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# MYSTICAL SYMBOLISM: Shabistari's Interpretation vs. Iqbal's Reformation

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## ABSTRACT

Gulshan-i Raz (Rose Garden of Mystery) is a masterpiece of Islamic mystical philosophy, written by Shaikh Mahmoud Shabistari (1228-1340) influenced by wujud (existential) teachings of Ibn Al-Arabi (1165-1240). Beside answering basic doctrinal questions in this book, Shabistari elaborates a set of oft-used mystical symbols of the Sufis. Almost six centuries later, Allamah Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) of Lahore, along his philosophical contemplation on 'reconstruction of religious thoughts in Islam' and particularly, in pursuit of reformulating theoretical Sufism, answered the same set of doctrinal questions in Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid (New Rose Garden of Mystery), but left the questions on symbolism unanswered. Therefore, this comparative study explores the use and denotations of Shabistari's set of symbolic terms in poetry books of Iqbal, to verify if his usage of the same symbolic terms are in accordance with poetry of traditional mystics. For further clarification, some couplets from Ibn Arabi, Hafiz Shirazi, Fakhruddin Iraqi and Ayatollah Khomeini are contrasted with Iqbal's verse lines. The research finds that Iqbal abstained from using popular mystical symbols such as female beauty and modified the wine related set of symbols. He also reformed the conventional wujud allegories and finally, introduced a new set of symbols more applicable to his khudi (self) doctrine.

*Keywords: mysticism, symbolism, Mahmoud Shabistari, Gulshan-i Raz, Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid, wujud school of Sufism, Allamah Iqbal, philosophy of self (khudi).*

## Introduction

Mystical writings are different from philosophical discourse. The mystics (Sufis) experience the truth through mystical union while the philosophers seek for knowledge through reasoning.<sup>1</sup> Thus, intellectual product of reasoning is expressed in logical language and arguments while conveying the ineffable mystical experiences to others, the mystic had to resort into symbolism and rely upon such terminology of worldly experience as that of love and intoxication—often objectionable from the orthodox viewpoint.<sup>2</sup>

The mystical approach of the Sufis is on basis of considering outer and inner meanings to the Quran and even to the prophetic traditions,<sup>3</sup> and thus, trying to find the inner meanings of Quran and as well interpret the sayings of the Prophet (*hadith*) as for them, even in exoteric dimension of religion, there is an element of spirituality.<sup>4</sup> For example, the saying of the Prophet that he loves 'woman, perfume and prayer' is interpreted differently, viewing the woman as a symbol for Prophet's own inward nature; suggesting that in speaking of perfumes, the Prophet meant the outside world, the

<sup>1</sup> C von Dehsen, *Philosophers and Religious Leaders, Lives & Legacies* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "Sufism - Sufi Orders | Britannica," accessed June 10, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sufism/Sufi-orders>.

<sup>3</sup> S V R Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (W. W. Norton, 2007), 59.

<sup>4</sup> S H Nasr and R Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Praeger, 2010), 171.

ambience; and speaking of prayer is his expression to his love of God.<sup>5</sup>

In line with their own interpretation of the holy texts and prophetic traditions (*ahadith*), in speaking of their own unspeakable mystical experience, the Sufis as well resort into symbolism to convey their mystical knowledge and to express psychological sensations of divine love, which are not within the expressive capacity of the common language. Thus, their language becomes highly symbolic, ‘appealing to intuitive.’<sup>6</sup> Therefore, for grasping the real meanings of a Sufi treatise or verses of poetry, one should exceed literal denotations of the poems and decode their symbols to grasp the inserted message.

Most notably, one of the best and famous books that explained mystical symbols of the mystics is *Gulshan-i Raz* that literally means ‘The Mystical Rose Garden’ written by Shaikh Mahmoud Shabistari the 14<sup>th</sup> century saint from Shabistar – Iran. The book is an important Sufi treatise, explaining theoretical thoughts in various aspects of mystical philosophy (*Irfan-i Nazari*) and notably, interpreting their symbolism. Shabistari’s *Golshan-i Raz* contains his answers to the fifteen basic questions on mystical knowledge and the secrets of the path (*tariqat*) from Imam Hosseini Heravi (1245-1318) who was the Sheikh of Khorasan. Imam’s questions and Shabistari’s explanations on mystical symbols of the Sufis have comprised the final chapters of the book, and became a resume of Sufi terminology in a plain and lucid explanation.<sup>7</sup> In

these three chapters, Shabistari not only explained the meanings of oft-used Sufi symbols but as well outlined a methodology for interpreting their meanings in other Sufi texts. In fact, without Shabistari’s clear explanations of Sufi’s peculiar phraseology in *Gulshani-i Raz* that pervades Persian poetry, it is impossible to comprehend the highly symbolic poetry and inspirational writings of the Sufis.<sup>8</sup>

The fame and importance of *Gulshan-i Raz* motivated Allama Muhammad Iqbal Lahori, the 20th century mystic-philosopher of Islam, to write “*Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*” that means ‘New Rose Garden of Mystery’ in response to Shabistari’s book, reformulating the old established theories of the Sufis. It is reasonable to claim that Iqbal’s *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* is his reaction against the *wujudi* school of Ibn Arabi that he considered it foreign to the simple and invigorating message of Islam, as embodied in the Qur’an and as represented in the dynamic life of Muhammad and his followers.<sup>9</sup>

Iqbal, as a muslim reformist and thinker, strongly criticised the Sufis, considering their teachings of self-negation and self-abandonment responsible for destruction of Muslims’ hegemony that led to colonial era. Thus, he aimed at the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* in Sufism that was influenced by neo-Platonic ideas that regarded the world as a mere illusion not worthy of striving for.<sup>10</sup> He even compared Ibn Arabi’s interpretation of the Quran to Shankara’s interpretation of the Vedas.<sup>11</sup> The contrast between Iqbal and Ibn Arabi’s followers is that

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<sup>5</sup> S H Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), 147.

<sup>6</sup> A Schellenberg and L Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Interpreting the Song of Songs: Literal Or Allegorical?*, Biblical Tools and Studies (Peeters, 2016), 185.

<sup>7</sup> J. Rypka, P. van Popta-Hope and K. Jahn, *History of Iranian Literature* (Springer Netherlands, 2013), 254.

<sup>8</sup> Mahmoud Shabistari, *The Gulshan Ráz*, translated by E H Whinfield (Wyman & Company, 1876), iii.

<sup>9</sup> Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, “Iqbal and Sufism (Part Five),” - Islamonweb, accessed February 2023, <https://en.islamonweb.net/iqbal-and-sufism-part-five>.

<sup>10</sup> Ehsan Ghodrattollahi, “The Doctrine of *Khudi* in Iqbal’s Philosophical Thought,” *Philosophical-Theological Research* 13(1)(2011): 65.

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Suheyl Umar, “Contours of Ambivalence Iqbal and Ibn ‘Arabi: Historical Perspective, Part I,” *Iqbal Review* 34(1)(April 1993): 16–37,

based on the Quran as Iqbal sees the world as creation of God while they consider the world as everlasting manifestation of God. Thus, in continuation to his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* delivered in 1930,<sup>12</sup> Iqbal based his philosophy on Islamic teachings, and beside his active engagement with social-political situations in Islamic land. However, doctrinal differences between Iqbal and Shabistari's schools of thought and Iqbal's criticism of Sufism is beyond the scope of this research.

Iqbal's *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* (New Rose Garden), written in Persian language and also published in 1938, was part of his endeavor to reconstruct theoretical Sufism on its original basis that is original teachings of Islam. Although *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* is a short treatise, but similar to *Gulshan-i Raz* of Shabistari, understanding it is not easy, and needs a fair knowledge of mystical philosophy of Islam.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding symbology of the Sufis in *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*, however, Allama Iqbal neither answered the last three questions on symbolism, nor introduced any new set of symbols in this book. Therefore, Iqbal's other poetry books would also be consulted to verify whether or not the same symbolic terms of traditional mystics that are elaborated in *Gulshan-i Raz* bear the same meanings.<sup>14</sup> So, if the symbols of *Gulshan-i Raz* has the same

implications in Iqbal's poetry, then he is in agreement with Shabistari and thus, the questions are unanswered to avoid redundancy. But if Iqbal's usage of the symbols have different connotations, the research would shed lights on differences between their mystical doctrines from a new angle and henceforth, clarifies Iqbal's reformation of mystical symbolism interpreted by Shaikh Mahmoud Shabistari in his *Gulshan-i Raz*.

