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Make it fresh: time, tradition, and Indo-Persian literary modernity

Rajeev Kinra

All poets, in all ages, have placed a premium on timely themes, verbal dexterity, and esthetic innovation, but in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century South Asia there was a heightened sense of newness in the air. By the end of the great Emperor Akbar's long reign, the Mughal Empire was well established, and Akbar's own rule of nearly five decades (1556–1605) had seen the consolidation of composite cultural trends that had, in many cases, been centuries in the making, but now received a more explicit political and administrative formulation than ever before. An atmosphere of religious tolerance, a respect for scholarly inquiry and the arts, the rationalization of bureaucratic and administrative policies, and a welcoming respect not only for the cultural diversity of the subcontinent itself, but also for the intellectual and commercial capital brought by travelers from around the world, were all hallmarks of the Mughal state ideology of “universal concord” (*ḡulḡ-i kull*). Of course, the term *ḡulḡ-i kull* was not itself new—it had been a key concept in the normative Indo-Persian political and ethical

vocabulary since at least the *Aḥqāq-i Nādirī* of the great medieval polymath Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī (1201–74)—and thus it is worth emphasizing that, for all their innovation, the Mughals’ notion of a new political and cultural order did not preclude a respect for medieval and classical traditions. In fact, the intellectual foundations of Mughal culture and politics rested precisely on the dual sense of both continuity with multiple classical traditions—e.g. the Islamicate, Indic, Persian, Turko-Mongol, and Greco-Hellenic—and the equally strong belief that by integrating these cultural streams into a composite world view, safeguarded by Mughal power, they were crafting an empire of unprecedented dynamism and social harmony.¹

This sense of being on the cusp of a new historical era has often been characterized as having emanated top-down from Akbar’s idealistic imperial court, particularly as reflected in the writings of his celebrated courtier and chief ideologue, Abū al-Faḥl ibn Muḥarrak (1551–1602). But the larger historical context suggests that something much more widespread was clearly happening, not just in South Asia, but across Eurasia in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—a set of trends which Akbar and Abū al-Faḥl certainly cultivated, but cannot be said exclusively to have initiated. This paper will focus on one such development, the attempt by early modern Indo-Persian poets to reinvigorate their classical literary tradition by making it “fresh” (*tāza*).

To put the “fresh-speaking” (*tāza-gū’ī*) movement in its proper context requires understanding that the Mughal world was part of a larger cultural zone that included not only the rest of the Indian subcontinent, but also the various regions of Central and West Asia, particularly the Safawid and Ottoman domains. As a surfeit of recent scholarship

has demonstrated, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of remarkable commercial and intellectual mobility throughout these interconnected regions, both overland and by sea. India was thus far from the only place where new types of global encounters were transforming intellectuals' world view and sense of epochal change. But as one of the world's most wealthy, welcoming, and tolerant locales, early modern India became a prime destination for an extraordinarily multicultural cast of global traders, artists, service professionals, and adventurers seeking commercial opportunity and artistic patronage—Armenians, Iranians, Yemenis, Africans, Europeans, and many others besides. This multicultural influx didn't just add to the existing diversity of the subcontinent; the very fact that such radical pluralism was even possible fed the widespread belief that a new age of social and political potential had arrived.

Another important factor in the early modern sense of epochal change across this entire region was the turning of the Islamic calendar's new millennium in 1591–1592 CE, which was itself only one calendrical signpost in what has been described as a much broader “millenarian conjuncture that operated over a good part of the Old World in the sixteenth century,” from the Iberian peninsula all the way to South Asia and beyond.² A giddy anticipation of new human possibilities accompanied this historical moment, in Mughal India no less than elsewhere, even as the excitement was accompanied in some quarters by an equally potent revival of messianic cults, visions of impending apocalypse, and omens of the end of days.³

But the sense of temporal transition was not limited to the eschatological. A number of South Asian knowledge systems were undergoing unprecedented internal changes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was around this same time, for

instance, that Sanskrit intellectuals first began drawing sharp contrasts between the work of “new” (*navya*) thinkers and that of “antiquated” (*jīrna*) scholars of generations past, inaugurating a self-consciously “new historicity by which intellectuals began to organize their discourses.”⁴ The “New Grammar,” the “New Poetics,” the “New Logic,” and so on, remained largely in conversation with the classical Sanskrit tradition, but the *navya* discourse nevertheless opened up a space for novel forms of poetic and scholarly self-expression, including robust literatures in regionalized *kāvya*.⁵ Meanwhile, by the sixteenth century South Asia’s “vernacular millennium” was well under way, and the two centuries before the Mughal consolidation witnessed the emergence of flourishing new genres and literary practices in north India, from devotional *sant* poetry of *bhaktī* versifiers like Kabīr, Mīrābai, Caitanya, Gūrū Nānak, and others, to Sufī Romances in the Awadhi register of Hindi such as Maulānā Dā’ūd’s *Candāyan* (1379), Malik Muhammad Jāyasī’s *Padmāvat* (1540), and Mīr Sayyid Manjhan’s *Madhumālatī* (1545), all of which drew on multiple linguistic and religious-cultural traditions to produce almost entirely new forms of literary expression.⁶ The famed *Rāmcaritmānas* (ca. 1574), an Awadhi version of the Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyana* by the celebrated poet Tulsīdās (1532-1623), emerged out of this same mix of generic and linguistic dialogism, as did one of the first early modern autobiographies ever produced in South Asia, the Jain merchant Banārasīdās’s “Half a Tale” (*Ardhakathānaka*; 1641).⁷ Banārasīdās’s witty memoir was written in Brajbhasha, another regional idiom that underwent a significant transformation during this period. Long known as a medium for regional devotional poetry, especially Vaishnava songs in praise of Krishna and Rādhā,⁷ Brajbhasha emerged in the late sixteenth and

early seventeenth centuries as the pre-eminent “courtly vernacular” of early modern north India. As Allison Busch has argued, Braj literati during this period, such as Keshavdās Mishra (ca. 1555–1617), engaged in a self-conscious and unprecedented effort to reinvent high classical Sanskrit tropes, poetics, and thematic topoi for their own compositions.⁸ The resulting *rīti* style also included elements of the classical Persian literary idiom, and became the darling of various Mughal, Rajput, and regional courts— an efflorescence that continued right up to the late nineteenth century, when such ornamental literary elegance in Hindi fell out of favor due to many of the same colonial and nationalist factors that had also ground virtually all remaining appreciation for the early modern Persian, Urdu, and Sanskrit literary worlds to a decisive halt.

Against this larger historical backdrop, it is perhaps not so surprising that Indo-Persian poets, too, would begin giving voice to a powerful sense of epochal transition in their compositions. Unfortunately, apart from a handful of notable exceptions, the story of exactly why, and under what circumstances, Indo-Persian poets began to describe themselves as “speaking the fresh” has not been fully explored by modern scholars.⁹ The reasons for this curious lacuna are complex, and are thus worth reviewing before we revisit the cultural context of *tāza-gūī* itself.

The fresh style or the Indian style?

One key reason why the *tāza-gūī* phenomenon is rarely talked about in modern scholarship is that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics, whether in Europe,

India, Iran, or elsewhere, have simply not liked the poetry of the early modern period very much. Orientalist critics, folding the critique of Indo-Persian poetry into the larger denunciation of Asian cultural production generally, argued that the *tāza* era's stylistic, metaphorical, and thematic innovations were strained affectations, the products of a decadent, rather than vibrant, society. Meanwhile, confronted with the brute fact of colonial subjugation, many indigenous intellectuals in places like India and Iran began increasingly to accept one of the key premises of the European cultural critique: namely, that their richly complex literary traditions were not achievements to be celebrated and learned from, but rather symptoms of a civilizational decay that needed to be rejected and overcome in order for Asians themselves to become modern. Artistically, literary complexity came to be viewed as antithetical to the romantic ideal of inspired genius; but more importantly to social reform-minded critics, it represented the feckless leisure of courtly hangers-on, not the work of productive citizens of the emergent nation(s). In response, numerous earlier periods of "mannerist" literary complexity in languages such as Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Braj, and Urdu all came in for harsh criticism, reclassified as the degenerate artifacts of once-great, but now atrophied, civilizations, while the textual traditions associated with them, such as the Sanskrit corpus of *śleṣā* literature, or the Braj–Hindi corpus of *rīti* poetry, or the Indo-Persian corpus of *tāza* poetry, began systematically to be repudiated as pompous affectations unworthy of serious study, and thus, to be excised altogether from the canons of respectable scholarship.¹⁰

To many critics, this problem of excess complexity in Oriental literary cultures was framed largely as a function of historical time: earlier golden ages of literary cultural

excellence had given way to periods of imitation, stagnation, and then desperate experimentalism. But in the case of *tāzā-gūī*, another principal factor was that the erstwhile cosmopolitan imagination whereby Persian had, for roughly a millennium, been used as a language of culture and power across the eastern Islamicate areas of South, Central, and West Asia—collectively referred to in Persian as *‘Ajam*—was now increasingly giving way to the notion that Iran alone could lay claim to correct usage and literary taste.¹¹ This was not the first time that such a claim had been made, as even medieval and early modern intellectuals had engaged in sophisticated debates about the interplay between Persophone cosmopolitanism and local idiomatic usages, or *ta‘arrufāt*. But the power of nationalist thinking intensified the force of such arguments, adding unprecedented levels of cultural essentialism and geographical determinism to the mix. Thus, while a pre-modern intellectual like Amīr Khusrau (d. 1325) might have recognized distinct regional variants of Persian usage within the larger cosmopolitan ecumene, such as those of Fars, Khurasan, Transoxiana, and Turan, and explained that certain historical factors and migration patterns had led the typical “Indian usage” (*isti‘māl-i hind*) to conform mostly to the Turani pronunciation, accent, and idiom, he would never have accepted the notion that these various adumbrations of the Persian language were mutually unintelligible, that they could be graded on a fixed scale of linguistic purity, or that the Farsi idiom had some *a priori* claim to absolute linguistic authority over the other regional idioms.¹²

This, however, is precisely what nineteenth- and twentieth-century commentators began to argue, with increasing vehemence, and the resulting shift from a cosmopolitan to a nationalist linguistic perspective has fundamentally transformed the way we talk

about pre-modern Indo-Persian literary culture. It became commonplace for scholars to describe the various pre-modern regional idioms not as accepted variants but rather as lesser, degraded, even corrupt deviations from “the standard Persian of Persia.”¹³ Meanwhile, despite centuries of contributions from multiple regions, the widely accepted Persian literary canon also started to be claimed exclusively for Iran, a narrowing of scope that one can track even in the titles of three major modern literary histories that all, despite their differing titles, cover roughly the same material: from Shiblī Nu‘mānī’s *Shi‘r al-‘Ajam* (“Poetry of ‘Ajam”; 1908-18), to E. G. Browne’s *Literary History of Persia* (1902–24), to Jan Rypka (*et al*)’s *History of Iranian Literature* (1968).

