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*An Analytical Survey of Persian Works  
on Indian Learned Traditions*

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## AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF PERSIAN WORKS ON INDIAN LEARNED TRADITIONS

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*Bayān-i 'ibādat-i mukh-hā ba-nām-i Takādī-bā*

The *Bayān-i 'ibādat-i mukh-hā ba-nām-i Takādī-bā* (Discourse on the religious practices of the Maghs titled The lamp of generosity) is a treatise on the ten perfections of Buddhism translated from the Arakanese. The translation was commissioned by British officer John Murray MacGregor (1745-1822). The work contains didactic and narrative sections and ends abruptly in the middle of a story. It focuses on topics related to generosity, the ritual recitation of prayers and formulas, the respect one owes to his parents and sexual continence.

As indicated by the invocation *huwa al-'azīz* at the top of each recto, the text of the Berlin manuscript, which is the only known copy, was most probably written by the *munšī* 'Azīz Allāh Buḥārī sometime before 1778 (Ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, orient. Fol. 203). The text may have been translated from Arakanese into Persian with the help of another *munšī* from Chittagong called Ṣādiq 'Alī and the assistance of the monk Kyō Jārī (on the collaboration of Ṣādiq 'Alī with Kyō Jārī see the colophon of Ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, orient. Fol. 179 ; Pertsch 1888, pp. 1039-1041, no 1093). 'Azīz Allāh Buḥārī worked for several years in the 1770s and 1780s at the service of John Murray and he left a short travelogue relating the travels he did in northern India while he was unemployed in 1203/1789 (Pertsch 1888, p. 52, no 15/1). The original Arakanese version of the text probably stands among the manuscripts of the Murray collection of the British Library (Herbert 1989). The Persian text preserved in Berlin is in a manuscript containing two other works: one on medicine titled *Sankārī* (ff. 1a-101b), which was also translated from the Arakanese, and a calendar of the year 1700 of the *śaka* era/c. 1778 (ff. 147-174). It was thus probably copied sometime before 1778. The text of the manuscript is written in *nasta'liq* with some elements of *šikasta*. The dots are often missing and there are few traces of proofreading or emendation (e.g. f. 103a).

Catchwords are written in the bottom left corner of each verso. A blank space is left on the left side of each page, probably for marginal glosses and annotations.

The *Bayān-i 'ibādat-i mukh-hā ba-nām-i Takādī-bā* exposes the fundamental values of Buddhism known as 'perfections' (Pali: *pāramī*, Sanskrit: *pāramitā*) designated by the Arabic term *īmān* in the present translation. After a short introduction elaborating on the metaphor of the darkness of ignorance enlightened by the lamp of the heart lit by reflexion and intelligence, the text engages in a systematic exposition of the ten perfections, or "ten principles of faith" (*dah īmān*) and how they should be practiced in order to put an end to rebirths. Then begins the frame story in which a demon (*rākas/šayṭān*) questions the Buddha (*būdhū thākūr*) about the ten principles of faith. After this preliminary dialogue, the Buddha tells stories to illustrate the principles mentioned above. All of the ten principles are not represented in the short edifying tales (*qiṣṣa*) that are sometime presented as events related to the Buddha's past lives. Fourteen stories are thus told by the Buddha before the text ends abruptly just after the beginning of the fifteenth. Some stories are composed following the model of Pali *jātakas* (stories of the previous lives of the Buddha) and others are clearly drawn from the commentarial literature. A recurring motif is the visit of a merchant to the sage's monastery in Rajgir (Bihar) to benefit from listening to his sermons (e.g. stories 3 and 7).

In the available fragment of the Persian translation the text focused on three out of the ten 'principles of faith' enumerated at the beginning (f. 104a): generosity (*ḥairāt dādan*), the ritual recitation of the scriptures (*Qur'ān ḥwāndan*) and, to a lesser extent, the respect due to one's parents (*ādāb-i pidar wa mādar ki za 'īf mībāšand ba-wajh-i aḥsan namūdan*, f. 104a). The author also stresses the need for women to avoid adultery (e.g. story 8).

