

CHAPTER 34

Mīr Dāmād and the founding of the “School of Iṣfahān”

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With the advent of the Ṣafavids (reigned 907/1501–1145/1732) in Persia in the early tenth/sixteenth century, the nomocentric, dogmatic forces in Islamic intellectual disposition immediately found a favourable political climate. The anxiety of legitimacy was particularly acute in the case of the Ṣafavids. Although of Turkish, or probably Kurdish (Bosworth (1967): 172), origin, they came to power by fabricating a fictitious Shī‘ī genealogy for themselves, linking their origins back to the sacred memory of the Shī‘ī Imāms. The probability that the founder of the Ṣafavid order, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn (d. 735/1335), was perhaps a Sunni made the Ṣafavid monarchs, from Shah Ismā‘īl I (ruled 907/1501–930/1524) onward, particularly anxious to demonstrate and institutionalize their Shī‘ī affiliation. The founder of the Ṣafavid dynasty, Shah Ismā‘īl, spent the first ten years of his reign in a ruthless drive to consolidate his power over Persia and to establish Shī‘ism as the ideological foundation of his, and his successors’, legitimacy (see al-Shaybī (1980): 365–402). Aggravating the Ṣafavid anxiety over their Shī‘ī self-legitimation was the powerful presence of the Sunni Ottomans, who, under Selīm I Yavuz (“the Grim”) (ruled 918/1512–926/1520), won a major victory in 920/1514 at Chaldiran against the Ṣafavids. When the Ṣafavids subsequently moved their capital from Tabrīz to Qazwīn and then to Iṣfahān, they distanced themselves from their powerful Sunni neighbours in more than just one sense. As they settled into their new capital, Iṣfahān became the new centre of the Shī‘ī world. The flourishing of Mīr Dāmād (950/1543–1041/1631) and the establishment of the “School of Iṣfahān” would hardly have been possible without these necessary political and social developments.

One particular Şafavid monarch was instrumental in these developments. When England was ruled by Elizabeth I, Spain by Philip II, Russia by Ivan the Terrible, and India by Emperor Akbar, Persia achieved one of its greatest periods of high culture and material civilization under the legendary reign of Shah 'Abbās I (ruled 996/1588–1038/1629), who came to power when Mīr Dāmād was forty-five years old and died when he was eighty-six. During his reign the “School of Işfahān” found its most celebrated patristic foundation; and Persia experienced one of the greatest periods of its political and material prosperity. The Ottomans were evicted from Āzarbaijān, the Şafavid authority over the eastern Caucasus and the Persian Gulf was consolidated, widespread contact with Europe was established, and, with the Moghal dynasty on its east and the Ottomans on its west, the Shī'ī capital of Işfahān became the centre of a world civilization reminiscent of pre-Islamic memories.

❧ PHILOSOPHY UNDER THE ŞAFAVIDS ❧

In their relentless quest for self-legitimacy, the Şafavid monarchs needed the Shī'ī jurists and dogmaticians, as well as the preachers and clerics, to propagate the ideological foundation of their state (Amir Arjomand (1984): 109–21). This inevitably created an unfavourable atmosphere for the free exercise of logocentric tendencies in theological, philosophical and scientific disciplines. If we witness the rise of a particular philosophical disposition, recently identified as the “School of Işfahān” (Nasr in Sharīf (1966), 2: 904–32; Corbin (1972), 4: 9–201; Āshtiyanī (1972): 60–1), during the Şafavid period, this phenomenon must be attributed more to the diligent and relentless philosophical engagements of a limited number of individuals rather than considered the product of favourable and conducive social circumstances. Those who engaged in philosophical matters did so at some peril to their personal safety and social standing. As is particularly evident in the case of Mīr Dāmād, philosophers often sought a safe haven in an abstruse and convoluted discourse (Nasr (1978): 33) for fear of persecution. Or else they were forced, like Mīr Dāmād's distinguished student Mullā Şadrā (979/1571–1050/1640), to abandon the more congenial environment of their colleagues and students and live in exile at least for certain periods in remote parts of the country (Corbin (1972), 4: 54–122; Nasr (1978): 31–53). The Shī'ī dogmaticians who had found a powerful state apparatus in their support were least tolerant of logocentric discourses which they rightly considered detrimental not only to the metaphysical foundations of their own discourse but to their social status and political power as well. The result was that the fate of philosophy was left in the hands of whimsical monarchs who for a number of practical and symbolic self-

interests, such as their need for a court physician and a court astronomer, would inadvertently provide for the possibilities of philosophical pursuits, historically linked to medicine and astronomy, at their court. Islamic philosophy has never had any institutional foundations except at the clandestine peripheries of the *madrasah* system, in the libraries of wealthy individuals, and ultimately in the whimsical vicissitudes of the court where the royal concerns with astrological and medical needs, as well as with the ceremonial apparatus of power, would provide such great luminaries of Islamic philosophy as Ibn Sīnā, Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Mīr Dāmād with material possibilities for their intellectual pursuits. That Islamic philosophy has flourished as a rich intellectual discourse testifies more to the philosophers' unyielding insistence than to a conducive social setting.

The dominant nomocentric proclivities in the Ṣafavid period would also have the catalytic effect of initially producing a form of philosophical dogmatism where epistemological innovations would be discouraged and prevented in favour of a more pedantic repetition of received conceptions (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 278). This unfavourable dogmatic condition must be considered further in relation to the major sectarian re-affiliation that took place during this period (Hinz (1936): 22–32; Mazzaoui (1972): 63–82; Savory (1980): 27–49). A principal impact of the Ṣafavids' rise to power was the almost immediate disruption of intellectual activities by Persian Sunni scholars who were forced to leave their homeland and migrate to more congenial places like India. It took a generation of "imported" Shī'ī scholars, mostly jurists and dogmaticians, from such predominantly Shī'ī lands as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain, to establish a new – and, from the Shī'ī Ṣafavids' perspective, more palatable – doctrinal discourse (Browne (1902–24), 4: 360–1). Mīr Dāmād, in fact, represents the first generation of Shī'ī philosophers born and bred in Persia during the Ṣafavid period. His father, Mīr Shams al-Dīn Dāmād, was the son-in-law of Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī or Muḥaqqiq-i Thānī (d. 940/1533), who had come to Persia early in the Ṣafavid era (Tunikābunī (1985): 346–7). The disruption of philosophical tradition by Sunni scholars in Persia and the superimposition of dogmatic and sectarian concerns on the logocentric discourse were such that even Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn Āmilī, also known as Sheikh Bahā'ī, the distinguished Shī'ī philosopher who was a close friend and associate of Mīr Dāmād, would refuse, according to some historians, to take Ibn Sīnā seriously on the assumption that he was a Sunni philosopher (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 381)!

Because of the rather unusual power of jurists during the Ṣafavid period, as exemplified by Mīr Dāmād's own grandfather Muḥaqqiq-i Thānī (Amir Arjomand (1984): 133–7), philosophy was more than ever a suspicious discourse. There are reports that on the front doors of some

schools in Iṣfahān the patrons had specifically prohibited the teaching of philosophy: "And it is necessary that the books of imaginary sciences, the sciences of doubts and uncertainties, which are famous and known as rational and philosophical sciences, such as [Ibn Sīnā's] *al-Shifā'* and *al-Ishārāt* [*wa'l-tanbīhāt* . . . , etc.] should not be read in the introduction to religious sciences" (Hādī (1984): 17). The ideological roots of the Ṣafavids in the mystical tradition, particularly in its populist dimensions (Mazzaoui (1972): 41–82), had further made philosophical inquiry a hazardous preoccupation. As always in the course of Islamic intellectual history, during the Ṣafavid period the practice of philosophy was a precarious act that Persian philosophers pursued at their own peril. Financial support for students of philosophy was virtually non-existent. Having a wealthy and influential father, as in the case of Mīr Dāmād and his student Mullā Ṣadrā, was a crucial factor in facilitating a philosophical career. But even these two independently wealthy Shī'ī philosophers were not totally immune to financial difficulties. In one of his extant letters to Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā complains in almost the same breath of his financial burdens in supporting his family and of harassments to which he has been systematically subjected (Mullā Ṣadrā (n.d.): 57). The *madrasah* system and its total reliance on religious endowments prohibited any financial support for students who were attracted primarily to philosophy.

Against all these odds, with the generation of Mīr Dāmād a new breed of Shī'ī philosophers came forward which was far too serious about matters of philosophical primacy to be dissuaded by unfavourable social conditions. They resumed and rejuvenated a robust philosophical discourse. Their problem, of course, remained the opposition that the jurists and dogmatists displayed against them. The prefaces and conclusions of almost all the philosophical treatises of this period are filled with grievances against the juridical authorities who harassed and persecuted the philosophers (Mullā Ṣadrā (1961): 39). Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā never lose an opportunity to condemn the dogmatists who considered them blasphemous infidels. Qāḍī Sa'īd Qumī (d. 1103/1691), a prominent philosopher of the period, issued a stern condemnation of these clericals in the introduction to his *al-Anwār al-quḍsiyyah*. The dogmatists, in turn, attacked the philosophers vehemently, considered them infidels and their writings blasphemous. They fundamentally challenged the authority of reason in the prevention of error. Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Nayrīzī (d. c. 1173/1759) forbade his followers from reading Ibn Sīnā's and other philosophers' writings. Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī (d. 1098/1686) wrote a book against both philosophers and Sufis, *al-Fawā'id al-dīniyyah fi'l-radd 'alā' al-ḥukamā' wa'l-ṣufiyyah*. The same Mullā Muḥammad accused the distinguished philosopher Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ (d. 1091/1680), one of the most brilliant students of

Mullā Ṣadrā, of being a “Zoroastrian master” (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 282). One of his poems condemned all philosophers and all philosophies:

A party of people have gone astray from the gate of faith
 And followed Ibn Sīnā and Bahmanyār instead.
 Out of ignorance they have turned Aristotelian and Platonic,
 Far away from the sacred Imām’s spearhead.
 They imitate Socrates and Galen,
 Escaping from what Bāqir and Ṣādiq have said.
 In their opinion most vile and impious,
 He who knows philosophy is utterly perfect.
 Perfect indeed is in God’s eyes
 He who has followed the family of the Prophet.
 I seek knowledge from the gate of the city [i.e., ‘Alī],
 From the Greeks I will not anything get.

(Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 282–3)

Mullā Muḥammad proceeds to boast that the Qur’ān is his *al-Shifā*, with a pun on the literal meaning of the title of Ibn Sīnā’s text, implying that God’s word cures him of all his mental diseases (e.g., philosophical inclinations). The collection of prophetic *ḥadīth* will do well for Mullā Muḥammad instead of Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Ishārāt wa’l-tanbīhāt*. He insists that “much of the Greek philosophy is fallacious” and that the Shī‘ī Imāms’ sayings are far superior (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 283).

The juridical opposition to philosophy went far beyond verbal abuse and physical harassment. A major re-codification of the dogmatic principles of the faith was an immediate result of the juridical awareness of the philosophical threat. Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), the most prominent dogmatician of the Ṣafavid period, set upon himself the Herculean task of collecting and codifying the Shī‘ī Imāms’ traditions precisely to combat his contemporaries’ diversion to philosophy. In answer to a question about the viability of philosophy, he is reported to have said that “if God Almighty recognized people sufficient in their intellect, He would not have sent them messengers and prophets” (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 283).

Despite these unfavourable conditions for philosophy, the general atmosphere of religious consciousness was particularly acute under the Ṣafavids. Beginning with Shah Ismā‘īl (ruled 907/1501–930/1524), the Ṣafavid kings and their royal families became the greatest patrons of religious learning – particularly in the fields of legal dogmatics and jurisprudence. Mothers, sisters and wives of the Ṣafavid monarchs were particularly attentive to religious endowments. A sister of Shah Ṭahmāsp (ruled 930/1524–984/1576), Suṭlāmūn (d. 969/1561–62), “made her entire estate, including her jewellery, into a religious endowment” (Amir Arjomand (1984): 190). Great luminaries of Shī‘ī learning such as

Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī and ‘Allāmah Majlisī are the products of this period – giants of Shī‘ī scholastic learning who while consolidating and legitimizing the ideological foundations of the Ṣafavid state, systematized, codified and considerably advanced the level of juridical discourse they had inherited from their previous generations.

