ESOTERIC KEYS OF MĪRZĀ ʿABD AL-QĀDIR BĪDEL

by

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(Under the Direction of Kenneth Lee Honerkamp)

ABSTRACT

Bīdel is considered the most difficult poet in Persian poetry. This study explores the complexity of his language through three key words: incapacity, mirror, and bewilderment. I argue that these are umbrella terms, which cover a range of concepts, images, metaphors, and symbols, and through understanding them, we find the keys to unlock the mysteries of Bīdel's thinking; not knowing them, the inner subtlety and significance of his works cannot be understood. The goal of this examination is to see how Bīdel's own ontological exploration yields a description of human relationship with the Divine.

INDEX WORDS: Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qadir Bīdel, Sabk-i Hindi, Sufism, Persian Poetry, Incapacity, Mirror, Bewilderment, Imagination, Theosophy

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Hawa, who suffered throughout her life.

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INTRODUCTION

Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdel[1] was an iconoclast poet of the 18th century in India.[2] He rejected the cherished styles of Persian poetry that flourished at the court and was patronized by the elites. At that time, such a move was an aberration and it was unacceptable if a poet was not consistent with the tradition, namely within the two major styles: the epic panegyric *Khorāsānī* style and the *Iraqī*, a lyrical style that uses mystical Sufi concepts. Bīdel adopted a new form called *Sabk-i Hindi* (the Indian style),[3] which emerged in the fifteenth century and flourished during the Timurid era.

Bīdel is considered an outstanding representative of the Indian Persian *(Sabki-i Hindi*) style of poetry, one who refined and raised it to its highest degree of sophistication and elaboration, such that today he is dubbed the most difficult Farsi poet. Once

[1] Scholars have written Bīdel's name in various ways but according to earlier sources, his full name is Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdel. One of the Tazkirah writers who was born ten years after Bīdel's death, has recorded the poet's name as Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir and his pen name as Bīdel. Later, the literati added another pen name Abu al-Maʿāni. See Sadriddin Ayni, *Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdel,* trans/ed. Shahbaz Iraj (Tehran: Surah, 2005), 103.

[2] Bīdel means heart-lorn. It is said that Mīrzā has borrowed his pen name from *Golestan* (the Rose Garden) of Saʿdi, specifically from this verse:

Gar kasī wasf aū zi man pursad
Bīdel az bī nishān chi goyad bāz?
If I were asked to describe her/him
What can a heart-lorn say about descriptionless?

[3] *Sabk-i Hindī* is a style of poetry in Persian language, which emerged in 15th century, in India. In the early part of that century when the Safavids came to power, many poets were forced to write their poems strictly limited to Shi'ism, which the Safavids had established as a state religion. As a result, many poets left areas under the control of the Safavids and eventually resided in India. Another factor that contributed to the emergence of the Indian Style, some believe, was frustration with banality and cliché that had dominated the domain of Persian poetry. See Shafīʿī Kadkanī, *Shāʿīr-i āyinah-hā: Barrasī-i Sabk-i hindi wa shi'r-i Bīdel* (Tehran: Āgah, 1366 [1988]), 16.

Muhammad Iqbal[4] said, "Bīdel is a speculative mind of the highest order." He continues, "perhaps, the greatest poet-thinker that India has produced since the days of Adi Shankara."[5]

Contrary to his predecessors, who were patronized by various dynasties, rulers and aristocrats, Bīdel not only shunned all patrons, but he also tried to escape from publicity. This is an important characteristic about him that should be remembered when studying Bīdel because he believed that success can be obtained with no association with power and politics. This was, of course, at the time when poets and writers were enduring long journeys to reach the Mughal Palace in Delhi in hope of getting entry into the Palace to serve the emperor. Bīdel, on the other hand, who lived in the capital, did not have the desire to visit the emperor's palace.[6] Not only did he reject meeting with the emperor Auranzeb, he refused gifts by the emperor.

Another important quality of Bīdel and his work that should always be considered is his poetic novelty, which could only be fitted in *Sabk-i Hindi.* Bīdel and many other poets who found the common Persian classical style of poetry stagnant, overusing images symbols and metaphors and lacking original thought, adopted the new style as an alternative to escape from banality of the prevailing poetic tradition. In *Sabk-i Hindi,* they sought for novelties and imaginative forms where they could look at the world and at

[4] Muhammad Iqbal (born in Sialkot, India now in Pakistan - 1877-1938) was a poet and philosopher. He is known for his influential efforts behind Muslim movement in British-administered India toward establishment of a separate Muslim state.

[5] Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Bedil in the Light of Bergson*, ed. Tehseen Firaqi (Lahore: Universal Books/Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1988), 1; Adi Shankara (or Shankaracharya) who lived in the 9th century, was a philosopher, theologian, and a renowned exponent of the *Advaita Vedanta* school of philosophy, from whose doctrines the main currents of modern Indian thought are derived. He died at the age 32. In his short life, he authored books such as *The Exegeses of Upanishads, Brahma Sutra*, and *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*.

[6] At this time, Aurangzeb, the sixth Mughal emperor ruled India. His reign lasted for 49 years from 1658 until his death in 1707.

things different from their predecessors. Critics, however, have often pointed out that though the proponents of the Indian Style broadened the Persian poetic tradition by adding a new dimension, they did not make poetry accessible to the general public; it, rather, became more complicated. They added that Bīdel combines sensuous expression with intellectualization of poetic devices.[7] They even went further and blamed him for obfuscation and riddling of poetic language that is often burlesque and that creates antitheses.[8] Bīdel's response to his critics is:

> *maʿni-yi boland-i man, fahm-i tund mīkhāhad*
> *sayr-i fikram āsān nīst, kūh-amu kūtal dāram*[9]
>
> My high meanings require acute perception,
> Following the track of my thought is arduous, as
> I am a mountain with lots of hills

Indeed, this statement is bold and true. Reading Bīdel, it requires patience, concentration, and tolerance, and, most importantly, a perspicacious insight. Bīdel constructs his ideas, similes, personifications, hyperboles, symbolism, metaphors and puns in a highly intricate and cerebral form that leaves little doubt about his departure from Persian traditional poetic formalism. His technique, forms, and narrative are essentially intellectual and cerebral.

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[7] These kinds of views, of course, created oversights and I discuss the reasons in the conclusion. See page 76.

[8] Oftentimes, Bīdel antithesizes to employ two words of contrasting meanings. For instance, *rang-i ṣadā* (color of voice); *rang-i wahm* (color of illusion)*; sadrang nāla* (the colorful wailing), to name a few.

> *"ghayr ʿuryāni libāsī nīst tā pūshad kasī"*
> except nakedness, there is no clothe to cover me; or
> *"dar parda-hā-yī khāmūshī āwāzi mā buland"*
> behind the curtain of silence, our voice is heard

[9] ʻAbd Al-Qādir Bīdel, *Kullīyāt-i Abu al-Maʻanī Mīrzā ʻAbd al-Qādīr Bīdel,* ed. Khāl Muhammad Khastah and Khalil Allah Khalili (Kabul: da Pohane Wizārat, da Dār al-Ta'līf Rīyāsat, 1341-1244 [1962/1963-1965/1966]), 1: 982.

Bīdel is creative, innovative, and forward thinker like many modern European realist thinkers. There are thirty-five occasions where Bīdel refers to existence as nothing but an illusion: *wahm* or *mawhūm* (illusory or imaginary).

> *ḥāṣil az hastī-yi mawhūm nafas duzdīdan*
> *aīnqadar būd keh bar āyīna ihsān kardīm*[10]
>
> The product of this illusory existence has been nothing,
> but holding our breaths to the mirror with respect[11]

The abundance of the terms *wahm* and *mawhūm,* which are often time combined with *hastī,* like *hastī-yi mawhūm, mawhūm-i hasti*, *zindagi mawhūm* (illusory existence) leaves little doubt in inference to the existentialistic question of human existence — that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of this life. These terms and compounds, which bear existential concepts, materialize throughout Bīdel's work. In his *dīwān* alone, which contains around 3,000 poems, the word *wahm* appears 630 times; *mawhūm* 174 times; the compounds, *hastī-yi mawhūm* appears thirty-five times, *mawhūm-i hastī* eight times, and *zindagī-yi mawhūm* appears one time. These terms rarely appears in the works of other Persian poets from the medieval era to modern day.[12]

Oddly, sometimes, Bīdel appears as an existentialist; some of his ideas bear remarkable similarities to that of Tolstoy and some other modern European existentialist philosophers. He tries to connect the dots in the infinite by explaining the interrelated states of "bewilderment" (*ḥayrat*) and the "incapacity" (*ʿajz*) in order to find meaning in a

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[10] Ibid., 1: 917.

[11] All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. Also, I use both the Farsi and Arabic Romanization method of the Library of Congress system of transliteration, but sometimes, I disregard their methods because the Farsi vernacular spoken in Afghanistan is phonetically different slightly from that of spoken in Iran and Tajikistan. For instance, I translate "و" as "*w",* instead of *v*; "به"as *ba*, instead of *bi* or *beh*.

[12] The illusory nature of existence is a classical Islamic and Sufi theme. But it is true that out of all Persian poets, Bīdel by far made greater use of the expression "illusory existence." In fact, a search of all the collections of Persian poetry at ganjoor.net shows that he uses it 35 times in his collected poetry. The only one who uses it more than twice is Sa'ib-e Tabrizi, who used it 9 times.

meaningless world, like Tolstoy, who detached himself from logical existence in order to find what the universe really means.[13] Similar to Tolstoy, Bīdel believes that our infinite existence cannot be explained; rather it is bewildering, and one who dares to find explanation should first find meaning in life itself. The state of bewilderment and incapacity are at the core of existentialism in which an individual, like Bīdel himself, is struggling to comprehend his own existence in a universe that cannot be perceived except through experiencing bewilderment and admitting one's incapableness. It is this struggle that prompts him to break the established conventions and to set his mind free of dogma for the sake of novelty and creativity. His escape from banality and triteness was an ontological quest for establishing a meaningful existential spatiality in the poetic tradition. What we always encounter in Bīdel's poetry are the ontological "whats" and epistemological "hows" explored through a range of powerful concepts such as bewilderment, mirror, incapacity, and colorlessness, among others.

Although this is not directly mentioned, Bīdel, had probably read the works of Plato because sometimes, the course of his thought resembles that of Plato, in particular in their mutual interest in bewilderment.[14] His philosophical curiosity is fueled by wonder (*thaumazein*) or bewilderment. "Wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder," Plato has Socrates say at 155d of the *Theaetetus*. For Plato, bewilderment gives rise to epistemological questions like what is life's essential purpose or meaning? Is life absurd? What makes it absurd? How can we know anything? How can we know what we know? For Bīdel, on the other hand, bewilderment gives rise to

[13] Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession,* trans. Aylmer Mude (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 47.
[14] The Greek thought might have spread to Indian subcontinent much earlier, but there is tangible evidence that the interaction started as early as the beginning of the 17th century through trade and diplomacy.

ontological questions, concerning the overall nature of what things are. Questions like, what is existence? What is the meaning of life? What is truth? What is the true path? Bīdel recognizes that the rational mind negates the meaning of life, and these questions cannot be answered through logic because it dictates that life as meaningless.

He, instead, provides answers to all of these by utilizing the Sufi metaphysics in its deepest details. He employs the word *waḥdat and kathrat* (unity and multiplicity) and argues that in multiplicity there exists unity. He also uses *wujūd,* which is one of the more common terms in Sufi metaphysics, denoting that existence is necessary and that it is the truth. From Bīdel's perspective, the truth is transcendent while immanent in all existence. If the truth is God, then He is not different from any created reality; He is the source as well as the consequence.

Time and again, Bīdel holds naturalist views of existence and tries to provide a plausible naturalist explanation of our world. He did not belief in the afterlife, and like Omar Khayyam who joked about religious matters, Bīdel ridiculed the concept of heaven and hell, and called it a "fairytale."[15] It is not surprising that he was labeled as a materialist and existentialist.[16] Bīdel was known for attacking or ignoring long-held traditions: he shaved his beard and mocked those who did not shave, called them bear-like or covered with hair, like sheep.[17] In some way, these existentialist themes situate

[15] Jan Rypka cites Sadriddin Ayni's book, in Tajik language, *Mirzo Abdulqodir Bedil,* printed in Stalinabad, 1968. Surprisingly, it is not mentioned in its translated version of Farsi. Obviously, it is censored. See Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, written in collaboration with Otakar Klima [and others], ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 516.
[16] Riccardo Zipoli, *Riflessi Di Persia/Reflections of Persia* (Venezia: Cafoscarina/Nazar Art Publications, 2013), 38.
[17] "*aīn qadar rīsh che maʿnī dārad? /* ghayr-i tashwīsh che maʿnī dārad*?" What the use of that much beard, except disquietude? Kulliyat 1: 417.

him as a transitional figure between the traditional classical poets and modernist poets in the domain of Persian poetry.

In this thesis, I attempt to decode some of Bīdel's complex ideas and concepts that revolve around ontological issues. In doing so, I adopt hermeneutical analysis in order to resolve the complexity of Bīdel's thinking. In chapter one, I examine the scholarship on Bīdel in the domain of English language. In the second chapter, I introduce *ʿajz*--incapacity--as one of the most important keys to understanding Bīdel's poetry. It serves as an umbrella concept for a range of related terms. I argue that in order to understand Bīdel one must have a better understanding of the concept of *ʿajz* because it is the soul—the *atman*—of his metaphysics. Similarly, in chapter three, I discuss another central key *āyīna* (mirror), which is metaphorically used for the heart as the center of the reflection of the reality of being. The heart is portrayed as a shining mirror, and if it is constantly polished, it can reflect in the awareness of devotee the guidance, love, and inspiration of reality. In the final chapter, similar to *ʿajz,* I discuss *ḥayrat* (bewilderment) as one of the most fundamental concepts. Without understanding *ḥayrat*, the inner subtlety of Bīdel's works cannot be understood because through bewilderment he raises some existential concerns relating existence. Bewilderment is cherished as an important spiritual state in which the rational mind is not able to function; the bewildering moment reveals aspects of reality, and, on the heels of bewilderment, lies illumination.

Finally, when encountering difficult phrases and especially contradictory compound words, we should think of Bīdel's language skills and ability. His native language was Bengali because he was born to a Bengali mother. On his father's side, he

belonged to a Mongol tribe, Arlas, one of the four major tribes of Chaghatai.[18] Farsi was among many other languages that he learned in his primary education. Bīdel might have been fluent in Farsi; however, it was not his mother tongue. Lacking fluency did not hamper him from mastering it in his own way. To understand the complexity of his compounds, terms, and symbols, one must pay attention to Afghanistan's and Tajikistan's vernacular language, which still uses some of Bīdel's terms. Repetition of terms may reflect his lexical inadequacy and should be regarded as being caused by a lack of quantity than quality.

It is fair to assume that if Bīdel had been exposed to Farsi from birth, we would not have the quality of poetry that Bīdel has given us today. He was not well versed in the Persian language as compared to his predecessors. A salient example would be looking at words that are repeated thousands of times. He exhausts the infinite usage of terms to eventually conceive meanings. The odd compounds of words[19] are the products of such difficulties; they serve as alternatives, not his mastery in language. But surprisingly, all the compounds Bīdel makes are eloquent and meaningful in an attractive way. It seems no one else other than Bīdel is as creative in developing compounds, and no one else has the courage to play with words and be so creative in utilizing the language with such masterly finesse.

