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Indo-Persian narrative literature: Cultural translation and rewriting of Indian stories in Persianate South Asia

Abstract: The present article aims to study the translation and rewriting process of Indian narratives in Persian during the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughal period (1526–1858), and to examine their cultural adaptations and strategies of adjustment to the Muslim recipient culture involving a reciprocal exchange of literary and cultural elements and religious interpretations. In the first stage, the features of Indo-Persian narrative tradition are briefly introduced with regards to structure and integral themes and in the second, the acculturation of Indian elements will be analysed according to Islamic principles and mystical thoughts in a selection of literary texts produced by Muslim Persian scholars. The article will focus on the representations of gender in stories and the perception of justice in the Perso-Islamic context to see, in particular, how narratives carried across Indian rituals and women's codes of conduct to the Muslim readership; in other words, we try to shed light on how the alienated Indian became domesticated in the Persian-Muslim world of thought.

Keywords: cultural translation, rewriting, narratives, Indo-Persian literature, Sufism, Islamic law

South and Central Asia have been the site of a wide-ranging exchange of religious, linguistic and cultural knowledge systems for millennia. Leading scholar of South Asian Islam, Carl Ernst has argued in this context that "as a cross-cultural event, the movement from Sanskrit into Arabic and Persian is comparable in magnitude and duration to the other great enterprises of cross-cultural translation, *e.g.* Greek philosophy into Arabic and Latin, and Buddhism from Sanskrit into Chinese and

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Tibetan."[1] The study of the history of translation in the South-Asian multi-lingual context at first generally privileged works emanating from and moving into the classical languages of Arabic and Sanskrit as the languages of Islam and Hinduism. The analysis of Arabic translations of Sanskrit philosophical, scientific and narrative texts by Ernst,[2] De Blois[3] and Van Bladel[4] have shown that early Arabic translations from Sanskrit date back to the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258). Recent scholarship by Eaton,[5] Alam,[6] Subrahmanyam,[7] Speziale[8] and Truschke[9] has highlighted the crucial role of Persian in the dynamic exchange of knowledge on various subjects such as occult sciences, medicine and narrative literature, through translations dating even before the time of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and after that in the Mughal period (1526–1857); and this continued with the transmission of this knowledge from Asia to Europe in the colonial period. Muzaffar Alam argues that the "Mughal empire had invested heavily in Persian as part of their cultural and political identity, even as Persian invested them with a cosmopolitan character that another language might not have afforded."[10] In *Culture of Encounters*, Truschke presents the textual production by intellectuals under Mughal sponsorship and describes the incorporation of Sanskrit into the Persianate world, concluding that the Mughal royal support of knowledge production was not only limited to Perso-Arabic traditions, but also covered new fusions of Sanskrit and Persian literatures and cultures.[11] Sunil Sharma's studies of Persian poetic tradition and literature in South Asia have opened up a new window towards Indo-Persian textual studies in English scholarship.[12] Despite some research conducted on the cultural interactions among diverse South Asian social groups such as the elite and the court, Sufis and the yogis, Hindu and Muslim communities,[13] the study of the methods and levels of acculturation of the Indian translated materials to the expectations of the Muslim-Persian receiving culture,

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1 Ernst 2016: 230.
2 Ernst 2003: 173–195.
3 See De Blois 1990.
4 Van Bladel 2011: 43–88.
5 Eaton 2019.
6 Alam 1998: 317–349; 2003: 131–198.
7 Subrahmanyam 2012.
8 See Speziale / Hermann 2010; Speziale 2018.
9 See Truschke 2016.
10 Alam 2003: 187–188.
11 Truschke 2016: 229–248.
12 Sharma 2007, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020.
13 See Alam et al. 2000; Alam / Subrahmanyam 2004: 61–72; Pollock 2003; Pollock et al. 2015.

particularly in what concerns Indo-Persian narrative literature,[14] remains underdeveloped.

The Perso-Arabic terms of *qiṣṣa* and *ḥikāya*, and the Persian *dāstān* are generally used to define "fiction" regardless of the length, literary style (in prose or in verse), forms of narration (oral or written) and types (popular or elite) of this genre of literature. The terms concern a narrative tradition that was once widespread among varied Muslim and non-Muslim cultures in a variety of languages including Persian, Arabic, Turkic, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Malay and Indonesian, in a vast geographical space that expanded from the Ottoman empire at the western borders of Persia to its Eastern frontiers with China, South and even South-East Asia. This tradition evolved diverse genres of fables, romances, anecdotes, fairy tales, mythical, allegorical and adventure stories, and at its intersection with history, it encompassed the life stories of prophets, and pseudo-biographical works about kings and epic heroes. The Persian language, as a non-sectarian *lingua franca*[15] used broadly for knowledge exchange, became the carrier of the *qiṣṣa* tradition to different regional cultures and subcultures for centuries. Anne Marie Schimmel states that the number of the Persian works produced in Mughal India (1526–1858) until the nineteenth century exceeds by far the number of the works produced in Iran proper.[16] This is particularly true about the Indo-Persian narrative literature, as based on the Indian erudite tradition, philosophical and scientific subjects were widely and dispersedly recorded in frame stories for educational purposes. In contact with the South Asian multicultural and multilingual context,

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14 The first generation of scholars who worked on Indo-Persian narratives were Siyyid Ḥassan ʿĀbidī and Tara Chand. They edited some manuscripts of stories such as the *Panchākhyāna* (1984) and *Lurik wa Mīnā* (1985). In Iran, Jaʿfar Maḥjūb (2018) studied some stories like the one of *Amīr Ḥamza* and *Basātīn al-uns*, and Hussayn Ismāʿīlī edited and published some popular narratives including the *Ḥātam-nāma* (2008). Aditya Behl and Wendy Doniger analyzed the Indo-Muslim devotional literature in two books: *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545* (2012) and *The Magic Doe: Qutban Suhravardi's Mirigavati* (2012). Recently, Pasha Khan has studied oral story-telling as a performative art and argued that the *qiṣṣa* tradition should be seen as a specific genre in the South Asian context. See Khan 2015: 185–207; 2019.

15 Bert Fragner suggested a new paradigm to show how Persian spread in medieval Islamic civilization as a trans-regional means of communication which led to its dominance by the support of the governing and intellectual classes. He suggested a distinction between Persian as the mother tongue (native language of a nation) and Persian as a trans-regional language (mediator of knowledge) in use in Central and South Asia, and the Caucasus. See Fragner 1999: 27–33. However, recent scholarship refers to the Persian hegemony with new terms such as "The Persianate World" in English or "Le Monde Iranien" in French which encompass the land of Iran (*Erānshahr*) where New Persian developed and other territories where Persian was used as *lingua franca*. Ashraf 2012. Nile Green's latest work suggests a shift towards the denationalization of Persianate studies. See Green 2019: 2.

