

Continuity and Change
Within the Persian Sufi Tradition in Later Timurid Iran:
a Study of Shams al-Dīn Lāhījī
and His Commentary upon the *Gulshan e-Rāz*

A Dissertation

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عشقی دارم پاکتر از آب زلال این باختن عشق ، مرا هست حلال
عشق دگران بگردد از حال بحال عشق من و معشوق مرا نیست زوال

I have a love that is more pure than limpid water
And this gambling of everything away for the sake of love
Is permissible for me.

The love of others is constantly changing from state to state

While my love and my Beloved never perishes.

- Mawlānā Rūmī, *Kullīyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizī*, *rubā'īyāt* no. 1100

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Notes on Transliterations and Pronunciations

Consonants				Long Vowels	
ب	b	ط	ṭ	آ	ā
پ	p	ظ	ẓ	و	ū
ت	t	ع	‘	ی	ī
ث	s	غ	gh		
چ	ch	ف	f	Short Vowels	
ج	j	ق	q	اَ	a
ح	ḥ	ک	k	اُ	u
خ	kh	گ	g	اِ	e
د	d	ل	l	Diphthongs	
ذ	ẓ	م	m	اَو	aw
ر	r	ن	n	اِی	ay
ز	z	و	v		
ژ	zh	ه	h		
س	s	ی	y		
ش	sh	ة	h		
ص	ṣ				
ض	ẓ				

The Persian terms transliterated in this thesis follow closely the transliteration system used by the Encyclopædia Iranica. I believe that this system of transliteration best represents the actual pronunciations of Farsi words into English letters and sounds. Although sometimes I have transliterated the Persian letter ذ into its Arabic equivalent instead, which is dh instead of z throughout my thesis. This is for the sake of trying to remain consistent with my translations of Arabic and Persian terms throughout my thesis, since Persian Sufis like Lāhijī also relied heavily upon and used many Arabic words throughout their writing.

Abstract

This dissertation brings to light unrecognised patterns of historical change and transformations that occurred within the wider Persian Sufi community of later medieval Iran, more specifically within the later Timurid and Āq Quyunlū era (851-906/1447-1501). Starting with A. J. Arberry, a prevailing sentiment has been that this Sufi tradition had exhausted its original and creative possibilities during the medieval period and had entered a period of stagnation, even decline. Scholars such as Alexander Knysh, Nile Green, and Devin Dewese have recently challenged this long-held and deeply rooted assumption. This thesis demonstrates that Sufism—especially in its manifestation within the Persianate world of later Medieval Iran—was still a highly dynamic tradition that enjoyed a mass following amongst all social classes of medieval Iranian society under both the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū polities.

There is no doubt that Sufism—as an inseparable and fundamental aspect of Perso-Islamic civilization and medieval Iranian societies—was undergoing deep and permanent changes as a result of the social-political upheavals caused by the military and political conflicts between the various Turco-Mongol dynasties who had divided Iran between themselves during most of the fifteenth century. By providing a deep analysis of one of the most significant and influential works of Sufism written during this period, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ Gulshan-e Rāz*, by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī (865-912/1433-1506-07), this thesis will show that profound and subtle changes took place within the Persian Sufi tradition as part of broader changes taking place in Iran during that historical period. Lāhijī played a definitive role as systematiser, consolidator, and transmitter of the entire intellectual heritage of the medieval Persian Sufi tradition that positively impacted future generations of Persian Sufis throughout the Persianate world. Especially for those Sufis living within the Safavid period, and even for Iranian Sufis living in contemporary times. His commentary was widely read and influential among Persian Sufi works but remains under-studied and largely ignored in Western academia.

Lāhijī attempted to synthesise the entire intellectual heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition with his lengthy commentary on the *Gulshan-e Rāz*. The approach is a line-by-line reading and analysis of the entire text in its original language, Persian. Lāhijī's magnum opus was undoubtedly a product of its time. As such, an in-depth analysis and contextualisation of this significant work of the Persian Sufi textual tradition can disclose distinguishing features and unique teachings of the Persian Sufi tradition as it existed during the later medieval period.

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

X

(Signature)

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Introduction

The Later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period of Iran's history (812-906/1409-1501) was crucial for the continuing historical developments of the Persian Sufi tradition as a whole. This particular historical era saw Sufism's fortunes on the constant rise, an ascent which began in the preceding era of the Ilkhanates (654-735/1256-1335), and maybe even before that within the Seljūq period (432-617/1040-1220).¹ So pervasive and deep was Sufism's reach and influence over medieval Iranian society that it might be impossible to understand the religious beliefs, cultural practices, and social norms of Iranians living during that time without paying close attention to the Sufism of the later medieval period. During what is sometimes called the Turco-Mongol period of Iran's history, *Iranshahr* during the fifteenth century remained under the rule of Timurid and Turkman tribes, the Qara Quyunlū and Āq Quyunlū.² In recent years, a number of scholars have taken an interest in the historical developments of the Persian Sufi tradition within the historical context of the Later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. These include Beatrice Forbes Manz, Shahzad Bashir, Maria Subtelny, Jürgen Paul, Chad G. Lingwood, Devin Deweese, and Hamid Algar, to name only a few. Their research recognises this particular period

¹ For more information on the historical state of Sufism within the Seljuk period of Iran, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006) 125-57. And for the Ilkhanate period, see Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism in Late Mongol and Early Timurid Persia, from 'Ala' al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1326) to Shāh Qāsim Anvār (d. 837/1434)." *In Iran After the Mongols (the idea of Iran)* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 177-210.

² For more information on this specific term and the reasons why the post-Mongol era of Iran's history is sometimes referred to by some scholars as the Turco-Mongol period, see David Durand-Guedy, "Isfahan during the Turco-Mongol Period (11th-fifteenth Centuries)." *In Cities of Medieval Iran* (Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 258-67.

of Iran's history as central to the longer history of Sufism, primarily because the Persian Sufi tradition seems to have played a prominent role in the lives of many Iranians living during that time.³ Sufism was connected to all the most important cultural, social, religious, and political developments occurring within Iran and the Islamic East during this specific era.⁴ The most critical figures responsible for or connected to the "Timurid renaissance"—the term scholars have coined to denote the historical phenomenon of the flourishing of Persian culture that occurred within the Timurid court capital of Herat during the later fifteenth century—were individuals affiliated with the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa*. The most well known of these influential followers of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* being Jāmī (d. 897/1492), 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī (d. 906/1501) and Kamāl-al-Dīn Ḥusayn Vā'ez Kāshefī (d. 910/1504-5).⁵ Not only were the cities of Āq Quyunlū Tabrīz and Timurid Herāt the most important centres of Perso-Islamic civilization during the latter half of the fifteenth century, but they also served as important centres for Sufism as well. Many influential Sufi masters and their respective communities of dervishes lived in these two cities, where they were able to propagate their respective Sufi *ṭarīqas* to the Iranian masses who seemed to be highly receptive to their Sufi teachings, rituals, and practices.⁶ The recent and vital research done by Bashir, Manz, Paul, Lingwood, and Algar upon the different historical

³ For more information regarding Manz's research on Sufism within the historical context of Timurid Iran, especially Khurāsān, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 219-45. In regards to Bashir's research, see Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies : Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 25-105. For Subtelny, see more in Maria Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 192-208. For Paul, see more in Jürgen Paul, "The Rise of the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in Timurid Herat." In *Afghanistan's Islam : From Conversion to the Taliban*, edited by Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017) 71-86. For Lingwood, see more in Lingwood, Chad G. *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī's Salāmān Va Absāl*. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81-111; 152-55. For Deweese, see more in Devin Deweese, "Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity in Medieval Sufi Communities of Iran, Central Asia, and India: The Khalvatī/Ishqī/Shattārī Continuum." In *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle*, edited by Steven E. Lindquist (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 251-300. And for Algar, see more in Hamid Algar, *Jami: Makers of Islamic Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 87-125, & Hamid Algar. "Naqshbandis and Safavids: A Contribution to the Religious History of Iran and Its Neighbors." In *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 7-48.

⁴ Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, 219-45. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 1-25. John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 83-4; 107.

⁵ For more information on these above mentioned historical figures and their role or contribution to the flourishing of Persian culture in Timurid Herat in the latter half of the fifteenth century, see Algar, *Jami*, 40-87. And in regards to Kāshefī's role and influence during the "Timurid renaissance", see more in Maria Subtelny. "A Man of Letters: Hoseyn Vā'ez Kāshefī and His Persian Project." In *The Timurid Century* (London: I.B Tauris, 2020), 121-35.

⁶ Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, 228-38. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism*, 81-95.

developments impacting Sufism during this specific era under review indicates that influential Persian Sufi shaykhs like Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī (d. 838/1435), Shāh Qāsem Anwār (d. 837/1433-34), Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 1464), Mawlanā Sa'd-al-Dīn Kashgarī (d. 860/1456), Khwāja 'Ubaydallāh Aḥrār (d. 896/1490), Ibrāhīm Gūlshenī (d. 940/1534) and Pīr Yaḥyā Shervānī (d. 867/1463), were all prominent and influential figures who shaped and influenced the latest cultural, social and religious trends within their local societies and communities—trends that would emanate beyond their local borders and impact other regions and cities of Iran, as well as others parts of the Persianate world.⁷

Perhaps the most significant development occurring with regards to the history of the Persian Sufi tradition within this particular era was the process of maturity or consolidation. This is most evident through the deepening institutionalization of the different Sufi *ṭarīqas*. Indeed, much of what we recognise today as the distinguishing features of the Sufi *ṭarīqas*, especially in regards to the formation of shared corporate identities linked to a specific Sufi *silsila*, owe their existence to the crucial historical developments impacting the Sufi *ṭarīqas* during this specific era under examination.⁸ It was not only the social and institutional aspects of the Sufi tradition which were being further solidified during the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū period. Perhaps more important were the ongoing processes of systematization, consolidation, and collating of the entire intellectual and literary heritage of the medieval Persian Sufi tradition that were being undertaken by certain influential and gifted Sufi authors and shaykhs. The most noteworthy individuals responsible for undertaking this arduous task were, of course, Jāmī and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad 'ebn Yaḥyā Lāhijī (d. 912/1506-7)—but Jāmī and

⁷ In regards to the influence of Khwāfī and Anwār upon the social-religious scene of Timurid Herat, see more in Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, 228-38. For Nūrbakhsh's influence and following, see more in Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 54-71. For more on Aḥrār, see 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Maḥmūd Aḥrār, Alisher Navoi, Jo-Ann Gross, A. Urunbaev, and Abu Raiḥon Beruni nomidagi Sharqshunoslik instituti. *The Letters of Khwāja 'Ubayd Allāh Aḥrār and His Associates*. Vol. 5 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 1-23. For Ibrāhīm Gūlshenī, see more in Side Emre, *Ibrahim-i Gulshani and the Khalwati-Gulshani Order: Power Brokers in Ottoman Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 47-60. For Shervānī's influence upon the Shervanshāh dynasty during the fifteenth century, see more in John J. Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire the Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350-1750* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 55-58. For the influence of Kashgarī and Jāmī's spiritual and cultural influence upon Timurid Herat, see more in Paul, "The Rise of the Khwajagan," 71-86.

⁸ Deweese, "Spiritual Practice and Corporate", 257-72.

Lāhijī were far from being the only ones.⁹ Lāhijī himself was a shaykh of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*, and was perhaps the most well-known *khalīfa* of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh. Sources tell us Lāhijī attracted disciples from all over Iran to his *khānaqāh* in Shīrāz during his lifetime, making Shīrāz one of the most important centres for the propagation of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* during the latter half of the fifteenth century.¹⁰

What did this process or task of consolidation and systematization of the Persian Sufi tradition entail in its theoretical and doctrinal aspect? To provide a general explanation of what this meant, it consisted of synthesizing and integrating Sufism's two distinct spiritual and intellectual streams into a single, coherent vision and Way of Sufism. Meaning, the fusion of the Akbarī school of thought with the Way of Passionate Love, which was distinctly Persian in its origins and characteristics. The adherents of this particular Way of Sufism have sometimes termed their Way as the "Religion of Love" (*mazhab-e 'eshq*).¹¹ In the opinion of Omid Safi, the founders or Imams of this particular Way of Love was Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126) and his student 'Ayn-al-quzāt Hamadānī (d. 526/1131).¹²

Before the mid-thirteenth century, these two traditions or schools of thought existed as separate and independent traditions or spiritual-doctrinal currents within the wider Sufi community.¹³ But with the creative efforts of such Sufi giants like Fakhr-al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 688/1289), Sa'īd-al-Dīn Farḡānī (d. 699/August 1300) and Maḥmūd Shabestarī (d. 741/1340) during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, these two currents of Sufi doctrine and

⁹ Other Sufi shaykhs and authors also worth mentioning who also devoted themselves to collating the intellectual-literary heritage of the medieval Persian Sufi tradition were Sayyed 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385), Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī (d. 834/1437) and Kamāl-al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī (d. 839/1435-36). More will be mentioned about these Sufi writers and Shaykhs in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

¹⁰ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 173-75.

¹¹ For more information on the principles of this particular tradition and stream of Sufism, see Ilhai-Ghomshei, Husayn, "The Principles of the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry" in *Hafez and The Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, (London: I.B Tauris, 2010) 77-107.

¹² Omid Safi, "On the Path of Love Towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics," *Sufi* 78 (Winter 09/Spring 10): 25-36. Reprinted from *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 3, no. 2 (2003).

¹³ For more information on the early separation of these two distinct spiritual and intellectual streams of the Sufi tradition, see William C. Chittick, "The Question of Ibn al-'Arabī's 'influence' on Rūmī." In *Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, edited by In Rustom, Mohammed, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011; 2012), 91-92.

praxis eventually merged.¹⁴ Jāmī and Lāhijī finally completed and refined the work that their predecessors began. Indeed, judging by the continuing popularity of the Persian works of Jāmī and Lāhijī, not just in Iran but also within the greater Persianate world as well, they seem to have been successful.¹⁵ This particular trend then, where certain Sufi masters and writers within the wider Persian Sufi community attempted to integrate the “Religion of Love” with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s system of Sufi metaphysics and cosmology, reached its full maturity in the widely read works of Jāmī and Lāhijī.

This intellectual task of systematizing and consolidating the doctrines and teachings of the Sufis once they had fully matured within the later medieval period was a notable cultural phenomenon amongst the wider Persian Sufi community. It was a task undertaken collectively by various individuals from amongst the Persian Sufi community, even though these individuals were affiliated with different *ṭarīqas*.¹⁶ Jāmī is already a well-known figure in Western academia,¹⁷ but Lāhijī, unfortunately, remains a much less prominent figure. And this is an oversight, for Lāhijī’s historical contribution to the theoretical and literary dimensions of the

¹⁴ For more information on ‘Irāqī and his synthesis of the Akbarī intellectual tradition with the stylistic discourse and poetics which was typical of the followers of the “Religion of Love”, see Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ‘Irāqī, *Divine Flashes*: Translated and Introduction by William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson, (London: Paulist Press, 1982), 33-63; 73-84. For more information on the life and Sufi thought of Shabistārī, see Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistārī* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1-10; 174-205. For more information on Farḡānī, see more in William C. Chittick, “Spectrums of Islamic Thought: Sa’īd al-Dīn Farḡānī on the Implications of Oneness and Manyess,” in L. Lewisohn, ed., *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism* (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publishers, 1992), 203-17.

¹⁵ For more information on the continuing popularity of Jāmī’s literary and Sufi works within the Persianate cultural sphere of the Islamic world, see Muzaffar Alam. “Scholar, Saint, and Poet: Jāmī in the Indo-Muslim World.” In *Jāmī in Regional Contexts*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 136-76. For the continuing popularity of Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan* amongst the Sufis in Iran, see more in Zarrinkoob, A.H. “Lāhijī”. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, 6: 604-5.

¹⁶ Notable works where the doctrines and teachings of the Persian Sufi tradition were systematized and consolidated during the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period were Kamāl-al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī’s four volume Persian commentary on the *Maṣnavī*, titled the *Javāher al-Asrār va Zavāher al-Anvār* and ‘Alī Hamadānī’s commentary upon Ibn al-Fāreż’s poem, the *Mashāreb al-adhwāq: sharḥ-e Qaṣīda-ye khamriya-ye Ebn-e Fāreż Mesrī dar bayān-e sharāb-e maḥabbat*. Shāh Ne’mat-Allāh Walī and Muḥammad Pārsa also wrote systematic works collating the medieval heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition, which was later transmitted to future generations of Sufis. For more on Khwārazmī and his extensive commentary upon Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*, see Devin Deweese, *The ‘Kashf al-Huda’ of Kamal ad-din Husayn Khorezmi: A Fifteenth-Century Sufi Commentary on the ‘Qasidat al-Burdah’ In Khorezmian Turkic* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1985), 219-222.

¹⁷ An entire book has recently been dedicated to Jāmī and published by Brill. Numerous scholars have contributed to this research project, filling in a major gap on the immense cultural legacy left behind by Jāmī, mainly within the eastern half of the Islamic world. For more details, see Thibaut d’Hubert and Alexandre Papas, “Introduction.” In *Jāmī in Regional Contexts*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1-23.

Persian Sufi tradition, especially in regards to Iran, has no doubt been significant and remains understudied. As a historical agent who was as crucial as Jāmī (and perhaps even more so than Jāmī) in systematizing, collating, and transmitting to future generations of Sufis the received heritage of the vibrant and multifaceted mystical tradition of medieval Persian Sufism, Lāhijī deserves much more attention within Western academia. This then is one of my research aims for this present thesis: to introduce the life and Sufi thought of Lāhijī to a broader audience, through a systematic exposition of Lāhijī's Sufi worldview, doctrine, and beliefs as they can be found within his most seminal work of Sufism, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz* ("Keys of Wonder to the Commentary of the Rose-Garden of Mystery"). Since this specific work by Lāhijī has been recognised throughout history—especially within Iran today—as the most remarkable commentary upon Shabistarī's *Gulshan-e Rāz*; as well as an indisputable masterpiece of theoretical and philosophical Sufism (*erfānī*) by seekers, scholars and researchers in the field of Sufi studies.¹⁸ I believe that Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* deserves deeper consideration and textual analysis, not only as a noteworthy commentary on the *Gulshan*; but also as a significant original work of Sufism that was written during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period in the Persian language. There is no doubt that Lāhijī's masterpiece of theoretical Sufism is considered today by many to form part of the holy canon of sacred Persian Sufi literature.¹⁹

Lāhijī's monumental work of theoretical Sufism, which Lāhijī began writing in 877/1473, remains very much a product of its time. By undertaking a line-by-line reading of Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan*, I aim to discern the contents and outlines of Lāhijī's vision of Sufism. Contextualising Lāhijī's life and Sufi thought will also help reveal unrecognised patterns of historical change within the broader history of the Persian Sufi tradition, especially with regards to the historical context of later medieval and early modern Iran.

The justification for this research approach lies in the fact that Lāhijī's commentary, as an encyclopedic book of Persian Sufi doctrine and thought, serves as an excellent

¹⁸ Maḥmūd Shabistarī & Kāzem Duzufūlīān, *Matn va Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz* (Tehran: Talāye, 1389/2010), 52-6.

¹⁹ Shabistarī & Kāzem, *Matn va Sharḥ*, 52-6. Henry Corbin. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Translated from the French by Nancy Pearson (New York: Omega Publications by agreement with Shambhala Publication, 1994), 110-20.

representation and summary of the intellectual and literary dimension of the Persian Sufi tradition as it had coalesced during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era. Lāhijī's text can help provide clues about the Sufi teachings, ideas, and beliefs circulating and being widely debated, discussed, and taught within the wider Persian Sufi community during that era. Lāhijī's text can therefore be viewed as a microcosm of sorts, that reveals to modern readers the historical state, along with the profound and subtle changes occurring within the Persian Sufi tradition and wider community on the eve of the early modern period. My research will reveal that Sufism as it was discoursed and presented within the pages of Lāhijī's commentary remained, for the most part, unchanged and was a faithful continuation of past teachings and spiritual practices. On the surface, much of the content of Lāhijī's text is identical to the Sufism that appears on the pages of earlier, classical works of the genre. Yet because Sufism was such an essential component of medieval Iranian society and culture, it was also profoundly impacted by the Mongol Invasions. Continuous misrule and warfare between the various Turco-Mongol dynasties that divided Iran between themselves devastated and upturned the lives of Iran's sedentary, urban populations.²⁰

Manifestations of Shī'ī messianism and apocalypticism increasingly occurred during this later medieval period. This was in most cases connected to diverse but usually heterodox and antinomian Sufi communities.²¹ Lāhijī himself, who lived his entire life when most of Iran—except for Khurāsān—was conquered and ruled first by the Qara Quyunlū, then the Āq Quyunlū Turkmen dynasties, lived in an era that was very different to the earlier, classical periods of Sufism's history. The increasing displays of 'Alīd-devotionalism characterised his era, even though the majority of Iranians were still followers of the Sunnī creed.²² Lāhijī's era was one of confessional ambiguity, where the parameters between Sunnism and Shī'ism within post-Mongol Iran were not so clear and easy to separate by later historians and scholars.²³ Some of

²⁰ Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 149-67. Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 67-73.

²¹ I. P. Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 302-26.

²² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam : Conscience and History in a World Civilization: Vol 2 The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 495-6.

²³ For more information regarding the difficulty that modern scholars have in pinning the true confessional identities of certain historical figures living in the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period, see Alexandra W. Dunietz, *The Cosmic Perils of Qadi Husayn Maybudi in Fifteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 51-4.

the most well-known and influential historical figures living during the post-Mongol era exhibited characteristics typical of Shī'ism, even though the available historical sources provide evidence that these individuals were most likely Sunnīs, as the overwhelming majority of Iranians were still adherants of Sunnīsm before the Safavid era.²⁴ This confessional ambiguity also seeps into the pages of Lāhījī's commentary. Traditional Sufi ideas and teachings had historically co-existed with mainstream Sunnī theological beliefs and jurisprudence in written texts, for Sufism had first emerged within environments where the inhabitants were mainly of the Sunnī faith. But the teachings and ideas of Sufism took on a more noticeably Shī'ī coloring within the theoretical framework of Lāhījī's Sufi discourse.²⁵

Literature Review

In order to situate the research question of this thesis, a general survey of recent literature will be undertaken here. The literature review will analyse the current and available literature on Lāhījī and his commentary on the *Gulshan e-Rāz*.

The current existing literature on Lāhījī and his most famous work, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, is scant. Although there have been a few significant scholars working within the field of Persian Sufi studies within Western academia who have mentioned him within their research, the sort of attention that he deserves is still lacking. In the anthology *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Henry Corbin is the first scholar to mention him in Western secondary sources. Corbin devotes a brief section to Lāhījī, recognizing his importance in the historical development of the Akbarī intellectual tradition within Iran. For, according to Corbin,

²⁴ More on this topic will be discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. One example of the confessional ambiguity of one major figure living during the latter Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period was the aforementioned Husayn Vā'eẓ Kāshefī, the influential preacher and polymath of Timurid Herat. In the view of Colin Turner and Maria Subtelny, Kāshefī was a Hanafi Sunnī because of the well-documented information from the primary sources that we have of his affiliations with the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa*. But because of his authorship of *Rawzat al-shuhadā'*, some scholars today—mostly Iranian—assume that he was a Twelver Shī'īte doing *taqīyya*. For more information on Kāshefī and the issue or debate concerning his true confessional identity, see Abbas Amanat, "Meadow of Martyrs: Kashifi's Persianization of the Shi'i Martyrdom Narrative in the Late Timurid Herāt." In *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*, edited by Amanat Abbas (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009), 92-110.

²⁵ For more details regarding the early historical origins of Sufism, and how Sufism developed as a distinct Islamic form or way of mysticism within Sunnī societies and communities, see Ahmet T Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 19-56.

Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* was a "veritable Summa of Sufi metaphysics".²⁶ Corbin again mentions Lāhijī in *Sufi Bodies of Light*, which was concerned with the historical development and analysis of the schema of subtle centres of consciousness as expounded by the Sufi masters of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*. Corbin quotes from a few passages of Lāhijī's commentary, especially those in which Lāhijī describes his personal and vivid mystical visions upon witnessing the black light of the Divine Essence.²⁷ It is only in connection to Lāhijī's vivid, mystical visions associated with different colored lights that Corbin mentions Lāhijī and takes any interest in him. Other than that, no further mention of Lāhijī is made within any other of Corbin's writings.

Toshihiko Izutsu wrote a short essay examining the metaphysical symbolism of darkness and light as it appears in the Sufi works of both Shabistarī and Lāhijī in his essay "The Paradox of Light and Darkness in the *Garden Mysteries* of Shabistarī".²⁸ Izutsu's work is one of the earliest in English to mention Lāhijī as a critical metaphysical thinker of the Persian Sufi tradition, although Izutsu's essay—the length of a single book chapter—is far too short to do any real justice to the breadth and depth of Lāhijī multifaceted system of Sufi doctrine, thought and praxis as expressed in his magnum opus the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*.²⁹ Izutsu's efforts nevertheless provide perhaps one of the earliest and most lucid expositions on Lāhijī's Sufi teachings for Western audiences. Izutsu was able to provide a small glimpse into the richness and depth of Lāhijī's personal Sufi metaphysics, especially in regards to his teachings concerning *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("Unity of Being").

Leonard Lewisohn is perhaps the next scholar after Izutsu to mention Lāhijī in his research on the life and thought of Maḥmūd Shabistarī.³⁰ Shabistarī's life and teachings are the main focus for Lewisohn, and he presents Lāhijī within the framework of his research as a

²⁶ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*. Translated by Liadain Sherrard with the assistance of Philip Sherrard (London: Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Institute of Islamic Studies, 1993), 305.

²⁷ Corbin, *The Man of Light*, 110-20.

²⁸ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1994), 38-65.

²⁹ Ibid, 39.

³⁰ For more on Lewisohn's work on Shabistarī and his heavily reliance upon Lāhijī's commentary for exposition on Shabistarī Sufi doctrine and thought, see Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 143-268.

faithful but excellent commentator upon the *Gulshan-e Rāz*—which he was for the most part.³¹ Lewisohn, in his study and exposition of Shabistarī's teachings (as it is expressed through the poetic *mathnawī* verses of the *Gulshan*) relies heavily upon Lāhijī's commentary, and he quotes it extensively with excellent, accurate English translations. English readers are therefore introduced to select passages from Lāhijī's text through the research efforts and translations of Lewisohn. Other than that, Lewisohn does not provide us with any biographical information about Lāhijī nor with any in-depth analysis of the Sufi doctrine and thought of Lāhijī himself as an independent Sufi master and thinker.

Shahzad Bashir, in his historical and biographical study on Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (a self-proclaimed mahdī and founder of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*), along with his analysis of the Sufi teachings and Mahdist messages of Nūrbakhsh, devotes a small sub-chapter within his book exclusively to Lāhijī.³² He provides a summary of the life of Lāhijī in a short paragraph, and also provides some details on Lāhijī's most famous and influential work; the *Mafātīḥ al-e 'jāz*.³³ Bashir notes that Lāhijī, according to the available primary sources, was undoubtedly the most famous of Nūrbakhsh's many students and *khalīfas*. He also points to the direct influences and seeping of mystical concepts and ideas from Nūrbakhsh's teachings into the works and ideas of Lāhijī, especially within the *Mafātīḥ al-e 'jāz*.³⁴ Bashir's contribution to the literature about the historical person of Lāhijī is valuable since there are no other sources within the relevant field available that can provide us with the same amount of knowledge about Lāhijī from secondary sources. Although, like Lewisohn, Bashir does not provide us with any in-depth analysis on the personal Sufi doctrine of Lāhijī; probably assuming that Lāhijī's teachings do not differ by any great degree from his own Sufi master. Yet Bashir also mentions one important fact relevant to our own studies: that Lāhijī, while a devoted and very close follower of Nūrbakhsh, did not accept his master's messianic claims of being the long-awaited

³¹ Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 15.

³² Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 173-175.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 174-175.

Shīrī Mahdī, and instead accepted and viewed him as a gifted and charismatic Sufi master and saint.³⁵

Finally, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi devote an entire chapter to Lāhījī and his commentary on the *Gulshan* in their lengthy series, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*. In Volume 4, they inform Western audiences of Lāhījī's historical importance and contribution to the philosophical tradition of Sufism within Iran.³⁶ Also, Mohammad H. Faghfoory provides an English translation from parts of Chapter One of Lāhījī's commentary, which deals with the more philosophical sections of Lāhījī's text, especially concerning issues of epistemology and the different categories of knowledge of God which the Sufi wayfarer can pursue and obtain.³⁷ Faghfoory's English translations, therefore, provide an excellent example for English-reading audiences of Lāhījī's Sufi discourse and his style of theoretical, philosophical Sufism.

Gaps in Knowledge, Research Aims, and Situating the Thesis

Since the above scholars have all stated within their works the significance of Lāhījī and his lengthy commentary on the *Gulshan* for the history of Sufism in Iran, it is therefore surprising that no serious and lengthy work of research on Lāhījī's masterpiece of theoretical Sufism has been undertaken by any other researcher. Not even a single research journal article in the English language can be found on Lāhījī and his masterpiece, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*. Of course, Iranian scholars have long been aware of Lāhījī's importance within the history of Sufism and the 'erfānī mystical tradition of Twelver Shī'ism within Iran.³⁸ Still, the intended audience for my thesis is not Iranian scholars specializing in Sufism, but rather Western academia, where Lāhījī

³⁵ Ibid, 174.

³⁶ For more on this chapter dedicated to Lāhījī, see S.H Nasr, "Maḥmūd Shabistarī and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhījī." In *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 476-79.

³⁷ For more on Faghfoory's excellent English translations on these sections of Lāhījī's text, see Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhījī Gilānī, "Commentary on the Secret Garden of Divine Mystery (From *Sharḥ Gulshan-e Rāz*): translated into English by Mohammad H. Faghfoory." In *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4, 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 479-96.

³⁸ Shabistarī & Kāzem, *Matn-e sharḥ*, 52-6. Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and 'Effat Karbāsī. "*Muqaddama*," In Lāhījī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad 'ebn Yaḥyā, *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, Edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and 'Effat Karbāsī. (Tehran: Enteshārāt Zavvār, 1391/2012), XXXIX-L.

remains a relatively unknown figure. Although Lewisohn, Izutsu, and Faghfoory have provided excellent and faithful English translations of selected passages from Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan*, these translations are minimal and even insignificant in proportion to the total size of Lāhijī's oeuvre. In its modern printed edition, Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* runs up to 600 pages without footnotes.³⁹ Since both the primary and secondary sources tell us that Lāhijī was one of the most critical and influential Sufi shaykhs and writers who lived during the latter Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, perhaps it is now time to introduce Lāhijī and his Sufi teachings to a broader audience beyond Iran. Instead of devoting a single chapter of research to the life and thought of Lāhijī, I aim to devote an entire thesis to Lāhijī and his Sufi teachings by providing a systematic exposition to Lāhijī's Sufi worldview and thought, as it can be found within the pages of his commentary on the *Gulshan*.

This thesis will provide in-depth analysis and an exegesis upon Lāhijī's text, allowing Lāhijī to also speak in his own voice; as well by providing accurate English translations that will attempt to remain faithful to the original spirit and meaning of the text. Although there has been much research conducted recently by various Western scholars on the Sufism of the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period—most noticeably the works of Bashir, Lingwood, Deweese, and Algar—there is still a lack of available scholarship on the literary works produced by the Persian Sufis of that era. And this is quite a huge gap in the existing literature, for the production and reading of Sufi books played a central role within the lived culture of many Persian Sufis in the past.⁴⁰ These books were read both individually and collectively within the *khānaqāh*, as a kind

³⁹ The edition that I have used is the one edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and 'Effat Karbāsī, and published by Zavvār. This is the same edition used by Lewisohn in his major work and research on Shabistārī. It is definitely the most popular edition available in Iran today, and perhaps the most accurate. Both Nasr and Lewisohn have claimed that Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* runs up to 800 pages in its modern, printed edition. Assuming that they are talking about Khāleqī's and Karbāsī's edited version of this text, the main body of the text runs up to 600 pages. But there is about another two hundred pages of footnotes added to the main text by Khāleqī and Karbāsī; which are mainly Farsi translations of Arabic passages found throughout the text, as well as useful references and sources for the abundant quotations by numerous authors and poets that Lāhijī had included within his commentary. Nevertheless, Nasr and Lewisohn are fully correct in their statements that Lāhijī's commentary is a long text that provides a systematic presentation and explication of the philosophical metaphysics of the Persian Sufis in the Persian language.

⁴⁰ For more details on the role and importance of Sufi texts within the culture of Sufism, see Erik S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: 'Umar Al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods*. Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts. Vol. 71 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 42-52. & Le Gall, Dina, A

of ritual or spiritual practice for devout followers of the Sufi path. Therefore, the production and consumption of Sufi texts were a crucial and fundamental aspect of the culture of the Persian Sufis. The Persian works written by Jāmī and Lāhijī on the sacred sciences of Sufism have also been some of the most widely-read and influential works of the genre within the textual tradition of Persian Sufism.⁴¹

By providing an in-depth analysis and exegesis on one of the most most significant and popular works of Sufism written in the Persian language during the fifteenth century, I aim to fill an important gap in the current literature, and in so doing underline Lāhijī's position as a notable historical figure in the history of Sufism within Iran. By reading Lāhijī's most famous work, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, as a valuable historical document concerning the history of Sufism, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing field of research into the broader historical developments of Sufism during the latter half of the medieval and the early modern periods. Lāhijī's commentary provides an excellent representation of the form of Sufism that had existed and matured during the late fifteenth century within Iran—especially concerning the doctrines and beliefs of the followers of this spiritual tradition—thereby providing modern readers with a valuable window into the worldview held by the Persian Sufis who lived during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era.

Since there was a wide acceptance of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings—as well as those traditional teachings associated with the *mazhab-e ʿeshq*—amongst the wider Persian Sufi community on a popular level during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, Persian Sufis, increasingly over time, did not come to differ too much from each other in terms of doctrines, beliefs, and ideas. A variety of differences instead existed between the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* more so on the plane of spiritual practices and methods; in their adherence to the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence (mainly Ḥanafism or Shāfeʿism); as well as in the different degrees in which they adhered to mainstream Sunnism; or to the extent in which they were influenced by different

Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700. SUNY series in Medieval Middle East History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 123-27.

⁴¹ Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yu's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm. With a New Translation of Jami's Lawa'ih from the Persian by William C. Chittick* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 113-121. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 30.

heterodox Shīʿī beliefs and customs that were then circulating within the periphery of Iran's religious culture during this specific era—and that were becoming increasingly popular over the course of time. I therefore believe that scholars of Sufism can discover within this thesis the kind of Sufi ideas, beliefs, teachings, and practices that were being widely circulated, discussed and debated amongst the Persian Sufis of the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. I aim to achieve this precisely through an examination of Lāhījī's Sufi thought and worldview as it is articulated and discoursed within his masterpiece of theoretical Sufism, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*. This is, therefore, the research aim and objective for my current work. I aim to achieve this research objective by conducting a thorough textual analysis of Lāhījī's masterpiece, which serves as the foundation for my systematic exposition of Lāhījī's Sufi thought and worldview. It can then also provide an important window into the hidden, broader patterns of epochal change that were occurring for the Persian Sufi community and tradition in the later medieval and early modern periods of Iran's history.

Structure and Outline of the Dissertation

The first four chapters of this thesis introduce the necessary historical context of Lāhījī's life and his masterpiece of Persian Sufi literature, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*. The first chapter of the thesis aims to provide a description—drawn mainly from secondary sources—of the political conditions reigning in Iran during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era. We will begin the chapter with the devastating Mongol Invasions of Iran between the years 616-619/ 1219-1222. One cannot understand the unique social-political conditions of Iran during the later medieval period (mid-thirteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century) without having recourse to the Mongol invasions and the subsequent rule of the Ilkhanate over Iran, which lasted almost a century. As a spiritual tradition and Way practiced and believed by many Iranian Muslims living during this era, Sufism was also profoundly affected by the surrounding conditions and environment of social-political collapse and economic instability due to decades and centuries of misrule by the different Turco-Mongol dynasties.

Chapter two will describe the religious culture prevailing in Iran during the later medieval period, an era described and coined by many scholars as an era of confessional ambiguity. Because of the devastating impact of the Mongol invasions of Iran in the early half of

the thirteenth century, which also included the destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdād, the traditional Sunnī worldview of the majority of Iranians was turned upside down. Since Sunnism was no longer the privileged religion of the Ilkhanate state, as it was in previous eras of Iran's history, this created room for various currents of Shī'ism—both heterodox and orthodox—to spread their teachings and beliefs amongst the Iranian masses. However, during the post-Mongol period, Iranians continued to remain faithful to the Sunnī faith until the rise to power of the Safavids. This chapter will take a deeper look at the problem of confessional ambiguity for historians working with this particular period of Iran's history. It will do so by looking at some of the most famous intellectual, literary, and Sufi figures living during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. For the cloud of confessional ambiguity seems to have cast its long shadow upon every major religious and intellectual figure who happened to live in this specific period under review. This chapter will also look at the possible connections between the different messianic, apocalyptic movements springing up in various parts of the Islamic East during the period in question. What relations did these various messianic movements have with historical developments occurring for Sufism in late fifteenth century Iran?

Chapter three is devoted to the state of Sufism in the late fifteenth century. Contrary to the former prevailing view in Western academia that Sufism was entering into an irreversible process of decline and decay, this chapter argues for the continuing vigor and expansion of the Sufi movement—represented by the different traditional Sufi *ṭarīqas*—during the latter half of the fifteenth century. This period under review saw many significant developments and changes occurring for the Persian Sufi tradition, which would have further ramifications for Sufism and its adherents during the early modern period. The age of Lāhījī and Jāmī can be considered one of the golden ages for Sufism in Iran, the heartland of the Persian speaking world; where Sufism reached the peak of its social, spiritual and cultural influence over Iranian society—in both the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū polities.

Chapter four continues to provide the necessary historical context to deepen our understanding of Lāhījī's commentary on the *Gulshan*, as well as to understand Lāhījī's crucial role as a transmitter of the medieval heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition to future generations of Sufis—especially for those Sufis who would inhabit Iran in the following centuries after

Lāhijī's own epoch. I will provide a brief but succinct description and analysis of the history of the Akbarī tradition—in its reception, acceptance, diffusion, and even criticism by certain members of the Persian Sufi community within Iran during the medieval period—and what Lāhijī's historical role may have been in the continuing spread and acceptance of Ibn al-ʿArabī's teachings during the latter half of the fifteenth century. This chapter will also introduce the *Gulshan-e Rāz* and Lāhijī's own commentary on the *Gulshan*, before moving on to the core sections of the thesis in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 concludes the introductory section of my dissertation with a biographical sketch of Lāhijī, relying upon the available primary and secondary sources.

Chapter 6, the first part of the core of my thesis, will be devoted to analyzing and outlining Lāhijī's personal engagement with the Akbarī school of thought. Since *wahdat al-wujūd* constitutes perhaps the central principle and idea in the entire Akbarī tradition—and indeed it is this single term which followers of Ibn al-ʿArabī have been known for and identified with throughout the intellectual and religious history of Islamic civilization—much of Lāhijī's Sufi discourse within his commentary on the *Gulshan* is therefore devoted to providing an in-depth exposition of this central principle of the Akbarī school of thought. I will illustrate that Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* is essentially an Akbarī text. Indeed, I argue the case that Lāhijī's work should be viewed as one of the most significant works and masterpieces of the Akbarī tradition ever written in the Persian language.

Chapter 7 continues our textual analysis of Lāhijī's text, focusing upon another principle of the Akbarī school of thought which is emphasised by Lāhijī within his own Sufi worldview and discourse—and that is his discussions concerning the Akbarī-Sufi idea of the Perfect Man (*ensān-e kamāl*). To illustrate Lāhijī's heavy reliance upon prior works of the Akbarī tradition, and to discern the multiple sources of textual influences that shaped Lāhijī's own production of his masterpiece of Sufi metaphysics, this chapter will also perform a comparative analysis between numerous texts—mainly between Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan*, Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ*, and Dāwūd Qayṣarī's influential commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*.

Chapter 8 will be devoted to analyzing and providing an exposition on Lāhijī's teachings regarding the thorny theological issue of predestination and free will—which has troubled the Islamic community for most of its history—as well as his esoteric theories regarding the identity of the Seal of Saints and his exposition on the spiritual reality of sainthood. Our analysis and discussion will be properly contextualised within the historical background of the confessional ambiguity which characterised the socio-religious milieu of Lāhijī's own era. There is no doubt that Lāhijī's discourse in regards to these two weighty issues was shaped and influenced by the confessional ambiguity surrounding him, which formed the zeitgeist of his age.

Chapter 9 is devoted to Lāhijī's teachings concerning the necessary prerequisites for the Sufi path. According to Lāhijī, the Sufi path is essentially a means, or a spiritual journey for the initiated Sufi to attain realised knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*). This chapter will then be split into two sections. The first section analyses and explains Lāhijī's teachings concerning the mystical Way of *ṭarīqat*. A path that, according to Lāhijī, leads to true knowledge of God's divine reality. The second section is devoted to Lāhijī's Sufi epistemology and the manner in which he categorises the different kinds of knowledge of God available for the Sufi wayfarer. A central principle within Lāhijī's epistemology is his theory concerning the nature of *ma'rifat*, and its superiority over the level of exoteric knowledge associated with the philosophers and speculative theologians who are considered to be rivals to the Sufis in their claims to true, metaphysical knowledge of God's *Wujūd*.

Chapter 10 will provide a systematic explication of Lāhijī's views concerning love, beauty, and the Sufi practice of contemplation and witnessing. Since Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* is an almost perfect summary and synthesis of both the Akbarī school of thought and the Sufi tradition of Passionate Love (*mazhab-e 'eshq*), an entire chapter will therefore be devoted to those aspects of Lāhijī's Sufism. For Lāhijī was also a devoted follower of this other spiritual current within the Persian Sufi community, and cannot be simply described as an Akbarī Sufi. Our exposition of Lāhijī's Sufi thought and worldview would therefore remain incomplete and deficient if we choose to neglect those sections of Lāhijī's extensive commentary on the *Gulshan* that deal with the fundamental principles of the "Religion of Love," which constitutes about a quarter of his entire text.

Chapter 11 will end the thesis by explaining the possible decline of Sufism in the Safavid period. One historical reason for Sufism's potential decline within the Safavid period—compared with the preceding medieval period where Sufism flourished for centuries and became deeply intertwined with every aspect of Persian culture and society—was the rise of the religious class of the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* within Safavid Iran. The Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'*, as opponents and critics of the Sufi movement, displaced the Sufi saints and shaykhs as the dominant spiritual-religious authorities and leaders within Iranian society as the only true representatives of the Holy Imams, especially as representatives of the hidden Imam himself.

Research Methodology

The thesis makes use of available primary and secondary sources in both Persian and English. The study will be located in the multidisciplinary field of religious studies, primarily using the history of religion approach within the first four chapters of this thesis. These sections of the thesis will aim to properly contextualise Lāhijī and his masterpiece of theoretical Sufism, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, and will treat all renditions of them as a historically relative and culturally determined hermeneutical process in which Muslims choose to interpret their religious experience.

This thesis came about while studying Lāhijī's text under my Iranian teacher's personal guidance and teaching at Shiraz University, where I studied and learned the Persian language for a year in 2017. My lessons in studying Lāhijī's commentary ran for six months, two classes a week. When I returned to Sydney, I continued studying and reading the rest of the text for another year—completely in its original language—which Lāhijī had written for the most part in Persian. Therefore, the research approach of this thesis is built upon a close, line-by-line reading of the entire text in its original language, and not only certain chapters and sections of the book. For if I wished to grasp and genuinely comprehend Lāhijī's Sufi doctrine and thought, as well as to contextualise Lāhijī and his text within the broader framework of historical developments occurring for the Persian Sufi tradition in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth

century, I consider this methodological approach as necessary for the fulfillment of my research aims.

Since Lāhijī's commentary—as a significant and considerable work of Persian literature which forms part of the sub-genre of Sufi/'*erfānī* works—is a text that is deeply mystical and esoteric in its content; a methodology of hermeneutics is therefore required so as to understand and grasp the deeper meaning of this text. The practitioners of this specific tradition of Islamic mysticism have historically employed the tools of poetic imagery, symbols, and metaphors within their literary works to allude to supersensory realities beyond the grasp of the rational intellect. In order for me to provide a systematic exposition of Lāhijī's Sufi teachings, I believe the use of hermeneutics as a methodology for study and research on Lāhijī's text can help aid us in truly comprehending the hidden layers of inner meaning concealed within this immense work of Sufi doctrine and thought. Certain sections of this thesis will also employ the methodology of comparative analysis between different canonical Persian Sufi texts to discern the relationship of intertextuality that exists between Lāhijī's work and the more classical, older works of the tradition. This is to illustrate the fact that not only is Lāhijī's version of Sufism—as it is articulated with elegance and mastery throughout his commentary—a faithful continuation of the Persian Sufi tradition of the revered past, but was also quite different from it as well. For subtle and very profound changes are noticeable from the Sufism of his predecessors. And this should not be all that surprising since Lāhijī's era was an epochal historical transition from the later medieval period into the early modern period for the people of Iran and the wider Islamic world.

Chapter One

The Historical Context of Later Medieval Iran

Lāhījī lived during the second half of the fifteenth century, an era defined by Roger Savory as the “struggle for supremacy for Persia” to describe the battles for control over *Iranshahr* between the Timurid, Qarā Quyunlū, and Āq Quyunlū dynasties.⁴² This struggle began with the death of Temūr in 1405, and lasted until the establishment of the Safavid empire with Shāh Ismā’īl’s conquest and coronation in the Āq Quyunlū capital city of Tabrīz in 1501. In order to historically contextualise Lāhījī’s life and the *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, this chapter will address the socio-political conditions in Iran during the later medieval period or, as it is known, the later Timurid and Qarā Quyunlū/Āq Quyunlū period (807-906/1405-1501). From this contextualisation we are then able to gain a deeper insight into Lāhījī’s considerable contribution to the intellectual heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition. His role as a systematiser, collator, and transmitter to future generations of Sufis of the theoretical and literary heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition will also be made clear.

To understand why this particular period of Iran’s history was so crucial for the historical evolution of the Persian Sufi tradition, we first need to examine the larger historical context of the Turco-Mongol period. The following sections will survey certain key aspects of the political milieu of later medieval Iran and how these broader socio-political developments affected the

⁴² For more information on Savory’s analysis and research on this crucial period of Iran’s history just before the rise to power of the Safavids, see R. M. Savory, “The Struggle for Supremacy in Persia after the death of Tīmūr.” *Der Islam: Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (1964): 35-65.

growth, expansion, and transformation of Sufism in return. Since the latter half of the medieval period of Iran's history is usually considered by scholars to begin with the Mongol invasions of the Khwarazmian Empire in the early decades of the thirteenth century, it is therefore necessary that we start our discussions from there.

1.1 The Dawn of a New Era for Iran: The Mongol Invasions and their Disastrous Consequences upon the People of Iranshahr

Numerous scholars term the period of Iran's history under review as the "Turco-Mongol period", as this era was dominated by various succeeding Turkmen and Mongol ruling dynasties. To get a sense of the social and political conditions during the reign of the various Turco-Mongol dynasties, we must start from the beginning of this particular epoch—the subsequent Mongol invasion and subjugation of Iran in the early thirteenth century.

Most historians rightly consider the Mongol invasion as one of the watershed events of Iran's history—possibly equal to the Arab invasion of the early seventh century and the rise of the Safavids in the early sixteenth century.⁴³ Unlike the Muslim Arabs who, along with their invasion of Iran in the early seventh century, brought a new religious dispensation for the Persian people (Islam), the Mongol invaders brought mass extermination for much of the settled population, as well as the complete destruction of most of Iran's major urban centres and towns.⁴⁴ Following one of the most horrific invasions in human history was almost a century of foreign rule by the Mongols, characterised by ruthless feudal exploitation of the sedentary population by the ruling Mongol elites.⁴⁵ This was no doubt an era of indescribable suffering and oppression for most Iranians. In the late Leonard Lewisohn's (d. 2018) own words about the political climate of Mongol rule over Iran, "'nightmarish' is too light an adjective to

⁴³ Ann K. S. Lambton and Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 77-78. See also Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia: The Tartar dominion (1265-1502)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1928), 4-5.

⁴⁴ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols & the Islamic World: From Conquest to Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 153-169.

⁴⁵ I. P. Petrushevskii, "The Socio-Economic Conditions of Iran under the Il-Khans." In *The Cambridge History of Iran in Eight Volumes: Volume 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 523-537.

use to characterize the horrific political history of Persia”.⁴⁶ And in the words of E.G. Browne (which may seem like hyperbole, but nevertheless rings true), the Mongol invasion, “changed the face of the world, set in motion forces which are still effective, and inflicted more suffering on the human race than any other events in the world’s history”.⁴⁷ The inflated numbers of fatalities in cities sacked and pillaged by the Mongols that past historians have cited should not be taken at face value; instead, we should see this exaggeration as a sign of the absolute horror of contemporary eyewitnesses to the mass slaughter and extermination of whole towns and cities that may never have been witnessed before—and even after—the course of Iran’s history.⁴⁸ In the opinion of Ibn al-Labbād (d. 630/1232), a historian who was a living contemporary to these events, “it is as if their aim was the extermination of the species,” and “...they do not seek territory or wealth, but only the destruction of the world that it may become a wasteland”.⁴⁹

Even Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍlullāh Hamadānī (d. 718/1318), the famous Persian historian and vizier of the Ilkhanate court of Ghāzān (d. 704/1304)(r. 693-704/1295-1304), when writing with a pro-Mongol bias on his history on the Mongols, concedes that “Chinggis Khan and his dynasty had killed more people than anybody before them since humankind began”.⁵⁰ He lists the following Iranian cities as being subjugated to the usual Mongol treatment of mass extermination, except for a small group of artisans and craftsman, along with female and child slaves who were carried off to captivity: Balkh, Shaburghān, Taleqān, Marv, Sarakhs, Herāt, Turkistan, Rayy, Hamadān, Qum, Iṣfahān, Maragheh, Ardabīl, Bardā’a, Ganja, Baghdād, Mosul,

⁴⁶ Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Guildford, Great Britain: Curzon Press, 1995), 56.

⁴⁷ Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia Volume II: From Firwdūsī to Sa’dī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 426-427.

⁴⁸ According to a local historian of Herāt, Saif al-Harawī, 1.6 million people were massacred during the sacking of Herat by the Mongols. Another Persian historian, Menhāj Serāj-al-Dīn Muḥammad Juwzjānī, states that 2.4 million people perished during the Mongol sacking. Similar exaggerated numbers are given for the other cities of Khurāsān that were also sacked by the invading Mongols, see more in Peter Christensen, *The Decline of Iranshahr: Irrigation and Environments in the History of the Middle East, 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500*. Translated by Steven Sampson (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 198. The Persian historian Juvaynī (d. 682/1283) states that in the sack of Marv by the Mongols, one million and three hundred thousand people perished. See more in J. A. Boyle, “DYNASTIC AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE IL-KHĀNS.” In *The Cambridge History of Iran*, edited by J. A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 314.

⁴⁹ Cahen, “*Abdallatif al-Baghdadi, portraitiste*,” 125, quoted from Jackson, *Mongols and the Islamic*, 154.

⁵⁰ Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic*, 155.

Erbīl.⁵¹ From the above list of cities, it is clear that the whole of Iran suffered from the Mongol calamity, and historical sources inform us that only Shīrāz, Kerman, Yazd, Lorestan, and Tabrīz escaped the fate that other Persian cities suffered at the hands of the invading Mongols.⁵² Finally, the Persian historian and geographer Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī (d. 750/1349), writing more than a century after the Mongol invasion of Iran, refers to “the ruin (in the present day) as a result of the irruption of the Mongols and the general massacre of the people which took place in their days” and adds, “further there can be no doubt that even if for a thousand years to come no evil befalls the country, yet will it not be possible completely to repair the damage, and bring back the land to the state in which it was formerly”.⁵³

The Mongol Invasion of Iran resulted in numerous long-term negative consequences for Iran and Iranians. One obvious consequence was the drastic decline of the sedentary Persian population in most of the provinces of Iran. To give one example, the region of Balkh, according to the historian Taqut, “at the beginning of the thirteenth century before the Mongol conquest, abounded in riches, producing silk and such a quantity of corn that it was the granary of the whole of Khurasan and Khwarazm”.⁵⁴ And we learn from the early life of Rūmī that the city of Balkh—as one of the major cities of Khurāsān during the Seljuq era, along with Marv, Herāt, and Neyshābūr— had a population of 200 000 inhabitants in the early thirteenth century.⁵⁵ During the Mongol invasion the city was sacked and the whole population put to the sword. Travelers who passed through Balkh in later times, like Marco Polo (the second half of the thirteenth century), the Chinese Taoist Ch’ang-chun (1223) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (the earlier half of the fourteenth century), “inform us that it and its environs were derelict and deserted”.⁵⁶

Whatever information we can gain from the primary sources attest to the fact that most of the provinces and cities of Iran that experienced the calamity of the Mongol invasion did not

⁵¹ Ibid. Other cities not mentioned in this list but that were also subjugated to the same dreaded fate, were Neyshābūr, Buhkārah, Samarqand and Tūs. See more in Jackson, *Mongols and the Islamic*, 71-94.

⁵² W. Limbert, *Shiraz in the Age*, 13-14 & Jackson, *Mongols and the Islamic*, 75-80.

⁵³ Qazvīnī, *Nuhzah al-qulūb*, 27. Quoted from Petrushevsky, “The Socio-Economic”, 484.

⁵⁴ Juvaynī, *Tāriḡ-e Jahān-gushāy*, I 103-5, 130-31, Translated into English by Boyle. Quoted in Petrushevsky, “The Socio-Economic”, 487.

⁵⁵ Petrushevsky, “The Socio-Economic”, 487.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

recover their pre-Mongol population levels even two centuries afterwards.⁵⁷ The region of Herāt, which became the most prosperous of Iran's provinces and experienced something of a revival under the competent rule of the Timurids, never reached its pre-Mongol population. In the tenth century, the province of Herāt consisted of 400 villages, while at the beginning of the fifteenth century it only consisted of 167.⁵⁸ Only Iṣfahān experienced any growth beyond its pre-Mongol level.⁵⁹ This drastic reduction of the urban populations of *Iranshahr* brought about a severe decline in the quality of life for most Iranians in their social, economic and cultural spheres.

In the opinion of John E. Woods, the Mongol invasion constitutes one of the defining moments for the history of the entire Islamic world, for it resulted in:

The influx of large numbers of nomadic people from Central Asia into Iran, Iraq, Syria, Anatolia, and southern Russia, including both the Mongol conquerors themselves and their eastern Turkish allies, as well as many Turkmens displaced by the campaigns of Changiz Khan and his successors.⁶⁰

As a result of either the mass extermination or emigration of the former inhabitants, large tracts of farmland were converted to pasture by these newly settled nomadic tribes.⁶¹ Not only did this cause the socio-economic life of the urban populations to deteriorate even further, it increased the competition over land and resources between the newly-arrived nomadic tribes and the sedentary population.⁶² The relationship between these two different social and ethnic groups during this era was usually characterised by feelings of hostility, suspicion, and outright resentment.⁶³ In the view of Ann K. S. Lambton, "the hostility between the peasantry and the

⁵⁷ Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic*, 179-180 & Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic", 485 & 496-506.

⁵⁸ Hafiz-I Abru, Geographical works, manuscript quoted, ff 225a-227b quoted from Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic", 496.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 3.

⁶¹ Ibid & Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic", 525-529.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, 99-100.

ruling classes (their new Mongol overlords) were heightened, and the gulf between them widened, to an even greater extent than had been the case under the Seljuq Turks".⁶⁴

1.2 The Introduction of the Yāsā /Törä Mongol Laws into the Socio-political Realm of Later Medieval Iran

After unleashing such unimaginable devastation throughout Iran, the Mongols, under the rule of Hülegü Khan (d. 664/1265)(r. 654-664/1256-65), sought to rule Iran as part of their spoils of war. Mongol rule represented a distinct historical epoch for Iran not only because of the wide-scale slaughter of much of Iran's urban population, but also because the Mongols brought an alien political system of governance from the steppes. Their system of tribal Mongol laws was called the *yāsā*, and is attributed by most scholars to Genghis Khan himself.⁶⁵ Although the Mongol Khans did not completely rid themselves of the traditional Perso-Islamic form of governance that Iranians were more accustomed to, the Mongols did add another system of tribal laws under which they governed.⁶⁶ The Ilkhanate, and those Turco-Mongol dynasties that succeeded them in the following centuries, had two distinct sets of laws or dual administrations that existed side by side and under which they governed their respective empires. The older, traditional structure of Perso-Islamic law was associated with the Islamic *sharī'ah*. In contrast, the Mongol tribal law was associated with the infidel and shamanistic culture of a foreign nomadic ruling elite, which was arbitrarily cruel and oppressive.⁶⁷ What is so significant about this particular political development within Iran during the later medieval period was that this form of governance, i.e., the dual structure of Mongol *yāsā* laws and the *sharī'ah*, was maintained even after the collapse of the Ilkhanate in 654/1335. All of the successor states that came after the Ilkhanate, namely, the Timurid, Qarā Quyunlū, and Āq Quyunlū dynasties, maintained this dual form of governance when managing their respective polities in various parts of Iran and Central Asia.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, 99.

⁶⁵ George Lane. *Genghis Khan and Mongol Rule* (Indiana, Ind: Hackett Pub. Co, 2009), 36.

⁶⁶ Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic," 492-493.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 107-114 & E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 16-17, & Petrushevsky, "The Socio-Economic", 496.

According to the important research done by Manz on the rise of Temūr (r. 771-808/1370-1405), when Temūr established his empire over Iran and Central Asia in the late fourteenth century, the form of government that he imposed upon his conquered subjects was identical to that of his predecessors the Ilkhanate, for “The fundamental division within Temūr’s government was between the settled (Persian) and Turco-Mongolian spheres,”⁶⁹ and that “there was one set of offices for the Persian bureaucrats who served him and another for his Turco-Mongolian followers”.⁷⁰ This dual form of government, where one level of the administration was staffed entirely with Persian bureaucrats who “continued to administer financial affairs, tax collection, and much of the local government,”⁷¹ while the other level of administration associated with nomadic and military affairs of the state was completed staffed by the Turco-Mongolian followers of Temūr, was maintained by all the successors of Temūr until the collapse of the dynasty in the early sixteenth century.⁷²

During the reign of the successor states to the Ilkhanate, in both the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū domains, many individuals from amongst the Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’ and Sufi circles were beginning to raise their voices in protest against the continued existence of these non-Islamic Mongol tribal laws alongside the *sharī‘ah*.⁷³ In the words of Maria Subtelny:

Muslim jurist and members of the religious intelligentsia were, however, unanimous in calling for the abrogation of the *törä* and its complete substitution by Islamic law.

Without differentiating between the *törä* and the *yasa*, the Timurid historian Khvāndamīr referred to them as “the evil *yasa*” (*yasa-yi shūm*) and “the despicable *törä*,” and Faḡlullāh d. Rūzbihān Khunjī, a leading Sunnī theologian of the late fifteenth

⁶⁹ Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 108-9.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 108-113.

⁷² Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 76-79.

⁷³ İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf Al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 264-265, and see more in Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 25.

century, complained that “the limpid water of the commandments of Islam [had] become sullied by the turbidity of the Chinggisid *yasa*”.⁷⁴

The question must be asked, what was it about these *yāsā* laws that provoked such ire from the religious scholars and jurists, along with the resentment of much of the sedentary Persian population? It might be that the *yāsā* was derived from non-Islamic, pagan customs of the invading Mongols and the hated Chinggis Khan. More recently, scholars have argued that the resentment held by the sedentary Persian population towards the *yāsā* or *törä* was due to its association with taxes—unsanctioned by *sharī‘ah*—imposed upon the subject population; because the *sharī‘ah* was considered to be the only valid source of laws in the eyes of Muslims.⁷⁵ This collection of non-Islamic taxes and customs not associated with the *sharī‘ah* was perceived as a heavy burden upon the sedentary population by most members of the Sunnī ‘*ulamā*’.⁷⁶ Although some rulers tried to eliminate or reduce the number of taxes related to the *törä*, it was never truly eliminated by any of the successors of Temūr, nor by their western counterparts within the Āq Quyunlū territories.⁷⁷ For instance, the ruler Shāhrukh (r. 811-50/1409-47), considered a pious Muslim by most of his contemporaries, made an attempt to eliminate these non-Islamic tribal taxes and customs but found it impossible to do so, since they constituted the primary sources of independent revenue for the Turco-Mongol emirs and tribal chiefs who provided the necessary military-political support for the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū sultans. This was essential support for any sultan aspiring to gain the throne from his rivals as well as to maintain the throne they took.⁷⁸ These military emirs and tribal chiefs understood that to acquire their revenue from the *törä* or *yāsā* was their right and privilege. It was, to them, their deserved reward for their service to the ruling sultan. Historical events in both the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū domain illustrate that the military and tribal chiefs reacted

⁷⁴ Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 25. The “*törä*” where the system of Mongol tribal laws that the Timurids relied upon to govern their domains. The “*törä*” then is just another name for the same Mongol “*yasa*” laws used by the Ilkhanate in previous centuries.

⁷⁵ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 264 & Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 25-27.

⁷⁶ Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 25-27.

⁷⁷ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 264.

⁷⁸ E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 144 & Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 82-89.

violently when any perceived violations occurred against their privileged rights to financially exploit the subjugated sedentary population through this system of tribal taxes and customs.⁷⁹

According to I. P. Petrushevsky, the underlying motive for why the Turco-Mongol military elites wished to maintain this oppressive, feudal system of non-Islamic taxes, was the desire for the “rapacious exploitation of settled peasants and town dwellers”.⁸⁰ For they “regarded the subjugated Persians as a permanent source of plunder and revenue and no more”.⁸¹ Moreover, he says “these representatives of the military feudal-tribal steppe aristocracy regarded themselves as a military encampment in enemy country,” and they “did not care if they ended by ruining the peasantry and the townspeople” with their feudal and oppressive system of taxation.⁸² The logical result of such a ruthless system was that the overwhelming majority of Iranians lived in a constant state of socio-economic distress which contributed to the fractured political climate of later medieval Iran. This period was characterised by constant political chaos and social instability resulting from the continuous military campaigns waged between the various Turco-Mongol ruling forces. Rival claimants to the throne within the same ruling tribe and polity would fight each other in the struggle to dominate *Iranshahr*.⁸³ No wonder the British Iranologist Ann K. S. Lambton described Iran’s history during the Turco-Mongol period as an epoch of “over-taxation and extortion, corruption and misrule, decay and public disorder,” for the overwhelming majority of Iran’s inhabitants.⁸⁴

⁷⁹V. Minorsky, “The Aq-qoyunlu And Land Reforms.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 457-458, and see more in Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 95-102.

⁸⁰ Petrushevsky, *The Socio-Economic*, 492.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 490.

⁸² *Ibid*, 492.

⁸³ For more information on the struggles for succession over the throne after the death of Temur within the Timurid empire, see Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 128-48. For more information on the wars between the Qarā Quyunlū, and Āq Quyunlū dynasties over control of central, western and northern Iran, as well as eastern Anatolia, see H.R Roemer, “The Turkmen Dynasties.” In *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, edited by Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 147-89. For more details concerning the fratricidal struggles that broke out within the Āq Quyunlū territories after the death of Sultan Ya‘qūb, see E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu: Clan*, 149-67.

⁸⁴ Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, 95.

1.3 The Structural Problem of Turco-Mongol Rulership: Never-Ending Succession Crisis, Fratricidal Strifes and Civil Wars

This brings us to our final point about Iran's political and social climate during the later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period. A constant threat of socio-political and religio-spiritual crises permeated all strata of Iranian society during this era. The numerous messianic and apocalyptic Shīʿī-Sufi movements that emerged with increasing frequency within Iran during the later fifteenth century were a symptom of the brokenness and inefficiency of Iran's social and political structures.⁸⁵ One major factor contributing to this collective sense of crisis was the constant outbreak of fratricidal civil war over the succession of a recently deceased sultan. Even though the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū empires were founded by two extremely successful conquerors, and politically astute rulers like Temūr and Uzun Ḥasan (r. 857-883/1453-78), neither of these two empires were based on firm foundations. Neither rulers were able to create and leave behind them after their deaths an effective mechanism for the smooth succession of the next ruler. This was an age-old problem inherent within the very structure of the tribal and nomadic form of governance favored by the various Turco-Mongol dynasties who had come to rule Iran, Central Asia, and parts of Anatolia during the Medieval period.⁸⁶ The political succession of one sultan to the next was never a straightforward process. Each recently deceased sultan had numerous male relatives who considered themselves equally justified—on the basis of Turco-Mongol law—to be the next sultan. And since only one sultan could rule the whole kingdom, years of civil war usually ensued between the ruling clan's male relatives and their military supporters amongst the powerful tribal chiefs and military emirs. For example, Shāhrukh—who most historians consider to be the most gifted and successful ruler out of all of Temūr's descendants—nevertheless struggled to claim his right to the throne in the early years after Temur's death. According to Manz:

⁸⁵ Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions, : The Nūrbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 31-34.

⁸⁶ For a brief but detailed survey of the political and military struggle for power that ensued amongst the male descendants of recently deceased sultans like Temūr and Uzun, see more in Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 129-147, and see also E. Woods. *The Aqquyunlu: Clan*, 125-132; 149-167.

During the first years after Temūr's death then, Shāhrukh was almost constantly engaged in putting down rebellions by local rulers all of whom, during Temur's life, had been exceptionally faithful and much favoured. They had thus retained much of their power and made use of the dissension within the Timurid dynasty to advance their own aims. At the same time, Shāhrukh faced a number of desertions and conspiracies among his own emirs, particularly from the members of Temūr's personal followings and sons. It was the most prominent emirs, closest to Temūr, who caused the most trouble.⁸⁷

For this reason Manz states that, "the struggle after Temūr's death was particularly long, bitter and destructive".⁸⁸ Although the problem of political succession was bad enough in the Timurid domains, it was far worse in the realms of the Āq Quyunlū. After the sudden death of Sultan Ya'qūb (r. 883-895/1478-90), the successor of Uzun Ḥasan and the second sultan of the Āq Quyunlū empire, nine different princes from Uzun's ruling tribe were each installed as ruling Sultans of the Āq Quyunlū empire during a period of only seventeen years following Sultan Ya'qūb's death.⁸⁹ This was a period of never-ending fratricidal strife between the competing princes and their military supporters from amongst the various Turkman confederates of eastern Anatolia and Azarbāyjān. In the view of Woods, this constituted the main reason for the sudden downfall and destruction of the Āq Quyunlū empire, which laid the foundations for the unexpected rise and conquest of *Iranshahr* by the Safavid dynasty under Shāh Ismā'īl (r. 906-930/1501-24).⁹⁰

1.4 Conclusion

During the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū period, Iran certainly experienced some degree of economic, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual revival after the devastation of the Mongol invasion of the early thirteenth century. Indeed, the Āq Quyunlū court capital of Tabrīz and the

⁸⁷ Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 138. For more on Shāhrukh's struggle to impose his authority upon the lands conquered by his father Temūr, see Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 138-140.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 129.

⁸⁹ Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 149.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 163-172.

Timurid capital city of Herāt became the most influential, famous and prosperous Islamic capitals of the age.⁹¹ Still, it has been said:

It is not reasonable to speak of general peace and prosperity, even though the conjunction of all these things were generally confined to a few limited areas. The sufferings of the people in the districts and cities affected were protracted and had long-lasting effects.⁹²

The general prevailing condition for Iran during this epoch, therefore, was characterised by the adverse conditions of ongoing political, social, and economic instability, and even an apocalyptic sense of chaos caused by the constant fratricidal wars between the competing princes of the ruling Timurid and Āq Quyunlū dynasties.⁹³ These destructive centrifugal forces in the closing decades of fifteenth century Iran should be perceived as some of the most significant consequences of the Mongol invasions. This continued to haunt Iran and its long-suffering peoples even two centuries on.

It is true that Iran's fractured society was the result of it never being governed by a centralised state authority, unlike the Ilkhanate and the Safavid before and after it. The only ruler who seemed to exercise effective, centralised rule over all of Iran during this period was Temūr. His reign only lasted for a mere two decades and was fleeting in comparison to the following century of political fragmentation and wars that beset Iran for much of the fifteenth century.⁹⁴ The well-known rulers of various Turco-Mongol dynasties who came after him, like Shāhrukh, Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (r. 873-75/1469-70 and 875-911/1470-1506), Jahān Shāh of the Qarā Quyunlū (r. 842-872/1438-67), Uzun Ḥasan and Ya'qūb, were only able to govern their own states located in various regions of *Iranshahr*. Therefore, the relationships between these rulers were usually defined by continuing rivalry, suspicion, and hostility, since they were

⁹¹ Bernard O'Kane, *Timurid Architecture in Khorasan* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers in association with Undena Publications, 1987), 1-50, and for more details on Tabriz as one of the cultural capitals of Iran during the latter fifteenth century, see more in Chad G. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmi's Salāmān Va Absāl* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81-110. And Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 134-140.

⁹² H.R. Roemer, "The Successors of Timur" in *The Cambridge History of Iran in Seven Volumes: Vol 6*, 98-146. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1986), 134.

⁹³ Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant*, 100-101. Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*, 67-73.

