

Fayzi's Illuminationist Interpretation of Vedanta: The *Shariq al-ma'rifa*

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In the history of Indo-Persian culture, the Mogul era stands out as a time characterized by a remarkable number of inventive intellectuals who engaged with Indian thought through the medium of Persian. One of the outstanding representatives of this movement was Abu al-Fayz "Fayzi," later known as Fayyazi (AD 1547–95), poet laureate at the court of Akbar, who has been somewhat eclipsed historically by his more famous brother, Akbar's chief minister, Abu al-Fazl 'Allami.¹ Fayzi was a trusted courtier, serving as a tutor to Akbar's three sons, working as a close adviser on religious affairs, and acting as ambassador to the kingdom of Khandesh in 1591.

Fayzi's literary accomplishments were considerable. In addition to an extensive collection of Persian odes and lyrics, he attempted to compose a quintet of romantic epics in the fashion of the poet Nizami, though he only completed two: *Markaz al-adwar*, on moral and mystical ideas, and *Nal-Daman*, a romance based on characters from the *Mahabharata*.² Fayzi was also noted for composing two learned works in Arabic using only undotted letters: a lengthy Koran commentary titled *Sawati' al-ilham* and an explanation of prophetic sayings called *Mawarid al-kalim*. When challenged on the grounds of having produced a regrettable innovation (*bid'a*) with these works, he ingeniously responded by quoting the Muslim profession of faith: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (*la ilaha illa allah, Muhammadun rasul allah*), a phrase that contains only undotted letters. In addition, Fayzi is responsible for a Persian translation of a Sanskrit work on mathematics, the *Lilavati*. He was, in short, a leading intellectual representative of the cosmopolitan tendencies of the Mogul Empire. Fayzi describes his eclectic propensities in a Persian ode of autobiographical character composed to relate the fortunes of his embassy to the Deccan.³ This lengthy poem has been analyzed, along with his quatrains, in a recent German dissertation by Gerald Grobbel.⁴

A striking interpretation of the philosophical traditions of India is offered by a Persian treatise attributed to Fayzi, titled *Shariq al-ma'rifa* (*The Illuminator of Gnosis*). This text can be found in a couple of manuscripts, of which I have scrutinized one from the India Office collection, written in a hasty and careless version of the Persian cursive hand known as

1. Munibur Rahman, "Fayzi, Abu'l-Fayz," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v9f5/v9f509.html (accessed 20 February 2010); Ziyaud-Din A. Desai, "Life and Works of Faidi," *Indo-Iranica* 16 (1963): 1–35.

2. For a detailed study of the latter text of Fayzi, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Love, Passion, and Reason: The Poet Fayzi and His *Nal-Daman*," *Studies on Persianate Societies* 2 (2004): 42–80.

3. Shaykh Abu al-Fayz Fayzi, *Kulliyat-i Fayzi (The Complete Works of Fayzi)*, ed. A. D. Arshad (Lahore: Idara-i Tahqiqat-i Pakistan, Danishgah-i Punjab, 1967), 74–84. Fayzi wrote another poem of self-description, beginning with the line, "Thank God that love of idols is my guide, and that I am in the Brahmin faith and idolatry" (*ibid.*, 53–59).

4. Gerald Grobbel, *Der Dichter Faidi und die Religion Akbars (The Poet Faidi and the Religion of Akbar)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2001), 21–28.

nasta'liq.⁵ Fortunately, there is also a much more legible lithograph edition, published in 1877 in a collection of four Indo-Persian texts.⁶ This work, which to date has not been the subject of scholarly analysis, is the basis of the following remarks on Fayzi's approach to Indian religious thought in this text. Fayzi exhibits here a stimulating example of a mystical and philosophical interpretation of two principal topics, the significance of Krishna in Indian religious thought and the importance of yoga as a spiritual path. Fayzi interprets these Indian traditions very much in terms of Sufism and a generalized form of Illuminationist (*ishraqi*) philosophy, in so doing naturalizing and familiarizing these "Hindu" themes along lines familiar to Muslim intellectuals; in this respect, he follows a number of other cosmopolitan Mogul thinkers who drew on Illuminationist Neoplatonism to provide an overarching framework to understand Indian religious thought.⁷ It is somewhat more difficult to locate the particular school of Vedanta on which he draws, though it could be described as philosophical rather than devotional. But it would be an exaggeration to characterize Fayzi's approach to either Illuminationism or Vedanta as specialized philosophy; this work plays the part of the popularization.⁸

