

## **"Krishna is the Truth of Man"**

**Mir 'Abdul Wahid Bilgrami's *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* (*Indian Truths*)**

**and the circulation of *dhrupad* and *bishnupad***

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The *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* (1566) by Mir 'Abdul Wahid Bilgrami (b.1509-d.1608)<sup>1</sup> is a short treatise in Persian offering a Sufi interpretation of words and images occurring in *dhrupad*, *bishnupad* and other "Hindavi" songs. The short work (18 ff.), which survives in a single manuscript copy, is divided into three chapters, listing respectively and in this order, technical terms related to music and performance and the detailed description of female beauty and ornaments; words and names related to the Krishna story; and the natural imagery of seasonal songs. The exposition follows the order of the Hindavi words—for the description of female beauty, for example, it proceeds from the top of her head to her toes. The Sufi interpretation touches upon a range of mystical topics without a clear structure or particular order. Rather, 'Abdul Wahid takes a single Hindavi word<sup>2</sup> and glosses it with one or, more often, several Sufi terms or concepts, as if to show discursively that the Sufi master perceives many meanings and truths hidden behind each superficial appearance, and that the disciple or seeker must learn to do the same. It is thanks to this mystical vision that the "truths of India" are perceived as signaling the truths of Islam.

The *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* thus offers not only precious direct evidence of the circulation of Hindavi songs in Sufi circles, but also an insight into the intellectual and religious process of translation that such circulation engendered. Although such a detailed exposition is unique, the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* can nonetheless be framed within three existing forms of cultural circulation, all germane to the purpose of this volume. The first frame is that of the long tradition of north

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to the Librarian and staff of the Persian manuscript section of the Maulana Azad Library in Aligarh for allowing me to photograph the ms (they have now a copy in their computer for anyone to request a copy of), and for Professors Azad Dukht Safavi and Farhan Mujeeb who actually arranged for the photographing to be done in my absence. I also acknowledge Hashem Sedqamiz's invaluable help in reading and interpreting the Persian manuscript text. **MS NUMBER**

<sup>2</sup> Only rarely short phrases or whole song verses are quoted, complete with the *parda* (i.e. *raga*) they were sung in.

Indian Sufi writing in Hindavi,<sup>3</sup> in particular romances or tales (*pemkathās*), lyrics and couplets.

While this engagement has long been acknowledged by Hindi literary historians, the critical rubric for assessing Hindavi Sufi love romances (*pemkathās*) starting from Maulana Daud's *Candāyan* (1379) has been largely one of "Indianness" vs "foreignness", revealing a long-standing awkwardness in Hindi criticism towards the presence of Islam—viewed as rather monolithically "foreign"—within north Indian culture. From such a perspective, "Hindi" writing by Sufis can only be perceived and valued in terms of a longing to be(come) Indian by "adopting" the local language and local literary forms.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, short treatises (*risālas*) on topics related to the Sufi path that contain Persian as well as Hindavi verses and lyrical fragments, like the *Rushdnāma* of 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi (1456-1537) or the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī*, show that within the tri-lingual world of north Indian Sufis, Arabic was the scriptural language, Persian was the textual language of exposition and poetry, and Hindavi was comfortably the local language of Islam and a parallel poetic language to that of Persian.<sup>5</sup> While Hindavi Sufi lyrics have come to us mostly as fragments couched within manuals or treatises, or else through the fluid oral transmission of the singers themselves, there is much more abundant evidence concerning the widespread and continuous tradition of *samā'* musical sessions and the oral recitation of the Hindavi Sufi romances. This evidence shows that although the *textual* world of north Indian Sufism appears to have been overwhelmingly Persian, its *oral* and *oral-literary* world must have been more substantially Hindavi.<sup>6</sup> Although direct evidence about the contexts and modes of performance and oral reception is scant, one source often quoted shows for example that verses from the *Candāyan* were recited from the pulpit in a mosque in sixteenth-century Delhi.<sup>7</sup>

The second frame is that of the range of poetic engagements with the story of Krishna, as

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<sup>3</sup> I will use Hindavi in the general Persian sense of any form of Hindi, and will instead use Awadhi, Madhyadeshi or Braj Bhasha when making specific points about regional styles.

<sup>4</sup> Aditya Behl discusses the question of the "Indianness" of Sufi *premākhyān* among Hindi critics from Ramchandra Shukla onwards in his 'Rasa and Romance: the *Madhumālatī* of Shaikh Mañjhan Shattari', unpublished Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1995, pp. 8 ff. In chapter IV of his thesis Behl in fact convincingly uses the glosses in the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* to read the deeper meanings in the description of Madhumalati's body; *id.*, pp. 194 ff.

<sup>5</sup> For a theoretical discussion based on Bengali Sufi sources see Stewart 2001.

<sup>6</sup> For a systematic exposition of Indo-Persian sources on north Indian music and songs, see the bibliography at the end of Nalini Delvoye's essay in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> 'Abdul Qadir Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-t-Tavārikh*, vol. 1, tr. G. Ranking (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1990: 33), quoted in Phukan 2000: 76.

not only oral and written vernacular versions of the Tenth Book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* circulated in north India, but the upsurge of Krishna bhakti in the sixteenth century must have made those tellings and devotional lyrics (*bishnupad*) increasingly popular.<sup>8</sup> If the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* is evidence of Sufi reception and interpretation of *bishnupad* specifically on Krishna, only a few years earlier in the nearby qasba of Jais, Malik Muhammad Jaisi had heard the story of Krishna sung by *ahirs* at the time of Divali and decided 'to compose a Krishna *kathā* and tell it to all'.<sup>9</sup> In Jaisi's romance, too, Krishna revealed to those endowed with the proper vision a "secret knowledge" (*kapāta gyān*) behind visible appearances.<sup>10</sup> The *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* therefore testifies to *one* kind of reception within a broader history of circulation of Krishna songs, tales and motifs in and out of public, religious and courtly domains, as other essays in this volume also show. Thus Stefano Pellò's essay on Bedil's Hindu disciples documents a rather different poetic engagement located in eighteenth-century urban Persian poetic circles, where Vaishnava disciples wrote about Krishna and Braj through the prism of Persian poetry, according to the categories developed over centuries by Persian poets. Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye's contribution points to the circulation of singers and songs between courtly and religious settings, and Allison Busch's essay highlights the circulation of Braj Bhasha poets and their *riti* poetry within the orbit of Mughal elites. Within this frame, we should therefore not think of Bilgrami's engagement with *bishnupad* about Krishna as something "strange", but rather as one among many and varied responses to an attractive cluster of motifs, structures of feelings and genres.

Finally, as a genre the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* could appear to belong to the long tradition of Sufi writings in defence of music—for any musical style beyond the simple voice has had a contested status in Islamic law.<sup>11</sup> It might also be described as a kind of spiritual glossary, a work explaining mystical terms and problems through scriptural and poetic examples—in another

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Dasam Skandha* in Braj Bhasha by Lalac Kavi, composed in 1530, which equates the Vedas with *Hari-bhakti*; McGregor 1984: 96.

<sup>9</sup> '*Kanha kathā kara sabahi sunāvū*', Gupta 1981: 140. For other instances of references to Krishna in Sufi romances, see Chandel 1976: 160-165.

<sup>10</sup> Gupta 1981: 250.