❧ MĪR MUḤAMMAD BĀQIR DĀMĀD ❧

In the history of Islamic philosophy during the Ṣafavid period, Mīr Dāmād is remembered with uncommon affection and unceasing admiration (Āshtiyānī (1972): 3; Khwansārī (1976), 2: 234; Tunikābunī (1985): 334). Muḥammad Ṭāhir Tunikābunī, the author of the biographical dictionary *Qīṣaṣ al-‘ulamā’*, reports that one day Mullā Ṣadrā, when the celebrated Shī‘ī philosopher of the Ṣafavid period was still a student of Mīr Dāmād, was waiting for his teacher to enter the room and start their discussion. The door is opened and in comes a local Iṣfahānī merchant who needs to ask Mīr Dāmād a question. While the merchant and Mullā Ṣadrā are alone in the room, the merchant asks whether Mīr Dāmād is superior in his learning to a prominent cleric in Isfahan. “Mīr is superior”, Mullā Ṣadrā says. What about Ibn Sīnā, the merchant inquires further, how does he compare with the master of Peripatetic philosophy? “Mīr is superior”, Mullā Ṣadrā repeats. What then of the Second Teacher, al-Fārābī (second only to Aristotle)? Mullā Ṣadrā hesitates for a moment. “Do not be afraid”, Mīr Dāmād encourages his student from the adjacent room, “tell him Mīr is superior (Tunikābunī (1985): 334).

The same hagiographical affection is also present in yet another story reported by another biographer, Ṭabrīzī Khīyābānī (in Mīr Dāmād (1977): Ivii). Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī is reported to have seen in a dream the first Shī‘ī Imām, ‘Alī, who instructs Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī to give his daughter in marriage to Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad. “She will give birth to a son who will inherit the knowledge of the prophets and the sages.” Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī does as he is told. But later that daughter, now wife to Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, dies before giving birth to a son. Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī is puzzled by the event. Soon after the original dream is repeated, and this time the first Shī‘ī Imām identifies another daughter of the learned cleric as the appointed bride. Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī proceeds by giving his second daughter to Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, to whom is born Muḥammad Bāqir, the future Mīr Dāmād, who will prove right the dream of his distinguished grandfather.

Mīr Burhān al-Dīn Muḥammad Bāqir Dāmād, whose poetic *nom de plume* was “Ishrāq” and who was also referred to as “the Third Master” (after Aristotle and al-Fārābī, who have been known as the First and the

Second Masters, respectively), was born into a distinguished religious family (Nasr (1966); Āshtiyānī in Mullā Ṣadrā (1967): 83–90; Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 1, the English Introduction; Tunikābunī (1985): 333; Hādī (1984): 15–20). Another honorific title by which Mīr Dāmād has been known is Sayyid al-Afāḍil, or the “Master of the Most Learned”. His father, Mīr Shams al-Dīn, was the son-in-law of ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd al-‘Alī, known as Muḥaqqiq-i Thānī or Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī (Hādī (1984): 21–22; Khwānsārī (1976), 2: 234), the prominent Shī‘ī cleric of the Ṣafavid period (Tunikābunī (1985): 333). Because of this relationship, the honorific title “Dāmād”, which means “the son-in-law”, remained in Mīr Shams al-Dīn’s family and was given to his son Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir (Hādī: 13, Iskandar Bayk Turkamān (1985): 113–14). That Mīr Dāmād himself is considered the son-in-law of Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī (Nasr (1978): 26) is a mistake. The report that Mīr Dāmād was Shah ‘Abbās’s son-in-law has also been discounted (Tabrīzī Khīyābānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lvii). Mīr Dāmād’s grandfather, Muḥaqqiq-i Thānī, was by far the most distinguished cleric of the early Ṣafavid period and, during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp (ruled 930/1524–984/1576), enjoyed unprecedented power (Amir Arjomand (1984): 140–2). Astarābād, the city in the north-eastern part of Persia from which Mīr Dāmād’s family emerged (Hādī (1984): 11–12), enjoyed particular economic and social significance during the Ṣafavid period. Mīr Dāmād’s father is also known as “Astarābādī” (Khwānsārī (1976), 2: 234). Mīr Dāmād was recognized as a prominent and distinguished philosopher in his own time. Iskandar Bayk Turkamān, the author of *Tā’rīkh-i ‘ālam ārā-yi ‘abbāsī*, pays considerable attention to his achievements and prominence (1985: 113).

Mīr Dāmād was born in Astarābād but raised in Mashhad. He received his early education in this religious capital of Shī‘ī Persia where he studied Ibn Sīnā’s texts closely. Prior to coming to Isfahan during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās, he also spent some time in Qazvīn and Kāshān. In Isfahān, Mīr Dāmād continued his education. He paid equal attention to intellectual and transmitted sciences. His contemporary, Iskandar Bayk Turkamān, reports of Mīr Dāmād’s prominence and significance as a philosopher and a teacher. At the time of Iskandar Bayk’s writing, 1025/1616 (1985: 113), Mīr Dāmād was active in teaching and writing. During his own lifetime, Mīr Dāmād was recognized as an accomplished philosopher, mathematician, jurist, hermeneutician and traditionalist. In jurisprudence, his judgment was canonical for other jurists. In most of these areas he had written influential treatises. His fame was such that, when Iskandar Bayk wrote about him, he knew not only of his published work but also of his writings in progress. Mīr Dāmād died in 1041/1631 (Madanī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): liv; Āshtiyānī in Mullā Ṣadrā (1967): 89) when he fell ill on his way to Karbalā’, in the entourage of Shah Ṣafī (ruled 1038/1629–1052/1642), and was buried in Najaf (Hādī (1984): 32–33).

❧ MĪR DĀMĀD THE PHILOSOPHER ❧

As is evident from his contemporary sources (Iskandar Bayk Turkamān (1985): 113), Mīr Dāmād was recognized simultaneously as a jurist, a mystic and a philosopher – a rare but not altogether impossible accident in Islamic intellectual history. His writings were recognized by his contemporaries as reflecting his comprehensive and encyclopedic interests in various disciplines. He wrote on philosophy and theology, prophetic and Imāmī traditions, Shī‘ī law, Qur’ānic commentary, ethics and mysticism as well as logic. He was recognized by his contemporaries as having a prodigious memory. Although he was a gifted poet, his biographers are reluctant to recognize him as a poet. “Although it is beneath his great status,” one biographer concedes, “sometimes he composed some poems.” In 1025/1616, Iskandar Bayk Turkamān reports that “today he lives in the capital city of Iṣfahān. I hope that his most gracious being for years will adorn the garden of time, and that the seekers of knowledge will be graced by the illuminating rays of his sun-like mind” (*ibid.*: 113–14). Mīr Dāmād’s ascetic exercises have been noticed particularly by some of his biographers (Ḥusaynī Kāshānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xxviii). These exercises are combined, if his biographers’ sometimes hyperbolic tone is to be believed, with a precocious attention to philosophy. It is reported (*ibid.*: xxix) that his earliest philosophical writings began when he was still in Mashhad. By 988/1580 his reputation as a distinguished philosopher was known. When in this year he came to Kāshān, one of his biographers, Ḥusaynī Kāshānī, went to visit him and to pay his respects (*ibid.*: xxix). Contrary to Iskandar Bayk Turkamān, Ḥusaynī Kāshānī is not hesitant in his admiration for Mīr Dāmād’s poetry. “Although he has achieved perfection in every field, his inclination more than anything else was to poetry, and most of the time beautiful poems came to his mind. Like other great masters, he was much inclined toward quatrains” (*ibid.*: xxix–xxx). When, in 933/1526, Ḥusaynī Kāshānī again sees Mīr Dāmād in Kāshān, he continues to praise the philosopher’s poetic gifts not only in quatrains but also in *qasīdahs* and *mathnawīs* (*ibid.*: xxx).

Despite his prominent status as both a mystic and a jurist, an uneasy combination made possible by certain specific features of the “School of Iṣfahān”, it was principally as a philosopher that Mīr Dāmād recognized, praised and distinguished himself, as seen in many of his self-praising poems, e.g.:

I conquered the lands of knowledge,
I lent old wisdom to my youth.
So that I made the earth with my *al-Qabasāt*
The envy of the heavenly abodes.

(Hādī (1984): 134)

or

I made my heart the treasure of Divine Secrets.
 In the world of Intellect I reigned.
 In *al-Qabasāt* I became the sea of certitude.
 The script of doubt and uncertainty I destroyed.
 (Hādī (1984): 134)

He bore proudly and confidently the attribution of “the Third Teacher”, after Aristotle and al-Fārābī (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 246).

Mīr Dāmād’s general philosophical discourse has been identified as primarily “gnostic”: “in the sense that the intellectual activity of the mind is conducive toward the experience of spiritual visions while the visionary experience stimulates the function of rational thinking giving both to new concepts and ideas” (Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 3, the English Introduction). Anticipating Mullā Ṣadrā’s attempt to synthesize all the competing discourses of Islam’s intellectual dispositions, Mīr Dāmād brings together the Peripatetic (Aristotelian–Ibn Sīnā) and the Illuminative (Neoplatonic–Suhrawardī) traditions of Islamic philosophy. The result is a peculiarly successful philosophical discourse in which, as Izutsu has stated, “beneath the surface of . . . [his] dry thinking and through the veils of the abstract concepts which he handles with remarkable dexterity, we notice the presence of swarming visions originating from an entirely different source, the living experience of a mystic” (*ibid.*). This combination of rational and metarational orientation in philosophical disposition, when properly anchored to the doctrinal principles of the Shī‘ī faith, would constitute the major characteristics of what we now call the “School of Iṣfahān”.

❧ MĪR DĀMĀD’S CONTEMPORARIES ❧

Among the prominent teachers with whom Mīr Dāmād studied were Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī, the father of Shaykh Bahā’ī, Mīr Dāmād’s contemporary colleague in Iṣfahān. His other teacher was Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karakī, the son of Muḥaqqiq-i Thānī, i.e., Mīr Dāmād’s own maternal uncle (Hādī (1984): 23–26).

Mīr Dāmād’s time was that of legendary friendships and rivalries among the prominent men of knowledge (Hādī (1984): 27–30). In the ruins of a royal building in Iṣfahān, dating back to the Ṣafavid period, there is a fading fresco that depicts three distinguished men in the presence of a terrifying lion (Hādī (1984): 30). This fresco depicts a famous story, according to which one day Mīr Dāmād and two of his prominent contemporaries, Shaykh Bahā’ī and Mīr Findiriskī, were sitting in a royal hall, engaged in a philosophical discussion. Suddenly a lion that

had escaped from the royal zoo enters the hall. The fresco depicts Shaykh Bahā'ī as collecting himself with signs of fear on his face, Mīr Dāmād as prostrating in gratitude, and Mīr Findiriskī as utterly indifferent to the lion's presence. The three distinguished friends were later obliged to provide an explanation of their immediate reactions. Shaykh Bahā'ī is reported to have said that by the power of reason he knew that unless the lion was hungry, it would not attack him, and yet instinctively he was moved to protect himself. Mīr Dāmād explained that, being a descendant of the Prophet, he knew that the lion would not attack him, so he prostrated and thanked God for being a descendant of the Prophet. And Mīr Findiriskī is reported to have said that he mastered the terrifying beast by the power of his inner serenity and self-control. The story, in its hagiographical hyperbole, indicates the range of doctrinal, philosophical and mystical issues current at the time – issues that will become the central problematics of the "School of Iṣfahān". If certitude and mental preparedness were the critical criteria of how to confront the anxieties of being, the three Ṣafavid sages represent the three possible modes of attaining those objectives. Either doctrinal faith in the saving grace of the Prophet's intercession, or rational engagement with realities that be, or else mystical dismissal of the anxieties of the "real" are embodied and represented in the respective accounts of these three key figures of the "School of Iṣfahān".

