

## **The Concept of Sufism in Sant Darshan Singh's Urdu Poetry**

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Having left his mortal body in 1989 in New Delhi, Sant Darshan Singh, the renowned mystic poet who established the center of Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission New Delhi, left behind him indelible imprints of his Sufi love for God and His entire creation. During his student life, he wanted to study engineering, but his Murshid Huzur Baba Sawan Singh, the great saint in the lineage of Sant Mat, instructed him to study the Persian language for the reason that it contains a treasure of the mystical teachings of the Muslim fakirs. Darshan Singh suppressed his desire to become an engineer and ardently studied Persian language with a focus on the concept of Sufism. Enriched with profuse information related to Sufism and deeply influenced by Hazrat Shamim Karhani's prosody of Urdu poetry, Darshan Singh penned five poetic collections in Urdu viz. *Talaash-e Noor* (1965), *Manjil-e Noor* (1969), *Mataa-e Noor* (1988), *Jadaa-e Noor* (1992) and *Mauj-e Noor* (1996). The first three collections were published during his lifetime but the remaining two were published posthumously. These collections intensively and extensively deal with the mystical teachings of the great mystics who not only represented the benign power of God but also led the erring humanity to His all-pervasive light. For producing *Talaash-e Noor* and *Manjil-e Noor*, Darshan Singh was honoured with the Urdu Academy Award by the Urdu Academy of Delhi and Lucknow. In his poetry he has expounded the path of positive mysticism and denounced the path of asceticism as negative mysticism. The concept of positive mysticism put forth by Darshan Singh through his Urdu poetry lays emphasis on doing the meditation practice as part of regular life while leading an ethical life and discharging our responsibilities towards our family, society, nation and the entire universe. While *Talaash-e Noor* reflects on the teachings of a couple of mystics, his *Manjil-e Noor* is exclusively devoted to the revelation of the mystical teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. Suffused with Sufi love Guru Nanak Dev showered upon the seekers after truth, *Manjil-e Noor* comprising ninety four stanzas constitutes Darshan Singh's tribute to the great saint on the occasion of his fifth birth centenary celebration. This paper aims to highlight the basic tenets of spirituality taught by Guru Nanak Dev and sung by Darshan Singh in his widely acclaimed poetic collection in Urdu. The paper will also discuss Darshan Singh's contribution to Sufism through his Urdu poetry as well as his deep mystic love for his Murshid in whom he saw the Light of God.

The youngest of Indian languages, Urdu showed little promise of a mystic dimension when it began. Given the Indian mind's unwavering interest in mystic experience, it was inevitable that sooner or later Urdu poetry would develop an esoteric tradition. This was greatly

strengthened by the fact that the Urdu writers of India looked increasingly to the classic Persian literature as a model and Persia itself had produced several great Sufi poets. The result of the mingling of Indian & Persian influences was a rich tradition of mystical verse writing in Urdu which drew immense vitality from the great devotional poets of Medieval India such as Kabir Das, Guru Nanak and from Persian Muslims such as Jalaluddin Rumi & Hafiz.

Qutub Shah, Wali Deccani & Siroj Aurangabadi were among the first to explore Sufi themes in Urdu verse. Khwaja Mir Dard, a deeply religious man, gave such writing a new dimension. His contemporary, Mir Taqi Mir explored both mystic and human love and often displayed a Vedantic influence. Mirza Galib struck a philosophic note in his verse and carried Urdu poetry to new heights. The next great poet in Urdu to strike a mystic note was Dr. Mohammad Iqbal. He was not only influenced by the Indian and Persian traditions but also was deeply affected by the English & German romantics. Sant Darshan Singh (1921-1989) with five published & widely acclaimed poetic collections in Urdu has emerged as the most forceful voice to sustain and extend the Sufi tradition in Urdu poetry after Iqbal. His poetic collections in Urdu viz. *Talaash-e Noor*(1965), *Manjil-e-Noor*(1969), *Jadaa-e Noor*(1988), *Mauj-e Noor*(1992) and *Mataa-e-Noor*(1996) give expression to the message of Buddha, Guru Nanak, Christ, Kabir and the Sufi masters. As a poet whose spirit and sensibilities have been shaped by the splendid traditions of Urdu literature, no matter what subject or which audience he addresses, Sant Darshan Singh inevitably carries the spirit and symbols of Urdu poetry. His spiritual work prompted several world tours where he met with seekers representing different faiths. He has placed lovers of Urdu literature forever in his debt by introducing the genius of Urdu poetry wherever he went.

