



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Desires Overwhelmed Me, Made Me Reel...

Dr. Madhvika Mathur

Head, Dept of English

Mahila PG Mahavidyalaya

Jodhpur.

Abstract:

In Persian Sufism, longing (*taleb* or *ishq*) is the sacred, driving force of the soul. It represents the painful yet ecstatic realization of separation from the Divine Beloved. This existential yearning transforms suffering into a spiritual path, urging the seeker past the ego toward divine union (*fana*). The soul feels like a reed pulled from its riverbed, weeping and longing to return to its eternal source. Yearning is not created by human will; rather, it is a spark planted by God to awaken the sleeping heart. Suffering in love is cherished because it burns away ego, pride and worldly illusion.

Key Words : *Taleb* - longing, *Fana* - Divine Union, *Ma`arifat* - Divine Love, *Ishq e Majazi* - metaphorical love, *biradaris* - clans.

‘Thus many a melody passed to and fro between the two nightingales, drunk with their passion. Those who heard them listened in delight and so similar were the two voices that they sounded like a single chant. Born of pain and longing, their song had the power to break the unhappiness of the world.’

~ Nizami Ganjavi

Learning to be yourself and dealing with other people’s perception of you can be hard for anyone. We love our fellow-creatures because there is in them something of the Divine, some dim reflection of the True Beloved, reminding our souls of their origin, home and destination. From the love of reflection we pass to the love of Light which casts it; and, loving the Light, we at length become one with It, losing the false self and gaining the True, therein attaining at length the happiness and rest and becoming one with all that we have loved-the essence of that which constitutes the beauty alike of a noble action, a beautiful thought, or a lovely face.”¹

The reciprocal link of divine love between Allah and man is called *Ma`arifat*. A true devotee is very near to God. Having attained the position of Allah’s friend, he soars high in the spiritual world or exists in a state of a kind of ‘other worldliness,’ This is the ultimate goal for which he has been aspiring, the true meaning of all his devotion. In words of Sufi Inayat Khan ‘The germ of Sufism is said to have existed from the beginning of the human creation, for wisdom is the heritage of all; therefore, no one person can be said to be his propounder. It has been revealed from time to time as the world evolved.’

The renunciation of self is the great lesson to be learned, and its first step may be learned from a merely human love. But what is called love is often selfish; rarely absolutely unselfish. The test of unselfish love is this, that we should be ready and willing to sacrifice our own desires, happiness, even life itself, to render the beloved happy, even though we know that our sacrifice will never be understood or appreciated, and that we shall therefore not be rewarded for it by an increase of love or gratitude. Such is the true love which leads us up to God.

Many centuries ago Jami, Rumi, Sa'adi, Hafiz and generations of Sufi poet-seers proclaimed a vision of "an all – embracing infinite and eternal reality-the immanent- transcendent Absolute Being underlying and pervading but also transcending the sensible material universe."(Web.np.).In the words of Jami (1416-1492),

Who is man?

The reflection of the Eternal Light.

What is the World?

Wave on the Everlasting Sea.

How could the reflection be cut off from the Light?

How could the Wave be separate from the Sea?

Know that this reflection and this Wave are that very Light and Sea.

Though they are separated from one another by large stretches of time, the mode of contemplating man, nature, and the Divine in the writings of the English Romantics, Sufi poets and Tagore joins them into a unified philosophical vision of the world.

By Allah!

and lose myself

in the mountains and the deserts

These sad and lonely people fire me.

I long to revel in the drunken frenzy of your love

and feel the strength of Rustam in my hands.

I am sick of mortal things.

I long to see your light.

---Rumi

Sufis saw beyond the accepted rituals into the broad religiosity that included all the created things and life -forms in one loving fold of the cosmic ruler. Poets like Rumi believed in prayers. But they gave a new meaning to it.

The main focus is laid on negation and dissolution of the Self as independent of the object of love. This happened to be the precondition for attainment of God's wisdom. 'In love, nothing exists between heart and heart,' says Rabi'a al-Basri. Sufism lays particular stress on the power of Love that binds one human being with another, man with nature's various forms and beings and then this bondage with God. Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) puts the same feelings in there,

When my beloved appears

With what eyes do I see Him?

With His eyes, not mine,

For none sees Him except Himself.

Sufis saw in love the alchemizing power that removes the thinnest film separating the lover (worshipper) from the beloved (object of worship) and mingles the two into one whole- a single consciousness. Mansur al-Hallaj (c. 858-March 26, 922) in *Kitab al- Tawasin* expresses it in this way,

Thy spirit is mingled in my spirit

Even as wine is mingled with pure water

When anything touches Thee,

it touches me.

Lo, in every case Thou art I!

