On the Prose Allegory *Sabras*¹⁾

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As pre-Urdu literature attained its full development under the patronage of the Muslim kingdoms in the Deccan, it is especially called Dakhinī (Deccanī) literature. On the contrary, in its original home in northern India, pre-Urdu remained a mere spoken language from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.²⁾ The age of Dakhinī literature can be divided into four periods: (1) the Bahmanī period in Gulbarga and Bidar (1347-c. 1520), (2) the 'Ādil Shāhī period in Bījāpūr (1490-1686), (3) the Quṭb Shāhī period in Golkunḍa and Ḥaidarābād (1512-1687) and (4) the Mughal period in Ḥaidarābād and Aurangābād (1686-1750).

Generally speaking, verse had been superior to prose both in quality and quantity throughout these four hundred years. Although the sprout of prose literature in pre-Urdu can be traced back to the end of the fourteenth century, almost all the early prose works are religious booklets called *risālas* which Ṣūfīs wrote with the purpose of spreading the Ṣūfī doctrine among the people at large. In the history of Urdu literature, *Mi'rāj al-'Āshiqīn* (Ascent of Lovers) of Saiyid Muḥammad Ḥusainī 'Gesū Darāz' (d. 1422) is regarded as the first prose work, but the appearance of a work of real literary values had to be waited till *Sabras*. And after *Sabras*, Urdu *dāstān* literature in prose developed into one of the main genres of Urdu literature.³⁾

Sabras is a courtly allegory of love in rhymed prose which was written by the court poet Mullā Wajhī (his real name was Asad-Allāh) in 1634 by order of the seventh Sulṭān 'Abd-Allāh Quṭb Shāh (1625-1672) of the Quṭb Shāhīs. Wa-

1) Mullā Wajhī, *Sabras*. Ed. by 'Abd al-Ḥaqq. 3rd ed. Karachi, Anjuman-i Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1964.

2) Aziz Ahmad, *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*. Edinburgh, 1969. p. 95.

3) Gyān Cand, *Urdū kī Naṣrī Dāstān*. 2nd ed. Karachi, Anjuman-i Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1969. pp. 123-130.

jhī is famed as the first Malik al-Shu'arā or the poet laureate of Golkunḍa and is well-known as the author of the *maṣnavī*, *Quṭb-Mushtarī* (1609), celebrating the love of the fifth Sulṭān Muḥammad-Qulī Quṭb Shāh (1580-1611) for a courtesan. Besides these two works, his *Tāj al-Ḥaqā'iq* (Crown of Truths) in prose and the Persian *Dīvān*, an anthology of poems, remain but his Urdu *Dīvān* has not yet been unearthed.⁴⁾

The title *Sabras* means 'sab kā ras' or 'the essence of all'. This *ras* in Urdu is equal to *rasa* in Sanskrit signifying in Indian poetry and music a mood or a feeling that is predominated in a work of art or a part thereof. There are nine basic *rasas*, viz. the erotic sentiment, the sentiment of humor, the pathetic sentiment, heroism, indignation, terror, disgust, surprise and tranquility. Therefore *Sabras* can be also interpreted to be a story containing all of the nine *rasas*, namely *sabras* or 'all the *rasas*'.

The story may be epitomised as follows: (Almost all the characters are personified parts of human body and various human qualities.)

The hero of the story, Prince Dil (Heart), son of King 'Aql (Reason), rules a city named Tan (Body) and is seeking for Āb-i Ḥayāt (the Water of Life). Naẓar (Glance), spy of the prince, is ordered to trace the Water. Passing through a city 'Āfiyat (Well-being) of King Nāmūs (Fame) and crossing over the Zuhd (Abstinence) mountains, he meets King Himmat (Bravery) of Hidāyat (Guidance), from whom he hears that Āb-i Ḥayāt is in the East over Mt. Qāf. The East is under dominance of King 'Ishq (Love), whose daughter is named Ḥusn (Beauty). She lives in a city Dīdār (Aspect), which is also called Gulzār-i Ruḵṣār (Garden of Countenance), where lies the fountain Dahān (Mouth) of Āb-i Ḥayāt.

After going through innumerable hardships, Naẓar reaches Dīdār with the help of Zulf (Tress), a friend of Ḥusn but is caught by a magician Ghamza (Ogle). It proving that both Naẓar and Ghamza are brothers, they presented themselves before Ḥusn. When Naẓar opens whole affairs to her, Ḥusn imme-

4) Muḥī al-Dīn Qādirī Zor, *Dakani Adab ki Tarīkh*. Dihlī, Book Emporium, n. d. pp. 62-63.

diately falls in love with Dil.

