

## **For the Love of an Ideal: Sufism and Renunciation of the Self in George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan***

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### **ABSTRACT**

According to the Sufi doctrine, a Sufi has to sacrifice his 'base self' for union with God. The Sufis maintain that this self could be summed up in all worldliness and physical passions. The object of the Sufi is to break away from such demands and fully entrust himself or herself to the hands of God. For the realisation of such a purpose, the Sufi is expected to pass some stages of spiritual illumination which will culminate in detachment from his or her desires and attain selflessness. In George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan* (1923), the seeker covets to recover the state of "union" with God and thus, renounces her physical safety to fulfil the will of the Sought. By framing our interpretation based on the doctrines of Sufism, this paper aims to examine Shaw's portrayal of Joan of Arc in *Saint Joan* in order to emphasise that the fulfilment of divine union is the supreme ideal of the Sufi.

*Keywords:* God, Islam, Sufism, George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan*, Union

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we began  
And know that place for the first time.  
*T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sufism, as the fundamental enunciation of the spirituality of Islam, requires from the initiate to give his being up to the "greater holy war" (*jihad al-akbar*), demanding that he should resist the material illusions that assail him.<sup>1</sup> It is in the space of such epiphany, we are told, that he is enabled to contemplate the essence of the Spirit. The Qur'an discriminates between the world of Testimony and the world of Mystery and asks the faithful to transcend the perceptible in favour of the Mystery. As a

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matter of principle, the aspirant squarely aims to penetrate deep into the opacity of the corporeal existence in order that he could reach, through divine grace and an effort of the will, beyond the constraints of individuality. Being uprooted from his ego and devoid of his attributes, he begins to observe the path of knowledge set before him, a station in which he is empowered to witness divine “Majesty” (*jalal*). In addition, love of God is established in his heart insomuch that all the inferior qualities lose their interest in his mind and eye. As a consequence, the secrets of divine “Beauty” (*jamal*) are unveiled before him. What follows is a conflation of the two within the divine “Perfection” (*kamal*) (Schuon, 2006).

As indicated in the Qur’an, love of God, which is taken to be the highest level of recognition and maturity, encourages one to the fulfilment of the most cardinal aspirations.<sup>2</sup> The seekers of such ideals

<sup>1</sup>In contrast to the “lesser holy war” (jihad al-asghar) which is the physical battle for God, the greater jihad, seen as the higher form of struggle, is an inner battle fought for self-improvement or, at its best, self-annihilation. It could be divided into three forms of struggle: 1) Jihad of the Heart (the struggle for preservation of faith and moral amelioration. 2) Jihad of the Tongue (the struggle to possess a decent speech for spreading the word of God across the world. 3) Jihad of the Hand (self-instruction for doing good deeds in keeping with Qur’anic verses and the Prophet’s traditions. See Bayman (2003) and Geoffroy (2010).

<sup>2</sup>The Qur’an says: “Love will the God of Mercy vouchsafe to those who believe and do the things that be right” (2005, Surah Maryam, p. 152).

necessarily close their hearts to the senseless pursuit of mundane affairs. Exalting this renunciation, Sufis declare that man needs to find his way out of the world’s labyrinth by avoiding spiritual degeneration. To this end, he has to break free of the shackles of attachment. As Dakake argues (2006), “he must allow the Essence to dominate his every earthly desire and he must actively seek to be an increasingly perfect and worthy suitor for Its sublime beauty” (p. 134). Strictly speaking, having extinguished the flames of his individual attributes, he allows God to replace him. Accordingly, he achieves ontological servitude (*ubudiyya*). For Sufis, this will not be possible unless the aspirant strongly resolves to neglect his ‘self’ for the benefit of his superior ideals.

As long as there is a self in the Sufi, the Islamic mystics believe, God will not dwell in his mind and heart. In other words, the Sufi makes room in himself for the presence of the Divine so that he may not be diverted from the path of righteousness. Sufis who celebrate this spiritual subjectivity indicate that the aspirant must necessarily give up on himself. Abu Sa’id Abi-l-Khayr states:

*To be a Sufi is to give up all worries and there is no worse worry than yourself. When you are occupied with self you are separated from God. The way to God is but one step: the step out of yourself. (Vaughan-Lee, 1995, p. 3)*

The Sufi completely leaves himself to the hands of God and puts out of his mind dualism and multiplicity which include

a conception of the self in order to clear his path toward God. In other words, the seeker abandons his earthly passions and endeavours to be in continual contact with God, not leaving himself to the evils of the body.

The quest for higher revelations may not be easily realisable; most of the time, the seeker has to sacrifice his life to disclose the layers of mystery. This seems to have been the case with two of the martyrs in history: Mansour al-Hallaj and Joan of Arc, the first a Muslim, and the second a Christian saint. Hallaj's call of "I am the Truth" (*anal Haqq*) and Joan's exposure of her divine visitations from Saint Michael the Archangel, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, and Saint Margaret of Antioch do not go well with the appetites of the authorities and the masses. Both of these individuals choose their own nonconforming positions and convey their intention with their lives. Simply put, it is the accomplishment of a divine mission that leads the courses of their lives and even if the result of their breaking the standards of society is death, death they seek.

