

Faghani, the Fascinator of South Asian Persian Poets

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ABSTRACT

The impact of Persian language and literature on South Asia in general and Indo-Pak subcontinent in particular is unparalleled to any other language or literature. The cultural traditions, historical bequest, philosophical birthright, religious inheritance and literary heritage of the Muslims of South Asia have been preserved in Persian. Amazingly, this so-called foreign language remained the official and court language of South Asia during the Muslim period and even the Sikh regime followed the course. The classical Persian poetry is divided into three foremost literary styles, namely Khorasani, Iraqi and Indian. Baba Faghani, the founder and innovator of the Indian style has inspired the South Asian Persian poets to a great deal. His impact on every single poet of Indian style is significant and unparalleled. More importantly, he was much highly esteemed in India than in his own country. In this article, poetry of Baba Faghani, the forgotten and neglected fascinator of South Asian Persian poets has been introduced and critically evaluated in the light of some renowned literary criticism and narration.

The Persian literature (Persian Literature. (n.d.). In Encyclopædia Britannica online. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from <http://www.britannica.com>) is privileged to have had sheer brilliance over the past thousand years. The history of world literature is left over and curtailed without extending a lions share to Persian poetry. In addition to that, in the same way, its great impact on Persian literature of South Asia is certainly high-flying. Persian has been the official, cultural, moral and literary language of the Sub-continent, through out the Muslim period and remained the focus of attention of the elite class of the society. The writers, poets, thinkers, philosophers and scholars have been expressing their thoughts, emotions, brilliance, intelligence and ideas in this so-called foreign but undoubtedly, the sweet and culturally rich language in a span of time, which is not less than ten centuries. Such miraculous happening is unparalleled and unprecedented in the human history.

The classical Persian poetry is divided into following three major literary styles. **Khorasani**, (Mahjoub. n.d.): The Persian poetry of the earlier age got the name of Khorasani style.¹ **Iraqi**: The middle age Persian poetry was named after another region, Araq-e-Ajam.² **Indian**: The last classical style of Persian poetry emerged and flourished in Indian Sub-Continent and was named after Indian Style.³

However, for the interest of many, the founder, innovator and inspiration of this great style of Persian poetry was another great from Shiraz, the fertile land of poetry which had already produced some all time legends i.e. Saadi Shirazi (1210-1290) and Hafez Shirazi (1315-1390) and he was Baba Faghani (بابا فغانی) (d. 925 A.H. / 1519).

The scope of Ghazal had amply widened by the ardent poets, and due to the changes in the cultural outlook of the people, erotic love, mysticism, philosophy, and moral and social values had become the subject matter of Persian Ghazal. Baba Faghani created a new school of poetry in the beginning of the Safawi period and poets followed him not only in Iran but also in India (Abdul Ghani, 1960:129-130).

Baba Faghani appears to be one of those poets who are much more highly esteemed in India than in their own country (Browne, 1930: 229-230).

Poetry emerge from emotions and imaginations. Thoughts and sentiments provoke the inner feelings to the extent where the meanings of simple words are changed and overshadow each and everything of the universe. The teller and the listener both are mesmerized. Such a true poet is Baba Faghani who left impact on every single poet in the centuries to come.

Baba Faghani is the great Persian poet of the later half of 9th century A.H. However, very little is known about his early life. The historians, literary critics and scholars have shown serious concerns and doubts even about his real name, his family, his parents and ancestors. However, undoubtedly, he belonged to Shiraz; (Fars), the birth place of many other great poets as earlier mentioned i.e. Saadi (d.1290), Hafez (d. 1390) and later Urfi (d. 1592).

Some of the narrators of Persian poets (تذکره نویسندگان شاعران فارسی) have given some precious information (Khayyampur, 1993:714) about his youth and it is normally assumed that he used to live a dissolute life and was a habitual wine drinker. Soheili Khansari quotes from a manuscript as under:

“Whenever the moon of the holy month of Ramadhan was sighted, the doors of the wine cellars were put to shut for the whole month and were opened in the morning of Eid day. He along with another drunkard got some piece of meat and both confined themselves in a tavern, spent whole of the holy month inside that and drank quite a few pitchers of pure wine” (Soheili Khansari, 1983:10).

