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Saif-ul-Malook: Translated Verses
Kaneez Fatima Syeda

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Introduction

Saif-ul-Malook (1863) is a Punjabi epic written by Mian Muhammad Buksh, Punjabi sufi poet of eastern Punjab. His mystic vision of life encompasses the very somber themes and great realities of universe in general and life in particular. His versified tale “Saif-ul-Malook” celebrates the eternal love and celestial union of Prince Saif-ul-Malook, the Egyptian prince with “Shah Peri” (Queen of fairies) whose real name was Badi-ul-Jamal. The prince happens to see the picture of the fairy on an old sovereign stamp and falls in love with her. After a long series of trials and toils the prince reaches the fairy and weds her. Mian Muhammad Buksh has described the tale in symbolical and allegorical stance. The Fairy in the tale symbolizes the “Eternal Truth”. The prince in search for the fairy is symbolical of man’s quest for the “Eternal Truth” or “Ultimate Reality” where he reaches only with the “Recipience of Divine illumination”. I have ventured to translate the selected verses of the epic in English to

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make it available for universal reading.

“Jis vich gujhi ramz na hovay , dard mandan de halun
Behtar chup Muhammad Buksha sukhn ajaihay nalun
Jo shair be peera hovay sukhn auhday bhi rukhay
Be peeray thein shaer na Honda, agg bin dhoon na dhukhay.”

(Buksh, p.28)

(The poetry in which there is no deep conceit suiting to describe the plight of the grieved, is not worthy of any merit. It is better to be silent Muhammad Buksh than utter such verse. The words of the poet devoid of pain are impact less. There is no poetry without pain likewise there is no smoke without fire.)

“Shaer mairay is mulk apnay vich mool na panday qeemat
Door duraday jis nu labhin , janay bahut ghaneemat .
Kaisar sasta hay Kashmiray, puchu mul Lahorun
Pista te Badam Muhammad sastay milan Pishawerun.”

(Buksh, p.30)

(The true worth of my poetry is not known in my own country; in far off lands it would be truly esteemed and enjoyed. The same as Saffron is cheaper in Kashmir where it is abundant but its true value can be judged while to be purchased from Lahore where it is not found easily. Muhammad Buksh everything is valueless in its native place but esteemed abroad, same is the case with my poetry.)

“Je lakh zuhd , ebadat kariay , bin ishqun kis kari
Jan, jan ishq na saray tainun , ta,ta nibhay na yari.”

(Buksh, p.35)

(Without Divine love, your prayers are vile. If there is no burning fire of love in your heart and soul, you can never embrace the beloved Reality.)

“Qissa Saif Malookay wala is karan hun kehna

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Talib himat kr ke chalay, rawa na rakhay behna.”

(Buksh, p.43)

(This is because of the burning fire of Divine love in me that I intend to narrate the story of Saif-ul-Malook in verse. I invoke the Divine providence of courage as Muse who will make me write the tale successfully.)

“Saif-Malook ander Rab paya buhta asar danai
Tez tabiat, hosh wadiat, fehm aqal, chitrai.”

(Buksh, p.53)

(The God put prudence in prince Saif-ul-Malook. He was wise, agile, mentally alert and active.)

“Saif Malook shehzaday ja oh moorat waikhi sari
Lagi aag , hoya dil ander tap ke wang angari
Achan chait gian khul akhin, maray ishq naqaray
Laiy hathiyar, latha mal thanay, kot aqal de maray.”

(Buksh, p.57)

(Prince Saif-ul-Malook saw the picture of the fairy inscribed on the stamp and was infatuated by it to the extent that he felt his heart burning like amber with the fire of love. Love blew the trumpet to fight a duel with reason to the extent that all the visible doors of his fragile and misleading brain got closed and the hidden oriels of his soul leading to Divine Reality were opened at once.)

“Ashiq da jo daru dasay bajh milap sajan de
Oh siana jan aiana, rog na janay mun de
Manday mun de rog Muhammad, manday nahin dawawan
Baid hovay jo dilber taain, baidan kholh sunawan.”

(Buksh, p.60)

(He ,who suggests any remedy to the lover except union with the beloved is sane no more. He can be considered imbecile not knowing the predicament of the soul. The ailment of the heart and soul are worst in a sense that no nostrum can reach them. The only cure is the union

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with the beloved.)