The *Shariq al-ma'rifa* is a text of medium length, forty-six pages in the Lucknow lithograph and twenty-eight folios in the India Office manuscript. It is organized into twelve sections, each of which is titled a "flash" (*lam'a*), a term with a long history in Arabic and Persian Sufi texts such as the *Kitab al-luma'* (*Book of Glimmerings*) of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988) and the *Lama'at* (*Divine Flashes*) of 'Iraqi (d. 1289).⁹ These twelve "flashes" are described in the preface as follows:

1. On the description of the greatness of Krishna Dev and the application of the practice of yoga.
2. On the explanation of the fact that all the lights of the world are darkness in relation to that illuminated one, which comprehends all lights.
3. On the explanation of the essence of the human form.
4. On the explanation of how the disciple becomes a wayfarer on the path of yoga.
5. On the gnosis of the Essence and the explanation of the substance of His attributes.
6. On the explanation of the wisdom of the gnosis of the Essence.
7. On the explanation of the description of the pure Essence, and the practice of yoga.
8. On the explanation of the composition of the human being, which is known as the microcosm.
9. On the explanation of how a seeker at first performs exercises observing the breath and can obtain knowledge of the internal substance.
10. On passing beyond desire for the things of origination, attachment, and action, and their result, so that perfect asceticism is attained.
11. On the explanation of the fact that everything impermanent is action, because its body is pure action, having come about from action, while the soul, which is the actor, is imperishable and eternal.
12. On the explanation of the fact that the worshiper of the true divinity finally reaches perfection and never suffers any diminution.

As a glance at the contents indicates, there is a fair amount of overlap and repetition in this text. In the remarks that follow, I explore Fayzi's method and approach in the interpretation of Indian philosophical and religious themes, con-

5. Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Printed for the India Office, 1903–37; London: India Office Library and Records, 1980), 1:1101, no. 1975. Another copy of *Shariq al-ma'rifa*, also attributed to Fayzi, is listed in E. G. Browne, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 94–96, no. 35 (add. 778).

6. *Majmu'a-i rasa'il* (Lucknow, India: Newal Kishore, AH 1294/1877). This edition contains *Risala-i shariq al-ma'rifa* (*The Treatise of the Illuminator of Gnosis*), *Risala-i atwar dar hall-i asrar* (*The Treatise of the Modes of Resolving Secrets*), *Risala-i Ram gita* (*The Treatise of*

the Song of Ram), and *Mathnawi-i Ray Chandar Bhan Barahman* (*The Couplets of Ray Chandar Bhan Barahman*). Many thanks to the University of Chicago's South Asia librarian, James Nye, for making this copy available. A reprint by the same publisher, dated AH 1303/1885, also exists.

7. Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 15 (2005): 15–43.

8. For an overview of Illuminationist philosophy, see Roxanne Marcotte, "Suhrawardi," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2007, plato.stanford.edu/entries/suhrawardi/ (accessed 20 February 2010). But as Grobbel points out (*Der Dichter Faidi*, 68), it was

light symbolism rather than a technical engagement with Illuminationism that was characteristic of the court of Akbar.

9. Abu Nasr 'Abdallah B. 'Ali al-Sarraj al-Tusi, *The Kitab al-Luma' fi 'l-Tasawwuf*, ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, vol. 22 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, and London: Luzac & Co., 1914); Fakhruddin Iraqī, *Divine Flashes*, trans. William Chittick and Peter Wilson, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982).

centrating primarily on the introduction and the first flash as examples.