His first poetic collection *Talaash- e Noor* gives expression to the mystical teachings of the distinguished mystics such as Kabir, Nanak Christ & Buddha. His second collection *Manjil-e Noor* is devoted to the treatment of life & teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. In one of the verses of this collection Sant Darshan Singhji says that since the dawn of the universe the Ambassadors of God have come upon the earth with the sole purpose of expelling the darkness from the hearts of seekers after truth and in future they will hopefully continue to bless the humanity by their divine appearance in human form. In the nineteenth verse of *Manjil-e Noor* he talks of Guru Nanak's divine personality & his immortal messages which possess a force that can redeem the mankind from trials & tribulations which off and on unavoidably haunt each one of us. The misery of life that Sant Darshan Singh talks of in his poetry is not related to the physical & emotional arena but to the spiritual arena in which soul's separation from its source i.e. God is the prime reason for all that the dark side of life stands for. As Sharan Malhotra says in in these lines:

I long to hear your beautiful voice  
which soothes away the turmoil of my mind  
Like a gentle breeze upon the butterfly  
glides along the path. (*Divine Darshan*, 101)

“Your language is wonderful, very wonderful, indeed. The depth of feelings and emotions and the maturity of literary style have made the poetry unique.”(qtd in LESMCP,9) So wrote the distinguished scholar & educator, Dr. Zakir Hussain on seeing Sant Darshan Singh’s first volume of poems *Talaash-e- Noor*(Quest for Light). By thus admiring a poet who was still relatively unknown in the world of Urdu literature, Dr. Hussain predicted the emergence of Sant Darshan Singh as a leading mystic poet writing in Urdu. Darshan Singh gave the evidence of his poetic talent at the age of seventeen when his Urdu poems were broadcast on national radio. Commenting on the height he scaled as a Sufi poet in short time, Dr.Mumtaz Ahamad, Editor, *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, and Professor of Political Science, Hempton University Virginia, says,“Sant Darshan Singh represents the best in the historic interaction of mysticism with Indo-Persian aesthetics. In the tradition of the greatest Sufi masters and poets, his passionate love takes him to the realm where the divine reality is no longer a distant transcendence. Those who love Rumi and Hafiz will love Darshan Singh, whose sublime spirit shines through these faithful yet poetic translations.”(*Love’s Lost Madness*, 17)

Mysticism is the *raison d’etre* of Sant Darshan Singh’s experiences and it finds unforgettable utterance in his poetry and spiritual discourses. His great theme is love- both human and divine. The two, in fact, are indivisible in his universe, for to love the Creator is to love His creatures. One who treads the path of love knows only too well its pain and anguish. Those who are prepared for suffering and sacrifice, according to Darshan Singh, stray into spiritual domain. An Urdu poet has described the condition of such people in these lines:

A world of people with their heads on  
their palms, and a universe of lovers  
with their hearts in their hands  
are coming to thy threshold to lay  
down their lives at thy feet.(*Spiritual Awakening*, 190)

Sant Darshan Singh has used the ghazal and its conventions to express his mystical experiences. His Urdu poetry springs from his personal mystical experiences. Behind every word there is some incident, some event, which made a deep impression on him. One of his ghazals opens with the following verse:

Whenever I traveled from earth to the milky way,  
I met love at every step and beauty in every glance.(WIS, 174)

In this verse he speaks of his taste of the nectar of divine love when he was just a child of five years. Fortunately, he was born into a family with a spiritually charged atmosphere. From the time he opened his eyes, he enjoyed a bliss and peace which many do not experience all their lives. Thus, he grew up in a home which was charged with mystic ecstasy. It was a few days before the completion of his five years that the divine gift of mystical experience was bestowed upon him by the grace of the great saint, Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji, the founder of Radha Swami Satsang Beas. Having tasted the nectar of divinity at an early age, he began experiencing

the sting of restlessness born of separation from the Creator. He has expressed his pain in this verse:

O restless heart, come, let us weep,  
let us toss in pain,  
why think now of sleep,  
we have a night,  
that knows no dawn. (WIS, 175)

In another verse he expresses his pain in a thought provoking way:

The cry that emanates from  
the core of my heart  
sinks deep into the hearts of others.  
My instrument may be subtle,  
but your music  
which passes through it  
is subtler still. (WIS, 177)

