

# Transcending The Temporal: Mystic Consciousness in The Poetry of Rumi and Mirabai

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## Abstract

The world is moving towards the shore of chaos and degeneration. With the changing times, human beings are getting unaware of their inner consciousness the reason they fail to discover their spiritual needs. They have imprisoned themselves in their own narrow perspective and limited needs restricted only to body. Mystic poetry helps us to map the way to reach the divine and attain spiritual peace. The poems of both Rumi and Mirabai widen our perspective to view the world in unity. The stories of Rumi are not only humorous but entertaining at the same time. Along with this they give a good knowledge of the religious scriptures, mythology, beliefs and the life of prophets. Rumi and Mirabai were renowned mystics of their times and their aim was the same that is to make people aware of their inner being. Both the poets emphasise on the essence which is present in all the beings which comes from god. They believe that the sole aim of a human being must be to achieve union. They were non-conformist in their approach and have expressed the relationship between an individual and god by giving an image of a lover and beloved in their poems. Intense longing and passion to unite with the almighty are the chief traits of a seeker. Music and dance feature an important element in their poetry. They have compared the world of mystics and the world of ordinary human beings. Rumi has devoted a complete section in Masnavi book four, about the difference between a philosopher and a mystic. The philosophers view the world as the microcosm, whereas the mystics as the macrocosm because they view the world in unity. Mirabai also gives a lot of comparisons between the world of human beings and the world of mystics. Though the poems of both Rumi and Mirabai are similar in many aspects, yet they differ in some perspectives and degrees. Where there is emphasis on ecstasy and bliss of having achieved the union, in Rumi's poems, there is much emphasis on rebelliousness and fearlessness in the poems of Mirabai. Rumi uses humorous stories and Koranic and Biblical parables to convey his ideas, whereas Mirabai connects this aspect to her own life. She uses autobiographical elements to strengthen the faith and devotion of readers. In Mirabai's poetry, Sri Krishna is referred to as her lord, her lover and her husband. There is a complaining tone, as if complaining about her lost mate and imploring him again and again to come in front of her and end her longing. She becomes conversational in addressing to her lord, Sri Krishna, who is often described in homoerotic tendencies. This aspect is not seen in Rumi's poems. Rumi describes the beauty of almighty, but he describes it through various metaphors, comparisons and images from nature like rose, gardens and many other. The poems of both Rumi and Mirabai concentrate on the similar aspect that is to make people realise their potential to unite with god. Their contribution in telling us about the process is immense; the reason both the poets have gained popularity over the years. Also, there is an increase in the demand for their translated works since the past decade.

**Keywords:** union, lover, beloved

The world is in a condition of strife. Human beings face today an unprecedented set of problems relating to the world order and the on-going process of spiritual decline. Suffering, difficulty and strain have encapsulated human beings and have turned them into mere puppets, bound to the worldly illusions destined to fall and suffer. However, this suffering is not inevitable as the ultimate bliss and peace can be tasted by leaning on the supreme grace. In order to bring back the peace and ecstasy in life, man must make an attempt to return to his origin. Mystic poetry helps us to understand the nature of our self, by giving us a taste of the experiences of saints. Mystics reject the institutionalized form of religion and believe in their inner spirit being capable of transporting towards the divine. Sant Kabir says “I am not a Hindu, nor am a Muslim I! I am this body, a play of five elements”.

Mysticism means to progress towards the “great end” of self- realization. Its aim is to eliminate all the veils between the individual and god. Fundamentally, mysticism is the love of the absolute. Rumi says that, the various prophets are like light bulbs that illuminate a room. Though the bulbs are different, but the current originates from a single source.

Music is considered as an important practice in seeking the divine communion. It makes the listener sensitive and palpable to absorb the emotions of the speaker. It softens the listener’s heart due to which emotions are conveyed effectively. Mirabai and other Bhakti saints gave primary importance to music. They sang bhajans (devotional songs) for the divine. Similarly, the Sufis practice a whirling dance, called the sama, which is said to be performed in ecstasy and bewilderment. Rumi’s Divan of Shams, was poured orally in his trance like state while performing sama . The literary works of both Jalal-Ud-din Rumi and Mirabai share the common characteristics of mystic literature; yet they differ in their perspectives. Where there is rebelliousness and fearlessness in Mirabai’s works, there is longing, ecstasy and the grandeur of experience in Rumi’s poems. My attempt is to analyse the poems of Rumi and Mirabai in the view of mysticism.

There are many forms in which Rumi has composed poetry like *ghazals*, *ruba’is*, *masnavi*, *qasida*, *tarik- band* and many other forms. The *ruba’is* is the most ancient Persian poetic form. The *ruba’i*, as the name implies consists of two couplets (*beyts*), or four lines (*misra*).

The *ghazal* is a unique form of poetry. Originally, *ghazals* were the songs of love that were sung by minstrels in the early days of Persian history. The word *ghazal* means ‘a conversation between lovers. It is said that this form originated with Adam. Adam is considered to be the first poet and also the creator of song. He created songs in praise of Eve, his true beloved. The *ghazals* he sung to her, before their eventual spiritual union was of longing and separation, and later on were about the bliss of their union. The *ghazals* of the Zoroastrians were sung in their wine houses. These wine houses became the venues for hundreds of years of the *ghazals*. The subject of love is not any kind of love, but particularly it is an illicit and unattainable love. This love as viewed as something that will complete a human being and if attained, will lift him into the ranks of the illuminated ones, or will bring satisfaction to the soul of the poet. Therefore, it is the intense divine love of Sufism that, this form serves as a perfect model.

The *masnavi* is the form used in Persian, Turkish, Urdu and other poetry to write epic ballads and romances. Each couplet has a different rhyme; this is to allow the greater freedom to go into longer description of the subject. All the great, long, narrative poems of Persia were composed in this form. Rumi chose a plain, descriptive name for his poem ‘*Masnavi*’ being the name of the rhyming couplet verse form. Each half- line or hemi stitch of a *masnavi* poem follows the same metre. The metre of Rumi’s *masnavi* is

the *ramal* metre, a highly popular metre which was also used by Attar for his *The Conference of Birds*. Rumi's *Masnavi* is much longer and is composed in six books. Each of the six books consists of about 4000 verses and has its own prose introduction and prologue. There are no epilogues.

