

Esoteric Vision in Eastern Spiritual Literature such as Pakistani Spiritual Poets and Rumi and D. H. Lawrence's 'Metaphysics'

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual poetry and Sufi ideas of different mystical thoughts have a very significant place in Pakistani culture. From Allama Iqbal to Bulleh Shah and from Shah Abdul Lateef bhatai to Rehman Baba Pakistani culture and literature cannot be completed with the spiritual couplets these great Pakistani Sufis. This paper has attempted to discuss the spiritual insights in the eastern and particularly Islamic Sufi ideas in comparison with DH Lawrence's philosophy of religion where he like Sufis gives faith a greater place than rationality. It is a conflict between faith and rationality, as Buleh shah says 'padh padh ketabian ketia kia', meaning - reading books and gaining rational knowledge take you nowhere in search of meaning of life. Similarly, we see the same argument in Iqbal where he reject the modern rationality and ask for reflection of religious truth. This study emphasizes the importance of Eastern mystical and

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metaphysical traditions and particularly Medieval Sufi thought and literature and its influences on the development of Western metaphysical ideas in an attempt to establish clear links between east and West during the Medieval and modern epochs, in so far as these interactions inform D H Lawrence's work. The discussion notes the peculiar unorthodox religious vision of Sufism and compare this vision to Lawrence metaphysical writings.

The cosmic vision these traditions put forward is significant because, as we shall see in case of Lawrence and Rumi, it resists the religious idealism and materialism of a two dimensional reality promoted by modern science and instead upholds an aesthetic notion of reality. One can find this trope in later Eighteenth century aesthetic theory and European Romanticism, which both inform Lawrence's literary works. Making the aesthetic experience of man the central point of philosophical and religious discussion not only problematizes the Cartesian paradigm of modern rational thought, it also presents the tension between Ibrahimic and Hellenic traditions. The Hellenising influence depends on appreciation of and reverence towards aesthetic experience as a gateway to the divine. In this picture the universal beauty of the divine poses a serious challenge to the doctrinal faith; the commanding Logos who is essentially outside and beyond any aesthetic appreciation. In the following explanation of Sufism and its relevance to Lawrence's art, I will also discuss particular aesthetic traditions and the role of such traditions in creating the Sufistic and Lawrentian worldviews.

Introduction

Mainstream theology maintains the idea of two separate worlds created by a greater but external being, and post-Cartesian and post-Enlightenment rationalists insist on a sensible and objective nature. Great Sufi poets and saints like Buleh Shah, Shah Lateef and Rumi, however, have a different vision of reality. Their cosmic vision, as we will see in relation to the ontological position of D. H. Lawrence, posits a reality which is outside our objective and rational

understanding yet at the same time part of our physical and spiritual existence. It is certainly not a unique position to take with regard to sensible and insensible phenomena, as one can notice such ideas in many esoteric traditions. However, Medieval Persian Sufis undoubtedly produced one of the finest literary traditions about such metaphysical questions. The European Romantic tradition that Lawrence refers to in so many places, are to some extent share a similar understanding of reality.

One of the enduring reference point in the diverse culture of Pakistan has been the medieval Sufi writings, particularly the Persian Sufi literature. The influence of medieval and later Sufi masters and their tales of love and common humanity runs through Pakistani folklores and mainstream literature alike. Every religion has its spiritual and mystical aspect, and Sufism carries the spiritual thread within Islam, as Gnosticism and other such mystical paths within other belief systems. In his introduction to *Sufism*, M. J. Arberry, observes that, 'mysticism is essentially one and the same, whatever may be the religion professed by the individual mystics.' He calls mysticism of all kinds "a constant and unvarying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God' (1972: 11)¹. This view is shared by many scholars of Sufi cosmology and while reading Sufi poetry one can feel the dispensing of a universal appeal, an intimate message to every individual regardless of belief. Sufism depends on the yearning and seeking heart, a heart which is restless to relate its existence to a cosmic reality which both beyond and greater than the material existence of an individual but also part of it. Evidence of Arberry's definition can be noted in much Sufi literature. For example, Allama Iqbal's spiritual guide, Mawlana Rumi announces that he is not Muslim or Christian or part of any other religion rather he is a seeker of the truth,

1 M. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, 6th ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 11.

a traveller and a wayfarer with a pure heart. In another place Rumi opens his arms in invitation to join his caravan,

'Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, idolater, worshiper of fire,
Come even though you have broken your vows a thousand times,
Come, and come yet again.
Ours is not a caravan of despair (2000: xiii)²

This Caravan of hope is based on a realisation on the part of the traveller that he is not what he thinks he is but that he is part of a greater reality which he needs to know and realize and that association with the other brings him to the knowledge of his own reality. In Rumi's words,

Why should I seek? I am the same as
He. His essence speaks through me.
I have been looking for myself
(1995: xx.)³

This is of course the ultimate realisation of a Sufi who experiences reality in its essence.

Similarly, Pakistani Sufi saint and poet of Punjabi language, Baba Bulleh Shah says, 'Not a believer inside the / mosque, am I / Nor a pagan disciple of false rites / Not the pure amongst the impure, / Neither Moses, nor the Pharoh.' Since it is not an objective reality, Sufism is never conclusive and always remains a way to knowledge not the knowledge itself. These two quotes from Rumi and Baba Bulleh Shah summarise Sufi cosmology and its importance for understanding Lawrence's metaphysics. The first is a call towards a path where no single ethical order is recognized as the dominant principle, and the second gives the sense of embarking on a journey of hope and reunion. In the second instance we can see the divine realisation of the individual

2 Eryk Hanut, *The Rumi Card Book: Meditation, Inspiration, Self-discovery* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), xiii.

