INTRODUCTION

POETRY ENJOYS PRIDE OF PLACE among literary and artistic forms throughout the Islamic world. While this is no doubt due in part to its aesthetics, the mnemonic quality of poetry makes it easy to remember for people who cannot read and write—a significant proportion of the world's Muslim population today as in the past. It is simultaneously valued for the same characteristics by literate people, for, as something that you can carry in your memory, it is a cheap and portable form of art.

One of the most satisfying marriages in world literature is the one between Islamic mystical (Sufi) experiences and teachings and poetry, which is capable of conveying these ideas in a manner that is as seductive as it is instructive. The mystical poetry written in Persian by famous figures such as Rumi (d. 1273), Sa'di (d. 1292), and Hafiz (d. 1389) is very well known both in the Persian original and in its celebrated and widely circulated translations. But mystical poetry is composed and enjoyed to no less a degree in other languages spoken by Muslims all over the world. There is a rich tradition of Sufi literary composition in Arabic which is often used as a source of inspiration by the best known Persian poets. Similarly, Ottoman Turkish and Urdu poetry derive much of their literary style from Persian and much of their content from both Arabic and Persian alongside their native Turkish and Indian cultures.

Persian Sufi poetry and its derivative genres in Urdu and Ottoman Turkish are representatives of a highly literate court culture, and have traditionally enjoyed a limited audience outside these circles. Paralleling this "high culture" form of poetry there was a popular Sufi poetical literature in both Punjabi and other languages spoken by Indian Muslims (not to mention Arabic, vernacular Turkish, Kurdish, and many others). This form of poetry was often viewed as too rustic to enjoy court patronage, and received none of the encouragement or rewards enjoyed by "high culture" poetry. It is therefore a testament to the innate talents of these popular Sufi poets and to the magnetic attraction of their poetry that for every Ottoman court poet like Sheyh Galip there is a Yunus Emre, and for every Mughal court figure like Mirza Ghalib there is a Sultan Bahu.

In fact, it is these popular poets, writing in the vernaculars of their own people, who are more renowned. The average citizen of a small town in Anatolia may not even be familiar with Sheyh Galip's name, but more than likely would know some of Yunus Emre's poetry by heart. Similarly, an ordinary citizen of the Punjab is unlikely to be familiar with Mirza Ghalib's work, but could be moved to tears by listening to someone like Sultan Bahu.

BAHU'S RELIGIOUS MESSAGE

Sultan Bahu's mystical poetry is an expression of disillusionment with formal, legalistic, and institutionalized forms of religion, and of optimistic faith in the possibility of a personal, individual spiritual relationship with God. Bahu is emphasizing a central tenet of Sufism: that an absolute love for and devotion to God can result in the experience of losing oneself within the divine. The major impediment to this union is human attachment to the physical world, an instinct ingrained in the human soul. Through systematic detachment from this world and the practice of asceticism under the guid-

ance of a Sufi master—together with meditational exercises based on the repetition of God's name—the Sufi successfully tames the soul. The soul's passions, once harnessed, help transport the Sufi further along his or her journey. The imagery used is often that of taming a horse, which then becomes the mount on which the mystic travels for the rest of the mystical path. The ultimate goal of this journey is to lose one's identity within the greater identity of God, or to attain spiritual death before physical death. This quest for death before dying is based on a saying attributed to the Prophet: "Die before you die!"

Sultan Bahu develops these central concepts in a manner which would be appealing and accessible to a wide audience unfamiliar with the more esoteric and philosophical dimensions of Sufism. He emphasizes the power of love and stresses that love is more important than learning. In order to show the danger of turning religious practice into a habit or a birthright, he juxtaposes the learned scholar, who is incapable of attaining God, against the illiterate person whose love-madness transports him or her to the divine.

