

**Dr. Fathullah Mujtabai**

### **Mir Findiriski in India**

Mir Abu' l- Qāsim Findiriskī (d. 1640 - 41) was a famous teacher of philosophy in Isfahān, and men like Sadr al - Dīn Shīrāzī (who became the greatest philosopher of his time), and Sarmad Kāshānī,<sup>1</sup> the poet saint who was Dārā Shikoh's teacher and spiritual guide,<sup>2</sup> were among his pupils. Mir Findiriskī was not a prolific writer, and, in spite of his renown, our knowledge about his life is very scanty. The writers of *tadhkiras* unanimously praise his merits as a philosopher and poet; but do not tell us much about his career. Of his writings we have a rather small treatise in Persian on sciences (*Risāla-i Sinā'īyya*) from a philosophic point of view; a mystico - philosophical *qasīda* which has often been quoted in anthologies and commented upon by Sharīf Dārābī;<sup>3</sup> and a number of *ghazals*, *rubā'īs* and verse fragments, some of which have a Sūfī colouring. Besides these, there are his works on the

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1 - Cf. *Dabistān - i madhāhib*, Cawnpore, 1904, p. 242.

2 - Cf. Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Indian Medieval Culture*, Bombay, 1973, pp. 46 - 47.

3 - *Tuhfat al - murād: Sharh - i qasīda - i hikmiyya- i Mir Abu' l-Qāsim Findiriskī*, Tehran, 1337 Sh.; *Risāla-i sinā' iyya* was printed in India together with Tūsi's *Akhlāq- i Nāsiri* (Bombay 1267 H.) and in Iran (Mashhad, 1317 Sh.) S. Jalāloddin Āshtiyani (co-ed. Henri Corbin) in *Anthologie des Philosophes Iraniens depuis le XII e siecle jusqu'à nos jours*, Tom I (Tehran-Paris, 1971), pp. 63 - 97, give selections from this *Risāla* together with two other small works written by Mir Findiriskī.

Persian translation of the *Laghu yoga - vāsishtā*, which he wrote during the later period of his life. These latter works will be discussed in the forthcoming pages.

Most *tadhkira* writers who give his biography say that he went to India and stayed there for a number of years; but none of them says that why and exactly when this took place. Mīr Fīndiriskī certainly did not go to India to gain fame and fortune, as a number of his contemporaries did. He was already a well-known philosopher in his homeland, and was personally known and respected by Shāh 'Abbās I (1557 - 1629). We know that in India he was not connected to the court of any of the Mughul rulers. Wālih Dāghistānī (18th century), who writes the biographies of Persian poets and writers, and in his *Riyād al-shu'arā'* calls the Mīr «the Aristotle of the age in philosophy (*hikmat*) and Abū Yazīd of the time in mysticism (*tasawwuf*)», says that in India he used to live incognito and was engaged in very low occupations.<sup>4</sup> Dāghistānī adds, however, that the Mīr had an interview with the king of India, but he does not tell us who this king was.

There are, however, few stories and remarks about Mīr Fīndiriskī's ideas and attitudes, which throw considerable light on his personal character. The following story appears in Dāghistānī's *Riyād al-shu'arā'* and a version of it has been rendered in English by E. G. Browne.<sup>5</sup> «Abu' l-Qāsim was», it is said, «extraordinary careless of appearances, dressing like a *darwish*, avoiding the society of the rich and the respectable, and associating with disreputable vagabonds. One day Shāh 'Abbās, intending to rebuke him for keeping such low company, said to him, «I hear that certain students cultivate the society of vagabonds and look on at their degrading diversions.» «I move constantly in those circles, » replied Mīr Abu' l-Qāsim, «but I have never seen any of the students there».

4 - MS. No. 57 of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, pp. 35 - 36.

5 - *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. IV, pp. 257 - 58, Cambridge, 1959,

The author of *Dabistān - i madhāhib* writes, «It is well known that being once asked, 'Why dost not thou in obedience to the law go on the pilgrimage to Mecca?' he replied, 'I go not on this account, as I must there slaughter a sheep with my own hand'.<sup>6</sup>

The same author says that the Mīr through his intercourse with the disciples of Ādhar Kaivān<sup>7</sup> became an adorer of the sun, and refrained from cruelty towards living beings.<sup>8</sup>

