Negotiating Female Authorship in Eighteenth-Century India: Gender and Multilingualism in a Persian Text

ZAHRA SHAH

Abstract

In the last years of the eighteenth century, an Indian woman authored a work in Persian intended for the entertainment and guidance of students of that language. Entitled Miftāḥ-i Qulūb-i Mubtadiyān *('The Key of the Hearts of Beginners'), the work comprised of stories from vernacular oral traditions as well as extracts from well-known Persian poetic, historical and ethical works. Although the work was translated into English in 1908 by Annette Beveridge, it has received no serious scholarly attention. Drawing upon recent scholarship offering new ways of thinking about India's multilingual literary past, this article examines the intersection of multiple vernacular and generic traditions as translated and manifested in* Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīyān. *While vernacular languages followed different, and in relative terms, more limited routes of circulation and exchange in comparison with cosmopolitan languages such as Persian, their paths of movement were no less significant. Through a close reading of this work and its context, this article seeks to understand how Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula crafted a distinct, cosmopolitan voice for herself through her deployment of both Persianate and regional Indian traditions.*

Keywords: Women; Persian Literature; Western translations; Eighteenth Century.

In the final years of the eighteenth century, a woman in north India authored a Persian text entitled *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn* ('The Key of the Hearts of Beginners', 1798/9). Although the author did not reveal her name, she identified herself as the companion (*bībī*) of an East India Company official, 'Ḥashmat al-Daula' William Augustus Brooke (1753–1833).[1] In her preface, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula explained that she had composed the book for the education and entertainment of students of Persian. The work was composed of three parts. The first part formed the bulk of the manuscript, consisting of fourteen translations of stories she had encountered orally, in the ordinary language of the people (*ki az zabān-i mardumān ba sam' āmada bāshad*) which she loosely described as *hindī*.[2] This was followed by extracts from standard works of Persian prose, and a selection (*intikhāb*)

[1] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Whinfield 53.

[2] Following the author's terminology, I use *hindī* (rather than *hindavī* or Hindustani) to refer to the vocabulary in this work.

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of verses from the *dīwān*s of various poets including Fak͟hr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm 'Irāqī (d.1289) and Abū Sa'īd Abu'l K͟hair (d.1049).[3] In her work, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula displayed an acute awareness of her position as a woman making an incursion into the conventionally male domain of literary Persian. Crossing such gendered literary boundaries thus constituted an important symbolic move. This article seeks to understand how Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula crafted her identity as a female author writing in Persian, and the ways in which her work was shaped by the colonial and vernacular milieu in which she participated.

Female Authorship in Persian in early modern India

Female authorship in Persian was a rare phenomenon in early modern India. While the voices of female poets were sometimes heard in late-Mughal Persian *taẕkira*s (biographical anthologies of poets), and evidence the participation of women in some literary milieu, these were for the most part restricted to educated royal women and courtesans.[4] On the one hand, as the language of the scholarly and bureaucratic elite across much of South Asia, Persian was acquired through a relatively formal education to which women had little access. On the other hand, as Sunil Sharma has pointed out, *taẕkira*s, which played a key role in the formation of literary canons and in delineating the Persianate socio-literary landscape, were, without exception, authored by men who were prone to discuss women's verses according to a simplistic binary (chaste versus vulgar).[5] It is possible that poets whose verses did not fit into either category were simply ignored or else not glossed as women, the lack of gender in Persian obscuring their presence unless explicitly stated. Few female poets featured in these compendiums, and when concerted efforts were made to collect evidence of women's literary output, *taẕkira*-writers and literary historians had little existing documentation on which to rely.[6] Beyond such participation of women in oral contexts occasionally documented in *taẕkira*s, there is little to suggest that Indian women attempted to preserve their Persian literary output in writing during this period.

Instead, female expression and experience were associated with 'unschooled' and less Persianised registers of vernacular languages.[7] Persianate and Indic poetics were routinely compared by Indo-Persian litterateurs, who recognised the latter as being particularly female-centric in subject in contrast to Persian.[8] Hence, Persianised male writers in India often adopted the vernacular, female voice (absent from the grammatically gender-neutral Persian) in order to evoke specifically feminine emotions and spaces.[9] A well-known

[3] It was not possible to identify the authors of all the verses included in the selection.

[4] S. Sharma, 'From 'Ā'esha to Nur Jahān: The Shaping of a Classical Persian Poetic Canon of Women', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2, 2 (2009), pp. 148-164.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] S. Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Cambridge, 2017), p. 31; S. Phukan, '"Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet": The Ecology of Hindi in the World of Persian', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 38, 1 (2001), p. 52.

[8] S. Sharma, 'Translating Gender: Āzād Bilgrāmī on the Poetics of the Love Lyric and Cultural Synthesis', *The Translator* 15, 1 (2009), pp. 87-103; C. Ernst, 'Indian Lovers in Arabic and Persian Guise: Azad Bilgrami's Depiction of Nayikas', *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 6, 1 (2013), pp. 37-51 (Categories of Lovers); see also A. Busch, *Poetry of Kings: The Classical Hindi Literature of Mughal India* (New York, 2011), pp. 79-83.

[9] Phukan, 'Through Throats Where Many Rivers Meet', pp. 33-58; I. Bangha, 'Rekhta: Poetry in Mixed Language', in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, (ed.) F. Orsini (New Delhi, 2010), p. 48; C. M. Naim,

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example of this in late eighteenth-century north India was the rise in popularity of non-mystical *rekhta* verse, and its feminine sub-genre *rekhtī*, which found fresh poetic subjects for the traditional *ghazal* in women's lives and relationships.[10] Set in 'feminine geographies' constituted by rooftops, bedrooms, bazars and fairs, Ruth Vanita has shown how *rekhtī* verse played upon domestic imagery to create layered meanings.[11] Few Indian women actually composed *rekhtī* verses— there are no more than three or four couplets to prove that any, in fact, did do so—as most female *ghazal* writers preferred to adopt the male voice traditional to the genre.[12] The relationship between women and specific kinds of language usage was, however, largely expressed by men—whether by writers employing Indic vernaculars to express feminine subjects or by the Persianate *tazkira*-writers hesitant to include (and mark as such) women in their poetic collections: as Allison Busch has observed in her work on *ritī* poetry, "Indian poetry may often have a female voice, but it has a male gaze".[13]

From the perspective of the Persianised man of letters, formalised, cosmopolitan expression was an inherently masculine realm, while untutored, vernacular forms of speech were marked as the sphere of women. This binary existed alongside long-standing traditions of associating different types of female beauty and qualities with specific regions, common to both Indic and Persianate aesthetics.[14] The discursive association of women with vernacular linguistic and spatial realms was to dovetail with later colonial policies towards Indian education. Although the East India Company shifted in favour of education in English and the vernaculars after 1835, its implementation was far from even, and many institutions continued to offer education in one or more of India's 'classical' languages (Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit).[15] This was not the case at the few institutions established for females, where learning was confined to vernacular, and sometimes English, instruction.[16] Scholarship has somewhat followed these contours, and women's voices have been sought, almost without exception, in vernacular writings dealing with domestic themes, even in male-authored texts.[17] While such scholarship has been undeniably nuanced in its reconstructions of gender

'Transvestic Words? The Rekhti in Urdu', in *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays of C. M. Naim*, (ed.) C. M. Naim (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 42-66; Anshu Malhotra also notes that *Bhaktī* poets, who composed in a variety of Indian vernaculars, deployed the female voice to express submission and devotion to the male god. See A. Malhotra, 'Bhakti and the Gendered Self: A Courtesan and a Consort in Mid-Nineteenth Century Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 6 (2012), pp. 1506-1539.

[10]R. Vanita, *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhtī Poetry in India, 1780-1870* (New York, 2012); C. Petievich, 'The Feminine and Cultural Syncretism in Early Dakani Poetry', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 8 (1993), pp. 110–121.

[11]Vanita, *Gender, Sex and the City,* pp. 41-73.

[12]S. Kugle, 'Mah Laqa Bai and Gender: The Language, Poetry, and Performance of a Courtesan in Hyderabad', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, 3 (2010), pp. 365-385.

