

SHAH ABDUL LATIF AND SUFISM

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A Sindhi sufi-poet of the 18th century, Shah Abdul Latif wrote his poetry at a critical period in the history of Sindh, witnessing himself the transition from the Sindh of the Delhi Empire to the Sindh struggling for independence. In his natural poetry, he touched upon a variety of subjects, Sufism being one of them.

Sufism is recognised as a system and its study is needed in its historical perspective. According to some authors the word *Sufi* is derived from **صوف** (Suf), meaning a woollen cloth, which due to its simplicity used to be worn by the Sufis. Some scholars are of the view that the word is derived from **صفا** (Sufa) which means purity, as the Sufis are pure.¹ **اصاف** According to Ali Hijwari the ideas of sufis are called *tasawwaf*². According to Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi, the author of the *Kitab-at-Taaruf li Madhab ahl-at Tasawwaf*³, (*the Doctrines of Sufis*) tr. by A.J. Arberry) the main beliefs of the sufi thinkers are as follows:

- I) The doctrine of monotheism means Oneness of God.
- II) The doctrine of spirit means an object through which life subsists, lives., ... a light fragrant breath (ruh) through which life subsists.
- III) The doctrine of soul means a hot wind (rih) through which the motions and desires exist.
- IV) The doctrine of love means illumination, a piercing of the veil of illusory and temporary thing.
- V) The doctrine of separation means a deeply ethical and purifying content separating the mystic from pleasureable things.
- VI) The doctrine of seeker and sought, means the principle that man seeks God only because God first sought him.

All these ideas are found in the poetry of Shah who represents Indian Muslim development of the philosophy of Jalaluddin Rumi. But in this paper I will discuss his message only. In *Shah Jo Rasalo* Shah has expressed his concept of God in the following verses: and give the following view regarding the concept of God.⁴

In the Beginning Allah is,
 Who Knoweth All, Who sits aloft.
 The Lord of all the World that be,
 He is the Mighty, Old of Days,
 Of His Own Power Established.
 He is the Lord, One only One,
 Sustainer and Compassionate.

The substance of the above verse shows that Shah's ideas on Sufism come from the Holy Quran and his views are inspired by various Surahs of the Holy Quran in respect of the Oneness of God. This view is further endorsed by Lilaram Watanmal that the Quran, Masnavi of Jalaluddin Rumi; and Sindhi verses of Shah Karim were always in the hands of Shah⁵. Thus we understand that the mysticism that he preached was based on the doctrines of the Muslim Sufis.

Alberuni, in his book entitled 'Alberuni's Indica has explained the Sufi doctrine of God. According to him some sufis are those who teach that this world is a sleeping soul and Yonder world a soul awake, and, who at the same time admit that God is immanent in certain places e.g. in heaven is the seat and throne of God (mentioned in the Quran). But there are others who admit that God is immanent in the whole world, in animals, trees, and the inanimate world, which they call His universal appearance. To those Sufis who hold this view, the entering of the souls into various beings in the course of etempsychis is of no consequence⁶. This explanation indicates that sufis differ in their concept of God and believe in two theories. The second theory is of Wahdat-ul-Wajud which holds that there is only one essence and that is God's. According to Majaddid Alif Sani, who advocated the doctrine of Wahdat-i-Shahud, the experience of Wahdat-ul-Wajud is only appearance. It appears to be so but is not really so; it is mere Shahud or seeming, the mystic only feels One⁷. The author of Tazakara Sufia-i-Sind, has expressed that Shah Abdul Latif has supported the theory of Wahadut-ul-Wajud. He says that Shah has beautifully defined this idea with careful and balanced manner in the following passage⁸.

