

SPIRITUAL INTERIORIZATION IN THE POETRY OF KHWAJA MIR DARD

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Abstract Sufi consciousness in the poetry of Khwaja Mir Dard against the historical and literary background of eighteenth-century Delhi. In an age marked by political decline, social uncertainty, and cultural anxiety, Dard's poetry reflects a decisive inward turn. Rather than responding to external disorder through direct commentary, he transforms historical unrest into an interior spiritual quest. His affiliation with the Naqshbandi Sufi order rooted in silent remembrance, self-discipline, and purification of the heart—profoundly shapes both the themes and texture of his verse. In Dard's ghazals, central Sufi concepts such as *ishq* (love), *fana* (annihilation of the self), *baqa* (subsistence in God), *hijr* (separation), and *visal* (union) transcend their conventional romantic meanings and signify stages of spiritual realization. His poetic language remains outwardly simple and aligned with the classical Urdu ghazal tradition, yet it carries layered mystical resonances. Symbolic motifs such as wine, the cupbearer, and the tavern function not as decorative imagery but as metaphors of spiritual knowledge, guidance, and inner awakening. At the heart of Dard's vision lies the concept of *wahdat* (unity), the perception that all multiplicity conceals a single ultimate reality. Importantly, he presents this idea not as abstract metaphysics but as lived spiritual experience. Through restraint, subtlety, and inward depth, Dard fuses romantic expression with mystical insight, creating a body of work that transforms personal sorrow into a profound exploration of spiritual truth.

Keywords: Khwaja Mir Dard; Sufism; Urdu ghazal; eighteenth-century Delhi; Naqshbandi Sufi tradition; mystical love (*ishq*); annihilation (*fana*); subsistence in God (*baqa*); unity (*wahdat*); spiritual symbolism; inward experience; separation (*hijr*); union (*visal*); metaphysical consciousness; Sufi poetics. The context of Khwaja Mir Dard's poetry is not merely the personal background of a poet; it is closely tied to the spiritual atmosphere of an entire era. Eighteenth-century Delhi appeared, on the surface, to be a center of culture and refinement, yet beneath that elegance the city was trembling. Political power had weakened, and repeated invasions and disorder filled the air with anxiety. When the outer structures of life begin to collapse, human attention often turns inward. Dard's poetry reflects this very inward turn.

INTRODUCTION

He belonged to an established Sufi family, and the training of the Naqshbandi order deeply shaped his temperament. Within the environment of the khanqah, practices such as remembrance (*zikr*), meditation, and the purification of the self were central values. Because of this, the terms that appear in his poetry—love, annihilation (*fana*), subsistence in God (*baqa*), the heart, separation—are not merely literary expressions. They represent stages

of spiritual discipline and experience. In his ghazals, Sufism does not appear as an abstract philosophical discussion; it emerges as a living, felt state of the soul.

It is one of the remarkable achievements of Khwaja Mir Dard's poetry that, despite his relatively small *diwan*, he influenced a wide circle of poets. In contrast, several of his contemporaries also emerged in opposition to him. It remains a long-standing debate whether Mir Taqi Mir and Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda were influenced by Khwaja Sahib to some extent, or how much these contemporaries benefited from his poetic style. However, in contrast to this debate, there appear to be several major poets of that era who directly drew inspiration from Khwaja Sahib's poetry. Among them, one of the most prominent names is Khwaja Mir Athar, in whose verse the strong imprint of Dard's style is clearly visible. (1)

During the same period, the Urdu ghazal in Delhi was shaping its delicate, inward-looking tradition. Poets like Mir Taqi Mir gave sorrow and interiority a new depth. Within that atmosphere, Khwaja Mir Dard wove subtle layers of Sufi meaning into the fabric of the form. He kept the familiar language of romantic love, yet infused it with inner, spiritual resonance. A common word would quietly turn into a spiritual sign.

This background shows that Dard's Sufi vocabulary did not grow out of some isolated philosophical system. It emerged from a particular age, from the training of a *khanqah*, and from a literary culture in which people, surrounded by outward disorder, were searching for their origin within. His poetry becomes a restrained yet profound expression of that search.

This fusion of metaphor and reality is, in fact, the result of Dard's mystical mindset. His poetic temperament and Sufi nature have blended so harmoniously in his ghazals that they have produced an exceedingly pleasant and refined synthesis. (2)

If Dard's poetry is confined merely to the sphere of romantic lyricism, its intellectual horizon shrinks. He was a poet of a time when Delhi was losing its political centrality. The weakening of power, the destruction brought by invasions, and social uncertainty unsettled the collective mind. That outward decline pushed sensitive souls toward an inward quest for meaning. Dard stands as a voice of that inward turning.

