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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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## *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb*

The *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* (A Delight for the Hearts) is the earliest direct translation into Persian of the Sanskrit *Hitopadeśa* (Friendly Advice). Based on the *Pañcatantra*, the *Hitopadeśa* is a collection of edifying stories written by a certain Nārāyaṇa around the 9th-10th century, perhaps in eastern India (Bihar/Bengal) (Nārāyaṇa 2007). The Persian translation was composed in the Jaunpur Sultanate during the rule of Maḥmūd Šāh Šarqī (r. 844-862/1440-1457) by a certain Tāj al-Dīn Muftī al-Malikī under the patronage of the *muqṭi* (fief-holder) of Bihar, Naṣīr al-Dawla wa al-Dīn, also mentioned in contemporary inscriptions as Naṣīr ibn Bahā (fl. 847-859/1443-1455). Nothing is known about Tāj al-Dīn from either contemporary or later sources. We simply know that he was a *muftī* (jurisconsult) in the service of Naṣīr al-Dīn. The text is mainly written in prose and, in comparison with several other Persian renderings of similar works, such as Kāšifī's *Anwār-i suhaylī* (Lights of Canopus, early 16th century) or Abū al-Faḏl's *Iyār-i dāniš* (Criterion of Knowledge, 1588), it is written in a rather simple style. The Persian text, later translated into Bengali (1732) and then also into Urdu (1803), seems to have been widely read throughout northern India.

Although references to the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* are virtually absent from modern scholarship and textbooks on north India's cultural history, the available manuscripts, printed editions and vernacular renderings of Tāj al-Dīn's translation attest to its great popularity until the end of the nineteenth century. Most manuscripts that are still preserved in collections in South Asia and Europe today were copied in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The language of the text differs significantly from one manuscript to the other, which is another sign of its popularity. So far, the oldest manuscript that we have found is kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (persan 386). It is dated 19th *rabī* 'al-*tānī* 1062/30th March 1652 and belonged to a Portuguese physician called Sebastião Velho Romão before being acquired by the

French Orientalist Melchisédech Thévenot (1620-1692). The text of this manuscript differs very substantially from that of the later copies and of the nineteenth-century lithographed edition. For instance, among the manuscripts that we have consulted, it is the only copy that contains Hindavi verses (*dohrās*) (Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, persan 386, ff. 36b, 39b).

Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) seems to be the first and only scholar to have published a study of the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* (Silvestre de Sacy 1819). He summarized his observations on the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* in the following four points: 1) The author systematically replaced aspects of Indian “dogmas, religious rituals, and philosophy” by Islamic ones. 2) He changed or wrongly transcribed proper and place names. 3) He did not try to render faithfully realia of the Indian environment. 4) He also observes that the prose of Tāj al-Dīn is very poor - his syntax is often jumbled, especially in passages in which he tried his hand at ornate prose writing (as in the prologue for instance). In addition to these general observations about the text, his comments on the organization of each book conveniently highlight the main differences between the Persian text and the Sanskrit original. The first book, *Mitralābh* follows its source very closely. The second book, *Suhridbheda*, presents substantial differences: three stories are missing (*Hitopadeśa* no. 3, 2.194; no. 4, 2.212; no. 8, 2.308) and three have been added (Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, persan 386, ff. 67a-70b, 81a-82b, 90a-91a) (see also Silvestre de Sacy 1819, pp. 240-244). But, as Silvestre de Sacy observed, it is in books three and four that we find the most significant variations.

Since the first discussions about the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* in western scholarly literature, several hypotheses have been put forward regarding the identity of its author and his patron. As far as we know, Silvestre de Sacy first suggested a period for the composition of the text. The topic was actually of little interest to him, because he was primarily concerned with *Kalīla wa Dimna* and its origins. He only says: “I have nothing to say about the author of this translation, except that his work was not unknown to M. Colebrooke, and he mentions it in the introduction that precedes his edition of the Sanskrit *Hitopadeśa*. I conjecture that this translation was done during Akbar’s reign; but I did not see that it was anywhere mentioned in the *Ā’in-i akbarī*, although it discusses various translations from the Indian [i.e. Indian languages/Sanskrit] into Persian done during the time of this prince” (Silvestre de Sacy 1818, p. 252). The rationale behind Silvestre de Sacy’s assumption is thus the association of Akbar’s reign with translations of Sanskrit texts into Persian. The next

attempt at dating the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* is found in the description of the text in Mehren's 1859 catalogue of the collection of manuscripts kept in Copenhagen. The cataloguer confidently states that "this composition is dedicated to the Sultan of Delhi Naṣīr al-Dīn, son of Bābur, who ruled starting from 937/1530" (Mehren 1859, p. 29). The identification of Naṣīr al-Dīn with the Mughal Humāyūn (r. 937-963/1530-1556) was then repeated by most cataloguers, and it is only with an article by Z. A. Desai published in 1978 that the text could be relocated in its proper context.

