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INTRODUCTION

THE *Madhumālatī* (*Jasminum grandiflorum*, 'Night-flowering
Jasmine') is a mystical Indian romance composed in AD 1545,
here translated for the first time into a western language. Shaikh
Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Rājgīrī, the author, was a Sufi of the
Shaṭṭārī order. The Sufis have been termed the 'mystics' of
Islam, and Sufism its 'mystical dimension'.[1] A Sufi, a mystic or
spiritual seeker, would, through his initiation to a particular
Shaikh, a spiritual master and teacher, become affiliated to a
particular spiritual lineage or chain (*silsilah*). The lineages,
organized around links between Sufi masters and their disciples,
focused on prayer, fasting, asceticism, and cultivating the self
through music and poetry to attain nearness to Allah. The
Shaṭṭārīs were an order founded in India in the fifteenth century
by Shaikh 'Abdullāh Shaṭṭār. Manjhan was the disciple of a
major Shaṭṭārī Shaikh, Muḥammad Ghaus Gvāliyārī (d. 1563),
and the *silsilah* was powerful and popular at the time Manjhan
wrote his romance.[2] Manjhan's name means simply 'the middle
brother', the midpoint in a series in Hindavī between Chuṭṭan
(the little one) and Buḍḍhan (the eldest one). Manjhan's birth-
place Rajgir is in the present-day State of Bihar, not far from
Patna in northern India, and the poem itself is written in Awa-
dhi or eastern Hindavī. Along with Maithili, Awadhi has
remained a major literary dialect of the spoken language of
northern and eastern India ('Bhākhā') since the days of the
Delhi sultanate.

Manjhan's poem belongs to that moment in Indian history
when the success of the empire established by the early Mughal
rulers Bābur and Humāyūn was not yet a historical certainty.

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[1] For excellent balanced introductory expositions of Sufism and the
Orders, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 1975), and C. W. Ernst, *Sufism* (Boston
and London: Shambhala Books, 1997).

[2] For further details about the Shaṭṭārī *silsilah*, see below, Section II.

Northern and eastern India, the territory of Hindustan, was occupied by a number of Afghan warlords and Rajput lineages newly demonstrating their martial prowess and attempting to carve out territories for themselves after the demise of the regional sultanates of Delhi and Jaunpur. The Sūr Afghāns from Bihar seized power after their military leader, the warlord Sher Shāh, had defeated the Mughal emperor Humāyūn and forced him to flee to Iran in 1540.[3] During the short Afghan interregnum, Sher Shāh Sūr set up an administrative and military structure that was later to prove useful to the Mughal emperors. He was killed in 1545, on the battlements of the massive fort at Kalinjar, when the base of a cannon exploded towards Sher Shāh rather than away from him. The date is given by a chronogram in Persian, *z̤ātish murd* ('he died by fire'), an event to which Manjhan alludes when giving the date at which he began his poem.

Sher Shāh was succeeded by his son Islām Shāh—also called Salīm Shāh—whom Manjhan praises in his prologue as the king of the time. It is as a poet in residence at Islām Shāh's cultured and multilingual court that we have the only historical description of our author Manjhan. He is mentioned in the *Afsānah-i Shāhān* ('Tale of the Kings'), a chronicle of life in Afghan times that has come to us in the form of the family lore of a Bihari Afghan Shaikh of the early seventeenth century:

Wherever he [Islām Shāh] happened to be, he kept himself surrounded by accomplished scholars and poets. Kiosks [*khūshak*] were set up, scented with *ghāliā* [a compound of musk, ambergris, camphor, and oil of ben-nuts*], and provided with betel leaves. Men like Mīr Sayyid Manjhan, the author of *Madhumālatī*, Shāh Muḥammad Farmūlī and his younger brother, Mūsan, Sūrdās and many other

* This come from F. Steingass, *Persian Dictionary*.

[3] See, *inter alia*, ʿAbbās Khān Sarvānī, *Tārīkh-i Śer Śāhī*; tr. B. P. Ambasthya (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1974), Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *History of Sher Shāh Sūr* (Aligarh: Dwadash Shreni and Company Private Limited, 1971) and Dirk H. A. Kolff, *'Naukar', Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

learned scholars and poets assembled there and poems in Arabic, Persian and Hindavī were recited.[4]

This rich and interactive mixture of vernacular and classical or, in Sheldon Pollock's phrase, 'cosmopolitan'[5] languages was part of a court-sponsored aesthetic culture. The Turkish and Afghan courts of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries fostered the growth of regional literary, musical, and artistic identities. Poets at these courts forged a distinctively Indian Islamic aesthetic culture using models and elements from Persian and Arabic literary and religious traditions as well as from Sanskrit and Indian regional languages.

The historical agents who were part of this Indian Islamic literary culture were, however, not just the courtiers and kings of the Delhi sultanate and the Afghan kingdoms that followed in its wake. They were also disciples in Sufi orders, guided by shaikhs who set themselves up as commanding spiritual jurisdiction (*vilāyat*) over different parts of the territory of Hindustan. The army of prayer (*lashkar-i duʿā*), as it is sometimes called, led by these shaikhs formed one dominant cultural force during the period. Sufi shaikhs played at being kingmakers, and established themselves at a calculated distance from royal courts in hospices (*khānaqāhs*). Here they trained disciples to attain nearness to Allah by teaching them spiritual exercises and cultivating their taste for things spiritual (*zauq*) through a ritually controlled exposure to music and poetry. They also wrote romances in Hindavī that describe the ascetic quest of the hero towards the revelatory beauty of a heroine (or God) by linking mortification, fasting, and prayer with a female object of desire. Drawing on the local language of ascetic practice, they made their hero into a yogi, while the heroine is a beautiful Indian woman. Their sensuous romances were recited in different contexts, including

[4] Cited and translated by S. H. Askari, 'Historical Value of Afsana Badshahan or Tarikh Afghani', *Journal of Indian History* 43 (1965). 194 (translation slightly emended). The Persian text with a modern Hindi translation is also given in P. L. Gupta, *Kutubana Kṛta Miragāvatī* (Benares: Viśvavidyālaya Prakāsán, 1967), 39.
[5] Sheldon Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57/1 (1998).

royal courts and Sufi hospices, and these diverse contexts for reception each provide us with protocols of interpretation for the poetry. Kings were celebrated in the prologues of the genre as ideal readers sensitive to the multiple resonances of poetry. In the Sufi hospice, the erotic attributes of the heroine and the seductive descriptions of love-play found in the genre were understood logocentrically as referring ultimately to God rather than to a worldly beloved.

I. The Formation of a Literary Genre

Amīr Khusrau, the celebrated poet who died in Delhi in 1325, famed both for his contributions to Indian music and to Hindavī and Persian poetry, was a disciple and close friend of the great Chishtī Shaikh Niẓām al-dīn Auliyā'.[6] Although it is certain that he composed poetry in Hindavī to Maḥbūb-i Ilāhī ('The Beloved of Allah'), as the Chishtī Shaikh was affectionately known, no early written manuscripts survive that testify to Khusrau's literary creativity in the spoken language of Hindustan. The only verses that are available to us come through the oral transmission of generations of singers at Sufi shrines (*qawwāls*), as well as through one eighteenth-century manuscript containing Khusrau's Hindavī riddles and punning verses.[7] The first surviving longer composition in Hindavī is the *Cāndāyan*, the romance of Lorik and Cāndā penned by Maulānā Dā'ūd in 1379. Maulānā Dā'ūd was a highly placed courtier in the retinue of Sultan Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq, and wrote the poem in attendance at the provincial court of Dalmau in Awadh. His immediate patron was Malik Mubārak, the nobleman assigned to Awadh as the *muqṭaʿ* or governor of the province (*iqṭaʿ*).

Maulānā Dā'ūd was also a disciple of Shaikh Zain al-dīn

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[6] The standard account of Amīr Khusrau remains Muhammad Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (1935; repr. Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1974).

[7] Based on a single manuscript in the Sprenger collection in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek and recently edited by Gopi Chand Narang as *Amīr Khusrau kā Hindavī Kalām, maʿ Nuskhah-yi Berlin Zakhīrah-yi Sprenger* (Chicago: Amir Khusrau Society of America, 1987).

Chishtī, the nephew of Shaikh Naṣīr al-dīn Maḥmūd 'Chirāġh-i Dihlī' ('The Lamp of Delhi'), the successor to Shaikh Niẓām al-dīn Auliyā'. Shaikh Zain al-dīn was the caretaker of the shrine in Delhi, but his competition with Sayyid Muḥammad 'Gesūdarāz' ('Long Locks'), his uncle's prize pupil, led to a dispute that ended in the interment of his uncle's spiritually charged material relics (*tabarrukāt*) with the body of the great Shaikh. The rivalry was part of a frequent pattern of competition in which the lineal descendants of Sufi shaikhs disagreed with their spiritual disciples over the succession. Possession of the *tabarrukāt* was often the key to making any claims to authority.[8] Shaikh Zain al-dīn took care of the shrine in Delhi after the death of Shaikh Naṣīr al-dīn Maḥmūd and the departure of Sayyid Muḥammad Gesūdarāz on his spiritual conquest of the Deccan. He also instructed disciples, amongst whom was the Hindavī poet Maulānā Dā'ūd.

