Chapter-3
Persian Sufi Poets and their Philosophy
The Old Persian of the Achaemenian Empire, preserved in a number of cuneiform inscriptions, was an Indo-European tongue with close affinities with Sanskrit and Avestan (the language of the Zoroastrian sacred texts). After the fall of the Achaemenians the ancient tongue developed, in the province of Pars, into Middle Persian or Pahlavi (a name derived from Parthavi - that is, Parthian). Pahlavi was used throughout the Sassanian period, though little now remains of what must once have been a considerable literature. About a hundred Pahlavi texts survive, mostly on religion and all in prose. Pahlavi collections of romances, however, provided much of the material for Ferdowsi's Shahnameh.

After the Arab conquest a knowledge of Arabic became necessary, for it was not only the language of the new rulers and their state, but of the religion they brought with them and -later- of the new learning. Though Pahlavi continued to be spoken in private life, Arabic was dominant in official circles for a century and a half. With the weakening of the central power, a modified form of Pahlavi emerged, with its Indo-European grammatical structure intact but simplified, and with a large infusion of Arabic words. This was the Modern Persian in use today.

Arabic continued to be employed in Iran, though on a decreasing scale, as Latin was used in Europe -that is, as a language of the learned. As such it was employed by Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna), al-Biruni, Rhazes, Al Ghazali and others; indeed, many of the most famous names in Arabic literature are those of men of Persian birth. But in general the use of Arabic declined; Persian developed rapidly to
become the vehicle of a great literature, and before, long spread its influence to neighboring lands. In India, Persian language and poetry became the vogue with the ruling classes, and at the court of the Moghul emperor Akbar Persian was adopted as the official language; spreading thence and fusing later with Hindi, it gave rise to the Urdu tongue.

To the west of Iran, Persian heavily influenced the language and literature of Turkey; Turkish verse was based on Persian models as regards form and style, and borrowed an extensive vocabulary.

A notable feature of Persian is the small extent to which it has changed over the thousand years or more of its existence as a literary language. Thus the poems of Roudaki, the first Persian poet of note, who died in the year 941 CE, are perfectly intelligible to the modern reader. Persian literature too has a number of noteworthy characteristics, the most striking of which is the exceptional prominence of poetry. Until quite recently there was practically no drama, and no novels were written; prose works were mostly confined to history, geography, philosophy, religion, ethics and politics, and it was poetry that formed the chief outlet for artistic expression. Classical Persian literature was produced almost entirely under royal patronage whence the frequency of panegyric verse. An influence of at least equal strength was religion, and in particular Sufism, which inspired the remarkably high proportion of mystical poetry.
Persian Poetry

Classical Persian poetry is always rhymed. The principal verse forms are the Qasideh, Masnavi, Qazal and Ruba'i. The qasida or ode is a long poem in monorhyme, usually of a panegyric, didactic or religious nature; the masnavi, written in rhyming couplets, is employed for heroic, romantic, or narrative verse; the ghazal (ode or lyric) is a comparatively short poem, usually amorous or mystical and varying from four to sixteen couplets, all on one rhyme. A convention of the ghazal is the introduction, in the last couplet, of the poet's pen name (takhallus). The ruba'i is a quatrain with a particular metre, and a collection of quatrains is called "Ruba'iyyat" (the plural of ruba'i). Finally, a collection of a poet's ghazals and other verse, arranged alphabetically according to the rhymes, is known as a divan.

A word may not be out of place here on the peculiar difficulties of interpreting Persian poetry to the western reader. To the pitfalls common to all translations from verse must be added, in the case of Persian poetry, such special difficulties as the very free use of Sufi imagery, the frequent literary, Koranic and other references and allusions, and the general employment of monorhyme, a form highly effective in Persian but unsuited to most other languages. But most important of all is the fact that the poetry of Persia depends to a greater degree than that of most other nations on beauty of language for its effects. This is why much of the great volume of "qasidas in praise of princes" can still be read with pleasure in the original, though it is largely unsuited to translation. In short, the
greatest charm of Persian poetry lies, as Sir E. Denison Ross remarked, in its language and its music, and consequently the reader of a translation "has perforce to forego the essence of the matter".

In the following brief sketch of the vast field of Persian literature we cannot hope to do more than mention a few of the most eminent authors, and to devote a paragraph or two each to the most famous of all.

**Early Literature**

Though existing fragments of Persian verse are believed to date from as early as the eighth century CE, the history of Persian literature proper begins with the lesser dynasties of the ninth and tenth centuries that emerged with the decline of the Caliphate. The most important of these were the Samanids, who established at Bokhara the first of many brilliant courts that were to patronize learning and letters. Here Abu Ali Sina, better known in the west as Avicenna, developed the medicine and philosophy of ancient Greece, and wrote numerous works that were to exercise considerable influence not only in the East but in Europe -where, translated into Latin, they were in use as late as the seventeenth century. Avicenna wrote mostly in Arabic, but composed an encyclopaedia -- the Danish Nameh-ye Ala'i - in Persian.

The most famous of the court poets were Rudaki and Daqiqi. Rudaki, generally regarded as the first of the great Persian poets, wrote a very large quantity of
verse, of which but little has survived. His style direct, simple and unadorned -
was to appear unpolished to some of the over-elaborate versifiers of later ages, but
appeals more to modern tastes. Daqiqi, a composer of epics, was commissioned to
write a work on the ancient kings of Persia, but only completed a thousand
couplets before his death. Some of these were later incorporated in the celebrated
Shahnameh.

The Ghaznavid and early Seljuq Periods

It is said that four hundred poets were attached to the court of Sultan Mahmoud;
of these, the most notable were Unsuri, the greatest of Mahmoud's panegyrists,
followed by Farrukhi, Manouchehri and Asadi. Of the prose writers, the most
celebrated was Biruni, author of the "Chronology of Ancient Nations", who wrote
exclusively in Arabic.