The frequency of breaks in the flow of narratives, is a distinctive characteristic of the *Masnavi*. It reveals that Rumi has earned the reputation of an excellent story teller. The *Masnavi* leaves the impression that he was brimming with ideas and these ideas, which are expressed in simple language loaded with imagery and metaphors from the Quran, sayings of Hadith and the Bible. His teachings are conveyed in anecdotes. These anecdotes or stories are entertaining, humorous and filled with vivid imagery. This simple and attractive form of *Masnavi* makes it accessible to multiple readers.

Rumi's poems are not concerned with any particular institutionalized form of religion, but with the essence which comes from God and is present in all the beings. This aspect is central to Sufism. Sufism focuses on blending one's soul with the almighty. It is believed that all the beings possess the divine essence which gives life to their soul. This essence comes from God and is capable enough to transport one to merge into the ultimate source of existence. In *The Little Book of Life* he says:

There are hundreds of religious books  
Yet they are all one chapter,  
There are a hundred different holy places  
Yet only one altar.  
All roads lead to the one House. (129)

Rumi's poems intermittently feature the image of a corn. Just like from the one seed of a corn, thousands ears of corn emerge; similarly all the religions, scriptures, teachings and beliefs emerge from one source that is the religion of the almighty. The aim of all religions is the same that is to help one to unite with one's source. He ends *Masnavi Book four*, with an address to Husamud- Din, in which he says that he hopes that this duality and polytheism disappear, as this is superficial. His chief aim is that man must be aware of the unity in nature, that is all the beings in the universe are connected. He says in the concluding lines:

With one heart, one worship, one aspiration!  
And schism and polytheism and duality disappear,  
And Unity abides in the Real Spiritual Being!  
When my spirit recognises thy spirit,  
We remember our essential union and origin. (204)

He believes that man must aim to return to his origin, which is the source of all the beings. To explain this aspect, he gives various metaphors. The famous of them is the metaphor of the mirror which is symbolic of a man's soul. It reflects the image of the beloved or the supreme.

Some famously used metaphors in his poems are: 'the sky', which is described as an 'inverted bowl' and 'the blue dome'. The sky symbolises fate which is unpredictable, untrustworthy, and always changing, 'the sun', which represents the beloved, god, the bright face of the beloved, and the power of god's light revealing the truth, 'the moon', is the beauty of the true beloved or it can be the beauty of creation (physical beauty). The moon cannot be seen unless the light of the sun is upon it. "The sickle shaped" moon represents the bent shape of the poor, dejected and suffering lover. "The half or split moon" represents the opposites existing in the psyche, and throughout creation. The 'full moon' usually means the beloved, showing fully the beauty of god. 'Venus' is the symbol of music and good fortune, 'the Pleiades' sometimes symbolises the tears of the lover and sometimes the necklace of jewels placed around

beloved's neck. 'The wind', symbolises the bringer of bad news, misfortune and death, whereas "the breeze" is the bringer of divine messages, good news or divine inspiration. 'The sea' is the ocean of love to be crossed by the lover. It is the immensity of divine love, of which human love is but a mere drop. The turbulent sea represents the difficulties that the lover must endure on the voyage to god; 'The boat' represents the perfect master who sails us to the divine shore. 'The pearl' represents the ultimate truth and the 'pearl diver', the seeker of truth.

'The shell' is the outer, physical form which is illusionary and false. 'The desert' symbolises the long period that the lover must pass through when the lover's thirst for god's grace remains unquenched. 'The hills and valleys' symbolize the ups and downs experienced by the lover on the path of love. 'The field' is the world, whereupon the game of love is played. 'Polo game' also serves as an important image. The game is the symbol of the game of love. In the game, the horseman represents the beloved and the ball symbolises the lover's mind and sometimes the lover's heart. The beloved's long curling hair symbolises polo-mallet that strikes the ball (lover's heart). 'The garden' is the special space where the lovers meet and see the beloved. It is the place of union, where the beloved is present.

'Narcissus' is a proud beautiful one, jealous of beloved's beauty. Sometimes Rumi refers to beloved as Narcissus, telling the beloved not to be so proud and to accept the lover. 'The cypress' symbolises the form of the beloved because of its tall, upright stature and because like god who never changes, the cypress remains green throughout the year. The 'cypress cone' is the lover's heart.

The beloved's beauty, his face and the facial expressions hold a lot of significance in his poems. Rumi describes the facial expressions and features according to the mood and the tone of the poem. For example, 'beloved's hair' represents the attraction of god's grace. The hair sometimes symbolises the world with its problems and mysteries, in which we get trapped. 'Beloved's curls' is the beauty of god's manifestation or the charms of the beloved. 'Beloved's eye' represents the power of god. One glance from him can annihilate the lover in his love. 'Beloved's eyebrow' is often compared to the arch towards which one prays (the direction of Mecca) in a Mosque. God is represented in some of Rumi's poems as 'the painter and the architect' because of the marvellous creation god has created for human beings. 'The star' becomes the important symbol representing Prophet Mohammad, just as a guiding light, guiding the pilgrims to reach their shrine.

Similarly in the poems of Mirabai, Lord Krishna is addressed by many names. she also attaches many epithets to his name, like 'The Dark One', 'Mountain Lifter', 'Giridhar', 'Dagger thrower', 'Beloved', 'My husband', 'Hari', 'One who takes all', 'Nand's son', 'Teacher', 'Mysterious One', 'Bridegroom', 'Lord Brajnath', 'Great Snake Lifter', 'Great Dark Snake', 'Great One', 'Nandlal', 'Mira's Lord', 'Shyam', 'Holy Lord', 'Yogi', 'My Dear Husband', 'Strong Bodied One', 'Moon', 'Chief' and 'Throne'.