Faghani's own verses do verify this fact. As he says:

از گوشه های میکده جویم صفای وقت
کانجا هزار آینه در گل نهاده اند

(Faghani, 1983:207)

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Faghani lived during the reign of Sultan Hossein Mirza Baiqra and Amir Ali Shir Nawai (d.1481 A.D.) was his prime minister and both were great lovers and patrons of literature and Persian poetry in particular. Almost at the age of 30, Faghani paid a visit to Herat and according to many, he met with Nur-u-Din Abd-ar-Rahman Jami (نورالدين عبدالرحمن جامی) (August 18, 1414–November 19, 1492). Then he moved to Azerbaijan which was the centre of learning and knowledge during that time. Sultan Yaqub, the ruler of Azerbaijan, warmly welcomed Faghani and graciously called him Baba. However, after the demise of Sultan Yaqub, Faghani could not stay any more in Azerbaijan and returned to Khorasan.⁴ He spent 17 golden years of his life in Tabriz and Azerbaijan.

The later part of his life was entirely different from his youth and middle age. Now he had become a true believer and pious and was no more a mere drunkard. The last days of his life remind us the life style of Baba Tahir.⁵ He secluded himself for religious service in Mash'had and later passed away in the same holy city in 925 A.H. but nobody has any clue of his grave to this date.⁶

In the beginning, his pen name was Sakkaki but in the collection of his available poetry not even, a single verse is seen having this pen name.

The Divan e *Faghani* (ديوان فغانی) consists of *Elegies* (قصاید), *Odes* (غزلیات), *Composite Ties* (ترکیب بند), *Stanzas* (قطعات) and *Quatrains* (رباعیات).

Faghani school of poetry was called *Tazagui* (تازه گوئی). The Indian poets followed Faghani and this new element evolved a unique fineness not only in thought but also in expression.

Time is akin to ever flowing river that captures everything coming to its way. It has nothing to do with tautness or rigidity. The same principle could be applied to poetry as well. Poets adopt different styles in different spans of time. The Khorasani style was known for its simplicity, utmost ease and natural fluency. The Iraqi style was flourished with the purification of language. During this period, technical terms of various fields of knowledge became the integral part of Persian poetry. Moreover, the Arabic influence was enhanced largely. Then a brand new style was introduced with thorny words, complicated terms, peculiar proverbs, innovative similes, spanking metaphors and furthermore ever increasing amphibology and later it was named the Indian style of Persian poetry. Faghani is the innovator, exciter and founder of this poetic style.

Shibli Nomani (June 3, 1857 - November 18, 1914) admits that founder of the revolutionized poetic style in 10th century A.D. is no other than Faghani (Shibli. 27-30).

Dr. Zabihullah Safa believes that Faghani actually led the Persian poets of 10th century and afterwards (Safa, 1994: 527-529).

Baba Faghani was not a blind follower. He lit the candle of originality and literally created an ingenious style and inspired many generations to come. In the beginning, he faced many hurdles and people did not appreciate his comparatively complicated style and furthermore used to poke fun of its be calling Faghaniyeh (فغانیه). But time tested his theory and proved his brilliance.⁷

Baba was a great admirer of Hafez Shirazi and he has truly reflected the glimpses of Hafez's imagery and imagination and love and lyric with unparalleled sincerity and affection in his poetry. That is why many of the literary critics have called him The Little Hafez (حافظ کوچک) (Rypka).

Although Faghani is rightly considered the inventor of Indian style Persian poetry but the complexity and ambiguity that became the tradition of this style is not found with him. It could easily be called the stunning harmony of Iraqi and Indian style. In particular, he gave a new voice and lyricism to Persian Odes. During pre-Faghani era, the Persian Odes were not as simple but after having gone through his poetry, we find it quite simple. It seems that the poet is talking frankly and expressing our own sentiments (Soheili Khansari, 1983: Twenty Seven).

There is not even a single complex verse found in his entire poetry and it could be easily claimed that his poetry is far from the negative features of notorious Indian style. The following few verses do justify such statement:

رفتی و سراپای تو را سیر ندیدیم
داغی به جگر ماند ز هر جای تو ما را

(Faghani, 1983:88)

شد گرفتار فغانی به کمند عشق
کس نپرسید که آن صید گرفتار کجاست

(Faghani, 1983:163)

نزدیکتر از سایه به او بود فغانی
بس دور فتادست ندانم چه گنه کرد

(Faghani, 1983:209)

Faghani introduced conciseness and novel intricacy with greater emphasis on freshness of similes and metaphors (Ghani, 1960).