[18] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Anarkali, Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), 2.
[19] See examples on page 3 footnote.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE CURRENT STUDIES ON BĪDEL

For much of history, Mīrzā Abdul Qādir Bīdel remained unknown to the West. Scholars in the West sporadically mentioned his name, regarding his poetry with fascination, and praised him for his delicately nuanced and extremely complicated style, which is known to the Persian literati as *Sabk-i Hindi* (Indian Style). Despite conveying interest in his poetry, almost no one ventured to delve deeply into his works, which are fortunately available in various libraries across the world. In the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, Abdul Ghani authored the first critical study, titled *Life and Works of Bedil*.[20] In 1975, Mohammed Moazzam Siddiqi wrote his dissertation on Bīdel, *An Examination of the Indo-Persian Mystical Poet Mīrzā ʻAbdul Qādir Bēdil with Particular Reference to His Chief Work ʻIrfān.*[21] Later, in 1989, Haji Mohamad Bohari Haji Ahmad, a Malaysian scholar, wrote about *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Bīdel's thought as part of his dissertation at the University of California Berkeley.[22] In 2013, Hajnalka Kovacs, at the University of Chicago, wrote her dissertation on one of Bīdel's *mathnawis, The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd*

[20] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960).
[21] Moazzam Sidiqi, "An Examination of the Indo-Persian Mystical Poet Mīrzā ʻAbdul Qādir Bēdil with Particular Reference to His Chief Work ʻIrfān." (PhD diss., University of California, 1975).
[22] Haji-Mohamad Bohari Haji-Ahmad, "The ideas of Waḥdat al-Wujūd in the poetry of ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdil (Persian), İbrahim Hakki Erzurumlu (Ottoman Turkish), and Hamzah Fansuri (Malay)" (PhD diss., University of California, 1989).

al-Qadir Bedil.[23] Three years later another book on Bīdel and his circle came out, authored by Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark*.[24]

The current scholarship on Bīdel's *oeuvre*, though scant, suggests that he is probably the most difficult poet in the Persian language, with complex, rich imagery and convoluted language; yet, his poetry is not that complicated to understand if a little effort is invested. A crucial aspect of Bīdel's poetry is, undoubtedly, the influence of Ibn ʿArabi and the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or the Oneness of Being. In addition to a brief introduction, this chapter will present the current scholarly findings, arguments and suggestions of Western, English language, scholarship on Bīdel.

In the outset of his book, *Life and Works of Bīdel,* Abdul Ghani states that there is almost a general agreement over Bīdel's Mughal origin, referring to Mongol heritage,[25] and specifically to the Arlās tribe.[26] According to Ghani, it is nearly impossible to establish a definite argument regarding the proximate migration of Bīdel's ancestors to India. He was born in Azimabad (current Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar) in 1644, and became an orphan when he lost his father at age four and his mother at age six. He was reared under the care of his father's stepbrother, Mirza Qalandar, who took Bīdel

[23] Hajnalka Kovacs, "The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013).
[24] Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016).
[25] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), 1.
[26] Timur, the founding of the Timurid Empire was descendent of Arlas tribe, which was of Mongol origin. Historical records shows that the Arlas had been the part of early Mongol invasion of Central Asia and later spread to Khorasan and South Asia. They embraced Persian and Turkic culture and converted to Islam. For further reading: Scott C Levi and Ron Sela, *Islamic Central Asia Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources an Anthology of Historical Sources*, ed. Professor Ron Sela (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 1. Or Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 45.

under his sole charge. In his early childhood, Bīdel was schooled primarily in Arabic grammar and Persian prose, though some writers believe that Farsi could have been his primary language. Annemarie Schimmel noted that Bīdel did not have a proper education, and yet was able to achieve higher levels of learning as well as mystical knowledge.[27] Schimmel's statement is not supported with evidence, nor do other authors provide evidence; nonetheless, one must accept that if Bīdel has ever been schooled, he definitely received a traditional education, which was primarily based on religious education.

There is also some disagreement about Bīdel's origin and his birthplace. There is no independent historical record about Bīdel's life; what is available today for historians and scholars to base their statements on are a number of records left by early *Tazkirah*-writers (biographical anthology of poetry).[28] In her Ph.D. dissertation, Kovacs says that the quite general view that Bīdel was born in Azimabad is contested by a recent study done by an Indian scholar, Sharif Husain Qasimi, based on an earlier research of ʿAtāʾurraḥmān ʿAtā Kākvī. She cites Qasimi's finding, which is based on Shah Varid's account at whose house in Mathura Bīdel spent one and a half years. According to this source, Bīdel was born in Akbarnagar (Raj Mahal) near the Bengal-Bihar border.[29] Some Afghan authors who are fervent followers of Bīdel have often claimed in their writing that he was actually born in Khaja Rawash, a proximate neighborhood of Kabul, and later his family migrated to India. However, there is no evidence to support this claim.

[27] Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Literatures of India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973), 43.
[28] *Tazkirah* is a genre of writing consisting of compendia about the life and works of poets and authors along with sample of works as well as commentary and criticism.
[29] Hajnalka Kovacs, "The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 24.

Qasimi's finding certainly requires more work by researchers in order to confirm or disapprove it. In either case, his birthplace has become a mystery of Bīdel's life, as he sought to explore the universe as mysterious with his creative mind.

A famously prolific and well-travelled man, Bīdel lived a productive life whose influence spread beyond the Indian continent. Having traveled through most of India, Bīdel encountered sages, learned men of every religious persuasion, and Sufis. Though he was strongly influenced by Islamic mysticism, he did not follow a particular path, or *ṭarīqah*.[30] He attracted many students from different sects, especially Hindus, and it is said that he himself was strongly influenced by the philosophical thought of Hinduism, as well as Buddhism.[31] He died in the year of 1721, in Delhi, and was buried there. His tomb is now a pilgrimage site for his followers of different religions from South Asia to the Middle East and Transoxiana in Central Asia. Bīdel's works are well preserved. He produced 147,000 verses, which were printed as *Kullīyāt* (collected works) in Kabul between 1962-1965, including three volumes of poetry and one of prose.[32] His works are considered a great contribution to Farsi literature, and his influence has been significant, especially on Ghalib and Iqbal who both sought inspiration from him, and he continues to inspire many contemporaries.

Abdul Ghani's extensive work, *Life and Works of Bedil,* could arguably form the basis of many scholarly works so far. Ghani deeply discusses Bīdel's origin, ranging from early life until his death. As such, he delves into any available *Tazkirah*, and any

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[30] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 371.
[31] Moazzam Siddiqi, Bīdel, Mīrza ʿAbd-al-Qāder." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition. Article published December 15, 1989. http://www.iranicaonline.org/ articles/bidel-bedil-mirza-abd-al-qader-b.
[32] Ibid; In Jan Rypka's account, Kjllīyāt was first published in Bombay in 1881-2, comprises of 16 volumes of 147,000 verses. Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, written in collaboration with Otakar Klima [and others], ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 518

writings available in any languages to deliver a descriptive account about Bīdel. Ghani dedicates almost a quarter of his book to details about events surrounding Bīdel's life, as well as contextualizing his studies in the 17th century political development of India. He lived at a time when the Mughal Empire was crumbling; however, Ghani praises the period, claiming that, under Shah Jahan's rule, there was a cultural richness.[33] Ghani was likely referring to the period of great literature and art, which began during the time of the third Mughal Emperor, Akbar, who ruled from 1556 to 1605, and which continued until the 6th Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb.

In spite of Ghani's asserting that the period, in which Bīdel was born was "glorious," it was, I argue, not that praiseworthy. Perhaps, the most notable artworks of this period include the Taj Mahal, an ivory-white marble mausoleum in Agra, and palaces like the Peacock Throne in Delhi. Despite these architectural achievements, Shah Jahan's period is marked as a period of decline and disaster that were chiefly caused by his lavish expenditure on building projects while a terrible famine was sweeping Gujrat and Dakhin.[34] Nonetheless, most Mughal rulers were great lovers of the arts, and it can be inferred that Bīdel enjoyed his finest years with special popularity in the time of Aurangzeb (1658-1707). His relationship with rulers was not always harmonious; at one point, he even refused the emperor's order to write a Shāhnāmah of the Mughal Dynasty, and even threatened to leave India.[35] Rejecting the emperor's order and threatening to leave the kingdom could have brought dire consequences, but it appears that Bīdel enjoyed the emperor's leniency and goodness.

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[33] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), vii.
[34] Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, written in collaboration with Otakar Klima [and others], ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 516.
[35] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), 94.

Though Ghani's *Life and Works of Bedil* is a comprehensive biographical work on Bīdel, it also has exegetical, hermeneutical, and comparative analysis in it. In chapter four, concerning Bīdel's ghazals, Ghani pinpoints some commonalities and influences of medieval Sufi poets in Bīdel's works. For instance, he states that Bīdel composed quatrains, dialogically imitating similar quatrains to those of Rudaki, and, in his *qaṣīdas* (odes), Bīdel especially imitated Khaqani, Amir Khusrow, and many other classical poets of the medieval era.[36] Similarly, he says, Bīdel wrote his *mathnawi ʿirfān* imitating the style of *Hadiqa* of Sana'i and his *Tarjīʿ-band*. It is not surprising to see Bīdel being susceptible to imitation, interpretation, and interpolation; what is surprising to find in Bīdel's poetry are new compounds and some other linguistic flourishes. Bīdel was especially adept at creating new compound words and sometimes even seemingly contradictory ones, which may sounds unusual, but are actually part of the Indian style first began by Bābā Faghānī and continued by Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī, and Kalim Kashani.

Bīdel inherited a great literary tradition, and perhaps, that was an advantage. The Indian style of poetry he adopted was created by Bābā Faghānī of Shiraz (d.1519) in the beginning of the Safavid Empire, at a time when classical Persian poetry was at its height. Soon, poets not only in Iran, but also in India followed his style. Muhammed Moazzam Siddiqi, however, disputes this view, in his dissertation. In his preface, he states that it is not true that the so-called Indian style of poetry began with Baba Faghānī in the time of Akbar, but that rather it began as early as the 11th century CE, when Lahore became the capital and cultural center of the Ghaznawid Empire.[37] According to Ghani,

[36] Ibid., 131.
[37] Moazzam Sidiqi, "An Examination of the Indo-Persian Mystical Poet Mīrzā ʻAbdul Qādir Bēdil with Particular Reference to His Chief Work ʻIrfān." (PhD diss., University of California, 1975), 1.

Faghānī offered some new features to Persian poetry, such as succinctness with unique intricacies, as well as greater emphasis on the freshness of similes and metaphors.[38] In India, poets like ʿOrfi Shirazi, Naẓiri of Nishapur, Zuhuri Torshizi and some others also followed Faghānī. These poets, in addition to earnestly and vigorously following the tradition of poetry, also added new elements in both structure and meaning. Therefore, when Bīdel was born, this Indian style of poetry was already developed, and he was endowed with not only great teachers, but also an abundance of great works of Persian poetry dating from the medieval era.

Though Bīdel did not follow a particular order of Sufism, however, he could be assumed as a pantheist[39] because of his studies of Ibn ʿArabi's thought. Abdul Ghani also thinks that he was influenced by Ahmad Sirhindi's belief in a Transcendent God. Ghani says that, like Sirhindi, Bīdel thinks God is unapproachable, inexperienceable, inexplicable, and unknowable.[40] These aspects are reflected in the following verses, translated by Ghani:

> *Khīyāl waṣl-i tū pukhtan dalīl-i ghaflat-i māst*
> *Katān chi ṣarfa barad dar qalamraw-i mahtāb*
>
> To cherish a desire for union with you is a sign of our ignorance
> What benefit can linen derive from the moonlit domain?[41]
>
> *Bā ki bāyad guft Bīdel mājarāyi āreuzū?*
> *anche del khāhe manast az ʿālam-e idrāk nīst*
>
> Whom should I tell O Bīdel, the nature of my desire?

[38] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), 130.
[39] Panthiesm is a doctrine that identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God.
[40] Ibid., 156.
[41] My translation: "To cherish imagining union with you is a sign of our drunken neglectfulness ** What benefit can linen derive from the moonlit domain?"

What my heart desires lies beyond the range of human perception.[42]

Bīdel rah-e ḥamd az tū ba ṣad marḥala dūr ast
khāmūsh ke āwārah-e wahm-and bayānhā
O Bīdel, the path of Divine praise is far from you by a hundreds stages.
Be silent, because all expressions are simply the creations of fancy.[43]
[This verse should be translated as "Be silent! Because all expressions are refugees of allusion"]

These verses suggest that Bīdel was under the influence of both Sirhindi and Ibn ʿArabi. Ghani reminds the reader that it should be understood that Bīdel, despite having interest in the idea of immanence and the beyond-ness of God, is an ardent believer in pantheism, the concept that in all things is the essence of truth.[44] The majority of scholars who have so far worked on Bīdel's *oeuvre* have recognized that pantheistic belief, especially when they point out some similarities of his ideas with those of Ibn ʿArabi. The concept of the Unity of Being is further discussed in Moazzam Siddiqi's dissertation. He provides some convincing examples regarding Bīdel's thought on the Unity of Being. Siddiqi cites verses from Bīdel's *ʿirfan* that directly engage with the transcendence of God.

Aū na bāgh-u na gul-u na rang-u na būst
har qadar aū kuni taṣawwūr-e aūst[45]

He is neither the garden, nor the rose, nor the odor,[46]
Whatever is pointed to be 'He' is but His conception.[47]

[42] My translation: "O Bīdel, with whom can I speak about the events caused by my desire? ** What my heart desires lies beyond the range of human perception"
[43] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), 157.
[44] Ibid.
[45] My translation: "He is neither the garden, nor the rose, nor the fragrance ** Whatever way you conceive of Him, 'He' is He"
[46] "It is impossible for you to come near to realizing Him"
[47] Moazzam Sidiqi, "An Examination of the Indo-Persian Mystical Poet Mīrzā ʿAbdul Qādir Bēdil with Particular Reference to His Chief Work 'Irfān." (PhD diss., University of California, 1975),186.

Siddiqi explains that words such as garden, rose, color, and fragrance are the conventional images used in Persian poetry for Divine attributes, and Bīdel, in this verse, recognizes that these only point to, but do not encompass, the Divine. Moreover, the following verses support the idea of transcendence and affirm that God is beyond comprehension.

> *qurb-i taḥqīq-i aū majāl-i tū nīst*
> *ghayr-i aū guftan ihtimāl-i tū nīst*
>
> It is impossible for you to come nearer to comprehending Him,
> It is not possible for you to call Him except by the pronoun 'He.'
>
> Or,
> *tā kujā ḥarf-i kibrīyā gūʾīm?*
> *sakht dūrīm tā kujā gūʾīm?*
>
> How long should we speak about the Almighty?
> We are far away, how long should we speak?[48]
>
> *az man-u tū baa ū doʿā che rasad?*
> *aū ham aū nīst tā ba mā che rasad?*
>
> How would the prayers from you and I reach Him?
> He Himself is not He (then) what will come to us?[49]

On the ontological nature of the transcendent God, Bīdel uses one of his favorite motifs, the imagination (*khayāl*). Imagination also lies at the heart of Ibn ʿArabi's ontology, in which for him, the reality of "He/not He" manifests in in the cosmos through imagination.[50] Our perception of reality or anything that we are capable of knowing through our sensory system can sometimes be contradictory and misleading because we are susceptible to our emotions and unconscious blindspots, which are usually triggered

[48] My translation: "We are very far away, to what degree should we speak?
[49] Sidiqi., 186.
[50] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 115.

by our direct or indirect experience. This internal singularity can be mutually contradictory, but according to Ibn ʿArabi, in combination with imagination, which possesses the strength and power that marks the Divine name the "Strong" (*al-qawi*).[51] Bīdel's ontology of the immanence of God draws from the exact idea, which can be seen in the following distich.

> *har che mījūshad az jahān-e khayāl*
> *zān charāghast partawi tamthil*
>
> Whatever comes forth from the world of fantasy,
> is the shadow of similitude of that lamp.[52]

According to Siddiqi, the world of phantasy (*jahān-e khayāl*) is a reference to the universe and the lamp represents God, which is mentioned in the Qurʾān.[53] Additionally, in such an imaginary domain, the universe is a reflection of the Divine Names and Attributes, which are called *al-aʿyān al-thābithah* (the Fixed Archetypes).[54] This is one of Ibn ʿArabi's terms, which is essentially associated with "Being" and reflects God's reality and quiddity (*māhīyah*), but cannot be juxtaposed to anything other than God. This view has also been reflected in the works of another scholar, Haji-Ahmad, who has paid particular attention to the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and especially, Ibn ʿArabi's influence on Bīdel's thinking.

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Moazzam Sidiqi, "An Examination of the Indo-Persian Mystical Poet Mīrzā ʻAbdul Qādir Bēdil with Particular Reference to His Chief Work ʻIrfān." (PhD diss., University of California, 1975), 187.
[53] "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is knowing of all things." Qurʾān 24:35.
[54] Moazzam Sidiqi, "An Examination of the Indo-Persian Mystical Poet Mīrzā ʻAbdul Qādir Bēdil with Particular Reference to His Chief Work ʻIrfān." (PhD diss., University of California, 1975), 187.

Haji-Ahmad devotes part of his dissertation, called *The Ideas of Waḥdat al-wujūd in the Poetry of ʿAbd al-Qadir Bidil (Persian), Ibrahim Hakki Erzurumlu (Ottoman Turkish), and Hamzah Fansuri (Malay)* on Bīdel's idea of the Oneness of Being. Interestingly, Haji-Ahmad mentions that Bīdel has crafted his own terminology in order to reflect the Fixed Archetypes. *Haqāyīq-e Āshyā* (the latent realities of things) reflects the same meaning in Bīdel's thought and he asserts that *Haqāyīq-e Āshyā* is determined through the manifestation of Divine Names in the external world, which is illustrated in the following manner.

