

Dari Poetry Revived in the Works of Haroon

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Dari literature has a long history in Afghanistan. Upon examining the history of the language we know it was well established as a literary language in the courts of Seistan, Ghazni, Herat and Balkh. Famous Dari works like the Shahanama of Sa'di and the Hadiqa were the labor of eminent scholars reared in these courts. In the Islamic period the Safarids of Seistan, the Saminids of Balkh, the Ghorids of Ferozkoh and the Ghaznavids of Ghazni were famous dynasties where prominent scholars lived who had a rich background in letters, arts and sciences.

During the 15th and 16th centuries Herat was the center of literature in Asia and the Timurid kings had special art schools in the city. Some of the most renowned poets, writers, artists and sculptors of the East like Jami, Behzad, and Abdul Razaq studied in these schools.

After the fall of the Temurids and the death of the great Dari poet, Maulana Jami, a dark age descended over this land. Political schism was widespread and art and science died until Ahmad Shah ascended the throne in 1747 bringing an end to years of chaos and idleness.

One of the few families which kept up their interest in art and literature despite the years of political disunity was the family of Haji Jamal Khan Mohammadzai, which lived south of Kandahar in the area between Maruf and Arghasan as far west as the banks of the Helmand river. This family led the Barakzai tribe.

Haji Jamal Khan died in 1765 at the age of 86 and was buried in Zakar, south of Kandahar city. After his death his sons Hamidullah Khan and Sardar Payenda Khan took over the leadership.

Payenda had two sons, one of whom, Haroon Khan was the governor of Grishk and a poet. He was the first Dari poet in the family. His complete divan (anthology) consists of 4,500 verses. After Haroon others in this family also wrote poetry in Dari and have left behind their anthologies.

Haroon Khan was undoubtedly the most versatile poet of the family, his verses are pleasing and clear. His poems have the sweetness of style of the Khorasani poets, Khwaja Hafez and Maulana Jami and like Sa'di and others his odes deal mainly with the subject of love.

In his writings the lighter Indian form of poetry is rare. This form of poetry and Hazrat Beidel's school of writing became popular with the poets of this family only after Mashreqi and

Tarzi became followers of Beidel's school and the lighter Indian style.

Haroon was not a follower of the aforementioned style since he says:

I learned to speak from those ruby lips;

A student of Jami, a master of poetry.

Haroon lived for a long time in Grishk and also traveled to Herat and India. His eloquent and lucid style is not found in the works of other poets of his family. We know of only two copies of his anthology, one of which is housed in the London museum.

The eminent orientalist, Donald Reid, believes that this book was written by another Haroon, the son of Shamsuddin Mohammad, who has also written an anthology and who was a close friend of Sa'di. The similarity in names has probably confused the orientalist while the fact is there is a span of six centuries between Haroon the contemporary of Sa'di and the 18th century Haroon Khan.

Speaking of Grishk and about the Afghans he says:

Haroon at times will remember Grishk

Since love for one's country is no disgrace.

The other copy of his anthology, a calligraphic masterpiece, is housed in the Karachi museum.

On love he appeals to deep loneliness and melancholy as expressed in the following sonnet:

Tomorrow the doors of your court will be closed,

Oh who will submit my request of love.

When you hide your face I burn inside,

For Gods sake raise the veil from your face!

I prayed to you, you cursed in return

If that be the reward, satisfied am I.

I was obsessed by your bounty of love

When I saw two tresses on your shoulders.

Oh Haroon don't deplore your lover's desertion,

For you have posed, yourself, this evil on you.