

SHAH ABDUL LATIF BHITAI, LALON SHAH AND QAZI NAZRUL ISLAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO SUFISM

Mohammad Abu Tayyub Khan*

Abstract:

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1688-1752) is undeniably the greatest Sufi poet of Sindhi Language. His nearest Bengali language bards are Lalon Shah and Qazi Nazrul Islam of Bangladesh. Shah Abdul Latif was born in an illustrious family in 1102 Hijri i.e. 1688 A.D. at Bhainpur, a village near Khatian Halla Taluka district Hyderabad, Sindh. His father Syed Habibullah himself was an outstanding Sufi poet. His forefather had migrated to Sindh from Arab peninsula and his descent is traced back to Prophet Mohammad (Peace upon him). In Bangla literature Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890) and Qazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) are two most popular poets and maestros who have become famous for their respective mystical trends in folklores and modern songs. They made most of the mystic rhymes of their own like Shah Latif Bhitai. Lalon Shah and Qazi Nazrul Islam shared Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai's School of Sufism and search for divine union with Great Self. They allegorically employed heroines from local folk stories in their poetry to expound complicated and abstract ideas of Sufism to the masses. The trio evidently appears to have benefited from the most revered and read mystic poet Maulana Rumi across the globe.

* Dr Muhammad Abu Tayyub Khan, Assistant Professor, Department of Bangali, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

Mysticism and Sufism

Sufism has been described differently by scholars but they all consider it as being the inner, esoteric, mystical, or purely spiritual dimension of the religion of Islam.

R. A. Nicholson in *The Mystics of Islam* (1914) describes Sufism as “Islamic mysticism” and says that Sufism was largely the product of diverse philosophical and spiritual influences.¹

R.A. Nicholson in his article ‘Mysticism’ quoted Eckhart’s famous saying:²

The word 'Sum' can be spoken by no creature but by God only; for it becomes the creature to testify of itself 'Non Sum' reminded me that three and half centuries earlier, at Baghdad, Abu Nasr-al-Sarraj, commanding on a definition of mystical unity (*Tawhid*), had written 'None saith 'I' except God, since real personality belongs to God alone. The remark of Edward Carpenter, “This perception seems to be one in which all the senses unite into one sense”, caused me to look up some verses, in the *Taiyya* of the Egyptian poet and saint Ebn-E-Farid (A.D.1235), where he describes his mystical consciousness as an experience in which all the senses are unified and exercised simultaneously:
My eye conversed whilst my tongue gazed; My ear spoke and my hand listened;
And whilst my ear was an eye to behold the everything visible,
My eye was an ear listening to song.

Sufism evolved in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) essentially on the basis of Islamic ideology at the end of the second century of the Hijra i.e., between A. D. 719 and 816. Muslim mystics were prevalent then like Christian ascetics. These Muslim mystics were generally called Sufis. R. A. Nicholson has rightly put it here that, 'early Muslim asceticism with its fearful visions of the wrath to come, its fasters and weepers, its austerities, devotion, and endless litanies, was a forcing-house for mysticism.'³

A.J. Arberry similarly states in *Sufism* (1950) that Sufism is “the name given to the mysticism of Islam” and “the mystical movement of an uncompromising Monotheism”. He says that Sufism in essence is derived from the Quran and Prophet Muhammad’s (S.A.W.) tradition.

¹ Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1987) p.457.

² Mohammad Nurul Huda [Ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation* (Dhaka: Robiul Islam, 2000), p.232.

³ Mohammad Nurul Huda, *op.cit.*, p.233.

Arberry said:

“After Malcolm’s ‘History of Persia’, the first monograph devoted exclusively to Sufism was published by F.R.D. Tholuck known as ‘Sufismus Sive Theologia Persica Pantheistica’ though by modern standards is trivial.

“Tholuck aims at convincing his readers of his wide research and linguistic gifts, as was and is the fashion, yet must be convicted for having definitely failed in his main purpose because the material he chose to construct his thesis on was wholly inadequate... His main material is drawn from Persian and here his list is more impressive though very primitive and one forms the impression that he had by no means, read through all the books he names... yet Tholuck suffered from the handicaps under which every pioneer labours... leaving the beaten track he had none to guide him through the pathless jungle of abstruse thought that lay ahead... He opts in favour of derivation of the Sufi term from suf (Wool), then mentions that formerly he held the view that Sufism was of Magian parentage. This theory, however, which has since attracted no support, he had abandoned for lack of evidence, and he had consequently changed to the view that Sufism sprang from the widespread- Arab tendency to monasticism...”⁴

Victor Danner says in his book *The Islamic Tradition* (1988), “Sufism is the spiritual Path (tariqah) of Islam and has been identified with it for well over a thousand years... Unlike mysticism in English, Sufism is a continuous historical and even institutionalized phenomenon in the Muslim world that has had millions of adherents down to the present day. Indeed, if we look over the Muslim world, there is hardly a region that does not have Sufi orders still functioning there”.⁵

‘Sufism or tasawwuf’,⁶ as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. Today, however, many Muslims and non-Muslims believe that Sufism is outside the sphere of Islam.

Nevertheless, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the foremost scholars of Islam, in his article ‘The Interior Life in Islam’ contends that Sufism is simply the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam. It is founded on the pursuit of spiritual truth as a definite goal to attain. This very logical principle is based on a typically succinct saying of Prophet Muhammad: “Whoever knows oneself, knows one's Lord.” Hence many scholars maintain it is impossible to relate Sufism to any religion outside Islam.