The presentation of the text in its lithograph and manuscript versions has interesting variations. The manuscript begins with an epigraph containing the typical Islamic formula “in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate” (*bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*), but it contains no opening praise of God or the Prophet. Conversely, the lithograph begins strikingly with a Sanskrit epigraph in Urdu script, *sat-chid-anand* (*sic*; “existence-consciousness-bliss”), which is then followed by a page and a half of praise of God and prayers for forgiveness for sin—though the name of the prophet Muhammad is strikingly absent from both versions. Likewise, it is notable that the famous Lucknow publishing firm of Newal Kishore highlights on the front and back inside covers its lengthy list of “books on the religion of the Hindus in Urdu” (*kutub-i madhhab-i hunud Urdu bhasha*). The ornate cover uses a vocabulary of Islamic mysticism to proclaim the contents of the anthology as follows: “Four gardens of the enduring spring of Sufism and wayfaring [*tasawwuf o suluk*], that is, a collection of four treatises translated from the *Vedanta-sara* [*badant-sar*], transmitted from Sanskrit to the Persian language.” It then goes on to describe the treatise in question primarily as a translation directly from authoritative Sanskrit texts: “the Persian translation of the Gita, the Jog-Bishist [Yoga-vasista], the Bhagavata, and the Vedanta, a useful translation of the words of Sri Swami Vyasa-ji.” Thus the lithograph edition omits the name of Fayzi altogether, whether as author or translator, while the manuscript clearly gives the name of Fayzi Fayyazi in the colophon.¹⁰ Whether or not the treatise may be securely attributed to Fayzi may still be an open question, since it is not claimed as such in his biographies, and indeed one could assume that the author of this work was instead a Hindu scholar trained in Persianate learning. Regardless, the ultimate authorship of the work may have been irrelevant for the publisher’s placement of the text in an anthology of

translations from Sanskrit. In this article, by way of convenience, I provisionally accept the *Shariq al-ma’rifat* as a product of Fayzi’s ingenious pen.

The introduction to the text makes a strong argument for the importance of Indian philosophy, by placing it into a direct and even superior relationship with Greek philosophy. This intricately written passage, with long clauses composed of rhyming prose, touches on themes of universality and cosmopolitanism characteristic of the Mogul imperial ideology as expounded by Abu al-Fazl and others.

Since this seeker of the gnosis of God, according to the aspiration centered in his consciousness, by the cherished positions of those from every religion who have realized truth by way of universal peace [P. *sulh-i kull*], having extended the glance of knowledge of universal and particular order, became occupied with the universal, which by certain knowledge is congenial to the reception of peace—in general, [he became occupied with] the explanation of the words inducing peace, based on truth, knowing reality, the gnosis without peer, and the complete unity, belonging to the confidant of secrets, and the elite of the elite, Swami Vyasa, who is beyond the description of everything said about him, and is outside and beyond everything that they write about him—just like the first sage, Plato, who attained fame throughout the realms and was renowned among the philosophers of the Arabs and the non-Arabs. Despite the different types of wisdom, he [Plato] was distinguished by the Illuminationist wisdom [P. *hikmat-i ishraqiyya*]. He was in the service of discipleship to Tumtum the Indian, who was a philosopher of great stature. Plato in his writings described his [Tumtum’s] perfections in a degree of such perfection; he was the master of his age, and this master of his was a student of the chain of the disciples of Swami Vyasa. His rank of greatness cannot be imagined, in terms of the rank that it would have. As soon as one hears it, such influence is exerted that the heart enters into the condition of the perception of the ecstasies.¹¹

It is noteworthy that Fayzi places his search for wisdom in the context of “universal peace” (*sulh-i kull*), a formula often used to encode the

10. The copyist evidently meant to add the date, but the space after the phrase “with the date of” (*bi-tarikh*) is left blank.

11. *Shariq*, 3 (citing the 1877 lithograph edition unless otherwise indicated). The source languages for original terms are indicated by the abbreviations A. (Arabic), H. (Hindi), and P. (Persian). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

ecumenic policies of Akbar with respect to non-Muslims.¹² Further, he establishes a genealogy of wisdom, which invokes Plato as well as his Muslim Neoplatonic successors known as the Illuminationists. Yet in a move reminiscent of early European romantics like Georg Friedrich Creuzer, Fayzi makes the Greek philosophers into students of the ancient sages of India, in this instance linking them to Vyasa through the mysterious sage Tumtum the Indian, a well-known figure in the history of Arabic magical literature such as *Picatrix*.¹³

Fayzi then goes on to proclaim the central importance of Vyasa as the source of Indian wisdom, with respect to both the principal divine personalities and the primary sacred texts. He further explains that in writing this text he has provided the gist of all of this ancient Indian teaching (rather than direct translations, as the cover of the lithograph would have it), in a way that will be suitable for the spiritual goals of his readers.

