BOOK REVIEWS

Siyar al-Árifin by Ḥāmid ibn Faḍl Allāh, commonly known as Darwīsh Jamāli, Urdu translation by M. Ayyub Qādirī, published by Markaz Urdu Board, Lahore, 1976, price Rs. 15.00

Siyar al-Árifin is the first systematic and well-planned biographical work on the leading mashā'ik (saints) and šuifs (mystics) of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Prior to the compilation of this work by the widely-travelled scholar and šūfī Mawlānā Jamāli Kanbūh, there did not exist any regular work which treated of the šuifs and mashā'ikh who flourished during the Sultanate period or even earlier in the sub-continent. It was written some time between 938/1531 and 941/1535 as it was dedicated to the Moghul emperor Naṣīr al-dīn Humāyūn, who ascended the throne of India in 937/1530, on the death of his father, the emperor Bābur; Jamāli died in 942/1536 (d. Storey, i:970). Giving the reasons for composing this work the author says that on his return home from extensive travels in the lands of Islam, including Mecca, and Medina, Yemen, Palestine, Rūm, Khurāsān, the Maghrib and 'Irāq, when he related his experiences and what he had seen there of the monuments and mausolea, wonders and antiquities, and his meetings with the scholars and pious men of those places; the account he gave of the tombs and burial places (al-Ziyārat) of the prophets and saints of yore he was asked by his friends and well-wishers, men of learning and piety, to record his experiences, both physical and spiritual in book-form for the benefit of a much larger circle of readers, both scholars and laymen. (Persian text, Delhi 1311/1893, p. 3; Urdu translation, p. 143).

The saints and šuifs whose biographical accounts appear in this book are: Khawāja Mu‘in al-dīn Chishti Ajmeri; Qutb al-dīn Bakhtiyār Kāki; Bābā Farid al-dīn Shākarganj of Pāk Pattan; Khawāja Niẓām al-dīn Awliyā’ of Delhi; Shaykh Naṣīr al-dīn Chirāgh-i Dihlī; Shaykh Najīb al-dīn Mutawakkil, all belonging to the Chishtiyya order of šuifs; Shaykh Bahā’ al-dīn Zakariyyā Multānī; Ṣadr al-dīn ‘Ārif; Abū‘l Fath Ruḳn al-dīn; Shaykh Ḥamīd al-dīn Mutawakkil, all belonging to the Chishtiyya order of šuifs; Shaykh Bahā’ al-dīn Zakariyya Multānī; Ṣadr al-dīn ‘Ārif; Abū‘l Fath Ruḳn al-dīn; Shaykh Ḥamīd al-dīn Mutawakkil, all belonging to the Chishtiyya order of šuifs.

Jahangasht Bukhari. He also utilized some others like the Tarab al-Majalis on Jahaniyan-Jahangasht by Amir Husayni and Manaqib-i Quthi both on his karamis and other wondrous acts, which are either no more extant, or have not been traced as yet. In its turn it has been utilized by the author of Akhbar al-Akhyaar, Shaykh 'Abd al-Hasq Muaddith of Delhi and by the well-known historian Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Firishta. 'Abd al-Qadir al-Badayuni also mentions Siyar al-'Arifin (Muntakhab al-Tawarih, i:325) but disparagingly remarks that it is not free from defects and contradictions. Referring to Jamali he says:

This criticism by Badayuni is based on the fact that Jamali has placed much reliance on the marvellous and thaumaturgical acts said to have been performed by the saints or on stories and traditions which are either apocryphal or unnatural. In spite of this defect the book remains a first-hand source for a cultural, spiritual and social history of the period in which Jamali flourished. Pir Husam al-Din Rashidi, who has contributed an exhaustive and very detailed introduction to the work under review comprising more than 125 pages, also remarks that while reading through this work a very clear picture of the cultural, spiritual and social conditions then obtaining emerges. In fact Jamali relates personal experiences and observations in many cases. His towering personality as a scholar, an eminent suf and a close friend of Sultan Sikandar Lodhi (reg. 894-1148-923-11517) lends much credence to what he says and it is why in spite of certain shortcomings and defects, which at places mar his narrative, the book was freely utilized by those who followed Jamali e.g. Shaykh 'Abd al-Hasq Muaddith and Hindu Shah Firishta.