⁹⁴ Manz, *The Rise and Rule*, 90-107.

competing dynasties with the pretensions of universal imperial rule over the domain of Islam and *Iranshahr*.⁹⁵ Peaceful coexistence between the Timurids and their rival Turkmen dynasties to the west, although manageable for the most part, was always underlined by tension, friction, and suspicion, which could have broken out into open conflict and war at any moment.⁹⁶

These ruling Turco-Mongol dynasties were all fragile and susceptible to sudden collapse. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into the detail of the rise and fall of various Turco-Mongol dynasties, it will suffice to say that many of the ruling dynasties of post-Mongol Iran were thrown to the dustbin of history because of the violent and sudden rise to power of Temūr, Qarā Yusūf (d. 823/1420)(r. 791-823/1389-1420), Jahān Shāh, and Uzan Ḥasan.⁹⁷ This fractured political climate would have had repercussions, negatively affecting other areas of the life of Iranians living during that time.

In the next section, we will review the socio-religious milieu of the period in question and see how a climate of socio-political instability influenced the religious beliefs, general outlook, and makeup of Iranian Muslims and Sufis. This period of Iran's history fostered deep

⁹⁵ M. Melvin-Koushki, "Early Modern Islamic Empire." In *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, edited by A. Salvatore, R. Tottoli, B. Rahimi, M.F. Attar and N. Patel (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018), 356-62. For more information on the Imperial ideology and discourse of political legitimacy of the Timurids, see İlker Evrim Binbaş, "Timurid Experimentation with Eschatological Absolutism: Mīrzā Iskandar, Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī, and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī in 815/1412". In *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 277-303. For more on the imperial ideology underpinning the pretensions to universal Islamic rule of Uzun Ḥasan, the founder of the Āq Quyunlū empire, see E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan*, 100-9.

⁹⁶ Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 113. And in the view of Roemer, "The rise of the two confederations (Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu) was accompanied, not only by endless conflicts with their neighbours, but also by mutual jealousies and rivalries... These quarrels and conflicts determined their policies of alliance and their choice of enemies, in other words, their entire destiny." H.R. Roemer, "The Turkmen Dynasties" in *The Cambridge History of Iran in Seven Volumes: Vol 6, 147-188* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1986), 154.

⁹⁷ Dynasties worth mentioning here who were completely annihilated due to the establishment of the Timurid, Qarā Quyunlū and Āq Quyunlū empires over Iran over the course of the late fourteenth to fifteenth century, were the Sarbadār dynasty (736-783/1336-1381) in Khurāsān; the Kart Dynasty of Herāt (1245-1381); the Muzaffared dynasty of Fārs, Yazd, Kermān & Shīrāz (713-95/1314-93); and the Jalāyirid Sultanate of Azarbāyjān and Baghdād (1336-1432). For more information on the Sarbadārs, see John Smith Masson, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 93-159. For more details on the Kart dynasty, see Lawrence G. Potter, "The Kart Dynasty of Herat: Religion and Politics in Medieval Iran," PhD dissertation, (Columbia University, 1992) 25-82. For more information on the Muzaffared dynasty, see John Limbert, *Shiraz in the Age of Hafez: The Glory of a Medieval Persian City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004) 33-47. And for more details regarding the Jalāyirid Sultanate, see Patrick Wing, *Jalayirids: Dynastic State Formation in the Mongol Middle East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) 48-147.

seated emotional and religious feelings of 'Alīd-devotionalism, a deep sense of the coming of the apocalypse, and Shī'ī messianism amongst Iranian Muslims of all social classes. All of this was couched in terms of, and expressed through beliefs borrowed from, both heterodox and orthodox Shī'ite spiritual currents that were active at that time. These subterranean spiritual-religious currents are understood to have been influential during the latter half of the fifteenth century.

Chapter Two

Sufism and Heterodox Shī'ism in Fifteenth Century Iran, and the Gradual Erosion of Mainstream Sunnism amongst Iranians

According to Mustawfī Qazvīnī in the *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, his famous work of geography on Iran during the fourteenth century, the majority of Iranian Muslims living during his era were Sunnīs of either the Shāfe'ī or Ḥanafī *māzhab*s. Sunnīs of the Shāfe'ī *māzhab* constituted the majority of Muslims of central, western and north-western Iran, mainly within the cities of Iṣfahān, Qazvīn, Abhar, Zanjān, Shīrāz—along with the entirety of Fārs province—Gulpāyagān, Yazd, Hamadān, Tabrīz, Ardabīl, Ahar, and Nakhjavān.⁹⁸ Only Marāgheh was of the Ḥanafī *māzhab*.⁹⁹ Ḥanafītes predominated in Khurāsān; especially in the cities of Herāt, Khwāf and Juwayn.¹⁰⁰ Kermān and Sīstān were also populated primarily by Sunnīs.¹⁰¹ Only the cities of Qum, Kāshān, Rayy, Sabzevār, Gurgān, Māzandarān, and parts of Gīlān province were of the Shī'ī faith; mainly Twelvers or Zaydīs, and even a smaller minority of Isma'īlīs.¹⁰² From this valuable information

⁹⁸ Qazvīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 49, 58, 59, 62, 66, 68, 74, 77, 81, 84, 89, 115. Taken from I. P Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 303.

⁹⁹ Qazvīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 87. Taken from Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 370.

¹⁰⁰ Qazvīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 150, 152, 154. Taken from Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 303.

¹⁰¹ Qazvīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 71. Taken from Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 303.

¹⁰² Qazvīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, 45, 60, 67, 68, 69 & 74. Taken from Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 303. The Muslims of Qum, Rayy, Kāshān and Sabzevār were followers of Twelver Shī'ism, while the Muslims of Gīlān and Māzandarān were Muslims of the Zaydī branch of Shī'ism. Although the Isma'īlīs were perhaps the largest community of Shī'ites within Iran during the Seljūq period, historical records seem to indicate that the Isma'īlī community underwent a severe decline after the Mongol destruction of Alamūt castle during the reign of Hülegü khan. Nevertheless, during the 15th century, Anjedān, which was located in central Iran, eventually became an important center for the Isma'īlī sect, and even small pockets of Isma'īlīs continued to survive in Quhestān, which is located in eastern Khurāsān. For more details concerning the history of the Isma'īlī community within post-Mongol medieval Iran, see Shafique

provided to us by Mustawfī, we can presume that the religious conditions of Iran in Mustawfī's era would have remained unchanged until the Safāvīd era. Therefore, we can assume that the Sunnīs were the majority in Iran within Lāhījī's lifetime in the second half of the fifteenth century—but this doesn't tell the whole story. As other researchers have noted when looking into the unique religious situation of Iran in the post-Mongol period, "confessional ambiguity" prevailed.¹⁰³ Scholars and historians working on the religious history of Iran during the later medieval period have coined this term to describe the ambiguous religious environment of medieval Iran following the Mongol invasions. In Judith Pfeiffer's own words:

In the wake of the Mongol invasions, new cards were dealt to everyone, old hierarchies shaken up, confessional boundaries mellowed to the extent that we can speak of a period of "confessional ambiguity" during which especially the distinctions between Sunnism and Shi'ism were largely dissolved into a form of 'Alid loyalism that makes it difficult to discern strict confessional boundaries during this period.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, the following discussion in this chapter will be concerned with the historical question or problem of "confessional ambiguity" as it had reigned over Iran during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. I will provide a brief but concise overview of the historical developments affecting the different Islamic traditions and communities of Iran during the period in question; namely Sunnism, Sufism and the various currents of Shī'ism. By doing so, we are then able to understand the role of Lāhījī within the context of the broader historical developments shaping the Persian Sufi tradition during the closing decades of the fifteenth century.

N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), 48-133.

¹⁰³ According to Claude Cahen and Said Amir Arjomand, the religious history of Iran during the current period under examination, can be described as the "Shī'itization of Sunnism," where "Shī'ite elements were superimposed on the veneer of Sunnī Islam." See more in Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*. Publications of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies; No. 17 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 67.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Pfeiffer, "Confessional Ambiguity vs. Confessional Polarization: Politics and the Negotiation of Religious Boundaries in the Ilkhanate." In *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in thirteenth–fifteenth Century Tabriz* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 129.

2.1 The Role of the Persian Sufi Community in the Confluence of Shī'ism and Sunnism in the Turco-Mongol Period

This historical phenomenon of “confessional ambiguity” also meant that the traditional sectarian boundaries between Sunnism and Shī'ism were dissolving and became more fluid over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The various Sufi communities that dotted the Iranian landscape played a crucial role in forming a bridge between the two Islamic communities that were previously divided by rigid sectarian boundaries.¹⁰⁵ It was through the Sufis, who formulated and traced their *silsilas*—the spiritual genealogy of Sufi saints—back to Imām 'Alī, the first of the Holy Imams of the Twelver Shī'ites, who played an important role in the spread of 'Alīd-devotionalism amongst the Iranian masses.¹⁰⁶ The Mongol and post-Mongol period of Iran's history saw a rise in influence of Sufism and the heterodox and orthodox streams of the Shī'ī spiritual tradition. Formerly heretical Shī'ī beliefs—especially concerning the holy and exalted status of the household of the Prophet Muḥammad—began to subtly influence the religious world-view of both the Persian Sufis and the Sunnī majority as well.¹⁰⁷ This is why amongst most Persian Sunnīs and Sufis, “‘Alīd-loyalism,” i.e., devotion and love for the household of the Prophet Muḥammad (*Ahl al-bayt*)—especially for the Twelve Holy Imams—became so widespread during this specific era. Indeed, one could even consider it a cultural phenomenon within Iranian society during the later fifteenth century.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ For more information on the sectarian divisions between the different Muslim communities during the preceding Saljuq period, see David Durand-Guedy, *Iranian Elites and Turkish Rulers: A History of Isfahan in the Saljuq Period* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 145-148. See also Peacock, A. C. S., *Early Seljūq History: A New Interpretation*. Vol. 7 (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), 99-122.

¹⁰⁶ The most influential and wide spread Sufi *ṭarīqas* during the later medieval era within Iran were the various branches of the Kubrawīya, Suhrawardīya, Ne'matullāhī, Kazarūniya, Naqshbandīya and Khalvatīya *ṭarīqas*. All these Sufi orders, even including some Naqshbandī communities according to Hamid Alger, traced their *silsilas* back to Imām 'Alī, and from him to the Prophet Muḥammad. For more details on these Persian-Sufi orders, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations* (London: SCM Press, 1991.) 80-104; 144-62. For the Khalvatīya *ṭarīqa*, see B.G Martin, “A Short History of the Khalwati Order of Dervishes,” In Keddie, Nikki R. and Gustave E. von Grunebaum. *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500* (London: Center for Near Eastern Studies, 1972), 275-280.

¹⁰⁷ Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 66-76.

¹⁰⁸ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam : Conscience and History in a World Civilization: Vol 2 The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Period*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, 446. And see as well Colin Turner, *Islam Without Allah?: The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000; 2001), 52-56, 65.

One religious concept that was common amongst the different religious communities, and was even fundamental to the religious world-view for both the Sufi and Shīʿī communities, was the concept of *valāyat* (“sainthood”/“friendship with God”). The concept of *valāyat* underwent a profound evolution during the later medieval period as a result of this cultural-religious environment of confessional ambiguity. According to Shahzad Bashir, the concept of *valāyat*—as articulated by Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers—during this epoch was already a highly developed metaphysical and religious concept adopted by the wider Persian Sufi community as well as being widely discussed and debated amongst them. This was because of the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s theosophical ideas, whose works were eagerly embraced and studied by a variety of Sufi *ṭarīqas* within Iran and the Islamic east during this period.¹⁰⁹ The concept of *valāyat* that had been a crucial element within the shared discourse of the Sufis since the beginning of the history of the Sufi community,¹¹⁰ was now increasingly being influenced by the Shīʿī understanding and interpretation of this same religious idea.¹¹¹ The majority of the Persian Sufis within the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era had gradually come to accept Ibn al-ʿArabī’s elaborate teachings on the cosmos and its governance by an unseen hierarchy of *awleyāʾ* (“saints”/“Friends of God”). Many of the Persian Sufis had also come to subscribe to the belief that their own Sufi shaykhs were part of this invisible, spiritual hierarchy of governing saints.¹¹² At the peak of this unseen, spiritual hierarchy stood the *quṭb* (“pole”)—

¹⁰⁹ Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 37. And see also Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 78-85. The concept of *valāyat* (sainthood), will be further analysed in chapter 6, in relation to Lāhijī’s personal understanding of this particular but extremely important Sufi concept. In brief, the attainment of sainthood (*valāyat*) was considered necessary by the Sufi community for any Sufi shaykh who wished to guide a community of Sufi dervishes upon the way of the *ṭarīqa*. Without the attainment of sainthood, no Sufi shaykh was considered qualified to guide others upon the way towards God. The attainment of *valāyat* also signified that the Sufi shaykh who was in possession of this spiritual station was believed to be a conduit for the transmission of God’s divine grace (*ḡayṣ*) for his community of followers—and which also flowed towards the surrounding community of Muslims. Sufis also believed that a Sufi shaykh who had attained the degree of sainthood could also transmit this divine grace to whomever he turned his attention towards. For more details on this particular topic, see Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 95.

¹¹⁰ For more information on the historical development of the Sufi conception and understanding of *valāyat* in the early history of Sufism, see Palmer, Aiyub. *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Ḥakīm Al-Tirmidhī’s Theory of Wilāya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunnī Caliphate* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 145-66.

¹¹¹ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 38. And see as well Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī*. Islamic Texts Society, Golden Palm Series (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 26-46.

¹¹² Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 37 & Green, *A Global History*, 126-127 & Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 13 & 85-86.

the supreme Sufi saint under whose authority all the other saints in the world were subject.¹¹³ Because of the widespread influence and popularity of Shaykh al-Akbar's theosophical teachings amongst the Persian Sufis during this particular epoch, the Sufis perceived and revered the *quṭb* as a *khalīfa* ("vice-regent") and elect servant of God. This same belief concerning the *quṭb* also seemed to be shared by ordinary Muslim believers as well, since Sufism enjoyed widespread popularity and acceptance amongst Iranian Muslims of all social classes during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period.¹¹⁴

Connected to this theory of an unseen hierarchy of Sufi saints governing the affairs of the creation on God's behalf, was the widespread belief amongst both ordinary Muslims and Sufis that a Sufi shaykh who was also the *quṭb* of his era could bestow his *barakāt* ("spiritual blessings") upon any individual of his choosing. This was regardless of whether that be one of his devoted Sufi disciples or a ruling sultan who desired to win the favour and attention of this special "Friend of God". Many Muslims had therefore come to believe that the fortunes of a ruling dynasty were dependant upon the *barakāt* of a living Sufi saint.¹¹⁵ Because of this widespread belief in the spiritual powers and miracles that seemed to emanate from the *quṭb*—who was also a Sufi master of a large community of dervishes—many individuals from the different Persian Sufi communities were now boldly attributing spiritual powers and miracles to their Sufi shaykhs that were eerily similar to what the Shī'ites had traditionally attributed to their Holy Imams.¹¹⁶ Sufis were gradually—and with increasing intensity—perceiving the role of

¹¹³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of Saints*, 53 & 58.

¹¹⁴ Ṣafā, Ṣabīḥ-Allāh, *Tārīkh-e Adabīyāt dar Irān: Volume III which is an Abridgement of Volume IV*. Abbreviated by Seyyed Muḥammad Turābī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Ferdūs, 1379/2000), 40-43.

¹¹⁵ According to Chodkiewicz's research on the subject of sainthood within the framework of Ibn al-'Arabī's theoretical discourse, where Chodkiewicz devotes much time to outlining Ibn al-'Arabī's discussions concerning the different categories of saints who govern the cosmos in partnership with the *quṭb*, "The Pole, *quṭb*, the one being in this world who is 'the place of Allah's gaze', and who therefore carries out the 'mandate of heaven' in all of the universe." Chodkiewicz, *Seal of Saints*, 58. For more on the different degrees of sainthood as well as the different groups of saints who govern the cosmos, see more Chodkiewicz, *Seal of Saints*, 89-116.

¹¹⁶ Devin Deweese, "Intercessory Claims of Sufi Communities During the fourteenth and fifteenth Centuries: 'Messianic' Legitimizing Strategies on the Spectrum of Normativity." In *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 212-215. Deweese has recently written an article showing how the reverence and devotion that certain Sufi communities held for their respective *Pīrs*—like the Sufis of the Kubrawīya-Hamadānīya had for Seyyed 'Alī Hamadānī—was now reaching messianic levels never heard of before in previous ages, as a result of the possible influence of Shī'ism and Alid loyalism. For more details, see Deweese. "Intercessory Claims," 197-219.

their saintly Sufi masters to be messianic figures imbued with qualities and traits that the various Shīʿī communities had traditionally attributed to the different members of the household of the Prophet Muḥammad.

This confluence of different strands of Sufism and Shīʿism that was occurring during the fifteenth century in Iran was the inevitable result of powerful historical forces which followed the destruction of the Abbasid Caliphate by the Mongols in 1258.¹¹⁷ The growing sense of apocalypticism—couched in heterodox, messianic Shīʿī terms—was increasing amongst certain sectors of the long-suffering Iranian masses as a result of the ongoing social, economic, religious and political crises afflicting Iran during this period.¹¹⁸ Therefore, all of these factors just mentioned contributed to and sustained this religious culture or environment of confessional ambiguity, which was unique for Iran during the fifteenth century.

2.2 Confessional Ambiguity or Crypto-Shīʿism within the Later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū Period

To get an idea of what this particular religio-cultural environment of confessional ambiguity was like for many Iranians during the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period, we need to briefly examine the religious affiliations of some of the most influential intellectual and spiritual figures of the age. Even today, there still exists disagreement within the academic community regarding the true religious affiliations of certain Persian historical figures of the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era. Already in the early Timurid period, probably the most influential philosopher and polymath of the age, Ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī (d. 835/1432), lived most of his life under a cloud of confessional ambiguity. When a Ḥurūfī assassin by the name of Aḥmad-e Lur attempted to assassinate Shāhrukh in 830/1427, Iṣfahānī himself eventually became a victim of the political purges carried out by Shāhrukh.¹¹⁹ In response, Iṣfahānī wrote a treatise in his defense, proclaiming his orthodox Sunnī credentials passionately. While most scholars would disagree, Leonard Lewisohn has

¹¹⁷ Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 23.

¹¹⁸ Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 302-26. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 66-76.

¹¹⁹ Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and Theology in the Confessions of Ṣā'in Al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 830/1437)." In *Sufism and Theology*, edited by Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 64. For more details on the attempted assassination of Shāhrukh by the Ḥurūfīs, which occurred within Herat in 830/1427, see İlker Evrim Binbaş, "The Anatomy of a Regicide Attempt: Shāhrukh, the Ḥurūfīs, and the Timurid Intellectuals in 830/1426–27." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 3 (2013): 391-428.

written that Iṣfahānī was indeed a sincere orthodox Sunnī with strong Sufi inclinations.¹²⁰ Lewisohn strongly objects to the opinion of Henry Corbin that Iṣfahānī was a crypto-Shīʿīte engaged in *taqīyya* (dissimulation) in order to protect himself—although Corbin’s view is a representation of the opinions of most scholars on Iṣfahānī’s true confessional identity.¹²¹

Mathew S. Melvin-Koushki, who has perhaps written the most extensive work on the life and thought of Iṣfahānī, states that Iṣfahānī’s “Shāfiʿī credentials are impeccable”.¹²² Although, according to Melvin-Koushki, a careful reading of certain texts by Iṣfahānī does reveal an undoubtedly pro-Shīʿī bias.¹²³ In Melvin-Koushki’s final opinion, Iṣfahānī was neither strictly a Sunnī nor a crypto-Shīʿī, but both. He derived elements from both Sunnism and Shīʿism to craft his own personal, mystical and philosophical vision for a universal occult science of letterism. This is where his true devotions lay.¹²⁴

Further to the east, when we look at the religious affiliations of two of the most influential Naqshbandī writers of the Timurid period, Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā (d. 822/1419-20) and Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), there is no doubt concerning their strong Sunnī convictions.¹²⁵ Yet Jāmī, during his *Hajj* pilgrimage, stopped over in Baghdad and visited the tomb-shrines of Imām ‘Alī in Najaf and Imām Ḥusayn in Karbalā’.¹²⁶ There he wrote poems describing his love and devotion for the *Ahl al-bayt*¹²⁷ even though Jāmī was known by

¹²⁰ Lewisohn, “Sufism and Theology,” 64-78.

¹²¹ In Lewisohn’s words, “I find it repugnant to think a man of such great religious sincerity could exhibit such an extreme depth of dissemblance, which would make him the author of two contradictory, exoteric teachings.” Lewisohn, “Sufism and Theology,” 80.

¹²² M. Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Ṣā’id al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (1369–1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran” (PhD Diss., Yale University, 2012), 73. For more information on Koushki’s research on Iṣfahānī and his occult science of letterism, see Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Occult Challenge to Philosophy and Messianism in Early Timurid Iran: Ibn Turka’s Lettrism as a New Metaphysics.” In *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 247-76.

¹²³ Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal,” 75-76.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 76.

¹²⁵ For more information on Pārsā, see Hamid Algar, “Reflections of Ibn ‘Arabi,” In *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, 10 (1991): 45-66. Accessed August 25, 2018, <https://ibnarabisociety.org/naqshbandi-tradition-hamid-algar/>. For more information on Jāmī and his relation to the Sunnī faith and his hostile attitudes towards Shīʿites, see Sajjad H Rizvi, “Before the Safavid-Ottoman Conflict,” In *Jāmī in Regional Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 227-55.

¹²⁶ Hamid Algar, *Jami: Makers of Islamic Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 50, 54.

¹²⁷ Ibid, and Rizvi, “Before the Safavid-Ottoman Conflict,” 239-42.

his contemporaries to be a hostile critic of the Shī'ites, where according to Algar, Jāmī considered “all Shī'ites were effectively bastards because they did not regard unintentional the utterance of a formula of divorce as legally binding”.¹²⁸ He also used the derogatory term of Rāfedī (“rejecters”) when referring to the Shī'ites; thereby displaying his sectarian attitudes towards the Shī'ī community within Iran.¹²⁹ Pārsā, who was one of the most important disciples and *khalīfas* of Shāh Naqshband (d. 791/1391), dedicated a whole chapter of hagiographies on each of the Twelve Holy Imams in the *Faṣl al-Ketāb*, listing their many virtues and charismatic miracles, thereby making it obligatory for his Sufi and Muslim readers to love the family of the Prophet Muḥammad, including the Twelve Holy Imams.¹³⁰ He writes about the *Ahl al-bayt*—specifically the Twelve Imams—with the utmost praise, love, and respect.¹³¹

Another figure who symbolised this environment of confessional ambiguity was Ḥusayn Vā'iz Kāshefī (d. 910/1504-5), the famous Timurid preacher, scholar, and polymath. Kāshefī, along with Jāmī and 'Alī Shīr Navā'ī (d. 907/1501), was the most influential intellectual and literary figure of Ḥusayn Bayqara's court in Herat during the latter half of the fifteenth century.¹³² Kāshefī was a devoted follower and affiliate of the Sunnī Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa*, where he was initiated through his close relationship with Jāmī after having a dream-vision of Sa'd-al-Dīn Kashgarī in which the latter urged him to come to Herāt and join his circle of dervishes (d. 860/1456).¹³³ However, many scholars today—especially Iranian scholars—consider him to have been a Twelver Shī'ite who was doing *taqīyya* in the Sunnī environment of Timurid Herāt in order to advance his worldly career and fortunes. This position is based on the fact that Kāshefī originally hailed from Sabzevār, which along with Qum, was one of the strongholds of the Twelver Shī'ī faith in Iran during the medieval period. He was also the author of the *Rawzat*

¹²⁹ Algar, “Naqshbandis and Safavids,” 29.

¹³⁰ Khwājah Muḥammad Pārsā, *Faṣl al-Ketāb*, edited by Jalīl Misgar Nejād (Tehran: Markez-e Nashr-e Dāneshgāhī, 1381/2002), 459-598.

¹³¹ Pārsā, *Faṣl al-Ketāb*, 459-598.

¹³² For more on Kāshefī's works and his legacy on Persian culture, see Maria E. Subtelny. “Husayn Vā'iz-i Kashifi: Polymath, Populariser, and Preserver,” *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2003): 463-67.

¹³³ Maria E. Subtelny, “Kāshefī, Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥosayn Wā'eẓ.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Vol. XV, Fasc. 6, 2011: 658-661, accessed June 30, 2018, https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kasefi_kamal.

al-shuhadā' ("Meadow of the Martyrs"),¹³⁴ a poem that was "highly influential in the development of the Shī'ī passion play (*ta'zīa*) and the mourning verses (*nawha*) of the *Muharram* procession".¹³⁵ This work, a long poem describing the tragedy of Karbalā' and the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn, along with his closest relatives and family, was authored by Kāshefī in the last two years of his life, on the eve of the conquest of Timurid Herāt by the Sunnī Uzbeks; and then by the militant Shī'ī Safāvids.¹³⁶

Interestingly enough, Kāshefī was also regarded by the people of Sabzevār as a traitor to his original Shī'ī upbringing for his opportunistic conversion to Sunnīsm, while the Sunnīs of Herāt were always suspicious of his crypto-Shī'ism and were never truly convinced of his fidelity to the Sunnī faith.¹³⁷ This distrust is not surprising when considered alongside examination of another vital work attributed to Kāshefī, the *Futuwwat-nāma-ye sultānī*, a comprehensive book detailing the Persian *Futuwwat* tradition as it had existed during the Timurid era within the Khurāsān region. This particular work by Kāshefī is filled with references to the Twelve Imams, and thereby reveals Kāshefī's undeniable Shī'ī tendencies.¹³⁸

Finally, confessional ambiguity also casts its shadow over other historical figures, such as the Persian philosopher, religious scholar, and Qadi of Yazd, Qadī Mīr Ḥusayn Maybudī (d. 910/1504), who was also a student in the rationalist Islamic sciences of the foremost theologian and philosopher of the Āq Quyunlū age, Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502).¹³⁹ Maybudī's most

¹³⁴ Subtelny, "Husayn Vā'iz-i Kashifī," 466-467.

¹³⁵ Amanat, "Meadow of the Martrys," 91.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 96.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 94.

¹³⁸ For more details regarding this particular work by Kāshefī, and the relevant passages that reveal Kāshefī's bias for the Shī'ī faith—or his devotion for the twelve Holy Imams—see Ḥusayn Vā'iz Kāshifī. *The Royal Book of Spiritual Chivalry (Futuwwat-nāmah-yi sultānī)*. Translated by Jay R. Crook (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2000), 89-135.

¹³⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī was perhaps the most influential and famous Persian polymath of Āq Quyunlū Iran. Davānī was considered an accomplished master in the traditional religious sciences as well as in Islamic philosophy, and because of his fame, Shiraz became one of the major learning centres for the Islamic sciences and philosophy during this period. He was also a writer of numerous works, mainly commentaries upon older classical works of Islamic theology and philosophy. His most well known work is the ethical work *Akhlāq-e jalālī* a work following in the tradition of the prince of mirrors genre dedicated to Uzun Ḥasan, as well as a illuminationist commentary upon a work by Suhrawardī, the *Šawākel al-ḥūr fī šarḥ Hayākel al-nūr* (872/1468). Since Davānī lived in the later medieval period of Iran's history, the cloud of confessional ambiguity also overshadowed him. There has been some scholarly debate in recent years concerning his true religious affiliation. According to Newman, in 905/1499, Davānī wrote a work titled *Šarḥ al-aqā'id al-'azodīya*, an openly anti-Twlewer Shī'ī work based upon rationalist

important work was the *Sharḥ-e Dīvān-e ‘Alī*; an in-depth philosophical-mystical commentary by Maybudī on the poetry of Imām ‘Alī, the first of the Twelve Holy Imams.¹⁴⁰ Although, according to Alexandra W. Dunietz, “Maybudī was not a crypto-Shī‘ī”,¹⁴¹ yet, he “obviously holds ‘Alī in high esteem, calling him the closest *vali* to Muḥammad, just as the closest prophet was Jesus, and exhibits no antagonism towards the Shī‘ī as a group”.¹⁴² The following statement by Dunietz is pertinent in relation to the historical problem of confessional ambiguity that reigned over Iran during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. It serves as a fitting conclusion to this section of the chapter:

The parameters of religious identification are not well known. What range of belief and practice could be subsumed under Shi’ism or Sunnism is not clear to scholars today, nor does it seem to have been sharply defined for the men of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as evidenced by the arguments over whether Maybudi and Davani adhered to one religious grouping or the other... The terms “Shi’i-Sunnism”, “imamophilism”, “Alid loyalism”, and “crypto- Shi’ism” adopted by a variety of scholars demonstrate that sectarian identities remain hard to pin down. The primary material leads to everyone articulate a variation on one conclusion—namely, that confessional ambiguity prevailed.¹⁴³

Perhaps it is relevant now that we introduce a brief section on the issue of confessional ambiguity in relation to Lāhījī. This crucial issue will be revisited in chapter five of this thesis when I provide a biographical sketch of Lāhījī from the available sources. The next section will

Ash‘arī theological dogmas. Yet a couple of works of an openly Shī‘ī nature can be attributed to Davānī as well. Davānī passed away during the conquest of Iran by Shāh Ismā‘īl and the Qezbalish, and supposedly rejected Shāh Ismā‘īl’s messianic claims. For more information, see Andrew J. Newman. “Davānī, Jalāl-al-Dīn Moḥammad.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Vol. VII, Fasc. 2, 1991: 132-133, accessed July 16, 2018, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/davani>. And According to Pfeiffer’s own research on Davānī and his scholarly activities in Shiraz, “Quite in tune with his times, Davānī had Shī‘ī leanings, and the question of his ‘true colour’ remains debated in the scholarship.” Judith Pfeiffer, “Teaching the Learned: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī’s Ijāza to Mu‘ayyadzāda ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Efendi and the Circulation of Knowledge between Fārs and the Ottoman Empire at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century.” In *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 296.

¹⁴⁰ For more details concerning this specific work by Maybudi, see Alexandra W. Dunietz, *The Cosmic Perils of Qadi Husayn Maybudi in Fifteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 51-112.

¹⁴¹ Dunietz, *The Cosmic Perils*, 51.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 65.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 53.

focus on other facets of Iran's religious culture of confessional ambiguity that also impacted the historical developments of Sufism in the later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū era.

2.3 The Search for a New Political-Religious Dispensation in the Wake of the Collapse of the Ilkhanate Amongst the Muslims of Iran

The question that now must be asked in connection to our present inquiry is this: what were the historical causes responsible for creating and sustaining this religious, cultural environment of confessional ambiguity that was unique to Iran? In the view of Savory:

One has to go back to the capture of Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols, and the extinction of the caliphate. This event not only marks a watershed in the political history of the Islamic world, but had far-reaching effects on religious developments as well. For 600 years the caliphate had been a visible symbol of the unity of the Islamic world, and the upholder of the orthodoxy of the Islamic faith. The religious tolerance (some might say indifference) of the Mongols deprived Sunnī or orthodox Islam of its dominant position, and created conditions which facilitated the development of not only Shi'ism but of popular religious beliefs of every kind.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, the post-Mongol period saw an increasing intellectual and theological rapprochement between the two different branches of Islam that was impossible in the pre-Mongol period. This may have been because the Khans of the Ilkhanate were mostly Buddhist or believers in Shamanism for almost half a century of their rule over Iran and were simply indifferent to—and perhaps ignorant of—the deep sectarian differences that divided the two branches of Islam from each other.¹⁴⁵ Sunnī Islam no longer received the traditional privilege of exclusive state patronage—unlike in previous ages.¹⁴⁶ This attitude of religious tolerance by the Mongol Khans was a boon for the different Shī'ī communities within Iran. For the first time in Iran's history there was room for the different Shī'ī sects to expand their religious and spiritual

¹⁴⁴ Savory, *Iran Under*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Florence Hodous, "Faith and the Law: Religious Beliefs and the Death Penalty in the Ilkhanate." In *The Mongols' Middle East*, edited by Bruno De Nicola & Charles Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 120-24.

¹⁴⁶ Pfeiffer, "Confessional Ambiguity," 132-133, 135-136. And Jackson, *The Mongols and the Islamic*, 297-327.

influences throughout Iranian society, and to even flourish without the interference of hostile state powers allied to mainstream Sunnīsm.¹⁴⁷

The annihilation of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate by the Mongols no doubt had profound religious, spiritual, and political ramifications upon Iran, whose consequences were still reverberating even until Lāhījī’s own lifetime. The destruction of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate shattered the last remaining spiritual and religious symbol of unity for the global Sunnī community as personalised in the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs.¹⁴⁸ It also dealt a fatal blow to centuries of Sunnī preeminence and dominance within the Islamic world by shattering the religious and political legitimacy of universal Islamic rulership—by the Sunnīs—as traditionally symbolised by the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs. The political and spiritual legitimacy of the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfs* as the rightful rulers of the entire Muslim world was argued for and theorised by a host of Sunnī religious scholars in the preceding centuries.¹⁴⁹

In the periods leading up to the Mongol invasions, all the Sunnī sultans of Iran—along with the the rest of the Islamic world—received their political legitimacy to rule over the *ummah* as representatives of the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfa*, through a conferral of authority from the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfa* based in Baghdad.¹⁵⁰ Although the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfas* ceased to effectively govern the worldwide Islamic community since the early ninth century, the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfa* was still envisioned within the collective imagination of Sunnīs as possessing a real, and even luminous, sacred authority deriving from God Himself.¹⁵¹ This model of universal kingship that united Sunnī Muslims from East and West in the revered figure of the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfa* was

¹⁴⁷ B. S. Amoretti, “Religion In the Timurid and Safavid Periods.” In *The Cambridge History of Iran*, edited by Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lockhart, The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 610-614.

¹⁴⁸ Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 23, 31-41.

¹⁴⁹ Concerning the views of Sunnī theologians and scholars regarding the legitimacy of the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfas* and the necessary role they played in bestowing the right to rule upon other Sunnī rulers who were supposedly subordinate in relation to the ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfas* and ruled on their behalf in other parts of the Islamic world, see Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam (London Oriental)* (Abingdon; Oxfordshire: Routledge Curzon, 2014), 69-103.

¹⁵⁰ Vanessa Van Renterghem, “CONTROLLING AND DEVELOPING BAGHDAD: CALIPHS, SULTANS AND THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE ABBASID CAPITAL (MID-5TH/11TH TO LATE 6TH/12TH CENTURIES).” In *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, edited by Christian Lange and Songul Mecit (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 118-120.

¹⁵¹ Hassan, *Longing for the Lost*, 23 & 31.

forever shattered with the invasion and destruction of ‘Abbāsīd Baghdad by the Mongols in 656/1258.

After the death of Temūr, the older models of universal kingship, i.e. the Sunnī ‘Abbāsīd model and universal rule through Chinggis descent, that once held political-religious legitimacy and validity amongst the populace of the eastern Islamic lands, no longer resonated with Muslims and had seemed to have lost its relevance.¹⁵² There seems to have been a desperate yearning to formulate a new and more relevant model of universal, but Islamic, kingship that was more appropriate for the transformed conditions of the post-Mongol era. There was a sense amongst Iranians of all levels of society—especially amongst the intellectual, religious, and aristocratic scholarly classes who were more deeply involved in the affair of governance—that there was a need for the “restoration of Islam, conceived of as the restoration of the true *sharī‘ah*”.¹⁵³

When Shāhrukh succeeded Temūr as the next ruler of the Timurid empire in 808/1405 he moved the court from Samarqand to the more Sunnī environment of Herāt. This shift transformed Herāt into the cultural, religious, political, and intellectual capital of the Timurid empire, and by extension the centre of Perso-Islamic civilization during the entirety of the fifteenth century, and symbolised the collective desire by Persian Muslims to return to a more pure and orthodox Islamic form of government.¹⁵⁴ Shāhrukh no longer based his right to rule over his Muslim subjects on the Chinggis model favoured by his father. Instead, he fashioned for himself and his dynasty a more traditional, Islamic model of kingship.¹⁵⁵ According to İlker Evrim Binbaş, “The numismatic evidence suggests that the title *khalīfa* was used for the first time by Shāhrukh as early as 819/1416-17 in Herāt, and it continued to be seen on coins until 825/1421-2 in Khāvarazm”.¹⁵⁶ What was new about Shāhrukh’s attempt to style himself as a Sunnī *khalīfa* for his Sunnī subjects was that this authority of universal rulership was not

¹⁵² Amoretti, “Religion in the Timurid,” 610-614.

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 611.

¹⁵⁴ Colin Mitchell, “Two tales of one city: Herat under the early modern empires of the Timurids and Safavids.” In *Layered Landscapes: Early Modern Religious Space Across Faiths and Cultures*, edited by Nelson, E., & Wright, J. 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), 210-11.

¹⁵⁵ İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf Al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 260-69.

¹⁵⁶ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 260.

transferred to him from some shadow ‘Abbāsīd *khalīfa* from Cairo, but his worthiness or qualities of being God’s *khalīfa* was inherent within his very own person.¹⁵⁷ The Persian, Timurid historian Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (d. 1454), according to Binbas’s own research, “accorded the title of *mujaddid*, ‘renewer of religion,’ to Shāhrukh”.¹⁵⁸ This is because Shāhrukh had abolished the infidel *yāsā* law with a revival of the *sharī‘ah* and had initiated a program of Sunnī revivalism by building numerous *madrasas* in his capital city to teach the “true” and “orthodox” Islam to religious students who had traveled to Herāt from all over the Islamic world to learn the traditional, Islamic sciences.¹⁵⁹

This attempt by Shāhrukh and his successors to revive the classical and Sunnī-‘Abbāsīd model of universal kingship—which was no doubt acceptable and popular amongst Iranian Sunnīs in previous ages—seems to have exhausted itself soon after Shāhrukh’s death.¹⁶⁰ For the historical evidence suggests that an increasing number of Iranian Sunnīs were transferring their allegiance and devotion to the household of the Prophet (*Ahl al-bayt*) instead. There was a growing belief amongst Persian Muslims that the only possible legitimate rulers for the *ummah*—those who could govern with justice and rid society once and for all from the centuries of heathen oppression and tyranny that began with the Mongol era—were the Holy Imams of the *Ahl al-bayt* or those who were believed to be their spiritual representatives.¹⁶¹ This factor was responsible for the ever-increasing spirit of ‘Alīd-loyalism that pervaded Iranian society during the latter half of the fifteenth century. Various groups within Iran and the Islamic East would increasingly formulate new models of universal Islamic rule as representatives of the Holy Imams of the *Ahl al-bayt*, and not as representatives of a Sunnī *khalīfa* based

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 262.

¹⁵⁹ Maria Eva Subtelny and Anas B. Khalidov, “The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning in Timurid Iran in the Light of the Sunnī Revival Under Shāh-Rukh.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 2 (1995): 211-219.

¹⁶⁰ Binbas, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid*, 260. Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā, the last effective Timurid sultan to rule Herat, and who was a Sunnī like all the rulers of the Timurid dynasty, nevertheless wished to read the Friday *khutba* in the names of the Twelve Shī‘ī Imāms. He was only discouraged to do so by the intervention of ‘Alī shīr Navā‘ī, as well as by some of his other advisors. See more in Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200-1800 / Muzaffar Alam* (London: Hurst & Co, 2004), 51.

¹⁶¹ Amoretti, “Religion in the Timurid”, 614-640.

somewhere in distant Cairo,¹⁶² as nearly all Iranian Muslims living in the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period believed that the sacred authority and charisma of the Twelve Holy Imams was beyond dispute.¹⁶³

2.4 The Results of this Confessional Ambiguity upon the Political, Social and Religious Environment

This confusing religious environment of confessional ambiguity, combined with the ever-deepening sense of apocalypticism amongst Iranian Muslims in the wake of long conflicts fought by the rulers of the Turco-Mongol dynasties, created a situation ripe for the explosion of various messianic and revolutionary religious movements which espoused a mixture of heretical Shīʿī and Sufi ideas and beliefs. One common characteristic shared amongst these different Shīʿī messianic groups was the stringent belief of their adherents that their charismatic leaders were the long-awaited Imām Mahdī, or his chosen representative or incarnation. These charismatic messianic leaders were perceived by their devoted followers to have a real, spiritual kind of relationship with the Hidden Imām himself, along with the revered Holy Imams of the *Ahl al-bayt*, and this belief served as the underlying bedrock for the sacred, and even political, authority which these messianic leaders claimed for themselves before their followers.¹⁶⁴ The first of these groups to make an impact were the *Sarbadār* movement in Khurāsān during the fourteenth century, just before the collapse of the Ilkhanate dynasty.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² William F. Tucker, "The Kūfan Ghulāt and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Türkmen Iran." In *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 178-94.

¹⁶³ Ali Anooshahr, "Timurids and Turcomans: Transition and Flowering in the Fifteenth Century." In *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, edited by Touraj Daryaee. Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 277-78.

¹⁶⁴ For more details on Nūrbakhsh's claim to being the long-awaited Imām Mahdī—the founder and leader of the Nūrbakhshīyya messianic movement and Sufi *ṭarīqa*—see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 76-109. For more on Muḥammad ibn Falāḥ's claims to being the *walī* and shield of the Hidden Imām—who was the founder of the Musha'sha'iyya movement—see B. S. Amoretti, "Religion in the Timurid," 626-29. And for more details on the gradual claims to divinity and then being the representatives to the Twelve Holy Imams by the different shaykhs of the Ṣafāviyya movement—especially by Shāh Ismā'īl—see Riza Yildirim. "Turkomans between Two Empires: The Origins of the Qizilbash Identity in Anatolia (1447–1514)," PhD dissertation (Bilkent University, 2008), 218-72. For more information on Faḡlallāh Astarābādī's—the founder of the Ḥurūfiyya movement—purported spiritual relationship with the different Twelve Holy Imams, see Shahzad Bashir, *Faḡlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2012), 58-63.

¹⁶⁵ For more on the Sarbadār movement, see John Masson Smith. *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*. Publications in Near and Middle East Studies. Series A, no. 11 (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 93-159.

The following century, leading up to the Safavid era, saw four other major messianic movements emerge within different regions of *Iranshahr*, whose religious ideology was a potent mixture of various Shīʿī and Sufi beliefs. The following groups were all significant players in the religious and political history of Iran during this specific period: the Ḥurūfīyya in northern Iran (also during the fourteenth century); the Mushaʿshaʿīyya of Khūzestān, the Nūrbakshīyya of Western and Central Iran, and the Ṣafāwīyya movement of Eastern Anatolia and Aẓarbāyjān.¹⁶⁶ As Petrushevsky states, all of these Shīʿī-Sufi movements attracted Iranians of all social classes, especially from the lower and more dispossessed classes.¹⁶⁷ These heterodox Shīʿī-Sufi movements were a direct response to “the heavy yoke of the Mongol conquerors and to feudal exploitation. Ideologically they were directed against the then predominant Sunnīsm and also against the ‘Great Yasa’ of Chingiz Khan.”¹⁶⁸

This explosive syncretism of messianic Shīʿī and antinomian Sufi beliefs and teachings provided a powerful impetus to the down-trodden members of Iranian society to stage violent acts of mass rebellion against the establishment—as embodied in the hated Sunnī Turco-Mongol Sultans and their Persian Sunnī collaborators and administrators—in the hopes of realizing their longed-for utopia of ridding the world of injustice, oppression, and tyranny once and for all.¹⁶⁹ The followers of these various heretical Shīʿī-Sufi movements refused to remain politically passive actors. According to Petrushevsky, one characteristic feature of this age was the never-ending mass uprisings staged by these types of movements against the ruling Sunnī establishment:

A rebellion in Khurasan in 1337 set the tone of the risings which from now on would agitate Iran until the sixteenth century—and not only Iran but the bordering countries where feudal exploitation was equally advanced. Time after time the peasants, the urban poor, and runaway slaves rallied to the standard of revolt. The Sarbadar movements in Khurasan, 1337-81, in the Samarqand region in 1365/1366, and in Kirman

¹⁶⁶ For a brief historical overview of these subversive, revolutionary Shīʿī-Sufi movements listed above, see Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 66-85.

¹⁶⁷ Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 302.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Tucker, “The Kūfan *Ghulāt*,” 178-94.

in 1373 were part and parcel of this wave of resistance. Other analogous movements were: risings in Mazandaran in 1350-60 and following years in Gilan in 1370 and following years, in Sabzawar in 1405, and in Mazandaran in 1406; the Ḥurūfī agitation which swept across the immense tract from Khorasan in Ottoman Turkey in the first decades of the fifteenth century.¹⁷⁰

Most importantly, Petrushevsky reminds us that “the ideology common to almost all these popular movements, as had been said, was Shīʿīte of the various sects in combination with Sufism; the dervishes invariably playing a prominent role in them”.¹⁷¹

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a brief overview of the crucial historical developments affecting Iran’s society and religious culture during the post-Mongol period. The religious culture in which Iranians of the later medieval period lived has been described by most historians and scholars as having been defined by confessional ambiguity. This described a situation in which the traditional boundaries of Sunnīsm, Shīʿism, and Sufism of the previous eras, whilst retaining their formal existence, became more porous over time. The religious culture of Timurid and Āq Quyunlū Iran could eventually be described as a confusing mixture of, and even synthesis between, the various strands and currents of Sunnīsm, Shīʿism, and Sufism. This may be the reason why many present-day scholars and researchers find it difficult to pinpoint with accuracy the true confessional identities of some of the most famous historical figures who lived during this period. For some of these individuals who seemed to be Sunnī—as determined by the available primary source materials—also displayed characteristics usually attributed to followers of various traditions of Shīʿism.

One important feature of the post-Mongol period that we should note before continuing further into our research was that Perso-Islamic civilization was undergoing a long-lasting historical process where a variety of historically influential personalities and their respective communities were engaged in the continuing reconfiguration of the socio-political

¹⁷⁰ Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, 304-305.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

order with the different religious elements that were then present within Iran. During the course of the fifteenth century, religious elements associated with different heterodox streams of Shī'ism were increasingly coming to the forefront—with Sunnīsm quietly receding into the background, and Sufism continuing to maintain an eminent position within both the socio-political order, as well as within the shared religious cultures of the different polities of *Iranshahr*. Increasingly, the political and religious discourse surrounding legitimate Islamic rule during this era was taking on more distinctly Shī'ī overtones over time—as evidenced by the many messianic and apocalyptic movements that erupted all over *Iranshahr* during the latter half of the 15th century, where the leaders of these different messianic movements justified their right to rule based upon their proclaimed spiritual relationship with the twelve infallible Imāms—especially with the long awaited Imām Mahdī. Added to this creative ferment was the increasingly popular Sufi-Akbarī discourse on the metaphysical nature and cosmological role of the Perfect Man, and the unseen hierarchy of Sufi saints who governed the cosmos under the supreme authority of the *qutb*, i.e., the Perfect Man. Many Iranian Muslims also believed that these Sufi saints exerted real and powerful spiritual influences upon the political mechanisms and social interactions that defined the everyday lives of Iranian Muslims living in the closing decades of the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period.

When discussing the religious climate of Iran during the latter half of the fifteenth century, the changing attitudes of most Sunnī Iranians towards Shī'ism had gradually softened over time. Some Sunnīs were not only more tolerant, but even eager to embrace specific ideas and beliefs from various currents of the Shī'ī tradition. Iranians in this period did not seem to harbour hostile sectarian feelings towards the manifestation of Shī'ī beliefs and ideas, unlike in previous ages, such as during the Seljuq era when Iranians seemed to be far more fanatical in their devotion to the Sunnī faith.¹⁷² This warming towards Shī'ism was evident in the display of

¹⁷² Peacock, *Early Seljūq*, 99-111. For more on the sectarian conflict between the Ḥanafītes and the Shāfe'ītes in Nīshāpūr during the Seljuq period, see Richard W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*. Vol. 16. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972), 61-88. For the sectarian conflict between the Ḥanafītes, Shāfe'ītes and Ismā'īlīs in Iṣfahān during the Seljuq period, see Durand-Guedy, *Iranian Elites*, 153-82 & 281-95. The only exception to this rule seems to be Jāmī, along with some of the Naqshbandī Sufis within Khurāsān, since the attachment of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa* to the Sunnī tradition has been well-documented by many scholars. For more information on Jāmī's negative, sectarian attitudes towards Shī'ītes and Twelver

‘Alīd-loyalism amongst Iranian Sunnīs of all social classes and occupations. It was only with the emergence of the Safāvīds to political ascendancy over *Iranshahr* (in the beginning of the 16th century) when the Safāvīd Shāhs imposed Twelver Shī‘ism as the exclusive religion of the Safavid polity did this era of confessional ambiguity finally come to an end. This entailed the violent prosecution, harassment, and oppression of Iranian Sunnīs and Sufis who had refused to convert to the new faith. Safavid rule reintroduced a second and final separation between Sunnism and Shī‘ism within the lands of Iran—with Sufism being perhaps the only bridge between the two.¹⁷³ The boundaries separating these three Islamic communities established during the Safavid period have remained in place, even until the present day.

Shī‘ism, which can also be seen as a representation of the general views and opinions of the followers of the Naqshbandiyya *ṭarīqa* during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era, see Algar, “Naqshbandis and Safavids,” 27-31.

¹⁷³ For more information on the imposition of Twelver Shī‘ism by the Safāvīd dynasty upon Iran, and its effects upon the Sunnī tradition within Iran and upon the different Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* as well, see Saīd Arjomand. “Religious Extremism (*Ghuluw*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722.” In *Sociology of Shi‘ite Islam: Collected Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 330-61.

Chapter Three

Historical Developments of the Persian Sufi Tradition during the Later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū Period

Most scholars consider the medieval period of Islamic history to be the “golden age” for Sufism. Indeed, for many Muslims throughout the Persianate world, Sufism’s all-pervasive influence over them was inescapable. Sufism was an intrinsic component to the urban, social and cultural landscape for much of the Eastern Islamic lands during the period in question.¹⁷⁴ By the latter half of the medieval period, within both the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū domains, Sufism became a popular spiritual movement, or an influential sub-culture. The Sufis—or dervishes as they were sometimes called—formed a distinct community of Muslim mystics within the larger *ummah*. These Persian Sufi communities would continue to exist side by side, sometimes in harmony or rivalry with other groups of Muslims who had also formed their own distinct traditions and communities of Islamic schools of thought.¹⁷⁵ Sufism attracted the fascination of the most powerful rulers of the age, like Temūr and Uzun Ḥasan, not to mention their influential family members who resided in their court capitals of Tabrīz, Samarqand, and Herāt. Sufism also won the devotion of the military-aristocratic elites, artisans, religious scholars and students of the

¹⁷⁴ Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 126. And Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 11-13.

¹⁷⁵ Nile Green, “Islam in the Early Modern World.” In *The Cambridge World History: Volume 6: The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE, Part 2: Patterns of Change*, edited by Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam & Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 360-72.

madrasa, and the merchants who lived in the major urban centres that dotted the Iranian plateau.¹⁷⁶ In other words, the most famous and influential Sufi shaykhs of the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period—like Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī (d. 838/1435), Shāh Qāsem Anwār (d. 837/1433-34), Pīr Yahyā Shervānī (d. 867/1463), and Khwāja ‘Ubaydallāh Aḥrār (d. 896/1490)—amassed a wide following from amongst the different social classes of medieval Iranian society. Sufism, within the various polities that dominated Iran and Central Asia during the later medieval period, become in a sense a cultural phenomenon—indeed the zeitgeist of the era—where most aspects of Perso-Islamic civilization was subject to the spiritual, literary, and cultural influences exerted by the various Sufi networks and their saintly Sufi masters. Indeed, available primary and secondary historical sources attest to the fact that the Sufi networks or *ṭarīqas* were operating and propagating their teachings and unique Sufi practices throughout every region and major urban centre of later medieval Iran.¹⁷⁷

For Persian Sufism, the later medieval period was not a time of stagnation and decline as some scholars have believed. Instead, Sufism in the later medieval period constitutes a further period of growth and expansion for the Sufi community throughout Iranian society. This period of expansion and influence throughout all levels of Iranian society that began during the Ilkhanate period (656-754/1258-1353) did not suddenly end with the downfall of the Ilkhanate dynasty. Instead, the blossoming of the Persian Sufi tradition continued in its ascent towards social, cultural, and spiritual eminence in the latter half of the medieval period—perhaps unparalleled in Sufism’s history within Iran.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran*. Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 192-206. And Chad G. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī’s Salāmān Va Absāl* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81-91; 93-100.

¹⁷⁷ One proof for Sufism’s widespread influence within medieval Iranian societies was the increasing prevalence of Sufi *khānaqāhs* throughout Iran. Muhsen Kiānī lists these provinces and cities within medieval *Iranshahr* that had numerous *khānaqāhs* from the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* during the medieval period: Khurāsān—especially Herāt during the Timurid period—Khwārazm, Samarqand, Fārs, Shīrāz, Kāzerūn, Yazd, Kermān, Azerbaijan—especially Tabrīz—Ardabīl, Hamadān, Iṣfahān, Qazvīn, Kāshān & Semnān. For more information on the history of the Sufi *khānaqāh* within Iran, see Muhsen Kiānī, *Tārīkh-e khānaqāh dar Irān* (Tehran: Ketābkhāneh-ye Tahūrī, 1369/1990), 182-246.

¹⁷⁸ Zabīḥ-Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-e Adabīyāt dar Irān: Volume III which is an Abridgement of Volume IV*. Abbreviated by Seyyed Muḥammad Turābī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Ferdūs, 1379/2000), 40-41.

The following sections of this chapter will provide a brief overview of the historical developments shaping the Persian Sufi tradition and the wider community of its adherents during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period ((812-906/1409-1501). Lāhījī himself was someone who engaged with, and influenced, the culture of Sufism during this period. By providing an outline of the most crucial historical developments that occurred for the Persian Sufi tradition within this era, the significant contributions Lāhījī made to the textual tradition of Sufism through his commentary on the *Gulshan* will be better understood.

3.1 The Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū Period: A Golden Age for the Persian Sufi Tradition

When Nile Green, in his own research on the global history of Sufism, states that “Sufism was Islam in its medieval form,” it does not seem to be beyond the realm of possibility to describe the state of Sufism within the historical context of later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū Iran in the same way as well.¹⁷⁹ In other words, Islam for the majority of Persian Muslims—especially for Sunnīs—was so deeply intertwined with the teachings, customs, and spiritual practices of Sufi dervishes that the form of Islam that existed in later medieval Iranian societies *was Sufism itself*. At the very least, it was deeply shaped and influenced by the teachings and beliefs that belonged distinctly to the Sufi tradition. In the opinion of the Iranian historian Zābiḥ-Allāh Ṣafā:

From another perspective, from the seventh century (*Hejrī*) onwards, the principles of *tasawwūf* and Sufi mysticism (*‘erfān*) gradually entered into the books of the traditional religious sciences and lessons. This doctrine [of Sufism] gradually emerged out of the specific domain of the Sufis, and the students of the religious sciences and the masters of spiritual tasting became informed of the many allusions and secrets of this school of thought [Sufism]. And little by little, dervishhood [the way of the Sufi] and the teachings of the dervishes permeated the common people to such an extent that in the ninth and tenth centuries (*Hejrī*) rarely do we not find a poet, writer or religious scholar where the traces of Sufi mysticism were not to be seen in their own works.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Green, *A Global History*, 126.

¹⁸⁰ Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-e adabīyāt*, III: 40.

Contrary to the consensus of past scholars on the subject of Sufism during the latter medieval period, Sufism, in reality, did not lose its vitality and creativity during this era. Hence, it did not ossify, nor enter a period of irreversible decline as assumed.¹⁸¹ Although it was not the epoch when Sufi authors elucidated the doctrines of Sufism most originally, recent research by more contemporary scholars like Deweese, Manz, Subtelny, Bashir and Lingwood reveals that Sufism reached the peak of its social, cultural and political influence over Iranian society during this period.¹⁸² Sufism as a spiritual-religious movement within the Islamic world continued to expand and solidify its influence over Iranian society. Evidence of this phenomenon is the reverence and even emotional attachment that the rulers of the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū dynasties showed towards certain holy Sufi shaykhs and their descendants.¹⁸³ The dynastic literature of the Timurids has historical narratives portraying Temūr with an attitude of sincere reverence for Zayn al-Dīn Abūbakr Tāybādi (d. 791/1389), who was a descendant and follower Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jām (d. 536/1141).¹⁸⁴ Temūr also expressed his devotion to Shaykh Aḥmad Yasavī (d. 562/1166), the founder of the Yasavī *ṭarīqa*, building one of the largest mausoleums over his tomb during the later medieval period.¹⁸⁵ Uzun Ḥasan—who was responsible for transforming the Āq Quyunlū Turkmen dynasty into one of the great Islamic empires during the fifteenth century—credits the Sufis of Tabrīz and Azarbāyjān with his rise to power.¹⁸⁶ Indeed,

¹⁸¹ The two most famous exponents for this historical narrative of Sufism's decline within the later Medieval period, were authors J. Arberry (d. 1969) and J. Spencer Trimingham (d. 1987). Other well-known scholars within the field of Western Islamic-Sufi studies who also adhered to this view were Snouk Hurgronje (d. 1936), Fritz Meier (d. 1998), Louis Massignon (d. 1962), and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988). For more detailed information concerning this historical narrative of Sufism's decline in the later medieval period, see Alexander D. Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 160-170. And see as well Rachida Chih, *Sufism in Ottoman Egypt: Circulation, Renewal and Authority in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 79-84.

¹⁸² Concerning the social, cultural and religious influence of certain influential Sufi shaykhs upon Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū society, see more Manz, *Power, Politics*, 228-238, Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 78-104, and Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry*, 81-100.

¹⁸³ Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry*, 82-86 & 90-100 & Manz, *Power, Politics*, 195-206.

¹⁸⁴ Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion*, 196.

¹⁸⁵ O'Kane, Bernard, *Timurid Architecture in Khorasan*, 88-89.

¹⁸⁶ In Lingwood's research into the extent of the influence of various Sufi *Pīrs* over the Āq Quyunlū court capital of Tabrīz, he states that the influence of the Sufi *Pīrs* in the early years of the establishment of the Āq Quyunlū dynasty under the rulership of Uzun Ḥasan, "according to the *Rawzāt al-jinān va-jannāt al-janān*, the Ḥusaynī sayyid Abd al-Ghaḥfer Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 895/1490) had prophesised Uzun Ḥasan's conquest of Azarbāyjān well before its occurrence in 872/1467. In fact, on the eve of the conquest, Uzun Ḥasan is reported to have dreamed that all the dervishes and saints of Azarbāyjān had assembled in order to seat him on the throne of Tabrīz." Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry*, 84.

throughout his entire reign, he “maintained close relationships with the “Sunnī” Kubravīya, Khalvatīya, and Naqshbandīya, as well as the “Shī‘ī” Ni‘matullahīya and above all, the Safāvīya”.¹⁸⁷ Dede ‘Umar Rūshanī (d. 892/1487), who was one of the main *khalīfas* of Pīr Yahyā Shervānī, the second and perhaps true founder of the Khalvatīya *ṭarīqa* according to most scholars, was invited personally by Uzun Ḥasan to Tabrīz to spread the teachings of his Sufi *ṭarīqa* amongst the populace.¹⁸⁸ Along with his foremost disciple and spiritual successor to the *ṭarīqa*, Ibrāhīm Gūlshenī (d. 940/1534), “‘Umar Rūshanī counted members of the royal family among his disciples”,¹⁸⁹ and, “the principal wife of Uzun Ḥasan, Saljūqshāh bt. Kūr Muḥammad Begum (d. 896/1490), reportedly made a pious endowment (*vaqf*) in favor of ‘Umar Rūshanī by granting him a hospice”.¹⁹⁰

Another notable feature concerning Sufism’s unchallenged influence within later medieval Iranian society was the increasing manifestation of the “cult of Sufi saints” as it appeared in all its modalities. This cultural and spiritual phenomenon was also a reflection of the unstoppable rise to social prominence of contemporary Sufi masters, which allowed them to exert their spiritual and even political influences upon their local societies.¹⁹¹ In Jo-An Gross’s

¹⁸⁷ John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire (Revised and Expanded Edition)* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 83.

¹⁸⁸ Pīr Yahyā Shervānī is undoubtedly one of the most influential and historically important Sufi masters of this era, and played a similar role to his famous Naqshbandī counterpart in the east, ‘Ubaydallāh Aḥrār of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa*, in transforming the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa* into an international Sufi order that spread beyond its traditional homeland of Shervān. Under his leadership and spiritual charisma, Yahyā Shervānī expanded the Khalvatī order throughout north-western Iran, Azarbāyjan and Anatolia during the early half of the fifteenth century, from his base in Bākū. Most scholars believe Shervānī to be the real founder or the second founder of the Khalvatī Sufi order since he established the institutional foundations for the order’s later expansion throughout the Ottoman lands during the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. For more information regarding Yahyā Shervānī and his historical importance for the history of the Khalvatī Sufi order, see John J. Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire the Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350-1750* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 55-60.

¹⁸⁹ Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry*, 91.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ For information on the emergence and dominance of the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa* under the leadership of Rūshanī and Gūlshenī in the Āq Quyunlū court capital of Tabrīz during the reign of Uzun Ḥasan and Sultan Yaḡub, see Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry*, 81-100. In regards to Pīr Yahyā Shervānī himself and his relations to the Shirvānshāh dynasty in their court capital of Bākū, John C. Curry states that, “Yahya was a respected figure who worked in close proximity to the court of the Shirvānshāh rulers. We know this because his tomb, marked by large octagonal selcuk-style tower, still stands in the inner palace complex of the rulers in Bākū today,” and “his connections with the local Shirvānshāh rulers and their supporters undoubtedly helped” him establish his own branch of the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa* and transform it into the largest *ṭarīqa* of Shirvān. Curry, *Transformation of Muslim*, 57. For more details on the emergence and dominance of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* in Timurid Herāt, especially during the reign of Sultan

research on ‘Ubaydallāh Aḥrār—the most influential Central Asian master of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa* after Shāh Naqshband himself (d. 791/1391)—she informs us that Aḥrār was able to exert his spiritual influence upon the Timurid sultan Abū Sa‘īd (d. 874/1469)(r. 855-73/1451-69) in regards to certain state policies, especially in connection to matters pertaining to the implementation of the *sharī‘ah* within the Timurid domains, because of his role as Abū Sa‘īd’s personal Sufi master.¹⁹² The mass popularity of the cult of saints also manifested itself through the social-urban landscape, where the ruling Timurids expended much wealth to construct and renovate new shrine complexes over the tombs of revered, deceased Sufi saints. One of the most extensive shrines built during the Timurid period was the shrine of Khwājah ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089); the revered Sufi master who was considered a patron saint for both the Sunnī inhabitants of Herāt, and the ruling Timurid dynasty as well.¹⁹³ According to Subtelny:

Although the shrines of many other Sufi saints and Sunnī scholars, and traditionalists were patronised by the Timurids throughout the fifteenth century, none was accorded the attention lavished on the Anṣārī shrine.¹⁹⁴

The construction of this lavish shrine complex reveals that the ruling Timurids believed the fortunes of their dynasty were linked to the unseen *barakāt* (‘spiritual blessings’) emanating from the holy tomb of this patron saint of Herāt.¹⁹⁵ The construction of such large shrine complexes by the Timurid sultans over the tombs of such universally revered Sufi saints like Anṣārī, Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jām, and Aḥmad Yasavī,¹⁹⁶ reveals another interesting facet to the

Bayqara, see Jurgen Paul, “The Rise of the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in Timurid Herat.” In *Afghanistan’s Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*, edited by Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 71-86.

¹⁹² ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Maḥmūd Aḥrār, Alisher Navoiī, Jo-Ann Gross, A. Urunbaev, and Abu Raiḥon Beruniī nomidagi Sharqshunoslik institute, *The Letters of Khwāja ‘Ubayd Allāh Aḥrār and His Associates*. Vol. 5 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 14-17. For more on Aḥrār’s role and influence for the political ascendancy of Abū Sa‘īd Mirza, see Jo-Ann Gross, “Khojar Ahrar: a Study of the Perceptions of Religious Power and Prestige in the Late Timurid period” (PhD diss., New York University, 1982), 89-126.

¹⁹³ Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 201-202.

¹⁹⁴ Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 203.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 203-205.

¹⁹⁶ For more information on the history of the shrine complex surrounding the tomb of Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jām, see Shivan Mahendrarajah, *The Sufi Saint of Jam: History, Religion, and Politics of a Sunnī Shrine in Shi‘i Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 55-93. For more on the construction of a religious shrine over the tomb of Shaykh Aḥmad Yasavī by Temūr, see O’Kane, *Timurid Architecture*, 89.

collective religious life of Persian Muslims living during that period: the increasing importance of *zīārat*—the act of holy pilgrimage undertaken by Muslims and Sufis to the shrine complexes of revered Sufi saints which dotted the urban landscape of later medieval Iran. The *zīārat* was an increasingly popular—although some may say innovative—form of religious ritual integrated into the intricate system of daily Islamic religious practices by the Muslim masses. It also became normalised as an acceptable, even mainstream, sacred ritual within the collective religious life of Iranian Muslims during this period.¹⁹⁷

Other signs of the increasing popularity of the cult of Sufi saints within this period was the increasing growth of numerous hagiographical accounts of Sufi saints, detailing their *Karamāt* (powers to perform miracles) and exalted spiritual stations. This is reflected in the increasing number of hagiographies of Sufi Saints written during this period, the most famous being the *Nafahāt al-uns* by Jāmī.¹⁹⁸ Another important work of Sufi hagiography worth mentioning is the *Manqabat al-jawāher*, written by Ḥaydar Badakhshī. This work was dedicated to, and centred upon, the famous and influential Kubrawīya Shaykh ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385).¹⁹⁹

As a result of the increasing popularity of Sufism, the rulers and princes of the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū dynasties sought to enter into relationships of patronage with these charismatic Sufi shaykhs who were able to gather around themselves large numbers of devoted disciples from all social classes in medieval Iranian society. This allowed them to exert an

¹⁹⁷ Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 192-198. Most Iranian Muslims came to believe that religious pilgrimage and devotion to the tombs of Sufi saints allowed one to experience and gain the *barakāt* (spiritual blessings and power) of that deceased saint, who was also considered the spiritual shāh over that particular province or region. Green, *A Global History*, 126-127. Some Sufi *ṭarīqas*, like the Naqshbandīs, considered a living as well as deceased Sufi master to be a conduit for the infusion of Divine Grace (*fayẓ*), and pilgrimage to their tombs was considered highly beneficial for the sincere spiritual seeker. See more in Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 107-109.

¹⁹⁸ Z. Safa, “Persian Literature in the Timurid and Turkmen Periods.” In *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Vol. 6., edited by Peter Jackson, and Lawrence Lockhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 923 & 928. For more details about Jāmī’s most important and influential work on Sufism, the *Nafahāt al-uns*, see Jawid A. Mojaddedi. *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from Al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 151-177.

¹⁹⁹ For more details concerning this particular work by Badakhshī, see Devin Deweese, “Intercessory Claims of Šūfī Communities during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: ‘Messianic’ Legitimizing Strategies on the Spectrum of Normativity.” In *Unity in Diversity*, 205-15.

undeniable spiritual and social influence within their local communities.²⁰⁰ The Timurid and Āq Quyunlū rulers sought to co-opt the popularity and sanctity of certain Sufi shaykhs in order to legitimise their own dynasties in the eyes of their pious Muslim subjects as well as to ensure the longevity and continued fortunes of their dynasties through the sanctification of their political-military authority as bestowed upon them by the *barakāt* of a living and revered Sufi saint.²⁰¹ The Sufi saint, according to the religious beliefs of their followers, was the *quṭb* (“spiritual axis” or “pole”) of the universe.²⁰² The Sufi shaykh, who was also considered a *walī* (“Friend of God”), was argued by the Sufis to be the spiritual sultan and *khalīfa* of the unseen realm. While the worldly, secular rulers of Islamdom—like Temūr or Shāhrukh—were considered the rulers or “*khalīfa*” of the physical realm.²⁰³ Of course, in the views of the Sufis and those Muslims whose worldview was profoundly shaped by the teachings of the Sufis, the spiritual sultanate of the

²⁰⁰ Manz, *Power, Politics*, 192-96.

²⁰¹ This historical phenomenon, where Turco-Mongol conquerors sought to gain religious legitimacy for their newly established empires by entering into a relationship of sorts with different Sufi saints, has its historical origins in the Seljūq period; and was carried over into the following Ilkhanate period as well. According to the Iranian historian Rawandī, when Sultan Tughril (d. 455/1063) encountered the Sufi saint Bābā Ṭāher (d. 410/1019-20) at the entrance of Hamadan, Bābā Ṭāher offered Sultan Tughril his personal ewer through which he used to perform his ablutions, as well as his personal ring. Through this bestowal of Baba Tahir’s personal items upon Sultan Tughril, a transfer of *barakāt* occurred between the two individuals. This well-known account between these two famous historical figures alludes to the idea that Sultan Tughril was able to subjugate almost the entire eastern half of the Islamic world because of the saintly blessings that he had received from Bābā Ṭāher. For more information about the history of this particular aspect of the relationships between the Turkic Seljuk sultans and various Persian Sufi saints, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 125-157. Also Ṣāfi Kāshefī in his hagiographical account on ‘Ubaydallāh Aḥrār in his *Rashaḥāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt*, narrates certain miraculous stories associated with Aḥrār, giving the impression or communicating to his readers the fact that Abū Sa‘īd’s successful rise to power and seizure of the Timurid throne was only possible with the spiritual support and *barakāt* given to him by Aḥrār, who Kāshefī presents within the pages of his *Rashaḥāt* as one of the greatest living Sufi saints of his age. For more details, see Kāshefī, *Rashaḥāt*, II: 519-49.

