

Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi Annual Lecture 2014

**SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IDEAS IN NORTH
WESTERN INDIA DURING THE EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY: ANALYZING THE VERSES OF
THREE MAJOR POETS**

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(Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi, a pioneer Punjabi settler in California, spent almost half a century in the USA. He lived in California for more than half of his life from AD 1902 to AD 1945. The annual lecture has been instituted by former Professor and Head, Punjab School of Economics, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; Punjab, India, Dr. Autar Singh Dhesi who is grandson of Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi.

Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi was the eldest of Dewan Dhesi, 16th direct descendant of Chauhs Dhesi who had owned about 3500 acres of fertile land under his control in the Manjki area of Jalandhar district. Mahan Singh Dhesi's mother belonged to an aristocratic family of Jadali near Phagwara associated with Maharaja Ranjit Singh, later bestowed with the title of Zaildar. Mahan Singh Dhesi was married to the eldest daughter of Bapu Waryam Singh, headman (Lumberdar) of village Virk, near Phagwara. Mahan Singh Dhesi's only son, Milkha Singh also inherited the title and property of Bapu Waryam Singh as his adopted son. Milkha Singh Dhesi's wife belonged to direct descendant's house of a princely state centered in Phagwara, covering vast tracks of present districts of Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Nawanshahar and Hoshiarpur. One of the famous rulers of this state was Raja Hakumat Rai. Mahan Singh Dhesi's only daughter, Kartar Kaur was married to the youngest son of Sardar Bahadur Sardar Chur Singh Zaildar of Cheema Khurd near Nur Mahal. Chauhs Dhesi had a number of illustrious descendants in the 17th and 18th century. The most renowned among them has been Baba Sang (Jodha) Dhesi, a renowned Sikh saint associated with Guru Arjan Dev. He preached universal brotherhood and oneness of mankind. He was ninth direct descendant of Chauhs Dhesi.

Thus wrote Bhai Gurdas, Saint Paul of Sikhs, about Babaji:

Dhesi Jodh Husang Hai Gobind Gola Haas Milanda Vaar II, Pauri 23

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(Jodha Dhesi with Noble Face; His Devotee interacts with grace)

Bhai Sangtu Dhesi was a commander(General) of Guru Hargobind's army. Bhai Bakat Dhesi, a writer in the court of Guru Tegh Bahadur was assigned the duty to record activities of young Guru Gobind Singh. Bhai Bakat Dhesi's grandson General Nanu Singh Dhesi(10th descendant of Chaus Dhesi) was a distinguished army commander of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur who decisively defeated the army of ruler of (Sirhind) Fatehgarh Sahib.

With the rich heritage, Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi embodied the lofty civilizational values of altruism, charity and compassion for others. All along, he generously contributed to various activities initiated in California for social and educational uplift of rural Punjab. As an illustration of his compassion and concern for the welfare of his fellow beings, Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi allowed surgeons to remove muscles from one of his legs to repair the limbs of a virtually crippled man from his village. He did this despite forewarnings of the surgeons that he might suffer circuiting pain in his leg later, which he did for his remaining years. Yet, as a token of his magnanimity he bequeathed a part of his estate to his co-villager. Earlier, he could not bear a young nephew of the beneficiary of his generosity and large heartedness being refused entry to the US as young man's real uncle was not in the position to furnish the needed surety as per the then prevailing law. Later, he continued to assist the young man to complete his study to become a dental surgeon who served in the US armed forces during the World War II. One can go on enumerating such examples of his generosity and altruistic behavior. Editor)

During the eighteenth century, north western India witnessed the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, the rise of regional powers and foreign invasions. At the level of the ruling elite, a political crisis was manifested in acute factionalism among nobles and a struggle for prime ministership (*wizarat*). An ever increasing burden of land tax was accompanied by the failure of the state to maintain the twin institution of military ranks (*mansab*) and revenue assignments (*jagirs*). The resultant popular uprisings of Sikhs, Jats and Satnamis succeeded in mobilizing such plebeian elements as peasants, artisans and petty traders.¹ These armed insurrections enabled the rebels to uproot the foundations of the Mughal administrative structure and to assume political power in several areas. Nadir Shah not only plundered the wealth of the Mughal aristocracy, but also tried to secure the allegiance of the helpless provincial governors. Ahmad Shah Abdali, the ruler of Afghanistan, led his armies across the Indus many a times and, in the process, removed the remnants of the Mughal rule and annexed parts of north western India. Taking advantage of a fluid political situation, the Marathas made an abortive bid to bring north western India within the

ambit of a rapidly expanding empire. The Sikhs, while facing the repressive measures of the Mughal governors after the defeat of Banda Bahadur, organized themselves into armed guerilla bands under a new crop of leaders. They established autonomous rule over several pockets in Punjab with the help of the mechanisms of collective resolution (*gurmata*) and protection tribute (*rakhi*). A fresh political crisis, which was characterized by internecine conflict among the Sikh potentates (*misdars*) and the recurrent incursions of the Afghan hordes from Kabul,² created conditions for the emergence of the kingdom of Lahore under Ranjit Singh.

What appears to be rather paradoxical, the above tumultuous political scenario did not have any perceptible adverse impact on the cultural landscape. In fact, the region and period stands out for experiencing a virtual revolution in the domain of ideas. This particular trend is clearly manifested in the prolific contributions of three major poets who composed their verses in three different languages ñ Bulleh Shah in Punjabi, Shah Abdul Latif in Sindhi and Nazir Akbarabadi in Urdu. It is true that they lived in different regions, expressed themselves in different languages and inherited different cultural traditions. Yet they shared a number of common traits. They lived during the same time span, were born in the same religious tradition and chose to write in the vernaculars. While essentially adhering to the spirit of Islamic spirituality, they refused to see any merit in sectarian ideologies. They consciously distanced themselves from the elite classes and identified themselves with the common man. They possessed a wide social outlook as well as catholic vision. At the same time, they were deeply rooted in the local culture, as shown by their intimate familiarity with the local historical phenomena ñ myths, legends, beliefs, customs and modes of life ñ that were preserved in the folklore of their respective regions. Not surprisingly, we find a considerable affinity between their dominant concerns. The present exercise seeks to examine their socio-religious ideas, with a view to underscore their contribution to the ongoing larger process of cultural fusion in South Asia. We need to remind ourselves that the poetry under study enjoyed immense popularity till the recent times, notwithstanding the cultural fault lines that appeared with the emergence of the colonial state and the bourgeois socio-religious reform.

