



The Pursuit of Gnosis in Kashmiri Sufi Poetry

Dr Manzoor Ahmad Najar

Assistant Professor

Dept of English Language and Literature

IUST, Awantipora

Abstract

This paper begins with an overview of the process within which the concept *Ma'rifat* emerged as an expression of the specific kind of knowledge proper to the Sufi discipline. In *Kash_ful Mahjoob*, Muhammad Fadl al-Balkhi says: “knowledge is of three kinds—from God, with God, and of God.” Knowledge of God is the science of Gnosis (*ilm-I ma'rifat*), whereby He is known to all His prophets and saints. It cannot be acquired by ordinary means, but is the result of Divine guidance and information. The significance of the concept is examined in relation to Kashmiri Sufi poetry, where the finest expressions of *Ma'rifat* can be found. The existence of Human Being in Sufism is seen as a macrocosm, and of the Universe as microcosm. When a Sufi attains the stage of *Al-Arif* (Gnostic) he fathoms the Ultimate Truth and from his head flows a shower of Ultimate knowledge, which becomes an Elixir to his life, and he realizes the unrealized.

In this paper it is argued that the definitive and ultimate content of *Ma'rifat* can be seen more clearly in relation to the principle of *tawhīd*. For while the *tawhīd* of the theologian means affirming that there is but one God as opposed to many gods, for the *Aarif bi-Llah*, the ‘knower through God’, it entails the spiritual realization that there is but one Reality. The article focusses on the pursuit of a Sufi to gain *Ma'rifat* as revealed aptly in Kashmiri Sufi poetry.

Key Words: *Ma'rifat* (Gnosis), *Aarif*, Sufi, *Tawhid*, Realization, Ultimate Truth, *Shahada*.

Overview of Sufism and the process of *Ma'rifat* (Gnosis)

Sufism is the most universal manifestation of the inner dimension of Islam; it is the way by which man transcends his own individual self and reaches God (Nasr 32). It provides within the forms of the Islamic revelation the means for an intense spiritual life directed towards the transformation of man's being and the attainment of the spiritual virtues; ultimately it leads to the vision of God. Islam is primarily a “way of

knowledge,” which means that its spiritual method, its way of bridging the illusory gap between man and God—“illusory,” but none the less as real as man’s own ego—is centred upon man’s intelligence (Schuon 13). Man is conceived of as a “theomorphic” being, a being created in the image of God, and therefore as possessing the three basic qualities of intelligence, free-will, and speech. Intelligence is central to the human state and gains a saving quality through its content, which in Islam is the *Shahāda* or “profession of faith”: *Lā ilāha illā ’llāh*, “There is no god but God”; through the *Shahāda* man comes to know the Absolute and the nature of reality, and thus also the way to salvation. The element of will, however, must also be taken into account, because it exists and only through it can man choose to conform to the Will of the Absolute. Speech, or communication with God, becomes the means—through prayer in general or in Sufism through quintessential prayer or invocation (*dhikr*)—of actualizing man’s awareness of the Absolute and of leading intelligence and will back to their essence (13-18).

Through the spiritual methods of Sufism the *Shahāda* is integrally realized within the being of the knower. The “knowledge” of Reality which results from this realization, however, must not be confused with knowledge as it is usually understood in everyday language, for this realized knowledge is “To know what is, and to know it in such a fashion as to be oneself, truly and effectively, what one knows” (Guenon 10). If the human ego, with which fallen man usually identifies himself, were a closed system, such knowledge would be beyond man’s reach. However, in the view of Sufism, like other traditional metaphysical doctrines, the ego is only a transient mode of man’s true and transcendent self. Therefore, the attainment of metaphysical knowledge in its true sense, or “spiritual realization,” is the removal of the veils which separate man from God and from the full reality of his own true nature. It is the means of actualizing the full potentialities of the human state.