16 Schimmel 1973: 1.

the Persian literary tradition that had already developed diverse devotional, lyrical and didactic themes before reaching India, was enriched with the Indic elements of wonder and imagination, and scientific and occult knowledge. The longest prose narrative text in Persian literature, the *Būstān-i Khiyāl* (Garden of Imagination), is a work of a South Asian scholar named Mīr Muḥammad Taqī Jaʿfarī Ḥussaynī in the eighteenth-century in fourteen volumes. The *Būstān-i Khiyāl* represents an encyclopaedia of fables and tales from Indic and Perso-Islamic traditions, and both historical and imaginary ones interwoven together in labyrinthine frames. Authors and translators of these stories in Persian were scholars with different backgrounds: they were either Indian Muslims, Persian-speaking Hindus, or Muslim men of learning from Iran and Central Asia who had immigrated to India, to seek a more generous support (*ṣila*) from the Mughal court. Indo-Persian narrative texts not only concerned translations from the *Katha*[17] and *Kāvya*[18] in Sanskrit, but also included popular tales from vernacular languages and dialects such as Awadhi, Sindhi and Punjabi, in addition to those which were transmitted indirectly from earlier translated Pahlavi or Arabic sources.

This article aims to examine the transmission and circulation of Indian stories in Persian literature by looking at the translations that date to the Ghaznavid dynasty (962–1187), the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) and the Mughals (1526–1858). Our aim is to study the systematic acculturation of the Persian (re)productions of Indian narratives of diverse genres within the translation or rewriting process. The article suggests that the process of translation provided reproductions of the original work, but it also involved acts of rewriting and reinterpretation that meant to adjust the text to the social and religious values of the translator, the ones of the patron or of the readership. We intend to see, in particular, how narratives carried across non-Muslim Indian cultural notions to Muslim readership – considering that the Islamization process was not a homogeneous trend, but a composite phenomenon which drew elements from different spheres of Muslim theological learning such as the law (*sharīʿa*) and mysticism (*ṭarīqa*). Further examples of intertextuality and suppleness in narrative texts will be provided to prove the embodiment of cultural diversities via multiple narrative strategies of reduction, selection, hybridization and/or [symbolic] interpretation.

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17 The word *katha* means "tale" or "story" and refers to the literary tradition of storytelling and collections of fables and tales in classic Sanskrit literature, many of which were translated into Persian in the Mughal period and were rendered from Persian into other languages such as Arabic, Turkish and European languages.

18 *Kāvya* is a Sanskrit literary style that flourished from the early centuries of our era and was applied in Indian court epic literature. It is characterized by the extensive use of poetic devices such as similes, metaphors and hyperbole in both prose and poetry. Aśvaghoṣa (second century CE) and Kālidāsa (fifth century CE) are the most prominent masters of *Kāvya* literature.

1 Indo-Persian narrative tradition

The Indo-Persian narrative literature – by which we refer to the category of fiction with its specific formal and thematic characteristics – involves two-way reciprocal literary interactions that cover on the one hand, the adoption of Persian narrative elements and literary styles by Indian poets from the thirteenth century on, and on the other hand, involve the Persian renderings and interpretations of Indian narratives which date centuries earlier than the domination of the Sultanate and Mughals, and go beyond the South Asian geographical region. Though Indo-Persian stories have certain similarities to the Persian ones, they display features in form, structure and content that make them distinct. With regards to the form, Indo-Persian stories follow typical characteristics of multiple framing structures with linking sequences. Many are compilations of tales retold within a main frame story in a linear, synchronic or labyrinthine order. Three formal sections of prologue, context and epilogue are repeated at regular intervals at the beginning, within and at the end of each tale inside the frame story. Each inner tale has a circular plot of narration composed of the four phases of i) stability, ii) conflict (separation, enigma, evil temptation, etc.), iii) success in the trial, and a iv) return to the stability point, repeated in form of a spiral pattern within the story. Narratives are written in prose or verse, or a combination of both. In verse narration (*manẓūma*), under the important impact of works of renowned Persian poets such as Niẓāmī Ganjawī (d. 1209), Sa'dī (d. 1292) and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492), popular love stories in *matnawī*[19] attain great popularity from the thirteenth century. Stories such as *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, *Liylī wa Majnūn* and *Khusrau wa Shīrīn* were versified by numerous South Asian poets who adopted similar metrics and poetic styles of Persian poets in their versifications.[20] Amīr Khusrau of Delhi (d. 1325) imitated Niẓāmī's *Khamsa* (Five Books)[21] in his own book of *Khamsa*.[22] Jāmī's

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19 A style of poetry in Arabic and Persian literatures, composed of a large number of couplets for narrating long stories. Each two verses of a couplet in the *matnawī* rhyme together with words of identical ending syllables at the end of each verse.

20 Ṣiddīqī 1999: 50.

21 The five books are the *Makhzan al-asrār* (The Treasure Chest of Secrets), the *Khusrau wa Shīrīn*, the *Liylī wa Majnūn*, the *Haft gunbad* (Seven Domes), and the *Iskandar-nāma* (The Book of Alexander).

22 A compilation of the following five *matnawīs*: the *Matla'al-anwār* (The Dawn of Lights), *Shīrīn wa Khusrau*, *Majnūn wa Liylī*, *Āyyīna-yi sikandarī* (The Alexander's Mirror), and the *Hasht bihisht* (The Eight Paradises).

work, *Haft Aurang*,[23] was imitated in the same manner by Indian poets and his *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā* was rendered into Sanskrit by a certain Śrīvara under the title of *Kathākautuka* in the second half of the fifteenth century.[24] Likewise, compilations like the Sanskrit *Kathāsaritsāgara* made in 1600 by a Jain named Hemavijaya borrowed a number of tales from Persian sources.[25]

Authors combined the Indian narrative structure with Persian poetics, Perso-Arabic rhetorics (*al-balāgha*) and metrics (*'arūḍ*). In accordance with Persian literary models, translators/authors of Indian tales shaped the long-winded introductory part of their works, consisting of (i) the praise of Allah (*ḥamd*), (ii) the praise of prophet Muḥammad (*na't*), (iii) his ascension to the heavens (*mi'rāj*) and eventually, (iv) the eulogy of the dedicatee or the commissioner of the work (*madḥ*). The introductory part of the *mathnawī* love story of *Lurik wa Mīnā* – composed in Persian verse in 1607 by Ḥamīd Kalānaurī – is 165 couplets long.[26] In another example, the Persian *Padmāwat* (1618) by 'Abd al-Shakūr Bazmī (d. 1662), the introductory part reaches the lofty number of 272 couplets.[27] In certain compositions by Sufis, the introductory section integrated mystical views and doctrinal concepts. For instance, in the formulaic introductory prologue to the story of *Madhumālatī*[28] in Awadhi, the author Mīr Siyyid Manjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī, elaborated a long presentation about the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd*[29] (unity of being) which was widespread among *Shaṭṭārīs* and members of other Sufi orders in India.[30] A similar case is the introduction to the *Hīr-u Rānjha: maṭnawī-i Yiktā* by

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23 A compilation of seven books in *maṭnawī* style: the *Silsila al-ḍahab* (The Golden Chain), the *Salāmān-u Absāl*, the *Tuḥfat al-aḥrār* (The Gift of Freemen), the *Subḥat al-abrār* (The Benefactors' Worship), the *Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā*, the *Liylī wa Majnūn*, and the *Khirad-nāma-yi iskandarī* (Alexander's Book of Wisdom).

24 Obrock 2018: 752–776.

25 Mills et al. 2003: 579.

26 Kalanauri 1985: 7–10.

27 Bazmī 1971: 31–46.

28 *Madhumālatī* is an Indian Sufi romance about Manohar and a beauty named Madhumālatī, which was written by Mīr Siyyid Manjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī in 1545. See Rājgīrī 2000.

