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## Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī (Nūr Arfa<sup>ʿ</sup> 1286–1353/1907–1974)

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### Introduction

Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī (1286–1353/1907–1974) was a relatively little-known poet in the Iranian intellectual and literary sphere. Two principal factors have contributed to the limited attention her works have received: first, her poems were not widely published in the press during her lifetime; second, no independent scholarly research on her life and oeuvre has been undertaken until recently. Consequently, her name and biographical details are only briefly mentioned in several compendiums and general works concerning eminent literary personalities in Iran. In addition to composing poetry, Nūrī Sayyārah was an accomplished painter and artist, yet none of her artworks were published or exhibited during her lifetime. Her poetry, which is predominantly imbued with mystical themes, was scattered in various sources and has only recently been collected. No tangible evidence remains of the location of her paintings or other artistic productions. Her consistent engagement with the Ṣafī ʿAlī Shāhī Sufī order profoundly influenced the mystical tenor of her verse, which may partly explain her limited public recognition. However, she remained silent on these inclinations due to the political and social constraints of her time.

Accounts of Nūrī Sayyārah's life and career appear sporadically in various publications, such as the third volume of *Zanān-i sukhanvār az yik hizār sāl pīsh tā imrūz kih bih zabān-i Fārsī sukhan guftah*'and (Eloquent women who have spoken Persian

from a thousand years ago until today) by ‘Alī-Akbar Mushīr Salīmī;<sup>1</sup> *Sukhanvarān-i nāmī-i mu‘āsir-i Īrān* (Renowned orators of contemporary Iran) by Muhammad Bāqir Barqa‘ī;<sup>2</sup> *Zanān-i nāmī dar tārikh, farhang va tamaddun-i islāmī* (Notable women in Islamic history, culture, and civilization) by ‘Abd al-Rahīm ‘Aqīqī Bakhshāyishī;<sup>3</sup> and the second volume of *Kitāb-i Gīlān* (The book of Gilan) edited by Ibrāhīm Islāh ‘Arabānī.<sup>4</sup> The most recent and dedicated scholarly work on Sayyārah’s poetry is *Tahlīl va barrasī-i ash‘ār-i bānū Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī* (Analysis and review of the poems of Lady Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī) by Zahrā Rūhīfar, which collects her dispersed mystical poems alongside a critical analysis.<sup>5</sup>

### Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī’s Life and Thoughts

Nūr al-Mulūk Khānum, known by her pen names Sayyārah and Nūrī Sayyārah, was born in 1286/1907 in Rankuh, a district of Amlash in Langarud County.<sup>6</sup> Her father, Sayyid Nasr Allāh Mu‘īnī (Arfa‘ al-Mulk), served as a high-ranking bureaucrat fluent in French and English. He was highly proficient in Persian language and literature, and an accomplished musician. Her mother, Parvīn al-Saltanah Munajjimī Saffārī Gīlānī, a granddaughter of Fath ‘Alī Shāh Qājār, was a distinguished poet and of her time. Growing up in such a cultivated and intellectually rich family environment, Nūrī Sayyārah began composing poetry from an early age, a talent that she seems to have inherited from her maternal family. Like her cousin, Lady Ashraf Mishkūti began composing poetry in childhood.<sup>7</sup> Nūrī Sayyārah was familiar with French and Russian languages. As previously noted, she was a painter; in addition, she was also a skilled musician. She learned to play the *tār*<sup>8</sup> under her father’s supervision and studied painting under renowned masters of the field, producing exquisite works in both disciplines.<sup>9</sup>

After completing her secondary education, Nūrī Sayyārah developed a profound interest in Islamic mysticism and joined the Ni‘mat Allāhī Sufī order. In *Shukūfah’hā-yi pindār* (Blos-

<sup>1</sup> ‘Alī-Akbar Mushīr Salīmī, *Zanān-i sukhanvār az yik hizār sāl pīsh tā imrūz kih bih zabān-i Fārsī sukhan guftah* and [Eloquent women who have spoken Persian from a thousand years ago until today], vol 2. (Tehran: Mu‘assisah-‘i Matbū‘āt-i ‘Alī Akbar ‘Ilmī, 1333/1954).