While *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* and *Gulshan-i Raz* are important sources of mystical philosophy with very rich, concise language and yet, comparative research on the books is very few. However, an article written by Mirza Muhammad Munawwar and C.A. Qadir on nature and the role of reason in *Gulshani-i Raz* vs. *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* is the most notable one among few that focuses on the epistemic question of the books.<sup>15</sup> On symbolic language of Iqbal compared to the traditional symbolism that are explained in *Gulshan-i Raz*, and on the unanswered questions in *Gulshani-i Raz-i Jadid*, the authors found no available literature. Some available publications focus on Shabistari's Sufism, such as Leonard Lewisohn, Samira Mammadova, and Andrey Lukashev;<sup>16</sup> and some studies on Iqbal's sufism, such as Mazheruddin Siddiqi, Feyzullah Yilmaz,

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<http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/apr93/2.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> The *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930) is Muhammad Iqbal's major philosophic work: a series of profound reflections on the perennial conflict among science, religion, and philosophy, culminating in new visions of the unity of human knowledge, of the human spirit, and of God. Muhammad Iqbal and J Majeed, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Encountering Traditions* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Although many commentaries are written on *Gulshan-i Raz* of Shabistari, but still, there is no major commentary on Iqbal's *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*.

<sup>14</sup> The English translation of Allama Muhammad Iqbal's poems are available on Iqbal's online library at: <http://www.allamaiqbal.com>

<sup>15</sup> Mirza Muhammad Munawwar and C.A. Qadir, "*Gulshan-i-Raz* and *Gulshan-i-Raz-i Jadid* (The Nature and Role of Reason)," *Iqbal Review* (October 1983) 24 (October 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari* (Curzon Press, 1995); Samira Mammadova, "Mahmud Shabistari and Western Orientalism," *The Journal of Academic Social Science*, 2(5) 2014, 469-477; Andrey Lukashev, "Faith and Infidelity in the Context of the Notion System in the Works by Mahmud Shabistari," *Politics and Religion (Politologie des Religions)*, 14(1), 2020.

and Sakina Khan<sup>17</sup>—although there are a number of studies on his philosophical thought, which touch also of the Sufistic aspect of it, such as Annemarie Schimmel, Naeem Ahmad, Christopher Scott McClure, Hasan Azad.<sup>18</sup> However, there are surprisingly little studies on both Shabistari's *Gulshan-i Raz* and Iqbal's *Gulshani-i Raz-i Jadid*. Among these little studies of *Gulshani-i Raz* are Vladimir Ivanow,<sup>19</sup> Andrey Lukashev<sup>20</sup> and Sayeh Meisami.<sup>21</sup>

### Mahmoud Shabistari and *Gulshan-i Raz*

Little information is known about Sheikh Mahmoud Shabistari. Annemarie Schimmel in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* states that his life is "obscure" and describes his biography in only two short paragraphs with great uncertainty. The only certain information is about the places of his birth (Shabistar, a town near Tabriz) and of his

death (Tabriz) and his work *Gulshan-i-Raz*. Schimmel even speculates about the date of his birthday and death, subsequently c. 1288 and dead in c. 1340.<sup>22</sup>

Shabistari lived after the Mongol invasion of Persia (1219 -1258) and its defeat of Baghdad (1258), and probably spent most of his life in Tabrīz, the capital of the new Mongol empire. This situation affected his life. The fierce doctrinal debates between Christianity and Islam for the allegiance of the Mongol rulers were reflected in his works. His spiritual life might also be part of his taking distance of worldly life under the non-Muslim ruler.<sup>23</sup>

Shabistari is one of the most important mystical and Persian poets, apart from Rumi, Hafiz, Attar.<sup>24</sup> He was influenced by three philosophical-theological schools including the philosophy of Ibn Arabi, the theological school of

<sup>17</sup> Mazheruddin Siddiqi, "A Historical Study of Iqbal's Views on Sufism." *Islamic Studies*, 5(4), 1966, pp. 411–27; Feyzullah Yilmaz, "Overcoming Nihilism Through Sufism: An Analysis of Iqbal's Article on 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī,'" *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 30, Issue 1, January 2019, Pages 69–96; Yilmaz, Feyzullah. "Iqbal, Nietzsche, and Nihilism: Reconstruction of Sufi Cosmology and Revaluation of Sufi Values in *Asrar-i-Khudi*" *Open Philosophy*, 6(1) 2023, pp. 1-20; Sakina Khan, "Iqbal and Sufism," *The Dialogue*, 5(4), 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963; Ahmad, Naeem. *Iqbal's Concept of Death, Immortality and Afterlife*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2006; Christopher Scott McClure, "Reconstructing Islam in a Post-metaphysical Age: Muhammad Iqbal's Interpretation of Immortality". *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp. 142-166; Hasan Azad, "Reconstructing the Muslim Self: Muhammad Iqbal, Khudi, and the Modern Self," *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2(2) Fall 2014, pp. 14-28.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Ivanow, "An Ismaili Interpretation of the *Gulshani Raz*," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the*

*Royal Asiatic Society* (JBBRAS), Vol. 8 (January 1, 1932), 69-78.

<sup>20</sup> Andrey Lukashev, "The Issue of Faith and Infidelity in "The Rose Garden of Mystery" by Mahmud Shabistari (1288–1321)," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 329, 2019, pp. 993-994; Lukashev A.A. "The Ontological foundations of the problem of sectarianism in Mahmud Shabistari's 'Rose Garden of Mystery,'" *East and West: common spiritual values, scientific cultural links*. Baku: [2010]. P. 645-8.

<sup>21</sup> Meisami, Sayeh (2021). "The Point of Reality and the Circle of Appearance: The Sufi Philosophy of Maḥmūd Shabistārī's *Gulshan-i rāz* through the Lens of Shams al-Dīn Lāhījī's *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz*," *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 9(1), 30-51.

<sup>22</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "Sufism", *Britannica.com*; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sufism>, accessed 3 September 2023.

<sup>23</sup> F Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668* (Asian Educational Services, 1996); Mahmud Shabistari, *The Gulshan Rāz*, translated by E H Whinfield (Wyman & Company, 1876); Annemarie Schimmel, "Sufism."

<sup>24</sup> Elahi Ghomshei 2013

Ash'ari and the romance of Sanaei Ghaznavi.<sup>25</sup> Shabistari was also among the group of famous mystics such as Rumi, Saadi, and Jami who were the followers of Attar.<sup>26</sup> In age of 33, he attained the highest state of spiritual realization.<sup>27</sup> The small village of Shabistar became famous because of him that even Amir Timour (1336-1405) wrote in his autobiography that, he refrained Shabistar's people from massacre and instead distributed gold among them for his respect towards Shaikh Mahmoud. The Iranian mystic, Hossein Elahi Ghomeshi even suggests that *Gulshani-i Raz* is not only the key to understand mystical writings of famous poets, but the key to understand the Quran itself.<sup>28</sup> In *Gulshan-i Raz*, Shabistari answers basic questions on mystical philosophy in a very short but precise way. The questions were actually coming from Imam Hosseini Heravi, sent by a messenger to the congregation of Sheikh Bahauddin Yaqub Tabrizi, the Shaikh of Tabriz.<sup>29</sup> Although *Gulshan-i Raz* was the first experience of Shabistari in writing poetic treatise, he skillfully in one or two lines, summarizes a whole treatise of the Shaykh al-Akbar, ibn Arabi that makes the book absolutely unique, branded by Aminrazawi and Nasr as the supreme masterpiece of Persian Sufi poetry.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, *Gulshani-i Raz* became a favorite among Sufis, and several commentaries were written on the book.<sup>31</sup> It is still widely read and

oft-quoted of Sufi poems, as it combines heavenly-inspired beauty with remarkable clarity and simplicity while discussing the most important elements of 'Irfan'.<sup>32</sup> The book has become the common heritage of all Persian speaking people, well known in Pakistan and among Indian Muslims.<sup>33</sup> Such fame and importance of the book persuaded Allama Iqbal (1877-1938) of Lahore to write his *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* (New Rose Garden of Mystery) in response to Shabistari's Rose Garden. Although both books have the same name, but their answers to the same questions are in different paradigms.

