

Borders

Itineraries on the Edges of Iran

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Kashmir and the Mughal Fad of Persian Pastoral Poetry

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Abstract The annexation of Kashmir by the Mughals resulted in the celebration of the natural beauty and imperial architecture of the valley in a body of Indo-Persian court poetry. Visited by the emperors Akbar, Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān, and Aurangzeb, Kashmir became a major cultural and literary center in the seventeenth century. Especially in Shāh Jahān's reign, the poet laureate, Kalim Hamadāni (d. 1651), along with a dozen other poets visited Kashmir and composed topographical poems using the *masnavi* form, initiating a literary fad that lasted for over two decades. Although most poems modified the model of the city poem for this purpose, using the same metaphors praising urban spaces that included descriptions of idealized Persian gardens, others produced poems in the pastoral or bucolic mode with realistic descriptions of actual places, the flora and fauna of the region, and praise of life in the countryside. Given their relationship to the empire and land, Iranian and Indian-born poets employed by the Mughal court had differing attitudes to the place of Kashmir in the imperial mosaic. The fad of the Kashmir poem is a previously unexplored episode in the history of seventeenth-century Mughal court culture.

Keywords Mughals. Indo-Persian poetry. Kashmir. *Masnavi*.

The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Mughal society was the result of a tremendous zeal for travel and mobility, both on a transnational level and within the early modern empire. The lingua franca Persian unified this vast polity and kept it connected with the world of Safavid Iran, Ottoman Turkey, and Central Asia. The poetic form of the *ghazal* or love lyric was the most accessible means of participating in a unified Persophone literary culture where texts, and even a line of poetry, travelled with amazing speed from Delhi to Isfahan and Constantinople. But when we look at other genres of poetic writings, particularly poems of place that were in vogue in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is clear that new literary developments were taking place that were tied to a new understanding of the local or regional in a larger geographic framework. Therefore, whereas the *ghazal* was universal, generic, and portable, as were some other poetic forms and genres as well, the corpus of topographical poetry was specific to a time and place. The genre of what Paul Losensky calls «urban-topographical» poetry of this period, mostly composed as *masnavīs*, included

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descriptions of imperial architecture, versified travelogues within a region or on a more international level, i.e. between Iran and India. Persian court poets and historians of this period paid special attention to praising the cities that were being built or expanded, its architectural monuments, bazaars and inhabitants, celebrating the here and now (Losensky 2003). This genre was the literary legacy of the earlier Indo-Persian poet Amīr Khusrau's (d. 1325) encomiastic writings on Delhi and of Timurid texts describing Herat and other places.¹ The new found sense of place in the early modern period can be linked to the awareness of the expansion of the literary realm of Persian to include new regions, peoples, and sense of aesthetics. There was a shift in the spatial consciousness of Persian poets who were no longer constrained to describing idealized gardens and assemblies that were suspended in time, but rather wrote about these same spaces in actual time and place.²

A special category of Persian topographical poetry flourished in the seventeenth century Mughal court under the emperors Jahāngir and Shāh Jahān that was exclusively devoted to the beauties of the landscape of the Kashmir valley, the northernmost province of the empire and a veritable paradise in popular imagination.³ The genre of Mughal pastoral poetry describing non-urban spaces commemorated the appropriation of places on the edges of the empire into the imperial domain, combining the traditional praise for buildings and gardens constructed by various members of the imperial family and governors, with the beauty and richness of nature. Thus, along with the rise of poetry about cities, there is an increasing attention given to the countryside using the same tropes and metaphors. From a literary point of view, it is intriguing to explore the emergence of a poetic genre that can be termed 'pastoral', in contrast to the ever popular tropes of idealized spaces and allegorical gardens in Persian poetry. Additionally, from a cultural and historical point of view the appropriation of provincial rural spaces as part of the cosmopolitan capitals offers an alternate way of looking at the centre-periphery and urban-rural binaries. I will attempt to demonstrate that the inscription of Kashmir as paradise in the seventeenth-century Mughal propaganda was conveyed in complex ways. Close readings of some poems in the context of the lives of their

1 Amīr Khusrau's *masnavīs*, chiefly *Qirān al-sa'dain* and *Nuh sipihr*, contain such verses. Herat is praised in Muhammad Isfizārī's *Rauzat al-jannāt fī ausāf madīnat-i Harāt*, quoting Amīr Khusrau's earlier poetry on Delhi.

2 In this regard, for actual places as settings of poems, see Pellò 2015.

3 In a similar development in Safavid Iran, the northern province of Mazandaran became a courtly resort: «Shah 'Abbas I conquered the region of Mazandaran near the Caspian Sea in 1596-97 and this area held as much delight for him as did Kashmir for the Mughal emperors Jahāngir and Shāh Jahān» (Tittley, Wood 1991, p. 38). Poetry about Mazandaran, though, did not take on as a literary fad.

authors reveal that the varied descriptions of the province were also linked to personal expressions of attachment to place, as well as being a literary trope that functioned at a metaphorical level to espouse an imperial ideology, and at times, even to draw attention to the cracks in the empire.