Swami Vyasa, in terms of the conversations he has had about the gnosis of reality in relation to the utmost elite manifestation of divine lordship and the knowledge of the internal secret of Krishna, Arjuna, Ramchandra, Vasista, Vishnu, and Brahma, in the books of the Gita, the Yoga Vasista, the Bhagavata, and the Vedanta, has expanded them, and has put them into the form of verses in the Sanskrit language. Among those, he [the author, i.e., Fayzi] has brought one out of a thousand, and a few from many, according to his own understanding, into black on white. For the luminous black point of the heart, when from excessive worldly preoccupations it reaches reduced comprehension and insight, and from the waywardness of heedlessness it reaches injustice, in meeting that exposition and illumination it becomes clear that the path to gnosis is not beyond reach. God Most High speaks to these seekers who are attuned to this action, and since the world-illuminating sun bestows light on the macrocosm, by the same principle of

twelve “flashes,” this epistle has been composed in twelve flashes, since it is the bestower of light on the microcosm, and it is known by the name of *The Illuminator of Gnosis*. (4)

Thus Fayzi presents this treatise as a compendium of Indian philosophy, which will be of the utmost value to readers. It scarcely needs to be pointed out that the title makes a strong gesture toward Illuminationist (*ishraqi*) wisdom by its use of the agent noun from the same root, that is, *shariq*, or Illuminator.

As he opens the text, Fayzi begins the first section with praise of Krishna as the manifestation of divinity, with a direct allusion to a celebrated incident in the *Mahabharata*, in which Krishna punishes the arrogance of Sisupala (who has objected to the recognition of Krishna as the divine Narayana) by executing him with his discus, or chakra. Since Fayzi is believed to have been involved with the revision of the first two books of the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata* sponsored by Akbar, the latter text may have been the initial source of his information on this particular incident.¹⁴

First Flash: On the greatness of Krishna the divine, and the performance of the practice of yoga, and the fact that Krishna the Divine was the essence of God. His definition, description, grace, and generosity cannot be described. His wrath and anger render lofty degrees into lowly states. Such was the case with Sisupala, the king of Chanderi, who was a complete master of might, power, majesty, and pomp, and most of the kings of the earth obeyed him. From extreme stupidity and ignorance, when he did not recognize the praiseworthy power and influence of that unique one of the age, he was continually insulting Krishna the divine, and he was casting the latter's goodness into evil. That day when the assembly of all the kingdoms on earth was held, and Krishna the divine was honored there, in the presence of all of them he made himself an insulter by his own insults. Because Krishna was

12. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Akbar and Religion* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1989), 19, 230.

13. Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam (The Natural and Occult Sciences in Islam)*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, Section 1, Supplemental Volume 6, Part 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 298–99, 381.

14. *Mahabharat, buzurgtarin manzuma-i kuhna-i mawjud-i jahan (Mahabharata, the Largest Ancient Poem Found in the World)*, trans. from Sanskrit into Persian by Mir Ghiyath al-Din 'Ali Qazwini Naqib Khan, ed. Muhammad Rida Jalali Na'ini and Narayan Shankar Shukla, Hindshinasi 15–18, 4 vols. (Tehran: Kitabfurushi Tuhuri, AH 1358–59/1979–81), 1:240–45. This passage corresponds (with some abridgment) to *The Mahabharata*, bks. 2–3, trans. J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 96–106.

[characterized by the hadith saying,] “anoint yourself with the qualities of God Most High, the most generous of the generous” [A. *takhallaqu bi-akhlāq allāh akram al-mukarrimin*], as much as he shielded his eyes, he did not hold back from the most hateful of his qualities. (4–5)

Krishna then cast the discus and beheaded Sisupala, but because the execution came at his divine hand, Sisupala achieved one of the superior types of salvation (Persian-Arabic *najat*), which “in the Indian language [*hindawi*] is called *sajuj*,” a term that Fayzi glosses as “the joining of light to that which is lit” (P. *payvastan-i nur bi-munawwar*); this circumstance allowed Sisupala to “become effaced [A. *mahw*] by gazing on the pure light of Krishna.” The term *sajuj* can be restored as Hindi *san-yuj*, or Sanskrit *sayujya*,¹⁵ which in classical Vedantic texts is indeed a type of impersonal liberation (*mukti*) consisting of union with the formless Brahman. In the more devotional forms of Vedanta, as displayed for instance in the teachings of Chaitanya, *sajuj* is rejected as an erroneous deviation from the four types of union with the personal form of the deity.¹⁶ Thus Fayzi, by introducing the concept of *sayujya*, draws on a more intellectual aspect of Indian religious thought, of the kind exemplified by Vaishnava philosophers such as Venkatanatha (1595–1671) and Nimbarka (fourteenth century).¹⁷ This passage illustrates the complexity of Fayzi’s approach. He applies theological formulas including an Arabic hadith, much cited by the Sufis, that denotes the process of taking on the qualities of God by meditative practice, and he joins that with a technical term for a Sanskritic formulation for the most abstract form of liberation, redefined with Illuminationist imagery.

