



# PERSO-INDICA

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

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

is published on line at: [www.perso-indica.net](http://www.perso-indica.net)  
ISSN: 2267-2753

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Perso-Indica  
c/o Fabrizio Speziale  
École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales  
Centre d'études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du sud  
54 Boulevard Raspail  
75006, Paris  
France  
e-mail: [fabrizio.speziale@ehess.fr](mailto:fabrizio.speziale@ehess.fr)

## *Šams al-aṣwāt*

The *Šams al-aṣwāt* is a treatise on Indian music and was translated by Ras Baras in 1109/1697-98. As the author states, it is a translation of an ancient (*kuhan-sāla*) book in Sanskrit (*zabān-i hind*) with the title *Sangīt* (Ras Baras 2012, p. 15 of the edition). Judging by the number of parts (*faṣl*) and the contents of the work, it is very likely that it is an abridged translation-cum-commentary on the *Saṅgītaratnākara* by Śārṅgadeva.

Śārṅgadeva, a scholar and music theoretician, was born in the second half of the twelfth century. He served at the court of Siṅghaṇadeva (r. 1210–1247) of Devagiri as a royal accountant. The *Saṅgītaratnākara* was composed in the Deccan during the first half of the thirteenth century. It consists of seven chapters as follows: i) *svaragatādhyāya*, ii) *rāgavivekādhyaṣya*, iii) *prakīrṇakādhyāya*, iv) *prabandhādhyāya*, v) *tālādhyāya*, vi) *vādyādhyāya*, vii) *nartanādhyāya* (Śārṅgadeva 2007).

Ras Baras, the son of Ḥuṣḥāl Ḥān Kalāwant, was probably born sometime between 1630 and 1650 and died at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Ras Baras 2012, p. 29). Very little is known of him. He grew up in a musical family and probably received his musical education from his father Ḥuṣḥāl Ḥān, who was a renowned *kalāwant*, a class of musicians. Ḥuṣḥāl Ḥān is mentioned by Faqīr Allāh Sayf Ḥān (d. 1095/1684) who was the governor of Bihar during Awrangzeb's period (r. 1658-1707) and the author of the *Risāla-yi Rāg-darpan*, another Persian work on Indian music (Faqīr Allāh 1996, p. 198). Ras Baras is mentioned as one of the celebrated musicians of his time in a treatise by an anonymous author from the early eighteenth century entitled *Risāla dar tāl* (Brown 2007, p. 107).

The *Šams al-aṣwāt* is a rather concise text divided into a preface (*ḥuṭba*) and six chapters (*bāb*). The first chapter concerns the description of features of *svara*

(note). In this chapter, which consists of fourteen parts (*faṣl*), the author deals with sound (*nāda*), micro-intervals (*śruti*), tone-system or pitch-collections (*grāma*), scales (*mūrcchanā*), tonal patterns (*tāna*), the table of *khaṇḍameru* (permutation-indicator), and musical figures or decorative motifs (*alaṅkāras* or *alaṃkāras*), among other issues. The second chapter concerns the description of modes (*rāga*) and contains two *faṣl* on the main musical modes (*rāga*) and the secondary ones (*rāgiṇī*). The third chapter deals with the description of omitted and modified *svara*, called *ālāpa*, and miscellaneous topics. This part consists of seven *faṣl* and deals with the *ālāpa*, embellishments of notes (*gamaka*), and the description of the good and censured singers. The fourth chapter is on the description of various types of music and songs (*gīta*). The author concisely deals with two types of composition (*guyandigī*), improvised or not pre-composed (*ghayr-i basta*) and composed (*basta*). The *basta* compositions are divided in two kinds (*mārga* and *deśī*), which are further subdivided in four types. The fifth chapter is on the rhythm and time cycles (*tāla*). This chapter is the most illustrative of the translator's approach to the original Sanskrit work and the treatment of musical elements. Ras Baras points out that this chapter was among the longest chapters of the original Sanskrit work, but he has abridged it to adjust it to the practical performances of his time. The sixth and last chapter of the *Šams al-ašwāt* is on the musical instruments. This *bāb* is very concise and deals with four classes of instruments: the chordophones (*tata, tāntra*), the membranophone (*vitata*), the aerophones (*suṣira*) and the idiophone (*ghana*).