[13]Busch, *Poetry of Kings,* p. 83.

[14]M. H. Fisher, 'Women and the Feminine in the Court and High Culture of Awadh, 1720-1856', in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, Piety,* (ed.) Gavin Hambly (New York, 1998), pp. 489-519; R. D. Williams, 'Songs between Cities: Listening to Courtesans in Colonial North India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, 4 (2017), pp. 1-20; Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia,* pp.100-111.

[15]Z. Shah, 'Between Cosmopolitan and Classical: Persian in Early Colonial India, c.1757-1857' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 2017), pp. 190-226.

[16]See, for example, *Reports from Committees: Session: 4 November 1852 – 20 August 1853*, xxv (London, 1853), pp. 188-200; partly the emphasis on vernacular education for girls was also a result of greater missionary interest in female education. See also J. Murdoch, *Education in India: A letter to His Excellency the Most Honorable, the Marquis of Ripon* (Madras, 1881), pp. 119-143.

[17]For example, see R. Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness* (Cambridge, 2013); R. Vanita, '"Married Among Their Companions": Female Homoerotic Relations in Nineteenth-Century Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India', *Journal of Women's History* 16, 1 (2004), pp. 12-53; see also

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relations, as well as unearthing possibilities of female agency and experiences, it has rarely interrogated the relationship between women and vernacular languages. In particular, mapping female experiences onto singular vernacular spaces, tied to particular regions, results in a distortion of the mobile and multilingual worlds that women in early modern India could inhabit.

Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn offers one view of what Francesca Orsini has termed "the multilingual local" may have looked like at the close of the eighteenth century.[18] Encountered orally by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula in a vernacular vaguely termed '*hindī*' (Indic), the stories included in the work span several genres and find echoes in multiple regional traditions, challenging any neat identification of their author with a specific location or performative context. At the same time, it would be misleading to suppose that the work was a simplistic reflection of the socio-linguistic milieu of the time. Like all literary works, *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* was predicated on a series of choices pertaining to language, genre, aesthetic and narrative content, which illuminate both the possibilities and limits of different modes of expression.[19] This article thus seeks to answer three related questions. First, what exactly did writing in Persian prose offer to Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula? The argument that Persian simply offered cultural capital (and hence the opportunity for social mobility) by virtue of its higher position in di-glossic contexts is insufficient here, given the elevated status that *rekhta* composition had attained in the north Indian urban centres where Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula lived and worked. It is also clear that Braj, Dakhanī, and Marathi verse and 'Hindustani' prose, at least, were valued enough to circulate in writing alongside Persian amongst Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's circle of Indian and European acquaintances.[20] Through a close reading of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*, this article suggests that the adoption of Persian as the main language of the work permitted Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula to benefit from literary conventions specific to Persian composition. In particular, these conventions allowed her to blur her potentially problematic position as William Augustus Brooke's mistress, and claim instead the well-established identity of scholar and teacher.

Second, what role does the incorporation of vernacular vocabulary and narrative traditions play in this work? Specifically, does the presence of the vernaculars help us to 'locate' Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula in a particular region or affiliate her with a certain social setting? Orsini has noted that linguistic choices signal "which particular geographies—real and imaginary—were significant for each set of authors and genres in each language".[21] Examining a set of texts in which (male) authors described Awadh, Orsini highlights the variety of forms of affiliation with the region expressed by these writers, as well as the different historical and political

G. Minault, 'Begamati Zuban: Women's Language and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Delhi', *India International Centre Quarterly* 11, 2 (1984), pp. 155-170; Siobhan Lambert-Hurley's recent work on women's autobiographies also primarily focuses on the later colonial and postcolonial eras, and women's writing in Indian vernacular languages and English, see S. Lambert-Hurley, *Elusive Lives: Gender, Autobiography, and the Self in Muslim South Asia* (Stanford, 2018).

[18]F. Orsini, 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature', *Comparative Literature* 67, 4 (2015), pp. 345-374.

[19]*Ibid*., p. 364.

[20]Mirzā Abū Ṯālib Iṣfahānī numbered amongst Brooke's close acquaintances, and authored a Persian *tazkira, Khulāsat al-Afkār* ('The Essence of Thoughts') which also included a selection of Braj verses: British Library, MS. Isl. 2692. Another Indian writer patronised by Brooke was Mīr Abū'l Qāsim "Nis̤ār" of Lahore, who wrote in both 'Hindustani' and Marathi, and also translated Persian stories. See Cambridge University Library, MS. Corpus 185.

[21]Orsini, 'The Multilingual Local', p. 346.

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tensions in each author's work.[22] Taking up this notion of 'significant geographies', this article explores how the inclusion of vernacular traditions and vocabulary could also work against the specificity of particular regional or urban ties, resulting in a sense of place-less-ness while also emphasising the potential cosmopolitanism of female 'vernacular' knowledge. Tracking the origins and '*hindī*' vocabulary of the writings in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn* stories presented by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula, it argues that the presence of this ambiguously expressed vernacular served to obscure and pluralise her position by taking part in multiple 'significant geographies', transcending any singular identification.

Finally, this article briefly considers the extent to which Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's work may have circulated, as well as its subsequent treatment by the European orientalists with whom it came into contact. Despite being produced under particularly colonial relations, *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* points to multiple contexts and frameworks through which Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula accessed different forms of knowledge, each of which entailed a different set of norms and conventions. Deploying these frameworks simultaneously allowed Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula to expand the expressive potential of her work. Anshu Malhotra's study of the Punjabi prostitute, Piro, is instructive here. Drawing on Judith Butler's "location of agency in the ruptures between multiplicities of norms governing an individual, which do not align", Malhotra shows how Piro was able to manipulate her identity as prostitute, consort and devotee (*bhakt*) simultaneously to negotiate her position in the hierarchy of the Gulabdasi sect.[23] Literary languages and genres, too, constitute comparable sets of norms, which govern the author and impose their own hierarchical structures on expression. Recourse to multiple literary traditions allowed Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula to transcend the limitations of each, however, and find expressive space between the parallel patriarchies posed by the colonial, Persianate and 'local' frameworks.

The Uses of Persian

Little is known about Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula, other than what she tells us in the preface to *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn* and the information that can be inferred from William Augustus Brooke's career. Of her early life she says nothing, except that she had wanted to learn to read and write from a very young age. It is likely that she became attached to Brooke at some point in the 1770s and lived with him in Calcutta for some time. Until the late 1830s, concubinal relationships between colonial officers and Indian women were widespread.[24] Such relationships, and the position of women within them, varied considerably ranging from domestic slavery to long-term monogamous relationships resembling marriage.[25] It is uncertain how the relationship between Brooke and Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula originated: it is possible that she was initially a domestic servant, as she described entering Brooke's 'service' (*khidmat*) at an early age. Their relationship was a long-term one, spanning

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] A. Malhotra, 'Miracles for the Marginal? Gender and Agency in a Nineteenth-Century Autobiographical Fragment', *Journal of Women's History* 25, 2 (2013) pp. 15-35.

[24] E. Wald, 'From *Begum*s and *Bibi*s to abandoned females and idle women: sexual relationships, venereal disease and the redefinition of prostitution in early nineteenth-century India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46, 1 (2009), pp. 5-25.

[25] D. Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 25.

