

Book Review

Sultan-iIshq: Collection of Poetry
Syed Muhammad bin Mubarak Al'awi Kirmāni
Eds. MoeenNizami and Uzma Aziz Khan
Lahore: Oriental College, Punjab University, 2008.
pp, 103; price: // paper back

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Histories and life accounts vocalized through silence, words or arguments come in a number of diverse forms at numerous levels, be that in Keats' letters, carefully framed Rousseau's *Confessions* or Yeats' poems. In this regard, *Sultan-iIshq* is primarily a collection of poetry but it also examines the life account of renowned prolific Chishti writer and poet, Syed Muhammad bin Mubarak Al'awi Kirmāni, famously known as AmirKhurd.¹ He authored remarkably acclaimed *tadhkira* (hagiography)² titled, *Siyar al-Awliyā' darahwālvamalfūzāt-imashāyikh-i-Chisht*, ["Biographies of the Sufis and the States and Conversations of the Chishti Sufi Masters"].³ The book gives a detailed and consistent history of Chishti sufis *Silsila* in India. It is regarded as a distinguished Chishti hagiography which deals primarily with pietistic line of Chishti shaykhs and their disciples in Indian Chishti sufi fraternity. The collection of poetry in the book under review is extracted from *Siyar al-Awliyā'*. This book deserves an important position primarily for the historians of Chishti sufi *Silsila* and Delhi Sultanate, in particular and South Asian sufism, in general.

Many historians of the Sultanate period look into this only available piece of writing by Amir Khurd for substantial data; however, little attention has been paid to explore his poetic career. The editors of *Sultan-iIshq* have made a pioneering effort by compiling Amir Khurd's scattered pieces of poetry in *Siyar al-Awliyā'* in a book form. Previously, in *Dabistan-iNizam*, Dr. Aslam Farrukhi has translated some of Amir Khurd's stanzas in Urdu; however, he did not compile the poetry in an anthology.

After writing the preface of the book, the editors have added a remarkable introductory biographical profile of Amir Khurd, from *Dabistan-iNizam*. The book has two fold objectives, first is to compile the scattered pieces of poetry by Amir Khurd and secondly, integrating almost entire available information about the poet in a single publication. They have borrowed the name of the book *Sultan-iIshq* from one of his verses.⁴ This is quite impressive work done by the

¹Tanvir Anjum, "Amir Khurd," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*. (Boston, Leiden: Brill, 2015), 27-28.

²For the simple definition of *tadhkira*/hagiography see "Biography and Hagiography" in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*.

³*Siyar al-Awliyā'* is the major Chishti sufi memoir. It covers the time from the thirteenth to the well-nigh mid-fourteenth century. This well knitted work produced by Amir Khurd, which gives detailed history not only about Chishtis but also about the society of the North India and early Muslim settlements during fourteenth century, as well. It is mostly based upon oral history/sources, which Amir Khurd learned from his ancestors. His grandfather, father and he himself were very close to Chishti Shaykhs (Baba Farid and Shaykh Nizamul Din Awliyā'). *Siyar al-Awliyā'* comprised of 10 chapters, early chapters of the book throw light on Chishti Shaykhs and their disciples, later chapters, however, structured upon discipleship, important prayers, *ishq*, love, topics like manners regarding purity and cleanliness are also striking and the last chapter is on *sama* (sufi music and dance).

⁴ MoeenNizami and Uzma Aziz Khan, ed., *Sultan-iIshq: Collection of Poetry Syed Muhammad bin Mubarak Al'awi Kirmāni*. (Lahore: Oriental College, Punjab University, 2008), 9.

editors. Furthermore, another characteristic of *Sultan-i-Ishq* is the Urdu translation of Khurd's poetry. The book proves Amir Khurd as a mature poet having deepest love for Khwaja Nizamul Din Awliyā, (d.1235).

Those who are feebly acquainted with South Asian sufi poetry will be familiar with some of the themes from this book. We find his poetry is in the form of Hamd, Na'at, Baiyt, rubayee and manaqbat, however, not in ghazals or nazm. He is a simple poet with soft, colorful and heart-touching effects in his poetry. His poetry includes themes like the love of Shaykh Nizamul Din Awliyā and for the Chishti fraternity, which shows how this love, which is *Ishq*,⁵ run into the veins of their disciples and devotees. Sometimes Amir Khurd is also seen praising his uncle Sayyid Hussain's *ishq* for his Shykh. In his poetry he also teaches wisdom and tolerance, though himself being impatient for the love of his Shaykh.

The content of the book is an invitation to unlock the door of one's heart to view another world. While reading these verses, the reader feels like reflecting and contemplating his own state of affairs and mind. Moreover, the stanzas in *Sultan-i-Ishq*, have been placed in a sequence as they appeared in *Siyaral-Awliyā*, which takes the reader to the journey of love/*ishq*. Though the poetry is in Persian, the editors have also translated it in simple Urdu. Besides this, the imagery and symbols used in the poetry are beautiful and striking i.e. starry skies, beautiful sun soaring eagles etc, editors-cum-translators have enhanced this beauty with their translation. Besides this, there are some problems in the book, which could have easily been avoided. There are several pieces missing from the source,⁶ i.e.

ے مہ بزیر ابر احتجاب نمود
عشقان را بدین عذاب نمود
پرده از زلف بست بر رخ خود
درد و حیرت بدین خراب نمود

ے مسلمان و هندوؤ ترسا و کبر
ز خاک درت جملہ افسر کنند
چو کافور و صندل از آن پاک
بچشم اندر آرد و دائر کنند⁷

ے عہد کردیم کہ دل در خم زلف تو نہیم
جان مشتاق بزیر سُم اسپ تو نہیم⁸

ے بدست گیر و برون آر و دست گیری کن
کہ جز محبت تو ہیچ دست گیر ندارم⁹

ے کلاہ بر سر بنده نہاد و کرد قبول
قبول اوست بتحقیق نزد حق مقبول¹⁰

⁵ According to many scholars of sufism, *Ishq* cannot be translated or equated with English word love.

⁶ Amir Khurd. *Siyar al-Awliyā*, ed., Chirinji Lal (Delhi: Mohib-i Hind Press, 1884).

⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁸ Ibid., 335.

⁹ Ibid., 349.

¹⁰ Ibid., 361.

ے ز عشق چشم تو چشم من شد چشمہ پیدا
ولے ز آن چشمہ ہا د ایم رواں خون جگر باشد¹¹

Another typological or publishing error is that stanzas from 22nd to 26th are all on page 26, however, the 26th stanza has been stated referenced on page 16 instead of 26. Despite these errors the book is a welcome addition and a fresh inclusion in the corpus of literature on South Asian sufi poetry. As the editors-cum-translators of *Sultan-iIshq* carefully translated the stanzas, arguably one of the remarkable Persian sufi lyrics to bring out the extended spiritual excursion of Amir Khurd for the quest of love and union with his Shaykh. Simultaneously, the work under review affirms the continued relevance and significance of memory, origin and content of sufi poetry for the readers. If someone loves sufi poetry, *Sultan-iIshq* is a must read.

¹¹Ibid., 509.