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DIVINE LOVE AND MYSTICAL QUEST: SUFI INFLUENCES IN THE POETRY OF ALLAMA IQBAL AND KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

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Abstract

This scholarly study delves into the exploration of Sufi influences in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam, focusing specifically on themes of divine love and mystical quest. Both poets, belonging to distinct cultural and geographical contexts—Iqbal from the Indian subcontinent and Nazrul from Bengal—express profound spiritual insights rooted in Sufi philosophy and tradition. The research employs a comparative analytical approach to examine how these two poets articulate and interpret concepts such as divine love (*ishq*) and the mystical journey (*suluk*) within their respective poetic oeuvres. Central to the analysis are the poetic symbols, metaphors, and allegories used by Iqbal and Nazrul to convey their spiritual experiences and insights, which often resonate with classical Sufi literature. Through a close examination of select poems from both poets, the study aims to highlight their shared reverence for spiritual unity (*tawhid*), the yearning for divine proximity (*uns*), and the transformative power of love in attaining spiritual enlightenment. Additionally, the research explores how their interpretations of Sufi concepts reflect broader socio-cultural and religious influences of their times, contributing to a deeper understanding of the universal appeal and enduring relevance of Sufi themes in poetry. Ultimately, this comparative analysis seeks to illuminate the nuanced ways in which Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam integrate Sufi influences into their poetic expressions of divine love and mystical quest, enriching our appreciation of their contributions to both literary traditions and spiritual discourse.

Keywords:

Sufism, Mysticism, Iqbal, Kazi Nazrul Islam

Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), one of the most influential Urdu and Persian poets of the 20th century, is renowned for his profound philosophical poetry, which has been translated into numerous languages, including English and Bengali. His works, such as *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, *Asrar-e-Khudi*, and *Bang-i-Dara*, reflect his deep engagement with spirituality, selfhood, and socio-political issues. Iqbal's intellectual pursuits took him to England and Germany, where he studied literature, philosophy, economics, and history. His poetry conveys a critique of materialism and an advocacy for a spiritual renaissance, drawing from Western philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Goethe, and Henri Bergson while being deeply influenced by classical Persian poets such as Rumi and Hafiz.¹ (Muhammad Iqbal).

Similarly, Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), known as the “Bidrohi Kobi” (Rebel Poet), played a transformative role in Bengali literature. As Bangladesh's national poet, Nazrul challenged social and political oppression, blending Islamic spirituality with modern sensibilities. His literary contributions span poetry, songs, essays, and fiction, incorporating themes of freedom, love, and revolution. Like Iqbal, Nazrul was influenced by Sufi philosophy, weaving mysticism into his poetic expressions. His fusion of Bengali ghazals with Arabic, Persian, and Urdu elements highlights his innovative approach to poetry.²

Despite their distinct literary and cultural contexts, Iqbal and Nazrul share a profound concern for human spiritual and intellectual liberation. Both poets engage deeply with Sufi philosophy, emphasizing themes of divine love (*ishq-e-haqiqi*) and the mystical journey (*suluk*). This study aims to explore the manifestation of Sufi influences in their poetry, addressing critical questions regarding their conceptualization of divine love, their portrayal of the mystical quest, and the socio-cultural factors that shaped their interpretations of Sufi thought. Employing a qualitative approach, this research examines selected poetic works to highlight how Sufism informs their literary expressions.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the manifestations of Sufi influences in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam, analyzing how both poets interpret and express themes of divine love and the mystical quest. It seeks to compare and contrast their use of key Sufi concepts such as *ishq* (divine love) and *suluk* (mystical journey) within their works. Additionally, the study examines the poetic symbols, metaphors, and allegories employed by Iqbal and Nazrul to convey their spiritual insights. Furthermore, it investigates how their socio-cultural and religious contexts shaped their interpretations of Sufi themes, offering a nuanced understanding of their mystical poetics.

