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Ghum Charkharī/Spin, O Spinning-wheel: Cotton-spinning and Weaving Symbolism in Shah Husayn's Poetry

Abstract

Shah Husayn (1539-1593) of Lahore, popularly known as Lal Husayn, is a celebrated sixteenth-century sufi poet of premodern Punjab, who composed very lyrical and melodious short poems or kāfis. His poetical compositions are high symbolic in nature, with similes and metaphors drawn from Punjabi rural life and folk traditions. In particular, most of his metaphors are related to cotton-spinning and cloth weaving, cotton being a major agricultural produce of Punjab. One of the reasons is that Shah Husayn belonged to a family or caste of weavers, which was, and is still, considered a marginalized community in South Asia. He was not shamed of his social status, as he did not hesitate to openly acknowledge it in his poetry. Most of his famous kāfis feature spinning and weaving metaphors, with charkha or the spinning-wheel as the central symbol. He employed a feminine voice in his poetry. He also talked about the technicalities of spinning and weaving, as well as attan or the female social space for spinning, and dowry, and beautifully weaves them in his sufi symbolism, which is meant to disseminate ethical ideals among the readers. He urges the people to earn good deeds during their lifetime so that they could enjoy the eternal pleasures in the life hereafter.

Keywords: Shah Husayn, Punjabi sufi poetry, symbolism, cotton-spinning, weaving, charkha or spinning-wheel

Shah Husayn of Lahore is one of the early Punjabi sufi poets whose lyrical and melodious poetic compositions are highly symbolic in nature. He used the vehicle of his verses for dissemination of sufi ideology among the people at large. His poetry embodies an ethical message for the readers, which is relatable to all irrespective of religious orientation, caste, creed, gender and age. Before we proceed to explore the symbolism in his poetry, it seems pertinent to briefly discuss his life sketch along with a historical overview of cotton production and weaving.

1. Shah Husayn: A Brief Life Sketch

Shah Husayn (1539-1593) of Lahore, popularly known as Lal Husayn, is a celebrated sixteenth-century sufi poet of premodern Punjab. He was born in the year 1539 in a converted family of Kāyastha Hindus who lived inside Taxali Gate,

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in the walled city of Lahore, the area then was known as Mohalla Tilla Bagga. It was in the fourteenth century during the reign of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughluq (r. 1351-88) that his ancestors converted to Islam.¹ He belonged to the *Dhātā* clan of Rajputs. From maternal side he was Doha and Kalsraī from his paternal side.² The name of his father was Shaykh Uthman, who was a weaver by profession, and lived in abject poverty when Husayn was born.

It is said that Shah Husayn spent first ten years of his life studying at home and in *madrassah* (religious seminary). He was sent to Maulvi Abu Bakr to memorize the Quran and become *hāfīz* (one who memorizes the Quran) at the tender age of ten. During this period, Shaykh Bahlol Daryai (d. 1575) of Chiniot (in present day District Jhang, Western Punjab), a renowned Qadiri sufi, reached India and met Maulvi Abu Bakr. During his meeting, he saw Shah Husayn and inquired about him from his teacher. From there he came to know that Shah Husayn had memorized seven *pārās* (volumes of the Quran which are thirty in number). On hearing this, Shaykh Bahlol asked Husayn to bring water for ablution from the River Ravi where he is said to have met Khwaja Khidr.³ The next day the holy month of Ramadan was starting. Shaykh Bahlol asked Shah Husayn to lead the *tarāvīh* prayer (supererogatory prayers performed by the Muslims in the holy month of Ramadan), but the latter replied that he could not do it since he had memorized only seven *pārās* of the Quran, whereas it is customary that the *tarāvīh* prayer leader is expected to be a *hafiz* of the entire Quran. Shaykh Bahlol asked him to just start reciting the Quran, and ensured that he (Shah Husayn) would be able to do it by himself, and it happened the way Shaykh Bahlol had predicted. This *karāmat* (miracle) of reciting the entire Quran verbally became famous. After this, Shaykh Bahlol formally started training the young Shah Husayn in spirituality, and instructed him to stay at the shrine of learned and popular sufi of the eleventh century, Saiyyid ‘Ali Hujwiri (d. 1077) in Lahore, and learn the stages of *taṣawwuf*. Shah Husayn stayed there during day time, while he spent his nights standing and reciting the Quran in the waters of River Ravi.⁴ He also benefitted from Shaykh Sa‘ad-Allah, another prominent scholar and teacher of his times.