29 The philosophy introduced by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) and developed by other mystics such as Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) in his allegorical *Maṭnawī ma'nawī*. This philosophy is based on the belief that all beings of diverse or similar religious traditions are united and one in their existence as they are all from one divine essence that is God, and nothing other than God exists. Prominent poets and mystics such as Ḥallāj (d. 922), Shams-i Tabrīzī (d. 1248), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1340) the author of the *Gulshan-i rāz*, and 'Aṭṭār-i Niyshābūrī (d.1221) have expressed the same thought on the spirit's journey towards its source of existence, ending with annihilation in God (*fanā fi Allāh*) and becoming omnipresent with God (*Baqā bi Allāh*).

30 The philosophy of "*waḥdat-al-wujūd*" became very popular in India from the sixteenth century. Many South Asian Sufi schools such as the Chishtīya, Qādirīya and Shaṭṭārīya are known as *waḥdat-al-wujūdī*. For more information see Rizvi 1975: 241–301, vol. 1.

the 17th century poet Aḥmad Yār Khān Yiktā, who introduces important infor-
mation about the *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) and the *waḥdat al-shuhūd*[31]
(unity of vision) into the introductory section of his work.[32]

Collections of stories were not mere renderings of one particular source, but of
various materials consulted and combined by their translators and authors. A close
analysis of several Persian texts, previously considered as renderings of a single
work, reveals that they were compilations of tales selected from different sources.[33]
Certain Indian notions found in them, such as those about the categorization of
women in temper and sexuality, their art of seduction, masculine presence and
kingship, as well as sciences such as medicine, math, astrology and musicology
are clear indications of translators' consultation of non-fictional sources. For
instance, the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*[34] (The Book of a Parrot), a Persian adaptation of the
Sanskrit *Śukasaptati* (Seventy Tales of a Parrot) prepared by Żiyā al-Dīn Nakhshabī
(d. 751/1350–51), is a collection of tales about women's guiles and tricks that lays
stress upon home, life, love, marriage and the importance of chastity for women.
Nakhshabī was a savant and Sufi of the Chishtīya order who immigrated to India
from Central Asia at the time of the Delhi Sultanate. He prepared his *Ṭūṭī-nāma*
based on an earlier Persian translation of the Sanskrit book: the *Jawāhir al-asmār*[35]
(Gems of Tales), by ‘Imād al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṭagharī, a *munshī* at the court of
Khaljīs (1290–1320). Contrary to the Sanskrit work that was comprised of seventy
nights of story-telling by a parrot as the internal narrator of the frame story, the
Persian versions contain fifty-two nights and over eighty tales. Ṭagharī indicates
in the introduction that he was selective in choosing the tales and omitted the
ones that were not suitable to be presented to the king. He replaced them with
the ones from other Indian books, mostly from the *Hindī*[36] *Kalīla wa Dimna*, and

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31 The believers of the "*waḥdat al-shuhūd*" (unity of vision) philosophy in Sufi schools, such as the
Naqshbandīya and Kubravīya, believed that the perception of the essence of existence is only
possible through revelation *kashf-u shuhūd*. *Kashf* means revealing the hidden sense and *shuhūd*
means the vision of the unseen which could be possible by the absence of "me" and the presence of
"God". Once the Sufi becomes free of any belongings, and is empty of himself, he finds God within.
The lover becomes the beloved, and discovers Ka‘ba in his inner self.
32 Yiktā: 55–56.
33 Even the Pahlavi *Karīraka Damanaka* by Burzūya Pizishk from the Sassanid period was a
compilation of tales from different Sanskrit sources, and was not a mere rendering of one book.
34 For the edited text see: Nakhshabī 1993. For the English translation see Nakhshabī 1978.
35 This is a unique manuscript preserved under the number 10/5328 at Iran's National Parliament
Library in Tehran. For the edited text see Ṭagharī 2006.
36 Although the terms *hindī* or *hindawī* (Indian) are mentioned in the text, one should doubt if the
translator meant the "Indian language" in general, which could be Sanskrit or other vernaculars,
or if he literally meant the *hindawī* language, an umbrella term used for an earlier variation of
Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. One cannot be certain whether a *hindawī* variation of the *Pañcatantra*
was available to the translator or he translated his work directly from Sanskrit.

the ones that were not translated into Persian yet.[37] The close study of the tales in this treatise reveals that several among them were taken from the *Hitopadeśa*[38] (Beneficial Advice) and the *Vetāla Pañcaviṁśati*[39] (Twenty-Five Tales of *Vetāla*, the Evil Spirit). Likewise, chapters twelve and thirteen of the *Jawāhir al-asmār*[40] contain concise information about Indian musicology, which is not found in the Sanskrit *Śukasaptati* and must have been borrowed from a non-narrative source. Nakhshabī goes even further to Persianize this chapter by replacing the Indian musical terms with the Persian ones, so that it could be understood by the Persian reader who is not familiar with the Indian *rāga* system. Nakhshabī's *Ṭūṭī-nāma* also includes the entire story of another book, the *Sindbād-nāma*[41] (The Book of Sindbad) in the ninth night chapter, which also follows a labyrinthine structure and contains tales about women's deceitfulness.[42]

This selective approach becomes more apparent in cases where sequences taken from different stories are amalgamated into one. For instance, some later Persian adaptations of the *Śukasaptati* that date from the eighteenth century, include the sequence of treason of the young lady by an older go-between woman in the frame story; this neither exists in Sanskrit nor in its early Persian versions by Ṭagharī and Nakhshabī, but it is found in Indian vernacular love tales such as the *Lurik wa Mīnā*[43] and Persian and Arabic popular tales such as the *Dalīla-yi muḥtāla* character[44] in *A Thousand and One Nights* (or *Hizār-u yik shab*). The sequence must

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37 Ṭagharī 2006: 18.

38 *Hitopadeśa* is a Sanskrit collection of fables, believed to have been derived from the ancient *Pañcatantra*.

39 *Vetāla Pañcavimśati* is a collection of twenty-five tales within tales in Sanskrit dating to the eleventh century. Vetāla or Baitāl is an evil spirit which has been compared to vampire in Western literature because it hangs upside down to the tree and lives in dead bodies. Vikrama, the legendary king of Ujjain struggles to overcome the *vetāla* who has possessed a dead body. Every time the *vetāla* tells stories and ends them with riddles to which the king should find an answer, and the cycle continues twenty-five times before the king succeeds in the end.

40 Ṭagharī 2006: 173–181.

41 A collection of tales about women's guiles retold by a sage *vizier* to the king, in order to distract him from punishing his son to death. The prince is accused of having sexual intentions towards his step-mother. See Ẓahīrī Samarqandī 2002.

42 Nakhshabī 1993: 69–84.

43 A popular tale derived from the *Chandāyan* story, which will be discussed further in the present paper.

44 A very deceitful old woman in popular tales whose job is to convince women with the finest tricks to meet with stranger men. This go-between lady receives money in return from men for her service. See Mazdāpūr 1995.

have been depicted from other tales as such and added to the later versions of the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*, and it becomes an inseparable episode in its latest Persian version, the *Chihil-ṭūṭī*,[45] proving that the Indo-Persian compositions are of hybrid nature and form a patchwork of narrative and non-narrative data knotted on the string of the plot within frame stories.