1. To explore the manifestations of Sufi influences in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam.
2. To analyze how Iqbal and Nazrul interpret and express themes of divine love and mystical quest in their poetry.
3. To compare and contrast the use of Sufi concepts such as *ishq* (divine love) and *suluk* (mystical journey) in their works.
4. To examine the poetic symbols, metaphors, and allegories employed by Iqbal and Nazrul to convey their spiritual insights.
5. To understand how socio-cultural and religious contexts influenced their interpretations of Sufi themes.

Research Questions

This study seeks to examine how Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam conceptualize and portray divine love in their poetry, exploring both the similarities and differences in their depiction of mystical quests. It aims to analyze the poetic symbols, metaphors, and allegories they employ to reflect their understanding of Sufi philosophy and tradition. Additionally, the research investigates the socio-cultural and religious factors that influenced their interpretations of Sufi themes. Finally, it explores how the poetry of Iqbal and Nazrul contributes to the broader understanding of Sufi influences on literature in the Indian subcontinent.

1. How do Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam conceptualize and portray divine love in their poetry?

2. What are the similarities and differences in the depiction of mystical quests in their works?
3. How do the poetic symbols, metaphors, and allegories used by Iqbal and Nazrul reflect their understanding of Sufi philosophy and tradition?
4. What socio-cultural and religious factors influenced their interpretations of Sufi themes in their poetry?
5. In what ways do the poems of Iqbal and Nazrul contribute to the broader understanding of Sufi influences on literature in the Indian subcontinent?

Literature Review and Research Gaps

The exploration of Sufi influences in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam has garnered significant scholarly attention, revealing profound spiritual dimensions and literary significance in their works. Both poets, emerging from distinct cultural and geographical backgrounds, have intricately woven Sufi themes into their poetry, contributing to the rich tapestry of South Asian literature.

Allama Iqbal, often revered as the “Poet of the East,” extensively incorporated Sufi philosophy into his poetic corpus. His concept of *khudi* (selfhood) reflects a deep engagement with Sufi ideals, emphasizing self-realization as a conduit to divine enlightenment. Iqbal’s poetry, particularly in works like *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self), delves into the journey of the self towards the Divine, resonating with the Sufi pursuit of spiritual union. Scholars have noted that Iqbal’s interpretation of Sufism is not merely a passive reflection but an active, dynamic process intertwined with contemporary thought and scientific discourse.³

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh, similarly infused his poetry with Sufi motifs, though his approach is distinctively marked by a blend of mysticism and revolutionary zeal. Nazrul’s works, such as those found in *Agnibina* and *Sanchita*, express an intense yearning for divine union, utilizing allegory and metaphor to convey the soul’s longing for the Divine. His poetry reflects a fervent devotion to the mystical journey, portraying the

agony of separation and the ecstasy of union with the Divine Beloved. Nazrul's engagement with Sufism is characterized by an immersion in mystical and esoteric dimensions that transcend religious boundaries, reflecting a universal quest for spiritual truth.⁴

Comparative analyses of Iqbal and Nazrul reveal both convergences and divergences in their poetic engagement with Sufi themes. While Iqbal's Sufism leans towards philosophical self-empowerment, emphasizing the cultivation of the self as a means to achieve spiritual and political awakening, Nazrul's approach is more emotionally charged, intertwining mysticism with a call for social justice and resistance against oppression. Both poets, however, share a common reverence for the concept of *ishq* (divine love) and the mystical quest (*suluk*), central tenets of Sufi thought that advocate for the transformative power of divine love as a pathway to spiritual enlightenment (Rahman 87).⁵

The socio-cultural and religious contexts in which Iqbal and Nazrul composed their poetry significantly influenced their interpretations of Sufi themes. Iqbal's exposure to Western philosophy and his education in Europe informed his dynamic and process-oriented view of Sufism, integrating scientific and philosophical discourses into his spiritual framework. In contrast, Nazrul's experiences in colonial Bengal, marked by social and political turmoil, infused his poetry with a revolutionary spirit, where Sufi mysticism became a vehicle for expressing dissent and advocating for societal transformation.