This verse was written when Sant Darshan Singh shot into eminence as an Urdu poet. He gained popularity in such a short time that his literary friends were immensely surprised and very curious about the reason for his catching the public eyes so quickly. The secret of his success as an Urdu poet is not to be found in the medium of expression. It lies not in diction, rhythm, alliteration, or other poetic techniques. The verse quoted above is, as he himself says, "faulty" in respect of the use of instrument of expression. A flute made out of the reed of bamboo may have some defects in it, yet the music which flows through it may be flawless. Similarly, his instrument may be faulty, but the music that passes through it is the divine music, the harmony of all harmonies. He sings the glory of this music:

All glory to the beloved for breaking my heart  
the notes of its bursting sweetened the silence of the night. (Spiritual Awakening,

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After listening to this uplifting music, the devotee in him experiences the grace of the beloved and devotionally utters:

I set out at the dawn of time,  
and now I approach its sunset,  
This life is short  
but my journey of love  
has been long. (Spiritual Awakening, 75)

This single verse encompasses the entire span of time. The present life may be short but the story of human existence began eons ago. God decided to become many from one. The soul, once separated from its Creator, knows no rest until it can return to its source. The soul's separation from its Creator is represented by the dawn of time, and the present, according to the poet, may be spoken as the evening of time. The journey is indeed a long one and is completed

only after what appears to be an eternity of yearning & longing. The soul has been pining to attain lasting peace, tranquility and bliss. A prayer gushes out of the poet's heart to express the intensity of spiritual thirst. To grant him the godly wine which brings about the union of the soul with the Creator, he cries to the Lord:

The flights into the expanse  
of this vast creation will one day  
come to an end.  
Man, when totally exhausted,  
will ultimately come back to you  
O Lord.(WIS, 178)

A Sufi saint does not belong to any one religion, or any one nation. He lives for the welfare of entire humanity and suffers for the sake of all sufferers. If we go through the pages of history, we see how Sufis and saints have suffered for humans' sake. Christ was crucified, Shams-i-Tabriz was flayed alive, the fifth Sikh guru, Guru Arjun Dev Ji, was burned to death on an iron plate. The story of divine love is one of suffering and sacrifice. One of Sant Darshan Singh's verses says:

O men of lust, beware of entering the land of love,  
Here you will find only the cross and the gallows. (WIS, 181)

The Sufis teach us the path of love and devotion, patience and perseverance. When Sant Darshan Singh was a student in a college of Lahore, he studied some of the poems of Dr. Mohammad Iqbal who was the torch bearer of mystic poetry at that time both in Urdu and Persian. One of Iqbal's verses speaks of realms beyond the stars and says that love has yet to undergo many a test. As Darshan Singh was then only seventeen, he could not comprehend the concept of love as implied in this verse. To solve his problem, Darshan Singh went to his college professor Sufi Gulam Mustafa Tabassum, who was a distinguished Urdu poet. He told his teacher, "sir, I do not understand what Iqbal means when he speaks of love in his poetry. The same day his teacher asked him to accompany him to Iqbal's home. At Iqbal's residence he felt happy to hear both poets discussing the finer points of mystical verse writing in Urdu. When they finished their discussion, Iqbal was told about Darshan Singh's interest in his poetry and about his difficulty with some of his verses. After Darshan Singh recited the verse, Iqbal looked into his eyes and said, "My son, you have raised a very pertinent point. If you want to understand my poetry, remember that whenever I speak of love, I mean a continuous struggle, a continuous restlessness." This insight of Iqbal's has time and again found expression in Darshan Singh's poetry. One of his verses says,

Love is the name for a continuous restlessness of the heart,  
This endless yearning is the symbol of my life. (WIS, 184)

The Sufi poets have depicted the great desire to become one with the Creator as the most significant theme. It is only when this desire becomes irresistible that it finds its fulfillment. Darshan Singh unfolds his irresistible desire for union with God in this verse:

I realize I am not worthy  
of your continuous glances  
but spare at least one glance  
for your forlorn Darshan.(WIS, 184)

Darshan Singh, like all Sufis, thinks that lifetime is too short to express his gratitude to God for his gift of love. As he says in another verse,

With every breath I must bow to my friend,  
for I owe my life to his grace.(WIS, 185)