His stance is not one of open protest but of contemplation. Khwaja Mir Dard does not turn the chaos of his age into a direct subject. Instead, he searches for its echo inside the human soul. That is why the pain found in his poetry, though experienced personally, becomes a symbol of the entire era. This pain is not merely the sorrow of a lover. It has an existential quality human beings cut off from their origin, restless in the search for their true reality.

By transforming one of the well-known concepts of Sufism the spiritual journey within one's own being (*safar dar watan*)—and employing it in his ghazals, Khwaja Mir Dard made it distinctly his own theme. In this way, the subject moved beyond the general range of mystical themes in Urdu poetry and became specifically associated with Dard. The style he adopted to express this theme was sufficient in itself to grant him a distinguished position in Urdu poetry. (3)

Dard's Sufi background shapes the direction of his thought. The training of the Naqshbandi Order emphasized inner purification, silent remembrance of God, and constant awareness of the self. In his poetry, that quiet spiritual discipline takes on an aesthetic form. He never turns Sufism into abstract theoretical debate. Instead, he expresses it through lived experience. Words like "love," "annihilation (*fana*)," "subsistence in God (*baqa*)," and "the heart" stop being simple terms and become signs pointing to stages of spiritual realization.

The style of his ghazal also reflects this inward tendency. The language feels simple, the phrasing is not tangled or ornate, yet the meanings carry many layers. A tone of gentle brokenness runs through the expression, a soft rhythm that mirrors inner pain. This stylistic simplicity is not accidental. In the Sufi tradition, simplicity is often seen as closer to truth. Dard creates depth precisely through that quiet simplicity.

Jitni barhti hai, utni ghat-ti hai

Zindagi ap hi ap kat-ti hai (4)

In the literary atmosphere of Delhi, where Mir Taqi Mir was giving artistic height to inwardness and sorrow, Khwaja Mir Dard introduced a deeper spiritual awareness into the same space. In Mir's poetry, grief is often tied to human relationships and personal experience. In Dard's verse, that same grief rises into a metaphysical dimension. Romance and Sufism do not stand apart in his poetry; they become two layers of a single experience.

Madrasa ya deyr tha ya Kaaba ya but khana tha

Hum sabhi mein maatwan, ek tu hi sahib khana tha (5)

Seen in this light, Dard's ghazal becomes the poetic shaping of a Sufi experience. He does not narrate historical turmoil directly. Instead, he absorbs its effects into the inner life of the human spirit. The destruction of the city appears in his poetry not as loud lamentation but as a quiet sadness. That silence lifts his poetry beyond simple romantic expression and turns it into an intellectual and spiritual dialogue, where the individual—through inner restlessness—tries to reconnect with a universal truth.

Jin ke sabab se dair toone kiya kharab

Ae shama un buton ne mere dil mein ghar kiya (6)

Within Dard's poetry, the idea of love (*ishq*) becomes a rich subject when viewed through the lens of Sufi thought. In the traditional Urdu ghazal, love usually circles around the beauty and presence of the beloved. With Dard, that idea crosses that boundary and enters a spiritual and existential field. His family belonged to the Naqshbandi Order, a Sufi path known for disciplined spiritual training and inward refinement. That background shapes the foundation of his understanding of love.

A close reading of his poetry reveals that love appears as a kind of spiritual fire a force that burns the inner self and purifies it. This love is not merely an emotional or psychological state. It is tied to the stages of spiritual practice. In the Sufi tradition, love becomes the path through which a human being moves toward the Divine. Within the Naqshbandi discipline, this journey unfolds through remembrance of God, meditation, and the purification of the self. The intensity and restlessness that appear in Dard's verses reflect that lived, experiential dimension of the Sufi path.

In the poetry of Khwaja Mir Dard, another striking dimension of love is spiritual anguish. Love does not simply bring delight or emotional intoxication. It stirs restlessness. That restlessness signals an inner search. The pain comes from a deep awareness that the human soul stands at a distance from its true origin. Through that awareness, the soul begins turning back toward what it has lost.

Aatish-e-ishq ji jalati hai

Yeh bala jaan hi pe aati hai (7)

Log kehte hain, aashiq ki

Jis ko hum jo dekha, badi museebat hai (8)

Viewed through a research lens, Dard's idea of love moves on two levels at once. On the surface, the language stays within the familiar romantic vocabulary of the Urdu ghazal. Beneath that layer, the same language points toward stages of spiritual discipline. That blending reveals how carefully Dard worked within the literary and mystical climate of his time. Love is not treated as a decorative poetic theme or a burst of emotion. It becomes a lived process.

