Abstract This paper is the first substantial study of the Jilwa-yi żāt, an unabridged Persian verse translation of the tenth skandha of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, completed in Delhi in 1732–33 by Amānat Rāy, a Vaiṣṇava pupil of the influential poet-philosopher Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil. The paper focuses especially on the textualization of Krṣṇa and Krṣṇaite devotion within the framework of Persian literary conventions and the dominant Ṣūfī-Vedāntic conceptual atmosphere, with a special attention for the intertextual ties with the works of Bīdil. A few philological remarks on the contours of a hitherto largely ignored Krṣṇaite subjectivity in Persian are also included.

Keywords Amānat Rāy · Bīdil · Krṣṇa · Bhāgavata Purāṇa · Persian translation

In the first chapter of his Haft tamāshā, “The Seven Views,” a doxographic work completed in the early 1800s and devoted primarily to an articulate description of the beliefs and religious habits of various communities of Hindus and Indian Muslims, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Qatīl, while dealing with the “creed” (mażhab) of the Smārtas (samartgān) and the “cult” of the eighth avatāra (avatār-i hashtum) Krṣṇa (kishn), writes:

The capital city of Kanhaiyā is the town of Mathurā….In a large qaṣba called Gokul, at a distance of two karohs from Mathurā, lies a place called Bindāban….These two cities, that is, Mathurā and Bindāban, are set on the bank of a river named Jumnā and are the house of pleasure (‘ishratkada) of Kanhaiyā. Hindūs (hinduwān) call Ban the territory between Bindāban and
Mathurā. In Hindī, ban means “open field” (maydān wa ṣahrā), but this is only its literal meaning: in fact, not every wilderness can be called ban, the term being technically used by Hinduś to refer exclusively to this place. According to their creed (maḥāb), this forest (jangal) called Ban provides soothing for the spirit (tāzagī-yi ṣāḥ) and deep joy for the heart (shiguftagī-yi dil). The land where this forest lies is called Bīr..., and the whole region is considered to be the ground of love and the terrain of affection (khāk-i ʿishq wa zamīn-i maḥabbat) (1875: 16).

Qatīl, who is writing in Lucknow for an Iranian audience (1875: 4), is not only expressing a cultic truth by recalling several immediately recognizable lexical and metaphorical features of the codified mainstream tradition of Persian lyrical poetry (ʿishratkada, tāzagī-yi ṣāḥ, shiguftagī-yi dil, khāk-i ʿishq, zamīn-i maḥabbat, a few lines later ʿayshgāḥ, maʿshūqa, ʿāshiq, and so on). A Bhandārī Khathrī from a prominent munshī family, who had converted to Twelver Shiʿīsm at a young age, Qatīl is actually reconnecting to a whole set of late seventeenth- and especially eighteenth-century Indo-Persian texts, from taḵkiras to maṛnawīs, where the bliss of the Braj mandal and the amorous deeds of Kṛṣṇa had already carved out a specific place for themselves, enlarging the inclusive repertoire from within.

As variously claimed in recent times, one of the “new horizons”—to use Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyan’s (2012) expression—conquered by the eighteenth-century Khathrī and Kāyastha writers of Persian is the organization of a noncontrasting self-representational and self-promotional space, both as Vaiṣṇava and Persianate intellectuals, within the textual reality of Indo-Persian literary culture. As Qatīl’s receptive observations aptly suggest, a non secondary aspect of this process of self-projection—aesthetical as much as historical—is easily the rich output of Persian poetic translations, rewritings, and original compositions referring to the Indic religious environment authored by Hindu munshīs during the eighteenth century, already noted by Aziz Ahmad in the 1960s (Ahmad 1964: 235) and substantially overlooked up to now. The principal question I am posing here is whether and how we can begin to speak of Vaiṣṇava textuality within this specific framework textured by change and newness, as well as by the confidence of munshīs in making their own use of received literary models. In other words, if categorization is meaningful, then I would like to add a fifth category to the four groups of “translations” from Sanskrit as described by Carl Ernst (2003: 174): the “scientific” works of Sultanate era, the “historical” endeavors of Akbar’s court, the philosophical-comparative explorations from the time of Dārā Shikoh, and the early British colonial “informative” texts. We can provisionally identify this tentative “fifth category,” indeed, in the more or less devotional (especially but not only

---

1 For a survey on the shifting representation of the historical-poetical persona of Mīrzā Qatīl and his Hindu background in Indo-Persian taḵkira literature, with special attention to the semiotics of his conversion, see Pello 2012: 161–68 and 2016.

2 In a wider multilingual perspective, the multiple intersections at the level of poetic practices involved in similar processes (from, to, or within the Persianate space) have been explored in studies such as Busch (2011: 130–65) and Orsini (2014). Some relevant textual specimens more directly related to the Indo-Persian sphere, primarily from Indo-Persian taḵkiras, have been discussed by Pello 2014: 30–42.
Krṣṇaite) works by munshīs identifying themselves (and identified in taẓkira literature) as hindū and creatively applying to their textual identities the traditional Persian set of lexical tropes—such as butparast, ṣanamparast, and aşnāmī—used to identify the “idoler.”³ As pointed out elsewhere (Pellō 2014), but I shall elaborate further here, studying this textual world means not only exploring how (a certain amount of) Vaisnavī devotionality is projected onto the preexistent Persian poetic palimpsests, but also, and perhaps more importantly, measuring to what extent the poetical codes and protocols themselves are capable of moulding and widening their set of extra- and intra-textual references to accommodate such devotionality. In general, this paper also hopes to offer some useful insights into how to better articulate a series of questions revolving around the sociotextual (to use Sheldon Pollock’s formulation) contours and refractions of the poetic self in a late Persianate environment. In such a context, the monumental Persian rewriting of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (and especially of its tenth skandha) by one of the disciples of Mīrzā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (1644–1720)—Amānat Rāy—seems particularly representative and promising, considering both the relevance of the poetic silsila Amānat appears to belong to and the fortune of his work in nineteenth-century printed editions. Indeed “Reading the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in Bīdil’s Poetic Circle” would have been an appropriate alternative title for this essay; as we shall see, while textualizing Krṣṇa in his Persian Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Amānat is also responding to the stylistic and philosophical premises of his master’s works, from his dīwān to his maṣnawīs to his autobiography.

The Textual Biography of Amānat Rāy

The biographical data on Amānat Rāy appearing in taẓkira literature are relatively scanty. There is no entry devoted to him in the main source for Bīdil’s maktab, the Safina-yi Khwushgū by Bindrāban Dās Khwushgū, nor in the taẓkira gul-i ra’ānā by Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq, whose second volume is declaredly devoted to Hindu poets of Persian.⁴ While the reasons for this exclusion are not clear to me, short biographical sketches and a few verses of his do appear in other sources. The most important among these, and apparently the oldest one as well, is the Taẓkira-yi Ḥusaynī, completed in Delhi by Mīr Ḥusayndūst Ḥusaynī in 1750 while Amānat was still alive:

The poet who embellishes the expressions, Amānat Ray, belongs to the Khatri of Lālpūr and is one of those people who were favored by the company of Mīrzā ‘Abdul Qādir Bīdil. For a certain period he was the chief secretary (mīr munshī) of Nawāb Amjad Khān, the foster brother of emperor

³ For details regarding the use of the term hindū in premodern and early modern Persian literature, see Pellō 2012, 2014, and 2015. On the relevant complementarity of ethnography and trope in Mughal textuality, see also Sharma 2012.

⁴ Some scanty biographical and bibliographical information on Amānat can be found in ‘Abd Allāh (1992: 203–4), Baqir (2011), Anūsha (2001, 1: 260). As we shall see later in this paper, Amānat himself provides the reader with some significant autobiographical information in his own poetic works.
Muḥammad Shāh. He once related this incident: “One night, I was walking near some ruins, thinking about writing a diwān of verses, when suddenly, in the darkness, I saw a madman in high spirits dancing hand in hand, though respectfully, with my master. In the height of ecstasy, my master looked at me and said: ‘Go, and a whole sea of pearls and rubies will for certain burst from the spring of the particles of dust!’ And so I went, and I succeeded in completing my diwān in a very short time.” He translated the whole Śrī Bhāgavat [Purāṇa], the Nāyikabheda, and other similar works from Hindi to Persian poetry (1875: 48–49).

Together with the personal relationship with his master Bīdīl, the other main trait of the poetic personality of Amānāt—that is, his interest in the Persian rendering of Indic works—as already been clearly stated by Ḫusayndūst Ḥusaynī, who also pointed out his provincial Khatrī provenance and the courtly environment where he lived in Delhi. Just over fifty years later, in 1804, Bhagvān Dās Hindī, writing in Lucknow, adds some more information in his Safīna-yi Hindī:

He was the munshī of Nawāb Amjad Khān. After the latter’s death he was protected by Rahīm al-Nisā’ begam, the Nawāb’s sister also known as Kōka Sāhib, who used to pass him a monthly salary. In poetry he is a disciple of Mirzā Bīdīl. He has left a huge diwān and versified long Hindi books (kutub-i mabsūt-i hindī) such as the Bhāgavat and the Rāmāyan… (1958: 21–22).

The figure of Amānāt is characterized, again, by his Persian poetic renderings of Sanskrit classics such as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Rāmāyaṇa, to be added to the Nāyikabheda which is mentioned, as we have seen, in the Taṣkīra-yi Ḥusaynī. This trend will continue in much later texts. Debi Prashād “Shād” mentions Amānāt Rāy in his Taṣkīra-yi ʻāṣār al-shuʿarā-yi hunūd, a little-known collection of biographical notes and short verse anthologies of 656 Hindu poets writing in Urdu (and Persian as well) up to the second half of the nineteenth century:

Amānāt: the takhallus of Rāy Amānāt Rāy, who used to live in Dihli’s Darībā neighborhood. No details about his life are known. He must be the same Amānāt Rāy who composed the versified translations of the Rāmāyan and the Bhāgavat (Debi Prashād 1885: 7).

