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**Robes for the Heart:
Exploring Love and Devotion through
Sartorial Symbolism in Urdu Literature**

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Exploring Love and Devotion through
Sartorial Symbolism in Urdu Literature**

by

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Dedication

To my parents Jamshaid and Manazza

And to my sister Khatija

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Abstract

Robes for the Heart: Exploring Love and Devotion through Sartorial Symbolism in Urdu Literature

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This paper explores the aesthetics of love and devotion in Urdu literature vis-à-vis sartorial symbolism. I analyze the ways in which love and devotion are constructed, imagined, and experienced through clothing by surveying selected examples from different genres such as the *ghazal* (lyric), *qawwali* (devotional songs), *hamd* (praise of God), *na'at* (praise of Prophet Muhammad), and *nasr* (prose). I map the thematic development of sartorial references and elucidate their aesthetic and discursive functions within and beyond written and oral texts. I question to what extent the different roles and meanings of clothing are reused, expanded, or problematized across genres. In doing so, I illustrate how discourses of love and devotion for one's self, beloved, family, community, nation, and religion are formed and performed through clothing.

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A Note on Transliteration

The letters of the Urdu alphabet have been transliterated as follows:

Alif as: a, i, u, ā
b p t ṭ ś
j ch ḥ kh d
ḍ ž r ṛ z
zh s sh ṣ ẓ
ṭ ẓ ‘ ḡh f
q k g l m
n
vā’o: v ū o au
h ī
baṛī ye as: y e ai
nūn-e ḡhunnah: ñ
hamzah: ’
iẓāfat: -e

Introduction

*Parda nahīn jab koī k̄huda se
Bandoñ se parda karnā kyā
Jab pyār kīyā tho darnā kyā
- Mughal-e Azam*

If there is no veiling from the Master
Then why veil from the Servants
Why should we fear if we have loved?¹

This paper explores the aesthetics of love and devotion vis-à-vis sartorial symbolism. I analyze the ways in which articulations of love and devotion are constructed, imagined, and experienced through clothing in the Urdu literary tradition. I elucidate their aesthetic and discursive functions of within and beyond written and oral texts by surveying selected examples from different genres such as the *ghazal* (lyric), *qawwali* (devotional songs), *hamd* (praise of God), *na'at* (praise of Prophet Muhammad), and *nasr* (prose). I also question to what extent the different roles and meanings of clothing are reused, expanded, or problematized across genres. In doing so, I illustrate how discourses of love and devotion for one's self, beloved, family, community, nation and religion are formed and performed through clothing.

In Chapter 1: Clothes in the Urdu Ghazal, I situate clothing in the complex system of symbols and signs that are the basis of the ghazal. I conduct a close reading of an array of Urdu poetry from the eighteenth and nineteenth century to highlight the different functions and meanings of clothing in mediating the relationship between a devotee and the Divine. I consider the ways in which notions of beauty, jealousy, comfort, distance, and proximity are all imagined and experienced through clothing.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations presented in this paper are my own.

Chapter 2: The Prophet's Clothes turns to devotional songs of qawwali dedicated specifically to Muhammad and expands on the ways in which his signature attire – the black *kamli* (blanket/shawl) - shapes his image in popular devotion as a humble, kind, generous, and playful friend, king, and intercessor. I analyze sections of the qawwali *Teri Har Ek Ada* by Aziz Ahmed Khan Warsi and *Bhar Do Jholi* by the Sabri Brothers to demonstrate the significance of the black shawl and other sartorial items associated with him in negotiating his relationship with his followers.

Chapter 3: Gender and Clothes explores the silences and omissions of the ghazal especially in regards to women and illustrates the ways its conventions are revitalized and undermined through clothing. By examining a range of texts by Mir Anis, Baqar Ali Chirkin, Ismat Chughtai (*Chauthi Ka Jora and Lihaf*), Wajida Tabassum (*Utran*), and Sadaat Hasan Manto (*Tapish Kashmiri and Khol Do*), I evaluate to what extent definitions of love and devotion are expanded, complicated, or problematized within and beyond the context of the ghazal. In my analysis, I explain the different levels at which love and devotion for one's self, family, religion, and nation is mediated by gender and performed through clothing.

Limitations of this Study:

It must be noted that my analysis does not take authorial intent into consideration. Although it is valid that literature is influenced by the surrounding political, social, and cultural milieu, the primary goal of this paper is to show how a metaphor assumes a life of its own. Therefore, I limit discussions about the lives of poets and writers, and instead focus on the performance of symbolism and metaphors within texts and their ability to tie in larger discourses. This is not an exhaustive study of clothing references in Urdu literature but rather an attempt to demonstrate their evolution, endurance, versatility, and limitations across time and genres.

CLOTHING IN LANGUAGE AND PRACTICE

Beverly Gordon, in *The Fiber of our Lives: Why Textiles Matters*, suggests that in order to get a sense of the deep associations and meanings that textiles and clothing hold in our cultural consciousness, the best way to start is by examining language, metaphor, and myth. The connection between clothing, love, and devotion becomes apparent when we look at the repertoire of imagery, stories, and practices which Urdu devotional literature draws heavily from. Sufism played a significant role in the spread of Islam in South Asia. Those who resisted and opposed Islam's imperial expansion wore coarse wool and called themselves Sufis; The word *sufi* is derived from the same root as *suf* (wool) and *saaf* (pure). As it developed into a social movement, its message had to be disseminated in a concise and mnemonic way so that people could understand it and pass it on. Thus, poets took inspiration from everyday activities such as weaving and spinning to explain an abstract system of mystical stages and states, which required an immense degree of intellectual and spiritual discipline, in a comprehensible and appealing way. Followers were not asked to master doctrinal or esoteric knowledge, but only to feel comfort in God's unity and majesty. The oral and written texts produced for this purpose also served as a way through which Sufis sought to secure for themselves the role of mediator between God and the people who used those texts to regulate their lives.²

Dhikr, a form of meditation which entails uninterrupted repetition of Divine names or of the profession of faith, is held to resemble the act of spinning thread.³ Like the thread which becomes finer by constant spinning, the human heart too is refined by *dhikr*, and the soft murmuring sound its reciters make is like the humming of the spindle. This image of the *charkha* (spinning wheel) is especially common in the poems from

² Eaton, "Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam," 124–25.

³ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 224.

cotton-growing areas in Punjab and the Deccan.⁴ The *charkah-nama* is one of the most widespread forms of poetry in the Deccan consisting of songs sung mostly by women while spinning the thread at the spinning wheel. Simple Islamic precepts are reinforced by parallels and metaphors drawn between them and the various parts of the spinning wheel:

Imagine that your body is a spinning wheel, oh sister.
We should get rid of our negligence
And give up worldly differences, oh sister.
The tongue is the unspun thread for the message of God;
The tongue is the rim of the spinning wheel.
Bring out the thread of breath and show it, oh sister.
Both of these memories should be in our throat:
God has given us the ability to turn our hand,
And it is that which moves the wheel, oh sister.
Faith must be for you what the drive-rope is for the wheel.
Perhaps you know of the two wheels connected by the rope;
Then you will know how the wheel turns, oh sister.⁵

Mansur al-Hallaj, the arch-martyr of divine love, is one of the most frequently cited and celebrated figure from Islamic history in the ghazal whose declaration *Ana al-Haq* “I am the Truth” led him to the gallows in Baghdad in 922.⁶ He earned the name *hallaj al-asrar* “the cotton carder of the innermost hearts” since people believed he knew all things hidden in the human heart and soul.⁷ He serves as a model for all subsequent lovers who wish to annihilate themselves in God and experience *wahdat al-wujud*, oneness of existence, but at the same time, he is mentioned as a warning to those who divulge the secret of love.⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Eaton, “Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam,” 123.

⁶ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 127.

⁷ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 67.

⁸ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 126.

The Quran calls the story of Yusuf (Joseph) *qisa al-husna* (the most beautiful story) in which his father Yacub (Jacob) cries so much after being separated from his son that he becomes blind. He is cured by the scent of Yusuf's shirt. For poets, every breeze carries the fragrance of his garment. They see and feel him everywhere until his name becomes "a fur coat in winter days."⁹

The language used to describe the process of writing and interpreting poetry is also full of clothing imagery. For instance, the double quality of the poetic word, that is it both veils and unveils, makes Persian poets speak of their work as "weaving a festive dress for the bride Meaning. One can admire the wonderful fabric of the garment as one can admire the beauty of the bride hidden beneath it."¹⁰

More broadly, clothing is central to the way we communicate. Both English and Urdu are full of sartorial expressions and idioms. We say "life hanging by a thread," or the "fiber of our being," or we speak of people's lives as "interwoven in a social fabric." Our emotions also rely on these images as we can be "cloaked in fear" or "clothed in darkness."¹¹ Similarly, there are many sartorial idioms in Urdu: *āstīn kā sāñp* (literally means sleeve snake, but it refers to a back-stabber), *girebān meñ jhāñknā* (to look inside one's own collar before pointing out the vices of others), *dāman sāf/pāk honā*, (to be pure/chaste), *dāman pehlānā* (to beg by spreading one's hem/skirt), *dāman jhārnā*, (to get rid of), and *pagri uchālnā* (to humiliate).

Islamic rituals involving birth, death, and all the rites of passages and milestones in between are also marked by clothing. A baby is wrapped in unstitched cloth immediately after it is born. A deceased person's body is covered in a shroud which is

⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Gordon, Beverly, "The Fiber of Our Lives: A Conceptual Framework for Looking at Textiles' Meaning," 2.

preferred to be from one of the holy cities such as Mecca, Medina, or Karbala. Marriage rituals also include exchange of clothing since the Quran speaks of the relationship between men and women in terms of clothing in Surah 2:187: “They are garments for you and you are garments for them.” In terms of devotional practices, prayer is often performed on a prayer rug (*ja namaz*). *Hajj* is performed in *ihram*, or two unstitched pieces each to cover the lower and upper body. The Kaba is covered in a black cloth called the *kiswa*. Sheets of cloth or *chadors* inscribed with Quranic verses are often offered at shrines along with garlands of flowers.

FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW:

A central point of contention in sartorial discourse is how meaning is signified. Is the meaning of cloth inherent in its color, textures or shapes, or is it generated from signifiers internal and external to cloth? Ronald Barthes’ *Systeme de la Mode* (The Fashion System) leans heavily towards the latter. He acknowledges textiles as a signifier that can be combined with other signifiers internal and external to fashion (such as cut and drape, or season, place and situation) to construct and deconstruct meaning. He argues that meaning is not a property of a garment like its color. Barthes suggests that it is variants within the properties of cloth which act as the signifiers, rather than the cloth itself: “Gray can be either light or dark, and it is this opposition which signifies meaning, not the colour gray itself.”¹²

This structuralist approach cannot explain how clothes function in Urdu literature. This task requires a framework that comes from within the social and cultural milieu being discussed. Therefore, my analysis of clothing in Urdu literature is framed by the

¹² Andrew, “Textile Semantics,” 37.

understanding of cloth as a unique conveyor of spirit and substance.¹³ It possesses innate transformative and talismanic properties that can be transferred between people. Cloths of different textures, colors, or origins change the moral and physical being of the wearer or recipient. Cloth is porous, dense and intertwining, and can absorb, retain, transmit and transfer holiness, purity, and pollution.¹⁴

A garment can be considered a person's second skin or ego: it acquires the wearer's qualities and can be substituted for the real person.¹⁵ It transfers power and transforms relationships. To give a garment that has been worn to someone else is as if it were to bestow on the recipient a piece of one's blessing or *baraka*. Clothes are not just bodily coverings nor just symbols of power and authority: they literally are authority. This idea underlies the ritual of *khil'at* (literally meaning cast-off) or gifting robes in exchange for *nazr* (offerings, usually gold or silver coins) that upheld the patron-client relationship during the Mughal empire. This robe was a garment that a king or noble had worn, or at the very least, had been brushed across his shoulders.¹⁶ In presenting the robe, the ruler symbolically made the recipient an extension of himself and delegated his authority in exchange for an oath of allegiance. The donation of cloth prolonged the sight or *darshan* of royalty for the subordinate who was thought to benefit morally and materially from having contact with kingship.¹⁷ Within the Sufi tradition, initiation rituals also often included exchange of robes or turbans that belonged to great teacher or saint as

¹³ Bayly, Christopher, "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930," 287.

¹⁴ Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 287.

¹⁵ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 220.

¹⁶ Minault, Gail, "The Emperor's Old Clothes: Robing and Sovereignty in Late Mughal and Early British India," 126.

¹⁷ Bayly, Christopher, "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930," 299.

a way to deepen piety and practice.¹⁸ Although these rituals linked imperial authority to divine authority, the source of all earthly power, they were also contested and intertwined with politics and power. Different components of the rituals such as the giver, objects, receiver, and audience, as well as values, practices, and points of contestation defined *khil'at* as a specific system of honor.¹⁹

The subject of clothing in South Asia has attracted the attention of many historians and anthropologists. This body of scholarship includes mostly historically oriented work on negotiations over dress both by colonizers and the colonized and on the interplay of imperialism and nationalism. The British imperial administration first recognized the Mughal authority by participating in its rituals, but as the roles reversed, there was increased reluctance in engaging in ritual subordination that were at odds with the political reality.²⁰ Bernard Cohn's work describes how the British administration continued the Mughal patronage system and even some of its rituals, but either misunderstood the symbolic meanings of those rituals or deliberately altered their meaning to reorganize hierarchical relations between themselves and their new subjects.²¹ The British first utilized clothing as a means to master their new subjects and then later as a way of communicating and maintaining their economic, political, cultural, and moral superiority.²² They reduced the complex symbolic codes and their associated meanings such as exchange of *nazr* for *khil'at* into commercial transactions.²³

¹⁸ Gordon, *Robes of Honour*, 4.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Minault, Gail, "The Emperor's Old Clothes: Robing and Sovereignty in Late Mughal and Early British India," 127.

²¹ Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Minault, Gail, "The Emperor's Old Clothes: Robing and Sovereignty in Late Mughal and Early British India," 128.

