

By T. Tafazzoli

## A STUDY OF MIR FANDARASKI'S LIFE AND WORKS

### **Mir Fandaraski:**

Mir Abu'l Qasim, son of Mirza Beg ibn Amir Sadr addin Musavi Hossaini, known as Mir Fandaraski<sup>1</sup> is one of the outstanding Islamic sages, theorophists and mystic-philosophers. He is among the greatest Shi'ite scholars, who in philosophy, metaphysics, mathematics and other Intellectual Sciences "al-Ulum al-Aqliyya" was unrivalled in his

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1. *The name is derived from the name of his hometown Fandarask. Fandarask is one of the small towns of Estarabad Province of Iran. It is approximately, 80 kilometers from Estarabad proper. ("Falasifa ash-shi'a" by Abdullah Na'ma page 101).*

age. Moreover, he was one of the distinguished Islamic gnostics and the head of the mystic orders. Many amazing and miraculous acts has been attributed to him. In the book: "Taraiq al-Haqaiq", an account of his encounter with one of the Indian spiritual Masters is given and it is related, how Mir retired into the seclusion of his monastery for seven years, and eventually alchemized his body into gold.<sup>1</sup>

The biographers have recorded that Mir passed away in the year 1050 A.H. when he was eighty year old. It is obvious from this account that his birth had taken place around the year 970 A.H.

### **Mir's Contemporaries**

Mir Fandaraski lived in the Safavide era, during the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (990 – 1037 A.H), and Shah Safi (1037 – 1051 A.H.). He was the contemporary of Sheikh Baha'i (d. 1031 A.H.) and Mir Damad (d. 1042 A.H.).

### **His spiritual and scholarly position:**

Mir visited India and devoted a good deal of his time to meditations and the rigours of spiritual discipline. Some of the Indian rulers and kings were attracted towards him and held him in a high-esteem. He returned to Iran during the reign of Shah Safi and was enthusiastically welcomed by all classes of the society. His lectures on Avicenna's "Qanun" and "Shifa" were attended by the erudite and prominent scholars of the time who learned a great deal from him.<sup>1</sup>

It is related: once, in his presence a question of geometry was posed, which is discussed by the wellknown philosopher Tusi. Mir

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1. *"Tadkirat al Qubur" or "Redjal-e Esfahan"* by Mulla Abd'l-Karim Khabri, with notes and additions by Siyyid Muslih ad-din Mahdawi, page 90.

1. *Mohammad Ali Moddries, Rayhana al-Adab. Tabriz, V.IV, P.357.*

proposed a solution of that difficult problem off-hand, while he was still reposing on his pillow, and asked, whether Tusi has argued in the same way, the audience replied: "No".

Mir proposed another solution and once again asked: "Was this the view of Tusi?" The audience once again replied in the negative. In this way, he put forward a number of alternate solutions and arguments, imprompto. This exhibits full mastery and consummate skills of Mir Fandaraski in this subject.

However, concerning Mir Fandaraski's merits, the author of "A'yan ash-Shi'a" has quoted from the book "Riyad Al-Ulama" that:

"Sage, scholar, philosopher and a well known mystic, he was well-versed in Intellectual-Sciences" (al-Uloom al-Aqliyya) and mathematics; but had a limited knowledge of religious law and Arabic literature".

With all his learnings and dignified position, and with all that love and respect which was showered upon him by learned and laymen alike, still Mir Fandaraski was distasteful and averse of all formalities and the shows of pomp and power and lived a simple life. He kept a distance from the company of rich and noble and preferred to sit with Derwishes and the humble folk and the people of spiritual-disposition. He used to wear rugged garments and go through the rigours of spiritual discipline<sup>1</sup>. Regarding this, he himself has composed the following lines:

دنیا بگذاشتم به اهل دنیا      دنیا نکند قبول مرد دانا  
الا سه چهار ناچاری را      آب رزو و باده و شراب و صهبا

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1. *Hedayat, Rida Quli Khan: Riyad al-Arifin. Ist ed., p. 165.*

It is related that: once, Shah Abbas decided to rebuke him for attending the company of lowly and humble. Shah Abbas said: I have come to know that there are some scholars and learned persons who have taken up the company of riff-raff and ignoble persons and observed their lowly games. Mir Fandaraski retorted: "I had been always there but I have never seen any scholar or learned person anywhere near there". The king was ashamed and realized that there must be some wisdom in the conduct of Mir.