Debi Prasād, who quotes only one Urdu line attributed to Amānāt, basically identifies the author with the Persian versified translations of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa; other biographical sources deal with Amānāt as well, without however adding too much. As a matter of fact, by the time Debi Prashād is writing, Amānāt’s two main poetic enterprises, the Rāmāyaṇ mentioned by Bhagvān Dās and Debi Prashād and the Bhāgavat mentioned by all his biographers, had already been circulating in printed editions, published by Naval Kishor in Kānpur and

---


6 The copy of the Śrī Bhāgavat 1–9 at the British Library, for instance, bears the stamp of the North-West Frontier Province.
Lucknow from the late 1860s onwards. Remarkably enough, as far as the subsequent identification of his figure with the main subjects of his literary production is concerned, Amānāt is described, on the cover page of the printed edition of the eleventh iskand (skandha) of the SĪr Bhāgavat (1868), as “Expert of the Vedas, learned in the śāstras and bhakta” (dānā-yi bēd wa shāstrayānī wa bhagat). Further stressing the “specialized” character of his poetic production and confirming Ḥusayndūst Ḥusaynī’s and Bhagvān Dās’s statements about Amānāt composing other Persian remakes of “Hindi” works beyond the Bhāgavat, the Rāmāyana, and the Maṣnawī-yī nāyak, a Bhagatmāl (that is, Bhaktamāl, a collection of hagiographies of Indian saints, in maṣnawī form) also exists, of which two manuscripts (one incomplete) are preserved in Pakistani libraries (Munzawi 1985: 2140). As the nineteenth-century editor of Amānāt’s Persian Rāmāyana clearly states in his introduction to the book, his Bhāgavat, contrarily to the Rāmāyana “which since its composition has been difficult to find until now” (ki az zamān-i taṣnīf tā īdam nihāyat nāyāb būda-ast), is by far the most “famous and renowned” (mashhūr wa ma’rūf) of his literary works (Amānāt 1872: Cover). Along with the Rāmāyana, with roughly forty thousand lines, this text is also the most consistent of Amānāt’s poetic efforts, confirming Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh’s judgment of our author as a “very prolific writer” (1992: 203).

The core of Amānāt’s Bhāgavat is not surprisingly the tenth skandha, which was the first part of the Purāṇa reworked by the Khatrö student of Mirzā Būdīl and, according to all available evidence, was initially conceived as an independent work. As a matter of fact, the book bears the title Jilwa-yī zāt (“The Epiphany of the Essence”), which is also the chronogram of the date of its completion (AH 1145, that is, 1732–33), a key to understanding the Persian poetic textualization of the notion of the āvatāra and a direct quotation from a perceived model of Ṣūfī poetics such as Hāfīz’s dīwān (Amānāt manuscript,folio 17b). The rendering of the other skandhas was achieved by Amānāt during the successive decades of the eighteenth century (the final date of completion of the rest of the Bhāgavat is indicated as the year 1807 of the Vikram era, corresponding to 1751; Amānāt Nī: 695). Interestingly enough, Hermann Ethe describes the manuscript copy of the Jilwa-yī zāt in the India Office collection in London as “A very large mathnawi on the adventures of Krishna, interspersed with many ghazals and rubā’īs, and founded on Sanskrit sources, by a poet with the takhallus Amānāt” (1903: 918n1696). Probably on this imprecise description, the Jilwa-yī zāt was erroneously described as an “original composition” in some secondary sources that never name the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in

7 Compare Amānāt 1868, 1870, 1872.

8 Jilwa-yī zāt is found in one of Hāfīz’s most famous ghazals: ba’d az in rūy-i man u āyina-yi vasf-i jamāl / ki dar ānjā khabar az jilwa-yī zāt-am dāddand (Heretofore I shall turn to the beauty-describing mirror / because there they made me aware of the epiphany of the essence) (Hāfīz 1983–84: 372). The notion of tajallī-yī zāt (tajallī and jilwa being virtually synonymous), “the epiphany of the essence,” has an important place in the conceptual universe of classical Persian Ṣūfī poetry and is explained in the glossary by Sayyid Ja‘far Sajjadi as the “unveiling of the sun of the truth of supreme Truth (haqīqat-i ḥaqq-i ta‘ālā)” (1991: 223).
relation to this book. The text is actually an all-inclusive rendering of the entire tenth book of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a favorite among translators and also, as already noted (Pellò 2014), a specific topos within Bīdil’s maktab in Delhi. A maṣnawī in the hazaj-i musaddas-i mahzūf meter, a favorite in Persian romance writing since Fakhr al-Dīn As‘ad Gurgānī’s Wīs u Rāmīn (eleventh century) and Nizāmī’s Khusraw u Shārīn (twelfth century), the Jilwa-yi ẓāt is an extensive work interspersed with a great number of ghazals and rubā‘īs, consisting of about seventeen thousand bayts collectively. The work is subdivided, both in the lithographed Naval Kishor edition and in the India Office manuscript, into ninety chapters corresponding quite precisely, in terms of narrative contents, to the ninety adhyāyas of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. These are preceded, in the printed edition, by a brief autobiographical note (mājarā-yi sargūzash-i muṣānmafi sī Bhāgavat) (Amānāt 1870: 1–5), a description of the causes leading to the composition of the book (sabab-i nazm-i kitāb) (5–9), a long introduction (shurā‘-i kitāb-i mustaṭāb-i srī Bhāgavat) (10–26), and several invocations (munājāt) (26–27). The order of these introductory sections is slightly different in the India Office manuscript (copied in 1772), where the introduction (folios 1–11b) and the invocations (11b–12b) precede the autobiographical note (13a–15a) and the occasion for the manuscript’s composition (15a–18a). The descriptive titles of the narrative sections corresponding to the adhyāyas are already present in the manuscript as well (in red ink), with some minor discrepancies in the printed text. As mentioned above, the correspondence with the traditional subdivision of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is generally respected, and, with some exceptions (chapters 1 to 4 in the India Office manuscript and 1 to 3 in the Naval Kishor edition cover adhyāya 10.1 and 10.2), each chapter corresponds to one adhyāya. A preliminary comparison of the Jilwa-yi ẓāt with the other skandhas of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa rendered in Persian by Amānāt reveals that the special attention given by Amānāt to the recreation of the most beloved book of the Purāṇa is already apparent from a simple quantitative analysis: with around seventeen thousand lines, the ratio between the Jilwa-yi ẓāt and the Sanskrit tenth skandha of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is an average of about four bayts for every śloka; whereas in the case of Srī Bhāgavat 1–9 (fourteen thousand lines), the average ratio is less than two bayts per śloka. Within this generally intensified focus, the Rāṣapāṅcāḍhyāyi receives a particularly attentive treatment; in the India Office manuscript, for instance, the Persian version of adhyāya 10.30 alone takes up almost seventeen pages (folios 104a, verse 12 to 112b, verse 4), corresponding to about two hundred eighty bayts, compared to the forty-four ślokas of the Sanskrit text (more than six bayts per śloka). This is not only very much in line with the fortune of the paṅcāḍhyāyi in the vernacular literary space, which must have been

9 Compare Baqir 2011 and Mujtabai 1978: 75. Mujtabai mistakenly identifies this work as the Persian Bhagavad Gītā by another disciple of Bīdil, Lāla Huḵm Chand Nudrat.

10 The Bhāgavata Purāṇa (especially the tenth book) had a remarkable success in Persian, both in prose and in poetry: incomplete (and not always precise) lists can be found for instance in Mujtabai (1978: 76–78) and Sharma (1982: 30–31). In more recent scholarship, a reconsideration of the Mughal translation movement is Truschke (2016). Keshavmurthy’s (2018) study of Mašīḥ’s seventeenth-century version of the Rāmāyaṇa — another favorite with Indo-Persian writers—makes a good parallel reading for this paper.

11 \( \text{ṣū - Ṣū} | \text{ṣū - Ṣū} | \text{ṣū - Ṣū} \), corresponding to the traditional scanning mafā ‘ilūn mafā ‘ilūn mafā ‘il.
among the immediate sources for Amānat’s work, but also—and more interestingly for our purposes here—with the interest of the Braj mandal as the locus for the erotic pleasures of Krṣṇa and for Krṣṇa himself as a typological ma’ṣẖūq in Indo-Persian poetic maktaba. As a matter of fact, the Persian chapters on the rāsālīlā offer a privileged point of view to initiate a discourse on the pragmatics of those comparative poetics evoked by several eighteenth-century critics. Just to name a couple of relevant cases: the pages of Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq (not by chance a disciple of the eighteenth-century “comparativist” Āzād Bilgrānī) on Krṣṇa as the eternal beloved, where the lyrical language of Persian ghazal works like a “dubbing” of the Indic imagery that is the object of his descriptions (Pellò 2014: 40); on the side of reception, the instrumentality of this kind of textual asset in providing a wealth of homogeneous literary material—forming a continuum with the transregional Eurasian dimension of the world of Persianate literature—for later observers and popularizers such as Mīrzā Qatīl (who explicitly refers to Krṣṇa when insisting that “the people of India,” ahl-i hind, tend to describe love in poetry as the love of a woman for a man or, for that matter, the British with their puritan approaches.

Envisioning the Paṅcādhīyāḥ in Persian

Let us consider, as a preliminary sampling, Amānat’s remake of Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.29 (Amānat manuscript, folios 100a–104a). The title chosen by the author is “The raising of the head towards madness of a multitude of women in the dark night / in search of a meeting with that moon without faults” (sar kashīdan ba jumīn-i khayl-i zanān dar shab-i tār / dar ṭalabkārī-yi didār-i mah-i bīnuqšān). The expressions,

12 Here I attempt to conceptualize—by recurring to the familiar cinematographic metaphor of the dubbing of a movie in a foreign language—the tendency to use Persianate correspondents to summon simultaneously Indic poetic images; in Lachhmī Narāyan Shafīq’s taḵīrā, for instance, a verse where the canonical couple of lovers Lāyāl and Majnūn are used to “visualize” the preceding discussion on Krṣṇa and the gopīs (see Pellò 2014).

13 Qatīl (1875: 7) is comparing three different practices of describing love in poetry: whereas the Indians would favor a woman-to-man perspective, he says, the Arabs would do exactly the contrary while the Persians (ajam) would talk about it as a homoerotic experience.

14 In the preface to the second volume of his History of Hindostan, Thomas Maurice introduces Nathaniel Brassey Halhed’s English abridgement (from a Persian original) of the dasama skandha, included in the book, as follows: “I have not presumed to alter it farther than to blot out some parts which, however agreeable to a highly-seasoned Oriental palate, appeared to me to glow with colours and images not sufficiently chasté for an European eye. I should have erased more, but it was necessary that the reader should judge for himself concerning this motley character, which has been so impiously paralleled with that of the Christian Messiah….” The reader must see Creeshna as he is, to judge of him properly; he must contemplate him with all the puérility and licentiousness, as well as with all the virtue and dignity, attached to his Avatar. I never intended to do the work of the adversary, by making Creeshna a perfect model of an incarnate Deity (1798: viii–ix; emphasis in original). The figure of Krṣṇa is here even used with an anti-French purpose: with a sarcastic tone, Maurice writes that suggesting that “the history and miracles of Christ were borrowed from those of the Indian Creeshna” would have the “laudable purpose of plunging Christian Europe into all the horrors of atheistical France” (vi).

