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CHAPTER ONE

UNVEILING THE GARDEN OF LOVE

... whose naked glory you hide
under hundreds of veils.

—Annemarie Schimmel

The Issue at Hand

Man's mystical experience, which is a direct experience of the Divine Presence in the here and now, has been said to be a state which surpasses human understanding or description. Yet, throughout the ages, this experience has been expressed through diverse forms of sacred and traditional art. Thus art functions as a vehicle for expressing the mystical experience. Frithjof Schuon (2003) says that all traditional art belongs in some way or other to the ritual domain, and that art is

> ... a projection of truth and beauty in the world of forms; it is *ipso facto* a projection of archetypes.... It means concentration, a way back to God.... The archetypes of sacred art are celestial inspirations; all other artworks draw their inspiration from the spiritual personality of the artist.

Of all the artistic forms of expression, poetry, specifically that of a mystical nature, plays a central role. In the same way that music is the vehicle, or medium of expression for the musician, and paint the medium for the artist, so is language the medium for the writer. Through this medium, mystical and metaphysical poets and writers have produced abundant and eloquent works extolling their spiritual experiences.

In most religious traditions the mystical experience is established as ineffable and inconceivable, precisely because it is a transcendental, other-worldly, and extra-ordinary experience. That being the case, the question usually posed is: how do words of an ordinary, human language capture and convey an extra-ordinary, transcendental experience? The answer, as attested to by all major religious and literary tra-

ditions is, by recourse to the language of symbolism.[1] Humanity uses symbols as a concrete or perceptible means of expressing the experience of abstract, imperceptible, spiritual, and divine realities. Schuon's expression of this is as follows (Coomaraswamy 1981, 252):

> In order to bring the realm of the spiritual and the divine within the range of perception, humanity ... loses the immediate union with the divine and the immediate vision of the spiritual. Then it tries to embody in a tangible or otherwise perceptible form, to materialize what is intangible, and imperceptible. It makes symbols ... and sees in them and through them the spiritual and divine substance that has no likeness and could not otherwise be seen.

At the most heightened state of consciousness, the mystical experience has been perceived as an encounter between two intangible entities, namely, the human soul and Divine Reality. In order to express the abstract encounter therefore, the concrete has to be expediently employed. In this context, the paradigms of love between man and woman, in all its myriad aspects, have most often been employed by mystics as a means of expressing this experience. In portraying this earthly love, however, the concern is usually not with the actual persons figured, but with them as archetypes, and as symbols of divine realities.

It is also of significance that symbolic expression generally focuses on the *process towards union*, rather than on union per se, with the Divine. In diverse mystical traditions this ontological experience has been given emphasis because mystical union is arrived at only through the stages of a long and arduous path.[2] This path, or journey, is expressed by the portrayal of human love-in-separation, in which the lovers are "torn" from each other. The separation is characterized by a searching, or quest, and a journey back to each other, fraught with pain, agony, and intense longing. This state of affairs symbolizes the consciousness of the human soul of its separation from God, and a yearning to return to its Source. This yearning has been hauntingly

[1] In a general sense, symbolism may take the form of images, allegories, parables, metaphors, or figurative expressions. It can also be in the form of characters, types, archetypes, prototypes, or mythical figures.

[2] See Marcoulesco (1993).

portrayed in "The Lament of the Reed," one of the most beautiful Sufi poems ever written. It conveys the plaintive cry of the reed (symbolizing the human soul) being torn from its original place (symbolizing Divine Reality). The great Persian mystic of the thirteenth century, Jalalu'l-Din Rumi), wrote (Ardalan 1998, 106):

> Harken to this Reed forlorn,
> Breathing, ever since 'twas torn
> From its rushy bed, a strain
> Of impassioned love and pain ...
> 'Tis the flame of love that fired me,
> 'Tis the wine of love inspired me.
> Wouldst thou learn how lovers bleed
> Harken, harken to the Reed

In the context of this process towards re-union, two great and dominant traditions, namely the Islamic-Sufi tradition of Persia, and the Hindu-Bhakti tradition of India, have produced literary works of singular beauty and merit in the form of prose, as well as poetry. In particular, two classic poems, Nizami's *Layla Majnun* (Gelpke 1997), and Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* (Miller 1984), have gained widespread acclaim and canonicity within their individual literary traditions, as well as sanctity in their originating mystico-religious traditions.

