

‘Iyani, A Shirazi Poet and Historian in the Bahmani Deccan

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Abstract

This paper examines MS D 92 of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras/Chennai, which contains the works of ‘Iyani, a late fifteenth century Shirazi poet and historian. ‘Iyani had migrated to the Deccan, and wrote in Persian in the Bahmani sultanate (1347-1528), and received the patronage of both Sultan Mahmud Shah (r. 1482-924) and Habib al-Din Muhibbullah, a descendant of the Sufi saint Shah Ni‘matallah Wali of Kirman. The paper investigates ‘Iyani’s works, which comprise *qasidas*, *ghazals*, *ruba‘iyyat* and two *mathnavīs*, the *Jangnama-i Shahrukh* and the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*. The latter, recording the defeat of a rebellion led by the Abyssinian commander in Gulbarga, Dastur Dinar, sheds new light on the political and factional environment in the final stages of Bahmani rule. ‘Iyani’s works represent a new source for the cultural, literary and political history of the fifteenth century Deccan.

Keywords: Deccan, Bahmani Sultanate, Persian poetry, Bidar, Shah Ni‘matallah Wali

This paper introduces a neglected Persian source for the literary and political history of the Deccan, the works of ‘Iyani, a late fifteenth-century emigre poet and historian writing under the Bahmani dynasty (1347-1528). ‘Iyani’s principal patron, and the theme of many of these poems, was Habib al-Din Muhibbullah (830/1427-908/1502), a grandson of the famous Sufi saint of Kirman, and descendant of ‘Ali b. Abi Talib, Shah Ni‘matallah Wali (d. 1430) who was resident in the Bahmani capital of Bidar. ‘Iyani’s works are preserved in a manuscript in Madras/Chennai,¹ MS D. 92 of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library. One text from this manuscript was published in 1955 by Abu Hashim Yusha‘, the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*, but this edition seems to have fallen into almost total obscurity both within India and

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¹ Both Madras and Chennai are used locally; I will retain Madras here as the older term, to avoid anachronism when mentioning the University or Presidency.

beyond.² More recently, a couple of notices regarding ‘Iyani have appeared in the Urdu journal *Ma‘arif* in 1991, principally a study by Nur al-Sa‘id Akhtar of the *Fathnama*.³ Produced apparently in ignorance of Yusha‘’s publication, Akhtar provides some excerpts in the original, but presents little critical analysis of ‘Iyani’s works. Despite these Indian publications, awareness of the manuscript does not seem to have permeated into the Anglophone scholarship on the Deccan, or indeed wider scholarship on Persian literature, and it seems justifiable to claim that ‘Iyani has been more or less entirely forgotten.⁴ The aim of the present paper is to provide an overview of ‘Iyani and his works as reflected in MS D92, with a preliminary attempt to place them in their historical context. By examining not just the *Fathnama*, but the other poems by ‘Iyani in MS D. 92, to date largely absent from even the limited discussions by Yusha‘ and Akhtar, a much more comprehensive picture of the poet and his literary and historical context emerges.

MS D.92 is now held in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (GOML) located within the Anna Public Library, to which it has recently been moved from the University of Madras. Doubtless, the location of the manuscript in Madras has been a factor in its neglect, as Tamil Nadu often seems to fall beyond the purview of Persianate South Asia, somewhat unjustly.⁵ However, the GOML does hold quite rich collections of Persian manuscripts.⁶ These derive both from local centres of Persianate culture like Arcot, where the local Muslim dynasty continued to promote Persian into the nineteenth century,⁷ and from materials brought to Madras from elsewhere as a legacy of the city’s role as capital of the Madras Presidency under British rule. Some manuscripts were probably intended to meet the

² Yusha‘ (ed.), “Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi”. Apparently, this was also published in book (or pamphlet) form in Madras in 1955, although I have not been able to trace this in any libraries. See Nushahi, *Kitabshinasi-i Athar-i Farsi*, vol. 4, 2494 (no. 10337).

³ Akhtar, “Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi”. Akhtar’s article provoked responses by Shakira Sahiba and ‘Irfan in the November 1991 and August 1992 issues of *Ma‘arif*, published by the Maulana Shibli Academy in Azamgarh, correcting historical information and errors in reading the verses. The latter two authors also seem to have been unaware of Yusha‘’s edition. There is no mention of ‘Iyani in Devare, *Short History*, although the author’s death in 1957 may explain this.

⁴ Exceptions are brief references in Hadi, *Dictionary*, 267-8 and Subrahmanyam, “Between Eastern Africa and Western India,” 818, n. 37.

⁵ A useful corrective is Kukan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic*.

⁶ See Chandrasekharan, *Catalogue*; for this and other collections in the region see Khalidi, “A Guide,” 64-7.

⁷ Schwartz, “The Curious Case of Carnatic.”

need for study materials for British officers. There is, however, no information exactly how MS D.92 reached Madras, and it lacks any ownership notes or seals. The manuscript lacks the initial folio or folios – it is unclear how many are missing - and possibly was never completed, as the final folios (fol. 135-137) do not have the gilded margins present on most of the rest of the manuscript.

The manuscript contains eight different works

- a) [Untitled] *Qasidas*, fol. 1a-56a.
- b) *Muqatta‘at*, fol. 56b-64b.
- c) *Ghazaliyyat*, fol. 66b-fol. 82a.
- d) *Ruba‘iyyat*, fol. 83b-fol. 88a.
- e) *Jang-nama-i Shahrukh*, fol. 88b-fol.94b.
- f) *Zubdat al-Akhbar*, fol. 96b-107a.
- g) *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*, fol. 108b-134b.
- h) Ghazals and verses in praise of the sultan, fol. 135a-137b.

All these works, with the exception of the *Zubdat al-Akhbar*, are by ‘Iyani, who regularly mentions this penname (*takhalluṣ*). The *Zubdat al-Akhbar az Ahadith-i Ahmad al-Mukhtar*, as its title suggests, is a collection of selected Prophetic hadith, accompanied by a Persian verse translation that expands and comments on the Arabic original. This work is by ‘Abdallah b. ‘Abd al-Jabbar according to the colophon. Apart from the first one, this section’s pages lack the gilded margins we find in most of the rest of the manuscript, and the hand seems rather different. It seems possible that the *Zubdat al-Akhbar* was inserted by a later owner into ‘Iyani’s *Kulliyat*.

It appears that MS D. 92 is, as far as presently known, the sole extant copy of ‘Iyani’s works. The catalogue of the GOML does mention two other copies in its collection, MSS D. 803 and D. 862, containing the *Kulliyat* and the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi* respectively, but these were unavailable on my visits in 2019 and 2020.⁸ However, these may be copies dating to the 1940s or 1950s, when new manuscript copies of much of the GOML’s Persian collection were made, and therefore not, if they still exist, independent witnesses to the text.⁹

⁸ Chandrasekharan, *Catalogue*, 40, 42-70.

⁹ However, somewhat different information is given by Akhtar, “Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi,” 33, who states there are two works (*karnama*) by ‘Iyani, the *Divan* and the *Fathnama*, which, it is implied, are in separate manuscripts. The *Fathnama* manuscript, D 92, is the same as that consulted here, but according to Akhtar the

It is of course possible that other copies of ‘Iyani’s works lie undiscovered in the numerous poorly catalogued libraries of India.

MS D. 92 measures 17.3x11.6cm, and contains 137 folios, written throughout in *nasta‘liq*. It contains no colophon, but the style of both the *sarlawhs* and the handwriting is consistent with a fifteenth century date (**figures 1, 2, 4**).¹⁰ Most probably, this is the poet’s autograph, and the use of expensive blue and gold in the *sarlawhs* and the presence of gilded margins on most pages suggests it was a presentation copy destined for the poet’s patron. Some folios have suffered considerable damage from the vicissitudes of time, and probably termites, while in a number of instances lines have been neatly erased and the space between the margins neatly filled in with blue coloured paint (**figure 3**). In at least one case the erasure seems to have been intended to cover up some reference to the *mamdūh*, Muhibballah.¹¹ Why this should have been done is unclear, as he is the principal subject of ‘Iyani’s verses. Possibly the extravagant terms in which ‘Iyani praised him proved too much for a later reader. At any rate, these erasures, combined with the damage the manuscript has suffered, mean that some lines cannot be read.

‘Iyani’s life and origins

There is no trace in any other sources such as *tadhkiras* and histories of any poet named ‘Iyani in India; he seems to have been forgotten by contemporaries as well as posterity, although it must be remembered that our knowledge of the Persian literature of India is quite limited, and it is possible that he is discussed in some yet unpublished source.

Divan was in a damaged, old manuscript kept in the Oriental Institute Library, of which a copy was made for the Madras University Library in 1945. The copy had numerous mistakes in it. This is probably to be identified with MS. D. 803, given the Oriental Manuscripts Library was previously held in the University Library, and according to the information given to me by the librarians in the latter, all the manuscripts had been transferred to Anna Public Library. Still, it is curious that Akhtar seems unaware that the *Divan* is present in MS D.92 alongside the *Fathnama*. Akhtar describes a second manuscript with the same contents as MS D.92, although for obscure reasons in a different order. It is this possible that another manuscript exists (or existed) in Madras, although far from certain. Further research was rendered impossible by the pandemic of 2020-2021.