The generic model that Maulānā Dā'ūd created in the *Cāndāyan* is a composite one, and one which can best be seen as the textual record of the historical interaction of the Chishtī Sufis with Sanskritic, Persian, and regional religious and literary traditions. In his creative engagement with Indian and Persian literary models and conventions, Dā'ūd takes topoi and narrative motifs from diverse sources and refits them into a framework adapted from the Persian *masnavī*.[9] Chief among the conventions taken from Persian are the elaborate theoretical prologues that frame these romances within the metaphysics of an Islamic godhead reinscribed in a local language as well as within courtly and Sufi institutional settings with their distinct yet interlinked protocols of reception. The central aesthetic value or linchpin of Dā'ūd's literary creation, however, is a uniquely Indian poetics of *rasa*, the 'juice' or 'flavour' of a literary text, poem, or play. Along with the Hindavī words *kāma*,

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[8] For an analysis and detailed account of the rivalry, see Simon Digby, '*Tabarrukāt* and Succession among the great Chishti Shaikhs', in R. E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Delhi Through the Ages* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 77–89.

[9] See Section III below.

'desire', and *prema*, 'love', Dāūd uses the aesthetics of *rasa* to link the narrative pleasure of listening to love-stories with the erotics of union with an impossibly distant transcendent God. His distinctive literary formula also contains elements taken from Indian regional traditions such as the *bārahmāsā*, the rural songs describing the twelve months of separation from one's beloved.[10]

Rasa itself was defined famously in Bharata's eighth-century Sanskrit aesthetic treatise, the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, as the juice or flavour of a poem arising from 'the combination of the *vibhāvas* (sources of *rasa*), the *anubhāvas* (actions, experiential signs of *rasa*), and the transitory emotions (*vyabhicāribhāvas*)'.[11] The aim of reading is to have an experience of the dominant *rasa* that animates the poem, and the *sahṛdaya*, or cultivated reader, feels the emotions of the parted lovers in the poem. The *sahṛdaya*'s response is shaped by the sources of *rasa* depicted by the poet. These include monsoon clouds indicating the season of love, the experiential signs of love such as bodies trembling and perspiring from desire, and the transitory emotions that attend the progress of the main emotional mood of a poem: apprehension, envy, contentment, shame, joy, and so on. A reader can approach the poet's vision and the feelings of the characters only because he is a *rasika* or connoisseur.

Dāūd approaches these classical conventions and ideas creatively, using them to compose a text that served as a model or formula for an entire regional tradition of Indian Sufi poetry. After the *Cāndāyan* of Maulānā Dāūd stands Quṭban's *Mirigāvatī* (1503), composed at the court of Sultan Ḥusain

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[10] For examples of these, as well as a sound discussion of the meanings and literary place of the *bārahmāsā*, see Charlotte Vaudeville, *Bārahmāsā in Indian Literature: Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literatures* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

[11] Translated in J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Aesthetic Rapture: The Rasādhyāya of the Nāṭya-Śāstra* (Poona: Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1970), i. 46. For a succinct and clear account of Bharata's theory, see David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13–16.

Shāh Sharqī of Jaunpur. Although there are scattered references to two romances entitled the *Paiman* and the *Jot Nirañjan* from the early sixteenth century, these have not survived.[12] The model of the *Cāndāyan* and the *Mirigāvatī* is emulated most powerfully by Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī, several poems by whom are still extant. Pre-eminent among these is the *Padmāvat* (1540), which tells the story of King Ratansen of Chittaur and his quest for the Princess Padmāvatī. In addition, he composed a version of the life of Krishna called the *Kanhāvat*, as well as a number of shorter poems. These include the *Akhrāvat* ('Alphabet Poem'), an acrostic composed out of the beliefs of a millenarian group of Sufis (the Mahdavīs of Jaunpur), and the *Ākhirī Kalām* ('Discourse on the Last Day') a foreshadowing of the events of doomsday. Finally, there is the *Madhumālatī* (1545) of Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Rājgīrī, the Shaṭṭārī Sufi attached to the court of Islām Shāh Sūrī.[13] Although poets continued to compose romances on this model until the early twentieth century, they did not reproduce the formula of the two heroines or the elaborate Sufi ideology of the earlier works.[14]

What is an ideal romance for the authors and audiences of the Hindavī narratives? All four poets use the same metre and form and all draw on the conventions of the Persian *masnavī* to frame their romances with introductory prologues. In these prologues there is first praise of God, then of Muḥammad and the first four 'righteous' Caliphs, then praise for the king of the time and the author's immediate patron, then praise and thanks to the author's spiritual guide followed by a disclaimer of the poet's own poetic skills. The stories are set in the ambience of the court, with kings and queens, princes and princesses, handmaidens, friends and companions. There are marvellous palaces

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[12] S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), ii. 155 n. 2.

[13] For summary accounts of these texts, see R. S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 26–8, 65–73.

[14] R. S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature from its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century*, 150–4.

and lush gardens containing mango orchards, canals of cool running water, and picture-pavilions. Demons, heavenly nymphs, wonderful beings, and magical events all add to the imaginative allure of these works. Early in each poem an image of divine beauty is introduced: the heroine's body is described in a formal literary set-piece called a *nakh-śikh-varṇana* ('toe-to-head description') in Sanskrit which parallels the *sarāpā* ('head-to-foot description') in Persian and uses the same symbolism and imagery. In the twenty verses of these set-pieces, the beloved is described from the top of her head to her legs, usually with verses alternating between emphasizing divine grace and beauty (*jamāl*) and divine might and majesty (*jalāl*). This first encounter of the lover and the beloved is treated as a way of conveying the Sufi concept of the first meeting of the soul with divinity in the phenomenal world.[15] After this initial contact with the image of divine beauty, which is then taken away, the hero begins to suffer from *viraha*, the pain of love in separation. The stories of the romances are driven by the urge to transform this desire into a mutually fulfilling love, called *prema-rasa* by the poets.

   All the plots have certain formulaic elements that are drawn from earlier canons or common cultural stereotypes about gender and culture and reshaped into a distinctive formula by the Hindavī poets. These include the moment of the awakening of love through a vision, a dream, or a description of the heroine's beauty as a divine manifestation, a convention common to both Persian and Indian romances. The hero and heroine have helpers who commonly exemplify spiritual values such as mystical absorption (*sahaja*) or the abstract quality of love (*pemalprema*). Alternatively, there are demons to fight and trials of strength, which the lovers have to pass through in order to attain each other. The necessary transformation of the hero into a yogi and his ascetic quest draws on the poetry of the Gorakhnāth *panth*. The ordeals on the quest for the beautiful princess and the passage to a heavenly realm are modelled on Persian spiritual quests

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[15] Peter Gaeffke, 'Alexander in Avadhī and Dakkinī *Mathnawīs*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109 (1989), 528.

like ʿAṭṭār's *Conference of the Birds*.[16] The hero's abandonment of a first wife in order to consummate his love with the divine heroine is a distinctive motif, and ultimately draws on the common cultural stereotype of the jealousy between co-wives (*sautan*) in a harem. This deserted wife then sings a *bārahmāsā*, a description of her suffering from the pain of love in separation in each of the twelve months of the year, which is conveyed to the hero. On hearing it, the hero takes his divine beloved and returns home with her, whereupon the two co-wives quarrel and have to be reconciled. The hero's resolution of the strife between the co-wives, his death and the burning of both his wives on his funeral pyre uses the misogynistic stereotype of the Indian woman's *satī* to signify a mystical annihilation (*fanā*).

II. *The Shaṭṭārī Sufi* Silsilah

The involvement of the Shaṭṭārīs in this richly creative religious and literary world began with the founder of the spiritual lineage, Shaikh ʿAbdullāh Shaṭṭār (d. 1485), who came to India from central Asia in the second half of the fifteenth century. In the competitive cultural landscape of northern India, it might have been expected that a newcomer would settle in a single place and slowly build up his following and area of spiritual influence, his *vilāyat*. However, ʿAbdullāh Shaṭṭār preferred a rather more martial style of public presentation. He travelled widely with a large retinue of disciples dressed in military uniforms, and, to the beat of drums, in every town or village, he demanded to know if there was anyone who wished to be shown the way to God. Inevitably the Shaikh's claims to spiritual superiority brought him into competition with the Sufis who were prominent in the regional sultanates. Eventually, he settled down in Mandu under the patronage of Sultan Ghiyāṣ al-dīn Tughlaq and was buried there after his death.

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[16] See Farīd ud-dīn ʿAṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds*, tr. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), and James Winston Morris, 'Reading *The Conference of the Birds*', in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (eds.), *Approaches to the Asian Classics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 77–85.