15 Due to its relatively early date, its interesting transmission (see the last section of this paper), and the fact that it is integral, I prefer here to base the textual analysis of the Jīlwa-yī zāt solely on the India Office manuscript.
metaphors, and semantic paradigms (the defiant madness of the lover / Majnūn, the longing for the “meeting” with the beloved) selected by Amānāt to introduce the celebration of the passionate love of the gopīś for Kṛṣṇa, all deeply immersed into the broad lexical and metaphorical hypertext of Ṣūfī poetics, are, as a whole, reminiscent of the well-known episode of the Egyptian women losing their minds at the appearance of Joseph’s beauty in ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī’s famous maṣnawī, Yūsuf u Zulaykhā (fifteenth century). Furthermore, if we look closer, at least three expressions are direct quotations from powerfully normative canonical works of pre-Mughal Persian poetry, all part of the linguistic education of a munshī: (i) khayl-i zanān “multitude of women” comes from the didactical Būstān of Sa’dī (thirteenth century), (ii) shab-i tār “dark night” clearly echoes the shab-i tārīk evoking the asperities of the path of the seeker, which introduces the fourth line of Hāfiz’s first ghazal in the Dīwān (1983–84: 18), and (iii) mah-i bīnuqšān “moon without faults” is taken directly from Mawlāwī Rūmī’s masterpiece of lyrical ‘irfān, the Dīwān-i Shams (thirteenth century), precisely from a stanzic poem where the dominant theme is a dance with a beautiful Christian (tarsā) youth (Rūmī 1999: 1196–7). The significance of such intertextual ties is even more notable if we look at the immediate literary surroundings of the Jīlwa-yi zāt. The reference to the “madness” (jumān) of the gopīś as an exemplary figure of love is, as a matter of fact, the key rhetorical feature of the passage devoted to the description of Mathurā by Amānāt’s master, Mīrzā Bīdīl, in his own autobiography, where the prose evocation of the “tears of the gopīś” and Kṛṣṇa’s bāṃsūrī is followed by the “subtitles” of three ghazal lines revolving around “Majnūn’s valley” (wādī-yi majnūn). Similarly, a bayt dealing with the “desert plains of Majnūn” (sahrā-yi majnūn) by Āzād Bīlgrānī is used by Lachhmī Nařāyān Shafaq to comment upon his explicative description of the gopīś’ love for Kṛṣṇa in the Indian “love poems” (references and translations in Pellò 2014). Amānāt then dubs the first two ślokas and half of the twenty-ninth adhyāya, depicting the autumnal nights in Vrindāvan, as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shab-i chūn zulf-i khūbān maṭlaʿ-i nūr} \\
\text{tajāllībakhsh-i sham ʿi rawshan-i ṭūr} \\
\text{sawād-ash sarkhāʿ-ī lawḥ-ī tamānnā} \\
\text{bayāz-ash nuskha-yī ḥusn-i dilārā}
\end{align*}
\]

16 Generally speaking, the Akbarian anagogical systematization of Indian commentaries on major Persian Sufic works such as Rūmī’s Maṣnawī or Hāfiz’s Dīwān—I am thinking here, for instance, of the ready-made frames of the reference provided in Khatmī Lāhūrī’s Maraj al-bahrayn (1628)—should be considered a probable source for Amānāt’s textual adaptations (as well as those of several other eighteenth-century Hindu Persian poets).
17 The episode (Jāmī 1998: 78) is directly based on Qurān 12:30–32.
18 An interesting catalogue of the Persian texts to be studied by a seventeenth-century Hindu secretary writing in Persian can be found in the letter written by Chandar Bāhān Barahman to his son Tej Bāhān (the letter is published in ‘Abd Allāh 1992: 268–70 and has been translated into English by Alam and Subrahmanys 2004: 62–63).
19 The expression appears in the first chapter of the didactic poem—one of the pillars of the linguistic education of any premodern and early modern Persianate intellectual from Bosnia to Ningxia—by Sa’dī (consult Sa’dī 1954: 315).
A night resembling the curls of the beauties, an opening verse of light, offering the epiphany of the bright candle of Mount Sinai.

Its blackness was the leading line of the blackboard of desire
its whiteness the manuscript of the heart-adorning beauty.

With the inebriated epiphany of moonlight, the earth made a wave-like movement, resembling quicksilver.

On the surface of the sky, a myriad of stars were showing themselves on a plate like a handful of pearls.

The sky, with the flashes of the world-conquering moon was overflowing like a bowl full of milk.

The imagery chosen by Amānāt to represent the bliss of the nocturnal environment, while in general substituting the reddish tones of the Sanskrit (arūṇa, kuṅkuma)\(^{20}\) with the Persian ultra-classical black and white contrast (shab “night” / nūr “light,” zulf-i khūbān “dark curls of the beauties” / sham ‘-i rawshan “bright candle,” sawād “blackness” / bayāż “whiteness”), contains some notable specific references as well.

The Biblical and Qur’ānic bush of fire of Mount Sinai (Ṭūr), representing the epiphany of God to Moses, is not only a centuries-old Persian poetic metaphor, in perfect harmony with the repeated mentions of the notion of manifestation so central to Amānāt’s work (tajallībakhsh and the very jilwa), but also a clear allusion to the work of the most representative masters of Mughal-Safavid times. As a matter of fact, the very expression sham ‘-i tūr appears to be relatively popular in the authoritative ghazals by Sā‘īb-i Tabrīzī and occurs as well in other great authors of the seventeenth century like ‘Urfī Shīrāzī, Wāhshī Bāfqī, and, most notably for our purposes here, Mīrzā Bīdī,\(^ {21}\) who uses the image of Mount Sinai as a place for the

\(^{20}\) A detailed and articulated comparison of the aesthetic interactions between the Sanskrit Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the vernacular adaptations most likely available to Amānāt, on the one hand, and the Persian text, on the one hand, is of course highly desirable. While deferring such an endeavor to a future study—the textual world of Amānāt’s readings, with the partial exclusion of the Persian ambit, still needs to be reconstructed—here I will be content with making general reference to the Sanskrit text as examples of a fruitful way to move forward, of course to be soon enlarged to the vernacular contexts.

\(^{21}\) The image occurs several times in Sā‘īb-i Tabrīzī’s Dīwān (see, for example, 1985–95, 1: 146, 371; 2: 671, 908; 5: 2690). Compare also Wāhshī-yi Bāfqī (2001: 470) and especially Amānāt’s master Bīdīl (1997, 2: 213). While, for the purposes of this paper, I strongly prefer a reading of Amānāt’s work as seen through the specific stylistic lens of the masters of the Mughal-Safavid period, and especially of his ustād Bīdīl, it should of course not be forgotten that all the tropes mentioned in this paper have a long history in Persian poetry, often going back to the Samanid and Ghaznavid times and even to the Arabic poetry of the Abbasid courts. For a general introduction to the conventional imagery of Persian poetry, see Zipoli 2009.
appearance of knowledge even as the icastic title of one of his maṣnawīs, the Ṭūr-i maʿrifat. To proceed with a tentative comparison with the Indic aesthetics just mentioned, it is worth noting that the dense intertextual figure of the fire of Mount Sinai also represents a powerful change of dress for the equally paradigmatic image of divine epiphany represented by the similitude of the splendor of the face of Lakṣmī (Sanskrit rām) in the original textual environment. In addition, the equally iconic images related to milk dominating śloka 5 (duhantyaḥ; dohaṁ; payaḥ) in the Sanskrit text are anticipated and condensed (and never touched again) in Persian by the reference to the sky “overflowing like a bowl of milk” in line 5. With such a rich and articulate rhetorical play of transformations, relocations, quotations (taẓmīn), and replies (istiqbal), one should not forget however the creative role of all the familiar Persian images in effectively evoking, on the part of the reader used to the above-described comparative practices, the black yet luminous beauty of Kṛṣṇa himself, who actually appears in the following lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
& ba \text{ taklīf-i bahār-i } \text{‘aysh hamdast} \\
& srī krishn zī jām-i ḥūsn-i khwud mast \\
& šābāsā ba sūy-i ban rawān shud \\
& bahār imrūz har barg-i khazān shud \\
& ba istiqbāl-i ū ūtaraf-i chamanhā \\
& bar āmad būy-i gul az pīrāhanhā \\
& ba gulshan bā hujūm-i shawq har dam \\
& shud az bahr-i sujūd-ash shākh-i gul kham \\
& gul ānjā chūn ‘arūs-i nawrasūda \\
& libās-i surkh-rā dar bar kashīda (Amānat manuscript, folio 100b)
\end{align*}
\]

Hand in hand with all the fanfare of a spring of pleasure Sṛī Kṛṣṇa, intoxicated by the cup of his own beauty, like a breeze began moving towards Ban:

today every autumn leaf has become a spring.

In order to welcome him, towards the meadows, from the shirts soared a perfume of rose.

In the rose garden, with the assault of passion every instant the branch of the rose has bent to bow down to him.

There the rose, as a young bride wore a red dress on her body.

The “divine power” (yogamāyā) that Kṛṣṇa resorts to while “turning his thoughts towards the enjoyment of love” (rantuṁ manaś cakre) in śloka 29.1 is overwritten, in Amānat’s Persian remake, by the cardinal monistic-narcissistic notion, in Suficate literature, of the supreme identity of love, lover, and beloved (ishq, ʿāshiq, and maʾshūq), here inflected through the image of Kṛṣṇa “intoxicated by the cup (jām) of his own beauty (ḥusn).” Other than the several possible classical antecedents
related to the interconnected ideas of the reflective powers of the cup-mirror-heart and of God as both the creator and the lover of the reflection of his own beauty, it is worth pointing out that a direct source in conceptual poetics is to be found in the work of Amānāt’s master, for instance in Bīdīl’s cosmogonical maşnawī, Muḥīt-i aʿzam, where the metaphor of the “passing around” of the cosmic Wine Cup by the eternal Cupbearer has a constitutive role. 22 Beyond the maşnawī environment, a strikingly precise parallel, in terms of imagery, comes from the Dīwān of Mīrzā Bīdīl (1997, 2: 516):

\[\text{mastī-yī ḥusn u junūn-i ʿishq az jām-i man-ast} \\
\text{dar gulistān rang-am u dar ʿandalībān nāla-am.}\]

The intoxication of beauty and the madness of love come from my cup:
I am the color in the rose garden, I am the lament of the nightingales.