Another example of the selection and hybridization is the *Padmāwatī* romance about the princess of Singhal and the Rajput ruler of Chittor Fort, which was versified in Persian by ʿĀqil Khān-i Rāzī in 1658. The classical categorization of Indian women presented in the story by a Brahman character named Raghu[46] is a depiction from the first chapter of the *Koka Shastra*.[47]

Persian translations and retellings of the Indian narratives bring upon the issue of cultural sensitivity with regards to Indian rituals such as *satī* (women's self-immolation), *jauhar* (women's self-immolation in groups), *bārahmāsā* (folk lamentation songs for the husband, song by the abandoned wife), the belief in the reincarnation, metempsychosis and metamorphosis, the peaceful and maieutic relationship between human and non-human creatures and the *yogi* culture, which were conceived in the Muslim context as elements of wonder and added to the dramatic aspect of narration. The belief in the reincarnation of the human soul in animal bodies created the fusion of the real with the unreal, and appeared in narratives in form of personified animal characters. In Persian versions of fables of Buddhist or Hindu origin, such as the *Jātaka*[48] tales, the *Kathāsaritsāgara*[49], and the *Pañcatantra*[50], animals play similar roles as humans. They have proper names and speak human languages; they advise their human partners in tough situations and interact with them against common enemies. These Indian elements distinguish Indo-Persian stories from the Persian ones in the larger Persian narrative

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45 A series of popular Persian tales and anecdotes retold in a frame story similar to the one in the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*. It is a recension of the *Ṭūṭī-nāma* narrative tradition developed outside of India in Iran.
46 Bazmī 1971: 16–17.
47 *Koka Shastra* is a Sanskrit medieval text about manners of making love with women, their temperaments and characteristics, customs and places. The first chapter of the book is about "women's physical categories and their related seasons". Four types of women are presented as: the *padminī*, the *chitrinī*, the *śankhinī* and the *hastinī*. See Comfort 1964: 103.
48 The *Jātakas* are series of tales about the previous births of the Buddha in both human and animal forms. For the English translation see Cowell 1895: vols. 1–6.
49 The *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Ocean of the Streams of Stories) is a famous 11th-century collection of Indian legends, fairy tales and folktales in Sanskrit by Somadeva. For the English translation see Mallinson 2007.
50 The *Pañcatantra* is an Indian collection of didactic tales and animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, attributed to Vishnu Sharma and dated to roughly 200 BC. For the English translation see Rajan 1993.

tradition, though as we see in the next section, many were largely influenced by the standards and expectations of Muslim authors/ readers.

2 Cultural translation and the Indo-Persian literary context

The interdisciplinary approach to literature and translation studies in the past decades has led to the theorization of the concept of "cultural translation" to challenge "word for word" translation in its traditional sense.[51] The idea connotes the implication of individual and communal identities in the formation and formulation of a shared, and at the same time distinct literary arena through translation. It persists in the "cultural involvement" of the producer (author/translator) or the target audience (the reader) in the translation and (re)interpretation of texts. What is transformed through a new narration reflects the system of beliefs and customs of the author and the reader and how they interpret the world.[52] Along with linguistic variances, expectations of the target culture can make a translated work distinct from the original one to the level of a new literary production, or even recognize it as a new rewriting.[53]

Within multilingual and multicultural settings as in South Asia, versions and variations of the stories that were common among different literary traditions and languages, inevitably developed cultural differences and preferences by their Hindu, Jaïn or Muslim authors and/or translators under the impact of their religious beliefs as well as the ones of their readership. As a result, narrative accounts with similar plot and dominant themes transmitted different cultural and religious elements. The most popular love stories like *Liylī wa Majnūn* and *Khusrau wa Shīrīn* which were retold numerous times in Persian, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, etc. display diversities in narration depending on the religious system that the poet or translator belonged to and the micro-culture he came from. Likewise, among the Persian versions of the *Hīr wa Rānjha* story, one may rarely come across two versions that narrate sequences in a similar manner or from the same point of view. In fact, authors/translators took the liberty to reformulate the plot, use different words and metaphors, opt for a different conceptual orientation and conform the text to their preferred cultural and religious expectations. Anna Martin has referred to the application of the Persian system of allusions and poetic elaborations in Persian

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51 See Trivedi 2007: 277–287; Buden / Nowotny 2009: 196–208; Gambier / Doorslaer 2012: 21–25.
52 See "Cultural Translation" in Gambier / Doorslaer 2012: 21–25.
53 Lefèvre 1992: 9.

versions of Indian tales as a strategy of adaptation to the Persianate literary culture.[54] In certain texts, we see evidence of cultural overlapping or mutual influence while in some others cultural oppositions are stressed upon. To underline the adaptation of Indo-Persian stories with regards to the Muslim religious norms, we now focus on the two concrete factors of gender (women) and justice, to see how social practices changed in the narrative according to the orthodox Islamic law or under the influence of more liberal mystical interpretations.

3 Indian tales and Islamic concepts

Persian (re)production of Indian tales by Muslim authors inevitably involved the assimilation of Islamic concepts and the elimination or adaptation of Indic ones according to Islamic principles. The Islamic amendment of Indian tales commonly took place in the development of the plot and content, and was provided support with Quranic verses (*āya*) as well as citations from prophet Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*). In general, story characters' actions, the rise and fall of events and final consequences were adjusted to Islamic law (*sharī'a*) in a way to affirm Muslim ethics (*akhlāq*) and justice (*'adl*), and to confirm social standards regarding sexuality, patriarchy or women's passive social status. Muslims inserted their own gender-based vision in the text and presented a pessimistic image of women based on their distrustfulness and cunning nature. In this regard, we shall return once more to the *Ṭūṭī-nāma* (Tales of the Parrot) by Żiyā al-Dīn Nakhshabī, the Persian adaptation of the Sanskrit *Śukasaptati* in ornate prose; The frame story in summary is as follows:

A merchant named Khwāja Maymūn (Madanavinda in the Sanskrit version) goes on a journey and leaves his wife, Khujasta (Prabhāvati in the Sanskrit version) at home with a parrot and a mynah. In the absence of her husband, Khujasta falls in love and decides to join her lover at night. The female mynah warns her of the dire consequences of her act and as a result gets killed straight away. On the contrary, the wise male parrot entertains Khujasta at home by telling stories about women's love affairs and their tricks for hiding their act of adultery and saving their honor. In the Sanskrit version, when the merchant returns on the seventieth night, the male parrot affirms the wife's innocence and the husband receives her with care and respect. The birds that were in fact cursed and metamorphosed wise savants, return to their original form and fly to the heavens. In the Persian version, the names of characters have been Persianized and the names of geographical places in India have been replaced by known regions in Iran and Central Asia such as Kirmān, Ispahān and Khurāsān. The happy ending in the *Śukasaptati* and the

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54 Martin 2017: 33.

lovers' reunion are eliminated and the Persian *Ṭūṭī-nāma* takes a tragic turn: the housewife is beheaded by her husband for having the mere inclination of leaving home and joining another man. Then the merchant sets the parrot free, wears a Sufi cloak (*pashmīna*), renounces worldly pleasures and lives the life of a wanderer in the desert. The Muslim narrator's approach to the guile and trickery is drastically different from the one in the Sanskrit text. While in the Sanskrit version the use of ruse is perceived in positive sense as intelligence and praised without raising any moral judgement, the Persian rendering exposes a negative image relating it to immoral concepts of deceit and treachery: an unforgivable sin! Cunning women in the *Śukasaptati* are clever tricksters whose intelligence and wittiness evoke astonishment, appreciation and laughter while the same characters turn into daft and clumsy ones in the *Ṭūṭī-nāma* whose actions are easily revealed and punished without any remorse.

