e-ISSN 2385-3042

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
Vol. 60 – Giugno 2024

The Fire of India
Poetics, Translation and Imitation in the Indian *Maṯnavīs* of ʿĀqil Khān 'Rāzī'

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Abstract ʿĀqil Khān 'Rāzī' (c. 1026-1108 AH, c. 1617-1696 AD) is a seventeenth-century Indo-Persian poet, historian and statesman who authored a *dīvān*, some mystical treatises, a historical chronicle and a number of *maṯnavī*s. This paper focuses on two of his *maṯnavī*s, *Mihr-u māh* (1065 AH, 1654/55 AD) and *Shamʿ-u parvāna* (1064 AH, 1658/59 AD), which are adaptations/translations in Persian of two Neo-Indo-Aryan narrative poems written in Awadhī during the sixteenth century. The aim is to understand how ʿĀqil Khān adapted/translated these two South Asian texts in Persian. In order to achieve this objective, this study concentrates on the imagery of fire in the prologues and in the conclusions of the compositions. The intertextual elements are analysed, unveiling the literary process devised by ʿĀqil Khān 'Rāzī' to compose a complex layered text that could be enjoyed by the multilingual readership of seventeenth-century South Asia.

Keywords Persian. Persian literature. Indo-Persian literature. Neo-Indo-Aryan literatures. Mughal Empire. South Asia. Seventeenth century.

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Edizioni Ca'Foscari

Peer review

Submitted 2024-03-12
Accepted 2024-06-04
Published 2024-07-25

Open access
© 2024 Baptiste | 4.0

Citation Baptiste, V. (2024). "The Fire of India". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 60, 139-170.

DOI 10.30687/AnnOr/2385-3042/2024/01/007

> Si vous voulez, je peux définir mon écriture comme une espèce de parcours – il y a une très, très belle phrase de Michaux qui dit "J'écris pour me parcourir" –, comme une espèce de parcours, une espèce d'itinéraire que j'essaie de décrire à partir, disons, d'une idée vague, d'un sentiment, d'une irritation, d'un refus, d'une exaltation, en me servant, non pas de tout ce qui me tombe sous la main, mais d'un acquis culturel qui existe déjà. À partir de là, j'essaie, si vous voulez, de dire tout ce que l'on peut dire sur le thème d'où je suis parti. C'est ce que les rhétoriciens appelaient les lieux rhétoriques.
>
> (Georges Perec, *Conférence sur les pouvoirs et limites du romancier français contemporain*, 1967)

1 Introduction

In this passage from a speech given at the University of Warwick in 1967, the great novelist and poet Georges Perec (1936-1982) attempts to define his relationship with writing and literary creation. He describes it as a process (a 'path') that stems from a feeling but matures only, in the writing process, through reference to a given cultural tradition and to the established literary *loci* or themes (*lieux rhétoriques*) that he tries to expand upon. If we invert the process, it means that, in order to understand the place of a text in literary terms (that is, the literary project of the author), one has to understand the other, older texts that it borrows from, engages with and refers to.

Classical Persian poetry does not differ in that respect: every Persian composition exists in a network of literary interactions that we can unweave following the threads of the rhetorical *topoi* outlining the framework of the composition. Investigating this network allows us to fully grasp the context and the substance of a particular work. In that regard, scholars have repeatedly emphasised the importance of imitation (*istiqbāl*), rewriting (*naẕīra-gōʾī*) and literary response (*javāb-gōʾī*) in the classical Persian poetic milieu.[1] Such referential

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my two PhD supervisors, Prof. Nalini Balbir and Prof. Thibaut d'Hubert, who supported and keep supporting me greatly in my research. I would also like to warmly thank Sonya Rhie Mace who was kind enough to proof-read the draft of my article.

This article will rely on the transcription system used in the *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* of Steingass (1892) with the following changes: ث is transcribed s̱ and not ṣ; ی, when *majhūl*, is transcribed ē and not e; و is transcribed v and not w and, when *majhūl*, is transcribed ō and not o (except when metrically short in words such as *tō*/*to* or *dō*/*do*). Neo-Indo-Aryan languages are transcribed in IAST. The schwa has been deleted when unpronounced.

1 The preferred field of these studies is the 'New Style' (*ṭarz-i tāza* also called the 'Indian Style', *sabk-i hindī*) of Safavid-Mughal poetry: Losensky 1998; Akbarī 2000; Ḥāʾirī, Kalāntar 2012; Āzar 2008. However, many interesting studies were also produced for

devices are a mean for a poet to assert his position in a particular literary field, to pay homage to his predecessors and to attract praise and attention from his target readership. In this paper, I will attempt to locate the position in the Indo-Persian literary sphere of two seventeenth-century *masnavī*s written by ʿĀqil Khān ʿRāzī', being adaptations in Persian of romances originally composed in Hindavī,[2] using the elements of poetic referentiality scattered throughout the prologues and the conclusions of both poems.

1.1 Literary Imitation and Creation in Classical Persian Literature

This study is located in the scholarly framework of stylistics and literary history. The first concept that I will refer to is that of 'style' (*sabk*) as inaugurated by Muḥammad Taqī Bahār 'Mālik ul-Shuʿarā'' (1943). This concept replaces, in the writing of modern Iranian scholars, the premodern concepts of *shēva*, *ṭarz* and *ravish* (words all referring to the style of a particular poet or school of poetry) since it adds to the traditional mode of analysis of literature the criteria of historicity. *Sabk* redefines style as a historical phenomenon and, as a result, *sabk-shināsī* 'stylistics', makes ample use of cultural studies and historical linguistics (Īrānzāda 2016).[3] Following this methodology, this study will try to focus on the particularities of ʿĀqil Khān's style both on a personal level (choice of words and themes, use of compounds) and on a broader historical level (Mughal-era Indo-Persian literature).

The core concept on which this study relies on, however, is that of poetic imitation in the context of classical Persian literature. The work of Marc Toutant on ʿAlī Shēr Navā'ī demonstrated that imitation plays a central role in Tīmūrid aesthetics (Toutant 2016) and, following the footsteps of senior scholars, I will attempt to demonstrate that imitation was similarly cultivated during the Mughal period. Riccardo Zipoli (1993) in a well-known article and Paul Losensky (1998, 107-13), in his work on Bābā Fighānī and his imitators, elaborate on a number of technical terms used by the classical poets and literary critics to refer to the poetic devices of imitation, emulation and response in the Persianate literary milieu. First, we have the word

other branches of classical Persian poetry: Zipoli 1993; Murshidī 2012; Toutant 2016, 245-314; Ingenito 2020.

2 In this article, I will use this Persian word to refer to Central/Northern Neo-Indo-Aryan literary languages commonly used and cultivated at the Mughal central and provincial courts, such as Braj Bhāṣā, Awadhī or Deccanī.

3 One of the most cutting-edge study on *sabk-shināsī* in that regard is most probably: Āqābābā'ī 2020.

istiqbāl (poetic imitation), which is intended as a tribute or a response to a revered model. Then come the very important terms *muʿāraza* and *tatabbuʿ*, usually meaning a poetic response to an earlier poem in the same meter and in which rivalry plays an important part. The word *javāb-gōʾī* (a literary answer or response) implies a more peaceful relationship to the model whereas *naẓīra-gōʾī* and *iqtidāʾ* are general, neutral designations for the practice of *imitatio*.

In this paper, I will further argue that *tarjuma* (adaptation/translation) is also an integral part of the poetics of *istiqbāl* and holds a special place in the multilingual South Asian world. Successfully identifying these devices will allow us to grasp the literary tradition in which we have to locate ʿĀqil Khān ʻRāzī's *masnavī*s. In order to do so, I will focus on the imagery of fire and burning as it appears in the two poems, mainly in their prologues and in their conclusions.[4] Fire plays a decisive part in the Indo-Persian poetics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Sharma 2010) and this intricate fire imagery, through the practice of imitation, reuse, reference and adaptation, made its way into the poetry of later authors, such as Mīrzā Asadullāh ʻGhālibʼ (1797-1869) (Schimmel 2007, 62-95). This study thus aims at bringing a contribution to the history of the evolution and transformations of poetical *topoi* in Persian literature and their relationship with patronage, historical taste and poetic creativity.