The entire textual landscape of the opening of Amānāt’s pañcādhyāyī is already present in Bīdīl’s line, marked by precise lexical parallels: the “intoxication” (mastī), the “cup” (jām), the “rose garden” (gulistān), the “color” (rang), the implied junūn “madness” that we have dealt with above, and even the “lament” (of the goşīs-nightingales) that appears a few lines later. In such a deeply intertextual milieu, the self-reflective epiphany of the beloved Krṣṇa is set in the prototypical Persian lyrical landscape of the garden into which the forest of Ban, colored by the gentle rays of the moon (vanaṁ ca tat komalagobhī raṇjitam), is transformed. The autumnal luxuriance of the North Indian natural scenery is maintained, in Persian, through the repeated exploitation of the rhetorical device of the Ḥusn-i taʿlīl, 23 which again, at least in the case of the personified abstraction of the “assault of passion” (hujūm-i shawq), includes another precise Bidilian echo as well as a general stylistic tribute to other masters of tāzagūyī. 24 Thus, thanks to the appearance of Krṣṇa, “every autumn leaf” can “become a spring.” Autumn, which in the Persian tradition is, in sharp contrast with Sanskrit aesthetics, the season of dryness and decay, can be magically turned into its own opposite, without distorting in the slightest the Indic original timing of the year and while keeping the rāsalīlā event in its proper South Asian season. In other words, exploiting the possibilities provided by rhetorical devices, it is the Persian fall (khazān) that is transformed into a spring—thus properly corresponding to the Indic autumn (śārada) of the textual setting—and not the reverse. The above-mentioned translatability of Krṣṇa with Joseph / Yūṣuf is cleverly harnessed by the reference to the “perfume of rose” (būy-ī gul) soaring from the “shirts” (pīrāhanāh); Amānāt is alluding here to the famed episode of the “perfume of Yūṣuf’s shirt” (būy-ī pīrāhan-ī yūṣuf) substituting and

22 On the Muḥīt-i aʿzam, see Kovacs 2013.

23 The husn-ī taʿlīl, literally “beauty of rationale” and generally translated as “fantastic etiology,” is among the most widely employed figures of the so-called ʿilm-i bādī, or “science of rhetorical embellishment.” Chalisova (2012) properly defines this figure, already described in the earliest Persian treatises on ʿilm-i bādī (eleventh century), as a “a conjunction of fantastic images within a syllogism” that “creates additional levels of opposition in the line, rationally ‘proving’ the possibility of the impossible and thus presenting lies disguised as truth.”

anticipating Ya‘qūb’s vision of his most beloved long-lost son (based on the “most beautiful story” of Qurān 12, and very popular, for instance, with Rūmī’s Maṣnawi-yi ma’navī). With this reconstructed, recontextualized, and “told anew” (that is, in a tāzagīyī voice) background of heterotopic spring colors and perfumes, the voice of Kṛṣṇa’s bānisurī is finally heard:

dar ānjā az hawāy-i naghma-yi nāz
ba nay la ‘l-i lab-i ū shud hamāwāz
zi bas az fayż-i la ‘l-ash bahrawar shud
nay-i khushk az ḥalāwat nayshakar shud
chunān nay shu ‘laz dar kharman-i jān
ki dil-rā sūkhtan gardīd āsān
ma-rā z-in chūb-i khushk-i lālasāmān
ba dast-i ḥayrat uftād-ast dāmān
ki bā labhā-yi ū hamāshyān shud
ḥalāwathâ-yi ‘ālam-rā zamān shud
zi àwāz-ash chūnān zād bikhwud-i bīhūsh
ki shud har kas zi yād-i khwud farāmūsh
chi akhgar dar bar-i khwud dārad īn nay
ki labrīz-i sharar shud har rag-ī way
chunān dar ‘ishq sur’atdastgāh-ast
ki az dil tā ba ū yakwajh rāh-ast
zamīn khāk-ī ba sar az shawq-i nay shud
falak dar gardish az àwāz-ī way shud
magar ārad zi sūy-ī yār payghām
ki nay az dil kunad tāraj-ī ārām (Amānat manuscript, folio 100b)

There, with the passionate air of a coquettish lament
the ruby of his lips became harmonious with the flute.
And the dry flute was so favored by the grace
of his ruby that, with that sweetness, it became a sugarcane.
The flute threw such a spark in the harvest of life
that it became easy, for the heart, to catch fire.
Because of this tulip-like dry wooden stick
the lap of my dress fell in the hands of bewilderment.
Whoever became intimate with his lips,
became the guarantee of the sweetness of the world.

25 The scent of Yūsuf’s shirt is the subject of a celebrated twenty-five line paragraph in the third daftar of Mawlawī’s poem (Rūmī 1996: 431).
What firebrands does this flute bring with itself, that every single fiber is brimful with sparks.

It is so quick moving in love that from the heart to it is only a step.

The earth felt desperate because of the passion of that flute the sky began rotating because of its sound.

Perhaps it also brings a message from the beloved, because the flute plunders tranquility in the heart.

The bāṁsurī briefly mentioned by Mīrzā Bīdil while speaking of Mathurā in his Chahār ‘unsur (see Pellò 2014: 35–36), and not even named in the corresponding passage of the Sanskrit text, is the object here of a poetic commentary composed of no fewer than nine whole couplets. If, in Bīdil’s model work, Kṛṣṇa’s flute is mirrored by the narrow alleys of the city and echoed by the wind passing through them “throwing sparks which make the dust dance (shu’laḩang-i ghubārangīz)” (Bīdil 1965–66: 148), in Amānat’s Jīlwa-yi žāt an entire set of canonical imagery for the flute is conjured up to give it a dynamic description. In this case, the representational weight of the traditional iconography of Kṛṣṇa with the flute encounters the possibility of being naturalized in Persian. This is achieved by drawing on a rich and apt metaphorical lexicon; the theme of the flute makes up for a substantial number of lines in most authors of ghazal and Suficate maṣnawī, beginning with the ubiquitous “song of the cane” that opens Rūmī’s Maṣnawī-yi ma’nawī, with all its figurative connections to the central topos of the lament (nāla) for separation (hijrat). By unfolding and amplifying a familiar literary image to textualize the iconic figure of Kṛṣṇa as a flute player, Amānat is adopting, as a matter of fact, the same strategy that allows eighteenth-century tagkīra writers to reuse a comfortable referential repertoire to include “new” literary actors (such as the hindū Khatrī and Kāyastha writers), so to say, in the collective majlis of Persian literature. In this case, he is exploiting the rich and centuries-old set of imagery and metaphors relating to the world of “unbelief” from the zunnār to the fire-temple (Pellò 2012: 183–98). It is thus not only (or not so much) Kṛṣṇa who enters the Persian poetic codes, but, more aptly and subtly, the codes themselves that see their set of possible extra- and inter-textual referents enlarged to paradigmatically include Kṛṣṇa. The nay, while remaining a nay for all Persian poetic matters and purposes, at the same time calls upon the tune-setting opening of Rūmī’s ‘irfānī masterwork, ‘Abd-al Raḥmān Jāmī’s influential Naqshbandī reading of it, as well as Kṛṣṇa’s Sanskritic and “bhakti” bāṁsurī, in a polysemic dimension and with no real break. The gopīs complete this picture:

ba gūsh-i gūpiyān tā shud ṣadā-y-ash
zi khwud chūn nāla raftand az barāy-ash

---

26 The zunnār—originally the belt of the Byzantines and a very common lexical item in poetry to characterize various kinds of “infidels”—is often used in the Indo-Persian literary world as the referent to “translate” the Brāhmanical thread.

27 I refer here to the famous commentary on the first two verses of Rūmī’s Maṣnawī-yi ma’nawī known as Risāla-yi nā’iwa or Naynāma (see, for instance, Ridgeon 2012).
When its voice reached the ears of the gopīs, as a lament, they left themselves for him. All of them were stunned like images on a wall: the heart had stopped working, because of him. Because of his voice, one rose from sleep and, like a lament, restless, began walking towards him. Another fell on the earth deprived of her senses, having left the reins of her heart like a tear. One, like a mirror, was nothing other than the imagination of him, another was the butterfly of the candle of his beauty. One had on her lips the name of Kanhaya One, having lost herself, was inquiring after herself. One had lost the way to her household one, full of passion, had begun to shout…. The variety of the reactions of the women of Vraj described in ślokas 5–11 is read under the poetic species of the “madness of love” junūn-i ʿishq, along the same lines described above. Thus, Amānāt’s gūpiyān are at the same time a reflection of the cowherdesses of Vrindāban abandoning their homes and their husbands for Krṣṇa and a multiplication of the Qurānic and classical Arabic-Persian literary figure of Zulaykhā losing her mind and her honor for Yūsuf. The poet, one is tempted to say, is describing a whole bed of reeds (nayistān) of plangent reed flutes (nay) longing in separation for the beloved, the dominant rasa of viraha being appropriately filtered through the above-mentioned topos of hijrat. As in the above-mentioned cases, precise references to the textual mirrors of literary contemporaneity can be found here as well. First of all, the whole section is closely reminiscent, beginning with the very peculiarities of verse construction (the repetition of yak-ī… / “One…” at the

28 The metathesis Kanayā < Kanhaya is due here to reasons of meter.
of the relatively long part (eighty-nine bayts) of the third chapter of Bidil’s maṣnaωvī, Muḥtil-i aʿżam, where a number of ecstatic reactions to the turning of the cosmic Wine Cup are described (Bidil 1997, 3: 609–12). In more detail, the use of the widespread visual metaphor of the “images on the wall” (šūrat-i dīwār) can be closely linked to the complex and articulate discourse on the conceptual semiotics of the portrait made by Bidil in the Chahār ‘unsur, where the very image of the wall-paintings is used to metaphorically reflect both on the creative activity of the Deus pictor and on the conditioned actuality of individual existence.29 The intimately related theme of the mirror (āyīna)—a most representative key image of Bidil’s poetics (and, of course, of the whole Persian repertoire30) and its metaphorical substitutes (for example, the cup, jām, or the particles of dust, zarra)—is used to illustrate the reflective relationship between the gopīs / lovers and the appearance of Krṣṇa / beloved. In the above-mentioned lines, the gopīs are “nothing but the imagination” (maḥw-i khayāl) of Krṣṇa, “like a mirror” (āyinasān), as, in the following line of Bidil (where the same expression maḥw-i khayāl is used), where every man is nothing but a bewildered, only illusorily distinct and individualized reflection:

āyīna naqshawīd-i gul-i imtiyāz nīst
maḥw-i khayāl-i khāna-yi hayrānī-yi khwud-īm (Bidil 1997, 2: 573)

The mirror is not the creator of images of the flower of distinction: we are nothing but the imagination of the house of our bewilderment. Such transitional Śūfī-Vedāntic tones, and the related imagery of cups, mirrors, and reflections, are maintained in the rendering of the subsequent dialogue between Parīksit (parīchit) and Šuka (sukhadev), where the doubt of King Parīksit (how could the flow of the guṇas of the gopīs cease, if they saw Krṣṇa as a beloved and not as the Brahman?) helps us to focus on the inner aspects of ṣūratparastī, the “adoration of the forms.”31 The following three lines from the ten-bayt-long question of Parīksit are a good summary:

zi laʿl-i yār shīrīnḵām gashtand
tuhī az khwud ba rang-i jām gashtand…

hama zāhīrparastān-i khaṭṭ u khāl
hama āyinasān mushťāq-i timsāl

chīsān dīdand ḥusn-i bīnishān-rā
bidānistand asrār-i nīhān-rā (Amānāt manuscript, folio 101a)

29 This conceptually dense episode in the autobiography of Bidil (1965–66: 281–86)—already highlighted and summarized in Abdul Ghani (1960: 57, 67–68)—has been recently analyzed by Keshavmurthy (2016) and also discussed by Pellò (2017b).