The satirical language in the *Śukasaptati* adds a fun twist to the story while in Nakhshabī's version the language becomes more serious and the characters' re-actions are more brutal. Nakhshabī follows a strict didactic purpose in narration and ends tales with the guilty character's punishment. As a result, the amusing aspect of story-telling is overshadowed in his Persian version. By constantly emphasizing patriarchal elements, Nakhshabī delivers an ethically judgmental assessment of the events he recounts, insisting that women bring sinful earthly joys. As a Sufi who practiced renunciation of worldly life, Nakhshabī tries to convince the reader that the woman is of a diabolic nature and must be avoided. In the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*, he propagates the celibate way (*khalwat*) of life as a true man (*mard-wār*), and advises men not to trust any women. In Nakhshabī's poetry, women are compared to poisonous snakes and the Devil (Iblīs) in their beguiling nature:

> Oh Nakhshabī! The woman is completely of cunning nature. Anyway, the world never lacks fraud. Women's deceitfulness is not even found in Iblis.[55]

> Oh Nakhshabī! The woman is exceedingly tricky. Try to free yourself from her charms. As the snake is deadly and poisonous from head to tail, the poor woman is likewise fatal from head to toe.[56]

In the tales of the Sanskrit version, wives succeed in convincing husbands of their loyalty and saving their honor in public. In the rare cases where women's secret affairs are revealed, they are either forgiven by the king or in the most unfortunate case, forced to leave their village while most tales in Nakhshabī's *Ṭūṭī-nāma* end with the death of disloyal wives.

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55 Nakhshabī 1993: 323. The translations are mine.
56 Nakhshabī 1993: 78.

Nakhshabī! Know that Woman deserves the sword! [Real] man is the one who kills the woman! What regrets will you have if a woman dies? The bad woman would better be killed by a honed sword![57]

Cases of men's adultery are reported in Nakhshabī's text too, but they are conceived as normal and do not arouse any question. A careful reading of the Sanskrit version in comparison with the Persian one demonstrates the different perception of the sexual act as a sin in Muslim culture. In Islam, a woman's sexual life is solely legitimized in a marital relationship and it directly defines or rather questions her honor whilst a man's affair with multiple women is well perceived as natural. The Quranic law considers the right for men to have sexual relations as a gender necessity by legitimizing them to have up to four official spouses and to get engaged with an unlimited number of women through temporary marriage.[58] In this context, women are treated differently and seen as men's possessions or objects of desire; sexual relationship out of religious marital conventions is not tolerated for them and would be punished by death. This is how the Muslim author consciously changes the narrative plot and the characters' fates in accordance with the *sharī'a* and Muslim sociocultural norms (*'urf*).

The status of the male parrot and the storyteller with respect to the woman is also worthy of attention in the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*. In the general logic of the Muslim author, men benefit from an innate superiority over women in thinking and intelligence. The male parrot to whom the female character has been entrusted represents the same masculine and dominant position vis-a-vis the woman's weakness and dependence. The bird character performs more tactfully and smartly in conflictual scenes as the male presence in the house. Male-driven depiction of women refers to the different perception of power relations in Sanskrit and Persian literatures. The narrators' view about the "prohibited desire" shifts from tolerance and acceptance to a total discard and retaliation: a fruit of transition between two religious cultures to which narrators and their audience belong.

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57 Nakhshabī 1993: 84.

58 *Quran* 4: 3, See Pickthal 1953 for the English translation. By this, I refer to the Shiite interpretation of *sīgha* in Persian and *nikāḥ al-mut'ah* in Arabic, literally meaning pleasure marriage. The Sunnite law prohibits the *nikāḥ al-mut'ah*, but it suggests other forms of marriage that could be compared to the temporary form of marriage. Despite the fact that Sufi sects were more liberal in their thoughts and interpretation of Islam, many remained conservative towards social norms and legal measures regarding women. The author of the *Ṭūṭī-nāma*, Nakhshabī was a follower of Chishtīya Sufi order whose members mostly followed Ḥanafī Sunni school of jurisprudence, yet they highly respected Shiite thoughts and prioritized *sharī'a* before *ṭarīqa*. Persian literary production by Chishtī Sufis includes mystical poems and panegyrics about Shiite Imams recited in Chishtī *samā'* gatherings, the *malfūḏāt* (Sufi masters' words and teachings), the *maktūbāt* (masters' letters) and the *taḏkira* (biographical works). See Āryā 1986: 216–219 (vol. I).

Another example for the Islamic adaptation of men-women relationship is found in the *Hīr-Rānjha*. This is a popular love story of Punjab about the hidden love affair of Hīr, a young woman of an aristocrat family, and Rānjha who works for Hīr's father as a cowherd. Numerous Persian versions of the story exist in prose and poetry along with the Punjabi ones. As we read in sequences in the Punjabi versions, lovers meet in private and engage in an intimate relationship without their families' consent or any official marital agreement. Once Hīr's family becomes aware and forcefully marries her to a man of another tribe, Rānjha, in grief, becomes a *yogī-ṣifat* and travels across Punjab in search of his beloved. The story ends with their symbolic death side by side. The earliest version of the tale in Persian, *Dāstān-i āshiqī-i Hīr wa Rānjha*[59] was versified by a Tajik poet and Sufi of Naqshbandī order, Ḥayāt Jān Bāqī Kulobī (d. 1579) who dedicated his work to emperor Akbar (d. 1605). All throughout the story, when talking of Hīr and Rānjha's secret rendezvous, Kulobī explicitly insists on the fact that the lovers did not cross the borders of Islamic morality and did not have any sensual physical relationship. The poet interprets their love as divine, a symbol for the mystical passion of a Sufi for God (*Allāh*). Kulobī's *Hīr wa Rānjha* (C. 1575–79) is clearly different from the Punjabi version in this regard and mostly focuses on long wordy dialogues between the lovers – similar to the *munāẓira*[60] we see in Niẓāmī's poetry – rather than describing any act of intimacy. In one sequence the lovers kiss, but the poet immediately intervenes and provides a mystical interpretation, that their love was so pure and true and they were so sincere in heart that their act of kissing should not be seen as a sin nor an immoral act. He compares it to a small stick falling into the clear river, admitting that a stick will never make a river dirty.[61] In this example and many others, we deal with the Muslim narrator's censorship of the non-marital sexual act and his reinterpretation of the narrative to confirm standards of conjugal relationship in Muslim culture. Interestingly, in another version of the same tale, *Maṯnawī-i Yiktā* produced by Aḥmad Yār Khān Yiktā in the 17th century, the lovers' marriage takes place after their death, when their souls are ascended from the physical body and released from any carnal desire.[62] A similar idea is represented symbolically in the Sufi *'urs* ceremonies. Contrary to Muslim poets' mystical interpretation, Mansā Rām Munshī of Khushab, the eighteenth-century Hindu

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59 See Ashraf 1971–1975: 666, Manuscript no. 975/1. I thank Anne Murphy, Professor of Punjabi literature at the University of British Columbia who provided me with a copy of this unique manuscript.

