

SUFI TRADITION OF SINDH AND
SHAH ABDUL LATIF

Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Soomro

ABSTRACT

Sindh is the land of rich spiritual of mystical tradition. At the start of the thirteenth century when Sufi orders had started taking roots, Sindh including Multan region came in direct contact with the founder of Shaikh Shahab uddin Suhrawardi. However, before the arrival of Bahauddin Zakariya in Baghdad, Nuh Bhakkari hailing from Bhakkar, Sindh had already received mantle of Khalifa from Shaikh Shahabuddin in Baghdad. In the same century Sayyid Muhammad Makki the grandson of Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi came to Sindh and settled in Bhakkar. During this century Pir Patho, buried on a hillock near Thatta, was the most prominent Khalifa of Bahauddin Zakariya in Sindh. In this period Shah Jamial who belonged to Chishtiya order traveled from Girnar and reached Thatta to preach Chishtiya teachings in Sindh. Qadriya and Naqshbandiya orders started flourishing in Sindh during the tenth and eleventh centuries. It was scholar turned Sufi Qazi Qadan who composed Sindhi verses of high mystical concepts which were recited by Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri and were included along with his own verses in his *malʿuzat* “*Bayan al Arifin*”. Shah Lutfullah Qadir and Shah Inayat Rizvi are the two most illustrious poets of the Sufi tradition in Sindh, whose all-round poetic influence is discernible in the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif. Miyan Shah Inayat Rizvi was the real predecessor of Shah Abdul Latif in many respects. Shah Abdul Latif was the great grandson of Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri, as such he inherited the great Sufi tradition of Sindh as his family tradition. In Shah Abdul Latif, the mystical tradition of Sindh and its poetical exposition reaches its climax.

Sindh entered the fold of Islam in the first century Hijrah (92/711)/eighth AD and remained a part of the Arab rule till the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century (401/1010). During the last quarter of the fourth century the most celebrated Sufi Hussain bin Mansur Hallaj is believed to have visited Sindh, who was executed in Baghdad in 309/ 922. At the start of the seventh/ thirteenth century when Sufi orders had started taking roots, Sindh including Multan region came in direct contact with the founder of Suhrawardiya order Shaikh Shahab uddin Suhrawardi (d: 632/1234). However before the arrival of Bahauddin Zakariya in Baghdad, Nuh Bhakkari hailing from Bhakkar, Sindh had already received mantle of Khalifa from Shaikh Shahabuddin in Baghdad. In the same century Sayyid Muhammad Makki the grandson of Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi (son of his daughter) came to Sindh and settled in Bhakkar where he died in 644/1246. During this century Pir Patho (d. 680/1282), buried on a hillock near Thatta, was the most prominent Khalifa of Bahauddin Zakariya in Sindh. In this period Shah Jamial who belonged to the Chishtiya order traveled from Girnar and reached Thatta to propagate Chishtiya teachings in Sindh. Qadriya and Naqshbandiya orders started flourishing in Sindh during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

By the end of the ninth/ fifteenth century Sayyid Muhammad of Jaunpur in India, who had identified himself to be “Mehdi” reached Thatta via Gujarat. Although controversial in his claim, he was able to attract many prominent religious scholars and jurists including Qazi Qadan (d. 958/1551) to be his disciple in Sindh. It was scholar turned Sufi Qazi Qadan who composed Sindhi verses of high mystical concepts which were recited by Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri (d.1034/1623) and were included along with his own verses in his *malfuzat* “*Bayan al Arifin*”. The *malfuzat* was compiled by one of his disciples just six years after his death in 1630. The seven verses so recorded in the *Bayan al Arifin* are regarded as the finest specimen of earlier Sindhi Sufipoetry. The most significant verse which speaks of his spiritual experience and conversion is as under:

جو کيء جاگايوس، ستو هوس نندپر،
تهان پوء تيسوس، سندي پريان پيچري.

*I was awakeved by a Yogi
While I was in deep slumber.
It was only afterwards that I am on path of my beloved.*

After a lapse of four centuries it was in 1978, that more poetry of Qazi Qadan was unearthed along with the poetry of Dadu Dayal of Gujarat (1544-1603), a Bhakti poet of the 16th century from Ranila village in Haryana State of India.