¹⁰ For the dating of the *sarlawhs* I am indebted to the advice of Emily Shovelton and Elaine Wright.

¹¹ This is in a *ruba‘i* on fol. 86 b. The first two verses have been left in place and mention Muhibballah by name, while the second two have been erased. The surviving verse reads:

مخدوم حبیب دین محب شاہی * یابی ز خدا هر آنچه میخواهی

There is another Persian poet bearing the *takhalluṣ* ‘Iyani, Ibrahim Shabastari, who wrote a vast history of prophets in verse which survives in manuscripts in Konya, London, Baku and Tabriz, and was active in the early sixteenth century, but his works did not circulate in India.¹² It is evident that he is not to be identified with the ‘Iyani of the Deccan.

A few fragments of biographical information appear in the poems. Our ‘Iyani tells us that he was a migrant to the India from Shiraz, whose given name was Sa‘d:

خاکم از شیراز باد آورده در هندوستان * آتشم در جان و خان و مان ازین آبشخورست

...

بنده مخلص گر عیانی تخلص میکند * اسم او از آسمان سعدست و سعد اصغرست

My [native] soil is of Shiraz, the wind brought it to India; The burning in my soul, home and household is due to my separation from this origin ...

Although this servant’s penname is ‘Iyani, his heaven-given name is Sa‘d, and he is the lesser Sa‘d.¹³

Here ‘Iyani plays on sharing his given name with Venus, Sa‘d-i Asghar,¹⁴ the planet associated with music and poetry, which is also the most visible (*‘iyān*) in the solar system after the sun and moon. His *takhalluṣ* may also have specific allusions: it derives from the Arabic root *‘ayn*, a polyvalent term that was the subject of much wordplay on poetic inscriptions on Bahmani buildings, evoking both divine and human vision as well as the springs of paradise and this earth. These poetic inscriptions appear on the tomb of the Bahmani ruler Ahmad Shah (r. 1422-1436) in Bidar, and have been attributed to Shah Ni‘matallah, who had been invited to settle in the Deccan by the sultan.¹⁵ Although Shah Ni‘matallah declined the invitation, his son Khalilallah (d. 860/1455) taken up residence in Bidar and received the patronage of the rulers, as did Khallilallah’s offspring, suggesting the strong Ni‘matallahi influence in the Bahmani state.¹⁶ Shah Ni‘matallah’s *divan* contains

¹² Shabistari, *Anbiyanama*

¹³ MS D. 92, fol. 16a-b.

¹⁴ Akhtar, “Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi,” claims ‘Iyani’s given name is Ni‘matallah, but this seems to be a misunderstanding.

¹⁵ For a discussion, see Gupta, “Interpreting the eye (‘ain)”.

¹⁶ For the Ni‘matallahis in the Bahmani state see Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Ṣūfis*, 78-85, 154-158, 172-177.

much wordplay based around the root ‘*ayn*,¹⁷ for ideas of sight and perception had a special place in Ni‘matallahi thought. ‘Iyani’s *takhallus* may thus have alluded to his Sufi, and perhaps specifically Ni‘matallahi leanings, while reflecting a favourite theme of Bahmani courtly Sufism.

Two statements allow us to date ‘Iyani. In a *qasida* entitled the *Qatrat al-Amtar* he writes:

قطرة الامطار کردم نامش و تاریخ اوست * سال صاد و ضاد و بیتش یکصد و ده دلبرست

I gave it the name “Raindrop”; its date is year *ṣād* and *ḍād*, it has 110 ravishing verses.¹⁸

In the *abjad* system, *ṣād* represents 800 and *ḍād* 90 giving the chronogram for the date of 890 hijri/1485. The only other date that appears is in his *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*, which records a battle in 898/1493, as discussed below. However, in another poem, ‘Iyani tells us that he had been some fifty years in India:

بنده ز شیراز آمد با برگ و با ساز آمد * بس رفته و باز آمد شاهها بغور من برس
پنجاه سالست این زمان تا من بهشتم خان و مان * اینجاست تن آنجاست جان شاهها بغور من برس

I came from Shiraz with many possessions; there was much coming and going. O king, help me!

It is fifty years since I left my home and family; the body is here, the soul is there. O king, help me!¹⁹

¹⁷ See for example the second poem in *Kulliyat-i Ash‘ar-i Shah Ni‘matallah*, 23:

هرچه گفتم عیان شود بخدا * پیر ما هم جوان شود بخدا
در میخانه را گشاد یقین * ساقی عاشقان شود بخدا
هرچه گفتم چنان گردید * هرچه گویم همان شود بخدا
از سر ذوق این سخن گفتم * بشنو از من که آن شود بخدا
آینه پیش چشم می آرم * نور آن رو عیان شود بخدا
باز علم بدیع می خوانم * این معانی بیان شود بخدا
گوش کن گفته خوش سید * این چنین آن شود بخدا

¹⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 16a. In fact, there are more than 110 verses in the poem.

¹⁹ MS D. 92, fol. 59a.

Elsewhere, ‘Iyani alludes to forty-five years having passed since he left his homeland.²⁰ This suggests that the number is not simply a literary conceit to mean a long time, but rather gives us an approximate chronology for his life. Both poems are undated but, assuming they were written in the period of the 1480s-90s when we can be sure the poet was active in the Deccan, he must have left Iran in the 1430s or 1440s.

‘Iyani’s travels constituted part of a much larger phenomenon of migration from Iran to the Deccan in the mid fifteenth century, and in particular to the Bahmani state. The Bahmanis actively sought to import scholars, administrators and soldiers from Iran, allegedly even sending empty ships to the Gulf to collect them.²¹ The emigres formed a powerful faction known as the *gharībān*, with whom, as we shall see, ‘Iyani strongly identified. The Bahmani state enjoyed especially close relations with Shiraz, with its famous vizier, Mahmud Gavan (himself originally from Gilan), corresponding with the famous Shirazi philosopher Dawani, whom he attempted to attract to the capital, Bidar.²² Indeed, it was another Shirazi migrant poet, Mawlana Badr-i Shirazi, who wrote the chronogram for the completion of Mahmud Gavan’s famous madrasa in Bidar in 876/1471-2.²³ A Shirazi calligrapher, Mughith al-Qari al-Shirazi, is also named on the building inscription above the entrance to Shah Khalilallah’s mausoleum.²⁴ Another such Shirazi immigrant to Bidar had a specific affiliation to the Ni’matallahi order, like ‘Iyani. This was Siraj al-Husayni al-Shirazi, who produced in 858/1454 a treatise on penmanship dedicated to Muhibbullah, and is also known as the copyist of two de luxe manuscripts of Yazdi’s *Zafarnama*, one of which was commissioned by the Timurid Ibrahim Sultan.²⁵ Indeed, Ibrahim Sultan corresponded with and presented several manuscripts to the Bahmani Ahmad Shah.²⁶ Peyvand Firouzeh argues these contacts were facilitated by a Shirazi scholar employed as tutor and vizier at the Bahmani court during the reign of Firuz Shah (1397-1422), Mir Fadlallah Inju, who is reported to have

²⁰ MS D. 92, fol. 63a.

²¹ Subrahmanyam, “Iranians Abroad,” 342-3; Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 147-154; and see in general Overton (ed.), *Iran and the Deccan*.

²² Anooshahr, “Shirazi scholars,” 336.

²³ Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 146; Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, 119.

²⁴ Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 148-9.

²⁵ Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 150-151; Ernst, “Sufism and the Aesthetics.”

²⁶ Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 152-3.

recommended Iranian poets to the Bahmanis. The lavish rewards they received encouraged others to follow them.²⁷

‘Iyani regularly identifies himself as a *gharīb*,²⁸ which meant not just being an exile or outsider, but in the context of fifteenth century Deccan a specific factional affiliation to a largely Turko-Iranian military elite. Opposed to the *gharībān* was the so-called Dakani faction, which in fact also comprised immigrants such as Abyssinians, alongside local Indian allies.²⁹ In the Bahmani state this distinction was institutionalised, so that *gharībān* and Dakani nobles were arranged opposite sides of the royal hall of audience. The polarisation resulted in outright confrontation between the two sides that at times threatened to overwhelm the Bahmani dynasty, culminating in the killing of the great Mahmud Gavan who had attempted to balance the factions. At the same time, Richard Eaton has argued these factions were at least as much political and constructs as ethnic realities; some *gharībān* had been resident for decades, or even generations, while Dakanis might be themselves of part Turkish ancestry, descendants of the migrants who had come to the Deccan from North India in the fourteenth century when the Bahmani sultanate was first established.³⁰

There is no explicit reference to any of his Iranian migrant contemporaries in ‘Iyani’s work bar one, the poet Naziri who also had a close relationship with the Bahmani court. Naziri, originally from Tus in Khurasan, became poet laureate under Mahmud Gavan, and was a Ni‘matallahi disciple, penning panegyrics to Shah Khalilallah and the latter’s sons. He is also said to have written a continuation of the lost verse history of the Bahmani dynasty by Adhari.³¹ ‘Iyani expresses his desire to supplant the now apparently deceased Naziri, writing:

گر نظیری بود شاعر آنزمانها درگذشت * بنده هستم این زمان بی نظیران زمان

If Naziri was the poet of times of old, now I have no parallel (*nazīr*) in this age.³²

²⁷ Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 153-4.

