

Reza Gujarati

[An Early Seventeenth Century Sufi Poet of Persian]

Prof. Dr. Nisar Ahmed Ansari

A concise leave alone, a comprehensive history of India's contribution to Persian literature has yet to be written, No doubt great scholars and most prominent teachers of Persian have done a great deal of valuable work in this field. The state of the various regions of India is even more disappointing Gujarat in the western part of the country is also no exemption A couple of scholars made substantial contribution in varying degree to the subject.

The cultivation by the people of Gujarat of Persian language and literature in the pre-Mughal period not much is known, let alone written except four five articles by Dr. Ziyauddin Desai the most important of which is on of 13th century Iranian emigree Persian poet Zainuddin Ali Satari whose epitaph at Cambay contains a Ghazai and two Rubais in mystical strain. In another one, he has described in details the Ganj-i-Ma-a'ani of Persian poet about whom not much is known.

What is regretable is that even the Collection of the Hazrat Pir Mohammad Shah Library and Research Center, Ahmedabad which furnishes also its published six parts of catalogue shows quite a good deal of materials on the subject, has been overlooked. The Diwan-i-Reza or Diwan-i-Mohammed Reza introduced in this

* Head Department of Persian, *Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan's, College of Arts and Commerce, Khanpur, Ahmedabad.*



paper is one such work. I came across it accidentally, when Prof. M. G. Bombaywala, Honorary Director of the Librery and Research centre, was going through some boxes filled with the papers including loose sheets or loose bound manuscripts etc. Since I have taken up the editing of Kuliya-t-i-Reze of Saiyed Jalal Sadrussudoor Shahi Rizvi with the Pen name Reza naturally, with great interest I looked up the defective manuscript aiming poem by Reza later on a few more folios were found and its complete except for the first two folios, fly leaf etc. but immediately I found that this Reza is different from Reza. Shahi Rizvi, Going through it a little carefully I found that this was an interesting collection of Sufi Poems by a poet from Gujrat. The following lines are derived to whatever I could gather about this unknown poet and his poetry as a contribution of Gujrat to Persian Literature the quality of which appears to be fairly of good order.

The collection of Reza's verses, Ghazaliyat, Qitaat, Masnavis and Rubais, appears to have been compiled by the poet himself, and is very probably an autograph copy (ref. ff 85 b, 89b, 94a). In its present state it comprises 102 folios but originally their number was 104 as it shown by figures numbered on each folios in red ink. The last folio is numbered 104 while the first folio bears the number 3 which means that the first two folios are missing. The fly leaf is also missing, which might have contained the title etc.

Not much is known about him from external sources. He was mostly Reza as also Mohammed Reza as his poetic name. Apparently, Mohammed Reza was his name and Reza is nom-deplume. Now Prof. S. A. H. Abidi in his article introducing a manuscript of another Diwan-i-Reza in the Jami Masjid Library at Bombay had named as many as thirty one poets with this poetic name, from India and Iran, mentioned in the Tazakeras. A comparison of these verses quoted in the Tazakeras with our poet's verses could help his identification or otherwise but these biographical works of persian poets not having readily available to me it is not possible to identify any of the above thirty one poets for the present.

Fortunately his poem contain comparatively speaking, a fairly goods deal of material that helps us have some glimpses into the life of the poet. He calls himself by his own name in many verses (e.g. ff.74a, 8b, 10a, 11b, 13b, etc.) the next thing we know about him for certain is that by profession, he was a soldier before he took up spiritual meditation for the uplift of his soul and welfare of the next world. He composed a whole poem of 79 verses captioned 'Hakayat-i-Sarguzasht' (story of the past life)