²⁰² The belief that a particular Sufi saint was the spiritual axis (*quṭb*)—the highest spiritual rank that a living saint could occupy within the hierarchy of saints—through whom the divine grace or effusion of God (*fayḍ*) was mediated and transmitted to all of the cosmos (and therefore, through the existence of the *quṭb* the entire cosmos was sustained), was associated with Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school of thought. By the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, this idea was widespread amongst the Iranian-Muslim community and was deeply imbedded in the mystical discourse of the Sufis. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 85-87. For more information concerning Ibn al-‘Arabī’s understanding of the *quṭb*, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 58, 91-95.

²⁰³ According to the Darvish Muḥammad b. ‘Alīshāh Ṭabasī (d. 828-42/1424-39), an associate of the famous Persian historian Sharaf ad-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī (d. 858/1454) and a Sufi disciple of Shāh Ne‘matallāhwālī (d. 835/1431), in every age there must exist a “caliph of the kingdom of heavens (*khalīfa-yi malakūt*) and the caliph of the temporal kingdom (*khalīfa-yi mulk*) and in the fifteenth century these figures were Qasim-I Anwar and Shahrukh.” İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf Al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 271.

saintly “Friend of God” was far superior to the worldly sultanate of the different Turco-Mongol sultans who dominated the lands of Iran through brute military power and political cunning.

This unique relationship of patronage that existed between the rulers of the Timurid and Āq Quyunlū dynasties and certain Sufi shaykhs was not one-sided in that only the sultans and family members of the reigning dynasties benefited spiritually and politically. Indeed, these living Sufi saints also became dependant upon the material support provided by the ruling elites, which provided them with the means of sustaining the socio-religious institutions under their control as well as propagate the Way of Sufism that they espoused in relation to rival *ṭarīqas* and Sufi shaykhs.²⁰⁴ As a result of the dependence of Sufi shaykhs and their communities upon the patronage of powerful and wealthy members of the ruling establishment, inevitably much competition and rivalry ensued between the different *ṭarīqas* and Sufi shaykhs through Iran and Central Asia.²⁰⁵ During the Timurid period, the most well-known rivalry between two influential and famous Sufi shaykhs was undoubtedly the rivalry between Shāh Qāsem Anvār and Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī.²⁰⁶ According to the available sources, these two Sufi shaykhs were considered to be the most eminent Sufi masters of Herāt during the reign of Shāhrukh (r. 811-50/1409-47), where they had legions of followers from amongst the different social classes hailing from the different regions of Iran.²⁰⁷ However, the sources indicate that the central issue of contention and rivalry between the two shaykhs boiled down to their irreconcilable disagreements over Ibn al-‘Arabī and his teachings—especially concerning the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*—since Khwāfī was known for being an open critic of Ibn al-‘Arabī while Anvār was famous for openly defending the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī.²⁰⁸ Yet another

²⁰⁴ Manz, *Power, Politics*, 206-207.

²⁰⁵ Devin Deweese, “Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity in Medieval Sufi Communities of Iran, Central Asia, and India: The Khalvatī/Ishqī/Shattārī Continuum.” In *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle*, edited by Steven E. Lindquist (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 256-264; 273-276. And Manz, *Power, Politics*, 234-238.

²⁰⁶ Manz, *Power, Politics*, 237-238. And Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 99-100.

²⁰⁷ Manz, *Power, Politics*, 231-233.

²⁰⁸ On the level of Sufi doctrine, the main disagreement between Anvār and Khwāfī was over the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, especially in relation to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. For more details on the disagreements of these two Shaykhs over Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, see Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 99. Khwāfī earned a reputation for his rejection of the Sufi metaphysics that was associated with the Akbarī school of thought because of the perceived monism of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which in his view contradicted the central theological tenets of Sunnīsm, while Anvār on the other hand was an enthusiastic proponent of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s monistic teachings.

unmentioned underlying source behind their rivalry may have been the system of patronage that existed between the Turco-Mongol ruling elites and the influential, charismatic Persian Sufi shaykhs. This exchange of financial patronage for legitimization through the bestowal of *barakāt* by a saintly Sufi master, would ultimately define the very nature of the relationship between these two different groups of individuals during the latter Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era.²⁰⁹

3.2 The Historical Formation of the “Silsila” as a Result of the Formation of Corporate and Sectarian Identities Amongst the Persian Sufis

Another vital development occurring within the wider Persian Sufi community during this era was the hardening of distinct corporate identities between the various Sufi communities of Iran and Central Asia. Older and more established *ṭarīqas* like the Kubrawīya and Suhrawardīya, along with their various off-shoots, now had to compete with other recently emerging and expansionist *ṭarīqas* like the Khwājagān-Naqshbandīya, Khalvatīya, Nurbakhshīya, and the Ne‘matullāhīya *ṭarīqas* while still commanding legions of devout disciples all over Iran.²¹⁰ These Sufi *ṭarīqas* differed amongst themselves not so much in the dimension of doctrines and teachings, but more importantly on the plane of spiritual practices and methodology. Scholars like Manz, Bashir, and Deweese have showed the profound differences between the spiritual practices and methods of spiritual realisation of the various *ṭarīqas*. In Bashir’s extensive research on the lived culture of the Sufis in Timurid Iran and Central Asia during this period, the different Sufi shaykhs and the respective communities of disciples had different preferences and opposing views concerning the religious legality and spiritual efficacy of a wide range of different Sufi practices. For example, the dervishes of the Naqshbandīya were well-known

²⁰⁹ Green, *Islam in the early modern*, 362-3. And Gross, “Khojar Ahrar: a Study,” 127-150.

²¹⁰ For more details on the history of the Naqshbandīya within the eastern Islamic lands during this period, see Itzhak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*. Routledge Sufi Series; 8 (London: Routledge, 2007), 34-48. In relation to the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*, see Hamid Algar. “Kobrowiya ii. The Order.” In *Encyclopedia Iranica*, originally published July 15, 2009, accessed June 6, 2018, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kobrawiya-ii-the-order>. For the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa* see Martin, B. G., “A Short History of the Khalwat Order of Dervishes.” In *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, edited by Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1972), 275-305. For more details on the Kubrawīya-Nurbakhshīya see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 162-172. And for the Ne‘matullāhī order, see Michael Paul Connell. “The Nimatullahi Sayyids of Taft: A Study of the Evolution of a Late Medieval Iranian Sufi Tariqah” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004), 105-171.

adherents of only the silent method of *zēkr* (“remembrance of God”),²¹¹ while the other established *ṭarīqas*—especially the Kubrawīya, Zaynīya, and Khalvatīya—were known to promote and prefer the loud method of collective *zēkr* over the silent method in their communal and weekly gatherings.²¹² Khwāfī and the Zaynīya community that he headed, preferred to perform their *zēkr* rituals loudly and intensely.²¹³ The Khalvatī dervishes of Khurāsān, Shervān, and Azarbāyjān, developed a reputation over time for loud noise-making during their collective *zēkr* gatherings; for they made it a custom to perform their *zēkr* rituals with the accompaniment of the tambourine.²¹⁴ They also differed regarding the role and permissibility of certain practices that were unique to the Sufi community, like the *samāʿ*. The famous Kubrawīya Shaykh ‘Alī Hamadānī, favored the *samāʿ* and was himself firmly inclined towards it. In contrast, the dervishes of the Naqshbandīya took the opposite position and shunned it completely.²¹⁵

The Naqshbandīs also shunned the standard Sufi practice of the 40-day retreat (*chehel* or *Khalvat*), which was customary and even had a central role to play within the spiritual practices of the other *ṭarīqas*, especially the Kubrawīya, Zaynīya, Nūrbakhshīya, and the

²¹¹ Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 69-72.

²¹² Ibid, 72-74 & Deweese, “Spiritual Practice,” 265. The spiritual practise of *zēkr* (Remembrance of God) involved the Sufi chanting the various names of God a set number of times, either individually (silently) or communally (loudly) with fellow members of his Sufi order. The spiritual practise of *zēkr* constituted for all the Sufi communities the central rite of their spiritual tradition. It was the defining marker of a Sufi, and the Sufi was encouraged by his spiritual guide (*Murshed*) to be engaged in the remembrance of God constantly with every breath. It was through the consistent practise of *zēkr* that the Sufi initiate would be able to attain the lofty goal of spiritual realisation and union with God’s Presence. For more details concerning the spiritual practise of *zēkr*, see Alexander D. Knysh. *Islamic Mysticism a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 317-322.

²¹³ Manz, *Power, Politics*, 235.

²¹⁴ Side Emre, *Ibrahim-i Gulshani and the Khalwati-Gulshani Order: Power Brokers in Ottoman Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 251. According to Side Emre, in regards to the ecstatic communal, weekly *zīkr* of the Khalvatī dervishes under the spiritual leadership of Ibrāhīm Gūlsenī, “the influential social pull of the weekly *sema* and *zīkr* rituals of the Gūlsenī s in Cairo were based on the legacy of Rusenī, who promoted expressive forms of practise and emphasised the importance of asceticism (*zuhd*), while underlining the significance of *samāʿ* and *zīkr* practices for those on the *Halveti-Rusenī* path.” Emre, *Ibrahim-i Golshani*, 251. See also, Deweese, “Spiritual Practice,” 264-65.

²¹⁵ Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 74 & 71-72, Deweese, “Spiritual Practise,” 258-59. The *samāʿ* was the Sufi ritual, usually conducted within the *khānaqāh* amongst the initiates of a particular Sufi order. It involved listening to music, usually a vocalist (*qawwālī* or *motreb*) singing classical Sufi poetry to the accompaniment of various musical instruments, usually the *daf* and tambourine. The Sufis would then eventually rise up from their seated positions and engage in various dance movements to give expression to a *hāl* (mystical state of ecstasy) that suddenly descended upon them. For more on the practise of *samāʿ* within the Persian Sufi context, see Leonard Lewisohn, “Principles of the Philosophy of Ecstasy in Rumi’s Poetry.” In *The Philosophy of Ecstasy: Rumi and the Sufi Tradition*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., 2014), 35-82.

Khalvatīya.²¹⁶ Instead, the followers of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* confidently affirmed the superiority and spiritual efficacy of the Naqshbandī method of *rābeṭa*,²¹⁷ *ṣuḥbat*,²¹⁸ and *khalvat dar anjuman* (“solitude in the crowd”) as superior Sufi practices to the wide-spread Sufi practice of seclusion which was common amongst the other *ṭarīqas*.²¹⁹ The followers of the Naqshbandīya believed and taught that their own spiritual methods were more effective and potent in realizing intimacy with God (*uns*) as well as the supreme goal of the Sufi path, which was experiential knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*).²²⁰

This wide spectrum of competing Sufi practices that existed amongst the wider Persian Sufi community, reveals that the community of Sufi followers was not homogenous. The debates and differences in spiritual practice amongst the Sufis was a cause for the crystallization of corporate and sectarian identities amongst the different Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* within the later medieval period. The different Sufi *ṭarīqas* were in a constant state of rivalry for new adherents and, perhaps, patronage from the ruling establishment. Hence, this formation of corporate and even sectarian identities amongst the Sufis of this era laid the foundations for which Sufis in the following generations would collectively link themselves to a specific and exclusive *silsila*.²²¹ As noted by scholars like Trimingham and Knysh, a *silsila* was taught by the Sufis to be the spiritual genealogy and initiatic chain of realised Sufi masters—which stretched all the way back to the Prophet Muḥammad himself—where the present Sufi master at the

²¹⁶ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 316 & Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 28. According to Bashir’s research on the life and thought of Nūrbakhsh, Nūrbakhsh “places a particular emphasis on forty-day retreats (*arbʿīn*), which had been a part of his own training under his shaykh and which he observed in the most strenuous of conditions.” For more details on this particular subject, see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 141-42.

²¹⁷ The Naqshbandī practice of *rābeṭa* meant forming and developing a spiritual connection with one’s own Sufi shaykh through the contemplation of his mental image or face through the deployment of the Imaginal faculty. For more details on this distinctly Naqshbandī spiritual practice, see Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 114-19; 159.

²¹⁸ *Ṣuḥbat* within the framework of Naqshbandī teachings, meant association and companionship with the Sufi shaykh and fellow dervishes of the same Sufi community through serving the Sufi master and sitting in his presence when the Shaykh is giving spiritual discourses and lessons. For more details on this specific Naqshbandī practice or custom, see Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi shaykh* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 131-38, 33 & 84.

²¹⁹ For more details on the practice of *khalvat dar anjuman* amongst the Naqshbandīs, see Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, 28-29.

²²⁰ Fahkrudīn Ṣāfī ‘Alī Kāshefī, *Rashaḥāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt*. 2 vols, edited by ‘Alī Aṣghar Muʿīniyān (Tehran: Bunyad-e Nekūkārī-ye Nūrānī, 1356/1977), I:145-53, 168-71, 215-19.

²²¹ Deweese, “Spiritual Practice,” 253-54.

head of a particular *silsila* and *ṭarīqa* was considered the spiritual successor and rightful *khalifa* of these past, revered Sufi saints listed in the *silsila* of a particular *ṭarīqa*.²²²

The *silsila* then provided the necessary proof of a Sufi shaykh's "enlightenment" or attainment of spiritual realisation—under the hands of his own Sufi master who was himself connected to an unbroken spiritual genealogy of Sufi saints. In time, the construction and presentation of a *silsila* would serve as an indispensable tool for legitimizing every Sufi shaykh who claimed for himself the spiritual and moral credentials necessary for him to guide Sufi initiates upon the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*.²²³ Without presenting an unbroken *silsila*, a living Sufi shaykh who would have made the claim of being a shaykh himself, would have no doubt been considered by the wider Persian Sufi community as being nothing more than a fraud without the spiritual and moral authority to guide others on the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*.²²⁴ As Jürgen Paul and Deweese have stated in their respective research on this particular subject, the *silsila* as a means of legitimization for Sufi shaykhs and their associated community of dervishes that were reliant upon them, did not come into formation until the later Timurid period.²²⁵ Deweese argues for a revaluation of our traditional understanding of how the *silsila* came into existence amongst the Sufis of Iran and Central Asia, and the historical reasons of why the *silsila* as a concept of legitimization started to become universally adopted by the Sufi community only during this era.²²⁶ According to Deweese, this central Sufi concept of the *silsila*—which came to serve as the necessary identity marker for Sufis in later generations—was further entrenched within the collective consciousness of the Sufis as a result of the intense rivalry between the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* of Khurāsān and Central Asia during the later Timurid period.²²⁷ Contrary to the commonly accepted view than, the concept of the *silsila*, along with the deep sense of "*ṭarīqa*-consciousness" that developed amongst the Sufis, did not come into

²²² John Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 31-37, and Buehler, *Sufi Heirs*, 138-141. For a brief but detailed history of the various Sufi *silsilas* in the Islamic world, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 179-294.

²²³ Erik S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: 'Umar Al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods*. Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, vol. 71 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 279-80.

²²⁴ Paul, "Rise of the Khwajagan," 72 & 81.

²²⁵ Deweese, "Spiritual Practice," 253-54 & Paul, "Rise of the Khwajagan," 72.

²²⁶ For Deweese's unique and original views on the historical reason for the formation of the concept of the *silsila* amongst Persian Sufis of Iran and Central Asia, see Devin Deweese. "Spiritual Practice," 251-300.

²²⁷ Deweese, "Spiritual Practice," 265 & 268-71.

being and become a staple of the Persian Sufi communities until the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.²²⁸

Therefore, the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era of Lāhijī's lifetime was a crucial period for the development and maturity of *silsila* and the *ṭarīqa*-consciousness that went along with it. The *silsila* has been a mainstay of the wider Sufi community ever since; for it provided the Sufis with a sense of belonging to a single, united community and a spiritual genealogy of revered Sufi saints that they could identify with. The Persian Sufis during the Timurid period also formed corporate identities—that could also be quite sectarian in nature—over a shared spiritual affinity and emotional attachment to specific Sufi practices that were propagated by a particular *ṭarīqa* and its Sufi master. Every Sufi community considered the Sufi practices of their own *ṭarīqa* to be more superior and spiritually more effective than the Sufi practices of rival *ṭarīqas*.²²⁹ For a Sufi to be identified and linked to a particular *silsila*, meant developing a spiritual relationship with a revered Sufi saint through initiation into that specific *ṭarīqa*; it also meant one's devotion and loyalty to a specific system of Sufi practices linked to that particular *silsila* and *ṭarīqa*. Undoubtedly, it was considered by its faithful practitioners to be far superior to that of rival *ṭarīqas*.²³⁰

3.3 Production of Sufi works During the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū Period

Numerous works of Sufism were written by other Sufi authors during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, indicating the continued flourishing of the Persian Sufi tradition. Nearly all of the texts produced during this period were extensive commentaries written upon older, classical works of the genre, Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* perhaps being the most significant and widely read work of this newly emerging sub-genre. Far from being the only one, there were a large number of works written by the Persian Sufis during this specific period—both in Arabic and Persian—dedicated to explaining the theosophical teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. Some Sufi authors also produced works dealing with other subject matters or sciences

²²⁸ Devin Deweese, "Organizational Patterns and Developments within Sufi Communities." In *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, edited by A. Salvatore, R. Tottoli, B. Rahimi, M.F. Attar and N. Patel (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018), 330-35.

²²⁹ Deweese, "Spiritual Practice", 289-91.

²³⁰ Ibid. 255-290.

concerning the Sufi path; especially in relation to the doctrine of divine and passionate love. In this period, one of the most extensive and influential commentaries written in Persian on Rūmī's *Maṣnavī* was by Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī (d. 839/1435)—a Sufi of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*—titled the *Javāher al-Asrār va Zavāher al-Anvār* (“Gems of the Divine Mysteries and the Manifestations of Divine Lights”).²³¹ Khwārazmī's lengthy commentary runs up to four volumes and was a significant contribution to the growing body of Persian Sufi literature developing during this period. It was perhaps the most comprehensive commentary ever written upon the *Maṣnavī* in Persian up to that time, even though Khwārazmī only succeeded in completing his commentary with the first three volumes of the *Maṣnavī*. According to Deweese, this work was “widely circulated and highly regarded”²³² within the Persianate world, especially in the eastern Islamic lands. Ya'qūb Charkhī (d. 851/1447), one of the *khālīfas* of Shāh Naqshband, wrote what was possibly the earliest commentary on the *Maṣnavī* in Persian, titled *Nay-Nama* (“Book of the Reed”).²³³ Another well-known work based upon the *Maṣnavī*—and more widely popular than the two previously mentioned works amongst Persian Sufis—was the *Lubb-e lubāb-e Maṣnavī* (“The quintessence of the *Maṣnavī*”) by the aforementioned Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Wā'ez Kāshefī.²³⁴

²³¹ For more on this particular work, see Devin Deweese. *The “Kashf al-Huda” of Kamal ad-din Husayn Khorezmi: A Fifteenth-Century Sufi Commentary on the “Qasidat al-Burdah” In Khorezmian Turkic* (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1985) 219-222. This work has also been printed in a modern edition in Iran more recently. For more details, see Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn ibn Ḥasan Khwārazmī, *Javāher al-Asrār va Zavāher al-Anvār: Sharḥ-e Maṣnavī-ye Molāvī*. 4 vols, edited by Muḥammad Javād Sharī'at (Tehran: Asāṭir, 1384/2005)

²³² Deweese, *The Kashf al-Huda*, 219.

²³³ For more information on Charkhī and his commentary on the *Maṣnavī*, see Lloyd Ridgeon, “Naqshbandi Admirers of Rumi in the Late Timurid Period.” In *Mawlana Rumi Review: Volume 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 124-136. According to Ridgeon, this commentary by Charkhī is based upon the first 35 rhyming couplets of the *Maṣnavī*, followed by a summary and analysis of six stories found in the six volumes of the *Maṣnavī* of Rūmī.

²³⁴ For more details on this work by Kāshefī, see Maria E Subtelny, “The Works of Ḥusayn Wā'ez Kāshefī as a Source for the Study of Sufism in Late fifteenth and early sixteenth-Century Central Asia.” In *Sufism in Central Asia: New Perspectives on Sufi Traditions, fifteenth-21st Centuries*. Vol. 25, edited by Devin A. Deweese, and Jo-Ann Gross (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 105-11. In the view of Subtelny, although in appearance this work by Kāshefī seems to be a thematic arrangement of the rhyming couplets of the *Maṣnavī* according to various topics related to the Sufi path, it is “misleading to call the *lubb-e lubab* simply an anthology of selections from Rumi's *Masnavi*. It is much more than that, because what Kāshefī does is use selections from the *Maṣnavī* to illustrate the three stages of the Sufi path—*sharī'at*, *ṭarīqat*, *ḥaqīqat*.” Subtelny, “The Works of Ḥusayn Wā'ez,” 107. This may be the underlying reason why this particular work by Kāshefī found such a wide audience within the Persian-speaking world in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Other significant works of Sufism written during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period worth mentioning are the *Nafaḥāt al-uns men ḥazarāt al-quds* (“Breaths of intimacy from presences of sanctity”) by Jāmī. An encyclopedic work containing 618 hagiographies of Sufi saints of the entire medieval period. This work had a considerable impact and influence on later works of the genre and was translated into Ottoman Turkish and Arabic during the century following Jāmī’s death.²³⁵ The *Rashaḥāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt* by Fakhr al-Dīn Ṣāfi ‘Alī Kāshefī (d. 910/1504) was another Persian work of prose similar in nature and content to Jāmī’s *Nafaḥāt*. Kāshefī’s work was one of the most widely read and influential works of its kind amongst future generations of Naqshbandīs, since it contained the hagiographies and reported sayings of nearly all the Central Asian and Khurāsānī masters of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* who lived during the medieval period.²³⁶

Since many of the works written by a number of different authors of the Persian Sufi tradition were devoted to the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī during this period, more information concerning these different Akbarī works will be provided in the next chapter. An overview of these works will help outline the historical development of the Akbarī tradition within Iran and the Persianate world during the later medieval period, as well as situate Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan* within the broader history of the Persian Sufi textual tradition.

Before we conclude this chapter, we must also highlight two features that are clearly discernable in the works of Sufism produced in this specific period that differed from the works of previous eras, which indicates broader and irreversible patterns of historical change occurring for the Persian Sufi tradition. The first is the prominent display of “*ṭarīqa*-consciousness” amongst the Sufis of this era. To be a Sufi in the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period meant being a Sufi who was linked to and identified with a specific and authentic *silsila*.²³⁷

²³⁵ Hamid Algar, “Chapter 3: Jāmī and the Ottomans.” In *Jāmī in Regional Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 117-18. And see as well, Paul Losensky, “Jāmī i. Life and Works,” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. XIV, Fasc. 5, (2008): 469-75. For more details on Jāmī’s *Nafaḥāt*, see Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition*, 151-176.

²³⁶ Kāshefī was the son of the famous Herātī preacher Ḥusayn Wā‘eẓ Kāshefī, and a devoted Sufi disciple of ‘Ubaydallāh Aḥrār. For more details on Kāshefī and his most important work of Sufism, the *Rashaḥāt*, see Edward G. Browne. *A Literary History of Persia: The Tartar dominion (1265-1502)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 441.

²³⁷ For examples of “*ṭarīqa*-consciousness” in the works of Muḥammad Pārsā of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa*, see more in of Pārsā Muḥammad, *Qudseyya: Kalemāt-e Bahā’uddīn Naqshband*, edited by Aḥmad Ṭāherī ‘Erāqī

Secondly, the discourse of the different Sufi authors and shaykhs of this period were uncannily similar, and one could even say identical with one another. When comparing the different works of Sufism produced in this period, one can discern an underlying unity that existed between the different Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* and Shaykhs in the dimension of doctrines and ideas (with the notable exception of Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī). Unlike the apparent differences and even conflicts that existed between the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* and Shaykhs on the plane of spiritual practices, customs and rituals, the differences between the Persian Sufis concerning ideas and doctrines were perhaps skin-deep. The discourse of the different Persian Sufi Shaykhs of this era, basically, was a deepening synthesis of the Akbarī school of thought and the popular ideas and teachings derived from the “Religion of Love” (*mazhab-e ‘eshq*). This is apparent if one compares the most influential and widely read works of Sufism produced in this period under review.²³⁸

3.4 Conclusion

Far from being a phase of irreversible decline then, the later medieval period witnessed a stage of further expansion, growth, and consolidation for the Persian Sufi tradition that was crucial for Sufism’s later history. This was the case for Iran and the wider Persianate world as well,

(Tehran: Ketābkhāneh-ye Ṭahūrī, 1354/1975), 8-16. In relation to Jāmī, see more in Nūr-al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns men Ḥazrāt al-Quds*, edited by Maḥmūd ‘Ābedī (Tehran: Entershārāt Sukhan, 1394/2015), 380-410, 420-37 & 473-495. In relation to Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī and the sub-branch of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa* that he was affiliated with, see also Khwārazmī, *Javāher al-Asrār*, I: 27-96. And for Lāhijī’s display of *ṭarīqa* - consciousness within his own works in relation to the Nūrbakhshīya branch of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*, see more in Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ebn Yahyā Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012), 585-86.

²³⁸ Both Jāmī and Sayyed ‘Abdallāh al-Barzishābādī—the rival to Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh and founder of his own sub-branch of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*—each wrote a commentary upon ‘Irāqī’s *Lama’āt*. If one compares these two works side by side with Lāhijī’s own commentary upon the *Gulshan-e Rāz*, one would find the contents of all three books to be practically identical with one another, even though all three authors followed different Sufi *ṭarīqas*. For an example of Jāmī’s Sufi teachings in English, see more in Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yu’s Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih’s Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm. With a New Translation of Jami’s Lawa’ih from the Persian by William C. Chittick* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 128-211. And for an example of Lāhijī’s Sufi discourse in English, see more in Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī Gilānī, “Commentary on the Secret Garden of Divine Mystery (From *Sharḥ Gulshan-e rāz*): translated into English by Mohammad H. Faghfoory.” In *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 479-96.

where an underlying cultural unity existed between its different nations and peoples. For centuries the Persianate world was highly influenced by the latest cultural, religious, and intellectual developments emanating from Iran, the heart of the Persianate world.²³⁹

The position held by some scholars that Sufism experienced a fossilization or degeneration in the later medieval period is mainly based upon a few factors. One is that in their view, the Sufis of this historical period were no longer producing highly original works of doctrine and thought. Whilst this was undoubtedly true from a certain perspective, it is nevertheless a mistake to sideline a whole spiritual tradition as being in a state of decline solely because there existed a lack of original works being produced in that era. Indeed, influential works of Sufism were still being written by a variety of Sufis that would eventually become some of the most widely read works of the Persian Sufi textual tradition, such as the works of Jāmī and Lāhijī. Yet earlier Western scholars on Sufism like Louis Massignon, A.J Arberry, Fritz Meier and J.S Trimingham—to mention the most influential proponents for this general theory of decline—may have dismissed these later works of Sufism. Perhaps in their judgements, these later works were mainly commentaries repeating what had already been stated before in previous works of the genre.²⁴⁰

If we abandon this narrow vision of only focusing on a single and particular aspect of the Persian Sufi tradition—the theoretical and literary dimension—and look to other aspects, especially in its social engagement with the wider society and culture in which the Sufis of the different *ṭarīqas* lived and participated, we cannot help but notice that the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period was indisputably one of the most dynamic periods of Sufism’s entire history

²³⁹ Abbas Amanat, “From Peshawar to Tehran: An Anti-Imperialist Poet of the Late Persianate Milieu.” In *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca*, edited by Nile Green, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2019), 261-73.

²⁴⁰ The scholar whose views have best exemplified this theory of Sufism’s irreversible decline during the later medieval period, and whose views have perhaps influenced the opinions of other scholars within the field of research the most was A. J. Arberry. For more on his views on Sufism’s decay and decline throughout the later medieval period—beginning in the fourteenth century—see A. J. Arberry. *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 119-34. For more information on this until recently dominant theory of the decline of Sufism in the Later Medieval period (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries), see Knysh, *Sufism: A New History of*, 162-65, and also Green, *Sufism: A Global*, 1-2. Knysh, Green and Deweese are more recent scholars who have challenged this long held view and assumption on Sufism’s irreversible decline beginning from the later Medieval period onwards, which is usually associated with the views of Arthur Arberry, J. S. Trimingham and Louis Massignon.

within Iran. Numerous *khānaqāhs* and shrine complexes devoted to revered Sufi saints were being constructed in every major urban centre within Iran; certain Persian Sufi shaykhs exerted considerable social, cultural, spiritual, and even political influence upon their local societies and the ruling establishment as well, and the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* within Iran and Central Asia experienced noticeable exponential growth. Much of what we recognise today as being characteristic features of the Persian Sufi tradition—in their customs, spiritual practices, doctrines, and beliefs—was further consolidated and developed into a state of refined maturity during this specific period in question.

Although certain scholars may consider earlier periods of Iran's history to be the golden age for the Persian Sufi tradition—mainly the era of the Ilkhanate²⁴¹—there is enough evidence to suggest that the actual golden age of the Persian Sufi tradition was this age of the Timurids and Āq Quyunlūs. The fifteenth century for Iran represented the last burst of flourishing for the Persian Sufi tradition before its irreversible decline that occurred in the following era of the Safavids, as a result of the religious transformation of Iran from a predominately Sunnī country to a stronghold of the Twelver Shī'ī faith.²⁴²

²⁴¹ George Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 226-36. And see also Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 104-25.

²⁴² Lewisohn is of the view that Iran's religious transformation from a predominately Sunnī country to that of a predominately Twelver Shī'ī country, was responsible for the decline of Sufism in Iran during the Safavid period. For more on Lewisohn's views, see Leonard Lewisohn. "Sufism and the School of Isfahan Tasawwuf and 'Irfan in Late Safavid Iran ('Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji and Fayz-i Kashani on the Relation of Tasawwuf, Hikmat and 'Irfan)." In *The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)* V. 3 (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2018), 63-84. More on this relevant issue will be discussed in Chapter eleven of this thesis.

Chapter Four

The Reception of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Teachings in Iran during the Later Medieval Period and Lāhijī’s Commentary in Relation to the Akbarī Tradition

One aspect of the flourishing of Sufism in Iran during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period that we have not mentioned so far was the increasing popularity and acceptance of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings—along with his followers and commentators upon the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥekam*—amongst the Persian Sufis of Iran. Bringing this aspect to bear is crucial to understanding the pattern of historical developments of the Persian Sufi tradition during this specific epoch. Indeed, during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, the Akbarī tradition, as a distinct intellectual school of thought within Sufism, had risen to hegemonic dominance over the entire Persian Sufi community. So deep and penetrating was the influence of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical ideas during this particular era that in the view of the Iranian historian Zarrīnkūb, Sufism within Iran took on a totally different color; meaning it underwent permanent and long-lasting transformations because of the doctrinal influence of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his Akbarī followers.²⁴³ These are changes that remained intact even up to the modern era. Understanding the doctrinal content and the historical significance of Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan* would not be possible if we do not take into account the historical context of the Persian Sufi tradition during the later medieval era. The following sections of this chapter will then be devoted to

²⁴³ ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-ye Justujū dar taṣawwuf-e Irān* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1369/1990), 142-3.

outlining the historical development and reception of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, along with the Akbarī tradition amongst the Persian Sufis of Iran during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. This will be followed by an introduction and concise summary of both the *Gulshan* by Shabistarī and Lāhijī’s commentary and their historical significance within the textual tradition of the Persian Sufi community. The aim of this will be to establish why the works of Shabistarī and Lāhijī have become among the most sought-out and read works of the entire literary tradition of Persian Sufism.

4.1 The Historical Development of the Akbarī Tradition within Iran during the Later Medieval Era (Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries)

An analysis of the Akbarī tradition is vital to understanding the specific historical developments that were occurring for the Persian-Sufi tradition during the later medieval period in Iran. It is relevant to begin our analysis with Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), who was the son-in-law and spiritual successor to the intellectual-spiritual legacy of Ibn al-‘Arabī.²⁴⁴ After the death of Ibn al-‘Arabī, Qūnawī spent the rest of his life, not only as a qualified religious scholar in the exoteric Islamic sciences—especially in the science of hadith—but more importantly, as a teacher who spent most of his life teaching the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī to his disciples and followers in his *khānaqāh* in Konya.²⁴⁵ During his years as a teacher of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works in Konya, he gathered around himself a group of students who would also have a significant impact on the continuing development and spread of the Akbarī tradition to the rest of the Islamic world, especially in the penetration of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas further to the east into the lands of Iran,

²⁴⁴ In the view of Claude Addas, Qūnawī was “also a spiritual master, an Akbarian heir (*wārith akbarī*) and as such, a transmitter of the *rūḥanīyya* or spiritual influence of the Shaykh al-Akbar.” Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 233. According to Todd’s research on the life and thought of Qūnawī, while Ibn al-‘Arabī was still alive, Qūnawī spent many years with him in Damsacus studying and learning his teachings directly from Ibn al-‘Arabī. “We know too that in Damascus he studied Ibn al-‘Arabī’s works under *Shaykh al-Akbar*’s close guidance—a course of reading that has been carefully documented elsewhere. Notably, this included all twenty volumes of the first redaction of the *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*—Ibn al-‘Arabī’s monumental summa of esoteric knowledge, consisting of 560 chapters “recited to me”, as his master confirms, “from beginning to end.” And that, “around the year 630/1232-3, while still in his mid twenties, Sadr al-Din was granted an *ijāza* to transmit Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings in their entirety.” Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr Al-Din Al-Qunawi's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 16-17.

²⁴⁵ Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine*, 19.

Central Asia, and India,²⁴⁶ for “it was perhaps chiefly through the intermediary of his Iranian disciples who studied the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī under his direction that Sadr al-Din contributed to the propagation of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas in Iran and Turkey”.²⁴⁷ His most influential students upon later generations of Akbarī followers in Iran were mostly Persian like himself and hailed from different regions of Iran and Central Asia. These were Mu‘ayyed-al-Dīn Jandī (d. ca. 700/1300), Sa‘īd-al-Dīn Farġānī (d. 699/August 1300) and Fakhr-al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289).²⁴⁸ As a result of Qūnawī’s lessons on the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī—especially on the *Fuṣūṣ*—numerous works were authored by his students who eventually exerted a considerable influence on both the Akbarī intellectual tradition and the Persian Sufi tradition as well.²⁴⁹ In fact, the works of Jandī, Farġānī and ‘Irāqī have been esteemed by the adherents of the Akbarī school of thought throughout the centuries, especially in the Persian speaking world, as masterpieces elucidating Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical teachings and Sufi metaphysics.²⁵⁰

The most important work by Jandī was his Arabic commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*,²⁵¹ which laid the groundwork for the later classical commentaries of this specific tradition,²⁵² and “is

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 23-4.

²⁴⁷ Addas, *Quest for the Red*, 233. And in the view of Chittick, concerning the historical role of Qūnawī as the most important transmitter and interpreter of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings to future generations of Akbarī followers in Iran and the rest of the Islamic East, “there can be no doubt that in the Eastern lands of Islam, where Ibn Arabī’s school has been of primary importance in determining the course of all metaphysics and philosophy to the present century, the influence of Qūnawī through his own writings and those of his immediate students has been such that Ibn al-‘Arabī has always been seen through his eyes.” See more in William C. Chittick, “The Last Will and Testament of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author,” *Sophia Perennis* 4 (1978): 43.

²⁴⁸ For more information on a list of Qūnawī’s most important students, as well as on teaching activities and duties while residing in Seljuk Konya—both as the Shaykh al-Islam of the city and as a Sufi shaykh in his own right and heir to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s intellectual-spiritual legacy—see Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine*, 21-6.

²⁴⁹ There is no doubt that amongst Akbarī followers throughout history, out of the two main works of Ibn al-‘Arabī which contains his entire doctrine of Sufi metaphysics and cosmology, the *Fuṣūṣ* overshadowed the *Futūḥāt* in attracting the attention of the most readers as well as inviting the most commentaries. One possible explanation for this historical development was that, in the view of Todd, “given the daunting magnitude of the *Futūḥāt*, the *Fuṣūṣ* became a natural vehicle for the study of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s doctrines, with his numerous enigmatic passages inevitably inviting commentary.” Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine*, 24.

²⁵⁰ Jāmī himself praised Farġānī’s lengthy introduction to his Arabic commentary on Ibn al-Fārez’ poem the *al-Tā’īya*, stating that “no one has explained the problems of the science of reality as solidly and coherently.” Nūr-al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns men Ḥazrāt al-Quds*, edited by Maḥmūd ‘Ābedī (Tehran: Entershārāt Sukhan, 1394/2015), 559. And according to Chittick, “The most widely read Persian work by Qūnawī’s students was no doubt the *Lama’āt* of Faḵr-al-Dīn ‘Erāqī.” William C. Chittick, “Ebn al-‘Arabī, Moḥyī-al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd-Allāh Moḥammad Ṭā’ī Ḥātemī.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Vol. VII, Fac. 6, (1996): 664-670, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/ebn-al-arabi>.

²⁵¹ Mu‘ayyed-al-Dīn Jandī. *Sharḥ-e Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥekam*, edited by S. J. Āshtīānī (Mashhad: Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgā-e Mashhad, 1361/1982).

generally considered the formative work in that genre”.²⁵³ Farḡānī was the author of *Mashāreq al-darārī al-zuhar fī kashf ḥaqā’eq naẓm al-durar*, which was primarily based upon Qūnawī’s lectures and commentaries on Ibn al-Fāreż’s poem the *al-Tā’īya*.²⁵⁴ Farḡānī began a tradition which was later followed and continued by followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī, like Dāwūd Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), ‘Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385) and Jāmī, in that these followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī wrote systematic, but short commentaries upon the Sufi poems of Ibn al-Fāreż so as to unveil the inner, esoteric meanings of the poem through the theoretical framework of the Akbarī school of thought.²⁵⁵ ‘Irāqī, in turn, was the author of the *Lama’āt*, a short work of Persian prose intermixed with short verses of poetry where ‘Irāqī expresses flashes of brilliant spiritual insight into the different theosophical ideas and principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings as elucidated within the *Fuṣūṣ*.²⁵⁶ The importance of the *Lama’āt* for the history of the Persian Sufi tradition also lies in the fact that ‘Irāqī was the first author to achieve a successful synthesis of the Akbarī school of thought with the tradition of passionate love (*mazhab-e ‘eshq*) while employing the stylistic formula and literary forms associated with the Religion of Love.²⁵⁷ This work by ‘Irāqī also invited numerous commentaries by later Akbarīs, especially during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period.

An even more crucial figure for the propagation of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical teachings amongst the wider Persian Sufi community during the medieval period was ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730–6/1329–35), who was a student of Jandī, and it is through Jandī that Kāshānī is

²⁵² Chittick, *The Last Will and Testament*, 43-4.

²⁵³ Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine*, 23. For more information on Jandī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, which was largely based on the private lectures on the *Fuṣūṣ* given by Qūnawī and its historical importance within the tradition of commentaries written upon the *Fuṣūṣ* throughout history, see William C. Chittick. *The Chapter Headings of the Fuṣūṣ*. First Published in the Journal of the Muhiddin Ibn Arabi Society, Vol. II, (1984): 41-94.

²⁵⁴ Sa’īd-al-Dīn Farḡānī. *Mashāreq al-darārī al-zuhar fī kashf ḥaqā’eq nazm al-durar*, edited by S. J. Āshtīānī, 5th edn. (Qum: Bustān-e Ketāb, 1397/2018).

²⁵⁵ William C. Chittick, “Spectrums of Islamic Thought: Sa’īd al-Dīn Farḡānī on the Implications of Oneness and Manyness,” in *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, edited by L. Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publishers, 1992), 206-9.

²⁵⁶ Fakr-al-Dīn ‘Irāqī. *Lama’āt*, edited by Muḥammad Khwājawī, 4th ed. (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1390/2011). For more information on ‘Irāqī and his work, the *Lama’āt*, see Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ‘Irāqī, *Divine Flashes* (London: Paulist Press, 1982), 33-127.

²⁵⁷ In the introduction to his own treatise, which can also be considered a treatise on the mystical metaphysics of divine-human love, ‘Irāqī states that his work is inspired by and follows closely the model of the *Sawāneḥ* of Aḥmad Ghazālī. See more in ‘Irāqī, *Divine Flashes*, 70.

spiritually and intellectually connected to Qūnawī himself.²⁵⁸ In the view of Zarrīnkūb, based on his research into the history of the Persian Sufi tradition within Iran, he considers Kāshānī along with Qūnawī, as the two individuals most responsible for propagating and spreading the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī amongst the Sufis of Iran during the medieval period; especially during the Ilkhanate period.²⁵⁹ Kāshānī was a prolific author. Attributed to him are forty major works on various subjects related to the mystical sciences of Sufism; both in Arabic and Persian.²⁶⁰ His most famous and widely read-works are: commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*;²⁶¹ commentary upon ‘Abdallāh Ansārī’s *Manāzel al-Sāerīn*;²⁶² the *Eṣṭelāhāt al-Ṣufiyyah* (a book explicating various Sufi terminology, especially relating to the Akbarī school of thought²⁶³); and his profoundly esoteric and Akbarī commentary on the Quran, the *Ta’wīlāt al-Qurān*, which is probably his most widely read work but has sometimes mistakenly been attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī.²⁶⁴ Not only was Kāshānī, like Qūnawī, a great systematiser of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi metaphysics and cosmology, he was also passionately devoted to imparting Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical teachings to the largest and broadest audience possible (even to the lay Sufi initiate). This is probably the reason why—unlike Ibn al-‘Arabī who employs a teaching style that is cryptic and most of the time difficult to understand for the uninitiated—Kāshānī’s explanations, in contrast, are simple, direct and straightforward. Thus, his Akbarī teachings had a profound impact on his many readers and students.²⁶⁵ Kāshānī’s influence on the spread of the Akbarī tradition within Iran was also due to the fact that he was the Sufi shaykh and teacher of lessons from the *Fuṣūṣ* for Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī. The latter in return was the Akbarī teacher to

²⁵⁸ Seyyed Shahabeddin Mesbahi, *Ibn ‘Arabī and Kubrawīs: The Reception of the School of Ibn ‘Arabī by Kubrawī Mystics* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2019), 20-1.

²⁵⁹ Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-ye Justujū*, 121 & 132.

²⁶⁰ For more information regarding Kāshānī’s life and his list of works, see Ismail Lala. *Knowing God: Ibn ‘Arabī and ‘Abd Al-Razzāq Al-Qāshānī’s Metaphysics of the Divine* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1-28.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī. *Anīs al-‘ārefīn: Sharḥ Manāzil al-Sāerīn-e Khwājah ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī*. Translated into Persian by Ṣafī al-Dīn Muḥammad ṭāremī (Tehran: Asāṭīr, 1395/2016).

²⁶³ Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī. *Eṣṭelāhāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*. Persian translations by Muḥammad ‘Alī Mawdūd Lārī; Gul Bābā Sa’īdī (Tehran: Hawzah-e Hunarī, 1376/ 1997-8).

²⁶⁴ For more information on Kāshānī’s commentary on the Quran, see ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, *Tasfīr al-Kāshānī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Quran Part 1*, 1-18. Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought & Fons Vitae, accessed November 25, 2018, <https://www.altafsir.com/Books/kashani.pdf>.

²⁶⁵ Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-ye Justujū*, 132-33. Lala, *Knowing God*, 181-3.

Baba Rukn al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 769/1367).²⁶⁶ Each of these students wrote their own commentaries upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, which would further the spread of the Akbarī tradition amongst Sufis in Iran and further east. Qayṣarī's commentary arguably became the most famous and widely read of all the classical commentaries in Iran and the eastern half of the Islamic world.²⁶⁷ At the same time, Rukn al-Dīn Shīrāzī's own commentary—which is also heavily reliant on Qayṣarī's—is historically significant for the intellectual history of the Persian Sufi tradition, since it was the first commentary written almost entirely in Persian upon the *Fuṣūṣ*.²⁶⁸ Until then, all commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* were written exclusively in Arabic, limiting its readership amongst those Persian Sufis who were not proficient in Arabic. Shīrāzī thus started a trend that would continue to gain momentum even after his death. As such, numerous commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ* have been written exclusively or partially in Persian. It further facilitated the spread of Ibn al-'Arabī's theosophical ideas and teachings amongst the wider Persian Sufi community within Iran as well as within the Persianate cultural sphere of the Islamic world; especially in India and Central Asia.

The next Sufi to write a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* in Persian after Shīrāzī, was Sayyed 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385), titled *Hall-e Fuṣūṣ*.²⁶⁹ This work has been mistakenly attributed to Khwāja Pārsā in its modern, printed edition. Hamadānī, following in the footsteps of Qayṣarī, also wrote a short Akbarī commentary upon Ibn al-Fārez's poem the *Khamriya* (Wine-Ode).²⁷⁰ Following 'Alī Hamadānī, a certain Tāj-al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī (d. 835/1432) also wrote a

²⁶⁶ William C. Chittick, "The School of Ibn Arabi." In *History of Islamic Philosophy: Part 1* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 517-18. Chittick believes both Qūnawī and Kāshānī contributed to the spread of Ibn al-'Arabī's theosophical teachings—especially in Iran during the medieval period—because, in their logical systematisation of Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi teachings, they borrowed and employed the language of the Islamic philosophers, especially the terminology associated with Ibn Sīnā and his followers. See more in Chittick, "The School of Ibn 'Arabī," 510-27.

²⁶⁷ Caner K. Dagli, *Ibn Al-'Arabi and Islamic Intellectual Culture: From Mysticism to Philosophy* Vol. 18. (London; New York: Routledge, 2016.), 119-21. For more information on Qayṣarī and his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, see Mukhtar H. Ali. *Foundations of Islamic Mysticism Qaysari's Introduction to Ibn 'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*. Foreword By Hamid Alger (Milton Keynes: Spiritual Alchemy Press, 2012), 3-12.

²⁶⁸ Rukn al-Dīn Mas'ūd Shīrāzī. *Nuṣūṣ al-Khuṣūṣ fī al-Tarjumah al-Fuṣūṣ*, 3 vols, edited by Ḥāmed Nājī (Tehran: Sukhan. 1395/2016).

²⁶⁹ Khwājah Muḥammad Parsā. *Sharḥ-e Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥekam*, edited by Jalīl Misgar Nejād. Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Dānishgāhī, 1366/1987.

²⁷⁰ Sayyed 'Alī Hamadānī, *Mashāreb al-adhwāq: sharḥ-e Qaṣīda-ye kamriya-ye Ebn-e Fārez Mesrī dar bayān-e sharāb-e maḥabbat*, edited and translated into Persian by Muḥammad Khwājawī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1384/2005).

commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* in Persian.²⁷¹ This work follows so closely Qayṣarī's own commentary that it can be considered a Persian translation of Qayṣarī's own work; only with slight changes and additions.²⁷² Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī (d. 834/1437)—the founder of the Ne'matallāhiya *ṭarīqa*—also wrote a Persian commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* titled *Khātām al-Fuṣūṣ*, which “is much longer than any of Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh's printed *rasā'el*”.²⁷³ Perhaps the most significant commentary written upon the *Fuṣūṣ* by a Persian Sufi author—because of its wide-readership amongst Sufis of the Persianate cultural sphere in following generations—were the commentaries written by Jāmī. The first was his *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-Fuṣūṣ*, a commentary upon Ibn al-'Arabī's own work titled *Naqsh al-Fuṣūṣ*, where Ibn al-'Arabī summarises the main points of each chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*.²⁷⁴ According to Chittick, this work was particularly famous in the Islamic East, as indicated by the large number of manuscripts that exist in numerous libraries throughout the Islamic world.²⁷⁵ Later on, when Jāmī was nearing the end of his life, he wrote a full-commentary in Arabic upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, which “succeeded in establishing itself among the most authoritative commentaries on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥekam*”.²⁷⁶ Besides his commentaries upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, Jāmī also authored numerous works in connection to the Akbarī tradition. The first was his highly influential but short work, the *Lawāyeh*.²⁷⁷ Jāmī seems to have written this work with the underlying purpose of summarising and condensing the main principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi metaphysics and cosmology in a short and easily readable work, in which he imitates the literary styles of 'Irāqī and Aḥmad Ghazālī.²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ Tāj-al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī, Shaykh Akbar Muḥiy al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Sharḥ-e Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥekam*, edited by Najīb Māyil Heravī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1393/2014).

²⁷² The most important additions in comparison to Qayṣarī's text is the addition of many poetic verses in his commentary, both in Arabic but also in Persian. See more in Najīb Māyil Heravī. “*Muqaddama*.” Khwārazmī & Shaykh Akhbar, *Sharḥ-e Fuṣūṣ*, XXII-XL.

²⁷³ Chittick, “EBN AL-'ARABĪ,” 667.

²⁷⁴ Nūr-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-Fuṣūṣ*, edited by William Chittick (Tehran: Institute of Iranian Philosophy, 1381/2002). For more information on this particular work by Jāmī, see William C. Chittick. “Ibn 'Arabī's own Summary of the Fusus. 'The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom.'” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society Vol 1*, (1982): 30-93.

²⁷⁵ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī's own Summary,” 30-31.

²⁷⁶ Hamid Algar, *Jami: Makers of Islamic Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98.

²⁷⁷ Nūr-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Lawāyeh*, edited by Yann Richard (Tehran: Āsātīr, 1383/2004).

²⁷⁸ For more information on the *Lawāyeh* and its place within the collection of Jāmī's works, see Sachiko Murata. *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yu's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm*. With a New Translation of Jami's Lawa'ih from the Persian by William C. Chittick (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 113-21.

Like other Akbarīs before him, he also wrote two commentaries in Persian upon both of Ibn al-Fāreż's poems, titled *Sharḥ-e qasīda-ye tā'īya-ye Ibn Fāreż* and the *Lawāme' fī sharḥ-e qasīda-ye mīmīya-ye khamrīya-ye Fāreżīya*.²⁷⁹ Also worth mentioning is Jāmī's own commentary upon 'Irāqī's *Lama'āt*, titled *Asha'āt al-lama'āt*.²⁸⁰ Finally we should also mention the *Sharḥ-e Lama'āt-e 'Irāqī*, another Akbarī commentary written in Persian upon the *Lama'āt* by the Kubrawīya Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn 'Abdallāh al-Barzishābādī (d. 872/1467), the rival to Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh and the founder of the sub-branch of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa* that was named after himself.²⁸¹

This list of various prose works written chiefly in Persian expounding the principles and teachings of the Akbarī school of thought is not the only historical evidence we have available that reveals the depth of influence of Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings upon the entire Persian Sufi community and tradition during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. During this period, various Persian Sufi poets also propagated the monistic teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī through their Sufi poetry, mainly through the poetic forms of the *ghazal* and *rubā'īāt*. Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī and Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghrebī (d. 809/1406-7) both produced *dīvān* collection of *ghazals* which are pervaded by the terminology and monistic ideas associated with the Akbarī tradition,²⁸² while Jāmī and Abū al-Wafā' Khwārazmī (d. 835/1431-32) propagated or expressed their mystical insights through the specific terminology of the Akbarī school of thought through the poetic form of the *rubā'īāt*.²⁸³ Also worth mentioning here is Shāh Qāsem Anwār (d.

²⁷⁹ Nūr-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Bahārestān wa Rasa'el-e Jāmī*, edited by A'lākhān Afsahzād et al (Tehran: Mīrās Maktub, 1379/2000), 337-439.

²⁸⁰ Nūr-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Asha'āt al-lama'āt*, edited by Hādī Rastigār Muqaddam Gawharī (Qum: Būstān-e ketāb, 1383/2004).

²⁸¹ Shihāb al-Dīn Amīr 'Abdallāh al-Barzishābādī al-Mashadī, *Sharḥ-e Lama'āt-e 'Irāqī*, edited by Ahmad Qadāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1379/2000).

²⁸² Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-ye Justujū*, 150-52. For more information regarding Maghrebī, see Leonard Lewisohn, "Shirīn Maghribī, Muhammad" In *." In The Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012), IX: 484.

For a sample of his poetry in English translations, see Edward G. Browne. *A Literary History of Persia: The Tartar dominion (1265-1502)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 330-43. And for more on the Akbarī influence on Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī's *ghazals*, see Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī. *Dīvān-e Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī*, edited by Sa'īd Nafīsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Naghā, 1398/2019).

²⁸³ In regards to Jāmī see more in È. Feuillebois-Pierunek, "Jāmī's Sharḥ-i rubā'īyyāt dar vahdat-i vujūd". In *Jāmī in Regional Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 343-66. And in regards to information concerning Khwārazmī, see more in Hermann H. Landolt, "Abu'l-Wafā' Khwārazmī" In *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/4, (1983): 394, accessed June 12, 2018. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abul-wafa-kvarazmi>. For a sample of his *rubā'īāt* in English, see Reza Saberi, A

837/1433-34), the highly influential Herātī Sufi shaykh during the reign of Shāh Rukh, who actively propagated the monistic teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī through his own poems and sermons.²⁸⁴ Taken all together, these Persian Sufi poets—along with Shabistārī’s *Gulshan*, which was also being widely read amongst the Sufis of Iran during this period as well²⁸⁵—contributed significantly to the spread of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical teachings and monistic ideas amongst the wider Persian Sufi community of the later medieval period. It is no surprise, then, that in the view of Zarrīnkūb, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence was so pervasive over the entire Sufi community within Iran during the later medieval period that on the level of doctrine—and especially in their manner through which the Persian Sufi authors and shaykhs expressed their mystical teachings to their readers and disciples—Sufism underwent a profound transformation during this era.²⁸⁶ Indeed, there is no noteworthy Persian Sufi writer or shaykh who was alive during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period who did not heavily rely on the specific terminology associated with the Akbarī school when articulating their own Sufi discourse, with the possible exception of Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī (d. 838/1435).²⁸⁷ The hope, however, is to further illustrate this point by mentioning a few more influential Persian Sufi figures during the ninth/fifteenth centuries who were highly influenced by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s system of Sufi metaphysics and cosmology.

According to Shahzad Bashir, Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 868/1464), the Sufi master of Lāhijī, was also one of several Persian shaykhs whose Sufi world-view was deeply shaped by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysics and cosmology during the Timurid period. For “Nūrbakhsh’s Sufi

Thousand Years of Persian Rubāiyāt: An Anthology of Quatrains from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century Along with the Original Persian. Translated into English by Reza Saberi (Bethesda: IBEX Publishers, 2000), 399-408.

²⁸⁴ Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 99, and Jurgen Paul, “The Rise of the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in Timurid Herat.” In *Afghanistan’s Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*, edited by Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 79. For more information on how Shāh Qāsem Anwār expressed his mystical insights into *waḥdat al-wujūd* through his Persian poetic verses—especially through the *ghazal*, see Junaid Ola, Qasemzadeh Seyed Ali, Samizadeh Reza. “Epiphany from the Perspective of Ibn Arabi and its Reflection in Shāh Qasim Anwar’s Poetry.” In *Religion & Mysticism*. 17, no. 66 (2021): 29-50. Available from: <https://www.sid.ir/en/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=7890242021> (accessed December 21, 2018).

²⁸⁵ Many commentaries were also written upon Shabestārī’s famous work during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era, and not just by Lāhijī. This is evidence of the popularity of Shabestārī’s work amongst Persian Sufis of Iran and within the Persianate world during the later medieval era. For more information on this subject, see Maḥmūd Shabistārī & Kāzem Duzufūliān. *Matn va Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz* (Tehran: Talāye, 1389/2010), 45-65.

²⁸⁶ Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-ye Justujū*, 142-3.

²⁸⁷ Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 99.

thought is principally grounded in concepts denoted by three terms: oneness of being, the Perfect Man, and the Seal of Sainthood”.²⁸⁸ In expounding upon these three essential Akbarī concepts—which serves as the principal foundations of his Sufi doctrine and thought—Nūrbakhsh was heavily reliant on the terminology and ideas employed by the Akbarīs.²⁸⁹

Pīr Jamāl Ardestānī (d. 878-9/1474-75) was the founder of another sub-branch of the Suhrawardīya *ṭarīqa* named after himself, the Pīr-Jamālīyah *ṭarīqa*, during the early half of the ninth/fifteenth century, during the reign of Shāh Rukh. Ardestānī was a prolific author of numerous Sufi works and treatises, as well as being a charismatic Sufi shaykh with a large following of Sufi disciples throughout Iran, and whose Sufi doctrine and thought was strongly influenced by the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī.²⁹⁰ Within the numerous Sufi works produced by Pīr Jamāl Ardestānī can be found innumerable discourses, sections and treatises dealing with Akbarī concepts like *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the Muḥammadan Reality, as well as the esoteric concept of the Perfect Man (*ensān-e kamāl*). Some of the works which reveal his Akbarī affiliations include the *yusuf-nāmeḥ* and the *Mer’āt al-efrād*.²⁹¹

According to Hamid Algar, the early masters of the the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* within Khurāsān and Central Asia were familiar with the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and may have even been his devoted followers as well. There is enough evidence to suggest that besides Jāmī, the list of shaykhs and followers of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* who were influenced by Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings can also include Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā (d. 822/1419), Khwāja ‘Ubaydallāh Aḥrār

²⁸⁸ Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 109.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 109-19.

²⁹⁰ Ardestānī’s own Sufi master was Pīr Murtezā ‘Alī Ardestānī (d. 795/1393), who traced his Sufi lineage or *ṭarīqa* back to Najīb-al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Buzḡush Shīrāzī (d. 678/1279-80) and was a disciple and one of the main *Khalīfas* of Abū Hafs ‘Umar Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234)—the founder of the Suhrawardīyah *ṭarīqa*. For more information on Jamāl Ardestānī and the many manuscripts that have been attributed to him, see O. Soroory, “Introduction to a manuscript of the general works of Pīr-Jamal Ardestani as preserved in the manuscript chamber of Central Library of the University of Tehran along with a brief summary of his works and biography.” In *Journal of Academic Librarianship and Information Research*, 43(1), (2009): 51-70.

²⁹¹ For more information in regards to Ardestānī’s exposition on these Akbarī concepts and his reliance upon the terminology of the Akbarī school of thought within his own Sufi discourse on the Muḥammadan Reality, see Khūshhāl Dastjerdī ṭāherī. “Bāztāb-e Ḥaqīqat-e Muḥammadīyya dar Yusuf-e Nāmeḥ-e Pīr Jamāl Ardestānī.” In *Matāleāt-e ‘erfānī*. Vol 3 (2006): 123-44. For more information on Ardestānī’s teachings on the Akbarī concept of the Perfect Man, see Vālī Dīnparast, ‘Alī Rezā Karīmī, N. Sadeghī, A. Ghāneī Zavāragh. “Perfect Man and the Possibility of Governance in the Iranian Mystic’s Thoughts in the Ninth Hijri Century.” In *Journal of Iranian Islamic Period History* 10, no. 21 (2020): 61-86.

(d. 896/1490), as well as Fakhr al-Dīn Ṣāfi ‘Alī Kāshefī (d. 910/1504).²⁹² Algar suggests that evidence of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influence upon Aḥrār’s Sufi discourse can be found in “Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Alī Ṣāfi’s *Rashaḥāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt*, the principal published source for the biography of Aḥrār, [which] records many topics that Aḥrār sought to clarify—in the course of the oral instruction he dispensed— by referring to Ibn ‘Arabī”.²⁹³ There is also evidence to suggest that the circle of Naqshbandī followers surrounding Sa’d-al-Dīn Kashgarī (d. 860/1456) and Jāmī in the Timurid capital city of Herāt, were not only active followers of the Akbarī tradition but may have also played a key historical role in making Ibn al-‘Arabī’s system of Sufi metaphysics and cosmology acceptable to Sunnī Muslims in Iran and the larger Persian-speaking world. Thanks to the spiritual and literary influence of the Naqshbandīs of Herāt, from the later Timurid period onwards, especially in the Sunnī lands of the Persianate world, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s ideas became part of mainstream Sūnnī Sufism”.²⁹⁴

Lastly, the primary hagiographical source on Shaykh Ibrāhīm Gūlshenī (d. 940/1534) states that Gūlsenī himself, along with his own Sufi shaykh in the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa*, Dede ‘Umar Rūshanī (d. 892/1487), were followers and staunch defenders of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings. Indeed, Gūlsenī personally went out of his way to defend Ibn al-‘Arabī and his controversial book the *Fuṣūṣ* from its many detractors within the Āq Quyunlū domains—especially within the region of Qarabagh. The exoteric ‘*ulamā*’ accused Ibn al-‘Arabī of unbelief and heresy and “reviled and burned” the *Fuṣūṣ*.²⁹⁵ In one account narrated from the *Menāqib-e Ibrāhīm Gulshenī*, the narrator states that in a certain year Gūlsenī traveled with Sultan Yā’qūb to his winter quarters in Qarabagh, where the religious scholars of that region were debating and arguing over the problematic passages contained within the *Fuṣūṣ*. At one point during the debate, “Shaykh Ibrāhīm challenged the ‘*ulamā*’ of the four corners of the earth to attack the

²⁹² Hamid Algar, “Reflections of Ibn ‘Arabi in Early Naqshbandī Tradition.” In *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, Vol. X (1991): 45-50. Accessed August 25, 2018, <https://ibnarabisociety.org/naqshbandi-tradition-hamid-algar/>. And Fakhrudīn Ṣāfi ‘Alī Kāshefī, *Rashaḥāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāt*. 2 vols, edited by ‘Alī Aṣghar Mu‘īniyān (Tehran: Bunyad-e Nekūkārī-ye Nūrānī, 1356/1977), I: 144-53.

²⁹³ Algar, “Reflections of Ibn ‘Arabī,” 53.

²⁹⁴ Paul, “The Rise of the Khwajagan,” 79-81.

²⁹⁵ Alexandra W. Dunietz, *The Cosmic Perils of Qadi Husayn Maybudi in Fifteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 42.

book. He was able to explain every dubious passage so that it offered no contradiction to the *sharīʿah* and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).”²⁹⁶

Debates concerning the orthodoxy or heretical nature of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s works, especially his most popular and controversial work, the *Fuṣūṣ*, were also occurring within Timurid Khurāsān as well, especially within the Timurid capital city of Herat. Jāmī himself seems to have been involved in these heated debates concerning the orthodoxy of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his works. According to Algar’s own research on the life and thought of Jāmī, most of the controversy centred around Ibn al-ʿArabī’s apparently heretical statements in the *Fuṣūṣ* concerning the faith of the Pharaoh, who he proclaimed died as a believer and earned God’s mercy. According to Algar, “Bayqara convened a meeting of the learned to discuss this troublesome opinion, and a clear majority proclaimed Ibn Arabi to be guilty of a serious error that relegated him to the status of an unbeliever. Informed of this outcome, Jami dismissed their verdict as deriving from ignorance.”²⁹⁷ Jāmī, of course, as a passionate follower of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his school of thought, took up the cause in defense of Ibn al-ʿArabī from his many detractors.²⁹⁸

The acceptance of Ibn al-ʿArabī was far from universal, even though during the later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period Ibn al-ʿArabī’s influence and the intellectual-spiritual tradition that

²⁹⁶ Gulshenī, *Menāqib-e Ibrāhīm Gulshenī*, 181. Taken from Dunietz, *The Cosmic Perils*, 42. According to the research of Carl W. Ernst, these polemics and debates concerning the controversial remarks made by Ibn al-ʿArabī concerning the faith or unbelief of Pharaoh within his *Fuṣūṣ* may have also been occurring within the city of Shīrāz as well, since the famous Shīrāzī philosopher and *kalām* scholar Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī also penned an entire treatise defending Ibn al-ʿArabī controversial statements in regards to Pharaoh’s faith and forgiveness by God as not being contradictory with the *sharīʿah* nor with the theological creed of Sunnī Islam. See more in Carl W. Ernst, “Controversies Over Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Fuṣūṣ*: The Faith of Pharaoh.” In *It’s Not Just Academic! Essays on Sufism and Islamic Studies* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2017), 106-11.

²⁹⁷ Algar, *Jami*, 96.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 95-96. The author of the *Rashaḥāt*, Ṣāfi ʿAlī Kāshefī, narrates an interesting story occurring within the city of Herat during the reign of Shāh Rukh from the words of his Sufi master ʿUbaydallāh Aḥrār. According to Aḥrār, one day Shaykh Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿUmar—one of the most influential Sufi shaykhs residing in Timurid Herāt during that time, along with Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī and Shāh Qāsem Anvār—asked Aḥrār “What news is there in the city?” Aḥrār replied back, “there are two items of news,””Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn and his companions say that everything is from Him (*hama az ūst*), while Sayyed Qāsem and his affiliates say that everything is He (*hama ūst*). What do you say?” Shaykh Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿUmar “bowed his head as he replied: ‘the evidence you adduce is apparently intended to prove the case of Zayn al-Dīn’s followers, but it actually proves the opposite side correct!’ He produced further strong arguments to the contrary, but they were again supportive of the other side. I then understood his purpose: While he secretly shared the view of Sayyed Qāsem and his party, he needed to show apparent agreement with Zayn al-Dīn and his followers.” Kāshefī, *Rashaḥāt ʿayn al-ḥayāt*, II: 427-28. This narration provided by Aḥrār in the *Rashaḥāt*, is one valuable historical proof that Ibn al-ʿArabī’s monistic ideas were indeed being widely debated amongst the Sufis and learned scholarly communities of Timurid Herāt during the fifteenth century.

he represented was pervasive throughout the Persian Sufi community. Nearly all the different Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* had willingly embraced and adopted Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theosophical teachings as their own. By this point in time, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, and the teachings of his followers—especially the classical, Persian commentators upon the *Fusūs*—had so impacted the intellectual and doctrinal aspect of the Persian Sufi tradition that it was impossible to separate the discourse of the Persian Sufis of this particular era from the terminology, beliefs and cosmological-metaphysical ideas associated with the Akbarī tradition.

Before ending this chapter, it is perhaps necessary to stress that certain Sufi shaykhs—who were also considered saints by their followers and by the wider Sufi community—adamantly opposed Ibn al-‘Arabī and his monistic teachings. However, they were the exception and small in number in comparison to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s many admirers amongst the wider Sufi community. The most noteworthy of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s critics during the fifteenth century was the famous Herātī Shaykh of the Zaynīyya *ṭarīqa*, Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī (d. 838/1435). In fact, in 1428, Khwāfī wrote an entire book denouncing and criticizing Ibn al-‘Arabī and his Akbarī followers for their teachings on *waḥdat-al wujūd*, as “among the most reprehensible intellectual movements in Islamic history”.²⁹⁹ The book, titled *Manhaj al-rashād*,³⁰⁰ also denounces four other groups within the Muslim *ummah*, which were the sophist, the materialist, and the philosophers, which he grouped with the followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī as being *Naw-mulhedān* (“New Heretics”).³⁰¹ Khwāfī considers the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, who he terms as *wujūdīyān* (“proponents of the unity of Being”), as simply being “nothing more than an amalgamation of the ideas of the Sophists (*sūfstā’īyān*), Materialists (*Dahrīyān*), and Philosophers (*Faylasūfān*), and they are not the teachings of the prophets and saints, but rather they are about the religion of treachery (*dīn-i khīyanāt*)”.³⁰² The ultimate aim of these new heretics which included the followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī, “was to eradicate Islamic law”.³⁰³ Another

²⁹⁹ Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 99.

³⁰⁰ Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī. *Manhaj al-rashād*, edited by Najib Māyil Haravī In *barghā-yi pīr. Majmu ‘a-yi bīst asar-ei chāp-nashuda-ye fersī az qalam-rū-ye tasavvūf* (Tehran, 1381/2002-3).

³⁰¹ İlker Evrim Binbaş, “The Anatomy of a Regicide Attempt: Shāhrukh, the Ḥurūfīs, and the Timurid Intellectuals in 830/1426–27.” In *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 3 (2013): 422.

³⁰² Binbaş, “The Anatomy of,” 421.

³⁰³ Ibid.

influential Persian Sufi shaykh who was opposed to the theosophical teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, and who forbade his disciples from reading the works of Ibn al-‘Arabī, was Zayn al-Dīn Abūbakr Tāybādi (d. 791/1389), a descendant and follower Shaykh Ahmad-e Jām (d. 536/1141).³⁰⁴

The aim of this chapter has been to establish the historical context that gave rise to the Lāhijī’s masterpiece on Sufism, the *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan e-Rāz*. When situating Lāhijī’s influential commentary and work of Persian Sufi doctrine and thought within its proper historical context, this can reveal a few details concerning the state of the historical development of the Persian Sufi tradition that was occurring during the later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū era of the late fifteenth century. Perhaps the most obvious detail is that Lāhijī’s own commentary—like the numerous Akbarī works written in Persian by other Sufi authors and masters during this same period—was in direct response to the growing demand amongst the wider Persian Sufi community to engage intellectually and spiritually with the Akbarī tradition. Judging by the growing number of commentaries written upon the *Fuṣūṣ* during this same period in question, it seems that Ibn al-‘Arabī’s most famous and controversial work the *Fuṣūṣ*, still constituted the most sought out work of the Akbarī school of thought. Although there existed other works that the Sufis also sought in order to learn Ibn al-‘Arabī’s elaborate and intricate system of Sufi metaphysics and cosmology. These were earlier Akbarī works written by various followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī from earlier centuries—the most well-known of these was ‘Irāqī’s *Lama’āt* and the *Gulshan-e Rāz* by Shabistarī.³⁰⁵ Lāhijī’s commentary upon Shabistarī’s *Gulshan* is similar to the commentaries written upon the *Fuṣūṣ* during the later medieval period, and indeed these Akbarī works were most likely read by Lāhijī and influenced his own discourse in matters related to Sufi metaphysics and cosmology. Later chapters of this thesis will discuss how his Sufi discourse—especially in matters related to Akbarī ideas and teachings—is in fact identical to the discussions and teachings which can be found in these earlier Akbarī works.