Ras Baras omitted in the translation the last chapter of Śārṅgadeva's *Saṅgītaratnākara*, which deals with dance and which, according to him, concerns a tradition belonging to other people, i.e., the Hindus (Ras Baras 2012, p. 26 of the edition). In addition, in the preface (*ḥuṭba*) of the work, Ras Baras emphasizes that he does not intend to produce an exact translation of the whole work, which he would consider *taṭwīl-i kalām* (the prolongation of speech) and therefore pointless; and, most of its contents would seem out of date (Ras Baras 2012, p. 26 of the edition). Ras Baras's translation shares the features of Persian post-scholastic music theoretical treatises (ca. 1500–1850), which are conciseness and straightforward. Furthermore, the music theoretical treatises from that era are less speculative and more based on the performance practice of their time. For instance, in the first chapter of the *Šams al-ašwāt*, on *svara* (tone), the part on *jāti* (melodic types) has been omitted by Ras Baras and the whole chapter is simplified and less speculative than the original Sanskrit

work. Another example, in chapter five, on rhythm, which is among the longest parts in the original Sanskrit work with descriptions of one hundred and twenty *tālas*. In the *Šams al-ašwāt*, there remain only eleven *tālas* which, according to Ras Baras, were practised during his time (Ras Baras 2012, p. 96 of the edition). However, another text composed during Awrangzeb's period offers a different view about the number of *tāla* practiced during this time. In the section on music of the *Tuhfat al-hind*, Mīrzā Ḥān ibn Faḥr al-Dīn lists ninety-one *tālas* which were applied in music during the author's time (Ḥān 1354/1975, pp. 430–456). It seems that Ras Baras's abridged translation of the *Saṅgītaratnākara* was a model for Ġulām Rizā ibn Muḥammad Panāh's *Uṣūl al-naḡamāt*, another Persian treatise on India music. The treatment of the topics in the *Uṣūl al-naḡamāt* is almost identical with that in the *Šams al-ašwāt*.

**Manuscripts:** **London**, British Library, India Office, LXX 28, ff. 1b–28a, **ii**) 29 *ša'abān* 1200/22 June 1786, **iii**) Faṭḥ 'Alī walad-i Šayḥ Mihr Allāh, **iv**) Ḥwāja Šams al-Dīn, **viii**) Ross - Brown 1902, p. 56. **London**, British Library, India Office, 1746, ff. 1b–32b, **i**) مارش (Mārš?), **ii**) 4 *ša'abān* 1196/15 August 1782, **viii**) Ethé 1903, cc. 1122-1123. **Edinburgh**, Edinburgh University Library, Or. 585/3, ff. 25b–34b, **viii**) Massoudieh 1996, p. 189. **Manchester**, The John Rylands University Library, 346, ff. 1b–40b, **viii**) Massoudieh 1996, p. 190.

Legend: i) Place of copying; ii) Period of copying; iii) Copyist; iv) Commissioner; v) Information on colophon; vi) Description of miniatures/illustrations; vii) Other remarks; viii) Information on catalogue(s)

**Edition:** *Shams al-ašwāt: The Sun of Songs by Ras Baras*, Mehrdad Fallahzadeh - Mahmud Hassanabadi, eds., Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2012, pp. ۱۱-۱۰۴.

**English translation:** *Shams al-ašwāt: The Sun of Songs by Ras Baras*, Mehrdad Fallahzadeh - Mahmud Hassanabadi, eds., Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2012, pp. 75-127.

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### **Mehrdad Fallahzadeh**

Originally published: 08 mai 2013

How to quote this article:

Fallahzadeh, Mehrdad, 2013, "Šams al-ašwāt", *Perso-Indica. An Analytical Survey of Persian Works on Indian Learned Traditions*, F. Speziale - C. W. Ernst, eds., available at [http://www.perso-indica.net/work/sams\\_al-aswat](http://www.perso-indica.net/work/sams_al-aswat).

ISSN: 2267-2753

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