

"BAYAN-UL-ARIFEEN"
SINDHI TRANSLATION AND EXPOSITION
BY DR.ABDUL GHIAFFAR SOOMRO: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The book is printed on quality paper, in demi-size (23x36), divided into 7 chapters, containing 384 pages of running matter, bolstered by photostat facsimile of the original manuscript containing another 385 original pages, followed by 19 odd pages of selected pieces, and 3 pages of introduction in English. The price is Rs.300/- which is not mentioned on the face of the book, as usual, but fixed in a joint meeting of the Sindh Auqaf Department and the Allama Kazi Risalo Research Project, who are the publishers. The book is available at the office of the Chief Administrator Auqaf, Hyderabad.

Bayan-ul-Arifeen is a '*malfoozat*' related to the teachings of Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri (1538-1623). It was penned down in Persian by one of his learned disciples, Mian Muhammad Raza Thattavi, within six years of his demise, in 1629 A.D. It contains an introduction, seven chapters and an epilogue, comprising aphorisms and wise sayings of Shah Karim, illustrated through interesting tales and his Sindhi poetry.

The manuscript remained obscure for over a century-and-a-half (1629-1798). It was first translated, in part, by Mian Abdur Rahman Ibn Muhammad Malook in 1798. Makhdoom Abdus Samad Ibn Haji Muhammad Muqem was the next Sindhi - Persian scholar, who improved upon the first translation (manuscript) in 1874

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which was published from Bombay. Mirza Qaleech Beg produced Risalo Karimi (based on Bayan-ul-Arifeen) in 1904. Dr. U. M. Daudpoto published "*Shah Karim Bulriwaray-jo-Kalaam*" in 1937. Dr. Abdul Majid Sindhi produced "*Karim-jo-Kalaam*" in 1963, and improved upon it in 1973. Then a Hindu-Sindhi scholar, Prof. Motilal Jotwani, attempted English translation of a few verses and added brief introductory and biographic material, entitled: *Shah Abdul Karim - a mystic poet of Sindh*. It was published from New Delhi in 1979 and from Karachi in 1986. Now in 2002, we have a complete translation in Sindhi (coupled with the facsimile of the original Persian manuscript) by Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro, who has added rich historical exposition of the thought - content in the context of the times the *Malfoozat* relates to. Furthermore, it is prefaced by Dr. N. A. Baloch, who is an acclaimed authority on the subject.

Shah Karim was given the title: "*Chausar of Sindh*", by Dr. Daudpoto; in fact, he could be best described as the "Rumi of Sindh", as he is the first exponent of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), and his *malfoozat*, "*Bayan-ul-Arifeen*" follows the same genre as "*Masnavi Rumi*". Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro has done well to trace the development of Sufism in Sindh; annotating the text of Bayan-ul-Arifeen. He divides it into two phases: The first phase, which lasted upto the 14th century A.D., emphasized mendicancy (*Darvaishee*) abstention (*Zuhd*) and asceticism (*Faqar*). The second phase introduced Sufism in its philosophical form. In Sindh, Qazi Qadan (d.1555) was the representative poet of the second phase. Shah Karim (1538-1623) built a bridge between the two phases and carried on the traditions of both. Dr. Soomro's observation is quite true. It may be further pointed out that besides providing a link and continuity of the two phases of development of Sufism in Sindh, Shah Karim

also strived to steer the development towards the right direction. The institution of Sufi Khanqah had virtually converted into Dargah, or the seat of a saint, where the devotees had to pay *nazrana*, or the redemption tax, while the Sufi Khanqah provided free lodging and boarding, and the Shaikh, or the head of the Khanqah, did not accept a *nazrana* as such. Shah Karim did the same. He tilled his ancestral land and supported his family and the Khanqah through self-help. His illustrious descendant, Shah Latif (1690-1752), further carried his tradition to the detriment of the established Dargahs of Sindh. It was socio-sufistic revolution initiated by Shah Karim, which can be comprehended through the study of Bayan-ul-Arifeen.

Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro, in his Ph.D. thesis on "Shah Abdul Latif and his Sufistic Thought, with Special Reference to Rumi" (1998), had pointed out the need for translating the entire text of "Bayan-ul-Arifeen", which was one of his main sources. Now, out of a truly scholar's research habit, he has himself met the need. Well done, particularly, when in his present dossier, he has gone beyond the expected translation only. His comments, annotations and probing insight into the thought contents provide a rich study on Sindhi Sufism. The clarity of expression in Sindhi is a helpful plus point. It does not smack of a translated matter and is easy to comprehend, rather feel interesting. Bayan-ul-Arifeen is virtually a text-book on Sufism, in which the complicated concepts and its terminology are explained in simple terms: e.g., the concepts of "Tajreed" and "Tafreed" can be better understood, through the anecdotal illustrations of Shah Karim, now made available by Dr. Soomro in simple and fluent Sindhi. The learned scholar, while translating the Persian text, has added the relevant source - material, which is useful for the students as well as the research

scholars of to day.

Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro, through his present effort, has established a tradition for the Ph.D. degree holders, to continue with the research in their respective fields, as a life long undertaking. In a real spirit of a research scholar, Dr. Soomro has taken his Ph.D. thesis back to its main source: "Bayan-ul-Arifeen". The question raised by him in his thesis" as to what extent Bayan-ul-Arifeen influenced, or helped mould the make up of the mind of Shah Latif" may keep him engaged also to investigate how for Shah Karim was influenced by Rumi, who in turn was mainly inspired by the "Wandering frair" Shams Tabriz (d. 1245/1250).

Sindh received informal streaks of Sufism since its early days, but the philosophy was contained in Persian tracts, which only a few learned divines could comprehend. From the 13th century A.D. on, an organized movement was launched to spread Sufism in Sindh, in letter and spirit, through four main Sufi orders: Suhrawardia, Qadiria, Chishtia and Naqshbandia. These were the main orthodox Sufi orders, which were launched, with different forms of *tariqat*, propounded by Shaikh-ul-Shuyyukh Umar Shahabuddin (1145-1234), Piran Pir, Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), Khwaja Abu Is'haq of Chisht (d. 940 A.D.) and Shaikh Bahauddin Naqshband (1317-1389) respectively. According to Saen G. M. Syed, Shah Karim belonged to the Qadiri *tariqat* (Paigham-e-Latif, p. 52). However, it is yet to be ascertained whether he and Shah Latif belonged to any orthodox Silsila (order) or followed Ibn-e-Arab's *Wahdat-al-Wujood*, or *Ana-al-Haq* of Mansur Hillaj (not accredited as a Sufi), or Shams Tabriz (who said, "*I am great pious, my status is great*" and Maulana Rumi, who introduced song, music and dance in devotional practice.

Shah Karim says (rendered into English)

Having bewitched you, the earthly love will vanish,
Beware lest your eyes should fix a trustful gaze.

It is in line with the discerning Sufistic philosophy of life, which culminates in Rumi's philosophy of Divine love as (as rendered in English):

Dry string, and dry rind, and dry rod;
Whence doth the music come, friend!