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## THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DIALOG IN THE POETRY OF MUHAMMAD FUZŪLĪ (D.963/1556)

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### Abstract

Muhammad Fuzūlī (d.c. 963/1556) a Poet of the 16<sup>th</sup> century who lived in Baghdad, used to write poetry in three languages: Persian, Turkish and Arabic. Originated from the Oghuz tribe of Bayat, this lyric poet has brought to light different social and political events and conflicts of his time through his divergent poetic work.

The era in which he flourished, was the scene of bitter rivalries and hard clashes between regional powers of the time, i.e. Iran, under the Šafavids, and the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, two religious ideologies of Sunī and Shi'a played their own role in the struggle for power in the region.

Despite being respected as a man of theosophy and literature among intellectual segments of Baghdad, Fuzūlī could by no means get close to neither Šafavid's nor Ottoman's Court. What was the cause of Fuzūlī 's social and political isolation?

In some of his poetry, he apologizes to an anonymous king for an unknown "Sin". But he never explains what this sin was. Considering the complex political situation of the era in which Fuzūlī lived, I am putting forward this suggestion that Fuzūlī was trying to play both sides in regional competitions of Ottoman and Iranian governments during 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, this dangerous game not only had no achievements for him, but also enhanced his instability even more.

**Keywords:** Muhammad Fuzūlī, Poetry, Šafavid, Ottoman, Hurūfid.

### Introduction

Muhammad Fuzūlī (d.c. 970/1592) was a distinguished poet of 16<sup>th</sup> century. He had an interest in theology and mysticism and wrote many panegyrics in praise of Shi'a Šafavids and Sunni Ottomans, but despite all of his accomplishments, he did not obtain any great success with neither of these two rival powers of the time. In this article I will survey Fuzūlī's complicated status during his life in a period of turmoil, religious fervor and bloody clashes between the regional powers.

### Main part

Persian language and literature gets through a flourishing era during 10/16<sup>th</sup>. Century. Not only was the Persian Language and Literature common in Iran and Asia Minor, but also it was widespread in a vast area From Indian peninsula to North Africa. Great governments in region such as the Šafavids and Ottomans and Indian kings had great interest in Persian, and many of them wrote poetry in Persian. One can mention among others, Ottoman Sultan Salim (reign 1540-1548) Sultan Suleiman (reign 1548- 1596), and Šafavid kings Shāh Ism'īl (reign 1501-1524) and his successor , Shāh Tahmasb (reign 1524-1576) of whom collections of Persian poetry has come down to us (Sadighi Afshar ,1327/1948:7-10; Sām Mirza 1314/1935: 136-137). Influential men in power were well aware of the great roal poetry could play as a traditional means of propaganda, so they tried to make the best use of this instrument. An important feature of poetry of this time is the emergence of bilingual or trilingual poets, who composed poetry in Persian, Arabic and Turkish. However not all poets and not all types of poetry were welcome in the courts of Šafavids and Ottomans. The Šafavid reign was based on the ideology of shi'sm and its rulers persuaded the religious poetry which was in accordance to their ideology.

Muhammad Fuzūlī (963 h. /1556 a.d) rose and flourished in such environment (Khayyampour, 1329/1950: 97-110)<sup>1</sup>. His nationality has always been disputed .Although in the prelude of his Persian Divan

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he states that the Turkish language suits his nature (Tab') (Fuzūli, 1374/1995: 7) the best, a few researchers consider him as Kurdish poet (Krimski, 1916: 124-132).

Fuzūli was very devoted to Shi'ism and preferred not to leave Iraq, to be able to live close to the shrine of Shi'a leading figure Imam Ali (praise of God upon Him). Fuzūli had a difficult situation between two dogmatic regional powers of time i.e. The Shia Šafavīds and the Sunni Ottomans.<sup>2</sup> The place in which he lived, Iraq was being exchanged frequently between the two governments, and Fuzūli seemed to be bewildered deciding which one to praise?