#### **Mir's tours and travels:**

It has been stated in the Introduction of the book "Tuhfat-ul-Murad" as well as in the literary history of Brown, that during his visit to India, Mir came under the influence of one of the disciples of Adar Kaywan. He was impressed by the Zoroasterian, Hindu and Budhist ideas, as is obvious from his following remark:

"I will never go for pilgrimage of Mecca, because it involves killing of an innocent animal."

In his Introduction to the book "Tuhfat-ul-Murad", Fadl'llah Layiq has quoted the following story from the book "Qisas al-Ulama" Sa'id Nafisi has also mentioned it in his book "Ahwal Wa Ash'are Sheikh Baha'i". Here is the story:

"Once, a lion of the Imperial Zoo escaped from the cage. Sheikh Baha'i and Mir Fandaraski were sitting in the upper story of the Imperial Castle. All of a sudden they found themselves face to face to the lion. Though Sheikh Baha'i did not run away from his seat but he was quite frightened; he took up his cloak and hid half of his face. However, Mir Fandaraski tamed the lion, with a

single glance through his inner will and spiritual power, patted it and put it once again into the chains.”

Anyway, Mir Fandaraski had attained mysterious spiritual elevations and a number of miraculous acts have been attributed to him. It is recorded that: once, Mir Fandaraski was visiting some regions of non-Muslim populations and moving in their company. Some of them taunted him at the ruined nature of Muslim Mosques and contrasted it with the outward pomp and glitter of churches. Mir retorted: “in our mosques there is sincere worship of God and intense prayers and invocations to Him; the buildings and brick and stone structures can not bear the calls of a pure heart; while in your churches they do not invoke God sincerely.” They said: “If you are true, come to our churches and invoke God sincerely; let us see what effect it can have on the building”. Relying solely upon God, Mir accepted their challenge. He went into the well-known and the greatest church of that city and while seeking help from his forefathers (i.e. the Imams and the Prophet of Islam) prepared himself for worship. A group of Christian spectators was looking on. Mir recited “adhan” (i.e. the prayer-call) and “Iqama” and made the resolve to perform the prayer, threw up his hand and cried: “Allah-o Akbar” (i.e. God is the greatest” then he ran out of the church. Within no time, the walls and the roof of the church were shattered and the whole structure was razed to ground.<sup>1</sup>

**Mir’s invaluable works:**

A number of philosophers and theologians were disciples of Mir Fandaraski. Moreover, he has left a number of invaluable works. The followings are some of his books:

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1. *Mulla Ahmad Naraqi: Khazain. p.116.*

1. *Risala-e Sana'iyya*:- (Persian) This is a short but well known book. In this treatise he has dealt with all crafts and arts. In fact, in this book Fandaraski has made an inquiry into the reality of various sciences and arts. This treatise has been published in Bombay with the name of "Haqaiq al-Sana'a".
2. *History of Safavides* (Tarikh-e Safaviyye).
3. *Tahqiq al-Mazalla*
4. *Commentary on Maha Bharata or "Kitab al-Maharaat"*

This original is by one of the Indian sages. This is the Persian translation of it. The book is also known as "Sharh-e Joke".

5. *Maqala al-Haraka wa'l-Tahqiq Fiha*
6. *A book on the Qur'anic exegesis*
7. *A collection of Poems*

#### **Mir's Poetry:**

Occasionally Mir Fandaraski composed some romantic lyrics when he was in such a mood. Here are some lines from them:

شرب مدام شد چو میسرمدام به

چون می حرام گشت به ماه حرام به

یک بوسه از رخت ده و یک بوسه از لب

تا هر دو را چشیده و گویم کدام به

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ما طفل مکتبیم و بود گریه درس ما  
ای دل بکوش تا سبق خود روان کنی

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ندانم کز کجا آمد شد خلق است و میدانم  
که هر دم از سرای این جهان آن رفت و این آمد

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جان دهی و جان ستانی داده حق چشمی ترا  
کز نگاهی جان ستانند و زنگاهی جان دهد  
پسرانه پیشم آیی پدرانه بوسمت لب  
چکنم پسر ندارم چکنی پدر نداری

He also composed the following well-known philosophical ode in response or reply to the ode of Nasir Khusrow 'Alawi Qabadyani. It drew the attention of philosophers and gnostics and some of them have written commentaries on it.