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at least eighteen years, and appears to have been regarded as particularly eccentric by Anglo-Indian society.[26] Although concubinal arrangements such as these were prevalent during this period, they were not officially sanctioned and remained morally ambiguous. In Brooke's case, there is no hint of any relationship in official records, nor do notices of his death mention any kin.[27] It is possible, however, that there were illegitimate children: according to Annette Beveridge, they had at least one daughter, Arabella Brooke, who died in infancy.[28]

In 1781, Brooke was appointed by the East India Company as Revenue Chief in Bihar, and they moved together to Patna.[29] Here, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula began to take lessons in Persian and read the Qur'an. Her first teacher in Patna was an educated woman whose family was from Shahjahanabad in Delhi. From her, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula learned the Perso-Arabic alphabet, and read and copied Sa'dī Shīrāzī's *Gulistān* and the *Pand-nāma*.[30] Such classical texts formed the basis of any education in Persian, and held great ethical and literary importance.[31] Towards the end of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula also mentions 'Abdul Rashīd's *Farhang-i Rashīdī*, the famous seventeenth-century Persian dictionary produced for the emperor Shāh Jahān.[32] After this, Brooke arranged for her to have lessons with his own *munshī*, Khūran Mal. She studied, albeit without much regularity, under the *munshī* for six years, at the end of which period (in 1788 or 1789) he passed away. Approximately ten years later, in 1798/9, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula completed *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*. By this time Brooke had been posted to Calcutta as a senior judge, and it is likely that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula accompanied him.[33] In 1804, Brooke was transferred to Benares, where he lived until his death in 1833.[34] Although no details are available about Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's life after the completion of her book, it appears that she resided with Brooke at Benares, where their longstanding relationship became notorious in Anglo-Indian society.[35]

To what extent were Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's life and writing shaped by the specifically colonial environment in which she lived? In 1789, Brooke became the first Company employee to take an official stand on *satī* (widow immolation) when he intervened in a *satī* in Shahabad and halted the burning.[36] Brooke's actions received a fair amount of

[26] An author in *The Saturday Review* mentioned in 1877 that "of [Brooke's] 'odd ways […] and his connexion with a native lady to whom he was always faithful, there are stories current in Anglo-Indian society to this day." See, 'The Raja of Sarawak', *The Saturday Review* 43 (21 April 1877), p. 488; see also, 'Obituary: W. A. Brooke, Esq.', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (May 1834), p. 555.

[27] See, for example, *ibid.,* and also 'Asiatic Intelligence – Calcutta: Mr. Brooke', *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany* 13, 49 (February 1834), p. 92.

[28] Beveridge relies on the *Annals of Rural Bengal* for her information, but this source is not entirely clear: it could also refer to Thomas Brooke, another judge at Benares. See A. S. Beveridge, *The Key of the Hearts of Beginners* (London, 1908), pp. ix-x.

[29] J. F. W. James, *Selections from the Correspondence of the Revenue Chief of Bihar, 1781–1786* (Patna, 1919), p. 33.

[30] MS. Whinfield 53, f.4r.

[31] M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a Munshi', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, 2 (2004), pp. 61-72.

[32] MS Whinfield 53, f.167v.

[33] MS. Whinfield 53, ff.4v-6v.

[34] *Bengal: Past and Present* (Journal of the Calcutta Historical Society) 33, 65 (1927), p. 143.

[35] For instance, 'The Raja of Sarawak', p. 488.

[36] *Papers Relating to East-India Affairs: viz. Hindoo Widows and Voluntary Immolations* (London, 1821), p. 22. It should be noted that this source, and Mani below, both transcribe W. A. Brooke as M. H. Brooke. However, it

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attention and provoked a response from the colonial government, raising questions in Anglo-Indian society regarding the status of women in India.[37] It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which such events might have influenced or engaged Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's literary imagination, if at all. In other respects, however, the colonial context is more apparent. Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's movement between Calcutta and Patna, and later Benares, was at least partially determined by Brooke's Company career and his various postings. Her path to literacy was facilitated by this movement, as with Brooke's aid she found her first teacher in Patna. The presence of Brooke's *munshī,* a figure who had become almost exclusively associated with language teaching under the late-eighteenth century colonial regime, also played an integral role in her education.[38] Given these circumstances, a further question thus arises of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's agency: bound in this way to the norms established through colonial contact, how did she go about fashioning her own self? It is argued here that recourse to the vocabulary of the Persianised literary elite allowed Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula to escape the limitations of such a relationship and speak to a wider audience. Indeed, this vocabulary allowed her to both acknowledge and obscure the circumstances of her literary life, opening up interpretative space in the ambiguity thus generated.

Integral to such an endeavour was Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's awareness of the literary conventions of Persian. This understanding was overlooked by early translators of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*. Formulaic expressions of humility in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's preface to the work, emphasising her ignorance and unfitness for literary pursuits, were misread by Beveridge, who interpreted them quite literally. In her English translation of the work, published in 1908, she portrayed the Bībī as a modest "house-mother", whose interests in living "a dutiful home-life" echoed those of "western women" like Beveridge herself.[39] However, as Ruby Lal has argued with regard to Beveridge's translation of the princess Gulbadan's memoirs, Beveridge projected her own notions of ideal womanhood onto Indian women.[40] Looked at in its particular aesthetic and social context, much of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's preface is couched precisely in the language and vocabulary commonly employed to express literary and scholarly identities in the eighteenth-century Persianate world.

Beginning her preface with the traditional praise (*ḥamd*) addressed to God and the prophet Muḥammad, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula described her path to literacy as a series of fateful events and relationships. Key among these were her entry into Brooke's service, moving to Patna, and the influence of her two teachers, a lady from Shahjahanabad whom Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula met in Patna, and Brooke's own *munshī,* Khūran Mal. In the case of her first teacher, it was briefly noted that she was a lady of rank (*begam*) from an elite family in Shahjahanabad (which had long been considered a literary centre renowned for its 'correct' language—a compliment that the writer Inshā'llāh K͟hān "Inshā" extended even to the women

is clear that William Augustus Brooke is the individual referred to, as his designation as Collector of Shahabad district is also mentioned.

[37]Lata Mani notes that between 1789 and 1829 four circulars regarding *sati* were published by the government, as the practice gradually became a matter of concern for the colonial state. See, L. Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley, 1998), p. 17.

[38]B. Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago, 2012), p. 85.

[39]Beveridge, *The Key of the Hearts,* p. xi.

[40]R. Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (New York, 2005), pp. 61-64.

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of the city).[41] Under her guidance, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula attained basic literacy, and read several books including Sa'dī's *Gulistān* and the Qur'ān.[42] Munshī Khūran Mal, who taught Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula after her departure from Patna to Benares, was the subject of a much longer passage, in which Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula extolled his piety and modest temperament. The personal nature of their relationship was underscored by her inclusion of his frequent illnesses, his grief at the untimely death of his son, and her own sorrow at Khūran Mal's death.[43] The master-disciple relationship (*ustād-shāgirdī*) was central to the transmission of Persian texts and literary training, and students drew authority from the ethical and scholarly reputations of their teachers.[44] By emphasising the piety and rank of her teachers, and mentioning the details of the guidance that she received from them, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula situated herself firmly in the terrain of Persianate learning.

Even more significant was the treatment of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's relationship with William Augustus Brooke. While the intimacy of their attachment was made clear through Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's reference to herself as Brooke's *bībī* (literally construed as 'lady of William Augustus Brooke'), a term commonly applied to colonial mistresses, this aspect of their connection was rendered ambivalent through a strategic reference to Bībī K̲h̲adīja, the first—and arguably most revered—of the Prophet Muḥammad's wives.[45] However, this too was only briefly mentioned when Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula first introduced herself. Instead, her relationship with Brooke was more generally framed as one of patronage, constituting of service (*k̲h̲idmat*) repaid by kindness from her lord (*k̲h̲udāy-gān*). While these terms might equally be applied to a sexual or romantic relationship, taken in the wider context of the preface they also speak to the vocabulary commonly employed by Persianate literati to describe scholar-patron relations.[46] As the facilitator of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's education, and probably as her source of financial support, Brooke acted in the capacity of a patron. Rather than being presented as the object of love (who may have inspired Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's literary pursuits), Brooke's virtue was shown to lie in his recognition of her desire for learning (*shauq-i dars wa taḥrīr*), which existed prior to their personal attachment.

