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SARMAD: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SUFI

The poet named Muhammad Sa'id Sarmad Kashani (his *nisba* is also mentioned as Lahori [Tazkira Shu'arā'-i Punjab 1967, p. 178]) was executed during the reign of Aurangzeb in Delhi in 1660/61 at the age of 70. With his execution a new expression "sword and rope" (*tīghu rasan*) would appear in the Persian and Urdu poetry, in addition to a known expression "rope and gallows." While the latter expression referred to Hallaj and his torturous death, the former quite possibly pertained to the torturous death of Aynu'l-Qudat Hamadhani¹ by hanging and Sarmad's death by decapitation, in addition to the Hallaj reference. After his death Sarmad got a nickname "The Second Hallaj" (*Hallāj-i Thānī*). Annemarie Schimmel pointed out that the torturous life story of Sarmad should be compared to that of Hallaj through Aynu'l-Qudat Hamadhani: "He (Sarmad.—*N. P.*) followed the tradition of Hallaj, longing for execution as the final goal of his life... This idea goes back at least to Aynu'l-Qudat Hamadhani" [Schimmel 1978, p. 362]. Reminiscences of his contemporaries serve as the sources of information about Sarmad. Among them are the memoirs of Bernier and Manucci² and anthologies — *tazkira* — such as *Dabistān-i mazāhib*, the author of which is considered to have been Sarmad's peer,³ *Riyāz ash-shu'arā'* of Waleh Daghistani

¹ See a very impressive sketch on 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadhani: Bertels E. Ayn al-Quzzat Hamadhani // Izbrannye trudy. Sufizm i sufiyskaya literatura. Moscow: GRVL, 1965. P. 310–319.

² "Neither of them had any acquaintance with Sarmad but both of them were critical of him especially Bernier." Bernier. Travels. P. 317. " [Rai 1978, p. 2; Bernier 1916, p. 317]. Bernier was a French physician at the Court of Shah Jehan. He wrote: "I was for a long time disgusted with a celebrated Fakir, named Sarmet, who walked in the streets of Delhi as naked as he came to the world. He despised equally the threats and persuasions of Aurungzebe and underwent at length the punishment of decapitation for his obstinate refusal to put on his wearing apparel" [Bernier 1936, p. 268].

³ About the name of the author of *Dabistān*, see: [Rai 1978, p. 2; Asiri 1950, p. ii]. Annemarie Schimmel attributes the authorship to Fani Kashmiri [Schimmel 1978, p. 363]. According to Walter Fischel, "the identity of the author is not yet definitely established, though most of the scholars agree that his name was Mubad Shah born in Patna at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and originally a Parsee of the Sipasi sect" [Fischel 1948–1949, p. 165]. Singer and Gray refer to one Moshan Fani as the author of the

also known as ‘Ali Quli Khan [Rai 1978, p. 3] and several others. Sarmad’s name appears also in biographies, such as *Mir’at al-Khayāl* by Sher Khan Lodi, *Majma’ an-Nafā’is* by Siraj ad-Din Ali Khan Arzu [ibid., pp. 3, 320], *Riyāz al-‘Arifīn* by Riza Quli Khan. It can also be found in historical chronicles, *Mir’at al-‘ālam* by Muhammad Bakhtawar Khan and others. Lakhpat Rai considers *Dabistān-i mazāhib* and *Riyāz ash-shu‘arā’* to be the most valuable ones among the rest.

According to the majority of sources, Sarmad was an Iranian Jew, who converted to Islam. About 300 *rubai* in Persian, belonging to Sarmad, have been preserved. Their number fluctuates between 290 and 334⁴ throughout various publications.

There is a small number of texts in the form of *ghazal*, *qit‘a* and a few *she’rs* of the poet. Sarmad’s letters were also found, although their authenticity has not been proven with a certainty [Rai 1978, p. 3].

Sarmad never founded a systematic school of thought, although, without a doubt, his poems contain the philosophy of Divine Love [Rai 1978, p. 2].⁵ Dr. Zahurul Hassan Sharib writes: “There can be no denying the fact that he has played a very important part in molding and shaping the spiritual thought and evolution of India” [Sharib 1994, p. 1]. Whether he belonged to any particular *silsila*—one can only guess. However, the matter of Sarmad being a Sufi also calls for a discussion, since several authors have doubts even about that. Especially, since there is a great inclination to surmise that he converted from Islam into Hinduism, which can be seen in the following *rubai*:

سرمد به جهان بسی نکونام شدی *** از مذهب کفر سوی اسلام شدی
آخر چه خطا دیدی ز الله و رسول *** برگشته مرید لچهن و رام شدی

O Sarmad! Thou hast won a great name in the world,

Since thou hast turned away from infidelity to Islam.

What wrong was there in God and His Prophet

That you hast become a disciple of Lacchman and Rama?

[Asiri 1950, No. 334]

Dabistān-i Mazāhib [Jewish Encyclopedia, Sarmad Mohammad Sa‘id] (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=257&letter=S#ixzz1IM3GBatf>).

⁴ [Asiri 1950] contains 324 *rubai*.