Emma Tarlo's comprehensive study *Clothing Matters* is organized around the dilemma of what to wear as Indians encountered colonialism, modernity, and nationality in the nineteenth century. She sheds light on the forces that shaped how people sought to manage and express their own identities, and evaluates the extent to which the choice of what to wear did not convey a stable, singular meaning as these choices were made in relation to other factors such as caste, education, urbanization, and ideas of female modesty. Clothes were thought to be badges of identity, easily removed and replaced. She argues that clothes are a means of both identification and differentiation. She also looks at issues of national identity through Gandhi's adoption of *khadi* (home-spun) and the various meanings associated with it. Nationalist leaders encouraged Indians to strip off their European apparel and cast it into the sacrificial flames, replacing it with Indian handspun and hand-woven cloth.²⁴

While Tarlo's work lays a solid foundation for studying clothes in India, Lisa Trivedi offers a more nuanced and sustained study of the transformation of *khadi* from an ordinary cloth into a powerful political symbol. She brings together social history and the study of visual culture to account for *khadi* as both a symbol and commodity that occupies space in "visual vocabulary of nationalism." It departs from Tarlo's work, which is largely restricted to a reading of *swadeshi* and *khadi* from *Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi*, by referencing other resources such as letters, memoirs, photographs, advertisements. She demonstrates how nationalists including Gandhi used *khadi* to construct a common visual vocabulary through which a population separated by language, religion, caste, class, and region communicated their political dissent and their visions of community. Gandhi drew upon a variety of pre-existing and overlapping

²⁴ Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*.

discourses about cloth and clothing to encode *khadi* with meanings of purity, sacrifice, and patriotism.²⁵ In using *khadi* to transform how Indian society perceived the body, time, and space, nationalists and common people reinvented a traditional fabric to serve a distinctly modern future, securing for *khadi* a special place in the national cultural of modern India.²⁶ The wheel at the center of the Indian flag attests to how central the idea of homegrown clothing is to the nation's consciousness.

As Gandhi's popularity grew, the messages he brought to the Indian public via speeches and writings had a limited range. Most people who attended his public addresses could not hear him or understand him. To solve this problem, Gandhi used the communicative power of his clothing to convey the dignity of poverty, the dignity of labor, the equality of all Indians, and the greatness of the Indian civilization as well as his own saintliness.²⁷ People came literally to see him, for a *darshan*, since the sight of the eminent or holy blesses and purifies the viewer. This transcended the limitations of linguistic and cultural boundaries, and allowed the power of Gandhi's appearance to surpass his message in words. The sacred sight of the Mahatama, his *darshan*, was almost equivalent to a pilgrimage to the holy Banaras.²⁸

The politics of clothing has been discussed in detail by many scholars, however, the poetics of clothing still demand more attention. Most studies that look at clothing metaphors focus primarily on American, French, British, or Russian literature in which they are viewed as indicators of fixed social, historical, or cultural realities.²⁹ While this

²⁵ Bayly, Christopher, "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930," 285.

²⁶ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation*.

²⁷ Bean, Susan, "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence," 368.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Elahi, *The Fabric of American Literary Realism*; Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*; Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*; Ivleva, "Functions of Textile and Sartorial Artifacts in Russian Folktales."

perspective is beneficial for exploring how clothing construct identities or reflect changing socio-historical conditions, it also limits the understanding of cloth as an object that is always at the mercy of the context. This study departs from the view that clothes have essentialized roles in literature, and instead proposes to engage with them

Despite the innumerable references to clothing in both classical and modern Urdu poetry and prose, there has been no sustained or systematic study that engages with the role clothing play in constructing and disseminating ideas of love and devotion.

Annemarie Schimmel's *A Two-Colored Brocade* and Frances Pritchett's detailed work on Ghalib's *divan* are the only resources that come to mind which offer substantial commentary on the appearances of clothing imagery and metaphors in Urdu and Persian poetry.³⁰ I draw heavily from their work in order to fill this void and to add a literary perspective to the ways in which we think about clothing, love, and devotion. Some cultural symbols more readily available than others, and clothing is one such symbol that is freely invoked. It is utilized by writers across time and genres, regardless of whether they are considered as part of the canon or not. Functions of clothing seem so obvious and so natural as to eliminate the need for discussing them, yet it is this seemingly banal symbolism that I wish to unpack.

³⁰ There are several other studies that have explored connections between textiles, poetry, art, and architecture, but none of them focus specifically on literature. See: Bier and Textile Museum (Washington, D.C.), *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart*; Turner, "Zaher va Baten: Outer Form and Inner Meaning in Iranian Textile Designs"; Bush, "A Poem Is a Robe and a Castle: Inscribing Verses on Textiles and Architecture in the Alhambra."

Chapter 1: Clothes in the Urdu Ghazal

The ghazal with its numerous images, which are apparently kept together only by the rhyme, reminds the reader often of a very finely woven garden carpet whose pictures, flowers, and arabesques should be seen against a larger background: each of them meaningful, and yet the whole of its beauty is more than the sum of its parts.³¹

- Annemarie Schimmel

*khūb pardā hai ki chilman se lage baithe haiñ
Sāf chupte bhī nahiñ sāmne āte bhī nahiñ*

- Daagh Dehlvi

How great is veiling, for he sits against the curtain
Neither is he properly hidden, nor does he come forth

This chapter sifts through the varied but limited repertoire of images, practices, and stories that the Urdu ghazal draws from in order to locate and engage with sartorial references that express love and devotion to a beloved/Creator. I first lay out the basic conventions of the ghazal, and then I outline the various aesthetic and discursive functions of clothing in mediating the relationship between the devotee and the Divine. I demonstrate that experiences of love, devotion, beauty, pain, separation, and closeness and the ways in which they are imagined, felt, and expressed can be weaved into clothing. The simultaneous pushing/pulling and advancing/retreating that characterize the relationship between a lover and his beloved is embodied by a series of contradictory functions of cloth: it is both a material object and a symbol, faces inward and outward, creates proximity and distance, reveals and conceals, comforts and disturbs, fold and unfolds, and protects and exposes.

Although there are innumerable references to clothing in the Persian and Urdu ghazal, there has been no sustained attempt to critically engage with their aesthetic and

³¹ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 9.

discursive roles.³² The most common references occur in the context of the lover who either rips his clothes in madness or envies the tight dress for its closeness to beloved's body.³³ The aim of this chapter is to show that clothes do much more than that: they embody and give a material form to the beloved's beauty, mark the lover's way of loving as distinct, describe the lover's condition, and express distance and proximity between the lover/creation and the beloved/Creator.

GHAZAL CONVENTIONS

The mono-rhymed and multi-themed ghazal is the most privileged genre of the Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Punjabi, and Sindhi literary traditions. Its conventions continue to pervade and color not only subsequent genres of devotional literature in regional languages but also popular songs and films throughout South Asia. The basic theme of this genre is love, be it worldly or divine, but as Shamsur Rahman Faruqi says, the ghazal is not a love poem but rather a poem *about* love.³⁴ Within its self-contained, two-line universe lives a passionate *āshiq* (lover) who is in a constant state of suffering because he lacks access to his *mahbūb* (b/Beloved). The genre grew within the framework of the pre-Islamic *qasīda* (ode) in which love featured as a conversation between a lover and his beloved only in the *nasīb* (prelude) to the main part (*madīh*) of the poem. By the eleventh century and onward, as the ghazal passed into Persian and then Urdu and grew under the influences of Sufism, love acquired mystical overtones and became a central organizing theme, with a detailed and intense exploration of the

³² The only exception to this is Annamarie Schimmel's *A Two-Colored Brocade* which dedicates an entire section to clothing and textile metaphors in Persian poetry.

³³ Orsini, *Love in South Asia*, 19; Faruqi, "Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," 15–16.

³⁴ Faruqi, "Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," 4.

emotional states of love and its accompanying passions of pain, jealousy, hope, and despair.³⁵

The Arabic-Persian configuration of hierarchical love inherited by Urdu places *ishq* at the highest level. Although love for God is considered true love (*ishq-e haqīqī*) and love between humans is merely metaphorical (*ishq-e majāzi*), this distinction is often conflated since the beloved is an idea that can be represented in many ways. In many cases, the beloved is grammatically masculine, and at other times it is feminine especially when women's clothing, jewelry, and veiling are mentioned, but there is an implicit rule that the name, gender, age, religion, profession, and origin of the beloved should remain indeterminate. Since the beloved is not anchored in any particular person, it can be anyone: a young boy or girl, a man, a woman, or God himself, all or none. This general sense of "belovedness" enables the "you" to assume a life of its own.³⁶

The core function of love is to soften the heart, making it receptive to more pain, which ultimately makes the human heart a site for the Divine Light to be reflected upon and into it.³⁷ The lover's sole purpose to suffer; the beloved's function is to inflict suffering. The lover and the beloved both live in a world of extremes: the beloved exemplifies both Divine *jamāl* (Beauty) and *jalāl* (Majesty), while the lover demonstrates supreme devotion. Thus, the beloved is a mirror of the seemingly contradictory attributes of God.³⁸ This constant interplay between the unchanging beauty and ever-longing lover is translated into contrasting tropes of master-slave, wine-goblet, hunter-prey, rose-nightingale, and candle-moth.

³⁵ Orsini, *Love in South Asia*, 17.

³⁶ Faruqi, "Conventions of Love," 10–11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁸ Schimmel, "Eros - Heavenly and Not so Heavenly in Sufi Literature and Life," 131.

In the ghazal, the polarity of joy and pain become identical, hence Ghalib says: when pain reaches its limit it becomes a remedy. Perpetual longing for eternal beauty is the highest state the soul can reach, for it results in poetic creativity, whereas union brings about silence and annihilation.³⁹ Meanwhile, the lover is stuck in the paradox of having to express the incommunicable mystical experience in words, yet this is the only mode of expression available to him. Poetry concretizes and personalizes his overwhelming emotions and enables him to use his “imaginative power that outsoars the universe and himself.”⁴⁰ This poetry celebrates the idea of unrequited love. Union with the beloved exists only as a desire that is to be longed for but never fulfilled. Therefore, in this scheme of life, “success in love” is not a valid outcome. The greatest achievement is death, but only the beloved is the rightful taker of lives. Suicide is not contemplated since it would deprive the lover of the merit and distinction of being killed by the beloved, or worse, by killing himself, the lover would resume to occupy the space that can be occupied only by the beloved.⁴¹ If death is unattainable, the lover prefers madness, banishment, imprisonment, or general ill fame. The stronger the madness, the farther the wandering, the blacker the ill fame, the truer and deeper the love.⁴² By negating his own being, he affirms the being of the beloved, who alone is sufficient as life and as life-giver.⁴³ As he frees himself from the attachments of this world, he may reach the last goal of his quest which is experienced and expressed as a loving union. This moment is also described as the “lifting of the veil of ignorance,” the veil that covers the essential identity of God and his creation.⁴⁴

³⁹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 307.

⁴⁰ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 10.

⁴¹ Faruqi, “Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century,” 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁴ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 4.

The ghazal is colored by the tension between legalism and spiritual freedom, between intellect and love. This is reflected by ideas and practices that are drawn from the realm of *haram* or religiously prohibited as a way to resist literal and legalistic interpretations. Thus, a system of relations was developed in which each and every worldly image could be explained as a metaphor for something spiritual. Since the ghazal is also part of a performative tradition and is intended to be recited at *mushairas* and public gatherings, it conveys ideas and experiences of love in a way that make sense to the audience as a whole.⁴⁵ Given its compact and derivative nature, a single expression can conjure up a whole story and one single word may evoke several related meanings. This basic treasure of allusions has barely changed over the centuries and is always known to the audience.⁴⁶

BEAUTY AND CLOTHING

Allahu jamāl wa yuhibbul jamāl

Allah is Beautiful and He loves Beauty

At the center of ghazal stands someone who can never be reached, and *should* never be reached by a loving worshipper.⁴⁷ It may be God, a king, or a *shahid*, a witness to the invisible beauty of God which radiates through him. This beloved is the object of loving admiration and veneration even though it is supposed to remain unknowable and un-seeable. When the lover directs his gaze towards the beloved, he can only make sense of him in human terms, and the most visible and tangible sign of his manifestation is his clothing. The lover's eyes are compelled to admire and contemplate the garment covering

⁴⁵ Faruqi, "Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," 8.

⁴⁶ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 7.

⁴⁷ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, p. 10

the beloved's body and seek his beauty in it. But the finite cannot contain the infinite so clothes temporarily give the illusion that the beloved is reachable.

The idea that divine beauty can be described using sartorial articles is traced back to the Prophet. According to one tradition, after the Prophet returned from his heavenly journey or *miraj*, he said, "I saw my Lord as a young man, with his silken cap awry." This background underlies all poetic descriptions of or addresses to the beloved that mention the *kajkulāhī* as early as Attar and later by poets in Iran and India.⁴⁸ One of the most famous verses referencing the *kajkulāhī* is written in Persian by Hasan Dehlvi, an eleventh century poet in Delhi:

Mā qibla rāst kardīm be-samt-e kajkulāhī

We have directed our prayer toward the one with his cap awry
Like the tilted cap, the lover's approach to love and devotion is also skewed in contrast to the literal, legalistic, and unimaginative interpretations and attitudes of the *zāhid*, devout and pious one. An unbearded boy is considered a true witness of God's eternal beauty.⁴⁹ He is often called an idol, a *sanam* or *but*. Instead of directing his prayer towards the Kaba, which was once purged of idols, the lover turns to the beloved with his crooked silken cap, a symbol of his charm, coquetry, and youthful tenderness. To look at a *shahid*, to adore him and his beauty from a distance, and to contemplate his face is not only an expression of love but also worship. Thus, *nazar* (looking/sight) becomes central to experiences of beauty and love.⁵⁰ The interaction that occurs between Moses and God on Mount Sinai is also based on the demand for a sight. Moses says: "*Taranī!* - Show Thyself" to which God replies: "*Lantarānī!* - You cannot see me." Instead, Moses sees a

⁴⁸ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 290.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

flash of lightening as Mount Sinai is reduced to ashes. In the lover's imagination, the *kajkulāhī* is a manifestation of that *jalva*, that flashing splendor. Since the "human eye cannot bear the unveiled radiance of the Divine which is hidden behind seventy thousand veils of light and darkness,"⁵¹ his presence is imagined through this cap which even the Prophet had the honor of seeing. *Rāst kardan* also means to straighten so the pun implies that by turning towards the beloved's cap, the lover "fixes" the *qibla* direction that was initially misdirected. The fixed, cube-like, stone structure of the Kaba thought to be the house of God is transformed into a portable, lopsided cap on the beloved's head. In this way, the *kajkulāhī* renders fixed prayer timings and cardinal directions as meaningless: The Kaba can be anywhere and everywhere, accessible to all, and not bound to a specific time and place.

