

Mīr Findiriskī and the *Jūg Bāsisht*

Sayyid Amīr Abū al-Qāsim Astarābādī Findiriskī (1562/3–1640/1), better known as Mīr Findiriskī, was a well-known Iranian Muslim philosopher of the Safavid Empire, as well as a frequent traveler to South Asia. Although a renowned philosopher and Sufi who had earned the respect of even the Safavid emperors, he nevertheless stands as an enigmatic and mysterious figure about whom surprisingly little is known. Findiriskī's main claim to fame in his Iranian homeland was as a teacher of Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*) philosophy, although his somewhat eclectic corpus of (primarily Persian) writings render him somewhat difficult to categorize philosophically. Most significantly for this study, at some point during his various travels across Mughal South Asia, Findiriskī came across a copy of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, in the margins of which he penned his own running commentary, sharing his varied thoughts and observations concerning this Hindu philosophical narrative. Given that we know so little about the three members of the translation team, the highest hope for this chapter is that Findiriskī might serve as a sort of “explanatory commentary” that can provide probable insight into the translation team's (in this case, largely Pānīpatī's) thought processes and translation decisions. For a considerable portion of his commentary, Findiriskī provides running glosses, tracking the Persian text's various Sanskrit expressions and explaining them in the terms of Arabo-Persian Islamic—particularly Peripatetic—philosophy, usually following the translators' lead but at times providing his own suggestions and emendations. At least one of Findiriskī's goals in the commentary, in other words, was to track and evaluate the equivalences between Sanskrit and Arabo-Persian thought proffered by the translation team. Such observations may indeed help us to understand the translation team's choices more deeply. At the same time,

Findiriskī's commentary affords us the opportunity to witness a prominent early modern Islamic philosopher's reception of and reaction to a most fascinating Hindu philosophical tale.

Accordingly, as with the previous two chapters, the first aim of this chapter is to sketch Findiriskī's life and times in order to provide a contextualized entry into his writings. With this context in place, the chapter can then survey his treatises in an attempt to shed light on his reception of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, paying particular attention to his conceptualization of issues of religious and philosophical difference and diversity. Finally, in examining Findiriskī's commentary on the *Jūg Bāsisht*, we can also consider how his insights may help to illuminate the decisions and thought-processes of the *Jūg Bāsisht* translation team. This final objective, moreover, will provide us with the occasion to at last return to the text of the Sanskrit *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* situated alongside its Persian rendition, the *Jūg Bāsisht*.

A PERIPATETIC PHILOSOPHER BETWEEN THE SAFAVIDS AND THE MUGHALS

Mīr Findiriskī received his early schooling in his native region of Gorgān, also studying for a time in Qazvīn before finally receiving his advanced education in the intellectual center of Iṣfahān. Iṣfahān would also be the city where Findiriskī would ultimately pass away, nearing the age of eighty, in the year 1640/1. He is regularly included in the major *taẓkirahs*, which, overall, paint a rather consistent (and colorful!) picture of the man across the centuries of their composition.¹ Numerous accounts inform us, for instance, that, as a renowned teacher of *mashshā'ī* (Peripatetic) philosophy, Findiriskī enjoyed considerable time in audience with the Safavid emperors Shāh 'Abbās and Shāh Ṣafī (r. 1587–1629 and 1629–42). One frequently transmitted story, for example, relates that, on one occasion, Shāh 'Abbās wished to admonish Findiriskī for his unbecoming conduct in the marketplace (*bāzār*), but without the impoliteness of naming and chiding Findiriskī directly. Accordingly, Shāh 'Abbās reportedly said to him, “I have heard some very strange news that some of the knowledge-seekers stand around at the edge of the cock-fights among the throngs of ruffians,” to which Findiriskī replied, “They have spoken a lie to you: every day I am present at the edge of the cock-fights, and I have never seen any one of the knowledge-seekers there!”² Despite his reputation, thus, as something of a norm-challenging antinomian—regularly wearing coarse, shabby woolen garments while conducting himself in unexpected, somewhat transgressive ways—the *taẓkirah*-writers unanimously praise his learning in several disciplines, including philosophy (*ḥikmat*), mathematics, medicine, poetry, and alchemy and divination; in the eighteenth century, Vālih Dāghistānī would even call Findiriskī “the Aristotle of the age in philosophy (*ḥikmat*) and the Abū Yazīd [Bisṭāmī] of the era in Sufism (*taṣawwuf*).”³ In terms of his career in Iran, Findiriskī's most enduring reputation was as a teacher of the philosophical, scientific, and medical corpus of Ibn

Sinā, particularly the latter's watershed philosophical compendium, *al-Shifā'*, and medical encyclopedia, *al-Qānūn*. On the basis of such activities, Findiriskī came to be widely regarded as one of the three greatest Safavid intellectuals of his generation, alongside Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631/2) and Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1621). It is also possible that Findiriskī was an ancillary teacher of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), arguably the most influential philosopher-theologian of the entire Safavid period, though the evidence for this suggestion is rather scant.⁴

Despite the considerable fame and renown that Findiriskī thus enjoyed as a prominent philosopher and teacher within Safavid Iran, the *tazkirah*-writers paint a very different picture regarding his time spent in India. Findiriskī took numerous extended trips to South Asia, the first in the year 1606, and then several more between the years 1627 and 1638.⁵ However, the compilers of the *tazkirahs* consistently relate that, in contrast to his high profile in Iran, in India, Findiriskī took great pains to remain incognito, performing only menial labor, such as the task of shooing cattle off the road to let carriages pass, in the hopes of avoiding any and all recognition. Findiriskī is depicted as wandering the region somewhat itinerantly, reaching as far as Kashmir, Gujarat, and the Deccan, and preferring to meet *gurus* sitting in seclusion rather than kings sitting upon thrones.⁶ A number of accounts relate Findiriskī's immediate departure from a locale as soon as anyone recognized him, hence "blowing his cover," so to speak.⁷ While modern historiographers would rightly caution against accepting such accounts at face value, the fact that generations of biographers nearly unanimously memorialized Findiriskī in this fashion is certainly suggestive that he simply did not have any great public aspirations in South Asia. Although Findiriskī did have some contact with the Mughal court, his time spent there seems minimal and somewhat incidental: at the invitation of the Grand Vazīr Abū al-Ḥasan Āṣaf Khān, Findiriskī only twice met the Mughal emperor Shāh Jahān, once in 1628 and then again in only the last two or three years of Findiriskī's life (1637–38).⁸ So far as I have been able to find, there is no record of Findiriskī having received any kind of patronage or employ in any South Asian royal court. Findiriskī's quiet stays with reclusive Indian spiritual masters, however, often lasted much longer, such as his reported seven-year residence in a South Asian Sufi lodge (*khānqāh*) in order to undertake a regimen of purificatory practices.⁹

In short, there is little compelling evidence that Findiriskī had any particular, overarching social, political, or public agenda in South Asia, and so it seems that another explanation would better account for his swelling interest in the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*. Although Findiriskī does not often write about politics directly, one could perhaps take a further (though debatable) suggestion of his disinterest in kings from his lukewarm depiction of the vocation in his *Risālah-i ṣanā'iyyah*: whereas prophets, the Shī'ī Imāms, and philosophers occupy the noblest possible of vocations, kings (*shāhs*), in contrast, typically sit upon a middle-to-low rung of the hierarchy, tending, in Findiriskī's view, to promote

neither the rectitude nor the corruption of their subjects, but rather, prevalingly serving themselves and their own selfish interests alone.¹⁰ This is not to naïvely claim that Findiriskī exhibited no political agenda at all: to the contrary, one could plausibly read Findiriskī's engagement with the *Laghu* as, in part, a pointed gesture directed at the stifling Iranian Safavid ideologues in affirmation of the idea that wisdom can be found in many places other than Shī'ī dogma.¹¹ Nevertheless, I do not think such a characterization *exhausts* the reasons for his interest. As Findiriskī mentions in his commentary on the *Jūg Bāsisht*, he did attempt to learn Sanskrit himself, and also expressed great frustration at the inaccuracies in the translation, lamenting that the *paṇḍits* of his time no longer knew Sanskrit properly and that the translations were not directly from Sanskrit to Persian, but rather, typically occurred through an oral Hindavī vernacular as intermediary.¹² Such observations clearly point to a scholarly, philosophical interest, on the part of Findiriskī, for Hindu Sanskrit philosophical materials in their own right. Urging the Safavid elite to "broaden their horizons," accordingly, does not sufficiently account for Findiriskī's demonstrable interest in the detailed, technical specifics of the *Laghu*'s Sanskrit metaphysics, ontology, and soteriology; Findiriskī's primary interest in the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* via the *Jūg Bāsisht*, in other words, was its intellectual, philosophical contents first and foremost. At the very least, the trajectory of his life-activities, as well as the tenor of the passages from the *Laghu* that interested him most, indicate that Findiriskī's interests were not *merely* political, but were furthermore fundamentally oriented toward a search for eternal truths and world-liberating knowledge, in whatever form, language, or intellectual tradition these might be expressed.