Ḥusn orders Naẓar and Khayāl (Thought) to bring Dil to Dīdār. They arriving at Tan and talking to Dil about Ḥusn, he is also captivated by Ḥusn's beauty. But Wahm (Fancy), vizier of the prince, discloses this to King 'Aql. Dil, Khayāl and Naẓar are casted into prison. Then Naẓar runs away from prison by the aid of the ring given by Ḥusn and a few hairs of Zulf and at last he can get to the Ḥusn's palace. In order to rescue Dil and Khayāl, Ḥusn makes Ghamza accompanied with Naẓar. At this time King 'Aql has already issued orders for arresting Naẓar to various places. Naẓar and Ghamza fight against the troops of Tauba (Repentance) and after winning a victory, went to the city 'Āfiyat of King Nāmūs, where three of them disguise themselves as qalandars.

On the other hand, King 'Aql releases Dil from prison and persuades him to conquer the city of King 'Ishq. At the head of a mighty army of lieutenant Ṣabr (Patience), Dil goes toward Dīdār. Ḥusn enlists the aid of 'Ishq in order to fight with Dil and then 'Ishq confronts lieutenant Mihr (Affection). Dil is shot in the breast by the arrow of Hiyāl (New Moon) and carried to Ḥusn. Ḥusn takes advice from the nurse Nāz (Coquetry) that Dil should be imprisoned down in the Cāh-i Zaqaṇ (Dimple of the Chin). King 'Aql being taken hold of by Zulf, the West is at length conquered by the East.

Ḥusn and Dil are sent to the Qaṣr-i Wiṣāl (Castle of Union) in secret by Wafā (Fidelity), a most magnificent banquet being spread before them. But unfortunately Ghair (Outsider), daughter of Raqīb (Rival), becomes inconstant in love with Dil. Dil is exiled by Ḥusn and is imprisoned in the Qilla-i Hijrān (Fort of Separation). But Ghair writes a letter of apology to Ḥusn. Receiving the letter, Ḥusn becomes ashamed for having treated innocent Dil in such a way.

The story is ended by the intermediation of Himmat. By Himmat's directions 'Aql becomes a vizier of 'Ishq and Ḥusn and Dil get married with great pomp. At last the days full of wars come to an end. Dil, Himmat and Naẓar find Āb-i Ḥayāt in the Gulzār-i Rukhsār, when the saint Khawāja Khizr appears and reveals the secrets of Āb-i Ḥayāt.

It is clear from the gist of the story above mentioned that *Sabras* deals with

the most profound problems of Sufism. Now it is necessary to allude to the original of *Sabras*, which offers more impotrant points of view. Judging from the chapter on 'A Motive of Writing',⁵⁾ it seems as if *Sabras* were of Wajhī's own creating. But by 'Abd al-Ḥaqq's researches⁶⁾ it proved that Wajhī had copied from a Persian story, that is, an allegorical *maṣnavī*, *Dastūr-i 'Ushshaq* (Handbook for Lovers) of about five thousand distichs and *Ḥusn u Dil*⁷⁾ (Beauty and Heart) in beautiful rhymed prose, a brief summary of the former, both of which were written by Muḥammad bin Yaḥyā Sibak 'Fattāḥī' of Nīshāpūr⁸⁾ (d. 1448). The story of *Ḥusn u Dil* was adapted by the Turkish poets in Ottoman Turkey and by the Persian and Urdu poets and prose writers in India.⁹⁾ Only in India five copies, including *Sabras*, were adapted and translated from this story in the seventeenth century, which shows that this allegory of Sufism obtained great popularity.

A discussion about the origin of the story being avoided,¹⁰⁾ in this place attention will be directed to the problems related to Urdu literature. The first problem is the style in which both *Sabras* and *Ḥusn u Dil* are written. This style, called *saj'* or rhymed prose, is formed by folding up the rhymed sentences one after another and is indispensable for prose to produce rhetorical effects. It owes its origin to Arabic literature. Beginning with the *Qur'an*, gradually proceeding to the *Maqāmāts* of Badī' al-Zamān and Ḥarīrī, *saj'* became specially characteristic of Arabic *maqāmāt* literature. After it was introduced into Persian literature, the *Maqāmāt* of Ḥamīdī and the *Tārīkh-i Waṣṣāf*, etc. were written in this style.

There is very little doubt that Wajhī himself adopted the style of *Ḥusn u*

5) *Sabras* : 51-52.

6) *Sabras* : 7.

7) Muḥammad bin Yaḥyā Sibak Nīshābūrī, *Ḥusn u Dil*. Ed. by Ghulāmriṣā Farzānapūr. Tehran, Kitābkhāna-i Ṭahūrī, 1351; Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*. Dordrecht-Holland, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1968. pp. 284-5.

8) *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New ed. Vol. 2. Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1965, p. 865.

9) *Sabras* : 8-9. 38-43.; Gyān Cand : 124-125.

10) For the origin of the story *Ḥusn u Dil* see 'Azīz Aḥmad, 'Sabras ke mākhaz aur mumāṣilāt' *Urdū*, Jan. Apr., 1950.

