



NAZIRI NIŠĀPURI

NAZIRI NIŠĀPURI, Moḥammad Ḥosayn, Indo-Persian poet of the late 16th and early 17th centuries (b. Nishapur, ca. 1560–d. [Ahmadabad](#) in [Gujarat](#), between 1612 and 1614). Naziri left his native city of Nishapur as a young man after the death of his father. Though he traveled to western Persia as a merchant, he was already an accomplished poet when he met the literary biographer Taqi-al-Din Kāši in 1584 in [Kashan](#), where Naziri honed his skills exchanging verses with experienced poets of the city, such as Ḥātem, Šojāʿ, and Rezāʿi (Golčīn-e Maʿāni, pp. 37-48, 218-32, 160-75). Shortly after this meeting, Naziri migrated to India, where he became the first Persian-born poet to join the court of the great Mughal statesman and literary patron ʿAbd-al-Raḥīm [Kān-e Kānān](#). Over the next decade, Naziri established himself as a master poet, composing many panegyrics in honor of the Kān and often enjoying his legendary largesse. Through ʿAbd-al-Raḥīm, Naziri was introduced to the imperial family, though he did not enter the inner circle of [Akbar](#)ʼs literary establishment. He performed the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1593-94. When Naziri was waylaid by Bedouin brigands, he called on the aid of Akbarʼs foster-brother, Moḥammad-ʿAziz Aʿzam Kān, who also happened to be in the Hejaz at this time and whose conquest of the citadel of Juna Naziri had earlier celebrated (*Divān*, Ṭāheri, pp. 345-51, 423-27).

When Naziri returned to India, he settled in Gujarat and without severing ties completely, he gradually distanced himself from the court of Kān-e Kānān. Naziri is said to have felt slighted when ʿAbd-al-Raḥīm referred to him in passing in a postscript to a letter of thanks addressed to another poet, Anisi



Şāmlu; in a *qaṣida* (panegyric ode), Naẓiri complains that Kān pays no respect to those who have served him longest (*Divān*, Ṭāheri, p. 328). This falling out was in part a pretext; Naẓiri's growing wealth and fame had opened up many financial and literary opportunities that would have been curtailed by too close an attachment to one patron. A letter survives in which 'Abd-al-Raḥim mocks Naẓiri's taking up the life of a gentleman farmer (*Kārvān-e Hend*, II, pp. 1455-56). But according to the literary historian Awḥadi of Balyān, who was present in Gujarat during the poet's later years, Naẓiri prospered in his agricultural and commercial enterprises and became a wealthy man. He continued to be much in demand as a "freelance" poet, writing panegyrics not only for the Kān, but also for Prince Morād and Jahāngir, who summoned the poet to [Agra](#) in 1610. Now a member of the urban elite, Naẓiri built himself a princely mansion and contributed to the support of the poor. He was also an active literary patron, receiving poets newly arrived from Persia into his home. He died sometime around 1613 in Ahmadabad and was buried in a mosque he had built near his home. Having lost a brother, an infant son, and a daughter during his life, he was survived by three daughters and his son-in-law, the poet Mir Fāyez.

Naẓiri was a powerful and aggressive player in the highly competitive literary world of early Mughal India. Even in his earliest poem to Akbar, he criticizes the plague of no-talent pretenders at the monarch's court (*Divān*, Ṭāheri, p. 391). He attacks 'Orfi, his rival, for the attention of Kān-e Kānān, as the "acme of ignorance and stupidity" (*Divān*, Ṭāheri, p. 452). In one of his *gāzals* (p. 266), he recommends that Şufi of Māzandarān be hung with his own clerical robe. On the other hand, he displayed great generosity to poets who showed proper deference to his position. He promoted the careers of many younger poets such as Tajalli of Kashan and Nādem of Gilān and was a deserving object of their praises (*Kārvān-e Hend*, I, pp. 205-06 and II, pp. 1399-1405). Naẓiri's appeal on behalf of Ğani of Asadābād ironically cost this poet his life by reminding Akbar that he was still alive in prison. Naẓiri was orthodox in matters of religion. He disparages Akbar's ecumenical *Din-e elāhi* in a panegyric to Prince Morād (*Divān*, Ṭāheri, p. 361). His responses to [Bābā Feġāni](#) indicate his leeriness of the ecstatic and visionary aspects Sufism and suggest his preference for a religiosity of repose and equanimity (Losensky, pp. 254-89). A *tarkib-band* (a strophe-poem in which each stanza ends with a different verse and rhyme, see Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* II, pp. 39-41) in twelve stanzas, one dedicated to each of the twelve imams, leaves no doubt of Naẓiri's Shi'ite affiliation. Toward the end of his life, Naẓiri took up the study of Arabic,



hadith, and Koranic exegesis.