Aside from the *tazkirahs*, the corpus of Findiriskī's writings can also help to more fully flesh out his context. Over twenty works have been attributed to Findiriskī with varying degrees of certainty, mostly composed in Persian.¹³ The most important and confidently attributed among these include his Persian treatise on the proper ordering of societal vocations and occupations, the *Risālah-i ṣanā'iyyah*; a collection (*divān*) of Persian poetry, alongside a well-known philosophical-didactic poem, the *Qaṣidah-i hikmiyyah*, itself the subject of at least three commentaries; his Arabic treatise on the philosophical category of "motion" (*ḥarakah*), *al-Risālah fī'l-ḥarakah*, including an evaluation of the notion of the Platonic archetypes (*al-muthul al-Aflātūniyyah*); his Persian *Risālah dar tashkīk*, a brief response to a question posed by Āqā Muẓaffar Ḥusayn Kāshānī on the validity of the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) concept of gradation (*tashkīk*) in essences (*dhawāt*); a Persian commentary, unfortunately no longer extant, on the Akbar-era translation of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, known as the *Razm-nāmah*;¹⁴ his Persian commentary on the *Jūg Bāsisht*, the *Sharḥ-i Jūg*, taking the form of a running marginal gloss (*ḥāshiyah*); and his condensed recension of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, the *Muntakhab-i Jūg Bāsisht*, in which Findiriskī had stitched together selections from the *Jūg Bāsisht* interspersed with selections from the corpus of classical Persian Sufi poetry. The

Muntakhab also includes a glossary of Sanskrit terms explained in Persian, typically utilizing the lexicon of the *wujūdī* and Peripatetic traditions. Findiriskī also has a number of other treatises accredited to his pen on particular philosophical questions, including *Fi ḥaqīqat al-wujūd* (“On the Reality of Existence”), *Fi irtibāṭ al-ḥādith bi’l-qadīm* (“On the Relationship between the Occasioned and the Eternal”), *Fi’l-maḳūlāt al-‘asharah* (“On the Ten [Aristotelian] Categories”), as well as a treatise on alchemy, though these titles remain unedited and largely unstudied. From these writings, it becomes clear that Findiriskī was an intellectual deeply steeped in the Islamic philosophical tradition, including Peripatetic, Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*), and *wujūdī* thought, as well as in the Persian tradition of Sufi didactic poetry. Findiriskī’s several successful pupils—including Mullā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī (d. 1686/7), author of a well-known gloss on the metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā’s *Shifā’*; Rajab ‘Alī Tabrizī (d. 1669), whose metaphysics would remain influential for a century or more;¹⁵ and Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzavārī (d. 1686/7), appointed by the Safavid sultan to the position of chief judge (*shaykh al-islām*)—only further indicate Findiriskī’s distinguished learning within the Arabo-Persian jet stream.¹⁶ His intellectual formation is thus similar to that of Muḥibb Allāh, though, between the two of them, Findiriskī certainly leans more toward a Peripatetic orientation. It is also worth observing that Findiriskī, in choosing to compose most of his treatises in Persian, was a direct contributor to the rise of Persian as an emerging medium for Islamic philosophical reflection in the early modern period. Hence, like Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī, too, participated in this nascent Persian philosophical jet stream, although one still deeply and inextricably tied to Arabic.

On the question of authorship, some modern scholars have doubted Findiriskī’s composition of the *Muntakhab* on the grounds that one of the Sufi poets whose verses have been inserted into the recension has been identified as one Fānī Iṣfahānī, a Sufi poet who passed away in 1807, long after Findiriskī’s lifetime.¹⁷ I am inclined to accept the attribution of the *Muntakhab* to Findiriskī, however, for a number of reasons. In the first place, Fānī Iṣfahānī is an obscure and little-known poet, in dramatic contrast to the other poets included in the *Muntakhab* (enumerated below), who were not only, uniformly, literary giants of the world of Persian Sufi poetry, but also all hailed from well before Findiriskī’s own lifetime, the latest, Qāsim-i Anvār, passing away in 1433, some two hundred years before Findiriskī and nearly four hundred years prior to Fānī. This discrepancy is immediately suspicious. Furthermore, we have confirmation from *taẓkirah*-authors as early as the late seventeenth century—within fifty or sixty years of Findiriskī’s death—that Findiriskī composed some variety of commentary upon the *Jūg Bāsisht*, as ‘Abd Allāh Afandī (d. 1717) reports in 1696 in his major biographical compendium, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’ wa-ḥiyāḍ al-fuḍalā’*: “[As for] his [Findiriskī’s] commentary (*sharḥ*) upon the *Jūg Bāsisht* . . . I have seen some of its benefits.”¹⁸ Granted, “*Sharḥ-i Jūg*” would most likely refer to Findiriskī’s marginal glosses on

the *Jūg Bāsisht* rather than to his *Muntakhab*, but the statement nonetheless confirms Findiriskī's direct association with the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*, rendering the fact that all extant manuscripts of both the *Sharḥ-i Jūg* and the *Muntakhab* attribute the works to him just that much more plausible.¹⁹

Furthermore, while Mojtabā'i was the first to identify the problematic poet in question as "Fānī Isfahānī," he has, unfortunately, given no details as to how he arrived at this identification.²⁰ One presumes that Mojtabā'i compared the verse fragments in the *Muntakhab* with some collection of Fānī's poetry, but, so far as I am aware, no such collection has been published, while I have not been able to access any manuscripts of Fānī's poetry on my own in order to check this claim. Fānī being such an obscure and late poet in comparison with the other poets cited,²¹ I am inclined to doubt the accuracy of the attribution of these verses to Fānī, at least until further details come to light. One might even suspect that Findiriskī himself could have been the poet in question, writing under the pen-name "Fānī Isfahānī," particularly given his well-known poetic production in his *Divān* and *Qaṣīdah-i ḥikmiyyah*, and the fact that Isfahān was Findiriskī's own place of residence, where he was buried, and where his tomb in the *Takht-i Fūlād* cemetery continues to be visited to this day. As will be shown below, the explicit statements and affirmations concerning non-Muslim communities and revelations that appear in Findiriskī's other writings lend weight to the image of a figure who would be interested and intrigued by a text such as the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*. In any case, given Afandī's statement above and its timing, the attribution of the *Sharḥ-i Jūg* to Findiriskī seems secure, while there is strong reason to accept his authorship of the *Muntakhab* as well.

BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

Modern studies have struggled to categorize Findiriskī philosophically, with different scholars affirming one philosophical identity or another via different pieces of evidence from across his writings.²² Some have considered Findiriskī best characterized as a Peripatetic (*mashshā'i*) thinker in the tradition of Ibn Sīnā, while others have regarded him as more in line with the school of Illumination (*ishrāq*) that traces its origins back to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191).²³ Several suggest a certain change and development in Findiriskī's thought over the course of his career, with him typically starting off as a more straightforward Peripatetic, and then coming to embrace Illuminationism and even philosophical Sufism (*'irfān*) later in his career. In most of these latter accounts, Findiriskī's various encounters with Indian Sufis and scholars during his travels in South Asia are highlighted as a likely impetus for the shift, his meetings with disciples of the so-called "Zoroastrian Illuminationist" Āzar Kayvān (d. 1618), as reported in the enigmatic *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*,²⁴ cited in particular as a potential turning-point in Findiriskī's philosophical outlook.²⁵ In my own view, the particular way in which

these questions are posed can be somewhat misleading, since, by this later period in the development of Islamic philosophy, figures like Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 1502), Shams al-Dīn Khafri (d. 1535), Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī (d. 1542), and numerous others had already been combining elements of Peripatetic, Illuminationist, and ‘*irfānī/wujūdī*’ metaphysics in various permutations for quite some time,²⁶ while the philosophical synthesis achieved by Findiriskī’s younger contemporary, Mullā Ṣadrā, marks an arguable high point in the coalescence of these traditions within a single metaphysics.²⁷ It was quite normal by this time, in other words, for figures to blur the lines between *mashshā’i*, *ishrāqī*, and ‘*irfānī/wujūdī*’ “identities.”

Nevertheless, certain seeming discrepancies across Findiriskī’s various compositions do demand some attempt at explanation. In addition to his teaching career, which, being primarily tied to the *Shifā’* and *Qānūn*, would suggest an Avicennan slant, most of Findiriskī’s known writings largely confirm this same Peripatetic orientation. In his aforementioned Persian *Treatise on Gradation* (*Risālah dar tashkīk*), for instance, Findiriskī sides with the mainstream Peripatetic position, contra the Illuminationists, in affirming that, although certain accidents/attributes (*a’rāḍ*) are subject to gradation (*tashkīk*)—it is logically coherent to speak of one object as “longer” or “smaller” than another, for example—essences (*dhawāt*, sing. *dhāt*), on the other hand, do not admit of gradation. In the case of a “human,” for instance, the essence (*dhāt*) of which is a “rational animal,” even if it might make semantic sense to speak of one human as “more” or “less rational” than another, such “gradations” or measures of magnitude, Findiriskī asserts along with most Peripatetics, are not matters *essential* to the human being as such, but rather, only concern what is *accidental* to the human being.²⁸ What a human being essentially is, in other words, is the fact of being an animal combined with the fact of being, in principle, rational; the degree to which one is *actually* rational, on the other hand, is only a matter accidental (*‘arīḍ*), rather than essential (*dhātī*), to a given human being. In his Arabic *Treatise on Motion* (*al-Risālah fī’l-ḥarakah*), Findiriskī again favors several roughly classical Peripatetic positions in rejecting all of the following: the occurrence of motion in substances (*jawāhir*), gradation in essences, the cognitive notion of the “unification of the knower and the known” (*ittiḥād al-‘āqil wa’l-ma’qūl*), and the existence of Platonic Forms (*muthul Aflātūniyyah*).²⁹ Such trends characteristic of the majority of his writings do indeed indicate a prevailing Peripatetic orientation across Findiriskī’s overall corpus.

Certain moments within Findiriskī’s writings, however, complicate this Peripatetic identification in ambiguous and enigmatic ways. Despite Findiriskī’s aforementioned rejection in the *Treatise on Motion*, for instance, of the epistemological tenet of the “unification of knower and known,” in his Persian *Risālah-i ṣanā’iyyah*, in contrast, Findiriskī speaks more favorably about the very same notion.³⁰ In his well-known philosophical poem, the *Qaṣīdah-i ḥikmiyyah*, in turn, Findiriskī expresses a certain critique of two foundational figures of Islamic Peripatetic thought, Ibn Sīnā and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950), indicating that their teachings

represent a sort of limited “exterior/exoteric understanding” (*fahm-i zāhiri*) that is unable to grasp the true depths of knowledge (*maʿrifat*):

Heaven with these stars is clear, pleasing, beautiful; whatever is there above has a form (*ṣūrat*) below. If the form below, by the ladder of gnosis (*maʿrifat*), is trodden upward, it will become the same as its principle (*aṣl*). No outward understanding (*fahm-i zāhiri*), whether it be an Abu Nasr [Fārābī] or an Abū ʿAlī [ibn] Sīnā, can grasp these sayings.³¹

Indeed, in this same verse, with its evocation of the (Aristotelian) “form below” possessing an identity with its “principle above”—that is, the idea that any given object within the material realm has some sort of a celestial counterpart or originary principle beyond the transient, material world—many have interpreted Findiriskī to be here *affirming* the reality of the Platonic Forms, despite his rejection of their existence as superfluous in the *Treatise on Motion*.³² One could attempt to account for this seeming discrepancy in multiple ways: perhaps such statements do not really affirm the Platonic Forms as usually understood, but only the presence of the forms of all objects within God’s (or the “Active Intellect’s” [*al-aql al-faʿāl*]) knowledge, and hence do not really constitute a departure from customary Peripatetic views;³³ or perhaps such assertions do indeed represent on Findiriskī’s part a certain turn toward the Illuminationist school, which robustly affirms the concrete reality of the Platonic Forms;³⁴ or perhaps the intended referent is not the Platonic Forms at all, but rather some iteration of the *wujūdī* notion of “immutable essences” (*ʿayān thābitah*), distinct from the Platonic Forms (as seen in the previous chapter) in that the former are situated within God’s knowledge rather than in a separate rung of the ontological ladder, while each immutable essence also corresponds to a single object in the here-below, unlike the Forms that are typically envisioned as universals ontologically connected with *multiple* material particulars.³⁵ Either of the second or third options would lend credence to the supposition that Findiriskī’s philosophical thinking may have developed in new ways later in his career, perhaps through his interactions with South Asian intellectual circles.

Rather than a philosophical or historical resolution to these textual discrepancies, however, one might consider taking a cue from Findiriskī himself. On more than a few occasions throughout his writings—particularly in his poetic or less dialectical compositions—Findiriskī reiterates a theme that, if read earnestly, could provide an alternative path for resolving the seeming contradictions within his corpus. This theme effectively presents the multitude of conflicting philosophical perspectives not only within the Islamic tradition, but across the ages, as differing formulations, angles, or viewpoints on the absolute truth, each voice articulating some aspect of the veritable truth while also being restricted by the limitations of its own perspective or vantage-point. In Findiriskī’s own words from his didactic poem, the *Qaṣīdah-i ḥikmiyyah*:

The jewel is hidden in the mystery (*ramz*) of the ancient sages (*dānā*), only he who is wise can uncover these mysteries. Leave aside these words! . . . We can say all these [words] of Him, but He is above all that . . . This winding, twisting world possesses nothing, *nothing* [of its own] . . . On this path, the prophets are like camel-drivers; they are the guides and the leaders of the caravan . . . Everyone understands their [the prophets'] words only from his own imagination (*wahm*); they do not grasp the words, for these words are mysterious . . . Would that the sages before us had said everything completely, so that the opposition of those who are incomplete would be removed!³⁶

Here we see a depiction of an ineffable God who is beyond all descriptions of Him. God's prophets (*anbiyā'*) and messengers (*rusul*), meanwhile, provide guidance to lead humanity back to God, but, in a suggestion that arguably mirrors the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*'s notion of "*saṃkalpa*" or the uniqueness of each soul according to Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī avers that each individual only grasps a prophet's guidance through the limitations of her own imagination and fancy. Similarly, though Findiriskī acknowledges that the full depths of knowledge (i.e., the "jewel") are somewhere to be found within the teachings of philosophers and sages across the ages, he further depicts each sage's teachings as somehow incomplete, articulating only *something* of the total Truth. When this partiality is combined, for Findiriskī, with the limited imaginations of the individuals who receive those teachings, the result, it seems, can sometimes be closer to ignorance than to knowledge.