<sup>11</sup> For a careful discussion of Islamic legal debates regarding different types of music, see al-Faruqi 1985. Robson (1938) translates two Arabic treatises regarding music, one by Ahmad Ghazzali. Bruce Lawrence (1983, and in Ernst and Lawrence 2002) discusses several works in defence of *samā'* by Indian Sufis of the Sultanate period, upon which later compilations drew: *Uṣūl as-samā'* (in Arabic) by Fakhr ud-din Zarradi and *Risālah-e samā'* by Shaykh Hamid ud-din Nagauri. The fourteenth-century Delhi saint Mas'ud Bakk devoted a chapter of his *Mir'āt al- 'arifīn* to *samā'*, and so did the biographer of Sayyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani in his *Latā'if-i Ashrafī* and the disciple of the Deccani Sain Burhan ud-din Gharib, Rukn ud-Din, in his *Shamā'il at-tiqiyā*.

treatise, the *Risālah-i ḥal-i shubhāt* (Treatise for the removal of doubts), 'Abdul Wahid appended mystical interpretations of terms such as *zulf* (lock of hair), *bosa* (kiss), *bulbul* (nightingale) and *qumrī* (turtle-dove) appearing in the poems of Hafiz.<sup>12</sup> The fact that 'Abdul Wahid himself wrote an epistle in defence of *samā'* to a local scholar who was hostile to it shows that music in Sufi assemblies remained a controversial topic,<sup>13</sup> but actually in the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* the apology does not come at the beginning of the text but only at the beginning of the second chapter, which deals with Hindavi words in *bishnupad* connected with Krishna. In other words, this work seems directed not to those hostile to *samā'* who would object to music and singing as such, but to disciples who may perceive some discomfort in listening to religious songs that contained "the coarse names of *kāfirs*".<sup>14</sup> It is worth quoting the passage in full:

If someone says "who gave permission<sup>15</sup> to listen with great delight to the names of coarse kafirs (*kafirān-i ḡhalīz*) and to dance ecstatically to words contrary to the *shari'a* (*namashru'*)?" I say that a tradition narrates that to someone who had asked him, 'Umar Khattab (*raziullāh*)<sup>16</sup> replied "are there not in the Quran addresses to enemies and kafirs?" And to someone who had asked him about this, 'Ain al-Qaza<sup>17</sup> said that Abu Jahil saw in the Quran the names of the Pharaoh, of Hamar and Qarun,<sup>18</sup> but out of ignorance he only heard the Quran.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, since it is possible for someone to hear the names of enemies and the addresses to kafirs in the Quran, it is (also) possible to hear the coarse names of kafirs in a piece of music. (p. 19)

Clearly, this justification is presented for the sake of those who looked with suspicion upon this *particular* song genre in Sufi musical assemblies. 'Abdul Wahid defends it on two accounts. First, as we shall see, he invokes a general argument that Sufis perceive hidden spiritual truths underneath *any* worldly appearance and event. Second, here he specifically invokes the Quran as the unimpeachable authority: the mere mention of kafir names is not objectionable as long as

<sup>12</sup> Qadiri n.d.: 32; Rizvi 1957: 30.

<sup>13</sup> The scholar was Mufti Ilaḥdad Danishmand of Lucknow. I have been unable to see the letter, which is preserved in the Barakatiya Khanqah at Mahru; see Qadiri n.d.: 29.

<sup>14</sup> In other words, this is not a syncretistic text in the sense of aiming to bring about unity between Sufis and Vaisnavas, in the way in which Sufis and Sants are sometimes hailed as the "apostles of Hindu-Muslim unity".

<sup>15</sup> Lit. "where is it from?"

<sup>16</sup> The second Caliph.

<sup>17</sup> A famous Sufi.

<sup>18</sup> Abu Jahil was an uncle of the Prophet who disagreed with him to the end. Hamar was the Pharaoh's minister, and Qarun a wealthy man and a symbol in Islam of the love of wealth.

<sup>19</sup> In other words, he did not understand that these were names of Kafirs.

one does not invest them with belief.

Before we move to the text itself, it is useful to consider existing scholarly treatments as well as some family background about the Bilgramis that will help locate 'Abdul Wahid historically. The *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* was first brought to scholarly attention by the indefatigable S.A.A. Rizvi, who found it while compiling a catalogue of Persian manuscripts at Maulana Azad Library in Aligarh and published a Hindi translation in Devanagari back in 1957.<sup>20</sup> He also mentioned and summarised parts of the text in his *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India* (1965) and *History of Sufism in India* (1978, vol. 1), in the chapter on "The Interaction between Medieval Hindu Mystic Traditions and Sufism," where it is sandwiched between the translations of Yogic texts and Sufi interest in Nath and Siddha practices and poetry, the poetry of the Bauls and the Awadhi romances. Rizvi noted that Sufis 'regarded [Vaishnava themed songs] as welcome additions to their devotional poetry to induce ecstasy,' and viewed the phenomenon as an instance of "influence of Vaishnavite themes" (Rizvi 1978, I: 359). More recently, Muzaffar Alam has considered the text within the paradigm of "assimilation from a distance" which the Sufis of Awadh worked with, both out of their belief in the (inclusive) doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, "unity of existence", but also out of political necessity in the face of continued threats and attacks from local Rajput zamindars (Alam 1996). Indeed 'Abdul Wahid belonged to a lineage of provincial Sufis who claimed allegiance to the important Awadhi qasba of Bilgram. The family's enforced journeys show a pattern of limited movement across local networks of towns and families (as opposed to long-distance or centripetal) and of acquisition of local roots, as part of the family settled in one place while others moved on. Like the other Awadh Sufis that Muzaffar Alam considers, 'Abdul Wahid's grandfather Saiyyid Qutbuddin Mahru, who had moved from Bilgram to the nearby qasba of Sara, founded the settlement of Mahru Khera and built a small fort there, was fatally caught up in disputes with local Rajput zamindars.<sup>21</sup> He and several of his children were killed and buried there and the family was displaced from the lands he had received as *in'am*. They moved to Gaughat and then again to Sandi, while one son who had pursued a course of education was appointed by the local

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<sup>20</sup> The translation was of course a great help during our reading, but the fact that Rizvi chose a very "Hindu" and Sanskritized register meant that one had to go to the original to see whether 'Abdul Wahid had in fact used bhakti and Indian philosophical terms, and in fact he had not.

<sup>21</sup> The following information on 'Abdul Wahid's life and family are taken from Mir Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami (d. 1786)'s *Ma'aṣir al-Kirām*, a *tazkira* of Sufis from Bilgram, quoted in Rizvi 1957: 23-28.

qazi of the qasba of Bari and later received it as *in'am* during Akbar's reign. 'Abdul Wahid himself moved between Bilgram, where his daughter was married, and Qannauj, his wife's hometown.

As for his spiritual lineage, it also reveals a pattern of provincial Shaikhs firmly rooted in the Awadh countryside. Both in the case of his *pir* and of 'Abdul Wahid himself, the possibility of travelling to Mecca or to meet other important Sufis and "remove one's doubts" was rendered unnecessary by opportune dreams which suggested that the nearby pir or his tomb could be just as effective. 'Abdul Wahid's first spiritual guide was Shaikh Safi ud-din Saipuri, himself a disciple of Shaikh Sa'd uddin Khairabadi. Shaikh Safi initiated him, and after his death 'Abdul Wahid became a disciple of his *khalifa*, Shaikh Husain, who was famous in Sufi *tazkiras* for having given up all his wealth and taking pride in his newly-found poverty. That musical sessions were a regular part of the life of the lineage is confirmed by Shaikh Husain's wish to die listening to a singer with a good voice reciting verses from the Quran in *kori* or *jayashri raga* (Rizvi 1957: 25-27). 'Abdul Wahid seems to have been one of the fortunate Chishti Sufis who did not suffer but in fact found favour under Akbar's dispensation, most likely through the good services of Mir Sadr Jahan Khan Pihanvi, who was for a time tutor to Prince Salim and had risen through the ranks to become *Sadr as-sudur*.<sup>22</sup> The emperor summoned him at court and granted him 500 bighas as rent-free land. 'Abdul Wahid had become famous enough in his lifetime for 'Abdul Qadir Badaoni, Akbar's famous historian, to place him among the celebrated Sufis of his day.<sup>23</sup> Certainly his manual *Sab'a sanābil* (The seven ears of corn), on topics and problems related to the Sufi path, was his most famous and popular work, but he was also the author of several commentaries, and ostensibly of a short masnavi on the relative merits of the mango and the melon.<sup>24</sup>

What about the motivation behind the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī*? According to Muzaffar Alam, in this work 'Abdul Wahid 'sought to *reconcile* Vaisnav symbols as well as the terms and ideas used in Hindu devotional songs with orthodox Muslim beliefs' within the 'syncretistic religious milieu' of Awadh qasbas (Alam 1996: 174). While Alam importantly points out the political

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<sup>22</sup> Sadr Jahan Khan was from the small town of Pihani (today dist. Hardoi) and to him 'Abdul Wahid addressed one letter; see Qadiri n.d.: 30.