Pastoral poetry in a romanticized mode is actually quite rare in classical Persian literature. Found in the Western literary tradition, with its origins in Greek and Latin poetry, the pastoral poem celebrates the pristine countryside, in opposition to the corrupt city, although literary critics such as Frank Kermode and others have argued that this genre in effect indirectly addresses urban issues (*English Pastoral Poetry* 1972, p. 14). According to Brian Lockey, «the challenge of pastoral poetry is that at the same time that it defines its own innocence in relation to an outside corruption, it also furtively undermines the very opposition through which its own purity is constituted» (Lockey 2006, p. 37). The use of nature imagery in Persian literature was so commonplace so as to be trite, but the stylized description of ideal gardens populated with roses and nightingales signifies a system of complex metaphors for a range of courtly and mystical practices, and almost never to be taken as literal representations.⁴ In contrast to European pastoral poetry written under courtly patronage, the Persianate ruler is more of a gardener than a shepherd. With Babur, the first Mughal, came the idea that Hindustan is the emperor's garden, as reflected in his laying out of several gardens and ethnographic interest in the flora and fauna of the land (Stronge 2002, p. 88; Koch 2007). During the seventeenth century the terms paradise (*bihisht*, *firdaws*) and paradisaic were employed as stock metaphors for many places, from intimate interior spaces to entire territories. Along with this, I argue, the conception of the empire as an unspoiled Arcadia, where the city and countryside come together harmoniously emerged in Shāh Jahān period Mughal pastoral poetry before being eclipsed by other literary trends.

Even as there was a growing consciousness of the trans-local spread of Persianate culture, writers of both prose and poetic works from the late sixteenth century began to celebrate the local, including regional history and biographies of notables, as if to introduce or integrate it into a larger narrative of Muslim history. Abu al-Fazl's encyclopedic *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (Institutes of Akbar) provides detailed information on the provinces (*sūba*) of the Mughal Empire. Completed in 1592, the *Tabaqāt-i Akbarī* (Ranks of Akbar) by Nizāmuddīn Ahmad departed from the traditional chronicles by including nine sections on the different provinces of the empire. In

4 Julie S. Meisami (1985) provides a thorough treatment of this subject. An extensive bibliography on secondary literature about gardens can also be found there. Meisami argues that Persian poets realizing that the universe's «order is knowable and that knowledge of one aspect will lead to knowledge of the others, they create a varied array of earthly gardens through which to convey their vision of cosmic order» (p. 253). Also see de Fouchécour 1969.

the same year the gazetteer-biographical dictionary, *Haft Iqlīm* (Seven Climes), written by Ahmad Amīn Rāzī in 1593-94 at the Mughal court, dealt separately with the various Muslim states of India as part of a universal narrative of the spread of Perso-Islamic culture. In the early sixteenth century in the Deccan, the historian Firishta's *Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī* (Rose Garden of Abraham) included the Deccan and other regions, not only to provide the political history of all these provinces, but also their cultural history, in order to give a more complete picture of the centres of Muslim polities in India. Although historical chronicles do not always provide details of the topography of places, they occasionally employ a poetic mode of description, even quoting verses.

Taken over by the Mughals and becoming a province in 1586, Kashmir began to figure as an important place in the imperial imagination of court historians and poets.⁵ In the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, Abū al-Fazl provides both geographical and cultural information about the province, ascribing the Hindus of the valley with positive qualities with simple, pastoral qualities,

The most respectable class in this country is that of the Brahmans, who notwithstanding their need of freedom from the bonds of tradition and custom, are true worshippers of God. They do not loosen the tongue of calumny against those not of their faith, nor beg nor importune. They employ themselves in planting fruit trees, and are generally a source of benefit to the people. They abstain from flesh-meat and do not marry». (Abu 'l-Fazl 1891, pp. 353-354)

The same author's account in the chronicle *Akbarnāma* of the Emperor Akbar's first visit to the valley in 1590, despite being discouraged by the fact that it was nothing but a pit and prison, adds a mystical bent to the newly conquered province:

Since the wonder of destiny increases farsighted thoughts, he was constantly thinking of Kashmir and imagining its delightful climate. When the incomparable deity brought that beautiful region into the imperial realm, it increased the emperor's desire to tour that land of perpetual spring. As much as the chatterers at court represented that it was not wise for a monarch to abandon such a vast expanse and go off to a corner without an important reason of state, the emperor refused to agree, saying, «The divine Bestower gives me no choice in this desire, and furthermore Jannat-Ashyani [Humayun] took this wish to the grave

5 Mattoo 1988; Zutshi 2014, esp. Ch. 2: *A Literary Paradise: The Tarikh Tradition in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Kashmir*, after the political upheavals; she writes, «Mughal rule allowed for a narrative turn towards asserting Kashmir's uniqueness, and hence distinctive position, within the Mughal empire» (p. 73).

with him. Our expedition there will be the fulfillment of his desire». (Abu'l-Fazl 2015-2016, 2)

At the same time, the historian's brother and poet-laureate Faizī (d. 1595) also commemorated the event in a formal victory ode (*qasīda*), representing the process of conquest as a romantic endeavor: «A thousand caravans of desire travel overnight in order to unpack their loads of pleasure in the land of Kashmir» (*hazār qāfila-yi shauq mīkunad shabgīr | ki bār-i 'aish gushāyad bi-'arsa-yi Kashmīr*). The purpose of the endeavour is again tinged with mysticism: «The territory of Kashmir is laid out as if kissing the foot of the [heavenly] throne by way of the divine halo of fate» (*zamīn-i 'arsa-yi Kashmīr z-ānsān guzarānad | bi-farr-i daulat taqbil-i pāya-hā-yi sarir*) (Faizī 1983, pp. 42-47).⁶ Akbar is called *murshid* and *pīr* to the people of the land. Faizī makes a reference to the administration of the city in a poetic vein, claiming that if the mountain springs do not gush forth, «an official takes them to the judge of the city, and the inspectors of the province reprimand them» (*agar na muftī-yi ū mīkashad bi-qāzī-yi shahr | kunand muhtasibān-i vilāyatash ta'zīr*). In this way, a Persianate Arcadia was created.