The Seljuq era, regarded as the second classical period of Persian literature, is one
rich both in prose and poetry. Famous prose works include Ghazali's influential
Revivification of the Religious Sciences in Arabic and its Persian summary
entitled Kimiya-ye Sa'adat (The Alchemy of Happiness); Baihaqi's History of the
Ghaznavids: the Siasat Nameh, a treatise on the art of government by Nizam ul-
Mulk, vizier to Alp Arslan and Malik Shah; the entertaining Qabus Nameh of Kai
Kawous, translated by Professor Levy as "A Mirror for Princes"; the collection of
animal fables of Indian origin entitled Kalila va Dimna by Nasr Ullah; the
charming Chahar Maqala or Four Discourses of Nizami Aruzi; the Fars Nameh of
Ibn al-Balkhi, and the noted treatise on poetics of Rashid-i Vatvat. Four of the above works - the Chahar Maqala, the History of Baihaqi, the Qabus Nameh and the Siasat Nameh - are considered by the poet Bahar as the four great masterpieces of early Persian prose.

A number of authors of this period wrote both prose and poetry. One of the most brilliant of these was Nasir-i Khosrow, writer of some fifteen works in prose and 30,000 verses, of which less than half have survived. His best known prose work is the Safar Nameh, an account of his journey to Egypt. Most of Nasir-i Khosrow's poems are lengthy odes, mainly on religious and ethical subjects; they are noted for their purity of language and dazzling technical skill. In the opinion of the scholar Mirza Mohammad Qazvini, the name of Naser Khosrow should be added to those of the six poets - Ferdowsi, Khayyam, Anvari, Rumi, Saadi, and Hafez - whom "practically all" agree to consider the six greatest Persian poets, each in his special field. Other famous poetry of the period includes the work of the mystics Ansari, Abu Sa'id and Baba Taher of Hamadan; the odes of Qatran; Gorgani's romantic epic Vis o Ramin, and the Divans of the two Indian-born poets Masoud-e Saad-e Salman and Rumi. Seven other poets of the period are of outstanding fame and brilliance; these are Khayyam, Sana'i, Moezzi, Anvari, Khaqani, Nizami and Attar.

The versatile Khayyam - "the only man known to me", says Bertrand Russell, "who was both a poet and a mathematician" - is still perhaps the best known and
most appreciated Persian poet in Europe and America. There was for long considerable scepticism as to whether he was in fact the author of all or any of the quatrains attributed to him, but the discovery recently of manuscripts more ancient than any of those previously known has removed these doubts.

Khayyam's poetry was largely neglected in Iran until the end of the nineteenth century, mainly no doubt owing to the censure of orthodoxy. When Fitzgerald's translation made him suddenly popular in the west the Iranians began to reassess his merits as a poet, and as we have seen, some native critics are now ready to accord him a place in the poetic Pantheon. Since he uses imagery common to the Sufis, Khayyam has often been hailed as a Sufi himself; but while some of his quatrains can be made to bear a mystical interpretation, the general impression of his work is one of hedonism tinged with a gentle melancholy, born of acceptance of the tragic transience of life, the power of destiny and man's ultimate ignorance. The attitude is that of a materialist rather than a deist; indeed, he has with some justice been compared to Lucretius.

Sana'i, who wrote in a style similar to that of Nasir-i Khosrow, was the author of two great Sufi epics, the prototypes of the later masterpieces of Attar and Rumi, as well as of a huge divan. Mu'izzi, hailed by 'Abbas Ighbal as "one of the artistic virtuosi of the Persian language", wrote mainly panegyric verse in a highly elaborate style. Anvari, author of numerous poetical works, mostly panegyric, wrote in a difficult style, sometimes requiring a commentary; he is regarded by
some as one of the greatest Persian poets. The poetry of Khaqani is even more mannered. The last three poets mentioned - Mu'izzī, Anvari and Khaqani - are all famous in Iran, mainly for their technical brilliance; but, being particularly difficult to translate, they are less appreciated in the west. This is not the case with the next two poets to be mentioned.

Nizami, born at Ganja in the Caucasus in 1140, was a prolific writer famous especially for his Khamseh or Quintet, a series of five great romances and epics. These consist of the Makhzan al-Asrar or Treasure House of Secrets, a mystical epic inspired by Sana'i; the popular romances Khosrow o Shirin and Lailа o Majnun; the Iskandar Nameh or Story of Alexander, and the Haft Paikar, the life story of Bahram Gur. Nizami's style is original and, colorful; his works enjoyed great popularity, and episodes from his romantic poems were favorite subjects for miniature painters.

Farid od-Din Attar, who was born possibly around 1136, was a great and an original poet who produced numerous religious and didactic works. He was essentially a mystic, and as such exercised a great influence on Rumi. The best known of his works, the Mantiq ut-Tair (translated by Fitzgerald as the Bird Parliament), is a mystical allegory in which the birds all set off in search of the mythical Simorgh, whom they wish to make their king. The story, which symbolizes the quest of the soul for union with God, ends with their discovery that they have no existence separate from the object of their search.
The Thirteenth century

The Thirteenth century produced two poetic geniuses of the first rank, Saadi and Rumi. It is also particularly notable for histories, of which many were inspired by these singularly troubled times. Hamdullah Mostofi produced notable works both of history and geography, as well as an epic, the Zafar Nameh or Book of Victory, in 75,000 couplets, and Nasir ud-Din Tusi wrote on philosophy and logic. Three notable poets of the period are Iraqi, author of the mystical Lama'at or Flashes; Amir Khosrow, known as "The Parrot of India" and author of no less than five divans, and Zakani the satirist.

