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Strategy and imagination in a Mughal Sufi story of creation

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This article examines a seventeenth-century text that attempts to reconcile Hindu and Muslim accounts of human genesis and cosmogony. The text, Mir’at al-Makhluqat (‘Mirror of Creation’), written by a noted Mughal Sufi author Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti, purportedly a translation of a Sanskrit text, adopts rhetorical strategies and mythological elements of the Purāṇa tradition in order to argue that evidence of the Muslim prophets was available in ancient Hindu scriptures. Chishti thus accepts the reality of ancient Hindu gods and sages and notes the truth in their message. In doing so Chishti adopts elements of an older argument within the Islamic tradition that posits thousands of cycles of creation and multiple instances of Adam, the father of humans. He argues however that the Hindu gods and sages belonged to a different order of creation and time, and were not in fact human. The text bears some generic resemblance to Bhavishtyottarapurāṇa materials. Chishti combines aspects of polemics with a deft use of politics. He addresses, on the one hand, Hindu intellectuals who claimed the prestige of an older religion, while he also engages, on the other hand, with Muslim theologians and Sufis like the Naqshbandi Mujaddidis who for their part refrained from engaging with Hindu traditions at all.

Keywords: Cosmogony, time, translations, Gods, prophets, Sufis, Hindu–Muslim relations, Mughal

Introduction

A significant feature of Mughal Indian culture was the interest of its rulers in India’s Hindu religious traditions and its ‘Hindu past’. They commissioned translations

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into Persian of several major Hindu texts, including the *Mahābhārata*. With the appearance of these translations, Muslim scholars and divines were given access to pasts and legends that would have stretched their imagination. Muslims of the time traced the origins of this world, for instance, to the birth of Adam, who in their estimate lived around 7,000 years earlier, while they now learned that in the Hindu tradition, the world and its inhabitants had existed for hundreds of thousands of years. Many of them must have dismissed these new discoveries as mere myth, but many others struggled to make sense of them, faced as they were with the need to develop effective strategies for survival in a heterogeneous religious environment. Shaikh Abu’l Fazl’s (d. 1602) attempt to provide an account of Hindu cosmogony, and later in the seventeenth century Prince Dara Shukoh’s (d. 1659) attempt to project the similarities between Islam and Hindu religious traditions, were manifestations of such a struggle. In the following pages, I discuss a similar venture, in this instance an account of human genesis, as a story told by an eminent seventeenth-century Mughal Sufi, Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti (d. 1683).

Stories and anecdotes had long been integral to Sufi discourses. A large number of *malfūz* texts were comprised mostly of anecdotes, while even in others, where the discussion was predominantly doctrinal, the exposition was interspersed with stories. Nizam al-Din Auliya reports in the *Fawā’id al-Fu’ād*, related stories from Baghdad, Bukhara and other cities of the Islamic East in almost every *mālij* with his disciples and devotees. We have in some Sufi texts, such as in Khwaja Nasir ‘Ali ‘Andalib’s *Nāla-i ‘Andalib*, compiled in eighteenth-century Delhi, the delineation of the entire tarīqa code cloaked in tales.

The story that I am concerned with here, found in Chishti’s treatise, *Mīrāt

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1 It was notably described by Abu’l Fazl as ‘the most honoured, most sacred and most comprehensive book’ of the Hindus. See Shaikh Abu’l Fazl, *Ā’in-i Akbarī*, pp. 18–19. Also see *Mahābhārata*, Persian translation by Mir Ghiyas al-Din ‘Ali Qazwini.  

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al-Makhluqat, has no roots in the Islamic world. It comes almost exclusively from the world of the Hindus, evoking a time when Islam had yet to appear on the world stage.

I first read about the Mir’ä’at al-Makhluqat in S.A.A. Rizvi’s History of Sufism in India. Rizvi noted that he employed Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s writings, including Mir’ä’at al-Makhluqat, as a major source for his history, and he was perhaps the first modern historian to do so. For instance, K.A. Nizami, another noted historian of Sufism in India, who wrote extensively both in English and Urdu, nowhere mentions this text. Though Bruce Lawrence and Carl Ernst used and discussed another very important work by Chishti, namely the Mir’ät al-Asrär, they did not refer to the Mir’ät al-Makhluqat. On the other hand, the text has not been ignored altogether, as a comprehensive study of it is expected to be available soon. The treatment of it by Rizvi was however somewhat problematic. Identifying it with the text entitled Yoga-Vashista, Rizvi writes:

Shaikh ‘Abdu’r-Rahman Chishti, a descendant of Shaikh Ahmed ‘Abdu’l-Haqq of Rudauli, who succeeded to the leadership of the Chishti order in 1032/1622 was an interesting personality. A scholar of Sanskrit, he gave new explanations to the Bhagavad-Gita in the light of Islam, most notably in his work, the Mir’ätu’l Makhluqat, which associated the Hindu cosmogony of Yoga–Vashisht philosophy with Muslim Beliefs.

Nowhere in the text, however, as we will see below, is there any reference to the Yoga–Vashista, even though the narrator in the text is none other than Vashista Muni himself. This confusion may have further arisen because Chishti identifies the source of his story as ‘Malfüź-i Bashist’ (The Utterances of Bashist). This could well be mistaken for a translation of Yoga–Vashista, particularly in light of the fact that a pair of actual Persian translations of the Yoga–Vashista were also titled

5 The text, still unpublished, is one of five major works by ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti. Several manuscripts are available in India and abroad. I have read and collated three of them: (a) Aligarh ms. (Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Habibganj Collection, Farsiya Tasawwuf, 21/343); (b) Chishti Khanqah, Sarkhej, Ahmadabad ms. (microfilm, Noor Microfilms Centre, Iran Cultural House, Embassy of Iran, New Delhi); and (c) British Library, London ms. (India Office Library Or. 1883). All references here (unless specifically cited) are from the British Library ms., which is bound and paginated continuously with several other manuscripts, including ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s rendering of the Gītā, titled Mir’ät al-Haqa’iq.

6 Ernst and Lawrence, Sufi Martyrs of Love.


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by their translators as *Fārmūda-i Bashist* (The Sayings of Bashist) or *Kalimāt-i-Bashist* (The Words of Bashist).⁹

The *Mirʾāt-al-Makhlūqāt*, which Chishti claims to be a Persian translation of a previous Sanskrit original by the sage Vashista, is centred on the figures of Mahadeva and Krishna. It effectively makes use of the concept of *yugas* in order to present a relativist argument that places the Prophets Adam and Muhammad (and latter’s grandson Husain) in a narrative connecting them with events from the time of the early Hindu tradition. It is currently unclear what was the Sanskrit work that Chishti used, or whether it even existed. It seems to bear some generic resemblance to *bhamishya purāṇa* materials. I shall show how the *Mirʾāt* and its author combined rhetorical and political strategies to provide a reconciliation between Hindu and Muslim traditions, without surrendering the key ideas that gave a superior position to the Muslim tradition. I will contrast this work with similar stories and narratives presented by Chishti and other Muslim scholars elsewhere.

The Story

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti begins his *Mirʾāt al-Makhlūqāt* with the claim that he had read several well-known Indian history books and scriptures, written in antiquity, in search of an account of Adam, the father of humankind (Abu al-Bashar). He initially failed in his search, but ‘after a great effort’, he then ‘discovered a book written by Bashist Muni in which the births of Adam and Muhammad along with their descendents were given in detail’. Chishti calls this text ‘*Malfūz-i Bashist*’,¹⁰ invoking the well-known Sufi genre of ‘table-talk’, even though, as we will see below, it is written in the *purāṇa* style, and is purportedly borrowed from the *Uttarākhaṇḍa*. He alleges that the leaders of the Hindu community because of their prejudices (*taʾassub*) had deliberately taken it out from their books and kept it secret (*makhfī midāshṭand*).¹¹ Chishti thus implied that they did so because it contained information in support of Islam and the beliefs of Muslims.


¹⁰ *Mirʾāt al-Makhlūqāt*, f. 238a. Sarkhej Ahmadabad ms. (p. 1) has Malfūz, only, Aligarh ms. (f.1a) calls it *Kitāb-i Bashist*.

¹¹ ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti, *Mirʾāt al-Makhlūqāt*, f. 239a. It is difficult to say what exactly this treatise was. Chishti generally mentions unknown books as sources for his writings elsewhere too. See his *Mirʾāt-i Madārī*, British Museum Manuscript, f. 2b, where he mentions *Īmān-i Mahmūdī*, a biographical account of Shah Madar by one Qazi Kanturi as his source. See also Shahid Amin’s writings for the *Mirʾāt-i Masʿūdī*. Chishti’s story in *Mirʾāt al-Makhlūqāt* seems to have been drawn on several *purāṇas* that he may have read or the *kathās* based on *purāṇas* that he may have heard.

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His tone is polemical, but interestingly, in the succeeding passages, he also invokes a close relationship between the traditions of the two communities. He writes:

Bashist was an accomplished member of the community of the jinns and had a position of muni. Muni in their terminology is used for prophet. Bashist communicated the knowledge to that community, having received it from Mahadeva.

Mahadeva was Abu al-Jinn [Father of the jinns] and he was the [principal] prophet (rasūl-i mursal) of the jinns. Tabari and other historians agree to the fact that there were prophets amongst the jinns for their guidance and education.12 The Qur’an says ‘and the jinns, we had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind’13 (…). The author of Rauzat al-Safā’ reports from Ibn ‘Abbas [a companion and cousin of the Prophet] that the name of Abu al-Jinn was Soma with the title of Jann and that in the Book of Adam it is written that Jann’s name was Tarnus (...) In sum the author Tabari and Rauzat al-Safā’14 have mentioned the four ages (zamāna) as four cycles (daura) of the stars (sawābīt).15

12 Tabari (d. 922) mentions the jinn in his tārīkh in the context of his discussion of the angels, Ibliṣ’s position in their midst, and also where he (Tabari) discusses the creation of Adam. Cf. Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, Tārīkh al-Rasūl  wa al-Mulūk, ed., Muhammad Abu al-Fazl Ibrahim, Vol. 1, pp. 81–90. In his tafsīr (commentary) however, interpreting the verses, ‘O you assembly of jinns and humans! Did you not receive messengers from among you, who told you of My signs, and warned you about the meeting of this day?’ (Qur’an, 6:130), he mentions several hadīṣ and early Muslim scholars’ views to show if there were prophets from among the jinns themselves, cf. Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wil-i Āy al-Qur’ān, ed. ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Turkī, Vol. 9, pp. 559–62. See also Vol. 14 for his comments on the verse, ‘I did not create the jinns and the humans except to worship Me alone’ (Qur’an, 51:56). It is significant that in some tafsīrs written in India in the later Mughal period, Hindu deities are identified as some such jinn prophets. Qazi Sana-Allah (d. 1810), Tafsīr-i Mazhari, Urdu trans. ‘Abd al-Dayyim al-Jalāli, Vol. 4, pp. 217–18. For Qazi Sana-Allah (Qadi Thana’-Allah Panipathi) see Rizvi, Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad, pp. 558–73.

13 ‘wǝl jānna khalqa-na-hu min qabli min nār is-sumān’. This verse follows the verse, ‘We created man from sounding clay, from mud molded into shape’. Qur’an, 15:26 and 15:27.

14 Here the text which has signs of deletion following the word ‘Tabari’ and ‘‘awurda (has mentioned) has to be read with some care. Since earlier Chishti mentions Tabari and Rauzat al-Safā’, when he sums up, the scribe first wrote both names, and then deleted Tabari. He deletes the verb ‘‘awurda’ too, which is an obvious error, for the verb for this sentence ‘qarār dāda and’ comes later. We know that the discussion of time (zamān) in Tabari’s Tārīkh is totally different. Cf. Tārīkh al-Rasūl  wa al-Mulūk, Vol. 1, pp. 9–80. But Rauzat al-Safā’ does mention cycles (dauras) of time, and also cycles of ‘recompense’, an echo of which we will notice below in Chishti’s description in the jinns’ time of a sequence—from their glory to their dishonour and decline. Cf. Mir Muhammad bin Shayyid Burhan al-Din Khwawandshah aliu Mir Khwand (d. 1498), Tārīkh-i Rauzat al-Safā’, with an introduction by ‘Abbas Parwiz, Vol. 1, pp. 20–21, English translation by E. Rehatsek and ed., F.F. Arbuthnot, Vol. I, pp. 36–38.

