

**SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SYMBOLS OF SUFISM AS  
DEPICTED IN SHAH LATIF'S POETRY**

*Ali Murad Lajwani*  
*Dr.Nagina Parveen Soomro*

**ABSTRACT**

*People living on earth are socially connected due to their social needs and social actions. Such social actions and social needs are root-cause of various social relationships. The art of building true relationships is one of social actions which create harmony and tolerance among the people. Shah's poetry offers openness to demonstrate good behavior and make global relationships with glowing understanding of spiritual concepts about different religions. There are poetic signs and symbols which connect hearts of people together in the same way as social needs are ground reasons of peaceful relationships. This poetry is a creative attempt with many signs and symbols of love, peace and spirituality. Like the poetic words are very catchy and appealing with unique spiritual flavour that starts its function of connecting people together while enjoying the reading as well as listening spiritual music (Shah-Jo-Raag). The unique flavour of reciting verses is genuinely food for human inner-soul and thought that creates a collective wish of social solidarity. Through the spiritual symbols of Shah's poetry many intellectual scholars are globally connected in the present era of terrorism and frustrations because the continuous pursuit of reading Shah's poetry and listening spiritual music promotes sense of spirituality among the people on becoming peaceful citizens. This worthwhile poetry helps on improving the sense of spirituality and such capability is the basic need of our present as well as future generations.*

---

**Keywords:** Spiritualism (Sufism), Spiritual Music (Shah-Jo-Raag), Poetry (Shah-Jo-Risalo), Poetic Chapter from Manuscript (Sur), A Person Practices Spirituality (Sufi).

**INTRODUCTION**

The science of society has its place in understanding the collective cognizant which is sum total of beliefs, sentiments, thoughts and social collaborations. Emile Durkheim in his views says that society is combination of social facts where people exhibit different pattern of behaviours. He further elaborates social groups in societies are connected with social ties in mechanical and organic solidarity where social norms,

values and beliefs are practiced with mutual cooperation. In the same way concept of spirituality makes people peaceful, and tolerate with awakening of their collective conscience. Sufis are generally known as tolerated people having no any rigidity of religious thoughts. They equally respect other religions in the same way as they do have their own. If we look back towards the history – it presents the message of spiritualism (Sufism), its roots were grown from Islam, like the seed of vedant was already sown in Hindu Vedas and Shasters. The word “Sufi” has been accounted from the roots of Islamic history. A person namely Abu Hashim Kufi (766 AC) was the first man to be called a “Sufi”. Then Zun Nun Misri (860 AC) formulated the principles of Sufism. Till then the main emphasis of the Sufi lay on abstinence and devotional worship. But there was a change in the Sophistic thought. Sufi was drawn to Divine love and knowledge of the truth, rather than mere abstinence and devotional prayers. Bayazid Bustami and Mansur Hillaj were the pioneers of this perceptual change.

According to some philosophers word “Sufi” is derived from the Greek word “Sophia” which means wisdom. While others hold that it is taken from Arabic word “ahle-Safa” means the dwellers of the hall, who were a group of indigent immigrants from Mecca that sat in a hall of Masjid-i-Nabvi for receiving alms. They were mediators’ detached word denoting cleanliness as a Sufi his heart of all evil desires. However the leaned are now agreed upon the historical roots of term Sufi. During the Ummayed Caliphate when luxuries increased, the true believers disdained it and dressed themselves in coarse clothes. According to Ibn-i-Khaldun in the early days of Islam, woolen clothes displayed simplicity. Sufi “Soof” means wool. In Persian Sufi is called wearing wool.

Sindh is familiar place of spiritual saints known as Sufis. They have preached widely for brotherhood and religious harmony. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai was a great saint, scholar, and intellectual poet. He left his poetry for the people to understand the real applications of spirituality. Shah visited in nook and corner of the sub-content, met with oppressed and under privileged people at each location. His poetry presents good teaching mysticism passing through various stages. There are many signs and symbols of Sufism in his poetry where Sufis are highlighted as travelers walking through terrible tracks and moving towards their destination. They do not give up their struggle despite the various challenges. The symbols of Sufism are secrets and mysteries which are highlighted in each chapter of Shah-Jo-Risalo. We have to explore it each

level and this will bring some positive behavioral changes in our life. Following lines are witnessing the Sufi message:

The Echo and the call is same  
If you sound's secret knew  
They both were "one" but two became  
Only when hearing came (Shah)