1.2 ʿĀqil Khān ʻRāzīʼ: His Life and Work

ʿĀqil Khān ʻRāzī's original name is Mīr ʿAlī ʿAskarī Khwāfī (Ārzū 2006, 84). He is the son of Muḥammad Taqī and the grandson of Muḥammad Qāsim al-Khwāfī.[5] He was very probably born in India and he himself greatly insists on his Iranian origins, as his family hailed from the city of Khwāf in Khurāsān.[6] He died in 1696[7] and lived for 82 years (ʿĀmir 2005, 20). We can thus infer that he was born around 1617, during the reign of Nūr ul-Dīn Muḥammad Salīm ʻJahāngīrʼ (r. 1605-27). He was

4 In order to grasp, as faithfully as possible, the content of the literary project of ʿĀqil Khān ʻRāzīʼ (its roots and its possible outcomes in later literature), this paper focuses mostly on the prologues and on the concluding remarks of the poems, since it is the space *par excellence* in which Persian *masnavī* composers present their references and sources of inspiration, the core imagery of the text and their literary intentions.

5 Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Samarāt ul-ḥayāt*, f. 1*v*.

6 See for example this *bait* from Rāzī's *Mihr-u māh* (Rāzī 2010, 44):

ba hindustān agar hastam sukhan-bāf | tār-u pūdam hast dar Khwāf
Although I compose poetry in India, my warp and weft are in Khwāf.

7 *Rabīʿ ul-sānī* 1108 AH. ʿĀmir 2005, 21. M.A. ʿĀmir explains that it is also claimed in some sources that he died in 1107 AH. His monography on ʿĀqil Khān is very good. Another very helpful work on Rāzī is the book of Jāvēd (1999).

the disciple of Shaikh Burhān ul-Dīn 'Rāz-i Ilāhī' of the Shaṭṭārī order (1589/90-1672/73) and collected his discourses in a compilation entitled *Samarāt ul-ḥayāt* (1643-44).[8] The *takhalluṣ* of Mīr ʿAlī ʿAskarī, 'Rāzī', is a reference to his Shaikh's second name: 'Rāz-i Ilāhī'.

In his youth, he was a member of the personal entourage of Muhī ul-Dīn Aurangzēb, the future emperor ʿĀlamgīr (r. 1658-1707) while he was in the Deccan (Shāh Navāz Khān 1890, 821).[9] He composed his first *masnavī*, *The Sun and the Moon* (*Mihr-u māh*), in 1654-55 (ʿĀmir 2005, 68). This is a Persian rendition of Mīr Mañjhan Rājgīrī's *Madhumālatī*, a romance originally written in Awadhī in 1545 and was most probably composed in Burhānpūr or in the newly renamed city of Aurangābād.[10] When Aurangzēb acceded to the throne in 1658, Mīr ʿAlī ʿAskarī received the title of 'Intelligent Khan' (*ʿĀqil Khān*) and a promotion (Shāh Navāz Khān 1890, 821). In the same year, he composed *The Candle and the Moth* (*Shamʿ-u parvāna*), his second *masnavī*. This is a Persian rendition of another Awadhī romance, Malik Muḥammad Jāysī's *Padmāvat*, written in 1540.[11] During his life, ʿĀqil Khān held varied positions in Mughal administration. In 1663-64 he was employed as a 'police' officer (*faujdār-i Dōʾāb*) in Awadh; then, he worked as superintendent of the private apartments of the emperor (*dārōgha-yi ghuslkhāna*, 1658-59), general superintendent of the postal service (*dārōghа-yi ḍākchaukī*, 1666-67), military administrator (*bakhshī-yi tan*), and finally governor of Delhi (*ṣūbadār-i Shāhjahānābād*, 1680-81) (ʿĀmir 2005, 25-32).

ʿĀqil Khān 'Rāzī' composed a number of other works in the fields of History (Rāzī 1936), Mystics and Poetry, including a fully edited *dīvān* (Rāzī 2010). Many premodern and modern scholars have noted the similarities of his style with that of Maulānā Rūmī, Niẓāmī or Saʿdī and his remoteness from the more contemporary and intricate Indian style (Ārzū 2006, 84-5; Rāzī 2010, 17-28). I will now examine these claims more in depth.

8 On this figure, see Burhānpūrī 1951. Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Samarāt ul-ḥayāt*.

9 He was, more precisely, the *bakhshīgarī-yi duvvum* (second superintendant for the wages) of the Prince.

10 For a critical edition of the work, see Mañjhan 1961. For an English translation see Behl, Weightman 2001.

11 Critical edition: Jāysī 1951.

2 ʿĀqil Khān's Persian Adaptations: The Building of a Literary Tradition and the Imagery of the *Satī* in Classical Persian Poetry

2.1 The Literary Field of Indo-Persian Adaptations of Hindavī Romances: The Creation of a Genre

The literary context in which we have to locate Rāzī's two *masnavī*s is that of the Persian renditions of South Asian tales (ʿĀbidī 1966) and, more precisely, of the Persian adaptations of vernacular Awadhī romances.[12] The lost translation of the *Candāyan* (an Awadhī romance written by Maulānā Dāʾūd in 1379) by the Chishtī Shaikh ʿAbd ul-Quddūs Gangōhī (1455-1537) (Behl, Doniger 2016, 62) and the *Rājkunvar*, a Persian translation of Quṭban Suhravardī's *Mirigāvatī* composed for the young Prince Salīm in the beginning of the seventeenth century (Orsini 2017),[13] are two early examples of the genre. It is, however, *The Poem on Chastity* (*ʿIsmatnāma*, an adaptation of the *Candāyan* story) composed by Ḥamīd Kalānaurī in 1607-08 that truly inaugurates the poetic framework in which ʿĀqil Khān asserts himself (Kalānaurī 1985). Indeed, as Kalānaurī's *Poem on Chastity*, both *The Sun and the Moon* and *The Candle and the Moth*, are *masnavī*s in form and style that take considerable liberty with the original text. The storyline is frequently modified, some events are added, other suppressed, the name of some characters are altered (or erased) and the poetical imagery entirely conceptualised anew.

Another good example of this genre is the *Rat Padam* (1628-29) by Mullā Muḥammad Samīʿ ʿAbd ul-Shakūr Bazmī, a translation of *Padmāvat* (Bazmī 1971). In the prologue of the work, Bazmī gives us an important clue about the context in which such *masnavī*s were composed. He narrates the visit his father paid to him, and the piece of advice he gave him:

guftī ghazal-u qaṣīda bisyār
gū masnavī ba tāza guftār

ʿishq-i Ratan-u Padam bayān kun
afsāna ba pārsī zabān kun

dar jōsh bikun khum-i kuhan rā
nau rang bidih may-i sukhan rā
(Bazmī 1971, 49)

12 *Pemakathās* 'love tales', or *premagāthā*/*premākhyān* 'love poems', in Hindi literary criticism. Pandey 1982; Orsini 2017, 25-6.

13 For more details on *Rājkunvar*, see Orsini 2023, 65-71.

You have composed many *ghazals*, many *qaṣīdas*,
do compose a *masnavī* in the modern style,

Narrate the love of Ratan and Padam,
tell the story in Persian.

