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POET-LAUREATE OF MUGHAL COURT OF EMPEROR AKBAR SHAIKH ABUL FAIZ FAIZI

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ABSTRACT:

As the title suggests the present paper entitled "Poet-laureate of Mughal court of Emperor Akbar: Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi" primarily deals with the literary personality of Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi, a literary giant and Poet-laureate at the court of Mughal Emperor Akbar. This paper will unravel the various facets of the features and characteristics of his valuable literary productions which contributed a lot to the development of Indo-Persian literature in the sixteenth century medieval Indian subcontinent. Moreover it sheds light on the importance and relevance of Indo-Persian literature produced by the great scholar even today in the twenty first century modern world of science and technology. Abul Faiz Faizi, the Poet-laureate (Malek ush Sho'ara), was not only a poet but also a great thinker and a brilliant intellectual of sixteenth century medieval Indian subcontinent.



Some of his important literary contributions include "Sawati-ul-Ilham" "Tabashir-us-Subah" "Nal-o-Daman" (Nala and Damayanti), "Markaz-e- Adwar" (The centre of circle) "Sulaiman-o-Bilqis" (Solomon and Bilqis) "Haft Kishwar" (The seven zones of the earth) and a voluminous Divan of verses which contains Ghazals qasidas, masnavis and Rubais. The aim of the present paper is to bring into sharper focus on the variety and dimension available in the literary productions of Faizi. I hope that interesting facts will emerge during the discussion, motivating scholars to take up further research in this field of study. This is worth mentioning here that the present paper is an indispensable reference for the scholars for the study of Indo-Persian literature.

KEYWORDS: Key words include Emperor Akbar, Poet-laureate (Malek-ush-Sho'ara), Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi, Indo-Persian literature, Sanskrit texts, translations, Indian philosophy and wisdom, national treasure, Morales and ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Persian language and literature flourished during Mughal period. Akbar's reign was the golden period of Persian language and literature in the Indian subcontinent. A variety of genres of poetry and prose emerged in this period. Great

poets like Naziri Neshapuri, Ghazali Mashhadi, 'Urfi Shirazi, Qasim Kahi, Maily Haravi, Shakebai Isfahani, Abul Faiz Faizi and others are just a few names from the galaxy of accomplished poets of this period.

Life and works: Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi, popularly known by his pen name Faizi, was the eldest son of

Shaikh Mubarak who was a renowned scholar of Nagaur, India. Shaikh Mubarak was a man of comprehensive genius. In other words Faizi was the elder brother of a great historian of Medieval India, Abul Fazal Allami. Shaikh Mubarak migrated from Nagaur to Agra and settled there. Faizi was born at Agra on 20th September,

1547 A.D.¹. His father Shaikh Mubarak was great scholar, philosopher, litterateur and Islamic theologian. Faizi was mostly educated by his father. Shaikh Mubarak managed to gain access to the court of Emperor Akbar through the good offices of Mirza 'Aziz Kukah. Faizi gained access to the court of Emperor Akbar in 1566 A.D. At the age of twenty Faizi came to Emperor Akbar's notice in 1567. Faizi along with his brother Shaikh Abul Fazal Allami gradually impressed Akbar and became his chief counselor. Akbar received him most favorably². He in short time became Emperor's constant companion and friend³. Faizi served Akbar in various capacities. He held important post of Poet-laureate (*Malik-us-sho'ara*). He played an active role in the diplomatic affairs in Deccan. Faizi was active and an early riser⁴. Having recognized the genius in him, Akbar had appointed him tutor for his princes Salim (Jahangir), Murad and Daniyal. After the death of Ghazali Mashhadi, the 1st poet-laureate of Mughal court, Emperor Akbar made Faizi his Poet-laureate (*Malik-us-sho'ara*) in 1588. Abul Fazal rightly says, "His majesty understood the value of his genius, and conferred upon him the title of '*Malik-us-sho'ara*' or king of the poet⁵. He had performed his duty as the Mughal envoy at Khandesh and Ahmad Nagar. He was a great poet and scholar of late medieval India. With sincerity and zeal he strived to make his master's reign an era of success. He promoted the policy of universal peace (*Sulh-e-kul*). He was one of the nine Jewels (*Navaratanas*) of Akbar's court. Being impressed by Faizi, Akbar included him in the list of *Navaratanas*. Faizi died of asthma on 5th October, 1595⁶ at Lahore. On Faizi's death also Akbar was grieved and threw his turban⁷ on the ground and wept aloud beside Faizi.

A brilliant intellectual, great scholar, renowned poet and an extremely prolific writer Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi is reported to be the author of about hundred books. Unfortunately all the titles are not known to us. He had great authority over Persian language. He composed significant poetic works in Persian. Some of his important literary contributions include "*Mawaridul Kalam*" "*Sawati-ul-Ilham*" (Rays of inspiration) "*Nal-o-Daman*" (Nala and Damayanti), "*Markaz-e-Adwar*" (The centre of circle) "*Sulaiman-o-Bilqis*" (Solomon and Bilkis) "*Haft Kishwar*" (The seven zones of the earth) and a voluminous *Divan* of verses titled "*Tabashir-us-Subah*" which contains Ghazals *qasidas*, *masnavis* and *Rubais*. Brief description of his works are given below which will be great importance for the readers.

