

## “EXPLORING A TREASURE OF POETIC GEMS” A REVIEW OF HAFT GANJ-I-SULTANI

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Scholars and historians unanimously agree with Aurel Stein's assertion that Islam made its way into Kashmir not by forcible conquest but by gradual conversion which virtually began when Rinchan embraced Islam at the hands of a Sufi Saint from Turkistan and became the founder of the Muslim rule in Kashmir. The real and continuous missionary activities to propagate Islam, however, began towards the end of fourteenth century when hundreds of Saiyids and Sufis from Central Asia entered Kashmir with Shah-i-Hamadan and his son, Mir Mohammad Hamadani. Though they established centres of their activity in every nook and corner of Kashmir, they could not establish here a genuine social order based upon the essential teachings of Islam because of the language problem. Such a social order was ultimately established by local saints like Shaikh Nooruddin and Sultan-ul-Arifin who avoided confrontation with the Brahmins and political demagogues and devoted their entire attention to religious propagation so as to create a spiritually oriented social set-up. Unfortunately, under a well-thought of intrigue the innocent masses and unlettered agriculturalists have been led astray by priests and Pandits who have deliberately invented such legendry accounts and fabulous stories about these saints as would make them mysterious supermen rather than true propagators of spirituality and egalitarianism. Viewed in this perspective, Mohammad Siddique Niyazmand's recent book, *Haft Ganj-i-Sultani*, is of immense value because it not only describes the mystic leanings of Sultan-ul-Arifin and his seven learned disciples but also analysis their literary writings and scholarly pursuits.

The 268 page book comprises eight chapters (in addition to perface and foreword) dealing with the Sultan and his seven disciples: Baba Daud Khaki, Shaikh Ahmad Chagli, Khwaja Hassan Qari, Khwaja Ishaq Qari, Sayid Hyder Telmule, Baba Mohammad Ali Raina and Khwaja Miram Bazaz Sikanderpuri. Since the writer is primarily concerned with the contribution of these Saints to Persian literature, as the sub-title of the book suggests, we do not find a detailed account of their lives in the book. Instead, the writer elaborately and analytically discusses Khaki's *wirdul Muridin* and *Dastur-u-Saliqin*, Chagli's *Risala-i-Sultaniah*, H. Qari's *Rahat-u-Talibin*, I.Qari's *Chilchil-a-Arifin* Baba Hyder's *Hidayat-ul-Mukhlissin*, Ali Raina's *Tazkirat-ul-Arifin* and Sikander Puri's *Tazkirat-ul-Murshidin* in order to evaluate their literary value and, at the same time, enumerate the important features of *Silsila-i-Sultani*. In this connection Mr.Niyazmand observes: "Among the writings of the Sultan's disciples *Chilchil-s-Arifin* is of vital importance because this book not only discusses the essential prerequisites of forty *Chilas* but also describes the life and spiritual attainments of the disciples of the Sultan. The way Khwaja Ishaq Qari has analysed the basic requirements of *Chilas* remains unsurpassed and unique". (186) However, Niyazmand is very surprised to learn that the writer of *Asrarul Abrar*, who was a contemporary of Khwaja Ishaq, does not make even a passing reference to this great piece of literature. (172). Similarly, while analysing Khwaja Hassan Qari's *Rahat-u-Talibin*, a hand-written manuscript of 22 leaves, Niyazmand points out that in spite of the fact that the book enumerates silent features of Islamic mysticism propounded by the Sultan, it has a number of mistakes. However, he strategically remains silent in pointing out these mistakes. At another place, while discussing Sikander Puri's *Tazkirat-ul-Murshidin*, he outrightly points out that the book is full of exaggerations and contradictory accounts (250), probably an inherent feature of such manuscripts. As we

know, most of these disciples were primarily concerned with eulogizing their preceptor and guide, Shaikh Hamzah Makhdoomi, and accordingly they gave such exaggerated accounts of his life in which facts seem to have merged with the mist of digressions and anecdotes bordering miracles and supernatural narrations. Same is true of other source material on which Mr. Niyazmand relies: like *Tarkh-i-Hassan* by Pir Hassan Khoihami, *Tazkr-a-Awlia-i-Kashmir* by Khoihami, *Resala-i-Sultani* by Chagli, and *Hidayat-ul-Mukhlisin* by Hyder Telmuli. Probably, the entire history of Kashmir and its origin is totally shrouded in mystery and there is an urgent need for an analytical research by dispassionate scholars so as to separate the sacred from the profane.

Niyazmand's book, *Seven disciples of Sultan-ul-Arifin*, is an important contribution in this direction because out of haze and mist the writer has been able to extract a lot of information about the Sultan with whom most of the people in Kashmir are not familiar. Mr. Niyazmand very vividly projects the life history of the Sultan, his family background, childhood, education, mystic leanings and scholarly tastes. He clearly points out that Sultan-ul-Arifin was a learned scholar, fully acquainted with the Islamic theology (53) as a result of which he always directed his disciples to observe rigidly the code of conduct prescribed by the Quran and the Hadith. He advised them to avoid waylayers like inordinate greed, attachment to worldly goods, anger, pride and conceit but never allowed them to retreat in solitude. Like the Naqshbandhi and the Suharwardi Sufis, the Sultan believed in *Khilwat-dar-Anjuman* and revolted against the asceticism that was being practised by monks and hermits(47). He also disliked music and singing: he not only avoided listening to music himself but also directed his disciples to abstain from this irreligious activity (46). Similarly, Niyazmand observes: the Sultan was so curious to read and learn that he would purchase every book for his library

whenever he came across new book (53). It was the result of his being a student of such learned scholars as Saiyid Jamaluddin Bukhari and Baba Fetahullah Haqani in Khanqahi Malik Shamsuddin.

The greatest merit of the book, however, is that it brings in limelight the hidden treasures of the *Silsila Sultani* and evaluates very objectively the writings of seven scholars of this *Silsila*. It also negates the belief of some ignorant writers, as well as the thesis of the biased historians who are at pains to argue, that Kashmiri Muslim do not have the literary tradition behind them. The book analysis not only the literary value of the writings of the seven disciples of the Sultan but also points out analytically their religious value in understanding the true nature and significance of Kashmiri mysticism in the light of the remarks of its propagators. It also brings out clearly the fact that before the Mughal invasion, Persian was the language of scholars and religious leaders and through this language they learnt a lot about Islam and propagated it to illiterate Kashmiris in vernacular (Kashmiri). Unfortunately, this language is being neglected today as a result of which the classical religious books written by Kashmiris still remain in manuscript form. Keeping this in view Mr. Niyazmand's book unhesitatingly needs to be appreciated by anyone who wants to know mysticism in Kashmir in its proper perspective.