### Muhammad Iqbal and *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*

Sir Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877 - 1938) is a unique figure in the history of Islamic thought. He was a philosopher, a politician, a poet and a mystic. His father, Shaikh Nur Muhammad, was a Sufi with rare religious experiences that Iqbal witnessed during his lifetime. From the early years of his life, Iqbal was acquainted with the Quran and spirituality of Islam by his teacher Mir Hasan. The teacher not only taught him Persian, Arabic and Urdu language and traditional knowledge of the day but advised Iqbal's father to send him to study modern science at British school. The teacher was a fan and familiar with Sir Seyed Ahmad Khan's empowering teachings for Muslims of India.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Mousa Rahimi Nezhad and Seyed Jasem Pazhohandeh, "Gnosticism in the Words of Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 6, no. 4 (September 30, 2017): 1078, <https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i4.1131>.

<sup>26</sup> L Lewisohn and C Shackle, *Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Molana Salaheddin Angha, *The Fragrance of Sufism*, G - Reference, Information and Interdisciplinary Subjects Series (University Press of America, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Elahi Ghomshei 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Mohsen Kadivar, 'Description of Golshan Raz Description, General Courses on Mysticism', *Culture and Wisdom Circle, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*, 2016; Abdul Hossein Zarinkoob, *Search in Sufism in Iran* (Amirkabir Institute, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> M. Aminrazavi and S. H. Nasr, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> R. Saberi and K. Com, *An Invitation to Persian Poetry* (Ketab Corporation, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Aminrazavi and Nasr, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*.

<sup>33</sup> S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (State University of New York Press, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Mustansir, 2020; David Lelyveld, "*Mubammad Iqbal*", in Richard Martin (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, A-L, Macmillan, (2004), 356; Javed Iqbal, *Zinda Rood: Allama Iqbal Ki Mukammal Sawaneh Hayat (Urdu Edition)*; vol. 1 (Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2019).

Thus, apart from his traditional education, Iqbal got also Western education. He was a firm follower of Rumi, introduced by Soroush as the Rumi of the modern age.<sup>35</sup> Allamah Iqbal called on Muslims to use both intellect and love, heart, and mind, to shape their “self” (*Khudi*). Iqbal considered the popular practice of Sufism of the time as a cause for weakening Muslims and corrupting Islamic communities. Therefore, he wanted Sufism to be reconstructed; an effort he did, among other things, in the *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*. Apart from his poems, Iqbal’s thought on Sufism is reflected in *Reconstruction* as well as in some other writings, such as “Islam and Mysticism”, and “The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jili.”<sup>36</sup>

*Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* is part of *Zabur-i `Ajam* (Persian Psalms), Iqbal's philosophical poetry book, written in Persian. This book includes four sections: the first two sections are ghazals or Arabic classical form of amatory poem or ode, and the last two sections contain *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* and *Bandagi Nama* (Book of Servitude).

*Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* of Iqbal cannot be separated from Shabistari’s *Gulshan-i Raz*, because it is a critical response to the latter. On these two works Annemarie Schimmel has made a brief but important comment:

In the last part [of the *Zabur-i `Ajam*], Iqbal has followed the pattern of the *Gulshan-i raz*, the Rose Garden of Mystery, a mystical question-and-answer-poem of Mahmud Shabistari, a Persian pantheistic mystic of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, now

introducing the reader, in this New Rose Garden (*Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*) into his own philosophy of life, and of life-giving love.<sup>37</sup>

However, Schimmel did not elaborate this point further. This writing will partly delve further into this issue.

### Iqbal vs. Shabistari

In his introduction of *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*, Iqbal praises Shabistari as the last mystic who puts fire in the heart of the Muslim, although they are from different era, with different world views. Shabistari is a representative of traditional Sufism when Muslims did not face serious intellectual challenge as the tradition of Islam was still dominant in each corner of Islamic land. But Iqbal, during all his life could feel the real intellectual challenges of modernism as a competitor to Islamic tradition in all aspects. Thus, Iqbal tried to answer the modern issues by returning to the original teachings of Quran. Moreover, he aimed at empowering Muslims to free themselves from colonial powers as for Iqbal, the power of Muslims who concurred the was a nostalgia. Thus, the decline of power and Islamic hegemony became the reason and motivation that modernists and reformists started to rethink Islam, to find a solution for empowering Muslims, in a time that Muslims were defeated, and their land was colonized. As the thinkers are influenced by the social situation of their time, Shabistari and Iqbal are no

<sup>35</sup> Abdulkarim Soroush, “A Dive into Iqbal Lahori’s Sonnets Lectures (1-8) - YouTube” (Bonyad Towhid & ICCNC - YouTube, January 2021).

<sup>36</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, “Islam and Mysticism,” *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, pp. 250-51, as cited in *Speeches Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, compiled and edited by Latif Ahmed Sherwani (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995), 154-6;

Muhammad Iqbal, “The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jilani,” *Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, September 1900, 237-46, as cited in Iqbal, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 77-97.

<sup>37</sup> Schimmel, *Gabriel’s Wing*, 49.

exception. Therefore, the traditional Shabistari is different from reformist Iqbal, as the first one aimed for the sacred knowledge of God while the later aimed for changes through “reconstruction of religious thoughts” and by reformulating mystical doctrines, by mapping the human self, beside the “Supreme Self” of God. However, although it is beyond the scope of this study, it should be mentioned that Iqbal has tried to synthesize traditional, modern, and puritan views on Islam.

### Questions of *Gulshan-i Raz* on Symbolism

The Question of Imam Heravi and Shabistari’s answers are on wide range of metaphysical issues in such as eternal and temporal, necessary and contingent, existence (*wujud*) and non-existence (*adam*). The other questions on cosmology, epistemology, secrets of the Sufi path, relation between human and God find Shabistari’s comprehensive answers that shape his doctrine. Yet, out of the 15 questions, this article confines to the last three questions (that are missing in *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*) to study Iqbal’s treatment of mystical symbolism in his poetry.

The last three questions translated from Persian are as follow:

Question 13:

*What the mystic means by those expressions of his,  
what does he indicate by eye and ‘lip’?*

<sup>38</sup> Shabistari, *The Gulshan Ráz*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Shabistari, 78.

<sup>40</sup> Shabistari, 83.

<sup>41</sup> Shabistari, 71.

<sup>42</sup> The Most Beautiful Names of Allah of which there are 99 in the Qur’an. The compendium of all the names is “Allah”. Look at: Mawlana Syed

*What seeks he [the Sufi] by ‘face’, ‘curl’, ‘down’, and ‘mole’?*

*Who is in the ‘stations’ and what is the ‘states’?*<sup>38</sup>

Question 14:

*What meaning attaches to ‘wine’, ‘candle’, and ‘beauty’?*

*What is assumed in being a ‘hunter of taverns’?*<sup>39</sup>

Question 15:

*‘Idols’, ‘girdles’ and ‘Christianity’ in this discourse, are all infidelity. If not, say what they are?*<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, Shabistari’s explanation and elaboration on above symbols is crucial for understanding Sufi poetry.

Based on Shabistari’s view, the mystics see the created world in outmost perfection and beauty as it is originated from God, the most beautiful and perfect ‘One’. Thus, they draw a comparison between world’s perfection and the face of a beautiful beloved; given ways to poetic expressions and symbolic description of transcendence based on the female (human) beauty:

*The world is as curl, down, mole and eyebrow,  
For everything in its own place is beautiful.*<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the names of God (*Asma ul Husna*)<sup>42</sup> are in two types; either ‘Jalal’ (the power) or ‘Jamal’ (the beauty) of God. Therefore,

Moenuddin Shah; Qadri and Nazeer Ahmed, “Asma Wa Sifaat (The Names and Attributes of Allah) – History of Islam,” *History of Islam - An Encyclopedia of Islamic History-* (Xlibris Corporation, 2001, 2021), <https://historyofislam.com/2021/06/16/asma-wa-sifaat-the-names-and-attributes-of-allah/>.



according to Shabistari, the symbols are either referring to “*Jalali*” or “*Jamali*” attributes of God. Based on this view, the epiphany of God with the attribute of beauty finds similarities in the ‘face’ of a beloved while the power manifests itself in her ‘curl’. Accordingly, when the beauty of God appears, His power is veiled while manifestation of His power would veil His beauty. Accordingly, God’s *Jalali* and *Jamali* attributes get similar with a woman hiding her ‘beautiful face’ with her ‘dark curl’. In Shabistari’s own words:

*The attributes of ‘The Truth’ are mercy and vengeance,*

*Face and curl of fair ones are types of these two.*<sup>43</sup>

Inspired by teachings of Ibn Arabi,<sup>44</sup> Shabistari considers the created world as suppositional that is just a shadow of Reality. In this fashion, Shabistari concludes the symbols are real as coming from the world of Real:

*I believe that these words were at first assigned,*

*To those mysteries in their original usage.*<sup>45</sup>

Shabistari suggests that symbols are real in their true sense. He explains the names of mentioned symbols are in fact assigned to the real mystical objects, but they have appeared in the

<sup>43</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan Ráz*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> As pointed out by Lewisohn, Shabistari embraces without reservation the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī in *Gulshan-i Raz*, but later he is more critical in the Sa’adat-nāma. Lewisohn suggests that such a change was motivated by the religious-political changes in under Sultan Abū Sa’īd (reg. 1317-1335), in which he lived. See Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*, 29.

language of common people as this world is a shadow of the real world. Therefore, the rule for interpretation of the symbols is considering proportionality, although the perfect analogies of the real world are unattainable in the shadowy world of manifestation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, to apply or interpret mystical symbols, one should look at their final intent, usage, and attributes. The method is to find a relevant and reasonable comparability between the symbols and what has been experienced by the mystic, otherwise, a person without mystical experience should abstain from applying or interpreting the symbols.