One of the prominent Sufis who both ignored his challenge and made disparaging remarks about the outlandish claims of newly arrived Sufis from Khurasan and Fars, was the Bengali Shaikh Muḥammad Qāzin ʿAlā, who was the maternal grandfather of our author, Manjhan. His initial hostility was overturned by a miraculous dream in which his deceased father told him his spiritual future was in the hands of Shaikh ʿAbdullāh. He left for Mandu and waited three days outside the Shaikh's house until, moved by his humility, the Shaikh took him on as a disciple, but only after he had promised to give up his previous methods and learn Shaṭṭārī practices. Shaikh Qāzin ʿAlā (d. 1495) became Shaikh ʿAbdullāh's principal *khalīfa* or successor, and took the Shaṭṭārī method of spiritual practice to Bengal and eastern India. Shaikh ʿAbdullāh Shaṭṭār forged a distinctive spiritual regimen based on fasting, ascetic exercises, practices of visualization, and the Arabic letters that made up the names of Allah.

These practices were passed down in his lineage through the successors of Shaikh Qāzin ʿAlā, Shaikh Ẓuhūr Ḥājī Ḥamīd (d. 1523) and Shaikh Abuʾl Fatḥ Hadīyatullāh Sarmast (d. 1539). These Shaikhs established a Shaṭṭārī presence in Bihar and had many links with local lineages such as the Firdausīs, as well as with the rulers of Bihar. Shaikh Ḥamīd had as disciples the remarkable brothers Shaikh Muḥammad Ghauṣ and Shaikh Phūl. Under him they learned the Shaṭṭārī method of *zikr*, the esoteric science of the invocation of the names of Allah encrypted in the letters of the Arabic alphabet. They also performed forty-day fasts and meditated in the caves and jungles around the town of Chunar. During this period Muḥammad Ghauṣ composed the most famous work of Shaṭṭārī asceticism, the *Jawāhir-i Khamsah* ('Five Jewels').[17] Arranged in 'five jewels' that ascend from ordinary prayers to the inheritance and realization of divine truth, the work was seen as a *summa* of esoteric Indian Sufi practice and is commonly found in manuscript form in shrine libraries to this day.

[17] We have used the India Office Library manuscript of the *Jawāhir-i Khamsah*, Ethé MS 1875, in preparing this summary account of Shaṭṭārī practice.

The third *jauhar* or jewel, the central part of the book, is focused on the invocation of the divine names. This mode of practice, with elaborate prescriptions for purity and directions for gaining different sorts of powers, implies a Sufi notion of the human body as the site for a divine manifestation in microcosm. Shaikh Muḥammad Ghauṣ's account of the coming into being of all created things is encoded in the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet. In Shaṭṭārī letter-mysticism, combinations of letters signified selected names of Allah in sequence as well as places in the Shaṭṭārī cosmology, and each was the abbreviated code for a different Shaṭṭārī practice. Apart from interior visualization, the Shaṭṭārī cosmology had another application: to predict or to influence the future by calling up the angels or spiritual agents of each station in order to make them perform whatever task was desired, or to make an efficacious talisman or amulet.[18] Each of the twenty-eight letters was matched with a numerical value, a name of Allah, a quality, either terrible or benevolent, a perfume or incense, an element, a zodiacal sign, a planet, a jinn, and a guardian angel. These were called up in rituals of invocation that varied with the particular goals of the seeker.

In accordance with the order's tradition of conquering new territory, Shaikh Muḥammad Ghauṣ went to Gwalior in 1523. After three years, he had acquired a considerable following and was an acknowledged influence on the local population. This enabled him to intervene in the political and military struggle over Hindustan between the Afghan rulers and the Mughals in the 1520s. Although the received Sufi wisdom was to avoid having anything to do with kings, in sixteenth-century India Sufi

[18] A detailed account of this practice, as well as an extensive table containing all the stations and all their corresponding elements, is given in Thomas Hughes, 'Daʿwah', in *Dictionary of Islam* (1885; repr. Calcutta: Rupa, 1988), 72–8. For more details about Shaṭṭārī magical practices, see Jaʿfar Sharīf, G. A. Herklots, and William Crooke, *Islam in India or the Qānūn-i Islām: The Customs of the Musalmāns of India* (1921; repr. New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1972), 218–77. For a review of the scholarship on Indo-Muslim esoteric practices, see Marc Gaborieau, 'L'Ésotérisme musulman dans le sous-continent indo-pakistanais: un point de vue ethnologique', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*, 44 (1992), 191–209.

lineages like the Chishtīs, the Naqshbandīs, and the Shaṭṭārīs took sides with Mughals or Afghans in their struggles for sovereignty over northern India. The Chishtīs, for example, had long-standing historical connections with local Afghan sultans and nobility and did not back the Mughals in their fight for supremacy. On the other hand, Shaikh Muḥammad Ghaus, the poet Manjhan's spiritual guide, was instrumental in the Mughal emperor Bābur's capture of the fort of Gwalior from the Afghans. By passing privileged information to the leader of the Mughal forces and exhorting him to establish a token presence in the city, the Shaikh enabled Bābur's army to seize this key strategic fortress through a covert night attack. He was rewarded with a considerable land-grant on which he built his hospice in Gwalior. His establishment became a favoured site for aristocratic patronage during the reigns of Bābur and Humāyūn. Shaikh Muḥammad Ghaus and his brother Shaikh Phūl were so highly influential in the Mughal court that many Sufis of other lineages took Shaṭṭārī affiliation in addition to their own existing connections, simply in order to acquire patronage and position.

The emperor Humāyūn in particular was extremely interested in occult and mystical matters and was especially favourably disposed to the Shaṭṭārīs. One imperial chronicle relates that Shaikh Muḥammad Ghaus and his brother Shaikh Phūl taught the emperor occult sciences and were very much in favour at court. Humāyūn's younger brother Mirzā Hindāl eventually had Shaikh Phūl murdered in 1539 when the Shaikh attempted to dissuade him from making his own bid for power. Shaṭṭārī fortunes suffered a further reversal when Sher Shāh Sūrī defeated Humāyūn in 1540. When Humāyūn went into exile in Iran, Manjhan cultivated the Afghan court, almost certainly with the encouragement of his spiritual guide Shaikh Muḥammad Ghaus. The Shaikh himself, on the other hand, fled from Afghan reach to the sultanate of Gujarat, whence he conducted a secret correspondence with Humāyūn. In this way, the Shaṭṭārīs had both possible outcomes covered. The author of the *Madhumālatī*, Shaikh Manjhan, with impressive pedigrees as the grandson of Shaikh Qāzin 'Alā and as the spiritual

disciple of Shaikh Muḥammad Ghaus, was at the very centre of the Shaṭṭārī Sufi order when it was at its most vigorous and influential. When his presence was noted as a courtier at the court of Islām Shāh, it would have been both as a poet and as a Sufi Shaikh, almost certainly by then authorized to give spiritual instruction to others.

A person wishing to set out on the spiritual path would first find a Shaikh, either one personally impressive or one belonging to the chosen Sufi lineage, who was willing and authorized to accept him or her as a pupil. Along with the authorization, *ijāzat*, went the *barakat*, the grace, blessing, spiritual power which derived from the spiritual founder of the lineage and was passed from one Shaikh to another down the chain, the *silsilah*. Thus a lineage was a chain of blessings and authority, and the different orders were distinguished one from another by the pedigree of the Shaikhs who were members. A spiritual lineage was also known as a *ṭarīqah*, a path or way, and a disciple on the path was known as a *sālik*, a traveller. Each lineage had its own path of spiritual training and development, although all included such spiritual practices as prayer, fasting and other privations, periods of seclusion, attendance at the Shaikh's talks, collective and private formulaic repetitions, self-observation and self-awareness exercises. What is important for the understanding of Shaikh Manjhan's poem is how the Shaṭṭārī *ṭarīqah* differed from those of other orders.