Mystical Conception of God

At the initial stage of their spiritual quest, the sufis endeavour to understand the nature of God, with particular reference to the phenomenon of creation. In the view of Bulleh Shah,³ there was a time when the world had not been created. Only God existed as a hidden treasure, but there prevailed an amazing void. Displaying Himself as unitary being, God came into the state of the One (*wahdat*) so that a veil lay between the whole

and part. He declared, 'Let there be and it became.' (*kun fayaqun*). As a result, many were born out of the One. In fact, God assumed a garb to become a man and this phenomenon was replicated repeatedly, leading to a massive expansion of creation.⁴ Looked at in another way, God put the veil of Meem over His face, so that Ahad (the One) was transformed into Ahmad (another name of Prophet Muhammad) i.e. from formless He became manifest. Concealing Himself behind the veil and keeping His head covered by the canopy of cosmos, God peeps at His creation out of sheer love.⁵ He abides in all human beings irrespective of their race and class. He abides in kings and princes, masters and slaves, ascetics and beggars. He also abides in wild animals like leopards and deer. He is not visible to the uninitiated and worldly. But to those who have developed their spiritual consciousness, He is manifest in all forms of creation. At different places and moments, he appears as friend and enemy, Laila and Majnu, preceptor and disciple, robber and robbed, a judge (*qazi*) and warrior (*ghazi*). At one place, He builds a mosque for prayer, while He erects a temple for idols at another. At one place, He assumes the form of a hermit, while He takes the garb of a Shaikh at another. At one place, He is found on the Muslim prayer mat, while He is seen reciting the Hindu scriptures at another.⁶

Exercising His unique power, God plays on the celestial flute and produces the unstruck melody (*anhad*). These wondrous notes strike deep into the heart of the seeker, who is uncontrollably attracted to the divine flute player. This master of flute, like Krishna and Ranjha, is in tune with the whole world. Unseen from the human eyes, He reveals peerless beauty through the ethereal music. Everyone hears the sound, but few understand its meaning. Anyone who succeeds in comprehending the unstruck melody (*anhad*) becomes enamoured of the flute and rejoices like the peacock. The strains of the flute, being simple, provide attributes (*sifat*) to the essence of existence (*wujud*). This flute possesses five to seven stops, each of which emits a distinctive note. But a single strain breathes through each stop. It is this particular strain which has bewitched the seeker, who feels elated at the end of his troubles and arrival of the Beloved at his door.⁷

Quite often, the sufi poets treat the seeker as a female lover and God as the male Beloved. Ever since she fell in love with her Beloved, she sees him every where and none else. Having lost control over herself, she discards her existence and ego. She feels that the Beloved exists from head to foot within herself and this joyful feeling induces her to remove her veil and dance in the open.⁸ When a union with the Beloved is attained, it is like the taste of jaggery to the dumb. Her eyes are able to behold the Beloved from a distance of hundreds of miles. She imagines being

trapped in a charming bait. She dwells in the abode of oneness (*wahdat*) which is a state of unlimited wonder. The pursuit of love is not easy. As turbulent as the water of four rivers, it either flares up into a flame or freezes into ice. The lover is pulled towards the sound of drums of love (*ishq nagara*). Severing her natural ties with her parents and siblings, she establishes a close kinship with her Beloved. She sacrifices her life and sleep for the Beloved who resides far away in the skies.⁹ Though she does not boast of any qualities, yet her love is sincere. She feels that her mind and body belong to her Beloved. But she does not reveal this secret lest she should be sent to the gallows like Mansur. She intends to unite with her Beloved through ecstasy (*masti*) and thus acquire eternal bliss. When the Beloved appears in her eyes, waves of her delight rise in a flood and a stream of her blood surges out. Love transforms her body into roasted meat, water of her eyes into wine and bones and nerves into a rebeck (*rabab*).¹⁰ She carries a heavy burden of this love on her head with great effort, as its single particle is heavier than a mountain. Her intention of attaining a passionate union with her Beloved has been confirmed by Jalaluddin Rumi after satisfying himself from the scriptures.¹¹ Love does not care for caste or creed. Nor does it pay any heed to the sermons of theologians (*mullahs* and *qazis*). Ever since she learnt the lesson of love, she distanced herself from the canonical law (*shariat*), holy books (Quran and Vedas), sacred places (mosques and temples) and conventional rituals.¹² Ever since the flower of love blossomed in her heart, she began to experience the thrills that make her dance to a rapturous beat. At times, she feels that love is acting like a poison which has afflicted her with a fatal disease. As she nears death, she prays for the arrival of the physician who is none other than the Beloved.¹³

Inseparability of Love and Separation

The sufis conceive manís/womanís relation with God in terms of love. A seeker develops a relation of passionate love for God. He/she understands that this quest of love involves pangs of separation. In fact, there can be no love without the painful experience of separation. The nature of this pain has been explained by narrating the experience of legendary lovers of north western India viz. Hir, Sohni, Sassi, Marvi, Momal and Lilan. Sassi has acquired a considerable space in the mystical poetry of Shah Abdul Latif, the most prominent sufi poet of Sind.¹⁴ As soon as she learns that Punnu has been carried away by his relatives without informing her, she falls into a state of shock. In her desperation, she rushes out of her native town of Bhambhor and embarks on a fateful journey towards Kech, with a view to catch up with Punnu and his companions. As she passes through a waterless tract ñ comprising patches of desert,

hills and scrub ñ she is exposed to the vagaries of nature. She neither has a sheet to protect her head from the burning sun, nor does she have a blanket to protect her body from the cold winds at night. Owing to the increasing physical fatigue, her limbs become weak and her joints imbibe pain. Her eyes become moist and her head turns cloudy. Her feet are crushed by pointed stones. Her soles are pierced by thorns so that the flesh is reduced to shreds.¹⁵ Since she is faced with terrifying loneliness, she begins to converse with the natural elements in her immediate surroundings ñ sun, wind and mountains. Often falling into a state of introspection, she tries to identify the causes of her travails. She is confronted by her mother and friends. How could she, a homely Brahmin maiden, fall in love with a Baloch who was an unknown stranger and who was on a short visit to Bhambhor. Sassi's answer is simple. When she sees Punnu for the first time, her heart is smitten by the arrows of love and she fails to restrain her natural modesty. If Sassi's friends had seen Punnu, they would have been amazed at his beauty and would have asked her to continue her love for the stranger. Sassi asks her mother to break the spinning wheel, because it is not possible for her to return to her parental home and revive her life as a virgin.¹⁶

