

KHVAJA SAIYID MUHAMMAD ASAR

Prologue (Dibacha and Ishq-o-Sifat-e Ishq)*

(ba‘d ḥamd-e khudā va na‘t-e rasūl)

Drowning the praise of God, the adoration of his Messenger,
A person with no sense, no compassion
And no respect for the occasion
Is babbling words, meaningless words,
Reeling as he performs, like a drunken man
In a world of madness and uproar.
This is neither a tale (he has nothing to tell)
Nor a complaint (he has nothing to complain of)
But a pointless and unfounded tirade,
All about separation and union—union with what?
And to perfect his display, his parable of the world,
The poet has given it a name: “Dream and Imagination.”

(haiṅgī saudā’iyōñ kī ḥālātēñ)

Here are set down all the circumstances of an affliction:
Love’s gibberish and outcry,
Love’s depths and squalls,
Its unmeasured wastes.
This tide of ineptitude and madness
Is said to have drowned Lailā and Majnūñ,
Farhād the mountain digger,
Shīrīñ and Khusrau and (for good measure) Vāmiq and ‘Uzrā.
Wretches drowned here in lakhs, in the best of good company.
Wisdom itself, if it tried to pass over here, would be drowned.

* Selected passages from the author’s *Khvāb-o-Khayāl*. (Aurangābād (Dakan): Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdū, 1926).

The Red Sea of calamity was this ocean,
In which lives foundered and were wholly lost,
In which the most tender of intimacies availed nothing,
For there was no shore at hand.

2

(‘ishq-e şūrī baṛī malāmat hai)

The love of outward forms is degrading to the lover.
Its only fruit is repentance.
It builds neither ascendancy in this world
Nor increase in the next.
All it brings is loss.
There is nothing to be gained from it.
Lives are endangered at every turn,
Woes, sorrows and iniquities are counted as trifles
In the hope of such lovers' encounters: and if they were to take place,
These exploits of parting and reunion?—what would be the good of
them?
Qais in his madness was a dead thing.
The beauty of Lailā was as dust to him.
Let none be so lackluster at heart,
O God: spare us the additional pain in the world
Of captivity to appearances,
Of enthrallment by love.
Let none of us incline to be bound,
To invent new needs
Or to mix hearts,
To mingle our hearts, O God, with anyone but you.

3

(āb sārā hai ye jabān-e ghalāṭ)

How mistaken their world is.
The thoughts of lovers could not be more astray.
For who would wish it on any of us
To perform all our deeds in the imagination?

“Which is the beloved here? Who loves?
 Who lies? Who is telling the truth?”
 For days on end lovers can dream on like this,
 And all from a want of good sense.
 A self teeming with desires will worship the wind.
 Only love will break that spirit,
 That spirit, or infidel, which can harm no one
 But scuffles with itself.
 That self rains blows, or is defeated and slinks away—
 And in both cases, it is victorious!
 The self should be an intimate to itself, not a stranger
 Breeding enmity to its own being and to the world.
 Those who would mortify the senses of their own accord
 Bring delight to Satan.
 For all their ascetic zeal, they are cast out,
 And forsaken for all their pride.
 The self does not perish by its own hand.
 It is the grace of God that performs the work.
 It is the pir who wields the antidote,
 The pir who reduces that self to dust.
 To abandon oneself in one’s pir
 Is to pass away in him and to remain in him:
 But where this remedy is despised
 One’s entire being is flooded with resentment,
 Is caught and infused
 With sadness, injury and reproach for others.
 For the love of the pir is love.
 Love is the love of that preceptor who will come to our aid.
 This allegory is a bridge to the real,
 And not, as some say, a vicious spell which works evil.
 What is meant by love is a love guided by the Messenger,
 A love which is the gateway to acceptance,
 Which uncovers what is hidden,
 That portion of the sky where there is light.

Love is arousal, too, and noise.

Love will not suffer me to be quiet.
Now, in an instant, love whirls up.
The Beloved is called by name.
I am an offering at the threshold
Of one Exalted, of the Truth on high.
Yā Nāṣir!—whose portrait is in my heart.
Yā Nāṣir!—whose witness is on my tongue.
That Helper who is the staff of our lineage
Keeps watch over two domains, the inner and the outer.
In the hearts of the unmindful, it is he who cries 'Come',
But he calls, too, in the exterior world.
If there is any good in me, it is the worst of him.
From the beginning to the end, I am his,
And when he conferred my name,
I became Aṣar. I am the Consequence of his Pain.