CLOTHING AND THE LOVER'S CONDITION

One of Urdu's most significant contributions to the ghazal genre is distinguishing between meaning (*ma'nī*) and theme (*mazmūn*). This distinction is missing from classical Arab-Persian literary theory which only mentions *ma'nī* and assumes that a poem meant what it contained. Early Urdu writers recognized that a poem could be split into two components: *mazmūn* - the thing/object/idea which the poem is about and *ma'nī* - the inner, deeper, wider signification of the poem. Following this line of thinking, two important principles of classical Urdu poetics emerged: *ma'nī āfirīnī* (meaning creation) and *mazmūn āfirīnī* (theme creation). *Ma'nī āfirīnī* constructs a text that implies something more or different than what its words say. It also refers to the ability of a line to be read as a statement, a question, or an exclamation due to *ibhām* or ambiguity.

⁵¹ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 221.

Maẓmūn āfirīnī means to take an existing theme, trope, word, or image and to present it in a new way. Pritchett describes *maẓmūn āfirīnī* as:

[A]meaning-making process [that] is based on and extended, proliferating, free-wheeling use of metaphor, one that generates a constant supply of new images, thoughts, and propositions about the ghazal universe. Over time, if a particular leap of metaphor is admired and widely adopted, it undergoes a kind of concretization, becoming a well-established part of the ghazal landscape. As such, it can readily become the jumping-off point for further leaps of metaphor.⁵²

In Urdu poetics, metaphors do not merely represent facts, they *are* facts. In this vein, the various uses, parts, colors, and textures of a piece of clothing become possibilities for word and image play and for deriving other metaphors.⁵³ Cloth can be cut, stitched, worn, stained, ripped, or mended. All of these stages in a cloth's life can correspond to the lover's condition.⁵⁴ For example, the lover's clothes are reflective of his willingness to be humiliated as he roams the beloved's street in the following couplet by Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

Ye hamīñ the jin ke libās par sar-e-rah siyāhī likhī gāī
Yehī dāgh⁵⁵ the jo sajā ke ham sar-e-bazm-e-yār chale gae

That was me on whose garment blackness was written in the middle of the road
These were the very scars with which I adorned myself and arrived at the
beloved's assembly

As the lover walks by, street children throw stones at him. However, the lover desires to be wounded and treasures these scars since the loss of dignity, honor, and station ensures the suppression of his own self, making him more suitable for dying at the hands of the beloved.⁵⁶ The stones leave a black mark on his robe and inflict bloody wounds on his body. When the stone's blackness and blood's redness mix together, the stains appear

⁵² Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 93.

⁵³ Faruqi p.26

⁵⁴ Pritchett, Frances, "Ghazal 17, Verse 9."

⁵⁵ One is immediately reminded of Faiz's *Subh-e Azadi* in which dawn appears as if scarred by leprosy – *ye dāgh dāgh ājālā...*

⁵⁶ Faruqi, "Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," 25.

like scars of leprosy. He wishes to impress the beloved with these scarred patterns on his clothes, proving that only he is the true lover.

The different parts of a garment have their own unique roles. For example, the *āstīn* (sleeves) and the act of *charhānā* (pulling up) signal the arrival of dawn for the lover:

*Āstīn usne jo kohnī tak charhāī vaqt-e subh
Āa rahi sare badan kī be-hijābī hāth meñ⁵⁷*

When he pulled the sleeves up to his elbows at the time of dawn
The unveiling/nakedness of the entire body was drawn into the hand

The lover's gaze is focused on the hand which is pulling up the sleeves. The entire body's nakedness is absorbed and condensed into the hand, emphasizing that he only needs to see a part in order to imagine the whole. Dawn arrives when the beloved rolls up his sleeves and unveils night. The lover sees his own condition manifest around him and can relate to the lifecycle of sleeves. Sleeves-elbow is another metaphor for the lover-beloved; The purpose of sleeves is to be rolled up, come to a momentary stop at the beloved's elbow, and then to be pulled back down. This motion of constant closeness and separation, advancing and retreating resembles the lover's plight.

One of the classic symptoms of madness and grief is the tearing of one's clothes. The lover in his madness feels suffocated and wants to remove all constrictions so that he can breathe. There is no better way to do this than ripping the *girebān* or collar which refers to a long, narrow, slit-shaped neck-opening of a shirt.⁵⁸ This tearing of the collar is painful and elaborate: The lover grabs the two sides and gives a strong pull to make a long, dramatic rip that starts at the bottom of the opening and runs all the way down the

⁵⁷ Faruqi, "Conventions" p. 15 - Mushafi Ghulam Hamdani

⁵⁸ Pritchett, Frances, "Ghazal 17, Verse 9."

chest, like the single vertical line of the letter *alif*.⁵⁹ The lover's instinct to tear the *girebān* is described by Daagh Dehlvi:

*Chāk ho parda-e-vahshat mujhe manzūr nahīñ
Varna ye hāth girebān se kuch dūr nahīñ*

I do not consent to the tearing of the veil of wildness
Otherwise, this hand is not too far from the collar

In this couplet, the lover gains a bit of integrity as he tries to act sane by declaring to keep the veil of wildness intact, but concedes that it will not take him long to give in to the demands of his passion and madness. The hand is at standby, waiting for the lover to grant it permission to tear open the collar.

Ghalib tells us that the true home of the collar is at the hem which is often embroidered with flowers:⁶⁰

*Ābrū kyā kḥāk⁶¹ us gul kī kih gulshan meñ nahīñ
Hai garebāñ nang-e pairāhan jo dāman meñ nahīñ*

What honor does that rose have if it is not in the garden
The collar is a disgrace for a robe if is not in the hem/foothills

In Mir Taqi Mir's couplet, the beloved's clothes as an extension of his body also have the power to directly impact the lover:

*Uske sone se badan se kis qadar chaspāñ hai hā'e
Jāma kibrītī kasū jī jalātā hai bohat⁶²*

Oh, how closely it clings to his gold-like body
How the sulfur-colored robe burns my heart so much

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pritchett, "Ghazal 87, Verse 1."

⁶¹ *Kya kḥāk* can mean "what the hell" or dust

⁶² Faruqi, "Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," 16.

The lover vicariously experiences the effect of the contact between the beloved and his clothing. The metaphor of a sulfur-colored dress on a gold-like body, when taken as a fact, leads to the acknowledgment that sulfur refines gold. Since the beloved is the epitome of perfection, he does not require refinement. The closest thing that needs to be polished and purified is the lover's heart which burns and dissolves instead. The beloved's clothes are a source of both comfort and discomfort as the lover desires for his heart to burn, but also wishes to be as close to the beloved as the dress.

The image of the clinging dress is presented again by Mir:

*Jī phat gayā hai rashke se chaspāñ libās ke
Kyā tang jāma liptā hai uske badan ke sāth⁶³*

The heart is torn to pieces in envy of the clinging robe
How tightly the robe hugs the body

In these lines, the robe transforms into a rival (*raqīb*) who makes the lover jealous by being so close to the beloved. Yet, the dress is also an intercessor, a *wasīla* through which he attempts to experience proximity to the beloved. The dress is stretched so tightly that it is at the verge of being ripped at any moment, but instead it is the lover's heart that tears into pieces.

PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE THROUGH CLOTHING

Mir Anis writes about the dilemma creation faces of being so close yet so far from its Creator using light imagery:

*Putlī kī tarah nazar se mastūr hai tū
Āñkheñ jise dhūñdhthī hai woh nūr hai tū
Qurbat rag-e jāñ se aur phir us par ye buad
Allah, Allah, kis qadar dūr hai tū*

Like the pupil you are hidden from the gaze

⁶³ Ibid.

You are that light which the eye seeks
Such closeness to the vein of life, yet this distance on top
Allah Allah, still how far you are

This theme of simultaneous proximity and distance between the Creator and his creation is reiterated but with a clothing metaphor instead in the opening line of Ghalib's *divan* or collection of poetry:

*Naqsh faryādī hai kis kī shoḳhī-e taḥrīr kā
Kāghazī hai pairahan har paīkar-e tasvīr kā*⁶⁴

Drawing/sketch is the victim/plaintiff of whose mischievous writing
Made of paper is the robe of every figure of the image

The relationship between seeing, knowing and loving is brought to the forefront and the futility of human existence is represented through clothing. The opening line of a *divan* typically consists of a *hamd*, or praise of God. However, creation seems to question how it should praise the Creator if it is permanently imprisoned within paper clothes. Creation is nothing but a sketched or painted figure, a victim of a wrong-doing who seeks redress from the entity that brought it into existence through mischievous speech.

There are two levels at which the paper robes function in this couplet: First, this imagery refers to a custom in Iran where a subject appeared in front of the ruler in paper garments to indicate that he or she had come to petition.⁶⁵ The paper robe was not merely a symbol: it was the petition itself. Second, in the world and space that a painted or drawn figure occupies, its clothes can be made of nothing but paper. *Naqsh* is trapped in a paper robe, perpetually living in the state of being a plaintiff. Its existence is limited, transient, insubstantial, and contingent upon the artist who gives it form.

⁶⁴ Pritchett, "Ghazal 1, Verse 1." Extensive commentary on this couplet is available on Frances Pritchett's website.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The textile of the canvas also serves as a veil drawn over the real that enables an artist to create a representational world. It directs the spectator's point of view from looking at the world to looking at the surface for meaning. Ghalib expresses the inability of love and passion to be represented in another couplet:

Shauq har rang raqīb-e sar-o-sāmāñ nīklā
Qais tasvīr ke parde meñ bhī 'uryāñ nīkla

Passion, in every color/form, turned out to the rival of proper possession
Qais even in the veil of a picture turned out to be naked

The Quran shapes both the experience and language of love. This couplet articulates the breach of a pact of love established in Surah 5:54 which states that love came into existence by God's activity and that His love precedes human love: "He loves them and they love him."⁶⁶ Thus, creation feels betrayed and fooled after being pranked by the Creator's *shokhī*. This dispute also resembles verse 36 in Surah Yasin in which God reminds mankind of how it came into existence:

Does man not consider that We created him from a [mere] sperm-drop – then at once he is an open disputant? And he presents an (argument of) likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. He asks (in confusion): "Who will give life to the bones when they are disintegrated?" Say: "He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognizant of all creation... and He is the Superb Creator (of all), the Ever-Knowing. Surely His Command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it: Be! and it is!

The playful and mischievous speech is equivalent to the verbal command *Kun Faya Kun!* Be! And It Is! which brought the world into existence. It can also refer to the *loh-o-kalam*, the tablet and pen which God uses to issue decrees on creation's fate. However, behind God's mischievousness is a desire to be known and to be worshipped as described in a *hadīth al-qudsi*: "I was a hidden treasure then I desired to be known so I created a

⁶⁶ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 40.

creation to which I made Myself known.”⁶⁷ The function of the Creator is to be known and the creation to know. Yet, still there is no mechanism to overcome this sense of distance. If it is the creator/artist who creates and sustains, and if God is closer than the jugular vein, then how is it that creation is unable to see him, feel him, know him, and to love him?

The Quran prescribes prostrations as a remedy for distance and to attain proximity to God, “prostrate and draw near.”⁶⁸ Muhammad Iqbal expresses a sense of impatience and restlessness to perform prostrations:

*Kabhi ae haqīqat-e-muntazir nazar āa libās-e-majāz meñ
Ke hazaroñ sajde tarāp rahe hai merī jabīn-e-niyāz meñ*

Oh Awaited Reality, appear in worldly/metaphorical⁶⁹ attire sometime
For a thousand prostrations are convulsing in my petitioning forehead

The lover demands a *nazar* like Moses, but recognizes the limitations of his own *nazar*. He knows the only way he can handle this sight and cross the bridge to Divine love is if it comes in front of him in a metaphorical form as the Arabic proverb suggests: *al-majāz qantarāt li'l al-haqīqa*.⁷⁰ The lover and beloved also complement each other. The lover's actions consist completely of *niyāz*, asking and petitioning, whereas the beloved is made of perfect *nāz* or coquetry.⁷¹ The beloved needs the lover for his own perfection, otherwise his beauty is meaningless. Similarly, the lover's submission can only be made possible only if there is something to submit to. After all, even the wine bottle continuously performs prostrations in front of the goblet. The lover wishes to be marked

⁶⁷ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 131.

⁶⁸ Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 132.

⁶⁹ Majaz – Profane, carnal, authorized, metaphorical are all acceptable meanings

⁷⁰ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 292.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

by a scar of love, a dark spot that forms on the forehead as a result of frequent prostrations.

This couplet also calls to mind the Primordial Covenant as revealed in Surah 7:171. Prior to creation, God drew the yet uncreated souls from the loins of future Adam and asked: “Am I not your Lord?” The souls responded: “Yes, we testify,” thus promising God to worship him alone as their Lord. Just as these nonexistent possibilities were endowed with existence and were able to attest their complete submission by divine address, these yet-to-be created prostrations are also pleading to be called into existence by divine appearance cloaked in a human form.

