

**“Ka’ba kā Shauq Hai na Sanam Khāna Chāhiye”:
The Symbolism of Spiritual Transcendence in Bedam Shah Warsi’s Poetic Vision**

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a close study of the literary and mystical meanings of Urdu ghazal "Ka'ba kā shauq hai na sanam khāna chāhiye" by Bedam Shah Warsi. It is discussed in the context of Sufi poetry and the qawwali tradition of the Indian subcontinent. Bedam Shah Warsi (1876-1936), who was the disciple of Haji Waris Ali Shah and famous for na'tiya and mystic verses, constructs the ghazal through the vision of divine love (ishq-e-haqīqī), which goes beyond Ka'ba and the idol-temple (sanam khāna). In this case, religious institutions are substituted for the union with the Beloved. The symbolism in the ghazal such as wine-cup (sāghar), goblet (paimāna), tavern and its spiritual leader (murshid-e-mai khāna), Laila Majnun and 'the prayer of love' (namāz-e-ishq), indicates the inferiority of the rituals before divine relationship, that leads from exterior architectural structure of the faith to theophany. These symbols have been examined through Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Symbols(1967). The study fills the gap that Bedam, despite all the regular and sustained recitation of his kalam by prominent qawwals and ghazal performers in India and Pakistan, has remained an outsider to the academic work. It also aims to pay attention on how Bedam has remodeled the classical style of Persian-Urdu poetry to convey the concept of longing, in which the door of the Beloved (dar-e-jānāna) transcends all sacred porches.

Keywords: Bedam Shah Warsi, Sufi poetry, Ghazal, Symbolism, Divine Love, Qawwali, Urdu Mysticism

INTRODUCTION

To date, all research on Sufi poetry has concentrated only on some poets such as Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, and Khwaja Ghulam Fareed whose work has been extensively published, translated, and critically examined. While expressing the mystical thoughts, these Sufi poets have always used certain symbols in their poetry, such as the tavern and the cup of wine, the veil and the unveiling, the shrine and the statue. With this inheritance, one who has made a unique contribution to this poetic tradition is Bedam Shah Warsi, but still his work requires the scholarly attention. So the present work aims to fill this gap by writing an authentic biographical note, and the analysis of his famous ghazal.

Bedam was born in 1876, in a Syed family of Anwar Husayn and Bandi Begum, a pious couple. The family was reputed as noble, had landowner background, and settled from seven or eight generations back in Muhallah Shah Mehmud, Etawah (a city of district Barabanki in Uttar Pradesh). He was the only child of his parent, given the name Ghulam Husayn, later became unknown by the name Bedam Shah by his mentor, Haji Waris Ali (A. Waris, 2017, p. 47). Since childhood, he had sober personality, disliked wasting time with friends.

As the tradition of that time, he was learnt to read Koran, given necessary knowledge of Islamic beliefs and rituals, and familiarity with Persian, Arabic by Wahid Husayn Etawi and Sanskrit by Pandit Ram

Ghulam as primary schooling (Mehfil e Auliya, 2025). Meanwhile there is a narration of going to Ali Garh, for higher studies of scholarly education (A. Waris, 2017, p. 47).

From the adolescence, he used to listen to the poetry of different poets, which develop keen interest and attracted him towards literary circles. As a result, the poetic nature brought young Ghulam Husayn to Agra, where he became the disciple of Syed Nisar Akbar Abadi (the pupil of Waheed Mankpuri, also the student of the famous poet Haider Ali Atish of Lucknow) (Saghar, 1975, p. 134). The company proved fruitful, the combination of poetic prevalence and competence guidance grew him as poet with the pen name 'Bedam' which means "breathless". (S. I. Warsi, personal communication, December 16, 2025)

During the Stay at Agra, Bedam was inspired by a spiritual figure, known him by name, listened through his teacher (Saghar, 1993, p. 39). He was Haji Waris Ali, leaved influence and raised the desire to enter in his Sufi order, but still in veil. After having grip on poetic utterance, Bedam departed teacher's house, and came back to Etawah. As per nature, the time and tide waits for none, days and nights passed, and started to live his life as he wished.