As a disciple of Shaykh Bahlol Daryai Qadiri, Shah Husayn joined the Qadiri *Silsilah*. According to Nur Ahmad Chishti, the latter was at the tender age of ten when he was initiated in the Qadiri *Silsilah* at the hands of Shaykh Bahlol.⁵ The Qadiri *Silsilah* was introduced in India during the fifteenth century when the Qadiri sufis established themselves in Deccan and Uch, from where they later spread to other parts of India.⁶ Reportedly, the *Silsilah* was introduced in Deccan by Mir Nur-Allah, a grandson of Shah Nur al-Din Naimat-Allah (d. 1430/31) during the times of the Bahmani Sultans. In Punjab, however, it became popular during the first half of the fifteenth century when it was introduced by Saiyyid Bandagi Muhammad Ghawth (d. 1517), a descendant of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Jilani of Baghdad (b.1077-d.1166; founder of the Qadiri *Silsilah*). Saiyyid Bandagi arrived in Uch in 1482,⁷ and is considered primarily responsible for the growth and development of the *Silsilah* in Punjab.

Coming back to Shah Husayn, he observed the path of sobriety during the next twenty-six years of his life, and strictly adhered to the norms of society and followed the injunctions of *shari‘ah* or the law of Islam. In year 1575 at the age of

thirty-six, however, he renounced sobriety, and became an ‘intoxicated’ or ‘drunk’ sufi, who spent the rest of his days singing, dancing and drinking openly in the streets of Lahore.⁸ So he became the first and the foremost sufi representing the Malāmatiyya tradition (literally meaning self-reproaching), often referred to as the antinomian tradition, in Punjab.⁹ There is a popular incident regarding Shah Husayn’s adoption of ‘Malamati’ path and the story goes that once he was learning *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Quran) from Shaykh Sa’ad-Allah. Upon reading a verse which meant that this world is nothing but a game show and pastime,¹⁰ Husayn started singing and dancing, and also left the *madrassah* and all the scholarly pursuits immediately.¹¹ To him, dancing and singing was better than knowledge without practice.¹² It is important to note that the sixteenth-century Punjab witnessed the dissemination of the liberality of outlook, tolerance and religious pluralism associated with the Bhakti Movement and Chishti *Silsilah*. Moreover, the ideology of *wahdat al-wujud* (the Unity of Being) and the religious policies of Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1555-1605) further discouraged religious bigotry and extremism, and promoted universal peace and tolerance. The Qadiri *Silsilah*, to which Shah Husayn was spiritually affiliated, emerged as a symbol of sufi rebellion, as opposed to orthodoxy, in the sixteenth-century Punjab.¹³ His antinomian and liberal orientation can be understood in context of these developments. Shah Husayn fell in love with Madho, a young Brahman Hindu lad and spent sixteen years feeling the pain of separation. During this period, initially Madho was indifferent to the affection of Husayn but later he started reciprocating the feelings, and started spending days and nights with him.¹⁴ When Madho’s family went to River Ganges for *ashnān* or ritual bath, he could not accompany them. Shah Husayn miraculously took Madho to the River Ganges in a blink of an eye when they both were physically present in Lahore. This miracle converted Madho to Islam, who later attained spiritual elevation in the company of Shah Husayn.¹⁵ Husayn’s love for Madho has now become a metaphor for secularism, spiritual love, tolerance towards other religions and interfaith harmony as well. Shah Husayn declared his love for Madho in these words:

*toon hain tānā, toon hain bānā, sub kujh mera toon*¹⁶

You are my warp and weft, you are everything to me.

Their love-relationship has not only become proverbial but controversial as well. According to Krishna, however, his poetry is completely silent about it,¹⁷ though others find clues and inklings about it in his verses. The Mughal Emperor Jehangir (r.1605-27) was very much impressed by Shah Husayn, and had thus appointed Bahar Khan Munshi to pen down his day-to-day activities, so a book or a memoir named *Bahāriyya* was composed, which is not extant now. Shah Husayn did not compose any book, except for the poetry in Punjabi that survived after him.