Dil along with its contents. Then didn't Wajhī refer to *Dastūr-i 'Ushshāq* in preparing *Sabras*? 'Abd al-Ḥaqq points out:¹¹⁾ 'Wajhī referred to Fattāhī's *Ḥusn u Dil* in prose but *Dastūr-i 'Ushshāq* did not catch his notice. There are several reasons. The first is that Wajhī imitated the style of *saj'*, the second is that what is explained in detail in *Dastūr-i 'Ushshāq* is treated briefly in *Ḥusn u Dil* and *Sabras*.' Azīz Aḥmad gives an adverse opinion:¹²⁾ 'The printed edition of *Sabras* numbers three hundred pages and *Dastūr-i 'Ushshāq* is consisted of five thousand distichs. But on the contrary *Ḥusn u Dil* in prose written by Fattāhī is of about four hundred and fifty lines. I think that Wajhī was aware of the existence of *Ḥusn u Dil* and even of *Dastūr-i 'Ushshāq*.'

In order to solve this question, attention must be called to the literary circumstances in the Deccan courts of those days. Although the Dakhinī language was given rank as an official and literary language in the Deccan courts, first under the Bahmanī reign, Persian literature was traditionally still on head. The style of Persian poetry in the subcontinent, known as the *sabk-i Hindī*¹³⁾ or Indian style was going to reach its culmination. Here is an instance of Persian stylistic *belles-lettres* in *saj'*, *Siḥ Naṣr* (Three Prose Works) of Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṭāhir 'Zuhūrī' (d. 1615), the court poet of Bijāpūr. It is consisted of three parts: *Nauras* (Nine Styles) written as an introduction of Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh II's music book *Nauras*, *Gulzar-i Ibrāhīm* (Garden of Ibrahim) and *Khāni Khālī*. It can be reasoned that this flowery affected prose work exerted a deep influence on Wajhī and that he introduced more highly rhetorical and ornate style into Dakhinī literature, excluding the dry and tasteless style as in the past. Wajhī writes in the introduction of *Sabras* as follows:¹⁴⁾

āj lagan, ko'i is jahān meñ, hindustān meñ, hindī zabān sauñ, is laṭāfat is chandān sauñ, naẓm haur naṣr milā kar galā kar yūñ naiñ bolyā.

(Up to this day, no one in the world or in India spoke in such an elegant and

11) *Sabras*: 10-11.

12) 'Azīz Aḥmad, 'Sabras ke.....' pp. 9-10.

13) Aziz Aḥmad, *I. H. I. I.* pp. 77-78.; Aziz Aḥmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*. London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969. pp. 228-231.

14) *Sabras*: 54.

artistic expression, mingling verse and prose.)

Saj' had since been the fixed style of prose writing till the time of Fort William College (1800). *Nau Tarz-i Muraṣṣa'* (New Form of Adorned Speech) of Mir Muḥammad Ḥusain 'Aṭā Khān 'Taḥsīn' can be counted among the best.

Another characteristic of *Sabras* is that the refined literary aroma and the exotic mood are produced by interspersing Arabic and Persian *dohās* or couplets and proverbs; while the Indian color is also added by means of *dohās* of Braj Bhāṣhā (which Wajhī calles Gwāliyārī).

After *Sabras*, any other example of allegory can almost never be seen in Urdu literature. The reason of it is probably that the Sufistic symbolism could be fulfilled by development of the *ghazal* or love lyric. Another example will be appended: Rajab 'Alī Beg Surūr's *Gulzār-i Surūr* (c. 1850), a prose rendering of the Persian *maṣnavī*, *Ḥadā'iq al-'Ushshāq* (Fruit-garden of Lovers).¹⁵⁾

There are bestiaries like *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* (Brethren of Purity) in Arabic, *Anwār-i Suhailī* (Lights of Canopus) in Persian and *Hitopadeśa* in Sanskrit, but no example similar to *Ḥusn u Dil* except the above mentioned Persian work and Kṛishṇamīśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*¹⁶⁾ (Moonrise of Spiritual Awakening) in Sanskrit.

Lastly the relation to the *dāstān* will be mentioned. The theme of the *dāstān* is Beauty (ḥusn) and Love ('ishq) and its contents are always both imaginary and nonrealistic. The plot of the story is worked on by following elements: the sequence of scenes, strained interpretations of facts, disorder, unlooked-for events, admiration, uneasiness and so on. The hero and the heroine are the prince and the princess, and the *devs* or demons and the *paris* or fairies appear on the stage along with Mt. *Qāf*.¹⁷⁾ If an allegory is excluded from *Sabras*, the structure of the *dāstān* will come out. (July 16. 1973)

15) Gyān Cand : 123.

16) Rāhul Saṅkṛityāyan, *Dakḥiṇī Hīndī-Kāvyaadhara*. Paṭṇā, Bihār-rāshṭrabhāṣhā-parishad, 1959. p. 30.; Naoshirō Tsuji, *Sansukuritto Bungakushi*. Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1973. pp. 102-104.

17) Gyān Cand : 54. 72. 75.