He then proceeds to say that he was a soldier by profession and was in the provincial governor's (Nawab's) service, a mansabdar of average rank (Mansab-i-bish-wa-kami) He possessed an Arab horse and few animals like bulls, camels and was holder of a lance and standard (niza-wa-alam) indicating his status. Very probably when he was a state official of some position he had got made his signet, the seal legend of which was the hemistich banda-i-ali-i-aba hast Mohammed Reza "Mohammed Reza is the slave of the man of the clock i.e. Hazrat Ali's family Ahl-i-Bait (F.78a)". He owned a house family and servant hovering round (i.e. attending upon) him. In his turn, he would also in this very manner attend as "some one else". (i.e. his superior) the Nawab as a servant. If the Nawab were pleased to order grant of fief) (jagir) Diwan would not carryout his order. (one some pretext or the other). He would at times think how he would pride himself to be a close attendant of his superior having sold his religion for two three tankes (copper coins) of salary and causing hurt to poor people or sit on high cushion thinking he was a great Mir and Khan. How long should he more about at average one's door for a morral or why should he all the while worry about the grey colour of his beard and apply colour dye (Khizab)?

In sum, when get disgusted with this state of affairs, he took an Omen (fal). As a result he thought that there was nothing more important in this fleeting world than the rememberence of Allah. It was suggested to hiim through inspiration that he should look for a spiritual guide. (Pir) and carryout his instructions strictly and unhesitantly. It was on Friday, the 27th Rajab of the Hijri year 1034 (Ascension 1625 A.D.) the day of the holy prophet's meraj to go and fall, with bent back (i.e. with great humility) and tears in



eyes at the feet of the benevolent and large-hearted Pir. The name of this spiritual guide was Mohammed Jivie Noor Baksh the like of a man of the greatness like him the eye of the sky had not seen.

The poet seems to have enjoyed the spiritual guidance of his Pir hardly for four five years. For, he had according to his own statement (f. 14a), became his desciple on Friday 27th Rajab of the Holy Prophet Mohammed) of the Hijro year 1034 (25, April, 1625 A.D.) when he was "spiritually sick" for 53 years (ff 33b, 69b) That incidentally means that he was born since time in A. H. 1981 (1573-74 A. D.) and Hazrat Mohammed popularly known as Badamiyan, his spiritual guide had passed away into the mercy of Allah on Wednesday 4th of the month of Rajab A.H. 1038 (17th February 1629 A.D.) according to two chronograms composed by the poet This second chronogram is quite ingenious. The hemistih char shamba Charum-i-Mah-i-Rajab (Wednesday 4th the month of Rajab) yield the year 1038 (of Hijra) when the value of its letters according to Ab-j-ad system.

About the poet's Pir Hazrat Mohammed urf Badamiyan nothing is known nor does the poet furnish any information beyond praising his spirituals guidance or beyond stating repeatedly that he belongs to the Shattari Order of Sufism. The Shattari was represented by a grand son of Shah Wajihuddin Alavi the famous scholars teacher, author a desciple of the famous Shattari Saint Shaikh Mohammed Jiv Ghaus of Gawaliar etc. We do not come across the name of Mohammed with the popular name Badamiyan among Shah Wajihuddin's descendants though the last but one of his descendants who passed away a few years ago was known mainly Badamiyan Sahab.

It is natural that he many have travelled a good deal in India (and perhaps abroad) like Afghanistan or Transoxiana) during his military service. A stray reference to the Shahr-ara-garden of Kabul laid out by the Mughal emperor Babar (f 69 b) many perhaps be taken to indicate that he might have been in service there during the time of Mughal emperor Jahangir. It is also very likely that he was not an original resident of Gujarat may have come through Kabul from Central Asia. At least he seems to have

lived in those parts for some time, since we have one poem which contains two couplets in a Central Asian language.