For Findiriskī, accordingly, prophets, philosophers, and Shī'ī Imāms across the ages brought the same truth, in different languages and expressions, to different human civilizations. Indeed, according to Findiriskī, since the prophets have a mission to teach not only to the elite, but to every last member of a given community or civilization, they hence have no choice but to take into account the varying intellectual capacities of the myriad individuals within that collective.³⁷ So, unlike philosophers—who, Findiriskī says, teach only in general, universal terms—the prophets, in contrast, speak to the specific conditions of the context and times in which they find themselves, tailoring their instruction to the particular demands of the community around them. The prophets are thus akin to physicians, prescribing one regimen in times of health in order to maintain health, while prescribing another remedy in times of sickness in order to combat it;³⁸ although Findiriskī does not say it himself, one could readily imagine a doctor even prescribing two different remedies to two different patients afflicted with the same illness, so as to accommodate those patients' individual needs with respect to allergies, age, constitution, and so forth. In much the same way, Findiriskī affirms, different prophets and revelations enjoin distinct laws (*sharā'i*) and creeds to suit the particular conditions of the society (the "patients") to whom those teachings are addressed.³⁹ This conception of prophecy in fact becomes the basis for Findiriskī's conception of Islam's superiority over other religions (*adyān*; sing., *dīn*): when the doctor

offers a new “prescription,” updated to the patient’s current condition, it would be a mistake for the patient to continue to hold onto the old, now outdated remedy. In Findiriskī’s articulation, although Moses was fully correct to teach to the Jewish community what he taught at that ancient time when he taught it, if Moses were alive in the Prophet Muḥammad’s time and grasped the conditions of that era, then he (Moses) would have prescribed exactly what the Prophet Muḥammad prescribed. Hence, even if Moses’s revelation was true for its time, it is now invalid, given that more recent revelations have been brought to update the remedy in the interim.⁴⁰

Findiriskī explicitly extends this hermeneutic to include the South Asian context on a number of occasions. Once again in his *Risālah-i ṣanāʿiyyah*, for instance, Findiriskī describes the imperfect state of knowledge of those who fail to see the common meaning (*maʿnā*) behind the varying verbal expressions (*alfāz*) of the ancient Greek philosophers, the Islamic philosophers, and the books of the Brahmins and Indians (*barahmanān va hindavān*).⁴¹ The suggestion seems clear: the religion(s) of India too teach the same truths as do the Muslim philosophers, the Shīʿī Imāms, and the Prophet Muḥammad, even though the language, expressions, scripture, customs, practices, and laws are evidently disparate, and even though the teachings of the two traditions may at times appear mutually contradictory. Even if, to Findiriskī’s mind, the Hindu tradition might no longer be practicable after the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad—a stance that again reflects the mainstream Muslim view of Islam’s having “abrogated” (*naskh*) all prior religions upon its dawning—Findiriskī nevertheless found some interest or benefit in studying the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* up close. As shall be seen presently, in encountering the *Laghu* via the Persian *Jūg Bāsisht* translation, Findiriskī applied to this treatise much the same framework for comprehending religious diversity outlined here, only now, we are able to witness this general theory of religious diversity in more concrete application.

A MUSLIM COMMENTARY ON A HINDU TEXT⁴²

As mentioned above, upon encountering the *Jūg Bāsisht* at some point during his travels across South Asia, Findiriskī compiled his own abridgment of the Persian text, selecting the passages that he, presumably, found most interesting. Findiriskī then stitched his chosen pericopes together to form a shorter text known as the *Muntakhab-i Jūg Bāsisht* (*Selections from the Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*, hereafter “*Muntakhab*”). Echoing a common practice among Persian translations of Indic texts, Findiriskī inserted into this condensed version of the *Jūg Bāsisht* numerous selections from the corpus of classical Persian Sufi poetry—culled from the *divāns* of such well-known poets as Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 1220), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1320), Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Ḥāfiẓ

(d. 1389), Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī (d. 1406), Shāh Niʿmat Allāh Valī (d. 1431), and Qāsim-i Anvār (d. 1433)⁴³—and also included a few prefatory verses of his own in praise of the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*.⁴⁴ These prefatory verses appear not only on one of the manuscripts of the *Muntakhab*,⁴⁵ but also on one of the manuscripts of Findiriskī's marginal commentary on the full *Jūg Bāsisht*, known as the *Sharḥ-i Jūg*.⁴⁶ Hence, even if one doubts Findiriskī's authorship of the *Muntakhab* as per the above, the poem's presence within the *Sharḥ-i Jūg*, which is of more certain authorship, lends credence to the view that these verses indeed came from Findiriskī's own pen. This prefatory, laudatory poem provides us with an insightful glimpse into Findiriskī's interpretation of the *Laghu*, and so it is worth dwelling upon at some length:

This discourse (i.e., the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*) is like water to the world;
 pure and increasing knowledge, like the Qurʾān.
 Once you have passed through the Qurʾān and the Traditions,⁴⁷
 no one has sayings of this kind.
 An ignorant one who has heard these discourses,
 or has seen this subtle cypress-grove,
 Attaches only to its outward form (*ṣūrat*);
 thus, he makes a fool of himself.⁴⁸

In analyzing these fertile verses, let it suffice to point out the main features of Sufi thought and metaphysics that are referenced therein. The allusion to apparent, exoteric form (*ṣūrat*, *ẓāhir*) on the one hand, and esoteric meaning or essence (*maʿnā*, *ḥaqīqat*, *zāt*, *bāʿin*) on the other—correlated with the “ignorant” versus the “knowing” ones, respectively—is a recurring central theme of Persian Sufi poetry. The accompanying image of “pure water to the world” recalls the conventional poetic motif of the one, essential substance “water” which, across the world, may assume the various outward forms of “wave,” “ice,” “snow,” and “foam,” etc., as discussed in the previous chapter. As Annemarie Schimmel explains this motif of Sufi writing:

[Rūmī discusses] ‘the ocean of inner meaning’ and the external world . . . us[ing] the image of the foam on the sea to express this very idea . . . outward manifestations and all forms visible to the eyes are nothing but straw and chaff which cover the surface of this divine sea . . . the outward material forms are always conceived as something . . . which hides the fathomless depths of the ocean.⁴⁹

The [Sufi] poets . . . like to speak of the ocean, the billows, the foam, and the drop, which in each instance look different and yet are the same water. Niffarī seems to have been the first to use the symbolism of the divine ocean. Ibn ʿArabī had visualized the divine essence as a large green ocean out of which the fleeting forms emerge like waves, to fall again and disappear in the fathomless depths.⁵⁰

Hence, absolute Reality (*haqīqat*), which transcends every articulation and form, is symbolized by formless water; this Reality, in turn, assumes various delimited forms in the world, just as water appears sometimes as foam, sometimes as ice, and sometimes as snow, yet all these forms are ultimately one and the same water. And so, according to this Sufi metaphysics, as seen with Muḥibb Allāh, one and the same transcendent Reality attains manifestation in the world in diverse forms. Findiriskī's implication, it seems, is that, although the Qur'an and the *Laghu* are evidently disparate in accidental form, they nevertheless express the same Truth in essential reality. Only the knowing sage, however, will be able to perceive this common essence; the ignorant one, caught up in the world of forms, will never be able to discern the shared basic substance of bubbles and ice. As Findiriskī asserts, quite in this vein, in one of his marginal notes on the *Jūg Bāsisht*: "after understanding to the extent of my capacity (*isti'dād*), I find no opposition in any issue at all between the Brahmins (*barāhimah*) and the Islamic philosophers (*falāsifah*)."⁵¹ As we have already seen, Findiriskī affirms much the same stance in his *Risālah-i ṣanā'īyyah*, where he pointedly proclaims that whatever apparent differences there may be between the speech of the ancient philosophers (*qudamā-i ḥukamā*)—a term Findiriskī uses to encompass the pre-Aristotelian Greek philosophers, Aristotle himself, the Neoplatonists, the philosophers among the Brahmins and Indians (*barahmanān u hindavān*), and others—these are merely differences of expression (*ikhtilāf-i lufẓī*), for all these thinkers arrived at their teachings by way of the intellect (*ʿaql*), and "the way of the intellect is one" (*ṭarīq al-ʿaql wāḥid*).⁵²

