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HADI SABZEWARI AND CRITICAL STUDY OF HIS MAGNUM OPUS ‘SHARH-E-MATHNAWI’

INTRODUCTION

Being a Masters in Persian as well as Arabic, I was keen to approach my research in Modern Persian Literature with a topic that allowed me to explore both these languages.

Of equal interest to me were sciences like philosophy and tasawwuf and their close relation with Modern Persian Literature.

On consulting my respected teachers from the department and colleagues I concluded that the Qajar era of Persian history (1789-1925 AD) presented a ripe opportunity to explore my subject of research given the advances of Persian literature in that era. This is a short period in Iranian history and often ignored by researchers for that reason.

A cursory glance at the Qajar period revealed many names, but none caught my attention like Hadi Sabzewari and consequently I selected the aforementioned nomenclature for my research.

Hadi Sabzewari was a rare breed - a poet-philosopher and mystic of the 19th century in the Qajar era. He wrote poetry under the pen name ‘Asrar’. He is considered the greatest philosopher of the 19th century, who also wrote poetry – a rare combination for any individual.

Any attempt to evaluate the progress of Persian literature and sciences like gnosis / mysticism and philosophy in the Qajar era would be incomplete without assessing the role of its greatest exponent. Hence a study in the life, time and works of Hadi Sabzewari with specific reference to his contribution to Persian literature forms a crucial topic for a student of Persian arts.

Possessed with the gift for poetry and eloquence and great intellectual intuition, Sabzewari appears more as a Sufi poet well versed in philosophy than a philosopher interested in gnostic doctrines.

Sabzewari left a permanent impact on various domains like philosophy, mysticism, theology, jurisprudence, logic, oratory, exegesis on Quran and supplications with the finesse of a master of Persian and Arabic literature.

He achieved this at a time when many of these sciences had been buried under centuries of neglect. He revived them in a manner so as to create a launchpad for deeper progress in the following eras.

It is no wonder that none other Muhammad Iqbal Lahori considers Sabzewari as the greatest Iranian contemporary thinker. Likewise, some call him the 'Plato of the time'.

The dissertation on Hadi Sabzewari delves into his contribution to Persian literature with specific references to his exposition on Rumi's Mathnawi.

It is hoped that this study will ignite interest in the progress of Persian literature during the Qajar dynasty.

The subject matter of the research spans across five chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. At the end of the dissertation, bibliography and necessary appendices are included. The description of the content is as follows:

- INTRODUCTION
- Chapter 1: PERSIAN LITERATURE IN QAJAR ERA
- Chapter 2: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION OF IRAN DURING THE QAJAR ERA
- Chapter 3: LIFE AND WORKS OF HADI SABZEWARI
- Chapter 4: LITERARY CONTRIBUTION OF HADI SABZEWARI TO PERSIAN LITERATURE
- Chapter 5: A CRITICAL STUDY OF 'SHARHE MATHNAWI' – HADI SABZEWARI'S MAGNUM OPUS
- CONCLUSION
- BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chapter 1 - Persian Literature in Qajar era

Poetry and Literature in the Qajar era is complex and has given rise to different opinions.

There are many aspects about the literature in the era, translation movement, humor writing, requiem, epic literature, among other variations.

The most important development of this era was of course "Return of literature" due to which most of the poems in this period were undergoing transformation.

This chapter will discuss at length the development and transformation of poetry in the Qajar era poem. Lesser attention will be paid to prose, except in important cases. This demarcation is mainly due to the greater advancement of poem vis-à-vis prose in the era.

Chapter 2- Social, Cultural, Political and Economic Condition of Iran during the Qajar Era

When Mohammad Khan Qajar established the dynasty, Iran was a weak state. Its borders were ill-defined, it ran a poor economy, deteriorating infrastructure with much political turmoil.

From this abysmal low, the country turned around under the stewardship of the Qajars.

It is not surprising therefore that many of the later cultural, social, and political movements have their roots in the Qajar period.

For instance, Amir Kabir (1807–1852), the chief minister to Nasir al-Din Shah, established Dar al-Fonun. This was the first modern school in Iran, seen by many as the beginning of cultural and social reform in the country.

The use of modern technologies, such as the telegraph, was a high point.

During the Qajar period, Iran's historical attempts to acquire printing machines, dating back as early as the Safavid dynasty in the sixteenth century, were finally fulfilled at Tabriz under the patronage of the crown prince Abbas Mirza.