Within this framework, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's movement between different cities as Brooke's companion also found a mirror in the patterns of itineracy common to the lifestyles of cosmopolitan scholar-literati seeking livelihoods and learning in the form of *k̲h̲idmat* and *shāgirdī,* often expressed in terms of fate and destiny. As Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula represented it, destiny and the grace of God played vital roles in ensuring that she was able to find a fit patron in Brooke, who was able to cultivate her literary temperament. The same forces then sent her to Patna, where she encountered her first teacher. By contextualising her movement in the framework of Persianised scholarly and literary pursuits, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula transformed her potentially problematic position as the mistress of a colonial officer, and the

[41]T. Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (Karachi, 2011), p. 120.
[42]MS. Whinfield 53, f.4v.
[43]MS. Whinfield 53, f.5r.
[44]F. Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27, 1 (2008), pp. 229-251.
[45]MS. Whinfield 53, f.4r.
[46]Shah, 'Between Cosmopolitan and Classical', p. 152.

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circumstances of her education, into an elevated quest for knowledge. These strategies rendered her a recognisably literary figure addressing a cosmopolitan audience. The geographies charted in her preface were the urban centres of empire and patronage in north India (Calcutta, Patna/Azimabad and, through her connection with her first teacher, Shahjahanabad). Whereas Calcutta and Patna drew many members of the literate elite in the late eighteenth century due to the opportunities for service under British patrons, Shahjahanabad represented the centre of a still highly-revered Mughal culture.[47]

Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's descriptions of her patrons and teachers, the books that she had read, and account of her migration between different cities, find parallels in many of the prefaces of Persian works authored for British patrons around the same time.[48] Thus far, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's use of the generic features of the Persian preface (*dībācha*) followed contemporary conventions closely. The opportunities offered by the choice of Persian were not without tensions, however, and Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula could not, or did not, place herself at the centre of this tradition. Even while drawing on the language of the Indo-Persian literati in her preface, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula did not exploit all possible options for locating herself within this tradition. In particular, she made no mention of her name (*ism*; *nām*), lineage (*aṣal*) or the place of her birth (often denoted by *waṭan* or *maulid*, depending on the nature of the relationship to a particular place). While these markers were not always present in autobiographical descriptions, they were ubiquitous enough for us to consider more carefully the reasons for their absence in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's otherwise quite formulaic preface.

First, the absence of lineage was connected to Indo-Persian literary and social norms of concealing the identities of respectable women (the female teacher from Shahjahanabad and her family were also not named by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula). This namelessness amounts, as Ruby Lal notes, to a "denial to women of agential position", but in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's case, it also served to blur her potentially unrespectable birth and claim instead precisely the *sharīf* (well-born) status that she might have initially lacked.[49] In this sense, the same structures of Persian usage that suppressed the identity of well-born women were manipulated to enhance her respectability and escape condemnation. Beveridge, for instance, decided that the author of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* was "gently bred", although the text provided no actual basis for this assumption.[50] Second, as markers of origin and settlement, lineage and place of birth also reflected personal and family histories of emigration from and settlement in particular localities. Often this information was included in a man's name, through the adoption of designations such as 'Iṣfahānī, 'Bilgrāmī', 'Dihlawī', and so on, which linked an individual to a particular location in the Persianate world. In part, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's evasion of a mention of a birthplace or regional identification fulfilled the same condition of namelessness deemed appropriate for respectable women. However, the gendered nature of regional associations carried its own potential for the sexual objectification of women: as Richard David Williams has noted, there existed "a long established

[47]G. Khan, 'Indian Muslim Perceptions of the West during the Eighteenth Century' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oxford, 1993), pp. 34–40.

[48]Such biographical segments were also similarly structured in *tazkiras*. See, Shah, 'Between Cosmopolitan and Classical', pp.139-165.

[49]Lal, *Coming of Age,* p. 37.

[50]Beveridge, *The Key of the Hearts,* p. ix.

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tradition of describing cities through its womenfolk", and Indian writers often catalogued women according to "racialized stereotypes" about different regions and the "types" of women associated with them.[51] At the Lucknow court, too, female dancers and entertainers at the court were described according to their ethnicity and origin.[52] It is possible that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's reluctance to identify with a particular region stemmed from a desire to avoid such associations.

In this sense, Persianate conventions of naming, authorship and regional affiliation proved to be a double-edged sword for women, as respectability could only be claimed through the suppression of these aspects of individual identity.[53] Even as Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula deployed cosmopolitan Persian to announce her presence in the Indo-Persian literary ecumene, the same language also provided the circumstances of her concealment. Similarly, even as the colonial relationship with Brooke offered Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula the opportunity to gain literacy, it was only through obscuring the circumstances of their association—through the strategy of using Persian—that she could claim an authoritative voice. Occupying the interstices between the entangled colonial and Persianate socio-political realms, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula laid a claim to both, finding slippage and room for manoeuvre between, rather than within, parallel patriarchies.

Moving Vernacular Traditions

Thus far, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula described herself within the conventions of Persianate literary production, emphasising her literary career and piety. The extracts which form the last part of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* reinforced this standard narrative, offering proof of her classical education through the inclusion of extracts from established works such as such as the *Ta'rīkh-i Firishta*. The pedagogical intent of the work also justified the *intikhāb-i dīwān* (selections from the diwans of poets). As previously noted, women rarely, if at all, authored *tazkiras*: this selection proclaimed Bibi's discriminating taste and aesthetic judgment in the realm of Persian literature. This said, the Persianate literary tradition and its associated geographies were not the only frames of reference for *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb*. In the preface to her work, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula also drew attention to the centrality of Indic vernacular cultures to both her learning and her literary craft. First, she noted that before embarking on the present work, she had already partially translated another non-Persian text under Munshī Khūran Mal's guidance. This was a Dakhanī version of the *Mi'rāj-nāma* ('The Book of Ascent', a narrative of the Prophet Muḥammad's flight to heaven).[54] Although there is no extant copy of the manuscript of her translation, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula mentioned that it was written in a separate book,

[51]Williams, 'Listening to Courtesans', p. 597; similarly, the Indo-Persian traveller (and Brooke's acquaintance) Mirzā Abū Ṭālib Iṣfahānī also described European women when he visited England at the turn of the nineteenth century. See Charles Stewart, *The Travels of Mirza Abu Talib Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe during the years 1799–1800, 1801, 1802 and 1803*, 2 Vols. 2nd edition (London, 1818), pp. 57, 97-106, 188.

[52]Fisher, 'Women and the Feminine', pp. 489-519.

[53]For instance, the wealthy Hyderabadi courtesan, Māh Laqa Bai "Chandā", who was Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's contemporary, was memorialised in later *tazkiras* as a 'prostitute' despite the powerful position she commanded at the Hyderabadi court. See Kugle, 'Mah Laqa Bai and Gender', pp. 365-367.

[54]MS. Whinfield 53, f.4r; This version of the *Mi'rāj-nāma* may have been that of Saiyid Bulāqī, composed in Dakhanī in 1694 AD. See A-M. Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Kuala Lumpur, 1985), pp. 159-175.

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possibly signalling its availability to her readers. Second, there was the reference to '*hindī*', the language in which the fourteen stories in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* had been encountered and on which she had based her translation. Finally, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula also specified that she had included some of the original *hindī* words in her predominantly Persian text.[55]

As Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula explained, she did not complete the translation of the entire text of the *Mi'rāj-nāma,* and only reached the part dealing with the Prophet's marriage to his first wife, Bībī K͟hadīja. At this stage, Khūran Mal assessed her work, and decided that despite its correctness of language, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's translation lacked textual depth. The shortcomings of his student's translation of the *Mi'rāj-nāma* prompted Khūran Mal to set her the project of writing down in Persian the stories that she had heard in '*hindī*'—glossed in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* as "the language of ordinary people".[56] By drawing attention to the difficulty of the Dakhanī *Mi'rāj-nāma*, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula delineated the vernacular, non-Persian bases of her work as potentially sophisticated and important traditions. At the same time, the episode established a hierarchy within vernacular literary forms, in which the Dakhanī text, despite its linguistic accessibility, was marked as having greater complexity of meaning in contrast to the spoken language. While recounting this incident did not necessarily present Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's literary talents in a positive light, it situated the vernacular literary tradition within an Islamicate geography, a relationship which the subject of the *Mi'rāj-nāma* established independently of Persian as a mediating language.

