

BAWA MUHAIYADDEEN: A STUDY OF MYSTICAL INTERRELIGIOSITY

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by
Saiyida Zakiya Hasna Islam
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Examining Committee Members:

Dr. Khalid Y. Blankinship, Advisory Chair, Department of Religion
Dr. Terry Rey, Department of Religion
Dr. Sydney White, Department of Religion
Dr. Jayasinhji Jhala, External Member, Department of Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the study is on the teachings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, the mystic saint whose tomb is in Coatesville, PA, which is the only Sufi shrine in North America. Much has been written on the community of Bawa's followers whose main office is in the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship in Philadelphia, PA, USA. However, as far as my research revealed, as to this date, no study has focused particularly on his teachings. The objective of this study is to initiate that. This study spotlighted on how this Sufi saint integrated the various religions in his teachings. His teachings are evidently premised on the Islamic concept of *Tawheed*. This aligns with the mystic perspective and thus is this study premised. Bawa's vision is of a single truth emanating throughout creation through all space and time. This is a characteristic that mystics of all traditions appear to share. What makes Bawa unique among the known mystics is how he weaves in the various religions to convey his teachings. Thus, his teachings are a veritable pot pourri of ancient wisdom flowing from the Hindu *Puranas* to the Sufi teachings in Islam. In one way it can be viewed as a one-man inter-religious monologue. It is not so much the perennial message as looking at each tradition in a way that had eluded the believers of each tradition before. Sufis of yore are known to use this method, but had remained within their own traditions. Bawa's teachings are significant in his being a figure that is metaphorically described in a title of a Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship publication as the "Tree That Fell to the

West”. Thus, spanning both the East and the West, his teachings became global in its reach and appears to be more relevant and accessible due to the nature of contemporary progression of our psyche.

To situate Bawa the study has provided a very brief overview of the mystic perspective and a comparative sketch of mysticism in the West and Islam. Bawa being a Muslim mystic, a chapter on Islam and the Muslim world view and an insight into Sufism was deemed essential to comprehend the depth of Bawa’s teachings. It was also necessary to analyze the significance of the pioneering spirit of North America that is so consonant with the element of freedom that defines the mystic message that is essentially that of liberation. This is viewed as a vital component in the message of Bawa that probably served to capture the psyche of his followers in the USA in particular.

What is notable in Bawa’s teachings is how he integrates the popular ideas of different traditions to draw out a hidden significance that overturns the traditional way of how the listener had hitherto viewed them. He views the religions as sections, states, etc., that have to be experienced into the distillation of the truth in a manner of speaking. Each of these plays its part in the progression of every individual to the point of the ultimate realization to the Real.

Bawa’s teaching methodology appears to be aligned to the tradition of the “holy men” who have come to light with the recent research of the past two decades. Bawa remains unique in his expansion, per se, in continuation of the

model left as the legacy by those holy men that researcher Richard Eaton brought to our attention. An analysis of that legacy is provided as it will be conducive to understanding as to how the Sufi perspective centered on *Tawheed* brings in the terrain of multiple traditions.

Bawa taught through discourses. Such teachings belong to the age old oral tradition. Thus, the teachings flow according to the teacher's discernment of each individual's needs in the audience. He would tell his followers that he provides the nourishment as per the need of each individual as he "sees" where each of his "children" are when they come to him. This translates into his perceptiveness of each person's level of comprehension and his contouring his message to gear into that level for optimal learning.

Bawa's teachings can be described as a veritable ocean in its breadth and depth. The task was to attempt to draw manageable parameters for this research. As such, the usage of Hinduism is the sliver that has been chosen to analyze what and how Bawa conveyed his message. The focal point is that it is through the mystic perspective Bawa integrated diverse traditions to converge on the single point of the Islamic concept of *Tawheed*. What is shown here is that it is such a perspective that allowed Bawa to bring together the apparently diametrically opposite traditions of Hinduism and Islam through an interreligious journey that brings in a perspectival shift by expanding the psyche of the listener.

DEDICATION

To

My father, the late Saiyid Abdun Nabi

My dear brother Saiyid Munirunnabi Fazlul Wahhab

My husband Kazi Monirul Islam

My sons Khalid Munirul Islam Kazi & Zia Ullislam Kazi

my cousin brothers, the late Saiyid Ahmed Mahmud and Syed Kalimullah

&

The members of the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship

who are striving tirelessly to disseminate his teachings

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to mention a few of the very important people in my life that brought in the trajectory that eventually resulted in this research. First and foremost is my father, who bred in my psyche an understanding of the universality of the faith tradition that I was raised in which required a study of all faith systems. The truth of the Oneness that is an approximation of the meaning of *Tawheed* was emphasized by his teaching me that the “Source” of all faith tradition is the “One”, and so the emphasis was first to get grounded in the Quran, and then to study all faith traditions. Thus raised with an interfaith psyche, studying other faith traditions became my forte. So, when I encountered the followers of Bawa — who I now consider as my spiritual family — I naturally absorbed the teachings of this great sheikh.

I am deeply indebted to some members of my aforementioned spiritual family for the invaluable help I got from them in my research. In short, this research could not have been undertaken without their help. I need to mention in particular, Kelly Hayden and Ayesha Sterne. Ayesha Sterne went the extra mile to inform me of whatever new material came her way that was pertinent to this research. Also Kelly and Nourah Karimah amidst their busy schedule, located the unpublished transcripts I requested for, and allowed me to study those. Dr Ganeshen and his late wife Fatima Ganeshan have been invaluable in clarifying aspects of the Hindu praxis and tales for me.

During the course of my progression it was the constant encouragement of a dear friend and soul mate Sr. Maria Hornung and my cousin Syed Kalimullah and the support of my husband Kazi Monirul Islam and especially my son Zia ul Islam Kazi that allowed me to keep going.

I am deeply indebted to Leonard Swidler who guided me to the academic trajectory of this research and who initially anchored me to this domain. It was Dr Terry Rey who had suggested the topic of my research, pointing out the importance of my role being that of a participant-observer. The invaluable help with his expertise has been a constant in directing me to overcome obstacles specially towards the end of this journey. Dr Khalid Blankinship was the first to introduce me to the study of Richard Eaton. This opened up a whole new world that proved vital in providing a background to an aspect of folk Sufism in the interiority of the Indian subcontinent which is only beginning to be recognized in the academia. Dr Jayasinhji Jhala steered me to interview the members of the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship and is consistently encouraging me to continue on that terrain. Needless to say, this provided a priceless dimension to get an insight into the teaching methodology of Bawa.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude to Dr Sydney White who in the last phase of this journey agreed to be the third member of the defense Committee, despite being stretched thin with her other responsibilities.

I am adding this note of gratitude at the end to Shahid Nigro, without whose support I could not have managed the technicalities involved in the formalities at the final stage of submission of this dissertation

Saiyida Zakiya Hasna Islam
Springfield, Pennsylvania, USA
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INTRODUCTION

This study is focused on the teachings of Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. He was a spiritual teacher who was a Sufi mystic. This study is premised on the mystical perspective of unity. The primary purpose of this study is to focus on his teachings geared to exemplify through him how the mystical perspective brings in a convergence of all faith systems to a single point. Such a convergence is what essentially defines for a Muslim mystic the way to the realization of *Tawheed*.¹ The unitive vision of *Tawheed* is considered the crux of the Islamic tradition. In this study, this unique Muslim mystic's teaching are analyzed to demonstrate how the unitive mystic vision can encompass traditions that appear to be antithetical to each other. This Sufi mystic is endearingly referred to as just Bawa.² Buried in the outskirts of Philadelphia, his shrine is the only Sufi shrine in North America. He came to the USA from South Asia during the counter culture upheaval of the Seventies. Thus he was initially embraced by the Americans at that time evidently due to the cultural turn of the West towards the East for wisdom. His teachings leading to the transformation of lives four decades later is a testament to the universal power of his message that went beyond the cultural needs of the Seventies. The goal of this study is to attempt to analyze his teachings and his methods to learn how he was able to allow,

¹ The approximate translation of this term can be said to be oneness. However, like terms specific to a faith traditions, this barely scratches the surface of the deeply layered connotations of the term.

² Henceforth, he will be referred to mostly as just "Bawa" in this study.

even quietly encourage, his followers to traverse diverse belief systems. His followers were those who had already embarked on a spiritual quest. Such quests appeared to unvaryingly involve engagement with other faiths. As will be evident from this study, Bawa's teachings furthered such engagements and opened up their pathways to allow for their expansion for spiritual progression.

Situating Bawa in Mystical Studies

Academic studies require situating Bawa in the theoretical conversation on mysticism. Regarding this, it needs to be stated at the very outset that this will be a challenge to say the very least. Any attempt to describe the nature of Bawa's teachings in order to formulate it within a framework brings in the metaphor of trying to confine the running flow of a stream that is continually incorporating elements along its course. Needless to say, no single thesis — or even a combination of them — will suffice to even attempt to contain what is within that flow by drawing parameters to situate the teachings of Bawa. At best we can attempt to weave towards that end by drawing in strands from a few that may apply to some notable aspects of Bawa's teachings.

Bawa was a Muslim mystic whose actions were inevitably aligned with scriptural injunctions of the Quran. Hence, the cornerstone of Bawa's mystical insight is *Tawheed*. So, apparently situating Bawa in the theoretical conversation of mysticism would initially appear to be aligned with what the common core

thesis was derived from. That brings it in to be more in concordance with the views of authors such as Evelyn Underhill's of it being a "union with Reality" (*Practical Mysticism* 9), or William James' insistence that a "Consciousness of illumination is for us the essential mark of 'mystical states'" (28). Very much in accord with these is what Rufus Jones speaks of as the "transcendence of finite reality and normal self-awareness into an undifferentiated matrix consciousness' that transcends thought and has its closest resemblance to **enhanced aesthetic appreciation** (emphasis are mine)".³ This aligns with Bawa's description of human progression whereas the 'enhanced aesthetic' appreciation somewhat parallels the progression described by Bawa in the procession of *Iman*, *Islam* and *Ihsan*.⁴ This, as per Ralph Hood, has to be "delineated from the perennialis thesis ... in which there is postulated not only a common core experience, but also values and practices claimed to be associated with this experience, if not directly derived from it".

The discussion on the development of this thesis entails a conversation which brings in attempts of scholars to develop "an explicit psychometric measure ... to allow empirical assessment" of mysticism.⁵ Hood points out that it was McGinn who recognized the continuance of discrete literature while staying

³ See Micheal Stoeber, 4.

⁴ *Ihsan* or Beauty based on Compassion is the apex of human progression in the nuanced depiction of the three dimensions of the religion related in a famous tradition known as the Hadith of Gabriel.

⁵ See Ralph Hood, 35.

ignorant of each other which he classified as theological, philosophical and comparative/psychological. However, Hood critiques McGinn for ignoring “psychometric studies of mysticism in which mysticism is measured and its presence and absence empirically assessed” (36). Regarding this, in light of situating Bawa, one can say that McGinn probably had the insight to see the futility in the very idea of “measuring” being applied to the study of mysticism which, to say the very least, is beyond the temporal and spatial.

Scholarly discussions appear to end up either trying to liberate mysticism from the constrictive parameters of a chosen discipline or transferring it to another discipline or blending it to that somewhat. Evidently none of these appear to be satisfactory. So, going along with the focus of the study here, I can view the mystical perspective as a paradox constituting of a constant and a dialectical flow like Bawa’s teachings. It is a continual process from a Source like a flowing stream that can contain countless elements and meander into configurations of myriad contours while flowing towards the realization of an essential truth. To think such a flow with a constant incorporation of countless mix can be “measured” in “psychometric studies” does appear to border on intellectual arrogance. So, it will not be surprising if scholars like McGinn perhaps chose to ignore it. Bawa viewed the “heart” as the seat of wisdom as opposed to the “intellect” that is tied to arrogance. Aligned with that spirit, the stance here is simply to search for strands that lend itself to a qualitative rather than the quantitative situating of Bawa and his teachings.

Hence, based more on the aforesaid perspective, Bawa's teachings align to a view of seekers of *ma'rifa*⁶, or Gnostics, as those who have experienced "union with Reality"⁷ more or less to a degree or have the desire to attain it. This stance does incorporate James' view of a "mystical ladder" of ascension to realize into "Consciousness of illumination" as the essential mark of "mystical states".⁸ This also resonates strongly with Rufus Jones as a transcendence into an undifferentiated" matrix consciousness".⁹

However when one explores the essentialist/contextualist debate that is purported to have broadened the field to bring the comparative study of mysticism, one inevitably faces the fact that there are strands that can be drawn from each and strands that need to be left out in the weaving process of situating Bawa . For example, as mentioned earlier, the psychometric aspect of the common core theory cannot be applicable to Bawa. His teachings appear to be more in line with "a spiraling dialectic of ego-regression and transformative spiritual reintegration" that defines the transpersonal theory of human development. Ken Wilbur led the way for this theory to develop. However,¹⁰ This

⁶ Derived from the root word *a'rif*, to know.

⁷ See Evelyn Underhill (9).

⁸ See Ralph Hood 37.

⁹ See Michael Stoeber 3-5.

¹⁰ Michael Stoeber uses this description when referring to Michael Washburn 22.

inevitably brings us into the arena of depth psychology. Bawa's teachings was essentially about the progressing expansion through the contraction of the ego or *nafs* to the realization into the single point of *Tawheed*. That is when one becomes an *insan* or a true human being. This is the attainable transcendence of "becoming" the mirror to reflect the Real or *Haqq*. Only one in every eon will eventually realize into an *Insane-kamil*¹¹ or the "complete human" or "the perfect human". In the paradoxical dialectical realm of mystical language, this perfection or completion entails the complete disappearance of the ego or *nafs*. It is the *nafs* that sets up "veils" of separation that impedes progression. Hence is the need to initiate the process of rending the veils towards the realization by re-integrations. This process entails a continual self-surrender. It involves going through states represented by each religion to eventually transcend them all. This draws in to the conversation Randall Studstill's "significant critical elaboration and refinement of Hick's religious pluralism" (Stoeber 13) – specifically what Michael Stoeber noted as Studstill's uncovering of the "common processes of radical self-surrender, letting-go, and the deconstruction of dualistic thinking and perception". As per Bawa, inherent in all humans is the potentiality for such progression. This is echoed by Dupre in what he said about the drive for mystical union being the "vital principle of all religious life" (485). Bawa's

¹¹ William Chittick views this as one of the "most famous ... technical terms" created by the 11th century mystic master Ibn Arabi (*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 27).

teachings are geared to awaken the individual to the awareness of this drive through the vital element of being in a constant state of vigilance or *taqwa*¹² and have the intent of what Bawa calls *Iman-Islam*. Again, the meaning of these two terms are far too profound to go into here. Suffice it to say that *Iman* is the underpinning of the vital fuel of faith, and *Islam* is the praxis that sets in motion the journey to that process of progression or, as Bawa preferred to say, purification. Bawa's teachings, in tenor with other Sufi teachings, are essentially an explication of what is stated in the Quran. As such, the spiritual seeker is rooted in a single Source to spiral out into an experiential trek through differences for gnosis to return into the integrative point of Tawheed. Thus such journey involves traversing apparently dialectical domains of different traditions. Hence, inherent in this is the interreligiosity. This idea of a progression through ego-regression to ultimate transcendence to transformation is supported by the transformative psychology spearheaded by Ken Wilber.¹³ However, Bawa's teachings align more with Michael Washburn's proposition of spiraling dialectic of ego regression and transformative spiritual reintegration.¹⁴ Bawa's interreligious trek to integration also requires us to pull in the strand of Panniker's pluralistic

¹² The approximate meaning is more akin to a God-consciousness— constant consciousness of *Tawhid*.

¹³ Needless to say, in the final analysis, none of the recent scholarship appears to be quite new as they resonate with the transformative views like that of William James. All of it appears to boil down to splitting hairs.

¹⁴ See Washburn, especially chapters 1, 2 and 5.

integrative mystical sense of an all encompassing “cosmotheandric” mystical intuition (149-150). Perhaps, in view of how Bawa’s teachings align with Washburn, one can question the validity of the criticism against him for what was viewed as his “Oriental treatment of Eastern mystical tradition”. It appears more to the point, that in the final analysis, whatever contemporary discussions may ensue, they can be boiled down to what the pioneers in this field of study, i.e., Evelyn Underhill , William James, etc., had already said.

As Stoeber noted, that the essentialist/contextualist debate broadened the field of discussions to include other aspects for the comparative study of mysticism. Whether this makes situating a given mystic or a mystical experience easier is debatable. Perhaps it is more of an intellectual audacity of the academic world to try to contain the ineffable within such constraints under the pretext of attempting to acquire operational indicators. Perhaps it is time to recognize and respect the realm of the apophatic and explore avenues for discussion with the conscious intent of leaving room for a simple acceptance of the ultimate intuitive nature of the understanding of it all.

Bawa's Teachings and Hinduism

Mystics of any tradition delve into the depths of the scriptures to bring out the pearls. In Bawa's words "There is a pearl within an oyster. If the pearl matures, the oyster can no longer exist. It is destroyed".¹⁵ Extending this metaphor to his followers, who he called his children, they were the oysters being prepared for the realization of the pearl within. Bawa appeared to anchor on to their questing spirits and took them to the deepest gnostic level. In doing so, he had them traverse the different faith systems, drawing out the wisdom from them for the seekers of truth, which was often times overlooked, if not outright forgotten and misrepresented for them before. His ultimate goal was to bring his "children" to the realization of *Tawheed*. Huston Smith's description of mystics can be totally applicable to Bawa when he called them "the advance scouts of mankind who have transcended their egos, and in exceptional cases, merged with God completely".¹⁶ Bawa's followers and what we discern in his teachings leaves one with no doubt that he was one of those "exceptional cases". He was considered by his followers a "*qutb*".¹⁷ They are adepts who are considered the axis or pivot or poles of an age.

¹⁵ See the slim publication of Bawa's discourses *Four Steps to Pure Iman*, 13. In this regard, it needs to be mentioned that when it comes to the publications of Bawa's books and pamphlets, the titles need to be mentioned as many of them were published in the same year.

¹⁶ See Philip Goldberg's *American Veda*, 10.

¹⁷ See Willaim Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 1989, 370-375.

Again, it is the point of *Tawheed* where the mystic vision of Sufis converge. The central creed of *Tawheed* in Islam can be roughly translated as oneness. Thus do the Sufis converge on the same point as the mystics of other traditions with their integrative unified vision. For those seeking wisdom, the goal of the realization of *Tawheed* entails the idea of traversing the belief systems set in motion by sages that has been passed down throughout the ages. The constant Quranic injunction to “remember” what humans were told and shown throughout the ages that they constantly “forgot”, is the stream that Bawa took his children to. They were taken on an interfaith journey to see the manifold ways the truth has been revealed to humankind. Encounters with mystics, and how they get their followers to embark on such journeys that take one to the countless streams of creation to the ocean without shores within, is beyond the scope of any study. Hence only the tiniest sliver of Bawa’s teachings has been analyzed here to show how he takes one through the process of seamlessly crisscrossing the paths of diverse belief systems to realize one into *Tawheed*. For this he was following on the age old pattern of the oral tradition. Bawa’s discourses embraced all religions and then transcended to the Truth. This Truth was the unitive *Tawheed*.

The seemingly endless flow of Bawa’s discourses are archived in thousands of hours of simultaneously translated recordings of audio and video tapes. They are being transcribed and edited for publications maintaining the utmost scrupulous standards. Hence this study has been taken up with a heavy

sense of responsibility. It is for the sake of feasibility that the aforesaid sliver has been chosen from Bawa's teachings to exemplify how integrative the mystic vision is. For this, Bawa's use of two apparently diametrically opposite faith traditions has been chosen to show how he has woven them together in his discourses to teach the truth of *Tawheed*. Those two traditions are Hinduism and Islam. Hinduism, replete with images, is apparently the antithesis of Islam with its absolute prohibition of images. Yet Bawa seamlessly weaves in strands from each in the tapestry of his teachings to make the point that is beyond both. Thus this study will offer examples of Bawa's usage of elements from Hinduism. The argument this study puts forth, and elaborates on, is that the validity of whatever Bawa draws on to teach can be premised on the truth of *Tawheed*. Bawa's teachings encompass countless recognizable traditions to draw out the essential truth from each towards a perspectival shift to the realization into *Tawheed*. Thus the usage of a tradition that is replete with forms and is apparently antithetical to the Islamic tradition, is shown to be essentially functional when taken in context of *Tawheed*. Ultimately, there is the perspectival shift that reveals the mystical insight to that Truth or *Haqq*.¹⁸

¹⁸ One of the 99 attributive names of God. The approximate translation would be the Truth.

Chapter Contents

To analyze Bawa's teaching methodology through the lens of how he used the Hindu *Puranas*, Hindu terms and metaphors, etc., meanwhile we have to begin with his being a Sufi mystic, a Muslim, and coming from the mystical folk tradition of the hinterland of the Indian sub-continent. Furthermore, this study will briefly explore Bawa's bringing that wisdom over to the American soil and how and why that soil was receptive to the seeds of the fruits that he brought from the East. Thus Chapter One will be analyzing the essentials of the mystic perspective. For the relevancy of the topics that will be discussed, there will be a brief comparative sketch on Christian mysticism in the West and mysticism in Islam. It will touch on the gnostic perspective based more on Hans Jonas' study. It will also bring in Meister Eckhart because his *Bulio, Ebullio* and Creation echoes the Sufi perspectives. Mysticism in the East has been limited to the Sufi "holy men" who have been — and still are — a part of the landscape of the eastern regions to this day.

Again, Bawa is a Sufi. Due to the prevalence of a misrepresentation of Sufis as being separate from Islam and Muslims, Chapter Two will discuss Islam and the Muslim world view to establish how the Islamic belief and practices are fundamentally integral to the Sufi thoughts and actions. The next section of this chapter will be a brief introduction to the essentials of Sufism. The common chord in the Islamic belief system always converges at the point of *Tawheed*. It

will briefly extrapolate how the mystics in the Islamic traditions functioned in their teachings. In this regard, a constant will be the primary importance of the oral traditions in such ventures.

The shift in Chapter three is across the oceans to the USA. The heading for the section after the introduction to the chapter is “Freedom”. Here, the factors in the new land that had made it receptive to Bawa’s teachings are discussed. This chapter is more of a sweeping overview with a focus on what I see as the freedom that defines the spirit of the new world with its spectacular naturescape that shaped the psyche of those that the land nurtured. This is tied in with the most vital component of mysticism in general, and Sufism in particular, that ultimately it is all about liberation. The expression of “dying before death” pervades Sufi thought and expression. One of Bawa’s publication is titled *To Die Before Death*, in fact, here, the very basic metaphor is of the soul or spirit being imprisoned in the physical body due to its unawareness of its essence. One can be liberated from this imprisonment before the physical death by transformative self-cultivation that will bring complete detachment to the phenomenal world. This is “dying before death”. The awareness of the possibility of such freedom comes with the awareness of the spirit within and thus the striving begins for the ultimate liberation through a full realization. Hence this particular chapter is titled “Freedom” in an attempt to take in the meaning of the term from the merely phenomenal to the deepest most profound mystical connotation.

So, the vastness of the continent gave free rein for the growth of the spirit in which a connection to nature was inevitable. The brief historical perspective on the mushrooming of countless Christian denominations appears to be a natural corollary for free spirits. The ancestral heritage of such free spirits may have contributed to the counter culture movement of the Seventies that made the youth of that time turn to the mystic East in their spiritual quest. Thus they embraced a figure like Bawa who to them appeared to embody ancient folk wisdom from the East.

The most significant chapters in this study are the final two. Chapter Five has the main thrust of the study. Due to the dearth of any research on Bawa's teachings, a discussion on sages like Bawa who worked at the folk level is the focus of Chapter Four. This chapter is a vital preamble to Chapter Five. The objective is to situate Bawa in the Indian subcontinent with mystics who lived and worked among the masses transforming their lives at multiple levels. Bawa came from the East to the West. The focus of this chapter is on mystics who almost a millennium ago had headed to the East in the darkest region of India. The prosperity that drew other aliens to India at that time had never penetrated this region and it was left to those simple holy men to come from the western Arabian lands and dispel the darkness at all levels for the inhabitants of that hinterland. Their work was defined by the use of the vernacular and the integration of the local belief system in their teaching methodology thus expanding into an inter-religiosity that lends a universality that is inherent in folk

wisdom. Sufism in the South Asian subcontinent of India has been studied for a significant part of the twentieth century by well-known authors. However, the subject of those studies were Sufis who left a legacy of Arabian and Persian heritage. During the period of Muslim rule, they had among their followers — besides the common man — many Muslim elites and at times the rulers themselves. It appears that there are hardly any significant research done of figures like Bawa, who appear to be aligned with the South Asian mystics known as *pirs*. These are “holy men” who live on in the legends and lore of the common man in rural regions, beyond the ken of the literate class. The only exception is that of Sai Baba, whose religious orientation is contested by Hindus and Muslims both. Bawa’s Islamic orientation is beyond any doubt by the fact that he established masjids in both in Sri Lanka¹⁹ and in the USA.

The study of figures like Bawa has been a recent development in the in Western scholarship. Pioneered by Richard Eaton, the first such research was undertaken to solve an enigma. It was discovered only in the nineteenth century

¹⁹ The masjid in Sri Lanka is in Mankumban. It was constructed by his American disciples in the mid Seventies. It is narrated that Bawa predicted this in the Forties and would not allow his Sri Lankan followers to build it after they had built the foundation in 1954. He told them that it will be built by his American followers. At that time nobody had any idea that Bawa would ever have any connection with the West or USA. Two decades later in 1954 his American followers built the Masjid in Mankumban, Sri Lanka. See Chloë Le Pichon et. al. edited *The Mirror*, 50. A decade after this the masjid in Philadelphia was built with Bawa’s supervision by his American followers. See *The Mirror*, 192-199. This is the first masjid constructed ground up in Pennsylvania. The others were buildings bought and converted to masjids.

by the British colonists that the majority of the rural masses of the remotest part of India, East Bengal, were Muslims. Hitherto, it had been assumed that they were Hindus as this region was avoided by all the invaders and raiders as centuries before it was covered with impenetrable jungle. It only became possible to investigate this phenomenon due to the research methods breaking away from the narrow template established by the West. Thus, oral tradition, which is considered a vital source in Sufism, became acceptable in research which paved the way for Eaton. The result was the recognition of the unique contribution that transformed a region by simple “holy men” whose saga is kept alive through oral tradition that lives on at the folk level. What is particularly notable is the significant difference between these sages and the renowned Sufis of Northern India. Researchers like Asim Roy and Tony Stewart have followed the trail that Eaton blazed to bring into the arena studies on figures that are living legends in the hinterland of Bengal. Such folk figures have lived on endearingly in the common man’s psyche for centuries. Their methodology appears to be drawn on similar paradigms as that of Bawa’s. So the importance of this chapter lies in its particular focus on those holy men and the discussion on the vital importance of the oral tradition. Bawa appears to share the paradigm they followed and thus it situates him as part of an ongoing tradition among the masses at what may be viewed at the grass roots level. It will also focus on the folk elements these *pirs* incorporated to convey their message. This is premised on the idea that inherent in the folk element is the primal appeal which translates into the universal. It is

best that I provide an explanation of the “primal appeal” In the context of the study here. I have chosen to use this phrase investing it with connotations drawn in from the world of literature , mythology and psychology.²⁰ Since in Islam the *qalb* or heart is where the connection to the Divine is, whenever or whatever that succeeds to connect to that is the litmus test to the Truth. So, the usage in this study of the expression the “primal appeal” will be indicative of a profound emotive appeal at the deepest level that is recognized across the board.

Chapter Five contains the main thrust of this study. Initially the concentration is on the crux of Bawa’s teachings. The first sections treats the goal that Bawa sets up for his followers to be transformed to man-God, God-man. It translates into the effacement of the ego-self to merge and realize into the single truth of *Tawheed*. This is to be an *insan* and thus Bawa aligns it with the Sufi tradition of the being truly human. The culmination of course is to be realized into the earlier mentioned Complete Human or the Perfect Human. It is evident that Bawa was an *insan-e-kamil* , although he never claimed to be one. Then the chapter treats the incorporation of elements from the Hindu Tradition in Bawa’s teachings with the aim to demonstrate how Hinduism factored in into Bawa’s teachings. Again, this is to exemplify the nature of the interreligious trek that Bawa takes his listeners to. The major part of this study will analyze Bawa’s

²⁰ Choosing not to go into further detail I can just refer the reader to see "primal, adj. and n." *OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 27 June 2017.*

usage of elements from the Hindu tradition of India, i.e., metaphors, allusions, terminology, etc. with particular focus on the Puranic stream.

This study will take more of the interpretive approach in its analysis. This is to be in tenor with the process of meaning making that the mystical methodology entails. The interpretive approach also allows for blending of boundaries of the different domains of human lives. This in turn tunes in with *Tawheed* as aligned to the universal mystic vision.

The conclusion will provide a conclusive analysis of how the mystical vision allows for the seamless incorporation of apparently antithetical religious traditions as demonstrated by Bawa's usage of Hindu tradition fraught with forms to convey the essential message of Tawheed in the totally formless tradition of Islam.

Concluding with the Personal Experience of the Mystical

In this final section of the introduction I will be joining the club of what Hood called the "confessional scholars" (44) with my sharing the story of my entry into the realm of mysticism. It was accidental to say the least. At that time, I was clueless to that dimension and totally unfamiliar with the language and terms associated with that realm. We were invited to a wedding of one of my husband's acquaintances. The name of the venue, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship intrigued me. It was a Muslim name, and yet it did not say "mosque".

I was in my late thirties and very much against any head covering unless it is a mosque. For some reason or other, I decided to wear my wedding sarree²¹ of red and gold for the event.²² As an afterthought, I took a light black chiffon scarf in my party purse if just in case the place did turn out to be a mosque. We were seated inside a room with rows of fixed chairs. In front was a podium with an empty green velvet upholstered chair. Behind it on the wall was a boxed illumination with the triple names sequentially of Allah, Muhammad and Muhaiyaddeen.²³ All along the other walls there were other framed delicate prints of obvious spiritual significance. The room evoked a spirit of serenity, so I was confused as to whether it was mosque or not. I was so impressed when the Imam came and officiated the betrothal rites, that I came to the conclusion that it must be a mosque. This specially so as I heard the call to prayer. The only thing that was bothering me was a large black and white portrait of a gentle-looking bearded old South Asian gentleman that was hung on a side wall near me. The thought kept on nagging me as to why would these people hang a portrait inside a mosque.²⁴ At the end of the wedding I actually expressed my uneasiness about

²¹The garb of South Asian ladies. It is a six yards long fine silk fabric which is draped around the body with folds in front and a trail behind.

²² It was the second and last time I wore that sarree. The first time was at my wedding.

²³ It means “reviver of the true faith”.