> The Lord was neither found on the exalted throne, nor is the Lord in the Kaʿba.
> The Lord was not found in learning and books, nor is the Lord in the prayer niche.
> He was never found swimming in the Ganges, nor met through countless pilgrimages.[1]

In line with many other Sufi figures from the formative period of Sufism in the ninth century onward, Bahu uses an emphasis on the value of illiteracy not to undermine the importance of Islam as a religion but to underline it. According to Bahu, while religious scholars only observe the formal, outward aspects of Islamic ritual and doctrine, the illiterate lover understands their true meaning. In

the heart of the lover, the Islamic creedal statement "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah" takes on a magical significance. Bahu states that the only writing one needs to know are the letters *mīm* and *alif*. The *mīm* is the first letter of the name "Muhammad." The *alif* is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet and also the first letter of the name "Allah." It is written as a vertical line, bringing to mind a raised index finger and symbolizing the unity of God. Thus when Bahu speaks of knowing only the *alif*, he is positioning himself squarely in a Sufi tradition which uses this metaphor to emphasize the futility of becoming preoccupied with external forms while ignoring underlying meanings.

> Those who find the Beloved in the letter *alif* need not open the Qur'an to read it.[2]

Many of Sultan Bahu's metaphors are common to Sufi poetry in many languages. The divine beloved is haughty and distant, and the quest for this beloved is a source of great anguish to the Sufi lover. The lover is likened to a nightingale in love with the rose which sits unattainable in its bed of thorns, causing the nightingale to spend its life in lamentation and to risk capture in the rose garden of grief:

> I pecked and ate many grains of wheat, now the string of eternity is around my neck.
> I flutter, caught in the noose, like the nightingale in the garden.[3]

Such metaphors and his references to famous Sufi figures of the past also place him squarely in a wider Sufi poetical tradition, as does his use of the term *faqir* (meaning beggar) to refer to a mystic, thus signifying the belief that material poverty is related to spiritual wealth.

Sufi symbolism is apparent in Bahu's very name, which means "with Him" (i.e., God). Bahu used his given name to greater advan-

tage than most other poets. Most of his poems end in the refrain "hu" ("He" or "Him"), a formula which simultaneously renders them instantly recognizable as Sultan Bahu's compositions and marks them as specifically Sufi poetry because "hu" is a common formula in the Sufi meditational exercise of *zikr*. This refrain became so characteristic of his style that later generations added it to all his poems. In a similar fashion, his name "Bahu" appears in the final line of all his poems, even though in many instances it ruins the meter of the verse and was, undoubtedly, not included by the poet himself. On other occasions, not only is the name Bahu an integral part of the final verse, as is common in Islamic poetic traditions, but its meaning is also incorporated into the poem:

> You will find the singular Beloved if you gamble your head.
> Be drunk in the love of Allah, always saying "Hu! Hu!"
> While contemplating the name of Allah, control your breath.
> When essence blends with Essence, only then will you be called "Bahu."[4]

Many of the themes discussed by Bahu and the metaphors he uses are drawn from the literary bank of Sufi writing and are then adapted to the Punjabi environment. A striking example of this is his frequent reference to birds. In addition to the stock metaphor of the nightingale referred to above, Bahu made particular use of hawks and falcons. They are often used as symbols of the soul in its quest to return to God, just as a falcon desires to return to its master's hand:

> How can the poor falcon fly, for its feet have been bound.
> Whoever does not possess love, Bahu, loses both worlds.[5]

In some of his poems Bahu refers to birds in a context which is comprehensible only if one is familiar with the Indian environment. This is true, for example, in his reference to the owl as symbolizing

stupidity[6] and in his images of birds singing as if to welcome the monsoon:

> I wander lamenting like the cuckoo, begging that my days not go by in waste.
> Speak, bird! The monsoon has come; perhaps God will shed some rain.[7]

The cuckoo is traditionally believed to be singing a lament that means "Where is my beloved?" In the second line, I have substituted the generic "bird" for a species known as *papeeha* in Punjabi, the call of which is this same lament.