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai is the greatest poet-philosopher of Sindh. He portrayed all about the soil and its sons in the finest language human mind can conceive of. Through simple folk-tales and their characters he expressed profound ideas of brotherhood. He is a real peace maker for every generation and genius of Sindhi literature. His verses are distinguishable by rhythmic flow, richness of thought and beauty of expression. The great beauty of his poetry is that his every single line or couple is sung with specific note or melody till today (Rasheed Bhatti, 2002, page-39). The core themes in different chapters are relations and connections with reality and sense of spirituality. There are vivid images which reflect inner satisfaction and love to mankind. The image of sea is being equated with the world where pearl are developed with the purity of nature. Shah in tradition of their Sufi predecessors uses the symbol of pearl and oyster. Both employ with its Sufi implications, comparing the life of the Sufi (Salik) to that of oyster. Although oyster lives in the Sea it does not taste the Sea water but only a drop of rain water. Consequently, it is rewarded with pearl. In similar manner Sufi (Salik) rewarded with Divine Grace (Durr-e-Shahwar, 1988:207). The concept of self education is also one step ahead towards the larger picture of spiritual panorama. Shah's period of self-education is a practical example of some spiritual steps that is persisted over twenty years. This period of his life was devoted to quest and search for truth, spiritual comprehension and understanding of esoteric verities. His search for divine truth was continued throughout his life and he observed things keenly and presented different signs of truth in poetry (Nabi Bux Baloch, 2010-59). The prominent British research scholar H.T. Sorley has largely discussed about the treasure of Shah's poetry. He has mentioned that Shah's poetry was inspired by the noblest message of Islamic teaching in spiritualized and mystical form. His poems have become a kind of national heritage (H.T.Sorley, 1984:163). The Sociological work resembles with spirituality in a way that suggests solutions of problems in the field agriculture on increasing the soil fertility which source of survival poor communities. A Sociologist namely Macionis defines the large scale

cultivation is referred dawn of human civilization as various innovative advances were made like irrigation, wheel and various other crafts. The use of plough enabled the farmers to cultivate larger areas of land with an additional benefit that such technique increased the fertility of soil (Amal Sajjad and Jawad Tarique, 2016:45). Like the crops in field passes through different stages and they produce some sweet and fleshy fruit. In the same way spirituality becomes matured passing through different phases and the spiritual development of Shah was also passed through three stages. At every stage the ways of the Sufis were unfolded for the poet. The first stage is seeker embarks upon the difficult path in search for his beloved. The second stage of spiritual and mystic development is vividly stated in Sur Leela-Chanesar and Momal-Rano. The mystic philosophy of these Surs is love for the beloved which was became stronger during the separation. The spiritual development process enters the third stage in the life of Sufi the mystic. In lives and dwells in the heart of Talib, the seeker. You cannot wilderness, and deserts and for the entire life search for the beloved, without exploring the self within you. You will have to first clear the soiled and stained mirror of your mind, then you will be able to behold the countenance of your beloved (Amar Jaleel, August 1993:52-53). Shah's poetry presents many symbols which are of no use as apparently but serve the real purpose of human welfare. For example a needle is an instrument that by sewing binds together the shapeless material and bestows upon it a beautiful form which fits well on your body. Shah presents this symbol in a mysterious manner that invisible needle has joined me firmly, inseparably with love to creation. Slow modest steps by imperceptible stitches my body my being is put in between various layers. There are invisible strata all around us atmosphere either wave, rays, build our link with our beloved. It is human bondage by a slight stretch of imagination we realize that in this universe everything belongs to everything else (Akram, Ansari, 1983:18). There is a significant chapter with title "Poorab" means melody of spiritual realm. The word Poorab would literally mean "East" which is the direction from where the sun rises and sheds of daylight on darkness of night to launch day. The word is thus allegorical to spiritual light. This is the brief melody that describes the poet's passion to undertake a voyage for pilgrimage to the holy land. Besides, the poet uses metaphor of the crow bird to explain the task of messenger who serves as the means of communication between the lover and beloved. The poet also asks crow to take his message to beloved, urging it to maintain a humble and respectful demeanor while delivering the message in confidence – to