60 Versified dialogue in form of questions and answers between the two main characters of the story. Out of sixty-seven chapters in Kulobī's *Hīr wa Rānjha*, twenty are in form of dialogues between the lovers.

61 Manuscript No. 975/1, folio 51v. See Ashraf 1971–1975: 666.

62 Yiktā: 88.

translator of the tale[63] into Persian, reports the erotic scenes as happened in Damodar's[64] *Hīr* and the story ends with the lovers' physical reunion.

The idea of bringing justice to sinful acts does not concern only women, but relates to the Muslim ideology that all evildoers should receive measured punishment for being disobedient and unfaithful to the rule of God. The Persian translations of fables from the *Pañcatantra* offer another emblematic example of the application of Islamic principles to translated materials. *Pañcatantra* (Five Books of Knowledge) is a collection of fables and tales from *Kāvya* Sanskrit didactic literature, retold in form of apologues by two jackals named Karataka and Damanaka. After a selective rendering of some tales from *Pañcatantra*, *Jātakas* and other Indic sources into the Pahlavi language, the compilation was rendered into Arabic from Pahlavi by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (around 750) who gave it the title of *Kalīla wa Dimna*. The new Persian versions of this book in verse were already popular from the tenth century. In the twelfth century, a scholarly *munshī* at the Ghaznavid court, Abū al-Ma'ālī Naṣr Allāh Munshī translated it from Arabic to New Persian. The book's innovative prose style highlighted by a very poetical nature founded the elaborate literary style of "ornate prose" (*naṭr-i maṣnū'*) in Persian literature. A number of variations, abridgements and interpretations of Munshī's work were produced in later centuries in South Asia including the *Anwār-i Suhaylī* by Wā'iẓ Kāshifī (d. 1504), the *'Ayār-i dānish* (an abridgement of *Anwār-i Suhaylī*) by Abū al-Faẓl (d. 1602), minister of the Mughal court, and the *Nigār-i Dānish* (an abridgement of the *'Ayār-i Dānish*). The Arabic and Persian versions compared to the Sanskrit texts available today display differences in the number of chapters and content, but one major aspect of these translations occurs in the Islamization of tales. The two jackals in the frame story convince the lion to devour his best friend, the ox. Their wicked plan is realized and the story ends in the Sanskrit version without any specific judgment. On the contrary, a new extra chapter is added to the Arabic and Persian versions produced in the Islamic period, about the punishment of Dimna's evil work (*bāzjust-i kār-i Dimna*)."[65] That is, after a succession of some events, the narrator returns to his Islamic belief about the retribution of evilness and renders justice by upholding the Islamic law in reference to the Quranic word: "Whosoever has done even an atom's weight of good will behold it and whosoever has done an atom's weight of evil will behold."[66] Consequently, the evil jackal,

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63 Mansā Rām Munshī, *Ḥīr-nāma*, Manuscript No. Or 1244, British Library. See Rieu 1881: 770, vol. 2.

64 Damodar Das Arora (d. circa 1656) is the Punjabi poet whose *Qiṣṣa Hīr* is known to be the oldest version of this love tale in Punjabi literature.

65 Munshī 1992: 129–156.

66 *Quran* 99: 7–8, See Pickthal (1953) for the English translation.

Dimna, is punished by death in a new chapter that the Muslim translator adds to his work.

It is noteworthy that tales and fables of *Katha* and *Kāvya* traditions do not reflect any absolute evilness nor goodness and characters' actions are narrated as they happen from a realistic point of view, regardless of any judgements inserted by the narrator about their nature. But the Perso-Islamic narrative literature introduces certain principles for defining goodness or evilness, stressing upon the existence of the resurrection day (*qiyāma*) and the ultimate divine judgement when the evildoers are treated with justice. This philosophy reshapes tales to resonate with the Islamic perception of integrity and justice for the Muslim reader. In other words, the Muslim narrator consciously leads the flow of events towards a direction that would confirm his own or his readers' religious belief in the divine fairness.

4 Sufi metaphors and the interpretation of Indian rituals

Indian tales in translation were influenced by mystical concepts and the symbolic metonymy that was current and extensively applied in Persian Sufi literature. The expression of mystical thoughts in allegorical stories by prominent South Asian Sufi masters was an established narrative tradition (*premakhyan*) before these romances were translated into Persian. On the other hand, by the time the Perso-Islamic culture settled in India with the support of the political power, the symbolic and metaphoric expression of mystical thoughts in Persian was at its highest peak in the fourteenth century; men of literature (*adab*) and Sufi scholars substituted the divine love for carnal desire and interpreted related concepts such as passion, union, separation and sufferance figuratively for diverse levels of the spiritual journey towards mystical union with Allah and transcendence to the level of a "perfect man" (*insān-i kāmil*). Symbolic mystical literature had precursor examples in both Arabic and Persian from the earliest periods of Islamic mysticism in the 8th and 9th centuries when Sufi didactics were taught through narration. In an embellished prose, Bāyazīd Basṭāmī (d. 874), the mystic of the ninth century, compared his spiritual journey (*ṭarīqat)* towards the truth (*ḥaqīqat*) to a bird who would drown into eternity and become part of it:

> Never Saw a lamp brighter than darkness. Never heard a word better than silence. I dwelled in silence, and wore the woolen cover (*khirqa*) of patience. I became a bird, with eyes of unity, [and] wings of eternity, flying in the air free of whatsoever. I drank from a cup for what I never lost my evermore thirst.[67]

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67 'Aṭṭār Niyshābūrī 2019, see part 1 "Ḏikr-i Bāyazīd-i Basṭāmī" (About Bāyazīd of Basṭām).

Islamic philosophers and Iranian mystics of later centuries elaborated this poetical prose in allegorical tales. Avicenna (d. 1037), the peripatetic philosopher, wrote *Risālat al-Ṭay, Salāmān wa Absāl* and *Ḥay Ibn Yaghżān* in Arabic. Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), the mystic theologian and philosopher of the Illumination school of thought (*ḥikmat-i ishrāq*), wrote the *Āwāz-i par-i Jibra'īl* (The Sound of Gabriel's Feather) and *'Aql-i surkh* (The Ruby Reason). Withal, Muḥammed Ghazzālī's (d. 1111) *Risālat al-Ṭayr* (The Treatise on Flying) and *Kīmīyā-yi Sa'ādat* (The Alchemy of Happiness), Sanāyī's (d.1131) *Siyar al-'Ibād ilā al-ma'ād* (The Worshippers' Path Towards Resurrection), Rūmī's (d. 1273) *Mathnawī ma'nawī* (The Spiritual *Mathnawī*), and 'Aṭṭār Niyshābūrī's (d. 1223) *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (Confluence of the Birds) are all examples of this mystical narrative genre, in which the story characters appear as representatives of spiritual concepts of soul, lower soul, reason, senses, lust, the divine ecstasy and spiritual states. The most current theme in these narratives concerns the human spirit jailed in the cage of the body. The conscious truth-seeking soul begins a journey to set itself free of the materialistic world and fly back to its celestial origin. During the journey towards salvation, the spirit might be helped by a guide who appears as an old sage (*pīr*). The choice for the use of a symbolic language was to hide the secret mystical messages from the impure unaffiliated souls, and to reveal them only to those who had the spiritual capacity of deciphering them. The use of a metaphorical language would also make the interpretation complex, and open doors to Islamic hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*); certain authors preferred to explain the ultimate message at the end of the tales in order to make it more comprehensible for their readers. The other reason to opt for the symbolic expression was, as Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1311) says in his interpretations of Suhrawardī's Philosophy, to resemble the word of God in the Quran.[68]