Hallaj and Joan seemingly represent two irreconcilable faiths. Yet, what takes precedence over the outward differences is that both extinguish themselves to the point of no longer seeking anything but God. Hence, we believe Joan could fit into the Sufi model. In order for the demands of the flesh not to take control of her will and to detach herself from the illusive comfort of sin, she is alert never to step back from her ideal. She is unfailingly ready to cope with

the deadliest of trials only to carry out the will of God and, by so doing, to ascend the stations of recognition and illumination, steps which are taken by Sufis as well. By drawing upon the formulations of the Sufi tradition, we attempt to examine the similarities between Sufism and the doctrine of Joan of Arc in *Saint Joan* by the eminent Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw. To attain this in the light of the Qur'anic wisdom and the doctrine of the Sufi masters, we will endeavour to illustrate the affinities between Joan's idea of divine mission and the Sufi's concept of union (*itihad*).

#### **SUFISM AND ONENESS WITH THE ULTIMATE TRUTH**

Sufi scholars generally believe that Sufism is the concrete manifestation of the Qur'an and the perfect actualisation of the ideals hailed by the Prophet Muhammad (Bayman, 2003; Nasr, 2004; Chittick, 2008). Geoffroy writes: "Sufism represents the living heart of Islam, the inner dimension of the Revelation given to Muhammad, and not an arbitrary form of occultism" (2010, p. 1). A Sufi physically lives in the world but he is spiritually absent from it. His selflessness renders it vital for him not to follow any worldly ambitions, making him independent of any consideration of individual interest and indifferent to the love of Paradise or fear of Hell. The sole aim of a Sufi is, then, only union with the Beloved (God). The thought of satisfying the Beloved is nourished in the heart of the lover to such an extent that he willingly consents

to go to Hell if it is His will. In a similar vein, he rejects the quasi-sensual desire for the blessings that spring forth from the afterlife. That is why Sa'di (2011), one of the major Persian poets of the medieval period, lashes out at the sanctimonious who merely boasts of being a constant lover of God:

*Knows not the value of love, is not  
honest in his pace  
The weakly-vowed who bears not the  
weight of tyranny.  
If I am allowed to choose what I want  
in the Doomsday,  
The Beloved for me and for you all  
Heavenly blessings.  
(p. 321)*

Sufis do not yearn, as common believers do, for heavenly graces. What they want is only to get to God, and they stop at nothing else. For them, the issue of transaction matters the least, as they are full of the belief that they have nothing to offer God. They readily admit that, on the part of God, all that exists is grace and blessing, while, on the part of man, all that exists is sin and ingratitude. Thus, by following the footsteps of the Prophet and Imams (*Aemme*), Sufis are taken to a world where not Justice but Compassion is wished from the side of God. Sufis, says Nasr (2006), are drawn to the promising aspects of their gnostic tradition without being burdened “with questions of Divine justice and punishment” (p. 196).

Sufism imposes certain measures on the Sufis to help them lose sight of both mundane and heavenly ostentations. This is

in logical agreement with the teachings of Islam. Yet, the weight bestowed upon such an ascetico-mystical conviction in Sufism is greater than that given by the orthodox Islam which is, by and large, more suitable for the capacity of the masses. One could conclude with caution that Sufism is the esoteric side of Islam as compared with the exoteric aspect (*shari'a*). Chittick argues:

*Sufism is the most universal manifestation of the inner dimension of Islam; it is the way by which man transcends his own individual self and reaches God. It provides within the forms of the Islamic revelation the means for an intense spiritual life directed towards the transformation of man's being and the attainment of the spiritual virtues; ultimately it leads to the vision of God. It is for this reason that many Sufis define Sufism by the saying of the Prophet of Islam concerning spiritual virtue (ihsān): “It is that thou shouldst worship God as if thou sawest Him, for if thou seest Him not, verily He seeth thee.” (2006, p. 21)*

The term Sufi is likely to have been derived from the Arabic word ‘soof’ which means wool. This is due to the fact that the early Sufis used to wear wool clothing, which was an imitation of the Prophet Muhammad's example. Geoffroy says: “As did the prophets who preceded him, Muhammad wore clothing of wool” (2010, p. 5). This practice was followed by the Prophet's contemporary Hasan al-Basri (d. 728). In this way, it was with the rise of Islam that Sufism gradually took

shape. Early Sufis such as Hasan al-Basri, Uwais al-Qarani, Malik Deenar and Rabia al-Adawiya, who lived during the seventh and eighth centuries, decided to detach themselves from the mainstream social life and, while alien to the ways of the 'outer life', they started to pay close attention to the 'inner life'. These proponents of renunciation rigorously explored the depths of the human soul, and this self-discovery was characterised by an aversion to social life and a passage to the margins of society. Karamustafa (2007) summarises this succinctly:

*For these 'interiorising' renunciants, the major renunciatory preoccupation of eschewing this world (dunya, literally, 'the lower, nearer realm') in order to cultivate the other world (Akhira, 'the ultimate realm') was transformed into a search for the other world within the inner self. (p. 2)*