3 Coleman Bark, *The Essential Rumi* (London: Penguin, 1995), xx.

self. Every individual has to find his own truth and realise his own revelation through his own experience of the divine. The Sufi idea of an individual's mysterious journey through uncertain experience towards the divine proposes a unique religious perception of the human relationship to the divine. A person's realisation of a greater self through aesthetic experience in the world and with the other person opens the gates of divine reality for him/her. Truth here has numerous manifestations and countless ways to reveal itself.

Lawrence reached similar conclusions when he was working on his more mature and metaphysical novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. In a letter written during 1914-15 he notes that, 'One is not a little individual living a little individual life, but ...one is in oneself the whole of mankind, and one's fate is the fate of the whole of mankind, and one's charge is the charge of the whole of mankind'(Letters II: 302)⁴. For Paul Poplawski, 'this philosophy grew to be at the heart of *The Rainbow*' (1993: 36)⁵, the novel which for F. Zangenehpour (2000)⁶ represents a Sufi mystical journey into the fulfillment of the self. In her reading of *The Rainbow*, Zangenehpour notes the parallel between a Sufi path of knowledge and the spiritual journeys undertaken by the characters in Lawrence's novel. She delineates the Sufi themes of the transformation and mystical *experience* in *The Rainbow* and the quest of characters in the novel to travel from one world to another into their spiritual self which awakens them to different levels of being. However, what we see in Zangenehpour's reading is the first part of Sufi cosmology which is expressed in the first quote of Rumi's call for joining the 'caravan' of hope and embarking into a quest of spiritual awakening. This total self-realisation,

4 James T. Boulton, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Vol. II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 302.

5 Paul Poplawski, *Promptings of Desire: Creativity and the Religious Impulse in the Works of D. H. Lawrence* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 36.

6 F. Zangenehpour, *Sufism and the Quest for Spiritual Fulfillment in D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow* (Gouteborg, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2000).

which cannot be expressed more succinctly than in Rumi's second quote above, is the reunion, the ultimate association and disappearing of the other which Birkin seeks in his relationship to Ursula in *Women in Love*. Lawrence uses a similarly esoteric paradigm of human love, especially the love relationship between a man and a woman as used in much Sufi literature to express mysterious union of the cosmic reality.

Baba Bulleh Shah and other Sufis always emphasize the individual's journey who set out in search of the universal other, the dark side of existence, dark side representing the transcendent, which is a fundamental theme in both Lawrence's writings where the sensual love is celebrated as the means to reach a bigger reality. Similarly, the Sufi journey, which ends in the realisation that 'I have been looking for myself', indicates a holistic picture of the world and a movement towards an ultimate cosmic unity. Interestingly, Lawrence like the Sufis, mentions a dark side of existence as an aesthetic expression for divine reality. This positive connection with the darkness of reality not only facilitates the Sufi mood of sensuous perception of the spiritual world, it also highlights the provocative connotation of the term 'dark' that manipulates readers into confronting a Manichean division into good/light and dark/evil. In a similar way Lawrence explicitly pronounces his motif for his metaphysical quest, 'I extricate myself into singleness, the slow-developed singleness of manhood. And then I set out to meet the other, the unknown of womanhood' (1988: 112)⁷. Here Lawrence seems to suggest both the importance of the pure single self, free from ethical and rational constraints and the mysterious cosmic unity in a state of self-realisation through association with the other. This rather paradoxical way of seeking individual emancipation in pursuit of union with other is best explained in Sufi traditions. To better understand and interpret Lawrence's cosmology through Sufi

7 D. H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed., Michael Herbert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 112.

metaphysics let me introduce briefly the bases of Sufi aspiration, the different phases of the development of Sufism and the historical context in which Sufi traditions are formed in the following paragraphs.

This brief introduction does not claim to bring new meaning to Sufi thought and practice. However, to ascertain the important influence of Sufi literature and its highly imaginative mode and ontological vision on the development of similar kinds of literature and thought in the West which leads us to Lawrence's work in the early twentieth century, I would like to emphasize certain aspects of Sufi aspiration, its context and practice which shed light on the significance of the Sufi literature of the Medieval Persian masters. Sufism is based on two important aspects of Islamic faith: the first concept is the absolute Oneness of God and other is the 'manner in which the Quran was revealed to the Prophet' – the Voice of God speaking to a human being. Passages in the Quran, as Arberry has suggested, which testify to 'God's Nature and Attributes', provide the bases of Sufi aspirations and the hope that through these verses they might be able to commune with God or that the truth may be revealed to them. The Quran calls its verses 'ayat' (signs) and it says that these are 'signs for those who consider.' The Quran also calls the whole of the universe and the natural world around as 'signs' through which one can perceive and understand God, and the indication for God in the Quran is 'No god but God' signifying that there is nothing except God, and only one reality and that truth belongs to God. The universe is a signpost directing us towards God and the world as such does not render any meaning without the transcendent reality of God. The very definition of God in the Quran indicates that unity of being which is the basis of Sufi cosmology.