Make this old pot boil again,
add new colours to the wine of poetry.[14]

Bazmī's father's advice is to try out different forms in poetry: the adaptation in Persian of the story of *Padmāvat* is conceived, in that regard, as a fitting exercise.[15] In the case of Bazmī as in the case of Rāzī, the process of translation is indeed not merely understood as a simple literal and faithful translation, but as a full reproduction of the content of the original story into the framework of classical Persian poetry. Very often, this takes the form of an emulation of a revered model:

chūn ḥarf-i Ratan shumār kardam
Rat az Ratan ikhtiṣār kardam

z'ān rū ki miyān-i hindī ashʿār
maʿnī-yi rat ast ʿāshiq-i zār

ṣad shuʿla ba khūn-i dil sirishtam
tā nāma-yi Rat Padam nivishtam
(Bazmī 1971, 50)

When I scanned the word 'Ratan',
I shortened Ratan to Rat,

Because, in poetic Hindī,
the meaning of 'Rat' is afflicted lover.

I added a hundred sparkles to the blood of my heart
to write the story of the Rat of Padam.

14 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

15 To 'translate' or 'adapt' such Indian stories in Persian, to train one's pen must have been a rather frequent occurrence: Shaikh Aḥmad ʿAlī Khān Hāshmī Sandīlavī, speaking about ʿĀqil Khān in his *tazkira*, sadly remarks that his Indian stories "were deficient in style and did not gain any fame" perhaps because "the composition of the stories happened during the first exercises of poetic writing" (*Chūn az faṣāḥat uftāda chandān shuhrat nayāfta. Shāyad dar avā'il-i mashq-i shiʿr ba naẓm āvardan-i ān qiṣṣahā vāqiʿ gashta*) (1970, 178).

Bazmī refers here to the Hindavī word *rat* (skt.: *rata* 'root': *ram*, *ramate*) meaning 'enamoured, fondly attached to' (Platts 1884). The title of Bazmī's work is, grammatically, an Arabic title: *Rat Padam*[*i*]: "The *Rat* (the 'mad lover') of *Padam*". It mirrors the title of the famous Arabic story of Lailā and Majnūn: *Majnūn Lailā*, "The Mad Lover of Lailā".[16] Even more telling than this pun is the meter chosen for the poem: it is the same as the one selected by Niẓāmī for his famous Persian adaptation of the story (*hazaj-i musaddas-i akhrab-i maqbūẓ-i maḥzūf*). Here we have a clear case of poetic imitation and response to a revered original poem in the same meter. Bazmī is indulging here in an intertextual *exercice de style*: his aim is to give an 'Indian' rendition of a highly respected Persian piece of literature.

2.2 Āqil Khān 'Rāzī' and the Imagery of the *Satī* in the Indo-Persian Literary Tradition of the Sultanate Period: Between Persian and Vernacular Literatures

This litetary scheme is extremely important for our topic: the practice of *istiqbāl* is a way for Indo-Persian poets to introduce Indian stories and themes inside the classical canon of Persian poetry. As Niẓāmī is, perhaps, the most revered and imitated Persian *masnavī* composer, many authors intentionally become his followers to emulate the literary tradition and assert their poetic personality. 'Āqil Khān 'Rāzī' is, surely enough, located inside this scheme of referentiality going back to Niẓāmī. The meter he uses in *The Candle and the Moth* is the same as the one used by Niẓāmī in his masterpiece, *The Seven Portraits* (*Haft paikar*) (*khafīf-i musaddas-i makhbūn-i maqṭūʿ*), and the meter of *The Sun and the Moon* is the same as the one selected by Niẓāmī for *Khusrau and Shīrīn* (*hazaj-i musaddas-i maqṣūr*). Even if these two *masnavī*s, unlike the poem of Bazmī, are not real literary responses to the model of Niẓāmī, 'Āqil Khān wishes to engage with the Persian classical canon in a number of ways. He says himself:

sharar-i Hind dar dil andōzam
z'ātish-i Fārs shuʿla afrōzam

kōk sāzam ba parda-yi ushshāq
naghma-yi Hind bā navā-yi 'Irāq

16 I cannot thank enough Pr. Thibaut d'Hubert for his help, as he was kind enough to share this intuition with me.

e-ISSN 2385-3042

ba khurāsān kunam zi Hind irsāl
tuḥfa-yi kārgāh-i ʿishq-u jamāl
(Rāzī 2017, 94)

I gathered in my heart the sparks of India,
I fanned the flames with the fire of the Fārs.

I tuned myself to the mode of love,
I played the melody of India with the scale of Iraq.

I sent, from India to the Khurāsān,
the wonders of the workshop of love and beauty.

The musical imagery that Rāzī summons here is extremely telling: his purpose is to tell an Indian story in the framework of classical Persian poetry. The theme is Indian, but the literary aspect is completely Persian. This passage also contains an important clue for our study: for ʿĀqil Khān, poetry, and especially poetry about India, is 'fiery'. Speech is compared to fire and poetic inspiration to sparks. This is a fundamental element as it locates the poem inside a long poetic tradition associating India with heat, fire and burning. One of the first poet to associate India, fire and love stories is Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī (1253-1325), himself a very famous imitator of Niẓāmī.[17] The practice of *satī* (ritual burning of a wife on the pyre of her deceased husband) is, for example, the key theme of this extract:

na'ī kam z'ān zan-i hindū dar īn kūy
ki khwud rā zinda sōzad bar pay-i shūy
(Khusrau 1927, 32)

You are not inferior in this town to the Hindu woman,
who burns herself alive to follow her husband.

The definitive introduction of the literary motif of *satī* is, however, the deed of another Indo-Persian poet, a famous friend of Amīr Khusrau: Ḥasan Sijzī Dihlalvī (1253/54-c. 1388). Indeed, he authored a *masnavī* entitled *A Poem on Love* (*ʿIshqnāma*) in 1301, set in the almost contemporary context of the court of the son of Ghiyās ul-Dīn Balban, Malik Muḥammad Qaʿān (who died in 1285), and telling the story of an Indian scribe and an Indian girl (Gould 2021; Dukht Mashhūr 2010). The story culminates with the death of the lover on the pyre of his beloved, taken away from him by a disease. The whole poem is a response to *Lailī and Majnūn* of Niẓāmī and contains numerous

17 On this subject, see Ashraf, Muẓāhirī, Ibrāhīmī 1990 and Murshidī 2012.

e-ISSN 2385-3042

references to the great Persian *masnavī*. *A Poem on Love* is extremely important because it established a new poetical theme. Therefrom, poets seeking to give an Indian flavour to their love stories regularly compose, or retell, Indian tales ending with both lovers dying together on a pyre. *Rat Padam* and *The Candle and the Moth* clearly assert themselves as members of this genre. Indeed, at the end of the *Padmāvat* story, the hero, Ratansen, is killed by the Sulṭān ʿAlā ul-Dīn Khiljī and the death of his two wives, Padmāvatī and Nāgmatī, takes place on his pyre. In the prologue of *The Candle and the Moth* (*Shamʿ-u Parvāna*) ʿĀqil Khān refers to this fate:

> *har do bā ham chigūna sākhta and*
> *jigar az sōz ham-gudākhta and*
>
> *ātash-i dil chisān furōkhta and*
> *har do yak-dam chigūna sōkhta and*
> (Rāzī 2017, 91)
>
> Verily, these two are made for each other!
> Their hearts were fused together by the same blaze.
>
> The flames of their hearts reduced them to ashes,
> Indeed they both burned in the very same instant!

This passage allows us to appreciate how the literary theme of the Indian *satī* became a poetic subject ingeniously reused across centuries. Here, the 'burn' is, of course, that of the funerary pyre, but also refers to the burn of love. The flames become an image describing the intensity of the feelings of the lovers and their burning hearts. As a result, the culmination of the story is nothing but the material expression of their deeper spiritual bond. The verbs used in these two verses are quite telling in that regard. In the first verse we have *sākhtan* 'to form' and *gudākhtan* 'to melt, to intermingle', while in the second we have *furōkhtan* 'to kindle, to inflame' and *sōkhtan* 'to burn'. The Indian fire of the *satī* is a material bonding force that fuses together lover and beloved spiritually by taking away the corporal limitations preventing their souls from uniting. This poetic conceit interests Rāzī because it allows the conventional images associated with the pains of love, such as the burn of passion, the fire of the longing etc. to become actual 'physical' elements of the tale.[18]

18 I must thank the Prof. Thibaut d'Hubert, who underlined how this 'concretised metaphor' appears sometimes in visual representations too. See, for example, London, British Library, *Pēm nēm* (add. 16880), f. 138*r*.