Metaphysical knowledge in the sense just described can perhaps be designated best by the term “gnosis” (*Ma’rifat*), which in its original sense and as related to Sufism means “Wisdom made up of knowledge and sanctity” (Palmer 8). The *Ma’rifat* of the Sufis is the gnosis of Hellenistic theosophy, i.e. direct knowledge of God based on revelation or apocalyptic vision. It is not the result of any mental process, but depends entirely on the will and favour of God, who bestows it as a gift from Himself upon those whom He has created with the capacity for receiving it. It is a light of divine grace that flashes into the heart and overwhelms every human faculty in its dazzling beams. “He who knows God is dumb” (Nicholson 30).

The online Encyclopedia Britannica defines *Ma’rifat* as:

Ma’rifat, (Arabic: “inside learning”) in Islam, the enchanted information of God or the “higher substances” that is a definitive objective of devotees of Sufism. Sufi magic came to *ma’rifat* by taking after an otherworldly way that later Sufi masterminds sorted into an arrangement of “stations” that were trailed by an alternate arrangement of steps, the “states,” through which the Sufi would come to union with God. The procurement of *ma’rifat* was not the consequence of learnedness however was a kind of gnosis in which the otherworldly got brightening through the beauty of God.

Many Sufis speak of gnosis as being synonymous with love, but “love” in their vocabulary excludes the sentimental colourings usually associated with this term in current usage. The term love is employed by them because it indicates more clearly than any other word that in gnosis the whole of one’s being “knows” the object and not just the mind; and because love is the most direct reflection in this world, or the truest “symbol” in the traditional sense, of the joy and beatitude of the spiritual world. Moreover, in Sufism, as in other traditions, the instrument of spiritual knowledge or gnosis is the heart, the centre of man’s being; gnosis is “existential” rather than purely mental (Schuon 50).

In his commentary on these verses Nicholson recognises that Rumi does not differentiate between gnosis and love: “Rumi...does not make any...distinctions between the Gnostic (*Arif*) and the lover (*Ashiq*); for him, knowledge and love are inseparable and coequal aspects of the same reality” (Rumi 294). In Sufism, contrary to Hinduism for example, there is no sharp distinction between the spiritual ways of love and knowledge; rather, it is a question of predominance of one way over the other (qtd. in Chittick 24).

Sufism deals first and foremost with the inward aspects of that which is expressed outwardly or exoterically in the *Sharia*, the Islamic religious law. Hence it is commonly called “Islamic esotericism” (Burckhardt 1). In the view of the Sufis, exoteric Islam is concerned with laws and injunctions which direct human action and life in accordance with the divine Will, whereas Sufism concerns direct knowledge of God and realization—or literally, the “making real” and actual—of spiritual realities which exist both within the external form of the Revelation and in the being of the spiritual traveller (*salik*). The *Sharia* is directly related to Sufism inasmuch as it concerns itself with translating these same realities into laws which are adapted to the individual and social orders.

Purifying the Soul

Sufis agree on the necessity of devoting oneself to the purification of the soul (*tazkiyat an-nafs*), which is the only way that can bring about the emergence of a noble character (*khuluq*) and the proper inward and outward attitude (*adab*) in a human being. In doing this their intention is to follow the model of the Prophet: “Surely thou art endowed with a tremendous character (*khuluq*),” says the Quran addressing the Prophet (SAW) (68:4). The noble virtues (*akhlāq*, pl. of *khuluq*) that Sufis endeavour to acquire are therefore the same as those of Islam, but Sufis give them particular weight by bringing them to life within themselves; thus these virtues are transmuted into initiatic stations. This type of Sufism, it goes without saying, has been accepted by the general body of *ulamā*. In this perspective, it represents one of the three parts of the religion, along with the dogma (*aqīda*) and the Law (*Sharīa*). He who travels the Path would not try therefore to experiment with supernatural phenomena but would try instead to ascertain the truth of the Law and to perfect his submissiveness to God.