Fayzi goes on to remark, drawing on a very typical Sufi vocabulary, that the apparent wrath of Krishna is in reality compassion. “Thus he is called ‘the most merciful of the merciful’ [A. *akram al-mukarrimin*], and in the Indian language he is named *patit-pavan adham-dharan*, or ‘the forgiver of the sins of the greatest sinners’

[P. *bakhshanda-i gunah-i gunah-karan-i a’zam*], to such a degree that he knows that all of creation [A. *khalq*] is from him, and he knows that no one is separate from him, since no one is apart from him and all are attached to his reality” (5).¹⁸ Likewise, with regard to Sisupala, he observes that, “having torn that veil of duality and non-recognition of him, he [Krishna] brought him into the recognition of unity. When the drop fell into the ocean, duality departed and unity took its place. And Krishna Dev, whom they call in the Indian language ‘abounding in compassion’ [H. *karuna-may*], in the same fashion, giving compassion for the pain of all who suffer, he gives peace for their suffering” (6).¹⁹ At this point, Fayzi halts to comment once again on the process of translation, which is fundamental to the entire project of this text: “Having praised his qualities and recited his signs [A. *ayat*], which Swami Vyasa arranged on the thread of mystical poetry [P. *nazm-i suluk*], the translation of that was put into pure Persian by means of that content, since not everyone has command over the Sanskrit language. For once, those who know the language of Persian, which is common to the time, are not excluded and have a share” (6). Fayzi’s translation enterprise has a dramatic salvific aim that is enlarged by the process of rendering his topic from Sanskrit into Persian.

Enough has been seen of Fayzi’s approach to translation to require a methodological digression on the problem of representing Sanskrit terms in Persian script. While this might seem like a minor technical problem, close examination of the examples cited already reveals a number of serious difficulties. In the many Persian texts that have been written on Indological topics, there is no consistent system of transliteration, and one finds multiple spellings of well-known words, particularly due to the lack of short vowels in the Persian script. In addition, there is the likelihood that Persianate writers were dealing with vernacularized forms and pronunciations, which they vaguely ascribed to “the Indian language” (Hindawi),

15. John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English* (London: W. H. Allen, 1884), 631, 689.

16. *The “Caitanya Caritamṛta” of Kṛsnadasa Kaviraja*, trans. Edward C. Dimock Jr., ed. Tony K. Stewart, Harvard Oriental Series no. 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 178, 205, 421.

17. Surendranath N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 3:161 (regarding Venkatanatha, where the term *sayujya* is glossed as “sameness of quality” with the deity), 3:442–43n4 (Nimbarka).

18. For the Hindi expressions *patit-pavan* (purifying the guilty) and *adham-dharan* (he who affords support to the lowest and most unworthy), see Platts, *Dictionary*, 35, 224.

19. For *karuna-may*, see *ibid.*, 828.

at a time much before the distinct emergence of the modern languages of South Asia such as Hindi and Urdu. Moreover, there is a confusing inconsistency between several commonly used systems for the Roman transliteration of Perso-Arabic script (Library of Congress, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, etc.), depending especially on whether the written or spoken forms of the words take priority. Finally, the existence of a reasonably consistent Roman transliteration for Sanskrit runs into the problem that similar transliterations (underdots, for example) are used for entirely different purposes to represent letters of the Perso-Arabic script. Thus it becomes a problem to decide which system to use to represent letters such as the Indic retroflex consonants. Because of the academic tendency to privilege “classical” Sanskritic forms over vernacular variations, one also has to consider whether it is preferable to demonstrate the spelling of a name or term in Persian script (e.g., Byas) or its more familiar Sanskrit form (Vyasa); frequently it is simpler to use common forms (e.g., Krishna) without diacriticals, as has been done in this article. Moreover, as will be seen shortly, it is often extraordinarily difficult to recognize which Indic term lies concealed in Persian script.

