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The court of ‘Abd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān as a bridge between Iranian and Indian cultural traditions

Corinne Lefèvre

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Culture and Circulation

Literature in Motion in Early Modern India

Edited by

Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch



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The present volume originated in a conference in 2006 at Leiden University in the Netherlands, which brought together a group of scholars who saw the need to better understand the cultural exchanges that were driven by the circulation of writers, poetic forms, and ideas in premodern South Asia. The editors convened a panel entitled "People in Motion, Ideas in Motion: Culture and Circulation in Premodern South Asia" over two days, provoking many interesting nodes of discussion. We have since worked closely with the contributors over a period of years to produce the essays collected here. Not all of the original panelists (there were nearly twenty) are represented, but all helped in the conceptualization of the project. We are particularly thankful to Vasudha Dalmia, Françoise "Nalini" Delvoye, Samira Sheikh, Ramya Sreenivasan, and Hugh van Skyhawk for their contribution to the ideas that fuel the essays in the volume.

The Leiden conference marked a moment of taking stock of the history and practice of the study of India's centuries of textual traditions. Several of the scholars working in vernacular languages (especially Hindi) had regularly interacted at a triennial international conference that was often dubbed "the Bhakti conference". Many of us felt that it would be desirable to meet more regularly as well as to engage with wider linguistic terrains and broader questions. One productive outcome of the panel was to foreground the links and crossovers between the discrete and sometimes fragmented academic lineages that comprise the field. This volume, which especially foregrounds the early modern period, develops new ideas, but also stands on the shoulders of a pioneering generation of scholars, who brought a wealth of material to light and first charted this relatively unknown terrain.

The sparkling presence of Aditya Behl merits a special tribute. As a discussant, he commented on and summarized the insights from the various papers, and helped to synthesize them in a manner that enormously benefited the present volume. His untimely death in 2009 stopped short his contribution to this field of scholarship, but his sparkling genius still inspires the essays in the volume.

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THE COURT OF 'ABD-UR-RAḤĪM KHĀN-I KHĀNĀN AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN IRANIAN AND INDIAN CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Corinne Lefèvre*

'Abd-ur-Raḥīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627) was a major figure from the Mughal nobility during the reigns of Akbar (1556–1605) and Jahāngīr (1605–27). Born in India, he was the son of Bairam Khān—one among the few Iranian *amīrs* who had gathered around Bābur (r. 1526–30) in the hope of a new and rewarding career under the rising Mughal power. Bairam Khān had indeed achieved considerable success under Bābur and his successors (he became the tutor and vice-regent of the young Akbar) before falling into disgrace in 1561 and being murdered soon afterwards. Following Bairam Khān's death, Akbar took his only son under his personal care and entrusted his education to several distinguished scholars. The 1580s saw the real start of 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm's political career, the sequence of which closely parallels that of the Mughal expansion: After having successfully headed the imperial campaigns in Gujārat (1583) and Sindh (1591), he was assigned to the Deccan (1593) where he spent his remaining life and enjoyed the highest degree of power and autonomy.¹

Following the imperial example—and more particularly that of his father—'Abd-ur-Raḥīm was a man of the sword as well as of the pen. He first distinguished himself by his language skills: His own writings show that he was proficient in Turkish, Persian, and Hindavi, and he is said to have known Arabic, Sanskrit, and Portuguese—learning the last at Akbar's request. His personally translating Bābur's memoirs from Turkish into Persian testifies to his linguistic capabilities. The Khān was also an author in his own right, as is evident from the poetry he composed under the pen name of "Raḥīm" ("the compassionate"). Aside from his own literary skills, the *amīr* was an enthusiastic patron of architecture as well as an ardent collector of books. From the 1580s onwards, he maintained a library-cum-workshop, which is one of the best documented examples of a sub-imperial library in Mughal times. Reflecting the wide-ranging interests of its patron

* I am grateful to Allison Busch, Sunil Kumar, Imre Bangha, and the late Aditya Bahl for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article.

¹ For a detailed account of 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm's career under Akbar, see Husain 1999: 27–36.

in literature, painting, and architecture, the *Khān's* court (and renowned generosity) attracted scholars and artists from all over Iran as well as from different parts of India.

As shown by this brief survey, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's life and achievements fully participated in some of the circulatory dynamics that nurtured the Mughal Empire. Himself the son of an Iranian migrant, he travelled extensively within and on the edge of the royal territories, bringing him and many other soldier-administrators into contact with regional courtly traditions that differed in some cases substantially from the central norm under elaboration. Successively established in Tharta, Ahmadabad, and Burhanpur, his court became another moving center for the growing flow of West and South Asian literati, who carried with them different languages and cultural paradigms. Except for the Iranian origin and the geographical locations of his court, the above characterization of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm could, however, equally apply to any of the Mughal royalty he served. Why then choose to address the question of circulation through this figure? First and foremost the existence of contemporary, relevant, and yet relatively untapped documentation—in this case the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīm*, a massive chronicle commissioned by 'Abd-ur-Rahīm that details his life as well as his activities as a patron—is a strong draw for the historian. Second is the dual characterization of his person in secondary literature. While the accounts found in handbooks of Mughal history generally portray the *Khān-i Khānān* as a great general and administrator but mention only briefly his cultural activities, the man takes on the garb of Rahīm under the pen of historians of Hindi literature and is presented almost exclusively as the author of a rich corpus of poetry written in Hindavi. Rahīm obviously possessed a certain fluidity in identity that has by and large failed to be addressed in scholarship, but the circulation paradigm adopted in this book should help to uncover it. Third is the opportunity to closely examine the cultural dynamics of circulation at work in a sub-imperial court envisioned as one among the many courtly layers of early modern India, and to reflect on what these dynamics meant for their participants in terms of prestige. In this essay I will focus more particularly on two types of circulatory trajectories. The first is the circulation of people between Iran and India and across South Asia through a study of the *Khān's* entourage. I am also centrally concerned with crossovers between Persian and multi-faceted Indian cultural traditions as expressed in the works produced or patronized by Rahīm. After analysing these intertwined instances of circulation, the essay will conclude with a brief examination of the links between 'Abd-ur-

Rahīm's cultural stance and contemporary norms at the imperial Mughal court and thus address the question of the circulation of models from an imperial to a sub-imperial level. Before dealing with these questions, however, it is essential to pause a moment and properly introduce the main Persian source for this study, the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīm*.²

The work was written in 1616 at the behest of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm by a Persian immigrant named 'Abd-ul-Bāqī Nahāwandī. As shown by the events of his life, he was one among the many participants in the cultural and courtly networks that linked Iran to the Subcontinent during the early modern period, and his itinerary thus deserves more than a cursory treatment.³ 'Abd-ul-Bāqī was born in 1573 near Hamadan in western Iran. Of Kurdish origin, his family joined the service of the Safavids at the time of Shāh Isma'īl (r. 1501–1524). During Shah 'Abbas's reign (1587–1629), Nahāwandī's elder brother discharged the function of *wazīr* in Kashan, while he himself held the position of steward of the Shah's private purse in that same city. It was also in Kashan that he began to associate with literary people and to write poetry. Sometime after 1598 he met Mir Muḡhīs-ud-dīn Maḡwī Asadābādī, a Persian poet who had just returned from India where he had served 'Abd-ur-Rahīm. Nahāwandī may well have been swayed by the description of the *Khān's* munificent patronage but he decided to leave Iran for a very different reason. In 1607, his family suffered a sudden reversal of fortune: his elder brother was murdered, and when Nahāwandī took over his charge of *wazīr* in Kashan he was slandered to such a degree that he had no choice but self-imposed exile. On his arrival in India in 1614, he immediately proceeded to Burhanpur and shortly afterwards entered the service of the *Khān*, who commissioned him to write a book on his life and achievements. Unfortunately, not much is known of the life of Nahāwandī after he completed the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīm*. He first served Jahāngīr's son Prince Parvīz, and subsequently Mahābat *Khān* (one of the greatest *amīrs* of the time, also of Iranian origin), and stayed in India until his death sometime after 1636.⁴

The *Ma'āsir-i Rahīm* was thus composed at the request of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm during one of the most important periods of his career. Between 1612 and 1616 he exercised an undivided authority over the southern prov-

² Rahīm being both the *Khān's* pen name and a divine epithet, the title of the book may alternatively be translated as "The Memorable Deeds of Rahīm" or "The Glories of the Compassionate".

³ The following account is based on Nahāwandī 1910–31, iii: 1536–46.

⁴ Orthmann 1996: 12.

inces of the Mughal Empire. From the mid 1500s onwards, and even more during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, his management of Deccan affairs and, more particularly, of the Mughal campaigns launched against the independent sultanate of Ahmadnagar was, however, seriously questioned. He was thought to be secretly collaborating with the enemy and fomenting division among the Mughal *amirs* serving in the Deccan, thereby compromising the chances of Mughal success in the area.⁵ These accusations are far too numerous in the contemporary sources to be ignored or ascribed to malevolence or jealousy, as has been argued by some scholars.⁶ On the verge of old age (he was then sixty years old), the *Khān* probably felt the need to answer the charges brought against him and to present quite a different image from the one spread by his detractors. To this end, he appropriated the model of imperial chronicling as the means for his rehabilitation—a bold (yet not uncommon?) gesture on behalf of an *amir* as chronicles had, by the seventeenth century, become a privileged medium for dynastic and royal propaganda. The *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* should thus be considered not only a highly eulogistic work but also a great campaign of public relations directed at the emperor and the Mughal nobility.⁸ The political stakes that underlie this monumental work (encompassing more than three thousand pages) naturally necessitate a great deal of caution in its use by scholars.