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Bāqir Barqa‘ī, *Sukhanvarān-i nāmī-i mu‘āsir-i Īrān* [Renowned orators of contemporary Iran] (Qom: Khurram, 1373/1994).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Abd al-Rahīm ‘Aqīqī Bakhshāyishī, *Zanān-i nāmī dar tārikh, farhang va tamaddun-i Islāmī* [Notable women in Islamic history, culture, and civilization] (Qom: Navīd-i Islām, 1382/2003).

<sup>4</sup> Ibrāhīm Islāh ‘Arabānī, ed. *Kitāb-i Gīlān* [The book of Gilan], vol 2. (Tehran: Gurūh-i Pazhūshigarān-i Īrān, 1374/1995).

<sup>5</sup> Zahrā Rūhīfar, *Tahlīl va barrasī-i ash‘ār-i bānū Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī* [Analysis and review of the poems of Lady Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī] (Lahijan: Dānishgāh-i Āzād-i Islāmī-i Lāhijān, 1403/2024).

<sup>6</sup> Mushīr Salīmī, ‘Aqīqī, and Pūrān Farrukhzād all record Nūrī Sayyārah’s birth year as 1293/1914, while Barqa‘ī alone cites 1286/1907. However, on oral accounts from her family and close associates, along with the date inscribed on her tombstone, suggest that 1286/1907 is the most accurate date. See Mushīr Salīmī, *Zanān-i sukhanvār*, 368; ‘Aqīqī, *Kitāb-i Gīlān*, 401; Barqa‘ī, *Sukhanvarān-i nāmī-i mu‘āsir-i Īrān*, 1855; Pūrān Farrukhzād, *Zanān-i farhang’sāz-i Īrān* [Women cultural pioneers of Iran] (Tehran: Zaryāb, 1378/1999), 2:1881.

<sup>7</sup>Ashraf Mishkūī, born in 1290/1911, was also a poet from a very young age. Lady Ma'sūmah, known by her pen name Ashraf Mishkūī, was a Gilaki poet from Langarud province. Her work reflects the influence of classical poets such as Hāfiz, Firdawsī, Sa' dī, and Mawlānā, while she was also shaped by prominent modern poets including Parvīn I'tisāmī, Nīmā Yūshij, Malik al-Shu'arā Bahār, and Parvīz Nāfil Khānlārī. Her poetry, which was published in contemporary newspapers, engages with ethical and social concerns, particularly themes of freedom and women's rights. Her collected poems are published under the title *Tālār-āyīnah* [Hall of mirrors]. She spent much of her life in her ancestral residence, known as Ashraf'sarā, located in a rural area called Qasimabad, a district of Rudsar in the Gilan region. Following her retirement, she relocated to the United States, settling in Washington, D.C., where she remained active in the Iranian American literary society and participated in programs at the Husayni Center of Washington. She passed away in 1989 in Washington, D.C. Abbas Panahi and Maryam Shadmohammadi, "Ashraf Mishkātī: The Love-Stricken Poet of Gilan," in *Women Poets Iranica* (Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2025), <https://poets.iranicaonline.org/article/ashraf-mishkati-the-love-stricken-poet-of-gilan/>.

<sup>8</sup>The *tār* (تار) is a traditional Persian plucked string instrument and one of the most important instruments in clas-

soms of thought), Firiydūn Nawzād writes: "In a letter dated Farvardīn 27, 1348/April 16, 1969, Nūrī Sayyārah wrote to me, 'My religion is Islam, and my order is Ni'mat Allāh Safī 'Alī Shāhī.' Indeed, she was a truly pious, charming, and faithful dervish."<sup>10</sup>

Nūrī Sayyārah never married and devoted her life entirely to composing poetry, learning music, and painting. She traveled to various countries in the Middle East and Europe in pursuit of intellectual and cultural experience.<sup>11</sup> In her poetry, Nūrī Sayyārah primarily drew inspiration from classical masters, especially Hāfiz of Shīrāz, showing exceptional skill in composing ghazals. Her poems possess profound mystical fervor.<sup>12</sup> She is said to have composed nearly two thousand verses, yet at present only scattered pieces remain, none of which have been published in an independent collection. Although she was an accomplished artist, none of her creative works, whether in poetry, music, or painting, were made publicly available during her time. Her avoidance of publication during her lifetime remains unexplained. Only years after her short and relatively unrecognized life did some relatives and friends, apparently with familial ties, collect a number of her verses.