2. Shah Husayn as a Sufi Poet

Shah Husayn’s poetry is deeply embedded in the mystical or esoteric tradition of Islam, often referred to as Sufism. He cannot be dismissed as a ‘Vedantic Sufi poet’ and ‘almost a Hindu saint in his beliefs,’ as mistakenly suggested by some scholars such as Sadhu Ram Sharda.¹⁸ Nonetheless, such arguments have been challenged by more recent scholarship, more notable among is Christopher Shackle, who emphasizes the Islamic/sufi character of the Punjabi sufi poetry,

including that of Shah Husayn. He urges for reading the premodern Punjabi poetry in an essentially ‘sufi context.’¹⁹

Shah Husayn wrote in a single genre, i.e. *kāfi*, which a distinct literary genre of Punjabi and Sindhi vernacular poetry. As a genre, *kāfi*, most probably, was not popular outside Punjab and Sindh. The term *kāfi* is used for Muslim-sufi poetry, while *shabd* or *ashlok/shalok* is used for non-Muslim poetry. A *kāfi* is a short poem often containing rhymed lines and a refrain.²⁰ It can be defined as a “monorhyme stanzaic verse form usually set to music.”²¹ Baba Guru Nanak (b.1469-d.1539) is considered to be the first who wrote *kāfis* in Punjabi language, though some consider Shah Husayn as its pioneer. The style of Shah Husayn is more vernacular while that of Nanak, as the former contains many old Sanskrit words. A *kāfi* is based on regional folk melodies, and thus, primarily meant for singing. Therefore, they are popularly sung by the people. It is the musicality in Shah Husayn’s poetry which renders it easier to be sung and remembered. It is interesting to note that he was familiar with various melodies or *rāgs* which were prevalent at that time. According to a critic, his *kāfis* are “designed as musical compositions to be interpreted by the singing voice. The rhythm in the refrain and in the lines is [sic] so balanced and counterpointed as to bring out a varying, evolving musical pattern.”²² Shah Husayn’s poetry offers a variety of themes. Most of his poetical compositions revolve around the mortality of life and the reality of death, obedience to God, nearness to God, Divine love, and ethical teachings such as politeness, humility and kind heartedness. In his *kāfis*, we generally do not find more than six to seven lines. They contain sufi doctrines and moral values, though some of them could be romantic sometimes, which can be interpreted in terms of both temporal romantic human love between a male and a female, referred to as ‘*ishq-i majāzī*, or Divine love, referred to as ‘*ishq-i haqīqī*. His ideas touched the hearts of millions of people irrespective of their religion, caste, creed and gender. Moreover, his poetry refers to the economically wretched and socially marginalized sections of society. His ancestors were weavers by profession. So he lived among the common people and felt their pain and sufferings. He drew attention towards their pain and anguish. He expressed his resentment towards the establishment of the period and the prevailing oppressive social set up.

3. Cotton-spinning and Weaving Symbolism in Shah Husayn’s Poetry

Before we turn to the symbolism in Shah Husayn’s poetry with reference to cotton-spinning and weaving, it seems pertinent to have a brief overview of the history of cotton production and weaving. Among the people of ancient civilizations, Harappans were the pioneers of cotton production. One can find references of cotton in ancient Hindu sacred texts as well. Rig Veda, for instance, highlights the weavers in one of its *shaloks*, which reads: a man prayed to God: “O Powerful! Though I am a priest, I am worried like a weaver who is worried for his cotton from being attacked by mice.”²³ Herodotus (Greek historian, c. 484-425 B.C.) while praising the quality of cotton produced in India says that in India the trees grow wildly and produce a type of fibre that is better in quality and beauty than the wool of sheep, and they use it for making their clothes.²⁴ The celebrated Ajanta caves (situated in Aurangabad District, State of Maharashtra) depict the images of cotton growers in India, and also show that the Indians were the

pioneers of roller machine that separates seeds from cotton balls. During Gupta period (stretching from 240 to 590 AD), the Indians were selling cotton as a luxury item to their neighbours in East Africa, Middle East and Southeast Asia.²⁵ The renowned ancient Indian text on state conduct, *Arthashastra*²⁶ offers instructions regarding the distribution of the material to cotton weavers and spinners, and also lists the taxes they were supposed to pay to the government.²⁷ It also mentions the permission granted to the prostitutes and widows to work on looms for their living.