Other Sufis, going further, considered purification to be just a means and not an end in itself, since its goal is to arrive at the knowledge of God in order to better adore Him. “They have not appreciated God equal to His true measure” (Quran 6:91). According to Al-Qushayrī, this verse means “They did not know God in His true measure.” The doctrinal seeds of “knowledge,” of gnosis (*Ma’rifā*), are present in the first

masters, and it may be that it is necessary to see in this the beginning of a Neoplatonic influence which would later provide Sufism with conceptual tools. According to Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (750 -815), who was regarded as the founder of the Sufi school of Baghdad, Sufism consists in “seizing upon Divine Realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) and forsaking all that comes from creatures (*khalā'iq*).” During this same period, al-Bistāmī affirms that the “knower,” the gnostic, “flies towards God, while the ascetic only walks,” and Ruwaym says that “the hypocrisy of gnostics is better than the sincerity of aspirants [who aspire only to purification]” (Michon and Gaetani 84). Knowledge is a mirror, adds Ruwaym, in which the gnostic sees God revealing Himself. Dhūl-Nūn al Misri insists on this direct grasping of God: “How did you (come to) know your Lord?” someone asked him, “I knew my Lord through Himself” he replied (84).

Inspiration and unveiling are indispensable for he who wants to clear a path towards this God who appears as “the Light of the heavens and the earth” (Quran 24:35). It is for this reason that all Sufis sought to make room in themselves for the “radiation” (*tajallī*) of this light. Unblocking human nature from its opacity, just as the sun drives away darkness, (Cf. Quran, 92:2.) this theophany reveals God to the heart of man. As-Sarrāj observes that the simple believer sees by the light of God, while the gnostic sees by God Himself (qtd. in Geoffroy 13). Later, Ibn 'Arabī would explain how multiplicity is spread from its start in Unicity through a succession of uninterrupted theophanies that take innumerable forms. The Sufi thus sees God in all being, in every manifested thing. Unlike the ascetic, he does not reject the world, because to him it is illuminated by the divine Presence. “Beings were not created so that you would see them, but so that you would see their Master in them,” said Ibn Aṭā Allāh (Michon and Gaetani 85). Again and again the Koran encourages man to decipher the “signs” (*āyāt*), to contemplate God by contemplating His Manifestation. “We shall show them Our signs in the universe and in themselves until they see that it is the Truth [God]” (Quran 41:53).

Uniting Oneself with God, or “Extinguishing Oneself” in Him?

The ultimate goal of the mystical life cannot be to know God but to be united with Him. However, in Islam one cannot speak of a *via unitiva* in the same sense as in Christian theology. From the point of view of the central dogma of *tawḥīd*, which focuses only on “the divine Unicity,” the very concept of “union” with God is eminently paradoxical (Michon and Gaetani 86).

The central concern of the Ṣufis, as of every Muslim, is *tawḥīd*, the witness that “There is no deity but God.” This truth has to be realized in the existence of each individual. A prominent Kashmiri Sufi, Sheikh ul Alam Says:

La : Ila:ha Ill_Allah sahiy korum/ vahi korum panun pa:n

waju:d travith mu:ju:d sorum/ ada boh vo:tus la:maka:n

(there is no deity but God, did I verify and confirm; my self “I” quite burnt away. Ignoring the manifest, I mediated on the Everlasting. So was the Spaceless (divine world) realized to me)

Indeed, union presumes the coming together of two entities, of two substances. Now, the profession of faith (*shahāda*) of Islam affirms: “There is no god but God.” For the Sufi, this negative assertion actually means: “Only God is,” since that which is created, the contingent, vanishes in the face of the Absolute.

Therefore, the Sufi doesn't live in a state of union, strictly speaking, since in Islam there is no continuity of substance between God and creation. His goal is "extinction in God" (*fana*). Removed from the various solicitations of the world, the initiate then knows the intoxication of immersion in the divine Presence. Being completely unaware of himself as subject-consciousness, he becomes a mirror in which God contemplates Himself. This state paradoxically opens up the horizons of Knowledge, for man can only have access to divine realities when his ego no longer interposes itself in his contemplation, that is to say when divine Being shows through in him (86).