1. *‘Abd-ur-Rahīm’s Entourage*

Of particular interest for understanding the various constituencies of ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm’s immense patronage activities is the epilogue (*khātima*) of the *Ma’āsir-i Rahīmī*. Covering nearly one thousand and seven hundred pages, it deals with the life and work of the men who benefited from the *Khān’s* patronage. The biographical entries are divided into three sections: ‘*ulamā’*

and scholars (*‘ulamā’ wa fuṣalā’*), poets (*shu‘arā’*), and soldiers and men of merit (*shāhīyān wa mustafīdan*). A number of scholars have relied on this epilogue to reconstruct the *amir’s* patronage,⁹ but none has critically assessed its status as a historical document. Here I would like to make two observations about the epilogue. The first relates to its scale. By devoting more than half of his work to the “protégés” of the *Khān*, Nahawandi drew special attention to ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm as an outstanding patron, and this stands as one of the pillars of the rehabilitation put forward by the *Ma’āsir-i Rahīmī*—the other two being to portray him as an exceptional administrator as well as a dervish whose piety verged on sanctity.¹⁰ That the scale of the *Khān’s* patronage was deemed fit to mend his damaged reputation as a statesman points to the enormous prestige attached to cultural activities in Mughal India and underlies their political significance. The presentation of ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm as an embodiment of the perfect patron clearly challenged the emperor who claimed that very status for himself.¹¹ The fact that one thousand and five hundred pages alone (i.e., nearly half of the whole *Ma’āsir-i Rahīmī*) were devoted to poets highlights how central culture was in the *Khān’s* definition of (his own) power. Albeit, this statement is not altogether surprising. As a sphere of activity that state authority could not so easily control, culture (and, more particularly, literature) was a space with a freer scope for self-assertion. That ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm and his panegyrist were fully aware of this is borne out by the shift towards hagiography shown by some parts of the *Ma’āsir-i Rahīmī*. The second observation about the epilogue relates to the criteria applied by Nahawandi when listing the recipients of the *Khān’s* patronage. These criteria were obviously quite loose and he included individuals, especially poets, who were only very vaguely connected with the *amir’s* court. Some poets mentioned in the epilogue never left Iran, and their relationship to the *Khān* amounted merely to the sending of a poem in the hope of some financial reward. *Zuhūrī* and *Malik Qummī* are telling examples of poets featured

⁵ Harawī 1960, ii: 498; Jahāngīr 1999: 114; ‘Abd-us-Sattār 2006: 114–5; Bhakkani 1993: 32. See in particular Schimmel 1990: 154, 159–60, and 1992: 210, 212, and 217.

⁷ While no trace of such an appropriation may be found (except for one case) during the preceding period, three other sub-imperial chronicles were commissioned by Mughal *amirs* during the reign of Jahāngīr: the *Zūdat-ur-tawārikh* for Shaikh Fārid Bukhārī also known as Murtaẓā Khān (d. 1616), the *Tārīkh-i Khān Jahānī wa Maklūzāt-i Aḡlānī* (1613) for Khān Jahān Lodi, and the *Aḡā-ul-akhbār* (1626–1627) for Khānjar Khān. Taken together, these works testify to the filtering down of imperial genres and instruments to the “lower” levels of the state apparatus—a process whose centrifugal implications would become clear by the eighteenth century.

⁸ For a demonstration of this point, see Lefèvre 2007: 1292–9.

⁹ Haq 1931, Naik 1966, Khān 1985, and Orthmann 1996.

¹⁰ This is argued in greater detail in Lefèvre 2007.

¹¹ In this respect, it is interesting to note that whereas Rahīm is never mentioned as a patron in the *Jahāngīr Nama*, most of the references to him found in the *Muḡils-i Jahāngīr*—a newly discovered chronicle that was written under the close supervision of the emperor—pertain to the poets he patronized (Shakibi, Naziri Nishāpūrī, Nari Khunāsānī, and Kufī) and to his commensurate poetry (‘Abd-us-Sattār 2006: 39–40, 49, 199–90, and 199). While this discrepancy may be explained by the different focuses and audiences of the texts, it shows that Jahāngīr was perfectly aware of the *Khān-i Khānān’s* high status as a patron and makes his silence in the memoirs all the more significant.

in the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* who were not actually under 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage. Even though both poets wrote verses in praise of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm,¹² it is well known that they were based at the courts of the sultans of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur. Of course, the privileged connection that both poets enjoyed with the Deccani courts did not prevent them from establishing special relations with other leading regional figures. Still, the advance of including such famous literary figures in the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* under the rubric of the poets patronized by the Khān could hardly have been missed by his panegyrist or the reader: 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's own status as a patron swelled accordingly as a result.

The aim of these remarks is not to preclude us from using the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* as a historical document, but rather to caution against any simple-minded reliance on its contents. Whenever possible, the information it provides must be checked against other sources. For the painters, we may benefit from consulting the notes and signatures inscribed on the manuscripts made or altered for 'Abd-ur-Rahīm. Thanks to the research conducted by John Seyller, these inscriptions have recently been collected, and he has uncovered the names of sixteen artists to supplement the list of five known from the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*. Seyller's analysis has further shown that the painters mentioned by Nahāwandi were far from the most prolific or gifted members of the Khān's atelier, and has pointed to the lack of a coherent motivation behind their inclusion in the chronicle.¹³ This last point may be interpreted as a sign of Nahāwandi's unfamiliarity with or lack of interest in the visual arts; it certainly calls for further caution in using his work. Concerning the architectural production, the verification process proves more intractable since none of the other descriptions that have come to my notice provide any new evidence on the architects or their buildings,¹⁴ and very few inscriptions have actually survived. In fact, I only know of one, which is dated 1607–1608 and concerns a *hammām* built on the orders of the Khān in Burhanpur.¹⁵ As to the Persian-speaking poets, additional information may be found in their own works, and the biographical literature (*tazkiras*) produced in Mughal India, the Deccan Sultanates, Safavid Iran, and Uzbek Central Asia. Altogether different is

the case of the Hindavi-speaking literati whom 'Abd-ur-Rahīm is also said to have extensively patronized.

In this respect, it is first important to note that the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* contains very little information on the subject. Nahāwandi states that Hindavi-speaking poets eulogized the Khān, but he also indicates that the favor (*tajammul wa in'ām wa ḥisān*) he bestowed on them was ten times inferior to that shown to Persian-speaking poets, meaning thereby that the former's material and symbolic remuneration (wages and prestige) corresponded to one-tenth of the latter's.¹⁶ Further on in the text, Nahāwandi also apologizes for not taking into account the Hindavi-speaking poets who showered praise on the Khān, and expresses the wish to deal at length with this group later.¹⁷ His wish was, however, never fulfilled and his silence raises a number of questions. First is the issue of Nahāwandi's access to the works of these Hindavi-speaking poets: Did he, during his stay in the Deccan, learn some kind of Dakani Hindavi that would have enabled him to read the poems? If so, why did he (or 'Abd-ur-Rahīm, for that matter) finally decide not to include them in his chronicle? While no definitive answer can be given here, several lines of reflection may be offered. The first one pertains to the intended audience of the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*, i.e., the emperor and the Mughal nobility (as hinted above) or, more precisely, the Persian-speakers among them. Now, while many of these men (including 'Abd-ur-Rahīm) were also proficient in Hindavi and took a keen interest in the literature written in that language, Persian certainly remained for them the most prestigious idiom where culture and politics were concerned. Concurrently, the personal prestige of these *amirs* depended first and foremost on the number and greatness of the Persian-speaking (rather than Hindavi-speaking) literati (preferably of Iranian origin) they were able to attract to their court.¹⁸ Even though the Khān personally cultivated both literary traditions, he or his panegyrist apparently refrained from giving them an equal visibility in the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*¹⁹—a rather astute

¹² Nahāwandi 1910–31, iii: 399–446, 450–2, 469–89.

¹³ Seyller 1999: 317–8.

¹⁴ Compare, for example, Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 607–9, and Jahāngīr 1999: 247 on the Garden of Victory (*ṭarḥ bāghā*) built at the behest of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm near Sarkhej (Gujarat).

¹⁵ Verma 1955–6: 115–6.

¹⁶ Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 561–2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 590.

¹⁸ It is significant, in this regard, that the position of *mullik-ush-shu'arā'* (poet-laureate) instituted by Akbar was exclusively meant for Persian-speaking poets. That this title was awarded only once to an Indian Muslim (Abū'l Faḍl's brother Faḍl) is even more telling (Aham 2003: 161).

¹⁹ A similar imbalance is manifest in Nahāwandi's treatment of the multilingualism of the Khān, whom he significantly refers to as *zabān-dān* (linguist). Whereas the author of the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* provides a detailed list of all the different types of Turkish and Iranian 'Abd-ur-Rahīm is said to have mastered, he remains somewhat elusive where Indian languages are concerned (Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 590–3).

choice in view of the cultural hierarchy that prevailed in the Mughal milieu for which the book was intended. Here again, one cannot help but note the very limited degree of circulation between the two poles of the *Khān's* identity.