Even if, in the story of Manohar and Madhumālatī, the issue is happier, ʿĀqil Khān still alludes to this pyre imagery in the prologue of *The Sun and the Moon*:

ba Hindustān chi ātash shuʿla afrōkht
ki bā-ham ʿāshiq-ū maʿshūq sōkht[19]

In India, the sparks glitter in such a blaze
that together it burns lover and beloved.

Now, if we briefly stray away from the prologues and take a look at the conclusions of the *masnavī*s, another literary layer of this *satī* imagery appears. Indeed, in *The Candle and the Moth*, Rāzī uses other referential devices based on the imagery of self-immolation to identify his composition as a retelling of the Awadhī *Padmāvat*. This tribute paid to Jāysī is quite visible in the conclusion of the work, after the depiction of the killing of Ratansen by Devapāl and of the self-immolation of the women of Chittaurgarh, the fort and city-state of the hero:

rāz bā[20] *dar jahān ba rūy-i zamīn*
na Ratan mānd u na ʿAlāʾ ul-Dīn

na Padam mānd u nay jamāl-i Padam
burd bā khwud Ratan khayāl-i Padam

laik az ʿishq dāstānē mānd
zān vafā-pēshgān nishānē mānd
(Rāzī 2017, 243)

Let the secret be known in the world on the surface of the earth:
neither Ratan nor ʿAlāʾ ul-Dīn remained,

Neither Padam nor her beauty subsisted.
Ratan took with him the thought of Padam.

But, of love, one story remained,
a sign of these faithful persons subsisted.

Malik Muḥammad Jāysī writes in his own conclusion:

19 I am currently completing a critical edition of *Mihr-u māh* based on several manuscripts. In this article, for convenience purposes, I will mostly refer to one manuscript: London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 5*r*. When necessary, other manuscript references will be specified.

20 I read *bā* as *bād*[*ā*] here.

kahāṁ ratanasena asa rājā
kahāṁ suvā asi budhi uparājā

kahāṁ alāudīna sulatānū
kahaṁ rāghau jeiṁ kīnha bakhānū

kahaṁ sarūpa padumāvati rānī
koi na rahā jaga rahī Kahānī
(Jāysī 1951, 555, stanza 652)

Where is Ratansen, such a [mighty] king?
Where is the parrot who devised such intelligent thoughts?

Where is the Sultan ʻAlāʼ ul-Dīn?
Where is Rāghava who did the description [of the queen]?

Where is the beautiful queen Padmāvatī?
None subsists, only their story remains.

The structure of the two passages is similar: both texts give a list of characters and, playing on the semi-historical nature of the story of Ratansen, Padmāvatī and ʻAlāʼ ul-Dīn Khiljī, philosophically remark that no trace of them is to be found now on the surface of the earth. Ratansen and Padmāvatī burned together on the pyre and ʻAlāʼ ul-Dīn, guided by his bodily passions, his lust for Padmāvatī and his vanity, was, in the same way, destroyed and lost in the abyss of time. The key verb is the same in the two versions: 'to stay' 'to remain' 'to subsist' (*rah-* in Awadhī, *māndan* in Persian). Both poets conclude that the power of love is the force that allowed the lovers to survive in the form of a tale after the destruction of Chittaur and the death of all its inhabitants.

The two passages share the same structure (repetitions, binary division) and the same idea (the triumph of the spirit over the body). ʻĀqil Khān is clearly borrowing Jāysī's core ideas, both stylistically and philosophically.[21] This means that at least some parts of the *masnavī* were composed after a close reading and study of the vernacular poem. As a result, it is clear that India-inspired imagery is not, for Rāzī, a mere Persian literary trope used to make the setting more exotic, but a way to cleverly introduce his reader to a complex layered text, partially based on an informed reading of a written version of the Awadhī romance.

21 This makes this passage fall into the ambiguous category of *sariqat* (literary 'borrowing/theft'), a technical word in Arabic and Persian sometimes used with a positive connotation and sometimes in a more derogatory way. Losensky 1998, 105-6; Grunebaum 1944.

As I will attempt to demonstrate below, this mix of references and selected imagery, aiming at localising the text inside the Persian tradition and of well-thought borrowings of ideas or style elements from the Hindavī text is exactly what defines a rendition in Persian in the 'adaptation' genre I defined earlier. This network is however quite intricate since, as we just saw, the Hindavī references are usually much less obvious than the Persian ones. The Persian classical elements (reprisal of a meter or of a famous storyline) indeed enjoy the status of framework, or model, and are usually claimed, more or less clearly, in the prologue or the conclusion, whereas the elements borrowed from the Hindavī appear in the text, as they feed the poet's inspiration. I will now attempt to go back to this Persian referential structure to understand more in depth how ʿĀqil Khān framed the Awadhī romance with the tools of classical Persian poetics.

2.3 The *Satī* in ʿĀqil Khān's *Maṯnavī*s and Poetic Modernity

If the origin of what will be later known as the *Poem on Satī* (*satīnāma*) tradition (Bābāsafarī, Sālmiyān 2008) is indeed traceable to the writings of Ḥasan Sijzī and Amīr Khusrau, and has received considerable inspiration from vernacular South Asian literature, it was also a very fashionable Persian genre in Rāzī's lifetime. As a result, ʿĀqil Khān refers directly to works composed by almost contemporary authors in order to assert the modernity of his work. He does it quite openly in *The Candle and the Moth* by describing his poem in the followings words:

> *mukhtaṣar nuskha'ē zi sōz-ū gudāz*
> *jāmiʿ-i ḥusn-u ʿishq-u nāz-ū niyāz*
> (Rāzī 2017, 92)
>
> It is a condensed version of the poem *Burning and Melting* (*Sōz-u gudāz*), bringing together beauty and love, disdain and supplication.

ʿĀqil Khān mentions here, in a *double entendre*, *Burning and Melting* (*Sōz-u gudāz*), a *maṯnavī* composed by the poet Nauʿī Khabūshānī (1562-1610) for Akbar's son, Prince Dāniyāl (Nauʿī 1969). In the prologue of the work Nauʿī reveals that Dāniyāl Mīrzā asked him to compose a new tale as he got weary of the old stories of the moth and the candle, Shīrīn and Farhād or Lailī and Majnūn (Nauʿī 1969, 38-9). He wants something 'unheard of', written in a modern style, dealing with Indian topics. He is, in that regard, fascinated by fire worship and the ritual suicide of women on the pyre of their husbands in India (39-40).

Nauʿī Khabūshānī, often following the footsteps of Ḥasan Sijzī, thus devises a tale set in India, during the reign of Akbar, telling the

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story of two Hindu idol-worshippers (63). Nauʿī does not linger on the details of the story, as it is clear that his goal is more poetic than narrative in nature. The idea is to fully engage with all the intricacies of a given literary topos and to elaborate on this imagery of fire, burning and Indian idol worship by resorting to classical Persian poetic devices (Sharma 2010). By doing so, Nauʿī is strongly asserting his belonging to the latest trend in Persian poetry: the new style (*ṭarz-i nau* or *tāza-gōʾī*) in which poets seek novelty, originality and strangeness in meaning and form by resorting to complex images without discarding their literary heritage (Losensky 1998, 195-204). In *Burning and Melting*, Nauʿī addresses God in these terms:

> *khudāyā shēva-yi ʿishqam āmōz*
> *dilam zʾātash-i īn zan afrōz*
> (Nauʿī 1969, 92)
>
> O God, teach me the ways of love,
> set ablaze my heart with the fire of that woman!