Foremost in the ranks of historical works are Juvaini’s Tarikh-e Jahan Gusha, an account of the Mongol conquests; the history of Juzjani, an important source book for the history of Moslem India; Rashid ud-Din’s great Jame ot-Tawarikh or Universal History, and the History of Vassaf. The style of the period tended to over-ornateness: Juvaini, according to Arberry, was "the most accomplished exponent of the prized art of verbal arabesque", while Vassaf "modeled his style on Juvaini at his most intricate and verbose." Of the writings of this school Levy remarks that it was "so filled with metaphor, allusion, and assonance, that the meaning was often lost in a tangle of verbiage". By contrast, the work of the conscientious Rashid ud-Din, considered by Browne to be the best of all the Persian historians, is a model of clarity.
The Fifteenth Century

The fifteenth century produced a number of notable historians -Nizam od-Din Shami, author of the Zafar Nameh (a history of Timur); Yazdi, who wrote a work of the same name; Hafiz-e Abur, Khafi, Dowlatshah and Mir Khand, author of the immense Rozat as-Safa or Garden of Purity. Other prose writers of note, include Davvani, author of the Akhlaq-e Jalali, and Kashefi, who produced an elaborate prose paraphrase of Kalila va Dimna known as Anvar-e Suhaili (The Lights of Canopus). Fifteenth century poets include the Sufis Maghribi and Qasim-e Anvar, Katibi, the saintly Ni`mat Allah Vali, and Jami.

Jami, "universally regarded as the last eminent figure in the history of classical Persian literature" (Arberry) was born in 1414. A man of considerable erudition as well as of poetic genius, Jami produced some forty-five works, of which the best known are the Baharistan, the Divan, and the Haft Aurang or Seven Thrones, a series of four didactic works and three romances (Salaman o Absal, Yosef o Zoleikha and Laila o Majnoun) which he intended to rival the work of Nizami.

After Jami, who died shortly before the rise of the Safavis, Persian poetry is generally considered to have fallen into decline. There were indeed no poets of the very first rank after the fifteenth century, yet in this long period there was no lack of writers and poets of talent, some of them of great eminence.
Of the poets immediately following Jami, his nephew Hatif was a noted writer of romantic and historical epics; also famous were his pupils Asafî, Fighani (who earned himself the title of "The Little Hafiz"), Ahli and the Sufi poet Hilali. Later in the sixteenth century came the poets Hayrati, Kasimi, Kashi the panegyrist, Shani, Fasihi and Shafai.

Saeb (born 1677), the greatest literary figure of the seventeenth century, is considered by some to be the best Persian poet after Jami. In early life he spent some time in India as court poet to the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan, and returned to Iran to become poet laureate to Shah Abbas II. Saeb was a vivid and original poet who infused fresh life into the old forms and founded a new school. Also of note was his contemporary Fayyaz. A famous prose writer of the eighteenth century was Azar, author of the Atesh Kadeh (a biographical dictionary containing the lives of over 800 poets) as well as of a divan and a romantic epic. The prolific writer Hazin produced histories and an autobiography, as well as four divans. Also worthy of note is the poet Nejat.

The Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century Saba, poet laureate to Fath Ali Shah, composed a divan and an epic called the Shahanshahnameh; as a poet he was excelled by Neshat, also author of a divan. Qaani (died 1853), the best writer of the nineteenth century and perhaps the most outstanding since Jami, was one of Iran's most brilliant and melodious poets. Well-known prose works of the period include Nasir ud-Din
Shah's diaries of his three journeys to Europe and the literary biographies of the poet Reza Quli Khan. This period was marked by the increasing influence of European literature, noticeable in the works of the poet Shaybani and others.

The real revival of Persian letters came in the early twentieth century, when the growing desire for reform inspired numerous satires. One of the most outstanding figures of this period was Iraj Mirza (died 1926), a poet of great talent and champion of the emancipation of women. Other noted poets were Adib, Bahar, Lahuti, Shahryar, Aref and the poetess Parvin E'tesami. Poets of more recent decades include Nima Yoshij, Ra'di, Khanlari, Islami, Gulchin, Ahmad Shamlou, Mehdi Akhavan Sales, Mas'ud Farzad, Sohrab Sepehri, Fereidoon Moshiri and the poetess Forough Farrokhzad. Some of these poets have introduced verse forms new to Persian literature. Here should not be forgotten the great works of Sadeq Hedayat, Samad Behrangi, Sadeq Choubak and many others who enriched the Persian literature.

**Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi**

Jalaluddin Rumi (may God sanctify his holy spirit) is among the greatest Muslim saints and mystics. He has also been hailed by Western scholars as the greatest mystical poet of all time.\(^1\) And popularized versions of his poetry have made him

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the best-selling poet in America in recent years\textsuperscript{1} -- after a period of over 700 years, during which his fame has endured in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

The popularity of Rumi's (may God sanctify his holy spirit) poetry has spread in the West because of its heart-felt themes of lover-beloved mysticism, and its spiritual joy which seems to emanate even from the most distorted versions in English. However, the popularization of his poetry has also been attained by a number of sacrifices: (1) a lack of accuracy of the meanings of his words and teachings; and (2), a deliberate minimization and evasion of verses in his poetry that reveal that he was a pious Muslim all his life, and a very devoted follower of the prayerful daily life exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (may God pour blessings upon him).

Rumi (may God sanctify his holy spirit) was born in what is now the nation of Tajikistan (the country north of Afghanistan) in town of Wakhsh, where his father worked as a Muslim preacher and scholar. Wakhsh was part of the cultural area of the ancient city of Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan), which had been a major center of Islamic learning for five hundred years before Rumi (may God sanctify his holy spirit) was born. His father, also a great mystic, or sufi master, was from Balkh. He named his son Muhammad, but later called him by the additional name, Jalâlu 'd-deen ("the Glory of the Faith"). His full name was

\footnote{the best-selling poet in America in recent years: according to an article in the "Christian Science Monitor," 11/25/97.}
Jalālu 'd-deen Muhammad bin (= son of) Husayn al-Balkhī. Later, when he moved to Anatolia (present-day Turkey) with his family, he became known as Jalālu 'd-deen Muhammad al-Roomee. This is because Anatolia had been called for centuries "Rūm" (a form of "Rome") which meant "the land of the Greeks" (who had long ruled the area from Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire and later the Byzantine Empire). In the East, he has always been known as Mawlānā (pronounced "Mowlānā" in Iran, India, and Pakistan; pronounced "Mevlana" in Turkey). This means "our Master" in Arabic, and was traditionally a title given to Muslim scholars. However, due to his great fame, the respectful title "Mawlānā" quickly came to refer primarily to Jalaluddin Rumi. Only in the West has he been called "Rumi."