(dard kī zāt-e pāk kā būn̄ ghulām)

I am a slave of the sacred personality of Dard.
His is the name I repeat at heart,
Lost as I am in my beloved,
Gifted away as I am to Ḥaẓrat Khvāja Mīr.
I am the chattel of his purchase
And an initiate at his hand.
It was humility in him, famed for his mastery
In the two worlds, to take me by the hand.
Worthy of love is his lineage.
Higher than mere speech is his discourse.
Let those who have a place at his threshold
Rain words, rain language that accords with their place.

5

(bīch-o-nā-čīz thā main̄ naṅg-e 'adam)

Naked and nondescript, of null account,
Owing what truth is in me to the bounty of God,
All I have is the gift of my pir.
All is the gift by alms of Ḥaẓrat Khvāja Mīr.

All I am is the Token of his solicitude.
 Those moved by their devotion to him
 To forsake the world, to forsake all they know,
 Crave nothing and defer to no one.
 What task have they, other than this?
 He made his dwelling-place in my heart.
 He conferred on me a freedom that excels freedom.
 He excused my faults.
 Were it not for him, I would have drowned
 In the abundance of my vices,
 A wanderer who had strayed from his kind,
 Buoyed aloft by the sound of his own voice,
 Soaring one moment to the highest heaven,
 Dashed to earth the next.
 Only witness—for all my faults and failings—
 What eloquence I had—and what impudence!
 An ingredient of course was missing—apart from the brain—
 And that was repose at heart. I was unfree.
 Yet one thing came from another:
 My true temperament slowly emerged,
 And his, too—so opposed to mine!
 It was a challenge to my nature to accord with his.
 I don't say he despaired of me wholly,
 But all those absurdities!—what was he to make of my poem?

(*kučḥ sar-e dast bañstē bañstē kabā*)

Between speech and laughter, he would come out with an expression
 Which any bystander might hear and recall.
 Nothing was entered in his *Dīvān*.
 No verse in this poem is included in his *Dīvān*.
 To him it was a test of his fluency, an occasion
 To show what could be done, out of the exuberance of his nature.
 Whatever he said, and threw away, in a day or two
 Persons unknown to him would assume as their own.
 Verses of his might turn up just anywhere with anyone.
 These very lines are his. They are none of mine.
 For one thing, this *Rēkhta* is an easy language.
 Whatever is said in *Rēkhta* has a mischievous quality.
 It is no great thing to declaim in *Rēkhta*,

To propound this or that in *Rēkhta*.
Sure enough, all the population will understand it.
But what do they know of verse or prose?
If there is one thing about poetry they believe they know,
On that one point they are ludicrously mistaken.
Whatever a poet may be,
May he at least be skilled in the poetic art,
May he set store by the meaning of a verse,
May he at least retain some involvement with language.
Let him not think verse-making a facile undertaking,
And whatever he undertakes, let him finish it.
The waves of the sea sing in verse.
When he has anything to say, let the waves sing.

(*yā jō kō'ī ke yār-e ṣādiq hūn*)

But should a friend come to light—
Or a group of friends—impulsive
And true, loyal in their affections,
Paying no heed to what the world thinks,
Conscious of what it is to melt and burn,
Schooled in the lovers' idiom of secrets and meetings:
Friendship will mean the world to them,
Yet Pain, and Consequence, they will hold in their hearts.
Friends like these will radiate their discernment on everything,
And no harm will come of them.

(*varna bē-dard us kō kyā jānē*)

Otherwise—who is there to take notice?
Who but the unfeeling, the cold at heart!
Those are the fault-finders.
Their conversation is worthless.
The shortest account of them is too long.
There is nothing to be said about them.
Better for a person to understand what he understands
And choose as he may choose, according to his own intelligence.
Talk will not change a thing.
His pen is not under his command.

The expression that alights on his tongue
 In a poem, owes nothing to his conscious exertion.
 There is no authorized method of verse-making.
 He follows no drill-manual for the imagination.
 If this is verse, it is verse with a difference.
 It appears I have invented a new style.
 I would describe it as a *masnavī*, but if this is a *masnavī*
 Other kinds of verse have broken in on it,
 My own *ghazals* among them,
 Verses I have recited on many occasions,
 Some in Persian, where Persian is called for,
 Others when and how they occurred to me.
 Whatever else is here, is the word of a beloved preceptor.
 A beloved name tolls.
 A Pathos wells in the verse.
 Something of Consequence remains with the listener.
 And were it not for Pain and Consequence, for Dard and Ašar,
 There would be nothing here at all.