Accordingly, there have been literary studies and enquiries carried out on both *Layla Majnun* (henceforth *Layla*) and *Gitagovinda* (henceforth *Govinda*). However, the profundity of these outstanding works cannot be sufficiently appreciated unless the literary elements therein are fully considered and explained in relation to the mystical content. In particular, the importance among mystics of symbols as the means for expressing the ultimate meaning of poems, renders it worthwhile to investigate the literary elements for their underlying mystical meanings. Apart from the literary and mystical meaning, the affinities and commonalities, and the differences and contrasts, between these texts have not yet been considered from a comparative approach. Although scholars such as Toshihiko Izutsu, S.H. Nasr, and Ananda Coomaraswamy have extensively examined philosophical doctrines from a comparative point of view, no one has examined the poetry of these traditions from a comparative perspective.

The issue to be addressed in the present study is the symbolic meaning of expressions in *Layla* and *Govinda*, as representative

works of two different literary and mystical traditions. Considering that symbolism is the main criterion of assessing a poem's ultimate meaning among the mystics, it seems worthwhile to investigate the underlying philosophical assumptions of this poetic symbolism. In other words, the study focuses on the inward meaning of outward expressions. Based on a casual observation of the texts in question, it appears that there are similarities, affinities, and commonalities, as well as contrasts, disparities, and differences. This observation presents a challenging prospect for reconciling the manifest, literary elements, with the hidden, mystical dimensions of these elements.

At the literary level, the texts are acknowledged as masterpieces and as classic love stories. *Layla* is one of the best-known legends of the Middle East, of which it is said: "The two lovers of this classic tale are remembered to this day in the poems and songs from the Caucasus to the interior of Africa, and from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean" ("Nizami" 2001). Similarly, Jayadeva's work is repeatedly referred to as the immortal lyrics of *Gitagovinda*" (Mukherjee 1989).

There have been many retellings of the tragic love story of *Layla*. In several versions and adaptations in the West, in India, and even in popular Persian literature, it has frequently been regarded as a narrative of two ill-fated lovers separated by feuding families, much in the manner of Shakespeare's classic love story, *Romeo* & *Juliet*.[3] Similarly, *Govinda* has often, even among Indian scholars themselves, been relegated to an account of "the illicit and rapturous love of Radha for Krishna," and perceived merely as an aesthetic rendition of an erotic Indian tale. As individual love stories, the *extent* of literary parallels between the texts remains undiscovered. Consequently, the potential for mutual understanding and enrichment between the two literary traditions has been missed. In this context, it is possible that a comparative and systematic study of literary elements may reveal the extent of parallels between the two texts.

Beyond the extent of apparent literary parallels between *Layla* and *Govinda*, the real *nature* of the parallels between the two texts in question is also unknown. In other words, it has not been ascertained

[3] Adaptations also exist as films, especially in India, the most famous being "Heer Ranjha," and "Heera Panna," depicted as Indian characters, and the Punjabi "Sohni Mehwal," depicted as Middle Eastern, or Moghul, characters.

whether or not the manifest similarities and differences exist only at a superficial, physical, or outward plane, or if there is a deeper, mystical, or inward affinity between them. Therefore, there is a possibility that the literary elements in the texts of two different traditions veil a further dimension. This possibility arises from the idea that there are enduring and universal principles of likeness and correspondence among the world's mystical traditions that come to light when they are closely examined. In this connection, Huston Smith has posed a challenging question about the ubiquity of likenesses of this nature, in a powerful aquatic metaphor. He asks: "What precisely,... is this subterranean water table which, pressurized by truth ... gushes forth wherever and whenever the earth is scratched?" (2001, 140). This question, considered in relation to different religious traditions, applies equally to the Persian-Islamic-Sufi, and the Indian-Hindu-Bhakti, traditions respectively. Thus, an inquiry into comparable concepts in the texts of *Layla* and *Govinda* may well be able to address the question.