Despite the rich body of literature examining the Sufi influences in the works of Iqbal and Nazrul, certain research gaps persist. There is a limited number of comparative studies that specifically analyze the themes of divine love and mystical quest in their poetry. Additionally, there is a need for more in-depth exploration of how socio-cultural and religious factors uniquely shaped their interpretations of Sufi concepts. A detailed analysis of the poetic techniques and literary devices employed by both poets to convey their spiritual insights would further enrich the understanding of their contributions to Sufi literature. Addressing these gaps would provide a more nuanced comprehension of the universal appeal and enduring relevance of Sufi themes in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Existing scholarship highlights the deep Sufi influences in the poetry of both Iqbal and Nazrul. Iqbal's poetic philosophy is closely tied to Sufi themes, particularly the concept of khudi (selfhood), which embodies self-realization as a path to divine enlightenment.⁶ Similarly, Nazrul's poetry resonates with Sufi motifs, expressing an intense yearning for divine union through allegory and metaphor.⁷ Scholars such as A.R. Khan emphasize that both poets advocate for the transformative power of divine love in their poetry, reflecting core Sufi ideals.⁸

However, certain research gaps persist. There is a limited number of comparative studies analyzing the portrayal of divine love and mystical quest in the poetry of Iqbal and Nazrul. Additionally, Sufi concepts in their works have not been extensively explored from a comparative perspective. Existing scholarship also lacks a detailed analysis of the socio-cultural and religious influences that shaped their interpretations of Sufi themes. Furthermore, there is a need for a deeper examination of their poetic techniques and literary devices in expressing spiritual insights. Lastly, a broader investigation into the universal appeal and enduring relevance of Sufi themes in their poetry remains an area of scholarly interest.

Theoretical Framework

The study of Sufism in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam requires an exploration of several interconnected theoretical perspectives. This framework draws upon key Sufi concepts, their relation to mysticism, and their adaptation in literary traditions, particularly in poetry.

1. Sufi Poetics and Mysticism

Sufism, derived from the Arabic root “suf,” meaning wool, represents a mystical path within Islam focused on achieving unity with the Divine. Early Sufis adopted woolen garments to symbolize their renunciation of worldly attachments, an ethos that directly influences their literary output (Muhammad Suhrawardi 8).⁹ Mysticism in Sufi poetry is closely connected to the inner spiritual journey, which involves an evolving understanding of Tawhid (the oneness of God), striving to reach the pinnacle of spiritual insight through the stages of Islam, Iman, and Ihsan (Schimmel 9).¹⁰

The mystical journey of the Sufi poet is depicted through various symbolic representations, such as the longing for divine union and the process of purification.¹¹ The mystical experience, known as *Mushahidah*, is the perception of religious truths that transcend conventional understanding, providing a deep basis for the spiritual metaphors used in Iqbal's and Nazrul's poetry.

2. The Role of Poetry in Sufism

Poetry has long been intertwined with Sufism, serving as a medium for expressing spiritual insights and meditative introspection. Ranjit Das notes that Sufi poetry embodies a union of spiritual reflection and creative expression, where mystical experiences are articulated through allegories, metaphors, and symbols (qtd. in Uddin 8).¹² Jalaluddin Rumi's famous assertion that "I am not a Jew, nor a Christian, nor a worshiper of fire, nor even a Muslim" emphasizes the universal nature of Sufi thought, which transcends religious boundaries (Uddin 8).¹³ The influence of Sufi poets such as Rumi, Hafiz, and Saadi resonates in the works of both Iqbal and Nazrul, shaping their spiritual visions and poetic forms.

3. Dhikr and its Mystical Role

Central to the practice of Sufism is *Dhikr*, the remembrance of Allah, which is a means of spiritual purification and connection to the Divine (Glasse 97).¹⁴ The practice of invoking divine names is essential to achieving *Ihsan* (spiritual excellence), which serves as the basis for the profound expressions of spiritual insight found in Iqbal's and Nazrul's poetry. The invocation of divine attributes through *Dhikr* enables the poet to transcend the ordinary, entering a mystical realm that deeply informs their literary expression (Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* 13:28).¹⁵ This connection between spiritual practice and poetic expression is essential for understanding how both poets integrate Sufi themes into their works.

