

## **The Mystical Philosophy of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai A Study of Shah-Jo-Risalo**

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**Abstract** *The mystic poetry of Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai was compiled by his disciples in Sindhi language. It was largely circulated among common folk due to mystical concepts, the peculiar taste of spiritual music and cultural stories of seven women. These women were presented as heroines in the poetry due to their self-awareness and deep insights. The mystical notions, spiritual themes, sequential melodies promote humanity and tolerance. It has been translated into Urdu, English, and other languages. Therefore, readers deeply explore the treasured subject that promotes equality and discourages the intolerance, religious differences, and gender discrimination. The creative and multi-dimensional poetic sense of taste awakens the soul to connect the mercy of the divine and promote social fabric in society. The study of poetry is highly needed for the young generation to be lovers of the entire creation. It gives an essence to hinder social discriminations that cause terrorism and suicide attacks over the world. Peace and love are the basic needs of present generations. Favorably, poetry enriches kindness and sympathy among people beyond the boundaries. The present study covers various mystic and enriching topics that were discovered from the different chapters of Shah-Jo-Risalo. The hand-written and printed manuscripts were included in the study that consisted of five thousand three hundred and forty poetic couplets and thirteen hundred thirty fascinating melodies. Thus, the piece of research is a great subject of mysticism and Sufism studies.*

**Keywords:** Mysticism, Spiritual Realism, Humanity, Shah-Jo-Risalo

### Introduction

Explicitly and implicitly explaining, Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai is narrated as a Saint and poet of mysticism. He was born in the year of 1668, at the small village familiarly known as “Hala-Haveli” in district Matiari, Sindh-Pakistan. He traveled throughout the sub-continent and conveyed the true meaning of divine and mercy. Finally, he had selected the mound which was known as “Bhit” in native language; that surrounded by sandy-dunes green lands and an entire atmosphere of mystic experience.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai has institutionalized the treasure of mysticism, and composed his poetry in Sindhi language. Further, his composition of poetry as classified into didactic, devotional, romantic or epic genres. Besides to this, verses were valued not only for their syntactical splendor but also philosophical depth and their ability to touch hearts and minds. The melodious chapters (Sur) as framed into the spiritual-music familiarly known as “Shah-Jo-Raag”. According to some oral traditions, Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai as engaged two musicians namely Atal and Chanchal who had both arranged the poetry into melodious chapters (Sur). The disciples of Bhattai are acknowledged as “Bhattai-Fakeers”, and enthusiastically involved in singing the spiritual-music “Shah-Jo-Raag” from the desert to sing the verses with melodious combination of indigenous musical instrument “Dambooro”. Shah Bhattai as composed poetry and engaged fakirs to sing the poetry Manzoor Kanasro.<sup>1</sup> While the poetry was arranged in a shape of book, and regarded as “Shah-Jo-Risalo” into two forms- the hand-written as well as the published manuscript of the printing press. Dr. Hotchand Molchand had discovered through the different sources, and explained that Ernst Trump was the first person who had brought “Shah-Jo-Risalo” out of obscurity into lime light.<sup>2</sup> He got two old preserved manuscripts which he got compared and corrected by the local literate to compile his version, then that was printed and published in the German City Leipzig in 1866. Hence, the following is the detail of

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<sup>1</sup> Manzoor Kanasro, *Legacy of Shah Latif*, trans. Anwar Pirzado (Sindh: Sindhica Academy and Culture Department Government of Sindh, 2007), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Hotchand Molchand Gurbuxani, *An introduction to Shah Muqqadmah Latif*, trans. Dr. Habibullah Siddique (Sindh: Institute of Sindhological University of Sindh, 2009), 134.

published “Shah-Jo-Risalo” that was largely circulated among the people at the national and international level.

- a. Shah-Jo-Risalo complete published 1867 A.D from Bombay
- b. Shah-Jo-Risalo by Dr. Hotchand Molchand Gur Buxani 1923 A.D
- c. Shah-Jo-Risalo by Kalyan Advani 1958 contains 1577 couplets and 42 Vaees
- d. Shah-Jo-Risalo by Agha Yaqoob 3038 and 195 Vaees
- e. Shah-Jo-Risalo by Dr. Nabi Bux Khan Baloch 3320 Vaees

Parting with this, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai also illuminated the experience of silence by enriching of the spiritual and social fabric through attachment with the souls of mankind. In this perspective, the same fact, the greatest Persian poet Jalal-u-din Rumi great mystic poet illustrated the concept of silence by dint of mysticism. Irrespective to this, Coleman Barks explaining that Rumi has devoted much more attention to silence, especially at the end of poems where he gave the words back into the silence they had come from (Khamush in Persian).<sup>3</sup>This is a real fact that mysteries which flow through him. Hence, this is the only poet who has paid such homage to silence in this respect. Further, he was once asked, “Isn’t it a strange that you talk so much about silence?” He answered, “The radiant one inside me has never said a word.” Here are some closing lines from this collection that included the silence after the poem as an integral part of the poem. The deep silence of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai turned into the mystic-voice containing the language of humanity beyond geographic boundaries; the gender differences, and the religious difference. His poetry being circulated with the melodious indigenous music and the source of inspiration of people around the social world.