⁵ The followers of the Gudri Shahi Order still consider Sarmad a saint. It is a contemporary branch of Chishti order. “The Spiritual Genealogy of the Gudri Shahi Order (by Uwaisi connection from Khawaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti), Hazrat Seyed Malik Mohammed Alam Moeeni Kanjar Walay, Saenji Gudri Shahi Baba. He also traces his spiritual descent from *Hazrat Abdul Qadir al-Jillani* from his spiritual guide Hazrat Mustafa of Baghdad, Hazrat Abdur Rahim Shah Saheb Moeeni, Qazi Gudri Shahi Baba, Hazrat Mohammed Khadim Hasan Moeeni Gudri Shahi (d. 1970), Nawob Saheb or Nawob Sahib Baba [He also traces his spiritual descent from Hazrat Maqdam Samauddin Suhrewardy], Hazrat Dr Zahurul Hassan Sharib Gudri Shah Baba (d. 1996), Zahur Mian (originator of the Zahuris), Hazrat Inaam Hasan Gudri Shah Baba-Inaam Mian” [see: Zahuri Sufi website].

Poets prior to Sarmad, first of all Hafiz Shirazi (Sarmad confesses to be following him in *ghazal*, as he is following Khayyam in *rubai*⁶), used the word Sufi with a negative connotation. Certainly, one can argue that Oriental poetry and the reality are rather far from each other. Meanwhile, the poetry itself is only a metaphor for the prose of the ordinary life. Further on, the trivial idea of the Sufi discourse lies in the contrast between the real and the metaphoric (*majāzī* and *ḥaqīqī*). For Sufis, life is nothing more but a metaphor for the Supreme Reality (*Ḥaqīqat*). That is why every metaphor is based on a certain reality, which remains as such even in the poetic representation. The imaginativeness of the poetic discourse hides a certain reality; nevertheless, one who wishes to find it, must perform a typical Sufi job, i.e. tear off one veil after another. In other words, one must do what is referred to as *kashf al-mahjūb* or to uncover what is hidden behind a veil. In that sense one should suppose that Sarmad's poetry conceals the mystery of his life and death, and this mystery will be open to those who would tear some veils off.

It is our job to try and get to the most disguised corners of his soul. Canonical and traditional nature of Sarmad's *rubaiyat* is the first obstacle in this task. The image of the hero of *rubais* is conventional rather than possessing individual traits. It is true, however, that, in spite of its conventionality, *rubai* is less conventional than *ghazal* [Schimmel 1992, p. 28–29; Schimmel 1978, p. 362]. So, one should not even hope that the poetic text could be taken at face value and would yield up the desired information without much effort on our part. Here I'd like to mention some well-known facts of Sarmad's biography, or at least regarded as such. There has been a speculation that Sarmad was born in Kashan (Iran) approximately in 1590 during the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (d. 1618). It is believed that the poet's parents came to Iran from Armenia, or even could be *ferengi*, the descendants of Europeans [Asiri 1950, p. ii; Rai 1978, p. 14]. Sarmad first studied the Torah and acquired the right to be called a *rabbi*, then studied religion with the famous Iranian philosopher Sadr ad-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra)⁷ and

⁶ با فکر و خیال کس نباشد کارم *** در طور غزل طریق حافظ دارم
اما به رباعی ام مرید خیام * * * نی جرعه کش باده او بسیارم

With the thoughts and ideas of others I have no concern;

Though in style of ghazals I am a follower of Hafiz.

As for quatrains, I am a disciple of Khayyam,

But I have tasted little the wine he offered. [Asiri 1950, p. 39/33, No. 230]

⁷ Mulla Sadra Shirazi (1570/71–1640). In the beginning of the 20th century Muhammad Iqbal described Mulla Sadra in the following way: "No great thinker, however, appeared in Persia until the 17th century, when the acute Mulla Sadra of Shiraz upheld his philosophical system with all the vigour of his powerful logic. With Mulla Sadra Reality is all things yet is none of them, and true knowledge consists in the identity of the subject and the object. De Gobineau thinks that the philosophy of Sadra is the mere revival of the Avicennaism. He, however, ignores the fact that Mulla Sadra's doctrine of the identity of subject and object constitutes the final step which the Persian intellect took towards complete monism" [Iqbal 1908, p. 175]. See the collection of articles: *Mulla Sadra & Comparative Philosophy on Causation*. Edited by Seyed G. Safavi. Inst. of Islamic Studies. London, 2003.

his pupil Mir Abu'l-Qasem,⁸ after which he converted to Islam from Judaism [Tazkira Shu'ara-i Punjab 1967, p. 178].⁹

Here the story of Sarmad's life in Iran ends and the events continue in India. Sarmad sailed off for the purposes of trade, bringing expensive goods. In 1042/1634 he appeared in the town of Thatta in Sind. There Sarmad fell in love with a young Hindu, named Abhai Chand. The father of the young man decided to hinder their communications and took him away out of town. The separation shocked Sarmad to such a point that he gave away all of his possessions, took his clothes off and never covered himself up since then. The youth's father was immensely touched by the depth of the poet's suffering and finally allowed his son to accept Sarmad's friendship and patronage. Since then Sarmad never parted with Abhai Chand, while constantly sharing his knowledge with him. Abhai mastered the art of religion and languages, and learned the skill of a translator. Sarmad travelled extensively. He arrived in Lahore (hence his *nisba* in the "Anthology of the Poets of Punjab"), later he took off for Hyderabad (Deccan). His trace gets lost for a few years (it has been suggested that he led a life of a hermit in the forest), and finally he appears in Delhi. Several painted images of Sarmad exist, in which he is shown as a naked old man, rather grand in stature, sometimes against a background of wild nature. On certain paintings Abhai Chand, a young man of extraordinary beauty, accompanies him. In Delhi his reputation for devotion and wisdom reaches the ear of Prince Dara Shikoh (1615–1659), and the poet becomes a frequent guest in the Palace. Only for his visits to the Palace Sarmad agrees to conceal his nudity. In their correspondence Dara calls Sarmad "my master and preceptor" [Fishel 1948–1949, p. 171]. Dara himself was a member of the Qadiri order instead of the Chishti order accepted by the Great Moghuls. Hence comes his pen name Qadiri [Tazkira Shu'arā'-i Punjab 1967, p. 288]. Dara Shikoh was an author of several works about Sufism. Here is what *Tazkira Shu'arā'-i Punjab* says about him: "Despite that fact that he was a sultan and a son of a sultan, Dara studied the *'irfān*. He kept friendship with Sa'id Sarmad and had a genuine liking and friendship with Mulla Shah Badahshani"¹⁰ [ibid., p. 288]. Sarmad actively participated in the discussions concerning reli-