That Mohammed Reza did spend a considerable part of his life in Gujrat and became more or less a Gujarat goes without saying. This is corroborated by what can be easily clinching evidence furnished by a poem of 56 verses entitled Rikhta Inaugage, a miniature of Persian and local language mainly Gujrati (not proto Urdu Gujarat) found in the Diwan at the end. The first ten verses contain the rhyme "ai haio hun hoon karoon" meaning "O brother what should I do?" This rhyme in Gujarati is not only repeated in five more verses at random but the first ten verses contain six verses in Gujarati and atleast three more in the rest of the poem. In this very poem while asserting that his purpose in all these uncommon utterances and strange ways is only to relate the mysteries of spiritual life, he refers to his love for a Gujarati boy (ishqi-i-Gujarati Pesar) who must be the same as one whose date of death he was chronogrammed in one of his poems.

The poet had constructed a mosque very probably at Ahmedabad where he seems to have passed most years of his life possibly until his last in A. H. 1040 (1630-31 A.D.)

An interesting piece of information we get is that at more than one place of his poems the poet claims to have been blessed with the vision of the holy prophet in a dream for as much as five times. While other references are made secondarily in some poems, at least two have been specially chosen as the topic of his experience. The poet goes on to describe this most cherished dream-episode the Holy prophet condescending to address him. He also states that the holy prophet the signet of the Hazrat Murtaza (Ali) on his hand which he presented to the poet who also found that Hazrat Murtaza was also seated there.

In the other description Reza states that one night he was out of himself in his excessive love for the prophet when all of a sudden he saw him (in dream) come near him (dar kanar-i-ma) and addressed him saying he was him (the poet) and the latter him (the Holy prophet) etc. He also had a persian quotrain (Rubai) on his lips which he asked the poet to commit to memory and recited

it three times to enable him to do that; the quatrain has been quoted at the end of the poem. The holy Prophet also showed many favours upon him including the grant of four articles a clock, a shirt a turban (amama) and a lance with a small flag (niza-ba bairaq). This vision occurred on the 16th of Zul-Qada A. H. 1040 (6th June 1631 A.D). The poet seems to have performed Hajj or Pilgrimage to the Holy Kaba.

Another particular of the poet's personal life not very revealing of course speaks of the demise of a very close companion and intimate friend who was his constant companion. Both were seen together in private and public. He died all of a sudden leaving the poet to mourn his death, in the morning of Saturday the 9th of the holy month of Fasting i.e. Ramzan in the year A. H. 1037 (3rd May 1628 AD) in the prime of youth at the age of 36. Very probably he is the same Gujarati boy (*Gujarati pizar*) to whose love he refers in one of his verses as seen above (f 103b).

The poet does not speak anywhere about his formal education except in one place. In one of the poems (f. 3b), he says that he was a Qari that is an expert in the science of Recitation of Quran in all its seven styles. He had also transcribed a copy of the Holy Book (f. 3b).

After whatever could be gleaned about the poet, his vocation, his background, activities, etc. from this moderate sized collection of his poems, something needs to be said about the contents of the same. The manuscript measures about 12 by 20 c.m. with the writing space occupying an area of 6 by 15 c.m. There is no Judul (border line). Nor is there any dividing line between the two poetical pieces on any folio. As stated above the first two folios, fly-leaf etc. are missing from the manuscript and hence it is difficult to say what the poet called the poems occupying the major portion folios numbered 3-85 out of the total 104, that is 83 out of extant 102, since the first two folios are missing). It is almost certain that these were titled *Ghazals*, their number now being 79 excluding one or two in the missing folios, looking to the length of *ghazals* through out the section. Fragments (*Qita*) numbering 8 starting from f.85 b. These are of varying length,

unusually long, comprising three to twenty seven verses. The first of these fragments, mourning the death of an intimate friend also as stated above; one of four verses as mentioned earlier, comprise the chronogram of the death of spiritual guide and is also styled as such (f. 89a). This is followed by three Masnavis of which the first is longest, of 145 verses (ff. 89b-93b), major theme thereof being as stated in prose heading, an account of "I did not see anything except that in which I saw Allah" i.e. *wahdatul wujud*. The *Masnavi* section is followed by Quatrain (Rubai) numbering 88 (f. 94a to 101). this section ends with the word *Tammam* (end), indicating that the manuscript ends here. Below it is inserted one more Quatrain in a different hand and ink it is difficult to say that if it is by our poet Reza or by some other poet or the scribe thereof.