The Sufi saints tell us that God, who was one, thought of becoming many. This impulse led to a vibration which manifested in the Light of God the Music of the Spheres. Both of these manifestations combined are referred to as a holy word in the *Bible*, *Kalma* in the Muslim scriptures, as *Naam* in the Hindu scriptures, as *Sonorous Light* in the Buddhist scriptures, as *Sarosha* in the Zoroastrian scriptures, as *Tao* in the Chinese scriptures, as *Logos* by the ancient Greek philosophers and as *Bang-i-Aasmani* by the Sufis. To experience the presence of these primal manifestations of God within us, we need the help of the one who has himself experienced them. Such an evolved person is known as *Guru* in Sanskrit, *Murshid* in Urdu, Master in English and *Saki* or Cupbearer in Sufi tradition. He is recognized as the supreme teacher who is there to guide us at every turn in spiritual as well as worldly arena. As a Sufi poet once put it:

I have my friend locked up in my bosom,  
and I only have to turn within to behold him.(WIS, 11)

In the following verse Sant Darshan Singh has referred to his guru as a Cupbearer:

I had hoped when the Cupbearer arrived,  
He would quench my thirst.  
But alas! He has come and gone,  
and my thirst has been intensified.(WIS, 142)

The technique of meditation taught by the Sufi saints is known as dying while living. The Muslim scriptures say, “Mauto-kablantumauto” or “Die before death.” Socrates said that the true philosophers are always occupied in the process of dying. Dadu Sahib, one of the great Indian mystics, has said, “Each of us must die on the appointed day, why not learn to conquer death in your life time.”(qtd in WIS, 17) When Sufis celebrate the death anniversary of a saint, they refer to the occasion as an “urs” or a “wedding day”. The great poet, Janab Shamim Karhani, has said,

The festivity of birth is over, and  
the festivity of death is yet to come,  
one marriage party has already come and  
the other marriage part is yet to arrive.(qtd in WIS, 24)

Our success in the technique of meditation, although attainable after prolonged and continuous practice under the guidance of a perfect guru, leads the aspirant to the fountainhead

of the water of life, which is known as *Amritsar* in Sikh scriptures and *Chashma-e-Kausar* in the Sufi tradition. When the soul tastes this nectar, it finally sheds all traces of mind, matter and illusion and realizes its own identity. It then cries out in wonder *Anahu* or I am that. Sant Darshan Singh has described the real identity of man in this verse:

What does it matter if I am called a man  
In truth I am the very soul of love  
The entire earth is my home  
and the universe my country. (WIS, 170)

Fakers and Sufi have been telling us that human birth is the only form of life in which we can attain God realization. The human body, according to them, is the house wherein soul & God live together and our life is a golden opportunity of bringing about the union of soul with God. That is why the Muslims refer to human birth as *Ashraf-ul-makhluqat* and the Hindus call it *Nar-naraini-deh*. The Christian scriptures say that God made human beings in his own image. But our predicament is that our soul which should seek proximity to God is irresistibly drawn to the worldly allurements which take it very far from its source. Our predicament has been aptly described by the great Persian Sufi, Khwaja Hafiz. He says, "Man has been tied to a raft and left in the midst of the high seas with the warning, 'Beware, let your clothes get wet'." To get rid of our predicament, when we pray to God, he listens to our cry. As one of the verses of Sant Darshan Singh says,

He is bound to hear you  
Would you but lift your spirits?  
He is so close to you  
Call him, he will surely respond. (WIS,32)

The Sufis teach us the secrets of spirituality in a very straightforward manner. To them, spirituality is nothing more than redirecting our attention from the external to the internal. This point was brought home to Bulheh Shah when he first met his Murshid Inayat Shah, who was a gardener. On being persuaded to reveal the secrets of spirituality, Inayat Shah said, "It is simply a matter of transplanting. Uproot the plant of attention from here and implant it there." (qtd in WIS, 50) Once an aspirant asked Sant Darshan Singh, "Master, do you believe in conversion? The Master replied, "I don't believe in conversion, I believe in inversion."

It is hardly surprising that all of us are afraid of death. Undoubtedly, our fear emanates from our ignorance about what will happen to us at the time of death & afterward. The Muslim scriptures say that the pain experienced at the time of death is as unbearable as if one passed a thorny bush through the rectum and took it out through the mouth. The Hindu scriptures compare the agony of death to being stung by a thousand scorpions. The Sufi mystic Baba Farid has said that at the time of death one feels as if every limb of the body is breaking. That is why the Sufi saints advise us to focus our attention on the point between and behind the eyebrows. This point is known as *Shiv Netra* in Hindi, *DasamDwar* in Sanskrit, *Third Eye* in English and *Nukta-e Subeda* in Urdu. By focusing our attention on this point again and again we can master the

technique of dying while living and face the challenge of death with preparedness and without fear.

