

Persian at the Court or in the Village?

The Elusive Presence of Persian in Bengal

Thibaut d'Hubert

Persian[.] which was closely connected with the life of the court, does not seem to have had any direct impact on the ordinary people, nor could it produce literature of any importance in our period.

MOMTAZUR RAHMAN TARAFDAR, HUSAIN SHAHI BENGAL, 1494–1538

When listening to Persian from someone else's mouth, one cannot understand properly and be content.

‘ABD AL-HAKIM, NUR-NAMA (BOOK OF LIGHT, CA. 1660)

The available historiography of Persian in Bengal tells the story of travelling saints, men of letters, and political elites, with occasional signs of indigenization; or else it tells of its opposite: a fierce resistance to identifying the Bengali environment with the Persianate cultural ethos.¹ Then, we have the influential historiographical notion of the influence of Persian on Bengali language and culture, which appears as the natural outcome of the cultural hegemony of Persianate elites in the region.² In such narratives, Persian belongs to the cosmopolitan elite. Correspondingly, the Bengali expression of whatever is Persian is primarily seen as a matter of translation, usually performed by some intermediary figures located between the elite and the lower, vernacular strata of Bengal's society.³ This schema foregrounds narratives of successive colonizations and the attempts by vernacular agents to negotiate with hegemonic cultures so as to survive and elevate their status. Part of this historiographical narrative can indeed be verified in the primary sources that have come down to us. But as one might expect, a closer look at the economy of Persian in Bengal reveals a more complex situation, which points to many unanswered questions. This chapter provides a critical survey of the primary evidence available for the scope and character of Persian use in Bengal, particularly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries prior to the Mughal conquest of the region during the 1570s.

In addition to providing a synthetic overview of the available sources for the study of Persian in Bengal, the following pages revisit the historical narrative of the presence of Perso-Arabic learning in the Bengal frontier of the Persianate world.⁴ The chapter dwells on two cases that are representative of the issues surrounding the history of Persian in the region. The first case study invites us to reconsider how the sultanate of Bengal was integrated into the geography of the Persian-using world, while the second case study looks at the presence of Persian outside the court, in the remote rural areas of eastern Bengal in Noakhali, Chittagong, and Sylhet.

It is sometimes instructive to tread the paths of previous scholarly traditions, and in the present case to have a fresh look at *the* quote that located Bengal on the map of Bert Fragner's *Persophonie* in the fourteenth century. No piece of scholarship dealing with Persian in the Indian subcontinent generally or in Bengal specifically would omit to quote the following verse by Hafiz of Shiraz:

*Shakkar-shikan shawand hama tutiyan-i hind/z'in qand-i parsi ki ba
bangala mi-rawad*

All the parrots of India started crushing sugar/this Persian candy that goes to Bengal.

This verse became emblematic of the Persianization of South Asia's Muslim courts. Already in premodern times, commentators strove to locate the poet's ghazal within a specific historical context. This contextualization of Hafiz's poem would later become a landmark in the historiography of Persian in the Bengal sultanate (1205–1574) and the ultimate proof of the patronage of Persian literature at that regional court. The problem is that this prestigious poetic anecdote is a rather isolated clue. As we shall see below in further detail, this one poem and the commentaries that surround its reception tell us more about the perception of the expanding geography of poetic patronage than about the actual cultivation of Persian in Bengal.

The subsequent section of the chapter then turns to a later period of Bengal's history and to the eastern margins of the province. It studies a body of texts that contrast with the previous example to show how deeply the Persian language had penetrated into rural areas by the seventeenth century. After a brief overview of the use of Persian in didactic religious literature, the analysis focuses on the anonymous Persian *Nur-nama* and its several Bengali versions. The chapter argues that both the Persian and the Bengali texts testify to the formation of a regional Islamic idiom in Bengal. We shall also see that the topic of cultural and linguistic hegemony, although present in the discourse of the Bengali translators, offers a wide range of possible attitudes to Persian. What *Nur-nama* clearly shows is the availability of a little-known corpus of "popular" Persian texts that were instrumental in the religious instruction and ritual life of Bengali Muslims.

THE ELUSIVE PRESENCE OF PERSIAN IN BENGAL

Historians have highlighted the fact that, until the late Mughal or the early British period—that is the mid-eighteenth century—we lack a consistent and substantive body of Persian sources on the basis of which one could write the political and cultural history of Persianate Bengal.⁵ This observation could also apply to belles-lettres: judging from the available texts from that period and from the *tazkira* (anthology) literature, no noteworthy Persian poet seems to have received the patronage of Bengali sultans.⁶ Only one manuscript of Nizami's *Sharaf-nama* testifies to the cultivation of calligraphy and miniature paintings based on classics of Persian poetry in Bengal's royal ateliers.⁷ On the other hand, religious literature is fairly well represented in the corpus of Persian texts from Bengal.⁸ Among the oft-mentioned sources from that period are the letters and treatises of the Chishti saint of Pandua, Nur Qutb-i 'Alam (d. 1415).⁹ The works of this Chishti Sufi are extremely valuable sources about the cultivation of Persian in urban elite milieus in the Bengali sultanate. They have been mostly used by historians for the information they contain about the conflicts surrounding the accession to the throne of Raja Ganesh after the death of the Ilyas Shahi ruler, and Nur Qutb-i 'Alam's role as the spiritual master of Bengali sultans.¹⁰ Stone inscriptions also provide further pieces of the puzzle, but it is worth noting that until the Mughal period these were mainly in Arabic and therefore provide little positive information about the status of Persian under the Bengali sultans.¹¹

What can be gathered from the sultanate period shows that Persian was mainly used in urban centers—that is in Gaur, Pandua (near Malda in today's Indian state of West Bengal), and Sonargaon further east (near Dhaka in today's Bangladesh). There is no doubt about the fact that Persian was used at the court as a language of communication, as well as in the chancery's administration, if perhaps not to the same extent that it was used in the neighboring kingdom of Jawnpur and in later, Mughal times.¹² Chinese travelers noted the use of Persian at the Bengal court and identify it as the second language of the kingdom after Bengali. The court protocol, titles, and architecture of the sultanate also indicate the role of Persian models in the political idiom of the period.¹³ But despite all these clues, the actual language of official statements composed for both inside and outside the kingdom was predominantly Arabic.¹⁴

The majority of stone inscriptions from the sultanate period were written in Arabic. Most of them were formulaic, containing quotes from the Quran and Hadith. Some titles evince the desire of Bengali Sultans to claim recognition in both the *'Arab* and *'Ajam* domains of the Muslim world.¹⁵ But the most visible attempts at gaining supraregional fame are linked to traditional Arabic learning, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in particular. The establishment of educational institutions in the sultanate is well attested by numerous inscriptions, as well as by later records that point to the supraregional significance achieved by some centers of learning.¹⁶

Sonargaon was one such center of learning that seems to have attracted scholars from abroad.¹⁷ Accounts of the contribution of Bengal to Islamic learning point to Sharaf al-Din Abu al-Tawwama, the teacher of Sharaf al-Din Yahya Maneri (1263–1381). Very little is actually known about him, though, and almost none of his works have come down to us. The only exception is a versified treatise on jurisprudence entitled *Nam-i Haqq* (Name of the Truthful God), but the evidence for attributing this popular work to either him or one of his direct disciples is extremely thin to say the least.¹⁸ The other instance of supraregional scale in the fostering of Arabic traditional learning was the foundation in 1410 of al-Madrasa al-Bangaliyya, the Bengali madrasa founded in Mecca by Ghiyas al-Din A'zam Shah (r. 1389–1410). This case differs in the sense that we have much information regarding the foundation of this educational institution from a variety of Arabic and Persian sources.¹⁹ Here again jurisprudence played a central role, because this was the first madrasa in Mecca in which the four legal schools (*mazahib*) were all taught: twenty students would each study Shafi'i and Hanafi *fiqh*, and ten each Maliki and Hanbali *fiqh*.²⁰ As we shall see, this instance of long-distance patronage of an institution fostering Arabic learning probably contributed to the inclusion of Bengal in the geography of 'Ajam.

