

# A Review of the Art of Translation



# A Review of the Art of Translation:

*An Analysis of 'The Lament  
of Baba Tahir'*

By

Mansoureh Bidaki

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*In the Name of God*



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First and foremost, I would like to begin with the name of God, whose mercy is great and whose kindness to all creatures is eternal and infinite. I dedicate this book to my parents, who raised me in their loving arms, and I have always benefited from their heartfelt prayers. I dedicate it to my husband Mehdi Moradi for his unconditional love and support and to my professor Amir Ghajarieh Biglar-beigi from Irshad Damavand University, who generously helped me with his valuable input and expert comments while writing and publishing this book. I would also like to wholeheartedly thank my professor, Mohammad Amin Mozaheb, who helped print the article from the book, and his valuable guidance.

Bidaki, Mansoureh

December 2022

## ABSTRACT

It is impossible to ignore the literary dialects in a translation that expresses the author's ethnic identity; therefore, the transfer of implicit meanings and related geographical culture is always under the shadow of dialect words. If the intended literary text is a poem, the role of these words doubles because the most crucial factor in creating poetry, i.e., the music, comes from the words. Of course, it is more colourful in dialect poems, and it is clear that ignoring the connection between dialect words and the feelings created by this beauty can be challenging in a dialect poetry translation. In translating a dialect poem, a correct and intimate understanding of the dialect words in the standard source language should be provided to achieve an eloquent text in the target language. By establishing a relationship between the two languages, the translator can familiarise the reader of the second text with the semantic and cultural importance of the original text. In Heron Allen's book *The Lament of Baba Tahir*, the translator has tried to create a platform for expressing the poet's desired feelings through his simple prose. However, the languages of poetry and prose are not the same, and this book focuses on disambiguating some of the meanings of the dialect words in the translation, which occurred due to a lack of access to valid phonetic tables, as well as the absence of a written manuscript left by the poet. The implied meanings interpreted by Heron Allen are a window to rich Persian literature, and the reflection of Baba Tahir's tender feelings have been investigated as much as possible. However, no mind will be able to understand the subtle concepts and feelings hidden in the poem like the creator of it, as Lasan al-Ghaib Hafez Shirazi says;

آن قدر ای دل که توانی بکوش

گرچه وصالش نه به کوشش دهند

*Although the union of the beloved is not due to effort, O Heart, try  
hard as you can.*

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DWs	Dialectal Words
DFs	Dialectal Features
PTs	Poetry Translations
SL	Source Language
TL	Target Language
ST	Source Text
TT	Target Text



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

The book aims to investigate the treatment of dialect in translated *dobeyti* or *two-beyt* of the famous Iranian poet Baba Tahir from Persian into English in terms of the adopted strategies to ascertain the translatability or non-translatability of dialectical words and features in the target version. Among literary texts, poetry has a unique writing style, creating a general notion of poetic thought and feeling. Compactness in style and uniqueness of wording in poetry are essential elements for finding the fullness of the poet's idea, and failure to pay close attention to these factors in poetic translation deprives the readers of understanding the literary and spiritual content of the original text.

Over the centuries, different theories have been put forward to help literary translators to decode units and structures to understand the overall meaning of an original text, and these theories enable translators to make decisions and bring people closer together from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds; in studying dialect, linguists have different views. Some scholars (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998)<sup>1</sup> argue that dialects, unlike standard languages that are completely understood, are recognised as a variety of corrupted languages, while others perceive dialects as a group identity (Brisset 2010); hence, an excellent literary translation can enable readers to have a coordinated view of the universe. Luigi Bonaffini (1997) believes that dialect assigned with particular meanings and nuances and lack of them in translating would produce flattened text; he claims translators should consider dialect not only as a marginal language but also as another type of national language.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of dialect and its translation used for centuries in literature, achieving a well-defined set of standards and principles to describe dialect

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<sup>1</sup> Walfram, W. & Natalie Schilling-Estes, 1998, *American English: Dialects and Variation*. Malden: Blackwell Publisher Inc. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaffini, L. 1997. *Translating Dialect Literature*. World Literature Today 71.2, 279.

are challenges that are yet to be met; according to Einar Haugen (1966), language is realised as superordinate, whereas dialect is subordinate since language can be used with no reference to dialect while dialects still depend on language.<sup>3</sup> Translating dialectal words, in other words, is incomprehensible to the readers, he argues, “To the original-language reader, the dialect gives a concrete impression of place and class. But dialect has meaning only in its language” (Wechsler 1997).

