

# 4th Young Researchers' Indo-Persian Conference

*Patronage in Persianate  
South Asia*



2026 - EHESS Marseille

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**4th Young Researchers' Indo-Persian  
Conference:  
Patronage in Persianate South Asia**

**June 11th-12th 2026  
at  
Centre de la Vieille Charité,  
2 Rue de la Charité, 13002, Marseille  
(France) and Online**

**Organized by:**

**Victor Baptiste (EPHE-GREI)  
Raffaello De Leon-Jones Diani (EHES-  
CESAH-CERCLeS)**

**With the collaboration of:**

**Maria Ashak  
Mathys Colin**

# Thursday, June 11th

**Session 1** –Chair: Hairy Ozkoray (AMU)

**10:00-10:30:** Introduction by the organizers

**10:30–11:30:** “Sufis and Poets: Provincializing the Empire through Religio-political Dynamics, c.1600-1750” by Shakir ul-Hasan (Online)

**11:30-11:45:** Coffee Break

**11:45–12:45:** “Rajput kings and their engagement with Vedānta in 17th and 18th century North India” by Rosina Pastore

**12:45–14:00:** Lunch break

**Session 2** –Chair: Carmen Spiers (AMU)

**14:00–14:15:** Introduction

**14:15–15:15:** “The Wish-Granting Creeper of Praise: The Language of Patronage in Mughal Banaras” by Kartik Maini

**15:15-15:30:** Coffee Break

**15:30–16:30:** “A Brahmin Pandit and his Muslim patrons: Śrīvara's attendance at the Kashmiri Śāhmīrid court” by Fabio Pagliani

**16:30-17:30:** “Religious Patronage at the Mughal Court: Title Bestowal on 16<sup>th</sup> Century Jains” by Raffaello De León-Jones Diani

# Friday, June 12th

**Session 3** –Chair : Eleonora Canepari (EHES-CERCLes)

**10:00-10:30:** Introduction by the organizers

**10:30–11:30:** “Patronage, Protection and Friendship: The Nature of the Relationship between ‘Āqil Khān ‘Rāzī’ and Mirzā ‘Bēdil’ Dihlavī during the Late 17th Century” by Victor Baptiste

**11:30 –11:45:** Coffee Break

**11:45–12:45:** “The Mughal Shu‘arā’ Showdown: One Story of Inter-religious Love in Two Indo-Persian Mathnawīs” by Ojaswini Shekhawat (Online)

**12:45–14:00:** Lunch break

**Session 4** –Chair : Fabrizio Speziale (EHES-CESAH/CERCLes)

**14:00 –14: 15 :** Intro

**14:15–15:15:** “Architectural studies of Tarikh-i-Rauza-i-Taj bi bi” by Abdullah (online)

**15:15–15:30:** Coffee Break

**15:30–16:30:** **Special guest** Pr. Said Arjomand  
“Concluding Remarks on Persianate Studies”

General Discussion

**17:15:** Final Refreshments

## **Sufis and Poets: Provincializing the Empire through Religio-political Dynamics, c.1600-1750**

**Shakir ul Hassan**

Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology, TSLAS, Patiala

This study focuses on the Mughal cultural sphere in two of its seasonal capitals-Kashmir and Lahore- through the lens of religio-political elite dynamics especially the competitive Sufi intellectual networks, horizontal friendship bonds and the provincial patronage structures that inspired innovative topographical registers describing the cityscapes. In Mughal studies, 'Provincial turn' understood the cultural dynamics remarkably unfolding in a few bustling mercantile and cultural centres in this case Kashmir and Lahore, where it created new orders of public life, competitive spiritual-intellectual markets and built urban structures. As agents of urban intellectual life, the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandi Sufi intellectuals entered into brisk debates concerning the mystical philosophy of Wujūd. The merchant households and privileged social class in Kashmir and Lahore frequented the imperial courts forging connections with the Naqshbandi Sufi networks. Murad Teng Kashmiri (d.1719), author of *Hubul Matin* (lit.'strong cord'1718) and A'zam Didamari (d.1748), author of *Risāla-yi Fayz-i Murād* (1720) and *Wāqiāt-i-Kashmīr*, both recent entrée into the Naqshbandi cluster, recorded vigorous networks and spiritual exchanges among Sufis and over the mystical theory and practices. These intellectual 'clusters' competed for patronage, networked and aligned with the provincial and imperial elite echelons to enrich power and privileges. On the other hand, these networks became flexible as membership rules and certification (k̄hilafanāma) could be obtained simultaneously from multiple Sufi networks. Murad Teng, a scion of powerful religious household, who had monopolised the post of chief Qazi in Kashmir from early sixteenth-century, tied to the Naqshbandi order of Khawand Mehmood (d. 1674), who immigrated to Lahore from Central Asia. A'zam *Risāla-yi Fayz* enlightens the flexible and multilayered functioning of Sufi networks that otherwise are rendered scripturalist and orthodox and relegated to the simplistic conceptual label of 'Naqshbandi reaction'.