### **Iqbal and Symbolic terms**

Based on Shabistari’s explanation of the symbols in the last three questions, a comparison is drawn between Iqbal’s usage of the terms contrasting with some of the famous mystical verses written by Ibn Arabi, Iraqi, Hafiz Shirazi and Ayatollah Khomeini respectively from 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Based on Shabistari’s explanation of the symbols, the meaning of their mystical verses become clear. The aim of such comparison is to verify if Iqbal’s usage, intend and interpretation of the mystical terms are in accordance with the listed symbols and the examples.<sup>47</sup>

### **Eye and Lip**

The eyes and lips of the beloved are central symbols in traditional writings of the mystics.

<sup>45</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan-i Ráz*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Shabistari, 71.

<sup>47</sup> For detail research on symbolism of *Gulshan-i Raz*, Look at: Nabiollah Masoumi, Moch. Nur Ichwan, and Dicky Sofjan, “Mystical Symbolism of the Sufis in *Gulshan-i Raz*,” in *International Conference of Interreligious and Intercultural Studies (ICIIS)* (Universitas Hindu Indonesia, 2022), 163–78.

The following verse that Hafiz Shirazi speaks of beloved's lip is an example:

*Mine is the joy of her companionship,  
Whose healing lip is laid upon my lip— This is  
enough for me!*<sup>48</sup>

As it is mentioned, the necessity for understanding mystical symbols is the knowledge of God's attributes of *jamal* and *jalal*. From this standpoint, the Sufis would hint God's benevolence which is of His *Jamal* (beauty) by symbolic description of 'beloved's lips' that metaphorically gives happiness to the lover (*Ashiq*). On the other hand, 'the beloved's eye' is a symbol for both attributes as love and wrath could find expression in the eyes. So, the Sufi's symbolically used the eyes of the beloved (*Mashuq*) to hint God's beauty and power at the same time.<sup>49</sup> In Shabistari's own words:

*By a frown of His eye, He plunders the heart,  
By a smile on His lips, He cheers the soul.*<sup>50</sup>

Although the symbolism that Sufi's has attributed to God is like the lips and eyes of the human in common language of worldly romance, they should not be translated in literal ways as God transcends such qualities. However, by using this kind of symbolism in their poetry, the Sufis

were misunderstood and often accused of seeking for earthly love. The following verse of Ibn Arabi is an example of undifferentiable similarity between literary and symbolic connotations of the lips:

*Which charm by their laughing and smiling  
mouths;  
whose lips are sweet to kiss.*<sup>51</sup>

In contrast, the image of lips and moreover, kissing beloved's lips is not mentioned in Iqbal's poetry. Instead, Iqbal has mentioned in *Asrar-i Khudi* of the beautiful kiss of the moon and stars on the feet of the man who is prostrating before God,<sup>52</sup> and recommending the wayfarer to kiss the ground in front of the house of the Perfect man:

*Transmute your handful of earth into gold.  
Kiss the threshold of a perfect man!*<sup>53</sup>

It is notable that he has not used eyes for any symbolic expression. Generally, it seems that female body symbology is not of Iqbal's favorite as he did not want to be ambiguous about the meaning of his poetry, hence he consciously avoided the elements that would blur his message. Only in one place, Iqbal has used the drunken eyes of the beloved like the traditional

<sup>48</sup> Hafiz Shirazi and Gertude Lowthian Bell, *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz* (London: William Heinemann, 1897), 73.

<sup>49</sup> Mulla Mohsen Feyz Feyz Kashani, *Meshvagh Treatise*, manuscript, 2002, 26, <https://ia601005.us.archive.org/6/items/ktp2019-16-00201/ktp2019-16-00201.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan-i Ráz*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn al-' Arabi, *The Tarjumán Al-Ashwáq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Hoyal Asiatic Society, 1911), 107.

<sup>52</sup> Prostration unto God had marked his brow; The Moon and stars bow down to kiss his feet. A J Arberry and M Iqbal, *Mysteries of Selflessness: Rumuz-i Bekhudi*, online edi (Kazi Publications Incorporated, 2001), <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/persian/ramuz/translation/index.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Muhammad Iqbal and Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi) a Philosophical Poem* (Toronto: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 29.

Sufis, as he ascribes his teachings as the ‘young wine’ that he poured into the cup (his poems) to self-realize the ‘drunken one’ (*rend*). This is the wine that Iqbal has borrowed from the Magian of the previous age, from the cupbearer’s eyes. He writes:

*This youthful wine I poured into the cup,  
would self-realize the drunken one (rend),<sup>54</sup>  
For, like the ancient Magians, this wine,  
I borrowed from Saki’s languorous eye.<sup>55</sup>*

As the terminology of ‘rend’, ‘Magian’, ‘wine’ and ‘Saki’ (the cup bearer) are the central symbols and the famous terms in Hafiz poetry, it seems that Iqbal refers to him, and in a subtle criticism, branding Hafiz as a Magian from previous age.<sup>56</sup>

### **Curls (hair)**

Curl is another key symbol in mystical poetry. The following verse of Ibn Arabi is an example:

*My night is radiant with her face,  
and my day is dark with her hair (curl).<sup>57</sup>*

<sup>54</sup> A.J. Arberry, has translated the second semi-verse to “Revives the aged toper near to die”, which based on the original Persian words of the verse is not the best translation.

<sup>55</sup> M Iqbal and M S ‘ Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)* (Iqbal Academy, 2000), 71.

<sup>56</sup> Hafiz, is the most famous Poet of Persia among Iranians. It is said that in each house, there are two books to be found for sure: Quran and the book of Hafiz. Though Iqbal didn’t accept Hafiz type of life and teachings, but he massively is under the influence of his language.

Based on Shabistari’s account, “curl” symbolizes the world of multiplicity that emanates from unity. The similarity is that beloved’s curl is of many strands. The darkness of the beloved’s curl would blind the wayfarer (*salik*) to fall into darkness of heresy (*kufir*) by covering the face, thus signifies *Jalali* attribute of God.

Despite complexity and symbolic beauty of the curl in mystical writings and frequent usage of it, it is remarkable that in his poetry, Iqbal neither used it as a term nor as a symbol.<sup>58</sup> It seems that Iqbal that criticized Hafiz for his ambiguous language did not want to confuse his readers about implications of his terminology. However, Iqbal’s time and culture, and social situation of those days needed a very clear message to the people.

### **Beloved’s Face and Down (Khat)**

The ‘face and down’ is another symbol that appears very often in prose and poetry of the mystics. For instance, Hafiz Shirazi describes the beloved’s face and down in following verse:

*Sweet, the way of Thy grace; beautiful Thy line  
(of down) and mole:*

*The eye and the eyebrow of Thine, adorned.<sup>59</sup>*

<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-‘ Arabi, *The Tarjuman Al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, 117.

<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that Iqbal, was a follower of Rumi whose poetry was very simple and sometimes criticized by the followers of Ibn Arabi that he speaks with the language of common people. Look at: Abdolkarim Soroush, “Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush and Masnavi’s Lecture Series 2 — ICCNC 2016-2021,” *Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California* (YouTube · School of Rumi, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> Hafiz Shirazi, *The Divan I Hafiz: Vols. I. & II.*, ed. Major H.S. (ed.), Clarke, Lieut.-Col. H.

