



SAIIDO NASAFI, MIROBID

SAIIDO NASAFI, MIROBID (Mir ‘Ābed Sayyedā Nasafi), Tajik poet (b. Nasaf, present-day Qarshi, ca. late 1740s; d. Bukhara, between 1707 and 1711). Information about him is scanty. One must turn to Saiido’s own poetry to supplement the brief notices in the works of his contemporaries. Muhammadbade Maleho Samarqandi (Moḥammad-Bade‘ Maleḥā Samarqandi, ca.1650-ca.1700) included a biographical notice (*taḏkera*) into his *Moḏakker al-aṣḥāb*, while Mirmuhammad Amin Bukhori (Moḥammad-Amin Bokāri, fl. 1702-1711) mentioned Saiido in his *‘Obayd-Allāh-nāma*. Sadriddin Aini (1878-1954; q.v. ‘Ayni, Ṣadr-al-Din), who compiled an important anthology of Tajik literature, revived interest in Saiido’s work after long neglect.

As a boy Saiido moved to Bukhara, where he studied at the Nadir Devonbegi. Although poor and often obliged to earn his living by physical labor, he found the intellectual life of the city and its artisans, who were his constant companions and supporters (Mirzoev, 1947, pp. 167-178), enormously stimulating. Independent by nature and always sympathetic to those who worked, he nonetheless reluctantly sought patrons among the powerful as the only way a man of talent could gain “a name and bread.” But he found such links of little value, mainly because of the hypocrisy and ignorance he discovered among those in high places, and he resigned himself to working as a weaver. As economic conditions worsened and intellectual life withered under the Toḡay-Timurid Sobḥānqoli Khan (r. 1681-1702; see [CENTRAL ASIA vi](#), p. 191), and as many poets and scholars left Bukhara for India, Saiido, too, contemplated such a move. But because of age and his attachment to Bukhara



he stayed. He chose, instead, isolation from the social and political elite, and seemed to find a certain tranquility. Perhaps moved by the thought that solitude was unsuited to a poet of life, he dedicated a rare *qaṣida* to the new khan 'Obayd-Allāh (r. 1702-11), but by now his work as a poet was largely over.

Saiido is considered the greatest Tajik poet of the 17th century. In his own day he was recognized as a master of the *ḡazal* and *moḡammas*, and was immensely popular. Although the “Indian style“ influenced his poetic means in significant ways, especially in the use of complex comparisons and allegories, and he owed much to Sā'eb of Tabriz (ca. 1592-1676, q.v.), Saiido achieved renown as an innovator of form, content, and language. His poetry has come down to us in eleven manuscript copies of his collected works, five in the Ferdowsi Library in Dushanbe, three in the Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent, and the others in Bukhara and St. Petersburg (Mirzoev, 1954, pp. 81-98).

Among the poetic genres he practiced, the *ḡazal*, of which he wrote some 550, comprising 4,600 distichs (*bayts*) or over half of his *Kolliyāt*, predominates. Their originality lies not so much in their rhyme and meter, which follow traditional patterns, as in their subject matter. Tributes to beautiful women and descriptions of flirtations have their place, but Saiido uses the *ḡazal* as a vehicle to criticize the prevailing social and political order and to lament the hard life of scholars and workers. His heroes are not the romantic lovers of the traditional *ḡazal* but rather ordinary men engaged in the life of their time (Mirzoev, 1954, pp. 122-35). Next in importance for Saiido was the *moḡammas*. Here his powers of innovation were somewhat limited by the need to respect the meter, rhyme, and poetic devices used by the author of the *ḡazal* he borrowed. His mastery of the genre is evident in the elegance, imagery, and clarity of his verse. Besides a few *robā'īs* he is also said to have written *qet'ās*, *mostazāds*, and *mowaššaḥs*, but they have not yet been found.

Saiido was drawn to yet another genre of poetry, the so-called artisan verse (*šahrāšub*). Others before him had practiced it, notably Saifi Bukhoroi (Sayfi Boḡāri, d. 1503), but Saiido perfected it. He wrote a series of shorter poems, each between 23 and 53 *bayts* and each devoted to a separate craft. In form they were *matnavi*, but their contents call to mind the *qaṣida*. In other words, Saiido expressed his attachment to the working classes in a way usually reserved for the praise of khans and courtiers. His masterwork in this genre comprises 405 *bayts*, in which he describes 212 crafts in one or more *bayts* written in various meters. Combining his humanism and lyrical sense, it



attracted wide attention (Saʻdiev, pp. 247-59). These poems about craftsmen reveal especially Saiido's concern for language. He drew abundantly on the everyday speech of the people, thereby introducing into the literary language words and expressions up to then unknown. No one before Saiido had given such constant and systematic attention to the vernacular (Mirzoev, 1954, pp. 147-58; Hodizoda, Karimov, and Saʻdiev, pp. 183-87). His striving for clarity and the accessibility of his language and thought to a wide audience were at odds with the prevailing Indian style, which limited the appeal of poetry to the learned few.

Saiido devoted a narrative (*dāstān*) to craftsmen. The *Bahoriyot* (*Bahāriyāt*) comprises 184 *bayts*, and was probably completed in 1679. It, too, expresses his critical views on social conditions in Bukhara, not openly, but as an allegory. The plot is straightforward: eighteen animals, from a mouse to a lion, in pairs, praise themselves while denigrating their opponents. When the final speaker, an ant, chastises them all for their vanity, the animals feel remorse and ask forgiveness of one another. For Saiido, the ant represents the working classes, whose virtues and superiority to all other classes, represented by the other animals, he extols.

The significance of Saiido's work lies in his mastery of the *ḡazal* and *mokammas*, in his broadening of the subject matter of poetry, and in his break with tradition by introducing on a large scale common words and phrases into the language of poetry. These accomplishments explain his popularity among his contemporaries and the similarities between his language and the modern Tajik literary language.

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