It may be pointed out here that the fame of Qazi Qadan as a poet had crossed the frontiers of Sindh just after his death and reached Gujarat so that when Ghausi Mandvi was composing his famous *Tadhkirah Gulzar-e-Abrar* by about the years 1613-20, he cited four verses of Qazi Qadan as proof of being a Sufi poet.

Bayan al Arifin being the collection of sayings and discourses of a great Sufi like Shah Karim is the best example of hagiography in Sindh composed in Persian by one of his outstanding disciple just six years after the death of the saint. It further reveals that Shah Karim was initiated into the Qadriya order. He was also a poet of high caliber and his verses contain simple as well as sophisticated ideas of Sufi thought. He was also fond of Sufi *Sama* or singing in which he used to participate himself. He has told about one such *Mehfil-e-sama* in which he participated in Ahmedabad Gujarat, where he had the chance to listen to Hindi verses also. This is how verses of Kabir and Saman are found in the *Bayan al Arifin*. Shah Karim had great appreciation for *Qawwals* or singers. He would always reward them, if nothing else, then whatever he had as additional cloth on his body, usually a *shawl* or that may be something like “*Ajrak*” of today. This is how the *Bayan al Arifin* provides the narrative as well as the substance of the Sufi tradition of Sindh.

The study of *Bayan al Arifin* further reveals the acquaintance of Shah Karim with the ideas of great Sufis like Bayazid Bistami (d. 246/875), Junaid Baghdadi, Mansur Hallaj (d. 302/922), and Abul Hassan Kharqani (d. 425/ 1023). There are indirect references to *Futubat* and *Fusus al-Hikam* of Ibn Arabi. Above all he was well conversant with the *Masnawi* of Rumi (d. 672/ 1274) as is quite apparent from many of his verses.

هي ڪن گڏ هڻا وڪڻي، ڪن ڪي ٻيا ڳنهيڃ،
تنين سان سڻيڃ، پريان سندي ڳالهڙي.

*Dispose off these asinine ears
And get other ones.
So as to hear the message of beloved.
This reminds of Rumi's famous lines.*

گوش خر بفروش و دیگر گوش خر
کین سخن را در نیابد گوش خر

The other most distinctive characteristic of Shah Karim's poetry is that he introduced characters of folk- tales of Sindh and assigned mystical meaning to them such as Sassi, Sohni, Marwi and Layla. Besides other familiar characters from everyday life, he referred to *Khaboris* as the exalted gnostics which is but continuation of Qazi Qadan's concept of Yogi as 'Gnostic' or spiritual master.

ڏيهه ڏيهائين ناه، جتي پير نه پڪيان،
تتي ڪاهوڙيان، ور ڏيئي وڻ چونڊئا.

That land is altogether different

There no birds can reach.

Only the ascetics go there And avail of its fruits.

Shah Lutfullah Qadir (d. 1090/ 1679) and Shah Inayat Rizvi (d. 1130/ 1717) are the two most illustrious poets of the Sufi tradition in Sindh, whose all-round poetic influence is discernible in the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif. Shah Lutfullah Qadri as the appellation suggests was affiliated with the Qadriya order and by training and aptitude was an accomplished religious divine and Sufi master. Besides his Sufi poetry which was first discovered in 1968 by Dr. N. A. Baloch, his scholarly Sufis treatise in Persian has been recently translated and edited into Sindhi in 2009. In this book, which he has written for the beginners of the Sufi path he has delineated some of his personal spiritual experiences and has enumerated 184 stages or stations on the path, which the traveler or the *salik* has to tread before reaching his goal i.e. attainment to God.

The poetry of Lutfullah is replete with common place imagery as well as scholarly explanation of *wahadat al wujud*. His poetry abounds in direct quotations and technical terms from the works of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, Shaikh Akbar Ibn Arabi and others. He seems well aware with the Persian Sufi tradition and its masters such as Sana'i, Attar, Shaikh Sadi. He has divided his poetry under seven headings and in the last chapter he has explicitly mentioned Yogis as spiritual masters and gnostics.