Approach to the Issues

In comparing literary elements in the texts of *Layla* and *Govinda* the realities expressed in the two texts will be subjected to intra-textual interpretation and explanation, as well as inter-textual comparison. This will include both similar/parallel expressions as well as contrastive/contrary expressions, pursued at both the literary and the mystical levels of meaning.

The major, underlying principle of approach to *Layla* and *Govinda* is the progress from the lower to the higher level of understanding of human expression. This means that through the interpretation of literary elements, the mystical and esoteric elements will be unveiled. This principle, aptly stated by Reza Shah-Kazemi in relation to the writings of Martin Lings, is especially relevant for stating our purposes. He writes that (Shah-Kazemi 1999, 61, emphasis mine):

> ... interpretation of the image furnishes us with a key for comprehending the works.... His manner of treating this subject always carries the reader from the realm of *forms* to that of the *Essence*, from the *particular* to the *Universal*, and from the *symbol* to the *Archetype*.

A reading of the texts based on this principle allows multiple levels of interpretation. Foregrounding literary variations among the texts, this work initially brings out the nature of textual and outward similarities, as well as differences. Subsequently, the esoteric or underlying spiritual principles of the Islamic-Sufi tradition discerned from *Layla*, is compared with that of the Hindu-Bhakti tradition evinced from *Govinda*. In this way the question of whether or not there is a significant equivalence between the texts at the literary and spiritual levels may be reliably ascertained.

Within the above context, the hermeneutic approach, focusing specifically on the ideas developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, forms the basis of enquiry. This approach is informed by the Traditionalist perspective which is in fact intrinsic to hermeneutics, even though the Traditionalists deal mainly with traditional and spiritual principles, rather than with poetry. The key concepts and features of hermeneutics, as well as the Traditionalist perspective, are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

The term hermeneutics originated in the classical Greek tradition. Its etymology can be traced to Hermes, the messenger of the Greek god Zeus (Jupiter in Latin). Zeus is identified, among other things, as the transmitter of Olympian messages into a language understandable to the lowly mortals (Quito 1990, 8). He is also known as the god of sleep, of alchemy and transformation, and of boundaries, who guides the newly dead to the underworld. "Hermeneutics" as related to interpretation derives from the Greek term *hermeneuein* meaning "to interpret." In this context it has three senses: to interpret poetry orally; to explain; and to translate. This term is closely associated with *hermeneutike mantike*, the technique of oracle interpretation, whereas poets are referred to as *hermenes ton theon*, "interpreters of the gods" (Preminger 1993, 516). Hermeneutics has come to mean "the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding" (Palmer 1969, 3). In the same context, it is associated with "revealing the hidden" (Preminger 1993, 517). On this basis, hermeneutics, and more specifically, spiritual hermeneutics, has been particularly applied to the interpretation of works of divine origin, including the Vedas and the Koran. In the Hindu tradition, the counterpart of hermeneutics is

brahmavidya, meaning "the supreme science."[4] On the other hand, the Arabic term *ta'wil*, meaning "to cause to return" or to lead something back to its beginning or origin, is a legitimate form of hermeneutics in Islamic literary criticism.[5]

Hermeneutics has reemerged as an important discipline in the human sciences, particularly in philosophy and literature. The philosophers directly responsible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are of the German and French schools. Notable of the former group are, F.D.E. Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, whereas taking center stage of the latter group are Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida.