The Origin of Sufism

The origins of Sufism can be traced to the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, whose teachings attracted a group of scholars who came to be called “Ahle Suffe”⁷, the People of Suffe, from their practice of sitting at the platform of the mosque of the Prophet in

⁴ W.B.S., Rabbani, *Islamic Sufism* (Lahore: Bbazam-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, 1990) pp.196-197.

⁵ Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1987) p.463.

⁶ W.B.S. Rabbani, p.151.

⁷ Syed Amir Ali, *op.cit.*, p.459.

Medina. There they engaged themselves in discussions concerning the reality of Being, and in search of the inner path and devoted themselves to spiritual purification and meditation.

They were the Companions of the Prophet and were the people of principles practicing certain disciplines and meditations for the sake of purification, the realization of Divine love and the understanding of reality. These individuals were the founders of Sufism.

Among the most famous of these individuals were:

Salman Farsi, Ammar Yasser, Balla'al, Abdullah Masoud and Oveyse Gharani. Within a century or two their style of self-understanding and discipline were introduced by their students to nations as diverse and widely separated as Persia, India, Indonesia, Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia(Iraq)and North Africa.⁸

Through this process of diffusion, different schools and orders of Sufism gradually emerged from the single original group of Suffe at Medina. Their practices differ from one another in emphasis and doctrine, but all legitimate Sufi schools trace their ultimate origins back to the original group of the Prophet's spiritual disciples.

Fundamental Principles

'Sufis' represented the inner side of the Islamic creed, which stresses on self-realization, beautification of the soul through piety, righteousness and universal love for all. The Sufis consider that there is a particular Divine Attribute that dominates the being of every prophet and saint, such that they can be said to be the incarnation of that attribute.⁹

All of the Prophets are manifestations of the Divine Unity and Perfection, but Prophet Muhammad is its supreme manifestation. The aim of Sufism is the cultivation of Perfect Beings who are mirrors reflecting the Divine Names and Attributes.

In Sufism, a perfect being is also called a Wali (saint), a word that literally means 'sincere friend'. All who have been prophets have also been saints. The superstructure of Sufism is built upon the concept of teacher, pir or murshid.¹⁰

To be initiated into the Sufi cult one is required to have implicit faith in his teacher and consider his commands as divine and the path shown by him as the straightest. Sufism has succeeded in inculcating the sentiments of fraternity, equality and equity, coupled with the sense of service to humanity, in the followers, irrespective of race, community, caste, creed and colour. In the earlier stages, it emphasised only on the Love of God but later it also stressed on the need of the development of man with the purification of mind, through prayer and meditation. In un-divided India, Sufism helped in maintaining communal harmony and social stability by advocating religious tolerance and by

⁸ Masood Ali Khan, *Sufism and Naqshbandhi Order* (New Delhi: Anmol Publication Pvt. Ltd. 2003) p.18.

⁹ W.B.S. Rabbani, *Islamic Sufism* (Lahore: Bazam-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, 1990) pp.76-77.

¹⁰ Syed Amir Ali, *op.cit.*, p.471.

borrowing spiritual techniques and practices from other religions, which were not against the principles of Islam and which were conducive to spiritual attainments.

The musical and ecstatic aspect of Sufism is called 'Sama'. This is a particular kind of devotional dance and was introduced by Jalaluddin Rumi, the great and the celebrated Sufi poet.¹¹

Two Phases of Sufism

The spiritual journey in Islam has two phases, as opposed to the single-phased journey of mysticism in Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jewish Cabbalaism and Hasidism, in which the ultimate goal was fana.¹²

In Islam the first phase is characterised by intoxication resulting in quietism and asceticism, while the second phase is that of activity and the fullest participation, in worldly life. In fact, life after completion of the spiritual course is more active, meaningful and real than before. For, the seeker has now got rid of his lower bestial self and is endowed with Divine Qualities. He now sees by Divine Sight, hears by Divine Hearing and does everything by Divine Power. He is, therefore, more honest, more sincere, more kind than before and is more sympathetic to mankind and is capable of higher services and sacrifices. He is no more a burden on society like the Western ascetic, Hindu Yogi or Buddhist monk. On the contrary, he is an asset to the society. His best contribution to society is his ability to guide others to the same goal by dint of the experience and the light he has gained.

Another speciality of his 'Baqā-bi-Allah'¹³ is that besides his worldly activities, he goes on improving his own position in the way of proximity to God as well. The storm of love in his heart is so great that he is never satisfied at any stage of nearness. The higher he soars, the greater is the fascination. He travels stage after stage and still finds countless stages ahead. But the journey does not come to an end, even if he continues the flight up to eternity. The more he flies the greater are the charms of nearness. In this way he goes on passing through limitless stages of Divine Union, but the storm of love in his heart is so great that his thirst is never quenched and he cries for more and more (Hal min Mazid).

Separation in Union

At this stage he is both united with God and separated from Him, Since Baqā-bi-Allah, or descent known as Abdiyat is the speciality of the Holy Prophet of Islam, his followers always prefer descent over ascent or separation over union. They love to remain humble servants of God.

A Sufi poet has expressed this state in the following words:¹⁴

¹¹ W.B.S. Rabbani, Islamic Sufism (Lahore : Bazam-e Ittehad – ul – Muslimeen,1990) pp.86-87.

¹² Ibid., p.93.

¹³ Ibid., p.94.

¹⁴ W.B.S. Rabbani, Islamic Sufism (Lahore : Bazam-e – Ittehad-ul- Muslimeen,1990) p.94

“I am not prepared to part with the sweet sorrows! of separation for the pleasures of union. To me heresy of thy dark hair is better than the faith of your bright countenance.”