<sup>23</sup> Though Badaoni seems keen to assert that 'Abdul Wahid, who was fifty-seven at the time of their meeting, had given up his ecstatic Hindi singing : 'He used formerly to indulge in ecstatic exercises and sing ecstatic songs in Hindi and fall into trances, but he is now past all this', Badaoni 1986, vol. III: 106.

<sup>24</sup> *Munazira-yi amba va kharbūza*; for a list of his works, see Qadiri n.d.



dimensions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the composite and competitive social world of the Awadh countryside, the terms "syncretism" and "reconciliation" need to be approached with some caution. Rather, this essay argues that in a social world where religious traditions and events could and would have multi-religious audiences, and singers and songs travelled among courtly, religious and other "open" contexts, religious symbols and terms could and did acquire more than one meaning. It is precisely this phenomenon of multivocality of symbols that the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* evinces. Particularly worth noting is the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī*'s claim that the "*saguṇa*" vocabulary of Krishna songs could be as multivocal as the "*nirguṇa*" vocabulary of the Naths or the Sants, which North Indian Sufis had already been using.<sup>25</sup> This may well have been due to the growing popularity of *dhrupad*, *bishnupad* and the Krishna's story (*Harikathā*) in the sixteenth century.

## Sufis and Dhrupad

While the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* is unfortunately silent on the actual settings in which the songs were sung, and on who the singers were, other sources point to an eclectic musical landscape in which Sufis played an important role as patrons, composers, connoisseurs and, we may infer, trainers and impresarios. Thus, while singers of *qaul* and *tarana* "in the style of Amir Khusrau" are what we most immediately associate with Sufi *samā'*, the musically-inclined Chishtis of north India drew upon a wide range of musicians and musical styles. For example, it is said about Pir Buddhan, renowned as the *pir* of Sultan Husain Sharqi (r. 1458-1479), himself a famous music connoisseur, that 'often *nāyaks* and *kalāvants* from the Deccan would gather, who sang *praband* [*prabandha*] and *sangīt*... based on the principles of music and according to the *shāstras* in Sanskrit'.<sup>26</sup> Within this eclectic and multilingual musical repertoire, *dhrupad*

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<sup>25</sup> For an example of Sufi interpretation of Nath vocabulary, *dohas* and *padas*, see 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi's *Rushdnāma*, Jajihar: Muslim Press, 1314H/1896-7; for a Hindi translation in Devanagari, see Rizvi 1971, and Weightman 1992. For a consideration of his poetic language, see my 'Echoes of Multilingual World: Hindavi in Persian Texts', paper presented at the conference 'After Timur Came: Multiple Spaces of Cultural Production and Circulation in Fifteenth-century North India', SOAS, 29-31 May 2007. Among Sufis who composed (song) poems in Hindavi, Badaoni mentions, apart from 'Abdul Wahid, Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus, Shaikh Burhan of Kalpi, Shaikh Gada'i of Delhi; but the list of famous Shaikhs who listened regularly to music and songs (including probably songs in Hindavi) includes: Shaikh Fakhruddin, Shaikh Azizullah, Shaikh ul-Hidya of Khairabad, Shaikh Adhan of Jaunpur, Abu'l Fazl's father Shaikh Mubarak of Nagor, Shaikh 'Abdul Ghani of Badaon and Shaikh Jalai Wasail of Kalpi; Badaoni 1983, vol. 3, chs. 1 and 2.

<sup>26</sup> Sherani 1927a: 48, summarizing and translating into Urdu the *Chishtiya Bihishtiya* (see below). According to

clearly emerged in the sixteenth century as a popular and fashionable style, and it is not surprising that it should have become a fixture at Sufi musical assemblies as well. As 'Nalini' Delvoye has documented in her numerous writings on the subject, *dhrupad*, a lyrical song-poem (*gey pad*) in the vernacular, though first mentioned in Persian treatises from the sixteenth century and only a century later in Sanskrit ones, was traced back to the court of the great patron and connoisseur of music Man Singh Tomar of Gwalior (r. 1486-1516), whose much-admired singer-composers (*vāggeyakārs*, cf. Persian *go'inda*) moved to other courts after the demise of Tomar rule.<sup>27</sup> *Dhrupad*, she notes, developed in parallel with the poetic and musical tradition of the *bhakta-kavi*—a phenomenon epitomized in the relationship between Tansen and Svami Hari Das.

That Sufis listened and danced to *dhrupad* in *samā'* assemblies is confirmed by the author of the *Chishtiyya Bihishtiyya* (1655), a history of a small Chishti sub-branch written by Shaikh 'Ala'ud-din Barnawi, son of the renowned music connoisseur and composer Shaikh Baha'ud-din Barnawi. While acknowledging ruefully that *dhrupad* had become more and more popular with poets and ordinary people (*'avvām*) because of its easy and comprehensible language (which he terms "Gwaliori"), the author notes that '*in previous times* no friend of God (*awliyā-i Ilāhī*) listened to it or danced to it in *samā'*'.<sup>28</sup> The same must have been true of *bishnupad*, a song genre associated with Mathura and with Vaisnavas and wandering Bairagis.<sup>29</sup> For example Shaikh Baha'uddin Barnawi was a good friend of a Bairagi called Baba Ghanun (?) who was, like him, a learned connoisseur, accomplished composer and wandering impresario who taught his new compositions to disciples/musicians. He and other Bairagis 'often used to come to Hazrat Makhdum [Shaikh Baha'uddin] to perform their verses and *kabīrīs* [?]'.

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this text, at Pir Buddhan's estate in Rapri, singers from Delhi singing *jikri* [*zikri*] in praise of the Pirs and Jaunpur singers of *farodast parda* were always in attendance, while Afghan minstrels also came to perform. Another group of particularly renowned singers were the Chokhs from the Deccan, who became attached to the Sufi's family for generations. Initially limited to singing Sanskrit *prabandha*, they were later trained by a descendant of Pir Buddhan, Shaikh Baha'ud-din Barnawi (d. 1628/9), one of the most famous composers and music connoisseurs of his day, to extend their repertory to other styles such as *chand*, *qaul*, *tarana*, *farsi*, *naqsh*, *jikri*, *khayal* of Delhi, *chutkula farodast*, *sadra* from Mewat, and indeed *dhrupad* and *bishnupad*. After Baha'ud-din's demise, his son remarked ruefully, these singers made *dhrupad* their chief source of livelihood; see Sherani 1927b: 18.

<sup>27</sup> The following summary draws upon her seminal article 'Les chants *dhrupad* en langue Braj des poètes-musiciens de l'Inde Moghole', Delvoye 1991: 139-159. See also her contribution to the present volume.