²⁸ E.g. MS D. 92 fols. 44a, 55b.

²⁹ Abyssinian is used here to render the Persian *ḥabash/hubūsh*, which is also a generic term for black-skinned peoples.

³⁰ Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 59-63, 67-70; see also Sherwani, *The Bahmanis*, 191-194, 223-6, 325. For a different perspective see Subrahmanyam, “Iranians Abroad,” esp. 343, 358.

³¹ Devare, *Short History*, 195-6. For the extant manuscript of Naziri’s poems, see British Library MS Or 1150.

³² MS D. 92, fol. 44a, 55b, 56a.

Otherwise we know little of ‘Iyani, although he often expresses his discontent with India, as we shall see. However, an intriguing fragment of autobiographical information appears in one of ‘Iyani’s *qasidas* dedicated to Muhibballah.

با چنین لشکر بی شکر چو در شهر رسید * برسیدند به او غو کش و جاری بشتاب
نقد جستند ندیدند زدند و بردند * گاو کنتالی و دیک و کشب اسب و اسباب
هیچ اندیشه آنها بدلم نیست و لیک * جگرم از غم اوراق و کتابست کباب
اسب بر باد شد و گاو بخاک تیره * کاشکی آب نبردی ورق چند کتاب
پیش ازین از کرمت بود مرا سیمی چند * بستند از من فلک و داد عوض رنج و عذاب

When such a thankless army reached the town, they arrived crying out, racing in haste

They sought cash; when they didn’t find any, they struck out and seized cows from Kantal, cocks, Arabian horses³³ and moveable goods.

I do not think at all of these things, but my heart does burn in sorrow for my books and papers

The horses disappeared with the wind, the cows were buried in the dark earth, but would that the water had not borne off the pages of so many books

Previously, I had some silver thanks to your generosity; the heavens took it from me and compensated me with pain and torment.³⁴

‘Iyani’s discontent was thus rooted not just in his alienation from Iran, but in these misfortunes, which evidently must have befallen him while in India, as is suggested by the reference to Muhibballah’s patronage. It is probable that he refers here to one of the periodic massacres that occurred in the course of contests between the *gharībān* and the Dakanis, possibly, for example, those of 892/1487, when factional rivalry resulted in repeated carnage in the town of Bidar.³⁵

The poet’s patron and the *Qasidas*, *Muqatta‘at*, *Ghazaliyyat* and *Ruba‘iyyat*

³³ Kashab of the text probably refers to Ta’if in Arabia. I am grateful to Saeed Talajooy for this explanation.

³⁴ MS D. 92, fol. 31a.

³⁵ Sherwani, *The Bahmanis*, 363, 366-7

The manuscript opens with a section from a panegyric *qasida*. The first folio or folios are evidently missing, for there is no *bismillah*, and the first lines clearly come from the middle of a *qasida*, not its beginning:

خورشید و ماه بر سرگردون بود دو گوش * بهر صدا شنیدن بانگ بلال تو
آن مرغ طرفه که کنی سیر در دمی * از فرش تا بعرش و دو گیسوت بال تو
پیر سپهر عینک خورشید و مه نهاد * از بهر حفظ کردن درس جمال تو

The sun and the moon are two ears on the earth's head, to hear the echo of your Bilal's call to prayer

You are that bird of marvel who travels in a moment from the earth to [God's] throne; your two forelocks are your wings

The master of the heavens put on the spectacles of the sun and moon in order to remember the lesson of your beauty³⁶

The identity of this *mamdūh* is not explicitly revealed, but it is clear enough that is the Prophet Muhammad, with its allusion to his muezzin Bilal and his *mi'rāj* or ascension into heaven. The Prophet, 'Ali b. Abi Talib and their descendants, in particular Muhibballah, are the major theme of the *qasidas*. The poet repeatedly singles out 'Ali b. Abi Talib for praise:

سرور ما در حقیقت حیدرست * رهبر ما در شریعت مصطفاست

Our leader in the truth [*ḥaqīqat*] is 'Ali, our guide in the law [*sharī'at*] is Mustafa [Muhammad]³⁷

Many of the poems conclude with the Shiite formula

از دل و جان گوی بهر دفع شر * یا محمد یا علی خیر البشر

With heart and soul say to ward off evil, "Oh Muhammad, Oh 'Ali, best of mankind"³⁸

The use of explicitly Shiite formulae is striking, for it seems to go beyond the philo-'Alidism that typified the late medieval Iranian world. Muhibballah's ancestor, Shah Ni'matallah, was avowedly Sunni even if he allotted 'Ali a special place of honour in his

³⁶ MS D. 92, fol. 1a.

³⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 4b.

³⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 2a, 4b.

verses, and the poet's hometown of Shiraz had been a stronghold of Sunnism.³⁹ The Bahmani state too was officially Sunni, with Sultan Mahmud sending an army against one notable, Yusuf 'Adil Khan, who publicly embraced Shiism.⁴⁰ However, there is evidence for the spread of Shiism in the Bahmani realm, and Ahmad Shah has been attributed with Shiite tendencies.⁴¹ 'Iyani's verses suggest that the spread of Shiism was not simply due to the presence of Shiite migrants, but was embraced by the descendants of Shah Ni'matallah in the Deccan. While the Ni'matallahi order in Iran is thought to have embraced Shiism in the sixteenth century in order to maintain and enhance its position under the Safavids,⁴² 'Iyani's works suggest this process also happened independently of, and prior to, the advent of the Safavids.

While the poet declares himself to be the slave of 'Ali's slave (*man ghulāmash-rā ghulāmam Khwāja-yi man qanbar*),⁴³ the dedicatee of most of the qasidas is Muhibballah, whose name is frequently played on with references to Muhammad or 'Ali's "devotee" (*muhibb*).⁴⁴ He is envisioned not just as the descendant of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, but the identity of both seems to merge through 'Iyani's regular comparison of both to the sun.⁴⁵ Muhibballah is the "supreme pole" (*quṭb al-aqtāb*) of his age,⁴⁶ but also the bestower of kingship, who by his presence Islamises and purifies the pagan land of India. The poems thus entwine worldly kingship with Shiite and Sufi devotion. For example, 'Iyani starts one *qasida* that appears to be addressed to 'Ali b. Abi Talib:⁴⁷

ای محبان تو در عیش و طرب * دشمنانت در بلا و در تعب
 ترک و هندو شد مطیع و تابعیت * هم عجم کردی مسخر هم عرب
 از تو اندوزد فلک قدر و شرف * واز تو آموزد ملک علم و ادب

³⁹ Graham, "Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī," 176-8.

⁴⁰ Sherwani, *The Bahmanis*, 397

⁴¹ Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Sufis*, 154-6.

⁴² Connell, "Ni'matullahi Sayyids of Taft," 176-190

⁴³ MS D. 92, fol. 15b.

⁴⁴ E.g. MS D. 92, fol. 2b, *muhibb-i āl-i payghambar*.

⁴⁵ E.g. MS D. 92, fol. 1a, 30b.

⁴⁶ E.g. MS D. 92, fol. 24a, 28b.

⁴⁷ Unfortunately, some of the page this qasida is written on is damaged, meaning the poem cannot be fully read.

O you whose devotees [*muhibbān*] enjoy ease and leisure, your enemies suffer pain and weariness

Turk and Indian are both your obedient followers, you have subdued both Arabs and Persians

From you the heavens acquire gravitas and honour; from you the king learns knowledge and sophistication (*adab*).⁴⁸

In the long qasida that praises Muhammad, ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and the twelve imams entitled *Qatrat al-Amtar*, ‘Iyani writes of Muhibballah,

داشته‌ی در آستین دست ولایت زان نهاد * از کریمان تاج بر سر شاه ملک هند را
هرچه را کردی نظر گر خاک بودی زر شدی * سرو و گل گشتی روان گر خار بودی یا گیا
قلب تاریکم بمهر او بود روشن چو زر * آری آری زر شود مسهای قلب از کیمیا
دوزخ هند از نسیمش گشت گلزار عدن * زان چمن نخلی برآمد میوه اش سیم و طلا
آن نهال دولت و اقبال شاهی سروریست * کش حبیب الدین محب الله اسمت از سما

You possessed saintliness/sovereignty (*wilāyat/walāyat*), from which your partisans bestowed the crown on the head of the kingdom of India

Everywhere you looked turned to gold even if it were dust, cypress and rose came alive even if they were thorns and bush

My dark heart was lit by his sun like gold, yea through alchemy is the heart’s copper transmuted to gold.