Bahu's extreme reverence for his spiritual master is also a theme common in Sufism, particularly in the Indian context. Sufi writers traditionally emphasize the centrality of a living spiritual guide, stating that it is almost impossible to attain advanced mystical states without the help of such a master. The Sufi practitioner is supposed to surrender both his body and soul to this person, proverbially becoming like a corpse in the hands of a mortician. This attitude toward Sufi masters has led to a very high degree of veneration, so much so that the tombs of dead Sufis function as the centers of saint and shrine cults which are visited by all sorts of devotees, most of whom have no formal Sufi affiliation. They also function as the centers for major religious celebrations, and many people come to these shrines to seek the intercession of Sufi saints—both living and dead—for critical events in their lives. Many legalistic scholars find this veneration suspect and speak out against the Sufi shrines. In premodern times such critics had limited success in curtailing the popular devotion to Sufi shrines, which occupy a more central position in the spiritual landscape of the Punjab and other parts of South Asia than do the mosques. Bahu echoes this sentiment in his many verses

which assert that devotion to a Sufi guide is a substitute for the literal observance of all Islamic rituals:

> This body is a dwelling of the true Lord, and my heart like a garden in bloom.
> Within it are fountains, within it are prayer grounds, within it places to bow down in prayer.
> Within it is the Ka'ba, within it the *qibla,* within it cries of "Only Allah!"
> I found the Perfect Guide, Bahu, He alone will take care of me.[8]

One of the most intriguing features of Bahu's poetry, also characteristic of popular Sufi poetry in India, is his occasional use of the feminine gender when talking about himself. Sufi love poetry outside India (and even in the Indian high culture traditions of Persian and Urdu) represents the relationship between lover and beloved as one in which an active human lover pursues a passive (or passive-aggressive) beloved. This dynamic traditionally genders the active partner as male. There is some ambiguity concerning the gender of the passive partner, in part because homoerotic love is widely accepted in Islamic literature and in part because of the lack of formal gender in both Persian and Ottoman. Most of Sultan Bahu's poems fit this pattern, but in a few of them the lover is explicitly female, something which is very clear since Punjabi does have gender:

> I am ugly and my Beloved beautiful—how can I be agreeable to Him?
> He never enters my home though I use a hundred thousand ruses.
> Neither am I beautiful nor have I wealth to display—how can I please my Friend?
> This pain shall remain forever, Bahu, I will die crying.[9]

There is little Islamic precedent for this form of eroticization of the relationship between the human being and God. On the other

hand, it seems to share many elements with Hindu literature, in particular with the *virāhinī* tradition of northern India in which the poet addresses God in the voice of a girl or young woman.[10] Similar to the devotional love poets of the *bhakti* tradition of Krishnaite Hinduism, the Sufi poet can be seen in the role of the herdswoman or Gopi who is in love with God. The death anniversary of an Indian Sufi saint is traditionally called an *ʿurs,* an Arabic word for "wedding," and many of the rituals undertaken at such festivals clearly celebrate the saint's death as the occasion of his marriage to God. Such feminization of the Sufi is taken to an extreme in some popular Sufi groups where the men dress up in women's clothing. Bahu evokes this image in one of his poems where he uses the term *sadā suhāgan* to indicate a level of blessed happiness; the term literally means a woman whose husband never dies and who therefore never becomes a widow.[11]

Some of the images evoked by Sultan Bahu are peculiar to his Indian environment. Islam and Hinduism were viewed by many legalistic religious scholars as mutually irreconcilable religious systems. This attitude sometimes combined with the administrative policies of Muslim rulers to create conditions of mutual hostility between Muslims and Hindus. It was largely through the efforts of mystical figures such as Sultan Bahu that Islam gained popularity and converts in India. These mystical thinkers not only absorbed Indian ideas and values, they also consciously attempted to address an audience wider than the Turco-Persian settlers and the small number of Persianized Indian converts. Sultan Bahu's Punjabi poetry is clear evidence of this. The majority of his works are in Persian, but his fame derives from Punjabi verses that emphasize the sincerity of religious devotion irrespective of religious affiliation. It is no wonder that he is revered by Sikh and Hindu Punjabis as well as by Muslims.