An array of distinguished philosophers, theologians, Sufis and jurists were contemporaries of Mīr Dāmād. He had a full and fruitful course of dialogue and correspondence with them, chief among whom was Shaykh Bahā'ī. Both Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Dāmād enjoyed prestigious positions in Shah 'Abbās's court. They had utmost respect for each other. The other distinguished contemporary of Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī, was a prominent philosopher/mystic in his own right. Among his other contemporaries in Iṣfahān was Mīr Fakhr al-Dīn Sammāk.

The legendary friendship between Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā'ī, when they were both in the service of Shah 'Abbās, provides notable access to the political ramifications of having prominent men of religious learning at the royal court. One biographer of Mīr Dāmād (Tābrīzī Khīyābānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lviii–lix) reports that one day Shah 'Abbās was riding his horse in the company of Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā'ī. Because Mīr Dāmād was fat and heavy, he and his horse would regularly fall behind. Shah 'Abbās is reported to have approached him and in jest suggested that Shaykh Bahā'ī is not polite and reverential enough and gallops fast ahead of Mīr Dāmād. "That is not true, your Majesty", Mīr Dāmād is believed to have responded. "His horse is so happy for having such a great man riding it, it cannot control itself and jumps and pushes ahead of everyone else." Shah 'Abbās goes to Shaykh Bahā'ī and this time complains of Mīr Dāmād's weight and says he is so fat he cannot keep

up with the entourage. "That is not the reason, your Majesty," Shaykh Bahā'ī is reported to have said, "the poor animal cannot bear the weight of so much knowledge that it carries. Mountains would break carrying the weight of Mīr Dāmād's knowledge." Shah 'Abbās is reported – and here is the political aspect of such high-ranking men of religious learning – to have descended from his horse and in front of all his entourage kissed the ground and thanked God Almighty for having blessed him and his kingdom with such great men of humility and learning. Shah 'Abbās's going back and forth between Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā'ī (to which one can easily add Mīr Findiriskī) is also an indication of the constant political need of realizing the relations of power between the king and any particular subdivision of his religious constituency. Representing the juridical, philosophical and mystical centres of power in the Ṣafavid realm, Mīr Dāmād, Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Findiriskī need Shah 'Abbās's political backing as much as the monarch needs theirs. That Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā'ī deliberately safeguard their respective positions and do not fall victim to Shah 'Abbās's trap could be read as an indication of the pious hagiographer's wishes rather than reality. Shah 'Abbās's supposed prostrations, while Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā'ī are still on the horse, is the ultimate testimony of the often-concealed proclivity of the religious authorities for political power.

Mīr Dāmād's famous and distinguished student was Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, by far the most influential philosopher of the Ṣafavid period and of the "School of Iṣfahān". Mullā Ṣadrā began his early education in his native Shīrāz. He then moved to Iṣfahān and studied with the most distinguished Shī'ī scholars of the time, chief among them Mīr Findiriskī, Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Dāmād. He would proceed to develop a revolutionary philosophical school, highly ambitious in its universal attempt to synthesize not just the divergent orientations of the Islamic Peripatetic and Illuminationist traditions, but even more fundamentally to co-ordinate that already difficult synthesis with both the gnostic and Shī'ī juridical doctrines. Yet in many respects the immediate impact of his studies with Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī and Shaykh Bahā'ī remained with the Shīrāzī philosopher. In addition to Mullā Ṣadrā, Mīr Dāmād had a number of other, less prominent, students (Hādī (1984): 31), among them Shams al-Dīn Jīlānī, Mīr Lawḥī, and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ushkūrī. Zulālī Khwānsārī, a distinguished poet of the period with a particular penchant for philosophy and mysticism, composed many poems in honour of his teacher Mīr Dāmād (Hādī (1984): 47). In his poetry one detects Mīr Dāmād's profound influence, an influence particularly pertinent to the formation of the "School of Iṣfahān". In one of his poems, there is a conversation between two protagonists, one mature and perfect, the other immature and inferior. The question is simply put, "What is the function of the heavenly sphere and of primary matters?"

Logical, biological, theological, philosophical and gnostic questions are raised, doctrinal issues are debated, using all the developed and loaded terminologies of these exclusive disciplines about the nature, function and purpose of existence. The questions are as fundamental as “Why is pre-eternity separated from post-eternity?” But the progressive questions are brought to an abrupt end by the immediate theocentric assumption (put in the form of a question) that “In whatever form these things are / Who are they obeying in Eternity?” The answer, upon this *a priori* theocentric postulation, is then given through a shift from these logocentric questions to a mystical discourse. “The prophet is love, religion love, God love / From the deepest earth to the highest heavens love / . . . / Every atom is in ecstasy from love / Everyone is like Manṣūr [al-Ḥallāj] by love” (Hādī (1984): 47).

❧ MĪR DĀMĀD’S WRITINGS ❧

Some fifty treatises have been attributed to Mīr Dāmād (Hādī (1984): 37–45). Not all these have been found and positively identified. Most of his writings are still in unedited manuscripts. He wrote *al-Qabasāt*, *Širāt al-mustaqīm* and *Ufuq al-mubīn* in theology and philosophy. His *Rawāshih al-samāwiyyah* is an exegesis on a collection of Shī‘ī Imāmī traditions. He has a Qur’ānic commentary called *Šidrat al-muntahā’*. His other famous treatises include *al-Jadhawāt* and *Tashrīq al-ḥaqq*. His theological concerns are evident in such works as *al-‘Imādāt wa’l-tashrīfāt fī mas’alat al-ḥudūth al-‘ālam wa’l-qidamihi*, *Taqwīm al-īmān fī mabḥath wājib al-wujūd wa taqdīsahu wa tamjīdahu* or *al-‘Iqādāt fī khalq al-a’māl wa ‘afāl al-‘ibād*. The latter treatise is an exposition on Ibn Sīnā ontology. Mīr Dāmād was also concerned with such questions as why Moses’ body did not burn on Mount Sinai, while the stones of the mountain did. He treated this question in his famous Persian treatise *al-Jadhawāt: fī bayān sabab ‘adam ihtirāq jasad Mūsā ‘alayhi al-salām wa ihtirāq al-jabal fī ḥāl al-tajallī tūr Sīnā*, which he wrote for Shah ‘Abbās. In the field of *Ḥadīth*, he has a commentary on al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi*. This book, *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyyah fī sharḥ aḥādīth al-imāmiyyah*, has not yet been completely edited and published. Mīr Dāmād also wrote a Persian treatise on jurisprudence. This treatise is composed in a series of hypothetical questions and answers. The subject and theme of this book follow the standard topics of the juridical genre, with specific chapters on ritual purity, prayer, religious alms and *hajj* pilgrimage, as well as more mundane commercial transactions. In his juridical judgments, Mīr Dāmād supports his arguments by all necessary traditional (*manqūl*) sources. Yet he also resorts to intellectual (*ma’qūl*) arguments in substantiating his case. A typical

juridical judgment of his is as follows. Suppose *A* gives *B* an object for safekeeping and then instructs *B* to give it to *C*. In the meantime, *D* appears and proves to *B* beyond any shadow of a doubt that the object rightfully belongs to him. What should *B* do? Mīr Dāmād maintains that if the rightful possession of the object by *D* is perfectly evident to *B*, he should give it to him and neither *A* nor *C* has any legal claim on him (Hādī (1984): 43–4). Mīr Dāmād repeatedly brought his considerable philosophical prowess to bear on the doctrinal dogmatics of shī'ism. For example, he wrote a treatise on why it is forbidden to call the Twelfth Shī'ī Imām by his name (Hādī (1984): 44; Tabrīzī Khīyābānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xii). His Qur'ānic commentaries include *Amānat-i ilāhī* in Persian, *Ta'wīl al-muqta'āt fī awā'il al-suwar al-qur'āniyyah*, *Tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlās*, and *Ṣidrah al-muntahā*. A philosophical commentary on Ibn Kammūnah, a commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Najāt*, a treatise on logic (*Risālah fī'l-mantiq*), and a commentary on Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's *al-Istibṣār* are also among his other writings. The five important books for which he is most celebrated and discussed are *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyyah*, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, *al-Qabasāt* and *al-Jadhawāt* (Ashkiwārī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xxxii). *Al-Qabasāt*, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, *al-Taqdīsāt* and *al-Ḥabl al-matīn* are his chief treatises in philosophy (Madanī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): liv). But Mīr Dāmād's most significant text by far, containing the essential features of his philosophy, is *al-Qabasāt* (Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 2; the English introduction).

AL-QABASĀT

Until quite recently there was no critical edition of *al-Qabasāt*. The definitive edition was critically edited, annotated and published in 1977 (Mīr Dāmād 1977). The full title of the book is *al-Qabasāt haqq al-yaqīn fī ḥudūth al-'ālam*. *Al-Qabasāt* consists of ten *qabas* ("a sparkle of fire") and three successive conclusions. The central question of this book is the creation of the world and the possibility of its extension from God. Mīr Dāmād wrote *al-Qabasāt* in 1034/1624 (Mīr Dāmād (1977): v). The first *qabas* discusses the variety of created beings and the divisions of existence (*ibid.*: 3–36). In the second *qabas*, Mīr Dāmād argues for a trilateral typology of essential primacies (*al-sibāq al-dhātī*) and his preference for the primacy of essence (*dhāt*) (*ibid.*: 37–80). The duality of perspectives through which existence is subdivided and an argument to that effect through pre-eternal primacies constitute the third *qabas* (*ibid.*: 81–120). In the fourth *qabas*, Mīr Dāmād provides Qur'ānic evidence, as well as references from the Prophetic and Imāmī traditions, to support his preceding arguments (*ibid.*: 121–42). The fifth *qabas* is devoted to a

discussion of the primary dispositions through an understanding of natural existence (*ibid.*: 143–182). The connection (*ittiṣāl*) between “time” and “motion” is the subject of the sixth *qabas* (*ibid.*: 183–238). In this section, Mīr Dāmād also argues for a “natural order” (*al-naẓm al-ṭabīʿī*) in time. Here he argues for the finality of numeral order and against the infinity of numbers in time-bound events (*al-ḥawādith al-zamāniyyah*). He then devotes the seventh *qabas* to a refutation of opposing views (*ibid.*: 239–78). In the eighth *qabas*, he verifies the Divine Authority in the establishment of such orders and the role of reason in ascertaining this truth (*ibid.*: 279–344). The ninth *qabas* proves the archetypal substance of intellect (*al-jawāhir al-ʿaqliyyah*) (*ibid.*: 345–406). In this chapter Mīr Dāmād provides an argument for the presence of an order in existence, a cycle of beginning and return. Finally, in the tenth *qabas*, he discusses the matter of Divine Ordination (*al-qadāʾ waʾl-qadar*), the necessity of supplication, the promise of His reward and the final return of all things to His Judgment (*ibid.*: 407–84).