HAFIZ AND THE INDIAN PARROTS

If Amir Khusraw was the first Indian poet to gain fame throughout the Persian-using world and self-consciously to include Hind in the imaginary of Fragner's *Persophonie*, the following ghazal by Hafiz is perceived as an acknowledgement of the role of India in the economy of patronage of Persian poetry:

Saqi hadis-i sarw-u-gul-u-lala mi-rawad . . .

Cup-bearer, so goes the story of the cypress, the rose, and the tulip,
and this conversation goes with three purifying cups of wine.

Serve wine because the bride of speech is fully adorned; now, what's
to be done is done through the intermediary's craft.

All the parrots of India began crushing sugar; this Persian candy
that goes to Bengal.

See the crossing in space and time of the poem's journey: This child
born yesterday sets off for a year-long trip.

See this bewitching eye that tricks the pious man; the caravan of
enchantment follows his trail.

Lest you depart from the path for the sake of worldly pleasures;
it is an old woman who sits there, deceitful, and acts like
a procuress.

Warmed up, he wanders, and on the cheeks of jasmine, ashamed by
his face, sweat drips like dew.

The spring wind blows from the king's garden and morning dew
flows like wine in the tulip's cup.

Hafiz, do not silence your eagerness to join Sultan Ghiyas-i Din's
gathering because your work is only done by ways of laments
and requests.²¹

The interpretation of this ghazal has a long and complicated history. Modern scholars have seen in it clear evidence of Hafiz's relations with Indian sultans, but premodern commentators equally strove to uncover the context, which may help explain its otherwise obscure images.²² Before scrutinizing the various accounts found in the commentarial literature and the speculations of historians as to the identity of the Sultan Ghiyas-i Din mentioned in the last verse of the poem, let us first see what a decontextualized reading of the poem can reveal.

The first couplet brings the reader right in the middle of a banquet that takes place in a pleasure garden. The poet reflexively comments on the completion of a poem ("the bride of speech is fully adorned") and the role of the messenger who will deliver the poem to its addressee. The destination of the poem is given in the third couplet in which Hafiz says that Indian parrots began crushing the candy of Persian poetry, which reaches even the far end of the world that is Bengal. Pushing further his reflection on the commissioning of a poem by a sultan living in a faraway land, the poet identifies the work that he composed the day before with a newborn baby who must set off on a year-long journey. With this line, Hafiz manifests a clear awareness of the economy of poetic patronage in the Persianate world and subtly conveys the amazement—and perhaps the anxiety—of a poet who sends the product of his labor to a region of the world that he can barely comprehend. Here the poetic images are not so much conceived as hyperbolic statements about a familiar environment than as default ways to depict a world beyond the reach of experience. Couplets five to seven are particularly difficult to include in a unified interpretation of the poem. Most commentators chose to identify the figure of the beloved with the patron: the bewitching eye, the path, and face covered with sweat might all refer to the sultan.²³ Yet this interpretation is problematic: the various orders in which the verses have been arranged by premodern commentators and modern editors show that they struggled to make them fit in the poem's general schema.²⁴ If the poet was talking about the patron, then why focus on the journey, the caravan, and the sweating caused by the journey? It almost seems as though Hafiz was addressing the messenger and warning him about the temptations of the world that could cause a delay in the delivery of the poem to the sultan. Indeed, verse eight comes as the goal of the messenger's journey, with the refreshing "spring wind" and the wine served in the perpetual banquet in the king's garden—his mission is over and we are back to the scene that opened the poem. The final couplet is also very self-reflexive in the sense that, after some observations about the economy of patronage in the geographical space of the

Persianate world, the poet comments on the transgression of courtly etiquette that he is forced to make when manifesting his desires and lamenting on his inability to join Ghiyas-i Din's banquet.

Attempts to identify the sultan mentioned in the signature line started early in the commentarial tradition. The Ottoman commentator Sudi Busnawi (d. 1600) is vague about the identity of the addressee and simply says that Bengal is the capital (!) of the rulers of India.²⁵ Around the same time in Mughal India, we find two historical interpretations of this ghazal: one is a brief mention of the poem in the *Ain-i Akbari* of Abu al-Fazl (1551–1602), reviewing the rulers of Bengal, and the other is from the entry on the term *thalatha ghassala* in *Madar al-Afazil*, the dictionary of Allahdad Fayzi Sirhindi (d. 1595). In the latter work, the source of the story is said to be the *tazkira* (anthology) devoted to the poetry of sultans in the Muslim world compiled by Sultan Muhammad ibn Muhammad Harawi “Fakhri” (fl. 1551–55), the *Rawzat al-Salatin* (Garden of Sultans). The critical edition of this text by Sayyid Husam al-Din Rashidi gives the story in the chapter on the poet-sultans of Hind. The editor placed this account in the notes because it was only found in one manuscript kept in Istanbul, which was copied in 1628. The account given in both the *Rawzat al-Salatin* and the *Madar al-Afazil* goes as follows:

Sultan Ghiyas al-Din of Bengal was a protector of the arts and patron of many poets at his court. One of his ministers had three sons named Sarw, Gul, and Lala. The sultan was fond of the three young men. As they grew in beauty and intelligence, the sultan one day composed the line: “Cup-bearer, so goes the story of Sarw, Gul, and Lala.” He liked it a lot, and he decided to send one of his ministers to Shiraz with gifts for Hafiz to get him to complete the ghazal. The emissary went by sea, but was caught in a storm that made the ship drift “below the wind.” After a year's travel, he eventually reached Shiraz, gave Hafiz Ghiyas al-Din's presents, and submitted his request. The next morning, Hafiz handed the completed ghazal to him, and the messenger went back to Bengal.

After this, the text of the Istanbul manuscript adds a piece of information that is absent from the *Madar al-Afazil*, namely, that one Mawlana Muhammad Bihbahani, who was a respected figure in Shiraz and who was old by then, had heard the story from his father and testified to its accuracy by saying: “This account is correct” (*in waqi'a sahih ast*). In order to close his demonstration, the author then took the poem as evidence of the accuracy of this story and invited the reader to verify his account by reading Hafiz's poem.

This first account of the circumstances of the writing of this poem by Hafiz shows the need to provide a narrative context for this ghazal in order to make sense of its images. The conventional scene of a springtime banquet in a garden with the recitation of poetry on the tropes of the cypress, the rose, and the tulip turns into an actual story. The tropes become characters at the court of Ghiyas al-Din of Bengal. In this version of the story, the episode of the storm is hardly relevant to the unfolding of events. Of course, the fact that the messenger eventually

takes a year to reach Shiraz is reminiscent of the “year-long trip” of the fourth verse. But it is also reminiscent of another story involving Hafiz and India that was recorded in Firishta’s chronicle and later repeated by various anthologists.²⁶

The story is also related in the commentary on Hafiz’s *Diwan* attributed to Khatmi Lahawri (fl. 1615)—supposedly one of the earliest complete commentaries written in the subcontinent.²⁷ The author mentions as his sources both the *Rawzat al-Salatin* and the *Madar al-Afazil*.²⁸ But Khatmi provided a second account drawn from another commentary that he simply calls *Sharh-i Diwan*:²⁹

When sultan Ghiyas al-Din, the ruler of Hind, conquered Bengal, he fell ill. Three servants took care of him and, thinking that he was about to die, they gave him his last bath. The servants’ names were Sarw, Gul, and Lala. The sultan was eventually cured, and the three servants became his favorites. The other courtiers became jealous and started making fun of the untimely bathing of the sultan. One day the sultan heard about the mockeries and wrote this line: “Cup-bearer, so goes the story of Sarw, Gul, and Lala.” Then the poets of the court tried to complete it, but they failed, and the ghazal was sent to Hafiz [to complete].