DIVINE ATTIRE

Qawwali performers draw poetry, images, idioms, and stories from disparate sources to create a coherent narrative through the technique of *girabandī* (knot-tying). By doing so, distinctions between different genres of devotional literature such as *hamd*, *na’at* (praise of the Prophet), or *manqabat* (praise of revered Islamic personalities) are blurred. In one of the *girahs* of “Allah Hu,” Aziz Ahmed Khan Warsi sings:

*‘Arz kī Majnuñ ne Haq se ek rāt
Ae mere mālik khuda-e shish jhāt
Rahm ke qābil hai merā hāl-e zār
Rahm kar mujh par mere parvardigār
Jāma-e dil shirk se maila huā
Terā bandā āshiq-e Leila huā
Āshiq-e Leila banayā kyuñ mujhe
Apni nazroñ se girayā kyuñ mujhe
Nagahañ hātif se āī ye nidā
Mere Majnuñ bas na kar itnā gilā
Ishq-e Leila se tujhe gar yās hai
Ġham na kar rab tera tere sāth hai
Are ishq kī Majnuñ bananā kām hai
Mere hī jalvoñ kī Leila nām hai*

Majnun spoke to the Truth one night:
 Oh my Master, Lord of all six directions
 My plight is worthy of pity
 Have mercy on me, my Sustainer
The cloak of my heart is stained by duality/association
 Your slave has become Leila's lover
 Why did You make me Leila's lover?
 Why did You make me fall in your eyes?
 Suddenly, this voice came from the heavens:
 Enough, my Majnun, don't complain this much
 If you are despaired by Leila's love
 Don't be sad, for your God is near you
Arey, love's job is to make a Majnun/madman
 These are my very epiphanies that are named Leila!

The tendency to doubt, judge, and fear love is reflected in this exchange between God and Majnun. The pivot of Muslim devotional life, the Kaba in Mecca is invoked again in the symbolic language of Leila as God compares himself to this dark-skinned sweetheart of Islamic literature who drove her lover Qais mad.⁷² The true seat of the divine spirit is not the Kaba made of stone but the Kaba of the worshipper's heart. By associating Leila as a partner to God, Majnun thinks the robe of his heart has become sullied by *shirk*, the "other" of *tauhīd* or oneness of God. In response, God reminds Majnun that Leila is just another one of his splendid manifestations, reinforcing the idea of *wahdat al-wujūd*, the oneness of existence. This *gīrah* and the stained robe also serve to emphasize that there is no real existence besides God, and that *ishq-e majāzi* is a variation of *ishq-e haqīqī*. Divine intervention is needed to remind us that the relationship between a devotee and Divine can never be breached by a third person and that there are multiple ways in which love can be experienced and practiced.

The color black is also significant in this cosmology. Blackness/darkness by its very definition can never be stained. Leila's power, embodied by the meaning of her

⁷² Hyder, "Towards a Composite Reading of South Asian Cultures: The Case of Islam," 27.

name and her dark complexion, is such that she literally condenses into the black pupils of Majnun. In addition, the Kaba is often described as a bride in a luminous black veil.⁷³ This veil is believed to be hiding the Leila of both worlds: the *majazi* and *haqiqi* Leila.

The idea that Leila enshrouds divine beauty is further developed in this verse by Daagh Dehlvi:

Qamar ko jāma-e-shab tho basar ko parda-e-chashm
Kā libās tere nūr ko sīyāh mile

Moon has the dress of night and sight has the curtain of eyes
Your light has found several black dresses

God is the tailor or weaver who produces both white and black garments.⁷⁴ His radiant beauty needs a form that can contain it even if it is for a single moment. Thus, His light can only be understood when it is compared to darkness and vice versa. Love and devotion to Leila is not *shirk* if Leila is embedded in and around us so naturally.

⁷³ Young, "The Ka'ba, Gender, and the Rites of Pilgrimage."

⁷⁴ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 220.

Chapter 2: The Prophet's Clothes

*Yār ko hamne jā-bā-jā dekhā
Kahīñ zahir kahīñ chupā dekhā
Kahīñ woh bādshāh-e-takht nashīñ
Kahīñ kasā līe gadā dekhā
Kahīñ woh dar libās-e-māshūqāñ
Bar sar-e nāz aur adā dekhā
- Shah Niyaz Ahmed*

I saw my beloved everywhere
At times revealed, at times hidden
At times he was the emperor sitting on the throne
At times I saw him with a mendicant's begging bowl
At times in the beloved's attire
I saw him showing off his styles and gestures

Prophet Muhammad, considered to be the bearer of God's final revelation, is central to the aesthetic frame of Islam, and remains a significant focus of love and devotion for millions of Muslims. Though buried in Medina, he lives in God's presence and is able to be present especially in places where his name is mentioned.⁷⁵ This sentiment is expressed in qawwali songs dedicated to the Prophet which move beyond the written biographical texts and instead praise his life, achievements, kind-hearted and generous nature, supreme standing as a messenger, pietistic legacy, and his graceful relationship with God. These devotional songs build upon the powerful feelings to recall, retain, and identify with past events as if these memories are one's own.

Muhammad constitutes the beautiful model (*uswa hasana*) for every Muslim who aspires to imitate him, even if it is in insignificant actions and habits. He is believed to have provided the paradigm for establishing legal, personal, and social norms, and exemplified moral perfection. The intensity and depth of veneration that Muslims feel toward their Prophet is reflected by the variety of roles ascribed to him: he is the

⁷⁵ Hyder, "Towards a Composite Reading of South Asian Cultures: The Case of Islam."

exemplar, guide, intercessor, friend, and beloved. The Quran states that he was sent by God as a “mercy to the world.”⁷⁶ In theological circles, he has reached the status of the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) in whom the divine names manifest in their fullness.⁷⁷ Despite his spiritual greatness, his followers have a deeply personal and intimate relationship with him. In popular devotion, he is thought to be extremely kind and gentle, caring for the poor and the needy. In poetry and songs, he is addressed as if he is alive and affectionately listening to his followers as they seek his help in solving every type of problem.⁷⁸ People entrust themselves to him and pour out their hearts before him just as they would do with a beloved or an elder in the family.

As the messenger and mediator, Muhammad is uniquely positioned to understand people and their needs and to negotiate with God. The intimacy and proximity he has to God stems from his status as *habīb Allah* (God’s beloved). During the *mirāj*, he is the only prophet allowed to cross the divine threshold and come in God’s presence. The dialogue he has with God, asking him to reduce the number of required prayers from fifty down to five, affirms his right to negotiate as an intercessor on the Day of Judgment when he will request God to not let anyone from his community, even the greatest sinners, be sent to hell.⁷⁹

However personal the relationship between the Prophet and his followers may be, there is a general consensus among Muslims that liberties can taken with God, but Muhammad is off limits. This code appears in the Persian saying:

Bā khuda dīwanā bāsh
Bā Muhammad hoshyār bāsh

⁷⁶ Asani, Abdel-Malek, and Schimmel, *Celebrating Muhammad*, 12. See Surah 21:107.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁹ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 160.

Be crazy with God
Be careful with Muhammad

Wilfred Cantwell Smith states while commenting on the significance of the Prophet for the Muslim community of early twentieth century India:

The emphasis is on Muhammad as a person, human being of commanding excellence...He becomes the object of devotion...Muslims will allow attacks on Allah; there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence.⁸⁰

The privileged status of the Prophet in comparison to God also echoes in the words of Muhammad Iqbal who says, "You can deny God, but you cannot deny the Prophet." While God remains a nebulous figure hidden behind veils of divine names and attributes, it is the Prophet through whom Islam becomes articulated as a religious system, and it is through him that Divine wisdom is revealed to humankind.⁸¹ The idea that as a human he is more accessible than God and that there could be a possibility of a person-to-person encounter with him makes people turn to him in love and devotion.

KĀLI KAMLĪ

The most common imagery that permeates through devotional poetry dedicated to the Prophet is that of light. Although he does not cast a shadow, he represents the primordial light from which the spirits of other prophets were created.⁸² It is his light which shines through Joseph (Yusuf), the paragon of beauty according to the Quran. He is the candle of the assembly around which human hearts throng like spellbound moths.⁸³ The Quran (Surah 33:46) calls him *sirāj un munīr*, the shining lamp.⁸⁴ Poets have likened

⁸⁰ Asani, Abdel-Malek, and Schimmel, *Celebrating Muḥammad*, 21.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸² Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 124–25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁴ Schimmel, *ibid*

the opening verse of Chapter 93 in the Quran “By the morning light” to the radiant beauty of Muhammad and the first words of Chapter 92, “By the night,” to his black hair.⁸⁵

Along with the Prophet’s figure and face, the sight of his garments also serve as inspiration for poets to produce verse as well for his followers who strive to imitate them. According to classical descriptions, he preferred white or green clothing, but owned only one piece of each kind. An Egyptian narrative ballad narrates an incident concerning the Prophet’s shirt. Since he has no cash to help a starving beggar, the Prophet gives him his only shirt, which is then auctioned until a Jew buys it for an enormous sum. The Jew’s blindness is cured by this very shirt and as a result, embraces Islam. The motif of Joseph’s fragrant shirt which healed his father Jacob’s blindness is applied to the Prophet.⁸⁶

His sandals *na’l*, which the Prophet had touched the Divine Throne with during his heavenly journey, take on special significance and become the object of admiration and veneration in popular poetry in various languages. Its two strings drawn between the toes are compared to an amulet full of *baraka*, protecting from the evil eye. The Persian poet Jami writes that the “thread of the soul” is nothing but the strings of Muhammad’s sandals and the cheek of the lover resembles the fine Ta’ifi leather of which these sandals were made.⁸⁷

In 1932, the experience of visiting Qandahar, where a cloak of the Prophet, *khirqā-e sharif* is preserved, inspired Muhammad Iqbal to compose a Persian hymn in which “he compares his heart to Gabriel who was able to see the Prophet in flesh, and tells how his heart sings, dances and recites poetry in the presence of the sacred relic.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Asani, Abdel-Malek, and Schimmel, *Celebrating Muḥammad*, 13–14.

⁸⁶ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 39.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

In 1996, Taliban leader Mullah Omar, also visited the shrine that houses this relic in Qandahar and demanded the shrine-keeper to let him take the cloak outside. While perched on the rooftop of an old mosque in the center of the city, he inserted his palms through the garment's short sleeves as other Taliban leaders around him shouted "*amīr ul-mominīn*" or Commander of the Faithful. According to the *Hadīth of the Cloak*, the Prophet covered Ali, Fatima, Hassan and Hussein with his cloak and designated them as *ahl al-kisa*, the People of the Cloak.⁸⁹ By donning the Prophet's cloak, Mullah Omar drew upon the ritual power, authority, and charisma vested in the cloak and placed himself in the prophetic lineage to ritually legitimize his conquest of Afghanistan, since in the Islamic tradition "clothes are not just body coverings and matters of adornment, nor can they be understood only as metaphors of power and authority, nor as symbols; in many contexts, clothes literally are authority."⁹⁰ The ritual value of this act stems not only from the cloak itself but also from the community gathered around this spectacle.⁹¹ According to the residents of Kandahar, the crowds cheered as many lost consciousness, others threw their hats and other items of clothes in the air in the hope that they would make contact with the cloak.⁹²

There is another community that forms around the Prophet's cloak. This is the community of believers who hold the Prophet to be the *mashūq-e majāz*, dressed in a coarse, black cloak, whose intercession leads to *ishq-e haqīqī*. The centrality of having contact with him becomes apparent when we look at the ways in which his garments are invoked in devotional songs. These songs form and shape the image of the beloved Prophet as the helper of the helpless, the consoler of the community, and the intercessor

⁸⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁹⁰ Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 114.

⁹¹ Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, 22.

⁹² Onishi, "A Tale of the Mullah and Muhammad's Amazing Cloak."

whose black shawl is a sign of hope and reassurance. He becomes more relatable and accessible when his followers can know him, see him, and sense his presence through his garments. If one is physically unable to travel to Medina and grasp the *rauza*, the lattice gate of his tomb, at least in imagination, his shawl is available to serve that purpose. The *baraka* his name and garments carry can influence both the teller/singer and listener of stories and songs in which he is praised.⁹³ In the folds of his shawl, the child-like desire to cling to something familiar, to be wrapped in a loving embrace, and to be protected is fulfilled.

Qawwali, as a genre that grew within a composite culture, derives its idioms from both the Arabic-Persian and Bhakti repertoires. In *Teri Har Ek Ada*,⁹⁴ this intersection of two literary traditions takes on the form of *virhana*, a clearly marked feminine voice that longs for her male beloved. Love and devotion also become interlaced with ideas of kingship, protection, redemption, and beauty through sartorial items that are associated with the Prophet - his *kālī kamlī* (cloak/shawl), *amāma* (turban), and *chitāī* (mat). These objects in essence become metonyms for him. The qualities he is identified with such as being humble, merciful, playful, and kind, manifest in how his clothes appear and what he does with them. The qawwali suggests these are the qualities that one should love and be devoted to. The clothes also play a role in concretizing the Prophet's narrative and grounding him in human form.

Terī har ik adā⁹⁵ ko maiñ jān gayī na
Woh tho kāli kamalia the aure hue

⁹³ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 155.

⁹⁴ This qawwali has been translated and thoroughly explained by Syed Akbar Hyder in "Qawwali Songs of Praise." I am revisiting this qawwali to explore how sartorial imagery sheds light on the the questions Hyder raises in his analysis: "Who/What is Muhammad and what are the qualities we should love and be devoted to?"

⁹⁵ *Ada* is an incredibly rich word that encompasses meanings such as coquetry, styles, manners and charm.

Rūp badla tho kyā pehchān gayī na

I have come to know every single one of your gestures, no?