The central tool used for spinning cotton is *charkha* or the spinning-wheel. It is an old machine for turning fibre into thread, which was used to make cloth out of it with the help of a loom. It was invented in India between 500-1000 A.D.²⁸ and then reached Europe and other parts of the world, but its origins are still obscure. It was improved during the 1700s in the wake of Industrial Revolution in Europe. In short, it was used in many parts of the ancient world with slight variations in shapes. Coming back to Shah Husayn, his poetry is full of symbolism. The similes and metaphors he used were largely drawn from Punjabi rural life, domestic industries, the relationships of the people with each other, and their folk traditions. In particular, most of his metaphors are related to cotton-spinning and weaving. The importance and centrality of spinning and weaving in an agrarian economy cannot be overstated. Punjab's economy has always been predominantly agrarian owing to fertile soil and availability of plenty of water. Cotton is a major agricultural produce of Punjab, besides wheat and rice. In addition to this, Shah Husayn belonged to the family or caste of weavers. Therefore, most of his famous *kāfis* feature weaving symbols, with *charkha* or the spinning-wheel as the central symbol.

As pointed out above, Shah Husayn was a weaver by caste, which he proudly acknowledged time and again in his poetry. He had its profound knowledge, which is well-reflected from the technical vocabulary and terminologies related to spinning and weaving employed throughout his *kāfis*. For instance, he observes: *je waḍ charkha te waḍ ghumaen*²⁹ (both spinning-wheel and its handle are equally large in size) which shows that till that time in India treadle had not been added to the spinning-wheel and the weaver had to use both hands for moving the wheel. In addition to *charkha*, he refers to the following technical terms in this regard:

- (i) *tānā bānā*³⁰ (the warp and weft of a loom/cloth)
- (ii) *gohṛā*³¹ (raw form of cotton)
- (iii) *ponī*³² (raw cotton ball for making thread)
- (iv) *naliyān*³³ (thread cones)
- (v) *aṭīran*³⁴ (frame for making thread)
- (vi) *baetar*³⁵ (a thin rope which helps move the spinning-wheel)
- (vii) *aṭiyān*³⁶ (twisted thread)
- (viii) *munne*³⁷ (leg of spinning-wheel)

3.1 Shah Husayn ‘the Weaver’ as a Representative of a Marginalized Community

As mentioned above, Shah Husayn was a weaver or *julāhā* by caste. The term *julāhā* is derived from Persian word *julāh* (ball of thread) which is associated with the Hindi word *jala* or *jali* (interlaced thread). At present, the weavers or *julāhās*

are listed as a scheduled caste under the provisions of the Indian Constitution. The official records of colonial India reveal that they spoke vernacular dialects and languages, and were largely confined to weaving, but were not village menials who were paid the customary dues.³⁸ They were fond of calling themselves as Rajputs.³⁹ They were also popular with the names of *Kāsbi*, *Nurbāf* and *Bāfinda*. They were called *Julāhā* in the East, and *Paolī* in the western villages. Both their men and women used to weave cloth, and get the payment of their work according to the length of the woven cloth.⁴⁰ They were considered one of the most troublesome artisans, as a famous Punjabi saying goes: ‘how should a weaver be patient?’ Other popular sayings depict their low social status: ‘a weaver by profession and his name is Fateh Khan (literally meaning the victorious chief)’.⁴¹ According to one opinion cited by Ibbetson in *Punjab Castes*, the *Chamārs* (an occupational group primarily associated with leather work) and *Julāhās* probably had the same origin, but owing to their different occupations, they had acquired different social status. The *Julāhās* neither work with impure leather, nor do they eat flesh of dead animals. They were basically artisans.⁴² They often work with close family members in order to transfer their skills from generation to generation. The social status of a weaver can be judged by a popular saying: ‘last year I was a weaver, this year I am a Shaykh; next year if prices rise I shall be a Saiyid.’⁴³ In short, it must be remembered here that the weavers were at the lower rungs of the society, and were a marginalized community in many parts of India.