31 As far as the challenging issue of the cult of the images is concerned, it is worth noting here that the little explored textual world of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Persian writing munshī even includes a specific treatise on the subject, the Ḥuijat al-Hind, or the Proof of India (see Mujtabai 1978: 89).
Their mouths became sweet thanks to the ruby lips of the Beloved:  
like a cup, they became empty of themselves….

They were all worshipers of the external form of down and mole,  
like mirrors, they were all yearning for the simulacrum.

How could they see the beauty without signs?  
How could they come to know that hidden secret?

Krṣṇa—Parīkṣit is suggesting in his (rhetorical) question—appears in the mirror of  
the gopīs, who are “empty of themselves” like the convex emptiness of the cup,  
whose paradoxical essence corresponds to the empty space ready to receive the  
wine, evoked as well by the la’l “ruby” of the Beloved’s lips. Looking at the output  
of Amānät’s master Bīdil (and to the works of several other tāzagū authorities), it is  
quite easy to link this reading of the gopīs like blanks to be filled (the cup as well as,  
again, the empty mirror “yearning for the simulacrum”) to a complex series of other  
images used to meditate on the functions of ṣūrat / “form” as a precious index; from  
the naqsh-i pā “footprint” to the ḡabāb “bubble” to which, for instance, Bīdil  
devotes an entire twenty-two-distychs detailed description in his maṣnawī, Ṭūr-i  
ma’rifat. I quote here two lines as an example of Bīdil’s poetic-philosophical  
argumentation, to which we can be reasonably sure Amānät is responding:

\[
\begin{align*}
  zahī wàz̀-i ḡabāb-ī bī sar u pā & \\
  ki ḡyvrānī zi naqsh-ī ū-st paydā…. & \\
  sabukrāhī waqār-ī intimyāz-ash & \\
  tuhī az khwud shudan sāmān-ī nāz-ash & (Bīdil 1997, 3: 540)
\end{align*}
\]

Behold the state of the powerless bubble  
from whose image bewilderment appears….  
Having a light spirit is the honor of its distinction  
becoming empty of itself is the equipment of its gracefulness

Just like the empty cup and the empty mirror of Amānät’s line on the gopīs, Bīdil’s  
bubble is instrumental in building a metaphorical play of paradoxes on the binary  
notion of emptiness and fullness, here allowing the logical-situational transfor-
mation (again, through the formal analogy of a round shape) of an essence-of-
emptiness like the bubble into the gawhar / “pearl,” the centuries-old Persian poetic  
image of essence par excellence. Śuka’s reply (which in the Persian text covers no  
less than twenty-two bayts) maintains the same tenor in terms of the imagery chosen  
to talk about the manifestation of Krṣṇa, who is read, to select just one example,  
through the image of the light of the sun being reflected by the endless multitude of  
mirrors represented by the particles of dust:

\[
\begin{align*}
  mišl-ī khwurshid harjā jīlwagar shud & \\
  hujūm-ī zarra har sū dar naẓar shud & (Amānät manuscript, folio 101b)
\end{align*}
\]

Like the sun, he manifested himself in every place:  
the assault of the particles of dust became visible in every direction.
As in the previous cases, the weight of the experimentations of Amañat’s masters and predecessors is easily recognizable. In this respect, Amañat’s “solar” introduction of Kṛṣṇa seems to be replying to the following line by Šā’ib-i Tabrīzī, built on the very image of the “assault of particles” (hujūm-i zarra):

\[ \text{az nūr-i waḥdat ānki dil-ash bahrawar shawad} \\
\text{kay az hujūm-i zarra parishānmāzar shawad (1985–95, 4: 2051).} \]

The person whose heart has had its part of the light of oneness how can he be disoriented by the assault of the particles of dust?

Notably enough, Amañat’s figure of the Kṛṣṇa-sun multiplied in the atoms shimmering in the air responds to Šā’ib’s observations on the illusory relationship between unity and multiplicity by building an intertextual triangle with another line by his master Bīdīl, where the latter subtly claims a right to his bewilderment (ḥayrat), noting that the “assault of the manifestation” (hujūm-i jilwa) of the Beloved is the same in the particle of dust and in the sun (Bīdīl 1997, 2: 502). It is in this context that Kṛṣṇa begins his discourse to the gopīs, asking, in the Persian rendering as well as in the Sanskrit original, if everything is well in Vraj (dar shahr-i shumā khayr-ast imshā) and trying to convince them to go back to their homes and their husbands (for example, “Everywhere a woman goes without the command of her husband (bī ḥukm-i shawhar) / she goes towards the hell (dūzakh) of pain and misfortune”). As in the above-mentioned passages, the Persian text takes up many more lines than the Sanskrit and the strategies of poetical expression do not change. Kṛṣṇa speaks of the love for himself along the same lines outlined above, saying for instance that the hearts of the gopīs “left themselves as waves” (hamchu mawj az khwīshtan shud), again recurring to the poetic tongue of his master to analyze the ontological paradoxes of erotic abandonment.\(^{32}\) Such examples of interpretative poetics can easily be multiplied. Without adding much to what has already been observed, I will provide just one last example. In the reply of the gopīs to Kṛṣṇa, we may consider the use of the ubiquitous image of the sarw-i āzād (“the free-standing cypress”) to textualize the devotional notion of Kṛṣṇa as the eternal beloved “who vanquishes distress” (vṛjinārdana):

\[ \text{tu khwud guftī ki har kas dil ba man dād} \\
\text{buwad az bār-i gham čīn sarw āzād (Amānat manuscript, folio 103b).} \]

It was you who said that whoever gives his heart to me will be free as a cypress from the burden of suffering.

Perhaps more peculiar, in terms of textual strategies, is the way in which the subjectivity of Amānat is infused into the text through his poetic persona. As a matter of fact, following Kṛṣṇa’s discourse to the gopīs, the author inserts a seven-line-long ghazal addressed, in the maṭla’, or opening line, to Kṛṣṇa as the shāh-i khūbān, “the king of the beauties,” and canonically bearing the takhalluṣ of the

\(^{32}\) The synesthetic implications of the use of the metaphorical image of the mawj, “wave,” to indicate both illusory self-identification and self-annihilation are richly explored by Bīdīl, who studies extensively the image in at least four ghazals where the term mawj is used as a radīf (Bīdīl 1997, 1: 764, 766–67).
author in the *maqta‘*, or closing line. The *ghazal*, which is introduced by the declaration “I have pronounced a *ghazal* regarding this situation” (*ghazal* guftam *dar ān ḥalat*), can be seen at the same time both as a lyrical commentary in the rarefied, decontextualized *langue* proper to the genre itself and as an attempt by the poet to intensify the voice of the *gopīs* by becoming one of them in dramatic terms. Amānāt is here the *gopī* and the *gopīs* are Amānāt, asking the “king of the beauties,” Krṣṇa, in a perfect *summa* of the *ma’shūq* and the *ma’būd*, to “not leave me, by God, devoid of the ruby of your lips / because I am thirsty and have no other refuge but you” (Amānāt manuscript: folio 103a). As in the above-mentioned passages from Bīdīl’s *Chahār ‘unṣur* and the *taẓkiras*, the textual *milieu* in which the lyrical verses are inserted reveals the possibility of actualizing them, by including Krṣṇa as an external referent (in this case, by far the dominant one), according to the same modalities I have described when speaking of the flute in the preceding paragraphs. More generally, this points to a possible, fascinating reception of the *ghazal* as a truly dramatic device both here and, for instance, in the rendering of the longing of the *gopīs* for Krṣṇa in 10.30 and 10.31, where they are made to sing *ghazals* for the absent beloved.33

**Encoding and Decoding Krṣṇa: Multiple Referentialities**

Amānāt’s treatment of several other iconic episodes of the tenth *skandha* could and should of course be questioned in our search for the “terms of inclusion” of Krṣṇa’s figure in the eighteenth-century Indo-Persian *maṣnawī* dimension; from the *Shāhnāma*-like demon-killing hero of several *adhīyas* to the iconic divine child eating the mud and showing the universe in his mouth of 10.8, where Yaśodā (*jasodhā*) observes “at once what has a place and what is beyond place” (*ba yak bār makān u lāmakān dīd*), asking herself if “this child of mine is that very God / of whose presence no place is empty” (*in pisar-i mā bāshad khudāy-ī / ki khālī nīst az way hīch jā-ī*). It is perhaps more useful, however, to briefly focus on the long introductory section of the *Jilwa-yī zāt*, where some precious keys for the reading of the Persian Krṣṇa are provided and which will finally lead us—widening the perspective to the entire Persian Purāṇa by Amānāt—to make some more general remarks on the reception and use of the text itself.34

The first twenty-one *bayts* of Amānāt’s preface are devoted to a poetical description of the formless and omnipervasive “essence” (*ẕāt*) and its relationship with the material realm of immanence and experience. The weight of Bīdīl’s conceptual formulations can be felt, apart from the closely resembling style, especially if we consider the cosmogonic theories found in philosophical poems

33 This seems to somehow retrace the generic modalities of the *dahnāma*, “ten letters,” or *ṣīnāma*, “thirty letters,” subgenre (Syed Hasan 1973), whose specific South Asian implications have been studied by Orsini (2006). Within the *Jilwa-yī zāt*, the lyrical form of the *ghazal* is often used to substitute direct speech while at the same time introducing the subjectivity of Amānāt himself through the constant use of the *takhallus*, “pen-name.”