He was enshrouded in a beggar's black cloak

So what if his appearance changed, I recognized him

Muhammad's humility and humbleness is conveyed through his cloak made of thick, coarse wool. His cloak ties him to the community of the poor and marginalized. He stands as someone who has forsaken worldly pleasures and luxuries represented by silk, the most valued commodity acquired through trade. The undyed, unrefined wool in its purest form embodies the Prophet's epithet *ūmmi* which means he needed to be unlettered so that the Quran could descend in all its purity and not be sullied by worldly knowledge.⁹⁶

The *kamalia* appears in the Prophet's service as part of his *adā* that ranges from being playful to deceptive.⁹⁷ It enables him to disguise himself as a beggar and be elusive, yet it is also what enables his devotee to recognize him since he wears the cloak par excellence. The black cloak, which both reveals and conceals, is rendered transparent, allowing the lover to not only physically *see* her beloved, but to see right *through* him, through his elusive behavior.⁹⁸ No matter how many times he insists he is a human by appearing in this cloak, in this *libās-e majāz*, she knows he is much more than a human.⁹⁹ The refrain in Aziz Ahmed Khan's rendition of this qawwali, *woh tho kālī kamalia, woh tho kālī kamalia*, also demonstrates that this image resonates with the audience and validates *kālī kamlī wālā* as term of endearment for the Prophet.

The Prophet not only wears the *kamlī* to entice his lover but also performs his role as the protector and intercessor with it:

⁹⁶ Hyder and Petievich, "Qawwali Songs of Praise," 96–97.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

*Sarwar-e khūbañ, khusro-e-ālam, tāj-e shafāt wālā hai
Pehlā huā hai dāman-e rahmat
Kitnī khush qismat hai ye ummat
Sāre gunahgāroñ pe us ne kamlī ka parda dālā hai*

The Chief of Beauty, the King of the World, the one with the crown of
intercession
The hem of mercy is spread out
How fortunate is the community?
He spreads the curtain of his black shawl over all sinners

The mantle of mercy he spreads on others is not something he acquired in this world: he was “clothed in the cloak-of-honor of the Attribute of Mercy. Then, as mercy endowed with form, was sent down to creation.”¹⁰⁰

In another qawwali titled *Bhar Do Jholi*, the narrator takes on the role of a beggar who has come to seek physical and spiritual sustenance as well as redemption from the Prophet. There are no formalities or reservations with Muhammad. One can be persistent and feel entitled to his mercy and generosity. The narrator extends his garment¹⁰¹ out in front of him to fill it with his blessings. Amjad Sabri sings:

*Sar-e-mahshar gunahgāroñ se pursish jis gharī ho gī
Yaqīnan har bashar ko apni baḡhshish kī paḡī ho gī
Sabhī ko ās us dīn kamlī wāle se lagī ho gī
Pukāre ga zamānā us gharī dukh dard ke māroñ
Na ghabrāo gunahgāroñ na ghabrāo gunahgāroñ
Ke aise meñ Muhammad kī sawārī āa rahī ho gī
Āa rahe haiñ woh dekho Muhammad
Jin ke kāndhe pe kamlī hai kālī*

On the Day of Judgment, the moment at which sinners will be questioned
Truly, every being will be preoccupied with his own salvation
That day everyone will be placing their hope in the one with the black shawl

¹⁰⁰ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 81.

¹⁰¹ *Bhar do jholi* may be translated as “fill my bag,” but it also refers to the “bag” that is created when the bottom corners of one’s shirt are folded upward.

At that hour, time will call out, “Oh you who are afflicted with suffering”
Don’t worry, sinners! Don’t worry, sinners!
Meanwhile, Muhammad’s procession will be coming
Look, Muhammad is coming
On whose shoulders is a black shawl

Muhammad’s commitment to his community was established during the Night of Ascension. God sees the Prophet and says *habībī, habībī*, (my beloved, my beloved), but the Prophet responds *ummatī ummatī* (my community, my community). Similarly, during the dreaded Day of Judgment, everyone including Jesus will call out *nafsī, nafsī* (myself, myself), while Muhammad alone will march forth and call: *ummatī, ummatī*.¹⁰² By spreading the hem of his mercy, he fulfills his role as both a *habīb* and *tabīb* (physician) through *shafat* (intercession) and *shifa* (healing) for the *dukh dard k maaron* (ones afflicted with suffering).

The qawwali ends by offering salutations and peace to the Prophet for his various deeds including for embracing and providing comfort to those who abused him:

Salām us par jis ne khūn ke pyasoñ ko qabañ dīñ

Peace be upon him who presented robes to those who were thirsty for blood
Muhammad is admired for dealing graciously with people who opposed him. This is best exemplified by the incident when he offered his cloak to a sick woman who threw trash at him everyday on his way to the mosque. This act of extending his love and kindness to someone who abused him is equivalent to *turning the other cheek*.

Multiple narratives are weaved together in the qawwali through the technique of *girahbandhī*, but sometimes one single metaphor is the source of intertextuality. The layers of meanings that are produced as a result of this sharing of idioms between texts enable articulations of love and devotion to blur lines between different religious traditions. The *kālī kamlī* is a perfect example of this richness: in *bhajans* (Bhakti

¹⁰² Asani, Abdel-Malek, and Schimmel, *Celebrating Muhammad*, 11.

devotional songs) Krishna's dark skin and lotus-like eyes captivate his devotees who also refer to him as *kālī kamlī wālā*:

*kālī kamlī wālā mera yār hai
Mere man ka mohan tū dildār hai*

The one with the black shawl is my beloved
The captivator of my heart, you are my sweetheart

PARDA

The image of the *parda* (curtain/veil) in *Teri Har Ek Ada* poses a challenge to the view that the Divine is un-seeable and unknowable:

*Amāma kare bāndhte the shāh-e sarfarāz
Jibrīl se farmayā ae munis-o-damsār
Jis parda-e wahdat se tujhe āti hai āwāz
Jā kar tho zara dekh ke poshīdā hai kyā rāz
Jibrīl ne kī arz ke qudrat mujhe kyā hai
Mahbūb ne farmayā ke jā merī razā hai
Parda jo hatayā tho nazar āī na kuch she
Dekhā tho ye dekhā jo yahañ tha so wahañ hai
Parde meñ khuda tho nahīñ mahbūb-e khuda hai
Amāma usī tarah kara bāndh raha hai*

The Exalted King stood tying his turban
He said to Gabriel: Oh my friend, my companion
That curtain of unity from which you hear a sound
Go and see what mystery lies behind it
Gabriel stated: What authority do I have?
The Beloved said: Go, for you have my permission
When the veil was removed, not a thing was visible
He looked and saw, that which was here was also there
Behind the veil was not God, but the Beloved of God
In the same way, he stands tying his turban

Similar to the transparent *kamalā*, the *parda* separating mortal and divine realms is actually a mirror that reflects the reality of “here” and “there” as one, suggesting there is no separation between God and the self and even God and Muhammad. God longing in

His pre-eternal loneliness to be known loved, created Muhammad as the first mirror for His light and beauty.¹⁰³ Therefore, Gabriel sees Divine Beauty and Reality manifests in Muhammad who is yet another *jalva* of God. This idea also appears in a poem by Muhammad Iqbal which cites the *hadīth al-quḍsi*, *Ana Ahmad bila mīm*, “I am Ahmad, without *mīm*, *Ahad*, the One,” to express that the lover sees God through the Prophet when “the veil of *mīm* is lifted for the lover’s sight.”¹⁰⁴

An alternative reading points to the deception of love and devotion which alters a devotee’s sense of perception. Gabriel is the Prophet’s companion, protector, and guide. In *Hadīth Jibrīl*, when Gabriel comes to test the Prophet’s knowledge of Islam, he appears as a man dressed in clean white robes with black hair, showing no sign of traveling.¹⁰⁵ His companions do not recognize him but the Prophet knows who he is. The Arab poet Umar Ibn al-Fariḍ sees in this a metaphor for the state of the mystic: “while the Prophet sees an angel, others see but a man.”¹⁰⁶

Gabriel accompanies the Prophet through the various levels of heaven on the Night of Ascension, but he is unable to go beyond the threshold of divine presence. Even the arch-angel has never witnessed Absolute Reality. The only reality he knows has always been mediated by the Prophet, so when he looks behind the curtain, he sees his own version of the reality, just like Majnun who sees Leila everywhere, or the lover who sees the Kaba as a tilted cap.

¹⁰³ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁰⁵ Reynolds, “Gabriel.”

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

TURBAN AND BED

Muhammad wears a turban of honor, faith, and authority. In other poetry, it is tied on him by God himself.¹⁰⁷ His turban, called *as-sahab* (cloud), is also a symbol of spiritual succession passed on to his cousin and son-in-law Ali and then to his grandson Hussein. The metaphor of rain pouring down from the “sphere of generosity” and saturating thirsty lovers further develops the cloud-like quality of the turban.¹⁰⁸ Although the Prophet is the ultimate beloved of the bridal soul, he is a bridegroom who is preparing to be united his own beloved, God. The image of the turbaned bridegroom once again brings to mind Krishna with his flute.¹⁰⁹

The worldly and spiritual notions of kingship and sovereignty vested in the Prophet’s clothes are passed on to Hussein who Muslims believe defended Islam through his martyrdom in Karbala in 678. Muhammad’s clothes gain another layer of significance in the *marsiya* (lyrical elegy) when Hussein’s sister Zainab dresses him for both battle and burial:

Mirāj meñ Rasūl ne pehnā thā jo libās
Kashtī meñ lañ Zainab use shāh-e dīn ke pās
Sar par rakha amāma-e sardār-e haq shinās
Pehni qabā-e pāk Rasūl-e falak isās
Bar¹¹⁰ meñ darust-o-chust tha jāma Rasūl kā
Romāl Fatīma kā amāma Rasūl kā

That attire which the Prophet had worn during the heavenly journey
Zainab brought it to the King of Faith in a tray
She placed the turban of the God-Knowing Chief on his head
He wore the holy robe of the Prophet who traversed the celestial skies
In width, the prophet’s robe was fitting and appropriate
Fatima’s handkerchief and the Prophet’s turban

¹⁰⁷ Asani, Abdel-Malek, and Schimmel, *Celebrating Muhammad*, 33.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Hyder and Petievich, “Qawwali Songs of Praise,” 95.

The double meaning of the word *bar* suggests the outfit is indeed fitting for his stature as well as his burial. Fatima's handkerchief which has absorbed her tears and the Prophet's turban which retains his fragrance continue to protect him even after death.

Muhammad embraces both modesty and poverty. His bed embodies his saying: *faqri fakhri*, "my poverty is my pride:"

Shāh-e ālam kā bistar tho dekho
Chitā kajuroñ kī kālī kamalā

Look at the bed of the Emperor of the World
His bed is a black blanket of date leaves

In other poetry, his bed which is made out of a coarse, black rug is compared to a dark rain cloud that sails over lands and revives thirsty hearts which have become like dried-up fields.¹¹¹ The Quran refers to both rain and the Prophet as signs of God's mercy. This rain imagery is extended in Sindhi folk poetry by Shah Abdul Latif who describes the Prophet as a "friend who has donned the garment of clouds. The north winds and clouds [are] black like his hair... each flash of lightening wears red garments like [the] bridegroom."¹¹²

The model of living humbly, showing mercy and generosity, and offering protection, represented through Muhammad's clothes, commands his follower's love and affection. The last line of the qawwali highlights the passion and willingness of his followers to sacrifice themselves for his sake:

Maiñ tho apne nabī ke qurbān gayī
Kamlī wale nabī ke

I am sacrificed for my prophet
The Prophet, the one with the shawl

¹¹¹ Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 81.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 82.

Chapter 3: Gender and Clothes

Farāz-e-koh pe bijlī kuch is tarah chamkī
Libās-e-vādī-o-dasht-o-daman badalne lagā
- Parveen Shakir

Lightening flashed at the top of the mountains in such a way
The attire of the valleys and deserts and foothills began to change

This chapter looks at a range of texts that brings in voices and perspectives which either expand, subvert, or problematize the way love and devotion are experienced and practiced. I start by unpacking sartorial references in a ghazal couplet by the nineteenth century poet Mir Anis' as well as in his ode to *zulfiqār*, Hussein's sword, both of which address a female beloved adorned with jewelry. Then, I turn to Baqar Ali Chirkin who uses the ghazal form to subvert its established conventions by bringing the loftiest and lowest elements of language, body, and religion together.

The second part of the chapter engages with sartorial items situated in the *zenana* (women's quarter). Ismat Chughtai's *Chauthi Ka Jora* and *Lihaf* and Wajida Tabassum's *Utran* shed light on the role clothing play in offering a lexicon to women to conceptualize and articulate their needs, desires, and experiences with love and devotion. The last section delves into Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories. *Tapish Kashmiri* highlights the absurdity of conventions that govern how love and devotion should be experienced and performed. Finally, *Khol Do* initiates discourse on the cost of love and devotion for a nation through a woman's body in Partition narratives.

While mapping the history of love as a social construct in literary, oral, and visual traditions of South Asia, Francesca Orisini emphasizes the role genre plays in framing and limiting discourses of love:

Genre leads readers into thinking that its own partial view is in fact the whole. Each genre codifies a particular correspondence between signifiers and signified and thus establishes its own language, its own rhetoric. Each genre carves up the

world and limits the universe of discourse according to its partial intentions, presenting itself to the reader as a whole. The Perso-Urdu ghazal will makes us think that its way of speaking about love is the only way. It makes us forget that is a codified language that gives shape and meaning to words and emotions and also shuts out everything else that does not fit its code. When genres absorb and use elements from other genres and discourse into its own, it replaces their existing meanings with new ones consistent with its own universe.¹¹³

One of the critiques leveled against the ghazal is that it does not correspond to reality. It is completely divorced from the surrounding political, social, economic, and material contexts. It constructs a monogamous world where there is no way to “fall out of love.” Dissent or rebellion against the beloved is not an option. The lover has the time and resources to produce verse after verse to flatter his beloved and there is nothing that can distract, deter, or dampen his love. It often excludes women, marriage, family life, money, labor, poverty, and disease. There is no hunger, thirst, or calls of nature, and nor does the beloved ever become old or ugly. Despite this criticism, the ghazal is not a monolithic genre. Poets and writers utilize its form and conventions to call attention to the discourses it ignores.