In order to react against the slippery slope made use of by the "intoxicated" mystics, other Sufis, called "temperate," emphasized that in the ecstatic state of *fana* man always had to keep a glimmer of lucidity, especially as this state, being paroxysmal but still transient, was only the prelude to a more complete experience, that of *baqa* having burnt away his individual attributes, the initiate "subsists" henceforth in and by God so that it is the divine Attributes that now act in him. According to a *hadith qudsi* frequently cited by Sufis, God becomes "the ear with which he hears, the sight through which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, and the foot with which he walks." Maulana Rumi thus says: "Make everything in you and ear / each atom of your being, / and you will hear at every moment / what the Source is whispering to you... / You are, we all are, the beloved of the beloved, / and in every moment of your life, / the Beloved is whispering to you exactly / what you need to hear and know."

In the first phase, the one of *fana*, a person doesn't see anything outside of God; in the second, the one of *baqa*, he sees Him in everything. After the intoxication of immersion in God comes the soberness that allows the initiate to be with God and with the world at the same time. Letting God do with him as He will, he achieves his ontological servitude while at the same time putting himself at the service of men.

This double experience of *fana/baqa* is so essential in Sufism that Junayd thought that it is this experience alone which defines it. "Taṣawwuf," he said, "is summed up thus: the Real [or, the 'Truth,' i.e. God] makes you die to yourself, and causes you to come alive again through Him." (A-Qushayri 280) This theme is the transposition onto a mystical plane of the Koranic verse: "All that is on earth is passing away. There remaineth (*yabqa*) but the Countenance of thy Lord of Majesty and Munificence" (Quran 55:26-27). The initiatic death, as implied by the experience of *fana/baqa*, is a response to the Prophet's injunction: *mutu qabla anta mutu* "Die before you die!" Specifically, it is inscribed in the example of Muhammad, he who "has been sent" among men to guide them. Extending the dogma of the divine Unicity and the spiritual "tasting" of *fana*, some Sufis explained that God is One in the sense that He alone possesses Being: in manifesting creatures, He endowed them with an existence emanating from His Being, but this has only an ontological content that is relative, or even non-existent. Many exoteric scholars have fought against this metaphysical formulation, which is known as the "oneness of Being" (*wahdat al-wujud*) because it has seemed to them to deny divine transcendence. The meaning of *wahdat al-wujud*, if not the actual expression, can be found in sources ranging from certain Quranic verses, such as "Whithersoever ye turn there is the Face of God" (2:1 15), to certain sayings of the Prophet, such as "I am 'Ahmad' without the letter 'm'" (meaning Ahad or the One, referring to the inner oneness of the Prophet with the Source of all being) (Nasr

55). It is also the theme of many poems, some of which are among the greatest masterpieces of Sufi poetry. In the words of a Kashmiri Sufi poet Rahman Dar, the same thought can be observed as he says:

Nur nish nur paedeh draav

Ahadas ahmad kornai naav

Muhammad laaegith bazar draav

Bahar aav jani janana

(Spiritual light originated from Spiritual light. In the same way Ahad (the unidentical One) was named Ahmad. In the guise of Muhammad (SAW), He sends Ahad into this world and the world was bloomed with His coming.) (he send his Beloved Muhammad SAW to manifest Himself and to bloom this universe).

As for its full exposition, it must be sought in works of Sufi metaphysics. The poems of Sheikh Noor-ud Din wali do reveal that he did receive God's grace and in ample measure. The veil of illusion was lifted, as Sufis claim, from the face of the Truth. Light of God shone upon him destroying darkness of doubt and ignorance. His intense penance, unalloyed faith, strict control of his sense organs, and absolute riddance from the powerful forces of obscuration, such as greed, lust, egotism and desire for worldly goods had, at last, borne fruit. He attained the realization of the Divine Being. The affirmation of this 'state' is made in the following verses:

Da:l go:m mi:lith Aliphas ta Hayas/ Ami hayan kornam bayas na:sh
Sheshikal troprim Ahadakis payas/ Meema_rous Ahmad logum ra;sh
Sheyi_wanna phyu:rus mo:yas mo:yas/ Ada par mokalyom ta kodum va:sh

('Da:l' got suffixed to 'Aliph' and 'Hai'. And 'hai' destroyed my fear!. Six (apertures) of sense did I close to gain clue to the One. Minus 'Meem', Ahmad (became Ahad)- the source of my joy. I roamed about the six forests, every nook and corner; lo! And behold! My wings came unfolded and I stretched myself.)