4. Comparative Mysticism

A comparative approach to mysticism, drawing from the works of scholars such as Henry Corbin and William Chittick, allows for a deeper analysis of the metaphysical aspects of Sufism within the poetry of Iqbal and Nazrul. Their poetry can be seen as part of a larger tradition of mystical expression that spans various cultures and

epochs. Both poets use Sufi concepts to explore the universal quest for divine truth, infusing their works with a unique blend of personal spirituality and socio-political engagement. Their poetry, rooted in Sufi philosophy, offers insights into the transformative power of divine love and the mystical journey, reflecting their distinct socio-cultural contexts while engaging with a broader, cross-cultural mystical tradition.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, combining primary and secondary data sources to explore the influence of Sufism on the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam. The research is designed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which both poets articulate themes of divine love and mystical quest, drawing from the rich tradition of Sufi mysticism.

A key component of the methodology is a detailed literature review on Sufi poetry, focusing on the works of Iqbal and Nazrul. This review will help establish a theoretical framework for the study, encompassing relevant scholarly discussions on Sufism, poetic expression, and the intersection of these elements within the context of both poets' works. The literature review will also incorporate insights from Sufi poetics and comparative mysticism, as well as critical analyses of Iqbal's and Nazrul's spiritual and philosophical inclinations.

The next step involves a careful selection of representative poems from both Iqbal and Nazrul, particularly those that delve into the central themes of divine love (*ishq*) and the mystical journey (*suluk*). These poems will serve as the primary texts for analysis, allowing the researcher to examine how both poets engage with Sufi concepts and how these themes manifest in their poetic structures.

A thorough textual analysis will be conducted to identify the specific Sufi influences, poetic devices, and thematic coherence within the chosen poems. This analysis will focus on metaphorical language, symbolic imagery, and allegories that reflect Sufi mysticism. Through this process, the study will uncover the unique ways in which Iqbal and Nazrul employ these literary devices to express their spiritual insights and mystical experiences.

In addition, a comparative approach will be applied to identify both the similarities and differences in how Iqbal and Nazrul portray Sufi themes. This will provide a deeper understanding of their respective contributions to the broader mystical tradition, while also highlighting the distinctive cultural and philosophical nuances in their treatments of divine love and the mystical quest.

The study will take an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating perspectives from literature, Sufi studies, cultural studies, and religious studies. This will allow for a holistic exploration of the poets' works, providing insight into how their cultural and religious contexts shaped their expressions of Sufi thought. A contextual analysis of these factors will be pivotal in understanding the socio-cultural dynamics that influenced the poets' engagement with Sufi mysticism.

Finally, the synthesis of findings from the textual analysis, comparative study, and contextual examination will contribute to the broader understanding of Sufi influences in literature. The research will offer new insights into the role of Sufi mysticism in shaping literary traditions, particularly in the context of the Indian subcontinent, and will examine how these mystical themes continue to resonate in contemporary spiritual discourse.

Sufism in Iqbal: Iqbal's Critique of Sufism

In his writings spanning from 1900 to 1928, Iqbal's views on mysticism evolved significantly. Initially, he described mysticism as veiled metaphysics, emphasizing its role as a system of verification through personal experience (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1900, pp. 237-46).¹⁶ By 1908, he noted the influence of Vedantist and Buddhist ideas on certain forms of Sufism, equating their concepts of absorption and annihilation with pantheism (Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, n.d., pp. 83-89).¹⁷ In 1915, he reflected on Buddhism and Persian Sufism, viewing them as beneficial but transient influences akin to "nights in the days of life" (Iqbal, *The Letters of Iqbal*, 1977, pp. xxiii-xxiv).¹⁸ By 1917, he dismissed Hellenic-Persian mysticism as self-deception and nihilism (Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, 1917, pp. 250-51).¹⁹

During this period, particularly in a letter dated November 13, 1917, Iqbal discussed his initiation into the Qādrī Sufi order and criticized wujūdī Sufism as an alien import from ajam, attributing its origins to Buddhism (Nadwī Kī Nazar Maīn, 1917, p. 126).²⁰ In 1928, he criticized the term “mysticism” for its association with inner religious experiences, contrasting it with Muslim philosophy influenced by Greek thought and theology shaped by Magian dualism, while praising devotional Sufism for recognizing inner experience as a source of knowledge (Iqbal, *The Secret of the Self*, 2013, pp. 143, 77).²¹