CLOTHING AND JEWELRY

The analysis presented so far has been limited to clothing references. Another reservoir of symbolism emerges when we look at accessories that complement clothing. Mir Anees illustrates this point by bringing women and sex together through jewelry to challenge the view that the ghazal is primarily about unrequited love for an unbearded youth:

*Kis se ae shauq huī rāt ko hāthā pāī
Nau ratan āj jo dhalke hai tere bāzū se*

Oh passionate one, who did you have a scuffle with last night?
For the bracelet has rolled down your arms today

¹¹³ Orsini, *Love in South Asia*, 3–4.

The lover teasingly asks his beloved about the nature of activities that transpired on the night of union. The untied *nau ratan*, an enamel arm bracelet held together by a thread, that has slipped down the beloved's arm insinuates moments of foreplay and intimacy. The beloved is unable to put it back on unless she solicits help from another trained woman. Sex becomes a metaphor for the metaphysical annihilation that union entails.

The meanings of metaphors constantly shift as they are rearranged and linked to different objects of devotion. The object towards which love and devotion is directed to, whether it is a human beloved, a saint, God or an actual object, defines and limits the extent to which metaphors can perform their function. Mir Anis uses clothing and jewelry again, but this time he personifies Hussein's double-edged sword *zulfiqar* as a bride:

*Zaiba thā dam-e jang parī wash use kehnā
Māshūq banī surkh libās us ne jo pehnā
Jauhar the ke pehnī thī dulhan phuloñ kā gehnā
Is auj par woh sar ko jhukae hue rehnā
Saib-e chaman-e khuld kī bū bās thī pahl meñ
Rehtī thī woh Shabbir se dulhā kī baghal meñ*

It was fitting to call it fairy-like at the moment of battle
She became the beloved when she wore a red dress
Were they jewels or was the bride wearing a garland of flowers?
She kept her head bent at this height
The fruit was such that it had the fragrance and essence of the apple from the
garden of paradise
She lived in the arms of a groom like Shabbir

This sword was given to Ali by Gabriel through God's command, and then it was passed on to Hussein. Its double-edged shape is compared by Sufis, poets, and calligraphers to a pair of scissors by which the believer should cut off relations with anything but the One and only God.¹¹⁴ In this tribute, the sword is compared to a fairy, a beloved, a bride, a jewel, a tree, and a fruit. This shifting of form signifies that it cannot be contained in any

¹¹⁴ Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 120–21.

form for too long. Each metaphor is dependent on particular contexts and traits and eventually falls short in describing and capturing its beauty and majesty. For example, it has to appear in the battlefield first before it can be called fairy-like. This fairy-like quality is only an approximation since a metaphor can never be identical to the object it is compared with. Next, it is required to don red clothes to become the *māshūq*. The wedding dress alone however does not turn a beloved into a bride: the bride's beauty has to be enhanced by wearing a garland of *jauhar* or jewels that are green like emeralds. It can also mean that it has to embody the institution of *jauhar*¹¹⁵ and display selflessness, bravery, and courage. The red dress and green emerald-like garlands transform it into a tree laden with fruit, though its fruit comes directly from the garden of paradise. Despite these vivid descriptions, we are unsure of what it was before it donned these forms. Every single comparison has been made possible only when Shabbir (Hussein) carries it in his arms. Aesthetically, the qualities and practices specific to women add novelty, richness, and depth to the poem.

UNDRESSING LOVE AND DEVOTION

If love and devotion is mediated through clothing, it is also satirized by it. Baqar Ali Chirkin, an eighteenth century poet from Delhi, brings clothing and scatology together to draw attention to the silences and absences within the world constituted by the ghazal. He highlights the arbitrary nature of rules that regulate devotional practices and shakes the pedestal on which the ghazal beloved. He uses bodily functions such as urination, excrement, and menstruation to desensitize us to the stigma, fear, and anxiety attached to the body:

¹¹⁵ Vijayakumar, "Altruistic Suicide in India," 74. Jauhar was a custom developed in Rajput kingdoms of India which entailed mass suicide of women and children when men suffered a defeat in a battle.

*Thor the ho guz se apna wuzū
Sheikh jī sahib tumhe kyā ho gayā*

You break your ablution with a fart
Oh Sheikh *ji*, sir what has happened to you

*Sheikh ji ab isko badal daleñ
Āpka amāma sara ¹¹⁶ ho gayā*

Sheikh *ji*, now please change this
Your turban has been soiled

The basic question raised here is what place do bodily functions have in relation to devotion in the ghazal world. The ghazal lover always mocks the Sheikh for his reproachful and ostentatious piety as well as his blind devotion and narrow interpretation of scripture and religious law. Chirkin also calls ritual purity into question by suggesting how fragile it is if all it takes is a gust of wind to ruin it. He stresses the absurdity of controlling and regulating bodily functions so that they do not disrupt and invalidate moments of prayer and devotion. By telling the Sheikh to change his soiled turban, a symbol of his religious knowledge and authority, Chirkin casts doubts about the need to purify the body when in fact bodily fluids, normally considered as “impure” in ritual contexts, are absorbed by clothing.

By framing the interaction between a lover and beloved in scatological terms, he rewrites the aesthetics of the ghazal and brings the highest and lowest registers of language, body and religion together:

*Malta huñ maiñ kaproñ meñ ae rashk-e gul
Attar mujhe mūt tarah ho gayā*

I rub in my clothes, oh envy of the rose
Perfume which for me has become like urine

¹¹⁶ The most literal meaning of *sara* is burnt, but it also means soiled, rotten, and smelly.

The ghazal, with its fascination with the rose and nightingale, completely overlooks the economy of desire. *Attar*, whether used as a fragrance or for medicinal purposes, is a commodity that is not accessible to all. The *bulbul* is attracted to the color and the smell of rose, but does not have much to offer in return. No matter how hard he tries, the odds will always be against the lover who goes through so much trouble preparing for the night of union. He is forced by his helplessness to use his own urine as perfume. The ghazal's tendency to characterize the relationship between the lover and the beloved in extremes leads to the juxtaposition of the rose's scent with that of urine.

The beloved of the ghazal is always kept on a pedestal, but here Chirkin shows that she can be prone to bodily needs and urges like the rest of the world:

*Haiz ke lathoñ se tere ae sanam
Gul kā girebān qāba ho gayā*

From your soiled rags of menses, oh beloved
The collar of the rose has become like an open robe

Although the beloved it is not anchored in any particular gender, the reference to menstruation, which marks a period during which women have to suspend their prayers and rituals of devotion, obviously makes the beloved a female. The lover must flatter the beloved with the most carefully selected and novel comparisons and images. *Husn-e-talīl* or “elegance in assigning a cause” is a literary technique frequently used in the ghazal to attribute a natural phenomenon to the beloved. For example, Nazeer Akbarabadi writes:

*Guloñ ke rang ko kyā dekhte ho ae khubañ
Ye rangateñ hai tumhare hī pairahan kī sī*

Oh beautiful, why do you look at the color of roses?
These colors are just like your dress

Ki si is significant here since it suggests that the colors of the flowers are close to the color of the beloved's dress, but they are not identical. The lover does not want to offend

the beloved by equating her likeness to something that already exists. Yet, he dares to be inventive by declaring that the rose gets its color from the beloved's menses rags. The *gireban*, the slit that the lover rips in the frenzy of grief, passion, and madness is now perceived as a rose's layered vagina that is penetrated and ripped open by a menses rag.

CLOTHES IN PROGRESSIVE LITERATURE

The hegemony of the ghazal officially came under attack after 1857 when the British East India Company was abolished in favor of direct rule. Both colonial administrators and reformists cited the obsession with the unnatural world of lovers and beloveds as one of the many reasons for the decline of the Mughal empire. Thomas Macaulay's infamous claim "who can deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" was internalized by Urdu editors and literary critics who increasingly grew and still are embarrassed of their "unrealistic" poetry. The movement to purge Urdu and make the ghazal adapt to its surroundings gained momentum in the nineteenth century and culminated in the formation of the Progressive Writer's Movement in 1936, an association of writers and intellectuals who believed in creating art for social change. They played a significant role in shaping people's political consciousness through literature and film. They carved a space for themselves in the political, social and literary spheres of India for nearly three decades. In the years before Independence, they influenced debates on imperialism and decolonization, and were at the center of discourses on the nature of the newly independent post-colonial state and society.¹¹⁷

In this climate, clothing that served a utilitarian purpose or that could unite people around a common cause were deemed better:

¹¹⁷ Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change*, xiv.

*Tere māthe pe ye ānchal bohat hī ḡhūb hai lekin
Tū is ānchal se ek parcham banā letī tho achā thā*

The scarf on your head is beautiful indeed
But it would have been better if you had made it into a flag

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's iconic *nazm* (poem), *Mujse Pehli Si Mohabbat Na Mang Mere*

Mahbub best captures the growing sense of dissatisfaction with the ways of the ghazal:

*Anginat sadiyoñ ke tarīk baihīmāna talism
Resham-o-atlas-o-kamḡhwāb meñ bunwāe hue
Jā-bā-jā bik the hue kūchā-o-bazār meñ jism
Ḡhāk meñ lithare hue ḡhūn meñ nehlae hue
Jism nikale hue amrāz ke tanūroñ se
Pīp behti huī galte hue nasūroñ se
Laut jāti hai udhar ko bhi nazar kyā kī jīye
Ab bhi dilkash hai tera husn maḡar kyā kī jīye
Mujhse pehli si mohabbat mere mahbūb na māng*

The dark, dreadful spells of uncountable centuries
Knitted into silk, satin, and velvet
Bodies sold in every place, in the alleys and markets
Flesh covered in dust, bathed in blood
Bodies emerge from furnaces of diseases
Puss flowing from decaying wounds
My gaze keeps returning there, what can I do?
Your beauty is still alluring, but what can I do?
Don't ask me to love you the way I once did my beloved

The lover is torn between the demands of love and those of the larger world and its oppressions. The lover concedes that the heart-tugging beauty of the beloved still entices him, but explains that there are other sorrows in the world which also claim his attention. He juxtaposes the beloved's beauty against the miseries and ugliness of the world which has hunger, disease and deprivation, a world that can never let him be the lover he once was, for a love that is divorced from social reality is too individualistic, too meaningless.¹¹⁸ Sheer ugliness disguises itself in luxury. Satin, silk, and velvet are all

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 274.

superficial, all acquired through centuries of injustice, cruelty, and exploitation. Ghazal poets often speak of *kamkhwab* as “velvet sleep” which perfectly sits straight and has the ideal soft touch. When it wakes up, it looks at the onlooker with a thousand horrified eyes.¹¹⁹ Here, the dark dreadful spells of countless centuries make sure it never awakens so that it never realizes that it has been complicit in distracting the lover and keeping him occupied only with the concerns of all-consuming love.

Chauthi Ka Jora

Ismat Chughtai, writing broadly in the context of secular, nationalist, reformist India and under the socialist imperative of the Progressive Writer’s Movement, chronicles the lives of middle-class women in Muslim households in her stories. She writes in *begumaati zuban* or women’s language, and grants us access to an archive that remains underexplored.

Her short story, *Chauthi Ka Jora* (Fourth-day Outfit) unsettles the world of love and devotion by offering a glimpse into a household with two generations of women, Bi Amma and her daughters Kubra and Hamida, whose devotion to each other, to their means of survival, to a potential suitor, and to a saint/God, all result in utter disappointment. Chughtai reveals the exploitative and almost parasitical nature of devotion which sucks away people’s physical and emotional resources. In the story, Bi Amma remains occupied with sewing a *chauthi ka jora* for her daughter Kubra “whose youth stagnated the very day it arrived.” When Kubra and Hamida’s cousin Rahat comes to stay with them for a few days, Bi Amma thinks he can be a possible suitor for Kubra. The women devote their time and energies in ensuring that he gets the best treatment, feeding him fried meatballs, *parathays*, and kababs while remaining hungry themselves.

¹¹⁹ Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 225.

Rahat's unsolicited advances towards Hamida make her feel uncomfortable, but she continues to bear him after seeing a sparkle of hope in her sister's dull face. The labor of all three women proves to be fruitless when Rahat's marriage is arranged with someone else. Kubra dies of tuberculosis while Bi Amma cuts a shroud which she knows for certain will not stay carefully folded in a trunk full of unworn dresses.

Clothing is the tool with which Chughtai uncovers the inconsistencies within devotion. Behind the detailed descriptions of glittery sequins, gold lace, twill, and fabric is a critique of the idea of devotion as a promise or a transaction between a devotee and the object of devotion. The story highlights the absurd nature of devotion which requires people to place blind faith in each other, in a higher being, or in other means while being expected to remain hopeful even in the face of adversity. When situated in a culture where mechanisms for freeing oneself from the demands of devotion do not exist, devotion, with or without love, becomes mandatory whether it is to one's family, religion, or nation. The story provides a critique of religion and raises questions such as how long and to what extent does one wait in order to receive something in return for being devoted? How does one accept, cope, and make sense of the disappointment that arises when devotion does not yield favorable results? Is it God's will, or is there something lacking in one's devotion?

Devotion is diffused across four levels: Bi Amma is committed to sewing a fourth-day outfit, Kubra is devoted to making Rahat's stay as pleasant as possible so that he will agree to a proposal, Hamida wants to see her family happy, and all three direct their devotion to a saint or God.

As a widowed mother, Bi Amma's devotion to her daughter Kubra is directed towards sewing a fourth-day outfit. The outfit signifies the fulfillment of a girl's obligations to her parents. It is given to her when she returns to her parent's home after

her marriage is consummated. This return sets the terms for subsequent returns to her parents' home. Bi Amma is a skilled artisan who can "measure the length and width of a cloth with the tape of her eyes." Cloth is a precious commodity, more important than jewelry. She saves money whenever and however she can while also pawning her clove, leaf, and flower-shaped gold studs, her silver anklets, and even the two bangles on her wrist which she received upon her widowhood in exchange for crepe fabric, gold lace, strings of sequins, and twill. No piece of cloth is ever wasted. If there was even a bit of trimming left, she would sew a cover for an oil jar or a glass bottle and decorate it nicely with a bit of gold lace. She remains oblivious of her daughter's deteriorating health and Rahat's overconsumption of their rations as she continues to spread out the colorful fabrics everyday in hopes that the "day will come soon when the dewy *dupattas* that were stitched, prepared, and drowned in the depths of the wooden, heavy, grave-like trunk would be resurrected and worn." Devotion, as form of investment in the fourth-day outfit is so fragile that if the outfit is not sewn properly, there can be very real consequences. If any of the pieces were cut backwards, there would certainly be an obstacle in the proposal, or it could mean that the groom has a mistress or that his mother will create a scene while demanding gold bangles. Her labor and devotion is channeled into an object that fails to fulfill its intended purpose. Her obligation to her daughter also remains unfulfilled as different components of the *jora* come into the house, but the stitched outfit never leaves the three-doored room where Bi Amma sews all day.