In the possible definitions of dialect, some translators believe dialects are language varieties held in common intelligibly and are characteristic of different user groups (David 1986). The history and roots of a group of people are discovered through dialect; thus, in the face of dialects, translators find themselves in complex dilemmas between finding a roughly imaginable equivalent and creating something suggested by the original text poetry as,

A special case within a literary translation involves far greater difficulties than the translation of prose. The PTs (poetry translation) must stand on its own as a poetic text (Connolly 2001)

In poetic translation, translators must consider the stylistic and formal beauties as well as the influence of semantic meanings. Thus, in addition to words, the content of the poetry, including the poet’s unique way of thinking, dialect, and style (as a poem’s body and spirit), are the most challenging tasks to be performed by translators. In addition, creativity in reproducing the poetic context in a literary translation has as high a priority over the poet’s inner meanings. Thus, creativity can be considered a central component of literary translation in decision-making, and without creative interference, the literary text is inconceivable. According to Jean Boase-beier (Boase-Beier 2011),

All translation, and especially literary translation, involves creativity on the part of the translator, because interpretation is itself a creative act

This study focuses on sixty-two couplets of Baba Tahir’s quatrains (990 CE), used as a case in point, and it analyses the DWs and DFs carried out through the English translation of Edward Heron Allen (1902), and also, a

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<sup>3</sup> Haugen, E. 1966, “Dialect, Language, Nation,” *American Anthropologist* 68.4, 923.



back translation<sup>4</sup> based on Heron Allen's prose rendered into English verse by Elizabeth Curtis Brenton (1902).

One of the essential features of translating poetry is the ability to transfer meaning from one language to another without fundamentally changing its form. Eugene Albert Nida and Charles Russell Taber (1969: 4) state that any message expressed in one language can be said in another unless the form is an essential element of the message. Therefore, form is a feature that must be considered in the translation of a poem, and its preservation is essential for conveying the poem's message. Translators of literary texts have long considered the PT. In word-for-word translation (Marcus Tullius Cicero 106–43 BCE), all the words of the original text are accurately presented in the TL. However, the acceptability of this type depends on maintaining the syntactic criteria in the target text. Any change in the translation of the rhyme, metre and some beauties of the poem, such as its eloquence and rhythm, will cause a change in its exact shape and structure during translation. However, in addition to the fact that all features of the poem are transferable, sometimes translators have difficulty finding the equivalent of some words in the TL. In such a case, theorists like Newmark suggest the translation of meaning specific to literary texts.

Literary translation is not just transferring the meaning of words and sentences from one language to another. Translating a literary text requires special abilities, and translators of such texts must have talent, powers of discernment, good skills and knowledge about the language, culture, and customs of the SL and TL. In the PTs, translators face two theories, untranslatability and translatability of poetry. Robert Frost says, "Poetry is what gets lost in translation" (Gentzler 1993).

Literary translation is a difficult task when rendering poetry, compounding the complexity to a greater extent. In this regard, a host of factors should be considered in a poetic translation, including the appropriate words, figurative language, and metaphors, as well as the emotions and intentions of the poet. The unique characteristics related only to a poem make this task more difficult, and sometimes translators of a literary text deal with a particular method and dialect in writing influenced by the traditions of the time. Sometimes the similarity of phonemics identifies the semantic relevance which dictates why scholars, like the poet, use connotations or implicit meanings to express ideas and feelings,

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<sup>4</sup> Back-translation involves taking a text, original or translated with which the target language readers are unfamiliar, to provide a literary translation as close as possible to the original text (Baker, M. 1992, 8).

Aesthetic function (*truth and beauty*), is language designed to please the sense, firstly through its actual or imagined sound, and secondly through its metaphor" (Newmark 1981)

The poetic structure generally includes the original poem's plot, shape, and balance of the individual sentence in each line. In contrast, sound includes rhyme, rhythm, and stanza, considered like the translated poem.<sup>5</sup> A literary translation enables people to access the world's literature and immerse themselves in the poet's thoughts and feelings. Literary translation, including poetry, is of particular importance when the original text accompanied by a dialect refers not only to an independent feature but also to a particular literary style as the main component of the text. Luigi Bonaffini<sup>6</sup> refers to the dialect of the original text as its "non-translatable-ness" due to "its semantic opacity" and believes that in such cases, the correct use of colloquial words and specific terms, limited to the custom of a particular place or period, can be of great help to the translators. The poet's use of dialect, in addition to being part of the stylistic features of the text, also gives the audience a lot of information about the author, but in translating literary texts, as Parhizgar (Parhizgar 2001)<sup>7</sup> says, "Dialect is one of the difficulties that sometimes make translation impossible."