Consequently the first official Persian newspaper, the weekly Vaqaye'-e Ettefaقيه, was also published in 1851 in Persian.

It was also the tyranny of the Qajars that sowed the seeds of a struggle for democracy in the country.

Chapter 3- Life and Works of Haji Hadi Sabzewari

Sabzewari was born in 1212/1797 in Sabzewar—a city in the Khurasan province of Iran, near Mashhad.

His father, Mirza Mahdi who was known as Tajir or merchant was a philanthropist having constructed a mosque and a cistern in Sabziwar. Mirza Mahdi Tajir endowed a portion of his property to feed the poor Muslims. Sabzewari's mother, Zinat al-Hajiya, was a woman from a religious family in Sabzewar.

Sabzewari started learning religious disciplines when he was eight years old.

At the age of ten he went to Mashhad where he continued his studies in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), logic, mathematics, and *philosophy* for another ten years.

He left Mashhad to pursue the intellectual sciences and journeyed to Isfahan, as Mulla Sadra had done two hundred and fifty years before him.

He returned to Mashhad and started teaching philosophy, jurisprudence, etc. He sojourned in Kerman for a while, and then returned to his birthplace, Sabzewar, and taught in the Seminary School of Fasihiyya, parts of which survive till date.

Unlike his idol Mulla Sadra, who wrote primarily in Arabic, Sabzewari wrote in Arabic as well as Persian. His commentary on Mathnawi of Rumi and his Persian essays bear testimony to his love for the arts in addition to the sciences.

He received the simple title / designation of Haji – something that is accorded by the Persians only to the greatest luminaries e.g. Shaikh for Ibn Sina, Maulana for Jalal al-Din Rumi, Khwajah for Nasir al-Din Tusi, Akhund for Mulla Sadra.

Sabzewari never made a living from the exchequer; he made his living from his own farm.

He died in 1873 AD.

In this chapter, all the available source materials pertaining to the life and works of Hadi Sabzewari will be reviewed. Various aspects of his life, particularly from the standpoint of Persian literature will be highlighted, so as to present a comprehensive picture of his personality before the readers of Persian language and literature.

Likewise, views of different personalities / scholars on the life and works of Hadi Sabzewari will also be presented.

Chapter 4 – Literary Contribution of Hadi Sabzewari to Persian Literature

The works of Hadi Sabzewari add up to nearly fifty-two works in both Arabic and Persian.

These works deal mostly with:

- i. philosophy
- ii. literature and poetry
- iii. jurisprudence, and what in general terms is called theology

The corpus of his works includes independent books, commentaries on well-established earlier texts as well as on his own works, and also answers to questions posed by students or other scholars.

His command over the Persian literature combined with an acute understanding of philosophy endeared him to the king of the era – Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar. The king who was a regular at Sabzewari's residence requested him to write for him a book in Persian containing the complete cycle of traditional philosophy. Sabzewari obliged and composed the *Asraril Hekam*, which is dedicated to Nasir al-Din Shah, and another one called *Hedayatil Talibin*.

His most significant work in Persian literature is the commentary (Sharh) on Rumi's *Mathnawi* as also his Persian essays.

In this chapter, the literary works of Hadi Sabzewari including his Persian exposition on philosophy and mysticism will be explored at length.

Chapter 5 – A Critical Study of ‘Sharh-e-Mathnawi’ – Hadi Sabzewari’s Magnum Opus

Sharh-e-Mathnawi of Sabzewari occupies a unique place among the numerous commentaries on the Mathnawi insofar as it is the only widely documented philosophical commentary on the Mathnawi. It offers insight in Rumi’s teachings through rational and metaphysical debates, while other commentators adopted a literary or Sufi approach. Evidently, the author has taken great care to clarify Mathnawi’s more complex expressions and allusions.

Hadi Sabzewari's familiarity with Islamic and Greek philosophy, theology and jurisprudence makes him a worthy candidate to interpret the difficult theological and philosophical subjects discussed by Rumi, in his masterpiece ‘Mathnawi-e-Manawi’

Sabzewari’s frequent references to and quotes of famous philosophers and sufis feature throughout his commentary, in the main body or the footnotes, to support his views thereby showcasing his fluency and competence as a formidable Mathnawi commentator.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter indicates, the summary of the research findings will be presented.

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