Facing the gaps in Nahāwandi's account, the historian hoping to assess 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage of Hindavi-speaking poets should normally look for answers in the works of the latter. Unfortunately, it will not be attempted here in view of my own ignorance of Hindi—a limitation on my part that acutely points to the necessity of a sustained dialogue between scholars of early modern India working in various languages and different disciplinary fields in order to reach a deeper understanding of this multifaceted society. Pending the full realization of such a cooperation (in which this book participates), the following discussion relies solely on secondary literature written in English and should consequently be regarded as a very partial and preliminary treatment of the question. This secondary literature was produced largely by Indian historians of Hindi literature who were active during the 1950s-1960s at a time when the newly-born Republic of India was eagerly looking for historical figures able to bolster the nascent and somewhat precarious sense of nationalist feeling. Akbar was certainly the most qualified to carry out the task, as shown by the writings of many Indian historians who praised him as the architect of a national unity transcending religious boundaries.²⁰ This ideological context should be kept in mind when dealing with modern accounts of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm. Comparable to constructions of Akbar's religious pluralism, the *Khān's* connections with the Hindavi literary milieu as well as the poetry he wrote in that language seem to have inspired historians to put him on a pedestal in the manner of other putatively proto-nationalist figures. Their books have indeed portrayed 'Abd-ur-Rahīm as such an exceptional patron of Hindavi literature that he became at their hands a powerful symbol of Hindu-Muslim concord in pre-colonial times.²¹ The historian eager to reconsider this received wisdom has, furthermore, to face an even greater problem: the difficulty of accessing Mughal-period Hindavi court poetry. The factors that lie at the root of this relative inaccessibility (e.g. the Hindu nationalist perception of this courtly tradition as decadent, and the near exclusive focus of Mughal scholars on texts produced in Persian) need not

detain us longer here;²² suffice it to say that they resulted in both a lack of published editions of the aforementioned corpus and the absence of studies drawing on reliable manuscript traditions.

While the ideological context of the 1950s and 1960s and the specific intellectual parameters of Hindi literary history account to a large extent for the kind of assessment C. R. Naik provides of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage of Hindavi, a critical analysis of his *'Abd-ur-Rahīm Khān-i-Khānān and his Literary Circle* (1966) leads one to conclude that this aspect of the *Khān's* activities has been somewhat overstated.²³ The first point of criticism relates to the material on which Naik relied for his chapter entitled "Hindi Poets Patronised by the Khān-i-Khānān." He does not base his analysis on the few original sources available, but only on secondary literature written in Hindi, from which quotations of poems are occasionally extracted.²⁴ Naik draws from these sources a list of fourteen Hindavi-speaking poets said to have been patronized by 'Abd-ur-Rahīm. This list in turn calls for two remarks. First, even if taken at face value, the list testifies to the very different scales on which the *Khān's* patronage of Persian- and Hindavi-speaking poets seems to have operated—over a hundred Persian-speaking poets are mentioned in the *Mā'āsir-i-Rahīmīn*. Second, the list itself appears highly questionable when one turns to the names of the poets it provides and to the kind of evidence given in favor of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage. Arousing particularly strong suspicion are the names of two poets whose works are relatively well known today.

The first of them is Keśavdās (1555-1617), a poet often regarded as one of the founders of the *riẓ* literary tradition and one who has recently been the subject of a thorough re-examination.²⁵ Drawing on the opening verses of the *Jahāngīrī-ascandrikā* (Moonlight of the Fame of Jahāngīr, 1612), Naik argues that this historical poem was written for Irāj Khān, one of the sons of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm.²⁶ There are indeed a number of elements pointing in that direction, including the fact that the *Jahāngīrī-ascandrikā* contains a series of verses praising Irāj Khān as well as his father 'Abd-ur-Rahīm and his grandfather Bairam Khān.²⁷ As a matter of fact, no other Muslim lineage of the Mughal Empire benefited from such a preferential treatment at the

²² See Busch 2000a and 2001 for a discussion of these factors.

²³ To this day, C. R. Naik is the scholar writing in English who has paid the greatest attention to 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage of Hindavi-speaking poets.

²⁴ Naik 1966: 463-97.

²⁵ Busch 2004, 2005, and 2011, especially: 23-64.

²⁶ Naik 1966: 488, probably relying here on Chaudhuri 1954: 7.

²⁷ For further details on this subject, see Busch 2000a: 279, and 2001: 56 and 141.

²⁰ See among others, SHIVASTAVA 1973.

²¹ Vidyabankar 1950, Chaudhuri 1954, Jindal 1993: 136-41, Naik 1966: 463-97, and Handa 1978: 173-7.

hands of Keśavdās. The Khān was then probably on very good terms with the poet. However, there is no clear evidence that he patronized the latter, whose family had been employed by the Bundelas of Orchha for several generations.

Further calling into question the reliability of Naik is his mention of the great bhakti poet Tulśidās (1532–1623) among the Hindavi-speaking literati supposedly patronized by the *amir*. Naik gives no formal evidence of this link and is satisfied with echoing the otherwise baseless (if widespread) assertion that Tulśidās would have written his *Barvai Rāmāyan* under the influence of Rahīm—whom Naik, as many others, considers the “father” of the *barvai* meter.²⁸ Apart from the fact that the attribution of the *Barvai Rāmāyan* to Tulśidās remains to this day “far from proven,” Rupert Snell has recently shown that the hypothesis of Rahīm’s influence on Tulśidās is totally baseless.²⁹

The way Naik misinterprets the connections between Keśavdās, Tulśidās, and ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm casts serious doubts on the links he further establishes between the latter and a number of other Hindavi-speaking poets who are much less well known and whose patronage networks are extremely difficult to ascertain. According to Naik, the Khān patronized the following poets: Alāqulī, Bān, Gaṅg, Harināth, Jādā, Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa, Maṇḍan, Mukund, Narhari, Prāsiddh, Santa Kavi, and Tārā. With the exceptions of Gaṅg, Narhari, Narhari’s son Harināth, and Maṇḍan,³⁰ I have unfortunately been unable to trace any of these poets elsewhere. Moreover, concerning even these four known poets, all we have is, as mentioned above, scant information and a very sketchy manuscript tradition except, perhaps, for Maṇḍan.³¹

As a matter of fact, the tradition portraying ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm as a great patron of Hindavi-speaking poets is based on very meager contemporary material and seems to owe much to the wishful thinking of Indian nationalist historiography. The only thing we can actually be sure of is that some poets like Keśavdās or Gaṅg did eulogize the Khān in their poems. In the

²⁸ Naik 1966: 470.

²⁹ Snell 1994: 376 (quotation), 380, and 397.

³⁰ Gaṅg (c. 1538–1617), Narhari, and Harināth (fl. ? 1587) were closely associated with the Mughal court and composed a number of poems in praise of the Mughal emperors (Humāyūn, Akbar) and *amirs* (including ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm). See McGregor 1984: 116–20, Jindal 1993: 141, Handa 1978: 177–9, and 180–1. The case of Maṇḍan is more problematic since he is deemed to have been patronized by Rājā Maṅgaḍ Singh of Jaitpur (Bundelkhand), circa 1660 (McGregor 1984: 193).

³¹ Personal communication with Allison Busch.

opening verses of the *Jahāngīrīscandrikā*, Keśavdās thus praises ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm through his assimilation to two eminent Hindu figures (Hanumān and Rāma).³²

Rahīm protected Akbar’s sovereignty in every respect.

He was as dutiful as the brave Hanumān towards his one master.

Rahīm’s charisma dazzles the entire earth, its splendor like the milk ocean.

And his pure motives and limitless nobility are respected everywhere,

Just like Ganges water:

The Khān of Khāns is like Rāma’s arrow.

It destroys evil and protects the world.³³

Gaṅg, for his part, paid a stirring homage to the renowned generosity of the *amir* by asking him the following question:

How did you pick up

this habit of giving alms?

As the hand goes up to give,

the eyes go downwards as though automatically.³⁴

Gaṅg’s *dohā*, if authentic, appears to be a vernacular reiteration of the numerous Persian verses praising the Khān’s munificence.

The critical survey of the available sources imposes some limits upon but does not ultimately call into question the role of ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm as a patron. Dozens of Persian-speaking poets, twenty painters, and at least two architects are verifiably associated with his court. As to the question of the Hindavi-speaking poets, we have seen it come up against a two-fold problem: first, the biased nature of the *Ma‘āzīr-i-Rahīmī* whose account strongly emphasizes Persian-speaking literati of Iranian origin, presumably because of the enormous prestige the latter enjoyed in Mughal India; second, the scanty evidence found in Hindavi contemporary sources as they are known today. Pending further research, the focus here will be on the people whose connection to ‘Abd-ur-Rahīm’s circle stands on firmer ground. The majority of these people came from Iran, but the Khān’s entourage also included a number of Indian Muslims and a few individuals from Central Asia. The composition of this group clearly testifies to the importance of the cultural and courtly circuits that connected West, Central, and South Asia, as well as a number of regional centers within the Subcontinent, during the early

³² For a further analysis of the Hinduization of Muslim Mughal figures in the work of Keśavdās, see Busch 2005: 45–50.

³³ Quoted from the English translation of Busch 2005: 49.

