



INFLUENCE OF DIVINE INTUITION IN POETICS: A STUDY ON MALAYALAM SUFI POETRY

Dr Munawar Hanih T T
ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellow
Modern Indian Languages
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Abstract: The South Indian state of Kerala has preserved an extensive literary tradition from the 12th century onward, with Malayalam poetry evolving under the influence of various philosophical and cultural movements. Among these, Sufism played a significant role in shaping Malayalam poetry's thematic and aesthetic dimensions, much as it did in other Indian literary traditions. Sufi poetry in Malayalam, predominantly composed by Sufi mystics, is distinguished by its unique thematic and stylistic features, making it a standout genre in Malayalam poetry.

This study investigates how the poet's mystical (Sufi) identity influences the poetics of Malayalam Sufi literature, contributing to the formation of a unique literary genre. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How does the service or prophetic personality of Sufi poets shape the philosophical and poetic dimensions of Malayalam Sufi poetry, distinguishing it from works by non-mystical poets? This paper hypothesizes that the authors of these works were Sufis whose mystical experiences and prophetic inclinations deeply informed their literary output, enriching the philosophical depth and stylistic particularities of their poetry, a contribution that deserves appreciation. By examining the interplay between the poet's mystical identity and poetic expression, this research aims to illuminate how Sufi thought alters literary aesthetics and fosters a distinct genre within Malayalam literature.

Key words: Index Terms - Malayalam Sufi poetry, mystical identity, literary imagination, philosophical.

I. INTRODUCTION

The author of a text plays a crucial role in shaping the theme and meaning of a literary work. Every piece of literature serves a purpose, and the choice and execution of that purpose lie primarily with the writer. Unlike ordinary texts that discuss mundane worldly affairs, a literary work emerges when the author interprets and reflects upon human experience. Thus, the world and human experiences conveyed in literature are filtered and refined through the author's perspective. Consequently, the content and expression of a text are largely determined by the author, making the creation of literature a deliberate and complex endeavor rather than a naïve or simple act. There is always a conscious intent behind the author's writing, defining the reality and experiences they wish to convey (Harker, 1988, p. 7).

This discussion centers on literary communication and the author's role in it. My key argument is that the identity of the author or poet significantly influences the poetics of a literary work. According to Jonathan Culler, poetics seeks to explain literary effects by analyzing the conventions and reading processes that make them possible. In other words, poetics is the systematic, objective study of how literature produces meaning (Culler, 2011). Given that the writer is instrumental in shaping a text's meaning, their role is equally central in poetics. Poetics examines the general principles of poetry and literature, encompassing the theoretical study of literary features. Since these features and principles are determined by the author, their perspectives, identity, and philosophy profoundly impact the poetics of their work (Culler, 2011).

In Indian literary tradition, the author (kavi) is not merely a creator but a *rishi* (seer) or *drashta* (visionary) who channels profound truths through their work. Unlike ordinary texts that deal with transient worldly matters (*laukika*), true literature (*kavya*) emerges when the author interprets human experience (*anubhava*) through the lens of deeper wisdom (*jnana*). This process aligns with the *Rasa* theory of Indian poetics, where the poet's imaginative and intuitive faculties (*pratibha*) transform raw experience into an elevated aesthetic and philosophical expression (Vijaya Laxmi K, 2024).

As such, "we also speak of the poetics implicit in the works of an individual writer or a group of writers... which focus on the characteristic techniques, compositional habits, and ways of treating subjects in the literary practice under consideration." This statement underscores the author's pivotal role in shaping literary poetics. With this established, this paper explores how certain authorial identities—particularly those rooted in prophetic or mystical traditions—alter the characteristic features of poetry. When a writer possesses seeric or prophetic insight, these attributes inevitably manifest in their literary work.

Thus, I argue that a poet's identity—shaped by a specific philosophy, ethos, or moral framework—can deeply influence their literary imagination. The focus here is not on ordinary imagination but on a philosophical and literary imagination that transcends the experiential and sensible realm. Authors with prophetic faculties possess a rare form of imagination guided by divine intuition. While conventional writers transform real-world experiences through imagination grounded in tangible reality, prophetic authors are guided by an intuitive, almost divine, faculty.

In essence, an author's identity profoundly shapes the poetics of their work. When the author is a seer, *rishi*, or Sufi mystic, their literary and philosophical imagination is driven by intuition rather than mere experience. Though they may draw themes and styles from the real world, they refine and reflect upon them through their spiritual insights. As a result, their works carry traces of prophecy, divine knowledge, and intuition, serving a greater purpose than ordinary literature.

II. Divine Intuition and Literary Imagination

Why have texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Ramayana, and other religious scriptures endured across centuries? The answer lies in their authorship—individuals touched by divinity. Even if one views these works as human creations rather than divine revelations, figures like Valmiki and Vyasa were undeniably guided by profound religious, moral philosophies, and divine intuition. The poetics of these

works have ensured their lasting relevance as guiding lights for humanity. Their enduring legacy attests to the strength of their literary structure and the depth of their authors' philosophies.