Throughout his career, Iqbal’s perspective on mysticism evolved from a veiled metaphysical concept to a nuanced understanding of its philosophical and spiritual dimensions, influenced by both Semitic and Aryan traditions. He saw Sufism as a synthesis of these influences, evolving from a focus on will and intellect to emphasizing love as the supreme principle in creation (Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, 1909, pp. 97-117; Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1954, p. 83).²²

Iqbal and Pantheism

Iqbal criticized pantheism, equating it with waḥdat al-wujūd (the unity or oneness of being). He viewed pantheism as stemming from an intellectual interpretation of the universe and disapproved of the Sufi schools that embraced this perspective. During his time in Europe, Iqbal extensively studied the philosophies of Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Bergson, all of whom were influenced by Spinoza (Sirhind 1, 31).²³

Iqbal’s Critique of Persian Literature and Poetry

Iqbal criticized the literature and poetry of the Iranians, particularly that of Ḥāfiz, which he believed induced apathy and inactivity among Muslims in the 19th century. According to Iqbal, this contributed to their loss of vigor and prestige (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1998, pp. 146-47).²⁴ His critique of Ḥāfiz in *Asrār-i Khudī* stirred controversy, leading to accusations that he opposed not only Sufism but Islam itself (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1998, p. 222).²⁵ However, Iqbal clarified that he respected the Sufis and aimed only

to expose un-Islamic elements infiltrating certain Sufi circles (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1998, p. 227).²⁶

Iqbal also believed that philosophical influences on religion had led to a skewed view of God as immanent in creation, similar to the Hindu Vedanta, which he deemed incompatible with Islam (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1975, pp. 195-96).²⁷ He criticized certain Sufi schools for adopting these views and called for a return to a more original, less Persianized form of Sufism that aligned with the essence of Islam (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1986, p. 71).²⁸

Despite his critiques, Iqbal did not entirely reject Sufism. Instead, he advocated for its reinterpretation in a way that aligned with modern scientific and philosophical thought. He emphasized a form of Sufism that harmonized with contemporary psychological and physiological understandings (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1975).²⁹ His approach aimed to rejuvenate religious life through a dynamic engagement with faith, thought, and mystical discovery (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1975, p. 143).³⁰

Sufism in Nazrul

Nazrul's writings predominantly revolve around the theme of humanity, placing man at the forefront of his literary works. His human-centered approach reflects a religious inclusivity that transcends specific doctrines. Regardless of nationality, caste, or creed, Nazrul expressed deep affection for all people, valuing their religious affiliations throughout his life. His overarching concern was the welfare of society, recognizing the necessity of eradicating communalism for true freedom and humanist ideals to flourish in India. Nazrul believed that overcoming Hindu-Muslim animosity was crucial for India's liberation from British rule, urging all Indians and native leaders to unite in reclaiming their dignity and autonomy. He actively promoted friendship between Hindus and Muslims, vehemently opposing communalism through his songs and poems, where he harmoniously invoked Allah, God, mosques, temples, and churches. According to him, sacred texts like the Quran, Bible, Vedas, and Zendavesta served humanity, but secular consciousness

transcended any religious scripture, fueling Hindu-Muslim unity in India's struggle for independence.

Nazrul's literary works beautifully amalgamated Hindu and Islamic traditions, introducing ghazals to modern Bengali literature and composing bhajans and kirtans that crossed religious boundaries. In Dhumketu, he advocated for unity between Hindus and Muslims, declaring that places of worship should not divide people (Bhatia).³¹

His poems Kemal Pasha, Ronobheri, Bajichhe Damama, and Shat-el Arab exhibit a Pan-Islamic influence, particularly Shat-el-Arab, which glorifies the historic Muslim legacy amidst a lament for lost glory. In Bajichhe Damama, Nazrul rallied Muslims to reclaim their former greatness, urging them to uphold the values of Islam with courage and determination.