Shah Husayn was not shamed of his social status, as he did not hesitate to acknowledge it in his poetry, and openly declares:

*naoñ Husayn te zāt julāha, gāliyāñ tāniyāñ wāliyāñ*⁴⁴

By name I am Husayn and by caste a weaver. I have ruined the name of the weavers!

One of his *kāfīs* implies the low social standing of the weavers in the society, as they could easily be blamed by others for the latter’s faults:

*apnā soot teñ ap wanjāya, dos julāhay nōñ lāya kiyun*⁴⁵

You have lost cotton yourself, why are you blaming the weaver!

3.2 Charkha or the Spinning-wheel and its Symbolism

In many parts of the ancient world, the *charkha* or the spinning-wheel have come to symbolize many things. Since spinning cotton and making cloth was often associated with women, so it has come to symbolize the dignity of a woman’s labour in some cultures.⁴⁶ In Punjabi sufi poetry, however, the *charkha* appears as a central symbol around which other symbols are woven in a complex whole. The rotation of the spinning-wheel resembles the rotation of the earth on its axis, bringing about day and night. For Shah Husayn, the spinning-wheel is a symbol of the material or temporal world, a symbol of the span of human life with all its ups and downs like the day and night. The process of spinning cotton on the wheel symbolizes the drudgery of human life as well. Since cotton-spinning is mindless, backbreaking, and a plodding task, it is evoked as a symbol of the humdrum and monotony of daily life of an average individual involved in some kind of menial

labour, which was quite often the fate of the rural folks in Punjabi villages during the times of Shah Husayn.

Young girls in premodern Punjab used to spin cotton in order to be taken as a part of their dowry to the groom's place after wedding. The dowry, in fact, earned them respect in the eyes of the in-laws. The preparation of dowry in the parental home guaranteed the girls or women success in their marital life. Shah Husayn intelligently evokes the symbol of the young girl to refer to the human souls, and urges them to prepare themselves for the life hereafter. In this way, the entire process of spinning cotton come to symbolize the earning of good deeds in one's life, which ensures success in the life after death. Wedding comes to symbolize death, since wedding unites the two bodies, and death symbolizes the ultimate union of human soul with the Godhead, as per the sufi worldview. In sufi tradition, the concept of 'spiritual marriage' between a human soul and God has been a frequent premise,⁴⁷ which has given birth to a whole range of bridal symbolism in sufi literature, particularly the sufi poetry. The bridal metaphor is evident in the poetic writings of as early as the ninth-century Persian sufi, Bayazid of Bistam (d. 874), who referred to the bridal symbols and talked about the human souls as the bride of God.⁴⁸ Later on, in the thirteenth century, the Andalusian/Spanish sufi master, Muhiyy al-Din Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) in his work, *Tarjūmān al-'ashwāq*, and the celebrated sufi master, Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) in his monumental work, *Mathnavī-i' ma'anvī* employed the wedding metaphors for the spiritual union of the human soul (symbolized as a bride) and God, presented as the 'Primordial Beloved.'⁴⁹ So according to this extended symbolism, death appears as the symbol of the moment of transformation by shedding off one's physical/material or fleshly existence, and entering the subtle realm of existence, characterized by the union of the human soul with God, its source of origin. In sufi philosophy, the notion of '*ishq* (which cannot be adequately translated as love) can probably be explained as the 'intensified love coupled with passionate longing for union.' It is argued that all human souls have been separated or alienated from their Divine source of origin, and so they all have a burning desire to return to It. This passionate desire is referred to as '*ishq* in sufi lexicon.