According to oral testimonies from her relatives and friends, including Mītrā Razzāqī, the daughter of Ashraf Mishkūī, Nūrī Sayyārah's musical compositions and paintings reflected subtle mystic and spiritual sensibilities, as well as delicacy and refinement.<sup>13</sup> None of those works have survived. Nūrī Sayyārah was a sincere dervish, a devout mystic, and a compassionate human being. Through her art, music, literature, and, most importantly, her religious and moral principles, she created works of lasting value. In articulating her mystical worldview through poetry, she drew upon virtues such as humility, piety, sincerity, modesty, purity, contentment, discretion, loyalty, and love. Her verses conveyed these inner values and imparted to her readers the moral qualities she had learned and embodied. Her poetry abounds in motifs of divine knowledge and devotion to God. In



essence, her corpus represents a comprehensive expression of asceticism and piety, often employing allegory and dialogue to convey moral lessons. A large portion of her surviving works consists of instructional and moral verses, parables, and aphoristic poetry, forms that dominate her literary output.

For reasons unknown, the National Organization for Civil Registration of Iran holds no record her date of death. However, her tombstone in Zahīr al-Dawlah cemetery bears the date Khurdād 11, 1353/June 1, 1974.<sup>14</sup>

### Nūrī Sayyārah and Ashraf Mishkūtī

According to records and documents preserved by Mitrā Razzāqī, daughter of Lady Ashraf Mishkūtī, Ashraf Mishkūtī and Nūrī Sayyārah corresponded with one another in verse. In a surviving poem addressed to Ashraf Mishkūtī, Nūrī Sayyārah paints a bleak portrait of her life's misfortunes. More than reflecting her inner world and solitary realms of her poetry, this correspondence showcases her deep affection for her cousin. In these verses, Nūrī Sayyārah articulates her "wretched state" as follows:

I took up the pen and put my miserable situation into words.  
By your eyes, I swear, I wrote with tearful eyes.

My greetings to you, O Ashraf, noble and learned lady;  
At your feet, I wrote to you about my tired soul.

Of misfortune and defeat, of all that befell me,  
Of the pain of separation and the beloved's coldness I wrote.

I wrote so that you may know of my nights and days,  
On this page, I wrote of the times and fate's ways.

I swear by the soul-burning lament of afflicted lovers  
Having your dark hair before my eyes, I wrote through the dark night.

sical Iranian music. Its name means "string" in Persian, and it has deeply influenced music not only in Iran but also in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

<sup>9</sup>Safā al-Dīn Tabarrā'iyān, *Chihrah'hā-yi dar khāk* [Faces in the dust] (Tehran: Rūz'nigār, 1382/2003), 276.

<sup>10</sup>Firaydūn Nawzād, *Shukū-fah'hā-yi pindār* [Blossoms of thought] (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>11</sup>Farrukhzād, *Zanān-i farhang'sāz-i Irān*, 2:1881.

<sup>12</sup>Barqa'ī, *Sukhanvarān-i nāmī-i mu'āsir-i Irān*, 1855; Farrukhzād, *Zanān-i farhang'sāz-i Irān*, 2:1881; Mushīr Salīmī, *Zanān-i sukhanvār*, 368.

<sup>13</sup>Mitrā Razzāqī, in discussion with the author, Lahijan, Iran, 2022.

<sup>14</sup>The following poem is inscribed on Nūrī Sayyārah's tombstone:  
O Lord, by the soul of Muhammad, our very essence,  
O Lord, by the soul of 'Alī, our guiding presence,

O Lord, by Fātimah, our sacred refuge  
Her love blooms eternal in this heart of mine.

Extend Your hand, for we have fallen low.

Of dark nights, the beloved's sorrow, misfortune, and separation,  
From a thousand sorrows, I wrote but one, one of a thousand.

In memory of the epochs of friendship, love, and kindness,  
In memory of the epochs of tenderness and compassion, in  
memory of the beloved I wrote.

Come, you whose radiant face eases the pains of the soul;  
With your face before my eyes, I wrote about the springtime's  
bloom.