In addition to hymns in praise of Allah, Nazrul composed numerous naats honoring the Prophet Muhammad, widely sung during milads in Bangladesh today. His repertoire includes works like "Tora Dekhe Ja Amina Mayer Kole" ("Go and see, Amina is in her mother's lap"), depicting the Prophet as a radiant figure embraced by dawn, and "Saharate Phutlo Re" ("The morning has blossomed"), celebrating Islamic rituals such as Fateha Doazdaham, Moharram, and the two Eids.

Throughout his poetry and songs, Nazrul emphasized the obligations of a Muslim, from prayers and fasting to pilgrimage and charity. In "Namaz Poro, Roza Rakho," he extolled the virtues of these practices, while in "Hey Namazi Amar Ghore Namaz Poro Aaj" ("Hey devotee, pray in my house today"), he invited others to pray in his home, transforming it into a place of worship. In "Masjideri Pashe Amar Kabar Diyo Bhai" ("Brother, bury my grave beside the mosque"), he expressed a desire to be buried beside a mosque, where he could perpetually hear the call to prayer and the recitation of the Quran from his grave—an honor the Government of Bangladesh granted by burying him near the Dhaka University Mosque.

This comprehensive approach in Nazrul's writings reflects not only his deep spiritual and cultural connections but also his enduring commitment to fostering communal harmony and societal welfare.

Mysticism in Nazrul

Nazrul Islam, known as the “Bidrohi Kobi” (Rebel Poet) in Bengali literature, epitomized a mystic empathy with the world. Similar to the existentialist Albert Camus, Nazrul transcended religious boundaries, viewing the Creator from a non-sectarian perspective and seeking direct communion through mystical practices. His poem *Daridrya* illustrates this universal approach: “Hey daridrya, tumi more korechomohan/tumi more daniyacho Christer somman” (“O poverty, you have made me great, you have given me the honor of Christ”), where poverty symbolizes spiritual depth rather than material lack. Nazrul’s portrayal of Allah as “Rabbul-Aalameen” (God of the Universe), not limited to “Rabb Ul-Muslimeen” (God of Muslims), underscores his universalistic outlook beyond conventional religious boundaries. His works like *Chhatrodoler Gaan*, *Eid Mubarak*, *Foriyad*, and *Hindu-Muslim Juddho* reflect a broader canvas of concerns, promoting unity and the eastern concept of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*—the world as one family (Times of India).³²

Nazrul’s writings delve into the profundity of Sufi practices, where the quest for self-discovery leads to a profound connection with the divine. He envisioned Allah as an idea transcending form and attributes, aligning with the mystic concept of “Fana Fillah” (annihilation of the self in the Divine). His Bengali ghazals and devotional songs echo this sentiment of intense love and spiritual unity, where the seeker yearns to dissolve into creation (Haq).³³

Comparing Iqbal’s and Nazrul’s Poems: Sufism

It has been noted that both poets held strong beliefs in mysticism, and since the mystical aspect of Islam is known as Sufism, it is clear that both poets share similarities in their thoughts on Sufism. According to Sufism, man is inherently a source of knowledge. Through self-inquiry, individuals seek to discover the eternal truths of life by understanding themselves. When individuals perceive themselves as egoless beings, they can establish a direct connection with God. The question arises: How can Sufis achieve a direct relationship with their beloved God? Is it through devotion, or through a journey where individuals relinquish all belongings to seek and feel God’s presence? Nazrul addresses this journey using the

term “Murshid,” stating, “Towhideri murshid amar muhammader nam..oi nameri roshi dhore jai Allah’r pothe [The name of my guide in the path of monotheism is Muhammad... holding onto that name, I walk on the path of Allah],” meaning Nazrul acknowledges Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as his guide to reach Allah. Similarly, Iqbal recognized Rumi as his guide and said, “The light of the Quran is hidden in his (Rumi’s) breast, The cup of Jam fades in the presence of his mirror.”