Mirabai constantly talks about the beauty of Lord Krishna. She explains that how his radiant body encapsulates her and elevates her soul. She says: "For disguised though I was, the Lifting One caught me, / and seeing his beauty, I offered him all that I am." (*Ecstatic Poems* 18). Krishna's dark face has penetrated her body, has illuminated her and filled her with beauty. Now darkness and shame hold no place in her life. Seeing his face, her world has brightened up forever. She says that because of that dark face, darkness and night has fled away and days have come when she will have to live in the day and sunshine forever. (*Sweet on my Lips* 13)

She considers Lord Krishna as her lover, beloved and many times her husband, the reason Krishna is described in homoerotic tendencies because of the minute, sensual description of his body. He is

described as dark and beautiful with large eyes which pierce Mirabai's heart, just like a dagger. The beautiful curls on his cheek give her more reason to get attracted to him. Light radiating from his earrings shaped like fish, flute between his sweet lips, rope of jasmine blossoms around his neck, red smudge on his forehead, the spot of saffron between his eyes, making her eyes open up and soul illuminated and the crown of peacock feathers calling her to surrender.

Many metaphors have also been used for Lord Krishna. For example, he is constantly referred to as 'Moon' in her poems, or 'The Full Moon', because of his radiant beauty. 'Moonlight' refers to as Divine grace or knowledge. She says:

I put it (the necklace) around my neck; it fit well.  
It became a string of lovely pearls, each with a moon inside.  
My room was then full of moonlight, as if the full moon  
Had found its way in through the open window. (*Sweet on My Lips* 41)

The person seeking the divine union is the lover, who longs and pines in pain to unite with his beloved. Many mystics have given the image of the lovers wanting to be united or get married. Just like lovers before marriage or union long to be united, similarly a seeker of truth must show the same longing and sincerity to achieve union with god. A lover ought to be like an empty flute, ready to receive god's breath. One needs to undergo the process of self-annihilation. Rumi says:

A true lover is like a lute  
It makes music only when empty  
As soon as it is filled the bard lays it down.  
If you are full of yourself, you cannot  
feel the sweet touch of His fingers.  
Empty yourself and surrender. (*Little Book of Life* 94)

The path to attain the union is not a bed of roses but a bed of thorns. It is filled with dangers, uncertainty and self-death. A lover ought to be passionate enough to pass through the way of immense hardships without complaining. If a lover complains then the path to reach the beloved blurs. Sufis call lovers or seekers dervishes. A dervish is a person who renounces the pleasures and comforts of the world. Once he passes the temptations, he will be drawn closer to god. He says in *The Little Book of Life*:

Heart, be considerate  
Soul, be tolerant  
Patience, run if you cannot bear grief  
Reason, go and play your childish games. (56)

One cannot reach the beloved solely by prayers and remembrance. Though they are considered as important elements of Sufism, yet one needs to behave madly like a lover, who is intoxicated by his beloved's beauty and cannot bear to remain separated even for a second. One of the most important features of Rumi's poems is that they give a lot of emphasis to the aspect of bewilderment and passions as one of the chief characteristics of a lover. A lover's thirst to unite with his beloved must be insatiable. He says in *The Little Book of Life*:

In the Garden of Love you cannot relax  
Even for a moment or you will lose  
Your place in the lovers' queue.  
Be sharp as a thorn if you want  
The Beloved to sit beside you (58)

Even if a lover has experienced the beloved's majesty yet he must be a drunkard who is never satisfied of the eternal wine from god. Most of Rumi's poems are addressed to Shams in his state of trance and madness. Shams and Rumi shared a complex yet an intimate relationship. However, after sometime Shams disappeared having left crestfallen Rumi in a state of bewilderment and madness to reunite with him. Scholars consider that Shams has been an image of the beloved for Rumi, as it was Shams with whom he realised the power of the supreme. Because of Shams' teachings Rumi was able to attain union with the almighty.

In his poems, 'the path, street, highway' represents the path of love or the spiritual way. The path leads to the wine house, wherein is found the perfect master. It is the inner journey towards the true self-consciousness. 'The winehouse' represents the place where the lover goes to be with the beloved. In order to meet the beloved, one needs to let go of reason and embrace passion, madness and bewilderment. Only in one's intoxicated state can a person glimpse god and attain salvation or union. 'The wine' represents truth or the divine knowledge when one's soul gets illuminated by god's grace. An ordinary wine changes a person's personality, so divine wine changes the inner consciousness and draws the lover closer to god. The more the lover drinks the wine, the more he becomes addicted to it and the more he loses his reasoning. 'The cup' is the symbol of the heart of a lover, into which god's wine is poured into it. The cup must be empty of its contents in order to receive the wine. Also, god is represented in most of his poems as 'the wine bringer', 'the wine maker' and the 'wine seller' Rumi says in *The Little Book of Life*:

Seek the wine of joy from the Wine Maker  
In whom it is stored.  
Every object of love is like a jar, one full with dregs  
Another full of pure pearls.  
Any wine will get you high, but be a connoisseur  
And taste with caution, judge like a king and choose  
The one not tainted with fear and vain expectations. (19)

Similarly, in Mirabai's poems, many a times Lord Krishna is described with an arrow. He shoots an arrow, which pierces Mira's heart; which means: Mirabai is in head over heels for Krishna's love and constantly pines and longs to get a glimpse of him again and again and ultimately become one with him.

Mirabai refers to herself as a 'milkmaid', 'babbling milkmaid' or 'gopi' who is wandering through the pathways and alleys with a pot on her head and calling "Who will take the beautiful Dark One?" (*Ecstatic Poems* 7) or "Taste Hari! Taste Hari!" (*Ecstatic Poems* 33), as if inviting people to join her in the journey of truth, ultimate pleasure and happiness. In many poems she refers to herself as a 'slave' asking no payment being forever bound to the service of Sri Krishna. When she longs for the union, she calls herself, 'an unlucky one' and 'an abandoned one'.