34 An earlier, abridged version of the following paragraphs of this section has been published as a preview to this study (Pellò 2017a).
such as ‘Irfān and the Muhīṭ-i aʿzam. The latter, in particular, is sometimes quoted almost verbatim, as is the case when it deals with the process of manifestation of Pure Being. However, from this point onwards, the poetical theology of Amānāt Rāy acquires more definite and specific tones. After having introduced the sudden manifestation of the “absolute beauty of the Beloved” (ḥusn-i muṭlaq-i yār) (1.22) the poet explains the cosmic event as follows in line 23:

\[
\text{khwud-i āyīna shud khwud shakhṣ u timshāl hamān yakrang-ash dar gardish-i ħāl (Amānāt manuscript: folio 2a)}
\]

He himself became the mirror, he became the person and the simulacrum, such is his unity of color in the revolution of states

The manifestation of the “absolute beauty of the Beloved” in line 22 is undoubtedly reminiscent of a famous ghazal by Ḥāfiz of Shīrāz where the “beauty” (ḥusn) of the Beloved suddenly appears (tajallī zad) in the eternal (azal), creational event of love (Ḥāfiz 1983–84: 312). However, once again, Bīdīl’s experimentations are clearly observable even here, in the connection between “absolute beauty” (ḥusn-i muṭlaq) and its reflection in the “mirror” (āyīna), which leads to “self-identification” (khwudbīnī), explored in his Dīwān and his maṣnawī (for example, Bīdīl 1997, 1: 406). The identification of the surface instrument (āyīna “mirror”), the subject (shakhṣ “person”), and the object of vision (timshāl “simulacrum”) of line 23 is an actualized declension of the traditional monistic identification of the triad of love (ʿishq), lover (ʿāshiq), and beloved (maʿshūq). This kind of metaphorical identification had been repeatedly played upon by Bīdīl himself, for instance with the auditive triad nay-naghma-muṭrib / “flute-melody-minstrel” in the Muhīṭ-i aʿzam (Bīdīl 1997, 3: 583); another great master of late seventeenth-century Mughal poetry, Nāṣir ʿAlī Sirhindī had even recast the triad in the field of painting, with the identification of painting, painter, and painted image in a little studied maṣnawī (see Pellò 2017b). Looking at Amānāt’s contemporaries, it is worth noting, as well, how a closely comparable image of the mirror is being used in eighteenth-century Iran by Ḥātif-i Isfahānī (died 1783) to explore the Christian trinity in Persian poetical terms. In his well-known tarjīʿ-band he speaks in this regard of a “face reflected by three mirrors” (Ḥātif-i Isfahānī 1968: 18). It is in this context of dense intertextual references, conceptual continuities, and aesthetic layerings of renovation that the specific notion of the trimūrtī appears:

\[
\text{ba ḥasb-i khwāhish-i ān zāt-i yaktā mukhustain shud si shikl-i khāṣ paydā}
\]
\[
\text{yakī barmaḥā ki dar gulzār-i dunyā shud az nīlāfārī gul jilwafarmā}
\]
\[
\text{sabab-i ī shud pay-i ījād-i ʿalam ki bāshad bāqī-yi bunyād ʿalam}
\]

35 Consult, for instance, the use of the imagery revolving around the idea of taqaddus (“sanctity”) of the muḥīṭ (“ocean”) of Essence, and so on, in Amānāt manuscript, folio 1b–2a and Bīdīl 1997, 3: 583.

According to the will of that unique essence as was convenient, three specific shapes appeared. The first is Brahmā who, in the rose garden of the world, became manifest from a lotus flower. His function was to bring the world into existence, to make certain that the foundations of the world are stable. Then, that pearl of the deployment of possibility took the shape of Viṣṇu, with the power of ten lives. Third came Rudra, who, just like a fearless Turk burns the harvest of existence like straw.

The reins of the choice between being and nonbeing are always held in their hands.

And although they are separated in speech, in their own essence they are God.

The iconographical textualization from which Brahmā appears (shud jilwafarmā) in the “garden of the world” (gulzār-i dunyā) and the even more striking reading of Rudra through the metaphor of the “fearless Turk” (turk-i bibāk) burning “the harvest of existence” (kharman-i hastī) are compelling examples of how the wealth of material provided by the inventory of the Persian literary hypertext can be used in projecting “new” material onto the hypertext itself. But they are also interesting examples of what the eternal “garden,” which had been the active background for most lyrical events in Persian from the Samanid times, or the beautiful “fearless Turk” that had been destroying hearts from the very prehistory of the Persianate cosmopolis in Central Asia,37 can contain and evoke paradigmatically in an eighteenth-century Indo-Persian textual setting. In such a context, the unambiguous declaration of the fact that, for Amānat Raṭy, Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu “in their own essence are God,” having the “rein of choice between being and non being” (it is worth highlighting that they are not read here under the generic heading of firishta “angels” very often applied in Indo-Persian texts), appears to be perfectly

naturalized in the canonical environment recreated in the poem. After having compared the function of the avatāra to that of a mirror which permits the observation of the absolute beauty (Amānat manuscript, folio 2b) and after having enumerated and quickly described, in eleven bayts, the first seven avatāras (Matsya = māhi “fish”; Kūrma = kashaf “tortoise”; Varāha = Barah; Narasimha = shīr “lion”; Vāmana = Bāvan; Parasūrāma = Parsūrām; Rāma = Rām), Amānat at last comes to the object of his poem and, as we shall see, of his devotion. The relatively lengthy passage presenting the figure of Krṣṇa is worth translating in its entirety:

\[
\begin{align*}
&ba \text{ hashtum bār ān māh-i jahāngīr} \\
&ba \text{ shikl-i kishn ʿalam kard taskhīr} \\
&shud az ḫusn-i malīh-i khwud dar āfāq \\
&\text{namakfarsāy-i zakhm-i jān-i ʿushshāq} \\
&ʿadīm al-maṣal shud dar khūbī u nāz \\
&ki mānd az ʿīdan-ash muṭzhān ba khwud bāz \\
&ba \text{ mushtāqān numūd ān ḫusn-i mastūr} \\
&ki khālq az jilwa-yi u ḡasht maʿmūr \\
&sar-i gīsūy-i mushkīn-ash tā bar u dāsh \\
&pay-i mardum kāndān-i gardān-i hūsh \\
&kulāh-ash az parr-i ṭawus bar sar \\
&ba khūbī rashk-ī gardān-i purakhtar \\
&ḥayā-rah hamzabānī bā nigāh-ash \\
&ṣabā dilbasta-yi ṣulf-i siyāh-ash \\
&bahā-yi jān du laʾl-i nūshkhand-ash \\
&qiyyāmat sāya-yi quad-i buland-ash \\
&ba tangī gḥuncha mansūb-ī dahān-ash \\
&zi gham bārīk mū bahr-i miyān-ash \\
&zi gawhar dar gālū-yi ū ḥamāyil \\
&ḥazārān dil ba yakjā karda manzil \\
&numāyān ḡasht hāngām-ī nazzāra \\
&ba jayb-i mihr-i tābān ʿṣād sitāra \\
&guhar dar gūsh-ī ān ṣāyinaštāma \\
&ba māh-ī kard kawkab dast bālā \\
&kaf-i pā az safā ṣāyina-yi gul \\
&zi naqsh-ī pā numāyān sāghar-i mul
\end{align*}
\]

Interestingly enough, Amānat uses here the poetic argumentation of the “three names” and “one essence” as Ḥātif-ī Isfahānī (1968: 18) does when speaking of the Christian trinity in his famous tarjī band.

A translation of the passage can be found in Pellò (2014: 34).
The eighth time that world-conquering moon
subjugated the world in the shape of Krṣṇa

That salty beauty reached the horizons
spreading salt on the wounds of the soul of the lovers

He became incomparable in beauty and coquetry
so that eyelashes, looking at him, remained spread wide.

He showed that hidden beauty to those who were anxious to see him,
so that creatures, through his epiphany, became prosperous.

His black curls, reaching his shoulders and his breast,
were a snare catching the neck of people’s intellect.

His hat, with a peacock feather on top,
was the envy, for its beauty, of the sky full of stars.

Modesty spoke the same language of his gaze
breeze was an intimate lover of his black locks.

His two sugar-chewing rubies had the price of life
the Day of Resurrection is the shadow of his tall figure.

From his mouth descends every tiny blossom
and the hair derives its thinness from his waist.

Because of the pearl hanging on his throat
thousands of hearts have settled in one place.

At the moment of contemplation, there appeared
one hundred stars in the bosom of a gleaming sun.

The pearl in the ear of that mirrorlike figure
made a star to be imposed upon a moon.

The sole of his foot was pure as a mirror reflecting a rose
from his footstep appeared a cup of wine.

That beauty was hidden in its black color,
as the mole of the pupil of the eye is the capital of light.

With this aspect that world-embellishing moon
became more close to the heart than the black stain.

Krṣṇa is masterly described by recurring to the sarāpā (literally, “head to feet”), a little studied genre devoted to the detailed description of the beloved’s physical beauty (Shafī‘īyūn 2010) comparable to the Indic sikh-nakh (Busch 2011: 158) and
which enjoys a certain diffusion in the late Indo-Persian and Urdu contexts. Thus, Kṛṣṇa’s beautiful figure is studied through a fashionable poetic lens, which serves well—via the multiple aesthetic citizenships of the sarāpā-sikh-nakh—in accommodating the traditional iconography of the avatāra within the textual environment of a Persian maṣnawī. Usually, the technique is that of selecting a series of deeply codified images that can, by close formal analogies or easy contrasts, be readily applied to the “new” referent. In other words, except for the explicit mentioning of Kṛṣṇa as the object of the description, no reader educated in Persian literary culture would find anything uncanny. On the other hand, the description is at the same time precise in its adherence to the prevalent iconographies of Kṛṣṇa and shows, once again, how an eighteenth-century Vaiṣṇava munshī—or for that matter any reader immersed in the multilingual and multiliterary milieu of late Mughal India—could recodify the centuries-old attributes, imagery, and metaphors employed here and how vast a world of referents (that is, Kṛṣṇa multiplied in the mirrors of the multitude of named and anonymous beloveds of the Persian tradition) he could see in them. A most immediate example is the treatment of the color black. If the “black curls” represent a perfect iconographic parallel, the dark color of Kṛṣṇa’s skin (which, by the way, is not at all unprecedented in Persian poetry) is celebrated by its paradoxical transformation into a more acceptable white “capital of light,” through the similitude with “the pupil of the eye,” which in turn becomes a “black mole”—the latter evoking the lingering image of the black hindū with which it is often in a relationship of syntagmatic cohesion. In the line that follows, the “dark light” of Kṛṣṇa can be—thanks to the formal analogy provided by the round shape—at the same time a light full moon and the black stain (suwaydā) on the heart, which is a common figure of passionate love in Persian, deeply immersed in Śūfi culture (see for instance Sajjadi 1991: 111) and alluding to Muḥammad as well. It would be fascinating, in this context, to explore the contextual pendants of the apparent contrast that is drawn by Amānat between a Turk (white) destroyer Rudra and a Hindu (black) sweet Kṛṣṇa (who is appropriately saucy like the dark gipsies / lāliyān of Hafez in a famous chiascuro ghazal). Here, however, I will limit myself to underline that the oxymoronic (for the Persian aesthetic tradition) blackness of the beautiful “beloved” Kṛṣṇa will be discussed one generation later in Qatīl’s Haft tamāshā (a more than plausible audience for Amānat’s work), where the Khatrī convert explains to his Iranian audience that: “In the beginning, Kanhaiya was extremely beautiful, harmonious, and fair-colored (ṣabīhalwān). At a later stage, he was bitten by a snake and became black, but his blackness was so well blended that

40 An example taken directly from the normative Dīwān of Ḥāfīz is where the beloved is described as having a wheat-colored cheek (‘āriż-i gandumgūn); compare Ḥāfīz (1983–84: 134). Wheat-colored (that is, having the color of ripe wheat) is used in Persian as an image to convey the idea of a brownish color; a dark beauty in contrast with a white one.