This doctrine of form and essence is intimately tied up with the Islamic cosmological framework of God's names and attributes (*al-asmā' wa'l-ṣifāt*). According to a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad, God has ninety-nine divine names,⁵³ each of which, as many Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī have affirmed, articulates an attribute of God's total, ineffable Reality. The effects or traces (*āthār*) of these names, however, can be discerned within the phenomenal world if one is able to glimpse beyond the forms.⁵⁴ And so, the divine Name "the Beautiful" (*al-jamīl*), for instance, may be manifested in both a flower and a gazelle: at the level of form, these two objects, qua objects, can never be identical, but the transcendent essence they manifest—God's own dimension of beauty, that is, His name "the Beautiful"—is a singular reality. Indeed, in this Sufi metaphysics, the entire phenomenal universe is envisaged as simply the trace and manifestation of God's many Names, as the Sufi poet Rūmī explains in his *Fīhi mā Fīhi*, again referencing the *ḥadīth qudsī* of the "hidden treasure" already encountered in the previous chapter: "God says, 'I was a Hidden Treasure, so I wanted to be known.' In other words, 'I created the whole of the universe, and the goal in all of it is to make Myself manifest, sometimes through Gentleness and sometimes through Severity . . . Therefore all creatures make God manifest.'"⁵⁵

In this cosmological scheme, furthermore, below the formless level of reality—where the names and attributes have their root—are successive levels of

crystallization and corporealization, embracing such “lower” (though still supra-physical) realities as the Platonic forms, angelic beings, and the imaginal (*khayālī*) realities associated with dreams, each of which can attain even more diverse manifestations in the levels below them. Although difficult to discern the precise philosophical details, we have already seen Findiriskī echo such a hierarchical vision of the cosmos, in which diverse phenomenal forms manifest transcendent essences and realities, in his *Qaṣīdah-i ḥikmiyyah*: “Whatever is there above has a form below; if the form below, by the ladder of gnosis (*maʿrifat*), is trodden upward, it will become the same as its principle (*aṣl*). No outward understanding (*fahm-i zāhirī*) can grasp these sayings . . . The jewel is hidden in the mystery of the ancient sages, only he who is wise can uncover these mysteries . . . We can say all these [words] of Him, but He is above all that.”⁵⁶ According to one of the later commentators on this *Qaṣīdah*, Ḥakīm ‘Abbās Sharīf Dārābī, it is indeed the names of God to which Findiriskī is referring in these verses.⁵⁷ Another commentator, al-Gilānī, asserts that Findiriskī is here describing the archetypes (*muthul*), that is, the immaterial universals (*kulliyāt-i mujarrad*) residing above the level of corporeal reality, which govern the relevant species in the corporeal world below them.⁵⁸ In other words, much like Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī here appears to envision a metaphysics where, for instance, the transcendent universal “human” is the ontological source and cause of all particular humans (Matthew, Mark, Luke, etc.) that exist in the here-below. As Findiriskī explains in his *Risālah-i ṣanāʿiyyah*, these universals are not mere mental abstractions of the human mind, but have a real, concrete reality in the levels of existence above this corporeal world; specifically, the universals have their roots and are contained within the emanating intellects that constitute the classical Peripatetic cosmology of the Avicennan tradition.⁵⁹

Of course, not all manifestations of God’s Names and Attributes are created equal, and the prophets (*al-anbiyāʾ*)—especially the Prophet Muḥammad—are typically considered to be the most comprehensive manifestation possible within the realm of creation, hence their revered qualification to serve as receptacles for divine revelation (*waḥy*). As we have seen, much like Muḥibb Allāh’s discussion of prophecy, Findiriskī too offers an account for the cause and purpose of religious diversity, though he cleaves closer to a Peripatetic lexicon than to a *wujūdī* formulation. The prophets, according to Findiriskī, have attained union with the celestial intellects, and thus, possess comprehensive knowledge; this is also the goal of philosophy (*ḥikmat*). The prophets, however, attain to this knowledge through revelation (*sharʿ*; *sharīʿah*), rather than through action, effort, or contemplation, which means that they enjoy a divine protection and infallibility that “mere” philosophers do not. While the philosophers only speak to the elite few who possess a requisite philosophical temperament, the prophets, on the other hand, speak to the entire community, with a direct responsibility over the health and well-being of that community.⁶⁰

Like doctors with their patients, however, the remedy for a given ailment is not “one size fits all”: the doctor has to take into account the particular constitution of the patient in front of him and then prescribe accordingly. Thus, the prophets, as we have seen Findiriskī assert, do not prescribe one practical path to all people for all time, but rather, God sends new prophets with new revelations as necessary in order to address the new and emerging particularities of people and communities as they transform over time. The truth that all the prophets teach, however, is indeed one and the same all-encompassing Reality.⁶¹ Compounding this is Findiriskī’s account for religious diversity at the level of the individual, as, in the *Qaṣīdah-i hikmiyyah* passage examined above, individuals are depicted as only understanding the teachings of the prophets in their own limited way, that is, to the extent that their individual intellects (*‘aql*) and imaginations (*wahm*, *khayāl*) are capable of grasping the total truth. And so, invoking a common Sufi metaphor, Findiriskī encourages his readers to make every effort to rend the veil that covers the secret of this knowledge.⁶² Accordingly, although Findiriskī does not seem to accept that aspect of Muḥibb Allāh’s view which would have the uniqueness of each prophet influence the uniqueness of each *sharī‘ah*—Findiriskī, in contrast, asserts that Moses would have relayed the same revelation as the Prophet Muḥammad had the former’s mission taken place in seventh-century Arabia—Muḥibb Allāh and Findiriskī are nevertheless in considerable agreement over the notion that the unique qualities, dispositions, and ailments of each person and community profoundly shape the character of the revelation that is conveyed to them.⁶³

These considerations of prophethood bring us to Findiriskī’s peculiar utilization of the image of the cypress tree (*sarv*) in his prefatory verses, which in Persian poetry is frequently associated with the Prophet Muḥammad as beloved.⁶⁴ Typically, however, the cypress-beloved, because it demands the total attention and absorption of the lover, remains single and unique. Hence, the cypress “is often called *āzād*, ‘free,’ because it stands majestically alone.”⁶⁵ Yet Findiriskī, in his verses, mentions not a solitary cypress, but rather, a populated cypress-grove; indeed, according to Mojtabā’ī, the latter half of Findiriskī’s laudatory poem is actually a quotation from the poet Sanā’ī’s (d. 1130) *Hadiqat al-ḥaqīqat* (“Garden of Reality”),⁶⁶ with the sole modification that the phrase “manner of explanation” (*tarz-i bayān*) has been changed to “cypress-grove” (*sarvistān*), suggestive of a deliberate decision on Findiriskī’s part. What could be the significance of a multitude of prophet-beloveds, or, to use the language of Findiriskī’s verses, a multitude of “subtle discourses”? In light of the Islamic metaphysics outlined here, wherein the one Reality can be distinguished from its multiple manifestations in the world, my suggestion is that, just as God’s Names and Attributes, and the celestial realities and essences, have attained a direct-as-possible manifestation in the Qur’ān, the *Laghu*, in Findiriskī’s estimation, is also a similarly complete and profound manifestation. The two manifestations, the Qur’ān and the *Laghu*, are separate cypress trees, each communicating, in drastically divergent languages, the singular glories

of God's Reality, doing so with such brilliance as to demand our dedication and devotion, provided we have the eyes to see it.