²⁴ My misgivings came from my being raised as a Muslim who believed that human images are forbidden inside a mosque.

it to the lady sitting next to me. She replied “Oh, but this is not the mosque. This is the meeting room. Haven’t you seen the mosque? You must see it. It is beautiful! It is upstairs. Be sure to see it before you leave.” I assured her that I would and as soon as the guests started to leave I began to ask the people the way to the mosque and eventually found myself climbing a set of green carpeted stairs. As soon as I stepped into the mosque the light hit me. I have no other language to phrase that experience. It was around 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon and it was a sunny day, and yet it was a light that I had never experienced before. I started looking up and around for the source of the light. I looked at the windows and the beautiful stained glass dome at the top. The light was not coming from any of those. It was entirely different from anything that I had experienced before or since. Then when I turned to look at the people who had encircled me, I saw that their faces were radiating the selfsame light. Apparently, I had involuntarily asked “what place is this?”, and they had gathered around me to respond to that query. The next moment I remember as a blur of a beautiful symphony of joy and serene beauty.²⁵ Whatever they were telling me was just beautiful music and tears of joy were streaming down my face. Eventually the circle parted and two ladies stayed with me taking me down the stairs while continually telling me whatever they were saying of which I do not remember anything. My husband met me downstairs and I still remember his look of

²⁵ This is the best that I can do to describe it as such experiences are essentially indescribable.

surprise at his seeing the tears streaming down my face and my repeated “Isn’t it beautiful! Isn’t it beautiful”. He looked confused, but I was too happy to care. Finally, I registered one thing that the lady who stayed with me said. She said that every morning before dawn they do *zikr*²⁶ together at the mosque. I exclaimed “How beautiful!” again and got the time of 4:30 am from her. The other lady came back with two books for me. The very next morning, I started to leave home at 4:00 a.m. to join in the morning *zikr*. This beautiful symphony of voices chanting aloud the divine names together was something I had never observed, let alone participated before, in my life. My life took a turn and shifted into a gear which became a conscious quest for the ineffable of which this study is a miniscule part.

²⁶ The word itself means remembrance. Technically it is the chanting aloud of the divine names.

CHAPTER 1:

MYSTICISM

Introduction

This study on Bawa has taken the mystic perspective. Bawa was a Muslim mystic who was apparently born and raised experiencing the traditions of the East. It was during the last phase of his life that he brought his wisdom to the West. He was “The Tree that Fell to the West” which is the title of one of the Bawa’s published discourses. So, here we need to have a brief analysis of what mysticism is purported to be. This will be followed by a brief comparative sketch of Christian and Muslim mysticism as Bawa being a Muslim mystic chose to bring his wisdom to a land with a Christian majority.

Understanding Mysticism

Any attempt to address mysticism initiates one into a vast expanse of vagueness with language clothed in ambiguity and paradoxes. We already embarked on that journey in the Introduction to this dissertation. Now we will choose to converge all into what Evelyn Underhill said about mysticism being the art of union with the Reality (*Practical Mysticism* 9).

So the key terms revealed here are the “Reality” and the “union”. Monotheistic traditions like the Abrahamic ones, label that Reality as God, while

those in the Eastern tradition may refer to Brahman or just the Truth or “the moment of Awakening”. In the ultimate analysis, whatever all the above connote appear to come together or more accurately converge with each other. Herein, what is revealed is what the second term of “union” connotes.²⁷ Discussion of mystics from each tradition may entail the differences of the practices of each tradition. However, the closer one reaches the pinnacle or the center, the more common ground they tread in conceptualizing it, or mystically speaking, breaking free from the constraints of those. It is a freedom from the structure of concepts. In other words, it is when one treads into what scholars of mysticism have termed as “unsaying” or the realm of the apophatic that mystics from diverse traditions appear to converge on a single point. This becomes profoundly evident in the meeting between a Muslim mystic and a Hindu as described below:

After a few minutes he entered the orchard holding the staff of a *sannyasin*. He came to within some ten yards of me and then squatted on the ground without his staff touching the earth. A disciple accompanying him greeted me on behalf of the master who, he explained, was observing a fast of silence. Being an untouchable from the point of view of Hindu law, which I, of course, honored greatly, I could not come closer to Hindu master nor could he to me. And so we looked at each other in the eye for several minutes in utter silence. Then he smiled and made some signs with his hands to his disciple, who then said to me, “The master says that he wishes to tell his Persian friend [that is myself] how happy he is that the understanding of the reality of God in Advaita and Sufism is the same.” Here was a discourse on God at the highest level carried out in silence and also the most profound religious

²⁷ Metaphorically the mystical process entails both a linear and a circular process. The more one ascends the nearer is one to the center. The center is considered to be in the human heart.

dialogue I have ever carried out with the representative of another religion, although not a single word was exchanged between us.²⁸

What is evident is that the language of mysticism involves dialectics. Whatever is said, is immediately unsaid, so to speak, and the progression of the argument is through the tension between the two propositions. The message comes through the interstices of the double propositions per se.

The ineffable nature of mystical experiences has stimulated reaction ranging from profound reverence to outright condemnation in every age. The mystical experience is a journey of constant affirmation and retraction that is challenging to apprehend for the uninitiated. This is due to mysticism being essentially apophatic; hence the title of Michael Sells book *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (1994). In this book Sells basically attempts to explain why the subject of mysticism will elude conventional description by the laity or the analysis that defines academic writings. Sells unpacks the hidden depths which brings in the necessity of negative language for the ineffable by bringing in readings from texts from ancient to the medieval of the western traditions and Islam. However, to whoever has studied mysticism, it will be apparent that Sells account can be equally applicable to the Eastern ones. Due to the limited scope of our study, we cannot go into that any further. For our purposes here, we will take from Sells what he wrote about Islamic mysticism to state the case for the verbal declaration of the *Tawheed* in Islam. This declaration of faith called the

²⁸ See Marcus Borg and Ross Mackenzie (Ed.) *God at 2000*, 80.

shahada, is the first pillar of what the world views as exoteric Islam. Various translated, the one chosen here is “There is no divinity if it be not be the Divinity”.²⁹ Most Muslims simply see this statement as distinguishing themselves from the idol-worshippers. Or as they prefer to call them “the pagans.”³⁰ The ones that go a little deeper, see that it is indicative of the human tendency to worship wealth, power, etc. to the point most insidious and hence dangerous — the worship of the self. It is only the spiritual wayfarer who sees the simplicity of the deep wisdom in the first half of the declaration. Unpacking it reveals that if one is able to understand and act on the significance of the first half, one has succeeded in cutting away all the attachments of the created world and is realized into the second half. There is no other action needed. Realization to the only Real is right there. They have realized into the truth of *Tawheed*.

On the other hand, the incomprehensibility of mysticism provides opportunities for charismatic figures to pass as mystics and grow a following. Each era has had their share of cults with large followers ending in disillusionment and despair and much worse results. Thus, such experiences lead to the pathological. In fact, in all probability, some kind of a

²⁹ Titus Burkckhasdt 43-46. Also as noted in the introduction of the Bernard McGinn translated and edited *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, 21, “No negation, nothing negative, belongs to God, except the “negation of negation,” which is “how the One is predicated in the *via negationis*.”

³⁰ Similar to what the Christians not too far back referred to as “the heathens”. However, Muslims applied the term “pagans” specifically to those who erected idols for worship.

mental/psychological pathology must be pre-existing in the followers which makes them vulnerable to the deviants with their apparent miracles that pass as mystical.³¹ As such, for anyone to be wary of tales of mystical experiences and figures termed as mystics is understandable.

So, each age has had its share of individuals looking askance at those who were revered as mystics. In recent times, the twentieth century has had its share of cult-like followings to have seen the deleterious effect of such “charismatic” figures on their followers. So it is important that we keep in view a certain criterion to view any given mystical experience which is likely to also reveal how one can determine mystical experiences/expressions are healthy or pathological. A short answer to how to determine that would be to quote Jesus in Matthew 7:20, “it is by their fruits...” — only if such experiences or teaching leads us to love what the world views as “even the least of persons.”

Hence to judge by the fruits, needs the span of both time and space. Human history has been replete with tales of mystical experiences. The oracles of antiquity to the tribal shamans in any tropical jungles to the quiet contemplative in a mountain cave or hermitage or the ordinary laity engaged in daily duties while always being in the presence of God in utter simplicity, all fall within the

³¹ Bawa was constantly warning his listeners about the allurements of the “mantra, magic and miracles”. As per Bawa, cultivation for the attainment for such powers are not geared towards the search for wisdom or Truth. As such they come from the forces of creation and can lead one astray. Bawa taught that each element that went into the composition of humans, i.e., earth water, fire, air and ether has properties with certain powers therein.

range of those who have had mystical experiences. Some of them have been recorded, some not. Each tradition has them. Christianity appears to have more of the written expressions whereas Islam and the eastern traditions have more of the oral to this day.

Needless to say, eventually the oral expressions are being written down by the followers of the mystics. The fact that Christianity has more of the written expression is in all probability due to the monastic tradition that created the context and provided the setting and the opportunities for those.

Here we have a brief comparative description of mysticism in the two traditions of Christianity and Islam which will serve to see the dynamics of the times that went into how the mystics were viewed and treated.

Mysticism in the West and in Islam

At the very outset of this section, we need to reiterate, that Islam retained its roots with the original Abrahamic traditions of the Near East. The spread of Christianity to Europe appeared to lead to a sundering of those roots that became apparent with what is termed as the Age of Reason. When we delve into western mysticism we encounter Gnosticism in both the Judaic and Christian traditions. The idea of *gnosis* or knowing is akin to how mysticism is viewed in Islam. In Islam mysticism is called *ma'rifa* from the verb *a'rif*, "to know". The mystic in Islam is called a "wayfarer" questing "to know". Thus the quest metaphor with that of stages of ascension is common to all traditions across the

board. The challenges in the expression of this journey are inherent in the ineffable nature of the process. That is the crux of the problem that mystics confront from the guardians of the doctrines. However, of these guardians, the Christians with their highly structured edifice had more at stake than those in Islam. The Five Pillars of Islam provides a structured system of exercise in spirituality for the average practitioners of the faith. Most of the Muslims tend to get attached to this exoteric dimension as the means to piety and feel uncomfortable going beyond that. So the outcome is a natural growth of dogmatic orthodoxy. However, since no centralized institutionalism took hold of the Islamic system, the Muslim mystics were spared institutional persecution.

On the other hand, Christianity is replete with inquisitors and their harsh sentencing. Stories of martyrs burning at the stakes are the many examples. A case in point is Marguirette Porete. In her mystical quest she went beyond “virtue,” which from the mystical standpoint meant being at the point of Unity,³² one does good works automatically without any conscious attachment to it. The religious authorities deemed it as amoral and disseminating dangerous ideas to the common folk, and thus was she prosecuted and executed. Her complete silence in her eighteen months in prison is a testament to her mystical state of detachment and the power of the legacy she left behind her.³³

³² What Masignon speaking of Hallaj termed as Hallaj’s “*Le Point Vierge*”.

³³ See Amy Hollywood’s “Suffering Transformed” in Bernard McGinn ed. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, 113. Also, see the Preface by Lerner in Ellen

Except for Hallaj,³⁴ Islam does not have any mystics being executed. If one is aware of what the mystic is in quest of and how it transforms that individual, one sees an entity of utter humility full of love and compassion emanating deep wisdom. So the upside of such experiences is an expansion into compassion that makes one inclusive to touch and draw in from all creation. The downside depends on the beholder. When Siddharta Gautama's father was told that his son would be a great king or a great teacher, the father went for the king! The father probably did not live to see his son as the Buddha and decide on the pluses and minuses of mysticism!

When it comes to the mystic tradition in Christianity, the 13th century Meister Eckhart probably holds the position of being the “Meister” (master) in that domain. He also belonged to a time that marked a period of explosion in contemplative experience and their expression in Western Christendom. This period can be compared to the burst in Islamic mysticism in the earlier 8th to the 10th centuries in the Muslim world. In our discussions, we will refer to them as the “Sufis of Yore”. This is due to the fact that whatever system was developed a few centuries later was based on the lives and practices of these luminary

L. Babinsky translated *Porete, Marguerite*, See also Maria Lichtmann in McGinn ed. *Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart* 1994.

³⁴ His execution was more due to his having made enemies among ruling authorities than having any religious basis.

figures.³⁵ Probably the earliest most known among these figures in the Islamic tradition is the female mystic Rabiya Al Adawiiya whose singular focus on Love as the Divine infused mysticism in Islam as well as many medieval Christian mystics thereafter.³⁶ Interestingly, a few centuries later the female Beguines of Western Christendom with similar expressions as Rabiya, had their impact perhaps due to their expressing their experiences in the vernacular. Of these, the *Mirror of the Simple Souls*³⁷ by Marguirette Porete, stands apart in its effect on posterity and especially on Eckhart, the German master mystic. What scholars are finding are that such influences are more evident in Eckhart's vernacular sermons (McGinn, 2001, 8-9).

In view of the above, a brief discussion of the Beguines will provide an insight into Eckhart. The Beguines and the Begharts were "free spirits" in the sense that they were somewhat free from the formal ties that spiritual seekers in Western Christianity were tied to. Christianity in the West had become highly institutional. Hence the Christian mystics that have come down to us were all attached to some kind of monastic order. These institutions engaged in the theological development and dissemination of doctrines, rituals, etc. Needless to

³⁵ Qushairi, Kalabadhi, and Hujwiri have compiled tales passed down orally about these early Sufis. Based on what they said and did, these writers built the corpus that serves what is known as the Sufi doctrine.

³⁶ Ironically, the returning Crusaders allowed for the mystical ideas of those earlier Sufis to be introduced to Europe and scholars see those influences can be clearly discerned in Medieval mysticism in Europe.

³⁷ From henceforth will be referred to as the *Simple Souls*.

say, the “doctors” of such scholastica were all males, whereas it was an inescapable fact that females appeared to be equally capable of contributing in the realm of spirituality. However, in the late 12th century the institutional decision was not to allow them to be teachers in the formal arena, but their spiritual quest was recognized and they were not required to enter any order to do so. This allowed a freedom that led to the burst of female contemplatives known as the Beguines. The Begharts were the male equivalents of such “free spirits”. However, it was the Beguines who have left an indelible mark on the spiritual development of western Christianity. The *Pieta* may be viewed as a symbol for the Beguines. They were Mary, in their chastity and their poverty.³⁸ They were the healers and the comforters. They expressed their experiences in the vernacular. This, added to which was the cheaper paper having replaced the vellum for writing, contributed to the spread of their simple spiritual messages to the hearts of all simple souls. Like Rabiya, their expressions were imbued with total detachment from the world and a full focus for the union with Love as the Divine. The institutional hierarchy of the western church with their inquisitory inclinations guaranteed the gradual demise of such freedom. However, when coming to Eckhart, we can see that every such stream tends to live on by flowing into another as a tributary. The most well-known of the Beguines was Marguerite

³⁸ This “poverty” is referred to in the deepest mystical sense which will be described later when we come to Eckhart.

Porete who was charged and prosecuted as a relapsed heretic by the Dominicans and burnt at the stakes.

It appears that at one point of his life Eckhart lived in the house where Marguerite's chief prosecutor lived and where there were writings attributed to her which were used as evidence against her. Eckhart's writing, especially the ones that were later viewed as being heretical,³⁹ resonate with what Marguerite wrote. For this and other elements in style and content, evident in Eckhart's sermon on Poverty, has led researchers to believe that Eckhart must have had access to her writings during the time he spent in that abode.

Eckhart stands out due to his radical vision of unity. This union is to the point of being indistinct in divinity — "*indivinus*". Herein came the conundrum the Church authorities were in with their Christology and their doctrinal structure of the Divine. He uses the German term for ground to connote a Unity beyond the Trinity. He takes the birthing of the "son" out of history into a continual perpetuity.⁴⁰

³⁹ Eckhart died before he was charged.

⁴⁰ See Julia A. Lamm edited *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, 346.

To delve into Eckhart, we need to look into some of his symbolism. For Eckhart the goal⁴¹ of the mystical quest is the German word for ground⁴² which is in the human heart. Like Marguerite, Eckhart speaks of freedom from reason. Again echoing Marguerite, he believes in having no “will”. Eckhart’s writing about the mystical process draws symbolism from the Neoplatonic tradition that streamed into Christianity through Pseudo-Dionysus and Gregory of Nysus. Similar to the Dyonesian “darkness”⁴³, for Eckhart, darkness is not the absence of light but potent with positivity and palpable luminosity. Detachment is “wanting nothing”, “having nothing” to the point of even “knowing nothing”. It is a process of becoming and unbecoming. Eckhart uses the terms “*Bullisio*” which means “boiling in the original” and “*Ebulisio*” boiling out or flowing out to convey God coming out of Godhead. Eckhart uses the symbol of the “desert” as that devoid of any thing the ultimate no-thing. The interiority of the mystical journey called for emptying of will or ego-self, “the poverty of spirit”, per se. As per Eckhart, the beatific vision of the Kingdom of Heaven is attainable now. For this, the process to the state of poverty is initiated with detachment. This is cutting all attachments

⁴¹ Again, paradoxically in such a quest the goal is a “no goal”.

⁴² In a concrete sense “the ground” as the place where all is and can go no further. However, in the abstract sense it is a ground beyond the ground into an ever-receding no-where of Godhead. It may be considered an approximation of *Tawheed* in Islam.

⁴³ This is resonant of another well-known medieval work in the vernacular *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

— even the attachment to the desire for detachment. This detachment takes one to the wilderness out of the confines of concepts that the doctrinal structure ties one to. Thus one becomes the virginal state of the empty desert. Only then comes the “birthing” of the son. Through this “birthing” is the “breaking through”⁴⁴ to the godhead of total indistinctness.

The indistinctness referred to above in Eckhart is somewhat akin to the term *fana* or annihilation in Muslim mysticism. This is most radically expressed in the 10th century martyred mystic Mansur Al-Hallaj, who was executed for crying out in the ecstatic state of *fana* “I am the Reality”.⁴⁵

Whereas, marriage (with Christ) figures in prominently among the Christian mystics, Muslim mysticism is not as much into marriage as a mystical union as inherent in the phenomenal existence is separation and inherent in the idea of worship is duality. However, as mentioned earlier, very early on in the history of Islam, in the 8th century, Rabiya Al-Adawiyya introduced the concept of Oneness in Love as the Divine. This Oneness is told in the classic popular tale of her wanting to burn the garden of paradise and douse the fires of hell for she

⁴⁴ It is notable that Eckhart does not use nouns. They are all acts—“birthing”, “breaking through”, etc.

⁴⁵ The Arabic term *Haqq* is one of the ninety-nine attributive names of God and means Reality or Truth. The fact that he was executed for this is improbable, as there were earlier mystics like Bistami (who said “Glory be to me” in the *fana* state). Hallaj was known to frequently challenge and defy authority and it is more likely that those conflicts came to a head and led to his execution.

neither wants the reward of paradise nor has the fear of hell but is only pulled in by the singularity of the unitive vision of the Divine as Love and Love Alone. Mystically speaking, Muslims see this loving inextricably tied in to serving and knowing.⁴⁶ The more one knows the Divine, the more one loves and the more one wants to serve. Hence the profound connotation of being the *abd*-Allah or the slave of Allah. The glory is disappearing in servitude. So disappearing into the divine is common to mystic traditions across the board including Christianity and Islam. However, Islam has a rich oral tradition tied to mysticism which has disseminated mystical terms such as *fana* in common usage. Unlike Christianity, Islam never quite became as institutionalized⁴⁷ and as such, mystics of a whole spectrum of colors were always a part and parcel of the Islamic landscape, and this is so still to this day. However, it is the burst of the mystic teachers from the 8th to the 10th century that left behind a legacy that is drawn from to this day. The tradition is primarily oral and remains so to this day. It is only two centuries later that some of the later mystics began to write down what has become the corpus of hagiographical writings based on the life and tales of the earliest mystics like Rabiya, Hasan, Hallaj, Bistami, etc. Based on those figures, writers like

⁴⁶ The mystical way is called *ma'rifa* or knowing in Islam.

⁴⁷ Although that may not be quite accurate in case of the Shia sect, who were so far are still in the minority, but politically appear to be growing in their influence.

Kalabadhi, Qushairi, Hujwiri, etc., constructed the corpus that is viewed as the Sufi doctrine.

These later scribe mystics also began to draw out concepts and terms from the lives and tales of those figures of yore that imbued and facilitated mystical discussions. Notable among them were Sarraj and Qushayri. Sarraj's earlier work is considered rough while Qushayri's is refined. However, the one that has left the most profoundly indelible mark with written expression for the world of mysticism is the yet much to be mined work of Ibn Arabi. He can be said to be to Muslim mysticism as what Eckhart is to Christian mysticism. This 12th century figure is the master of the practicing Muslim mystic. He had absorbed the Quran and the Muslim traditions and drawn from the depths of those sources for others to dive into. From him the concept of Oneness comes with the term of *wahdat-ul-wujud*, the approximated meaning of which is "the One in Being"⁴⁸ which may be viewed as radical *Tawheed*. The path to that Oneness — somewhat comparable to Eckhart's godhead — initiated with cutting away attachments as nothing is real. *Faqr* or poverty factors in a major way in here. Again, similar to Eckhart, poverty is much more than material poverty, it is the complete emptying of self, the "desert" in Eckhart. It is the disappearance and

⁴⁸ See William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 412, n. 3.

It needs to be reiterated again that meanings of terms such as this can only be an approximation.

erasure of the self to complete elimination. Interestingly, the process begins by ridding of reason. *Aql* means reason or rationality in Islam. It also means “to bind.” Being thus free,⁴⁹ enables one to be in the heart, *qalb*, where is the *sirr* or secret which is the uncreated spark within the human. Metaphorically, placed in the heart is the mirror, which when fully polished, will reflect the Reality. The Arabic for heart is *qalb*, which also is significantly tied to the term *taqallub* means transforming. The mystical path is in the process of constantly polishing the mirror towards the transformation to enable the realization to Reality. Attaining that ability is being the complete human — the *insan-e-kaamil*. Adam is considered the first *insan-e-kaamil*.⁵⁰ A complete human person is in a sense in becoming a no-thing. Continuing the metaphor of the mirror, it is what it reflects. The *Insan-e-kamil* is the polished mirror reflecting nothing but the ultimate Reality.

In the final analysis we see Eckhart going beyond the structure of the Trinity in his mystical vision to bring suspicion of heresy from the guardians of the doctrines. Islam has been spared from being institutionalized like Christianity and has been having more of freelance mystics, in a manner of speaking, than Christianity. Even so, no religion could entirely escape a self-appointed body of

⁴⁹ In this regard, this study emphasizes the idea of freedom or ultimate liberation as inherent in the mystical perspective.

⁵⁰ In the creation story in the Quran, God commands the angels to prostrate before Adam. Adam being the *insa-an-e-kaamil* was the polished mirror, so it follows that the angels were seeing the reflection of Reality to which they were prostrating to.

orthodoxy to frown on what in their opinions were the deviants. As such, there always have been few who have felt a discomfort with the depths that have been delved into by such luminaries and have prevented ones like Ibn Arabi from being in the mainstream. However, the early teachers that burst forth in the Muslim landscape in the 8th and 9th century live on in the psyche of all the simple Muslim souls. Similarly, is Margurette's *Mirror* reflecting the simple Reality through her writing and its effect on Meister Eckhart making its way to being revered by posterity.

CHAPTER 2

MYSTICISM IN ISLAM

Introduction

Mysticism in Islam, as mentioned earlier, is viewed as a journey into *gnosis*. This journey is initiated by the spiritual sojourner with the specific intent of self-cultivation on the path to Truth. However, what the world in general, and the West in particular, assumes is that such sojourners do away with the exoteric aspect of Islam. What is important for the non-Muslim to realize is the Muslim world view is essentially built on the idea of self-cultivation. Self-cultivation informs the very tradition of Islam in all its aspects. The rituals of the exoteric aspect of Islam, are constructed as the very basic format for this cultivation. Thus those practices are called the Five Pillars of Islam. One of the primary intents of this section is to extricate Islam from the manifold misconceptions it is riddled with in the average mind. The attempt here will be to explain the structure and the sources that inform the world view of the Muslim mind. Here, it needs to be mentioned again that many components of Islamic faith and practices are resonant of other traditions. For this, it is not uncommon to harbor the idea of Islam having incorporated those from its encounter with those traditions. In this regard, it should be stated at the very outset that to the Muslim who is familiar with the Quran, the Islamic scripture, all traditions are Islam as in the Quran it is stated clearly that this religion is nothing new — termed “way”— but has been

revealed from the beginning of creation. Murata and Chittick term this as the “islam” with the lower case to be distinguished from the “Islam” with the upper case which the world views as the religion of Islam (xxx, 4-5). So, traditionally, in view of the lower case “islam,” the number of messengers like Muhammad who are believed to have come are said to be 124,000. In this respect, all the known and unknown personages viewed as *avatars* or sages or prophets of the Eastern and Western traditions, be it Krishna, Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Moses, Jesus or Muhammad — all are the same. The Quran clearly states that there is no distinction among them. It also affirms the inevitability of modifications to changing times.⁵¹ One example is that the observance of *salāt*, the daily ritual prayers, which had stopped being practiced for perhaps more than a thousand years, is traditionally believed to have been originally fifty times a day. This apparently was reduced to five times at Muhammad’s time with the format followed by Muslims now. From this, what can be inferred is that that the essential principle of the messages that these personages left for posterity remains the same. Pervasive in the Quran is the reiteration that it was revealed as the last scripture to remind and reinstate what humanity has stopped practicing or altogether forgotten and to eliminate harmful practices humans had superimposed in their error. In this regard, the invocation of “remember” is the most pervasive in the Quran. This is tied to the concept of “forgetting” which is

⁵¹ This continuity of messengers is part of the covenantal aspect in the creation of humans (*Quran* 3:81). Also see 2:285, 35:24 in the *Quran* and Murata and Chittick’s *The Vision of Islam*, (xv).

equivalent to losing one's "way". As such, it follows thereof that "forgetting" is how sin is conceived of in Islam. Hence the visibility of the praxis can be said to be tied to prevent this forgetting.

In view of all the above, we need to acquaint ourselves with some basic concepts and terms which function to formulate the spiritual cum cosmic-psychic structure in Muslims. For the Muslim the only valid source for any frame of reference is the Quran as the validity and the preservation of it is divinely guaranteed within the Quran (15:9, 41:42). The prophetic tradition which includes Muhammad and the scriptures that came before the Quran are valid as per the attestation of them in the Quran (Merton et al 18-19). For example, if a practice is forbidden in the Quran, i.e., sacrificing of animals before an erected idol, then that practice is invalid. However, it is an acknowledged fact that the language of the Quran or the succinct sayings of Muhammad are difficult for any non-Muslim to access. So for the purpose of our discussion here we are including Sufi sources as well. These sources are geared towards extrapolation of scriptural truths, hence is generally more comprehensible for all. To make it relevant to our study here in particular, we will also include the discourses of Bawa.⁵² The Muslim world view is based on what is derived from the aforesaid

⁵²In this paper the titles of Bawa's books will be abbreviated. *To Die before Death: a Sufi Way of Life*, *The Divine Luminous Wisdom That Dispels the Darkness* and *The Guidebook: To the Secret of the Heart*, henceforth will be referred to D&D, DLW and SH, respectively, in this paper.

sources.⁵³ The self-cultivation paradigm is formed in alignment with that world view.

One of the misconceptions about Islam is in its being viewed as part of the Western tradition due to the shared origin with Abraham. For more than a century the West—and the world at large with them—went to a self-congratulatory mode with the Age of Reason. This more so with the material success of the Industrial revolution culminating in the obsession with the apparent success that the sciences brought in the twentieth century.⁵⁴ The fact that the Islamic world was not affected by all this appears to be overlooked here. The upside to this is what apparently appears to be a deprivation is what actually spared the Muslim psyche from the downside of the Enlightenment. This was the eventual consequence in the fragmentation of the western psyche that began to be diagnosed during the latter half of the past century. Unlike the West, the Muslims did not undergo the ill-effects of modernity manifested in such a conundrum. Neither did the Muslim world become immersed in the materialism which became the treadmill of consumerism which is still ongoing in the West with the East sadly competing to get on it.⁵⁵ The Enlightenment, with its

⁵³ See Merton et al 23-25 and Padwick xxi-xxix.

⁵⁴ Seyyed Nasr describes it well in his Introduction to *Sufi Essays*, 11.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, this race to get on board with the economically “developed” West appears to be having the consequence of a resultant obsession with material success. As such obsession does appear to be tied in to an extent to a fragmentation of the psyche. In all probability, if the present pace of economic development in Asia, Africa and Latin America—which is viewed by the majority

celebration of rationality, made the West lose the spirit in throwing the baby out with the bathwater (Merton et al. 10). Such oversight has been a pattern in human history. For this, the message of the Quran, the Islamic scripture, was of it being a reminder of what humanity had forgotten with the key word of “balance” (*mizan*), with the metaphor of the balancing scales, being emphasized in the Quran. So, at one level the Quran revived and reinstated the beneficial practices, on the other hand it set up principles allowing for modifications with changing times. Through it all, the perspective remained holistic. Thus, this holistic perspective is what separates Islam from the Christian tradition as it developed in Europe gradually cutting off its roots from the Abrahamic traditions. It is also due to this that the Sufi tradition has so many commonalities with the Eastern traditions.⁵⁶

Islam and the Muslim World View

The purpose of self-cultivation is integral to the Muslim world view due to the importance given to “personal transformation”. This is achieved through deeper knowledge or “recognition”. Pertaining to this is the Hadith “He who knows himself knows his Lord” (Merton et al. 22, Chittick 1989 437). It is important to

as progress —continues, then in the not too distant future we are liable to see the same fragmented psyche that we see in the west now.

⁵⁶ Eastern traditions includes both the South Asian and the far Eastern traditions in regard to their having the holistic approach to a realization to truth.

understand the centrality of *Tawheed* in a Muslim's world view in such progression (Helminski 102; Murata & Chittick 45-46). It is generally acknowledged that much is lost in translation. This is specially so in case of scriptural language. As many Arabic terms and expression will be appearing in this paper, we need to see those in light of what Nasr said regarding approaching the Quran:

... so you have to draw on the totality, this great sacramental world, this ocean in which you can swim. One verse may say one thing; another verses another thing. It takes a lifetime ... one has to grow into it. It is that *intimacy that reveals*. Even verses whose external meaning might hurt us, or verses that we might misunderstand by being *limited to the logos* interpretation, can reveal their inner beauty and meaning. Each person is destined to receive from scripture what that person is. *We will never be able to receive more from scripture than what we are ourselves*" (Borg and Mackenzie ed. 148, italicized for emphasis).

So from the above mentioned stance, the central meaning of *Tawheed* is significantly lost when it is translated as Oneness and more so when it is translated as Unity. Hence, the best we can do is to proceed with the occasional usage of Oneness or Unity as operative terms. However, in view of these translations carrying only a fraction of the highly nuanced meaning which cannot be explicated within the scope of this study, we will continue to use the term *Tawheed* as much as possible. The self-cultivation is geared for the transformation which comes with self-awareness. We are created for this (Helminski 6).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This echoes Nagatomo's explication of Yasuo and in part Dogen in the "Concluding Remarks" of chapter 3 (74-76).

The verbal “form” of the above-mentioned *Tawheed* is in the first part of the *Shahada*, which is the First Pillar of Islam. “There is *no* divinity, if it be *not* the Divinity” (italicized for emphasis) have used the upper case for the latter Divinity as here it is being referred to as the ultimate and *only* Reality. Of the various translations, this one with the emphasis on the negatives appears to be near-accurate. A Muslim formally declares himself to be a Muslim with the *Shahada*. The term means witnessing. Again, we need to keep in view that there is more to its meaning than the literal translation. To the first part of the *Shahada* is essentially the verbalization of *Tawheed*. To this is tagged “Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”. Again both the term messenger and Allah have deeper connotations. This is especially true for Allah,⁵⁸ which is much more than just “God”. Suffice it to say that the term God limits the meaning of Allah and hence the *via negative* in the *Shahada*. The declaration of the *Shahada* binds the Muslim to the practice of the Five Pillars of Islam, as practice is a vital component of “the way to the water⁵⁹” which is the meaning of the much maligned term *sharia*. In our discussion however, we will use the shorter version of “the way” or “the path”. This path structures out the practice which will save the practitioner from the pulls of the phenomenal world or *dunya*.⁶⁰ Being in the physical body is

⁵⁸ See Merton 25. Also, Murata & Chittick 40-48.