⁸ Sayyid Amir Abu'l Qasem Mir Fendereski (1562/3–1640) was one of the most outstanding philosophers of the Safavid period, he was an expert in Indian philosophy and travelled to India; he also participated in translation activities at Akbar's court, and rendered Sanskrit literature into Persian [see: Iranica. Mir Fendereski] (I thank Professor Eshote who provided me with this information).

⁹ "His conversion was probably only nominal and superficial, since he himself later warned the Jews not to convert themselves to Mohammed's religion" [Fishel 1948–1949, p. 160]. On the contrary, contemporary followers of Sarmad refer to his Muslim piety even after his death: "After he was beheaded, he was heard reciting the full Kalima three times" [Sharif 1994, p. 12].

¹⁰ Molla Shah Badahshani (d. 1661) was the disciple and successor of the saint Mian Mir, head of the Qadiri order in Lahore; he introduced Dara to the saint [Shimmel 1978, p. 361].

gious matters and, due to his in-depth knowledge of Judaism, Islam and undoubtedly Hinduism, which he acquired in his wanderings, he became a welcome guest of Dara Shikoh and his circle. He was able to contribute his opinion to the discussion of *dīn-i ilahī*, an idea of “Divine Religion,” which Dara was working on. In addition, ideas adopted from Mulla Sadra, which involved a search for absolute monism, corresponded to Dara Shikoh’s understanding of Unity (*waḥdat*). Annemarie Schimmel wrote: “The feeling *hama ūst*, ‘everything is He,’ permeates all his (Dara’s.—*N. P*) work” [Schimmel 1978, p. 362]. Niccolao Manucci in his book writes: “Dara held to no religion, when with Mahommedans, he praised the tenets of Muhammad, when with Jews, the Jewish religion; in the same way, when with Hindus he praised Hinduism. This is why Aurangzeb styled him a kafir (infidel). At the same time, he had great delight in talking to the Jesuit fathers on religion, and making them dispute with his learned Mahommedans, or with Cermad [Sarmad], an atheist much liked by the prince. This man went always naked, except when he appeared in the presence of the prince when he contented himself with a piece of cloth at his waist” [Storia do Mogor, tr. by William Irvine, 1901. Vol. I. P. 223; see: Jacob Seth 1937].

Sarmad was especially popular in Delhi because he often managed to predict the course of events, and his predictions came true. Several anecdotes exist about the magic performed by Sarmad. Once he was sitting in a Jama Masjid when Aurangzeb came in there. Aurangzeb demanded that Sarmad covered himself with a blanket lying next to him. Sarmad asked to pass the blanket to him. “The king then tried to lift the blanket by holding its end and to his utter amazement noticed a dreadful scene underneath the blanket—the severed heads of all his brothers and other relations were lying there and fresh blood was flowing from them” [Rai 1978, p. 46].

However, Sarmad was not able to perform the main magic trick, i.e. Dara Shikoh did not win the battle for the throne as had been predicted by Sarmad. Alamgir Aurangzeb, who executed his brothers, did succeed. Sarmad’s turn followed soon after Dara Shikoh. The pretext for his execution became his nudity, his ambitions for magic and his alleged blasphemous statements. Examples of such are: he claimed to have read only the first half of *kalima*. “The Ecclesiastical Council was summoned <...> Upon being repeatedly asked to recite the whole Kalima, he submitted to the Council; ‘I find myself unable to recite the whole Kalima as I have known only negative part so far. The second stage, where I can understand the positive aspect, I have not entered yet’ ” [Sharib 1994, p. 11].¹¹

¹¹ “The contrast between the two parts of the sentence ‘There is no god—but God’ has from early times, often attracted speculative minds who discovered not only a strictly dogmatic meaning but also a deeper mystical truth in the confrontation of *lā* and the *illā*. The great Persian mystics like Sana’i and ‘Attar have made use of these contrast-pairs <...>. Indian Islam inherited this poetical and mystical use of the formula from its Persian masters. <...> Sarmad was accused of reciting only the first part of the creed *lā ilāh <...>*” [Schimmel 2001, p. 90].