Following are the metaphors most frequently used by *Baba*:

پرتو، آینه، چراغ، پروانه، گل، شمع، ساقی

افروختی چراغ فغانی به یک نظر
آری همین بود صفت ذره پروری

(Faghani, 1983:406)

هرگز نداد صحبت بیگانه پرتوی
پیش چراغ خویش چو پروانه سوختیم

(Faghani, 1983:320)

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بی برگ شو که آنکه جهان را دهد فروغ
شاید که شب چراغ نباشد به خانه اش

(Faghani, 1983:286)

روشن دلان چو آینه از غایت صفا
بینند روی خلق و نبینند روی خویش

(Faghani, 1983:292)

گل این وفا ندارد و گلزار این صفا
ای لاله غریب ز صحرای کیستی!؟

(Faghani, 1983:408)

Conciseness and brevity are the salient features of Indian style, and Faghani has exposed his proficiency in expressing enormous meanings in shortest possible lexis, like:

با هر کس مگوی فغانی که عاشقم

(Faghani, 1983:228)

رنگ سخن از خون جگر داد فغانی

(Faghani, 1983:125)

شبهها چراغ خلوت تنهای کیستی

(Faghani, 1983:408)

عشق آمد و در چاه فراموشیم افگند

(Faghani, 1983:218)

می آید از علاج دلت بوی زندگی

(Faghani, 1983:368)

بشکن قفس که بر سر آزاده باج نیست

(Faghani, 1983:123)

رسمی چنان نهاد که نتوان ازان گذشت

(Faghani, 1983:121)

چه امید خیر باشد ز چنین سرشت ما را

(Faghani, 1983:78)

Love is the integral part of his poetry. He is the most celebrated poet of 9th century A.H. as far as lyrical love songs are concerned. There is hardly any Ode in his collection of poetry where we do not find recipe of lusty love. (Safa, 1994: 527-529):

قسمت نگر که کشته شمشیر عشق یافت
مرگی که زندگان به دعا آرزو کنند

(Faghani, 1983:259)

طبع موزون فغانی بین که در گلزار عشق
هر بهار از معنی رنگین چه نخل تازه بست

(Faghani, 1983:158)

There is seldom a single verse without the pain of passion and fervour love. He was a devotee of love in true sense of the word and he has articulated it explicitly. Safa does not find a single Ghazal or even a verse in his poetry without strong passion (Safa, 1994:527-529). There is nobody to put off the fire and flames of his emotions.

آبی بر آتش دل ما هیچکس نزد
چندان که پیش محرم و بیگانه سوختیم

(Faghani, 1983:320)

The tribe of grief has subjugated this feeble and helpless meager individual.

دنبال کرد خیل غمت اهل درد را
من ناتوان تر از همه بودم مرا گرفت

(Faghani, 1983:127)

Now even the heart rendering sighs seem futile-

زین آه دردناک فغانی چه فایده
چون یار بیغم تو نداند که آه چیست

(Faghani, 1983:153)

Obsession of love and abundance of sentiments do stimulate or rather animate the poet and the reader as well. The insanity, madness and lunacy dominate all around and a state of intoxication is emerges.

از غلغله ی سینه ی پر جوش فغانی
آسوده ز گلپانگ هزارست دل ما

(Faghani, 1983:90)

ما نخل خرد از بن و پیوند شکستیم
آشوب جنون تند شد و بند شکستیم

(Faghani, 1983:320)

خوش حالتی که در طلبت گم شوم ز خود
چندان که تا ابد نکنم جستجوی خویش

(Faghani, 1983:291)

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Faghani's personality went under drastic changes during the later part of his life as we observe in the lives of many others i.e. Sanai Ghaznavi (d. 1131 A.D.), Fariduddin Attar Nishapuri (1145-46-1221 A.D.) and Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi (30th September 1207 to 17th December 1273). The true love dominates earthly desires and a drunkard becomes pious mystic. He is ashamed of his youth and regrets openly. Wine loving days are gone and he has got the secret of eternal life. Morality and ethics have replaced the lusty desires.