Translation theorists have expressed different views in this regard. The role of dialect in literary translation makes the translator focus on slang language and local cultural features. If it is necessary, these words must be first translated (Newmark 1988) due to the differences in the syntactic structure and morphological norms of the official SL, considering the degree of deviation of the author's dialect from the standard language, with the syntactic norms of the official target language (Sánchez 1999). In addition to recognising the signs of geographical dialect in the source text, the translator faces the challenge of reproducing them in the target text. One of the translator's strategies in dealing with this is to reduce spoken language to written language by approximating the geographical dialect of the SL to the official dialect or language of the target, which is applied by relying on two practical methods of standardisation or simplification, and compensation (Englund Dimitrova 1997).

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<sup>5</sup> Newmark, 1981, *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.P.56.

<sup>6</sup> Bonaffini, L. 1997. "Translating Dialect Literature." *World Literature Today* 71.2, 285.

<sup>7</sup> Parhizgar, M.R. 2001, "Dialect Translation and Its Issues and Problems" *Translator Quarterly*, vol. 34, 95–96.

The ST should be structured according to the conventional standards of the TL in a way that does not challenge the reader to understand the content. In some opinions, standardisation is the only provision that helps the translator use the facilities of the standard language to clarify the lexical and syntactic ambiguities mixed with the source language (Baker 1996), translating the specific formal and semantic features of the ST by using the compensation strategy in such a way that the original textual and semantic methods of the TT are recreated with the original author's intended effects (Harvey 1995). However, in dialectal poems, not only should events be related in the translation, but the translator should also involve the reader in the author's ethnic experiences due to the importance of translating words from one language to another to convey the poet's tragic rapture to the reader, since dialect indicates the experience of a forgotten minority whose language has faded or changed over time (Bonaffini 1997).

Some also suggest tools such as addition, foreignisation, and compensation in translating dialect and prefer the simplifying dialect translation to the compensatory solution. From this group's point of view, although in simplifying the source dialect into the standard TL, the temporal and spatial position of the dialect and the stresses reflected in the OT are described where,

understanding the content among non-professional readers makes the translation popular (Leppihalme 2000).

Therefore, one standardised measure in writing a description and interpretation of the dialectal features of speech is related to the introduction, footnotes, or appendix of the translated text (Pinto 2009). Some theorists consider standard features significant and emphasise dialect's function or role in literary texts (Hatim and Mason 2005). In contrast to some, translating the dialect of the SL with the closest mixed dialect of the TL is considered a practical method in this type of translation (Conde-Parrilla 2010). Writing an introduction is the most basic way translators can explain the functional features of the ST dialect and prepare each reader for a relatively accurate understanding of the dialect. In addition to this general approach, the translator can use in-text strategies to compensate for the lexical and grammatical signs of the dialect; for instance, at the lexical level, translators can use phonetic symbols and dialects close to the Persian that are understandable to readers.

The subject of the present study is the couplets, "two-beyt", of Baba Tahir, the great Sufi, spiritual lover and an "Oryan" (someone "Naked" of all worldly possessions). His quatrains flow like a spirit and are very

pleasant, like a breeze at dawn. The translators are more interested in the poetic form of the 'do-beyti' rather than their literal translation.

Baba Tahir's poem focuses on the tenderness of his feelings, which were yet to be moulded into Sufi sayings and works at that time. Creative similes, metaphors, simple and unaffected expressions, and local spice create desirable and pleasing qualities for the audience. The study evaluates the two English versions of Baba Tahir's couplets by Edward-Heron Allen (1902) and a back-translation rendered by Elizabeth Curtis Brenton (1902). The ancient dialect of poems made the translator pay more attention to this task and clarify why the first translated version is prose. Edward Heron Allen<sup>8</sup> says,

Mrs Brenton has rhymed my literal interpretations with a fidelity and exactitude which is often but little short of amazing. Whatever errors of interpretation are to be found in this volume (and I am exceedingly conscious that they are many), are entirely due to my lack of a just comprehension of the original