He also questioned the *mi'raj* in one of the *rubais*, stating that the Prophet did not reach the Heaven, but rather Heaven came to him:

هر کس که سر حقیقتش باور شد *** او پهن تر از پهناور شد
ملا گوید که بر فلک شد احمد *** سرمد گوید فلک به احمد شد

He who understood the secrets of the Truth
Became vaster than the vast heaven;
Mulla says "Ahmad went to heaven";
Sarmad says "Nay, heaven came down to Ahmad."¹²
[Asiri 1950, No. 126]

He was also accused of having declared that Shaitan was the most devoted God's servant, and that one should "go, learn the method of servanthood from Shaitan."¹³ Sarmad was sentenced to death by decapitation and was executed publicly in front of a large gathering of people. He refused to admit his sins and to betray his tradition of nudity. He welcomed death, reading a *rubai*. When he saw the executioner with a bare sword, he cried out:

رسید یار عریان تیغ این دم ** به هر رنگی که آیی تورا میشناسم

[Salahi 1991, p. 291]

The sweetheart with the naked sword in hand approached
In whatever garb Thou mayst come I recognize Thee!¹⁴

Other sources cite different versions of the last verses allegedly recited by Sarmad at the moment of the executor's advent. For example, *Riyāz ash-shu'arā'* by Waleh Daghistani gives the following lines as the last in Sarmad's life [*Riyāz*, p. 165]:

بیا بیا که به هر صورت که بیایی تورا میشناسم،
*** به هر رنگی که خواهی جامه میپوش، من از طرز خرامت میشناسم

O, come come! I'll recognize Thou in all the appearances you'll come;
put on every sort of garment you want, I'll recognize you by the character
of your walk.

In *Makhzan al-Gharā'ib* [*Makhzan*, p. 184] and *Natā'ij al-afkār* [*Natā'ij*, pp. 336–337] the same text is cited: "At the time of execution he said the following *bayt*:

¹² About Rumi, Sarmad and Iqbal's view in this connection see: [Schimmel 2001, pp. 121–122].

¹³ About Sarmad's Satanology see: [Schimmel 1978, p. 195], and the literature referred to by the author.

¹⁴ I quote the translation of this *bayt* by [Schimmel 1978, p. 362]. Rai refers to the same *bayt* as the last dictum of Sarmad [Rai 1978, p. 56], though neither he nor Asiri whose work he refers to, do not quote it in Persian. It is my pleasure to thank Nahid Pirnazar Oberman (UCLA), who provided me with the Persian text of the *bayt*.

سر جدا کرد از تنم شوخی که با ما یار بود ** قصه کوتاه گشت ورنه درد سر بسیار بود

My head has been severed from the body by a flirt who was my companion; the matter was cut short, otherwise it would have been a source of a great headache.” [Asiri 1950, p. xvii]

Riyāz al-‘arīfīn gives two different *she‘rs* [Riyāz, pp. 131–133].

The first is following:

عمریست که آوازه منصور کهن شد ** من از سر نو جلوه دهم دار و رسن را

and the second is:

همچو دورافتاده ای کآخر رسد بر یار خود
دست تا در گردن من کرد تیغش خون گریست

Like the parted who at last has found his friend,

When his sword touched my neck, he wept with bloody tears.

In *Sham‘-i gharībān* (pp. 133, 134) the following *bayt* is quoted:

بر سرمد برهنه کرامت تهمت است *** کشفی که ظاهر است از و کشف عورت است

It’s wrong to ascribe any miracle to the naked Sarmad,

The only revelation he has made is the revelation of his private parts.

[Asiri 1950, p. 10]¹⁵

Here we come to the main phase of our quest. What else could Sarmad’s life have been but a search for a mystic union? What else was his behavior in the final part of life but to throw a challenge to death? The history of Sufism gives some impressive models of such behavior. After Dara’s death Sarmad pronounced this *she‘r*, which probably made the eminent author to conclude that he “followed the tradition of Hallaj, longing for execution”:

عمریست که آوازه منصور کهن شد *** من از سر نو جلوه دهم دار و رسن را

It is ages since the tale of Mansur has become dated.

I’ll give a new shine to gallows and rope. [Asiri 1950, p. 52]

If to take into consideration the situation when these lines were said, one may only be certain that the poet understood the consequences of his proximity to Dara in Aurangzeb’s time [see: Sharib 1994, pp. 8–9]. So, was he really “longing for execution as the final goal of his life,” as A. Schimmel put it? In short, how did he understand his mystic status?

Let’s start with the last question. Sarmad’s behavior reminds us of a *malāmātī*, who always remained a target for public reprimands and blame. In Sarmad’s *rubaiyat*, there are no words with the Arab root *lwm* (for example, *malāmātī*). In many cases Sarmad behaves like a *malāmātī* but, if he confesses it, he would have to consider his behavior reprehensible. Is it so? May be this ques-

¹⁵ For some other verses imputed to Sarmad as his last lines, see: [Asiri 1950, p. xvii].

tion can be answered if we examine the subject of sin in his poetry, and whether “he was sorry for his sins.”¹⁶ Frequency with which this motif appears in Sarmad’s writings is very high compared to others. It will be enough to say that more than 30 poetic lines (*bayts*) with this theme occur in his 300 *rubai*. However, words meaning sin (*jurm*, *gunāh*, ‘*iṣyān*, *taqṣīr*) are paired up with words, which signify mercy and forgiveness (*lutf*, *karam*, *bakhshāish*, *fazl*). Therefore, while admitting his sins, Sarmad hopes for the mercy of the Creator, which always exceeds any wrongdoing. Let’s show an example:

هر چند که عصبان مرا میداند *** بر خوان کرم هر نفسی میخواند
در خوف و رجا بسی تأمل کردم *** بیش از همه مانل به کرم ماند

Though He knows about my sins (‘*iṣyān*) well,
Yet He calls me every moment to the table of His bounties,
I contemplated much about my hopes and fears,
And [I found] He is kinder to me than to all others.