### Literature Review

Dr. Durr-e-Shahwar greatly elucidated that every Sur of Shah-Jo-Risalo is divided into the sections that vary in length from the two to twelve, and covering on the subject matter with respect to such the Sur.<sup>4</sup>Each section is mystically arranged into the various themes and metaphors.

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<sup>3</sup> Coleman Barks, *Thoughts upon Silence: Rumi Bridge to the Soul, Journey into the Music and Silence of the heart* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Durr-e-Shahwar, *The Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai*, (Hyderabad: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1988), 43.

For instance, Sur “Marui” is one of the longest Surs covering the twelve sections each section contains from the nine-twenty-one couplets (Baits) and ending with one or more melodies (Vaees). The two smallest Surs including Ghatu (one section), and Ripp (two sections) while the first part having twenty-eight couplets (Baits) and one melody (Vai), the second portion comprising of nineteen couplets one melody (Vai). In some Surs like Sasui as included the ten melodies. Professor Annemarie Schimmel has explained in intellectual labor that mystical thought in Bhattai’s poetry revealing out the human sufferings and well-being of mankind on social world.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, the Sufis love of yore. Besides to this, Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai realized the purifying power of sufferings; and making the heroines as the example for the soul purification through the difficult journey of deserts of this social world or through of affliction until they reach union with the Divine Beloved at the moment of death.

Shah Latif Bhattai has close affinity to the original mysticism of Hallaj that has been condensed in Attar’s story. In the first Sur of “Shah-Jo-Risalo” Bhattai Latif has expressed the sign of the true lover and symbol of union in this manuscript. In this context, Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai travelled the various parts of Sindh and adjacent areas. However, his poetry amalgamated with depth-feelings as well as the practical experiences and so forth. His poetry is composed in Sindhi language. Professor Ameena Khamisani gave an opinion that the first manuscript was thrown in “Karar Lake” with some mystic intentions, but nothing has been reported for its authenticity.<sup>6</sup> Besides to this, there are some general statements.

Thus, Shah latif’s devotees and disciples felt repent and grieved deeply at such the action, meanwhile he allowed them to prepare another manuscript that was taken from two or three manuscripts which were under custody of his other disciples, but a devoted disciple - Mai Niamat assisted much more in collection of verse known as “Shah-Jo-Ganj” or “Shah-Jo-Risalo”. However, “Shah-Jo-Risalo” initiated with transcendence and immanence of Almighty Allah and praise of the last Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him). In addition to this, every Sur of “Shah-Jo-Risalo” focuses on the spiritual melodies

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Annemarie Schimmel, *Pearls from the Indus, Studies in Sindhi Culture* (Hyderabad: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1986), 115.

<sup>6</sup> Professor Ameena Khamisani, *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai* (Hyderabad: Bhitshah Cultural Centre Committee, 1994), 21.

including “Kalyan and Yaman Kalyan” are related with the spiritual journey, peace and soul searching in love of Allah as played the spiritual melodies in this way. His poetry covers the Divine spirit, spiritual thrust and knowledge; secret of mankind life; love and longing and so forth. Parting with this, Shah Latif’s teachings speak of an opportunity for a social life that is bestowed by Allah to man for purification of soul in this social world. His poetry is a reflection on man’s longing to reach at the higher level in social life so as to meet Creator- Almighty Allah. In similar manner, His poetry is largely based on the allegorical strategy and discussing the ordinary folklores and tales including Suhni-Mehar, Sasui-Punhoon, Marui-Umer, Noori-Jam Tamachi, Sorath-Raidyach, Moomal-Ranu, and Leelan-Chanesar that were the more common during his days meanwhile the characters of such tales allegorically illustrate the mystical symbols and aspects of spiritual life and journey of man in this earth-Ali Ahmed Brohi.<sup>7</sup> Irrespective to this, Elsa Kazi as explained in Sur (Suhni) the relationship between the soul of mankind and Divine spirit, and relied on the entire scarification of life in love of Allah.<sup>8</sup> Thus, this indicates the union with beloved and shun of worldly lust. In this Sur (Sasui and Punhoon), Shah Latif Bhittai defined the predicament of the lover in separation of beloved. In this respect, the folk-lore of “Leela and Chanesar” expressing the covetous nature of the queen and sold soul of king for worldly pleasure and further to accumulate worldly riches instead of heavenly. Thus, the story symbolized as king’s fall from grace and the Queen’s languishment’s, repentance and entreaties on account of sold her husband for the transitory riches of the world. For understanding of mystic couplets given in “Shah-Jo-Risalo” that determine out human soul, mind, circumstance and so forth are taken as substrata for his Sufic effusions popular tales and stories that are known through the length and breadth of the country.