³⁴ Quoted from the English translation of Vidyavalkar 1950: 126.

modern period. Now I will attempt to address the following questions: What factors presided over the constitution of such circulation networks? How did they operate? What was their role in the shaping of a multi-layered and transregional courtly hierarchy? By way of background, I will first outline the circumstances that led so many Iranians to leave their homes, before turning to assess the position of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court vis-à-vis other Indo-Persian centers of patronage.

2. *The Indian Eldorado*

Contrary to the usual explanation for the exodus of literati from Iran to India, the *Ma'āzīr-i-Rahīmī* does not depict the religious intolerance of the Safavids as a decisive factor. Four other inducements for Iranian poets and artists to try their luck in the Subcontinent, and more particularly at the Khān's court are, however, stressed repeatedly.³⁵ The first two can best be described as "push factors": wars and political disfavor.

The wars waged between Safavids, Uzbeks, and Ottomans throughout the last quarter of the sixteenth century account for the migration of many Iranians. On the eastern frontier, Khurasan had been a bone of contention between the Safavid and Uzbek powers since the beginning of the century. When 'Abdullah Khān Uzbek (r. 1583–1598) conquered the area at the end of the 1580s, many Khurāsānīs chose to leave their native place to escape the depredations of war. Such was the case with Muḥammad Amīn Jadwal, Yūqūh Beg Anīsī and Isma'īl Beg Unsi, who made their way to India and joined 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's service after the Uzbek army had taken control of Mashhad and Herat.³⁶ On the western frontier, the Safavid Empire was regularly threatened by its Ottoman rival, and although we have evidence for only one poet who fled from Hamadan to India when he heard of the approach of Ottoman troops at the beginning of the 1580s,³⁷ one strongly suspects that there were many more. While some left for India from fear of the war, others sought to escape the wrath of the Shāh and his representatives. Such was the case of the young Maulānā Tasallī, whose father Shāhwardī Khān 'Abbāsī had rebelled against Shāh 'Abbās in 1598. After his father had been sentenced to death, he spent his childhood wandering

incognito in Iran until he was old enough to undertake a journey to India.³⁸ However, the causes of royal disfavor are not always so easily identifiable: We do not, for instance, possess any information explaining either the murder of Nahāwandī's brother or the nature of the slander to which he fell victim.

The "push factors" so far mentioned certainly played an important part in quite a number of individual cases, but cannot fully account for the large migration of literati from Iran to India from the mid-sixteenth century. Reaching its apogee under Akbar and Jahāngīr, this movement is perhaps best explained by the combination of two powerful "pull factors". The first one relates to the economic disparity between the Iranian Plateau and the Indian Subcontinent. The Mughal Empire commanded far greater financial and human resources and consequently offered far better opportunities for patronage than its Safavid counterpart.³⁹ As hinted above, the second factor lies in the immense prestige enjoyed by Persian culture in Mughal India. Akbar's interest in promoting intellectual contacts with Iran as well as in engaging Iranian literati is well known, and this interest was widely shared by the political elite of the realm.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the presence of Persian migrants in Indian courts reciprocally enhanced the reputation of the latter.

The two same factors also account for the attraction of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court: he was renowned for his exceptional generosity and "Iranophilia"—two qualities to which the following verses pay tribute:

In Iran nobody appeared to buy the merchandise of "meaning".
In this Iran the palate of my soul has become bitter—
Now I have to go toward Hindustan.
Like the drop sent toward the vast ocean
I send my merchandise toward Hindustan,
For among those who know words in this age there is
No one to buy words save the Khān-i-Khānān.⁴¹

Selling their merchandise at the best price seems indeed to have been the main incentive for many poets who came to 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court. The *Ma'āzīr-i-Rahīmī* accordingly presents us with numerous examples of individuals who joined the Khān's entourage just long enough to obtain from him a generous reward, thereafter returning to Iran. Writing about the poet

³⁵ On Iranian migration to India during the early modern period, see more generally Subrahmanyam 1992 and Haneda 1997.

³⁶ For these three cases, see Nahāwandī 190–31, iii: 1678–9, 57–21, and 625–33.

³⁷ His name was Ghām Beg Asadābādī (ibid., 979–82, and Orthmann 1996: 100).

³⁸ Nahāwandī 190–31, iii: 1525–6, and Orthmann 1996: 97.

³⁹ Dale 2003: 66–7, and Subrahmanyam 2005, i: 182.

⁴⁰ Alam 2003: 159.

⁴¹ Poem by a neglected Persian poet called Kausarī, as cited in Schimmel 1992: 202–3.

Fahm-ud-din Fahīmī, Nahāwandi tells us that "once he had gathered [enough] money and presents, he returned to his ordinary residence. Thanks to the benefits and gifts he had taken back with him, he spent his time in this port [Hummuz] in leisure."⁴² We also get a glimpse of the Khān's generosity through the description of the rewards he offered to the poets connected with him: Nawā'ī is said to have been weighed in gold, and we are told that Ḥayātī and Shūqī were both brought to the *amīr's* private treasury where they were allowed to take away as much gold as they could carry.⁴³ Although such descriptions were, to some extent, formulaic, the economic reality they referred to can hardly be questioned. Until the mid-seventeenth century, India was certainly a place where financial rewards and elevated positions could quite easily be won by those among the Iranian elite who were willing to undertake the journey.⁴⁴

'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court was of course not the only place in the Subcontinent where literati seeking patronage could try their luck. The Khān was in fact only one among many potential patrons: Mughal emperors, princes and *amīrs*, as well as independent sultans, all aimed at assembling a brilliant court where Iranian poets and artists often held pride of place. Analyzing the various trajectories followed by the literati who chose to associate (whether temporarily or long-term) with the Khān affords a good view of the circulation of producers of culture in Persianate India during the first quarter of the seventeenth century; it also enables us to reconstruct (at least to some extent) the prevailing courtly hierarchy at the time, and to better assess the position of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's establishment within the latter.

3. 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's Court and Other Indo-Persian Patronage Centers: Circulation and Hierarchies

Let us first take a look at 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's status as a patron within Mughal India. The Khān was certainly not the only *amīr* to bestow generous patronage on the Persian-speaking *ahl-i qalam*, but few other grandees offered such good prospects, judging from the *Mā'āsir-i Rahīmī*, Ḥakīm Abī'ī Fathī

⁴² Nahāwandi 1910–31, iii: 1427. Also quoted by Orthmann 1996: 112.

⁴³ Orthmann 1996: 116. See also 'Abd-us-Sattār 2006: 40 for the large amount of money (*nadlaql-i farāwan*) presented by the Khān to Shaktī as a reward for the composition of his *Saqī-Nama*.

⁴⁴ As recently shown by Alam and Subrahmanyam 2007: ch. 5, this situation changed during the second half of the seventeenth century.

Gilānī—who was himself of Iranian origin as shown by his *nishbat* (patronymic)—appears as the only such figure,⁴⁵ and it is interesting to note that some members of his literary circle later enjoyed 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage.⁴⁶ Furthermore, no poet is known (at least from Nahāwandi's account) to have left the Khān to serve another *amīr*. If we are to believe the evidence at hand, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court then appears as the most attractive and, thereby, as the most eminent among the *amīrīd* courts of the empire.

Things were, however, different when it came to competing with the upper strata of the Mughal courtly hierarchy, almost every movement between the court of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm and those of the princes occurring to the benefit of the latter.⁴⁷ The motives at work here are easily discernible: Moving from an *amīr's* to a prince's entourage meant higher prospects in terms of salary and socio-cultural recognition; above all, it was one way of getting closer to the imperial court for those who nourished still greater expectations. It is significant that three of the five individuals who left 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's for a prince's service made their way afterwards to the imperial court.⁴⁸ These movements from *amīr* to prince call for two further observations: first, they generally took place in the Deccan, at a time when the princes (Dāniyāl, Parwīz, and Khurram) were in command of the military operations there; second, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm was often instrumental in introducing the poet to the prince. The Khān's eagerness to find a job for some of his "protégés" at the courts of the princes appointed in the Deccan may be more generally explained by his willingness to build through them a strong network of influence. As evident from his own Deccani career, this strategy turned out to be profitable, and it also partly accounts for the circulation of Persian-speaking literati between his and the Mughal court. As a matter of fact, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage seems to have been considered a springboard for entry into imperial service by many poets and artists who had freshly arrived in India from Iran. Their hope was to win the favor of the Khān in order to convince him to introduce them to

⁴⁵ For a brief survey of his life and deeds, see Bhakkari 1993: 143.

⁴⁶ Such were the cases of 'Urī Shīrāzī, Sanā'ī Khurāsānī, and Malhannī (Nahāwandi 1910–31, iii: 293–9, 334–60, and 604–10).

⁴⁷ Nazīm Nishapūrī left 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's service for Prince Murād's and Nau'ī Khurāsānī for Dāniyāl's (ibid., 115–8, and 635–8). While both Faḡhūr Lāhījānī and Nahāwandi made their way to Parwīz, Shukrullāh Shīrāzī attached himself to Khurram (ibid., 901–13, 1535–46, and 27–30).