Although differing from each other in terms of features developed in the notion of hermeneutics, both Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989), and Paul Ricoeur (1985), underscore its philosophical and ontological nature. In opposing its consideration as a methodological, and therefore scientific, process, Gadamer says that truth eludes the methodical individual and hence, method retards, if not subverts, the truth. In other words, we reach the truth not methodically but dialectically (Quito 1990, 51). In the same vein, although Ricoeur does not rule out hermeneutics as a method, he discards the objective, rigid, structured method of the natural sciences. He (1985, 94) says:

> The question of truth is no longer the question of method; it is the question of the manifestation of being, for a being whose existence consists in understanding being.

[4] *Brahmavidya* is considered an introspective tool, with which the inspired *rishis* (literally "seers") who lived ascetic and celibate lives (*brahmacharya*) in the forest hermitages (*ashram*) of ancient India analyzed the awareness of human experience to see if there was anything in it that was absolute. "Supreme" because where other sciences studied the external world, *brahmavidya* sought knowledge of an underlying reality which would inform all other studies and activities. The discoveries of *brahmavidya* are *shruti*, i.e., records of the direct encounter with the divine transmitted through *shabda*, literally, "sound" or "that which is heard." See the Introduction by Eknath Easwaran in his translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1986, 4-5).

[5] *Ta'wil* refers specifically to spiritual exegesis of the revealed truths contained in religious sources. In the Islamic literary tradition, it is an esoteric form of interpretation to achieve the inner understanding of the text, arrived at by means of symbolic interpretation. However, penetrating the significance of a symbol is done by intuitively sensing the original spiritual experience attained by the author of the text, and not through rational elucidation. See Md. Salleh Yaapar (1988, 44-45).

From the hermeneutic perspective, Ricoeur's understanding of symbol highlights the revelatory function of a symbol. An apparent meaning points analogically to a second meaning which is not given otherwise. In this context, his idea of the "architecture of meaning" is explained in the following manner (Blaikie 1995, 154):

> The symbol as it stands means more than one thing; there are different levels of meaning contained in it. The most obvious, or literal meaning hides the figurative meaning but at the same time it also discloses it, since the figurative meaning cannot be grasped except through the literal meaning.

However it should be remembered that even though all symbols are signs, every sign is not a symbol. A symbol enjoys a "double intentionality." Therefore while a sign manifests other than itself, it does not invite thought. Signs perform indicative function while symbols also have an added dimension: they perform a revelatory function.

In the hermeneutical definition, a text is viewed as a projection of the human world, in that it imitates the world in a relation of *mimesis* and *poesis*. This means that the text is not merely a copy or duplication of the world, but an author's creative and intentional act, conveying a particular discourse. Further, the text entails a specific context which is determined by its "historical tradition," or "culture," or "worldview," and situated in a particular milieu, i.e. its location in time and space. This milieu constitutes the historicity of the text. As the author's act is his construction of the human reality situated in a particular context, his text should therefore be understood through its historicity, rather than as an autonomous entity.

In this context, it is important to the process of understanding and interpreting a text to be aware that the author and his text, and the reader (or interpreter), originate from different cultures or traditions, or, in Gadamer's terms, different "horizons." This difference invariably influences and colors the interpreter's understanding. Consequently, there has to occur a "fusion of horizons," in order for interpretation to take place. This is a process whereby the horizons of the text are merged with the horizons of the reader. According to Ricoeur, several elements are inherent in this process. One is *Aneignung* or appropriation, meaning "genuinely to make one's own what is initially alien" (1981, 18). Appropriation requires the correct attitude in approaching

a text. In relation to the text, this attitude is one of sympathy. The aim is to "hear" or "see" what lies beyond the words of a text. In doing so, the interpreter's openness to the relevant tradition will allow the text to reveal itself to the interpreter. One has to look beyond what is said in the everyday meaning of the language, to what is being taken for granted, while it is being said (Blaikie 1995, 64). In allowing the text to reveal itself, the anteriority of the text, or what stands "in front" of it, comes into play. The notion of anteriority is explained by Ricoeur (1986, 68) as follows:

> Ultimately, what the reader appropriates is a *proposed world*, which is not behind the text, as a hidden intention would be, but *in front of it* as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text.* It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self.