I swear by your hair, Ashraf, longing for you, Ashraf,  
In memory of your street, Ashraf, I wrote this as a keepsake.

Nūrī Sayyārah wrote in the land of good people,  
Who in your land, I wrote of the agony of the beloved.

Ashraf Mishkūṭī's poetic response reads as follows:

I wrote of my agonies to you, lustrous as the full moon.  
I wrote of the pains held in my restless heart.

I wrote so you would know how disheartened I am in your absence.  
I wrote to complain of time and of separation.

I wrote that I am caught on the tip of your hair.  
I swear by your dark eyes that I wrote shedding tears.

I wrote of unfaithful friends and my hapless heart,  
I wrote of my sorrowful mood and the ache in my soul.

I wrote of the grief I had kept hidden within.  
O you, sage and shrewd idol.

I put into words the torment of your absence.



I wrote of reunion, and separation, and the test of patience.

I nothing in life but sorrow and vows.

O my friend, I wrote clearly all that I witnessed in life.

Come to my door so that I may hold you close.

Come, come, for I wrote in hope of your kindness.

See how my bright day has turned dark as your hair.

I wrote that in your absence, daylight has become night for me

I live alone, the pain heavy in my heart.

I wrote of the bird imprisoned in its cage.

I wrote of the prey fleeing the snare to the mountains.

I wrote of the nightingale released from its cage.

I wrote that my heart bleeds when you are away.

I begged you not to wound me with your detachment.

I wrote the song of your love when spring had just begun.

I wrote to you as a keepsake, O you, the bright moon.<sup>15</sup>

### **Nūrī Sayyārah and Other Poets**

In composing her poetry, Nūrī Sayyārah followed the methods of the classical masters, such as Mawlānā (as the example in the next section shows), and held special devotion toward Hāfiz of Shiraz, the great ghazal poet and one of the foremost figures of Persian literature in the eighth century AH (fourteenth century CE). Nūrī Sayyārah, while continuing the tradition of Hāfiz in her own ghazals, was deeply influenced by his thoughts, ideas, and the spiritual and thematic content of his verse. She also used explicit word borrowings (*tadmīn*) from the Book of Poems (*Dīvān*) of Hāfiz. One significant example appears in her poem that borrows words from the first line of the following couplet by Hāfiz:

<sup>15</sup>Zahrā Rūhīfar, *Tahlīl va barrisī-yi ash'ar Nūrī Sayyārah Gilanī* [Analyzing the poetry of Nūrī Sayyārah Gilanī] (Lahijan: Intishārāt-i dānish-gāh-i āzād-i Islāmī-yi Lāhījān, 1403/2024): 26.

O cupbearer, roll the cup of wine and give that to me

Because love seemed so facile at first sight but brought about such problems.

Inspired by this line, Nūrī Sayyārah composed the following poem:

O cupbearer, bring me the violet wine,  
That I may savor both old age and youth.

O eternal cupbearer, for the sake of God, release me from sorrow,  
Where is the wine that enlivens the dead with life's soul and tomorrow's hope?

Alas, I aged and never tasted joy,  
Yet you, pour for me from the pure wine served for every celebration.

A sorrow sits in my heart, heavy and unrelenting,  
Let me drink the wine that helps forget such pain.

My heart is bleeding; the world is cruel.  
O wise elder, give me a cup brimming with kindness and mercy.

There is no eternity in this passing world,  
So give me a cup of wine that tastes of the eternal.

I will not drink the wine that grows from worldly vines.  
O spirited sage, pour for me from that celestial vintage.

I am a cunning soul, known across the heavens for my devotion to the cup.  
O you eternal cupbearer, give all the wine you can.

If the pious forbid us from drinking,



Tell them gently: they will never understand what we mean.

The sixth line of this poem, which dominates Khayyām's worldview of celebrating the joy of the present moment, is one example of the classical poets' influence on Nūrī Sayyārah.

For this reason, considering the content and ideas present in her poetry, it appears that Nūrī Sayyārah was more influenced by the poets of earlier generations than by her contemporaries. She did not compose poetry in the Nīmā'ī style nor in the poetic forms that had just begun to emerge in her era. Similarly, there is no available account or report indicating that she maintained intellectual, literary, or friendly relations with the poets of her time, apart from her cousin Ashraf Mishkūī.