⁴⁸ This was the case for Nazīm Nishapūrī, Nau'ī Khurāsānī, and Shukrullāh Shīrāzī.

the monarch.⁴⁹ For his part, the *amir* willingly played the game since men who entered royal service through his mediation henceforth became indebted to him. He could then reasonably expect that they would intervene on his behalf if the need arose. Fueling the imperial court with new talents was, moreover, a safe way to win the monarch's favor. All in all, it proved to be a fair deal for both parties: social promotion in exchange for political leverage. Equally interesting are the departures from the imperial court to 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's service, because they allow us a glimpse into another set of factors explaining the attractiveness of the Khān's circle. Contrary to what one might expect, these departures were not so rare and did not systematically occur as a consequence of royal disgrace.

Among the examples provided by the *Mā'āsir-i-Rahīmī*, the case of Shaidā Takū appears particularly significant. His family originally belonged to the Takū tribe of Mashhad but had settled at Fatehpur Sikri. Shaidā Takū himself began his career in the service of some Mughal noble who had been favorably impressed by his poetic skills, thereafter introducing him to Jahāngīr. Though the monarch enrolled him as a royal *ahādī* (a horseman serving directly under the emperor's orders), Shaidā Takū soon became dissatisfied with his new position because it did not allow him the chance to compose poetry. While escorting the imperial train to Mandu in 1616, he then decided to address a poem to the Khān-i Khānān wherein he asked for a position at his court. 'Abd-ur-Rahīm accepted his proposal, and Shaidā Takū immediately resigned his imperial office to join the Khān's service as a poet. After the death of the latter, he made his way back to Shāh Jahān's court, this time, however, as a recognized poet.⁵⁰ This story of Shaidā Takū portrays 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court as a place where shifts of professional identities were not only allowed but also encouraged, and where poets were given the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations. One should, however, be careful not to consider this circulation in terms of socio-professional categories as a hallmark of the Khān's patronage alone, as this was a time when frontiers between different occupations and social identities were much less strictly defined than today, and when poets and artists (including those patronized by the *amir*) often combined literary pursuits with administrative or military activities.

⁴⁹ The poets Husain Kufī and 'Abd-ul-Baqī Tāhīmī stayed so briefly at 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court that we can safely assume that their main aim was to advance from there to the imperial court (*ibid.*, 807–8, and 1452–5).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1487–8, Orthmann 1996: 74, and Naik 1966: 429–34.

The circulation of the painters patronized by 'Abd-ur-Rahīm serves as another interesting case-study, for the logic underlying their trajectories seems to have been quite different from the one guiding the mobility of the poets. According to the limited information available today, none of these painters is known to have left the Khān's workshop for another patron, and eight out of the twenty-one so far traced had been employed in Akbar's studio before entering the Khān's service.⁵¹ We can conjecture three main motivations for painters to move from Akbar's workshop to Rahīm's.⁵² The first relates to the stylistic changes that took place in the imperial atelier throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. Some painters were probably unable (or unwilling) to adapt to the new trends and hence had to find a new patron.⁵³ The second is linked to the decreasing size of the Mughal workshop under Jahāngīr, who chose to rely on a small team of outstanding painters. That 'Abd-ur-Rahīm, like other subsequent patrons, benefited from the flow of ex-imperial artists that consequently occurred is all the more likely because the majority of the manuscripts executed at his behest were produced precisely during the reign of that monarch. Finally, the Khān himself highly valued these painters for the *servoir-faite* they had acquired in the imperial studio and the innovations they were likely to introduce in his own workshop.

Situating 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's establishment within the courtly hierarchy of Mughal India is necessary but not sufficient in order to correctly assess his status as a patron for, as seen above, he resided for different lengths of time in two regions of the Subcontinent that were also dynamic cultural hubs: the court of the Tarikhans of Sindh (at least until the 1590s) and those of the Deccan sultanates of Bijapur, Golconda, and, to a much lesser extent, Ahmadnagar.⁵⁴ Since these regional centers also offered good patronage opportunities for Persian-speaking literati, exploring the networks of circulation that connected them with the Khān's circle should enable us to enrich the picture delineated so far and to answer the following questions:

⁵¹ These are Maulana Ibrāhīm Naqqaš, Ghulam 'Alī, Kamāl Mōhana, Šyāma Sundara, 'Abdullāh, Baravarānī (Khūrūd), and Bhagavātī (Nahāwandi 190–30, iii: 1688 and Seyller 1999).

⁵² The following development takes its inspiration from a number of remarks scattered in Seyller 1999.

⁵³ For a synthetic presentation of the major trends in Mughal manuscript painting, see Beach 1992.

⁵⁴ No mention is made here of Gujarat for, by the time 'Abd-ur-Rahīm took up residence in the region (in the 1580s), the Muzaffarid dynasty had already been severely weakened by the Mughal campaigns of the 1570s, and its role as a patronage center had accordingly shrunk. Furthermore, of all the poets and artists who entered the Khān's service during his stay in Ahmadabad, none seems to have previously benefited from Muzaffarid patronage.

To what extent, if at all, did the Sindhi and Deccani courts supply the entourage of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm with new talents? How did the latter measure up to the other patrons of the day?

On the eve of the Mughal conquest of Sindh, Mirzā Janī Tarkhān (d. 1598/9) was a sovereign renowned for the generous patronage he bestowed on literati. His submission to Akbar in 1593 did not have much effect on the status of his court as a regional center of patronage since he was allowed to stay in his former kingdom as governor of the new province of Thatta. That we only know of one poet who chose to leave Tarkhān's service for that of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm confirms this. A native of Kashan, Mir Ghurūr served the Safavid governor of Darabgird and then Mirzā Bāqī Tarkhān (d. 1585), a son of the monarch Mirzā 'Isā, before applying for a position at 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's court following the Mughal conquest of Sindh.⁵⁵ Some poets of Sindhi origin also took advantage of the Khān's sojourn in Thatta by joining his entourage. Such was the case of the young Muḥibb 'Alī Sindhī, who had so far failed to attract the attention of a patron.⁵⁶ The majority of the poets and artists who entered 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's service in Sindh were, however, not locals but recent migrants from Iran to India. From the few examples gathered here, it thus appears that the years spent by the *amīr* in Thatta did not have a great impact on the composition of his entourage.

Far more interesting to analyze is the position 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's establishment came to occupy in the cultural landscape of the Deccan. The Khān's residence in Burhanpur extended over a much longer period of time and corresponded to the apogee of his career as a Mughal *amīr* and of his attractiveness as a patron.⁵⁷ When 'Abd-ur-Rahīm settled in the Deccan by the mid 1590s, the sultans of Bijapur and Golconda were the most active patrons of Islamicate South India, while the importance of Ahmadnagar as a cultural center had begun to decline in the face of repeated Mughal attacks. Contrary to what Nahāwandī suggests by including Zuhūrī and Malik Qummī among the poets patronized by the Khān, the latter's court did not really benefit from the stream of literati leaving Ahmadnagar. Most of these men actually chose to try their luck in Bijapur or Golconda. Both sultanates were at the time on very good terms with Iran and had encouraged Iranian literati to settle in their territories since the mid-sixteenth

century. While it is true that Bijapur underwent a political and cultural indigenization at the expense of Iranian influence under Ibrahim 'Adīl Shāh II (r. 1580–1627),⁵⁸ the monarch nonetheless kept patronizing Persian *ahl-i qalam*, as is clearly shown by the examples of Firishah, Zuhūrī, and Malik Qummī and by the contents of his library.⁵⁹ If the sultans of Golconda also promoted a kind of mixed culture between 1550 and 1612, the Iranian influence remained strong throughout these years before developing with a new vigor during the reign of Muhammad Qutb Shāh (1612–26).⁶⁰ Throughout 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's stay in the Deccan, both sultanates then undoubtedly stood as very attractive centers of patronage for Persian-speaking literati. Now, how did Bijapur and Golconda compete with the sub-imperial court of the *amīr*?

The *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* provides us with a roughly equivalent number of individuals who resigned their position in one of the two Deccani sultanates and then applied for 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage in Burhanpur, and of others who made the opposite choice. Furthermore, we know of at least two poets who made a roundtrip between Golconda and the Khān's court. Interestingly, none of these individuals was of Deccani origin. Three points should be stressed with regard to the observations I have made so far. First is the density of the cultural flux, especially when compared with what seems to have been the situation in Sindh. Second is the equivalence of the three Deccani poles in the eyes of the Persian-speaking literati in quest of patronage. That the courts of the sultans and the *amīr* could be deemed equally prestigious is a good indicator of the contemporary balance of power in the region: Although Jahāngīr kept the Deccani sultanates under continuous pressure, it is well known that no significant progress was made towards annexation under his rule. It was therefore a time when serving a Mughal *amīr* whose intercession could eventually lead to the emperor's court and favor could be considered as good a position as working under the patronage of the fully-fledged (yet ultimately threatened) monarchs of the Deccan. Third is, at least according to the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*, the apparent imperviousness of the cultural flux that connected the three Deccani courts to local literary resources—a situation that parallels what has been described for Sindh. This, in turn, leads us back to the issue of the biased nature of Nahāwandī's account: Does this imperviousness reflect a real

⁵⁵ Nahāwandī 1910–31, iii: 133–4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 489–94.

⁵⁷ This is also echoed by the author of the *Majālis-i Jahāngīrī* who connects the Khān's activities as a patron with the Deccan at several points in the text ('Abd-us-Sattar 2006: 39–40 and 49).