Now, with regard to the rigidity and anti - Sūfī attitude of religious authorities during the Safavid period, it is clear that Mīr Findiriskī, with his extremely liberal, universalistic, and non-conformist ideas, did not find it easy to live and teach in the existing religious and intellectual environment of Iran. We know that Sadr al - Dīn Shīrāzī, the Mīr's younger contemporary and once his student, had to face serious troubles and difficulties for his philosophical ideas; and we also know that during this period, among a large number of people who were attracted to India for worldly ends, there were many free-thinkers and non-Muslims who migrated there for the freedom of thought and creed that they could enjoy. Many of these newcomers are mentioned in contemporary Persian histories and books of biography (*tadhkiras*) which were written in India; and the author of *Dabistān - i madhāhib* gives the names of a number of Ādhar - Kaivānī and Zoroastrian immigrants who were settled in different cities of India.<sup>9</sup>

6 - *The Dabistān*, English translation by D. Shea and A. Troyer, Paris, 1843, Vol. I, p. 140.

7 - Ādhar Kaivān was the leader of a heretical Zoroastrian sect, who left Shīrāz in late 16th or early 17th century and settled in Patna. For his life and ideas see *Dabistān - i madhāhib*, Cawnpore, 1904, pp. 2 - 57.

8 - Cf. *The Dabistān*, Engl. trans., *loc. cit.*

9 - *Dābistan - i madhāhib*, p. 35.

According to the *Dabistān* (see above) Mīr Findiriskī was associated with the disciples of Ādhar Kaivān, and not with Ādhar Kaivān himself. If this statement is accepted we may infer that the Mīr came to India sometime after 1618, the year in which Ādhar Kaivān died; and since the Mīr lived until 1640 - 41, his visits to India have been during the later part of his life. His associations with the Ādhar - Kaivānīs must not have been very deep; for there is no evidence in his works to his affiliation with this group, and none of the numerous writings of this sect has been attributed to him. But, on the other hand, from his marginal notes on the Persian translation of the *Laghu-yoga - vāsishtha*, from his remarks about the beliefs of the Hindus, and from his great admiration for the *Yoga - vāsishtha*, we may conclude that during his stay in India he had been trying to acquaint himself with Hindu religious and philosophical views.

In India he may have settled in Patna, where Ādhar Kaivān and his followers had already established themselves. Early in this period he had engaged himself in the study of the subject, and he must have read the literature which was available to him in translation. He had also read Bīrūnī's works; for in his marginal notes on the Persian translation of the *Laghu-yoga-vāsishtha* he makes references to Bīrūnī's *Pātanjala*.<sup>10</sup> As the Mīr's notes suggest, he had acquired some knowledge of Sanskrit too, which he must have learned from native teachers. In a note on the word *Kalpa - vriksha* (wishing-tree) which occurs in the *Laghu-yoga-vāsishtha* (VI. 9. 553), he says, «As I know it through studying this language, KLP (= *kalpa*) means desire, and BRJ (= *vriksha*) means a tree.»<sup>11</sup> In another place, complaining of the inaccu-

10 - For Bīrūnī's works on India, see the present writer's article, «Bīrūnī wa Hind» in *Essays on al - Bīrunī*, High Council of Culture and Arts, Tehran, 1973, pp. 242 - 91; and Fathullah Mujtabāi, *Hindu- Muslim Cultural Relations*, (lecture I), New Delhi, 1978.

11 - MS. in our possession, folio 504.

cies of translations and the difficulties involved in learning Sanskrit, he says, «The translations of these works contain numerous mistakes; because the Sanskrit works were first rendered in common Hindi for the translators, and then they translated them into Persian from Hindi. Their theological ideas themselves are difficult to understand, and the Sanskrit language is more difficult than that. The Brahmins of our time know neither Sanskrit nor the theology well enough; and the translators who have quoted them have been even worse. Sanskrit, in comparison with any other language, abounds in synonyms and derivatives, and particular words for various aspects and qualities of things are many. For instance, a girl before puberty is called by a name, on puberty she is designated by another word; she is referred to by yet another word after marriage, and when she gets pregnant an entirely different word is used for her. Each of these names has also a symbolic meaning attached to it.»<sup>12</sup>

The above remarks point out that Mīr Findiriskī was seriously involved in what he was doing, and also had a critical eye on the material which was available to him.

In what follows, we shall try to give a brief account of his works on the Persian translation of the *Laghu - yoga - vāsishtha*.