Nasir Khusrow's ode opens with this line:

چيست اين خيمه كه گويي پر گهر درياستي  
يا هزاران شمع در پيکاني از ميناستي

Mir opens his ode with the following couplet:

چرخ با اين اختران نغز خوش و زيباستي  
صورتی در زیر دارد هر چه در بالاستي

According to the author of "Raihana al-Adab", this ode has thirty-two couplets. However, the author of the introduction to "Tuhfat-ul

Murad” has given the following account regarding this matter:

“Poetry was below the dignity and rank of Mir, but he was, nevertheless, endowed with a soaring imagination. Among Fandaraski’s verses, the Ode of “Hikamiyya” has forty-one couplets and is the source of the ‘Tuhfat-ul-Murad’. In the following pages, this ode has been given in full, along with the two quad-liners (Ruba’i) of Mir”.

In the same introduction, two other couplets have been ascribed to Mir, on the evidence of “Madjma’ al-Fusaha”.

کافر شده ام بدست پیغمبر عشق  
جنت چکنم ! جان من و آذر عشق  
شرمنده عشق و روزگارم که شدم  
درد دل روزگار و درد سر عشق

Let it not remain unremarked that the above mentioned ode of Mir has been inserted by Siyyid Amir Mohammad Hindi in his own five-line stanzas which begin with these lines:

ایکه ذات در دو گیتی مظهر اسماستی  
جوهری دهر را چون لؤلؤ لالاستی  
بشنو از انجام خود حرفی که از مبداستی  
”چرخ با این اختران نغزو خوش و زیباستی  
” صورتی درزیر دارد هر چه در بالاستی ”

**Commentaries on Mir’s “Qasida-e-Hikamiyya”:**

The following scholars have elucidated and explained this ode and have written commentaries on it:



1. Mohammad Salih and Mohammad Sa'id Khalkhali. He was a disciple of Mulla Mohammad Sadiq Ardistani.
2. Hakim 'Abbas Sharif Darabi (d. 1300 A.D.). He has named his commentary 'Tuhfat-ul-Murad'. (Both of these commentaries have been published).

Hakim 'Abbas Sharif Darabi was the pride of the Persian scholars in the 13th century. He was a distinguished philosopher and an outstanding mystic. (For further informations about this scholar, see the Introduction to Tuhfat-ul-Murad").

#### **His death and his tomb:**

At last Mir passed away in Isfahan during the reign of Shah Safi in the year 1050 A.H. while he was eighty years old. In accordance with his last will all of his books were transferred into the Imperial Library of Shah Safi.

His grave is located by the side of the tomb of the great mystic Baba Rukn 'ddin, at the site which is now known as "the resting place of Mir". It is at the entrance of the old graveyard of "Takhte Poulad" in Isfahan.

On the wall of the cell of this tomb, there is an inscription in the handwriting of Mir 'Emad Hossaini. He was one of the Sadat of Qazwin and a master of the Persian style of writing (Nasta'liq). He was assassinated in the year 1050 A.H. charged with being a Sunni.

The majestic lyric of Hafiz is inscribed in the fair hand-writing of Mir 'Emad. It begins with the following line:

"روژه خلد برین خلوت درویشانست"

This all goes to produce such a solemn effect on a visitor that one is transported into a state which can be only felt, not described.

There is a triangular platform over the grave and the inscription stone is set upon it in a vertical shape. It is made of marble. The date of his death is inscribed in the Arabic characters. At the end of the Inscription, the exact year of Mir's death is given in the following manner:

“His death took place in the year 1050 A.H.”

The tomb of Mir has become a pilgrimage spot for some people. They seek God's help and assistance at the moment of their need, through this pious mystic.

Manuscripts of Mir's Works and those of the Commentaries on his ode (Qasida-e Hikamiyya):

1. Risala-e Sana'iyya of Mir Fandaraski.

In the manuscript-list of the Faculty of Law, Tehran, it has been recorded under the title of the book “Lubab al-Albab”, page 430:

In the eleventh century, Mohammad Taqi Nassiri translated the ‘Risala-e Sana'iyya’ of Fandaraski into Arabic”.

Muhammad Taqi ibn ‘Abd ‘l-Hossain ibn Mohammad Zaman Nasiri Tusi Sipahani was probably the brother of the author of “Kashf al-Ayat”. He was in the line of Khwadja Tusi and a disciple of Faid Kashani, and was one of the Akhbarite Shi'a's scholars. He was also author of the book “Mabda' wa Ma'ad”. He started writing a book intituled “Lubab al-Albab” on the subject of politics, ethics and religious jurisprudence whom he calls “Namus”. This manuscript is in author's own hand-writing.