This simple approach to the development of Sufism in relation to the Quran and Islamic tradition does not tell everything about Sufism or about the Quran. The interpretation of the Quran and the prophetic traditions by Sufis, and the subsequent development of the Sufi

metaphysic, took many routes to maturity over the first six centuries of Muslim history. Sufism is a broad discipline which covers every aspect of life. In Sufi teachings one can find guidelines for leading a virtuous but wise life. It teaches among other things ethics, service, humility, good humour, chivalry and spiritual poverty. However, the main purpose of this path is wisdom and knowledge of the nature of things. Lewisohn quoted William Blake and rightly called Blake's sayings the vision of a Sufi. Blake said that:

Reasons and opinions concerning acts are not history. Acts themselves alone are history... tell me the Acts, O historian and leave me to reason upon them as I please; away with your reasoning and your rubbish! All that is not action is not worth reading. Tell me the What; I do not want you to tell me the Why, and the How; I can find that out myself... His opinions, who does not see a spiritual agency, is not worth any man's reading (1999: x)⁸.

For Hujwiri and Bu'l-Hussayn Al-Nuri⁹ Sufism is ethics. Sa'di called the way of dervishes a *dhikr* (invocation) and *fikr* (recollection) of God. For Abu'l- Qasim Junayed, Sufism is a divine modality. For Junayed, Sufism is first a remembrance of God then a physical ecstasy in which, at last you become neither the one who remembers the divine and nor the one who is being remember. This is the stage of *fana* and *baqa*. For Junayed, this stage of selflessness is where one can reach through physical ecstasy. For Junayed. Sufism means that 'Allah causes you to die to yourself and gives you life in Him' and he teaches what is called sober Sufism. This means you can physically experience the divine in a state of ecstasy by losing your egoistic self. Then you can come back to your usual self but, now, more wise and knowledgeable or in other words as a true master of soul –

8 Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, *The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism*, i, ii and iii, iv (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), x.

9 Bu'l-Hussayn Al-Nuri, also known as Ahmed Ibn Abu al-Hassan al-Nuri (840 – 907 AD), early Sufi saint born in Baghdad. He was accused of heresy and charged in 878 C.E. However, he was later pardoned and sent into exile in Syria. Nuri is the author of *Muqamat al-Qulub* (stations of the Heart). He famously said 'I love God and God loves me'. He is one of the earliest Sufis.

Sufi. Junayed (d. 909), a representative of the Baghdad school, formulated the doctrine of *fana*—the mystical absorption of a Sufi into the divinity, leading to “superbeing” (*baqa*), or eternity in the absolute. The Sufi’s mystical journey, according to Junayed, was marked by three stages: the *sharia*, or universal Muslim religious law; the *tariqqa*, or the Sufi path of purification; and the *haqiqa*, divine reality, or the mystical comprehension of truth in God. Junayed held that one of the basic precepts of Islam, the *tawhid*, the unicity of God, was demonstrated not through verbal proofs, as in theology, but through the Sufi’s own ascetic life in a transcendental unity with God.

The development of Sufism from its early period emphasized poverty and abstinence (Hasan al-Basri (d. 728)) but later includes the highly philosophical treatise of Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Ibn’ Arabi in the twelfth and thirteen centuries. This was a time of Islamic expansionism; Muslim rule was established from Central Asia to the Mediterranean in the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The importance of contacts with other cultures and cosmologies, particularly with Greek philosophy, cannot be over-emphasised in terms of its influence on the development of Islamic thought. Arguably, Sufism formed many of its metaphysical notions through the engagements of Muslim scholars with ancient Greek and Hermetic traditions of the Mediterranean. Arberry, while stressing the Quranic basis of Sufi doctrine, argues that ‘The esoteric exposition of the Koran became a central point in the hard training of the Sufi.’ However, he cannot ignore the influence of Greek philosophy in the Islamic metaphysical traditions. In the same book he goes on to argue that the ‘rhapsodic and highly rhetorical style of the Muslim scriptures suited such interpretation which made Arabs and Persians disciples of Aristotle and Plotinus’ (1972: 23)¹⁰.

In his study of Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami’s biographical dictionary of classical Sufis before the twelfth century,

10 Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, 23.

Melchert¹¹ notes the ontological changes in the outlook of early to later classical Sufism. He compares and contrasts the sayings and practices of the Sufis from early Islam to the eleventh century CE from al-Sulami's biographical records and shows the transformation from an ascetic to a mystical approach in classical Sufism. Melchert notes that mystical themes and concepts started becoming more prominent after the ninth century but before that he notes an Islamic ascetical tradition which he defines as a programme of self-discipline and austerity and extreme adherence to laws of fasting and prayer in obedience to a transcendent God. For Melchert, Islamic mysticism emerged from this early ascetical tradition. However, it is significant to note that around this time Muslim scholars were busy handling Greek philosophical materials which certainly had an impact on Sufi thought as well as on other theological and philosophical modes of learning. Nasr (1973) stressed the importance of ancient philosophical tradition within Islamic thought after the ninth century. Although for Nasr a philosophical bent of mind was reflected in every aspect of Islamic civilisation from the Medieval to the present age, which is hard to establish given the state of philosophical enquiry and attitude towards knowledge within the Islamic societies after later Middle Ages. However, he rightly noted that one could find the 'most profound metaphysics in Islam' in the writings of the Medieval Sufi masters. As he noted, "In order to understand the real role of 'philosophy' in Islam we must consider ... especially the dimension of al-Haqiqah (the Sufi Path) where precisely one will find the point of intersection between 'traditional philosophy' and metaphysics and that aspect of the Islamic perspective into which Sapientia in all its forms has been integrated throughout Islamic history" (1973: 57-58)¹².

11 Christopher Melchert, *Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.*, ed., Lioud Ridgeon (London: Routledge, 2008).

12 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Meaning and Role of "Philosophy" in Islam," *Studia Islamica* 37 (1973): 57-58.
Source: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595467>.