This approach was adopted by South Asian Sufi writers who transformed Indian popular romances into allegoric containers of inner insight, and recited them while preaching in mosques and hospices (*khānqāh*). From the fourteenth century, the elaborated devotional Sufi romances pictured arcane mystical senses such as the challenge between the good and the evil, the divine and the profane love, chastity and sensual lust through series of events by depicting human or animal characters, and creating an impact of amazement and wonder in dramatic sequences. Narration in a metaphorical language also provided marginal indications that helped the auditors to elucidate the meaning. Love tales were largely popularized by Sufi poets for transmitting the mystical sense and interpretations to it were provided in the prologues and epilogues to make their message clear to the reader.

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68 Pūrnāmdārīyān 2004: 281.

The very popular romance of *Chandāyan* by Maulānā Daud in Hindavi relates the love story of Lurik for a beauty named Chanda. His love rises to the point that makes him abandon his wife, Mina. The wife's lamentation in the absence of her husband and her resistance to temptation to join another man are symbols of patience in the path towards the truth (*ṭarīqa*).[69] The earliest Persian translation of *Chandāyan* was carried out by 'Abd al-Quddūs of Gangoh (d. 945/1537) who was a prominent Sufi master of the Ṣābirī branch of the Chishtīyya order in the sixteenth century. As we read in the *Laṭāyif-i Quddūsī* prepared by 'Abd al-Quddūs's son, Rukn al-Dīn, when 'Abd al-Quddūs translated the tale from Hindavi into Persian, after the praise of God (*tauḥīd*) and his prophet Muḥammad (*na't*), he decided to follow Niẓāmī's tradition and compose verses about Muḥammad's ascension (*mi'rāj*) since there was no part as such in the Hindavi *Chandāyan*. He versified a hemistich:

> ("*Layla-yi Isrā' ki zi mi'rāj-i ūst*") "That secretive night of Isrā' is (the moment of) his ascension". Then, he immediately heard a voice from heavens (*ghayb*) that inspired him to write the second hemistich as follows: ("*Nūr-i khudāwand-i jahān tāj-i ūst*") "The light of the God of the world is his crown." [70]

Based on this information, the first hemistich of this couplet is from 'Abd al-Quddūs and the second one is a divine inspiration; *i.e.* the author of *Laṭāyif-i Quddūsī* asserts that 'Abd al-Quddūs's high spiritual level allowed him to receive divine calls just as prophet Muḥammed did. 'Abd al-Quddūs's version of *Chandāyan* seems to have vanished during the battle between Sultan Buhlūl Lodī (r. 1451–1489) and Sultan Ḥussain Sharqī (r. 1458–1479). Among the only seven couplets remaining from the Persian *Chandāyan*, four are about *mi'rāj* discussing Muḥammad's superiority over other human beings and his ascension from 'Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem to the other world where no duality existed – which as mentioned, are not found in the Hindavi version. Maulānā Daud, the composer of the tale in Awadhi, believed that the whole story of the *Chandāyan* was divine Truth and that it was compatible with the interpretations of some verses of the *Quran*.[71] Other renderings of *Chandāyan* took main characters' names for their title, *e.g. dāstān-i Lurik wa Chandā* or *Lurik wa Mīnā*, reminding of the similar tradition for Persian and Arabic love romances. This story exemplifies the separation, the path of asceticism and the arduous levels of self-practice (*riyāżat*) that led to the purification of the traveler's (*sālik*) soul and provided him with the mere perception of self, of the creator and of the world. In Ḥamīd Kalānaurī's Persian *Lurik wa Mīnā*,

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69 See Kalānaurī 1985.
70 Rukn al-Dīn 1894: 99–100.
71 Rukn al-Dīn 1894: 100.

also known as the *'Iṣmat-nāma*, and dating to the seventeenth century, the author deciphers the story characters: Mīnā, Lurik, Satin and the go-between lady respectively as symbols for God (*khudā*), the spirit (*rūḥ*), the Devil (*Shayṭān*) and the lower soul (*nafs*). He explains that his intention was not only to narrate an entertaining story, but also to transmit a profound mystical message:

> There are secrets in my words, there are pearls in this shell. Under the cover of Mīnā's mystery, I revealed a hidden secret; only men of heart would comprehend the signs and the imbeciles would never reach it.[72]

The other example for the application of stories for transmitting mystical concepts and the symbolic narration is the aforementioned *Padmāwat* about Ratan Sen and princess Padmāwatī, and their adventurous love quest and reunion. The lovers live happily at Chittor Fort until 'Alā al-Dīn Khaljī's attack in 1303. Finally, Ratan Sen dies in the war with 'Alā al-Dīn and Padmāwatī leads a group of women at the fort into self-immolation (*jauhar*). Various versions of this tale exist in oral and written traditions in Hindi, Jain and Muslim literatures. In the *Padmāwat*, Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī (d. 1591) the Muslim author, recalls the symbolic nature of the tale and decodes Chittor city, Ratan Sen, Padmāwatī, 'Alā al-Dīn, the parrot, and Brahman Raghu, respectively as the human body, the spirit, reason, deceitfulness, the spiritual guide and Satan.[73] Muslim versions of the tale end with an emphasis on the arrival of Islam and the conquest of Chittor by a Muslim ruler while Hindu and Jain versions insist on the local resistance against Islam as exemplified in Padmāwatī's life. This interesting example shows how members of religious communities within the larger South Asian community adapted and narrated the shared narrative corpus differently based on their own religious values and sociocultural norms.

The translations and retellings of the Indian *premakhyan* highly enriched Persian allegorical literature with unprecedented religious diversity and non-Muslim rituals. The established system of mystical metaphors in Persian literature opened doors to new images and symbols for narrating spiritual experiences. Certain literary rituals that were conform to the Islamic principles of education, such as *bārahmāsā* for instructing women on chastity and resistance to carnal desire, were preserved while certain others that were foreign to the Muslim culture and did not comply to their tradition, such as women's self-immolation (*satī*) or group suicidal attempts (*jauhar*), came along with an Islamic interpretation. *Bārahmāsā* revolved around the songs about different seasons and the change of weather in each month throughout the year, and it was song by lonely abandoned

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72 Kalānaurī 1985: 38.
73 Bazmī 1971: 14, "Muqaddima" by 'Ābidī.

women to express their love and loyalty for their absent husbands. In poetry, the change of the weather in each season is associated with the heroine's moods and sorrowful feelings. It is called *bārah nāvau* (description of the six seasons) in Jain literature, and is also known as *viraha* in Hindu ethical stories. In tales, *bārahmāsā* represents self-sufferance and the devotional practice (*riyāżat*) of the traveler (*sālik*) in his path towards the divine beloved. The story of *'Iṣmat-nāma* by Ḥamīd Kalānaurī applies *bārahmāsā* as a symbol for the devotional practice of the truth seeker. This is not found in Persian devotional literature produced in Central or West Asia.