These long-term trends coalesced in the scholarship of Muhammad Taqī Bahār (1886–1951), the renowned poet laureate (*malik al-shu‘arā*) of early twentieth-century Iran.¹⁴ In a series of essays that advocated a “cultural return” (*bāzgasht-i adabī*) to the romanticized norms of a prelapsarian Iranian golden age, and further elaborated in a magisterial three-volume study of “Stylistics” (*sabk-shināsi*), Bahār introduced an entirely new vocabulary to the technical jargon of Indo-Persian literary criticism, centering on a novel metageographical terminology for classifying literary *sabks*, or “styles.”¹⁵ Like many modern critics, Bahār sought to disavow the poetry of the early modern period; but his lasting influence has rested more on the ingenious logic through which he attempted to absolve the Iranian national character of *tāza-gūī*’s perceived excesses. He contended that exposure, first to the Arabian, and then especially to the Indian, environments had enervated a once-pure Persian literary culture, inviting the “errors and tastelessness (*bī-salīqagī*) that have caused Persian prose to

wither [from] its natural and innate beauty.”¹⁶ He posited that the entirety of Persian literary cultural history could be broken up into three distinct “styles” (*sabks*), each of which was associated at successive historical stages with a corresponding geographical space: first Khurasan, then Iraq, and finally India. Bahār viewed these three regions’ periods of influence not as concurrent and cosmopolitan, but as sequential and deterministic, with each *sabk* diminishing in linguistic purity (and thus esthetic quality) over time. The *sabk-i Ālurāsānī*, which had the (metageographical) advantage of being both close in time to the ancient Sāsānid imperial legacy and relatively far in geographical space from Arabia, was said to have been simple and naturalistic, and to have bloomed under Central Asian dynasties like the Saffārids (861–1003), Sāmānids (875–999), Ghaznavids (962–1187), and early Saljūqs (1037–1194). As Mongol aggression caused these cultural centers to wane in power and influence, however, Bahār argued that the epicenter of Persophone patronage and cultural production shifted westward to Mesopotamia. The resulting “Iraqi Style” (*sabk-i ‘irāqī*), he claimed, replaced the heartfelt, sincere, clear-speaking (*sāda-gū’ī*) literature of the earlier phase with a new rhetorical excess and ostentatious formalist antics like rhymed prose (*saj‘*), literary puzzles (*mu‘ammā*), allegory (*tamas s ul*), and other types of “pedantic expressions” (*iqt ilā āt-i ‘ilmī*).¹⁷ According to Bahār these were not natural literary developments, but rather the deleterious result of too much patronage being in culturally hazardous proximity to the Arab heartland. Thus, even though many of the literati of this period are true luminaries of the classical canon—‘Attār, Khāqānī, Nizāmī Ganjavī, Sa‘dī, Rūmī, Hāfiz, Amīr Khusrau, and Hasan Dihlavī all come to mind—and despite the fact that they came from all over ‘Ajam, Bahār nevertheless

insisted that the defining feature of the period, no matter where any given poet was actually situated geographically, was a trend “toward imitation of the Arabs” (*ba taqlīd-i ‘arab*). The resulting literary defects only foreshadowed yet further deterioration to come with the arrival of the “Indian style” (*sabk-i hindī*) beginning in the sixteenth century, when the epicenter of the Persian literary world shifted east thanks to generous Mughal (and Deccan) patronage.

Despite being of such relatively recent vintage, Bahār’s metageographical terminology has nevertheless been so influential over the past century that a kind of mass amnesia has set in, as if the cosmopolitan perspective of the early modern *tāza* literati themselves simply never existed, or is somehow irrelevant to how we should approach their cultural history. Indeed, though prominent scholars like Muzaffar Alam and Paul Losensky have offered powerful correctives, it is not at all uncommon, even today, to read new scholarship on the period that does not even mention *tāza-gūī*, preferring instead to frame the period’s alleged excesses as a problem of “Indian elements”¹⁸ inciting poets to privilege “mental acrobatics” over “real life experience.”¹⁹ Really, though, the enduring problem with the *sabk-i hindī* paradigm has not just been its essentialist chauvinism—although that, too, is unfortunate—but rather its detachment of Indo-Persian literary periodization from any meaningful sense of historicity. To be sure, in casual usage the time frame of the “Indian style” tends to be associated with the *tāza* era that we will be discussing below, dating, in one scholar’s chronology, to “after about 1600.”²⁰ But many others have sought the style’s origins not at a particular moment in time, but in the work of a particular figure here or there. Thus, some will give the great Iranian poet ‘Urfī Shīrāzī

(1555–91) credit for “introducing *sabk-i Hindi*, the formalistic ‘Indian style’ into the Persian poetry of India,”²¹ while others will suggest that it was not ‘Urfī, but another Iranian, Bābā Fighānī Shīrāzī (d. 1519), who was “the founder of *Sabk-i Hindi*.”²²

One might well ask: how could Iranian poets like ‘Urfī and Fighānī introduce the “Indian style” to the Indian poets themselves? The answer, at least from the *sabk-i hindī* perspective, would go something like this. Hyperintellection is a primordial feature of “the Indian mind, which revels in abstraction.”²³ This “hair-splitting subtlety of the Indian mind”²⁴ is said to be what makes Indian literati (Hindus in particular) especially prone not only to produce, but also to appreciate esthetic formalism, artifice, and other fancy tricks, to a degree unthinkable in other places (or among non-Indian Muslims). From this perspective, *sabk-i hindī* is not just a particularly abstruse authorial style, but also an ontology of audience reception. That Fighānī’s and ‘Urfī’s poetry was “Indian” in its complexity is proven precisely by the fact that they found a receptive audience there (never mind that they were both appreciated elsewhere, too). But the question then becomes: how did these non-Indian poets begin to write such complex verse in the first place? The answer will usually recant the original premise and argue instead that Iranian “founders” like Fighānī and ‘Urfī were actually influenced by yet earlier “Indian style” poets who were, in fact, Indian. “From very early on,” we are told, “there developed a unique style of Indian Persian called *sabk-i hindi* (the Indian style), which incorporated Indian elements into the world of Persian literary culture ... [it] began modestly with early poets such as Mas‘ud Sa‘d Salman (d. ca. 1131) and Amir Khusrau (d. 1325), reaching maturity in the seventeenth century.”²⁵

Here *sabk-i hindī* no longer signifies a specific literary era, but rather some sort of deeper, timeless, civilizational pathology. Unfortunately, there is little consistency in actually diagnosing its symptoms. Often, “Indian” simply means “difficult” or “complex.” Thus, we might be told, Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān’s style was “Khurasani” whenever it was “simple” and “straightforward,” but suggestive of “the later intellectualized ‘Indian Style’” whenever it presented “difficulties of expression.”²⁶ Elsewhere, Amīr Khusrau’s fondness for wordplay (*īhām*) is flagged as a sign of the Indian style to come, because poetic ambiguity, while “present in Islamicate literary culture (and in Persian poetry) before Khusrau’s time ... arguably found more traction in Hinduism’s various medieval forms.”²⁷ It is this alleged (Hindu) will to complexity, born of India’s “special climate,” and so powerful that any exposure to it might “dazzle” and “overmaster” literati in other regions,²⁸ that is said to have been “transmitted” (*sirāyat kard*) like a virus to poets in Iraq and Khurasan such as Fighānī and ‘Urfī, in effect Indianizing their minds and poetic psyches from afar.²⁹

To some, however, *sabk-i hindī* is not an issue of stylistic complexity at all, but rather, simply, of Indophilia. The argument here is that by using India as a setting, or engaging Indic knowledge systems in any capacity, literati like Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān and Amīr Khusrau caused some sort of deviation from the classical norm. But one must remember, the “wonders of India” (*ajā’ib al-hind*) had already figured prominently in the wider commercial and cultural imagination of medieval Central and West Asia for centuries, even before Salmān and Khusrau came along.³⁰ And in any case, analytically speaking we must make a categorical distinction between literary Indophilia

at the level of content—something that even non-Indian poets like Rūmī, Sa‘dī, and Hāfiz engaged in—versus structural transformations at the level of language and form. Simply telling an Indian tale, or boasting of its charms did not, in itself, require a poet to use a more “difficult” Persian idiom, any more than Shakespeare using Italy as a setting for *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew* made those plays less comprehensible to an English audience than, say, *Henry V.*³¹

Others have suggested that Indic words are the real culprit, because medieval Indian poets were increasingly forced by circumstance to use “Hindawi words” in their compositions due to a steady loss of “pure Persian” competence.³² But this merely conflates linguistic apples with literary oranges. Language acquisition is not a zero-sum game, and mastery over a second (or third, or fourth) language does not negate expertise in a primary language. Moreover, Hindi words are not in and of themselves more abstruse than those of any other language, and a poet who uses *pānī* instead of *āb* to signify “water” might be making a tactical literary choice, but is not changing the formal rules of poetic composition, or altering Persian’s linguistic structure, just using a loan word.³³ And even if we were to grant the proposition, it is not at all clear how medieval Indian poets of such allegedly diminished linguistic competence would, in turn, be then able to traffic in the kind of abstruse poetry that is understood to have so dazzled their colleagues in faraway Shiraz and Herat. Nevertheless, in the teleology of *sabk-i hindī* it can be plausibly argued that Hindi words were a gateway to Hindu thought, until the entire Persian cosmopolis “succumbed to the influence of Indian customs and creeds, legends and mythology, romance and folk-lore.”³⁴ This premise is further reinforced by a slide into religious determinism, whereby Hindus are

deemed to have been more attuned to the “essentially pantheistic mind” than Indian Muslims—an argument that comes full circle with the claim that Indian-style expressions “reached their acme in the composition of the Hindu Munshīs [of the Mughal period].”³⁵

Now, obviously, the historical trajectory of Indian Persian literary culture has had its own particular inflection. But it is equally clear, I would like to suggest, that the term *sabk-i hindī* has occluded far more than it has illuminated. It sometimes refers to formal complexity, sometimes to novelty of content. It sometimes refers to authors, sometimes to audiences. It is applied to works that display Indophilic content, whenever, wherever, or by whomever they were written, even if they are stylistically “easy”; but then again it can be applied equally to works that are only “Indian” insofar as they are “difficult.” It confuses subtle changes in patterns of linguistic usage with radical shifts in literary taste. To some, it is the hyper-technical verbiage of erudite savants with too much time on their hands, while to others it is the diluted idiom of non-native speakers whose linguistic competence has been compromised by their religion (or even the religion of those around them). And finally, it designates a specific literary era—and yet it does not.

Indeed, it is no small irony that the concept of *sabk-i hindī*, by heaping opprobrium on early modern Indo-Persian literary culture to the point that a serious engagement with it is practically anathema to modern scholarship, has actually obscured our understanding of precisely the era it purports to explain. It obscures the fact that the *tāzā* esthetic was not simply about the “Indianization” of Persian poetry, at least not in the eyes of those who produced it. It obscures the fact that early modern audiences recognized multiple competing styles during the period, some “fresh,” some not. And

perhaps most ironically, it also obscures the fact that there was a classicist backlash against *tāza-gūī* even in its own time, one which anticipated the modernist critique by nearly three full centuries.