The poets regretted that man, immersed as he is in worldly affairs, “Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers, “doesn’t get enough time to look into himself. This creates all kinds of problem for him. Lot of emphasis was laid on knowing Self through an inward journey.

There is a remarkable comparison in Sufi poet’s conceptualization of the worshippers yearning for his God and the beloved’s acute desire for union with his/her lover. In old Indian spiritual poetry also abundant examples are found of the use of amorous passion to depict the spiritual urge for merging one’s soul into that of the object of desire. This appears to be a unique aspect of the Oriental poetic sensibility, which may startle the Western mind to some extent.

In Hindu religious literature a worshipper is often shown to visualize God in the form of the beloved, whose extraordinary power of attraction draws him irresistibly away from the worldly attachments and invited him/her to concentrate the entire life into a single focal point of loyalty. Love becomes an exclusive means of attaining that sublime elevation of spirit depicted in terms of metaphors highly sensual and erotic.

Krishna plays the magical flute

O Ranjha with the flute-

O Cowherd Ranjha!

You are in tune with all of us!

You make your delights

Chime with your consciousness

Krishna plays the flute³.

Just as in devotional Bhakti poetry Krishna symbolises God, in the Sufi poetry Ranjha becomes a symbol of God. Bulleh Shah dissolves gender identity when presents himself as a woman before her lover. He says:

Remember Ranjha day and night

I've become Radha myself.

Call me Dhido Ranjha,

No more be I addressed as Heer⁴

Many times it becomes difficult to separate the erotic from the spiritual, for the ecstasy of describing the beloved's charms reaches the crescendo of ecstatic exclamations of a dancing dervish. As Hafiz exclaims,

My friend has fled! Alas my friend has fled,

And left me nought but tears and pain behind!

Like smoke above a flame caught by the wind,

So rose she from my breast and forth she sped.

An analogy or inter-relatedness between religion and sexuality can be found in all religions and in all ages, though, it has been expressed esoterically. However, sexuality is often masked by orthodoxy.

The classic Persian literature, rich in male homo eroticism, widely reflects the emotional and sexual relationship, through its popular form, poetry. There are evidences of same – sex relationships in Zoroastrian scripture books, and severe punishment for homosexual relationship suggests that the practice was quite common in those days. Also, the practice of same-sex relations in the form of an unequal power relation has been documented in the royal court of the Acheamenid Empire (ca. 550- 330 BC). Pierre Briant, the author of 'From Cyrus to Alexander,' says that Cyrus the Younger was in love with a eunuch named Tiridates, who later joined Artaxerxes the Second of Persia. He also fell in love with him. When Tiridates died, 'still a youth emerging from childhood' the king declared three days of public mourning throughout Asia.⁵ From these incidences it's clear that same-sex relationships were not alien to the pre-Islamic culture of Iran.

Also there was a Zoroasterianist belief that same-sex relations emerged as a result of Ahriman, the destructive spirit- the Lord of Lies, who is broadly compared to the Devil or Satan in Abrahamic religions. In his bid to destroy the world, Ahriman engaged in the act of self-sodomy, which led to an explosion of the forces of evil from him, leading to birth of all vices. In the later years, the law insist on the death penalty for homosexuality and consider pederasty to be a minor sin in comparison.

Around 1000 AD, two different literary trends came in vogue, both had different understanding of love and same-sex relationships. The epic poet Abulghasem (935-1025 CE) initiated lyrics on love. For the first group of poets, heterosexual relationship was significant and the second group of poets valued and initiated the literary tradition of homoerotic love relationship. The latter ones gradually had a stronghold over the Persian poetry for almost a millennium. Islamic philosophers had innumerable views on this. The relations accepted by these rationalists had cogent platonic propensity.

The emergence of Sufi thoughts can be traced and linked to the Middle East in seventh and eighth centuries following the life of Prophet Mohammad. Between the tenth and twelfth century Sufism had spread over a wide area and had become popular as a strong discipline. Poets whose contribution have been pivotal in enriching the Sufi thought are Rabbia al basri, Rumi, Sa`adi of Shiraz, Khwaja Shams-ud-

Din Muhammad Hafiz-e Shirazi, Farid ud- Din and Attar, Nur ad- Din Abd ar- Rahman Jami and many others.