Based on GR, beloved's 'face' is the way for the Sufis to symbolize manifestation of God's 'beauty' (*jamal*).<sup>60</sup>

The 'down' (*khat*) is an invisible line that frames the face, implying that all the beauty are inside the creation of God. As the created world of God in the mystic eyes is not, but beautiful and thus, nothing is outside of the beauty, so nothing is outside of God. In Shabistari's own words:

*His face scores a line through beauty,*

*Saying "without me is no comeliness of face."*<sup>61</sup>

Based on God's plurality of names and attributes, it should be noted that face symbolism also refers to Divine Nature<sup>62</sup>, and manifestation of God's 'names and attributes' (*asma wa sifat*) in the world. In addition, Shabistari explains that 'down' signifies delineations of the unseen world (the worlds of spirits and the angels) as the closest to the realm of God.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast with traditional Sufis, Allama Iqbal has not invested on face symbolism. His usage of the term is plain and simple. It can be said that Iqbal has given up the beauty and complexity of traditional symbols for the sake of clarity and simplicity. However, he poetically refers to the face of God (*wajhi Allah*) which is a Quranic term, and alludes to the famous verse of Quran (24:35) that Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth:

*O Thou whose **face** lends light to the moon and the stars.*

*Withdraw thy fire from my soul.*<sup>64</sup>

In an apparent departure from traditional symbolism of Sufi literature that 'beautiful face' would often be credited to a 'Christian beloved', Iqbal points at the modesty of that beauty before the beautiful face of Islamic community (*ummah*) that he finds at the outmost charm.

*My mind was weary of Christian company,*

*When suddenly your **beauty** stood unveiled.*<sup>65</sup>

The Iqbalian approach thus affirms social responsibility of the mystics towards Muslim community that at his time were on the peak of vulnerability.

### **Mole (Khal)**

Mole is the black dot on the human face. It has found a unique place in symbolic language of the Sufis. Hafiz Shirazi famously traded the two famous cities for a Hindu mole in the following verse:

*If that Bold One of Shiraz gain our heart,  
For her Hindu **mole**, I will give Samarkand and Bukhara.*<sup>66</sup>

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Wilberforce. (ed.1891) Jarrett, First (London.: The Octagon Press Ltd., 1974), 549.

<sup>60</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan Ráz*, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, 76.

<sup>62</sup> Feyz Kashani, *Meshvagh Treatise*, 36.

<sup>63</sup> Mohammad Kazem Muhammadi Baghmolaei, *Hadith Bi Kam o Bishi (Description of Gulshan-i Raz Sheikh Mahmud Shabestari) (Sharh Mohammadi Baghmolaei Mohammad Kazem), Preface, Explanatory,*

*S.D., Lahiji's Description by Mohammad Ka Zam Mohammadi with the Introduction of Jafar Hamid*, vol. 1 (Qom, 2000), 390; Feyz Kashani, *Meshvagh Treatise*, 37.

<sup>64</sup> Iqbal and Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi) a Philosophical Poem*, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Arberry and Iqbal, *Mysteries of Selflessness: Rumuz-i Bekhudi*.

<sup>66</sup> Hafiz Shirazi, *The Divan I Hafiz*, Vols. I. & II., 40.

When the mole appears under the lips of a beloved, gets similar to the dot under the Persian-Arabic letter B (ب), which is the initial letter of the first verse of Quran that is the dot of Bismillah. On this basis, mole is a central symbol in mystical writings. Explained by Shabistari, 'mole' is the symbol of God's unity in His essence and it's the origin of plurality.<sup>67</sup> In other words, it refers to the point of unity<sup>68</sup> and the principle of existence on the face of multiplicity.<sup>69</sup> That means the world of multiplicity finds its finitude in the mysterious dot of unity. For instance, in mystical poetry of Ayatollah Khomeini, the lover is captivated by the mole of the Beloved which is interpreted as the central point of existence and the focal point of monotheism.<sup>70</sup>

*O Friend, I have become captivated,  
by the mole over your lip.<sup>71</sup>*

Interestingly, and in a sharp contrast with the others, Iqbal has not mention anything about beloved's mole in his poetry except in a verse, borrowing the second semi-verse from Hafiz Shirazi<sup>72</sup> to advise the Muslim youths how their pure and beautiful face is needless of fake colors and artificial moles and make ups.

*The simple life was the pride they had in their  
deeds of glorious show,  
'How does the lovely face feel like it needs rouge  
and mole and art?'*<sup>73</sup>

## **Idol**

<sup>67</sup> Feyz Kashani, *Meshvagh Treatise*, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Baghmolaei, *Hadith Bi Kam o Bishi (Description of Gulshan-i Raz Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari) (Sharh Mohammadi Baghmolaei Mohammad Kazem), Preface, Explanatory, S.D., Lahiji's Description by Mohammad Ka Zam Mohammadi with the Introduction of Jafar Hamid*, 1:392.

<sup>69</sup> Hassan Aminloo, "Thousand Treasures: Description of Masnavi Golshan Raz, Composed by Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari Using Mafatih Al-Ajaz by Sheikh Mohammed Lahiji (RA)," Online

One of the most unorthodox symbols in mystical writings is 'idol'. Based on Shabistari's explanation, it symbolizes manifestation of love for the 'Absolute Essence' of God and as well symbolizes the love for God and in different context, even denotes God's unity.

The idolater prays to the beloved idol, while considering the worship for anything else as infidelity. So, similar, and proportional with their idol worshiping, the Sufis has symbolized it as manifestation of love for the 'Absolute Essence' of God. However, some verses like the following verse of Shabistari in *Gulshan-i Raz* has been greatly debated and thus, caused challenges for the Sufis:

*If the Muslim, but knew what faith is,  
He would see that faith is idol worship.<sup>74</sup>*

As Shabistari's view is in accordance with *wujudi* school of 'Unity of Bing', thus for him everything and every form in the created world is manifestation of God. In this sense, the idol, idolator and even the prayers are not, but manifestations of Absolute Reality. In Ibn Arabi's famous words, one could find the very allusion to the idol in this sense of unity, as he found that his heart is capable of every form; a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, the tablets of the Tora and the book of the Koran.<sup>75</sup> In addition, as the famous people are also called idols and receive adorations and admirations,

(Tehran: Limiya, 2005), <http://hezarganj-golshanraz.blogfa.com/1400/05>.

<sup>70</sup> G R A'wani, *The Wine of Love, Mystical Poetry of Imam Khomeini* (Lulu.com, 2014), 8.

<sup>71</sup> A'wani, 51.

<sup>72</sup> Hafiz Shirazi, *The Divan I Hafiz, Vols. I. & II.*, 41.

<sup>73</sup> Iqbal and ' Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 187.

<sup>74</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan-i Raz*, 84.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn al-' Arabi, *The Tarjuman Al-Ashwag: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, 67.

comparably the Sufis as well refer to their spiritual master as their idol.<sup>76</sup>

However, Iqbal's position on 'idol' is again contrary to Shabistari and traditional Sufis, as for him idols would mean nothing but the material world, although he wanted Muslims to take the worldly affairs seriously and scientifically to empower the Islamic nation (*ummah*). The Idol-house in Iqbal's poems sometimes alludes to India, where the people worshipped their very idols in Hindu temples. As he was in Europe for a couple of years, and was familiar with the colonial politics, he wanted both Hindu and Muslims of India to be more concerned about their social life and to free themselves from what he called slavery. The following verse is an example of Iqbal's use of idol and his approach towards empowering Indian people:

*But oh! this poor Kashmiri who, in slavery born  
and bred,*

*He is busy carving idols from the tombstones of  
the dead.<sup>77</sup>*

Moreover, as a believer and mystic, Iqbal could see how humans create and worship new idols in modern times. In fact, one of the idol-houses that Iqbal identified in his era was the idol-house of the West. In his words:

*You have been melted so by the heat of the West,*

*That you have fallen from your own eyes, just  
like a tear, Alas!<sup>78</sup>*

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<sup>76</sup> Feyz Kashani, *Meshvagh Treatise*.

<sup>77</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 29.

<sup>78</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, 77.

<sup>79</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, 51.