In *al-Qabasāt* Mīr Dāmād engages in the age-old debate over the priority of “essence” (*māhiyyah*) versus the priority of “existence” (*wujūd*). After a long discussion, he ultimately decides in favour of the priority of essence, a position that would later be fundamentally disputed by his distinguished pupil Mullā Ṣadrā. *Al-Qabasāt* has remained a central text of Islamic philosophy since its first appearance. A number of philosophers of later generations have written commentaries upon it, including those by Mullā Shamsā Gilānī and Āqā Jānī Māzandarānī (Āshṭiyānī in Mullā Ṣadrā (1967): 86 n. 1). Mīr Dāmād wrote *al-Qabasāt* in response to one of his students who had asked him to write a treatise and in it prove that the Creator of creation and being is unique in His pre-eternality, pre-eternal in His continuity, continuous in His everlastingness and everlasting in His post-eternality (Mīr Dāmād (1977): 1). In this text, he set for himself the task of proving that all existent beings, from archetypal models to material manifestations, are “contingent upon nothingness” (*masbūqun biʾl-ʿadam*), “inclined towards creation” (*tārifan biʾl-ḥudūth*), “pending on annihilation” (*marhūnun biʾl-halāk*), and “subject to cancellation” (*mamnuwwun biʾl-buṭlān*) (*ibid.*: 1). The question of the pre-eternity (*qidam*) or createdness (*ḥudūth*) of the world is one of the oldest and most enduring questions of Islamic philosophy, deeply rooted in the early Muʿtazilite codification of Islamic theology (Watt (1962): 58–71; Fakhry (1985): 67–8; Leaman (1985): 11–12, 132–4). Mīr Dāmād reminds his readers that even Ibn Sīnā considered the nature of debate on this question to be “dialectical” (*jadalī*) rather than based on “proof” (*burhān*). (For Ibn Sīnā “proof” was a mode of logical argument superior to “dialectic”.)

“Creation” (*ibdāʾ*) is the “bringing-into-being” of something from absolute-nothing. That which is “evident” (*maʾlūm*), if left to its own

“essence” (*dhāt*), would not be. It is only by virtue of something outside it, i.e. its cause, that it is or, more accurately, it is brought-into-being. Things in their own essence have an essential, not a temporal, primacy over things that are located outside of them, such as their cause for becoming evident and manifest. Thus the secondariness of the caused over the primacy of its cause is an essential not a temporal secondariness. From this it follows that unless the relation between the cause and the caused is a temporal one, not every caused is created in time, i.e., not every *ma'lūl* (“caused”) is a *muḥdath* (“created-in-time”). Only that caused is created-in-time which is contingent upon time (*zamān*), motion (*ḥarakah*) and change (*taghayyur*) (Mīr Dāmād (1977): 3). That created-being which is not subsequent to time is either subsequent to absolute nothingness, whose creation is called *ibdā'* (or “brought-into-beginning”), or subsequent to not-absolute-nothingness, in which case its creation is called *iḥdāth* (or “brought-into-being-in-time”). If the created-being is subsequent to time, it can have only one possibility, which is its being-in-time subsequent to its being-in-nothingness (Mīr Dāmād (1977): 3–4).

There is also a hierarchical conception of time that Mīr Dāmād begins to develop, mostly from previous arguments made by Ibn Sīnā, Naṣīr-i Khusraw and Khwājah Naṣīr Ṭūsī (Mīr Dāmād (1977): x). First there is “time” (*zamān*), to which the “atemporal” (*dahr*) and ultimately the “everlasting” (*sarmad*) are superior and more expansive (*ibid.*: 7). This hierarchy of time-span is also to be understood in terms of relationship. *Sarmad* postulates the relation of the permanent to the permanent; *dahr*, the relation of the permanent to the changing; and *zamān*, a relation of the changing to the changing (Nasr in Sharif (1966): 915–17). From this trilateral conception of time, Mīr Dāmād reaches for his unique understanding of creation. Both *ḥudūth* (“creation”) and *qidam* (“pre-eternity”) are of three kinds: *dhātī* (or “essential”), *dahrī* (or “atemporal”) and *zamānī* (or “temporal”). Essential pre-eternality (the counterpart of the essential createdness) is that whose being and actuality are not subsequential to its not-being (*laysiyyah*) and/or nothingness (*'adam*). Atemporal pre-eternality (the counterpart of the atemporal createdness) is that whose being and actuality are not subsequential to its absolute nothingness in the span of the atemporal. On the contrary, from pre-eternity it is in-being. And finally, temporal pre-eternity (the counterpart of temporal createdness) is that temporal-thing whose being is not specific to a time and whose already-being (*ḥuṣūl*) is constantly present in the course of all time, and for the beginning of its being there is no temporal beginning.

Mīr Dāmād proceeds to systematize further the received Ibn Sīnā conception of “createdness” (*ḥudūth*), with particular reference to *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbihāt* (1977: 5), by arguing that “temporal createdness” (*al-ḥudūth*

al-zamānī) contains the other two “creatednesses” as well. “Temporal createdness” is the only kind of *ḥudūth* that consists of three different kinds: gradual, instant and timely – which means that temporal createdness can be realized either gradually and by incremental achievements in correspondence to specified divisions of time, in instant realization without any division of time, or finally in a timely space between points A and B. Contemporary commentators of Mīr Dāmād (Mohaghegh in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xii–xiii) have traced the origins of his ideas on the question of pre-eternality and createdness as being primarily to Plato, Aristotle, and Ibn Sīnā, and then chiefly to Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī.

As a believing Muslim, Mīr Dāmād must advance, perforce, the argument of the createdness of cosmic existence. Neither “essential createdness” (*al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*) nor “temporal createdness” (*al-ḥudūth al-zamānī*) is subject to disagreement among philosophers because they are self-evident. It is only in the question of “atemporal createdness” (*al-ḥudūth al-dahrī*) that disagreement arises. God’s creation of the universe, Mīr Dāmād concludes, is of the *ibdā’* (“brought-into-beginning”) and *ṣun’* (“brought-into-createdness”) kind as it pertains to “atemporal createdness” and of the *iḥdūth* (“brought-into-being-in-time”) and *takwīn* (“brought-into-existence”) kind as it pertains to “temporal createdness”.

By the common consensus of many of his commentators, *al-Qabasāt* is Mīr Dāmād’s most significant philosophical text (Musawī Bihbahānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lxiv). His principal contribution in this text to the continuous debate over the pre-eternity (*qidam*) or createdness (*ḥudūth*) of the world is his concept of *al-ḥudūth al-dahrī* (“atemporal createdness”). He argues that the created world cannot be considered as merely “essentially” (*dhātī*) created, because in that case only its “essential” non-being (*al-‘adam al-dhātī*) precedes it. “Essential” non-being is a relative and not a self-evident attribute. The created world can be “essentially” contingent upon non-being and yet, in a relative sense, be. Moreover, the created world cannot be considered as contingent upon “temporal” non-being, because in that case time itself, which is a dimension of the created world, must be contingent upon its own non-being in time; and in the space thus considered time cannot be and not be in the same instant. There is also a theological problem in making the created world contingent upon a “temporal” non-being, because the postulation still necessitates a state of being when God was and His bounty to the world was not.

Mīr Dāmād proceeds to distinguish between three kinds of “world”. First is the “Everlasting World” (*al-‘ālam al-sarmadī*), which is the space for Divine Presence, His Essence, and Attributes; second is the “Atemporal World” (*al-‘ālam al-dahrī*), which is the space for the pure archetypes

(*al-mujarradāt*); and third is the “Temporal World” (*al-‘ālam al-zamānī*), which is the space for daily events, created beings, and generation and corruption. There is a hierarchical relationship among these three worlds: the Everlasting World encompasses the Atemporal and the Temporal. The Temporal World is the weakest and least enduring of the three.

As temporal events are contingent upon time, i.e., there are times when they are not and then they are “produced”, or brought-into-being, in time, the same contingency governs the hierarchical order of *sarmad* (everlasting), *dahr* (atemporality), and *zamān* (temporality). (See Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 4, the English introduction, where Izutsu prefers “no-time” for *sarmad*, “meta-time” for *dahr*, and “time” for *zamān*.) Every inferior stage, such as *zamān*, is in an actual state of non-being in relation to its superior state, in this case *dahr*. The real existence of the superior stage is identical to the actual non-being of the inferior stage. Reversing the order, the accidental defectiveness of the inferior stage – *zamān* to *dahr*, or *dahr* to *sarmad* – is not present in the superior stage. The in-itself existence of the superior stage, in other words, is the *ipso facto* non-existence of the inferior stage in-itself. Mīr Dāmād then concludes that the contingent non-being of the world of the archetypals of the *dahrī* stage in the stage of *sarmadī* existence is a real and self-evident non-being. Thus all created beings and their archetypals are consequent to real and self-evident non-being. Their creation is an atemporal (*dahrī*) creation and not, as theologians maintain, a temporal (*zamānī*) creation (Musawī Bihbahānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lxxvi–lxxvii). From this it follows that beyond their “essential creation” (*al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*) all temporal events are contingent upon and consequent to three real modes of non-existence: temporal, atemporal and everlasting. All the archetypal beings in the stage of temporal being are also contingent upon and consequent to one kind of non-being, namely the everlasting. And of course the everlasting world is not contingent upon and consequential to anything (see Musawī Bihbahānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lxxiii; for an alternative reading of the *sarmad–dahr–zamān* relationship, see Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 4–10, the English introduction).

What Mīr Dāmād achieves through this systematic separation of a trilateral stipulation of existence is the effective separation of God at the top of the hierarchy where He can initiate and sustain the world and yet not be subsequent to temporal corruption, to which all visible creations must yield. Moreover, the necessary contingency of an agent of creation, which is evidently active in the *zamānī* and *dahrī* stages of existence, is not necessary in the superior stage of *sarmadī*. As one of Mīr Dāmād’s commentators rightly observes, “By devising the concept of *ḥudūth-i dahrī* (atemporal creation), he [Mīr Dāmād] has succeeded in establishing a compromise between the theologian and the philosopher, in other words,

between the religious law and reason" (Mūsawī Bihbahānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lxix).

❧ JADHAWĀT ❧

Mīr Dāmād's *Jadhawāt* is also devoted to an understanding of the nature of existence, for him a theophany distanced from the Divine Essence, a movement which is complemented by a reversal of this emanation back to its Origin. There are gradations and stages in this descending/ascending act of creation. In the descending order, first there is the *Nūr al-anwār* ("Light of Lights") (the Suhrawardīan First Principle) from which are issued all the descending orders of existence. From *Nūr al-anwār* first is issued *anwār-i qābirah* or "archetypal lights", *primus inter pares* among which is '*aql-i kull* or "the universal intellect". *Anwār-i qābirah* constitutes the first order of existence in close proximity to the source of all being, the pure Light, the Light of All Lights, or *Nūr al-anwār*. In the second order of descending creation of existence is yet another constellation of lights called *anwār-i mudabbirah* or "the governing lights", *primus inter pares* among which is *nafs-i kull* or "the universal soul". *Nafs-i kull* receives its light and existential energy from '*aql-i kull*, as the latter does from *Nūr al-anwār*. In the same order, the *anwār-i mudabbirah* receive their authority and existential energy from the *anwār-i qābirah*, themselves in turn created and energized by *Nūr al-anwār*. In this second order of descending existence, the *anwār-i mudabbirah* and *nafs-i kull* chief among them constitute the *nufūs-i falakiyyah* or "the heavenly souls" from which are descended all the lower stages of existence. The third order of descending creation directly under the authority of *nufūs-i falakiyyah* are *nufūs-i muntabi'ah* or "the natural souls", which contain the archetypal sources of all that exists in the heavens and earth. From these archetypal sources descend the fourth order of existence, which is *ṣūrat-i jismiyyah* or "the bodily form", itself the source of *hylé* or physical matter. In the ascending order, first there is *jism-i mutlaq* or "absolute body"; then the composite bodies, the vegetative soul in plants, the animal soul in animals, and penultimately the intellectual soul of human beings, which stands right below the Truth Itself (Nasr in Sharif (1966): 917–21).

