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

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Risāla-yi wujūdiyya

This short Persian text on yoga and meditation is attributed to the famous founder of the Indian *čišṭī* Sufi order, Šayḥ Mu‘īn al-Dīn Čišṭī (d. 633/1236). That attribution is contradicted by the emphatic declaration of one of his successors, Našīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd “Čirāg-i Dihlī,” that neither Mu‘īn al Dīn nor any of the other early masters of the Čišṭiyya ever wrote any books (Habib 1974, p. 402). There is no textual indication of this work prior to the 17th century. It is likely that these writings grew over time through oral transmission as these yoga practices were assimilated into *čišṭī* circles. A number of different versions of this treatise exist with different titles, though most commonly it is called *Risāla-i wujūdiyya* (Treatise on Existence), which can also be translated (following an older meaning of *wujūd*) as the “Treatise on the Human Body”. Typically it contains three chapters (*bāb*), though some copies contain only two: (i) an account of the subtle physiology of *hatha yoga*, with emphasis on the three channels that parallel the spinal column and breath control; (ii) amplification of the microcosm-macrocosm relationship, with frequent quotations from the Qur’an; and (iii) a correlation of metaphysical levels and archangels of Islamic cosmology with the breaths of yogic practice. The language and style of the individual chapters differ considerably, as the first chapter abruptly outlines yogic physiology with arcane Hindi terminology, while the other chapters have a narrative flow and multiple Islamic references.

The text maintains that the realization of these levels is closely related to the supreme spiritual states associated with the Prophet Muḥammad, especially with knowledge revealed during his ascension to heaven (*mi`rāj*). Moreover, it relates that this knowledge was then conferred on Mu‘īn al-Dīn Čišṭī, either spontaneously by the Prophet Muḥammad or through the agency of Mu‘īn al-Dīn’s master, ‘Uṭmān Hārwanī (d. 607/1211). The net effect of this claim is to confer an exalted authority

for this teaching in terms of the Islamic sources of čišťi Sufism. The framing of yogic practice with the Qur'an follows a strategy demonstrated by the čišťi master 'Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (Digby 1975, pp. 43-44, Ernst - Khodamoradi 2019), who in his *Rušd-nāma* invokes two key phrases from Qur'an (17: 79-80), "a praised station" (*maqāman maḥmūdān*) and "an aiding authority" (*sulṭānan našīran*). In citing these terms, the text preserves the appearance of Qur'anic orthography by retaining the final long *alif*, which in the Qur'anic text carries the accusative case; these phrases now are written *maqāmā maḥmūdā* and *sulṭānā našīrā*. These Qur'anic verses had traditionally been interpreted in Sufi circles as a warrant for extended prayers of night vigil (*tahajjud*, 17:79), and it may also be that their reference to "a true entry [...] and a true departure" (17: 80) was taken as a reference to inhalation and exhalation.

Other notable features of this work include detailed instructions for its use in a 40-day retreat, including encounters with 28 spiritual guardians connected to the five elements of Indian cosmology. Elsewhere the text mentions the four elements of Greco-Arabic science, which are correlated with the categories of angelology and psychology. Typically these correspondences are illustrated by diagrams. Qur'anic reference to "signs on the horizons and in your souls" (41: 53, 51: 21) makes the connection between signs of the zodiac and parts of the body. After additional cosmic analogues for the four breaths, presented in terms of Mu'īn al-Dīn's ascension, the text concludes with instructions for utilizing the subtle nerves of yogic physiology to induce visualization of one's Sufi master and also the Prophet Muḥammad. The attribution of this text to Mu'īn al-Dīn Čišťi is a striking indication of the internalization of yoga practices in the Indian Sufi circles. Legend is replete with accounts of Mu'īn al-Dīn Čišťi and his successors engaging in thaumaturgic contests with various yogis, but these stories are clearly part of the hagiographic tradition, in which Sufis inevitably were victorious over the yogis. Now this text fully integrates yogic practice into a Sufi worldview. While the text acknowledges that these practices should be esoteric, they are explicitly authorized for all adherents of the čišťi order.

In addition, this treatise demonstrates a degree of vernacularization in the Indic terminology that is employed. The terms for yogic concepts such as the nerves are spelled with many variations, indicating the likely oral nature of this transmission (e.g., the central vein called *sukhumnā* uses the Hindi pronunciation of the Sanskrit *suṣumṇā*, while the parallel veins, known as *idā* and *pingalā* in Sanskrit, are here made into a rhyming pair, either *hingarā* and *pingalā*, or else *ingalā* and *pingalā*).

Some of the Indic terms are no longer recognizable. The general impression is of texts that are basically transcriptions of oral teachings given at different times and places, by disciples who may have had a more or less sure grasp of the contents. In short, this work represents the mature appropriation of yogic practices into the framework of Sufism. It is not a systematic or genetic approach, however, because some Indian theories are simply presented alongside Islamic material without any sense of difference. Pragmatic experience, assisted by narratives of Muslim adoption of Indian techniques, was sufficient justification for linking these yoga teachings to the great *čišī* master.

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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)

English translation: “Two Versions of a Persian Text on Yoga and Cosmology, Attributed to Shaykh Mu`in al-Din Chishti,” Carl W. Ernst, ed., *Elixir*, 2006, 2, pp. 69-76, 124-125.

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