<sup>28</sup> Sherani 1927b: 26, emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> It is mentioned also in Faqirullah's *Risāla-i Rāgdarpan* as a genre linked to Mathura and the worship of Krishna; Sarmadee 1996: 115.



himself composed *bishnupad* 'in every *raga*, some in imitation of Kabir the weaver and some of Surdas the blind'—a reference to style or content?<sup>30</sup> His son and biographer is eager to point out that the Shaikh only composed on mystical Sufi themes, and in a style slightly different from that of Bairagis, but it is easy to see how the same musical and song styles could be made to represent the "truths of mysticism" as well as the "truths of India" (*Haqā'iq-i Hindī*)—Baba Ghanun, after all, was valued by the Shaikh not only as an accomplished musician and friend, but also as someone who 'had a foot in the unity of Being'.<sup>31</sup> Barnawi's account, then, provides evidence of the circulation of singers, the mutual exchange of songs between a Sufi and a Vaishnava Bairagi, the simultaneous cultivation of a range of song styles that we now apportion to different sectarian traditions, as well as the multivocality of spiritual terms and metaphors that we will focus on.

For, having ascertained that it was not unusual for sixteenth-century Sufis to listen to *dhrupad* and *bishnupad* and enjoy the aesthetic experience, the question remains: how did they relate those "truths of India" to their own religious understanding? Particularly in the case of *bishnupads* and the Krishna motif, is Bilgrami's explanation an allegorical reading? If so, does he establish a one-to-one relation the two sets of (figured) ideas, the bhakti and the Sufi, or does he suggest multiple possible interpretations? To what extent did Bilgrami's evident knowledge of the chain of meanings underlying the Krishna story "influence" his explanation? Was the result a kind of syncretic combination of bhakti and Sufi symbols and concepts? Or did he completely displace the bhakti meanings and overtones with new Sufi meanings, which took no notice of the "original" symbolisation? Did the words remain linked together, only in a new and parallel chain of meanings? Or were they delinked and made to stand alone, or else reassembled in new and different chains of significations?<sup>32</sup>

To anticipate my conclusions, I argue that there is no overall attempt at syncretism at the level of theology or even mystical practices. The text in fact shows very little interest in the *theology* of bhakti, as the discussion of the *murlī* (Krishna's flute) will show, where the only possible overlap in that case is the sound of the flute being likened to the sound of creation

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<sup>30</sup> Sherani 1929: 88, 87.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*: 88.

<sup>32</sup> The question of allegorical reading of course looms large over modern interpretations of pre-modern works, in particular the attempt at reading all love verse in a mystical light that other contributors to the volume have already questioned.

(II.8, f. 11r). One other potential convergence can be detected in Bilgrami's explanation of the term *gopīs* (Krishna's devoted milkmaids), who at times indicate, in his words "the true existence [of a kind of people] on the basis of their oneness [despite] their various qualities." The point here is that despite appearing to be different and many, they are actually one. Bilgrami could here be referring generally to the gopis, but also possibly to the *rāsa* dance, when the appearance of many Krishnas hid the truth of his oneness with the gopis, who each thought that Krishna was dancing with her alone. Bilgrami does not explain his point, but he argues that "if the eye of discriminating reason (*khīrad*) sees difference in these signs (*ishārat*, i.e. in the appearance of multiple Krishnas?), difference (*tafāvvut*) lies in the eye of reason,<sup>33</sup> since there is no difference between such designs (*irādat*, of God) and signs." (II.2, f. 10v)

To give another example, while the order in which the Hindavi words are listed shows that 'Abdul Wahid was well familiar with the Krishna story and chain of meanings—starting with Madhopuri/Bindraban/Madhuban in Krishna's childhood, followed by Mathura in his successful fight with his evil uncle and usurper Kamsa, and ending in Dwarka, where Krishna rules and died—the emphasis on individual terms seems dictated by the importance of the concept associated with it in the Sufi paradigm. For example, about Jasodha's *vātsalya bhāva*, one of the most important elements of Krishna bhakti emanating from Braj, it is merely said that she "indicates the gift and mercy that God had for men since the beginning (*sābqa*)" (II. 16, f. 12r).<sup>34</sup> Thus, Jasodha is fitted but awkwardly into the Sufi framework, which transmutes the mother's defence of her child against the gopis' accusations into God's mercy for man's real faults and weaknesses:

II.24 And if among Hindavi words we find from the tongue of Jasodha expressions like *yah bālak mero kachū najānen* (this child of mine knows nothing) or *Kanhaiyā mero bāro tum bāw lagāvat khor* (my Kanhaiya is good, you accuse him for no reason), they

<sup>33</sup> I.e. in the eyes of the gopis in the rasa dance. It was this reference to the eyes that see a non-existing difference that pointed me towards the rasa dance, but I could well be mistaken. *Wahdat al-wujūd* did of course favour a position where even outward religious differences were attributed to the external eyes of reason, whereas the inner eyes would perceive only unity. Indeed, Malik Muhammad Jaisi made precisely this statement in his version of the Krishna story, when he has Krishna reveal to the *gopī* Chandravali that he is Gopal-Govinda only in appearance (*pargat*) and according to the "secret knowledge" (*kapāta gyān*) there is no Turk nor Hindu; Gupta 1981: 250. But 'Abdul Wahid does not make the same statement about Krishna, as we shall see.

<sup>34</sup> Jasodha is allotted even less space than Kamsa, for whom five possible meanings are given: he 'indicates either the *nafs* (lower soul), or a *khannās* (a *jinn* or person who suggests evil acts) or Iblis, or else one the names of God's majesty and wrath. He may also indicate the laws of the first Prophets.' [II.11, f. 11v]

allude to the object demonstrated by these two *ayats*: "And man is created weak" (Qu 4:28), and "Surely he is unjust and ignorant" (Qu 33:72).<sup>35</sup> The seekers of truth say that God the Holiest and the Almighty, out of the extreme kindness he feels for his devotee (*banda*), named him weak and ignorant (*nādān*), so that if he falls short in fulfilling his worship and a gap occurs in his mystical state (*ḥāl*) because he is subject to desire and to the *nafs*, the benevolence of God the Almighty unfastens the language of apology and of mercy and says that "I created him from the beginning weak and ignorant and a sinner." *ma'ānī*: "Your mercy begs for the forgiveness of us all." (f. 13r)

I have already suggested that rather than "reconciliation" or "syncretism," a more appropriate way of conceptualizing the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī*'s engagement with Krishna motifs is in terms of the multivocality of symbols. If we consider north India in this period a synchronic palimpsest in which genres like songs (Vaishnava, Sant, seasonal, etc.) circulated among different interpretive communities, the same images and symbols became by necessity multivocal, i.e. there was no one interpretation that was valid for all. Participants like 'Abdul Wahid knew this and accepted it as such. Thus, when he set out to interpret Vaishnava motifs for his Sufi disciples he quickly departed from the "original" meaning (though the term is not apt in this context), retaining sometimes only a faint whiff of it or its abstract quality, and immediately drew it into a web of meanings that is completely Sufi. This is an intertextual web that, as already mentioned, weaves together the mystical interpretation of Quranic verses, early Islamic traditions and Persian poetry. Rather than "accommodation from a distance", therefore, one may characterize this particular stance as "parallel enjoyment" or "enjoyment from close by." In the rest of the essay I try to support these suggestions by examining more closely the Hindavi words included in 'Abdul Wahid's exposition and the Sufi interpretation that he provides.

## The range

The first Hindavi words explained in *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* have to do with technical terms about music and performance—*Sarsatī* (Sarasvati, the goddess of speech and music), *sur/swara* (note, sound), *tāl* (beat) and *bandhān* (possibly a composition?).<sup>36</sup> As Françoise 'Nalini' Delvoye has

<sup>35</sup> This is said about man when he accepted the trust (*amānat*) of the *rūḥ* given by God, whereas mountains and heavens refused it.