Shāh Isam'īl had forbidden to mention the name of the Califs, Abu Bakr, Umar and 'Uthman and had determined a huge punishment for it, as if it was a great crime. The Sunnis inside Iran – willingly or aversely – were converting into Shiism and those who could not give up their faith at least pretended to have changed their beliefs in to the formal religion of Šafavīd rulers Shiism. Shāh Isma'īl found the national solidarity in unifying the nation under Shiism and did not hesitate to crackdown the opponents harshly and decisively. In one of his wars against the uzbek Sheybak khan the number of death rose to 10,000.<sup>3</sup>

In Ottoman territory the Situation was even worse. Shi'as were strictly persecuted and exposed to all type of harassment and torture. Just in one command by Ottoman Sultan Salim (reign 918- 926) 40,000 Shias were sentenced to death. In such circumstances Baghdad became under control of either Šafavīd or Ottoman governors successively. Therefore Fuzūli who lived in Baghdad, had to be very cautious. Applying a Shi'a Tradition which is called "Tagyya" or concealment, he had to hide his beliefs to save his life from peril and execution.

In 914 the Šafavīd King defeated the ottoman governor and captured Baqdad. Fuzūli was fond of the young King and composed an allegorical longish Mathnawi poem for him which was called "The Wine and the Hemp" or in Persian "Bang U Baadeh". In this longish poem, he praised the young king symbolically: the "wine" signified the Šafavīd King Isma'īl who appeared much powerful in compare to the Hemp (symbol of the Ottoman opponent). During this period of time, Fuzūli expressed his emotions openly and composed many odes in praise of Imam Ali and other prominent Shia figures (See Fuzūli, 1374/ 1995: ode Nr. 23, 115-123, ode Nr. 27, 142-146, ode Nr. 28, 147- 150, Nr. 29, 151-154).

However there is a subtle hint in an extract of his poetry in which he asks the king for forgiveness. Though he does not certify which King he is addressing to, but by the content of the poem we assume that it must be dedicated to Shāh Isma'īl. In This extract, he indicates to his earlier "sins" and declares repentance:

**"I know this would not be right to compromise with the opponents of the king (Mukhalifan) but I repent of such crime thousands time".** (Ibid: ode Nr. 10, couplet 23, 69).

Since the date of composing this ode goes back to 914 h./ 1508 a.d.- the date of Shāh Isma'īl's triumph in capturing Baghdad- it comes to mind that the poet is probably repenting for being involved in some rebellion, such as the insurgencies lead by an extremist sect under the name of "Musha'sha'ie"<sup>4</sup> in Iranian province of Khuzestan, a rebellion which Shāh Isma'īl suppressed after long period of turmoil in the same year (914/1508) (Kasravi, 1984: 13-45). Can one suggest that Fuzūli had been in any contact with this sect? This is hardly to believe. Since Fuzūli never lived in southern Iran, he was a resident of Baqdad all time, besides there are no signs of any adherence to such beliefs in his poetry. He is probably apologizing the Šafavīd king for the support he had shown to Ottomans earlier. There is no doubt that Fuzūli has dedicated his Ode nr 10 to the Šafavīd King, since within this ode he point out the Mushasha'i crackdown and

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<sup>1</sup> Source for his biography are numerous including Persian Anthologies such as Sam Mirza, *ibid*. See also other works: Alessandro Bombaci (1971). "The place and date of Fuzūli", in Bosworth ed., *Iran and Islam*, in the memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky, Edinburgh, pp. 91-105; *ibid* (1970). *Introduction to Leyla and Majnūn*, Translated by Sufi Nuri, London: Unesco.