Folio 102a is blank while folios 102b-104a contain what has been already referred to above as the *Rikhta* poem. It starts not from the top but after leaving a blank space, as in an *Umwan* of a manuscript, which would tempt one to wonder if this folio formed the beginning part of the manuscript. Their numbering is in the same hand, as in the text and the heading in red ink *rikhta* and could have been given after the manuscript got rebounded. One unusual thing worth noting about the manuscript is that it does not contain many scribal mistakes. This may perhaps be attributed to the fact, that the manuscript was written by the poet himself. The way of first hemistich of the opening line of the ghazal on f. 16a to wit.

may taken corroborate this. It can be said without much fear of contradiction that this may be one of the very very few manuscripts of a critical editing could be preferred only on the basis of a single manuscript available .

Now coming to the literary value it would be presumptuous to say that the Diwan can claim place with the works of the great sufi poets like, Sanai, Attar, Rumi and the like. At the same time it is of a fairly good order and can easily find place in the history of persian literature in Gujarat as and when attempted.

The first thing that strikes the readers is to the unusual length of ghazals quite a few of them verses from 28 to 94 verses. Another ingenuity found in these poems is the fact that in almost all of them the poet brings the first hemistich of the first verse as second hemistich of last verse or in very few cases in the second but last verse. In quite a few of them, a hemistich of a verse from one poem is repeated in another poem. Then, not so frequently, he goes on repeating the same hemistich or the major part thereof in the same, poem, as many as seven to forty two times. He adopts the same method in quatrains also. He also repeats at times with minor change of rhyme (*radif*).

He also uses a variety of metres short medium sized and long with great ease. He is inclined to use difficult rhymes (*radif*) and half-rhymes (*qafiya*) in fairly long poems also, such as *saqat shikaste*, *faqat shikaste*, *kildi*, *kai*, *hai*, *Taqwah*, *nagaha*, *maha*, *Taha*, *payazi*, *nayazi*, *razi* etc. At times he uses a rhyme comprising a phrase of repeated words; to wit *chira duri chira duri*, *hama nuri hama nuri qalandar shaw qalandar shaw* etc. In one poem he uses the Alphabate letters *h, b, a, b, t, s, kh, y, f, z* etc. as per their pronounciation *ha, ha ba* etc. as the rhyme. But all these he does with ease, and without any attempt at forced versifying (award). He himself says in one place:

Raza az hal guyad na az qal.

"Reza speaks out of inspiration and not speach"

He also makes frequent use of such figures of speech as Tazad, and Tajnis of all types. The poet also shows quite his ingenuity in the use of compound words, mostly in similees and metaphors such as for example *Kashmir-i-dilam* (The Kashmir of my heart) [blossomed forth flower], *Manjaniq-i-Dida* (The stone throwing machine of eye) *busa baran* (raining kisses) *chater i-ful-u-mul* (canopy of flower and wine for *Hubab*, bubble) and the like. The verses in which these are used furnish example of novelty of expression of the poet. At the same time the poet uses quite a few unfamiliar or absolute word and construction *Tarakib* in his verse such as *Lafliz*, *ghaman*, *shaikh Ajir*, *busa baran*, *musai* (instead of