Mirza Bedil has described his separation in union in the following beautiful words:¹⁵

“O Beloved I have been drinking cup after cup of the wine of union but my thirst has not yet been quenched. How cruel Thou art by not coming into my embrace from my embrace”

This is a unique honour and achievement which is the speciality of Islam and is found nowhere else. Rumi expresses the same experience in the following words:

“Sitting at the bank of the river, they drink continuously and feel more thirsty.”

Rumi said:¹⁶

“The Beloved is in my embrace and search for the Beloved continues. It is like the thirsty sitting at the bank of the river drinking and feeling more thirsty.”

Rumi said:¹⁷

“O brother! There is no limit to His greatness. The more you fly to Him the farther He is.”

Rumi said again:¹⁸

“The path of love never ends. The more you travel the longer it grows. It is like the grape vine which grows faster by trimming it.”

Historically Sufi Orders in South Asia comprise of Chistiya, Qadriya, Naqsbandiya and the Suhrawardiya. Sufi saints of all these Orders preferred to live in Khanqahs or hospices along with their disciples. However there are also some intermediary schools that sprang from the main school as listed below:¹⁹

Silsala Chishtiya: The head of this Silsala is Khwaja Mamshad Ali Dainori who was the Khalifa of Khwaja Abu Hubaira Aminuddin Basri. Khwaja Mamshad Ali Dainori was succeeded by Khwaja Abu Ishaq Shami who was deputed by the Sheikh to settle down at a place called Chisht in the neighbourhood of Herat in Afghanistan. Abu Ishaq Shami was the first Sheikh who was called Abu Ishaq Chishti. It is, thus, that the great Silsala

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.95.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.95.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.251-254.

Chishtiya came into existence. He was succeeded by Khwaja Abu Ahmad Abdal who was a dignitary of Chisht. Khwaja Abu Ahmad was succeeded by Khawaja Abu Mohammad Chishti, who was succeeded by Khwaja Abu Yusuf Chishti, who was succeeded by Khwaja Qutub-ud-Din Maudood Chishti. These five Sheikhs are known as the five pillars of Silsala Chishtiya and are buried at Chisht.

Silsala Ajamiya: It is named after Khwaja Habib Ajami who was the Khalifa of Imam Hasan of Basra.

Silsala Taifuriya: It is named after Sultan-al-Arifin, Khawaja Abu Yazid Bestami whose original name was Taifoor. It is stated in "Tazkara-tal-Aulia" by Faridud-din Attar that Abu Yazid received spiritual "faizan" from a hundred and sixteen Sheikhs and that he lived twelve years with Imam Jafar As-Sadiq, the sixth Imam of the family of the Prophet, and received spiritual blessings and benefits. Some/ are of the opinion that he received inspiration from the Imam by way of Awesiya (i.e. after the latter's demise through spiritual presence.) However, both of these methods are recognized by the spiritualists as effective. It is said in "Lataif Ashrafi" that he received Khalafat from Khwaja Habib Ajami as well.

Silsala Karkhiya: It is named after Khawaja Maaruf Karkhi who received Khalafat from Imam Musa Kazim, the seventh Imam of the family of the Prophet. He received another robe of Khalafat from Khwaja Daud Tai who was the Khalifa of Habib Ajami.

Silsala Saqtiya: The head of this Silsala is Khwaja Sari Saqti who was a Khalifa of Maroof Karkhi.

Silsala Junaidiya: This Silsala is named after Khawaja Junaid of Baghdad who was a murid and Khalifa of Khwaja Sari Saqti. These Sheikhs were so great that all the various branches and their offshoots were known after them under separate names.

Silsala Gazruniya: This is known after the name of Khawaja "Abu Ishaq Gazruni who was the king of Gazroon. He left his kingdom and became a 'murid' of Khwaja Abdulla Khafif who was the Khalifa of Khwaja Mohammad Roem, the Khalifa of Junaid of Baghdad who traced his origin with Hazrat Ali.

Silsala Tusiya: The head of this Silsala was Sheikh Ala-ud-Din Tusi who was a Khalifa of Khwaja Wajhuddin Abu Hafs who was connected up with Junaid through intermediary Sheikhs. Sheikh Ala-ud-Din Tusi was 'a friend of Sheikh Najmuddin Kubra of Firdaus. Sheikh Najamniuddin was a contemporary' of St. Francis of Assisi who undertook the journey to Baghdad to see the former but could not reach there due to some unknown reasons. Sheikh Najamuddin Kubra was Khalifa of Sheikh Abu Najib Suhrawardi.

Silsala Suhrwardiya: It is known after Sheikh Zia-ud-Din Abu Najib Suhrawardi who was a Khalifa of Sheikh Wajhuddin Abu Hafs. Sheikh Abu Najib received another robe of Khalafat from Sheikh Ahmad Al-Urla who traces his origin to Junaid through five intermediary Sheikhs.

Silsala Firdausiya; The head of this Silsala is Sheikh Najamuddin Kubra who was a dignitary of Firdaus and was a 'murid' and Khalifa of Sheikh Abu Najib Suhrawardi. Jami has said in his "Nafahat al-Uns" that Sheikh Najamudain got another robe of Khalafat from Sheikh Amniar Yasir as well. Ammar Yasir was one of the prominent Khalifas of Sheikh Abu Najib Suhrawardi who was connected up with Junaid through six Sheikhs in-between.

