

Mystical Islamic Poetry 7: Week 3

Sultan Bahū *Abyāt*

1) The hidden shadows of the Lord Master; nothing is known of their source – Hū

I pecked and ate many grains of wheat;
 now the string of eternity is around my neck – Hū

I flutter, caught in the noose, like a nightingale in the garden – Hū

Tossing all else from the heart, Bahu, keep hoping for grace – Hū

2) This body of yours is the True Lord’s dwelling, so mystic, look inside!

Don’t beg favours from Master Khizr¹; the water of life is within you.

Illuminate the darkness with the lamps of longing,
 then perhaps you’ll find what you have lost.

They die before they die, Bahu, who understand the riddle of Truth.

3) My whole body is burned by words; pain has taken me over

I wander lamenting like a cuckoo², begging that my days not go by in waste

Speak, bird! The monsoon has come; perhaps God will shed some rain

Be sincere and step forward, Bahu, for perhaps
 the Lord will let the seekers meet a Friend

4) Love saw me weak and it came, taking over my home.

Like a fussy child, it will not sleep or let me sleep.

It asks for watermelons in winter; where can I find them?

But all rational thoughts were forgotten, Bahu, when love clapped its hand.

¹ A reference to Khidr, the ever-living ‘green man’, who in the Sufi tradition is regarded as the guide of those who do not have an earthly master. One of the myths concerning him is that he became immortal when he discovered the water of life.

² The cuckoo: its call is traditionally rendered as the lament: where has my beloved gone? Another interpretation is that the cuckoo is repeating: “Hū. Hū”. In both cases the cuckoo serves as a metaphor for the mystic’s soul.

5) My guide is the divine falcon who has gone and joined up with his friends –

The divine will is pulling my strings;
when will I have the fortune to meet him again? –

He banishes the pain of lepers; he heals the sick – ya Hū

You are the cure of each and every ailment, Bahu,
so why do you place me in the hands of the physicians? –

6) The rosary spun but the heart did not spin; what’s the point of holding a rosary?

You learned all the sciences but you did not learn manners (*adab*);
what’s the point of learning sciences?

You sat for long vigils but experienced nothing; what’s the point of doing vigils?

Yoghurt does not set without a starter, Bahu, even if you boil the milk until it browns.

7) The love which drinks the blood of the painstricken is a deadly falcon

It has created a lair in the breast, like the tiger takes over the forest

Like an elephant drunk on vermilion, it charges and charges

Do not fear this charge, Bahu, for without the charge there is no meeting

8) The heart is deeper than rivers and oceans; who knows what lies in the heart?

Within it are boats, within it oars, within it boat-poles and boatmen.

Fourteen levels has the heart, where love has pitched its tent.

Those who are the heart’s confidants, Bahu, only they recognise the Lord.

9) The perfect guide thrashes one like a laundryman beats clothes.

He purifies with his gaze, and he soaks one in bleach and soap.

He makes the dirty white and does not leave a speck of dirt.

One should have such a guide, Bahu, living in every cell of one's being.

Translations by Jamal J Elias, *Death Before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu*. University of California Press, 1998.

- 1) p. 24
- 2) p.135
- 3) p.77
- 4) p. 92
- 5) p. 109
- 6) p.51
- 7) p.65
- 8) p. 61
- 9) p. 101