❧ ONTOLOGY ❧

As is evident in both *al-Qabasāt* and *Jadhawāt*, for Mīr Dāmād being is circulated through a cycle of emanation from the Divine Presence to the physical world and then a return to It. In a progression of distancing

emanations, the material world is gradually emanated from the Divine Presence. From the Light of Lights (*Nūr al-anwār*) are first emanated the archetypal lights (*anwār-i qābirah*), of which the universal intellect (*‘aql-i kull*) is the first component. From this stage is emanated the “heavenly souls” (*nufūs-i falakiyyah*), the “ruling lights” (*anwār-i mudabbirah*), of which the “universal soul” (*naḥs-i kull*) is the primary member. The “natural souls” (*nufūs-i munṭabi‘ah*) were subsequently created by the “universal soul”. The archetypes of the heavens, planets, elements, compounds and the four natures are thus created. The final stage of the ontological emanation of being is the creation of matter from these archetypal origins. There is then a reversal order through which matter is sublimated back to light. Through this order, absolute or irreducible body (*jism-i muṭlaq*) is advanced to the mineral stage of compound compositions. The minerals are then sublimated to the vegetative stage and then upward to the animal. Humanity is the highest stage of this upward mobility before the absolute matter rejoins the Light of Lights (Nasr in Sharif (1966): 918). At the centre of this descending/ascending order, stands the human being, who is the existential microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm of the universe of Being.

Another principal aspect of Mīr Dāmād’s ontology is his philosophical preference for the “priority of essence” (*aṣālah al-māhiyyah*) over the “priority of existence” (*aṣālah al-wujūd*). (See Āshtiyānī (1972): 40–7 for a critical assessment, and Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 10, 14, the English introduction, for a more sympathetic review.) The debate over the priority of *māhiyyah* (essence or, more accurately, quiddity) or *wujūd* (existence) is a long contentious problematic in Islamic philosophy. While Mīr Dāmād believed in the priority of *māhiyyah*, his celebrated student Mullā Ṣadrā became the most ardent propagator of the priority of *wujūd* (Āshtiyānī (1972): 45). The priority of quiddity considers the appleness of the apple which is its essence to be real and its existence to be a mere accident, a necessary attribute for the actualization of the appleness. All existent beings share this accidental necessity of existence, but what distinguishes them and thus constitutes their unique ontological status is their quiddity, their what-it-isness, their appleness as opposed to orangeness. The philosophical genealogy of this position is to be traced back to Suhrawardī and Platonism (Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 11–12, the English introduction). Mullā Ṣadrā resoundingly disputed his teachers’ firm belief in the priority of quiddity over existence and in a moving passage announced:

In the earlier days I used to be a passionate defender of the thesis that the quiddities are extramentally real while existence is but a mental construct, until my Lord gave me guidance and let me see His own demonstrations. All of a sudden my spiritual eyes were

opened and I saw with utmost clarity that the truth was just the contrary of what philosophers in general had held. Praise be to God who, by the light of intuition, led me out of the darkness of the groundless idea and firmly established me upon the thesis which would never change in the present World and the Hereafter. As a result [I now hold that] the individual existences of things are primary realities, while the quiddities are the “permanent archetypes [*a’yān thābitah*] that have never smelt even the fragrance of existence”. The individual existences are nothing but beams of light radiated by the true Light which is the absolutely self-subsistent Existence. The absolute Existence in each of its individualized forms is characterized by a number of essential properties and intelligible qualities. And each of these properties and qualities is what is usually known as quiddity.

(translated by Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 13–14,
the English introduction)

Mīr Dāmād’s position, however, is founded squarely on the originality of essence over existence. Here is how he argues his case in the second chapter of the *Qabasāt*:

The essence of a thing [*al-shay’*], in whatever shape or format it might be, is the occurrence [*wuqū’*] of the essence [*naḥṣ*] of that very thing in that form [*ẓarf* = literally “vessel”, “container”], not the attachment or appendage of something to it. Otherwise, simple matter [*al-ḥāl al-basīṭ*] would be turning into compound matter [*al-ḥāl al-murakkab*]. Yet the bringing into being [*thubūt*] of a thing in itself is the bringing-into-being of that thing in that thing. Thus whoever considers the existence of the essence [*al-māhiyyah*] an attribute [*wasf*] among the actual attributes, or an aspect [*amr*] among the mental aspects, above and beyond the concept of the Originating Existence, he would not be among those worth talking to, and he would not be among those in search of truth, as indeed it has been said by our [two] foregone companions in the act [of philosophy, i.e., Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī].

(Mīr Dāmād (1977): 37)

❧ TRANSMIGRATION OF THE SOUL ❧

As an example of this descending/ascending order of existence, there is the treatise called *Risālat al-khal’iyyah* attributed to Mīr Dāmād (Ashkiwarī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xxxiv–xxxv; Madanī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): lv–lvi)

in which he describes the momentary transmigration of his own soul. (See “Exaltations dans la Solitude” in Corbin (1972), 4: 30–53.) He writes that on Friday 16 Sha‘bān 1023 (21 September 1614), as he was engaged in a rigorous solitary self-reflection, after an intense period of remembering God Almighty, calling Him by His Most Bounteous Name, he was completely isolated from the physical world. At this point he felt himself totally surrounded by the sacred precinct of God’s Presence. His Light cast totally upon him, Mīr Dāmād remembers having left his physical body, abandoned the network of his sense perceptions, and been completely released from the bounds of nature. He soars towards the Absolute Presence of Truth, having completely left his body behind. He transcends everything that there is, supersedes temporality and reaches the realm of atemporality. He transcends all created things, all things that were brought into being. He transcends the physical and the metaphysical, the sacred, the material, the atemporal, the temporal, the division between faith and blasphemy, Islam and ignorance, transcends all degrees, all stages, all who came before, all who will come later, for ever and ever. He transcends everything that ever was, everything that can ever be, small and large, permanent and mandatory, present and yet-to-come. Then everything in solitude or in a group was ready at the gates of His Majesty and there he saw His Most Majestic Presence, with the eye of his inner intentions, in a way he could not understand. In utter annihilation everything recited His Name, pleading, begging, asking for His help, calling Him “O Thou the Rich, Thou the Giver of Richness!” These all were said in a way not known to them. Mīr Dāmād persists in that state of utter mental unconsciousness, forgetting the substance of his faculties of understanding, in a total state of non-being. Then he comes out of that absolute state of unconsciousness and returns to the material world.

Comparing this experience to the Ibn Sīnan “visionary recitals”, Corbin gave a full enthusiastic interpretation of this account (Corbin (1972), 4: 39–45), considerably emphasizing the significance of the middle of Sha‘bān, the Prophet Muḥammad’s reported favourite month. Referring to the Ismā‘īlī significance of this month, Corbin adds that: “Les traditions ismaéliennes insistent sur le sens ésotérique de cette Nuit. A la question d’un adepte demandant pourquoi l’on parle parfois de l’excellence du ‘jour’ (*qawm*) de la mi-Sha‘bān, alors que dans le *ḥadīth* rapporté du Prophète, il est question de la *nuit* et non pas du *jour*, – il est répondu qu’ici le *jour* et la *nuit* indiquent les positions respectives du Prophète et de l’Imām. Le Prophète a déclaré: ‘Sha‘bān est mon mois,’ ce qui réfère à son message, La *Risālat*” (*ibid.*: 41–2). Corbin’s interpretation is based on a text that gives the date of Mīr Dāmād’s vision as “Friday 14 Sha‘bān 1023”. There is no such date in the year 1023 of the Islamic calendar. As the text (Madanī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 55–6)

indicates, the night in question is “Friday 16 Sha‘bān 1023” which corresponds to Friday 21 September 1614. In the year 1023/1614, 14 Sha‘bān was on Wednesday 17 September, and not on a Friday. The Friday in question was 16 Sha‘bān, and Corbin’s interpretation must be modified accordingly.

The notion of the transmigration of the human soul from the material body into the realm of Divine Presence must be understood in the context of Mīr Dāmād’s meta-epistemology whereby all the uncertainties of the material faculties are eliminated in a realm of metarational experience that the human soul leaves the body and ascends all the stages of existence he has identified in both the *Qabasāt* and *Jadhawāt*. What substantiates this assessment is the attribution of many ascetic exercises to Mīr Dāmād. His nocturnal solitude, best discussed by Corbin (1972, 4: 39–45), would have created a favourable condition for such conceptions. Mīr Dāmād, in effect, translated a mystical conception of reunion with the Truth (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 246) into a metaphysics of his own, in which the transmigration of soul from body, through excessive concentration in ascetic exercises, into the Divine Presence constitutes the ultimate state of achieving certitude.

❧ MĪR DĀMĀD’S PROSE ❧

Mīr Dāmād’s philosophical discourse in both the *Qabasāt* and *Jadhawāt* is indexical and suggestive, symbolic and referential. He relies heavily on a thorough knowledge of the history of Islamic philosophy to his time. He has a particular penchant for obscure Arabic words that he successfully incorporates into his philosophical discourse. The legendary difficulty of his philosophical prose (Mohaghegh in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xvi; Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 3, the English introduction; Nasr (1978): 33; Hādī (1984): 34–6) will have to be understood in the general anti-philosophical climate of the period promoted by the politically powerful nomocentric jurists. Perhaps the greatest philosopher of this period, Mullā Ṣadrā, was forced to leave the capital city of Iṣfahān at the instigation of the high clerical establishment precisely because of the articulate clarity of his prose. In this respect there is a story in *Qiṣaṣ al-‘ulamā’* which is indicative of this problem. Tunikābunī reports (1985: 334–5) that Mullā Ṣadrā once saw Mīr Dāmād in a dream and asked him why people condemned him as a blasphemer while he had just repeated what Mīr Dāmād had already said. “The reason is,” Mīr Dāmād is believed to have answered, “that I wrote philosophical matters in such a way that the religious authorities [‘ulamā’] could not understand them, and that nobody other than philosophers would comprehend them. But you have popularized the philosophical issues and said them in such a way that if

a teacher of an elementary religious school reads them, he can understand them. That is why they have called you a blasphemer and not me.” Had it not been for the occasional protection of such powerful kings as Shah ‘Abbās, the philosophers, whose knowledge of astronomy and medicine was always beneficial to the royal court, would not have enjoyed even the limited freedom of discourse and inquiry that they did manage to sustain. Concealing one’s philosophical or gnostic ideas in difficult and abstruse prose was one particularly effective way to limit the hermeneutic circle legitimately operative around philosophical texts.

In a letter attributed to Mīr Dāmād (Hādī (1984): 35–6), he makes a specific reference to the difficulty of his prose.

It is the utmost indication of shamelessness that idle souls and rugged individuals rise in meaningless dispute and superfluous boasting against sacred minds and most sacrosanct jewels. One has to have enough intelligence to know that understanding my discourse is an art, not quarrelling with me and then calling it an “argument”. It is perfectly evident that understanding superlative ideas and comprehending subtle issues is not possible for every short-witted, ill-prepared individual. Consequently, entering into a dispute with me in philosophical matters is necessarily due to some natural defects and not because of the precision of observation by a bunch of bat-like blind people who mistake their sense perceptions for the heavenly abodes of knowledge and consider them the highest achievement of the intellect. They had better not boast and express animosity in competition against those who are among the present in the Divine’s presence, those whose ray of intellect rotates around the orbits of the lights of the heavenly world. That is not right or proper. However, the disputation of whimsical fantasy with intellect, the hostility of untruth with truth, the struggle of darkness against light is an abomination not accidental, a transgression not recent. Grievance is to be taken to God, and peace be upon him who follows the right path:

When he who is incomplete attacks me,
To my perfection that is a perfect testimony.
Those who follow these, O Khāqānī!,
Are but crows wishing to walk like pheasants.
Suppose the asparagus made its body look like a snake,
Where’s its poison for its enemies, or love for its friends?