Thus, it is evident that both poets chose the path of journeying to reach God, purifying their hearts, and embracing the spiritual truths of life. Additionally, both poets embarked on their journeys as travelers in search of themselves, pleading to God to accept them in their helplessness and fulfill them through His acceptance. Nazrul wrote in “Otol Pother Jatri”:

Far desert gorge
Seek to know in the midst of the unknown
...
I waved back and forth
Drag me into the abyss, dead lord. (Islam, “Otol Pother Jatri,” 86)³⁴

Allama Iqbal similarly wrote as a traveler to his Lord in “The Traveler’s Request”:

Prayer to the terrestrial and the celestial world’s Lord
That I may again become happy with paying homage to Him
May He remain happy in the world like rose,
Whom I have always held dearer than my life
Blooming, my heart’s bud may become a flower!
May this traveler’s request be accepted!³⁵ (Iqbal, “The Traveler’s Request”)

According to Sufism, one must purify oneself to establish a direct relationship with Allah and receive His blessings upon discovering oneself devoid of even a trace of ego or pride. Sufis believe this is the only way to transform from a mere human into a vessel of divine grace. Iqbal expressed his thoughts clearly on this aspect:

ALLAH has bestowed on me science long
His praise, reflection, charm, and song.
The flood of light that makes its show
On true and faithful Muslim’s brow

With grandeur same is quite replete
That fills being's soul and makes it complete.³⁶ (Iqbal, "Hope")

Nazrul emphasized that Allah has gifted us His entire creation and spread our inner potential throughout His wonderful creation so that we can feel ourselves everywhere:

Oh dear, as long as I hold you in my arms,
Find me, give me as much creation as spread

...
To hold me, you are pulling me to spread in your creation.³⁷ (Islam, "Se Je Ami," 17)

Both Nazrul (in poems like "Notun Chand") and Iqbal (in poems like "Allah's Oneness") boldly declared the oneness of Allah in their works. Nazrul, as a Sufi, expressed that he would be completed as a pure soul when closely united with Allah:

Friend! How can I quench my thirst if I don't get you fully?
I myself came in the form of imperfection, leaving perfection behind.³⁸
(Islam, "Ovedhom," 19)

Though both poets explored the unity of religions and the human spiritual journey towards the divine in their poems, they differ in their individuality. Nazrul, especially in selected poems like "Notun Chand [New Moon]," "Se Je Ami," "Ovedhom," "Ar Kotodin," "Keno Jagaili Tora," "Shuili Fuler Mala," and "Vangar Gaan," focused more on themes of self-inquiry, self-discovery, self-transformation, the universality of spiritual experiences, and expressed a deep longing to be close to God, which are highly relevant aspects of Sufi thought, more so than in Iqbal's poems. Nazrul wrote in "Why Did You Awaken Me":

In the vast, directionless world of the great samadhi, I know not where I was.
Suddenly, in search of me, which force did I touch?³⁹ (Islam, "Why Did You Awaken Me," 29)
Know this, O cupbearer, yesterday the earthly world came to me,
I asked, "Is my beloved still in this world?"⁴⁰ (Islam, "How Much Longer," 33)

In Iqbal's poetry, the realization of self (*kebudhi*) is a central element in terms of Sufism. Allama Iqbal spent his life as a poet in pursuit of the divine, spiritual truth, and self-realization, reflecting a deep

understanding of Sufism. Influenced by classical Sufi poets like Rumi and Attar, Iqbal used a contemplative and philosophical style to explore Sufi philosophy in his poems. The mystical touch is a complementary element in Iqbal's poetry in exploring Sufi philosophy, as he wrote:

I did not feel attachment to the garden Of paradise
When I drank the fiery cup of Intellection
I remained in pursuit of the Truth of the Universe
I exhibited the excellence of elegant Thoughts.⁴¹ (Iqbal, "The Story of Man")

In contrast, Nazrul, as a Bengali poet, differed with emotional intensity, portraying himself as a lover of Allah rather than a servant, and expressing a passionate sense of urgency in his approaches. Nazrul wrote in "How Much Longer":

The milkman whistles, and the nightingale sings, startling me awake,
With a gesture, I understand my beloved calls me to the grove of desires!⁴² (Islam, "How Much Longer," 32)

Thus, a unique difference is found between Iqbal and Nazrul's selected poems in terms of self-realization and communal thoughts. Iqbal's poetry delves into the concept of self (khudi) and its relation with the divine, urging individuals to find themselves and strive for spiritual growth. He wrote in "The Heart":

Now it looks like the "Arsh" now like the Ka'bah
God! Whose lodging is the abode of my Heart
It has its own junun and I have my own Sawda

.....