Rumi must have memorized much or all of the Holy Qur'an when he was young, because the Mathnawi and his other poetry are filled with direct quotes in Arabic, Persian paraphrases, and references to Qur'anic verses. He belonged to the Hanafi school of Islamic law, one of the four orthodox legal traditions of the Sunni branch of Islam. This means that his daily religious behavior was faithful to the many details of the Hanafi tradition of how to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad.

Rumi's (may God sanctify his holy spirit) first sufi master, Sayyid Burhānu 'd-din Termezi, was his father's leading sufi disciple who came to Anatolia after hearing of the death of his father. Rumi (may God sanctify his holy spirit) was his sufi disciple for ten years, during part of which he was sent to Syria to obtain a
traditional Islamic education. Sayyid Burhanuddin was also a profound mystic who instilled in Rumi a love of Persian sufi poetry and ordered him to do a number of lengthy solitary prayer retreats.

Rumi was 37 years of age when he met his second sufi master, Shamsu 'd-deen Muhammad al-Tabreezee (from Tabriz), traditionally believed to have been about 60 years old. It is now known that Shams was not an illiterate and "wild" dervish as previously thought by Western scholars, but had a solid Islamic education and was literate and fluent in Arabic as well as Persian. And Shams himself belonged to another major orthodox school of Sunni Islamic law, called Shafi'i. In the "Discourses of Shams," a collection of notes recorded by his disciples (among whom was Rumi's son, Sultan Walad), Shams reveals himself not only to be a profound mystic, but very knowledgeable about traditional and mystical interpretations of verses from the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

And he criticized at least one famous sufi master for not following the daily religious behavior of the Prophet.5

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1 Shafi'i: see "Rumi-- Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalâl al-Din Rumi" by Franklin D. Lewis, United Kingdom: Oneworld, 2000, p. 142.


3 not following the daily religious behavior of the Prophet: refers (in Shams' "Discourses") to "Shaykh Muhammad," believed by scholars to be the famous sufi genius. Ibn al-'Arabî, whom Shams both admired and criticized because he "did not follow" [mutâba'at] (the Prophet). See Lewis, p. 150.
In a biography of Rumi, written by a disciple of Rumi's grandson, Aflâki, along with many miracle stories, are many accounts of how Rumi prayed the five daily ritual Islamic prayers, fasted during the month of Ramadan, and did many extended voluntary fasts. And there are many accounts in which he voiced traditional Islamic beliefs on many topics.

But it is in the masterpiece of his later life, the Mathnawi-ye Ma'navî (literally, "Rhymed Couplets of Deep Spiritual Meaning") that he reveals himself as both a profound mystic and an extremely devout Muslim. And a study of his stories and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad reveals his veneration and love for the Holy Prophet and the Revelation that was sent to him from God Most High.

Mawlânâ Jalâlûddîn Muhammad al-Balkhî al-Rûmî died in 1273 and was buried next to his father's tomb in Konya, Turkey. The anniversary of his death was commemorated for centuries according to the Islamic lunar calendar, but has been celebrated in Turkey for the past 50 years according to the Western solar calendar on December 17. On the night of this date, Mevlevis all over the world whirl in remembrance and glorification of God, and many kinds of groups read Rumi's poetry in their own languages.

Rumi was both a great mystic and great poet. His poetry is vibrant with the energy and illumination of a saint who has reached a consciousness beyond the ordinary experiences of man. Through his poetry Rumi is able to give a wonderful glimpse of the mystic beyond. And by giving us a glimpse, these poems have the potency
to awaken in ourselves a sense that this mystic world can be accessible to our own aspiring soul.

Give me ecstasy, give me naked wonder, O my Creator!

Give birth to the Beloved in me, and let this lover die.

Let a thousand wrangling desires become one Love. (1)

- Rumi

**Confused and Distraught**¹

Again I am raging, I am in such a state by your soul that every bond you bind, I break, by your soul.

I am like heaven, like the moon, like a candle by your glow; I am all reason, all love, all soul, by your soul.

My joy is of your doing, my hangover of your thorn; whatever side you turn your face, I turn mine, by your soul.

I spoke in error; it is not surprising to speak in error in this state, for this moment I cannot tell cup from wine, by your soul.

I am that madman in bonds who binds the "divs"; I, the madman, am a Solomon with the "divs", by your soul.

Whatever form other than love raises up its head from my heart, forthwith I drive it out of the court of my heart, by your soul.

Come, you who have departed, for the thing that departs comes back; neither you are that, by my soul, nor I am that, by your soul.

Disbeliever, do not conceal disbelief in your soul, for I will recite the secret of your destiny, by your soul.

Out of love of Sham-e Tabrizi, through wakefulness or nightrising, like a spinning mote I am distraught, by your soul.

**Ode 2180**

From these depths depart towards heaven;

may your soul be happy, journey joyfully.

You have escaped from the city full of fear and trembling;

happily become a resident of the Abode of Security

If the body’s image has gone, await the image-maker; if the body is utterly ruined, become all soul.

If your face has become saffron pale through death, become a dweller among tulip beds and Judas trees.

If the doors of repose have been barred to you, come, depart by way of the roof and the ladder.

If you are alone from Friends and companions, by the help of God become a saheb-qrān. [lord of happy circumstance].

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If you have been secluded from water and bread, like bread
become the food of the souls, and so become!

Farid al-Din 'Attar

Greatest Sufi poet, Farid al-Din 'Attar was born in Nishapur, in northeastern Iran, in 1142. He was beheaded by the invading Mongol army in 1221. His tomb at Shadyakh is visited by many.