The fusion of Neoplatonist thought with new forms of Muslim intellectualism involving greater responsiveness to the wider world is one part of the development of Sufism but other Pagan cosmologies are foundational for Sufism as for Medieval Western metaphysics. Mystical and Gnostic movements within Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious traditions around the same time in Medieval Europe and the Middle East help us understand the second distinctive element of Sufism, that is, the divine realities of the sensible world. An elaborate discussion on the mystical tendencies in Christian, Muslim and Jewish metaphysics of the Middle Ages is not possible here, given the scope and limitation of this study, but in order to understand the parallels in Lawrentian and Sufi metaphysics we need a brief overview of the hermetic traditions at the time when Sufism was flourishing on the both sides of the Mediterranean.

Western writers traced the mystical tradition in the Christianity back to the first century CE. Friar Origen of Alexandria was a contemporary to Plotinus. According to some accounts, Origen was a class fellow of Plotinus in the Syrian School of Greek learning. A recent Cambridge study by Mark J. McInroy (2011) noted the use of sensory language by Origen to describe the human relation with God as the basis of 'the doctrine of the spiritual senses'. McInroy argues that 'Origen discusses the divine senses of the inner man' (2011: 21)¹³. Origen creates a perception of God who can be touched and heard through spiritual or inner senses. If we compare Origen's perceiving God and the Sufi notion of knowing and recognising God, both seemed to suggest a physical and sensual paradigm to our relation with God. One can find such language to describe God in later Christian theology such as Augustine. The most important mystical traditions in Western Christianity, such as Franciscan Order of thirteen-century Catholic Friar Francis of Assisi, began at the same time as Sufism was flourishing in the Middle Ages.

13 Mark J. Malnroy, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21.

Around the time when later Sufism was taking shape with more and more mystical and esoteric dimensions, similar phenomenological conceptions of the reality of God and an unorthodox religiosity were taking place in the Christian world. Mystical traditions along with scholastic theology were flourishing in Medieval Christian Europe similarly to Muslim Ilm-al-Kalam and Sufism in the Eastern Mediterranean. Francis of Assisi and other Christian mystics took a more personal religious experience than the Roman Catholic Church would otherwise have liked them to do. Vitray-Meyerovitch notes that 'there were many common traits between Rumi and St. Francis of Assisi who died when the master of Konya was nineteen'(1987: 32). They had the same love for the humble and the poor and the same urge for putting a sacred cosmos in unison. 'The trees,' Rumi used to say, 'recognize me and answer my salutations'" (1987: 32)¹⁴.

Around the time when Islam was emerging as a potential politico-religious force in the Middle East and Mediterranean, the Catholic Church in Rome was increasingly becoming a formidable force in Europe. By the time Islam was able to make inroads in the European part of Mediterranean through southern Spain and Italy, the Roman Church had already established itself as the sovereign ruler of the kings and dukes of Europe. The growing power of the Church made the bishops and priests rich and they increasingly led luxurious lives. To sustain this life of luxury by ruling the masses it was necessary for the clergy, as Lawrence observes, to "keep the great secrets, they must stand between God and the masses" (1989: 203)¹⁵. This purpose was achieved by not allowing the people at large to read and understand the Bible. However, about the time when the grand masters of Sufism like Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi were

14 Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, *Rumi and Sufism*, Trans. Simone Fattal (Sausalito California: The Post-Apollo Press 1987), 32.

15 Lawrence, D. H. (1989) *Movements in European History* / D.H. Lawrence ; Edited by Philip Crumpton. Edited by Philip Crumpton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

engaged in their hermeneutic study of the Quran and individualism in understanding God's ways, some Christian groups first in France and then in Italy and Spain started reading and interpreting Bible with their own understanding. One first such group was called 'the Poor Men of Lyons' who began practising their own understanding of the religious revelation around 1170s CE. Like the early Sufis these people believed in poverty, fasting and total abstention from worldly life. This kind of religious doctrine was a direct threat to the life style of the priests and bishops of the Roman Church and so they were persecuted along with other Gnostics and heretics throughout Europe.

However, the most important development, as far as Christian mysticism during the Middle Ages is concern, was the establishment of the Franciscan Order. St. Francis of Assisi, who started the great religious movement, was a man of love and poverty. Lawrence says of Assisi, 'Frail in health but passionate in soul' (1989: 234). His followers were called the Order of 'wandering friars', because they believed in travelling and meeting people and telling them the way of love and sharing with them their joyous realisation of truth. Franciscans were different from the monks of the Roman Catholic Church, "The older monks were dark, loveless men, who never looked at the earth [...] Francis taught differently. He loved the sky and the grass and all living things" (1989: 239). Like Rumi, as noted above, who talked to trees, Francis "once stood and preached a sweet sermon to the birds that fluttered round him, calling them, my little sisters, the birds" (1989: 239). According to some sources (Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, 1987, Lynn Wilcox¹⁶), St. Francis visited Sufi monasteries in Egypt during the crusade in 1218-19 AD when the saint went to meet the Sultan in the interests of peace, the incident reported by almost all the historians of Catholic Church and probably St. Francis took many of his ideas from Sufi understanding of religious truth during his

16 Wilcox, Lynn (1995) *Sufism and Psychology*, Chicago: ABJAD Book Designers and Builders

presence in Egypt and Palestine. Wilcox, for instance, observes

Sufi teachings were made known throughout the 'Western' world through Spain and provided the foundation for the Christian mystics – St. Theresa, St. Catherine, Meister Eckhart, Richard Rolle and other – who began to appear in the eleventh century. The best known, St. Francis of Assisi; visited the Sufi-influenced court of the Sultan of Egypt in Damietta in the midst of the Crusades (1995: 13).