Desai proposed a date based on previously untapped sources. He concludes that Tāj al-Dīn's patron, Naṣīr al-Dawla wa al-Dīn, was the *muqṭi* ' mentioned in two inscriptions from Bihar Sharif dated 847/1443 and 859/1455. From our reading of the prologue, it seems that the *muqṭi* ' brought the Sanskrit text to the notice of the Sultan of Jaunpur, who ordered the translation of the text into Persian: "When Naṣīr al-Dawlat wa al-Dīn, the *muqṭi* ' of the province of Bihar, brought this book to the King of the East and West - may God perpetuate his greatness - [the latter] saw that in it were some good stories and excellent advice. He ordered that this book be translated into Persian," (*ḥūn īn kitāb rā piš-i malik al-mulūk al-šarq wa al-ġarb Naṣīr al-dawla wa al-dīn muqṭi* '-i *šiqq-i bihār* - *yudīmu allāhu ma'āliya-hu* - *rasīd* [read: *rasānīd*], [*malik-i madkūr*] *dīd ki dar ān qišṣahā-yī ḥūb wa pandhā-yī margūb ast, farmūd tā īn kitāb rā fārsī kunand*, (Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, persan 386, f. 2b).

If the suggested emendation based on the BNF manuscript is correct, this account shows the range of cultural interactions that existed within elite milieux, from the local *muftī* (jurisconsult), through the *muqṭi* ' in charge of the province, up to the sultan himself. The figure of the *muftī* here is particularly interesting, since he was a representative of the Sultan's power at the local level. His ethnicity apart, through daily face-to-face interactions with the subjects of the kingdom, he was likely to interact in regional languages, and because of his professional activity in a kingdom whose population was largely non-Muslim, he most probably had to interact with local legal courts and developed some familiarity with Sanskrit legal texts.

Mian Muhammad Saeed has highlighted the attempts of Maḥmūd Šāh to appear as a champion of Islam: he waged war against the infidel king of Orissa, built mosques in the eastern province of the kingdom - he specifically refers to the inscriptions discussed by Desai - and appointed *muftīs* in the region (Saeed 1972). This political context and the information provided by contemporary texts from the region, such

as the Persian *dīwān* and *malfūz* of the Sufi saint of the Firdawsiyya order, Aḥmad Langar-i Daryā Balḥī (d. 891/1486), titled *Mu'nis al-qulūb* (note the similar pattern of this title with *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb*), may help locate the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* in the cultural history of the Sultanate.

What was the purpose of such a text? What did it represent for its readers then? To answer these questions, let us give an overview of the cultural production during the Šarqī period (796-901/1394-1495). If the impressive architectural remains of the Jaunpur Sultanate have been well studied since the colonial period, the other aspects of cultural life under the Šarqīs still need to be studied in a comprehensive way. After architecture, it is the contribution of Šarqī rulers to the domain of music that is often highlighted, by both premodern and modern scholars. Noteworthy is the composition of the musicological treatise titled *Saṅgītaśiromaṇi* (1428), which was compiled by a group of pandits from various regions of the Subcontinent at the provincial court of Malika Šāhi of Kaḍā under Ibrāhīm Šarqī's rule (804-844/1401-1440).

If we turn to the court itself, it is possible to gather some evidence about the consumption and production of Persian and vernacular literatures. A unique window on the Persian literary culture of the early period at the court of Jaunpur - which also constitutes a rare testimony of the book-culture in this region - is found in the *Dastūr al-šu'arā* (a.k.a. Jaunpur Anthology), an anthology of classical Persian poetry. At the other chronological end of the history of the Šarqī dynasty, it is vernacular poetry that furnishes the richest overview of courtly culture with Quṭbān's *Mirigāvatī* (909/1503, written at Kahalgaon, Bihar). In this Avadhi narrative poem we get a sense of the multilingual and polyvocal culture that developed throughout the fifteenth century in Šarqī courtly milieux, in which Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, and vernacular literatures were cultivated, often in connection with music connoisseurship. This courtly culture must also be put in relation with Mithila (nowadays eastern Bihar and southern Nepal) and the literary production of Vidyāpati (ca. 1370-1460), who composed what - in terms of genre - is the closest contemporary equivalent of the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb*: the Sanskrit *Puruṣaparīkṣā* (ca. 1412-1416); a collection of edifying tales sharing the generic features of the *Pañcatantra* and the *Hitopadeśa*, but in which the characters are human beings rather than animals.