15 Mir‘at al-Makhlaqāt, f. 239b; for cycles of time, Rauzat al-Safā’, pp. 36–38. Mahadeva in the Hindu tradition is the god Shiva and Bashist (Vasistha) is the noted sage (rishi) whose speech comprises the well known text, Yogavasistha. cf. Vettam Mani, Purānic Encyclopaedia, pp. 723–31, 834–37.
Chishti then describes the four eras (or yugas) according to the Hindu calculation of time; he writes:

The first of the four ages was Satjug, comprising over seventeen lakhs twenty eight thousand years (1,728,000), the second was Tretā, comprising over twelve lakh ninety six thousand years (1,296,000), the third is known as Dwāpar which comprised over eight lakhs sixty four thousand years (864,000), and the fourth is Kaljug, comprising over four lakhs and thirty two thousand years (432,000). Today, which is the one thousand forty-first year (1141 AH) from the hijrat of our Prophet, there have passed four thousand seven hundred and thirty years (4731) from the Kaljug (...). In two of these four ages, the jinns reigned supreme in the inhabited portion of the earth (rubʿ-i maskān). They had a law (shariʿat), given by God, and acted according to it. During the third era most of them became too involved in this world (ghalba-i kasrat-i dunyā), and began to turn their faces from and revolted against the Divine Commands. [Subsequently] God commanded the angels to chastise them until they were annihilated.16

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti seems to be comfortable with this calculation of time, for in some earlier Islamic literature too the time before Adam was divided into four ages even though the duration of each of the four ages was much less than a Hindu yuga.17 Further, in the Sufi tradition, as we will see below, the world had existed much before the traditional figure of Adam. Chishti thus begins with a language of universalism, a plea for the possibility of some kind of intellectual exchange with Hinduism. However, he does continue to maintain important differences. Hindu gods, according to him, lived before Adam. Rama, Krishna and Arjuna had no connection with Adam. He writes that it is incorrect to think,

...as some people do, that they were the descendents of Abū al-Bashr (Adam). Ramchand lived during Treta and Bashist has written that he was a descendent of Brahma, who lived in Satjug. Mahadeva also lived in Satjug and both these two persons were created by absolute God, without mother and father. Brahma was created out of light (nūr) and fire (nār) and Mahadeva from fire and air (bāđ), while Adam was created towards the end of Dwapar age. Although Kishan and Arjun were contemporaries of the descendents of Adam, Biyas [Vyas] has traced their genealogy to Raja Jada. Raja Jada also lived in Tratya age and because of this connection Kishan is known as Jada bansi, that is, from the

16 Miʿrāṭ al-Mahdīyāt, f. 240a.
17 cf. Rauḥat al-Safāʾ, pp. 20–21. According to Ibn ʿArabi, the jinns had lived and been in control of this world for sixty thousand years before the creation of the humankind. There were twelve principal groups of them and they, also, fought among themselves. Cf. Muhīy al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabi, Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya, Vol. 2, ed. Othman Yahya, revised by Ibrahim Madkour, pp. 276–86.

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family \((nasl)\) of Raja Jada. In fact, until the time of Kishan and Arjun, Adam’s descendants had not come to the country of Hind and there the jinns and ‘unsurūr, i.e. non-\(nūr\), angels\(^{18}\) were still in command. Biyas writes that the coming of Kishan was for the annihilation of Kans and for the killing of the entire community of the jinns in the battle of Mahabharat. The purpose was to vacate Hind so that Adam’s descendants would take it over. Thus the time of the jinns ended.\(^{19}\)

Having said this, Chishti hastens to add that in the exterminated past too, the world was graced with the Divine Truth, brought from Heaven by the Hindu gods and sages, and this is what he projects to be a true Sufi’s religion \((mashrab):\)

Mahadeva jinn was made of fire but in his own community he was matchless, both in physical and spiritual perfection. He would come out with the message of oneness of God \((tauhid)\) and would divulge the divine secrets. The Qur’anic verse, ‘I did not create the jinns and the humans except to worship Me alone’,\(^{20}\) is a proof of the (divine) gnosis of the jinns. It is written in the \(Tafsīr-i Zāhidī\) that before the coming of our Prophet, the Devs and the jinns would rise high to the sky, and listen to the conversation of the angels. After the advent of the Prophet, however, their way to the sky has been closed (\(...\)). In believing this there is no harm. The religion of the Sufis is that we should appropriate the good thing and good word \((sukhan-i nīk)\) from each community. This is the message in the \(haddīs\) of the Prophet, ‘take what is good and pure, reject what is dirty and impure’.\(^{21}\)

Thereafter ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti returns to the story with some details that necessitated the creation of Adam and the laying of the foundation of ‘Islamic

\(^{18}\) Earlier in the introductory note in the \(Mir‘āt\), ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti mentions two categories of angels \((malā‘īk)\), one \(nūrānī\), that is, made of light, another ‘unsurūr, made of elements, and he says that these angels are the same as those identified as \(nārī\), that is, made of fire. \(Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt,\) f. 238b.

\(^{19}\) \(Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt,\) f. 240b. For Kans (Kamsa) the notorious demon King of Mathura, who was killed by Krishna, and Kishan (Krishna) and Ram (Rama), the Hindu gods, see Vettam Mani, \Panini Encyclopaedia,\) pp. 382–83, 420–29, 631–40.

\(^{20}\) ‘\(mā khalqū l jinnā wa’l insā illā līya’ budān’\) Qur’an, 51:56.


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time’ at the beginning of Kaljug. For the principal part of his story, as we will see, Chishti, or the person who may have written the original Sanskrit, adopts the Purāṇa and Kathāsaritasāgara style, apparently to make it sound like a genuine tale told by Mahadeva in response to his wife Parvati’s queries (we may also note here that the Kathāsaritasāgara and some Purāṇas were available in Persian in Mughal India at this time). 22

Since during the Satjug time (zamān-i satjug), that is the first age, the ‘unsurī’ angels and the jinns led their lives in comfort and luxury, without any problems, they grew haughty. During the entire period of Treta, the second age, they did things contrary to the divine commands. At that time, Mahadeva told them that if you wish for your welfare, you should not give up the path of the divine law (Sharī‘a). They did not listen to his advice out of their arrogance. They were too attached to the world [of their own]. Mahadeva felt ashamed [at his advice being turned down by his own community]. He told these rebels ‘beware, God willing, during the Dwapar time, God will create a person who will not leave a trace of you in the inhabited part of the earth.’ Having said this, he set out for Kailash. 23

Mahadeva’s wife, Parvati, heard all this in astonishment. She also followed her husband. One day when Mahadeva was well settled in his appointed place in Kailash mountain and was resting, Parvati considered it a good opportunity to ask a question. She asked: ‘Since the day when you said that in the Dwapar age God will create a person who would annihilate the entire community of the devatās (gods) and daīts (daityas, demons), and so on and will take over the inhabited part of the earth, I have continued to be amazed. Now do please tell me the nature of that person’. Since Mahadeva had immense love for his wife, he started telling the true story (bayān-i wāqi’).


23 The mount Mahameru with the golden coloured peak of Himavan (Himalaya), the seat of Shiva, according to the Purāṇas. See Purānic Encyclopaedia, pp. 364–65, 462–63.


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Here ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti breaks his narrative, inserting a parenthesis to
clarify how this Mahadeva–Parvati conversation came down to this world through
Vashista Muni and why he translated it from Sanskrit, ‘the language of God’, into
Persian. He writes that at the time when Mahadeva started telling the story,

Bashist Muni, busy with prayers at the base of the Kailash mountain, over-
heard it. Since he had immense devotion to Mahadeva, he wrote (dar qalam
āvurū) all the details. Bashist Sut and Saunak, who were great scholars in
Namikhar, report these details (dar qaum-i khwud mujtahid-i kāmil būdand
wa ‘ābid wa zāhid, ānhā az Bashist Mun naql mikunand), the ashloks
which are translated here. Initially, I had intended to communicate and copy
these ashloks verbatim but since not everybody can understand them, I have
given here only one of the [original] ashloks as evidence. The rest are in trans-
lation so that everybody understands them without any difficulty (bītakalluf).

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti then picks up the thread to continue with what
Mahadeva, according to him, said in response to Parvati’s question:

O Parvati, he will have a long life and will be the best of all creatures. His eyes
will be bulging like lotus (nilāfār) flowers; his face will be illumined like
thousands of full moons. O Parvati, when Brahma would manifest that world-
adoring and matchless person in the being of Adam, the people would be help-
less all around and will fall in prostration before him. It is about this situation
that Shaikh Farid al-Din ‘Attar [d. ca 1230 ] writes:

Gar nabāde zāt-i haq andar wujūd.
Āb wa gī rā kai malak karde sujūd.

25 Sut (Suta) and Saunaka: Suta was the disciple of Vyasa, who learnt from him the Purāṇas and
Mahābhārata and recounted them to Saunaka and the other rishis assembled at Naimisaranya (Nimāsār
in modern district of Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh). Saunaka was the one who organised the assembly.
Purānic Encyclopaedia, pp. 517, 774; see also Ludo Rocher, The Purāṇas, pp. 53–59, 161. Abu’l
Fazl writes Nimsar as Nimakhār, which he describes a ‘shrine of great resort’, with numerous temples
and a tank called Brahmapuratkund and also the springhead of a stream about which the Brahmins
say that ‘its sand shapes itself into the form of Mahadeo which quickly disappears again and of
whatever is thrown in, as rice and the like, no trace remains’. Ā’in-i Akbarī, ed. Syed Ahmad Khan,

26 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 240b. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti cites here a shloka: ‘ado manya pra’ıt
bodha ait maheshā nilakanthi hast maha kotaha tarkand hadiya’, which appears to contain some
Sanskrit words but is totally unintelligible. I approached several Sanskrit specialists to read
and make sense of this shloka, but to no avail. The shloka may have been distorted because of some
Persian copyists’ ignorance of the language, as ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti himself does seem to know Sanskrit,
and we know that he translated the Gītā as Mir’āt al-Haqā’iq. Cf. Roderic Vassie, ‘Persian
Interpretations of the Bhagavadgītā in the Mughal Period, with Special Reference to the Version of
Abd al-Rahman Chishti’. We will see below his unusual familiarity with Sanskrit philosophical texts.

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(If God Himself were not manifest in his person, how would then angels have prostrated before a person made of mud and water). 27

O Parvati, at that time God will command all the creatures to prostrate before Adam, all devatās, rishīs, daits, rākshas, et cetera, will then fall in prostration. God has said, ‘and when we said to the angels, fall prostrate before Adam, they fell prostrate, except Iblis; he refused, and was arrogant and a disbeliever’. 28

O Parvati, when all the creatures would have fallen in prostration, a devatā named Hanwant, that is, ‘Azazil will refuse to prostrate, and out of jealousy he will utter words in contempt, and say that this is the worst creature, created out of dirty earth, while my creation is from a delicate fire’. He will then address the other devatās and say: ‘O dear ones, please do justice, how can I prostrate before him?’ The Word of God, ‘he [Iblis] said, “I am better than he; You created me from fire, and You created him from clay”,’ 29 carries the same sense.

O Parvati, Hanwant devata would turn disobedient knowingly because all devatas would see that God made Adam with His own hands and that He had instilled His own light into him. Brahma observed this and therefore the devatās also prostrated before him. Hanwant humiliated himself because of his arrogance and ignorance. He will be neither in the heaven nor in any other place where Brahma will live, nor in my place, nor in the place of any other devatās or gandharb [heavenly being]. He will be nowhere near any rishi nor the rajas, nor even in the company of the jogis. No one will give him a place and he will become a vagabond (sargardān), roaming between the earth and the sky.

O Parvati, arrogance is the worst vice, a real ‘ārif [man of gnosis] is the one who regards God as present and watchful everywhere and remains humble and obedient. Since he looked at Adam with contempt, he was thrown into Hell.

O Parvati, God has given Adam the kingdom of the seven climes (bādshāhī-ye haft iqfīm), endowing him with full strength, bravery and all kinds of sciences of the people of ancient times. God says, ‘and He taught Adam all the names’. 30 O Parvati all beings created of fire will fear Adam, he will dominate

27 There are several verses by Farid al-Din ‘Attar bearing strong affinities to this verse, besides being in the same metre. Cf. Musībat-nāma, pp. 58, 242; ‘Ushīr-nāma, pp. 30, 302–03, under hikāyat-i ādam. In the Asrūr-nāma ‘Attar gives the same verse in a different order: dar ādam būd nāri az wujūdash/wagarna kai malak karde sujūdash (there existed a light in the existence of Adam/otherwise how could the angels have prostrated before him), p. 47. Interestingly, another poet, Amir Husaini Haravi, cites the same verse with a difference in the second part of the first line of the verse. Instead of ‘Attar’s ‘zār-i haq andar wujūd’, Amir Hasan writes ‘partav-i haq dar wujūd’, in Masnavi-hā-i irfānī, p. 44.