The difficulty of his prose has often been the occasion of much poetic humour. For example, in reference to his *Ṣirāṭ al-mustaḡīm* (“The Right Path”), someone has said

Of Mīr Dāmād's "Right Path"
 May Muslims not hear, nor the infidel see!
 (Hādī (1984): 41)

Many commentaries on Mīr Dāmād's philosophical work have also been necessitated by the difficulty of his prose. Sayyid Aḥmad 'Alawī, for example, wrote a commentary on the *Qabasāt* to explain its difficult expressions and phrases (Mohaghegh in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xvi–xviii). There are a number of other commentaries as well on the *Qabasāt* (*ibid.*: xviii–xx). There are, however, those biographers of Mīr Dāmād who praise him for his eloquence (Ḥusaynī Kāshānī in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xxviii).

❧ POETICS ❧

Mīr Dāmād was a gifted poet (Hādī (1984): 46–7) who left a collection of poetry in both Persian and Arabic. As convoluted and twisted as his philosophical prose is, his poetic voice is crystal-clear and rather elegant. Much "poetic licence" was conventionally given and tolerated by the visceral literalism of the dogmatists. Mīr Dāmād took full advantage of this "poetic licence" and expressed considerable aspects of his philosophical and gnostic ideas in poetry.

There is a rather remarkable self-confidence in Mīr Dāmād's poetic voice. He repeatedly boasts of his learning and erudition in his poetry. "I am the nightingale of virtue, art is my garden / I have cauterized the forehead of knowledge with my seal" (Hādī (1984): 89). In full confidence he announces that "I am twenty lunar years old / and yet in knowledge older than wisdom." He then proceeds to claim:

I am the lord of virtues, prince of knowledge,
 Intellect is my throne, wisdom is my seat. . . .
 If like the moon kings borrow
 Their majesty from the crown and throne,
 I make my crown from my knowledge of the Divine,
 Of natural sciences I make my throne. . . .
 My fortress is my knowledge of subjects in Arabic,
 My palace is my knowledge of sciences in poetics.
 I am like an aged wine, the universe is my container.
 I am like pure wine, the world is my bottle. . . .
 (Hādī (1984): 89–91)

As the repeated apologies of a recent editor of Mīr Dāmād's poems indicate (Hādī (1984): 48, 87), it was considered below the status of a distinguished philosopher to engage in poetry. Among philosophers poetry appears to have been considered a light avocation for momentary

distraction from more serious discourses. The nature of this dismissive attitude towards poetry seems to stem from both a metaphysical and a social disdain for what is considered to be a frivolous distraction. Although the frequency and volume of poetic output attributed to Mīr Dāmād prevent us from assuming that the poet himself considered his poetry as frivolous, it is also true that in his poetry we fail to detect a poetic voice distinct from his philosophical ideas expressed elsewhere in prose. Even when he engages in a poetic dialogue with Nizāmī (535/1141–600/1203), in his famous response to *Makhzan al-asrār*, Mīr Dāmād is still an effective and eloquent translator of his philosophical prose into poetry. Poetry *qua* poetry, with an independent aesthetic presence and a marked difference from a logocentric disposition, has no particularly discernible place in Mīr Dāmād's *Kitāb mashriq al-anwār dar jawāb-i makhzan al-asrār*. Be that as it may, *Mashriq al-anwār* is still an eloquent *mathnawī* that Mīr Dāmād composed in dialogue with Nizāmī's *Makhzan al-asrār*. This *mathnawī* follows the traditional sections canonized by Nizāmī. First there is a prologue in praise of God, followed by two supplicative prayers (*munājāt*) and a seeking of forgiveness (*ṭalab-i maghfirat*). Then there are two conventional praises of the Prophet, followed by two successive praises of 'Alī, a section on all Shī'ī Imāms, and a concluding praise of the Twelfth Imām.

Mīr Dāmād's significance as a poet should not be underestimated. Poetic "licence" gave philosophers like Mīr Dāmād the possibility and the imaginative discourse of seeing and thinking at a level beyond the immediate logocentricity and nomocentricity of their philosophy and jurisprudence proper. Husaynī Kāshānī's overwhelming praise for Mīr Dāmād's poetry (in Mīr Dāmād (1977): xxix–xxx) leaves no doubt that his contemporaries recognized and praised him more as a poet than as a philosopher. He, in fact, considers Mīr Dāmād in the same league as the greatest poets of Khurasan, Fars or 'Irāq, by which he means western Persia (*ibid.*: xxx). His commentary on Nizāmī's *Makhzan al-asrār* is particularly noted as his greatest poetic achievement.

THE "SCHOOL OF IṢFAHĀN"

The term "School of Iṣfahān" was established most successfully by Nasr and Corbin (Nasr in Sharif (1966): 904–32; Nasr (1978): 19–53), Corbin (1972, 4: 9–201) and Āshtiyānī (1972: 6) and then extended by others (Izutsu in Mīr Dāmād (1977): 12, the English introduction) as a generic term identifying the syncretic discourse that emerged in the Iṣfahān of Mīr Dāmād's period. Mīr Dāmād himself is credited with having established this school. The three prominent figures that Corbin studies (1972, 4: 9–201) in his discussion of this school are Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā

Shīrāzī and Qāḍī Saʿīd Qummī (d. 1103/1691). To these names Nasr adds those of Shaykh Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿĀmilī (Shaykh Bahāʾī), Mīr Findiriskī, Mullā ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661) and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (Nasr in Sharif (1966): 908–32). Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Tabrīzī (d. 1080/1609), Āqā Husayn Khwānsārī (d. 1098/1686) and Mullā Shasmā Gīlānī (d. 1081/1670) are also studied in the same group of philosophers (Āshtiyānī (1972): 218–494).

Before the star and the highest achievement of the “School of Iṣfahān”, Mullā Ṣadrā, could emerge as the leading philosopher of the Ṣafavid period and of the “School of Iṣfahān”, much preparatory work had to be done by Mīr Dāmād’s generation. Protected by his eminent religious family, particularly his grandfather, Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī, and his own learning in juridical sciences, Mīr Dāmād engaged in philosophical writings with a particular penchant for mystic and Illuminationist tendencies. His attempt to wed Suhrawardī and Ibn Sīnā (Nasr (1978): 26) was matched by an unyielding concern with mystical possibilities of “understanding”. Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī and Shaykh Bahāʾī were the dominant figures of the pre-Mullā-Ṣadrā period, all sharing this simultaneous interest in gnostic, Peripatetic, Illuminationist and juridical (doctrinal) positions of Shiʿism. As Shiʿī men of learning, Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī, Shaykh Bahāʾī and ultimately Mullā Ṣadrā were at the receiving end of the collective philosophical legacies of Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazzālī, al-Suhrawardī and Ibn ʿArabī. The ultimate objective of the Shiʿī philosophers of the Ṣafavid period was to demonstrate the central and meta-epistemological harmony among all these discourses. In his person, Mīr Dāmād exemplified this synthetic ambition of the “School of Iṣfahān”. As a Shiʿī philosopher/jurist/mystic, he wrote logical treatises and juridical edicts with the same ease and competence with which he composed mystical poems. “He expounded a rigorously logical philosophy and yet wrote a treatise on a mystical vision he had received in Qom. He harmonized Ibn Sīnā cosmology with Shiʿite imamology and made the ‘fourteen pure ones’ (*chahārdah maʿṣūm*) of Shiʿism the ontological principles of cosmic existence” (Nasr (1978): 32–3).

The flourishing of the “School of Iṣfahān” in general and the political possibilities of engaging in philosophy for Mīr Dāmād in particular were due to a considerable degree to the exclusive attention paid to religious learning by Shah ʿAbbās the Great. As the greatest and perhaps most powerful of all the Ṣafavid kings, Shah ʿAbbās was particularly concerned, anxious even, about his relations with the religious establishment at large. Other than Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahāʾī, for both of whom the Ṣafavid monarch had a particular affection and reverence (Falsafī (1990), 3: 883–7), there were a number of other prominent religious authorities with whom he regularly associated. Mullā ʿAbd al-Muḥsin Kāshī, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ, Mawlānā ʿAbd Allāh Shushtarī

and Shaykh Luṭf Allāh Maysī Āmilī are among these high-ranking authorities. They would regularly attend his court where he would arrange for discussions and arguments around a religious issue. Particularly during the month of Ramaḍān, he would break his daily fast with the religious authorities. Each of these high-ranking clerics would have his individual dining cloth, on which would be served an extravagant array of dishes, which included sweets and chocolates imported from Europe (*ibid.*: 883). Whatever was left of this sumptuous meal was sent home with the clerics. This was in addition to regular sums of money that Shah ‘Abbās would give to his high-ranking religious dignitaries.

Religious dignitaries like Shaykh Bahā’ī and Mīr Dāmād were regularly among Shah ‘Abbās’s entourage, even when he was on a military campaign. There are even reports that he visited these great men of religious learning at their places of residence. His respect for his religious dignitaries ought to be seen, at least partially, in light of his pious devotion to his faith. One of Shah ‘Abbās’s servants, who had evoked his wrath, appealed to Shaykh Aḥmad Afshār Ardabilī, known as Muqaddas, a particularly revered cleric. Muqaddas wrote a letter to Shah ‘Abbās: “The custodian of the transitory kingdom should know that if this man had once committed a transgression, now he appears to be transgressed against; if you forgive him, maybe God Almighty may forgive some of your own sins. Signed the Servant of the King of Absolute Sovereignty [‘Alī], Aḥmad Ardabilī” (*ibid.*: 885). Shah ‘Abbās responded in utter humility: “May ‘Abbās humbly report that your command has been heartily obeyed. May you not forget this devotee of yours in your prayers. Signed, the dog at the door of ‘Alī, ‘Abbās” (*ibid.*: 885–6). The more humble Shah ‘Abbās would appear in front of these religious dignitaries, the more legitimate his own power and authority would be *vis-à-vis* his subjects.

The two major urban settings that flourished in this period were Iṣfahān and Shīrāz. This may, in fact, fundamentally modify the “School of Iṣfahān” appellation, unless we give the Ṣafavid capital its due political significance. One prominent member of the “School of Iṣfahān”, Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, not only was born, raised and received his early education in Shīrāz but, in fact, was chased out of Iṣfahān by Shī’ī dogmatists. Mullā Ṣadrā’s most productive writing years were spent in the remote village of Kahak near Qom. As early as the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, Shīrāz was the scene of considerable philosophical activity. Mullā Jalāl Dawānī (d. 908/1502) had a flourishing teaching career in Shiraz. Amīr Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Dashtakī Shīrāzī (d. 903/1497) and his son Amīr Ghayāth al-Dīn Manṣūr advanced the cause of philosophical studies in Shīrāz. And ultimately Mullā Ṣadrā taught for years at the *madrasah* of Khān in this city. This is not to underestimate the significance of Iṣfahān as a great cosmopolitan centre of

learning under the Ṣafavids. When Shah 'Abbās I ascended the Ṣafavid throne, Iṣfahān became a particularly favourable setting for a number of leading philosophers. Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī and Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn 'Amilī became the great figures of philosophical learning in the Ṣafavid capital.