The Shaṭṭārīs, probably more than any other spiritual lineage, appropriated Indian yogic practices into their regimen. Among Shaikh Muḥammad Ghaus's many compositions is the Persian *Bahr al-Hayāt* ('The Water of Life'), a translation of the *Amṛta-kuṇḍa* ('The Pool of Nectar'), a now-lost Sanskrit text on yoga.[19] In accordance with the order's competitive stance, it should

[19] For a detailed study of this text, see Carl Ernst's translation and introduction to the text, in *The Arabic Version of 'The Pool of the Water of Life' (Amṛtakuṇḍa)* (forthcoming), as well as Yusuf Husain, 'Haud al-Hayat: La Version arabe de l'Amratkund', *Journal Asiatique*, 113 (1928), 291–344. For a listing of the numerous manuscript versions of the Persian and Arabic versions of the text, see Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 78 n. 23.

come as no surprise that the Shaikh represented his efforts as liberating useful practices for cultivating spiritual awareness from the shackles of false belief. These practices included: using exercises for breath control, using yogic postures for sitting, maintaining ritual purity of place and person, assimilating the Indian yogic chakras and their tutelary deities into the Shaṭṭārī cosmology, controlling diet strictly to exclude flesh and liquor, and using certain Hindavī words in the *zikr* (repetition of names and attributes of Allah, often done in conjunction with physical exercises to accomplish spiritual transformation). In addition, the Shaṭṭārīs claimed their method of spiritual development to be swifter than the methods of other lineages in effecting the spiritual transformation of its disciples. 'According to the Shaṭṭāriyya technique, the neophyte at the very beginning of his training is required to consider himself in the presence of Being and then descend step by step from the realm of Self-manifestation of the Absolute to the phenomenal world. Then step by step he re-ascends and reaches the Divine sphere, effacing all traces of the stages of ascent. In contrast to this method, the other Sufis direct their disciples to ascend step by step from the realm of humanity to *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* [the unity of all existence].'[20]

Shaṭṭārī self-transformation was thus focused on realizing the human being's link with Allah and seeing oneself as part of a larger universe that has its source in Allah and refracts the div-ine essence through the many veils of existence. The circular structure implied by the initial taste of *jazbah* or mystical absorption and the eventual return to Being can be seen to have its impact on the plot-structure of the *Madhumālatī*. Thus, the hero Manohar ('Heart-enchanting') meets his divine beloved Madhumālatī through supernatural agency, falls in love with her, is separated, and then has to climb back step by step to the joys that he first tasted in a midnight encounter. In addition, as one scholar has pointed out, 'The Shattars did not have to pass through the stage of *fanā* [evanescence] or the final stage of *fanā al-fanā* [extinction in evanescence]. Their intuitive perception of Allah in their own beings was permanent. This state was

[20] Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, ii. 151–2.

described as *baqā al-baqā*, the everlasting reintegration of the spirit with Allah. Mystics of other *silsilah*s were either conscious of their love for God or experienced ecstasy while the Shattars transcended these two states as separate conditions producing a new combination of their own.'[21] The Shaṭṭārī poet Manjhan eschews the generic pattern of the two co-wives of the hero and their final annihilation on a funeral pyre. As we shall see, his romance ends with the everlasting and blissful union of the two pairs of happy lovers.

III. The Prologue to the Story

Despite these broad correspondences between Shaṭṭārī cos-mology and poetic meaning, we should emphasize that there is no single or flat allegorical scheme to be found in the events and imagery of the story. Rather, when these works were performed in Sufi hospices and royal courts, different protocols of inter-pretation were used to explain the poem's mystical or erotic meanings and allegorical moments. In the elaborate prologue to the romance, the poet establishes a set of historical and theor-etical frameworks that enable us to delineate these different understandings of his poem. These are modelled on the pan-egyrical conventions of the Persian *masnavī* or verse romance, which begin with the praise of God (*ḥamd*), the Prophet Mu-hammad (*nāʿat*), the ruling king, and the author's commission-ing patron, frequently a highly placed nobleman or courtier.[22] In common with the other poets of the genre, Manjhan extends these conventions to create a set of distinctive Hindavī meta-physical and aesthetic terms. He begins his prologue with six verses in praise of Allah. Manjhan links the Creator first with 'love, the treasure-house of joy' (*prema prīti sukhanidhi*), the

[21] Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, ii. 160.
[22] For a concise definition of the Persian *masnavī*, a heroic, historical, didactic, or romantic poem composed in rhyming couplets (*aa, bb, cc*, etc.), see Jan Rypka *et al.*, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), 98 *et passim*. For an example of the genre translated into English with a good introductory discussion, see Niẓāmī, *Haft Paykar. A Medieval Persian Romance*, tr. Julie Scott Meisami (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

central value of the love-story. Then he sketches out the attributes of the ruler of the universe: the Creator (*vidhātā*), Lord (*gosā'īṃ*), King (*rājā*) of the three worlds (heaven, earth, and the nether world, the *tribhuvana*) and the four ages (*juga*). In constrast to all of these stands the poet, whose tongue is not equal to the praise of the glorious Creator. When all those who came before him have failed in the task, how can the poor poet Manjhan succeed in conveying Allah's true stature?

Manjhan answers his rhetorical question by asserting that his poem can only go 'as far as the bird of knowledge can fly, as deep as the mind can fathom . . . beyond that point, where are the means?' Despite this metaphysical and poetic assumption of Allah's ineffable nature, the poet goes on to find Hindavī approximations for the widespread Sufi theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* or the unity of all existence, playing on the Lord's unity (*waḥdat*) and his multiplicity (*kaṣrat*). Manjhan expresses his amazement at the contrast between the oneness of the Creator and the multiplicity of created forms behind which God is hidden. Manjhan represents the Lord as unqualified, yet singular, hidden, yet manifest, formless, yet many-formed. Manjhan refers to the Names of Allah, which are so important as prototypes of all things in existence. In the Sufi cosmogony, these form the patterns or models through which divine light is refracted into the veils of existence. Manjhan's use has a special referent, though, because the Shaṭṭārīs formulated an elaborate system of letter mysticism and cosmology based on the Names of Allah. The divine Names were used extensively by the Shaṭṭārīs to inculcate God's qualities or attributes in the practitioner.

Next, he uses the convention of the *nā'at* (praise of the Prophet) and the praise of the 'companions' of the Prophet elegantly to suggest Muḥammad's true nature. Muḥammad is not simply the Prophet but rather the cosmic principle of the Creator within creation, the reason for creation and the light within it. Manjhan uses the paradoxical logic of the Sufi theory of the refraction of divine light into the forms of this world to declare the sole substantial reality of Muḥammad's body (*sarīra*) and the shadowiness of the concrete, sensible world: 'He

is the substance, and the world his shadow.' Further, he uses the Hindavī word *rūpa* ('form, beauty') to skirt the language of incarnation dangerously. Allah is *alakh*, the invisible one, but the form that can be seen is that of Muḥammad. The true meaning of this beautiful form is God; significantly, *rūpa* is also used extensively in the erotic encounter in the romance to refer to the divine and human aspects of the love that blossoms between the hero and heroine. He ends his *nā'at* with the standard words of praise for the first four 'righteous' Caliphs, expressed simply and beautifully.

There follows the traditional address of obeisance (*khitāb-i zamīnbūs*) to the ruling sultan, Salīm Shāh, which is couched in terms of conventional extravagance. Modelled on Persian prologues that themselves draw on the inflated claims and rhetoric of Islamic texts on polity and statecraft ('mirrors for princes'), the address to Salīm Shāh waxes eloquent in praise of the king's generosity, bravery, and justice. Manjhan uses the standard tropes of the lion and cow playing happily together, of lamb and wolf grazing together in peace, to describe Salīm Shāh as an ideally just king and his state as a 'garden come to flower without any thorns'. He also refers to kings famed for their greatness and nobility in Indian mythology and history: the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas from the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhiṣṭhira, the generous Karṇa, and the cultivated patron of poetry and the arts, King Bhoja of Ujjain. Manjhan also praises the Afghan nobleman and military commander Khiẓr Khān Turk,[23] a regional governor of Bengal who may have patronized the poet and supported him in his entourage.

The balance of spiritual over temporal is then redressed by no fewer than eight verses in praise of Manjhan's spiritual guide, Shaikh Muḥammad Ghauṣ Gvāliyārī. As we have seen, Shaikh Muḥammad was intimately involved in politics at the Mughal courts of Gwalior and Agra. The verses addressed to him emphasize his long years of asceticism and his importance in defining Sufi practice for seekers at his hospice. He is described

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[23] For more details about Khiẓr Khān Turk, see Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *History of Sher Shāh Sūr*, 107.

as a great Shaikh, 'profound in knowledge, matchless in beauty'. The poet focuses on two crucial aspects of the Shaikh's power: the transformative power of his gaze (*disti*), and the figurative kingship of even a disciple of his. The first of these refers to the power of the gaze of the spiritual guide, which can reach within a disciple's being and change his way of being in the world. The disciple can then triumph over 'death', a reference to the Sufi experience of *fanā*, self-annihilation on the path. The triumph over death refers to the stage of subsistence after annihilation, *baqā*. Here the poet uses the Hindavī *disti* to approximate the Persian *tavajjuh*, the absorbed attention of the Shaikh which transforms the consciousness of the disciple, awakening him to the unseen mysteries of the Shaṭṭārī spiritual cosmos. Such a disciple becomes not merely an earthly king like the one the poet has been praising, but king over all the ages of the world.