In the early seventeenth century, the emperor Jahāngīr and his chief wife Nūr Jahān, who was of Iranian origin, made Kashmir into a fashionable haunt of the court as a retreat during the summer months. Jahāngīr visited Kashmir more times than any other Mughal ruler, sojourning in the valley in 1607, 1619-20, 1622, 1624, 1625, 1626, and then one last trip in 1627 when he died on the way back to the plains. On a trip to the province in the spring of 1621, while recording an ethnographic description of Kashmir, Jahāngīr lapses into lyrical praise of the land:

Kashmir is a perennial garden and an ironclad bastion. For monarchs it is a garden that delights the eye, and for poor people it is an enjoyable place of retreat. Its lovely meadows and beautiful waterfalls are beyond description. Its flowing waters and springs are beyond number. As far as the eye can see there is greenery and running water. Red roses, violets, and narcissi grow wild; there are fields after fields of all kinds of flowers; and the varieties of herbs are too many to count. During the enchanting spring, mountain and plain are filled with all sorts of blossoms; gateways, walls, courtyards, and roofs of houses come ablaze with tulips. What can be said of the plateaus covered with refreshing clover?

The coquettes of the garden displayed themselves, cheeks adorned, each like a lamp.| Buds give off the fragrance of musk from beneath

⁶ Faizī's poem is quoted in the *Haft Iqlīm*, section on Kashmir, 2, p. 618. In the Deccan, Firishta also includes a romantic description of Kashmir, particularly dwelling on its many temples.

their skin, like musky amulets on the arm of the beloved. | The melody of the dawn-rising nightingale sharpens the desire of wine-drinkers. | At every spring a duck puts its beak to drink – like golden scissors cutting silk. | A carpet of flowers and greenery laid out in a garden: the lamp of the rose lit by the breeze. | The violet has twisted the ends of her locks, tying a tight knot in the heart of the rosebud. (Thackston 1999, p. 332)

This poetic outburst innovatively combines a bucolic mode of description mixed with the conventional garden imagery of classical Persian literature, and thus is a precursor of a special kind of nature poetry genre that would develop in the following two decades.

Jahāngīr's Persian wife, Nūr Jahān, has been credited with making Kashmir a regular destination in the itinerary of the imperial court «which under her guidance travelled increasingly for leisure's sake» (Findly unpubl. and 1993). This tradition would continue for at least the next half century. Nūr Jahān also helped to develop the handicrafts industry and creating a vogue for Kashmiri embroidery and shawls. Several palaces and gardens were built in and around Srinagar by her and other members of the extended imperial family, such as the gardens of Verinag and the terraced Shalimar Bagh. Jahāngīr's Iranian-born poet-laureate, Tālib Āmulī (d. 1526-27),⁷ who must have accompanied the emperor to Kashmir on one of his trips was the first Mughal poet after Faizī to compose poems on the pristine beauty of the valley; he produced two *qasīdas* extolling the natural wonder of the place along with praise of the ruler; one poem opens with the line: «Traversing the difficult way to Kashmir has become easy by the fortune of the Emperor Jahāngīr» (*shud āsān tay-i rah-i dushvār-i Kashmīr | bi-iqbāl-i shahanshāh-i Jahāngīr*).⁸ These poems are undisguised imperial propaganda and do not contain detailed poetic ethnographies of the land, nor are they the verse travelogue genre of poems that would come into vogue in the following decades. But there are already elements present here that would become a regular feature of the genre, such as a partial list of gardens in Kashmir and a catalogue of its fruits. The aim of these poets was to praise Jahāngīr and Kashmir provides the exordium for launching into panegyric: «There is spring all year because it is not permissible for the world to deviate from the rectitude of your justice» (*tamām-i sāl bahār ast zi ānki nīst ravā | zi istiqāmat-i 'adl-i tu jahān taghyīr*). But it is really under the next ruler, Shāh Jahān, and his children, Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā, who had close connections to the Qadiriya Sufi order of Panjab and Kashmir, that poetry on this province flourished as a full-fledged genre of its own.

7 For an overview of the poet's life and works, see Losensky 2004.

8 Tālib-i Āmulī 1967; the two poems are on 1000-05 and 1005-09.

Shāh Jahān made four trips to Kashmir, in 1634, 1640, 1645 and 1651 during his thirty-year reign. The summer of 1634 trip took place three years after the death of Mumtāz Mahal. Kashmir was the ideal change of scene for Shāh Jahān. Many of the courtiers had accompanied him, of course, including the two poets, Kalīm and Qudsī, who were probably visiting the province for the first time. Since propaganda for Shāh Jahān exploited the use of botanical imagery, as in Agra's riverfront garden city, *pietre dure* floral motifs in architecture, and ornamentation in manuscripts, it was natural that his court would be drawn to the possibilities that the Kashmiri landscape offered. The art historian Ebba Koch explains, «The image of the garden and its flowers was the main metaphor of Shāh Jahān's imperial symbolism: it stood not only for the emperor himself and his good government but also for his court and his family».⁹ Floral images are found on so many objects in Mughal art and architecture, just as the metaphors of garden and paradise applied to every place in Persian historical and poetic texts of this time, that one is necessarily overwhelmed by their clichéd connotations. But in the age of Shāh Jahān, these had all gained subtler and more complex meanings.