The *Yoga - Vāsishtha*, also called the *Mahā - Rāmāyana*, *Arsha - Rāmāyana*, or *Vāsishtha- Rāmāyana*, is a philosophical work in more than 23000 verse lines (slokas). It is of unknown authorship, but traditionally it is attributed to the famous Vālmikī, who is said to have been the author of the *Rāmāyana*. The date of the work is also uncertain, but according to modern investigations it was composed sometime between the 5th and the 8th centuries A. D.<sup>13</sup> The

12 - Fol. 170, MS. mentioned in note 11 above.

13 - B. L. Atreya, *The Philosophy of the Yoga - vāsishtha*, Madras, 1936, p. 27; S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II. p , 131.

work is a long dialogue between the sage Vasīshtha and the prince Rāma Candra, and consists of 55 stories by which the sage illustrates his teachings to his royal disciple. The philosophical content of the work is essentially monistic idealism, similar to the *advaita - vedānta* of Sankara's school, simplified and popularized by stories, mythical legends and various analogies.

The *Yoga - vāsishtha* itself was never translated into Persian; but during the 16th and the 17th centuries two of its summarized versions, i. e. 'the *Laghu-yoga - vāsishtha* of Gauda Abhinanda (9th century), and the *Yoga - vāsishtha sāra* were rendered in Persian, and several works were produced on these abridged forms.<sup>14</sup>

The number of the Persian translations of, and writings based on, the *Yoga - vāsishtha* literature and the abundance of manuscript copies of these works in public and private libraries, point to the fact that this literature had been of special interest and attraction in those times not only for the Hindus, but for Muslims as well. It was greatly admired and appreciated by such distinguished Muslim thinkers and intellectuals as Faidī, Mīr Fīndiriskī and the learned prince Dārā Shikoh. This is not merely because the free and simple style of these writings, and the abundant use of narratives, make their philosophical content more easily understandable, but also because of the similarities that exist between the *advaita* philosophy of the *Yoga - vāsishtha* and the pantheistic tendency which is often very prominent in Islamic mystical thinking.

The *Laghu - yoga - vāsishtha* was translated into Persian first by Nizām al - Din Pānīpatī at the instance of prince Salīm (later Jahāngīr), son of Akbar

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14 - For the *Yoga - vāsishtha* literature in Persian, see Fathullah Mujtabai, *Hindu - Muslim Cultural Relations*, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 81 - 84.

Shāh, when he was the crown prince.<sup>15</sup> It was this translation which attracted Mīr Findiriskī's attention and made him deeply interested in Hindu religious and philosophical thought.

Now let us turn to his works on this book. Descriptions are based on our personal examination of the manuscripts.

1 - Marginal notes on Nizām al - Dīn's translation of the *Laghu - yoga - vāsistha*<sup>16</sup>. These notes are copious and cover the margins of almost all the folios of most of the manuscripts of the work. Each note ends in the Mīr's initials, QS (for Abu' l Qāsim), and transcribers add the two letters RH (for *rahmahu'l-lāh*—God's peace be upon him) to it as usual. In these notes he tries to elucidate difficult points by putting them in different phraseologies, by comparing them with Islamic philosophical ideas, or, occasionally, by introducing Platonic or Aristotelian views. Sometimes he tries to make improvements upon the translation by using his own understanding of the text, and for some of the stories of the book he gives his own allegorical interpretations. Often to support the validity of Hindu religious doctrines he adduces Qur'anic verses, or sayings of the Prophet or of the Imāms. In these latter type of notes it sometimes becomes very clear that he did not doubt the divinity of Hindu scriptures.

15 - This book has recently been published by M. R. Jalālī Nā'inī in Tehran; but he has omitted Mīr Findiriskī's marginal notes from his edition.

16 - MS. No. 651, Majlis Library, Tehran; MS. preserved at the library of Āstān - i Radawī, Mashhad, described in *Fihrist - i Kutub... Āstān - i Quds - i Radawī*, Vol. IV, pp. 339, 400; MS. in possession of the present writer, undated, but not later than early 18 th century.

2 - Glossary. The glossary that he has made for the Persian *Laghu - yoga - vāsishtha* contains a great number of religious and philosophical terms that have been used in the text in their vernacular pronunciations. Examination of the explanations will show that they are generally extracted from the text itself and put in alphabetical order, the intent being to help the reader to find the meanings of the words, if he does not know them or cannot remember where he has seen them in preceding pages. This glossary is appended, under Mir's name, to most of the MSS. of Nizām al-Dīn's translation, and a separate copy of it is preserved at the Central Library of the Tehran University.<sup>17</sup>

3- Verses in praise of the *Yoga - vāsishtha*. In a short verse passage which appears on the front pages of MSS. of Nizām al - Dīn' s translation, as well as on the front page of the MS. of *Muntakhab - i jūg - basasht*, and bears Mīr Findrīskī' s name, he extols the spiritual value of the *Yoga - vāsishtha* and compares its merits and excellences to those of the Qur' ān. They are the fools, he says , who stick to the outward appearances and do not see beyond the literal forms. A literal rendering of the verses in English would read as follows:

These words are in the world like water,

Pure, and increasing wisdom, even as the Qur' ān.