Thus the four Silsalas, Firdausiya, Suhrawardiya, Tusiya and Gazruniya, join up with Junaid who is connected through another link of Tariqat with Imam Ali Raza, son of Imam Musa Kazim, son of Imam Jafar As-Sadiq, son of Imam Baqir, son of Imam Zainul Abidin, son of Amir ul-Mominin Imam Hussain, son of Hazrat Ali Al-Murtaza, the fourth Khalifa of the Prophet . (may peace be upon them). According to a 'tradition, Imam Hasan, the elder brother of Imam Hussain (Rz) also comes in these four Silsalas.

It is stated in "Nafhat al-Uns" that Sheikh Abu Najib also received Khalafat from Kumail bin Ziyad, the Khalifa of Hazrat Ali, through the following link:

Sheikh Abu Najib, Sheikh Ismail Misri, Sheikh Mohammad bin Maukil, Sheikh. Mohammad bin Daud, Sheikh Abdul Abbas bin Idris, Abul Qasim bin Ramzan, Abu Yaqub Rabri, Abu Abdullah Usman al Makki, Abu Yaqub Nahrjori, Yaqub as-Susi, Kumail ibn Ziyad who was the/ Khalifa of Hazrat Ali Al-Murtaza.

It is stated that, Sheikh Najamuddin. Kubra had as many as seventy Caliphs of his own status. His followers are divided into two Silsalas: **Firdausia** and **Kibroya**.

These are the original fourteen Salasul of Islam whence sprang up forty more branches or offshoots out of which only the twelve most prominent ones are mentioned below:

Silsala Qadriya, Ghousia: It is named after Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani who was the Murid and Khalifa of Sheikh Abu Saeed Makhzumi, the Khalifa of Abul Hasan Ali Al Qarshi, Khalifa of Abul Farah al Tartusi, Khalifa of Abul Fazl Abdul Wahid Yamni, Khalifa of Sheikh Abu Bakr Shibly, Khalifa of Syed al Taifah Junaid of Baghdad, till Hazrat Ali Al-Murtaza. Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir received a robe of Khalafat through his ancestral link from Imam Hasan ibn Ali Al-Murtaza as well with eleven links in between.

Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani was an eminent Wali Allah who enjoyed the distinction of being a Ghous (Supreme commander in the spiritual hierarchy which will be mentioned later on). He also enjoyed the status of Mahbubiat (Beloved of Allah) and Fardaniyat (Singularity with Allah).

Silsala Yasuya: This was headed by Khwaja Ahmad Yasui who is known as the "Sheikh of Turkistan". He was a Khalifa of Khwaja Yusuf Hamadani, Khalifa of Khwaja Ali Farmadi (who was the Sheikh of Abu Hamid Ghazali). Khwaja Ali Farmadi was the Khalifa of Khwaja Abdul Qasim Gorgani, Khalifa of Abu Usman Maghrabi, Khalifa of Abu Katib, Khalifa of Abu Ali Rodbari, Khalifa of Junaid Baghdadi till Hazrat Ali Al-

Murtaza. Khwaja Ahmad Yasui is also linked up with Hazrat Ali Al-Murtaza by another link of Mashaikh through Mohammad Hanfiya son of Hazrat Ali Al-Murtaza.

Silsala Naqshbandiya: Which is named after Khwaja Baha-ud-Din Naqshband. He was a Khalifa of Amir Syed Kalal, Khalifa of Khwaja Mohammad Samasi, Khalifa of Khwaja Ali Rametani, Khalifa of Khwaja Mahmud Abul Khair Faghnavi, Khalifa of Khwaja Arif Revgiri, khalifa of Khwaja Abdul Khaliq Ghajidwani, Khalifa of Khwaja Yusuf Hamadani, Khalifa of Khwaja Ali Farmadi, Khalifa of Khwaja Abul Qasim Gorgani, who is linked up with Junaid Baghdadi by three links in between. Khwaja Abul Qasim Gorgani is also linked up with Hazrat Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, the first Khalifa of the Prophet, by a batini connection through Khwaja Abul Hasan Kharqani, Abu Yazid Bestami and Imam Jaffar As-Sadiq who was the recipient of two robes of Khalafat: first, from his grandfather on maternal side, Imam Qasim, the grandson of Hazrat Abu Bakr As-Siddiq. Imam Qasim was the Khalifa of Hazrat Salman Farsi, famous Companion of the Prophet, Hazrat Salman received spiritual wealth both from the Prophet as well as Hazrat Abu Bakr, after the Prophet's physical departure from this world.

Imam Jaffar Sadiq's second Khalafat is from his ancestors, belonging to the family of the holy Prophet (Peace be upon him). This chain is like this:

Imam Jaffar As-Sadiq s/o Imam Mohammad Baqir s/o Imam Zain-ul-Aabidin s/o Eazrat Imam Hussain s/o Hazrat All Al-Murtaza, (May blessings of Allah be upon them all.)

Khwaja Baha-ud-Din Naqshbandi was an eminent 'Sheikh with an immense spiritual capacity. He would often recite the following verse of Sheikh Abdullah •Balbani:

I cannot rest, till
I see God with physical eyes,
People say He cannot be
seen with physical eyes,
Well, they may not see
I am what I say."

Silsala Nuriya: It is named after Sheikh Abul Hasan Nuri. He belonged to Baghbur a village, between Herat and Merve. He was Khalifa of Sari Saqti, the Sheikh of Junaid of Baghdad. He was contemporary of Mohammad All Qassab popularly known as Dhinnoon Misri and had met him.

Silsala Khazroya: This started with Khwaja Ahmad Khazroya who was a Khalifa of Khwaja Hatim Asum, Khalifa of Shaiq Balkhi, Khalifa of Khwaja Ibrahim Adham who was the recipient of Khalafat from Khwaja.