In the new style that Nauʿī pursues, poetic images become so pervasive that they reach a metapoetical status as they succeed in representing, at the same time, the feelings of the characters, the core concept of the story (the power of passion) and the poetic devices used by the poet (metaphors, similes, poetic speech). Fire is an image for the feeling of love felt by the female character who, burned inwardly by her passion, becomes capable of physically consuming her body on the sacrificial pyre. But Nauʿī makes the image of fire depart from the mere context of the story to transform it into the manifestation of the power of God in the physical world. He begs God to toss him into the fire of love depicted in the tale so that he would get poetically inspired: fire becomes an image for inspiration and a metapoetical device. This capacity of images to become complex poetic objects, metaliterary in nature and self-referential, is a defining feature of the new style. In that regard, and even if he never reaches the level of intricacy of the true poets of the new style, ʿĀqil Khān is clearly a conscious follower of Nauʿī Khabūshānī and other poets of this trend:

> *chūn dilam shuʿla-bāz shud ba zabān*
> *shuʿla-zan shud zabān ba gōsh-i jahān*
>
> *naqsh bastam ba lauḥ-i afsāna*
> *nām-i īn nāma shamʿ-u parvāna*
> *har kujā shamʿ rukh bar afrōzad*
> *jān-i parvāna lamʿaʾash sōzad*

shamʿ ham dar ghamash zi girya-u sō
z birasānad shab shitāb ba rōz
z'ān ki yak shuʿla mē-kunad khāna
dar dil-i shamʿ-u jān-i parvāna

ham chunīn īn do ʿishq-bāz-i majāz dīda[22]
az yak sharār sōz-u gudāz
ātash-i ʿishq bar-afrōkhta and
har do az yak zabāna sōkhta and
(Rāzī 2017, 93)

When my ardent heart lit my tongue,
it set on fire the ears of this world.

I inscribed, on the tablet of tales,
the name of this story: The Candle and the Moth.

Wherever a candle lights up its face,
its splendour sets the moth's soul ablaze.

When the despaired candle ardently weeps,
it quickly turns its nights into days.

Since but one flame dwells
both in the candle's heart and in the moth's soul,

Similarly, these two worldly lovers
were burned and consumed by one and only flash of sparks.

They were set ablaze by the fire of love;
one and only flame burned them both.

ʿĀqil Khān explains the choice of his title *The Candle and the Moth* as a reference to the poetic tradition of fire imagery in Persian classical poetry. First, he brings into play a classical comparison: the tongue, symbolising poetic inspiration, is likened to a flame. Rāzī then follows Saʿdī's footsteps and elaborates on the candle and the moth (an image of absolute love and devotion) by borrowing from him the image of the 'weeping candle'.[23] The originality of Rāzī is to reuse this candle and moth imagery in the context of an Indian love story culminating

22 The critical edition has only the recensions *yada* and *dīd*. This word was corrected to *dīda* to respect the meter and obtain a satisfactory meaning.

23 See Saʿdī 1941, 120: *shabē yād dāram ki chashmam na khuft | shanīdam ki parvāna bā shamʿ guft | ki man ʿāshiqam gar bisōzam ravāst | tarā girya-u sōz-bārī chirāst*.

in a self-sacrifice. Padmāvatī and Ratansen, at the very end, burn in the same fire very much like the moth who, attracted by the candle, burns to his death in the flame.

Fire is also the essence of good love poetry: every poem about passion must burn the ears of its audience with its 'fiery tongue'. The high degree of recursivity and metapoeticity that Rāzī instils in his images is quite typical of the intricacies of the new style, even if the rest of the poem does not reach the imaginal complexity of other similar works.

In *The Sun and the Moon*, ʿĀqil Khān also engages with very similar topics:

dilā sōzē ki dārī ba zabān dih
zabān-i shuʿla bar nūk-i qalam nih

biband az shuʿla nakhl īn bōstān rā
bizan dam ātash-i Hindūstān rā[24]

O heart, place your burn on the tongue,
put the tip of your flame on the tip of your pen.

With this blaze, plant the tree in the orchard,
blow the fire of India.

Here again, we have a close association among the burning fire of love, poetic inspiration (the pen) and 'fiery' India. Rāzī clearly follows the footsteps of Nauʿī Khabūshānī. However, in his case, the Indian fiery imagery that he develops has another point of origin in the vernacular poetics of Mañjhan and Jāysī. Indeed, as I tried to demonstrate earlier, the Persian intertext is a framework that allows the poet to claim his place in the classical repertoire, but is not the only intertextual element that ʿĀqil Khān employs. If we read, for example, the prologue of *The Sun and the Moon* while keeping in mind the rest of the composition, another picture appears in which Rāzī's reading and emulation of the vernacular text plays an important part.

24 London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 4*v*.

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2.4 Satī and Burning Passions: Love and Self-destruction in the Vernacular Intertext of *The Sun and the Moon* (*Mihr-u māh*)

Indeed, when, in *The Sun and the Moon*'s prologue, Rāzī foregrounds fire-based imagery, he also draws attention on the very components he borrows from the Awadhī romances. Indeed, in the *Madhumālatī* fire is also a major poetical element, as it represents the inner pains of separation (*biraha*, skt.: *viraha*) and, more broadly, love and its soul-transforming powers. Separation, like the *satī*, is a voluntary self-immolation of the lover, motivated by his passion for the beloved but, contrary to *satī*, it happens only spiritually. It is beyond doubt that a part of ʿĀqil Khān's readership was familiar with the Awadhī romances or, at least, with the vernacular poetics used by Mañjhan and Jāysī, including the fire-based imagery.[25] The universe that he devises is thus designed to resonate with both the earlier Indo-Persian tradition and Neo-Indo-Aryan literature.

In the case of the fire imagery, the proximity of the satī-related images and the descriptions of the pains of separation is very clear in Mañjhan's text. Indeed, in the *Madhumālatī* we find expressions such as: *nakha sikha uṭhī kuṁvara ke jvālā* (the flames [of passion] took up the Prince's [whole body], from head to toe); *eka agini dui ṭhāeṁ bārā* (there is one fire [= love] lit in two places [= bodies]); *pema agini* (the fire of love); *aba lahi guputa jariuṁ tehi āgī* (until now I have burned secretly in that fire); *biraha dauṁ* (the bonfire of separation).[26] It is this poetical universe that Rāzī is trying to emulate in the *Mihr-u māh* when he uses expressions such as: *sōz-i dil* (the burn of his/her heart); *zi sōz-i ʿishq-i ʿālam-sōz nālīd* (he cried because of the burn of love, fire raiser of the world – when Manohar is separated from Madhumālatī); *gham-i dil-sōz-i khwud kard iẓhār* (she expressed her heart-burning pain – when Madhumālatī is separated from Manohar). See also the following passages, where he puts such words in the mouth of Madhumālatī: *zi sōz-i ḥijr-i tō rōzam siyah shud* (my days have been obscured by the burn of my separation from you), *labam khushk ast az āh-i jigar-tāb* (my lips were dried up by heart-burning sighs).[27]

To remain in the textual framework that I chose for this article, focusing on the introductions and conclusions of the *masnavī*s, a close

25 See for example the *Present of India* (*Tuḥfat ul-Hind*), an encyclopaedia of the Indian sciences, including poetics, written during Aurangzēb's reign (Mīrzā Khān 1975) or the *dhrupad* poems sung in Braj Bhāṣā at the Mughal court: Delvoye 1991.

