



## In search of the divine: Meera Bai, Rumi, and the path of mysticism

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### Abstract

The present study explores the various mystical themes that encompass the creative works of Rumi and Meera Bai, two major poets in the realms of mystical versification. It follows the theistic mysticism followed by an examination of the mystical themes followed by Rumi such as truth, the perfect divine being mystic path, and the spiritual morality with Islamic mysticism and the poetry of Meera Bai which is enriched mysticism. It is a comparison between two poets and two philosophies as well. Both are the prophetic voices of their particular philosophies and blew the triumph of spiritual revival and social rebellion, and explored philosophical themes such as love, compassion, and mystical vision often using poetic language that reflected their eastern philosophies.

**Keywords:** Mysticism, divine, spirituality, philosophy, morality, Islamic

### Introduction

Mysticism is a spiritual philosophy that places a strong emphasis on inner exploration, contemplation, and intuitive insight as means of experiencing the divine or ultimate reality. It entails the quest for an intimate, direct, and unmediated relationship with the divine and frequently calls for ascetic lifestyles, meditation, and prayer. Truthful mysticism, a disposition as opposed to a doctrine, and a climate as opposed to a philosophical framework.

Roots of mysticism can be found in several religious and spiritual traditions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Mystics are thought to be people who possess a unique insight into the nature of the divine or ultimate reality. In these and who possess the ability to impart this understanding to others. Mysticism is characterized by its emphasis on direct knowledge of the divine and personal experience. This experience, which can include emotions of love, joy, and peace, is frequently characterized as a sense of unity or oneness with the divine. In addition, mystics frequently use metaphors and symbols like fire, water, and light to describe their experiences. Another crucial component of mysticism is the conviction that a greater sense of compassion and empathy and a greater sense of connection with all of creation. Although mysticism is frequently connected to religious and spiritual traditions, philosophers, psychologists, and experts in comparative religion have all studied it. Mysticism has drawn criticism for being founded on purely subjective experiences that are impossible to confirm or validate, but it has also gained support from those who believe it can provide important insights into the nature of reality and the human condition.

### Eastern Philosophy of Mysticism

In Eastern mysticism, communication with God comes first. The idea that an impersonal life force is the ultimate manifestation of reality is central to Eastern mysticism philosophy. There is no God to whom a person can relate on a personal level or who can reveal himself to humanity. From a philosophical standpoint, this worldview holds that all of reality is made up of and reducible to a single

substance (monism) and does not make a distinction between the divine and the secular (pantheism).

Essentially, this philosophy holds that the impersonal life force contains the fundamental essence of all living things. The essence of existence is impersonal and devoid of personal self-consciousness, not personal and self-conscious. This implies that your apparent self-awareness and ability to live your life by your awareness of your desires are illusions. Your ultimate destiny is to live a completely self-aware life. Your life force is just a component of a more impersonal whole. Eastern mysticism adherents are incapable of considering knowledge or sensory experiences from any form of material reality seriously.

This is a result of their denial that anything like this is real. They continue by saying that humans are unable to fully understand the nature of ultimate reality, which they refer to as the impersonal life force. Therefore, accepting that reality cannot be fully known and leading a passive life are the ultimate goals of life. A person who adopts this mindset is liberated from the suffering that "seems" to surround them. The premise is that we can ignore pain and suffering because they are merely illusions. Achieving complete passivity liberates people to just let life happen as it happens. Several prominent belief systems, including Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, and some aspects of the New Age movement, have their roots in Eastern mysticism.

### Bhakti and Sufi Mysticism as a Part of Eastern Philosophy of Mysticism

Eastern mysticism philosophy is a broad term that encompasses many different philosophies. Numerous major belief systems, including Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, and some aspects of the New Age movement, have their roots in Eastern mysticism. "Bhakti" refers to a state of devotion or intense love for the divine. The mystical oneness of the individual with God is emphasized by the Bhakti movement. While Bhakti

is present in the Vedas, it was not given much attention in the beginning.

