

## Research Report, 25 January 2016

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As indicated in my proposal for Taleghani Scholarship, My research is concerned with intertwined issues of power and knowledge demonstrating the relationship between the religious-political aspirations of the Safavids and the poetic language of Persian *qaṣīdahs*. It explains how the religious-political ideologies of the Safavids, traced out significant changes on the structure, themes and genres of poetry. Application of different spaces, both political and religious spaces, depiction of imams and prophets through novel images, to legitimize their kingship through affiliation with religion affected the elements of poetry during this period.

One of the most important areas that experience a great change in comparison to poetry of previous centuries during the reign of Safavids is amorous depiction of love. In the MESA 2015 conference in Denver, I addressed the relationship between socio-religious impact of the Safavid ruling system on issues related to sex and sexuality briefly. By comparing the distinct language between court circles and the dominant language of non-elite spheres such as coffeehouse, I proposed linking the so-called “immortal” language of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century poetry to new sexual discourse imposed by the Safavid rulers. Benefiting from wide variety of *diwans* from both court and non-court poets—What I spent the most of my fellowship on, I demonstrated that the amorous images in *vasukht*<sup>1</sup>, is not only to breaking away from stylistic features of previous poets, but a reflection to the new crafted sexual discourse which eventually controlled both men and women in society. In this new discourse, the (male/female) beloved, suppressed by sexual rules and regulations processed by the state, lost its value in the poet/lover’s eyes. In addition, naturalized by discussions and arguments on proper etiquettes of love, love found a realistic

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<sup>1</sup> *Vasukht*, which literally means to “burn again” is a branch of *vuqu* style, the dominant style of writing during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In *vasukht*, poet completely abhors love for a beloved to stay free from heartache. *Vasukht*, is written in a vernacular language, and in according to some scholars, is “immoral” and “corrupted”.

image. Unlike the earlier poems in which the lack of beloved never could be compensated for the lover, in this new relationship, the beloved could be easily replaced in case the relationship could not work.

Inspired by questions and discussions after the panel which was led by Dr. Yaseen Noorani, I figured out few points that need further research and consideration. First, that reconstructing ideological apparatuses of medieval (or pre-modern) period needs a heavy historical archival research requiring access to Persian manuscripts in Iran/ Turkey/ or India. Second, analyzing the writings of best-known poets is not enough, and I need to look at a variety of less-known poets in non-elite circles. Based on the language they applied, one may find about socio-religious discourses of time. However, determining the reasons of socio-linguistic changes, or various socio-cultural strands of the Iranian society during the Safavid period, needs an inter-disciplinary research considering various resources and analyzing other elements effecting the languages and dominant religions of the time period.

As of today, I am working on the poetry of some Persian poets from India, from both court and non-court circles. These poets were either patronized by kings, local leaders or other rich poets who ran literary circles. My goal is to compare the notions of gender, sex and sexuality in their writings with of those who lived within the Safavid court system or who were belonged to non-elite circles. The result of this project can suggest connections between literary productions and the broader cultural elements that influence them. I hope to stimulate a pattern for future studies on reading and interpreting Persian poetry. By contextualizing stylistic features of Persian poetry in culture and history, my research offers something to those outside of literary studies, for example, historians of the Safavid-Mughal period who provided deliberate foci on the history and art of this period. In addition, it offers outlook on practice of power in Middle East, which may help the political theorists dealing with issues related to the region nowadays.