From the perspective of the translated text, we should distinguish between the statements reproduced - sometimes selectively, as we shall see in a moment - from

the source text, and the comments of Tāj al-Dīn and his entourage. Here is an excerpt from the opening of the text: “Endless praises to the Lord of sovereignty who, out of all his servants bestowed upon man the loftiest rank, and placed upon his head the white umbrella of wisdom set with the pearls of science, and dressed [him with] the picturesque tunic of literary composition along with the headdress of the crown of metaphors circled with the jewels of His own grace and generosity, and made [him] ride the galloping noble gray-hued steed of inspiration with the reins of insight on the golden saddle of wit, and made him the ruler of the kingdom of the heart, so that he may plunder the country of the stubborn-minded ones, and after bringing forth the pleasing idols and heart-thieves without compare, girdle their necks with the necklace of the jewels of speech.” (Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, persan 386, ff. 1b-2a).

First of all, let us mention that this ornate invocation (*ḥamd*) in rhymed prose (*sajʿ*) is not at all representative of the style of the rest of the work. One can observe that from the outset, the author highlights the status of humankind in the midst of God’s creation. What makes humans so outstanding is precisely what the *Hitopadeśa* seems to be playing with by attributing it to animals: the ability to produce ornate and convincing speech. As far as we could see, the fact that animals are endowed with the ability to speak is not at all problematic in the Sanskrit text - in fact it is not even mentioned as a special feature of those stories. In that sense the *ḥamd* almost sounds as a disclaimer: I know that the stories I am about to tell are irrational, but they are the product of the very capacity to produce pleasing and instructive speech bestowed on humankind by God himself.

We may compare this opening passage with Nārāyaṇa’s invocation: “May good people succeed in their enterprises by the grace of Lord Śiva, whose matted locks bear the digits of the moon, like a streak of foam in the Ganges. If one takes heed of this Friendly Advice, it will bestow proficiency in refined discourses, resourcefulness of expression in all circumstances, and knowledge of right conduct.” (*Hitopadeśa* śloka 1-2). This opening much more straightforwardly states the purpose of the book. First, as indicated by the initial position of the word *siddhiḥ* (accomplishment, success) in the first stanza of the Sanskrit text, the purpose of the book is to provide one with the proper means to reach his goal in his enterprise (*sādhya*). Then it brings three benefits: eloquence (*pāṭavam*), resourcefulness of expression in all circumstances (*vācām sarvatra vaicitryam*), and knowledge of right conduct (*nīti-vidyām*). Beyond

the invocation, what Tāj al-Dīn highlights most is certainly the fact that these stories are entertaining. When he reads/hears the book for the first time, the patron finds that it contains “some good stories and pleasing advice.” The text is also able to teach the “trick of the tricksters” (*ḥarakat-i mutaḥarrikān*). This expression is very peculiar, and according to Šīrānī (1966, p. 81), it is absent in standard classical Persian and it must be derived from a Hindavi idiom (*mutaḥarrik* = *čāl-bāz/dhoke-bāz*).

The Sanskrit *Hitopadeśa* is as much an anthology of well-turned verses (*subhāṣita*) as it is a narrative/didactic text. The function of the book as a source of good poetry does not apply equally to the Persian text. As it has been repeatedly demonstrated, Nārāyaṇa has drawn from a large body of versified texts, ranging from epic literature (e.g. *Mahābhārata*) to famous Sanskrit plays (e.g. *Śiśupālavadha*, *Kīrātārjunīya*, *Nāgānanda*, *Prabodhacandrodaya*). It is noteworthy that the versified passages in the *Hitopadeśa* are translated in prose, and the Persian verses are original additions. The amount of versified text is much more limited in the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb*. Sometime a line (*qiṭ`a*, *bayt*) or a quatrain (*rubā`ī*) is inserted to illustrate a point. Some verses are quoted from classical authors - mainly from Sa`dī (13th century), and others could be the author's own compositions. Among the various stylistic reworkings by later copyists, the insertion of new lines of poetry is very frequent.