26 Jāysī 1951, 62 stanza 45, 98 stanza 117, 126 stanza 151, 164 stanza 309, 164 stanza 310.

27 London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, ff. 19*v*, 29*r*, 33*r* etc.; London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 27*v*; London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 49*r*; London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 49*r*.

reading of the concluding remarks of *The Sun and the Moon* also allows us to appreciate how ʿĀqil Khān interwove his composition with the Awadhī text and how fire imagery played an important part in this literary layering. Let us first read an extract of the conclusion of Mañjhan's *Madhumālatī*:

> *pema kai āgi sahī jeiṁ āṁcā*
> *so jaga janami kāla seuṁ bāṁcā*
> (Jāysī 1951, 481, stanza 538)
>
> The one who endured the flames of the fire of love
> enjoys in this world a life spared from death.

The next stanza adds:

> *kabitā gāta jabahi lahi rahaï jagata mahaṁ nāuṁ*
> (Jāysī 1951, 482, stanza 539)
>
> As long as poetry's limbs will live on, their names [Madhumālatī and Manohar] will subsist in the world.

The fire of love is described by Mañjhan as a mystical force that transforms the soul, purifies it with its burning flames and opens the doors of immortality to the lovers. Love poetry, similarly, carrying the story of Manohar and Madhumālatī, makes their passionate 'burning' legacy live on in the world. Rāzī, in his own conclusion borrows some of these ideas:

> *khwushā hāl-i dil-i āzād-i mardē*
> *ki gardad banda-yi ʿishqē-u dardē* [...]
>
> *ba har maḥfil buvad zʿū dāstānē*
> *ba har manzil bimānad zʿū nishānē* [...]
>
> *gar īn shuʿla buland āvāza kardī*
> *ba dilhā dāgh-i ḥasrat tāza sāzī*[28]
>
> Blessed is the rank of the heart of the man
> who became the slave of a passion or a pain [of love]. [...]
>
> In every assembly his story is told,
> at every step a sign of him remains. [...]

28 London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, ff. 14*v*-15*r*.

e-ISSN 2385-3042

If you made this flame [= story] famous
you left a new scar of suffering in the hearts.

Like Mañjhan, our poet describes love and its sufferings as a pathway to immortality. The heart of the lover is free because he is liberated from the fetters of the material world and, as a result, his spiritual passion remains in the world in the form of a tale that grants him immortality. Since love is equated with the inner-burning fire of separation, the amorous *masnavī* is compared to a flame, that, if spread around, burns the hearts of the listeners when they experience the pain of love through it. Once again, Rāzī borrows the poetic ideas of his vernacular source text. He 'domesticates' the imagery of *satī* and separation by bringing into play Persian literary references such as works by Saʿdī or Nauʿī but, as we saw reading the prologues, he also always conscientiously focuses the attention of his readership on the 'indianity' of the imagery he develops. This is not merely a trick to set the stage in South Asia, but also a way to signify to his cultured readers that he wants them to identify, reading between the lines, the vernacular poetics of love-in-separation typical of Awadhī and other Neo-Indo-Aryan literatures (Vaudeville 1962).

The poetic devices and tropes that ʿĀqil Khān uses to suggest an Indian setting in his *masnavī*s rely greatly on the combined imagery of fire and self-immolation. However, love in separation and *satī* are not the only pillars of the complex imaginal world introduced by Rāzī to the reader in the prologues. Indeed, he also builds thoroughly on the warm nature of the climate in India to develop the intertext of his *masnavī*s. This image is not inherited from Nauʿī, so we must further our research to locate its origin.

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3 India and Fire: The Importance of Faiẓī and His Quest for Poetic Novelty in India

3.1 India and Its Warm Climate: A Poetic Conceit

Let us dive in a few extracts, taken from *The Sun and the Moon*:

ba Hind īn shuʿla afrōzanda-tar bīn
dar īn iqlīm khwur sōzanda-tar bīn[29]

Look, in India the sparks glow more,
look, in that climate the sun shines more.

And from *The Candle and the Moth*:

bas ki dar Hind ḥusn jilva-gar ast
ātash-i ʿishq khāna-sōz-tar ast

shuʿla-yi ʿishq-i Hind pur-sharar ast
z'ān ki dar Hind mihr garm-tar ast

sōz dar Hind sīna-sāz buvad
naghma-yi Hind jān-gudāz buvad
(Rāzī 2017, 89)

When beauty reveals itself in India,
the fire of love set houses on fire far quicker.

The flame of Indian love is full of sparks,
because in India the sun is warmer.

In India, the burn cuts deep,
the song of India melts the soul.

The core idea here is that, in India, love is more intense. As in the poetics of ʿĀqil Khān love and fire are one and the same; the power of Indian love is characterised by its burning features. In India, the climate is warmer because the sun shines more intensively. As a result, the sparks glow brighter, and the flames burn more violently. The lovers, sick with the fever of passion, are reduced to ashes, and their souls melt one into another. This imagery, together with the theme of *satī* and of love in separation, is the backbone of ʿĀqil Khān's

29 London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 4*v*.

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Indian *masnavī*s. Although the mastery that Rāzī has over this *locus* is quite remarkable, it is not exactly his invention.

In fact, our poet refers here to another great piece of Indo-Persian literature which is the *masnavī Nal and Daman* (*Nal-u Daman*) written by Abū'l-Faiẓ Ibn Mubārak 'Faiẓī' in 1594-95 AD at the request of Akbar the Great (Faiẓī 1987, 28, 48-9).[30] The poetic setting for the adaptation in Persian of an Indian story that Faiẓī creates in the prologue of the poem is, in that regard, the unambiguous model for later authors like 'Abd ul-Shakūr 'Bazmī' or 'Āqil Khān 'Rāzī'. Indeed, it is probably in this composition that we come across the image of the new Persian adaption versus the old Indian story for the first time. Likewise, the poetic idea of the warmth of India's climate appears to be Faiẓī's creation, and was clearly borrowed from him by Rāzī:

dil bā dil tan bā tan ba-ham dōst
āmēkhtand chūn do maghz-u yak pōst

īn ḥusn ba 'ishq shud giriftār
chūn bāda bā shīsha naghma bā tār

īn shu'la ba Hind garm-khēz ast
īnjā ki āftāb tēz ast

'ishq-i 'Arab-u 'Ajam shanīdam
az Hind bigōyam ānchi dīdam
(Faiẓī 1987, 48-9)

Heart with heart, body with body,
the two lovers fused together like two fleshes in one body.

Beauty tied itself to love,
as wine to the bottle, a music to its strings.

These flames are powerful in India
because here the sun is strong.

I heard about love in Arab lands and in Iran,
I will relate what I saw in India.

30 Faiẓī (1547-1595) is a very important author who was the poet laureate of Akbar's court. *Nal and Daman* was meant to be part of a complete *Khamsa*, a rewriting of Niẓāmī's work, and in which *Nal and Daman* was intended to be a response to *Lailī and Majnūn*. This *masnavī* tells the story, borrowed with a few alterations from the *Mahābhārata*, of King Nala and Princess Damayantī. It appears to have been extremely influential since many *tazkira* writers praise it greatly. Faiẓī 1987, 28-53.

This extract is important because it shows how the three elements that we have concentrated upon so far (love and fire, the *satī* and the warm climate of India) were put together for the first time by Faiẓī. At the end of the story, Daman commits suicide on the pyre of her deceased husband, Nal. Faiẓī describes how they become one, both on a spiritual and a bodily level. India is then promoted by Faiẓī to the rank of third 'great land of love', after the Arab world (*ʿarab*) and Iran (*ʿajam*).