Kashmir quickly became the favourite subject of Persian court poets because it came closest to the idealized Persian garden and paradise that appears as a metaphor in classical poetry. During Shāh Jahān's reign, it also became an important literary centre for poets from the Mughal court, locals, and Iranian itinerant literati who visited the place or settled there. Even more than the imperial family, it was one man who provided the patronage and created a hospitable atmosphere for poets: the Mughal governor Zafar Khān (d. 1662), himself a poet who used the *takhallus* 'Ahsan'. Son of Khvāja Abū al-Hasan of Turbat, governor of Kabul, then Kashmir, and married to the granddaughter of Nūr Jahān's brother, Zafar Khān took over the governorship of Kashmir for seven years (1632-1640), then later for another four years.¹⁰ Under him several major poets of the time congregated there: such as the Iranians Kalīm Hamadānī, Salīm Tihriānī, Qudsī Mashhadī, Tughrā Mashhadī, Sā'ib Tabrīzī, Bihishtī Haravī, to name a few, and the Indian-born Munīr Lāhorī (d. 1644), two local Kashmiri poets, Fānī and Ghanī, who are more firmly enshrined in the local memory, and even the Sufi Mullā Shāh Badakhshī was at the fringes of this courtly group.¹¹

9 Koch 2006, p. 224. This metaphor was particularly exploited in the ornamental decoration in the Taj Mahal since the monument was supposed to evoke the idea of paradise.

10 Zafar Khan Ahsan 1985, pp. 15-50. His other poems, chiefly *ghazals*, have also been published: Zafar Khān Ahsan 1976.

11 According to the historian Aziz Ahmad (1976), «Patronage of poets was a status symbol for a cultivated Mughal nobleman, and the expense incurred was well-justified in his view, since his mansab [rank] and estate was not hereditary; he tried to spend his wealth as lavishly and as elegantly as possible during his lifetime» (p. 125).

Below is a list of Mughal poets who wrote one or more poems on Kashmir.¹²

Poet	In the reign of
Faizī	Akbar
Tālib Āmulī	Jahāngīr
Kalīm Kāshānī	Shāh Jahān
Qudsī Mashhadī	Shāh Jahān
Salīm Tīhrānī	Shāh Jahān
Zafar Khān ‘Ahsan’	Shāh Jahān
Mullā Shāh Badakhshī	Shāh Jahān
Munīr Lāhorī	Shāh Jahān
Sālik Qazvīnī	Shāh Jahān
Bihishtī Haravī	Shāh Jahān
Saidī Tīhrānī	Shāh Jahān
Fānī Kashmīrī	Shāh Jahān
Mullā Tughrā	Shāh Jahān
‘Ināyat Khān ‘Āshnā’	Shāh Jahān
Jūyā Tabrīzī	Aurangzeb ‘Ālamgīr
Bīnish Kashmīrī	Aurangzeb ‘Ālamgīr
Nāsir ‘Alī Sirhindī	Aurangzeb ‘Ālamgīr

An autograph manuscript of Zafar Khān’s three connected *masnavīs* describing the Mughal gardens in and around Srinagar, now in the Royal Asiatic Society, London, includes paintings by the artist Bishandās that depict some of the Mughal gardens of the valley. The emphasis is on the courtly figures using these spaces, but the natural world is never far from the manmade structures.¹³ The intersection of imperial patronage and personal attachment on Zafar Khān to this place resulted in a distinct visual representation of the local topography that does not exist for any other Mughal province.

¹² This is not meant to be an exhaustive list since not all poems have been published. All the poems except the ones by Fayzī and Tālib are in *masnavī* form, and Mullā Tughrā has several works on Kashmir in both prose and poetry. Also, the Kashmir poems by Sālik and Bihishtī are part of longer narrative works. Many of these poets and selections from the poems are included in *Tazkira-yi shu‘arā-yi Kashmir* (Rashidi 1967-1969). There do not appear to be any similar poems in Mughal Hindi texts, as far as I know. Audrey Truschke (2016) discusses a short Sanskrit work, *Āsaphavilāsa*, by the poet Jagannātha, which would have been written in the 1630’s. *Āsaphavilāsa*, is a prosimetrum panegyric piece in praise of the Mughal officer Āsaf Khān, who accompanied Shāh Jahān to Kashmir on one of his visits. Jagannātha praises the beauty of the region and the Himalayas along with his patron. Although it is unclear whether the subtleties of the composition were appreciated by Āsaf Khān or other nobles, it was almost certainly written in response to the Kashmir-mania among Persian court poets. For Kashmir in pre-Islamic Sanskrit texts, see Inden 2008, pp. 523-547.

¹³ The paintings from this manuscript were first published by Pinder-Wilson (1957, 1989).

A close reading of three poems on Kashmir will illustrate how the topic signified differently for Iranian and Indian Mughal poets. One of the most famous of these poems, and one that would have been emulated by all later poets, was composed by Kalīm, who spent his early life in Iran before building his professional career in the Deccan, and finally at the Mughal court.¹⁴ He retired to Kashmir at the end of his life and died there. Kalīm wrote two topographical poems in *masnavī* form of roughly equal length: one on Akbarabad (Agra) (236 lines), and the other on Kashmir (188 lines); the former has been studied more extensively than the latter. In his poem on Akbarabad, Kalīm takes the reader on a panoramic tour of the capital city, describing its monumental architecture, bazaar and a garden. A section of the poem is in the *shahrāshūb* mode, listing a sampling of young professionals in the bazaar, as well as social groups such as Shaikhs, Rajputs and Pathans.¹⁵ After praising the cosmopolitan nature of the city and the busy marketplace, Kalīm expresses his amazement of the river Yamuna (*Jaun*), the boats on it and lofty buildings alongside it. During his time, visitors travelling to Agra by boat would have had a stunning view of this magnificent garden city built along both sides of the river (Koch 2008). Kalīm describes this wondrous sight: «A city on two sides and the river in between; on the seashore, [but] a sea without shore» (*du jānib shahr u daryā dar miyāna | kinār-i bahr, bahr-i bī-kirāna*), and he invites the reader to take a ride on the river to relieve the mind of sorrow. The rest of the poem is devoted to a garden which contains specifically Indian flowers such as *champā*, *maulsri*, and *keorā*, along with the usual narcissus and tulip, presenting a harmonious blend of the Indic and Persian natural worlds. In the end, Kalīm declares that although the previous owner of the garden, the emperor's late wife Mumtāz Mahal, is in paradise (*jannat*), she left *this* paradise to her daughter Jahānārā. Kalīm's poem was meant to highlight the magnificence of the Mughal capital, and its Indo-Persian garden for a Persophone audience beyond the limits of the Mughal domain. In his verses nature complements the cityscape and is contained within a walled garden in the city, with everything in its proper place.