Despite the importance accorded to Dakhanī, there is no reason to assume either that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula was originally from the Deccan or that Dakhanī was her first language (although both possibilities can also not be ruled out). Unlike the *Mi'rāj-nāma*, the language (or languages) from which the tales in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* were taken was not made explicit. During the eighteenth century, and for much of the nineteenth, '*hindī*' remained a very loosely defined linguistic term. From the Persianate perspective, it simply connoted an Indic language (rather than Persian or Arabic, for example), and was applied to various registers of the north Indian vernacular which scholars have termed *hindavī*, as well as courtly or learned languages such as Braj and Sanskrit.[57] The *hindī* vocabulary present in the stories does not clarify the issue beyond signalling a north Indian vernacular base, since these non-Persian words were found in a number of Indian languages and regions (see Table 1), and across a range of registers of *hindavī*. It is therefore not possible to identify a 'local' vernacular based on the generic *hindī* vocabulary scattered throughout the Persian text, or to use this information to discover the author's birthplace or 'native' language.

Turning now to the stories themselves, it is similarly difficult to identify a particular provenance or singular point of origin for the majority of the narratives: many versions closely resembling all or parts of the stories circulated in multiple regions. The diversity of the genres underlying the stories is not immediately apparent: all, except the *qiṣṣa* of 'Sīt Basant', were referred to as *ḥikāyat* (lit. narration; tradition) by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula—a wide-ranging term in Persian that captured an array of oral and textual narrations. However, the way in which these stories begin sometimes carries information about the manner of their

[55]MS. Whinfield 53, f.5v.
[56]*Ibid.*
[57]Bangha 'Rekhta: Poetry in Mixed Language', p. 22.

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Table 1. *Hindī* words in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*[58]
(While this list is not exhaustive, it indicates the multiple regions and languages in which these words occurred.)[59]

bhaṭiyārī	an inn-keeper, the feminine form of *bhaṭiyār*	Marathi, Bihari, Punjabi, Hindi
jhoṅprī	small hut or hovel	Marathi, Nepalese, Hindi; Punjabi
pothī	book	Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Hindi, Kashmiri
sīt	winter, also the name of a character	Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Kashmiri
ḍeṛh	one and a half	Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi
aṛhā'ī	two and a half	Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Kashmiri, Punjabi
ćhal	deception; fraud	Marathi, Hindi, Punjabi
arthī	a bier, usually used by Hindus in funeral processions	Hindi, Marathi,
ćitā	funeral pile	Bengali, Marathi, Hindi

transmission. The *ḥikāyat* of '*Ḍeṛh-ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī-ćhal*' ('One and a Half Wits and Two-and a Half Wits'), for instance, is introduced as a *dāstān* (a tale or story, often associated with longer narrations) which appears to have been transmitted in the form of a song (*naghma*).[60] Another version of this story is the tale of the 'prince thief', Shabrang, which originated in Kashmir and was associated with the ballad tradition.[61] It is possible that the Kashmiri ballad (also known as a *naghma*) was the source of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's rendition. In the case of '*Sīt Basant*', the genre marker of the *qiṣṣa* is embellished with the information that this was a form of evening entertainment (*asmār,* pl. of *samar*). In this case, the story conforms loosely to the Hindi/Urdu *qiṣṣa* versions of the same name, which began to circulate in print in the early twentieth century and which have been indexed by Frances Pritchett.[62] This pan-Indian story also circulated as both *kathā* (story) and *qiṣṣa* in Punjabi, and an early *swāṅg* enactment (a form of dance theatre which) was reported in Agra in 1827.[63] Significant discrepancies between the relatively coherent corpus of *qiṣṣa*s listed by Pritchett and Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's much earlier version (possibly one of the earliest manuscript versions of the story) prompt us to exercise caution when attempting to establish the exact form in which the latter was encountered.[64]

[58]MS. Whinfield 53; J.T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London, 1884); J.T. Molesworth, *A Dictionary, Marathi and English.* 2nd edition (Bombay, 1857); M. Singh, *The Panjabi Dictionary* (Lahore, 1895), R. Schmidt, *A Practical Dictionary of Modern Nepali* (New Delhi, 1993); S. Biswas, *Samsad Bengali-English dictionary,* 3rd edition (Calcutta, 2000); G. A. Grierson, *A Dictionary of the Kashmiri Language* (Calcutta, 1932).

[59]Names of gods and goddesses, such as Rām, Indar and Sītā, have been excluded due to their ubiquity.

[60]The title of this story refers to the cleverness of two characters: the literal meaning of *ćhal* is stratagem, deception or fraud. This was wrongly transcribed by Beveridge as *chahār* (four) and misinterpreted by Grierson as *ćhār* or *ćhārī* ('ingot'). See, Beveridge, *The Key of the Hearts,* p. 25; G.A. Grierson, 'Review of The Key of the Hearts of Beginners by Bībī Brooke and Annette S. Beveridge', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1909), pp. 517-521.

[61]MS. Whinfield 53, ff.22r-45r; J. H. Knowles, *Folk-tales of Kashmir*, 2nd edition (London, 1893), pp. 104-123; A. Datta, *Encyclopaedia of South Asian Folklore*, i (New Delhi, 1987), p. 345.

[62]MS. Whinfield 53, ff.107-147r; F. W. Pritchett, *Marvelous Encounters: Folk Romance in Urdu and Hindi* (Riverdale, 1985), pp. 124-143, 191-193.

[63]A Gurmukhi manuscript entitled 'Roop Basant Katha', also glossed in the text as a *qiṣṣa,* is housed at Kurukshetra University, and is available online: Panjab Digital Library, MN-000043, http://www.panjabdigilib.org (accessed 4 January 2019); cf. Pritchett, *Marvelous Encounters,* p. 133.

[64]For instance, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's version lacks the miraculous gifts that the brothers possess in some of the versions listed by Pritchett, in which pearls and precious jewels fall when the brothers laugh or cry; similarly, the younger brother, Basant, in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's story, causes a ship to sail by uttering the Arabic 'Bismillāh'. This said, the stories follow the same basic plots, and 'Gul-rukh', the name of the merchant's daughter (and Basant's

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Perhaps one of the most interesting stories in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's collection is the fiction entitled '*Az Āṣ̱ār-i 'Ajā'ib wa G̱harā'ib*' ('Of Wonderful and Strange Things').[65] One of the longest narratives in the book, this is also the most marvellous. Claiming, *dāstān*-style, to draw authority from the knowledge of news-bearers and the wise, the story is replete with miracles and magic, performed mainly through the agency of *'afārīt* (pl. of *'ifrīt*, a monster or powerful demon, often likened to *jin*). Employed in the service of Raja Indar, god of the sky in the Hindu pantheon, the commander of the *ifrīt* army becomes sympathetic to the plight of the lovers, Māhyār and Parī-rū.[66] Parts of this plot bear affinities with the *qiṣṣa* of Gul-i Bakāwalī ('The Flower of Bakāwalī'), of which a Persian version was written in 1722 by Mīr 'Izzatu'llāh Bangālī, and translated into Urdu at the College of Fort William by Munshī Nihāl Chand Lahorī in 1802/3.[67] In both instances, a good son sets off to find a remedy for his father's ills, and has to overcome a series of obstacles along the way. During the journey, he also meets his beloved, whose aid proves essential to a peaceful conclusion. The female protagonist—a fairy in the Gul-i Bakāwalī *qiṣṣa*, and a human named Parī-rū (lit. fairy-faced) in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's version—is appointed to dance each night at Indar's court, from which she must be released. This problem is resolved when both protagonists perform at the heavenly court and win Indar's favour. Upon returning to the hero's country, the lovers must overcome a final obstacle in order to reach a happy ending. Permutations of this story appear to have circulated widely in north India, and the figure of Raja Indar, who commanded thunder and rain, was a familiar figure in popular folklore.[68] By 1853, the court of Indar would become the focus of Aghā Ḥasan Amānat's hugely influential play *Indarsabhā,* first performed in Lucknow.[69] At the same time, there are also significant departures from the Gul-i Bakāwalī plot: in '*Az Āṣ̱ār-i 'Ajā'ib wa G̱harā'ib*', the son sets off not to procure the magical flower to cure his father's eyesight, but in search of a miracle, demanded from his father on pain of death by a foolish and capricious king.

Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's rendition may have reflected popular variations of the story, although it is difficult to say exactly where she departed from normative oral renderings. When juxtaposed with the more consciously literary versions produced by 'Izzatu'llāh Bangālī and Nihāl Chand Lahorī, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's version reveals certain tensions. For one, the main characters in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's version are not, unlike Zain al-Mulūk and Tāj al-Mulūk of Gul-i Bakāwalī, great kings and princes, but a minister (*wazīr*), Māhyār (the minister's son or *wazīr-zāda*), and the kindly *'ifrīt* commander.

future bride) in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's version even echoes her Indic counterpart, 'Phūlwantī', both names suggesting flower-like beauty and delicateness.

[65] MS. Whinfield 53, ff.59r-91v.

[66] Indar, rather than Indra, is the spelling preferred by in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula.

[67] Nihāl Chand Lahorī, *Mazhab-i 'Ishq,* translated by Nihāl Chand Lahorī (1844, Calcutta); also published as Nihāl Chand Lahorī, *Gul-i Bakāwalī,* (1804, Calcutta). Another version was produced in the form of an Urdu *masnavi* in 1838: see D. Shankar, *Gulzar-i Nasim* (ed.) Amir Hasan Nurani (Delhi, 1965). For 'Izzatu'llāh Bangālī's *Gul-i Bakāwalī,* see Cambridge University Library, Add. MS. 3263. This manuscript appears to have been in circulation in 1785.

[68] F. A. Steele and R. C. Temple, *Wide-Awake Stories* (Bombay, 1884), p. 314; W. Crooke, *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Allahabad, 1894), p. 38; also see Jaffur Shurreef and G. A. Herklots, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India* (London, 1832), p. 385.

[69] K. Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India* (Oxford, 1992), p. 76.

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Parī-rū, too, is the daughter of the *wazīr* of a country whose king has been killed by Indar and his *'afārīt*. The king and Raja Indar are both portrayed as impetuous rulers whose actions have often caused harm to other characters. The tale ends with Māhyār becoming the king of the country once destroyed by Indar, and when harmony is restored between the human and divine worlds. In addition to imparting the important lesson that incompetent rulers do not deserve loyalty, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's story thus holds the promise of social mobility in contrast to its more literary counterparts: this is a narrative in which the second-in-command plays a far more important and positive role than the ruler.

'*Az Āṣār-i 'Ajā'ib wa Gh̲arā'ib*' also revealed anxieties of a more gendered nature. The story begins with the king of an unnamed country demanding that his *wazīr* show him something of a wondrous or miraculous nature within one year, or face death. In order to satisfy the king's demand, Māhyār, who is the *wazīr*'s son, promises to perform such a wonder. At the end of the story, he and Parī-rū are disguised—with the aid of the *'afārīt* — as a *jogī* (devotee, often possessing magical powers) and *jogan* (feminine form of *jogī*). The news of their beauty and magical prowess spreads quickly, and they are soon invited to be the king's guests. It is then that the couple enact the final miracle, that of returning to life after death. Māhyār leaves Parī-rū (disguised as a *jogan*) under the protection of the king. The king is then shown a vision in which Māhyār (the *jogī*) appears to be dead. Following the instructions given to her by the '*afārīt*,, Parī-rū begins to wail ('Rām Sītā, Rām Sītā') and demands to be burned along with her husband. The dismayed king reluctantly agrees to her wish, and she is set alight on the pyre. A *satī-chaura* (tomb built at the site of a *satī*) is built to house her ashes. At this point Māhyār returns and demands to see his wife. The king is rendered almost senseless with terror to see Māhyār alive and well, and at the prospect of having to justify the death of the *jogan*. At Māhyār's insistence, the *satī-chaura* is demolished, and reveals Parī-rū sitting in a chamber, completely unharmed from the experience of having been burned alive. When the petrified king discovers that Māhyār is the son of his minister, and this is the 'wonder' he had demanded to see, he is humbled and begs the minister for forgiveness.

As various scholars have noted, *satī* was usually deployed in Persianate literature to signify the loyalty of the lover and the power of all-consuming, destructive love.[70] Aditya Behl has also indicated the use of *satī* in medieval Hindavī Sufi romances as a symbol of mystical annihilation (*fana*), a point linked more firmly to the patriarchal imagination (particularly in the Rajput context) by Ramya Sreenivasan.[71] In contrast to these metaphorical treatments, *satī* was rather more prosaically glossed in '*Az Āṣār-i 'Ajā'ib wa Gh̲arā'ib*' as a practice performed by some Hindu women (*ba'ẓe az zanān-i hindū*).[72] Moreover, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula added, the funeral pile on which widows were burned was known as *ćitā* or *sārā* in *hindī*.[73] The symbolic or metaphorical meaning of *satī* was undermined by the inclusion of these socio-lingual details which stressed *satī* as an actual practice, while also creating an almost

[70]Ernst, 'Indian Lovers', p. 4; Sharma, 'Translating Gender', p. 91.

[71]A. Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545*, (ed.) W. Doniger (Oxford, 2012), p. 23; R. Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India, c. 1500-1900* (Seattle, 2013), pp. 56-57.

[72]MS. Whinfield 53, f.85.

[73]The term *sārā* occurs in Hindi/Urdu, as well as Rajasthani. See, Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English;* G. Mcalister, *A dictionary of the dialects spoken in the state of Jeypore* (Allahabad, 1898).

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ethnographic distance between Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula and her subject. Significantly, even as *satī* was shown to be a real event, it was also revealed to be an illusion performed by Rājā Indar's power *afārīt*. Parī-rū sees the vision of Māhyār's dead body at the same time as the king, and does not yet know the whole plan. However, prompted by the *afārīt,* she begins to wail and demand to be burned on the pyre. It is only after the event of being burned that she realises the full extent of the illusion. The *satī* experience is, thus, reduced to a painless magical trick, and in fact paves the way to reclaiming and ruling (alongside Māhyār) her own lost homeland. It is possible that this treatment of *satī* was a feature of an oral version of the story that circulated mostly amongst women, going beyond escapism to work through fears and anxieties surrounding the practice. Unlike female protagonists in *Gul-i Bakāwalī* and other similar stories, in the oral story transcribed by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula, Parī-rū is not a fairy, but a human, who has to face worldly as well as divine obstacles.

A similar tension can be observed in the case of the *ḥikāyat* of '*Ḍeṛh-ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī-ćhal*'. Conforming for the most part to the tale of 'Shabrang, Prince and Thief', documented in Hinton-Knowles' *Folk-tales of Kashmir,* this story is also set in an unnamed location, and centres on an arrogant Muslim king (Ḍeṛh-ćhal) who determines to outwit the clever daughter of a *Brāhman*, by marrying her and giving her a divorce before the consummation of their wedding night, much to the shame of her natal family.[74] The rest of the story then relates how the *Brāhman*'s daughter ingeniously manages to get her revenge and simultaneously restore herself to the position of royal wife. As Afsaneh Najmabadi has noted in the case of *The Thousand and One Nights,* stories in which the plot revolves around the delay of the marital night helped women to cope with potentially traumatic events, such as the separation from parents and the natal home, and the consummation of marriage. These delaying tactics allowed women to gain experience of the world and enter the marriage on their own terms, often taking sexual control and seducing their partners.[75] This is certainly the case in '*Ḥikāyat-i Ḍeṛh-ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī-ćhal*', in which emphasis is laid on the period between her dismissal from the palace and her eventual return to her husband. Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula described how the *Brāhman*'s daughter, now free of social constraints forcing her to live with her husband, could now carry on living with her parents. When she nears the age of puberty, the *Brāhman*'s daughter persuades her parents to let her travel, accompanied by a few maids so that she may achieve her goal. When they have left her natal village, the girls hire *ustad*s and learn to dance and sing, until they are entirely skilled in the courtesan's arts. After this, the *Brāhman*'s daughter, in the disguise of a courtesan, seduces her husband and bears his child (Aṛhā'ī-ćhal), and eventually attains the position of queen and mother of the king's heir-apparent.