During the course of her journey, Sassi is assailed by questions regarding the causes of her travails. But her physical exhaustion and mental agony pushes her into confusion. She cannot blame the camel drivers, because they were strangers to her and acted on the behalf of their masters. The real culprits were Punnu's kinsmen, who had come with the secret mission of abducting her beloved. Since she was ignorant of their intentions, she performed her duty as the host and extended a warm welcome to them. If she had the slightest inkling of the plot, she would have tied the camels with her own hair and thus demobilized them till the next evening. Yet Sassi restrains herself from cursing Punnu's kinsmen. At another moment, she attributes her desertion to the fact that she, being an ordinary Brahmin girl, could not be accepted by the high ranking Balochis on account of social differences. Another reason could be the fact that her marriage with Punnu had not been formally solemnized, otherwise she would have vigorously asserted her matrimonial claims and damned Punnu's kinsmen in strong words.¹⁷ In the final analysis, she blames herself for sleeping so soundly as to be deaf to the sound of camel drivers saddling the camels and grunts of the beasts themselves. At another moment, she prefers to blame her fate instead of any earthly being. However, she is more categorical in drawing a distinction between her home town Bhambhor and Punnu's native place Kech. She declares her intention of setting fire to Bhambhor, as it is in this town that she was struck with betrayal, while the locals remained ignorant about it. In contrast, she

refers to Kech and its inhabitants ñ Kechis, Balochis and Hots ñ with sweet tenderness, because the region and its people are associated with her beloved. In fact, she treats herself not only less than the shoes of the Balochis, but also as their chattel, servant and slave.¹⁸

In spite of her woes, Sassi continues to groom her love for Punnu. It is the passion of love that enables her to bear indescribable suffering and nurture the hope of uniting with her beloved, even though there is remote possibility of such a happy climax of her tortuous journey. She wishes to dress like a bride and apply henna of Maler on her hands, so that she is able to reach Punnuís house in Windar and live with him as his wife.¹⁹ While preserving these hopes, she knows that suffering is built into love and that the two are inseparable. In love, she is required to place her body on a bed of spikes and shed tears of blood. When she is unable to walk on the road leading to her beloved, she must crawl on her hands, knees and feet.²⁰ Ever willing to forget the injustice done to her, she refrains from asserting the claims of marriage, because she does not wish to shame Punnu among his people.²¹ She seeks the help of sun to convey an urgent message to Punnu, beseeching him to meet her before she dies. If death overtakes her before Punnuís arrival, her body would be eaten by vultures sitting on trees that would look like gallows.²² However, such pessimism is a fleeting thought as Sassi displays indomitable will even in acute adversity. She is determined to die in pursuit of her beloved, as it is unthinkable to return alive without achieving her goal.²³ When the Balochis declare her mad and warn her of an imminent death, she expresses her willingness to sacrifice her life.²⁴ At this stage, Latif intervenes to reconstruct Sassiís struggle in terms of sufic framework. He advises Sassi to stop physically searching for Punnu in the deserts and hills, but to experience his presence in her heart. She must travel with her heart, not with her feet because Punnu is residing in her heart and not at his home in Windar.²⁵ Those who undergo suffering in the path of love, feel the stones as soft as silk. They are happy to find stones cutting their flesh into pieces of meat, which can be offered to the dogs and crows. In fact a lover must die before death. Such lovers are never subdued by death and are destined to live forever.²⁶ It is self annihilation that leads to an eternal union with the beloved.

Jogis in the Sufi Discourse

The Jogis, who had renounced the world in their single minded search for the divine union, figured many times in the contemporary documentation on Islamic spirituality.²⁷ Jogis and sufis were seen debating on spiritual matters, each trying to overpower the other in argument. Yet, we can discern between them a strong undercurrent of mutual affinity.

In fact, our poets held the Jogis in high estimation and adopted a sympathetic attitude towards their way of life. In their observation, the Jogis do not pay any attention to their personal appearance. They keep long hair and smear ash on their bodies, while their clothes are covered with dust. They do not stay at one place for any reasonable period of time. Perpetually on the move, they are seen undertaking pilgrimage to their sacred centres (*tiraths*). While travelling, they do not carry clothes, food and goods. They always travelled at a fast so that, if any one is left behind, it is not possible to catch up with them. When they encamped at any spot, they collect twigs and thorns and, thus, light a smouldering fire (*dhuni*), which is a distinct practice of their path. When they leave a camp, they do so in the morning and give out a loud signal indicating departure, but without revealing their destination. They are known to travel towards Hinglaj on their way to Nani and,²⁸ it is heard, they even reach Dwarka in order to achieve their cherished object (*murad*). They are also known to undertake the journey to Qalat. Though they carry a begging bowl in their hands, yet they were adept in suppressing all worldly desires. They also carried a wooden gong (*naqus*), whose sound was more melodious than any other musical instrument. This simple device is not only packed with compassion and pain, but it also emits eternal sounds with mystical meanings. When they play on it, the listeners feel intoxicated and start shedding tears. They are constantly engaged in chanting God's name and sacred charms. The melody of their chanting is singular and unparalleled. The musical notes of the singer are enchanting, while the lyrics are beyond any attributes (*sifat*). Whether Sohni or Diyach, their harmonious voice conforms to the nature of their doctrines. Even their cry of departure (*bang-i-rahil*) possesses a magical quality, which can either kill or burn the listener. Its impact is so powerful that the listener loses control over himself. It overwhelms the heart and takes away the soul. This kind of spiritual music appears unique, but perhaps it is not confined to Hind and Sind.

The world is dark, but the Jogis have illuminated it with their manifestation of light (*jalwa-i-nur*) and spark of fire (*shola-i-naar*). Their disposition emits light of beauty (*nur-i-husn*). Having discarded physical pleasures, they have embraced the woes of universal love. They have mastered the art of revealing the divine nature (*lahut*). They attract people by their sweet voice, which permeates with divine secrets. The sheer elegance of their spiritual ideas exercises a powerful influence on the listeners, who even lose control over their senses (*hosh o hawas*). They possess the power of extracting pain being suffered by their followers. They remain static in all circumstances, standing above all disputes and controversies (*qil o qal*). The object of their smouldering fire (*dhuni*) is to burn every ego and lower self, so that their followers imbibe the lesson

of humility and patience. While following the path of asceticism and severing all worldly connections, they immerse themselves in the pursuit of love (*ishq*) and create the fragrant air of ambergris (*hawa-i-inbarbez*) around themselves. Averse to developing social relationships, they scrupulously conceal their principles and mysteries. That is why a large part of their beliefs and practices have remained a secret, while a relatively small part is known. They seek solitude so that they can immerse from head to foot in love. They nurture the pain of love which, in fact, is a malady which smoulders day and night. They have no worries as their path is guided by love. They are friends of God who burn their bodies and hearts in the blaze of love. Since they adhere to the principle of self annihilation, they do not see any difference between a small organism and the large universe (*juz o kul*). They are a part of every thing, yet they are detached from all. They are both far and near.²⁹