41 A critical review of this celebrated trope can be found in Meneghini (1990).

42 The reference is to the well-known tradition based on the interpretation of Qurān 94: 1–3, the black stain (the symbolic mark of “darkness” on human hearts) on the heart of Muḥammad was cleansed by the angels with snow when he was still a boy.

43 I am referring here to Ḥāfīz (1983–84: 22), sometimes read, in classical commentaries, as a reference to Tīmūr Lang.
it captured every heart” (Qatîl 1875: 15). Amânat’s sarāpā of black Kṛṣṇa as the eternal Beloved leaves no space for technical observations in the doctrinal field. In particular, nothing is added as far as the special relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the “Essence” is concerned, especially if we consider the theological issues introduced by the interesting discussion on the trimūrti seen above. A quick look at the later translation of a pivotal passage of the first skandha (as previously mentioned, completed in 1751 with all the other skandhas up to the ninth) is useful in gaining a more precise idea of who Kṛṣṇa is for Amânat Rāy. The key śloka 1.3.28, containing the famous line kṛṣyas tu bhagavān svayam “but Kṛṣṇa is God in person” is translated as follows:

\[
dah avatār andar īn bazm-i ūlismāt
dumāyān gashta yakyak partaw-i zāt
zuhūr-i kirishn ‘ayn-i zāt-i yaktā-st
ki khwud-i sham-i shabistān-i tamannā-st (Amânat Nd: 17).
\]

The ten avatārās, in this symposium of magics, have shown, one by one, the beam of the Essence,

[but] the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa is the unique Essence in itself:
he is the very candle of the night-chamber of hope.

Amânat’s translation is quite assertive in its identification of Kṛṣṇa with the very essence of God. Particularly if read in the light of the above-mentioned identification of the trimūrti with God (ba zāt-i khwīshtan īnhā khudāy-and “in their own essence they are God”), the passage is transparent in stating the theological preeminence of Kṛṣṇa (who subsumes, and thus precedes, the whole trimūrti) as the “unique Essence in itself.” Especially noteworthy is the fact that the central Islamic notion of the unity/unicity of God (tawḥīd), rendered by the use of the attribute yaktā “unique,” is expressly applied here to the “manifest” (zuhūr) figure of Kṛṣṇa. In Amânat’s work, such doctrinal claims are flanked by devotional statements that are even more relevant if we consider the generic protocols of the Persian textual milieu in which they are inserted. This places the poetic figure of Amânat’s Persian Kṛṣṇa at the center of a much wider sociotextual framework, where the layered personality of an eighteenth-century Hindu munshī acquires a new centrality. Following the autobiographical note, to which we shall return briefly, Amânat, as we have seen, inserts in the general description a note on the reasons and the occasion leading to the composition of the book (sabab-i naẓm-i kitāb) (Amânat manuscript, folios 15a–18a). He first describes an archetypical night dominated by “restlessness” (bītābī), “bewilderment” (ḥayrat), and the absence of real inspiration for both spiritual enlightenment and artistic creation (shikār-i ẓād khayāl-i pūchmawhūm “the hunter of a hundred imaginations, without a single inspiration”) in which he was wandering with his heart in turmoil like “the wave of a vortex” (mawj-i ġirdāb). Then, he tells the reader, suddenly a “rising star of happiness” (tālī’-i sa’ād) came to his aid in the person of an admonishing guide urging him to awake. The nocturnal event, which is strikingly resemblant of the encounter between Amânat and his master recounted in the Taẕkira-yi Ḥusaynī (see
above), draws on ultraclassical models in a recognizable Bidilian style of diction. Here, however, the key figure leading to the literary-spiritual transformation in Amānat’s life has a proper name:

\[
\text{buwad nām-ash zi fayž-i haqq dar āfāq} \\
\text{ba shuhrat bālakrīshn-i kursmushtaq (Amānat manuscript, folio 16a)}
\]

His name is over the horizons for the grace of truth:
he is known as Bālakṛṣṇa the lover of soil

It is tempting to see an intertextual connection between this epiphany of Bālakṛṣṇa (“the infant Krṣṇa”) in Amānat’s narrative and the life-changing interventions of “hindu boys” (hindūpisar) in the literary biographies of other Hindu poets of Persian such as Bhūpat Rāy Bīgham Bayrāgī, whose life is transformed thanks to a beautiful boy named Nārāyaṇa (Narāyan).\textsuperscript{44} Be that as it may (the model for all these hindū figures of beautiful youths are, it should be born in mind, the Christian or Zoroastrian boys of classical Persian works\textsuperscript{45}), the words addressed to Amānat by this Persian speaking Bālakṛṣṇa are very clear in terms of the devotion required. After a reprimand concerning the opportunity of making something “through which your memory will survive” (bikun kār-ī k-az ān mānadh yādgār-ī), the butter-stealing child from Vṛindāban concludes his speech by telling Amānat:

\[
\text{ba nām-i khāṣṣ-i ū lab āshnā kun} \\
\text{ba nām u nang-i īn ālam du ā kun} \\
\text{agar dārī zabān dar kām gūyā} \\
\text{kanhāyā gū kanhāyā gū kanhāyā (Amānat manuscript, folio 17b).}
\]

Make your lips familiar with his proper name:
say a prayer for the honor of this world!

If you have, in your mouth, a tongue which is capable of speaking,
say Kanhaiyā, say Kanhaiyā, say Kanhaiyā!

Amānat’s response to this request, which leaves little room for doubt about the devotional nature of this dedication, confirms the author’s will to identify his spiritual path and provide his literary effort with a definite religious commitment:

\[
\text{chu īn nām az nishānī-yī ū shinīdam} \\
\text{ba maqshūd ki mībāyad raśīdam} \\
\text{zadam būsa ba dast-i rahbar-i khwīsh} \\
\text{qadām dar rāh-i ū kardam sar-i khwīsh (Amānat manuscript, folio 17b).}
\]

When I heard this name from his image,
I reached the aim that was convenient

\textsuperscript{44} Some considerations regarding the motif, with special reference to the transitional literary character of Bīgham Bayrāgī, can be found in Pellò (2015: 144–45), which includes additional bibliography.

\textsuperscript{45} It would be fruitful to explore the apparent close connections of such tropes with the important subgenre known as shahrāshūb, where the “characters” of a textualized urban environment are described. On their South Asian counterparts, see Sharma 2004.
I kissed the hand of my guide
and directed my steps to his path.

As a matter of fact, Amānat openly declares his devotion here and there in the text, for instance in the maqta’ (the closing bayt) of a ghazal inserted among the couplets of the translation of the very first adhyāya of skanda 1:

\[
\text{ba madḥ-i bādshahān kay buwad sar u kār-ash}
\]
\[
\text{ki guftugā-yi amānat ba ‘ishq-i siyām buwad (Amānat Nd: 21)}
\]

He will never be occupied with the praise of the kings:
Amānat speaks only of the love for Šyāma.

As in the case of the self-identification with the gopīs seen above, the author’s literary persona expressed by the takhallūs enters the text directly. In this bayt, Amānat sits together, so to say, with the object of his devotion, Krṣṇa, who in the best ‘irfanī tradition of the Persian lyrical genre, expressly subsumes the threefold function of the mamdūḥ (object of praise), maššūq (object of love), and ma‘būd (object of devotion).

**A Krṣṇaite Subjectivity in Persian**

A final quotation from the opening of Amānat’s rendering of the first skanda will serve as an ideal introduction to the concluding remarks of this paper. Here the semantic density of the figure of the “idol” (*but*) reveals all its weight as a key both to the inclusive poetic strategies of Amānat and to his discourse on textual self-identification:

\[
\text{dar īn butkhāna-yi hind īn kitāb-ast}
\]
\[
\text{sawād-ash mashriq-i ṣad āfāb-ast}
\]
\[
\text{but-ī az har ṭaraf dar jilwa-yi nāz}
\]
\[
\text{barahmanpīsha u nāqūsdamsāz}
\]
\[
\text{tu-rā gar hast zawq-i butparastī}
\]
\[
\text{dar īn manzil dar āyī u na ham hastī}
\]
\[
\text{dam-ī binwāz nāqūs-i faghān-ī}
\]
\[
\text{zi ‘ishq-ī but bayān kun dāstān-ī}
\]
\[
\text{jabīn kun šandalalūd-ī ghulāmī}
\]
\[
\text{savār dar sarw-i āzād-i mudāmī}
\]
\[
\text{shawad āyina-at ūf az kudūrat}
\]
\[
\text{bibīnī jilwa-yi ma’nī zī šīrat}
\]

---

46 The word *but*, originally meaning “Buddha” (consult Bailey 1931), has continuously been a pivotal one on the Persian poetical horizon since its very Central Asian beginnings, often connected with the image of the shaman < šramaṇa, originally representing the Buddhist monk (compare Melikian-Chirvani 1974).
In this idol temple of India lies this book whose black letters are the Orient of one hundred suns.

There is an idol that appears with its coquetry from every side, who has the ways of a Brāhmaṇa, who is intimate with the bells.

Should you have a taste for idolatry come into this house, unless you are already there!

Ring, for a while, the bells of a scream, illustrate a story from the love for an idol!

Stain your front with the sandal of servitude, on the free-standing cypress of eternity.

May your mirror be pure from every rust: observe the epiphany of meaning in form!

When you see the creator of forms from faraway, the whole of you becomes full of light like the sun.

You become grateful to the idol everywhere you go and you carve an image for yourself.

If you are a worshiper of image, then be my companion: come into the assembly, familiar with bewilderment.

If bowing down to the idol gladdens your heart, well, in my belief God is precisely this!