One day, the news spread, a Sufi saint arrived in the city and the people assembled around him as moths to lamp. The man with intoxicated eyes, taciturn nature, simple look but the impressive personality, became the center of attention to everybody. (F. Husayn, n.d., p. 46) Actually he was on his way to performing Hajj, so Etawah a stop of the journey, and the stay was not unusual. He spent short span of time, became the resident of Muhallah Katra Shahab Khan, entered many people to his order, among the first Abul Hassan Shah, the man fasting for twelve years, (this was the impact of the Sufi saint, which dwelled on Abul Hassan, did as he said) (Kawish, 1977, p. 48–49).

Every day the publicity of the Sufi saint was increasing, the people were coming to see him, for some he was a magician, many considered mere a saint sage, but there's a man for him, he was the hidden desire of the heart, and might be the time came to fulfill the desire. The desirer was Bedam, while the desire Haji Waris Ali Shah, who captivated him from the academic life at Agra. Bedam was also aware of the presence of Haji Waris in the hometown, so the moment came; the nightingale was going near flower, Bedam reached the place, where Haji Waris Ali was stayed, he entered into the closet, the eyes met, Haji Waris call came to near, placed his hand on shoulder and said "This is my Bedam" (S. I. Warsi, personal communication, December 16, 2025).

After that, Haji Waris Ali left the city and started his journey to Mecca, but the short meeting changed Bedam's inner world, showed influence in the form of convergence from figurative to divine love (Kawish, 1977, p. 49). Though this was the first interaction, but caused to become the Ehram-posh devotee (faqir) of Haji Waris, return from sacred journey, invited Bedam to arrive to Dewah, the city where he lived. (S. I. Warsi, personal communication, December 16, 2025) The anxious heart felt ease, a boy the age of seventeen, reached Dewah, took oath of allegiance on the hand of Haji Waris, gave new identity of threefold: new name; Bedam Shah, Ehram; the dress of two yellow cloaks, and seal of his hand on the chest, remained till death as the proof of the relation. Bedam discloses his feelings in these words:

مجھے خاک میں ملا کر میری خاک بھی اڑا دے

تیرے نام پہ مٹا ہوں مجھے کیا غرض نشاں سے

(Bedam, 2017)

(Translation)

Turn me to dust, then blow away that dust too

I have been obliterated in your name, what concern do I have for traces?

Bedam is regarded as the embodiment of spirituality and a Sufi poet of the Warsia order. His famous poetic books include, He was honored with the titles of *Siraj-ush-Shu'ara* (Light of Poets), *Lisan-ut-Tariqat* (Tongue of the Spiritual Path), *Khusrau Bargah Waris-e-Alam Nawaz*, *Ashiq-e-Sina Nigar* (Lover with a scarred chest), *Musawwir-e-Jazbat* (Painter of Emotions), *Chiragh-e-Bazm-e-Man* (Lamp of My Gathering), *Shama-e-Anjuman-e-Warsi* (Candle of the Warsi Assembly) by the contemporary stalwarts, who are experts in the art of poetry. (Rashid, 2017)

His available poetic work includes, *Karishma-e-Warsi* or "*Saut-e-Sarmadi*, *Guldasta-e-Warsi*, *Jigar Para*, *Fughan-e-Bedam* and *Mushaf-e-Bedam*, which consist both the mystical and romantic elements in a unique spiritual zeal of divine intoxication, that he practiced through many genres including Hamd (praise of God), Naat (praise of the Prophet), Manqabat (praise of saints), Shajra (genealogy/spiritual lineage), Salam, Marsia, and Ghazal. Besides this, he also revived the syncretic poetic traditions of North India by writing the Purbi kalam which includes Bhajans, Dadra, Thumri, and some seasonal songs like Holi, Chait, Basant, Sawan, Malhar, and Maand. (Rashid, 2017) In the Purbi Poetry, he Uses Holy Hindu imagery, vocabulary, and symbols to express his love and respect for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Ali the fourth righteous caliph, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, and the Chishti saints like Khwaja Moinuddin, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya, and mostly for his mentor Haji Waris Ali.