### **Themes and Concepts in Nūrī Sayyārah's Poetry**

Nūrī Sayyārah was among the few mystically inclined women of the modern era whose intellectual and poetic framework was founded upon spirituality. Her position within her family and her social environment was exceptional compared with that of other intellectual women of her time. During this time, women's cultural and social contributions were largely shaped by political struggles and domestic developments. Nevertheless, despite enjoying a privileged family and economic background, Nūrī Sayyārah distanced herself from the dominant concerns of her time and instead devoted herself to mysticism, grounding her poetry in spiritual and mystical thought. Notably, her poetry lacks references to the natural world or the cultural and geographic features of her native Gilan. Her intense focus on mysticism rendered her poetry almost entirely detached from the external world, overlooking broader cultural, social, or environmental elements.

Another noteworthy aspect of Nūrī Sayyārah's work is her disregard for themes of modernism and innovation in poetry, despite living during the transformative early Pahlavi era and

<sup>16</sup>A *murīd* is a spiritual disciple who actively seeks enlightenment, whereas a *murād* is the “sought” or “willed” one, a spiritual state where one is so devoted and transformed that they are pursued by God, no longer just seeking but being sought.

<sup>17</sup>*Ustun-i Hannānah* (حَنَّتَنَه) refers to the legendary “moaning pillar” in Islamic tradition, said to have sighed or wept when the Prophet Muhammad stopped leaning on it during sermons. The poet uses this image metaphorically to express deep emotional and spiritual presence.

<sup>18</sup>*Rūhīfār, Tahlīl va barrīsī-yi ash'ar Nūrī Sayyārah Gilānī*, 87.

belonging to a family and social milieu that offered her access to new intellectual currents, especially in contrast to other contemporary women writers. During the Pahlavi reign (1299–1357/1920–1978), women began participating actively in social debates and advocate for their rights. *Nūrī Sayyārah*, however, turned inward, focusing exclusively on Islamic mysticism. Although broader social conditions for women were far from ideal, *Nūrī Sayyārah*'s work reveals little engagement with such concerns. Instead, her poetry reflects a deep sense of solitude and inward contemplation, centered around mystical themes. She is particularly known for her mystical rhetoric and thought. Her poetry clearly demonstrates that she was both a spiritual disciple and the one who is “sought” (*murīd* and *murād*).<sup>16</sup> At times, she portrays herself as a seeker and compares herself to the “*Hannānah* pillar” (*Ustun-i Hannānah*),<sup>17</sup> while at others as the master, the possessor of a spiritual cloak:

You wanted to take the pulpit, speak, and steal hearts  
I stood in reverence, and became the *Hannānah* pillar

Behold the aspiration of the Magian Elder, through his grace  
and generosity,  
I was granted the spiritual cloak, I became a rosary of a hundred  
beads.<sup>18</sup>

*Nūrī Sayyārah*, in addition to her poetic and spiritual accomplishments, was a wise and perceptive individual who adorned her thought with the gems of refined expression. She was an eloquent and sensitive poet with insight and compassion. She contemplated the world around her with both vision and tenderness, observing the people, their joys and sorrows, their confusion and misguidance, through a lens of reflection and empathy. She urged all to view their fellow beings with equity and fairness:

O Zephyr, speak on *Sayyārah*'s behalf to the ignorant people.



Look upon no one with pride or disdain.

<sup>19</sup>Barqa ʿī, Sukhanvarān-i nāmī-i muʿāsīr-i Īrān, 1858.

The benefit of my words shall return to you,

<sup>20</sup>Mushīr Salīmī, Zanān-i sukhanvār, 370.

Even if they come from one poor, destitute, and humble.<sup>19</sup>

The poetry of Nūrī Sayyārah resounds with the call of love and spiritual intoxication. It is a source of joy and mystical inebriation. Using powerful imagery and musical rhythm, she gave voice and form to her contemplative vision, allowing every reader to engage in their own manner with the flame of her radiant being. Nūrī Sayyārah was a consummate actor upon the stage of existence, detached from titles and worldly status, who, like a graceful swan, yearned to ascend toward the abode of the Beloved and vanish into His essence.