Bulleh Shah visualizes the divine Beloved as Ranjha, the male protagonist of the famous Punjabi love story. But this Ranjha figures in two different garbs ñ cowherd (*chak*) and ascetic (Jogi) ñ that correspond with the two different stages in his tumultuous life. In the first stage, he was employed as a cowherd by Chuchak (Hir's father and a *zamindar* of Jhang Siyal) to graze a herd of buffaloes. The poet, speaking as Hir, portrays the cowherd as holding a staff in one hand and carrying a blanket on his shoulder. He adopts this lowly profession not to make a living, but to pursue his love for his employer's daughter Hir. He has no interest in worldly goods like cattle, milk and curds. Nor is he affected by hunger and thirst. His sole aim is to unite with Hir.³⁰ Since Hir is forcibly married to a youth belonging to the clan of Kheras, Ranjha gives up his job as a cowherd and, walking all the way to Tilla Banath, enrolls himself as a Jogi. How does he look like in his new garb? He shaves his face, bores his ears, puts a thick black thread (*seli*) around his neck and rubs ash on his body. Wearing a saffron robe and blowing a conch, he enters Rangpur in order to meet Hir. He faces stiff opposition from two villainous characters, the Qazi and Hir's uncle Qaidon. Fortunately for him, Sehti (Hir's sister-in-law) sees through the guise of the Jogi and, being afflicted with the same disease of love as the visitor, succeeds in arranging a meeting between the lovers. Hir, who has been suffering from the pangs of separation, is filled with immense excitement. She declares a firm resolve to go along with the Jogi, after applying a sacred mark (*tilak*) on her forehead and thus adopting his new path. She does not wish to stay at Rangpur any more and, once she leaves, she will not retrace her steps. In the eyes of the world, Ranjha is a Jogi. But for Hir, he is the friend of her heart. She can not recall the circumstances in which she fell in love with him. She was charmed by him, because he had spread the net of love (*ishq*) by his sweet

talk and created mysterious knots in her heart. Though people regard her as foolish (*kamli*), yet she alone has truly recognized the Jogi. All the disputes regarding her marital status would come to an end as soon as he embraces her with lakhs of good omens (*lakhan shagan*). Her aunts are not expected to taunt Hir, as the Jogi arrived at Rangpur in accordance with a decision of destiny and the grace of God. He is not only a beloved, but a veritable divine light (*nur ilahi*) and plays on the flute of unstruck melody (*anhad*). He is not only a Jogi, but a magician who has given the cup of spirituality to all. When Hir drinks it, she becomes eternally happy (*nihal*). She feels that she is married to the Jogi, but the people are ignorant about it. It is owing to the blessings of Panj Pir that she becomes a possession of the Jogi.³¹

Remembering the Prophet and Martyrs

Our poets strictly adhere to unity of being (*wahdat-ul-wujud*) and a passionate love for the Supreme Being. But they do not deviate from the basic tenets of Islam in any manner. Nazir Akbarabadi,³² the popular Urdu poet of Agra, pays rich tributes to Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Ali, besides emphasizing the significance of the profession of faith (*kalima*) in the life of Muslims. He shows unlimited reverence for Muhammad on account of being last of the prophets and for receiving the revelation of the Quran. Owing to his unique qualities as the head of the Muslim community, he illuminated both the earth and paradise. He was privy to divine mysteries, exercising authority over life and death. The sky is impressed at the land which has been sanctified by his feet. The Muslims are not worried about resurrection (*hashr*) as the Prophet is sure to act as intercessor (*shafi*) between them and God.³³ The Muslims are advised to recite day and night the profession of faith (*kalima*), which establishes the oneness of God and prophethood of Muhammad. It is not only a pillar of support for the Muslims in both the worlds, it also lends luster to natural phenomena ñ earth, sky, sun, moon, stars and gardens of paradise. It provides light to the Muslims even in the darkness of their graves. It enables the Muslims to face the day of judgement, to get relief from the burdens of their sins and to face interrogation at the hands of Nakir and Munkir. It enables the Muslims to travel across the narrow Pul Sirat, to secure the intermediacy of the Prophet culminating in forgiveness for their sins, to gain entry into paradise and to enjoy its pleasures. It is the greatest prayer for the Muslims, who have received it owing to the blessings of the Prophet.³⁴ In addition to the Prophet and profession of faith (*kalima*), the Muslims are expected to show reverence towards Hazrat Ali, as this act of devotion will bring them close to God and the Prophet. Hazrat Ali is admired for his bravery as a warrior, particularly his role in the battle

of Khaibar. He is lauded for his generosity, as he did not hesitate to give such gifts as gold and camels. What is equally important, he had acquired a high status in the domain of spirituality (*darya-i-maarifat*). He was reputed for possession miraculous powers. A lioness was able to recover her cubs owing to the supernatural intervention of Hazrat Ali's tomb. A Hindu lad of Agra, who was a devotee of Hazrat Ali, recovered his hand which had been cut off owing to religious prejudice. The repentant parents of this boy not only converted to Islam, but also undertook a pilgrimage to Karbala.³⁵

The month of Muharram holds special significance for the devout,³⁶ who wishes to be near Madina at this time of the year. He asks the dyer to dye his apparel in black, which symbolizes mourning. He feels extremely sad on remembering the death of Prophet Muhammad's grandson in tragic circumstances. The occasion provides him an opportunity to introspect on the battle of Karbala. To begin with, he curses Yazid for inflicting indescribable cruelties on Husain and his followers. He hopes that Yazid would not see a happy Id from then onwards as a just retribution for his tyrannical acts. The associates of Yazid are equally guilty of unpardonable crimes. The betrayal of the people of Kufa is highly condemnable. At the outset, they accepted Husain as their king and pledged their support to him. But they performed the ignoble deed of siding with Yazid and thus sold their trust for petty gain. Not only this, they went to the extent of refusing water to the sufferers. Husain and his followers, who fought with Egyptians swords, displayed unparalleled bravery and forced their enemies to tremble. The warriors who were fighting with Husain, did not flinch even a bit. Hassan, who wished to be by the side of his brother Husain, was not destined to do so. The princely brothers, while laying down their lives, remembered their valiant father Ali. The role of Hur, who swore loyalty to Husain, is worthy of note. He remained undeterred in the face of acute adversity. He believed that if God chose to give suffering to some people, He also gave them the strength to bear its burden. Declaring his own intention to bear all he could, Hur fell like a hero and became a martyr, covering himself with glory. While dying, he reiterated his faith in Prophet Muhammad, even though his beard and teeth had turned red with blood. When Husain and his companions received martyrdom, they reached paradise where they were welcomed by maidens with crowns and garlands. At the same time, a dove flew to the tomb of Prophet Muhammad and conveyed the sad news, asking him to rise and bring the tyrants to book. The entire episode remains a mystery in the eyes of the devout. He consoles himself with the thought that God kills those whom he loves the most. Even otherwise, warriors and horses ñ whether they defend forts or fight in the open battlefield ñ have a short life and their ultimate home

is paradise. They came from God and went to God. It is God who determines their fate. These thoughts fail to mitigate the agonizing grief of the tragedy. The woeful deaths are mourned by all categories of beings ñ humans in their homes, wild beasts in the forest and angels in the sky. The tragedy is so enormous that any person, who is not somber and distressed, will be deprived of Godís favour.³⁷