In Sufism, purification of the self is a lengthy and challenging process which requires watchful effort. According to Sufis, Seven Valleys must be passed in the development of the self, during which the aspirant enfeebles his base self and comes into contact with heavenly realities. Reaching the peak of unification, he is transformed into the 'Perfect Man' (*Insan al-kamil*). The concept of 'Seven Valleys' was formally introduced by Attar, a theoretician of Sufism who had an immense and lasting influence on Persian poetry and Sufism, in his allegorical poem *The Conference of the Birds*. The Valleys are:

- The Valley of Quest (*Talab*)
- The Valley of Love (*Ishq*)
- The Valley of Understanding (*Ma'rifa*)
- The Valley of Independence and Detachment (*Istiqna*)
- The Valley of Unity (*Tauhid*)
- The Valley of Astonishment and Bewilderment (*Heyrat*)
- The Valley of Poverty and Annihilation (*Faqr va Fana*). (Attar, 2002)

In the Valley of Quest, the seeker resolves to step in the path of God. He faces many problems in this station. First, he has to leave behind all worldly riches in order to relieve himself from the demands of the flesh. Then, after he is cleansed of the body, God bestows upon him the grace of Quest. As his enthusiasm grows, the seeker feels more prepared to go through different trials. With the passage of time, he asks for more enlightenment from God.

In the Valley of Love, the seeker still suffers from the pain of his choice but, this time, it is with more satisfaction. He leaves behind rational calculations and willingly sacrifices everything for his Beloved. In this stage, he neither cares for the good and the bad of his path, nor does he get offended by the ill judgment of others. He no longer dwells on the future and starts to consider the present moment as the only accessible reality when he should do his best for his union. As the 'son of the moment', his heart and soul are overwhelmed by his affection for the Beloved that other things leave him neither sad nor happy.

In the Valley of Understanding, the seeker leans on his reasoning power to guide him in his path. It means that on the basis of his knowledge and perseverance, he is enabled to get closer to his goal. Here, he comes to know whether he is the man for the job or not. For moving on through this station, he must achieve a balance between Love and Understanding. In this station, he gets to know himself, which will in turn lead him to know God.

In the Valley of Independence and Detachment, the seeker comes to appreciate that whatever makes him dependent on the world is downright unworthy. Thus, he casts aside the state of dependency and detaches himself from the ways of the world, convinced that his only and most worthy need is the need for union.

In the Valley of Unity, everything gets the colour of God and becomes a manifestation of Him for the seeker. The seeker starts to welcome the notion that all paths, one way or the other, lead to God.

In the Valley of Astonishment and Bewilderment, the seeker loses his sense of distinction. He comes to wonder whether he still exists or not. He loses his self, unaware that he is dissolved in the mighty ocean of the divine presence.

And finally, in the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the formerly weak individual is in complete union with God. He is now at the Fortress of Nonbeing, where he beholds the effulgence of God and drinks the ambrosia of union. With the base self purely forgotten, the purified self starts to live in ease and certainty. At this stage,

whatsoever is left in the seeker is God.<sup>3</sup> Rumi (2011) metaphorically describes the profound transformation as follows:

*He caressed me with a thousand graces  
Lastly He burned me with a thousand  
grieves.*

*Like His beloved chessman He played  
with me;*

*When all of me became Him He  
overthrew me.*

*(p. 1308)*

Rumi explicates that the Sufi's self is faded away and, now, it is only God, and not the Sufi, who exists. Therefore, the Sufi's quest is not an easy one. By conquering himself, he transcends the limits of his ego, viewing everything in ways unlike the ordinary people. This may explain why distinguished Sufis in history have met with different kinds of disapproval. Perhaps the most important figure of Sufism to have experienced mistreatment from political and religious authorities is Mansour al-Hallaj (858-922), a Persian mystic, revolutionary writer and teacher of Sufism. He is generally taken to be one of those Sufis who has passed the Seven Valleys, and his call of "I am the Truth" is reportedly taken to originate from his complete union with God. The mystic poet Tabrizi (2007) glorifies Hallaj when he writes:

*I want to cry for Mansour who in the  
gallows of annihilation*

*Said many truthful words, heard none  
and left.*

*(p. 423)*

<sup>3</sup>For more details on the subject of the Seven Valleys, see Attar (2002).

In a similar vein, Rumi (2011) says:

*Mansour was the khawjih who in the path of God*

*Took the garment of the soul off the flesh's cotton.*

*Where did Mansour say "I am the Truth"?*

*It was not Mansour, but was God, only God!*

*(p. 1314)*

Thus, the ecstatic utterances (*shath*) uttered by Mansour al-Hallaj and Bayazid al-Bastami (d. 874), as the prominent exponents of this tradition, is not for nothing. It suggests that, after union with God, mystics no longer speak on their own behalves, but feel the presence of God so deeply in each and every aspect of their spiritual selves that everything about them becomes His manifestation. This seems to be the latent reason behind the occasional and the apparent violation of the codes of religion by the Sufis. Those Sufis who expose such veils (*hijab*) are sometimes scorned by the more conservative ones. The life and personality of Junayd of Baghdad, one of the most famous of the early Sufis, could be taken as an example. He was seen as spiritually illuminated as his contemporary Hallaj. Yet, he believed that the veils of God should not be divulged to ignorant ears. For this reason, when Hallaj was his disciple, he did not favour him and actually expelled him from his spiritual circle (*khaniqah* or *zawiyya*) in Baghdad. Hallaj, however, was so profoundly engrossed in the presence of God that he refused to keep silent and

travelled around the world converting people into Islam. Throughout the history of Sufism, he could be regarded as one of the most controversial of Sufis, a revolutionary whom Schimmel calls the "martyr of divine love" (1975, p. 11). Accordingly, his eccentric and provocative articulations show his effacement and absorption in God:

*I have become the One I love,*

*And the One I love has become me!*

*We are two spirits infused in a single body!*

*Also, to see me is to see Him, and to see Him to see us.*

*(quoted in Geoffroy, 2010, p. 70)*

#### **BEYOND THE VEIL OF SELFHOOD: JOAN OF ARC AND EXTINCTION IN GOD**

George Bernard Shaw, the audacious and charismatic Irish playwright, is one of those rare figures in literary history who straightforwardly addresses the hard facts of society to provoke the public into being rationalistic, sober-minded, progressive, thoughtful and sensitive about falsehood and pompous bigotry. He is a social philosopher with a witty tongue who exposes the evils of society for an individual and collective purpose. Nevertheless, Shaw, with his cold-blooded honesty, acknowledges that the need for social and political change only constitutes half of his anarchistic philosophy. Moreover, he insists that a practical religious faith in the day-to-day business of living is required to give the overall direction to reformative causes.

*Saint Joan*, demonstrates the challenge of the advocate of this form of religiosity at odds with the unscrupulous rationalisations of the higher authority. The crowning achievement of Shaw's expiring genius, *Saint Joan*, reveals the loneliness of a devoutly faithful Christian who cannot bring herself to believe in the fanatical ways of the Roman Catholic Church. In this play, Shaw takes Jeanne d'Arc (1412-1431) as a model for his superman (superwoman) and criticises the self-congratulatory delusions of religious dogmas which lead people to outrageous conclusions. Indeed, Shaw's philosophy is not a pastiche of incompatible ideas mingled only for the sake of anarchy or iconoclasm. Rather, located within the horizons of logical mysticism, it is in accord with the guiding principles of a religion for one and all. In reviving a figure like Joan, he feels bound to give a more profound look at history and remind the world of its sin in not accepting the Truth that reveals itself in all ages. Cauchon's words in the Epilogue of the play bring such oblivion into light: "Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?" (Shaw, 2002, p. 95). In calling into question the institutionalised interpretations of Religion, Shaw submits history to scrutiny, hoping that a new shift might re-establish its long-lost conviction in the Universal Truth. Thus, Baker (2002) notes:

*Bernard Shaw aspired to give the world a new religion, a faith suitable for a new age. But a religion requires a congregation, which his faith has not found, and so he failed—at least for*

*now. He did create something more remarkable and rarer: a creed that is a reasonable and practical guide to living in the real world, a faith that is completely compatible with the facts, a religion consistent with itself. (p. 3)*

Baker, however, does not clearly indicate how Shavian principles function in such a delicate issue as religion. Far from creating a "new religion", Shaw seems to have suggested a reappraisal of the established religions in a more disinterested manner based on the congenial relation of truth and reason. It goes without saying that he delighted in the prospects offered by Islam. For Shaw, Islam carried spiritual seeds that were potent enough to grow and fruit in the heart of mankind. In accordance with the "facts", Shaw's "faith" eventually found voice in his serene conviction in Islam and the ways of the Prophet Muhammad. In his essay "The Genuine Islam" (1936), he praised the power of Islam for tackling the plights of the world and reintroducing tranquillity and felicity to it. Shaw (1936) claimed that it could bring about the true salvation of humanity:

*I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion, which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence, which can make itself appeal to every age. I have studied him - the wonderful man and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Saviour of Humanity. (p. 76)*



Therefore, it seems that one can trace a close affinity between the teachings of Islam and Shaw's ethical position. In tandem with this compatibility, Saint Joan could also be said to share the traits of an Islamic Sufi. The divine voices that Joan hears guide her to spiritual awakening. She is totally assured that the objectives defined to her by heavenly voices will be certainly accomplished, precisely for the reason that they are divine. However, the expedient churchmen and politicians are of the opinion that these voices are diabolic and will only hasten her eventual damnation. If placed within the Sufic tradition, she can be regarded as a Hallajian figure who is confronted by the disapprobation of authorities. She is a committed reformer who cultivates unique notions and who is inevitably opposed by the commanding forces of society. Shaw maintains that Joan's physical isolation from society does not do any damage to her spiritual vigour and insists that, to go hand in hand with her faith to the end, she does not need the sympathies of its pillars. He suggests that to go against the odds and attain the impossible, Joan needs hopes in an infallible force. In *Saint Joan*, Shaw recommends that this inspirational force is God.

It is significant that the boundaries of Sufism and Christianity can be crossed, as there are congruities between the creeds of the Sufi and Joan. Both of these individuals demand strong piety from their souls, and both of them speak on behalf of God. Assuredly, the demarcation between the

Sufi and Joan does not prevent them from welcoming the unity and indivisibility of all revealed religions. Joan shares the qualities of an Islamic Sufi and works her way up to salvation by staying firm in her decision.