Lawrence was full of admiration for St. Francis's path of love and poverty. In his history of Europe he regards the emergence of the Franciscan Order in Medieval Christendom as the end of the 'Age of Faith'. By the end of the 'Age of Faith' Lawrence means the challenge to Catholic orthodoxy. Like Sufi scholarship, the Franciscans and other early Christian mystics dented the authority of the book and its doctrinal proponents by their hermetical and deeper understanding of the text in the Bible which unleashed, as Lawrence noted, a spiritual form of reason and a subjective understanding of religious truth.

In a similar way Lawrence presents his vision of being, self, initiation and revelation in terms of cosmic unity and manifestation of reality, as Lawrence says in his analysis of Saint John's Revelation, "It's a revelation of Initiation experience, and the clue is in the microcosm" (2002: 450)¹⁷. In the same work of his apocalypse, Lawrence argues that Christian theologian editors of the Bible have ignored the 'pagan substratum' of the Biblical revelation. It is true that for Lawrence pagan does not mean only Neoplatonic thought; he includes all the ancient wisdom found in the pre-Christian world. However, as I have tried to show in the previous discussion Neoplatonism and Ancient Hermetic traditions were the dominant systems in Greece and the pre-Christian and pre-Muslim Mediterranean world. Most importantly these ancient metaphysical traditions continued to exist either as 'substratum', as Lawrence noted, or were acknowledged and

17 Boulton, James T. (2002) *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Cambridge: CUP

discussed in the case of early Muslim metaphysicians, like Avicenna and others.

Lawrence's understanding of human life, love and relationships becomes more complicated when we try to grasp his views in the light of post-Renaissance humanistic traditions, particularly when we treat his work within the traditions of Cartesian dualism. Lawrence's position is equally complicated regarding the Christian trinity and pre-Socratic cosmology. Critics such as Virginia Hyde, Luke Ferretter, Mark Spilka, Montgomery and others insist that Lawrence's vision and religious sensibility is either coming from the Bible or from ancient Greek cosmology. Lawrence has clearly read all these religious and philosophical traditions, one can find allusions and metaphorical references to Biblical stories and Greek myths as well as modern European philosophy. However, this is not a complete picture of the influences on Lawrence's art and his vision. He mentioned, while writing *Women in Love*, that he had come out of the Christian camp and now wanted to immerse himself in the early Greeks. While reading John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*, lent to him by Bertrand Russell in the summer of 1915, he was struck by the Heraclitean ideas of 'flux' and 'strife,' which are apparent in his novel *Women in Love*. However, it is also obvious from his remarks regarding the early Greeks that Lawrence was far from being settled as far as his ontological vision was concerned. He was a metaphysical writer of literature besides being a critic and commentator on different cosmologies. He was more of a traveller than a seeker of destiny. In his essay on 'Life' he expounded that 'the greatest truth of our being' is that 'at every moment we derive from the unknown.' Nonetheless, there were certain things Lawrence was settled about. He was against a materialistic and mechanical approach to understanding human life and the cosmos. He did not share the Cartesian anxiety of comprehending everything through reason within a subject-object paradigm. He was absolutely unyielding towards institutional Christianity and moral ethics. Neither

had he any dogmatic illusion nor any scientific certainty. Equally, he did not like any kind of reductionist positivism. Lawrence believed that, 'Christianity made us barbarians of the soul and now science is making us barbarians of the intellect' (1985: 11)¹⁸. Apart from these unwavering fundamentals in his ontological position, his vision of the cosmos was constantly changing and always seeking new directions. That is because he thought the 'Holy Ghost' he was looking for 'is always changing its direction.' He said 'we are like the blood that travels' (1988)¹⁹. For Lawrence 'Blake was the last civilized man' because, as Jeffrey Meyers notes,

Blake's insight into the unity of all creation, his vindication of the wisdom of the body and his creation of a highly individual style unfettered by conventional restraints and regular metre and poetic diction, 'an organic or expressive form to express his naked, passionate experience', served as a permanent source of inspiration for Lawrence (1985: 13).

As noted above, Hellenistic aesthetic and Neoplatonist ideas penetrated later Sufism and changed its ontological position from a self-denying other worldliness to the later metaphysical system of Ibn Arabi and Rumi. The second instance, where one can ascertain the influence of Greek traditions of philosophical enquiry and where, as argued earlier, Lawrence shares with Sufis the sources of Medieval philosophical, mystical notions in their literary works, is the way Sufis approach the truth and the way they challenge the authority of the book and the idea of unchanging traditions. The most unorthodox line one can imagine in a Medieval atmosphere of seeking authoritative guidance from a religious text was the Sufis' innovative approach to the authority of the Book. Nasr notes this rather extraordinary aspect of the Sufis in figures such as Ibn 'Arabi whose, "Ingenuous interpretation [...] relies upon stretching the