3.2 India as the Future of Poetry

The climate imagery that ʿĀqil Khān resorts to is, unambiguously, a reference to a literary tradition going back to Ḥasan Sijzī and Amīr Khusrau, in which Faiẓī is, by far, the most important predecessor for the seventeenth-century author. ʿĀqil Khān 'Rāzī' is perfectly conscious of what he owes to Faiẓī and presents, poetically, the heritage he engages with in *The Candle and the Moth*:

ʿishq tā sākht naghma-yi ushshāq
parda dar gasht īn navā ba ʿIrāq

gāh Farhād shīsha bar sar zad
gāh Khusrau ba sīna khanjar zad

dar ʿArab tā damīd īn afsūn
ṣad cho Majnūn fasāna shud ba junūn

bāz īn shuʿla tā ba Hind afrōkht
bas ki maʿshūq misl-i ʿāshiq sōkht

Padam az ātash-i Ratan sōzad
sōz-i Nal khirman-i Daman sōzad

ānchi madhumālat az Manōhar dīd
dahdah-i mihr-u māh kam-tar dīd
(Rāzī 2017, 89)

When love sung the song of lovers,
its tune reached Iraq.

There, Farhād hit himself with a bottle,
there, Khusrau stabbed himself with a knife.

When the spell reached Arab lands,
a hundred men were struck by madness like Majnūn.

e-ISSN 2385-3042

Then, this spark set India on fire
and lovers and beloved burned.

Padam burned in the fire of Ratan,
the love of Nal set ablaze the pyre of Daman.

What Madhumālatī saw in Manohar
concealed the glitter of the sun and the moon.

In this excerpt, Rāzī stages a cosmology of love in which the "song of lovers" is dispatched throughout the world. It reaches Iran first and strikes Farhād and Khusrau, two famous lovers of the Persian literary tradition. Then the spell bewitches the Arab world and maddens the well-known Majnūn. The last country to be touched is India, where love inflames Ratan and Padam, as well as Nal and Daman. This last passage shows that ʿĀqil Khān had, without doubts, Faiẓī's *Nal and Daman* present in his mind while he was writing.[31] Every type of love has its specificities: in Iran, self-destruction, in Arab lands, madness, and in India, self-consumption. The love of Manohar and Madhumālatī, even if it does not culminate in *satī*, takes place in that scheme; it is a 'burning love' because it is the story of the passion of two celestial bodies: Manohar is the sun and Madhumālatī, the moon.

The fact that Indian lovers come last in ʿĀqil Khān's cosmology is important: he is attempting to demonstrate the newness of his subject, imitating in that regard many contemporary poets. The genius of the passage is to assert, at the same time, the mastery of Rāzī over the Persian literary tradition, and his modernity in his choice of topic. Besides, ʿĀqil Khān correlates the literary power of Indian subjects with the historical phenomenon of the mass migration toward India of Persianate elites:

savād-i chashm-u rang-i rūy-i hindū
buvad dil-band chūn gēsū-yi hindū

azʿān har kas ba Hind āyad safar-sāz
ba mulk-i khwēshtan kam-tar ravad bāz

magar tājir ki ū bē-dard bāshad
u yā saiyāḥ-i ʿālam-gard bāshad[32]

31 India is the last step in the narrative because it is the 'newcomer' in the Persian tradition: Farhād and Khusrau appear in the *Shāhnāma* (eleventh century), Lailī and Majnūn in the *Khamsa* (twelfth century), and Nal and Daman in Faiẓī's *masnavī* (sixteenth century).

32 London, SOAS, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 5*r*.

> The blackness of the eyes and the colour of the face of the Hindu is as charming as the hair of the Hindu.
>
> This is the reason why everybody tries his luck in India, and rarely goes back to his land,
>
> Unless we are speaking of an inconsiderate merchant or of a traveller going all round the world.

ʿĀqil Khān refers here to one of the *topoi* concerning India, which is the blackness of the Hindus and the beauty of young Hindu men (Losensky, Sharma 2011, 93). ʿĀqil Khān remarks that, as a result, everyone is eager to move to South Asia: *The Sun and the Moon* is a poetic response to this immigration of Persian elites in Hindūstān. If India is a new virgin place full of opportunities for ambitious young men, this field is also open for poetry dealing with fresh, unheard-of topics to explore, inspired by Neo-Indo-Aryan literatures. This recalls Nauʿī Khabūshānī's literary project, aiming at novelty and renewal, stimulated by Prince Dāniyāl's patronage. Courtly patronage plays indeed quite an important part in this literary scheme. The desire to hear and read new, contemporary productions is characteristic of Mughal cultural sponsorship policy, seeking to assert its distinctiveness in the Persianate world (Sharma 2010, 256). In that regard, the two *maṯnavī*s are typical of the Mughals' imperial literary taste, at the same time deeply rooted in the classical Persian tradition and eager to develop its own novelty and originality.

3.3 The Pen-Identity of ʿĀqil Khān 'Rāzī': A Synthesis of the Indo-Persian Literary Repertoire

The will of ʿĀqil Khān to assert a distinctive Indo-Persian voice is, as a matter of facts, very explicit in *The Sun and the Moon*'s conclusion:

> *basā āʾīna-yi raushan-ẓamīrān*
> *zi Hind andākhta partau ba Īrān*
>
> *ba Khusrau bīn ki māh-i kishvar-i Balkh*
> *ba Hindustān namūda ghurraʾash salkh*
>
> *ba gōsh-i jān sukhan rā dād taʿlīf*
> *zi iʿjāzash zabān-i ʿājiz zi tauṣīf*
>
> *Ḥasan rā bīn ki az ḥusn-i kalāmash*
> *chi labrēz-i maʿānī būd jāmash*

girāmī nukta-sanj-i dihlavī būd
sarāsar naẓm-u nasrash maʿnavī būd

zi Faiẓī gō ki īn faiẓ az kujā yāft
chu dar Hindūstān nushū-u namā yāft

savād-i Hind rā gar nukta-dānī
sipāhī dān zi afvāj-i maʿānī

ba tabʿam lauḥ-i hindī chūn falak dād
ba ṣābūn-i ʿirāqī shust ustād[33]

Many enlightened minds' mirrors
have reflected in Iran a ray of India.

See Khusrau, the moon of the country of Balkh:
his crescent phase completed its month in India.

He supplied poetry to the ear of the soul;
his miracles filled the tongue of the impotent with words.

See Ḥasan: thanks to the beauty of his poetry,
how did his cup become full with meaning!

He was a precious poet from Delhi,
both his poetry and his prose were exceptionally deep.

As for Faiẓī: tell us where did he find this eloquence?
– It is because he grew up in India.

If you are a connoisseur of the darkness of India,
learn that you are a soldier from the armies of meaning.

Since the heavens have imprinted my nature with the tablet of India,
my master washed it with the soap of Iraq.

Rāzī is stating the main components of his poetic identity: he was born and raised in India, appreciates Hindavī poetry, is highly literate in Persian and admires the great Indo-Persian authors. Rāzī builds a chain of poets starting with Khusrau and Ḥasan Sijzī and going through Faiẓī in order to, finally, include him. As I attempted to demonstrate earlier, Amīr Khusrau, Ḥasan of Delhi and Faiẓī all

33 I follow here the recension of another manuscript: Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Mihr-u māh*, f. 58*r*-58*v*.

e-ISSN 2385-3042

brought a contribution to the imagery of fire in an Indian setting by developing poetically the theme of satī, of love in separation or of the heat of the climate in South Asia. ʿĀqil Khān, closing his *masnavī*, obviously wishes to make his identification with this literary universe clear to his reader.

However, the literary connection binding together those poets runs even deeper than their mere identity of Indo-Persian poets speaking from South Asia to the Persianate cosmopolis. Indeed, as we saw in some of the chosen extracts above, Rāzī developed in his two *masnavī*s a complex intertextual structure, sometimes straying away from the original poem, sometimes getting closer and closer to it, borrowing ideas and expressions from the Awadhī text. This method of layering or 'palimpsest', in the words of Gérard Genette (1982), of the text, adding elements inspired by Indo-Aryan literatures to the Persianate framework, is in itself a tribute to the literary tradition in which Rāzī locates himself.