Through his breath does the hell of India become the garden of Eden; a palm tree in that orchard who produced fruits of silver and gold

That sprig of fortune and prosperity is a happy king, whose heaven-given name is Habib al-Din Muhibballah.⁴⁹

The praise is more than just bombast. Both Muhibballah and his brother, the confusingly named Muhibb al-Din Habiballah, played a vital part in political and courtly life. Both presided at the coronation of the Bahmani sultan Mahmud Shah, and were linked by marriage

⁴⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 3a.

⁴⁹ MS D. 92, fol. 9b.

to the Bahmani family.⁵⁰ This role may be alluded to here through the references to them bestowing sovereignty on the ruler; equally, as the Bahmani kings were Ni'matollahi devotees, as reflected in the inscriptions on their tombs, the line might be understood as the conferral of *walāyat* in the Sufi sense. The boundary between the sacred and the secular may be deliberately blurred in this *qasida*, but other poems emphasise Muhibballah's mastery of both spiritual and material realms, with 'Iyani writing

خلق شاه دنی و دینش همی خوانند لیک * شاه گفتن دون قدر اوست قطب عالمست

People call him the king of this world and of the faith; but to call him king is beneath him, he is the *quṭb* of the world.⁵¹

Occasionally, the *qasidas* contain allusions to specific historical events. For instance, one discusses the disasters that followed from an unnamed individual's fall. It is tempting to speculate that the poem alludes to the disastrous aftermath of Mahmud Gavan's execution in 886/1481, widely seen as opening the way to the collapse of the Bahmani state.⁵²

Muhibballah is portrayed as the protector of the *gharībān* faction in their time of trouble:

پیمانہ چونکہ پر شد و برگشت روزگار * آخر ز اوج جاه فرو شد بقعر چاه
 نزدیک بود کز اثرش ریزد دو رود * چندین هزار خون غریبان بخاک راه
 میرفت خان و مان غریبان و مال و جان * آنکو نگاه داشت خدا داردش نگاه
 از تاب آفتاب ستم ذرہ نسوخت * آنرا کہ بود سایہ این در گریزگاہ
 قطب زمانہ محب اللہ آنکہ هست * شاه فلک سریر ملک لشکر سپاہ

When the cup of his time was full and the age turned against him, he was brought down from the zenith to the bottommost pit

So close was he that he left behind two rivers flowing with the blood of thousands of *gharībān* into the roadside

⁵⁰ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 480; cf. Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Śūfis*, 185, who says that Mahmud Shah give his sisters to be married into the family of Muhibballah and Habiballah; however Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma'athir*, 81 and Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 384 state that Muhibballah was the son-in-law of sultan 'Ala' al-Din, while Habiballah was the son-in-law of Ahmad Shah.

⁵¹ MS D. 92, fol. 44b.

⁵² Sherwani, *The Bahmanis*, 336-341

The *gharībān*'s families and property was lost, and people and possessions; [but] those who protected them, God protects them too;

Those who took refuge under the shade of this house were not burned in the slightest by the rays of oppression's sun;

The *quṭb* of the Age, Muhibballah, who is heaven's king, kingship's throne, the army's camp.⁵³

Muhibballah also features prominently if implicitly in the section of *ghazals*. As is conventional in the *ghazal*, the stock figures of the nightingale and the wine-bearer are present, and the poet describes himself as a lover (*'āshiq*). He emphasises his afflictions and suffering, from which he hopes to be rescued:

دلَم در سینه در بندست بی تو * بکن لطفی و بیرون آرش از بند
عیانی را ز غم بندست بر دل * نگشاید مگر لطف خداوند

My heart is fettered in its breast without you; show your favour and release it from its fetters

'Iyani is fettered by sorrow in his heart; nothing can set him free but the Lord's favour.⁵⁴

The poet hopes for succour from a king (*shāh*, *khusraw*) whom he frequently invokes, saying for example:

بر آستان شاه عیانی مقیم گشت * درویش را نگر که چه عالی مقام شد

'Iyani has taken up residence at the king's threshold; see what a high state the dervish has attained!⁵⁵

This may refer both literally to 'Iyani's status as a supplicant of Muhibballah, who is no doubt the king invoked, as well as more metaphorically to his status as a wayfarer on the Sufi path. Only once however, in this section does he directly name his patron, at the conclusion of the opening *ghazal*:

⁵³ MS D. 92, fol. 32a; cf. Philon, "New Considerations," 108-111 for the Ni'matallahis' involvement in factional politics in Bidar.

⁵⁴ MS D. 92, fol. 69b.

⁵⁵ MS D. 92, fol. 81a.

خواهد عیانی را شدن بسیار حاجتها روا * اندک عنایت گر بود میرزا محب الله را

Many of 'Iyani's needs will be fulfilled if prince Muhibballah pays a little attention.⁵⁶

The poet's insistence on his suffering while the patron/king/beloved ignores him must be interpreted as part of the conventions of the genre rather than literally. At any rate, it seems clear that Muhibballah is the king invoked so frequently here. Similarly, Muhibballah is mentioned directly in only two of the *ruba'iyat*,⁵⁷ but it seems reasonable to assume he is the subject of ones where he is unnamed such as this:

ای آنکه مدام بنده و صاف توام * سرخوش ز شراب مدحت صاف توام

با آنکه شب و روز در اوصاف توام * بالله که شرمندۀ الطاف توام

Oh you whom I constantly praise, I am drunk from the pure wine of praising you

Although I praise you night and day, by God I am ashamed of your favour to me.⁵⁸

Elsewhere, 'Iyani lists the various genres of poetry with which he has praised this king – *qasida*, *ghazal*, *qit'a*, *rubā'ī*, *mathnavī* and *tarjī*.⁵⁹ He speaks too of his desire to attract this king's attention with a his composition which he likens to the *Shahnama*:

گر التفات کند لطف شاه نامه من * چو شاه نامه در آفاق میشود مشهور

If the king pays attention to my book, it will become world famous like the *Shahnama*⁶⁰

However, 'Iyani's own imitation of the *Shahnama*, his historical *mathnavī* the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*, was addressed to a secular monarch, the Bahmani ruler Mahmud Shah. It is to this that I turn next.

The *Jangnama-i Shahrukh* and the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*

'Iyani's most significant works are two *mathnavīs*. The *Jangnama-i Shah Rukh* (fol. 88b-94a) commemorates Shah Ni'matallah's appearance in a vision to the Timurid ruler Shahrukh (r.

⁵⁶ MS D. 92, fol. 66b.

⁵⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 83b, 86b.

⁵⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 86b.

⁵⁹ MS D. 92, fol. 62a.

⁶⁰ MS D. 92, fol. 60a.

1404-1447) in the midst of battle, securing him victory through his intervention (**figure 5**). After praise of Ni‘matallah’s descendant Muhibballah, the *Jangnama* then recounts a similar episode in which Ni‘matallah came to the aid of the Bahmani ruler, much of the text being explicitly taken from ‘the Book of the Fathnama’) (*az Kitāb-i Fatḥnāma*).⁶¹ The saint appeared through the clouds, proclaiming

بگفتا که داند که من کیستم * دمی غافل از حال شاه نیستم

منم نعمت الله آل علی * که غمخوار شاهم به شاه ولی

He said who knows who I am? I am not for a second neglectful of the king’s situation.

I am God’s blessing [*ni‘mat allāh*] of ‘Ali’s house, I intercede for the king [Mahmud] with the protecting king [‘Ali]⁶²

The appearance of the holy man secures victory for the sultan, and much praise of Muhibballah ensues. The miraculous powers of Muhibballah are thus compared to those of his ancestor. Indeed, we know from other sources that Muhibballah on occasion accompanied the Bahmani armies, playing a leading role in the fighting.⁶³

The episode as related by ‘Iyani is distinctly confusing. Despite the unambiguous title of the text, there is no record in hagiographies of an association between Shahrukh and Shah Ni‘matallah; in fact, Ni‘matallahi sources regard Shahrukh distinctly unfavourably for his attempts to impose unjust taxes on the order.⁶⁴ The nearest parallel is a story recorded by the seventeenth century Deccani historian Firishta. He records that when Ahmad Shah the Bahmani first invited Shah Ni‘matallah to the Deccan, the latter had responded by sending one of his *murīds*, Qutb al-Din Kirmani, with box containing a green crown with twelve points for the sultan. When Ahmad Shah set eyes on Qutb al-Din, he exclaimed, “That is the same dervish that I saw in a dream under such and such a tree at such and such a time when I was fighting a fierce battle with [my brother] Sultan Firuz Shah. He presented me with a green crown with twelve points. I told no one about the crown for all this time. If this box

⁶¹ MS D. 92, fol. 90a.

⁶² MS D. 92, fol. 90a-b.

⁶³ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 384.