18 Meyers, Jeffrey (1985) *D. H. Lawrence and Tradition*, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press

19 Lawrence, D. H. (1988) *Reflections on the death of a porcupine and other essays*, edited by Michael Herbert, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

etymological and grammatical possibilities of the Qur'anic text to such an extent that the new inner meanings differed markedly from the literal reading" (2008: 9)²⁰. This kind of Hermeneutical method enabled Sufis to diversify the meaning of the text and diminish the authoritative nature of the text to such an extent that the metaphorical and imaginative understanding of the scriptures and their meaning became possible. In modern Western philosophy, one can see a similar effect in Martin Heidegger's technique of stretching the meaning of words. He challenges the concepts of being in this world based on Platonic, Christian and Cartesian ideas by questioning the authenticity of their meaning. He gives new meanings to the existential grammar of a person based on sensual experiences, actions and choices one makes. In his remarkable use of German language, Heidegger creates new boundaries of knowledge in his pursuit of meaning and description of existence. Similarly, if we consider Lawrence's attitude to the Bible, and the way he takes Biblical stories and gives them new meanings in his writings, one can sense a fresh and imaginative reading of the religious text and traditions. This is one of the most important contributions of Sufism and also the most prominent reason for their criticism in orthodox circles. Their liberating effects can be seen in every age. This aspect of Sufi thought has always attracted diverse audiences in the East as well as in the West. This is why, as we have discussed in the previous pages, the rebellious mood in Europe in the nineteenth century was attracted to Eastern Sufi literature when there was a revulsion against the authority of reason.

Sufi teaching and practice unlike that of the jurists and theologians who concentrated on moral and legal codes – on dos and don'ts – emphasised the development of the individual soul and the ontological question of man's relation with a larger reality of cosmic truth. Sufis love the truth more

20 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (2008) *The garden of truth: the vision and practice of Sufism, Islam's mystical tradition*, N.Y. : HarperOne

than any observance of doctrinal code and the most important aspect of their truth is that it is not settled and final. Sufis often described themselves as not the possessor of reality but rather somebody who is lost and searching for the true path to travel towards the ultimate reality – theirs is always a path, always a way and always a journey towards the knowledge of truth. So Sufi teaching and practice is fundamentally different from somebody who has the truth and the right way of action in his hand and whose job remains only to guide others to follow and adhere to what has already been decided by jurists with regards to religious traditions. In Rumi's memorable verse, 'Theologians mumble, rumble-dumble, / necessity and free will, While lover and beloved / pull themselves / into each other' (1995: 84)²¹. The fundamental difference between Sufism and doctrinal faith lies in the fact that Sufis seek a robust and living relation to God and to the Revelation and the prophets. They take hints from the Revelation and the prophetic traditions and try to find their own way and their own understanding of their own truth. Doctrinal faith emphasises discipline and fixity of principle so that one has to observe and practice what is already decided – things are settled and fixed in their essence, nothing can be changed except for minor interpretations of what they called 'subsidiaries'. In Rumi's words, on the other hand:

There are two types on the path. Those who come / against their will, the blindly religious people, and those / who obey out of love. The former have ulterior motives. / They want the midwife near, because she gives them milk. / The others love the beauty of the nurse. The former memorize the proof texts of conformity, / and repeat them. The latter disappear / into whatever draws them to God (1995: 79).

The practice of 'zikr' allowed Sufis to concentrate on the path on which the prophet has travelled and this idea of the prophet as a traveller on the path of knowledge, not as a law giver or an organiser and ruler, was solely possible in a Sufi way of metaphysical understanding of the religious truth. If

21 Rumi, Mawlana J. (1995) *The Essential Rumi*, Trans. By ColemanBarkswith John Moyne, A.J. Arberry and Reynold Nicholson. London: Penguin.

we consider the bulk of the work undertaken by the theologians and jurists who painstakingly collected the sayings and traditions of the prophet to show the correct way of doing everything from government to personal life, one can hardly see the metaphysical side of the religion. Sufis, on the other hand, relate to the Islamic traditions of the prophet and others but they quote the sayings and events from the lives of the prophets and caliphs as anecdotal representation and most of the time do not care about a truthful portrayal of the events. Rumi, for instance, quotes countless sayings and events from the lives of the prophets and caliphs in his *Masnawi* without emphasising their truthfulness through an archival reference system of the sort that we see in the works of the jurists and the writers of 'hadith' – sayings of the prophet of Islam. Sufis think of religious traditions as different from historical records. For Sufis the stories and events of religious history are part of a living tradition of the popular search for truth. The quest for truth and knowledge is not finished and part of the past. It is the responsibility of the seekers of every age to find their own path on this difficult road. However, when travelling on the path of knowledge one needs the leadership of a master. The master carries the traditions of the seekers of religious truth not as historical record. Rather he is a living example of the previous masters and their *tariqqa* (way) but he has the freedom of his own interpretations and creating his own meanings. He even has the freedom of establishing his own distinct *tariqqa*. Jurists and theologians of the orthodox schools do not have such freedom, rather they do not believe in such freedom in religious matters.

Schimmel (1962) considers the thirteenth century to be the richest period of Islam. During this time Sufi orders and fraternities were formed. This time also saw the greatest of the Sufi masters such as Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi and Attar. This was also a time of religious sensibility and spirituality in the Christian world of Europe, as noted by Schimmel: 'The names of St. Francis and St. Elisabeth, of Meister Eckhart in Germany, of Raymonds Lullus and St. Thomas, Dante, and

St. Bonaventura are only a few of the galaxy of the great saints who lived at that time' (1962: 47)²². However, Muslim fountains of knowledge and creative thinking of Sufi traditions, which were so entrenched with other mystical currents of the time, were soon to dry up at the source. Many reasons are given by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars for the decline of this kind of religious sensibility in the Islamic world. Many of them blame the thirteenth century Mongol invasion and the swift destruction of Muslim cultural centres because of it. Others ascribe this decay and decline to the aged Abbasi Caliphate as the major reason behind the fading of creative and philosophical discourse within the religion.