<sup>36</sup> I.1 'Know, o taster, that if, among Hindavi words, one finds the words *Sarsatī* and *sur [swara]*, then by *Sarsatī* they indicate the continuing bounty of God (*tavātur faiz-i Raḥmān*) and the continuous existence of God (*vujūd-i Raḥmān*) that never stops. And by *swara* they indicate the signs (*aṣṣār*) of that bounty which reaches

argued, *dhrupads* on musical theory were an integral part of the content of *dhrupad* and a way in which singers and singers-composers demonstrated their command over musical theory and their ability to instruct, as well as to please, their patrons and audiences.<sup>37</sup> *Nāyak* and *bahunāyak* usually refer to the patron of a musical performance, *pātar/pātur* (and her *caturāī*) to the courtesan-singer and her skills, the *bahurūpī* to the master of ceremonies, and words like *sudhang* (a kind of stage, but also a style or type of singing) and *jamanikā* (the curtain) to the stage. All these terms appear frequently in *dhrupad* lyrics—such as for example in the *Sahasrarasa*, a thousand lyrics attributed to Nayak Bakhshu and collected at Shahjahan's order around 1650.<sup>38</sup> Within the spiritual setting of the *samā'* performance and the mystical explanation by 'Abdul Wahid, these courtly terms acquire quite different meanings. Sometimes the object remains the same and only the context around it changes. For example, the stage is explained as 'the stage which is the fullness of all accomplished actions (*amūr*) and all the states (*ḥālāt*).' [I.8, f. 1v] At other times the object leads to another object within the Sufi/Islamic paradigm by way of similarity: for example the curtain becomes 'the mantle of greatness, as [God spoke] "Greatness is my mantle."' [*ibid.*] Yet at other times the "original" meaning is quickly left behind and the spiritual meaning leads in new directions: the *pātur*

indicates the seeker (*sālik*) who has been chosen (*majzūb*), or the chosen one who becomes a seeker, or simply the seeker. I.5 And if in Hindavi the epithet of *nāyak* is to be found, it indicates the *pīr* of the path (*tarīqat*) and the guide to true reality (*murshīd-i haqīqat*) or anyone who has been a full recipient of the bounty of God's presence (*faiz-i dargāh*) and to whom this name can be fully applied. I.6 And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of the *bahunāyak*, it indicates the one about whom is said "Every moment He is in a state of glory" (Qu 55: 29): *maṣnavī*: "O you have a different secret in every person." [f. 1v]

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the vigilant (*āgāh*) hearts of the seekers from the unspoken words (*vāredāt*), passions (*jaḥbāt*) and inspirations (*ilhāmāt*). *Vāredāt* are the words which one understands without having been spoken, while *ilhām* is the entry of a special meaning in the heart by the bounty of God. 'I.2 And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *tāl* and *bandhān*, they indicate the firmness (*istaqāmat*) which is the highest gift (*faṭṭ al-kirāmat*).' The words *anāgat* [*anāghat*], *atīt* and *sam*, corresponding to the falling of the word in the rhythmic cycle before, on and after the *tāl*, are glossed as follows: 'I.3 And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *anāgat* and *atīt* and *sam*, by *anāgat* they indicate/it indicates the passion that precedes setting on the way (*sulūk*), and by *atīt* the way which follows the passion, and *sam* indicates the equality (*musāvāt*) which occurs between the passion and the setting on the way'; f. 1v. I am grateful to Katherine Brown for her explication of these technical terms.

<sup>37</sup> Delvoye has made this point forcefully in her recent paper on 'Enchanting Tomar, Muzaffarid and Mughal rulers: The literary and performing strategies of court poet-composers and singers', presented at the conference 'Tellings, Not Texts: Singing, story-telling and performance' held at SOAS, 8-10 June 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Sharma 1972: 136-137, based on two manuscripts dated respectively 1656 and 1667. See e.g. lyrics 5.12 (12 in Chapter Five) for *sur* and *tāl*; 4.20 for *pātar/pātur*; and 3.3 and 4.3 for *bahunāyak*.

The word *bahurūpī*, which ordinarily refers to young male dancers and jugglers who performed extraordinary feats of masquerade, refers here to the beauty of God, who appears as the beloved or *shahīd*. The *bahurūpī*'s ability to disguise himself and come under many, ever new appearances is linked to the beauty of God which is carried into the phenomenal world both in its active and passive qualities, as 'the quality of being a beloved' (*ma'shūqī*) and 'the quality of being of a lover' (*āshiqī*) :

I.7 And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of the *bahurūpī*, it indicates the real beauty of God which appears in every speck that makes the two worlds [= this one and the next], [since] by virtue of being a beloved it possesses a special beauty (*husn o jamāl*), and by the quality of being the lover it has a special desire and yearning. And every moment the beauty of being a beloved displays a special novelty and appearance. While the desire and yearning of being a lover [display] special ways of showing love and joy, and "this has no end".

*qīṭā'*: "Since his face had a hundred thousand faces,  
It appeared different in every speck.  
Inevitably every speck revealed anew  
A different countenance of his face." [f. 1v]

This interpretation signals to the Sufis' mystical ability of discerning "real" beauty or truth inside worldly phenomena: when they hear mention of the *bahurūpī*, a handsome young male performer, they perceive the beauty of God.

As already mentioned, no explanation is deemed necessary for the importance of music for the cultivation of the heart and of mystical knowledge: the plectrum falls upon the strings as well as on the heart of the listener, and it sings about the mystery of the hidden world. Music opens the heart, its mystery symbolized by the fact that material elements (the gut strings, wood and skin front of an instrument) 'speak of the secrets of the Friend from the hidden world' [f. 1r]. Listening to music and grasping the hidden meanings of sounds and words are therefore introduced as appropriate for the "seekers of truth"—indeed Bilgrami hints that they are the only ones worthy of listening to such music and songs at all. 'Know that listeners are many but those with taste (*az'iq*) are few, and all those who do not have taste are not worthy of listening to these meanings: "A peevish person (*badmizāj*) who is not stimulated by spring and excited by music and instruments, is beyond treatment" [f. 1v].

The remainder of the first chapter, dedicated to words occurring in *dhrupad* songs, is

devoted to terms pertaining to the description of female beauty (*nakh-sikh, sarāpā*), starting conventionally from the parting of the hair (*māng*) down to the forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose, cheeks, ears and ear ornaments, and so on, which could refer either to a courtly heroine (*nāyikā*) or to Radha or some other *gopī*.<sup>39</sup> Here sometimes the allegorical reading is straightforward: the straight parting in the woman's hair 'indicates the straight path (*sirāṭal-mustaqīm*)' while the blackness of the hair indicates 'the darkness of losing one's way. God says: "This is the straight way. Follow me. Do not follow the other way. Because that way leads you astray"' [I.12, f. 2r]. The Sufi exposition of the Hindavi word *māng* is a good example of how expressions connected to a particular term generate new clusters of signification and recontextualization. Thus the parting filled with vermillion (*bharī māng*) or the parting from which vermillion has been scattered (*bithrī māng*) 'indicate the soul of the *sālik* getting lost in base actions through his own self (or selfishness, *khudī*), or his heart getting lost in the good things by forgetting himself' [I.13, f. 2r]. In other cases the logic is metonymical: the face for facing, the ear for hearing.<sup>40</sup>

There is a clear convergence between female beauty as celebrated by *nakh sikh varṇaṇ* and descriptions of the beloved's beauty in Persian poetry. For example, the Hindavi terms *locan* and *netr* (both meaning eye) evoke the following Persian verse [I.21, f. 2r]:

*she'r*: "Your black eye teaches me acts of deceit,  
Otherwise intoxication (*mastī*, also lust) and acting behind the veil are not for  
everyone."<sup>41</sup>

The explanation for eyebrows (*bhaunhen, barunī*) and sidelong glances (*katāch*) shows how the allegorical interpretation treats the sign as inherently multivocal. First we have the standard