Kalīm used the same basic tropes and images in his poem on Kashmir, a rhapsodic paean to the special status of the valley in the empire, compared to the rest of the subcontinent. At the beginning of the poem, Kalīm has an epiphany that Kashmir is more than just a garden: «I spoke in error: not just a fragrant garden or rose garden; | it is the abode of spring, a place of beauties, a paradise» (*ghalat guftam – chi būstān u chi gulzār*

¹⁴ For an introduction to Kalīm's life and works, see Meneghini 2004. Wheeler M. Thackston's unpublished dissertation on the poet, *The Poetry of Abū-Tālib Kalīm, Persian Poet Laureate of Shāhjahān, Mughal Emperor of India* is a valuable resource.

¹⁵ Abū Tālib Kalīm-i Kāshānī 1990, pp. 142-151. For the genre of *shahrāshūb* and a more detailed discussion of this poem, see Sharma 2004.

| *bahāristān, nigāristān, iram-zār*) (Abū Tālib Kalim-i Kāshānī 1990, pp. 174-181). The climate here is its most enticing feature, with no sign of the hot summer of the plains, and the clouds in the sky like a lover roaming in his beloved's lane. The topography of this land is so unique that it is garden, sea, and city, all at once. The term Kashmir at this time referred to both the province and city, a deliberately blurring the division between the urban and rural spaces. Employing clever puns and rhetorical figures, Kalīm takes note of the two main bodies of water here: Bahat (Jhelum river), like the Nile, and the other Lake Dal, that makes one's heart (*dil*) restless. He then invites the reader to take a ride on the water, as he had done in his Agra poem: «Come for a trip on the Dal, what is a rose garden? Collect flowers on a boat, what is a skirt» (*bi-sayr-i Dal biyā, gulshan chi bāshad? | bi-kishtī gul bibar, dāman chi bāshad?*). As Kalīm becomes the guide on the boat, he is struck by the fact that this is a garden of paradise on a green sea. The lotuses on the water (*kaval*) are like the lips of a beloved red with chewing betel-leaf (*pān*) and plucking them is like applying henna to one's hands!

Specific sites that are visible from the lake are pointed out: Takht-i Sulayman (the hill in southeast Srinagar where the Shankaracharya Temple is located), the gardens of Bahrara, 'Ayshabad, Farahbakhsh (Shalimar), the royal canal, and the Nishat garden with its lofty buildings that match the mountains behind it and its nine fountains (Thackston 1996). At one point Kalīm exclaims that with so many gardens in this country, he does not know in which one he can be a nightingale! Nature here is all contained within the limits of the city and lives in harmony with man-made architecture and is both wild and cultivated (see Losensky 2015; Meisami 2001, pp. 21-54). The last quarter of the poem is a panegyric to Shāh Jahān who is praised for his just rule and his support for upholding Islam in India. He is the refuge of the seven climes (*panāh-i haft kishvar*) for those who have given up hope, and he takes the hand of those who have been knocked over by fate. Kashmir is only a patch in the garden of his temperament, while the fingers of his hand are the five rivers of Panjab that irrigate the world. Kalīm ends with a benediction on Kashmir:

bi-khūbī tā shavad Kashmīr mazkūr | bi-'ālam nām-i nīkash bād
mashhūr
kunad daryūza kūh-i Pīr Panjāl | zi chatr-i daulatash rif'at hama sāl

As long as Kashmir is mentioned with good words, may it be
renowned in the world.
 The Pir Panjal mountain seeks elevation from the parasol of his
fortune, all year.

With this reference to the mountain range in the last line, the poet leads

the reader to the way back to Hindustan. Kalīm used the template from his poem praising Agra and applied it to Kashmir, with a few topographical specificities. Though he is moved by the natural wonder of the valley that threatens to outdo the imperial structures, his poetry is mannered and informed by an older tradition of Persian gardens. In his view as a professional panegyrist, Agra and Kashmir were equivalent spaces to showcase the Mughal Empire's greatness. The polished nature of Kalīm's language and the controlled he has over the narrative suggests that he is performing his role as poet laureate for the court or the larger Persophone world.

In contrast, Indian born poets wrote about Kashmir using the same literary devices as their Iranian counterparts, but in a more novel and personal way. A somewhat elusive figure in his own times, and almost forgotten in ours, Abū al-Barakāt Munīr Lāhorī (1610-44) was a poet of Shāh Jahān's court (Memon 1983). In 1635 Munīr entered the service of Mīrzā Safī Saif Khān, governor of Akbarabad (Agra) and brother-in-law of the empress, Mumtāz Mahal. After his patron's death in 1639, Munīr joined the court of I'tiqād Khan, the governor of Jaunpur but soon returned to Agra where he died young. Munīr wrote wistfully about being isolated in an Iranian-dominated literary circle at court and expressed an attachment to his place of origin. In one of his works he named five luminous personalities who have emerged from the land of India: Mas'ūd Sa'd Salmān and Abū al-Faraj Rūnī from Lahore, [Amīr] Khusrau and Hasan from Delhi, and Faizī from Nagor, thus providing what is the first literary canon of Indo-Persian poets and one linked to geography (Abu'l-Barakāt Munīr Lāhorī 1977, pp. 27-28).