The couplets in Iran, unlike official poetry, have long been welcomed by the local people and are of great importance to local poets so that they can be considered at the border of official and folk literature for the first time. The poem was translated into prose by Edward-Heron Allen in *The Lament of Baba Tahir; being the ruba'iyat of Baba Tahir, Hamadani* (1902), and regardless of the aesthetics of the poem, he gathered the couplets of Baba Tahir from several sources. The collection of poems lithographed at Bombay of about 57 quatrains attracted most of the translator's attention; the collection from Tehran contains 27 quatrains and 25 quatrains from Atash Kadah of Lutf Ali Beg Azar; ten quatrains from Majma'u'L-fusaha of Riza-Qali Khan; 32 quatrains of Munajat Khwaja 'Abdu'llah al-Ansari; the constructed text by M. Clement Huart in the *Journal Asiatique* collection belonging to Mirza Habib Isfahani in Constantinople, and the last one an undated source related to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century contains 27 quatrains, except three quatrains which are not in any of the sources mentioned above.

The translation of poetic and dialectal words and features is inherently subjective and not explicitly re-creative; the primary language's superiority, institutional imposition, and linguistic and cultural differences are significantly reduced for various reasons. First and foremost, the ability of translators to broadcast the voices of minority groups in the use of a particular dialect is limited, and the target version has fewer traces of the

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<sup>8</sup> Heron Allen, E. (1902).xviii.

original; second, the strategies used by translators are often influenced by the social context of the target text culture; and ultimately, the translator's effort is to meet the expectations of the target audience. The study focuses on essential guidance in the translation of the domestication of the ethnocentric reduction and the foreignisation of the ethno-deviant by Venuti (1995)<sup>9</sup>, the strategies of methodical approach of equivalence and back translation by Mona Baker (1992), the law of growing standardisation by Toury (1995), and lastly creativity introduced by Perteghella & Loffredo (2006), which is seen as a reckless and bold task of a translator.

According to Venuti (1965), the hegemony of Anglo-American culture dominates how the translator tries to achieve clarity by removing the unfamiliar linguistic meanings as well as the style of the original text. This suggests to the reader that translation is not a translation but a principle because Venuti believes that the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator and the more visible the original author is (Venuti 1995).<sup>10</sup>

Specifically, on the one hand, the author's attitudes and beliefs make the translator's activity concerning the original text appear derivative and introduce only the original text as dependent and loyal to the author; on the other hand, the translation tries to ignore its position, in creating the author's illusion, and has the originality of the ST. The two strategies of Venuti (1965)<sup>11</sup> in proving the translator's invisibility, *foreignisation* and *domestication*, deal with the choice of the original text and the translation method by the translator. Through these two methods, the translator first solves the difficulties of understanding the translation for the reader of the target language by removing unfamiliar linguistic and cultural meanings and providing a clear and close translation of the source text.<sup>12</sup>

The *do-beytis* or couplets of the internationally acknowledged Persian poet Baba Tahir used for the present research were selected based on three main reasons: the ancient dialect, the lack of a table of phonetic equivalents during the period of translation, and the examination of the aesthetic features in the English translation of the couplets.

The book is structured into four chapters. The first chapter begins with an introduction to the study and continues with a discussion of the importance of dialect in literary translation, followed by hypotheses presented by different scholars so far. In the second chapter, there is an

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<sup>9</sup> Venuti, L. 1995, *The Translation's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Rutledge: London and New York, p.20.

<sup>10</sup> Venuti, L. 1995, p1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Venuti, L. 1995, P.7.

<sup>12</sup> Venuti, L., (1995), PP.19-20.

overview of the standard language and related dialects in Iran provided by various scholars and some available information about the origin of Baba Tahir, its dialectal features and the couplets attributed to him compared with various authoritative manuscripts provided by Heron Allen. Chapter three is devoted to analysing the couplets of Baba Tahir in the book *The Lament of Baba Tahir*, gathered by the translator from old and authentic manuscript sources, and in the final chapter, the general conclusion of the discussed topics is provided.