In her poems, impatience to unite with Lord Krishna or her husband is the chief characteristics. She uses powerful metaphors and imagery to show her impatience and pain of being separated with her lord. These metaphors, imagery and comparisons not only give intensity to her suffering but also make her poems beautiful and powerful. For example, Krishna is compared to a flame that illuminates and gives knowledge and she, a wick, who wants to burn with the flame of knowledge. She compares herself to a lamp whose chief motive is solely to hold the flame and get illuminated and brightened by its beauty. In most of her poems, Lord Krishna is compared to an 'herb', which heals the wounds of those who love him and are poorer in spirit. She wants to be intimate with Sri Krishna just like those jasmine flowers, which cling to her master's neck in a form of a garland or like mother Jasumati, who is portrayed as combing Sri

Krishna's beautiful locks. Mirabai shows her intense despair that the grace of God, having once been tasted can disappear. She compares this great loss to that of a jeweller crying over his lost jewels.

Mirabai becomes enchanted and mystified by the beauty of Sri Krishna and now she constantly longs to have a glimpse of it, just as a partridge which becomes enchanted by the moon, and loves its presence immensely. When the moon disappears, it cries badly in dejection. Her attraction towards Krishna's beauty is compared to that of a moth, which constantly orbits around the beautiful flame and ultimately decides to mingle with it. Mirabai compares herself to a bee when she talks about her attraction towards Sri Krishna's beauty. On seeing a beautiful flower, the bee gets attracted and rushes towards it, on tasting its nectar, it gets trapped inside it; similarly, Mirabai's soul has been conquered by Sri Krishna's beauty. The game of hide and seek acts as a symbol of longing. Mirabai wishes that this game may end soon, so that she can find her lover.

Water imagery features a lot in her poems. Many symbols, comparisons and metaphors have been taken from water. Lord Krishna is compared to an 'ocean' or a 'sea', which is vast, immensely deep and uncertain. Mirabai constantly refers to herself as a fish thrown out of water, which longs in pain to be submerged into it. The period of intense longing is compared to drought, dry tank or dryness whereas the time of union is expressed through the images of rainfall, mists, thunder and dark clouds, which must burst to bring heavy rain. Mirabai longs to get drenched and fully soaked in rainwater. Mirabai covered in rain is symbolic of her being covered or bathed in divine grace and beauty. Wherever water comes in her poems, it signifies divine presence. Water is essential for living, without water, one cannot imagine to survive, similarly Mirabai needs the divine presence to live. She says:

Poison came to the door one day; she drank it and laughed.

I am at Hari's feet; I give him body and soul.

A glimpse of him is water; how thirsty I am for that! (*Sweet on My Lips* 11)

The time of union is conveyed through many other symbols and images, for example: a royal wedding or a marriage, where there are beautiful gilded pillars of gold. The moment of union is expressed as the sound of flute, played by Krishna. 'Peacocks dancing in the rain' or 'peacock's feathers' are an important symbol of God's grace. Mirabai's 'ankle bells' are an important symbol of her happiness when she dances madly as if a drunkard on having achieved the union. Her ankle bells are also symbolic of her intense devotion and faithfulness towards Lord Krishna. Her joy of uniting with her beloved is sometimes expressed through the symbol of 'lilies'. Lilies blossom under the full moonlight which is symbolic of Mirabai's happiness and joy of having achieved god's grace. 'Day' and 'night' also acts as important symbols in her poems. when Mirabai is deprived of the Beloved's glimpse and spends her time in pining and suffering, then that period is expressed through the time of 'night' and when she glimpses her beloved then she expresses that period through the time of 'day'. She compares the chord between them as hard and strong as a diamond that can shatter the hammer which attempts to strike it. At some places that divine chord between them is compared to as pure as gold. She explains her relationship through buying and selling, that she went to the market and is sold to him forever or she purchased Sri Krishna and in exchange, paid a huge price of giving her soul to him. In many places she compares herself to a lotus and Lord Krishna as water. Just as a lotus is rooted in water and blooms in it, similarly Mirabai is connected to her husband, Sri Krishna.

Her intense despair is shown by her bodily pain and very strong words to make readers understand her pitiable state. For example, she expresses the sorrow of Lord Krishna's absence as knives opening her heart and piercing her chest. She often mentions her swollen eyes with tears. She says that the song of a

cuckoo makes her remember that she is alone without her beloved and this feeling that cuckoo makes her feel is like salt to wound and saw blade cutting her heart and making her bleed to endless pain. She expresses intense pain because of longing which feels like insects eating her heart (*Ecstatic Poems* 35). At the night of longing, she is unable to sleep because of intense despair. Her mattress appears to be full of thorns aching her body. As this pain seems unbearable therefore, she wishes that it's better for death to arrive and end this journey of longing; and if not death then her husband must appear. She says in *Ecstatic Poems*:

Love's knife entered my heart  
Without Beloved, the festival of Holi is a bitter funeral  
The village grieves, the fields grieve  
The abandoned one wanders. Absence falls on her like blows.  
I've counted so many days alone my fingers grow calloused.  
Green spring has arrived. But the Beloved has not, and my pain  
Grows deeper. (32)

Mirabai was so absorbed in the love of Krishna that she vividly replicated the devotion of the cow herding women and girls (*gopis*). These maids instantly used to abandon their demands of conventional morality at the sound of Krishna's flute. They used to drop their brooms, churning sticks and cooking implements, and even slipped away from conjugal bed itself to rush out into the forest to dance the dance of love, Krishna's circular *ras* dance. Mirabai's urge was the same: to seek out the company of quite a different "family" from that to which *dharma* has assigned her- a family composed of those who sang the praises of her Lord. This put her constantly at loggerheads with her earthly family.