“Aih haqeeqat sun shehzada karda shukar baichara
Aisay dunia utay wasda kidhray yar piara
Dais ba daisi phirda rehsan ja tak hog hayati
Mat sabab banasi mola,labhsi dast kharati.”

(Buksh, P.68)

(The prince felt relieved by hearing from someone that his beloved fairy lives somewhere in this world ,so it was not impossible to reach her. He intended to wander from place to place in pursuit of the fairy, might be, God Almighty endows him with the sweet reward of his pursuit.)

“Daihu ijazat mainu babul aihu khahish mairi
Safar karan us soorat karan, katan ranj ghanairi
Kohistanan te Kohkafan,hor samander tapoo
Apun aihin jahin loran, ja ja hovay qaboo.”

(Buksh, p.72)

(The prince (Saif-ul-Malook) takes permission from his father to set out on his expedition in search of the fairy by saying that he will wander for his pursuit and bear the brunt of Sisyphean task. Like Superman he intends to wander in alien lands and undergo trials and sufferings on high mountains, in fairylands and into fathomless oceans. He will perform difficult tasks as Superman and reach the places where none can.)

“Khawbay ander nazri aius soorat moorat wali
Kaih kujh sift sunawan usdi sharah bianu ali
Saif Malookay khawabay ander pala usda pharia
Ratu ro nimana ashiq pairan ooper jharya.”

(Buksh, p.79)

(One night the prince saw the same beautiful maiden (the fairy) whom he saw on sovereign stamp in his dream. She was looking so charming that it beggared all description. Saif-ul-Malook, in the dream, approached the fairy bewailing and weeping blood, fell upon her feet.)

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“main te ap muhabat tairi tain thi kujh ziada
Tahin ap sadawan tainu jhabday a shehzada
Khushki rastay pahunch na saksain, thail nadi vich bairay
Lehr ishq di man Muhammad, chor tamamı jhairay
Nadi majaz, samand haqanu kharsi rah awalay
Baira bhaj hovay ga totay, kad sabit sang chalay
Rooh shehzada, nadi param di, baira jan badan nu
Jani nal milain tad jani, karain shakista tan nu.”

(Buksh, p.80)

(In the dream, the fairy spoke thus: “O, prince! I myself am infatuated by you and my love is more powerful than yours, so, I came in your dream to invite you and tell you the way to reach me. She told that the prince would never be able to reach the destination over land. Land is symbolical of barren frame of man which leads nowhere unless it is watered by the spiritual love and lighted by the Divine illumination. The fairy advised the prince to travel by sea. The wave of the sea can be taken for the wave of unfathomable love, O, Muhammad Buksh, which makes a man indifferent to everything under the sun. The stream in which to sail the boat, said the fairy, was actually the stream of this fragile life. After some distance in the stream there comes the sea of eternal life and Divine love. This sea will lead the prince into a new direction when he leaves the stream of this fragile life. The boat will break into pieces as it is destined to quit during the journey of soul towards the eternal reality. The prince in this epic stands for soul. The stream (sea) to sail in, to find out the fairy is the stream of eternal love and the broken vessel during the journey stands for the breakage of corporal frame of man. Only then one can embrace the lover or the eternal Truth when he breaks fragile body -links with this world of misleading happenings.)

“Main maqsood apnay da bhukha,har har jai loran
Ja ja oh maqsood na milsi, safrun mukh na moran
Sabh jazeeray tapu phirsan, kohkafan te pani

Ainwain lor karainda marsan jis din umer wihani.”

(Buksh, p.91)

(“ I am voracious for my objective, said the prince, so am hankering after it in every nick and corner of the world. I will never stop wandering until reach my destination, The Eternal Truth or The fairy in symbolical connotations.” The prince says to himself that he will search every island and oasis even the fairyland where human beings cannot reach but that he can as he possesses certain superman qualities. He pledged to himself that he would continue to search the fairy till his last gasp. Either he will find her or lose his life.)

“Hik, hik bander aida aida waikhdian dil darda
Saray banday ghair liunay, jan na dainday harda
Qaid hoya shehzada othay, kujh na chalda chara
Na oh maray jawin saray, na howay chutkara
Lai turay shehzaday tain, nalay ohdian nafran
Ashiq banna sukhla nahin, waikh ishqay dian safran.”

(Buksh, p.99)

(One day the prince was caught by a group of wild apes. Every ape was horribly gigantic. The apes captured every person accompanying the prince and the prince himself got imprisoned there. The prince felt helpless as neither they could be easily killed nor they let the prince go. So it is evident that the Divine love and pursuit is not an easy task. It puts the man in endless trials before the acquisition.)