For Iqbal, the Idol is anything that prevents the human from engaging and devoting with God, even if it is the religion itself. So, if the presence of God is not felt and the fire of love is absent in the heart, even the house of Kabbah will be nothing but another idol. Thus, he writes:

*You went around Kabbah, and You went around  
the idol house,*

*But you did not engage your vision with  
yourself, Alas!<sup>79</sup>*

In other words, Iqbal considers the believer's heart as the real temple of God. Therefore, if the man does not realize about the heart and fails to discover the 'self' then all the worship places would become just an idol-house. Even the philosophical forms could become idols as they would prevent the human of reaching to the formless (*surat va bisurat*). Thus, Iqbal introduces love as an idol breaker like Abraham that destroys the intellectual idols to create a sacred shrine (*Haram*) in the hearts.<sup>80</sup> It seems that refraining from using idol in its poetic and symbolic ways is Iqbal's respectful treatment towards the 'Shariat' and the outer aspect of Islam.

### **Girdle (Zonnar)**

Zunnar that means 'girdle' in English, is a belt that the Christians used to wear for identification of their faith. The frequent use of this symbol in Persian poetry is remarkable. For example, Hafiz Shirazi expresses his love for a rich charmer, whose girdle is embroidered with gold and silver.<sup>81</sup> Shabistari explains that 'girdle'

<sup>80</sup> Arberry and Iqbal, *Mysteries of Selflessness: Rumuz-i Bekhudi*.

<sup>81</sup> I, the beggar, desire one of cypress-stature, Within whose girdle, save for silver and gold, the hand goeth not. Hafiz Shirazi, *The Divan I Hafiz*; Vols. I. & II., 351.

is a symbol for the servants of God, and means obedience:

*I have looked and seen the origin of everything,  
The knotted **girdle** is the emblem of obedience.*<sup>82</sup>

It seems that Iqbal does not abide with the tradition and thus, changes the meaning of *zunnar* to a worldly symbol although in both negative and positive senses in different contexts. Iqbal firmly holds that Muslim's rosary needs a thread (*zunnar*) to get hold together, thus he demanded Muslims to be responsible for the well-being of the community and prosperity of Islamic lands. From this standpoint one could understand why Iqbal was critical towards the isolated Sufis, wanted them to wear the earthly girdle and establish livelihood for their families. In other words, Iqbal asked Muslims of colonial India to not only think of after life, but to focus on their life on earth as well. For Iqbal the world is of spiritual origin, thus he clearly opposes any dualistic view in the following verse:

*Learn how to put a rosary, bead on the **girdle**,*<sup>83</sup>  
*And if your eyes see double, then learn how not  
to see.*<sup>84</sup>

According to him the human intellect is with *zunnar* seeking material solutions, but love is the guiding light for the human to not lose the path.<sup>85</sup> Thus, in Iqbalian view, the intellect without faith

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<sup>82</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan Ráz*, 85.

<sup>83</sup> M. Hadi Husain has translated the term "Zunnar" (girdle) to "sacred thread" in this verse that is not correct.

<sup>84</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, 77.

<sup>86</sup> Muhammad Iqbal and Jamil Naqvi, "What Should Then Be Done, O People of the East:

is a western girdle that Muslims should strictly avoid it. So, Iqbal prays to God to protect the world from the West and its secular thinking as the Westerners have changed true knowledge into unbelief, recommending the Eastern youths to save their minds from intoxicating wine of the West and to put off the western girdle:

*You know the West and its deeds,*

*How long will you remain tied to its zunnar?*<sup>86</sup>

Iqbal as well criticized the religious leaders with attachments to material world, counting them as great disturbance to Islam. So, in this context, he complains of Muslim Sheikhs who break their promise to Islam by making rosary with *zunnar* and filling the holy house with idols, gambling Islam away for love of idols, and made a rosary from *zunnar*.<sup>87</sup> Although more examples could be listed, but it is clear that Iqbal's usage of *zunnar* is totally different from the traditional mystics.

## Christianity

Christianity with Jesus as its central figure known as the 'Spirit of God' (*Ruhollah*) is another important symbol in Sufi writings that are mentioned in GR. Based on the Islamic – Christian belief in ascendance of Jesus to the Heaven, thus for the Sufis the term 'Christianity' symbolizes liberation from the bondages of material world and finally ascending towards the Truth, as they found the creed similar to their own

English Rendered of Iqbal's Pas Chih Bayad Kard Ay Aqwam-ISharq," online (Iqbal Academy, Pakistan, 1977), <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/persian/pas/translation/index.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Iqbal and Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi) a Philosophical Poem*, 132.

spiritual path (*tariqat*). Shabistari explains the meaning of the symbol in the following verse:

*In Christianity the end I see is purification from  
self,*

*Deliverance from the yoke of bondage.*<sup>88</sup>

But the term of Christianity in Iqbal's poetry is used differently with what Shabistari explains in GR. Iqbal considers Jesus as a prophet of God and adores his kindness based on Quranic narrations. He praises the power of Jesus in resurrecting the dead, considering him as the master of natural and spiritual world, holding that prophets could negate the doubting view of scientist about the power of spirituality:

*The scientists tend to adorn a dead body,*

*They neither possess the Hand of Moses nor the  
Breath of Jesus.*<sup>89</sup>

In literary works of the Sufis especially in Persian poetry very often the symbol of 'Christian boy' (*Tarsa bacheh*) is used. In Hafiz poetry, the 'young Christian' is interpreted as the spiritual man who may have escaped from mean qualities and gained laudable qualities.<sup>90</sup> In the same fashion, Shabistari explains in *Gulshan-i Raz* that 'Christian boy' denotes the Sufi Master (*Qutb*) who symbolically offers spiritual wine to the mystics:

*What a cupbearer is he who by a single cup,*

*Makes drunken two hundred men of threescore  
and ten.*<sup>91</sup>

Therefore, when a mystic express love for the Christian boy and hence get outcasted from their tribes and religion, it simply means the person has initiated on the path of Sufism.

It is notable that despite frequent usage of the symbol in traditional writings of the mystics, Iqbal has only one time mentioned the Christian wine seller in his poetry,<sup>92</sup> where the young Christian that should be a spiritual master, has advised Iqbal to be sober in the path of *tariqat* and maintain respect and obedience for the religious law (*Shariat*).

*I do not ask that you Should not say your heart's  
say;*

*but say it with all due respect and only drink  
what you can carry well.*<sup>93</sup>

In fact, the above verse is Iqbal's criticism of the Sufis who ignore the religious laws of Islam, as for Iqbal, the spiritual practice would always accompany Islamic laws and rituals. The next advice of the Christian boy as the most important one that determines Iqbal's mystical philosophy is to not strive to become God, but to protect the self (*khudi*) and remain a servant of God.<sup>94</sup> The advice is the core of Iqbal's 'philosophy of self' that stands opposite to the common understanding of *wujudi* doctrine of annihilation in God (*fana fillah*).

However, the traditional view of Nasr is in contrast with Iqbal as for him, the greatest aim of

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<sup>88</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan Ráz*, 88.

<sup>89</sup> Muhammad Iqbal and Arthur J. Arberry, *Javid-Nama*, Online Edi (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966).

<sup>90</sup> Hafiz Shirazi, *The Divan-i Hafiz*, Vols. I & II, 154.

<sup>91</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan Ráz*, 92.

<sup>92</sup> The Christian boy is translated to "infidel wine-vendor" by M. Hadi Husain, which is not a good choice of terminology.

<sup>93</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 34.

<sup>94</sup> Iqbal and 'Umar, 97.



the human is to become 'nothing', to become the mirror in which God contemplates the reflections of His own Names and Qualities and the channel through which the theophanies of His Names and Qualities are reflected in the world.<sup>95</sup>

### Captured of the Tavern

The Sufis as well use the term tavern (*meykhana*) and extensively speak of the people who drink excessively thus captured by the tavern. In their writings the tavern appears as a sacred place. One would wonder how Iraqi who was a great mystic, prefers to sit in a tavern of love instead of taking a trip to Mecca:

*Do you want a guided tour of the Mecca of  
Love?  
Come, sit in the tavern, for the trip to Arabia is  
long and tedious.*<sup>96</sup>

Fortunately, Gulshan-i Raz of Shabistari is a great source of decoding such a symbol. Shabistari, explains that tavern symbolizes the universe of God where every atom would become a cup to get wine of existence from Him and to get intoxicated in this sacred winehouse. As every existed being (*maujud*) is in this tavern, thus Shabistari says:

<sup>95</sup> S H Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (K. Paul International, 1990), 104.

<sup>96</sup> Fakhordin Iraqi et al., *Divine Flashes*, Classics of Western Spirituality (Paulist Press, 1982), 41.

<sup>97</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan-i Ráz*, 80.