The Punjabi language has languished in comparison to the change in status of other northern Indian languages in the last two hundred years. Before the British colonization of India, its Muslim rulers had used Persian as their official language and ignored local vernaculars. Following the breakup of the Mughal Empire, the Sikh rulers of the Punjab continued to favor Persian as the language of state despite the fact that Punjabi is the Sikh scriptural language. By the time the British finally conquered the Punjab in 1839–41, the British administrative policy of using major ethnic languages to communicate with the colonized population was well in place, and the choice of Urdu (a language from north-central India) as the administrative language of Indian Muslims was an accomplished fact.

It is therefore no surprise that when British colonial rule was extended to the Punjab, Urdu was used as the medium of official commerce with the Punjabi Muslims (the use of Persian, the Islamic imperial language, was simply never an option for the British). As a movement for Muslim self-determination took shape in northern India, the majority of Muslim activists, including those from the Punjab, willingly accepted Urdu as the language representing Muslim ethnicity. This pattern, in which Punjabi was marginalized and trivialized to the benefit of Urdu, continued after the establishment of Pakistan in 1947.[12] The trivialization of Punjabi has meant that the government, which is the main sponsor of educational and cultural projects, has put virtually no effort into the standardization of Punjabi as a language or the preservation and dissemination of its literature. There is no standardized Punjabi grammar or script, and no good Punjabi dictionary. As a result systematic, critical studies of Punjabi literary works are all but impossible to do.

Greater Punjab is a vast geographical region, including the dusty flat lands surrounding Delhi, the rolling hills of Jammu and Himachal Pradesh, the narrow valleys of Hazara and Azad Kashmir, the salt hills and scrub of the Potohar plateau, and the rocky desert of the Deras in Baluchistan, Sindh, and Sarhad (the anachronistic North West Frontier Province of Pakistan). But the Punjabi heartland is the northwestern corner of the Indo-Gangetic plain, a flat region dominated by its rivers and from which the Punjab (Five Rivers) takes its name. Most of Islamic Punjabi literature comes from the center of this region, a place known as the Rechna Doab (Ravi and Chenab Twin River Region).

The rivers dictate the rhythms of the romanticized Punjabi life. The major daily occupations of this life are farming and the care of cows and water buffaloes. People live in villages surrounded by fields, rather than in homesteads located on private land. As a result, the daily march out to the fields or to pastures has become a motif in Punjabi literature. The rivers and the agriculture dependent upon them become the context in which the dramatic moments of Punjabi life are played out. Bathing, washing clothes and fetching water, grazing animals, fetching fodder, meeting mystics and mendicants, taking food to farmers and herdsmen—all become scenes of romance and intrigue. The Punjab is a place where poets can evoke images of birds pecking out the newly sprouted shoots of wheat, where buffaloes refuse to yield their milk until they hear the flute of their herdsman, and where (as mentioned earlier) a variety of lark is named after its plaintive cry, "Where is my beloved?"

This is a place where the rivers flood their banks with every monsoon, and where they mysteriously change course as they make their serpentine way from the Himalayas to the Arabian Sea. As the rivers make new channels, they create rich alluvial islands, called "*belas*." The *bela* is an important part of life as recorded in Punjabi

literature. A good *bela* is covered with grass, a bad *bela* with marshes and quicksand; a good *bela* is a place to graze animals and meet lovers, a bad *bela* is where tigers hunt and where one dies of snakebite or drowning. It is on a *bela* that Hir meets her beloved Ranjha in the famous Punjabi epic, and it is on the *bela* that she is betrayed. Thus when Sultan Bahu uses the imagery of the *bela,* he is not only evoking all that the *bela* represents in Punjabi rural life, he is also drawing on his audience's familiarity with the image of the *bela* in Punjabi literature, particularly in the epic of Hir.[13]