The original Persian text was published in Delhi in 1311/1893 and had become extremely rare. The Urdu translation appears after a lapse of 85 years and will be widely welcomed by scholars and research workers. The translation is readable and can be relied upon unlike some other similar translations which are defective and unreliable.

The translator has done a fine job by adding explanatory and in places additional footnotes which along with an extensive bibliography and a copious index have added to the usefulness of the work. The Central Urdu Development Board deserves thanks of the world of scholarship by launching a publication programme of Urdu translations of standard historical works relating to the sub-continent. The translations published so far include: Tarikh-i Firuz-shahi by Barani; Tarikh-i Mubarakshahi by Yabia ibn Ahmad Sirhindi; Tabaqat-i Nafiri by Minhaji-i Siraj Juzjani; 'Amal-i Shihi (Shajahan-nama) by Muhammad Shafi Khanb, Lahore; Ma'athir al Umara by Shamsem al-Dawla Shahnawaz Khan; Khulasat al-Tawarih by Sujan Ray Bhandari of Batala and Saljih-naama by Ibn Bibi. It is understood that the translation of Tabaqat-i Akbar by Nisam al-Din Ahmad Harawi is under print while the translation of Tarikh-i Shahi by Ahmad Yaghur is under preparation.
We agree with the concluding remarks of Mr. Râshidi that if the Central Urdu Board continued with the preparation and publication of Urdu translations of standard works Urdu language and literature would be greatly enriched with “these gems of erudite scholarship which are still hidden from the eyes of Urdu-knowing people”. The Board deserves congratulations on the work that it has so far done and the services that it has rendered to Urdu literature.

Certain misprints and misreadings of the original Persian edition have escaped the notice of the translator and consequently remain uncorrected. On p. 119 Sayyid ‘Alâ’ al-Din (‘Ali) al-Jiwari appears with the nisba Jabûrî and in f.n. 2 as Chanûrî. The correct reading is Jiwarî with reference to Jiwar, a small place in the vicinity of Bulandshahr (Baran). On the same page the tribal nisba of the notorious renegade and oppressor, Khusraw Khân, is given as “Barâvan’” a mistake commonly made. This should actually read as Barvâri or Parvâri, member of “a low, dishabille, cunning” caste of Gujarât to which the “ungrateful wretch” belonged. (For a discussion of this nisba, see K.S. Lal, History of the Khajits, Allahabad 1950, pp. 348-51). The name of this work duly appears in the Bibliography but the translator does not seem to have consulted it. Similarly on pp. 162-3, 197 one Khawâja Kamâl al-Din Mas’ûd Shirwâni is mentioned. Here also the nisba should have been corrected to read as “Sarwâni”. Shirwân is the name of a place in the region of the Caucasus and is often mentioned alongwith Darband. No tribes from that region are recorded to have migrated to the sub-continent. Sarwân, on the other hand, is the name of a small town of Sistân (Sijistân) to which the well-known saint Khawâja Mu’in al-Din Chisti of Ajmer belonged. Many persons of note migrated from Sijistân to the sub-continent after the establishment of Muslim rule here. The famous historian ‘Abbás Khân also hailed from this town and is, therefore, rightly known as Sarwânì. “Shirwânî” in the case of Mawlânâ Mas’ûd (p. 197) is clearly the scribe’s mistake. It should be read as Sarwânî. Distinction must also be made between the nisbas Shirwânî and Shîrânî. The latter refers to a Pathân tribe to which belonged the late Häfîz Mahmûd Shîrânî, author of “Panjáb men Urdu” and “Tangīd-i Shi’r al-‘Ajam,” and his illustrious son, the most popular Urdu romantic poet, Muhammad Dâ’ûd Khân “Akhtar Shîrânî” (d. 1952).

Despite these small lapses the translation will be found useful by all those to whom the original Persian text is not available or who are not acquainted with the Persian language. A much-needed index has also been supplied thus enhancing the value and usefulness of the Urdu translation.

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