Two ideas appear again and again in his poetry: *fana* and *baqa*. *Fana* means the dissolving of the self. The seeker lets go of ego, desire, even the sense of separate identity. After that comes *baqa*, a state of enduring through the Divine presence. These ideas echo the metaphysical writings of thinkers like Ibn Arabi, though Dard avoids philosophical complexity. He turns those ideas into felt experience, expressed in simple language.

Gar dekhiye to mazhar-e-aasaar-e-baqa hoon

Aur samajhiye joon aks mujhe mahv-e-fana hoon (9)

The heart stands at the center of his symbolic world. It is not just the seat of emotions. It becomes the place of knowledge—*ma'rifat*, a kind of inward recognition. Reason exists, but it stands behind the heart. The heart works like a mirror. When it is clear, truth appears within it. When it is clouded, the reflection disappears.

Arz-o-sama kahan teri wus'at ko paa sake

Mera hi dil hai woh ke jahan tu sama sake (10)

Kuch dil hi baagh mein nahi, tanha shikasta

Dil har ghuncha dekhta hoon, to hai gaah shikasta dil (11)

Yun tu hai din raat mere dil mein uska hi khayal

Jin dinon apni baghal mein tha sauda, baatein kahan (12)

Dil ke phir zakhm taaza hote hain

Kahin ghuncha koi khila hoga (13)

Dil bhi tere hi dhang seekha hai

Aan mein kuch hai, aan mein kuch hai (14)

Dil zamane ke haath se saalim

Koi hoga ke reh gaya hoga (15)

The pair *hijr* (separation) and *visal* (union) also stretches far beyond ordinary romantic meaning. Separation is not merely distance from a beloved figure; it marks distance from the ultimate source of being. Union points toward closeness with the Divine. Dard's poetry leans more toward separation. A quiet sadness flows through many of his verses, along with a gentle, persistent unease. That sadness does not belong only to personal emotion. It carries the tone of spiritual longing the soul sensing that something essential lies just beyond reach.

Then come those terms that outwardly seem to belong to the world of the tavern: "saqi" (cupbearer), "mai" (wine), "jam" (goblet), and "maikhana" (tavern). If they are taken in their literal sense, the meaning becomes superficial. In Sufi poetry, wine symbolizes spiritual knowledge (gnosis), the cupbearer represents the spiritual guide or the being who bestows grace, and the tavern is the place where one tastes ultimate truth. Dard employs these metaphors with great subtlety he does not create noise or spectacle; he simply gestures toward deeper realities.

The concept of *wahdat* (unity) is also present in his poetry. It is the idea that behind all the multiplicity of the universe lies a single reality. When a person tears down the wall of the self, that one manifestation becomes visible in every direction. The thought may seem philosophical, but Dard presents it as a personal experience like someone who has discovered a secret in silence.

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The poetry of Khwaja Mir Dard stands as a profound example of spiritual interiorization within the classical Urdu ghazal tradition. Writing in the turbulent atmosphere of eighteenth-century Delhi, Dard did not respond to political instability and social decline through direct commentary. Instead, he transformed historical anxiety into an inward spiritual quest. His verse reflects not escape from reality, but a deeper engagement with it—through the purification of the self and the exploration of inner consciousness.

Rooted in the Naqshbandi order, Dard's poetic vision is shaped by silent remembrance, discipline of the heart, and the gradual refinement of the soul. Central Sufi concepts such as *ishq*, *fana*, *baqa*, *hijr*, *visal*, and *wahdat* in his poetry transcend their conventional romantic meanings and become markers of spiritual realization. His language remains simple and restrained, yet layered with metaphysical depth. Through this stylistic subtlety, he fuses romantic imagery with mystical insight, turning personal sorrow into a universal expression of spiritual longing.

Moreover, Dard's contribution lies not only in thematic depth but also in aesthetic innovation. By internalizing the Sufi concept of *safar dar watan*—the journey within—he carved out a distinctive space for himself in Urdu literary history. His influence on contemporaries and successors demonstrates the lasting resonance of his inward, contemplative mode of expression. Ultimately, Dard's ghazal becomes more than lyrical poetry; it emerges as a disciplined spiritual discourse. His work embodies the transformation of historical crisis into metaphysical awareness and of human grief into a search for ultimate unity. In this synthesis of romance and mysticism, simplicity and depth, individuality and universality, Dard secures his enduring place as one of the most spiritually conscious voices of classical Urdu poetry.

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