

The Magic Doe

Qutban Suhrawardi's Mirigavati

Mirigavati or The Magic Doe is the work of Shaikh Qutban Suhrawardi, an Indian Sufi master who was also an expert poet and storyteller attached to the glittering court-in-exile of Sultan Husain Shah Sharqi of Jaunpur. Composed in 1503 as an introduction to mystical practice for disciples, this powerful Hindavi or early Hindi Sufi romance is a richly layered and sophisticated text, simultaneously a spiritual enigma and an exciting love-story full of adventures. The Mirigavati is both an excellent introduction to Sufism and one of the true literary classics of pre-modern India, a story that draws freely on the large pool of Indian, Islamic, and European narrative motifs in its distinctive telling of a mystical quest and its resolution. Adventures from the Odyssey and the voyages of Sindbad the Sailor--sea voyages, encounters with monstrous serpents, damsels in distress, flying demons and cannibals in caves, among others--surface in Suhrawardi's rollicking tale, marking it as first-rate entertainment for its time and, in private sessions in Sufi shrines, a narrative that shaped the interior journey for novices. Before his untimely death in 2009, Aditya Behl had completed this complete blank verse translation of the critical edition of the Mirigavati, which reveals the precise mechanism and workings of spiritual signification and use in a major tradition of world and Indian literature.

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