Tsha:nja:m bhava_nan beyyi shen dishen/ neib ta nisha:n lobmas na konei
Pristsha:m mala_ba:ban ta tapa_reshan/ tim lagi bu:zi revanei
Dab yelli dyutamas fikran ta andeishan/ ada sui dyu:nthum boh na kunei

(I looked for Him in the Bhawans and six directions. Neither any mark nor clue did I come upon. I enquired of the Mullahas and the Hermits. Hearing me they only bemoaned (their ignorance) as I subdued my logic and doubts. Lo! I found Him all-pervading and myself naught.)

Su me nische boh tas nische/ Me tas nische qarar aav
Na:haqqa tso:ndum me pardishei/ pananei dishei qarar a:v

(close by me stood He, and I by Him. Relaxed felt I by His vey side. Wrongly had I looked for Him in alien lands. (When) I found solace within myself)

In any case, to understand even the theoretical meaning of the oneness of Being on any level requires a certain intellectual intuition as well as intellectual preparation, in addition to Divine grace, while only the saint who has reached the end of the Sufi path and become drowned in the Ocean of Divinity can know its meaning fully and in the ultimate sense.

The knowledge of which Sufism speaks is not mental knowledge but a light that illuminates the beholder of this knowledge and in fact all around it and finally returns the human being to its Source, the Supernal Sun. On the highest level, the subject as well as the object of this knowledge is God. The gnostic in Sufism is called al- 'Arif bi'Llah, one who knows by God and not one who knows God, for ultimately it is only the Divine Spark within us that can know the Divine. Our duty is to remove the veils within that prevent such a unitive knowledge from taking place.

The Prophet has said, "Knowledge is Light," and one can add that the Quran speaks of God being the Light of the heavens and the earth. Now, existence itself is a ray of light that issues from the Divine Sun. Knowledge is therefore also being. The more one knows in a principia} manner, and not only discursively, the more one is. On the highest level the knower, knowledge, and the known are one. To know the Truth with one's whole being is ultimately to "become the Truth," to realize that the root of our "I" is the Divine Self I self, who alone can ultimately utter "I." It was not the individual ego of Al-Hallaj who uttered *Ana'l-Haqq*. That would be blasphemy, and that is how those ignorant around him who did not understand interpreted it. In reality, one who does not utter *Ana'l-Haqq* is still living as a polytheist and idol worshipper, positing his or her own ego as a reality separate from God as *Al-Haqq* and idolizing that ever-changing and evanescent ego as well as the world as a divinity. In any case, the quest for the Truth lies at the heart of Sufism, and the goal of the adept is to be able to ascend the levels of certitude until one's separate existence is consumed by the Truth and one is given access to the Garden of Truth (32).

The description and theoretical exposition of the Truth is contained in Sufi doctrine while the realization of the Truth is possible only through spiritual practice. Sufi doctrine, which is also called theoretical gnosis is itself the fruit of spiritual realization and not simply philosophical speculation. It is presented to those in quest of the Truth as a map of the structure of reality and the road that is to be followed to transcend the cosmic labyrinth. One might say that the Sufi masters first climbed the cosmic mountain and then flew into the sky of the Divine Presence and after that, upon descending, drew a map for other climbers who wished to reach the summit and fly to the Beyond. Sufi doctrine is like the lore of certainty and its realization the truth of certainty. From the operative point of view, the doctrine is presented and then its truths realized, but in reality it is the realization of the truths of the path that have made it possible in the first place for master expositors of Sufi doctrine to formulate their teachings and guide men and women on their journey to the One (33).