In contrast with the rationalistic thought of the authorities, Joan's spiritual personality is susceptible to various kinds of disapproval. Nonetheless, to do good to her fellow countrymen, she does not yield to the contaminated estimations of Christianity. On the contrary, she is adequately single-minded in her paces to avoid selling her soul for gaining physical security. That is why she cannot accept the argument of Robert de Baudricourt:

*ROBERT. What did you mean when you said that St Catherine and St Margaret talked to you every day?*

*JOAN. They do.*

*ROBERT. What are they like?*

*JOAN. [suddenly obstinate] I will tell you nothing about that: they have not given me leave.*

*ROBERT. But you actually see them; and they talk to you just as I am talking to you?*

*JOAN. No: it is quite different. I cannot tell you: you must not talk to me about my voices.*

*ROBERT. How do you mean? voices?*

*JOAN. I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.*

*ROBERT. They come from your imagination.*

*JOAN. Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us. (Shaw, p. 35-36)*

Robert insists in knowing what Joan attempts to keep hidden. In Sufism it is almost an obligation on the part of the Sufi not to talk freely about the mysteries which are to be left unknown to the undeserving. Hallaj and Bastami, however, are exceptions in the history of Sufism. It is true that after these two figures, we do not see any tangible intoxication (*sukr*) from the side of Sufis, since they have often kept silent about removing the veils of mystery. In a similar manner, Joan tends to be silent, as she is aware that by disclosing divine secrets, she will lose the support of God.

The second point touched by Robert is that the voices revealed to Joan are not authentic – that is, they are no more than illusions which are misconstrued by Joan. For Baudricourt and other authorities, nothing is quite believable regarding Joan. They may enjoy her society; nevertheless, her association with divine stations is intangible for them, and it is consequently ruled out. This is fittingly detectable in the history of Sufism. There is the Sufi master Shibli who was labelled as insane by people, yet, who was held in high estimation by his master Junayd (Attar, 2000). The same is the case with Ibrahim ibn Adham, one of the most prominent of the ascetic Sufis. Ibrahim was the king of Balkh who renounced his kingship in his search for God and was, therefore, regarded by some to have lost his wits. Likewise, due to her eccentric demeanour, Joan can easily fall prey to the pragmatic worldview of the power holders.

An important concept in the study of Sufism is the ‘perfect man’. For Sufis, this concept is incarnated in the life and character of a ‘pole’ (*qutb*) whose role is fundamental in the leadership of disciples (*murid*) as they go in quest of spiritual enlightenment. The pole is the highest spiritual authority, for Sufis believe that he has an intimate knowledge of spiritual purity. It is to him that they refer to get the answers for their questions. Schimmel (1975) explains that the pole “rests in perfect tranquillity, grounded in God—that is why all the ‘minor stars’ revolve around him” (p. 200). In the hierarchy of Sufis, there is another standing which is lower than the role of the pole and which is represented by a leader or master (*murshid*, or *pir*). The leader runs a spiritual circle known as *khaniqah* and guides a number of disciples. He is, as Gril (2006) points out, “a spiritual father to his disciple, a parent in the realm of the spirit” (p. 64). As the history of Sufism indicates, the aspirant ascends the steps of insight under the shelter of a leader. “The master is,” in the words of Bayman (2003), “the experienced mountain climber who guides the seeker in avoiding pitfalls on the climb to the Summit of Unification” (p. 191). There are many examples of the master-disciple relationship but, due to the limitations of the article, we only mention the more notable ones: Shibli, the disciple of Junayd, Abu Sa’id Abi-l-Khayr, the disciple of Abul-Hasan Kharraqani, and Rumi, the disciple of Shams-i Tabrizi. Some disciples are also guided by a master who died long

ago. These Sufis do not have any leader in the physical sense and “receive initiation from ‘the invisible master’” (Nasr, 2006, p. 200). They are called “*uwaysi*” which refers to Uwais al-Qarani from Yemen who was a contemporary of the Prophet. For example, Abul-Hasan Kharaqani was introduced to the Path through the spirit of his admirer Bayazid Bastami, who, before Kharaqani’s birth, had prophesied his appearance as a Sufi even greater than himself. There is also Attar of Nishapur who was inspired by Hallaj. In the case of the disciple Joan, one does not find any physical leader as well. Nevertheless, in the thorny path of higher realisations, she is guided by the spirits of St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret.

The concept of ‘poverty’ (*faqr*) is immensely significant among Sufis. They believe that they can pass the way to God only if they are equipped with this kind of poverty which is in itself full of riches. The Sufis point out that poverty is a stage the Sufi will not reach unless he takes some prior steps. The first step, which is by far the most important prerequisite, is repentance (*taube*) from all that distract the heart from God. In this step, the wayfarer (*salik*) resolves to leave his earthly passions behind and move in the narrow path of God. The second one is trust (*tawakkul*) in God and in all the deeds that the wayfarer is going to do afterwards. Without complete trust in God and His Omnipotence, Sufis assert, the wayfarer cannot reach his destination. Therefore, to overcome all the obstacles in the path, he needs an absolute trust in the ways of God.