Acceptance, and thereby a fuller appreciation, is enabled when the nature of the interaction between the self and the text "ceases to appear as a kind of possession, (and) implies instead a moment of dis-possession of the narcissistic ego" (1986, 68). In this context an important contrastive differentiation is held between "self" and "ego," whereby it is the text, "with its universal power of unveiling, which gives a *self* to the *ego*" (1986, 68).

If in relation to the text, appropriation requires the correct attitude, in relation to the interpreter, appropriation requires a suspension of the self. This involves the encounter between the self and the text, which is becoming aware of his own deep-seated assumptions, prejudices, or horizon of meaning, with regard to the nature of the experience or the object being studied. Without the encounter between the self and the text, preconceived notions would otherwise remain unknown or ignored. Awareness, and subsequently a relinquishment, of prejudices, brings about a suspension of presupposition and judgment, as well as a critical self-consciousness and, ultimately, a transformation or metamorphosis. In this case metamorphosis is understood as a relinquishment of the self as it were, by the interpreter, to the objective guidance and support of the text. Subsequently, a genuine understanding is achieved, not only of what is written together with

its inherent traits, but also of what he is himself, as a part of the meaning of the text.

It is equally important to be aware that the subject matter of the text is answering a particular question. Therefore, rather than attempt an "objective" interpretation, it is the responsibility of the interpreter first to reconstruct the question that the text is answering, and subsequently, to engage in a conversation or dialogue about it. For both Gadamer and Ricoeur, dialogue involves dialectics, whereby all contradictions and conflicting forces that come into play have to be worked out in the process of investigating the truth.

A consequence of the encounter between the interpreter and the text is that the interpreter's horizons are altered and thereby, broadened. Ricoeur describes this as "an ultimate expansion of consciousness" (1986, 68). By this he does not mean that the interpreter is trying to discover what the text or the author "really means," but rather that he is basically "becoming" an "experiencer" of the tradition that opens or reveals itself to him. In this context, hermeneutics means "bridging the gap between one's familiar world and the meaning that resides in an alien world" (Blaikie 1995, 64). Thus, as has been emphasized by most scholars of hermeneutics, "Understanding is not reconstruction, but mediation" (Linge, in Blaikie 1995, 64). The direct effect of mediation may be seen as the establishment of a connection between the self and the other at a level such that both the interpreter and the text are mutually transformed.

In consideration of all of the above attitudes, views, notions, contexts, and concepts, understanding is an ontological condition of mankind. Besides, in view of the fact that language is the conveyor of meaning, it allows us not only to understand a particular experience, but also the world in which it occurs. In this connection, Gadamer argues that even from the world of our own language we can grasp the world of another language. This view is explained as follows (Gadamer 1989 65):

> ... as language has a universal function of providing human beings with a world of shared understanding, and (as) hermeneutics is linguistic in nature, hermeneutics itself also has universal significance.

Accordingly, it is possible for the interpreter to identify elements of universal significance in literary works, when he adopts the foregoing

approach to interpretation. It also allows for subjectivity in recovering meaning. Subjectivity is important, for there cannot be only one true, original, meaning in a human expression, even for the author himself. Consequently, meaning is always open-ended. In Gadamer's words, "Art demands interpretation because of its inexhaustible ambiguity. It cannot be satisfactorily translated in terms of conceptual knowledge" (Gadamer 1989 65).