Reason and rationality hold no significance for a lover. Reason will only hinder one's path and will lead him to fall and suffer. Just like Canaan from Old Testament (*Masnavi* 199-201) who used his reason and never believed in Noah and his arc rather he mocked him and called him a madman. Even when the flood started, he refused to take refuge in his arc and boasted about his swimming, as a result he was perished. One must let go of earthly reason and focus on illuminating his soul then only he will acquire Universal Reason, which comes from the almighty. He says:

Make sacrifice of reason to love of "The Friend,"  
True reason is to be found where He is.  
Men of wisdom direct their reason heavenwards,  
Vain babblers halt on earth where no "Friend" is.  
If through bewilderment your reason quits your head,  
Every hair of your head becomes true reason and the head. (*Masnavi Book 4* p. 136)

Music is one of the important components in worship and longing for a Sufi. Sufis have a tradition of the whirling song *sama*, which is a sign of bewilderment and madness. Rumi has sung many songs while doing *sama*, when Shams was nowhere to be found and these songs were collected as poems by his followers including his own son Sultan Valad. Rumi says in *Masnavi Book 4*:

Hence it is that listening to music is lover's food,  
Because it recalls to them their primal union with God.  
The inward feelings of the mind acquire strength,  
Nay, are shown outwardly, under influence of music.  
The fire of love burns hotter under stimulus of music, (p. 18)



Music like qualities and also the qualities of instruments are far praised by Rumi in his poems. A lover ought to be like a musical instrument empty of itself so that he can move according to the breath of the divine. He says in *The Little Book of Life*:

A true lover is like a lute  
It makes music only when empty  
As soon as it is filled the bard lays it down.  
If you are full of yourself, you cannot  
Feel the touch of His fingers. (p. 94)

Similarly, Mirabai poems are cantered on Lord Krishna. She sang songs of longing and intense passion to unite with her beloved or Lord Krishna, these songs are called *bhajans*. Her devotional songs (*bhajans*) are so much filled with passion and emotions, that she calls herself mad and crazy in music. Krishna is also depicted as the lover of music and dance. Lord Krishna is also called ‘The Dancing Energy’ because of the famous *ras* dance of Krishna and his *gopis*. Lord Krishna is shown with a flute, singing songs of love. She often addresses the flute or the songs of the flute to invoke him. The time of union is expressed in many places as the song of the flute. She says in *Sweet on My Lips*:

The sound of the flute, O sister, is madness.  
I thought that nothing that was not God could hold me,  
But hearing that sound, I lose my mind and body,  
My heart wholly caught in the net.  
O flute, what were your vows, what is your practice?  
What power sits by your side?  
Even Mira’s Lord is trapped in your seven notes. (42)

The major part of Rumi’s *The Masnavi*, and also the last part of the *Little Book of Life* focus on the distinction between philosophers and mystics. He says in *The Little Book of life*:

Clergy knowledge is based on religious law  
The knowledge of judges is based on proof  
But the knowledge of the divine messengers  
Is based on the direct perception of the Light of God. (33)

In book four, Rumi’s main aim is to highlight the superiority of the divinely revealed knowledge over the other highest of the other forms of knowledge, namely the rational knowledge of the philosophers. For instance, he specifically compares the former favourably with the knowledge of the most celebrated Islamic philosopher Avicienna, and also includes a whole section on “the difference between philosophers and mystics”. He clarifies there that philosophers say ‘man is the microcosm’ while mystics say ‘man is the macrocosm’, and that is because the knowledge of philosophers is restricted to the form of man, while that of mystics penetrates the inner being of man.

Mystics view the world as transitory and illusionary, and focus on nourishing the souls rather than the body. To illustrate this, he gives the Koranic story of Belqis, queen of Sheba and King Solomon in *Masnavi Book Four* (p. 94-101). Once Belqis sent bags of gold to King Solomon, Solomon rebukes Belqis and rejects her gold and sends a message to come and bow before his God. Infuriated Belqis marches with her army towards King Solomon. On reaching his kingdom, she gets awestruck to see the glamorous city laden and decorated with gold everywhere even on the roads. She immediately realizes her mistake and bows before him and his God. Similarly, to mystics the wonders of the world are nothing, not even a fragment of what they have tasted and experienced in their union. They have seen immense treasures, in

front of which the worldly treasure seems to be a joke. People attached to this world are compared to an embryo (*The Little Book of Life* 73), whose only interest is feeding the body. It does not focus on the higher aims of life. He further says that the world is like a tree and human beings, an unripe fruit. They cling to the tree unless, are ready for the king's palace. Therefore, holding tight to this world is a sign of immaturity. To explain this, he narrates the Koranic parable of a woodcutter in *The Masnavi* (39-47). The woodcutter was once offered money for helping a dervish. He refuses to accept and in return smile and turn his logs of wood to gold and then back to logs of wood. Awestruck dervish realises that the woodcutter is an enlightened soul and therefore this money is nothing as compared to the riches he possesses. Rumi uses many other metaphors for the world for example ruin, darkness, grave and coffin. A coffin is dark and cold. People whose lives are deprived of love for the divine have a heart which is dark and narrow like a coffin where sun never penetrates. A grave is better than such a heart. He also uses the metaphor of an 'inn' or 'hotel' for the world because of its transitory nature where one must stay awhile temporary before passing on.

Just as the world is transitory in nature, similarly our body, which belongs to this world, is temporary and is bound to perish. He compares the body to a pot. A pot may be filled with the water of life or the poison of death. Our eyes see the body while the spiritual eye perceives the soul. He says in *The Little Book of Life*:

Focus on the contents and you will become a master

Focus on the pot and you will be misguided ( p. 91)

He compares his outer form to an oyster (*The Little Book of Life* 76) filled with a pearl signifying the divinely revealed knowledge. The worldly people will view the outer shell and pass baseless judgements, but only a mystic can penetrate deep and see the beautiful pearl because he is blessed with an inner eye, of which the worldly people are not. This inner eye enables him to judge and recognise the righteous ones.

Most of his poems differentiate between the righteous and the sinners of the world. He illustrates a Koranic story of a tanner (*Masnavi* p.13), who is habitual to the stinking hides. Once he smells the fragrance of musk in the market. He goes mad, gets a headache and faints. After so many medicinal potions for treatment, avails no improvement, finally a dervish comes with cow dung and places it on his face, the result he gets back to his senses. Similarly, the people who are used to the dirt of the world cannot understand the beauty of the divine. The pharaoh too was unable to realise God's miracle done by Moses' in his palace when he turned his staff into snake, instead called it witchcraft (*Masnavi* 54). These worldly human beings do not have the inner eye; therefore, they cannot look beyond the worldly form, and understand true wealth and beauty. Though such human beings are bound to the world and lack the inner eye yet it's never too late for them to turn towards god. If they lack the inward eye, then they must look onto those who have it that is the mystics, teachers or the prophets One of the most famous story in *The Masnavi*, is about the prince and his wife. ( p. 73-74) He had a beautiful wife yet he was lustful towards the courtesan, who was actually an ugly witch. The doctor helps him to cure his spell only then he was able to realise the beauty of his wife. The doctor is the mystic, the witch here is the world which is temporary and illusionary, and the beautiful wife is the divine knowledge.