The greatest message which Jesus Christ gave to his disciples can be summed up in two commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and "then shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Like Jesus, all Sufis teach us the path of love. They see no distinction between people of one color or another, one nationality or another, one religion or another. For them there is no high or low. As Sant Darshan Singh says in one of his verses,

I have learned to cherish all creation as my own.

Your message of love is the very meaning of my life.(WIS,128)

The most significant step towards the goal of God realization is to find someone who is overflowing with divine love. Such a one is known in Persian mysticism as *Saki* or the Cupbearer. He inebriates his followers with his lyrical love glances. In the terminology of Sufis "wine" refers to the intoxication of spirituality. As Sant Darshan Singh says in a verse,

What does it matter if we never  
regain our senses ?  
this day, o Cupbearer, pour forth  
as much as we can drink.(WIS, 151)

The wine of divine love that the Cupbearer pours forth from his pitcher into the goblets of the aspirants is so intensely blissful that it causes all worldly attachments to pale into insignificance. Those who taste the nectar of divine love become the fountainhead of love and freely share it with one and all. As Sant Darshan Singh says in one of his verse,

Love is the beginning and end of both  
the universes;  
I have brought this immortal gift  
with me to bestow on one and all.(WIS, 89)

It is from the disorder and confusion of thought sentiment and feeling that the Sufi poet creates the harmony of poetry. In becoming one with creation he, in Sant Darshan Singh's words, evolves "cosmos out of chaos."(LESMCP, 14) Sufi poetry at its highest is a double harmony and fulfills not only through its beauty but also by bringing us to a point of spiritual rest, a peace which passes understanding. Sant Darshan Singh is a creator of exquisite verse and a Sufi poet of highest order. He, in fact, represents the culmination of the Sufi tradition in Urdu poetry, and is at once the most mystical of Urdu poets and the one to touch on mystic themes most consistently. As he himself declares, "My work is not a child of imagination, but is born of personal experience and revelation."(LESMP,15) Each of his verses may be traced to some incident in his life. What is unique about his poetry is that, like scriptural writings, it flows from divine revelation. While other poets have had visionary glimpses and moments of spiritual intuition, in



Darshan we have an example of the tradition of poets such as Kabir and Nanak, Rumi and Hafiz St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross who were wholly steeped in mystic experience.

English readers are already familiar, through Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam, with the kind of symbolism used in the Sufi tradition. The Beloved, the Saki or Cupbearer, represents none other than the Divine Master or spiritual Adept. The lover or the tippler is the spiritual seeker. The wine which he receives from the Cupbearer is that of the Holy Word. It flows from the Saki's eyes and not from a terrestrial flask. The Beloved's tresses represent the grace and spiritual protection of the Adept, and they can envelop this world and the next. These and other related images and symbols constitute a world of their own, and Darshan plays many a new variation on the same. In his spiritual discourses and prose writings, he presents, with lyric grace, striking analogies from the world of science. In his poetry, he draws on contemporary experiences and themes while using traditional imagery.

The central relationship explored in Sant Darshan Singh's verses is that between the lover and the Beloved, the devotee and the Adept. The joy of first tasting the wine of divine love, the growing yearning to become one with the Beloved, the anguish and pain of separation, and the ecstasy of final union find unforgettable utterance in his poetry. Take for example:

Why blame the tipplers for their yearning eyes,  
When the wine itself dances so ravishingly in the cup?( LESMCP, 17)

It is commonplace to say that poetry is beyond translation. This is perhaps even truer of poetry in Urdu, for it delights in compression and in symbols which have multiple meanings. The ghazal, for instance, is a highly admired form of Persian and Urdu lyric poetry meant to be sung. Sant Darshan Singh has used both traditional and new forms of verse, delighting alike in the couplet, in free verse, and blank verse. In his youth he tried his hand at the sonnet. Over the years, he has experimented with many poetic forms, but the one form to which he has turned most frequently is that of the ghazal. He is, in fact, among the very select group of poets to use it for dealing with mystic love. In the process, he has extended its range of theme and effect. In his hands the ghazal as a vehicle of mystic writing has attained its highest point of development. His philosophy as an artist may be summed up in two words viz. fellowship and brotherhood. In employing these terms I don't have any ism or creed in mind. These terms refer to that principle at the root of human nature, which is, in fact, the very foundation and crowning jewel of the universe- the principle of love.

