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*An Analytical Survey of Persian Works  
on Indian Learned Traditions*

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## AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF PERSIAN WORKS ON INDIAN LEARNED TRADITIONS

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## *Mabda'-i jahān*

The author is said to be Šayḥ ‘Abd al-Ġanī Šūfī (or in some Mss. just Ġanī Šūfī, or ‘Īsā Šūfī), an otherwise unknown figure, but identified here as a disciple of the prominent Suhrawardī Sufī, Šayḥ Bahā’ al-Dīn Zakariyyā (d. 666/1267-8). All copies are late, however, and this attribution may be fictional. The pseudonymous attribution to an associate of the most famous Sufi saint of Multan, and the prominent mention of the city of Multan in the text, suggest Punjab as the place of composition of the text. A partially similar account was preserved in an otherwise unidentified Persian text belonging to a Sial family in Jhang (Temple 2013, vol. 3, pp. 412-415; Dames 1907, pp. 136-138).

This work offers to provide a clear understanding of what is Indian (*hindikī*, in some Mss. *hindū’ī*) and what is Muslim (*musalmānī*), so that people can tell them apart. The two key terms just mentioned do not mean quite the same thing as the modern concepts of Hinduism and Islam, conceived as religions in the European sense of the term. Indeed, Dihḥudā only defines the rare term *hindikī* (plural *hanādika*) as “related to India,” so it basically means Indian (Dihḥudā, “Hindikī”). The claim of an early date and an association with a famous early Sufī are the kind of credentials often employed by pseudepigraphical works seeking legitimation through association. The appearance in some manuscripts of the title with an ungrammatical Arabic *izāfa* construction with the Persian noun *jahān* (*Mabda’ al-jahān*) is problematic. The preface expresses the hope that it will be accepted by Muslim scholars and become famous in every town and village. While the bulk of the text presents a cosmogony following familiar Islamic sources, the second chapter is basically a polemic against Hindu deities, who are literally demonized in this narrative.

The *Mabda'-i jahān* is divided into four chapters (*faṣl*): (i) on the creation of the earth, the heavens, and the angels; (ii) on the *deva* Mārij and the Lord Mahādev; (iii) on

the noble Adam; (iv) on the departure of the noble Adam and Eve from paradise, and Cain's murder of Abel. Chapter one presents a typical account of Islamic cosmology based on the Qur'an, hadith, and sources such as the poetry of Sa'dī, with emphasis on the ascension of Muḥammad to paradise. Material on India is confined to chapter two, while the remaining two chapters relate standard narratives of Adam according to Islamic sources. It may be conjectured that this narrative may have played a role in conversion to Islam, as the copy reported from Jhang belonged to a Hindu family that became Muslim during the seventeenth century. The colonial official R. C. Temple treated it with derision, considering it "of course quite valueless as history . . . and [it] is so characteristic of the confusion of Hindu and Musalman traditions among them" (Temple 2013, vol. 3, p. 412). Yet it seems to have been popular, with over a dozen Mss. in existence.

Chapter two addresses India through its polemical account of the origin of Hindu deities. The text takes as its point of departure Qur'an 55:15, usually translated as, "He created the jinn from a mixture (*mārij*) of fire," but it follows a particular exegetical tradition which identified *mārij* as the personal name of the father of the jinn, who appeared on a hidden mountain. The text then explains how God instructed Mārij on the use of the rosary (*taṣbīḥ*) to recite Arabic prayers. After some time, his thigh split and a young woman emerged. When Mārij kissed her at God's command, she became pregnant and soon gave birth to a handsome youth, Lord (*īsur = iṣwar*) Mahādeva who for many years was dedicated to the worship of God. Eventually his thigh split and a girl emerged, who was named Gaura Parvati (*gawrjā pārbatī*). They fell in love and she bore twelve sons, whom God gave names (the Mss. vary widely in the spelling of these names, but they are mostly recognizable): Rāma, Krishna, Vishnu, Ganesh, Mahesh, Gosā'in, Parameśvar, Harjī, Vī, Jagdīś, Brahma, and Narayan. She later gave birth to twelve daughters named Mahādevī, Hūmī, Parīvī, Hinglāj, Jwālāmukhī, Menakshī, Kālkā, Sāradā, Tūtlā, Gangā, Jumnā, and Bharāy. All these names indicate Hindu deities or pilgrimage sites.

After twelve years, these youths went to Mārij and faced east, worshipping God, who offered them their hearts' desire. They asked for three boons: first, the *avatār*, meaning that God should appear in the house of the great; second, that he should give them children; and third, that their names will be famous. In reply, God promised that Adam would come among the infidels (*kāfir*), that they would have children, and that there will be many Rajas or famous ones, "for in those houses are the sparks of your

form that I will reveal to them” (‘Abd al-Ġanī Šūfī, *Mabda`-i jahān*, Ms. Ganj Baḥš 1917, p. 314). Then a *deva* called Nāra named the city of Multan “Šāmpur,” and he placed a king on the throne to establish a dominion that would last for 25,000 years. At the end of that time God offered the residents of the city the choice between funeral by earth or fire. A troublesome deity (*devātā*) named Dayy, as his death was approaching, proposed cremation for himself as a well-deserved punishment, in the hope that God would forgive for his sins and for his failure to worship him. The text concludes by explaining that it is for this reason that cremation is practiced among them, i.e., the people of India. Then God addressed the jinn through Lord Mahādev, telling them to depart the settled land and go to the hills and jungles.

The narratives just mentioned function on several levels to discredit Indian religion – in effect, what is now called Hinduism – by subordinating it to Islamic authorities. The Hindu gods, though referred to by the terms *deva* or *devātā*, are described as offspring of the jinn who acknowledge and worship God according to Islamic norms. The boons they seek from God end up reinforcing their subordination. Their request for an *avatar* or divine manifestation is met with the promise that prophets, starting with Adam, shall come among the infidels. Their desire for fame yields to the prophecy that the sparks within them will be revealed; this is fulfilled when the god Dayy chooses to be cremated in punishment for his sins, setting the precedent for cremation rituals for Hindus. The derogatory character of this story is enhanced by the wordplay on the Arabic term for hellfire (*nār*), which is evoked by the *deva* Nāra. This account thus offers an explanation for the existence of Hindu gods as second-rate jinn, who are banished from the urban centers of Islamic civilization and consigned to the wild countryside. In short, this is a narrative aiming to establish a triumphal Islamic presence in India by undermining the significance of the Hindu gods.

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