⁵⁸ On this subject, see Eaton 1996: 89–105.

⁵⁹ For a thorough assessment of Ibrahim 'Adīl Shāh II's collection of Persian books, see Overton 2011: ch. 2.

⁶⁰ For a survey of Golconda history under the Qutb Shāhīs, see Sherwani 1974.

absence of such connections, or is it the result of the chronicler's (or his patron's) lack of interest in—or ignorance of—such connections? Although the answer to these questions must await the analysis of relevant Sindhi and Dakani material, one should keep in mind that the mention of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage of Persian-speaking poets of Sindhi or Deccani origin (as well as Hindavi-speaking poets) was of limited use in respect of the overall purpose and intended audience of the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* that have been described above.

As mentioned in the introduction of this essay, focusing on 'Abd-ur-Rahīm and his entourage provides the historian with a great opportunity to not only address the physical circulation of poets and artists across West and South Asia and within the Subcontinent, but also to raise the question of accompanying stylistic circulations.

4. *The Play of Persian and Indian Cultural Traditions in the Works of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm and his Entourage*

4.1 *The Two Worlds of Rahīm's Poetry*

Given the doubts cast above on the extent of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's patronage of Hindavi-speaking poets, I will not be able to address the matter further here. Furthermore, the vast corpus of the Persian-speaking poets patronized by the Khān makes a detailed analysis far beyond the scope of this article. It is, however, well-known that many of those literati were themselves leading exponents of the so-called *sabk-i hindī* ("Indian style") or, more appropriately, of the *tāza-gīrī* or "fresh style,"⁶¹ the most famous among them being undoubtedly 'Urī Shīrāzī. And yet it is worth asking whether 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's own poetry was touched by the literary milieu of which he was such an exemplary patron. In considering the influence of this literary milieu it is clear that the multilingualism of a number of its participants is of key importance. Indeed, the originality of the *amīr's* poetical work stems from the variety of languages it explored. He composed poetry in Persian and Hindavi, but he is also credited with Sanskrit, Arabic, and Turkish verses.⁶² The latter having not yet been identified, one cannot help questioning their very existence—even though 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's translation of the *Bābur Nama* from Turkish into Persian gives some credibility

to his composition of Turkish verses—and we will therefore devote our whole attention to his writings in Persian and in different Indian languages.

With regard to Rahīm's Persian poetry, the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* stands once again as the principal source of information. According to Nahāwandi, the Khān started composing poetry at the age of eleven; he never sought the guidance of any master in this field and his harmonious verses stemmed from his own genius.⁶³ One is, moreover, told that the *amīr* played the role of a master in the eyes of the Persian-speaking poets he patronized. In his account of the poet Kāmī Sabzawar (d. 1606/7), Nahāwandi thus tells us that:

At this time, Maulānā Shaktī, Mullā Nazīr, Maulānā 'Urī, Anīs, and their fellows were among the companions of the *shāh salār* ['Abd-ur-Rahīm] and often took part in his *ma'jlis* [poetic gathering]. The poems he [Kāmī] had composed were read before them and were then distinguished by their praise and approbation. Through the mediation of this group, his poems were laid before the Nawwāb's eyes for correction (*ba islah*). Little by little, he made great progress (*tarraqqī*).⁶⁴

Nahāwandi evidently draws here on the traditional *topos* according to which the genius of the patronized artist only came to maturity through the attention and instruction of his patron.⁶⁵

In striking contrast to Nahāwandi's laudatory description, the Persian oeuvre of Rahīm—at least as it stands today—appears rather limited in terms of the quantity of surviving poems. The Khān in all likelihood put little thought into the collection of his poems, and no *dhawān* of his is mentioned either in the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* or in any contemporary source.⁶⁶ All we have at our disposal are the poems copied by Nahāwandi and presumably composed before 1616, plus a number of others quoted in later *tazkiras*.⁶⁷ How the latter came to be attributed to Rahīm is, at the moment, not clear and, pending further investigation into the reliability of the manuscript tradition, it seems safer to focus on the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī* verses.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 562.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, iii: 864. Also quoted by Orthmann, 1996: 122.

⁶⁵ This *topos* also permeates the accounts of several other artists in the *Ma'āsir-i Rahīmī*. See, for example, Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 1678, 1681–2, and Seyller 1999: 52–3, 318–9 for a further analysis of this subject.

⁶⁶ To my knowledge, Jindal 1993: 136 is the only historian crediting 'Abd-ur-Rahīm with a *dhawān* of Persian *ghazals*. He, however, produces no proof for it.

⁶⁷ Among them are the *Tazkira-i Nasrabadī* of Muhammad Tāhir Nasrābādī (Safavid Iran, 1672–80), the *Kalimat-ush-shu'arā'* of Muḥammad Afzal Sarḳhūsh (Mughal India, 1682–97), and the *Atash-kadah* of Hājī Lutf 'Alī Beg 'Azar" (Zand Iran, 1760).

⁶¹ On this complex question, see Alam 2003; Kimra 2011, as well as the contribution of Stefano Pellò in this volume.

⁶² Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 561.

These consist of one *ghazal* (love lyric), as well as a few *baits* (couplets) and *rubā'īs* (quatrains).⁶⁸

Testifying to Rāḥīm's preference for shorter poetical forms, this small collection of verses mainly deals with the longing (*shauq*) for the beloved, a theme which is here—as often in classical Persian poetry—heavily impregnated with mystical connotations. Nahāwandi, for his part, describes Rāḥīm's poetry as “verses of mystical love (*abiyāt-i ashūqāna-i tūjāna*).”⁶⁹ Like the poetry of a number of his contemporaries (especially Faḏl and ‘Ufī), Rāḥīm's verses are imbued with a conception of the divine which lay well beyond the traditional religions and reflected the non-sectarianism of the Mughals—a multi-layered ideology whose diverse sources included the Mongol legacy and the ethics of Nāsir-ud-dīn Tūsī (1201–74) as well as millenarian brands of Islam and the liberal *wahdat-ul-wujūd* trend of Sufism.⁷⁰ For example, in one of his poems, he says:

He whom fate has taken away from the thought of lovers
has been released from the mosque (*masjid*) and freed from the synagogue
(*kunish*).⁷¹

Of concern to us here is not simply the apparent scantiness of Rāḥīm's Persian oeuvre; also of note is the absence of Hindavi words or poetical images stemming from the Indian literary tradition. The surviving poems are all firmly rooted in a Persianate epistemic judging from stylistic and formal criteria at least, Rāḥīm's Persian poetry thus seems to have been rather impervious to its Indian environment.

The poetry composed by the *amīr* in different Indian languages constitutes a far richer corpus than anything that can be attested in Persian. As a matter of fact, the literary theorist Bḥkharīdas paid tribute to his contribution to Brajhasha poetry in the opening verses of his *Kāryanirṇay* (*Critical Perspective on Literature*, 1746), a major work of literary theory from the Hindavi tradition.⁷² While these verses undoubtedly show that Rāḥīm was already considered a part of the Braj canon a century after his death, the *amīr*'s literary production in Hindavi calls for a number of

⁶⁸ Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 562–70. For another contemporary piece of evidence of Rāḥīm's composition of *ghazals*, see jānāngī 1999: 265.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 562.

⁷⁰ On this subject, see Ernst 2003: 179, Alam 2003: 168–70, and 2004: 93 ff. and Moin 2012. *Wahdat-ul-wujūd* literally means “Oneness of Being” and refers to the Sufi trend initiated by Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240).

⁷¹ Nahāwandi 1910–31, ii: 567.

⁷² Busch 2011: 230.

remarks. One is that none of the poems is dated. Furthermore, the textual tradition of Rāḥīm's Hindavi poetry remains unclear to this day, and none of the collections so far published has actually been a proper critical edition.⁷³ Indeed, some poems present in these collections quite closely resemble verses attributed elsewhere to other poets.⁷⁴ As in the case of Hindavi-speaking poets considered to have thrived under his patronage, one should therefore be very cautious in dealing with the literary corpus so far attributed to Rāḥīm. Pending a thorough re-examination of the manuscript tradition, the discussion by R. S. McGregor serves as a preliminary but hardly definitive basis for understanding Rāḥīm's Hindavi poetry.⁷⁵

In Hindavi as in Persian, the Khān favored the poetical forms (*doha*, *barai*) best suited to a pithy mode of expression. Another salient feature of his poetry is the wide-ranging themes it explores. Part of his work is in keeping with the tradition of Brajhasha court poetry, which had been flourishing since the sixteenth century. Heavily drawing on the Sanskrit *nīti* tradition, Rāḥīm's numerous *dohās* on worldly wisdom and morality are a well-known and appreciated segment of his work. Two other collections of verses—the *Nagarsōbhā* (*dohās*) and the *Barvai Nāyikābheda* (*barvais*)—are for their part closely linked to an aspect of the topic of *śringār* (love) prominent in court poetry: the description and classification of heroines (*nāyikābheda*).⁷⁶ While most of these poems were composed in Brajhasha, the language of the *Barvai Nāyikābheda* has a much more markedly Awadhi or Eastern flavor. Besides, both works are distinctive for their playfully experimenting with Sanskrit and Persian vocabulary.⁷⁷ Taken as a whole, this portion of Rāḥīm's oeuvre shows that he had full command over a range of linguistic registers in the Hindavi tradition of court poetry as well as its lyrical imagery and formal conventions. The *Nagarsōbhā* also testifies to his capacity for bridging the gap between Brajhasha and Persian poetic genres.