Musawi) *Kashala*, *Safala*, *mala*, *chap-chap-i-busa* *aflij* *Musiche* etc. In quite a few places he is seen to resort to poetic licence a little more than legitimate, it may appear to some, but this appears to be one of the peculiar features - purposesfull use - of his verses that add to their poetical charm and effect. Thus, he uses plural is against grammatic rules like *ruzan-wa-shaban*, *khud Kashandan* (instead of *Khud-kushandagan*), *dawindan* (for *dawindagan*) and the like. In a full poem of thirty one verses most of the half-rhymes (*qafiya*) comprise such plural forms. Likewise he adds an *alif* or *ha* or *ya* to words, even proper names, using them for rhymes or half rhymes. Such as for example, *Maryama* (for *Maryam*) *Parchama* (for *Parcham*), *ghamina* (for *ghamin*) *hitala* (for *hital*) *dargahana* instead of *Dargahan* *Namishwami* (for *Namishwain*) etc. The last mentioned two forms are from a poem of 79 verses of the poem containing his autobiographical account which has all its rhymes like these. These peculiar forms, as stated above, invest the poetic verses with a particular pleasing charm and effect. It also shows the poetic command even and manoeverability of the language his skill in comparing ingenious chromograms.

Lastly a few words may be said about the subject matter of the poetical output of Reza. The entire collection is exclusively devoted to the exposition and propagation of the tenets of Sufism. The assessment as to how far he has been successful in his endeavour to propound his sufistic ideas and belief is best left to those who are well-versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of Sufism. Though as stated above he belonged to Shattari order of the Sufis, which he considers to be the nearest approach to Truth (God), his verses do not seem to furnish any coherent or explicit accounts of the tenets or practices, the follower of this order has to be obscure. He speaks of Sufism, the tenets of *Wahadtul-wujud* or *wahadatus shuhud*, *Ayan-I-thabita* etc. in usual general terms and exhorts his readers to put them in practice. He also refers or quotes the Sufi teaching as stated by Shaikh Fariduiddin Attar, Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, Shaikh Mohammad Shabistri, Khwaja Hafiz Shirazi, and the like and also refers to characters from the *Shah Nama* of Firdausi, the *Mantaqut Tair*, of Attar, *Sikandar Nama* of Nizami and Jami's *Yusuf Zulaikha* and also refers in one place of

Khawaja Abu Nasr Farahi the well known author of *Nisabus-Sibyan*. (ff 56b, 59a, 61a, 81a etc.).

He also lays stress in the strict observance of religion shariat, deep love for the Prophet, *Ali-I-bait* and the first Four Caliphs. A fairly good number of verses are in the praise of Hazrat Ali and his son Hazrat Immam Husain. He also speaks of universal love and catholicity of belief, the basic tenets of Sufism. Other favourite sufistic themes like love for God, disregard for the world and worldly affairs, selflessness, etc., also find expression in the some forcefully style.

The poet's verses also furnish indirectly of course some idea of the social or living conditions of people. He refers to colour dying gray beard and hair (f 11a), the *maa hazar* (whatever meal is ready in the house when some one unexpectedly makes a visit at eating time) of an ordinary man comprising *nan (roti)* and onion (67a) etc. He also refers to Indian birds like *Koyal* (nightingale) flowers like *baila* and *chameli* (Jasemine) in the garden of Hind (India). The river Chambal (in Madhya Pradesh) or Tribeni (Triveni), Ganga and Jamuna (at Prayag, Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh), the Zunnardar (sacred-thread wearing) Brahmin; a Hindu or (sadhu or lady) with a black mole and disheveled tresses; the characters Lorark and Chanda of the famous Bhasha (Hindi dialect) classic chandayan (of Mulla Daud of which comparatively not many Persian and Urdu readers are aware), etc.

In a curious allegorical piece, the meaning of which I have not been able to comprehend completely, Reza speaks of pigeons (*Kabutar*) named *Mohana* (?) *Sabz* (green) and *Udi* (aloe-wood-like) flying high up in circle in air, descending upon the earth etc. This perhaps has some meaning of the soul's journey in its quest of Truth (ff 36b, 37a, comprising eleven verses).

Here the time does not permit me to quote verses of Reza for the assessment of readers, but it can be said that most of his verses are of uniform quality, some *Ghazals*, *Qitas*, *Rubais* etc. being entirely of uniform poetic quality.