

**Raz Shirazi's *Asrar al-Velayeh*:
A Religious and Mystical Epic**

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Introduction

Among religious poems, the poems related to the life of Imam Ali and various aspects of his personality have a special place. On the one hand, his life, full of bravery and numerous wars, is a suitable tool for composing epic poems. On the other hand, Imam Ali's high spiritual states, dignities and virtues provide ample source for the creation of mystical poems. Raz Shirazi is one of those who composed a long poem in the form of masnavi about the life of Imam Ali. Mirza Abulqasem Hosseini Sharifi Dhahabi, known as Mirza Baba or the penname "Raz", is an outstanding sage and mystic of the 13th century and the 35th pole of the Dhahabi mystical order. He spent 20 years of his life in Shiraz studying various sciences and after that he started the mystical journey and learning esoteric sciences. There are fifty-two works left by Mirza Baba. One of the most important mystical foundations of his works is the idea of "Velayat".

Review of Literature

The most important researches about Raz are Khavari (2019), Moradi (2018), Rezamanesh, Neyeri (2007, 2016, 2021) and Moradi and Neyeri (2012). In the field of mystical epics, these works can also be mentioned: Shamisa (2015), Qobadi, Kimanesh (2002), Mahmoudi and Adabi Firouzjaei (2017).

This research tries to find answers to the following questions: What are the content and structural characteristics of *Asrar al-Velayah*? What are the stylistic features of this work? What are its manuscripts and lithographs? What is the relationship between this work and the literary genres of religious epic and mystical epic?

Discussion

The probable date of the compilation of *Asrar al-Velayah* is the end of 1285 A.H. There are copies of this book in the library of the Ahmadi Monastery of Shiraz, Malik National Library, Central Library of Tehran University, Astan Library of Shah-Chirag and Astan Quds Razavi Library. The book has not been corrected or edited so far.

Some linguistic and literary features of *Asrar al-Walayah*:

Asrar al-Wilayah is a narrative poem with an epic and mystical atmosphere, in the form of masnavi. This work is greatly under the influence of Rumi's *Masnavi* in its poetic and literary style. Most of the verses of *Asrar al-Wilayah* are devoid of imaginative poetic devices, but they have an intimate tone and a delicate language. The important stylistic features of *Asrar al-Wilayah* are the abundant use of verses and hadiths, the use of ancient Arabic words and theological and

philosophical terms, the use of Arabic poems, the use of poems by other poets, frequently used Quranic elements and terms.

The literary genre of *Asrar al-Welayeh*: *Asrar al-Welayeh* has the characteristics of both religious epic and mystical epic. The content of this Masnavi can be divided into three general parts: first, expressing the discovery and inner intuitions of the poet and bringing verses and hadiths to explain it; second, the epic description of the life and battles of Imam Ali; third, a detailed description of hadiths about the idea of Welayat.

In these three parts, the epic narration of the life of Imam Ali can be seen along with the explanation and interpretation of the most detailed mystical concepts.

The religious epic features of *Asrar al-Welayah*: Most of the features of the religious epic are present in *Asrar al-Welayeh*. One of these features is the heroic presence of saints and prophets. This masnavi deals with the battles of Imam Ali in the middle part. Raz describes the battles from the Battle of Uhud to the end of the Battle of Nahrvan, sometimes with the most precise details and sometimes with a general overview. It is clear that in these battles, the hero is Imam Ali. By comparing his bravery with other companions of the prophet Mohammad, Raz Shirazi emphasizes the heroic side of Imam Ali's personality and thus the narrative takes on an epic form.

Another feature is wonder works, in the form of narrating the virtues of Imam Ali. Raz explains the secret of these virtues by saying hadiths from the Prophet Mohammad or mentioning Qur'anic verses. These honors include the honors related to the battle of Khybar, the honor of Imam in breaking the water blockade by Muawiya, the

description of eight miracles of Prophet Mohammad during his life, including the story of Radd al-Shams.

Another feature is the influence of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. In this poem, this stylistic and linguistic imitation and influence is frequent and evident in war narratives, especially during single combats.

Historical sources are yet another feature, however without adhering to the text of history. Raz Shirazi has not refrained from any exaggeration in organizing many of these historical narratives, despite the authenticity of the story and narration, and in a few cases, he has narrated completely baseless stories.

The epic and mystical features of *Asrar al-Welayeh*: Mystical epic and religious epic have similarities; but specifically, there is a significant difference between the battle in the religious epic and the mystical epic. In the religious epic, the battle is external and in the mystical epic, the battle is internal. Therefore, in the religious epic, the battle of good and evil takes place between the hero, who is one of God's saints, and the anti-hero, who stands in the ranks of God's enemies. But in the mystical epic, the hero and the anti-hero are in conflict with each other within the main character or characters. With this description, *Asrar al-Welayeh* should be included among religious epics; however, the content and structure of this masnavi is such that its mystical aspects cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

Asrar al-Welayah can be classified as a religious epic because of the centrality of Emam Ali and his religious heroism and describing his battles and mentioning some of his greatness. But in the beginning and

final sections, the book deals with deep mystical topics and shows the mystical aspects of Imam Ali. Therefore, from the structural point of view, *Asrar al-Welayeh* consists of three parts: a religious epic part (with streaks of mystical elements) which is surrounded by two mystical parts. What makes the structure of this work coherent and the connection of its three parts possible is the concept of Welayah. By replacing the concept of a superman or hero with the concept of Wali, Raz Shirazi has given two important features to *Asrar al-Welayeh*: first, he places this masnavi with a coherent structure on the border between religious epic and mystical epic; second, by relatively separating the mystical and epic topics from each other, he intelligently includes both the external and internal aspects of the Wali in the structure of the work and presents it to the audience.

Key Words: Shirazi's Raz, *Asrar al-Velayah*, religious epic, mystical epic, Velayat.

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