28 ‘wa iz qulā līl malā ‘ikati usjudū fasajadū illā iblis ‘aba wa istakbara wa kāna min al-kāfirīn’, Qur’an, 2:34.

29 ‘anā khairun minhu khalaqtānī min nārin wa khalaqtahu min tin’, Qur’an, 38:76.


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over all others, will make the residence of his descendants the entire earth and thus bring the world under his control.\footnote{Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 242.}

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti then shows how with the birth of Adam began the history of the human beings who inhabit the world of the time that he and the others, both the Muslims and the Hindus, lived in. Parvati then asked Mahadeva how a woman could be created for him, made of clay and possessing such beauty, bravery and gnosis? Mahadeva is said to have replied,

O Parvati, his woman will be created out of his left side, she will be like the full moon, her body will be dazzling like pure gold, she will be born as a sixteen-year-old girl. And from that very moment, the life will be joyous (ba ‘aish). She will be the most perfectly beautiful woman (...). The people having seen his world adoring beauty would say that she is Parvati and that he is Mahadeva, while as a matter of fact you and I will be sitting over the mountain of Kailash, having a joyous life there.

Mahadeva then continues in the same vein:

O Parvati, the first son that will be born of them will be called Badila, he will be very strong and will perform several miracles. Then there will be a daughter who will be married to him. Badila then, accompanied by his wife, will leave Adam to settle [in other parts of] the earth. Within a little time there will be many sons and daughters, steadily taking control of the world. A second son of Adam will be named Hansila, he will be so brave and strong that all the jinns and daits will fall obedient to him. Whoever would refuse to obey him will be killed (halāk). And then there will be another daughter who will be handed over in marriage to Hansila. The third son of Adam will be named as Dahanki and will be fearless, will not accept Brahma and Bishan and will contemptuously annul all the rituals and prayers of their faith. Wherever their places of worship will be, he will urinate over them. And thus, our faith will encounter evils. He will do everything, religious or worldly, opposed to our devatas. Adam’s fourth son will be named Badhal. Five īqlīms (climes, countries) will be under his control, some of these he will forcefully wrest from the devatās and daits. He will also collect kharāj (tributes, revenues) from them forcibly. He will do the thing which should never have taken place, all rulers will be obedient to him and he will bring in a new sharī’at. O Parvati, in the same manner, each son of Adam will be married to the daughter who will follow. In all, there will be twenty-one sons and twenty-one daughters, and of them two sons will clash with each other over one daughter as a result of which one of the sons will be killed. The survivor, taking that girl with him,
will set out for the country of Koshal where he will grow in power and strength, accumulate piles of gold and silver, extracting them from the mines as well as the mountains and will distribute them to the people. Many thus will go to his country and according to their own desire will get the gold and silver. He will be a great king and will repent for the sin he had committed, and will do excessive prayers, dressed all the time in blue. O Parvati, from the sons of Adam there will be countless people born. From one son there will be one thousand, from one thousand there will be one lakh, and from the one lakh there will be one crore, and so on. I cannot in fact give you the exact figure of the descendants of Adam.32

The names of Adam’s sons and daughters are strange here and, even though some of the details remind us of the Biblico-Islamic story of the clash between Habil and Qabil (or Abel and Cain), the survivor takes the girl with him to Koshal, a country with an evidently Indian name. An Islamic story thus acquires an Indic colour. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s claim apart, his text is much more than a mere translation of Vashista’s story. While he tries to register the voices of his dramatis personae in the way that a paurāṇika would have done, he keeps his own presence noticed all through as the central narrator. As a matter of fact, large portion of the details here are from familiar Islamic literature. This becomes clearer as we move to the remaining parts of the story. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti supplies first the deep prehistory and then, as an astute narrator, brings it up to recognizable contemporary times. Here he narrates the significance of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, his mission, the Qur’an and Islam for the people in the Kali age:

[Mahadeva said: After] six thousand years, (when ‘Adam’s descendants will have adopted strange ways of living and the earth will be fed up with their sinfulness’) the Almighty (God) will create a wonderful person from among the children of Adam in the country of Mundali, which is located between the seas, a land which will be appropriate for [God] Bishan. Upon this Parvati asked Mahadeva: ‘Tell me the truth, whether the person who will be created by God in such a blessed place, will be born in the house of a devatā or a rishi?’. In response Mahadeva said, ‘O Parvati, he will be from the loin of Kant Bunjh, who will be in wisdom and gnosia like an ocean so that from him [whatever] will emerge [will be] a pearl. And the name of his wife will be ‘Sak Rekha’ [Sagarika]. He will have read three Beds, Siyām Bed, Rig Bed, and Jajar Bed, and the fourth Bed, Atharban Bed he would leave after having read up to the letters, “alif, lām” alone.33

32 Mir’at al-Makhlaqāt, f. 243.
33 A version of this part is also available on a website, www.ezsoftech/akram/prophetprophecies.asp, which shows the nineteenth century milieu of religious disputations in India. It cites and translates from the introduction (muqaddima) of a commentary on Qur’an titled Anwar al-Qur’an by one

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Clearly this part has special value for ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti. He thus buttresses it with a statement by the sage Vyasa,\textsuperscript{34} the master narrator of \textit{Mahābhārata} and the \textit{Purānas} as well as with Vashista Muni’s emphasis on the significance of his telling, when replying to a question and doubts expressed by his pupils, Sut and Saunak, regarding the truth of the story. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti writes:

Sut and Saunak asked Bashist that as he [Kant Bunjh] was to be like the ocean in gnosis, why then would he refuse to go ahead in the fourth \textit{Bed} beyond alif lām. Bashist replied: ‘Brahma created the four \textit{Beds} [for the use in the four different ages], which were all taught to some of the ‘unsuri devatās who were really able and were advised to work according to the \textit{Siyam} in Satjug, \textit{Rīg} in Tratya, and \textit{Jajar} in Dwapar. The Almighty would then create people from the globe (\textit{kura}) of the earth who would practice according to the \textit{Athurban Bed}. There are four \textit{charms} (sections) in the \textit{Athurban Bed}. Three of these will be read by Adam and his other descendants. The fourth one, which will combine in itself the purpose and substance (\textit{maqsūd}) of all the \textit{Beds} will be practiced by none other but Mahamat. If anyone will read the fourth \textit{charm} without the permission of Mahamat he will not get any benefit. Kant Bunjh will not read this fourth \textit{charm} of \textit{Athurban Bed} so that it remains intact as if held in trust (\textit{amānāt}).’ Up to this point was the speech of Bashist.

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s language of universalism here assumes an added strength. The prophets before Adam, even though the Divine Truth was revealed to them, were still jinns, genealogically different from Adam and the other prophets of humankind. But the Books of both the worlds, as Vashista here affirms in ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s words, have the same lineage; they are what the Hindus of his time identified as the \textit{Vedas}. The first three of them were the guides for the jinns’ eras, whereas the last one expressed itself in the four major Divine Books, Zabur, Taurah, Injil and Qur’an for mankind at different stages of their history. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti inserts all this as a parenthesis. He then continues with the story of Muhammad, now endorsed by Vyasa too, attributing to the Prophet Muhammad nearly all the virtues and miraculous qualities that were then popular within Indian Sufi Islam. According to ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti, Mahadeva tells Parvati that Kant Bunj will have three sons and the name of the third son, who will survive, will be Mahamat, that is Muhammad, who would be endowed with excellent etiquette (\textit{auzcā’}), and would be already circumcised, would have

\footnotesize{Maulana Sayyid Rahat Husain Gopalpuri. Gopalpuri apparently read this part as drawn from ‘Baran Uttar khand” (Brahmottarakhand). He also gives the meanings of the words ‘Kant Bunjh’ and ‘Sank Rakhinya’ mentioned by Mahadeva as names of Muhammad’s father and mother, as ‘Abdullah’ and ‘Amina’, which were their actual names in Arabic.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Purānic Encyclopaedia}, pp. 885–88.}

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no hair anywhere on his body except on his head and beard, and that he would not worship the gods that the people of his tribe would worship.

Biyas has also written in his book, *Bhabikh (Bhavishya) Uttarpurān*, that in the future, that is Kaljug, Mahamat will be born, whom the Muslims will call Muhammad. He will always have the shade of a cloud over his head and he will not cast a shadow. On his body, no flies will ever sit. And for him the earth will get shrunk (āra tayy-i zamān khwāhad būd) and he will have enormous virility, he will struggle only for the dīn (faith, religion), will have no concern for dunyā (this world), and whatever he will gain he will spend in the name of God. He will eat little; the king of the time will be his enemy but he will be the friend of the people. The Almighty will send to him a Purān of thirty adhāyāy (divisions), that is the sipāras of the Qur’an will be revealed to him, and everyone acting according to this book will reach God. At that time there will be no path left to reach God except this.

And, Mahamat, Mahadeva reports, will not simply set aside

...all the prayers and sharīʿats of previous ages, he will impart teaching of his own sharīʿat to the people of his time. He will struggle to make the world like his own self and (...) in the manner that we write the sankh, that is an era, in our books, in the same way they will have their sanat (era) of Mahamat until the end of the Kaljug age in their books.35

Time, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti implies, will then be measured according to a new calendar, and nothing will be left outside of it.

The martyrdom of Husain, the Prophet’s grandson, forms the third important part of the story, wherein we also note a significant feature of Chishti Sufi ideology, namely the high stature of ‘Ali and his scion, which I have discussed elsewhere.36 The Prophet Muhammad, Chishti writes, reporting of course from Mahadeva, all mediated in turn through the words of Vashistha, will have a daughter, better than a thousand sons, very beautiful, peerless, and extremely devoted to the worship of God, never lying and free from all minor and major sins. She will be close to God through the intercession of her father. God then will bestow two auspicious sons to her. Both of them will be men of gnosis, brave, courageous, generous and matchless in all good works. God will not create any others as perfect, physically and spiritually. These very sons of her will be successors of the Prophet. Here too Chishti adds his own voice by citing a hadīs in the narrative,

35 *Miʿāt al-Makhlūqāt*, ff. 244a–b.

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giving the impression as if this too came from the mouth of Mahadeva. He then continues stating that the descendants of the Prophet’s grandsons will be many and through them Islam will grow day by day. The Prophet will love his grandsons. All of their deeds will be in keeping with the Divine Will. They will always endeavour to perform Divine Duty; they will attend to the poor people’s plight, and seek to ameliorate it. After the death of the Prophet, some unlawfully born miscreant (harāmzādās) will kill them unjustly and thus the entire earth will be rendered leaderless. Their killers will be renegades (malechh, murtadd), dishonoured and rejected in both faith (dīn) and worldly matters (dunya). In their hearts they would have little devotion to the Prophet, even if in appearance they will claim it. Gradually, many people will join them and will act in opposition to the illumined path that the Prophet and his descendants had shown. Clearly Chishti here states his own position about the martyrdom of Husain and his killers, that is the Umayyid Caliph Yazid, his commander Ibn Ziyad and their army, and is thus in a measure also in dialogue broadly polemically with his own community. The polemical overtones become louder as he nears the end of the story and asserts the triumph of his faith vis-à-vis the Hindus. He writes:

Towards the end of Kaljug, the strength of the miscreants will increase, with the entire world facing turbulence (fasaḍ). O Parvati, at that time God will send a perfect man (mard-i kāmil) to support the faith of Mahamat, he will bring the entire inhabited part of earth under his control, putting in shame the hypocrites (munāfiq). All will then be on the right path, the illumined path that Mahamat and his descendants would have bequeathed. The [true] faith will again be triumphant, from the east to the west, and no one will remain opposed to it. Nowhere will one see a Hindu or a hypocrite. Mahamat’s faith will triumph everywhere in perfect form in the last phase of the Kaljug. All people will act upon the shari‘at of Mahamat that the incomparable God (bīchūn) had laid down in Atharaban Bed, that is, the fourth book.

The situation, however, will not remain the same for long, Mahadeva adds. As the rule is that everything that rises up eventually declines, the power of that


38 Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 245.
39 Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 245b.