In this version, it is the Arabic term *thalatha ghassala* (literally, “the three that wash,” that is the three cups of wine drunk in the morning to clear the body and mind) that triggers the contextual account of the poem’s composition. The term is lexicalized and it is found in several premodern dictionaries, including the *Madar al-Afazil*, which first gives its proper definition and then turns to the story.³⁰ It is this story that later authors kept retelling, whether in the commentarial tradition on Hafiz’s *Diwan* or in the Persian historiography of Bengal. For instance, this version of the story opens the section devoted to Ghiyas al-Din in the 1792 *Riyaz al-Salatin* (Garden of Sultans) of Ghulam Husayn Zaydpuri (d. 1817), the first Persian chronicle entirely devoted to the history of Bengal.³¹

The second story, as related in Khatmi Lahawri’s commentary and some other later commentaries from South Asia, does not make explicit the identification of Ghiyas-i Din with A’zam Shah of Bengal. The mention of the conquest of Bengal seems to indicate that the author had in mind the sultan of Delhi. As a matter of fact, none of the rulers of the time seems to match exactly with the possible time of the composition of the poem by Hafiz (ca. 1315–90). The first Ghiyas al-Din ibn Tughlaq ruled too early (between 1320 and 1325), and the second Ghiyas al-Din Tughlaq (r. 1388–89) and A’zam Shah of Bengal (r. 1389–1410) both succeeded to the throne at the very end of Hafiz’s lifetime. The absence of the name Ghiyas-i Din in the final verse and in verses 3, 4, and 8 in one of the earliest manuscripts of the *Diwan* dated November 1415 (Rabi’ I 818) that was edited by Nazir Ahmad makes it very probable that the references to Bengal and India were added after the death of the poet.³²

But the identification of Ghiyas al-Din is not what should monopolize our attention here. What is more relevant is the expression of an awareness of the “new” frontiers of the Persianate world and the making of a wider geocultural domain

in which Persian poetry circulates. Regarding the historiography of Bengal, this poem and the commentarial tradition that surrounds it thus show how the region was integrated into an imaginary of the Persianate world.

One reason that may have led to the association of Hafiz's ghazal with Ghiyas al-Din is a well-attested instance of long-distance patronage: the aforementioned foundation of al-Madrasa al-Bangaliyya in Mecca in 1410. This provided Ghiyas al-Din with an unprecedented aura in the wider Muslim world for a Bengali sultan. As a matter of fact, Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami (1704–84), who always drew a wealth of information from Persian and Arabic historiography in addition to mining previous biographical dictionaries, made the connection between sultan Ghiyas al-Din A'zam Shah's correspondence with Hafiz and the founder of the madrasa in Mecca. In Bilgrami's entry on Hafiz in his biographical dictionary *Khazana-yi 'Amira*, after quoting verse 3 ("All the parrots of India . . ."), Bilgrami identifies Ghiyas al-Din with the Bengali sultan and provides a Persian translation of a passage drawn from the Arabic *Tarikh Makka* (History of Mecca) about the foundation of al-Madrasa al-Bangaliyya.³³

Rather than the accuracy of the historical reading of this poem, what is significant is the role that it played in the inclusion of Bengal in a wider imaginary of the Persianate world. The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries constituted a key period for the formation of Bengal as a political and cultural entity. As a matter of fact, Hafiz's use of the term *bangala* to designate the region is contemporaneous with the term's adoption in Persian chronicles.³⁴ It was during the Ilyas Shahi and Husayn Shahi periods that the Bengali sultanate reached its maximum territorial expression. Yet in the decades that followed Ghiyas al-Din's rule, no major developments seem to have occurred regarding the patronage of Persian poetry at the court. We find some sporadic evidence of the cultivation of Persian classics through the compilation of the *Sharaf-nama-yi Maneri/Farhang-i Ibrahimi* under Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah (r. 1459–74) and the production of illustrated manuscripts in the ateliers of the Husayn Shahi rulers. Whereas the practice of long-distance patronage of Arabic learning via madrasas in Arabia continued with Jalal al-Din (r. 1415–32), Raja Ganesh's son who had converted to Islam at the hands of the Chishti saint Nur Qutb-i 'Alam, nothing seems to indicate that the Bengali sultans tried to turn their court into a proper center of Persian learning.

PERSIAN IN PREACHING AND RITUAL CONTEXTS

The Bengali literature of the restored Ilyas Shahi (1433–86) and Husayn Shahi (1493–1538) periods does, however, provide evidence for the diffusion of Persian literacy in Bengal. The principal domains of cultivation of Persian were administration, religious education, and public performances involving narratives in preaching and ritual contexts—which would have involved a certain level of bilingualism absent from the context of court poetry.³⁵ Among the Persian texts that are

attributed to authors who lived in Bengal during the sultanate, we find the famous Persian rendering of the earlier Sanskrit *Amritakunda* ('Pool of Nectar'), the *Hawd ma al-Hayat* (1210); a versified text on Sufi theory (*tasawwuf*) by Shaykh Sufi 'Abd al-Rahman Fathabadi entitled *Ganj-i Raz* (ca.1433–59); and *Nam-i Haqq*, another versified treatise, on elementary principles of religious obedience ('*ibadat*'), attributed to the scholar of Sonargaon, Abu Tawwama (d. 1300).³⁶ Bilingualism appears in the collected letters (*maktubat*) of Nur Qutb-i 'Alam, a Sufi who composed multilingual verses using eastern Indic words.³⁷ Texts written during this period in Bengali, which was then emerging as a written literary idiom, already contained several Persian loanwords. Elements of the narrative poems composed around this time outside of courtly contexts also show that at least some elements of Persianate culture had reached Bengal's rural areas and non-Muslim populations.³⁸

It is in the seventeenth century that we find the first texts that testify to the presence of Persian learning among Bengali Muslims in the rural areas of Bengal's eastern frontiers. In the kingdom of Arakan, starting from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Muslim authors began to compose texts using the Bengali literary idiom.³⁹ Although no Persian works from this early period have come down to us, the Bengali texts often acknowledge their reliance on earlier Persian and Arabic sources. The Bengali Muslim population of Arakan, and of other small kingdoms in eastern Bengal such as Bhulua (in today's Noakhali district of Bangladesh), was at least partly constituted of descendants of soldiers and officers formerly in the Bengali sultanate's employ,⁴⁰ and we can assume that their literary and religious culture reflected that of the sultanate. It seems, too, that in addition to narrative literature, it was ritualistic literature and treatises on religious obedience ('*ibadat*') conveyed through a regional religious idiom—but not courtly poetry—that constituted the main field of the spread of Persian literacy.