There are examples of relations in which two adults of similar status are involved. Relationship between Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273 c) and his mentor Shams-i-Tabrizi (1185-1248). Shams was known as a blunt, antisocial and powerful spiritual wanderer with number of followers. Shams was in his 60's when he met Rumi. His nickname was the Bird as he could not stay too long at the same place. Robert Barzan, in his book *Sex and Spirit: Exploring Gay Men's Spirituality*, says that their relationship was considered scandalous at the time and was not tolerated by Rumi's family, and society, as evidenced by the murder of Shams. It was difficult for Rumi to believe for a long time that his beloved had died. Rumi without Shams would not have been known to history.⁶

Sadr ad-Din Muhammad Shirazi also called Mudra Sadra (c.1571-2-1640) was an Iranian Twelve Shi'a, theologian and Alim, who led the Iranian cultural renaissance in the 17th century. In one of his famous books *Asfar al Arba* (The Transcendent Philosophy of the Four Journeys of the Intellect), a chapter is attributed to 'loving beautiful boys' where he first criticises Muslim thinkers who are against same-sex relationship and then defends being in love with young boys.⁷ Sufis considered beauty as one of the God's manifestations. Loving a beautiful person is therefore an acceptable form of love, also known as *Ishq e Majazi* (metaphorical love), which leads to higher level of mystical insight.

Persian poetry is abounding in such homoerotic references. For Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri, popularly known as Bulleh Shah, the rigid categories of religion, sexuality and gender did not exist. He was the disciple of Shah Inayat Qadiri, a Sufi *murshid* of Lahore. The verse form he employed is called *Kafi*, a style of Punjabi, which was used by the Sufi's of Punjab and Sindh and also by the Sikh guru's. Incidents around Shah Inayat are exciting for many reasons. They demonstrated how different practices of Islam materialized unique notions of caste, influenced not just by Brahmanical values but also the division of *biradaris* (clans) and genealogy.⁸ In his poems, Bulleh Shah has referred to his *murshid* as beloved. Some of the references are loaded with sexual innuendos. To quote Bullaeh Shah:

Inayat will come to my nuptial couch;

I am in great delight.

Also,

Bullah has fallen in love with the Lord.

He has given his life and body as earnest.

His Lord and Master is Shah Inayat

Who has captivated his heart?⁹

At one point in the play, dressed up in red as a bride Bulleh Shah is embraced by "her husband" Shah Inayat. Another prominent Sufi saint, Shah Hussain, is believed to have fallen in love with a Hindu boy, Madho Lal. They were buried together in Lahore and number of times referred together in one name- Madho Lal Hussain. Shah Hussain also addresses Madho Lal directly in some of his poems. To quote:

O Madho! I have been greatly defamed!

After drinking last night from my cup of sorrows,
I have wandered from morning till evening.
What can I say that I had drunk of?
People say it was the forbidden wine!
All here call me an infidel and accuse me of transgression!
They turn back their faces from me and abuse me!
Wails Hussain O Madho fast send my prayer to my Master! ¹⁰

I suppose without the mention of Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusro, any mention of Sufism is incomplete. Amir Khusro was an ardent spiritual aficionado of Nizamuddin Auliya, and used to create verses in the honour of his beloved Nizamuddin Auliya. We see, in his poetry, sexual innuendo towards his *murshid*. To quote:

Khusro has given himself to Nizam
You made me your bride when our eyes met...

There has been a constant debate going on as to what is the exact nature and properties of these same-sex relationships in Classic Persian literature. What was the nature of exact relationship between these people? Are these references in poetry metaphorical or is there any other inspiration behind them? How we to understand these relationships in today age's scenario? Some classify them as presence of 'homosexual relationship' whereas, others dismiss it as 'paedophilia.' Homosexual relations are no doubt a modern phenomenon and an exaggeration for Persian Classic literature. In fact, these relations were based on an inequality of power both in terms of age and social status.

Simple things such as love and faith received singular focus in the writings of poets to connect the tiny human self with the ocean of Eternity's Radiance in a day that fills that Sufi with a sense of greatness of God. This love generates a restless yearning of the Spirit, a continuous hungering after the knowledge of Him on the level of personal experience. One can detect echoes of Hafiz and Rumi in regarding the mundane world of give and take with contempt for wasting its precious time in moving in deadly cycles of trivial occupations.

Though Sufis evolved their own philosophy of what constituted the idea of God and what in all sincerity made devotion which over the centuries ramified through numerous accretions from many sources, at bottom it remained a simple and somewhat uncomplicated philosophy of universal love in its finest form which brings us face to face with the light of heavenly grace.

References:

- i. E.G. Browne. 'A Year among the Persians, p.140.
- i. History News Network, Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.
- i. From Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain to Amir Khusro, same sex references abound in Islamic poetry. November 2019.
- i. Ibid.
- i. Briant, Pierre, and Amelie Kuhrt. Alexander the Great and His Empire. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 269.
- i. <http://www.rumi.net> Rumi's Untold Story.
- i. Mollasadar, Asfare Arbae, Translated by: Khajavi, Mohammad. Tehran: Mola, 2000.
- i. Sufipoetry.wordpress.com. Bulleh Shah/ Sufi Poetry
- i. From Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain to Amir Khusro, same sex references abound in Islamic poetry. November 2019.
- i. Ibid.