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perfect man after his death too will eventually get dismantled. The world will acquire a different colour with chaos and disturbance prevalent all around. People will start leading lives like animals; nobody will discriminate between mother and sister. Fearing lest it should be totally destroyed because of the excessive sin of the people, the earth itself will then appeal to God for deliverance. What then follows is a very significant part of the story. Mahadeva continues:

O Parvati, God will accept the earth’s prayer, and subsequently He will appear in Sambhal in the house of a Brahmin, in the form of the powerful (gahhār) Kalki. The sky and the earth will then be shaken, a forceful storm will blow, and the Day of Judgment (qiyyāmat) will descend upon the people of the earth. Everything will be annihilated, darkness will prevail over the world, and it will remain in the same state of ruination and desolation for some time. At that moment, God will recreate Adam, along with all his descendants. He will then address Mahamat’s daughter, asking her to appeal for justice on behalf of her sons. God will command: ‘Go there, to Heaven to meet your sons’. God will again command her to request anything she would want. Mahamat’s daughter will then raise her hand, saying: ‘O God, be kind and award deliverance to those who recited the word (kalima) of Mahamat’. In kindness God will then say ‘I have forgiven the community of Muslims’. Mahamat’s daughter will then lie in prostration together with her sons and then take the entire community of Muslims with her to Sarg, that is Bihisht. Their time (daura) will thus end; the Kaljug will be over’. These are the words (kalimāt) that Mahadeva communicated to Parvati. God knows best what is right.40

Here ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti appears to have literally borrowed part of a late medieval Vaishnava text, the Kalkī-purāṇa, a continuation of Bhāgavata-purāṇa which deals with future events, describing the deeds of Vishnu to be performed at the close of the Kali-yuga, when he will be born as Kalki, son of Visnuyasas and Sumati of Sambhala-nagarama. Chishti apparently also conflates the other parts of this text where it mentions Adharma’s creation, the degradation of people and Vishnu’s approach (along with the earth) to Brahma for redress.41 The coming of Kalki in ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s story, however, is not to free the earth from the influence of Kali and establish the varnāshrama-dharma, a perfect version of which to him was obviously in the teachings of Muhammad. What is notable that he, as he has done earlier, integrates into it his own Islamic voice, to maintain that

40 Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 246a.
41 Cf. R.C. Hazra, Studies in the Upapurāṇas, vol. I, Saura and Vaishnava Upapurāṇas, pp. 303–08. Hazra considers it a very late (but no later than the eighteenth century) Vaishnava work, as there is no reference in it to Shankaracharya’s achievements, while it is also not mentioned by any known Smrīti-writers. For a brief description of Kalki Avatara, see also Abu’l Fazl, Ā’in-i Akbarī, ed., Syed Ahmad Khan, p. 532; English trans., H.S. Jarrett, ed., Jadunath Sarkar. pp. 318–19.

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the human time that began with the birth of Adam is not cyclical; it is linear, which will terminate with qiyyāmat when everyone will get the results of her or his deeds. But another feature of this part of the story is also that while ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti disputes and refutes the Hindu notion of time, he also joins issue with his own community when he projects the killing of Husain as the gravest sin committed in Kaljug. Among the first things that God will do on the Day of Judgement is the award of justice to Fatima, who then is portrayed as a most compassionate intercessor for the Muslims. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti breaks the story here with a polemical discourse, saying: ‘In sum the speech (kalām) of Mahadeva clearly repudiates [the idea of] the transmigration of the human soul which implies continuity of time, whereas it terminates eventually’.42

The story is now about to end, but with a view to enhancing the prospects of its acceptability, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti makes Vashista reaffirm what Mahadeva has said. Here, he uses the popular Hindu belief about the sage, Vashistha, who is eternal. Just as he was present and overheard Mahadeva converse with Parvati and recorded their conversation, he lived millions of years later in ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s time too. In response to a query from Sut and Saunak, he asserts rather angrily and says it is not only that he recorded Mahadeva’s conversation with Parvati about the world of Adam, he was also a witness to the truth and actual occurrence of what he has narrated:

Sut and Saunak asked Bashist: ‘You knew what Mahdev said about the world of Adam; later his birth and the birth of his descendants also took place in your presence. Was all that happened later the same way as Mahadeva had forecast or was there any discrepancy?’ Bashist replied: ‘You and I have lived all through this world, and still you have not gained the full knowledge (‘irfān-i kāmil). They all were born in our presence (huqūr-i mā wa shumā). What difference (tafāwut) did you see that you dared ask this question and doubted the truth of what Mahadeva said?’43

And here too Chishti apparently adds his own Islamic voice. For he has Vashista add: ‘O my dear ones, what Mahadeva said was not from himself; he reported what was written there in the Surg, i.e. heavens (aflāk). Where can the discrepancy then be?’44 Vashista then elaborates his response to convince further Sut and Saunak of the truth of the story. He retells it in brief, and this time he adds how the fascinating character of Narad Muni also had a role in facilitating the world for Adam and his descendants. Vashista continues that after all the creatures at

42 Ṣirāt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 245a.
43 Ṣirāt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 246.
44 Ṣirāt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 246b. Surg, that is, svarga or the heavens (aflāk) here probably means Laub-i Mohfīz, which according to Muslim belief, are the preserved tables in Heaven on which the transactions of mankind have been written by God from the eternity.

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God’s command prostrated before Adam, He proclaimed that He had given the entire inhabited part of the earth to Adam, that the community of the jinns should all move to the forests, mountains, and the islands. Having heard this, some devatās left for Heaven, while Mahadeva, accompanied by Parvati, left for Kailash mountain ‘where they are still living luxuriously’. Most of the rishīs who were sensible, left the earth and set out for the mountains. But some rulers of the community and some other people did not vacate the earth at once. As the number of Adam’s descendants increased and as they pushed ahead, these rulers and people who were gradually dislodged from the earth, decided to resist their advance, and they also gained an upper hand in the scuffle that ensued. At that time, some of the descendants of Adam who were close to God complained to Him about the existing situation. God accepted their supplication and commanded Narad to go down to earth to tell the jinns that all the three Vedas which contained their sharī‘at had been annulled; their shlokas and prayers were no longer of any use. While in their sharī‘at the cow was worshipped, it was to be slaughtered and eaten in the new world. He also offered them a fresh compromise: besides moving to mountainous terrain, they also had the option of giving up the worldly life and going up to Heaven to live in the world of the spirits. Narad was instructed in particular to warn them of dire consequences in the case of their refusal to act upon the divine command. Narad initially was hesitant to descend to earth. He feared for his own purity as the country of the jinns had turned a ‘breeding ground of sins’. On an assurance of protection from God, however, he came down and communicated God’s message to the leaders of the jinns. For a period of twenty years, Narad stayed on earth, persuading them to follow the divine command. Thereafter, many devatās also set out for Kailash, met Mahadeva there and reported to him about Narad’s visit with God’s orders. On their asking where they should reside in the mountains, Mahadeva said: ‘I live in one branch (shakh) of Kailash, there are still two more branches vacant, and you should go and settle there’. They then retired to these branches and began to live there, ‘where from the power of God there is also available to them the elixir of life (āb-i hayāt).’ The story in Vashista’s words (sukhan-i Bashist) closes here followed by what Vyasa said in addition.45

Of the disastrous consequences that Narad warned the jinns of, the following is of special interest for us, as it has a bearing on a significant feature of ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s narrative. Narad said:

If you disobey the Divine Command out of your arrogance, you will be ruined. It is to your benefit that you leave this land, otherwise God will create in your own community a person named Kishan who will be endowed with His attributes. He will annihilate you so completely that no trace of your existence will ever be found.46

45 Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 247.

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In Vashista’s story it was Mahadeva, Lord Shiva, who was shown as having predicted the birth of Adam, the beginning of human time and its triumph. Chishti now shows Lord Krishna too as the one who fights the demons in order to facilitate the settlement of Adam’s descendants in India. Mahadeva, Krishna, Adam, Muhammad and Husain, all fought against evil, and struggled to establish truth on earth, but they belonged to different sets of time. Among the legends and memories strong with both the Hindus and the Muslims around ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti, were the details of the battle of the Mahābhārata, the Pandavas, the Kauravas, Arjuna, Lord Krishna and also of the forces of the evil like Kansa and Jarasandha and their annihilation at Lord Krishna’s hands. Their stories, all from the Hindu past, must have remained alive with the new converts to Islam as well as they would have circulated among the Muslim ‘foreigners’ through the Persian translations of the Hindu texts or even through their retellings in vernacular. The battle of the Mahabharata and the rule of the descendants of the Pandavas in fact was now also integrated as part of the current period of human history. The question then would be whether the truth for which Lord Krishna and the Pandavas fought was part of human time that continued in the period when Adam was born, or whether it too belonged to the eras of the jinns, and whether Lord Krishna also foresaw and forecast the termination of his time as did Mahadeva and Narad. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti brings in these details as given by Vyasa, the principal reporter of the Mahābhārata. But Vashista and his disciples Sut and Saunak are first shown as advisors and helpers to the jinns in vacating the earth for Adam’s descendants. It is difficult to speculate if by invoking the authority of Vyasa here, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti once again hints at the Hindu pandits’ hiding of this critical portion of the text, an accusation with which he started his narrative. Indeed, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti writes that when the jinns heard the story from Vashista, they were astonished and shocked. They then all collected at Sut and Saunak’s residence in Nimkhār and requested their advice with a pledge to follow it considering their elevated stature, knowledge of the Vedas and Divine Will. Sut and Saunak suggested the same as Mahadeva had done. They also said, ‘as the Kaljugg will descend, we will also give up this transient life’. Many of the jinns then apparently followed their example. Some daits (daityas, demons) like Kans, Saspal (Sisupala), and Jarasandha, and others who were big kings, did not follow them out of their arrogance and haughtiness. Most of these tyrants lived in India (Hindustan), and for this reason Adam’s descendants, who were by then in control of several countries could not enter the land. Naraqd having observed this situation, returned to Heaven and reported it to God. Vashista also accompanied him. It was at that juncture that God created Krishna. Vyasa thereafter is mentioned as having summed up his account as follows:

47 Alam and Subrahmanyanam, Writing the Mughal World, pp. 396–428 for some seventeenth and eighteenth century works that include their histories.

48 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 248a.

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[Krishna] was born from the womb of Devaki, the sister of Kans Dait. Basdev, an 'unsurī devatā, was Kishan’s father. This Kans was a cruel king and lived in Mathura. He had a huge army and power, had subdued all the Rajas of Hind, and was a source of a variety of mischief and turbulence. The people, tired of his tyranny, approached the pious people of their own community. They consoled them and assured them that Kishan born from the womb of Devaki, would kill Kans. Some of the astrologers had also forewarned Kans of this. Kans thus would get every child born of Devaki killed, as this story is well-known, and he made big plans to destroy Kishan. God however kept Kishan safe and after some time he destroyed Kans and brought the country under his control. After that Jarasandh, the father-in-law of Kans, mobilized another army together with several other Rajas and invaded Mathura. Kishan defeated him too.\textsuperscript{49}

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti thus portrays Krishna as the destroyer of all the evil forces that were in power at the eve of the Kali yuga. Even after his retreat from Mathura to Dwarka, following his triumph over Kamsa and Jarasandha, the king of Magadha, he returned to combat Sisupala, the king of Chedi and commander-in-chief of Jarasandha’s armies, and other demon kings.\textsuperscript{50} He failed nowhere as ‘the all-knowing God, using His absolute power, manifested Himself in the guise (kiswat) of Kishan; no one therefore could overpower him’. ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti concludes the narrative part of Mir’āt al-Makhlilqāt with a description of the battle of the Mahābhārata, the return of the descendants of the Pandavas to rule and their contact with Adam’s descendants. This sounds like a kind of explanation of why even during the centuries after Adam the religion of the jinns continued in a certain form. He writes:

Thereafter took place the battle of Mahabharat, between the Kauravs and Pandavs. They [Kauravas] were a hundred brothers and there were several million people in their retinue. Kishan subdued them all in one swoop (\textit{ba yak qalam}). He then advised the Pandavs to perform \textit{jag-asmed} [Ashvamedha]. They together with their armies made a round of the whole earth. And wherever [the old] Rajas were left, they killed them. When no haughty person was left on this earth, Kishan wanted to depart and go in hiding. At that time he summoned Arjun, Udhav, and Ankod and told them that ‘since Kaljug has arrived, I will go into hiding, and you too taking all the Pandavs together, should move to the snow-clad mountains. Give up your transient existence as there is no time left anymore for you to live on this earth. He told Udhav to go

\textsuperscript{49} Mir’āt al-Makhlilqāt, f. 248a.
\textsuperscript{50} Mir’āt al-Makhlilqāt. For such figures as Jarasandha, Sisupala, Chanura (Chanura II) and Vajranabha, see \textit{Purānic Encyclopaedia}, pp. 177, 349–50, 719–20, 821.