On record saintly woman Rabeya of Basra (Iraq) (A.D.801) is described first exponent and hardliner in the mystical thinking of God. In her verse, how ecstatic she was in contemplating her Beloved it would be perceived here:

I love you in two ways:
One is that selfish I am for your love.
And in every thought above

All for me you remain selfless.²⁰

Here she sounds, herself satiated with the love of God. And that God is also praiseworthy to her in all respect. It appears that she herself graced with the divinity of mystical unity with Him.

Jalal al Rumi's (1207 – 1237 A.D.) hardly need any introduction. Because of the alarming political conditions in Balkh, Rumi's father Baha al-Din fled with his family in 1219 A.D. He visited several Muslim countries and finally settled in central Anatolia (Rum). Baha al-Din was invited to Konya by the Saljuq ruler and given him a place and the honour to preach and teach there. Rumi inherited his father's interest in Sufism and associated, like his father, with leading Sufis of the time. After his father's death, Rumi took up his father's religious office. He preached and taught from 1231 to 1244 A.D. in Konya. He preferably donned wearing the traditional turban and gown of orthodox religious scholars. Within Konya he became a prominent Sufi and spiritual leader in his own right.²¹

In 1244 Rumi met a wandering Dervish, Shams al-Din of Tabriz, whom he perceived as the perfect image of the Divine Beloved and Spiritual Guide. After the mysterious disappearance of Shams al-Din, Rumi directed his affection first to a goldsmith named Salah al-Din Zarkub and, after the latter's death in 1258 A.D., to Husam al-Din Hassan (Chalabi). It was on the latter's advice that Rumi composed his famous *Masnawi* in six volumes, that in addresses Husam al-Din. The first work of Rumi was of course the *Divan-i Shams*, a voluminous collection of lyrical poems.

After this brief sketch of Rumi's life, we may now turn our attention to the relationship between Jalal ud Din Rumi and Shah Abd al-Latif. The latter was a declared admirer of Rumi, acknowledging his indebtedness to him in his verses and referring to him directly on a number of occasions. For example, Shah Abd al-Latif said:²²

The seekers are many. Divine Beauty is the origin
(of everything),

This is the pleasant conversation of Rumi
First of all lose yourself, then seek the beloved.

He goes on to say:-²³

The seekers are many, (Divine) Beauty is the
origin {of everything}

Rumi had said so.

Remove the veil, then perception will be within.

There are altogether six such couplet in the *Risalo* wherein he refers directly to Rumi.

There are also a small number of verses which seem to show the direct influence of Rumi, as for example in the case of the image of the reed used in the following verses:²⁴

²⁰ Mohammad Nazrul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*, (Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000), p.229.

²¹ Arberry, A.J., *Discourses of Rumi*, London, 1961, pp.3-4. Cf. also Schimmel, A.M., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, 1975, pp.311-312.

²² Arberry, op.cit., p.6.

²³ Dr. Durre Shahwar sayed, *The poetry of Shah Abdal –Latif* (Hyderabad : Sindhi Adabi Board) p.197.

Like a segment of reed, it tells the tale of its
being cleft. It cries because of the flickering pain of the
beloved. Physician! why do you cauterise my arm
when the pain lies in my heart?

It must be admitted that the idea of the reed and other images used by Rumi are not new. For example, as Schimmel points out, the reed image is found in the *Hadiqa* of Sana'i which originally came from Greek source, i.e. the tale of King Midas.³ What seems highly probable, however, is that Shah Abd al-Latif came to know these images from his knowledge of the work of Rumi.

Now we shall make a detailed comparison between the imagery used in the poetry of Rumi and that in the *Risalo* of Shah Abd al-Latif. As far as Rumi's imagery is concerned, Schimmel has already devoted a major part of one of her principal works to that topic. We will therefore rely on Schimmel for an analysis of Rumi's imagery and pay more detailed attention to that of Shah Abd al-Latif.

The image of the sun is universal, although each writer uses it in his own way. Rumi, however, pays special attention to the concept of the sun. He uses the image primarily as it is used in - the Qur'an as possessing the Divine attributes of glory and majesty and having great miraculous powers.

In Rumi's poetry the sun represents perfection and hence is a symbol of God, who is loving and compassionate to man and the whole universe. Rumi is full of admiration for the sun and its powers, whether constructive or destructive. In his work the destructive aspect of the sun is intended for the benefit of mankind, for God is the knower of secrets.

For Shah Abd al-Latif, the sun has two distinct sides, one positive and the other negative. The positive aspect includes its radiant beauty which is evident to everyone. In *Sur Mumal Rano*, the beauty of a Kapari is compared to that of the morning sun, which is red like blood or a ruby:²⁵

The colour of the *swami's face* is red like
the *early morning sun*.
The sweet *fragrance* of perfume comes from
his crown
Show us the place from where the Lahuti has become red.

In the same *sur*, the *swami's* beauty and radiance are compared to that of the sun:²⁶

The colour of the Swami is like tomorrow's morning
sun.
I cannot bear the radiance of the sun for a second
Did he colour his face with *lakh'* or paint it

²⁴ Ibid., p.198.

²⁵ Dr.Durre Shahwar Sayed, op. cit. p.199.

with *pan*?
The love of Sodhai stands full to the brim.'

In the above verse, the *Swami*'s radiance is so great that one cannot bear it. The implied answer to the question as to how he made his face red is that it is all thanks to the light of love.

Rumi also speaks of the radiant light of the sun, which has the capacity to purify stone by its heat and to transform this insignificant substance into a precious ruby. The sun treats the stone harshly, but the poet justifies this action which, in his view, is for the benefit of the stone.