If the subject of love were grasped in its fullness, it would be seen to encompass all existence. Let me cite some of his verses on this theme.

O Cupbearer, the intoxicating wine you served  
Overflowed the goblet of my heart,

And now I am in love with all humanity.

I have learned to cherish all creation as my own,  
Your message of love is the very meaning of my life.

From dawn to dawn let us speak of peace and listen to the message of love,  
Shower laden clouds of Sawan have enveloped the tavern of time,  
O Cupbearer, let the cup of love go 'round and 'round. (LESMCP,23)

Sant Darshan Singh believed in the goodness of all creation and of those who inhabit this beautiful planet suspended in a limitless expanse of space. He held the view the Almighty did not work without a design. He had a definite purpose when he created the universe. Khwaja Mir Dard has defined it thus:

It was to share in the pain of his fellow beings  
That God created human beings;  
He had no dearth of cherubim to sing his glories.(qtd in LESMCP, 23)

This thought is carried a step further by Dr.Mohammad Iqbal:

The Lord has a thousand devotees to seek Him  
day andnight in the wilderness;  
But I will be a devotee of one who is a lover  
of those whom God has created.(qtd in LESMCP, 24)

Being part of God's creation, we are definitely all one. This is fundamental to our nature. We may differ in respect of color, race or nationality, but these differences are the result of living in varying geographical regions and environments. Sant Darshan Singh in his Urdu poetry seeks a world in which each individual is valued for his or her uniqueness and merit, and all people lead a life of dignity and respect and live together in harmony with sympathy and kindness toward each other, sustained by hope and spiritual aspiration. In one of his verses he says,

Let this world become a temple of love and peace,  
Let love and truth illumine the world,  
And adversaries of peace awaken to its light,  
This sacred land of God has been trampled with the burden of oppression.  
Life is not a dagger stained with the blood of hatred;  
It is a branch filled with the flowers of love and compassion.( LESMCP, 24-25)

In another verse he laments over the tragic condition of the modern world in an inimitable way:

We are communing with the moon and the stars,  
But alas, we have not reached the heart of our neighbor. (LESMCP,26)

Poetry, in whatever language, is the outcome of pure thought and intense feeling. In William Wordsworth's words "Poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility." It is born when the spirit is deeply moved. The Urdu and Persian term for literature 'adab' signifies respect for others. Its equivalent in Hindi and Sanskrit 'sahitya' points to that which is spoken or written for the benefit of others. Literature at its most sublime and uplifting is in the form of poetry. Poetry, to Sant Darshan Singh, is a divine gift and the song of God. He has tried to bring this fact home in these lines:

He is hidden in every instrument, in every song and melody.

All creation reflects His glory.

There exists not a sparkling wave, nor a fiery star

That does not own its radiance to His Light. (LESMCP,30)

Poetry descends upon a mystic when he is lost in ecstasy and communes with the inmost depths of the soul. The great Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, has said, "Such thoughts come from the unknown; the scratches of my pen are, in fact, divine music." (qtd in LESMCP,30)

Sant Darshan Singh's first collection of poems *Talaash-e Noor* contains several ghazals in Urdu and Persian language. In this collection he has celebrated the soul inspiring mystic message of the founders of various religions. He deeply studied their teachings and realized that they all saw God as the supreme goal of life and taught us the way to attain this goal in this very lifetime. Guru Nanak represents the galaxy of such mystics. His second collection of poems *Manjil-e Noor (Abode of Light)* consists of a long poem of ninety four stanzas which celebrate the universal message of Guru Nanak. Sant Darshan Singh holds the view that if we can only transcend our seeming differences of form and name and live by the basic teachings of all religions, we can achieve true happiness. In one of the stanzas of *Manjil-e Noor* he makes this appeal:

He bears a thousand names, call on Him by any;

Summon Him to the assembly of your thoughts  
and adore Him;

Offer Him a seat in the innermost chamber  
of your heart, and burnish His image;

Suffuse your life- blood with His name,

And fix Him in your soul.