The question, then, is this: what do the cultural dynamics of early modern Indo-Persian literary culture look like if we simply jettison the term *sabk-i hindī*? A provisional response to this problem will occupy us for the remainder of this paper.

Tāza words for a *tāza* world

Let us begin by noting that we can actually trace the usage of the term *tāza* as a marker of poetic value with relative historical precision. In *Ma'ās ir-i Ra'īmī* (c. 1616–17), his chronicle of the court of the celebrated Mughal grandee 'Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān (1556–1627), the Iranian émigré 'Abd al-Bāqī Nahāwandī (1570–1637) claims that the first literati to use such terminology were those in the circle of Masīh al-Dīn “Hakīm” Abū al-Fath Gīlānī (d. 1589).³⁶ Abū al-Fath's father had been a local ecclesiastical authority in northern Iran, but had fallen out of favor when Shah Tahmāsp Safawī conquered his home province of Gilan in 1566–7, and eventually died in prison. Fearing similar treatment, Abū al-Fath, together with his brothers Hakīm Hamām and Hakīm Nūr al-Dīn, sought refuge in India, where all three managed to gain appointments in Emperor Akbar's service. Abū al-Fath never achieved an illustrious rank at the Mughal court, though the emperor was apparently quite fond of him, and he did distinguish himself in various governmental and military capacities before his death in 1589. But in any event, according to Nahāwandī his most lasting influence had clearly been literary:

important treatise on medical theory. He clearly had an eye for literary talent, though, and Nahāwandī mentions that Abū al-Fath was among the first in India to recognize ‘Urfi’s genius and secure patronage for him, while Faizī, for his part, exalts the Hakīm in one letter as a “second Plato” (*aflāt ūn-i s ānī*).⁴³

Prior to this historical moment no one seems to have ever used the term *tāza-gūī* to designate a poetic movement or particular era, much less both at once. One can find poetic precursors who influenced the *tāza* poets, of course, but never before had there been such a collective expression of literary newness across the Persophone world. This does not mean, however, that literary periodization itself was new, as Indo-Persian literati had been distinguishing between the poetry of the “ancients” (*mutaqaddimīn*) and the “later” (*muta’ākhira*) or “contemporary” (*mu’āhirīn*) poets for quite some time. Differentiating among different poetic styles was also not new. For instance, in some cases earlier critics referred to regional “schools,” or *dabistāns*, within the larger Persophone world.⁴⁴ These were not abstract, geographically deterministic categories along the lines of Bahār’s *sabks*, but rather usually referred to the work of specific poets or groups of poets at specific courts, or in certain urbane regional centers like Isfahan, Shiraz, Herat, Samarqand, and Delhi, at particular historical moments. Thus, for instance, the great north Indian Chishti Sufi Nizām al-Dīn Auliya (d. 1325) is reported to have advised Amīr Khusrau to write “in the manner of the Isfahanis” (*bar t arz-i ifahāniyān*)⁴⁵—not because Isfahan had some special claim to the authoritative Persian dialect, but because there was a clique of particularly talented poets from Isfahan during that era who were worth emulating. There were also several common terms that critics used to distinguish the styles of master poets. The modern Urdu literary

critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has noted, for instance, that the traditional way of classifying Indo-Persian literary styles could comfortably allow for multiple styles and fashions to co-exist in any given era. Drawing on Amīr Khusrau’s literary critical essay prefacing his *Dīwān-i Gūrrat al-Kamāl*, Faruqi shows that words like *tarz* (“manner”), *shewa* (“practice”), and *rawish* (“mode”)—the term that Nahāwandī uses above to denote the *tāza-gūī* movement—could all refer to subsets of conventional poetic style.⁴⁶ These might emphasize different aspects of the versifier’s craft, or be further calibrated to the influence of particular canonical poets. But, as in all literary criticism, the gradations among the compositional postures denoted by such terms could be very subjective, with considerable overlap across categories. Thus, a poet might see himself as a follower of one earlier master’s *rawish* in one genre, and another’s *shewa* in another genre. Amīr Khusrau is a case in point: for all his famed Indophilia, he considered himself a disciple of Sanā’ī and Khāqānī in certain didactic genres, but a follower of Nizāmī and Sa’dī in expressive forms like *masnawī* and *ghazal*.⁴⁷

Much of this earlier critical vocabulary continued to be used even after *tāza-gūī* came into vogue, and commentators continued to refer to the early modern literati as “the latest” (*muta’āhirīn*), or sometimes “the contemporary” (*mu’āhirīn*), generations well into the nineteenth century. But unlike a term like *muta’āhirīn*, which was for the most part strictly a temporal designation, the term *tāza* had a dual sense, announcing both an epochal transition and an unprecedented—albeit somewhat ambiguous—esthetic claim: the new age demanded a new, “refreshed” poetic sensibility, one that was, moreover, not merely the product of any individual genius, but the product

of a collective, “fresh” new world view. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commentators began increasingly to speak of the poetic *now*, and phrases indicating “the manner of our present age” (*tāz-i zamān-i mā*), or the “fresh mode of our era” (*rawish-i tāza dar ‘ahd-i mā*), and so on, became ever more common across the Indo-Persian world.⁴⁸

This by itself represented a strikingly new way of talking about Indo-Persian literary historicity. But it is equally clear that “making it new” in this context did not mean completely exploding the existing formal and thematic conventions that had made for good literature. Indeed, Nahāwandī never suggests that *tāza-gūyān* like Faizī and ‘Urfī had invented an entirely new *form* of poetry. Both were steeped in multiple classical traditions, and continued using the established meters, drawing from the existing array of Indo-Persian poetic tropes and themes such as the rose, the nightingale, the wine of mystical and worldly intoxication, the poet-lover’s angst at the unattainability of the B/beloved, and so on.⁴⁹ ‘Urfī was especially attuned to mystically speculative verse, a knack for expressing “gnostic yearning” (*‘ārīfāna-yi ‘āshiqāna*) that led “all the eloquent literati and poetic craftsmen to keep his *Dīwān* of *gāzals* and *qāzidas* with them day and night, attached to their bosoms as if it were a magic talisman.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile, much of ‘Urfī’s verse was in explicit homage to the poetry of past masters like Kamāl al-Dīn Isfahānī and Khāqānī, and he was especially renowned for his innovative emulations of the panegyrics (*qāzidas*) of the twelfth-century master of the form, Auhad al-Dīn Anwarī.⁵¹

In fact, as Paul Losensky has shown in his exhaustive analysis of the legacy of Bābā Fīghānī Shīrāzī, it was common practice during this period for poets to “greet,” or

“welcome” (*istiqbāl*), poets of earlier generations into their own oeuvre by writing “answers” (*jawābs*) to their predecessors’ greatest works.⁵² Poets had been writing such *jawābs* for centuries. For instance, Nizāmī Ganjavī’s collection of romantic epics was so widely admired and imitated across the Indo-Persian world that the mere mention of their number had the force of a proper name—“The Five” (*ḥamṣa*).⁵³ Amīr Khusrau wrote five *masnavis* attempting to outdo them, and ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī (d. 1492), the great poet from Herat, had, in turn, tried to outdo Khusrau. Still later Faizī, ‘Urfī, and several other *tāza-gūyān* all tried their hand at refreshing the same set of master texts. Usually such *jawābs* were expected to be in the same rhyme and metrical pattern as the original poem, imposing significant formal constraints on later poets. This also meant that for each succeeding generation “the dialectic between innovation and tradition, between poetic intention and literary convention” grew ever more acute, as it grew increasingly difficult to distinguish one’s self from the crowd of other imitators, past and present.⁵⁴ Fellow connoisseurs, many of whom might be composing rival *jawābs* of their own, would be equally familiar with both the master text(s) and all the earlier attempts to answer them; and in such a competitive atmosphere clever manipulation of wordplay, tropes, and conventional themes came to be at an increasingly high premium. But all of this, it must be remembered, continued to take place within the formal and thematic parameters of classical meter, rhyme, and convention. The goal was not to renounce the canon, but to “reevaluate, reform, and recreate the tradition in order to do it justice.”⁵⁵

Faizī’s oeuvre was perhaps even more wide-ranging than ‘Urfī’s, and similarly steeped in various classical traditions, although, thanks to the *sabk-i hindī* paradigm, he

has been viewed quite narrowly in some modern scholarship simply as an “Indianizer” of Persian. This is, in some ways, perhaps understandable, as even in his own time a lot of Faizī’s fame rested on his talent for adapting classical Indic texts such as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Bhāskara’s mathematical treatise *Līlāvātī*, and the romantic legend of Nala and Damayanti, into Persian.⁵⁶ But it is also important to remember that, while there was an especially robust culture of translating Indic knowledge into Persian under the Mughals, such Indophilia was, as noted above, hardly new to Perso-Islamic literary culture. As the painstaking research of Finbarr B. Flood and others has so well demonstrated, South, Central, and West Asia had been interconnected in a vast, transregional “mercantile cosmopolis” for centuries. People and ideas moved quite freely in this cosmopolitan world unhindered by modern boundary and identity controls, and among the various classes of merchants, men of war, religious pilgrims, craftsmen, artisans, literati, and other men of the pen who made their way to and through the subcontinent the “wonders of India” (*ajā’ib al-hind*) had always provided a fertile source of imaginative possibilities. It should not be surprising, then, that many early modern poets continued to use “exotic” aspects of Indian culture to expand their metaphorical repertoire, even when writing for Persianate audiences beyond the subcontinent. Moreover, by the literary standards of the age the mere act of incorporating Indic mythemes and cultural topoi into a Persian composition was not enough to make the work *tāza*. It might not hurt, but the poetry itself still had to convey an ill-defined—but no less necessary—blend of classical (Persian) allusiveness, verbal artistry, and inventive meaning. Thus Faizī’s Iranian contemporary Nau’ī Khabūshānī (d. 1609) explored *satī* as a metaphor for the apotheosis of romantic love in an epic called “Burning

and Melting” (*Sūz u Gudāz*). But even this “exotic” topos was hardly new, and besides, stylistically speaking Nau‘ī’s text is composed in a common meter, explicitly modeled on one of Nizāmī’s *□□amsa*.⁵⁷ Such compositions always existed in multiple literary contexts and genealogies, and for many commentators in the Persian literary audience, specifically, the use of Indic literary topoi, or the occasional Hindi word, barely elicited comment. Thus in *Ma’ās ir-i Ra□īmī*, Nau‘ī is praised generally for the “colorful meanings (*ma’ānī-yi rangīn*) and heartfelt poems that sprang from his passionate nature,” traits which made him “distinguished and exceptional among the fresh speakers of the current age (*tāza-gūyān-i īn zamān*).”⁵⁸ And yet Nahāwandī is notably silent on the “Indianness” of *Sūz u Gudāz*, saying simply that “[Nau‘ī] has adorned the fabric of a *mas nawī* in the meter of [Nizāmī’s] *□□usrau wa Shīrīn*, called ‘Burning and Melting’, with glittering ornaments, and done it extremely well.”⁵⁹ What was noteworthy about *Sūz u Gudāz*, in other words, was not its subject matter but rather its expert use of language and its location within the taxonomy of Persian literary canonical precedents.