The seeker is required to understand that the pursuit of love can lead to his untimely and unnatural death. It is Godís sovereign power over His creation, which is reflected in the death of several earthly beings, who were quite steadfast in their love for the Divine Being. In the sufi discourse, we come across a long genealogy of martyrs, each of whom met his end in tragic circumstances. God forbade Adam from consuming wheat, but then He sent Satan (*shaitan*) after him in a manner that he was expelled from heaven in disgrace. God willed Isa to be born without a father, while Nuh was pushed into a massive deluge. Musa was made to climb Koh-i-Tur. Ismail was slaughtered. Yunus was swallowed by a fish. Yusuf was thrown into a well, while his brothers were held guilty of the crime, elevating the victim to a high status. Sulaiman was made to work in a furnace. Ibrahim was thrown on a burning pyre. The body of Sabir was infested with worms. Hassan was poisoned to death. Mansur was hanged on the gallows. The gall bladder of Rahab was pulled out. The head of Zakariya was cut with a saw. The throat of Sarmad was slashed. Shams was made to declare, 'By my command rise up!' and, as a punishment, was flayed from head to foot. Shah Sharf was turned into a wandering mendicant and made to stand in water for twelve years. Before the martyrdom of Hassan and Husain, their water bags were eaten by rats. Individuals like Nimrod and Phiraun, who dared to establish themselves as God, were wiped out of existence. Similar examples of Godís omnipotence were found in the Hindu religious tradition. In the battle between Kauravas and Pandavas, eighteen divisions of soldiers were decimated. When Ravana abducted Sita, Hanuman set fire to Lanka and plundered the royal palace. This was followed by Ramaís invasion and the destruction of Lanka. Krishna, who stole the butter of the Gopis, dragged Raja Kansa by the hair and dashed him to the ground. Harnaksh built a heaven, but he was killed at its entrance. Finally, the Mughals were deprived of their power and were replaced by the beggars who wore tatters.³⁸

Dealing with Social Identity

A rebel like Bulleh Shah was unable to reconcile with the social divisions that were based on religion, race, caste and region. These were Hindus and Muslims, Shias and Sunnis, long haired ascetics (*jatadhari*) and shaven headed mendicants (*munni*). They followed different belief

systems and ritualistic practices and, while observing them, adopted a narrow and rigid attitude. This anxiety to construct distinct social identities for themselves was reflected in different customs ñ modes of giving names, methods of slaughtering animals and ways of disposing the dead bodies. The diverse methods of observing these customs cause sectarian disputes (*jhagra*). In fact, such a situation has been a long standing uproar (*qadimi shor*). Bulleh Shah, being a sufi, refuses to accept the label of any social identity.³⁹ Since he consciously adopts the path of peaceful coexistence (*sulh kul*), he distances himself from all social groups and religious communities ñ Hindu or Muslim, Shia or Sunni, devout or infidel, saint or sinner, virtuous or wicked, puritan or libertine, settled or nomadic, satiated or hungry, covered or naked. Neither does he believe in any holy book, nor does he accept the sanctity of any sacred place. He does not claim to have discovered the mysteries of religion. Impervious to joys and sorrows, he has no interest in consuming wine or hemp. He does not attach himself to any natural element viz. earth, air, water and fire. He does not affiliate himself with any race, Arab or Turk. He does not boast of any connection with the cities like Lahore, Peshawar, Nagaur and Nadaun. Neither does he have a specific name, nor does he know who he is. However, he is certain that he is the progeny of Adam and possesses the same essence as the first man on earth.⁴⁰ Having discarded all forms of ego (*abhiman*), he sits in the spinning session (*trinjan*) for collective spiritual activity. His eyes are fixed on the Quranic verse 'I am near the royal vein' (*nahno akrah*). He is devoted entirely to the love of God, who has manifested his pure beauty (*pak jamal*) leading to enchantment among His seekers.⁴¹ He has received appropriate guidance from his mentor Shah Inayat and, as a result, surrendered at the true court (*sacha darbar*), becoming a sweeper in the service of God.⁴² He receives the calls of sublime knowledge from the heavens as well as Abdul Qadir Gilani, which were communicated to him by his preceptor Shah Inayat who was based in Lahore.⁴³ Bulleh Shah, who was born in a Syed family, dissociated himself from his high caste and identified himself with the lowly placed Arains, the caste to which his mentor Shah Inayat belonged.

If we look at the social structure in the city of Agra, which might have been substantially replicated in the urban centres of north western India, we are struck by the diversities and inequalities. No two individuals are alike. The differences are caused by several factors viz. power, wealth, occupation, learning, religion and morality. In spite of these differences, there is an underlying common factor i.e. all of them are essentially human beings. Recognition of this universal fact not only ensures peace and stability, but also enables individuals to fulfill their obligations towards God as well as fellow beings. In order to appreciate Nazir Akbarabadi's line