You surely will meet Him, just let your soul soar,

He is close to you, just call for Him.(LESMCP, 35)

The Vedic dictum, *VasudhevKutumbkam*, expresses a thought central to Sant Darshan Singh's poetry. Shiekh Saadi points to the same ideal when he says:

Humanity is like the limb of the body:

When one limb aches, the whole body is in agony.(qtd in LESMCP, 36)

In conformity with Sufi poetic conventions, Sant Darshan Singh's poetry offers equal reverence and adoration to all the world's religions and their founders. It serves to further human unity and nurture a climate of trust and peace. As he says in one of his verses:

All places of worship are symbols of the one Beloved.  
Bow your head when you see a temple,  
And salute when you see a mosque.

When the flowers of the church, mosque  
and temple gather together.

Spring will blossom forth in Your garden, O Lord.(LESMCP, 36)

What was most important to Sant Darshan Singh as a Sufi poet was to find expression for the creative impulse of which he considered himself as an instrument. That impulse springs from a source which is inexhaustible, for it is a God given gift. The Ocean of Light is without limit; it is life that is short. As he says in one of his verses:

Where is the completion of the magnificent edifice of my desires?

So far I have only drawn a few lines and am preparing a blueprint.(LESMCP,36)

Sant Darshan Singh began his search for truth early in his life and as the title of his first collected works suggests, it was a quest for Light(*Talaash-e Noor*, 1965). The volume contains poems written during his first three decades. It was a period of intense study, wide ranging experience and experimentation. As he himself says, "There surges in the heart and soul a boundless ocean of perceptions and felt experiences and every word that rises from its depth is impregnated with its riches."<sup>35</sup> The title must not mislead us into thinking that the poet was still engaged in this quest. It was in reality an invitation to the uninitiated to start their own search in the light of the poet's experiences. He published two other collections in Urdu, *Manjil-e Noor*(Abode of Light,1969)and *Mataa-e Noor*(Treasure House of Light,1988). He had just finalized his fourth, *Jadaa-e Noor*(*Path of Light*) and fifth *Mauj-e Noor* when the moving pen stopped suddenly. There were published posthumously in 1992 and 1998 respectively. If we look at the titles of the

collections, we find that there is a studied evolution-the quest, the abode, the treasure house and the illumined path.

In his essay, "My Concept of Poetry", Sant Darshan Singh has stated that poetry is the cry of the soul. It is, in other words, not a verbal reflection of what meets the eye at the physical level but is the result of inner striving. He is fully conscious of the deep crisis which has overtaken our civilization. He holds the view that material progress has led us to climb to heights which we could have only dreamt of in the past. Today, no doubt we are conquering outer space. But the basic question remains: Have we truly reaped the fruits of this progress? We are still groping in the darkness for the peace and happiness which are our birthrights.

In their ceaseless effort to unravel the mysteries of the universe, mystics have often pursued the path of asceticism and self-denial. Many have even taken to complete renunciation. But Darshan Singh's concept of mystic truth is positive. He lives and participates fully in life. He seeks to reach the goal of union with God through love, which embraces the entire universe.

Sant Darshan Singh has written in all the accepted forms of Urdu poetry and has even expressed himself in free verse. He has utilized each form as a suitable vehicle for communicating his divine experience. His favorite form, however, is that of the ghazal, which has developed over the centuries its own symbols and conventions. Its strong lyrics intensify its quality of experience. Like the Hindi *doha*, the ghazal attempts to complete an idea within the compass of two lines. For such concentrated writing, traditional symbols become indispensable. The lyricism of this form of poetry adds to its expressiveness. When the mystic poet speaks of beauty, love, wine, the cupbearer or the tavern, a whole procession of physical and spiritual experience unfolds itself before our eyes. We are captivated by the beauty and delicacy with which these images are woven into the texture of Sant Darshan Singh's ghazal. The mystic experience, which is often related to us in lyrical symbols, acquires a depth and intensity which would be difficult to obtain through other forms. But however beautiful and moving classical writing may be, the modern reader yearns for a contemporary relevance. Darshan Singh provides the nuances which are both modern and original.

Poetical works so consistently concerned with mysticism may tend to be restrictive in scope. Can one expect a skeptic or a non-believer to be interested in the world beyond? The beauty of Darshan's positive mysticism lies in his accepting the legitimacy of human participation in the physical world. It is the magic of Darshan Singh's poetical expression, that for him, mystical experience is inseparable from his love for humanity. Even a non-believer is moved by such an all-pervasive feeling of divine love and eternal bliss. Each person can respond to this love according to his own capacity. The awakening of one's natural affection and sensitivity is an achievement in itself, and Darshan succeeds in awakening that sublime feeling.