The actualized values of the centuries-old image of the but and the antinomian fashioning of the literary self as a butparast “idolater,” while calling on the most codified metaphorical language of Persian Ṣūfī poetry (where the search for the blame of the conformist is a stylistic feature at least from Sanā’ī of Ghazna, twelfth century), should be contextually read as an articulated series of poetical utterances of subjectivity. As a matter of fact, this is no isolated example. An eloquent

---

47 Deliberately echoing Michail Bachtin but leaning especially on Francois Rastier’s discussions on textual semantics and Sheldon Pollock’s stances on philology and history, by “subjectivity” I mean here (and elsewhere in this paper) the sociotextual dimension of what the French scholar calls the “enunciative nucleus” as it is represented in the text and/or situated in the generic protocols and rules (Rastier 2001: 14–18).
parallel comes from a slightly later original Persian hymn to Vārānāsī, the *Kāshī istīṭ* (the title is a Persian phonetic adaptation of the Sanskrit *Kāśī stuti*), written in 1778, by the Kāyastha from Allāhābād Matan Āfarīn, which opens with the following lines:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ḥamd-i but-i butkada-yi lāmakan}
\textit{ānki numūd īnhama nām u nishān}
\textit{bāng-i nukhust-i jaras-i ān maqām}
\textit{kun fayakun-i pardakash-i khāss u 'āmm}
\textit{farsh-i zamīn ṭālib-i pābūši-ash}
\textit{ʿarsh-i barīn rāhib-i nāqūsī-ash}
\textit{barahman-i 'ishq parastār-i ū}
\textit{kawn u makān ḥalqa-yi zunnār-i ū} (Āfarīn 1873: 2).
\end{quote}

Praised be the Idol of the idol temple which has no place the one who made manifest all these names and signs.

The very first ring of the bell of that high place was the “Be!” which created every extant being.

The carpet of the Earth wishes to kiss his feet, the supreme Throne is the monk who tolls his bell.

The Brahman of love is his caretaker and the whole universe is the buckle of his belt.

The challenging overture where the “Praise to the Idol” (\textit{ḥamd-i but}) evokes a canonical Arabic-Islamic \textit{al-hamdu li-ʾllāh} (the praise belongs to God), while substituting it, overlays an accumulation of the usual images of idolatry (the idol, the idol temple, the bell, the monk, the kissing of the feet, the Brahman, the \textit{zunnār}) interacting with core Islamic theological notions such as the creative “fiat” \textit{kun fayakūn} and the exalted Throne (‘\textit{arsh-i barīn}). As in the case of Amānat’s devotion for Krṣṇa, it is the intersection with the (pretextualized) context that provides these rhetorical utterances with new semantics. In its closing lines, the author actually dedicates the *Kāshī stuti* to the Brāhmaṇas. He deems himself a “Hindu secretary with obscure beliefs” (hindūdabīr-i tīrārāy). In those lines, the text is described as a guide (or even a substitute) for a pilgrimage to the sacred city of Vārānāsī (Āfarīn 1873: 43). In this context, the autobiographical information provided by Amānat both in the \textit{Jilwa-yi zāt} and in the \textit{Rāmāyan} stands out for its self-promotional values, especially at the level of social and geographical appurtenance, in a productive play both with the literary persona of the author and with the multiple implied readers of the text. In the \textit{Jilwa-yi zāt}, Amānat seems to be particularly interested in stressing that he was born in Lalpūr, which he was forced to leave due to a devastating flood and that he is a Khatrī belonging to the Seth subcaste (folios 14b–15a). More than twenty years later, in the introduction to his \textit{Rāmāyan}, he would once again describe his native Lalpūr hyperbolically as the “envy of the eternal paradise” (rashk-i khuld-i barīn) or the “garden of Iram” (bāgh-i iram), and
he would also celebrate the history of his family (who had been there for one hundred and sixty years, beginning with his ancestor Gopāl), his own education there as a secretary and a poet of Persian, and the excellence of his fellow Khatrīs living there, described as “having the nature of Brāhmanaś” (barahmansirishtān) and “reciters of the Veda” (bedkhvān) (Amānat 1872: 9–11).

In the same passage regarding the Smārtas mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Qatīl observes, after having mentioned the “various images” (sūrathā-yi mukhtalif) of Viṣṇu’s manifestation, that the “Arabic translation of avātar is mazhar (place of manifestation), and [the Smārtas] are so much in accordance with Śūfīsm (taśawwuf) that they consider each image (sūrat) the mazhar of God, and indeed God himself” (1875: 11). One is tempted to ask what was the actual circulation, reception, and use of works such as the Jilwa-yi zāt and the Śrī Bhāgavat within the multilayered and by no means neutral sociotextual backgrounds implied here as well as in Amānat’s or Āfarīn’s self-descriptions. Or in both plainer and bolder terms: were Amānat’s celebrated fellow Khatrīs and the other eighteenth-century North Indian secretaries writing in Persian who textualized themselves as hinduwān actually reading such texts, and how? Some precious preliminary indications come directly from the manuscript tradition. As the colophon informs us, the very manuscript on which the present paper is mainly based was copied in 1772 in the town of Farrukhābād (balada-yi Farrukhābād) by a certain Shiv Sahā, who hastens to tell the reader that he resided in the qasba of Maham and describes himself as a zunnārdār, that is, a “bearer of the zunnār” (Amānat manuscript, folio 499b). Moreover, the same Shiv Sahā specifies that the book—which contains, it may be useful to remember here, more than eighteen thousand masnavī lines—was copied in just a few days from another copy, owned by a certain Lāla Jagannāth, the son of Sadānand, a Khatrī living in Shāhjahānpūr. Thus, the Jilwa-yi zāt, written in Delhi by a Khatrī bhakta from Lalpūr, circulated among eighteenth-century munshīs from Uttar Pradesh in a non-courtly geography. Shiv Sahā would have taken to the qasba of Maham the book he had copied in Farrukhābād from the copy belonging to Lāla Jagannāth, who was in turn based in Shāhjahānpūr. The very size of the manuscript, a small portable book (16 x 8 cm) particularly if compared to the enormous number of lines it contained, is also an explicit indication of its private use. Among the most notable features of the manuscript is the fact that the first page bears as a dedicatory heading the unmistakable invocation Śrīkrishnāyanamah, in place of the customary Islamic basmala (Amānat manuscript, folio 1b). Again, this is not at all an isolated case; if we look beyond the Jilwa-yi zāt, similar invocations

49 In the absence of extensive philological explorations and careful textual analyses, an articulated discussion on the reception of these texts is still beyond our reach. However, considering their poetic refinedness, the fact that they were among the first books to be printed in North India and some external evidence—such as the stamp from the North-West Frontier Province on the Śrī Bhāgavat copy in the British Library or Qatīl’s observations from Nawābī Lucknow—one can tentatively suppose that they were read well beyond the immediate circle of the disciples of Bīdil and the world of the Hindu munshī. It might not be too fanciful then to imagine a truly transregional readership, including West Asian travelers as well as Rāj officials (consult also Pellő 2014: 41). To avoid any premature enthusiasm, however, it is worth highlighting that, until the present, I have not been able to locate any copy of Amānat’s work (neither manuscript nor printed) in Iranian collections.

49 Precisely during the beginning of the month of Ramadān 1186, corresponding to late November 1772.
to Kṛṣṇa (but also Gaṇeṣa and other deities) take the place of the traditional *basmala*. These can be found in several manuscripts authored and/or copied by Persian-writing Hindu intellectuals, beginning at least in the 1670s. Just to name a few scattered examples, in reverse chronological order: the abridged Persian version entitled *Sirāj al-ṭarīq* of the *Nasiketopakhyaṇa* by the Khatrī from Sialkot Rūp Narāyan (a Gopāl devotee flourishing at the beginning of the eighteenth century), copied in 1767, bearing the invocation *srī gopāl u srī kirishn sahāe* (Rūp Narāyan manuscript, folio 1a); the Mughal *Srī Bhāgavat Mahā-pūrāṇ*, copied in 1759 in Shāhābād by a scribe named Rajkaran, bearing *Srī Ganesāyanamah*, just like the *Purāṇ Srī Bhāgavat*, copied in 1726 and held as well in the Aligarh collection (see Zaidi 1994: 60–61, 69); and, most notably, the volume containing the Persian *Bhagavad Gitā, Gitāsārā, and Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, copied in 1080/1670 in a compact format (21.5 x 14.5 cm), where each of the three texts is introduced with the dedication *Srī krishna jayo* (Subha Chand manuscript, folios 44b, 88a, 92b) and where the name of scribe Subhā Chand is recognizable, for instance at folio 91b, where he defines himself as a Kāyastha Srīvastava from Gwālior. In this latter manuscript, the invocation *Srī krishna jayo* is scattered throughout the text itself (especially in the *Gitāsārā*, where it appears frequently in red ink) and the invocation *Hanuman jayo sahāe* is also present (folio 319a); notably enough, on the first page of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* the eulogy *Srī krishna jayo* is quite eloquently placed above the *basmala*.50

In the subtitle of his brilliant pamphlet *Filologia e libertà*, the Italian classicist and historian Luciano Canfora calls philology “the most subversive of disciplines.”51 Unequivocally endorsing such a statement, I suggest that a philological study of Persian works such as the *Jilwa-yi zāt* and several others of its kind, as well as their transmission and reception, would assist us in decisively subverting many die-hard essentializations—first of all, in terms of linguistic boundaries and walls—and presentist views regarding premodern and early modern Islamicate South Asian cultures. While showing that it might be useful to begin talking of a largely unexplored Vaishnava-Kṛṣṇait current *within* Indo-Persian literature, whose main producers, broadcasters, and consumers were apparently the Persian-educated members of Hindu scribal groups, such profound excavations challenge as well many preconceived views regarding the use of the texts, projecting these works onto a noncourtly provincial background of capillary circulation. Persian, once more proving its plasticity as an inclusive platform, should thus be numbered among the other “languages” of Kṛṣṇait textuality, in a nonpurist, mutual perspective. In other words, if Amānat Rāy’s as well as other comparable Persian remakes of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* might be even too easily (and predictably) categorized, in Lawrence Venuti’s fashionable terms, as “domesticating” translations (for instance, Venuti 1995: passim), one would question to which domesticity the domestication is supposed to lead. As a matter of fact, texts such as the *Jilwa-yi zāt*—

50 Such interesting data throw new light on polemic declarations such as those by the eighteenth-century *tažkira* writer ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Iftikhar on Hindus writing in Persian, who criticizes their work precisely because they are “devoid of the brilliant glare emanating from the eulogies of the Lord of the Prophets” (cited in Pellò 2014: 22).

51 “La più eversiva delle discipline” (consult Canfora 2008).
programmatically endowed with a rich semantic plasticity—seem to domesticate Kṛṣṇa in the ambit of Persian literary culture while at the very same time pointing to the existence of parallel, enlarged conceptual/performative grammars through which they could be read, thus providing the tools for a noncontrastive domestication of Persian to certain aspects of Kṛṣṇaite bhakti. From the point of view of the Persianate Hindu munshi, Kṛṣṇa is comfortably at home in Shīrāz as much as in Mathurā, and there is no need to “take him back” anywhere, since both places truly belong to the realm of the Indo-Persian writer. A properly philological exploration of the interstices of such a text-world will certainly serve as a fine tool for integrating and rethinking a number of narratives regarding the sociosemiotic articulation of modern South Asian religious “identities.”

References