The word *takā* (Arakanese *dagā* = Pali *dāyaka* "a donor") found in the original title of the work suggests that the central topic is generosity. This reflects the prominent role of this 'perfection' in Theravāda literature (Endo 2002, pp. 267-299; Sarkar 2005). The topic of the perfections in Buddhism is typical of a popular literature that could be intended for a lay audience. This text, as well as the other translations commissioned by John Murray, constitutes a unique window into the religious literature circulating in Arakan during the decades preceding the invasion of the kingdom by the Burmese in 1784. Whether *Takādī-bā* is an original text composed in the region or a popular text

circulating in other regions of the Buddhist world remains to be ascertained. Similarly the sources of the stories found in this non-canonical text may well be found in the Pali canonical literature. Here are samples of two stories dealing with the recitation of sacred formulas and praises:

“For the sake of illustrating the story (*hikāyat*) recorded above, he says a tale (*qiṣṣa*). At the time when lord Buddha (*būdhū thākur*) was alive, a dancer caught a parrot and looked after him. One day, the courtesan mentioned above taught him [how to speak] and [they] left. On the way they met with a *sāmānī* (Pali *sāmaṇerī*, ‘female novice’), that is to say the disciple of a *rāwalī*. He gave the parrot to the disciple of the *rāwalī*. The *rāwalī*’s disciple one day left the parrot somewhere and she herself sat in the shade and recited the *sarākūn* (i.e. Pali *saraṇa-gamana*), that is to say the Qur’ān. Suddenly a falcon came and took the parrot away to the jungle. The parrot was made prisoner in the jungle and called loudly: ‘*Sāmānī* – that is to say *rāwalī*’s disciple – a falcon took me away, rescue me!’ The *sāmānī* answered to the parrot: ‘You won’t get anything from me. That thing that I taught you: *būthārākītā*, *thāmarākītā*, *sankharākītā* (protected by the Buddha, protected by the Law, protected by the Community), recite it! Reciting it will rescue you’. When the parrot recited what the *sāmānī*, that is the *rāwalī*’s disciple, had told – *būthārākītā*, *thāmarākītā*, *sankharākītā*, by reciting these names [*sic*] a burning sensation appeared in the falcon’s stomach and he released the parrot. The parrot went to the *sāmānī*, that is the *rāwalī*’s disciple. The benefit of the name of God almighty is such that the falcon released him.” (Ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, orient. Fol. 203, ff. 114a-115a; compare with Buddhaghosa 1971, pp. 742-743.)

“The lord [Buddha] declared: ‘One day, when I was living in Rajgir (Rājakaḍḍh), a merchant who heard about the many benefits one gains from listening to my speech gave away his goods to his children and from his country came to me and became a *rāwalī*. The merchant’s wife learned the news of her husband going to the service of the lord and becoming *rāwalī*. When hearing this, the above-mentioned wife understood in her heart that from now she would have to take matters into her own hands. For this reason, the above-mentioned wife went to the service of Kīsalā who was the king of this country and married him. The king had a large harem. One day the wives of the king brought to offer them flowers like blue lotuses that were black and produced a nice fragrance. They distributed them among themselves. The wife of the above-mentioned king who was the queen gave a blue lotus to the woman whose husband