Indeed, no matter which classical tradition one was attempting to rejuvenate, the goal was, in Faizī’s words, to stretch the “old words” (*lafz -i kuhan*) so as to produce “new meanings” (*ma’ānī-yi nau*), a principle that applied equally whether one was drawing from Indic or Perso-Islamic traditions. Faizī, for instance, was also one of the most accomplished Arabic savants of his day, something he tried to prove by penning an extensive commentary on the *Qur’ān*. What made this routine exegesis “fresh,” however, was the fact that Faizī managed to compose the entire text using only undotted letters.⁶⁰ Then, as if to prove that this extraordinary feat was no fluke, Faizī

also wrote an entire treatise on ethics in which he did the reverse, using only letters *with* dots. Meanwhile, in his more conventional Persian poetry, even when he played with the concept of *tāzagī*, Faizī’s *gāzals* were overwhelmingly imbued with classical Indo-Persian poetic conceits, particularly the anguish of mystical love, or ‘*ishq*.

My heart burns from a fresh scar (*dāg-i tāza*)

Once again, it’s trapped in a house of fire.<xen>⁶¹</xen>

The fresh martyrs (*tāza shahīdān*) of the beloved’s wink gain new life;

For the sword of love reanimates the victims of sacrifice.<xen>⁶²</xen>

It’s a bit difficult to convey in English, but neither of these verses is eccentrically “Indianized” in any demonstrable way, nor do they contain any Hindi words. On the contrary, however clever their conceits might be, stylistically they are perfectly conventional. Elsewhere, Faizī sometimes engaged parochially in the art of “self-exaltation” (*ta‘allī*) vis-à-vis his cosmopolitan rivals, but even then he was apt to couch the boast in the language of a Sufi ‘*āshiq*:

Do not seek the road to abstention from Faizī

For this instructor [on the path] of Love (murshid-i ‘*ishq*)

Must lead the Persians on the way to the tavern lane.<xen>⁶³</xen>

None of this represents literary or linguistic Indianization in the simplistic way imagined by the *sabk-i hindī* paradigm. To be sure, Faizī certainly had a clear sense of pride in his Indian identity; but he also saw himself and India as full participants in the Persophone

ecumene, and considered *tāza-gūī* to be a movement generated by a transregional avant-garde. Hence his praise for Muhtasham Kāshānī, an Iranian poet whom he apparently never even met:

The silk-spinner of expression is a great man (muhtasham) in Kashan,
Who embroiders his eloquence with a fresh technique (*tāza* - *arz-i*
tāza).<xen>64</xen>

And hence too his confidence in drawing on the deep civilizational connection between India and ancient Persia to claim both traditions:

I might be Indian, but even so, through sheer talent
I claim the championship (pahlawānī) among those whose language is
Pahlawi.<xen>65</xen>

Even Faizī's forays into explicitly Indic literary topoi were often framed in terms that a broad audience across the Persophone ecumene could make sense of. Thus in the epilogue to *Nal-Daman* he locates the tale as part of the universal "story of Love" (*Qadīs -i 'ishq*), invokes Khizr as his guide, describes himself as a modern Bārbud—the medieval Persian musician proverbial for his lilting melodies—and claims that a hundred nightingales would croon that "an 'Iraqi rose has blossomed in India."⁶⁶ The subject matter itself might have been Indophilic, in other words, but the form is classical, and the Indian elements are artfully transcreated for a transregional cosmopolitan audience. Indeed, Faizī insists in the same passage that his poetic character was drawn as much from Ganja as it was from Delhi, yet another clear

indication that he too sought to measure himself against the classical standard set by Nizāmī Ganjavī.⁶⁷

The era’s widespread “treasure hunt for new themes and meanings,”⁶⁸ in other words, was one in which poets were expected to modulate, not overthrow, the cosmopolitan traditions they had inherited. This is why most of the poets lauded in *Ma’ās ir-i Raḡīmī* as talented “fresh speakers” are noted not for tackling a particular subject matter, or for embodying a particular literary lineage, or for hailing from a particular place, but rather for contributing general traits and gestures of ingenuity that built on the classical canon. Nazīrī Nīshāpūrī (ca. 1560–1614) is commended for giving voice to “elusive meanings and complex themes” (*ma’ āmī-yi gḡarība wa ma’ āmīn-i mushkila*), a talent which made him the “captain of eloquent poets and the commander of lovers of genuine expression.”⁶⁹ The account of Nūr al-Dīn Muhammad Zuhūrī (d. 1615) insists that “by raining down excellence and grace, the clouds of his lofty nature gushed artistry and accomplishment, as he made the springtime of words and meaning and the garden of eloquence and subtlety lush and verdant.” Notably, Nahāwandī adds that despite his ingenuity Zuhūrī’s verse was widely respected for being “free of formal excess and ostentation” (*bī- gḡā’ila-yi takalluf wa shā’iba-yi tasalluf*).⁷⁰

Even among Hindu poets, in whom the essentialist premises of *sabk-i hindī* would lead us to expect maximal Indianization of form and content, the early modern quest for novelty was almost always articulated specifically in terms of *tāzagī*. For instance, in this couplet from Chandar Bhān Brahman (d. 1662), the celebrated *munshī* and litterateur of

Shāh Jahān’s reign, the announcement of having written a “fresh lyric” (*gāzāl-i tāza*) itself constitutes the performance of *tāza-gūī*:

Surely the words must have alit from skies above

For such a fresh lyric (*gāzāl-i tāza*) to have found my tongue
today.<xen>⁷¹</xen>

Like Faizī’s above, this couplet is neither abstruse nor eccentrically Indian, but it is, nevertheless, eminently “fresh” according to the demands of the age—on some level, saying was doing, and the claim to be modern, the self-awareness of participating in the newness of the moment, was as important as the actual demonstration of one’s esthetic virtuosity. Of course, in most cases the poets did work to synchronize the superficial assertion of *tāza-gūī* with superb technical ingenuity, as in this verse:

O Brahman, plant a fresh theme in a fresh refrain (*radīf-i tāza*);

A new shoot always looks prettier in new ground (*nau zamīn*).<xen>⁷²</xen>

Here the call to newness on the straightforward, literal level is enlivened by the play on the word *zamīn*, which simply means “earth,” “ground,” etc., but also has a technical literary meaning, namely the prosodic “ground” specifying a *gāzāl*’s formal pattern. Thus, the literal ground for planting new flowers functions simultaneously as the literary ground through which the poet deploys his “fresh themes” (*ma‘āzāl-i tāza*).

Chandar Bhān's claims to *tāzagī* were also far more likely to wield allusions from the classical Indo-Persian canon than anything from Indian mythology. Here, for instance, he invokes Majnūn, the prototypical mad lover of Sufi and romantic tradition:

It's been ages since there's been any trace of the ways of Majnūn;
This ancient lifestyle (rasm-i kuhna) shall be refreshed (tāza shawad) in my
era.<xen>⁷³</xen>

And again here:

I'll give just one whiff of the tips of your tresses to the lunatics (junūn) [of love]
And thus, through me, the ways of the lineage (silila) [of Majnūn] will be
refreshed (tāza shawad).<xen>⁷⁴</xen>

Without knowing beforehand that these four lines were Chandar Bhān's, one might struggle in vain to decipher where (and by whom) they could have been written, because really they could have been written anywhere in the Indo-Persian ecumene. But given the poet's insistence on producing *tāzagī*, there can be little doubt about *when* they were written.

This buzz surrounding *tāza-gū'ī* continued throughout the seventeenth century, and is reflected in many different types of sources. Muhammad Sālih Kambūh, the prolific historian of Shāh Jahān's reign (1628–58), lauds a number of his contemporaries for their fresh compositions in his '*Amal-i □āli□*.<xen>⁷⁵</xen> A generation later, Muhammad Afzal Sarkhwush (d. 1714) also praised a great many poets as *tāza-gūyān* in

his biographical compendium *Kalimāt al-Shu‘arā*, and begins with his own ode to poetic expression (*suḥḥān*):

Suḥḥān is the soul, so listen, my dears, to the following discourse;

If you want a fresh soul (*jān-i tāza*) with every passing moment, hear now of

suḥḥān.⁷⁶

Losensky has also cited scores of examples from various poets, for instance these four couplets from Tālib Āmulī (d. ca. 1625–7), Sā’ib Tabrīzī (d. 1676), and Kalīm Kāshānī (d. 1651):

Like the garden of time,

I am an old rosebed, Tālib.

My fresh spring (*bahār-i tāza*)

is my new meaning.

We are, Tālib, the seeker

after the nightingale of melodious hymns.

The fresh manner (*rawish-i tāza*)

is our creation.

Whoever, like Sā’ib, is an old acquaintance

of the new style (*tarz-i tāza*)

speaks with the verve

of the nightingale of Amul [i.e. Tālib Āmulī]’s garden.

If the market for poetry’s wares
is depressed these days, Kalīm,
make the style fresh (*tāza kun t arz*)
so it catches the buyer’s eye.⁷⁷

Among these three, Sā’ib is probably the best known today, and is widely regarded as someone in whom “the ingenuity and cerebral juggling of sufistic and pseudo-philosophical themes characteristic of the ‘Indian’ style reach their climax.”⁷⁸ But once again, a closer look reveals that Sā’ib’s career is actually a perfect illustration of what is wrong with the *sabk-i hindī* paradigm. Sā’ib was already in his thirties when he arrived in Mughal India, via a sojourn in Kabul, making it quite a stretch to give India either credit or blame for his poetic style. Plus, he only stayed in the subcontinent for seven years (ca. 1625–32) before returning to Isfahan, where he lived out the next four decades.⁷⁹ And when he compiled his voluminous personal anthology (*bayān*) of favorite poets and poetry, the overwhelming majority of entries are the work of established canonical masters, with barely a few folios at the end dedicated to Sā’ib’s own contemporaries.⁸⁰ Far from rejecting the classical tradition, in other words, even the most avant-garde poets of the *tāza* era saw it as the foundation upon which their fresh esthetic was built.

Modulating and contesting the fresh style

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, an accomplished Hindu *munshī* of Aurangzeb’s reign named Nik Rai (b. 1670) describes in his memoir, *Taḥkirat al-Safar wa Tuḥfat al-Zafar*, the way he had studied the oeuvres of earlier generations of *tāza* poets like ‘Urfī, Sā’ib, and Mīrzā Jalāl Asīr. Nik Rai includes some of his own verses, too, which he says are in the mode of Sā’ib, but he also points out that there were vigorous debates (*munāz irāt*) between the *tāza-gūyān* and some of their critics.⁸¹ Indeed, one of the most overlooked aspects of this entire era is that the critical reception of *tāza-gūī* was far from uniform, even at the peak of its popularity. For one thing, there were clearly multiple different styles within the parameters of *tāza-gūī*. Some commentators considered Sā’ib, for instance, to have created a whole new brand of poetry. Meanwhile, beginning around mid-century, contemporary critics started taking note of yet another new poetic idiom which they began referring to as the “imaginative style” (*tarz-i ḥayāl*). These developments were summed up neatly by the noted eighteenth-century philologist and critic, Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Ārzū (1689–1756):

When Mīrzā Muhammad ‘Alī Sā’ib appeared on the scene, literary expression entered a whole new world ... Many of his contemporaries like Mīrzā Jalāl Asīr Shahrīstānī and Mullā Qāsim Mashhadī, better known as “Dīwānā,” took a new path, calling their style the “imaginative style” (*tarz-i ḥayāl*). Because of the fanciful imaginative possibilities of the age, they produced many poems that are altogether meaningless (*bī-ma‘nī*).

