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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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## *Čandāyan*

‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī’s (d. 945/1537) *Čandāyan*, a non-extant Persian work composed in verse in 781/1379-1380, is the first Persian translation of *Čanainī*, a popular Indian love tale, also known under the titles of *Mīnā Lurik* and *Lurik wa Čandā*. This romance is known to be the earliest of the series of verse romances by Muslim poets in Awadhi and Eastern Hindi languages. It was so popular in the fourteenth century that it was performed in East India from the Bengal Delta to the forests of Chhattisgarh (see Flueckiger 1996, pp. 131-155). ‘Abd al-Quddūs of Gangoh was a Sufi master of the Šābirī branch of the Čištīyya order and had much interest in Hindi and Persian poetry. Familiar with yogic discipline, he applied his Indic philosophical knowledge in his Sufi pedagogy. He authored several books apart from *Čandāyan*, including the *Ruṣd-nāma*. In his religious discourses, ‘Abd al-Quddūs referred to mystical poems and recited fragments from his Persian *Čandāyan* in mosques and the audience was impressed by their mystical meanings (see Digby 1957, pp. 54-56).

His *Čandāyan* is a translation of the tale in Awadhi, authored first by another Sufi of the Čištīyya order, Mawlānā Dāwūd of Dalmau (today in Uttar Pradesh) during the reign of Fīrūz Šāh Tuġluq (r. 1351-1388), or probably based on an intermediary Hindawi version. The Awadhi version was dedicated to Fīrūz Šāh Tuġluq’s minister, the younger Ḥān-i Jahān (see Badāyūnī 1868, vol. 1, p. 250). The story is about the adventures of a beautiful lady, named Čandā, and her challenges for reuniting with her beloved, Lur or Lurik, who was a champion from the Ahir tribe. The popularity of this narrative in South Asian Islamic mysticism comes from its focus on the importance of chastity and perseverance in love, the entire devotion to the beloved and his ultimate beauty, and the use of earthly and human desire (*‘išq-i majāzī*) as a metaphor for the divine love (*‘išq-i ḥaqīqī* in Sufi terminology).

Parts of ‘Abd al-Quddūs’s writings, which expressed his advocacy for the philosophy of the unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujūd*), were recorded by his son, Šayḥ Rukn al-Dīn in the *Laṭā’if-i Quddūsī*. Seven couplets from the beginning of his *Čandāyan* and three of the original version used by ‘Abd al-Quddūs for translation are cited in the *Laṭā’if-i Quddūsī* (Rukn al-Dīn 1311/1894, pp. 99-100). Rukn al-Dīn refers to the original version once as *nusha-yi hindī* (Hindi version) and a second time, as *alfāz-i hindawī-i čandāyan* (Hindawi words of the *čandāyan*). He also provides a brief description about how the Persian version was composed and later was destroyed before it was complete. ‘Abd al-Quddūs’s writings were partly burnt in a fire in his house during the war between Bahlūl Lodī (r. 1451-1489) and sultan Ḥusayn Šāh Šarqī (r. 1458-1479) in around 1479. Rukn al-Dīn’s description of Gangohī’s *Čandāyan* reveals that it visibly followed the structural model derived from the Persian narrative tradition, with an introductory section comprised of several subchapters on the praise of God (*ḥamd*), the praise of the Prophet Muḥammad (*na’ī*) and his ascension to the heavens (*mi’rāj*). This formulation of the introductory section was inspired by Niẓāmī Ganjavī’s (d. 608/1209) style in his *Ḥamsa* (Quintet), which was adopted and popularized in South Asia by Amīr Ḥusraw (d. 725/1325) from the thirteenth century on. As Rukn al-Dīn states, there was no fragment about Prophet Muhammad’s ascension to heavens from Al-Aqṣā Mosque in Jerusalem in the old Indian version of the story. ‘Abd al-Quddūs added verses about the *mi’rāj* to the beginning of his Persian rendering after receiving a prophetic revelation (Rukn al-Dīn 1311/1894, p. 99).