A special thing that can be observed is the state of Fana, which he immersed himself in completely and reflected in all his literary creations, caused by Haji Waris, taking the path from metaphor to reality at once. The spiritual path of Fana starts from the lofty character of the mentor. A true disciple first achieves the stage of Fana fi-Sheikh (annihilation in the Guide), then the Guide should take care of the rest of the path. The important thing is that the disciple should become the aim (Murad), while the lover, the beloved (Mashuq). (Rashid, 2017) That is why the traveler on the road rapidly achieves the stages of spiritual path and enlightenment. Bedam discloses his feelings during different stages, in the following words:

Stage 1: The first step is contemplation (tasawwur). Bedam expresses about the contemplation of the Shaikh:

بیدم نماز عشق یہی ہے خدا گواہ

ہر دم تصور رخ جانانہ چاہیے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 125)

(Translation)

Bedam, indeed this is the prayer of love, God witnesses

The image of the beloved's face is needed every movement

Then introduce himself in these words:

کافی ہے یہ پتہ میرا لوح مزار پر

بیدم ترا غلام تھا حلقہ بگوش تھا

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 142)

(Translation)

This identity is enough on my tombstone

Bedam was your slave, he was devoted

And how does he present himself in the court of his noble spiritual guide? Just look at the style:

اللہ اللہ رے مرا شوق شہادت بیدم

ان کی سرکار میں لایا ہے کفن پوش مجھے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 174)

(Translation)

Oh God, oh God, my passion for martyrdom Bedam

Has brought me to their court, shrouded

Regarding Fana'fi al-Shaikh (annihilation in the mentor), he says:

یہاں ہونا نہ ہونا ہے نہ ہونا عین ہونا ہے

جسے ہونا ہو کچھ خاکِ درِ جانانہ ہوجا ئے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 145)

(Translation)

Here being is non-being, non-being is the essence of being

As if it were being, let it not become mere dust at the doorstep

Stage 2: After attaining the status of Fana-fi-Rasul, its effects adorned in poetry in these words:

میرا دل اور مری جان مدینے والے

تجھ پہ سو جان سے قربان مدینے والے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 95)

(Translation)

My heart and my soul, O resident of Medina

I sacrifice a hundred thousand lives for you, O resident of Medina

سگِ طیہ مجھے سب کہہ کے پکاریں بیدم

یہی رکھے میری پہچان مدینے والے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 95)

(Translation)

May everyone call me the dog of Taybah

May keep this, as my identity, O resident of Medina

Stage 3: Now, when he entered the next stage of Fana-fi-Allah from Fana-fi-Rasul, he said:

بیدم یہ جستجو بھی عجب ہے عجب تلاش

نکلے ہیں ڈھونڈنے کو اسے ہم جو گھر میں ہے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 71–72)

(Translation)

Bedam this quest is strange, a strange search

We have set out to find one who is in our own home

کلیم جائیں جو جاتے ہیں طور سینا پر

ہمارے دل ہی میں جلوے ہیں طور ایمن کے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 71–72)

(Translation)

Kaleem (Prophet Moses) who goes to Mount Sinai

The manifestations of Mount Sinai are in our hearts

زابد کو اپنے زبد و عبادت پہ بے غرور

مجھ کو ترے کرم تری رحمت پہ ناز ہے

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 71–72)

(Translation)

The ascetic is proud of his asceticism and worship

I am proud of your grace and mercy

One notable aspect about the path of gnosis is the absence of any discrimination against color, race, country, and nation. When a person goes through the process of Faqr (poverty of spirit, spiritual poverty, annihilation in God), he/she sees all the creations of the Sustainer God as members of the divine family:

یاں کافر و مومن کی تفریق ہے لاحاصل

سب یار کے جلوے ہیں اپنا ہے نہ بیگانہ

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 71–72)

(Translation)

Here the distinction between infidel and believer is futile

All are manifestations of the beloved; neither one's own nor a stranger

سب نقش خیالی ہیں کعبہ ہو کہ بت خانہ

تو مجھ میں ہے میں تجھ میں اے جلوئے جانانہ

(B. S. Warsi, 2017, p. 71–72)

(Translation)

All are imaginary impressions, whether it is the Kaba or an idol house

You are in me and I am in you, O manifestation of the beloved

The ghazal "Ka'ba kā shauq hai na sanam khāna chāhiye" ("Neither the Ka'ba nor the idol-temple do I desire") is an instance of the larger literary intent, places in *Mushaf e Bedam*, and sung by different renowned qawwals. This article starts with the analysis of each verse in the ghazal, followed by a conclusion of their argument concerning spiritual transcendence according to Bedam ShahWarisi.