In his wanderings (*suluk*), the wayfarer moves on through different stations (*maqamat*) until he reaches, by the help of the Sought, and more or less slowly, his end, which is annihilation (*fana*) and subsistence (*baqa*). “Being completely unaware of himself as subject-consciousness,” Geoffroy writes, “he becomes a mirror in which God contemplates Himself” (2006, p. 58).

Poverty is a station where the Sufi is separated from the world. Although he actually lives in the world, spiritually he is integrated into the Divinity. He yearns for nothing, is saddened or delighted by nothing, and seeks only the presence of the Beloved by constant meditation. Consequently, the poor (*faqir*) is the Sufi who has turned his back to the world in order to receive light for his spirit in the long night’s journey into day. *Faqir* is, according to Al-Murabit (1998), “the one who has turned from the futile search for this world and set out on the quest for the Real, that is, the secret of his own existence” (p. 9). Such a *faqir* is poor because he has cleansed himself through his travails, lost his self, and seized upon divine realities. Thus, he is paradoxically rich for he does not need much, and his emptiness is filled with the nectar of divine wisdom. Ibn Arabi (2006) says: “I am in love with no other than myself, and my very separation is my union [...] I am my beloved and my lover; I am my knight and my maiden” (p. v). Ibn Arabi claims that he is now united with his Beloved. Nothing exists in him but God, and nothing is capable of separating

them. This is because there are no longer distances which he has to run, no more obstacles which he has to overcome, and no other requirements which he has to fulfil. As a result, he is authorised to say, "I am Him and He is me," something which emanates from his spiritual destitution.

In examining the character of Joan, one comes to appreciate that, like a *faqir*, she attains such a degree of poverty. Firstly, she crosses the restrictions and disregards the obligations that nature imposes on her. As a girl, she is not at all expected to go to the battlefield but to stay at home and do homely affairs instead of undertaking tasks that to others only prove to be perilous and quixotic. She perceives that her responsibilities require from her to revise the general rules and go against the law of man to fulfil the commands of God. Thus, she is poor in the sense that she is sexless, that she is with the One, and rationalisations of sex are not allowed to enter their friendly communion. Secondly, to achieve her end, she is ready to offer her own life. Unlike her companions in the battle against the English and unlike the masterminds of the war who are reluctant to jeopardise their safety for the fulfilment of divine justice, she is prepared to risk her life to attack the intruders. Joan is certain of victory, while others, even the Archbishop, doubt the assistance of God. This is because, compared to the safety of the soul, physical safety is nothing to Joan. To her, nothing is worse than seeing the wrath of God, and the way to avoid His wrath is to leave herself to His hands in all calamities.

And this, in turn, is because Joan is aware that "the hand of God [is] over their hands!" (2005, *Surah the Victory*, p. 542). Joan has complete trust in the inexhaustible treasure of God's companionship and openly abandons herself to Providence in the face of danger. Having been endowed with Godly guidance, she reveals her poverty:

ROBERT. [...] *You think soldiering is anybody's job?*

JOAN. *I do not think it can be very difficult if God is on your side, and you are willing to put your life in His hand.*

(Shaw, p. 36)

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, she neglects her earthly peace by going into the battle of soul. She is steadfast in her purpose for revolutionising her material life. Her intelligence is illuminated and her will is awoken to the science of spirituality. In consequence, she is in ceaseless conflict with her mundane desires, anticipating with zeal her eternal salvation. She separates herself from others in the sense that she does not desperately pursue material prosperity. In the preface to the play, Shaw observes in his typically humorous manner:

*Joan was not a common termagant, not a harlot, not a witch, not a blasphemer, no more an idolater than the Pope himself, and not ill conducted in any sense apart from her soldiering, her wearing of men's clothes, and her audacity, but on the contrary good-humored, an intact virgin, very pious, very temperate very kindly. (Shaw, p. 5)*

For a Sufi, it is absolutely crucial that he depend on none but God. When a seeker decides to experience the mystical truth, he, as discussed above, closes his eyes to all but God. He never asks for anything and is always content with what he already has. Being divergent from the multitude, he does not wail for the misfortunes that befall him and, surprisingly, prefers to undergo tragic events to get used to poverty and nothingness. "Are not the friends of God," the Qur'an indicates, "those on whom no fear shall come, nor shall they be put to grief?" (2005, Surah Jonah, p. 333). Sufis are, based on the Qur'anic wisdom, sincere friends of God who stay unshakable through thick and thin; they are those "who bear ills with patience and put their trust in the Lord" (Surah The Bee, p. 246). It is for this reason that the invocation of Ansari (2010), the leading mystic and hagiographer of Herat in the 11<sup>th</sup> eleventh century, expresses a pure spirituality:

*O God!  
Without your remembrance all  
happiness is arrogance.  
With your remembrance all sorrows  
are joys.  
(p. 90)*

Joan bows to no one but God. Hence, to fulfil her responsibility toward Him, she is even ready to go to the battlefield alone. Like other Sufis, she devotes herself to the wisdom that humans are mortals having the same deficiencies as her. She is aware that the only reliable station is with God, to which if she holds on, she will be delivered to salvation. Moreover, just like a Sufi,

Joan understands well enough that battling against selfhood is much more difficult than fighting with people like herself. She is conscious that it is through fighting with the self and its irrational passions that one can render powerless this greatest enemy one has. It is in the space of such acceptance that she responds in a matter-of-fact and resolute manner to what Dunois says:

*DUNOIS. Not a man will follow you.  
JOAN. I will not look back to see whether  
anyone is following me. (Shaw, p. 52)*

In addition to all self-conquests, Sufis also keep away from politics. By the same token, the politicised dogma of the reigning system is alien to Joan. Sufis advocate separation from the world convinced that they cannot be salvaged in the deceptive games of politics. Thus, Sufis always cultivate the right qualifications in their unique isolation. In the realm of God, they enjoy a kind of presence (*hudhur*) while worshipping His grandeur. They carefully watch over their conduct so as not to act unfairly to anybody and not to wrong themselves in the crucible of life. They are certain that even the most trifling deeds heavily influence the salvation and/or damnation of humanity. They keep away from anything that engenders their separation from God, and "[t]he end result is deliverance from pain and union with all joy" (Chittick, 2008, p. 86). In this light, Joan is aware that, to fulfil her responsibility, she has to observe it carefully. She is of the belief that in turning the states of affairs for better or worse, all her actions are of the greatest significance.

The Transcendentalist poet Walt Whitman (1990) speaks of this ethical commitment in “The Song of Prudence”:

*All that a person does, says, thinks, is  
of consequence,  
Not a move can a man or woman  
make, that affects him or her in a day,  
month, any part of the direct lifetime,  
or the hour of death,  
But the same affects him or her onward  
afterward through the indirect lifetime.*  
(p. 290)

To obliterate the causes of distraction from the ways of God, Joan separates herself from doubt and uncertainty. She does not allow reason to take control of her grave decisions in order to sacrifice herself for her ideals with certitude and serenity. With regard to Sufism, reason is not followed passionately for greater attainments. At the outset of his quest, the wayfarer seeks the assistance of reason without pessimistically leaving himself to its calculative measurements. He is certain that, for succeeding in his quest, he needs the help of reason, but he is also conscious that he needs more than that.<sup>4</sup> He consequently builds his path on a selfless love, resolutely optimistic that all of his spiritual achievements are made possible through its authority. He knows that divine knowledge (*ma'rifa*) is not reached by the discursive reason, for this knowledge is a higher understanding whose nature no longer allows the communication

of pragmatic reasoning. In other words, the Sufi needs to break away from daily apprehensions to comprehend the proximity of the union. Sufis declare this cannot be turned into reality unless one emancipates oneself from the materialistic measurements of reason and embraces the greater logic of love which issues from one's heart, “a faculty with which we think, both in a rational and a suprarational way” (Ware, 2004, p. 13).

It is discernible that Joan is full of zeal for her journey and is steady in her steps to undergo the tribulations of her path to enthusiastically receive her God, whom, she is assured, will supply what she lacks. She is all ears to the divine voices within her in order to hear her next mission. Along similar lines, a *sine qua non* on the part of the Sufi is an ardent devotion to God which does not allow transgressing the subtleties of the affection. Bayman (2000) points out that “a condition of love is that the lover obey every wish of his Beloved” (p. 137). On this plane, there is an acceptance of misfortunes with placidity, with obedience, without objection and, as a result, God manifests Himself in the lover's heart in full bloom. In times of the disheartening imprisonment and interrogation, Joan does not get dejected and sincerely wishes the best for her fellow beings. She does not even cast herself as saintly and virtuous when referring to her visions and voices to refuse the limelight. What we might gauge, if not judge, is that what mostly matters to her is to behave selflessly toward others, which

<sup>4</sup>One of the spiritual stations is Understanding after all.

she knows will come to pass through her divine voices. Spoto (2007) expounds on this idea:

*What mattered for Joan was not the physical sight of spiritual beings or saints, much less a retelling or an embellished account of the sight by her or anyone else. What mattered was that the message came, as she believed, from God. The important thing, in short, was not what she saw or how she saw it, but the inner revelation, the compelling sense that she was purposefully addressed. (p. 14-15)*

Joan is assured that the voices within her are those of Truth. Related to this faith is the knowledge based on which Joan believes the route to deliverance lies in unifying the schisms that have originated from the egotism of the authorities. Joan intends to breathe life into the paralysing malaises within the body of the Catholic Church to strip it of its self-conceit and help it rein its desires. Yet, the message of self-purification is not attended to as Joan struggles deep within herself to retain her own serenity in the face of inward and outward challenges. Thus, when she encourages the church officials to give a serious look to her voices, she does not receive blessings from them. For them, the voice of God is only conveyed to Christians by the Church, and Christians are obliged to go through this course of action. For Joan, however, this is not true. She is a mystic who knows that God privately discourses with His subjects. She is certain that she does not need to confess her sins

to anybody but God. She is privately connected to God, and her relationship with God is set above her relationship with the Church:

*THE ARCHBISHOP. How do you know you are right?*

*JOAN. I always know. My voices—*

*CHARLES. Oh, your voices, your voices. Why don't the voices come to me? I am king, not you.*

*JOAN. They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it; but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do. (Shaw, p. 66)*