Sufism gives importance to the role of teachers. A teacher is like an alchemist who changes the heart into gold. Worldly human beings cannot measure the way to reach the divine on their own. The hazardous journey can easily trap them in its snares. Therefore, they need a teacher or a philosopher to guide them to reach the abode of enlightenment. Just like the story of mule and camel in *Masnavi* (201-

204) the mule falters many times as he only looks downwards while walking, while the camel walks straight because he looks upwards. The mule is incapable to walk on its own without faltering therefore he must follow the camel instead to keep itself on the right path.

Rumi throws light on three kinds of people in the world. He distinguishes them through the story of three fishes: wise, half wise and foolish fish (*Masnavi* p. 151-156). As per the story the wise fish swiftly moves towards the sea through the narrow tributary as it senses the impending danger of fishermen. The half-wise fish struggles initially and delay doing anything till the fishermen actually make the appearance with nets. He then floated upon the surface of water, pretending to be dead, and the fishermen threw it into the stream. But the foolish fish did nothing but swim wildly and was caught and killed. The mystics or the wise men are like the wise fish, they are their own protectors. The second half wise knows the wise men as his guide, so as to become possessed by the wise man's sight but the fool has no grain of wisdom, he knows no way and is also ashamed to follow the footsteps of a guide. Such people are bound to die.

Mirabai too speaks about the shallowness of the world and worldly relationships. She becomes stern and blunt in ridiculing the ways of the world. For her the world is like a trap. She compares it to a gooseberry bush which constricts people in it. The world is uncertain, where the foolish men are awarded and the wise men are ridiculed. She expresses its strangeness in variegated images, for example the deer eyes may be large, yet it fails to perceive the dangers ahead and wanders in the forest, the black coloured cuckoo, sings beautifully and pacifies the spirit, fools sit on the throne and the wise men begs for bread or are executed, the lovers of God are hunted by kings. The world is often called as a 'sleeping world' which is filled with death and darkness and the worldly people are often ridiculed as parrots (*Ecstatic Poems* 26), squawking in their cages of ignorance and lust. She says:

I don't like your strange, strange world Rana.

There are no holy men in it, and the people are trash

Rivers flow with pure water

Then the great sea turns them to salt

I don't need a bridegroom.

Mira takes the graceful Giridhara as her master.

The king hunts down the lovers of God. (*Ecstatic Poems* 16)

Saints of Bhakti Movement rejected the caste system, gender distinction, class differentiation and other vain structures of the society. She says:

The life here- that's not genuine; the ties of family, the

Obligations to the world- they're not genuine.

My family's honour, my reputation- it's all water running through

The fingers- it's your beauty that makes me drunk

Mira's Lord is the Great Dark Snake. (*Ecstatic Poems* 34)

In order to ridicule the patterns of the world, Mirabai makes strong comparisons between the world of ordinary human beings and the world of mystics. She says that in front of the divine throne, worldly monarchs are wily courtiers. Her divine world is as strong and powerful as an iron, whereas worldly strength is tin and glass which can break easily. Her divine world is as fresh and sweet as ambrosia, whereas the worldly world is stale water. If the depth of this world is like Jamuna or Ganga, then the divine world is as deep and vast as the ocean. Rebelliousness and fearlessness mark the important characteristics of her poetry, which not only adds vitality, potency to her poems and voice, but also amazes the readers at every point. Mirabai says:

Modesty in public, the chains of family life-  
Mira shed both for the Lifter of Mountains.  
Like a latter-day gopi, she showed what love can mean in our  
Devastated, age- ending age.  
No inhibitions. Totally fearless. (*Sweet On My Lips* 37)

Not only has this physical world held no importance for her but also her own physical body. She says that her soul is a conquered soul, which no longer belongs to her, but to her husband Sri Krishna. She has also given up all worldly pleasures, feminine beauty and adorning of hair and darkening the eyelids with kohl because now she is filled with real beauty. In order to unite with her beloved, she constantly wishes her physical form to die. She feels restless and helpless in her physical state and considers it a burden or a hindrance in achieving union. Sometimes she even wishes to suicide in the ocean, so that her intense love and longing while living in this world may come to an end. She says:

O my friends,  
What can you tell me of Love,  
Whose pathways are filled with strangeness?  
When you offer the Great One your love,  
At the first step your body is crushed,  
Which holds no place with the One.  
Next be ready to offer your head at his seat.  
Mira has offered herself to her Lord. (*Sweet on My Lips* 39)

Nature plays an important component in Rumi's poems. He seeks transcendence and peace in nature than in any other part of the earth. Nature gives peace and tranquillity, that it becomes easy to seek divine union amidst of nature. Metaphors from nature have been frequently used in his poems. the place of union is referred to as 'gardens', 'garden of roses', 'roses', 'spring', 'jasmine', 'cypress' and 'lilies' in his poems . Somewhere inner soul is also referred to as 'gardens' and ' roses', 'fire', ' lily', 'moonlight', 'greenness' and 'spring'. Water imagery is also often used in his poems. 'Sea', 'ocean' and 'deep waters' signify the ultimate knowledge which is vast and immeasurable.

Bird imagery too features in his poems. 'Falcon' and "eagle" is used to signify the almighty, "the black raven of sorrow" (*Little Book of Life* 38) signify death and destruction. 'The phoenix' signify rebirth. 'The nightingale' represents the lover or the poet who sings the beauty of the beloved. 'The parrot' is the poet who talks to the beloved in the hope that the beloved will reward him with sugar (love and grace). 'The falcon' represents god or the perfect master who preys upon the heart of a lover. 'The kite and the crow' represents ignorance and false matters. 'The partridge' represents false pride and pomposity. Often the partridge represents an earthly king, vain and proud. 'The hoopoe or lapwing' symbolises the faithful messenger of god. 'The moth' represents the lover who wishes to extinguish himself in the flame (love) of the candle (god).