When some of the Indian poets, such as Shāh Nāsir ‘Alī [Sirhindī], Mīrẓā ‘Abd al-Qādir Bedil, and Irādat Khān Wāzih, took a liking to Asīr and Qāsim, they added yet another hue [to this new style], and carved out many more fresh thoughts and expressions (□□ayālāt wa ‘ibārāt-i tāza tarāshīdand).<xen>⁸²</xen>

Bedil is yet another poet routinely touted in modern scholarship as representing the pinnacle of Indian-style abstraction.<xen>⁸³</xen> Yet clearly at least some of Bedil’s contemporaries viewed him as part of a new movement, distinct from *tāza-gūī*, and distinct even from Sā’ib’s neo-*tāza* style. Note, too, that whatever its eccentricities, the Indian poets were not even viewed as the progenitors of this new *tāza-gūī* □□ayāl, at least not according to Ārzū.<xen>⁸⁴</xen> We might also detect an echo of this imaginative turn in other late seventeenth-century works, for instance in the title of an important compendium of literary biographies and other essays by an Afghan named Sher Khān Lodī, the “Mirror of the Imagination” (*Mir’āt al-□□ayāl*, 1690–1), and possibly even in the name for the musical genre known as □□ayāl, which was emerging as a popular form at precisely this historical moment.<xen>⁸⁵</xen>

Contrary to what the *sabk-i hindī* model would lead us to expect, in other words, there were multiple ways of classifying literary newness and imagination among seventeenth-century Indo-Persian cognoscenti, most of which hinged on stylistic judgments above all else. It is clear too that early modern audiences, anticipating the complaints of later critics, felt that there were limits to how far one should go in terms of

verbal ostentation, as the line between ingenious “meaning creation” (*ma‘nī-āfrīnī*) and trafficking in “meaningless” (*bī-ma‘nī*) nonsense could be a fine one. In fact, the esthetics of *tāza-gūī* were being contested all along, as some poets pushed the limits of metaphorical and semantic possibility, while other poets and commentators criticized them for overdoing it. Already in *Ma‘ās ir-i Ra‘īmī* (1616), though the author admired the poet Husain Sanā‘ī Khurāsānī’s intricate expressions, he also noted that many contemporaries were often unable to understand Sanā‘ī’s strained verse, at times ridiculing his “inaccessible language” (*nā-rasā‘ī-yi lafz*).⁸⁶ Of Maulānā Haidarī, Nahāwandī gripes: “he used to just imitate the manner and mode of his mentor Maulānā Lisānī’s expressions, and had no taste for the latest poetic fashion (*rawish-i muta‘ā irīn*).”⁸⁷ Kamāl al-Dīn Jismī of Hamadan is said to have written too many “difficult and overly intricate verses” (*ash‘ār-i mushkila daqīqa bisyār*) even for sophisticated contemporary audiences, and thus, though he liked Jismī personally, Nahāwandī concedes that “his oeuvre must be excused for the immaturity, nonsensicality, and all the other flaws that the work of *tāza-gūyān* in this day and age may be prone to.”⁸⁸

In short, as in any age of literary ingenuity, not everyone was enamored of *tāza-gūī*, and even aficionados like Nahāwandī did not simply indulge bad poetry just because it was experimental or provocative. They too sometimes puzzled over particularly abstruse verses, and there was an ongoing negotiation, in the courts, the literary salons, and the bazaars, over what constituted the appropriate way(s) to deploy poetic originality. Nahāwandī’s comment about Jismī shows, moreover, that astute commentators recognized that the esthetic logic of *tāzagī* was itself part of the problem. Taken to

extremes, it always carried the potential, especially in less talented poets, to cross over into nonsense and absurdity.

Consider, moreover, that one of *tāza-gūī*'s harshest contemporary critics was, in fact, an Indian, Abū al-Barakāt Munīr Lahorī (1610–44). In a sharply worded essay called *Kārnāma* (“Book of Deeds”), Munīr takes aim squarely at four literary titans of the previous generation, ‘Urfī Shīrāzī (d. 1591), Tālib Āmulī (d. 1626), Mullā Zalālī Khwānsarī (d. ca. 1615), and Nūr al-Dīn Muhammad Zuhūrī (d. 1616), all Iranian émigrés. He begins courteously enough, imagining a literary assembly in which he himself sat quietly in a corner, listening to the discussions, as the conversation turned to comparisons of the new poets with the literati of previous generations (*su□□anwarān-i peshīn*).⁸⁹ Some praise ‘Urfī for being the “master of the fresh manner” (*□ā□ib-i t arz-i tāza*), while others praise Tālib Āmulī for “giving new life to those who express fresh meanings” (*tāza-guftār-i ma‘nī rā jān dāda*), and so on.⁹⁰ The attendees go on to proclaim that earlier poets like Mīr Razī Dānish Mashhadī, Kamāl al-Dīn Isfahānī, Amīr Khusrau, and Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān—i.e. two Iranians, two Indians—had they been alive in this era, would have been like mere students learning at the feet of these four modern masters. This is too much for Munīr, who, as the “wielder of the mirror of justice” (*āyina-dār-i in□āf*), finally speaks up and appeals to people of fair conscience (*in□āf-□amīrān*) to put a stop to such hubris. “Do not elevate these purveyors of the ‘fresh’ over the ancients,” he implores, begging his colleagues not to continue such prideful “infidelity (*kufīr*) against the path of justice.”⁹¹ Then, his plea falling on deaf ears, Munīr decides to argue the case in writing. He acknowledges that some might see his attacks as a violation of “the etiquette of universal concord”

(*shewa-i* □*ul*□*i kull*); but he hopes, nonetheless, that those “who understand literature in India and comprehend meaning in Iran” (*su*□□*an-shināsān-i hind wa ma‘nī rasān-i īrān*) will excuse his speaking the truth bluntly.<xen>⁹²</xen>

What follows is a meticulous critique of various couplets by the four authors in question, framed as a classicist corrective against the excesses of *tāza-gūī*. It is not that Munīr is opposed to poetic ingenuity as such, so much as critical of innovation for its own sake, particularly when it produces verses so outré that they are ineffective, or simply don’t make sense. Some are criticized for the same sin of “inaccessible language” (*nārasā’ī-yi lafz*) that Nahāwandī had also cautioned against, while others are lampooned for having conceits so far-fetched that they are *shutur-gurba*—like comparing “camels to cats.” In some cases Munīr’s objections regard usage and grammar, for instance the discussion of what he considers to be ‘Urfī’s incorrect use of the word *nuq*□*ānī*.<xen>⁹³</xen> Elsewhere he quibbles about word choice, as when he suggests that the imagery of one of Zuhūrī’s verses would have been more powerful if he had used the phrase “world of water” (‘*ālam-i āb*) instead of “torrent of wine” (*sail-i sharāb*).<xen>⁹⁴</xen> The approach, in other words, is detailed and scholarly, emphasizing the technical minutiae of the poet’s craft in a witty, occasionally even sarcastic tone.

It has been suggested that what these complaints actually reflect is a growing “ethnic-professional” rivalry between Indian and Iranian intellectuals at the Mughal court, as an ever larger number of Iranian émigrés “sought to advance their lot by questioning the linguistic competence of the poets of Indian descent,” prompting a backlash among Indian poets and other literati.<xen>⁹⁵</xen> There is, undoubtedly,

some truth to this assessment. In a short epilogue to *Kārnāma*, Munīr complains openly of the way which, in his estimation, Mughal patrons fawned over Iranian émigrés at the expense of talented Indian poets like himself. This complaint was not, however, as nativist as it might first appear. For one thing, the bulk of Munīr’s argument—which, let us remember, is explicitly addressed to the literati of *both* Iran and India—is framed not in ethnic terms but specifically in terms of defending classicalism against the excesses of *tāza-gūī*.⁹⁶ Nowhere does he even hint that classical poetic norms and conventions should be “Indianized” in the way imagined by the *sabk-i hindī* thesis; on the contrary, his point is precisely that literary competence in a cosmopolitan language like Persian is not region specific, citing as evidence the popularity and gracious reception of Indian poets like Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān, Abū al-Faraj Rūnī, Amīr Khusrau, Hasan Dehlavī, and Faizī in the wider Persianate world.⁹⁷ The problem in his era, as Munīr saw it, was that patrons were beginning to privilege Iranians as “native speakers” in a historically unprecedented way, and thereby undermining the traditional hospitality of ‘*Ajam*’s cosmopolitan literary culture. Pointing out the errors of Iranian poets like ‘Urfī, *et al.*, was a way of illustrating that even Iranians were not infallible when it came to errors in grammar, usage, and esthetic taste, while, concomitantly, erudite Indian poets and literati with classical training were perfectly competent to critique such errors. In short, while Munīr’s literary argument was conservative, his cultural argument represented a plea for cosmopolitan egalitarianism over parochial favoritism.

Conclusion

In this light, while it is true that the growing rivalry between Indian and Iranian intellectuals during this period was a critical historical factor that remains in need of much more scholarly attention, it is equally clear that the larger contestation of the fresh style did not play out solely in those terms. Other, non-Indian, literati also criticized *tāza* poets of various stripes for their “inaccessible language,” while conversely plenty of Indian-born intellectuals continued to express admiration for the *tāza* esthetic in general, and Iranian poets like ‘Urfī, Tālib Āmulī, Sā’ib, Kalīm Kāshānī, and Muhammad Jān Qudsī in particular. Munīr’s complaints, therefore, though clearly significant, were hardly representative among all Indian-born intellectuals.

Sure enough, we may conclude by noting that Munīr’s position in *Kārnāma* was openly rebuked a few decades later by another Indian, Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Ārzū, in an essay aptly titled *Sirāj-i Munīr* (“A Light on Munīr”).⁹⁸ Ārzū acknowledged that some of Munīr’s criticisms of “the latest poets” (*shu‘arā-yi muta’āllimān*)⁹⁹ were valid, but nonetheless faulted his predecessor’s repudiation of *tāza-gūī* as a squeamish failure of imagination. The task of poets, after all, had always been to innovate and stretch the possibilities of linguistic meaning. Ārzū made a point, too, of chiding Munīr’s sarcastic tone as an unproductive breach of scholarly decorum, noting at one point that “no progress can be achieved through glibness (*charb-zabānī*).”¹⁰⁰ More important, as Ārzū painstakingly demonstrated, was the fact that many of the “fresh” usages and conceits that Munīr had criticized as outrageous crimes against poetic language could actually be supported by examples from the classical canon. In a bravura display of literary critical philology—all the while insisting, notably, that his methodology was entirely objective and “free of

bias” (□□āḷ az ta’a□□ub)<xen>¹⁰¹</xen>—Ārzū provided exhaustive rejoinders to every one of Munīr’s objections. Many of these run to several pages, as Ārzū corroborates the contested *tāza* usages through authoritative attestations, or *sanads*, from past masters whose linguistic and esthetic credentials were beyond dispute: Anwarī, Rūdakī, Kamāl Isfahānī, Khāqānī, Nizāmī Ganjavī, Amīr Khusrau, Sa’dī, and Faizī, to name a few. Implicit in Ārzū’s argument, in fact, is a telling verdict: it is precisely Munīr’s imperfect mastery of the ancients that hinders his appreciation of the moderns.

