Tablet of Shikkar Shikan: Wilmette Institute faculty note

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Notes by Iskandar Hai:

"Warblers, mellifluous-toned, all the parrots of Ind shall be,
Because of this Parsi sugar-cone which to Bengal goes"

The above verse from the Persian poet Hafiz is the opening line of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet known as the Tablet of Shikkar-shikan which are the opening words of the above poem. The late Bahá'í scholar Mr. Habíb Taherzadeh in collaboration with a committee of scholars has made a translation of a portion of this Tablet which is published in Volume 18 of The Bahá'í World: 1979-1983 (Bahá'í World Centre Publications, 1986, p. 11).
The original Persian, of course, has an unmatched beauty and power which is very difficult, if not impossible, to translate into English.

Some details
about the circumstances surrounding the revelation of this tablet can be found in H. M. Balyuzi's book Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory as well as in Adib Taherzadeh's book The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume One. Briefly, since his arrival in Baghdad in July 1860 as the Persian Consul, Mírzá Buzurg Khán started harassing the community of Bábí believers and started collaborating with the Muslim divines to put pressure on the Ottoman government to have Bahá'u'lláh and His companions and followers extradited back to Iran. Bahá'u'lláh advised the believers to seek Ottoman citizenship and protection. The Consul and the Persian Foreign Minister Mírzá Sa'id Khán then started pressing the Ottoman government to banish Bahá'u'lláh to a place farther from the Persian border. Now, around this time there was a fickle Bábí in Baghdad who, apparently, was in communication with Mírzá Sa'id Khán; his name was Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavalli of Qum. He was amongst the besieged believers at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsi; but when Quddis warned the Bábís of hard times ahead, he broke ranks with the Bábís and communicated with the enemy that the Bábí commander Mullá usayn had died. This Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavalli-i-Qumi later insulted Quddús. In the aftermath of the August 1852 attempt on the life of the monarch, he was imprisoned with Bahá'u'lláh in Síyáh-Chál but when, one day, food was brought to the prisoners from the Imperial Court, Bahá'u'lláh instructed all not to partake of the food. Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavalli was the only person who disobeyed Him. So, around 1860-61 or so, Mírzá Sa'id Khán, in order to silence Bahá'u'lláh, sent a letter to Him through Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavalli, advising Him not to teach, not to appear in public, not to talk about The Faith, etc. for His safety and well-being. The Foreign Minister Mírzá Sa'id Khán and Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavalli-i-Qumi were in communication with each other.

The Law-i-shikkar-shikan was revealed in answer to that letter in

honor of Mírzá Husayn but intended for Mírzá Sa'id Khán's eyes as well as for Mírzá Buzurg Khán and other enemies of Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavalli-i-Qumi in Adrianople became a follower of Mírzá Yahyá Azal.

Notes by Iraj Ayman:

The Tablet of Shikkar Shikan is a very special Tablet. Since you know the background I shall not repeat it here. Hafiz in his poem is praising his own poem.
This is customary in Persian poetry that a poet sometimes boasts and composes poems in self-admiration. Since in Persia parrots are known to be birds of India and Bengal in India used to be one of the famous seats of Persian language and literature, Hafiz is referring to the geographical extent of his fame and the spread of his poetry. One of the favorite items for parrots is apparently lump of sugar. "Shikkar Shikan" (literally "sugar breaker") is a reference to the lump of sugar being broken by parrot's beak! Allegorically it means "sweet speaking" or having pleasant disposition or talent. At the same time parrot is a bird who can learn and imitate words or short phrases. So it is a speaking bird. Allegorically parrot refers to psittacine individuals ["parrot-like," from Gr. psittakos, "parrot"]. Hafiz wants to convey that his poetry is so sweet
that can make the parrots in India sweet speaking birds!

Mírzá Sa'id Khán, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nasiriddin Sháh, was a man of letters. Bahá'u'lláh knew him from the time that both were frequenting the court circles. This Tablet is actually addressed to Mírzá Sa'id Khán who had sent a letter to Bahá'u'lláh cautioning and intimidating Him because of possible troubles that may come to Him if He continues to proceed in supporting the new Cause. Apparently Mírzá Sa'id Khán had written his letter in a poetic and high literary style. Thus Bahá'u'lláh, answering him, starts His Tablet with this famous poem of Hafiz. This Tablet is revealed in most beautiful literary style and is indeed very moving.

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