The motivation for Kubra's devotion to Rahat boils down to a very basic, carnal need, that is the need for *roti*, *kapra*, *makān*, food, clothing, and shelter. The desire to be with a man swells up in her mind as a question of survival not longing. She is appeased by the idea that he will place whatever he earns in her palms. In her mind, devotion to him is the same as watering a fruit-bearing plant. It is an investment that will yield a great

return. When the flowers bloom and the fruit-laden branch bends, what an insult it will be for the ones who taunt her. With this in mind, “she sweeps Rahat’s room with her eyelashes, folds his clothes with love, washes his smelly, rotten rat-like socks, cleans his undershirts and handkerchiefs smeared with snot, and embroiders “sweet dream” on his pillow cover dripping in oil.”

Devotion is closely tied to two other notions, that of service (*khidmat*) and sacrifice (*qurbāni*).¹²⁰ Kubra, “whose hands live the life of a slave,” does not voluntarily enlist herself in *bandagi* (servitude) or willingly sacrifice herself like the lover in the ghazal. It is merely an illusion that devotion is performed out of choice, or out of genuine love. When it comes to survival, Kubra has no agency in choosing to devote herself to service and sacrifice. Even in the absence of a strong male character, her life is governed by patriarchal norms. She is “the burden of a widow’s breast that *must* be pushed off.” The only option she has to escape the cycle of poverty is to believe in getting rewarded for her service and sacrifices. She gladly accepts the pain, discomfort, filth, and injustice that devotion entails even though the “the glittery net of sequins becomes hazy and dim,” foreshadowing the futility of her efforts.

Although Hamida realizes that entire premise of devotion is based on someone else having the upper hand, she feels “like a chicken with a slit throat.” She senses Rahat’s perverted intentions, but “the plea in Bi Apa’s eyes, the dust of returned wedding processions, and the sadness of old “fourth-day” outfits” tugs at her and compels her to bow her head and go. The continuation of Bi Amma’s and Kubras devotions depend on Hamida to serve as the messenger, delivering food and clothes to Rahat. As long as she endures harassment, as long as she bears “Rahat’s filthy, arrow-like eyes that pierce her

¹²⁰ Boivin and Delage, *Devotional Islam in Contemporary South Asia*, 1.

heart,” Kubra will keep cooking and Bi Amma will keep sewing the fourth-day outfit.

She provides sustenance to their dreams, hopes, aspirations and devotions:

Wearing the glittering fourth-day outfit, laden with flowers, tired with shyness, Bi Apa is coming slowly with measured steps...The golden fourth-day outfit is twinkling. Bi Amma’s face is blooming like a flower...Bi Apa’s eyes, weighed down by modesty, look up once. A tear of thanks rolls down... “this is all the fruit of your effort,” Bi Apa’s silence is saying.

Devotion to God and Ali is above all the other forms of devotion. After her *fajr* prayer, Hamida exclaims, “May this time my sister’s fortune open up. Allah I will pray 100 sets of *nafal* at your shrine.” Bi Amma even mortgages her anklets to give an offering to Ali, the difficulty-removing saint. While burning with fever, Kubra hands a plate of offerings to Hamida stressing that *Molvi sahib* has prayed on it. She skeptically asks, “the holy mixture will help us gain our wish?” With trembling hands, she makes a morsel of the holy mixture and moves it towards Rahat’s mouth. As the girls in the courtyard sing a song in honor of Ali, the plate slips from her hand, and Rahat, like a huge boulder, strangles her shriek.

The expectation that one’s prayers will be fulfilled is firmly rooted in the belief that God never disappoints. But what does it mean when God does disappoint? Hamida getting attacked by Rahat with praises of Ali in the background raises serious doubts about love, devotion, and religion: why does a saint require offerings even from those who barely have anything to offer? How can one’s hopes, dreams, and aspirations be shattered in the presence of Ali, the problem-solver?

There is not a a single description of what the characters actually wear in this story. The elaborate sartorial descriptions are instead of all the elements that make up the *chauthi ka jora* as they arrive in the domestic space through Bi Amma’s savings and

pawned jewelry. In the end, the shroud becomes the only piece of cloth that is truly

Kubra's:

The white shroud like the hem of death was spread before Bi Amma. She straightened it and folded it and in her heart countless scissors began to cut. Today, there was frightful peace and lush/green contentment on her face, as though she firmly believed that like the other *joras* this *chauthi ka jora* would not be kept carefully... On the red twill... a mark of the white cloth! In its redness, God knows how many innocent brides have celebrated their wife-hood, and in the whiteness, how many unfortunate virgins have been shrouded. Bi Amma filled the last stitch and broke the thread. Two thick tears began to slowly crawl on her cotton-like soft cheeks. From the creases of her face rays of light burst open and she smiled, as though today she was content that her Kubra's wedding outfit had been made and prepared.

Lihaf

The theme of love and devotion takes a very different turn in Chughtai's *Lihaf* (The Quilt) which explores the issue of female sexuality. In 1944, Chughtai found herself at the center of a major public outcry when the colonial state brought a charge of obscenity against her. She writes in her memoir *Kaghazi hai Pairahan* (interestingly named after Ghalib's couplet quoted in Chapter 1), "the obscenity laws prohibited the use of four letter words... In those days the word 'lesbianism' was not in use. I did not know exactly what it was... I knew no more at the time than the child knew..."¹²¹ Although the text has gone through rigorous queer readings, an analysis of *Lihaf* through the *lihaf* and other demonstrates that the text's silence and inability to name what is confronted confines female homoerotic desire not only within the homosocial space of the *zenana* but also under the quilt.¹²² This gender-neutral piece of cloth represents a site where the dichotomies between public and private and reality and imagination disintegrate so that

¹²¹ Mitra, "There Is No Sin in Our Love," 314.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 316.

transgression against heteronormativity can take place. The tangible quilt transforming into an elusive shadow stands as a metaphor for the ways in which female sexuality is silenced, distorted, and even erased.

The narrator of *Lihaf* revisits a memory from her childhood when she is left with Begum Jan, a wealthy friend of her mother for two weeks. She describes her withering under a neglectful husband, but then blooms as her maid Rabbo massages her incurable “itch” everyday. Every night, the child witnesses the quilt casting terrifying elephant-like shadows on the wall that continue to haunt her, though she remains unsure of what goes on under it until one night when the corners of the quilt are lifted up and she gasps, “What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a *lakh* rupees!”

The warmth and comfort provided by a quilt during cold winter days is often interpreted as a sexual innuendo as popularized by the song “Bīrdī(Cigarette)” in the film *Omkaara* (2006):

Itī sardī hai tho kisī ka lihāf lehī le
Jā parosi ke chuhle se āg laī le

If it’s so cold take someone’s quilt
Go get fire from the neighbor’s stove

The narrator hints that the quilt also offers a space under which romance, licit or illicit, can occur:

Begging your pardon, I am not about to relate a romantic incident surrounding my own quilt—I do not believe there is much romance associated with it. The blanket, though considerably less comfortable, is preferable because it does not cast such terrifying shadows, quivering on the wall! ¹²³

The quilt at first represents Begam Jan’s unfilled and neglected desires:

¹²³ All translations of *Lihaf* quoted in this section are by Tahira Naqvi.

In her household they equipped themselves for their winter needs. But despite renewing the cotton filling in her quilt each year, Begum Jan continued to shiver, night after night. Each time she turned over, the quilt assumed ferocious shapes which appeared like shadowy monsters on the wall. She lay in terror; not one of the shadows carried any promise of life.

After Rabbo's arrival, the quilt helps Begam Jan regain her youth. The unnamed child narrator's fears and anxiety about what happens under the quilt literally and figuratively become projected as an *elephant in the room*. The quilt, which appears *masum* or innocent during daytime, is forever branded in her head as an object that is both a source of fear and fascination. Although the lack of a language to describe same-sex desires is fulfilled by the quilt, at the same time, the impossibility of this desire to be textually, verbally, and visually articulated in public forces it to be distorted into a shadow. The child's imagination interprets the quilt and its shadow in many different ways: sometimes it appears as if an elephant is struggling underneath it as it rises and falls, convulses, swings, and sways, while at other times it seems like a cat lapping in the saucer or as if someone is enjoying a feast.

The division of space between the Nawab and Begum is also marked by clothing. The *mardana* is identified by the presence of the "young, slender-waist, gossamer-shirted youths" who entertain the Nawab while the *zenana* is occupied by Begam Jan's quilt, her Hyderabad net *kurtas*, and her dark skirts and billowing white *kurtas* (tunics). Begam Jan feels she has to compete with the gossamer shirts for attention:

She felt like stuffing all her fine clothes into the stove. One dresses up to impress people. Now, neither did the Nawab Sahib find a spare moment from his preoccupation with the gossamer shirts, nor did he allow her to venture outside the home.

The narrator and Begam Jan's conversations also center around having new clothes made or dressing up dolls. The child's own sexual awakening occurs when she witnesses Begam Jan having her "famous fit:"

The gold necklace she was about to place around my neck was broken to bits. Gossamer net scarf was shredded mercilessly. Hair, which were never out of place, were tousled with loud exclamations of "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

There is certainly a great deal of ambiguity generated by the quilt and the unreliability of the child narrator, but the audience relies on these descriptions to imply that Begam Jan's sexual needs and desires that are neglected by the Nawab find a way to be fulfilled under the quilt. Jurat Qalandar Bakhsh comes to a similar conclusion based on these images:

Bāl hai bikhre band haiñ tute kār meñ terda bāla hai
Jurat ham pahchān gae hai daal mein kāla kāla hai

The hair is tousled, the knots are untied, the earring is bent
Jurat, I have recognized that there is something black in the lentil

Utran

Wajida Tabassum's *Utran* (Cast-off) is also written in a *zenani* language, but is heavily inflected by the Hyderabad dialect of Urdu. The film *Kama Sutra* is an adaptation of this story. *Utran* redefines the relationship between a master and a servant and engenders a competition between them in which a man's body becomes incidental to clothing. These cast-offs become a form of communication, speaking in the language of rivalry, jealousy, and seduction. The story is about Chamki, the daughter of a wet-nurse who lives with a family of nobles in Hyderabad. She questions why she always has to wear *Shahzadi* (Princess) Pasha's hand-me-downs. Her resentment towards these used clothes grows as she gets older and bears Shahzadi Pasha's taunts about her dowry consisting only of her hand-me downs. Chamki finds the ultimate opportunity for revenge

the night before Shahzadi Pasha's wedding when she seduces her soon-to-be husband and makes him her *utran*.

In *Utran*, cast-offs represent the decline of the princely state of Hyderabad and the concomitant collapse of feudalism. Receiving a cast-off, a *khil'at* which was once a sign of loyalty and devotion to a king or noble, is divested of its transformative value and becomes linked to notions of inferiority and humiliation as Chamki's heart is "pricked by a thousand needles every time she wears the cast-offs." Chamki undermines the master-servant relationship when she confronts Shahzadi Pasha and questions if she would ever wear her cast-offs. The desire to assert her own individual identity through clothes rather than being subservient to Shahzadi Pasha creates a competition in which being the first to wear or use something becomes tied to achieving pleasure, satisfaction, and respect.

When Chamki enters the groom's chamber, she is wearing that one outfit which is truly hers, an orange suit which she receives from Shazadi Pasha's mother as a gift when she reads the Quran in its entirety for the first time. It is "a suit which picks her up from the grounds of inferiority and raises her to the heights of the sky," giving her a sense of confidence and entitlement to assert her identity in a way that is not defined by her social position.

Utran's value is derived from its previous owner or wearer. By the end of the story, it transforms from a piece of clothing into a man. The master-servant roles flip and Chamki gets the last laugh as the Shahzadi Pasha's husband becomes her *utran*:

On the second day of the ceremony, when Princess Pasha went to give her wedding dress to Chamki in accordance with the family tradition, Chamki smiled and said, 'all my life I have used your cast-offs, Pasha, but now you too...' And then she began to laugh as if she had gone mad... 'My used thing is now yours forever!'

Utran is a bright flag of victory for one girl and a bitter reminder of the coming of a new order for the other.

Tapish Kashmiri

Saadat Hasan Manto wrote about the “little person” – the low life, the outcast, the marginalized.¹²⁴ Sardar Jafri calls Manto’s heroes “mutilated men” who cannot be representative of the *ām admi*.¹²⁵ His relationship with the Progressive Writer’s Association remained contested and strained, as the movement which once embraced and appropriated his stories of the subaltern, later ostracized him, labeling him and his stories as obscene and voyeuristic. He was charged with obscenity six times. As these cases piled up, Manto rebutted that his intention was neither pornography nor titillation, but simply to show stark realities of life:

I am no sensationalist. Why would I want to take the clothes off a society, civilisation and culture that is, in any case, naked? Yes, it is true I make no attempt to dress it - because it is not my job; that is a dressmaker's job. People say I write with a black pen, but I never write on a black board with a black chalk. I always use a white chalk so that the blackness of the board is clearly visible.¹²⁶

His story *Tapish Kashmiri* challenges the very idea of realism that the Progressive Writer’s Movement espoused. Clothes question the logic of love, devotion and desire by offsetting the binaries of proper and improper, convention and deviance, and rationality and absurdity. An unnamed narrator tells the story of Tapish Kashmiri¹²⁷, a man whose very name embodies a contradiction. seamlessly falls in and out of love, first with a Lahori boy and then with a girl who elopes with a wrestler. He subverts the monogamy of the *ghazal* by experimenting with beloveds of different genders. The liminal moments in

¹²⁴ Jalil, “Loving Progress, Liking Modernity, Hating Manto,” 44.

