

PLSJ

Persian Literary Studies Journal (PLSJ)

Vol. 8, No. 14, 2019

ISSN: 2322-2557, Online ISSN: 2717-2848

DOI: 10.22099/JPS.2021.38586.1121, pp. 107-110

Book Review

***One Verse, One Book, in the Domain of Bēdil Studies,*
Abdulghafour Arezou, Herāt: Ahrari Publications, 1401/2022, 305
pages, ISBN: 7-0544-1-9936-978**

Manizheh Abdollahi

Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature

abdolahm@sums.ac.ir

Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Paramedical
School, Persian Dept. Shiraz, Iran

Mawlānā Abdul-Qādir Bēdil Dehlavī (1642–1720) is one of the important poets of the Indian subcontinent who wrote in Persian. He is famous for his intricate, ornate, flowery poetic style. Though his poetry is not easy to understand due to his subtle expression of ideas and complicated poetical imagery, he is one of the most influential poets of the Indian style or Sabk-e hendi; he is very popular among Persian speaking people. He has been paid attention to in recent years in Iran and several books have been written on him. One of the first books entitled *The Poet of the Mirrors* was written by Shafiei Kadkani followed by two other books written by Kavous Hasanli, *Bēdil and Composing Bewilderment: Understanding Bēdil's Thirty Ghazals of the end of the Divan* (2020) and *Bēdil and Charm of Bewilderment, Reworking Bēdil Dehlavī's Forty Ghazals* (2021).

Due to popularity of Bēdil in Afghanistan and Persian speaking population of the subcontinent or possibly because of his own interest, Abdulghafour Arezou

has published six other books on Bēdil. This book is based on analysis and explanation of only one controversial verse of Bēdil:

هیچ شکلی بی هیولی صاحب صورت نشد

آدمی هم پیش از این کآدم شود بوزینه بود

Nothing forms without primary matter/ human was an ape before becoming human.

The major argument about this verse is whether many years before Darwin's birth, Bēdil was aware of evolution, survival of the fittest or natural selection that he seems to have expressed has presented or that immaterial of Darwin's views, Bēdil is leaning on the philosophical views of his time. Abdulghafour Arezou has published this book in order to answer this question. In the introduction he states that he was asked about this verse in a literary gathering to which he answers that the subject requires a close analysis of Bēdil's thoughts and views as well as the philosophical discussions and worldviews of his time. At the request of the audience he starts a series of talks leading to the publication of the book.

The book consists of six chapters with an introduction; two other chapters have been added, one comprises questions and answers during the talks and the last one includes three appendices related to the topic. Usually scholars of classical Persian literature discuss the metaphorical and allusive meanings of the words and expressions continuing with rhetoric and aesthetic aspects of the verse. However, Arezou has not followed this tradition. He believes that first the philosophical views of Bēdil in the context of his time must be explained. He discusses the philosophical and rhetorical concepts of primary matter and form; hence, in the first chapter he gathers all the views of ancient philosophers, Muslim scholars' views on these two concepts as well as their Greek roots and how they were perceived at the time of Bēdil. In the second chapter he has elaborated more the same concepts linking them with indivisible particle and essence. These two chapters show the mastery of Arezou over the subject in the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan.

A short discussion of Darwin's views are presented in chapter three followed by a reading of the views of Muslim thinkers about evolution, the creation of the universe and human beings and the origin of life from the beginning to recent times. Hence, views of different groups such as Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā or The Brethren of Purity and thinkers like Ibn Khaldun, Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi are analyzed.

In chapter four, views of philosophers such as Avicenna on the subject are discussed. Arezou distinguishes carefully between the Qur'anic views on creation of humans and myths of heaven, Adam and Eve, and the four elements of water, soil, fire and wind as the source of creation according to Greek philosophers. He has also reviewed the hierarchy of evolution from inanimate objects to plants and from plants to animals and from animals to human in the views of Muslim philosophers and mystics; he believes their method is to put together these different and sometimes contrasting issues. Independently these two chapters can be of benefit to readers interested in history of Islamic thought.

In chapters five and six, the readers are finally faced with the discussion of the verse. Arezou starts chapter five by criticizing the views of those scholars who have discussed this verse based on Darwinian views arguing that many of these scholars have misunderstood Darwin. He start his own analysis which is continued in chapter six based on the arguments mentioned in previous chapters. He pays special attention to the genealogy of the word ape in the poetry of Bēdil concluding that the verse is far from Darwin's views. He states that Bēdil follows the ancient worldview moving from inanimate object to plant and to animal. Thus, he argues that in the hierarchy of existence there is development and people in each category are different from others, some being on a higher plane and some on a lower one. So although there are similarities with Darwinian views, they have fundamental differences due to their different worldviews.

The book is edited in such a way that each chapter can be read independently while there is a logical link between different parts. His precision and in depth

look can be used for some hard to decipher Persian verses, especially with regards to Hafez studies. However, it must be admitted that in the today's fast-paced world not every reader is interested in reading one book for one single line of verse.

Another point is that as the writer has mentioned in the introduction, this book is the outcome of several talks, hence there are some repetitions and overlapping. Sometimes the writer has digressed from the subject—possibly due to the talks. Arezou who has a taste for poetry himself has used poetical language to express some points which is not a good vehicle to argue and discuss logical points. Though Arezou has been accurate in mentioning the sources listed in the bibliography, no reference has been given for Bēdil's poems nor to poems by other poets.

The book can be a relevant and helpful source for scholars interested in Bēdil who has become popular among Persian speakers, especially in Iran. The book is a help to the understanding the complicated language of Bēdil and his worldview.