[Asiri 1950, No. 125]

Furthermore, Sarmad repeats a peculiar formula several times: *chashm-i karamash ‘āshiq-i ḥusn-i gunāh* — “His merciful eye is the Lover of the beauty of sins” [Asiri 1950, No. 186].¹⁷

As for Sarmad’s Sufism, we must point out that, most likely, Sarmad did not have a *sheikh*, or a spiritual mentor. Trimmingham’s classification of Sufi, *mala-mati* and *qalandar* is worth mentioning in this connection.¹⁸ According to him, the difference between the two latter consists in the fact that the first one conceals his religion, and the second tries to expose it and even use it to provoke

¹⁶ Asiri discusses this problem and compares the same motif in Khayyam with Sarmad. He writes: “Khayyam believed that for the manifestation of the mercy and kindness of God, commission of sins is necessary, for he thought only the sinner by repentance can move to God’s mercy” [Asiri 1950, p. xxx]. But he discerns the notion of sin in Khayyam and Sarmad. “Sarmad writes for others which is quite befitting his position as a true mystic; Khayyam ... argues like a philosopher ... Khayyam sins but is not sorry for his sins for he believes that the sins are made to be committed, and they move God to mercy. But Sarmad, on the other hand, is sorry for his sins and always ponders over the consequences that might follow in the wake of them.” *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

¹⁷ Cf. the *ḥadīth*: “Al-Ḥākīm transmitted <...> the following: ‘Adam asked: O God! Didst Thou not create me with Thine own hand? God replied: Yes, I did. Adam asked: Didst Thou not breath into me of Thy spirit? God replied: Yes, I did. Adam asked: O Lord! Didst Thou not settle me in Thy Paradise? God replied: Yes, I did. Adam asked: *Does Thy kindness not exceed Thy wrath? God replied: Yes, it does.* Adam asked: If Thou seest that I repent and behave rightly, wilt Thou return me back to Paradise? God answered: Yes, I will’ ” (*Al-Ḥākīm al-Naysābūrī*. *Al-Mustadrak ‘alā ’l-ṣaḥīḥayn*. Haidarabad, 1334–1342 L.H. Vol. IX. P. 247 (3961)).

¹⁸ *Trimingham J.S.* *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. Appendix B (I have used the Russian translation by A.A. Staviska [Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1989. P. 277]).

censure. Suhrawardi wrote that a *qalandar* seeks an opportunity to destroy the established traditions. He is likewise not burdened by conventions of everyday life. A *qalandar* is not tied to a certain mentor by inner spiritual links, he is not necessarily a follower of a definite school of thought or a branch of Sufism, and he is above the religious law.¹⁹ That is why when we come across the only *bayt* in which Sarmad applies the word *qalandar* to himself, we are likely to agree with this self-definition, which gives also the definition of the literary genre, and even to believe his sincerity:

شاه و درویش و قلندر دیده ***
 سرمد سرمست و رسوا را ببین
 Have you seen king, darvish and qalandar [in a single person]?
 Look at Sarmad, drunk and ill famed! [Asiri 1950, p. 49]

One can hardly say to which period of Sarmad's life all his *rubais* belong.²⁰ The composition of *Divan* gives us no clue as to the chronology of the poems. What is interesting, in some cases two or more *rubais* are put one after another and look like a kind of small cycles having a common theme, similar imagery and rhyme. That might indicate that they were written at the same time or opposed by the author consciously. Judging from the style and themes of the verses, one can suppose that these *rubais* are created by a mature author. Some of them could be interpreted as hints about the events of his private life:

سرمد در دین عجب شکستی کردی ***
 ایمان به فدائی چشم مستی کردی
 با عجز و نیاز جمله نقد خود را * * *
 رفتی و نثار بت پرستی کردی
 In religion, o Sarmad, you have created a strange confusion,
 As you have offered your faith to the intoxicating eyes [of the Beloved]
 With all humility and politeness you approached
 And offered all your gains to the idol-worshipper.

[Asiri 1950, No. 326]

These lines could be read not only as a metaphor of Divine love, but as an allusion to the personal situation—love for the “idol-worshipper,” the Hindu Abhai Chand.

¹⁹ Islam. Enciclopedicheskiy slovar'. Moscow, 1991. P. 129 (in Russian). In his article De Bruijn gives three definitions of the area of use for the term *qalandar* (*qalandariyya*): as “a tendency which began to manifest itself in the life of the Sufis” in the age of Shihab al-Din Abu Hafis 'Umar Suhrawardi (539/1145–632/1234) [De Bruijn 1992, p. 76]; as “the type of very extreme *malāmatī* mystic” which “manifested itself in practical life under the very name of the 'qalandar'.” The two first areas belong to the mystical theory and the actual life of the Sufi, while the third area belongs to the terminological use of the word in literature, or as De Bruijn puts it “as the principal character of a literary genre” [ibid., pp. 76–77].

²⁰ Asiri notes, that Sarmad was a prolific author who wrote in his green years a lot of “mostly perfect love poetry. The poet says: I'm old now and it's difficult for me to write poetry, // all I needed to say I said early in life” [Asiri 1950, p. xviii].