³⁰⁴ Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 98-99.

³⁰⁵ William C. Chittick, “‘Erāqī, Faḡr-al-Dīn Ebrāhīm.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Vol. VIII, Fasc. 5, (1998): 538-540, accessed May 19, 2018, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/eraqi>. And Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Guildford: Curzon Press, 1995), 15 & Shabistarī & Duzufūlīān, *Matn va Sharḥ*, 21-41, 45-65.

Lāhijī's text should therefore not be merely read as a commentary on the *Gulshan*, but can also be read as an independent work that attempted to systematise the entire Akbarī tradition and provides an in-depth and clear exposition of the essential principles that constitutes the world-view and metaphysics of the Akbarī school of thought. Indeed, this is what his contemporary readers from amongst the Persian Sufi community had a demand for. What is significant about Lāhijī's work and other Akbarī works written during this same historical period is that they were written in fluent and straightforward Persian, not the technical Arabic of the religious scholars and philosophers who were students of the madrasa. Before the Timurid era, all Akbarī-related works were exclusively written in Arabic, thereby limiting access to sought out books of the Akbarī tradition for many members of the Persian Sufi community, since proficiency in Arabic was a skill only in possession of those Sufis who had spent years in the madrasa educational system.³⁰⁶ This significant feature of Lāhijī's works, along with the existence of numerous Akbarī works written in Persian during this period under review, highlights the historical fact that the Sufis widely sought out the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers during this era. Also, the structure of metaphysics and cosmology that the different Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* absorbed into their own Sufi world-view and mystical discourse was entirely derived from Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings, as articulated by Ibn al-'Arabī in his *Fusūs* and by his followers within their respective commentaries. In the following sections, we will take a closer look at Lāhijī's text by providing a short but concise introduction to it and its interconnected textual relationship with the *Gulshan* of Shabistārī, along with its seminal and historically significant position within the canon of the Persian Sufi literary tradition.

³⁰⁶ According to Chittick, "Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers wrote for the ulama, those with thorough training not only in the Koran, Hadith, and jurisprudence, but also in Kalam and philosophy. None but the highly learned were capable of studying their works." William C. Chittick, "The Question of Ibn al-'Arabī's 'influence' on Rūmī." In *Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, edited by In Rustom, Mohammed, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011; 2012), 92. All of these sciences could only be learnt and taught within the educational setting of the madrasa. For an idea of how many years any non-native Arabic speaker would have to spend within the madrasa in order to gain a degree of proficiency in Arabic and a mastery of these Islamic sciences so that they could comprehend the works of Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers, see Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi - Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings, and Poetry of Jalāl Al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 109-14.

4.2 Introduction to the Text of the *Gulshan-e Rāz* by Maḥmūd Shabistārī

Since Lāhijī's most important work of Persian Sufi doctrine and thought is first and foremost an extensive line by line commentary upon Shabistārī's *Gulshan-e Rāz*, it is, therefore, necessary to briefly introduce this significant work of the Persian Sufi tradition before our introduction and analysis of Lāhijī's own commentary on the *Gulshan*.

The *Gulshan-e Rāz* is a short *Maṣnavī* poem entirely written in Persian, composed of 1006 verses, including the introduction, in which Shabistārī states why he wrote the poem. According to Shabistārī, the *Gulshan-e Rāz* emerged as a response to a set of questions posed and sent to the dervishes and Sufis of Tabrīz from a certain Amīr Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī (d. 718/1318) in the winter of 1317 during the Ilkhanate period. Ḥusaynī was a Sufi shaykh, poet, and writer native to the city of Herāt.³⁰⁷ The opening lines of each separate chapter of the *Gulshan*, are therefore most probably Amīr Ḥusaynī's questions, where the rest of the verses of that particular chapter are Shabistārī's own direct response. All the questions deal with various subjects or the esoteric sciences of Sufism. Since Shabistārī's composition of the *Gulshan-e Rāz* became one of the most influential literary works of the Persian Sufi tradition, Shabistārī was therefore successful in answering the difficult questions posed by Amīr Ḥusaynī to the Sufis of Tabrīz—with mastery, flair, and confidence. Shabistārī reveals himself through the *Gulshan* to be a realised Sufi master who was truly adept in the mystical ways and sciences of the Sufi path. Indeed, one feature of Shabistārī's poem that is apparent to the reader, and which may have contributed to its popularity amongst the wider Persian Sufi community, is Shabistārī's uncanny ability to express deep spiritual insights in all the different subjects related to the mystical sciences of Sufism in the shortest and simplest of poetic verses—all in graceful, fluent and easily understandable Persian. Persian speakers and readers of all levels of comprehension could have read the *Gulshan-e Raz* without too much difficulty throughout the centuries.

³⁰⁷ Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 21-22. According to Jāmī, Amīr Ḥusaynī was himself considered a famous and influential Sufi shaykh, prolific writer of many Sufi works and poet amongst the denizens of Herat, and during his lifetime he had many followers and disciples from amongst the people of Herat and Khurāsān. According to the details that Jāmī provides us from his *Nafahāt al-uns*, Amīr Ḥusaynī was a follower of the Suhrawardīya *ṭarīqa*, Ḥusaynī's *silsila* stretched back to Shaykh Bahā'uddīn Zakarīyyā Multānī (d. 666/1267), who was the Sufi master of 'Irāqī and one of the main *khalīfas* of Abū Hafs 'Umar Suhrawardī. For more details on Amīr Ḥusaynī, see Nūr-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns men ḥazrat al-quds*, edited by Maḥmūd 'Ābedī. (Tehran: Entershārāt Sukhan, 1394/2015), 602-3.

In the view of Leonard Lewisohn—who arguably wrote the most extensive work of research on the life and thought of Shabistarī—one reason for the celebrated fame of the *Gulshan* amongst the wider Persian Sufi community over the following centuries was because:

Shabistarī shows a peerless flair for metaphysical penetration combined with an aphoristic skill in synthesizing intricate dilemmas of Islamic theological and theosophical thought, unrivaled by any other medieval Persian Sufi poet in brevity of output and profundity of content.....The *Gulshan-i raz* was composed in a series of semi-abstract aphoristic flashes of inspiration, the harmony of which is often only intuitively apprehended.³⁰⁸

It is quite amazing how much Shabistarī was able to condense within his short *maṣnavī* poem the various mystical sciences and subjects connected to Sufism and provide penetrating, fresh, and original insights into the various difficulties and problems encountered by Sufis—especially in relation to the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī.³⁰⁹ The different Sufi subjects that are included within the *Gulshan* for discussion are: the divine-spiritual origin of the human being and the necessity for spiritual wayfaring; eschatology and the esoteric interpretation of the Day of Resurrection and its connection to the world of imagination; the perpetual renewal of creation; the illusion of creation and the reality of *waḥdat al-wujūd*; the fundamental differences between philosophical and rational knowledge and the knowledge of unveiling and witnessing that is the way of the Sufis; the difference between the spiritual rank and reality of sainthood and prophethood and the spiritual relationship between the two, as well as the identity of the Seal of Saints; and the real meanings behind the esoteric poetic symbols employed by the Persian Sufi poets in their descriptions of their ecstatic love for God.³¹⁰ It is no

³⁰⁸ Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 17.

³⁰⁹ In his research on the life and thought of Shabistarī, Lewisohn has done a comprehensive overview of the Sufi contents and teachings contained within the *Gulshan*. For more details, see Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 143-318.

³¹⁰ In the view of Husayn Ilahi-Ghomshei, the last third of Shabistarī’s *Gulshan-e Rāz* deals with the subjects, themes and esoteric poetic-metaphors related to the tradition of passionate love of the Persian Sufi tradition. As he states in his own words: “surveying the whole spectrum of Islamic mystical poetry, these three hundred odd lines (vv. 714ff.) represent the pinnacle of all symbolic poetry in the Persian Sufi tradition. In this final section, Shabistarī rends aside the veil of Sufi symbolic discourse with a directness and clarity unrivaled by any previous writer and unmatched by any subsequent Persian poet. Whereas his precursors in the tradition, such as ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa’dī and Nezamī, tried to draw a veil over the more abstruse aspects of Sufi symbolic lexicon and conceal their esoteric terms and truths in hermetic hints couched in cryptic and paradoxical imagery, Shabistarī devotes all

wonder that numerous commentaries were written upon the *Gulshan* in the following decades and centuries after Shabistarī's death. Each of these attempted to divulge the many layers of meaning or the different implications of each poetic verse of the *Gulshan*. According to Gulchīn Ma'ānī, in the Central Library of Tehran University, which contains much of Iran's historical manuscripts, about forty major commentaries have been written by various authors upon the *Gulshan*.³¹¹ This would then make the *Gulshan* perhaps the most commented work of the Persian Sufi literary canon. Some important historical figures who wrote their own commentaries upon the *Gulshan* were the influential Timurid polymath, occult-letterist, philosopher and theologian Ibn Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 830/1427), Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Wālī, Bābā Ne'mat-Allāh Nakhjavānī (d. 920/1514)—who was a Naqshbandī disciple of 'Ubaydallāh Aḥrār, and Shāh Dā'ī Shīrāzī (d. 870/1464-5)—a Sufi poet and disciple of Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Wālī.³¹² But there is no doubt that Lāhijī's commentary has been the most remarkable ever written upon the *Gulshan*, and the most widely read and circulated amongst Persian Sufi circles throughout history. We will now turn our attention to Lāhijī's commentary in the following sections.

4.3 Introduction to Lāhijī's Commentary upon the Gulshan and Its Value as an Independent Work of Persian Sufi Doctrine and Thought

Why has Lāhijī's commentary earned its position as the most outstanding and popular commentary on the *Gulshan* amongst its Sufi audience? One feature of Lāhijī's text which may have contributed to its popularity is that Lāhijī's commentary reads like a textual Persian carpet, where Lāhijī interweaves quotes from a variety of different textual sources—mainly works from the genre of the Persian Sufi tradition—but he also quotes from a variety of theological and non-Sufi works as well. This particular aspect of Lāhijī's text points to the fact that Lāhijī must have had in his possession a private library of a significant number of books when he was writing his lengthy commentary. A bulky text of almost 600 pages in its modern, printed edition,

his exquisite poetic diction here to rendering an expose of the lexicon of Sufi mystical terms." Husayn Ilahi-Ghomshei, "Of Scent and Sweetness: 'Aṭṭār and his Legacy in Rūmī, Shabistarī and Ḥāfiẓ." In *Attar and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn and Christopher Shackle (London: I.B Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili studies, 2006), 42.

³¹¹ Shabistarī & Kāzem, *Matn va Sharḥ*, 41.

³¹² Shabistarī & Kāzem, *Matn va Sharḥ*, 41-65.

Lāhijī must have spent a significant amount of time authoring the book, perhaps even years, while he was residing as the head shaykh at his Sufi *Khānaqāh* in Shīrāz. Of course, like all previous works of the genre, the text is filled with abundant quotations from the Quran and the hadiths as well, mainly from Sunnī sources and those hadiths which possess unverified chains of transmission, but which have nevertheless been traditionally and widely used by Sufis within their works. This shows that Lāhijī was proficient in Arabic and may have had some training or education within the *madrasa* in the exoteric Islamic sciences as well. It is worth mentioning the Sufi poets and writers names that he quotes within his own commentary since this list serves as an indication of those Sufi masters from the past who most informed and shaped Lāhijī's own vision and personal style of Sufism. The Sufi poets that he most quotes within his text were Rūmī³¹³—especially from his *Maṣnavī*—‘Aṭṭār,³¹⁴ ‘Irāqī,³¹⁵ Shīrīn Maghrebī,³¹⁶ and Ibn al-Fārez,³¹⁷ and of course Shabistarī, but mainly from Shabistarī's prose works like the *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*, which is the most extensively quoted and referenced work within Lāhijī's entire commentary along with the *Sa‘ādat Nāma*.³¹⁸ Like the earlier influential works of the genre, he also quotes from the classical Sufi masters from the past, like Rābī‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 105/801),³¹⁹ Bāyazīd al-Bestāmī (d. 261/875),³²⁰ Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911)³²¹ and Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922),³²² numerous times throughout the text, thereby revealing his familiarity with the earlier classical works of Sufism written as training manuals from the earlier centuries. Proof of this is that Lāhijī also quotes from Khwāja ‘Abdallāh Ansārī's (d. 481/1088) *Manāzel al-sā‘erīn*.³²³

³¹³ Lāhijī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ibn Yaḥyā. *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012) (For the rest of this chapter will be cited as *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*), 355, 356, 399, 471, 473, 512, 554, 595.

³¹⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 311, 356, 512.

³¹⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 109, 295, 536, 594.

³¹⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 101, 117, 467, 486, 508, 577.

³¹⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 255, 322.

³¹⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 34, 255, 256, 259, 321, 326, 333, 365, 373, 377, 379, 409, 416, 418, 420, 422, 436, 438, 442, 447, 462, 466, 499, 533.

³¹⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 224.

³²⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 119, 224, 292, 473, 576.

³²¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 60, 224, 242, 546, 585, 602.

³²² *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 264, 286, 311, 312, 315, 316, 317, 318, 473, 531.

³²³ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 245.

Interestingly enough, he quotes the foremost Persian Imāmī theologian of the medieval era, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) only twice.³²⁴ This fact may reveal that Lāhījī was a practicing Twelver Shīʿite, yet he also quotes from Sūnnī-Ashʿarī theologians like Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)³²⁵ and Fahkr al-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 605/1209)³²⁶ numerous times throughout the text. One significant aspect of the text which may provide a clue to Lāhījī’s true religious affiliations is the large amount of quotations and direct references made to Imām ‘Alī (d. 40/661). In fact, Imām ‘Alī is one of the most widely referenced saintly figures throughout Lāhījī’s commentary, being referenced both implicitly and explicitly about eighteen times throughout the text.³²⁷ The only person to be referenced more than Imām ‘Alī is the Prophet Muḥammad himself, especially his hadiths which are largely derived from Sūnnī sources or unverified Sufi sources. Sometimes Imām ‘Alī is referenced as a model of Islamic saintliness which every Sufi wayfarer should take as their personal role model for the Sufi path as encouraged by Lāhījī, and Lāhījī even composes an entire *ghazal* within his commentary praising and extolling the many virtues of Imām ‘Alī.³²⁸ Yet most of the time when Lāhījī mentions or references Imām ‘Alī, he directly quotes from his transmitted sayings or religious sermons, especially from the *Nahj al-Balāgha*.³²⁹ All of this might make it seem that Lāhījī was a devout and practicing Shīʿite, as some scholars have claimed,³³⁰ yet Lāhījī rarely makes any mention of the other Holy Imams of the Twelver Shīʿites throughout his commentary. The only time he mentions the other Holy Imams is when he provides the full details of his *silsila* as an initiate and shaykh of the Kubrawīya-Nurbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*. He mentions the first seven Holy

³²⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 393, 395. The work of Ṭūsī that Lāhījī quotes within his commentary is Ṭūsī’s famous work on philosophical ethics, the *Akhlāq-e Nāṣerī*. For more information on this particular work by Ṭūsī, see Joep Lameer, *The Arabic Version of Ṭūsī’s Nasirean Ethics* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 1-33.

³²⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 86, 113, 281, 511.

³²⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 208, 217, 491.

³²⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 50, 55, 65, 231, 238, 247, 248, 266, 280, 271, 284, 350, 361, 481, 572, 585, 587, 595.

³²⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 280.

³²⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 350, 361, 481. *Nahj al-Balāgha* is a collection of sayings, teachings and religious sermons attributed to Imām ‘Alī and compiled by Sayyīd al-Rādī in the fourth/eleventh century. For more information, see Reza Shāh-Kazemī, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam ‘Ali* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 11-72.

³³⁰ The Iranian scholar Seyyed ‘Alī al-Dawūd who has edited and published a modern edition of Lāhījī’s *Maṣnavī* poem the *Asrār al-Shuhūd*, believes that this information does in fact prove that Lāhījī was a Twelver Shīʿite. For more details, see Shamsuddīn Muhammad Asīrī Lāhījī. “*Muqaddama*.” In *Asrār al-Shuhūd*, edited by Seyyed ‘Alī āl-Dawūd. (Tehran: Pejūhesghā ‘alūm-e ensānī va matālā’āt-e farhangī (1388/2009), XVII-XVIII.

Imams of the Twelver Shī'ites as significant saintly figures of his Sufi *silsila*.³³¹ All of the above information is not enough proof to identify Lāhījī as a devout and practicing Twelver Shī'ite. Instead, it is more likely the case that this is a reflection of the religious-cultural environment of confessional ambiguity which had reigned in Iran throughout the later medieval period, especially during the later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period, which was the historical epoch that Lāhījī spent most of his life—and in Lāhījī's own words, he began writing his commentary on the *Gulshan* in the year 877/1473. Rather than seeing this as proof of Lāhījī's affiliation with Twelver Shī'ism, these statements of devotion to Imām 'Alī should be seen as manifestations of Lāhījī's personal feelings of “‘Alīd-devotionalism”, which was all too common amongst Iranian Sunnīs and Sufis during this particular era of Iran's history, and can even be described as the “spirit of the age”.³³²

There are other textual sources that have also influenced the composition and content of Lāhījī's commentary, but these textual influences are implicit and are not directly quoted by Lāhījī. The first text we should mention is the *Merṣād al-'ebād men al-mabda' ela 'l-ma'ād* by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256)—the foremost and most widely-read Kubrawīya manual and

³³¹ *Maḥfātīh al-e'jāz*, 585. Lāhījī's own Sufi *silsila* and *ṭarīqa* is an offshoot of the Kubrawīya-Hamadānīya *ṭarīqa*, so it does not differ too much from the standard Kubrawīya *silsila* which is well known. The one glaring difference is that after Imām 'Alī, he lists Imām Ḥusayn, Imām 'Alī Zayn al-'Abedīn, Imām Muhammad Bāqer, Imām Ja'far Sādeq, Imām Musa Kāẓem and Imām 'Alī Reẓā as important Sufi masters of his *silsila*. After Imām 'Alī Reẓā, who is considered the eighth Holy Imam by Twelver Shī'ites, Lāhījī claims that the *silsila* was passed on to Ma'rūf Karkhī, who was in return the Sufi master of Sarī al-Saqatī, who was the Sufi master and uncle of Junayd al-Baghdādī. Lāhījī's own Kubrawīya *silsila* then appears in the following manner within his commentary upon the *Gulshan-e rāz*: Muḥammad 'ebn Yahyā 'Alī Gīlānī Lāhījī>Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh>Ishāq Khuttalānī>Amīr Seyyed 'Alī Hamadānī>Maḥmūd Mazdaqānī>'Alā' ad-Dawla as-Semnānī>Nūr-al-dīn 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Esfarāyenī>Aḥmad Zāker Jūrfānī>'Alī Ibn Lālā>Najm al-Dīn Kubrā>'Ammār Ibn Yāser Bedlīsī>Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī>Aḥmad Ghazālī>Abū Bakr Nassāj>Abū al-Qāsem Gurgānī>Abū Uṣmān Maghrebī>Abū 'Alī Kāteb>Abū 'Alī Rudbārī>Junayd al-Baghdādī>Sarī al-Saqatī>Ma'rūf Karkhī>Imām 'Alī Reẓā>Imām Musa Kāẓem>Imām Ja'far Sādeq>Imām Muḥammad Bāqer>Imām 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābedīn>Imām Ḥusayn>Imām 'Alī Murteẓa>Muḥammad Muṣṭafa. Historically, other branches of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa* who possessed similar spiritual genealogies that stretch back to Junayd and Imām 'Alī, have Dāwūd al-Tā'ī instead of Imām 'Alī Reẓā as the Sufi master and initiator of Ma'rūf Karkhī in their *silsilas*. So in Lāhījī's Shī'itised version of his Kubrawīya *Silsila*, he removes Dāwūd al-Tā'ī, Ḥabīb al-'Ajamī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī completely, and replaces them with the first seven Holy Imāms of the Twelver Shī'ites, excluding Imām Ḥasan. This “Shī'itised” *silsila* presented by Lāhījī can be considered an indication of Lāhījī's pronounced Shī'ī tendencies. But is this enough evidence to prove that Lāhījī was a Twelver Shī'ite and not a Sunnī? Maybe this is evidence for Lāhījī's personal indifference and apathy towards sectarian affiliations and labels, and suggests he was neither a Twelver Shī'ite, nor a Sunnī in the traditional sense of these two labels.

³³² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization: Vol 2 The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 446-8.

text throughout Sufism's history,³³³ and which someone as widely learned as Lāhijī must have been familiar with, since he himself was also an initiate of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*. The sections of Lāhijī's commentary dealing with the spiritual origins of man and his return journey towards God share many similarities with Rāzī's *Merṣād*.³³⁴ The second work of the Persian Sufi tradition, which also had an implicit influence on Lāhijī's text, is 'Irāqī's *Lama'āt*. Judging by the commentaries written by Jāmī and Barzishābādī, as well as the influence that the literary format and style of the *Lama'āt* had on the prose works of Jāmī and Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī, it is safe to assume that Lāhijī had also read the *Lama'āt*, since it was one of the most widely-read works of the Akbarī tradition amongst Persian Sufis. Indeed, when comparing the two texts side by side, Lāhijī closely follows the same format and structure of the *Lama'āt*, which in return is based upon the model first established by Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126) with his *Sawāneḥ*. The structure of Lāhijī's text closely follows 'Irāqī's, where, with simple and fluid and at times very eloquent Persian prose, he elaborates in-depth upon a variety of Sufi subjects. These prose paragraphs are then usually separated by verses of Persian but sometimes Arabic poetry—sometimes his own, but most frequently quotations from the great masters of the Persian Sufi love tradition, like 'Irāqī, Rūmī, Ibn al-Fāreḥ or Maghrebī.

One of the most surprising aspects of Lāhijī's text, though, is a lack of direct and explicit reference to authors of the Akbarī school of thought. He quotes from Kāshānī's *Eṣṭelāḥāt* three times,³³⁵ Qayṣarī's *Sharḥ-e Fuṣūṣ* four times,³³⁶ and from Ibn al-'Arabī's *Futūḥāt* only once,³³⁷ and from his *Fuṣūṣ* about six times.³³⁸ This is surprising since Lāhijī's own commentary is essentially an Akbarī text—three quarters of the text at least—which means that it is a work that devotes most of its pages expounding upon the different teachings and principles that are part and parcel of the Akbarī intellectual tradition. Although Lāhijī rarely directly references Ibn al-'Arabī within his own commentary, there is no doubt that Ibn al-'Arabī's presence looms

³³³ 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn Rāzī and Hamid Algar, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return: (Merṣād Al-'ebād Men Al-Mabḍā' elā 'l-ma'ād): A Sufi Compendium*. Vol. no. 35. Delmar (New York: Caravan Books, 1982), 19-20.

³³⁴ Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *The Path of God's Bondsman*, 201-235, 294-334. *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 204-26, 246-53.

³³⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 92, 291, 421.

³³⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 117, 295, 344, 403.

³³⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 117.

³³⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 117, 170, 232, 329, 424, 485.

large over every page of the work. Indeed, Lāhijī's own Sufi discourse—like most Persian Sufi authors of his time—was heavily reliant upon the unique terminology and theosophical ideas associated with the Akbarī tradition. It is therefore highly likely that Lāhijī was well acquainted with the works of Shaykh al-Akbar—with both the *Futūḥāt* and the *Fuṣūṣ*. And judging by his quotations and references to Qayṣarī's commentary, Qayṣarī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* was also a likely source for his Akbarī teachings and ideas. Indeed, one significant feature of Lāhijī's work that most likely contributed to its immediate popularity with Sufi readers in Iran and the wider Persianate world was that Lāhijī had a talent for simplifying his explanations and teachings in easy to read Persian prose. His prose style contains a certain lucidity that makes his expositions on even the most abstruse ideas associated with the Akbarī school of thought easy to digest for his readers. Although admittedly, he may repeat the same points unnecessarily over and over again, thereby making the text feel repetitious at times.

Nevertheless, Lāhijī, throughout his commentary, displays a deep mastery over the entire system of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Sufi cosmology and metaphysics. When reading Lāhijī's explication of different points concerning the Akbarī school of thought, there is no doubt we are being guided by a confident teacher who has assimilated the mystical philosophy of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his followers on the deepest level, much like his more famous contemporary Jāmī himself. For example, although most of the time Lāhijī's aim is to unveil his interpretation of the concealed meanings in a specific verse of the *Gulshan*, sometimes he also takes the opportunity to enter into a lengthy exposition on certain principles or metaphysical-esoteric ideas related to the Akbarī tradition.

Lastly, Lāhijī's text should also be understood as the culmination of an intellectual, spiritual, and cultural trend that was occurring within the wider Persian Sufi community during the latter half of the medieval period. Moreover, and notably, it was the synthesis of the Akbarī tradition and the Love tradition of the Persian Sufis, which is sometimes referred to by scholars of Sufism and even by the adherents of this particular tradition as the *mazhab-e ʿeshq*

("Religion of Love").³³⁹ Although in their historical beginnings, these two spiritual streams of Sufism existed as two separate and distinct traditions, the first emerging within the Sufi-Islamic cultures of North Africa and Andalusia and the second emerging from the greater Khurāsān region during the early eleventh century.³⁴⁰ These two traditions eventually merged with one another through the creative efforts and inspired visions of Qūnawī's students, 'Irāqī and Farḡānī, owing to the widespread popularity of their respective Sufi texts within Iran and the Persianate world. Later Sufis, especially Shabistarī during the following Ilkhanate era, further reinforced the fusion between these two strands of the Sufi tradition. Other influential Persian Sufi shaykhs and authors like 'Alī Hamadānī and Shāh Ne'mat-Allāh Walī, in the following generations also articulated their own personal styles of Sufism for their Sufi disciples through this continuing synthesis of the Akbarī tradition with the ecstatic love tradition of the Persian Sufis. Throughout the medieval period this ecstatic-love tradition was best exemplified in the lives and influential Sufi teachings of Aḥmad Ghazālī, 'Aṭṭār, Rūmī, 'Irāqī, and possibly Ḥāfeẓ (d. 715-792/1315-1390) as well.³⁴¹ In the closing decades of the fifteenth century, this intellectual, spiritual, and cultural trend within the Persian Sufi community found its full blossoming in Lāhijī and Jāmī's influential works of Sufism. Jāmī's *Lawāyeh*, serves as one of the best examples of synthesis between these two Sufi traditions.³⁴² About one fifth of Lāhijī's commentary on the

³³⁹ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 526-1131) was perhaps the first Persian Sufi author to explicitly mention *maḏhab-e 'eshq* within his own writing and to identify the Sufi followers of this particular Way of Sufism with it. As he states in his most important prose work, the *Tamhīdāt*, "the lovers follow the religion and the community of God. They do not follow the religion and creed of Shāfi'ī or Abū Ḥanīfa or anyone else. They follow the Religion of Love and the Religion of God [*maḏhab-i 'ishq wa maḏhab-i khudā*]." Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 114-15. Taken from Husayn Ilhai-Ghomshei, "the Principles of the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry." In *Hafez and The Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (I.B Tauris & Co., 2010), 77.

³⁴⁰ Chittick, "The Question of Ibn al-'Arabī's," 91. For more information on the historical development of this particular tradition of Love amongst the Persian Sufis, especially in their conceptionalisation and theoretical discourse upon the divine mysteries of love, see Joseph E. Lombard, *Ahmad Al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 116-151. For more information on the historical development of the Akbarī tradition, beginning with Ibn al-'Arabī and continuing in Iran in relation to the Persian Sufi tradition, especially in connection to the Kubrawī Sufis, see Mesbahi, *Ibn 'Arabī and Kubrawīs*, 7-47.

³⁴¹ For a brief overview of this ecstatic-love tradition amongst the Persian Sufis of the medieval period, see William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 287-93; 311-22. And see also Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi*. Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, S.C.) (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 85-119.

³⁴² For more on the *Lawāyeh*, see Chittick's English translation of this particular work in Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, 128-210.

Gulshan is devoted to discourse on the principles and ideas of the “Creed of Lovers”. It is within these specific sections of the text that he adopts a prose style reminiscent of the passionate, love-intoxicated discourse of his legendary predecessors of the Persian Sufi love tradition; like Maybudī, Aḥmad Sam‘ānī (d. 534/1140), Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, Aḥmad Ghazālī, and ‘Irāqī.³⁴³ Lāhijī’s commentary is therefore not exclusively an Akbarī text where its only concern is with the teachings and ideas associated with Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers of the Akbarī tradition—it is also a highly significant work in relation to the Sufi way of passionate divine and human love.

4.4 Conclusion

All the above features that we have noted about Lāhijī’s commentary gives an all-comprehensive quality to his work; and indeed, sometimes Lāhijī’s text reads like a superb encyclopedia on the doctrines of the Persian Sufi tradition as it had fully coalesced in the later medieval period. Most readers of Lāhijī’s commentary would no doubt agree with Toshihiko Izutsu’s view that Lāhijī’s magnum opus is “one of the most lucid, systematic expositions of Sufi philosophy written in Persian”.³⁴⁴ This particular quality of Lāhijī’s work may have also contributed to its continued popularity amongst generations of Sufi readers within Iran, even up to the present day. Lāhijī’s work has historically been read by its readers in two main ways. First, as a commentary that supplements the original and classical text of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*. Secondly, as an independent and encyclopedic work of Persian Sufi doctrine and thought. It is with the second approach that we intend to study and analyse the magnum opus of Lāhijī in the following chapters of this thesis—as an independent work worthy of research. By doing so, we will reveal the vital place that Lāhijī’s commentary occupies within the canon of Persian Sufi literature, as a historically significant work of Sufism written in Persian that has transmitted to future generations of Sufis much of the medieval heritage of the theoretical Persian Sufi tradition.

³⁴³ For a sample of the love-inspired prose of Maybudī, Ahmad Sam‘ānī, as well as Ahmad Ghazālī that may have influenced Lāhijī’s own prose-style when discoursing on matters related to passionate divine and human love, see Chittick, *Divine Love*, 311-338.

³⁴⁴ Izutsu, Toshihiko, “The Paradox of Light and Darkness in the *Garden of Mysteries* of Shabastari.” In *Creation and the Timeless Order of Things: Essays in Islamic Mystical Philosophy* (White Cloud Press: Ashland, Oregon, 1994), 39.

Chapter Five

A Biographical Sketch of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ebn Yaḥyā Lāhījī

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ebn Yaḥyā Lāhījī Gīlānī, sometimes referred to simply as “Lāhījī” or his pen name “Asīrī”, was born in 840/1436-1437 in Lāhījān, a city within Gīlān Province of northwestern Iran.³⁴⁵ Not much is known about Lāhījī, despite being the author of the most popular and systematic commentary written on the *Gulshan-e Rāz*, and the most sought-after *khalīfa* of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh. Available sources provide scant details on this influential Persian Sufi figure of the later fifteenth century. Still, we will attempt to use the available primary and secondary sources to provide a biographical sketch as accurately as we can.

In his *Maṣnavī* poem the *Asrār al-Shuhūd* (“The Divine Mysteries of Witnessing”), Lāhījī says that after becoming afflicted with the pain of passionate love (*dard-e ‘eshq*) from an early age, he yearned to find a spiritual guide from one of the *abdāls* (“substitutes”) of God. Hearing about Seyyed Nūrbakhsh, who was staying in Gīlān during that time, he intended to visit this famous Sufi master and follow the way of Sufism under his spiritual guidance. He then left his home province of Lāhījān in the company of two people who became his companions on the road to Nūrbakhsh.³⁴⁶ If we accept Lāhījī’s own words that he met Nūrbakhsh in the year 849/1445, then Lāhījī would have only been between the ages of 9-10 when he met Nūrbakhsh.

³⁴⁵ Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī, “Lāhījī.” In *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012), XXXIX.

³⁴⁶ Lāhījī, *Asrār al-Shuhūd*, 252-70. Taken from Khāleghī & ‘Effat, “Lāhījī,” XXXIX.

While this is no doubt possible, it was still an extremely young age for anyone to decide to renounce the world and devote himself sincerely to the path of Sufism. Lāhijī then moved to Rayy, which was the permanent residence of Nūrbakhsh during the final years of his life, and states that he was in the continuous service of Nūrbakhsh for 16 years.³⁴⁷ Because of the abundance and intensity of the spiritual states and mystical events that he experienced in devotion to his Sufi master, he received permission from Nūrbakhsh on three separate occasions to guide other disciples according to the Sufi practices and teachings of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*.³⁴⁸

The Iranian historian Zabih-Allāh Ṣafā states that since Nūrbakhsh passed away in the year 869/1465, the total amount of years that Lāhijī actually spent in the company of Nūrbakhsh must have been twenty altogether. Or if we accept the words of Lāhijī instead—that it was in fact sixteen years that he spent in close service to Nūrbakhsh—then Lāhijī must have left the presence of Nūrbakhsh four years before the latter’s death, whereupon he emigrated to Shīrāz and spent the rest of his life devoting himself to propagating the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* amongst the inhabitants of Shīrāz and the surrounding province of Fārs under his own spiritual authority and guidance as a qualified Sufi shaykh.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Seyyed ‘Alī al-Dawūd, “Muqaddama.” In *Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ebn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, Asrār al-Shuhūd* (Tehran: Pejūhesghā ‘Alūm-e Ensānī va Matāla‘āt-e Farhangī. 1388/2009), IV. Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh was the founder of the sub-branch of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*, which in turn was an off-shoot of the Hamadānī line of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa* that was established by ‘Alī Hamadānī. The Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* was the product of an internal schism that occurred within the community of the Kubrawīya-Hamadānīya dervishes surrounding Khwāja Ishāq Khuttalānī (d. 826/1423) within the early fifteenth century. Khuttalānī himself was the foremost *khalīfa* and spiritual successor to ‘Alī Hamadānī. Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh not only proclaimed himself as being the long-awaited Imām Mahdī to Khuttalānī’s Sufi community, but was also a rival to Sayyed ‘Abdallāh al-Barzishābādī in their opposing claims to being the true successors to Khwāja Ishāq Khuttalānī and ‘Alī Hamadānī of the Kubrawīya *silṣila*. For more details on the early historical accounts of this internal schism that occurred within the Sufi community surrounding Khwāja Ishāq Khuttalānī that eventually resulted in the emergence of the Nūrbakhshīya branch of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*, see Devin Deweese, “The Eclipse of the Kubrawīyah in Central Asia.” *Iranian Studies* 21, no. 1/2 (1988): 55-63. For more on the life, Sufi thought and messianic claims of Lāhijī’s Sufi master, Nūrbakhsh, see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 29-160.

³⁴⁸ Dawūd, “Muqaddama,” XV-XVI. In the final sections of his commentary on the *Gulshan* Lāhijī provides the full *Ijazāh* written by Nūrbakhsh, permitting Lāhijī to guide others on the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* according to the spiritual methodology of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*. For more information, see Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ebn Yaḥyā Lāhijī. *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Ridā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012), 586-88.

³⁴⁹ Zabih-Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-e Adabīyāt dar Irān: Volume IV* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Ferdūs, 1363/1984), 529-30.

Because Lāhijī spent a significant amount of time in the presence of Nūrbakhsh before the later's death, he was considered one of the most senior and experienced disciples and *khalīfas* of Nūrbakhsh.³⁵⁰ After the passing of Nūrbakhsh, Lāhijī, along with Nūrbakhsh's son and official successor, Shāh Qāsem Fayzbakhsh (d. 919/1513-14), became the two most sought-after shaykhs of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* throughout Iran.³⁵¹ While Lāhijī took on the responsibility of spreading the *ṭarīqa* throughout the Fārs province in southern Iran from his *khānaqāh* in Shīrāz, Fayzbakhsh continued spreading the *ṭarīqa* in northern and eastern Iran.³⁵² Shams al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 933/1526) was another competent disciple of Nūrbakhsh who transplanted the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* in Kashmir in the late fifteenth century, and who spent a number of years at Lāhijī's *khānaqāh* in Shīrāz. 'Irāqī states that Lāhijī was the most sought out shaykh of the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* during this later period of the *ṭarīqa*'s history. Lāhijī was also known to have initiated disciples into the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* on a far more casual basis than the shaykhs for other Sufi *ṭarīqas*, a practice for which he received criticism on a number of occasions.³⁵³

The *khānaqāh* that Lāhijī established in Shīrāz was called the *Nūriya*. The *Nūriya khānaqāh* was constructed to enable the dervishes under Lāhijī's spiritual guidance to take periodical retreats according to the customs of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*.³⁵⁴ According to the Safavid historian and religious scholar, Nūrullāh Shūshtārī, Lāhijī soon became a famous resident of the city of Shīrāz and was regularly visited by the city's Sufis, religious scholars, philosophers and even the ruling elites. Davānī, Maybudī and Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī (d. 949/1542) all paid Lāhijī numerous visits at his *khānaqāh* in Shīrāz.³⁵⁵ Lāhijī spent

³⁵⁰ Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-e nazm o nasr*, I: 319. Taken from Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XXXIX.

³⁵¹ Dawūd, "Muqaddama," IV.

³⁵² Dawūd, "Muqaddama," VI-VIII. Tabrīz, then the capital city of the Āq Quyunlū empire, also became one of the major centres of the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* during the latter half of the fifteenth century, until the Safavid era. For more details, see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 167-173.

³⁵³ Kasmīrī, *Tuhfat al-aḥbāb*, 36-37. Taken from Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 173.

³⁵⁴ Shūshtārī, *Majāles al-mu'menīn*, II:156. Taken from Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XXXIX-XL. According to Nūrullāh Shūshtārī, the *Nūriya khānaqāh* was bestowed upon Lāhijī as a *waqf* endowment by the ruler of Shīrāz at the time.

³⁵⁵ Shūshtārī, *Majāles al-mu'menīn*, II:150-51. Taken from Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XL. According to Shūshtārī in his *Majāles al-mu'menīn* ("Assembly of the Faithful Believers"), before entering into Lāhijī's presence at his *khānaqāh*, Davānī would always first rub the dust of the threshold of Lāhijī's residence upon his own eyes and face, as a way of showing respect to Lāhijī as a living Sufi saint and Friend of God. Dashtakī was a well-known philosopher and religious scholar of Shīrāz during the Āq Quyunlū and Savāfid period. For more on Dashtakī, see

43 years of his life in the city, where he was eventually buried within his *Nūrīya khānaqāh* in the year 912/1507.³⁵⁶

Other than his years spent in Lāhījān, Rayy, and Shīrāz, sources inform us that Lāhījī also went on Hajj after firmly establishing himself and the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*.³⁵⁷ On his return journey from the Hajj he stopped in the town Zabīd, located in Yemen. When a Yemeni father and son, both Sufis from that area, heard that Lāhījī was stopping over in Zabīd, they rushed to visit this famed Sufi master in order to be blessed by his spiritual presence. After many conversations on the divine secrets of the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*, Lāhījī himself bestowed upon them *kherqas* (Sufi robes of initiation) from his *silsila*; and wrote out an *Ijazāh* in Arabic authorizing them to initiate and guide others upon the Sufi way; this being in accordance with the Sufi methodology of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*.³⁵⁸ Lāhījī also at one time visited the city of Tabrīz, and resided there for a period of six months.³⁵⁹

After completing his commentary on the *Gulshan-e Rāz*, Lāhījī reportedly sent a copy to Jāmī. After taking some time to read it, Jāmī sent a short *rubāʿī* in reply praising the work and its author:

Oh your poverty bestows light upon the Lords of Need

Flourishing in joy from the thoughts of your spring, the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

Throw one gaze towards the direction of my copper heart.

It may be that I take the way towards the Divine Realities, away from illusions.³⁶⁰

Reza Pourjavady. *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran: Najm Al-Din Mamud Al-Nayrizi and His Writings Islamic Philosophy, Theology & Science: Texts & Studies* v. 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 24-32.

³⁵⁶ Shūshtārī, *Majāles al-mu'menīn*, II:156. Taken from Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhījī", XL.

³⁵⁷ Dawūd, "Muqaddama," VI.

³⁵⁸ Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhījī", XL.

³⁵⁹ Ibid. According to Bashir's research on the activity of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* after the death of Nūrbakhsh, "circumstantial evidence suggests that Tabrīz was one of the most active centres of Nūrbakhshī activity in the first half-century following Nūrbakhsh's death... Muḥammad Alvandī, a contender for the position of Nūrbakhsh's successor, visited the city at some point in his life, and disciples initiated by him in the Nūrbakhshī path were prominent members of the local Sufi community." Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 167. Since Lāhījī himself spent half a year in Tabrīz, this seems to indicate a growing community of Nūrbakhshī dervishes within that city during the latter half of the fifteenth century. It is therefore not beyond the realm of speculation to suggest that Lāhījī—as the most famous of Nūrbakhsh's *khalīfas*—may have played a significant role in the spread of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* within the city of Tabrīz during the Āq Quyunlū era.

³⁶⁰ Dawūd, "Muqaddamah," XII, and Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistārī* (Guildford: Curzon Press, 1995), 15.

Besides his commentary on the *Gulshan-e Rāz*, Lāhijī wrote numerous other works on Sufism; the most important of which was his *dīvān* collection of *ghazals* written under his pen name, Asīrī. This *dīvān* consists of 522 ghazals, one mastzād, three *tarjī'-bands*, seventy-seven *rubā'īāts* and three *takbayts*.³⁶¹ Lāhijī's second most well-known work of Sufism was his *maṣnavī* poem the *Asrār al-shuhūd*. It consists of three thousand verses discoursing on mystical subjects of Sufism, especially on the realised, experiential knowledge of God ("*ma'rifat*") and *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("Unity of Being").³⁶² In poetic style, the *Asrār al-shuhūd* closely follows the structure of Rūmī's *Maṣnavī*, a text Lāhijī also quotes extensively from in his commentary on the *Gulshan*.³⁶³ Another work, the *Muntakhab-e Maṣnavī ye-Mūlavī* ("Selections from the *Maṣnavī* of Mūlavī"), was written by Lāhijī to explain some of the more difficult passages of the *Maṣnavī* in poetic verses.³⁶⁴ The existence of this work, along with his extensive quotation of the *Maṣnavī* in his commentary on the *Gulshan*, reveals Lāhijī's life-long devotion to Rūmī. It also shows the deep influence of Rūmī's Sufi poetry upon Lāhijī's personal style of Sufism, which could be quite passionate in tone at times.³⁶⁵

The Question of Confessional Ambiguity in Relation to Lāhijī

A superficial look at the available evidence suggests that Lāhijī was a Shī'ite, but a closer interrogation complicates this assumption. Although there is evidence that Lāhijī may have been a devout Shī'ite, to assert that Lāhijī was a practicing Twelver Shī'ite—like the overwhelming majority of Iranians today—was quite unlikely and difficult to prove based on Lāhijī's written works.³⁶⁶ Since Lāhijī lived in the late fifteenth century when "confessional ambiguity" still characterised the religious-social milieu in Iran, and where the traditional

³⁶¹ Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XLII. This *dīvān* collection of Lāhijī's Sufi poetry has been edited and published in modern times within Iran by Barāt Zanjānī, see more in Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad 'ebn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Dīvān-e ash'ār va rasā'el-e Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Asīrī Lāhijī: shāreh Gulshan-e Rāz* (Tehran: *musesa-ye matāle'āt-e eslāmī-ye dāneshghā-ye mak gīl*, 1357: 1978).

³⁶² Khāleghī & Karbāsī, "Lāhijī," XLII. This particular work has also been edited and published in modern times within Iran as well. For more details, see Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad 'ebn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Asrār al-Shuhūd*, edited by Seyyed 'Alī āl-Dawūd. (Tehran: Pejūhesghā 'alūm-e ensānī va matāle'āt-e farhangī, 1388/2009).

³⁶³ Dawūd, "Muqaddama," XX-XXI. And Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XLII.

³⁶⁴ Dawūd, "Muqaddama," XXII. And Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XLII.

³⁶⁵ Dawūd, "Muqaddama," XXII.

³⁶⁶ Dawūd, "Muqaddama," XVIII.

demarcations between Sunnīsm and Shī'īsm were porous and far more fluid than they were in preceding ages, we should take the opinions of later scholars who are convinced of Lāhījī's adherence to the Twelver Shī'ī faith with a degree of skepticism. For it may have also been the case that Lāhījī—like the majority of Persian Sufis and Sunnīs at the time—was merely giving expression to feelings of 'Alīd-loyalism, which as we know from the primary sources was an all-pervasive phenomenon in the collective religious culture of Iranians during the later medieval period.

Most of today's available information concerning the real confessional identity of Lāhījī comes from Nūrullāh Shūshtārī. Shūshtārī was himself an initiate of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*.³⁶⁷ In his hagiographical account of Lāhījī in his text *Majāles al-mu'menīn*, Shūshtārī relates a story narrated by the grandson of Lāhījī, Abū 'l-Qāsem Baṣīr:

Among the followers of Lāhījī was a student who was a Sunnī of the Ḥanafī *maḏhab*. He complained to Lāhījī that he wasn't experiencing any spiritual openings. Lāhījī said this to him, "you must convert to the Shāfe'ī *maḏhab* so that spiritual openings (*futūḥāt*) may be realised for you". When he converted to the Shāfe'ī *maḏhab*, and after a period of performing some mortifications and ascetic exercises, and he was still not experiencing any spiritual openings or states, Lāhījī then encouraged him to convert to the Shī'ī *maḏhab*.³⁶⁸

The second story narrated by Shūshtārī occurs after the conquest of the Fārs province and Shīrāz by Shāh Ismā'īl during the early days of the Safāwīd conquest of Iran. Lāhījī was reportedly famous for wearing black clothing during his lifetime. After Shāh Ismā'īl had conquered Shīrāz, he sought to be honored by the presence of this famed Sufi master by paying Lāhījī a personal visit. Shāh Ismā'īl then questioned Lāhījī on the exact reason why he always wore black clothing, to which he replied that mourning for that beloved master (Imām Ḥusayn) would never leave his robes until the day of judgment.³⁶⁹ In the opinion of Seyyed Hossein Nasr,

³⁶⁷ For more information on Shūshtārī and his connection to the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*, see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 48-56.

³⁶⁸ Shūshtārī, *Majāles al-mu'menīn*, II: 153. Taken from Dawūd, "Muqaddama," XVII.

³⁶⁹ Shūshtārī, *Majāles al-mu'menīn*, II:152-53. Taken from Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhījī," XL-XLI. Ibn al-Karbālā'ī narrates the same story but occurring between Shāh Ismā'īl and a Nūrbakhshī Sufi by the name Muḥammad siyāpūsh,

there may have also been a more esoteric reason for Lāhijī's black clothing. In the scheme of spiritual progression within the cosmological-metaphysical world-view of the Sufis of the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*, the witnessing of black light also signified the realisation of the highest spiritual station attainable for the Sufi. For the witnessing of black light meant the Sufi wayfarer's annihilation and realisation of the Divine Essence.³⁷⁰

One problem with the views of those who claim that Lāhijī was a Twelver Shī'ite, was the fact that Lāhijī spent a significant amount of his life in Shīrāz—43 years to be exact. Supposing Lāhijī was a Twelver Shī'ite and not a Sunnī, why then did he choose Shīrāz as his new home, making it the base of his operations in spreading the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* throughout Iran, even though Shīrāz during the entirety of the medieval period was inhabited mainly by Shāfe'ite Sunnīs?³⁷¹ Why did Lāhijī not immigrate to Persian cities where the inhabitants were his co-religionists, like Qum, Kāshān or Sabzevār? That is, if he was indeed a Twelver Shī'ite like some later—mostly Iranian—scholars claimed that he was.³⁷² Since most of the evidence that these scholars rely on for Lāhijī's affiliation to Twelver Shī'ism are based upon the writings of Shūshtārī, we should be skeptical of Shūshtārī's vigorous assertions that Lāhijī was a Twelver Shī'ite. Shūshtārī himself claims that most of the great masters of the Persian Sufi tradition who lived in the medieval period were Twelver Shī'ites doing *taqīyya*. Though he makes this bold claim without any evidence in support.³⁷³

which occurred in 1501 at the time of Shāh Ismā'īl's conquest of Tabrīz. For more details see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 167.

³⁷⁰ S.H. Nasr, "Maḥmūd Shabistarī and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī." In *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 477. For more information concerning the different colours of light witnessed by the Sufi wayfarer—according to the teachings of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*—see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 167 and 145-56.

³⁷¹ For more information on the history of Sunnism in Shīrāz, and the historical perception of other Iranians that Shīrāz was a sacred Sunnī city, see Denise Aigle, "Among Saints and Poets: The Spiritual Topography of Medieval Shiraz." In *Cities of Medieval Iran*, edited by David Durand-Guédy, Roy P. Mottahedeh and Jürgen Paul (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 142-76.

³⁷² Seyyed 'Alī āl-Dawūd who edited and printed a modern edition of Lāhijī's *Asrār al-shohūd*, believes there is no doubt that Lāhijī was a Twelver Shī'ite. He bases his claim upon the abundance of praise of Imām 'Alī that can be found throughout Lāhijī's dīwān collection of *ghazals*. Dawūd, "Muqaddama," XVII-XX. Āgā Samī'ī, another Iranian scholar in his introduction to his edited, printed edition of Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan-e Rāz*, states a contrary opinion and believes that from the available textual evidences, Lāhijī was really a Sunnī. Khāleghī & 'Effat, "Lāhijī," XL.

³⁷³ Ata Anzali, *"Mysticism" in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, S.C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 70. And Reza Tabandeh, "Enraptured Sufi and Shi'ite Philosopher: Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh,

Since Lāhījī was born in the city of Lāhījān in the first half of the fifteenth century, this little detail may provide a clue to Lāhījī's true confessional identity. Lāhījān, which is situated in the eastern part of Gīlān province, was undoubtedly known to be one of the centres of the Shī'ī faith during the medieval period.³⁷⁴ It is, therefore, quite possible that Lāhījī was indeed a Shī'īte. The problem is that the Shī'ītes of Māzandarān and Eastern Gīlān were mostly Shī'ītes of the Zaydī branch—not of the Twelver branch which most Iranians are today.³⁷⁵ Indeed, the Twelver branch of Shī'ism was not introduced into Lāhījān and Gīlān until much later, during the reign of Shāh 'Abbās (r. 1588-1629)—nearly a century after Lāhījī passed away.³⁷⁶

Shahzad Bashir, in his research concerning the confessional identity of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh and his followers, does not consider Nūrbakhsh and Lāhījī to have been Twelver Shī'ītes. Rather, he argues they were primarily Sufis of a profoundly esoteric and mystical bent who wished to bridge the gap between Shī'ism and Sunnism. The Nūrbakhshī Sufis combined elements from both of the two main branches of Islam when constructing their unique and heterodox way of Sufism, which, according to Nūrbakhsh's own writings, was the result of mystical revelations he had received from the realm of the unseen, confirming his status as the long-appointed Imām Mahdī for the entire Muslim community.³⁷⁷

We will look more closely at the confessional ambiguity of Lāhījī's religious identity in Chapter 8 of this thesis. This will be done by examining Lāhījī's own theological positions in

Champion of Theological Reconciliation between Sufism and Shi'ism." In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn (Irvine: Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2020), 390-92.

³⁷⁴ For more details concerning the history of the Zaydī sect of Shī'ism in Gīlān province, see Farhad Daftary, *Ismaili History and Intellectual Traditions* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018), 49-53.

³⁷⁵ Western Gīlān during the medieval period was mostly inhabited by Shāf'īte Sunnīs, and a small minority of Ḥanbalīs as well. Some famous Sunnī traditionalist scholars also hailed from this area. For more details, see Wilferd Madelung, "GĪLĀN iv. History in the Early Islamic Period," In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. X, Fasc. 6, (2001): 634-635, accessed November 30, 2018. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gilan-iv>.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 77-78, 283. For more on the Sufi teachings and messianic claims of Nūrbakhsh, see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 76-160. This may have also been one of the reasons why Jāmī refused to write a hagiographical account of Nūrbakhsh within his *Nafahāt al-uns*. In his own writing Jāmī—as a staunch and devout Sunnī—displays a negative and even hostile attitude towards the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa* because of the perceived elements of Shī'ism that had infiltrated and corrupted the Sufi Ways and teachings of the Nūrbakhshī dervishes. For more, see Hamid Algar, *Jami: Makers of Islamic Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94, 106. And Sajjad H Rizvi, "Before the Safavid-Ottoman Conflict." In *Jāmī in Regional Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 231-32 & 248-49.

regards to the historical debate of free will and predestination as it can be found in his commentary on the *Gulshan*.

Chapter Six

Waḥdat al-Wujūd in the *Sharḥ-e-Gulshan-e Rāz*: Lāhijī's Sufi Metaphysics and Cosmology

Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan-e Rāz* is fundamentally an Akbarī text. Therefore, it can be categorised with other Sufi works from the later medieval period as a commentary upon an older text of the Persian Sufi tradition, but its commentary is steeped in the terminology and ideas of the Akbarī tradition. The central pillar of this distinct intellectual school of thought within the wider Sufi tradition is undoubtedly *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("The Oneness or Unity of Being"). *Waḥdat al-wujūd* serves as the doctrinal axis upon which the entire system of Lāhijī's Sufi teachings revolves, especially as they are articulated in his commentary on the *Gulshan*. Thus, gaining a deeper understanding of Lāhijī's Sufi worldview would be impossible without analyzing this specific Akbarī idea in depth. This chapter will then be devoted to Lāhijī's discourse of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as it can be found throughout the pages of his commentary. Undoubtedly it would be impossible to sufficiently analyse this central idea of Lāhijī's Sufi doctrine within the space of a single chapter. The aim of this chapter is therefore to analyse the essential principles that make up part of Lāhijī's discourse on *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This is a necessary endeavor before we can further contextualise Lāhijī's text and his historical role within the broader history of developments occurring within the Persian Sufi tradition. Since Lāhijī's writing on the teachings of the Akbarīs in his commentary on the *Gulshan* is written almost entirely in Persian, his text has played a significant role in developing the body of literature of the Akbarī tradition within Iran and the Persianate world in the later medieval and

early modern periods. And this is something we must remind ourselves of when progressing through this chapter. That the appearance and circulation of numerous Persian texts that was devoted to expounding upon the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period certainly left a lasting impact upon the Sufi communities in Iran. Lāhijī commentary is indeed one of the most influential of these Akbarī-related works that were written in Persian during this period under review. Lāhijī presents Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings in a systematic and rational manner within his extensive commentary on the *Gulshan*, which soon achieved a celebratory status even during Lāhijī’s own lifetime.

6.1 The Two Fundamental Aspects and Degrees of the One Eternal Wujūd of God according to Lāhijī

Before laying out Lāhijī’s discourse on *wahdat al-wujūd*, we first need to take a brief look at Lāhijī’s understanding of the One Real *Wujūd*, which is equivalent to God’s *Wujūd* and belongs to Him alone.³⁷⁸ Lāhijī and other Akbarīs like him define the Absolute *Wujūd* of God from two perspectives. In other words, we cannot gain a true understanding of the Reality of God’s *Wujūd*—and the possible *wujūd* of the creatures—if we do not first clarify these two fundamental aspects of God’s *Wujūd*, which forever remains one, pure, unique and unified, without any plurality or multiplicity whatsoever. The first aspect that we need to understand of God’s Absolute *Wujūd* is that of His nonentification and utter transcendence over the created cosmos.³⁷⁹ In other words, God in this specific ontological degree of His Absolute and Pure *Wujūd* is not qualified by any of His Names and Attributes, and none of the fixed entities have yet to be articulated as the eternal objects of His Knowledge in the Presence of Divine

³⁷⁸ Throughout my thesis I have decided to keep the term *wujūd* without any English translations. Although other scholars who have worked in the field of Ibn al-‘Arabī studies are correct in their choice of translations for this particular term, which they have rendered as “being” or “existence”, yet according to Chittick “the primary sense of the term is ‘finding’ or ‘to be found,’ and Ibn ‘Arabī never forgets this. The difficulty of providing an appropriate translation in English is compounded by the fact that terms such as *being* and *existence* have been understood by Western thinkers in a variety of ways.” William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 15. Sometimes I may translate this term as “being” or “existence”, depending upon the particular context, but only rarely.

³⁷⁹ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ibn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012)(From now on it will be cited as *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*), 73.

Knowledge.³⁸⁰ This particular aspect of God's *Wujūd* remains forever concealed from the creatures, and His Essence or Self is never unveiled to any of his servants through a revelatory, mystical experience. Therefore, His Divine Essence (*dhāt*) never becomes an object of knowledge or witnessing. Only God has any knowledge of His own Essence and Self, and it is this eternal unknowability of the Divine Essence that is the fundamental marker and distinguisher between the servants and the Real ("*Ḥaqq*").³⁸¹

The second and just as equally important aspect of God's *Wujūd* is situated beneath the first ontological degree of Absolute *Wujūd*, and this is the first entification that the One Absolute *Wujūd* of God enters into and entifies Himself with.³⁸² Lāhijī terms this degree of God's *Wujūd*—which is still at the level of the Divine Reality—as “The inclusive Unity of the Names” (*wāḥedeyyat*).³⁸³ In other words, this is the particular ontological degree where God's Absolute *Wujūd* is qualified with and determined by His Universal Names and Attributes. This Presence of Divine Unity is also the ontological source for everything that comes into being within the manifest cosmos. Hence this level of God's Unity of the Names is the basis for the multiplicity of the creatures and worlds that exist within the manifest cosmos.³⁸⁴ It is also in this degree that the “fixed entities” (*a'yān-e thābeta*)—as the eternal archetypes for Manifest *Wujūd*—are articulated and entified in the Presence of His Divine Knowledge (*ḥuṣūr-e 'elm*); yet at this level they are still considered to be non-existent.³⁸⁵ Whenever the *kalām* scholars, philosophers, and Sufis discourse on God's *Wujūd*—especially in its relation to the creatures and the cosmos through his many different Names and Attributes—they are discussing this particular aspect and ontological degree of God's *Wujūd*. For whatever we can know of God's

³⁸⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 5 & 194.

³⁸¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 133-35, 527.

³⁸² Within Lāhijī's Sufi cosmology and metaphysics, Absolute *Wujūd* is synonymous with the Divine Essence. According to Chittick, “on the highest level, *wujūd* is the absolute and nondelimited reality of God, the ‘Necessary Being’ (*wājib al-wujūd*) that cannot not exist. In this sense, *wujūd* designates the essence of God or of the Real (*dhāt al-ḥaqq*), the only reality that is real in every respect. On lower levels, *wujūd* is the underlying substance of ‘everything other than God’ (*mā siwā Allāh*)—which is how Ibn Arabi and others define the ‘cosmos’ or ‘universe’ (*al-'ālam*). Hence, in a secondary meaning, the term *wujūd* is used as a shorthand to refer to the whole cosmos; to everything that exists. It can also be employed to refer to the existence of each and everything that is found in the universe.” Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 16.

³⁸³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 461.

³⁸⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 461, 500.

³⁸⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 180, 304.

Reality and *Wujūd* can only be entified as the Divinity qualified by the different Names and Attributes. This level of the Divinity also serves as a veil over the Pure, Divine Essence, which Lāhijī defines at times throughout his text as the supreme *barzakh* situated between the transcendent, nondelimited Essence and the manifest cosmos.³⁸⁶

Although the object of Lāhijī's theoretical Sufi discourse is mostly the One Unified *Wujūd* of God, he does not clarify whether he is taking the first or second aspect of God's *Wujūd* as the object of his metaphysical and mystical discourse. And throughout the commentary, he most frequently applies the term *Ḥaqq* ("The Real") and *Allāh* when referring to God.³⁸⁷ In these particular instances, he is simultaneously referring to the level of the Divine Essence and the Divinity qualified by the Names and Attributes. The solution to this constant ambiguity is to remember that the Divine Essence and Self also possesses a Name that alludes to it specifically, just as the other Names of God allude to and signify a particular aspect and perfection of God's Absolute *Wujūd*. In this instance, this would be the name *Hū* ("He"), or sometimes he applies the term *Huveyyat* ("Divine Identity").³⁸⁸ *Allāh* ("God") is considered His greatest Name for it is the all-comprehensive Name that comprehends within itself all of the Names of God, even the Names that signifies his Divine Essence.³⁸⁹ We must also remember that Lāhijī makes clear time and time again throughout his commentary that whenever we speak of God as qualified by one of His Names or Attributes, or in regards to his pure, transcendent and unknowable Essence, we are not talking about two different things. We are still discoursing on the same One *Wujūd* of the Real, for there can never be any real, concrete distinction and separation between these two different aspects of God's Being. The distinction between these two fundamental aspects of God's *Wujūd* can only be intelligible.³⁹⁰ Although it is necessary for the seeker to keep this

³⁸⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 114, 494.

³⁸⁷ The Real (*Ḥaqq*) is one of the Names of God in Islam, and it means that God in His *Wujūd* is the ultimate reality and truth. Lāhijī then follows Ibn al-'Arabī's lead as well as his later followers and commentators who prefer using this particular term when denoting God throughout their metaphysical discourse, for as Chittick states "Ibn al-'Arabī and many other Muslim authorities consider the two Names of God, *Allāh* and *al-haqq*, to be synonymous with each other and employ them interchangeably. Often Ibn al-'Arabī will use the term *Allāh* rather than *al-haqq* to call attention to the specific properties of the Name *Allāh* itself, rather than the Reality which is named." William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 132. Lāhijī also does the same throughout his Sufi discourse.

³⁸⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 194.

³⁸⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 425.

³⁹⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 179.

distinction in the back of their mind in their quest to gain true, realised knowledge of God's *Wujūd*. Otherwise, the spiritual seeker will not be able to realise true and comprehensive knowledge of God's Reality—which is also the main goal of the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*.³⁹¹

To clarify this matter even further, whenever Lāhijī is discoursing upon the true nature of the relationship between the cosmos, the creatures, and God's Absolute *Wujūd* (and this is what the whole matter of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is all about), he obviously has in mind the Divine Reality of God as determined in the first level of His Entification (*ta'ayyun*) and self-disclosure (*tajallī*). Whenever Lāhijī states that God can be witnessed and known through the mystical experiences of unveiling that occurs for the Sufi wayfarer, he is alluding to God's *Wujūd* in His second aspect as a Divinity. Whenever Lāhijī states the fact that God can never truly be known and witnessed through unveiling, he is definitely referring to God in his first aspect as the Essence that is undetermined, undefined, and nonentified (*bī ta'ayyun*). It is necessary to keep these two important distinctions and perspectives of God's *Wujūd* in mind in the following chapters when we delve deeper into Lāhijī's Sufi metaphysics and ontology. For without keeping these necessary and intelligible distinctions of God's One Unified *Wujūd* in mind, it may seem like Lāhijī is constantly contradicting himself, which may, in turn, lead to a certain amount of confusion for the reader. For Lāhijī can state that God's *Wujūd* is definitely one thing according to mystical, realised knowledge (*ma'rifat*) and unveiling (*kashf*), and then in the next paragraph or sentence negate that very same quality or description from God's *Wujūd* or Reality.

6.2 The Self-Emanation of the One Absolute Wujūd of God and the Creation of the Cosmos and the Possible Entities

Although the Divine Essence of God is completely pure and free from any relationship with the manifest cosmos and the possible entities, the descending degrees of the self-emanation of *Wujūd* paradoxically begins at this very ontological degree of the Absolute Divine Essence.³⁹² The whole process of unfolding of *Wujūd*, and therefore the unfolding stages of creation which eventually concludes in the material world of the corporeal bodies and the human species,

³⁹¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 206-7.

³⁹² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 461.

begins with what Lāhijī and the followers of the Akbarī school term as “the most holy self-disclosure” (*tajallī-ye eqdas*). This specific Akbarī term alludes to the metaphysical phenomena of the Divine Essence of God disclosing the infinite potentialities of His own Divine Reality to His Self, as a result of knowing and realising His own Self and Essence.³⁹³

Proceeding from this first self-disclosure of the Essence, the *Wujūd* of God descends from the degree of his pure and transcendent Essence, or from the degree of “Exclusive Oneness of the Essence” (*aḥadeyyat*) to the lower and second degree of the “Inclusive Unity of the Names” (*wāḥedeyyat*), which is also the second ontological degree and the first entification of God’s Absolute *Wujūd*.³⁹⁴ In this ontological degree of the first entification of Absolute *Wujūd*, the different Names and Attributes of God are intelligibly distinguished from one another, each possessing different universal meanings and realities.³⁹⁵ This is also the degree where the relations between the Divine Names and Attributes are established with the immutable entities within the Presence of Divine Knowledge. These immutable entities—once they have entered into manifest *Wujūd*—serve as the receptacles that display the traces and

³⁹³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 98. This term is one of the fundamental principles of the Akbarī school of thought, and is usually paired with the term “the holy self-disclosure” (*tajallī-ye muqaddas*). Other followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī like Qaysarī use the terms “the most holy effusion” (*ḥayz-e eqdas*) and “holy effusion” (*ḥayz-e muqaddas*), which are practically interchangeable within the Akbarī tradition. The most holy self-disclosure or effusion is the first self-disclosure of the Divine Essence where the preparedness of the immutable entities are predetermined in the Presence of God’s Knowledge. The holy self-disclosure which comes after the first brings the immutable entities from the Presence of God’s Knowledge out into the realm of Manifest *Wujūd*, according to their innate preparedness and receptiveness to the effusion of the Real’s *Wuūd*, which was predetermined for them with the first and most Holy self-disclosure of the Essence. For more on these two terms, see Ibn al-‘Arabī, and Caner K. Dagli, *The Ringstones of Wisdom: Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam* (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), 4-5.

³⁹⁴ *Aḥadeyyat* and *wāḥedeyyat* are two terms that are usually paired together and can be found in most Akbarī texts, for they signify the two fundamental aspects of the One *Wujūd* of God as Divine Realities. Chittick prefers to translate these two terms as “Unity” and “One-in-Allness” respectively. While Shahabeddin Mesbah prefers to translate them as “Exclusive Unity” and “Inclusive Unity”, and Mohammed Rustom translates these two terms as “Exclusive Oneness” and “Inclusive Oneness” respectively. The reason I have chosen to translate *aḥadeyyat* and *wāḥedeyyat* as the “Exclusive Oneness of the Essence” and the “Inclusive Unity of the Names” is because the meaning of the first term (*aḥadeyyat*) signifies the Divine Reality of *Wujūd* in the aspect and degree of its pure Essence, which is completely free and pure from all of the Names, Attributes, Acts, relations and respects that will later come to define and qualify it in its descent into its First Entification. At the degree of *wāḥedeyyat*, the One *Wujūd* of the Real is now qualified by its various Names and Attributes; this is why I have translated this specific term as “the inclusive Unity of the Names”, because it is within this specific ontological degree of the Real’s *Wujūd* that the various Names and Attributes exist, not in the first and higher degree where only the Essence can be in its sheer Oneness. For more on these two terms, see Seyyed Shahabeddin Mesbahi, *Ibn ‘Arabī and Kubrawī Mystics: The Reception of the School of Ibn ‘Arabī by Kubrawī Mystics* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2019), 164-81.

³⁹⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 179.

effects of the Names and Attributes within the witnessed cosmos.³⁹⁶ Within this first self-disclosure and entification of the Absolute *Wujūd* of the Real, the “preparedness” (*este’dād*) of the possible entities to receive the effusion of *Wujūd* are also predetermined by God according to what their fixed, immutable essences demand from Him. So this degree of the Divine Reality, where God knows within Himself all of the infinite possibilities of his own realities which He will later manifest and self-disclose in the manifest cosmos—meaning His Names, Attributes, and Acts—is the level of the Divinity (*ulūheyyat*) and the “Inclusive Unity of the Names” (*wāḥedeyyat*).³⁹⁷

The third presence in this continuous unfolding and self-emanation of *Wujūd*, is the realm of the angelic spirits, pure intellects, and spiritual realities. This level of *Wujūd* comes into being with the creation of the First Intellect (or the Muḥammadan Reality) and the Universal Soul. The Sufis name this degree of *Wujūd* “the world of dominion” (*‘ālam-e malakūt*).³⁹⁸

After the world of dominion, the next realm that comes into being is the world of imagination (*‘ālam-e khayāl*). This Presence of *Wujūd* is also sometimes called by Lāhijī as the realm of the *barzakh*—for it is situated between the formless world of spiritual meanings and intellects and the dark, corporeal world of bodies.³⁹⁹ It is in this specific realm of the imagination where dreams and visions occur. It is this level of *Wujūd* where all human spirits will be transferred to, where they will rest in their graves until the Day of Resurrection after their deaths.⁴⁰⁰ Their good and evil deeds, habits, character traits, knowledge, and beliefs will be embodied in imaginal forms and witnessed by them there.⁴⁰¹ It is also the realm where the Day of Resurrection will occur, and where the different degrees of Paradise and Hell are

³⁹⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 434, 461.

³⁹⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 114, 462.

³⁹⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 22, 114.

³⁹⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 22, 114.

⁴⁰⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 116-17.