There is little information on the formative life of the poet other than he was the son of a prosperous pharmacist and that he received an excellent education in medicine, Arabic, and theosophy at a madrasah attached to the shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad. According to his own Mosibat Nameh (Book of Afflictions), as a youth, he worked in his father's pharmacy where he prepared drugs and attended patients. Upon his father's death, he became the owner of his own store. ¹

Work in the pharmacy was difficult for young 'Attar. People from all walks of life visited the shop and shared their troubles with him. Their poverty, it seems, impacted the young poet the most. One day, it is related, an unsightly fakir visited the shop. The way he marveled at the opulence of the store made 'Attar uneasy; he ordered the fakir to leave. Looking the owner and the well-stocked shop over, the

¹ Farid al-Din 'Attar by Iraj Bashiri. 2002
fakir said, "I have no difficulty with this, pointing to his ragged cloak, to leave; but you, how are you, with all this, planning to leave!"

The fakir's response affected 'Attar deeply. He pondered the fakir's reply for many days and, eventually, decided to give up his shop and join the circle of Shaykh Rukn al-Din Akkaf of the Kubraviyyah order. His new life was one of travel and exploration, very much like the fakir who had inspired him. For a long time, he traveled to Ray, Kufa, Mecca, Damascus, Turkistan, and India, meeting with Sufi shaykhs, learning about the tariqah, and experiencing life in the khaniqahs.¹

When finally he felt he had achieved what he had been seeking in travel, 'Attar returned to Nishapur, settled, and reopened his pharmacy. He also began to contribute to the promotion of Sufi thought. Called Tadhkirat al-Auliya (Memorial of the Saints), 'Attar's initial contribution to his new world contains all the verses and sayings of Sufi saints who, up to that time, had not penned a biography of their own.

Regarding the poetic output of 'Attar there are conflicting reports both with respect to the number of books that he might have written and the number of distichs he might have composed. For instance, Reza Gholikhan Hedayat reports the number of books to be 190 and the number of distichs to be 100,000. Firdowsi's Shahname contains only 60,000 bayts. Another tradition puts the number of books to be the same as the number of the Surahs (verses) of the

¹ ibid
Qur'an, i.e., 114. More realistic studies consider the number of his books to have been between 9 to 12 volumes.

'Attar's works fall within three categories. First are those works in which mysticism is in perfect balance with a finished, story-teller's art. The second group are those in which a pantheistic zeal gains the upper hand over literary interest. The third are those in which the aging poet idolizes the saint Ali. During this period there is no trace of ordered thoughts and descriptive skills.

One of 'Attar's major poetic works is called Asrar Nameh (Book of Secrets) about Sufi ideas. This is the work that the aged Shaykh gave Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi when Rumi's family stayed over at Nishapur on its way to Konya, Turkey. Another major contribution of 'Attar is the Elahi Nameh (Divine Book), about zuhd or asceticism.  

But foremost among 'Attar's works is his Manteq al-Tayr (Conference of the Birds) in which he makes extensive use of Al-Ghazali's Risala on Birds as well as a treatise by the Ikhwan al-Safa (the Brothers of Serenity) on the same topic. Led by the hoopoe, the birds of the world set forth in search of their king, Simurgh. Their quest takes them through seven valleys

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1 Farid al-Din 'Attar by Iraj Bashiri, 2002
Seven Valleys of Love¹

The Valley of the Quest

"When you enter the first valley, the Valley of the Quest, a hundred difficulties will assail you; you will undergo a hundred trials. There, the Parrot of heaven is no more than a fly. You will have to spend several years there, you will have to make great efforts, and to change your state. You will have to give up all that has seemed precious to you and regard as nothing all that you possess. When you are sure that you possess nothing, you still will have to detach yourself from all that exists. Your heart will then be saved from perdition and you will see the pure light of Divine Majesty and your real wishes will be multiplied to infinity. One who enters here will be filled with such longing that he will give himself up completely to the quest symbolized by this valley. He will ask of his cup-bearer a draught of wine, and he has drunk it nothing will matter except the pursuit of his true aim. Then he will no longer fear the dragons, the guardians of the door, which seek to devour him. When the door is opened and he enters, then dogma, belief and unbelief—all cease to exist."

¹ Written by Farid al-Din 'Attar (1142-1220) Translated by C. S. Nott
The Valley of Love

"The next valley is the Valley of Love. To enter it one must be a flaming fire—what shall I say? A man must himself be fire. The face of the lover must be enflamed, burning and impetuous as fire. True love knows no after-thoughts; with love, good and evil cease to exist. "But as for you, the heedless and careless, this discourse will not touch you, your teeth will not even nibble at it. A loyal person stakes ready money, stakes his head even, to be united to his friend. Others content themselves with what they will do for you tomorrow. If he who sets out on this way will not engage himself wholly and completely he will never be free from the sadness and melancholy which weigh him down. Until the falcon reaches his aim he is agitated and distressed. If a fish is thrown onto the beach by the waves it struggles to get back into the water.

"In this valley, love is represented by fire, and reason by smoke. When love comes reason disappears. Reason cannot live with the folly of love; love gas nothing to do with human reason. If you possessed inner sight, the atoms of the visible world would be manifested to you. But if you look at things with the eye of ordinary reason you will never understand how necessary it is to love. Only a man who has been tested and is free can feel this. He who undertakes this journey should have a thousand hearts so that he can sacrifice one at every moment."

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The Valley of Understanding

"After the valley of which I have spoken, there comes another--the Valley of Understanding, which has neither beginning nor end. No way is equal to this way, and the distance to be traveled to cross it is beyond reckoning". Understanding, for each traveler, is enduring; but knowledge is temporary. The soul, like the body, is in a state of progress or decline; and the Spiritual Way reveals itself only in the degree to which the traveler has overcome his faults and weaknesses, his sleep and his inertia, and each will approach nearer to his aim according to his effort. Even if a gnat were to fly with all its might could it equal the speed of the wind? There are different ways of crossing this Valley, and all birds do not fly alike. Understanding can be arrived at variously--some have found the Mihrab, others the idol. When the sun of understanding brightens this road each receives light according to his merit and he finds the degree assigned to him in the understanding of truth. When the mystery of the essence of beings reveals itself clearly to him the furnace of this world becomes a garden of flowers. He who is striving will be able to see the almond in its hard shell. He will no longer be pre-occupied with himself, but will look up at the face of his friend. In each atom he will see the whole; he will ponder over thousands of bright secrets.