Classical Sufi texts are replete with the description of the virtues. I shall mention later some of the early Sufis, who wrote on this subject and whose writings culminate in Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya' ulUm al-din* (Revivification of the Sciences of Religion), the most important work of spiritual ethics in the history of Islam (Greenwood 19). Since the steps to God or the stations can be enumerated in different ways and seen from different perspectives, the number of stations and their ordering is not the same everywhere. Some speak of three main stations, some of seven, some of forty, and some of even higher numbers. In what follows I shall mention some of the main stations, whose understanding opens the door for the comprehension of this subject in general. Before turning to the schools of Baghdad and Khurasan, it is important to mention a ninth-century figure who did not belong to either school, Thawban ibn Ibrahim, known as Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (d. circa 86r). An Egyptian Sufi who travelled to Baghdad and was also known as an alchemist and philosopher, he not only spoke of the love of God and called Him the Beloved but was also the first Sufi to develop the theory of gnosis, or Ma 'rifa. He also developed the theory of annihilation (*al-fana'*) and subsistence (*al-baqa'*), discussed above, on the basis of Quranic teachings (Rizvi 18).

The Sufi then dwells in a various spiritual stations (*maqāmaat*). Kashmiri Sufis have described some these *maqamaats* for instance Shams Fakir talks of seven *maqamats* in his poetry:

Sath samandar chhim peth mmeani taaley

Ath daryaavs kati tari naav

Ani gatti Shamso tsoung kous zaaley

Meha gos baaley choun deedar

(there are seven oceans upon my head, how to cross a boat across the river. Oh Shams who shall dare to ignite a lamp in the night, I wish to see my beloved.)

The Sufi who sets out to seek God calls himself a 'traveller' (*salik*); he advances by slow 'stages' (*maqamat*) along a 'path' (*tariqat*) to the goal of union with Reality (*fana fi'l-Haqq*). Should he venture to make a map of this interior ascent, it will not correspond exactly with any of those made by previous explorers. Such maps or scales of perfection were elaborated by Sufi teachers at an early period, and the unlucky Moslem habit of systematising has produced an enormous aftercrop. The 'path' expounded by the author of the *Kitab al-Luma'*, perhaps the oldest comprehensive treatise on Sufism that we now possess, consists of the following seven 'stages', each of which (except the first member of the series) is the result of the 'stages' immediately preceding it--(1) Repentance, (2) abstinence, (3) renunciation, (4) poverty, (5) patience, (6) trust in God, (7) satisfaction. The 'stages' constitute the ascetic and ethical discipline of the Sufi, and must be carefully distinguished from the so called 'states' (*ahwal*, plural of *hal*), which form a similar psychological chain. The writer whom I have just quoted enumerates ten 'states'--Meditation, nearness to God, love, fear, hope, longing, intimacy, tranquillity, contemplation, and certainty. While the 'stages' can be acquired and mastered by one's own efforts, the 'states' are spiritual feelings and dispositions over which a man has no control:

"They descend from God into his heart, without his being able to repel them when they come or to retain them when they go" (Nicholson 29).

The Sufi's 'path' is not finished until he has traversed all the 'stages,' making himself perfect in every one of them before advancing to the next, and has also experienced whatever 'states' it pleases God to bestow upon him. Then, and only then, is he permanently raised to the higher planes of consciousness which Sufis call 'the Gnosis' (*Ma'rifat*) and 'the Truth' (*haqiqat*), where the 'seeker' (*talib*) becomes the 'knower' or 'gnostic' (*Arif*), and realises that knowledge, knower, and known are One (12).

Mystical poetry in Kashmiri (spoken by the natives of the valley) has a richness and variety of its own, traceable to the mingling of several cultural streams. Its growth began in the fourteenth century with the famous woman poet and saint, Lal Ded. It was in her time that Sufism first came to Kashmir through Muslim saints and mystics. Consistent with her Saivite background, Lal Ded, in her vakhs, neither characterizes the world as illusory nor recommends external renunciation. She looks upon the objective universe as the Swarupa Itself (the Real Form) that parallels the Sufi view of the physical world as *Wahadat-ul-wajud*.

To the discerning reader, Shamas Faqir's description of the Sufi path must appear suggestively similar to the spiritual 'adventure' given in other varieties of religious mysticism (including Hindu and Christian mysticism). In several poems, he makes use of the *via-negativa* and *via-affirmativa* approaches in his accounts of the Divine. Each of these approaches to Reality involves a characteristic language use, which the poet accomplishes so well; sometimes we find the two approaches deftly interwoven in the same poem. In quite a few poems, we come across direct allusions to the Persian mystic, Mansur-ul-Hallaj, and the doctrine of An-ul-Haq (I am Truth) that he boldly preached.