خلقى به تنگ از من و من از عذاب خویش
شرمنده در میانه ی جمهور مانده ام
در هیچ خرقة نیست ز من ناسزاتری
این هم عنایت ست که مستور مانده ام

(Faghani, 1983:317)

ای دل بیا که نوبت مستی گذشته است
وقت نشاط و باده پرستی گذشته است

(Faghani, 1983:139)

در جگر الماس داری و نمی گویی سخن
زهر می نوشی فغانی و تحمل می کنی

(Faghani, 1983:405)

از عمر بسی نماند ما را
بیش از نفسی نماند ما را
هر سود و زیان که بود دیدیم
دیگر هوسی نماند ما را
ماییم و دل رمیده از خود
دیگر هوسی نماند ما را

(Faghani, 1983:78)

He delivers the ultimate message to keep check on yourself and remain in peace and calm with the others, and then he adds that nothing could be achieved without going through strains and sorrows, furthermore advises to grab the aches with open arms.

با کسان در صلح و با خود دائماً در جنگ باش
هیچ کار از بی غمی نگشایدت دلتنگ باش

(Faghani, 1983:294)

He is a pantheist and expresses his ideas boldly. He finds and observes the ultimate reality everywhere in the universe and resembles himself with flame and fire, and his heart spreads light all around. Moreover, he knows that the path of love guides towards the hereafter.

مشکل حکایتی ست که هر ذره عین او ست
اما نمی توان که اشارت به او کنند

(Faghani, 1983:259)

یک چراغ است درین خانه و از پرتو آن
هر کجا می نگریم انجمنی ساخته اند

(Faghani, 1983:214)

چنین که پیش نظر صورت نکوی تو دارم
به هر طرف که کنم سجده رو به روی تو دارم

(Faghani, 1983:321)

آتش صفتانیم که در خانقه و دیر
هر جا که نشینیم چراغ است دل ما

(Faghani, 1983:100)

هر گام ره عشق ز دنیااست به عقبی
این بادیه را منزل و فرسنگ نبود ست

(Faghani, 1983:108)

He is one of those rare literary figures who had a great impact on many centuries to come. His unique style soon became a school of thought and influenced thousands of poets. Although the style was named, Indian but we seldom find a poet who did not accept his supremacy especially in late 10th and 11th centuries A.H. He could easily be called the greatest ever exciter of South Asian Persian poets. Some great Iranian poets i.e. Urfi Shirazi (d.999 A.H.) Naziri Nishapuri (d.1021 A.H.), Taleb Aamoli (d.1036 A.H.) Abu Taleb Kaleem Kashani (d.1061 A.H.), Saib Tabrizi (d.1088 A.H.), Qodsi Mashhadi (d.1067 A.H.), Zohouri Tarshizi (d.1024 A.H) and Hazin Lahiji (1692-1766) etc. and renowned South Asian Persian poets i.e. Faizi Dakkani (1547-1595), Seraj Ali Khan Aarezu (d.1756), Bidel Dehlavi (1644-1721), Ghaleb Dehlavi (1797-1869) etc. followed his path. Following are few verses that reflect the beauty and elegance of his poetic skills:

از بخت شور و تلخی عمرم خبر نداشت
آن کز خدای خواست به صد آرزو مرا

(Faghani, 1983:94)

He claims the uniformity in his inner and outer self. It goes beyond saying that it is the distinctive feature of a true believer.

خود را چنان که هست به مردم نموده ایم
هر جا که بوده ایم چنین بوده ایم ما

(Faghani, 1983:95)

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His lyrical poetry is of utmost beauty and some of his golden verses remind us the unforgettable lyrics of other Indian style poets.

مقصود صحبت است ز گل ورنه بوی گل
انصاف گر بود ز صبا می توان شنید

(Faghani, 1983:179)

رفتم ز کوی تو چو مقامی نداشتم
دل برگرفتم از تو چو کامی نداشتم

(Faghani, 1983:320)

خوبی همین کرشمه و ناز و خرام نیست
بسیار شیوه هست بتان را که نام نیست

(Faghani, 1983:166)

The literary critics in all ages have admired his poetry at large, but the South Asian narrators have exclusively described him as the greatest exciter of Indian style poetry;

“A self-possessed lyrical poet with extraordinary skills” (Aazar, 1898: 306).

“One of the most celebrated poets of Iran. This great fellow from Shiraz has sung some sweet verses” (Sami, 1935: 102-103).

“The Poet of some elegant and subtle verses” (Sepahsalar, 1937-39: 448-449).

“The most prominent poet of his age” (Siddiq, 1914: 364-365).

“The most outstanding Ghazal poet of his age” (Qodrat, 1957: 528).

“He appears to be one of those poets who are much more highly esteemed in India” (Hosseini, 1292 A.H.: 242).