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to Badri Kedar mountain and be engaged in worshipping God. Ankod was advised to go to Mansarvar and stay there. Kishan then went into hiding. He lived in this world for one hundred and eight years. After him the Pandavas climbed the snow-clad hills and sacrificed their lives. About one thousand years later, some of the Rajas from their (the Pandavas’) generation had stayed back on earth; and around that same time several of Adam’s descendants who had settled there, gained in strength. Their power grew day by day. Some descendants of the son who had killed his brother and had run away and become rulers in India, married the daughters of the jinns and built and settled in [the city of] Qanauj, named after their father, Qabil (Cain). Deprived of the book of Adam they embraced the religion of the jinns, and read the Beds. After some time, as the time of the advent of Mahamat drew closer and the succession of lineages of the jinns began to be discontinued, they were constrained to adopt the descendants of Adam as their sons and settled them in their place instead. They themselves disappeared and [then] the entire inhabited quarter of the world came under the control of Adam’s descendants. Whatever God desired became manifest. This is the meaning of what God said, ‘Allah does what He wants, and He commands what He intends.’

The Story Retold in the Mir’ât al-Asrâr

In his other better-known work entitled Mir’ât al-Asrâr, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti repeats a version of this narrative in the context of a discussion of Hindu cosmogony. But the retelling here reads like a more detached and ‘learned’ account, without the flow and story-like quality of the former. The Mir’ât al-Makhlûqât contains a number of different voices and the narrative sweeps along, whereas the Mir’ât al-Asrâr does not contain fewer ‘dialogic’ elements and reads like a more sober summary of knowledge about the other people. The narrative here runs as follows:

The Indian philosophers hold the view that the first creature that came to existence after the creation of the heavens and the elements was Brahma [the text has Brehâ throughout]. At the time when God Most High manifested the sphere of land on the sphere of water, the land appeared in the middle of the water like a lotus-flower, and some of the heavens and the elements brought forth from the land Brahma, who then became busy with praising God. Brahma’s natural life span (‘umr-i tab’î) is equal to hundred years of that world, and he is the

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51 ‘yaf’al-ullâhu mà yashâ-a’, and ‘wa yahkamu ma yurid’, Qur’an, 14:27 and 5:1. Mir’ât al-Makhlûqât, if. 249–250a. Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers, was one of the central protagonists in the battle of the Mahabharata; Udhav (Uddhava), a Yadava was an intimate friend of Krishna. Purânic Encyclopaedia, pp. 803–04.
cause behind the creation of all creatures. In his lifetime, the land is drowned in water several thousand times and the world becomes annihilated. By God’s command, earth appears again. All Indian philosophers agree on the point that the way the cycle of the days, weeks, months, and years goes on and one follows each other, the same way the four periods, which they call the four jug, follow each other in a continuous cycle, without interruption. The duration of each jug is 12,000 years of the year of that world; according to the year of this world, it is equal to 4,320,000 years. Consequently, the duration of the first period, which is called sat jug is 1,728,000 years of the year of this world. The life-span of the people of that period was 100,000 years. The duration of the second period, which is called tretā jug is 1,296,000 years, of the year of this world. The life-span of the people of that period was 10,000 years. The third period is called dwāpar jug; its duration is 864,000 years of the year of this world. The life span of the people of that period was 1000 years. The duration of the fourth period which is called kaljug is 432,000 years, of the year of this world. The life-span of the people of that period is 100 years. These four jug are called one chaukari or four periods (chahār zamāna) or four cycles (chahār daura). The duration of one day of Brahma is equal to thousand chaukari jug; Brahma’s nights likewise.

When Brahma’s day, the duration of which is one thousand chaukari jug, reaches its end, all land becomes drowned in water. This is called pralay, and Brahma becomes immersed in sleep in the World of Similitudes (‘ālam-i misāl). He stays in sleep for the same duration as the duration of his day. When his morning arrives, the water dries out, Brahma wakes up from his sleep and begins to create the creatures. In this manner when 360 days and nights pass, one year of his life span is completed; his life-span consists of one hundred such years. When he becomes hundred years old, he dies; after this, no trace remains of the world and whatever lies in it. This is called mahāpralay. Then God Most High, with His wisdom and power, creates another Brahma, and all creatures come into existence the way it had happened before. Their [the Indian philosophers’] belief is that in this way 1,000 Brahmas had been created. The life span of these Brahmas is 50 years and half a day. The Indian philosophers had written voluminous books about this matter, but only the authentic parts written in them have been summarized here.52

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti goes on to mention the ‘Hindu’ account of Adam without repeating the charge against the pandits that they had hidden it. He also mentions the text that contains the account and describes cyclical time, without any polemical note which—as we noticed above and will observe again below—he brings into the story in his Mir‘āt al-Makhluqāt:

52 Mir‘āt al-Asrār, British Library ms. Or. 216, f. 244a.

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Further, some philosophers of that community who are free from prejudice narrate without prejudice from their heavenly book Bed (Veda) that when 3000 years are left from the dwāpar jug, the Omnipotent, by infusing moonlight into the mixture of the elements, from the sphere of land creates a man called Dubjā [Dvija], i.e., Adam. He has a great knowledge of God (khudā-shinās), embodies all branches of knowledge (jāmi‘-i ‘ulūm), is beautiful, of graceful stature, intelligent (‘āqil), and protects his honour (ghayūr). His wife comes from one of the ribs on his left-hand side, and from her countless children will be born, and until the time of the kaljūg the whole earth will be gradually filled with them.

In every period, from amongst the children of Adam a few special servants will be honoured with the proximity of God (qurb-i ilāhī), will provide guidance to others, and, with the power given by that God, they will subject the species of jinns. Some of them will attain the rank of king (saltanat) or chief-tain (riyāsāt). Among them the best will be Mahāmat, that is Muhammad, who will be born in the period of kaljūg and will be close and beloved to God the Most High. He will reach the level of perfection. Gradually all creatures will follow him, to such a degree that even some angels and the majority from the species of the jinns will obey his commands. In the kaljūg his followers will acquire such dominance that they will demolish and obliterate the Indians’ places of worship and pilgrimage centres. The water of the river Ganges will also disappear and no Hindu will be seen from East to West. At last, that religion (dīn) will reach its perfection, and, in the last part of the kaljūg, the deeds of people will gradually become bad and human beings will live like animals. In that time no rain will fall from the sky, the vegetation will dry out and the land will become like a human finger. No water will remain in the springs and rivers and all living beings will perish. For some time the world will be dark and devoid of light until the end of the time of kaljūg. At that time a black cloud will appear with awe and gravity (mahābat wa wiqār) and will cause rain to fall, in the form of procreating matter (ba-sūrat-i āb-i manī), on the whole surface of the earth. From this the whole world will suddenly become green and fresh, and all living beings of the past will appear in their archetypical forms (misālī ajṣād). To each of them the Omnipotent will mete out punishment or reward (‘itāb wa khīṭāb), in accordance with their [past] deeds, and will give place to some of them in Paradise, to some others in Hell, and to some of them in the place in between (a‘rāf, a kind of purgatory). With this, the cycle of kaljūg ends and Brahma, on the command of God the Most High, begins to bring forth creatures the way he had done before.

Thus, in this way pralay, by which qiyāmat is meant, is of three kinds: the first is the major pralay (parlay-i kabīr), which is when Brahma dies; the second is the minor pralay (parlay-i saḡhīr), which is when Brahma’s cycle ends; the

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third is the micro-pralay (parlay-i asghar), which takes place at the end of each four jug cycle, as it has been described above.

In any case, much had been written on this subject, but the intellect (‘aql) falls short of comprehending it. These secrets will not be unveiled as long as the eyes of insight (dida-i basirat-i ‘arif) are not filled with Divine light, with the help of spiritual exercises and striving (safa-i riya‘at) and the Lord’s grace (faiz-i mawahibat-i Ilahi).\footnote{Mir‘at al-Asrār, British Library ms. Or. 216, ff. 244a–245b.}

The passage thus ends with a Sufi’s state of hairat (astonishment, awe) and his desire to acquire the ability to understand it with Divine help. While ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti thus does not entirely accept these Hindu accounts, his approach is not dismissive either. In the Mir‘at al-Asrār, we will see below, he also brings in a version of ‘pre-Adamite’ time in Sufi terms, invoking the evidence of the vision of the great Shaikh Ibn ‘Arabi (d.1240).

**The Reception of the Story**

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti was not the first South Asian Sufi to write a text with narrative elements from the Hindu world blended with details from Islamic literature. These inclusions occur already in several sufī-yoga treatises composed in eastern Bengal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At about the same time Sayyid Sultan wrote the Nabīvamsa in which Krishna finds a place among the thousands of Divine envoys between the Biblico-Islamic prophets Ibrahim and Musa. He narrates numerous myths and legends of the Hindu past before he describes the advent of Prophet Muhammad, and thus presents his own view of human history. Sayyid Sultan mentions reasons why he wrote this text. He was unhappy to see Muslims read about the Hindu gods Rama and Krishna, because they did not know Arabic and were virtually ignorant of their own traditions and history. Sultan therefore claims he decided to write the text to reform such sinners.\footnote{M.R. Tarafdar, Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538 AD, pp. 198–225; France Bhattacharya, ‘Hari the Prophet’, pp. 192–208.}\footnote{Asim Roy, The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal.} ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s story is however radically different from the one given in Sultan’s Nabīvamsa. According to the Nabīvamsa all the four Vedas belonged to the world of the Hindus. God (Niranjan)

...sent to earth the four Vedas carried by the four gods, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Hari (sic), men followed them and became dhārmik under the guidance of

\footnote{The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 49, 2 (2012): 151–95}
those who read the Vedas to them: the *dvijavara*. But later on, men stopped paying any attention to these texts. So Niranjan had to admit that the creation of these Vedas had been of no use and he ordered an angel to place them in the ocean.

Similarly Krishna even if sent by God to guide the people to the right path, himself fell in the trap of Satan (or Iblis) and indulged in sinful acts. Sayyid Sultan’s portrayal of Narad too is very negative. He played the role of Iblis, was ‘quarrelsome and a gossip-monger whose numerous missions as a messenger brought disaster to those he was sent to’.56 ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s account of the Hindu world is not so brazenly negative, even if his tone is often polemical. He does not hint at any shortcoming or failure on the part of the Hindu gods and sages. In his account only the three *Vedas* belonged to the Hindu world, part of the fourth *Veda* was significantly the Qur’an itself.

We have no clear evidence at present of how ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s *Mir’ât al-Makhlûqât* was received. What was the reaction to it amongst either Muslims or Hindus? At the end of the text, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti alludes to his intention to communicate to the Hindus (*hindûwân*) of his time through the stories in his text. As we will see below, after having given the story of the jinns, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti asserts that the Hindus were like himself and other Muslims, descendants of Adam. What is more, if we consider the nature of the *purânas*, on which he models his story, we have further evidence that ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti had in mind an audience of Hindus, including Brahmans, who could engage with his story. The *purânas* were meant to legitimise evolving religious customs and practices with reference to the *Vedas*. But within the broad Puranic genre the references to the *Vedas* would often, in a literal sense, be inaccurate, appearing sometimes as outright inventions by their authors. What is more, a Puranic text was not expected to be the same in each successive iteration. In this connection, it would not be out of place to cite an early-nineteenth century European experience of Puranic transmission:

In 1805, Captain Francis Wilford reported on his experiences when he asked a Pandit to copy, for him, some relevant passages from the *Purânas*. The Pandit knew what Wilford wanted, and he gave him exactly what he wanted. The Pandit knew that Wilford was looking for the term *Sveta* to refer to the British Isles; so the Pandit changed a few geographical names to have them read *Sveta*. He even composed, on his own, ‘two voluminous sections’, one supposed to belong to the *Skandapurâna*, another to the *Brahmândapurâna*, in which he narrated all the purânic stories which he assumed would help Wilford.

56 France Bhattacharya, ‘Hari the Prophet’.

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The only recognition he got for his labours is that Wilford calls him an imitator, and his composition a forgery.\(^{57}\)

Yet this would not have been the response to the ‘novelties’ in ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s story, whether he was just a translator of an already composed Sanskrit ‘purāṇa’ or whether he himself composed them in Persian.