<sup>2</sup> The relation of Fuzūli, with the Safavid and Ottoman rulers has been the basis of discussions. See Muhammad Muhiṭ Tabātabā'i (1977). "Fuzūli Baghdadi", *Gowhar*, year: 5, Nr: 51, Tehran, pp.252-252; *ibid* (1978). "Bāz ham Fuzūli," *Gowhar*, Nr 58. Tehran, pp. 734-743; Firuz Mansuri (1978). "Naghdi bar Javab i- Ustād Muhiṭ Tabataba'i dar Bab Fuzūli Shair", *Gowhar*, Nr: 58, Tehran, pp. 809-812.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed historical accounts can be find in various sources including Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1367/1988). *History of Ottoman Turk*, Translated by Mirza-Zaki Aliabadi, Tehran: Asatir. Wayne S. Vucinich (1346/1967). *Tārīkh Imperāṭūrī Othmani*, Translated by Suheil Āzari, Tehran: Ketab-furūshī Tehran. Abbas Eqbal Ashtiani (1346/1967). *Tārīkh Mufaṣṣal Iran*, Edited by Mohammad Dabir Sayaghi, Tehran: Khayam.

<sup>4</sup> The followers of Muhammad Musha'sh', who founded founded an extremist sect in southern Iran around 845/1465. He claimed to be the Imam Mahdi and the Spirit of God. For more details see Abbas Eqbal Ashtiani (1346/1967). *Tārīkh Mufaṣṣal Iran*, Edited by Mohammad Dabir Sayaghi, Tehran: Khayam, p. 664; Edward Granville Browne (1354/1955). *A literary history of Persia*, translated by Rashid Yasami, Tehran: Morvarid, vol. 4, p. 60.

expresses his delight about that. He also praises the king of Iran for the freeing the Iranian land of Huwayza (Fuzūli, 1374/ 1995: ode Nr. 10, 69).

However, victories of Šafavids in Iraq didn't last long. In 920/1514 Shāh Isma'īl was defeated by Ottoman King Salim and subsequently Baqdad fell in the hands of Ottomans again. Salim was a very strict suni king. He not only slaughtered the Shi'as in the captured territories but also started a massive suppression against the Sufis, many of whom were allies with Shias and had devotion towards the Šafavīd dynasty which was originally rooted in a Sufi sect. Fuzili entered into a period of unrest and anxiety again. He felt unsafe and started praising the Ottomans during this time. He wrote verses in praise of the three kaliefs: Abu bakr, Umar and Uthman to please the Sunni King. In the prelude of his famous Romance "Leyla and Majnun" which is an imitation of a romance by Nizami, he mentioned the "Four Companions" or in persian "chahar Yar (Fuzūli, 1970: Prelude).

He wanted to satisfy the Ottomans so that they might let him continue receiving a very small pension that he used to receive from Bagdad governor from earlier times. In his Divan he usually complains of poverty and it seems that he did not attain any regular pension.

It should be held in mind that Fuzūli teases the kings in general and takes them responsible for the poverty of people. Generally Fuzūli criticizes the domestic situation in Iraq sharply. He always complains about the cultural decadence of the period. People were living in extreme poverty. Paying the expenses of the great wars had led them into misery.<sup>5</sup>

During the reign of King Suleiman the religious policy softened and the suppression reduced. Suleiman even payed a visit to the Shia sacred shrines, an act so unprecedented for his time. He replaced the governor of Iraq with a mild and moderate person. It was a time of expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the whole region was undergoing bitter rivalries. Ottomans, Mamluks of Egypt, Šafavīds in Iran, Indian Kings and Portuguese were all competing to take over middle and near east. Great wars and victories of Ottomans and their allies in the region is reflected in Fuzūli's Divan. Fuzūli hoped that by praising the Ottoman foreign policy he might be let in court However he did not get any considerable achievement in trying to gain their trust. According to Sadighi Afshar who was in charge for the Royal Library of Shāh Abbas and had seen more than 30,000 lines of Fuzūli's poetry, he was originally from the Turkic tribe of Bayat and we already know what an important and essential role the tribe of Bayat have had in getting Šafavīds into power and this might be considered in estimating the relations of Fuzūli with Ottomans (Minorsky, 1368/1989: 150).

