

Introducing the Book *Anhār al-Asrār* by ‘Alīmullāh Balkhī Chishtī and the Necessity of Its Critical Editing

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Article Info (۱۶۹-۱۸۶)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research
Article

**Article
history:**

Received:
۲۵/۰۱/۲۰۲۴

Accepted:
۱۶/۰۸/۲۰۲۴

Keywords:
The Secret
River
Saadi's
Garden
Copy
correction
Thesis
Manuscript

Anhar-e-Asrar is one of the books written in the commentary on Saadi's Boustān by Alimullah Balkhi in the 12th century. This book contains relevant information about mystical and theological points. There are several manuscript copies of this work that have not been matched, verified, or corrected so far. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a revised version with lists and annotations about the content of the book. The aim of this study is to introduce the book An-Har-e-Asrar, its author, and some of the existing versions of this work, and on this basis, some of its literary features have been examined and the necessity of correcting this book has been stated. Therefore, among the existing versions of this work, the version available at Maulana Azad University, Aligarh, can be the preferred version. This study shows that Anhar-e-Asrar is a commentary on Saadi's Boustān based on a mystical perspective, which, considering topics such as mysticism, has many complexities in terms of understanding and meaning. Also, despite the use of simple and simple prose, the use of complex prose and technical prose, as a result of the presence of many literary devices and Arabism, has made it somewhat difficult to understand the meaning in this work. This research has used the library method and documentation collection in the introduction of the book and its author, and the analytical-descriptive method and the deductive method in the text review section.

Citation: Hassannejad, Ali; Tajbakhsh, Ismail (2025). Introduction to the book *Anhar-e-Asrar* by Alimullah Balkhi Chishtī and the necessity of its correction. *Modern Literary Studies*, 4(1) 169- 186

Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature



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DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1404.4.1.6.4](https://doi.org/10.28211413.1404.4.1.6.4)

Introduction

Sa'dī Shīrāzī's *Būstān* (*Sa'dī-nāmeḥ*) stands as one of the quintessential masterpieces of Persian literature. Its universal ethical, pedagogical, and spiritual themes fostered an extensive readership across the Persianate world, particularly within the Indian subcontinent where the first printed edition of Sa'dī's *Kullīyyāt* appeared in Calcutta (1824). Because Sa'dī's *sahl-i mumtani* (deceptively simple) diction occasionally conceals layered semantic ambiguities—especially for non-native Persian readers in India—numerous commentaries were produced by regional scholars. Among these, *Anhār al-Asrār* [Rivers of Secrets], authored in the 12th century AH by the Chishtī mystic and Hanafī jurist Sayyid 'Alī-mullāh Balkhī Sarhandī (1109–1202 AH / 1697–1787 CE), offers a distinctive mystical (*irfānī*) exposition of the *Būstān*. Despite its profound synthesis of Persian philology, Chishtī mysticism, and scholastic theology (*kalām*), *Anhār al-Asrār* has remained unedited and unpublished. This study aims to introduce the author and work, conduct a codicological evaluation of extant manuscripts, analyze its stylistic and literary features, and demonstrate the scholarly necessity of establishing a critical edition.

Method

This study adopts a hybrid methodological framework:

١. **Documentary and Codicological Method:** To identify, examine, and compare the known manuscripts of *Anhār al-Asrār* held in Iranian and Indian archives (including the National Library and Archives of Iran and the Maulana Azad Library at Aligarh Muslim University), evaluating criteria such as scribal accuracy, physical preservation, completeness, and chronological proximity to the author's lifetime to establish the base text (*nuskhā-yi asās*).
٢. **Descriptive-Analytical and Comparative Method:** To systematically assess the textual structure, linguistic register, rhetorical devices, grammatical commentaries, and theological-mystical doctrines within the treatise, contextualizing them against contemporary Indo-Persian commentaries (notably that of 'Abd al-Wāsi' Hānsawī).