Here we cite just one verse which quotes the most famous aphorism of Ibn-Arabi:

بيائي ٻڙو ناه ڪو، شڪ سيوئي لاه،
جا تو دوئي پائئي، سا هڏهين ناه،

سبحان من اظهر الاشياء و هو عينها، دوس دليئون راه،
ات هند حكايت ناه، حيرت جهڙي ڳالھڙي.

*Duality is not rewarding at all,
Keep yourself away from every doubt.
The duality which you come across,
exits no where in reality.
Glory to Him who manifested Himself
in every thing and is their essence,
Only his friends are acquainted with this fact
This mystery is beyond explanation
Here bewilderment is the order of the day.*

Miyan Shah Inayat Rizvi (d: 1130/1717) was the real predecessor of Shah Abdul Latif in many respects. The indigenous tradition of Sufi poetry which commenced with Qazi Qadan in the tenth/sixteenth century was strengthened by Shah Karim with the addition of *Sama'* or singing including intoning. Shah Inayat Rizvi's poetry is how ever essentially based on folk tradition of music. It is in this background that while compiling his poetry, it was properly placed under such headings as *Surud Kahyan, Asa, Marui, Sobni* etc. Shah Inayat made extensive use of folk tales along with metaphors for explaining the implications of spiritual life. He continued with the image of yogi as traveler of the spiritual path and he added new symbolism of 'Nath' and 'Gorakh' in it.

نڪي ڳولين ڳوٺ ۾، پيهي ڪين پنين،
ويئي بڪ بس ڪري، اتان آديسين،
اڻ گهريو عنات چئي، تن ڪي ڏنو ڏيهه ڏٺين،
گورڪ ڳوڏڙين، آسڻ ويني آڻيو.

*The ascetics search Him not in village surroundings
Nor do they go for begging here and there
They have divested themselves of hunger totally,
Lord, the all-giver have taken care of their needs
This is what Inat has to say.
Gorakh, their master was pleased to visit them at their place.*

Shah Abdul Latif (d. 1165/ 1752) was the great grandson of Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri, as such he inherited the great Sufi tradition of Sindh as his family tradition. It has been pointed out by the biographers that Shah Latif besides the Holy Qur'an, used to have the *Bayan al Arifin* and the *Masnawi* of Rumi as his constant companions. He was a born poetic genius and in his poetry *Shah-jo-*

Risalo Sufi tradition of Sindh blossomed with all its hues and colours. In so far as the description of Sufi path in his poetry is concerned. He unequivocally states.

وحده لا شريك له، جان تو چئين ايء،
مج محمد كارڻي، نرتئون منجهان نيه،
تان تو وچيو ڪيئن، نائين ڪنڌ ٻين ڪي.

*When you have affirmed oneness of Allah,
leaving no partner with him,
Then believe in the Prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH)
With all devotion and sincerity
Go not astray and prostrate not before others.*

All Sufi poetry revolves round one point and that is yearning of human soul to meet its beloved who is none else but his creator, the lord of the universe. According to Sufis, meeting this beloved in this life is possible as against the general belief of meeting him after physical death. This is what Sufis call “dying before death” i.e. *mutu qabla an tamutu*.

All the great Sufi teachers and masters are agreed that journey to God or traveling on the path is to be undertaken under the guidance and supervision of competent spiritual master. Shah Latif has described all this as a warning to Sasui, who is but *salik* or traveler on the path.

سڀا سياهي، آهي آري ڄام ري،
ڪڏهن پسبي ڪانه ڪا، رء لالڻ لالائي،
من لا شيخ فشيخ له الشيطان، ان رء اونداهي،
هوء جا هلي هيڪلي، سا گيرب گمائي،
من يمشي في الطريق بلا شيخ ڪمن يمشي في
البحر بلا سفينة اهڙي اوائي،
تنه ريء توائي، ڪوڙين ٿين ڪيتريون.

*It is dark all around without my beloved.
No light is possible without his glowing face.
My beloved cleansed my heart by removing dust and dirt
He who is without guide, has, Satan his guide.
Is the wise dicsource.
The one who travels unaccompanied is bound to go wayward.
The one who goes without guide is like crossing a sea without boat.
Numerous lost their way when they.*

ventured such unseen journey.