We may also note a much later Muslim response in a polemical mode, namely a nineteenth century exegesis of the Qur’an, entitled \textit{Anwār al-Qur’ān}, whose author one Maulana Syed Rahat Hussain Gopalpuri, mentions ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti in the introduction to his work. Gopalpuri used a part of the story that describes the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and the advent of Islam to show that the prophecy for the coming of Muhammad had already been there in the ancient Hindu scriptures. The book published sometime in the 1800s, is rare and I have unfortunately not yet been able to locate it. An enthusiastic Muslim has luckily given a translation of this portion in a modern website titled ‘the prophecies for Muhammad’. (It is interesting to note here that Shaikh ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti, whom we know was recognised as an eminent Sufi saint in his own time, is identified in the website as ‘Molvi’, which generally means a not very highly regarded theologian.) The language of the \textit{Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt} has also been given incorrectly as Urdu. The person who uploaded the translation on the website, or Maulana Gopalpuri himself, may have consulted or seen an Urdu translation, of which I am unaware. The website also mixes up the sources that ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti mentions as his authorities, and contains the significant observation that the story in the \textit{Mir’āt} could have been borrowed from an earlier text, ‘Alloopnishad’, compiled some time during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), in which Muhammad has been mentioned as a prophet (\textit{rasūl}). The noted Hindu reformer and revivalist Dayanand Saraswati’s \textit{Satyārtha Prakāśh} is cited as the authority for this reference.\(^{58}\) The reference to ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti in the \textit{Anwār al-Qur’ān}, it is clear, was already a part of nineteenth-century religious disputations.\(^{59}\)

\(^{57}\) Rocher, ‘Reflections on One Hundred and Fifty Years of Purāṇa Studies’, pp. 71–72; see also Rocher, \textit{The Purāṇas}, pp. 49–52. Rocher notes that such puranic texts are found even in earlier times, to which additions continued to be made, accounting among other things later for the East India Company as well, pp. 151–54. One such text is the \textit{Bhavishya Purāṇa} edited in 2 volumes with Hindi translation by Shri Ram Sharma Acharya, which includes accounts of Muslim sultans of Delhi and the Mughal emperor Akbar.


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We have noticed that the *Mir'āt al-Makhlūqāt* does not simply contain a prophecy for the coming of the Prophet of Islam, it begins with the story of Adam and tries to connect it with the known Hindu cosmogony. I am not in a position to conclude whether this story was devised by ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti himself or whether he borrowed it from somewhere else. We have seen that part of the story was at least borrowed, with evident modifications, from the medieval *purānas*. What needs to be also noted is that in the story, the Brahmanical cyclical time of yugas is filled with Islamic content. Adam is created, when, in the *Dwāpar* age, evil and chaos came to reign. The story is a narrative from the eras before Adam to the seventh century, the time of Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, Imam Husain. The cycles of decline are followed by the emergence of a saviour who resolves all problems, re-establishes goodness on earth. Krishna, Adam, Muhammad and Husain are seen as the saviours who appeared to resolve the problems of the people, and to do away with sin and evil. True, the past of the Hindus is annihilated as well as appropriated; the Hindu Gods are sanctified and, in a measure, also exterminated. The Hindu Gods are all asked to leave, go away to the mountains, leaving the inhabited world to Adam. There is clear recognition of a time before Adam. The divine power of Mahadeva and Brahma, and the sanctity of Vashista and other Hindu sages are all recognised: Mahadeva tells the story, Brahma creates Adam in clay, and Vashista records the sacred story of origins. But after the creation of Adam, the past before the time of Adam is dissolved. The continuity in time is ruptured. The time which has human meaning as well as sacred meaning is to be traced to Adam, though his creation is traced back to the divine will of Mahadeva and Brahma. Islamic rituals and practices are legitimated through the divine voice of Mahadeva and a dialogue with the sanctifying symbols of Brahmanism. The Qur’an is the fourth *Veda*, sanctified as a book of thirty *adhyāyas*. The legitimacy of *shari’at* and the Qur’an is derived through a narrative that recognises the need to locate the Islamic texts within the world of Hindu scriptures.

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti adduces support for Hindu cosmogony from Islamic traditions as well. He cites from a companion of the Prophet, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, the noted fifteenth century historian Mirkhwand, the historian and commentator of Qur’an Abu Ja’far ibn Jarir Tabari, and the twelfth-century author of a sufi commentary on the Qur’an, *Taṣfīr-i Zāhidī*. He also inserts in the story, wherever appropriate, Qur’anic verses and *hadīts*. He clearly says that Mahadeva also had true divine vision and that Lord Krishna was amongst those who were sent by God to fight against injustice and tyranny. Mahadeva and Lord Krishna both struggled, one using his words and the other his weapons, to create the conditions for the settlement of Adam’s descendants in India.

We know that Krishna had already figured in Chishti Sufi traditions in Awadh, in particular, the area from which our author came. The noted Awadhi poet, Malik Muhammad Jayasi of *Padmāvat* fame, also composed a text entitled *Kanhāvat*,

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the story of Lord Krishna.\textsuperscript{60} Vaishnava songs that were recorded and commented upon in the \textit{Haqā‘iq-i Hindi} by the sixteenth-century Chishti luminary Mir ‘Abd al-Wahid Bilgrami (d. 1569) centered around Lord Krishna. Bilgrami suggested that

Krishna and other local names used in such verses symbolized the Prophet Muhammad, or ‘Man’, and even sometimes the reality of a human being (\textit{haqīqat-i Insān}) in relation to the abstract notion of the oneness (\textit{ahādiyyat}) of Divine Essence. \textit{Gopī} sometimes stood for angels, sometimes for the human race, and sometimes in relation to the relative unity (\textit{wāhidīyyat}) of divine attributes. Braj and Gokul signified Sufi notions of the world (‘ālam) in their different contexts, while the Yamuna and the Ganga rivers stood for the sea of unity (\textit{wahdat}) and the ocean of gnosis (\textit{ma‘rifat}); or else for the river of \textit{hadīs} (origination) and the \textit{imākān} (contingent or potential existence). The \textit{muraqqa} (Krishna’s flute) represented the appearance of entity out of non-entity; and so on.\textsuperscript{61}

It could be argued that ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti went a step further, and in this connection it is interesting to note the way that he begins the \textit{Mīr‘at al-Haqā‘iq}, another important treatise which he prepared as a ‘translation’ of the \textit{Gītā}. Both the \textit{hamd} (praise of God) and \textit{nā‘t} (praise of the Prophet) are in characteristic Sufi idiom, inspired by the doctrine of \textit{wahdat al-wujūd}. He mentions the \textit{Gītā} as a book that reveals the secrets of \textit{tauhīd}:

In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful. He is the first, He is the last, He is the manifest, He is the unmanifest; and He is the knower of all things. He is the first, means: I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, so I created creation to be known. He is the last, means: Everyone that is thereon will pass away, and the countenance of your Lord of glory and kindness will remain. He is the manifest, means: God is the light of the heavens and the earth. So, whichever way you turn there is the countenance of God. He is the unmanifest, means: And in yourselves. Do you not see? In all we saw, we saw nothing but the beloved.

Thus it was known that there is no one except Him. And thus the verse: From all sides without a tune (to carry it) comes the note of \textit{There is no God but He}. Thus it became known that the building, annihilation, manifestation and

\textsuperscript{60} Malik Muhammad Jayasi, \textit{Kanha\=vat}, ed., Parmeshwarilal Gupta; Francesca Orsini, ‘Jayasi’s \textit{Kanha\=vat}: An Analysis’.


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concealment of the world are all [from] the note _hun_. The discerning have de-
cided that this same note is the sound _kun_, and some have called it the sound of
the letter _h_, again some say that it is the sound of blowing for which David’s tunes
are famous. God—may he be exalted—has said: _I breathed into him of my spirit._
[However] the proposition intended by all the divines is one [one and the same]
because, save the one being, there is no being in existence in either the manifest
world or the unmanifest. Hence: _There is nothing but Him in the two regions._
How can anyone describe that note that is without description, and it is indescri-
able insomuch as it is without parallel. The saying of God—may he be exalted—
on this secret is: _There is nothing in His likeness in earth, and He is the knower of
all things._ Since whatever is in all the world is me, the like of me cannot be found
in either world. So, out of excess of longing for his own belovedness in himself,
for the manifesting of his own love [He] began again and again to intone the
phrase _kun_. As Hazrat ‘Iraqi says [in a] _ghazal_:

> Love plays the instrument in key/Where is the lover to hear the sound?
> With every breath it plays another note/It begins every beat with a plectrum
> Throughout the world is the sound of His note/How can He hold back the
> sound?
> From every atom his secret/Hear for I am not telling [it].

God—may He be exalted—has said: _Whatever is in the skies or on the earth
praises God. Indeed God is the knower of everything._ At every instant out of love,
He tells his secret in His own tongue. People, because [you are] loved, hear with
your own ears how you were made. I speak with every tongue and listen with
every ear. This is all the more wonderful for my ear and tongue are invisible. Like
the sun I am visible on the face of every particle. Such is the extent of my visibility
that I am invisible. _Through me, he hears, sees and speaks._ Since I became
totally beloved, who is the lover?

Favour and boundless praise [be] on that possessor of [divine] knowledge and
secrets. Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa—may God’s prayers and peace be upon him—
whose true nature is oneness. Hence: _I am Ahmad without the ‘m’. _His merit
cannot be expressed by the pen. God has informed us: _Were it not for you I would
not have created the heavens._ Who has the power to describe the possessors of
that bliss? That sun of the two worlds is the likeness of the spirit, and each of
these four essences is like the four elements. Therefore, the spirit is with the
elements and the elements are with the spirit. Beloved, love and lover, all three
are one here. Since the union is immeasurable, what role has separation? Hazrat
Khwaja Hafiz has informed [us] concerning this state:

> The drinker, the singer, the vintner, all are he,
> the thought of water and roses along the path is pretense.

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Next, the servant—sweeper at the threshold of the Khwajahs of Chisht, ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Abd al-Rasul ‘Abbasi al-‘Alawi al-Chishti, writes a few words in clarification of the doctrine of tauhid. I called this treatise *Mir‘āt al-ḥaqā‘īq* which is known in Hindawi as the *Gītā, [in] which Krishna explained to the Arjuna, by means of examples, the secret of tauhid. Byas collected and put together that explanation in order to instruct the people. All the learned Hindus agree that Krishna has taken the secrets of the knowledge of the unification of God—may he be praised and exalted—from the four *Beds* and has revealed this explanation in *Gītā*. So, just as the enlightened Shaykh Sufi Qutbjahani once wrote a commentary on the *Kashf al-kunā‘*, also known as *Yoga Vasistha*, now for the sake of some true friends, who are as a flaming torch seeking after the sublime goal, the above-mentioned translation has been written out in Persian. Concerning [the doctrine of] unity of being, Hazrat Raja spoke thus [in a] verse:

I saw the being of the pure essence in every place and at all times, I saw [it] manifest in every direction, alley and view.

The Prophet’s words—on whom be peace—on this secret are: *Take what purifies and eschew what defiles*. What is meant by the purity is the knowledge of tauhid; what is meant by defilement is polytheism. We look for virtue, wherever it is available (*Bāyad mata‘i nīku az har ḏukān ki bāshad*).

Whoever has understood has understood. I forbid myself to talk with [other] people. But when the conversation turns to you, I cannot stop talking.62

In view of these other examples of ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s thoughts and renderings of Hindu cosmogony, the *Mir‘āt al-Makhlūqāt* becomes all the more intriguing and important. From the characters mentioned in the *Mir‘āt*, the notions of time and of historical imaginings that they represent, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti appears to be making an attempt to reconcile the history of Islam with pre-Islamic and indeed pre-historic India. He chose to present his position in the form of a purāna of his own, which perhaps echoes or imitates the *Uttarākhanda* and *Bhavishottarapurāna*, which he mentions, and *Kalkipurāna*, as we have seen earlier. To my mind, the contents and the literary form need to be considered carefully because imbedded in them are crucial clues regarding the intended audience of the text and the nature of its production. To begin with, could we consider that ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti may himself have propounded the text that he wrote in Persian, orally in Hindawi as well, and thereby widened the scope of his audience to include non-Persianate Muslims and Hindus? Given the structure and content of the text and its high degree of intertextuality, I believe this to be

62 Cited with some modification from Roderic Vassie, ‘Persian Interpretations of the Bhagavadgita in the Mughal Period’.

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highly probable. After all, who would be impressed by the author’s usage of ‘Bhabikhottrapurāṇa’, the oral Awadhī pronunciation of the Bhavishottarapurāṇa, or his careful noting of the names of Sanskrit philosophers, if not people who were familiar with those names themselves? Could we imagine that there may have been two stages of orality between the Sanskrit and Persian texts? The first would have been one in which the purāṇas (including the Bhāgavata purāṇa, with the details of Krishna’s battles and his opponents) and the Mahābhārata, and perhaps also the arguments of Sanskrit philosophers, were narrated and explained by the pandits and the local kathāvāchikas in the villages and qasbas; and the second, in which ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti would have reworked that information and woven it together with Islamic traditions to provide a competing narrative.