Having completed the conventional and historical proprieties, Manjhan now comes to defining some theoretical terms that are important for a fuller understanding of his poem. He elevates *prema-rasa* to the *rāja-rasa*, the royal *rasa*, and sketches out three key elements of his aesthetic: the ideology of love (*prema*), the importance of ascetic practice, and the privileged status of language in disseminating the truth embodied in poetry. To begin with Manjhan's view of love, the topos can be traced back to Persian *masnavī* prologues, which frequently include short philosophical reflections on love or poetry. These ordinarily emphasize that the world has its foundation in love, without which the human being is just an aggregate of clay and water. Similarly, in Manjhan's *Madhumālatī*, the very first word is love, and the final couplet is again devoted to love. Love is thus both the beginning and the consummation of his work. For Manjhan, love is much more than the feeling human beings sometimes have for one another; it is a cosmic force which pre-exists creation, which drives creation and which permeates creation. Particularly beloved by Sufis with regard to the causes of creation is the tradition attributed to God: 'I was a hidden treasure and longed that I should be known'. While one understanding of this tradition is that God created the universe because he wished to be known, another understanding

emphasizes that it is only through love that God can be known. For Manjhan, then, love is the most precious property in the universe. Along with love goes suffering, particularly the pain felt of being separate from one's beloved, whether human or divine. This pain of love in separation, *viraha*, is both an intense sorrow and a great blessing because it is the very means by which the human soul becomes self-conscious.

Love and beauty are central to the aesthetics of the *Madhumālatī*, in which the heroine becomes an exemplification of the process of the self-disclosure of the divine. Her beauty arouses love within the seeker, while *viraha*, the condition of being separated from his beloved, drives him onwards along the Sufi path. The path of asceticism involved, among the Shaṭṭārī Sufis, an intensive regimen of fasting and vegetarianism, supererogatory prayers, and a programme of yogic exercises and letter-mysticism. As we have seen, the Arabic letters of the Names of Allah encoded a system of visualization and interior discipline. Manjhan also refers to the unique Shaṭṭārī engagement with the Indian practices of yoga, exhorting the seeker to 'abandon consciousness, wisdom, and knowledge' in order to focus on meditative practice. He describes as a void (*sūnā*) the place where the seeker can remain absorbed in the attributeless Allah. Allah is the Absolute, the ground for revealing the self to itself. In this ascetic regimen, all created forms are refractions of divine essence but need spiritual practice in order to realize their identity-in-difference with divinity.

In addition, the poet uses the term *sahaja-samādhi*, the 'mystic union of Sahaja'. In Kabir and the other north Indian devotional poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *sahaja* refers to the soul's 'spontaneous or self-born' unity with the attributeless or *nirguṇa* Rāma, the transcendence in immanence to which the seeker has to awaken.[24] Among the Sufi poets the term represents the internalization of the Sufi paradox of the identity, yet radical difference, of the being of divinity and human beings. This carries through into Manjhan's view of language, which

[24] See Charlotte Vaudeville, *A Weaver Named Kabir* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 115.

encapsulates the paradox. As he points out, 'if words arise from mortal mouths, then how can the word be imperishable?' Further, 'if man, the master of words, can die, then how does the word remain immortal?' Language becomes the currency of immortality for the poet, since it encompasses the divine and the human. Words endure, although humans pass away. The answer to this paradox, of course, is that the word, like divinity, is perpetually alive because it is refracted in every heart.

In itself this topos is directly traceable to Persian prologues, which contain frequent reflections on poetry or verbal discourse (*sukhan*).[25] These focus on the creative power of the word *Kun* or 'Be', with which Allah created the heavens and the earth. This is approximated in the Hindavī text to the mystic word Oṃ, which Manjhan borrows from Indian religious systems to express the might and majesty of Allah in the Qur'ānic cosmogony. Manjhan makes the word the foundation of creation, as well as of all poetic discourse. As he puts it, 'If the Maker had not made the word, how could anyone hear stories of pleasure?' The poet resolves the paradox of identity-in-difference through his claim that divinity is manifest (*pargaṭa*) in the word, an incarnationist view that would be heretical to express in Persian. Language, in Hindavī poetics, becomes the ground for understanding and representing the revelation of divinity to humans.

Language thus embodies poetic pleasure, but it also becomes the medium for another sort of embodiment: the refraction of the divine essence in visible form. For the Hindavī Sufi poets, the body of the heroine provokes a blinding flash of revelation in the eyes of the seeker. The revelatory flash pushes the seeker on to his quest for love, to realize the union that he has only glimpsed in his vision. To savour *prema-rasa* is to understand the secret of the shared identity-in-difference between the seeker and the sought, the subject and object of mysticism. Manjhan asks his audience to cultivate the taste for this royal *rasa* at the end of his prologue:

[25] See, for instance, Niẓāmī, *Haft Paykar. A Medieval Persian Romance*, tr. J. S. Meisami, 22–3.

A story sweet as nectar I will sing to you:
O experts in love, pay attention and listen!
Such juicy matters only connoisseurs know,
tasteless stuff is tossed out by them.
Termites run away from wood without juice;
will camels eat cane without any sugar?
Whatever has *rasa*, is enjoyed as such,
and the man who does not have the taste
will find even the tasteful tasteless.
　Many tastes are found in the world, O connoisseurs!
　But listen: I shall describe love, the royal savour of savours.
　[43.1–6]

Rasa is the pleasure which listeners or readers take in stories as well as the lovers' consummation of desire in the savour or juice of love (*prema*). The Sufi cosmology within which this aesthetic of *prema-rasa* is set allows the Hindavī Sufi poets to refer suggestively to the relation of mirrored desire between God and creatures. It is in this sense that the Hindavī romances are susceptible to interpretation in multiple ways, whether as sensuous ornate poetry in courtly performance, or as mystical verses referring ultimately to God within the context of Sufi shrines.

IV. *Manohar and Madhumālatī*

After this elaborate prologue, the poet begins the story of Manohar and Madhumālatī in earnest. Many of the narrative motifs that he uses will be instantly recognizable to readers of Indian and Islamic story literatures. For instance, the story opens with King Sūrajbhānu (Light of the Sun) who has everything conceivable except a son, for whom he longs and hopes. For twelve years he serves an ascetic, who finally gives his Queen a small morsel of magical food which results in her giving birth to a son, a motif common to many Indian epic, literary, and folk traditions. The major device used to order the plot is the initial night meeting between the lovers orchestrated by flying nymphs, after which the lovers must wander in pain until they are able to regain that first flush of felicity. This motif occurs also elsewhere, most famously in the *Arabian Nights*, in the tale of the

Prince Qamar al-Zamān.[26] In that story, the lovely Princess Budur is carried to the bedroom of Qamar al-Zamān by flying jinns, who cannot decide which of the two is more beautiful. They leave them there overnight while they go to play. The Prince and Princess awaken, look at each other and fall in love. When they go to sleep again, the jinns carry the Princess back to her father's palace, and the Prince spends the rest of the story on a quest for the beautiful maiden who captured his heart in a midnight encounter. In the same way, the plot of the *Madhumālatī*, in common with those of the other Hindavī Sufi romances, draws the reader into the story by arousing his or her desire and constantly deferring that desire till the lovers attain erotic, narrative, and spiritual consummation.

Once the hero is born, astrologers are summoned who name the child Manohar. Foreshadowing the central narrative themes of desire (*kāma*), separation (*viraha*), and love (*prema*), they also predict that in his fourteenth year he will meet his beloved and fall in love. The two will then be separated and he will wander as a yogi for a year suffering the pain of love in separation. After that he will be King in all his births. The Prince is brought up and properly educated so that at the age of 12 he is crowned King. When he reaches the age of 14 some passing nymphs, attracted by his good looks, resolve to find a Princess for him of matching beauty. They debate the matter and decide on Madhumālatī, the daughter of King Vikram Rāi. The King rules the city of Mahāras, the great *rasa*, suggesting the ultimate aesthetic and spiritual value of *prema-rasa*. To compare the lovers, the nymphs transport Manohar to Madhumālatī's bedroom and put his bed next to hers. Astonished at the resulting loveliness they pronounce them a perfect match and go off to play. Manohar wakes up and is amazed by Madhumālatī's beauty, which the poet describes in the twenty verses of a head-to-foot description of the heroine's body.

When Madhumālatī wakes up she becomes extremely alarmed, but as they talk, love, coming from a former birth, is born between them. They pledge themselves to eternal fidelity and make love—though not fully—and then fall asleep. The nymphs return and are horrified at their dishevelled state and quickly carry back Manohar to his palace. When he awakes, the pain of separation overwhelms the Prince and he tells his nurse Sahajā (the simple or spontaneous mystery or mystical state) what has happened. Various kinds of doctors are called but they fail to cure him because they do not know love. Eventually Manohar resolves to set out against his parents' wishes to find Madhumālatī in Mahāras. He disguises himself as a saffron-clad yogi and sets out with a large retinue, but as they cross an ocean a storm sinks the ship. All are destroyed except Manohar who is washed up on a foreign shore, 'alone save for the name of Madhumālatī and the mercy of God'.