went to the lord and became *rāwalī*. The woman took the flower in her hand and began to cry and lament. The entire harem, the king's wife and the king inquired about the cause of such cries and laments. The above-mentioned wife declared: 'From the mouth of my former husband, the smell of that flower used to come out. Now I remember this former husband and love, therefore I lament and cry.' The king asked: 'Now, where did he go?' The above-mentioned wife replied to the king that he went to Rajgir to the service [of the lord] and he became *rāwalī*. On hearing this, the king, in order to sort out truth from lie, for the preparations for the invitation of the lord ordered his minister: 'I will feed the lord and we must investigate whether this woman says true or not.' The minister prepared everything and the king wrote a letter of invitation to the lord. He summoned the lord along with five hundred of his disciples to attend a banquet. The lord along with five hundred disciples came to eat. He ordered that food be offered and the king told to the lord: 'Lord, say a prayer in your tongue so that by listening to these words I may be liberated. The lord along with his five hundred disciples began reciting a prayer. The king investigated whether the smell of blue lotus came out of the mouth of one of the *rāwalīs*. The king from smelling the fragrance knew that this *rāwalī* was the husband of the above-mentioned wife. The lord declared in his tongue that from the mouth of the liberal man who sings praises comes out the sweet fragrance of the blue lotus.' (Ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, orient. Fol. 203, ff. 125b-126a).

The style of the Persian version bears the constraints of the guidelines that John Murray must have given to his team of translators. It is deprived of the rhetorical ornamentation typical of the late Mughal prose and it seems to follow the source text rather closely. The style is also very formal and the author uses formulas of administrative and legal texts (such as the very frequent use of *-i madkūr(a)* or *madkūr al-ṣadr* to refer to a character already mentioned; or the repeated gloss of the same term, as for *sāmānī* in the first story translated above). One indicator of the faithfulness of the translation is the frequent use of gerund forms reflecting probably presence of absolute verbal forms in the original. Several Pali and Arakanese words, prayers and proper names are transliterated into Persian without indicating the vowels. Many terms are glossed using the typical expression *ya 'nī* ('that is to say'). Besides some equivalences between the Islamic and Buddhist religious vocabulary – such as *qur 'ān ḥwāndan* ('reading of the Quran') for the *saraṇa-gamana* (i.e. the recitation of the three 'refuges' – the Buddha, the law, and the community of the monks) – it is noteworthy that the translator kept using Indo-Persian terms like *rāja*, or even the

more regionally specific honorific title *thākur* (Bengali *thākura*). On a similar note Buddhist monks are systematically called *rāwalī* – a term of uncertain origin found in other Persian and Western sources on Buddhism and Southeast Asia during the early modern period (Leider 2010).

**Manuscript:** Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, orient. Fol. 203, ff. 102a- 146b, **ii**) c. 1778, **iii**) ‘Azīz Allāh Buḥārī, **iv**) John Murray MacGregor, **viii**) Pertsch, p. 1042, no 1094/2.

Legend: i) Place of copying; ii) Period of copying; iii) Copyist; iv) Commissioner; v) Information on colophon; vi) Description of miniatures/illustrations; vii) Other remarks; viii) Information on catalogue(s)

**Secondary sources bibliography:** Buddhaghosa, 1971, *The Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī, Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Dīgha nikāya, Part III*, T. W. R. Davids - J. E. Carpenter - W. Stede, eds., London, Luzac & Company LTD. **Endo**, Toshiichi, 2002, *Buddha in Theravada Buddhism: a study of the concept of Buddha in the Pali commentaries*, Dehiwela, Buddhist Cultural Centre. **Herbert**, P., 1989, “The making of a collection: Burmese manuscripts in the British Library”, *The British Library Journal*, 15, 1, pp. 59–70. **Leider**, Jacques P., 2010, “Southeast Asian Buddhist Monks in the Peregrinação: Tracing the “Rolins” of Fernão Mendes Pinto in the Eastern Bay of Bengal”, in : Jorge M. dos Santos Alves, ed., *Fernão Mendes Pinto and the Peregrinação. Studies, Restored Text, Notes and Indexes*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente et Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, vol. 1, pp. 145-162. **Pertsch**, Wilhelm, 1888, *Verzeichniss der Persischen Handschriften der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Berlin. **Sarkar**, S. C., 2005, “Concept of Pāramitā & Daśabhūmi in Therāvāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism”, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 47, 4, pp.17–30.

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