A year or so before his death, Naẓiri compiled a *divān* of some 12,000 verses and had it delivered to ‘Abd-al-Raḥīm’s library for preservation. Though Naẓiri never attempted the narrative *maṭnawī*, his *qaṣidas* provide a lively chronicle of his life. The *tarkīb*- and *tarjī‘-band* are his preferred form for *elegy*, and his poems mourning the deaths of his family members, of Prince Morād, and of his fellow poets Ṭanā’i and Anisi are among the finest examples of the genre in the period. His reputation, however, is based primarily on his *gāzals*. As suggested by his pen name, Naẓiri was an assiduous practitioner of *naẓira-gu’i* (writing a reply to an earlier poem utilizing the same meter and rhyme scheme): He modeled his *qaṣidas* after the works of *Anvari* and *Kāqāni*; in the *gāzal*, he shows a preference for the works of *Sa’di*, Bābā Feḡāni, and above all, *Hāfez*. More than most poets of the age, Naẓiri felt the literary achievements of the past to be a burden rather than a resource (Losensky, pp. 207-11). Naẓiri was well respected by both his contemporaries and later readers. Even the great proponent of the so-called “literary return” (*Bāz-gašt-e adabi*), *Āzar Bigdeli*, who treats most Safavid-Mughal poets with undisguised disdain, praises Naẓiri as “a truly incomparable poet” (*Divān*, Moṣaffā, p. 627). Compared to other poets of his age, Naẓiri was painstaking in his adherence to earlier standards of poetic diction, and his language is distinguished by a fluent, musical clarity. Based on a comparison of parallel poems by Naẓiri and ‘Orfi (written in response to *gāzals* by Feḡāni), Āli-Rezā Dakāwati Qarāgozlu (1993, 80-84) concludes that Naẓiri is a tradition-bound, conservative poet.

Though Naẓiri’s poetry occasionally utilizes the conceptualistic metaphors characteristic of the emerging *šiva-ye tāza* (‘fresh style’), for the most part, he shuns the bold, risky experimentation of his contemporaries. Some of his *gāzals* propound an ethically oriented, circumspect mysticism. But Naẓiri’s greatest strength, as Šebli-No‘māni has suggested (III, p. 122), may lie in his amatory lyrics. Many of these poems reveal his training in the *maktab-e woqu’*, the ‘realist school’ of poetics that emerged in Safavid Persia in the sixteenth century and that turned away from Sufi symbology to depict the encounters of flesh-and-blood lovers, their evasions, ploys, delights, and disappointments. In the following verses (a response to Bābā Feḡāni), the speaker seems at once an active participant and a detached observer:

če koš ast az do yakdel sar-e ḡarf bāz kardan

soḡan-e goḡašta goftan gela-rā darāz kardan



gahi az neyāz-e panhān nazari be-mehr didan

gahi az 'etāb-e zāher negahi be-nāz kardan

aṭar-e 'etāb bordan ze del-e ham andak andak

be-badiha āfaridan be-bahāna sāz kardan

How sweet it is for two to open their hearts as one,

to speak of the past, to linger over complaints.

To catch now a glimpse of love through hidden yearning

and then to spy coy beckoning behind apparent reproach.

To erase bit by bit traces of bickering from one another's heart

to concoct banter, to improvise excuses. (*Divān*, Ṭāheri, pp. 270-71)

The meeting between two former lovers and the unresolved tensions between them is concisely and deftly portrayed in series of short, well-balanced phrases. In this regard, Naziri is perhaps better regarded as a culmination of the poetics of the *maktab-e woqu'* than as a forerunner of the literary trends that would shape Persian poetry over the next two centuries.

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