Shah Abd al-Latif is not as fond of the sun as is Rumi. In a couple of verses, as seen above, he does speak of the beauty and radiance of the *Swami* in terms of the sun, an analogy which also has its spiritual implications, but such verses are not as frequent as in Rumi's work.

For Rumi the sun represents diverse things. On the one hand, it stands for God and also for the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), who is the source of light and blessing in this world. On the other hand, in his imagistic system, the sun of course stands for Shams al-Din of Tabriz, who in Rumi's estimation represents the Perfect Man. Rumi sees the Divine Light and Beauty and the glory of the Prophet as being combined in his beloved Shams al-Din. After the latter's death, Rumi sees a reflection of (*Ziya*) the same light in Salah al-Din and later in Husam al-Din. In the case of Shah Abd al-Latif the sun does not symbolise the Perfect Man or the Prophet. Moreover, in various *surs* about Sasui such as *Abri*, *Husaini* and *Ma'zuri*, the sun is depicted as unsympathetic and heartless, having no compassion for the already dejected Sasui. For example, while Sasui is forced to travel through the rugged mountains, the sun heats the mountains and thus burns her feet:²⁶

There are the tall trees of Wankar
and mountains like Ja'o, Jamar and Jar.

The stones and concrete have become hot, and the earth is burning with heat.
The poor one is wandering, unable to find the footprints of her beloved.
Elsewhere, the poet has Sasui accused the sun and the other elements of taking her beloved away from her. Thus, she considers them as her enemies.²⁷
The camels are my enemies, so are the camel-men,
my brothers-in-law are also my enemies.
The wind which has blown away the footprints of
Punhu has become my fourth enemy.
The sun which by setting delayed me has become
my fifth enemy.
My sixth enemy is the mountains, which have not
kept their path straight

²⁶ Ibid., p.200.

²⁷ Ibid., p.201.

The moon which has not risen early is the seventh
 enemy
 When the birds settle down
 I rush through the mountain.

Shah Abd al-Latif does not like these elements which display qualities of brute force and hardness because they cause miseries to the weak.

Shah Abd al-Latif prefers the light of the moon to that of the sun, considering it soothing and full of comfort. The poet depicts the moon as the go-between for lovers to whom they disclose their secrets and from whose company they derive comfort:²⁸

As you arise, first of all you must look at
 my beloved.
 Give him the numerous love messages that I am
 going to give you.
 O moon! tell him, 'sweetheart! ail my life
 my eyes will be waiting for you.'

It should be said that the full moon in rural areas where there was (and is) no electricity, has great importance because it brings cheerfulness. It illuminates the whole environment with its cool soothing light cast over the trees, rivers and everywhere. It is common practice for weddings to be arranged on the fourteenth day of the moon's cycle, and for lovers to meet at the full moon. In other words the moon has great romantic significance in everyday life. Shah Abd al-Latif as a lover expresses his views on the moon in the following lines:²⁹

Tonight it is bright, because it is the fourteenth
 day of the moon
 My beloved is due to come to my house
 In my house there is jubilation, but the envious
 ones are embittered.

To sum up, Rumi expresses great admiration for the sun, attributing to it double implication; it is the source of nourishment, for humans as well as trees and grass, an attribute which it shares with God. Similarly it is the radiance of Shams al-Din which is the source of his inspiration and happiness. Just as, without the light of the sun nothing can survive in the darkness, so, without Shams al-Din for Rumi there will be only spiritual darkness and death.' It is clear that for Rumi the sun is a much more powerful image than it is for Shah Abd al-Latif.

Jalal al-Din Rumi makes extensive use of the image of water. As Schimmel has shown, the image of water is found in the works of many Muslim poets because of its prominence in the Qur'an. In their poetry water represents the origin of everything,

²⁸ Ibid., p.202.

²⁹ Ibid., p.203.

including the very existence of human life. In addition it serves as the source of sustenance for every living creature.

Following the tradition of several of his poetic predecessors, Rumi expresses his views on the Divine Nature or Essence of water. According to Rumi it has numerous functions serving, at times as a blessing and Divine mercy in the form of rain, and at other times bringing the wrath of the Almighty on sinners, causing misery, disaster and death.

In the work of Shah Abd al-Latif, the image of water appears continuously and seems to have been greatly favoured by him. It occurs extensively in four *surs* his *Risalo*, namely, *SurSarang*, *Srirag*, *Samundhi* and *Suhni*. Although references to water can be found in other *surs*, these are less extensive.

In the above mentioned *surs* water is dealt with on different levels. Unlike Rumi whose thoughts are sequential, Shah Abd al-Latif's style is distinctly non-narrative and non-sequential in comparison with the narrative form of Rumi's poetry.

Most of the meanings which Rumi associates with water are taken from the Qur'an. For example, he says that the function of water is to purify and sanctify sinners. Moreover, water symbolises Divine Mercy or *rahmat* brought about by the Prophet Muhammad and the Saints. But the same water which may be a blessing can also bring destruction to the infidel.

When suggesting the religious connotations of water Shah Abd al-Latif follows the same Sufi tradition as Rumi. In this respect the ideas of the two poets correspond.

In the work of Shah Abd al-Latif there are a number of verses which refer to the Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W.).

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai's a large number of poems honour the Muslim Sufi poet. These also infused Renaissance among the Muslims of the South Asia as a whole. Shah Abdul Latif follows Sufi tradition as Persian poet Rumi. There are a number of verses which refer to the Prophet Hazarat Mohammad (S.A.W.).

He said:

Flashes of lightning have started from the tomb of the Prophet(S.A.W.).

They have approached flashing and filled the Spout(with water).

At the command of the guide, because this place has been thirsty.