> *az taqāḍāye jilwa-e asmā*
> *shud muʿayyan ḥaqāyīq ashyā*
>
> The latent realities of things became determined."[55]
> From the demand of the manifestation of Divine Names

Haji-Ahmad explains, "according to Ibn ʿArabi, the *aʿyān* (realities of things) are non-existent," adding, "It does not mean they do not have reality or being at all. In fact what they lack is only external existence or any existence separately from the Essence of which they are states."[56] Bīdel has reflected on this view in the following distich:

> *aīn ḥaqāyīq bīrūn-e imkān-ast*
> *gar che ashyā-ast jism-u aū jān-ast*
>
> These latent realities of things are outside the realm of contingency
> Although things are body and they are the life in that body.[57]

These features of Ibn ʿArabi's influence on Bīdel have also been reflected in the works of a recent scholar, Hajnalka Kovacs, who wrote her dissertation on Bīdel's

[55] Haji-Mohamad Bohari Haji-Ahmad, "The ideas of Waḥdat al-Wujūd in the poetry of ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdil (Persian), İbrahim Hakki Erzurumlu (Ottoman Turkish), and Hamzah Fansuri (Malay)" (PhD diss., University of California, 1989), 116.
[56] Ibid., 220.
[57] Ibid., 221.

Mathnawi Muhit-i Aʿzam (The Greatest Ocean). In the last two chapters of her dissertation Kovacs discussed Ibn ʿArabi's influence on Bīdel. In particular, she highlights Bīdel's concept of speech, which she believes is based on the idea of the Divine Speech (*nafas al-raḥmān*) in the *Muhit-i Aʿzam*.[58] According to Kovacs, for Bīdel, speech is not a simple human ability, but rather is a Divine one and has cosmological and ontological aspects. As such, when God speaks, "he articulates words in his breath, so his breath is the underlying stuff of the universe."[59] All existence in the universe has one reality, which is God, because existence was uttered by Him. Ibn ʿArabi says, "The existence of the realm of being has no root other than the Divine attribute of speech, for the realm of being knows nothing of God, but His speech, and that is what it hears."[60] Ibn ʿArabi is basically expounding the idea of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God.

Although speech is recognized as a distinct metaphor for the existence of God, its scope is limited in Bīdel's thinking. Kovacs argues that while Ibn ʿArabi has approached speech with broad and yet relatively related notions, Bīdel has exclusively used speech as a metaphor only because "it provides him a convenient analogy through which to ponder the nature and role of human speech and by extension, of poetry and music."[61] Bīdel has not taken up everything that Ibn ʿArabi has attributed to speech; in fact that would be dull and unimaginative; instead, he has generated his own sense of speech. Kovacs's critical analogy deserves appreciation. In the end, we must emphasize the novelty of Bīdel's

[58] Hajnalka Kovacs, "The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 176.
[59] William Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi, Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford, 2005), 59.
[60] Ibid., 60.
[61] Hajnalka Kovacs, "The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 177.

thinking, because it would be almost unfair to expect that he should reflect on every Ibn ʿArabi's last word from the 12th century.

The *Muhit-i Aʿzam* is the first *mathnawi* that Bīdel wrote, at the age of twenty-four. He authored it in the meter *maqṣūr-e moṯamman-e motaqāreb*. The total couplets are considered to be between 2,000 and 6,000, depending on the manuscript.[62] *The Greatest Ocean* explains the development of the created world in eight *dawr* (*cycles*) with each round representing a chapter — in total eight chapters. It is said that Bīdel, in this *mathnawi,* has followed Ibn ʿArabi's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*; in particular, he draws on the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* through which he explains the step-by-step formation of the universe by using the metaphor of the wine fermentation process.[63] According to Kovacs, Bīdel uses terms that have almost similar meaning to "breath," words such as *dam zadan, nafas zadan,* which are compound verbs.[64] *Muhit Aʾzam* is composed in the style of *sāqināmah* (ode to the cupbearer), which essentially demonstrates the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* while using wine as symbol of multiplicity.

Prashant Keshavmurthy, in *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark,* also reflects on the influence of Ibn ʿArabi. Keshavmurthy examines Bīdel and two of his students in the political context of the 18th century Mughal period. As such, he explores commonalities, influence, and especially the writers' use of Perso-Arabic and Hindavi literary traditions in their writings. Keshavmurthy states that the key to understanding Bīdel's poetry is to recognize the

[62] Abdul Ghani, *Life and Works of Abdul Qadir Bedil* (Lahore: Publishers United, 1960), 181.
[63] Hajnalka Kovacs, "*The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 79.
[64] Ibid., 78

poetic interpretation of Ibn ʿArabi's theistic monism.[65] Similar to Kovacs and Siddiqi's analysis, he emphasizes that central to this monism is *nafas al-rahmān* (The Breath of All-Merciful), which is adopted in Bīdel's *oeuvre* as *sukhan,* meaning speech.[66] For Bīdel, he says that this word is considered to have a theotic power because, initially, it was the Divine's speech that brought creation into being: saying, *Kun* or "Be!" *Sukhan* makes humans distinct from all other creatures because of their cosmic qualities, and yet, not everyone was endowed with such traits. Among those who *were* given such qualities was the Prophet Muhammad, who was perfectly capable of such imitation.[67]

There are, however, some instances in which Keshavmurthy fails to present accurate meanings of poems in both translation and interpretation. In most cases, the translations are either erroneous or inspired by author's own imagination. Take, for example, the compound words "*kulāh shikastan,*" which literally means "breaking hat"; it is a pun and sometimes can mean something entirely different from what one might assume. Keshavmurthy claims that Bīdel uses the word *shikastan* to "convey his call to submit oneself passionately to the Real."[68] The term, however, is not used consistently to denote submission to the Real; rather, it implies something opposite to modesty and humility. *Kulah shikastan* is as an expression of pride. Only when *shikast* or *shikastan* appears independently is the meaning "modesty" or "humility" deployed.

The confusion and misinterpretation becomes apparent when the author attempts to contextualize the terms such as *shikastan* in the following distich:

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[65] Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 19.
[66] Kevshavmurthy has translated as 'poetic utterance.'
[67] There is a belief among some Muslims that Muhammad was a cosmic being who was endowed with perfect love and perfect beauty.
[68] Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (London: Routledge, 2016), 85.

"Don't count worldly defeat as incapacity ['ajz]./ Self-sufficiency has doffed its cap"[69]

The author fails to mention or cite the original poem. After reviewing several poems consisting of *shikastan* and comparing them with the interpretation, I concluded that what the author has translated corresponds closely with the following couplet:

ba awj-i kibrīyā kaz pahlū-yi ʿajz ast rāh ānjā
sar-i mū-yi gar īnjā kham shawī bishkan kulāh ānjā[70]

The second distich can literally be translated as "if you show little self-effacement here, break your hat there."[71] The complexity of the poem lies in the compound-word "*Bishkan Kulāh*," which literally means breaking hat. Bīdel is famous for his diverse use of symbols and metaphors that could only be evocative in a particular social context. *Kulāh shikastan* is one of Bīdel's favorite compound words, which is a social status signifier for lordship and honor. In the Bīdel's time, it was common for civil servants to wear hats with brims tucked in. It was a sign of pride and power, especially for those who were directly or indirectly associated with the ruling class. This particular compound appears a few times in his *dīwān*. Bīdel is not, however, the first person to use the term, and this is where Keshavmurthy comes short of discerning the breadth of meanings in Bīdel's poetry. At times, in order to understand the meaning of Bīdel's poem, it is necessary to be familiar with the tradition of Persian classical poetry. Having a basic familiarity of the form would be an important step in recognizing not only the genealogy of common metaphors, symbols and imageries, but also in understanding the poetic antecedents.

[69] Ibid.
[70] ʻAbd Al-Qādir Bīdel, *Dīvān-i Bīdil* (Bombay: Maṭbaʻ-i Fatḥ Al-Karīm, 1884), 6.
[71] See the complete translation on page 37.

The term *kulāh shikastan* was a common symbolic expression among classical Persian poets, beginning in the 10th century. It is not clear who invented the compound, but I was able to locate it in both Hafez Shirazi's (d. 1390) and Saib Tabrizi's (d. 1676) *dīwāns.* Both poets use *kulāh shikastan* several times in their poetry. Here is an example from Hafez's *dīwān:*

> *ba bād deh sar-u dastār ʿālami yaʿni*
> *Kulāh gūsheh ba āyīn-i sarwarī bishkan*
>
> Leave your head and turban to the wind of destruction, that is
> Break (tuck in) the cap's edge in ceremonial pride.

In common culture, it was and still is customary among young people to wear hats with the front brim tucked in or the sideband flipped inside or broken. It is still common in some parts of Afghanistan, especially in the south, like Kandahar. Perhaps, Bīdel is the only Persian classical poet who has extensively employed some of the quotidian traits from popular culture, not only to create novelty, but also to reflect everyday life. In fact, this was one of the reasons that his contemporary Persian poets in Iran disparaged him. They thought that he diluted the quality of courtly poetry, in which wine and love were the main themes. Prashant Keshavmurthy's description of *kulāh shikastan* as "to doff a hat," is false and it is a misrepresentation of the poem. The phrase means the opposite. Literal translation, therefore, without cultural context, does not help us understand Bīdel's thinking.

Moreover, Bīdel does not always talk about the God or the Real. He uses Islamic phrases within a frame that is strongly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. When he talks about *shikastan,* he is, more than likely, in tune with ethical discourses than religious ones. Bīdel was not a very religious person, though he was influenced by the

Sufis of the Qadiriyya order to which his father, Mīrzā ʻAbdul Khāliq, belonged. It is not fair, and to some degree not true, to Islamicize everything Bīdel writes; he should be studied within the context of India, as well as within his time and tradition as imbued by local culture.

Unfortunately, mistakes, mistranslation, and misinterpretation are so abundant in *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* that if someone attempts to comment on them all, a great deal of paper is wasted. Here is another example by the author that is a complete mistranslation. This is a direct quotation.

> *"Ba andāz-i taghāful nīm rukh ham ʿālami dārad*
> *Chira mustaqbal-i mardum chu taṣvīr-i farang āyī*
>
> A spectacle, too, is your turning heedlessly away into a picture in profile. Why face me like a European portrait?"[72]

Keshavmurthy claims that the distich illustrates a topos that is prevalent in Bīdel's poetry as well as in Persian Sufi literature. This topos, he explains, is "the Beloved's self-disclosure" (*jilvah-i maḥbūb*), and then adds "the Divine Beloved's self-disclosure as radiance."[73] The author assumes that the poet is addressing God, but there is no insinuation in the distich. What we read is the author's own imagination, which is not related to the meaning of the poem at all. Probably the most amusing part is where the author tries to back up his earlier claim by explaining how the Divine beloved diffuses light from his eyes and his face.

[72] Prashant Keshavmurthy, *Persian Authorship and Canonicity in Late Mughal Delhi: Building an Ark* (London: Routledge, 2016), 45.
[73] ibid.

> "…[L]ight would radiate from His face and, particularly, from His eyes, thus cancelling the effect of the lover's own luminous sight-rays. The plea is thus a plea to be allowed to witness or direct his sight-rays towards the Beloved addressee without being blinded by an unbearably great counter-light."[74]

None of these things relates to the poem.

To understand the poem, we must take it apart in order to identify the symbolic meanings that correspond between hemistiches. The word "*andāz*" here means "intention." *Taghāful* is one of the more frequent words in Bīdel's work, which means "neglectfulness" or "heedlessness," but here means "modesty," "shyness" or "uncomfortably diffident." The term *nīm rukh* is a side portrait, which was the genre of miniature developed in the time the Mughal Empire from the 16th to 18th century. The phrase *ʿālami dārad* literally means, "it is valuable, satisfying, and praiseworthy." In the second hemistich, the word *mustaqbal* was commonly used for a full-face portrait; it is still used in some Arabic speaking countries. In some Persiante societies, the same type of portrait was called *taṣwir-e dū chashma* (two-eye portrait) and a side portrait was called *taṣwir-e yak chashma* (one-eye portrait).

Bīdel's main purpose in this poem is an appreciation and endorsement of Indian miniature. He elevates it as a higher genre of art that is particular to Indian culture and favors it over European traditions. This is a simple poem, but the key is to contextualize, which allows us to extract meanings that are embedded within the poem itself. The poem does not allude to the Real, the Beloved, or any other entities. Keshavmurthy fails to comprehend the obvious meanings. In truth, I have never come across an attempt to

[74] Ibid.

interpret and analyze Bīdel's poetry that is as fictionalized as this one. Keshavmurthy relies on subjective validation, deploying academic jargon, rather than engaging with the text and trying to understand what the poem is about. Giving that Keshavmurthy's book distorts, misinterprets, and misrepresents Bīdel, any future scholars must be cautious and treat the contents of the book critically.

The great merit of these studies of Bīdel is in highlighting some features of poetry in which Bīdel shows dexterity in his interactions with the available literature. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Bīdel's poems are never simple or direct for a reader unfamiliar with the Iraqi style (*Sabk-i Irāqī*) and the Indian style of poetry (*Sabk-i Hindi*). Bīdel's symbols, metaphors, and other poetic features move beyond their traditional meanings, and sometimes meanings of poems do not appear straightforward to readers who are unfamiliar with the context. Contrary to many Persian poets of the medieval period like Rumi, Hāfez, and Saʿdi whose poetic languages were chiefly situated around the nobility and tailored for higher social strata, Bīdel's poetic symbols and metaphors are often inspired from among working class society and laymen. He was often scolded and accused of lowering the quality of Persian poetry, which later appeared to be one of the reasons he was neglected. Therefore, it is vital to remember, when reading Bīdel, that the meanings of his poems do not necessarily reveal themselves without intimacy with the context of the everyday and without some effort. The current literature on Bīdel's *oeuvre* helps the reader to be aware of the intricacies of the poetry, while elucidating the main poetical features, providing some tools to the reader in order to understand his poems. While much scholarship is dedicated to Bīdel's life and autobiographical references, the current literature does provide critical examination on some poetical

works of Bīdel. Though these works cannot fill the present lacuna, they have laid the groundwork for future scholarship on Bīdel's works. I would like to continue this scholarship, examining key terms in Bīdel's poetry, from the point of view of one who, not only is a scholar of his work, but is part of the cultural landscape in which he wrote.

CHAPTER TWO:

INCAPACITY

Bīdel's *dīwān* begins with *ʿajz* (incapacity), or incapacity. It is one of his key words, and I contend that the key to understanding Bīdel's mystical thinking and his work is a deep and subtle understanding of this term. Bīdel uses *ʿajz* profusely, not only to establish a concept, but also to traverse the domain of its implicit meanings through single and diverse compound words. I will argue that he uses *ʿajz* as an umbrella term to cover a range of concepts, images, and metaphors such as *mū* (hair), *bi-rangī* (colorlessness), *inkisār* (selflessness), *uftādagī* (humility), and *qanāʿat* (contentment), etc. Bīdel has used the term *ʿajz* more than 1,100 times in his *dīwān*,[75] which contains about 3,000 ghazals.[76] In this chapter, I will emphasize that just as the *nay* (reed flute) is a central key in the *mathnawi* of Rumi, likewise *ʿajz* is central for Bīdel. To understand Bīdel, one must pass into his world with a comprehension of *ʿajz* as one of the chief keys to his thought.

While at first it might appear that Bīdel uses *ʿajz* merely to indicate the inherent human state of powerlessness and incapacity in contrast to of God's being All-Powerful, a closer look reveals that its most essential use is actually to define the path to *maʿrifah*

[75] A collection of poetry, or prose. See (Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition).
[76] Ghazal is a genre of lyric poem, which is generally short and graceful in form and typically deals with themes of love. See (Encyclopedia Britannica, Islamic Literature).

(an intimate knowledge of God).[77] By using *ʿajz* as a guidepost, the complexity and multifaceted meanings of terms closely related to the concept of *ʿajz* in Bīdel's poetry can be discovered and navigated. As a result, its complexity can be comprehended, and the reader can appreciate his poetry more clearly.