While this chaotic situation might be enough to drive orientalists to despair, there are a number of resources that may be called on to deepen scholarly access to Indo-Persian texts, beyond what is available in standard dictionaries. One of these is Albrecht Weber's 1887 critical edition, in Roman script, of a short Sanskrit-Persian dictionary composed by a certain Krishnadasa during the reign of Akbar.²⁰ Another is the eighty-page Persian dictionary

of Sanskrit terms appended by Tara Chand and Amir Hasan 'Abidi to their critical edition of an important Persian translation of the *Yoga-vasista*.²¹ Finally, there are several Sanskrit-Persian dictionaries compiled by the indefatigable Muhammad Reza Jalali-Na'ini.²² It would be especially useful for future research on Indo-Persian texts if these compendia could serve as a baseline for an expanding collaborative lexicon of Persian and Sanskrit, which could be facilitated by the use of Internet-based software. Likewise, there is a serious need for a reliable and comprehensive inventory of Persian translations of Indic texts, as well as independent Persian writings on Indological subjects. I hope that interested scholars will begin to consider such projects as ways of advancing our knowledge of this significant but neglected area of cultural exchange.²³

To resume consideration of the text at hand, I would like to go through the remaining portion of the first chapter in order to elucidate further the key terms and concepts that are of primary interest to Fayzi. The next topic to claim his attention is breath control: “In arranging to lose heart and soul in the essence of God [P. *dhat-i haqq*], who is the beloved [P. *janan*], the spiritual wayfarer [A. *salik*] should realize that sight is provided for the eye, smell for the nose, hearing for the ear, speech for the tongue, and the perception of hot, cold, soft, and hard for the enjoyment of physical pleasure, by the exercise of holding the breath, which in the Indian language is called *adhatm* and *pranayam*” (6). This fascination with breath control is well attested among Muslim writers conversant with the practices of yoga.²⁴ Yet the Hindi terminology here is anomalous; although the second

20. Albrecht Weber, *Über den Pārasīprakāṣa des Krishnadāsa (On the “Pārasīprakāṣa” of Krishnadāsa)* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1887). Several other such Persian-Sanskrit dictionaries exist: “The *Parasīprakāṣa* of Vihārikṛsnadāsa gives Persian equivalents of Sanskrit expressions. *Yavanaparipatīanukrama* of Dalapatīraya gives Persian words together with Sanskrit equivalents. *Parasīprakāṣa* of Vedāngarāya gives Persian and Arabic terms used in Indian astronomy and astrology and *Rajavyavaharakōṣa* of Raghunātha gives Persian and Arabic terms with Sanskrit equivalents.” H. L. N. Bharati, “Sanskrit Lexicography: Theory and Practice” (PhD diss., University of Mysore, 1991), chap. 2, 42, dspace.vidyanidhi.org.in:8080/dspace/handle/2009/1324 (accessed 20 February 2010). One of these has recently been

published, *Rajavyavaharakōṣa of Raghunātha Pandit: Persian-Sanskrit Phraseology* (Delhi: Vidyanidhi Prakashan, 2007).

21. *Jog bishist/Yogavasistha*, Persian trans. from Sanskrit, ed. Tara Chand and Amir Hasan 'Abidi (Aligarh, India: Aligarh Muslim University, 1967), 261–340.

22. Muhammad Reza Jalali Na'ini and Narayan Shanker Shukla, *Lugat-i sanskrit madhkur dar kitab ma lil-Hind-i 'Allama Biruni (The Sanskrit Vocabulary Used in the “Indica” of the Scholar, Biruni)* (Tehran: Chapkhana-i Khurrami, AH 1353/1975); Muhammad Reza Jalali Na'ini, *Farhang-i Sanskrit-Farsi (Sanskrit-Persian Dictionary)* (Tehran: Pizhuhishgah-i 'Ulum-i Insani wa Mutala'at-i Farhangi, 1996).

23. Since writing these lines, I have been delighted to learn that a team of scholars led by Fabrizio Speziale and Svevo Onofrio are proposing to establish a database of texts partly along these lines, titled, “Perso-Indica: A Bibliographic Survey of Persian Works on Indian Learned Traditions,” with sponsorship from the Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (IFRI).

24. Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga.”

term, *pranayam*, is well known in yogic literature, the word *adhatm* looks like a version of *adhyatma*, or “supreme self,” with no obvious connection to breath control.

Nevertheless, our author continues exploring the topic of breath control and its luminous effects:

Having brought together all one’s perception and comprehension of the intelligible qualities [A. *ma’qulat*] of one’s essence, one meditates [*mu-raqaba*] on oneself. That is, one engages in the consciousness of recognizing the breaths, which they call *atha pran* and *apan*. At the moment when this *apan* breath rises, and then goes down from the inhaling of *pran*, he becomes aware of where it comes from, and when it descends [he knows] where it goes. When he grasps the place of their entry and exit, that is the flash [*lam’a*] of the pure light, which they call comprehension and external knowledge. (6)

While the linkage of meditative technique and breathing is emphatic, again, the terminology is in part obscure. The terms *pran* and *apan* refer normally to inhalation and exhalation, and they are extensively used in yoga texts. The Hindi term that precedes them is unclear,²⁵ but the author is quite confident and even masterful in his use of Persian terminology.

Fayzi continues to explore meditative techniques in the passage that follows, and he considers equivalent the silent recitation of divine names, regardless of their origin:

This [is] knowledge of the part, which is an expression of fancy [A. *wahm*]. For as long as a person practices holding the breath and reciting the name of the essence [P. *dhikr-i ism-i dhat*], which in the Indian language they term “silent recitation” [*ajap*], and does not correct the lotus [*nilufar*] of his breast, which is open in quality, the heart of the matter will never be understood by the intellect, and he will be in a fancy of twisted understanding. (6)

By referring to “reciting the name of the essence” (P. *dhikr-i ism-i dhat*), Fayzi appears to be invoking the well-known Sufi practice of recitation of the name “Allah,” but he equates it with

the silent recitation (*ajap*, the negation of *jap*, or recitation) of yoga and demands the correct ordering of the psychic faculty symbolized by the lotus flower, elsewhere correlated with the psychic centers known as *cakras*.

Fayzi endows these practices with theological and metaphysical properties that would be quite familiar to readers steeped in Islamic literature. The following extended passage is a rich example of his hermeneutic:

If by the aforementioned practice he becomes purified, to the contrary, he reaches the level of the universal intellect [P. *‘aql-i kull*] and universal knowledge, which comprehends God, the mighty and powerful [*haqq ‘azza wa jalla*]. Fanciful knowledge is effaced in that. Afterward, while he meditates on the universal knowledge in himself, since this knowledge is a flash of the generous pure light, when he persists in this thought for a while, he realizes that what comprehends all [*muhit*] is the heart, and the manifestation [*zuhur*] of this knowledge comes from the heart. Knowledge is the clarity of the light of the heart. Thus by that clarity of the light of the heart, like a full moon, it is clear; he has a display of beauty by sixteen perfect rays [A. *shu’a*].²⁶ (6–7)

Successive passages employ the full rhetorical resources of rhyming prose, which is a treasured tool in the tradition of Indo-Persian literature:

He beholds, and he faces this knowledge there. And by the light of the heart, by meditation in the heart, with complete forthrightness [*istiqa-mat-i tamam*] and unspeakable control [*istihkam-i la kalam*], he practices *pranayam* of concentration [*samadhi*], that is, peace [*aram*]. When he has passed some time in this concentration and never becomes restless, remaining in the state of stability and peace, he beholds in the heart the pure light of the soul, which is refined and incomparable; there is nothing that resembles it. He does this to such an extent that the heart becomes lost in that. When the heart is effaced, he remains one in the attribute of unity, and he realizes his soul by an attribute that is the special attribute of the Most Holy Essence [*sifat-i khass-i dhat-i aqdas*]. He knows the existence of the attribute of the soul of the essence as his own de-

25. *Atha* (with retroflex T).