Among the extant couplets from the *Čandāyan* about the *mi’rāj*, four refer to verses from the seventeenth *sura* (*al-Isrā’*) of the Quran and to a hadith. The latter is a statement attributed to Muḥammad that talks about his divine destiny as a prophet even before Adam was born. The other three couplets express the difficulties of attaining the divine secret wisdom in the mystical path (*ṭarīqa*) towards the ultimate truth. For this, ‘Abd al-Quddūs applies the symbolic image of a tall tree with ripe fruits hanging from its branches in the sky, which remain inaccessible to hopeless people who do not have the courage to face their fate and step into the path. Who would ever have the courage to raise their hand and touch the branches, without knowing the risky game that the malicious sky (*falak*) may play against them? The Night and the Day are the guardians ready to kill whoever dares to look up and see the fruits (see Rukn al-Dīn 1311/1894, p. 100). This poetic image is an allusion to an Indian parable about a man who, running away from a furious animal (elephant, camel or tiger in different versions) takes refuge

in a dry well and holds on to the roots (or branches) of a nearby tree. Deep inside the well, a venomous dragon with its mouth wide open is awaiting the man to fall, and two white and black mice – symbols of day and night - are chewing the roots or branches he is hanging on to. In the meantime, the man is distracted and happily satisfies his hunger by reaching for a fruit (or a honeycomb in some versions) in the tree.

The parable is found in the *Mahābhārata* and in four Jain sources: the *Vasudevahiṇḍi* of Saṅghadāsa, the *Samarāicca-kahā* of Hribhadra, the *Parīṣiṣṭa-parvan* of Hemacandra and the *Dharma-parīkṣā* of Amitagahi as well as some Buddhist sources in Chinese and Tibetan languages (see Zin 2011, pp. 39-40). Persian authors and men of learning prior to ‘Abd al-Quddūs, such as Majdūd ibn Ādam Sanāyī of Ghazna (d. 545/1131), Muḥammad al-Ġazzālī (d. 505/1111), Naṣr Allah Munshī (6th/12th century), ‘Abd Allah Buḥārī (6th/12th cent.) and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) have recited this parable in their Persian works. The interpretations of the symbols vary in each tradition. Rukn al-Dīn also provides the *hindawī* original fragment (three couplets) of this symbolic narrative, the remains of which were found with the Persian fragments at ‘Abd al-Quddūs’s home. The Persian translation corresponds closely to the Hindawi version cited by Rukn al-Dīn. His verse translation is loyal in content, although it is not a word for word translation. It is versified in *matnawī* style in one of the most familiar meters in Persian poetry, the *baḥr-i sarī’-i matwī-i makšūf*, which interestingly accords rhythmically with the *hindawī dohā* couplets. ‘Abd al-Quddūs possessed significant knowledge of Indian vernacular poetic tradition; he composed verses in Hindawi and inserted them within the texts of his other work, the *Ruṣd-nāma* (see Digby 1957, pp. 56-66; Khodamoradi - Ernst 2019). ‘Abd al-Quddūs applies literary devices such as allusion to Quranic verses and hadith, and palilogy, alliteration, and repetition to create inner rhyming in stanzas, which are evidence of his acquaintance with Persian literary tradition. His poetry resonates with Nizāmī’s poetic and descriptive style and inclines to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s popular didactic language in the *Matnawī-i ma’nawī*.

‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī’s *Čandāyan* is one of the earliest attempts for the Persian translation and adaptation of Sufi love romances (*premakhyān*) from north Indian vernaculars and their integration into Persian devotional literature of South Asia, a tradition which later became very popular in the Mughal period (1526-1857). Simon Digby considers ‘Abd al-Quddūs to be the innovator of this tradition (see Digby 1957, p. 56). The existing fragments of ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī’s *Čandāyan* were

known to readers through Rukn al-Dīn's *Laṭā'if-i Quddūsī*. The story had a wider circulation during the Mughal period in the South Asian Persian-speaking milieu in different written versions and oral variations. Among them, *Dāstān-i Mīnā wa Lurik* (also known as *ʿIṣmat-nāma*) by Ḥamīd Kalānawrī is worth mentioning; it also has an introductory chapter in praise of God and Muḥammad's heavenly accession, and was dedicated by the poet to the Mughal emperor, Jahāngīr (r. 1605-1627).

**English translation:** Partial translation: Aditya Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition (1379-1545)*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 62.

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