Under favourable conditions created by the Ṣafavid monarchs, and despite severe expressions of hostility by the nomocentric jurists, an array of distinguished philosophers, with more or less similar epistemological orientations, emerged in tenth/sixteenth-century Persia. The principal core of the "School of Iṣfahān" was an attempt to bring together the diverse and opposing forces of Islamic intellectual history into a harmonious epistemological and ontological unity. Until the culmination of this movement in Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, the efforts of Mīr Dāmād's generation must necessarily be considered as preparatory groundwork. Out of necessity or conviction, or a combination of both, Mīr Dāmād's generation of Shī'ī scholars wrote on a range of diverse issues, including Peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophy, Mu'tazilite theology, Ibn 'Arabī's school of mysticism, Qur'ānic commentary, juridical edicts, Shī'ī dogmatics, and even on such popular topics as pious supplications to Shī'ī Imāms, etc. The earliest traces of this synthetic tendency among the Shī'ī scholars in particular are to be seen in such encyclopedic collections as Ḥusayn 'Aqilī Rustamdārī's *Riyāḍ al-abrār*, composed in 979/1571 (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 285). In this book, the Shī'ī encyclopedist brings together an array of theological, philosophical and mystical topics, plus such issues as "occult sciences" (*'ulūm-i gharībah*), with a consistent penchant for the primacy of Shī'ī sentiments and credal dogmas. Mīr Dāmād's *Risālat al-iḍālāt fī funūn al-'ulūm wa'l-ṣinā'āt* is a text in this genre. Other prominent figures of the "School of Iṣfahān", such as Mīr Abu'l-Qāsim Findiriskī, wrote similar treatises on the variety of "sciences". Mīr Findiriskī's *Risālah ṣanā'iyyah*, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī's *Fihrist al-'ulūm* and Muḥaqqiq-i Sharwānī's (d. 1099/1687) *Unmudhaj al-'ulūm* are among the most notable examples of this genre of writings. In such encyclopedic collections of texts, we witness, although with no articulate epistemological or ontological statement, an attempt to bring the diverse array of Islamic intellectual discourses into some sort of harmony.

The emergence of the "School of Iṣfahān" was predicated on the continued success of the Peripatetic and Illuminationist discourses dominant in Islamic philosophy since the time of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, respectively. These two philosophical discourses were equally matched by widespread concern with Ibn 'Arabī's school of mysticism. The most prominent figures of the "School of Iṣfahān", including Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, reached for a level of philosophical discourse that combined these three dominant traditions and then in turn sought

to wed the result to the Shī'ī doctrinal positions. Through the active articulation of such key conceptual categories as "the unity of being" (*waḥdah al-wujūd*), "the priority of being" (*aṣālah al-wujūd*), "transubstantial motion" (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyyah*) and "the unification of the knower and the known" (*ittihād al-'āqil wa'l-ma'qūl*), the "School of Iṣfahān" shifted the philosophical preoccupation of Islamic philosophers to a plane of operation more responsive to mystical sensibilities. The synthetic discourse with which the "School of Iṣfahān" was gradually identified was *ḥikmah* (Nasr (1966): 907). Central to this discourse was an attempt to combine the doctrinal teachings of the Shī'ī Imāms with the wide range of theoretical speculations in gnosis, philosophy and theology.

The triumphant development of the "School of Iṣfahān" as a distinct philosophical orientation ought to be seen in the context of the Ṣafavid state and the self-assuring confidence it engendered and sustained in the Shī'ī intellectual disposition. Mīr Dāmād and the "School of Iṣfahān" were the supreme cultural products of a confident, prosperous and self-assertive Ṣafavid state. With Mīr Dāmād's generation of Shī'ī philosophers, mystics, jurists and legal theorists, a new mode of intellectual confidence was created that could attend, with perfect authority, the whole gamut of Islamic intellectual history. The formation of the "School of Iṣfahān" is the institutional expression of a daring synthetic discourse set to bring together three conflicting thrusts in Islamic intellectual history – the philosophical, the mystical and the (Shī'ī) doctrinal. Regardless of their degree of success or failure, the chief exponents of the "School of Iṣfahān", from Mīr Dāmād to Mullā Ṣadrā, its most celebrated achievement, contributed towards the emphatic establishment of a level of unprecedented philosophical discourse which saw no fundamental difference between the intellectual configuration of reality and its mystical comprehension or between these two modes of coming to terms with a significant truth (a truth that signifies) and the doctrinal mandates of the Shī'ī faith. What would later be known as *al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah* ("the transcendental philosophy") is the theoretical culmination of this synthesis, a cutting deep through all the dominant, and fundamentally hostile, intellectual discourses in Islam. Mīr Dāmād's rather distinctive self-confidence (repetition of his poetic boasting of what a profound philosopher he is, a rather surprising phenomenon given the timidity and humility with which the Muslim literati usually describe their history, and his authoritative voice when attending to any number of philosophical, mystical, doctrinal, Qur'ānic, hermeneutic, and other Shī'ī discourses) is the reflection of a triumphant Ṣafavid dynasty reimbursing Shi'ism for centuries of persecution and humility. The ambitious terms with which Mīr Dāmād and other members of the "School of Iṣfahān", particularly Mullā Ṣadrā, thought they could conceive to bring

together the whole universal repertoire of Islamic intellectual history could have been possible only in a kingdom under “the Shadow of God on Earth”.

Among the earlier generations of philosophers preceding the “School of Iṣfahān”, Qāḍī Maybudī (d. 910/1504) had already combined a Peripatetic orientation in his philosophical writings with a mystical disposition best represented in his poetry. He was a student of Mullā Jalāl Dawānī. Because of his Sunni beliefs, Qāḍī Maybudī was murdered at the order of Shah Ismā‘īl (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5, 1: 297). Qāḍī Maybudī wrote extensively on Peripatetic philosophy. His commentaries on *Hidāyah al-ḥikmah* of Athīr al-Dīn Abharī (d. 633/1235) and *Hikmah al-‘ayn* of Najm al-Dīn Dabīrān (d. 675/1276) were widely read and discussed. In theology, he wrote a commentary on *Ṭawālī‘ al-anwār* of Qāḍī Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286). But the traces of a synthetic discourse, wedding philosophy and mysticism, are more immediately evident in his *Jām-i gītī-namā*, a treatise he wrote in Persian and in which he combined aspects of the philosophical and mystical discourses.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ghayāth al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī Shīrāzī (866/1463–948/1541) was another distinguished philosopher of this earlier generation, anticipating the “School of Iṣfahān”. He is considered the Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī of the tenth/sixteenth century. In fact, many of the honorific titles with which he has been praised are identical with those of Khwājah Naṣīr (Ṣafā (1959–85), 5.1: 299–300). When Shah Ismā‘īl conquered Shīrāz in 909/1503, he ordered Ghayāth al-Dīn Manṣūr to repair the Maraghah Observatory. During the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp (930/1524–984/1576), for a period of time, between 936/1529 and 938/1531, he became a vizier to the Ṣafavid king. A rivalry developed between him and Muḥaqqiq-i Karakī, Mīr Dāmād’s maternal grandfather, which led to his dismissal from the Ṣafavid court. He subsequently returned to Shīrāz and resumed his writings on philosophy. In his *Mir’āt al-ḥaqā’iq*, Ghayāth al-Dīn Manṣūr begins to work his philosophical ideas into a synthetic discourse between the Peripatetic and Illuminationist schools of philosophy. In his critical commentaries on Mullā Jalāl Dawānī’s exegesis on Suhrawardī’s *Hayākil al-nūr*, he puts forward a vigorous Peripatetic twist to the Illuminationist discourses of both Suhrawardī and Dawānī.

Mīr Findiriskī is perhaps the most distinguished example of this ecumenical and synthetic spirit rising simultaneously with Mīr Dāmād. He travelled as far as India, became acquainted with Zoroastrian and Hindu ideas, and even wrote a notable commentary on *Yoga Vaiseska*. His *Risāla-yi ṣana‘iyyah* is an encyclopedic collection of all “rational” and “transmitted” sciences. Other than his philosophical treatises, like *Maqūlāt al-ḥarakah wa’l-taḥqīq fihā*, in which he challenges the notion of Platonic ideas, Mīr Findiriskī reproduced much of his philosophical ideas in his

poetry. The opening lines of one of his most famous *qaṣīdahs* is a good example of this philosophical poetry:

The Universe with stars in it is all so beautiful, pure, and in
harmony,
Whatever is in the heavens has a form down here on earth.
(Hādī (1984): 66)

The ambitious challenge that the “School of Iṣfahān” sought to meet was wedding together all the diverse and opposing discourses of legitimate understanding that had historically divided Muslims and then have doctrinal Shī‘ism preside over them all. The principal points of contention were not only the philosophical traditions of the Peripatetic and Illuminationist branches, but also the gnosis of Ibn ‘Arabī and the Shī‘ism of the post-*Ghaybah* period. Luminaries of the “School of Iṣfahān”, such as Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā, became the chief protagonists of this new philosophical discourse, took the possibilities of ascetic exercises and of gnostic Illumination seriously, and saw the result in perfect harmony with the Shī‘ī doctrinal position. In the figure of Mīr Dāmād, for example, were combined the otherwise conflicting characters of a logocentric philosopher, a practising mystic and a powerful jurist. Even if the report that Shah ‘Abbās was actually afraid of him and had plotted to kill him (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 246) is not true, still the assumption is a good indication of the political implications of such a constructed image of social and metaphysical authority.

Mīr Dāmād’s principal work in the “School of Iṣfahān” was his reconstruction of a Peripatetic philosophical orientation with a practical mysticism akin to the Illuminationists. Separation from the physical body, in this meta-epistemology, becomes the necessary precondition of conceptual cognitions. Mīr Dāmād’s ascetic exercises, thus rooted in his epistemology, become equally constitutional in his appeal to the mystics. The optimum balance that Mīr Dāmād was able to maintain between delicate intrusions of philosophical and mystical doctrines into the dogmatic and juridical principles of the faith was not continued by his pupils. By the time Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) sought to carry Mīr Dāmād’s suggestions to their logical conclusions, he had managed to antagonize the Shī‘ī clerics considerably, so much so that he had to flee to the remote village of Kahak. Mullā Ṣadrā, in fact, manages to antagonize both the Sufis and the jurists. In his *al-Aṣfār al-arba‘ah*, *Kaṣr aṣnām al-jāhiliyyah* and *Risālah-yi sih aṣl* he severely criticizes both the intoxicated Sufis and the literalist jurists. Mullā Ṣadrā’s antagonism against some of the practising Sufis seems to have stemmed from a necessary desire to distance his adaptation of a mystical discourse into his general philosophical narrative from such functional Sufism associated with the Sufi orders which had neither theoretical sophistication nor social prestige at

that time. As is evident in both Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā's writings, the "School of Iṣfahān" is the collective expression of an intellectual enterprise that seeks to denounce the ecstatic mysticism of a more popular orientation in favour of an articulate adaptation of Sufi gnosis integrated into a principally philosophical discourse. But at the same time this systematic logocentricity has to maintain a safe and necessary distance from the literal nomocentricity of the jurists with its quintessentially anti-philosophical and anti-mystical convictions.

The synthetic nature of the *ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah*, as the highest theoretical achievement of the "School of Iṣfahān", is also evident in its constant references to the works of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī in his later works, where he had already achieved a balanced equilibrium among the existing discourses of his time. In his *magnum opus*, *al-Asfār al-arba'ah*, Mullā Ṣadrā demonstrated the viability of the mystical discourse by adopting its formal narrative for his otherwise most ambitious philosophical project. An ambitious synthesis of a logocentric discourse, combined with mystical observations, and ultimately governed by the Qur'ānic language is perhaps the most enduring legacy of the "School of Iṣfahān" as represented in its best spokesmen Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā and their respective students.

Mullā Ṣadrā was perhaps the greatest figure and the most celebrated representative of the "School of Iṣfahān". As Mīr Dāmād's principal student, he gave the fullest account of the principal doctrines of the "School of Iṣfahān". Since there are separate chapters on Mullā Ṣadrā in this volume, I need not discuss him fully here. Suffice it to say that he generously benefited from the work and achievement of his three principal teachers – Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī and Shaykh Bahā'ī – and in his *magnum opus*, *al-Asfār al-arba'ah*, as well as in such major treatises as *al-Mashā'ir*, *al-Shawāhid* and *al-Ḥikmah al-'arshīyah*, he gave the synthetic discourse of the "School of Iṣfahān" its most successful expression.