It is in the wedding of Islamic mystical metaphors with the imagery of the Punjabi heartland that Sultan Bahu most distinguishes himself, and it is in this very aspect that I feel my translations are weakest. Assuming that the majority of readers of this work will be unfamiliar not only with Punjabi but also with the Punjab, I have leaned toward more generic metaphors in my translation. Thus "*bela*" is translated as "marsh," "dune," and "river bank." I have also changed the names of birds and plants when the original is unknown in most of the English-speaking world. In other places, I have taken advantage of linguistic ambiguity, such as in translating the word *daryā* as either "sea" or "river" depending on the context.

I have attempted to translate Bahu's work as literally as possible while retaining some semblance of English style and grammar. One characteristic of the genre of Punjabi *abyāt* is that the content of each line of a poem does not necessarily have anything to do with the next. Furthermore, Bahu's *Abyāt* are often in a very colloquial tone, and frequently reverse the normal Punjabi word order. These characteristics combine to give the translation an occasionally choppy and awkward tone. Keeping in mind the fact that these poems are normally sung, and are not expected to conform strictly to Indo-Persian metrics, I have rearranged the sentence structure only in a few extreme cases. The Punjabi *Abyāt* of Sultan Bahu are nor-

mally arranged in alphabetical order by the first letter of the Arabo-Persian alphabet. Since this arrangement is irrelevant in an English translation and has absolutely no relationship to the content, I have arranged the translations according to my own aesthetic sense.

SULTAN BAHU'S LIFE

Very little is known about Sultan Bahu's life, and such information as exists is shaped by a three-hundred-year-long exercise in hagiography. He is mentioned in passing in biographical dictionaries of Indian Sufi figures, but these entries are extremely brief. The only substantial account of his life is in the *Manāqib-i Sultānī,* a work written six or seven generations after Sultan Bahu's death by one of his descendants by the name of Sultan Hamid. According to this text, which is extremely hagiographical in its tone, Sultan Bahu was born during the reign of the Mughal ruler Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58) in the town of Shorkot, located between Multan and Jhang in Pakistan. Shorkot had been given as a source of revenue to his father, Bayazid Muhammad, in recognition for military service to the Mughal government. His mother, Rasti, gave him the overtly mystical name of Bahu, meaning "With Him [God]." Bahu kept this as his pen name, to which his disciples added the honorific title of "Sultan" which has been retained by both his spiritual and biological descendants. Prose works by Sultan Bahu suggest that he referred to himself as Bahu Aʿwan. The Aʿwans are a tribe, based in the extreme western end of the Punjab, claiming descent from ʿAli (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet) through his son Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya. ʿAli is considered the fourth caliph by Sunni and the first imam by Shiʿa Muslims. As a result, not only do the Aʿwans command high status in the Indian Muslim environment for being Arabs but they also claim descent from the household of the Prophet, albeit not through his daughter Fatima.

Nothing is known of Sultan Bahu's early childhood or education. It has traditionally been held that he received little or no formal schooling, and evidence in support of this view is drawn from some of his verses. Such verses are a formulaic part of the image of the love-infused Sufi; they deemphasize formal education in order to underline the transformative power of the love of God. Stories abound of early Sufis who could read nothing except the name of God but who worked miracles through it. Bahu's extensive writings would, in fact, suggest that he must have had at least some formal schooling. His lengthy and esoteric Persian writings show that he was familiar with the standardized Sufi teachings of the day. Furthermore, Bahu's prose works contain many traditions of the Prophet which are quoted in Arabic, a language and literature which could only be learned in the Punjab through formal education.

The *Manāqib-i Sultānī* states that Sultan Bahu tried his hand at agriculture in his youth but gave it up and began to wander the forests and graveyards near Jhang. On one such occasion he encountered a Sufi on the banks of the Ravi. This man, named Habibullah Khan, became Bahu's first spiritual guide but quickly realized Bahu's unusual mystical potential and sent him to Delhi to study with his own master, Sayyid ʿAbdur-Rahman of the Qadiri Sufi order. It is most likely that Bahu's formal knowledge of Sufism derives from the unspecified amount of time he spent in Delhi with this second Sufi master.

