



ABU'L-BARAKĀT LĀHŪRĪ

ABU'L-BARAKĀT MONĪR LĀHŪRĪ, Indo-Persian poet (commonly known as **MOLLĀ MONĪR LĀHŪRĪ**), b. at Lahore, 12 Ramaẓān 1019/28 November 1610. He is generally regarded as one of the three major poets of Lahore during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahān (Yamīn Khan, *Tārīk-e šer*, p. 310). Monīr came from a family noted for its fine poetic taste, cultural refinement and piety. His father, about whom some confusion exists in the biographical sources (see Maḥmūd Šīrānī, "Mawlānā Abu'l-Barakāt," p. 5), was a famous calligrapher employed by Akbar. Abu'l-Barakāt adopted the pen name Monīr at age fourteen and so began his formal career as a poet. His early compositions were mostly imitations of verses by Falakī, Sanā'ī, and Anwarī. In 1045/1635 he entered the service of Sayf Khan, governor of Akbarābād (Agra) and brother-in-law of the queen, Momtāz Maḥall. By his own account, Abu'l-Barakāt was well received by the learned men in Sayf Khan's literary assemblies (*Enšā'-ye Monīr*, letter 35).

After his patron's death in 1049/1639, Monīr joined the court of the governor of Jawnpur but soon returned to Akbarābād, where he was admitted to the inner circle of court poets. He died young, on 7 Raġab 1054/9 September 1644, and was buried in Lahore.

Monīr was a prolific writer, claiming to have written 100,000 verse couplets. He tried practically every verse form, but his reputation rests primarily on *maṭnawīs*, including *Sawād-e aẓam*, *Mazḥar-e gol*, *Āb o rang*, *Sāz o barg*, *Maykāna va mer'āt al-ḳayāl*, and *Bayt al-ma'mūr*. The most popular of these in the subcontinent is the charming and elegantly wrought *Mazḥar-e gol*, also



called *Maṭnawī dar šefat-e Bengāla*. Begun and completed within a fortnight in 1409/1639, it vividly describes a delightful but perilous boat ride on the Ganges, and the flora, fauna, and climate of Bengal. Interspersed with the praise of Bengal are occasional subtle allusions to the poet's dislike of that region. First published in Lucknow in 1889, *Mazhar-e gol* has since been reprinted several times.

Monīr's high opinion of his own verse was shared by many of his contemporaries. Chandarbhān Brahman not only considered him the most accomplished poet of that era but also sought from him advice on ways to improve his own verse, while Moḥammad Šāleḥ Kanbōh lavished praise on Monīr as the only Indian poet after Fayzī to enjoy equal mastery over all forms of verse. The mainstay of Monīr's poetic skill lies in his ability to manipulate different poetic conceits and rhetorical devices, standard features of the Persian lyrical style known as *sabk-e hendī*. Yamīn Khan (*Tārīk-e šer*, p. 316) even credits Monīr with making great advances in what he calls *sabk-e hendī-e kāmel*.

In his prose style, Monīr consciously strove to imitate Abu'l-Faẓl, though with minimal success (Aḥmad, *Tārīk*, p. 65). His major prose works include: 1. *Enšā-ye Monīr*, a collection of notes and fifty-five letters in ornate prose which is incorporated with miscellaneous other prose writings into 2. *Roq'āt-e Monīr* and 3. *Nowbāva* (alternate reading, *Nowbāda*); 4. *Kārestān*, a romance in embellished prose about the imaginary prince Vālā Aḳtar and his battles, compiled in Jawnpur in 1050/1640 and dedicated to Shah Jahān; 5. *Tadkera-ye šo'arā*, biographical accounts of poets with a critical evaluation of their poetry; 6. *Šarḥ-e qaṣā'ed-e 'Orfī*, a Persian commentary on 'Orfī's panegyrics; and 7. *Kār-nāma*, a short tract written in 1050/1640 pointing out serious defects in the poetry of 'Orfī, Ẓohūrī, Ẓolālī, and Ṭāleb Āmolī. Despite Monīr's contemporary and continuing importance, most of his works remain in manuscript form. They warrant publication and wider circulation.

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