The opposition “youth—old age” also has a correlation with the way of his life: “I sin like a youth though apparently I’m old // It’s long since I have been a slave to them. // I expect forgiveness of all from His single act of kindness, // However large be the number of my sins” [Asiri 1950, No. 205]. Or yet another *rubai*:

دل باز گرفتار نگاری شده است *** در فکر و غم لاله عذاری شده است
من پیر و دلم ذوق جوانی دارد *** هنگام خزان خوش بهاری شده است

My heart is again lost in love for a beautiful one;
It is lost in desire and grief for the sweet-faced one;
I’m old but my heart still has the strength of youth,
That is, in autumn it blooms like spring.

[Asiri 1950, No. 71]

The benevolent friend at the same time could be referred to as God all-gracious and forgiving sins, and these two characters merge in a single whole:

صد شکر که از یار ترحم دیدم *** احسان و کرم به حال خود فهمیدم
نخلی که نشاندی ثمر میبخشد * * * آخر گلی از باغ محبت چیدم

A hundred thanks that I have seen mercy from the Friend!

Beauty and grace I felt by my own state of spirit

The sprout, which you plant, gives fruits,

At last I picked a rose from the garden of Love.

[Asiri 1950, No. 209, p. 30]

It may be assumed that this situation is rather unusual in poetry since the seeker practically never obtains kindness from the Beloved, and the maxim, “you reap what you sow,” inevitably points the way to the Day of Judgment!²¹

From these and some other lines one can draw a rather unexpected conclusion that concord with this world is possible and is not alien to Sarmad, that love must not necessarily be unrequited, that flourishing in old age is desirable (هنگام خزان میل شگفتن دارم — “I wish to blossom at the time of fall”), and so on. The above-mentioned motifs of sin and God’s mercifulness and indulgence emerge as a result of the poet’s harmony with life.

What is more, Sarmad says that God loves madmen [Asiri 1950, No. 50]. Madmen used to throw their clothes off long before Sarmad (Majnun, for example); besides, to be dressed does not necessarily mean to be pious and a good man! God gives the most direct clarification in this respect: “O sons of Adam! We have sent down to you garments (*libās*) wherewith to cover your shame, and plumage (fine dresses); but the garment (*libās*) of piety, that is better. That is one of the signs of God, haply ye may remember” [Koran 7: 25–26, tr. by Palmer]. It is easy to conclude from this *ayat*, then, that the garment of piety equals the very

²¹ See [Koran 99:7, 8]; a study of Hafez’s *bayt* 9 from *ghazal* # 5 (*bulbul zi shākh-i sarv ba gulbāng-i pahlavī...*) in: [Prigarina 1999, pp. 149, 247—the reference to Meisami 1985].

nakedness of Adam and Hava's innocence before they were driven out of Paradise.²²

It seems quite natural to expect the emergence of the theme of nudity in Sarmad's *rubaiyat*. As a matter of fact, this theme even has a certain pragmatic aspect to it. It becomes clear that, first of all, nakedness is quite efficient, for it never wears out (like virtue itself):

خاک نشینی است سلیمانیم *** نیک بود ز افسر سلطانیم
چهل سال که مرا پوشیدمش *** کهنه نشد جامهٔ عربانیم

My Sulaimanhood is sitting in the dust

It's better than crown of sultan for me,

It is forty years as I cover myself with it,

And still is not worn out the garment of my nudity.

[Asiri 1950, p. 51, No. 14]

Sarmad compares his plain habit of sitting in the dust to the throne of Sulaiman—the highest of the thrones of the earthly kings. Another *rubai* alludes to the reason why he took off his dress:

خوش بالائی کرده چنین پست مرا *** چشمی به دو جام برده از دست مرا
او در بغل من است و من در طلبش * * * دزد عجبی برهنه کردست مرا

A sweet-statured one has reduced me to a very low position

By the intoxicating cups of His eyes He had carried me away from myself.

He is in my arms and I run about searching for Him,

A strange thief has stripped me of my garments.

[Asiri 1950, No. 19]

Here we shall confine ourselves to two themes—those of nakedness and death. One can expect to come across these themes in the *rubaiyat*. Both of them are rather traditional for the literature in Persian (e.g. Baba Tahir 'Uryan [Naked]). In Sarmad's time, the poet Saib used the motif of nakedness to express his disregard of public opinion.²³ It can be easily shown that the motif of nakedness contains a certain philosophy, which, in its turn, is closely linked with Sufism and Hallajian motifs in literature.²⁴ Let us first consider the following *rubai*:

²² Hence the problem of *iltibās* (the same root *lbs* as in *libās*), concealment of pre-eternal beauty (Schimmel, 1978, p. 299) and envelopment of the human being in the light of pre-eternity (Schimmel, 1978, p. 79). Its transformation is obvious in the teaching of Ali-ilahi or Ahl-i Ḥaqq. See: [Minorsky 1911].

²³ کدام جامه به از پرده پوشی خلق است *** بیوش چشم خود از عیب خلق و عربان باش

Which garment is better than to hide people's errors?

Close your eyes to the people's blame, and be naked [Saib, p. 536].