A poem on Kashmir by Munīr is the *Masnavī-yi bahār-i jāvīd* in 1337 lines (Abu'l-Barakāt Munīr Lāhorī 2009, pp. 195-227), considerably longer but which shows clear influences of Kalīm's poem. The phrase «eternal or perennial spring» is the same that both Abū 'l-Fazl and the emperor Jahāngīr used to describe this land. The poem is dedicated to I'tiqād Khān Shāpur Mīrzā, brother of the dowager empress Nūr Jahān, who had been governor of Kashmir under Jahāngīr. It does not bear a date but was probably written at the end of the poet's short life. In a section on the reason for the composition of this work, Munīr employs a conventional device explaining that a beautiful creature visited him with a command to write the poem. Munīr boasts that will be the nightingale in the garden of Kashmir and write in the style of the masters Qudsī and Kalīm. He also states early on that he will describe the garden, mountains, and city (*numūdam husn-i bāgh u shahr-i ū rā | sutūdam dasht u kūh u bahr-i ū rā*), bringing all these places together under his poetic gaze. Beginning with praises for the paradise-like quality of Kashmir, Munīr describes the city of Kashmir (Srinagar) as the envy of Isfahan, Shiraz, Kabul, and Constantinople. He marvels that every street of this city is filled with beautiful people (*bi-har kūcha-yi nigār-parvar | ki bi-shikasta kalla az nāz bar sar*). Then, as Kalīm had done before him in his Akbarabad poem, he goes on to list a series

of professionals engaged in different occupations who represent the best qualities of the city: *bāzdār* (falconier), *kamāngar* (archer), *najjār* (carpenter), *bazzāz* (grocer), *sārbān* (camel driver), *murdashūy* (washer of corpses), *saqqā* (water-carrier), a list that is somewhat different from the one included by Kalīm. Munīr then launches into the natural beauty of the province, its cold but invigorating climate, the charming wooden houses, and even musical instruments such as the sitar and *vīnā*. In terms of the geographical topography of the province, the impressive Pir Panjal range is next on his list, followed by specific mountains such as Koh-i Maran (Hari Parbat). In fact, the mountain in its loftiness is like a city rather than a village (*ki shahrī hast nabuvad rustāy*); Kashmir is proud of this bounty and the world is exalted next to it. After the mountains, Munīr describes the flowers and lakes of the valley. The endless beds of flowers on land and water are likened to army troops. The lotus flower (*kaval*) is his particular favourite, and the riot of colour on the surface of the lake makes him think that it has eaten *pān*. The boats on the lake are described next and compared to water fowl, who are in a precarious state because they must bear the weight of the handsome boatmen. The poet mentions the Safapur *tālāb*, most likely the Manasbal Lake, because in the present time Safapur is known as a village in the Jhelum valley near Srinagar and famous for its lotuses on the lake.¹⁶ Munīr does not describe buildings in his poem, and there were several in this area constructed under the patronage of the Mughals, only picking out natural formations to bestow praise on, in contrast to other Mughal poets writing on Kashmir who had a preference for architectural monuments.

Gardens are on Munīr's list of topographical features of Kashmir, his list in this respect being the same as that of Kalīm. His first choice is the Shalimar garden, located on the northeast portion of Dal Lake, and what was once the residence of Jahāngīr and Nūr Jahān when they summered in the valley. The description of the gardens of Farahbakhsh (Shalimar) with its flowers, Nishat with its fruits, Bahrara with its chinara trees, is followed by that of 'Aishabad. The avenues in the gardens make him think of streets (*khiyābān*) in a city, and he also uses the bazaar metaphor for the thick foliage. A saffron field and the royal canal, along with some verses on a fountain and waterfall complete the picturesque nature of the landscape.¹⁷ The Takht-i Sulaiman hill draws praise from him although Munīr does not mention the temple there. Sindh Brari, i.e., the Sindh Valley in

16 Ebba Koch's forthcoming article *The Bagh-i Safa alias Jharoka Bagh in Kashmir: The Garden of Princess Jahanara on the Manasbal Lake* retrieves the history of this garden.

17 All these gardens, as well as the royal canal, are mentioned in some detail by the two major historians of Shāh Jahān's reign, Lāhorī in his *Pādshāhnāmāh* and Kambo in his *'Amal-i Sālih*. Some of the poetic descriptions are matched to the ones done by historians by Thackston.

the north of Srinagar that leads to the Zojila pass into Central Asia, where the renowned Sonamarg (Golden meadow) is located, is the last item on his list of topographical features. In the end Munīr compares his verses to a cypress in a garden and the lines in his notebook to a street or road (*khiyābān*). The very last line is: «In the rose garden of poetry there are a hundred tulip gardens; there is spring, there is spring, there is spring» (*bi-gulzār-i sukhan sad lālazār ast | bahār ast bahār ast u bahār ast*), being reminiscent of the oft-quoted line applied to Kashmir in this period: «If there is a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this» (*agar firdaws bar rū-yi zamīn ast | hamīn ast u hamīn ast u hamīn ast*). Whereas Kalīm had ended his poem with the Pir Panjal mountain range, Munīr takes us right through this meadow in a natural setting to the northernmost limit of the empire. Munīr also composed a *masnavī* on another border province, Bengal, where he had a similar reaction: «Everywhere you look there is lush greenery; there is spring, there is spring, there is spring» (*har jānib ki bīnī sabzazār ast | bahār ast u bahār ast u bahār ast*), repeating the phrase he employed in his Kashmir poem. But in the Bengal poem he goes further in bringing the world of untamed nature into his poetic gaze, exemplifying the full flowering of the Mughal pastoral genre (Abu'l-Barakāt Munīr Lāhorī 2009, pp. 148-191). There are no formal gardens that are usually at the centre of the genre of Mughal topographical poetry, rather the attention is fully on the natural environment: from the flora and fauna, climate, topography, using a poetic ethnographic narrative style. But let us return to the Kashmir poems under discussion.