Manohar sets off inland and reaches a plantain forest, the *kadalī vana* that signifies the place of self-mortification and spiritual attainment in Tantric practice and devotional poetry in the north Indian languages.[27] As he is wandering through this dark wood, he finds a pavilion in which a young and innocent Princess, Pemā (Love), is imprisoned. She is the beloved daughter of King Citrasena of Citbisaraun (Forgetfulness or Ease-of-Mind). She was out playing with her girlfriends when they had to take shelter in a gallery or pavilion painted with pictures (*citrasārī*) to escape a swarm of bees. The pictures painted on the walls of the pavilion suggest the realm of images (*ālam-i imṣāl*) in Sufi cosmology, one step closer to the world of concrete phenomena than the place of the divine Names. As they came out of the picture-pavilion a demon seized her and brought her to the dark forest where she is an unhappy prisoner. Manohar introduces himself and tells her about Madhumālatī. Pemā, in reply, says she is a childhood friend of Madhumālatī's and that Madhumālatī visited her parents' home with her mother every month. When he hears this, Manohar resolves to save Pemā by

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[26] Richard F. Burton (tr.), *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (Benares = Stoke Newington or London: Kama Shastra Society, 1885–6), iii. 212–348, iv. 1–29.

[27] See David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 113.

confronting the demon. When the demon returns, Manohar wounds it, but the demon miraculously recovers.

Pemā explains that there is a tree whose ambrosial fruit grants immortality, and that in it resides the demon's life. Hearing this, Manohar knows that Allah would give him victory if he could but destroy the tree. He is hesitant to commit the sin of killing a living tree, but is persuaded by Pemā's unfortunate plight. By cutting down the tree and uprooting the trunk, he leaves the demon no source from which to renew his life. Once the demon is dead, Manohar takes Pemā back to her parents, who are so grateful they offer him their kingdom and Pemā's hand in marriage. He declines, since his heart is pledged to Madhumālatī. He becomes increasingly impatient to set off on his quest again, when Pemā informs him that Madhumālatī and her mother are coming the next day. He waits in the picture-pavilion, restless with the pain of separation. Pemā brings Madhumālatī there, leaving them together as she guards the door. Manohar moves in and out of consciousness in her presence. She is initially angry at his cruelty in deserting her, until their former love reawakens. They renew their vow not to make love fully until they are married and fall asleep together. Madhumālatī's mother, meanwhile, worrying about her daughter, descends on the pavilion and finds them there together. Overcome with shame and rage, she has Madhumālatī taken back to Mahāras, where she utters a spell and turns Madhumālatī into a bird. When Manohar wakes up he finds Madhumālatī gone; he is cast down once more in his own bedroom at Kanagiri. He resumes his yogic disguise and sets off again on the quest for his beloved.

Madhumālatī, transformed into a bird, flies all round the world in search of Manohar. This motif is found commonly in Islamic mystical literature, in which the divine in the form of the Universal Spirit moves through the world in the form of a dove after creation.[28] She suffers horribly from *viraha*, the pain of love in separation. Despairing, she sees a Prince who looks like Manohar and allows herself to be caught. He is Prince Tārācand

[28] See, for instance, Muhyīddīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, tr. R. A. Nicholson (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), 20, 72–3.

of Pavanerī (Wind City, a reference to the airs or winds of the subtle yogic body) who, hearing her story, leaves his kingdom to serve her and bring her back to her family and native land. Madhumālatī's mother is full of remorse and quickly restores her to her former self. She offers Tārācand Madhumālatī in marriage but he refuses, knowing she could only be happy with Manohar. Madhumālatī's parents meanwhile write to Pemā telling her what has happened. Madhumālatī encloses a *bārahmāsā*, a song describing her suffering through the twelve months using exquisite natural and seasonal imagery. The letters reach Pemā just as Manohar reappears still disguised as a yogi. Further letters are exchanged and a marriage is arranged between Manohar and Madhumālatī. After the wedding ceremony, they consummate their long love-affair in full, much to the amusement of Madhumālatī's girlfriends. Tārācand stays with them both and one day he sees Pemā swinging in the picture-pavilion and falls in love with her although he does not know who she is. Madhumālatī realizes it must be Pemā he has fallen for and tells Manohar. Manohar says that since Pemā had been offered in marriage to him there was no difficulty in her being married to Tārācand. The marriage of Pemā and Tārācand takes place and after a while they all decide that they must return to their respective kingdoms. After an elaborate leave-taking, Manohar and Madhumālatī finally reach his kingdom where, amid great rejoicing, he is reunited with his happy parents.

This outline of *Madhumālatī* reveals an entertaining and sensuous love-story that is both Indian and Islamic in terms of narrative motifs, in common with the other texts of the genre. The plot moves through successive stages of deferred desire, driving the lovers and the audience along to the narrative, metaphysical, and erotic satisfaction of desire in the final union. The poet ends with a rhymed couplet that serves to round off the story and to justify its continued circulation, translation, and dissemination:

The elixir of immortality will fill love's sanctuary, wherever it is found.
As long as poetry is cultivated on earth, so long will our lovers' names resound.

Since poetry is still cultivated on earth, the sensitive reader (*sahṛdaya*) will recognize that the *Madhumālatī* is a Sufi romance full of delightful imagery and narrative symmetry. Both pairs of lovers come together happily at the end to produce a beautifully balanced conclusion. The only two formal literary conventions in the story are the head-to-foot description of the heroine and the *bārahmāsā*, the rest being told with a lightness and sensitivity in keeping with the theme. The poem fully justifies Manjhan's claim that it is pervaded with *prema-rasa*, the evocative *rasa* of love that is above all the *rāja-rasa*, the royal *rasa* or savour fit to be enjoyed by kings.

V. Mystical Meanings and Symbolism

The various Sufi *silsilah*s that composed Hindavī poetry in north India were fully steeped in the conventions and symbolism of the various genres of Persian poetry, both lyric (*ġhazal*) and narrative (*maṣnavī*). At the same time, the Sufis were fascinated by the poetics and alluring imagery of Indian classical and regional poetry as they encountered it in musical and dance performances and in poetic recitation. The cultural history of sultanate and Mughal India is in part the history of the enthusiastic participation of Sufis and other Muslims in the formation of the canons of Indian poetry, art, and music. The genre of the Hindavī Sufi romance should be read against this larger historical background of cultural appropriations, comminglings, and creative formulations. Thus, the Hindavī Sufi poets used Indian *rasa* theory and the conventions of Persian poetry to create a romantic genre centred around the various meanings of *prema-rasa*, the juice or essence of love. As we have seen, *rasa* means taste or essence, and was used in Indian poetic theory to refer to the property in a poem that evokes a trans-subjective emotional response in the hearer or reader. *Rasa* has at least two other meanings. At its core, the word means the physical juice, sap, or semen that runs through humans as well as the natural world. Secondly, this liquid essence or semen can be manipulated through certain yogic practices to produce mystical bliss.

When the Hindavī Sufi poets appealed to their readers as *rasika*s, they were able to combine the notion of the *sahṛdaya*, a person of literary taste, refinement, and sensibility, with the notion of the *ʿāshiq*, the lover, and the *sālik*, the seeker on the mystical path. There is a constant assertion through the prologues of the genre that these poems have multiple layers of significance. They are multivalent and multilayered, containing as many levels of meaning as there are levels in the soul of the reader to apprehend. Rather than straightforward allegory, which requires a point-to-point correspondence between levels of meaning, these works are full of multiple suggestions and resonances. As J. R. R. Tolkien notes in his introduction to his verse translation of the Middle English *Pearl*,

A clear distinction between 'allegory' and 'symbolism' may be difficult to maintain, but it is proper, or at least useful, to limit allegory to narrative, to an account (however short) of events; and symbolism to the use of visible signs or things to represent other things or ideas ... To be an 'allegory' a poem must *as a whole*, and with fair consistency, describe in other terms some event or process; its entire narrative and all its significant details should cohere and work together to this end. There are minor allegories within *Pearl* ... But an allegorical description of an event does not make that event itself allegorical. And this initial use is only one of the many applications of the pearl symbol ... For there are a number of precise details in *Pearl* that cannot be subordinated to any general allegorical interpretation, and these details are of special importance since they relate to the central figure, the maiden of the vision, in whom, if anywhere, the allegory should be concentrated and without disturbance.[29]

The *Madhumālatī* is 'allegorical' and 'symbolic' in this precise sense, containing a variety of suggestive incidents, an allegorical centrepiece in the form of the seductive divine heroine, a genuine poetic commitment to a range of poetic meanings, and a sense of the poem *as a whole* suggesting and evoking

[29] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Introduction', in his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Orfeo* (London: Unwin Paperbacks. 1975), 6–7.

rasa. It is clear from the text of the *Cāndāyan*, the first surviving Hindavī Sufi romance, that the poet was familiar with the technique of suggesting non-literal and non-figurative meanings, called *dhvani* (resonance) or *vyañjana* (suggestion) in Sanskrit literary criticism.[30] The later poets of the genre, especially Malik Muhammad Jāyasī and Mīr Sayyid Manjhan Shaṭṭārī Rājgīrī, used these techniques to suggest and to evoke spiritual levels of meaning, the fleeting 'scent of the invisible world'.