Here, then, we have an Indian philologist wielding profound classical erudition to defend the modernist tendencies of Iranian *tāza-gūyān* against a conservative attack lodged by another Indian who saw himself, ironically enough, as an avowed champion of the very same classical canon later employed to refute him. Given this tremendous deference to the earlier tradition, imagine the surprise of all concerned if they were somehow granted a glimpse into a future in which they were remembered simply as typical of an age characterized by mass “alienation of the poets from the old established masters.”<xen>¹⁰²</xen> Imagine the look on Munīr’s face if he were to read in a modern reference work that his literary style and ‘Urfī’s were both of a piece, merely reflecting “standard features of the Persian lyrical style known as *sabk-e hendī*.”<xen>¹⁰³</xen> And imagine how oddly it would strike Ārzū to hear another of his essays, *Tanbīh al-Gāfilīn*, described as “an essay in defense of *Sabk-e Hendī*.”<xen>¹⁰⁴</xen> The fact that one has to conjure a different meaning of the term *sabk-i hindī* for each of these statements even to make sense is proof, if any more were needed, that the very category is simply inadequate for capturing the sophistication of these intellectuals’ literary world.

Indeed, there is an uncanny synchronicity to the fact that ‘Abd al-Rahman Jāmī of Herat—“universally regarded as the last eminent figure in the history of classical Persian literature”¹⁰⁵—died in 1492, the year of Columbus’s discovery of the New World. Several hundred years of vibrant, cosmopolitan Indo-Persian literary and intellectual production were yet to follow, much of which not only participated in, but also made potent contributions to, the “connected” intellectual histories of global early modernity.¹⁰⁶ And yet, for nearly a century this rich archive has all too often been walled off by a self-defeating scholarly embargo—not just in Iran, but also in Europe, in America, and even, surprisingly enough, in India and Pakistan— under the flimsy pretext that it was all too “Indian,” too Hindi, or too Hindu to be anything more than an embarrassment that should be repudiated when spoken of at all. This has had devastating consequences not just for the study of Indian Persian literary culture, specifically, but also for the study of South, Central, and West Asian cultural modernity generally. And so, if we are ever to bring the vast Persophone literary tradition into the wider scholarly conversation about various “alternative modernities,” then it is precisely such “homeless texts” from the age of *tāzā-gūī* that call out for further scrutiny.¹⁰⁷ For that to happen, needless to say, an entirely new critical vocabulary will be necessary, and, as I have tried to suggest, maybe taking a fresh look at the world of the fresh poets would be an ideal place to start.

Notes

<fn-group type=“endnotes”>

1 There is a substantial bibliography of existing scholarship on these themes, far too lengthy to list here. On the influence of the *ahlī* tradition on Mughal ideology, see Muzaffar Alam, “*Ahlī* Norms and Mughal Governance,” in Muzaffar Alam, Françoise “Nalini” Delvoe, and Marc Gaborieau (eds) *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar; Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2000, pp. 67–95; Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 26–80. On the role of Tūsī, specifically, in the formulation of Akbar’s imperial ethos, see also Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Kingdom, Household, and Body: History, Gender, and Imperial Service under Akbar,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 2007, vol. 41, no. 5, pp. 889–923. For the general context, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan,” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 131–98; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State, 1526–1750*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

2 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Turning the Stones Over: Sixteenth-Century Millenarianism from the Tagus to the Ganges,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2003, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 129–61.

3 Some conservative Mughal intellectuals, like the historian ‘Abd al-Qādir Bādāyūnī (d. ca. 1615), explicitly used such millenarian discourse to critique Akbar’s humanistic policies of *ulūl-i kull* as too open to heterodox influences. See for instance A. Azfar Moin, “Challenging the Mughal Emperor: The Islamic Millennium according to ‘Abd al-Qadir Badayuni,” in B. Metcalf (ed.) *Islam in South Asia in Practice*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 390–402. Others, like the famed Naqshbandi Sufi Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) who boldly cast himself as the “Renewer of the Second Millennium” (*mujaddid-i alf-i s ānī*), drew energy from the moment to couch their own mystical visionary claims in terms of messianic reform. For a bibliography of further reading on Sirhindī and a recent reconsideration of his career and milieu, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs, and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 2009, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 135–74. For comparison with the Safavid context, see for instance Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. And for the Ottoman context, see Cornell Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in

the Reign of Süleymân,” in *Soliman le Magnifique et son Temps*, Gilles Veinstein (ed.), 1992, Paris: La Documentation Française, pp. 159-77; Kaya Şahin, “Constantinople and the End Time: The Ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Last Hour,” *Journal of Early Modern History*, 2010, vol. 14, pp. 317–54.

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<en><label>4</label>Sheldon Pollock, “New Intellectuals in Seventeenth-Century India,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2001, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 3–31. </en>

<en><label>5</label>An excellent bibliography of additional research dealing with various aspects of Sanskrit *navya* can also be found on the “Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism” website, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks/papers/index.html> (accessed 28 September 2010). See in particular the articles by Yigal Bronner, Lawrence McCrea, Christopher Minkowski, and Gary Tubb. On early modern regional *kāvya*, see Yigal Bronner and David Shulman, “‘A Cloud Turned Goose’: Sanskrit in the Vernacular Millenium,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2006, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 1–30.</en>

<en><label>6</label>On the concept of the “vernacular millenium,” see Sheldon Pollock, “India in the Vernacular Millenium: Literary Culture and Polity, 1000–1500,” *Daedalus*, 1998, vol. 127, no. 3, pp. 41–74; *Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 283–436. For a general overview of developments in literary Hindi, specifically, see for instance Stuart McGregor, “The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Transregional Idiom,” in Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Literary Cultures and History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 912–57. On Sufi romances in Awadhi Hindi see Shantanu Phukan, “Through a Persian Prism: Hindi and Padmavat in the Mughal Imagination,” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2000; “Through Throats where Many Rivers Meet: The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2001, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 33–58; Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, *Madhumālāṭī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. </en>

<en><label>7</label>McGregor, “Progress of Hindi,” pp. 919–32.</en>

<en><label>8</label>Allison Busch, “Hidden in Plain View: Brajbhasha Poets at the Mughal Court.” *Modern Asian Studies*, 2010, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 267–309; *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (forthcoming).</en>

<en><label>9</label>There is only a small handful of modern scholarly works that deal, specifically, with the history and poetics of the *tāza-gū’ī* movement in terms that the early modern literati themselves would have recognized. In Urdu, see for instance S. M. ‘Abdullāh’s essays “Tāza-gū’ī: Ek Adabi Taqārīk” and “Sabk-i Hindī aur Isti‘māl-i Hind,” in *Fārsī Zabān-o-Adab: Majmū‘ah-i Maqālāt*, Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-yi Adab, 1977, pp. 114–41. For the larger historical context, see Muzaffar Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan”; Muzaffar Alam, “Pursuit of Persian”; and Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam*, pp. 115–40. On the poetics of *tāza-gū’ī* from the Persian literary theoretical perspective, see Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal*, Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 1998, esp. pp. 193–249. S. R. Faruqi’s “A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-i Hindi,” *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 2004, vol. 29, pp. 1–93, is another outstanding overview of the poetics of the period, although it retains much of the terminology that I critique below.</en>

<en><label>10</label>For the modernist rebuke of Braj *rīti* literature, see Busch, “Hidden in Plain View,” and relevant portions of *Poetry of Kings*. On the modernist response to early modern Persian and Urdu, see below, as well as S. R. Faruqi, “Unprivileged Power: The Strange Case of Persian (and Urdu) in Nineteenth-Century India,” *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 1998, vol. 13, pp. 3–30; S. R. Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001; Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; see also Pritchett and Faruqi’s respective introductions to their translation of Muhammad Husain Āzād, *Āb-e Qayāt: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001. On the widespread modernist rejection and neglect of post-Gupta Sanskrit literature, see Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.</en>

<en><label>11</label>Ironically enough, many nineteenth-century South Asian critics actually agreed with the Iranian claim. For details, see Faruqi, “Unprivileged Power”; Rajeev Kinra, “Fresh Words for a Fresh World: *Tāza-Gū’ī* and the Poetics of Newness in Early Modern Indo-Persian Poetry,” *Sikh Formations*, 2007, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 125-49.</en>

<en><label>12</label>For a discussion of these nuances, see ‘Abdullāh, “Sabk-i Hindī aur Isti‘māl-i Hind,” pp. 127–30.</en>

<en><label>13</label>Momin Mohiuddin, “Sabk-i Hindī (The Indian Style of Persian Prose), with Special Reference to Inshā,” *Indo-Iranica*, 1960, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 19–30.</en>

<en><label>14</label>For details on Bahār’s life and scholarship, see Matthew C. Smith, “Literary Courage: Language, Land and the Nation in the Works of Malik al-Shu‘arā Bahār,” PhD diss., Harvard, 2006; “Literary Connections: Bahār’s Sabkshenāsi and the Bāzgasht-e Adabi,” *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 2009, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 194–209; Wali Ahmadi “The Institution of Persian Literature and the Genealogy of Bahār’s Stylistics,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2004, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 141–52. </en>

<en><label>15</label>Muhammad Taqī Bahār, *Sabk-Shināsī: Yā, Tārīkh-i Tatāwwur-i Nasr-i Fārsī*, 3 vols., Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Khudkār, 1942; “Bāzgasht-i Adabi,” reprinted in Muhammad Gulban (ed.) *Bahār va Adab-i Fārsī: Majmū‘ah-i Yak-sad Maqālah az Malik al-Shu‘arā Bahār*, vol. 1, Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-yi Kitāb-hā-yi Jībī, 1972, pp. 43–66.</en>

<en><label>16</label>Quoted as translated in Ahmadi, “Institution of Persian Literature,” pp. 144–5.</en>

<en><label>17</label>Bahār, “Bāzgasht-i Adabī,” pp. 45–6. For a less tendentious overview of prose styles during the period roughly corresponding to Bahār’s *sabk-i Qurāsānī* and *sabk-i ‘irāqī*, see I. A. Zilli, “Development of *Insha* Literature to the End of Akbar’s Reign,” in Muzaffar Alam, Françoise “Nalini” Delvoe, and Marc Gaborieau (eds) *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar; Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2000, pp. 309–49.</en>

<en><label>18</label>Jan Rypka, “History of Persian Literature up to the Beginning of the 20th Century,” in Jan Rypka et al., *History of Iranian Literature*, Karl Jahn (ed.), Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968, pp. 295–6.</en>