Many metaphors, images and comparisons are taken from flowers. For example, 'The rose' is the true beloved or god, whose heart is expanded like a rose. Sometimes the rose signifies a beautiful woman. The rosebud signifies the lover, whose heart has yet to become expanded by divine love. 'Rosewater' is the grace of god, divine mercy and kindness shown by the perfect master. 'Tulip' is the humble, faithful, tragic lover of god. The tulip, blood-streaked, shaped cup often symbolises the heart of the grief-stricken lover. 'The violet' is the patient obedient servant or the disciple of god (rose). In Persian gardens violets

are often planted in rows leading up to the rosebushes, that is the attendants or lovers waiting to serve the beloved. 'The lily' symbolises a gossip. Its long yellow stamen represents a tongue. 'The arghavan' or Judas tree has crimson flowers. This represents the mature, long-suffering lover. Judas betrayed Jesus, because of his deceitful kiss; Jesus was arrested by Pontius Pilate and was crucified. For this Judas was paid sixty pieces of gold from Pilate. After crucifixion, when Jesus rose from the dead, Judas felt guilty and was unable to face the Resurrected One. Finally he realised his mistake and longed for God's mercy, grace and forgiveness, that he once enjoyed being a disciple of God. In his pining he hung himself on the arghavan tree by using his hair. Also god is often addressed in his poems as "O Gardener" Rumi says:

Green worlds, green gardens  
Roses smiling, rubies aflame  
Souls uniting one with another  
Revealing the greatness of Beauty. (*The Little Book of Life* 189)

The seasons feature in his poems according to his mood and time. The world is compared to the season of 'autumn' and 'winter' which is cold and deprived of love and knowledge, whereas the place of union or the presence of god is compared to that of summer season and spring. Rumi says in *The Little Book of Life*:

Love's infinite garden holds other fruit  
Besides laughter and tears  
Forever fresh and green like  
Spring without autumn. (187)

Allusions, symbols, metaphors and parables have been used from the Koran and the Bible. Rumi's poems, especially *Masnavi* is flooded with Koranic and Biblical allusions. For example, the story of Canaan, Adam, Noah, Moses, Job, Solomon, David, Cain and Abel feature intermittently from the Bible. Some of the other important references are: 'Khizer', who is a particular kind of perfect spiritual master or the prophet or messiah who has gained immortality and the ability to appear anywhere at any time in any form, to direct someone. 'Hallaj' the martyr Mansur Hallaj (919 A.D.) is the symbol of a perfect master. He was sentenced to hanging for saying "I am the Truth" (*Anal Haq*). Rumi has written much about his famous statement when he discusses that all the beings spring from a single source. 'Ramdaan' also features as an important symbol of God's grace and divinity. *Ramdaan* is the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which there is a daily fast. The Koran manifested to Prophet Mohammad during this month is called 'The Night of Power' or 'The Koran Night'. This night brings grace to lovers because of their penance, fasting and longing for God. Mount Sinai is a reference from the Bible, this serves as an important symbol of the Divine truth. Somewhere it symbolises the face of god. It is the mountain on which Moses saw God in the form of "the burning bush" and also had a discourse with God when God told him the way to free the Israelites from the persecution of the Pharaoh.

Rumi and Mirabai were renowned mystics of their times and their aim was the same that is to make people aware of their inner being. Since both were mystics, therefore there are many prominent characteristics that are similar in their poetry. Both the poets give emphasis on the divine essence which is present in all the beings which comes from god. They believe that the sole aim of a human being must be to achieve union with the divine soul. They focus on the aspect, that man is equal in the eyes of god, therefore no distinctions on the basis of caste, creed, sex, religion, race or any other factor can be made, yet there is a vein of social reformation in the poetry of Mirabai. Mirabai bluntly ridicules the ways of the

world, of making distinctions among people, and in doing so the tone of her poetry becomes a mocking one.

Both the poets were non-conformist in their approach. They discarded multiplicity and emphasised that god is one. They were against polytheism and duality; instead propagated that man must be aware of the unity in nature. Rumi says in the concluding lines of *Masnavi* book four:

With one heart, one worship, one aspiration!  
And schism and polytheism and duality disappear,  
And Unity abides in the Real Spiritual Being!  
When my spirit recognises thy spirit,  
We remember our essential union and origin. (204)

Both the poets have expressed the relationship between an individual and god by giving the image of a lover and beloved in their poems. Intense longing and passion to unite with the almighty are the chief traits of a seeker. A seeker should be restless and impatient to glimpse god. This thirst to blend into the divine must be insatiable. God is referred by both as “beloved”.

The symbols of moon, sun, ocean and many others are common in the poems of both the poets. Moon is considered as a symbol of beloved’s beauty and ‘moonlight’, the symbol of divine grace and blessing. Similarly, ‘the sun’ is considered as a symbol of god’s power and majesty, however this symbol is more prominently used by Rumi, whereas Mirabai constantly uses ‘moon’ as the symbol of Sri Krishna’s beauty, and ‘moonlight’ for Sri Krishna’s presence. Other commonly used symbols by both the poets are: ‘the day’ and ‘night’. ‘Day’ features when the poet experiences illumination or glimpses the divine, whereas the time of longing, pining and suffering is expressed through the time of ‘night’. ‘Ocean’ and ‘seas’ are symbolic of god’s vast knowledge, which is deep, uncertain and uncomprehend able by the worldly human beings, in front of which the worldly knowledge is but a mere drop. The ‘pearl’, is symbolic of god’s beauty and divine wisdom, which is precious and cannot be sought easily by mere human beings, but by only those who make significant attempts and a lot of sacrifice.

Both the poets have compared the world of mystics and the world of ordinary human beings. Rumi has devoted a complete section in *Masnavi*, book four, about the difference between a philosopher and a mystic. The philosophers view the world is the microcosm, whereas the mystics view the world as the macrocosm as they can penetrate beyond physical form and view the world in unity. Both have explained that how the mystics are blessed with an inner eye, which the philosophers are not, the reason they sometimes fail to make judgements, whereas the one who is blessed with an inner eye is gifted with wider perception of the world which will enable him to judge wisely between the good and the bad. Rumi’s poetry is suffused with humorous short stories and parables from the Bible and the Koran to teach this aspect. Mirabai also makes a lot of comparisons between the world of human beings and the world of mystics. However in doing so, she openly laughs and ridicules the world at its short-sightedness and vain structures.