In addition to practical wisdom and eloquence, a certain concern for a good conduct in accordance with religious principles is visible in Tāj al-Dīn's text. In other places, Tāj al-Dīn simply refrained from translating images of Hindu religiosity, as in the rendering of the following stanza: “Even a worm can climb up good people's heads by sticking to the flowers they wear. Even a stone can become a god if it is consecrated by the great” (*kīṭo`pi sumanaḥ-saṅgād ārohati satām śiraḥ | aśmāpi yāti devatvaṃ mahadbhiḥ supraṭiṣṭhitaḥ || prologue, śloka 45*) which becomes in the Persian translation: “If a worm falls in a flower, with the flower it reaches the head of great men” (*agar kirmī dar miyān-i gul uftad barābar-i gul bar sar-i buzurg-ān bi-rawad*, Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, persan 386, f. 7a). In addition to such intentional selection regarding what should be translated or not, it is noteworthy that, unlike translations that were done during the Mughal period, the translator never glosses Indic elements he may have kept in his translation. Despite his selective attitude there are still several passages which are unmistakable parts of the Indian cultural environment. In a later period such passages would have necessitated a gloss.



This certainly shows that his readership was already familiar with Bihar's cultural environment.

The *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* represents another branch of the Persian reworking of texts originally stemming from the *Pañcatantra* - in the present case through Nārāyaṇa's *Hitopadeśa* - that is distinct from the *Kalīla wa Dimna* tradition. The *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* was certainly a popular text in a context that we may call "household literacy" and clearly had an impact in various regional contexts as attested by Heyāt Māmud's Bengali rendering (1732) titled *Sarvabhedavāṇī* (On the Piercing of all Secrets). Later on, under the aegis of John Gilchrist (1759-1841), Mīr Bahādur 'Alī Ḥusaynī rendered the text in Urdu at Fort William College and the book was published in Calcutta in 1803 under the title *Aḥlāq-i hindī* (Indian Moral Tales). The Urdu version was reedited several times, both in India (e.g. Bombay 1848, 1875, 1884; Bangalore 1874) and Great Britain (London 1868). The Persian text was also published by Nawal Kiśor Press (Lucknow, 5th reprint in 1869) under the title: *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb, Gīdarnāma mulaqqab ba Gītak Damnak* (A Delight for the Hearts, The Book of the Jackals, called Gītak Damnak). The subtitle of the Nawal Kiśor edition indicates an attempt to bring back the *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb* into the textual genealogy of the *Kalīla wa Dimna* tradition.

**Manuscripts:** **Paris**, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, persan 386, **ii**) 19th *rabī' al-tānī* 1062/30th March 1652. **Berlin**, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Orient. Fol. 264, **ii**) ca. 1770. **Bombay**, Library of the University of Bombay, volume 52, MS. n. 94, **ii**) 22 *rajab*, 24 *julūs* of Muḥammad Shāh 1155/1742-1743, **iii**) Asad Beg, **iv**) Bayājī Pandit, **v**) Bayājī Pandit was the *wakīl* of the Deshmukhs of Zafarnagar. **London**, British Library, Add 25,833, **ii**) 1195/1781. **Karachi**, Anjuman-i taraqqī-i urdū, 3 q. f. 30, **i**) قرولی Karauli (Rajasthan?), **ii**) 1207/1792, **iii**) Mīr Tābit 'Alī ibn Šādiq 'Alī. **London**, British Library, India Office, Persian 1985, **ii**) 1807. **London**, British Library, India Office, Persian 1984, **ii**) before 1818. **Munich**, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. pers. 143. **Copenhagen**, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Persian 79. **London**, Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, Persian 338. **London**, British Library, India Office, Persian 1983. **London**, British Library, India Office, Persian 1985, **vii**) previously part of the collection of the College of Fort William. **Cambridge**, Cambridge University Library, Add 242, ff. 1b-110b. **Cambridge**,

Cambridge University Library, Add 566, ff. 3-93. **Dublin**, Library of Trinity College, 1554.

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)

**Lithograph:** *Mufarriḥ al-qulūb, gīdarnāma mulaqqab ba Gītak Damnak*, Lucknow, Nawal Kiśor, 1307/1869, 5th reprint.

**Urdu translation:** Mīr Bahādur ‘Alī Ḥusaynī, 1803, *Aḥlāq-i hindī*, Calcutta, The Hindustani Press.

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**Urdu translation:** Mīr Bahādur ‘Alī Ḥusaynī, 1963, *Aḥlāq-i hindī*, Waḥīd Qurayshī, ed., Lahore, Majlis-i Taraqqī-i Adab.

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