<sup>39</sup> A selective list includes: *māng*, *ghūnghaṭ* (veil over one's face), *sīndūr* (red vermillion), *alak* (lock of hair), *jūrā* (hairbun), *lalār* and *māthā* (forehead), *tīkā* and *tilak* (forehead mark), *nāsikā* (nose) and *besar* (nose ring), *locan*, *netr* and *ānkh* (all synonyms for the eye), *bhaunhen* and *barunī* (eyebrows), *katāch* (sidelong glance), *kājal*, *sarvan* (ears), *karanphūl* and *taraunā* (ear ornaments), *kapol* (cheek), *ānan* (face), *adhar* (lips), *lālī* (redness, e.g. *pān kī lālī*), *muskān* (smile), *rasnā* (tongue), *kan*, *kanthī*, *kanthmālā* and *rudrāch* (necklaces), *angurī* (finger), *ur* and *chhātī* (breast), *ābhūshan* (ornaments), *sar* (head), etc.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. 'And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *sarvan* or *karanphūl* or *taraun* or any other names of ear ornaments, they signal the opening of the heart to inspirations from the beyond (*ilhamāt-i ghaibī*) or to hearing religious teachings or the teachings of the Quran.' [f. 2v]

<sup>41</sup> By contrast, expressions connected with the eyes mentioned in the second chapter, devoted to *bishnupad* and the Krishna theme, such as *vah rah [rāh] becan jā'e* ("sold" on the road, i.e. waiting) or *dahāvan [dhāvan?] jā'e* or *nīr bharan jā'e* (they fill with tears), are all glossed as referring prayers and forms of worship in which the person praying weeps; see f. 12r and v.



metaphor of the beloved's eyebrow capturing the lover's heart:

*beit*: "I have captured both worlds with my eyebrow (*ābrū*) and my wink (*ghamza*),  
Overlook the fact that I have no bow and arrow."

And at times they indicate the meaning of this verse:

*she'r*: "I cannot escape alive from his eyes, for everywhere I look  
They are lying in ambush with an arrow ready on the bow." [I.23, f. 2v].

But then the next example introduces a mystical dimension: the eyebrow is a place (and stage) between the two bows and it can also allude to the mystical meaning of the word *mihrāb*, not the place which indicates the direction of Mecca in the mosque, but the place of the "great Jihad" within the mystic, since apart from being curved like the eyebrow, *mihrāb* derives from the root *ḥarb*, i.e. the place of warring (with Satan).<sup>42</sup> Besides, while at times the explanation embraces the imagery of human beauty and love in positive terms, at other times it can just as easily view beauty as an obstacle on the path of the mystic, as the example of the lock of hair shows:

And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *alak* (lock) or other names for it, or of *tīl* (mole), they indicate anything which causes confusion to the mystics, distraction to the seekers and disarray (*bī-sar-o-sāmān*) to the lovers. At times they indicate their restlessness in front of the veil (*hijāb*),<sup>43</sup> at times they mean sin and at other times they indicate also the [sin of] forgetting God for one's whole life.

*she'r*: "If you knew the worth of each one of your hairs  
Would you waste even one of your musk locks?" [I.16, f. 2r]<sup>44</sup>

In line with courtly poetry and women's folk poetry, the heroine can be either unmarried or married, and the list of Hindavi continues with words referring to marriage and married women (*suhāgin*, *duhāgin*, *naihar*, *sasurār*, *byāh*). The proud (*mānmatī*) woman for example

<sup>42</sup> 'And at times the eyebrows refer to the place of [between] the two bows (*maqām-i qāb-i qausain*), and at times they indicate to the *mihrāb*, that is the weapons and bows in the war, since the 'great *jihād* (against oneself) takes place there.' [I. 23, f. 2v] In Sufi terms, the *maqām-i qāb-i qausain*, the infinitesimal distance between Muhammad and Jibrael during their meeting (see Qu 53:9), refers to the infinitesimal distance between God and the mystic.

<sup>43</sup> *Hijāb* could refer either to (a) *hijāb-i zulmānī*, the veil of darkness i.e. sin; or (b) *hijāb-i nūranī*, i.e. virtuous actions which also keep one away from God.

<sup>44</sup> By contrast, the *tīkā* or *tilak* are given a positive gloss, assimilated to the marks on the forehead of those who pray a lot: 'they indicate the light of rectitude (*nūr-i salāh*) which appears on the face: "The marks [of light] are on their faces because of the effects of their prostrations (*sijda*)" (Qu 48:29).' [I.19, f. 2r]

seems to be a married woman—the term comes right after *saut*, the co-wife, suggesting that it was because of her pride that the husband took another woman.

Finally, the last area of vocabulary to consider apart from that of the “matter of Krishna”, pertains to natural details related to the seasons, in particular spring (*basant*) and the rains, their attendant pleasures and festivals.<sup>45</sup> These are terms common to a whole range of poetic compositions, from women’s seasonal songs and *barahmasas* to courtly *dhrupad* lyrics. Unfortunately, in most cases the fragments are too short to try and assess their provenance. As for the terms drawn from *bishnupad* centred on Krishna, the following section shows that there is even less of an attempt to impose a single allegorical reading, and almost every element is treated as a multivocal symbol.

## The Krishna motif

‘Abdul Wahid was clearly knowledgeable about more than the basic outline of the Krishna story and, in the case of Krishna himself, he includes several of his names: *mor mukut* (the crest of peacock feathers), *govardhan dhārī* (holding mount Govardhan on his finger), *syām sundar* and *sānvaro* (the beautiful dark one), *antarjāmī* (who dwells inside the human’s heart/knows the human’s heart) and *pīt pachaurī* (dressed in yellow garments).

II.1 Therefore, if among Hindavi words one hears mention of Kishan or any other of his names, they are a metaphor for the *risālat-panāh* (“refuge of prophecy”, i.e. Muhammad) [PBUH], and sometimes they refer to him and other times to the Truth of man (*haqīqat-i insān*),<sup>46</sup> which is founded upon the essential oneness of God (*aḥḍiyat-i zāt*). And at times [they refer] to Iblis (= Satan), and at other times to the meaning intended by idols, Christian children (*tarsa bachcha*) and Zoroastrian children (= beauty), as will be known

<sup>45</sup> Some of the words included in chapter three are: *basant* (spring), *puhup* (flower), *māh pālā* (frost), *pavan* (breeze, wind). These are followed by a series of terms for women’s ornaments: *hār* and *hamel* (a necklace made of coins), *causar hār*, *sehrā* (a garland), *naulāsī* (delicate). After it, the rainy season (*barkhā rut*) and its various poetic components are listed: *badrī* (cloud), *meh* (heavy rain), *svāt nakhat* or *būnd svāti* (the Svati asterism and Svati bird who drinks drops of dew at moonlight during the rainy season), *cakor* (partridge), *barī barī būndan* (very large raindrops), *nanh nanh būnden* (tiny raindrops), *papīhā* and *dādur* and *mor* (cuckoo, frog and peacock, the animals mentioned in this season), *dāmini* (lightning), *hans bak*, *chakaī*, *sāras* (various kind of poetical birds), *ghan garajī* (heavy thunders), *bīr bahūtī* (the red-lac insect which comes out during the rainy season); *hindolā* (swing) produces the following verses: *Ek hindolā bāp diyā, dūjā jo pī'ū de'ī, tisre hindole na pāv dharū* (My father gave me my first swing, my love the second, on a third one I will not set foot), Rizvi 1957: 101. Among *tyohār* (festivals), *divālī* and *holī* and *dhurhandī* (Rizvi suggests *dhuleṇḍī*) are mentioned; *Haqā'iq*, ff. 14-18, Rizvi 1957 87-103.

<sup>46</sup> The higher stage of man, before actual man was created.

from this *maṣnavī* verse:

"The idol and the Christian child are the manifest light,

The source of light is the face of the idol.