Since the task of spinning thread on the spinning-wheel was mostly done by women and young girls, Shah Husayn identifies himself with the girl (*kurī*) who is spinning cotton. The young girl (bride-to-be) symbolizes human souls who have a longing to meet the beloved groom, symbolizing God.⁵⁰ As pointed out above, this bridal metaphor is not something uncommon in sufi poetry. The symbolic expression of the 'bridal pair' for God and human beings is characterized by gender reversal. It is significant to note that the sufi worldview discourages gender biases and prejudices. The sufis seem to transcend the normative gender categories in traditional social set up, in defiance to the patriarchal social structures. Shah Husayn used the motif of a *virahinī*, i.e. a woman/wife separated from her lover/husband who experiences the agony of parting, and intensely longs for her union with him. The passionate love and longing of the *virahinī* is not unlike the sufi experience of '*ishq* based on the notion of the separation of the human souls from God, and the desire for reunion.⁵¹ As pointed out above, Shah Husayn represented the Malamatī or the antinomian tradition, as his actions and demeanour was in flagrant violation of the prevalent social norms as well as the

injunctions of the *shari'ah* or the Muslim law. In the post-sobriety phase of his spiritual journey, he used to openly drink and dance in the streets of Lahore. This 'colourful' and pleasure-seeking life style is again depicted in his poetry by using the metaphor of *charkha*, as he declares:

*charkha mera rangra rang lāl*⁵²

My spinning-wheel is colourful, having red colour

He adds: *ghum charkharyā*, spin, O spinning-wheel!, and praises the girls who pay attention to spinning cotton in these words: *terī kattān wālī jivay! naliyañ wattān wālī jivay!*⁵³ In the same *kāfī*, he maintains that it is not only the spinning-wheel that praises God but its parts such as *baetar* (a thin rope which helps move the spinning-wheel) also utters the sacred formulae of 'Hu' (literally meaning 'It is He' or Allah).⁵⁴ It must be remembered that *dhikr* or *zikr* (remembrance of God often done verbally by repeating/reciting certain sacred formula or the names of Allah) is an important sufi practice. Shah Husayn suggests that one should not merely do *dhikr* verbally through the movement of tongue but all the organs of human body should join a person in this exercise. According to the sufis, true *dhikr* is the one which is perpetual; a sufi should be engaged in it at all times and climes. In this sense, the spinning-wheel and its parts in Shah Husayn's poetry symbolize human body, and its varied organs.

3.3 *Attan* or the Female Social Space for Spinning

Shah Husayn often talks about *attan* (also referred to as *tiranjan*) in order to refer to the spinning parties as well as the social space which is reserved for spinning by womenfolk. The girls and women usually sat together in small groups, where they used to spin cotton while talking, gossiping, telling jokes, sharing old memories, laughing together and at times singing or humming folk songs. "These social gatherings ... were so important to the girls that they sang many songs about them and exchanged reminiscences about them later in life."⁵⁵ These spinning parties were purposeful meetings of unmarried girls who used to bring their looms and sit together after finishing their daily household chores.⁵⁶ It served as a 'social space' because of the absence of any communal compartmentalization in pre-colonial Punjabi society.⁵⁷ It was practiced by almost all the sections of society. While highlighting *attan* as an important social space, Shah Husayn says:

*kahē Husayn faqīr Saīñ dā, attān phera pā*⁵⁸

Says Husayn, the beggar of Lord, come to my spinning space

In another *kāfī*, he again highlights the significance of *attan* or *tiranjan* and spinning in the Punjabi society in these words:

*attan mai kyū āī sāñ, morī tand nā pāī ā kē*⁵⁹

My arrival at the spinning space is useless because I have not prepared any strand or fibre

In symbolic terms, *attan* in Shah Husayn's poetry refers to the span of worldly life, the time granted to each human soul from his/her adolescence to the last drawn breath in order to earn good deeds. Like in *attan*, some girls do not pay attention to spinning, and instead get lost in gossiping, similarly, some people

forget the goal of securing good and righteous deeds in their lifetime, and get engrossed in maximizing the material comforts and pleasures of the world. That is why, Shah Husayn urges the young girl to learn to spin cotton as her wedding preparation are underway.⁶⁰ In a similar tone, the celebrated eighteenth-century Punjabi sufi poet, Bullhe Shah (1680-1757) of Qasur admonishes the girls in these words: *kar kattan wal dhyān kuṛay* (Girl, pay attention to spinning).⁶¹