Poetry of both Rumi and Mirabai highlights the importance of renunciation. Rumi calls the seekers on this path, dervishes who have renounced the pleasures of the world and live for serving god and his creation. Mirabai shows this aspect and call the seekers, *sadhus*, the ones who have renounced the world and live in the company of each other (*sadhu sangh*), with the sole aim to praise and worship god.

The values of humility and service to god are considered primary in the poems of both Rumi and Mirabai. Since the divine essence flows in all the beings, which equates all, therefore there is no distinction between who is superior or inferior. Human beings must inculcate these values to be loved by god. Mirabai

emphasises that Lord Krishna is the protector of the meek and gives strength to the poor, therefore the poor must be loved and uplifted, so to get a place in god's kingdom.

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

Both the poets teach the way or the secret to achieve the union. Rumi uses humorous stories and Koranic and Biblical parables to convey his ideas, and in doing so he strengthens the faith of the believers, whereas Mirabai connects this aspect to her own life. She uses many autobiographical elements to strengthen the faith and devotion of readers. She motivates everybody through her own testimonies to instil the desire in the hearts of others to achieve the similar strength and security that she enjoys. While speaking about the miracles in her life, she shows the greatness of god.

The tone of Rumi's poems is didactic not complaining or questioning as that of Mirabai. It comes to readers as if a teacher is giving sermon to his students. This is fulfilled by using many anecdotes from the Koran and the Bible. There are various breaks and digressions showing Rumi's ability of being an excellent story teller. The major vein in his poems is about ecstasy and bliss that the seeker enjoys once he has tasted union and this bliss is expressed through beautiful images which he extracts from nature.

The tone of Mirabai's poems often becomes complaining and conversational, as if one is complaining about her lover who is not showing up. The way she addresses Lord Krishna is personal in nature, as if he is her husband or a friend. This aspect lends a sense of intimacy while addressing Krishna. She also becomes conversational with readers, by addressing them as friends, sisters, companions as if inviting them to sail with her in the boat of divine grace. The tone of her poems sometimes become questioning, that why she has to bear with his absence after having enjoyed his presence once. She questions again and again about the whereabouts of her lover and at the same time asserts and affirms that she always belong to him. Her lover may disappear for some moments, but can never desert her, as her soul forever belongs to him. She boldly and fearlessly claims that she is married to Sri Krishna and the relationships of the world are nothing to her. She says in *Ecstatic Poems*:

Conquerer of Demons, come.

Mira says to her Master, "Return. You are my refuge,  
body and mind.

I have slept with no other, your virgin through many lives." (33)

Mirabai's poems are personal in nature. She uses many aspects from her personal life, like the rejections she faced while doing her *bhakti*, the mockery and the insults she had to go through. She always speaks boldly about her disagreement with Rana, who got extremely enraged because of her devotion to Sri Krishna, that he despatched a cup of poison, which couldn't harm her but even made her glow. She discusses that how a coffer was sent to her from her in laws, telling her that it contains jewels of the queen, instead it contained a venomous cobra, however to everyone's amazement, she fits the cobra perfectly around her neck, which magically turns into a beautiful necklace of pearls. She discusses these testimonies and miracles of god, to talk about the greatness and power of the almighty.

Once someone overhears her, cooing to a lover behind her door. It was rumoured that she had liaisons with other men. The Rana was summoned hastily with a sword in hand, demands to be admitted to her chamber, and asks her to show him the man with whom she has been conversing so lovingly. Her

response is to tell him that the one he seeks stands directly in front of him- her image of Krishna. She mentions this episode of her life that how Rana, flustered and angry, freezes “like a picture on the wall” and retreats. Like this Mirabai uses elements from her life to beautify her poems which increases the devotion of readers through her testimonies.

Mirabai poetry speaks of a personal relationship with Krishna as a lover. A number of compositions continue to be sung today in India. One of her most popular compositions remains “*Paayoji maine Ram Ratan dhan paayo*” (I have been given the richness of Lord Ram’s blessing). She was unique among the poet-saints of the Bhakti movement owing to her socio-economic background as well as her gender. Born a princess, she opted for the life of a mendicant and wanderer living a life of austerity and poverty to be spiritual. In the book, *Songs of the Saints of India*, John Stratton Hawley says about Mirabai: “... she fired the imagination with her fearless defiance... the only one of her gender to have earned a place on the honour roll of north India Bhakti saints, she exerts a fascination that none of her male counterparts can match”.

This defiant image of a woman saint who openly walks the street with no shame or fear of authority is one of the most subversive images of royal women in those times. “Mirabai accomplished the impossible in her poetry; by making it an instrument of rebellion through a perfect blend of asceticism and aesthetics”, says Mridula Garg. Her life has immense relevance today because her courageous story can find parallels in the lives of contemporary women who still have to fight opposition from families and society to live an independent and creative public life.

Mirabai shows her intense longing and suffering by using strong and bold words like “Knives opening my (her) heart (Bly 30)”, “salt to a wound (Bly 31)”, “ saw blade cutting my (her) heart (Bly 32)”, insects eating her (Bly 35)”, aching body due to mattress full of thorns and many other. Therefore, by showing her bodily or physical pain, she shows her intense sorrow of longing and separation. This aspect is not present in Rumi’s poems. Though his poems focus on longing and separation, but the intensity is less as compared to Mirabai’s, secondly this aspect of longing and separation is not shown through physical pain but through various comparisons and images drawn from nature.

The poems of both Rumi and Mirabai concentrate on the similar aspect that is to make people realise their potential to unite with god. There is an increase in the demand for their translated works since the past decade. Their works are a source of both delight and instruction for those who want to attain salvation. Mankind will benefit from such pieces of art as it will arouse their consciousness and make them realise the need to embark on this journey of revelation.

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