"But, how many have lost their way in this search for one who has found the mysteries! It is necessary to have a deep and lasting wish to become as we ought to be in order to cross this difficult valley. Once you have tasted the secrets you
will have a real wish to understand them. But, whatever you may attain, never forget the words of the Koran. "Is there anything more?"

"As for you who are asleep (and I cannot commend you for this), why not put on mourning? You, who have not seen the beauty of your friend, get up and search! How long will you stay as you are, like a donkey without a halter!"

**The Valley of Independence and Detachment**

"The there comes the valley where there is neither the desire to possess nor the wish to discover. In this state of the soul a cold wind blows, so violent that in a moment it devastates an immense space; the seven oceans are no more than a pool, the seven planets a mere sparkle, the seven heavens a corpse, the seven hells broken ice. Then, an astonishing thing, beyond reason! An ant has the strength of a hundred elephants, and a hundred caravans perish while a rook is filling his crop.

"In order that Adam might receive the celestial light, hosts of green-clad angels were consumed by sorrow. So that Noah might become a carpenter of God and build the ark, thousands of creatures perished in the waters. Myriads of gnats fell on the army of Abrahah so that that king would be overthrown. Thousands of the first-born died so that Moses might see God. Thousands of people took to the Christian girdles so that Christ could possess the secret of God. Thousands of hearts and souls were pillaged so that Muhammad might ascend for one night to heaven. In this Valley nothing old or new has value; you can act or not act. If you
saw a whole world burning until hearts were only shish kabab, it would be only a
dream compared to reality. If myriads of souls were to fall into this boundless
ocean it would be as a drop of dew. If heaven and earth were to burst into minute
particles it would be no more than a leaf falling from a tree; and if everything
were to be annihilated, from the fish to the moon, would there be found in the
depths of a pit the leg of a lame ant? If there remain no trace of either of men or
jinn, the secret of a drop of water from which all has been formed is still to be
pondered over."

**The Valley of Unity**

"You will next have to cross the Valley of unity. In this valley everything is
broken in pieces and then unified. All who raise their heads here raise them from
the same collar. Although you seem to see many beings, in reality there is only
one--all make one which is complete in its unity. Again, that which you see as a
unity is not different from that which appears in numbers. And as the Being of
whom I speak is beyond unity and numbering, cease to think of eternity as before
and after, and since these two eternities have vanished, cease to speak of them.
When all that is visible is reduced to nothing, what is there left to contemplate?"
The Valley of Astonishment and Bewilderment

"After the Valley of Unity comes the Valley of Astonishment and Bewilderment, where one is a prey to sadness and dejection. There sighs are like swords, and each breath a bitter sight; there, is sorrow and lamentation, and a burning eagerness. It is at once day and night. There, is fire, yet a man is depressed and despondent. How, in his bewilderment, shall he continue his way? But he who has achieved unity forgets all and forgets himself. If he is asked: "Are you, or are you not? Have you or have you not the feeling of existence? Are you in the middle or on the border? Are you mortal or immortal?" he will reply with certainty: "I know nothing, I understand nothing, I am unaware of myself. I am in love, but with whom I do not know. My heart is at the same time both full and empty of love."

The Valley of Deprivation and Death

"Last of all comes the Valley of Deprivation and Death, which is almost impossible to describe. The essence of the Valley is forgetfulness, dumbness and distraction; the thousand shadows which surround you disappear in a single ray of the celestial sun. When the ocean of immensity begins to heave, the pattern on its surface loses its form; and this pattern is no other than the world present and the world to come. Whoever declares that he does not exist acquires great merit. The drop that becomes part of this great ocean abides there for ever and in peace. In this calm sea, a man, at first, experiences only humiliation and overthrow; but
when he emerges from this state he will understand it as creation, and many
secrets will be revealed to him. "Many beings have missed taking the first step
and so have not been able to take the second--they can only be compared to
minerals. When aloe wood and thorns are reduced to ashes they both look alike--
but their quality is different. An impure object dropped into rose-water remains
impure because of its innate qualities; but a pure object dropped into the ocean
will lose its specific existence and will participate in the ocean and in its
movement. In ceasing to exist separately it retains its beauty. It exists and non-
exists. How can this be? The mind cannot conceive it."

These seven valleys were supposed to be level of self accutualization for a Sufi
saint. In the first of which a hundred difficulties assail them, they undergo many
trials as they try to free themselves of what is precious to them and change their
state. Once successful and filled with longing, they ask for wine to dull the effects
of dogma, belief, and unbelief on their lives. In the second valley, the birds give
up reason for love and, with a thousand hearts to sacrifice, continue their quest for
discovering the Simurgh.

The third valley confounds the birds, especially when they discover that their
worldly knowledge has become completely useless and their understanding has
become ambivalent. They cannot understand why both the mihrab and the idol
lead to understanding. Devoid of their earthly measures, they lose their ability to
distinguish right from wrong. The fourth valley is introduced as the valley of
detachment, i.e., detachment from desire to possess and the wish to discover.

The birds begin to feel that they have become part of a universe that is detached
from their physical recognizable reality. In their new world, the planets are as
minute as sparks of dust and elephants are not distinguishable from ants. It is not
until they enter the fifth valley that they realize that unity and multiplicity are the
same. And as they have become entities in a vacuum with no sense of eternity.
More importantly, they realize that God is beyond unity, multiplicity, and
eternity. Stepping into the sixth valley, the birds become astonished at the beauty
of the Beloved. Experiencing extreme sadness and dejection, they feel that they
know nothing, understand nothing.

They are not even aware of themselves. Only thirty birds reach the abode of the
Simurgh. But there is no Simurgh anywhere to see. Simurgh's chamberlain keeps
them waiting for Simurgh long enough for the birds to figure out that they
themselves are the si (thirty) murgh (bird). The seventh valley is the valley of
depravation, forgetfulness, dumbness, deafness, and death. The present and future
lives of the thirty successful birds become shadows chased by the celestial Sun.
And themselves, lost in the Sea of His existence, are the Simurgh.
The Veil

We are the Magians of old,
Islam is not the faith we hold;
In irreligion is our fame,
And we have made our creed a shame.