3.4 Dowry

Dowry (*dāj*) is an age-old custom in the Punjabi society where marriage is believed to be of primary importance. Shah Husayn mentions the significance of dowry for the bride or bride-to-be.⁶² In one of his *kāfīs*, he reminds the young girl to collect dowry while living in her parental home:

*babul de ghar dāj vihonī, darbar pōnī kat lē*⁶³

You can spend life at your father's place; spin something whether good or bad

In another *kāfī*, he laments that he (Shah Husayn) has not earned enough good deeds during his lifetime. In fact, he is representing those human souls who forget the actual meaning of life on this earth, and fail to do anything worthwhile to ensure success in the life hereafter:

*hornāṇ katiyāṇ punj sut poniyāṇ, mai kīh ākhan jāe*⁶⁴

Other (girls) make five to seven big cotton balls (for their dowry), what I would tell, as I have prepared nothing.

In another *kāfī*, Shah Husayn bemoans that all the friends have left the *attan* and the silly girl has been left alone, and then infers that the reward one gets later depends on how one spins the cotton and weaves the cloth.

*charkha chā sabhay ghar gaiyāṇ, rahi akeli hoṇ*⁶⁵

jehā rejā thok wunaeyoṇ, tehī chādar tān key soṇ

All the girls brought their spinning-wheels back to their homes and I am alone now;

You sleep under the shade of the kind of cloth you weave!

He admonishes the girl who does not spin and waste her time in roaming about. Owing to her carefree comportment, her raw cotton balls used for making thread were eaten up or destroyed by the lamb. He warns her that she would go to the house of her in-laws empty-handed without dowry,⁶⁶ and thus she would fail to win the love, care and attention of her husband and his family members after marriage. In traditional South Asian context, it is the amount of dowry which ensures respect and love to a girl among her in-laws after marriage. In a nutshell, according to Shah Husayn, symbolically it is the good deeds one earns during the lifetime that will guarantee success in life hereafter. He brings home the truth that the kind of comfort and treatment one gets in life hereafter actually depends on how one behaves in his/her lifetime.

Notes & References

¹ Zahoor-ul-Hasan Sharib, *Tadhkira Awliya-i Pak wa Hind* (Lahore: Progressive Books, 1999), 245.

² Nur Ahmad Chishti, *Tehqiqāt-i Chishti* (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Academy, 1964), 363.

³ Khidr or Khizr is a figure mentioned in the Quran as a righteous servant of God, who guided Prophet Moses (AS). He is known as a possessor of wisdom and secret or esoteric knowledge. In certain parts of South Asia, he is also known as the guard of the waters, including the seas, rivers, wells and streams.

⁴ Chishti, *Tehqiqāt-i Chishti*, 371.

⁵ For details see Chishti, *Tehqiqāt-i Chishti*, 364-76.

⁶ Fatima Zehra Bilgrami, *History of the Qadri Order in India (16th-18th Century)*, (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, 2005), 368.

⁷ For details, see Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dehlavi, *Akhbar al-Akhyar*, Urdu tr. Iqbal al-Din Ahmad (Karachi: Dar al-Isha'at, 1997), 281-82.

⁸ Chishti, *Tehqiqāt-i Chishti*, 372-73; see also John A. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1938), 265-66.

⁹ Qazi Javed, *Punjab kē sufi dānishwar* (Lahore: Fiction House, 2010), 131; see also, Fateh Muhammad Malik, "Shah Husain and the Malamatiya in the Punjab," in *Sufi Traditions and New Departures: Recent Scholarship on Continuity and Change in South Asian Sufism*, eds. Søren Christian Lassen and Hugh van Skyhawk (Islamabad: Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, 2008), 40.

¹⁰ *al-Quran*, Surah 29, Verse 64.

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¹³ Javed, *Punjab kē sufi dānishwar*, 129.

¹⁴ Chishti, *Tehqiqāt-i Chishti*, 376.

¹⁵ Chishti, *Tehqiqāt-i Chishti*, 378-79.

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¹⁷ Lajwanti Rama Krishna, *Pañjābī šūfi poets, A.D. 1460-1900* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 14-18.

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¹⁹ Christopher Shackle, "Punjabi Sufi Poetry from Farid to Farid," in *Punjab Reconsidered History, Culture, and Practice*, eds. Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26-27.

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