The word *ʿajz* is Arabic and comes from the root *a-j-z*, which has a variety of connotations, depending on the context, and the occasion. The primary meanings range from "to be incapable of, to appear powerless, to be impossible, and to be inimitable.[78] The term *ʿajz*, as a noun, is never mentioned in the Qurʾān; however, it is important to note that some other terms, which share the same root, *are* often used. For instance, *ʿajz* in its third form becomes *ājīz,* which means weak, incapable, and helpless. As a verbal noun, it becomes *iʿjāz,* which means inimitability, and according to Muslim dogma, it is considered the central miraculous quality associated with the Qurʾān. Despite the non-existence of the exact term in the Qurʾān, the concept of inimitability appears to manifest itself in various ways in the claims and arguments that *are* made to challenge Muhammad's opponents and to produce something like the Qurʾān.[79] To many, the revelation of the Qurʾān is considered a *muʿjizah* (define), and only God has enough power to perform such an extraordinary event.

To some degree, *ʿajz* is is an ambiguous term that needs to be elucidated in context. In the Qurʾānic context, the word *ʿajz* relates directly to its root meaning, but its meaning and the interpretation vary in the Divine word, in the Qurʾān. In the Qurʾān, the

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[77] *Maʿrifah* is synonymous with knowledge and cognition but the definition that is given by Ṣūfīs and mystical tradition is that Maʿrifah is knowledge of God and it is especially true for Bīdel's mystical thought. See (Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition).
[78] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English lexicon*, Book I (Librairie du Liban, 1963), 1960.
[79] The concept of inimitability emerges in the Qurʾān in the face of those who claim to produce books like Qurʾān. It has also derived from the passage that states the text is the Divine's words. Oliver Leaman, *The Qurʾān: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2005) 295-358.

word, which shares its root with *ʿajz* is *muʿjizīn.* It is derived from *aʿjaza,* which again is derived from *ʿajz*, and has various meanings ranging from "not being able to escape; those who are defeated, or are incapable; and cause failure." It depends on the translation, but what is clear here is that the meaning of *muʿjizīn* slightly changes depending on context. In the Qurʾān, *muʿjizīn* refers to the unbelievers who are incapable of changing, or escaping from God's plan.[80] There are numerous verses in the Qurʾān that are related to a period of hostilities between Muslims and their enemies and to the Muslims who appeared to be weak while their enemies were strong. What is significant about *muʿjizīn* here is its rhetorical function, which shares its roots with *iʿjaz, ʿājīz* and *muʿjizah.*

Regarding the concept of the *ḥadīth*, however, the term *ʿajz* is mainly used in conventional language. Its primary meaning has not changed; but what is different about *ʿajz* in the *ḥadīth* is its coexistence with some words, which have a strong impact on the meaning of *ʿajz*. These words include *ḥizn* (grief or sadness), *kasal* (laziness), *jubn* (cowardice), and *bukhl* (miserliness). For instance, as Anas bin Malik, who was a well-known companion of the Prophet Muhammad narrates, he observed Muhammad saying "O Allah! I seek refuge with you from worry and grief, from incapacity and laziness, from cowardice and miserliness, from being heavily in debt and from being overpowered by (other) men."[81] What is evident in this *ḥadīth* is that *ʿajz* is considered as a negative attribute for a pious person to have. The connotation is intensified especially when used alongside other terms that bear negative meanings. Though, in the *ḥadīth*, it is not used for the purposes of disparagement and underestimation of the enemies of Muslims, as is

[80] Lo! That which ye are promised will surely come to pass, and ye cannot escape. The Qurʾān, Al-An'am 6.134 also see Al-Anfal. 8:59.
[81] Sahih Al-Bukhari, Vol.6, Ḥadīth, Vol. 8, Book 75, Ḥadīth, 380.

mentioned in the Qurʾān, but rather is used or to depict an internal struggle against one's weakness.

ʿ*Ajz* in the *ḥadīth* is characterized negatively and often shows a form of degrading characteristics in a person that are not only a sign of ignominy, but also of condemnation. For instance, Muhammad himself appeals to God to safeguard him from falling into ʿ*ajz,* or powerlessness. As we noted, Anas bin Malik, says that Muhammad used to supplicate: "O Allah! I seek refuge in you from helplessness, indolence, cowardice, senility, and miserliness; and I seek your protection against the torment of the grave and the trials of life and death."[82] A distinction can be drawn between how ʿ*ajz* is used in the *ḥadīth* and how it is used in the Qurʾān. While the Qurʾān does not furnish much-needed information concerning ʿ*ajz*; the *ḥadīth,* on the other hand, provides us some clues that ʿ*ajz* is not restricted to particular individuals and events, but that it describes the human being: even the strongest person can feel incapable and powerless at some point in time. As we explore the meaning of ʿ*ajz* in Islamic scripture, it is important to remember that the use of ʿ*ajz* changes over time and space and that such change is significantly noticeable in the mystical sphere.

Thus far, it is clear that ʿ*ajz* has a negative connotation in both the Qurʾān and the *hadith*; however, in Sufism, ʿ*ajz* is understood differently. It is looked at as an esoteric path, undertaken when a Sufi wants to embark on the spiritual journey towards *al-ḥaqīqah* (the ultimate truth)[83] and *maʿrifah* or an intimate knowledge of God. The Sufi path is dependent on a guide in order to dislodge the traveler from his ego and self-

[82] Sahīh Al-Bukharī, Vol.6, Ḥadīth, Vol. 8, Book 17, Ḥadīth, 1474.
[83] *Ḥaqīqa* (also transliterated as *ḥaḳīḳa*) is derived from *ḥaqq,* which means truth, or the real. In *taṣawwūf,* the *ḥaqīqa* is an ultimate truth, or a genuine act or utterance. It is a profound reality to which only the experience of union with God opens the way. See Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition.

centeredness. It is a path for advancing toward embracing the Oneness of Being or what is known as *waḥdat al-wujūd,* which suggests a school of thought popularized by Ibn al-ʿArabi (1165-1240).[84] Many Sufi poets and thinkers were strongly influenced by the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhī, more commonly known as Rumi, was one of them. Being of a mystical and philosophical cast of mind, Bīdel was strongly influenced by Ibn ʿArabi and his doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* which he adopted in his reflections on God, humanity, and existence.[85]

Power and capability, from the perspective of the Sufis, are God's alone. We, as human beings, are weak and powerless; therefore, how can someone who always is in need and in search of a protector claim to have power? This is first discussed in the Qurʾān. For instance, in the Qurʾān, it is God who is *al-ʿAlīm* (the All-Knowing), *al-Hakim* (the All-Wise) [Qurʾān 2: 32] and *Al-Qādir* (the All-Powerful). [Qurʾān 65]. The existence of humanity and the universe depend on God, not vice versa; he does not need us, but we need him. Therefore, expressing and confessing our weakness is to acknowledge God almighty, and it is indeed a preliminary step to uphold *ʿajz* as a prerequisite towards *maʿrifah*.

Pursuing this further, *ʿajz* as a concept is an essential requirement in Sufism, and is a specific means of power that does not only provide protection, confidence, respect and love,[86] but also helps finding the right path to everlasting subsistence in God or

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[84] See article on *Rumi* and *waḥdat al-wujūd* by William Chittick Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh. *Poetry and mysticism in Islam: The heritage of Rumi*, (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70; Also, see article on the history of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* Chittick, William C, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, Edited by Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 70.

[85] William L. Hanaway, "Classical Persian Literature." *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 3/4 (1998): 543-59.

[86] Bīdel explains the ʿajz's power in this line:

nīst āshūb-i ḥawādith bar banā-yī rang-i ʿajz
sāyah rā bījā nasāzad qūwat-e sīlāb-hā (Kullīyat, 1: 14)

baqā.[87] Muslim scholars of the formative period had already established the concept. Prior to the work of Ibn ʿArabi, one of the early medieval scholars who discussed *ʿajz* was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazali (1056-1111), a Muslim theologian, philosopher, and mystic. It appears that al-Ghazali used the word *ʿajz* to denote the "absence of power" (*ʿadama al-qudrah*).[88] The absence of power indicates the sense that one voluntarily accepts defeat, or withdraws from a situation without taking revenge, or without pressing the advantage, especially when the enemy is in a weak position. Undoubtedly, it shows greatness and magnanimity, but it is also a sign of prestige and victory. It is certainly in the light of this meaning that the concept of *ʿajz* has developed and been shown as a desirable path for *ʿārif* (Sufi).

For instance, when a person embarks on a spiritual journey towards *ḥaqīqa* (the Real), the first thing that he or she must consider is to the realization of his or her weakness and inabilities. At this level, Al-Ghazali, in his seven duties suggests that one who wishes fully to understand God's words must first acknowledge one's incapacity (*iʿtiraf bal-ʿazj)*.[89] In other words, *ʿazj* as a new path of transformation requires a complete surrender with no preconception. Accepting, or acknowledging *ʿajz* is a level of understanding which also requires a profound understanding of one's own self and capacities. This is the foundation of the confidence and trust of the person who is ready to

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No tumult can threaten the existence of the color of *ʿajz*,
and no flood can displace the shadow.

[87] *Baqā* is preceded by *fanā*; in Sufism the terms signifying subsistence and passing away. In Sufi teaching, *fanā* is a level of asceticism where the Sufi is preparing to pass away from the material world and eventually rest in *baqā* where the experience and union with God happens. See (Encyclopedia Iranica).

[88] *ʿajz* has also been a major point of discussion in the works of Ibn al-Munayyir, al-Ghazālīl and Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari Ormsby, Eric L, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over Al-Ghazālī's "Best of All Possible Worlds*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 161.

[89] Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 267.

follow the path with firm conviction and reliance upon God (*tawakkul ʿala Allah*).[90] Bīdel believes such a journey would be impossible if the path were not consciously chosen in the first place. From his perspective, the desirable and sole path is one founded upon *ʿajz,* which leads to an intimate knowledge of Divine Reality. For this reason, the concept of *ʿajz* is multifaceted, and a careful reading of his work reveals some of its nuances.

In Bīdel's mystical world, *ʿajz* is wrapped in mystery that has roots in multilayered meanings and inferences. Bīdel gives *ʿajz* a unique position, which consistantly appears as a subtle guidepost and becomes obvious in the context of his poetry. It is also important to note that *ʿajz,* which is an Arabic term, does not retain its original meaning when it is used in Farsi; like many other Arabic terms, its application slightly changes. Contrary to its conventional function, such as in the *ḥadīth* and in the Qurʾān, in which it is presented as a commonly understood idea, *ʿajz* in Bīdel's thought generally does not connote a negative meaning. For Bīdel, *ʿajz* has meanings similar to what Ibn ʿArabi calls *ʿadama al-qudrah* or the "absence of power." It is this concept that Bīdel portrays, a path imbued with the power of *ʿajz*.

Likewise, it is also important to understand that for Bīdel, *ʿajz* is not something that happens involuntarily; rather, it is an action that he sees as undertaken consciously and voluntarily. Hence, for the sake of clarity, *ʿajz* can only be applied voluntarily. The meanings of this term only come to light in the analysis of the poetry, because *ʿajz,* in its more subtle meanings, is conveyed through various terms and often via compound construction. Compound words are unique to Bīdel's work, and it is through such

[90] Annemarie Schimmel, and Carl W. Ernst, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam Thirty-fifth Anniversary Edition*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 117. Also, *tawakkul* means to entrust [to someone], have confidence [in someone], and is a concept that in Sufism denotes the sense of dependence upon God. See (Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition).

exceptional invention that he creates a new level of meaning in Farsi poetry in general, as well as in the Indian style of poetry, for which he is best known.

Bīdel's concerns and contributions to Sufism are diverse. He is best known for his focus on the central terms of *insān* (humanity), *khuda* (God), *rūh* (soul), *man* (self), *ḥayrat* (bewilderment), *āyīna* (mirror), and *ʿishq* (love). *ʿAjz*, however, in Bīdel's metaphysical perception, has a powerful role in perfecting human nature. It is considered one of the central terms in his poetry that weaves into a vastly and intricately compounded realm of meanings where both God and human existence intersect. Achieving this intersection requires a decisive tool, and *ʿajz* is the key concept of such examination.

ʿAjz provides Bīdel an ideal symbol of selflessness, which awakens the profound inner space of self, the heart. Titus Burckhardt in his preface to Austin's translation of Ibn ʿArabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom,* writes that the "heart can be considered the very center of our psycho-physical being, as the meeting-place of soul and mind or, more precisely, as the focal point where the mind, which in itself is all knowledge or light, is reflected in the mirror of the soul."[91] Undoubtedly, Burkhardt's explanation is the closest interpretation of Bīdel's purpose in using *ʿajz*—to gain access into the inner heart, where a full awareness of selflessness ignites. This is similar to Rumi who starts his *mathnawi* with the reed flute, which is considered "an ideal symbol of the soul that can utter words only when touched by the lips of the beloved."[92] Rumi invites us to his world, which is the field of reed bed; Bīdel, on the other hand, invites us to a world, which is known to

[91] Ralph William Julius Austin, *Ibn Al-ʿArabi: The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), Xi.
[92] Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*. (London: Fine Books, 1978) 211.

him by its only path called *ʿajz*. In fact, he begins his *dīwān* with *ʿajz*, which appears in the first line.

> *ba awj-i kibrīyā kaz pahlū-yi ʿajz ast rāh ānjā*
> *sar-i mū-yi gar īnjā kham shawī bishkan kulāh ānjā*[93]
>
> The path to Divine glory is reached through *ʿajz*
> By showing a little self-effacement here, you can be prideful there[94]

Kibrīyā also means greatness and sovereignty, and it is worth noticing that for Bīdel that is the stage, which encompasses perfection, that is the highest level for a heavenly journey. In Bīdel's conviction, achieving that level of greatness and majesty is possible only through the path of *ʿajz*. Of course, traveling on such a path has its own requirements, as one must deflate the ego and give up any notion of self-centrality or power that is indicative of the denial of the power of God. He is the absolute perfection (*kamā-el mutlaq*) and it is He who is All-Powerful (*muqtadīr*). Therefore, when a person effaces himself of worldly pride (*kibr*) and acknowledges powerlessness here, he will achieve a peaceful state of well-being and the moment of highest unending bliss and happiness. Bīdel reveals the reasons behind such an emphasis in the following lines.

> *shud zi azal chihrah gushā, ʿajz zi paydā-yī mā*
> *mū nanihad pāh ba numū, tā qadam az sar nakunad*
>
> At the very outset of the creation of existence, incapacity was born,
> Hair does grow unless it first walks on the head[95]

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[93] Kulliyat 1:1.
[94] 'Abd Al-Qādir Bīdel, *Dīvān-i Bīdil* (Bombay: Maṭba'-i Fatḥ Al-Karīm, 1884), 6. The second distich can literally be translated as "*If you show little self-effacement here, break your hat there.*" The complexity of the poem lies in the compound-word "Bishkan Kulāh," which literally means breaking hat.
[95] It is quite difficult to translate how hair can walk on its head, but what Bīdel tries to say is that as hair grows, it can grow longer and so, it becomes malleable. Stiff hair will break and its growth never occurs. When hair grows longer, it starts bending on its head as if it walks. It is used as a metaphor for humility and incapacity of human beings. Bīdel's work is abundant with such intricate metaphors.

The above lines are among Bīdel's most sophisticated and complex lines of poetry, for they not only illustrate an existential image of the human condition, the lines also symbolically attribute *ʿajz* as an important aspect of human nature. In the first line, the meaning is quite clear that human existence began with *ʿajz*, which Bīdel sees as an inescapable fact. It may seem that the first *misraʿ*, or hemistich, encloses the meaning of *ʿajz* entirely, but not quite so; the meaning of the first hemistich depends on the second. One may be puzzled about the occurrence of hair in the second *misraʿ* and wonder how and under what symbolic meaning hair appears here and under what allegorical structure it relates to *ʿajz*?

In the second half-line, the term hair (*mū*) represents frailty and fragility, and it is symbolically used to denote the weakness and powerlessness of human beings. Human nature is being portrayed as hair. Hair symbolically walking on its head might seem strange, but it appears that Bīdel wants to find the perfect and the ultimate example of human frailty. Of course, as the hair grows longer, it becomes malleable; it begins bending to its base, or inward, which is an allusion to interior nature (*bāṭin*). On the other hand, stiff hair starts breaking, so, it does not grow. Moreover, it also insinuates to the process of a spiritual hermeneutic, which starts from the exterior world (*ālam-i zāhir*) and moves to the interior one (*ālam-i bātin*). This concept has been reflected in the following line:

> *hadaf-i maqṣad-i mā, sakht buland uftāda ast*
> *bāyad az ʿajz kamān kard kham-i bazū rā*[96]
>
> Our ultimate destination is stationed very high
> From *ʿajz* we should turn the supplicating arch of our shoulders into a bow

[96] Kulliyat., 1:86.