⁷³ Busch 2010a: 282, 2010b: 109, and 2011: 140. The most recent edition of Rāḥīm's Hindavi poetry is by Vidyamvas Mishra and Govind Rajnish, *Rāḥīm granthāvalī*, Delhi, 1985. It is mainly based on earlier Hindi printed editions of Rāḥīm's poetry rather than a thorough appraisal of manuscript traditions.

⁷⁴ McGregor 1984: 121 (n. 366).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 121–2. Unless otherwise indicated, the following discussion is exclusively drawn from this work.

⁷⁶ The *Nagarsōbhā* has also much in common with the Persian genre of *shahrazātib* (lament for the city), conventional poems that celebrate the exquisite charms of a particular city's handsome youth. Also see Busch, this volume.

⁷⁷ Snell 1994: 377, Busch 2010b: 112–3, and 2011: 94.

Elsewhere, Rahīm's work drew its inspiration from devotional or bhakti poetry, at times lending a more worldly character to some of its privileged themes. Such is, for instance, the case with the topic of *viraha* (the pain of separation felt by the *gopis* when deserted by their lover Krishna) which, at the *amir's* hands, becomes a more general state of longing for the beloved, be he (or she) human or divine.⁷⁸ This blending of devotional and courtly atmospheres makes itself best felt in a collection of *barvai* poems, which included four Persian couplets and may be described as "a loosely arranged anthology of mainly Krishnaite material."⁷⁹ It also permeates the *Madanāśītak*, eight verses on *viraha* and *śṛṅgāra* composed in Sanskrit meters and in a Sanskritized Khari Boli idiom interspersed with Persianized words.⁸⁰ What emerges from this more religious aspect of Rahīm's Hindavi poetry is his great familiarity with the major figures of Hinduism and with the poetical metaphors generally used to evoke them.

The last work worth mentioning here is the *Kheṭa-kautukam*, a collection of astrological verses purported to be by Rahīm. Composed in a surprising mixture of Sanskrit and Persian, it summarizes the effects of the nine planets in each of the twelve houses of the horoscope and ends with a chapter containing twenty-five verses on Rājayoga or lucky combinations of planets.⁸¹

This brief survey of Rahīm's works raises the question of the impact of the *amir's* multilingualism on his poetic oeuvre. In this respect, the contrast between the Persian and Hindavi corpus is striking. Rahīm's Hindavi poetry appears to be much more polyphonic and hybrid—at least at the linguistic level—than his Persian verses, as revealed by the interspersing in the former of vernacular idioms (Brajbhasha, Awadhi, and Khari Boli) and of Sanskrit, as well as the smattering of Persian or Persianized words and the presence of full couplets written in this same language.⁸² Furthermore, Rahīm's linguistic behavior calls for a number of general remarks. It is first particularly interesting to note that his residence in Gujarat, Sindh, and the Deccan had very little impact in this respect. As a matter of fact, he tried his hand at a variety of languages—those of the cultural tradition in

which he was educated (Persian, Turkish, and maybe Arabic) and those of the Indian environment in which he lived (be it Sanskrit or the Brajbhasha, Awadhi, and Khari Boli dialects). But he primarily cultivated two idioms—Persian and Brajbhasha—which the Mughals were promoting or encouraging as the two great channels of cultural (and political, in the case of Persian) circulation within the Indo-Persian ecumene.⁸³ Rahīm's self-definition—which may be described as the selective literary bilingualism of a polyglot—can thus be said to derive from the literary attitudes at the royal court even though his personal involvement in Hindavi literature clearly exceeded the frontiers of the royal model. Significantly, this very bilingualism is also a prominent feature of the manuscript paintings he commissioned.

4.2 *The Shāh Nāma and Mahābhārata Manuscripts of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's Atelier*

In the 1580s, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm founded a library-cum-workshop, which was in its time the largest establishment of this sort maintained by a Mughal *amir*. Over time its size kept increasing in keeping with the Khān's own rise to prominence. The institution is said to have welcomed approximately a hundred visitors a day, and ninety-five people worked in its precincts at one time or another in different capacities (supervisor, calligrapher, gilder, book-binder, painter, etc.).⁸⁴ According to the information provided by the *Ma'āsir-i-Rahīmī* and the surviving inscribed manuscripts, many of these people originated from Iran, more particularly from Herat and Shiraz—two cities highly reputed for their artistic production.⁸⁵ While the origins of the twenty-one painters patronized by the Khān remain in most cases difficult to ascertain, the data we have interestingly points to a group of indigenous artists: With the exception of one clearly identified Iranian, all of these men were probably either Indian Muslims or Hindus.⁸⁶ As mentioned in the first part of this essay, eight of them are, moreover, known to have been employed in the imperial atelier before entering the *amir's* service.

Unfortunately, only a small number of the books kept in the library are known to us today. Thanks to the tremendous work done by John Seyller,

⁷⁸ Snell 1991: 33–4.

⁷⁹ Snell 1994: 378.

⁸⁰ For further details on the intermingling of Indic and Persian lexicons and motifs in this work, see Busch 2010b: 109–11.

⁸¹ For a partial translation of this work, see Udhrain 1973.

⁸² As of today, Busch 2010b: 108–14 provides the most comprehensive treatment of this aspect of Rahīm's Hindavi poetry. For the Khān's macaronic Rekhta verses, see also Bangha 2010: 45–47.

⁸³ For the transformation of Brajbhasha into a transregional idiom under the impetus of the Mughals, see Busch 2010a and 2011.

⁸⁴ Seyller 1999: 50.

⁸⁵ Nahāwandi 1980–81, iii: 27–30, 1658–60, 1675–6, 1678, 1680.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1681–2, and Seyller 1999.

this portion is now, however, fairly well known and tells us a great deal about the literary interests of the Khān.⁸⁷ Reflecting to some extent his own poetical production, these were wide-ranging. While Persian classics were most esteemed along with theological and mystical texts, the library also contained Persian translations of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* (*Razm Nāma*).⁸⁸ In this last respect, it is particularly interesting to note that despite his knowledge of Sanskrit and the existence of vernacular versions of the *Rāmāyana*—most famous among which was Tulsi-dās's Awadhī *Rāmcarita-mānasa*—'Abd-ur-Rahīm chose the Persian translation of Badā'ūnī for copying and illustrating. His decision is to be seen as the result of the influence exerted by the imperial model, as is made clear by the Khān himself in the note he inscribed on folio 1a of the manuscript:

Upon completion of that [work] [Akbar's earliest illustrated manuscript of the *Rāmāyana*, now in Jaipur (1588–92)], this slave reared by the kindness of the emperor, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm ... requested that as I had the privilege of seeing this book, I be allowed to have a copy made. By royal favor, permission was granted. This work was prepared and illustrated by the scribes and painters of this well-wisher of the king.⁸⁹

Some of the library books were rare specimens acquired by the *amir* and were, should the need be felt, restored or illustrated by his painters. With only one exception, all the books altered at 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's request were works of Persian poetry. Illuminations were thus added to a sixteenth-century *Parī Ganj* of Jāmi (c. 1603–07). The original paintings of a sixteenth-century *Khamsa* (by Amir Khusrāu) and of a fifteenth-century *Shāh Nāma* (by Firdausī) were also replaced by works executed by the artists of the workshop in 1605–1616 and 1616 respectively. Finally, five paintings were added to an originally unillustrated *Timūr Nāma* of Hatif (c. 1610–1615). Other manuscripts were, however, entirely produced in the Khān's workshop: This was the case with the above-mentioned *Rāmāyana* (1597–1605) and *Razm Nāma* (1616–17). 'Abd-ur-Rahīm also commissioned a *Rāgamālā* album, which was completed in 1610.

⁸⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, the following description is based on Seyller 1997 and 1999.

⁸⁸ For an in-depth re-examination of the Mughal *Mahābhāratas* and *Rāmāyanas*, see Truschke 2012: 181–252 and 279–300.

⁸⁹ As cited in Seyller 1999: 74. The similarity of the cycle of images chosen, on the one hand, for Akbar's *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* and, on the other, for the copies illustrated in 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's workshop is further testament to the influence of the imperial court.

The stylistic analysis of these manuscript paintings is especially revealing in view of the present inquiry. It is first significant to note that none of these paintings bore the stamp of any particular regional influence.⁹⁰ This may be explained by the structural mobility of the library, but also by the Khān's ability to attract ex-imperial painters. The second element of importance is the coexistence within the workshop of two distinct styles used for illustrating two different bodies of work. As argued by John Seyller, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's artists "almost always selected a simplified composition, a strong palette, and a coarse painting technique for indigenous Indian subjects [i.e., for the *Razm Nāma*, the *Rāgamālā* album and, to a lesser degree, the *Rāmāyana*] and reserved their most ambitious compositional and color arrangements for Persian literary texts [the *Khamsa*, the *Shāh Nāma*, and, to a lesser extent, the *Timūr Nāma*]."⁹¹ In other words, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm (or, more likely, the supervisor and artists of his workshop) consistently chose to associate a particular mode of painting with the cultural and literary tradition to which the illustrated work belonged. This choice appears all the more significant in view of the above analysis of the Khān's poetical work: Much like the verses he preferentially (although not exclusively) composed in Hindavi and Persian, the paintings produced at his behest alternatively used what may be called an Indianizing and a Persianizing pictorial language. This kind of cultural bilingualism is, however, completely absent from the architectural works he patronized.