In the Islamic context, mysticism has historically been linked to the concept of Hikmah, which is wisdom and philosophy combined (Nasr 1996). The Qur'an and Islamic doctrine itself are the origins of mysticism and the mystical aspects of Islam. The mystics and philosopher-mystics of Islam have interpreted certain verses from the Qur'an as esoteric and allegorical clues for those who can perceive them. The well-known light verses, "He for whom wisdom is given, he truly has received abundant good" (Qur'an 2:269), and "God is the Outward and the Inward" (Qur'an 57:3)

Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam where followers of the faith seek knowledge and the truth of divine love via firsthand, intimate encounters with the Almighty. It is made up of a range of mystical routes intended to reveal the essence of God and humanity and to make it easier to sense that divine wisdom and love exist in the world.

It is now generally accepted that Islamic mysticism originated from early Islamic asceticism, which developed as a counterweight to the growing worldliness of the growing Muslim community. Only later were foreign elements that were compatible with mystical theology and practices adopted and made to conform to Islam, despite the earlier theory that the movement's roots came from various non-Islamic sources in ancient Europe and even India.

### **Mysticism in literature**

In the same way that it describes several subdivisions of the topic, from philosophical mystic references to nature worship or appreciation and religious and devotional material, mysticism in English literature is a magnificent foray into several types of mystic inclusion. It is well-written and includes a lot of quotes from authors such as Keats, Gibran, Bronte, Blake, Meera, Rumi, and others.

### **Meera Bai and Rumi**

In their respective cultures, mystic saints Meera Bai and Rumi made important contributions to the fields of philosophy, spirituality, and literature. Indian poet and mystic Meera Bai composed devotional songs in honor of Lord Krishna in the sixteenth century. Her poetry, which reflected her abiding love and devotion to the divine, has become a vital component of India's Bhakti movement. Millions of people worldwide are still inspired by Meera Bai's life story and poetry, which have been translated into numerous languages.

Meera Bai's mystical perspective emphasized the idea that the true purpose of human life is to attain union with the divine and that this can be achieved through devotion, love, and surrender. Her poetry is filled with imagery of love and longing, as she expresses her desire to merge with Krishna and become one with the divine. A large number of devotional bhajans composed by Meera Bai, with various philosophical connotations, are sung even today in India.

Meera Bai's verses are in the Rajasthani language. Presently there are no manuscripts of the hymns from her time; only two poems credited to her from the 18th century are found in the current records (more than 150 years after her death). There is a unique pattern and discreet style in Meera Bai's writing; where Krishna is a lover and a God, and she is his

devotee ever ready to take the role of his wife. Her poems combine love, longing, joy, passion and ecstasy moods, always directed towards Lord Krishna.

### **My Dark One has gone to an alien land**

He has left me behind, he's never returned, he's never sent me a single word. So, I've stripped off my ornaments, jewels and adornments, and cut my hair from my head.

And put on holy garments, all on his account, seeking him in all four directions. Mira: unless she meets the Dark One, her Lord, she doesn't even want to live.

### **Mira Bai, Translated by John Stratton Hawley**

The sole subject of Mirabai's writing is Krishna which she addresses as 'Dark One'. She differed from other poets of those times because according to them God is less specific whereas in the works of Mirabai, she was an ardent follower of Krishna. She observed herself as a novice at his feet, wanting the Lord to take her away as his spouse into a higher dominion.

Most of the poems of Mirabai are short, mystical songs, with modest rhythms and often with repetitive lines. This rebellious image saint who amenably walks the street with no humiliation or fear of authority is one of the most revolutionary descriptions of a royal women of that era. Her life has enormous significance today because her audacious story can find counterparts in the lives of modern women who still have to fight hostility from society to live a self-governing and ingenious public life. Mirabai was considered the inspiration for those who wanted to make their selections and twig to them, disregarding the social consequences.

In the first line of her poem "All I Was Doing Was Breathing," Meera explains that she has been, so to speak, taken hold of by a force she identifies at first only as "something." The process is mysterious. The "something" actively reaches out and seemingly absorbs into itself some essence of the speaker that emanates, or radiates, from her eyes ("the beams of my eyes"). The light from the eyes is presented as a tangible, or concrete, thing that can be taken in by another being. Some as yet unspecified spiritual exchange has been accomplished

In line 3 of the same poem, the poet emphasizes her passivity, as if what happened to her was none of her own doing: "All I was doing was being." It was the god who took the initiative and came calling on her or at least passed by her house.