It charms every heart, and

Sometimes it is a singer (*mughannī*), sometimes a *sāqī*." [f. 10 r and v]

Krishna clearly is assimilated not with Allah, but with the highest form of man, that is the Prophet Muhammad, while the term "*ḥaqīqat-i insān*" brings the disciple back, as so often in Sufi expositions, to the realm and moment of God's creation, at the beginning of ordinary time-space. Then, possibly on account of his being a god other than God, Krishna is glossed as Satan. The next element that 'Abdul Wahid adduces is Krishna's beauty, which assimilates him to the other figures of intoxicating beauty of Persian and Sufi poetry: *but* (idols) and the kafir young boys that Muslims encountered in the Middle East, i.e. Zoroastrian and Christian, recalling the mystical reflections on beauty of Sheikh Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi, or singers and cupbearers.<sup>47</sup>

After Krishna come the *gopīs* or *gujārīn*, who appear only as a group. They indicate the Sufis as a "kind of people" (*no'-i insān*), but also the ability to grasp the single spiritual essence (*vaḥdiyat*) beyond the multiple qualities of appearances. This could be taken as signifying that the gopis represent "true religion", though not in juxtaposition to the philosophical teachings of Udho, as in the Bhakti tradition. In 'Abdul Wahid's explanation Udho is not the exasperating character of the *bhramar gīt* tradition—once again he does not seem interested in the theological aspects of bhakti—but is only a sign for various kinds of messengers and intermediaries between God and men. Thus, he is glossed first of all as the Prophet himself, then as his first companions, and finally as the angel Jibrael.<sup>48</sup>

The character of the hunchback, *kubrī* or *kubjā*, like that of Krishna's evil uncle Kamsa, is straightforwardly assimilated to human faults and failings, whereas in the bhakti tradition she is a recipient of Krishna's grace because of her simple gift to him.<sup>49</sup> If there is any suggestion to compare God's mercy towards human failings and Krishna's miraculous intervention, it is not

<sup>47</sup> E.g. in the *Kitāb-i 'Abhar al-Āshiqīn*, translated into French by Henry Corbin; see Corbin 1958; see also Ernst 1996, who points out that his works were well known in India, and in the fourteenth century Indian Chishtī Sufis knew Ruzbihan as an advocate of listening to music; *id.*: 10.

<sup>48</sup> 'And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *Ūdho*, it refers to Muhammad (*janāb-i risāla-panāh*) [PBUH], and at times to those companions of Muhammad who saw him (*mutāb'ān*) who are the intermediaries between the devotee/slave (*banda*) and God the Highest, and at times they refer to Jibrail.' [II.4, f. 10v]

<sup>49</sup> 'And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *kubrī* and *kubjā*, it alludes to a person on the basis of his faults and failings.' [f. 10 v] For the hunchback in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, see Bryant 2003: 174-5, and in the wider bhakti tradition Pauwels 2008: 316 ff. For Kamsa, see fn. 34 above.

made explicit. Kamsa's temptation to kill Krishna is compared to the temptation of the *nafs*, the instinctual soul. As already mentioned above, nothing much is made of Jasodha, and she is given the same space and importance as her husband Nand: they both represent God's gifts of mercy, generosity and benevolence.<sup>50</sup>

The long explanation given to the term *patiyā* (letter) is a good example of what can be called a "target-oriented" re-signification. Within the Krishna story, the *patiyā*, the letter written by the gopis to Krishna after he has left Braj for Mathura, is quite a small detail, evoking the intensity of affect of the *virahinī* left behind and longing for her husband to come home. In 'Abdul Wahid's mystical explanation, the *patiyā* is assimilated to a book: first of all the Quran, the "descended book" (*kitāb-i munzil*), then the register on which all human actions are written (*nāma-yi ā māl*) and which will become manifest on the Day of Judgment. The next ring on the chain of signification is the book of God's creation, in which appearances are vowels, substances are consonants and classes of beings are like the signs of consciousness (*āyāt-i vuqūf*). The mystic knows how to read this book and the hidden meanings within visible things.<sup>51</sup> A *she'r* acts as a link to the next meaning, from book to story:

And at times it indicates the hearts in which God wrote faith: "Those are the people in whose hearts faith was imposed." (Qu 58:22)

*she'r*: "The day He kneaded the earth, He wrote inside the heart the story of faith (*qiṣṣa-yi īmān*).

And if you read that letter once, You will learn everything you want." (II.5, p. 21)

From letter to register, book and story: clearly the sign works here only as a point of departure for a journey in many directions, in which the multiplicity of possible meanings represents the process of spiritual instruction in which the master leads the disciple deeper and deeper into

<sup>50</sup> 'And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *Nand har*, it indicates the *janāb-i risāla-panāh* Muhammad, and sometimes it refers to the eternal gift, benevolence and generosity of God.' [II.17, f. 12r] For Jasodha see above.

<sup>51</sup> 'At other times it indicates the whole world made of substances, appearances, surfaces and compounds which is the Book of God the Almighty.

*maṣnavī*: "For someone whose life is in the light,

The whole world is God's Book.

Appearances are [like] vowels, substances are consonants,

Classes [of beings] are like the signs of consciousness (*āyāt-i vuqūf*).

But from a certain aspect every page from the book of the world is [itself] a book of mystical knowledge, and from a certain aspect every page and visible thing is a word from the book of the world.

*she'r*: "Consider the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* both to be the essence,

Know all things to be a book of the signs from God." [ff. 10v and 11r]

mystical knowledge (*ma'rifat*), opening up hidden meanings behind the realm of the visible.<sup>52</sup>

Until, as 'Abdul Wahid writes elsewhere in the text, the phenomenal becomes the real.

And if in such places misapprehensions pass through your mind about the word *gvāl*, for example that it should indicate the unity of God or mean that an ancient phenomenon [*hādith-i qadīm*] is saying something wrong, they have no reason, and my answer is that for this group [=Sufis] everything which is in the world of phenomena (*dar 'ālam-i majāz*) is [also] necessarily true reality (*haqīqat*). Then if by a phenomenon they indicate true reality, there is no cause for exception in this because "the phenomenal is a bridge to the real." This group especially says that all things that exist in the phenomenal world are all names of reality.

*she'r*: "Since He does not have a name,

With every name you call Him, He raises his head." [II.25, f. 13v]

As mentioned above, the sequential treatment of places associated with Krishna (Braj, Gokul, Mathura and Dwarka) shows once more how 'Abdul Wahid, while well aware of the significance of these places within the Krishna story, chooses to consider only their abstract quality—Braj is both the real and the eternal abode of Krishna, Dwarka becomes the place of arrival. In this case the exposition revolves around the hierarchy of realms created by God and the dual dwelling of the mystics in this world (*nāsavvat*) and in their "permanent abode" (*mustaqarr*) in the higher abodes, which are also stages in God's creation.<sup>53</sup> Thus,

If among Hindavi words one finds mention of *Braj* and *Gokul*, they allude sometimes to the human world (*'ālam-i nāsūt*), sometimes to the angelic world (*'ālam-i malakūt*), and at times to the highest heaven (*'ālam-i jabarrūt*).<sup>54</sup> [f. 11r]

Brindaban and Madhuban are associated with the valley of Imen, where God spoke to Moses, but more specifically 'to the [mystical] meaning that the valley of Imen has among this people

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<sup>52</sup> A similar case is that of the phrase *gvāl gāyen carāve* (the cow herder took the cows grazing), again quite a "neutral" action, which to 'Abdul Wahid suggests the idea of shepherding and protecting and finds several different applications: it indicates 'women and children, who are like cows and sheep, while the lord of the house is like the shepherd (*rā'ī*). "All of you are shepherds, and all of you are responsible towards your people." It also indicates the relationship between the limbs of the body, which are like cattle, and the '*aql-i ma'ād*, the faculty within the heart which directs the heart so that one does not go astray, which is like the shepherd. 'And sometimes they allude to [the fact that] mischievous thoughts are like sheep and the heart is their shepherd.' It may also indicate the *ummat*, who is like the sheep, whose keepers are the prophets. 'And sometimes they indicate that [he] turns the multitudes into unity. This is like a pearl, and that is like a flowing river.' [f. 13r]

<sup>53</sup> 'And since in the spiritual journey one jumps from the place one leaves and sets foot in one's permanent abode, this is what the phrase "the man who is not born twice does not enter the world of angels" is about.' [f. 11v]

<sup>54</sup> The '*ālam-i jabarrūt* was the first to be created, before the material world.