Theoretical Framework

For theoretical framework, the research relies on Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Symbols(1967), of the central principles of theory is that the symbol contains a "surplus of meaning." This means that symbolic expressions can communicate more than one level of significance and cannot always be reduced to a single interpretation. The literal meaning remains important, but it provides a point of departure for discovering broader psychological, cultural, religious, or philosophical meanings. Ricoeur consequently associates symbolism with hermeneutics because symbols require interpretation in order to disclose their deeper significance. Ricoeur's theory is especially applicable to mystical and religious poetry. Sufi poets often employ concrete images to communicate experiences that are difficult to express directly. Images such as wine, the beloved, the tavern, the cup, the mirror, light, and the journey may operate simultaneously at literal and spiritual levels. Wine, for example, can refer literally to a beverage while symbolically suggesting spiritual intoxication or the overwhelming experience of divine love. Likewise, the beloved can function at the human level while simultaneously representing the Divine Beloved.

In the poetry of Bedam Shah Warsi, Ricoeur's theory provides a useful framework for examining the relationship between literal poetic imagery and its deeper mystical significance. Terms such as the Ka'ba, sanam-khana, murshid, beloved, wine, and tavern can be studied as symbolic expressions whose meanings extend beyond their immediate references. Their interpretation requires attention to the wider Sufi conceptual framework of divine love, spiritual longing, mystical knowledge, and transcendence.

Research Method

The aim of this study is to interpret conceptual symbols used in Bedam's selected ghazal. The methodology used in the study is a mixed method approach; interpretive as well as analytical. The text is translated into English and then the symbols are interpreted by the researcher.

Textual Analysis: The Architecture of Renunciation

Beyond Shrine and Idol: The Opening Couplet

Ka'ba kā shauq hai na sanām khāna chāhiye

Jānāna chāhiye dar-e-jānāna chāhiye

("I have no desire for the Ka'ba, nor for the idol-temple; I want only the Beloved, only the door of the Beloved.")

The ghazal disrupts the conventional demarcation in South Asian religious affiliation into either the Ka'ba for the Islamic religious practices or the sanam khāna for polytheism. Bedam is not being an atheist by rejecting both in one breath; rather, he is making what is quite a common move for a Sufi by collapsing the boundaries of exoteric religion in favor of a devotion to an object that stands totally beyond the realm of confessional geography. The use of the word "chāhiye" ("is needed"/"is wanted") in this ghazal denotes the beloved, jānāna, and the threshold of their residence, instead of the place of worship.

The Wine-Cup without Wine: Intoxication as Guidance

Sāghar kī ārzu hai na paimāna chāhiye

Bas ik nigāh-e-murshid-e-mai khāna chāhiye

("I have no longing for the goblet, nor need of the cup; only a single glance from the tavern's spiritual guide is required.")

The tavern (mai khāna) and the sāghar and paimāna, both of which are wine vessels, are part of the most widely recognized group of Sufi symbols. Wine stands for the state of being intoxicated by divine love, while the tavern stands for the place where the love is passed, usually without orthodox approval (Schimmel, 1975). The unique aspect of Bedam's usage of the symbol in the couplet is that he takes away the very object that the symbol refers to – in his case, it is not the cup or the wine that he wants from the spiritual teacher, but the glance (nigāh). The intoxication here is not due to the consumption of the substance, but to receiving it through the glance.

The Torn Garment as Testimony

Hāzir hain mere jaib-o-garabān kī dhajjiyān

ab aur kyā tujhe dil-e-dīvāna chāhiye

("The shreds of my pocket and collar are ready / what more do you want, oh crazy heart?")