It gains freedom after being caught in the Net of love
On being thunder-struck, greens up the
Tree of the Heart.⁴³ (Iqbal, "The Heart," 44)

In Nazrul's poetry, he incorporates Sufi themes to discover the eternal truths of life and convey social and communal messages to establish justice. Nazrul wrote in "Abhedam":

Playing, playing, suddenly I catch a glimpse of my own shadow,
What is this ugly form devoid of beauty and harmony?
Immediately, I wish to slay that hideous, graceless demon,
My rebellion is for creating equality—there is no difference there.⁴⁴
(Islam, "Abhedam," 19)

In Iqbal's selected poems like "Punjabi Muslim," "Preaching of Islam in England," "Oneness of Allah," "The Decline of Muslims," "Death of the Ego," etc., the actual image of Islam in different parts of the world is portrayed. Sometimes, his poetry focuses on universal and cosmopolitan outlooks. Iqbal wrote in "Preaching of Islam in England":

If Franks embraced the Muslim faith,
Revealed to Mustafa, sundry and all:
There won't be change in Muslim's state
The wretch would still remain a thrall.⁴⁵ (Iqbal, 2012, 25)

In this regard, it can be said that Nazrul emphasized national issues in his poems and aimed to unify all religions under the supreme power known as Almighty Allah, without delving into religious issues from different beliefs. However, it is also true that he invoked Muslim heroes from different parts of the world in his various poems to promote peace. Nazrul wrote in his famous poem "Kamal Pasha":

O, the crazy mother's boy Kamal has worn a cap,
A tumultuous uproar has risen in the demonic realm, brother Kamal!
...
At the foot of worn-out lives, they crawl,
Today, in the sky, a sense of blood-sunshine shines bright! Bravo, youth!
Bravo!⁴⁶ (Islam, "Kamal Pasha")

Conclusion

In Sufism, three key principles—*Isma* (submission to the Will of Allah), *Iman* (faith), and *Ihsan* (excellence in worship)—serve as fundamental components of the mystical path. Other essential elements, such as *Takwāh*, *Tasawwuf*, *Dhikr*, mysticism, and *Tariqa*, are also deeply embedded in the Sufi tradition. Both Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam embrace these principles in their poetry, reflecting their adherence to the core tenets of Sufism. While their interpretations of Sufi philosophy, language, narrative style, and views on the establishment of Islam may differ, both poets consistently reject Pantheism and emphasize devotion to Allah and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as their spiritual guides (*murshid*). Their works, steeped in mystical thought, underscore their shared commitment to

Allah and their vision of unity among people, transcending religious and social divisions.

The poetic legacies of Iqbal and Nazrul stand as significant contributions to South Asian literature, offering profound insights into Sufi thought and its impact on both personal spirituality and broader socio-political issues. Their poetry reflects personal journeys towards the divine, interwoven with broader cultural transformations. This study, through the lens of Sufi philosophy, aims to shed light on the unique contributions of Iqbal and Nazrul to mystical literature. Their exploration of divine love and the mystical quest continues to resonate with readers, highlighting the enduring significance of these themes in literary traditions across cultures.

Notes and References

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- ² Islam, R., *Biography of Kazi Nazrul Islam*, Bangla Academy, 2023, p. 35.
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- ⁴ Islam, R., *Biography of Kazi Nazrul Islam*, Bangla Academy, 2023, p. 112.
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- ⁶ Aziz, K. K., *The making of Pakistan: A study in nationalism*, Sang-e-Meel Publication, Lahore, 2002, p. 45.
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- ⁸ Khan, A. R., *Sufi Thought in Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam: A Comparative Study*, Dhaka University Press, Dhaka, 2005, p. 78.
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