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*An Analytical Survey of Persian Works
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Maṭṭnawī-i mādhavānal-kāmakandalā mausūm ba maḥẓ-i i'jāz

Maṭṭnawī-i mādhavānal-kāmakandalā mausūm ba maḥẓ-i i'jāz is a maṭṭnawī retelling, completed in 1091/1680 by Ḥaḡīrī Kāšānī, of an Avadhi poem completed by ‘Ālam in 990/1582-83. Both poems narrate the amorous union, separation and re-union – already well known in Sanskrit and Old Gujarati versions in Gujarat and perhaps thence diffused to North and East India – of a virtuous and scholarly Brahmin *bīn*-player called Mādhavānal and a dancer called Kāmakandalā. Nothing is known of Ḥaḡīrī Kāšānī except that he served in the army of Mīr Jumla (d. 1073/1663), the Mughal governor of Bengal under the emperor Awrangzeb (r. 1658-1707). Judging by an initial chapter of his poem in praise of Šayḡ Muḡī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Qādir Gilānī (d. 561/1166), Ḥaḡīrī evidently venerated the Qādirī Sufī master though it is not clear that he was a member of the order. According to Mahdī Raḡīmpūr he was a Shia (Raḡīmpūr 2013, p. 108). His *Nuṣrat al-murtazā* is a semi-historical maṭṭnawī relating the lives of imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and his son Muḡammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya (d. 81/700-01). His only other known work, *Awrang-nāma*, a historical maṭṭnawī completed in 1072/1661 and narrating the battle of succession among the emperor Šāhjahān’s sons and Awrangzeb’s ascent to the throne, also signals his affiliation to the ruling elites of Awrangzeb’s reign.

Little is known of ‘Ālam, too, except that he was probably patronized by Rājā Tōḡar Mal (d. 998/1589), the emperor Akbar’s finance minister, since he dedicated his poem *Mādhavānal-kāmakandalā* both to the minister and the emperor. The tale is known to have been popular in Old Gujarati versions in Gujarat before Akbar’s conquest of Gujarat in 1572/73 and also survives in a Sanskrit version dating to around 1300 by Ānandadhara (Majumdar 1942, pp. 1-340, 381-442, 341-379). It was possibly Akbar’s integration of Gujarat into the Mughal Empire that led to the diffusion of the tale to North and East India. ‘Ālam’s motivations for composing

it in Avadhi and Rājā Tōḍar Mal's possible commission of it were probably bound up with Akbar's well-known imperial investment in Sanskrit and Sanskrit-informed vernacular literatures. Furthermore, the central role in almost all versions of the tale of the king Vikramāditya, fabled in India for his royal valor and justice, suggests that the popularity of the tale among such members of the Mughal elite as Mīr Jumla was bound up with the popularity of the larger tale-cycle of this king's deeds and its descriptions and prescriptions of norms of royal conduct. Corroborating this interpretation is the extended advice relating to kingship that Ḥaḳīrī's Mādhavānal gives his beloved, advice absent in the corresponding passage in 'Ālam's poem (Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, pp. 84-85). 'Ālam narrated his poem in the generic units conventional in long Avadhi poems, namely a narrative or descriptive quatrain (*caupai*) followed by a typically homiletic couplet (*dohā*). This generic choice itself signalled didactic import by invoking early modern Apabhramṣa poetry, authored by Digambar Jains, with which this format was associated (Bruijn 2012, p. 150). He explicitly invoked the vernacular poetics (*rīti*) of "erotic separation" (*viraha*, *viyog*). He claimed to have heard "a little of" an earlier Sanskrit version and combined it with his own, thus authorizing himself by reference to Sanskrit but signalling his creative distance from its poetics.

Ḥaḳīrī's maṭṭnawī explicitly solicits its reader's comparison of its text with that of 'Ālam's Avadhi version. It justifies its distinctiveness as a re-embellishment in Persian (*darī*) of 'Ālam's Avadhi (*hindawī*) tale (Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, p. 126). This claim is borne out under three aspects discussed below in the following order: Ḥaḳīrī's replication of 'Ālam's plot; his invocation of the mood and Persian poetics of "erotic separation" (*fīrāq*) that replicates 'Ālam's vernacular poetics of "erotic separation" (*viraha*); and his pervasive use in the distiches of each chapter of Persian tropes equivalent to the Avadhi tropes in 'Ālam's narrative and descriptive verses. The plots of both tales alternate between states of social disequilibrium and equilibrium. The pervasive incitement to this alternation and transition from one state to the next is the socially destabilizing character of the artistic expertise of the lovers, expertise only the king Vikramāditya recognizes and defends as a virtue. What made 'Ālam's tale amenable to Ḥaḳīrī's translation was partly this fused conception of artistic skill and ethical stature, a fusion corresponding to the Perso-Arabic notion of *fazl*, translatable both as "virtue" and "scholarship". Mādhavānal, a bearer of Indic *fazl*, may well have appealed to the emperor Akbar who prided himself on the musicians, poets