Here the poem turns from what the lover renounces to what the lover offers as proof. The torn collar and pocket (jaib-o-garebaan) invoke the ghazal convention, itself descended from the Qur'anic narrative of Zulaikha's pursuit of Yusuf, of the garment rent in a state of overwhelming passion or grief; the plural dhajjiyaan ("tatters, shreds") intensifies the image into something almost forensic, a body of physical evidence "presented" (hazir) as if in a court. The rhetorical question that follows — what more, addressed to the Beloved, could possibly be required beyond a heart rendered mad (dil-e-deewana) — marks the poem's first explicit invocation of the deewana, the "madman" figure central to the Majnun archetype that the following couplet will name outright. Madness here functions not as pathology but as credential: it is the visible sign that love has exceeded the bounds of calculated, reputable devotion, and is therefore, paradoxically, proof of its sincerity.

Laila-Majnun and the Logic of the Candle

Āshiq na ho to ḥusn kā ghar be-charāgh hai

lailā ko qais sham 'a ko parwāna chāhiye

(“Beauty (*husn*) is lifeless or unseen without the longing of love (*‘ishq*); As Laila needs Qais, the classic symbols of a beloved and her lover, and the candle needs a moth.”)

The fourth couplet generalizes the personal claim of the third into a universal principle by invoking two of the ghazal tradition's most stable emblematic pairs: Laila and Qais (the legendary lovers of the Majnun Laila cycle, itself widely read in the Persian and Urdu mystical tradition as an allegory of the soul's longing for God) and the flame (*shama*) and moth (*parwana*), whose self-immolating devotion supplies perhaps the single most recurrent image of mystical self-annihilation, or *fana*, in Persian-Urdu poetics (Schimmel, 1975). The couplet's claim — that beauty (*husn*) without a lover (*aashiq*) is “a house without a lamp” (*be-charagh*) — inverts the ordinary hierarchy of beloved and lover: rather than beauty existing independently and drawing love toward it, beauty is here said to require the lover's gaze and self-sacrifice to be illuminated, to become fully itself. This is a distinctively Sufi claim about the mutual constitution of divine self-disclosure (*tajalli*) and the created being who witnesses and responds to it: God's beauty, on this reading, is not complete without a lover positioned to burn in response to it, just as a candle's flame needs a moth circling it to be witnessed as light rather than mere combustion.

Grace without Veil: The Ethics of Unconcealment

Parwarda-e-karam se to zēbā nahīn hijāb

Mujh khāna-zād-e-husn se parda na chāhiye

(“Veiling does not become one nurtured by grace; from me, a servant born within the house of Beauty itself, no curtain is needed.”)

Here, the veil (*hijāb/parda*) emerges as a potent metaphor in the realm of Islamic mystic philosophy in which reality appears as a series of veils separating the mystic from Absolute Beauty (*husn*). *Bedam* is a *khāna-zād*, or one who has been born into the house, implying that he is a servant who has been brought up within the family rather than one who is let into the house from the outside and thus does not need to wear a veil. He is “raised on grace” (*parwarda-e-karam*), and proximity to Beauty is an intrinsic part of his identity.

The Believer's Blasphemy: Gratitude under Trial

Shikwa hai kufr ahl-e-mohabbat ke wāste

Har dam jafā-e-dost pe shukrāna chāhiye

(“For the people of love, complaint is itself unbelief; at every instant, one owes gratitude even for the Friend's cruelty.”)

Bedam turns the conventional calculation of devotion on its head. While conventional piety may regard suffering as an occasion for complaint, *ahl-e-mohabbat* – community or people of love – regard complaint as a form of *kufr* or disbelief. *Jafa* or harsh treatment of the Beloved becomes the justification for perpetual gratitude (*shukrāna*), not a ground for lamenting. This irony defines the Sufi economy of love whereby the sufferings inflicted by the Beloved are interpreted as a sign of concern on His part rather than neglect; as such, Ernst (1997) regards this inversion of common ethical expectations as a hallmark of Sufi poetry.