But would Findiriskī say that the *Laghu* is an *equally* profound manifestation as the Qur'ān? His phrase "once you have passed through the Qur'ān and the Traditions" would suggest not. On the other hand, for Findiriskī, it may be less a question of which book is more comprehensive of Reality, and more a question of which book is better suited to a given reader. Indeed, Findiriskī affirms, as we have seen, that Moses would have conveyed the same revelation as Muḥammad had he been a messenger to seventh-century Arabia rather than the ancient near east, thus suggesting a parity between the two prophets. At the same time, however, the patient must follow the most "updated" doctor's orders: the most recent revelation is the one best tailored to current conditions and ailments, and so to follow an older revelation (an "outdated" doctor's order, so to speak) would be an error that could bring great peril.⁶⁷

Accordingly, much like Muḥibb Allāh, Findiriskī in his *Risālah-i ṣanā'īyyah* deplores those who would seek to undermine the specifically Islamic *sharī'ah* by casting aside the literal words of the revelation or its particular formal practices, labeling such "sects" (*firqah*) as the single gravest threat to a healthy society.⁶⁸ Even though the ultimate goal is the one Reality, which lies beyond all form, the only way to reach it is to follow a *sharī'ah*, or, as Rūmī often phrases it, to follow in the footsteps of a prophet.⁶⁹ It is only *through* the form that one's field of comprehension can be opened up to the universal essence; universal realities are only available to us in the here-below as manifested in particular forms, so one must penetrate the particular form in order to ascend to the level of the universal reality, or, in the language of Findiriskī's *Qaṣīdah*, one can only climb the ladder of knowledge/gnosis (*ma'rīfat*) "upward" if one starts from the "form below."⁷⁰ Hence, forms cannot be haphazardly equated in the here-below—ice is never foam at the level of form, nor a flower a gazelle—but can only be identified *transcendently*.⁷¹ The affirmation of a single, supra-formal, transcendent Absolute, accordingly, does not require the dismissal of the very real distinctions that occur at each and every level of reality beneath this Absolute, which include all the levels where we humans, practically speaking, always live.

Having now glimpsed, in its very broad outlines, the Arabo-Persian philosophical resources which Findiriskī brought to his study of the *Laghu* and the overall hermeneutical framework with which he interpreted it in his *Muntakhab*, let us now further this account with a glance at this framework in concrete application. Although a detailed look at Findiriskī's other *Laghu*-related composition, the *Sharḥ-i Jūg*—Findiriskī's marginal commentary on the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha/Jūg Bāsisht*—would be a natural next stage of analysis, such an examination will, unfortunately, have to await a future study. Of all the known manuscripts of the *Sharḥ-i Jūg*, the most important copy is currently held in a private Iranian collection that, unfortunately, I have not yet been able to access. It seems clear that this

manuscript is by far the most complete version: in this copy, according to Mojtabā'i, Findiriskī's commentarial notes "are copious and cover the margins of almost all the folios,"⁷² whereas, in the other copies I have examined to date, the notes are comparatively infrequent and occasional. I will therefore reserve a comprehensive analysis of the *Sharḥ-i Jūg* for another occasion, once this manuscript has become accessible; the material available in the other, less complete manuscripts, however, is certainly sufficient to supplement my analysis here. As such, I will draw from the *Sharḥ-i Jūg* at relevant moments throughout the remainder of this study.

At this juncture, then, let us instead turn to the body of the *Muntakhab*. With all the ground covered in the previous chapters, we are, at last, equipped to return to the text of the Sanskrit *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* placed side-by-side with the translation team's Persian rendition in the *Jūg Bāsisht*, here selected by Findiriskī and re-woven in the form of the *Muntakhab*. As I hope will be evident, copious slices of the philosophical schools and intellectual currents examined in this study thus far all play into the Persian translation, dictating and informing the creative intellectual processes by which Jagannātha Miśra, Paṭhān Miśra, and Pānīpatī found their own chosen ways to express the Sanskrit thought of the *Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* in the terms of the Arabo-Persian Islamic intellectual tradition.

THE FRAMEWORK IN CONCRETE APPLICATION

Without knowing more about the translation team's biographies, it is difficult to be sure of what precisely their intellectual formations would have consisted. Yet we can still infer a great deal about their intellectual backgrounds from the *Jūg Bāsisht* itself, that is to say, from the choices they made in translating a given Sanskrit passage one way or another. On the basis of the text of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, it is clear that, in Pānīpatī's case, his formation was prevailingly Sufi and *wujūdī*, as the perspective on religious diversity reflected within the Persian text owes a great deal to the sort of Islamic discourse exemplified by Muḥibb Allāh.

Yet, as discussed in chapter 3, well before the early modern period, the *wujūdī* tradition had already assimilated a great deal of the terminology and conceptual framework of Islamic Peripatetic philosophy. Hence, Muḥibb Allāh frequently speaks in the Avicennan terms of "necessary" and "possible existents," "universals" and "particulars," etc. Accordingly, in the first place, the evidence of the translation team's (particularly Pānīpatī's) debt to the philosophical Sufi *wujūdī* tradition is unmistakable: from the very first pages of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, we witness a litany of technical terms that come straight from *wujūdī* discourse in ways that mirror Muḥibb Allāh's representative deployment of them; in even just the opening passage of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, as presented in the introduction, we find the deployment of such *wujūdī* terms as *mazhar* (locus of manifestation), *ta'ayyunāt* (specifications), *waḥdat-i zāt* (oneness of the Essence), *tajallī* (manifestation), and so forth

and so on. At the same time, however, the language employed by the translation team also exhibits a distinct *Peripatetic* influence, as in the terms *ṣūrat* (form), *muṭlaq* (absolute), and *ʿaql-i khālīṣ* (“pure intellect,” a term referring to the celestial intellects of Avicennan cosmology). In other words, by this point in Islamic intellectual history, there was no longer a clear line dividing Sufi and Peripatetic thought: the two, in general, had become considerably intermingled, allowing for a whole spectrum of intellectual possibilities that, in the large “grey area” between the two poles, drew from both sides, much as Findiriskī and other figures also did. And so, with Findiriskī generally preferring a Peripatetic discourse and Muḥibb Allāh favoring *wujūdī* formulations, we can bring both of their intellectual perspectives to bear on the analysis of the *Jūg Bāsisht*, which, somewhat inevitably, bears the marks of—and exhibits “wisps” from—both philosophical traditions. This “Peripateticized” *wujūdī* Sufism, in other words, formed a large part of the Arabo-Persian intellectual heritage that the translation team (specifically Pānīpatī) brought with them to their reading of the *Laghu*, and which underlay the particular processes of thought and interpretation that informed the team’s translation choices and conduct.

Bearing all of this in mind, let us now try to consider how the translation team might have applied these various Arabic and Persian intellectual resources to the translation of a particular, concrete passage of the *Laghu*. I present here a characteristically metaphysical passage from Findiriskī’s *Muntakhab*, side-by-side with the original Sanskrit passage from the *Laghu*. For the purposes of comparison, I have translated the two versions of this passage rather literally, even though the result may sound at times inelegant in English. The left column translates Abhinanda’s Sanskrit *Laghu*; the right column translates the corresponding passage from Jagannātha Miśra, Paṭhān Miśra, and Pānīpatī’s *Jūg Bāsisht* (which Findiriskī has simply excerpted from the larger text, without modification, for the purposes of his abridgment, the *Muntakhab*). Finally, Findiriskī inserts a verse of Persian Sufi poetry into the selection, thus affording us the opportunity to consider his exegesis of the passage as well:

Laghu-Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha (Nirvāṇa Prakaraṇa)
(6:11:34–35, 6:12:2–6)

[*Brahman*] is not born, nor does it die in any way, in any place, or at any time; *brahman* alone expands [itself] in the phenomenal⁷³ form of the world.