Some of Bīdel's poems are almost impossible to translate, like the above lines, unless a paragraph or two is dedicated to commentary. The purpose of this poem is to highlight human weakness. The first hemistich has ritualistic and cosmic implications, which, he says, we are located below, but our ultimate destination is a lofty one, which could be a reference to the Real. In the second hemistich, the bow, metaphorically, is used for shoulders that as a result of hands raised up in the air for prayer, the gesture personify a bow. Bīdel says that if we want the arrows of our prayers to reach their target; we should turn our shoulders into a bow. Notice the beauty of Bīdel's choice of words. Imagine, if we raise our hands over our heads, this forms a bow and it only happens when we feel weak, grief-stricken, or cry out for help. As we raise our hands over our heads for help, we also bend, like a bow, in prostration, which again indicates our powerlessness.

However, it is not only the term *ʿajz* per se that signifies the concept of incapacity, Bīdel also uses various other words, either in compounds or singular, that reflects the same concept, or fall into the sphere of *ʿajz*, such as "colorlessness." In other words, they sometimes supply collateral meanings to *ʿajz*, such as the term *bi-rangī* in the following lines.

naqshband-i chaman-i wahsḥat-i mā bi-rangi-st
shud hawā āyīna tā nālah numāyān kardand[97]

The painter of our solitude is colorlessness
If the air turns into a mirror, wails become visible[98]

[97] Ibid., 1:512.
[98] *Chaman-i wahsḥat* literally means meadow of fear, but that is not what Bīdel is trying to mean here. Oftentimes when this compound appears in Bīdel's poetry, it has one general meaning: loneliness or solitude. Bīdel sees himself in a world of loneliness. In some other places, *chaman-i wahsḥat* can also mean desert, *dasht or bīyābān*.

Colorlessness is a close motif that implies *ʿajz*; moreover, it is indicative of God's singularity: God, being powerful, in contrast to the weakness of human beings is unfettered by time and space. Color represents the exterior appearance, and attraction of, not only nature, but also of human beings. Rumi has also used this motif in his *mathnawi*,[99] in which he relates color to clouds that conceal and confuse us. While colorlessness is related to the moon: when illumination appears in the clouds at night, it has only one source: the moon.[100] Another significance is the cloud's physical property, which not only tries to block the illumination of the moon, but also beclouds our vision. For Bīdel, colorlessness is a symbol of the Unity of Being, and it provides us a vantage point from which to perceive the truth without using glasses, which could influence our vision by causing us to see in different colors.[101]

Bīdel says that in the meadow we inhabit there is nothing but solitude (or retreat) and if a painter paints the meadow, the color palette of the painter would be colorlessness. Indeed, if the palette is colorless, then color does not exist. He proves this

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[99]

They closed the door and continued to polish,
Like the sky, it became pure and smooth

There is a path from two hundred colors to colorlessness,
Color is like the cloud and colorlessness is like the moon

Whatever splendor you see in the clouds,
Know that it comes from the stars, the moon and the sun
(Rumi, Masnavi, Book1, Part 157)

[100] Oliver Leaman, *The Qurʾān: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2005), 124.

[101] Color and colorlessness symbolize not only *ʿalam waḥdat wa ʿalami kathrat* (the world of unity and the world of multiplicity), but also imply the *ʿalam-e zāhir* (exterior world) and *ālam-e bātin* (interior one). For instance, Bīdel oftentimes uses the peacock to illustrate multiplicity, exteriority, or apparent attractions, but in this line he uses the peacock and crow to compare and contrast between the unity and dissension and disparity among human beings. He says that the difference and diversity are nothing but illusion / even though, the peacock and crow's blood color is the same. Rumi has a similar poem that argues: "*The disagreement of mankind is caused by names: peace ensues when they advance to the reality*" Mathnawi, Book II, Verse 3680.

insight in the second hemistich: If the air turns into a mirror, then wailing becomes visible as well. First, this construction sounds odd and confusing, but if we think deeper, one thing can be extracted from this contradiction: the nature of impossibility. Notice the beauty and complexity of his imagination and of the metaphors that Bīdel applies in the second line. Air cannot be mirror; it is rather the enemy of it, because when it blows into it, the mirror becomes beclouded and gray. Then again, it is stated as a condition that if air can be a mirror, therefore, one's cry of pain, or sorrow can be visible as well, which cannot be so because a wail is audible.

gush-i murūwatī kū, kaz mā nazar napūshad?
dast-i gharīq yaʿnī, faryād-i bī sadāyīm[102]

In this line, he uses the phrase "soundless wail" to symbolize a person who is drowning. The drowning person in the water does not have voice--his head might be already in the water--but the drowning person makes hand gestures to call for help. The act of raising hands in the air is what Bīdel calls the soundless wail, or soundless cry for help. Bīdel has a second poem, which helps to explain these lines: "Where are the kind ears, not to turn and look away from us? The drowning hand is an indicator of my soundless wail." As a result, the visible cry is the meadow of solitude, which is one of the fundamental principles to *ʿajz*. Bīdel uses all of these metaphorical phrases not only to explain *ʿajz* and its application in various of ways, but also, to support his general notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* because colorlessness symbolizes the accomplishment of the path, which goes through *ʿajz* and unites eventually with *ḥaqīqa.*

[102] Kulliyat, 1: 914.

Other terms, which are frequently used in relation to *ʿajz,* are *inkisār* (selflessness) [103] and *Shikast* (break). They are Bīdel's favorite terms for the state and attitude of the mystic's heart.[104] These two terms are interchangeably used in Bīdel's *oeuvre*. In the mystical realm, *inkisār* implies a modesty, refinement and respect that in return, it requires a sense of gracefulness and dedication. *Inkisār* means to cast aside certain notions of selfishness and conceit, which are intoxicating and prevent us to come out of our limited sense of self and to reach our inherent state of totality. Bīdel, in the meantime, beautifully and powerfully reflects on *inkisār* and what real selflessness is.

zarra rā az khod-furoshī sharm bāyad dāshtan
bī-fuzūlī nīst har-chand inkisār āwūrdah am[105]

A particle must be ashamed of boasting
It is not ostentatious that I chose selflessness

Note how, in the above passage, Bīdel affords especial characteristics to selflessness. Here, he emphasizes an important matter regarding selflessness, which directly implies *ʿajz*. A tiny particle (*zarra*) symbolizes selflessness, but he admonishes the particle if the same particle expresses, or acknowledges, this as its attribute, because when a particle calls attention to its attribute, that means seeking recognition. A truly selfless person is unaware of his selflessness. How can someone know his or her selflessness? To understand your selflessness, you would definitely compare yourself with others, and that requires a self, or ego.

[103] *Inkisār* is originally an Arabic term from *k-s-r,* which meaning breaking. *Inkisār* is a verbal noun, means brokenness, or brokenness in spirit. In Bīdel's poetry, it means humility and selflessness. *Inkisār* is also translated as detachment from worldly things and conditions.
[104] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 371.
[105] Kulliyat., 1: 912.

Perhaps, one of the ways to contest the ego is humility. Bīdel constantly uses the term *uftādagī* (humility) – which is also used in the above passage – when he discusses *ʿajz*. Indeed, in an important stage in the path of *ʿajz*, one must be purged of pride and arrogance, the sources of jealousy and envy. Bīdel says:

> *chū ātash sarkashī-hā mīkunam ammā azin ghāfil*
> *ki juz uftādagī kas bar nakhāhad-dāsht bāram rā*[106]
>
> I am being rebellious like fire, but unaware that,
> Were it not for humility, no one would bear my load

In order to articulately convey his philosophical concepts and meanings, in relation to *ʿajz*, Bīdel skillfully applies an allegorical narrative strategy throughout his *dīwān*, which is obvious in the preceding line. The word "fire" (*ātash)* in the first hemistich suggests two different allegorical references. First, Bīdel epitomizes the sense of pride and arrogance as a fire that generates flames. The fire's flame becomes rebellious because its nature requires it to flare and to spread; therefore, it demands more wood and air to devour, and it is never satisfied. It does not only burn itself out, which eventually extinguishes its very existence, but also becomes harmful to others. It can burn its surrounding and that will deter people from approaching it. Such is the nature of desire and arrogance in human beings if there is an absence of humility. In the second hemistich, the word load (*bār*) allegorically refers to a load of firewood, which is in contrast with the fire. The pile of firewood neither burns nor creates flaring flames; it simply lies on the ground. The load is usually carried and such is the state of humility to which Bīdel infers.

[106] Ibid., 1: 47.

Another interpretation of the allegorical complexity of this line is that the word "fire" is ascribed to Satan. Bīdel emphatically asserts that pride and arrogance are intrinsic characteristics of Satan who was honored and favored by God alongside the angels. Upon the creation of Adam, however, when God called on the angels to prostrate themselves to him, all the angels bowed, except Satan, who refused because of pride and arrogance (Qurʾān 2:34). When God asked him why he refuses to prostrate to Adam, he argues that he is better than Adam, because he had been created from fire, while Adam was simply created from clay (Qurʾān 7:11-13). Thus, he said, "how is it possible for me to prostrate to someone who is made of clay?" In effect, Bīdel beautifully portrays pride as the nature of Satan, which is like the rebellious flames of fire that is always flaring. Humility is praised in the Qurʾān and it is regarded as a guide to paradise, while pride and arrogance can lead us to hell.[107] In Bīdel's poetry, one of the important keys to understand the concept of *ʿajz* is indeed humility. As has been noted, the mystical language of Sufism is unique, particularly for Bīdel, whose creativity and novelty generates an allegorical world of multi-faceted meanings through the use of metaphors and symbols. This leads us to another important key term within the sphere of *ʿajz,* which is *qanāʿat* (contentment).

Qanāʿat is the virtuous hallmark of Sufism thought. In Bīdel's poetry, if the word *qanāʿat* did not exist, a huge void would be felt in our comprehension of *ʿajz* and in fact, the term would be incomplete. In the following verse, Bīdel illustrates the quality of avarice (*tamaʿ*) and warns us to guard ourselves against its alluring and enticing nature.

qanāʿat sāhil-i amn ast afsūn-i tamaʿ mashnaw

[107] Qurʾān 7:55 and (Qurʾān 31:18) "And turn not your face away from men with pride, nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, God likes not each arrogant boaster."

mabādā kashtī-yi dawīsh dar kām-i nahang uftad[108]

Contentment is a safe shore, listen not to be bewitched by avarice
Lest the dervish's ship falls prey to the whale.

In these lines, Bīdel portrays contentment as a safe shore, which is situated next to the body of the sea of avarice that constantly tries to tempt us to launch our boat into it. A greedy person is never satisfied with what he or she already has; there is always a desire for gaining more, which causes rivalry and, violence. In fact, in many of the aspects of Sufism poverty are highly praised as a desirable condition of living, as they free one from avarice, which is essential to the concept of detachment from the world. Bīdel warns us that the sea is not safe; there are whales that can prey upon us and can make our boat sink in the bottomless sea of avarice. We must be careful not to become excited or emotionally enticed by the vast sea of greed, which is selfishness.

We have discussed in detail how *ʿajz* is the key term that appears from the beginning of Bīdel's *dīwān* and constantly emerges in various ways throughout the book, which contains around three thousand poems. Heightened in meaning and reinforced through multifaceted allegorical and symbolical meanings, *ʿajz* is not only a key concept, but also functions as an umbrella term that attracts multiple other terms and compounds words. Understanding the concept of *ʿajz* helps us to understand not only Bīdel's poetry in his *dīwān*, but it also guides us to understand Bīdel's thinking in general. Finally, *ʿajz* in Bīdel's work offers a unique contribution to his metaphysical poetry. It is a term that sometimes appears independently, while it, at other times, relies on other terms in order to expand its dimension of meaning. Often, it appears in a chain of symbols, allegories and allusions, which understanding *ʿajz*, helps us in disentangling the knots of their

[108] Kulliyat., 1: 48.

intricacies. In short, the meanings of the poems are not readily available through simple translation of terms, but require the knowledge of context and everyday usage.

CHAPTER THREE:

MIRROR

One of the most used metaphors in Sufism literature is the word "mirror" (*āyīna* in Farsi and *mir'āt* in Arabic). It is one of Ibn ʿArabi's favorite motifs in his presentation of the heart of a Sufi. The mirror is considered to be the center of consciousness, where God and His image are reflected. In order to make the reflection possible, the mirror of the heart should be constantly polished. The metaphor is discussed in Ibn ʿArabi's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* the Oneness of Being or the Unity of Existence. He uses the mirror especially when he debates the reality of creation and an intellect that is perplexed or incapable of comprehending such mystery

Bīdel was strongly influenced by Ibn ʿArabi and his metaphysical teachings. In nearly all Bīdel's work, one can undoubtedly find themes, symbols, metaphors, and elaborate imagery that resemble those used in *Fuṣūṣ alḥikam* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* of Ibn ʿArabi. Bīdel has utilized the mirror in his work to convey his own ideas that are beyond the scope of mystical concepts. While at first it might appear that Bīdel uses the symbol of the *āyīna* as Ibn ʿArabi does, to denote metaphorically the heart as the center of the reflection of the reality of being, we see, rather, for Bīdel the mirror becomes an all-inclusive reflection of the multiplicity of everyday life.

One of the central ideas in Sufi psychology is that of the heart (*qalb*), symbolized by the mirror. The two other main ideas are the soul (*nafs*) and the spirit (*ruḥ*). Out of all

these ideas, the heart is considered a supreme identity, not because of its operative level, but because it plays a central role in human consciousness. Ibn ʿArabi considers the heart a locus for knowledge, rather than for sentiments or feelings.[109] The root word *q-l-b* means to turn upside down, to turn inside out or outside in, and to topple.[110] In fact, one of God's names is *Muqallib al-qulūb,*[111] which means "the transformer of the hearts." Ibn ʿArabi links *qalb* with its reflexive form *taqallub,* which is derived from the same root and which means perpetual transformation of the heart. From Ibn ʿArabi's perspective, the heart is never steady and never still; rather, it is undergoing perpetual change, which is accompanied by Divine manifestations.[112] However, such manifestations are not possible if the mirror of the heart is not polished. Only polished mirrors of the hearts are capable of reflecting God's image.

The heart has infinite capacity in Sufi psychology. The Qurʾān utilizes the term *qalb* about 130 times, and its attributes are often link understanding and intelligence with the healthy heart.[113] A healthy heart is a polished one that is sacred and can guide the possessor of the heart. *Qabl* (heart) shares the same root with *qibla*, which suggests direction to the Kaʿbah, a Muslim shrine in Mecca, to which Muslims orient themselves, five times a day for prayers. Ibn ʿArabi also equates the heart with the Kaʿbah, as the most sacred place.[114] The heart is also important in the famous *ḥadīth* of Muhammad who

[109] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York press, 1989), 107.
[110] According to the Hans Wehr Arabic dictionary
[111] There is a famous supplication that is recited at the moment when the Persian New Year arrives. Often time it is called *Naw-ruz* prayer: "*Yā muqallib al-qulūbi wal-absār*," (O turner of the hearts and sights!). Another term that originates from the same root is *inqilāb* (revolution).
[112] Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 110.
[113] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York press, 1989), 107.
[114] ibid.

said, “The hearts of all the children of Adam are like a single heart between two of the fingers of the All-merciful.” For Sufis, the heart is considered a scared sanctuary where one can take refuge from the mundane world by constant purification, by way of remembrance, and by performing devotional acts, either audibly or silently.

Esoterically, the created world is a mirror that reflects God’s essence. God prefers to be acknowledged, and yet there must be a way to reflect his wishes. There is a famous *ḥadīth Qudsi* that bears witness to this: “I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the world.”[115] The world is a mirror for God, and He wants to see Himself in his creation. So this world can be reflected through a mirror that is faced towards God. In order to keep this mirror of the heart purified and polished, one must be watchful of his or her acts and words in every moment and at every place. One must also be vigilant of his or her surroundings because the mirror reflects everything around it and everything within its reach.