and painters who attended his court. The ensemble of linguistic, poetic, music-and-dance related (*sangīṭ*), physiognomic (*sāmudrik*) and erotological (*sringār*, *singār*) skills that Mādhavānal excels at and later teaches Kāmakandalā correspond to those explicated in the second part of the fourth book of *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, part of the court-sponsored history of the emperor's reign. They also correspond to the courtly practices of pleasure explicated in around 1675 in Mīrzā Ḥān ibn Faḥr al-Dīn's encyclopedia of "the current Indian sciences", *Tuḥfat al-hind*. Ḥaḳīrī replicates the mood and poetics of 'Ālam's text by framing his tale with prefatory declarations corresponding to 'Ālam's. In one of his prefatory verses 'Ālam says: "To the best of my abilities I fitted letters together, / Decked in the established manner of *viraha* [*sakal singār viraha kī rīṭī*] / The tale of the love of Mādhau and Kāmakandalā". He adds that his narration would "give rise to [the affect of] erotic separation [*biraha viyogū*]" ('Ālam 1953, p. 187). Correspondingly, Ḥaḳīrī invokes the canonical Islamic topos of the dream-vision of the beloved to declare that he composed his poem as a lasting memorial to his dream-meeting with a lover who vanished on his waking (Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, p. 26).

The poetics or normative literary discourses of both Persian and Avadhi assumed the distich (*šī'r*) and the line made up of two end-stopped half verses (*ardhālīs*), respectively, as the largest semantic frame for all tropological and syntactical prescriptions. That is, neither tradition recognized enjambment between two hemstitches or half-lines or beyond a distich or line. This implied that poets in both traditions were subject to inherited constraints within the limits of a Persian distich or Avadhi line but were free to organize narrative sequences of distiches or lines more or less idiosyncratically. This accounts for why Ḥaḳīrī did not translate – or rather transcode – those Avadhi metaphors and images that were without equivalents in the poetics of the Persian distich. It equally accounts for the liberties he took with 'Ālam's plot, such as having the enemy king killed by Vikramāditya rather than only defeated as in 'Ālam's text. He thus describes physical beauty, erotic union (*singār*) and separation (*viraha*) in metaphors that are, wherever the poetics of the Persian distich permits, equivalent in convention to 'Ālam's. For example, 'Ālam alliteratively describes one of Kāmakandalā's gestures thus: "When she arches the playful bow of her brow – Her beautiful face steals upon the knowing mind. / The sweet fish [i.e. her eye] defeats the lotus-deer – The twin eyes gaze fiercely" (*bhrakuṭī cānp cancal jab moṛai – citwan cārū catur cit corai / mīn madhur pankaj mrig hārai – nirkhat locan jugam ḍarārai*, 'Ālam 1953, p. 188). Since only the first of these lines corresponds

to a Persian descriptive convention Ḥaḳīrī matches this with: “Her eyes, with their heedless gaze, / Shattered Babylon’s spell” (*čašmaš ba nigāh-i pur taḡāful / barbād zada fusūn-i bābil*, Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, p. 46). Likewise, Ḥaḳīrī substitutes the life-saving intervention of the supernatural Betāl in ‘Ālam’s poem with the intervention of the Islamic saviour Ḥizr (Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, p. 116). His character Mādhavānal underscores such poetic equivalences by naming such prior pairs of lover-protagonists, known in Mughal courtly circles, as Faizī’s Nala and Damayantī and Amīr Ḥusraw’s Dewalrānī and Ḥizr Ḥān (Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, pp. 58, 66, 74). But Ḥaḳīrī’s subsequent descriptions of Mādhavānal’s desolation in the desert are indebted for their imagery to Nizāmī Ganjawī’s much-imitated descriptions of Majnūn in his *Laylī o majnūn*.

Judging from the sole surviving manuscript of Ḥaḳīrī’s maṭṭnawī, it seems not to have won a wide circulation (the manuscript was in the possession of Yog Dhyān Ahuja who has edited the text, see Ḥaḳīrī Kāšānī 1965, editor’s introduction, p. 12). However, in 1712 in Delhi, the prolific Sufī poet ‘Abd al-Qādir Bedil (d. 1133/1721) completed his longest maṭṭnawī *‘Irfān*, including as the longest of its many allegories the tale of Madan (i.e. Mādhavānal) and Kāmdī (i.e. Kāmakandalā). It is not improbable that Ḥaḳīrī’s poem along with ‘Ālam’s served Bedil as hypotexts he transformed. The most conspicuous feature of this transformation was Madan’s allegorical status as the imitable Sufī aspirant who strives even in frailty towards union with his kindred soul in Kāmdī. This striving for union, an allegory teaching Bedil’s adaptation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theistic monism, was enabled by the efforts of a valorous king. Though not identified as Vikramāditya, this king fulfils the promise of righteous power consequent on ascetic frailty. Mughal Delhi’s ruling elite patronized Bedil at a time when they were threatened by the dispersal of central political power. Witness to this erosion of Mughal sovereignty and the de-sacralization of the Mughal king’s body, Bedil responded by transforming the tale of Mādhavānal and Kāmakandalā into a Sufī allegory of an ascetic will to power. ‘Ālam’s poem and Ḥaḳīrī’s translation of it, already containing prescriptions relating to just kingship, arguably facilitated Bedil’s project and its amenability to such a timely interpretation. Finally, it is also worth noting that Ḥaḳīrī’s translation initiated what became, through the popularity of Bedil’s oeuvre in Central Asia, the currency in Persian of the plot of Mādhavānal and Kāmakandalā in Central Asia where it became a model for eristic imitations (Vanina 1996, pp. 75-76).

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