Notably, Kashmir and Lahore were preferred domiciles for the Sufis and poets, as Purnima Dhavan recently characterised the latter a ‘desirable destination for Persianate-speaking scholars’ to forge intellectual careers (Dhavan: 2019). The Mughal eminent poets- Munir Lahori (d.1644) and Zafar Khan Ahsan (d.1647), the celebrated governor of Kashmir- began producing lively images of urbanity rather than humanistic geography and urban topographical imagery in mathnavī formats- the former’s verse themed around natural landscapes- rivers, topography, flora and fauna, while the latter tied it to urban gardens (Sunil Sharma: 2017). In this study I use A’zam Didamari’s *Risāla-yi Fayẓ-i Murād* and *Wāqiāt-i-Kashmīr*, and Zafar Khan’s *Jalwah-i-Nāz wa Maiḳhān-i Raz* to elucidate these newly robust forms of intellectual outpouring, elite politics, literary exchanges, and overlapping sufi identities so far untapped in the Mughal cultural history. It brings to fore the limits of Mughal cosmopolitan inclusivity while Kashmir and Lahore were transforming into hubs of competitive and flexible Sufi networks whose patronage structures, intellectual and philosophical outlook, and other literary outpourings spawned rich, previously overlooked urban cultural world, documented in *Risāla-yi Fayẓ-i Murād*, *Wāqiāt-i-Kashmīr*, and *Jalwah-i-Nāz wa Maiḳhān-i Rāz*.

## **Rajput kings and their engagement with Vedānta in 17th and 18th century North India**

**Rosina Pastore**

Postdoctoral researcher, Ghent University (Belgium)

The engagement of Mughal family members and their entourages in the study and translation of philosophical texts dealing with Vedānta has received significant scholarly attention (e. g. Gandhi 2020; Nair 2020; Alam 2016; Faruqui 2014). This interest in the philosophies of Vedānta, especially its non-dual branch (Advaita), has been interpreted from the lens of religious interactions between Muslims and Hindus on the one hand; on the other hand, it has also been considered integral to a Mughal political project, where the sovereign is an individual endowed with spiritual perfection (Moin 2012). This paper intends to enrich our insight into the intersection of Vedānta, politics and religion by introducing a neglected perspective, that of the Rajput vassals of the Mughal crown. In particular, it will focus on the early Hindi texts composed and sponsored in the context of the 17th and 18th century Rajput lineages of the region known today as Rajasthan, such as the Rathores and the Kacchwahas. This paper argues that these early Hindi works hint at intra-Rajput connections through their authors, manuscript colophons, and literary genres. Moreover, it will partially reflect on how the literary production on Vedānta in these courts and by these authors relate to the Mughal engagement with Vedānta based on their genres and the themes treated.

These initial insights will serve a reconsideration of Vedānta as a courtly and imperial enterprise. As such, this paper underscores the need to move beyond understanding the Rajputs as just competing among themselves to gain the favour of the Mughals and will interrogate the significance of this cultural production within Rajput–Mughal relationships as reflected by other types of cultural production or political activity (e. g. Thelen 2022; Belli Bose 2015; Horstmann 2009).

## The Wish-Granting Creeper of Praise: The Language of Patronage in Mughal Banaras

**Kartik Maini**

PhD Candidate, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, The University of Chicago

This paper focuses upon the oeuvre of Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī (fl. 1650) of Banaras: an ascetic, polymath, and poet who was, in his time, one of the city's most celebrated scholar-intellectuals. Sometime in the mid-seventeenth century, Kavīndra entered the orbit of Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān (r. 1628-1658) and his son, Dārā Shukoh (c. 1615-1659); he would go on to compose praise-poetry for both and collaborate with the latter on a range of ecumenical projects. Kavīndra's praise-poetry, with which my presentation is concerned, has come down to us in both Sanskrit (as the Kavīndrakalpadruma) and Hindi (as the Kavīndrakalpalatā) versions. In my presentation, I shall attempt a comparative reading of the two texts, and by way of doing so, formulate a coherent theory of Kavīndra's language of patronage—a language that was both distinctive and yet commonly shared. How was Mughal sovereignty experienced by those whose socio-cultural authority it came to encase, and what—in what we can glean from their poetic expressions—did Indic intellectuals stand to gain from yoking their own fortunes to the promise of Mughal imperium?