In fact, for some poets the theme of the crossing of the Pir Panjal, usually a preamble to the panegyric sections, became more central than the destination itself. Paul Losensky (unpubl.) writes in connection with the poet Jūyā Tabrīzī's handling of this theme: «As an antithesis of structured social space, the mountain provides a setting where mundane cultural values can be questioned and transcended». In his essay *The Real Arcadia*, the historian Garry Willis writes about the phenomenon of 'mountain dissociation' during his travels in the region of Arcadia in modern Greece. He explains:

The religious experience of these mountains is what is most essential to Arcadia and most absent from Arcadian poetry. This is the land of the sublime, which is always a bit scary, not of the beautiful, which tends to be sedate. The pastoral landscape is what the Romans called *locus amoenus*, an 'agreeable place' ... But Arcadia does not accommodate. It challenges. You are disoriented here on Mount Aphrodisium, the necessary preliminary to reorientation in the rituals that were once performed in such out-of-the-way and hard-to-reach places. (Willis 2003, p. 119)

In the case of Kashmir, the mountainous journey is the major challenge.

Once the mountains are crossed, a Shangri-La awaited the traveler. Nature in the valley is carefully cultivated by the Mughals, and the mountains that one regards from a boat on the Dal or even close up in a garden are integrated into the space of the empire. For this reason, in several poems there are frequent references to Khizr, the guide of the perplexed and lost traveler, to safely convey one to the valley.

A shift in the poetic genre of the Kashmir poem is seen in a poem by Muhammad Muhsin Fānī Kashmīrī (d. 1670-71) that presents more sinister aspects of the mighty empire in the twilight years of Shāh Jahān's reign. Fānī had been in Mughal service in Allahabad as a judge (*sadr*), then went into forced retirement after a scandal during the Balkh campaign of 1646-7 that was meant to conquer the Mughal ancestral lands (Qasemi 1999). At one time, Fānī was thought to be the author of the *Dabistān-i mazāhib*, the valuable encyclopedia of religions of the time. Fānī's Kashmir poem, entitled *Maikhāna* (Tavern) was composed in 1655 and dedicated to his Chishti Sufi master Shaikh Muhibullāh Allāhābādi (d. 1648).¹⁸ This poem, slightly shorter than Munīr's work, is in the genre of a *sāqīnāma*, an address to a young wine server. Losensky's recent study on such poems notes that «the quest for self-identity enacted in the *sāqī-nāma* also opened the genre to more personal concerns and further modes of symbolic immortality» (2014, p. 148). Fānī's poem is explicitly localized and mystical at the same time, though he is also conscious of the requisite formal elements in this by now fully established Kashmir poem genre. Fānī mentions the same gardens that Munīr did, but then adds that comparing the garden of the king, Bāgh-i Shāh, the Chashmashahi garden of today that was a gift from the emperor to his favourite son Dārā Shikoh, to them is like comparing a house to a Sufi lodge (*az in bāghhā bih buvad bāgh-i Shāh | ki farqast az khāna tā khānaqāh*). Fānī also mentions Dārā Shikoh in connection with this garden and natural spring; in fact, they both shared a serious commitment to Sufism and attachment to Shaykh Muhibullāh. A temple is described, which could possibly refer to the Mamal Shiva temple at Pahalgam, where Fānī offers his prayers (*namāz*) in a blasphemous gesture. Whereas Munīr following Kalīm had listed some skilled young tradesmen engaged in different occupations to people their cityscape, Fānī picks a *pān*-seller to represent the populace of Kashmir, as an Indo-Persian equivalent to the shepherd in the European pastoral poem:

*furūshad bi-jān bīra pān-furūsh | chu ū hīchkas nīst arzān-furūsh
dukān rā chunān basta ā'in zi pān | ki chūn āsmān ast sabz ān dukān ...
chu tīflān girifta bi-kaf ān javān | kitāb-i Gulistān zi awrāq-i pān ...*

18 Selections from the poem are included in the anthology by Gulchīn Ma'ānī 1980, pp. 327-362; it was also published separately in *Masnaviyāt-i Fānī Kashmīrī* (Muhsin Fānī 1964, pp. 147-218).

The *pān*-seller sells *pān* for the price of life – and no one sells so cheaply!
He has set up his shop in such a way with *pāns* that it is green like the sky.
The young seller holds the *pāns* like children holding the *Gulistān*.

This is followed by praise for sugarcane, and then, in a nostalgic vein he makes a somewhat abrupt shift in setting, ruminating about Payag (Prayag, Allahabad) which brings tears like the spring of Verinag in Kashmir to his eyes. He romanticizes over the confluence of the two holy rivers in Payag, Ganga and Yamuna, which seem to him like two whales facing each other as the city of Allahabad floats over the waters. He compares its gardens to those of Kashmir and recalls the neighbourhood of Khuldabad in Allahabad as the best place and a veritable *gulzār-i jannat* (rose-garden of paradise). He writes that every year people gather in this town like deer in a plain, referring to the annual Hindu pilgrimage-fair, the mini-*kumbh melā*:

*hama ahl-i ān shahr daryā-dil and | bi-daryā-yi ma'nī chu mā vāsil and
zi faiz-i daryā-yi 'ilm u 'amal | hama yāfta ābrū az azal*

The people of that city are generous and connected to the sea of
knowledge like us.
From the bounty of the sea of knowledge and deeds, they have all
obtained honour.