The polished mirror is another version of the Sufi doctrine of *fanā,* the annihilation or passing away of the self in contemplation of the Divine.[116] In some ways, it is connected with Ibn ʿArabi’s idea of the mirror image, in which he believes that a mirror brings two sides and unites them as one.[117] When someone stands in front of the mirror, what appears in the reflective object is an image of him or herself; the reflective object itself disappears. An unpolished mirror, on the other hand, does not have the capability to reflect what can be seen around it; rather it becomes lost in a cloudy, dusty,

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[115] According to Annemarie Schimmel, sometimes the phrase “I wanted to be known,” is replaced in Sufi circles, by “I wanted to beloved.” See Annemarie Schimmel, *Rumi's World: The Life and Works of the Greatest Sufi Poet* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 74.
[116] Michael Sells. "*Ibn ʿArabi's Polished Mirror: Perspective Shift and Meaning Event.*" Studia Islamica, no. 67 (1988): 121-49.
[117] William Chittick. "*Ibn Arabi*", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

and isolated state because of constant wrongdoing and showing reluctance for change and improvement. For Ibn ʿArabi, a polished mirror is an optimal metaphor for *Insān-e Kāmil* or Perfect Man, a metaphor Bīdel has widely used in his works.

Bīdel begins his *dīwān* with the word *āyīna,* or the mirror to link it with the beginning of the creation. Traditionally, among many Persian classical poets, there was a tendency to commence their major work with an ideal symbol, or metaphor, that would set the tone for the rest of the book. Rumi, for instance, opens his *mathnawi* with the word reed flute, an ideal metaphor for himself and for his endless longing for the eternal home, which is the red bed that is considered to be the ultimate destination of the whole creation.[118] Similarly, Bīdel uses mirror to remind us about creation and our eternal destination, however, with slightly different interpretation. In the following distich, the mirror reflects something that is more characteristic of early creation.

> *āyīna bar khāk zad sunʿ yaktā*
> *tā wā namūdand kayfīyyat-i mā*[119]
>
> The only craftsman crashed the mirror into the dust
> Upon disclosure of our quality

The word *yaktā* (the only) here refers to God who has initiated the craft (*sunʿ*). Bīdel sees the world as a final product of a complicated invention that involved several stages of formulations, and what evolved eventually was the creation of Adam.[120]

The creation from clay is a common theme that reappears in Abrahamic religions as well as, to some degree, in other religions, which has its basis in Greek mythology.

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[118] Annemarie Schimmel, *Rumi's World: The Life and Works of the Greatest Sufi Poet* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 199.
[119] Kulliyat., 1: 6.
[120] Bīdel, in his *mathnawi* of *Muhait-e A'zam* describes the creation of the universe as the ocean of wine and how it stage by stage comes into fermentation. See Hajnalka Kovacs, "'The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities': The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd al-Qadir Bedil(1644–1720)." (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 79.

Verses from the Bible say, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). In the same way, the Qurʾān implies: “And certainly did we create man from an extract of clay” (Qurʾān, 23:12).[121] One way to interpret this distich is to assume that after the composition of man from clay, God discovered the quality of man and became disappointed. As a result of his irritation, he threw the mirror, which is a symbol of creation in these lines, on the ground, because man was weak and incapable as compared to angels made of light and Satan made of fire.

It is this human weakness that plays a decisive role in Adam’s movement and subjugation to a state of guilty disobedience from the state of innocent obedience to God:[122] “And we said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers" (Qurʾān, 1:35). When Adam and Eve could not resist the temptation of eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was forbidden by God, they doubled the frustration of God over their actions. As a result, God expelled both of them from the Garden of Eden, and therefore, Adam and Eve and their children were subjected to eternal suffering. For Bīdel, such suffering manifests itself in incapacity, weakness, and vulnerability that are all inherent to human nature since the beginning of the creation. That is to say, the human creation is pieces of the crushed mirror, and so, it is up to us to figure out how, carefully, to pick up pieces and fragments

[121] In the Qurʾān there are several verses that allude to the creation from clay. Here is one more verse: “[So mention] when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay.” (Qurʾān 38: 71). One of the most famous verses that is ubiquitously used in Sufi literature is this verse: “So, when I have made him and have breathed into him of My Spirit, do ye fall down, prostrating yourselves unto him.” (Qurʾān 15: 29).

[122] Also the Epistle to the Romans 8:20 “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope.”

of ourselves to finally become a whole -- as it existed in the first place -- which is through polishing the mirrors of our hearts.

From the mystical perspective, Bīdel considers the mirror to be the center of the manifestation of the Divine quality. Beauty is one of the qualities that disclose itself after a period of constant polishing the mirror of the heart. It is one of the essential fulfillments of Divine manifestation at the heart of a human being in which He loves to see His own image.

> *ṭalism-i ḥayrat-i mā manẓar-i tajallī ūst*
> *ghurūr-i husn zi āyīna bī-khabar nabūwad*[123]
>
> Our enchanting bewilderment is the scene of his manifestation
> the pride of beauty is aware of the mirror

In Persian literature, the heart is often referred to as the house of the beloved, a beautiful garden as well as the Kaʿbah, the house of God. The mirror of the heart in which the beloved one is being reflected is directly in correspondence with the famous holy utterance (*ḥadīth qūdsi*), to which Ibn ʿArabi often alludes: God says, "I was a Hidden Treasure, but unrecognized. I loved to be recognized, so I created the creatures and I made myself recognized to them, so they recognized me."[124]

Bīdel suggests that there is only one being (*wujūd*), and, therefore, all other beings are a reflection of the original being. The Hidden Treasure that wanted to be known, in which, he often points out, are fragments, or pieces, of the whole. The compound "the enchanting bewilderment" in the first line is often repeated in Bīdel's work. The poet situates himself in a state in which his discovery has left him bewildered, unable to explain the phenomena that has manifested to him. This state is, quite accurately, we

[123] Kulliyat., 1: 664.
[124] William C. Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 31.

think, described by Rudolf Otto, as the *mysterium* in his famous concept of *Numinous.*[125] It is experienced in blank wonder, or in a state of near unconsciousness. This description recalls the sphere of liminality, discussed by Arnold van Gennep and elaborated on by Victor Turner: a state in which a person has been exited from normal social life and has entered to a threshold phase in which every notion of identity, time and space is suspended and in which a person goes through spiritual transformation.[126] To that end, Bīdel, in the aforementioned distich, suggests that absolute transcendence is the enchanting state of bewilderment, of the *limen*, which occurs when God sees himself in the heart of the Perfect Man, who is the Divine mirror.

Though with different articulations, the concept of the Perfect Man is echoed throughout Bīdel's work. The idea of the Perfect Man (*al-Insān al-Kāmil. al-Insān*) is a gender-neutral term meaning the humankind or the human being and is one of Ibn ʿArabi's best technical terms when he discusses the concept of *waḥdat al-wūjūd,* who actually has never mentioned the phrase in his work. In Bīdel's work, on the other hand, the concept of human perfection is reflected in the mirror. To put it another way, Bīdel suggests that the perfection of man hinges on the purification of the mirror of the heart, which reflects God's image.

> *shab ki āyīna-yi ān āyīna rū gardīdam*
> *jelwa-yi kard ki man ham hama aū gardīdam*[127]
>
> The night I emerged as the mirror of his face-like-mirror
> upon his manifestation, I also entirely became like him

[125] Rudolf Otto paid special attention to the practice of mysticism in both Western and Eastern tradition . See "The Idea of the Holy," trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 25.
[126] Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," In *The Ritual Process Structure and Anti-Structure*, (New York: Cornell University, 1977). 94.
[127] Kulliyat., 1: 945.

From Bīdel's perspective, the perfection of man takes place when a person has gone through several years of spiritual meditation. In such a state, that person becomes the mirror of God's essence, while God becomes the mirror reflecting the essence of the Perfect Man. One may wonder why Bīdel, Ibn ʿArabi and some other Sufis are so much concerned with the concept of the Perfect Man? The answer is obvious. It features an overwhelming impression of everything that is Godly, such as perfect love, perfect beauty, perfect awareness, perfect wisdom, perfect trustworthiness, and so on. All prophets, according to Ibn ʿArabi, are the archetypes of the concept of the Perfect Man. However, the Islamic prophet, Muhammad, occupies a special place.[128] That is due to the idea that Muhammad was considered a cosmic being long before he was born or became a prophet.[129] Nonetheless, what Bīdel fundamentally means by becoming the mirror of God is an ontological approach towards self-consciousness and the true self. It is a way to show or explore existence because it only makes sense when it is discovered and experienced joyfully.

The discovery and understanding of the true self is the main purpose of Sufis. Generally, it is believed in Sufism that the chief purpose of the Sufi journey is attaining *maʿrifah* (*gnosis*), the intimate knowledge of God; however, the journey itself is a framework with ethical and spiritual disciplines that gradually facilitates the understanding of the true self as reality gradually unveils itself in each spiritual state and station (*maqām*). Awareness and knowledge throughout the spiritual path is an essential

[128] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 236.
[129] Toshihiko Izutsu mentions in his book that Ibn ʿArabi bases his conception on a well-known tradition in which Muhammad describes himself as a being of a cosmic nature by saying: "I was a prophet even while Adam was between clay and water." See Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism,* 236.

part of the journey, which according to Ibn ʿArabi involves knowledge of self and, at the same time, knowledge of the Divine reality.[130] It is the embodiment of the famous *ḥadīth* by Muhammad, "Whosoever knows himself, knows his Lord." The same concept resonates in the following poem of Bīdel.

> *shab chashm-i imtīyāzi bar khīsh bāz kardam*
> *āyīna-yi tū didam, chandān ki nāz kardam*[131]
>
> At night I opened my expectant eyes to see myself
> I saw your mirror as I flirted with the mirror.

Bīdel says that he wanted to see his advantages, his superiority. As soon as he opened his eyes, however, he saw something unexpected: he sees himself in the mirror that belongs to God. He says to God that "I saw your mirror and I felt your perfect love and perfect beauty. Upon seeing myself in your mirror, I flirted with it and I felt proud of myself."

The true self is the field of consciousness and the nucleus of existence. Exploring the true self requires fighting the ego and the false personality that it creates for us. We are born in this world with undeveloped consciousness, but we gradually become aware of our environment and ourselves as we grow. We start possessing certain characteristics that are directly imposed by the society on us. These characteristics form a personality that is obviously desirable for us and for the people around us. We have a tendency to be loved when we are socially desirable and to nurture distaste when we are not. Our ego conditions us to react in a certain way in response to others' feelings, reception, and attitudes. Therefore, fighting the ego and false personality require a person to evaluate the self by reflection in the mirror. By doing so, one should be able to examine the everyday

[130] Ibn Al'Arabi, *Ibn-Al-Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 61.
[131] Kulliyat., 1: 944.

activities and actions and hold the self accountable for everything that has so far occurred in one's life.

To conclude, the mirror is one of the most common metaphors for the heart in Bīdel's metaphysical thought, especially when he discuss the concepts of Unity of Being and multiplicity. Bīdel believes that the mirror of the heart, when polished, is not only the center of manifestation of God, which creates bewilderment in the heart of a believer, but it is also a medium between God and human, in which both parties could be reflected. The mirror also is a metaphor for a person in relationship to other people. There is a famous *ḥadīth* by Muhammad who said to his followers: "The believer is the mirror to another believer." The simple meaning of this is that, if someone sees inappropriate behavior or actions in someone else, he or she is morally responsible to acknowledge it to the doer. This is especially important because self-awareness and self-discovery require a level of understanding of self and that is possible by becoming a mirror to another person.

CHAPTER FOUR:

BEWILDERMENT

In this final chapter, I attempt to interpret some of the cryptic language that lies within key terms. I contend that the key to understanding Bīdel's mystical thought and his work is a deep understanding of the terminologies that he applies in his poetry. One term that he uses extensively is *ḥayrat* (bewilderment).[132] Bīdel believes that it is impossible to find or experience a state of unity unless one falls into bewilderment, which does not necessarily mean finding God, but being effaced (*maḥw*) in Him and in His beauty, which is considered the highest spiritual state. As a concept, Bīdel uses bewilderment not only to establish a metaphysical concept, but also to attempt to establish the state of bewilderment for the imaginative mind of his reader. While, at first, it might appear that Bīdel uses bewilderment solely as an intrinsic part of human nature and as simply astonishment or wonder when experiencing new and extraordinary things, a closer look reveals that its most essential use is actually to obtain intimate knowledge (*maʿrifah*). In this chapter, *ḥayrat*, the main concept, will resemble a wreath that is

[132] I prefer to use the term bewilderment for *ḥayrat*, though many scholars like Toshihiko Izutsu have translated it as [metaphysical] perplexity, and some others translated into astonishment or wonder. William Chittick also uses bewilderment. It means beyond being simply perplexed, it rather indicates a condition that proceed into complete mystification.
Bewilderment as an important intellectual aspect lies at the heart of western philosophical scholarship. Philosophers have often considered it as an emotional response to unexpected events; other time, bewilderment is treated as a stimulus to the cognition that triggers the sense of intellectual curiosity. For millennia, it has been discussed as an indispensable topic that engaged the minds of many philosophers including Plato, Socrates and Rene Descartes. See René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 61.

festooned with words like “mirror,” “meadow,” “dew,” “sun” and “flower,” which not only complement the main concept of *ḥayrat*, but also delineate of the doctrine of transcendent Unity of Being or *waḥdat al-wujūd*.[133] Finally, the word “bewilderment” will also serve as a guidepost not only for discovering variously complex meanings and interrelated mystical ideas, but also for helping the reader to comprehend and appreciate the complexity of Bīdel’s poetry.

Ḥayrat is an Arabic term, according to the *Muʿjam Lisan al-ʿArab* lexicon, that comes from the root *ḥ-y-r*, or *ḥayr*, meaning whirlpool, which is sometimes symbolically used in the works of Ibn ʿArabi as one his favorite images of someone being in the state of bewilderment who draws a circle, or forms a circular movement.[134] The literal meaning of the term *ḥayrat* is closely translated as astonishment, confusion, and wonderment, as well as perplexity. None of these words is an accurate translation of the source term; however, the closest and, perhaps, the most frequently used terms in academic research that reflect some quality of *ḥayrat* is bewilderment or wonder.[135] Additionally, words from the same root in Arabic, the terms like *ḥayra*, *ḥayran* as well as *ḥāʾīr*, in its active participle are interchangeably used. Ibn ʿArabi often uses *ḥāʾīr* in his book *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*), instead of *ḥayran*. In the Farsi language, in addition to *ḥayrat,* there are two other terms that are often used interchangeably including *taḥayyur* (perplexity, astonishment, or bewilderment) in the verbal noun of the fifth Arabic form, and *ḥayran* (perplexed, astonished, or bewildered), which is an active

[133] Bīdel was influenced by Ibn ʿArabi, and such influence manifest itself in various ways, which will be discussed towards the end of the chapter.
[134] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 70.
[135] The word bewilderment comes from its archaic etymology wilder, according to Oxford English Dictionary; it means to lose one’s way; lead or drive astray.” It says the origin is uncertain, perhaps it comes from wilderness.

participle. In addition, these are the words that appear in Bīdel's *dīwān* abundantly. All of them are from the same Arabic root *ḥ-y-r,* which overall provide the definition of *ḥayrat*.

In the Qurʾān, however, the term *ḥayrat* is not only a rare word, it also stands in direct opposition to the essential meaning in the context of Sufism. Throughout the Qurʾān, the only term that originates from the root *ḥ-y-r* is *ḥayran* and it is used only once, yet, in pessimistic and negative disposition. The Qurʾān uses *ḥayran* to mean confusion and aberration, in contrast to those who are rightly guided. "... like one bewildered whom the devils have infatuated in the earth" (Qurʾān 6:71). God asks the apostle to address the unbelievers who are infatuated by the devils and who worship the idols, to say that there is no benefit in turning their back to the guidance of God. Moreover, there are some other phrases and verses that play important roles in corresponding with the meaning of bewilderment that is mentioned in the verse. In another verse, the Qurʾān says: "Look how they strike for you comparisons; but they have strayed, so they cannot [find] a way" (Qurʾān 25:9). Sometimes, the Qurʾān calls those who are bewildered, the "abashed," or the "lost" (Qurʾān 2:258). The meaning of *ḥayrat* in the Qurʾān is negative because it is associated with the unbelievers; its Qurʾānic definition stands in extreme contrast with what it means in the Sufi context and its main tenant of believing in *tawḥīd* (Oneness of God).

In Sufism, *ḥayrat* is one of the most used terms and has a unique meaning, especially when it comes to the realization of the Divine truth. Rūzbihān Baqlī, one of the most outstanding figures in Persian Sufism of the 13th century, offers an ample definition of the term. He explains the state of bewilderment as a moment of spontaneity that passes into the heart of the gnostic through contemplation; as a result, he becomes bewildered,

which draws him to definite and indefinite, and knowing and not-knowing.[136] Baqlī draws our attention to an explanation, which can be referred to as teleological conception of bewilderment. To put it another way, the gnostic contemplation causes a thin moment of spontaneity in pursuing some end, which in this case is oscillating between definite and indefinite. We can illustrate this procedure for a Sufi as a transient state, or behavior that would resemble a pendulum in accordance with the law of harmonic motion, albeit erratic. For instance, the equilibrium position, where a gnostic remains in a normal state would be then the point of polarity between definite and indefinite; knowing and not-knowing; existence, and non-existence.