“Bahut museebat seh ke latha us kohkaf buray tu
Agun sakht ujarin aya,khus bharay te raitu
Maiway khanda, pani peenda, karda yad ilahi
Na koi shehr, giran na adam, na milda koi rahhi.”

(Buksh, p.115)

(Then it happened that the prince strayed into an endless desert losing his companions, left alone to suffer. He endured every suffering all alone in that wilderness where there was

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nothing else except vast patches of sand and barren land. There was no city or village in the vicinity and no human being but for himself. He, even, did not see any traveler there. The prince, however, because of Divine illumination, was provided with every necessity of life. He used to eat dry fruit and drink heavenly water to feed his body. Divine love, pursuit and remembrance of Divine Reality which dwelled in his heart, however, served as the food for his soul.)

“Jis dil ander ishq samana, us nahin phir jana
Toray sohnay Milan hazaran, nahin yar watana
Loha, pathar maqnateesay uth milda kr dhai
Moti, heeray waikh na uthda, qeemat, rang, safai
Jis sar ,sir ishq da othay shehwat mool na wasdi
Jis dil hub sajan di us vich hub nahin har kas di
Ag na saray kakh jinhan te Rehmat badly wasdi
Ainwain sidq na har Muhammad waikh tabiat hasdi.”

(Buksh, p.119)

(The heart which nourishes the Divine love can never betray the Infinite Reality. As love does not change its axis in any situation so the Divine lover cannot replace his beloved uninfluenced by external charms. Charms strikes the sight but merit wins the soul and Divine love is the merit of selected ones. External charms do not affect the internal reality as magnet clings to the iron irrespective of its worthlessness. It does not cling to the bright and precious jewel like diamond. Iron is the craze of magnet same as the beloved reality is the craze of Divine lover. Where there is spiritual love, nor is there lust so the heart in which dwells Divine love, gets indifferent to everyone else. Even fire cannot burn those straws upon which rains the cloud of Divinity, so, Muhammad Buksh! don't lose faith and Divine love by indulging in external charms.)

“Bahut hoya lachar shehzada, taqat zor na reeha
Tangi, talkhi aisi, jaisi jan kandan din jeeha
Karay irada aih shehzada, maran pait katari
Ais talkhi de sakht azabun chutay jind baichari

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Aqal shehzaday nu phir warjay, mat tairi kiun mari
Sans udan taka as na torin, khas jinahndi yari
Nafs kahay main kahla hoya, kachrak tori jarsan?
Lakh museebat jhag na milya, aj milay bin marsan.
Aqal kahay kiun kamla hoyoun?ishqay laj na lain.
Itni sakhti agay jhalya, koi din hor langhain.
Nafs kahay hun kithun milsi, na koi das sanaiha
Aas hondi das pondi jis di, aiwain jaran kaweeha
Aqal kahay aih kam ashqi da ishqun bas na karni
La kay bazi, baiandazi, orik war na harni.”

(Buksh, p.123)

(One day the prince felt so helpless and dejected due to loneliness and thirst in desert that he decided to commit suicide because his plight was more painful than death. He thought that death could rid himself of that pitiable plight. The prince decides to die but his Insight (soul) pleads that the prince should be sane enough not to do so. Those whose love is divine one, never shun hope till their last gasp. Sight (body) of the prince answers that it is in hurry to get rid of the miserable condition. How long more it should bear the brunt? If it cannot reach the Divine Reality (fairy) after countless trials, today the body must perish to end its existence along with these trials. Insight (soul) pleads that Sight (body) should be wise. It should not blemish the Divine love. If the body has undergone so much misery why not endure a little bit more. Sight (body) answers that it seems difficult to reach the Divine Reality (fairy) as there is no clue to excess. The desire nourishes the hope of the object which is physically in sight or hearing. Hankering after the invisible and abstract is useless. Insight (soul) pleads that the divine lover never desist from Divine Reality. His whole existence centers on this pursuit.)

“Akhin sutian te dil jagay, jagay tallay sutay
Acan chait hik mard az ghaibun an khala sar utay
Ang insani, rang noorani, aan nisang khalota
Bhari si dastar siray te, sabz jiwain rang tota.”