A unique manuscript excerpting texts dealing with Islamic jurisprudence, devotional practices, and mysticism (*tasawwuf*), copied in the late seventeenth century by a shaykh and his son in Sylhet, and kept at the Dhaka University, sheds a great deal of light on the uses of Persian literacy in rural areas and the integration of local elements into religious practice.⁴¹ This is therefore a unique source through which to study the texts that were part of the curriculum of the provincial imams and shaykhs in eastern Bengal. For instance, we find the Persian versified treatise of Yusuf Gada entitled *Tuhfa-yi Nasa'ih* (A Gift of Guidance; 1393) translated entirely by the poet Alaol in Arakan in 1663, and also partly by 'Abd al-Hakim in Bhulua around the same time.⁴² The excerpts given in this compendium are drawn from classical Persian literature, Indo-Persian Sufi texts (such as the treatises attributed to Shah Madar or the *Tuhfa-yi Nasa'ih*), and anonymous handbooks on how to perform remembrance of God (*zikr*) or bio-cosmological knowledge known as *nuzul-i tawhid* (the descent of Unicity). In the margins of folios 26b to 30a, we find an abridged version of an anonymous ritual text about the creation of the world entitled *Nur-nama* (Book of Light), which was very popular

in northern South Asia at the time. This is a perfect example of both the rooting of Islam in the subcontinent and the role of Persian in the daily religious practices of Bengali Muslims.

THE “NUR-NAMA” AND YOGIC SUFI LITERATURE IN BENGAL

Among the traces of the diffusion of Persian literature outside urban centers and institutionalized religious movements (the Sufi orders particularly), we find the fascinating corpus of eastern Bengali treatises on Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*) and bio-cosmological practices.⁴³ Historically speaking, these texts remain in a void: we have a fairly coherent corpus that can be dated from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century, but very little is known about their authors, social status, and readership, or about the precise textual and doctrinal background of their teachings on *‘ibadat*, *tasawwuf*, and bodily/yogic practices.

These Bengali Muslim treatises on yoga were composed in the regions of Chittagong, Comilla, and Mymensingh. The earliest author of this tradition is believed to be Sayyid Sultan (fl. 1630–45). Ali Raja is considered one of the latest and most accomplished. Other authors such as Mir Muhammad Shaphi may have been relatives and/or disciples of Sayyid Sultan.⁴⁴ The anonymous *Yoga-Kalandar* is one of the most popular texts of this corpus.⁴⁵ The manuscripts were consistently found in eastern Bengal. Besides the Bengali alphabet, some manuscripts have been copied in fully vocalized Arabic *naskh* script. To this we may add the Sylhet Nagari texts that deal with cosmogony and Sufi practices, though they belong to a somehow different and later tradition in which the place of yogic knowledge remains to be assessed.⁴⁶

The structure of these treatises is stable, and if all the usual topics are not treated, they appear in the same order. After the *hamd* and *nat* (in Persian spelling, *na‘t*), that is, the praises of God and the Prophet, the author gives an account of the creation, from the formless God through his beloved consciousness that is the Light of Muhammad (*Nur Muhammad*). Then we find the exposition of the *man-jil-tattva*, or science of the stages of spiritual realization. The author then proceeds with teachings about various aspects of the *deha-tattva*; that is, bio-cosmological knowledge per se. The last part of the treatise is typically dedicated to the development of the fetus in the womb and the interpretation of omens.

If we look at the doctrinal content of Bengali treatises on bio-cosmology, the transmission from classical Sufi and Nath traditions may be obvious, but the exact nature of the textual transmission is not.⁴⁷ The texts themselves do mention precise Persian sources, but, as far as is known, no Sanskrit or Bengali Tantric texts are explicitly cited. Very few references are given to the field of Persian literature. But at least one of these texts is known to be a Bengali rendering of a Persian work, namely, the *Nur-nama*. This text is a cosmogony dealing with the

creation of the universe by the Light of Muhammad.⁴⁸ The researcher Raziya Sultana provides a preliminary survey of the six Bengali versions of this text.⁴⁹ Several manuscripts bearing this title are preserved in various libraries around the world.⁵⁰ A manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France contains a complete version of the *Nur-nama* in prose.⁵¹ Its content largely matches that of the Bengali texts consulted in researching this chapter, namely, 'Abd al-Hakim and Muhammad Shaphi's *Nur-namas*. The Bibliothèque nationale manuscript was copied in Central Asia in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵² The creation story just takes a few folios at the beginning of the manuscript, then we find indications about the merits gained from reading, copying, or reading the *Nur-nama* aloud. Then there follows a story about al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who sent a manuscript of the *Nur-nama* to Mahmud of Ghazna. The Sultan read it and redeemed himself of all his sins. The manuscript ends with a prayer in Arabic relating how the body of the Prophet was created from the qualities of various elements of God's creation. The text emphasizes the importance of the daily recitation of the *Nur-nama*. If one cannot copy it, one should have it copied; if one cannot read it, one should have it read; and if one cannot have it read aloud, one should keep a copy at home.⁵³

The abridged version of the Dhaka manuscript differs slightly from that of the Bibliothèque nationale de France; and as one might expect, its version is closer to the Bengali versions of the *Nur-nama*—especially that of 'Abd al-Hakim. The manuscript provides an exposition of bio-cosmological correspondences in Persian that agrees with the Bengali texts on the topic. It also contains Hindwi terminology.⁵⁴ The *Nur-nama* is thus an Islamic creation story in Persian and Arabic with characteristically Indic features.⁵⁵

It goes without saying that even if the Persian *Nur-nama* is claimed to be the direct source of the Bengali versions, this does not imply that the original text came from outside South Asia.⁵⁶ For instance, its creation story shows the influence of Nath Yogi cosmogonies. Nur Muhammad is not only the medium of God's epiphanies and it is through the exudation of drops from his own "body" that the elements of the universe are created. In Muhammad Shaphi's version, the reformulation of the account by means of a local religious idiom makes the likeness with Nath cosmologies even more striking.⁵⁷

Following Simon Digby, Carl Ernst, and Aditya Behl's works on 'Abd al-Quddus Ganguihi, the *Amritakunda*, and Shattari literature respectively, the example of the transmission of the *Nur-nama* illustrates the inclusion of Indic bio-cosmological knowledge in South Asian Persian literary culture.⁵⁸ The presence of Indic elements is not a new phenomenon of doctrinal synthesis engendered by the vernacular rendering of the Persian text: by the time Bengali versions were composed, the Persian *Nur-nama* was itself conveying elements of a South Asian religious idiom.

The *Nur-nama* was thus a ritual Persian text that was part of the daily environment of the Bengali Muslims from at least the seventeenth century on. 'Abd al-Hakim's Bengali version is particularly instructive regarding the

transmission of this text and the attention given not only to its ritual reading, but also to its meaning. The prologue of 'Abd al-Hakim's *Nur-nama* is often quoted for its elaborate apology for treating religious matters in a written work in Bengali. As a matter of fact, in some milieus, using the regional language (*deshi-bhasha*) rather than Arabic or Persian to discuss Islamic topics deserved some kind of disclaimer.⁵⁹ But in 'Abd al-Hakim's case, things are more complicated than a mere dichotomy between the classical languages of Islam, of which most Bengali Muslims were supposedly ignorant, and the easily accessible regional idiom. Here is a prose translation of the famous passage in which the author presented his arguments against meaningless rituals and in favor of the use of the vernacular to access Arabic and Persian texts:

All those accounts about religions are remarkable and everything is related in [Perso-Arabic] books [*kitaba*]. Those friends who are not trained to read [Perso-Arabic] books came to me and affectionately submitted their complaint. Therefore, I strove to satisfy everyone by rendering the poem about the creation of light into the language of Banga, and by composing it I fulfilled everyone's wish. When listening to Persian from someone else's mouth, one cannot understand properly and be content. This is why I address you in a Bengali composition and satisfy everyone with my work. Treatises in Arabic convey no emotion, but one is deeply moved when he understands a work in the regional idiom. It makes no difference if God writes about the Prophet's qualities in Arabic, Persian, or in the language of Hind. Whether in Arabic, Persian, or Hinduyani, God wrote the Prophet's story in treatises. In the Arab country, the Lord provided Muhammad with a Quran [*musapha phorkana*] in Arabic language. In the country of the Uryan, he sent the Torah to the prophet Musa in Uryani. In Greece, he sent the Psalms [*jabbura*] to David in Greek. In the country of Syria, it is in the Syriac language that he sent the Gospel to Jesus. In all countries, whatever the language people speak, the Lord understands all of them, be it Hinduyani, the language of the country of Banga, or any other idiom. Whoever worships the Lord in his own tongue, he will address him accordingly. The lord does not ignore any language; whatever the kingdom, he knows its language. Allah, Khuda, Gosai, all these are his names; Niranjan is the receptacle of all qualities. The savant wrote with Indic letters a Muslim speech and understood its explanation. Letters never had any importance; it is the teaching of the treatises one ought to know. If one does not follow the conduct prescribed by treatises, it is useless for him to read Arabic and Persian texts. Whether in a *pustaka* or a *kitaba*, letters manifest a hidden message. *Alif*, or *anji*, are God's creations; there is no other creator besides God. Whether in Arabic, Persian or Bengali, God wrote the Prophet's teachings in treatises. He ordered meritorious deeds and forbade sin.⁶⁰

This passage is typically quoted to illustrate the tensions between those in favor of Bengali and traditional Islamic scholarship associated with Arabic and Persian.⁶¹ 'Abd al-Hakim put his defense of the use of the regional language in the clearest terms possible. But this side of his discourse should not lead us to miss the testimony regarding the cultivation of Arabic and Persian in rural areas that this

text, as well as the rest of his oeuvre, illustrates. For his *Nur-nama* constitutes a very elaborate commentary on the Persian source text, and somehow brings back the focus to its semantic content, which may seem counterintuitive considering the text's own invitation to talismanic use.⁶² Among 'Abd al-Hakim's other works, we find a poem that may be described as a "popular" Persian text that was circulating between Central Asia and Bengal, *Durr al-Majalis* (Pearl of Gatherings). This is not a ritual work; it is rather a prose compendium of stories about the prophets that also contains didactic sections in which 'Abd al-Hakim inserted renderings of other didactic works such as *Tuhfa-yi Nasa'ih* mentioned earlier. 'Abd al-Hakim was a very self-aware mediator who was himself multiliterate and was addressing an audience with various degrees of familiarity with Perso-Arabic literacy. He does not describe a blunt opposition between a knowledgeable elite and an ignorant popular mass. People were variously exposed to Perso-Arabic literacy through their education and religious life—a fact he clearly expresses in the trope of the friends' request and in his mention of the difficulties one might encounter when "listening to Persian from someone else's mouth."

Another domain in which some nuance is needed is the form that "Muslimani"—that is, regionally Islamic—literacy might take. At some point 'Abd al-Hakim turns to the alphabet and what we should understand as a codicological definition of the book's religious identity. A text could be defined by its language, its alphabet, or the shape of the manuscript itself. The Bengali alphabet is designated as *hinduyani akshara* (Indic letters), and the Indic "book" is called a *pustaka*, in contrast to the Perso-Arabic-derived term *kitab*. He also draws a contrast between the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, *alif*, and *anji*, the auspicious sign inscribed at the beginning of both Hindu and Muslim Bengali manuscripts right up to the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the *anji* sign had a crucial function in the sanctification of Islamic texts written in the Bengali/*hinduyani* alphabet.⁶³ We have other evidence during this period of emerging debates about the Islamization of literacy and of the book as a physical artifact. It is very probable that the practice of writing Bengali in vocalized Arabic *naskh* script and of arranging the pages of books (even ones written in the Bengali alphabet) from right to left began sometime in the seventeenth century.⁶⁴ But the vast majority of the manuscripts displaying such features were apparently produced in the nineteenth century.⁶⁵

In order to gather the various threads of this chapter, let us turn to a final example of the impact of Perso-Arabic literacy in rural Bengal by way of an undated manuscript of Muhammad Shaphi's version of the *Nur-nama*. The copy bears no date, but judging from the quality of the paper, it may be from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, that is to say, approximately a century after the author's roughly seventeenth-century lifetime. The copy was produced by Muhammad 'Abd al-Hamid for Shaykh Asalat Khan, son of Musa Khan, of the village of 'Ashah (?) in the *chakla* of Pata in the district of Islamabad, also known as Chatgam (corresponding to Chittagong in today's Bangladesh). The manuscript is kept at the

Bangla Academy in Dhaka. The text was edited a few decades ago, but only on the basis of manuscripts written in the Bengali script.⁶⁶ The Bangla Academy manuscript is complete, but it has been copied from a model whose first one or two pages were missing. At the end, we find magic formulas in Persian, Arabic, and Indic languages, as well as diagrams that highlight the ritual use of the text.

The Bengali text of the manuscript is meticulously pointed and vocalized. We find a few marginal notes in Persian indicating that the scribe of the model from which the copy was prepared made errors (e.g., *dar inja katib ghalat karda ast*: “here the scribe made a mistake”). We also find other orthoepic signs to guide the recitation and indicate the sections of the text (such as *la la* for *la waqf*; *ta* for *faqat*, used when the end of a verse coincides with the end of a line, or to indicate the end of a section). The annotations and orthoepic apparatus indicate the dual function of the text, which conveyed meaningful teachings and was meant to be used in ritual contexts.

The copy has two scribal colophons in Persian conveying almost the exact same information. Its first part, written in Persian *naskh* script, informs us about the copy’s patron and contains conventional statements forbidding other claims of ownership. The second part identifies the scribe (*katib*) and is written in a cursive Persian *nasta’liq* script. A marginal note provides further information on the copyist and is in *nasta’liq* with elements of *shikasta* script for the verb *ast* in both lines. The second colophon is entirely written in *nasta’liq*, though the text is almost exactly the same, with the addition of minor conventional expressions. The copyist signed the second colophon with an elaborate calligraphic monogram (*tughra*). A marginal note indicates the names of the copyist and his father, as well as his place of residence.

The conventional expressions, belonging to the formal register of legal discourse, indicate that we are dealing with a professional *munshi* (secretary). In the two lines that he adds in the margin of each colophon, the scribe tells us:

[*Agar*] *kase pursid ki in katib chi nam ast bi-nawisam muhammad hamidullah bi-dani ‘arabi ast* If someone asks what is the name of the scribe I shall write that it is Muhammad Hamidullah, know that it is Arabic

The reference to the Arabic origin of his name suggests that besides the ritual and practical dimensions of this scribal tradition, some ethnic claim may have motivated the adoption of this Arabicized system of transcription. In another text, similarly composed in the eighteenth century in the same region of Chittagong, we find the family history of a local landlord who claims to be the descendant of a saint who came from Baghdad. The text itself is said to be a translation from an Arabic original.⁶⁷ This manuscript from Chittagong shows how Perso-Arabic literacy shaped the vernacular tradition, or perhaps more accurately that Perso-Arabic literacy was instrumental in shaping Islamic modes of transmission of local forms of religiosity.