Results

The research yields several key findings across codicological, stylistic, and doctrinal dimensions:

١. Manuscript Tradition and Selection of the Base Text:

- *Manuscript A* (National Library and Archives of Iran, MS 1035557): 348 pages, 20 lines/page, copied in 1236 AH.
- *Manuscript B* (Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, MS 9/89105525 *Ahsan Farsiyya*): 553 pages, 19 lines/page, transcribed in 1226 AH by Nur-Muhammad b. Muhammad-Hasan b. Hafiz Ahmad Kalamullah. It contains a comprehensive analytical table of contents and scribal preface, exhibits legible *nasta'liq* script, and is devoid of lacunae (*uftādegī*), physical damage, or decay.
- *Manuscript C* (Maulana Azad Library, AMU, MS 99/862 *Abd al-Salam Farsiyya*): 193 folios, 18 lines/page, incomplete.
- *Selection*: Manuscript B (AMU MS 9/89105525) is definitively established as the primary base manuscript (*nuskha-yi arjah wa asās*) due to its chronological proximity to the author, textual completeness, structural integrity, and legibility.

٢. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Approach:

- *Mystical-Theological Exegesis*: 'Alīnullāh interprets Sa'dī's verses through a Chishtī Sufi prism. For instance, commenting on the opening hemistich ("*Bi-nām-i khodāvand-i jān-āfarīn*"), he dedicates multiple folios to defining the ontological nature of the spirit (*rūḥ*), drawing upon Qur'anic exegesis (*Tafsīr al-Madārik*), scholastic theology (*kalām*), and Sufi metaphysics (e.g., distinguishing between mediate divine command via prophets and immediate existential creation via the word *Kun*).
- *Conjectural Emendations*: The author occasionally proposes textual corrections based on his contemporary oral/written transmission (e.g., citing *Mu'ayyid al-Fudalā*

regarding early scribal worm-damage), reflecting Indo-Persian philological practices.

- *Intertextual Apparatus*: ‘Alīmullāh frequently cites prominent lexicographical and grammatical authorities (such as *Kashf al-Lughāt* and *al-Sayyid al-Sanad* on the *Muṭāla*’), while according primary authority to ‘Abd al-Wāsi’ Hānsawī, whom he reverently designates throughout as the “Investigative Commentator” (*shāriḥ-i muḥaqqiq*).

۳. Stylistic and Linguistic Peculiarities:

- *Prose Classification*: While predominantly composed in lucid expository prose (*nasr-i mursal*) suited for pedagogy, the commentary incorporates rhymed prose (*nasr-i musajja*’) and ornate artistic prose (*nasr-i fannī*) within its introductory sections.
- *Arabisms and Scholarly Formulae*: Heavy syntactic and lexical incorporation of Arabic expressions, Qur’anic verses, Hadiths, maxims (*mā al-turāb wa rabb al-arbāb*), syntactic markers (e.g., using Arabic *qīla* for “it is said”, *li-hādhā* for deduction, *ay* for glossing), and concluding hermeneutic signals (*fa-fham*, *fa-ta’ammal*).
- *Indo-Persian Linguistic Adaptation*: The text includes phonetic/orthographic transcriptions of Hindustani equivalents for medical and botanical terminology (e.g., glossing the dropsical condition *mustasqī* with Hindustani *jalodhar*).
- *Rhetorical Devices*: Frequent employment of parallelism (*muwāzana*), complex paronomasia (*jinās*), extended similes (*tashbīh*), and compound citation (*taḍmīn al-muzdawaj*).

Conclusion

Anhār al-Asrār represents a major, yet hitherto unedited, monument of 12th-century AH Indo-Persian scholarship and Sufī commentary. It bridges classical Persian literary analysis with eastern Chishtī mysticism, linguistic glossography, and scholastic theology. The existence of a well-preserved, early, and complete manuscript at Aligarh Muslim University provides an ideal basis for scholarly editing. Preparing and publishing a



rigorous, critical edition equipped with scholarly annotations, variants, and indexes is urgently necessary to enrich Sa'dī studies and preserve this invaluable piece of Persianate manuscript heritage.