⁶⁴ Connell, “The Ni‘matullahi Sayyids,” 62-66, 111-115; see also on Shahrukh Graham, “Shāh Ni‘matallāh,” 185-6; Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 87-9.

contains a crown, the dream will be explained.”⁶⁵ Of course, as it turns out, this is exactly what the box contains. The dream serves to legitimise Ahmad Shah’s violent seizure of power from his brother, but it also has significant differences from the version recorded by ‘Iyani, as according to Firishta, the sultan’s dream is only of the *murīd* Qutb al-Din, not of Shah Ni‘matallah himself. Nonetheless, it seems likely that Firishta and ‘Iyani are drawing on the same stories that centre around a supernatural intervention in battle by Shah Ni‘matallah.

Much of the text of the *Jangnama* is excerpted from ‘Iyani’s longer *mathnavī*, the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi* (figure 1). This describes the Bahmani defeat of a rebel Abyssinian slave, Malik Dastur Dinar, who had attempted to establish independent rule in Gulbarga. In his chronicle the *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, Tabataba identified the African slave component of the Bahmani forces as a key reason for the kingdom’s demise, for he says, the Africans arrogated such power to themselves that they were able to divide up the kingdom.⁶⁶ However, this was far from the only problem the Bahmanis faced, and ‘Iyani was writing at a period of profound crisis in the Bahmani state. Firishta links the destabilisation of the kingdom to the killing of the great Mahmud Gavan; the latter’s death in 886/1481 was followed one year later by the demise of sultan Muhammad III. The latter was succeeded by his twelve year old son Shihab al-Din Mahmud Shah (r. 1482-1518), leaving power in the hands of military factions. Under Mahmud Shah, the vicious factional fighting that had threatened to engulf the Bahmanis in earlier periods now became endemic, and eventually led to the foundation of new sultanates by leading Bahmani amirs, most of whom were of *ghulām* (slave soldier) origin. The most notable of these new dynasties were the Adilshahis of Bijapur, founded by the Turkish émigré Yusuf ‘Adil Khan, the Nizamshahis of Ahmadnagar founded by Ahmad Nizam al-Mulk, a leader of the Dakani faction, the Qutbshahis of Golconda, led by Qutb al-Mulk, another Turkish amir, and the Baridis of Bidar, founded by the chief minister Qasim Barid, who bore the title Barid al-Mamalik.

‘Iyani’s *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi* is a unique first-hand, if decidedly partial, account of one episode in the disintegration of the sultanate, Dastur Dinar’s revolt. ‘Iyani’s account is highly significant as one of only two historical works from the Bahmani sultanate to come down to us, the other being ‘Isami’s verse history of Muslim rule in India, the *Futuh al-Salatin* (1350), which, however, only covers the first years of Bahmani rule. A

⁶⁵ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 382; cf. the discussion in Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 98-9.

⁶⁶ Subrahmanyam, “From Eastern Africa to Western India,” 817.

continuation by the poet Adhari, entitled the *Bahmannama*, is lost.⁶⁷ Our other Persian sources for the Bahmanis are much later, comprising principally the accounts as part of broader surveys of Deccani history by Sayyid ‘Ali Tabataba (completed in 1003/1594) and his contemporary Firishta, written at the Nizamshahi and ‘Adilshahi courts respectively. Both cover the revolt of Dastur Dinar, as we will discuss further below. Indeed, they offer much additional information on the career of the rebel, which continued for several years after the events described in the *Fathnama*. I will first offer an overview of the contents of ‘Iyani’s work before comparing it to the later accounts.

After the opening doxology and praise of the Prophet, the *Fathnama* starts with a lavish encomium of Mahmud Shah as equal to the great heroes of old:

فریدون نگویم بفر و کرش * فریدون نفر باشد و چاکرش
 قباد و سکندر توان گفتنش * سلیمان دیگر توان گفتنش
 چنین پادشاهی معظم کجاست * که هر بنده او یکی پادشست
 ز رستم بود پیش دستان او * که پا می نهد پیش میدان او

I cannot call him Faridun in his glory and fighting ability, for Faridun [compared to him] is a mere mortal and his servant.

He could be called Qubad, Alexander or a second Solomon.

Where [else] is such a great king, whose every slave is himself a king?

His tale surpasses that of Rustam, for he would surpass the latter in the field of battle.⁶⁸

An elaborate description of Mahmud Shah’s prowess in battle ensues, which is followed by the tale of Shah Ni‘matallah’s miraculous apparition in the midst of battle, which is present in the *Jangnama* too.⁶⁹ The following section, entitled “In praise of Habib al-Din Muhibballah, may God lengthen his life” is also replicated word for word in the *Jangnama*.⁷⁰ This confirms that Muhibballah was alive at the time of writing, and suggests the poem is intended for a

⁶⁷ Jackson, “‘Esāmi”; Devare, *Short History*, 183-188, 269-70.

⁶⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 110a.

⁶⁹ MS D. 92, fol. 111a-b (for the same text in the *Jangnama* see fol. 90a-b).

⁷⁰ MS D. 92, fol. 111b-112a (for the same text in the *Jangnama* see fol. 91a-b).

dual audience, both Mahmud Shah himself, and Muhibballah. ‘Iyani emphasises Muhibballah’s precedence over earthly kings, who prostrate themselves before him and are described as his tribute bearers, while he is the pole of sainthood (*quṭb al-aqtāb*) on earth.⁷¹ ‘Iyani’s lavish encomium to Muhibballah at the outset thus undercuts his praise for the sultan, reminding the reader of the latter’s ultimate subservience to the saintly descendants of Shah Ni‘matallah. The last verse of the introductory encomium to Muhibballah stresses how all three figures are bound together:

محبتت و مخلص شهنشاہ را * بود جانشین نعمت اللہ را

He [Muhibballah] is the beloved and intimate of the king of kings [i.e. Mahmud Shah], it is he who takes the place of Ni‘matallah.

Nonetheless, it is clear from one of the final sections of the work, where the sultan is praised for his protection of the *gharībān* faction, that Mahmud Shah is indeed intended to be the dedicatee:

شہا تخت و ملک از نو آراستی * ترا میرسد سلطنت راستی

گل و گلستان غریبان توئی * نوابخش این عندلیبان توئی

O king, you have adorned anew your throne and kingdom, to you does dominion belong by right.

You are the rose and rosegarden of the *gharībān*, you are the bestower of patronage on these nightingales.⁷²

The phrase *navā-bakhsh-i īn ‘andalībān* suggests simultaneously that the sultan furnishes both the theme for the poem by giving song (*navā*) to poets, and patronage on them by giving them money or sustenance (*navā*). The title of this section is *dar madh-i shāh-i ‘ālam bi-tarīq-i khiṭāb* ‘In praise of the king of this world by way of address’, the *shāh-i ‘ālam* being contrasted with the other-worldly kingship of ‘Ali, Shah Ni‘matallah, and Muhibballah. Indeed, despite the exiguous size of the work – some thirty folios – ‘Iyani explicitly compares his work to Firdawsi’s masterpiece:

نوشتم در اوصاف شہ نامہ * کہ باشد ز انصاف شہنامہ

⁷¹ MS D. 92, fol. 112a.

⁷² MS D. 92, fol. 132a.

نه درجست این نامه یا دفترست * که هر صفحه درجست پر گوهریست

نه شعرست تنها که من گفته ام * که بحرست و دری که من سفته ام

دری چند بر آب غلطان بود * که شایسته گوش سلطان بود

I have written a book describing the king, that rightly should be called a *Shahnama*.

This book is not [merely] a chronicle or record, for each page is a casket full of jewels,

It is not just a poem that I have composed, it is an ocean, of which I have strung the pearls,

Some pearls rolling on the water, which are fit for the ears of the sultan.⁷³

After the opening encomia, the historical section proper begins under the title *āghāz-i dāstān* on fol. 112b. Again, ‘Iyāni compares his work to the *Shahnama*:

بیا داستانی ز نو گوش کن * زدستان رستم فراموش کن

چنین شاه فرخ رخ نیکبخت * که موروثی او... تاج و تخت

چو رستم بشمشیر شیر افکنست * شه بهمنی زاد روئین تنست

Come, harken to a new tale, forget the story of Rostam!

[Of] such a fortunate and happy king, whose patrimony is crown and throne,

Like Rostam does he slay lions with his sword, he is the king of Bahmani descent, the bronzen-bodied.⁷⁴

The poet relates how in the year 898/1492-3, “a hundred rebellions (*fitna*) appeared everywhere”. When the sultan became aware of the revolt he marched on the rebels, who were led by Dastur Dinar. The rebels, who had accrued massive wealth, based themselves in Gulbarga and the nearby castle of Sagar. Their challenge to the sultan was couched in explicitly ethnic terms:

که مارا حکومت ده و کن بزرگ * اگر تاج خواهی بکن ترک ترک

⁷³ MS D. 92, fol. 132b.

⁷⁴ MS D. 92, fol. 112b. The epithet *ru’īn-tan* ‘bronzen-bodied’ belongs to Bahman’s father Isfandiyar, the *Shahnama* hero eventually defeated and killed in combat with Rostam. Perhaps again here we can see ‘Iyāni subtly undercutting his own claims of Mahmud Shah’s greatness.