In her view, the true lover resembles a drunken nightingale praising the beauty of the Divine, dancing ecstatically and joyfully at the feet of the Beloved, seeking enlightenment through spiritual surrender:

A lover must be like a drunk nightingale,

Who does not alight upon every thorny branch.

Whose soul lies willingly upon the palm of joy,

Bound heart and foot in the garden of love.<sup>20</sup>

Following the prevailing trend of utilizing symbols of nature in the Persian mystic literature, Nūrī Sayyārah eloquently draws upon the natural world. Given that painting and music were among her other arts, one may regard nature as the central source of inspiration for her artistic and literary creations. She composed a poem that borrows Mawlānā's famous words, "I long for the true human," crafting an ode that draws inspiration from the harmonious beauties of nature, from spring, the night-

<sup>21</sup>Āsif bin Barkhiyā (Arabic: *أصف بن برخيا*) is thought to be the Islamic scriptural figure who brought the Queen of Sheba's throne to King Solomon.

<sup>22</sup>Rūhifār, *Tahlil va barrisī-yi ash'ar Nūrī Sayyārah Gilānī*, 94.

ingale, the garden, gentle rain, the wandering deer, and verdant pastures. Her verse expresses deep emotion through these refined natural scenes:

Spring has arrived, and I long to see my beloved friends.

I am the nightingale who yearns for the garden and its blooms.

I long to sit beside my love, amidst flowers, grass, and green.

I long for the breeze of spring and the soft falling rain

Yet here I sit, mouth sealed, wings broken in this cage.

I ache for the garden, the meadow, and the scent of fresh herbs.

O Love, have mercy, my head is bowed in sorrow's sleeve.

Like a startled deer, I am trapped in grief's tight snare.

O Lord, my heart is heavy in this corner steeped in sorrow.

I long to hear the song of a sweet-voiced bird,

I long for the bright face of that radiant moon.

I long for the wilderness, desert, mountain, plain, and field.

O you, Asif Barkhiyā,<sup>21</sup> herald of hope and love

I long for Solomon's throne, like the Queen of Sheba once did.<sup>22</sup>

A full reading of her poetry reveals that the visible and hidden meanings within her verse are but a means to unveil the different dimensions of her soul and emotions, all seeking to remove the veils from divine truth and unite with the celestial essence of God, a hallmark of Sufi poetry, and indicating her deep un-



derstanding of mystical terminology:

We tore away the veil from the face of truth.  
Those who behold You seek nothing else.<sup>23</sup>

Like other Sufi poets, Nūrī Sayyārah employs similes and metaphors to depict spiritual pleasures through the language of worldly sensations. Following Hāfiz, Mawlānā, and Khayyām, she transforms physical delights into metaphors expressing higher spiritual ecstasy. By borrowing vocabulary from the Dīvān of Hāfiz in the poem referenced above, she reminds readers that the cupbearer (sāqī) of the mystical school serves not wine of the material world but the wine of divine knowledge and the sweetness of mystical vision. This celestial wine bestows ecstatic joy, restores vitality, eliminates sorrow, and brings serenity to the heart. It grants youth to the old, turns hardship into ease, spreads kindness throughout the world, and evokes everlasting life. The cupbearer and wine in Nūrī Sayyārah's poetry, like in Hāfiz's, symbolize the vision of the Beloved, whose beauty permeates every corner of existence and upon whom her poetic imagination constantly dwells. This cupbearer is the sāqī of love itself, whose wine, symbolic of revelation and divine insight, transmutes age into youth and dissolves grief into joy. The tavern is her spiritual garden, where nightingales of love sing shamelessly of union and where intoxication is a sacred rapture that frees the soul from self. In this sense, Nūrī Sayyārah may rightly be regarded as a Sīmurgh of immortality, a wise and awakened mystic who, though fully aware, displays the humility of divine inebriation.<sup>24</sup>

### **An Analysis of Nūrī Sayyārah's Poetry**

The emergence of mystical and Sufi poetry is undoubtedly one of the most significant developments in the history of Persian literature. The analysis and interpretation of the poems by mystic poets and poetically inclined Sufis—whether regarded as “the manifestation of mysticism in Persian literature” or as “the

<sup>23</sup>Mushīr Salīmī, *Zanān-i sukhānvār*, 369.