This book has been developed from an article with the cooperation and guidance of respected professors Dr Amir Ghajarieh and Dr Mohammad-Amin Mozaheb, in which some of the theories related to dealing with dialect in translation, the lexical analysis of some data and the general conclusions were briefly discussed.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [http://efl.shbu.ac.ir/article\\_151642\\_bb79d8e973a05be65fd1dc1f111c5a11](http://efl.shbu.ac.ir/article_151642_bb79d8e973a05be65fd1dc1f111c5a11)

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## CHAPTER TWO

# BABA TAHIR, LANGUAGE VARIETY AND POETRY TRANSLATION

### Introduction

In an age of union and globalisation, where a common language is used to communicate between nations and increase homogenisation, and where global and larger communities may eliminate the features and characteristics of minorities and scattered groups, dialects have a special place in culture. Dialects still exist in various Iranian languages and texts, adapt to and develop with them, and may never disappear. According to Natel Khanlari (1968: 84), the evolution of any language is as long as it is not written and there are no literary works in it, and every change happens slowly because there is a fixed example for the pronunciation and interpretation of each word, and the construction of any phrase can be very difficult to break. In addition, a particular dialect expresses a group identity and shapes our understanding of its culture and social life. When a dialect is considered in the written language as a variant ‘*other*’ of the national language, the concept of the author’s mystical, historical, and social identity comes to mind that cannot be expressed by the uniformity of “standard language” (Bonaffini 1997). Another manuscript dates back several years before Ravandi wrote his book. *Letters of Ain al-Qudat* is among the outstanding works written in solid Persian prose by Abdullah bin Mohammad Ain al-Qudat, written during 1126–1131 CE, in which the author refers to Baba Tahir’s relationship with the mystics of his time. These letters were written in 1969 by Alinaghi Monzavi and were corrected and printed by Asiran.

It is worth noting that Baba Tahir’s biography and his couplets are in obscurity; his place of birth, habitat, poetry collection, dialect and access to an accurate table of phonetic equivalents are among the main reasons preventing translators from achieving a desirable translation. In the analysis of literary texts, especially the classical poems of Persian literature, one of the points that help to understand the texts is the extent to which the author follows the language of literature versus ordinary language. In his article, Jan Mukarovsky (1932: 123–149), a member of the Prague Linguistic



Circle, examines the relationship between poetic language and the standard. He states that to understand poetry better, it is vital to find the relationship between the extension of poetic language and that of the standard language, the relationship between their position, and the language system as a whole. It is also essential to prove that poetic language is a branch of standard language or has an independent formation from the standpoint of words, syntax, etc.

Researchers have expressed different views on the primary roots of Baba Tahir's dialect. Edward Heron Allen (1902) mentions some of them in the introduction of his book, but there is still no consensus on the poet's dialect. In the beginning, a short biography of Baba Tahir and the features of his couplets, done by the authoritative sources cited in the introduction to Heron Allen's book (1902), and the comparison with the sources approved by other scholars are presented. In order to study the dialect of couplets based on the historical and geographical conditions of the poet's habitat, this chapter considers the definitions of language variety, standard language, and dialect. The history of *Fahlavi*, the course of its evolution, the scope of its expansion, and the *Pahlavi* regions of the language, as well as the metre of *Fahlavi* poems, are studied to provide more information about Baba Tahir's couplets as remnants of the old *Fahlavi*. Then, the poetry translation, the study of its categories, and the influence of dialectal words in the translation process are examined. Finally, experimental research conducted by native and non-native translators is reviewed.

## **A Brief Introduction to Baba Tahir and his Couplets**

### **The Trace of Baba Tahir's Life and Poetry in Other Publications**

What has been said about Baba Tahir, in general, by various writers is that he is a dervish poet from the Hamadan region, and his fame is due to the couplets that he wrote in the local dialect. Notably, the original version of these couplets has changed over time and is closer to Persian. In addition to couplets, a collection of aphorisms is also one of the most valuable works of the poet, about which ancient mystics and sages have written many explanations and interpretations. There are disagreements about the date of his life; the estimates mostly fall from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Therefore, different beliefs have been put forward about the name and nickname, date of birth, place of residence, tomb, and works of Baba Tahir. Among the researchers who have studied in this field, there are authors such

as Vladimir Minorsky (1928), Parviz Natel Khanlari (1968), Javad Maghsoud (1975), and Parviz Azki (1996).

Edward Granville Browne (1862) is a renowned British orientalist who has written many books on history and literature. His literary history of Iran in four volumes is the most detailed and comprehensive writing in this field in European languages, and the contents of his collection are confirmed by Reza-Quli Khan (The Majma'u 'l-Fusaha 1295 A.H, v.I). Citing information about Baba Tahir in the book of *Rahatu's-Sudur wa Ayatu's-Surur*, one of the oldest books about the unique history of the Seljuks kept in the Schaefer Collection in Paris, Browne (1862) acknowledges that the poet's life was in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. In this book, written in 599–600 AH by Ajmu'd-Din Abu Bakr Muhammad bin, "Ali bin Sulayman who wrote it for the Saljuq ruler Abu'l Fath Kay-Khusraw, the meeting of Tughral Baba Tahir, as an insane lover, gives very pleasant and instructive advice to Tughral" (cited in Heron Allen 1902, ix-x).