“Give us governance and make us great; if you want the crown, leave the Turks!”⁷⁵

Initially, ‘Iyani records, the two armies were equally marched, comprising more than 10,000 troops, but through “God’s decree” the sultan was aided by two generals who were nearby, who swelled his forces to include an elephant contingent,⁷⁶ which is later described in detail.⁷⁷ The reference is probably to ‘Adil Khan and Qasim Barid’s assistance at the battle of Maindargi, which Firishta mentions, as I will discuss further below. ‘Iyani emphasises the sultan’s personal role in the fighting, for ‘the king’s swords rained down on the enemy’:⁷⁸

بشمشیر آن شاه والاگهر *نوشتست نصر من الله [اکبر

By the sword of that king of elevated essence was decreed victory from God the great.⁷⁹

Much of the work is taken up with descriptions of the fighting, which we need not repeat in detail here. When Dastur Dinar’s horse was struck in the breast by a Turkish arrow, the rebel leader was captured, and taken before the sultan.⁸⁰ After the victory, the sultan headed to Gulbarga, where he was greeted with rejoicing, at least by the *gharībān*:

بفرمود اصحاب تجار را * که خوانید گلکار و بخارا
سراهای خود را عمارت کنید * سرائید و عیش و تجارت کنید
در گنج لطف و کرم باز کرد * غریبان درمانده آواز کرد
به اقبال شاه زنده گشتند باز * بجان و بدل بنده گشتند باز
اگر خلق عالم بجان زنده اند * غریبان به شاه جهان زنده [اند]

[The king] ordered the merchants, “Summon the potters and incense-makers

Rebuild your houses, sing, enjoy yourselves and do business.”

He opened the door of the treasury of favour and generosity, and called for the despairing *gharībān*

⁷⁵ MS D. 92, fol. 115b.

⁷⁶ MS D. 92, fol. 115a.

⁷⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 116b-117a.

⁷⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 116a: *zi shāh bar ‘adv tīgh bārān shudī*.

⁷⁹ MS D. 92, fol. 116a.

⁸⁰ MS D. 92, fol. 117b.

By the king's fortune they became alive again, in heart and soul they became his slaves again

If the people of this world live through their soul, the *gharībān* live through the king of the world.⁸¹

The description of the victory is followed by an account of the sultan's ten viziers (probably meant in the general sense of *wazīr* as advisor), starting with Qasim Barid (*barīd al-mamālik*)⁸² and Yusuf 'Adil Khan,⁸³ who are both praised for their martial abilities and role in defeating the Abyssinian enemy. Indeed Yusuf 'Adil Khan is depicted almost as the saviour of the Bahmani kingdom, somewhat ironically in view of his subsequent part in its dismemberment:

بيک گرز فولادی ده منی * شکست او عدوی شه بهمنی

With a single steel mace weighing ten *mann*, he broke the enemy of the Bahmani king.⁸⁴

There is also extensive praise of Fakhr al-Mulk,⁸⁵ who is identified by Firishta as the son of one of Mahmud Gavan's slaves and a close ally of Nizam al-Mulk,⁸⁶ and of Khan-i Jahan,⁸⁷ and 'Ayn al-Mulk.⁸⁸ We know from Firishta that the latter was governor of Goa,⁸⁹ and the former is probably to be identified with Khvaja-i Jahan Dakani, governor of Parenda.⁹⁰ Qutb al-Mulk, future founder of the Qutbshahi dynasty, and a certain Bahjat al-Mulk and Jahangir or Jahan-Pahlavan, both unidentified commanders, are also given dedicated panegyrics.⁹¹

⁸¹ MS D. 92, fol. 118a.

⁸² MS D. 92, fol. 118b.

⁸³ MS D. 92, fol. 119b.

⁸⁴ MS D. 92, fol. 120a.

⁸⁵ MS D. 92, fol. 120a.

⁸⁶ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 476

⁸⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 121a.

⁸⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 121b.

⁸⁹ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 494; he had been granted the *iqṭā'* of Goa after the fall of its previous governor, Bahadur Khan Gilani, around 899/1493.

⁹⁰ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 11.

⁹¹ MS D. 92, fol. 122a-123a. Firishta (*Tarikh*, vol. 2, 501) mentions that there was a son of Dastur Dinar named Jahangir Khan, but it seems unlikely he is the one referred to be 'Iyani. Jahangir Khan subsequently received the *iqṭā'* of Gulbarga. The Jahangir Khan of 'Iyani is mentioned in passing by Tabataba'i, *Burhan-i Ma'athir*, 145.

Further passages praise Ulugh Khan, “the great vizier” (*vazīr-i kabīr*), and Mubariz al-Mulk, both unidentified.⁹² In all instances the praise focuses on the vizier’s martial prowess.

After the panegyrics, the narrative resumes with the story of how the sultan ordered his ten viziers to capture Sagar, the fortress stronghold of the remaining rebels.⁹³ The defenders locked the gates in face of the attack, but the sultan took the lead:

در قلعه را شاه خود رزم ساخت * بدل فتح آن قلعه را جزم ساخت
بلشکر چنین گفت و با هر وزیر * که باید نهادن بکف جان دلیر

The king himself fought over the castle gate, his heart was decided on the conquest of that castle.

He said to his army and to each vizier, “We must be ready to die and fight fearlessly.”⁹⁴

Sagar soon fell but this was not the end of the story, for Qasim Barid and Fakhr al-Mulk interceded with the sultan for the defeated Dastur Dinar.⁹⁵ They urge him:

خطا میفتد بندگانرا بسی * غلامان خود را نکشته کسی
خطایی اگر رفت از آن درگذر * ازو مال بستان و از سر گذر
اگر بنده ناگه گناهی کند * چو آید از آن بار و آهی کند
گناهش ببخشد خداوند پاک * اگر شاه این جرم ببخشد چه پاک

Many a slave has committed a mistake, but no one kills their own servants,

If there has been a mistake forgive it; seize his wealth, but forego his life.

If a slave makes a mistake by accident, when it leads to a problem that makes him sigh in lament.

Almighty God will forgive his sin, so why shouldn’t the king forgive this crime?⁹⁶

⁹² MS D. 92, fol. 123a-124a.

⁹³ MS D. 92, fol. 124b.

⁹⁴ MS D. 92, fol. 125b.

⁹⁵ MS D. 92, fol. 126a-b.

⁹⁶ MS D. 92, fol. 126b.

The sultan immediately grants this request, pardoning Dastur Dinar and returning his wealth to him. Finally, the sultan and his men leave Sagar to return in triumph to Bidar, where they are greeted with popular rejoicing:

همه شهر تا کوچه راستند * دکانها بزیلو چه پیراستند
علم از زمین سر بگردون کشید * قلم این الف راستی چون کشید
شد از مقدم شاه فرخنده فر * مشرف بتشریف دیوار و در
تماشاکنان شاه و خان و ملوک * برآسود از راه و سیر سلوک

The entire town, every alley was decorated, how its shops were adorned with cotton rugs!

The banner raised its head from the ground into the firmament, just as the pen drew this letter *alif* aright,

The walls and gates were honoured by the coming of the fortunate king,

The king, khans and princes watched and relaxed from their long travels.⁹⁷

In celebration, the sultan gave out lavish rewards, and Bidar is compared to not just the garden of Iram but even paradise itself (*khuld-i barīn*).⁹⁸ The praise of Bidar may reflect the fact that the town was not merely the Bahmani capital but had been designed for the *gharībān*, in contrast to Gulbarga, which was traditionally associated with the Dakani faction.⁹⁹ Thus to the contemporary audience, even the names of the towns would have been loaded with factional symbolism, and ‘Iyani’s celebration of Bidar as an earthly paradise can also be understood as a celebration of the *gharībān* faction. This passage is followed by another panegyric on Qasim Barid, this time lauding his unequalled excellence in administration (*tadbīr*), followed by further praise of the sultan’s bravery and an exposition of the reasons for the book’s name. The manuscript closes with various verses (fol. 135a-137a), mainly in praise of the sultan, but these do not form part of the *Fathnama*. The lack of margins on these final folios suggests that ‘Iyani left the manuscript unfinished. Possibly his own death intervened before he could present it to his patron.

⁹⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 128a.

⁹⁸ MS D. 92, fol. 128b, 129a.

⁹⁹ Philon, “New Considerations,” 108.