Ḥasan Sijzī Dihlavī is, perhaps, the first to have included in his *Tale of Love* major South Asian themes, while referring to Niẓāmī on many instances (Gould, Tahmasebian 2021).[34] As for Amīr Khusrau, he is famous for having opened his *dīvān* with the verse "The cloud rains and I am separated from my friend" (*abr mē-bārad u man mē-shavam zi yār judā*) (Schimmel 1992, 203), a clear reference to the twelve-month separation of the lover from the beloved (*bārahmāsa*) as described in many Neo-Indo-Aryan poems (Vaudeville 1965). Abū'l-Faiẓ 'Faiẓī', literate in Hindavī, Persian and Sanskrit, is the last member of this literary tradition and the most important one for Rāzī, since Faiẓī's literary project is his main model. Indeed, in *Nal Daman*, Faiẓī strays away from the storyline found in the Mahābhārata (Desai 1958) and recomposes the tale in Persian, in the framework created by Niẓāmī, while discreetly following some of the conventions and tropes of the Awadhī *pemakathā* genre. Many passages do conceal a subtle intertext pointing at Awadhī works such as the *Padmāvat* and the *Madhumālatī*.[35]

34 The final satī scene is the most obvious element, but, moreover, at some point in the story, the beloved woman tells her lover that she will give herself to him while her husband is away on a business trip (Gould, Tahmasebian 2021, 84), which is a typical element of Indic literatures. See for example the *Śukasaptati* in which Prabhāvatī, the wife of Madana Sena the Brahmin, plans to take a lover while her husband is away on a business trip. See Haksar 2000.

35 For example, in a scene that recalls the Madhumālatī, the birth of love in Nal's heart causes a sickness for which the doctors cannot find a cure. Daman is said to be from the Deccan – the dancers that captivate the hero in the beginning of Madhumālatī are also from the Deccan – and is described to the hero in a way that would perfectly correspond, albeit in a deeply persianised way, to a head-to-toe description, a classical element of the *pemakathā* genre. The lovers, burning with the fire of separation, write each other letters that resemble the messages exchanged by the protagonists of

It is this type of literary palimpsest that ʿĀqil Khān is trying to emulate: his claim of belonging to an Indo-Persian literary tradition and his use of fire imagery to reinforce this pen-identity are ways to signify to his reader that he writes 'in' the Persian classical repertoire while subtly infusing Hindavī tropes in between the lines. When Rāzī speaks, like Faiẓī does in his own prologue, about the "Indian imprint" of his nature he is not merely indulging in a display of stylistic mastery, but expressing something of his own story as a litterateur. Since he was undoubtedly exposed to South Asian tales in his life, including some belonging to the Awadhī *pemakathā* genre, some of the poetical material that fills his mind (both narrative patterns and images) is Indian in nature (and thus possesses, for the pun, a dark complexion). However, his literary language, the one his master taught him, is Persian: it is the poetic and scholarly tradition to which he refers and speaks, turning it into the 'soap' with which he 'washes away' the darkness of his Indian mind filled with Neo-Indo-Aryan pieces of literature.[36]

This literary imagery playing with black and white contrasts presents to the reader, in a playful way, a new manner of making Persian literature prompted by the composite and multilingual nature of the cultural life in South Asia during the seventeenth century. It is true that the search for novelty in poetry during the Mughal period is largely embodied by the intricacies of the new style as practised by ʿUrfī Shīrāzī, Ṣāʾib Tabrēzī or, later on, Bēdil Dihlavī, who developed the complexity of poetic images to previously unseen degrees. However, as we saw in the case of the *Rat Padam*, the *Burning and Melting* and the texts of ʿĀqil Khān, the adaptor poets also laid claim to novelty and modernity, enriching their imagery system in the *masnavī* with complex intertexts, both referring to intra-Persian references but also going, in disguise, in the direction of Hindavī texts.

Mañjhan and Jāysī's texts (including a *firāqnāma*, a Persian equivalent to what would be a *barahmāsa* in Hindavī). Finally yet importantly, a bird intervenes at some point in the story as a go-between and, strangely enough, happens to be from Sarangdīp (Ceylon), exactly as is the parrot in the story of Padmāvatī. One can refer to the very useful summary of the tale in Subrahmanyam, Alam 2012, 218-40.

36 Another pun is present in that verse: the *nukta-dān* is the 'connoisseur of the *nukāt*' that is of the 'subtleties' (*pointes* in French, *acutezze*, *argutezze* in Italian) but also, literally, of the 'dots', the fundamental graphical element of the Perso-Arabic script made by the reed pen dipped in black ink on white paper, a conceit once again pointing at the dark appearance of Indians.

4 Conclusion

ʿĀqil Khān is not considered to be a major poet in Indo-Persian literary historiography. His name scarcely appears in compilations and scholarly dissertations, and a large volume of his poetic compositions remains unedited.[37] However, his work is a matter of interest for a number of reasons. First, he is located at an interesting intersection of the Persian literary tradition. His references are deeply classical (Niẓāmī, Saʿdī, Rūmī), and he does not engage as profoundly as others in the intricacies of the new style. Nevertheless, he pays considerable attention to the modern literary accomplishments of Faiẓī or Nauʿī. ʿĀqil Khān rarely comes up with new images or poetic conceits himself, as he prefers to borrow them from other compositions and to build in the framework of Persian Indian-themed romances. He is, second, particularly good at manipulating these traditional images and uses the Indian fire imagery in very resourceful ways, in the two *masnavī*s, using his knowledge of vernacular South Asian literature to enrich his compositions. In that regard, our two texts are not only literary responses to Faiẓī's *Nal and Daman* but also imitations of Mañjhan and Jāysī's *Madhumālatī* and *Padmāvat*. As Rāzī explains, his literary purpose is to tell these Indian stories in an Iranian mode, that is, to disguise them but, like any disguise would, he still lets the cultured reader get a glimpse of the original poem in between the lines. The fire-inspired *topoi* to which he resorts are a mean of locating his *masnavī*s in a distinctly Persian poetic context while maintaining a creative ambiguity *vis-à-vis* the original thematic framework of the two Avadhī *pemakathās* (for example, fire imagery can also refer to the vernacular theme of separation). The inner dynamism of these two poems is provided by Rāzī's deep engagement with the concept of love. The imagery and the style are infused with mystic and philosophical ideas about passion, intertwined with the fire-imagery, that are, in themselves, a form of *istiqbāl* pointing at a number of features of Niẓāmī's or Faiẓī's poetry as well as the key-concept and core-imagery of love (*pema*) as depicted in the Awadhī *pemakathās* (Pandey 1982). In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that the study of stylistic features and intertextuality are two essential and interlinked fields as far as Indo-Persian poetics are concerned. Unknotting the grid of references and poetic images spread in ʿĀqil Khān's two Indian *masnavī*s allowed me to locate this author more precisely in the literary field of his time and to appreciate the intricacies of his multilingual poetic culture. As Georges Perec would put it, writing was for ʿĀqil Khān a process stemming from deep feelings (love

37 Such is the case of *Mihr-u Māh* but also, for example, of *Kashkōl* or *Naghmāt ul-ʿishq*, two mystical treatises. See the list of his works in Jāvēd 1999, 61.

e-ISSN 2385-3042

and passion) that reached maturity through the cultivation of his composite cultural heritage (both Persian and Hindavī) and through the exploration of the *loci poetici* cherished by former generations of poets. Much remains to be done in the field of the Indo-Persian translations/adaptations of Awadhī romances and many of them still lie unedited in manuscript format, but I would like to suggest, as a concluding remark, that a fruitful approach could be to look deeper into the palimpsests that they offer, seeking to retrace how early-modern Persian-speaking authors read and reinterpreted texts from Neo-Indo-Aryan literatures before turning them into *maṯnavī*s. Such a work could bring significant contributions to the literary and cultural history of the Mughal Empire by shedding light on the reading and writing practices of Persianate intellectuals during the seventeenth century and beyond.

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