Another interpretation of this phrase might suggest, however, that the poet was well prepared to receive the divine; she was in a state of spiritual readiness, in which she was simply aware of "being," to the exclusion of all sense impressions and physical or mental activities. In this line, Krishna is described as the "Dancing Energy." The image suggests the subatomic world revealed by modern physics, in which subatomic particles interact in a ceaseless flow of energy. Some have likened this view of the world to Indian spiritual thought, in which there is one underlying reality behind all the changing forms of life.

Rūmī on the other hand is the greatest Sufi mystic and poet in the Persian language, famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic *Mašnavī-yi Ma'navī* ("Spiritual Couplets"), which widely influenced mystical thought and literature throughout the Muslim world. After his death, his disciples were organized as the Mawlawiyyah order.

The strength of Rūmī's influence in Iran and Turkey can be seen in the various claims made to be the author of Turkish and Persian literature due to his use of Persian and Arabic in addition to some Turkish and less Greek in his poetry. His writings have had a significant impact on the Indian subcontinent as well. His popularity reached a global scale by the end of the 20th century, with his poetry finding widespread distribution in Western Europe and the US.

After his introduction to the world of mysticism, Rumi learned everything he could about love unbounded, compassionate, and universal. He would go on to become the most famous son of Sufism, and the most-read poet of all time. Rumi's words speak not to our minds, but to our hearts. We learn more about love from his poems and stories than from any other book. We don't just read his words. We experience them. We enter and inhabit his verses, and they take us to another realm that nourishes our longing for spiritual connection and universal belonging. With Rumi's poems, we transcend our material existence and move toward joy, inner peace, and our core desire — love. Rumi believed passionately in the use of poetry, music, and dance as a pathway to reach towards God, resurrected. It was through this concept and these ideas that the practice of whirling Dervishes developed into a ritual form.

By analyzing Rumi's work further one can easily see the influences of the people he met, the ones who inspired him endlessly. Moreover, the tint of the music and religious milieu during his times can be observed in the poem we will analyze further.

Like many other Persian mystic and Sufi poets, Rumi's poetry speaks of love. Rumi's teachings are also expressed in the tenets which are summarized in the Quranic verse. In the interpretation attributed to Shams, the first part of the verse commands humanity to seek knowledge of tawhid (oneness of God), while the second instructs them to negate their existence. Rumi became devoted to the unorthodox spiritual path under the guidance of Shams.

In Rumi's terms, tawhid is lived most fully through love, with the connection being made explicit in his verse that describes love as "that flame which, when it blazes up, burns away everything except the Everlasting Beloved." Henceforth for him to acquire such an idealistic stage in desire is presented through this quote mentioned earlier in his book *The Mansavi*.

Rumi's discovery of poetry is generally dated to his midlife friendship with the mystic Shams al-Din Tabrizi. Around 1244, Shams arrived in Konya, preaching the possibility and necessity of direct communion with God. Rumi became a disciple and intimate friend to Shams; the two were rarely apart. It is said that Rumi's sons and followers were jealous of Shams and drove him from the city. Whatever the cause, after Shams's disappearance, Rumi consoled himself with writing poetry, chanting, and performing dance, in particular the circling dances set to music that became known as the whirling dervish.

Rumi quickly gained a reputation as an ecstatic visionary, and devoted the rest of his life to writing and worship. Rumi's major works all date from after Shams's disappearance: *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabriz*, or "The Collected Poems of Shams," written partially in the voice of Shams; *Mathnawi*, or "Spiritual Couplets," sometimes known as the Persian Koran and the most widely read poem in the Muslim world; and various prose works including *Fihe ma*

*fihi*, or "Discourses"; sermons designed for occasions, *Majales-e sab'a*; and many letters known as *Maktubat*.