<sup>98</sup> Muhammad Iqbal and Hadi Husain, *A Message from the East: A Translation of Iqbal's Payam-i Mashriq Into English Verse*, online edi (Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977), 93,  
<http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/persian/payam/translation/index.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> Iqbal and Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi) a Philosophical Poem*, 138.

<sup>100</sup> In many English translations of Iqbal, 'Haram' is written as ('Harem'), which is misleading.

*Reason drunken, Angels drunken, Soul drunken,  
Air drunken, Earth drunken, Heaven drunken.*<sup>97</sup>

In contrast, Allama Iqbal presents a reformed version of the symbols. For him wine is the mystical knowledge that rhymes in poetry, and it is poured around the world. Therefore, the Iqbalian tavern is the world itself, where the 'new wine' from the jar of God fills the cups of people based to their bowl's capacity.<sup>98</sup> The wine in the cups interestingly is the new message of Iqbal himself that comes in his poetry, aiming to change the situation and to start a new era for Muslims:

*From the jar of Truth, we made rosy wine gush  
forth,  
We fought against the old taverns.*<sup>99</sup>

Iqbal as well makes a distinction between the winehouse and the Haram.<sup>100</sup> As according to Iqbal, the life of the community requires a visible focus, so the focus and the secret of Islamic community is *Masjid al-Haram* of Makkah in Arabian land.<sup>101</sup> Hence, the 'Haram' becomes Iqbal's symbol of the Islamic world that is unique, eternal, and powerful<sup>102</sup> while there are many different taverns in the world. As Iqbal viewed the Western culture a rival to the Eastern religions and especially to Islam, thus in opposition, he criticizes the western tavernas for offering a wine that alienates people from

'Harem' refers to the domestic spaces reserved for the women of the house in a Muslim family. While Iqbal's Haram that is one the main symbol for his poetry, derived from the name "Masjid al-Haram", the Great Mosque of Mecca, that surrounds the Kaaba in Mecca.

<sup>101</sup> Arberry and Iqbal, *Mysteries of Selflessness: Rumuz-i Bekhudi*.

<sup>102</sup> Mohammad Baghaei Makan, *A Cup Book from Lahore's Winehouse (Excerpts of Allameh Iqbal's Poems with Descriptions of Words and Key Concepts)*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Ferdows, 2022), 57.

themselves.<sup>103</sup> Thus, his advice to the Muslim youth is to avoid and abstain from drinking wine from the western taverns.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, Allama Iqbal would face to the old man of the wine-house (*Haram*) who is no one, but his master Mawlana Jalaluddin Balkhi Al-Rumi,<sup>105</sup> and says:

*It is time I should again open the tavern of  
Rumi:  
I have seen the custodian of the Harem  
intoxicated in the churchyard.*<sup>106</sup>

### Wine, Candle & The Beauty (*Shahed*)

In mystical view, God is not only the Creator and Ruler of the world, but he is also the “Essentially Beautiful” and the “True Beloved.”<sup>107</sup> Ibn Arabi again with his highly symbolic language of love, alludes to the human desire for the Heavenly Beloved in following verse:

None blames me for desiring her,  
for she is beloved and **beautiful** wherever she  
may be.<sup>108</sup>

Directly related to the beloved, wine is another keyword in mystical poetry of the Sufis, that rubs the lover from his/her own self. The symbolism of wine, cup, and cupbearer that first expressed by Abu Yazid al-Bastami in the 9th

century, became popular everywhere, whether in the verses of the Arab Ibn al-Farid (1181-1235), or the Persian Fakhreddin Iraqi (1213-1289), or the Turk Yunus Emre (1238-1328), and their followers.<sup>109</sup> As an example, Iraqi who was the famous follower of Ibn Arabi, in the following verse hints that wine is taken from the eyes of the beloved:

*First wine that filled the cup,  
They borrowed from the saki's<sup>110</sup> drunken  
eyes.*<sup>111</sup>

Decoding the symbology, Shabistari holds that ‘wine’, ‘candle’ and ‘the beauty’ designate the Truth (*haq*) that is God:

*Wine, candle, and beauty are epiphanies of  
Verity,  
For it is that which is revealed under all forms  
soever.*<sup>112</sup>

Shabistari’s position is the same as Iraqi, as both are the followers of *wujudi* school of Sufism based on the teachings of Ibn Arabi, holding nothing exists, but ‘The Truth’. Thus, the wine, candle and beauty are Him and He is the only ‘One’ that exists. The doctrine is concisely expressed in the following verse of Iraqi:

<sup>103</sup> Iqbal and ‘ Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 47.

<sup>104</sup> Iqbal and Naqvi, “What Should Then Be Done, O People of the East: English Rendered of Iqbal’s Pas Chih Bayad Kard Ay Aqwam-ISHarq.”

<sup>105</sup> Makan, *A Cup Book from Lahore’s Winehouse (Excerpts of Allameh Iqbal’s Poems with Descriptions of Words and Key Concepts)*.

<sup>106</sup> Iqbal and ‘ Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 363.

<sup>107</sup> Hafiz Shirazi and Gertrude Bell, *Poems From the Divan of Hafiz* (READ BOOKS, 2020), 62.

<sup>108</sup> Ibn al-‘ Arabi, *The Tarjuman Al-Ashwaq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Schimmel, “Sufism - Sufi Orders | Britannica.”

<sup>110</sup> Saki is the beautiful beloved who offers wine to the lover and making him/her drunk.

<sup>111</sup> Iraqi et al., *Divine Flashes*, 39.

<sup>112</sup> Shabistari and Whinfield, *The Gulshan Rāz*, 78.

*Hunter and prey, and bait in the trap, candle,  
candlestick, flame, and moth,*

*beloved and lover, soul and soul's desire saki,  
fellow drinkers, wine and cup: all HE.*<sup>113</sup>

On this basis, the *wujudi* Sufis hold that Allah is the true existence,<sup>114</sup> and thus, interpret the verse “*La ilaha illallah*”, (there is no God but God) as “*La wujudu illallah*” (there is no existence but God).

Iqbal is not in agreement with *wujudi* implications of the symbols at all. Thus, he clearly speaks against the Sufis who are drunk with Iraqi<sup>115</sup> poetry instead of Quran!<sup>116</sup> Thus, his usage of above symbolic terms differs from his predecessors.

## **Wine**

About the symbolism of wine, Iqbal uses the symbolic wine that metaphorically comes from God. In line with this, he even finds the beauty of the rose and her illuminating reddishness due to the wine from God.<sup>117</sup> Thus, Iqbal’s spiritual wine gets its power from the light of *tawhid* manifested in “*La Ilaha Illa Allah*”, and his wine owes its bracing effect to it.<sup>118</sup> Iqbal’s emphasize on the basic moto of Islam is in contrast with *wujudi* its interpretation of ‘*la wujudu illa Allah*’ that means “there is no existence but God.”

Interestingly, the heavenly wine of Iqbal is poured into different cups of clay that come from different lands of China, India, Syria, Europe, and other lands. Although the wine remains the same, the clays are diverse.<sup>119</sup> Clearly, Iqbal changes the traditional cup and wine symbolism to symbolize ethnicities of Muslim world united as Islamic nation. Then, the cups become Iqbal’s replacement of the beloved’s curl that in Shabistari’s account denotes the world of multiplicity.

Iqbal as well introduces his ‘homemade wine’ (*sharab khanegi*),<sup>120</sup> that signify his own poetry in the cup of Persian language; totally different from what is used in previous Sufi tradition. In other words, and based on his own account, the Iqbalian wine is neither the same as what comes in the poetry of the court poets nor it is the annihilating wine that *wujudi* mystics offer to rob the wayfarers from self-identity, dissolving the self in the ocean of God. In his words:

*I did not buy the luxury of being lost in the sea;*

*I did not taste the wine that robs you of your  
self-identity.*<sup>121</sup>

Thus, based on his own established mystical doctrine, Iqbal speaks to the Muslims against the alienating and wakening effect of ‘*wujudi*’ wine, beside the alcoholic wine that court poets present to the people in the following verse:

<sup>113</sup> Iraqi et al., *Divine Flashes*, 110.

<sup>114</sup> M. Ibn Arabi, *The Seals of Wisdom: From the Fusus Al-Hikam* (Concord Grove Press, 1983), 42.

<sup>115</sup> The 13th century Persian Sufi, the firm follower of Ibn Arabi.

<sup>116</sup> Arberry and Iqbal, *Mysteries of Selflessness: Rumuz-i Bekbudi*.