There is much discussion in the poetry of Shah Latif as to what are the qualifications and characteristics of a spiritual master, who can guide the *talib* or seeker and put him on proper path. He has identified them in Sur 'Kalyan' with this precondition.

حاصل جان نہ حال، صوفي جمر سڌائين،

ڪينهن تينن قال، وٿون جن وڃايون.

Claim not yourself to be a Sufi

If you have not attained to the 'Hal'.

They shundiscourses and verbosity who have lost everything.

In sur Ramkali, he has identified them with yogis, Kapris, Adesies and they symbolize gnostics or Arifs:

جياسون جوڙ ٿي، جوڳي ڏٺوسون،

ڪنا تنهن مون، حاصل ڪي حال ڪئون.

I was fortunate to enjoy the

company of that 'yogi'

Due to him I attained to the 'Hal'.

'Hal' and 'Maqam' are the two technical terms signifying what are called 'the states and stations' on the Sufi path and their full description is available in the classical manuals of Sufis such as *Kitab ul Taarruf* by Kallabadhi, *Kitab al-Luma*, by Abu Nasr Sarraj, *Risala-e-Qushairyia* of Qushairi and *Awarif al-Maarif* by Suhrawardi.

Distinction between 'Hal' and 'Qal' a favorite topic with Rumi and it has been briefly explained in the *Masnavi*.

ماڀرون را ننگريم و قال را

ما درون را بنگريم و حال را.

We look not at the tongue or outward

We look at the inward (spirit) and the state of feeling

Both Rumi and Shah Latif have treated gnostics as the true spiritual masters in whose company one reaches the goal or destination. It is they who are highly capable enough to rekindle the light of life in us otherwise we are dead and in darkness. Shah Latif has laid great emphasis to be in their company as they can instill life in you. They can bring you on the threshold of real life. Shah Latif identified them in these words.

مرٿان اڳي جي مٿا، سي مري ٿين نہ مات،

هوندا سي حيات، جيٺان اڳي جي جيا.

*Those who die before death are never dead,
They live for ever who lived this life earnestly*

Rumi has given exposition of this phenomenon in this way

سایه یزدان بود بنده خدا،
مرده او زین عالم و زندهء خدا.

*The shadow of God is that servant of God,
who is dead to this world and living through God.*

At another place Rumi has clarified that only God intoxicated souls are alive, others are dead. If you want to be alive, go and sit with them otherwise you will be dead, when you go and sit with others, who were apparently alive, but their souls are dead.

ای خنک آن مرد کز خود رسته شد،
درو جود زنده پیوسته شد.

*Oh, fortunate is the man who is freed from himself,
and united with the existence of a living one!*

Yet at another place Rumi ascribes to these spiritual masters the role of Israfeel, the angel who is supposed to revive the dead from the graves.

هین که اسرافیل و قتلند اولیا،
مرده را زیشان حیاتست و نما.

*Beware, for the saints are the Israfeels, of the present time.
The dead ones get life and freshness from them.*

Shah Latif has dwelt at length with such saints or friends of God in Ramkali, in forty three verses he continuously repeats the words, 'I cant live without them' or 'My life is not possible without them.'

ستی سیچ هیاس، مون کی آه اثارو،
جني جاگایاس، آء نه جینندي ان ري.

*While I was in leisuly sleep, a deep sigh of love woke me up.
The one who awakens me, I cant live in his separation.*

H.T. Sorley in his monumental work *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit* while assessing the impact of Rumi on the thought process of Shah Latif was of this view 'To what extent Shah Abdul Latif was acquainted with the great Persian poets we do not know, there is no evidence that he had studied any of them except Jalaluddin Rumi, a copy of whose *Masnavi* was said to be constantly in his hands.'

It was under the influence of Rumi's concept of Arif or gnostic that Shah Latif presented the Yogis as an ideal of gnostic, and eulogized their spiritual attainments. 'Abmal' (plural of *Hal*) in that

particular traditional Sufi terminology, shows his extraordinary understanding and personal achievements as a Sufi.