⁵⁹ Needless to say, spiritual terms and phrases are highly metaphorical. Here “water” is evidently connoting divine Grace.

⁶⁰ Literally this word means the world. One of the spiritual connotations is the world of forms and appearances, has the connotation of being illusory.

being a part of the visible dimension of creation. Thus is the danger of “forgetting” that there is more to it than just what is “seen” in the phenomenal world. The “unseen” or *ghaib* is the primary focus and is constantly referred to in the incantatory recitation of Quranic verses that serve as the accompaniment in the practice of the Five Pillars. The “unseen” also has a phenomenal aspect of which the higher includes the angelic realms. However, spiritual progression entails the struggle to stay centered to the awareness (*taqwa*) of one’s true essence (*zat*). The struggle is in the vigilance required to stay connected to the essence within for the ultimate realization into *Tawheed*. This struggle is what is the true meaning of *jihad* — another misunderstood term. Thus, in the aforementioned context, the unseen or *ghaib* is what underpins the psychological cum spiritual progression of the Muslim. The first part of the *shahada*, which is essentially is the vocalization cum verbalization of *Tawheed*, anchors one to the unseen dimension of their true self while the second part points to the role model (Muhammad) to follow (Merton et al. 18) for the actualization to the realization of *Tawheed*.

Quran, Sunnah and Sufi Sources

The sources that went into the construction of the spiritual paradigm within the Muslim psyche referred to above, is defined by the Quran and the Sunnah. The Quran is the book that Muslims believe was revealed to the unlettered Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Within the book God is speaking directly

to humanity with injunctions about the principles in the guidance for the best way to realize themselves. It validates all other such guidance that humanity has lived by since the beginning of time as all having come from Him (Allah) and calls the Quran the final book. As per the Muslim belief system, no other book will be revealed, although individuals may continue to receive messages according to their level of development.⁶¹ The Quran is both a reminder and a standard for humanity.⁶² They need to remember what has come before to them and is being reiterated in the Quran. The human tendency is not only to forget, but also to add on harmful ideas rooted in vested interests and practices which lead them further astray. As such the Quran is the standard or criterion (*furqan*) by which one can discern such insertions that need to be screened and discarded. Muhammad exemplifies by his lifestyle the way to perfection. This is called the Sunnah of the prophet or in short the Sunnah. Muhammad specifically forbade the Muslims to write down what he did and said for the danger of them becoming incorporated as the divine word or injunctions. So the Sunnah was passed down as an oral tradition until a century after his demise. It then began to be written down and came to be known as the Hadith. So at times the terms Sunnah and Hadith are used interchangeably.

⁶¹ This validates what the *walis*, or the “friends of Allah” has said or may say.

⁶² The Quran is replete with verses pertaining to this. Injunctions and allusions to reminders and about forgetting and remembering are too numerous to cite.

Regarding the above-mentioned oral-transmission, the deepest expression of Islamic thought continues to flow through the oral tradition even to this day (Burckhardt 6-70). The idea being that to be the best method to transmit the ineffable. It allows for the building up of a spiral format of metaphorical imagery so characteristic in oral discourses of the Sufi Masters. The spirit of Islam is the most pervasive in the Sufis who communicate through discourses and verses (Murata & Chittick 23-25). The structure of these discourses develops in the aforesaid spiral manner and much of the meanings are conveyed through how much a word or a syllable is stressed, intoned and repeated for reiteration in the course of the expanded development. This can be tied to the fact that the Quran means recitation and the reading of the verses involves intonations and stresses for the overall effect. The influence of the Sufis specially in delving into the depths experiencing the sacred in the Quranic letter, word, etc. place them at a station of significance as a source of spiritual discourse. The importance of the oral tradition, which is of particular importance in Bawa's teaching methodology, will be discussed at some length in the next section of this chapter.

Scheme: Worship Rites for Self-Cultivation

The scheme of the transformative process is aligned with the above-mentioned spiritual cosmic-psychic structure centered on *Tawheed*. The central

point of *Tawheed* is from where or what came forth the primordial “... profound silence of beginningless beginning ...” of all creation and to where or what all converges back into.⁶³ The relation of the Creator to the created is implicit in the famous Hadith Qudsi⁶⁴ which will be henceforth called the Hadith of the Hidden Treasure or HT. In this Hadith “God speaks in the first person: ‘I was the hidden treasure. I wanted to be known. Therefore I created the world so that I would be known’⁶⁵ (Borg & Mackenzie 151). Thus is the Creator experiencing himself out in the multiplicity of creation.⁶⁶ So, in here we see creation itself has no reality by itself only the Creator is the Real. Yet the manifested multiplicity is related as much for it being created by the Creator and so has a natural orientation to that Source of being, per se. Thus inherent in self-cultivation is the intent of humans to experience this natural orientation back to the convergence to the realization of the Real. At that point, the “different beings are extinguished in the Truth as different colors that are reabsorbed into the principal whiteness of the light” (Lings, 2004, 18).

⁶³ The process described here is of the “upswelling” of *nūr* from within the longing as the pure consciousness. The “... mysteries that had lain dormant burst from within Him as rays of sparkling luminosity ...”(Barks, et al. 44).

⁶⁴ These are oral traditions “that contain extra-Koranic divine revelations—grew along with the Sufi influence on Muslim piety (Schimmel, 1975, 221).

⁶⁵ Like all such Hadith, it is translated variously by different individuals. The “Hidden Treasure” has also been translated as “the Secret”.

Through the Hadith of the HT mentioned above, we can draw the structure involved in the scheme of self-cultivation. The creative process and the creation of the humans⁶⁷ in particular, have been structured out in a schema through various related references in the Quran and Hadith. For our references here, we will look into the aspects of the human being. From the Hadith of the HT, we can attempt to comprehend the *rūh*.⁶⁸ It is the vertical connection with the Divine.⁶⁹ The horizontal *nafs* is the ego-self that humans develop through their interaction with the phenomenal world. The vertical *ruh* and the horizontal *nafs*⁷⁰ intersect at the *qalb* or the heart.⁷¹ Again, it should be remembered that the heart is a very

⁶⁷This has been described under various contexts in the Quran, but for our specific purposes here, regarding all creation being essentially good and the shaping of the human being beginning with clay, see 32:6-7.

⁶⁸ The Quasi body in Yasuo's body scheme (Nagatomo 69) somewhat resonates conceptually with *rūh*. However Bawa brings in another element and calls it *ruhani*. In this scheme *ruhani* would be like the Quasi body and *rūh* like the "causal body" or *shen* of the Taoist tradition (Ibid. 268-269). As per Bawa the *rūh* "is not something that comes or goes. Once it has become the light, it is the Light. "You must focus on that part which becomes the light. As soon as you see God as God, then that which sees God is God" (*D & D*, 96, emphasis are mine).

⁶⁹See Burckhardt 14, 86; also Merton et al.. 24.

⁷⁰ Bawa describes *nafs* having different levels. The *nafs* "are delineated, from the lowest to the highest states of realization. The *nafs ammarah* describes the *nafs* at the lowest level, which compels a person to be motivated by base desires. It is known as the inciting *nafs*. Lit. personality ... inclination or desire which goads or incites towards evil" (*D & D*, 2003, 249).

⁷¹ As per Bawa, the heart "is the station of God. All that matters is there. This where God, the soul, and the light of wisdom exist. This is a temple of God which is formed as an atom within an atom, heart within the heart, the *qalb* within the *qalb*. It is within what is within. It cannot be destroyed by the five elements. You must understand this. It can never be destroyed" (*D&D* 96).

inadequate translation of the *qalb*. A lack of awareness of the unseen aspects of the human which at its depth is represented by the *ruh*, make humans add layers to their ego-self which is termed *nafs-al-ammarah*. This leads them to stray further and further away (Helminski, 50-54) from the realization of the secret *point* within which is the *sirr*. Herein lies the essential true self. Thus Self-cultivation begins with the faith in one's latent potentiality to transform the self into the true essence and realize into the *nūr* or *noor*, the light that radiates at the crystal sharp point of *sirr*, the secret, which is resplendent as the reflection of the Divine Absolute. Thus there is the repeated emphasis in the Quran in the unseen/invisible, *ghaib*, aspect of humans, as it is indicative of the divine intimacy. As is apparent from all this, the structure involved in this process is so ineffable in nature that it is best depicted allegorically, as Bawa did in "Seven Steps to Mystical Union" (DL 19-20). It is an example of how Sufi literature is more suited to convey concepts of self-cultivation as the experiencing into the self-transformation to attain the state of resplendent realization.

In the aforesaid state of what Bawa calls "Divine Resplendence" humans attain *clarity* to see that the "physical body ... was made to be the seat and citadel of His Divine Luminous Wisdom" (DL 19-20).⁷² This can be better understood in light of how it is informed by the Quran and the Hadith. The

⁷² The titles of Bawa's books are significant in their connotations. This particular citation was taken from *The Divine Luminous Wisdom That Dispels the Darkness*.

human was shaped and the divine breathed into by the Divine. The point of this connection was placed in the deep recesses of the *qalb*. This point is the aforesaid *sirr*, which is termed the Secret by Bawa. This connection is tied to the human being entrusted with the Creator's creation.⁷³ This makes the body a sacred vessel with the *qalb* or heart being the sanctum. Self-cultivation is initiated with the worship rites at the initial level which stay integral to it throughout. In this regard, it should be mentioned that when some groups attempt to show Sufism as separate from Islam, they try to do so by diminishing the importance of *sharia* or the ritual aspect of worship in the Islamic tradition. The performance of these rites are the necessary honing exercise that will determine the development of the ability for further spiritual progression required to accomplish responsibilities attached to the trusteeship.⁷⁴ Thus, how the rites are performed, i.e., just mere acts, or with the certitude of convictions, as well as the nature and degree of the intentionality involved, determines the levels of attainment of abilities of insight. It involves the "cutting through the veils or shedding them to generate the *qalb* which Bawa calls in the Guidebook the "citadel of Divine *noor*". As mentioned earlier, these veils are the layers the ego-self constructs in its interaction with the

⁷³ See in the Quran 2:30, 6:165, 7:74, 27:62, 33.:72, 17:70.

⁷⁴ This term was chosen due to its significance pointed out in a personal conversation with David L. Johnston, author of *Earth, Empire and Sacred Text: Muslims and Christians as Trustees of Creation* (2013). To him (who is also an ordained pastor) "trusteeship" is more profound than what biblically has been viewed to as "stewardship" which has led to the idea of domination and thus the exploitation of nature.

phenomenal world. As is apparent from the above, the creation of the human and the realization of the natural orientation to the Creator (Quran 3:83) is what delineates the structure of the scheme. Thus based on Hadith,⁷⁵ Islam is viewed in the three dimensions of *islam*, *iman* and *ihsan* which roughly is interpreted into acts, convictions and beauty respectively. It is a heuristic device that guides self-cultivation by distinguishing rites of worship being the initial phase as *islam*. This should be more than mere mechanical acts geared for the love of rewards or fear of punishments. The power of the intent in the initial phase will progress to the convictions of certitude of *iman* that assists in staying on course with the initial intent to the ultimate transformation as in *ihsan*. *Ihsan* is derived from the root word “*hsn*” which means Beauty. The connotation is analogous to what John Keats said about equating Truth with Beauty.⁷⁶ Thus is the spiritual sojourner taken to the deepest recesses to the Resplendence within. The concept of such transformation necessitates knowing what is believed to be the constituent elements of the body. As per Bawa, the body is composed of five elements of earth, fire, water, air and ether:

The elements of the body do not die. They have eternal life; they are immortal. Illusion or *maya* never dies. The senses never die; they also live forever. They transform themselves into the elements and then unite once again to take form as another body. This process is ongoing. This is what happens with the body, but the soul, wisdom, and light are connected to God. They are His property (*D & D*, 94).

⁷⁵ Popularly known among Muslims as the Hadith of Jibrail (Gabriel).

⁷⁶ Ode to the Grecian Urn.

This brings out the Real or Absolute (in the uppercase) which is the ultimate Ineffable and labelled as Allah by all Arabic speakers of the Abrahamic traditions. Herein we see the implication of Bawa viewing the transformation into the Real in terms of “man-God or God-man”.⁷⁷ This will be discussed further in chapter five when we come to Bawa’s teachings.

Hence we see that the worship rites function as centering exercises for *taqwa*⁷⁸ the awareness of that *Absolute Reality*. The purpose of the body is contextualized in all creation as being *good*⁷⁹ and functional towards the realization of humans as the most evolved in all creation, having the power to experientially realize themselves. Part of the transformative experience would be in beginning to “see” how each and every part of the creation is purposive. So practices are provided as a structure to keep the individual anchored to the ultimately invisible aspect that is the essence, *zat*. Thus the worship rites are structured into the lifestyle of the individual from the daily, monthly and annual basis in order for him to awaken fully to the “seen” and grow into the insight to the “unseen” dimensions of all creation. It can be said to have “the practical goal

⁷⁷ These are the terms used by Bawa in his discourses for transformative self-transcendence of humans.

⁷⁸ Approximate meaning of being constantly vigilant or aware.

⁷⁹ “Who made all things good which He created, and He began the creation of man from clay;” (Quran 32:7) there are many verses in similar strain affirming such essential goodness.

of enhancing the intimate correlativity between the psychological functions of the mind with the physiological functions of the body” (Yasuo xvii). The ultimate awakening will come when he/she is said to “to die before death” which is to die to the *dunya* or the phenomenal world and all the created realms. This is what is said to lead one to eventually transform and converge into *Tawheed*.

In regard to the above-mentioned worship rites, the significance of the term *abd* needs to be extrapolated. Being the *abd*, which is the shortened version of the term *abd-Allah* or the slave of Allah, is part of the transformative process as it involves *ego-effacement*. One can be the perfect *abd* at the state of complete submission or surrender and only then are all the layers constructed by the ego-self shed and the essential *self* (italized for emphasis here) experientially revealed. The word *ibadat* or service, which is the formal term for rites, is intertwined with the term *abd*. Helminski observes “service is the natural expression of the soul” (1992, 48). Needless to say, the service here goes way beyond the rites to the full connotation of profound growth through serving. Padwick sees through this relationship “*abd* has to be packed all the more fully with spiritual emotion” (4) which comes from what Chittick sees as “the mutuality of the situation” in the relationship to the Master (Merton et al. 28).

In view of the above, devotional worship in the corpus of what is viewed as the exoteric aspect of Islam, is constructed with a view to remind, direct and attune *human* to their natural orientation to *Tawheed*. The words in the devotional worship are those of praise and glorification of Allah. In fact, the daily

ritual prayers, the *salāt* is considered the first form of worship. It provides the avenue for “perpetual adoration molded by the religious form” (Burckhardt 10). There is much significance attached to the vocalization of the Quranic verses involved in the rites of practice. These are forms of praising, glorifying, invoking peace upon Allah, and the whole range of His creation termed as *salāms*, *salawāt* etc. All such offerings of praise to Allah according to Bawa, come “... back to you as your own treasure, your own wealth. The *salāms* and the *salawāt* you offer come back to you and light up your own face and heart. This is the reason that the *salawat* is considered to be something very exalted” (*D & D* 253-254).⁸⁰

Sufism

“Today Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is a name without a reality

It was once a reality without a name”

Each age relates to the quote above as per the needs of their times. This statement becomes clearer from what Ibn Khaldun remarks “...that in the first three generations of Islam mysticism was too general to have a special name. But ‘when worldliness spread and men tended to become more and more bound up with the ties of this life, those who dedicated themselves to the worship of

⁸⁰ This is Sufistic expression of various verses in the Quran as in 63:9.

God were distinguished from the rest by the title of Sufis.”⁸¹ In fact the term “Sufism” is a Western construct.⁸² The aforesaid statement appears to be truer today than at the time it was stated by the mediaval Sufi writer. The term Sufism is prevalent in the Western world to the point of separating it from Islam, This very fact appears to have determined the usage by the contemporary Western world. The academic world may have a more accurate perspective about it being an esoteric aspect of Islam due to authors such as Schimmel calling it “the inner dimension of Islam”. However, what appears to be lacking in a significant group, particularly in the West, is the understanding that the exoteric aspect of Islam is very integral to this “inner dimension”. Many in the larger western world appears to have gone to such extremes as to viewing it as a system independent of Islam. Here we will take a brief overview of the development of Sufism from the Near East. As all the academics are pointing out, contrary to the general belief Islam was spread by the Sufis and not by the sword.⁸³ Bawa’s teachings are a specific example of that.

⁸¹ Martin Ling’s *What is Sufism?*, (1975), 45.

⁸² See <<http://abwoon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/LanguagesofExp.pdf>>

⁸³ Some tend to argue that this may be true for some conquered regions but not all. The response to those are that if after ruling Spain for almost a millennium, the Muslims there were so negligible that Isabella and Ferdinand could expel or force them to conversion to Christianity, then it is evident that there were no significant number of conversions in the general populace. The practice of Islam in the Balkans has all the evidences of having been derived from Sufi masters. Not surprisingly some of these masters are said to have ventured to those regions before the Ottoman invasions—as has been the case in the easternmost region of India (see Chapter Four).

However, there are certain characteristics that define these Sufi teachers. In this regard, it is important to mention here that Bawa appears to belong to a certain group who have been studied only in the last few decades. The significance of Bawa being assigned to this particular group will become apparent in chapter four which will contextualize Bawa and situate him to the tradition that has been recognized by researchers very recently.⁸⁴ This group of folk Sufis did their work in the easternmost —at one time a virtually inaccessible — region of the Indian subcontinent. The reason the Sufis of this region are the choice for our analysis in chapter four, is their being Sufis who incorporated the local wisdom lore in their teachings. Bawa's teachings follow a similar pattern. The purpose of that chapter will be to provide more of a very vital orientation to an aspect of Sufism that brings in all wisdom since the creation as Islam. The full comprehension of this is vital to grasp the essential inclusiveness so pervasively demonstrated in Bawa's teachings. The inherent inter-religiosity in Bawa's teachings is part of a tradition very much in accord with Islam, which Murata and Chittick had termed as "lower case islam".

As stated earlier, Sufism is purported to be a reality without a name at the time of the prophet Muhammad and the subsequent decades after him. At that time it was more the rule of people living out the divine word that had been revealed to them through the prophet. We see the parallel to this in the early

⁸⁴ Nile Green argues that Sufism is better understood through "the rubric of 'tradition' rather than 'mysticism'". See *Sufism: A Global History*, xi.

Christians. In all probability, this has been so with the early followers of all great guides from ancient time onwards. There are various theories as to where the word Sufi is said to be derived from. It is said to be derived from the word *safa* which means purity. This is in accord with the idea of the mystical realization. Another version views it being derived from the word *suuf* which means wool. This due to their presumably having donned woolen garbs. Only the earliest ones apparently were attired in that manner. This garb, and aspects of their lifestyle appear to put them as a continuation of the tradition of the Christian desert fathers. However, soon the distinct characteristics which set them apart from their fellow mystics of other traditions became apparent. The contrast was more with the tradition of Christianity as that was the immediate preceding tradition in the Near East. The commonality the earlier Muslim mystics shared with their Christian counterparts was in their being essentially ascetic recluses. After the tradition of the desert fathers, the notable Christian mystics appear during the medieval period. In Chapter one we already discussed how the latter group of notable Christian mystics who flowered during the medieval period were different from the Muslim ones. Again, in short, they were distinctively different as they belonged to an institutionalized order in their esoteric venture. Christianity had become highly institutionalized by this time.

As for the mysticism in the Islamic tradition, one has to resort to the Sufi literature that is replete with tales of the *Walis* or “Friends of God”.⁸⁵ They were men and women of a sublime spiritual stature earned by the supreme sacrifice of their selves or to be more specific their lower selves, *nafs*. This sacrifice at the most basic level was evident in their complete disregard for any worldly pleasure — be it material or otherwise. They were figures defined by an ardent drive to know to love, to serve, and through those to disappear in the ultimate light of the Divine. What they said and what they did is what the later Sufis drew upon to construct that some view as a Sufi doctrine.⁸⁶

So, Sufism is the term applied to the mystical strain in Islam. The appropriateness of both the terms of Sufism and mysticism may be debatable in context of the content it entails. For the purposes of discussion here, however, both the term of Sufism and mysticism will be accepted interchangeably at times for operative functionality. This definition of Sufism will refer to the experiences — and the knowledge thereof — that is left as a legacy by those who were referred to by posterity as *walis* or friends of God.

The definitions of Sufism is drawn from a later group of Sufi scribes. Their transcriptions of the lore surrounding each of the earliest Sufis was the eventual

⁸⁵ This word is derived from the Quran and is shortened from *wali-Allah* or Friends of Allah.

⁸⁶ From a Sufi viewpoint there can be no such doctrine. It is essentially apophatic.

source for the formulation of the classical Sufi treatises. Such lore was based on the orally passed down revered perceptions of those that had encountered these personages and had experienced their transformative presences. Notable is the fact that their teachings always were oral discourses. So the aforesaid latter writing hinged on these sayings, their acts, and the deeds and of these figures as archetypal anchoring.

Here we will attempt to analyze how this concept fits in with the overall Sufi perspective. As scholars now generally agree upon, the Sufi perspective has to be contextualized as an enhanced experiential aspect within the framework of Islam. Hence the central apex of *Tawheed* rules the thought, the intent and the act of Sufis. The Sufis' focus is the journey to an experiential awareness to the Source where the process begins and ends (Hujwiri 15). Sufis are those who embark with a conscious intent of the cultivation to connect to their essential selves for transformation. Thus it involves the struggle to be in an intense state of awareness of the essential self at all times while being engaged in servitude. The glory is in servitude, being the slave, *abd*. Inherent in *abd* is the complete disappearance of the ego self.

The challenge in this struggle is to be enabled to actually see beyond the apparent multiplicity of creation to the single Creator. Thus terms that pervade all traditions come into play, transformation comes with the ultimate in-sight — to be awakened. It is to be in the Light — en-lightened. Such terms borrowed from Eastern traditions like Buddhism or any other wisdom folklore and other literature

on mysticism also apply to Sufism. The point of “enlightenment” is being in the white light by tracing the spectrum of the colored lights to the Source. In Sufi terminology, the veil is what *we set up by the lack of awareness* (emphasis are mine). The more we get caught up in the world of appearances, the more “veiled off” we are. Hence from this perspective, being veiled off is not being experientially aware of the Source Light.

It follows therefore, in tracing the above-mentioned metaphor, that in being veiled off, one may have the knowledge of the white light, but such knowledge of that separation itself—of being veiled off—entails duality. Hence “the shedding of veils” is a significant part of Sufi terminology. Going back to tracing the metaphor, experiencing the colored lights with an awareness of the white Source light brings in the key words implicit in the relationship to God in the Sufi lexicon — that He/She is to fear, to love, and to know.⁸⁷ It should be noted that “the fear” is of not being close enough to God. As opposed to the fear of the created, this fear makes one go towards Creator. The glory is in serving.

As is evident, unlike the Christian medieval mystics working within a highly institutionalized system, famous Sufis of the early years of the Islamic tradition remained individual seekers. In this study I have referred to them as the Sufis of yore. Based on the legends and lore surrounding their life and teachings, the Sufi doctrine developed in the later generations. Eventually over the last few centuries, Sufis were the sages recognized as spiritual teachers who gained

⁸⁷ See Seyyed Nasr in Borg and Machenzie (ed.) *God in 2000*, 80-81.

followers and thus the teacher/student paradigm of the sheikh/disciple, murshed/mureed, etc. evolved.

Although the Sufi orders were very unlike the orders in Christianity, which needed to be sanctioned by the hierarchical institutionalized church, the existential reality was that within the orders themselves some form of duty-based structure did evolve for functioning in the environment, but there was no institutional referent point of accountability. Thus some of the orders formed are the Naqsbandiyas, the Chistiyas, the Qadiriya, etc. Throughout the centuries across regions when followers gather around teachers like Bawa, the order they profess to be is more of a emotive/attributive connective terminology than an actual institutional one. For example, Bawa's followers state being of the "Qadiriya tariqa". There are countless Qadiriya tariqas across the globe and yet they are not aware of each other and neither does it matter to any of them as it is a non-factor in their self-cultivation.

As mentioned before, the earliest Sufis shared characteristics with the Christian desert fathers. They were recluses whose integrated lives made their physical travels a part of their spiritual journey to Gnosticism. They were engaged with society with very distinctive unorthodox teaching tools. In this regard, it is important to remember that the prevalent word in Islam for such seeking is *ma'arifa* from the word *a'rif* to know. Evidently the term gnosticism appears to be a better translation than any other term in English. Thus, in their search for the divine each had a distinctive pathway. Again, for them, God, is to

fear , to love and to know It is tied to the awe and the intimacy that is evoked in the Quran⁸⁸. These two aspects are equivalent to the masculine and the feminine, respectively, in the divine. The awe and majesty is the *jalla* and the intimacy is in the love of the Beauty or *Jamal*. The fear is not being close enough and to strive for that proximity to the point of disappearing completely in it. So, the way to progress through knowing or loving to the point of seeing “nothing but God”.⁸⁹ The more ardent the love, the more intense is the striving to know the Beloved. These are all inextricably connected. There is an undergirding of love in so much as we want to know fully the Beloved to the point of totally identifying with it. Again, the more we know the nature of divine the more we love and so the more the fear of distancing from it. The striving is to know more the Beloved. Thus knowing deepens the love to want to disappear in it so that any distance that separates intensifies the striving to be closer.

Going back to the Sufis of yore, their self-denying lifestyle was the epitome of ego-effacement which became embedded in the Muslim psyche through legends and lore. Their teachings passed down through the oral tradition of spiritual folk lore. When at latter time, Sufism began to be a name

⁸⁸ See Michael Sells *Early Islamic Mysticism* 1996, 108. Regarding *fuad*, & *qalb*, the former is said to be [the pericardium,]. *Fuad* has more to do with ardor, motion, pulsation, etc.. See William Lane’s *An Arabic English Lexicon*, 2323.

⁸⁹ Part of the declaration of faith. This is another version of the translation of the *shahada*. It is considered to be the verbalization of *Tawheed* which is considered as the first pillar of Islam.

without a reality, these were the figures around whom the later Sufis began to build their doctrines. The distance of time from the earlier sages and the turn to materialism came in the train of the expansion of the Muslim empire and the prosperity that followed. This was much to the dismay of the truth seekers. Needless to say their presence became prickly for the ruling class. Their teachings bespoke of a model of life that implicitly critiqued the luxurious lifestyle of the ruling class. What followed was the patronage of a legalistic theologians group (Ulemas) whose focus appeared to be more with the safer arena of hermeneutics relevant to public morals and ritual practices of the faith. As human nature would have it, patronage translated into the beneficiaries pandering the benefactors. This put the Ulamas at odds with the Sufis who abided by the singularity of focus of being the slave of Allah only. This discord served the rulers well and resulted in the Sufis gradually going underground. Nevertheless, as an analysis of Bawa's teachings will later illustrate, lore is so primal to human nature that the mystical aspect of the faith prevailed among the masses through the sages of yore and through the rapturous tales of ecstasy of many of the latter figures like Hallaj and Bistami.

The above-mentioned discord between the rulers and the Sufis tends to give the impression that the latter are world denying. Nothing could be further from the truth. To understand the Sufi viewpoint one has to resort to the aforesaid Hadith Qudsi of the Hidden Treasure (HT) and fathom the full import of God saying 'I was the hidden treasure. I wanted to be known. Therefore I created

the world so that I would be known'. So, the Muslim mystic's journey is approached with the striving for a deeper understanding of the Divine by experiencing the creation. Creation was part of "*sifat*". The focus was experiencing all as the manifestation of the Divine while constantly being vigilant that these manifestations have been set forth as examples. So, to get attached to anything related to the created manifestations is to lose sight of the ultimate truth. Metaphorically speaking, it is tracing the return of the spiraled out created back to the Source Creator without ever losing sight of the Source at any time. In other words it is a realization to Tawheed — to the no-thingness of that. As a palpable means to the experiential knowledge of the Divine Thus is Muslim mysticism palpably life affirming.

So the spiritual seeking of the Muslim mystic is diving into the creation to seek the Divine. It appears to be pantheistic at times and Monistic at other, but for the fact that it is centered on the truth of Tawheed. So it is deeply world-affirming in striving to know the creator through the creation. The key words relevant to this prevalent in the Sufi terminology are *zat* and *sifat*. *Zat* is the essence and *sifat* is the attribute. The *zat* is the unknowable secret that is hidden away within and can be realized by *taqwa* while experiencing *sifat*. *Taqwa* is awareness. It is more of a constant vigilance specifically to the idea of truth of Tawheed that one can only realize into with the constant cultivation. The *sifat*, a term that is adjectival and hence connotative of description, is the term applied to creation. So despite the apparent contradictions in the creative

manifestations, to quote Julian of Norwich “all manner of thing is good”.

Experiencing the apparently endless multiplicity of *sifat* with the acute awareness of the ultimate convergence of all to a single point of the truth of Tawheed is the process of self-cultivation of the spiritual sojourner. That *taqwa* or constant awareness of the truth of Tawheed sets them apart from others. Their striving for the ultimate realization is going beyond the duality in monotheism when there is no separation between the worshipper and the worshipped. To be the slave is to be completely eliminated and annihilated and being nothing is to be in the nothingness to the realization of *Tawheed*.

In the light of the above, we have to review and be familiar with some of the key Sufi terms and concepts. Sufi inspirations are drawn from the Quran and the Hadith Qudsi. As mentioned above, striving to be the perfect slave is the ideal. This entails poverty or *faqir*⁹⁰ in the deepest sense. It is tied to the total elimination of the ego which is so inextricably tied with love, *hub*, which is connected to the highest state of *ihsan*, or compassion, and thus to Beauty—as this term is derived from the root word of *hsn* meaning Beauty. Love propels the heart to pulsate in the search and so we have the primacy of the heart in this search. The heart of *qalb* is the *fuad*.⁹¹ Thus does the spectrum of awe and intimacy shift and pulsate to be the same.

⁹⁰ In fact a reverential prevalent term for Sufis among the masses is “*faqir*”, the poor.

⁹¹ The root verb for *fuad*, which means heart, is verb *fa'ada* means burning or a flame. Thus it brings in profound emotive layers. Also, Sells reference to the

Further attempts to unpack the above will entail necessary repetition. So, to reiterate, mystical realization entails getting the ego-self out of the way. Hence, the key ideas of inherent in *abd* is to “To Serve, Love, Know” God. Ego effacement as opposed to ego gratification involves service through continual surrendering. It needs to be noted that this means to serve one’s essence or highest self (Helminski 48). Thus it is the desire to connect to that Source that inextricably connects it to Love is thus tied to the voluntary striving to surrender. It follows thereof, that the more one loves the more one knows and thus the Hadith Qudsi, “Know thyself to know thy lord.” Thus, inherent here is the Hadith of Gabriel that delineates the process of progression through the concepts of *Islam*, *Iman*, *Ihsan*⁹².