Then follows praise for his Sufi master and some autobiographical statements. At the end of the poem, in another turnaround, Fānī lapses into a mystical reverie and begins to exhort his readers about morally correct conduct in these dark times. He paints a horrific picture of a dystopia where virtue is absent and vice reigns supreme. In such a place instead of doing their respective occupations, everyone busies himself with some other wanton activity. The king with his crown resembles a rooster, the *shaikh* robs the innocent like Satan, the *qāzī* takes bribes, the people are occupied in drunkenness and debauchery. Religion remains the only refuge for good men. Fānī's extremely somber tone is in contrast to the earlier exuberance of the poem, but as someone who is no longer part of the Mughal imperial administration, he can choose to not leave the reader in a paradise-like Kashmiri garden but remind them of loftier spiritual and religious truths. Fānī's poem displays a concern about the moral welfare of the world, and given his association with the Mughals, its political subtext cannot be ignored. Kashmir may still be the pristine countryside for him, but it was no longer a microcosm of the Mughal Empire.

The literary fad of the Kashmir poem lasted until the early years of the Emperor Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr's reign (r. 1658-1707). The aforementioned Zafar Khān's son, Muhammad Tāhir 'Ināyat Khān 'Āshnā' (d. 1670-71), superintendent of the royal library at the very end of Shāh Jahān's reign

and author of one of the many chronicles of this period, composed a rather insipid short *masnavī*, «On the description of the mountain road to Kashmir». Āshnā just could not match up to being a poet of his father's caliber and his poem is actually part of a cluster of loosely connected topographical poems followed by several others: on the House of Mirrors (*Ā'īnakhāna*) in Lahore, on the Sulaiman mountain, Dal lake and the lotus, on various buildings and a garden, and praise of Shahjahanabad (Delhi).¹⁹ Another minor poet in the last years of Shāh Jahān, Sayyid 'Alī Saidī, who was a Mughal of Iranian origin and died young in Delhi, left an incomplete poem on Kashmir (Saidī Ṭihirānī 1985, pp. 61-67), in addition to three other short poems on the gardens of Sahibabad, Shalimar, and Faizabad. Choosing brevity over what had become a florid genre, Saidī advises his readers: «Poetry describing Kashmir is out of place; shut your mouth here and open your eyes» (*sukhan dar vasf-i Kashmīr ast bījā | zabān īnjā bi-band u dīda buḡshā*). But by this time the court was no longer going for regular sojourns to the valley and Mughal poets were only left to imagine this fabled paradise, inscribing it as a mythical place in their verses.

Kashmir with its cypresses and beauties lent itself perfectly to being the ideal garden of Persian poetry. At one level, its neatly laid-out and serene gardens represented the taming of nature and the countryside, on another level it was as an allegory for the flourishing empire. For some poets such as Munīr and Fānī, it was the refuge from the heart of the bustling but corrupt urban centers. The literary fad of writing poetry about Kashmir, and to some extent about other provinces, in the pastoral mode peaked in Shāh Jahān's early years and then faded away like the memory of the imperial court's visits to the valley. Although many of the poems on the praise of provinces, starting from Faizī's *qasīda* on Kashmir and all the way to Kalīm and Munīr, were composed under courtly patronage to celebrate the expansion of the empire, the personal investment and attachment of individual poets to certain places redefined the literary geography of Mughal Persian literature. Munīr was from Lahore and took great pride in following in the footsteps of the great Indo-Persian poets from his city and those of Delhi; he found similarities between the wild idyllic landscape of Kashmir and natural wilderness of Bengal, indicating that there was a more personal investment and individual programme of representation behind his poems. Fānī was originally from Kashmir but fondly recalled his time in Allahabad, meditating on his checkered career in the Mughal administrative network. Nature was liberating for these poets, whether in a courtly and mystical setting, but for Munīr it opened up his world and provided a freedom that allowed him to celebrate the expansion of the

19 The unpublished manuscript has the shelf-mark Ethe 1584, Herman Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office* (Oxford: H. Hart, 1903), v. 1, pp. 866-867.

Persian language and poetic parameters, while for Fānī it was a refuge from the wickedness of the material world.

Whereas in Western pastoral poetry the simple life of the shepherd or country dweller is often idealized, in Fānī's poem, a humble tradesman, a *pān*-seller, assumes this role, and praise is reserved for the poet's Sufi master rather than for the emperor. Claiming a rural space as urban as some of our poets do in their poems may seem contrary to the basic definition of pastoral poetry, but this is precisely the distinctive way in which this genre developed during the reign of Shāh Jahān, as an extension of poems about cities. These literary works should not be taken merely as indicative of a nascent regional identity or pride, but as a sophisticated development in a literary tradition that was nurtured by certain ritual journeys of the Mughal court that were orchestrated in poetry by the best poets of the court – such as the frequent trips to Kashmir or travelling down the Ganga or Yamuna by boat – and the complex patronage and administrative system that facilitated this mobility. Especially in the case of Kashmir, in the post-Shāh Jahān period when the province lost its prominence, it nevertheless came to be inscribed in the artistic imagination in a romantic mode. Nature in an idealized form had always been paramount in Persian literature, and in Mughal Persian poetry it was particularly idealized by a group of innovative poets as the 'true' paradise of which the urban world was a pale reflection.

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