## Projecting a Sanskrit king: a Brahmin Pandit and his Muslim patrons at the Kashmiri Śāhmīrid court (a reading of Śrīvara's Jainataranṅiṇī – Rājataranṅiṇī)

Fabio Pagliani

PhD Candidate, EHES-CESAH/CeRCLeS

What is known as *Rājataranṅiṇī* ("The River of Kings") is a series of historical chronicles of Kashmiri kings composed in Sanskrit verse by various authors from the 12th to the 16th century. The first *Rājataranṅiṇī* (1148-1149) was written by Kalhaṇa, whose chronicle spans the period from the mythical King Gonanda I to the author's own time. At the behest of Zayn al-Ābidīn (r. 1420-1470), Jonarāja wrote a sequel including the Islamic Śāhmīrid dynasty and the reign of Zayn himself. After Jonarāja's death (1459), Śrīvara was tasked with continuing the work. Both Jonarāja and Śrīvara were courtly pundits and Śrīvara's chronicle, which covers the years up to 1486, is particularly shaped by the poet's direct experience, offering a vivid and at times intimate testimony of the reigns of Zayn and his successors.

The first part of this paper will examine how Śrīvara interprets the political and social dynamics of the sultans' rule in continuity with a framework of long-established Sanskrit set of cultural references - focusing on the author's drawing, for this purpose, on the epic (*Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*), religious (*Nīlamata Purāṇa*), and philosophical (*Mokṣoṣpāya*) literary works: he projects a Sanskritic pre-Islamic Kashmiri image of kingship onto a Muslim dynasty, intending to establish an ideological continuity within the context of the *Rājataranṅiṇīs* and to shape a pattern of cultural inclusivity among the ruling elite.

The second part investigates Śrīvara's descriptions of the sultans' engagement, both at a personal level and in their capacity as patrons, with actors linked to Sanskritic culture who gravitated around the court. The content and stylistic choices of these depictions are consistent with the ideological framework outlined above. Particular attention is devoted to passages concerning the sultans' support for the Brahmin class (which included Śrīvara himself) and its associated cultural institutions, as well as Zayn's noteworthy interest in Nāth Yogīs.

## Patronage, Protection and Friendship: The Nature of the Relationship between 'Āqil Khān 'Rāzī' and Mirzā 'Bēdil' Dihlavī during the Late 17th Century

Victor Baptiste

PhD Candidate, École Pratique des Hautes Études, EPHE (Paris)

'Āqil Khān 'Rāzī' (1617?-1696 AD) is an important dignitary (maṣṣabdar) of the reign of 'Ālamgīr who occupied various positions in the Mughal state apparatus as well a prolific litterateur who authored a dīvān, four maṣnavīs, two mystical treatises and one historical chronicle. In 1667 AD, while he was holding the office of superintendent of the private chambers of the emperor (darōgha-yi ghul-khāna), he met with the young poet Mirzā 'Abd ul-Qādir 'Bēdil' Dihlavī (1644-1721 AD), who later became a major Indo-Persian literary and intellectual figure. Bēdil moved from Patna (aḏīmābād) to Delhi in 1664 AD and, while seeking patronage, found in the person of Rāzī a mentor. His correspondence (ruqa'āt) as well as contemporary tazkirāt demonstrate that he sent a copy of his first maṣnavī (muḥīṭ-i a'zam) to the nobleman, dedicated him his ṭilism-i ḥairat in 1669/70 AD and suggest that their relationship developed until the death of Rāzī in 1696 AD. In this paper, I will reflect on the various dimensions of this 'friendship', offering new insight on the history of literary patronage in Mughal India. Indeed, Bēdil benefitted in different ways from his connection to 'Āqil Khān. Rāzī enjoyed some degree of proximity to the emperor as well as to leading courtiers and could offer the young poet access to élite dihlavī social circles and to their literary gatherings (majālis). He was also a connoisseur of Persian poetry and mystical subtleties and Mirzā Bēdil praises in his qit'āt his literary judgement and his mastery over spiritual matters. The reciprocal dimension of this relationship will also be highlighted: enjoying a closeness to Rāzī also prompted Bēdil to take sides in courtly disputes. As an example, 'Āqil Khān could count on his protégé to counter the attacks of his rival, Muḥammad Afzal Sarkḥwush, who authored in 1682 AD the Kalimāt al-shu'arā.