In addition to these longer tales, shorter anecdotes were also included in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's work. Of these, 'The Story of the Four Friends' ('*Ḥikāyat Chahār Yār*') is set in

[74]Knowles, *Folk-tales of Kashmir*, pp. 104-123. This story also bears strong affinities with the short *maṡnawī*, '*Gulzār-i 'Abbāsī*' ('The Rose Garden of Abbasi'), authored in 1671 by the poet Muḥammad Ṭāhir Waḥīd, in which a prince rejects his bride after the wedding, only to be later seduced by her in disguise. However, Wahid's version refers to broadly defined countries (the protagonist is the son of a 'king of Iran', while his wife is the daughter of a 'king of India' who masquerades as a princess from Europe); in '*Ḥikāyat-i Ḍeṛh-ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī-ćhal*', no place names are given. See, Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia,* pp. 191-193.

[75]A. Najmabadi, 'Reading and Enjoying "Wiles of Women" Stories as a Feminist', *Iranian Studies* 32, 2 (1999), pp. 203-222.

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a broadly Indian context, involving a miserly *jogī* who gets his come-uppance at the hands of a clever boy.[76] The story of the dervish who foolishly asks whether another character has ever seen God, however, had its roots further afield. Also published in Francis Gladwin's grammar for colonial officials, *The Persian Moonshee* (1795), the story is also found in 'Ubaidu'llāh Zākānī's fourteenth-century collection of witty and wise anecdotes composed in Qazwin (in present-day Iran), *Risāla-i Dil-gushā* (The Joyous Treatise).[77] Although it is clear that anecdotes such as those in Zākānī's *Risāla* travelled widely and had become part of multiple oral traditions stretching across Central Asia and India, it is important to note that they also retained their textual associations. This is indicated by the fact that Gladwin's *Persian Moonshee* (published at the time that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula was also writing) contained multiple stories from *Risāla-i Dil-gushā*, suggesting his acquaintance with such compendiums.[78] As a student of Persian, it is probable that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula would at least have been aware of the story's presence in the classical Persian textual tradition, particularly as it was also current in the colonial circles that Munshī Khūran Mal served. The slippage between the high literary, textualised traditions and popular variants of stories comes to the fore in this instance: the incorporation of the story of the foolish dervish may well have served as an indicator of the cosmopolitanism of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's oral repertoire, undermining the parochial nature of vernacular narrations.[79]

In his review of Beveridge's translation of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb,* the colonial administrator and linguist, George Grierson (1851-1941) speculated that the author of the text may have been from Kashmir. His reasoning was, first, that Beveridge's account of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula reminded him of a "Mussulmaunee Cashmerienne" in an Anglo-Indian household described in Mary Sherwood's novel, *Lady of the Manor* (1829). Second, he claimed that two stories in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb,* '*Ḥikāyat Ḍeṛh- ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī- ćhal*' and '*Qiṣṣa-i Shah-zāda Sīt wa Basant*', were of Kashmiri origin.[80] It is notable that Grierson failed to take into account not only the other regional strands present in the rest of the collection, but also the fact that (as already mentioned) even the supposedly Kashmiri '*Sīt wa Basant*' circulated widely, and was to be found across north India.[81] Even where an 'original' early version may be identified, it is not possible to always know exactly the form in which Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula might have encountered them as the stories moved across linguistic registers and genres.[82] In addition, there is a striking lack of place names in the stories themselves, which occur in a variety of unnamed landscapes—coastal towns and ports, palaces, a forest, a desert, a market, and so on. The closest the text comes to describing a particular (rather than generic) location is in a single reference to an 'imperial capital', and another to the god Indar's mythical heavenly court.

[76]MS. Whinfield 53, ff.9v-12r.

[77]U. Marzolph, '"Pleasant Stories in an Easy Style": Gladwin's Persian Grammar as an Intermediary between Classical and Popular Literature', *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iran Studies* (Bamberg, 30 September to 4 October 1991), pp. 445-475.

[78]Marzolph, '"Pleasant Stories in an Easy Style."'

[79]Similarly, as noted earlier, '*Ḥikāyat Ḍeṛh- ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī- ćhal*' also had parallels in an earlier work produced in 1671, dedicated to Shāh 'Abbās II. See Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia,* pp. 191-193.

[80]Grierson, 'Review'.

[81]Pritchett, *Marvelous Encounters,* pp. 124-143.

[82]In the case of '*Sīt Basant*', as noted already, the story circulated in at least three forms: *qiṣṣa, kathā* and *sangīt/swāṅg*.

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If, as Sheldon Pollock has claimed, vernacular languages were always "of place", and, as Orsini has argued, multilingualism in texts incorporating cosmopolitan and vernacular languages necessarily did some work to connect specific localities, then how are we to interpret the deployment of non-specific vernacular vocabulary, and the drawing together of multiple regional traditions in Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's work?[83] Resisting a search for clues by which the author may be situated in a particular/singular social context, her text instead evokes a sense of movement as the reader is led through multiple regional traditions and travels across an array of landscapes. Representing a selection of the oral lore that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula had encountered, the stories bring together a range of contexts of listening and telling—the repeating of anecdotes from a distinctly Persianate tradition, for instance, alongside the relation of a longer narrative such as the *qiṣṣa* of '*Sīt Basant*', found in Bengali, Punjabi and Kashmiri literary formations.

Eighteenth-century authors and listeners such as Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula herself may have been attuned to recognising these stories as being 'from somewhere' or belonging to specific performative contexts. While recognition of the existence and interaction of these languages and genres is not new, the fact that they intersected in their encounter with Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula is significant. Resonating with a plurality of regional and linguistic narratives, the stories highlight the routineness of vernacular circulation. As Angma Jhala has noted in her study of *zanāna* women in princely states, royal wives were central to the "development of hybrid forms of expression" as they moved between their natal homes and the households into which they married, carrying cultural knowledge, practices and languages with them.[84] Mobile women such as Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula (even if non-elite) may also seem to have performed similar tasks, as they moved between different cities and social settings. Taken together, the stories signal the possibility of an audience comprising, in part at least, women able to participate in manifold contexts of performance and reception. The 'work' done by transcribing these diverse stories into a single text is aimed, thus, not simply at integrating particular lineages or affiliations, or politically or spiritually significant locations into Persianate geographies, but at binding genres and regional traditions also inhabited by women to this cosmopolitan, male space.

Conclusion: The Colonial Afterlife of Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn

Ruby Lal has argued that colonial translations of Indian women's writing erased textual nuances as they transformed their subjects into terms recognisable to European readers, resulting in "flattened pictures" of otherwise complex social milieu.[85] In the case of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb*, the work's colonial afterlife certainly reflects this judgment, both in the assumptions made about its author and the ways it was treated and interpreted. In the preface to her translation of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb,* Annette Beveridge referred to the manuscript in her possession as "unique" and "without a second".[86] Beveridge assumed that the work she "came

[83] S. Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* (New York, 2006), p. 93; F. Orsini, 'How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century North India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, 2 (2012), p. 241.

[84] A. D. Jhala, '"Home and the World": Cosmopolitan, Transnational Identities of Courtly Indian Women in the Late Imperial Zenana', *Modern Asian Studies* 49, 6 (2015), p. 1706.

[85] Lal, *Domesticity and Power,* p. 62; see also Lambert-Hurley, *Elusive Lives*.

[86] Beveridge, *The Key of the Hearts,* p. xi.