(*she'r ḥazrat kē kučḥ jō pā'ē haiñ*)

Such verses of Ḥazrat Khvāja Mīr as I happened to recall
 I affixed to the whole,
 Counting on their appeal to everyone.
 Three hundred verses of his I obtained in this manner:
 One hundred in Persian, one hundred in Hindvī,
 And a hundred more to make up the *masnavī*.
 Three hundred?—let there be three thousand.
 All are leaf and fruit of the same tree.
 One day found him in a lively humor
 And glad to amuse:
 We listened to him rattling off verses
 In the form of a *masnavī*, without so much as thinking about it.
 Those verses were spoken but were set aside.
 A time came when I remembered, and called for them.
 The verses became the template of a composition
 That branched and multiplied.
 Verses that had once been spoken and were cast aside
 Were now the substance of the poem.
 Thousands of verses he had spoken aloud in this manner.

Was nothing more to be heard of them?
A time came for me to recall them
And so, by permission, they were aired again.
In sum, one hundred verses were accorded to this servant,
Mixed with the whole
And spoken without attribution.
Two hundred more were attributed to their proper source.
In the name, and by the favor of Ḥaẓrat,
Those that were worthy of his selection stood out from the rest.
Let us hear no more of that particular composition.
Peace be on the Prophet and on the family of the Prophet.

(aur jō dēkhi'ē ḥaqīqat mēñ)

And to confess the truth,
Whether in substance or in form,
All we are is his. All we propose
Is his, all we signify is his.
I am his, my compositions are his—
Not four or five: all of them.
I burn for him, in secret, and in outward appearance.
Did I not burn, the senses would run away with me.
I seek, and it is him I seek.
I converse, but there is only one topic.

(hai vaẓīfa aṣar kalām-e dard)

The word of Pain has the Effect of prayer.
In the name of Dard, our observances are renewed.
His word dissolves the pain of a lover.
His word repairs hearts stricken by grief.
The language in which Ḥaẓrat Khvāja Mīr uttered his verses
Will stand as a remembrance till the Day of Judgment.
It is no very wonderful thing to compose verses,
But for verse itself, it is an occasion for pride.
Rēkhta acquired its fame for verse
When Ḥaẓrat Khvāja Mīr began composing in *Rēkhta*.
Then its standing rose.
In esteem, it began to rival Farsi.

Where is there a match for this feat of words?—
 A tongue was loosened, and began to flow.
 There is no like instance.
 The real had never been disclosed in this way.
 I have not known a truth of this nature to appear in verse
 Anywhere but in the verse of Ḥaẓrat.
 The masters of the word, those who prize speech,
 All the arbiters of taste, know its value.
 Whatever the form of his utterance, in verse or in prose,
 Every word is inspired.
 The spirit of the angel emboldened him.
 The difficulties of Tauḥīd have been solved.
 And is his verse heeded?—is it loved by many?
 The heart has only to listen, to be swept away.
 His word penetrates heart and soul.
 His measure is repeated on the tongue of the world.
 In select speech, and in the speech of the multitude,
 This word of his is treasured like a quotation.

(ĉūñke bastam siyāh mast-e sukhan)

Because I am utterly consumed with verse-making,
 My rapid pen, like the impetuous horse of Rustam,
 May slip my grasp: and so I have abandoned the reins
 To the sure hand of the composition.
 How fresh and colorful is the kingdom of language.
 How lively and commendable is the subject.
 To match the curiosity of a friend
 I have brought a gift which is the envy of a thousand gardens.
 Behold the flower-garden of meanings,
 The floral wealth of discernment in the beds of flowers.
 This springtide of the Word has made flowers of everything.
 The idol of the Word shows her adorable face.
 The flow of the disposition is like the flow of water.
 Life is bestowed, here, on the live-at-heart.
 Because of the clarity of the lettering, the hues of the composition,
 The surface of the page is the envy of any garden.
 This shining place is the place of the manifestation of the beloved,
 The glass by which she may be seen.
 Confer this gift—even in the smallest proportion—

On any unhappy heart, and you will gladden that heart.
Here love's convulsion and love's confusion,
The madness and the uproar of love, are a part of the show.
The reproaches of the lover are worth hearing.
His universe of desires is at least worth a look.

—*Translated by Ian Bedford*