The beloved has manifested his sanctified splendor³⁰

In the above verse there is a suggestion of the blessing of the Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). It seems that poet Abdul Latif Bhitai is suggesting that both the rain and the well-being brought about by it, have been brought about at the command of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.).

³⁰ Dr. Durre Shahwar sayed, The poetry of Shah Abdal Latif (Sindhi Adabi Board,Hyderabad,1988) p.205.

Rumi speaks of the ‘ocean of inner meaning’ and the outside world. He calls the sea by different names, such as ‘the water of life’ or ‘ocean of unity’ which has immeasurable depth. The outside forms which one sees around are straws. They have no significance and hide the actual sea.

Shah Abdul Latif lived in a rural area and saw the distress, which lack of water caused to every living creature. Rain was desperately needed by everyone in a pastoral and agricultural society. The very existence and well-being of all organisms depend on water.

Shah Abdul Latif said

Human beings, deer and buffaloes all long for the rain.
The wild ducks hope for the cloud,
Whilst the cuckoo is also crying.
The oysters in the sea wait every morning for it.
Let the countrymen drink the rain water and become content.³¹

Such a scene must have moved the poet who pleads and prays for rain on their behalf:

O rain! In the name of God, look after the thirsty ones
Let there be plenty of water on the ground,
to make the grain cheap.
Let the country flourish, and
the countrymen become prosperous.³²

What Fakir Lal Shah made in his deliberation:

‘Man lives within—this Man.’³³

Qazi Nazrul Islam put it in different way:

To me Allah is the dearest one,
He is not far away from me
I am in love with Him.
So near, He is the nearest one.³⁴

On one hand it is said that Latif had the greatest knowledge of the language (Sindhi); and on the other hand it is claimed that he did not receive formal education. It is the matter, which must be investigated, explored and researched. One can presume from such discourse that although Shah seldom received formal education, yet he was so much blessed by the divine fountain of knowledge that he said:

‘O Mullah, punish me not;
Should I concentrate on lesson,

³¹ Ibid., p.208.

³² Ibid., p.209.

³³ Professor Muniruzzaman, [ed.], Nazrul Institute Journal, Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993) p.153.

³⁴ Ibid.

Or see the beloved?³⁵

Another poem Abdul Latif Bhitai's prayer:
O God, may ever you on Sindh
Bestow abundance rare;
Beloved! Allah the world let share
Thy grace and prosper be.³⁶

Also he said:

What comes from Divine Beloved is all sweet,
There is nothing bitter if wisely perceived.³⁷

What a divine knowledge is concealed in such words that leave the Mullah (formal teacher) spelled bound and sans argument.

In all orders of Sufism Allah manifests Himself as the Living Being. Qazi Nazrul Islam was so devoted to Allah by heart that he could engross himself in his devoted songs too:

'Sipping the wine of love for you, Khoda
I have I come absolutely drunk.'

Even he could be fair to see God by himself:

'I see my Unseen Parent
within my own Self.'³⁸

Nazrul rapped the spirit of the religion in his magnanimity:

What a distant sky
Where the sun moves!
But the sunflower
Always keeps its face towards the sun.

The same way I do keep my face also
towards God;

I hardly attribute any accounts to that.³⁹

Similarly Lalon postulates:
His movement makes me move.

³⁵ Manzoor Ahmed Kanasro, *Legacy of Shah Latif*, (Karachi: Sindhica Academy) p.103.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.109.

³⁷ Dr. Durreshahwar Sayed, *Shah Jo Risalo* (Karachi: Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai Chair, University of Karachi) p.23.

³⁸ Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed], *Nazrul Institute Journal*, (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993) p.153.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.154.

When I enquire into my Self,
I found in me
What is I or my self.⁴⁰

And sufistic trend of joy and ecstatic exuberance are well textured in the verse of Jalaluddin Rumi's 'House of Love':

This house wherein is continually the sound of viol
Ask of the Master, what House is this?
If it is the Ka'ba, what means this idol form?
O Master, bend down thy head once for this roof.
For in thy fair face is a token of fortune.
Life a mirror, the soul has received thy image
in this heart;
The tip of thy curl has sunk into its heart like a comb.
This is the Lord Heaven, who resembles Venus and
the moon

This is the House of Love, which hath no bound or end.⁴¹
Lalon also had his query in an irreversible manner that the sperm of human is not seen
but housed mysteriously:

“To whom to ask about the mystery
Who can make out its essence
Whether the Merciful has any form or not
Whence Shain came unseen but an afloat sperm
In the womb
What has his form in that

And that has been developed thereafter”.⁴²

(The Songs of Lalon Shah)

Nazrul had a liberal family background and was closer to Arabic and Persian literatures and religion. His family moved from Mesopotamian, present Iraq, to the Sub-Continent and first settled in Patna, capital of Vihar province of India. However in search of livelihood, the family finally moved to then prosperous Calcutta, West Bengal. Nazrul was born in Churilia village and was brought up amidst hardship. As a child Nazrul used

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mohammad Nazrul Huda, [ed.], Nazrul An Evaluation, (Dhaka: Robin Islam, 2000),p.236.

⁴² Ibid.

to visit 'Dargha' or 'Mazars' of saints with his parents. The serenity and solemnity at Mazars had deep impacts on sensibility of young Nazrul.

Nazrul while in search of truth was spell-bound by the essence of mysticism – Love and devotion appealed to Nazrul most to find the truth. In course of the journey to truth he came in contact with Lalon Shah's teaching. The mazar of Lalon Shah (1774-1890) is in Kushtia district, the place well known for origin of Bengali Language. In Bangladesh it could be equated with Delhi or Lucknow, famous for evolution of Urdu language. Lalon Shah is a great Sufi poet and is widely revered in Muslim world. He through his inimitable songs preached 'Tariqat', the spiritual path to Allah.