Islam is the cut out exoteric path of exercise necessary to keep one balanced to maintain the cosmic balance of creation. Undergirding that exercise with the certitude or *iman* entails the *taqwa*, the underlying awareness of the faith. This eventually brings in the actual certitude, thus priming one to allow one

Quran 53:1-12 — particularly to the ayat 11 —is as per Sells the “affirmation (that) becomes a proof text” (Sells (1996) 35) for the claim of the primacy of the heart. In *The Message of the Quran* Muhammad Asad translated it as “intuitive perception (the “vision of the heart”) of what is normally not perceptible”.

⁹² This aforementioned process of progression also ties in with the chapter “Najm” in the Quran.

to transcend to the next phase, to transform into glimpsing the highest *Ihsan* or Compassionate Beauty.⁹³

The above-mentioned transformation has been approximated by Helminski as when “ones individuality can be so centered in Spirit, that it becomes a subtle expansive and healing presence” (48). To comprehend this would be to go into Jungian depth psychology of individuation. However, Jung may have couched the process of progression to make it acceptable to his science-obsessed audience, the procession to such progression begins when we are aware to what Helminski call the difference between our conscious mind and our “essential self” (13). A constant awareness of that essential self or spirit and the cultivation to serve, love and know brings in the transformation.

The Spirit is everywhere to be found (the HT) but is concentrated in the human heart. Hence the importance of *taqwa*, which can be translated as vigilance or awareness. It is the awareness of the spark within that results in such vigilant effort to stay connected with it. Through such effort ensues the highly nuanced growth of expanded but focused sensitivity as per the degree of the growth to our own state based on our intent (Helminski 14, 18-20).

⁹³ It is important to remember that terms such as these are laden with so much mystical connotation that we can only attempt to an approximation of meanings. Neither the term “compassion” nor the term “beauty” will scratch even the surface meaning of this term.

As is apparent in the attempt to trace the journey of the Sufi, the ineffable nature of Sufism is the reason that authors like Ann Marie Schimmel made their work anecdotally rich. They are a testament to the fact that a study of Sufism inevitably requires a modicum of attempt to get a direct apprehension of the medium with which the Sufis imparted their experiences. Here we are going to analyze why this kind of endeavor is so essential to understand Sufism.

For the aforesaid analysis, we need to begin with the concept of the “*wali*” as well as “*qutb*”⁹⁴ who come in inevitably when discussing the stature of individuals who appear to have such insight into the spiritual realm. These individuals become important in the context of the discussion of the relation of roles between them and the prophets. From the Sufi perspective, the prophets came primarily to convey the word of God to guide humanity. This involved the ethical/moral guidelines that establish order. Based on those guidelines the Prophet Muhammad’s role was to model the discipline involved in the guided path to perfection. Again, from the Sufi perspective it appears there are other layers to the prophetic role that may not be apparent to the average person (Schimmel, 213-227). The “*ghaib*” or invisible or unseen realm being so pervasive a term in the Quran, appears to offer the trajectory for Sufis to expand in that role of the prophet. Hence the frequent resort to Hadith Qudsi in Sufism.

⁹⁴ *Wali* is the shortened term for *wali-Allah* which means friend of Allah. A *qutb* is considered the spiritual axis. “The pole of a period’ ... This pole is often unknown to most spiritual men” (Burckhardt 70, 112). Also see Chittick’s *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 371.

To explicate this we can borrow the concept of the Maslow's pyramid and convert or collapse it to a mixed metaphor of a circular figure with the periphery equivalent to the base of the pyramid to represent both going to the center within and an apical ascension. So, the more one ascends the more one goes nearer to the center of the circle so metaphorically the deeper one gets into the ocean of the "*ghaib*". This is the "way inward" to the "heart" which is the "dwelling place of God" (Schimmel, 1975, 190). This collapsing of Maslow's pyramid converts the ascension to a pull to the center. This will perhaps help to understand the other layers the Sufis see in the role played by the prophet. The ones on a spiritual quest will ascend from the base of the pyramid or go deeper from the periphery to the center of the circle. Thus the *Mi'raj*⁹⁵ is so potent a metaphor for the human soul's progression for the Sufis. So by putting the role of the prophet in context of the converted Maslow's pyramid, the prophet is modeling for both the average man and the ones on spiritual quest. The latter may gain the stature of *walis* to the followers due to the inspirational experiential realms they are able to traverse. Now, as Green's book outlines, the Sufi tradition appears to have begun by being built around such early figures as Rabia al Adawiyya. Tales told and passed on and added to by latter figures, i.e. Attar, came eventually to be systematized into a corpus — not to speak of the institutionalization of the sheikh and the followers. The common stream that runs through this development are

⁹⁵ As per authors like Michael Sells, this word is derived from the depiction of the prophet Muhammad's ascension to the Divine presence. See *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 48-54.

the discourses. These figures told tales and invoked verses. Evidently, their experiences of the “unseen” invisible realms can only be revealed in rich metaphors. So, significantly, like a running stream, it stays oral. It appears that it is always the followers who tried to write down what the sheiks had said and in doing so they also undertook the very difficult task of imparting what they experienced in the course of the discourses.

So, it follows that to even begin to understand the Sufi tradition requires the flavoring and tasting no matter in whatever morsels it is provided as Schimmel attempted to do.⁹⁶

Individuals like Bawa appear to be defined most by their deep compassion as is testified by all those who encountered him. He can be categorized with the simple holy men who are enshrined in simple tombs in the easternmost parts of the Indian subcontinent. Due to Bawa’s apparent shared tradition with them, chapter 4 has been devoted to these folk sages. They have generally remained unknown beyond those spheres where they wrought the transformations. Unlike the well-known Sufi sheikhs of northern India,⁹⁷ these holy men live on in the

⁹⁶ Her writings on Sufism are anecdotally rich. This stands true for many other writers like her who have delved into the works of Sufis, i.e., Michael Sells.

⁹⁷ The shrines of the saints in North India are mostly elaborate structures. These structures are due to the rulers and the powerful being devotees of these saints. The structures they built are also tourist sites due to their evocative architecture. One example is the one in Fatehpur Shikri. The fame of such saints had crossed geographical boundaries as rulers and nobility went to them to ask for their blessings. They communicated in Persian which was the court language of India’s Muslim rulers. Whereas, the sages that are aligned with Bawa in this

memory of only the locals near their tombs through the legend and lore about the transformation that these men wrought in the lives of those simple folks. These figures can be said to be the ones who in encountering the “divine self-disclosure” had “an opening of the heart toward infinite wisdom” (Chittick, 1989, 30).

The journey of such Sufi mystics takes on a deeper level of discipline with actions that go beyond what the average Muslim does. Therefore, they are propelled by an inner drive into a process of progression that entails a discipline that runs deeper than the rituals set up in normative Islam. More importantly, for the purpose of our discussions here, their actions, particularly their actions in service of humanity, transcends that of the average person. It needs to be reiterated again the vital importance of servitude for a Muslim is inherent in the term “*abd*”. It is the shortened version of “*abdullah*” which, again, means “slave of Allah”. It is only in the achievement of that state that one can transcend the ego self and thus begin the process of transformation.⁹⁸

paper, communicated in the vernacular. Western scholarship on Sufism has barely begun to study such vernacular works in the East and South of the Indian sub-continent.

⁹⁸ It is difficult for some in the West to comprehend the full significance of the term *abd*. It does appear that they view it with the lens of slavery in the USA. Also the “surrendering” or “submission” in Islam appears to be misunderstood due to a connection with the image of warfare. One has to take these terms in context of inner growth where being a slave is being infinitesimal to merge into the expansion of the infinity — to disappear to the phenomenal is the to awaken to the Real, per se.

Thus the common strain of the stories starts with mystics setting out for distant climes as a path to further their progression in the process of their self-cultivation. The nature of their setting forth for the unknown with absolute faith bespeaks of their having achieved a level of spiritual state that is termed as *Tawakkul* in Islam. As Schimmel puts it “*Tawheed* demands *Tawakkul*’ and describes it to mean “realized *Tawheed*” (1975, 119). *Tawakkul* is equivalent to what Underhill describes as “to cease all conscious, anxious striving and pushing ... asking nothing, seeking nothing, but with your doors flung wide open towards God”. The spiritual wayfarers began thus.

The spiritual state of the aforesaid mystics and their methods also provide evidence of their having expanded into what Murata and Chittick termed as the aforementioned lower cased “islam”. Thus, wherever these mystics went, they could discern the essence and connect with that as “islam”, thus expand into the inherent inter-religiosity therein. This connection thus was in turn reciprocated with the trust of those they encountered. Therein, perhaps, lies the reason for the receptivity for the guidance they provided. Metaphorically speaking, those mystics discerned the light in the beliefs of those they encountered and engaged with that luminosity and through the expanded radiance the mystics emanated their message. Hence, the transformation of those around them is more of an expansion than a conversion as is generally understood by orthodox groups.

The above mentioned method engendered from a spiritual state that is achieved through self-cultivation. Mysticism as understood generally, with Sufism

being no exception, involves the elimination of the ego through such self-cultivation. Sufi tales depict this process as a journey. The interiority of this journey invests it with the mystical dimension. The Muslims who choose to undertake it are termed as the wayfarers. In the words of Bawa, it entails the demolition of the “dogs of desire” and chaining the “monkey mind”.⁹⁹

For the Sufi, the above-mentioned process is vital to cut away the veils of vanity that the arrogance of ego puts up, and arrive at the clarity of the truth of *Tawheed*. For the purpose of our discussion/analysis/study here, we will center on the aforesaid “interiority” and the mystics as “wayfarers” travelling in the fulfillment of the intent to remain engaged in the process. Metaphorically speaking, this process of progression diffuses the inner light to emanate outwards and benefits those encountered on the way by encircling them within it.

As mentioned before, the Sufi practices go beyond the given rituals to a more rigorous discipline for the realization of the Ultimate (Hujwiri 13-14). That realization is said to be in the complete effacement of the ego to become a “mirror” that is constantly polished, (Schimmel 187-188; Hujwiri 5) to clearly reflect the only Reality, the Truth or *huq*. This state is what Underhill describes as “the doors of perception are cleansed and everything appears as it is” (47).

Furthermore, as Schimmel points out, this kind of knowledge converges into the knowing of the self. Again, this “self” emerges when one is free of the

⁹⁹ The expressions are prevalent in the *Puranas* and Bawa’s discourses are peppered with them.

ego. The arrogance of the ego is what builds up the mountain of that self which in the Quran is depicted pervasively as the *nafs*. So the discovery is of the secret of the real self, called the *sirr*, which is all along the “point”¹⁰⁰ of divine Truth that is within the innermost heart (Schimmel 192), but is veiled away by the build-up of the vanity of the ego (Hujwiri 9). This brings us to the importance of the heart or *qalb* in the Sufi doctrine. The heart is the where the spark of the divine revelation, *sirr*, is (Schimmel 192) which connects us to the ultimate reality of the Divine. It also brings in the difference between intellectual and intuitive knowledge and the latter being more functional in “real learning”¹⁰¹ for true development and progression. Intuitive knowledge is inextricably tied in with experience. Thus, is mysticism essentially experiential and the heart being the seat of the *sirr* is infused with compassion. So, the Sufi path being essentially experiential, the focus is to realize God. The final state in this process is that of *fana*, which elevates the seeker to being the *wali* or friend of God. One of them may be what the world views as the *qutb* or adepts or “pole” of the world. Bawa is viewed by his followers as a *qutb*.¹⁰² One of their purposes is to guide humans

¹⁰⁰ Bawa calls it variously “The Point, “The True Secret of the Heart”, “*sirr*”, etc.

¹⁰¹ Muhaiyyaddeen. Unpublished transcript of audio tape, March 13, 1976 , 11-14. Also p. 24 where Bawa advises to “throw the book away” for real learning.

¹⁰² <<http://www.bmf.org>>

to their true essence. Bawa's expression for that state when human beings are in their true essence is man-God, God-man, son of God, etc....¹⁰³

¹⁰³ To describe this state Bawa also puns with the sun metaphor , sun/son, drawing on the Christian tradition of Jesus as the son of God.

CHAPTER 3

USA

Introduction

This chapter explores the landscape of the USA through the lens of the factors that made its soil receptive to Bawa's teachings. Bawa came to America in 1971. By the Seventies the counter-culture movement of the Sixties had turned completely from "slogans to mantras". This is the title of the book in which Kent (2001) analyzed how the movement against the Vietnam War and the disillusionment with the establishment catalyzed into a quest for the ineffable.

This chapter is premised on freedom and diversity that became integral to the unconscious growth of the descendants of the pioneers who ventured to virgin soils ready to confront the unknown. As such, what is now termed as the New Religious Movements (NRMs) are in fact essential to the spirit of a land peopled by those who dared to cross oceans in their quest. The focus of this chapter is the eventual recognition of the Americans of their entrapment in the apparent ocean of *maya* in their apparent wealth of materiality. Thus began the turn to the freedom of the ineffable. Concepts from the Eastern faith traditions such as *maya* and *karma* which is part of the mainstream vocabulary now, was in fact imported due to the Sixties and Seventies youths' turn to the East in their spiritual quest.

A nation that was engendered on the spirit of freedom and established in a landscape that breathed of it, also grew increasingly diverse in all domains. What was bound to evolve is a culture of pretzels and pizza, from opposing cultures in Europe such as Germany and Italy, respectively. Added to this later were the much loved falafels and tacos and tortillas from the Middle East, Mexico and the land of the Latinos. Shifting from food for the stomach to the food for the soul, the socio-cultural history of this land is showing that each group has eventually been able to not only carve out a space for themselves, but their proximity has unconsciously influenced their environment and those living there.¹⁰⁴ There is a reason why the Jews who were purported to be a persecuted race for almost two thousand years in Europe became the most influential in the USA in little more than a century. Proximity begets familiarization, which eventually brings tolerance. Due to globalization, this is a phenomenon that is going beyond the USA now. However, for our study here we will see that it is this new world which has actually led the world in syncretism, per se. It started off with Christianity, with each group going off and creating a new denomination with the result that the USA has the largest number of Christian denominations. Added to that was the refugees coming in from the Asian regions affected by the proxy wars that the USA engaged in during the Cold War. Similar turmoil in South America—as well as desire for economic freedom—brought in the South

¹⁰⁴ See Hinnells edited *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, (2005), 2-3.

Americans with their unique brand of Catholicism. The steady flow of immigrants from the Middle East and South Asia added to the mix of religion and culture. The latter group brought a significant increase of Muslims in America. However, they remained unnoticed at that time. So, there was no palpable prejudice against them in pre 9/11 USA. Needless to say, when Bawa came to America in 1971, there was a near-total absence of familiarity with Islamic terms, which made the Muslims just another exotic “other”.

Freedom

The forefathers of the present inhabitants of the USA were essentially free spirits. They ventured out at great risks to this unknown “new world,” initially for freedom from religious persecution. Overtime it became freedom from other forms of oppressions—be it political or economic. The pioneering spirit of those who spread out in this vast landscape to set down roots undoubtedly passed on that love of freedom that burst forth in the counter-culture movement of the Sixties and Seventies. What began as an antiwar movement eventually turned to an anti-establishment one. It thus brought in a spirit of rebellion against all institutions including the religious ones. Thus it came to be defined as the spiritual quest of an age. No doubt the pinnacle of material success achieved brought in the realization that there is more to life than just fulfilling material needs. Hence the free spirited descendants of those free spirited pioneering

forefathers rebelled against all the materiality that their environment had come to represent and turned to the East in their yet undefined quest.

Historically America was the “new world”. So when it began to be peopled by those of the “old world”, the encounter brought in unique dynamics that translated into the social forces that shaped the religious changes in this land. First, one has to consider the mental make-up of the group who dared to cross the ocean to an unfamiliar territory to build a new life. Such mettle which defined them initially, was later toughened even more by the environment where they had to fight the elements—that too so unfamiliar at times—to eke out a living.

In the context of the above, our focus here is to analyze the features that went into the formation of the society in which these pioneering spirits evolved and the forces that grew to contribute to the religious changes that are so unique to this land. In regard to religion, it needs to be remembered that the first group of recorded pioneers were known as the Pilgrims. They were Puritans who set out to save themselves from persecution in England. This group settled in the North East region of the now USA. The largest eventual settlement was in Virginia. They were Anglicans who brought with them a modicum of the structural hierarchy with them. However, due to practicality, there was never an adequate number of priests to implement the hierarchy they came from. This was the reality across the board for all the denominations. The Roman Catholics, who were the majority in Maryland, also could not have the full measure of their highly structured church. So after the initial group cohesion necessitated for survival in

a strange clime, when the immigrants adjusted to their environment, one can assess the growth of individuality in their development with the infinite spaces to roam and no hierarchical church to monitor their morality. So the scattered population grew in a diverse manner. The comparatively urban having a psychological attachment to a church, while the ones spread out living in isolation in the vast landscape as the fabled frontiersman were defined more by a defiant free spirit. The distance between the small groups of settlements meant that each of them developed independently. As noted above, such independence was accentuated even more in the isolated ones at the frontier. Probably therein lies the reason that the USA has such countless Christian denominations.

Due to the aforementioned dearth of ministers, the church encouraged personal piety, so reading the Bible at home was a practice that contributed to the book being subjected to diverse interpretation. This was again reflected in subsequent development. So historically, in the context of religion, we see two major developments in America. The first is called the First Great Awakening in the eighteenth century. This period was marked by the fiery fervor of individual preachers who inspired those they encountered and preached against the established church. The environment could be said to have fostered that fiercely free spirit that went against the Calvinistic dictum and believed in a will that can overcome all odds. It was as if the pioneering spirit got channeled into religion. In Virginia there was a tension between the Anglicans with their under tug to the hierarchy of England and the Deists, to whom belonged the founding the fathers

like Jefferson and Madison. As is evident, it was the latter's free spirit that informed the American Revolution and in the Patriots 1786 de-established the Anglican Church in Virginia.

The Second Great Awakening was in the nineteenth century and can be said to be seeded by the first at the end of the eighteenth century. This was marked by what is known as the "camp meetings". We can analyze this development in the light of Durkheim's functionalism, in particular the group "effervescence". The human need for company probably led to the desire to commune more with fellow souls. So sites were chosen for religious gatherings. Families in wagons came there and set down camp for days to listen to inspiring sermons. These meetings were infused with the Evangelism and had an egalitarian thrust that has left a lasting legacy to this day. We can relate this to have bearings on our particular study here. In hindsight it can be viewed as the evolution of a mindset that allowed for the advent of Gurus of the Seventies form their bodies of followers here.

As mentioned above, there was always an undercurrent stream of spirituality running through the inhabitants of a land whose awe inspiring naturescape could have very well contributed to the development of such psyche. Before coming to the great shift in this psyche in recent times, it needs to be mentioned, that one group that claims to be Christian, but is significantly large to be noticed is the Church of the Latter Day Saints commonly known as the Mormons. Founded by Joseph Smith in upstate New York 1830, they were

hounded out of there and eventually settled in Utah. The other Christian group that is distinctive in their difference are the Jehovah 's Witness founded by Charles Taze Russell, in 1872. The denominational struggle for regions resulted in the dominance of different groups in different areas. For example, the vast Mid-West, the Bible Belt, are Lutherans. The South is Baptist. Historically the ruling elites being Anglicans, Baptists spread among the poor whites to which the African slaves converted to as well. There is an enclave of Roman Catholics in Louisiana—legacy of the French there. The South West is the Latin American Catholic, due to the proximity of that region and the continual flow of immigrants from there. Most of the other regions are Methodists, Presbyterians or Episcopalians. Needless to say, the metropolitan areas being cosmopolitan has significant number of Jews and Muslims living there as per the growth of immigrants.¹⁰⁵

In regard to our study here, our focus is on the significant shift in religious consciousness in the youth in the USA that happened in the Sixties and Seventies. As scholars like Schulman and Slocum-Schaffer described, these were turbulent times at many levels. Marked by economic prosperity, there was yet an undercurrent of fear. This was due to the cold war and the threat of a nuclear attack resulted in a pervasive fear of apocalyptic destruction. Paradoxically, the capitalist society had reached its peak in prosperity to the point

¹⁰⁵ This distribution is cursory to say the least and may not reflect the actual reality in many instances.

that wealth was deified. As a result, the society had become so materialistic that to some of the idealists with a reflective mindset viewed the establishment as instrumental in the death of the spirit. The youth being less tainted by materialism, began to view organized religion as part of that establishment. The idealism of the youth that had found the figure of a young president, John F. Kennedy, to channel their aspirations into, had it dashed to pieces with his assassination. All the causes that they took up such as the Civil Rights Movement, appeared to end up in ashes with further killings like that of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. The other ongoing threat was that of being drafted into the senseless proxy wars fought by a government they felt more and more estranged from. This war in Vietnam came home to them in the new ubiquitous television where they witnessed their own kind killing innocent civilians in an alien land. The Seventies saw the return of the Vietnam vets traumatized and burdened with guilt returning home only to be greeted with hostility. These vets turned to the drugs that was part of the counter culture of the rebellious Sixties. The Sixties rebellious spirit had made way for the advent of rock music, drugs, free sex, etc. into the social scene. The spiritual vacuum felt by the youth made them turn to the East. That quest resulted in leaving families and travelling to the East. Most of it resulted in just more drugs and the "liberation" defined mostly by what appeared to be a downward spiral of a different kind, such as free sex. The consequence was the venereal disease that took its toll.

As mentioned earlier, in the context of our study here, the most notable change was in the sacroscape of this land. This change was due to what is described above as the influx of eastern charismatic spiritual figures coming to the USA. As a result the New Religious Movements (NRMs) became part and parcel of the American scene. Stephen Kent describes this phenomenon in his aptly titled book *From Slogans to Mantra: Social Protest and Religious Conversion In the Late Vietnam war Era*. As per Kent, the activist energy of the youth, failing to bring about social change politically, turned to do it spiritually. Kent may have a point, however, in the longer historical view of a nation of free spirits growing in diversity where eclecticism became a hallmark of growth, the aforesaid NRMs may be viewed as part of the natural development of this land. However, their subsequent survival was as per their functionality. However, what also has come into the American scene are the mega churches at one end which scholars see as the smaller individualistic groups finding a niche. With globalization accentuated by the internet, and the increasing number of immigrants there is a mushrooming of religious diversity ranging from the African to the Asian resulting in the syncretism that is inevitable with the plurality of beliefs living in such close proximity—a natural outcome in a land of immigrants such as the USA.

Syncretism and the NRMs

Since our study here is delving into how a spiritual teacher could seamlessly integrate what to others appear as traditions contradictory to each other, we will have to address the idea of syncretism at the very outset here.

Generally speaking, syncretism pertains to the mixing of elements from two or more cultures. The confluence of cultures is inexorable in the history of civilization, as has been so metaphorically expressed by Thomas Tweed with his aquatic metaphors and tropes of “crossing” and “dwelling”. This leads to the inevitable—which is Jergenson’s definition of syncretism—“change of religion over time through mixture”. Religion being inextricably connected to culture, religious syncretism is then viewed to be the absorption of elements from the religions that come into sustained contact with each other. In this regard, all major religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism are syncretic. It is generally acknowledged by scholars that Christianity is the most syncretic of them all. The reason is that besides the organic mingling that occurs due to natural encounters, the conversion agenda of Christianity brought in a power element with its own set of dynamics towards that end which eventually resulted in more syncretism for them. Prior to that, even at the beginning, Christianity, started as a form of Judaism, assimilated elements from Zoroastrianism, Pharaonic Egypt, the Greco-Roman belief system—which in itself was very syncretistic.

Ironically, despite the aforesaid syncretism in Christianity, Christian theologians were the most critical about this. Although, not articulated as much, this attitude was and is shared by purists of most religions who tend to see religion as purely normative without the “lived” aspect of it. Hendrik Kraemer’s definition of syncretism as the “illegitimate mingling of different religious elements,” is representative of the attitude of such critics. To them it meant “an unacceptable admixture of ideas and practices that transgresses the boundaries of Christian identity”. It is when studies in the humanities moved towards being more interdisciplinary – (syncretic in a way!) that anthropology’s neutral stance towards syncretism seeped into religious studies, eventually making it more acceptable to the gatekeepers of Christianity as well. Thus in 2011, Robert Schreiter stated preference for Christian theology to “distinguish between ‘good’ syncretism and ‘bad’ syncretism and follow anthropology where the term is more “neutral”.¹⁰⁶ Thus the acceptability of the idea through terms such as “contextualization” for the Evangelicals in 1972 and the “enculturation” for the Roman Catholic Church in 1975 leading this term to be in the papal documents in 1979.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Robert J. Schreiter, "Cosmopolitanism, Hybrid Identities, and Religion," in *Exchange*, 40(2011) 31 Also, see in Charles Stewart’s “The Meaning of ‘Syncretism’” in Leopold and Jensen (ed.) *Syncretism in Religion* (2005) 325-326.

¹⁰⁷ See in Charles Stewart’s “Relocating Syncretism in Social Science Discourse” in Leopold and Jensen (ed.) *Syncretism in Religion* (2005).

In the West, particularly in the USA, religious syncretism was taken to whole new level towards the latter part of the twentieth century, especially with the social upheaval of the Sixties and Seventies. Part of it was due to the surge of the questing youth of this land for spiritual sustenance. Material wealth having reached its zenith with a comfortable middle class, the youth felt a spiritual vacuum brought in by the actions of the establishment that brimmed with economic prosperity and the capitalistic culture driven to a point of idolatry of wealth. One can say that materialism became a form of religiosity. Organized religion was perceived by the questing youth as part of the establishment they were rebelling against. They thus took the one hundred and eighty degree turn to what was romantically perceived as “the mystic East”. As mentioned earlier, their escape from their environment took the form of drugs, a new kind of music and actual travel to the East. This turn brought in the trend of the New Religious Movements (NRMs). Mining into this quest, charismatic figures from the East began to make their presence felt in the West, infiltrating into the “sacroscape” of this land.

Added to the phenomenon mentioned above, was the legalization of immigrants from nonwhite nations. This led to the influx of immigrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America, thus changing the landscape even further. With those immigrants came an infusion of multiple religions and now mainstream America had the “other” living next door. Overtime, now we have the “bricoleurs” picking and choosing and making ones’ own elements from the various religio-

cultures they encounter. This is another aspect of syncretism as analyzed by Veronique Altglas in her book *From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage*.

However, going back to the NRMs, which continue to be a part of new millennium, we can use syncretism as a heuristic tool. Such movements demonstrate what Ulrich Berner said about suspension of boundaries between two systems. Such suspension could be both at a conscious or an unconscious level.¹⁰⁸ In the context of the USA, the NRMs were initiated by the host of charismatic individuals from primarily Hindu orientations who came during the Sixties. Thus the “guru” or “swami” or “baba” garbed in exotic yellow, orange or ochre robes¹⁰⁹, had the mystique of the east to draw the spiritually thirsty to them. Such movements has over time branched off into many facets with the increasing globalization ranging from those tinged with a stated moorings to the “universal truths” but tinged more with the secular (the bricolage), to the growing fundamentalist groups across the board. Altglas demonstrated with her case studies, how the “bricoleurs” made use of elements from other religions, what she termed as “religious resources”, “disembodied” those from their systems, shaped them into the Western context, then adopted them for their own therapeutic needs. At the other end of the spectrum, the fundamentalists are

¹⁰⁸ In Leopold and Jensen ed. *Syncretism in Religion*. 2005, 295-315.

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that Bawa’s garb was always white. This is the preferred color for Muslim holy men.

paradoxically also picking and choosing what they consider to be fundamental to their way of belief and creating small groups of movements.

Counted among these NRMs are the countless small Sufi groups that exist in numerous states of the USA. There are many Muslims and non-Muslims alike who count Bawa's followers as one of those groups. The general tendency to paint such groups with a broad brush leads one astray. It is important to mention and emphasize what has been stated in chapter two that the term Sufism has been much eschewed in its use, due to the West viewing it as independent of Islam. As such, among the NRMs can be seen at one end such groups as totally divorced from the Islamic tradition, and at the other end, those like the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship (BMF) completely based on the Muslim traditions. Our chapter on Sufism will suffice here to enable one to discern that a group claiming to be a Sufi group would not make it so. Regarding, the Sufi groups, what Mark Sedgwick said about their being somewhat syncretistic to an extent, can be in the light of the mystic perspective. They loosely belong to an order, but have countless suborders adapted to the environment they are in and thus "can be understood as a swarm of NRM, constantly in motion, but generally staying in established if contested limits (Leopold, 2005). The key phrase here for our study is "established and contested limits". He adds that they "... can also be understood in terms of 'glocalization'". Glocalization means being both global and local. Thus the BMF professes to belong to the Quaderia Sufi order which originated with the medieval founder named Abdul Quader Jilani in present day

Iraq. The order is global due to the countless suborders, as Sedgwick puts it, that extend from the USA to the Far East such as Indonesia. The common denominators that are established among these are the core monotheistic Islamic belief based on the scripture, the Quran, and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. However, it is in their methodology of how the core message is conveyed by a charismatic local leader, and received and practiced by the followers that we find the syncretic admixture which may be contested for acceptance. Sufism, being the inner dimension of Islam, there is an interiority to it in which all the mystical dimensions of other religions meet and converge into a single point. This is the essence of mysticism. This convergence point is where mystics like Bawa dive into to draw out what appears to be syncretic elements to others. Borrowing from what Berner said, it can be said that at the deepest level of truth there is “a suspension of barriers” among systems in the sense that the illusory barriers disappear. So, it follows that NRMs founded by mystics from any tradition will find their founder’s messages resonating with each other. Thus Bawa, like some of the NRMs with founders who were mystics, emanated Weberian charisma that drew the spiritual seekers to his fold. From the syncretic angle, Bawa is multi-layered as per the Tweedian “confluence” that “flowed” in and out of him, in a manner of speaking. He was a Muslim saint whose teachings began in a Hindu village in the Buddhist majority country of Sri Lanka. Mystics like Bawa teach truths through a familiar format. They anchor on to the essential truth of each tradition, draw it out to attach onto it their intended

message, gradually expanding the message and the form by bringing in the new unfamiliar. The Sixties having turned to the East in their spiritual quest, Bawa's followers were already somewhat familiar with Hindu and Buddhist elements. This was the time when the counter-culture movement was gaining momentum and had turned to what is generally recognized as the Hindu culture. This is an important factor in any discussion of Bawa's teachings as the nature of the followers/students' comprehensibility factors into his teaching methods. In this regard the climate of that time saw the answer to their quest in the form of an Indian "guru".¹¹⁰ In fact, one can assume that those in all probability factored in to attract them to Bawa. He also had the "guru" look, although he dressed in white, which is the preferred color of the Muslim mystic. He was racially Indian, spoke Tamil which derived from the ancient Dravidian language. The pre 9/11 times meant there was no familiarity, and as such still no prejudice against Islam. Hence, the very Islamic terminologies like "Islam", "Allah", the verbal declaration of the Muslim faith that Bawa constantly recited, Islamic prayers of benediction, etc., practiced by Bawa, were unconsciously being assimilated in the psyche of his followers with inspirational fervor. Bawa would begin all his discourses with the *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim*. The discourses were sprinkled with Islamic

¹¹⁰ It is very important to note here that in 1978 Bawa "had the title of guru officially removed from his name and from the Fellowships that had grown around him". This was due to the fact that in "the 1960s and 70s, there was a sudden influx of so-called gurus into the west. He became disturbed by the behavior of some of these individuals ... and did not wish to be associated with them" (Editor's Note, in *Truth and Light*, 2004, 10).

terms and metaphors and were pervaded with allusions to the Quran and the Hadith. These also pervaded his narration of the tales from the Hindu Puranas which his listeners were gaining wisdom from while being expanded into the Islamic world. So, by the time Bawa introduced the Islamic rites and rituals, the exoteric aspect of Islam, per se, it was natural for most of his followers to embrace them. What appears to be an apparent paradox is actually the very spirit of Bawa's message. In this regard, it needs to be mentioned that there were, and still are, some who refused to do the ritual prayers as to them it represented a group (Muslims) they did not find any communion with. This is so despite the fact that they believe in the Quran and the prophet Muhammad.