Likewise, bewilderment for some Sufis is an ultimate mission in which one resides not corporeally, but spiritually in the gnosis of reality while engaging as a spectator on God's both transcendence and immanence. The experience of bewilderment enables the individual to undulate between the multiplicity (*kathrat*) and unity (*waḥdat*), which is intrinsic to our existence from the vantage point of Sufism.[137] It does not mean to be ignorant of the state of being. The Sufi is fully aware of what is happening especially in the state of uncertainty and confusion, whereas an ordinary person could be simply lost or could struggle to realize what is happening, which may result in further mystification, but a Sufi in the state of bewilderment remains in full apprehension. In Islamic mysticism, *ḥayrat* is one of the most desirable stations (*maqāmāt*) for Sufis (of certain *ṭarīqah*) to experience. They believe that our rational faculty is incapable of

[136] Rūzbihān Baqlī, *Sharḥ-i Shaṭḥiyyāt*, ed. Henri Corbin, trans. Faraidon Asyabi Ishqi Zanjani, p, 210. I had access to an electronic copy of this book, which is available on www.sufi.ir. Direct link to the e-book: http://www.sufi.ir/books/download/farsi/roozbehan/sharh-shathiyat.pdf

[137] Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 137.

understanding God, because the Divine truth is always is greater than our apprehension; therefore, our rational faculty inexorably falls in the state of bewilderment.

Experiencing bewilderment is a natural tendency for Sufis so they can possess true knowledge. Ibn ʿArabi, a great imaginative and one of the most prolific authors in Islamic mysticism believes that those who are in the state of bewilderment are in possession of true knowledge.[138] This will lead to perception of transcendence of Divine essence, or what is known as theophany or Divine self-manifestation (*tajallī*). Theophany can be experienced by ordinary people as well, but in a limited way because according to Sufi credence, we are habituated to our primordial emotions and the way we respond to them leads to an adverse effect. In another word, *nafs* or ego self, commands us to evil inasmuch as our consciousness is contracted, falling into an overwhelming internal tensions that leaves little room for maturation. In contrast, when a spiritual wayfarer experiences the theophany, he or she is capable of seeing unseen things. It is at these moments, when the layers of Divine secrets reveal. Nonetheless, this is not where the journey ends.

From the point of view of Mohammad al-Qāshāni (d. 1239), this is yet the familiarity stage, or a closer step to the realm of intimacy that belongs to the very nature of the Divine being.[139] It is rather a transient state that will be repeated until the true knowledge (*maʿrifah*)[140] is acquired. The acquiring nature will not cease because

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[138] The precise quote is: "*Ahl al- ḥayrah hum arbāb al-maʿrafah al-ḥalqah*." For further reading on *ḥayrat* and its multidimensional meaning see Muḥyiddin Ibn ʿArabi, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol.1 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1968), 271.

[139] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 86.

[140] *Maʿrifah* is synonymous with knowledge and cognition but the definition that is given by Sufis and mystical tradition is that *Maʿrifah* is knowledge of God and it is precisely true for Bīdel's mystical thought. See (Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition).

theophany is eminent and transcendent in every present time. The idea that the reality creates in every moment intersects with Bīdel's viewpoint, albeit in more sophisticated and elaborated form. For Bīdel, who was strongly influenced by the Ibn ʿArabi's philosophy, bewilderment lies at the heart of his mystical thought. Like Ibn ʿArabi, Bīdel adopts bewilderment in order to discover the mystery of the existence. For him, things do not appear in an explicit form. For instance, he sees birth, existence, love, and death as mysteries of creation. He finds it extremely difficult to explain these phenomena, because he believes that there is no way to explain them. Instead, he suggests that observation and bewilderment are the only ways to find explanation for them. For Bīdel, they are not problems; rather, they are invaluable resources of truth that fascinate his thinking and attract his attention. In this respect, he follows Ibn ʿArabi's footsteps in arguing that true knowledge cannot be fully achieved; notwithstanding, Bīdel affirms in his collection of poems that we can experience some aspect of it through bewilderment.

In Bīdel's *dīwān*, one of the most common motifs closely associated with bewilderment is *ʿajz*, meaning incapacity or inability. Contrary to Ibn ʿArabi who sees a fundamental link between love and knowledge of God (*maʿrifah*), Bīdel chooses an alternative concept that has deeper impact. *ʿAjz*, which is the innate quality of poverty, has strong correlation with bewilderment. Bīdel juxtaposes the human being's incapability and weakness, with God's All-Powerful and All-Knowing being. Respectively, Bīdel believes that human beings have an intrinsic disadvantage in not being able to comprehend everything about Divine reality, and by its very nature, that inability falls into bewilderment. For this reason, he says, when we arrive at the crossroad of uncertainty, we are grappling with our primordial inability, while being aware of

magnificence of God. It is at such juncture when bewilderment comes to our survival and leads us through the path that advances towards knowledge. This can be seen in the following distich, Bīdel asserts that life in this world is a caravan that its commodity is nothing but bewilderment.

ba dasht-i ʿajz-i taḥayyur matāʿ-i qāfila-īm
agar bar āyīna maḥmil kashīm nīst ʿjab[141]

In the desert of inability in which
Our caravan passes through
Our commodity is bewilderment
It should not be a surprise
If we place our palanquin over the mirror[142]

Bīdel metaphorically suggests that we are living in the world of incapacity. The word "desert" is a common metaphor for the world, which connotes loneliness, dreariness, vulnerability, and ephemerality. In this desert, the poet says, that we are the caravan and that our commodities or what we carry on mules, camels, and horses are nothing, but bewilderment. It should come as no surprise that throughout this desert, there are lodges to which we eventually arrive, but these lodges are made of mirrors that reflect God's essence. There can be an infinite number of lodges, because they are the points of bewilderment, which are unlimited. The reason that Bīdel draws so much emphasis on incapacity is that it is inherent to our nature, from the very day that we were born; *ʿajz*

[141] Kulliyat., 1: 162.
[142] Mirror is an important multivalent symbol in Sufi poetry and theoretical work. Most commonly, the mirror is a metaphor for the heart that functions properly only when burnished to a high sheen, but it can also stand for the whole person in relationship to others. See Historical Dictionary of Sufism by John Renard, page 205; Michael Sells explains: "The Divine attributes come into actuality in the polished mirror. The attributes are actualized at the point of intersection of human and Divine, cosmologically in the role of Adam as the polishing of the mirror, mystically in the polishing of the mirror of the heart that occurs in mystical union or *fanâ*." See Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 84; Additionally, the idea of man (*al-insan al-kamil*) as mirror of God, and God as mirror of man was developed by Ibn ʿArabi. Obviously he built the idea based on the famous hadith by Mohammad that says: "The believer is the mirror of the believer."

was born with us. Unlike Ibn ʿArabi and Rumi, whose contour of metaphysical teachings is love, for Bīdel, it is incapacity because it is looked at as a requirement for acknowledgement of the Divine truth, while love is either unconditional or conditional and must be earned. In another verse, Bīdel calls the caravan itself incapacity that has lost its path and, yet, it is bewilderment that leads it aright.

Ṣadāy-ī az darā-i kārawān-i ʿajz mī-āyad
ki ḥayrat ham ba rāhi mi-barad gum karda rāhān rā[143]

From the caravan of incapacity comes a call
That bewilderment will direct the lost ones aright

The caravan of inability leads Bīdel to an unending path of bewilderment, multilayered, and nonlinear. The world in which he lives is in a transient state and in order to reach its ultimate destination, one has to go through the state of incapacity. When we are disenchanted and our endeavor for search of truth becomes futile, bewilderment comes to our help.

Another popular motif in Bīdel's mystical thinking is the mirror that faithfully reflects bewilderment. As noted earlier, mirror is one of Bīdel's favorite metaphors for reflecting the essence of God. It is also considered one of the common symbols in Ibn ʿArabi's school of thought, which embodies the Oneness of Being or what is known as *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Bīdel asserts that everything in this world reflects God's essence and when he sees himself in the mirror, he becomes bewildered, however, he declares that his bewilderment is unplanned and happens spontaneously, in a way that he has no control over anymore because he has become aware of God's greatness in creation.

bi ikhtīyār-i ḥayratam, az ḥayratam mapurs
āyīna ast āyīna, āyīna-sāz nīst[144]

[143] Kulliyat., 1: 13,
[144] Kulliyat., 1: 292.

Do not ask me of my bewilderment
Because I am involuntarily bewildered
The Mirror is the mirror,
There is not a mirror-maker

Bīdel, in this verse says that the waves of theophany (*tajallī*) of God have overwhelmed him altogether, and he is no longer able to resist not being bewildered. Since he is neither in authority nor able to expound upon his state of bewilderment, it is futile to be questioned. One may wonder why does Bīdel decline to be asked about his bewilderment? In the second hemistich, he describes that he is a mirror and nothing more; and, because a mirror is limited to its capacity that is already measured by a designer, it is the designer who is limitless and immeasurable. He implies that it is because of the light that is cast on him that has enabled him to reflect his essence; otherwise, he would be invisible, and the very nature of his world be terminated and fall into darkness. Finally, he concludes that the very bewilderment that he falls in is out of his hands because he believes that he is simply a mirror and that his bewilderment is even in control of the mirror-maker. What is demonstrated here is the state of unity and multiplicity, which is symbolized by mirror and mirror-maker as well the occurrence of theophany in the mirror. The forthright statement that Bīdel produces here is that the universe as a whole is the mirror of God, and since humans are part of the universe, we are, therefore, a mirror of God, but in the mirror or mirror-maker is all one.

Similarly, bewilderment is also projected in dew (*shabnam*). Dew is another important motif in Bīdel's mystical thought that underlies the principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Bīdel's creative imagination produces varieties of imageries and meanings for *shabnam* that are related to humans, ethic, clarity and purity, ephemerality,

insignificance, and finally bewilderment. In its existence, dew chiefly relies on meadows, dawn, and morning breezes, which are integral to its liability.

dar īn gulshan na bū-yī dīdam-u nay rang fahmīdam
chū shabnam ḥayratī gul kardam-u āyīna khandīdam[145]

In this meadow, neither I saw the smells nor did I know the color
Like a bewildered dew I flowered and laughed in the mirror

In this verse, dew is intended to designate a human being. Dew sits on a rose and blades of grass. By way of explanation, dew is always the companion of a flower. It is gleaming, but colorless and has no fragrance. The expression of "flowering of dew" means coming into existence, and because dew is crystal clear, its essence is water, and by that virtue, water can be a mirror and reflect a flower. He says that this world was like a meadow, and I have been the dew in it. My existence was fugacious, so much so that as soon as the sun rose and as a result of its effulgence on the meadow, which is my dwelling, I become bewildered, mystified, until I evaporated and finally, was annihilated in Him.

In the second hemistich, Bīdel explains that I was destined to blossom, and that was the purpose of my life in this world. The outcome of life was nothing but bewilderment. Humankind is characterized as a dewdrop that is nothing by itself; it is just like a mirror that reflects the flower, which is a metaphor for the beloved. Additionally, by using dew, which is a famous Sufi topos, Bīdel tries to illustrate the spiritual methodology (*sayr wa sulūk*) of mystical thought based on the ideas of multiplicity and unity. In order to better understand symbolic meaning of dew, Bīdel elucidates the complexity of meaning of dew through bewilderment in the following verse.

ḥayratīm ammā ba waḥshat-ha ham-āghūshīm mā

[145] Kulliyat., 1: 912.

hamchū shabnam bā nasīm-i ṣubh ham-dūshīm mā[146]

We are bewildered, but we are in companion of loneliness [147]
Like dew, we are in the company of the morning breeze

Evaporating with the rise of sun is like detaching one's self from the world's possession and joining the sea of light. Bīdel, like many other Sufis considers existence as a drop and that its ultimate goal is to join the ocean, but through the light. When the light strikes upon the meadow, dew vaporizes immediately. For Bīdel, the underlying concept of dew and bewilderment is both teleological. He tries to explain that our birth and our existence have a source, like particles of light on earth. The existence, as such, was expected to be perfect, but it is not; therefore, we are left with limited choice. We have to realize our weakness and imperfection and acknowledge the source of perfection so that we can draw our attention upon it.

tā saḥar bi parda gardad, shabnam az khūd rafta ast
alwidaʿ ay ham nishīnān! dilbaram āmad ba yād

Dew is perished, as soon as the dawn's veil has taken away
Companion! I just recalled my love, au revoir!

Furthermore, in Bīdel's mystical thought, dew functions an elusive aphorism for the state of bewilderment that encapsulates not only purity and sincerity, but also symbolically portrays existence on earth as short-lived, silence, colorlessness, humility, and union with beloved. Symbols like dew, mirror, and bewilderment are among the most common elements in Bīdel's metaphysics. These three elements are the main concepts

[146] Ibid., 577.
[147] In the contemporary Farsi literature, the word "*waḥshat*," sometimes is understood as dreary or fear, but this word has variety of meanings in Arabic as well as in Farsi. In classical Farsi poetry, it offers a range of meanings, such as desert, solitude, dreary place, loneliness, sadness, wildness, and fierceness. Here, the closest meaning of *waḥshat* is loneliness, but in most other works of Bīdel, it means disquietude or impatience in a positive manner.

that explain the state of multiplicity and unity of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in Bīdel's mystical works.

In this context, it is worth noting that one of the most salient features of multiplicity in Bīdel's thought is speech, in contrast to silence. Speech represents multiplicity; it negates the realm of unity, while silence transcends the world of multiplicity and provides access to the unity.[148] In Bīdel's metaphysics of thought, silence plays a key role because it shares ontological characteristics with bewilderment.

> *ḥayrat zabān-i shūkhī-yi asrār-i mā bas ast*
> *āyīna mashrabān ba nigah guftgū kunand*[149]
>
> Bewilderment is the language
> That adequately unveils the playfulness of our secrets
> Those with the mirror-like disposition,
> Communicate through sight

Here, Bīdel comes to a decisive moment, disclosing something about bewilderment: the fact that it cannot keep secrets of his heart. In this respect, bewilderment, *per se*, is considered a medium of communication between the exterior and interior world. Bīdel is aware of the fact that mysteries known to him should not be told in public, but he also alludes to the reality that he has no ability to retain control over his state of bewilderment because he thinks of it as natural to let the restless secrets make themselves known.

It appears that at the heart of Bīdel's state of silence lies one important key factor: the mirror. By means of interlocking imageries and words, Bīdel attempts to extract an ontological result, that of the heart as a polished mirror and a place of manifestation of

[148] Hajnalka Kovacs, "*The Tavern of the Manifestation of Realities: The Masnavi Muhit-i Azam by Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), 18.
[149] Kulliyat., 1: 481.

ultimate reality. A mirror is a symbol of self-manifestation, which displays whatever it has instilled in it. Without uttering a word, it communicates through images that lead to a perpetual self-disclosure. Whatever manifests in the mirror is reality. This correlates with the idea of Ibn ʿArabi that the reality reveals itself, from time to time, quite independently of human will or effort, in order to instill into creatures the awareness of their true origin and essential nature.[150] Bīdel tells us that silence is the key to let the reality penetrate deep into our consciousness, and hence, it is in the state of tranquility in which reality will voluntarily expose itself.

This explanation requires another Bīdel's key concept, that of the love (ʿ *shq*), which is coupled with silence and bewilderment. Love is the unconditional and sustaining state for Divine longing. It enables a seeker to restrain the ego, which is a center for colors, shapes and multiplicity. Love provides a venue to secrets of reality and the Unity of Existence; however, the disadvantage of love is that it is a self-revealing language of bewilderment because it is established on senses. Feelings of love can be out of control and cannot be hid, because they are transparent. Despite being silent, the secrets of love, which are Bīdel's feelings for his beloved, are spilt out.

> *khamūsh gashtam-u asrār-i ʿ shq pinhān nīst*
> *kasī chi chārah kunad ḥayrat-i sukhangū rā*[151]
>
> The secrets of love is divulging
> Even so, I chose to be silent
> What can one do with the self-disclosure of bewilderment?