Several lyrics of Shamas Faqir centre round the theme of the mystic's quest for the primal cause of this universe. As an illustration, the lyric titled 'Agur Kami Manz Drav' repeatedly poses the question, 'what is the fountainhead of the stream?', which serves as its refrain. Here is my translation of some significant lines of the poem (attempted to convey the essential meaning):

*Day and night does Pavan flow
Through the four Bhavans non-stop;
Whence did it come
And whither did it go?
It was even (all of one hue),
Whence did the stream come forth?*

.....

*O Shamas, to attain gnosis,
 Throw open your heart's door;
 Sun-like, roam the sky through
 (To fathom the Secret);
 What is the fountain-head?*

We can see that the poem poses vital and thought- provoking questions regarding the First Cause. It instructs the seeker to pursue the spiritual journey inwardly to realize the Self. This would naturally call for annihilation of the little self. The answer to the imponderable question regarding the source of the Cosmos is provided through the intertwined images of the 'drop' and the 'river'. In the concluding lines, that lay stress on cleansing the heart as a means to inward transformation, the tone of the poem changes as the poet addresses his own self. Without sounding the didactic, the changed tone stimulates self- introspection in the reader/listener.

The Persian Sufi poets have often used the word *rinda* in their lyrics. It refers to the true lover, a liberated soul (not tied to this or that school). With its rich associations, it has been absorbed into Kashmiri mystical poetry and has by now got into common usage among the Kashmiris (Cyprian 28). It occurs frequently in Shamas Faqir's verse too. One poem titled 'Rinda Sara Ho Sapdi Kunu Ye' is specifically addressed to the rinda. This is how the poet instructs the aspiring gnostic:

*O rinda, in order to realize the One,
 Learn to die while still alive. (trans. A.N. Dhar)*

Emphasis is laid in the poem on self-conquest as being the stepping stone to advancement in spirituality. An *Arif's*, devotion has to consist in 'cleansing of the doors of perception', which involves a disciplining of the mind and the senses. He has to be discriminative and mentally alert throughout. Shamas Faqir is explicit about this quality required of the true aspirant:

*Seemingly blind, look keenly for
 What you seek, O rinda!
 Sifting the pure grain
 From the impure,
 Winnowing the grains a hundred times
 Will reveal the Precious One to you. (trans. A.N. Dhar)*

The poet draws our attention to the strenuousness and pains involved in the spiritual effort, in these lines:

*Break the stones at the dead of night,
 To take away the Gem guarded
 by the cobra;
 Feed the burning lamp*

with your blood,
Eat up your own flesh;
Thus will you, O rinda, realize the One.
Special stress is laid in the closing lines on belief and divine grace:
Believe before you verify,
That's Shamas Faqir's gospel;
When you get the 'Word'
As a God-sent gift,
O rinda, you'll realize the One. (trans. A.N. Dhar)

In one particular poem titled 'Walo Mashoka Deedar Hav', the poet employs 'dark imagery' throughout, from the beginning to the end, and mentions 'black light' specifically in these lines:

The Elixir of life is hidden in the dark,
The light divine is dark, too;
Light itself is grounded in darkness,
Pray, meet me Beloved! (trans. A.N. Dhar)

This poem reminds us of the images of 'darkness' that are so recurrent in St. John of the Cross, especially in his poem titled 'Dark Night of the Soul', there is a close parallel between the Christian concept of 'divine dark' and what Shamas Faqir conveys through his images. Similarly, the names of Hindu divinities such as Krishna, Shyama, Kalaratri, Megashyama, suggest 'the night of the great release into the oneness of Self', which is dark only to the senses, not to the spirit.

The 'human form divine', in its feminine aspect, is celebrated conspicuously in the poetry of Persian Sufis. Parallel motifs and images are seen to occur in both Hindu and Christian mysticism. The form functions as a wisdom figure, which is, in fact, a recurrent image in literature. It is also identifiable as the 'theophanic figure through whom the manifestation of God takes place' (Jankinath 38).