Like most NRMs, followers of Bawa consider themselves exclusive in the sense that they have been fortunate to be under what they consider the grace of Bawa. Bawa's entombed remains in Coatsville, Pa, outside Philadelphia is now the only Sufi shrine in North America and instrumental in a way for further global expansion. As per Sufi practice, pilgrims from around the world come to visit the shrine. This phenomenon appears to be increasing within the last decade. Like other NRMs, Bawa's teachings are being disseminated by his followers through print and audio/video media. The internet, of course, has become the ubiquitous means to disseminating any message now and so the <www.bmf.org> web site does its share as one of the many sites that the NRMs have.

The other syncretic elements that are evident in the Fellowship center is the celebration of Easter, Christmas, etc. minus the Christian trappings. The food

remains essentially Indian that Bawa taught them to cook. This is part of what Weber calls routinization of the group that sustains the group after the demise of their founder. Significant part of such routinization are the daily early dawn chant of God's holy names, post-prayer blessings on Bawa and the prophet, celebrating the birthday of the Prophet and the death/birthday of Abdul Quadric Jilliani,¹¹¹ the founder of the order. Like most NRMs, the second generation does not appear to have the attachment to the group as their parents do. However, there is an ongoing vibrancy due to new members joining in all the time. The fact that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the USA, and the group is essentially an Islamic group, does in the final analysis extend it beyond the majority of NRMs that tend to disintegrate soon after their founder's demise.

¹¹¹ This also happens to be the death anniversary in the Hijrah calendar of Bawa himself. Such coincidence aligns with the mystical concept that aligns all wisdom figures as one spirit. We will later see this when Bawa is speaking of Murugan and Muhammad interchangeably.

CHAPTER 4
HOLY MEN DISPELLING THE DARKNESS
AND
THE ORAL TRADITION

Introduction

“In terms of Islamic practice, Sufism in some form has been at the heart of Islamic devotional and spiritual life in South Asia” (Metcalf xvii). We begin this chapter with this quote to emphasize what was said earlier about Sufism spreading Islam across the world. The particular focus of this chapter is how Sufism went into a region of South Asia where conquerors dared not tread, or perhaps thought not worth their while to do so due to the nature of the terrain. As such, it went undiscovered that Islam was at the heart of the devotional practices of a region which centuries later the British thought were inhabited by Hindus. This was the hinterland of the Eastern region of Bengal. The evidence of the simple holy men who had transformed those regions more than a millennium ago was everywhere. However, those evidences were not recognized, as they did not fit the paradigm of the Western research methods. It is only in the past few decades when the loosening of the grip of the Western dominance of research methods on one hand, and the blending of disciplines in the other, that brought in anthropology to the study of religion that those pervasive evidences were taken

into account. Thus did researchers like Richard Eaton and Asim Roy discover how apparently innocuous spiritual sojourners penetrated the thick jungles of Bengal to bring light to the inhabitants at all levels. They live on through the local lore of oral tradition only. That lore points to a methodology very akin to what we have evince when we focus on Bawa's method in this study. As such, this chapter is devoted to those holy men to specifically situate Bawa with them. The hope is, in future the continuation of such research will find similar figures in other regions where elaborate structures have not marked the shrines of such Sufis. Authors like Schimmel and Metcalf, not to speak of countless others, have addressed the Sufis whose shrines are well-known due to their followers having come from the rulers and the elites of Arab and Persian heritage in South Asia. This, with just a nod to the emerging tradition of Dakkani, or Urdu, as a vehicle of Sufi oral tradition was what appears to have been mostly researched as Sufism in South Asia. It is only very recently that Richard Eaton has now paved the way for researchers like Roy and Stewart and other doctoral researchers such as Ayesha A. Irani,¹¹² who went to discover these hitherto unknown holy men. For this, they had to go into areas where oral tradition and the local lore are the only means of discovering early Sufis who in their spiritual sojourn enveloped those around them and left a legacy of simple devotion in the vernacular. Hence, one of the sections of this chapter will discuss the magnitude of the role of oral tradition

¹¹² Her dissertation on Sayad Sultan, a 15th century sage in Bengal appears to be the first academic work focused on a sufi who worked amongst the masses.

in Sufism with specific significance tied to its layers of the vernacular and the local tradition. First, Bawa will be situated with the “holy men” who transformed lives of the masses unbeknownst to the elites of the land.

Metamorphosis from Poverty to Prosperity Wrought by Holy Men

Muslim mystics like Bawa have done their work quietly in the hinterlands of India for centuries transforming those regions and their inhabitants' lives from poverty to prosperity at all levels. As mentioned earlier, it is only recently that researchers like Eaton and Roy could undertake studies to uncover one such phenomenon. It needs to be mentioned that such study could be undertaken by them due to research being finally free of the grip of the West that rejected the value of oral traditions. Research has come to recognize the importance of such resources. So the study of a startling historical fact was researched by these men to discover the contribution of apparently simple “holy men” to transform both the land and the lives therein.

This section has the particular focus of situating Bawa with these simple “holy men,” who are the unsung heroes in the larger world, but played the roles of completely transforming a region and their inhabitants that they encountered. The reason for the larger world being unaware of them is because these sages live on only in the psyche of the common man. Most of the educated elites as

well as the doctrine driven guardians of what is viewed as a normative belief systems tend to deride the practices of these rural folks. These are the humble folks frowned upon by the elites for their lack of education so their simple faith passed down as those learned from “holy men” who had transformed the lives of their ancestors and provided them with a spirituality that imbued their lives with meaning.

This chapter seeks to provide a case study of what Underhill termed as “practical mysticism”. Almost a millennium later, the paradigm of teaching that Bawa adopted both in the hinterlands of Sri Lanka and the diametrically opposite supposedly developed USA appears to be similar to those adopted by those simple sages. It is a paradigm that is observed to be applied with variation by such sages who work at the folk level far from any locations that may bring any recognition. In other words, they worked at the heart level, a connection that the materially developed West appeared to have lost touch with.¹¹³

This paradigmatic case study is that of how the eastern frontier of pre-modern India, which is the present-day Bangladesh, metamorphosed from a remote inaccessible neglected region peopled with ones mired in practices of

¹¹³ Observations like this may appear to be overly critical of the West to some. It is simply an observation noted by a lifelong experience of living in cultures of Asia, Africa, Europe and North America, that has made me notice how the fragmented and isolated the western culture has become due to perhaps the nuclear family oriented society. It could very well be that the rise of material wealth of the Asian cultures may lead to this kind of fragmentation in the decades to come.

“magic and spells” into a prosperous¹¹⁴ agricultural peace loving Muslim-majority society. In 1871-1872, the British rule in India took a census geared to determine specifics like the religion, caste, occupation age, education, and infirmities in the population of the Indian subcontinent. The rulers were startled by the results of East Bengal, who they had assumed, and thus predicted, to be a majority of Hindus. The greater surprise was in the fact that the Muslim majority were in the rural indigenous masses. This was counter to the general pattern of the Muslim concentrations of India being in the urban centers and spreading outwards from there. It was not until the recent last few decades that scholars like the aforementioned ones began to delve into this phenomenon. In this respect, Richard Eaton’s seminal work, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, has become the starting point for scholars. Subsequently, scholars such as Asim Roy and Tony Stewart have brought in their anthropologically angled insight into the scholarship. All research point to the “holy men” or “charismatic *pirs*” (Eaton 268-69), whose tombs¹¹⁵ dot the region, as having transformed a densely forested area to an arable land while establishing the religion of Islam among the

¹¹⁴ By the end of the seventeenth century this prosperity culminated in making Bengal “one of the most dynamic economic zones in Eurasia” (Eaton 2001, 266).

¹¹⁵ As Eaton points out, these were simple “humble structures” and the Mughal revenue records show that so were the masjids made of “thatching and bamboo” and yet “they exercised considerable influence among the indigenous people of the eastern delta” (264). This simplicity sets them apart from the Sufi shrine structures of the rest of the region, which, due to donations or the patronage of rulers, were monuments of stone and marble.

inhabitants. In their analysis of the said phenomenon of the only region of India where the rural masses formed the Muslim majority, researchers have taken the historiographical approach as well as that of syncretism. As mentioned in the introduction of this study, the argument set forth in this paper is to apply a different lens to approach this unique phenomenon, and thereby to shed light on the unobtrusive manner it occurred below the radar of the region. The attempt here will be made to view this regional transformation as a result of the vision of the Sufis. Simply stated, it is viewed as the fruition of the Muslim Mystics' application of what Evelyn Underhill calls "practical mysticism". This metamorphosis of East Bengal was generated by "... the true imagination which pours itself out, eager, and self-giving, towards the greater universe" (Underhill 21).

Such "imagination" engendering an expanded vision was drawn from the eclectic Islamic principles that infused the practical lives of those saints. Thus viewed, it becomes evident, that this transformation should not be termed as conversion and neither should the Muslim mystics be mistaken for missionaries.¹¹⁶ The mystic's method is to be all-inclusive in their journey of expansion. The unobtrusive manner in which the region was transformed is indicative of a gradual extension/expansion of the world view of its inhabitants. The probability is that of the populace being included in the self-cultivating 'way'

¹¹⁶ See Aquil, 2010, 79, Metcalf, 2009 and Eaton 2001, 275.

of their guides began to unconsciously absorb the principles their mystic mentors lived by.

One of the features of above-mentioned 'way' of self-cultivation is to be always on the look-out for the calls of those in need. More than likely it was the dire need of the much-neglected tiny silt-enriched deltaic region that pulled in the Sufi saints to East Bengal. Consequently, within a few centuries the region had become not only a prosperous Muslim-majority, but also became the only area in India where the rural masses were Muslims before pre-modern times and now has the second highest concentration of Muslims in the world. The beginning of this transformation can be tentatively dated from the twelfth to thirteenth century. It was taking place below the radar of the rest of the region until the prosperity drew the others' attention to it.

So the story of the eastern frontier of India before the above-mentioned transformation is one of utter neglect. Since ancient times, India was a land where aliens at different times and from different climes were riding overland to the northern plains. Such inroads continued since the ancient most Aryans to the latter Muslims. Some raided and left and some settled to rule. The earliest Aryans drove the indigenous docile Dravidians to the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. All available accounts of East Bengal describe impenetrable forests inhabited by wild animals and venomous snakes and peopled by those practicing witchcraft. So, all the forces of raiders and rulers, who rode into the rest of India did not attempt to penetrate the forests of Bengal. The rulers, who

were all initially aliens to this land—be they of the ancient most Aryans or the latest Muslims—had regarded the farthest eastern region beneath the consideration of their active rule. This disparagement went to the point of even their conversion being discouraged. Hence at the ancient times when the Aryan extracted variation of the Brahmanical system had somewhat even reached the southernmost tip of India¹¹⁷ where the original indigenous inhabitants had been driven to by the Aryans, East Bengal continued to be ignored. This remained so until the “holy men” produced the prosperity. This inevitably brought in the Brahmins to reap the benefits from this region. Hence centuries later when these overlords, perhaps mostly from West Bengal, entrenched in the Brahmanical system went into East Bengal, the caste system was closed. So these rural masses were viewed as the lowliest of the low—the outcastes.¹¹⁸

The above mentioned context is indicative of how the pioneers that penetrated the dense forests of East Bengal were of a different ilk than the raiders and invaders mentioned above. Within a few hundred years, these

¹¹⁷ In this regard it is notable that although the Brahmin power is evident due to the presence of that priest caste in the South, significantly, the warrior-ruling Khaistra caste is absent in there.

¹¹⁸ See Gilmartin and Lawrence (52-53); also, Barbara Metcalf points out that the British narrative of Muslims being the foreigners ruling a homogenous Hindu served the political agenda of deflecting attention for the lower or outcastes claim of affirmative rights (xxi).

Also see Pennington's study in his book *Was Hinduism Invented? : Britons, Indians and Colonial Construction of Religion* (2005).

pioneering *pirs* transformed the region to arable land cultivating wet rice. This led to a prosperity that drew the attention of not only the later Muslim Mughal rulers in seventeenth century, but also the maritime network of the time and thus connected it to the cosmopolitan world. However, what was not apparent to the rulers and the merchants was that the region was a Muslim majority. Thus the British were taken aback with the census results in 1872.

Here we will attempt to analyze the above-mentioned metamorphosis in light of the mystic vision. The unitive vision and the compassion inherent in that vision is what can make such spiritually infused individuals venture out to improve the lives of a neglected population. Furthermore, due to the all-encompassing nature of such vision, they had the insight to the central truth in each site and thus could tune in to the spiritual sounds therein and therefore connect, embrace, incorporate and thus integrate and transform those regions into the process of progression. The evidence of East Bengal having the highest concentration of the humble tombs of such saints, termed as *pirs* by the locals, is indicative of their influence. These stand as testaments to their success story as are the tales told in the oral tradition that makes them part of a living legacy.

The above mentioned legacy lives through the oral tradition in East Bengal. As such, for any research study relevant to this region, those oral transmissions are the vital secondary sources researchers have ultimately to resort to. So, in the next section of this chapter, the significance of oral tradition in general for both the Eastern tradition and specifically for the Islamic tradition

will be discussed. Since the pioneering *pirs* were Muslim mystics, it is important to get an insight into the world view that generated their ventures. This will be discussed in the section *Tawheed*, *Tawakkul* and *Sufism*. This will then bring us to the main thrust of our discussion. Thus the last concluding sections will focus on analyzing the depictions of the saga of the Sufi Saints entombed in the countless shrines that dot the region. The ubiquity of Sufi shrines and the narrative tradition surrounding them provide the interface of text and territory and is significant for cuing us to the analysis of the methods of the aforesaid mystics. Nile Green's analysis of how such geographical "space" of the sites of the shrines forms the center for the lore through which the saint-centered culture disseminates provides the key to get an insight into the interface of such text and territory in East Bengal.¹¹⁹ Needless to say, thus far this chapter is most significant as it draws on the only the very limited source of research that helps situate Bawa.

The Oral Tradition

Any kind of exploration of the aforesaid metamorphosis of Bengal and the mystics therein will involve delving into the region's oral tradition. This is due to the fact that the living legacy that the Sufi saints left behind prevails through the

¹¹⁹ See Nile Green's *Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India*, 17-21.

power of the oral tradition.¹²⁰ Hence, it is commonly claimed that Islam was spread by the Sufis.¹²¹ The Sufi shrines that dot the regions east of the Middle East are perhaps part evidence of that, and more so are the aforesaid living traditions left behind by those buried within those shrines. The life the earliest Sufis lived is the most significant legacy in Sufism. The anecdotal stories based on them took on a life of its own as legends and lore. Thus their deeds and their sayings became embedded in the psyche of the common man. As mentioned before, the Sufi doctrine was in fact built on those. These stories spread with the wayfaring Sufis as they were integrated into their discourses. The locals who flocked to the saints were told not only tales about the *walīs*, “friends of God”, but also fables and tales of folk wisdom. At the demise of such story-telling Sufis their burial sites became the shrines. These sites engendered further development of discourses. The new narrative comprised of the acts and deeds of their own local now buried saint. This narrative blended with those that he/she had told to his/her followers and became part of a growing tradition. Hence, do Western scholars question the historicity of tales told about these early Sufis.¹²² For this, perhaps Corbin’s view, as per Green, “is to maintain the mystical model

¹²⁰ Important teachings are reserved for oral transmissions termed “breast-to-breast” (Kugle, 4).

¹²¹ Scholars like Schimmel pointed out, that contrary to what is generally believed, Islam was spread by the Sufis and not the sword (1975, 346).

¹²² I confess to taking a short cut for examples of such scholars in referring to Nile Green’s observations to those such as J.S. Trimingham, Arberry, etc. and what Green calls their “decline model” in *Sufism: A Global History*, 1-3.

by using a phenomenological approach to historical documents in an attempt to interpretively 're-present' the inward character of past mystical experiences" (3).

In view of the above-mentioned oral transmissions, one needs to note that a discourse is more than two-dimensional. It allows for emotive nuances through intonations. Thus these discourses had in them vital elements of story-telling that made those narratives more effective than any other means such as print would have offered. Telling tales is a primal mode of teaching. Stories can be intelligible to the child or the simple minded while opening up metaphorically to the initiate. The spiritual sophisticate is aware that the language of that realm can only be conveyed symbolically. So these figures tapped into the primal core of the human emotions by telling tales to convey the inner truth and embed it in the hearts. So even in the writings of the later intellectual Sufis of ones such as Qushayri, one notes that in their systemization of Sufism "each major concept is woven around the sayings of earlier Sufis" (Sells 97).¹²³

Bawa Muhaiyyaddeen is the testament to the effectiveness of the oral tradition even in modern times and in a twentieth century USA. His discourses held his listeners enthralled although they had to listen to the translator as Bawa spoke in Tamil. This testifies to the fact that there was the element of experiencing the presence of Bawa that infused his discourses. Four decades

¹²³ Needless to say, this was the method that ancient wisdom — particularly scriptural wisdom was passed down.

after his demise,¹²⁴ what he said and did is the part of the lore not only among those who had known him when he was alive, but also among those who heard his tales recounted by others. Such is the power of the mystic experience for those who tread on the path. This kind of experience is best expressed by those who underwent it, as is evident in the works by his followers¹²⁵ when they refer to him in their writings

Regarding the above-mentioned oral tradition in East Bengal, in the research of all scholars, they were confronted with a dearth of textual records that would fit the acceptable paradigm for such research. The highly destructive tropical climate of Bengal is primarily responsible for that. The other significant feature the scholars encountered in the meagre documents that are available, were references to “holy men” and a general derision towards the denizens of the silt-enriched deltaic region. The focus in this section is on these holy men and the objective is to discern their approach to the region and its inhabitants through an analysis of a worldview of mystics in general and the Muslim mystics in particular.

¹²⁴ He is buried in Coatesville in the outskirts of Philadelphia, USA. It is the only Sufi shrine in North America.

¹²⁵ Michel Green, Coleman Barks, Locke Rushe, etc. These authors echo each other when they depict or refer to the experiences of encountering Bawa and how they felt him to be the answer to their quest. They are the ones who stayed on to become the gradually growing group to form what we see as the Fellowship today. Their experiences with Bawa, the retelling of the tales he told, the reiteration of the instructions he left, the description of what he did are similar to the lore that suffuses the tales of Sufi sages and thus can provide an insight to the model that is common to such Sufi teachers.

The connection of the above-mentioned holy men to the land was overwhelmingly evident in the ubiquity of the Sufi shrines that dot the region and the rich lore centered on the entombed saints¹²⁶. This lore are primarily tales of transformation. These references to transformations is what Eaton's study had focused on. This study mentions some of the documents that researchers uncovered which refer to a region covered with impenetrable "forests with wild animals" and "venomous snakes" and peopled by those with a lifestyle defined by magic and spells. Later documents are indicative of a reversal attributive to a cultivation of wet rice. The cultivation of this crop evidently made it revenue rich attracting the tax collectors from the imperial center in the northern plains, as well as the then outside world. The latter connecting the region to the cosmopolitan world drawing in the wealth evident in the abundance of the silver coins¹²⁷ spread by the maritime network.

Attempts by recent scholars to delve into what engendered the above-mentioned transformation of Bengal converge on the shrines of the Sufi sages and the sagas that abound about them. Therein lay the conundrum that researchers working on a western template had to confront. The oral tradition

¹²⁶ "In terms of Islamic practice, "... Sufism in some form has been at the heart of Islamic devotional and spiritual life in South Asia, ... Typically glossed as 'Islamic mysticism,' Sufism (*tasawwuf*) may embrace the inculcation of elders and holy men, living and dead, who may serve as teachers, guides, exemplars, **intercessors** and **conduits of charisma** (emphasis are mine)" (Barbara Metcalf xviii).

¹²⁷ These coins are among the archeological finds in Bangladesh that helped researchers like Eaton.

does not have much credibility in the paradigm established by the West¹²⁸ to which research so far had conformed to. This paradigm is premised also on linearity and a “modern ‘rationality’”.¹²⁹ On the other hand, the oral tradition is of equal importance — if not more — in the eastern tradition.¹³⁰ Thus the

¹²⁸ It needs to be clarified that in this paper, ‘the West’ and “Western” specifically indicate the countries that created the concept of the “Third World” as the industrially — and as such economically — underdeveloped regions. So West Europe, the North American countries of USA and Canada as well as Australia and New Zealand are covered by these terms in this paper. It was due to industrialization that led to the material wealth that made these nations consider the poorer nations as the “Third World”. Hence, ironically, in the context of this paper, it needs to be noted that the decline of the famed prosperity of East Bengal to eventual outright poverty was initiated by the British colonists. In order to serve their industrial demands, they forced the rice cultivators to grow the raw materials needed to feed their manufacturing needs in Britain. The resistance of the rice growers to this, as it was detrimental to their land to grow non-food crops, was harshly penalized. There are documented records of uprisings due to this and the severe punishments that were meted out. True to the regions oral tradition these also became the stuff of local lore and lyrics.

¹²⁹Chatterjee (1) “... based on a linear and largely Christian logic of time and history. In its Protestant and post-Reformation aspects, such logic implied the absolute uniformity of the faith of the subjects and their sovereign. Moreover, British colonial scholars in the early nineteenth century constructed a chronology in which a “Hindu epoch” was followed by a “Muslim one” and so on” Others to be “retrofitted” when discovered.

Also scholars like Alam point out that such modern rationalistic approach to interpretations is forced through a material and secular framework that makes events appear anachronistic Aquil, (148). Also, see Gilmartin and Lawrence (19).

¹³⁰ In this regard Islam has to be extricated from being considered as one of the western traditions. It is appropriate to be viewed with Judaism and Christianity under the umbrella of being the Abrahamic tradition only.

As is evident, the perspective here is that of viewing the Enlightenment in the West with a multi-domained lens. The Enlightenment resulted in the industrialization and the emphasis on individuality, the upside of which was material wealth. The downside of this was that it brought about a fragmentation of the psyche when quantity was gained at the expense of quality. The rest of the world stayed relatively poor and surprisingly whole. The happiness index that are

transformation of a dark forested region to cultivated rice paddy fields is linked in these oral traditions to saintly figures that ventured in from the faraway dry desert climes of the Middle East to live amidst the people of wet tropical climate engaging them in a process of progression at all levels. Hence the transformation ranged from poverty to prosperity at the pragmatic level to the spirituality of Islam as it was encompassed in the mystic vision of the pioneering *pirs*. Lately, due to researchers such as Tony Stewart, in regard to the issue of any studies of the region, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of the oral traditions. This is more so in the study of Sufism, where oral teaching is viewed as “superior”.¹³¹

It follows therefore, in relation to the study of East Bengal, the importance of the oral tradition is paramount. The reason for this is that the only written

taken shows the poorer nations are mostly in the lead
(http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2005/10/03/science/20051004_HAPP_G RAPHIC.html).

The holistic perspective that defines the non-western viewpoint was evident during the medieval period in Europe (Lings, 1998, 1-3). Despite the changes evident in the contemporary world in both the worldviews due to globalization, the west is yet to fully comprehend that death, disease and losses are not viewed with the sense of direness by the non-westerns. These are appropriated in a larger cosmic worldview wherein the collective sensibility and the interconnectedness is what matters most.

¹³¹ “The quintessence of Sufi doctrine comes from the Prophet, but as there is no esoterism without a certain inspiration, the doctrine is continually manifested afresh by the mouth of masters [Sufi teachers]. Oral teaching is moreover superior, since it is direct and “personal”, to what can be gleaned from writings. Writings play only a secondary part as a preparation, a complement, or an aid to memory and for this reason the historical continuity of Sufi teaching sometimes eludes the researches of scholars” (Titus Burckhardt, 7).

source available that relates the stories of the Muslim mystics and the metamorphosis that they wrought in the region are extant in handwritten manuscripts called *Punthi*. *Punthi* are tales told mostly in verses transmitted to posterity through the oral tradition. It is a tradition kept alive nowadays more in the shrines on special occasions. The manuscripts that survived were apparently scribed down at some point. However, the *Punthi* tradition belonging to the indigenous masses was in the vernacular and thus denigrated by the literate elite. Hence no attempt was ever made for their preservation. Had it had not been for the diligence of a nineteenth century court clerk, Munshi Abdul Karim, we would not have the meagre, but priceless collection of the handwritten manuscripts that we have now.

Thus the *Punthi* narratives, alongwith the local lore that keep alive the memories of the local saints, remain vital as the secondary sources to help shed light on the transformation of East Bengal.

Tawheed, Tawakkul and Sufism

Since the focus of this chapter is on the saints entombed in the shrines that dot the landscape of East Bengal, it is important to get an insight into them through their belief system from which their endeavors generated. In this regard, at the very outset it needs to be clarified again that the centrality of *Tawheed*¹³² is

¹³² There will be no further attempt made to provide a specific meaning for this term as it risks limiting what may be considered the most significant term in

the hallmark of the Islamic belief system. These Sufi saints' search was for the realization of *Tawheed* is what defines them for what they are.

These enshrined men were Muslim mystics termed as *walis*. As mentioned in chapter two, the Sufi doctrine in Islam is based on anecdotal stories of the lives of such men and women since the eighth century. What sets apart these individuals from others is the extent of their self-cultivation to realize *Tawheed*. To reiterate, *Tawheed* is the central concept on which the belief system of Islam converges. To reiterate, the ritual system of Islam as structured out in the Five Pillars¹³³ converges on the concept of *Tawheed*. It is a structured format which is supposed to provide a disciplined exercise to go beyond the ego-self to an awareness of the greater Self—a higher consciousness. The average worshipper's aim is that of being a perfect *abd* or slave of God. Since, God is *samad*¹³⁴ and thus has no need for anything; this enslavement is tied to serving God through serving creation. The practice of the rituals, thus, only serves as the reminder of carrying out the duties to the community and the environment in the endeavor to serve. Hence the ideal Muslim's life is tied in serving. All his actions,

Islam. It is the hope that the usage of the term in this paper will reveal to the reader a modicum of meaning as it pertains to the topics discussed.

¹³³ These are the formal statement of the creed called *shahada*, the five times daily ritual prayer of *salaat*, the month-long annual fasting, *Sawm*, the mandatory donation for the purification of accumulated liquid assets, *Zakat*, and the pilgrimage of *Hajj*.

¹³⁴ Self-sustaining but “besought of all” as expressed variously in the *Quran*, but most succinctly in the verse “*ikhlas*” (112:2)

be it at the workplace, society or family should be geared in with the intent of serving God.

In this regard, it should be noted again that the very act of worship brings in a duality¹³⁵ that apparently counters the idea of Absolute Oneness encompassed in *Tawheed*. This becomes apparent to the mystics. Hence the journey of the mystics takes on a deeper level of discipline with actions that go beyond what the average Muslim does. Therefore, the mystics are propelled by an inner drive into a process of progression that entails a discipline that runs deeper than the rituals set up in normative Islam.¹³⁶ More importantly, for the purpose of our study here, their actions, particularly their actions in service of humanity, transcends that of the average person. Thus, as already noted earlier here, the strain of the stories starts with mystics setting out in their “wayfaring” of self-cultivation. They follow an invisible call to distant climes as a path to further

¹³⁵ As per Hujwiri “the existence of love involves duality” (107). The very motif of love entails a state of duality of subject and object, hence from the ultimate perspective of *Tawheed*, despite the nearness, the veil still exists. Nevertheless, this remains a very high state as that state one is “veiled (from God) by their love” and has shed other veils such as that of even Paradise (Hujwiri, 107)—as Hujwiri further explicates: “Paradise is created, whereas love is an uncreated attribute of God” (107). Following this line of thought, it is the closest state to the drawing into the Oneness and the lifting of the final veil which reveals the indescribable, ineffable ecstatic pinnacle known in the Sufi lexicon as *Fana*. This final revelatory experience when all veils are rent asunder, could very well be a glimpse or a state of being that the names of figures like Abu-Yazid-Al-Bistami and Mansur-al-Hallaj conjure in the average Muslim mind.

¹³⁶ Pemberton & Nijhawan aptly view the normative in the identity formation as a “... the notion of a unitary bounded self” where in actuality, as the writers further observe, there is always an ongoing fluidity in such formation” (10). It is such a fluidity, that is characteristic of the process engendered by the mystic vision.

their progression in the process. The nature of their setting forth for the unknown with absolute *iman* is what is termed as *Tawakkul* which testifies to what Schimmel said —"*Tawheed* demands *Tawakkul*"— and describing it as "realized *Tawheed*" (p,119).¹³⁷ *Tawakkul* is equivalent to what Underhill describes as as the ultimate surrender.¹³⁸

The spiritual state of the aforesaid mystics and their methods also provide evidence of their having expanded into what Murata and Chittick termed as the lower cased "islam" as mentioned earlier in chapter two. So, to reiterate here, in view of the lower case "islam", all the wisdom embodied in avatars or sages or prophets of the Eastern and Western traditions, are in one respect the same.¹³⁹ Thus, wherever these mystics went, they could discern the essence of the local belief traditions and connected with that as "islam". This connection thus was in turn reciprocated with the trust of those they encountered. Therein lies the

¹³⁷ Schimmel "... *tawakkul* results in perfect inner peace and is what engenders romantic tales of Sufis wandering in the desert without any provision or of any fear of lions or highway robbers (119).

¹³⁸ " ... to let yourself go; to cease all conscious, anxious striving and pushing. ... asking nothing, seeking nothing, but with your doors flung wide open towards God. It (your goal) is there but you cannot by your efforts reach there. This realization of your own complete impotence, of the existence which the Transcendent—long sought and faithfully served—now seems to offer to your busy out going will and love, your ardor, your deliberate self-donation, is at once the most painful phase and most essential phase in the training of the human soul. It brings you into that passive state of passive suffering which is to complete the decentralization of your character, test the purity of your love, and perfect your education in humility" (Underhill, 2010, 68).

¹³⁹ See in the Quran 21:25, 35:24 and 17:15.

reason for the receptivity for the guidance they provided.¹⁴⁰ Metaphorically speaking, those mystics discerned the light in the beliefs of those they encountered and engaged that luminosity within the expanded radiance the mystics emanated. Hence, the transformation of those around them is more of an expansion than a conversion, as is generally understood by orthodox groups.

Thus such encompassing in an expansion is what appears to be the method with which the Sufi spirits steered those they met. The above mentioned method was engendered from a spiritual state that is achieved through self-cultivation. Mysticism as understood generally, with Sufism being no exception, involves the elimination of the ego. Sufi tales depict this process as a journey. Again, the interiority of this journey invests it with the mystical dimension. These Sufi travelers are intent on overcoming the mountain of the ego (Attar 29). So in the language of the twentieth century Sufi of our study here, Bawa Muhaiyyaddeen, demolition of the “dogs of desire” and chaining the “monkey mind” is what it entails.¹⁴¹

For the Sufi, this process is vital to cut away the veils of vanity that the arrogance of ego puts up, and arrive at the clarity of the truth of *Tawheed*. For our purposes here, we will center on the aforesaid “interiority” and the mystics as

¹⁴⁰ This inclusivity is evident in a Bawa Muhaiyyaddeen, His followers come from all races and religions and speak of him in reverence that is a common with anybody who has encountered such mystics.