of argument, we need to look at individuals at the two opposite ends of the social scale. On the one end, we see the king who possesses unlimited power and wealth, so that he is entirely autonomous and is able to satisfy his wants and whims. On the other end, we encounter the poor beggar who is forced by his dire circumstances to beg for bits of food and, thus, be dependent on the generosity of others. Yet one cannot lose sight of the fact that both, the king and beggar, despite the stark contrast in their worldly condition, are human beings. The domain of religion is no different, as the people follow different religious creeds and canons. There are several categories of Muslim mystics ñ *abdal*, *qutb*, *ghaus* and *wali* ñ who travel on the spiritual path,⁴⁴ with the aim of uniting with the Supreme Being. They have made spectacular achievements in the field of revelation and miracles (*kashf o karamat*) with the help of their puritanism and penance (*zuhd o riyazat*). But there are others who deny the existence of God and instead adhere to infidelity. The world has seen demonic individuals (Firaun, Shaddad and Nimrod) whose arrogance reached such a pitch that they claimed to be God. Yet both categories of men ñ godly and ungodly, believers and unbelievers, religious and irreligious, pious and impious ñ are human beings. Further, there are people who are virtuous in their conduct and, therefore, guide others on the path of honesty and decency. In contrast, there are others who follow the devil in their acts of violence and deceit. Those who are religious minded contribute to the construction of the mosque and go on to serve as congregational leaders (*imam*), besides offering the prayers (*namaz*) and reciting the Quran. But there are men who are so morally bankrupt as to steal the slippers of the devout. If there is a man who sacrifices his own life for others, there is another who would kill others with a sword. There is a merchant who travels with his goods, but there are dacoits who strangle him with a noose. During the normal course of our lives, we undergo experiences that enable us to see human beings in a wide range of roles ñ clowns, judges, lawyers, witnesses, musicians, bridegrooms, shopkeepers, buyers, hawkers, palanquin bearers, servants, dancing girls and their patrons.

The poet of Agra came across people with opposite characteristics ñ handsome and ugly, fair and dark, moral and degenerate, good and bad. The rich people are able to spend their wealth on costly apparel which is made of silk and velvet. They lie on new and soft beds that are covered with sheets of fresh flowers (*phoolon ki sej*). As they sleep, they cling to the chest of their lively sweethearts and enjoy themselves in hundreds of different ways. On the other hand, the poor are clothed in tatters and lie in the dirt. Is it not a surprising spectacle that a man is a thief, while another is a police officer. It is men who prepare a dead body for burial, covering it in a shroud (*kafn*) after duly washing it. It is

men who accompany the dead to the graveyard, reciting the profession of faith (*kalima*) while crying uncontrollably. How surprising, both the dead person and the handlers of his corpse are human beings. The society comprises men who sit at the opposite ends of the pole ñ from the elite (*ashraf*) to humble (*kamina*), from the king (*shah*) to minister (*wazir*), from the preceptor (*pir*) to disciple (*murid*), from the reputed (*sahib izzat*) to the infamous (*haqir*). The best and the worst among us are both human.⁴⁵

Material Basis of Human Condition

The most important factor in human life is the amount of money in one's pocket. It determines all aspects of human experience ñ political structure, philanthropic activities, social attitudes and individual behaviour. Though the dominant role of money is clearly visible, yet only the sharp minds understood this reality in its complexity. It is with money (*kauri*, *paisa*, *zar* and *rupiya*) that all comforts and joys arrive, while all wants and afflictions depart. Members of the ruling class maintain large establishments that comprise stables, elephant yards (*feel khanas*) and chariot houses (*rath khanas*). They lay gardens and orchards with tanks and fountains, besides tall trees of cypress (*saru*) and colourful flowers (*nargis*, *nasreen* and *samoa*). They also construct bridges, wells and inns. They raise armies and employ soldiers. They build palatial bungalows with shining walls that appear to be plastered with silver. These grand structures have not been raised by man, but by money. Inside they are furnished with fabulous curtains and cushioned beds. The rich wear fine clothes that are tied with a golden sash (*patka*) around the waist. They wear showy turbans with golden bands. They ride on horses whose saddle (*zeen*) is decorated with bunches of pearls (*moti*). They imprison exotic birds (*qamri* and *bulbul*) in a cage for their amusement. Apart from milk and curds, they eat dainty dishes like *malpuras*, *mohan bhog*, *halwa* and *kachoris*. They enjoy every moment of life as if it was one of the joyous annual festivals (*diwali*, *dasehra*, *basant* and *holi*).

Money enables one to derive happiness from travel and music (*sair o tarb*). One can win over an estranged beloved, because money can achieve what cannot be done by polite pleading. It can turn a stony heart into wax. One can attract the attention of moon faced beauties and purchase sexual favours. All forms of pleasure ñ music, dance, beauty, love and friendship ñ can be bought with money. A person who has money is treated as reliable (*ahl-i-yaqeen*). He is addressed with respect as Lalaji, Bhaiyya Ji and Chaudhari. A money lender without money is treated as a thief. An ordinary man, who acquires wealth, becomes Sethji. He is surrounded by account books and whatever he says is accepted as the

gospel truth. It is because of money that we see a virtual fair (*mela*) and jostling crowds in the bazaars of the city. A man, who is as good as a donkey, goes from shop to shop, if he has cash in his pocket. People adopt different occupations and put in great physical effort in order to earn money. Merchants travel to hundreds of countries to earn profits from commercial transactions, soldiers wear arms so as to kill and labourers toil hard to make both ends meet. It is not surprising that people go to any extent for the sake of money. They can accept abuse without any protest and give up their sense of shame (*sharm o haya*) in lieu of money. So much so that they would not hesitate to pull down a mosque if the crime promises to bring some monetary gain. If they find a small coin lying in filth, they would pounce to pick it with their teeth. Money is the beloved of all categories of people ñ king and minister, affluent and beggar, old and young. It attracts them in large numbers just as a piece of jaggery pulls a horde of flies.⁴⁶

In complete contrast to the pleasurable implications of prosperity, poverty makes people suffer in several ways. This truth is applicable to all categories of the poor. Poverty (*muflisi*) does not spare any one on the grounds of profession, religion and gender. Take the case of a physician (*hakim*) who was doing well owing to the patronage of Nawabs and Khans.⁴⁷ As soon as he becomes poor, nobody cares about him even though he is as good a doctor as Isa and Luqman. In fact, his medical knowledge (*hikmat*) disappears with the arrival of poverty. Individuals who were recognized as scholars (*alim fazil*) not only tend to forget even the profession of faith (*kalima*), but also begin to read Alif as Bey. A teacher, who gives instructions to the children of poor parents, fails to get rid of poverty all his life. A painter (*naqqash*), on becoming poor, ceases to get any work. Not only does he fail to decide the colour of his paintings, he also loses the colour of his own face. When a lover becomes poor, his beloved does not let him come near herself and, if he dares to appear at night, she turns him out fearing molestation. A good looking prostitute, whose price stood at one thousand, becomes willing to hire herself for a small coin (*dang o diram*). Since no male is attracted to her, she roams around offering kisses at the rate of two pice (*kauris*) each. A poor dancing girl earns ridicule instead of appreciation for her art. She cannot even tell the rate of her performance, as her heart is not in its place and her head covering (*dupatta*) is torn. She earns just two *tankahs* for dancing from evening to morning, whereas others receive four times that amount. She finds it difficult to meet her basic needs. If she earns a *dhela*, she spends it in the following manner ñ 1 *damarhi* on pan, 1 *damarhi* on *massi* and 6 *dams* on water supply. Having planned her day's meager budget in this fashion, she is quick to realize that her minute distribution of expenditure

leaves nothing to be spent on food. The fate of a poor singer (*kalawant*) is no better. Carrying a simple stringed instrument, he flits from house to house with the hope of earning a small measure (*pau ser*) of flour. But poverty has taken such a toll of his senses that he sings Rag Bhabas at the time stipulated for Rag Bhairavi.