bring internal peace with spiritual insights (Mushtaque Ali Shah, 2012:262,). Another chapter namely Sohni-Mehar is a famous folk-tale in Sindh. Shah has narrated spiritual significance of story of Sohni-Mehar in poetic form. He has presented in different verses in the form of some characters and objects. Sohni represents the lover, the seeker of God, and man, Mehar the loved one. The river the ocean of eternity intervening between the two – the dam worldly checks and censures, the whirlpool, the waves, dark nights are worldly troubles and difficulties. The drowning along with lover is the real union (K.F.Mirza, 1987:90). The spirituality is somehow the self education and self-awareness like C. Wright Mills has said the vivid awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society. He believes it is not a conscious effort but is a result of the historical problem-based discourse out of which the disciplines developed, in which the division between the disciplines becomes increasingly fluid. Thus Mills sets out what he believed to be a problem-based approach to his conception of sociological knowledge (Mills, 1959:136-142). Society do not keep the same shape always it changes mode often and rare. While with advancement of industry and technology in France, the society was undergone in enormous social changes in the form of revolution. People became wealthy but they lost peace of mind and they were dissatisfied due to the advancement of industries and technologies. It was material progress which caused dissatisfaction of people and they had lagged behind in cultural and social values of daily life. There was no science available which could solve social problems. August Comte named such science as “social physics” and later on this name was reframed by consensus as Sociology (Abdul Hameed Taga, 2010:45). The union and unity is well-defined power towards achieving the spiritual goal. In this connection Sheikh Shahabudin Suharwardy says the basic aim of a mystic is to re-unite his small self with the cosmic self. To attain this, he/she has to keep firm faith in the process of dooming day. During the journey towards the valley of union, seeker has undergone some essential exercise. He has sought the proper human values and guidance (Sakhi Qabool Muhammad Farooqui, 2009:28).

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The content analysis method was carried out in this qualitative research work. The qualitative verses and themes related with spirituality and symbolisms were searched through the various poetic chapters from the different volumes of Shah-Jo-Risalo. The seven editions of Shah-Jo-Risalo were searched as Risalo of Earnest Trump, Mirza Kalich Beg,

Kalyan Advani, Dr. Nabi Bux Baloch, Professor Ameena Khameesani, Syed Mushtaque Ali Shah and a hand-written manuscript in Sindhi by a disciple of Shah. There were 12092 verses in these volumes out of which 500 verses from different 20 chapters (Surs) were evaluated in first attempt. Secondly the 50 verses were selected out of 2 chapters (Surs) Kalyan and Yaman Kalyan. The symbolisms and themes were selected relevant with peace, tolerance, and spiritualism. The selected verses (poems) and themes were categorized in a logical order for drawing the results regarding concepts of spiritualism and Sufism.

### SPIRITUAL SYMBOLISMS IN POETRY

(1)

صوفي سالم ٿيا، جي اڪثر سين اڏيار  
 بازي بازندن کي، آهي اويسار  
 پريان سين پهڪار، رنديءَ رسائي ڪيا.  
 Sufi safely crossed; when they resisted ‘polytheism’  
 Battle of seeking; is memorable to combatants,  
 Ecstasy brought them; communion with Sweetheart.

The above highlighted poem was selected from chapter Yaman Kalyan. The word Yaman means to control one’s mind and make it so conscious that it finds peace. The each line highlights word “Sufi” in Sindhi language means the person who searches divine of God for and brings peace in the society. The first action of each person is to purify him with the positive thinking and bestowed nature – if he acquires such qualities then the path of his spiritual steps will take him to the destination.

(2)

صوفي سير سين ۾، جئن رڳن ۾ ساه  
 سان ڪري ڳالهڙي، جئن پويون پروڙي پساه  
 آهس اي گناه، جي ڪا ڪري پڌري.  
 Sufi lives everywhere; like soul in veins,  
 He discloses to none; whatever he attains,  
 It is but a sin for him; to disclose anything.

The spirituality has the language of silence where words do not express the real meaning. Shah says the Sufi do not disclose the mystery of

other people. They keep good qualities of human nature on many oceans they hide fault of others for the cause of humanity. The disclosing of sin of any other is such an awful habit and spiritual men have many good characteristics in their personalities.

(3)

ڏني ڏکوياءِ، اڻ ڏني راضي ٿيا،  
صوفي اي ٿيا، جئن کين کنيائون پاڻ سين.  
Unhappy being bestowed; happy being deprived,  
Sufi they became, who carry 'nothingness.

It is seen the people are running behind the outwardly things in the present times which is a fruitless mission for those who are Sufis. The spiritual people do not look for superficial happiness avoiding from such thing they remain sadden that is real cheerfulness for them. Good character is the wealth for them in this world as well as for the doming day.

(4)

صوفي لاکوفي، کون پائيس کير  
منجهيان ٿي منجم وڙهي، پڌر ناهس پير  
جنين ساڻس وير، ٿئي تنئين جو واهرو  
Sufi is not infidel; none understand him  
He wages a war within; but reveals nothing  
He became succor; of this bitter enemies.