¹⁴¹ These terms and expressions were pervasive in Bawa’s discourses. Some of these discourses have been transcribed and published. The book referred to here is *To Die Before Death: A Sufi Way of Life* (18-19).

“wayfarers” travelling in the fulfillment of the intent to remain engaged in the process. This process of progression diffuses the inner light outwards and benefits those encountered on the way by encircling them within it.

As mentioned before, the Sufi practices go beyond the given rituals to a more rigorous discipline for the realization of the Ultimate (Hujwiri, 13-14). That realization is said to be in the complete effacement of the ego to become a “mirror” that is constantly polished (Schimmel 187-188; Hujwiri 5) to clearly reflect the only Reality, the Truth or *huq*. This state is what Underhill describes as “the doors of perception are cleansed and everything appears as it is” (47). This is the path to become the Perfect Human, or the Complete Human—the *insan-e-kamil*. Schimmel observes that Adam “is the prototype of the Perfect Man; he was blessed with the special grace of knowledge” (188).¹⁴²

So the Perfect Human has knowledge. For a brief review of this process here, the progress in knowledge for the mystic leads to the different stages or stations, as the case may be which leads to *ma'rifa* or the gnostic realm of knowledge (Hujwiri 18). Knowledge at this level culminates in the comprehension which aligns with the purpose of creation as expressed in the Hadith Qudsi of the HT, “I was a Hidden Treasure (capilization are mine), and I

¹⁴² This brings a significant connection, as Adam figures large in the local lore as the first tiller of the land. See John P. Thorp’s “The Muslim Farmers of Bangladesh and Allah’s Creation of the World.” *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1982, p. 201., doi:10.2307/1178123.

wanted to be known, so I created the world” (Schimmel, 188-189).¹⁴³

Furthermore, as Schimmel points out, this kind of knowledge converges into the knowing of the self. Again, this “self” emerges when one is free of the ego when in Attar’s words “the mountain of the self” is demolished. The arrogance of the ego is what builds up the mountain of that self which in the Quran is depicted pervasively as the *nafs*.

So the discovery is the secret of the real self is that all along the truth that has been, and is, abiding within the innermost heart (Schimmel 192), but is veiled away by the build-up of the vanity of the ego (Hujwiri, p. 9). This brings us to the importance of the heart or *qalb* in the Sufi doctrine. Again, the heart is the where the spark of the divine, *sirr*, is. This connects us to the ultimate reality of the Divine.¹⁴⁴ It also brings in the difference between intellectual and intuitive knowledge and the latter being functional in a true development and ultimate transformation or *taqallub*—hence this term sharing the same root with *qalb* or heart. Intuitive knowledge is inextricably tied in with experience. Thus is

¹⁴³ As mentioned earlier, this hadith underpins and infuses Sufi thought.

¹⁴⁴ In *Four Steps to Pure Iman*, Bawa said within each heart there is a “minute point within the flesh” which is “intermingled within the tissues of the body itself” which is “made of light, and God has placed it within the body. God has placed that piece of flesh closer to us than our own lives, and God is within it, even smaller than that minute point” (2-3) “... only the state of existing within God as God has no destruction” (13, 15) “ ... merge with God ... become one with him ... firewood is no longer firewood after it is put into the fire. After the fire is consumed, only the fire remains. Like that in prayer when your thoughts are consumed, when your desires, your attachments, your connections, and your blood ties are all consumed and burned in prayer, then God alone will exist and nothing else. The ‘I’ will not be there,” (18- 19).

mysticism essentially experiential and the heart being the seat of the *sirr*¹⁴⁵ is infused with compassion. So, the Sufi path being essentially experiential, the focus is to realize God. The final state is in *ihsan* disappearing into *fana*¹⁴⁶, which elevates the seeker to being the *wali* or friend of God. Evidently these are the “holy men” mentioned in the various meagre, but significant, primary sources such as inscriptions or revenue records. Of course, their presence is ubiquitous in the secondary sources of hand written manuscripts pertaining to regions of East Bengal, whose transformation for the better were attributed to such men. Such individuals appear to be defined most by their deep compassion. They are the ones who in encountering the “divine self-disclosure” had “an opening of the heart toward infinite wisdom” (Chittick 30). A common strain in such men is to become the travelers at all levels thus crossing insurmountable terrains to spread the light. Enabled by the centered spiritual state of wisdom, they embrace the truth manifested in the myriad manner in the various cultures.

¹⁴⁵ This *sirr* is viewed as the secret point of divine connection within. Once one has penetrated the veil to the innermost recesses one's level of insight shifts to see the nature of good and evil as part of the manifested phenomena. From this perspective Satan, as the instigator of the doers of evil, is viewed as “a necessary instrument” in God's hands (Schimmel, 194). As per Ibn Arabi, evil does not have an ontological quality. According to him in the final analysis “Good is Being ... evil is the lack of good so it is non existence” (Chittick, 1989, 290). See also Chittick, 1989, 290-294 and Nasr on this topic in Borg and Mackenzie, 149-150.

¹⁴⁶ This state is equivalent to what Underhill states as the “union with Reality” in the successive scheme in the process that unites the mystic to the “Ultimate Fact” (29)

Text and Territory¹⁴⁷

The ability to discern the truth in its myriad manifestations is what enabled Muslim mystics to be integrated in their methods of modelling. Their journey of progression involved dissipating the darkness from all they encountered, and thus their advent to Bengal ushered in the metamorphosis of a forested region to cultivated rice-growing fields. This was combined with the improvement of the overall quality of the lives of the common masses. The saints' deep spirituality and commitment to the Sufi ideal of selfless service as the way to commune with the divine¹⁴⁸ is what drove such individuals to serve in such inhospitable territory such as that of East Bengal. These inhabitants had been left out of the active rule by all those who ruled India in pre-modern times. They were outcastes in the Brahmanical system as the caste system had closed when the Brahmins ventured for newer pastures of power and entered East Bengal. Such attitude of derision somewhat continued in the Mughal era with the growth of the Muslim elites bred in the Perso-Arabian culture.¹⁴⁹

Thus it was only the pioneering *pirs* who in their progression to perfection sought to serve the despised denizens of East Bengal. In doing so, they diffused

¹⁴⁷ This is borrowed from the subtitle from a section in Nile Green's *Nile Green's Making Space: Sufis and Settlers in Early Modern India*, 1.

¹⁴⁸ See Taneja 15.

¹⁴⁹ "The Mughal's alienation from the land was accompanied by feelings of superiority resulting in disdain and condescension toward its people. Especially in matters of language, dress or diet ... Mughal officers associated Bengalis with fishing, a mode of life they despised" (Eaton, 2001, 251).

the inner light which emanated from their being “conduits of charisma” in turn which attracted their ardent followers. In their expanded vision, these Seers saw the essence of truth in whatever the indigenous believed in. Thus, metaphorically speaking, they gradually connected that ray of light of the local souls with the expanded mystical beam they radiated.¹⁵⁰ So the familiar transitioned the followers to the expanded version of truth as projected in Islam.¹⁵¹ This transformation needs to be contextualized in the mystic vision, to comprehend as to why the application of the syncretic framework appears to be flawed in this specific case. As pointed out earlier, there is no deliberate intent geared to specificity in cobbling together equivalencies from multiple cultures in the methods of the mystics.

As elaborated earlier, mystics move in an extra-dimensional orbit of egolessness devoid of self-conscious motives that terms such as missionaries and conversion connote.¹⁵² In this respect it is worth recalling that the few records that do exist in relation to this region bear the mark of contempt and derision for

¹⁵⁰ The source of this radiation within the mystics is said to be guided by the “light and power of the Prophet Muhammad” (Stewart, 110).

¹⁵¹ One example of this was to integrate mythical figures, i.e., Krishna, in the prophetic tradition. Their role as avatars was equivalent to the divine revelations that the prophets received.

¹⁵² Aquil 78-79.

In the contemporary scene there is “Father Bob” in Bangladesh, who as an American Catholic priest does nothing but live with the poorest of the poor just to be with them and to help them in any way possible—never having made a Christian “convert,” nor it appears wishing to.

the denizens of the region. At that time, over a few centuries the Sufis quietly came in and unobtrusively transformed this neglected delta into the economically booming centers that the others in the land and the outside world rushed in to get a share of.

Even at the discovery that the rural masses of Bengal were Muslims, their co-religionists' reaction remained that of contempt perched up as they were in their elitist mentality stemming from their Perso-Arabian ancestry. Later in the nineteenth century, reformers began to view the *pir*-venerating Muslim masses to be too deviated from the center to be considered proper Muslims. So from the reform movement of the nineteenth century to the present, there is a continuous effort engaged to align their practices to what the reformers consider as normative Islam.¹⁵³ Despite all such attempts, the vast majority are still connected emotively to the *pirs* and their veneration. As such, the lore surrounding the shrines of Sufi saints to whom they owe the transformation of their region remain a living legacy.

As is apparent by now, this legacy is that of an overall transformation. These saints transformed the lives of those they encountered at all levels of Maslow's pyramid. This meant starting at the lowest level of mitigating hunger.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ This is also very similar in Indonesia, where Islam appears to be embedded in the Hinduism preceding it. Former president Abdurrahman Wahid, is a Sufi (his grandfather founded Nadlatulema—of which Abdurrahman was also the Leader) with 40,000,000 members!) whose tomb is that of a Saint visited by many thousands each year.

¹⁵⁴ As Tony Stewart aptly notes, penury undercuts the most basic morality, “so the first step to a religiously productive life is to gain sufficient wealth to allay the

The common themes and motifs in these narratives follow a consistent pattern relating a symbiotic relationship of the saint with nature and the dispelling of darkness through clearing the forests and the cultivation of crops that brought prosperity.¹⁵⁵ It is notable that miracles are prevalent throughout in the narratives. This is integral to and consistent with the depiction of an overall metamorphosis that mystics wrought in the region

The recounting of the aforesaid miracles in these sagas serve to strike the chord of awe for those *pirs*.¹⁵⁶ Their very entrance to the region astride wild animals sets the tone for the sense of awe. Then the songs shift to tell the tale of the venerated figures leading the communal efforts of cutting down the thick forests to bring in the light and till the soil to transform the land to arable fields ready for rice cultivation. This tilling is connected to Adam's tilling the soil to grow crops. Such insertions come both from the Indic and Judeo-Christian culture seamlessly weaving into the narrative the familiar with the unfamiliar. Just as Krishna is drawn in as a prophet while Adam's descent is viewed from the lens of Indic avatars. Another example is the love play of Adam and Hawa (Arabic name for Eve) that is resonant of the familiar love play of Krishna with Radha. This

nagging demands of providing food and shelter for the general weal of the family (12). This is what made evident by Maslow with his pyramid.

Apparently, this was also true of Sotaesan, the founder of Won Buddhism at the beginning of the 20th century in Korea.

¹⁵⁵ See Gilmartin and Lawrence (38-40); see also Eaton (1993, 218 & 2001, p268).

¹⁵⁶ See Taneja (10).

integration or conflation, in whatever manner it may be viewed, is very much in accord with the mystic vision of unison that plays more on larger cosmic patterns where microcosmic details expand into metaphors of the macrocosmic, i.e. such conflated interplay drawing on and intermingling the Indic with the Islamic depicting the dance of creation.

Another interesting recurring motif is the saints starting out from their original climes following upon the directions of their Sufi mentors. This is usually the teacher setting them forth with a fistful of soil and directing them to the east with the instructions to keep going until the soil of a region matches the soil they were given. Then, the wayfarers were to settle there for their self-cultivation to progression. As mentioned earlier, their individual progression was tied to that of the environment with its inhabitants they were directed to. Travelling as a mode of the Sufi path to progress also plays in here.

The first encounter of the natives of the land with the newcomer is always depicted dramatically such as them riding into the region astride a Bengal tiger or standing on a pair of swiftly swimming crocodiles or riding on the back of a gigantic fish in the strong river currents. Metaphorically it bespeaks of the symbiotic relationship of such spiritual entities with nature which leads to subsequent tales of their leading the community to the forest clearing by cutting down trees. This followed by the tale of tilling the silt-enriched soil for the cultivation of rice paddies. Told in the vernacular, these tales begin with and are frequently interspersed with rhythmic refrains that invoke Allah and the prophet

Muhammad. Islamic terminology is mingled in with the local. The rhythmic cadence of a rowing boat or a swinging motion of clearing the forestation is apparent when these are sung or chanted aloud.

Under such overarching themes of the transformation of the land and its people to prosperity are allusions to healing and metamorphosing miracles. These miracle stories are common in Sufi lore as sourced in the divine. In their perfected spiritual state as *Insan-e-Kamil*, they become conduits for the manifestation of divine will. It needs to be noted, that a region that was reputed to be steeped in magic and spells, miracles are viewed with the utmost awe and thus proved effective in harnessing the collective psyche.¹⁵⁷ These narratives were sung on special occasions which were part of the rites of *pir* veneration common to such folk tradition. On these occasions there is a general celebratory air underpinned by a devotionals expressed through such rites as the recitals of *Punthi*. Herein, it is important to note that these *Punthi* narratives are frequently interspersed at regular intervals with *zikr*¹⁵⁸ chants.

Visits to the tomb in all season are eclectic from the perspective of both religion as well as gender. Masjids are not accessible to the Muslim women in Bengal. As such these shrines are sites that fulfil the female population's spiritual need for visitation for supplicatory or petitionary prayers while providing for them the opportunity to participate in collective spiritual gatherings. This

¹⁵⁷ See Dempsey & Raj (3-8, 171-172) for *Karamat* (miracles by mystics).

¹⁵⁸ Rhythmic chanting aloud of the ninety nine names of God.

brings in the significance of the female populace in the diffusion of the *Pir* culture. The larger narratives are supplemented by them in the retelling of short tales of saintly miracles mingled with fables with moral underpinnings. Such stories were transmitted by the original sages as vehicles for their teachings. As mentioned earlier, such teachings laden with metaphorical meanings, as are some of the discourses, are part and parcel of the rich oral tradition based on Sufi transmissions.¹⁵⁹ Thus the women folk turn out to be very important transmitters for the oral tradition.

The females are also the primary participants in another feature of the *pir* traditions. It is that of providing *Sirni*. These are special concoction of food served at the shrines in lieu of fulfilment of prayers.¹⁶⁰ The shrines being the sites where the poor and the destitute find refuge, such *sirnis* provide an ongoing source of nourishment for them. In fact one of the miracles of these sites is viewed in the fact that everybody gets something to eat in those places. *Sirni*'s also replacing the offering that in years of yore were offered to the deities. In fact from this perspective the whole paraphernalia with the centrality of the saint has overtones

¹⁵⁹ What Eaton describes about the integration of the *Pir*-teachings with the rhyme of daily life such as "grindstone or spinning wheels" in the Deccan is equally true for East Bengal. As Eaton puts it "...what Sufis did was to adapt the simplest elements of Sufi doctrine to the already existing vehicles of folk poetry and substitute vernacular Dakkani for vernacular Marathi or Kannada. Since the ***Sufism injected into the literature carried with it the essentials of Islam*** (emphasis added), the Sufis use of this vehicle may be said to represent major development in the cultural history" (Aquil, 72).

¹⁶⁰ See Stewart (12-13).

of an earlier culture of deities and the offerings made to them. One of these that go across the board is the *vrata* or vows.¹⁶¹ The *sirni* at times serves to fulfill the promise or *vrata* made after a petitional prayer has been granted.¹⁶²

Conclusion

In conclusion, the objective of this chapter is to situate Bawa within a tradition that has so far been researched only very recently. In view of our focus of the study of Bawa's teachings being premised on the mystic perspective, the significance of this research is profound. It demonstrates what was achieved in East Bengal in light of the metamorphosis it underwent from poverty to prosperity due to being encompassed in the mystic vision of Oneness or *Tawheed* by pioneering Sufi saints. The terrain of Bawa's teachings appears to be paradigmatic on that of those folk figures. Like Bawa, they were figures expanded into embodied *ihсан* that reflected the ultimate Truth no matter what religious tradition one came from. They were in Marguerite Porette's words "mirrors of the simple soul." Thus their inclusive vision is what enabled them to embrace the peasant population of the region who prior to the *pirs'* coming continued to be despised and derided. Countless aliens that had traversed this region sometimes either for raiding or ruling had not ventured into the thick

¹⁶¹ See Raj and Harman (8-11).

¹⁶² It is due to all these that these tombs are targeted for attacks by the reformist groups.

forests of Bengal. The ancient Brahmanical order system had incorporated the neighboring West Bengal into their system, but had remained closed to East Bengal. It was later, when with advent of advancement that the Sufis had wrought, that the Brahmins came in increasing numbers to reap the benefits of the fresh pastures. This they did while looking down upon the Bengal peasants as the lowliest of the low. As mentioned earlier, this derision was shared to some extent by the Muslim Mughal rulers who were averse to even seeing such people convert to Islam—unaware that the majority of the peasantry were Muslims already. In fact, the Muslim rulers had continually neglected the region until it became apparent to them that it had become rich in revenue. So it was due to the mystics with their unitive vision that had enabled the transformation of the region to a booming economy that opened up to the cosmopolitan network of the times. The ruling class remained urban and alien, being either the Hindu landlords of West Bengal or the Ashraf Muslims of Perso-Arabian ancestry. Both had looked down upon the peasant populace that now is comprised of the second largest Muslim concentration in the world after Indonesia. Hence to this day there is a marked dichotomy in the Islam practiced in the urban regions with that practiced by the masses. Despite the well-funded reform movements efforts to get rid of practices viewed as deviant by the orthodox group, practices centering on Sufi shrines prevail to the point that it is increasingly drawing in diverse groups of the elite and the educated in a new age fervor of seekers. This draw of the latter group is what Bawa appears to have for the latter group as

evidenced by increasing numbers that flock to his tomb in Coatesville,
Pennsylvania.

CHAPTER 5

BAWA’S TEACHINGS AND HINDUISM

Introduction

In 1942, a figure entered into the recorded lore of mystics as a guru guide for seekers of truth in the remote interiority of Ceylon.¹⁶³ This figure, who for those people literally stepped out of the jungle to bring light to their lives, was Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. This was a man who responded to invitations to teach only. Thus his coming out of the jungle was a result of the encounter there with a group of Hindu pilgrims. They invited him to come out of his forest abode to teach them more of the wisdom they gained from him in that meeting. It was in response to the pilgrim’s request that Bawa had stepped into the human civilization again. Then again in response to another invitation in 1971, Bawa crossed the ocean to the larger arena of the USA. Thus did the wisdom of the East come from “the tree that fell to the West”. This time the fruits were for the spiritual seekers who had defined their quest by turning to the East.

So Bawa’s aforesaid advent, appears to be the result of encounters with spiritual seekers. He, thus falls into the tradition of the Sufi mystics who took it as part of their own learning to study— in Bawa’s words—“each heart” they

¹⁶³ Presently Sri Lanka.

encountered. What becomes apparent is that this study of “each heart” was honed to make the teachings uniquely geared to the individual need of each seeker. Bawa’s role back in Ceylon places him in the tradition of the “holy men” described in Chapter Four. Thus his teachings spiraled out through oral discourses in a pattern of expansion and reiteration. This process incorporated the familiar world of the listener while weaving in the unfamiliar in a manner that revealed the meaning of the unfamiliar through the flow of the narrative. However, Bawa is also viewed as a *qutb*.¹⁶⁴ As mentioned earlier, in the realm of the hierarchy of saints, the station of *qutbs* are of paramount significance.

Thousands of hours of audio and video tapes of Bawa’s discourses are archived in the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship in Philadelphia, USA. There is continuous work going on in the transcription of these. Books and pamphlets that are being published from those to disseminate Bawa’s teachings.

In accord with the unitive vision of mystics of all tradition in general, and the Sufi tradition in particular, Bawa’s teachings are about the realization of Truth.¹⁶⁵ For Bawa being a Muslim mystic, that truth is the Truth of *Tawheed*. This forms the core of Bawa’s teachings. His discourses appear to be an imitation of creation itself as they flow from a single point. They then flow out into

¹⁶⁴ Important to remember here is that the “... highest spiritual authority is the *qutb*, ‘axis, pole’ or ‘*ghauth*’, ‘help.’ ... The *qutb* is the virtual center of spiritual energy upon whom the well-being of the world depends” (Schimmel, 1975, 200).

¹⁶⁵ Terms like Truth, Love, Beauty, etc., will be capitalized in this study when used in its central all-encompassing meaning that mystics adopt.

seemingly countless tributaries to converge back to that single point. In fact “the Point” is a significant term that recurs countless times in Bawa’s discourses and is also the title of one of the publications of his discourses. Louis Masignon introduced this Sufi concept to the West by his “*le pointe vierge*”.¹⁶⁶

At the very outset of the study of how Bawa brings in Hinduism in his teachings, it needs to be reiterated that they are in complete accord with the Quran as the crux of Islam is *Tawheed*. Ultimately all converges into the Oneness. The differences in the diversity of race, religion, etc., exists for humans to learn, reflect and contemplate to draw out the wisdom. The Quran has God saying that He/She created the “differences” so that humans compete in good works and so that they “know”. Such simple statements are the underpinnings of scriptures. To comprehend this further, one can go to poets with a mystical mindset like that of the visionary poet William Blake.¹⁶⁷ His poems resonate with the simplicity of nursery rhymes and yet can convey both the terror and the awe as well as the gentleness of the Divine as manifested in the apparent contradictions in creations. The deep import of those poems dawn in a

¹⁶⁶ This is translated as “the virginal peak”. In the *ma’rifa*/gnostic realm the apex collapses to be the center of the circle. The innermost heart (*qalb*) is the center of a being and at that *qalb* is the secret (*sirr*). It is the spark that radiates the truth due to its connection to the Source of Truth. Merton’s experience of it (known as the “the vision in Louisville”) is characteristic of the unitive vision in its utter clarity of interconnectivity.

¹⁶⁷ See Harold Bloom in the Preface to Henry Corbin’s *Alone with the Alone* (x- xvii) and Clinton Minnaar’s Introduction to *The Underlying Religion*. Authors like these chose similar adverbs for poets like Blake to differentiate him from poets with explicitly Christian intonations like Auden, etc.

revelatory manner as they are processed within the recesses of one's psyche. Enabling such progression unconsciously is the tool of the mystic guides. It is an established fact that the most effective and lasting learning occurs at the unconscious level. It is the mystical mindset that enabled Blake to imbue his poetry to resonate with the sense of the profoundly sacred in the utter simplicity of the verses that appeals to the primal within. Thus it is in the Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience that we have the whole spectrum of what Bawa speaks of as the Quranic *zat* and the *sifat*.

“Good works” as the path “to know” is what wisdom teachers and poets like Bawa and Blake, respectively, are enjoining on their followers as the path to realizing into their essential man-God, God-man self.¹⁶⁸ So Hinduism in Bawa's teachings has to be contextualized within his overall message. His teachings, in accord with the Quran, perceive any separations, including that of religion, as a part of creation or *sifat*. These separations are there to enable humans to “know”—that is for gnosis. Bawa's teachings extrapolate this “knowing” as the steps to wisdom. Such progression with Bawa is realized into Divine Analytic Wisdom to the Light of Divine Luminous Wisdom. Bawa calls Krishna the Divine Analytic Wisdom in the Puranic tale later told here in in this chapter where he saves humanity by preventing the demon king Ravana to possess the divine

¹⁶⁸ In his work on Ibn Arabi Chittick uses the term “theomorphic” for this (1989).

nectar. This is, as per another frequent metaphor that Bawa uses, the process for the firewood to become the fire.

This study is premised on the mystic perspective of the unitive vision which, to restate again, for a Muslim mystic like Bawa translates into the message of the truth of *Tawheed*. Again, for Muslims, the word of God in the Quran is conclusive. The Quran states in the first person, God speaking directly to the reader, that He/She sent countless guides since the beginning of time throughout the ages to every clime messengers to guide humanity. From that perspective all the sages in every age has been Gods spokespersons bringing the same message over and over again for humans to “remember” what they “forgot”.¹⁶⁹ This brings in the inclusiveness of all faith/wisdom traditions in Islam. As mentioned earlier, Sufi teachings have thus, anchored on to the regional wisdom of wherever their students are and anchored on to the familiar strains of the local faith system to initiate the progression of their followers. This is more noticeable where the message that the sages bring apparently appears to contradict the ones they moored on to begin their teachings. This is most remarkable when a faith tradition involves forms and images in its ritual practices, as the Islamic tradition is absolutely opposed to all those. Thus it appears to be no less a feat than to affix on to the essence of the truth layered away in an intricate system of visual forms. Sufi sheikhs like Bawa were adept in navigating

¹⁶⁹ It is to be noted that these two words are a recurring strain in the Quran.

such mazes and then drawing out the wisdom from those tales of endless formation. Moreover, Bawa was viewed at the deepest and highest as he is considered a *qutb* —the axis of an age.

Ancient faith traditions still being practiced by a large region is what is generally termed Hinduism in India. Again, in this regard, it needs to be remembered that Hinduism is a British construct. There is no single faith tradition in India.¹⁷⁰ The British colonists in their adoption of their colonially pragmatic divide and rule policy had to set up a group against the Muslims from whom they had taken the power to rule the region. Thus they created a term based on the Arabic word for India, Hind (Hindu for the inhabitants of Hind), and conceptually constructed a system under the Vedic umbrella. This later served the agenda of Indian political leaders who came from the ruling elite of Vedic descent to have a common uniting term for the rest of the inhabitants of the land. Thus Hinduism as a term denoting the religion of India was established. However, as becomes evident with any research, India is a land of countless regional traditions that

¹⁷⁰ Scholars like Barbara Metcalf have pointed out that it was the British colonists who created the concept of a homogenous Hindu nation with the Muslims being the foreigners in a region that was, and still is, an amalgamation of countless belief systems (xxi). This narrative has been picked up by the elites of India to serve their own political agenda deflecting attention for the lower or outcastes' claims of affirmative rights.

Also see "Why Study Religion?" (7) in Hinnells Ed. The Routledge , 2005 and Brian K. Pennington's *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2005.

blended and reblended in Tweedian confluences with a dominance of different deities in different regions.

For the purpose of our study here, we need to go to the folk level to reach back to the pre-Vedic times before the white-skinned Aryans rode into the northern plains of India and settled there. The Aryans drove the dark skinned native Dravidians further and further away to the Southern and Eastern¹⁷¹ regions. So those are the regions where the anthropologists can dig out the most ancient traditions through the folk rites and lore. Chapter four discussed the most significant study done so far regarding such research of how only the Sufi sheikhs chose to penetrate those regions to bring light at all levels to the inhabitants and turn their lives around. This study places Bawa with such folk figures. His discourses traverse ancient mythic tales of the land in a panoramic scope weaving in the familiar strands only to reveal the layered away forgotten wisdom that had existed since ancient times. This shift primes the listener to be gradually weaned away from the realm of the faith systems based on forms to that of the ultimate truth that has no form and came from no time or to put it in Bawa's language "beginningless beginning". This truth of Islam is so organically realized into the psyche of the followers that it validates the natural orientation of

¹⁷¹ As mentioned in Chapter one, anthropological research is showing that due to the thick jungles none of these invaders ventured into the eastern most regions. Only the spiritual wayfarers like the Sufi sheiks, whose intent was the betterment of their fellow beings, penetrated those dreaded regions and brought them to the attention of the rulers by the prosperity their tutelage had transformed the region into.

*fitra*¹⁷² in each human heart that Bawa reiterates countless times throughout his discourses. Again, the spiritual progression to Truth here is beyond what the world recognizes as the religion of Islam. As per context, Bawa uses the term Islam for purity, truth and at times the religion of Islam as the world refers to.

The paradox, however, is that Bawa's teachings reveal that each individual, no matter what faith traditions they belong to, makes the journey from that of form to the formless. This is due to the fact that the spiritual journey encompasses inevitable stages of progression that are inextricable with our composition. Thus does Bawa's teachings based essentially in the Quran, draw out elements from the Hindu traditions to extrapolate and explain to the point of spelling out in detail the necessary meanings. For example, the bare essentials of the creation story of Adam made of clay is mentioned in the Quran. Previous Judeo-Christian narratives, unless a corrective is stated specifically in the Quran, is acceptable for further elaboration. However, Bawa's discourses dive into the depths of the meanings, the *tawil*¹⁷³ per se, drawing the listener to the center of

¹⁷² *Fitra*, is as per the Quran, the natural inclination of humans to the ultimate Truth. One may layer away that Truth and "forget", but this natural orientation abides therein : "So turn your face toward the true natural way of life—God's chosen *fitrah* (constitution) upon which He has formed humanity. There is no altering the primary state of God's creation. That is the correct way of life though most men fail to realize it. It is the path of turning towards God, remaining dutiful to Him, establishing prayer, and being not of those who ascribe partners to Him." (Qur'an 30:30-31).

¹⁷³ The various connotative interpretation of the Quran—the inner meanings, per se. They vary in degree of the depth of the meanings to the point that it is said in the Quran that only God knows the final meaning.

the self. For this, Bawa weaves the tapestry that goes beyond the Biblical-Quranic narratives and draws in the ancient wisdom of the land. For example, to understand the human one has to understand the elements that went into its composition. The details of the composition of the human being that of earth, fire, water, air and ether is drawn from the Hindu faith traditions. Each of these elements are a part of creation or *sifat*. So it is important to be aware that when humanity was formed, that form was made out of those elements. So spiritual progression entails learning about the properties of each of these elements. These properties are what pulls humans away, preventing them from realizing into their essence. Their true essence, or *zat*, is the light. Bawa calls it the light form. To realize into their true form requires constant vigilance to keep at bay the properties of the elements that went into their composition. Thus in Bawa's language it is vital to be vigilant in reigning in the "monkey mind" and driving away or tying up "the dogs of desires".

So, Bawa's teachings bring in an exquisite relationship between the *Sheikh and the Disciple* (1983) This is the title of a book from which the excerpt below is taken. Here, again, he points out that it is the mind and the attachments it creates and thus causes pain.

The intellect will experience pain and sorrow ... A good sheikh has to cut all this. You must think, "If he makes me suffer, it is only to kill the bad qualities within me and to extinguish this fire. That is why he is doing this. ...Remember that he is extinguishing the fire of karma which is scorching you and causing you to suffer. He is cutting the fire of hunger, the fire of doubt, and the fire of arrogance within you. He is cutting the karma of the five elements within you

... He is an instrument and you are the gem in his hands. He is cutting you to bring out the original light of the stone. You are a precious gem that came into his hands. He must make that stone valuable and then place it in the treasury. It is in his hands, so he has to do that work. He does not benefit. He has nothing to gain. He makes you valuable and places you where you belong, in the treasury of God's kingdom. When you reach that place, when you attain that clarity, you will appreciate the value of his work. But until such time you will experience pain. The gem feels the pain as it is being cut and faceted, but if this is done in just the right way, later you will realize the great value of that work (45-46).

Needless to say, Bawa's discourses being in the oral tradition is integral to the nature of his teachings. To extrapolate the above-mentioned message, Bawa's narrative flow takes one to an experiential journey that traverses vast regions of varied hues, only to converge back to the essential Single Point. In other words, his narratives are modeled on the infinite flow of creation itself with all its apparent oppositions and contradictions to be seen eventually as interconnected and merging into Oneness. Thus is achieved a shift in perspective on viewing the apparent differences in this world. In our study here, the focus is on how Bawa integrates Hinduism and Islam in his teachings. The usage of Hinduism in Bawa's teachings will be narrowed further to manageable limits due to the limited scope of this study. The discussion will take an interpretive approach.