Bīdel states that despite his being silent and uttering no word, the secrets of love are manifesting themselves. He implies that the concealment of secrets of love has been a

[150] Muḥyiddin Ibn ʿArabi, *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruḥ al-Quds and al-Durrat al-Fākhirah*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (London: Beshara, 1971), 51.
[151] Kulliyat., 1: 37.

difficult task because concealment tends to suggest that some Sufis may possess secret knowledge of truth and yet do not want to reveal it, therefore, they choose to be silent. In other words, it is possible that a Sufi can attain a lofty status in the Unity of Existence or arrive at the station of self-realization. Such achievement is considered secrets of the heart, but, for whatever reason, the secrets are self-revealing.[152] Once again, in this verse, Bīdel clearly acknowledges his inability in the face of the irresistible power of bewilderment that has left him no option other than obeying.

Bewilderment in Bīdel's thinking has fluidity: it does not pause or cease; it is continuous, and sometimes it becomes silent and colorless. All of these form in perceptual observation, which is called the internal senses (*ḥawāss bāṭinah*)--that is, one of seven internal senses defined by Avicenna.[153] All these elements, albeit in a rudimentary stage, are instrumental in creation of conditions in which instantaneous events occur. However, this can happen only through the path of *ʿajz* (incapacity) because it is in this stage where one can overcome the desire, fear and assumptions that are deep-seated and conditioned in us. As such, if a person can identify the functionality of his consciousness, he or she, in the meantime, can realize the source of the problems. This is perhaps one of the most noted qualities of Bīdel's thinking, where he can be seen in his deepest level of consciousness. It allows him to go beyond mundane consciousness

[152] Badi'ozzamān Foruzānfar has first mentioned this in his voluminous bibliography on Rumi. According to Foruzānfar Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, has infrequently used nicknames such as *khamūsh and khāmūsh,* which both means 'silent.' For further reading see Badi'ozzamān Foruzānfar, *Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī mashhūr ba mawlawi* (Tehran, Kitab Parsa, 2011); also see Sefik Can, *Fundamentals of Rumi's Thought* (New Jersey: Light, 2005), 40.

[153] Avicenna was strongly influenced by Aristotle's metaphysics. Aristotle believed that we have five external senses and three international senses (common sense, imagination, memory). Avicenna modified it and stated that we have seven internal senses: common sense, retentive imagination, composite animal imagination, composite human imagination, estimative power, and the ability to remember outcomes of lower processes, the ability to use that information. See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89.

where silence and the state of repose created an ideal condition for spiritual attainment and where bewilderment is met with exaltation and peace. This is what Bīdel desires to achieve, a pleasing state of losing of one's self in the infinite self of Divine reality.

Bīdel's poetry has a complex, distinctive style, which produces intricate meanings and imagery. In the light of this complexity and obscure style, he has been called "*Abu al-Maʿani*," (The Father of Meanings). In Bīdel's work, metaphors and symbols are intricately interlocked, but their inner meanings remain lucid.

In the domain of Farsi literature, Bīdel must be treated differently than any other poet, even those who are considered influential to his thinking. He is unique in the sense that he has to be read differently than other poets. One of the most common misunderstandings among researchers when reading Bīdel's poetry is an expectation of similarities with medieval Persian poets such as Rumi, Saʿdi, Ḥāfeẓ and Khayyām. While Bīdel has many commonalities with these poets in ways of thinking, he frames his thought differently. His medium, sometimes, is the vernacular and is layered with images and symbols only common among ordinary people. The Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* have less prevalence in his thought than that of other poets. Despite his emphasis on the vernacular, Bīdel was an intellectual and could have read the metaphysics of Avicenna because one can trace Avicennian influence, especially when Bīdel talks about the internal senses.

To some degree, Bīdel's thinking correlates with that of Omar Khayyam, who had a pessimistic disposition toward life and viewed faith matters with sarcasm. There are several poems of his poems that are not theistic, which cast doubt on the afterlife, for instance, calling it "*ḥich*," (nothing) or "*sifr*," zero. Like Khayyam, Bīdel raises open-ended questions when he finds everything bewildering, including our own existence.

Although Bīdel follows the conventional Persian poetry rules, he does not like clichés; instead, he creates new vocabularies, new compound words, and then threads them together in order to fit in his complex ideas. He warns his readers that his poems are complicated and not everyone can understand them. He says, "My high meanings require acute perception."[154] Indeed, comprehending and analyzing Bīdel's poetry requires a level of understanding of the skills and techniques employed in his poetry. In Iran, he has been neglected because of his complex and highly elaborate, not easily revealed meanings. Bīdel follows the conventional form of classical imagery of the Farsi language that already had been used by Sanā'i, Attar, Rumi, and Saʿdī; however, he develops a new dimension within the same framework, adding a different depth.

Bewilderment, in both the fields of philosophy and Islamic mysticism, plays a key role in instigating the desire for thinking; however, its applicability remains entirely divergent in other traditions. Bewilderment, according to Aristotle, is the departure point for acquiring knowledge, because one can raise question out of wonderment, like "what is X?" However, one could argue that a prerequisite to bewilderment in philosophical discourse is defined as nothing other than ignorance because it presupposes that the notion of "not-knowing" causes bewilderment, as it does for Plato.

In Islamic mysticism, the rational faculty is considered an obstacle to the realization of the Divine reality; therefore, a faculty of sense-perception is considered the only way to attain knowledge of the ultimate reality. In Sufism, on the other hand, bewilderment is considered a gift that can help a gnostic on spiritual journey towards discovering the unknown world to find God. It comes from the Sufi idea that God is

[154] See page 3.

beyond our understanding and that he is limitless, not found in any possible form; he is All-Powerful, he is All-Pervasive, and his Understanding is bewildering because he does wondrous things that the rational faculty cannot fathom, and, therefore, it becomes bewildered. Consequently, the only reliable path to knowing God is bewilderment that transcends the limits of reason and rationality because it is a genuine path of understanding the ultimate reality in mysticism.

In conclusion, Bīdel believes that the mystery of the unity of the world and His essence is multilayered. We can understand what we observe, and we are able to explain what we see, but there is so much that is unseen that eludes our eyes and minds. We are in the state of perpetual inability and weakness, and in order to engage with the Unity of Being in the metaphysical realm, we have to employ our imagination (*khayāl*). Bīdel is an avid observer in this realm; he has built a strong imaginative world that his creative mind can maneuver. This is a major trait in his thought, and it is not comprehensible unless we go beyond conventional poetic principles and submit to his boundless poetic freshness.

For Bīdel, existence is wrapped in mysteries, totally indecipherable or impossible to envision, and because of our inability to do so puts us in a disadvantageous position, we can only be bewildered about those mysteries, and that bewilderment is the doorway to understanding some aspects of reality, but not all. Finally, bewilderment is not harmful as Descartes describes it;[155] rather it is a Divine gift for seekers, like Bīdel, who are in pursuit of intimate knowledge of the Real. Lastly, bewilderment is a departure point for

[155] Descartes warns that bewilderment can be harmful if it turns into a settled disposition. He postulates that all passions are based on wonder or bewilderment as a primary passion and all other passions - desire, hate, love, sadness, and joy - are secondary. He identifies bewilderment as the 'first of all passions' because it occurs before we understand the object, which is in contrast with Heidegger's argument that bewilderment requires some basic knowledge. Furthermore, Descartes calls wonder a "sudden surprise of the soul," that is associated with the impression of the brain when encountering something rare and new. See René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 52-61.

Bīdel, not from the realm of reason and rational faculty, but rather a departure from the temporal dimension to a mystical and aesthetic sphere.

CONCLUSION

Mīrzā ʿAbd al-Qādir Bīdel is regarded by many as the most difficult and challenging poet of the Persian language to this day. Reading and understanding his poetry requires not only literary skills, but also interpretative prowess. Considering the difficulty of his poetry, it is not easy to write or talk about his vastly diverse characteristics and qualities of thinking. It is said that Bīdel in his early life was religious, but in his later life, he became spiritual and was attracted to the philosophical teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism. Methodologically, my approach to this study is as an insider and an outsider, not only as a native cultural informant, but also as a linguistic informant. As such, I have explained the intricacy of Bīdel's language as well as provided tools to resolve issues and tease out meanings that are concealed behind poetic devices. I do not provide a magic carpet enabling full comprehension of Bīdel's poetry. Rather, I have sketched out a map with guided routes that a reader can use to find his or her way through the difficult terrain of his thinking.

For future scholars who will work in this area, the best, and perhaps, easiest, way to appreciate Bīdel's work is to divide his work into three principle areas: his quatrains, his book, *Chahār ʿUnsur,* and his book*, Roqaʾāt*. One should read his quatrains (*rubāʿiyāt*) first for familiarization with his language and for understanding his poems because of the simplicity and accessibility of the meaning conveyed in quatrains. The quatrains are two couplets. This media, like Twitter today, demands a relatively direct

and straight interpretation because there is no space for explanation. Second, his book, *Chahārʿ Unsur* (The Four Elements), provides an additional foundation for understanding his life as well as his philosophical thinking. Third, his book *Roqaʾāt*, which is a collection of his correspondence, provides the reader with insights into his relationship with Mughal officials and the literati of his time. All Bīdel's works have been accurately preserved. His *Kullīyāt* — which, include the primary three categories — comprises three volumes of poetry (147,000 verses) and one of prose. Bīdel occupies a unique place in the history of Persian poetry principally because he enriched the language by inventing hundreds of compound words and innovative vernacular poetic techniques. Despite the overwhelming significance of his oeuvre, Bīdel has been neglected until recently.

There could be two reasons for this oversight. One is that because Bīdel used vernacular poetic techniques that were unheard of, his critics did not understand his language. By utilizing these techniques, he brought unprecedented novelties to the Persian poetry. One of the salient examples is that through metaphors, allegories, and symbols, he granted agency to nonhuman entities (both implicitly and explicitly) and emphasized how they influence human behavior.[156] This may have been shocking to his contemporaries; not only because they found them preposterous, but they could also be labeled as blasphemous and wicked because God in the Qurʾān says, "I am setting on the earth a vicegerent [*khalīfah*]" (Qurʾān 2:30).[157] It is clear that Bīdel's philosophical

[156] There are hundreds of agentive entities in Bīdel's works, including flood, hat, hair, footprints, wind, plants, mountain, desert, shadow, dew, water, fire, etc.

[157] This is not particular to Islam. In Christianity, there is a similar affirmation: Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, [a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1: 26).

concern is to extend subjectivities beyond the human species. In that sense, he was ahead of his time as this is currently the main topic of posthumanism.[158]

Second, Bīdel's contemporaries probably never liked or understood his highly cerebral poems because they are saturated with abstract ideas and imaginings that operate almost allegorically for the stories depicted in his poems. Though the images themselves are established via the senses, they cannot be conceived of strictly as rational. Bīdel invokes images that are created under the influence of imagination and then he brings them into consciousness for rational and contemplative purposes.

Considering the vast dimension of imaginative values of Bīdel's poetry, we can speculate (building on the work of David Shulman) that he was under the influence of ancient Indian linguistic theories, namely the *rasa* and *dhvani* school.[159] In the *rasa* school, advocates mainly emphasize the experiential or subjective aspect of meaning, while *dhvani* embodied into meanings and the suggestive power of words.[160] In the *dhvani* school, the conventional meanings of a word appear secondary, while the main emphasis is on the intention to create implied meanings, which is called suggestive poetry. The main purpose of the concept of *dhvani* is to influence the reader through senses, not explicitly, but implicitly or suggestively in order to produce *rasa* (taste or

[158] It is clear that human agency happens through attachments. Bīdel wants us to encounter and feel the power of the agentive attachments in our daily life. These ideas lie at the core of his metaphysical concept of self-effacement, incapacity, and how one detaches oneself in order to eradicate agency.
[159] In Sanskrit, *dhvani* means sound, echo, or resonance; and *rasa* means taste or savor. These aesthetic schools were the two most influential poetic theories in ancient India; the latter emerged out of the former. See David Shulman, "Illumination, Imagination, Creativity: Rājaśekhara, Kuntaka, and Jagannātha on "*Pratibhā*"," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 4 (2008): 481-505.
[160] Pravas Jivan Chaudhury, "The Theory of Rasa," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1 (1965): 145-49.

flavor). *Rasa* is responsible for the imaginative power to create meanings, sounds, colors, feelings, suggestions and adumbrations in words beyond denotation.[161]

This description reminds us of the verbal complex and emotive context of words that we see in Bīdel's poetry. In his poetry, words appear with a multitude of meanings in addition to their literal definition; they describe something other than themselves, the appearance of or the *dhvani,* the resonance. It is in this theoretical context that lies the concept of *pratibhā,* meaning illumination, which is a visionary and luminous mode.[162] *Pratibhā* is the imaginative faculty that enables the poet to have a connotative power over words. In *Sabk-i Hindi,* this visionary faculty is called *khayāl.* Similar to *pratibhā, khayāl* is a spontaneous visionary insight, which is the innate power of intentional imagining or phantasy in order to produce aestheticism. One of the salient features of both *khayāl* and *pratibhā* is to create freshness and new thematic significance. It is very likely that the theory of *pratibhā* cut through the linguistic boundary, especially, since we know that Jagannātha Paṇḍita[163] was one of Bīdel's contemporaries: a Sanskrit scholar and poet who worked with *pratibhā* and preserved the discourse around the significance of it.[164]

Bīdel's style is *khayāl.* The closest translation of this word would be the Greek word "phantasia," suggesting that imagination is the "psychological capacity to receive, interpret, and even produce appearances and to those appearances themselves."[165] Imagination or *pratibhā* is the power of mind over objects; for Bīdel, those objects are

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[161] Gupeshwar Prasad, *I.A. Richards and Indian Theory of Rasa* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 231.
[162] Shulman, ibid.
[163] Jagannātha Paṇḍita was a famous poet and literary critic who lived in the 17th century. He served in the courts of Mughal emperors and was a contemporary of Bīdel.
[164] For further reading see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-i Hindi," The Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004):1-93; Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 39-130.
[165] See Encyclopedia.com

either appearances that are created in images or appearances themselves. This is much like the state of wonder, which is depicted in the mirror or in the state of incapacity, in which the subject loses its agency and becomes the totality. For Sufis, it is one of the characteristics of *fanā,* or annihilation, in the path of the Real.

What is remarkable is that the state of bewilderment, *or camatkaratva* (in the *rasa* and *dhvani* school), which means transcendental pleasure works within the theory of *pratibhā.* It is possible that Bīdel's understanding of *ḥayrat* (bewilderment) is strongly influenced by the concept of *pratibhā* within the school of *rasa* and *dhvani*. This insight is significant if it turns out that Bīdel was, indeed, influenced by these ancient Indian linguistic theories. Of course, this information is solely conjecture since I only became aware of it while writing this conclusion. Any future studies on this topic would be groundbreaking.

As I have discussed throughout this thesis, Bīdel was strongly influenced by Ibn ʿArabi's metaphysics. I reemphasize here, however, that it would be a mistake to assume that Bīdel was under the influence of Ibn ʿArabi for his entire life and throughout his entire work. His impression of Ibn ʿArabi was based on ontological exploration of the existence of the truth. Therefore, he employs terminologies and phrases that are common in Islamic mysticism in order to establish his own philosophical metaphysical concepts that are not purely within the Islamic context, but are more in the context of Indian tradition imbued by Buddhist and Hindu teachings.

As I have explained here, Ibn ʿArabi's influence on Bīdel is undeniable, especially when it comes to the concept of the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Many of the motifs, which are used to explain the Unity of Existence in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*

by Ibn ʿArabi can be found in Bīdel's work. For instance, when Bīdel uses the word *ʿajz*, he talks about the selflessness of the human spirit, which is a process of the effacement of the ego. For Bīdel, to overcome one's *nafs,* or ego, is not only the first step of awareness, but it is considered the first step towards illumination. It is a few steps closer to reaching the truth.

Furthermore, it would be wrong to Islamicize Bīdel's thinking in its entirety because it would lead us to disregard the influence of Buddhism and Hinduism on his thinking. When Bīdel talks about bewilderment, it is not simply a prelude to encounter with the Real; rather, it is the state in which human comprehension ceases to function. For Bīdel this is the end of everything, and he concludes that the rest is nothing but *wahm,* or illusion.

> *Daryā-yi khīālīm-u namī nīst dar īnjā*
> *juz wahm wujūd-i ʿadamī nīst dar īnjā*[166]
>
> Here, we are the sea of imagination, but without wetness
> Here, there's nothing, except an illusory existence and oblivion

[166] Kulliyat., 1: 73.

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