⁴⁰¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 440-44. Since Lāhijī follows closely Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings on the world of imagination and the otherworldly experiences that every human soul will experience in the *barzakh*, for more details concerning this specific issue, see more in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 70-72 & 97-123. And see also William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 331-70.

situated. Hence, all the otherworldly experiences of paradise and hellfire also occur within this particular realm of *Wujūd* as well.⁴⁰²

The final realm that comes into existence is the material world of corporeal bodies. This is the realm that humans currently occupy and which they can perceive in their waking state. This is also the world of the animal species, minerals, vegetables, heavenly bodies, and the sphere of the fixed stars.⁴⁰³

Throughout the unfolding and self-manifestation of God's One Infinite *Wujūd*, which results in the creation of the cosmos and the bringing of the possible entities out into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*, the *Wujūd* of God forever remains one and unified, and there is never any division or split that occurs in His One *Wujūd*.⁴⁰⁴ This means that the same One *Wujūd* of God is manifest in all realms of existence—the divine, spiritual, imaginative and corporeal—and it is only our own ignorance and heedlessness that posits a different *wujūd* for one realm of existence over another, or between two different creatures.⁴⁰⁵ According to Lāhijī's teachings, the *wujūd* of the angelic spirits, heavenly beings, animals, vegetables, minerals, human beings, jinns and demons are all one and the same. The only difference between them is their different levels of preparedness to manifest the various perfections of the One *Wujūd* of the Real through the forms of their own entities.⁴⁰⁶ In other words, the nearer a possible entity is

⁴⁰² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 113-17.

⁴⁰³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 22 & 139-156.

⁴⁰⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 9, 340.

⁴⁰⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 458, 549.

⁴⁰⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 349, 91. To make this particular aspect of Lāhijī's Sufi teachings easier to understand, let us use laymen terms. To use an everyday example, let's say one day we visit a park. At this park, before our vision we see numerous objects that we consider to be living and existing in their own unique manner. We may perceive different trees; numerous plants and flowers; the clouds drifting in the sky; birds; a dog with his owner; and other human beings going about their daily business. According to the perception of most ordinary people, we will assume that we and everything else before our vision each possess an individual existence that is different and separate from one another. And we believe this is the truth of the matter, yet according to Lāhijī and other followers of Ibn al-'Arabī this is not really the case, for in reality, there is only the One *Wujūd* of the Real who is perpetually self-disclosing Himself through the different entities that we perceive as different objects before our gaze. We—the viewer—and the different living objects before our gaze are nothing more than different loci-of-self-disclosure for the manifestation of God's *Wujūd*. What exists is God, not me nor the other things that we perceive right before us in this park. As Ibn al-'Arabī states in the *Fusūs*, "there is no closeness greater than His Selfhood being the very bodily parts and faculties of the slave. The slave is none other than these bodily parts and faculties. It is the Real witnessed in an imagined creature. In the eyes of the believers and the folk of unveiling and finding, creation is intelligible while the Real is sensible. As for those falling outside of these two classes, in their eyes the real is intelligible and creation witnessed." al-'Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 108-9.

situated to the Divine Presence, such as the First Intellect and the Universal Soul, the more luminous and subtle it is, and therefore the possible entities of this realm can be qualified with, and manifest more of, the different perfections and attributes of God's *Wujūd*. The more distant the possible entity is from the Divine Presence of God, such as the material world of the human and animal species, the more dark and dense it is, and therefore they manifest less of God's Attributes and perfections through their own entities.⁴⁰⁷ Lāhijī and the Akbarīs name the process of *Wujūd*'s unfolding and self-manifestation the "Breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas-e raḥmānī*). Lāhijī explains what this unique Akbarī term means within the framework of his Sufi cosmology, and its connection with the self-emanation schema of God's *Wujūd* soon becomes apparent:

The two worlds, meaning the immutable entities of all the existent things of the unseen (*ghayb*) and the world of the witnessed (*shahādat*), which they have also named those immutable entities as the intelligible forms of the Real, became differentiated and distinguished from one another through the second kind of self-disclosure of the Real—that of the "Inclusive Unity of the Names" (*wāḥedeyyat*) and of the "Divinity" (*ulūheyyat*). And this is the degree of descent from the higher degree of the Oneness of the Divine Essence (*aḥadeyyat-e dhāt*) into the [lower] degree of the Divine Names and Attributes (*martabe-ye asmā' va ṣefāt*). The summary of these words is this: that the Divine Essence of Oneness, because it demands the First Entification [of its own *Wujūd*], which is the all-comprehensive intermediary between the Necessary [*Wujūd*] and the possible things (*emkān*), [the degree of] the "Exclusive Oneness of the Essence" (*aḥadeyyat*) in respect to the Tasks of the Divine Names, then became the degree of the "Inclusive Unity of the Names" and the "Divinity". They also give that First Entification (*ta'ayyun-e avval*) various terms, like the "Universal Intellect" (*'aql-e kul*); "the Pen" (*qalam*); "the Preserved Tablet" (*lūḥ*); "the Universal Spirit" (*rūḥ-e a'zam*); "the Mother of the Books" (*umm al-ketāb*); and the "Muḥammadan Reality" (*ḥaqīqat-e muḥammadī*). Now the plurality of these Divine Names is in respect to the differences [that exist] amongst the Divine Attributes and all the entities of the unseen and the

⁴⁰⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 304-305 & 349-50.

world of the witnessed—which they also call the two worlds—is in accordance with the form of this First Entification, according to the distinction that is established for them within the Presence of the Divine Knowledge of the Real. So through this kind of self-disclosure of the Real, the Breath of the All-Merciful enters into manifestation. And the “Breath of the all-Merciful” (*nafas-e raḥmānī*) is another expression for the manifestation of the Real in the forms of the possible things. And this kind of self-disclosure of the Real is when *Wujūd* is infused upon all of the existent things. The First degree [of *Wujūd*] which accepts this Divine effusion is the First Entification.⁴⁰⁸

Lāhijī makes it apparent in the previous passage that the self-disclosure of God’s *Wujūd* into the entities of the possible things is synonymous with the Breath of the All-Merciful. This is the primordial Act of God during which He infuses the light of his own *Wujūd* upon the immutable entities, and brings them out into the light of Manifest Existence (*Wujūd-e khārejī*) from the darkness of nonexistence.⁴⁰⁹ In another passage, Lāhijī compares the bringing out into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* of the immutable possible entities to the formation and manifestation of words from the mouth of a human speaker with his breath. For just as the existence of human words are brought into being from the breath of the speaker, so too are the fixed, possible entities—which are the infinite words of God—brought out into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* from the darkness of nonexistence through the perpetual All-Merciful Breaths of the Real. And just as every formulated word by the human speaker is essentially an entification of his breaths—which is simply nothing more than air—so too are the possible entities of the cosmos the different and diverse entifications of the One *Wujūd* of the Real; or in other words, His All-

⁴⁰⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 5. All the passages that are directly quoted from Lāhijī’s text within this thesis are my own English translations, unless stated otherwise. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 3 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁴⁰⁹ This specific kind of nonexistence mentioned here must not be confused with absolute nonexistence, which is pure nothingness and which is situated opposite the Absolute *Wujūd* of God. This absolute nonexistence is also sometimes called the “impossible being” by Lāhijī and Ibn al-‘Arabī, for it can never come into Manifest Existence. The immutable entities on the other hand, in their being fixed within the Presence of God’s Knowledge before their eventual entrance into the cosmos, although non-existent in relation to the cosmos, do possess a kind of existence within the Presence of God’s Knowledge. This is why this realm is considered a relative nonexistence in contrast to the absolute nonexistence of the impossible. For the immutable entities in the Presence of God’s Knowledge are the eternal objects of His Knowledge and they are forever witnessed by Him within His own Divine Consciousness and Self. For more on the difference between the relative nonexistence of the immutable entities and the absolute nonexistence of the impossible being, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 86-88.

Merciful Breaths.⁴¹⁰ Therefore, the Breath of the All-Merciful within Lāhijī's Sufi cosmology is understood to be the underlying universal substance of all existence, where the different entities of the cosmos are simply different entifications of this one underlying universal substance.

According to Lāhijī's Sufi cosmology and metaphysics, the beginning of the exhalation of the Breath of the All-Merciful first emerges from the depths of the unfathomable and hidden Essence of the Real. It then descends into the second ontological degree of the First Entification, where the Real *Wujūd*, at the level of the Divinity, comprehends within itself and is qualified by His own Universal Names and Attributes. This is where the preparedness of the immutable entities are predetermined within the Presence of Divine Knowledge through the most Holy Self-Disclosure, which serves as the eternal blueprint for Manifest *Wujūd*. After this, the Breath of the All-Merciful descends from this degree of the Divinity and brings the Muḥammadan Reality into existence, or in other words, the "Divine Pen", the "First Intellect" and the "Universal Spirit". And the All-Merciful Breaths keep on descending through the lower degrees of Manifest *Wujūd*, bringing out into *wujūd* all of the different worlds and possible entities that populate the different levels of the manifest cosmos, until it finally reaches the outermost boundary of Manifest *Wujūd*, which is the material world of corporeal bodies, and which is the current state of being for the human servant.⁴¹¹

Even though there seems to be an apparent multiplicity of creatures and worlds in existence through the gradual descents and repeated self-disclosures of the One *Wujūd* of the Real, there always remains an underlying unity and oneness of *Wujūd* that binds everything together. This is because every possible thing in *wujūd* is nothing but the self-manifestation of the Divine Essence through its Names, Attributes, Acts, and Tasks. The passage below by Lāhijī may further illustrate this particular point concerning the underlying unity of *wujūd*:

The manifestation of differences and their multiplicity
Is a result of the chameleon of possibility.

⁴¹⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 6.

⁴¹¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 5-6 & 22-23.

This means that the manifestation of the differences in the relations (*nasab*), Names, Attributes—along with the multiplicities of the Tasks of the Divine Essence—have manifested because of the chameleon of possibility, a term attributed to the fixed, possible entities. And the locus of manifestation for the differences and multiplicities of the Divine Names and Attributes are the possible entities which are the intelligible forms of the Real, and which are the witnesses [signs] of the Divine Names. And the task, which they also call a command (*amar*) or a state—such as “*Each day He is upon a new task*” [Q 55:29] and the Tasks of the Divine Essence (*shu’ūnāt-e dhātīye*)—is in respect to the fixed entities and the Realities [the Divine Names] within the “Exclusive Oneness of the Essence”; this is like the respect (*e’tebārāt*) [and pre-existence] of the date palm tree, its branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits that lies concealed within the seed of a date. And the Tasks of the Divine Essence reveal their manifestations within the Presence of “Inclusive Unity of the Names” (*wāḥedeyyat*) and are gathered together in the Presence of Divine Knowledge. The locus-of-manifestation (*mazhar*) for those differences and multiplicities [of the task, relations, and respects] are the tasks of the possible entities. Why is this so? Because the differences of the Divine Names is in accordance with the differences of the two worlds, and they [the differences of the Names] are manifest in the states, qualities, and acts [of the possible entities]. The reason being that every entity from amongst the entities is receptive towards a specific Quality (*khuṣṣeyyat*). For through that Quality it becomes a locus-of-manifestation for a particular Name from amongst the Divine Names, where nothing else is an associate with it [in being a locus-of-manifestation] for that specific Quality [of the Real].⁴¹²

⁴¹² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 461. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 714 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

The terms “divine task” (*shu’ūn elāheyya*) and “the Divine Tasks of the Essence” (*shu’ūnāt-e dhātīye*) are also commonly found through the texts of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s followers, and signify the acts, tasks or works that the Divine Reality has in relation with the immutable entities, for this is what their realities demand from Him. In Muhammad Rustam’s explanation of this term, he states that “the divine tasks are a synonym for the expression ‘keys of the unseen’. These terms refer to the multiplicity which comes about by virtue of the disclosure of the Essence’s manifest face. Once the Essence takes on different positions with respect to that which is strictly speaking outside of it, the names emerge with their own particularised qualities, which allow them to be distinguished from one another on the one hand, and from the Essence on the other. The level at which this takes place is what is denoted by the terms ‘divine tasks’ and ‘keys of the unseen’. ...The ‘names of the names’ are the tasks of the Essence found throughout the cosmos, which is to say that they are its properties and traces.” Mohammed Rustom, *The Triumph*

Even though the *Wujūd* of God at the first ontological degree of the Essence has no relation whatsoever with the cosmos and the possible entities—for at this Presence all of His different Names, relations, respects, and tasks are negated from His pure Essence—yet all of the infinite possibilities and states of Manifest *Wujūd* are also concealed at this level of Absolute *Wujūd*. In other words, they are hidden within the very depths of the Divine Essence itself. After the “Most Holy Self-Disclosure”, these infinite possibilities are articulated for the first time as intelligible meanings and eternal archetypes at the level of the Divinity, or within the Presence of Divine Knowledge. They later become the receptacles or loci-of-manifestation (*maẓāher*) for the self-disclosure of the One Real *Wujūd* within the cosmos.⁴¹³

In the previously quoted passage, Lāhijī uses the analogy of a date palm tree with its seed to further illustrate this difficult aspect of his Sufi metaphysics. For just as the date palm tree with all of its branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruits pre-exist in a state of hidden potentiality within the date seed, so too do the infinite worlds—along with the possible entities that will eventually emerge into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*—already pre-exist within the seed of the Divine Essence—or at the ontological degree of the “Exclusive Oneness of the Essence”. So every single thing that exists within the cosmos is a manifestation of a particular aspect or Quality of the Infinite Essence of the Real.

6.3 The Role of the Divine Names and Attributes in Lāhijī’s Sufi Worldview and Their Relationship with the Possible Entities

According to Lāhijī, at the degree of the First Entification of the *Wujūd* of the Real (meaning the level of *wāḥedeyyat*) it is here that the different realities of the Names and Attributes are

of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulla Sadra (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 60. Another way of explaining this is that the “divine tasks” are the infinite states whereby The Real self-transmutes in every moment in relation to his servants. In other words, they are the endless, diverse and infinite self-disclosures of the Real, and these self-disclosures become the states of the existent entities, whereby they are able to subsist in the realm of Manifest Existence. For example, in one moment the servant may be characterised as being in a state of anger. This state is a self-disclosure of the Real in the Name of His Wrath or Anger, so this very self-disclosure of the Real in the Attribute of His Wrath and Anger in relation to this particular servant constitutes one of the infinite Divine Tasks of the Real. And in reality, God never ceases working through his Divine Task, for the self-disclosure of the Infinite, Absolute Essence never comes to an end, and the possible entities never cease entering into and subsisting in Manifest Existence. What is termed a self-disclosure and Task of the Essence or the Real, is also that very same state of *wujud* the servant has in that exact moment of the Real’s self-disclosure within his entity. So every self-disclosure is a particular “divine task” of the Real. For more information concerning this specific term, see Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, 66-67.

⁴¹³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 98 & 303.

entified and established through the Most Holy Self-Disclosure. For the traces and effects that the Names and Attributes display in the manifest cosmos through their loci-of-manifestation—which are the possible entities— obviously differ from and conflict with one another. So the ontological roots of these differences go back to the diverse meanings and realities of the Names at the level of the Divinity. For example, the Quran and the Hadiths make clear that God the Vengeful is not the same as God the Forgiving; that God the Punisher is not the same as God the Loving; and God the Giver is not the same as God the Withholder, and so on. Even in the manifest cosmos around us—which perpetually displays the traces and effects of these different Universal Names of God—we notice the clear difference between human acts of mercy and wrath, love and anger, and so on. For everything that we witness in the manifest cosmos traces its ontological roots back to one of the Universal Names of God. If the realities of the Divine Names were not different and distinct from one another at their root, then their traces and effects which appear in Manifest *Wujūd* would not be different from one another as well, but they undoubtedly are. Yet paradoxically, Lāhijī also states throughout his text that in reality, there is no real difference between the opposing Names of God and the Divine Essence—for the *Wujūd* of God forever exist in a state of sheer oneness and unity. This is the reason why Lāhijī also terms the second ontological degree of God’s *Wujūd* as the “Inclusive Unity of the Names” (*wāḥedeyyat*), for even though the different and opposing Names and Attributes of God are articulated and identified in this specific degree of the Divine Presence, God’s *Wujūd* still remains one and unified just as it was in the higher degree of the “Exclusive Oneness of the Essence” (*aḥadeyyat*), or the degree of His pure, unlimited Essence. In other words, the Names and Attributes are none other than the Essence clothed as a specific relation towards a specific entity—for this is what the realities of the immutable entities demand from Him for their own states of *wujūd*. So the Names are non-existent relations, and do not exist as entities.⁴¹⁴ This means that they are not separate entities possessing their own individual beings within the cosmos—for they are universal intelligible meanings that subsist eternally within and through the Divine Essence. Hence, there is no concrete, existential difference between the various, opposing Divine Names nor with the Essence. As Lāhijī states, “every relation is an

⁴¹⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 179.

Attribute, and the Essence within every one of the Attributes is a Name, and it is from this perspective that the Name is the Essence of the Named”.⁴¹⁵ In other words, every Name not only denotes its own unique meaning and reality, but also the Essence itself. For example, the Name *ar-Raḥmān* (“the All-Merciful”) denotes the Attribute of God as being All-Merciful and the Essence as well. For this Name in reality is none other than the Essence; or a specific relation, standpoint, and respect of the One Essence of the Real towards some entity outside of itself.⁴¹⁶

Now that we have briefly outlined the relationship between the Names and the Essence, we must ask: what is the relationship between the Names and Attributes of God and the immutable, possible entities? Since everything in all levels of *Wujūd* are nothing but God’s own self-disclosure, the possible entities are therefore nothing but the loci-of-manifestation for God’s *Wujūd*; or in other words, theophanic-mirrors that receive and reflect the Eternal Countenance of the Real, although this is not the final word in Lāhijī’s definition of the possible entities.⁴¹⁷ Other important Akbarī terms that Lāhijī employs throughout his commentary are “entification” (*ta’ayyun*), “individuation” (*tashakhus*), and “delimitation” (*taqayyud*). These three Akbarī terms also play a key role in helping the reader understand the ontological status of the possible entities and their relationship with the One Real *Wujūd* within the framework of Lāhijī’s metaphysical discourse. In Lāhijī’s Akbarī discourse, these different terms share the same meaning: the process whereby the Absolute, Infinite *Wujūd* of God entifies, delimits and individuates Himself into one of the possible entities. This process is sometimes called the “the Divine Tasks of the Essence” (*shu’ūnāt-e dhātīye*) or the “Divine Acts” (*af’āl*) by Lāhijī. In other words, every possible entity that exists in the manifest cosmos is a unique and particular

⁴¹⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 179.

⁴¹⁶ In laymen terms, we can use the example of a human being. Let us imagine a person named Michael. In relation to a student of his, he is Michael the teacher. In relation to his wife, he is Michael the husband. In relation to a close friend of his, he is Michael the friend, and in relation to his son or daughter, he is Michael the father. In all these examples are there four different Michaels existing in entity because of these different relations? No, he remains the one individual and there is no change in Michael’s essence. In the same way that these different attributes of Michael can be considered to be non-existent relations in entity, so too are the various and different Names and Attributes of God non-existent relations in respect to the possible entities. They are intelligible meanings that subsist eternally within His Divine Essence, and they never introduce any concrete nor real division or partitioning within the One Unified Essence of God.

⁴¹⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 462 & 433-34.

entification and self-disclosure of God's infinite *Wujūd*.⁴¹⁸ This also means that there is in reality only One Real *Wujūd* in all of existence—contrary to our deep-seated beliefs and opinions that multiple and endless beings genuinely exist within the cosmos.⁴¹⁹

One analogy that Lāhijī relies upon numerous times within his text to illustrate this metaphysical aspect of his Sufi worldview is his use of the number one and its relationship with the following numbers in the series. For just as the succeeding numbers are nothing but a certain amount of multiplication of the original and same number one—for example, the number two is the multiplication of the number one two times, and the number three is the multiplication of the number one three times, and so forth—so every possible entity in Manifest *Wujūd* is none other than an individual and unique entification of the One Eternal *Wujūd* in its very essence and reality. And just as the rest of the numbers cannot exist without the original number one, so too can nothing else exist without the reality of God's *Wujūd*, which serves as the necessary foundation for all of existence. For everything ultimately exist through Him. Lāhijī compares the One Absolute *Wujūd* of the Real with the first number in the series—one—for it is purely transcendent of all relations, respects and entifications in its sheer Essence. The endless possible entities who enter into *wujūd*, are the self-disclosures of the One Absolute *Wujūd* into delimited and entified forms of relative and illusionary existence. Although each of these possible entities are unique entifications of the One Absolute *Wujūd*, they nevertheless all manifest and flow from the same ontological source: the One Entity of God. Therefore, one can state that the forms of the possible entities are *His Forms*. Without them, He would not be manifest and self-disclosed within the cosmos, and He would thereby remain

⁴¹⁸ "Entification" is another important term employed by the Akbarī Sufis throughout their works. According to Murata, "although the term 'entification' (*ta'ayyun*) is seldom used by Ibn al-'Arabī, it becomes an important technical term with Qunawī and his followers. The other translations which have been proposed for it, such as 'epiphany', 'characteristic', and 'phenomenon' (all Whinfield), 'individuation' (Richard), and 'determination' (Izutsu), lose sight of the fact that the word is derived from the term *'ayn* or 'entification'. Its basic meaning is to become an entity or to have the situation of being an entity, and an 'entity' is simply a thing (what the philosophers call a 'quiddity' or 'whatness', *mahīyya*). Thus the 'fixed entities' come to be discernable at the level known as the 'First Entification'. In the plural, the term 'entification' designates all the situations in which things can be discerned as entities, and hence everything other than the Essence." Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yu's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm. With a New Translation of Jami's Lawa'ih from the Persian by William C. Chittick* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 120.

⁴¹⁹ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 10-11 & 199.

forever concealed and hidden within the secluded sanctuary of his undelimited and unknown Essence. So the possible entities, as His endless and diverse loci-of self-disclosure, are essentially none other than He. Therefore, all the possible entities in the cosmos are signs that signify the One Real *Wujūd* of God.⁴²⁰

Another explanation that Lāhijī provides to explain the true nature and reality of the possible existents is that each thing that comes into *wujūd* within the manifest cosmos is also a locus-of-manifestation for a particular Name of the Real. According to Lāhijī, who completely follows Ibn al-‘Arabī’s lead in connection to this subject matter, the immutable essence of each creature is also a specific and unique Divine Name of the Real. Each Divine Name of the Real—the immutable essence of each creature—also represents a particularisation of one of the Universal Names of God. Therefore, each possible entity serves as the locus-of-manifestation for that particular Divine Name which also constitutes its eternal, immutable essence. So every possible entity within the cosmos is also the manifestation of a unique possibility of the Infinite Absolute *Wujūd* of God.⁴²¹

Even though, in Lāhijī’s Sufi worldview, there is no real distinction between the *Wujūd* of God and the creatures, he sometimes follows in the footsteps of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and applies the term “Necessary Being” (*wājeb al-wujūd*) or “Eternal” (*qadīm*) for God’s *Wujūd*, and the term “possible being” (*ḥastī-ye mumken*) and “newly brought into existence” (*muḥdeṣ*) for the *wujūd* of the entities.⁴²² In classifying the *wujūd* of God and the possible entities into these two different and contrasting categories of ontological existence, Lāhijī wishes to further clarify the allusive nature of the *wujūd* of the possible entities by contrasting it with the Necessary and Eternal *Wujūd* of God. The main difference between the Necessary Being of God and the possible beings of the entities lies in the ontological fact that the Necessary Being is not dependant upon anything else for the beginning and subsistence of its own *Wujūd*. It has always existed since pre-eternity and will always exist until post-eternity through its own Essence. This is in contrast to the possible beings of the entities who are in

⁴²⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 549, 93, 202.

⁴²¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 180, 462.

⁴²² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 455-60.

need of something other than themselves to bestow *wujūd* upon them in order to come into being, and who exist within the chain of secondary causes and effects.⁴²³ This means that every possible entity has a prior cause that brought it into *wujūd*. So its existence is an effect dependant upon that prior cause which is responsible for its existence. God as the Necessary and Eternal Being is not the prior cause of anything nor is He an effect of a prior cause, for He Exists and subsists independently through his own Essence and Reality. And yet paradoxically enough, according to Lāhijī—through a vision of unveiling—the ‘*āref* eventually realises that ultimately, the Necessary and Eternal Being of God is none other than the possible being of the creatures as well, as Lāhijī states in the following passage:

“All of these difficulties will become easy for you”, This means that when you have realised that whatever exists is none other than the Eternal [*Wujūd*], and the newly brought into existence (*muḥdeṣ*) is another expression for the entification of the Eternal [*Wujūd*], for it is, in reality, an appearance without any real being and nothing more than an illusory existence, all of your difficulties, doubts, and suspicions will disappear and then become easy for you [to comprehend], and it will be realised and known with certainty that the Eternal [*Wujūd*] is neither joined to the newly brought into existence, nor separated from it as well. Why is this the case? Because the newly brought into existence without the Eternal [*Wujūd*] is pure nothingness (‘*adam*). On the other hand, existence (*ḥastī*) never come together with nonexistence (*nīstī*), and the bringing together of these two opposites is impossible, so there is no complete separation [as well]. The reason being that if not for the self-disclosure and manifestation of the Necessary Being (*wājeb*) in the forms of the possible and newly brought into existence, never will the appearance of the possible things and newly brought into existence come to be. And they would remain forever concealed and hidden in the realm of nonexistence [i.e. the Presence of Divine knowledge as immutable and non-existent entities].⁴²⁴

⁴²³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 290-91.

⁴²⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 457. This passage is a commentary by Lāhijī on verse 707 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

In Lāhijī's own words, the possible entities can only exist within the manifest cosmos through the Necessary Being of God self-disclosing itself through its form. Otherwise, it would remain forever concealed within the darkness and poverty of its own nonexistence. From one perspective, the Necessary Being is other than the possible being of the entities—because there was a time when they were not qualified with *wujūd*, but afterward, they were qualified with *wujūd* through the Breaths of the All-Merciful. From another perspective, the Necessary Being is none other than the possible being: there is no real difference between them at all. For if the possible being was completely separated and cut off from the Necessary Being of the Real, it would be pure nothingness, for the necessary precondition for its manifestation in the realm of *wujūd* is that the Necessary Being of God turns its gaze towards it and bestows the light of its own *Wujūd* upon it. Otherwise, it would never exist at all. And as Lāhijī reminds us constantly throughout his commentary, *Wujūd* exclusively belongs to the Real, and never to the possible being who is nothing more than a locus-of-manifestation for the Real.

6.4 The Ambiguous Ontological Status of the Possible Entities in the Manifest Cosmos: Do they Exist or Not?

One of the most difficult and elusive aspects of Lāhijī's teachings concerns the true ontological status and nature of the possible entities. Do the possible entities possess any real and separate existence apart from God, or do they remain forever non-existent and fixed in the Presence of God's Knowledge as eternal and immutable objects of His Divine Knowledge, forever witnessed within His own Divine Consciousness? Do the entities ever truly come out into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* from the darkness and poverty of their own nonexistence? Or is it always and only the Real who perpetually manifests and discloses Himself through the forms of the possible entities? Upon first reading his commentary on the *Gulshan* it may seem that Lāhijī only affirms true *Wujūd* for God alone, and denies that the possible entities are ever qualified by *wujūd*. However further reading and a deeper pondering upon the meaning of Lāhijī's text reveals that the ontological status of the possible entities is not so clear-cut, and that their ontological status always remains ambiguous and almost impossible to pin down into a single category of either being completely non-existent or possessing and being qualified by *wujūd* after God infuses His All-Merciful Breaths upon them.

Let us consider the first aspect of this particular ontological issue. One of the original and unique insights of Ibn al-‘Arabī regarding the ontological status of the possible entities, and which would eventually become one of the fundamental principles of the Akbarī school of thought over the following centuries, is that contrary to the traditional beliefs and presumptions of the peripatetic philosophers and *kalām* scholars, the possible entities are never in reality qualified with *Wujūd*. This means their entities never leave the darkness of nonexistence behind to enter into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*. In fact, they remain forever fixed as immutable entities in the Presence of God’s Divine Knowledge. In the words of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, the possible entities never smell a whiff of *wujūd*.⁴²⁵ This metaphysical and mystical insight of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers—who claim throughout their works that this ontological truth was revealed to them by God through a series of mystical unveilings (*kashf*)—is contrary to the statements and theological-philosophical positions of the philosophers and *kalām* scholars, who like the Akbarīs also make certain claims to metaphysical truths in their own respective schools of thought.⁴²⁶

The very meaning of possible being—within the framework of the discourse of the philosophers and *kalām* scholars—suggests that there was a time when the possible thing was non-existent, and after the Necessary Being of God bestowed *Wujūd* upon the possible entity, it entered into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* to become an existent entity. Yet according to Ibn al-‘Arabī and Lāhijī, this presumption by most philosophers and *kalām* scholars is never truly the case, for the possible entities are nothing but loci-of-manifestation for the self-disclosure of God’s *Wujūd*, nothing else. So what exists—in every level and degree of Manifest *Wujūd*—is none other than God, and not the creatures.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 18. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, “God says to the thing, ‘Be!’ He does not address or command any but that which hears, yet it has no existence... it receives ‘coming to be’. But our view of its reception of ‘coming to be’ is not like your view. Its reception of ‘coming to be’ is only the fact that it becomes a locus of manifestation for the Real. This is the meaning of the words, ‘[Be!] And it is.’ This does not mean that the thing ‘acquires existence’ (*istifadat al-wujūd*). It only acquires the property of being a locus of manifestation... Hence He is identical to all things in manifestation, but He is not identical to them in their essences. On the contrary, He is He, and the things are the things.” Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II 484.23. Cited from Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 90.

⁴²⁶ al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 135 & Ibn Arabi, *Futūḥāt*, I 261.9. Cited from Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 169.

⁴²⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 91, 455.

Yet this does not provide the whole picture regarding the actual ontological status of the creatures and the cosmos, and this is where the issue becomes ambiguous and even frustrating to understand. For if the entities do not become manifest through the bestowal of God's *Wujūd* upon them, then what does become manifest in the cosmos? And why do we perceive such an endless variety of states, attributes and phenomena, along with the numerous existent entities in the world around us? According to Lāhijī, the infinite multiplicities of possible things goes back not to the One *Wujūd* of God, but to the properties and effects of the immutable and fixed entities, which are none other than the inherent possibilities and states of the immutable entities which are waiting to be actualised within the realm of Manifest *Wujūd*.⁴²⁸ Now the properties of the fixed, possible entities do leave a trace upon God's *Wujūd*, and even determine the manner and modality through which God's *Wujūd* self-discloses through the manifest cosmos. In other words, whenever the pure light of God's *Wujūd* enters into and self-discloses through the form of a particular possible entity, this possible entity—because of its own unique preparedness to receive the effusion of God's *Wujūd*—will colour and determine the self-disclosure of God's *Wujūd* through the properties intrinsic to its own immutable essence.⁴²⁹ This is the reason why the self-disclosure of God's *Wujūd* differs with each possible entity that also serves as a locus-of-manifestation for His One *Wujūd*. In Lāhijī's own words:

The immutable, fixed entities are nonexistent, but when placed in front of Being (*ḥastī*) the reflection of *Wujūd* is immediately attained, and multiple reflections then appear due to the plurality of the mirrors of the entities—and that is nothing more than One Reality. And based upon the differences of the properties of the receptacles which are the mirrors, He [the One *Wujūd* of the Real] has become manifest through different

⁴²⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 414-16.

⁴²⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 349. The immutable essences or entities, meaning the possible entities within the Presence of Divine Knowledge before their entrance into Manifest *Wujūd*, are the eternal archetypes of the possible entities. Another way of understanding the reality and role of the immutable essences in relation to the possible entities, is that the immutable essence of every entity is the conglomeration of all of its states in a state of potentiality waiting to be actualised and realised within Manifest Existence. It is these pre-existent states that are actualised through the Breath of the All-Merciful—the infusion and self-disclosure of *Wujūd*—within the possible entities, that bring the infinite and diverse states of the immutable essences into being. And as a result, ends up coloring and determining the One, Colorless Pure *Wujud* of the Real.

manifestations. And based upon the diversity of the loci-of-manifestation and the divine tasks of the Essence (*shu'ūnāt-e dhātīye-ye elāheyya*), they are brought out from a state of potentiality (*kamūn*) and into actuality (*be berūz āmad*)[the properties of the immutable entities]. It is nothing more than One single self-disclosure—which has in reality appeared—in accordance with the traces (*āthār*) and properties (*eḥkāṁ*) of the infinite locations for the self-disclosure of the Real (*majāli-ye ghayremutenāhī*).⁴³⁰

The above passage may need further clarification in order to truly understand what Lāhījī is trying to explain. One analogy that Lāhījī provides in order to help his readers understand the relationship between the One Absolute *Wujūd* of God and the apparent multiplicities of the manifest cosmos, is the relationship between a mirror and the human beholder situated opposite it. Now just as the mirror is the location for the reflection of the image of the beholder, so too are the endless possible entities of the cosmos the non-existent mirrors for the Eternal and Single Countenance of the Real. Just as the mirror is the cause and place of manifestation for the reflected image of the beholder, the possible entities are like non-existent mirrors that receive the reflection of His One Face. And just as the beholder is in need of a mirror to reflect back to itself its own countenance, so too is the Absolute *Wujūd* of the Real in need of the darkness of the possible entities to serve as non-existent mirrors for the self-disclosure of His Face. Otherwise, He would remain forever concealed within his Transcendent Essence and would never be manifest within External *Wujūd*. And just as the image of the beholder appears differently according to the different shapes of the mirrors that it is reflected upon—for example, if the mirror is crooked, the reflected image of the human beholder would be crooked, if the mirror is big, his reflected image will then appear big, if the mirror is small, then his reflected image will also be small and so forth—so too does the self-disclosure of the One Real *Wujūd* appear differently according to each mirror-entity's unique preparedness, which eventually colours and determines the very manner of the Real's self-disclosure.⁴³¹ For every possible entity—which is in possession of its own unique properties and the endless possibilities of its own states within *wujūd*—determines and colours the manner that the One

⁴³⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 92. This passage is a commentary by Lāhījī on verse 134 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁴³¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 92-93.

Pure *Wujūd* of the Real self-discloses through its form. And it is this ontological fact—that the mirror-entities determine the self-disclosure of God’s *Wujūd*—that is the real cause for the endless multiplicities, conflicts, and seeming differences that we witness in the manifest cosmos around us. But *Wujūd* always remains one, as does the human beholder whose reflections appear to be many and different because of the many different mirrors with their various shapes and sizes which are placed in different locations before him. According to Lāhijī, this is the same case when we gain true knowledge and insight into the ontological status of the cosmos and its relationship with the One Real *Wujūd* of God.

From this mirror/ image metaphor, Lāhijī urges the reader to realise what the true ontological status of the possible entities really are, and that what we believe are the different and real existences of the possible entities within the cosmos are in reality none other than so many different mirrors and loci-of-manifestation for the self-disclosure of the One Real *Wujūd*. What does come into existence from the immutable entities are their properties and effects which determine and colour the One *Wujūd* of the Real when it self-discloses through their forms. And these properties and effects that determine the self-disclosure of the Real’s *Wujūd* allude to the possible entities being forever established in their state of nonexistence as eternal objects of God’s Divine Knowledge. In other words, they do not truly exist at all, and never do they enter into the light of manifest *Wujūd* from the darkness of nonbeing, as the philosophers and *kalām* scholars assume they do.

6.5 The Perpetual Renewal of Creation

If we leave the matter of the ontological status of the possible entities here, it may seem clear to us that Lāhijī views the possible entities as being non-existent things that never enter into the light of *Wujūd*. But Lāhijī also looks at the situation from the perspective of what he and other Akbarīs term the “perpetual renewal of creation” (*tajaddud-e ‘ālam/khalq-e jadīd*). This term denotes the fact that all of creation is both in a constant state of annihilation from *Wujūd* as well as having their beings renewed every moment with the All-Merciful Breaths of the Real. It could be gleaned from Lāhijī’s own discourse on *Wujūd* that he does in fact believe the possible entities exist and that they do enter into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* from the darkness

of nonexistence with the Divine command “Be!” (*kun*). He may not decisively affirm that the possible entities enter into *Wujūd*, but with a deeper analysis of his discourse upon the “perpetual renewal of creation” he does seem to affirm some degree of *wujūd* for the possible entities—of course never independent from the One *Wujūd* of the Real.

Before we delve deeper into Lāhijī’s discourse and understanding of the “perpetual renewal of creation” we must note one more important aspect of the ontological status of the possible entities within the framework of Lāhijī’s metaphysics. This is the idea that every possible entity possesses two different faces, each turned towards a different direction. One face of the possible existent is turned towards the Face of Absolute *Wujūd*, and from this direction, where the Real gazes upon it, it receives the perpetual self-disclosures and bestowals of the Real’s *Wujūd*, whereby it is able to continue to abide in Manifest *Wujūd* without vanishing and returning back to nonexistence. The other face of the possible entity is perpetually turned towards the darkness of its own essential nonexistence and poverty, and from this direction it is always in a constant state of annihilation. The possible existent can never escape from the darkness of its own nothingness, which constitutes the very reality of its own being as possible existent.⁴³² Therefore, every possible entity can be viewed as a *barzakh* situated between the pure light of God’s *Wujūd* and the abyss and darkness of nonexistence. Here, it is constantly qualified with characteristics coming from both directions, since it perpetually has a face turned towards each opposing direction of pure *Wujūd* and pure nonexistence.

This particular aspect of Lāhijī’s Sufi worldview only makes sense if we accept that the possible entities do acquire some degree of *wujūd* and, contrary to Lāhijī’s previously stated position. In other words, the immutable entities do enter into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* and acquire some kind of existence. Once the immutable entities enter into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*, they thereby become “possible beings” (*mumkenāt*). But contrary to the theoretical and sophisticated arguments of the philosophers and *kalām* scholars, the *wujūd* that they come to acquire from the Necessary Being does not stay with them until death—or until the eventual

⁴³² *Mafātīh al-e’jāz*, 109-10.

moment of their annihilation at some point in the distant future, if that ever occurs. In the very same instant that they acquire a state of *wujūd* from the Real, they are annihilated from that state of *wujūd* and become qualified once again by their essential nonexistence.⁴³³ But in the moment of their nonexistence—or, to borrow the terminology of Lāhijī and the Akbarī followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī, the moment that the possible entities divest themselves of the robe of *wujūd*—they are qualified by a constant state of annihilation. Owing to the ontological reality that they always have one face turned towards the essential poverty of their own nothingness as possible beings, the Real through His All-Merciful Breaths bestows His Own *Wujūd* upon them again in that very same instant of their annihilation, whereby they are able to remain and continue subsisting within Manifest *Wujūd*.⁴³⁴

According to Lāhijī, this process where the *wujūd* of the possible entities is renewed for it by the Real, occurs in every single instance of time. Its occurrence is so subtle and quick that it escapes the perception and apprehension of most human beings. Only the realised knowers of God (‘*urafā*’) are able to witness this “perpetual renewal of creation” happening within every single moment, since God has opened up and illuminated their spiritual perspicacity (*baṣīrat*) with His Own Light and Seeing. The passage by Lāhijī below may help the reader further understand his insights upon this particular esoteric aspect of his Sufi doctrine and thought:

In itself nothing abides for more than two instants.

In that moment it passes away, it is born again.

This means that within the cosmos nothing remains in one state for two instances and is never fixed in one state (*qarār*), and for whatever exists, in every moment that thing becomes non-existent, then becomes existent again, and from the extremity of the speed of this renewal that comes from the Divine effusion of the All-Merciful (*fayḏ-e raḥmānī*), people assume that it [the possible entity] is always established in that one state and their creation and extinction which occurs every moment is not witnessed. In the moment in which it dies, or is annihilated, it is born again; meaning it acquires being (*mawjūd mī gardad*) through the assistance of the Breath of the All-Merciful (*nafas-e*

⁴³³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 417-19.

⁴³⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 425-28.

rahmānī) and the self-disclosure of *Wujūd* (*tajallī-ye wujūdī*), in a manner where the One *Wujūd* is continuously witnessed. Just as it is contemplated that in the Heavens the four elements and their offspring “yesterday”, as well as “the day before yesterday” possess one state of being, and today they appear before you again with the same state of being, despite the fact that, moment by moment, their [state of being] has been changed and transformed and they never remain in the same state [of *Wujūd*] in two instants. Therefore dying and being born is joined together, and dying, in reality, is the very essence of being born, and being born is the essence of dying. Dying is another expression for the perpetual return of multiplicity [of the creatures and the cosmos] back towards their original unity [in the Divine Presence], and being born is another expression for the manifestation of this Divine Unity in the forms of the multiple existents and the possible entifications.⁴³⁵

Lāhijī continues to theorise on instantaneous renewal and annihilation in his commentary on verse 657 of the *Gulshan-e Raz*:

But every moment the cosmos is transformed,
The end is like its first.

This means that although voluntary death is only possible for the human creation, nevertheless the entire cosmos is transformed and changed in every moment, and based upon the demand of it being a possible thing (*emkāneyyat*), in every blink of an eye it becomes non-existent, and through the uninterrupted bestowal of *Wujūd* and the breaths of the All-Merciful, another new world comes into existence and from the extremity of the speed of this renewal through the Divine effusion of the All-Merciful (*tajaddud-e fayz-e rahmānī*), just as he (Shabistārī) has stated: “the end is like its first”, continuously the One *Wujūd* without interruption is witnessed and no one is truly aware of the annihilation and renewal of creation of his own self that occurs in every instant and moment in time; and he therefore assumes that this is the same existence (*hastī*) that he had in the previous moment. And of the nonexistence (*nīstī*) and existence that

⁴³⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz*, 419. This passage is a commentary by Lāhijī on verse 646 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

continuously occurs in each moment for him, he is completely unaware, and he does not comprehend the new robes and clothes of *wujūd* that is bestowed upon him in every moment.⁴³⁶

From our discussion concerning Lāhijī's discourse on the "perpetual renewal of creation", we may conclude that for Lāhijī, this ontological situation occurs because this is what the essences of the possible entities demand from the Real. Because the possible entity has one face constantly turned towards the darkness of its essential nonexistence, it is always in a constant state of annihilation; and because its other face is constantly turned towards the Face of the One Real *Wujūd*, it is able to subsist every moment through the constant renewal of its *wujūd* through the perpetual infusions of the All-Merciful Breaths.

Lāhijī explains that another reason why this "perpetual renewal of creation" constantly occurs for all of the cosmos, is because this is what the Names and Attributes of God also demand from the possible entities. Or in other words, the "perpetual renewal of creation" is a result of the manifestation of the realities and effects of the Divine Names and Attributes within the cosmos.⁴³⁷ The renewal of the cosmos and the creatures in every moment takes place because of the effects and traces of the Names that come under God's Beauty and Mercy (*jamāl*): "Light" (*nūr*); "The Expander" (*bāseṭ*), "Benefactor" (*Nāfī*) and the "the Restorer" (*mu'īd*); while the constant annihilation in that very same instant is due to the effects and traces of the Names that come under his Majesty (*jalāl*): "the Wrathful" (*qahhār*); "the One" (*aḥad*); "the Unique" (*fard*); "the Eraser" (*māhī*); and the "Bringer of Death" (*mumīt*).⁴³⁸ So the Divine Attributes and Names that are categorised under his Beauty and Mercy desire to maintain the *wujūd* of the possible entities within Manifest *Wujūd* because of their inherit love and mercy for the creatures. On the other hand, the Divine Names that are categorised under his Majesty demand the annihilation of the possible entities from Manifest *Wujūd*; for the

⁴³⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 427-28. This passage is a commentary by Lāhijī on verse 657 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁴³⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 433.

⁴³⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 433.

Jealousy and Needlessness of God—which all these Names of his Wrath and Majesty share with one another—demand that no one else other than the Real must truly exist.⁴³⁹

6.6 The Entire Cosmos as an Illusion for the Ignorant and Heedless: a Cosmic Dream by God

Since Lāhijī defines the *wujūd* of the possible entities and the cosmos as situated between *Wujūd* and nonbeing perpetually, it is no surprise that Lāhijī sometimes refers to everything else besides God as “an appearance without any real being” (*namūd-e bī būd*); or a “relative affair” (*amr-e e’tebārī*); and even an outright an illusion, fantasy (*khayāl*) and dream that is a product of our ignorant state of heedlessness.⁴⁴⁰ In Lāhijī’s view, the human species is in a state of sleep and forgetfulness, where they are dreaming that their lives in this material world possess some kind of reality, when in fact, it is nothing more than an illusion and a dream. The illusion of our daily lives, which most of us are unaware of, veils us from the One Reality of God’s *Wujūd*. Placed beside this ultimate reality, the *wujūd* of the entire cosmos is reduced to being nothing more than an illusion and dream. For further insight into this subject, let us quote a passage from Lāhijī and let him speak in his own words:

In the same manner that an individual sees in his dreams several forms that do not correspond to reality, and in his dream state supposes they possess actual forms in *wujūd*, and does not know those forms are purely imaginary and do not exist outside of his dreams, so too you, who supposes that the cosmos possess real *wujūd*, are sleeping and dreaming in a state of heedlessness and do not know that the *wujūd* of the cosmos is also a false imaginary thing (*khayāl-e bāṭel*). And whatever you have seen [of this world observable by the human senses]—in truth, it is a reflection and sign of the *Wujūd* of the Real that has appeared from the mirrors of the possible entities, and there is no *wujūd* other than the Real.⁴⁴¹

Elsewhere within the text, Lāhijī states that the entire manifest cosmos and all the possible beings who populate it are like a passing dream before the Gaze of God.⁴⁴² According to Lāhijī,

⁴³⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 433-35.

⁴⁴⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 46 & 344.

⁴⁴¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 119. This passage is a commentary by Lāhijī on verse 173 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁴⁴² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 484.

it is only the spiritual elect of Muḥammad’s community, i.e., the saintly “Friends of God” and the spiritually realised Sufis, who have already woken up from the illusionary dream of relative existence. In this present life they are already able to directly witness the One Reality of God’s *Wujūd* through the mystical experiences of unveiling (*kashf*), contemplation (*mushāhada*) and witnessing (*shuhūd*). These mystical unveilings were achieved by the realised knowers of God only after dying to themselves by realising the mystical state of annihilation in God (*fanā’ fi allāh*).⁴⁴³ As decreed by God, the rest of humanity will only wake up from their present ignorant and heedless state when the day of resurrection finally dawns over them someday in the distant future.⁴⁴⁴ According to Lāhijī, the spiritually realised Sufis have already experienced the Day of Resurrection as an ineffable mystical state in this present life—by dying to their ego-selves and attaining spiritual union with the Beloved.⁴⁴⁵ The rest of humanity’s perceptions will be utterly transformed on the Day of Judgement when God shall finally self-disclose the Reality of His Own *Wujūd* to them, and they shall realise that their previous earthly lives were nothing more than insubstantial and passing dreams or illusions, the direct result of their being veiled from the true situation of *wujūd*. In commentating on verse 175 of the *Gulshan*, Lāhijī states:

When it arises, this fantasy before the cross-eyed,
The earth and the heavens will be transformed.

Meaning, at the morning of the resurrection, which is another expression for the arrival of the spiritual wayfarer to the station of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) where the two worlds become effaced and extinguished in the Light of Divine Unity (*nūr-e waḥdāneyyat*), for “except for the living and subsistent Lord, nothing else remains”, the illusion of the cross-eyed—because he perceives the *wujūd* of the existent things as other than the *Wujūd* of the Real—is like the cross-eyed who see one thing as two. Before his eyes that illusion of otherness will vanish, and he will then know with certainty that all of *wujūd* is the Real alone and that the *wujūd* of the existent things—who are in reality an appearance without any real Being—are nothing more than illusions, false imaginations,

⁴⁴³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 120.

⁴⁴⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 120-21.

⁴⁴⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 445-46.

and suppositions. The earth and the heavens will be transformed “*on the day the earth will be replaced by another earth, and the heavens [as well], and all creatures will come out before God, the One, the All-Subjugating*” [Q 14:48].⁴⁴⁶ This means that the earth and heavens will come to be, but not that first earth and heavens with which we are familiar, as they are illusions we saw during the night of our lifetimes, through the sleep of heedlessness which [caused us to imagine the existence of everything else] other than the Real. It will [finally] be revealed—through the morning of the Day of Resurrection—that those illusionary forms were in reality none other than the Entity [of the Real *Wujūd*]. And the appearance of otherness [or everything besides the Real], was nothing more than the illusion of the cross-eyed.⁴⁴⁷

Realising the oneness and unity of *Wujūd* through realised knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*), is, therefore, the key that awakens man from his present, heedless state to the real ontological situation of the cosmos.⁴⁴⁸ Once all the veils have been removed when advancing upon the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat* under the spiritual guidance of a perfect Sufi shaykh, the wayfaring Sufi is finally able to witness the eternal truth that it is only the One *Wujūd* of the Real who is disclosing Himself endlessly through the infinite and diverse forms of the possible entities.⁴⁴⁹ The wayfaring Sufi will then realise that there had never been multiple and separate beings in Manifest *Wujūd* as he had previously believed when he was in a state of heedlessness. Now that he sees everything around him through the light of the Real, he can be considered one of the realised knowers of God; he is awake and witnesses the true situation of the manifest cosmos for what it really is.⁴⁵⁰

6.7 Conclusion

Through this analysis of Lāhijī’s text—especially through the systematic exposition on Lāhijī’s teachings on perhaps the most essential principle of the Akbarī school of thought, *waḥdat al-wujūd*—we illustrated to the reader the extent of the Akbarī influence on Lāhijī’s commentary

⁴⁴⁶ The translations of this Quranic verse are from ‘Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translations.

⁴⁴⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 120..

⁴⁴⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 122.

⁴⁴⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 121-24.

⁴⁵⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 445-46.

on the *Gulshan*. Much of Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* is concerned with questions of metaphysics, cosmology and ontology, argued within the framework of the Akbarī school of thought and the theoretical tradition of Persian Sufism.

Since Lāhijī's commentary is deeply immersed in the intellectual and spiritual stream of the Akbarī tradition, Lāhijī's work therefore exists as part of a wider cultural trend that can be discerned within the Persian Sufi community of the later fifteenth century. There was growing demand within the wider Persian Sufi community for texts which dealt with the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī and his commentators, written in Farsi and not in Arabic, the language that the overwhelming majority of Akbarī texts had been written in before the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. Although Lāhijī's work is far from the first Persian text in the history of Iranian Sufism to provide an exposition of Ibn al-ʿArabī's theosophical teachings in a systematic and even logical manner, one crucial factor contributing to the wide circulation and popularity of Lāhijī's text was his uncanny gift to present his Akbarī discourse in a manner that was elegant, simple and filled with an unmatched lucidity, and in Persian as well. This not only helped to clarify the deeper meanings concealed within the poetic verses of Shabistarī's *Gulshan-e Rāz*, but also made it easier for its readers to comprehend the sophisticated ideas and teachings of the Akbarī tradition, an intellectual tradition of Sufism that undoubtedly exercised an unchallenged hegemonic influence over the entire Persian Sufi community within Iran and Central Asia during most of the fifteenth century. It is this quality of Lāhijī's work—which may be lost on the current reader because of our reliance upon English translations—that contributed to its popularity amongst the Sufis of Iran and the Persianate world, not only in Lāhijī's own lifetime, but in the following generations as well. Eventually, it was able to secure a place for itself within the sacred canon of Persian Sufi texts—even up to the present day.

Chapter Seven

Lāhījī's Sufi Anthropology and His Discourse on the Perfect Man

As we have seen so far, Lāhījī's worldview was deeply rooted in the Persian Sufi tradition. According to Lāhījī, the conventional understanding that most Muslim believers have of the reality of the human being, while true from a certain perspective, is still considered to be a deeply limited understanding of man's true nature. Lāhījī's Sufi anthropology—his study of man—closely follows the theosophical teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī and his followers, especially as it is articulated within the *Fuṣūṣ* and the classical commentaries written upon the *Fuṣūṣ*. Lāhījī and the Akbarīs expand upon the traditional, although limited, understanding of man's role and reality that was held by all Muslims who based their faith and creed on the Quran and the Hadiths. In much Islamic theology, man is viewed as a helpless servant subject to an all-knowing and all-powerful God. Still, in the Sufi cosmology of Lāhījī, which is largely borrowed and adopted from Ibn al-'Arabī and the early followers of the Akbarī tradition, the human being is considered a world unto himself for it is none other than the Real, along with all of His Divine Names and Attributes, who is unveiled and manifested through the human form. Indeed, in the view of Lāhījī and the adherents of the Akbarī tradition, the human being—or more specifically the Perfect Man (*ensān-e kāmāl*)—is considered the ultimate and necessary intermediary between the transcendent Divine Presence and the cosmos, which is populated by God's endless creatures. For without the existence of the Perfect Man and the human species, the

cosmos would remain incomplete and deficient, like a human body lacking its inner living spirit. Within the framework of Lāhijī's Sufi cosmology and metaphysics, the human being is ultimately an all-comprehensive mirror that receives the theophanic reflection of the all-comprehensive Name of God, which in Arabic—the language of divine revelation for the Islamic religion—is termed *Allāh*.⁴⁵¹ The Perfect Man—the primordial prototype of the human species—is one of the essential concepts within Lāhijī's system of Sufi doctrine and thought. This concept repeatedly appears throughout his commentary on the *Gulshan*, revealing its importance for him. The concept of the Perfect Man is also connected to other fundamental subjects within his Sufi doctrine and thought, such as his esoteric theories on the “Seal of Prophets” (*khātam-e nabuvvat*) and the “Seal of Saints” (*khātam-e velāyat*), as well as his ideas on the reality and the means of attaining *ma'rifat* (“realised knowledge of God”). Therefore, the concept of the Perfect Man is one of the pillars—along with *waḥdat al-wujūd*—of his entire system of Sufi doctrine and praxis. This chapter will therefore analyse Lāhijī's concept of the Perfect Man as it was articulated in his commentary on the *Gulshan*. We will also attempt to trace Lāhijī's idea of the Perfect Man back to Ibn al-‘Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ* and Qayṣarī's famous commentary of the *Fuṣūṣ*. The aim is to emphasise that Lāhijī's text was an active participant within the Akbarī tradition during the later Medieval period. Indeed, much of Lāhijī's teachings on the esoteric reality of the Perfect Man—as a significant metaphysical and cosmological principle within his Sufi worldview—is based upon the teachings of his famous Akbarī predecessors.

7.1 Lāhijī's Discourse on the Muḥammadan Reality and the Essential Role of the Perfect Man within His Sufi Cosmology

Before Lāhijī begins discussing his esoteric theory of the Perfect Man, he first lays out its foundations. This can also be understood as Lāhijī's anthropological understanding of the nature of man. He begins his discourse by describing the “Muḥammadan Reality” (*ḥaqīqat-e*

⁴⁵¹ *Allāh* is translated by most Islamic and Sufi scholars as “God”. *Allāh* within Islamic theology is understood not to be one deity amongst other deities, but the monotheistic God who is absolutely One and has no peer. According to Caner K. Dagli, “the use of the *Allāh* invokes a presence that is, in a sense, too much for certain contexts to bear. Among the Sufis, not only is the Name *Allāh* the Supreme Name that encompasses all other Names, but it is also the personal Name of God, as it is for all believers.” Ibn al-‘Arabī and Caner K. Dagli. *The Ringstones of Wisdom: Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam* (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), XV. I have decided to leave this specific term or Name of God untranslated within my thesis, since within the theoretical context of Lāhijī's Sufism, the Name *Allāh* always denotes the highest and supreme Name of God that comprehends within itself all the other Divine Names.

Muḥammadī) as an important metaphysical and cosmological principle. This Muḥammadan Reality is also identical with the Islamic philosophers “First Intellect” (*‘aql-e avval*). Lāhijī also sometimes uses the more philosophical term “First Intellect” interchangeably with the term “Muḥammadan Reality” throughout his text when referencing the same reality. Still, as a follower of Ibn al-‘Arabī, he prefers to use the term “Muḥammadan Reality” as it is favored by the Akbarīs and later Sufis when denoting this specific principle that is fundamental for the unfolding of creation—in both the cosmologies of the Akbarī Sufis and the Islamic philosophers.⁴⁵² Without understanding what the “Muḥammadan Reality” means as a metaphysical, cosmological principle within the paradigm of Lāhijī’s Sufi doctrine and thought—it is not possible for the reader to truly comprehend Lāhijī’s discourse on the idea of the Perfect Man.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter on the gradual descents and self-entifications of the One Absolute *Wujūd* of the Real—which begins the whole process of creation—the self-entification of the One *Wujūd* in its second degree after the First Entification of the “Inclusive Unity of the Names” (*wāḥedeyyat*), is the Muḥammadan Reality or spirit.⁴⁵³ This Muḥammadan Reality is the first possible being of creation and is ontologically situated just below the level of the Divinity. It serves as a mirror that reflects back to the Divine Presence all of the perfections of its own Names and Attributes, and therefore the Muḥammadan Reality is the locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive and greatest Name *Allāh*—the only Name amongst God’s Names which gathers and comprehends within itself all of the other Divine Names.⁴⁵⁴ Since Lāhijī considers the Muḥammadan Reality to be the first existent thing in creation to emanate from the Divine Presence—without any intermediary between it and the Creator—its reality is therefore understood by Lāhijī to be a direct reflection, shadow, and proto-copy of the level of the Divinity, which is also the degree of the Divine Presence termed as the “Inclusive

⁴⁵² For more on the doctrinal similarities between the “First Intellect” of the Islamic Philosophers and the “Muḥammadan Reality” of the Akbarī Sufis, see Muhammad Rustom, “The Cosmology of the Muḥammadan Reality.” In *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 4 (2013): 540-45.

⁴⁵³ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ibn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012)(From now on it will be cited as *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*), 20-22.

⁴⁵⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 20.

Unity of the Names”.⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, some Akbarīs even consider the Muḥammadan Reality—which plays an identical role to the Christian theological idea of the divine *logos* in the continuous unfolding of the cosmos—to be equivalent to the level of the Divinity of Absolute *Wujūd*.⁴⁵⁶ In Lāhijī’s own words, “The Muḥammadan Reality—peace and blessings be upon him—in the terminology of this particular group [the Sufis], is an expression for the Divine Essence of Oneness in respect to the First Entification and is also the locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh* (God)”.⁴⁵⁷ The metaphysical and ontological relationship that exists primordially between the Muḥammadan Reality—as the universal spirit of the Prophet Muḥammad—and the One Absolute *Wujūd* of the Real, is for Lāhijī the necessary prerequisite for the later unfolding of creation. Although Lāhijī—as a follower of the Akbarī tradition—makes it explicitly clear throughout his work that the possible entities are brought out into the light of manifest *Wujūd* through God’s divine command, he also reminds his readers that the Muḥammadan Reality always plays a central role in the whole process of creation, which never truly comes to an end. The following commentary on verse 19 of the *Gulshan* should serve as a further clarification on this particular teaching of Lāhijī’s concerning the Muḥammadan Reality as an indispensable cosmological principle for the creation of the cosmos:

Aḥad (“The One”) is the Name of the Divine Essence in respect to the annihilation of the plurality of the Names, Attributes, relations and entifications in the “m” (*mīm*) of Aḥmad, which represents the entification of Muḥammad. Why is this the case? For the distinction of Aḥmad from *Aḥad* (“The One”) is only through this single letter m which is an expression of his [Muḥammad’s] entification. Why is this the case? For the real locus-of-manifestation for the One is the reality of Aḥmad, and the rest of the degrees of the existent things are the locus-of-manifestation for the Muḥammadan Reality, just as it has been mentioned previously. And it is according to this meaning that the realised knowers have stated this: in the same way that the Real flows into and pervades all

⁴⁵⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 20.

⁴⁵⁶ For the similarities between the Akbarī concept of the Muḥammadan Reality with the *Divine Logos* of the Christian theological tradition, especially as a cosmological principle that is considered the basis for the unfolding of creation, see Fitzroy Morrissey, *Sufism and the Perfect Human: From Ibn ‘Arabī to Al-Jīlī* (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 2020), 97-117.

⁴⁵⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 21.

existent things, so this must also be the same for the Perfect Man who flows into and pervades all of the degrees of the existent things. Why is this so? For perfection belongs to that person who has become annihilated from his own selfhood and has become subsistent through the subsistence of the Real.⁴⁵⁸

The above passage by Lāhijī is dense in its metaphysical and mystical content and clarification may be needed. When Lāhijī states that “the distinction of Aḥmad from *Aḥad* (The One) is only through this single letter m which is an expression of his [Muḥammad’s] entification”, Lāhijī makes it explicit that the primordial and universal spirit of the Prophet Muḥammad was the first entity brought out into Manifest *Wujūd* from the Divine Presence of the Real, or in more specific terms, from the ontological degree of the “Inclusive Unity of the Names”. God then created the rest of the cosmos and the innumerable creatures that populate its various abodes and worlds from this same Muḥammadan Reality, which therefore serves as the true ontological cause for all of the existent and possible things within the cosmos.⁴⁵⁹ It is for this reason Lāhijī states that the universal spirit of the Perfect Man pervades every level of the cosmos, as well as pervading and flowing into every possible existent within the cosmos, for the Muḥammadan Reality serves as the underlying universal substance of entire creation. Therefore, everything within the cosmos can be understood as a unique entification of this one, universal Muḥammadan Reality. Lāhijī also establishes the connection between the two core concepts of the Muḥammadan Reality and the Perfect Man in the above passage. The above passage is taken from the earliest sections of his commentary and serves as an introduction to Lāhijī text, where he lays out the fundamental principles of his system of Sufi metaphysics and cosmology for his readers. Much like Qayṣarī’s *muqaddema* for his own commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, any mention of the Muḥammadan Reality by Lāhijī is always tied to his discourse on the Perfect Man’s nature, role, and identity.

⁴⁵⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 21.

⁴⁵⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 5-8. Sometimes Lāhijī uses other terms when describing this particular entification of the One *Wujūd*, such as the “First Intellect”, “Universal Spirit” (*rūḥ-e ā’zam*) or the “human reality” (*ḥaqīqat-e ensānī*), yet Lāhijī makes it quite clear throughout his text that all of these different terms signify the same Muḥammadan Reality within the framework of his theoretical and metaphysical discourse.

7.2 The Purpose for the Creation of the Perfect Man according to Lāhijī and the Akbarī School of Thought

This now brings us to a discussion on the Perfect Man and its significance within the cosmos according to God's eternal wisdom and divine plan. Much of Lāhijī's discourse on the subject is influenced by, if not derived from, Ibn al-'Arabī's own discourse in the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*. Within these sections of the *Fuṣūṣ* Ibn al-'Arabī is concerned with the divine wisdom of the bezel of Adam. Given the correlation, it is therefore appropriate to quote from Ibn al-'Arabī's most in-depth and systematic presentation on his esoteric theories concerning the Perfect Man. The following passage from the *Fuṣūṣ* illustrates the intertextual relationship between Lāhijī's text and Ibn al-'Arabī's influential *Fuṣūṣ*; moreover, it reveals an additional correlation with Qaysarī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*. Immediately in the opening passages of the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn al-'Arabī explains the hidden wisdom behind why God created Adam: the first and Perfect Man who is a physical embodiment of the Muḥammadan Reality. He states:

To see His Entity—in a comprehensive being that comprises the whole affair insofar as it is possessed of existence and His Mystery is manifest to Himself through it. For the vision of a thing has of itself in itself is not like the vision of a thing has of itself in another thing, which will be like a mirror for it; indeed, He is manifest to himself in a form accorded by the locus seen, which would not have manifested to Him without the existence of that locus and His self-disclosure to it.⁴⁶⁰

According to Ibn al-'Arabī then, the main reason God chose to create Adam—who as the first Perfect Man was a primordial prototype of the entire human species—was to witness all of His Divine Names and Attributes in an all-comprehensive manner within a single form. And only the form of the Perfect Man can play this sought-after role for the Real, since it was the form of the Perfect Man alone who serves as the locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive Name

⁴⁶⁰ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 3-4. Caner K. Dagli's English translations, taken from al-'Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 3-4. All direct quotations of Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* in this present chapter are taken from Caner K. Dagli's English translations, and will be cited from now on as *Fuṣūṣ*. I have made slight changes to Dagli's translations of the above passage, by replacing the word "identity" with "entity", in order to maintain consistency with the rest of my thesis.

Allāh. No other creature, not even the highest and nearest angels, possess the innate preparedness necessary to receive the self-disclosure of the Real in the totality of all of His Names and Attributes. This is also why, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, God selected Adam out of all his creations to be his vice-regent (*khalīfah*).⁴⁶¹ Qayṣarī further clarifies this particular aspect of the doctrine of the Perfect Man in the following passage, which serves as a commentary on the preceding passage by Ibn al-‘Arabī:

When the Real—the Most Glorious—wanted to self-disclose His own Essence to His own Essence, and had, therefore [already] contemplated all of His own perfections and Divine Attributes within His own Essence, He now wanted them [His Divine Names and Attributes] to be witnessed in a reality which for Him was like a mirror—just as it has been mentioned previously before in the first bezel—The Muḥammadan Reality which is the inner [and universal] reality of the human species, He brought into existence within the degree of the intelligible. Therefore, all of the realities of the cosmos can be found in that *wujūd* [The Muḥammadan Reality], which possesses an epitome existence (*wujūdī-ye ajmālī*).⁴⁶²

Lāhijī also shares this opinion of both Ibn al-‘Arabī and Qaysarī, for he states within his own text that “the mirror for the Divine Essence and Attributes is [the Perfect] Man, and the Real is manifest through his form”.⁴⁶³ Yet Lāhijī’s own discourse on this subject also adds a few interesting details not found in the discourse of his Akbarī predecessors, and his discourse is also shaped by the views of Shabistarī as well. Lāhijī’s own insight into this subject is based on his mystical *tafsīr* on a single verse of the Quran, which, historically, has often been commentated upon by the wider Sufi community. The particular verse in question is Q. 33:72. It is perhaps important to quote the entire verse in order to gain a deeper understanding of Lāhijī’s own interpretation. According to the Quran, “indeed we offered the [Divine] Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were apprehensive of

⁴⁶¹ *Fuṣūṣ*, 9 & 256.

⁴⁶² Dāwūd ibn Maḥmūd Qaysarī, *Sharḥ-e Qaysarī bar Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥekam-e Ibn ‘Arabī*. Translated into Persian by Muḥammad Khwājawī, 2 Vols (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1387/2008) (from now on it will be cited as *Sharḥ-e Qaysarī*), I: 167. All passages quoted from Qaysarī’s text within the present chapter have been translated into English by me.

⁴⁶³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 170.

it, but man undertook it. Indeed he is most oppressive and ignorant [towards himself]."⁴⁶⁴

Immediately after quoting this Quranic verse in full within his commentary, Lāhijī begins to expound his mystical *tafsir* upon this verse. According to Lāhijī, most commentators on the Quran have traditionally read the two qualities that God had attributed to man—"oppressive" and "ignorant"—as vilification by God towards man for taking up the Divine Trust when the rest of God's creation refused. Lāhijī, however, interprets this particular Quranic verse as being the height of praise by God for man, for their willingness to bear the burden of the Divine Trust. For "it maybe that 'oppressive' is derived from darkness".⁴⁶⁵

According to Lāhijī's interpretation, the burden of the Divine Trust is, therefore, nothing but the form of all-comprehensiveness that the human being (or the Perfect Man more specifically) possesses out of all of God's creatures. In other words, man's preparedness and receptiveness to serve as a locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive and greatest Name of God, *Allāh*. And according to Lāhijī:

The human being, from the perspective that it is the last of the descents and the conclusion of the manifestations [of the Real *Wujūd*], and after the degree of the human being, just as it has been mentioned previously before, nothing else has been created, and one side of him is the darkness of nonexistence (*'adamī*), and it is from this perspective that he has the receptiveness for that where the Real in all of His Names and Attributes is manifest in him; and he, therefore, becomes the bearer of the burden of Divine Trust of all-comprehensiveness (*hāmel-e emānat-e jāme'yāt*), for "*everything is manifest through its opposites*". So, therefore, these [attributes] "oppressive" and "ignorant" are the very essence of praise.⁴⁶⁶

If we keep in the back of our minds the structure of the cosmos that is envisioned by Lāhijī and other Akbarīs like him, the human species is considered to be the very last of God's creatures to come out into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*. For this very reason, the form of the Perfect Man—

⁴⁶⁴ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 169. 'Ali Quli Qara'i's English translation.

⁴⁶⁵ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 169.

⁴⁶⁶ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 170. This passage forms part of a Lāhijī's commentary on verse 263 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

as the primordial prototype of the human species—is the darkest and most dense of all God’s creatures within the cosmos, for it is the furthest removed from the Divine Origin.

Paradoxically, this darkness and denseness also bestows upon the Perfect Man the privilege and preparedness to serve as a locus-of-manifestation for the Real—especially for His supreme and all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*. This is what the Real ultimately desired when He created the Perfect Man and the rest of the cosmos.⁴⁶⁷ And indeed, the very purpose for creating the cosmos—according to Lāhijī and his Akbarī predecessors—was for the very creation of the Perfect Man. For otherwise, God would never be able to witness his own Self or Reality in the mirror of another form outside of Himself in an all-comprehensive manner, and as Ibn al-‘Arabī had stated in the *Fuṣūṣ*, “the vision of a thing has of itself in itself is not like the vision of a thing has of itself in another thing”.⁴⁶⁸ It is, therefore, the mirror-entity of the Perfect Man alone—whether that be Adam, Muḥammad or a “Friend of God” (*wālī*) of Muḥammad’s spiritual inheritance—who reflects back to the Real’s gaze all of the perfections of His own Divine Reality or Entity. The following short passage by Lāhijī summarises the previous discussion, and should further clarify this significant point concerning the nature and role of the Perfect Man within God’s creation:

After the human being, nothing else has been created, and one side of him is the darkness of nonexistence; verily, the darkness of the human being is more than the rest of the degrees [of the creatures]; therefore, the opposite of Light [of the Real *Wujūd*] in reality, you can state is the sheer darkness of the human being. And it is for this reason that he has become the bearer of the burden for the manifestation of the reality of [the Real] *Wujūd*....[Perfect] man has therefore become the mirror for all of the Divine Names and Attributes, and is the complete locus-of-manifestation for Him.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 169-72.