As well as presenting a historical narrative intended – at least ostensibly – to enhance the reputation of sultan Mahmud Shah, ‘Iyani’s *Fathnama* is an expression of the factional politics of the Deccan. The sultan’s interests and those of the *gharībān* are more or less identical, for as ‘Iyani writes of the revolt:

بملک دکن قصه رو نمود * که جز قصد جان غریبان نبود

In the kingdom of Deccan a story took place, that was nothing other than an attempt on the life of the *gharībān*.¹⁰⁰

Thus when Mahmud Shah responds to the revolt by setting out with his army, ‘Iyani specifies that he is accompanied by a thousand “Turk and Tajik” cavalry – i.e. the *gharībān*.¹⁰¹ The revolt is no less than a disease, for which the *gharībān* are the cure:

رعیت مریضند و شاهان طبیب * بدست طبیبان دواى غریب

The people are the patients, the kings are their physicians; in the hands of the physicians is the cure of strangers (*gharīb*).¹⁰²

Although modern scholarship sees Deccani politics as riven between *gharībān* and Dakani factions, the latter are nowhere mentioned. Rather ‘Iyani describes the conflict in racially charged terms as a battle between the pale-skinned *gharībān* and the black Ethiopians. India and Indians are almost entirely absent from the text. The night-like blackness of the Ethiopians is frequently underlined, as is the ethnic basis of the conspiracy:

شها تا که عالم بود شاه باش * ز احوال ملک خودآگاه باش

حبوش اتفاقی عجب کرده اند * بخود روز روشن چو شب کرده اند

ازین جمله دستور دینار نام * که دارد زر و مال و لشکر تمام

بجمعی پریشان هم جنس خویش * یکی گشته و گشته از دین و کیش

ز طور غلامی دگر گشته اند * ز شاه فلک جاه بر گشته اند

ندارند در سر بجز سرکشی * دوا نیست الا که لشکرکشی

¹⁰⁰ MS D. 92, fol. 113a.

¹⁰¹ MS D. 92, fol. 114b.

¹⁰² MS D. 92, fol. 113a.

King, may you rule for as long as the world exists! Be informed of the affairs of your kingdom:

The Abyssinians made a strange compact, they made the bright day dark like night for themselves.

From these, one Dastur Dinar by name, who has an abundance of gold, riches and armies, Joined with a group of the same race, who turned away from religion and faith.

They turned away from the normal practice of *ghulāms*, and rebelled against the king of heavenly rank.

No thought did they have but of rebellion; no cure was there but mustering an army.¹⁰³

Dastur Dinar is the ‘black crow’ (*zāgh-i siyah*) who eventually falls prey to the sultan.¹⁰⁴ “The Abyssinian armies” (*juyūsh-i ḥubūsh*) are described as “blackhearted as mist” (*siyāh-dil chū mīgh*), and as the ‘night-like enemy’ (*dushman-i shabī*) against whom the sun drew his sword.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, it is the sun no less that achieves victory for the sultan:

به بین حشمت و جاه شاه دکن * که خورشید اوراست یک تیغ زن

See the might and rank of the king of Deccan, whose swordsman is the sun.¹⁰⁶

In contrast to this emphasis on Dastur Dinar’s alien blackness, ‘Iyani celebrates how the Turkish *ghulāms* physically resembled the sultan with their lighter complexions:

بسطان هزارى جوانان ترک * که هستند و باشند دایم بزرگ
همه سرخ رویان و یکرنگ شه * زده تیغ مردانه در جنگ شاه
قراول شدند و برفتند پیش * رسیدند هر یک بخصمان [خویش]

The sultan has a thousand Turkish youths who are and will be with him forever mighty,

¹⁰³ MS D. 92, fol. 113b.

¹⁰⁴ MS D. 92, fol. 127a.

¹⁰⁵ MS D. 92, fol. 115a.

¹⁰⁶ MS D. 92, fol. 115b.

All red faced, the same colour as the sultan, they struck their swords bravely fighting for the king.

They formed the vanguard and went before him, each one of them reached his enemy.¹⁰⁷

The physical similarity of the Turks and the sultan thus underlines their common interests. Yet a very different picture emerges when we consider ‘Iyani’s account in the light of other sources dealing with Dastur Dinar’s revolt.

‘Iyani’s *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi* compared with the accounts of Tabataba and Firishta

Dastur Dinar is also discussed in the chronicles by Firishta and Sayyid ‘Ali Tabataba. Firishta in fact offers two somewhat different stories, the first in his section on Bahmani history, and the second in his account of the career of Yusuf ‘Adil Khan in the chapter on ‘Adilshahi history. In the first version,¹⁰⁸ Firishta states that Malik Dastur Dinar had been governor of Berar, and was then appointed as the *ṭarafdār* of Warangal; he had been dismissed from this position, but was granted the *iqṭā’* of Gulbarga and Sagar in 901/1495-6. However, Qasim Barid turned the sultan against Malik Dastur Dinar, and managed to have the latter’s amirs dismissed from his service. This prompted Malik Dastur to rebel, in alliance with ‘Aziz al-Mulk Dakani, gathering seven or eight thousand Abyssinian and Dakani troops, and seizing control of much of Telengana. On Qasim Barid’s advice, the sultan sought the aid of Yusuf ‘Adil Khan, and in the ensuing battle at Maindargi (near Akalkote) Malik Dastur Dinar was captured. However, through the intercession of ‘Adil Khan, the sultan decided to forgive the rebel and restore him to his *iqṭā’* of Gulbarga and Sagar. Yet Dastur Dinar, Yusuf ‘Adil Khan and Qasim Barid now started fighting over where the borders of their territory lay. The sultan avoided intervening in this dispute, but Yusuf ‘Adil Khan defeated Qasim Barid and Dastur Dinar, who now seem to have allied against him. However, Dastur Dinar evidently succeeded in resuming control of Gulbarga, for in 904/1498, Yusuf ‘Adil Khan launched another expedition against him there, forcing him to seek refuge in Ahmadnagar, where Malik Ahmad Nizam al-Din assisted him to regain his lands. Dastur Dinar’s alliance with Qasim

¹⁰⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 115a.

¹⁰⁸ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 481, 495-6.

Barid seems to have endured too, for it was only with the latter's death in 910/1504 that 'Adil Khan succeeded in finally capturing Gulbarga and killing Dastur Dinar.¹⁰⁹

Firishta thus depicts a long-running dispute lasting nearly a decade between Yusuf 'Adil Khan, Qasim Barid and Dastur Dinar, in which Mahmud Shah is only fleetingly involved, and is manipulated by the actors to suit their ends. He also portrays a world of ever-shifting allegiances, with Qasim Barid and Dastur Dinar first mortal enemies, then close allies against the nascent power of 'Adil Khan. Some of these allegiances are clarified in the second account, where Firishta adds some additional details. He tells us that Dastur Dinar was the adopted son (*farzand-khvānda*) of Hasan Nizam al-Mulk, father of Ahmad Nizam al-Mulk, the founder of the Nizamshahi dynasty of Ahmadnagar.¹¹⁰ It was because of this connection, on which he thought he could rely for support, that Dastur Dinar dared launch his revolt, which was an outright declaration of independence, as "like others, he desired to have the *khutba* said and coins struck in his name" (*khvāst kih hamchū dīgarān ū nīz šāhib-i khutba u sikka gardad*). Firishta's second account briefly records the fighting, which was led by Qasim Barid (whose lands, after all were the ones the rebel was encroaching on), and in this version it was Qasim Barid who summoned the sultan and 'Adil Khan to assist. Intriguingly, Firishta claims that, "Sultan Mahmud, at the instigation of Qasim Barid, condemned [Dastur Dinar] to death, but the Refuge of Justice [Yusuf 'Adil Khan], in spite of Qasim Barid, sent people to the presence of the king interceding [for Dastur Dinar] to be released, and granted his previous *iqṭā'* of Ahsanabad [Gulbarga]."¹¹¹ In 903/1497, 'Adil Khan moved to annex Dastur Dinar's *iqṭā'* for himself, but Dastur Dinar's ability to call on aid from Nizam al-Mulk, but also from Qutb al-Mulk and even his old nemesis Qasim Barid, enabled him to maintain control of Gulbarga until he was finally slain in battle with 'Adil Khan around 904/1498.¹¹²

Much closer to 'Iyani's account is that offered by Sayyid 'Ali Tabataba in his *Burhan-i Ma'athir*. This ornately written chronicle is frustratingly short on concrete details such as dates and places. Like 'Iyani, Tabataba mentions ten leading allies of the sultan, described by

¹⁰⁹ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 458.

¹¹⁰ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 23.

¹¹¹ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 24.

¹¹² Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 3, 25-32.

him as “ten-strong brave Turkish youths who served the king”.¹¹³ In the chapter describing the rebellions that beset Mahmud Shah’s reign, Tabataba relates how “Malik Dinar Dastur-i Mamalik, Khwaja-i Saray, the Abyssinian, lifted his foot from the path of obedience and became a wayfarer on the roads of rebellion.”¹¹⁴ Like ‘Iyani, Tabataba gives a prominent role to sultan in the fighting, while also emphasising the parts played by ‘Adil Khan, Qasim Barid and Fakhr al-Mulk. Like ‘Iyani, the place of battle is unmentioned, but Tabataba agrees with Firishta in stating Dastur Dinar was forgiven after ‘Adil Khan’s intercession. After the victory, the sultan marches on Sagar and Gulbarga, and returns to Bidar in triumph, again in line with ‘Iyani’s account.¹¹⁵ Although some details differ – Tabataba for example includes the information that Dastur Dinar was allied with the Turk ‘Aziz al-Mulk,¹¹⁶ and does not describe the rebellion in the ethnically centred terms that ‘Iyani does - the similarities in information are sufficiently striking to raise the possibility that Tabataba had access, directly or indirectly, to the *Fathnama*. Nonetheless, despite the numerous verse citations in the *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, none seem derive from the *Fathnama*, and this suggestion must be regarded as speculative. At least, however, it seems ‘Iyani’s work falls within the historical tradition for these events to which Tabataba had access, which differed substantially from that conveyed by Firishta.