**The Sufi Vision of Time: One hundred thousand Adams**

Even without using conjecture to imagine the local and perhaps oral audience of ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s work, there was another vibrant debate in which his text would have found a readymade audience. This debate centered on the problem of the origins of the world. This was also a more general question for Muslim thinkers as the religion spread across new regions. It was easier to disqualify the pre-Islamic period in the original Arabic-speaking area; but just as Christianity had to find some way of valuing the pagan times which contained Greek and Roman philosophy, in Persia and elsewhere, it raised a question about what attitude to adopt regarding the times before Islam. More accommodating thinkers were trying to find a way of valuing them, and finding a translation of their thinking about time in Islamic terms. In fact, in his introduction to the Persian translation of the Mahābhārata, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Shaikh Abu’l Fazl states that one of the objectives of these translations of the Mahābhārata was to let Muslims, who believed that the world was only 7000 years old, know about the ancient character of the world and the people living therein (kuhnagī-yī ‘ālam wa ‘ālamīyān). ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti belonged to an intellectual milieu that responded to its habitat creatively. The discrepant views on the ancientness of the world, was a significant idea in the Mirʿāt al-Makhlūqāt, but he poses

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63 Mohamed Tavakoli-Targhi, ‘Contested Memories of Pre-Islamic Iran’ and ‘Orientalism’s Genesis Amnesia’. There were also some mentions of Indic temporality in some early Arabic histories, but we are not in a position to assume that these texts were available in Mughal India. See for instance Abu-Zaid Ahmad bin Sahl al-Balkhi, Kitāb al-Bada’ a wa al-Tāriḵh, edited by M.C. Huart, Vol. 2, pp. 146–47. For a discussion of such texts see Kevin van Bladel, ‘The Astrological Current in the Formation of Islamic Historiography’. For a generally accepted Islamic view of the origins of the world see Najm al-Din Razi, Mīrṣād al-‘Ībād, ed. Muhammad Amin Riyahi, Chapter 2, dar bayān-i mabda’-i maqūdāt, pp. 37–97. According to this text the Nāṣ-i Muhammadī was the first to exist, and incidentally the jinns came much later.

64 Mahābhārata, Persian translation, Shaikh Abu’l Fazl’s introduction, pp. 18–19.

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the question again in his *Mirʿāt al-Asrār* in the context of his account of Shaikh Sa’d al-Din Hamawi. He writes:

Shaikh Sadr al-Din Qunawi, who had been in his [i.e. Sa’d al-Din Hamawi’s] *ṣuhbat*, said: ‘I heard from him that there have been seven covenants (*mawāsīq*, pl. of *mīsāq*) and that it [i.e. the covenant] was not limited to the covenant when God Most High asked the souls: ‘Am I not your Lord?’*.65* I mentioned this to Shaikh Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi, who then said: ‘He must have meant it in general (*kullīyāt*), otherwise, the particulars (*juzʾiyāt*) were more than this. He writes in his commentary to ‘Ali’s *diwān* that when the Zodiac will be at noon, then the sphere of the water will encompass the sphere of the land and no living being will remain on earth. Following this, the address (*khītāb*) will come: ‘O earth! swallow your water, and o sky! withhold [your rain]!*’.66* And the Zodiac will pass the turning point of the day (*ma’dal al-nahār*), the land will appear, and God Most High, will create Adam and his descendants anew, in accordance with the effect of the positions of the heavenly bodies (*aurzā‘-i *fakārīya*), ‘the way we created them the first time’ as God Most High says ‘that they should be in confused doubt about a new creation’*.67* According to the saying of the Greek philosophers this event will take place in 80,000 years (twenty times 4000 years). But it was not specified whether on this ‘year’ God’s year (*sāl-ī Ilāhī*) is meant or temporal year (*sāl-ī zamānī, ‘year as a measure of [our] time’). In any case, if in this situation the Day of the Covenant and the Day of the Resurrection take place several times, it is not something that would be outside of the power (*qudrat*) of the Omnipotent (*gādir-ī *matlaq*). Mullā Ahmad writes in his *Ṭārīkh-i Hukamā* that many philosophers, if not all, deny that there would be any beginning or any end of the creation. Further, they say that the universe is the essence of the Necessary Being (*zāt-ī vājiḥ al-wujūd*), and will subsist from pre-eternity to post-eternity. Although a group [of philosophers] maintains that the universe is other than God (*ghair-ī *haqq*) and asserts the contingency of the world (*hudās-ī *ālam*), nevertheless even they cannot determine the beginning and the end of the universe.

The Indian, Chinese and Firangi philosophers put the beginning of the creation to several thousand years ago (...). This belief is supported by Chapter 331 of the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* of the Great Shaikh [Ibn ‘Arabi], in which he narrates a *ḥadīs* of the Prophet: ‘Verily God created hundred thousand Adams’.*68*

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65 ‘*alastu bi-rabbikum*?’. Qur’an, 7:172.
66 ‘*yā arzū ‘bla’ī mā‘ākī wa-yā samā‘u *qli‘ī*’, Qur’an, 11:44.
67 ‘*ka-mā ansha‘ahum awwala marrah*,”... “..., bal hun fi labsin min khalaq jadīd’, Qur’an, 50:15.

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In the same chapter the Great Shaikh relates a story: ‘While circumambulating the Ka’ba, I witnessed a vision in the World of Similitudes (ālam-i misāl) that a group of pious people were circumambulating the Ka’ba with me, but I did not recognize them. Upon this, they said that some years ago we too were circumambulating the Ka’ba sanctuary, just as you are doing it now’. Then the Great Shaikh relates: ‘When I heard this, a thought came to my heart that these must be bodies belonging to the World of Similitudes. As soon as this occurred to me, one of them turned to me and said: ‘I am one of your forefathers’, I asked: ‘How long has it been since you left this world?’ He said: “40,000 years passed since I died.” Astonished, I said: “But it was only 7000 years ago that Adam died.” He asked: “Which Adam are you talking about? This Adam was in the beginning of the first cycle of these 7,000 years.”’

The Great Shaikh says: ‘Upon hearing this, I remembered the hadīṣ of the Prophet according to which God Most High created one hundred thousand Adams the way he created the Father of the Mankind (Abū al-Bashar).’ Following this, the Great Shaikh writes that it is possible that after every cycle of 7000 years the descendants of one Adam become extinct and descendants of another Adam come into existence, and this chain will go on as long as the world is contingent, until the Resurrection comes (wa badīn waza’ tā qiyām-i qiyāmat muntahī gardad), because all prophets had brought us news regarding this, and on the day of Resurrection God Most High will bring to life the progeny of all Adams, all at once; this is not anything difficult for the Omnipotent (qādir-i mutlaq). And God knows best.

In short, the essence of what several of the philosophers, verifiers of the Truth said concerning the past and the present times is that the eternal wisdom of the Absolute, the Wise (God Most High), creator and originator of the whole universe, requires that the higher bodies [the bodies on the sky] exercise their influence on the lower bodies [the bodies on Earth], especially the seven planets, the effect of which on the people of the world and whatever is in it [the world] is accepted and ascertained. In the terminology of the philosophers the heavenly bodies are called ‘fathers’ and the four elements are called ‘mothers’, and whatever is produced by the effect of the higher and the lower bodies and by the intermingling of the lower bodies is called the ‘three kingdoms of nature’ (mawālīd-i salāsa), or, vegetation, animals, and minerals. It is said that the influence of each of the seven planets is manifested for the period of thousand years. Because the Father of the Mankind (Adam) came into existence in the Cycle of Saturn (Zuhal), or, at the end of the third period, his life span and the life span of his descendants who were born in this period, was longer. In this way Adam’s life span was thousand years, or, according to a different tradition, 930 years. Likewise, the life spans of his sons too were long. Because the appearance of our Prophet is connected with the Cycle of the

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Moon, or, the fourth period, in which the life spans are in between 60 and 70 years, with some reaching to 100 years, for this reason the Prophet said the life span of the people of my community is within 70 years (bain al-sab’īn). Therefore, the scholars, verifiers of the Truth hold the view that when 7000 years are completed, one week of God’s days—one of which is equal to thousand years—is completed. But it should be known that according to them [these scholars], there are two types of the days of God, short (sīghār) and long (kibār). The short days are also called temporal days (ayyām-i zamānī, ‘days of time’) and the long ones [are called] God’s days. The duration of the short day is thousand years, as the venerable verse of Qur’an has it: ‘Verily a Day of your Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning’,69 while the long day, which is from God’s days, is equal to about 50,000 years. The venerable verse of the Qur’an—‘The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day that equals fifty thousand years’70—points to this truth. This is the reason why the author of the Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya writes that in the hereafter (ākhirat) one day is equal to 50,000 years, while one day in the World of Similitudes is equal to thousand years.71

In the circle of such Sufis too, ‘the world and the people of the world’ were much older than the 7000 years ascribed to them in the Islamic tradition. Relevant here are also the hadīṣ that describe the ancientness of the world in Islamic tradition. Two of them recount Moses’s queries to God regarding the origins of the world, which are traced to one million years ago. God’s responses mentions ten cycles (‘ashr marrāt) of creation, each lasting for 100,000 years, consisting of 50,000 years of development (‘imārāt) followed by 50,000 years of desolation (kharāb), until the time of Adam. Twice during these one million years, God created cities, once 70,000 of them, and the second time only 3000, but made of pure gold and silver, wherein 30,000 different Adams and their descendants lived for 900,000 years. All of these Adams lived before Adam the father of mankind. It is reported that after God completed the story of his Creation he asked Moses to count and note the world’s ancientness. Moses, according to one report, could not count them. He fainted, and when he recovered, he sought the forgiveness of God for his having even dared raise the question. According to another report he counted 8,359 years up to Adam the father of mankind, but could go no further. There are also several other hadīṣ reported by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad and ‘Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As. One such hadīṣ recounts the heaven and the earth’s creation 6,080,000 years ago, which was then initially populated by demons and demigods (devān). Such hadīṣ were of questionable authenticity

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70 ‘ta’raja‘-l-malā‘ikatu wa-‘r-rūhu ilaithī fi ya’amin kāna miqdarīhu khamsīna alfā sanātīn’, Qur’an, 70:4.
71 Mir‘āt al-Asrār, British Library ms., ff. 243a–244a.

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from the point of view of orthodox theologians, but they continued to be cited in Islamic literature, and became part of the Muslim imagination.72

We may thus conclude that even if ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti was confronted by apparently conflicting Indic and Islamic traditions, he had enough support in his own Sufi traditions to enable him to blend the two, at least in the imagination of the origins of the world. The Chishti Sufi thus combines different and apparently incompatible traditions: on the one hand, Indic historical imaginings of yugas populated by gods, rishis and heroic kings and on the other, the Sufi and also non-Sufic Islamic imagination. What is however interesting is that, in ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s own narrative, the originary being is always named Adam. By comparison, we may note here that Shaikh Ahmad Sirindi considers the 100,000 Adams, even as they appeared in Ibn ‘Arabi’s vision, to have lived in the World of Similitudes (‘ālam-i misāl) and in that world alone.73

**Polemics and Politics**

There is also a political subtext which links ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s voluminous textual production to the wider conditions of the time. While Chishti sufis had spread far and wide in India and established a dense network of their order’s houses and disciples, at the beginning of the seventeenth century they had come under attack for both their ideology and practices.74 In response, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti demonstrated his knowledge of Indian traditions, and endorsed certain Shi’a beliefs indirectly, showing both the ‘ulama’ and his opponents among the Naqshbandi saints how much more knowledgeable about, rooted in, and at ease he was on Indian soil. Concurrently he was also able to delineate the hollowness of indigenous beliefs, and demonstrate their weaknesses through a discussion of Hindu religious philosophy, furnishing evidence from the Hindu tradition itself. It was these features of Chishti practice, and not what was dismissed in the Naqshbandi writings as ‘deviance’ (bid’a or zandaqa) that legitimated their supreme religious leadership in the land.75 The Chishtis, with ‘Abd al-Rahman as their principal spokesperson, were then able to portray themselves as the real defenders of the Faith. While they appreciated indigenous social and religious practices, they also rearticulated Islamic beliefs, to make them more acceptable in the local conditions. Their language of accommodation to the locality is integral to their strategy to strengthen and refurbish the universalism of their tradition.

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75 See also Alam, ‘The debate within: A Sufi critique of religious law, tasawwuf and politics in Mughal India’.