Manjhan thus wrote against a background of presuppositions and expectations that was far wider than the conventions of his genre. He used both the poetics of *rasa* and suggestion in the works of Indian poets and the poetics of mystical symbolism found in Sufi poetry, particularly in Persian. The Persian, Sanskrit, and vernacular poets most relevant to Manjhan's time and place form a set of horizons against which one can measure the extent and effect of his own poetics of *prema-rasa*. The works of Persian poets were understood to be delicate, full, and richly suggestive poems, but lacking the graphic allure and frank eroticism of Hindavī. Comparing the *Madhumālatī* to the Sanskrit and vernacular poets of the period opens up new horizons of understanding. Thus, the Sanskrit, middle Indic, and new Indo-Aryan poetry to the god Kṛṣṇa from the period contains a fully worked out theology and aesthetics aimed at savouring the juice or essence of love. In the incarnationist theology of the poets who address a personified divinity (*saguṇa*), the seeker or devotee transforms his subjectivity by imagining himself in an embodied relationship with divinity. On the other hand, Kabir and the *nirguṇa* poets imagine a formless godhead, but their

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[30] The sophisticated and brilliant *magnum opus* that best systematizes the *dhvani* theory is the *Dhvanyāloka* ('Light on Dhvani') of Ānandavardhana along with the commentary of Abhinavagupta, the *Locana* or 'Eye'. For these texts, see *The Dhvanyāloka of Śrī Ānandavardhanāchārya with the Lochana Sanskrit Commentary of Śrī Abhinavagupta*, ed. with a Hindi trans. by Jagannāth Pāṭhak (Benares: Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan, 1965). Both texts have been translated into English by D. H. H. Ingalls, J. M. Masson, and M. V. Patwardhan as *The Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

version of *prema* is focused on self-recognition through the meditative practice of the divine Name.

The Hindavī Sufi poets fall somewhere in between these two poles. In their poems, the erotic body of the heroine signifies divinity in a temporary revelation that is intended to draw the seeker out of himself and on to the ascetic path. Since their metaphysics is focused on a transcendent principle that cannot be embodied, it is the journey of self-transformation and the balancing of this world and the hereafter that is central to their aesthetics. Since the Sufis believed in a notion of ordinate love, in which each object of desire is loved for the sake of the one higher to it, their poetry requires narrative stages in which the seeker advances towards the highest object through a series of ordeals. This is embodied in the erotic body of the heroine, allegorically understood to contain the concentrated blinding flash of Allah's divine revelation. Savouring the *rasa* of the events and imagery of the story involves picking up these multiple resonances and allowing them to transform one's subjectivity.

Thus, the aesthetics of the Hindavī Sufi romances was aimed at suggesting and awakening love between a transcendent godhead and the human world through the circulation of love between human lovers. In this poetry there is an interplay between profane and divine love, where divine love is considered 'ishq-i ḥaqīqī, love of God, and human love is just a reflection of this spiritual or true love, being described as 'ishq-i majāzī, metaphorical or profane love. This set of distinctions, often referred to as ordinate love and defined as a ladder or progression in Sufi treatises, is apparent to us from the brief and scattered interpretative comments on the Hindavī romances in the Persian sources of the sultanate period. The beloved in Sufi poetry, as well as the lover, demons and ordeals, can all have at least a double reference but they cannot be understood schematically or allegorically. The symbolism is altogether more subtle, using suggestion and allusion to hint at symbolic levels which are co-present with the literal, so that in any one context, in any particular verse or passage, one level might be applicable, or two or several. The heroine is not always God, the beloved,

sometimes she is simply a beautiful woman, and sometimes she is both. Similarly the hero is sometimes a lovelorn young man, sometimes the human soul, sometimes a spiritual traveller, sometimes the created world, sometimes any two or three of these together. The richness of the symbol is measured by the number of levels of understanding and response it can evoke in the reader or hearer.

The text of the *Madhumālatī* is richly allegorical and symbolic, outrunning the precise details of its allegory by the beauty and multivalence of the symbols used. In order to understand how this complex set of literary techniques, anchored in a poetics of *rasa*, is properly mystical, we need to turn the lens on another facet of the poem. In evoking the 'scent of the invisible world', the poet uses both allegorical events and symbolic excess. The classic writer on the theory of mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, defines symbols and their meanings very usefully: 'The greater the suggestive quality of the symbol used, the more answering emotion it evokes in those to whom it is addressed, the more truth it will convey. A good symbolism, therefore, will be more than a mere diagram or mere allegory: it will use to the utmost the resources of beauty and passion, will bring with it hints of mystery and wonder, bewitch with dreamy periods the mind to which it is addressed. Its appeal will not be to the clever brain, but to the desirous heart, the intuitive sense, of man.'[31] When Manjhan addresses himself to the *rasika* it is precisely this desirous heart and intuitive sense to which he is appealing. In her analysis, Underhill identifies three major classes of mystical symbols: that of the pilgrim or traveller on the way, the *sālik*; that of the lover searching for his Beloved, the *'āshiq*; that of the seeker of inward transformation, the *sādhak*.[32]

In the *Madhumālatī*, Manjhan employs all three allegorically and intertwines them into a beautifully constructed narrative. The first level of symbolism is that of the *sādhak*, here the yogic level. In the genre of the Hindavī Sufi romance, the hero ordinarily disguises himself as a yogi when he sets off in search of the

[31] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 126.
[32] See Underhill, *Mysticism*, 125–48.

beloved. A number of key yogic terms are used to suggest the ascetic level of meaning through a coded vocabulary. The highest state is referred to as *sahaja*, the state of spontaneous bliss, wherein is experienced *mahārasa*, the great *rasa*, the name of Madhumālatī's city. Manohar has a nurse called Sahajā, and Tārācand's city is called Pavanerī, which can be taken as indicative of *pavana*, breath. Pemā's city is called Citbisarāuṇ, which means peacefulness or forgetfulness of mind, the objective of meditation. Pemā means love and the release of Pemā from the clutches of the demon could be taken as the hero's liberation of the abstract quality of love from the darkness of the phenomenal world into which she has fallen. In terms of the yogic system of self-mortification, it could also signify the release of *śakti* from the base of the spine so that it can rise up the psychic channel *suṣumṇā* to union with Śiva and thus bring about immortality. Finally, when Manohar tells Madhumālatī that he is the sun and she is the moon this too would be taken to refer to the two psychic channels, the *iḍā* and *piṅgalā nāḍīs* that run on either side of the *suṣumṇā*. This yogic level of imagery and terminology is as explicitly a disguise as is the yogic appearance that Manohar adopts when he sets off on his search. The assumption of Gorakhnāthī garb is as surely an indication of the translation of Islam into an Indian landscape as it is an allegorical sign of the seeker's self-transformation by the end of his quest. Manohar has always shed his yogic guise, his *desī* version of Islam, by the time he meets Madhumālatī. In the final fairy-tale union, he is Islam internally and externally transformed into an Indian religious and literary world. The hero is the *'āshiq*, the lover, and the *sālik*, the Sufi traveller on the path, conventional symbols of Sufi poetry which can now be examined.

Underhill further analysed the various stages of the mystical path, mainly on the basis of Christian mystics, although she does show some acquaintance with Muslim mystics as well. Her analysis is suggestive in that it creates a generalized scheme with four major phases that she called awakening, purification (*via purgativa*), illumination (*via illuminativa*), and union (*via unitiva*). While there is no historical connection between the Shaṭṭārī Sufis and the Christian mystics, the scheme helps us to

focus on the narrative stages of the awakening, purification, illumination, and consummation of desire in the *Madhumālatī*. Manohar must be understood as the human soul which is granted a foretaste of divine beauty in the form of Madhumālatī, whereupon love is born between them coming from a previous life. This is certainly a familiar situation in Indian poetry, where reincarnation is a presupposition, but in Islamic terms it must refer to a pre-existent state of love between the soul and God which is reawakened. This portion of the story, until the nymphs separate the couple, is the first stage, and could be said to correspond to the awakening of love.

The second stage, purification, begins when Manohar is overwhelmed by the pain of love in separation and becomes ill. Doctors, often symbolic of learning and rational thought (*'aql*), fail to cure him because they do not understand love. All Manohar's tribulations and sufferings are part of this purgation of the lower forces in his nature. This culminates in the moment when he is able to slay the demon and set love, Pemā, free, after which love becomes his guide, *murshid*, and leads him to his second meeting with Madhumālatī. This second encounter marks the third stage, that of illumination or gnosis, called *ma'rifa* in Sufi schemes of spiritual advancement. It takes place, significantly, in the picture-pavilion which is symbolic of the world of imaginal forms (*'ālam-i imsāl*). Here Manohar invites her to draw back the veil of her locks and Madhumālatī, for the first and only time, indicates that her beauty is something more than human beauty and cannot be seen with one's ordinary eyes.