CONCLUSION

Writing the history of Persian in Bengal requires us to distinguish between the representation of the region in the geocultural space of the Persophone world and the actual uses of Persian in Bengal. We have seen that Hafiz's famous poem recognizes Bengal as a distinct region associated with the far end of Hind, but tells us very little about the patronage of Persian poetry by Bengali sultans. On the other hand, Hafiz's poem does testify to an awareness of the broadening of the landscape of literary patronage, in which Bengal stands as a landmark for the far frontier of Persian learning. Arguably, Bengal would find its place as a center of Persian literary production only in the Mughal period among the circles of governors and princes who were posted to the region.⁶⁸ The study of the formation of the stories linking Ghiyas al-Din A'zam Shah with Hafiz also testifies to the influence of the reputation of a ruler in the 'Arab world on the making of his fame in 'Ajam. These two domains—'Arab and 'Ajam—converged again in Azad Bilgrami's eighteenth-century account of Ghiyas al-Din in his biographical notice on Hafiz. The ghazal of the poet from Shiraz thus comes across as a *poème de circonstance* that required some kind of historical context in order to be understood. In fact, it actually ended up creating history.

When we turn to the linguistic economy of the Bengali sultanate, we see that whatever can be retrieved of its courtly culture does not fit with already established models of Persianate courts observable in Delhi, Jawnpur, or the Bahmanid sultanate in the Deccan. In these three polities, sultans had full-fledged Persian chancelleries, regularly used Persian in inscriptions, and patronized Persian poets. Nothing seems to indicate that the Bengali sultans followed this pattern, and the exact nature of their courtly culture demands further study on the basis of the relatively little evidence at our disposal. The spread of Perso-Arabic literacy in the rural regions of Bengal took place through preaching and a variety of religious practices centered on Arabic and Persian texts. For the earlier periods of the Bengal sultanate, we have a set of texts that suggests the efforts made to reach a broader audience by including regional linguistic and cosmological features in treatises. The recourse to verse forms to compose treatises on the basics of jurisprudence and religious observances is yet another sign of a deliberate attempt to popularize Islamic learning through Persian.

The formation of Bengali Muslim literature sheds light on a body of texts that we may term "popular" Persian literature. Yusuf Gada's *Tuhfa-yi Nasa'ih*, the *Nur-nama*, the *Durr al-Majalis*, and the *Iblis-nama*—which would become an important source for later Bengali Muslim literature—are all representative of this popular Persian literature.⁶⁹ These texts were not classics, nor were they associated with courtly culture or prestigious figures of Islamic scholarship. But they were instrumental in the making of Bengali Muslim religiosity. It is also remarkable to see the very limited amount of scholarship devoted to such texts—ironically, Hafiz is virtually absent

from the intertext of Middle Bengali literature, but these popular Persian texts that are virtually unknown to modern scholarship are omnipresent. Overall, the case studies presented in this chapter point to the need to revisit the dichotomy between Persianate urban centers versus vernacular rural areas. The situation is much more complex, and many pieces of the puzzle are missing. But we can still distinguish important trajectories of Perso-Arabic learning in Bengal, one of which led to the Bengali manuscripts in Arabic script that were produced in southeastern Bengal.

NOTES

1. Chapter epigraphs: Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 A.D.: A Socio-Political Study*, 2nd rev. ed. (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 1999), 253; *Nur-nama* in 'Abd al-Hakim Rakanavali, ed. Raziya Sultana (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 1989), 471. On Bengali resistance to the Persianate cultural ethos, see Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 159–93.

2. Richard M. Eaton, N. H. Ansari, and S. H. Qasemi, "Bengal," *Encyclopædia Iranica* (1989), 4, fasc. 2, 137–43, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bengal; *Danishnama-yi Adab-i Farsi: Adab-i Farsi dar Shibh-i Qarra-yi Hind (Hind, Pakistan, Bangladih)*, ed. Hasan Anushe, vol. 4 (Tehran: Wizarat-i Farhang wa Irshad-i Islami, 1996), s.v. "Bangālī"; and Abu Musa Mohammad Arif Billah, "Persian," in *Banglapedia*, ed. Sirajul Islam et al. (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2006).

3. Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

4. This chapter uses the term "Perso-Arabic" alongside "Persian" and "Persianate." Persian literacy cannot be dissociated from the Arabic episteme. The transmission of Persian literacy invariably required a certain degree of familiarity with Arabic language and literary culture. Moreover, the cases studied in this chapter clearly show a close connection between Persian, Arabic, and Bengali in the making of Muslim literary idioms in Bengal from the arrival of Islam in the region up to the nineteenth century.

5. Simon Digby, "Review of Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 A.D.: A Socio-Political Study by Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 30, 3 (1967): 713–15.

6. Muhammad Kalim Sahsarami, *Khidmatguzaran-i Farsi dar Bangladih* (Dhaka: Rayzani-i Farhang-i Jumhuri-i Islami-i Iran, 1999), 11–38.

7. For references to this manuscript, see Eloïse Brac de La Perrière, *L'art du livre dans l'Inde des sultanats* (Paris: Presse de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), 73, n. 54.

8. For a comprehensive survey of the Persian sources on Sufism in the Bengali Sultanate, see Abdul Latif, *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal, 1301–1550* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1993).

9. Nur Qutb-i 'Alam Pandawi, *Anis al-Ghuraba*, ed. Ghulam Sarwar (New Delhi: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi, 2010). See also Zuhur al-Din Ahmad, *Pakistan men Farsi Adab*, vol. 1 (Lahore: Yunivarsati Buk Aijansi, 1965), 608–38; Sahsarami, *Khidmatguzaran-i Farsi dar Bangladih*, 16–31.

10. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 89–91.

11. Abdul Karim, *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992); Muhammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Rihla ma'a al-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyya fi Bilad al-Banghal: Dirasa Tarikhiyya Hadariyya* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2004); and Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, *Epigraphy and Islamic Culture: Inscriptions of the Early Muslim Rulers of Bengal (1205–1494)* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

12. Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *Corpus of Arabic & Persian Inscriptions of Bihar (A.H. 640–1200)* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1973). On Persian and Arabic learning in Jaunpur, see Mian

Muhammad Saeed, *The Sharqi of Jaunpur: A Political & Cultural History* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1972), 169–210.

13. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 40–50; Syed Ejaz Hussain, *The Bengal Sultanate: Politics, Economy and Coins, A.D. 1205–1576* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), 219–40.

14. Regarding the predominance of Arabic in the inscriptions and the absence of actual patronage of Persian literature in the Husayn Shahi period of Bengal, see Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal*, 278–80.

15. Siddiq, *Rihla ma'a al-Nuqush al-Kitabiyya al-Islamiyya fi Bilad al-Banghal*, 62.

16. A. K. M. Yaqub Ali, "Education for Muslims under the Bengal Sultanate," *Islamic Studies* 24, 4 (1985): 421–43. See also Siddiq, *Epigraphy and Islamic Culture*, 48–52.

17. M. Saghir Hasan al-Masumi, "Sunargaon's Contribution to Islamic Learning," *Islamic Culture*, no. 105 (January 1, 1953): 8–17; Mohammad Yusuf Siddiq, "Sonārgā' on," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. C. Edmund Bosworth et al., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7095.

18. Abdul Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, Down to A.D. 1538*, 2nd rev. ed. (Chittagong: Baitush Sharaf Islamic Research Institute, 1985), 96–102.

19. Z. - A. Desai, "Some New Data Regarding the Pre-Mughal Muslim Rulers of Bengal," *Islamic Culture* 32 (1958): 195–207; Richard T. Mortel, "Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 60, 2 (January 1, 1997): 236–52.