Now to the tavern we repair
To gamble all our substance there,
Now in the monastery cell
We worship with the infidel.

When Satan chances us to see
He doffs his cap respectfully,
For we have lessons to impart
To Satan in the tempter's art.

We were not in such nature made
Of any man to be afraid;
Head and foot in naked pride
Like sultans o'er the earth we ride.

1 Written by Farid al-Din 'Attar (1142-1220) Translated by A. J. Arberry
But we, alas, aweary are
And the road is very far;
We know not by what way to come
Unto the place that is our home.

And therefore we are in despair
How to order our affair
Because, wherever we have sought,
Our minds were utterly distraught.

When shall it come to pass, ah when,
That suddenly, beyond our ken,
We shall succeed to rend this veil
That hath our whole affair conceal?

What veil so ever after this
Apparent to our vision is,
With the flame of knowledge true
We shall consume it through and through.

Where at the first in that far place
We come to the world of space,
Our soul by travail in the end
To that perfection shall ascend.

And so shall 'Attar Shattered be
And, rapt in sudden ecstasy,
Soar to godly vision, even
Beyond the veils of earth and heaven.

Sa'adi

Sa'adi (in Persian: سعدی, full name in English: Muslih-ud-Din Mushrif-ibn-Abdullah) (1184 - 1283/1291?) is one of the major Persian poets of the medieval period. He is recognized not only for the quality of his writing, but also for the depth of his social thought.

A native of Shiraz, Persia, Saadi left his native town at a young age for Baghdad to study Arabic literature and Islamic sciences at Nizamiah University (1195-1226). He is known as a Sufi thinker, and was a student of the respected Sufi Sheikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi. Saadi liked to travel, and lived much of his life as a wandering dervish. After Iraq he traveled the region for nearly thirty years. He went to Shamat (Syria), Palestine, Hijaz (Arabia), Yemen, Egypt and Rum (Turkey), which was in Byzantine control at the time. At one time he is said to have been captured by the Crusaders. Saadi died in his hometown of Shiraz. There is some discrepancy about the date of his death, but he may have died a
centenarian. His tomb was greatly elaborated in 1952 and has since became a tourist attraction.

Saadi's writings are held to be among the greatest Sufi classics. He wrote "The Orchard" (Bostan) in 1257,"The Rose Garden" (Gulistan) in 1258. There is also a Divan, or collection of his poetry. He wrote short stories and poems about his adventurous life in both his major works. Saadi has been translated by a number of major Western poets, most of whom were not deterred by the "transparently homoerotic" tone of much of his work. According to Wayne Dynes, "English translators even in the tamer episodes of the Gulistan turn boys into girls and change anecdotes about pederasty into tales of heterosexual love."

Chief among these works is Goethe's West-Oestlicher Divan. Andre du Ryer was the first European to present Saadi to the West, by means of a partial French translation of Golistan in 1634. Adam Olearius followed soon with a complete translation of the Bustan and the Golistan into German in 1654. Ralph Waldo Emerson was also an avid fan of Sa'di's writings, contributing to some translated editions himself.

One of his more famous quotes is, "Whatever is produced in haste goes easily to waste." Another famous poem focuses on the kinship of all humans. The same

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poem is used to grace the entrance to the Hall of Nations of the UN building in New York with this call for breaking all barriers: 1

**Have no Doubts**

Have no doubts because of trouble nor be thou discomfited;
For the water of life's fountain springeth from a gloomy bed.

Ah! ye brothers of misfortune! be not ye with grief oppressed,
Many are the secret mercies which with the All-bounteous rest.

**How could I ever thank my Friend?**

How could I ever thank my Friend?
No thanks could ever begin to be worthy.
Every hair of my body is a gift from Him;
How could I thank Him for each hair?
Praise that lavish Lord forever
Who from nothing conjures all living beings!
Who could ever describe His goodness?
His infinite glory lays all praise waste.

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1 Jan Rypka, History of Iranian Literature. Reidel Publishing Company. ASIN B-000-6BXVT-K
2 Sa'adi English version by Edward B. Eastwick
3 Sa'adi English version by Andrew Harvey
Look, He has graced you a robe of splendor
From childhood's first cries to old age!
He made you pure in His own image; stay pure.
It is horrible to die blackened by sin.
Never let dust settle on your mirror's shining;
Let it once grow dull and it will never polish.
When you work in the world to earn your living
Do not, for one moment, rely on your own strength.
Self-worshiper, don't you understand anything yet?
It is God alone that gives your arms their power.

If, by your striving, you achieve something good,
Don't claim the credit all for yourself;
It is fate that decides who wins and who loses
And all success streams only from the grace of God.
In this world you never stand by your own strength;
It is the Invisible that sustains you every moment.

Khajeh Shamseddin Mohammad Hafiz-s Shirazi

Very little credible information is know about Hafiz's life, particularly its early part. Immediately after his death, many stories, some of mythical proportions were woven around his life. The following is an attempt at encapsulating what we know with a fair amount of certainty about Hafiz's life. He is supposed to have born between the years 1320 - 1325 a.d or 722-727 A.H in Shiraz, in South-
central Iran. He proclaimed the pen-name of Hafiz or Hafez (a title given to those who had memorized the Koran by heart. It is claimed that Hafiz had done this in fourteen different ways). He was later given the title of Khajeh Shamseddin Mohammad Hafiz-s Shirazi. Hafiz married in his twenties, even though he continued his love for Shakh-e Nabat, as the manifest symbol of her Creator's beauty.