⁴⁶⁸ *Fuṣūṣ*, 3-4. Dagli’s English translations, taken from al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 3-4.

⁴⁶⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 170. This passage forms part of a Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 263 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

7.3 The Perfect Man as the Spirit of the Cosmos, and the Cosmos as the Corporeal Body of the Perfect Man

Another important teaching that Lāhijī presents to his readers in connection to his discourse on the Perfect Man, is the idea that the Perfect Man as the *quṭb* (“axis” or “pole”) of the entire cosmos, is the intermediary through which God sustains the *wujūd* of his creatures within the descending levels of the cosmos. The subsistence of the possible entities within the realm of Manifest *Wujūd* is a result of the divine grace and emanation (*fayḏ*) that flows from the heart of the Perfect Man towards the rest of creation. However, Lāhijī, Ibn al-‘Arabī, and his followers make it clear throughout their works that although these divine effusions are mediated through the heart of the Perfect Man, they ultimately originate from the Divine Presence. Since the Perfect Man is the *quṭb* which everything in the cosmos is dependant upon for their subsistence in *wujūd*, the Perfect Man is likened by Lāhijī and the Akbarīs as being the very spirit of the entire cosmos, and the cosmos is likened to the corporeal body of the Perfect Man. In other words, if it were not for the existence of the Perfect Man as the supreme axis of the cosmos, the cosmos and the creatures would be like an empty corpse derived of its inner, living spirit. It is perhaps relevant to introduce Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 652 of the *Gulshan* here to further make sense of this specific teaching concerning the role of the Perfect Man within the cosmos:

In the same way that the spirit and reality of all of the Names is the Universal Name *Allāh*, the spirit and reality of the cosmos is none other than the Perfect Man who is the locus-of-manifestation for the Name *Allāh*. According to the reality of *wujūd* where there is a complete unification between the locus-of-manifestation and what is manifest through it in *wujūd* [i.e the Real], it must be known that just as the Divine Identity (*Huveyyat-e elāhīye*) flows in all the things of the cosmos, the Perfect Man also flows into the whole of the cosmos, so the spirit and reality of the cosmos is in reality this Perfect Man. There he [Shabistarī] has stated that, “the entire cosmos is like you, one entified individual”. This means that the cosmos from the perspective of collectedness is similar to an entified human individual who is named the “greater human being” (*ensān-e kabīr*), from the perspective that the manifestation of the human reality occurs within

it. And just as for the human individual there exists a spirit and corporeal body, all of the degrees of the cosmos is likened to a corporeal body and the Perfect Man is its living spirit. It is because of this ontological fact that [Shabistarī] has stated that, “you have become like the spirit for it and it [the cosmos] has become like the body for you”. This means that you who are a human being, are like the spirit of the cosmos and the cosmos for you is in the position of being a body in relation to you; the reason being that just as perfection and realised knowledge (*maʿrifat*) of the corporeal body is obtained through the spirit, the mystical knowledge of realisation, recognition (*shenākht*) and the attainment of real perfection for the cosmos is only possible through the human being [or the Perfect Man].⁴⁷⁰

The following passage from his commentary on verse 269 of the *Gulshan* makes quite clear that Lāhijī believes the Perfect Man is the corporeal embodiment and manifestation of the Muḥammadan Reality. Lāhijī compares the cosmological position of the Perfect Man to the beating, living heart of the human body within the cosmos. For without the Perfect Man, the cosmos would not be able to survive for even a single instant within Manifest *Wujūd*—just as the human body would perish as well without the functioning of the human heart:

You are the inner kernel of the entire cosmos
And you are its centre.
Know thyself! For you are the spirit of the cosmos.

Meaning, the [Perfect] Man, because of the fact that it is the inner kernel and epitome (*khulāṣe*) of the [manifest] cosmos, and the purpose for the creation of the creatures was in reality he [the Perfect Man], and in relation to the circulation of the heavens, he is like the centre; therefore, in the same manner that the kernel is [located] within and the skin is on the outside, the position of the [Perfect] Man is located in the centre of cosmos, and the cosmos emerges forth circulating around the [Perfect] Man, and they

⁴⁷⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 424-25.

circulate around his periphery, and all [of the creatures] have come into existence [wujūd] dependant upon him [the Perfect Man].⁴⁷¹

Much of Lāhijī's discourse concerning this particular aspect of the Muḥammad Reality or the Perfect Man as the heart of the cosmos, seems to be largely influenced by Qayṣarī, as it can be found within Qayṣarī's commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*. The following passage is taken from Qayṣarī's text, and is a likely source for Lāhijī's own discourse on this specific issue:

[The Real] has placed the heart of the Perfect Man as the mirror for the self-disclosures of His Divine Essence and Names so that He first discloses Himself upon it [the heart of the Perfect Man], and afterwards through [the Perfect Man] He self-discloses Himself to the rest of the cosmos. [This is] like the reflections of light from a mirror which is positioned in front of the shining rays of the sun, and [then shines upon] whatever else may be in front of it [the mirror]. Based upon this, their entities [of the creatures] within the Presence of Divine Knowledge or within Entity, along with their perfections, are actualised through the intermediary of the Perfect Man.⁴⁷²

And:

In the same manner that the Real and His Identity (*huveyyatash*) flows into Adam, in the same manner that he [Adam] pervades and flows into every existent thing in the cosmos, but his [Adam's] pervading and disclosing itself in every reality from amongst the realities of the cosmos, is in the measure of the preparedness of the reality of that existent thing and its receptiveness.⁴⁷³

Qayṣarī makes it quite clear to his readers that the Real's *Wujūd*, or his self-disclosure, first falls upon the heart of the Perfect Man, which is like a pure, lustrous and dust-free mirror that perfectly reflects the light of the Real's Absolute *Wujūd* to the rest of the cosmos. For between it and the Divine Reality of Absolute *Wujūd* there is no other intermediary or intervening secondary cause. Only then does the Real's *Wujūd*, or his self-disclosure, reach the other

⁴⁷¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 173.

⁴⁷² *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 168.

⁴⁷³ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 216.

entities of the cosmos. In other words, the other possible entities within the cosmos receive the light of the Real's self-disclosure—through which they are able to subsist within Manifest *Wujūd*—through the intermediary of the Perfect Man's heart. And just as the Real's *Wujūd* penetrates the entire cosmos and everything existent within it, so too does the universal spirit of the Perfect Man. But what do both Lāhijī and Qayṣarī mean by this particular teaching of theirs? For a superficial reading of these passages may seem like *shirk*—the unforgivable sin of associating partners with God, hence violating the sanctity of His Divine Unity—which is considered the gravest sin within Islam. To clear up this confusion we must always keep in mind the ontological idea that the Perfect Man is essentially a locus-of-manifestation for the Real in his all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*, which is the Name for the Divine Reality at the level of the Divinity, and not of the Transcendent and Unknowable Essence. Since it is none other than the Real who has self-disclosed through the form of the Perfect Man, the inner being of the Perfect Man is none other than the Real. This is why Ibn al-ʿArabī states that the true identity of the Perfect Man is the “Real/creation”.⁴⁷⁴ Meaning that the Perfect Man in his outer, witnessed form is a creature of creation, but in his inner reality he is none other than the Real, for it is the Real itself who has disclosed Himself through his mirror-entity. In commenting upon this same passage by Ibn al-ʿArabī, Qayṣarī provides his own valuable insights concerning the true nature of the Perfect Man. Qayṣarī states that, “*he is the Real/creation*. Meaning that Adam is that [same] Divine Reality [*ḥaqq*] in respect to his Lordship over the cosmos, and his being characterised with the Divine Attributes. And he is a creation, in respect to his obedience and servitude, or in other words, he [Adam] is the Real in respect to his [inner] spirit, and he is a creation in respect to his corporeal frame (*jasad*)”.⁴⁷⁵

It should now be clear that for Lāhijī and Qayṣarī the inner being of the Perfect Man is none other than the Real through the self-disclosure of his all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*. When Lāhijī and Qayṣarī state that the universal spirit of the Perfect Man flows into the entire cosmos, along with every creature within the cosmos, what they mean is that it is none other than the One *Wujūd* of the Real who flows into every existent entity and level of the cosmos.

⁴⁷⁴ *Fuṣūṣ*, 15.

⁴⁷⁵ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 216.

This permeation of the Real's *Wujūd* allows the possible entities to maintain their existence within Manifest *Wujūd*. God, therefore, creates and preserves the creatures through the intermediary form of the Perfect Man, since the Divine Reality can only manifest itself within the cosmos through His All-Comprehensive Name *Allāh* through the form of the Perfect Man. For the Perfect Man alone has the preparedness for this “burden” or task: and it is for this very reason that the Real has singled him out to be his vice-regent amongst his creatures. The *wujūd* of the Perfect Man is therefore identical to the *wujūd* of the One Existent Being who is God, since it is none other than He who is self-disclosed through the heart of the Perfect Man. This interpretation therefore does not contradict the central message of Ibn al-‘Arabī, Qayṣarī and Lāhijī’s Sufi discourse on the reality of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, confirming the fact that only the Real truly exists and nothing else besides Him.

7.4 The Perfect Man as God’s Vice-Regent and the Subjugation of Every Existent Thing within the Cosmos beneath the Ruling Authority of the Perfect Man

Another interesting facet of the Perfect Man that can be found in Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan*, and which he spends a significant amount of time expounding upon, concerns the exalted position of the Perfect Man within the cosmos as God’s vice-regent. As God’s peerless vice-regent in all creation, every existent thing within Manifest *Wujūd* is subjected to the Perfect Man’s authority. Why, though, has God made this so? And what is the exact nature of the ontological and even mystical relationship that exists between the Perfect Man—as God’s vice-regent and the beating heart and axis of the cosmos—and the rest of creation? It is perhaps helpful here to quote a short passage from Lāhijī’s text to further help us gain insight into the particular issue. The following passage is Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 269 of the *Gulshan*:

Because the souls and the spirits of all the existent things are rays from the sun of the human reality (*ḥaqīqat-e ensānī*), and all life, knowledge, consciousness, and comprehension, are supported by and infused from it [the Perfect Man]. And outside of the human reality, all of the existent things are like [empty] bodies without spirits where they have no life at all, as well as having no knowledge nor comprehension, since the

spirits (*jān*) of everything are hidden in the form of the [Perfect] man. The [Perfect] man is, in reality, the spirit of all the things, therefore all of the things are subject to the command of the Perfect Man (*ensān-e kāmel*) and are obliged to obey his commands, “And he has disposed for you whatever is in the heavens, and whatever is on the earth, all is from Him” [Q 45:13] “And He disposed the sun and moon for you” [Q 13:33].⁴⁷⁶

In order to make the above passage by Lāhijī a little more lucid, we need to recall our earlier discussions regarding the fact that for Lāhijī, as well as for Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, the Perfect Man is considered the corporeal embodiment of the Muḥammadan Reality within the world of witnessed forms—whether that be the world of imagination or the world of corporeal bodies. The Muḥammadan Reality, as the first thing that God created and emanated out of His Own Divine Presence, contains within itself, in a state of potentiality, all that currently exists and will exist within the cosmos. For according to God’s Divine Foreknowledge, “the mirror and location of self-disclosure for the Real is the human reality who is the all-comprehensive form which contains within itself all of the corporeal and spiritual degrees of the cosmos”.⁴⁷⁷ Everything that exists within the cosmos—whether that be the Throne and the Footstall, the heavenly spheres, the nearest angels, the species of animals, plants, minerals, and the individual human beings—is all brought out into Manifest *Wujūd* from the universal spirit of the Muḥammadan Reality, which is the inner being and spirit of the Perfect Man.⁴⁷⁸ Because of this, the possible entities that populate the different levels of the cosmos can be considered particulars of the universal spirit of the Perfect Man, for as Qayṣarī himself states in his introduction to his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*:

Know that the realities of the cosmos in both knowledge and actuality are manifestations of the human reality, which is the manifestation of the Supreme Name, “*Allāh*”. Thus, the spirits of the world are the particulars of the Supreme Human Spirit, whether they are among the heavenly, elemental or animal spirits.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 173. The translations of the Quranic verses are from ‘Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translations.

⁴⁷⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 97-8.

⁴⁷⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 5-8, 22.

⁴⁷⁹ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 88-9.

Because of this ontological and metaphysical reality where the spirits or beings of the creatures are the particularisations of the Muḥammadan Reality of the Perfect Man, there always remains an unseen spiritual connection between the spirit of the Perfect Man and all of the creatures within Manifest *Wujūd*.⁴⁸⁰ It is through this unseen spiritual connection that God's *fayẓ* (divine grace or effusion) is infused into them ceaselessly.⁴⁸¹ And without this constant transmission of God's *fayẓ* the possible entities would immediately vanish back into the darkness of non-being, which is their essential state of being, since *wujūd*, in reality, belongs to the Real alone and no one else.⁴⁸² In other words, God perpetually infuses His *Wujūd* into the possible entities, and thereby maintains their entities within Manifest *Wujūd* through the intermediary form of the Perfect Man. For this reason, the rest of creation is subjected to the authority of the Perfect Man because they cannot survive and maintain their entities within Manifest *Wujūd* without him. This is a crucial cosmological role that he fulfills within the divine order of creation which God has specifically assigned to him alone.⁴⁸³ Lāhijī's discourse on this particular aspect of the Perfect Man's cosmological role and metaphysical nature is probably derived from Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ*, as well as by Qayṣarī's commentary. In order to highlight the channels of textual influences and interpolation that exist between these three Akbarī texts, a few passages will be quoted from Ibn al-'Arabī's and Qayṣarī's works. The first passage below is taken from Ibn al-'Arabī's text, while the latter passages are from Qayṣarī's:

That is why the creation of Adam, who is the Model that unites the Qualities of the Divine Presence—Essence, Qualities, Acts—he says, “Indeed God created Adam in His Image”. His Image is naught but the Divine Presence. In the noble Epitome, Perfect Man, He existentially all the Divine Names as well as all the realities found outside of him in the macrocosm. He made him the spirit of the world, subjugating both the exalted and the lowly to him by reason of the perfection of his form. Just as there is nothing in the world that does not glorify with His praises, so too there is nothing in the world that is not subjugated to man, by reason of what is granted to him by the reality of his form.

⁴⁸⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 172-3.

⁴⁸¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 173-8.

⁴⁸² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 173-8.

⁴⁸³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 173-4.

God most High said: “*And He has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, all together, from Him*”.⁴⁸⁴ Thus everything in the world is subject to man.

Whosoever knows this knows it, and such is the Perfect Man, and whosoever is ignorant of it is ignorant of it, and such is the animal man.⁴⁸⁵

The following two passages are by Qayṣarī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*:

As long as it remains like this where this human being [i.e. the Perfect Man] is existent within the cosmos, the cosmos will be preserved through his *wujūd*, and he continues to exercise his dispensation (*taṣarruf*) within the higher and lower worlds. Therefore nothing from the realities of the cosmos and the higher spirits have the gall in opening the divine treasures and storehouses and to exercise their own disposal (*tassaruf*) within them, except through the command of that perfect one [i.e. the Perfect Man], since He alone is the possessor of the Supreme Name [*Allāh*], and through that [Name] he nurtures the entire cosmos. And no spiritual reality from amongst the spiritual realities (*ma’ānī*) can manifest from the inner [and unseen] unless through his command, and nothing of the manifest can return to the inner [and the unseen] unless through his command... Therefore, he is the *barzakh* between the two seas and the curtain between the two worlds, as God has alluded to that [within the Quran] when He states, “*He merged the two seas, meeting each other. There is a barrier between them which they do not overstep*” [Q55:19-20].⁴⁸⁶

And:

From that perspective where the human being [the Perfect Man]—through his own immutable entity—comprehends within himself all of the immutable entities, and in his external existence he comprehends within himself all of the external existent things, so for [the Perfect Man] there exists the oneness in gatheredness (*jam’*) from the perspective of knowledge and entity. And as it has been stated previously in the introduction that the entities of the cosmos—within the Presence of Divine

⁴⁸⁴ Q 45:13.

⁴⁸⁵ *Fuṣūṣ*, 256. English Translations by Dagli, taken from al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 256.

⁴⁸⁶ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 173. Quranic verses are ‘Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translations.

Knowledge—are attained or actualised through the differentiation of the immutable entity of the human being [i.e., the Perfect Man].⁴⁸⁷

The above passage makes it quite clear that Qayṣarī views all the possible entities within the cosmos as pre-existing within the universal spirit of the Perfect Man prior to their eventual emergence or creation within the cosmos. Therefore, all the creatures are created from the universal spirit of the Perfect Man, or the Muḥammadan Reality. According to the Akbarī school of thought, another way of looking at the creation process is that when God commands the immutable entities to come into *wujūd* with His Divine Command “Be!”, God first deposits the immutable entities into the Muḥammadan Reality, which is the inner spirit of the Perfect Man. Afterwards, the Perfect Man, by obeying the command of the Real, then existentiates a specific possible entity from his own reality or spirit, which finally enters into the realm of Manifest *Wujūd*, but only according to the decree of the Perfect Man, who is God’s vice-regent. For as Qayṣarī states in the previous passage, “and no spiritual reality from amongst the spiritual realities can manifest from the inner [and unseen] unless through his command”.⁴⁸⁸

The fact that the Perfect Man gathers and comprehends within himself the realities of all the possible entities of the cosmos, and that the cosmos is none other than the differentiation and dispersion of his universal, spiritual reality, where the entities are like his particulars in relation to him, and he is like the universal, makes it understandable why Sufis like Ibn al-‘Arabī, Lāhijī, Qayṣarī and other Akbarīs have exalted the position and rank of the Perfect Man within their worldview—positing him as God’s greatest creation and servant—and have devoted so much space within their own treatises to unveiling the esoteric and metaphysical mysteries of the Perfect Man. It is perhaps relevant now to quote another passage from Lāhijī’s text which summarises all the points we have discussed so far in connection to the metaphysical reality and cosmological role of the Perfect Man. For it may help to further illuminate some of the difficulties for the reader concerning this esoteric doctrine of the Perfect Man. One important thing to note, in regards to the quoted passage below, is that Lāhijī sometimes use the term “Human Reality” (*ensān-e kabīr*) which seems to

⁴⁸⁷ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 205.

⁴⁸⁸ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 173.

be synonymous in meaning with the terms “Muḥammadan Reality” and “Perfect Man”. The passage below is a commentary on verse 141 of the *Gulshan*:

The cosmos became a human being,
And the human being an entire cosmos
There is no statement clearer than this.

Meaning that the cosmos in relation to the [the Perfect] Man became the Greater Human Being (*ensān-e kabīr*), and [the Perfect] Man is the compendium (*khulāṣa*) of all things, constituting a separate world [apart from the cosmos]. And just as the Real has become manifest in the [Perfect] Man, and has become his sight (*dīda*), and through [the Perfect Man’s] sight He has contemplated his own Self. [The Perfect] Man has become manifest within the cosmos, and has become the pupil of the eyes (*dīda*) of the cosmos, and through his self, he spiritually contemplates his own reality (*khūd*) in a differentiated manner (*mufaṣṣal*) [upon the mirror of the cosmos]. In summary, since the [Perfect] Man is the locus-of-manifestation for the Divine Name *Allāh*, the Name *Allāh* from the perspective of its all-comprehensiveness contains within itself all of the Divine Names. In reality, it is He [the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*] that is manifest in all of these Divine Names. The human reality (*ḥaqīqat-e ensānī*) which is the locus-of-manifestation for this particular Name [the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*], of course, it must also be that it too must contain within itself all of the degrees of the cosmos, and all of the realities of the cosmos are therefore the locus-of-manifestation for the Human Reality. Why is this the case? For every degree and every entitification [within the cosmos] is a locus-of-manifestation for every one of the Divine Names, and all of the Names are inserted beneath the authority of the All-Comprehensive Name *Allāh*, which comprehends within itself all of the Divine Names and Attributes. Therefore, the realities of all the degrees and entitifications [of the cosmos], will be placed underneath the authority of the human reality, which [it alone] is a locus-of-manifestation for that All-Comprehensive Name [*Allāh*]. From this perspective, the whole of the differentiated cosmos is named as the Greater Human Being. The reason being that it is the human reality that has become manifest in all of the existent forms of the cosmos. And because

of this all-comprehensive form [that the Perfect Man possess], he is worthy of becoming the vice-regent of God. The reason being that the vice-regent must be in the form of the One who appointed him as his representative. That is the meaning of [this particular hadith], “*God created Adam in His own Form*”. In reality, the mirror and the location for the self-disclosure for the Real is the human reality, who is the all-comprehensive form which contains within itself all of the corporeal and spiritual degrees of the cosmos.⁴⁸⁹

Another facet of Lāhijī’s interpretation of the Perfect Man’s metaphysical reality which is worth mentioning here is his esoteric idea that God governs the cosmos through the form of the Perfect Man. This continues our previous discussion on Lāhijī’s idea that the Perfect Man is, in reality, a locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*, and that all things in the cosmos are subjugated to the authority and command of the Perfect Man. For whenever the creatures obey the Perfect Man, they are in reality obeying God. The Perfect Man, being a non-existent thing like everything else in the cosmos, or in more precise terms, is a non-existent mirror for the self-disclosure of the Real through His All-Comprehensive Name *Allāh*; therefore, it is none other than the Real who acts and wills through his form. In other words, from a certain perspective the Perfect Man’s acts may appear to be his own, as a possible existent; however, he is in reality a non-existent mirror situated opposite the Real *Wujūd*, the Perfect Man actually serves as a locus-of-manifestation for the Divine Acts themselves, for it is only God who truly exist in all of *wujūd*.⁴⁹⁰ This esoteric discourse concerning the acts and will of the Perfect Man is largely based upon a particular interpretation of Q. 8:17 of the Quran in which God says to the Prophet Muḥammad, “*and you did not throw when you threw, rather it was God who threw*”.⁴⁹¹ This verse is often quoted by Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers, and serves as a kind of scriptural justification for the idea that it is the Real who acts and wills through the form of the Perfect Man; and therefore, his acts do not in reality belong to nor originate from himself, since he is a non-existent thing just like all the possible existents within the cosmos.⁴⁹² For this reason, the Real governs his creation through the form and reality of the Perfect Man,

⁴⁸⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 97-98.

⁴⁹⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 268-69.

⁴⁹¹ Lāhijī quotes this Quranic verse twice within his text, pages 98 & 377 of the *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*. The English translations are taken from ‘Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translations of the Quran.

⁴⁹² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 377.

and when the creatures obey the dictates and commands of the Perfect Man, they are in reality obeying their Divine Creator and Lord, who has manifested and disclosed Himself through the form of the Perfect Man through His All-Comprehensive Name *Allāh*.⁴⁹³ The passage below from Lāhijī alludes to this metaphysical reality, which serves as a mystical *tafsīr* by Lāhijī on the Quranic story of the creation of Adam and God’s command to the angels to bow down before him:

Because the Divine Essence and Attributes were reflected within the mirror of the human form, Shabistārī states that, according to the hadith, “*God the most Glorious had created Adam in His own Form*”, Adam was the reflection of the object of worship (*ma’būd*) for the angels; and based upon your all-comprehensiveness, and since they contemplated the Divine Form of their own worshiped Lord (*ṣūrat-e ma’būd-e khūd*) in you, they all prostrated before you [the Perfect Man], “*So the angels prostrated - all of them entirely*” [Q. 15:30]. It is for this reason that [the Perfect Man] was the reflection of the Level of the Divinity (*martebe-e ulūhīyat*) and all of the Divine Names, as well as the Named was reflected in you [Adam as the Perfect Man]; therefore, you become the place of prostration for all of the angels. And what is meant from prostration (*sajdah*), is obedience and submission, meaning that all of the servants of God become obedient and submissive to the human being. Why was this the case? For the origin and reality of man is the universal spirit (*rūḥ-e a’zam*), and based upon the all-comprehensive form that he possesses, man includes within himself all of the disengaged spirits and material existents. And every time that he obeys the command of the Real, it is based upon the fact that he possesses the degree of vice-regency from the Real. Therefore, all of the creatures of God are subjected to and obedient to him, and their relationship with the Perfect Man is like the relationship of the particular with the universal (*kull*). Of course, the particular must necessarily follow after the universal.⁴⁹⁴

From the above passage it may be speculated that perhaps the real reason why all the angels prostrated before Adam—the first Perfect Man in existence—was because they immediately

⁴⁹³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 172-3, 181-83.

⁴⁹⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 172. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 266 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

recognised that it was none other than the Real who had unveiled Himself to them through Adam's form. They were not in reality prostrating before Adam, but instead to their Divine Creator and Lord who had self-disclosed to them through the form of the Perfect Man, i.e., Adam. This discourse of Lāhijī's in relation to the Perfect Man and the ontological reality of his acts seems to also be derived from Qayṣarī's text. For according to Qayṣarī, "it is from this perspective that He—May He be Glorified!—does not govern the cosmos except through the cosmos and that he has made Adam His vice-regent upon the cosmos, and He governs and manages the cosmos through him [Adam]".⁴⁹⁵ In other words, The Real—who is utterly transcendent in relation to His creation—is also at the same time intimately involved in the governance and management of His creation through the form and the heart of the Perfect Man, for He cannot govern the world of forms and entities unless through a concurrent form that is situated within the world of the possible existents. The Perfect Man perfectly plays that required role for God.

7.5 The Perfect Man and Mystical, Realised Knowledge of God, and the Reason Why Mankind is Exalted above the Angels

Before we conclude our discussions on the Perfect Man, one more aspect concerning Lāhijī's discourse on this esoteric Akbarī concept of the Perfect Man is worth mentioning. It is linked to another important principle of Lāhijī's entire system of Sufi doctrine: *ma'rifat* ("mystical, realised knowledge of God"). Lāhijī devotes a significant amount of space within his commentary to expounding upon the nature of realised knowledge of God and its central role within the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* for the Sufi wayfarers. Indeed, it is one of the most discussed topics within his entire commentary on the *Gulshan*. Therefore, it is crucial for us to understand the mysterious connection between the concept of the Perfect Man and his discourse on the Sufi idea of *ma'rifat*. For Lāhijī, real knowledge of God—within the theoretical context of Lāhijī's Sufi teachings—means knowledge of God's *Wujūd*. More specifically, it means the level of the Divinity which is characterised by His numerous Names and Attributes; though, not of His Divine Essence, which remains forever inaccessible to his creatures. For it is not possible to

⁴⁹⁵ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, II: 1023.

attain this kind of mystical knowledge of the Real through the reflective and intellectual knowledge which Lāhijī and the Sufis classify as *‘elm*. Real knowledge, according to Lāhijī, is termed by the Sufis as *ma‘rifat*. And according to Lāhijī’s Sufi discourse, one reason why God has exalted the rank of the Perfect Man—since the era of Adam—above the rest of his creatures, even above the highest angels, was because of the degree of mystical, realised knowledge that he had of the Real.

One of the hidden reasons behind the creation of the Perfect Man, along with the human species, was for the sake of this all-comprehensive *ma‘rifat* which could only be achieved and realised through the form and creation of the Perfect Man. According to the theosophical teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Qayṣarī—which Lāhijī follows quite closely within his own explication on the subject matter—the reason why the rest of the creatures could not attain the same degree of mystical, realised knowledge as Adam, was because every creature can only know God according to the measure of their worship and praise of the Real. And every servant or creature of God can only worship the Real based upon the specific Divine Name for which they are a locus-of-manifestation. They cannot worship Him, hence know Him, in the other aspects of His Divine Reality which correspond to different Divine Names, and which they have no ontological relationship with, since they are not a locus-of-manifestation for that specific Name within Manifest *Wujūd*.⁴⁹⁶ This is why the worship of Adam—in the eyes of God—was more complete and perfect than the worship of the angels, even though they had worshipped and sanctified Him for tens of thousands of years before the creation of Adam. For as we must remind ourselves again, the Perfect Man is nothing more than a locus-of-manifestation for the supreme and all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*—the unique and single Name of God that gathers and comprehends within itself all of God’s Beautiful Names. Therefore, it is Adam alone—or in more specific terms, the Perfect Man, who includes the Prophet Muḥammad and his spiritual inheritors from amongst the saintly “Friends of God” within his *ummah*—who can worship and know God through all of His Divine Names. The worship and *ma‘rifat* of the rest of the creatures is limited by their own immutable essences, which in return are loci-of-manifestation for only a single Name of the Real. For this reason,

⁴⁹⁶ *Fuṣūṣ*, 7. And *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 8.

according to Lāhijī and the Akbarī tradition that he follows, even the nearest angels were inferior to Adam. According to Qayṣarī:

The all-comprehensiveness of the Names that existed for Adam did not exist for the angels, for they can only worship God from the aspect of a particular and delimited Name, and they cannot transgress beyond that. It is Adam alone who can worship Him with All of His Names.⁴⁹⁷

It is now relevant to quote a passage from Lāhijī, followed by a passage from both Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ*, as well as from Qayṣarī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, so as to show the textual relationships that exist between these three influential Akbarī texts. In Lāhijī’s own words regarding this specific subject matter:

So, of every Attribute where someone who in reality derives no benefit nor share (*maḥẓūẓ*) from it [of the Divine Attribute], those Attributes in relation to him are hidden, and the existent things in their totality are the loci-of-manifestation for the Divine Names, and each one [of the existent things] is a locus-of-manifestation for some of the Names; just as the angels have stated: *While we declare your praise and sanctify You*. [Q 2:30], and Satan had said: *I swear by your glory that I will lead them all astray*. [Q 38:82].⁴⁹⁸ So the locus-of-manifestation for all of the Divine Names and Attributes is none other than [the Perfect] Man; so, therefore, perfect and complete worship and mystical knowledge of God (*ma‘rifat*) does not occur except for the Perfect Man, and the rest of the existent things have only become realised knowers of some of the Names and Attributes where they are the loci-of-manifestation for them, and where they also worship the same Name from which they derive a portion. And the human being, according to the all-comprehensiveness that he possesses, is, therefore, a realised knower of all of the Divine Names. He (Shabistarī) has stated: “this intellect and discernment had manifested in Adam”. Meaning, because Adam— another expression for the Perfect Man—was the locus-of-manifestation for all of the Divine Names and Attributes, and his intellect and discernment was brought into existence so that he may

⁴⁹⁷ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 180.

⁴⁹⁸ Both of these Quranic verses are ‘Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translations.

know that this all-comprehensiveness is necessary for him, for he is the origin of all things. The reason being that through his own [particular] Lord who is *Allāh*, when he became a realised knower—in reality—he has become a realised knower of all the Divine Names. Why is this the case? For the other Names are gathered together and are beneath the authority of the universal Name *Allāh*, which is the Divine Essence that gathers within itself all of the Names and Attributes who are enfolded within it, like the enfolding of the particulars within the universal (*kull*).⁴⁹⁹

And according to Ibn al-‘Arabī in his *Fuṣūṣ*:

No one knows anything of God except what is accorded him by his essence. The angels did not possess the synthesis possessed by Adam, and were not aware of the Divine Names by which it is set apart such that they could glorify the Real and proclaim Him Holy through them. Nor do they know that God possess Names to whose knowledge they did not attain, therefore not glorifying Him with them nor proclaiming Him holy as did Adam.⁵⁰⁰

The following passage is from Qayṣarī’s text, and is a commentary on the previous passage by Ibn al-‘Arabī:

“For no one knows anything of God except what is accorded to him by his essence.” This is an explanation for the absence of awareness upon whatever the presence of the Real may demand of worship from them [the angels], the reason being that no one from amongst the servants knows anything of the Names of the Real and His Divine Attributes except whatever its own immutable essence may bestow upon that servant according to its own preparedness. And no one worships Him except in the measure of its own knowledge and realised knowledge (*ma’rifat*) of the Real. It is because of this that worship is informed through the realised knowledge of the object of worship [God], because of the fact that He is the Lord and King and is deserving of worship; and it [the servant’s worship] is informed through the realised knowledge of the servant ... So

⁴⁹⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 8. This passage forms part of a Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 6 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵⁰⁰ *Fuṣūṣ*, 256. English Translations by Dagli, taken from al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 7.

therefore, that one whose preparedness of its own immutable essence has not bestowed [upon it] the knowledge (*'elm*) and realised knowledge of all the Divine Names and Attributes, it is not possible that it may be able to worship the Real through all of His Names. And from this perspective, the Real—most Glorious is He—cannot be worshipped completely except through the Perfect Man. So he is the complete and perfect servant and worshipper.⁵⁰¹

Lāhijī emphasises the relationship between the Perfect Man and the category of knowledge classified by him and other Sufis as *ma'rifat* because he considers the realisation of *ma'rifat* by the Sufi wayfarer to be their spiritual inheritance from their primordial father Adam. As a member of the human species, the Sufi wayfarer also possesses the preparedness to realise the same degree of mystical knowledge of God's Reality as his primordial father Adam did, since he is a descendant and child of Adam.⁵⁰² Indeed, Lāhijī even considers that the underlying purpose for the creation of the entire cosmos was to enable the realisation of that all-comprehensive mystical knowledge of God, which is only possible through the form and creation of the Perfect Man.⁵⁰³ Lāhijī even goes so far as to state that only those humans who have realised the mystical knowledge of God's Reality can be considered "true" human beings, for, in fulfilling the higher purpose for which God had created them, they have realised their true potential as God's human servants.⁵⁰⁴ In Lāhijī's eyes, a true human being is someone who knows the Real, but knows Him mystically and experientially and not intellectually or through blind imitation of others (*taqlīd*). So the true purpose for man's existence—according to Lāhijī's worldview—is purely for the sake of seeking knowledge of God's *Wujūd* (or the Divine Reality characterised by His numerable and opposing Divine Names and Attributes), and this mystical realised knowledge of God is according to the measure of man's sincere worship and remembrance of his own Lord.

Adam and the Prophet Muḥammad, who are considered the archetypal "Perfect Men" within the framework of Lāhijī's Sufi discourse, gained their superior knowledge of God through

⁵⁰¹ *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 179-80.

⁵⁰² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 184-5.

⁵⁰³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 206-7.

⁵⁰⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 213-15.

their sincere acts of obedience and worship, and not through the intellectual and reflective knowledge that is the purview of the philosophers and speculative theologians. Indeed, Lāhijī even states many times throughout his text that any human being who does not devote his life to seeking knowledge of God, through worship and obedience to Him, has wasted their precious life away and has even become lower than the animals. Therefore, the lives of those who have not devoted themselves to claiming their spiritual inheritance are—in the eyes of Lāhijī at least—forfeit. This is because they abandoned the spiritual inheritance and gift that was offered to them as a privileged member of the human species and as a descendant of Adam. This, we must be reminded, was not offered to the rest of creation. The gift, therefore, being that all humans have the preparedness of acquiring or realizing the all-comprehensive mystical knowledge of the Real.⁵⁰⁵ These features of Lāhijī's discourse in connection to the Perfect Man and *ma'rifat* are important to remember when we delve deeper into our research on other areas of Lāhijī's Sufi doctrine and thought in later chapters. This is because the Sufis have traditionally—especially during the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period of Lāhijī's era—claimed a certain kind of spiritual authority for themselves and their saintly Sufi masters within the Muslim *umma*, based upon the exclusive claims that they made in regards to the realisation of true knowledge of God. It was the Way of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* which was the only means available for any Muslim to achieve any real, realised knowledge of God. For like most of the Sufis of Lāhijī's era, the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* claimed their respective *silsilas* stretched back to the Prophet Muḥammad himself—the Perfect Man *par excellence*, and the supreme *quṭb* of the cosmos. So the mystical knowledge that the Sufis claimed for themselves and which served as the basis for their spiritual and religious authority, was a spiritual inheritance that had been transmitted generation after generation in an unbroken chain of spiritual transmission between the hearts of the Sufi *pīrs* and their Sufi disciples, and ultimately stretched back to the Prophet Muḥammad himself. The Prophet, like Adam, received his realised, divine knowledge of God based upon his sincere and pure worship of the Real.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 303-4.

⁵⁰⁶ For more information regarding this historical feature of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* and their claims to spiritual authority and legitimacy within the wider Muslim community, see Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 87-134.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have outlined Lāhijī's discourse on the Akbarī concept of the Perfect Man, which by the time of Lāhijī's era had become one of the most widely discussed topics amongst Persian Sufi circles. This was because during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, Ibn al-'Arabī and the Akbarī tradition of his followers had come to exercise a hegemonic intellectual influence over the Persian Sufi community within Iran and the wider Persianate world. By examining Lāhijī's teachings on the Perfect Man, we also gain an insight into Lāhijī's anthropological understanding of the human being, and his views on the place of the human being within the wider cosmos. We have also illustrated that Lāhijī's metaphysical and esoteric discourse on the Sufi concept of the Perfect Man is deeply influenced by the widely-read texts of his Akbarī predecessors. Indeed, much of Lāhijī's material is either borrowed from, or inspired by, the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn al-'Arabī and Qayṣarī's commentary. Although the intertextuality between his commentary on *the Gulshan* and Ibn al-'Arabī's and Qayṣarī's texts is far more implicit than explicit, a more careful reading of Lāhijī's text makes quite clear that a relationship most definitely exists between these three Akbarī works.

As I have attempted to demonstrate in the present as well as in the previous chapters of this thesis, much of Lāhijī's commentary upon the *Gulshan*—which has been structured by Lāhijī and read by its audiences as a training manual for the Sufi path—much of it is heavily devoted to expounding upon the teachings and ideas associated with the Akbarī tradition. This can be taken as an indication of certain, long-lasting historical changes occurring within the wider Persian Sufi community during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era, where we witness a major shift in the collective attention of the Persian Sufis towards subject matters that were more metaphysical, cosmological, and ontological in nature, in comparison with the more traditional Sufi topics that were the main points of discussion in earlier classical works of the Sufi genre, such as: practical Sufi ethics; knowledge of proper manners (*adab*) for the *darvīsh*; as well as the sacred sciences of the mystical states and spiritual stations of the Sufi *ṭarīqat*. These previously mentioned topics were undoubtedly the main concern of earlier generations of Sufis, as evidenced by the earlier classical works of the Sufi genre that were written by such highly influential Sufi authors like, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378/988), Abū Ṭāleb al-Makkī (d.

386/996), Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073), Khwājah ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089), Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Quṭb al-Dīn al-‘Abbād (d. 547/1152).⁵⁰⁷ By the time we reach Lāhijī’s era of the late 15th century, newer teachings surrounding the popular Akbarī concepts of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the Perfect Man, seem to completely overshadow those older, traditional subjects within the works of Persian Sufi shaykhs who lived during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era. This cultural transformation that occurred within the textual tradition of Persian Sufism was likely the result of the increasing popularisation of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings, along with the wide circulation of texts associated with his Persian commentators and followers amongst the Sufis of *Iranshahr*. Of course, traditional Sufi teachings that dealt with the subject matters of practical Sufi ethics and the mystical states and stations of the Sufi path would have still been extremely important and highly valued by the wider Persian Sufi community; yet there is no doubt that the Persian Sufis of this specific era had an unquenchable thirst for the metaphysical and ontological teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers. This is evidenced by the fact that other authoritative Sufi shaykhs and authors who lived during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period—like ‘Alī Hamadānī, Shāh Ne‘mat-Allāh Walī, Pīr Jamāl Ardestānī, Nūrbakhsh and Jāmī—also wrote many books and treatises that were exclusively devoted to expounding upon the teachings associated with Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers—or their numerous works were at least highly inspired by this highly influential school of thought.

Lāhijī, therefore, much like the majority of Persian Sufi authors living in the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, was not much of an original thinker, especially in relation to those fields of knowledge connected to metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology; for it is clear from our research that Lāhijī followed closely the main principles and teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school of thought. But this does not mean that he was unable to express his own original insights on

⁵⁰⁷ For more information on these above mentioned Sufi authors, as well an excellent summary of the highly influential classical works of Sufism produced by these authors, see Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 116-50. For information on Quṭb al-Dīn al-‘Abbād and his Sufi manual the *al-Taṣfeya fī aḥwāl al-ṣūfiyya*, see William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 324-30.

various themes in relation to the sacred sciences of Sufism. Lāhijī's major contribution to future generations of Persian Sufis was his ability to assimilate the previous, classical texts of the Sufi tradition—especially those texts of the Akbarī intellectual tradition—into his own discourse. He synthesized these recycled ideas with his own mystical insights—since Lāhijī himself was a realised Sufi shaykh of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*—in lucid, easy-to-read prose, and mainly in Persian as well. This is contrary to most Akbarī texts before Lāhijī's era which were written chiefly in Arabic. Therefore, this is a testament to Lāhijī's exceptional abilities as a writer and a teacher—as well as being a populariser of the Akbarī school of thought within the Persianate world—since many of the topics he covers within his commentary on the *Gulshan* are highly esoteric, metaphysical, cosmological, and even philosophical. This may be the reason why Lāhijī's text continued to be sought out by generations of Sufi readers and seekers—even up to the modern era—particularly within Iran, where the Persian Sufi tradition continues to exist up to this present day.

Chapter Eight

The Confessional Ambiguity of Lāhījī's Sufism: The Seal of Saints and the Debate concerning Predestination and Free Will

One of the most persistent claims of the Sufis throughout history is that the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* is a means for the spiritual seeker to realise timeless truths through *ma'rifat*, spiritual tasting and unveiling. If the initiated Sufi fulfills the necessary preconditions of the Sufi path by following their teachings and practicing their spiritual methods—and that is if his own innate preparedness gives him the capability to do so—he or she can also realise the same, eternal truths as the great Sufi masters. For according to Lāhījī—and the wider Sufi community as well—the knowledge of the Sufi shaykhs and saints are not the products of their own imagination nor conjecture—unlike the knowledge of the speculative theologians and peripatetic philosophers. These divine and spiritual truths have been realised by the Sufi shaykhs and saints through moments of spiritual illumination, realisation (*taḥqīq*), and through the ineffable mystical experience of unveiling. These eternal and transcendent truths, which are the source of the unique doctrines and beliefs of the Sufis, are waiting to be realised by the willing Sufi initiate and wayfarer. Lāhījī, as a recognised Sufi shaykh and proponent of *ṭarīqa* Sufism, also presented the Sufi Way in this manner to his audiences within his commentary on the *Gulshan*. But things become a little bit more complicated when we consider Lāhījī's pro-Shī'ī bias, a position held by many, if not the majority, of Persian Sufis during the post-Mongol era of

Iran's history who were deeply influenced by the prevailing spirit of 'Alīd-devotionalism that increasingly shaped the religious-culture of Iran during the fifteenth century. Although Lāhījī, along with Jāmī, was one of the great systematisers of Persian Sufi doctrine and thought during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, and for the most part was a faithful transmitter of the medieval heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition to future generations, it also seems evident when analysing the content of his writings that his Shī'ī tendencies also coloured certain aspects of his Sufi doctrine and worldview. This is an important point to highlight for there are historical repercussions to Lāhījī's pro-Shī'ī interpretation of traditional Sufi beliefs and ideas. Historically, the Persian Sufis have always interpreted their teachings and practices within the legal and theological framework of the mainstream Sunnī tradition, which was the dominant faith amongst Iranians during the entire medieval period.⁵⁰⁸ One of the aims of this chapter is to discern which aspects of his Sufi doctrine and thought were coloured by Lāhījī's Shī'ī tendencies and convictions. But our other aim is to show how the recent statements by contemporary Iranian scholars—that Lāhījī was without a doubt a Twelver Shī'ī—is not so easy to prove if we are to search for irrefutable evidence of this through his own writings. Lāhījī, like most of his influential contemporaries living in Iran during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, cannot strictly be placed within a single rigid category of religious-sectarian identity. This is because it is impossible to discern whether Lāhījī was a Sunnī or a Twelver Shī'ī, for one can find textual evidence for both claims within Lāhījī's writings. What we wish to prove in the following sections of this chapter then, is that the more modern labels of "Twelver Shī'ī" or "Sunnī Sufi" that historians and scholars use today to identify the confessional identity of Muslim figures living in the past—especially in the pre-modern era—cannot be relied upon when attempting to discover the true religious affiliations of Lāhījī. And this is particularly the case in connection to Lāhījī, since the era in which he lived most of his life was an era of confessional ambiguity, where the traditional boundaries and distinctions between Sunnism and various spiritual-religious currents of Shī'ism were increasingly softening and blurring. Many Iranian Muslims of

⁵⁰⁸ For more information on the harmonisation of Sufism with the mainstream Sunnī tradition during the early medieval period, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 83-114.

that era were not afraid—and were even eager to—mix and synthesise the religious doctrines of the two main branches of Islam.

In the first section of this chapter, we will take a close look at Lāhijī's discourse on the Seal of Prophets and the Seal of Saints, and the eschatological and cosmological role of the Twelfth Shī'ī Imām within Lāhijī's Sufi doctrine and thought. Lāhijī's elevation of the role of Imām al-Mahdī within his Sufi worldview places the eschatological and messianic role of Imam al-Māhdī front and centre within Lāhijī's Sufism. The second half of this chapter will take a look at Lāhijī's own teachings concerning one of the most contested subjects amongst the Muslim community throughout the entire history of Islamic civilization: the debate on predestination and free will. Lāhijī's own ambiguous theological position on this contested issue highlights the difficulty in pinpointing Lāhijī's confessional identity, for, in certain passages, Lāhijī strongly opposes the views of the Mu'tazilites, and in some instances his arguments for the sheer determinism of all human acts veers closely to the position of the Sunnīs, especially as adopted by the Ash'arites. All of this will be made clear once we delve deeper into our analysis on Lāhijī's own arguments for the complete predestination of all human acts. After establishing Lāhijī's position on free will and predestination, we will ask if it is possible for contemporary readers to discern Lāhijī's real confessional allegiance through the theological positions that he chooses to adhere to within his commentary on the *Gulshan*, which undoubtedly constitutes the most lucid and comprehensive exposition of his own vision of the Sufi path.

8.1 Lāhijī's Explication of Sainthood, Along With His Exposition on the Spiritual Realities of Sainthood and Prophethood

Before we delve into Lāhijī's interpretation of this uniquely Akbarī idea of the Seal of Saints, we need to first establish Lāhijī's personal definition of the *walī* (saint or "Friend of God"). In the previous chapters we have analysed his teachings concerning the "Perfect Man" and the many different conditions or qualifications that makes someone an authentic Sufi shaykh, or a perfect *murshed*. The saint is a Perfect Man as well as a perfect and qualified Sufi shaykh who can guide others on the path towards God. One way of understanding who the saint is, is by looking at the literal translation of the term usually applied to him within Sufi text, which is *walī*. The literal

translation of these terms is “friend”, and that is why I have chosen to sometimes translate this term into English as “Friend of God” instead of “saint”, for that is the literal and specific meaning of this term. So, the saint is that human servant who is an elect and close Friend of God, owing to the special and intimate relationship that he possesses with the Real that the majority of believers do not possess. And he possesses this privileged relationship with the Divine because he has attained a spiritual station of proximity and nearness (*qurb*) with the Divine Presence, after having completed the spiritual journey of return and ascent by imitating the heavenly ascension (*me’rāj*) of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁵⁰⁹ For according to Lāhijī:

It is only the Perfect Men who are the prophets and Friends of God—peace and blessings be upon them all—from the perspective that they have become eminent and distinguished from the rest of the individuals of the human species, and through the way of inner purification, they have returned to the Divine Origin, and in the radiance of the self-disclosure of the Divine Oneness (*partū-e tajallī-ye aḥadeyyat*), they have become annihilated from their own illusionary existence (*hastī-ye mūhūm-e khīsh*), and have therefore become subsistent in God. So their particular attributes have become the very essence of the Universal Attributes of the Real.⁵¹⁰

These Sufi saints are then able to experience and realise the ultimate stations of *fanā’ fī-allāh* (“annihilation in God”) and *baqā’ be-allāh* (“subsistence through God”). And through existing in perpetual proximity and nearness to the Divine Presence, this saint thereby becomes one of God’s elect and chosen servants, and he now has the spiritual authority to guide others on the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*. That he is a perfect guide for the Sufis on the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* is, according to Lāhijī, one of the most essential characteristics of the saint.⁵¹¹ Therefore within Lāhijī’s own commentary, the three terms that are found scattered throughout his commentary—“Perfect Man”, “saint” and “Sufi master” (*pīr/murshed*)—are all synonymous with each other for they denote the same person or thing. For the Sufi Master cannot be a real

⁵⁰⁹ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘ibn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012)(From now it will be cited as *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*), 230.

⁵¹⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 19. This passage forms part of a Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 17 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵¹¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 137 & 231.

Sufi master if he is not also one of God's elect and chosen Friends, and the saint is a saint owing to the fact that he is a Perfect Man.⁵¹² And as we have mentioned already in the previous chapters, the Perfect Man is essentially that creature of God who has realised the ultimate function of his own human creation for which God had originally created him, which is to serve as an all-comprehensive locus-of-manifestation for the self-disclosure of the Real with the totality of all his Names and Attributes.⁵¹³

Now that we have defined who the saint is according to the Sufi teachings of Lāhijī, we can move on to his exposition on the Akbarī idea of "sainthood" (*velāyat*) and the "seal of sainthood" (*khātam-e velāyat*). The term "sainthood" is usually paired with "prophethood" (*nabuvvat*) in Lāhijī's teachings, and for a good reason. For the spiritual reality and rank of sainthood cannot be understood without relation to the spiritual rank of prophethood. They are like two opposite terms constantly paired together, perfectly complementing one another within Lāhijī's Sufi discourse. The term "prophethood", in its most basic sense, refers to the spiritual rank and station that certain servants of God are in possession of, and in a sense constitutes one of the attributes of their inner realities. Therefore, every past prophet and Messenger of God was in possession of this rank of prophethood.⁵¹⁴ Now both prophethood and sainthood, although designating different ranks and stations in relation to God and the creatures, are derived from the same spiritual reality—the Muḥammadan Reality (*ḥaqīqat-e Muḥammadī*)—which is equivalent to the Divine Logos of Christian theological tradition. As mentioned in the previous chapters in connection to the Perfect Man, the Muḥammad Reality is the metaphysical, spiritual reality which is the source of every spiritual inspiration and divine revelation that descends upon any messenger, prophet, or saint. These divine revelations or spiritual inspirations are transmitted to any community of believers through the intermediary of either a prophet or a saint.⁵¹⁵ What is important to note here is the fact that the sainthood of every saint of Muḥammad's community is derived from the niche of prophethood from the spirit of a particular prophet of whom he is a follower and spiritual heir. In other words, every

⁵¹² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 122, 249 & 552.

⁵¹³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 8, 20 & 425.

⁵¹⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 232-36.

⁵¹⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 19-20, 231 & 265-66.

saint of Muḥammad’s community inherits the spiritual charisma, *barakāt*, states and stations associated with a particular prophet of God. For example, a certain living saint may be a spiritual inheritor and follower of Moses, another of Abraham, and another of Jesus, with another being a heir of Joseph.⁵¹⁶ This is why Lāhijī describes the very nature of the spiritual relationship that exists between every saint and prophet to which he is a spiritual heir, comparing it to the relationship between the light of the sun and the moon. For just as the moon derives its entire light and illumination from the light of the sun—which is the origin for its radiance and illumination—so too do all of the saints of Muḥammad’s community derive the spiritual light and radiance of their sainthood from the eternal spirit of a particular prophet. And according to Lāhijī it is utterly impossible for any saint of Muḥammad’s community to nourish, cultivate and bring to a state of perfection their own sainthood unless they attach themselves to and follow sincerely a particular prophet.⁵¹⁷

If the saints derive the light of their sainthood from the niche and lamp of prophethood of a particular prophet, where then does the prophethood of every prophet and messenger arise from, or where does he derive it from? He derives it from his own sainthood. For his sainthood is that aspect of his inner being that exists in nearness to the Divine Presence, and from that special nearness that he possesses with the Divine Reality, he receives divine effusions of grace and *barakāt* every moment without interruption.⁵¹⁸ This is why Lāhijī claims that sainthood is superior to the rank of both messengerhood (*resālat*) and prophethood within each prophet and messenger. For according to Lāhijī, not only is the sainthood of every prophet the spiritual source of their own prophethood, but prophethood cannot be attained by any prophet if he first does not cultivate and actualise that inner spiritual reality of sainthood within

⁵¹⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 232-33.

⁵¹⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 234.

⁵¹⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 238. According to Lāhijī, because the sainthood of every saint, prophet and Messenger of God is a reflection or manifestation for the Divine Name *wālī* (“The Friend”), hence this rank or aspect of his inner spiritual reality is eternal, in the same way that the Names of God are eternal and everlasting. His prophethood, on the other hand, only exists in relation to the creatures—for the function of his prophethood is to inform the creatures about the realities of the hereafter and of God’s oneness and Being. His Messengerhood and prophethood is cut off in the afterlife for it only exists in relation to his time here in this world. The sainthood of every saint, prophet and messenger will, however, last until post-eternity. For this aspect of his inner spiritual reality is a locus-of-manifestation for that particular Divine Name of God, *wālī*—which is Eternal and Ever-Lasting. *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 234.

himself first. So the light of prophethood is like the light of the moon in relation to the light of his own inner sainthood which is likened to the sun.⁵¹⁹ In the Sufi worldview of Lāhijī and other Akbarīs like him, the past historical prophets still play a fundamental cosmological and metaphysical role in relation to the human creation, for none of the saints can nurture and actualise their own sainthoods—and hence become living Friends of God—without the necessary intermediary role of the prophets.⁵²⁰

To summarise, the prophets derive their prophethood from their own inner sainthood, which is that subtle aspect of their inner beings that exists in perpetual proximity and closeness to God, whereas the rest of God’s creatures do not possess this special and close relationship to God. In return, the light of prophethood of every historical messenger and prophet is the spiritual source or means for every saint of Muḥammad’s community to cultivate and actualise their own sainthood. So the light of sainthood of every saint is a direct reflection of the light of prophethood of the prophet to whom they are a follower and spiritual inheritor.⁵²¹

8.2 *The Identity of the Seal of Saints in Lāhijī’s Commentary on the Gulshan*

In his essential works on Ibn al-‘Arabī, Micheal Chodkiewicz has already provided a systematic exposition of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings on the Seal of Saints and the rank of sainthood. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to establish the doctrinal preliminaries of this particular aspect of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discourse in order to highlight the differences between Ibn al-‘Arabī and Lāhijī’s views on the subject. For although Lāhijī, for the most part, was a devoted Akbarī, he still diverges from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings regarding the identity of the Seal of Saints.⁵²² Chodkiewicz has identified three different seals within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s writings. “The Seal of Prophets” who is the Prophet Muḥammad, “the Seal of General and Universal Sainthood” who is Jesus, and “the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood”, who is none other than Ibn al-‘Arabī.⁵²³ In contrast to Ibn al-‘Arabī, Lāhijī only expounds upon the identities and functions of the Seal of

⁵¹⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 233-34 & 236.

⁵²⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 234-37.

⁵²¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 234-38.

⁵²² For more on Chodkiewicz’s thorough research on this particular aspect of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Sufi thought, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Golden Palm Series. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 74-89 & 116-47.

⁵²³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 116-141.

Prophets and the Seal of Universal Sainthood, and never mentions the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood. Lāhijī must have been aware of the real differences between the Seal of Saints and the Seal of Muḥammadan Saints; he knew that they were two separate individuals within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s discourse as he was familiar with the *Fuṣūṣ* and Qayṣarī’s commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*. Qayṣarī’s commentary was most likely one of the main textual sources for much of Lāhijī’s own understanding and exposition of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings.⁵²⁴ Since Lāhijī never mentions the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood in his own writing it is possible that he saw no real difference between the Seal of Saints and the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood, and that he merged the two together into one person, Muḥammad al-Mahdī.

According to Chodkiewicz, Ibn al-‘Arabī is explicit in his belief that the Seal of Saints is none other than Jesus, and Chodkiewicz quotes numerous passages from the *Futūḥāt* to prove this point. In the following passage from the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-‘Arabī argues that the Seal of Saints is Jesus, and not Imām al-Mahdī:

When Jesus descends to earth at the end of time, it will be granted to him by God to Seal the Great Sainthood (*al-walāya al-kubrā*) which extends from Adam to the last of the prophets. This will be an honor for Muḥammad, since the universal sainthood—the sainthood of all communities—will be sealed only by a messenger who is a follower of the Law. So Jesus will seal both the cycle of the Kingdom, and universal sainthood. He is thus one of the Seals in this world.⁵²⁵

In his own commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, Qayṣarī also supports Ibn al-‘Arabī’s explicit position that the Seal of Sainthood is Jesus and the Seal of Muḥammadan sainthood is Ibn al-‘Arabī himself. He states that Mahdī is neither the Seal of Sainthood nor the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood.⁵²⁶ Qayṣarī probably needed to refute the idea that Muḥammad al-Mahdī was the Seal of Saints since this Shī‘ī interpretation was already present amongst different Sufi circles in

⁵²⁴ Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Guildford: Curzon Press, 1995), 156-59.

⁵²⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, III: 514; IV: 195. Translated into English by Michel Chodkiewicz. Taken from Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the*, 121.

⁵²⁶ Dāwūd ibn Maḥmūd Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī bar Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥekam-e Ibn ‘Arabī*. Translated into Persian by Muḥammad Khwājawī. 2 Vols (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1387/2008), I: 266.

both Anatolia and Iran during his own lifetime.⁵²⁷ So Qayṣarī makes it clear within his own commentary that Ibn al-‘Arabī never stated that Imām al-Mahdī was either the Seal of Saints or the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood.⁵²⁸

Now that we have briefly established the identity of the Seal of Saints within Ibn al-‘Arabī’s own writing, we can move on in our discussion to Lāhijī’s own unique and different interpretation of the the identity of the Seal of Saints. To understand the central role of Muḥammad Mahdī—the twelfth and hidden Shī‘ī Imām—within Lāhijī’s Sufi eschatology, along with the unique, messianic position of the Seal of Saints given to him by Lāhijī, we need to mention Lāhijī’s idea that there exists two distinct spiritual cycles where the Muḥammadan Reality self-discloses throughout space and time, especially within the religious history of humanity. For according to Lāhijī, the collective destiny of the believers of Muḥammad’s community is deeply intertwined with the spiritual manifestations of the Muḥammadan Reality: the different prophets and saints are fundamentally the different loci-of-manifestation for the Muḥammadan Reality.⁵²⁹ The first cycle Lāhijī terms as the “cycle of prophethood”, which began with the emergence of the first human being, Adam. Each successive historical prophet who was sent to their respective communities to propagate God’s divine laws and revelations, represented a single dot within this continuous spiritual cycle of prophethood. The last dot of this cycle was none other than the Prophet Muḥammad, who is considered by Muslims to be the Seal of Prophets.⁵³⁰ This means that after the Prophet Muḥammad there will be no more prophets sent by God to any other community of humans. According to Lāhijī, the main reason

⁵²⁷ Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ-e Qayṣarī*, I: 266-8.

⁵²⁸ What is interesting about Lāhijī’s own position on the identity of the Seal of Saints being Muḥammad al-Mahdī, is that it reveals Lāhijī to be a Sufi who was willing to chart his own path contrary to his own Sufi masters. Lāhijī spills quite a lot of ink in expressing his personal belief that the Seal of Saints was Muḥammad al-Mahdī, contrary to the position of Ibn al-‘Arabī. This shows that Lāhijī was not a slavish imitator of his influential Sufi predecessors, and was willing to express his own opinions and interpretations even if his own position regarding the matter clearly contradicted the Imam of the Akbarīs. Our preceding discussion also shows that Lāhijī did not agree with his own Sufi master, Nūrbakhsh, regarding his life-long claims of being the long awaited Mahdī. This is interesting for the fact that it is well-known through historical sources that Lāhijī was a devoted and sincere follower of Nūrbakhsh, and was probably the most renowned and sought after spiritual successor and representative of Nūrbakhsh in Iran in the latter half of the fifteenth century. For more information on the Mahdist claims of Nūrbakhsh, Lāhijī’s own Sufi master, see Shazad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 76-108.

⁵²⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 265-67 & 272-73.

⁵³⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 265.

why the Prophet Muḥammad is ranked higher than the rest of the prophets and messengers in God's eyes, is because it was only the Prophet Muḥammad who manifested through his own being the totality of the different spiritual attributes of the Muḥammadan Reality. The other prophets only self-disclosed through their own entities certain aspects and perfections of the universal spiritual reality of the Muḥammadan Reality.⁵³¹

After the end of the first spiritual cycle of prophethood, the second spiritual cycle—what Lāhijī calls the “cycle of sainthood” (*dāyire ye velāyat*)—immediately begins. It is also a gradual manifestation throughout time and space of the same universal spiritual reality of the Muḥammadan Reality. The first dot of this spiritual cycle of sainthood was Imām ‘Alī, the first Imām and rightful successor of the Prophet Muḥammad according to the Twelver Shī‘ites. In Lāhijī's own words:

The beginning of the manifestation of the inner secret of sainthood (*serr-e velayat*) came with Imām ‘Alī, and that master who was God's messenger, states that: “*Alī is from me and I am from him, and he is the guardian over every believer*”. And, “*For every prophet there is an executor and successor, and truthfully, Alī is my executor and successor*”, and “*Oh Abū Bakr, my hand and the hand of Alī are equal in justice*”. And “*I am the city of knowledge and Alī is the door of that [city]. So whoever desires knowledge, he must enter in through that door*”. And “*Me and Alī are from one tree, and the rest of the people are from different trees*”.⁵³²

Lāhijī also deduces further proof for his belief that the cycle of sainthood begins with Imām ‘Alī; and hence, that the person of Imām ‘Alī is the eternal inner secret and reality of sainthood, is the fact that the initiatic chains of all the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* stretch back to Imām ‘Alī, and through Imām ‘Alī, are connected to the Prophet Muḥammad, who in return, is considered by all Sufis to be the spiritual source for all the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* in existence.⁵³³ Now according

⁵³¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 231.

⁵³² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 280. This passage forms part of a Lāhijī's commentary on verse 387 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*. The first and fourth Hadith quoted by Lāhijī are from Sunnī hadith sources, namely from the Al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī hadith collection, the *Al-Mustadrak 'alā l-Ṣaḥīḥayn*. The third Hadith that Lāhijī quotes in the above passage is from Sunan Tirmidhī, Hadith: 3723, as well as *Al-Mustadrak 'alā l-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, III: 127.

⁵³³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 280.

to Lāhijī, the Muḥammadan Reality continues its gradual manifestation within the material plane of existence through another cycle—the spiritual cycle of sainthood. This cycle commenced once the cycle of prophethood had come to an end with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. For there needs to be a continuous transmission of spiritual inspirations, guidance, and *barakāt* to reach the Muslim community through the intermediaries of the saints—but one that emanates from the single Muḥammadan Reality. Otherwise, the Muslim community would be deprived of all true guidance after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. In other words, the Muslim community would be spiritually lost without the living, spiritual presence of the Sufi saints to support them and guide them. It is through Imām ‘Alī—as the eminent link connecting the Sufi saints to the Prophet Muḥammad—that the Sufi saints have inherited this important role as the spiritual leaders of the Muslim community. According to Lāhijī, this cycle of sainthood, which began with Imām ‘Alī, has continued up until the present time. This is why the *ummah* will never be deprived of the spiritual presence of one of God’s Friends even until the Day of Judgement when, after the emergence of Imām al-Mahdī, the cycle of sainthood will finally come to an end and universal sainthood will be sealed by the Seal of Saints, and there will be no more saints after him.⁵³⁴

Just as the beginning of the cycle of sainthood commenced with Imām ‘Alī who was a member of the household of the Prophet Muḥammad, as well as being the first holy Imām of the Twelver Shī‘ites, so too will the cycle of sainthood be sealed at the end of time with one of the members of the household of the Prophet Muḥammad, who will be none other than the twelfth and hidden Imām of the Twelver Shī‘ites, Muḥammad al-Mahdī. In the words of Lāhijī:

The complete and perfect manifestation of sainthood (*velāyat*) will be through the Seal of Saints; and why is this so? For the perfect reality of a cycle comes into being through its last point. And the Seal of Saints is an expression for “Muḥammad al- Mahdī”, which has already been confirmed by that master of messengerhood [The Prophet Muḥammad]. And these are his words, *“If of the world naught remains but a single day, God will stretch out that day to such an extent so that in that same day, they will raise*

⁵³⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 266-70.

*up a man from my lineage and my household (ahl al-bayt). His name is my name, and the name of his father is the name of my father. Then he will fill up the earth with peace and justice, in the same way that it had been filled previously with injustice and oppression".*⁵³⁵ And, *"The Mahdī will be of my family, and one of the descendants of Fatimah".*⁵³⁶

Another way Lāhijī attempts to highlight the exalted spiritual rank and important messianic role of Imām al-Mahdī as the Seal of Saints is to explain the subtle and esoteric spiritual relationship that exists between the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām al-Mahdī, "since the Seal of Saints is the interior dimension of the prophethood of the Seal of Prophets".⁵³⁷ For Lāhijī, there exists three different kinds of relations between the Seal of Prophets and the Seal of Saints. That Imām al-Mahdī will be a biological descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad is well-established through the numerous hadiths of which Lāhijī's readers should already be aware. But what does Lāhijī mean when he states that the Seal of Saints is the interior and hidden aspect of the Seal of Prophets? According to Lāhijī, just as the complete manifestation of God's *sharī'ah*—the collection of God's divine rulings that governs every action of the believer—was only manifest in its totality through the Seal of Prophets (i.e., the Prophet Muḥammad), the prophets preceding the birth and life of Muḥammad were only loci-of-manifestation for certain attributes of the Muḥammadan Reality. In other words, they only manifested the universal Muḥammadan Reality in a very limited manner, and hence God's eternal *sharī'ah* was only revealed in a limited manner through each Prophet preceding Muḥammad's emergence. With the birth and life of the last Messenger of God who was also at the same time the Seal of Prophets, God's eternal *sharī'ah* was revealed in all of its glory and completeness.⁵³⁸ According to Lāhijī, the function of sainthood—which seems to also be influenced by traditional and

⁵³⁵ Lāhijī also derived this Hadith from Sunnī sources. Sunan al-Tirmidhī, II: 86 IX: 74-75, and from Sunan Abū Dāwūd, II: 7, and from Musnad Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, I: 84, 376; III: 63, and from al-Naysābūrī *Al-Mustadrak 'alā l-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, IV: 557.

⁵³⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 266. This passage forms part of a Lāhijī's commentary on verse 370 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*. This Hadith is also from Sunnī sources. Lāhijī most likely derived this particular Hadith from Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Ch. 36, Tradition #4271 (narrated by Umm Salama, the wife of the Prophet). And from Sunan Ibn Mājah, II: Tradition #4086.

⁵³⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 268.

⁵³⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 265.

heterodox Shīʿī beliefs concerning the Imamate and *walāyah*—is the God-given ability to unveil the inner, divine secrets contained within the revelation of the Holy Quran. And just as every saint preceding the emergence of the Seal of Saints is only a locus-of-manifestation for a specific and limited aspect of the Muḥammadan Reality, they are also only able to reveal certain divine secrets and esoteric mysteries contained within the Quran to other Muslims in a very limited manner. Yet with the emergence of Imām al-Mahdī, who is the Seal of Absolute and Universal Sainthood, and hence similar to the function of the Seal of Prophets who was the Prophet Muḥammad himself—since Muḥammad al-Mahdī will also be a complete manifestation of the universal Muḥammadan Reality through his own being—so will Muḥammad Mahdī alone out of all of God’s saints be able to reveal to the *ummah* of Muḥammad every one of the divine and esoteric secrets that God had deposited and concealed within the verses of the Quran. This unique role of unveiling the complete esoteric secrets concealed within God’s divine revelation is reserved for the Seal of Saints alone.⁵³⁹ And here we can witness in these particular passages of Lāhījī’s commentary the fusion of Sufism and Shīʿism on the doctrinal plane that was typical of the social-religious environment of his epoch. The deeper we delve into Lāhījī’s discourse on the identity of the Seal of Saints, the more difficult it becomes to discern which components of his hermeneutics are derived from the Persian Sufi or Shīʿī hermeneutical traditions.