A poor man lives in a miserable condition. No one listens to what he says. No one pays regard to his profession or birth (*hasb o nasb*). In fact, no one is willing to recognize him by face. He falls in his own estimation owing to poverty. He is forced to listen to things he has never heard before. His house is in a dilapidated state. Spiders have created large cobwebs in the corners of the roof. The bricks are crumbling, while the chains and bolts have been sold away. Only the stones remain in their place. There is no fuel in the hearth and no water in the pitcher. An atmosphere of mourning prevails as if his grandmother had died. Such an intense sorrow is understandable in the wake of a death. But in a poor man's house, the inmates are found wailing without any bereavement. Poverty has become his shroud (*kafn*) and he feels that he has been buried alive. Poverty has destroyed his sense of discrimination between lawful (*halal*) and unlawful (*haram*), besides wiping out the sense of dignity (*sharm o haya*). Since he has no work to do, his closest relatives ñ wife, daughter and son ñ treat him as good for nothing (*nikhattu*). As if this humiliation is not enough, he is often addressed as a donkey or an ox. His poverty is writ large on his poor physical bearing ñ torn clothes, long hair, dry mouth and yellow teeth. His body is covered with a thick layer of dust and, thus, he appears like a prisoner straight from jail. When he goes to a public function (*majlis*) where free food is distributed, he has to face immense public degradation. At the time of distribution of bread (*roti*), he is given just one, whereas the rich are given four. If he dares to ask for more, he is severely admonished without any reason. But since his hunger has not been overcome, he is willing to give up his life for each piece of bread. It is not surprising to see poor people fighting among themselves to grab bits of food, just as dogs fight over a bone. If a poor man fixes the marriage of his daughter, he cannot purchase any dowry and, for this fault, he is ridiculed even by the sweepers. If he arranges the marriage of his son, there is no illumination or musical band. The groom's mother follows the marriage party with a soiled sheet (*chadar*) on her head, while the party is surrounded by vagabonds (*shohdas*) and eunuchs (*hijras*). The servants of the house ñ singer (*domni*), gardener (*malan*) and water carrier (*saqqa*) ñ who anxiously await the arrival of the marriage party, pass sarcastic comments as they do not receive the traditional gifts. If there is a death in the poor man's house, he is not able to provide a decent burial and, therefore, is forced to consign the dead body to a river. He loses the affection of his

friends and the sympathy of strangers. In the end, he is forced by poverty to become a beggar, while his son becomes a thief.⁴⁸

The poets under study employ the vernaculars to express a wide range of ideas. They pay a considerable attention to exploring the relation between the seeker and God. They conceive God as a Beloved who not only gazes at His creation with love, but also abides in all forms of creation. In their view, the seeker assumes the garb of a female lover in order to unite with the male Beloved. Her long quest becomes remarkably similar to the travails suffered by the legendary heroines, who have been valourized in the regional folklore for their long struggles culminating in unnatural deaths. However, this articulation of spiritual urge in the idiom of physical love does not reflect any deviation from the fundamental postulates of Islam. Our poets show a heartfelt reverence for Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Ali, besides paying rich tributes to the martyrs of Karbala and several others who laid down their lives in the path of God. Since they nurture a universal vision and pluralistic outlook, they do not hesitate to seek inspiration from non-Islamic sources. They express unrestrained admiration for the Jogis (followers of Gorakhnath) who were engaged in a relentless pursuit of the divine union, which was essentially based on asceticism and celibacy. This does not mean that they had withdrawn from the society. They feel a deep concern for the social issues that troubled the minds of the non-elite masses. Identifying themselves with the universal human spirit, they rejected social identities based on religion, race and region. Yet they were acutely conscious of the wide difference in the human conditions that were manifested in the luxury of the rich and misery of the poor. In the ultimate analysis, they advocated an open ended spirituality which was based on universal humanism and cultural pluralism. The forceful articulation of these ideas went a long way in undermining the influence of Islamic revival which was spearheaded by Shah Waliullah and his followers.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 The contemporary Persian chroniclers (Saqi Mustaid Khan, Khafi Khan, Ishwar Das Nagar and Muhammad Shafi Warid), while describing the popular uprisings against the Mughal state, have ridiculed the armed rebels on account of their low social background. Irfan Habib, 'Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India,' in Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards A Marxist Perception*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995, pp.242-249.
- 2 For detailed studies on the complex maze of political developments leading to acquisition of power by the Sikhs, see Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, (*Evolution of the Sikh Confederacies 1708-1769*), Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, Reprint, 1978; Narendra Krishna Sinha, *Rise of the Sikh Power*, A Mukherjee & Co., Calcutta, Reprint, 1973; Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab during the Late Eighteenth Century*, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 1993.

- 3 Bulleh Shah (1680-1758), who has been hailed as the greatest sufi poet of Punjab, was born at Uch Gilanian near the town of Uch and received his early education at Qasur. Sometime later, he shifted to Lahore and enrolled himself as a disciple of Shah Inayat Qadiri. During the course of his spiritual journey, he acquired wide notoriety for the rapturous states of ecstasy, which were accompanied by indulgence in song and dance. While articulating his mystical ideas, he uncovered the pain experienced by the human soul in quest for a union with the divine, besides exposing the hypocrisy and fanaticism of theologians. His mystical verses (*kafis*) have been brought out at different points of time by Prem Singh Qasuri (1896), Anwar Ali Rohtaki (1889), Faqir Muhammad Faqir (1960) and Nazir Ahmad (1976). The musical renditions of Bulleh Shah's poetry by Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and several other singers have ensured its enduring relevance and immense popularity in the present times.
- 4 Sutinder Singh Noor, Ed., *Punjabi Sufi Kaav*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1997, pp.248.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp.198-199, 246.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp.242-243.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp.196-197.
- 8 J.R. Puri & T.R. Shangari, *Bulleh Shah: The Love Intoxicated Iconoclast*, Radha Soami Satsang Beas, District Amritsar, 1986, pp.245, 265.
- 9 Sutinder Singh Noor, Ed., *Punjabi Sufi Kaav*, p.217.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp.275-276.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 205-207.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp.250-251.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp.197-198.
- 14 Shah Abdul Latif (1689-1752) witnessed the establishment of the Kalhoros rule in place of the Mughals, besides the invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali. Though he was born in affluent circumstances, yet he spent his time in solitary contemplation and wandering with ascetics. His identification with the masses was indicated by his admiration for Shah Inayat, a mystic who was put to death by the Kalhoros. His mystical verses are found in a large volume entitled *Shah Jo Risalo*, which comprises nearly thirty chapters (*surs*) dealing with a wide variety of themes. Every Thursday evening, this poetry is sung at his beautiful mausoleum at Bhit Shah. Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth Century Muslim India*, Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, (Reprint), 2003, pp.151-152; Amanullah Memon, 'Alternative Voices from Sind: A Critical Study of Shah Abdul Latif's Poetry,' in Surinder Singh & Ishwar Dayal Gaur, Ed., *Popular Literature and Premodern Societies in South Asia*, Pearson Longman, New Delhi, 2008, pp.133-145.
- 15 H.T. Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit Shah: His Poetry, Life and Times*, Sindhi Kitab Ghar, (Reprint), 1966, pp.363,366,375.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp.384-385,389.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp.375-376,384.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp.367-368.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.390.