There may be more than one cause for this general decline in the Sufi *zikr* (remembering God) and *fikr* (Thinking or recollection – of the Truth) tradition in the Islamic world. One thing is obvious though, this kind of spontaneous and free discourse was not possible in an atmosphere of doctrinal faith and the puritanical situation which was on the rise at the same time as Sufism was at its zenith. Since law and moral diction need a simple and clear language to avoid suspicion and ambiguity in meaning, which should be on surface, the study of the Quran as a book of jurisprudence was stressed and upheld in courts and governing places. This increased the literal reading of religious texts and a tradition that consequently undermined the ontological position taken by Sufis and Medieval Muslim metaphysicians. To make things more difficult for a philosophical engagement with religion, such as Sufism, more and more puritanical religious movements emerged during later Middle Ages. These movements of religious jurisprudence called *fiqh* (law) were culturally conservative and morally and socially puritanical. These ideologies provided the bases for the ultra-conservative and extreme form of religiosity witnessed in

22 Schimmel, Annemarie (1962) *Spiritual Aspects of Islam*, Rome: Istitutto Perla Collaborazione Culturale

later Muslim history. Schimmel summed up this Anti-Sufi movement in Muslim history as follows:

In the middle ages, it was a representative of the sternest of the four juridical schools, the Hanbalis, who tried to liberate Islam from the many new customs which had been surreptitiously introduced because none of the scholars openly opposed them. The Hanballi School, founding their doctrine completely on the word of the Koran and on prophetic tradition, saw in all kinds of mysticism and especially in the veneration of the Shaikh, and the pilgrimage to the graves of religious leaders, a great danger to the purity of Islam. (1962: 65-66).

Schimmel describes the cultural manifestation of Sufi traditions from the perspective of Muslim historians who regard any creative and deviant mode of thinking in religion as 'dangerous currents in Islam'. Her understanding of Hannballi and puritanical movements to purify Islam is right. These purifying efforts made the Muslim world afraid of new ideas: Sufi ways of free and spontaneous speech, *sama* (spiritual dance), Music and other rich cultural manifestation gradually became impossible in many parts of the Muslim world. As with Lawrence, Sufis believe in the power of the 'unknown' and they love to descend into the 'darkness' of the soul. Thereby, to be afraid of the creative manifestation of the 'unknown' is stagnation and decay for Sufis. Their cosmic vision, like Lawrence, allow them, as noted earlier, to postulate a transcendent reality which also part of our sensual being. Sufis believe in travelling forever on the path of knowledge to assign a destination and a single form of living is similar to kill the purpose of life for a Sufi. Knowledge for Sufis is the name of everlasting creation and constant revelation of truth; to make it final and unalterable is similar to denying it altogether. Sufism's quest for fresh springs of knowledge and faith can be understood by the example of non-other than Rumi.

Rumi was the most prolific writer of later Sufi tradition and also the culmination of Sufi metaphysics in the Middle Ages. After him Sufism in its more philosophical colour started declining - a decline which is true to present day. Nasr's view of Rumi was that he was a 'metaphysician of the first order

and dealt with nearly every Gnostic and metaphysical question through literary mediums like parables, narratives and poetic symbols' (2005: vii). Rumi lived on the border of the Christian and Muslim worlds of the thirteenth century in present day Turkey. After meeting Shams of Tabriz, his beloved dervish friend, Rumi described his condition, 'I was raw, then I got cooked and now I am burned.' He added 'It is a burn of the heart that I want, it is this burn which is everything, more precious than a worldly empire, because it calls God, secretly, in the night' (Vitray-Meyerovitch, 1987: Mathnawi, iii: 203). Rumi's encounter with spiritual knowledge happened when he met Shams of Tabriz who told him that the secret of his spiritual powers is his, what he called, '*dhawq*' – desire for God and '*hal*' – the spiritual state. By the time Rumi met Shams, Rumi was already an established religious leader and jurist but Shams told him that all his knowledge was external whereas true knowledge was beyond that: 'Knowledge is to cross from the unknown into the known.' Shams elaborated his point with a verse of another great Sufi poet Sana'i's Divan: 'If knowledge does not liberate the self from the self / then ignorance is better than such knowledge' (1987: 24). After Shams' departure from his life, Rumi in pain created this beautiful image of reunion which was also his philosophy of union with God, 'I was snow, under your ray's I did melt; / Earth drank me; fog of spirit, / I climb back the road to the Sun.' Rumi's son Sultan Walad reported his father's situation after Shams left him, 'He never stopped listening to music and dancing; / He rested neither in the day nor at night. / He had been a scholar, became a poet. / He had been an ascetic, he became drunk with love' (1987: 27).

Rumi came to know the secrets of his dark soul, which Lawrence, following Freud, calls the 'unconscious', through his comradeship with Shams. As a result of this friendship he travelled to another level of being. He became wearied of juristic reason and theological stagnation and wanted to be freed from hollow intellectualism. He called for the unknown and darkness of soul to reveal itself, 'O subdued intelligence,

let yourself be vanished! / O lucid fullness, come! / O uncertain heart, come! O wounded soul, come!" (1987: 27).