He had memorized the Koran by listening to his father's recitations of it. He also had memorized many of the works of his hero, Saadi, as well as Attar, Rumi and Nizami. His father who was a coal merchant died, leaving him and his mother with much debt. Hafiz and his mother went to live with his uncle (also called Saadi). He left day school to work in a drapery shop and later in a bakery. At the age of 21, while still working at the bakery, Hafiz delivered bread to a wealthy quarter of town and saw Shakh-e Nabat, a young woman of incredible beauty. Many of his poems are addressed to Shakh-e Nabat. In pursuit of reaching his beloved, Hafiz kept a forty day and night vigil at the tomb of Baba Kuhi. After successfully attaining this, he met Attar and became his disciple. He later became a poet of the court of Abu Ishak. He gained much fame and influence in Shiraz. This was the phase of "Spiritual Romanticism" in his poetry. When Mubariz Muzaffar captured Shiraz, he ousted Hafiz from his position of teacher of Koranic studies at the college. At this time he wrote protest poems. Shah Shuja took his tyrant father as prisoner, and re-instated Hafiz as a teacher at the college. He began his phase of subtle spirituality in his poetry.
Hafiz fled Shiraz for his safety, and went into self-imposed exile in Isfahan. His poems mainly talk of his longing for Shiraz, for Shakh-e Nabat, and for his spiritual Master, Attar (not the famous Farid-uddin Attar of Neishabour - who predates Hafiz by a couple of centuries - but the lesser known Attar of Shiraz). By invitation of Shah Shuja, he ended his exile and returned to Shiraz. He was re-instated to his post at the College. Longing to be united with his Creator, he began a forty day and night vigil by sitting in a circle that he had drawn himself. On the morning of the fortieth day of his vigil, which was also on the fortieth anniversary of meeting his Master Attar, he went to his Master, and upon drinking a cup of wine that Attar gave him, he attained Cosmic Consciousness or God-Realization. In this phase, up to the age of 69 when he died, he composed more than half of his ghazals, and continued to teach his small circle of disciples. His poetry at this time, talk with the authority of a Master who is united with God. Tomb of the saint is located in Musalla Gardens, along the banks of Ruknabad river in Shiraz, which is referred to as Hafezieh.

The collection of his work includes Divan-e-Hafiz with some 500 ghazals, 42 Rubaiyees, and a few Qaseedeh's, composed over a period of 50 years. Hafiz only composed when he was divinely inspired, and therefore he averaged only about 10 Ghazals per year. His focus was to write poetry worthy of the Beloved. Compiler of DivanHafiz did not compile his poetry. Mohammad Golandaam, who
also wrote a preface to his compilation, completed it in 813 A.H or 1410 a.d., some 21-22 years after Hafiz's death.

Also another person who compiled Hafiz's poetry was one of his young disciples Sayyid Kasim-e Anvar, who collected 569 Ghazals attributed to Hafiz. He died in 1431 a.d. some 42-43 years after Hafiz's death.

**Hakim Sanai**

Not much is known about Hakim Sanai, often just called Sanai or Sanai of Ghazna. Sanai is one of the earlier Sufi poets. He was born in the province of Ghazna in southern Afghanistan in the middle of the 11th century and probably died around 1150.

Rumi acknowledged Sanai and Attar as his two primary inspirations, saying, "Attar is the soul and Sanai its two eyes, I came after Sanai and Attar." Sanai was originally a court poet who was engaged in writing praises for the Sultan of Ghazna.

The story is told of how the Sultan decided to lead a military attack against neighboring India and Sanai, as a court poet, was summoned to join the expedition to record the Sultan's exploits. As Sanai was making his way to the court, he passed an enclosed garden frequented by a notorious drunk named Lai Khur.
As Sanai was passing by, he heard Lai Khur loudly proclaim a toast to the blindness of the Sultan for greedily choosing to attack India, when there was so much beauty in Ghazna. Sanai was shocked and stopped. Lai Khur then proposed a toast to the blindness of the famous young poet Sanai who, with his gifts of insight and expression, couldn’t see the pointlessness of his existence as a poet praising such a foolish Sultan.

These words were like an earthquake to Hakim Sanai, because he knew they were true. He abandoned his life as a pampered court poet, even declining marriage to the Sultan’s own sister, and began to study with a Sufi master named Yusef Hamdani.

Sanai soon went on pilgrimage to Mecca. When he returned, he composed his Hadiqatu'l Haqiqat or The Walled Garden of Truth. There was a double meaning in this title for, in Persian, the word for a walled garden is the same word for paradise, but it was also from within a walled garden that Lai Khur uttered the harsh truths that set Hakim Sanai on the path of wisdom.

**Meditation**

Collect your mind’s fragments

that you may fill yourself

bit by bit with Meaning:

the slave who meditates
the mysteries of Creation

for sixty minutes

gains more merit

than from sixty years

of fasting and prayer.

Meditation:

high-soaring hawk

of Intellect's wrist

resting at last

on the flowering branch

of the Heart:

this world and the next

are hidden beneath

its folded wing.

Now perched before

the mud hut

which is Earth

now clasping with its talons

a branch of the Tree

of Paradise

soaring here

striking there -- each moment

fresh prey
gobbling a mouthful of moonlight
wheeling away
beyond the sun
darting between the Great Wheel's
star-set spokes, it rips to shreds
the Footstool and the Throne
a Pigeon's feather
in its beak --
or a comet --
till finally free of everything
it alights, silent
on a topmost bough.
Hunting is king's sport,
and just anyone's
pastime
but you?
you've hooded the falcon
-- what can I say? --
clipped its pinions
broken its wings...
alas.
Mystic Chat

My dear!
You haven't the feet
for this path --
why struggle?
You've no idea where
the idol's to be found --
what's all this
mystic chat?
What can be done
with quarrelsome
fellow travelers,
boastful
marketplace
morons?
If you were really a lover
you'd see that faith and infidelity
are one...
Oh, what's the use?
nit-picking
about such things
is a hobby for
numb brains.
You are pure spirit
but imagine yourself a corpse!
pure water which thinks
it's the pot!
Everything you want
must be searched for --
except the Friend.
If you don't find Him
you'll never
be able
to start
to even
look.
Yes,
you can be sure:
You are not Him --
unless
you can remove yourself
from between
yourself
and Him --
in which case
you
are
Him.