Selective Intoxication

Bāda-kashōn ko dete hain sāghar ye pūchh kar

kis ko zakāt-e-nargis 'ī-mastāna chāhiye

("They hand the goblet to the wine-drinkers, asking this; Who is it that needs the alms of the intoxicated, narcissus-like eyes?")

The penultimate couplet returns to the tavern imagery of the second, now introducing an economic and legal metaphor — zakat, the obligatory almsgiving of Islamic practice — applied incongruously to the "intoxicated narcissus" (nargis-e-mastana), the poem's figure for the Beloved's languid, wine-drunk eye, itself a conventional image in Persian-Urdu poetry for eyes so heavy-lidded and beautiful that they appear perpetually intoxicated. The couplet imagines the distribution of the cup (saghar, recalling the earlier renunciation of exactly this object) as a considered, almost ritual act, granted only to those judged worthy to "receive the alms" of the Beloved's intoxicating glance. By recasting an emblem of orthodox religious obligation (zakat) as something owed not to the poor but to those capable of receiving a look from Beauty, Warsi again collapses the distinction between formal piety and erotic-mystical devotion that structures the entire ghazal.

The Prayer of Love: Closing Signature

Bedam namāz-e-'ishq yahī hai khudā gawāh

Har dam tasawwur-e-rukh-e-jānāna chāhiye

("Bedam; this, God is witness, is the true prayer of love: at every breath, the imagined face of the Beloved is required.")

The last couplet of the poet, known as the maqta', provides the meaning of namāz-e-'ishq, which refers to prayer of love. Unlike the formal prayer (namāz), which has designated hours, positions, and direction toward Ka'ba, this alternate prayer (har dam) is always ongoing and includes only tasawwur – a constant mental image of the beloved's face. Hence, the couplet unifies the different instances of renunciation from zār, kāsa, lihāf, and taşfiya into one single activity, namely, a prayer of love.

DISCUSSION: TRANSCENDENCE AS RELOCATION, NOT NEGATION

When considered as a whole, the eight couplets in the ghazal constitute a relocation rather than a repudiation of religion. This understanding is only possible by viewing the ghazal through the lense of Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Symbols(1967), emphasize that the literal meaning remains important, but it provides a point of departure for discovering broader psychological, cultural, religious, or philosophical meanings. In each case where the Ka'ba, the idol-house, the wine-cup, the veil, sectarian affiliation, and prayer itself are cast aside, there is a corresponding intensification of its alternative: the door of the Beloved, the murshid's glance, unveiled proximity, and perpetual interior vision of the Beloved. Such a pattern is consistent with Schimmel's (1975) basic understanding of Sufism in that the outward observances of religion act merely as scaffolding, useful, but ultimately replaceable through the direct encounter with the divine which they inspire. The unique feature of Bedam is that he manages this transition in the most economical and symmetrical way possible – almost each couplet takes the form of a two-part statement of negation and redirection such that the form of the ghazal mirrors the action being described, taking the listener through couplets of abandonment of external religious observances towards an interior vision based on imagery of perpetual communion with the Beloved.

CONCLUSION

"Ka'ba kā shauq hai na sanam khāna chāhiye" by Bedam Shah Warsi is an example of an Urdu Sufi ghazal that uses symbolic language to represent a theology in miniature form. Bedam creates an argument that spiritual transcendence is not achieved through the practice of ritualistic correctness, but in creating an unbroken continuity of loving the Beloved by virtue of images through renunciation and redirection from shrine to threshold, wine-cup to glance, veil to nearness, sect to universal brotherhood, ritualistic prayer to continual inner vision. The ghazal, set in the context of Bedam's life as a disciple of Hazrat Waris Ali Shah and the wider tradition of Persian/Urdu Sufi mystical poetry, is a timeless declaration of the Sufi faith that the truest prayer is the one offered with every breath.

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- Note.* In-text citations labeled "personal communication" (Syed Ijaz Warsi, Bedam's Grandson, Lives in Walton, Lahore, interviews conducted by Muhammad Naeem Shah, 2025–2026) are not included in this list, per APA style, as they are non-recoverable sources.