In sum, we can see that the *Fathnama* only treats one brief episode in the convoluted story of Dastur Dinar’s revolt, the battle of Maindargi and its consequences. There are contradictions in both details and chronology between the various accounts. Firishta clearly dates the beginning of Dastur Dinar’s revolt to 901/1495, but the events are put in 898/1492-3 by the contemporary evidence of ‘Iyani who writes:

بتاریخ نهصد دو کم در شمار *چپ و راست صد فتنه گشت آشکار

In the year nine hundred minus two in the computation [i.e. 898], right and left a hundred disturbances appeared.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, 138: *az javānān-i turk dah dalīr-i suturg dar khidmat-i shahriyār-i ‘ālī-tabār ḥāḍir būdand.*

¹¹⁴ Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, 144.

¹¹⁵ Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, 146.

¹¹⁶ Tabataba, *Burhan-i Ma’athir*, 144.

¹¹⁷ MS D. 92, fol. 113a.

Although Firishta places Dastur Dinar's revolt rather later, he also dates the beginnings of the disintegration of Mahmud Shah's kingdom to 898/1492-3, when Qasim Barid incited the Hindu empire of Vijayanagar to invade, in the hope of destroying Yusuf 'Adil Khan. Indeed Qasim Barid "became so independent that nothing but the name of the sultanate was left to the sultan, and historians date the sultanate of the Baridis to this date".¹¹⁸ Firishta's internal chronology is certainly confused. Whereas in the first account Firishta has Dastur Dinar perishing in battle after the death of Qasim Barid in 910/1504, in the second, he implies the rebel died in 904/1498, and certainly not after 908/1502. Unfortunately, the complete absence of dates from the account of Tabataba means it is difficult to resolve this contradiction.

More significant is the disagreement between the sources over who interceded with Mahmud Shah for Dastur Dinar's forgiveness. While 'Iyani claims it was Qasim Barid and Fakhr al-Mulk who saved Dastur Dinar, in contrast Firishta – writing at the court of Yusuf 'Adil Khan's descendants – claimed the latter had intervened and in contrast, it was Qasim Barid who tried to have Dastur Dinar killed. Evidently, despite the negative terms in which the rebel is characterised, saving him is depicted as a meritorious act. It is doubtless not coincidental that 'Iyani provides especially elaborate panegyrics to Qasim Barid, perhaps indicating he was hoping for his favour. Ultimately, however, the question of who exactly interceded for the rebel is secondary to the more significant point: that despite the polarising factionalism between *gharībān* and Dakanis (or, as they are portrayed here, Abyssinians), the warring *ghulāms* shared common interests. In the death throes of the Bahmani state, no one had any desire to see the sultan asserting his authority and starting to punish rebel *ghulāms*. After all, what Dastur Dinar did by asserting his independence was no different from the course followed by many of his contemporaries – including both Qasim Barid and 'Adil Khan. It was merely that Dastur Dinar failed, presumably because the vested interests of his rivals demanded they make common cause with the sultan – if indeed, Mahmud Shah did play much of a role in the revolt's suppression, something which Firishta's admittedly unreliable testimony puts in considerable doubt. There the sultan is more or less a bystander as Yusuf 'Adil Khan, Qasim Barid and others fight over Dastur Dinar and his *iqṭā'*. None of the sources can be trusted to explain why Dastur Dinar was excused. Possibly in reality his connection to the powerful Ahmad Nizam al-Mulk, singularly absent from 'Iyani's account, saved him. Furthermore, as the constantly shifting alliances depicted by Firishta suggest,

¹¹⁸ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 486, and for the chronology see also *ibid*, vol. 3, 16-18.

some of Dastur Dinar's peers evidently had an interest in maintaining him – at least at times - in Gulbarga as a sort of buffer between themselves and their more imposing rivals.

Conclusion

Despite its brevity, 'Iyani's *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi* is a more complex text than at first appears. While superficially a panegyric to the heroic exploits of Mahmud Shah in defeating the rebel Abyssinian, it is highly unlikely that a contemporary audience would have been unaware of the realities that contradicted the poet's presentation. It is quite likely that, as Firishta indicates, Mahmud Shah actually played little part in events, but it is certain Qasim Barid, lavishly praised by 'Iyani for his skills in administration, had already embarked on establishing his own independent rule. Indeed, most of the ten "viziers" 'Iyani mentions who can be identified, so far from saving the Bahmani state, played a critical part in its demise. On one level, then, the text was perhaps intended to defend the actions of the *gharībān* faction with whom the author identified, and the constant *ghulām*-led rebellions would have given the lines "Many a slave has committed a mistake, but no one kills their own servants" (fol. 126a) an ironic resonance in the bloody politics of the period. On another level, by idealising the behaviour of the sultan and his "viziers" it might have reminded a contemporary audience of the disjunction between reality and ideal.¹¹⁹ For example, attributing the pardoning of Dastur Dinar to Qasim Barid might have critiqued the latter's alleged attempts to have the former executed. Indeed, the initial panegyrics to Shah Ni'matallah and Muhibballah suggest they are the only real heroes, strongly hinting through the description of Ni'matallah's battle apparition that any victory Mahmud Shah won was due to the intervention of the holy family.

However preposterous the poet's repeated comparisons of his brief *mathnavī* to Firdawsi's enormous *Shahnama* may seem, the work is a rare surviving testimony to the popularity of *Shahnama*-style verse histories in the Bahmani Deccan. 'Isami's *Futuh al-Salatin* is the most substantial surviving example; another is the lost *Bahman-nama* of Adhari – perhaps not coincidentally another Ni'matallahi devotee – allegedly commissioned by Ahmad Shah, which is said to have recounted the deeds of the dynasty.¹²⁰ Firishta tells us how the court of Mahmud Shah was attended by "storytellers and *Shahnama* reciters, poets

¹¹⁹ For an example of such strategies in earlier Persian verse, see Meisami, "Ghaznavid Panegyrics".

¹²⁰ Devare, *Short History*, 190-195.

and boon-companions from the furthest parts of the world.”¹²¹ A richly illustrated *Shahnama* dated 841/1438, copied by a Muhammad Shirazi, which may well have been destined for a royal Bahmani audience, suggests courtly interest in such texts.¹²² Yet the sultan is largely absent from ‘Iyani’s qasidas, which instead focus on the figure of Muhibballah. The latter was also the dedicatee of Siraj al-Din Shirazi’s calligraphy treatise, the *Tuhfat al-Muhibbin*, and was the subject of numerous poems by ‘Iyani’s slightly earlier contemporary Naziri.¹²³ ‘Iyani’s ostentatious praise of Muhibballah in the *Fathnama* may reflect the reality that literary patronage revolved as much around the *dargāh* of the descendants of Shah Ni‘matallah in the Deccan as the sultanic court. The role of such figures in the forging of an Indo-Persian literary culture deserves further investigation.

Biography

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Saeed Talajooy, Emily Shovelton, Elaine Wright, Vivek Gupta, David Durand-Guédy and Helen Philon for assistance and comments with regard to various aspects of this paper. I am also indebted to the staff of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and the Anna Public Library for their assistance, and permitting me to study and photograph the manuscript.

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¹²¹ Firishta, *Tarikh*, vol. 2, 484.

¹²² British Library MS Or 1403, see discussion in Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 177-182, and in more detail, with a more nuanced discussion of provenance, Firouzeh, “Convention and Reinvention.” On Deccani tastes for *Shahnama*-style narratives see Dayal, “On Heroes and History”.

¹²³ Firouzeh, “Architecture, Sanctity and Power,” 155-7; Ernst, “Sufism and the Aesthetics”; Naziri, *Divan*, British Library MS Or 1150; I shall discuss Naziri’s work in a future publication.

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Figure captions

Figure 1. MS. D. 92, fol. 108b-109a, the beginning of the *Fathnama-i Mahmud Shahi*. By kind permission of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Anna Public Library, Chennai.

Figure 2. MS D 92, fol. 66b. Opening of the *ghazaliyyat* section. By kind permission of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Anna Public Library, Chennai.

Figure 3. MS D 92, fol. 63a, showing one of the blue erasures that occur throughout the manuscript. By kind permission of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Anna Public Library, Chennai.

Figure 4 MS D 92, fol. 83b, opening of the *Ruba‘iyyat* section. By kind permission of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Anna Public Library, Chennai.

Figure 5, MS D 92, fol. 88b, the opening of the *Jangnama-i Shahrukh*. By kind permission of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Anna Public Library, Chennai.