<en><label>19</label>Ehsan Yarshater, “The Indian or Safavid Style: Progress or Decline?,” in Ehsan Yarshater (ed.) *Persian Literature*, Albany, NY: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988, pp. 249–88.</en>

<en><label>20</label>Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 23.</en>

<en><label>21</label>John Stewart Bowman (ed.), *Columbia Chronologies of Asian History and Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 343. </en>

<en><label>22</label>Karim Najafī Barzegar, *Mughal-Iranian Relations during Sixteenth Century*, Delhi: Indian Bibliographies Bureau, 2000, p. 200.</en>

<en><label>23</label>Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” p. 48. As I noted above, Faruqi is (along with Losensky) perhaps the most accomplished explicator of early modern Indo-Persian poetics working today. I do not, therefore, mean to give the impression with this reference to his work that he can simply be lumped in with those who reject Mughal and Safawid poetry outright. Indeed, he is one of the era’s biggest champions. But this, in fact, is part of what makes Faruqi’s case so instructive. By continuing to frame his argument in terms of *sabk-i hindī*, and simply attempting to reevaluate it as good (rather than bad) poetry, Faruqi’s outstanding scholarship nonetheless fails, ultimately, to mitigate the underlying essentialism of the paradigm itself. </en>

<en><label>24</label>Hadi Hasan, *Mughal Poetry: Its Cultural and Historical Value*, Madras: Islamic Literature Society, 1952, p. 13.</en>

<en><label>25</label>Ali Asani, “Poetry, Indian,” in Josef W. Meri and Jere L. Bacharach (eds) *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 619.</en>

<en><label>26</label>Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*, Edinburgh: University Press, 1969, p. 77.</en>

<en><label>27</label>Alyssa Gabbay, *Islamic Tolerance: Amīr Khusraw and Pluralism*, New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 37–8.</en>

<en><label>28</label>Rypka, “History of Persian Literature,” pp. 295–6.</en>

<en><label>29</label>Bahār, “Bāzgasht-i Adabī,” p. 46. </en>

<en><label>30</label>See for instance various examples from Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels in the Age of Discoveries, 1400-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Muzaffar Alam, “Culture and Politics of Persian”; Christine van Ruymbeke, “Kashifi’s Forgotten Masterpiece: Why Rediscover the *Anvār-i Suhaylī*?” *Iranian Studies*, 2003, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 571-88; Manan Ahmed, “The Many Histories of Muhammad b.

Qasim: Narrating the Muslim Conquest of Sindh,” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008; Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier*; and relevant essays in Irfan Habib (ed.), *A Shared Heritage: The Growth of Civilizations in India and Iran*, New Delhi: Tulika, 2002.

31 Even so, it has been suggested that Amīr Khusrau’s pride in his Indian homeland must be characterized not just as *amor patriae*, but as “an effort to counter the well-known condescension of Iranian writers, who were rarely shy about expressing their contempt for *sabk-i hindi*, the Indo-Persian literary idiom” (Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Bābur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India (1483–1530)*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 394). Never mind the anachronism, this does not even make sense by *sabk-i hindī*’s own logic—how could Khusrau transmit such an essentially Indian fetish for poetic ambiguity to Khurasan and Iraq, and thereby to later writers like Fighānī and ‘Urfī, if his Iranian contemporaries so detested it? On the other hand, if Indophilia alone is the principal symptom of *sabk-i hindī*, then how can it apply to someone like Fighānī, who had no connection to India, and showed little trace of such overt Indophilia?

32 Mohiuddin, “Sabk-i Hindi,” p. 24.

33 It is certainly true that Persophone intellectuals in India occasionally used Hindi words and/or Persian equivalents of Indic vernacular expressions in their compositions, but such regional linguistic peculiarities, or *taḥarrufāt*, were an issue throughout the Persian cosmopolitan ecumene, not just in India. This is why the premodern Indo-Persian philological tradition was multilingual and largely comparative right from the start of the discipline. For details, see Kinra, “Mirrors for Poets, Mirrors of Places: The Culture and Politics of Indo-Persian Comparative Philology, ca. 1000–1800,” in Yigal Bronner, Lawrence McCrea, and Whitney Cox (eds) *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock*, Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, forthcoming.

34 Mohiuddin, “Sabk-i Hindi,” p. 25.

35 Ibid., pp. 24–5.

36 ‘Abd al-Bāqī Nahāwandī, *Ma’ās ir-i Raḥīmī, Baḥsh-i Siwum: Zindagī-nāmahā*, ‘Abd al-Husain Nawā’ī (ed.), Tehran: Anjuman-i Āsār wa Mufākhīr-i Farhangī, 2002; n.b., because they were never patronized directly by ‘Abd al-Rahīm Khān-i Khānān, there are no separate entries in *Ma’ās ir-i Raḥīmī* for Abū al-Fath and his brothers, who are instead discussed under the heading of Abū

al-Fath's celebrated nephew, Hakīm Hāziq (pp. 478-84). For further details on Abū al-Fath's career, see Shāhnawāz Khān, *Ma'ās ir al-Umarā*, vol. 1, Maulvi 'Abd al-Rahīm (ed.), Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1888–96, pp. 558–62. See also Muhammad Bashīr Husayn's introduction to *Ruq'āt-i Qakīm Abū al-Fat Gīlānī*, Lahore: Idārah-i Tahqīqāt-i Pākistān; Dānishgāh-i Panjāb, 1968.

38 Nahāwandī, *Ma'ās ir-i Raīmī*, p. 480; also quoted and discussed in 'Abdullāh, "Tāza-Gū'ī," p. 114; Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*, p. 206.

39 For Faizī's life and career, see Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Shi'r al-'Ajām*, vol. 3 ([reprint] 'Azamgarh: Shibli Academy, 2002, pp. 25–64; Z. A. Desai, "Life and Works of Faizī," *Indo-Iranica*, 1963, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 1–35; Nabi Hadi, *Mughalo ke Malik al-Shu'arā*, Allahabad: Shabistan, 1978, pp. 79–152; Munibur Rahman, "Fayzi, Abu'l Fayz," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, 15 December 1999, <http://www.iranica.com/articles/fayzi-abul-fayz> (accessed 28 September 2010).

40 For 'Urfī's life and career, see Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Shi'r al-'Ajām*, vol. 3, pp. 65–107; Muhammad Ali, "Urfi of Shiraz," *Islamic Culture*, 1929, vol. 3, pp. 96–125; Muhammad al-Haqq Ansārī, *'Urfī Shīrāzī* (in Urdu) Lucknow: 1974; Ahsān Karīm Barq, *'Urfī: Shā'irī wa Uslūb*, Patna: Jami Publications, 1986; Losensky, "Orfi Širazi," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition (8 December 2003), <http://www.iranica.com/articles/orfi-of-shiraz> (accessed 28 September 2010).

41 Nahāwandī, *Ma'ās ir-i Raīmī*, pp. 189–91.

42 Ibid., p. 189.

43 Ibid., p. 190; Faizī, *Inshā-yi Faizī*, A. D. Arshad (ed.), Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-yi Adab, 1973, pp. 251–2.

44 For details, see 'Abdullāh, "Tāza-Gū'ī," pp. 115–16.

45 As reported by Shaikh 'Abd al-Haqq Muhaddis Dihlavī, quoted in Muhammad 'Abdul Ghani, *Pre-Mughal Persian in Hindustan*, Allahabad: Allahabad Law Journal Press, 1941, pp. 391–2.

46 Faruqi, "Stranger in the City," pp. 6–9.

47 Amīr Khusrau, *Dībācha-i Dīwān-i Gurrat al-Kamāl*, Sayyid 'Alī Haydar (ed.), Patna: Idārah-i Tahqīqāt-i Arabī wa Fārsī, 1988, pp. 59–60.

48 'Abdullāh, "Sabk-i Hindī aur Isti'māl-i Hind," pp. 133–4.

<en><label>49</label>For an overview of these common tropes, see Schimmel, *Two-Colored Brocade*.</en>

<en><label>50</label>Nahāwandī, *Ma'ās ir-i Ra'īmī*, p. 189.</en>

<en><label>51</label>Losensky, “ ‘Orfi Širazi,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition (8 December 2003), <http://www.iranica.com/articles/orfi-of-shiraz> (accessed 28 September 2010). For an analysis of one such poem, see Christopher Shackle, “Settings of Panegyric: The Secular Qasida in Mughal and British India,” in Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (eds) *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa, Volume One: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Leiden: Brill, 1996, pp. 205–52 (see esp. pp. 207–12). For details on Anwarī’s career and popularity at the Mughal court, see Annemarie Schimmel and Stuart Cary Welch, *Anwarī’s Divan: A Pocket Book for Akbar*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983, esp. pp. 57–70.</en>

<en><label>52</label>Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal*, Costa Mesa, Calif: Mazda Publishers, 1998.</en>

<en><label>53</label>For some modern perspectives on Nizāmī’s career, and a bibliography of sources, see for instance Kamran Talatoff and Jerome W. Clinton (eds), *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, New York: Palgrave, 2000. </en>

<en><label>54</label>Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*, p. 211.</en>

<en><label>55</label>Ibid., p. 212. </en>

<en><label>56</label>For details on these and other works see Desai, “Life and Works of Faizī,” pp. 19–33; M. Athar Ali, “Translations of Sanskrit Works at Akbar’s Court,” *Social Scientist*, 1992, vol. 20, no. 9/10, pp. 38–45; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “The Afterlife of a Mughal Masnavī: The Tale of Nal and Daman in Urdu and Persian,” in Kathryn Hansen and David Lelyveld (eds) *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 46–73; and “Love, Passion and Reason in Faizi’s Nal-Daman,” in *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, Francesca Orsini (ed.), Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 109–41. </en>

<en><label>57</label>On *satī* and *jauhar* as tropes for ultimate love in the Persianate imagination, see Shantanu Phukan, “ ‘None Mad as a Hindu Woman’: Contesting Communal Readings of Padmavat,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 1996, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 41–54. For an

analysis of Nau’ī’s specific approach in *Sūz u Gudāz*, see Sunil Sharma, “Novelty, Tradition and Mughal Politics in Nau’ī’s *Sūz u Gudāz*,” in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: Studies in Persian Literature Presented to Heshmat Moayyad on his 80th Birthday*, Amsterdam: Rozenberg; West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007.

58 Nahāwandī, *Ma’ās ir-i Raḡīmī*, pp. 360–2.

59 Ibid., p. 362.

60 For example, as Hadi Hasan has noted (*Mughal Poetry*, pp. 3–4), by rendering proper names like Joseph (یوسف) as “the son of the blind” (ولد الاعمی), or Pharaoh (فرعون) as “the enemy of Moses” (عدو . موسى). To critics who claimed that such a work was an innovation bordering on blasphemy, Faizī is said to have blithely retorted that, after all, the Muslim confession of faith also contained no dotted letters (لا اله الا الله).