مونا طورسینا، سندا سنیاین،
 سجدي ۾ سيد چئي، گوڈا گوڈزين،
 فکان قاب قوسين اودني، تا نانگا ائين نم،
 کل من عليها فان، باقي کين بچن،
 الله ولي الذين آمنوايخر جهنم من الظلمات
 الي النور اهزيء ۾ ۾ ۾
 خزموسي صعقا، تا جوگي جنگ جلن
 مازاغ البصر و ماطغي، اهزيء ۾ روش رون،
 مشاهدو محبوب جو، اتي اديسين،
 بي يبصر بي يمسع بي وصال و هن،
 بي يشمي بي ينطق تا اهزيء ۾ چال چلن،
 سيد چئي سندين، تون کل پچين تو كهزي.

*The (arch like) knees of the ascetics are Mount Sinai,
 sayyid says the loosely dressed are in prostration having bent their knees.
 And it was a two bow lengths or less, the poorly attired were in such proximity.
 Everything is perishable nothing (excepting God) is everlasting.
 Allah is the friend of those who believe in Him, and He leads them from darkness
 to light is their way of life.
 Moses fell down unconscious whereas the valiant yogis are burning.
 His sight turned not aside nor transgressed is their way of ascent.
 This is how the ascetics gained the vision of love.
 He sees by Me, he hears by Me, he unites Me- this indicates their union.
 And he works by Me, He speaks by me, this is what they achieved.
 Sayyed says What can I tell you about them.*

Here we may differentiate Arifs or gnostics as the mystics who have been bestowed with ‘Hal’ or state after having passed through stations such as repentance or (*Tawbah*) patience or (*Sabr*), trust or *tawakkul* or in other words who are recipients of special dispensation from God Almighty. This is how state and stations have been defined in the standard classics of sufi thought and practice such as *Awarf-al-Maarif* of Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi where in we find this exposition of ‘*Qurb*’ or nearness to God:

الله عباد طورسینا هم رکبهم تڪون روسهم علي رکبهم و هم في محال القرب

There are such servants of God whose Mount Sinai is their knees and when they keep their head on knees, they reach the state of ‘Qurb’ i.e. nearness to God.

‘*Qurb*’ or nearness to God is further divided into *Qurb-e-Nawafil* and *Qurb- Faraiẓ*, and according to Sufis it is based on a *Hadith Qudsi*. In the last two lines of this verse, the actual words of Hadith have been quoted and similar words have been cited by Rumi more than once in his *Masnavi*:

رو که بی یسمع و بی ببصر توئی
سر توئی چه جائی صاحب سر توئی

Go, for thy sake God said,
By Me he hears and by Me he sees,
Thou art the divine consciousness.

'Love of God' is also a state which is especially conferred on the mystics endowed with *'Hal'* and to this Rumi has referred as under:

عشق جان طور آمد عاشقا
طور مست و خر موسی صاعقا

*Love inspired Mount Sinai, O lover,
Sinai was made drunken and Moses fell in a swoon.*

The third state which has been referred to in this verse is contemplation or *Mushabdab* bearing reference to the Qur'anic verse:

چشم ظاهر ظابط حیل بشر
چشم سر حیران مازاغ البصر

*His outward eye is apprehending human forms,
while his inward eye is dazzled in (the glory of) the eye did not stray.*

These are the states which have been experienced by the mystics and here is an evidence from the same *Minhajal-Marifat* of Lutfullah Qadri referred to earlier:

(مرغ باطن) و ببعض اوقات چنان میرفت که بیک تگ از هم کون و مکان
را گذاشته و جولان در عالم لامکان میداشت و مسافت 'دنا فتدلی' را قطع کرد
بعالم معراج میرسید و طواف دربادیه 'قاب قوسین' میکرد.

Oh, my dear sometime the bird of my spirit flies so high and so swift that with one leap forward it crosses all the boundaries of universe and enters where there is no space and time. It draws nigh and further nigh and after that stage ascends higher and higher and finally circumambulates within less than two bow-lengths or even nearer.

The above lines from Ramkali present the best example of Sufi tradition which evolved over the period of two centuries, having its origin in the tenth/ sixteenth century and culminated in the twelfth/ eighteenth century poetry of Shah Abdul Latif, who is one of the great Sufi poets of the world.