This *brahman* is the whole [world], one, tranquil, without beginning, middle, or end, free from becoming and unbecoming. Having thought thus, be happy!

...

Muntakhab-i Jūg Bāsisht
(folio 99, Mojtabāʾi 2006: *fārsī* 108)

The whole world is the manifestation of that Being (*hastī*) and Reality (*ḥaqīqat*) and is found in it, which has no beginning, end, or middle, which is not born nor dies, into which change and transformation have no access. Having given space in your heart for this belief concerning it, repose at peace and ease!

He who, O Rāma, regards this multitude of rays as distinct from the sun, for him, that multitude is indeed as if other than the sun.

He by whom the bracelet is regarded as distinct from the gold [of which it is made], for him, indeed, that gold is not the same as that bracelet.

[But] he by whom the rays would be regarded as indistinct from the sun, for him, those rays are the same as the sun. He is said to be unwavering.⁷⁴

He by whom the bracelet is regarded as indistinct from the gold, he is said to be unwavering, possessing the great understanding of the oneness of the gold.

Having left aside all multiplicity, be firm in the condition of true knowledge—[which is] completely free of any object (of knowledge)⁷⁵—situated in the womb of pure consciousness.

Know that all these variegated existents and determined forms that come into sight, innumerable and without limit, are all occasions for the appearance of the Essence (*zāt*) and manifestations of Absolute Being. The root of all of these appearances is the one Essence of *brahman*, just as with ornaments and gold-pieces, such as bracelets, earrings, anklets, rings, and so forth, each of which has its own distinct determination and form: the source of all of those ornaments is the one essence of gold, which remains the very same gold even after those forms are shattered. Or just as, upon the rising of the exalted sun, thousands upon thousands of scattering beams, radiance, and rays can be seen, [still] the root of all those limitless and endless beams and lights is the one essence of the exalted sun.

When someone attains *barahm-gyān* (*brahma-jñāna*, “knowledge of *brahman*”) and arrives at complete knowledge of the Essence, his vision becomes effaced and he becomes annihilated (*fānī*) in the Essence, like a drop which falls into the ocean and becomes the ocean.

Shaykh [Farīd al-Dīn] ‘Aṭṭār [d. 1220]:

The eye which is not fixed upon the source—the ocean—

Is fixed upon the drop; how can [such a man] be Muslim (*musalmān*)?

So long as the drop and the ocean do not become one,

How can the stone of your unbelief (*kufr*) become the gem of faith (*īmān*)?

I see everything as the one sun,
But I don’t know how it will shine upon you!

Both versions of the passage begin with a description of absolute Reality (*brahman*) that is fairly standard in Hindu Sanskrit literature.⁷⁶ Ultimate Reality transcends all descriptions; it is eternal and immutable, thus suffering no change whatsoever even as it manifests itself in the form of the world. One may note the seamless inclusion, in the Persian translation, of standard Sufi designations for the Absolute, such as “Being” (*hastī*), “Reality” (*ḥaqīqat*), and “Essence” (*dhāt/zāt*).

One might also note the inclusion, in the Persian translation, of the technical term “locus of manifestation” (*maṣṣhar*), which, as we have seen, carries with it the entire metaphysics and cosmology of God’s names and attributes. Now, while the author Abhinanda, in the original Sanskrit *Laghu*, is happy to speak about the Absolute as “expanding” itself (*jṛmbhate*) in the phenomenal form of the world (*jagad-vivarta-rūpeṇa*) or “shining itself forth” (*svayam ullasati*) as other objects,⁷⁷ he never articulates a framework for this shining forth that quite corresponds with the Islamic names and attributes.⁷⁸ If the reader will recall Tony Stewart’s theory of “seeking equivalences,” outlined in the introduction, wherein Muslim translators merely look for overt similarities (or “equivalences”) but without seeking “perfect translation” (at least not of technical and nuanced theological concepts), then, so far, it seems that Stewart’s theory may indeed hold true.

Both versions of the passage then move on to two common analogies employed throughout the *Laghu*: the golden bracelet and the sun and its rays. To begin with the golden bracelet, in the *Laghu*, this analogy emphasizes the fact that the gold of which a bracelet is made is itself far more enduring than the particular ornamental form that the gold has assumed: some heat or hammering would alter the shape and thus make the bracelet no longer a bracelet—it would become, perhaps, liquid or shards, or another ornament such as a ring or necklace—but this would not make the gold cease to be gold; rather, the gold will endure through any such process of formal alteration. The import of this teaching is that any given ornament or piece of gold is, to one who sees beyond the form, really just gold, rather as ice and foam are really just water. Similarly, even as *brahman* shines itself forth as the myriad forms of the world, it itself remains wholly unchanged and transcendent, the essential reality underlying every fleeting form and apparent transformation.⁷⁹ While the translation team’s rendition, in typical Persian prose-style, embellishes the analogy and includes additional lines of explanation—presumably required for a Persian-speaking audience but not for Sanskrit-readers—the original passage is rather fairly represented, at least at the doctrinal level.⁸⁰

The *Laghu*’s recurring analogy of the sun and its rays again expresses the view of the essential identification between *brahman* and the phenomenal world, even if Abhinanda did not spell out all the analogy’s implications in this particular instance. Each ray of sunlight, according to the analogy, though fleeting and pale in comparison to the sun, is ultimately nothing other than the sun itself; even if only a dim extension, the basic substance of every individual ray is nothing but sunlight. Furthermore, regardless of the fate of the sun’s rays—no matter how many times they may be bounced off of objects, refracted, inflected with color, or simply fizzle out into the blackness of space—the sun itself remains transcendentally and majestically unaltered. In much the same way, Abhinanda repeats time and again in the *Laghu*, the basic reality of all objects is simply *brahman*, the source of the entire phenomenal order, while any apparent transformations are merely transient and illusory, *brahman* ever remaining exactly what it is.⁸¹ Only one who possesses great

wisdom, however, will be able to see that this is in fact the case. Again, the translation team's rendition seems to present this teaching rather faithfully, despite some poetic elaboration, while the verse of 'Aṭṭār's poetry that Findiriskī has inserted can leave little doubt that an overall similar metaphysical teaching—namely, the alternating identification between the phenomenal order and the Absolute, from one perspective, and then the nothingness of the phenomenal order in the face of the Absolute, from another angle—is given voice in both versions of the passage.

Subsequently, however, the translation team begins to take a few liberties. While the Sanskrit *Laghu* speaks of the one of great understanding, who has laid aside all multiplicity, as abiding in the womb of pure consciousness (*śuddha-cinmātra*), the translation team, perhaps to make the passage a bit more recognizable to readers cultivated in the Persian literary tradition, instead speaks of the wise one who is “annihilated” (*fānī*) in the Essence like a drop in the ocean. Now, the addition of the new analogy of the ocean-drop, though certainly a translator's innovation, does not seem to amount to all that much of a modification. Indeed, throughout the *Laghu*, Abhinanda is happy to speak of the disappearance of the individual ego in the one-and-only pure consciousness,⁸² while he also makes frequent use of similar images such as the transient wave on the ocean of *brahman*, an analogy that runs along very comparable lines.⁸³ The image of the drop and the ocean, accordingly, expresses much the same metaphysical teaching as the previous analogies: just as the drop—a sort of fleeting individuation of the ocean that bears (virtually) no effect on the ocean itself—consists of nothing other than ocean-water, similarly, the objects of the phenomenal world, the appearance and forms of which are transient and illusory, are really nothing other than *brahman*. In comparison with the Sanskrit original, the insertion of the ocean-drop analogy places perhaps slightly more emphasis on the subjective pole of this knowledge, that is to say, on the disappearance of the realized sage herself in the Absolute, though one could certainly make the case that the difference is negligible.