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(Buksh, p.124)

(During this dilemma between body and soul, the prince felt sleepy and closed his eyes to sleep. As the Sight (body) got asleep the Insight (soul) opened its inner eyes. When the soul awakes, there is always the good luck accompanying it. All of a sudden the prince saw with the ever-open eyes of his Insight, a man standing near him. The gate of that man was humanly but gestures were divine. He was wearing a parrot green turban on his head.)

“ Saif Malookay achan chaiti akhin ughir gayan
Sir, dhar, kan laga ke sunda, khul giyan khirkian
Obar wahia uth khalota, bhuli traih tamami
Os bazurg wal nal adab de niun ke hoya salami
Ba taazeem salam hazaran, kar ke adab ziada
Ya hazrat kaih nam tusada? Karda arz shehzada
Os bazurg ne kaiha agun, main han malak sarishta
Maira nam khudawand dharya hooraeel farishta
Lakh lakh howay Mubarak tainu Saif Malook jawana
Thori sakhti rehndi baqi, phiria naik zamana
Matlab taira hasil hosi, jasin gham hazaran
Nal Badee Jamal Peri de karsain chain baharan.”

(Buksh, p.125)

(The Insight of Saif-ul-Malook got active at once and all the oriels of his soul were opened to receive the Divine illumination from that heavenly messenger. The prince stood up abruptly and forgot all about his miseries and trials. First, he bowed with deference before that spiritual guide and then with due respect asked for his introduction. He told the prince that he was an angel named Hoorail. The angel congratulated the prince and told him that the dark days of his trials were near the end; that the rosy moments of acquisition were about to approach. He told that the prince was soon to be united with the fairy, Badi-ul-Jamal[Divine Reality])

“ Je so heelay bajh waseelay kariay nal daleelay

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Bhar bairay da par na janda bajh malah rangeelay
Nal malah salah milain, thailh chalain baira
Peer bina tadbeer na koi, jhoota aihu jhaira.”

(Buksh, p.125)

(If a man tries his utmost depending only upon his prudence without any Divine Illumination, he can never reach his destination (Divine Reality). Some boatman (Divine Illumination) is surely needed to get across the river of eternity leading to the ultimate destination. There is no prudence, no way out and no contrivance successful unless one has Divine Illumination.)

“Kanday sakht gulaban walay doorun waikh na dariyay
Chobhan jhaliay, rut chuaiay, jhol phulin tad bhariay
Bashak nagan de sir gahin, awin hath khazanay
Rut dolin, phat khawin shaha, sokhay nahin yaranay
Saif Malook shehzaday tain hukmay nal rabanay
Azam ism farishtay dasia, parhia shah sianay
Assay nal farishtay sachay leek zameen par pai
Kaihus isay rukh te jain, lor Karin har jai.”

(Buksh,p.126)

(If one has the desire to get roses, he should be ready to face the thorns. One can never get roses if scared of thorns. To get the hidden treasure of Divinity, one must, first kill the serpents of desires holding one back to reach that treasure. The prince had to undergo those ordeals only to get it dawned upon him that Divine love and pursuit was not some easy task. The angel (Divine messenger) gave Saif-ul-Malook Divine Illumination as a gift. The angel, drew a long line on earth with his cane and asked the prince to follow that line leading towards his destination.)

“Dhupan palay sir te sehnda, neendar bhkh piasan
Agay hi oh man na aha, lag pian hun aasan
Azam ism pakanda janda, barkat us di bhari

Quwat, zor ishq da tan vich, hor isam di yari.”

(Buksh, p.126)

(The prince once again set out to search the fairy (Divine Reality) with a greater determination. He happily endured all the unfavorable conditions during the expedition. Now, he was more enthusiastic than before meeting with the angel because he was sure to be soon united with the fairy. He, now, had two- faceted strength in him; one Divine love and second one Divine Illumination received from the angel [spiritual guide].)

“Saif Malook, peri ral baithay nal muhabat dil di
Jis cheezay nu lorin chariay orik kadan mildi
Loran wala reeha na khali lor keeti jis sachi
Lor karainda jo mur aya, lor ohdi gin kachi.”

(Buksh, p.287)

(At last, the prince reached the fairyland (ultimate destination) and got united with the queen of fairies (Divine Reality). It is true that if the pursuit is persistent, one does reach the goal at last. If one fails to reach the ultimate reality, it is crystal clear that either his pursuit is not persistent or he has no Divine Illumination or spiritual guide.)

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