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It is in order here to note the following polemical passages in the Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, where, after summing up Vashista’s account, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti engages in a disputation, refuting the validity of Hindu belief in the transmigration of the soul (tanāśukh). The Chishti Sufi writes:

In sum this conversation of Mahadeva, which closes with [an account] of the end of the time, clearly demolishes tanāśukh. Some of the theologians (mutakallimin) of the community because of their inadequate knowledge and comprehension (‘irfān), believe in tanāśukh while Biyas, who is their major religious leader, has furnished several reasons to show its invalidity. Some other rishis also agree with him. 76

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti summarises the different relevant positions, which shows his close reading and understanding of ancient and medieval Hindu philosophy, in nearly the same way as the story in the Mir’āt demonstrates his familiarity with the variety of medieval purānas. The argument in the Brahminical texts in support of tanāśukh he presents is as follows:

In this world there is one who is a king and the other one is a poor man, one of them turns blind, the other lame, one of them is helpless, the other possesses power. Such being the case, it becomes clear that whatever one does, one’s condition corresponds to one’s own deeds in this world. Otherwise, the implication will be that God is arbitrary and tyrannical, [and] that he makes one a king and the other a pauper and hapless without any reason and one’s virtue or fault. 77

The argument for the doctrine of rebirth from inequalities among living beings in terms of their conditions, status and experiences is an argument of long standing in Indian philosophical literature, associated initially with Jaina and Buddhist attempts to argue for karma and reincarnation. 78 ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti seeks support for his own arguments, invoking, perhaps, Shankaracharya and Vyasa:

Shankaracharj taking a cue from the reasoning of Biyas, says that there is no such avatār. God is almighty, He is wise, whatever He wants He does. Don’t you see the carpenter who makes the throne of the king and the planks of the door from the same wood? [Similarly] the potter makes a bowl for the king

76 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 246a.

77 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 246.

78 The following, for example, is from a Jaina text: ‘Here in the east, west, north, and south many men have been born according to their merit, as inhabitants of this our world—some as Aryas, some as non-Aryas, some in noble families, some in low families, some as big men, some as small men, some of good complexion, some of bad complexion, some as handsome men, some as ugly men. And of these men one man is king’: Herman Jacobi, Sūrākṛāṅga, 2.1.13.

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and also an alms bowl for the beggar from the same piece of clay. Was there any fault of that piece of wood or clay, by virtue of which they got such returns? He also says that at the beginning there was no creature who could have done good or bad and still one of the creatures was a human being, the other an angel, and still another an animal.79

From this, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti infers that it becomes clear that the advocates of tanásukh are unaware of the implications of their own position. Yet even though the Chishti Sufi makes an effort to use the ideas of Shankara and Vyasa to refute tanásukh, he does so, as we know, by considerably over-simplifying their views. Shankara has a very nuanced account of karma and rebirth, one part of which emphasised the function of human actions, and the other the role of the Creator. He uses the link between actions and their results, and the mechanism of rebirth, to justify the fact that it is beings themselves, and not God, who are responsible for these inequalities.80

After this ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti once again cites from Udayanacharya’s Nyāyakusumāṇjali in support of the idea of God’s omnipotence and implies thereby a form of support for his own position:

The second ashlok in the treatise Kusmāṇjal (Nyāyakusumāṇjali) of Udayancharj (Udayanacharya) refutes the position of Jamin (Jaimini). Jamin says: ‘I do not accept the argument of creation (khalq); the soul is eternal (azāli), no one created it; it comes into existence and goes off on its own (khud ba khud)’. Udayancharj refutes this. He says: ‘You yourself admit of [the existence of] ātman and paramātman. These [are the terms that] mean soul and eternal God’. He also says that ‘in this world whatever exists has come out apparently from one phenomenon. We and you do not have enough power to create our own selves or the world. And, if you say that everything comes out of its own then this is also wrong. For, if it were so, then nothing would have been subjected to any change; everything would have kept itself fully secured; nothing would have disappeared. Anything that changes also disappears. Thus it is clear that there is a creator who has created everything and he also annihilates it. If you say that the changes in a thing are effected by time then I would say that the person who [does so] creates a thing should possess knowledge as well as power. If these two qualities are not there in Time then how can it be a creator (khāliq)? And if these qualities are there in Time then you have not

79 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqāt, f. 246b.

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quite understood what I mean to say. God is the same phenomenon that you consider to be Time.”

This passage shows Chishti’s extraordinary familiarity with some sections of Hindu scholasticism. Udayanacharya is a major early philosopher; his Nyāyakusumāṇjali is regarded as the first systematic account of Nyaya theism. While Udayana does develop arguments against the epistemology of the Mimamsa tradition, the founder of which is said to be Jaimini, the phrase ‘khyāt ba khyāt’ instead echoes the atheistic Charvaka position which, as described by Udayana in the fifth verse of the first chapter of the Nyāyakusumāṇjali, maintains that things are spontaneous or ‘accidental’ (akasmikavāda or aksamāt bhavati). The Charvakas, we know, maintain that an event springs into existence at a particular time not because there is a cause behind it but because it is the nature (svabhāva) of the event to happen at that time. Udayanacharya refutes their position. ‘The production of an effect at a particular time and its non-production at a time earlier or later than that’, he maintains, ‘can be explained only by the fact that it has a cause which determines it’. In Udayanacharya too, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti saw a support for his position. He then goes ahead to demonstrate his knowledge of Vyasa’s Vedānta:

The third ashlok is from Jabal Rishi and Biyas, available in the third chapter (charn) in the Bedānt, which rejects Jamin and Gautam who advocate tanāsukh and support avatār. They say that one earns the returns of both the good and the bad deed in this world itself. It is because of this assumption (wahm) that they had adopted the mazhab (belief) of tanāsukh. Jabal and Biyas say that: ‘You have misunderstood it; the returns of good and bad are surg and narg, that is heaven and hell. And, if one gets the result of vice and virtue one will get, then what will be the purpose of the souls coming back again into the different bodies in this world’? It is sure that the seeds of vice and virtue bud into flowers in heaven. As they get this return, the seeds get terminated and without seeds nothing can grow.”

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti then gives his own assessment of Vyasa (credited by some as being the author of the Vedānta-sūtras) and Jabala (a sage often quoted in the Vedānta-sūtras) as supreme theologians and saints, while he calls Gautam and Jaimini as mere philosophers ‘who had gone astray (be-jānib-i digar rafta and).”

81 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqūt, ff. 245b–246a.
83 Visweswari Amma, Udayana and His Philosophy, pp. 14–16, 19–35.
84 Mir’āt al-Makhlūqūt, f. 246a.

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They were however still great. ‘Plato too was Gautam’s pupil’, he asserts.  

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti thereafter concludes the *Mir’āt al-Makhlišqāt* with an interesting message. He writes that ‘the Hindus are Adam’s descendants, but they have forgotten their ancestors, the religion of their ancestors, and their own selves. Indeed, they are wrong in tracing their genealogy to the community of jinns. They do so unknowingly and out of ignorance’.  

**By Way of Conclusion**

The seventeenth-century Sufi ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti lived in the Gangetic valley at the height of Mughal rule, a milieu that seems incessantly to have confronted him with conflicting cosmologies and theological principles. It appears that he wanted to carefully craft something that did not offend anyone, sounded plausible, and allowed him to argue and manoeuvre, and at the same time maintain his inherited identity and traditions within the complex religious and political space of Mughal India. He used the religious concepts of others in such a way that the key concept of his beliefs remained unimpaired. Brahma creates Adam but is subordinated to *Qādir-i Mutlaq* (Absolute God); God manifests Himself in Krishna, comes down to earth to fight the forces of evil, but Krishna is not God himself.  

Central and somewhat startling in *Mir’āt al-Makhlišqāt* is the idea that both the beliefs of the Hindus and of the Muslims are many stranded and internally plural, and therefore there can be significant similarities between their individual strands. This breaks down the abstract and comprehensive difference between the two religions as total systems that completely obstructs any mutual curiosity or accommodation. We cannot ignore, however, the polemics inherent in ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s position, whatever its politics. It was his endeavour to construct a narrative where his own tradition might still emerge paramount, and it is perhaps with this aim that he brought in the different scales of time from the Islamic tradition.  

‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s reflection on time was esoteric, and included questions about the age of the world, human genesis, and so on. He found that the

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85 While this remark shows ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s close reading of Indian philosophy and his contacts with the Brahman scholars of his own time, it is not fictitious. There is a fragment, preserving a memory that claims that Indian philosophers taught Plato, via Socrates, particularly concerning theology. Cf. Joachim Lacrosse, ‘Some Remarks about a Meeting between Socrates and an Indian (Aristoxenus 53)’, pp. 247–63. Islamic philosophers also noticed the similarity of Indian and Greek ideas of transmigration, and in some cases sought to show a diffusion of ideas. For example, Suhrawardi in his ‘Philosophy of Illumination’ places the doctrine of the Pythagoreans and Plato on reincarnation in the mouth of the Buddha (*bodasāfa*). See John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism*, p. 79. Some historians and philosophers traced the Indian ideas on reincarnation to Pythagoras, via his disciples who are said to have visited India. See Paul E. Walker, *The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam*, pp. 219, n. 11, 222.  

86 *Mir’āt al-Makhlišqāt*, f. 249b.
scales of Hindu time were much vaster than the scales in ‘orthodox’ Islamic thought, and he used this discrepancy not simply to say that Hindus believe in fanciful and false things. He subsumed one time-scale within the other; and what is even more remarkable is that the subsumption is of Islamic time within the larger cycles of Hindu cosmogony. Islam had encompassed several aspects of Judaism and Christianity—admitting, for instance, the prophetic status of Moses and Jesus. Early Islamic scholars had discussed the significance of such integration. But this was much easier to accomplish since the Qur’an itself was full of biblical prophets and Muhammad had proclaimed himself to be their successor. To describe the Indic gods and sages as prophets was a far more difficult task. None of them were mentioned in either the Qur’an, hadis or for that matter in any early Islamic text of the ‘classical’ Islamic period. Again, what ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti does with reference to his discourse on time is somewhat opposite to the process of absorbing Biblical prophets within an Islamic ecumene. In the Mir’at al-Makhlūqāt, he subsumes Islamic time into Hindu time, even as he makes the latter the time of the jinns. I would assume that he does so to explain the discrepancy between the two times in Islamic terms and thereby enhance his position’s acceptability within his own community. It is also relevant to notice in this context that Chishti seems to make a distinction between the core and secondary beliefs in Islam. His intellectual reasoning and manoeuvres relate to what appears as secondary ideas. As a result, without disrupting certain core Islamic sensibilities, he does modify the idea of a clear separation and necessary conflict between the doctrines of the two religious systems, and advocates a curious form of dialogue. Is there an implicit advice here to Muslim theologians, the Naqshbandi Shaikhs, and their close associates, members of the royal family and large parts of the nobility? Were they being asked to learn and interact seriously with the central ideas and beliefs of the ‘Other’, and not live complacently in ignorance of it? Tempting as it is to answer this question in the affirmative, a fully convincing response must await a clearer sense of the audience of this and other texts of this prolific and adventurous author.

Before we conclude, it may not be out of order to note here that around the seventeenth century and earlier too, we come across similar discussions in Europe regarding the nature of pre-Adamite time and the world. These discussions arose in the wake of the new sciences of the Renaissance and the discovery of the New World. The discussion in Europe was grounded in the Book of Genesis. The efforts of some thinkers were at reconciliation between religious dogma and the new discoveries, while others opted for a wholesale rejection of older religious explanations.87 There is no doubt that, by comparison, ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti’s discourse is solely in the frame of religion and revealed wisdom. But, notable in

87 Anthony Grafton (with April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi), New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery; David Livingstone, Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion and the Politics of Human Origins, pp. 1–79.

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this discourse is the author’s attempt at reconciling his own religious beliefs with those of the ‘Hindu’ people who also lived in India. The attempt may have had extrinsic political motivations related to the Mughal context of a multi-religious empire. However, his polemical stances are relatively simple. He did not have a brazen Islamicising agenda that was deviously cloaked in the language of universalism. As he projects the origins of the human world with Adam, he traces the lineage of his religion to a world wherein hundreds and thousands of Adams had passed through. The European quest for the origins of the world, by contrast, particularly in attempts to incorporate the newly discovered ‘savages’ of the New World into a pre-existing knowledge about the world, quickly took a turn towards carefully categorised and hierarchical thinking. This was directed in some measure at least to the problem of justifying the European usurpation of native rights to self-rule and of native enslavement. Moreover, whereas ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti does not in the final analysis deny the common origin of man, including the Hindus of his time whose views he repudiates and whom he accuses of hiding their knowledge of Adam, Europeans even debated the possibility of polygenesis to explain the observed diversity of the world.

It has often been assumed that the principal impetus to rethinking ‘Biblical chronologies’ and origins came from the discovery of the New World in the aftermath of the Columbian voyages. While there is undoubtedly some truth to this, it may also be remarked that the conversation between the votaries of the Religions of the Book and other traditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whether Indic or Chinese, could also throw up important challenges with regard to these same questions. Whether or not ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti was one of the ‘new intellectuals’ of seventeenth-century India, there can be little doubt that the challenges he faced as well as the solutions he found mark him out as an important voice of the period, one who has yet to find his proper place in general accounts of the intellectual history of Mughal times. It is the hope that this article would have contributed to a more rounded evaluation of this thinker in the context of his times, as well as the implications of his writings for our own.

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