During his time in Delhi, Bahu met the future Mughal ruler Aurangzeb at least once at the communal Friday prayer. Some biographers have made much of his contact with Aurangzeb, the last of the truly powerful Mughals, but these contacts are no doubt exaggerated. Bahu does not appear to have wielded any influence over Aurangzeb's religious policies, nor did he benefit financially or politically from association with the future emperor. If anything, their re-

lationship was most likely shaped by the fact that Bahu's Sufi master, Sayyid ʿAbdur-Rahman, was related by marriage to Aurangzeb's estranged brother, Dara Shikuh. It is therefore unlikely that Sayyid ʿAbdur-Rahman or any of his disciples would have had much to do with Aurangzeb.

Neither the date nor the reason for Bahu's return to Shorkot are known. The *Manāqib-i Sultānī* states that he married four times, had eight sons (daughters are not mentioned), and never again left the section of the Punjab from which he came. He died in 1691 and was buried outside Shorkot at a place called Qilaqahrgan (or Qilaqaʿrgan). In 1775 the Chenab river changed course and threatened to wash away his grave, whereupon his coffin was dug up and moved to its present location where his shrine functions as a pilgrimage site for people from all over the Punjab.

SULTAN BAHU'S WRITTEN WORKS

Sultan Bahu's fame is almost entirely due to his Punjabi poetry, called the *Abyāt*. This is despite the fact that he was a prolific writer of Persian prose and poetry.[14] The author of the *Manāqib-i Sultānī* claims that Bahu wrote one hundred forty works, and twenty-six existing works are ascribed to him.[15] Most of these have been published as nonscholarly Urdu translations. Through a strange set of circumstances, the work of critical edition and study of the Persian texts is being thwarted by the heirs of one Malik Fazl Din who, in the first quarter of this century, came to the realization that his vocation in life was to disseminate the teachings of Sultan Bahu. Malik Fazl Din convinced the owners of what are believed to be the most accurate (and in some cases, the only known) manuscripts of Sultan Bahu's works to hand them over to him. He then commissioned a number of unskilled translators to render them into Urdu, which he published in a press he had opened in Lahore under the name

Allāh wālē kī qawmī dukkān (The Godly One's Public Shop). The original manuscripts are in the hands of Malik Fazl Din's family which allows no one, not even the spiritual heirs of Sultan Bahu, to see them.

This is very unfortunate, because the available translations suggest that Sultan Bahu's prose works are deserving of study. They are comprised of a number of book-length monographs and a majority of shorter treatises, containing general Sufi teachings, statements demonstrating the excellence of the Qadiri order, and didactic writings illustrating visions, stations, and states encountered along the Sufi path. A preliminary investigation suggests that the most important of these are *Mahik al-faqr kalān* and *Nūr al-huda-yi kalān*.

THE PUNJABI *ABYĀT*

Bahu excelled as a mystical poet. There are frequent and extensive fragments of Persian poetry in his prose works, and he also has a Persian collection of poetry which has been published together with a versified Urdu translation.[16] But his Persian verse has not gained a popularity in any way comparable to his Punjabi poetry, which is regarded as one of the literary treasures of the language. At least fourteen editions of Bahu's Punjabi *Abyāt* have been printed, in both the Perso-Arabic and the Gurmukhi scripts (the latter being the script used by Sikhs). It has also been translated into Urdu and English, although all the translations have serious shortcomings.

Many problems of translation and redaction derive from the fact that there are no manuscripts of Bahu's Punjabi poetry known to predate this century. In fact, the oldest available collection of his *Abyāt* is a lithograph edition printed in 1891 and containing 116 poems. The most influential edition was published in 1915 by the aforementioned Malik Fazl Din and contains 183 poems. However, nothing is known concerning the written source of either of these