Satī is another Indian ritual that was foreign to the Perso-Islamic culture, and once pertained in the plot of some Indo-Persian romances, such as the *'Ishq-nāma* by Ḥasan Dihlawī (d. 1328), the *Sham'-u parwāna* (the Candle and the Moth) by Mīr 'Asgharī 'Āqil Khān Rāzī (1658–59), and the *Sūz-u Gudāz* (Burning and sore grief) by Muḥammed Riżā Nau'ī of Khabūshān (d. 1019/1610–11), it became a symbol for selflessness and complete devotion to the beloved. It also became an element of wonder that added to the dynamics of the narration. *Sūz-u Gudāz* is a *mathnawī* of four hundred and sixty couplets in the Indian poetic style (*sabk-i hindī*)[74] about the true story of a Hindu bride who lost her groom on her wedding day and longed for being burnt with her husband's body. Though Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) and his third son, Dāniyāl (d. 1013/1604) dissuaded her, the Hindu girl insisted on joining her beloved by committing *satī* and was finally burnt on a pyre. Saddened by this, prince Dāniyāl ordered Nau'ī to versify the event in details. *Sūz-u Gudāz* became an inspirational work for the later *Satī-nāma* by Mujrim Kashmīrī (d. 1856) who versified it in a hospice further to the request of a Sufi named Shāh Bahā al-Dīn Najm al-Dīn, and included a full description of the ritual.[75] Persian Poets compared *satī* to the Quranic story of Prophet Ibrāhīm to whom the fire appeared as a pleasant garden (*gulistān*) due to his strong belief in God (*īmān*).[76] The very well-known and popular metaphor of the lit candle and the moth turning around it is revealing of a poetical image of the same ritual. Though the act of suicide is an unpardonable sin in Islam, recounting it as a symbol in accordance with Islamic mystical concepts seems justified. Al-Mustamallī Bukhārī (d. 1491) relates *satī* to a spiritual state of annihilation in spiritual love. In his book, *Sharḥ al-ta'arruf li-maḏhab-i al-*

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74 A Poetic style in Persian literature that developed in India in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was specified with extremely elaborate imagery, and excessive and refined use of poetic devices which would make it difficult to perceive the poems' meanings. Because of its complicated artistic trait, it was used for expressing mystical secretive messages in poetry. Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī (d. 1676) and 'Abd al-Ghādir Bīdil of Delhi (d. 1720) are masters of this poetic style in Persian literature.

75 See Nau'ī Khabūshānī 1976, "Muqaddima : Dāstān-hā-yi *satī* dar Adabīyāt-i fārsī" by 'Ābidī.

76 *Quran* 21: 69, See Pickthal (1953) for the English translation.

taṣawwuf, he dissects Sufi spiritual levels for the process of purifying the human being towards perfection and eternal unity. Al-Mustamallī defines the mystical state of intoxication (*sukr*) as leaving the state of logic and committing precarious acts:

> It is a modality of soul that causes joy to an extent that causes unconsciousness. In particular, when love and passion exceed the degree of tolerance of animals and humans, the devotee *sālik* attains the state of astonishment, intoxication and amazement.[77]

This state could be caused by either extreme joy of unity or by the grand grief of separation from the beloved. The higher level of *sukr* would be ecstasy (*sahw*) when the disciple makes a conscious choice for torment or self-torture, which would give him joy and ecstasy instead of pain. Bukhārī states that Indian women's self-immolation was out of extreme love and full devotion for their husbands in the *sahw* state. He also mentions another Indian ritual where the devotee, after years of ascetical suffering, becomes eligible to meet the idol god. As part of the ceremony, he digs a ditch of paste around himself and fills it with oil. Then, he sets fire to the oil while visualizing the idol, and sits inside the circle with his legs crossed under his body. He burns and his brain runs out of his mouth and nose, but he doesn't even emit a sigh of pain due to his high virtue in love. His ash will be later considered as sacred and will be used to cure sick people.[78] Mustamallī gives a mystical interpretation for this ritual by relating it to the state of *sahw*, as a symbolic act of sincere devotion to the celestial beloved.

The following couplets are attributed to Amīr Khusrau and refer to *satī* in a similar sense:

> Oh Khusrau! Be thou not less than a Hindu woman in making love, who burns her soul alive for a dead body! Sacrifice your life for the beloved (*dūst*) in the same way the Hindu woman burns herself in fire [as proof of] loyalty for her husband.[79]

5 Conclusion

Indo-Persian narrative literature is a hybrid and intertextual corpus that reflects reciprocal literary interactions between Indic and Persian cultures in a historical period when translation and knowledge exchange were supported by Muslim governors of South Asia and beyond. As we study the integration of Indian tales

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77 Al-Mustamallī Bukhārī 1984: 1494.
78 Al-Mustamallī Bukhārī 1984: 1494.
79 ʿĀbidī 1976: 17.

into Persian literature along with their adjustments in style, their adaptations to the cultural standards and religious norms and the selective approach in preparing the new compilations of tales from different sources becomes apparent, which involved different forms of reinterpretation and rewriting. Persian translations and retellings of narratives were new compendiums that were distinct from the Indic ones. In many cases, Muslim authors altered or replaced Indic religious motifs with Perso-Islamic ones and in several others, the original Indian source was interpolated with materials and notions drawn from Islamic sources. Concrete examples of stories examined in this paper are proof of Muslim writers/ translators' application of Islamic culture in developing story characters, gender roles and elements of wonder. The cultural adjustment happened at two significant levels according to Islamic principles (*sharī'a*) and mysticism (*ṭarīqa*). The application of the religious norms based on the *sharī'a* involved a substantial rewriting of the original source, particularly in the case of female characters and their active roles in the Indian context, which would be diminished to a more passive and discrete one in Persian versions. Subjects such as chastity, dominance, faithfulness and betrayal were modified based on the gender norms of the target religious context, and boundaries of moralities were shifted with the punishment of the evil based on the Islamic established law for rendering justice. Sufi concepts also reshaped several features of translations by Muslims; for instance, *satī* or *bārahmāsā* were interpreted as mystical notions. This did not occur when the Persian writer/ translator was a non-Muslim. The adjustment of Hindu concepts to the Islamic criteria despite the interest in their quaintness indirectly reveals cultural concurrences and controversies, where religious communities tried each to own the shared literary arena by providing an adaptation that confirmed their own religious standards and preferences. The flexibility and intertextual aspect of narrative texts was a principal factor that allowed this to happen. Muslims and non-Muslims repositioned narrative themes and modified the integrated cultural values based on their own identities under the impact of the social and political systems of their time. In doing so, one religious identity did not remain "foreign" to the other, and the hybrid sites of meaning promoted by each community remained connected despite being distinct. Further study of the cultural translation and rewriting of narratives will allow us to attain a better understanding of the adoption and adaptation, of the acceptance and refusal and of religious encounters within the Indo-Persian literary context.

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