1. *Sawati-ul-Ilham* (Rays of inspiration): *Sawati-ul-Ilham* is commentary on the *Qur'an* without dotted letters. *Sawati-ul-Ilham* reflects his power of imagination and articulation which is very famous in the literary world.

2. Reports: Faizi wrote a celebrated series of reports on political and cultural conditions of Deccan during his stay in Deccan from 1591-1593. They are original records of that period. They are primary source of history.

3. *Khamsah* or *Panj Ganj* (literally five treasures): Faizi wrote *Khamsah* or *Panj Ganj* (literally five treasures) in imitation of *Khamsah-e-Nizami Ganjavi*. *Panj Ganj* comprises of "*Nal-o-Daman*" (Nala and Damayanti), "*Markaz-e-Adwar*" (The centre of circle) "*Sulaiman-o-Bilqis*" (Solomon and Bilkis) "*Haft Kishwar*" (The seven zones of the earth) and *Akbar Namah* (The history of Akbar) (incomplete). They are *masnavis*.

(i) *Nal-o-Daman* (Nala and Damayanti): As mentioned above Faizi versified love stories including the love story of Nala and Damayanti in the form of *masnavi*. *Nal-o-Daman* basically is a love story which narrates the romance of two lovers named Nala and Damayanti born in the province of Malwah. Nala was the *rajah* of Ujjain who fell in love with the sweetheart *Damayanti*. *Nal-o-Daman* is one of the most famous *masnavis* produced in India. Emperor Akbar asked Faizi to compose the love story in Persian. It is Persian version of the famous Indian epic *Nala and Damayanti*. It was completed in 1594. It was composed in response to the *Laila-o-Majnun of Nizami Ganjavi*. It comprises of four thousand couplets.

(ii) *Markaz e Adwar* (The centre of circle): "*Markaz e Adwar*" (The centre of circle) is deductive *masnavi* which was versified on the model of the famous *masnavi* of *Nizami Ganjavi* entitled *Makhzanul Asrar*. It is available even today.

4. *Divan of verses: Tabashir-us-Subah* (collection of poetry): A voluminous *Divan* of verses titled *Tabashir-us-Subah* chiefly comprises of *Ghazals qasidas*, *Rubais* and elegies. It consists of around nine

thousand couplets. In the field of poetry Faizi was the next to Khan-e-Aarzu and Amir Khusraw. He was a genius poet.

Translation: One of the most significant literary contributions of the royal court of Akbar was the establishment of the translation bureau which took up the task of translations of various literary as well as religious Sanskrit texts into Persian. Akbar had firmly intended to translate the sacred religious books into Persian on priority basis. Faizi had undertaken this large project of rendering the sacred books into Persian. In order to complete the project he acquired mastery of Sanskrit language. He has translated various ancient Sanskrit texts into Persian language. His translation works include *Lilawati*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and *Yogvashist*.

Lilawati: He translated *Lilawati*, an astronomical and mathematical celebrated Sanskrit treatise of Bhaskaracharya, into Persian which became very famous. According to Prof. Nbi Hdi, "Faizi's translation gave further dimension to the fame of *Lilawati*"⁸.

The Mahabharata: He translated the Mahabharata from Sanskrit into Persian language along with Naqib Khan, Mulla Abdul Qadir Badayuni and Mullah Sheri.

Bhagavad-Gita: He translated the Bhagavad-Gita from Sanskrit into Persian language along with Naqib Khan, Mulla 'Abdul Qadir Badayuni and Mullah Sheri.

Extracts from Faizi's Ghazals: In order to acquaint the non-Persian readers with the poetic taste of Faizi I give below English translation of few couplets of Faizi.

Faizi, is there anyone in this world that possesses more patience and strength than he who can twice walk down his street.

Desires are not to be found within my dwelling; when thou come, come with a content heart.

Renounce love; for love is an affair which cannot be satisfactorily terminated. Neither fate nor the beloved will ever submit to thy wishes⁹.

Prof. Waris Kirmani very rightly opines, "His verses reflect the inquisitiveness and rationality which characterized ancient Greek thinkers...consequently, some of his contemporaries bitterly criticized him and some scholars still hold him responsible for the so called heresies of Akbar"¹⁰.

CONCLUSION

Having discussed at length on the importance and relevance of the literary contributions of Faizi I am of the view that since their creation they have been the primary sources of ethics, knowledge, wisdom and philosophy of life. In view of their importance and relevance we need to discuss them again and again. Faizi succeeded Ghazali Mashhadi as the poet laureate of the royal court. He was a versatile poet. He composed significant poetic works in Persian. He composed a voluminous *Divan* of verses which chiefly comprises of Ghazals *qasidas*, *Rubais* and elegies. Some of the orthodox Muslim clergies stood against some of his views. Two religious figures of the Mughal court named Shaikh 'Abdun Nabi and Makhdumul Mulk had instigated Emperor Akbar against Faizi. They bitterly criticized him. But later on Faizi impressed Akbar and became his counselor, companion and moreover the Poet-laureate (*Malek ush Sho'ara*) of royal court.

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