It is difficult for a mystic writer to afford aesthetic pleasure to secular readers. To do so is an achievement of which any poet would be proud. That explains why, in the past, few poets have chosen mysticism as the main theme of their song. In Urdu, poets like Khawaja, Mir Dard or Asi Ghazi-puri are rare. Generally, poets have composed ghazals on traditional themes. Occasionally, some have made passing references to divine love. In modern times, Darshan Singh is alone in making mysticism the central theme of his ghazals. He has a firm belief in human endeavor, and he asserts that humanity must make it its mission to work for the welfare of others. Truth can be realized through selfless service.

Darshan Singh reinterprets the concept of renunciation in a positive manner. He advocates renouncing hatred and fear, not our responsibilities and obligations to the world. In the final analysis, everyone, from the agnostic to the mystic, will find himself at peace with the poet's view of life.

The poet feels deeply for the weak, the down-trodden, the disinherited of the earth. He is keenly interested in their uplift and welfare. The social concern enriches and lends a modern touch to the mystical subject matter of his poetry. His concept of beauty is universal, too, and his love embraces the entire humanity. But Darshan's fine art lies in converting the elevated spiritual experiences into attainable human goals. Similarly, he is able to blend erudition with intense feeling. For instance, he says:

The remedy for life's sorrows lies in the tears  
of love.

Friends, even though the night be dark,

Light the candle and pass 'round the cup.(LESMCP,105)

The discovery of the self is for Darshan the discovery of ultimate reality. And for the discovery of the self, one has to re-discover the universe. It is a most tortuous journey. We have been pursuing this path for centuries and have succeeded in covering many difficult stages, but perfection still eludes us.

As the caravan of my desires moved forward,  
I mistook each approaching turn  
for my destination.(LESMCP, 106)

Though mysticism is the heart and soul of Darshan Singh's poetry, I would not like the reader to conclude that his verse is exclusively metaphysical. The reader will find noble human sentiments and desires expressed with a unique combination of robustness and delicacy. We glimpse in his poetry that mysterious point which unites the mundane with the metaphysical. Here is an example:

My heart has flowered with the blossoms  
Of countless wounds;  
O my beloved, if you could but walk through his  
garden!  
Grant me but once a glance of grace!  
And I would pay with a lifetime of suffering.(LESMCP,106-7)

All great men think alike. So do all Sufis. Sant Darshan Singh, besides being a Sufi poet, thought and lived like a Sufi saint. An embodiment of love and humility, he spread the fragrance of God's love wherever he went. Through his Urdu poetry suffused with Sufi love, he rendered a great service to the literary world and extended a significant contribution to Murshid Hazur the furthering of Sufi tradition in India. Having imbibed the virtues of a Sufi saint from his Baba Sawan Singh and learned the prosody of Urdu poetry from his teachers Sufi Gulam Mustafa Tabassum and Janab Shamim Karhani, he made his Urdu poetry a tool to highlight the mystical teachings of the great seers and saints, mystics and fakirs. He shot into eminence as an Urdu poet with the publication of his second poetic collection *Manjil-e Noor* which, on account of critical acclaim it earned in short time, deserves a permanent rich in the edifice of Sufi poetry. For this timeless creation, the Urdu Academy Award was conferred on him by the UP Urdu Academy Lucknow in 1972. Although he wrote poems in Hindi, English and Punjabi also, his Urdu poems, rich in references to Sufi philosophy, captured the attention of the poetry lovers who found in them rich ingredients to satisfy their spiritual & intellectual urge. Commenting on his spiritual inclination and poetic genius, Eliot Jay Rosen, author of the Loss Angeles Times best-selling book titled *Experiencing the Soul-Before Birth, During Life, After Death*, says, "Darshan Singh conveys the nuances of divine romance with such variety, command and sensitivity that it is apparent his poetic muse springs from direct mystical experience, not mere literary imagination. His artistic genius enables him, like Rumi of old to impart the timeless, haunting fragrance of the inner spiritual realms while retaining its heart-warming humanity and contemporary relevance." (*Love's Lost Madness*, 25) In a nutshell, "his Urdu poetry, as he himself says, gives expression to the message of Buddha, Ashoka, Christ, Guru Nanak and the Sufi Masters." (LESMCP, 36)

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