”جنگل اور صحرائں تو کیریں جاتا ہے، کیریں اپنے محبوب کو اور ادھر ڈھونڈتا ہے؟ اے لطیف محبوبِ حقیقی کسی دوسری جگہ نہیں
 چھپا ہے۔ آنکھوں کو نیچے کر کے دیکھتے تیرے دوست کا مسکن تیرے اندر ہی ہے۔“

Shah also speaks about the Sufi doctrine of *Soul*. The mysterious unity of the Soul with God is a recurring theme in his poetry, which is often expressed in a language which has hardly any parallel. In the *Sur Sorath* occur the words:⁹

Man is My secret; I am his.
 Here lies the key to mysteries.
 This phrase the singer took to song
 The song he sang before the King;
 And when he sang, where there were two,
 The pair to single Oneness grew.

According to sufis, before the human soul is embodied in a human body, it lives in *alami itlak*, where it is regarded as loose from the body. This is for the sufi non-existence because it is an existence apart from God. When God places the *soul* in the human body, it lives in the *alam-i-takayyud* or binding world, in which state it is bound to the body and held as a prisoner. The soul is then separated from God. Separated from the Beloved land it wanders as a stranger in places far from its real abode. Shah has preached this doctrine through his poetry in a striking and beautiful language.

Another doctrine of sufis is known as Love and has been described by Shah. In his poem 'Love is Enough' it occurs¹⁰

The friends who planted in my heart
 The questings of my pain,
 My friends have gone and from my mind
 Have sorrow's fardel ta'en.

Shah Abdul Latif has made distinction between true and false love or *Ishq-i-Majazi* and *Ishq-i-Haqiqi*.

He says:

Set not love's store against the wine
 Nor count wine dear at such appraise.
 Prepare that head for cutting, thine,
 The wineshop is the place of them.
 Who by the wine-jars end their days.

At another place Shah states:

Who dull existence would conserve?
 For no such aim the lover strives,
 One breath from the Beloved's lips
 Is better than a thousand lives.
 And can this skin and bone of mine
 Compare with the Beloved's wine¹¹.

Shah's reference to wine in this sense is something which uplifts and exhilarates the spirit in its search for God. The intoxicated ones are those who are overcome with the glorious delirium of divine illumination. Sometime it is the act of loving God. Actually the taste of love can lead someone to have a chance for meeting his Lord. This doctrine of Love has deep roots in mysticism. It is prescribed in the Holy Quran that: those who love God or seek to be near Him, must do what the Prophet of Islam tells them to do; Say Muhammad (peace be upon him) to mankind- if you Love Allah, follow me. Allah will love you and forgive your sins. Allah is forgiving - merciful¹²

For the attainment of God, Shaikh Farid ud Din Ganj-i-Shakar prescribes the path of love, and he valued love of God so much that he used to greet his visitors with these words, 'May God give you pain (dard) of love'¹³

Shah has also dealt with another Sufi doctrine of seeker and sought. This doctrine shows that how a seeker travels along the mystic path for the attainment of God. Sayyid Ali Hamdani has set down ten spiritual stations but the Sufis in general say that there are four degrees or stations through which a man has to pass and these are as under:

- 1) Shariyat 2) Tariqat 3) Marifat 4) Haqiqat

Shah Latif mentions all the four degrees in his *Suhni*¹⁴

In the light of above discussion we can say that Shah Abdul Latif has discussed Sufism and its doctrines in his poetry with great zest and fervour. He was a genius who not only enriched the literature on mysticism but also opened new vistas for mystic minds.

REFERENCES

1. Lilaram Watanmal Lalwani, *The life, Religion and Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif* (Karachi, 1890), p. 34.
2. Ali Hijwari, *Kashful Mahjub*, (Lahore), p. 31.
3. Abu Bakr al Kalabadhi, *Kitab-al-Taaruf li Madhatab ahl-al-tasawwaf*. Tr by A.J. Arberry, *The Doctrines of Sufis*, (London 1960), quoted by L.W. Lalwani, *Ibid*, p. 32.
4. H.T. Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit*, (Oxford, 1940), p. 312.
5. Lilaram Watanmal *op. cit.* p. 11.