20. Mortel, "Madrasas in Mecca during the Medieval Period," 244.

21. Hafiz, *Diwan-i Khwaja Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz-i Shirazi*, ed. Muhammad Qazwini, Qasim Ghani, and Rahim Zu al-Nur (Tehran: Intisharat-i Zawwar, 1374/1995), 345–346, *ghazal* no. 225. Verse no. 6 is given in the notes.

22. Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami already quoted verse no. 3 of this *ghazal* to illustrate the category of poets who praised an Indian ruler but did not travel to India. These considerations are included in his biographical notice on Fayzi (1547–95). Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Tazkira-yi Sarw-i Azad (Tahrir-i Nahayi)*, ed. Mir Hashim Muhaddis (Tehran: Safir-i Ardihāl, 2014), 55.

23. See, e.g., Fouchécour's comments: "Les beyts 5 à 7 sont à l'éloge du prince, décrit comme un bien-aimé, avec son œil ensorceleur (beyt 5), sa fière démarche et la beauté de sa sueur qui rend hon-teux, par comparaison, le jasmin, pourtant si beau par sa 'sueur', la rosée sur sa 'joue' (beyt 7)." Hafiz *Le divān: Oeuvre lyrique d'un spirituel en Perse au XIV^e siècle*, ed. Charles-Henri de Fouchécour (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2006), 597–98.

24. Fouchécour refers to Neysari's edition in which verses 5 and 7 are paired and 6 comes after—we find the same order in Sudi Busnawi. Khatmi Lahuri moves *bayt* 6 before *bayt* 4.

25. Sudi Busnawi, *Sharh-i Sudi bar Hafiz*, trans. 'Ismat Sattarzada (Tehran: Nawbahar, 1390/2011), 1289. On Sudi and Persian philology in the Ottoman Empire, see Murat Inan's chapter 1 in this volume.

26. Aqa Husayn Quli Khan 'Azimabadi and Kamal Hajj Sayyid Jawadi, *Tazkira-yi Nishtar-i 'Ishq* (Tehran: Markaz-i Pizhuhishi-i Miras-i Maktub, 1391), 430–31.

27. Abu al-Hasan 'Abd al-Rahman "Khatmi" Lahuri, *Sharh-i 'Irfani-i Ghazal-ha-yi Hafiz*, ed. Baha al-Din Khurramshahi, Kurush Mansuri, and Husayn Amin, 4 vols. (Tehran: Nashr-i Qatra, 1378). See also Anushe, *Danishnama-yi Adab-i Farsi*, s.v. "Hafiz dar Shibh-i Qarra."

28. The absence of Muhammad Biḥbahani's testimony seems to indicate that Khatmi only consulted the *Madar al-Afzīl*.

29. At this point, I cannot identify which commentary he was referring to.

30. See also the many parallels in Arabic and Persian poetry given in Hafiz, *Diwan-i Hafiz: Lisan al-Ghayb: Nuskha-yi Faridun Mirza-yi Taymuri*, ed. Ahmad Mujahid (Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi Intisharat wa Chap-i Danishgah-i Tihiran, 2001), 334, 894, *ghazal* no. 284.

31. Ghulam Husayn Zaydpuri, *Riyaz al-Salatin: Tarikh-i Bangala*, ed. al-Haqq 'Abid, Bibliotheca Indica, n.s., vol. 129 (Calcutta: Matba' i Biptist Mishin, 1890), 105–9; *The Riyazu-s-Salātīn: A History of Bengal*, trans. Maulavi Abdus Salam (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1902), 108–9.

32. Hafiz, *Diwan-i Hafiz: bar Asas-i Nuskha-yi Muwarrakh-i 818 Hijri*, ed. Nazir Ahmad (New Delhi: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi-i Rayzani-i Farhangi-i Sifarat-i Jumhuri-i Islami-i Iran, 1988), *kaf*, 61n3, *ghazal* no. 108.

33. Ghulam ‘Ali Azad Bilgrami, *Khazana-yi ‘Amira*, ed. Human Yusufdihi (Tehran: Kitabkhana-yi Muza wa Markaz-i Asnad-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Islami, 2014), 275–80.

34. One of the first instances of the use of *bangala* to designate the region of Bengal in Persian historiography is found in Diya al-Din Barani’s *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi* (1357). In Dihkhuda’s *Lughat-nama*, the first example of the use of the term in Persian poetry is Hafiz’s poem. A. H. Dani, “Bangala,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1182; ‘Ali Akbar Dihkhuda, “Bangala,” *Lughatnama-yi Dihkhuda* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Danishgah-i Tihiran, 2002).

35. We assume that Persian was used in the administration but we have very little evidence regarding the existence of a Persian chancellery in the Bengali sultanate. It is very probable that the administration was still very much “Indic.” The presence of Hindu kayastha, vaidya, and brahman ministers at the court and the cultivation of Sanskrit and increasingly vernacular literacy and literature suggest the rather limited impact of Persian on courtly culture. See, e.g., the table of Hindu officers in Hussain, *Bengal Sultanate*, 237–38. See also the discussion on the rise of Raja Ganesh and the warnings of Sufis regarding the presence non-Muslims in the sultan’s entourage in Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 50–56.

36. Carl W. Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga in the ‘Amrtakunda’ Translations,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 13, 2 (2003): 199–226; Sahsarami, *Khidmatguzaran-i Farsi dar Bangladish*, 33–36. The dating of *Ganj-i raz* is very tentative.

37. Nur Qutb-i ‘Alam Pandawi, *Anis al-Ghuraba*, ed. Ghulam Sarwar (New Delhi: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi, 2010), 41.

38. E.g., the episode of the war against the characters called Hasan/Husen in various versions of the *Manasa-magala*. Other often quoted examples are the complaints by Vaishnava authors about bearded brahmans reading the *Masnawi* (or *masnawis*?) and the description of Muslim city-dwellers in Mukundaram’s *Candi-mangala*. Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar, “Husain Shah in Bengali Literature,” *Indian Historical Quarterly* 32, 1 (1956): 56–80; and Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 100–102.

39. For a refutation of Md. Enamul Haq’s early dating of various Muslim authors who were believed to have written Bengali texts in the sultanate period, see Karim, *Social History of the Muslims in Bengal*, 9–12. Regarding Bengali literature in Arakan, see Thibaut d’Hubert, “Pirates, Poets, and Merchants: Bengali Language and Literature in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U,” in *Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India*, ed. Thomas de Bruijn and Allison Busch (Leiden: Brill, 2014); and d’Hubert, “Arakan aur Janub-i Mashriqi Bangala-desh men Musulamanon ki Tahzib aur Zabanen,” trans. Timsal Masud, *Ma’arif* 194 (2014): 265–88.

40. Mawlawi Hamidullah Khan Bahadur, *Ahadith al-Khawanin, Ya’ni Tarikh-i Islamabad Chatgam ki Ham Musamma ba-Tarikh-i Hamid Ast* (Calcutta: Mazhar al-‘Aja’ib, 1871), 54; Sha’barid Khan, *Sha’barid Khaner Granthavali*, ed. Ahmed Sharif (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1966), cha-tha.

41. A. B. M. Habibullah and Md. Siddiq Khan, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian, Urdu & Arabic Manuscripts in the Dacca University Library*, Dacca University Library Publication (Dacca: University Library, 1966), 338–45, MS no. 336; call no. HR/11–21.

42. Simon Digby, “The Tuhfa i Naṣā’ih of Yūsuf Gadā: An Ethical Treatise in Verse from the Late-Fourteenth-Century Delhi Sultanate,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–123; Alaol and Muhammad Yusuf Gada, *Tohpha*, ed. Ghulam Samdani Quraishy (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1975); ‘Abd al-Hakim Racanavali (cited n. 1 above), 446–51.