As we have mentioned, the poets of the genre use a coded vocabulary to suggest multiple levels of symbolism and meaning. For example, the location of Citbisarāuṇ as a halting place (*maqām*) on the spiritual path is interesting, since the word can mean not only peace of mind but also forgetfulness. There is a sense in which this stage on the path is the point of greatest risk. Forgetfulness can translate as *ghaflat*, negligence, which is one of the greatest problems the Sufi traveller faces. When Manohar reaches Pemā's home he is offered everything, including Pemā, but he resists the temptation because of his pledge to Madhumālatī; that is, he remembers his primary loyalty. A further

temptation occurs in his meeting with Madhumālatī which they both recognize and reject, namely to make love fully as if they were married. They remember their former vow not to do so until they are married. Symbolically this signifies the recognition that illumination, *ma'rifa*, is not final union, that there is further to go on the path. Forgetfulness can also be taken as transcending the ordinary consciousness of the empirical world and enjoying ecstatic states, as Manohar does in their second encounter. Citbisarāuṇ is therefore an excellent choice of name for the location of illumination since it is charged with symbolic potency, indicative of both the high risk and the high reward of the traveller on the mystical path.

The transition between illumination and union, famously called 'the dark night of the soul' by St John of the Cross, is usually a barren despairing period in which both lover and beloved are not sure of the final outcome. The lovers are separated by Madhumālatī's angry mother, who transforms her delinquent daughter into a bird by the use of a magic spell. The bird Madhumālatī, formerly the image and experience of God, flies about the world in a desperate quest for her lover Manohar. After a year, she allows herself to be caught by Tārācand, a Prince who resembles Manohar. At the yogic level of symbolism Tārācand is suggestive of breath, but in a Sufi sense he is representative of selflessness and disinterested service (*khidmat-i khalq*). In the spirit of selfless service to Madhumālatī, he deserts his kingdom and does not expect any return for his devotion since the lovely and magical bird is already pledged to another. It was through love, Pemā, that Manohar was able to reach Madhumālatī, and now it is through the selflessness and devoted service of Tārācand that Madhumālatī is able to reach Manohar. Manjhan departs from the conventions of the genre at this point. He puts the *bārahmāsā*, the song of the pain of love in separation through the twelve months, in the mouth of Madhumālatī. The other romances usually have the *bārahmāsā* as a song sung by the deserted wife, who is usually taken to symbolize the lower self, the *nafs*, or the world, or both. In giving the *bārahmāsā* to Madhumālatī, Manjhan is able to demonstrate in a strong way—in that it departs from the

convention—the love and yearning of God for the human soul.

Manjhan handles the final stage of the consummation of desire, the ultimate savouring of *prema-rasa*, through a double denouement that uses the conventions of traditional Indian marriage. In the practice of child marriage, it was usual for the bride to remain with her parents after the ceremony until she reached the age of puberty. After this there was a second ceremony, the *gavana* or 'going', in which all goodbyes were said and she set out for her husband's home after the ritual of consummation as a sexually mature woman.[33] Union itself, as in other mystical literatures, is described in terms of both mystical marriage and of sexual union. After describing the grand marriage ceremony and the first night of union, Manjhan uses the time spent at her parents' home to allow Pemā and Tārācand to fall in love and get married so that all four live together in perfect harmony. The second ceremony, the *gavana*, then takes place with leave-taking and goodbyes. In Madhumālatī's case, this long goodbye includes her parents, relatives, friends and retainers, as well as the walls and ramparts, the bed, her clothes and her toys, that is, the entire conditioned world of materiality and relationship. All four set off, but, after a while, Pemā, human love, and Tārācand, selfless love and service, separate from the other two, since they cannot enter the totally unconditioned world to which Manohar and Madhumālatī are heir. Eventually Manohar reaches the kingdom from which he set out and becomes king in all his births. The cycle is complete; as the Sufis would say: 'From God we come and to God shall we return.' For Manohar and Madhumālatī, as spiritual travellers and Sufi lovers, this return is represented in life and not in death.

Underneath this generalized Sufi symbolism, which can be understood as allegorical moments or stages along a mystical

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[33] See S. W. Fallon, *A New Hindustani–English Dictionary, With Illustrations from Hindustani Literature and Folklore* (Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1879), 1015–16, and William Crooke, *A Rural and Agricultural Glossary for the North West Provinces and Oudh* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, and Co., 1888), 104–5.

progression as well as a weaving together of levels of symbolism, it is possible to detect a specifically Shaṭṭārī set of resonances. The attentive reader will recall from our summary account of the Shaṭṭārī path that the neophyte tastes mystical absorption in the divine essence at the very beginning of his ascetic practice. In the poem at hand, this is signified by Manohar's initial communion with Madhumālatī, the image of God and divine beauty in both its gentle (*jamālī*) and its terrible (*jalālī*) aspects. The episode with the heavenly nymphs and the first meeting in which a pre-existent love is reawakened, which Manohar describes as both real and unreal at the same time, describes just this process. Thereafter, Manohar, suffering from *viraha* and with only the name of Madhumālatī, descends, step by step, to the phenomenal world where he finds the Princess whose name is love detained by the evil demon. The Name of God proves to be his salvation because Pemā, love, recognizes it as the name of her childhood friend. Through his victory over the demon, he is able to begin his ascent back up from this low point on the upward arc of the circular Shaṭṭārī regimen. With love as his guide, he is reunited with God but in the imaginal world of the picture-pavilion.

Up to this point the story has been that of Manohar, but now it is told from Madhumālatī's point of view. It is as if the human soul can only hope to reach as far as illumination through its own efforts. Thereafter, only through selfless love and service is God able to reach the human soul and take it to union. In the other Sufi romances written within this genre, the heroes all die and their co-wives all commit *satī* on their husbands' funeral pyres. This implies that men sacrifice women on the mystical path after spiritual self-transformation. In the cultural logic of the period and among the Sufis, the final sacrifice is taken as referring to *fanā*, the annihilation of self, a necessary process for every mystic. In the *Madhumālatī*, however, nobody dies. The Shaṭṭārī path reaches beyond *fanā*, the annihilation of egotistical selfhood, to *baqā*, subsistence in God, and finally to *baqā al-baqā*, everlasting reintegration in God, which is the culmination of Manjhan's story. In this, as in the other ways that have been shown, the Shaṭṭārī path is

distinctive. In going beyond *fanā* and using this unique double denouement, *Madhumālatī* transcends the other poems of this genre.

It should be remembered that the yogic, Sufi, and Shaṭṭārī levels of signification are not really discrete elements since the different symbols are all intertwined and perfectly merged with the literal imagery and narrative. The allegorical and complexly symbolical aesthetics of *prema-rasa* necessarily involve a communication of desire between lover and beloved, human and divine, and reader and text. Savouring the juice of love meant, for the authors and audiences of the Hindavī Sufi romances, bringing all three relationships to consummation. Sufi authors considered that the form, shape, and potentiality for analogy of a story or situation had the power to settle in a reader and transform human understanding and consciousness. From all that has been said, it will be apparent that in the *Madhumālatī*, Manjhan composed a beautifully balanced and enchanting poem rich in its suggestive power and potential for mystical interpretation. It is hoped that this brief introduction will contextualize the work and its author and permit a more informed appreciation of the poem. We would like to emphasize, however, that the poem should be read and enjoyed as a *rasika* would read it, with an open heart, a discerning mind and a sensibility open to the poem's suggestive power.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

A FAMOUS dictum has it that one can never translate a poem, only rewrite it. Our work with Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* has aimed at recreating the poetic form of the text as closely as possible in English while conveying the lexical sense of the poetry accurately. Each verse of the poem consists of five short rhymed couplets, followed by a longer rhymed couplet summing up the point of the verse, somewhat reminiscent of the insistent 'bob and wheel' verse-structure of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[1] The second verse of *Madhumālatī* is transcribed below to show the structure and patterns of the poetry and its metres and rhymes:

> eka aneka bhāva paramesā   eka rūpa kāchē bahu bhesā
> tīni loka jahvā lagi ṭhāi   bhoga kai anabana rūpa gosāĩ
> kartā karai jagata jeta cāhai   jamu thā jamu rahai jamu āhai
> bāju thāva berasai sabha ṭhāĩ   nirguna eka omkāra gosāĩ
> guputa rūpa pargaṭa sabha ṭhāĩ   bājhu rūpa bahurūpa gosāĩ
>   tribhuvana pūri apūri kai, eka joti sabha ṭhāva
>   jotihi anabana mūrati, mūrati anabana nāva

The first line scans as follows:
$$-\cup\cup-\cup-\cup\cup--, \quad -\cup-\cup--\cup\cup--.$$
The line consists of two half-lines or *ardhālīs*, each having sixteen *mātrā*s or metrical instances and usually ending in a spondee (–). A short syllable, indicated by $\cup$, is one *mātrā*, and a long syllable, indicated by –, counts as two *mātrā*s. This metre, in which there are two rhyming half-lines of sixteen *mātrā*s each, is called *caupāī*. Every verse of *Madhumālatī* is of five couplets in the *caupāī* metre followed by a longer rhyming couplet called a *dohā*. A *dohā* is two rhyming lines of twenty-four *mātrā*s each, with a pause or caesura, indicated above by a comma, after the first thirteen *mātrā*s. The first line of the *dohā* scans as follows:
$$\cup\cup\cup\cup-\cup\cup-\cup-, \quad -\cup-\cup\cup\cup-\cup.$$

[1] See *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925).