<sup>117</sup> Iqbal and Husain, *A Message from the East: A Translation of Iqbal's Payam-i Mashriq Into English Verse*, 103.

<sup>118</sup> Iqbal and Naqvi, “What Should Then Be Done, O People of the East: English Rendered of Iqbal’s

Pas Chih Bayad Kard Ay Aqwam-ISHarq”; Iqbal and ‘ Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 366.

<sup>119</sup> Arberry and Iqbal, *Mysteries of Selflessness: Rumuz-i Bekbudi*.

<sup>120</sup> Muhammad; Iqbal and A J Arberry, *Persian Psalms: (Zabur-i ‘ajam) Parts I & II, Online*, Online Edi (M. Ashraf, 1948), <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/persian/persianpsalms/translation/index.htm>.

<sup>121</sup> Iqbal and ‘ Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 92.

*You are not the same person who made the  
galaxies your prayer dome,*

*The wine of the poets and the Sufis, alienated  
you from yourself.<sup>122</sup>*

What Iqbal aims by above verse is to emphasize on Muslims hegemony and spiritual power at the same time.

## Candle

The combination of “candle and moth” as a symbolic description of union with God, at first used by Hallaj (858-922) where candle denotes the beloved that burns the lover (moth) in the fire of love.<sup>123</sup> So, allegorically speaking, the fate of the wayfarer on the path of love (*tariqat*) is to annihilation in the mighty fire of God. Consistently, Ayatollah Khomeini usage of the symbol is a fine example:

*I will be a moth, burning, burning all my life in  
her/his **candle**,*

*I will be drunk with wine, marveling at her  
beautiful face.<sup>124</sup>*

In his opposition to traditional doctrines and based on his philosophy of self (*khudi*), Allamah Iqbal has changed the position of moth and candle, as he neither accepted the downgrading view on the human by the traditional Sufis nor recognized the *wujudi* doctrine of annihilation in God. Thus, in Iqbalian view, being a butterfly and getting burned into the flames is equal to the end

of existence and it is firmly rejected. Therefore, in a paradigm shift, Iqbal alters the relation between human and God, stating:

*How long shall we exist like moths that flit  
round **candle** flames?*

*How long shall we exist forgetful of ourselves  
like this?<sup>125</sup>*

His words imply that God approaches Muhammad, the orphan, like a butterfly around a candle. Iqbal as well refers to the story of Moses when the fire on the bush was from God. So, in one story, Iqbal depicts God as the fire and in the other regards Him as the butterfly:

*On the bush of a Moses, You hurl flames so  
ruthlessly,*

*And to the **candle** of an orphan, You come  
gladly like a moth.<sup>126</sup>*

Furthermore, the Iqbalian candle is the self (*khudi*) that brightens the blind world. Although the light of *khudi* is not comparable with the light of the Sun (which is Iqbal’s natural symbol for God) yet exists and shines with its own light. Interestingly, in the following verse, Iqbal introduces the symbol of a ‘glow worm’ that is made from the stuff of light as a self-lighten ego:

*I speak from a mature experience and what I  
say,*

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<sup>122</sup> Iqbal and Arberry, *Persian Psalms: (Zabur-i ‘ajam) Parts I & II*.

<sup>123</sup> Schimmel, “Sufism - Sufi Orders | Britannica.”

<sup>124</sup> A’wani, *The Wine of Love, Mystical Poetry of Imam Khomeini*, 50.

<sup>125</sup> Iqbal and ‘ Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 120.

<sup>126</sup> Iqbal and ‘ Umar, 47.

*Don't think of lost horizons and be steadfast on  
your way:*

*Keep shining like this while you may.*<sup>127</sup>

Another symbol of natural kind that is invented by Iqbal is 'Zindarood', a river in Isfahan of Iran that Iqbal has contrasted with the wujudi symbol of a drop (human) disappearing in the sea (God). The mentioned river has found such a high esteem in Iqbal's poetry, as it ends up into a desert not into any sea, thus became suitable for Iqbalian doctrine, symbolizing a self-realized mystic who embarks the journey to God and will not be annihilated in God. The name of Zindarood, in his book of 'Javid Nama'<sup>128</sup> refers to Iqbal himself.

### ***Shahed (the beauty/the witness)***

The term 'Shahed' that Shabistari explained, has two different meanings in Persian: the 'beautiful beloved' and the 'witness'. Iqbal has used the term in both meanings, but mostly as the witness, referring to the Prophet Muhammad as the witness of God's beauty in the night of ascendance (*Miraj*).<sup>129</sup> According to Iqbal, the eyes are to see the beauty of the human, the nature and most importantly to witness the beauty of God. So, for Iqbal, witnessing the beauty of God was Prophet's motivation for ascending to *Miraj*.<sup>130</sup>

*What is Ascension? The desire for a witness,  
an examination face-to-face of a witness.*<sup>131</sup>

Shahed in Iqbal's poetry also refers to God as the one who witnesses the human. In this regard, Iqbal pray to God (*Shahed*) be witnessed (*Mashhood*) asserting the omnipresent attribute of God.<sup>132</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The oft-used symbols of Islamic mystics that mostly appear in their mystical poetries find clear explanations in the final sections of Shabistari's masterpiece of *Gulshan-i Raz* that means 'Mystical Rose Garden', expounding *wujudi* school of Ibn Arabi. But Allama Iqbal Lahori, who wrote a 'New Rose Garden' answering the same set of questions of *Gulshan-i Raz*, has omitted this famous section of the book that are on mystical symbolism of the Sufis. Considering the difference between Iqbal and Shabistari's doctrines, the research has traced the same set of symbolic terminology in poetry books of Iqbal, analyzing their meanings according to Shabistari's notes on symbolism. The study finds that symbolic terms explained in *Gulshan-i Raz* are reformed by Iqbal according to his new mystical doctrine of *khudi* that stands in contrast with *wujudi* school of Sufism. Moreover, Iqbal has given up the richness, beauty, and complexity of traditional symbols for the sake of clarity and simplicity. Although, Iqbal as a mystic-poet employs symbolism to express the secrets of the path (*tariqat*), yet, he has totally abstained from using the popular sufi symbols of female beauty such as face, eyes, lip, curl etc. Therefore, the immense appreciation of the beauty of God manifested in all parts of universe especially in human face is absent from Iqbalian poetry. Moreover, with his respectful treatment of Islamic 'Shariat', Iqbal avoided of using unorthodox sufi symbols like 'worshiping idols' as manifestation of love for the 'Absolute

<sup>127</sup> Iqbal and ' Umar, 26.

<sup>128</sup> Iqbal and Arberry, *Javid-Nama*.

<sup>129</sup> Iqbal and Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi) a Philosophical Poem*, 117.

<sup>130</sup> Iqbal and ' Umar, *Iqbal: Collected Poetical Works (English Translation)*, 288.

<sup>131</sup> Iqbal and ' Umar, 286.

<sup>132</sup> Iqbal and Arberry, *Javid-Nama*.

Essence' of God that is often used by the Sufis. For Iqbal however, the 'idol' is not, but anything that stands between the human and God.

Allama Iqbal also uses wine related symbols with different meanings. For example, as a replacement for beloved's curl that is the symbol of 'multiplicity' in *wujudi* perspective, Iqbal employs the symbol of cups to refer to the unity of Muslims in diversity of their ethnicities. He even altered the famous allegory of 'candle and the moth' where candle as the symbol of the beloved (God) would annihilate the lover (the wayfarer). In Iqbalian alternation of the symbols, matching with his human centered doctrine of *khudi*, the candle would signify the lover which is a self-realized human like Prophet Muhammad that is approached by the symbolic moth that is changed to be a symbol for God. Most importantly, in Iqbal's opposition with *wujudi* concept of annihilation in God (*fana fillah*), Iqbal declares that mystical path is not towards vanishing in God or to become a part of God, but to remain His servant eternally according to the simple teachings of Islam. Therefore, Iqbal has created his own symbols like 'Glow worm' to express the survival of human self, beside the illuminating 'sun' that is Iqbal's symbol for God, the 'Supreme Self'. That is in contrast with traditional symbol of reflection of God's names and attributes in purity of the human mirror which is *fana* in traditional sense.

The research concludes that in *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid*, Iqbal did not answer the questions related to Sufi symbolism because the set of symbols interpreted in *Gulshan-i Raz* would not represent his new mystical doctrine of *khudi*. Thus, he has changed the implications of the old symbols and introduced new set of symbolism in his poetry.

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