<sup>24</sup>Nasr Allāh Pūrjavādī, “Bādī-i i'shq,” [The wine of love] *Nashr-i Dānish* 66 (Mīhr va Ābān 1370/October and November 1991), 420–29.

<sup>25</sup>Several members of her maternal family were celebrated literati of Gilan—most notably her grandmother Shāh Jahān Khātūn and her cousin Ashraf Mishkūti, a prominent female poet of the Pahlavi era whose published anthology remains in circulation today. See Zahrā Rūhīfar, *Tahlīl va barrasī-i ash'ār-i Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī* [Analysis and study of the poems of Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī] (Lahijan: Dānishgāh-i Āzād-i Islāmī-i Lāhījān, 1403/2024), 5–6.

<sup>26</sup>, *Tahlīl va barrasī-i ash'ār-i Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī*, 12.

entrance of poetry into mystical literature”—have always attracted the attention of commentators and scholars in this field. The fact that women, despite the restrictive nature of a patriarchal society, were able to enter this domain and dedicate themselves to writing, is in itself a bold and courageous act in the realm of intellectual and literary history.

Nūrī Sayyārah Gīlānī, the mystic poet of Gilan, unfortunately, did not achieve the recognition she deserved in the history of mystical or Sufī poetry, nor in modern Persian literature more generally. She remains, as it were, an overlooked and marginalized figure. The echoes of her mystical and ascetic poetry are only faintly discernible in the works of a few regional literary scholars—and even then, merely in a few scattered lines. Therefore, the neglect shown by contemporary scholars of mystical literature in introducing her thought, her mystical path (*tarīqat*), and her devotion in the divinely ordained way (*sharīʿat*) cannot and should not be disregarded. What remains of Nūrī Sayyārah’s mystical or ascetic poetry reveals a sobering reality: her contributions as a mystical poet, and even her recognition as a female poet, have received minimal attention in contemporary literary histories.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, her literary and even artistic output was rarely published in the journals of her time. It appears that the poet herself had little interest in engaging with the public or participating in the literary circles of her time. One point worthy of scholarly attention is the period in which Nūrī Sayyārah began composing poetry. Although only a small number of her verses and poems have survived, these suggest she turned to poetry during adolescence and composed most of her work in her youth and middle age.<sup>26</sup> Her extant verses, before radiating the exalted fragrance of metaphysical mysticism, primarily reveal her fervent temperament and the spiritual agitation of a dervish heart filled with yearning. They convey, above all, an echo of her restless passion and her state of inner ecstasy rather than a fully developed metaphysical system of thought. Since the



timeframe of her mature poetic stage cannot be established with certainty, one cannot categorize her poems among the most accomplished examples of contemporary mystical verse.

<sup>27</sup>Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār, *Mukhtār-nāmah* [The book of choices], ed. by Muhammad Rizā Shafī'ī Kadkanī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1401/2022).

The eloquent mystical terminology and the ethical and religious themes in her poetry reflect Nūrī Sayyārah's deep engagement with the world of mysticism. Had fortune favored her poetic legacy—had her works been preserved and made accessible to future generations—we might have recognized her as one of the pioneering female poets of Iran, a mystic and dervish-minded voice articulating the thoughts and ideals of a segment of Iranian women.

Today, given the limited amount of poetry available, her works can best be examined through the lens of the defining characteristics of mystical literature. According to Shafī'ī Kadkanī's framework, which divides the history of Persian mystical poetry into two major phases—pre-Sanā'ī and post-Sanā'ī—Nūrī Sayyārah's poetry may be positioned between both.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, some of her poems correspond to the traditional definition offered by early mystics, encompassing spiritual principles and esoteric truths. On the other, her verses reflect emotional states and yearnings, showing that she composed love poetry imbued with mystical sensibility.

What remains certain is that Nūrī Sayyārah was a mystic poet in her own right. "Seekers of the path" (*sālikān-i tarīqat*), at any stage of their journey, will find in her poetry a source of solace and wisdom. Nūrī Sayyārah's verses are often the intimate whispers of a lover seeking the Eternal Beloved (*ma'shūq-i azalī*), soliloquies born of spiritual ecstasy and bewilderment. Nūrī Sayyārah brought her mystical and spiritual inspirations into harmony her other Sufi arts, such as painting and music, which she pursued with equal devotion.