In Bangla Literature Fakir Lalon Shah (1774-1890) and Qazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) are the two most popular and noted poets and maestros who have become famous for their respective mystical trends in folklores and modern songs. They made most of the mystic rhymes of their own, as the two were interested to understand the mystery of life, hither to unknown.

Bangla mystical songs composed by Fakir Lalon Shah and Qazi Nazrul Islam with reference to Mysticism in Islam need to be compiled.⁴³

The mysticism sees life in the nature, communing with Allah, the Unseen. Sufis and Darveish always meditate God, the mystery. This sort of sensitivity can be sensed in one of the songs of Lalon Shah:

"I found this world illusory, funny and fake
I know not who goes where by the tide of time
For whom to build the buildings or acquire money
And where to run thereafter for what illusion
Who understands the deals of that Great Dealer
Does He take away this being but where does he take
But to whom would I ask this question
And who will make out the intricacies of this
queries
I know not who that actual Actor is responsible
for these
But whom I to say 'I' and 'I' and 'I'?"⁴⁴
-The songs of Lalon Shah"⁴⁴
"Being at heart dear
What makes you to be away

Qazi Nazrul Islam composed songs almost on the same episode:
so far away!
Being yourself like the moon in the sky above

⁴³ Professor Maniruzzaman, [ed], Nazrul Institute Journal, (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, Volume-2, 1993) p.150.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.151.

Lalon contradicts it in no sense
Being himself a Ketho Mollah".⁴⁷

--The songs of Lalon Shah.

Lalon's rebellious communion is pragmatically intuitive here.

That God who creates anything what He desires. He says, "Be", then and there that "Becomes".

"Inna Maa Amruhu Ijaa Arada Saaian Aii Ya Kula Lahu Kujn Faa Yakun"

(Surah

Yasin: 82)

That He is but the great and sacred who exerts His sovereign power over everything and you will return to Him.

"Faa subhanallahji Bay Yadihi Malakuto Kulley Saaain Oah Illaihey
Toorjaon".

(Surah Yasin: 83)

Hence there is no doubt in it that the source of all creation is God and none else.

Lalon epitomized the whole body of the universe into eighteen dwellings where one single light of the Nur (God) is lighted all among:

'It's weird but a great wonder,
Within eighteen dwellings
One single light of the Nur (God)
Is being lighted'.⁴⁸

Now it appears that this light is the source of all creations. And this universe exists, within the exact existence of the creator. Herein Sufis man is the microcosm in which all but a few remarkable qualities of God have been attributed. Lalon probably followed Ibnul Arabi in his thought:

That Man is living in this man.' And that is 'Perfect Man' of IbnuL Arabi. The first pronouncement of Ibnu'L Arabi was that God exists in every religion. Lalon had his resonance here:

"Go in quest of the root of your birth
And there you have the acquaintance of Shain (God)".
Qazi Nazrul Islam put the similar idea in one of his most popular poems...

"I could discern the identity of my creator in my own "Being".⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Mohammad Nazrul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*, (Dhaka: Robiul Islam, 2000).p.231.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.239.

⁴⁹ Mohammad Nurul Huda, [ed.], *Nazrul An Evaluation*, (Dhaka: Robiul Islam, 2000).p.239.

Nazrul like Lalou had his pantheistic Monism. He denied pluralism of God. In his poem 'Maha Samar (The Great War) he became the exponent of the monotheism.

“There’s a great war breaks out between (Towheed)
monotheism and (Bahutmabad) pluralism.
Monotheist (La-Sharik) will be victorious, said,
“Allah Ho Akbar”⁵⁰.

This is against the difference between man and man, and between the nation and nation.

This difference will go in 'Ahad' (monism of God) doctrine where all differences will sink to become equal into oneness.

Mysticism in Islam manifests the psyche of humanity in the oneness of God. This is the faith in which one can put his belief without distinction between man and man but understand the identity of one's own soul into the another. And by this way all artificial barriers in the aristocracy of the human society of its religious customs or traditions can be removed. Because the conception of the identity of human oneness after the image of the oneness of unseen God is revealed here. And this is the way how Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) could remove the social interregnum of his time and consolidate the establishment of Islamic way of life for common welfare of all in the society irrespective of creed or caste of other religious people. His was the simplification of social orders to bring about peace and tranquility among different warring but heterogeneous elements of the people.

Nazrul was the staunch follower of Hazrat Muhammad (SM) but his belief in Allah's Supremacy appears to have been superseded almost all aspects of mysticism:

“Above every aspect of all colours one who has not seen
The supreme acts of the light of Allah,
He cannot understand the acts of Allah, in this world.
He is the first and foremost poet of all
Who writes poems of His creations for day in and
Day Out....
He foils the diabolic designs of the devils
Setting aside the social imbalance,
When His creations become most perfect and beautiful.
Who will understand the acts of Ahad, the immortal?”⁵¹

(Ahad is the name of Allah whose Oneness cannot be parted.)

In Bengali folk-literature mystic maestro Fakir Lalou Shah will remain a pioneer but in mystic modern songs Qazi Nazrul Islam will also be the guide of our mystic heart. The truth which has been soothing our heart can never be erased.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.240.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Lalon and Nazrul like other ancient or mediaeval mystics or Sufis, blend their mode of thinking into mysticism. Plainly speaking, they put their deliberate efforts to make sense of the mystery in their devotional or spiritual songs.