In addition to Mullā Ṣadrā, the generation of Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī and Shaykh Bahā'ī trained a number of other distinguished philosophers, among whom is Mullā Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī (d. 1080/1669), the author of *Kilīd-i bihīsh*. Tabrīzī had studied with Mīr Findiriskī and became a prominent religious authority during the reign of Shah 'Abbās. Mullā Shamsā Gīlānī (d. 1081/1670) was another student of Mīr Dāmād. He continued his teacher's interest in the Divine act of creation and wrote a treatise on it (Āshtiyānī in Mullā Ṣadrā (1967): 93; Āshtiyānī (1972): 408–93). He also wrote a commentary on Mīr Dāmād's *al-Qabasāt*. Like his teachers, Mullā Shamsā was under the influence of Suhrawardī, and in opposition to Ibn Sīnā, in considering the comprehensive nature of Divine Knowledge above and beyond the knowledge of the essence. In the same generation of post-Mīr Dāmād philosophers is Aqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī (d. 1098/1686), who wrote extensive commentaries on Ibn

Sīnā's *al-Shifā'* (Āshtiyānī in Mullā Ṣadrā (1967): 94–5; Āshtiyānī (1972): 362–407).

With the third generation (Ṣadūqī Suhā (1980): 22–33) of the “School of Iṣfahān”, Mullā Ṣadrā's students had already learned to be more cautious in the formulation of their ideas. In his *Shawāriq*, Mullā ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661), Mullā Ṣadrā's student and son-in-law, reformulates an originally Ghazzālīan position (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 251) that mystical observations are the ultimate tests of preceding rational conclusions. The viability of the mystical discourse as a meta-epistemological basis of legitimate understanding continued to occupy a central position in the theoretical apparatus of the “School of Iṣfahān”. The principal problems that led the philosophers of the “School of Iṣfahān” towards the viability of the mystical discourse were created by the confrontation between the Peripatetic school of philosophy and the theological mandates of the Islamic faith. Such central dogmas as the nature of prophetic knowledge, the possibility of revelation, the plausibility of a day of judgment and of its corollary doctrine of bodily resurrection and, of course, ultimately the Existence and Attributes of God were paradigmatic problematics created for Islamic philosophy by virtue of its epistemological operation in the context of the Islamic creed. Islamic philosophy proper, as best represented in its Peripatetic tradition by Ibn Sīnā, could go only so far in stipulating the ontological viability of the Necessary Being. As best exemplified in Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, even the master of Peripatetic philosophy had recognized the inherent limitations of reason and of logocentricity to ascertain the revelatory mandates of the faith and sought to explore the possibilities promised in the mystical discourse. While in the mystical discourse proper, at least up until Ibn ‘Arabī, there is a fundamental suspension of reason in favour of an alternative certitude that bypasses the intermediary of intellect, in the *al-hikmat al-muta‘āliyah* of the “School of Iṣfahān” the attempt is made to adapt the possibilities of the mystical discourse, especially in its Ghazzālīan and Ibn ‘Arabīan formulations, into the working operation of an otherwise logocentric discourse when it finds it impossible to reach for a comprehensive conception of the metaphysical doctrines of the faith. Whereas both mysticism and philosophy proper had gone separate ways in their respective conception of existence, *al-hikmat al-muta‘āliyah* sought to hold to the initial logocentricity of a philosophical inquiry into the nature of being and then, when it reached the impasse of not being able to account for the doctrinally mandated principles of the faith, it turned to the mystical discourse and the possibilities of the metarational perceptions it promised.

In his *Gawhar-i murād* (Lāhijī 1985), Mullā ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī compared and contrasted the philosopher's method and the mystic's path, concluding that while the former “confirmed” all preliminary existent

beings in order to reach for the Final Cause, the latter “negated” all preliminary stages of existence until it reached a positive annihilation in Being. It is this mystical path that made the prophetic state conceivable to the philosophers of the “School of Iṣfahān”. In his philosophical orientation, Lāhijī is much more cautious than his teacher Mullā Ṣadrā in openly identifying with mystical conceptions (Āshtīyānī in Mullā Ṣadrā (1967): 99. But there are many occasions in *Gawhar-i murād*, which is more than anything else a text of philosophical kalām, where he openly identifies with the “Illuminationist” and mystical attainment of certitude. For example, in his chapter on prophethood (Lāhijī (1985): 247–87) he devotes a section to proving the necessity of prophethood by a tradition of the Sixth Shī‘ī Imām, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, followed by successive sections arguing in the same way according to theologians, philosophers and finally the mystics. For years Lāhijī taught the texts of Mullā Ṣadrā, including *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah*. His most famous student was Qādī Sa‘īd Qummī (d. c. 1104/1692). His choice of both texts to teach and philosophical projects to undertake confirms the assessment (Zarīnkūb (1983): 251–2) that Lāhijī’s understanding of mystical metacertainty beyond the limited achievements of philosophy proper corresponds to the later works of al-Ghazzālī, especially his *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*. His preference for the mystical discourse over the philosophical in *Gawhar-i murād* has also been compared to al-Ghazzālī in *Kīmīya-yi sa‘ādat* (*ibid.*: 253).

Another student and son-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ (d. 1091/1680), belongs to the same philosophical school. He, too, represents a synthetic attempt to wed mystical perceptions with dogmatic principles and brings both into a legitimate philosophical discourse. Shah ‘Abbās II (ruled 1052/1642–1077/1666) (see Luft (1968): 159–63) was particularly respectful of him. In his *al-Muḥākimah bayn al-muṭiṣawwif wa ghayrahim*, Mullā Muḥsin tries to distinguish between popular (what he calls “ignorant”) Sufism and the gnostic discourse he finds legitimate and useful in matters of philosophical pursuits. He has a treatise, called *al-Inṣāf fī bayān al-farq bayn al-haqq wa’l-i‘tisāf*, in which he identifies four major groups of Muslims: the philosophers, the mystics, the theologians and “the deviates” (*muta‘assif*) (Zarīnkūb (1983): 255–6). Although none of these groups are infidels, they have all gone astray in their respective pursuits. He particularly condemned the philosophers for having abandoned the book of God and adopted the books of the Greeks in their pursuit of truth. By philosophers here, he means the rationalistic philosophers because his own *Uṣūl al-ma‘ārif* is an important text in the tradition of the *ḥikmat al-muta‘āliyah*. But mystics and theologians are equally to blame. The implicit conclusion of this sweeping dismissal of all existing Islamic discourses is the validation of Mullā Muḥsin’s own contribution to the continued validity of *al-ḥikmat al-muta‘āliyah*. The principal foundations of this discourse, Mullā Muḥsin insists, are the

Qur'ān and the Prophetic and Imāmī traditions. Any kind of philosophical speculation which is not traceable to the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* is to be discarded. Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ's commentary on al-Ghazzālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, called *al-Maḥajjat al-bayḍā' fī tahdhīb al-iḥyā'*, has rightly been considered (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 256–7) the indication of a renewed interest in a mature combination of logocentrism and gnostic orientations. He achieves in *al-Maḥajjat al-bayḍā'* a systematic reconstruction of al-Ghazzālī's mature reflection on the nature of religious ethics on the foundations of Shī'ism and its traditions.

The adaptation of a supplementary mystical discourse in their otherwise logocentric orientation made the members of the "School of Iṣfahān" particularly sensitive to and critical of the more popular forms of Sufism. Thus, a major characteristic of the philosophers of the "School of Iṣfahān" is their denunciation of practising popular Sufis of their period, whom they identify with reckless endangerment of the faith. Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā, Mullā 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī, and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ all prefaced their theoretical adaptations of gnostic discourses with a visceral condemnation of popular mysticism. Mīr Abu'l-Qāsim Findiriskī went one step further and, in his *Risāla-yi šinā'iyyah*, accused the popular Sufis of disrupting the social order (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 258). Shaykh Bahā'ī wrote a satirical treatise, *Mūsh wa gurbah*, in which he condemned and dismissed the decadent type of Sufism of the more popular sort although he himself was a Sufi (Bahā'ī (1982): 175–287).

But no matter how diligent the philosophers of the "School of Iṣfahān" were in their attempts to distance themselves from popular Sufis and subject their gnostic/philosophical discourse to Shī'ī doctrinal principles, considerable hostility was still directed against them by the dogmatists. Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī (d. 1100/1688) wrote two treatises against mystics and philosophers. His *al-Fawā'id al-dīniyyah fi'l-radd 'ala'l-ḥukamā' wa'l-ṣūfiyyah*, as is perfectly evident in the title, is on the classical model of the appropriation of the faith by the clerical establishment through a visceral denunciation of philosophy and mysticism. In this classical genre of disputation, the particular literalist version of the faith is identified with *al-dīn* ("the faith"), and the alternative readings are condemned as aberrations of *al-ḥukamā'* and *al-ṣūfiyyah*. Yet not all jurists were anti-mystical or anti-philosophical in their nomocentric disposition. The greatest traditionalist of the period, Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī (the First) Majlisī (d. 1070/1659), looked favourably upon mysticism and, in fact, wrote a treatise against Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī's anti-mystical position. Still, both this Majlisī and his son Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir (the Second) Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) distinguished fundamentally between "traditional" Sufism of the patristic generation and what they observed among their contemporary Sufis. The Majlisī's tolerance of "traditional Sufis", however, does not extend to philosophers

as well. Both Majlisīs considered the human intellect to be insufficient for grasping the nature of the prophetic message. That message has to be accepted as a Divine mandate and in terms *sui generis* to it. The Second Majlisī, in his *I'tiqādāt*, took strong exception to the philosophers' interpretation of the Qur'anic and Prophetic truths so that they would coincide with "an infidel Greek's ideas" (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 261). It is with the continuity of precisely the same sentiments that, during the reign of Shah Sultan Ḥusayn (ruled 1105/1694–1135/1722), one of the most distinguished philosophers of the period, Mawlānā Muḥammad Šādiq Ardistānī, was harassed, persecuted and forced to leave Iṣfahān. He left Iṣfahān under such difficult circumstances that his infant child succumbed to the cold weather in the highway (Zarrīnkūb (1983): 261; Āshṭiyānī in Mullā Šadrā (1967): 109–10).

❧ CONCLUSION ❧

The central, yet subtextual, problematic of Islamic philosophy, its theocentricity, was initially reactivated but ultimately further consolidated in the gradual but persistent formation of the "School of Iṣfahān". The *a priori* certainty of the mystical discourse was transformed into the timid logocentricity of Peripatetic philosophy, and both were considerably assimilated into Shī'ī doctrinal dogmas. Aspects of Shī'ī liturgical piety, forces of mystical metacertainty, and remnants of Aristotelian logic were brought together under the general rubric of a philosophical discourse that remained quintessentially theocentric and cross-referential with the revelatory language of the Qur'ān. This remained the case without the slightest recognition of the legitimacy of the philosophical discourse on the part of Shī'ī legal orthodoxy. Shī'ī philosophers, in or out of the "School of Iṣfahān", remained the constant targets of suspicion. Mīr Dāmād sought refuge from anti-philosophical doctors of law in his convoluted discourse, Mullā Šadrā practically fled persecution and lived a life of exile for some years in a small village. Mīr Findiriskī and Shaykh Bahā'ī sought a poetic or satirical discourse as a haven. That they did produce a philosophy in which they sought to bring together the conflicting discourses of philosophy, (Shī'ī) theology and mysticism is a testimony to the relentless grip of their inquiring minds. That they could never escape or supersede the relentless theocentricity of their discourse, that all successive paradigmatic breakthroughs in Islamic philosophy (from Peripatetic to Neoplatonic to Illuminationist to the "School of Iṣfahān" and its highest achievement, Transcendental Philosophy) remained shy of a fundamental epistemic revolution as found in the modern West, are more commentaries on the Islamic tradition within which these philosophers thought and functioned than their generic concern with the rule

of reason, the uninhibited pursuit of truth or reality or, perhaps more accurately, the ironic possibilities of two counter-dogmatizing quotation marks around every rhetorical claim to “truth”.

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