4.3 "Turning Hindustan into Iran"

According to Nahāwandī, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's architectural patronage "turned Hindustan into Iran."⁹² However bombastic, this statement rightly points to the strong Iranian character of most of the buildings constructed at the *amir*'s behest. But who were the architects employed by the Khān? The two names which have come down to us indicate exclusively Persian origins: While Muḥammad 'Alī's title—Gurg-i Khurāsānī (literally, "the wolf of Khurāsān")—speaks for itself, the *nādira-i mi'mārān* ("Marvel of architects") Ustad Barwalī is said to have been previously employed by the monarchs of Iran and to have designed beautiful buildings for them.⁹³

⁹⁰ Nor is any particular regional influence visible in the few other known illustrated manuscripts made for identified sub-imperial patrons; their style was an imitation of the imperial idiom (*ibid.*, 29–32).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁹² Nahāwandī 1910–31, II: 601.

⁹³ The following discussion is based on *ibid.*, 600–1, Verma 1955–6: 115–6, and Koch 2002: 90–2.

Thanks to these men and probably to other architects originating from Iran, the cities and regions where the *amir* successively resided saw the blossoming of Persianate buildings. The Faḥ Bāgh ("Garden of Victory") he built in Sarkhej to commemorate his victory over Muẓaffar Gūjarāū (1583) aroused Jahāngīr's admiration when the emperor toured Gūjarāt during the winter of 1617–18.⁹⁴ As to the buildings which Ustād Barwāl was appointed to construct in Agra, they were to strictly conform to the ones he had previously designed for the Iranian monarchs. It is, however, in Burhanpur—the place where 'Abd-ur-Rahīm resided during his extended stay in the Deccan—that the Khān's imprint on the urban landscape was most conspicuous: In an outwardly civic spirit, he patronized several works of architecture in this Deccani city. Among them was a *hamāmīn* (1607–08) meant for public use, and which is probably the oldest such bath known in the Deccan. In 1615, he also endowed the city with an extensive irrigation system: Devised along the lines of the Iranian *qanāts*, this network of underground pipes brought water to the city and to the *amir's* La'ī Bāgh ("Ruby Garden"), and remains to this day the only known "Indian" example of *qanāts*. Although 'Abd-ur-Rahīm's Ruby Garden has not survived, the careful planning described by the *Mā'āsīr-i-Rahīmī* and the presence of a loutspoon in its center suggest an Iranian inspiration. The Khān may further be credited with the building of a *sarāy* (1617–18) and with the foundation of a new township—Jahāngirpura—on the outskirts of the city.

In view of the polyphony in the poetical oeuvre of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm as well as in the illustrated manuscripts he commissioned, and taking into account his own religious liberalism, one is left to wonder why the *amir* refrained from patronizing buildings more closely connected with his Indian environment or even from following one of the indigenous regional styles at hand.⁹⁵ To my knowledge, the only exception to this picture comes from the *Rasik-anaryamāl*, a seventeenth-century Rādhāvallabhī hagiography. According to Rupert Snell, this text relates

how a *kāyasth* named Sundardās Bhaṭṭāgār, a *dāśn* of Abdurrahim, undertook the building of a temple to Rādhāvallabhā in Vrīndāvan. When enemies of Sundardās reported to Abdurrahim that Sundardās was misappropriating

⁹⁴ Jahāngīr 1999: 247.

⁹⁵ As pointed out by the late Aditya Behl during the discussion of this paper, the transfer of cultural models from one setting to another generally implied a reshaping of these models, which subsequently acquired "new meanings". What these "new meanings" were remains, however, very difficult to ascertain in view of the scarcity of material on the subject.

funds for this project, Abdurrahim chastised him, told him to ask for funds openly, and himself provided ornaments and funding ... for the deity.⁹⁶

One should, however, note that 'Abd-ur-Rahīm did not initiate the building of the temple, but only provided some additional funding for it. In this respect, it is also worth remembering that while some Hindu *amirs* did sponsor the construction of mosques,⁹⁷ no Mughal emperor or Muslim *amir* is known to have ordered the building of temples. Funding was always allotted through discrete channels. The Krishnaite temples of Mathura and neighbouring areas probably provide the best examples in this respect: Although administrative documents have revealed to us that these establishments were partly maintained by the Mughal monarchs from the 1560s onwards, the imperial patronage surfaces nowhere in the contemporary official chronicles.⁹⁸

In conclusion, I would like to address a question which has been running through the pages of this essay, and which appears particularly relevant when trying to assess the originality of 'Abd-ur-Rahīm as a man of culture and as a patron: How should we define the Khān's position vis-à-vis the standards set up by the imperial Mughal court? Turning once again to the *Mā'āsīr-i-Rahīmī* provides us with a preliminary set of answers. While efficiently using the model of imperial chronicling for his rehabilitation, 'Abd-ur-Rahīm was at the same time unable to break away from the political and cultural paradigms it provided: Whether he was described as an exceptional administrator and patron, as a great poet, or as "a dervish in the garb of a sultan,"⁹⁹ Rahīm still remained within the boundaries set by the Mughal dynasty. The works he produced or patronized only slightly qualify this picture of conformity. As mentioned above, the Khān's patronage of poetry, painting, and architecture broadly followed the lines drawn up by Akbar. One should keep in mind that Akbar was the Mughal monarch who first encouraged the coming of Persian literati to India on a large scale; he also initiated the translation of Indian classics into Persian as well as the royal patronage of Hindavi-speaking poets (even though some of them seem to have previously worked for his father Humāyūn). When compared with

⁹⁶ Snell 1994: 399 (n. 7).

⁹⁷ A major figure of Akbar's reign, the Rajput Rāja Man Singh thus built two mosques, the first situated in Lahore, the second and more impressive in Rajmahal/Akbarnagar in Bengal (Asher 1992: 192–3).

⁹⁸ For the documents, see Mukherjee and Habib 1988 and 1989.

⁹⁹ Nahāwandī 1910–31, II: 538–9.

the imperial cultural stance, Raḥīm's composition of Hindavi poetry indeed appears as his only truly distinguishing characteristic. This peculiarity revealed itself not only in the Hindavi verses traditionally ascribed to him but also in his commissioning of the *Rāgamālā* album. As rightly underlined by John Seyller, its paintings constitute "the sole instance in which 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm ordered the illustration of a Hindu subject which had not been explored previously by the Mughal emperor."¹⁰⁰

If 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm can be regarded as a perfect embodiment of the cultural circulation that connected the imperial to the sub-imperial levels of the Mughal courtly hierarchy, he also took considerable part in two prominent networks of literary and artistic exchanges that linked, on the one hand, Safavid Iran and Mughal India and, on the other, the Mughal nobility with the Hindavi cultural sphere. Involving peoples, languages, literary genres, and styles, these exchanges certainly endowed the Mughal Empire and its principal actors with a fair degree of cosmopolitanism. And yet underlying this cosmopolitanism was a sense of hierarchy that held Persianate culture as the most preeminent in the eyes of the majority of the Mughal elite. The superiority attached to the Persianate episteme is an aspect that must not be overlooked, especially in the case of 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm. As a matter of fact, it is this very sense of superiority that accounts for the somewhat flat portrayal of the Khān in the *Ma'āsir-i Raḥīmī* and obscures the flux in his cultural identities. Considering 'Abd-ur-Raḥīm under the rubric of circulation has proven particularly fruitful in this respect because it has allowed us to rebuild the bridge that he had helped establish between the Persian and Hindavi traditions and to go beyond the truncated images provided by both pre-colonial and post-colonial historiographies.

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MIRABAI AT THE COURT OF GURU GOBIND SINGH

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Everything about the poet-saints of North India seems to circulate: the songs that bear their names, the performers who sing them, the motifs that are conjoined to form these saints' traditional life-stories, the manuscripts in which such stories and the songs attributed to these saints are recorded, and finally, of course, the saints themselves, whose lives often trace telling itineraries. Circulation itself seems to be one of the factors that turns an ordinary *bhaktā* into a saint.

We see this certifying power of circulation in the great debating tours (*dhgviyaya, śāstrārtha*) that are often encoded into the lives of those *bhaktas* who come to play the role of preceptor (*ācārya*), including Madhva, Chaitanya, and Vallabha. But circulation is also a prominent motif in the biographies of other *bhaktas* too—the wanderings of Surdas or Namdev, or the story that we hear in Sikh hagiographies about how Kabir was attracted into the magnetic presence of Baba Nanak.¹ The Kabir we meet, when such a thing happens, is not exactly the Kabir who is remembered in his hometown, Banaras. The same is true for other "bhakti period" *bhaktas* as well. Circulation does not merely certify, it alters. This essay will focus on a surprising and little-known example of this phenomenon: What happens to Mirabai when she—or rather, her story—visits the Punjab?

1. *Circulatory and Stationary Miras*

Mirabai was hardly a homebody. Anyone who knows her story knows that she traveled to Vrindavan, where she was led while searching for Krishna. Mirabai's attempt to enter the religious culture of Vrindavan precipitated

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¹ E.g. McLeod 1980: 151-5.