The problematic of different horizons, particularly in the modern (as opposed to the traditional) worldview, is that there has occurred a gradual and almost complete estrangement between the secular and the spiritual realities, which in effect is held by Ricoeur to be an estrangement from meaning itself. In order to recover this meaning, as well as to bridge the distances, points of view, horizons, or tensions between the other and the self, the fusion of horizons is advocated, in which appropriation occurs. Furthermore, appropriation takes place not arbitrarily or subjectively, but bound by the authority of tradition. Thus appropriation facilitates the unveiling of meaning in the text, and thereby establishes an ongoing dialogue between the writer and the reader. It is the establishment of such a dialogue that is considered as ultimately fulfilling the purpose and function of the text. In Ricoeur's words, "… reading is the concrete act in which the destiny of the text is fulfilled. It is at the very heart of reading that explanation and interpretation are indefinitely opposed and reconciled" (1986, 92).

The basic principles of the Traditionalist perspective, which informs the study and understanding of mystical symbols, may be understood as follows: The Traditionalists adhere to principles of *scientia sacra*, or the sacred science, which originates from primordial traditions. They contend that behind apparent or exoteric differences of religious forms there exists an inward or esoteric core of common spiritual Truth, unanimously attested to by the sages and the mystics of the revealed religions. This truth has been called the *sophia perennis* or "perennial wisdom," and those who subscribe to this view are often referred to as perennialists or perennial philosophers.

The objective of the earliest Traditionalists in the twentieth century, René Guénon and Frithjof Schuon, was to reveal the spiritual dimensions and essential truths inherent in symbols, and the universal applications of this perspective. Its outstanding advocates like Ananda Coomaraswamy, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, have upheld and continued these efforts by scholarship that

is more academic in character. Nasr's version of the perennial philosophy has largely been responsible for its acceptance in Western academia and for its application to the comparative study of religions (Hahn 2001, xvii).

The application of the ideas of the Traditionalists that are particularly relevant to the needs of the present work is specifically to augment our understanding of the forms of expression, rather than to address issues of doctrine and metaphysics of the differing mystical traditions. These may be summarized as follows: Firstly, higher levels of reality are expressed in symbolic language. Secondly, that different traditions represent these realities by different symbols. Thirdly, and consequently, the meanings of traditional symbols are determined by the individual traditions.

The main distinction between the interpretation of conventional literary symbols, and traditional, spiritual symbols is that the former are subjective, arbitrary, individual, or creative expressions of the poet, whereas the latter is objective and has a precision in reference according to its particular tradition. In fact, in the Traditionalists' view, symbolism is seen as an "exact science," and symbols represent the "technical" terms that authors employ in their works, which are recognized by members of that tradition. It is this recognition that facilitates the interpretation of symbols that are specific to a culture and religion.[6] This particularity of meaning reinforces and confirms the importance mentioned earlier, of appropriation in hermeneutics. The basis of appropriation is that interpretation of spiritual meaning takes place not arbitrarily or subjectively, but bound by the authority of tradition.

By unveiling the inward, quintessential meaning of expressions in *Layla* and *Govinda*, the true worth of these texts as traditional works of art can be unveiled. Ultimately, the blooms of these gardens of love could be regarded as expressions of the Inexpressible.

[6] See Coomaraswamy (1989, 131). For an excellent elucidation of the particularity in meaning of sacred symbols, see Ghazi bin Muhammad (2001, 85-108).

Limits and Boundaries

The comparative study of *Layla* and *Govinda* is based on English translations of the texts in question. Their particulars are tabulated below:

Texts	Layla	Govinda
ORIGINAL WORKS	*Leyli o Majnun* (one out of five *mathnawi* in a collection entitled *Panj Ganj (Five Treasures)*	*Gitagovinda* (in the tradition of performed recitation (*raga-kavya*))
LANGUAGE	Persian	Sanskrit
AUTHOR	Nizami (pen-name for Abu Muhammad Ilyas ibn Usuf ibn Zaki Mu'ayyad), mystic poet of Ganjar, Ayzerbaijan, Persia (Iran)	Goswami Jayadeva, wandering seer-poet of Kindubilva, Bengal, India
PERIOD OF PRODUCTION	Latter half of 12th century	Latter half of 12th century
TRANSLATED WORKS	*The Story of Layla and Majnun*	*Love Song of the Dark Lord: The Gitagovinda of Jayadeva*
TRANSLATORS	Rudolf Gelpke, translator and editor. Final chapter translated by Zia Inayat Khan and Omid Safi.	Barbara Stoler Miller, editor and translator
LANGUAGE	English	English
PUBLICATION	New Lebanon, New York: Omega Publications, 1997	New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977