Save the Qur' ān and the Traditions,

No one has sayings of this kind.

The ignorant one who hears these words,

Or sees this subtle way of expression,

Will adhere only to its external form,

And thus he makes a fool of himself.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> - MS. No. 528; see *Bibliothèque de l' Univ. de Teheran*, Collection de *Mishkāt* (Vol. III; 1333. Sh.9 No. 528).

<sup>18</sup> - For the original Persian of the verse see below.



4 - *Muntakhab - i jūg - basasht* ( Selections from the *Yoga - vāsishtha* ).

This work consists of a large number of extracts from Mizām al - Dīn's translation of the *Laghu - yoga - vāsishtha*, put together with pieces of Persian Sufī poetry taken from the works of such poets as 'Attār, Rūmī, Sayyid Hussainī, Shabistari, Hāfiz, Awhadi, Maghribi, Ni' mat - allāh Walī, Qāsim Anwār, and Fānī Isfahānī. All these figures lived in or before the 15th century A. D., except the last one, Fānī Isfahānī, the Sūfī poet of the late 18th Century,<sup>19</sup> who died in Isfahān in 1807, and nearly half of the verse passages quoted in this compilation are from his compositions. But on the other hand two of the oldest and the most reliable manuscripts of the work bear the name of Mīr Fīndiriskī as the author. We do not think that the inclusion of Fānī's name and verses in this work can by itself negate Mīr Fīndiriskī's authorship. The evidence of the two manuscripts which have been reproduced from different copies in different times and by different hands is too strong to be offset by the inclusion of these verse fragments that may, in all probability, have been later interpolations to the text. Accretion of older compositions by new material has been a very common practice in the past, and one may hardly find a manuscript free from later interpolations. The unproportionate number of Fānī's verse fragments in this work, as compared with the pieces taken from other poets, is itself a strange fact that points to their being later additions. Another strange point that has to be noticed in this connection is the fact that excepting Fānī, who died in 1807, all the poets whose poems are included in this compilation lived before the middle of the 15th century, and no other poet of the intervening three and a half centuries has been quoted in the work. All these

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19 - Hidāyat, in *Majma' al-Fusahā* (under Fānī), says that he left India and settled in Isfahān, where he died in 1222 A. H.

considerations, we believe, support the view that Fānī's verses were not part of the original compilation. Therefore, relying on the evidence of the two manuscripts described below, *Muntakhab - i jūg - basasht* has to be regarded as a work of Mir Fındiriskī, in which he has tried to give a comparative presentation of Hindu and Muslim mysticism.

Descriptions of the two manuscripts, which bear Mir Abu' l - Qāsim Fındiriskī's name as the author, are as follows :

1) Manuscript in ordinary nasta'liq,  $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 7$  inches, 98 pages, dated

1231/1816, originally belonging to Mr. A. Afshār Shīrāzī, now preserved in the library of Shīrāz University (not catalogued):

هو الله تعالى شانه العزيز - منتخب جوك باشست كه سيد الحكماء امير ابوالقاسم  
فندرسكى عليه الرحمه از زبان هندی ترجمه بفارسی ساده نموده و در وصف آن  
فرموده اند:

پاك و دانش فزای چون قرآن	همچو آبست این سخن بجهان
نیست کس را بدین نمط گفتار	چون ز قرآن گذشتی و اخبار
یابدید این لطیف طرز بیان	جاهلی کوشنید این سخنان
زانکه بر ریش خویش می خندد <sup>20</sup>	جز بصورت بدین نپیوندد

2) Manuscript of the Majlis Library, No 640,  $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 7 \frac{1}{2}$  inches, 70

pages, in fine nasta'liq, dated 1262/1845:

کتاب منتخب جوك من تصانیف امیر ابوالقاسم فندرسكى قدس سره كه بسبب  
جوك باشست تصنیف فرموده . . .

20 - The last two lines of the verse are taken from Sanā'i's *Hadīqat al - Haqīqa*.