### Research Methodology

For this research work, the content analysis as employed to study the poetic verses of the Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. The original hand-written and published manuscripts of “Shah-Jo-Risalo” referred as a primary source for this research task. The ten published “Shah-Jo-Risalo” included seven of Sindhi language and three versions

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<sup>7</sup> Ali Ahmed Brohi, “*Shah Latif*”, *Poet of Love, Bhittai the Message of the Master*, ed. Akhund Abdul Hameed (Hyderabad: Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai Cultural Centre Committee, 1993), 67.

<sup>8</sup> Elsa Kazi, *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif* (Hyderabad: Sindhi Adabi Board, 1996), 8-9.

of English language. The oral information as referred from the shrine with support of the regular rituals that are celebrated on regular, weekly, monthly basis and annual time frame. Besides, the manuscript of “Shah-Jo-Risalo” as deeply explored during the current study covering the forty musical chapters (Surs), five thousands three hundred forty verses/couplets and thirteen hundred thirty-four melodies (Vaees). The concepts relevant to mysticism as derived analytically. The mystical concepts of the poetic verses discussed as the below:

### **Bhittai’s Mystic Poetic Verses**

(1)

They will take you in wilderness and will bury you in dust,  
All livings shall test death’ think of it, the one weak,  
That you brought from there, set her free

لے جائینگے ویرانے میں، دیگئے تجھے دعا  
کل نفس الذائقہ الموت، کر یاد اسے تو ذرا  
جسے ہے اٹھا کر لیا، کر آزاد اس دکھیا کو۔

### **Mystical sense**

The poet defines that all the living things and creatures are created by Allah. The creation of human being is superior due to its testing of deeds. Every soul has to depart while each one will be buried. This mortal life is transient stop-over in the human journey from ‘infinity’ back to ‘eternity’. We must therefore, struggle to win the esteem and approbation of Creator Almighty. Thus, mysticism is neutral path to follow the love for mankind and does not give any harm to someone when we have to depart from here without any intimation.

(2)

Lightening is flashing on my kinsmen’s country remembering them  
I spent night in tears; don’t oppress the prisoners, O Umer

ماروؤں کے دیس میں، آج ہی بجلی چمکی  
یاد میں ان چرواہوں کے، روتے رات ہی بیتی  
جو ہے قید میں تیری، اسے نہ دے تو تکلیفیں۔

### **Mystical meaning**

Shah Abdul Latif elucidates the spiritual aspect that Marui as a woman from the deserted area reflected and memorized the beauty and fragrance of her homeland. Marui says the simplicity of life is happily living in their shabby shacks and eating wild desert grains. The shining

of deserts and fragrance of flowers were compared with the inner beauty and enlightenment. The life hardships and troubles created by someone could not stop to patriotism. The worldly things are not long-lasting but only the spiritual truth is proved as bless and bounty.

(3)

Rains and villages of my homeland are always, in my heart,  
Pain of the separation from my kinsmen torments me

یاد ہے دیس ملیں، ساون رات کی برکھا  
دل میں ہے اجیارا، جیڑا غم سے دک رہا ہے۔

### Mystical meaning

Shah says the homeland is like a paradise for each soul who believes in the human love and tolerance. The monsoon represents hope of an ordinary being for Divine blessing that could come anytime. The patience, parsimony and prudence of the desert dwellers are gloried as lesson for an ordinary being not to despair or lose heart because of the hardships of life.

The favors that my herdsmen showed me in Thar,  
How can I forget them, and cast away my shawal?

استے ہیں احسان، جن کا انت نہ کوئی  
ان گنوں کی خاطر کیسے، سر سے اتاروں لوئی

### Mystical sense

The character of Marui is comprehensively devoted to her land. Mystic experience is the same those who love their origin and do not have temptation by anyone throughout the life. It is the inner beauty which reflects from the attitude and behavior. The poet equates a spiritual guide on considering the divine path. The covering cloth is symbolized to human mercy. Those who help and cover others, and they are covered by divine here in this world as well as on the dooms day.