Among the researchers who study this subject, there are joint statements in the research of the authors such as Vladimir Minorsky (1928), Parviz Natel Khanlari (1945), Javad Maghsoud (1975), and Parviz Azki (1996). In addition to *Raha al-Sadr wa Aya al-Sawar*, another manuscript dates back several years before Ravandi wrote his book. *Letters of Ayn al-Qudat* is among the outstanding works that have been written in solid Persian prose by *Abdullah bin Mohammad Ain al-Qudat* written in 1126–1131 CE, in which the authors refer to Baba Tahir's relationship with the mystics of his time.

There are narratives and stories about the asceticism and piety status of the poet, as people called him *Oryan* [naked] due to his reluctance to have worldly affiliations. This nickname represents the poet's inattention to the world and its deceptive appearance. Some characteristics like delicacy, simplicity, a spiritual sense, and the particular dialect of the poem have attracted the attention of many worldwide translators. The title *Baba* was given to him by the people of his time because of being the elder and leader of the Dervish tribe of his time. Azkaei (1996)<sup>14</sup> states that "Baba" was a nickname people used to add to the beginning of the names of ascetics and mystics as praise, and they were often known by the same name.

Safa (1973)<sup>15</sup> believes that Baba Tahir Hamadan-i is a poet and mystic of the fourth and fifth centuries AH and one of the literary figures of the Seljuk period. His birth was recorded in the late fourth century and the fifth century. He was a mystic and sage; however, Reza Qoli Khan Hedayat

<sup>14</sup> Azkaei, (1996), *Baba Tahir Nameh: Seventeen Speeches and a Selection of Poems*: Tous: Tehran. p.127.

<sup>15</sup> Safa, Z. (1973), *History of Literature in Iran*. Tehran: Tehran University, 384.

believes that the authors mistakenly consider Baba Tahir as a contemporary of the Seljuk sultans. In his book *Majma u'l-Fusaha*, Hedayat mentions that Tahir Hamadani, known as *naked*, was called Baba Tahir and was one of the scholars and mystics of his life who lived at the time of "Dialame" in 1019 CE and died before famous poets such as Ferdowsi and Onsoni.<sup>16</sup> However, Azkaci (1996)<sup>17</sup> considers Baba Tahir's life in the second half of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century AH to coincide with the rule of the Delamians and the Kurds over the Fahla regions of Iran.

Sadegh Rezazadeh Shafaq (1973) regards Baba Tahir as one of the mystics born in the late fourth century, and his period of fame reached the middle of the fifth century. He cites the meeting between Baba Tahir and Tughril Beyk, mentioned in the manuscript of *Rahatu's-Sudur* by Ravandi (1202 CE), which emphasises the period of the poet's life. Rezazadeh Shafaq believes that according to the narration quoted in this book, Baba Tahir's birth can be estimated around the end of the fourth AH and his period of fame in the middle of the fifth AH (Rezazadeh Shafaq 1973)<sup>18</sup>

Mohammad ibn Ali ibn Sulayman Ravandi (1202–1206; 98–99, see in Azkaci, 1996: 116), in his book entitled *Raha al-Sadr wa Aya al-Sawar* on the subject of the history of the Saljuks, narrated the conversation of Baba Tahir and two of his companions, Baba Ja'far and Sheikh Hamsha, with Tughril Beyk of Saljuks as follows:

"شنیدم که چون سلطان طغرل بیگ به همدان آمد، از اولیاء سه پیر بودند: باباطاهر و باباجعفر و شیخ حمشا. کوهکی است بر در همدان آن را خضر خوانند بر آنجا ایستاده بودند، نظر سلطان بر ایشان آمد کوهکی لشکر بداشت و پیاده شد و با وزیر ابو نصر الکندری پیش ایشان آمد. باباطاهر پاره یی شنیفته گونه بودی او را گفت: ای ترک با خلق خدا چه خواهی کرد؟ سلطان گفت: آنچه تو فرمایی. بابا گفت: آن کن که خدا می فرماید: «إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ». سلطان بگریست و گفت: چنین کنم. بابا دستش بست و گفت: پذیرفتی؟ سلطان "گفت: آری."