43. Ahmed Sharif, *Bamlar Suphi Sahitya*, 2nd ed. (Dhaka: Samaya Prakashan, 2003); Tony K. Stewart, “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory,” *History of Religions* 40, 3 (2001): 260–87; France Bhattacharya, “Un texte du Bengale médiéval: *Le yoga*

du kalandar (Yoga-kalandar)," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême Orient* 90, 1 (2003): 69–99; Shaman Hatley, "Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal," *History of Religions* 46, 4 (2007): 351–68; Ali Raja, *The Ocean of Love: Ali Raja's Agama/Jnana Sagara*, trans. David G. Cashin (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1993); David Cashin, *The Ocean of Love: Middle Bengali Sufi Literature and the Fakirs of Bengal* (Stockholm: Föreningen för Orientaliska Studier, 1995); Carol Salomon, "Review of *The Ocean of Love: Middle Bengali Sufi Literature and the Fakirs of Bengal* by David Cashin," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, 4 (1998): 554–58.

44. 'Ali Raja, *The Ocean of Love*; Sharif, *Bamlar Suphi Sahitya*. The latest and most comprehensive study of Saiyad Sultan's life and works is Ayesha A. Irani's "Sacred Biography, Translation, and Conversion: The 'Nabivamsa' of Saiyad Sultan and the Making of Bengali Islam, 1600–Present" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

45. Bhattacharya, "Un texte du Bengale médiéval."

46. Shah Arman Ali, *Nura Paricae*, ed. Muhammad Abdul Mannan (Dhaka: Utsa Prakashan, 2011).

47. David Cashin argues for a *sahajiya vaishnava* influence, but this theory raises historical problems regarding the demography of such movements in eastern Bengal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Cashin, *Ocean of Love*.

48. U. Rubin, "Nur Muhammadi," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5985.

49. Raziya Sultana, 'Abd al-Hakim, *Kavi o Kavya* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1987); Thibaut d'Hubert, "'Abd al-Hakim," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Denis Matringe, Everett Rowson, and Gudrun Krämer, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/abd-al-hakim-COM_27231. See also the edition, translation, and commentary on various Middle Bengali creation texts, including Shekh Paran's *Nur-nama*, in Cashin, *Ocean of Love*, 59–115.

50. See the entry "Nur-nama" in the index of Ahmad Munzawi, *Fihrist-i Nuskha-ha-yi Khatt-i Farsi*, vol. 5 (Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi Farhangi-i Mintaqa'i, 1348/1969–), 341. The *Nur-nama* is often found in compendia such as the MS from Sylhet kept at the library of the Dhaka University. See, for instances, Wilhelm Pertsch, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin. Vierter Band. Verzeichniss der persischen Handschriften der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1888), 126, no. 62.7, MS orient. 8. 102. See the versified version in Vladimir Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collections of the Asiatic Society of Bengal First Supplement*, Bibliotheca Indica (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1927), 379, MS no. 832.

51. Anonymous, "Nur-nama, Shama'il-nama, Wasiyat-nama" (Transoxiana, ca. nineteenth century), *Supplément Persan* 1679, Bnf. Manuscrits orientaux.

52. E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1934), 179–80, MS no. 2219.

53. Anonymous, "Nur-Nama, Shama'il-Nama, Wasiyat-Nama," fol. 12–16b.

54. Compare with the table in Bhattacharya, "Un texte du Bengale médiéval," 97.

55. The *Nur-nama* was present in Central Asia in the nineteenth century. There are also several versions in northwestern Indic vernacular languages (Gujarati, Sindhi, Kashmiri) and in Urdu. The chronology of the diffusion of the text and whether or not it was originally composed in Bengal remains to be clarified. For the western versions of the *Nur-nama*, see Wafi Ahmed Momin, "The Formation of the Satpanth Ismaili Tradition in South Asia" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016).

56. The success of Yusuf Gada's *Tuhfa-i Nasa'ih* (1393) is also proof to the fact that an Islamic literature in Persian produced in South Asia was already used as the basis for the formulation of vernacular Islamic idioms at the regional level. Simon Digby pointed out that "an independent reason for the popularity of the *Tuhfa-i Nasa'ih* is that it provided for South Asian Muslims with a lower level of education, and especially for the children of such Muslims, a comprehensible guide to the good life in an easy mnemonic verse form. It can be classified with numerous other short verse treatises, mostly of later date and often bilingual vocabularies, under the heading *niṣab aṣ-ṣibyān* (the capital stock of

children).” See Digby, “Tuḥfa i Naṣā’ih,” 98. Versified treatises such as *Nam-i Haqq* or *Ganj-i Raz* were also “popular” didactic texts meant for a wide readership.

57. For instance, the “drops” (*qatra*) of the Persian text become “drops of sweat” (*gharma*) in the Bengali version. The sweat is reminiscent of accounts of primordial act of love making between the *Adi Purusha* and the *Shakti*.

58. Ernst, “Islamization of Yoga”; Simon Digby, “Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (1456–1537 A.D.): The Personality and Attitudes of a Medieval Indian Sufi,” *Medieval India: A Miscellany* 3 (1975): 1–66; Aditya Behl, *Love’s Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545*, ed. Wendy Doniger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

59. Ahmed Sharif, *Madhyayuger Sahitye Samaj o Samskritir rup* (Dhaka: Samay Prakashan, 2000), 63–65.

60. *Nur-nama* in ‘*Abd al-Hakim Racanavali* (cited n. 1 above), 471–72.

61. Perween Hasan et al., *Essays in Memory of Momtazur Rahman Tarafdar* (Dhaka: Centre for Advanced Research in the Humanities, Dhaka University, 1999), 442–45.

62. On the talismanic usage of Persian in the context of Eastern Turkistan, see Alexandre Papas’s chapter 8 in this volume.

63. Mohammad Abdul Qayyum, *Pandulipi Patha o Patha-samalocana* (Dhaka: Gatidhara, 2000), 25–26.

64. Another seventeenth-century author from southeastern Bengal mentioned the issue of the use of the Bengali alphabet in Islamic texts. See e.g., Hajji Muhammad, “*Suratnama*,” in *Bamlar Suphi Sahitya*, ed. Ahmed Sharif, 2nd ed. (Dhaka: Samay Prakashan, 2003), 117–18, 134.

65. Thibaut d’Hubert, “La diffusion et l’usage des manuscrits bengalis dans l’est du Bengale, XVIIe–XXe siècles,” ed. Maria Szuppe and Nalini Balbir, *Eurasian Studies, Special Issue: Lecteurs et copistes dans les traditions manuscrites iraniennes, indiennes et centrasiatiques; Scribes and Readers in Iranian, Indian and Central Asian Manuscript Traditions* 12 (2014): 335–45.

66. Ahmed Sharif, “*Nurnama*,” in *Banlar Suphi Sahitya*, 2nd ed. (Dhaka: Samay Prakashan, 2003), 151–61.

67. Muhammad Ujir ‘Ali, “*Nasle Osman Islamabad va Shahnama*” (MS no. 253), ‘Abd al-Karim “*Sahityavisharad*,” Dhaka University Library.

68. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 167–74; Sahsarami, *Khidmatguzaran-i Farsi dar Bangladish*, 40–70.

69. See Habibullah and Khan, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 345, for a dialogue between Iblis and the Prophet Muhammad to be found in the seventeenth-century MS from Sylhet in the Dacca University Library alluded to in nn. 41 and 50 above.