(4)

They are really blessed o brother, who keep awake,  
It removes 'says latif' rust from the hearts.  
Make effort to get up at dawn, o young man

جاگ کے ساری رین بتائیں، اعلیٰ وہ انسان  
دل کا سارا زنگ اتاریں، ایسے ہیں گوان

ساجن! رکھنا دھیان، صبح کو اس دکھیا کا۔

### Mystical approach

The mystical concept of the verses revealed that Allah is close to human beings. Man is awakening for a consciousness and embracing the Divine presence. The beloved is a divine in true sense that is achieved through a systematic sanitization of soul, rigorous self-discipline, diligent meditation and contemplation. This would, however call for qualifying four stages of spiritual ascension or observance of all religious duties as enshrined in Islam.

(5)

Lakho had undertaken to protect honor of we Oad woman.  
He will not harm us, we are already harassed people

ہم دکھیارے اوڈ ہمارے، لاکھو ہیں ننگیاں  
منہ نہ پھیرے گا پہلے ہی، جیون کی جنجال۔

### Mystical explanation

The metaphor shows the fall of soul from the Divine grace for having exchanged faith and loyalty for mundane extravagance. This exhorts an ordinary seeker to keep the moral fiber intact and resist mundane lures. Despite sever hard circumstance and difficulties the true lover would never go away from the destination. The destination achieved through the spiritual path and social cognition.

(6)

There are millions of lakhos but he is of singular kind,  
The Oad community got relieved of all fears after coming under his protection

یوں تو لاکھوں لاکھ ہوئے پر، اس کے اور ہی ڈھنگ،  
اوڈ رہے جب سنگ، تو ہو گئے سب محفوظ ہیں۔

### Mystical Expression

The experiences of spirituality and mysticism offer the inner strength where man achieves the sublime. At the stage of awe-inspiring confers strength whether someone is alone or there is majority of the people along but his connection is cultivated to divine. While divine is a safer path that always leads to success.

(7)

For some person's grief is a precious commodity,



Taking up a big sum in loin cloth, one should go and trade in grief

درد دل انمول سکھی ری! درد سا اور نہ دھن،  
بھر لیں درد سے دامن، درد کے ہم بنجارے بن کر۔

### Mystical Explanation

The melodious divine evidenced that pain and suffering is the blessed one. The suffering offers deep insight and legendary wisdom to mankind. While worldly luxuries always reason for the sluggishness and tyranny. The Sufi thought proves pain and suffering as an experience of awakening and tolerance. This tolerance is the path of humanity. It has been offered by hardships and difficulties that remained as friends in the life.

(8)

O miserable Sasui, forget all embellishments and the bridal bed,  
Look for the footprint on plains so that you find Aryani there

بھول جاہار سنگھار اے سسئی، تے سج سہاگ،  
مل جائیگے نقش پا بھی، چھان لے دشت کی خاک۔

### Mystical meaning

The hope that human being expressed in life and Allah would someday have mercy and forgive the sinners and seekers. Mankind must be ready to endure all privations and be resilient resisting all mundane desires and temptation to sin so as to focus on spiritual enlightenment. Travelling and nomadic is recollection tolerance eternal love. Footprints in deserts are evidences for continuing the experience of travelling that bringing out an awakening of consciousness.

(9)

Don't enquire about Hoat and Harho Mountain,  
Penetrate in the woods impatiently,  
Sasui! You are in good company of sufferings,  
Cross Mountain passes, so that, o woman!  
You reach in beloved's company

ہوت کو پوچھ نہ ہاڑے میں تو، جنگل کی لے راہ،  
درد ہے تیرے سنگ تو پھر کیا، دشت جبل صحرا،  
جس سے تیری چاہ، ملے گا وہ پر بت میں۔

**Mystical Expression**

The Sufi experience is climbing and travelling through the difficult paths to mountains. Hoat is asked not to search your loved one in the worldly things. He has also utilized the metaphor of lake sludge, to explain the dirt and filth that exists in the world. These pearls are parables of cherished values that never die.

**Conclusion**

The treasured mystic words, phrases and blessed concepts are well-articulated in the “Shah-Jo-Risalo”. The universality of spiritual realm described the stages of mysticism as enlightened for the human being to lead their soul to a virtuous of life by professing piety, repentance, empathy that would bring peace and serenity to soul and the overall attitudes of generations on demonstrating the tolerance and human love. The flavor of reading poetic verses from “Shah-Jo-Risalo” and listening “Shah-Jo-Raag” both offered the mental calmness and tranquility. The much more reading of poetic verses offered the depth insight on true love to mankind. Thus, such the text-book of humanity as translated into the different languages. It is high time to include the text-verses of “Shah-Jo-Risalo” as syllabus of mysticism and Sufism Studies.

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