There are many forms in which Rumi has composed poetry like ghazals, ruba'is, masnavi, qasida, tarikh-band and many other forms. The ruba'is is the most ancient Persian poetic form. The ruba'i, as the name implies consists of two couplets (beys),

or four lines (misra). The ghazal is a unique form of poetry. Originally, ghazals were the songs of love that were sung by minstrels in the early days of Persian history.

The word ghazal means 'a conversation between lovers. It is said that this form originated with Adam. Adam is considered to be the first poet and also the creator of song. He created songs in praise of Eve, his true beloved. The ghazals he sung to her, before their eventual spiritual union was of longing and separation, and later on were about the bliss of their union.

The ghazals of the Zoroastrians were sung in their wine houses. These wine houses became the venues for hundreds of years of the ghazals.

The subject of love is not any kind of love, but particularly it is an illicit and unattainable love. This love as viewed as something that will complete a human being and if attained, will lift him into the ranks of the illuminated ones, or will bring satisfaction to the soul of the poet. Therefore, it is the intense divine love of Sufism that, this form serves as a perfect model

All the great, long, narrative poems of Persia were composed in this form. Rumi chose a plain, descriptive name for his poem 'Masnavi' being the name of the rhyming couplet verse form. Each half-line or hemi-stitch of a masnavi poem follows the same metre, the ramal metre, a highly popular metre which was also used by Attar for his *The Conference of Birds*

It reveals that Rumi has earned the reputation of an excellent story teller. The *Masnavi* leaves the impression that he was brimming with ideas and these ideas, which are expressed in simple language loaded with imagery and metaphors from the Quran, sayings of Hadith and the Bible. His teachings are conveyed in anecdotes. These anecdotes or stories are entertaining, humorous and filled with vivid imagery.

*Masnavi* highlights the various hidden aspects of Sufism and their relationship to the worldly life. To accomplish his purposes, Rumi draws on a variety of subjects and derives numerous examples from everyday life. His main subject is the relationship between man and God on the one hand, and between man and man, on the other. Rumi apparently believed in some form of Pantheism and portrayed the various stages of man's evolution in his journey towards the Ultimate.

### Conclusion

Though the poems of both Rumi and Mirabai are similar in many aspects, yet they differ in terms of emphasis and perspectives. Where there is emphasis on ecstasy and bliss of having achieved the union, in Rumi's poems, there is much emphasis on rebelliousness and fearlessness in the poems of Mirabai. Also, there is a vein of social reformation running in Mirabai's poems, which is generally not prominent in Rumi's poems.

Both the poets teach the way or the secret to achieve the union. Rumi uses humorous stories and Koranic and Biblical parables to convey his ideas, and in doing so he

strengthens the faith of the believers, whereas Mirabai connects this aspect to her own life. She uses many autobiographical elements to strengthen the faith and devotion of readers.

She motivates everybody through her own testimonies to instill the desire in the hearts of others to achieve the similar strength and security that she enjoys. While speaking about the miracles in her life, she shows the greatness of God. The tone of Rumi's poems is didactic not complaining or questioning as that of Mirabai. It comes to readers as if a teacher is giving sermon to his students. This is fulfilled by using many anecdotes from the Koran and the Bible.

There are various breaks and digressions showing Rumi's ability of being an excellent story teller. The major vein in his poems is about ecstasy and bliss that the seeker enjoys once he has tasted union and this bliss is expressed through beautiful images which he extracts from nature. The tone of Mirabai's poems often becomes complaining and conversational, as if one is complaining about her lover who is not showing up. The way she addresses Lord Krishna is personal in nature, as if he is her husband or a friend.

This aspect lends a sense of intimacy while addressing Krishna. She also becomes conversational with readers, by addressing them as friends, sisters, companions as if inviting them to sail with her in the boat of divine grace. The tone of her poems sometimes become questioning, that why she has to bear with his absence after having enjoyed his presence once. She questions again and again about the whereabouts of her lover and at the same time asserts and affirms that she always belongs to him. Her lover may disappear for some moments, but can never desert her, as her soul forever belongs to him.

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