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AN ANTHOLOGY OF ISMAILI LITERATURE

A SHI'Ī VISION OF ISLAM

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Nūr Muḥammad Shāh

The son of Sayyid Imām Shāh, an Ismaili poet and preacher who settled in Gujarāt in the mid 15th century, Nūr (or Nar) Muḥammad Shāh (d. ca. 940/1534) was a prolific versifier. Among the compositions attributed to him is the *Satveṇī moṭī*, a mystical treatise of over 200 cantos. Many passages of this poem, including those translated here, caution believers from becoming attached to the ephemeral world and urge them to work towards the everlasting life of the next world. Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet, is praised as a paragon of resignation and spiritual love.

THE PERISHABLE BODY¹

Like a shadow cast at noon
When not a mote remains steady

Why waste your life chasing after
What constantly moves, like the shade of a tree?

How exquisite the first buds appear
But on the appointed day, all of them will rustle, falling to the ground

Indeed, to whom will this not happen?
Just as the leaves have fallen from the *pīpal* tree

Though one wearies saying ‘mine, mine’
All the blind are enmeshed in this

None but you my true lord, my beloved, none but you

Having seen the play of the tender buds
Never be fooled
When the appointed day arrives
All of them will rustle and fall to the ground

1. Nūr Muḥammad Shāh, ‘*Satveṇī moṭī*,’ nos. 10–12, nos. 41–42, tr. Shafique N. Virani. An earlier version appeared in his ‘The Voice of Truth: Life and Works of Sayyid Nūr Muḥammad Shāh, a 15th/16th Century Ismā‘īlī Mystic.’ Unpublished MA thesis (McGill, 1995), pp. 66–67; 87–89. The introduction is by the translator.

Seeing this fleeting world
How can you love the morrow?

None who came to this world remained
They were just like bubbles upon the water

First the beloved created Adam
You beheld his coming, yet thought not of his departure

He was made king over both the worlds
Yet, in the end, even he was not allowed to stay

Whoever has come has gone as well
From amongst them I see not a soul who remained

None but you my true lord, my beloved, none but you

Bind not your heart to a home
In which you cannot live
Just as a foreigner is but a guest
Who tarries, yet whose thoughts are elsewhere

While the field is verdant and flourishing
Why not take heed immediately?

People and family are naught but poor millet
For whom the harvest of truth is lost

When the beloved's elixir takes effect
All false actions are put to flight

All this coarse millet remains not standing
Yet you bear so much pain and suffering for it

All have come for the sake of the elixir
And shall flee these parched, arid fields

None but you my true lord, my beloved, none but you

Take heed
While the field is fertile
Know that people, family and relations
Are naught but poor millet.

THE POVERTY OF FĀṬĪMA

If there is any lady it is Fāṭima
Who lived like a foreigner in this world

She longed for the house of 'Alī
Yet did not incline toward the spinning wheel

Then the Prophet advised her
'Why don't you take the spinning wheel in your hand

You will get sustenance from the hand of your lord
Why not dedicate your life to this spinning wheel?'

Muḥammad was true at heart
Such was the wisdom he gave to his daughter

None but you my true lord, my beloved, none but you

Friendship is a game of tribulation
That most cannot play
Only those whom the sustainer exalted
Were given a meeting with him

The next day Fāṭima set out for home
She walked along, seeing naught but her faith

Without faith nothing but loss could be seen
Then she covered her head with an old shawl

When the friends were afflicted by the world
They abandoned it

This is how they met the lord
Only then they went and played the game of love

She who is engrossed in affection is in married bliss
Intoxicated, she burns herself in love

None but you my true lord, my beloved, none but you

Those most thirsty for love
Play the game of love

The Prophet showed the way of meditation
To unite us with the Lord.

(Translated by Shafique N. Virani)