The introduction of the term “annihilated” (*fānī*), however, seems more significant. The term “annihilation” (*fanā*) has a very long history in Sufi thought and practice, dating back very nearly to the earliest founding figures of the tradition,⁸⁴ and has been reused if not reconsidered and refined by perhaps every subsequent Sufi teacher in history. The basic meaning of the term is the “annihilation” or “extinction” of the individual ego or lower self (*nafs*) in the face of God's absolute Reality: as Findiriskī, in his *Sharḥ-i Jūg*, glosses the state of being meant to be communicated by the ocean-drop analogy, “after every relation (*nisbat*), mark (*nishān*), and echo (*āvāz*) of one's own [individual] qualities (*ṣifāt*) have become absolutely annihilated (*muṭlaq fānī gashtah*), one is then called ‘subsistent by the subsistence of the Real’” (*bi-baqā'-i ḥaqq bāqī*).⁸⁵ *Baqā'* is, of course, the traditional Sufi counterpart of *fanā*: one is “annihilated” from one's own individual, lower self (*nafs*) but then “subsists” in God alone with the phenomenological awareness of

God as the sole veridical reality. Given this long ritual, practical, theological, and metaphysical history within—and particular to—the Sufi tradition, the word *fanā'* is certainly a prime candidate, on Stewart's translation theory referenced above, for a technical term that cannot be "purely" translated, but rather, can only provide a broad "equivalence" that thus helps a Muslim translator to express his own Islamic worldview in the guise of the local terminology (in this case, the Sanskrit term *brahma-jñāna*, "knowledge of *brahman*"). Yet, considering this moment of translation from within the perspective of the Islamic metaphysics outlined here, it seems that a somewhat different interpretation might emerge: although, with *fanā'* and *brahma-jñāna*, we may indeed be speaking about two experiences, concepts, religious forms, or states of being that are evidently and undeniably distinct, one may nevertheless assert that the transcendent reality manifested therein is shared between them. Taking our lead from the Sufi poet 'Aṭṭār, whom Findiriskī has inserted into this passage, one individual may be looking at a drop and another at foam, but both should have their attention fixed on the ocean from whence the two objects came, or, to utilize 'Aṭṭār's second analogy, they should know the two distinct objects as only the light of the one sun.⁸⁶ Stewart is surely correct when he asserts that the translation is "imperfect," but, when one takes into account these Sufi tenets, it can further be said that what is an "imperfect" translation at one level can still be a "perfect" translation at another, more transcendent level.

In the face of this framework, one might, understandably, raise the objection that, if everything expresses the one and only Reality in the end anyway, then what is to stop someone from translating "cat" as "dog" and then claiming, on this supposed metaphysical basis, that the translation is perfectly accurate? At least one response, it seems from the foregoing, would be to reply that such an objection again fails to take into account the distinct levels of reality as they are articulated in the *wujūdī* tradition. There are certain essential realities, or certain aspects of the Real, that, for example, a flower does manifest, and other realities that it does not, even if all those essential realities alike ultimately refer to the (still more transcendent) absolute Reality. Stated more simply, a flower does manifest God's dimension of Beauty (the divine Name "*al-jamīl*"), but it does not, to say the least, manifest His Name "the Slayer" ("*al-mumīl*") particularly well; the case is likewise, *mutatis mutandis*, for a gazelle.⁸⁷ If one recalls the famous story of the elephant in the dark room, retold by Rūmī and others—in which a group of men, unable to see the elephant and touching different parts of it, describe this single multi-faceted object in multiple ways ("like a fan," "like a pipe," "like a pillar," etc.)⁸⁸—these men offered *partial* but still *good* descriptions of the reality before them; other descriptions, such as "miniscule" or "orange," would have been inaccurate and irrelevant. Analogously, calling a cat "furry" would be a good but incomplete description, while calling a cat "dog," without any further qualification, would be plainly useless. Again, as argued at length in the previous chapter, it would be a mistake to assume that *wahdat al-wujūd* amounts to a simplistic repudiation of difference

and distinction as utterly illusory; to the contrary, difference has a very real place within most iterations of *wujūdī* metaphysics.

Hence, according to this *wujūdī* metaphysics, even though all things are ultimately “connected” within a unified, transcendent Reality, nonetheless, within the realm of manifestation, some connections are more relevant than others. We can similarly observe in the *Laghu* that, though Vasiṣṭha teaches Rāma that all the different labels and categories of different people are all ultimately manifestations of a single ultimate Reality, and that Rāma should see himself and the whole world as not other than that Reality, Vasiṣṭha simultaneously implores Rāma to maintain a simultaneous awareness of his reality at the level of forms: Rāma, by birth, by constitution, by temperament, by destiny, is a king, and so he must live this life out as a king. *Wujūdī* thinkers, similarly, speak of the realized individual as “balancing the outward (*ẓāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*)” and as “seeing with two eyes [i.e., of the outward and the inward].”⁸⁹ Only the discriminative capacity and vision of the wise, however, can comprehend this subtle balancing act. If one lacks this capacity or is unwilling to pursue it, then it seems that one must remain an “ignorant exot-erist,” drowned in the world of forms, unqualified to plumb the depths of those “subtle discourses” of which Findiriskī speaks in his prefatory verses.

As we have seen in the early stages of this study, modern scholars have proposed a number of useful hermeneutics for conceptualizing the Mughal translation movement, ranging from motivations of political legitimation (Richards) and imperial political self-fashioning (Alam, Gandhi, Truschke), to the search for imperfect translational “equivalences” (Stewart), to the contextually-specific encounters between different South Asian actors (Ernst, et al.), all to be examined as historical *processes* that eschew essentialized religious categories. If one were to speculate how Pānīpatī, Muḥibb Allāh, or Findiriskī might respond to such theories and frameworks in the context of the translation of the *Laghu*, I submit they would confirm that these modern studies indeed have a point, yet none of them quite capture the complete picture. Yes, “religions” (our Muslim thinkers would say: “*sharā’i*,” “*adyān*,” or “*madhāhib*”) are most certainly historical things, ever changing through time as humans and circumstances compel them to; yet, in the accounts provided by the *wujūdī*-Peripatetic metaphysics articulated here, all such change is precisely the playing out of the possibilities already contained within a transcendent, immutable reality, namely, the total constellation of God’s names and attributes as deposited in the multiple revelations sent through the blessed souls of the prophets, and subsequently received uniquely by each individual soul and religious community. Again, yes, the *Jūg Bāsisht* is evidently an “imperfect” translation of the *Laghu* along the lines of “seeking equivalences”; yet, such imperfection can give way to another type of transcendent perfection, provided the reader has the eyes to see: what is at one level the use of an ostensibly Hindu vocabulary to express substantially Sufi ideas is, at the same time, an attempt to express, as far as language will allow, what is universal and shared between both

communities, precisely because *wujūdī* thought contains within itself the insistence that it should transcend its own concepts and formulations.⁹⁰ No word or form can capture the Absolute; the best words and forms are those which best help us to transcend those very same words and forms, so as to reach the level of the universal, transcendent, all-encompassing Reality of realities.

No doubt, our three Muslim thinkers and these modern scholars come to an impasse at a certain point. Where Pānīpatī, Muḥibb Allāh, and Findiriskī might view religious practice to be divesting a soul of all its human particularities and contextual qualities so as to approach God's universal realities (*tajarrud*, *takhalluq*, *ta'ālluh*), modern scholars have instead tended to see an individual being only all the more intensely and profoundly shaped by his immediate social and cultural context, falling ever *deeper* into cultural particularity. How to adjudicate this tension in the practice of modern scholarship is, in my view, a crucial question for the future of the field, and one that has no easy answers, though I will offer some of my own reflections at the conclusion of this study. And yet, when scholars of South Asia are seemingly unanimous in their goal to cease projecting modern assumptions back into the premodern past, at the very least, it becomes incumbent upon us all to understand, as far as our capacities and contexts will allow, the perspectives and worldviews of those whom we seek to study in their own terms. Such has been a central aspiration of this study, and one that I hope may finally coalesce in a more extended examination of the text of the *Jūg Bāsisht* in the next chapter.