After Sheikh Nur-ud-Din Rishi of Chrari Sheriff, it is he (before others followed them) who paid glowing tributes to Lal Ded in a poem wholly devoted to her, titled 'Zan Mila Nav Bhagvanas Sooty'. The poem shows how high he held her in his esteem, how familiar he was with her story and how thoroughly acquainted he must have been with her vakhs. Lal Ded says that one who thinks himself not different from the other; one who accepts sorrow as good as pleasure; one who frees himself from duality; he and he alone tells the beads of Lord of the Lords-Almighty and this is the basic thinking of Shaivism. She held a key to many mystic truths (Parimoo 6). The following stanza illustrates her deep mystic thought:

So my lamp of knowledge afar,
Fanned by slow breath from the throat of me.
They, my bright soul to my self revealed.

Winnowed I abroad my inner light.

And with darkness around me sealed,

Did I garner truth and hold Him tight. (Trans. Sir Richard Temple)

Lal Ded thinks dissolution of 'self' (Aham) essential for Realisation. According to her, Sadhaka has to reach that mental attitude where there is no difference between 'Him' and 'self'. She says one who considers his own self and others alike ends the distinction between 'I' and 'you', who treats days and nights alike, who is above sorrows and pleasures, can only realize God in his own self. According to her, differentiation between the human soul and Divine-self was Zero.

A Sufi on his way to illumination undergoes many changing spiritual states such as *qabd* and *bast*. He feels at certain times “constraint and happy spiritual expansion, fear and hope, and longing and intimacy, which are granted by God and last for longer or shorter periods of time, changing in intensity according to the station in which the mystic is abiding at the moment.” (Encyclopedia Britannica) The Sufi reaches to a point of his spiritual development in *Ma'rifat* (“gnosis”) or in *maḥabbah* (“love”), the central subject of Sufism since the 9th century, which implies a union of lover and beloved. In Sufism the final goal is *fanā'* (“annihilation”), primarily an ethical concept of annihilating one's own qualities and Sufis stress on complete extinction of personality/ existence (Arberry 17). In the words of a Shams Fakir:

Hasti dur kar near ats andrai

Wuchh_han jani jaanaan

(Extinct your existence and go inside your own. You will see the Beloved)

According to the prophetic saying “Take over the qualities of God,” but slowly developing into a complete extinction of the personality. Some Sufis teach that beyond this negative unity where the self is completely effaced, the *baqā'*, (“duration, life in God”) is found: the ecstatic experience, called intoxication, is followed by the “second sobriety”—i.e., the return of the completely transformed mystic into this world where he acts as a living witness of God or continues the “journey in God.” The Sufi has reached *haqīqah* (“reality”), after finishing the *ṭarīqah* (“path”), which is built upon the *sharī'ah* (“law”). Later, the disciple is led through *fanā' fī ashshaykh* (“annihilation in the master”) to *fanā' fī ar-Rasūl* (“annihilation in the Prophet”) before reaching, if at all, *fanā' fī-Allāh* (“annihilation in God”). In conclusion, I reiterate that Kashmiri Sufi poetry is outstanding in its grasp and assimilation of many mystical concepts like *Ma'rifat*.

The Sufi poetry of Kashmir is an expression of inner states of mind and manifestation of several metaphysical experiences. Because of strong spiritual and mystic traditions, Sufi poets of Kashmir have found the atmosphere quite conducive to their quest. The way these Sufi poets have preserved and enriched the mystic and spiritual traditions of Kashmir is quite appreciative. They do not reject the Sharia, which is fundamental to Islamic Sufism, but come up with a new and creative interpretation of it in the light of their own intense spiritual experiences. In their verses they describe the spiritual attainments of the saint concerned, pay their tribute, and makes a fervent prayer to God to bless them the same way. Accentuation is laid in the Kashmiri Sufi poetry on triumph toward oneself as being the venturing stone to headway in

otherworldly existence. An Aarif's commitment needs to comprise in 'purging of the entryways of observation', which includes a training of the brain and the faculties. He must be rationally cautious all through. Kashmiri Sufi poetry is explicit about this quality required of the true aspirant.

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