²⁴ For the motif of nakedness in connection with Hallaj's hagiographical and poetical notions in 'Attar, see: [Reisner, Chalisova 1998]. The article also deals with the motifs of the severed head, a cup of wine and the disclosure of a secret. For the motifs of cloth (*libās*), clothing in a dress (*malbūs*) as an act of receiving sanctity in the Ali-ilahi sect, see: [Minorsky 1911]; *iltibās*—"the envelopment of the human being in the light of pre-eternity" [Schimmel 1978, p. 79] or "concealment of preeternal beauty in created forms" [ibid., p. 299].

هستی به نظر چه شد اگر پنهانی * * * این راز نهفته را تو هم میدانی
چون شمع ز فانوس نمائی خود را * * * پیوسته در این لباس خود عربانی

Thou art visible, though Thou liest concealed

This hidden secret is known to Thee also.

Thou showest Thyself like a candle from within lantern,

Thou are always *naked* in this garment.

[Asiri 1950, No. 315].

Asiri rendered the last line in another way:

Thou showest Thyself like a candle from within the Fanus (shade),

Thou art ever *manifest* in this garment.

[Asiri 1950, No. 315, p. 54]

There is a poetic figure of *ihām*, two meanings of one line. The image is constituted by the candle concealed by the lantern, but manifested by the light it sheds. The candle is only veiled by the transparent glass of the lantern, and so its nakedness is revealed. In other words, the manifestation of Divine attributes reveals His essence; “nakedness” becomes a metaphysical notion (be it revealed or concealed under a veil).

Nakedness appears and vanishes again (as if pulsating) in the image of the world, which undergoes constant changes, like a tree that is covered with leaves or naked (*uryān*) [Asiri 1950, No. 263]. This motif directly corresponds to Shabistari’s understanding of the concept “face-hair” (*ruy-muy*). This Sarmad’s idea manifests itself in the image of a veil between the seeker and God: man is like a book, which is ignorant of the divine Sign (*Āyat-i Ilahī*) concealed (*bā hijāb*) in it, or like a bottle that does not feel the bouquet of wine contained in it [Asiri 1950, No. 24]. And, if there is something except Him in man’s heart, this is an obstacle (*hijāb*: “veil”) between man and Friend. The lover is searching for his Beloved, i.e. the thief who has stolen his garment (*dozd-i ‘ajabī barahna kard mara*).

If this is a hint about Sarmad’s life story, then his love for Abhai Chand could be regarded (and *is* regarded by some authors) as *nazar ilā-l-murd*, love for the beardless. This is one of Sufi notions linked to the contemplation of God in the beauty of a beardless youth. It is well known that nakedness can be attributed to an ascetic, but it differs from the one Sarmad praises. While an ascetic considers himself a saint, Sarmad claims to be a heretic, pagan and non-Muslim, even though he goes to a mosque. The naked poet is “dressed” in dust from the Friend’s street. However, this garment is torn in a thousand places—tears have plowed deep furrows in it. Those who are immaculate have no need to wear garments:

پوشاند لباس هر کرا عیبی دید * * * بی عیبان را لباس عربانی داد

Those with deformity He has covered with dresses,

To the immaculate, He gave the robe of nudity.

[Asiri 1950, No. 111]

The “dress of nakedness” cannot be worn out [Asiri 1950, No. 14, p. 49]. Yet, the nakedness, even if the body is covered with dust from the Friend’s street and turned into dust on this way, approaches the mystic and lover’s death: his body should be separated from the head by a sword’s blow:

سرمد مارا به عشق رسوا کردند *** سرمست و سراسیمه و شیدا کردند
عریانی تن بود غبار ره دوست * * * آن نیز به تیغ از سر ما واکردند

O Sarmad, by granting love, they put me into disrepute,
And made me intoxicated, perplexed and mad.
My naked body was dust of the Friend’s path

[not permitting to see it clearly].

That too has been cut from my head with a sword-blow.

[Asiri 1950, No. 136]

By the way, the closely connected words “naked” (*uryān*) and “sword” (*tīgh*) merged into the image of a naked sword (*tīgh-i uryān*) in Mirza Ghalib’s poetry.

Sufi connotations of the word “Way/Path” are widely known. This word acquires the meaning of Sufi way in Persian literature—*ṭarīq*, *rah*. Sarmad says:

دنیا نشود آخردم با تو رفیق * * * در راه خدا کوش رفیق است شفیق
خواهی که به سر منزل دلدار رسی *** گفتم به تو ای دوست همین است طریق

The world will not go along with you up to the last;
Try on the path of God, who is a kind companion.
If you wish to reach the abode of the Beloved,
I told you, O friend, this is the very path (*ṭarīq*) leading to it.

[Asiri 1950, No. 173]

He speaks of grasping the Truth, mentions the highest stage of Sufi knowledge—*maʿrifat (joz ba dar-i maʿrifat gadāʾī nakonam)*: “Nor do I beg from any one except the door of Knowledge of God” [Asiri 1950, No. 232].

He urges the reader to give up asceticism and hypocrisy (*zuhd-u-riyāʿ*) and drink the vine which fills the Cup of Truth (*ḥaqīqat*), in which the form and the sense (*ṣurat-u-maʿnī*) are seething [ibid., No. 167]. Intoxicated with the wine of Truth, Sarmad is an example of the *dervish* and *qalandar* [ibid., No. 1, p. 49]. God is merciful and charitable [ibid., No. 233], but he loves those who become mad for love on the way to Him (“Yes, wise is one who became mad, falling in love with him” [ibid., No. 50]). Nevertheless, this is a madness of a special kind—it gives power and success. Success is achieved by renouncing the world and its temptations (*faqr*), and by destroying everything personal in the mystic’s Self (*bogzar zi khudī*: “you must go out of your selfhood”).