- 20 *Ibid.*, p.380,386-387.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp.388-389.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.381.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp.372-373.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p.390.
- 25 *Ibid.*, PP.371,373.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp.378-379.
- 27 According to a treatise on comparative religion written in the mid seventeenth century, the order of Jogis was quite popular in India. In Sanskrit, Jog means union and the Jogis claim to be united with God (Alakh). They treated Gorakhnath as the founder of all religious creeds and all other prophets (including Muhammad) and saints as his disciples. Some of them followed the customs of Hindus, while others offered prayers and fasted like the Muslims. They attach maximum importance to breath control (*habs-i-nafs*), which is further connected with seven levels in the body, chanting of God's name and distinct sitting posture (*pranayam*). This exercise enabled them to awaken the bright red vein reaching the head (*kondli*) and thus to acquire supernatural powers. Mobad Kaikhuro Isfandiyar, *Dabistan-i-Mazahab*, Vol. I, Persian Text, Ed., Rahim Razazada Malik, Shirkat Chhap Gulshan, Tehran, 1342 AH, pp.159-161.
- 28 Situated in the Lasbela district of Balochistan, the shrine of Hinglaj Mata (a form of Durga) is found at one end of the Kirthar hills and along the Makran coast. It is believed to be one of the sites where Sati's head had fallen. It is said to have been visited by Rama, Gorakhnath and Guru Nanak. Muslims who undertake an annual visit (Nani Ki Haj) honour the idol as Bibi Nani. The sacred cave is 300 feet long, 150 feet wide and 90 feet high. At present a four day pilgrimage (the largest in Pakistan) is held every April, when nearly 60,000 devotees attend the momentous ceremonies. The difficult journey, which took months and weeks in the past, has become quiet convenient, as a drive of 250 kilometers from Karachi takes four hours. Reema Abbasi, *Historic Temples in Pakistan: A Call to Conscience*, Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2014, pp.20-30.
- 29 Shah Abdul Latif, *Shah Jo Risalo*, Urdu Translation, Shaikh Ayaz, Sindhica Academy, Karachi, (Reprint), 2005, pp.215-221.
- 30 Sutinder Singh Noor, Ed., *Punjabi Sufi Kaav*, p.277.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp.288-289.
- 32 Nazir Akbarabadi (1740-1830), a teacher by profession, lived in the capital city of Agra. Proficient in Persian and local dialects, he produced a large corpus of poetry in Urdu. He was inspired by the indigenous folk tradition as well as Sufism and Bhakti. Not surprisingly, he identified himself with the common man. Early literary critics held that his poetry pleased only the rustics and did not include him in the circle of eminent poets of the period. Since then his image has undergone a positive elevation. A keen observer of the contemporary socio-cultural scenario, he created vivid images of the life of the people of Agra, with particular emphasis on popular festivals of both Hindus and Muslims. Syed Muhammad Abbas, *The Life and Times of Nazir Akbarabadi*, Vanguard Books, Lahore, 1991, pp.1-3.
- 33 Nazir Akbarabadi, *Kulliyat-i-Nazir*, Kitabi Duniya, Delhi, 2003, pp.382-383.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp.384-385.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp.386-399.

- 36 Yazid, who became Caliph at Damascus after the death of Muawiyah, failed to get the support of many notables including Husain (624-680) and Abdullah bin Zubair. In response to an invitation from the Shia partisans of Kufa, Husain sent his cousin Muslim bin Aqil to prepare the way. But the cousin was captured and executed by the Umayyad governor. Yazid ordered Ubaidullah bin Ziyad to intercept Husain who had been reinforced with 600 men. An army of 4,000 under Umar bin Sad surrounded Husain at Karbala near the Euphrates. In the ensuing battle (10 October 680) Husain was killed and his associates were massacred. During the Muharram, the Shias mourn Husain's death and enact frenzied passion plays. Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Stacey International, London, (Reprint), 2004.
- 37 H.T. Sorley, *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit Shah: His Poetry, Life and Times*, pp.338-343.
- 38 Sutinder Singh Noor, Ed., *Punjabi Sufi Kaav*, pp.233-236.
- 39 *Ibid.*, pp.211-212.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp.195-196.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p.213.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p.216.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp.211-212.
- 44 The saints have been classed in a hierarchy according to a system, which is found in the same form among different authors. Sometimes they are found on earth. At other times, their sanctity is not apparent or they are not visible. They are replaced on their death, so that their number is always complete. 4,000 live hidden in the world and themselves are not conscious of their state. In the ascending order of merit, there are 300 *akhyar*, 40 *abdal*, 7 *abrar*, 4 *autad*, 3 *nukaba* and the *qutb* or *ghaus* who is unique. P.M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Muin al-Din Chishti of Ajmer*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.2.
- 45 Nazir Akbarabadi, *Kulliyat-i-Nazir*, pp.604-606.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp.577-582.
- 47 The inhabitants of Agra belonged to diverse social classes. The nobles, who made lavish expenditure on luxury, extended patronage to musicians, astrologers, physicians, priests and scholars. The middle class, which comprised officers and merchants, was quiet affluent. But the lower classes ñ skilled artisans, unskilled labourers, servants and attendants ñ were poor and lived in pathetic conditions. For details, see, I.P. Gupta, *Urban Glimpses of Mughal India: Agra, the Imperial Capital (16th and 17th Centuries)*, New Delhi, 1986, pp.63-84.
- 48 Nazir Akbarabadi, *Kulliyat-i-Nazir*, pp.586-589.