¹²⁵ Chatterjee and Jeganathan, *Community, Gender, and Violence*, 34.

¹²⁶ Jalil, “Loving Progress, Liking Modernity, Hating Manto,” 46.

¹²⁷ Tapish Kashmiri is difficult to translate. *Tapish* means heat or agitation while Kashmiri refers someone from to the mountainous region of Kashmir.

which he either pursues a new love interest or suffers a heartbreak are marked by changes in his clothing styles. It remains unclear whether clothes are the cause or the effect of a new beloved though the descriptions of his clothing are filtered through the narrator who carefully prefaces each episode with a commentary on Tapish Kashmiri's *ajīb-o-gharīb* (strange) behavior.

His clothes or lack thereof make him hyper-visible. His personality is revealed by the narrator who relies on descriptions of Tapish Kashmiri's clothes to provide evidence of his eccentric and unconventional ways of being. Yet, the narrator also normalizes and justifies his strangeness by establishing links between incidents in his life and his appearance. The material conditions around him become irrelevant as Tapish Kashmiri's clothes correspond more with his emotional or psychological states than other conventions that typically govern clothing choices.

The first clothing reference appears when Tapish Kashmiri tears his silk shirt and wipes away kerosene oil from a bicycle that belongs to the Lahori boy:

One time, the boy's bicycle broke. He gave it to his servant so that he could have it fixed. Mr. Tapish Kashmiri saw this and took the bike from the servant to a repair shop. He disassembled all the parts, dipped them in kerosene oil, and cleaned them. He asked the shopkeeper for a cloth to dry them, but he did not have it. Mr. Tapish Kashmiri took off his new silk shirt, tore it, and used it to wipe away the oil from all the parts and polished them very well.

Up until this point, Tapish Kashmiri does not have any direct contact with the boy. He leads prayer at the local mosque while the boy prays behind him. The narrator deems this as *aflatuni* or Platonic love, a play on both implications of the concept: it is nonsexual and that real love is only between men. However, the broken bicycle, as a *wasila* (intercessor), presents an opportunity to vicariously come into contact with the boy. The intercessor becomes the object of desire, attention, and devotion more than the actual beloved. Resembling a common scene out of a Bollywood movie in which the

heroine tears off a piece of her silk sari to wrap around her lover's wound, Tapish Kashmiri too tears his silk shirt and imbues the bicycle with some of his essence. This act of devotion is framed by the narrator as though it occurs out of necessity.

The season changes from winter to summer and Tapish Kashmiri's madness manifests in his outward appearance when he suffers a heartbreak at the hands of the Lahori boy:

Meanwhile, that boy developed a friendship with one of his class-fellows. Mr. Tapish Kashmiri was so hurt by this that he became half-crazy. He grew a beard. It was very hot, but he wore an overcoat, a panama hat on his head, spotted shorts, with full boots on his feet.

While the typical lover of a ghazal like Majnun roams around naked, Tapish Kashmiri puts on additional layers of clothes. His clothed body becomes a site of spectatorship which the narrator interprets as a reaction, a coping mechanism, and a remedy for his heartbreak.

The narrator also establishes a link between Tapish Kashmiri's divorce and his behavior:

Tapish Kashmiri had no desire in women. According to him, the hard kind should have no connection with the delicate kind. A mirror's relation with a rock is unnatural. And it was for this reason he divorced and liberated his wife who had never truly settled in his home.

He mentioned to me about this much later because according to him, this was not an important matter. But the effect of this became apparent when he started regular recitation of the Quran. But his way of recitation was also extraordinary. One day, I saw that he woke up early in the morning, did his ablution, and without drying his naked body, sat on the chair. He took out a small Quran from the amulet hanging around his neck and began the recitation. One chapter...then he wore clothes and left. I was lost in astonishment that what was this affair. Has he gone mad? I couldn't help but ask, 'Mr. Tapish ... you were naked... why do you recite the Quran with a naked body? Is this not improper?'

Mr. Tapish smiled: ‘nowhere in the Quran has it been issued that a man must recite it wearing three clothes. I don’t wear clothes because there might be dirt on them. After bathing, I don’t dry my body with a towel for this very reason.

It was a strange logic.

This exchange highlights the absurd and arbitrary nature of rules and logic that dictate devotion. He seems to be questioning how nakedness can prevent someone from achieving proximity to God if that is how we arrive and depart from this world. His actions are not extreme but rather very literal, and the irrationality of following something so literally is precisely what his actions emphasize. His actions correspond to a logic that seems unconventional to the narrator, but how conventions come into being in the first place is exactly what we are urged to consider.

The narrator is always perplexed by Tapish Kashmiri’s behavior, yet his tone expresses fascination as well. The narrator’s own love and devotion for Tapish Kashmiri is reflected by the apologetic justifications he offers after every episode of Tapish Kashmiri’s absurd behavior especially at the end when his second beloved also runs away with the rival:

But one day he asked me, ‘what should I do now?’ I said only this much, ‘Mr. Tapish, you know better than me. I am not as intelligent.’

Mr. Tapish heard my reply and remained silent for a few moments. And after that he said, ‘Okay, every person knows his own matters best.’ From the next day, he started wearing women’s clothing. These were the same clothes which he had gotten sewed for that girl.

Tapish Kashmiri disrupts the inherent power structure linked to clothing that controls what can or cannot be worn. Gender is often marked by clothes but this logic is unsettled when a man wears a woman’s wedding clothes. Clothes intended for *her* become *his* actual clothes. While clothes subvert his gender, he, by wearing them subverts their function, displacing them out of their specific, intended context and giving them a new

general purpose. The agency that is generated by the ambiguity of gender and function of clothing is an important element for the resolution of the story. Because Tapish Kashmiri's life exemplifies that defying conventions is the norm in his world, by the end, this seems like the most obvious and logical thing for him to do.

Thanda Gosht and Khol Do

The absurdity of love and devotion for religious and nationalist identities is explored by Manto through clothing. *Thanda Gosht* (Cold Flesh) tells the story of Isher Singh, a Sikh, who loses his ability to maintain an erection after trying to rape a dead Muslim girl, a heap of "cold flesh." The turban has a minor appearance, but it plays an important role as a marker of Sikh identity as well as a literal and figurative symbol of the loss of his sexual potency. His tightly tied turban slowly becomes loose and is eventually tossed to the side. The turban protects the head which is considered as both the seat of intelligence and virility.¹²⁸

A more nuanced exploration of the ways in which discourses of honor, violence, and trauma are tied to love and devotion for a nation occurs through clothing in *Khol Do* (Open It). It narrates the story of Sirajuddin who wakes up confused and disoriented in a refugee camp and realizes that his daughter Sakina is missing. Clothes not only mediate Sakina's relationship with her father and with the world around her but they also serve as a substitute for her body. Clothes simultaneously construct and deconstruct the notion of victim and victimhood. Different articles of clothing such as her *dupatta* (scarf), a coat, and her *shalwār* (trousers) mark moments of her separation, her encounter with a team of rescue volunteers, and finally her reunion with her father. Although everything else she

¹²⁸ Bayly

may have experienced in between remains ambiguous, her clothes provide a glimpse of her fragmented narrative and identify her as a victim of sexual violence.

Sakina had been with him. They were both running barefooted. Sakina's scarf had fallen. He had wanted to stop and pick it up, but Sakina screamed: 'Aba ji, leave it!' But he had picked up the *dupatta*. As he was thinking, he looked at his coat's bulging pocket, put his hand inside, and took out a piece of cloth. It was Sakina's scarf, but where was Sakina?

Sirajuddin is preoccupied with saving Sakina's *dupatta*, a symbol of her honor, while losing his actual daughter along the way. The *dupatta* also exemplifies the fixation on defending, protecting, and saving a lifeless object such as a piece of land or idea of the nation while ignoring the human cost. It also emphasizes the gendered nature of violence and trauma as most Partition narratives tend to invoke a female victim. Urdu lacks a word for "victim"¹²⁹ so clothes fulfill this need by offering a visual vocabulary that helps in constructing a discourse of victimhood. We are forced to see Sakina as a victim because there is no piece of clothing that would make a father be concerned for his son.

A team of young *razakārs* (volunteers) set out on a rescue mission to find Sakina. They find her on the side of the road:

The eight volunteers consoled her in every way. They fed her, gave her milk, and put her in their truck. One of them gave his coat to her because she felt uneasy without her *dupatta* as she unsuccessfully attempted to cover her breast with her arms.

The coat is meant to rescue her from her unease about not having a *dupatta*, but neither the *dupatta* nor the coat are able to protect her. This initial act of kindness is also symbolic of the *apne* (one's own) rather than the "others" who are the perpetrators of violence. The *diljuyi* or consoling foreshadows the betrayal that is about to occur: even a

¹²⁹ The closest words that come to mind are *shikar* (prey) or *mazlum* (oppressed or one who bears cruelty).

sacrificial goat is fed and taken care of before it is slaughtered. If Sakina's clothed body represents the nation, then its very founders or rescuers desecrated it.

Sirajuddin gives the rescuers thousands of prayers to find Sakina. The prayers are answered and she is found:

The doctor looked at the corpse lying on the stretcher. He checked her pulse and said to Sirajuddin: 'Open the window.'

There was a movement in Sakina's dead body. With lifeless hands, she opened the drawstring and slipped her pants down.

Old Sirajuddin screamed with happiness: 'She's alive! My daughter is alive!'

Sirajuddin's reaction to the "opening" of the *shalwār* can be viewed as a critique of those who celebrate the birth of one nation and the survival of another yet remain completely oblivious of how they both came into being, what they have endured, and what condition they are in. Although a normative reading of the story indicates that the *shalwār* marks Sakina as a rape victim, it also urges us to consider if there is a way to speak of sexual acts without attaching any sort of stigma. Is there any room for Sakina to have agency? Can we speak about her beyond the discourse of victimhood? Can we consider the possibility that she willingly pulls her pants down or that there is no connection between the command *khol do* and the act of taking pants off?

The names of the characters in the story evoke the relationship between Hussein, known as the Sirajuddin (lamp of religion par excellence) and his four-year old daughter Sakina. She is described as his favorite child who always slept on his chest.¹³⁰ Hussein's conversations with Sakina in the *marsiya* tradition offer the most emotionally-charged descriptions which highlight his human side as a loving and caring father who explains to

¹³⁰ Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 15.

his daughter what it means to be an orphan.¹³¹ However, unlike Sakina in *Khol Do*, the women in the Karbala narrative are never painted as victims of sexual violence. These parallel narratives of martyrdom and violence intersect, resulting in role reversals as Sakina becomes an involuntary martyr and Sirajuddin turns helpless like an orphan.

¹³¹ Ibid., 126–27.

Conclusion

*Shah-e-beḡhudī ne atā kiyā mujhe ab libās-e-barhnagī
Na ḡhirad kī baḡhyagarī rahī na junūn kī pardadarī rahī*

The King of Intoxication bestowed upon me a robe of nakedness
Neither the stitching of logic remained nor the veiling of madness

Clothing may seem like a readily available metaphor, but we are reminded of its limitations as soon as we consider the process by which we make sense of the concept. In order to conceptualize something, we are dependent on what our physical senses can register and how our mind links that information. To understand any given metaphor, everything has to be filtered through the intellect first. Our tendency to “logically” understand things creates a chain of disparate thoughts. For instance, robes bestowed by kings were usually of the highest quality, embroidered with gold and silver threads and precious jewels. Gold and silver held special value because of their capacity to absorb light. *Nūr* (light), after all, is a divine quality, a visible manifestation of God’s reason working in the world. Such robes caught and reflected rays of God’s light.¹³² Hence, when a king or noble donned these robes, in effect he became a mirror of God, a direct transmitter of his divine light. When we encounter a robe of bareness we realize that the ideas we associate with clothing and their colors, textures, fabrics, the settings they are worn in, the givers, the receivers, they all makes sense only when our logic stitches incongruent ideas together and creates a definition for clothing. Similarly, the association of *junun* or madness with the tearing of clothes is baseless if its “other” logic or sanity is negated. There would be no need to veil or unveil madness if logic did not exist.

The relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary, but our logic forces us to think otherwise. Metaphors of clothing are short-lived. They are only

¹³² Bayly, Christopher, “The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930,” 292.

successful in creating momentary, fleeting approximations. The concept of a metaphor itself is flawed: how can we compare two things when the limitations of our language, logic, and senses do not allow us to fully understand the essence of either side?

Keeping these limitations in mind, expressing love and devotion, whether through clothing or any other metaphor, comes at a very real price. The recent killing of Amjad Sabri, a renowned qawwali singer, serves as a testament to the anger, intolerance, and anxiety that images, metaphors, idioms, and practices of love and devotion can provoke. On the other hand, Mumtaz Qadri, who assassinated Salman Taseer for defending a Christian woman accused of blasphemy, is hailed as an *ashiq-e Rasul* (lover of the Prophet) and is considered no less than a saint by some. The lover-beloved model continues to remain intact even though there are attempts to impose certainty upon ambiguity and to decide who can and cannot be the lover or the beloved.

This paper has made an attempt to introduce a new way of engagement with clothing and their role in defining love and devotion. Clothes serve as a mode of communication, a form of language which can illuminate the structure of a text, its values, its meanings, and its symbolic patterns. There are many other directions in which this project can be taken, and perspectives that are yet to be explored. My analysis has been limited to literature in Urdu, but written and oral texts from other languages such as Punjabi and Sindhi also can also serve as rich and productive sites of inquiry.

I have traversed across different terrains of love and devotion demonstrating that these narratives and practices are neither fixed nor linear. Even when the same metaphor, imagery, or symbol is invoked in multiple texts, its meaning never stays static. There is no single definition for these concepts. Love and devotion come in many forms and guises. They are like different robes for the heart which can be worn and taken off at any time.

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