Such views of Sufis as we noted with regard to Junayed and Rumi are no doubt unacceptable in mainstream Islamic orthodoxy today. For mainstream Islamic scholarship during the primary stages of Sufism, Sufis were characterised by their particular attachment to *zikr* (remembrance of Allah) and asceticism (seclusion), as well as the beginning of innovative practices, such as *sama* and use of musical instruments to 'aid' in the religious practices. At the early stage of Sufism, the some of the orthodox Muslim jurists and scholars expressed their doubts about Sufi beliefs and practices. Imam Al-Shafi' had the opinion, '[i]f a person exercised Sufism (tasawaf) at the beginning of the day, he doesn't come at Zuhur except [as] an idiot'. Imam Malik and Ahmad bin Hanbal also shared similar ideas on this new movement which emanated from Basrah in Iraq. For many orthodox scholars, Sufism began as a move towards excessive *ibadah* (worship or remembering God). These orthodoxies believed that such practices were doomed to lead to corruption because their basis did not come from authentic religious doctrines, but rather from exaggerated or uncontrolled human emotions. Sufism as an organised movement arose among pious Muslims as a reaction against the worldliness and materialism of the early Umayyad period (CE 661-750)⁴. According to orthodox views, the Sufis exploited the chaotic state of affairs that existed during the fifth and sixth centuries AH (Hijri era starts in 622 CE). and invited people to follow their way. They alleged that the remedy to this chaos was conformity to the guidance of their order's Sheikhs. According to S. R. Sharda (1998),²³ Dar al-Hikmah (the House of Wisdom in Baghdad) was established during the reign of Khalifah Ma'moon, when he invited the scholars of the Romans and Greeks to meet in Baghdad with the Muslims and discuss their respective positions. This provided the perfect breeding ground for the synthesis

23 Sharda, R. S. (1998) Sufi Thought, New Delhi: South Asian Books

between Islam and Pagan theology, to produce the Sufism of the like of Ibn Arabi.

With the decline of the provocation of Sufism within the Muslim world, we see the ascendancy of more and more rigid views in various orthodox schools of thoughts. Religion has increasingly becoming all law, rule and regulation to govern society rather than a path to attain divine wisdom and fulfillment of aesthetic experience with God. Depending upon the way one perceives the reality of life and human destiny, religious sensibility in the modern Muslim world seems to have transformed itself into a political and social project and the ground for any idiosyncratic understanding of one's faith is shrinking day by day. In an environment of doctrinal faith as the only acceptable religious engagement, the creative impulse of Sufi doctrine is hard to cultivate and hence the likes of Rumi travel alone in their path of aesthetic ecstasy and pleasure of divine experience.

As stressed earlier, the basic Sufi ontological positions are similar to Greek philosophical traditions of Neoplatonism and the theologians of doctrinal faith later try to keep a distant from the pagan ideas. The Sufi concept of the unknowable absolute which is the point of absolute unity can be compared to the Neoplatonic concept of the One, which is the source of all existence. Then there are the various levels – as Ibn 'Arabi calls the planes of being and also the concept of the temporal world which is a shadow of a real source – in Sufi philosophy. The temporal world of intelligible things is unreal therefore, and has to be overcome. One of the basic conditions for somebody who wants to take the Sufi path is an old Hellenistic maxim 'Know thyself'. It is not about knowing one's rational self nor is it about a surgeon or physician's knowledge of human body. It is, rather, the knowledge of the source, the soul and the dark side of the existence which fascinates and inspires the ontological quest in Sufism. It is the ancient question of being, and indeed the source of being has troubled Sufis for centuries. By knowing one's latent self and innate desires one can mirror and reach to the source of being itself. Although, the source itself,

Absolute Being – Lawrence calls it ‘unconscious’ – is unknowable we can see the source through its manifestations in the human soul, hence the dark side of one’s existence is the first mode of manifestation of the source itself, which the nearest aspect one can reach. Therefore, it is important for anybody willing to walk the Sufi path to first try to know his or her own self.

Lawrence’s ontological vision of life and artistic experience corresponds with Sufis in many ways. Particularly, Lawrence’s persistent interest in aesthetic experience of the divine and his understanding of true ‘being,’ the dark side of existence, as mentioned earlier with reference to phenomenal and transcendent level of realities, which he expounded in his letters, essays and other writings but most prominently in his novel *Women in Love*. Lawrence, like the Sufis, becomes aware of a subjective experience with his body and soul immersed in the knowledge of divine reality. Such spiritual thoughts provoke his rejection of doctrinal faith and the conventional understanding of an ethical life and cause him to seek ‘the unknown in womanhood’ and the ‘inhuman quality in human life’. In these ideas we find Lawrence’s ultimate rejection of many Christian and humanistic points of views, and certain ethical and moral strictures that seek to contain human life within their scheme. Lawrence, like the Sufis before him, cannot accept the containment of the ever-flowing stream of life into an ideological and moral frame because for him life creates itself anew every day and for him real existence is the submission to every new form of reality like St. Paul. Lawrence indicates this philosophy of his art in a letter he wrote to an artist friend Ernest Collings in 1914 when he was working on his novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*:

I am not so much concerned with the things around...but with the mystery of the flame forever flowing... and being itself ... We have got so ridiculously mindful, that we never know that we ourselves are anything...We cannot be... The real way of living is to answer to one’s wants ... Instead of that, all these wants...are utterly ignored, and we talk about some sort of ideas (2002: xxv).

In the writings of Sufis and Lawrence as in Blake and other Romantic poets, one can find the quest of the mystical idea of a greater reality beyond our perceptible world of material existence. One can also notice the suggestion that our body and soul being part of a unified universe in its absolute being can hope to transcend our material existence. Clearly the insistence on bodily and aesthetic experience of the physical world as a necessary part of attaining union with the divine shows the superiority and influence of Hellenistic traditions. Both the Sufis and Lawrence resist order and the spiritual restraints of doctrinal faith in favour of a spontaneous leap into life and an unknown sphere of manifestation. This is what makes them different from the rest and similar to each other.