Figure 1: Publication Background of Texts Being Studied

As has been mentioned previously, the literary interest in the texts is of paramount interest, although the spiritual and philosophical interests are considered as an integral part of the works in question. That is to say, the focus will primarily be on literary mechanisms and devices that are ingeniously and intentionally utilized by the authors to convey realities, experiences, notions, and viewpoints. Stated differently, the

present work is an attempt to pluck the "blossoms" from the gardens of love in *Layla* and *Govinda* to behold their resplendence, and to admire their fragrance.

The examination of the similarities and differences between *Layla* and *Govinda* is circumscribed significantly by two foundational and interrelated issues, that of language and genre, and requires a disclaimer. With regard to the issue of language, both texts are English translations, of which critical acclaim has been high. However, it is necessary to point out that the reliance, by necessity, entirely on the English translations, has diminished a full appreciation of the complexities of the works. In fact, some scholars maintain that the texts cannot be studied in their translated versions for the intended purposes. This is because, in medieval court poetry of both the Persian and Sanskrit literary traditions,[7] such special intricacies as the ambiguity of language, deliberate ambivalence in expression, emphasis on connotative and suggestive meanings of vocabulary, free use of imagery, frequent literary, scriptural, and other references, and allusions intrinsic to aesthetic and devotional expressions, are all highly effective forms and devices abundantly employed in the original languages. The general consensus of opinion is that translation is inadequate and unsuited for transforming these features into the English language. Furthermore, a high degree of interpretation is not only unavoidable, but incumbent upon the translator in the process of transforming one language into another. In the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, "every translation is at the same time an interpretation" (1989, 346). As is widely acknowledged, and as will be explained subsequently, the process of interpretation is a highly complex, rigorous process that requires active participation on many levels of informed awareness, specific attitudes, and modes of approach.

As to the issue of genre, there are also limitations. In the case of *Layla*, whereas the original is "a tragic poem in the tradition of courtly love" (Levy 1969, 83), Gelpke's translation has been rendered in narrative prose, with some exceptions where poetic form is retained in

[7] Note that the "cross-fertilization," and thereby the resemblance, between these two literary traditions is not unexpected considering their shared linguistic roots in the Indo-Iranian and Indo-European languages. This factor has been discussed by many scholars. It is dealt with at length in several works of Muhammad Bukhari Lubis (see 1990).

terms of rhyme and rhythm.[8] In Persian literature, as is the case for the original *Layla*, poems are always rhymed, within the principal verse form of the *mathnawi*. The *mathnawi* is particularly employed for heroic, romantic, or narrative verse, whereas the *ghazal* (the Western genres being the ode or the lyric) which appears in parts of *Layla*, is a comparatively short poem, usually amorous or mystical and varying from four to sixteen couplets, all on one rhyme.

As for the English version of *Govinda*, although it is preserved in the original style of a poem of twelve cantos containing twenty-four songs, it, similarly, has inevitably lost out on the rhyming patterns. Besides, as stated by the translator herself, "The *Gitagovinda*,... has a wealth of meaning embedded in structurally intricate forms and concepts drawn from various levels of Indian literary tradition" (Miller 1984, 7). She also confirms that "as the relations among words are fluid, any translation of *Gitagovinda* is necessarily tentative" (Miller 1984, 43). Besides, in terms of mode of expression, the original poem is a particular type of drama, the *ragakavya* which is customarily performed (acted, sung, danced, etc.), and therefore to be approached and interpreted in ways that are quite different from those of English poetry (Miller 1984, 43). In the words of Lee Seigel, who has adopted a literal approach in his translation of *Govinda* (1978, 234): "The ideals, aims, subtleties, constructions, standards ... are so utterly different from those of English poetry."