The first section will discuss Bawa's core message which pervades his teachings. Similar to Sufis who work at the primal level through tales, songs and verses, Bawa's message is so integrated with his methodology that the

discussion of both the message and the method will be just as integrated in the discussions here.

The next section will be devoted to Bawa's usage of Hinduism. This section will be further sub divided into the following:

- a) Bawa's usage of the stories of the Puranas,
- b) The Creation Myth,
- c) Bawa's use of Hinduism as a state.

This last sub-section of Bawa's use of Hinduism as a state relates to Bawa's view of all religion as a heuristic device to explicate the nature of progression in human development. Thus in the journey of progression each individual passes through each religion regardless of whatever faith traditions they may belong to, i.e., whether they are a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jew.

Throughout all the above-mentioned sections what is notable is the pervasiveness of the admixtures of traditions which include simple or allegorical allusions and metaphors constantly drawn from the Hindu traditions.

Bawa's Teachings: Message and Methodology

Similar to other Sufis, the core message of Bawa's teachings again stem from the Hadith Qudsi¹⁷⁴ of the Hidden Treasure or Secret. That "Hidden Treasure" is to what the secret point of Truth pulsating in each heart is connected to. Bawa speaks of one having to connect to a "point" within that to realize into Truth. To fully realize into that Truth entails an experiential journey that engages the senses in an enhanced manner to reflect and discern the truth in each experience to leap beyond the sensory. As per the Sufi teachings, which Bawa essentially adhered to, all the creations are "examples" and "illustrations" to experience the ultimate Truth. Extrapolating on the Quran, he says that the vowels provide the "sounds" in the Quran for us to experience it. Just as there are seven vowels that function to give the sounds to the consonants, so does "the seven causal signs" in the humans. These are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth provided to experience creation and then reflect on those experiences (*Four Steps to Pure Iman* 40-42).

¹⁷⁴ See "Hadith Qudsi" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. These are sacred tradition or report. Also called hadith rabbani or hadith ilahi (divine hadith). Refers to a saying (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad in which the meaning is revealed by God and the phrasing is formulated by the Prophet. Unlike prophetic hadith (hadith nabawi), the chain of transmission is traced back directly to God instead of ending with the Prophet. In contrast to the Quran, which is considered divine revelation in both meaning and wording, the authenticity of sacred hadith varies from one narration to another, and they may not be recited in prayer. They function as extra-Quranic revelation.

In the second section of chapter two of this study, we have the terms and concepts that one assimilates when they embark on the Sufi path. Yet the trek of each Sufi guide takes on the coloring of the teacher and the students. Here we will briefly attempt to identify the characteristics that are noted in Bawa's discourses. His teachings are rich with an intermixture of mostly Tamil and Arabic terms. His simultaneous usage of these terms appear to be interchangeable at times while also being complementary at times. Through such shifting methods terms and concepts are assimilated into the listener's consciousness. This process of assimilation by itself appears to be part of the pupil's progression. The spiraled out nature of the narrative flow, in which the concentric circles grow ever larger, has the terms recurring with a deeper and deeper connotations until the listener can leap beyond the world of form to the formless, as it all collapses back to a single point.

Thus, through the course of being immersed in the narrative flow of Bawa's discourses, terms and concepts uniquely pertaining to the message take on specific meanings. These meanings, as per the context, mostly expand into the territories Bawa takes the listener to. For example, as will become evident through this study, Hinduism and Islam in Bawa's message are spiritual states. The progression of the pilgrims in the gnostic journey that Bawa's followers undertake entails the aforesaid leap from the realm of form to that of the formless. This, in a way, is the initial vital step to the realization of the No-thing to the ultimate truth of *Tawheed*.

Bawa's spoke in Tamil with an English interpreter simultaneously translating into English. In this process certain Tamil or Arabic terms are introduced and translated, but the usage of the Tamil and Arabic continues. This not only embeds the terms in the listener's consciousness, but in the assimilation process the intonation and the manner Bawa delivered the discourse as well as the context is absorbed. Hence, it is evident how the oral tradition is integral to the message that Bawa brings. Only the oral method allows for a constant flow that can take on the contours of terrain to make its way to the goal. The terrain of the listener's consciousness, determines the trajectory of Bawa's lesson in order to bring it to the disciple's level of progression. The spiral format allows for countless repetition of terms and reiteration in terms of emphasis. Staying with the metaphor of the spiral, the discourse expands in the depth of their meanings as it spirals out into a larger circle of multiplicity. All this is executed while staying concentric to "the Point" to which the phenomenal collapses back in its interconnected unison. Bawa resorted to what can be described as linguistic acrobatics by latching on to a segment of a word from one language, i.e., Tamil, Arabic or English, and pulling it into the domain of another language where the segment is homophonic with a term in the other language with an entirely different meaning. The segment then takes on the meaning within the linguistic domain it is imported into and is conjoined with a term of its new domain. Thus a new term is created that serves to drive the message home. It is difficult to give an example of this complex word play that traverse multiple linguistic domains.

However, what is clear is the effect. It clears out the way for the listener to a deeper comprehension of the message that is being revealed through the discourses. For this the aforesaid spiral pattern of delivery is ideally suited.

So to analyze any aspect of Bawa's teachings necessitates an orientation to Bawa's universe of discourse. This is where the importance of his teachings being oral becomes significant. Studying Bawa's discourses reveals how the oral medium is vital in allowing the intended transition to the required domain of discourse. First of all the oral medium is a direct intercourse that allows the building of trust and intimacy at an individual level. Secondly, the teacher can gear the teachings to the level of the individual student's ability to receive and then process the information. Most importantly, since ancient times, it has been the oral medium of telling tales that has been the most effective vehicle to imprint moral maxims into the human psyche. They ranged from the Homeric epics to succinct Confucian sayings to the simple parables of Jesus. Tales appeal to the primal in the human psyche and enable the teller to unobtrusively radically overturn the familiarity one has with the universe as he/she had perceived hitherto. So sages like Bawa through their story-telling or singing gradually overturn the system that his listeners have adhered to. Then, while the student listeners are grappling to get a grip on what they are hearing, Bawa proceeds to build up a new structure for them to hold on to. What is notable is that ultimately all these are also in a flux. The fluidity is important as they are only temporal as being part of the process to realization. All are ephemeral crutches to convey one

to the realization to the Truth. It is what Buddha referred to as the ferry to cross the ocean. Once the ocean is crossed, which Bawa refers to as the ocean of illusion, the functionality of the ferry is over. One has arrived or awakened. The Truth is the only Real.

So one can visualize Bawa's process of teaching as a spiral format. This process expands out in a format of concentric circles with each circle twisting onto a larger circle of expanded meaning allowing for the progression to reflective insights. In that format there is a pattern of deconstructions followed by expanded forms of constructions that eventually breaks free the constraints of the mind with its conditioned pattern of thinking. This continues into another round of deconstruction and construction until the student listener wakes up to the true meaning of *sifat*. All creation is illusory. Their functionality lies in providing humanity to experience them as examples of the divine manifestation. This can only come with reflections and such reflections can in due course lead to the realization of the *zat* or essence. This is the secret of the divine mystery. The secret that connects all creation and thus orients each to the Source. It is only due to the natural orientation of all creation that enables one to such realization. That orientation is the *fitr*. So all is ultimately an ongoing process of going back. However, the progressing humans experiential return takes a different pathway for that. Theirs's is an awakening to different realms back to the Resplendence.

So in Bawa's discourses, one slowly wakes up to the fact that a term applied to a religion can take on different meanings. It could be the formal structure of laws at one time. At another it is in fact being applied to a state of progression or a specific attribute. So most of the time Islam is no longer a religion. At one moment it means purity, at another it is the state of *ma'rifa* gnosticism. At times there appears to be no limit to the variety of meaning that a supposedly known term may take as per the context in Bawa's narrative. One thing appears to be inevitable. The narrative is imperceptively breaking down the hitherto conditioned way of thinking.

Bawa's Usage of Hinduism

Thus Bawa's usage of Hinduism is to be viewed within the context thus described. Bawa's narrative takes away the listener/student from the domains of discourse he/she had hitherto adhered to another universe of discourse. There is a constant admixture of traditions in the weaving tapestry of Bawa's narrative of apparent interreligiosity. Thus unconsciously the listener is picking up terms and building up a connotative structure for whatever path is required at that moment.

For practical purposes of a research study with a limited scope such as this, the decision to dip into the ocean of Bawa's narrative necessitates the practicality of choosing only a few elements to analyze. Hence, this study is

limited to discuss some of the following in regard of what is noted as the elements of Hinduism in Bawa's discourses. These, as has been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, are mainly Bawa's usage of the stories of the *Puranas*, his constant admixtures of traditions which include simple or allegorical allusions, metaphors, etc. in the Hindu traditions . This admixture is very telling in the Creation Myth; and finally, Bawa's use of Hinduism as a state that all humans go through whether they are a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, or a Jew.

In this regard, it is important to mention that the above-mentioned elements are so pervasive in the thousands of hours of the audio and visual tapes, that for practical purposes, this study will use just a few references for this study. Once tuned in, a researcher can go in and randomly pick any recording and be able to discern the elements from Hinduism that are discussed here.

The Puranas: Examples, Allusions, Metaphors

Perhaps the most entertaining aspect of studying Hinduism in Bawa is in his usage of Hindu Puranas. At times he proceeds to tell a story to exemplify a point. At other, he is responding to perhaps a derogatory remark about myths to prove their value as not only vehicles of moral maxims but also as receptacles of the ineffable truth. Throughout it all there is a constant admixture of terms from Hinduism and Islam. What is ongoing is a constant drilling for the awareness of the five elements that went into the human composition and the pull of the

properties of the these that humans need to overcome to progress and realize into their true form of light. He applies the Hindu term *saktis* to refer to these properties. Also is established the ineffability of the divine and all the creation being a manifestation of the divine, where each and everything is an example, i.e., the sun is the metaphor for the eternal light, the moon exemplifying how the reflected light from the source can also light the way, etc.¹⁷⁵

The *Puranas* may be primarily vehicles of “form” functional to convey the formless for humans in their initial state of comprehension. This will be explained further when Bawa’s use of Hinduism as a state in human development is discussed at the end of this chapter. Bawa said that it is essential to understand the forms that we see outside as they are the manifestations of what we have inside. By observing and learning about them from outside we can learn to confront and overcome them within. For example he says all the animals that we see in the world are representations projected outside by our minds of what is within us. So if we observe a snake, a tiger or a fox we will learn to confront the qualities they represent that are within us and overcome them. In a larger sense Bawa speaks of that is happening in the world as “scenes” created by our minds with its “quadrillion ten thousand shaktis or energies”. So we have to cultivate

¹⁷⁵ These information are from an unpublished transcripts of the discourses of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen translated by Dr Ganeshan. September, 14, 1985, Saturday am. #s 1059 & 1060. 14.

and cleanse to enable us to transcend the mind-creating machinery to connect to the divine good.

Bawa's methods appear to be in accord with the ancient sages teaching methods in the usage of the *Puranas* for his teachings. The *Puranas* are said to be created by the sages to make the sacred scriptural revelations of *Sruti* (what is heard) accessible to the common man. Hence, we have the *Puranas* as *smriti* (what is remembered) in the ancient Indian sacred tradition. The variance of the *smriti* tales as per regional differences allows for accommodation to the receptivity of the listeners. The essential messages appear to remain the same. For example, the epic battles depicted in the epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are the ongoing battle between good and evil within the human heart. Bawa speaks of this overarching theme as representing the struggle within man. This struggle and the ways and means to overcome and transcend the forces that prevents humans from the clarity of truth is the constant reminder through the course of all discourses. For this imageries from all traditions are drawn on — including the *Puranas*. The *Puranas* being short and episodic and laden with such leitmotifs lends itself as symbolic illustrations for this eternal struggle and countless allusions to make a point.

Regarding the two epics and the Puranic tales derived from them Bawa said "... Poets have sung in this way. But the meanings ... it shows itself as some form of karma in man. Ravanaan, he has got ten heads ... the ten heads are the ten sins ... so when the ten heads, or the ten sins become the form of the

body ... so this body is the ten sins ...” and he goes on to say that despite cutting them with the “sword of wisdom” they will keep growing back until the five beetles are crushed together. He continues by saying that these sins are the product of the mind and “... All evil actions can be created by the mind” (Unpublished Transcript, March 13, 1976, p. 4). Bawa draws on a plethora of Puranic figures to teach how to fight and ultimately destroy those ten sins. Each figure is symbolic of something. For example Matchavellevan is what was “born out of the monkey mind” . So Matchavellevan that is born out of the monkey mind is the “‘essence’ of the monkey. It has tremendous number of energies. Its qualities are three times the qualities of the monkey mind.” Bawa continues to draw on imageries from the Puranas of animals, deities and demons. Frequently the symbols and metaphors change apparently to make the images more vivid. The unrestrained ego that keeps one imprisoned is suddenly termed as “the mountain of the mind” which has grown “... very, very high. You cannot measure its height. It has extended from the earth, from the bosom of the earth up to the skies ...”

What is revealed through the imageries is that the higher the mountain the deeper are its caves and the more difficult it becomes to catch the “five beetles” to crush them altogether as that is the only way to free oneself from the “ocean of Maya’ and see the Truth. The five beetles represent the five elements that form man. They are earth, water, fire, air, and ether that constitute man and are operative in the mind-creating imprisoning “forms”.

Other ways of Bawa's resorting to the Puranic stories is to relate a familiar story and to point out the real meaning that had eluded the listeners for ages. One such story is that of the contest between the two sons of the deity Shiva in which the oldest Ganesha won and the younger Murugan supposedly left in a tantrum because of that. It is notable that in Bawa's narration of the Puranic stories what stands out is the figure of Murugan. The story of the sibling rivalry between these brothers and Bawa's telling of the tale will illustrate Bawa's method of drawing out meanings specific to his teachings. Ganesha is the popular deity in Hinduism as he represents the much desired success and achievement . He is distinctive for his elephant head and pot belly. All deities have a mount and his is the downward Looking (hence earth bound) scurrying rat. Unlike him, his younger brother Murugan is tall, athletic and strikingly handsome and is perceived popularly as the discontented and rebellious younger sibling. Also known as Skanda , he is viewed as a warrior with him holding a lance aloft. His mount is the peacock. They are the sons of Shiva and Parvathi, who loom large in the creative myth of Hinduism. The popular Puranic story is about a contest between the two brothers in which the contestants have to race around the earth three times. The winner gets a rare fruit. At the start of the race in the blink of an eye Murugan takes off. Ganesha ponders on the impossibility of his chances of winning due to his pot-bellied slow gait and makes his decision. He waddles around Shiva three times and tells him that since Shiva is his world, he has gone around him. The much-gratified Shiva gives him the fruit. When

Murugan returns after circumambulating the world thrice, and finds his brother won by what he perceives as trickery, he sheds off all his clothes and leaves in anger. Traditionally wisdom is attributed to Ganesha for such aforesaid acts of success. The elephant god Ganesha is held in high esteem for his apparent “wisdom” to the point that it is a traditional practice to name the oldest son Ganesha. Bawa pointed out that the whole point of the story has been missed. The brothers were told “to go around the world” in order to learn experientially. Murugan by complying with that learned his lessons well and “shed” the world. His taking off his clothes symbolizes that. He had attained the insight to realize into wisdom that enables one to cut off all attachments due to the clarity to recognize the Truth. His lance symbolizes that sharp focus on the point. Murugan won by transcending the world or *dunya*.¹⁷⁶

Thus does Bawa’s take on this story take one into a complete shift of perspective. This is particularly so for his Hindu listeners who were conditioned into an adoration mindset for Ganesha . The build of Ganesha and the resultant gait is due to his pull to the world. His elephant head is signifying arrogance. His pot belly the consuming fire of hunger signifying the fire of the never-ending desires. His ride of the rat signifies the earthbound nature and crawling movement. The rat will always be looking down low towards the ground.

¹⁷⁶ This is the Arabic word for the world However, the spiritual connotation are the temporal illusory realm which one may get entrapped in due to its visible materiality.

Murugan carries the lance that pierces the illusion of the world. His mount is the peacock. The five colors of the peacock represent the five elements of creation. Murugan has reigned them in and transcended to wisdom. Thus going into Bawa's interpretation of the story, by going around the world three times, Murugan has pierced into the knowledge of the illusory nature of creation. This progression into the insight has made the contest meaningless to him. So his shedding off his clothes signifies shedding off the world to transcend to another realm. Thus his ascent is literally an ascension of transcendence.

It should be remembered that stories from the *Puranas* have multiple versions in the different *Puranas*. Again, countless stories surround significant characters to accentuate a particular trait in them in order to promote that or make a teaching point. Bawa appears to use an amalgam of these tales to illustrate his teaching. In one recording he relates the story of Visvamisra, Vashista and Arundhati. In the same discourse he first relates the Visvamisra and Vashista's encounter and the subsequent confrontation. In the initial encounter Visvamisra, who was a king, encountered Vashista, a *gnani* (a wise man) in the jungle deep in his meditation and asked for his help with the feeding of his large army. Vashista granted the request feeding the large army with the milk of a remarkable cow that was given to him by a deity. The confrontation started when Visvamisra decided to take the cow away by force to enable him to feed his large army. In this confrontation the large army was completely destroyed when all Vashista did was hold out his stick. Visvamisra, was so

impressed by this power that he decided to self-cultivate to attain such powers. He went through severe asceticism for countless years and gained numerous powers. Although his name and fame spread due to these powers, they all at one time or another proved to be inadequate and Visvamitra started anew with more severity.

The point of the above story in Bawa's narrative was to show that at one level the difference between appearance and reality and at another level the power of intent. Although many times the powers of Vashista and Visvamitra appeared to be the same, in fact while Vashista's powers were centered on the "*qalb*" and thus with the divine Truth therein, Visvamitra's were centered on the "mind". Thus the latter powers were outer and had arrogance in it. The *qalb* is "inner", as per Bawa, while the mind is "outer". Another point that Bawa points out in this story is the significance of the right intent. Visvamitra's intent was to attain power, Vashista's was to attain the insight to Truth. Thus Visvamitra's power came from "maya" and the Gnani Vashista's from God.¹⁷⁷

What is significant for the purpose of this paper is that the interpretation given here is uniquely Bawa's. In multiple versions of the Visvamitra story, nowhere is it indicated that his flaws were due to his powers coming from maya and the lack of the very important right intent. At times Bawa has blended stories

¹⁷⁷ For the version of this story from the epic see in J. A. B. van Buiten trans. & ed. *The Mahabharata: The Book of the Beginning*. 330-333. It should be noted that there are countless regional renderings of these stories throughout India. Those renderings form the voluminous version of the *Puranas*.

from the Abrahamic tradition with Puranic figures in a unique form of equivalency such as Adam and Eve with the deities Sivam (Shiva) and Sakti . For example at the end of a story of a journey by the prophet Khidr with a disguised archangel Gabriel to attain knowledge, God discloses to Khidr the true form and identity of Gabriel. This is followed by Bawa identifying Gabriel with ether. Subsequently are the other archangels equated with Puranic deities – Michael with the element of water and the deity Varuna, Izrael with fire and the deity Akkini and Israfil with Vayu, the wind deity with the element of air.

When coming to Hinduism in Bawa's teachings, what is most notable is the allusions and metaphors taken from that tradition. At times of course there are direct equations or equivalencies with both the Islamic and Hindu terms juxtaposed together, i.e., "perfectly pure dinul-islam (Saivam¹⁷⁸)" (ROA 147). Countless times Adam and Eve, from the Judeo-Christian traditions are equated with Adam and Hawa from the Islamic one being the same as Shiva and Sakti or Ishwara and Ishwarni from Hinduism. The pervasiveness of such direct equivalencies as well as allusions and metaphors in his narratives appear to be functional in integrating them in the listener's psyche with eventual resultant interchangeability. This method invariably places Bawa within the tradition of the "holy man" who worked for the emancipation of the common folk of forgotten regions ignored by the Aryan elites that ruled most of India. Folk wisdom tends to be the daily bread of the have-nots and their lives are rich with it. Only a

¹⁷⁸ Derived from the name of the deity Shiva, it is indicative of the belief.

familiarity with Hinduism will enable a reader to note how pervasive such usage is. The style of Bawa's discourses with repetitive usage and simultaneous translation and constant reiteration of terms and the flips and the turns with the sense revealed through the context, is the stream of a new consciousness of meaning making. This again validates the value of the oral medium for such schooling.

In this regard it needs to be noted that Hindu mythology is perhaps most intricate in its development due to the nature of its landscape and the mixing and remixing of the inhabitants of the varied regions. The many versions of the story of Rama and the variations within, which is due in part to the regional renderings, are one of the examples as to how intricate the network of Indian mythology is. So, it is not within the scope of this study to trace which version of a story Bawa chose to tell at any time. This study, therefore will be confined to the larger matrix of the myths. Regarding the Hindu deities, it appears that Bawa purviews them as transcended beings some of whom may be wisdom figures like him. Krishna and Murugan are clearly among those. At other times one is taken back eons ago to another realm of creation. Sufi mystics have elaborated on Quranic allusions to others realms. In analyzing Ibn Arabi, Henry Corbin has introduced the term "Mundis imaginalis" to refer to those realms. It does appear that Bawa places some events and some characters from the *Puranas* in those realms. This becomes particularly notable in Bawa's depiction of the primordial creation as will be later described in this section.

As Martin Lings noted “ The Islamic doctrine of Rasulis ultimately is the same as the Hindu doctrine of the Avatara, the immediate difference being that the term Avatara means ‘descent’ — this is of the Divinity — whereas Rasul is defined either as an Archangel or else as a human incarnation of the Spirit. But this difference is one of perspective rather than fact for the Spirit has an uncreated aspect opening onto the Divinity as well as a created one” (2008, 23) .

Later in this dissertation, we analyze how the figure of Shiva merges with that of Adam as the primal father. Krishna and Murugan merge with the wisdom figures such as Bawa himself, who descend from time to time to every clime for the guidance of humanity . This brings us to a complex area we need to address but due to the limited scope of this study will be unable to unpack in further detail. It appears Hinduism provided Bawa the vehicle to insert into the listener’s psyche, what we referred to earlier, that which Henry Corbin termed as the creative imagination (*Mundis imaginalis* of Ibn Arabi) as a passage in the wayfarer’s progression. Corbin warned against the pervasive use of the term as to prevent its degeneration into the profane.

The apparently intricate maze of Hindu mythology is what one can step into to understand the state before and after creation that the scriptures allude to but leave it to the spiritual sojourner to awaken to. This is what Martin Lings referred to as spiritual development going beyond the horizontal historical past to the spiritual vertical past. To the uninitiated it can only be a labyrinthal realm of

forms. The initiated on the trek are those who hold on initially to a guide to navigate the trek until the leap to the transcendence.

So Bawa weaves into the narrative Shiva who at times appears to belong to a realm familiar and yet not in the formal history that is taught. At other times he is clearly identifiable with the primordial Adam with whom scripturally the world of the senses began. This latter identification is specifically so when Bawa speaks of Shiva's consort Parvati and says *par* means earth and that Shiva is called Parshiva and that they are primal parents of earthlings *per se*. Bawa refers to the other names that Parvati is known by. In this regard her name Sakti which literally means energy, is brought to the fore in relation to the creation story. The union of Shiva and Sakti is represented in the potency of the creative energy that the term *sakti* by itself connotes.

While on the term of *sakti*, Bawa elaborates that all the elements in creation has a specific *sakti*/energy/potency. Bawa is critical of those who go into severe cultivation of meditations and other measures to acquire such *saktis* to enable them to perform miracles and are revered by the laity as swamis. Meditations and mantras for the acquisition of such powers, as per Bawa, serve no purpose in human progression. Attaining wisdom is possible though performing acts of duties. It lies in service, it is in sacrifice. One glories in being the perfect slave — *abd*.

So wisdom comes with the penetration into knowing and progressing further into the realm beyond the senses and going into the silence¹⁷⁹ transcending the “*sakti*”s. So in a manner of speaking the creation myth is going back to go forward. Once the sojourner can leap beyond the boundaries of time and space, one is thrown into the spiral swirl that passes through stages of creation prior to the familiar and can incorporate all the mythical beings that the imagination can conjure. In this regard the following excerpt from an unpublished transcript speaks volumes:

He is God. He exists on the summit. That is that Power. At first that Power **has no sound** (emphasis are mine). It is only when Wisdom can slip into it that sound can be generated from it. Only when that sound comes...

That is the Grace. That is its Power. It is from there that the Discerning Wisdom of the Qutbiyyat¹⁸⁰ arises. It is only after that Wisdom arises that there is talking. Then there is speech. The speech is generated from there. The sound is generated from there. The Power is generated from there. That Power is God. That is God. These three are One.

Because it exists without sound we cannot find it through touch. All other things resonate and exist with sound. God exists without sound. That is what exists here as Allāh. This we must understand. This is how it exists.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Note the meeting between the Muslim mystic author Hussein Nasr and the Hindu sage described in the Introduction of this dissertation. They connected in that “silence”.

¹⁸⁰ From the term *qutb*.

¹⁸¹ “On the summit”, “has no sound” conjure depictions of Shiva in his deep meditative trance sitting on a summit.

Bawa's usage of Hinduism is evocative of the ancient Gnostic myths that Hans Jonas introduced in his seminal book *The Gnostic Religion*. Many mythic figures and the depicted powers therein and elsewhere are paralleled in Bawa's tales and Sufi traditions. They are evocative of the age of aeons prior to the creation of Adam. The Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron ages of the Western mythology, which are also alluded to in Sufi traditions, comes into play when Bawa brings in figures like Krishna and Murugan in his narratives. These figures evoke ages before the current most devolved age called the Kali *yuga* in the Indian tradition. Although the five divisions of the Hindu mythology *yugas* do not align or coincide perfectly with the four ages of western mythology, they both echo similar strains of a state of primordial times of perfection and a fall from that state. Bawa is perpetually using phrases and terms like *athi* and *anathi* that erases the boundaries of time and space as we know it. So the tales function in an alternate reality to bring home a point. One such Puranic tale Bawa begins by saying significantly that Love can be taken in any amount depending on the size of the vessel one brings. God is Plentitude. How much one can contain depends on being the container one has progressed into. Bawa then shifts to Truth being the same and proceeds to the telling of a tale to illustrate the point. It is significant that by this time there has been introduced the idea of Love, God and Truth being the same. However, how one has progressed to be the receptacle to receive such wealth depends on their level of wisdom. Bawa then tells the Puranic

story of Ravana's attempt to fulfil his mother's wish when she asked for the emblem of Shiva. Ravana is the antagonist character in the epic Ramayana who kidnapped the protagonist Rama's wife Sita. He is described as the ten-headed powerful demon king. Demons, or Asuras, are a race of beings who are variously described as demigods, demons, etc. sometimes good and sometimes bad. Ravana who is mostly considered as the evil antagonist of the good protagonist Rama, is actually revered by certain Hindu groups in India and Sri Lanka and Bali . So here is an example of the Tweedian crosscurrents of traditions, the currents in this case of an earlier revered figure being composited with a later competing one coming from another tradition to become an epitome of evil. Ravana was a devotee of Shiva. This meant that he drew his powers through prolonged meditation on Shiva. Evidently, here Bawa is illustrating the meditation with the misguided intent for *sakti*. So going back to Bawa's usage of this Puranic tale here we also note the admixture of Hinduism and Islam. Ravana's devotions went deeper when he played the music on the string made out of the "nerves" of his head. Bawa says the music was the "*La ilaha illallah*".¹⁸² After much meditation and playing of such music Shiva came. Ravana asked for the "container of the nectar in his chest" meaning what is in the "*qalb*", the heart. It is notable here that Bawa uses the deeply connotative Islamic mystical term *qalb* for heart here. Shiva said that this nectar belongs to all and cannot be "possessed" by

¹⁸² The Islamic verbal declaration of faith in Arabic.

one individual. Ravana gets angry and goes on a rant of “you call yourself Shiva...” and demands that his intense devotions and meditations on Shiva has made it obligatory on the deity to grant a boon as mandated by the cosmic laws. Thus now Shiva is obligated to grant what the devotions and meditation were put forth for. Shiva is thus forced to give in and takes out the “*qalb*” but tells him that he must never put this precious chalice on the ground. Ravana retorts “disdainfully” that he knows what to do and doesn’t have to be told that as he had earned it. He was also commenting on the “tiny thing” that it was. It is important here to note the overall arrogance of Ravana and the evidence of his not being worthy of having such a sacred trust. The underpinning message remains that of the mistake of such misdirected meditation that are more for acquisition. Ravana was embodying all the cardinal sins that Bawa constantly speaks of which are primarily that of arrogance and anger. Realization depends on the intent of the search. The search for *sakti* will give powers that are not related to wisdom. Evidently the attainment of wisdom was not Ravana’s intent.

Bawa’s goes on to say that Krishna, who was “divine analytic wisdom or Qutb” was worried. His fear was the precious content would fall into the hands of the asuras and help the demonic forces. To prevent that Krishna created a pond and cows and became a cowherd. Ravana wanted to purify himself for his prayers and called out to the “cowherd” boy (Krishna) to come and hold the vessel while he quickly went to the pond. Krishna refused saying that he has to tend the cows

who will stray away. After Ravana cajoled him, Krishna appeared to agree telling Ravana that if the cows stray away then he will call for him three times and then put it down to go back to his herding. Ravana agreed, and as expected, when he was bathing in the pond, the cows strayed away and Krishna called Ravana three times, then put the vessel down on the ground. Ravana ran back and of course could not get the chalice off the ground. After much trying, he went back into his severe meditation chanting to “the power of the One”. Bawa said he chanted “*la ilaha illallah*”. During that time all the elemental gods of earth fire, wine, etc. came and told him the futility of getting to move the vessel. Meanwhile his mother had died and they were waiting for him to do the rites. Eventually he had to give in to do so. As per Bawa, it was during this time period when he had attained such *saktis*, that the smite of Ravana’s sword on the rock had created the hot springs. He acquired and earned, as per his intent for his meditations, the *saktis* or powers to perform miracles. Bawa’s emphasis here is the futility of such powers, as it takes one astray and further off from realizing into higher truth.

Bawa ends the tale by saying that however the renderings of this story may be, the meaning is that no matter how much meditations to earn “merits” goes into earning something, if one is not worthy and is not rid of arrogance, then an “*avatar*” would prevent a sacred trust getting into the hands of such entities. In this case the avatar was Krishna.

So here we see how a story connected with the local lore of deities and holy sites (Kanniya Hot Springs in Trincomalee) is brought in to emphasizing that severe

meditation and collecting of merits is not enough for attaining wisdom. It can, in fact lead to more arrogance, which is antithetical to any progress. So, to hold the Truth one has to disappear in humility and be as “tiny” as what was given to Ravana who proved himself to be unworthy of retaining it. Bawa’s retelling of the tale has the hallmarks of his juxtaposition of Islamic vocabulary embedded in a Hindu tale introducing mystical ideas of embodied wisdom. His listeners in pre 9/11 times were being introduced to the Muslim declaration of faith in the truth of *Tawheed* seamlessly bringing in Arabic and Tamil translated into English with the Arabic intact as a *zikr* or remembrance as a meditative practice. What was taught was that this practice, with the right intent, can bring realization to the ultimate truth or wisdom.¹⁸³

In this regard, it can be mentioned that Bawa however critiques the viewing of some mythic figures as divinities by bringing into attention a major flaw in their character. One notable such criticism is of Rama’s doubting Sita’s fidelity. Bawa questions the validity of ascribing divinity to Rama when he had done such injustice to Sita.