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upon" in Henry Whinfield's personal library was Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's autograph version and the only copy of the work that was produced. Reading into the preface and its (conventionally) modest tone, Beveridge decided that the work was written for the benefit of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's children and was thus not intended to circulate beyond the "domestic citadel" of the "house-mother".[87] In his review of the translation, Grierson echoed this evaluation, reiterating the notion of a life conducted in "serene modesty" by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula, a view reinforced by Grierson's reading of Mary Sherwood's nineteenth-century novel mentioned earlier, *Lady of the Manor*.[88] The assumption that the work was not meant for broader audiences persisted later still. In 1954, A. F. L. Beeston, cataloguing the manuscript after its acquisition by the Bodleian Library, described it as an "exercise book", implying its status as an incomplete draft or private work, not yet fit for circulation.[89]

In fact, there is nothing about the text to suggest that this was the case. Leaving aside the completeness of the stories themselves, and the fact that if composed by a beginner, they had clearly undergone editing before reaching their final form, the presence of a *k͟hātima* (concluding section) and the work's chronogrammatic title (signalling the year of completion) indicate that the author saw the collection as a finished work ready for circulation. It is possible to identify at least two such instances of copying and circulation. The first is the manuscript used by Beveridge. While the manuscript in question appears to be the only extant version, it does not seem to be the first copy made: the paper of the manuscript bears a watermark for the year 1819. While Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula could have finished transcribing the work at a later date than that given by the chronogrammatic title, this does not seem to have been the case. For one thing, evidence in the margins shows that entire phrases—without which the text lost coherence—were missed out by the scribe and added later. These additions seem to have compensated for scribal rather than compositional omissions, indicating the existence of another text from which the copy was made. Further, the manuscript ends with a laudatory notice of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula, eulogising her chastity and piety, and terming her the blessing of William Augustus Brooke.[90] Such praise is a far cry from the assiduously observed conventions of humility expressed by authors (including Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula in her own preface). These features of the work suggest that the work was copied by a scribe who most probably completed the transcription while Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula was still alive (this is implied by the phrasing of the praise) and one who received Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula or Brooke's patronage.

The orientalist and scholar, Duncan Forbes (1798-1868) also acquired a manuscript version of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's work at some point between 1821 and 1866, and provided a description of the work written by the "*lady* of William Augustus Brooke" in the catalogue to his collection.[91] It is difficult to establish whether this was the same work that was

[87]Beveridge's own evidence suggests that the only child that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula may have had died before the completion of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*. Beveridge's assumption that there more children followed is pure speculation.

[88]Grierson, 'Review', p. 517.

[89]A. F. L. Beeston, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Part III: Additional Persian Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1954), p. 18.

[90]MS Whinfield 53, ff.169v-170r.

[91]D. Forbes, *Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts, Chiefly Persian, Collected in the Last Five and Thirty Years by Duncan Forbes* (London, 1866), ii, p. 32. Original emphasis.

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eventually acquired by Henry Whinfield and used by Beveridge: the fact that Forbes described a slightly shorter manuscript than the one now housed in the Bodleian Library suggests that these were separate versions.[92] Yet another instance of the work's reproduction and circulation is to be found in a manuscript transcribed in 1802 for Henry George Keene, which exactly reproduced the story of '*Sīt Basant*' in its entirety. In this copy, no mention was made of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula or the work entitled *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn*, and authorship was implicitly attributed to the scribe Muḥammad 'Alī Beg.[93] Given the short timespan between the composition of the work (1798/9) and the transcription made for Keene, it is likely that Keene and Muḥammad 'Alī Beg were aware of the author's identity, and simply did not acknowledge Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula.

Even from this scanty evidence, it is clear that *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn* circulated amongst some British orientalists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and was not simply restricted to Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's domestic circle. In its colonial setting, the text's treatment (and that of its author) was representative of several imperial tendencies: while Forbes valued the manuscript for its rarity and condition (and hence commercial value), Henry George Keene displayed an ethnographic interest in the work. Now housed in the India Office Library, Keene's copy of the story of '*Sīt Basant*' was bound in a volume along with two other Persian works also copied for Keene at the same time: a treatise on Hindu ritual practices, and a tract on Indic cosmography.[94] In a manuscript so carefully copied and marked with both a scribal colophon and Keene's own library stamp, the omission of the author's name is particularly significant.

In contrast, Annette Beveridge took a much greater interest in the personality of the author. Ignoring the fact that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula noted in her preface that she was unable to read or write before entering William Augustus Brooke's 'service', Beveridge assumed that the author had already become literate through the services of an *ātūn* (teacher) prior to her attachment with Brooke. In so doing, she assumed that Brooke and Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula met as social equals and lived according to the "Anglo-Indian habit of their day". This, coupled with Beveridge's insistence that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula was the "wife" of an East India Company employee whose "kindness" endeared him to Europeans and Indians alike, conjured up an idealised and harmonious vision of Britain's imperial past.[95] In her description of Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's life, Beveridge thus constructed an idealised image of an elite Indian womanhood, domestically situated, to which Beveridge herself could relate.[96] Indeed, Beveridge even rearranged the order of the stories, ending with the story of 'The Death Angel and Mama Susan', which led Grierson to comment admiringly on the "fine instinct that made the humble-minded Musalmani close her volume

[92]Forbes described a 322-page work, whereas the Whinfield/Bodleian manuscript consists of 338 pages.

[93]British Library, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, MS. Egerton 707.

[94]Apart from these two manuscripts, it is possible that other transcriptions of *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn* also exist. Keene's binding of the story alongside these ethnographic texts led Dr Tarachand to list the work as an example of a "Hindu story" written in Persian. See, Tarachand, 'Presidential Address', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 3 (1939), pp. 883–917.

[95]Beveridge, *The Key of the Hearts,* p. ix.

[96]For more on Beveridge's desires to identify with the Indian women whose works she translated, see M. A. Scherer, 'Woman to Woman: Annette, the Princess, and the Bibi', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 6, 2 (1996), pp.197-220.

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with a parable of love so sweet and pure".[97] In fact, the final story in *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb al-Mubtadīn* is the rather more dramatic *qiṣṣa* of '*Sīt Basant*', which Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula presumably chose as the last because it was the longest and most difficult of the stories.

Further nuances were lost in translation since Beveridge did not attempt to differentiate between the various genres and traditions to which the stories may have belonged. Instead, Beveridge added her own titles to many of the stories which Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula had simply referred to as *ḥikāyat*, and eliminated generic markers such as *qiṣṣa, dāstān, samar* and *naghma*. In the case of the tale of '*Ḍeṛh-ćhal wa Aṛhā'ī-ćhal*', the '*Brāhman*'s daughter' is given a name (Kāminī) by Beveridge, although the practice of not providing the characters with names seems to have been a common feature across different versions.[98] Far from being a "wayside flower", as Beveridge would have it, *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* presented a set of stories which were very much part of the oral and written literary and performative culture of north India. The stories present an early instance of documentation of milieu and performative contexts that continued to have currency later in the century, albeit in changed forms—the *qiṣṣa* of Sīt Basant and Āghā Ḥasan Amānat's *Indarsabhā,* discussed earlier, are cases in point. Drawing on multiple contexts of listening and telling, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula inscribed her place in the Persianate literary landscape through the writing of these stories, and placing them firmly within Persianate literary and educational conventions.

While it has proven difficult to map the text's journeys and encounters amongst Indo-Persian readers, this article has shown that Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's intent was certainly to fashion herself as an author in the terms acceptable to such readers. *Miftāḥ-i Qulūb* reflects the convergence of stories from different generic and regional traditions as they were encountered by Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula. The stories reveal not only the participation of women like Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula in a variety of oral contexts and performative spaces, but also point to the mobile imaginaries that women could inhabit and shape as a matter of course. More unusual was Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's step in writing these stories for learners of Persian, and the work's subsequent circulation amongst colonial officials. Even as Brooke's colonial *munshī* pushed her towards translating vernacular stories to practice her Persian, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula's framing of the work as part of a pedagogical text enabled her to assume the positions of Persian scholar, teacher and patron. Making use of the opportunities offered by the patriarchal structures of the colonial regime and Persianate scholarship, Bībī Ḥashmat al-Daula built on expectations of female anonymity and command over vernacular knowledge to produce an authorial voice that met these expectations and simultaneously transcended them. <zahra.shah@gcu.edu.pk>

ZAHRA SHAH
Government College University, Lahore

[97] Grierson, 'Review', p. 518.
[98] See Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia,* pp. 191-193; Knowles, *Folk-tales of Kashmir*, pp. 104-123.

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