26. “Sixteen perfect rays” appears to refer to Hindi *kala*, the sixteenth-part of the moon’s diameter, hence sixteen rays as the equivalent of completeness.

scription, which is the beloved in the kernel of kernels [*lubb-i lubab*]; it is Most Holy and most subtle, for it became that by all lights and encompassed all existing things, like the air, which in the Indian language they call *akas*. (7)

Now Fayzi has introduced another critical term of Yogi origin, *samadhi*, or “concentration,” which he nevertheless links with the experience of divine light expressed through technical terms from the vocabulary of Islamic theology. Yet in the end, he adroitly reverts to the Indic term *akas* as a cosmic reference for the all-encompassing air.

As Fayzi proceeds to describe a theophany of divine qualities, he again postulates theological equivalences from Muslim and Hindu sources alongside psychological terms:

Possible beings all are from that attribute, for they come into existence from it and they are annihilated [*fani*] in it, and that everlasting eternal essence [*dhat-i baqi-i la yuzal*] is the absolute unity; it has no limit, end, beginning, or term. It is undoubted and without peer. This world fits into the attribute of the essence of God—glory be to Him [*dhat-i haqq subhanahu*], which in the Indian language they call *paramatman*. So that in the human heart the desire that comes from the heart, and again is lost in the heart, which in the Indian language they call purpose [H. *sankalp*] and indecision [H. *vikalp*], even so this varied world that appears so wide comes into manifestation from the attribute of the absolute essence, and it vanishes into it. (7–8)

The main goal of Fayzi’s exposition is to demonstrate the illumination of the soul through the meditative techniques just outlined. In a very Neoplatonic mode, he contrasts the degrees of light to such an extent that the lower realms of existence appear to be darkness in relation to the higher sources of light.

This light of the soul, before that illuminated one, is darkness, but since the darkness of that illumined one is subtler, it is a life full of bliss, and the heart became the darkness of that life full of bliss. Although before this life full of bliss it resembles darkness, yet the flash of that light is full of manifestation, which is the locus of the manifestation of the whole world. That is, the spark of the attribute came to be in the absolute essence, which they call soul, and in the soul the spark of the heart came to be, and in the heart

the spark of the body came to be. And this world, which is the appearance of body and form, is dark before the flash of the manifestation of the heart, and the heart is the darkness of the light of the soul. The soul, with the existence of the display [*tajalli*] that accompanies it, before the beloved, resembles darkness. To such an extent it is clear and obvious that darkness, before the light, has no existence at all, just as the darkness of the world has no existence in the flash of the heart. In the same way, the heart and the soul, and the soul in the beloved, have no existence or being. That is that same single pure, eternal essence, which comprehends all. (8)

While Fayzi’s focus remains the experience of illumination, he concludes his survey of this process with an offhand summary of spiritual practice under the term “asceticism” (*riyadat*), the standard Persian-Arabic equivalent for “yoga.” All this is enhanced by standard theological language that would be acceptable within any Islamic context. “Therefore, if the person effaces himself, by the practice of the aforementioned asceticism, in the transcendent essence of God, who is ever eternal, he will hasten from annihilation to eternity, passing beyond humanity, and is honored with divinity, by His generosity and grace” (8). This concludes Fayzi’s chapter on Krishna and yoga.

How may we understand Fayzi’s method of interpreting his Indian sources in this text? It would be an exaggeration to say that Fayzi here has translated a particular Sanskrit text, nor does he pretend to do so. The amount of data that are clearly Indic is relatively sparse—perhaps a dozen Hindi terms or phrases are introduced, generally with translations that qualify the subject in terms familiar to the vocabularies of Islamic theology, Sufism, and Illuminationist philosophy. Fayzi’s enthusiasm for Krishna is certainly intense, and he is equally fascinated with the powerful effects of breath control and the techniques of meditation. But the bulk of this treatise is so thoroughly defined by the terms of Sufism and Illuminationism that it would be easy to quote whole paragraphs without suspecting the presence of any distinctively Indian topics or themes. The closing lines in particular display a typical Illuminationist argument, rigorously expressed in terms of emanation and the metaphysics of light, but infused with the flavor

of Islamic devotion conveyed by pious formulas in Arabic.

These critical observations would doubtless leave Fayzi, if one may pardon the expression, unfazed. He has ingeniously announced the legitimacy of both Indian thought and its Illuminationist interpretation by revealing that Plato was a student of the sages of India. Nevertheless, the ecumenic strategy of this cosmopolitan intellectual succeeded on its own terms precisely to the degree that it subordinated Indian themes to his own enlightened Persianate tradition. S