¹⁸³ This tale is in the *CD Informal and Formal Talks: Ravana and the Shiva*, Trk 4. Sri Lanka 1976-1978.

The Creation Myth

The function of Hinduism in Bawa is perhaps most interestingly projected through the depiction of the creation story in Bawa's discourses. What better vehicle to convey the seemingly endless array of creation going on throughout the eons? Researchers have long concluded that there is no denying the pattern of interconnectivity that is discerned among the creation myths of the different traditions. Be it the Gnostic mythology so elaborately put forth by Hans Jonas, or the oft quoted cosmogonical Quranic interpretation by Sahl-al-Tusturi, all these can find its visual depictions in the array that the ancient Dravidian culture has provided. The countless deities, *apsaras*, or *asuras* along with the heroic human figures engaged in epic battles provides the canvas for any example a teacher needs to convey his message of the infinite. Despite the power of the Vedic culture, the primordial native lore had gone ground up and fused in as per the regions within the ruling Vedic traditions. Thus do Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna etc. loom large in the landscape of India, whereas the Vedic Zeus-like figure of Indra and Rudra recede into the background or get fused in with one of the local ones as per the role. The oral tradition embedded in those lores appears to go back before time itself while the archeological finds of their visual depiction go back a couple of thousand years. Then, again there are the smaller, but more significant subplots of sages or rishis that open up a forgotten realm to the human consciousness. So it is only natural that a Sufi sage will make that ancient tradition functional to convey his message of Truth. Bawa had effectively served

in the eastern realm and arrived to serve the West to a pasture that was ready due to have tuned in to the ancient wisdom of the East in their spiritual quest. However, what is notable is that more often than not, while listening to an apparently familiar story, a listener is shifting to a meaning that was entirely lost to him before. Not only that, it may even be so contrary to a long-held belief as to overturn the apple cart of his system for him. Earlier it was exemplified with the story of the sibling rivalry between Ganesha and his brother Murugan, sons of Shiva and Sakti. Such expansion to the point of overturning is true for Bawa's usage of tales from any tradition, be it Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism or the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition.

As mentioned above, Hinduism provided the perfect source to draw in a pictorial depiction of the endless array of interconnectivity in the creative process. In this study we will refer primarily to a few allusions that conjure up Shiva and Vishnu when Bawa's narrative in storytelling or his songs is depicting the creation process. It is a challenge to delve into those depictions due to a resplendent radiance that flows out through Bawa as his listeners are taken into the sensory cum sensuous trail of the creative process with profound underpinnings of deep spirituality. In the feeble attempt to analyze for the specific purpose of this study, we can view this process in two parts. The first part is the cosmological Nur-e-Muhammadiya as was first interpreted by Tusturi. The second is the creation of insan or humans. Again, like everything that Bawa says, terms shift in significance and meanings in relation to what is being said. For example, male

and female shift as per the relation. Such shifting is functional to the gradual realization that all such division, variation etc., are ultimately temporal and converges to the ultimate single Truth. It is, simply put, an exercise in cultivating awareness beyond any contradictions to the point of the realization of the only Real.

The Islamic cosmogonical depiction stems from a single point of Oneness to a differentiation for the analytical experiencing, per se. So the multifarious manifold manifestation appears to be for this purpose of analytical knowledge. Whereas staying firm in the certitude of the ultimate Oneness is the vigilance required through the growing awareness that ensures that knowledge is transforming into wisdom. Bawa's discourses thus takes one in an Alice-in-Wonderland rabbit hole journey of forms and images being conjured that at one time appear to be depictions of the totally divine and at other messengers for the divine and so on to endless shifting perspectives. This twist and turn plays out in the gender roles as the relating of the cosmogonical tale unfolds. For example, in *A Song of Muhammad*, one takes off into a journey, where one at one moment sees Muhammad in the light of Nur-e-Muhhammadiya, the light that came out of the deep silence and turned around and prostrated in obeisance to Allah. At another moment it blends in with its root term *hamd* (praise) "the praised one" is the One of the Oneness and nothing else is. At times it is the term for the transformed wisdom that realizes into the Divine Luminous wisdom. Then again Muhammad, is the prophet Aminah gave birth to in historical time. In the Muslim

mystical *ma'rifa* tradition, such shifting perspective are but ways of cyclical analyzing and synthesizing until the conditioned way of the thinking mind breaks down for the leap to realize into pure consciousness.

It is challenging to quote from Bawa's discourses as the depictions unfold gradually in a revelatory manner through the prolonged course of the narrative process. Nevertheless we will make an attempt to do so in fragments to get a sense of what has been stated above to see how the two Hindu deities are conjured in the depictions. Below is an excerpt depicting part of the cosmogonical process:

...Allah said, "Ya Nur! You emerged from within Me as the resplendent form of awareness. The shadow that emerged from within that awareness as a form of darkness has assumed the subtle form of insan (man) ... If you want to capture that darkness, it can be done only by embracing it with the six rays of the resplendence of divine analytic wisdom (pahuth arivu). It is in this way that I will make it come before Me.—

"Ya Nur! You are the resplendent form of awareness that emerged from me. I am the Effulgence of Truth that emerged from within that awareness. Thus you and I — awareness and Truth— are one. And since this dark form emerged from our resplendence to stand apart as a shadow, I am going to send you to dispel the darkness of that shadow form, make it stand in awareness and come to know the truth with clarity, transform it into the resplendence of wisdom, and bring it back to us.

"Ya Nur! In the beginning, in athi, when I was intermingled within all things as the natural form of awareness and was imbuing them with fragrance of awareness, all those natural things were savoring it. Now, with My **resplendent gaze**, I am going to create those natural things as eternal lives, as hayat, in the form of the beauty of the awareness belonging to your radiance, and make them shine here, there and everywhere.

“Ya Nur! For all these creations, you will be the highest form of awareness (which dawned from Me), the most exalted, filled with truth, existing with the greatest clarity, with the resplendent light of wisdom, and integrity. Because this shadow split away from that awareness as a dark form, I will make it into the five elements, make those elements into the form of man (insan), transform that form of man into My beauty, and make your resplendence the wisdom for that beauty, and make my hikmatus-sirr (unrevealable secrets) the life, or ruh, for that wisdom.”(ROA, p. 93, emphasis are mine)

He gazed with His most gracious eyes,

The unquestionable Lord

In the form of His **gracious sternness**

Opened that gnostic eye with determination

The **eye on the forehead** (Song of M 5)

The Jothis, the Athi said more, “I will be the One

To **radiate as brilliance**, while for Me

You will have a beautiful feminine form,

For all lives in the world you will be masculine,

But I will be that God

Who is the Father and the Creator.” (*Song of Muhammad 7*)

Before man was created with this exaltedness,

The Athi, the primal One created

The **light of the eye on his forehead**,

When **He gazed at it with His lofty gnostic eye**

Of true **wisdom it became a peacock**. (*Song of Muhammad 16*. Emphasis are mine)

The above-mentioned excerpts are an attempt to provide a sampling to show the range of the spectrum of the figures that form to shade away into other forms with differentiated significance. The meanings are conjured implicitly at times. For, example, the silence before the emergence of the *nur* conjures the

Shiva in his deep meditation. The shifting gender role as per the relation is resonant of Shiva represented in the androgynous form. Then again Bawa has many a time equated Shiva explicitly as Adam. Significantly, in this regard, Bawa has within the same discourse said that the first parents are the same known by different names in different traditions. Evidently, when he is listing those names and mingling the biblical/Quranic human parents to the deified figures of Shiva and Parvati and Ishwar and Ishwarana, he is indicating the inherent message of the inevitability of humans to deify. The image of Shiva and Vishnu are more apparent in the next few excerpts:

My meditation and emerged from My kumbum (My heart, or qalb) transformed into luminous radiances of grace. Thus it was that these three meanings – My being formless, My **still silence (mounam)** being the form of darkness, and my meditational prayer being the heart's resplendence -resonated as resonances of grace arising from wisdom (gnanam)."

Thus Allah, in awwal (the beginning), by Himself, alone, as Original Nature in the form of darkness, looked at Himself from His state **of still silence**, and laughed in joy and happiness upon seeing, all the luminous rays that had emerged from within His heart. It was this understanding that Allah, in the nature of resplendent wisdom, later explained to His loved ones. His devotees with the clarity of wisdom, who were unaware of their own states. (ROA 196).

Allah, **who reclines in divine repose in the ocean of gnanam** (divine wisdom) as illallahu (*Resonance of Allah* 124)

... Ya Rahman! Later on, too You will make that innermost heart manifest within Your creations, and within it You **will recline in resplendent repose**... Of the five letters that appeared (alif, lam, ha, mim and dal) three are the resplendence of the Triple Radiance: Allah, Muhammad, and Muhaiyaddeen." (ROA 208)

However, in relation to the creation myth, it is the image of the dancing Shiva, Nataraja, that is most evoked in Bawa's narrative of the dance of ongoing creation and destruction and that all is ultimately that great experiential divine realization. The other image in this cosmogonical process is that of Vishnu, specifically when it comes to the terms of nurturing like Rahman and Rahim.¹⁸⁴ Of these, the most notable is the implicitly evoked one where Vishnu is floating on the ocean of Maya. In this depiction Vishnu, as Narayana, is floating in an ocean reclining in a couch that is the coiled body of a five hooded cobra, Ananta or Adi Shesha. The head of the serpent is providing shade to the sleeping deity. He is reclining in a couch that is the coiled body of that giant mythic snake. The five hoods of the serpent are shading the sleeping deity floating in an ocean. His consort deity Lakshmi is floating on a lotus holding a lotus while sitting near his feet in a posture of tending him. Out of his navel is the umbilical chord floating out in the air of which the other end is also a lotus. Sitting on that floating lotus is Brahma the four headed creator God. The setting of this panorama is an ocean.

¹⁸⁴ These two are the most recurrent attributive names of Allah in the Quran. Moreover, every chapter except one in the Quran also begins with the phrase "*Bismillahi-r-Rahman-ir-Rahim*" which means "in the name of Allah, the most Compassionate and the most Merciful". This term is significantly embedded in the Muslim psyche as the Muslim practice is to begin every act from the mundane to the lofty by reciting this phrase. They are the feminine attributive names of God.

In the excerpts quoted already there are many allusions to the above depiction. However the following excerpt taken from an unpublished transcript is a direct depiction with the perspectival shift characteristic in Bawa's teaching:

Krishna, wisdom, is known as the one who reclines on the coiled snake that floats on the sea of milk. It is mahavishnu. The sea of milk does not mean that it is an ocean of milk. It is love, intellect, and wisdom. The sea of milk is the heart. It is from the heart that the milk comes through the breast. It is the milk of love. This is nurturing. Wisdom that is truth sleeps on it and drinks the milk of love. He is called the one who rests on the coiled snake that floats on the waves of the sea of milk. The sea of milk exists below the venom of the snake.

Discerning Wisdom means to completely shut down the venomous qualities. It is Discerning Wisdom that completely shuts down the venomous qualities. Discerning Wisdom shuts down these qualities and sleeps upon the sea of milk that is love, upon the chest, upon the breast. The name of that wisdom is ***mahavishnu***.

When we look at it here, it is not God. This is the name given to the level of wisdom that shuts down the evil qualities. This will not grant favors. This is simply the name of the level of wisdom that dispels the evil qualities.¹⁸⁵

Bawa's narratives are rich with allusions to such pictorial portrayals as described above. Only a familiarity with such depiction will enable one to recognize Bawa's usage of such depictions in his discourses. As mentioned earlier, Shiva as the king of Dance is evocative in Bawa's discourses in the

¹⁸⁵ These were taken from an unpublished transcript:

The gods Are the Evil Qualities of the Mind and the Body

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description of the cosmogonical process. This is a highly symbolic depiction discovered in archeological finds in all mediums, — the ancient most are in copper and stone — of Shiva in the cycle of the dance of ongoing creation and destruction. He destroys to create again. When Bawa is narrating the Islamic tradition of *nur-Muhammadiya* described in Tusturi's tafseer of the Quran, in the extrapolation of the unpacking, he appears to frequently allude to the abovementioned depictions and the function is ultimately again what Lings said to bring in a perspective of the uncreated aspect "... one of perspective rather than fact for the Spirit has an uncreated aspect opening onto the Divinity as well as a created one (23).

The ninth century Tusturi's cosmogonical depiction that took hold of the Muslim psyche is also echoed in the mystical tradition in the Christian Medieval tradition that Eckhart unpacked with his *bulisio*, *ebulisio*, and creation. This is indicative of the universality of the creative myth although the focus of our study here is in the Hindu tradition. Evidently, it is in the tradition of forms that the cosmogonical myth can be fleshed out the most to the point that the average humanity may lose sight of the higher symbolism and begin to direct their devotions to the forms losing sight of the ultimate message. As Bawa points out time and time again, that this is the journey of humanity no matter what tradition one is born into. The Muslim who ties in the reward of heaven and hell to the diligent performance of the ritual practices losing sight of the fact that these

practices are just exercises pointing to something deeper, and so is he/she just as attached to forms as the Hindu is to his devotional puja.

As mentioned above Bawa's usage of Hinduism, per se, is perhaps most notable when he is relating or referring to the creation myth. This is a realm when the infinity that is so ungraspable by our finite minds requires to be evoked enough to an extent to enable a modicum of insight. Then comes the need to convey the nature of the force that went into the manifestation of that Power of the Divine into the endless process of creation. As Clinton Minaar said:

... they are, so to speak finite receptacles that 'contain' the infinite. They thus perform the fundamental role of communicating the Truth to man (doctrine), and providing him with the means of assimilate its sacramental and sanctifying Presence (method). For fallen man identifies primarily with his formal nature (his body and his soul) and not with his supra-formal or transcendent nature (his spirit); he has thus to approach the Real through the hallowed forms willed by Heaven and not otherwise. In consequence the same forms cannot simply be repudiated or dismissed in the name of a pretentious and wholly unrealistic desire to realize the "pure spirit".¹⁸⁶

Such omnipotence, omniscience, etc., are the ten headed, multi headed figures of divinity and the endless array of visuals around them that pervade the religious practice in the landscape of ancient India. Needless to say, it is only Bawa's narrative skill that can weave in these without losing sight of the truth they point to — these endless array of forms are constantly pointing to the beyond to the formless infinity only to disappear beyond form into the infinity.

¹⁸⁶ See the introduction to Martin Lings and Clinton Minnar (ed.) *The Underlying Religion*, xix.

Hinduism as a State

Four Steps to Pure Iman is a thin publication of Bawa's discourses pertaining to a particular painting by him. This painting by Bawa is on the cover of the book and depicts a tiered structure at the center of a garden. In the book, Bawa is describing this structure as that of the mosque in the human heart. Here Bawa explains spiritual ascendancy where the four tiers represent the four steps involved in such advancement. Throughout the three-chaptered discourse, Bawa labels these steps interchangeably with that of four religions as well as the Muslim spiritual modes and methods. What is revealed is an overview of all religions being states that all individuals ascend to in their spiritual progression. In such an overview, Hinduism is as much a state as is Islam, which individuals, regardless of what tradition they profess to belong to, have to pass through to transcend the structure to be realized into the purity of the ultimate Truth. All Bawa's teachings of thousands of hours of audio and video tapes that are archived in the Fellowship have this message reiterated and elaborated in the spiral manner of unfolding in expanded meanings possible only in the oral medium of the narrative flow. What is categorically stated is that this journey is universal to all.

For the focus of the study in this section here, it was thought best to attempt to explain religions as spiritual states based on this publication, due to

the fact that Hinduism as a stage in spiritual progression is pervasive throughout the vast oceanic flow of Bawa's discourses. Calling the four tiered structure "the mosque in the human heart", Bawa proceeds to teach his followers the true nature of what prayer is. He then describes how humans tend to pray. Herein, begins the revelations that the true nature of prayer is well beyond the petitionary and supplicatory nature that humans tend to perform as prayer. Prayer itself is a state one can transform into. As stated by Bawa "prayer is purity" (18).

What is generally viewed as prayer is described by Bawa as worship. He calls them alternatively practices and exercises. He calls the first stage of such exercises Hinduism. Due to particular focus of our study here being Hinduism in Bawa, our analysis here will focus on the stage that Bawa labels as Hinduism. Other stages will be briefly covered to provide the contextual insight. So, at the stage of Hinduism, one cannot see beyond form. What is revealed in Bawa's discourses is that the ritual practices of all religious traditions are Hinduism. It is tied essentially to the composition of humans and thus to the element of earth in their formation. As mentioned earlier, Bawa makes the terms applied to the tiers of ascendance that the spiritual wayfarer has to ascend interchangeable with the names of religions. For example, *sharia* is interchangeably used with Hinduism, *tariqa* with Zoroastrianism, *haqiqa* with Christianity and *ma'rifa* with Islam. In this regard the four "steps" of human spiritual development is also aligned with the whole human body divided into four sections. So, the initial section pertaining to forms is aligned with the lower procreative part of the body. This is also evocative

of Purusha from Hindu Samkhya philosophy. Again, the four elements of earth, fire, water and air play into the mix with the different sections. One way of looking at it is viewing each tier or section as providing the opportunity to analyze and discern and thus overcome the pull to transcend to the next level.

So, at the initial stage one is very attached to the “form” in prayer. They are scrupulous in following the rules of worship. Here we see Bawa calling this stage Hinduism and *sharia* or *shariyat*. Thus does Bawa continually refer to the four steps with interchangeable terms that integrate names of religions with that of terms applied by the Muslim laity to differentiate modes and methods of spiritual practice in Islam. These are *sharia* or *shariat*, *tariqa* or *tariqat*, *haqiqa* or *haqiqat*, and *ma'rifa* or *ma'rifat*. First we need to briefly explain these terms to get a modicum of comprehension as to how Bawa integrates the names of religions as interchangeable terms for these. *Shariyat*, which Bawa equates with Hinduism, is what is generally viewed as the exoteric aspect of the religious tradition of Islam. In equating it with Hinduism, Bawa appears to universalize both the terms to all belief traditions.

Sharia or *shariat* literally mean the way. It is the code of conduct that one has to maintain to keep the balance in the created domain. All the daily obligatory ritual practices a Muslim observes falls under the category of *shariat*. These practices are mostly observable external practices. What are generally known as the five pillars of Islam that Muslims practice are part of *shariat*. This is the familiar ground for every Muslim. The other three are terms that are somewhat

familiar to the average Muslim but the meaning is not fully apparent to them unless they consciously decide to be a spiritual sojourner. Then too, the meanings of the other three terms, i.e. *tariqat*, *haqiqat* and *ma'rifat*, may be said to unfold to them in a revelatory manner as per their level of progression in their journey. To go into Bawa's pictorial depiction, the level of their ascendance determines their gradual comprehension of those terms. To the Muslim laity *tariqa*, may mean the particular "way" or "method" depending on the teacher guide that an individual chooses for his spiritual journey. In the common Muslim lexicon this term denotes the Sufi orders. It is generally used prefixed with the name of the orders as described in chapter two. For example, the Bawa Muhaiyyaddeen Fellowship follows the Qadiriya *tariqa*. This means they recognize the founder of this path to be the mediaeval saint Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani .

The next stage is said to be *haqiqat*. Again, a few Muslims may be able to guess the meaning of it being "the way of truth" by relating to the powerful attributive name of God, *Haq*, as Truth. The vast majority may be clueless to any other connection beyond that. The term for the fourth and last tier is *ma'rifa*, which means Gnosticism. This term is more familiar at the folk level as they use it to describe what they see as the way of the wisdom figures among them. As mentioned in the introduction, such figures are integrated in the eastern communities across the board in all the faith-based communities in the eastern traditions. Muslims refer to them as those in the path of *ma'rifa*. Bawa describes

this as a state in progression that will eventually release one from the tiered structure into *sufiyat*. This is the state where, metaphorically speaking, the individual candlelight is disappearing into the resplendence of the Sun. It is going beyond the structure of tiered separations eventually to the merging and the realization into the Only Reality.

Going back to the tiered structure, as per Bawa, when humans are conceived, they are in purity. When born embodied in form, they exist as Hindus. They are unaware of what is right and wrong and have to learn those. This stage of learning and acquiring the prescriptions and the prohibitions is Hinduism or *shariyat*. However, in this elementary stage, they tend to be contained in forms and need to progress into the awareness and eventually into the full realization of their true essence or *zat*. They are constantly creating idols for worship. Thus, even the structures constructed to facilitate learning become the idols.¹⁸⁷ This leads to the next stage of *tariqa* or Zoroastrianism. This is equated with the element of fire and assigned to the abdominal section of the human body. Thus desire or “hunger” takes over. At this stage the desire for the created idols takes over. The petitionary prayers define this state. The next state is *haqiqat* or Christianity pertaining to the chest section of the human body. Herein lies the human heart. Apparently, this progression appears to have gone beyond forms. However, it has actually gone beyond the visible aspect of creation. Now, it is

¹⁸⁷ However, what is more potently harmful for humanity is the creation and thus the worship of the idols of power and wealth.

preoccupied with the spirit, which is invisible, but nonetheless is still a part of creation, but belongs to the unseen aspect. It is the domain of the element of water. It is the level when one is preoccupied — and at times obsessed — with the spirit to the point that they forget that the spirit too is a part of creation. Although beyond the nature of the earthen form, water does tend to take on the form of the vessel it is in, and also reflects the hues around it. The final step of the four is *ma'rifat* or Islam. *Ma'rifat* means “knowing” or Gnosticism. It is equated with light pertaining to the head section of the human body. Here one has acquired the power of discernment to go beyond the “separation”s of the structure into *sufiyat* which allows for the realization into their true essence.

So Hinduism or *shariat* belonging to the procreative section of the human body, is to learn how the role of form as fashioned out of earth plays in human development. The struggle is to recognize the pull of the earth which leads to form-making interpreted as creating of deities. Such discernment will enable one to break away from idol making and ascend to the next level. All this can be also viewed in terms of depth psychology. Hinduism or *shariat* are humans at the concrete level. They are bound by the world of appearances. Hence, they tend to view everything in forms. In one of the creation tales, Bawa describes the human search for God as inherent. Since, at the elementary level they are unable to think beyond forms, they keep on getting geared into forms. The ancient landscape, including that of India, provides Bawa with the examples for these tales. The universality of this search is echoed in the Quran in Abraham’s

search when he thought of the sun and the moon as divinities. Bawa continues to say that when “mind” and “desire” failed to find God, they decided to make God. Again, they were unable to go beyond form, so they made what they saw in creation and worshipped them as Gods. The ancient sacroscape, include statues and temples dedicated to all kinds of animals — including even the rat in some parts of India as the ride of the elephant-headed deity Ganesha. Bawa calls this creative joint venture of “mind and desire” the five headed “Brahma”. He goes on to say all gods have temples, but Brahma does not, because mind and desire cannot stay still in one place. So, for spiritual progression one has to “still” these two. Mind takes in the “scene” from the creation, desire joins in to crave for them. They dream and make memories and the cycle of form making begins. One has to break this cycle to realize into their true self - the *zat*.

Spiritually the above mentioned phase is that of ego building that can translate into fixations. The spiritual struggle is in overcoming the pull of wealth, recognition and power – all that “*dunya*” represents. When such multi-prismed perspective is applied, one sees each individual has to undergo the state of Hinduism. The objective is to understand and analyze that state then move on. For example, as mentioned earlier, if a Muslim is attached to the idea of the ritual practices to the point of idolatry, he is purported to be fixated at the level of Hinduism. The ritual practices should be observed with the appropriate perspective of being an ongoing honing exercises to keep one fit for the life journey of progressive discovery.

In the final analysis, Bawa's characteristic method of integrating terms until one flows into an expanded stream of interreligiosity is what figures like him have done to extrapolate the Quranic verse saying that the differences were created for learning and for competing to do good (5:48). As Bawa repeatedly reiterated, the search has to be for wisdom as one cannot search for God as he has no form. It is only with wisdom that one can realize into the Divine. So in order to get on that trek of learning one needs to make the right intent of searching for wisdom. Only this will enable them to discern through the apparent separations of *sifat* and realize into the true essence of *zat*.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, we will resort to the thirteenth century sufi ibn Arabi to explicate further the mystical interreligiosity that Bawa brought to the laity of the two hemispheres of this planet. As stated at the outset of this study, the cornerstone of such interreligization¹⁸⁸ is the Tawheed. That is the only Real. The multifarious multiplicity is but the minuscule manifestation of the “nondelimited Reality”¹⁸⁹ that has been, and is, and will be the ongoing phenomena of creation. The array of formations that appear in Hinduism can be situated in the context of the “imaginal worlds” that Ibn Arabi introduces as the dimension of engendering realms of *barzakh*¹⁹⁰ or isthmus (again this translation can be at best an approximation of the meaning of the term). The following extensive excerpt by Chittick quoting Ibn Arabi sheds light on how this diversity of beliefs are validated by Ibn Arabi.

“Each human being follows the authority of his or her own belief, and this gives rise to an indefinite variety of often contradictory gods. ‘The god of each believer is constricted by his proofs’ [IV

¹⁸⁸ At the suggestion of a mentor cum colleague cum friend Terry Rey, I am coining this term in the final discussion. It is being coined in the context of an aspect of Bawa’s message and method which is the focus of this particular study.

¹⁸⁹ See Willian Chittick in *Imaginal Worlds*, 162-165.

¹⁹⁰ This is a significant term from *the Quran* that Ibn Arabi expands in his explication regarding venturing beyond any boundaries. It is a term that ultimately takes one to a dialectical process of endless formation.

435.11]. But this does not imply that these gods are false. People worship what they understand as real, and this understanding is rooted in both the self-manifesting Real and the degree to which a person experiences the Real. ‘The doctrines are diverse because of the diversity of the views of those who view Him. Every viewer worships or believes only what he himself has brought into existence in his own heart. He brings into existence in his heart nothing but a created thing. That is not the Real God. Yet in that doctrinal form He discloses Himself to Him’” (IV 211.30).

In the last analysis, the God who is worshipped is none other than a manifestation of the divine mercy that takes precedence over wrath, and hence the innate human ignorance of God becomes an excuse that people can offer to God on the day of resurrection, an excuse rooted in God’s own mercy.

... Ibn Arabi writes, [sic] God’s mercy takes precedence over his wrath, and the ruling property belongs to God. As for everything other than God, that is a fabrication. The gods of belief are fabricated. Absolutely no one worships God as He is in Himself. Everyone worships Him inasmuch [sic] as He has been fabricated within the worshipper’s self. So understand this secret! It is extremely subtle. Through it God establishes the excuses of His servants, those concerning whom He says *They have not measured God with His true measure* [6:91]. Thus all people — both those who declare His incomparability and those who do not—share in this fabrication. Everyone who has a knotting¹⁹¹ concerning God has a fabrication. (IV 229.12)

¹⁹¹ See William Chittick 1994 139-141. The Arabic word *itiqad* is “is typically translated as belief” (138), Chittick explains that this is derived from the root that means to knit, knot, tie or join together. So as “a technical term signifying belief, it suggests a knot tied in the heart that determines a person’s view of reality”. Based on the unpacking of the significance of such terms, Chittick attempts to explicate Ibn Arabi’s view as well as validation of religious diversity. As per Chittick, the Shaiykh would most likely say that “if ‘true’ means that a knotting corresponds to reality, then of course all beliefs are true, since each belief represents some aspect of reality, however limited or distorted that aspect may be ... Hence we can reach a preliminary conclusion that all beliefs are true ... There can be no error in existence, because everything that exists is demanded by the Real, which is *wujud*.”

Chittick ends this section “The Divine Root of Religion” with his interpretation of Ibn Arabi’s view being that “Everyone serves God on the basis of God’s self-disclosures, so all beliefs are rooted in reality and all are true. However, all beliefs do not have the same effect on human becoming, and this provides an important criterion for **discerning** among them.”(emphasis mine)¹⁹² From this we can draw our conclusions as to what distinguishes figures like Bawa from the rest of humanity.

This study was undertaken to focus on the teachings of Bawa with a focus on the aforesaid interreligization. The particular objective was to emphasize his unitive mystic vision which was essentially based on the Quranic idea of the truth of *Tawheed*. His teachings are geared to help his followers “become God-realized being”, to “become a knower of that state beyond religions”, for in that state one loves “all lives in the same way” (*Song of Muhammad*, 19). The study was premised on the mystic perspective incorporating a journey of interreligiosity. For this, the analysis was limited to a sliver of Bawa’s discourses that would exemplify how his message and method incorporated diverse faith traditions. That sliver was chosen to be the apparently diametrically opposed Hinduism and Islam to establish the Quranic maxim that all the traditions were created to enable humans “to know”. Bawa’s usage of Hinduism in his teachings is resonant of such methods adopted by the “holy men” whose humble shrines dot the landscape of East Bengal. What was described as the reasons those folk figures

¹⁹² See Willian Chittick in *Imaginal Worlds*, 164-165.

integrated the local faith system in their propagation of Islam is equally true for Bawa's usage. It primarily stems from the Islamic faith in *Tawheed*. As mentioned before, this idea incorporates all religions as Islam. It is the Truth descending in different times and climes with messengers belonging to each culture. Over time the essence gets layered away from the consciousness. Thus, it is believed that mystics like Bawa, who are viewed as the cosmic *qutbs*, descend from time to time to anchor on to the truth in the familiar lingo of a region and proceed to peel away the layers to reveal the truth. In that process, they integrate in their narrative the familiar with the unfamiliar. Thus did in East Bengal the figures that are familiar such as Krishna wove in that with the unfamiliar Muhammad and other Judeo-Christian-Islamic figures, using local terms for divinity with the term Allah and so on. This same method was applied when Bawa came to the West, where the followers were taken on a journey where the truth about Moses or Jesus was discerned to be far deeper than what they grew up with. The USA was a land of pioneers bred on the idea of freedom. To this the Seventies with its turn to the East had expanded the psyche of the spiritual seekers. This not only made them embrace Bawa, but made his usage of folk tales and ancient wisdom figures from the East favorable to the listeners. With all this, Bawa brought in the Islamic terms and concepts and embedded them in the psyche of the listeners. This unconscious learning brought in the shift from the world of forms to that of formlessness which is fundamental to the faith tradition of Islam. It is this shifting perspective that characterizes the spiritual

progression that Bawa brings forth in the listener's psyche which brings in the ultimate freedom that is the crux of *ma'rifa* or Gnosticism. As reiterated multiple times in the discussion, the oral medium is fundamental for this kind of teaching. The translation and transcriptions of his discourses will continue to be published by the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship. However, the most priceless possessions will remain to be the thousands of hours of audio and video tapes of Bawa's discourses. Needless to say, forty miles away from Philadelphia, Bawa's tomb remains the only Sufi shrine in North America. For the increasing numbers of devotees that come to visit it every year it symbolizes the presence of Muhaiyaddeen – the giver of life to the true belief.

In the final analysis, much more than a sliver like this is needed to bring out even a fraction of the depth and breadth of Bawa's teachings. A treasure trove of the aforementioned recordings are what is still waiting for researchers to dive into to even begin to bring forth to some extent the infinite wisdom teachings of a phenomenon that was Bawa Muhaiyaddeen.

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APPENDIX: IMAGES



Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen



Mazar (Tomb) of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen
Coatesville, Pennsylvania