To understand the spiritual relationship that exists between the spirit of Muḥammad al-Mahdī as the Seal of Saints and the other saints of Muḥammad’s community, as well as the exalted position that Lāhījī situates him within the metaphysical hierarchy of God’s Friends who govern and administer the cosmos on God’s behalf, it is worth quoting a relevant passage by Lāhījī regarding this particular aspect of his Sufi worldview. As Lāhījī states:

Within the cycle of absolute sainthood (*velāyat-e muṭlaqa*) where the Seal of Saints is the locus-of-manifestation for that [the spiritual reality of absolute and universal sainthood], the points of the beings of the different saints, each one of them are like the different bodily members of the Seal of Saints: and why is this so? For the reality of

⁵³⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 266-67.

sainthood within every individual saint has manifested itself based upon a specific attribute from amongst the perfect attributes [of that spiritual reality of universal sainthood]. And all of the perfect attributes [of sainthood] will find their complete manifestation in the last point [of this spiritual cycle] who is “Muḥammad al-Mahdī”. So the latent perfections of this cycle of sainthood will finally come into being and actualise themselves within this last point. And just as all of the prophets have derived the light of their legislative prophethood (*nubavvat-e tashrīʿī*) from the lamp of the Seal of Prophets [the Prophet Muḥammad], so in the same manner all of the saints derive the light of sainthood and spiritual perfection from the sun of the sainthood of the Seal of Saints. So therefore, the sainthood of the Seal of Saints is named the “solar sainthood” (*velāyat-e shamsīye*) and the sainthood of the rest of the saints is named as “lunar sainthood” (*velāyat-e qamarīye*). For the source of the light of sainthood of all of the saints is that absolute sainthood of the seal saints [Muḥammad al-Mahdī], in the same way that the light of the moon is derived from the sun.⁵⁴⁰

This passage is relevant to our ongoing discussion on Lāhījī’s “Shīʿitization” of the Akbarī idea of the Seal of Saints. For according to Lāhījī, since the Seal of Saints is the spiritual source for the sainthood of every Sufi saint, all of the saints ranked beneath the Seal of Saints are compared to the different bodily members of the Seal of Saints. Every saint preceding Muḥammad al-Mahdī’s emergence is only a locus of manifestation for a specific and limited aspect of the Muḥammadan Reality, in other words, the spiritual reality of universal sainthood. But with the emergence of Muḥammad al-Mahdī at the end of times—as both a messianic eschatological figure for Muslims and as the supreme and final saint of Muḥammad’s lineage who will also seal universal sainthood forever—the reality of sainthood will be fully disclosed through him. So according to Lāhījī’s Shīʿī colouring of this specific idea, Muḥammad al-Mahdī as the Seal of Saints is situated at the most eminent rank within the metaphysical hierarchy of God’s friends, just as the Prophet Muḥammad as the Seal of Prophets is situated at the highest rank within the hierarchy of God’s messengers and prophets. This means that the complete spiritual reality of universal sainthood will only be fully disclosed through the person of Muḥammad al-Mahdī.

⁵⁴⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 267. This passage is Lāhījī’s commentary upon verse 371 of the *Gulshan e-rāz*.

Therefore, according to Lāhījī's Sufi worldview, there is no saint ranked higher than Muḥammad al-Mahdī himself. And this is also because Muḥammad al-Mahdī as the Seal of Saints is that luminous spiritual lamp—as the all-comprehensive locus-of-manifestation for the Muḥammadan Reality in all its perfections—which is the true source of sainthood for every saint of Muḥammad's community. For as Lāhījī states, “the source of the light of sainthood of all of the saints is that absolute sainthood of the Seal of Saints [Imām al-Mahdī], in the same way that the light of the moon is derived from the sun”.⁵⁴¹ So all of the saints are subjugated to the spiritual authority and rank of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, since they all must derive the light of their sainthood from him, just as all of the prophets of God must derive the light of their prophethood from the lamp of the Seal of Prophets.

There is a glaring problem with this particular section of Lāhījī's discourse on the unique and spiritual relationship between the Seal of Saints and the rest of the saints of Muḥammad's community. For in previous sections leading up to Lāhījī's discourse on Muḥammad al-Mahdī's position as the Seal of Saints, he had stated quite clearly that all of the saints derive the light of their sainthood from the eternal spirit of a particular prophet. It is perhaps helpful for us to quote a passage by Lāhījī here, where we will be able to perceive more clearly the contradictions in his claims that the saints derive the light of their sainthood from a certain prophet, as well as from the niche of the Seal of Saints. In Lāhījī's words:

The Prophet is like the sun and the Friend of God is like the moon, the reason being that just as the light of the moon is derived from the sun, the light of sainthood of the saint who is not a prophet, is derived from the prophethood of a [particular] prophet. Therefore he [Shabistarī] has stated that, “*The prophet has become like the sun, the Friend of God, the moon,*” meaning, because the prophet derives the light of prophethood and his spiritual perfection from the sun of his own sainthood, and from the perspective of its illumination through perfect light, he is in no need of another, nor does he follow another, so he is like the sun that is shining through his own self and is an illuminator of others. But the saint, meaning the saint who is not a prophet, is like the

⁵⁴¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 267.

moon, the reason being that although the saint is perfect through the light of sainthood, illumination, and radiance, but his light is [entirely] derived from the sun of prophethood of a [particular] prophet. For if the saint had not been a follower of that [particular] prophet, he would not have arrived at the perfect degree of sainthood; why is this so? For the illumination of the saint is through the light of the prophethood of a [particular] prophet.⁵⁴²

Lāhijī makes it abundantly clear in the above passage that no saint can actualise their inner spiritual attribute and rank of sainthood without first following the spirit of a certain prophet, for the light of sainthood of every saint is derived from the lamp of prophethood of a particular prophet. But in the section of his commentary dealing with the identity of the Seal of Saints, he contradicts himself in stating that the light of sainthood of every saint is derived from the lamp of the Seal of Saints. Unfortunately for the reader, Lāhijī does not help solve this apparent contradiction, and he seems to leave this problem to be solved by his reader's personal imagination and interpretation. So the question that may occur to the reader is this: who does the saint derive the light of their sainthood from? Does he derive it from the lamp of prophethood from the spirit of a particular prophet, or from the light of sainthood of the Seal of Saints?

I believe there may be an important reason why Lāhijī does not resolve this apparent contradiction within his commentary, and that may be because the implications of his Shī'ī interpretation on the identity of the Seal of Saints could have been perceived by his contemporary readers to be a heretical innovation. Although the main audience of his works would have been Sufis, undoubtedly most Persian Sufis of Lāhijī's era were still mostly of the Sunnī creed, since Sunnīs still constituted the majority of the population of Iran and the Islamic East during the latter half of the fifteenth century. Following on from this, suppose every saint in reality derives the light of their sainthood from Muḥammad al-Mahdi, who is the Seal of Saints, and not from the spirit of a deceased prophet. In that case, Lāhijī's Shī'ī interpretation in identifying the Seal of Saints as Muḥammad al-Mahdi seems to allude to the esoteric mystery

⁵⁴² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 234. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 338 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

that the prophets and Messengers of God also derive their sainthood from the lamp of the Seal of Saints. For according to Lāhijī—following Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings on this particular subject perfectly—every prophet of God also possesses the rank of sainthood as well. Meaning that every prophet is also at the same time a saint as well.⁵⁴³ So it is also possible that Lāhijī may be subtly alluding to the fact that every prophet and Messenger of God also receives the light of their sainthood from the Seal of Saints, while deriving the light of their prophethood from the Prophet Muḥammad. Although this interpretation is problematic for the reason that it would imply that Muḥammad al-Mahdī as the Seal of Saints is ranked higher, and is a superior servant and creation of God than the rest of the prophets and messengers other than Muḥammad. For most of his Sunnī-Sufi readers and followers this interpretation would have been unpalatable and irreconcilable with their own Sunnī theological beliefs. For no saint—not even the revered members of the *ahl al-bayt*—can be ranked higher than the Messengers and prophets according to Sunnī creedal beliefs.⁵⁴⁴ But the “Shī‘itization” of this Akbarī idea by Lāhijī would not have been so problematic for his Sufi readers who were either Shi‘ites or possessed Shī‘i tendencies. That is because heterodox Shī‘i groups have historically always considered the Shī‘i Imams to be the greatest of God’s servants—only after the Prophet Muḥammad himself.⁵⁴⁵ As is well known concerning Twelver Shī‘i beliefs, Muḥammad al-Mahdī as the twelfth Imām, is in a state of occultation, and from this state of occultation, he is both the supreme *quṭb* of the cosmos and the Imam of the entire Muslim community. Meaning that Muḥammad al-Mahdī is both guiding the Muslim community and governing the cosmos as the hidden *quṭb* continuously from the realm of the unseen according to the Twelver Shī‘ites.⁵⁴⁶

Lāhijī’s Shī‘itization of this Akbarī idea of the Seal of Saints evinces characteristic *ghulat* tendencies of both mainstream and heterodox Shī‘i groups to both exult and exaggerate the spiritual ranks of the Shī‘i Imāms in relation to the rest of the saints, and even above the

⁵⁴³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 233-4.

⁵⁴⁴ For a standard view of the Persian Sunnī-Sufi understanding of the superiority of the prophets and Messengers over the saints and household of the prophet Muhammad, see Reynold A. Nicholson, *Kashf Al-Mahjub the Revelation of the Veiled: An Early Persian Treatise on Sufis: Ali B. ‘Uthman Al-Jullabi Hujwiri* (Havertown: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014), 218-223.

⁵⁴⁵ Moosa, Matti, *Extremist Shi‘ites: The Ghulat Sects*. 1st ed (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 92-120.

⁵⁴⁶ Moosa, *Extremist Shi‘ites*, 98. And Omid Ghaemmaghami, *Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver Shī‘i Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 133-171.

prophets and Messengers of God.⁵⁴⁷ These specific passages from Lāhijī's commentary reveal the deep and subtle influences of Lāhijī's religious-social milieu upon his own Sufi worldview and beliefs. For as it has already been well documented by many scholars and historians, Lāhijī's own epoch was not simply characterised by confessional ambiguity, where the theological boundaries between Sunnism, Sufism and heterodox Shī'ī beliefs were increasingly intermingling, but Iranians of different communities were also becoming more susceptible to Shī'ī messianic and apocalyptic beliefs as demonstrated by the different Islamic messianic movements springing up in all the different parts of *Iranshahr* during the fifteenth century.⁵⁴⁸ These passages by Lāhijī reveal that, far from being an immutable spiritual tradition which transmitted timeless spiritual truths to its followers across generations via the Sufi *sisila*, Sufism was in fact a spiritual tradition highly susceptible to the ever-shifting religious-social milieu in which the Sufi practitioners lived. The continuing subtle transformations of Iran's religious culture, as a result of confessional ambiguity and other social-political factors, undoubtedly shaped the structure and form of Sufi practitioners communal and private lives, including their religious beliefs, unique spiritual practices and customs. The culture of Sufism was deeply impacted by the religious environment in which they lived and propagated their *ṭarīqas*. And the religious-social milieu of late fifteenth century Iran was, in return, shaped by powerful historical forces at work during this period in question, beyond the control of the Sufi community—even beyond the control of their revered Sufi saints.

It may seem self-evident for those readers of the Safavid period, or for those of the following periods of Iran's history, that these passages from Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* prove without a doubt that he was a Twelver Shī'īte, or that he was a Sufi with strong Shī'ī inclinations and tendencies. In the following sections, we will take a deeper look at another aspect of his Sufi thought—the thorny theological issue regarding predestination and free will—

⁵⁴⁷ For more on the historical phenomenon throughout Islamic history of different heterodox and even orthodox Shī'ī sects in their exulting and exaggerating of the spiritual rank of the house of the prophet Muhammad, see Moosa, *Extremist Shi'ites*, 92-110 & 352-53.

⁵⁴⁸ For more on the religious environment of Iran during the latter half of the fifteenth century on the eve of the Safavid revolution, see William F. Tucker, "The Kūfan *Ghulāt* and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Turkmen Iran." In *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, edited by Mir-Kasimov & Orkhan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 177-94.

and shows how labelling Lāhijī as a Twelver Shīʿī-Sufi, or a Twelver Shīʿī who was doing *taqīyya* in order to conceal his loyal adherence to Shīʿism, is not so straightforward.

8.3 Lāhijī's Unique Position on the Historical Debates Surrounding Predestination and Free Will

Before we can understand Lāhijī's theological position on the issue of predestination/free will, which has been one of the most heated topics of debate amongst theologians and religious scholars from the different schools of Islamic thought, we need to briefly return to the principle foundations of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Sufi metaphysics. As a devoted Akbarī it would be impossible to understand not only Lāhijī's own theological position on predestination and free will within the historical context of the ongoing debate amongst the different Islamic schools of thought, but also the nature of his arguments would not be comprehensible for the readers as well, and Lāhijī—unlike most Sufis, and the speculative theologians of both the Sunnī and Shīʿī communities—asserts the complete illusion of human free will because of his view that all human acts and choices are a result of divine predestination. Therefore, Lāhijī adheres to a rigid determinism that affords no space for even a limited form of human agency. Everything occurs through the Divine Will, and God is the only efficient agent in *wujūd*.⁵⁴⁹ Interestingly, Lāhijī's theological-moral position accords almost perfectly with certain arguments that the Ashʿarites have traditionally employed in refuting the objection of their Muʿtazilite opponents. Indeed, Lāhijī even borrows certain arguments by the Ashʿarites in reinforcing his own beliefs that God's eternal foreknowledge has divinely predetermined all of the acts of the human servant.

Lāhijī devotes most of Chapter Twelve of his commentary on the *Gulshan* to the thorny theological-moral issue of free will and predestination. He immediately states that man has no free will whatsoever at all, and there are many reasons and arguments for this being the case.⁵⁵⁰ First he discusses this issue within the context of his Sufi metaphysics, which is based upon the theosophical teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī. The most important thing for readers to remember—as Lāhijī advises them—is that before any human being descends into Manifest *Wujūd* through the Divine Command “Be!” (*kun fayakūn*), they already pre-existed as non-existent objects within the presence of God's Divine Knowledge. In this pre-existent state, they

⁵⁴⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 358-64.

⁵⁵⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 358-59.

are “immutable entities” (*‘ayn thābeta*), and since God has perfect and complete knowledge of all immutable entities since pre-eternity, God’s knowledge of their immutable essences results in God divinely predetermining all of their states and acts, which then constitutes the basis for the infinite possibilities of their own immutable essences which gradually unfold or enter into existence once their entities enter into Manifest *Wujūd* through the Breath of the All-Merciful. Once each immutable entity enters into the realm of *Manifest Wujūd* from the presence of Divine Knowledge, it now becomes classified as a possible being or entity, when in its prior state it was a non-existent entity.⁵⁵¹ The passage below is a theoretical exposition by Lāhijī on how the Real divinely predetermines all of the human servant’s acts and states within the Presence of Divine Knowledge, or within the very depths of the Divine Essence itself, even before the creation of the cosmos itself:

Know that the entities of all the things within external existence (*mawjūdeh-ye fī al-khārej*), before their [descent] into external existence (*wujūd-e khārejī*), they had already pre-existed in the presence of Divine Knowledge of the Real (*‘elm-e ḥaqq*), and they call these things the “immutable entities” (*‘ayān-e thābeta*). And for every entity from amongst those entities there had been a request from their essences (*eqteżā-ye dhātī*), meaning their preparedness and receptivity [for *wujūd*], and the self-disclosure of the *Wujūd* of the Real in the forms of the entities within external *wujūd* is in accordance with the same form of preparedness inherent within their immutable essences, neither more nor less, for “*God accords with the belief of every one of His servants*”. And in the example of that one who possesses the immutable essence of a believer, his [preparedness] demands faith [from the Real], and the immutable essence of the infidel and disobedient sinner (*‘āsi*) in return demands unbelief and disobedience [for that entity once it has entered into external existence]. In entified *wujūd* (*dar wujūd-e ‘aynī*) everything corresponds to that same attribute which they had requested from the Real [when they were immutable entities in nonexistence] once they are manifest through the Divine command “*Be!*” (*kun fayakūn*). In the view of the realised ones (*muḥaqqeqān*), the entities are not things made to be what they are by a maker

⁵⁵¹*Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 300-01.

(*maj'ūl be ja'l-e jā'el nīstand*)...; therefore, “to God belongs the conclusive argument” [Q 6:149], meaning, for the Real there is the irrefutable argument upon His creatures, for whatever we have given to you, all of these things [your acts, states and attributes] were the request of your own immutable essence whether of unbelief and Islam, obedience or sinful disobedience, knowledge of the religious sciences, realised knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*) or ignorance; and through the tongue of their innate preparedness every entity, whatever they have sought, they have found, for “*It was not God who wronged them, but it is they who wronged themselves*” [Q 29:40].⁵⁵²

The above passage is quite dense in its metaphysical content, so we need to unpack some of the sentences above to make it clearer. Probably the most important part of the above passage is the sentence in which Lāhijī states that, “the entities are not things made to be what they are by a maker”. Immediately afterwards he quotes the verse from the Quran: “*To God belongs the conclusive argument*” as further scriptural support. Yet what does Lāhijī mean by the statement that “the entities or things are not made to be what they are by a maker”? In adhering to a stubborn position for the divine predestination of all human acts, Lāhijī is aware that the main objection that the Mu'tazilites—and by extension, the Zaydī and Twelver Shī'ites who eventually adopted the rationalist theology of the Mu'tazilites for their own theological schools of thought—argued that it would be completely unjust on God's part to not only predetermine all of man's acts (especially the sinful and evil actions for which man is punished with the hellfire) but it is also wrong to claim that God is the sole creator of those predetermined acts.⁵⁵³ According to Lāhijī, God does not make anyone a believer or unbeliever in pre-eternity within the Presence of His Divine Knowledge. The very nature or essence of the immutable entities in their state of nonexistence is not given to them by God, for that was what they were in their state of immutability since pre-eternity. What then is God's role or responsibility in all of this? According to Lāhijī, all God does is infuse the light of his own *Wujūd* upon the immutable entities so that they can enter into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* from the darkness of

⁵⁵² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 300. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 415 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵⁵³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 362-8. For a more detailed overview and explanation of the issue of predestination and free will within the framework of Mu'tazilite theology, see Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, Ghāzālī and Ibn 'Arabī*. Culture and Civilisation in the Middle East (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 10-13.

nonexistence.⁵⁵⁴ Although God had already predetermined every single one of their acts and states while they were in their state of immutability and nonexistence through the most holy self-disclosure (*tajalli-ye eqdas*), God only predetermines the future acts and states of the entities in accordance with the unchangeable knowledge that they gave to him as eternal and immutable objects of His Divine Knowledge.⁵⁵⁵ Now it is proper to directly quote some statements of Ibn al-‘Arabī, since Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Fusūs* was the most likely textual source for this specific idea of Lāhijī’s Sufi metaphysics. Ibn al-‘Arabī writes that “knowledge has no effect on the object of knowledge. Rather, the object of knowledge has an effect on knowledge”;⁵⁵⁶ and “knowledge depends upon the known thing”.⁵⁵⁷ Since God’s Knowledge is only in accordance with what the object of knowledge is in its essence or reality, the immutable entities only demand from the Real those attributes, states, and acts which God has already found within their realities through his Divine foreknowledge. He does not put those states, acts and attributes within their immutable entities and then force them to commit those acts against their will once they have entered into Manifest *Wujūd*. This is why the unbeliever cannot manifest or be characterised by those acts or states which are commanded of them by the *sharī‘ah*, and why they cannot resist those punishable acts that they have been warned against.⁵⁵⁸ For those acts or states did not pre-exist as a potentiality of their own immutable essences where they could later be brought out into *wujūd* within the exact moment specified through the Power of the Divine Decree.⁵⁵⁹ In the passage below, Lāhijī makes this point in his argument even more clear:

If you had read the pages and the lines of the preparedness (*este‘dādātī*) that had been written and inserted in the book (*nāmeḥ*) of every immutable entity, without a doubt you will know and realise that everything that comes into manifestation through that entity—whether it be realised knowledge of God (*ma‘rifat*) or ignorance; [character]

⁵⁵⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 300.

⁵⁵⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 303-6.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 62. Caner K. Dagli’s English translations. Taken from Ibn al-‘Arabī, and Caner K. Dagli, *The Ringstones of Wisdom: Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam* (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), 62.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, 91. Dagli’s English translations. Taken from al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 91.

⁵⁵⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 300-1 & 303-6.

⁵⁵⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 306.

perfections or defects— all of this is as a result of the reality of the request of its own immutable essence. And the manifestation of the Real in the form of each one, is in accordance with the preparedness of that entity. And whatever he did not already possess in the primordial origin of its own receptiveness (*dar aṣl-e feṭrat-e qābeleyyat*), he will not attain them here. And the Real does not decree a thing which was not originally demanded and requested by the immutable entities, for imposing obligations upon a servant who does not have the capacity to burden it is not a sign of the justice of the Wise One.⁵⁶⁰

If we consider the above passage by Lāhijī in the framework of his Akbarī metaphysics, which underpins his entire Sufi worldview, it would then seem understandable why Lāhijī adheres to such rigid determinism for all human acts. This seems to be the only logical conclusion to arrive at if we closely follow the preliminary metaphysical principles that tie together Lāhijī's entire system of Sufi doctrine, which is based upon the *wāḥdat al-wujūd* of the Akbarī school of thought. Since for Lāhijī there is only the One *Wujūd* of the Real in all of existence, how can free will ever be attributed to something—such as the possible being of the human servant—which is essentially non-existent? For in Lāhijī's own words:

Since essentially, the *wujūd* and existence of the possible things is the self-disclosure and manifestation of the Real in their forms, and the possible thing in its essence is non-existent, and its being is nothing more than an illusion and fantasy, so in the same manner that the attribution of *wujūd* to the possible entities is essentially metaphorical [meaning it is unreal], the attribution of attributes, acts and effects which are dependent upon and follow after a [living and subsisting] essence—through priority and precedence—for it [the human being as a possible existent] is a metaphorical and relative thing which has no actualization [in existence]; the attribution of free will to your own self is therefore based upon ignorance, and knowing and believing yourself to be independent in your acts is ignorance upon ignorance.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 303. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 420 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵⁶¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 360. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 529 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the major principles of the Akbarī school of thought—in the words Ibn al-‘Arabī—is the idea that the immutable entities “have never smelled whiff of *wujūd*”.⁵⁶² This means that the possible entities have never entered into Manifest *Wujūd* from their state of immutability within nonexistence, and therefore do not exist, as we presume they do in our state of veiling and ignorance.⁵⁶³ And just as we assume the creatures exist, we also imagine that they possess the power of free will; hence, that every act they perform can be attributed to them. But, as Lāhijī states, that is not the case, for how can something which is fundamentally non-existent have the power to bring something else into existence, meaning their own various human acts classified as either good or evil? It follows then that what we regard to be the performance of certain acts through our own free will is nothing more than an illusion resulting from our ignorance and heedlessness, since the veils have not yet been removed from our spiritual perspicacity.⁵⁶⁴ Every act that the human servant performs, God had already predetermined for him, and He knows the exact moment when to bring that act into Manifest *Wujūd* through His Divine Decree. The human servant is only a locus-of-manifestation for these acts to come into existence through him.⁵⁶⁵ Therefore, according to Lāhijī, man is absolutely compelled to perform all of his acts, even those acts that are judged to be evil by the *sharī‘ah* and for which he will be punished, either in this life or the hereafter.⁵⁶⁶

8.4 Lāhijī’s Refutation of the Mu‘tazilites and the Accordance of His Own Theological Views with the Ash‘arites

The previous quotation by Lāhijī was taken from a sub-chapter of Chapter Twelve of his commentary, in which he introduces the different theological-moral positions of the *Qaderīya* and *Jabrīya* for the purpose of further strengthening his own argument on why free will does not exist for the human servant. As is well attested by historical sources, these two groups of early Muslims represented two opposing extremes of the predestination/free will debate. The

⁵⁶² William C. Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 41.

⁵⁶³ For Lāhijī’s teachings upon this specific idea of the Akhbari school of thought, see more in *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 90-95.

⁵⁶⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 360 & 364.

⁵⁶⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 366.

⁵⁶⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 374-5.

Qaderīya are those early Muslims who believed that the human servant's free will must exist in order for God's justice to be perfect when rewarding and punishing the acts of his creatures.⁵⁶⁷ At the other extreme were the *Jabrīya*, who believed that every one of the human servant's acts had already been predetermined by God, and that the human being is compelled to perform all of his acts—both the good and the evil. That is why the *Jabrīya* were called the people of “compulsion”.⁵⁶⁸ The opposing positions of the *Qaderīya* and *Jabrīya* were considered too extreme by later Islamic theologians and religious scholars, especially by the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites who would go on to constitute the two main theological schools of thought within the Sunnī community. The Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites have historically always attempted—sometimes desperately—to find a more moderate middle ground between the two extreme positions of complete predestination and complete free will for the acts of the human servant, and to convince their theological opponents, as well as the wider Muslim community, of the exclusive correctness of their positions.⁵⁶⁹ What is interesting about Lāhijī's views is his belief that each of the different theological schools of Islam can be categorised within one of these two groups (either as belonging to the *Qaderīya* and *Jabrīya*). Lāhijī believed that the attempts by the Ash'arites to assert the complete predestination of all human acts while simultaneously attempting to insert a little leeway for human agency and free choice was an exercise in futility, for one must either accept the reality of the complete predestination of all human acts—which is the necessary result of God's perfect and eternal foreknowledge—or the reality of complete free will for the human servant, which obviously undermines the omnipotence and omniscience of God.

What is interesting about Lāhijī's views is that he categorises both the Mu'tazilites and their traditional opponents the Ash'arites as Muslims belonging to the category of the

⁵⁶⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 362-63. For more information on the theological beliefs of the *Qaderīya* in early Islamic history, see Steven C. Judd. “The Early Qadariyya.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 44-54.

⁵⁶⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 364. For more information on the theological beliefs of the *Jabrīya*, see Livnat Holtzman, “Debating the Doctrine of *Jabr* (Compulsion): Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya Reads Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.” In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya*, edited by Birgit Krawietz & Alina Kokoschka (Berlin; Boston: Der Gruyter, 2013), 61-73.

⁵⁶⁹ For more on the Mu'tazilites views on predestination and free will, see De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 10-13. From the point of view of the Ash'arites, see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 187-94.

Qaderīya—those who believe in the free will of the human servant.⁵⁷⁰ He does, however, briefly acknowledge the Ash‘ari doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition)—one of the moderate creedal beliefs which attempts to reconcile the two extreme positions. As Lāhijī briefly explains, it is the theological belief of the Ash‘arites that God has absolutely predestined all human acts already, but the moment that he brings any particular act into existence through His Divine Will and Power of Creation through the locus of the human servant, the human servant acquires that act and becomes morally responsible for that act—meaning he is now liable to be punished or rewarded for the acquired act.⁵⁷¹

Contrary to the Mu‘tazilites and other historical opponents of the Ash‘arites, Lāhijī states that in holding this view the Ash‘arites should be assigned to the category of the *Qaderīya*, and argues that they too assert the folly and delusion of absolute free will like the Mutazilites!⁵⁷² Lāhijī insists that his own position is completely opposed to the *Qaderīya*, and by extension the views of the Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites. Although Lāhijī criticises the Ash‘arites for their belief in *kasb* (acquisition), it is really the Mutazilites that he singles out for particular criticism, since they are recognised throughout the entire *ummah* as being representative *par excellence* of all Islamic schools of thought which cling stubbornly to the absolute necessity for human free will.

Lāhijī, along with Shabistarī, denigrates the Mu‘tazilites by calling them “fire-worshippers”, or Zoroastrians, for the Zoroastrians are polytheists who are guilty of the sin of associating partners with God. According to Lāhijī, the fire-worshippers of the past were dualists who believed in the existence of two different Creators: *Yazdān*, the creator of all the good acts of humans, and *Ahrman*, opposed to *Yazdān*, who was the origin of the evil acts of humans.⁵⁷³ So the Mu‘tazilites also assert that God cannot be the creator of the evil acts of his human servants. Rather, there must be an autonomous power that creates acts existing within the human frame, and because humans are in possession of free will, they can choose to perform acts of evil. Therefore, it is the human servants themselves—and not God—who

⁵⁷⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 362-64.

⁵⁷¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 363.

⁵⁷² *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 363-65.

⁵⁷³ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 363.

determine their own fates in the next life through the actions they choose to perform throughout their present, corporeal lives. God, in his perfect justice—as the Mu‘tazilites like to claim constantly—does not compel nor predetermine any of his servant’s acts. This is why there must exist both free will, and the autonomous power to create acts that God has deposited within the human frame. So the human being is the creator of his own acts.⁵⁷⁴ This, for Lāhijī, is blatant *shirk*, and therefore the Mu‘tazilites—as well as those other theological schools of thought which share the same position regarding this specific issue—are guilty of associating partners with God, the worst sin any Muslim can commit..⁵⁷⁵ In reply to these arguments of the Mu‘tazilites, Lāhijī quotes two hadiths of the Prophet Muḥammad, who states that, “*the Qadarites are the fire-worshippers of this ummah*,” and “*the Qadarites are the enemies of divine predestination (taqdīr-e elāhī)*”.⁵⁷⁶ This means that anyone who shares or adopts the position of the Mu‘tazilites cannot call himself a true Muslim, and his belief in the reality of free will borders on unbelief. Further on, he states in reply to the Mu‘tazilites incessant advocacy for the reality of free will:

When through ecstatic finding (*wejdān*) you look into your own inner state in order to discover where most of these acts occur from, you will realise that you have no free will, and that they [the acts] occur contrary to your nature and desires. From that inner state of yours, know that the people of *qadr* [those who assert the power of free will], meaning, that one who says that I have complete free will in my acts and I am an independent [being], who is this? In reality, he is an ignorant one devoid of any realised knowledge of God (*ma‘rifat*), for he holds himself as an associator with God in [the creation of] his own acts.⁵⁷⁷

In a later passage, Lāhijī furthers his argument against the existence of human free will. For if God did not have perfect foreknowledge of every one of man’s future acts that He knows man

⁵⁷⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 362-64 & 374-76.

⁵⁷⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 364.

⁵⁷⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 363.

⁵⁷⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 364. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 536 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

will commit, then God's Divine Knowledge would be deficient and lacking, and He would not be omniscient. As he states:

Whatever you have believed from the conviction (*e'teqād*) that I am the doer of my own acts and for us there exists a particular power [to create] in relation to our own acts, how can this statement of yours actually be true? For when you were non-existent, and had not yet come into manifestation into the cosmos (*dar a'lam-e a'yn*), according to the statement "*everything they have done is in the books*" [Q 54:52]⁵⁷⁸, your acts and deeds had already been predetermined (*mu'ayyīn*) and entified (*makhlūq*) within the Divine Knowledge of the Real. So how can something that had already been predetermined and entified before your creation also be created through your own power [to create acts]?⁵⁷⁹

The Quranic verse that Lāhijī quotes in the above passage is also commonly cited by other Akbarīs. Lāhijī interprets "*everything they have done is in the books*" [Q 54:52] according to the Akbarī doctrine and worldview that he adheres to. Lāhijī considers this Quranic verse proof of the metaphysical reality that all of the deeds and destined allotment (*qadar*) of the human servant have already been prewritten by the Divine Pen upon the Preserved Tablet before the creation of the cosmos.⁵⁸⁰ And whatever God has inscribed upon the Preserved Tablet

⁵⁷⁸ 'Alī Qulī Qara'ī's English translations.

⁵⁷⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 366. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 540 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵⁸⁰ The term *qadar* ("destined allotment") is usually paired with the term *qaḍā* ("divine predetermination") and both can be found in the writing of the Akbarī Sufis as well as the speculative theologians who enter into discussions concerning the issue of free will and predestination. Lāhijī also uses these two terms within the relevant sections of his commentary on the *Gulshan* in order to explain how all human acts have already been divinely predestined by God, and that they occur within the realm of physical time and space when the Real, through the power of His divine decree, brings that specific human act—which constitutes one of the possible states of the servant's immutable essence—out into Manifest *Wujūd* according to the specific moment that was already known and predetermined for it by God's eternal knowledge. See *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 380. Toshihiko Izutsu, in his own research on this specific issue in regards to Ibn al-'Arabī and Kāshānī's teachings, explains *qadar* and *qaḍā* in this manner: "the *qadar* (destined allotment) specifies and determines further what has been decided by the *qaḍā* (divine predetermination). This specification is done in terms of time. In other words, every state to be actualised in a thing is determined by the *qadar* concretely as to the definite time at which it is to occur. The *qaḍā* does not contain any time determinations. It is the *qadar* that assigns to every event its peculiar time. And once determined in this way, nothing can occur even a minute earlier or later than the assigned time." See more in Toshihiko Izutsu, *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism - Ibn 'Arabi and Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1966), 176.

regarding our destinies in both worlds only accords with His immutable and eternal Knowledge of our immutable essences.⁵⁸¹

The only correct position, in Lāhījī's view, is that of the *Jabrites*, or the theological position that we are compelled by the Divine Decree in all of our acts, for everything that occurs in both worlds has already been predestined by God through his divine predetermination of the preparedness of our immutable essences. This is why Lāhījī states that, "anyone in his personal creed, way and belief who is not of the creed of compulsion (*jabr*).... The Prophet has stated that he is like a fire-worshipper".⁵⁸² Lāhījī is obviously aware of another of the main objections made by the Mu'tazilites in regards to the predestination of all human acts, and that is if God really does predetermine and create man's acts—especially those acts that are judged to be morally evil—this would make God unjust and even evil Himself. Thus, this would contradict and undermine one of God's Essential Attributes—His Attribute of Perfect Justice—for the notion of His Perfect Divine Justice in relation to his human creation constitutes the central principle of Mu'tazilitism. Not only that, the Mu'tazilites believe that God must always act for a wise purpose or motive (*gharaḍ*) for the benefit of his servants. Therefore, God cannot be the ontological source nor the creator of man's evil and oppressive acts.⁵⁸³ It is a well-known ethical position of the Mu'tazilites that every action of man is either intrinsically and objectively good or evil, and this goodness or wickedness of every human act can be judged according to the rational intellect of man.⁵⁸⁴ Unlike the Ash'arites and hence the majority of Sunnīs who believe in theological voluntarism, where every human act is only good or evil as it is judged in connection to God's Divine Rulings.⁵⁸⁵ So how can a just God not only create something evil, but compel and force his servants to perform those very same evil acts since He not only had predestined it for them in pre-eternity without their personal input or say in the matter, but the power of creation is also in God's hands as well?

⁵⁸¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 367 & 380.

⁵⁸² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 364.

⁵⁸³ For more information on this specific teaching of the Mu'tazilites—that God acts for a wise purpose or motive—see Majid Fakhry, *Ethical theories in Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41-44.

⁵⁸⁴ For more information on this specific teaching of Mu'tazilites, concerning their ethical theory, see Fakhry, *Ethical theories*, 36-40.

⁵⁸⁵ For more information on the theological voluntarism of the Ash'ari school of thought, see George. F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 124-35.

Interestingly enough, in reply to this well-known objection raised by the Mu'tazilites, Lāhijī comes off as a typical representative for Ash'arism when he states that:

The Divinity and the Lord (*khudāvandī*) in the totality of His majesty and greatness is [perfectly] needless, and whatever has issued forth from that Presence is the very essence of perfection, and it is not worthy nor proper for the act of God that there exist a hidden motive (*gharaḍ*) or a main cause which it [His act] was created for, so His acts are entirely without cause; the reason being that if the acts of the Real were dependent upon a hidden motive for the attainment of some benefit or the repulsion of some injury, then it would be necessary for the Real—Most Glorious is He—to be defective and that the perfecting of [His own Essence] would need to be attained through [the fulfillment] of that particular motive.⁵⁸⁶

The argument that God does not act based upon a hidden motive or wise purpose—for then it would imply deficiency on the part of God's Essence and Reality—is a rebuke traditionally used by various Ash'ari theologians when replying to their Mu'tazilite opponents.⁵⁸⁷ From the recently quoted passage, it also appears that Lāhijī adheres, to a certain extent, to Ash'ari voluntarism, meaning he rejects the notion that human acts are objectively good or evil in themselves. Lāhijī, also like the Ash'arites, states that God in His perfect majesty and needlessness can do whatever He wills—even creating the seemingly evil acts of men; for everything that God does is “the very essence of perfection”.⁵⁸⁸ Lāhijī then—like the Ash'arites—is adamant about preserving God's omnipotence and his absolute freedom to act and do as He wills, regardless of the moral objections of the Mu'tazilites and those who assert the free will of the human servant.⁵⁸⁹

In the following sections of the same chapter, Lāhijī—who wants to further undermine and destroy the foundations of the Mu'tazilite argument on why God must always act for a wise

⁵⁸⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 372-3. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 551 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵⁸⁷ For more details concerning why the Ash'arites objected to the Mu'tazilite belief or argument that God only acts for a hidden and wise purpose for his creation, see Joseph Normant Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 67-70.

⁵⁸⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 372.

⁵⁸⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 370.

motive or purpose—continues to present to the readers the Quranic story of Adam and Iblis. With an underlying mocking tone directed at the Mu'tazilites, Lāhijī asks that if God must always act for the exclusive benefit for His servants, why was it that Iblis—who had worshipped God for tens of thousands of years—was eternally banished from the Divine Presence simply because he refused to prostrate before Adam with the rest of the angels. On the other hand, Adam, who willingly disobeyed an explicit command by God when he approached the forbidden tree, was eventually forgiven by God, and afterwards he became one of God's elect and chosen servants, his rank rising above the rest of creation. For Lāhijī, this Quranic story is enough proof to show that God does not act for a hidden motive or purpose that the Mu'tazilites like to claim, for if He did, would not His actions in regards to Iblis be unjust and cruel?⁵⁹⁰

We need to remind ourselves again that within Lāhijī's Sufi worldview, all of man's acts are the Acts of God. Not only is He the only existent Being in all of *wujūd*, but He alone is the One Agent (*mu'aṣṣer*) or efficient cause who performs all of the acts of His human servants since it is His *Wujūd* who is perpetually self-disclosed through their entities.⁵⁹¹ So those acts that the Mu'tazilites—and by extension, the Shī'ī theologians who have adopted the same theological-moral positions as the Mu'tazilites—have considered to be evil and not worthy of being attributed in any shape or form to a perfectly just God, are in reality God's very acts. According to Lāhijī, it is only because the spiritual perspicacity (*baṣīrat*) of the Mu'tazilites is veiled and they do not see the reality of things the way the realised knowers and perfect Sufis do, that they foolishly continue to insist they are the creators of their own acts. Lāhijī further states that his own personal position on the matter accords with the knowledge and spiritual vision of the realised knowers of God (*'urafā*) and the saints. Since this kind of authentic knowledge—the realisation that free will is an utter illusion, and every human act is brought into existence through the Divine Decree according to its specified moment—has been revealed to the realised knowers of God through unveiling and witnessing.⁵⁹² In Lāhijī's own words:

⁵⁹⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 368-70.

⁵⁹¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 362-63 & 366.

⁵⁹² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 365 & 371.

“There is no Agent (mu’asṣṣer) in existence other than God,” means that within the forms of all the loci-of-manifestation in every place and in every location, it must be known that the [only] Agent is the Real. Why is this so? For the *wujūd* and acts of all things is the *Wujūd* and the acts of the Real which has manifested and appeared through the forms of the possible things. *“Do not place a step beyond the limit of your own self”* means do not place your foot beyond the limit of your own self, which is essential possibility and non-being, for there is nothing that exists in your own self, and when you gaze upon your essence, your gaze will reveal your own nonexistence. So how can any free will and power [to create acts] ever be attributed to you? For attributes and acts without *wujūd* have no existence whatsoever. And the possibility of a non-existent thing exerting an effect upon *wujūd* is an impossibility.⁵⁹³

The statement by Lāhijī that the human being cannot be the efficient cause of its own acts—since God is the only Agent in *wujūd*—accords perfectly with theological positions of the Ash‘arites, especially with the views of Imām al-Ghazālī. For according to Frank Griffel, “the traditional implication that humans are the agents of their actions is incompatible with al-Ghazālī’s cosmology in which there is only one agent or efficient cause (*fā’el*). Understanding God’s true nature (*tawhīd*) includes the realisation that there is no agent or efficient cause (*fā’el*) other than God.”⁵⁹⁴ This view is also apparent in the writing of Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), who along with Imām al-Ghazālī and Imām Juwaynī (d. 1085) is considered to be one of the most influential theologians of Ash‘arism during the medieval period. Rāzī states that, “the human is a compelled actor in the guise of a free agent.”⁵⁹⁵ This statement by Rāzī—which encapsulates perfectly his own theological position regarding the subject of predestination and free will—aligns perfectly with Lāhijī’s own views. For elsewhere within his commentary Lāhijī states, “well done to the servant who appears to be free while under compulsion!”⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 362. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 535 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁵⁹⁴ Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical*, 217.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 131.

⁵⁹⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 374.

8.5 The Historical Problem of Lāhijī's Confessional Identity in an Era of Confessional Ambiguity

This now brings us to the historical problem of what exactly Lāhijī's own confessional identity was: a traditional Sunnī-Sufi who was influenced by the 'Alīd-devotionalism that was the inescapable zeitgeist of the time, or a Twelver Shī'ī Sufi that some contemporary scholars claim he was? Suppose Lāhijī's confessional identity can be judged according to his own theological positions as stated in his commentary on the *Gulshan*—arguably the work that best represents his system of Sufi teachings and beliefs. In that case, Lāhijī can definitely not be regarded as a normative Twelver Shī'ī as some contemporary Iranian scholars claimed he was. By arguing strongly for the case of complete predestination of all human acts along with the nonexistence of free will, Lāhijī's theological position on this issue conflicts with the traditional shared consensus of the Imāmī and Zaydī theologians. We have enough information from other researchers that prior to the establishment of the Safavid dynasty, most Iranian Shī'ites belonged to either one of these two sects of Shī'ism; with even a smaller minority also belonging to the Nezārī Isma'īlī sect as well.⁵⁹⁷ Lāhijī's own theological position is much closer to the position of the Sunnīs, who were mostly adherents of Ash'arism.⁵⁹⁸ Recent research on the historical development of Imāmī theological thought also establishes the indisputable fact that many of the theological positions of the Imāmī community gradually became identical with the Mu'tazilites during the medieval period. Especially in their shared creedal belief in the complete free will of the human servant in opposition to their Ash'arite opponents.⁵⁹⁹ That is why, according to Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, "during the early Safavid era, the Imāmī theologians were primarily concerned to defend the positions of their predecessors against the

⁵⁹⁷ For more on the various Persian Shī'ī communities in existence during the later medieval period prior to the emergence of the Safavids, see I. P. Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, translated by Hubert Evans (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 202-33 & 302-4.

⁵⁹⁸ For more on the prevalence of the Ash'ari school of thought amongst the Persian Sunnī community during the medieval period, see Eichner, Heidrun. "Handbooks in the Tradition of Later Eastern Ash'arism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: University Press, 2016), 494-512.

⁵⁹⁹ For more information on the historical development whereby by the Twelver Shī'ī and Zaydī communities gradually adopted and assimilated the rationalist theology of Mu'tazilitism into their own theological systems, see Ansari, Hassan. "The Shī'ī reception of Mu'tazilism (I) *Zaydis*." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 181-92. And see also Ansari, Hassan & Sabine Schmidtke, "The Shī'ī reception of Mu'tazilism (II) Twelver Shī'īs." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 196-210.

criticism of the Ash‘arites,” for they were “fully aware of the overall agreement between their own doctrinal views and those of the Mu‘tazilites”.⁶⁰⁰

Yet this historical process whereby the Imāmī theologians gradually adopted the rationalist theological tenets of the Mutazilites had its origins nearly half a millennium before the Safavid era. This deep engagement with, and wholesale adoption of, Mu‘tazilism by the Imāmī theologians began with the influential school of Baghdad at the end of the fourth/tenth century. Influential Imāmī theologians and polymaths like Shaykh al-Murtaḍā (d. 435/1044) and his disciple Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) left a permanent mark upon future generations of Imāmī theologians by adopting and synthesizing the rationalist theology of Mu‘tazilism with the traditional theology of Twelver Shī‘ism. According to Hussein Ali Abdulsater’s research on the life and thought of Shaykh al-Murtaḍā:

The question of human agency is among the earliest controversies in Islamic theology in general. Differences among Imami positions concerning this question existed from early times, but the rationalist tendency had clearly—though to varying extents—avoided association with determinism. By Murtada’s time, the rejection of determinism had more or less become the mainstream Imami position with Mufid’s explicit elaboration of a position that affirms human agency: God enables humans to act and alerts them to prohibited and lawful actions, but it is they who decide on and carry out their actions. Murtada’s position is no different, and he emphasises the concurrence between the Imamis and all the other groups that support the belief in human agency.⁶⁰¹

Both Shaykh al-Murtaḍā and Shaykh al-Mufīd were, therefore, explicit through their theological writings that “God does not will in any way the sins of mankind,”⁶⁰² and, “He is in no sense the creator of their actions”.⁶⁰³ According to both Shaykh Murtaḍā and Mufīd, the Twelve Holy

⁶⁰⁰ Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, “Twelver Shī‘ī Theology.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke, 456-72 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 465.

⁶⁰¹ Hussein Ali Abdulsater, *Shi‘i Doctrine, Mu‘tazili Theology: Al-Sharīf Al-Murtaḍā and Imami Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 132.

⁶⁰² Mufīd, *Sharḥ ‘aqā‘ed al-Ṣadūq*, 202-207. Taken from “Free-Will.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica* Vol. X, Fasc. 2 (2000): 202-205, accessed on January 15 2019, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/free-will->.

⁶⁰³ *Sharḥ ‘aqā‘ed al-Ṣadūq*, 197-201. Taken from “Free-Will,” 202-205.

Imams held these views themselves.⁶⁰⁴ One of the historical ramifications of Shaykh Mufīd’s and Murtaḍā’s emphasis on human free will within the framework of Imāmī theology, upon the proceeding historical developments of further systematisation, clarification, and elaboration of the entire system of the Imāmī school of thought as a distinct theology of Islam—especially in opposition to their Sunnī opponents and rivals—was that the wider Twelver Shī‘ī community “adopted some theological positions associated with Mu‘tazilism by emphasizing divine justice at the expense of divine omnipotence and denying divine predestination of all events in favor of human free will and, as a consequence, human responsibility for their deeds”.⁶⁰⁵ A closer examination of Imāmī theology reveals that the only differences between their theology and that of the Mutazilites are in regards to three issues: the theological issue concerning the Imamate, intercession, and miracles.⁶⁰⁶ In every other aspect they seem to be in complete agreement with one another. This is why Mīr Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Ḥusayn al-‘Arabshāhī (d. 1568)—an Imāmī theologian and philosopher of the Safavid period—could state that “Imāmī doctrines are mostly identical with those of the Mu‘tazilites”.⁶⁰⁷ One can therefore imagine the hostile reactions of certain Shī‘ī *‘ulamā* during the Safavid period when reading Lāhījī’s views on predestination and free will. Lāhījī’s views would have been completely anathema to them and would have seemed to be the detested theological views of their hated Sunnī-Ash‘arī opponents. This may also be another reason why the class of Twelver Shī‘ī *fuqahā’* was so hostile to the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī—and by extension of the Sufis—during the Safavid era.⁶⁰⁸

Although we cannot state with complete certainty that Lāhījī was a Sunnī of the Ash‘arī creed, he most definitely was an Akbarī. Therefore, if there is one thing we can state with complete certainty regarding Lāhījī’s confessional identity as represented in his discourse, and

⁶⁰⁴ Abdulsater, *Shi‘i Doctrine*, 132-135.

⁶⁰⁵ Alexander D. Noysh, *Islam in Historical Perspective* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011), 173.

⁶⁰⁶ Abdulsater, *Shi‘i Doctrine*, 151-81.

⁶⁰⁷ Pourjavady & Sabine, “Twelver Shī‘ī,” 465.

⁶⁰⁸ Muḥammad-Tahīr Qummī (d. 1100/1689), the leading polemicist against the Sufis during the Safavid period, criticised and attacked Maḥmūd Shabistarī and Ibn al-‘Arabī for their belief in predestination (*jabr*), as well as all the Sufis of his time who followed and read their teachings. For more details, see Andrew J. Newman, “Glimpses Into Late-Safavid Spiritual Discourse: An Akhbari Critique of Sufism and Philosophy. In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh & Leonard Lewisohn (Irvine: Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2020), 265-66.

his own unique theological positions on predestination and free will, Lāhijī was a Sufi who was a follower of the Akbarī school of thought. And Lāhijī's own rigid beliefs and statements on the complete predestination and predetermination of all human acts, which leaves no room whatsoever for any free will on the part of the human servant, makes perfect sense when argued for within the framework of Ibn al-‘Arabī's Sufi metaphysics and ontology, ideas which serve as the foundation for Lāhijī's own Sufi doctrine and thought.⁶⁰⁹

8.6 Conclusion

In our previous discussion concerning Lāhijī's theological position on predestination and free will, it became obvious that it is impossible to align Lāhijī's own confessional identity with normative Twelver Shī'ism, especially the form of mainstream Twelver Shī'ism which eventually became the dominant faith of the majority of Persians during the Safavid period. If the task of identifying Lāhijī's confessional allegiance is elusive and difficult to pin down when analysing his own writings, this may be because the era in which Lāhijī lived was a period characterised by confessional ambiguity. Although scholars like Hamid Algar are correct in stating that much of Iran, preceding the emergence of the Safavids to political power and domination, practiced the Sunnī faith, it is undeniable that the Sunnism of the post-Mongol period was drastically different in quality and character than the Sunnism that existed in earlier times. Because of the increasing influence of Shī'ism, in its many different forms, on Iranian society, the religious-social milieu of Lāhijī's era can be described as being highly elastic and fluid. The traditional and rigid boundaries between the different individuals and communities of Sunnīs, Sufis and Shī'ites, in their diverse manifestations, were changing and intermingling over time. That is why, even amongst scholars today, there exists the debate on the true confessional identity of other famous Iranian figures who were either contemporaries of Lāhijī—like Davānī and Dashtakī—or who lived in earlier generations during the Timurid period—like Ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī. One way of

⁶⁰⁹ We must also remind ourselves that Lāhijī's own views on predestination and free will go against the consensus of the majority of Persian Sufi Sunnīs of the medieval period. Since the overwhelming majority of Persian Sufis during the medieval period were Sunnīs who most likely adhered to Ash'arism and tried to find a balance between complete predestination and free will for human acts. This is most clear when we look at Rūmī's teachings regarding predestination and free will within his *Maṣnavī*, and contrary to Lāhijī, Rūmī as the most famous exponent of the "Religion of Love" (*mazhab-e eshq*), does affirm some degree of free will for the human servant. For more on Rūmī's views on predestination and free will, see William C. Chittick and Jalāl Dīn Rūmī, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 113-18.

perceiving the doctrinal content of Lāhījī's commentary on the *Gulshan* is as a microcosm of the fractured and highly elastic religious environment of Timurid/Āq Quyunlū Iran. There can be no doubt that Lāhījī, like every other major Sufi and Islamic figure throughout history, has been influenced by the ethos of his own age. This means that the religious-social environment which was characterised by confessional ambiguity—and not polarization between Sunnīsm, Shī'ism, and Sufism—influenced the religious mindset and spiritual vision of Lāhījī. This no doubt can be witnessed within his own writing, and this is why one can find confessional allegiance to Shī'ism—especially in devotion to Imām 'Alī and the household of the Prophet Muḥammad—as well as certain theological positions and beliefs more aligned with the Sunnīs, which contradict certain theological views of the Shī'ites. It seems like an impossible task, then, to uncover the true confessional identity of Lāhījī within his own writings.

Before we conclude the current chapter, we must also note that Lāhījī, like Jāmī, was a significant historical agent in transmitting the intellectual and literary medieval heritage of the Persian Sufi tradition to future generations of Persian Sufis. Lāhījī did this through his gifted efforts to further systematise and elaborate upon the Persian Sufi tradition's entire doctrinal and theoretical heritage. By the later Timurid and Āq Quyunlū period, this multifaceted and rich tradition of Islamic mysticism had blossomed within Iran and Central Asia into a state of refined maturity. Yet Lāhījī possessed more pronounced Shī'ī tendencies and beliefs than Jāmī. In certain sections of his commentary on the *Gulshan* he undoubtedly colours traditional Sufi ideas and teachings, which had for centuries been espoused within the theological and legal framework of the mainstream Sunnī tradition, with a more Shī'ī tinge. Lāhījī's Shī'ī reimagining and reinterpretation of core Sufi ideas—especially in his claims that the Seal of Saints was Muḥammad al-Mahdī—may have subtly influenced the collective religious consciousness of the wider Persian Sufi community on the eve of the Safavid revolution. Lāhījī's widely read commentary may have helped to shift the collective religious consciousness of his Sufi followers towards a more Shī'ī orientation, and away from the traditional Sunnīsm of their forefathers. Might Lāhījī's own writings and discourse on Sufism—which was subtly interlaced with ideas and beliefs from Shī'ism—have prepared the way for the eventual mass conversion of not only the community of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya dervishes that Lāhījī was an important and

highly influential member of, but also the wider Sunnī community of Iran as well, to Twelver Shī'ism during the following Safavid era?

Chapter Nine

Lāhījī's Theory of Knowledge & the Way of the Sufi *Ṭarīqat*

One of the core principles of Lāhījī's Sufism is the belief that the underlying purpose for the creation of humans, indeed, for the creation of entire cosmos and all the different species included within it, was for the exclusive purpose of the realisation of mystical knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*) within the human frame. This realised, mystical knowledge of God is, in essence, the spiritual realisation of the true ontological situation of the cosmos by the Sufi wayfarer, which is knowledge of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ("The Unity of Being"). This is the final goal for every human being who embarks on the spiritual journey of ascent and return towards God. And this spiritual realisation of the oneness and unity of *wujūd*, is attained through what the Sufis term *kashf* ("unveiling"), *shuhūd* ("witnessing"), *mushāhada* ("spiritual contemplation") and *taḥqīq* ("realisation"). The term *ma'rifat*, within the context of the theoretical discourse of the Persian Sufi masters, alludes to the mystical, visionary experiences that occur for the Sufi wayfarer during their journey towards God, or at the culmination of their spiritual ascent and return towards the Divine Presence. In this visionary mystical experience, the many veils that have veiled the wayfarer from the Divine Reality of God's *Wujūd*, are finally removed from the spiritual vision of their heart (*baṣīrat*)—through God's divine grace—at which point they are able to witness and contemplate the Attributes, Acts and even the Essence of God directly—which constitutes the ultimate object of knowledge for the Sufis. For Lāhījī then, true knowledge of God's Reality is born from direct seeing and contemplation. Since Lāhījī

repeatedly places so much value upon *maʿrifat* within his commentary, the question we eventually ask ourselves while researching Lāhijī's Way of Sufism is how the human servant achieves this lofty goal? Fortunately for us, Lāhijī spends a significant amount of space within his text discoursing upon this particular and fundamental issue. According to Lāhijī, *maʿrifat* is a category of knowledge that is only possible for those human servants who are initiated into the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* under the hands of a perfect and living Sufi shaykh. However, other groups of knowledge seekers existed within the wider Muslim community who also aspired to attain real and certain knowledge of God's *Wujūd* (mainly the speculative theologians and peripatetic philosophers). Yet, Lāhijī vehemently claims throughout his commentary that these groups of seekers are unable to gain any real knowledge of God because of their exclusive reliance upon the rational faculty (*ʿaql*). For God has not given the rational faculty the capability of knowing His Divine Reality. So another core principle and belief within Lāhijī's system of Sufi doctrine and praxis is the central role of the authentic and perfect Sufi shaykh—who Lāhijī also considers to be the true spiritual successor and living representative of the Prophet Muḥammad—within the framework of the spiritual life of the Sufi disciple. Lāhijī leaves no doubt within his readers' minds that no human being can ever attain authentic knowledge of God without the mystical experiences of unveiling and witnessing that can only be discovered with the guidance and support of a living Sufi master.

One of our aims for this thesis is to argue that Lāhijī's vision of the Sufi path remains, for the most part, faithful to the teachings and principles of the great master of this spiritual tradition. Yet Lāhijī also makes subtle changes to traditional ideas when presenting the teachings of Sufism to his contemporary audiences. One striking similarity that Lāhijī's commentary shares with his famous predecessors is his strong emphasis on the central role of realised, mystical knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*). Indeed, judging by the amount of space that Lāhijī gives to this idea within his commentary, one might conclude that Sufism is nothing more than the mystical path of the spiritual elites that eventually culminates in the attainment of *maʿrifat*. For Lāhijī, the realisation of *maʿrifat* constitutes the underlying true purpose for our human existence according to God's Eternal Wisdom. This aspect of Lāhijī's work puts him within the same tradition of the "classical" period of Sufism of the late tenth and early eleventh

centuries, when the earliest systematic works of Sufism were written by a variety of influential Persian Sufi authors, mainly from the region of greater Khurāsān. The *Al-Risāla fī'l-taṣawwūf* ("Epistles of Sufism") by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, the *Kashf al-maḥjūb* ("Unveiling the Veiled") by 'Alī al-Hujwīrī and the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* ("Waystations of the Wayfarers") by Khwaja 'Abdallāh Ansārī, perhaps being the most famous and widely-read works of the genre throughout the history of Sufism.⁶¹⁰ Influential works of Sufism produced by following generations during the later medieval period, like the *Merṣād al-'ebād* ("the Path of God's Worshippers") by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256),⁶¹¹ *Meṣbāḥ al-Hedāya* ("The Lamp of Guidance") by Maḥmūd Ezz al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. 735/1334-35),⁶¹² and even the *Maṣnavī* of Mawlanā Rumī, all contributed to placing *ma'rifat* as one of the core concepts and principles of the teachings of the Sufis.⁶¹³ All of these latter works of Sufism that were written during the Ilkhanate period would further cement the almost religious belief within the collective minds of the Persian Sufi community in the need for the Sufi disciple to surrender himself or herself utterly to a realised Sufi shaykh in order for them to attain real mystical knowledge of God.⁶¹⁴ So by Lāhijī's own lifetime, when the medieval period was coming to a close in order to make way for the early modern era, the two key concepts of *ma'rifat*, and the indispensable role of the perfect Sufi shaykh for the Sufi initiate's realisation of *ma'rifat*, became intrinsically linked within the discourse of the Persian Sufis. Lāhijī, therefore, was a passionate advocate for *ṭarīqa*-based Sufism—the traditional form of Sufism that was centred upon the *khānaqāh* ("Sufi

⁶¹⁰ For more on these earlier and very influential works of Sufism, see Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 131-40. Regarding the views of Qushayrī, Hujwīrī and Ansārī on *ma'rifat* and the means to acquire it, see more in John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology*. Translated and introduced by John Renard (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 264-97.

⁶¹¹ For Rāzī's teaching and discussion on the nature of *ma'rifat*, see more in 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn Rāzī and Hamid Algar, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return: (Merṣād Al-'ebād Men Al-Mabdā Elāl-ma'ād): A Sufi Compendium*. Vol. no. 35 (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1982), 133-48.

⁶¹² For Kāshānī's teaching and views on *ma'rifat* and *'elm*, see more in Maḥmūd Ezz al-Dīn Kāshānī, *Mesbāḥ al-Hedāya wa meftāḥ al-kefāya*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and 'Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1381/2002), 35-84.

⁶¹³ For more details on Rumī's views and teachings concerning *ma'rifat*, see Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and J. A. Mojaddedi, *The Masnavi, Book Three* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 161-62, verses 2650-2658.

⁶¹⁴ For Rāzī's views on the indispensable role of the Sufi *pīr* for the Sufi initiate in his wayfaring towards God, see Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *The Path of God's*, 235-54. For Kāshānī's own views on this same subject, see Kāshānī, *Mesbāḥ al-Hedāya*, 74-79 & 153-59. And for Rūmī's own teachings on this specific subject, see Jalāl al-Dīn and Rūmī J. A. Mojaddedi, *The Masnavi, Book One* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 180-83, verses 2947-2993.

lodge”). Lāhijī believed and taught that it was within the social environment of the *khānaqāh*, combined with the emotionally and spiritually intense relationship between the *murīd* (“Sufi disciple”) and their *murshed* (“Sufi master”), that the willing Sufi initiate could realise true knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*.

Although Lāhijī’s seminal work on Sufism does not evince much originality of thought—like most of the works of Sufism produced during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period—there is a crucial difference between Lāhijī’s text and those of his more legendary classical predecessors, and that is the fact that his definition and discourse on *ma’rifat* was deeply colored and impacted by the theosophical teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers. This is largely because Lāhijī’s own discourse on the nature of *ma’rifat* comes under the intellectual hegemony of Ibn al-‘Arabī Sufi metaphysics and ontology, like nearly all the Persian works of Sufism written during this historical period under review. This will become apparent within the following sections of this chapter as we continue to analyse Lāhijī’s discourse on the many kinds of knowledge of God that can be pursued and realised by the spiritual wayfarer.

9.1 The Need for an Authentic and Perfect Sufi Shaykh for the Sufi Disciple and Lāhijī’s Warning of the Fraudulent and False Sufi Shaykhs

Throughout Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan*, especially during his theoretical discourse on *ma’rifat* (“realised knowledge of God”) and the spiritual realisation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (“the Unity of Being”), Lāhijī repeatedly emphasises that the only means available to the Sufi aspirant to achieve true realised knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*—which also entails real knowledge of His Divine Acts, Names, and Essence—is through following the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*, the path of spiritual devotion and practice associated with the Sufis and Friends of God. Since the mystical Way of the *ṭarīqat* cannot be undertaken without the spiritual guidance of a living and perfect Sufi shaykh, Lāhijī also devotes an entire sub-chapter within his commentary to help his readers discern between the real and false Sufi shaykhs that exist and populate the religious-social milieu of his age. Because success upon the path of spiritual wayfaring depends so much upon the continuous spiritual support and guidance provided by a Sufi saint to his disciple through his *hemmat* (“aspiration”), it is imperative for the spiritual seeker to possess the necessary

knowledge to distinguish between a real Sufi shaykh and the many imposters that can be found throughout the world.⁶¹⁵ Although this attitude of Lāhījī's may be an expression of his own sectarianism and rivalry with other rival Sufi *ṭarīqas*—for obviously Lāhījī posits himself and his own Sufi master, Nūrbakhsh, as authentic Sufi shaykhs who can guide curious spiritual seekers and Sufis upon the path of the *ṭarīqat*—this sentiment of warning potential spiritual seekers about false Sufi shaykhs can also be found in the writings of many Sufi authors of previous centuries as well.⁶¹⁶ Therefore, the danger of false Sufi shaykhs who preyed upon naive and ignorant potential spiritual seekers within the Muslim community must have been a very real and ever-present danger for all spiritual seekers who were on the constant search for a living Sufi shaykh.

According to Lāhījī, one of the main signs that a Sufi shaykh was nothing but a pretender was his propensity for manifesting charismatic miracles in order to attract a devout following around himself from the gullible and ignorant masses.⁶¹⁷ The dervishes who crowd around this false shaykh and tirelessly sing his praises all day are, in turn, ignorant and spiritually blind, for they have embarked upon the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* not with the sincere intention of attaining the Divine Presence—but for ulterior and worldly motives. Because of the spiritual blindness of their hearts, they have been fooled by the manifestation of charismatic miracles performed by these charlatan Sufi shaykhs. And since the faith of these naïve and ignorant Sufis is based on nothing but blind imitation and faith (*taqlīd*), they do not possess the spiritual insight to distinguish between a real Sufi saint and a charlatan.⁶¹⁸ This is why (as Lāhījī claims) you can find many communities such as these throughout the Islamic world, and even

⁶¹⁵ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad 'ebn Yahyā Lāhījī, *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reẓā Barzgār Khāleqī and 'Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012)(From now on it will be cited as *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*), 546-50.

⁶¹⁶ Criticism of false Sufi claimants seems to be a common theme within the literature from the earliest history of the Persian Sufi tradition. From Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*—one of the earliest works of Sufism written in Persian—to the writings of Imām al-Ghazālī and Rūmī, one can find scathing attacks from these authors against the false, hypocritical Sufi masters and their ignorant and deceived followers, who seemed to exist in every generation. For more details on Imām al-Ghazālī's attacks on the charlatan Sufis of his era, see Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad Ghazzālī Ṭūsī, *The Alchemy of Happiness (Kimiya al-sa'adat)*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2008). I: 54-55. For Rūmī's criticism of the false Sufi shaykhs of his own era, see more in Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and J. A. Mojaddedi. *The Masnavi, Book One* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 140-41. Verses 2275-90.

⁶¹⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 549-50.

⁶¹⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 551.

though these false shaykhs have gathered a large following around them, this is not a sign that they are real Sufi shaykhs.

According to Lāhijī, in the eyes of the real Sufis, the manifestation of charismatic miracles is considered blameworthy. The real Sufi shaykh should abstain from manifesting charismatic miracles, even though he has the powers and capabilities to do so. For only the prophets and Messengers are allowed to perform miracles (and only when God commanded them to do so) to convince their communities to accept God's Divine Revelations and Rulings. Since God never commands the Sufi saint to manifest charismatic miracles—as it is not their responsibility to reveal a new divine revelation to their respective communities—there can only be one reason why these so-called Sufi shaykhs are displaying their miraculous powers before the ignorant and gullible masses, and that is to accrue followers. The charlatan shaykh becomes like a pharaoh who makes the false claim of lordship over his followers. The manifestation of miracles is considered completely forbidden by the real Sufi shaykhs, unless it occurs contrary to his free will and according to the Divine Will.⁶¹⁹

Another sign of a false Sufi shaykh are the character traits of haughtiness, arrogance, ego-centrism, and hypocrisy—because of his ability to manifest charismatic miracles and to gather around himself a large following of insincere Sufis—as a genuine shaykh is free of these spiritual diseases that afflict the hearts of most men.⁶²⁰ He is, therefore, a follower of Satan. And instead of being a true guide and helper for the Sufi disciple on their Way towards God, they are, in reality, bandits who ambush and lead the potential spiritual seeker away from God, and into the abyss of perdition, falsehood, and even heresy.⁶²¹

In contrast to these false Sufi shaykhs—who Lāhijī believes are more abundant in his age because of the prevalence of degeneracy and moral corruption⁶²²—the manifestation of

⁶¹⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 547-49.

⁶²⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 550.

⁶²¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 552. In Lāhijī's criticism of false and rival Sufi shaykhs and their insincere Sufi followers, could he be implicitly criticising and slandering Sayyed Abd-Allāh Barzashābādī and his followers? Since it is known from historical sources that these two Kubrawīya communities—who were each an off-shoot of the Kubrawīya Hamadāniya *ṭarīqa* through Khwāja Ishāq Khuttalānī—were in a perpetual state of intra-*ṭarīqa* rivalry during the later Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū period.

⁶²² *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 552.

charismatic miracles does not indicate the real Sufi master. Instead, it is through the gathering and comprehension of the knowledge of the *sharī'ah* and the *ṭarīqat* within one's inner being that makes one an authentic Sufi master. For the real Sufi shaykh, through his comprehensive knowledge of the *sharī'ah* and the *ṭarīqat*, has realised within his inner being all the mystical states of the Divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*).⁶²³ The authentic Sufi shaykh is, in Lāhijī's eyes, like a spiritual physician who can cure the many spiritual illnesses afflicting the heart of the Sufi aspirant because of their enslavement to the capricious desires of their own lower *nafs*. Through the spiritual powers of "dispensation" (*taṣarruf*) at the shaykh's disposal—because of the fact that he is one of God's living and hidden saints—he is able to gradually restore the Sufi disciple to spiritual health and well-being.⁶²⁴ This is the most significant quality that defines a real Sufi shaykh and Friend of God (*walī*) that every sincere Sufi should devote most of his waking life in search of. Once he has discovered a real and perfect Sufi shaykh, the wayfarer should bind his heart to him in sincere devotion and love, for the spiritually perfected and matured shaykh is able to exercise his spiritual influence upon the innermost consciousness (*sirr*) and inner being (*bāṭen*) of his many disciples and remove from them the blameworthy and ugly character traits that are the biggest obstacles on the Way towards the Divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*).⁶²⁵

Lāhijī also reminds the reader that the real Sufi shaykh is not required to be an expert on the outer sciences of Islam, like the exoteric religious scholars, but they must have real and extensive knowledge concerning the sacred sciences connected to the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*—and this knowledge of theirs is acquired through "spiritual tasting" (*dhawq*), spiritual realisation (*taḥqīq*), as well as through witnessing and the spiritual contemplation of the unseen realities of *wujūd*. He is able to achieve these exquisite and subtle mystical states and stations "since he is the [true] successor in his inner and outer being of that spiritual master (*ḥaṣrat*) the

⁶²³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 559.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. This Sufi term *taṣarruf* indicates the power of the Sufi shaykh to exercise his spiritual influence—usually through his gaze—upon the heart and inner state of his disciples who have a spiritual connection to him. Meaning that the inner being of the *murīd* is completely at the disposal of the Sufi shaykh and the spiritual influences that the shaykh subjugates him to from time to time. For more information on this term, see Jonathan Glustrom Katz, *Dreams, Sufism, and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad Al-Zawāwī* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 48-9.

⁶²⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 559 & 249.

Prophet Muḥammad”.⁶²⁶ This means that the perfect Sufi shaykh is someone who is deeply experienced in the practice of spiritual wayfaring, and is also someone who possesses the necessary knowledge concerning the mystical visionary experiences that occur for the Sufi wayfarers on their return journey towards God. These qualities then make him an *‘āref* (“realised knower of God”) of the many divine mysteries and secrets of God’s *Wujūd*, who does not fall into error when witnessing the unveiled divine realities of the unseen. He is also able to distinguish the different thoughts that pass through the minds of his Sufi disciples—meaning the lordly (*rahmānī*) angelic (*malakī*), satanic (*shayṭānī*) and the thoughts deriving from the lower, deceiving *nafs* (*nafsānī*).⁶²⁷

9.2 What the Sufi Path Entails, according to Lāhijī

Now that Lāhijī has provided essential information to the reader on how they can discern the differences between a false and authentic Sufi shaykh, and once the Sufi aspirant has devoted himself to a realised, perfect Sufi master, there are certain spiritual practices that become obligatory for the recently initiated Sufi to undertake on a daily basis. These spiritual practices associated with the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* are taught to him personally by his own Sufi shaykh, and are the very means for the Sufi disciple to realise the truth of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. This means that *maʿrifat* cannot be attained unless the Sufi disciple practices these different spiritual practices with utmost perseverance and sincerity. The first Sufi practice that becomes obligatory for the new disciple is *ẓikr* (“remembrance of God”). This is the central spiritual practice and act of devotional worship that not only distinguishes the Sufi from the broader Muslim community, but it is more fundamentally the indispensable tool for polishing the rusted mirror of the human heart so that it may then receive the self-disclosures of God’s Divine Names and Attributes, and hence allow the Sufi to attain real mystical knowledge of God’s Divine Unity.⁶²⁸ Here is Lāhijī’s description of the Sufi practices of *ẓikr*:

⁶²⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 250.