There is also a probability that Fuzūli had been involved in other sects and movements which were active during that time in Iraq and Anatolia. Specially the Baktashiyya, the followers of the Sufi Muhammad b. Ibrahim Neyshaburi (d. 669/1271), known as Haji Baktash. It should not be forgotten that after having been beaten harshly during Timurids, Hurūfis fled and scattered massively in Anatolia . This happened almost in Fuzūli's childhood. Baktashyya were the main cultivator of the Hurifi ideas in Asia minor during 9-10 century. Hurūfies and baktashiyya were looked upon suspiciously under Ottomans, since they were considered as allies of Šafavīds. Hurūfis were practically acting against the Ottomans.

Despite his great interest in Sufism in general, Fuzūli never claimed to be a Hurūfi, however, in one of his odes Fuzūli says:

**"we are that sect of which the members have always been scattered by the events and turmoil .... We are always suffering but we cannot talk about it aloud, just like candles we burn silently... we are like bubbles scattered and isolated from each other... we can never unify as a community"**(Fuzūli, 1374/1995: 115).

The fact that Fuzūli has not expressed any adherence to Hurifies in his divan, does not defy the probability of his sympathy towards them. As in the divan of the great Hurūfi poet of 9<sup>th</sup> century Emad al-din Nasimi(persecuted in 820) one cannot find any direct indication to Hurūfi sect, but he was a well known member of the sect and was killed due to his beliefs (Mohammadzade, 1972: 7-9.).

The very fact that later scholars have tried to reject accusations about extremist Shia beliefs which were made to Fuzūli, proves that such suspicions about him really existed. (Ishghi, 1338/1919: 37) In the introductory part of his Divan he makes an eloquent chapter singing the praise Discourse as the ultimate goal of Existence. One should bear in mind that in Hurūfi beliefs the Letters are considered sacred. In

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<sup>5</sup> One can mention among others, odes Nr. 14, 21, 28 *Persian Divan* in which he expresses his dissatisfaction and resentment about social circumstances.

addition to this, Fuzūli has composed many verses in admiration of Numbers and Letters. He esteems the Human being as the complete mirror of God. And regards the beauty as a sacred attribute in Human Beings (Musharraf, 1380: 60-61). Russian Iranologist and scholar I. Bertels suggested that Fuzūli might have been a Hurūfi (Bertels, 1986: 493). But this opinion has been challenged by Turkish scholar F. R. C. Bayli (1351: 355). The truth is that there are indications in Fuzul's divan which are similar to Hurūfi ideas but not enough to prove his serious affiliation with this movement. What increases the likelihood of his being adherent of Hurūfi movement is the sudden departure of his family from Iran and their migration to Iraq right in the middle of the Hurūfi crackdown in late 9<sup>th</sup> century in Tabriz (Minorsky, 1383/2004: 42-43; Ājand, 1369/1990: 96-98). As a matter of fact Hurūfi movement had a strong base among the peasants of Azerbaijan during 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century and one might say that even if Fuzūli never declared such beliefs openly it is very probable that his family could be a follower or adherent of this movement and for this reason he is asking for merci and showing repentance addressing not the Šafavīd, but the Ottoman king.

### Conclusion

Muhammad Fuzūli rose and flourished in an era and area where sectarian beliefs were common. He was a shī'a Poet and his book of poems proves that he was devoted to Imam Ali. This admiration made him a permanent resident of Iraq, however, he never gained any success at the court of shī'a Šafavīds. Indications to some sectarian adherence and repenting of an unknown "sinn" in his Persian Divan, enhances this estimation that he might have been accused and suspected in the eyes of Iranian King. Although during his youth, Fuzūli had praised victories of the Šafavid king, Shāh Isma'īl, but later he mainly was a panegyrist of the Ottomans. However he could not gain the trust of Ottomans. Hurūfi ideas such as appreciation of Human being as the highest manifestation of grace and beauty, along with admiration of letters as symbols of "Devine Will" are frequent in his poetry. Besides, Fuzūli accuses the courts in general for increasing social misery and cultural decadence. Although he has never openly discussed his theological beliefs but for all these reasons, one may estimate that he was suspicious in the eyes of Ottomans as well.

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