It is also held that the greatest charm of Persian and Sanskrit poetry lies in its musical effects. Just as the integration of sensual lyrics and plaintive cadences of the *ghazal*, situated within the original *mathnawi*, complements and enhances the musical effect of the original *Layla*, so the original *Govinda*, written in the form of devotional songs (*bhajan*), and set in various musical modes (*raga*) and beats (*taal*), evokes a certain emotion and response in its practitioner/audience, during a performance.[9] Consequently, the incorporation and transmission of these elements in the English translation is a practical difficulty. Furthermore, this limitation is a particular shortcoming because it is

[8] Cf. XXIV:75, LIII:174.

[9] For example, the presentation of *bhajans* in "Kavi Jayadeva's Gita-govinda."

related to the acoustic or auditory effects of the original texts, an element that is critical to the study of literary devices.

For the practicalities cited above, it may be that full justice cannot be done to the original texts. The endeavor is nevertheless undertaken on the following premises. Firstly, on the understanding that the translations represent "secondary" sources. Secondly, the study is confined to the translated texts as observable evidence of literary elements. Finally, on the premise of the sub-discipline of Comparative Literature, that without translated texts, in this case constituting authoritative translations, the world's greatest works would be unattainable and inaccessible between one culture and another.

This work is by no means a comprehensive account of all the paradigms of love in the texts in question, nor is it necessary to be so. Consequently, the analysis of expressions is not exhaustive. Rather, single, and in some cases several, representative examples of expressions of a particular notion, concept, element, or aspect of love will be interpreted and explicated. In this context, it should be made clear that in both the cases of *Layla* and *Govinda*, what is being studied here is the later, *probably* posthumous Sufi reading of Nizami's poem, and the *obviously* Sahajiya reading of Jayadeva's poem. This adoption and adaptation of the works by mystics of the individual traditions constitutes another parallel between Nizami and Jayadeva. For the reason stated above, the core of discussion revolves around key episodes of the two poems which are essential for the mystical (Sufi and Bhakti) interpretation, and not on the text in entirety.

Towards a Contribution

The present work anticipates its primary contribution to be towards a better understanding of these two works in terms of affinities in literary elements and subject matter, as well as an enhanced awareness of their perennial and universal significance.. The ramifications of this discovery may make a small contribution in identifying commonalities that lie beyond the surface of apparently distinct, and sometimes contrasting, religious and cultural traditions. In view of this, certain parallels in the mystical traditions of Islamic Sufism of Persia and Hindu Bhaktism of India may emerge.

As a corollary to the above, this work hopes to supplement the limited corpus of comparative studies available in English on these two mystical texts. As access to most extant studies are limited by

language, i.e., Arabic or Hindi, and thereby by readership, i.e., to the Middle Eastern or Arabic-literate readers and to the sub-continent of India, this fills a niche in inquiries conducted in English on the topic.

Finally, it is the hope that a greater awareness of, and sustained interest in, the common wealth and universality of the spiritual and perennial dimension in man's existence may be promoted by this book. In the context of ever-widening gulfs in the relationship between cultures of the world, and the contemporary emphasis of secularism and material gains, such awareness is viewed as essential to mutual appreciation, harmony, and acceptance.

The material in this book is divided thematically. The first two chapters are to provide basic information on the subject matter of the comparative study, and the milieu and some fundamental aspects of interpretation of the texts, such as literary conventions and mystico-religious norms, of both the Persian-Sufi and Indian-Bhakti traditions underpinning the texts of *Layla* and *Govinda* respectively. This is followed by four chapters of analysis and comparison to determine the nature and extent of the similarities and affinities, as well as the differences and contrasts, between the texts. Each of these chapters presents aspects of a particular mystical theme, namely, of initial union, of separation, and of reunion. The final chapter concludes the work by summarizing principal findings and implications.

Unveiling the Garden of Love

Features in

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