The rishis of the Vedas, the sant-kavis of Bhakti poetry, and the Sufi mystics of medieval India composed works that endure because their authorship was rooted in *aparoksha anubhuti* (direct spiritual experience). Unlike secular writers who rely on empirical observation (*pratyaksha pramana*), seer-poets drew from *shruti* (revealed knowledge) and intuitive realization (*pratibha*). This is why texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata—despite their ancient origins—remain eternally relevant. Their *kavyas* are not mere narratives but *brahma-vidya* (knowledge of the Divine), structured through *chandas* (metrical discipline) and infused with *rasa* (Nair, 2014). In the *Kavyaprakasha*, Mammata asserts that great poetry arises from a combination of innate genius (*pratibha*), learning (*vyutpatti*), and disciplined practice (*abhyasa*). However, for seer-poets, *pratibha* is not just talent but a divine gift—an intuitive flash (*pratibha-jnana*) that transcends ordinary perception (Mammaṭācārya, 1925). This aligns with the Kashmiri Shaiva concept of *pratibha* as *shaktipata* (descent of divine energy), where the poet becomes a medium for higher consciousness.

I contend that literary works produced by authors with divine intuition and philosophical imagination possess a timeless quality, offering enduring benefits to humanity. Such works exist across languages, societies, and cultures.

III. Sufi Identity and Sufi Imagination in Poetic Expression

Kerala, a southern Indian state, has long been a cultural mosaic due to its land and maritime connections. Various religions, cultures, and peoples have influenced this region, with Sufism being one such philosophy. Though foreign in origin, it assimilated into Kerala's indigenous culture and thrived. Just as the medieval Sufi movement reshaped India's sociocultural landscape, it also left a significant imprint on Kerala—particularly through literature.

Numerous Sufi literary works, especially poems, were composed in Kerala, some written and others transmitted orally. These poems were crafted by Sufi mystics driven by divine philosophy, mystical experiences, and transcendent imagination. Their works primarily explored religious, philosophical, and moral themes aimed at individual and societal well-being (Hanif, 2023).

An analysis of Kerala's vast corpus of Sufi poetry reveals how divine intuition guided these poets' literary and philosophical expressions. A major genre of Malayalam poetry was thus sustained by divinely inspired authors, shaping the poetics of Sufi poetry in the region. The earliest works, intricately woven with divine concepts, set a precedent: for a poem to qualify as Malayalam Sufi poetry, its author must be endowed with divine intuition, guiding their literary and philosophical vision. The enduring power of Indian literary masterpieces—from the Vedas to Kabir's *dohas* and Rumi's *masnavis* in the Indian context—stems from their authors' *drishti* (visionary insight). While Western poetics examines literature through structural and semiotic lenses, Indian poetics recognizes the *kavi* as a *sadhaka* (spiritual aspirant) whose work is a *yajna* (sacred offering). Thus, the poetics of such texts is not just about literary devices but about

transmitting satya (truth), shiva (auspiciousness), and sundaram (beauty)—the threefold ideal of Indian aesthetics.

In this light, Malayalam Sufi poetry, like all great Indian *kavya*, must be composed by those with *antahkarana-shuddhi* (purity of inner faculties). Only then does it attain the status of *mahakavya* (great poetry), serving as a bridge between the human and the Divine (*laukika* and *alaukika*). This is the hallmark of Indian literary genius—where the poet's identity is inseparable from the *rasa* they evoke, and their work becomes a timeless vessel of *ananda* (bliss).

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has argued that the identity of the author, particularly when rooted in mystical or prophetic traditions, profoundly shapes the poetics of literary expression. Authors imbued with divine intuition and philosophical imagination bring a unique quality to their works, evident in texts ranging from the Vedas and Upanishads to Sufi poetry. This "divinely inspired" authorship results in literature that transcends the ordinary, offering enduring spiritual, moral, and philosophical insights. Ultimately, recognizing the author's role as a seer or visionary allows for a deeper appreciation of the power and lasting impact of such literary creations. In short, the enduring power of certain literary works lies in the divine intuition and philosophical depth of their authors. Whether it's the *rishis* of the Vedas, the *sant-kavis* of the Bhakti movement, or Sufi mystics, these writers create *kavya* that goes beyond mere narrative. Their works, infused with *aparoksha anubhuti* (direct spiritual experience) and *pratibha* (divine intuition), continue to resonate across centuries, offering guidance and spiritual nourishment. Recognizing this connection between authorial identity and poetic expression allows us to understand why these texts hold a timeless place in human culture. In conclusion, this exploration has demonstrated the significant influence of authorial identity on literary poetics, especially in the context of mystical and prophetic traditions. When authors possess divine intuition, their works become more than just literature; they become vessels of spiritual truth and enduring wisdom. This understanding helps us appreciate the lasting impact of texts shaped by such unique creative forces.

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