[I heard that when Sultan Tughril Bey came to Hamadan, three mystics and dervishes were there: Baba Tahir, Baba Jafar, and Sheikh Hamsha. They were standing on a hill called Khezr at the gate of Hamadan. The presence of three mystics caught the Sultan's attention and ordered the troops to stand, dismounted, and came to them with his minister, Abu Nasr al-Kandari. Baba Tahir, who was a pious and truthful man, said to him: "O Turk, what will you do with God's creature?" "Whatever you say," said Sultan. "Do what God says in the Qur'an: 'Indeed, God commands justice and goodness,'"

<sup>16</sup> Safa, Z. (1973). 847.

<sup>17</sup> Azkaci, (1996), 143.

<sup>18</sup> Rezazadeh Shafaq, S. (1973), History of Literature in Iran. Tehran: Piouz.pp.14-213.

Baba said. The Sultan cried and said, "Let me do this." Baba took his hand and said, "Did you accept?" "Yes," said the Sultan]

A review of Baba Tahir's anecdotes and stories in *The Letters of Ayn al-Qozat Hamadani* (1126–1131 CE) proves that Ravandi's document cannot be considered the only and most reliable source about Baba Tahir and the symmetry of his life with Seljuk rulers such as Tughral Beyk. In these letters, in addition to referring to Tahir and his tomb in Hamadan, the great mystic and professional elders who lived at the same time and were close to him have been mentioned.

Abdul Hossein Zarrinkoob (1978: 193) and Parviz Azkaei (1996: 76) are among the first to confirm this fact.

Vladimir Minorsky, in his book (*Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, 1997, Vol. Iv: 62), does not consider Ravandi's book to be the only surviving document from Baba Tahir's time, and he refers to some "Letters of Ayn al-Qudat" written by one of the great geniuses of Islamic mysticism, Ayn al-quzat Hamedani, several years before Ravandi (599 AH). In his article, he argues that in "Letters of Ayn al-Qudat" (520–25 AH), the author mentioned a poet named Tahir who was buried in Hamadan, and his life period coincided with two other mystics named Shikh Barakeh and Sheikh Fateha.

Parviz Azkaei (1996) also refers to the quotations of Ayn al-Qudat from his masters and considers it as an acceptable reason for approving this historical document, which refers to Baba Tahir's meeting with Sheikh Barakeh (vol. 1, 45):

" از بَرَكه-قَدَه- شَنِیدِم که طاهر گفت که مردمان می آیند و ریش خود به افسوس ما فرا می دارند، پس افسوس می برند و به ریش خود می دارند."

[I heard from Shikh Barakeh that people come to me and shake their beards (because they are unable to understand our words and knowledge), and make fun of us. However, when they leave us, this ridicule and humiliation (due to their ignorance and common understanding), becomes their own (and create many problems in their lives)]

Hamdollah Mostofi (1330: 152), in his book *Nuzhat al-Qulub*, has written about Baba Tahir's tomb at the holy graves of Hamadan. Hossein Bahr al-Ulumi (1976: 442) writes that Baba Tahir's tomb is located on a hill northwest of Hamadan and in front of the tomb of Imamzadeh Harith ibn Ali. An octagonal brick tower was built on the tomb of Baba, as Ayn al-Qodat Hamadani (vol. 1: 351, cited in Azkaei, 1996: 128) referred to his tomb:

"ای عزیز! این نبشته هم بر تربت طاهر نبشتم، روز شنبه"

[Oh dear! I also wrote this post on Tahir's tomb on Saturday]

### Baba Tahir as a Mystic Poet

Considering the concepts and the spirit of Baba Tahir couplets and his biography, it can be accepted that he was not a Sufi and a mystic in the institutionalised sense but a human being cut off from the world, with an exciting spirit. He saw the manifestations of God in the plains, deserts, forests, and seas. In the eyes of the people, he was highly sanctified and considered a mystic. Clement Huart (1885), in the preface of his essay to "Les Quatrains de Baba Tahir *Uryan* en Pehlevi Musulman", refers to a passage in *Nuzhat al-Qulub* by Hamdu'llah Mustawfi, who died in 750 AH concluding that the tomb of Baba Tahir, ten years before the date, was highly respected in Hamedan. He also quotes from the Comte de Gobineau in *Trois ans en Asie* and tells us that Baba Tahir is now known in Iran as one of the saints of the "Ahl-i Haqq" or "Nusayri" sect. A spiritually inspired beggar who avoids worldly affiliations and seeks to learn religious sciences then, the prefix Baba is a name given to Baba Tahir as praise and respect and indicates that he was a dervish or a Kalandar [Qalandar] rather than a Sufi (cited in Heron Allen's book 1902: xiii-xiv).