بگزر ز خودی که دین قرینت گردد *** سر دفتر اعمال همینت گردد
در هر دو جهان سکه بنامت بزنند *** عالم همه در زیر ننگینت گردد

Give up vanity so that Faith may get closer to you,
 That you might stay at the head of all doers of good.
 In both worlds they will stamp coins with your name
 And the Universe may be put under your care.

[Asiri, No. 128]

The highest level of such self-denial, as Sarmad states, demands total self-destruction (Unless you annihilate Yourself, you cannot receive life) [Asiri, No. 135]. The true Lover is not afraid of death:

در مسلخ عشق جز نکو را نکشتند *** لاغر صفتان زشت خو را نکشتند
 تو عاشق صادق ز کشتن مگریز *** مردار بود هر آن که او را نکشتند

In the slaughterhouse of love only the good ones are killed,
 Not the emaciated and the ill-tempered ones
 You are a true lover, fear not death, for
 One who is already dead is not killed (sacrificed). [Asiri, No. 119]

One cannot help remembering another poet of this period, Naziri, who said: “Those who weren’t killed are not from our tribe.” In addition, the great poet of the 13th century Rumi asked: “What is beheading? Slaying the carnal soul in the Holy War” (*Masnavi* 2:2525 [Schimmel 1978, p. 392]).

This philosophy together with the confluence of his life’s events allowed Sarmad to accept death stoically, and, like the great heroes of the antiquity, to pronounce the Last Word addressed to future generations, or to make a fine gesture.

Whatever was his behavior after Dara’s slaughter—suicidal or longing for death, whatever was his denial to repent and refusal to take a different view, he really gained his end if, according to Hermann Hesse, he strived for “outside forces” to finish his life story.²⁵ In any case, the theme of decapitation, or deprivation of head and feet on the Path of Love, is inherent in Sarmad’s poetry (Asiri 1950, No. 139; Asiri 1950, p. 49, No. 2, etc.) that alludes to the motif of Hallaj and of Imam Hussain, as a martyr of Islam killed in the battle of Kerbela, whose severed head was put on a lance by enemies:

ما سر خود را چو کوه و زیر پادانسته ایم *** شهر دهلی را به سان کربلا دانسته ایم
 رفت منصور از قضا و رفت سرمد نیز هم *** دارها را از عطائی کبریا دانسته ایم

We regarded our head as mountain, but knew its place is under feet,
 We knew that city Delhi is the same Karbala,
 Mansoor went as fate has willed, went Sarmad as well,
 We regarded gallows as one of the Almighty’s gifts.

[Asiri 1950, p. 50, No. 6]

²⁵ G. Tchartshvily 1999 in his book “Writers—Suicide” (in Russian) calls these cases “suicide through the sense of duty and self-sacrifice”.

What is significant, Sarmad's death became the pretext to clarify the mutual relations between God and his devotee in the poetry and thought of Indian poets and thinkers. The Sindhi poet of the 17th century Sachal Sarmast "enumerated the names of those who have had to suffer for their love of God:

Welcome, welcome Thou art—to which place wilt
 Thou bring me? Thou wilt again cut off a head!
 Giving a kick to Sarmad Thou hast killed him;
 Thou hast brought Mansur on the gallows,
 cut off Sheikh 'Attar's head—
 Now Thou art asking the way here!"

[Schimmel 1978, p. 394]

* * *

Let us come back to the last dictum of Sarmad. Actually, it was not the above-mentioned reminiscence of Mansur and the conceited pride to be the second one in this lineage. It seems more natural that, on the threshold of death, the poet recollects the martyrdom of his dear friend, prince Dara Shukuh. The message of Sarmad's *bayt*: "In whatever garb Thou mayst come—I recognize you" reveals the philosophy of Divine Love in the motif of "garment (garb)"; Persian *har rang* ("every color"), means also "every sort of something." In his small treatise *Risāla-i Haqq-Numā*, Dara Shukuh discusses "the various states of spiritual development"; the prince writes that he considers himself one whom God "draws towards Himself," and "*in spite of his being in this garb* (of a prince) opened to him the portals of saintliness and divine knowledge; so that human beings may know that His favor is without any particular cause. *He draws towards Himself whomsoever He likes, in whatever garb he be*. This wealth (of Divine knowledge) is not bestowed on everyone but has been bestowed specially on *him*" [Majma' 1982, Introduction by Malfuz-ul-haq, p. 9].

Sarmad's *she'r* seems to have the opposite meaning: the poet himself urges to recognize his Beloved in whatever garb He be, even in the garment of an executioner. However, the words of Sachal Sarmast testify that such a situation between God and a Sufi is ordinary enough. In addition, the latter has "to recognize that, in whatever way He acts, or in whatever form He manifests, we see our Beloved. As Hazrat Sarmad said at the point of martyrdom—'in whatever form You come I recognize You'," as the representative of the Gudri Shahi order Jamiluddin Morris puts it [*Zahuri Sufi website*].

Therefore, life and death of one who is intoxicated with Divine love became in Sarmad's poetry not only a unity of one's mystical behavior justified logically, but a glorious finish for a seeker of Truth. Now his wish to become a martyr of Divine Love is an accomplished fact, and the poet triumphs over the carnal death.

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