In this book there are twenty-three other treatises by Nasiri and others. Among these treatises is "Risala-e-Sana'iyya" of Mir Abu'l-Qasim al-Fandaraski. It begins with these words:

"هذه رسالة موسومة بالصناعة للسيد الجليل المرحوم . . . ميرابوالقاسم  
الفنندرسكي في فنون طوائف الناس من جهة الصناعة الكلية و الجزئية والحقة  
والباطلة والصناعة كلية في حد الصناعة والصناعة اصل قريب للتمدن و كان  
هذه الرسالة مرشحة من جزء اخير كتابنا الناموس و اما تفصيل الملل والاديان  
يظهر في خاتمة الناموس ان شاء الله تعالى ."

**The catalogue of the Central Library of Tehran University:**

Catalogue of the books donated by Siyyid Mohammad Mishkat, Vol. III, Part One, compiled by Danish Pazhooh, printed in 1332 A.H. page 295, No. 1046.

2) "Sana'iyya" (persian) Mir Abu'l-Qasim son of Mir Sadr'ddin Fandaraski Estarabadi, philosopher, physician, mathematician, has written this treatise about various arts, their uses and potential practitioners. It has a preface and twenty-three chapters. For the first time, it was published in India (1267 A.H.) and then in Iran (1317 A.H.) along with the text of Tusi's Ethics".

This copy has the library No. 8. It has been written in cursive-Persian characters by Mohammad Sharif ibn Mohammad Qa'imi in 1051 A.H. Another copy of this book is preserved in the Library of Madj-lis-e Shooraye Melli, under the library No. 444/5. It is mentioned in the Vol. II, page 411 of the catalogue.

The Catalogue of the University Central Library Vol. III, page 478.

3. JOK BASHISTA:  
Catalogue of the University Central Library, Vol. III, page 478,  
Library No. 246.

4. JOK BASHISTA:  
The Catalogue of the University Central Library, Vol. X.

5. The book Kashf Al-Lughaat-e Kulliyate Jok'' (Persian):

In this book, Mir Fandaraski has rendered into Persian, the Indian terminology of Jok Bashista. It begins with the following terminological item:

باب الالف . اتمان هستی مطلق واصل آفرینش

The book ends with the following term:

تیرته معبدتی وبار اسم یکذات . . . . تم بالخیر

This copy has been written in the Persian character and is preserved under library No. 15

6. Following account has been given in the catalogue of Sepahsalar Library, Vol. II, page 255.

“Fandaraski rendered the Indian terminology in his selection of Jok. Later on, someone else compiled the discourses of Nazam 'ddin Panipati (the Persian translator of the Jok) and Mir Fandaraski.

The Catalogue of the University Central Library, Vol. VIII, page 89.

7. Collection No. 1416, manuscript in the hand-writing of Mohammad Lahidji.
1. Kashf'l-Lughat-e Kulliyat-e Jok" by Mir Fandaraski.
  2. Jok Bashist, dealing with the Indian mysticism.
8. Manuscript of the Commentary on the Ode entitled: 'Tuhfat-ul-Murad" by Mirza Abbas Sharif Darabi, written for Hossama's-Saltana in the last decade of 13th century; it begins:
- “. . . as the unique Ode of the 'Chief of Philosophers Amir Abu'l-Qasim consists of many mysterious allusions, I have started writing this explanation, encouraged by Aqa Mirza Mohammad Khan, the librarian of the Gracious King, the Patron of arts, the prince Hossam as-Saltana . . .

This manuscript has been written in the Persian character by Abu'l-Hassan ibn Abd'llah (23rd Jamadi ', -Ula, 1293). The copy was given by the Commentator of Hossam ad-din son of Hadj Mirza Mohammad, known as Hakim-Bakhshi.

Manuscript-List of the Faculty of Law & Political Sciences, Tehran University, page 103, Library No. 652, University Publications.

9. Commentary on the Ode of Fandaraski (Manuscript) by Mohammad Salih Khalkhali.
- Mohammad Salih has given the following account of Fandaraski's this Ode:

“. . .This Ode has forty-one couplets. This Commentary is a part of Tuhfat-ul-Murad”.

The beginning of this book is:

" شرح قصیده عارف کامل میرابوالقاسم فندرسکی . . . . و به نستعلیق  
ای آنکه بجز تو نیست در هر دو جهان  
برتر از خیالی و مبری زگمان

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