[*qaum* = the Sufis].

*she'r*: "Come once to the vally of Imen,  
and hear: "Truly I am God."  
Come to the valley of Imen, where suddenly  
A tree will tell you: "Truly I am God.""

Know that in their usage the valley of Imen refers to the mode of purification of the heart and illumination of the *rūḥ* (*tajalliya-yi rūḥ*), which are necessary for receiving the grace and the "opening" (*futūḥ*) [by God]. And at times they are a synonym for the words *Gokul* and *Braj*.' [f. 11v]

Thus, for 'Abdul Wahid Brindaban and Madhuban are, like the valley of Imen, a spatial metaphor of the stages of purification that comes at the onset of the mystical path so that the seeker may receive God's grace. Dwarka, Krishna's final destination, indicates both the Sufis' permanent abode 'and the place to which they will return (*ma'ād*), and it is the great place of transit (*barzakhi*) where the journey of the perfect Sufis and of their actions and knowledge reaches completion.' [f. 12r] But it also alludes to the higher stage to which a mystic can aspire.

Finally, despite the significant attraction of the banter between Krishna and the gopis in Krishna bhakti, 'Abdul Wahid is not captivated by it in terms of spiritual exegesis. The banter is only interpreted in a negative light as seduction by Iblis or else, taking the gopis' anger quite literally, as a symbol of God's wrath or a warning that the seeker will not find a way to God. As in all the other cases, it would be a mistake to consider this as a failure of understanding on his part. Rather it is an indication of the freedom with which an interpretive community could re-formulate existing symbols.

And if among Hindavi words one finds mention of *Kānha ghaṭ rūndho*, or if they say *Kanhaiyā mārag roko* or other such expressions, they refer to the different kinds of seductions and deceptions by Iblis.

*she'r*: "The beloved told me: Sit by my door, and  
Do not let anyone in who is not seduced by me."

And sometimes they refer to the fearsome majesty (of God) who is wrathful.

*she'r*: "The light of God cannot be contained in the visible,  
For the glories of the majesty of God come with wrath.  
Let go of your reason; stay with the Truth (*haqq*),  
For the bat cannot endure the light of the sun."

And at times they refer to the "keep away" of these words: "The seeker will be sent away and the door will be shut."

*she'r*: "Until you walk with your feet and your head,



Go your way, this is not the path for you.  
Until you can bring the *azal* and the *abad* together,<sup>55</sup>  
However many times you knock on the ring, the door will remain shut."  
And sometimes it indicates the heart seduced by worldly idols,<sup>56</sup> something that is  
forbidden by worship and by propriety. [f. 12v]

## Conclusions

Texts like the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* are not only evidence of circulation of religious ideas, literary and musical forms and aesthetic tastes. They are also useful because they force us to go beyond a simple acknowledgment that such circulation took place and to think about the specific phenomena that were created in the process. First of all, we can safely say what this text is not: it is not a kind of syncretism, as 'Abdul Wahid clearly shows no interest in the theology of bhakti underlying the songs. Nor is this the work of a "neophyte", to use the term conveniently adopted to explain the interest of Muslim poets like Raskhan for Krishna poetry (Snell 1989). Rather, in provincial contexts such as that of Awadh qasbahs and other parts of the Mughal empire (e.g. Punjab), far from direct imperial control and the obsessive focus on the imperial court, the wide range of performances and patronage by local elites and religious groups and institutions becomes apparent. It may be argued that the parallel enjoyment of texts and performances to which the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* and Jaisi's *Kanhāvat* and *Padmāvat* bear witness, pressed among some the desire to re-interpret stories and symbols in one's own fashion. It may have also encouraged the realization that some religious-philosophical ideas could be considered comparable and that at the level of secret knowledge (*kapāta gyān*) there was "no Turk, no Hindu", as Jaisi put it. While the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* reveals a substantial knowledge of the story and theology of Krishna, and there is a hint of convergence in the importance given to sound in both Krishna bhakti and Sufi theology, by and large it is not bhakti that 'Abdul Wahid is interested in. His exposition is firmly anchored in Sufi ideas about the hierarchy of realms and stages that are mapped onto the successive stages of creation, and on the fundamental principle that everything that the seeker realizes is *received* from God by way of the pir. Intuitions and realizations "enter" his heart through the bounty and grace of God. This of

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<sup>55</sup> *Azal* and *abad* are eternity without beginning and without end.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. women.

course offers interesting parallels with bhakti theology and the different stages of proximity and unity of the bhakta with God envisaged by Vallabhacharya, for example (Barz 1976), but it is not a parallel that 'Abdul Wahid draws himself at any point. At the same time, the scholastic (and partly apologetic) quality of his commentary points to the dialogic position that his Sufism had vis-à-vis other brands of Sufism and of Islam.<sup>57</sup>

A certain limit to cross-cultural sharing can arguably be found at the level of vocabulary, too. Whereas with the Awadhi Sufi romances or the Hindavi verses by the fifteenth-century Awadh Sufi 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi we can see Sufis forging a local language of Islam out of the linguistic materials at their disposal, as Tony Stewart has argued in the case of Bengali Sufis (Stewart 2001), here the religious vocabulary of Krishna bhakti is not assimilated but rather kept at a distance. What does this mean? That it was far easier to use the religious ideas of the Naths and Sants because they were less denominational and linked to a well-defined mythology? Or that in the sixteenth century Krishna bhakti was too embedded in its own socially powerful communities of devotees, Vaishnavas and Bairagis, for its vocabulary to be incorporated?

Taken together with other contributions in this volume, this essay has highlighted different sites and agents of circulation—singers and Sufi patrons. While in the courtly or other elite urban settings discussed by Allison Busch and Stefano Pellò it was the poetic language and aesthetic that dictated access and practice, and aristocratic Muslim practitioners of Braj Bhasha *riti* poetry or upwardly mobile and elite Hindu practitioners of Persian poetry adopted poetic categories and idioms wholesale, down to representing themselves within the terms already set by the poetic tradition, we see 'Abdul Wahid *adding* Krishna poetry in Hindavi to his repertoire of Persian poetry. Thus while forms as well as individuals clearly crossed boundaries as they circulated in both social, geographical and aesthetic terms,<sup>58</sup> the predominant form in which audiences and practitioners took to new forms seems to have been in terms of adding further options, further "textual identities" (to borrow Stefano Pellò's term) within a panoply of tastes and identities, rather than in terms of fundamental transformations. True, often it is only one identity that found literary expression and has thus come down to us, as in the case of the

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<sup>57</sup> I owe this point to Thomas de Bruijn.

<sup>58</sup> Nalini Delvoye has emphasized the flexibility of singers and songs to adapt, with only slight variations, to different religious and courtly contexts. *Dhrupad* lyrics in the courtly *Sahasrarasa* pay homage to the *bahunayak* as the royal patron, whereas in the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* he is the *pir-o-murshid*.

Persian identity of Stefano Pellò's Hindu poets. And often it is exegetic traditions such as *tazkirās* and *vārtās*, which favour sudden conversions and single identities, that tell us the story. Yet texts like the *Haqā'iq-i Hindī* remind us that the expansion of aesthetic tastes and appreciation did not necessarily involve dramatic transformations at the level of belief.

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