Heaven the destination of peace lovers whereas waging war is an inhuman exploiting action in the society. The Sufis/peace lovers do not go for war or fight but they remain moderately calm even in during the circumstances which are against them. Their first step is forgiveness to those enemies who do wrong with them. Shah says the Sufis are very much tolerate and forbearing in nature in this way they create harmony for the inner soul.

(5)

صوفي صاف ڪيو، ڏوئي ورق وجود جو

تمان پوءِ ٿيو، جيئري پسڻ پرين

When Sufi purged; inner layers of this soul  
Only then could be; behold Beloved in this life.

Naturally the personality of man is divided into two aspects physical appearance as outlook and cognitive or emotional thinking process as inner look. Spirituality demands from us the purification of mind and soul which is a main characteristic of good personality. The poetry the sign of beloved is success rather end result of our good deeds and thoughts. In this way the Sufis reach at their ultimate goal with positive thinking and good moral values and so called their beloved as well.

(6)

صوفي چائين، سڌ ڪرين! صوفين اي نه صلاح

ڪاٽي رک ڪلاه، وجهه اچلي آڳ ۾

Want to be called a Sufi and keep desires! Not Sufis cult!  
Tear that tall hat (of Sufism); and fling it into fire.

The desires and wishes for the luxuries of life emerge in ordinary way and these are so sweet to those who do not have the real taste of spirituality. The journey of spirituality is not easy rather it is very difficult and challenging in any circumstances. It is a testing and the journey begins from hardships but Sufis are keeping their efforts continued and they reach at the truth and genuineness.

## CONCLUSION

In present qualitative research 500 verses from the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai were reviewed in study spheres. Selectively the stanzas and couplets were found consequential towards the symbols of Sufism. There are glowing illustrations in each (Sur) chapter where the group of Sufis is hinted in traveling day and night for the search of truth and Divine. These symbols of spirituality eloquently urge people to lead peaceful life. The world is heaven for us if we look into our own deeds and do not blame on others of our own faults. Yet, there are some close-

mindful people in our society who are showing intolerance and narrow-mindedness but this characteristic may easily be defeated if there is firm belief in forgiveness. Justice is not a miracle rather it is reality of our daily life and making justice with oneself and others is the practice of Sufism. The respect of other religions is our major obligation and nobody has the legal right to remark about others in anyway. Though few people misinterpret the real words and message of religion and they translate with their own agendas. The Sufis have the religion of mankind and they believe in inter-faith harmony. The reading of Shah's poetry and demonstrating tolerance, patience, and nature of peacefulness is Sufism.

#### REFERENCES

- C. Wright Mills, (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press, pp.32-143.
- Sorley, H.T. (1984). *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit: His Poetry, Life and Times. A Study of Literary, Social and Economic Conditions in Eighteen Century Sindh*, Ashish Publishing House 8/81, Punjabi Bagh New Dehli -110026, India.
- Shah, Mushtaq Ali, (2012). *Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai: Apostle of Love*, Roshni Publication, Hyderabad/Kandiaro.
- Sajjad Amal, Tariq Jawad, (2016). *Sociology*, Jahangir's World Time Publication, Ghazni Street, Urdu Bazaar Lahore.
- Sayed, Durr-e-Shahwar, (1988). *The Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif*, Sindhi Adabi Board, Jamshoro/Hyderabad.
- Akhund, Abdul Hameed, (August 1993). *Bhittai the Message of the Master*, Shah Abdul Latif Bhit Shah Cultural Centre Committee, Bhit Shah, Hyderabad.
- Taga, Abdul Hameed, (2010). *An Introduction to Sociology*, Al-Fazal Market Urdu Bazar, Lahore, Pakistan.
- Bhatti, Rasheed, (2002). *Birth of a Great Poet (Kalhora Period 1700-1784)* Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh. Jamshoro.
- Mirza K.F, (1987). *Life of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and a Brief Commentary on His Risalo With Selections Bearing on the Mystic Philosophy of Sufis*, Bhit Shah Cultural Center Committee, Hyderabad.
- Baloch, Nabi Bux, (2010). *Life and Thought of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai Based on Commentary of Shah-Jo-Risalo Poetic Compendium of Shah Abdul Latif*, Culture Department Government of Sindh, Pakistan.
- Ansari, Akram, (1983). *Symbolism in Latif's Poetry*, Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.
- Farooqui, Sakhi Qabool Muhammad (2009). *Study of Mysticism in Darazi School of Sufi Thought*, Culture and Tourism Department Government of Sindh, Pakistan, Karachi.