61 Faizī, *Dīwān-i Faizī*, Delhi: Matba‘-i Iftikhār-i Dehlī-yi Muhammad Ibrahīm, 1880, p. 25.

62 Faizī, *Dīwān*, p. 41.

63 Ibid., p. 15.

64 Quoted in Desai, “Life and Works of Faizī,” p. 18.

65 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 3.

66 Faizī, *Nal-Daman-i Fārsī*, Kanpur: Nawal Kishore Press, 1889, pp. 138–44.

67 Ibid., p. 139. While it is certainly true, as Alam and Subrahmanyam have pointed out (“Love, Passion, and Reason in Faizī’s *Nal-Daman*,” pp. 111–14), that Faizī’s *Nal-Daman* quite proudly announces its emphasis on the “specific Indian manifestations” of the *ḡadīs* -i *‘ishq*—a form of what they call “Hindustani patriotism” akin to what I have been calling Indophilia—they are equally quick to reiterate that Faizī’s point of telling the tale in the first place was “quite clearly to make a statement that would extend beyond India to Iran, and to the Persian-speaking world more generally, of which he believed himself to be a part.” They too note that the model for *Nal-Daman* was Nizāmī’s *Layla-Majnūn*, both “in terms of the metrical scheme utilized as well as a number of other features,” and remind us, as well, that Faizī’s vision was not simply Indophilic, but also epochal, a call to “tell that old tale anew” (*nau sāz fasāna-i kuhan rā*).

<en><label>68</label>Faruqi, “Stranger in the City,” p. 48. </en>

<en><label>69</label>Nahāwandī, *Ma’ās ir-i Raḡīmī*, p. 91. </en>

<en><label>70</label>Ibid., pp. 238–9. Nahāwandī praises numerous poets along similar lines throughout *Ma’ās ir-i Raḡīmī*, few of whom are even recognized today. See for instance his descriptions of Kāmī Sabzāwarī, Maulānā Baqā’ī, Mullā Shīrāzī, Tajallī, Saidī, Muhammad Yūsuf Tab‘ī, and Nadīm Gīlānī (*Ma’ās ir-i Raḡīmī*, pp. 487–508, 539–50, 573–86, 620–2, 662–8, 690–2). </en>

<en><label>71</label>Chandar Bhān Brahman, *Ahwāl wa Ās ār-i Chandra Bhān Brahman wa Dīwān-i Pārsī* (*Life and Works of Chandra Bhān Brahman, with a Critical Introduction of His Persian Dīwan*), Muhammad ‘Abdul Hamīd Farooqui (ed.), Ahmedabad: Khalid Shahan Farooqui, 1967, p. 138. For further details on Chandar Bhān’s life and career, see my “Master and *Munshī*: A Brahman Secretary’s Guide to Mughal Governance,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2010, vol. 47, no. 7, pp. 527–61. </en>

<en><label>72</label>Brahman, *Ahwāl wa Ās ār*, p. 13. </en>

<en><label>73</label>Ibid., p. 187. </en>

<en><label>74</label>Ibid., p. 180. Note the clever play on the word *silsila*, which means a “chain of transmission,” i.e. a poetic or especially mystical genealogy, but also refers to the “chains” of the beloved’s tresses—thus the “chain” of cultural genealogy is refreshed by the scent of the very “chains” used to trap lovers like Majnūn and drive them mad. </en>

<en><label>75</label>Muhammad Sālih Kambūh, ‘*Amal-i Ḥālī*’: *al-Mausūm ba Shāh Jahān Nāmāh*, vol. 3, Ghulām Yazdānī (ed.), Lahore: Majlis-i Taraqqī-yi Adab, 1967, pp. 305–38. </en>

<en><label>76</label>Muhammad Afzal Sarkhwush, *Kalimāt al-Shu‘arā: Mushtamīl bar Ḥikr-i Shu‘arā-yi ‘Aḡr-i Jahāngīr tā ‘Ahd-i Ālamgīr*, Sādiq ‘Alī Dilāwarī (ed.), Lahore: Alamgir Press, 1964, p. 1. </en>

<en><label>77</label>All four verses are quoted here as translated in Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī*, p. 199 (Persian text on pp. 355–6). </en>

<en><label>78</label>Wheeler M. Thackston, *A Millenium of Classical Persian Poetry*, Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 1994, p. 87. For similar associations of Sā’ib with *sabk-i hindī*, see Barzegar, *Mughal-Iranian Relations*; Yarshater, “The Indian or Safavid Style,” p. 272); Francis Robinson, *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 275; K.

Aini, R. Farhadi, and Irfan Habib, "Literature in Persian and Other Indo-Iranian Languages," in Ahmad Hasan Dani et al (eds) *History of Civilizations of Central Asia, Vol. 5: Development in Contrast: From the Sixteenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Paris: UNESCO, 2003, p. 710. </en>

<en><label>79</label>On Sā'ib's career and poetic legacy, see Aziz Ahmad, "□afawid Poets and India," *Iran*, 1976, vol. 14, pp. 117–32; M. L. Rahman, *Persian Literature in India during the Time of Jahangir and Shah Jahan*, Baroda: Department of Persian and Urdu, M.S. University of Baroda, 1970, pp. 135–41; Paul Losensky, "Sā'eb Tabrizi," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition (14 January 2004), <http://www.iranica.com/articles/saeb-tabrizi> (accessed 28 September 2010). </en>

<en><label>80</label>*Bayā□-i Sā'ib*, MS, Oriental Manuscript Library and Research Institute, Hyderabad, #6170. </en>

<en><label>81</label>On these and other aspects of Nik Rai's career and historical milieu, see Muzaffar Alam & Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Making of a Munshi," *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 2004, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 61–72.</en>

<en><label>82</label>Quoted in 'Abdullāh, "Sabk-i Hindī aur Isti'māl-i Hind," p. 134.</en>

<en><label>83</label>Moazzam Siddiqi, for instance, describes Bedil as "the foremost representative of the later phase of the 'Indian style' " ("Bīdel, 'Abd-al-Qāder," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, 15 December 1989, <http://www.iranica.com/articles/bidel-bedil-mirza-abd-al-qader-b> (accessed 28 September 2010)). </en>

<en><label>84</label>Some of my colleagues will no doubt object here, asking how I could ignore the clear gestures toward Indic philosophical traditions in Bedil's *oeuvre*. These clearly reflect "Indianization," do they not? In response, I would simply say that one can acknowledge these fascinating aspects of Bedil's thought without being beholden to the essentialism of the *sabk-i hindī* thesis. For instance Wālih Dāghistānī, who, as an acolyte of Ārzū's great rival Shaikh 'Alī Hazīn, was no stranger to eighteenth-century Indo-Iranian cultural rivalry, clearly differentiated between Bedil's sometimes quirky linguistic usages and the assessment of his poetic genius, saying: "Although many of his poems do not conform to the standard idiom of 'Ajam, and he has introduced strange expressions into the Persian language, nevertheless he has composed many great and outstanding verses, and the maturity of his soul was evident to anyone

who conversed with him” (*Riyā al-Shu’arā*, Sharīf Husain Qāsimī (ed.), Rampur: Kitāb-Khāna-yi Rezā, 2001, p. 133).

I am grateful to Hasan Siddiqui for pointing the possible connection with the *ayāl* song genre. For Lodī’s text, see Shīr ‘Alī Khān Lodī, *Taḳira Mir’āt al-ayāl*, Hamīd Hasanī and Bihrūz Safarzāda (eds), Tehran: Rauzana, 1998.

Nahāwandī, *Ma’ās ir-i Raīmī*, p. 220.

Ibid., p. 722.

Ibid., pp. 524–5.

Abū al-Barakāt Munīr Lahorī, *Kārnāma*, S. M. Ikrām (ed.), Islamabad: Markaz-i Tahqīqāt-i Fārsī-yi Iran-o-Pakistan, 1977, p. 3.

Ibid., pp. 4–5.

Ibid., p. 6.

Ibid., p. 7.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 25.

Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography*, New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 26–8; see also Alam, “Culture and Politics of Persian,” pp. 182–6.

See for instance Munīr, *Kārnāma*, pp. 4, 6, 7, 15, 23, 24, and 25.

Munīr, *Kārnāma*, pp. 26–9.

Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Alī Khān Ārzū, *Sirāj-i Munīr*, S. M. Ikrām (ed.), Islamabad: Markaz-i Tahqīqāt-i Fārsī-yi Iran-o-Pakistan, 1977.

Ārzū, *Sirāj-i Munīr*, p. 33.

Ibid, p. 59. N.b., this critique of Munīr’s anti-*tāza* rhetoric was taken up even more systematically in another treatise that Ārzū titled “Poetic Justice” (*Dād-i Suḳhan*, S. M. Ikrām (ed.), Rawalpindi: Markaz-i Tahqīqāt-i Fārsī-yi Iran-o-Pakistan, 1974, where he took Munīr to task for having joined another Indian poet, Mullā Shaidā, in a literary feud with Shāh Jahān’s Iranian poet laureate Muhammad Jān Qudsī. *Dād-i Sukhan* shows the same rigorous scholarly approach displayed in *Siraj-i*

Munīr. (For further details, see Ikrām’s introduction to *Dād-i Suḡḡān*, as well as S. M. ‘Abdullāh, “Dād-i Suḡḡān,” in *Fārsī Zabān-o-Adab*, pp. 142-7).</en>

<en><label>101</label>Ārzū, *Sirāj-i Munīr*, p. 33.</en>

<en><label>102</label>Rypka, “History of Persian Literature,” pp. 295–6.</en>

<en><label>103</label>M. U. Memon, “Abu’l Barakāt Lahūrī,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition (15 December 1983), <http://www.iranica.com/articles/abd-al-hamid-lahuri> (accessed 28 September 2010).

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<en><label>104</label>M. Siddiqi, “Ārzū, Major Indo-Muslim Poet, Lexicographer, and Litterateur,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition (15 December 1987), <http://www.iranica.com/articles/arzu-seraj-al-din-ali-khan-major-indo-muslim-poet-lexicographer-and-litterateur-b> (accessed 28 September 2010). Some will no doubt protest that in texts like *Tanbīh al-Gḡāfiḡn* (“A Reprimand to the Ignorant”) Ārzū was defending Indian poets against attacks from the Iranian émigré Shaikh ‘Alī Hazīn. Why should this not be seen as a “defense of *sabk-i hindī*”? I would reply, in the first instance, that the term *sabk-i hindī* was not known to Ārzū, so we should not put words in his mouth. Second, that there is a difference between Ārzū defending Indian poets’ basic linguistic-literary competence and defending Indophilia + linguistic Indianization + poetic complexity, or however one wants to define *sabk-i hindī*. Indeed, Ārzū’s approach in *Tanbīh al-Gḡāfiḡn*, just as in *Sirāj-i Munīr* and *Dād-i Suḡḡān*, was to draw his philological evidence from the established classical canon, not to authorize some sort of Hindi free-for-all. </en>

<en><label>105</label>A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* [1958] Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994, p. 425.</en>

<en><label>106</label>Cf. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 1997, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 735–62.</en>

<en><label>107</label>Cf. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “The Homeless Texts of Persianate Modernity,” *Cultural Dynamics*, 2001, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 263–91.</en>

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