Heron Allen (1902: xi) quotes "Lotf Ali Beg Azar" as saying that he (Baba Tahir) is a mad lover (in a Sufi manner or spiritual consciousness) and the warmth of his soul is evident from his poems, the word "Baba" is used as a preface in all old and recent sources, including history books and memories related to Baba Tahir. The title is undoubtedly praiseworthy, as "Baba" is equivalent to a sheikh, an elder, and a leader. Other mystics have been nicknamed "Baba", such as Afzal and Babakohi; hence, this title has been used for great people and truth-seekers. Hajviri (fifth century AH), in his book *Kashf al-Mahjoub*, argues that the dervishes and the great elders of Fergana called him "*Bab*" (301). In addition, in three odes whose metre is the same as the metre of *do-beyti*, the poet calls himself "Tahir" and, in one ode, introduces himself as "Baba Tahir" (Maqsoud 1977). The poet is also known as Tahir in Hamadan (Azad Hamedani 1996).

Authors such as Hedayat in the *Majma'u 'l-Fusaha* (1878: 847), Lotf Ali Beg Azar in *Atash Kadeh* (1860), and Sajjadi in *Introduction to the Principles of Mysticism and Sufism* (2001: 5–83) confirm that Baba Tahir's poems are based on asceticism and lack of worldly attachments. Baba Tahir is a wise man who seeks truth through piety and submission, his goal is to reach the absolute God and the spiritual understanding beyond reason, and of course, the similarity between Baba Tahir's ascetic poems and the

thought of the great mystics is proof of this claim. Non-dependence on the world, ordering contentment, avoiding evil deeds, and paying attention to the world after death are the main topics the poet addresses because he considers worldly belongings as an obstacle to raising the level of human beings higher.

Baba Tahir lived in an era in which mystics spoke of two types of mystical methods: ascetic mysticism with a focus on the works of great mystics such as Khajeh Abdullah Ansari and Ali ibn Othman Hajveri and romantic mysticism and the unity of existence in the works of people like Baba Tahir Hamadani and Ahmad Ghazali (Emami and Abbariki 2010). Abdul al-Hossein Zarrinkoob (1978: 187–9) writes of Baba Tahir's Sufism and his relationship with Ahl-e Haqq or "people of truth", and he says that the poet's name is mentioned among the elders and ancient saints and shows his relationship with this sect. Whatever is written in the old books quoted from Baba Tahir has been recorded by the same sect or their relatives. In the oldest document left about Baba Tahir in the Konya Museum, dating to 848, he is referred to as the "*Qudut al-Arifin*" [an example of mystics]. Parviz Azkaei (1996: 143) also writes in this regard that he was a follower of the Iranian Gnostic sect or religion of truth whose principles and beliefs were deeply rooted in the thoughts of Zarwani-Manichaeism زروانی-مانوی and the ancient Fahlavi wisdom.

Love is the main subject in Baba Tahir's mysticism, but in his couplets, mystical asceticism is also prominent (Pourjavadi 2008).

### **Baba Tahir's Couplets (Do-beyti) Features**

Fahlavi or Pahlavi poems are couplets, songs, or melodies that are important in terms of poetic metre. The most prominent and famous examples of Fahlaviyat are Baba Tahir's couplets, which most literary scholars consider syllabic metre (Azkaei 1996). In terms of types of poetry, Malek al-Sho'arai Bahar (2002: 131, cited in Azkaei, 1996: 215) considers the couplet as one of the root forms of Persian poetry, which is an eleven-syllable poem composed of four stanzas, all on one rhyme except the third stanza in which the rhyme is optional. Each of the four stanzas has an independent meaning. *Do-beyti* is the most common format. The principle of the couplet is that the poet states something and ends it in "*two-beyt*," which expresses the power of feelings and emotions and his inner self in the last stanza. The most famous of *do-beyti* is "Mafa'iln Mafa'iln Mafa'il" or "Faulun" (Bahr Hazj Masdas Maqsoor or Mahzof). Edward Heron Allen (1902: xi) writes in the definition of the difference between a couplet (*do-beyti*) and a quatrain (*ruba'i*), "The particular *two-beyt* metre referred to is