Hence, Joan is in perpetual conflict with the holders of power. She becomes aware, by degrees, that she has no choice but to reconcile herself to the fact that the majority of men cannot assimilate the secrets of God and merely identify them with sheer heresy. When her military career comes to a close, she recognises that there is one final mission she must accomplish. She is informed that she is to be burned at the stake for her breach of faith, but insistent on the faith that her "loneliness" parallels that of her country and God, she does not give in to the thought of compromise:

*JOAN. [her eyes skyward] "I have better friends and better counsel than yours" (Shaw, p. 69).*

Joan's untainted spirituality makes it possible for her to not only resist the temptation of falling prey to the safety that the church will apparently offer but even to accept death under the shelter of her faith. Joan's unique intoxication bears resemblances with that of Bayazid Bastami, who, as portrayed in *Masnavi Ma'navi* by Rumi (d. 1273), cannot keep silent regarding the divine presence. When he claims that he is God, his disciples get angry with him. Bayazid orders them to attack him with knives if he claims it again. Surprisingly, when he repeats his claim, his disciples attack him with bare knives. However, as they hit him, they only cut and kill themselves, while Bayazid is safe and secure. At the end of the poem, Rumi makes a remarkable conclusion about the Sufi who is in complete union with God:

*Ah! you who smite with your sword  
him beside himself,  
You smite yourself, therewith; Beware!  
For he that is beside himself is  
annihilated and safe;  
Yea, he dwells in security forever.  
His form is vanished, he is a mere  
mirror;  
Nothing is seen in him but the  
reflection of another. (2001, p. 289)*

In the discerning eye of the Sufi, nothing exists in the world but that which mirrors God's eternal beauty. He witnesses divine signs in his daily life and recalls the majesty of God which exposes itself to view even in the most typical things. According to Nasr (2006), he reaches "the 'proximity' of the Infinite and [...] shed[s]

the bonds of finite existence" (p. 189). This provides the ground for Bayazid's unorthodox demeanour to be reminiscent of the Prophet Muhammad's tradition, to "die before you die" (quoted. in Bayman, 2005, p. 37). Bayazid is, in effect, in the presence of God wondering if he really exists in the world or not. Making such heterodox utterances, he reveals the truth about himself: he has reached the final station of spiritual illumination which is annihilation (*fana*) and is immersed in Him (*baqa*).

By accentuating the spiritual journey of Joan, it turns out that she is a mystic in union with her God. Immersed in the state of proximity (*qurb*), she allows the seeds of love to germinate throughout her being, as she offers herself on the sacrificial altar of the longing of her heart. She battles against all worldliness with the aim of purification and spiritual illumination. For the satisfaction of God, thereby, she seeks martyrdom with passion through which she becomes a second Hallaj. Viewed thus, Joan's manner of living could be an extension of the Sufic ideals when, by discarding her base and local self, she starts to envisage herself in God's universal mirror. It is at this juncture that she is driven out of the abyss of the self and filled with enthusiastic rapture for the Beyond.

## CONCLUSION

In order to estrange the aspirant from everyday wanderings and give him the proper torch for reaching God, Sufism brings up a mystic on the basis of Islam.



According to Sufism, such alienation will not come to pass unless the seeker of Truth starts to appreciate the beauty of union with God in the next world and abhor the pernicious snare of the present world. With such illumination and the leadership of a master Sufi, the disciple passes the different stations of spirit to unite all-inclusively with the Beloved and, after that, to become a master himself.

The Sufi does not praise God for heavenly rewards, nor does he abstain from sin for the fear of Hell. He praises Him because he observes Him all the time and abandons sin because he is aware it would be unacceptable to sin in the presence of his Beloved. Continually practising piety, the Sufi does not wish to go against the divine law and detach himself from the sole object of his actions. He does not allow his carnal soul (*nafs*) to take control of him and cancel the spiritual union with his Beloved. It is for this reason that, for the Sufi, the battle against ego and selfhood is more rewarding than any other kind of battle, for *nafs*, according to Sufis, is the fiercest enemy one has.

Shaw's *Saint Joan* shows remarkable resemblances with the doctrines of Sufism. Like a Sufi, Joan ascends the steps of spiritual elevation. She is fully excited to fulfil whatever she thinks is her duty. Inspired by divine voices to crown the Dauphin and force out the English from France, she turns her back to all mundane well-being. All along her way, she never backs down from fulfilling her mission and, in the times of dejection, she is given

even more spirit to get closer to God by assuming her duties. She acts like a Sufi in the quest of fulfilment, never allowing the interests of her body to overcome the aspirations of her soul. By so doing, she finally realises her dream: union with God.

This paper delves into the correspondence between the creed of Joan and the doctrines of Sufism. For doing this, it examines Joan not merely as a Christian saint but also as an individual who shares the qualities of a Sufi. She may indeed represent non-Muslim believers, or those who may not concur with the peculiarities of Islamic Sufism. This study, however, suggests that for lovers the path of divine love is the same and the difference is one of degree, not of direction. In this regard, Joan could represent those who agree with the spirit of Sufism and are guided by God in the path of illumination. Joan's unflinching faith and deep spiritual engagement causes her to speak openly, like Hallaj, about the mysteries of unity. We draw the comparison between Joan and Sufis in order to suggest that the mystical statements of both point to a similar goal of extinction and subsistence.

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