“Baba Faghani, the little Hafez, was a sensitive, kind-hearted man, a drinker, an ardent lover and a great poet” (Nuri, 1260 A.H.:12).

Saib Tabrizi (1601/1602- 1677 A.D.), one of the most celebrated and flourished poets of Indian style Persian poetry, has categorically accepted the great influence of Faghani on his poetry. He says:

این غزل را پیش ازین هر چند انشا کرده بود
صایب از روح فغانی دیگر استمداد کرد

(Saib, 1994:355)

Deep literary analysis and scientific evaluation reveals that Faghani could easily be named the most significant fascinator and exciter of every single follower of Indian style poetry in general and the South Asian Persian poets in particular.

Notes

1. 10th to 12th century A.D.
2. It is also called the childhood period of Persian poetry and some great poets i.e. Rudaki Samarqandi (858-941), Abu Mansur Daqiqi (d.976/980), Asjadi (d.1072), Unsari (d. 1039/1040), Ferdowsi Tusi (935-1020), Farrokhi Sistani (d. 1037) and Manuchehri Damghani (d. 1040) produced some everlasting verses. *Shahnama* of Ferdowsi is still considered the best epic poetry. While initially overshadowed by Arabic during the Umayyad and early Abbasid caliphates, New Persian soon became a literary language again in the Central Asian lands. The rebirth of the language in its new form is often accredited to Ferdowsi and his generation, as he used pre-Islamic nationalism as a conduit to revive the language and customs of ancient Persia. In particular, says Ferdowsi himself in his *Shahnama*:

بسی رنج بردم در این سال سی

عجم زنده کردم بدین پارسی

"For thirty years, I endured much pain and strife, with Persian I gave the Ajam verve and life"

3. The 13th century marks the ascendancy of lyric poetry with the consequent development of the Ghazal into a major verse form, as well as the rise of mystical and Sufi poetry. This style is often called "Iraqi style", (western provinces of Iran were known as Araq-e-Ajam or Persian Iraq) and is known by its emotional lyric qualities, rich meters, and the relative simplicity of its language. Emotional romantic poetry was not something new however, as works such as *Vis o Ramin* by Asad Gorgani (فخرالدین اسعد گرگانی) (11th century Persian poet), and *Yusof o Zoleikha* by Shihabuddin Am'aq (عمیق), a 12th century Persian poet, exemplify. Poets such as Sana'i (d.1131) and Attar (1145/1146-1221), who ostensibly have inspired Rumi (1207-1273), Khaqani Shirvani (1121/1122-1190), Anvari (1126-1189), and Nezami (1141-1209), were highly respected Ghazal writers. However, the elite of this school are Rumi (1207-1273), Sa'di (1210-1290), and Hafez (1315-1390).
4. In Persian tradition, only a highly respected person is named Baba. Baba is someone equally respected and honored as the father.
5. As he admits in one of his verses:

آلوده شراب فغانی به خاک رفت

آه از ملایکش کفن تازه بو کنند

"Stained with wine, Faghani sank into the earth, Alas if the angles should sniff at his fresh shroud".

6. Baba Taher is known as one of the most revered and respectable early poets in Persian literature. Most of his life is clouded in mystery. He probably lived in Hamadan, the capital city of the Hamedan Province in Iran. He was known by the name of Baba Taher-e Oryan (The Naked) which suggests that he may have been a wandering dervish. Legend tells that the poet, an illiterate woodcutter, attended lectures at a religious school, where he was not welcomed by his fellow-students. The dates of his birth and death are unknown. One source indicates that he died in 1019. If this is accurate, it would make Baba Taher a contemporary of Ferdowsi and Pour Sina (Avicenna) and an immediate precursor of Omar Khayyam. Another source reports that he lived between 1000 and 1055, which is most unlikely. Reliable research notes speculate that Baba Taher lived for seventy-five years. *Rahat al-sodur of Ravandi* (completed 603/1206), describes a meeting between Baba Taher, and the Saljuq conqueror Togrel (pp. 98-99). He could be described as the first great poet of Sufi love in Persian literature. In the last two decades his do-bayts have often been put to music.

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7. Surprisingly the history repeated itself in 20th century when Nima Yushij (1896-1959) (www.artarena.force9.co.uk/nima.htm), father and founder of the modern Persian poetry, introduced new ideology and people called the modern style poetry Nimai (نیمایی).

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