## The Mughal Shu‘arā’ Showdown: One Story of Inter-religious Love in Two Indo-Persian Mathnawīs

Ojaswini Shekhawat

PhD Candidate, University of Yale

After a brief courtship by way of covertly flirting in the Ganga, a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy drown to death in a Gangetic whirlpool in Banaras — this story blew up in the eighteenth century, with many authors composing multiple Persian and Urdu Mathnawīs about it. The antecedents of this story, however, are in the seventeenth century, when “Bīnīsh” Kashmīrī (fl. 17th century), a Kashmiri court poet, and Mūsawī Khān “Fīṭrat” (d. 1690-91), a high ranking Mughal Mansabdār composed a Mathnawī each about this (fictitious) young interreligious couple, during the reign of Aurangzeb. In contemporaneous Sanskrit sources, this story appears mirrored — here we have Brahmin men and Muslim women, and instead of the Sufi-esque Mathnawīs with tragic endings, we see a celebration even of adulterous relationships through the generic conventions of śṛṅgāra or erotic literature.

This paper asks — how (and why) did various authors with diverse sources and levels of patronage, and at different nodes of the literary network (both in terms of places of production as well as the circulation of their works), writing in either Sanskrit or Persian, compose the same story of interreligious love?

## Religious patronage at the Mughal Court: Title Bestowal on 16th Century Jains

Raffaello De León-Jones Diani

PhD Candidate, EHESS-CESAH/CeRCLeS

Between the late 16th century and early 17th century, Jain monks were present at the Mughal court, echoing such a Jain presence at the court of Muḥammad b. Tuḡluq (r. 1325-1351). While their presence has been explained in terms of cultural exchanges, with an emphasis laid on Sanskrit textual production, these ties go beyond the philosophical discussions that are recorded in these texts. Indeed, Jains of both the Tapāgaccha and Kharataragaccha (the two most numerous Śvetāmbara gaccha-s) sought Mughal protection from threats and taxes, resulting in their obtaining farmān-s from the Mughal emperors. However, it was not only outward protection that the Jains sought but also internal patronage: indeed, Jains of both gaccha-s, as recorded in their own textual production, levied their position at court to obtain nominations within their monastic lineage by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1555-1605). Both Akbar and his son Jahāngīr (r. 1605-1628) are recorded in the Jain Sanskrit accounts as bestowing titles both personal and monastic to different members of the various gaccha-s. This practice of bestowing titles upon Jain leaders favoured by the Mughals shows the latter's involvement in the former's religious life while it also appears that it was the Jains who actively sought to obtain this patronage from the ruling dynasty. This is further echoed by later attempts at securing protection from rival gaccha-s under the reign of Śāhjahān (r. 1628-1658).

By looking at accounts found in two 16th century Sanskrit accounts of the Jain presence at the Mughal court, the Bhānucandragāṇicarita and the Mantrikarmacandravamśāvāliprabandha, this paper aims at shedding light on the Jain practice of securing titles from the Mughals.

## **Architectural studies of Tarikh-i-Rauza-i-Taj Bibi**

### **Abdullah**

Research scholar, Department of Persian, University of Delhi

An analysis of a rare 19th-century Persian manuscript, *Tarikh-i-agra wa Tarikh-i-Imarat-i-Hindustan* (also known as *Tarikh-i-Rauza-i-Taj bibi*), which is preserved in Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library patna cat no 645. This manuscript serves as an invaluable primary source for the study of Mughal architecture in Akbarabad (Agra) mainly Taj Mahal.

The analysis highlights the manuscript's unique contents, which offer deep insight into the construction of the Taj Mahal following the death of Mumtaz Mahal. Key information extracted includes technical specifications such as a list of the 22 types of precious stones used and their global origins (including from Egypt, Yemen, and Tibet), as well as details on the weights and measurements of construction materials. This demonstrates the scale of the Mughal Empire's trade networks. Furthermore, the text documents a complete roster of the master artisans and chief architects employed from across the region (including Shiraz and Kandahar). This proves that Shah Jahan pulled the best talent from various cultures, blending their skills into a uniquely Mughal masterpiece. Alongside poetic inscriptions found on the Taj Mahal's gate and other major Mughal structures like Akbar's tomb Moti Masjid and the Diwan-i-Khas.

In short, this manuscript shifts the focus from the emotional love story behind the Taj Mahal to the extraordinary logistical and technical brilliance required to build it. It confirms the structure's status not just as a symbol of love, but as a testament to the Mughal Empire's sophisticated engineering and global reach.

Image credits: Page from the Late Shah Jahan Album, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Herbert F. Leisy in memory of his wife, Helen Stamp Leisy 1977.207.



مرد از او ده کوزه بار بار  
آفرود و خطا بود  
عجب  
را که این از دو حال دون  
با قضا نیست با قضا بود  
تر قضا نیست چندی نصد  
و قضا نیست خود و بار بود  
میرای علی