⁶²⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 250. For more information on this particular Sufi concept of *khavāṭer* (notions/thoughts) see Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism: Al-Risala al-qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*. Translated by Alexander D. Knysh & reviewed by Muhammad S. Eissa (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2007), 106-7.

⁶²⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 294-300.

The spiritual wayfarers who have crossed over the path of *ṭarīqat* with the footsteps of striving and effort, and who have arrived at the spiritual station of the Divine Reality (*maqām-e ḥaqīqat*) know with complete certainty that arriving at union with the station of their goal is not possible without the instrument of negation and affirmation; so the spiritual masters first transmit the remembrance of “*there is not God but God*” (*lā elahā ellallāh*) into the spiritual wayfarer so that the word “no” (*lā*) negates everything apart from God—which possesses nothing more than a mere appearance—and then through the words of “*but God*” (*ellallāh*) they affirm the Real Divine Unity (*waḥdat-e ḥaqīqī*). Why is this so? For as long as the multiple is not removed by the Whole (*kull*), the Divine Unity without partnership will not reveal itself [to the spiritual wayfarer]. And there exists no obstacle more difficult for the spiritual wayfarer than his own illusory existence. And it is necessary for the spiritually perfect one (*kāmel*) [the Sufi master], for the sake of guiding the spiritual seekers, to explain the many obstacles on the Way towards God. And it is because of this that most of the Friends of God first speak of the many veils of existence and of the illusions of the [false and lower] self with the spiritual wayfarers in order that they may take precaution [of the many dangers and obstacles of the Sufi path].⁶²⁹

The above passage by Lāhijī makes it explicitly clear to the reader that no spiritual wayfarer on the path towards God can ever realise any of the various mystical states and ascending spiritual stations of the Sufi Way without the constant Sufi practice of *zēkr*. Another way of understanding the central role of the *zēkr* within the spiritual life of the Sufi is that the *zēkr* serves as a vehicle which carries the spirit of the Sufi through the hierarchy of the spiritual stations until the final and supreme goal of realizing and witnessing the Divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*). The Sufi’s attainment of the Divine Reality is basically synonymous with achieving the final spiritual stations of the *ṭarīqat*, which is annihilation and subsistence in God.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 30. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 30 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁶³⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 294 & 258-64. These specific passages by Lāhijī reveal him to be a Sufi affiliated with the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa*, for past Sufi masters of this particular *ṭarīqa* have also emphasised the central and indispensable role of the *zēkr* within the spiritual life of the Sufi disciple. Especially the *zēkr* of *lā elahā ellallāh* (*there is not God but God*). This becomes clear if we compare the above passage with a brief passage from Najm al-Dīn Rāzī’s

Another important prerequisite for the Sufi, if he wishes to realise the eternal truth of *waḥdat al- wujūd* through unveiling and *maʿrifat*, is to cut all family relations and blood ties if they are an obstacle on the Way towards God. This is interesting advice by Lāhijī to his Sufi readers, since Islam places utmost importance and value upon its believers to maintain their family and kin ties to the best of their ability. Indeed, it is one of the most important duties for all Muslims to observe, and, according to the *sunna*, providing for the daily sustenance of dependents is a duty that cannot be neglected.⁶³¹ For Lāhijī, the greatest obstacle preventing the potential spiritual seeker from embarking upon the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*, is the burden of providing for one's wife and children. If providing for one's own family prevents one from continuing his spiritual wayfaring towards God, and therefore prevents him from realising his true and ultimate purpose in life, which is realised knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*), then Lāhijī—who perfectly follows Shabistarī's own views here—strongly urges the reader to cut his ties to them and devote himself entirely to the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*. This is because the Sufi must sever its attachments to the material world and the creatures who inhabit it, including one's own family who are a part of this physical world.⁶³² One way that Lāhijī tries to urge the reader to take such a drastic measure (no doubt many of his readers may have been reluctant) was to emphasise that the birth of every child only occurs through the sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Yet, according to negative views of Shabistarī and Lāhijī on this particular issue, if the husband was not overwhelmed by his base, capricious lust for his wife, would he have ever approached her and had sexual intercourse with her? Since it can never be otherwise, even what is considered one of God's greatest blessings for human beings—i.e., the

influential Sufi treatise, the *Merṣād*. For as Rāzī states in regards to the Sufi practice of *zeker*, “By *la elāha* (‘no God’), [everything] other than God is negated, and by *ellāʾillāh* (‘But God’), His majestic Presence is affirmed. When one pursues this *zeker* and persists in it, the attachments of the spirit to anything other than God will be gradually severed by the scissors of *la elāha*, and the beauty of the monarch of *ellāʾillāh* will become manifest and emerge from the veil of Majesty. In accordance with the promise of ‘*make remembrance of Me, and I will make remembrance of you*’, that Beauty will cast off the garment of letter and sound; and in the manifestation of the light of the sublimity of divinity, the property of ‘*all things shall perish but His face*’ will become apparent.” Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *Merṣād al-ʿebād*, 270. Hamid Algar's English translations, taken from Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *The Path of God's*, 270.

⁶³¹ Al-Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of*, I: 248-53. For more details on the conflict or struggle of the Sufis in early history between the prophetic *sunna* of marriage and the inclination of certain Sufis for a life of celibacy and solitude, see Arin Shawkat Salamah-Qud, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety: Personal and Communal Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 25-53.

⁶³² *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 572-73.

birth of a child—is already tainted by animal lust. In fact, Lāhijī considers the maintenance of most blood ties and kin relationships to depend solely upon the foolish, vain, and capricious desires of the lower *nafs*. This realisation will inevitably dawn upon the Sufi aspirant if they are to reflect deeply enough upon the true nature of family relations.⁶³³ This is why there is no more significant obstacle upon the path towards God than the heavy burden of family and kin ties. Lāhijī makes his point clear in his exegesis upon verse 942 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*:

What value is your lineage? Seek harmony and balance

Turn your face towards the Real, abandon all blood ties

This is an allusion to that community where their formal lineage (*nasb-e šūrī*) has become an obstacle in their Way, and they have divested themselves of it, for they are seeking a Sufi master (*murshed*) and they serve the spiritually perfect one (*kāmel*). So through the Way of guidance, he [Shabistarī] has asked that, ultimately, what value and worth does lineage have? And what spiritual perfection can result from the arrangement of blood ties and lineage? So seek harmony (*munāseeb*) with someone who has found a connection (*nesbatī*) with the world of disengagement [apart from the world] and solitude (*‘ālam-e tajarrud*). He [the Sufi disciple] must not be restrained by the chains of lineage and blood ties, and he must bring the face of his sincerity and spiritual attention (*tavajjuh*) towards the Real and the threshold of the Divine Unity (*jāneb-e waḥdat*), and therefore, abandon all formal ties and lineages.⁶³⁴

It seems the reason Lāhijī stresses such a drastic measure for the Sufi disciple is that he recommends another distinctive Sufi practice for the aspiring Sufi who hopes to attain union with the Divine Beloved, and that is the Sufi practice of periodic seclusion (*khalvat*). Since Lāhijī himself was a follower and authorised shaykh of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*, it is well documented in the available historical sources that periodic seclusion was one of the fundamental spiritual practices and pillars of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa* throughout its history. To quote another relevant passage by Rāzī, again concerning our current discussion for further proof of our preceding statement: “know that the foundation of wayfaring on the path of

⁶³³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 572-75.

⁶³⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 571.

religion and of attaining the stations of certainty is seclusion, withdrawal, and isolation from men. All the prophets and saints devoted themselves to seclusion at the beginning of their state, and persisted in it until they reached their goal.”⁶³⁵ Since the loftier spiritual stations and states of the path of *ṭarīqat* cannot be realised without entering into periodic seclusions, how can any Sufi ever enter into periodic seclusions if he is married and burdened by the incessant need to work and provide for his family? So it follows that Lāhijī urges his readers to follow the example of Jesus, who was himself not married and remained celibate his entire life, and was considered by Sufis like Lāhijī to have established the *sunna* of constant seclusion from the world and God’s creatures. Once in seclusion, the wayfarer can cut off all material attachments to the base world and liberate his imprisoned spirit from the chains of multiplicity in order to ascend through the realm of the disengaged and pure spirits (*tajrīd*)—where eventually it will return to its original abode within the realm of the Divine Unity.⁶³⁶ According to Lāhijī, it is impossible to liberate oneself from the chains and attachments that entrap the spirit in this material world and corporeal body unless the Sufi enters into periodic seclusions conducted under the spiritual guidance of a perfect Sufi shaykh. Otherwise, the Sufi initiate can never attain the ultimate goal of transcending the prison of this material world and lower *nafs*.⁶³⁷

There exist other Sufi practices and obligations to which the initiated Sufi must either constantly adhere or practice in order to make spiritual progress on the Sufi Way, such as the

⁶³⁵ Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *Merṣād al-ebād*, 279. Translated into English by Algar, taken from Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *The Path of God’s*, 279. Also Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, in his short Arabic treatise *Aqrab al-Turuq ilā Allāh*, considers the Sufi practice of seclusion as one of the fundamental pillars of the Sufi path. In his own words, “the essence of seclusion is confining the senses through private retreat (*al-khalwa*) from unrestrained conduct in the sensory realm, for indeed every canker (*āfa*), every sedition (*fitna*), and every calamity that afflicted the spirit gave potency to the self, fostering the self’s attributes, came in through the dormer window of the senses, by means of the senses, the self led the spirit to the *Lowest of the low* (95:5) and, through the senses, the self fettered the spirit and took mastery over it. Hence, through private retreat and isolating the senses, severed is the self’s support from the lower life (*al-dunyā*), from Satan, and from the assistance of whim and desire.” Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *al-Usūl al-‘Ashara*, 127. Taken from Cyrus Ali Zargar, “The Ten Principles: Theoretical Implications of Volitional Death in Najm al-Dīn Kubrā’s *al-Usūl al-‘Ashara* (A Study and Translation).” *The Muslim World*, Vol. 103, Augustana College (2013): 127. And according to Jamal J. Elias’s research on the life and thought of Alā’ ad-dawla as-Simnānī (d. 1336), who was the most influential and significant shaykh of the Kubrawīya *ṭarīqa* during the Ilkhanate period, “Simnānī excelled in engaging in forty-day meditational exercises (*arb’īnāt*) and, over the course of his lifetime, allegedly completed one hundred and forty such retreats at the khanaqah-i Sakkakiyya and one hundred and thirty at other locations.” See more in Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of Alā’ ad-dawla as-Simnānī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 29.

⁶³⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 565.

⁶³⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 528-29.

five daily ritual prayers (*namāz*)—when performed with presence of heart and purity of intention—which is also one of the means of attaining nearness to the God (*qurb*) and *munājāt* (“intimate whispered prayers”).⁶³⁸ Lāhijī also reminds his readers that the Sufi must always follow the dictates of the *sharī‘ah* at all times, and it can never be abandoned by the Sufi, for “the *ṭarīqat* without the *sharī‘ah* is nothing but capricious desire, vanity (*havas*) and satanic whisperings (*vasvase*), while the *ḥaqīqat* without the *sharī‘ah* and the *ṭarīqat*, is heresy and libertinism”.⁶³⁹ For our purposes, we simply need to note that if the Sufi is able to fulfill the various necessary preconditions of the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat* under the spiritual guidance of a living Sufi master, then eventually the veils before the eyes of his inner heart will be removed and he will be able to witness, face-to-face, the Divine Unity of the Real’s *Wujūd*.⁶⁴⁰ The passage below summarises our previous discussion on the topic. It serves as a concise passage that expresses Lāhijī’s conviction that the Sufi practices and customs that are obligatory for the initiated Sufi are the very means for him to attain the supreme and final goal of the Sufi path: mystical union with the Real which also results in the unveiling and witnessing of the Real. In Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 178 of the *Gulshan*:

And when he clings to the robe of a perfect shaykh like this, he must obliterate his own free will in the will of the *pīr* (“Sufi master”), under the authority of the Sufi master he must be like “a corpse in the hands of a corpse washer” and through the command of the Sufi master he must continuously keep his attention [constantly] towards the Real, accustom himself with constant sincerity of words and deeds, turn away from all sins and sensual pleasures, and purify his inner self from the vices of character traits and the defects of his actions. He must also preoccupy himself with religious devotions and acts of obedience according to the noble *sharī‘ah* of the Prophet—peace and blessings be upon him—and abstain from any extravagances (*efrāt*) and indulgences (*tafret*). He must also turn his face entirely away from whatever is an obstacle for his spiritual attention towards the Real. Through a scarcity of words and sleep—along with ceaseless remembrance of God and little eating—he must make his daily litany and complete way

⁶³⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 297-98.

⁶³⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 251.

⁶⁴⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 123.

of life. Then the mirror of the heart of the spiritual wayfarer, which is the world-displaying goblet of the Real (*jām-e jahān-numāye ḥaqq*), through that holy and pure light, becomes illuminated and cleansed of the rust of human nature. And when he cuts off all attachments to this lowly world of darkness, his spirit will enter into flight towards the higher worlds, and ascend towards the heavens and the throne of God, and whatever is above the throne of God will be attained and realised for him. A direct correspondence between him and the spiritual beings and the angels will then be manifest, and the divine lights will shine forth within his pure heart. Then he will attain—through the eyes of its innermost consciousness (*be dīde-ye serr*)—the vision of God, which is the end of all goals and the conclusion of all desires.⁶⁴¹

In the above passage, Lāhijī makes it clear that real knowledge of God—the knowledge that is imbued with certainty and which is termed *maʿrifat* by the Sufis—is equivalent to the mystical vision of witnessing God directly without any intermediaries in between. And this supreme goal of witnessing God through unveiling is only possible by following the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*, the interconnected system of Sufi practices which is incumbent upon the initiated Sufi if he desires to attain the spiritual realisation of the Oneness of the Real's *Wujūd*. This combination of ascetic and devotional spiritual practices of the Sufis—in order to achieve true knowledge of God's *Wujūd*—Lāhijī makes quite clear throughout his commentary is very different to and even superior to the intellectual, speculative methods of the peripatetic philosophers and speculative theologians. This significant point in Lāhijī's Sufi thought will become more evident in the following sections of this thesis once we begin to analyse, in-depth, Lāhijī's discourse on the nature and reality of *maʿrifat*.

9.3 The Sufi Wayfarer Cannot Travel upon the Sufi Path without a Perfect Sufi Master

It may seem like much of the success and failure for the Sufi in completing his spiritual wayfaring on the path of return towards God depends almost exclusively upon his own personal efforts. But this is not the case, since Lāhijī constantly reminds his readers that his efforts are completely futile and indeed bear no actual fruit if not for the spiritual support and

⁶⁴¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 122-23.

guidance of a perfect Sufi master.⁶⁴² Although the personal exertion of the Sufi disciple does undoubtedly play a certain role in his progress upon the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*, yet in reality, much hinges on the *barakāt* (“spiritual blessings”) of the perfect Sufi shaykh.⁶⁴³ The Sufi shaykh who is a living saint and heir to the Prophet Muḥammad is a conduit through which the effusion of divine grace (*fayḏ*) is transmitted, through his heart and towards his Sufi disciples, who are spiritually connected to him through *bay’ah* (“initiation”) and feelings of love and devotion.⁶⁴⁴ So, in the view of Lāhijī, it is the *barakāt* of the saintly Sufi shaykh that bears most of the weight in carrying the Sufi disciple through the spiritual stations—even up to the final stations of annihilation and subsistence in God.⁶⁴⁵ Lāhijī makes this significant point clear in the following passage, where he recounts a visionary, mystical event (*vāqe’ā*) that he experienced with his Sufi master Nūrbakhsh. Through this particular visionary event, he was able to experience the mystical state of “voluntary death” (*marg-e ekhtiyārī*), which is the Sufi dying to himself through the slaying of his own lower *nafs*. In the mystical teachings of the Persian Sufis, the ego-self is the last veil and obstacle that needs to be removed in order for the Sufi wayfarer to achieve the final spiritual stations of the Sufi path, which is annihilation and subsistence in God. As Lāhijī states vividly in his own words:

In the beginning of my spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*), when this poor one arrived at the continuous service of my master (*ḥaẓrat*), Sayyed Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh—May God sanctify his precious secret—I was in his service for some time, and yet the mystical states which were the sought goal (*maṭlūb*) had not been unveiled upon this poor one according to his own states. One night I saw in a visionary event (*vāqe’ā*) that my spiritual master had been sitting in a certain place, and this poor one came forward and presented himself before him, where I said, “because the degrees of sainthood (*velāyat*) and perfection is something that is not within the capacity of everyone to arrive at union with, it is therefore proper for this poor one who does not possess the capacity for those perfections, that if you command him [towards] righteous works, give him

⁶⁴² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 559-60 & 594.

⁶⁴³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 560.

⁶⁴⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 588-96.

⁶⁴⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 122-24.

permission so that he may go into a corner of poverty (*darvīshī*) and preoccupy himself with the worship of the Real". When I had spoken these words, also within that same visionary event, I saw my spiritual master become irritated, and he replied: "Why is it not possible? Be better than everybody else!" Suddenly I saw a huge, iron mace within the hands of my spiritual master, which he then brought down upon my own head, and from those spiritual realities, dread and panic were found within me, and I said, "I repent, I repent". Suddenly, also in that same instant, a thought [from Nūrbakhsh] came into my mind that, "let it be so that I may strike and you may die, for this is a good thing". The state of fear then went out of me, and I completely surrendered [to my spiritual master]. When he struck that iron mace upon the head of this poor one [again], I became effaced, ecstatic, and without consciousness, and then I returned back to [ordinary] consciousness from those mystical states. If not for the ardent love (*'eshq*) and nurturance [of my spiritual master], when could I have ever arrived at those degrees? [of spiritual perfection].⁶⁴⁶

As Lāhijī describes through this personal, visionary experience of his encounter with his Sufi shaykh Nūrbakhsh, the slaying or dying to one's own self—which is the necessary precondition for realizing the mystical state of annihilation in God, and which leads to union with the Divine Beloved—can only occur under the hands of the perfect Sufi shaykh. It is as if God had exclusively entrusted the execution of this supreme function or sacred duty—the slaying of the false, lower *nafs* of the Sufi disciple—to his Friends (*awleyā'*), the realised Sufi shaykhs. And this state of "voluntary death" can only occur within the context of the intimate and deeply spiritual relationship that develops between the Sufi master and his submissive Sufi disciple. Without earnestly submitting to the subtle, spiritual influences (*taṣarruf*) of a living and perfect Sufi shaykh, it would be impossible for the spiritual seeker to attain the Divine Presence, as well as attain true, realised knowledge (*ma'rifat*) of God. For according to Lāhijī, "know that 'voluntary death' (*marg-e ekhtiyārī*), is the means for attaining to realised knowledge of God

⁶⁴⁶ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 353-54. This passage forms part of Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 519 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

(*maʿrifat*) which is also the very purpose for [your] creation”.⁶⁴⁷ In other words, the voluntary death where the Sufi dies to his own self, is the very gateway that leads to realised, mystical knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*)—which is the ultimate purpose or goal of the spiritual striving of the Sufi disciple on the path of *ṭarīqat*, and which cannot be realised without complete submission and devotion to a perfect Sufi shaykh.

I have attempted to provide a minimum but necessary systematic exposition on Lāhijī’s teachings concerning the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*, which is the very path that leads to the attainment of *maʿrifat* (realised knowledge of God). It is impossible to do complete justice to Lāhijī’s discourse on the path of *ṭarīqat* and on the specific roles and responsibilities of the shaykh and the Sufi disciple within one chapter. By briefly outlining what Lāhijī considers to be the necessary preconditions of the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*, as well as the fundamental role of a living and perfect Sufi master within the spiritual life of the Sufi disciple, we hope to establish within the minds of the readers the necessary connection between the *ṭarīqat*—which is the Way of the Sufi dervishes and the saintly Friends of God *par excellence*—and Lāhijī’s theoretical discourse on the definition and nature of *maʿrifat*. The term *maʿrifat*, throughout Lāhijī’s text, constitutes one of the central concepts of his entire system of Sufi doctrine and praxis. And this evinces Lāhijī’s deep affiliations with the Persian Sufi tradition. For throughout the history of the Persian Sufi tradition, *maʿrifat* has been one of the most widely discussed subjects within the collective discourse of the Sufis. It sometimes even overshadows the idea of divine, passionate love (*muḥabbat/ʿeshq*) in its central importance for the followers of Sufism.⁶⁴⁸ The deeper we dive into Lāhijī’s text, the more it becomes apparent that *maʿrifat*, as a concept, is intertwined with *waḥdat al-wujūd*—the pillar and axis of Lāhijī’s entire system of Sufi doctrine and thought. This means that for Lāhijī, the spiritual realisation of the true ontological situation of the cosmos—directly witnessing and realising the reality of *waḥdat al-*

⁶⁴⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 427.

⁶⁴⁸ Although Maḥmūd Ezz al-Dīn Kāshānī in his *Meṣbāḥ al-Hedāya*—arguably one of the most influential Sufi manuals written in Persian during the later medieval period—states that love is the most important and valued mystical state for the Sufi beginner to taste and experience on the Sufi path, nevertheless he only devotes a single sub-chapter to the topic on divine love. On the other hand, when it comes to his discourse on *maʿrifat* and knowledge, he devotes two entire chapters (twenty sub-chapters) at the beginning of his book. Therefore highlighting for the reader the importance of correct knowledge and *maʿrifat* for the aspiring Sufi. For more details, see Kāshānī, *Meṣbāḥ al-Hedāya*, 281-86 & 35-84.

wujūd (“Unity of Being”)—is attained by the Sufi through the specific category of knowledge that the Sufis term *maʿrifat* (“realised knowledge of God”). We will now continue to analyse this concept in the following sections within the context of Lāhijī’s Sufi metaphysics and epistemology.

9.4 The Definition of Tafakkur and Maʿrifat within Lāhijī’s Sufi Doctrine and Thought and the Impossibility of Attaining True Knowledge of God according to the Way of the Philosophers and Speculative Theologians

Before we can delve deeper into Lāhijī’s own definition of *maʿrifat*, and its central role within the spiritual life of the wayfaring Sufi, we need to clarify and define another important concept within Lāhijī’s Sufi doctrine and thought: *tafakkur* (“reflection”). The intention here is not to dedicate too much space to explicating Lāhijī’s understanding of *tafakkur*, since the late Leonard Lewisohn has already done this within his own research on Shabistarī.⁶⁴⁹ Although we cannot completely bypass Lāhijī’s teachings concerning *tafakkur*, since Lāhijī’s understanding of *maʿrifat* is impossible to grasp without first establishing and defining what *tafakkur* is within the framework of his discourse. This is because, in the early chapters of his commentary, Lāhijī constantly pairs these two terms together, since one is defined in opposition to the other as the distinct modalities of seeking knowledge of God’s *Wujūd* that are available to human beings.

In the beginning of his commentary, Lāhijī offers a brief description of the two main ways man can attain knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*:

Mystical knowledge of God (*ʿerfān*) is possible through two ways: the first is through rational proofs (*estedlāl*), which is trying to prove the existence of God from the effect (*athar*) to the Efficient Cause (*muʿaṣṣer*), from the Divine Act (*feʿl*) to the Divine Attribute (*ṣafat*), and from the Divine Attributes (*ṣefāt*) to the Divine Essence (*dhāt*), and this is particularly the Way of the exoteric religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*). And the second Way is through the purification of the inner being along with the complete denuding of the

⁶⁴⁹ For more details, see Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Guildford: Curzon Press, 1995), 217-68.

innermost consciousness (*serr*) from all others [apart from the Real] and the refinement of the spirit. And this is the Way of realised, mystical knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*), and this is especially the Way of the prophets, saints, and the realised knowers of God (*ʿurafā*).⁶⁵⁰

According to Lāhijī, the first Way of gaining knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*, which is based upon establishing rational proofs for God’s *Wujūd* through the discursive, rational intellect, is the Way of the religious scholars (*ʿulamā*), peripatetic philosophers and speculative theologians.⁶⁵¹ The Way of knowledge of these groups of seekers is based upon *tafakkur* (“reflection”) within Lāhijī’s epistemology. The second, superior Way of knowledge is based upon *dhawq* (“spiritual tasting”) *kashf* (“unveiling”), *shuhūd* (“witnessing”), which leads to or is synonymous with *maʿrifat*, and is sometimes called *tafakkur* as well by Lāhijī, although in its truest sense. This is the Way of knowledge associated with the realised knowers of God (*ʿurafā*), prophets, and the Sufi saints. This category of knowledge is only accessible to the spiritual elite from among God’s servants. The confusion about the different meanings of *tafakkur* in relation to the two different groups of knowers will be further clarified as we proceed further on in our discussion. It will soon become clear to the reader that for Lāhijī, real knowledge is the mystical knowledge associated with *maʿrifat*, and not the reflective, rationalist knowledge of the exoteric scholars, peripatetic philosophers, and speculative theologians.

In the following passage, Lāhijī explains in detail the epistemology of the philosophers and the speculative theologians in their seeking knowledge of the Known Object, i.e., God:

⁶⁵⁰ *Maḥāṣin al-eʿjāz*, 7. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 6 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁶⁵¹ Whenever Lāhijī mentions the peripatetic philosophers as a distinct group of seekers of knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*, he is most likely referring to Ibn Sīnā and his later followers within the Islamic world, whose own school of thought is a synthesis between Aristotle’s rationalism and Neo-Platonism. When Lāhijī refers to the *kalām* scholars within his commentary, he is most likely referring to both the classical Sunnī theological schools of thought, meaning the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites. In the later Timurid period the three Sunnī speculative theologians who were the most well-known representatives of the Sunnī *kalām* tradition within the Persianate world, was Sadr al-Dīn Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) and Sharīf al-Dīn Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502). For more information on these Persian Sunnī theologians and the Persian Sunnī theological tradition—especially within the historical context of medieval Iran—see Mehdi Aminrazavi and S. H. Nasr, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia. (Philosophical theology in the Middle Ages and beyond)*, Vol. 3 (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 285–367.

Since thought (*fekr*) is defined as the hierarchical order and arrangement (*tartīb*) of known principles that leads to the discovery of the unknown, know that the view of the people of knowledge is that thought (*fekr*) and theoretical knowledge (*naẓar*) requires finding the unknown through that which is known... In addition, there is no doubt that acquiring a particular unknown from what is a known is not possible in every sense that one may desire; rather, it requires a particular order and arrangement (*tartīb*) of those known things, which are contingent on whether they are in relation to a concept (*taṣavvur*) or a judgment (*taṣdīq*)... The known consist of those known subjects that are the basis (*mabādī*) of the objective that is sought. From that particular hierarchical order, the proof of the unknown becomes known, in other words, the proof of the unknown objective becomes known. For example, the reality of a human being is an unknown hypothesis composed of two parts, that of an animal and a rational faculty, in a special hierarchical order that prioritises the universal over the particular. The creation of the world, a conceptual unknown, is composed of the concept of a changing world and the concept of a created universal that undergoes change.⁶⁵²

The passage below by Lewisohn—although it relates to Shabistarī, it can equally apply to Lāhījī as well—provides a further clarification of this methodology of knowledge favored by the philosophers and speculative theologians:

According to Shabistarī, as well as Ibn Arabī, correct ratiocination involves several stages. The first is “conception” (*taṣawwur*) of an unknown object of knowledge. Second stage is the organization of this “conception” into its principle constituent elements, which is called “recollection” (*tadhakkur*); Here, of course, Shabistarī draws close to the Platonic *anamnesis*, the “unforgetting” of what we already know from eternity. The third stage is actual ratiocination (*fikrat*) in which the process of syllogistic reasoning

⁶⁵² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 47-8. This passage is Lāhījī’s commentary upon verse 77 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*. I have relied upon and borrowed Mohammad H. Faghfoory’s English translations for this particular passage. Taken from Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhījī Gilānī, “Commentary on the Secret Garden of Divine Mystery (From *Sharḥ Gulshan-e Rāz*): translated into English by Mohammad H. Faghfoory.” In *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 4: From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2012), 485.

assumes control. The fourth stage is the “inference” or “moral” (*‘ibrat*) to be drawn from this entire process. Thus, “when known objects are arranged into their particular elements, by discernment of what is known, one can verify the unknown”.⁶⁵³

In this highly intellectual method of gaining knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*, the philosopher or speculative theologian establishes rational arguments and proofs for the Reality of God’s *Wujūd* through inferring the proof of his *Wujūd* from what is perceived in the material world of the senses. In other words, they attempt to gain knowledge of the Necessary Being through the perceived *wujūd* of the possible beings. According to the surmise of the peripatetic philosophers and speculative theologians, the entire cosmos and all the possible entities that exist within it, exist within a chain of causality which ultimately began with the First and supreme Cause, which they consider to be the Necessary Being, i.e., God. Therefore, since everything that exists is the effect of the supreme Cause—God—we can infer the transcendent Necessary Being of the Creator through the possible and perceptible beings of the creatures.⁶⁵⁴ Yet according to Lāhijī, this conceptual and rationalist methodology of the peripatetic philosophers and speculative theologians is entirely wrong, and this is why the method favored by them can never in truth lead to real knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*. This particular kind of knowledge can only be valid if God is truly an efficient and primary cause of the cosmos and everything that exists within it. But this is not the case, since God in his Pure, Divine Essence completely transcends the cosmos, and has no like or similarity to be compared with in order to be known and defined; and this is because things are known through their opposites, and God has no opposite, since nothing else truly exists other than He.⁶⁵⁵ This means that God’s Essence cannot exist within the chain of causality that the philosophers and speculative theologians situate Him within. He is not, in His essence, a prior cause of the cosmos and all of the possible existents, for if He were so, this would delimit his transcendent and pure Divine Essence.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵³ Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 230.

⁶⁵⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 78-9 & 59-60.

⁶⁵⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 60.

⁶⁵⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 60-61. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī in his *Futūḥāt*, “reflection is a state which offers no preservation from error. Hence it is a station of danger (*khatar*). He who possesses it does not know if he is mistaken or correct, since reflection accepts either. If the possessor of reflection wants his reflection to be mostly correct in knowledge of God, he should study each verse which has come down in the Koran in which reflection

Lāhijī states his own position firmly that God cannot be known through inference from the secondary causes or possible existents—ever.⁶⁵⁷ Lāhijī constantly encourages his readers to ponder more deeply upon this specific methodology of knowledge of the peripatetic philosophers and the speculative theologians, in order for them to eventually realise that claims of knowledge made by these two groups are never truly free from the fog of doubt and suspicion. He then totally rejects the validity of this particular rationalist method for gaining knowledge of God's *Wujūd*.⁶⁵⁸ In fact, according to Lāhijī, the more proofs that these two groups establish for the Reality of God's *Wujūd*, the further they stray from the true path of knowledge. For every rational argument and proof established by the philosophers or speculative theologians regarding knowledge of God's *Wujūd* is nothing more than an unseen veil added upon the many already existing veils covering the spiritual vision (*baṣīrat*) of their hearts. In the view of Lāhijī, these endless rational proofs constructed by them are nothing more than futile attempts to prove the Reality of God's *Wujūd*. Which does nothing more than to keep them in a state of perpetual blindness and ignorance that prevents them from openly witnessing the reality of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and truly knowing God's Reality.⁶⁵⁹

For Lāhijī as well, much of the knowledge that the philosophers and speculative theologians take pride in, and which constitutes one of the main intellectual traditions of Islamic civilization, is in reality based upon blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of their revered predecessors.⁶⁶⁰ And this kind of knowledge, which they have accepted based upon blind imitation and faith, cannot be personally verified by the seeker of knowledge, since it is a knowledge that is constructed through the rational proofs and arguments of their Imāms. In Lāhijī's adverse judgment, their knowledge of God is nothing more than the pure conjecture and speculation of their blind and limited rational intellects and imaginations. The knowledge of the philosophers and speculative theologians was not received or known through an ineffable

(*tafakkur*) and taking heed (*e'tibar*) are mentioned..." Ibn al-Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, II 230.19. Taken from William C. Chittick, *Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 165.

⁶⁵⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 59-61.

⁶⁵⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 49-50 & 55.

⁶⁵⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 49-50 & 64-66.

⁶⁶⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 48-49 & 72.

mystical experience of unveiling, spiritual tasting, or direct witnessing of the Real *Wujūd*. Yet according to Lāhijī, if only these two groups of seekers had received God’s divine guidance—as the Sufi saints and prophets had—they would have realised that their methodology of knowledge, based upon endless and complicated rational proofs and argumentations, was an entirely futile enterprise that leads them no-where. In Lāhijī’s view, whoever attempts to know God through the exclusive reliance upon their rational intellect and the rational proofs constructed by it, is doomed to wander lost and confused for his entire life, forever seeking knowledge that he can never truly gain.⁶⁶¹ As Lāhijī states in his commentary on verse 80 of the *Gulshan-e Raz*:

Once again, if those efforts are not accompanied by God’s Grace
Indeed it would be nothing but sheer blind imitation

If the special order and the rules of logic, argumentation, and proofs are not
accompanied by Divine Guidance, which also includes preparedness and inner purity,
and if the heart is not illuminated by Divine Light, nothing will be accomplished except
pure imitation and repetition. Poem:

The imitating man is like a handicapped person;
Although he possess reason and sound proof,
The depth of his proof and form of presentation
Distance him from spiritual insight and sound judgement.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶¹ *Mafātīh al-e’jāz*, 55-62 & 68-72. In regards to gaining true knowledge of God’s *Wujūd* through the rational faculty of the intellect, Ibn al-‘Arabī states in the *Fuṣūṣ*, “for this reason, none of the men of knowledge have discovered this knowledge of the soul except the godly, namely the Messengers and the Sufis. As for the men of reasoning and the masters of thinking—namely the ancients and the theologians in their theological discussions concerning the soul and its quiddity—none have discovered its reality, and mental reasoning will never grant it. Whosoever seeks knowledge of it by way of mental reasoning does so in vain.” Ibn al-‘Arabī and Caner K. Dagli, *The Ringstones of Wisdom: Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam* (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), 135.

⁶⁶² *Mafātīh al-e’jāz*, 49.

9.5 True Knowledge of God (*Ma'rifat*) is Only Possible by Following the Way of the Sufi Friends of God

By now, it becomes plainly evident that Lāhijī has quite a negative (one could even say a hostile and even contemptible) view of the Way of knowledge of the philosophers and *kalām* scholars. If, according to Lāhijī, their Way of knowledge is utterly inadequate for gaining true and certain knowledge of God's Reality, what then is the true path of seeking knowledge of God? That is, how can the spiritual seeker gain real and certain knowledge of God? This brings us back to one of the central principles within Lāhijī's system of Sufi doctrine and thought, which is the indispensable role of the realised Sufi master for the seeker of knowledge, along with the role of the human heart for the acquisition of *ma'rifat*. For according to Lāhijī:

The seeker of God must totally abandon the Way of rational argumentation and pay attention to the Real Originator, and with the guidance of a perfect Sufi master (*ershād-e pīr-e kāmel*) he must purify his heart from the dust of strangers so that the Beauty of the Real Beloved will reveal itself in that mirror [of his heart].⁶⁶³

The above passage mentions another important principle of Lāhijī's system of Sufi thought: the role and importance of the human heart for the realisation and acquisition of true knowledge of God. Since Lāhijī devotes a significant amount of space to the elucidation of the true reality and function of the human heart within his commentary, it is therefore necessary to provide a brief synopsis of his teachings concerning the human heart. Of course, when Lāhijī mentions the human heart as a crucial spiritual faculty of perception and apprehension, he, like most masters of the Persian Sufi tradition, is not referring to the piece of flesh situated on the left side of the chest of our physical bodies.⁶⁶⁴ He is referring to a spiritual faculty of perception that can perceive and apprehend suprasensible realities that lay beyond the world of material

⁶⁶³ *Mafātih al-e'jāz*, 50.

⁶⁶⁴ For more information on the teachings of the Persian Sufi masters regarding the human heart as a spiritual faculty of cognition that can comprehend spiritual and divine realities beyond the reach of the human intellect, see Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, *The Psychology Of Sufism (del was Nafs)* (London: Khaniqah-Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), 71-113. Since Lāhijī's own explanations of the role and nature of the human heart shares many similarities with his famous Kubrawīya predecessor Rāzī, see more in Rāzī, *The Path of Gods*, 201-19. For more on the heart in connection to the teachings of Rumi, see William Chittick, and Jalāl Dīn Rūmī, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 37-40.

forms.⁶⁶⁵ This is a vital point to keep in the back of our minds in connection to Lāhijī's constant criticism of the philosophers and speculative theologians and their claims of possessing true and exclusive knowledge of God. According to Lāhijī, since the philosophers and speculative theologians are so bewitched and enamored by their own rational intellects (*'aql*) they have become completely unaware that there exists another faculty of perception within themselves that exists in contrast to, and is superior to, the rational intellect: the human heart. Only the human heart, once it has been polished and purified through following the mystical path of *ṭarīqat*, can recognise and truly know God with complete certainty.⁶⁶⁶ Why is this the case? For it is within the mirror of the human heart that the Real perpetually self-discloses through his various Names and Attributes.⁶⁶⁷ This is why, within the framework of Lāhijī's Sufi physiology, the human heart plays a central role within the spiritual life of the Sufi disciple and is also the most esteemed organ or spiritual faculty within the human being. For it is the heart—and not the rational intellect favored by the philosophers and speculative theologians—that can know God truly through those mystical experiences of unveiling, spiritual contemplation, and witnessing that can occur for the sincere Sufi disciple during his spiritual wayfaring towards God.⁶⁶⁸

According to Lāhijī, once the Sufi wayfarer has made sufficient progress on the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*, the spiritual eyes of his heart will be finally opened through the Real bestowing His own light upon it. The Sufi wayfarer now gains the ability to witness, contemplate and apprehend those suprasensible realities and meanings that the rational intellect is completely incapable of perceiving and apprehending, since the Real did not give it the capability to do so when He created it. Now that the veils covering the realised Sufi's heart have been removed, the Sufi, through the spiritual eyes of his awakened and purified heart, is now able to witness God. Either through divine self-disclosures or through the heart's spiritual

⁶⁶⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 66.

⁶⁶⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 122-29.

⁶⁶⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 503-6. Lāhijī quotes the *Hadith Qudsi* much used by the Sufis, where God states, "neither the heavens nor the earth can contain Me, but the heart of my faithful servant does contain Me." As scriptural proof for this particular teaching of his concerning the central role of the human heart within the spiritual path of the Sufis. Since it is the heart alone within the human reality that receives the perpetual self-disclosures of the Real, thereby causing the heart to constantly fluctuate from one state into another state within each passing moment.

⁶⁶⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 103-104 & 66.

vision where it can contemplate the One, Real *Wujūd* upon the diverse and endless theophanic mirrors of the possible entities. This means that *waḥdat al-wujūd* has now been transformed from a conceptual theory to a witnessed reality for the realised Sufi. Commentating upon verse 102 from the *Gulshan*, Lāhijī states:

For the rational intellect there does not exist the capacity
To perceive the light of that Face.
Go, and for the sake of gazing upon Him
Seek another pair of eyes.

This means that because reason, which is the rational intellect (*‘aql*), according to “*there is none among us but who has a known station*” [Q 37:164],⁶⁶⁹ does not possess the endurance and patience [for witnessing] the light of the Divine Beauty of that Majestic Presence, someone who is a seeker of the face-to-face vision (*dīdār*) of that world illuminating Divine Presence (*‘ālam-e afrūz-e ḥaẓrat*), now says to him: go and for the sake of the spiritual contemplation of the Divine Beauty of the Friend (*mushāhada-ye jāmal-e dūst*) seek another pair of eyes. For He cannot be seen through the eyes of rational proofs (*be dīde-ye estedlāl*), and those eyes which can comprehend and realise the Real are the inner eyes of the heart (*dīde-ye del*), which they have also named as the faculty of spiritual perspicacity (*baṣīrat*). And until the eyes of your spiritual perspicacity have not been illuminated with the collyrium of tears resulting from mortification; spiritual wayfaring and the spiritual purification of the self (*naḥs*) and the heart, as well as the refinement of the spirit; then the spiritual contemplation of the Divine Beauty of the Friend through the Way of witnessing (*shuhūd*) will not occur for you, and this spiritual reality (*ma‘nī*) will not be realised except through the perfect guidance of a God-seeing (*ḥaqqbīn*) and God-knowing (*ḥaqqdān*) shaykh for the people of the *ṭarīqat*.⁶⁷⁰

From the above passage, Lāhijī makes it clear to his readers that the human being can only gain true knowledge of God’s *Wujūd* through witnessing and contemplating God’s *Wujūd* with the

⁶⁶⁹ ‘Alī Qulī Qara’ī’s English translation.

⁶⁷⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 66.

spiritual perspicacity of the heart. Yet the heart as a subtle, spiritual faculty of cognition and perception can only be awakened for the human being through following the path of *ṭarīqat* under the spiritual guidance of a saintly Sufi master. True knowledge of God then comes about as a result of seeing and witnessing, not from the reflections of the rational intellect (*tafakkur*).

It should now be apparent to the reader that within Lāhijī's discourse there is a crucial and even fundamental difference between the *tafakkur* of the philosophers and theologians and the *ma'rifat* of the realised and perfected Sufis. In order to further establish the point that true knowledge of God comes from the act of seeing and witnessing—but through the spiritual vision of the illuminated and awakened heart—Lāhijī goes on to describe the true knower of God. Within the framework of Lāhijī's discourse on this subject matter concerning the different categories of knowledge, Lāhijī—faithfully following his predecessors of the Persian Sufi theoretical tradition—states that the true knower of God is called an '*āref*' ("realised knower of God"). This term is connected to the concept of *ma'rifat*. In its most basic meaning, the '*āref*' is someone who has acquired *ma'rifat* within themselves—meaning mystical, realised knowledge of God. And the '*āref*' acquires *ma'rifat* every time he or she experiences a mystical experience of unveiling ("*kashf*") or a visionary event (*vāqe'a*), during which the '*āref*' is able to contemplate, witness and recognise the Real through His self-disclosures—but through the spiritual perspicacity of the heart.⁶⁷¹ Unlike the rational knowledge of the philosophers and

⁶⁷¹ One unique and fascinating feature about Lāhijī's work is the fact that Lāhijī relates many of his own personal mystical experiences or mystical states of union with God for his readers. Lāhijī relates about ten of these mystical events (*vāqe'a*) throughout his commentary. One reason Lāhijī gives for relating these highly personal visionary events, is to reinforce his point or argument that true knowledge of God—meaning *ma'rifat*—can never be attained through the rational and intellectual methods of the philosophers and speculative theologians, for *ma'rifat* can only be bestowed or realised through following the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat* under the authority of a living Sufi master. One important fact to highlight concerning the nature or condition of these mystical events (*vāqe'a*), is that they are not vivid dreams that Lāhijī had during a state of sleep. Instead, they occurred in the intermediary state between wakefulness and sleep, usually in the early mornings when he was performing his daily Sufi practices and worship. Meaning that he was awake when these visionary events occurred, and they seem to be synonymous with what the Sufis term as "unveiling" (*Kashf*) and "witnessing" (*shuhūd*) within their writings. Henry Corbin has noticed the importance of Lāhijī's visionary, mystical experiences and connects it to the broader history of the unique doctrine of the Kubrawīya shaykhs and their emphasis of seeing different coloured lights during their spiritual progression on the Way of the *ṭarīqat*. For more details on Corbin's interpretation and explanation of Lāhijī's visionary experiences and witnessing of God as a black effulgent light, see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Translated from the French by Nancy Pearson (New York: Omega Publications by agreement with Shambhala Publication, 1994), 110-20. For more details on Lāhijī's personal and vivid experiences

speculative theologians, this mystical kind of knowledge (*maʿrifat*) is never clouded by doubt and suspicion.⁶⁷² *Maʿrifat* then completely bypasses the rational mechanisms of the rational intellect, and is infused or bestowed into the heart of the *ʿāref* from the Divine Presence itself during the Sufi's witnessing of God during his mystical experiences of unveiling. The passage below, taken from Lāhijī's text, should make this relevant but highly significant point of Lāhijī's Sufi teachings clearer for the reader:

The realised knower (*ʿāref*) is that one whom the Divine Presence has brought to the spiritual degree of witnessing directly His own Divine Essence, Names, and Attributes. And this spiritual station manifests for him through the Way of mystical states and unveiling, not through an exclusive dependance upon intellectual, reflective knowledge (*ʿilm*), for him [the *ʿāref*] "*knowledge is seeing*" and realised knowledge of God (*maʿrifat*) is the inner state of that realised knower (*ʿāref*). And that heart which has been qualified by spiritual perfection, of everything that it witnesses, first sees God and the creatures as hidden. The reason being that the Manifest of All things is the *Wujūd* of the Real, for He is manifest through his own Self, and the manifestation of all other things is through Him. Supposedly, do you not see that when you contemplate something from a far distance, its being (*mūjūdeyyat*) is comprehended first? However, sometimes it happens that because the distance is too far, it is not apparent whether that form is a human being, or a bear, or something else. Rather, in every circumstance, the reality of whatever is apprehended and perceived is nothing but [The Real] *wujūd*; the reason being that other than [The Real] *wujūd* all is non-existence. That is why that realised knower [Ibn al-ʿArabī] has stated that, "*The Real is Manifest, and the creatures are intelligible*".⁶⁷³

The above passage by Lāhijī makes it clear that *maʿrifat* is born from the act of witnessing and spiritually contemplating the Real. Still, *maʿrifat* also results in the spiritual realisation within

of these mystical events (*vāqeʿa*) from his commentary on the *Gulshan*, see *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 66-67, 80, 85, 193, 314, 356, 343, 522-24.

⁶⁷² *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 48-49.

⁶⁷³ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 53. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 84 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

the realised knower of the true ontological situation of the cosmos, which is the realisation of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. The *‘āref* then, according to Lāhijī’s teachings, actually perceives the Oneness and Unity of *Wujūd* through a mystical state of unveiling, and this realisation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* bestows complete certainty upon the heart of the *‘āref*. In other words, the *‘āref* is never afflicted by the dark clouds of doubt and suspicion regarding its realised knowledge of the Real. So for Lāhijī—and the Sufi followers of the Akbarī tradition—knowledge of God’s *Wujūd* does not remain a mere abstract concept or rational proof within the Sufi’s mental landscape, but is an ontological reality directly witnessed and “tasted” by the realised and spiritually awakened Sufi during those mystical experiences of unveiling or *vāqe‘a* (“visionary event”).⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷⁴ It is perhaps pertinent now to provide a short passage from one of the many visionary events that Lāhijī provides for his readers within his commentary. The vivid descriptions of these “visionary events” (*vāqe‘a*) provided by Lāhijī helps the reader to imagine what these visionary events entail when they occur for the wayfaring Sufi, and they reinforce Lāhijī’s arguments that *ma‘rifat* can only be attained for the seeker of knowledge through these mystical experiences of unveiling or *vāqe‘a*. In Lāhijī’s own words, “One night after the revitalization of the spiritual moments [a state] of absence occurred for this poor one (*faqīr*), where I saw the entire surface of the earth as a rose garden. And the collection of the roses because of their delicateness and greatness could not be described, were blossoming, and the world from a certain perspective was full of light and illumination where the eyes did not have the capacity [to perceive] those rays of light. And this poor one became ecstatic (*bīkhūd*) and mad, and I was running in the midst of the meadow of flowers, screaming and shouting like a mad man. During that mystical state, I turned my face towards the heavens, and I saw the entire heavens were shining like radiating suns, such that from the manyess of the suns, the face of the heavens was concealed and their light in a certain way shined into this world where the description of that cannot possibly be explained. At that moment, my madness had increased; suddenly, I saw that an illuminated figure had approached and said to me, “Do you wish to see God? I replied, “yes.” He then hastily went, and this poor one followed behind him. Suddenly during that walking, it came to my mind that this was a dream (*khāb*). I entered into the extremity of terror and shaking, for may I never wake up from this dream! That person [continued] hastily to continue on his way, and I [continued] to follow behind him. Suddenly a building was found where all of it consisted of the rarest of jewels, and I entered that building. The entire vault and courtyard of this building were constructed out of gold, and from the extremity of its greatness, the surrounding edges of those vaults could not be discovered. That [mysterious] person then turned his face around and said “it is this.” I gazed, and saw the light of the divine self-disclosure (*nūr-e tajallī-ye elahī*) that through its awesomeness was more manifest than anything else such that it cannot in quantity and quality enter into description. When the gaze of this poor one fell upon that [the light of divine self-disclosure], all of my bodily members and faculties of perception fell apart, and I became absolutely annihilated (*fānī-ye muṭlaq*) and without consciousness. And I saw in that mystical event that I had returned to myself again – and again I looked – and I was spiritually contemplating the Divine Beauty with all of its perfection. Once again, I became completely annihilated and absolutely effaced (*maḥv-e Muṭlaq*). Then I returned to my own self from that mystical state. *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz*, 66-67. This passage forms part of Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 102 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*

9.6 Realised Knowledge of the Self Leads to Mystical Knowledge of the Real and the True Reality of the Self

There is one more important feature of *maʿrifat* that also needs to be mentioned before concluding this chapter. According to Lāhijī, *maʿrifat* needs to be divided into two distinct categories because of the different objects of knowledge that *maʿrifat* is based upon. The first is realised knowledge of the self (*nafs*), and the second is realised knowledge of God, or the Real.⁶⁷⁵ Although they differ from one another because the object of knowledge differs, for Lāhijī they are inseparable from one another. For realised knowledge of God—which constitutes the ultimate purpose for the human creation—cannot take place if “self-realisation” (*maʿrifat-e nafs*) is not first achieved by the Sufi.⁶⁷⁶ Self-realisation is, therefore, the necessary precondition and foundation upon which the higher degree of *maʿrifat* is based. This means that without self-realisation, real knowledge of God will be impossible for the Sufi to realise. But why is it so essential that every seeker of knowledge must know himself first in order to gain true knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*? From one perspective it is the mystical and esoteric knowledge of realising the primordial function and nature of his own human creation—which he has forgotten because of the state of heedlessness that has overwhelmed him during his earthly state—whose main and original purpose was to serve as a theophanic mirror for the self-disclosure of the Real through all of His Names and Attributes.⁶⁷⁷ To realise that his form—especially his heart—is a mirror that reflects back to the Real the endless perfections of His own Divine Self—meaning His Names, Attributes, and Acts.

Therefore, the realised Sufi realises their essential non-existence and poverty in relation to their Creator. In reality, the *wujūd* that they have attributed to themselves this entire time belongs exclusively to the Real. So *maʿrifat-e nafs* is realizing the eternal truth that they are no more than a locus-of-manifestation for the One *Wujūd* of the Real.⁶⁷⁸ According to Lāhijī, the only one who can genuinely say “I” is none other than the Real. For the individual identity of the human being is nothing but a particular entification of the Divine Self, or the

⁶⁷⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 7 & 184.

⁶⁷⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 181-85.

⁶⁷⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 183-85.

⁶⁷⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-eʿjāz*, 181-85.

Divine Essence.⁶⁷⁹ Or, in other terms, the “I” of the seeker of knowledge, which is an expression of his own relative, illusory self, is a shadow and reflection of the True, Eternal, and Transcendent Self of the Divine Identity. In order for the human servant to realise his True Self, or the Only “I” that truly exists in all of *Wujūd*, he must realise the utter illusion and nothingness of his own individual and relative self—through the mystical state of annihilation.⁶⁸⁰

And this realisation of the Eternal, Divine Self by the *‘āref* can also be considered the ultimate objective of *ma‘rifat*. According to Lāhijī, this self-realisation is impossible to attain through the study of books and the conceptional thinking of the rational intellect. In other words, the Way of the philosophers and speculative theologians can never lead to self-realisation, and hence, their Way of seeking knowledge of God can never lead to *ma‘rifat*.⁶⁸¹ In the beautiful passage below, in which Lāhijī displays all the powers and skills of his prose writing, he summarises much of what we have discussed so far concerning Lāhijī’s discourse on *ma‘rifat* and *tafakkur*: that self-realisation is the absolute prerequisite for the attainment of *ma‘rifat* for the Sufi wayfarer:

Because the Real, through all of His Names and Attributes, discloses and manifests Himself in the location of self-disclosure of the human reality, and the receptivity for that all-comprehensiveness does not belong to anyone other than the human being, therefore the human being is a comprehensive copy [or reflected image] of the Divine Form. The Real, through the perfection of manifestation, has become concealed within the veil of this iron [the human form] and has become clothed in his robes, therefore he [Shabistarī] has stated, “seek from your own self everything that you desire”. This means that if you are a seeker of that mystery of beauty (*ānī*) which is seeing the Real openly, and according to the hadith, “*Know yourself and you shall know your Lord*”. It must be that first you recognise yourself in order to arrive at the contemplation of the Divine Beauty (*mushāhada-ye jamāl-e ‘elāhī*). The attainment of this awesome fortune is not possible through the rational intellect, cleverness, rational proof (*dalīl*) and

⁶⁷⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 186-91.

⁶⁸⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 193-94.

⁶⁸¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e‘jāz*, 184 & 48-60.

arguments (*burhān*); for unless you efface your own entification and illusionary existence in the Real and the curtain of your you-ness you throw aside so that the Real may reveal His Face to you—only then you can contemplate the Real within your own self. This spiritual reality cannot be attained except through devotion and worship (*tāʿat va ʿebādat*); spiritual journeying and wayfaring (*seyr va sulūk*); spiritual struggle against the lower-self along with taking the hand of a perfect guidance (*ershād-e kāmel*); inner purification and refinement (*taṣfeya va tajleye*); and constant remembrance of God (*davām-e zekr*), which is similar to a polisher that purifies the mirror of the heart from the dust and rust of others [everything apart from God], until eventually the divine light shines into that heart. And when the light of the sun of the Divine Essence (*nūr-e khūrshīd-e dhāt*) shines forth, according to this poem:

When He self-discloses his pre-eternal Attributes
Therefore the characteristics of my contingent being
were entirely consumed.

The spiritual wayfarer, through the light of the self-disclosure of the Divine Oneness (*nūr-e tajallī-ye aḥadī*)—which demands the annihilation of the locus-of-manifestation [the possible being of the Sufi]—now becomes effaced and annihilated. And the spiritual wayfarer in the essence of selflessness and ecstasy (*bī-khudī*) witnesses themselves now as the entity of that Reality. And in reality, he or she becomes a knower of the Real through attaining the degree of “reality of certainty” (*ḥaqq-al yaqīn*), and they now know with complete certainty how the Real can be seen and in what manner. And the suspicions and doubts that never leave the people of the rational intellects concerning this spiritual reality, has wholly disappeared before them [the realised Sufi] (*az pīsh-e vay bar khīzad*).⁶⁸²

In concluding our section on Lāhījī’s definition of *maʿrifat*, there is one more significant esoteric mystery that lies at the heart of Lāhījī’s discourse on *maʿrifat* and *tafakkur* which he has devoted so much space to within his commentary, and that is the divine mystery that in the

⁶⁸² *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz*, 310. The above passage is Lāhījī’s commentary upon verse 434 of the *Gulshan e-rāz*

end, the only knower of the Real is none other than the Real itself. Or in other words, the knower and the known are one, and it is none other than He. And the witnesser and the witnessed, the seeker and the sought, the lover and the Beloved is none other than the One *Wujūd* of the Real.⁶⁸³ For, in fact, the human knower and seeker is none other than a particular form for the self-disclosure of the Eternal, One *Wujūd* of the Real—so it is none other than He that is manifest through the realized knower of God (*‘āref*), along with His different Attributes and Names that make up the different perfections of His One *Wujūd*. So according to the internal logic of Lāhijī’s Sufi metaphysics, which is based upon the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, only God can know God; but through man, i.e., the realised Sufi. And the Real cannot know Himself through man unless man first annihilates his own individual entification and relative *wujūd* within the endless ocean of His Absolute *Wujūd*, through the ultimate and highest self-disclosure of His undelimited Divine Essence.⁶⁸⁴ After this, all that remains of the realised knower (*‘āref*) is his name and form, but the *Wujūd* that is manifest through him and which witnesses and contemplates the One *Wujūd* of God upon the endless theophanic mirrors of the cosmos, is none other than the Divine Beloved Himself.

9.7 Conclusion

In Lāhijī’s epistemology there exist two main opposing categories of knowledge available for the seeker to realise, the knowledge that Lāhijī terms as *tafakkur* (“intellectual reflection”) or sometimes as *‘elm* (“religious knowledge”), and the mystical knowledge that Lāhijī associates with the Way of the Sufis, *ma’rifat*. In the earlier chapters of his commentary, where he spends a significant amount of space laying out his epistemology for his readers, Lāhijī also provides an uncompromising and systematic attack on the rationalist methodology of the philosophers and speculative theologians. When we closely follow Lāhijī’s criticism of the very foundations of the Way of the philosophers and speculative theologians, it is soon revealed that Lāhijī has an underlying agenda. Not only does Lāhijī intend to show his readers the limitations—or even the

⁶⁸³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 300 & 241-42.

⁶⁸⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 79 & 228. In relation to the complete unity and oneness of the Knower, the Known and Knowledge, Ibn al-‘Arabī states that, “from himself he knows himself, and his self is not other than the Selfhood of the Real. No being is there that is and is other than the Selfhood of the Real; indeed, it is identical with that Selfhood [The Real]. In one form He is the knower, the knowledgeable, and what is acknowledged, and in another form He is the one who is neither knower nor knowledgeable, and He is denied.” al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 135.

futility—of the Way of the philosophers and speculative theologians, but in doing so he sets the stage to present the superiority of the Sufi Way as a means of seeking knowledge of God. Ultimately he establishes that the Way of the revered Sufi saints and their loyal disciples is the only effective and valid Way of realizing true knowledge of God’s *Wujūd*. Lāhijī, throughout his discourse, is quite explicit in his views that true *maʿrifat* was not possible with the rationalist methodology of the peripatetic philosophers and speculative theologians. Lāhijī considered these two groups as being spiritually lost on their Way towards God because of their exclusive reliance upon the discursive intellect, which does not have the capacity to know God truly; or in other words, mystically and experientially like the spiritual faculty of the heart. The epistemology of the Sufis—for whom Lāhijī saw himself as a spokesperson—was instead based upon the consistent performance of certain spiritual practices that were identified with the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*. For Lāhijī then, the Way of the Sufis was essentially anti-rational, and even anti-madrassa in nature, for the contemplative and devotional Way of the Sufis was traditionally practiced and experienced within the environmental confines of the *khānaqāh*—the social institution *par excellence* that was identified with the Sufis. This may be why Sufis traditionally have always had a competitive and even hostile relationship with the speculative theologians and philosophers, for just like the Sufis, the philosophers and theologians were rival groups in their claims of having authentic knowledge of God’s *Wujūd* and Reality, in that they also dealt with the fields of knowledge related to metaphysics, cosmology, and ontology. Still, unlike the Sufis, their knowledge was purely theoretical and reflective, relying upon the discursive intellect (*ʿaql*) to establish rational proofs for their doctrines and theological beliefs concerning God’s *Wujūd*. And in the final view of Lāhijī, this kind of knowledge was considered not only wholly useless and futile—but even worse—its preoccupation could eventually become a dark, impenetrable veil covering the heart of the spiritual seeker. Lāhijī even believed that the veils that were formed through the seeker’s engrossment with the rational knowledge of the philosophers and speculative theologians could become impossible to remove over time.

Lāhijī's own positions on *tafakkur* and *ma'rifat* seem to be views that were commonly held by the wider Persian Sufi community.⁶⁸⁵ Lāhijī had, therefore, not only articulated his own opinions regarding the superiority of *ma'rifat* over *tafakkur* within his commentary on the *Gulshan*, but also expressed the collective views of the wider Persian Sufi community, which seem to have remained unchanged for most of the medieval period. In contrast and direct opposition to the philosophers and speculative theologians (and perhaps including those *sharī'ah*-oriented '*ulamā*' who were opposed to the Sufis), the Sufis have described their knowledge of God's *Wujūd*—which was attained or infused into the heart of the Sufi adept through profound moments of spiritual realisation or unveiling—as being more mystical and experiential in nature.⁶⁸⁶ For Lāhijī, this experiential and mystical kind of knowledge that he termed *ma'rifat*, bypassed and transcended the discursive intellect's limited, rational mechanisms completely, for it was a knowledge born of the direct witnessing and contemplation of God's *Wujūd* by the Sufi.

Lāhijī and many Sufis of his time considered the realisation of *ma'rifat* to be the ultimate purpose of the Sufi Way, even believing it constituted the underlying purpose for

⁶⁸⁵ It is interesting to compare Lāhijī's own discourse on the different categories of knowledge with the teachings of Jāmī, especially with his short work the *al-Durra al-Fākhera*. In this short work that Jāmī completed in the year 996/1481, he compares the different positions of the speculative theologians, the philosophers and the Akbarī Sufis, and then goes on to argue for the superiority of the teachings of the Akbarī Sufis over the different and conflicting positions held by the philosophers and speculative theologians in regard to God's *Wujūd*. Although there is no evidence that Jāmī and Lāhijī ever met nor corresponded in length through letters, yet regarding their views on knowledge and the correct Way of seeking it, they probably would have agreed with each other on a lot of matters. For more details on this particular work by Jāmī, see Jāmī and Nicholas L. Heer (Tr.), *The Precious Pearl: Al Jami's Al-Durrah Al-Fakhirah*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979) 36-66.

⁶⁸⁶ Najm al-Dīn Rāzī in his *Merṣād al-ebād* is filled with numerous passages attacking the peripatetic philosophers and their Way of seeking knowledge. It is perhaps possible that Rāzī's views had an influence upon Lāhijī's views regarding the philosophers and their Way of knowledge. For more on Rāzī's hostile attitude and persistent criticism of the philosophers and their Way of seeking knowledge, see Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *The Path of God's*, 54, 136-39, 211-12 & 379-81. Khwājah 'Abdallāh Anṣārī also wrote an entire treatise attacking the Way of the speculative theologians as he considered all *kalām* a grave heretical innovation within the *ummah*. For more on Anṣārī's attacks on *kalām*, see Abdullah Ansari, *Stations of the Sufi Path: The One Hundred Fields (Sad Maydan) of Abdullah Ansari of Herat*. Translated and Introduction by Nahid Angha (Cambridge: Archetype, 2011), 37-41. And Rūmī himself also constantly belittled and criticised the philosophers and speculative theologians within his own works, especially within the *Masnavī*. For more on Rūmī's negative views towards the philosophers, see Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī & Alan Williams. *The Masnavi of Rumi, Book One: A New English Translation with Explanatory Notes* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 216-17, Verses 3292-3300. And Leonard Lewisohn's own important research on the life and thought of Shabistarī also reveals that Shabistarī held a hostile view of the peripatetic philosophy of Ibn Sīnā and his followers. For more details, see Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith*, 37-38 & 51.

God's creation of the human species.⁶⁸⁷ Therefore, real knowledge of God—as Lāhījī strongly asserts through his work—can only be attained by those who were initiated into the Sufi path, and who consistently practice a host of different Sufi practices associated with the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*. Of course, these practices must be performed with sincerity of intention, combined with complete submission, obedience, and love for a living Sufi shaykh. This religious conviction of Lāhījī's makes him a proponent of (and even propagandist for) *ṭarīqa*-based Sufism, especially for the *ṭarīqa* that he followed, the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*. Our analysis and exposition of this particular dimension of Lāhījī's Sufi doctrine and praxis, therefore, reveals another important facet of Lāhījī's Way of Sufism, and offers us a more comprehensive picture of who Lāhījī was in the broader historical context of the Persian Sufi tradition. Although there may still exist a cloud of uncertainty regarding the true confessional identity of Lāhījī, there is no doubt regarding Lāhījī's strong connections and loyalty to the tradition of *ṭarīqa*-based Sufism. Our analysis reveals that Lāhījī was a staunch advocate for *ṭarīqa* Sufism—as he asserts it is the only valid Way for seeking true knowledge of God's *Wujud* for the Muslim believer, especially in opposition to the inferior and insufficient Way of the philosophers and speculative theologians.

⁶⁸⁷ Imām al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-'Arabī are the two most famous figures within the Sufi tradition who claim that the path of Sufism is so intimately connected to the constant pursuit and seeking of knowledge of God, that the entire way of Sufism has sometimes been described as the way of knowledge by some of these adherents. For more information concerning Imām al-Ghazālī's conception of the way of Sufism as a path of knowledge, see Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*. 2nd ed (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 162-8. And In regard to Ibn al-'Arabī's own vision of the path of Sufism as the Way of seeking knowledge of God, see more in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 147-68.

Chapter Ten

Lāhijī's Views on Love, Beauty, and Witnessing, and His Adherence to the Religion of Love

From the previous discussions it may seem that Lāhijī was a Sufi strictly of the Akbarī tradition. As has been established, he was no doubt an Akbarī, however as already pointed out, he was a more complex Sufi figure than generally anticipated. He most certainly did employ the unique terminology and sophisticated metaphysical ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers for the exposition of his own Sufi discourse and commentary on the *Gulshan*. Still, there is a further layer to his Sufism which needs to be uncovered. Lāhijī's discourse displayed a deep mastery and understanding of the Akbarī tradition's core concepts and themes. Yet Lāhijī was also a passionate follower of an entirely different tradition of Sufism. Historically, within the wider Persian Sufi community, this other Way was called by its followers as the “Religion of Love” (*mazhab-e ‘eshq*).⁶⁸⁸ This particular crystallisation within the Sufi tradition suddenly emerged in Greater Khurāsān during the early part of fifth/eleventh century. It came to view through various poetic and prose works written in the new Persian script, Farsi. Two good and early examples of this phenomenon are the *rubā’īyāt* poems of Abū Sa‘īd Abū al-Khayr (d. 440/1049) and the *Munājāt nāmeḥ* (“The book of intimate whispered prayers”) by Khwājah ‘Abdallāh Anṣārī. Both works that seemed to enjoy widespread popularity amongst Persian Muslims of

⁶⁸⁸ For more information on this particular school of thought within the wider Sufi tradition, see Husayn Ilahi-Ghomsheji, “The Principles of Religion of Love in Classical Persian poetry.” In *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (London & New York: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd), 77-107.

the Islamic East throughout the history of Persian literature.⁶⁸⁹ Abū Saʿīd and ʿAbdallāh Ansārī were most likely responsible for planting the seeds of this spiritual tradition of Islamic mysticism which flourished in the later decades and centuries of the medieval period. In the following generations, influential Sufi masters like Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1123 or 1126), Sanāʾī (d. 525/1130), ʿAṭṭār, and Rūmī—perhaps being the most famous exponents of this particular Sufi tradition of love (*ʿeshq/maḥabbat*) and beauty (*jamāl/ḥusn*)—inherited this tradition and brought it to fruition through their respective literary masterpieces. These works continued to shape and influence the collective imaginations and personal pieties of the Persian Sufi community—as well as those Sufi communities which existed within the wider Persianate cultural sphere of the abode of Islam—for centuries afterward.⁶⁹⁰ We can count amongst the followers of this “Religion of Love” some of the most famous and influential Persian Sufi masters who lived during the medieval period. This list included the likes of Rūzbehān Baqlī, Fakr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī, Maḥmūd Shabistarī, Khwāju Kermānī (d. 733/1352), Ḥāfeẓ Shīrāzī (d. 792/1390), Kamāl Khujandī (d. 803/1400-01), Shams Māghrebī, Seyyed ʿAlī Hamadānī (d. 786/1384) Shāh Neʿmatallāh Walī, Shāh Qāsem Anvār, Pīr Jamāl Ardestānī (d. 878-9/1474-75) and Jāmī.⁶⁹¹ Judging by the number of important figures listed here, this particular strand of the

⁶⁸⁹ For more information on Anṣārī’s *Munājāt-e Nāmeḥ*, see Minlib Dallh, *The Sufi and the Friar: A Mystical Account of Two Men in the Abode of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 89-97. And for more information on Abū Saʿīd Abū’l-Khayr and his *Rubāʾīāts*, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), 16-19. For more information on the historical formation and growth of this love tradition of Persian Sufism, see William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 287-318.

⁶⁹⁰ For more information on Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and the impact *Sawāneḥ*—his supreme prose masterpiece on the mystical realities of love—has had on the Persian Sufi tradition, see Joseph E.B. Lumbard, *Aḥmad Al-Ghazali, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 51-79 & 151-74. For more information in regards to ʿAṭṭār and his influence on the Persian Sufi tradition, see Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār*. Translated by John O’Kane with editorial assistance by Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 520-615. And for more information on Rūmī’s influence on the Persian Sufi tradition through his poetic masterpiece the *Masnavī*, see Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalal Al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 467-489.

⁶⁹¹ For more details on Rūzbehān’s Sufi teachings on human-divine love, see more in Carl W. Ernst. “The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rābi’a to Rūzbehān.” In *The Heritage of Sufism - Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*, Vol. 1 of *The Heritage of Sufism*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 448-455. And on the relationship between Khwāju Kermānī and the Religion of Love, see Leonard Lewisohn, “The Malāmatī Sufi Counterculture: Anti-clericalism in Persian poetry from Nizari to Ḥāfiz.” In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn (Jordan Centre for Persian Studies; Irvin, California, 2020), 523-35. For more information on the possible connections between the *ghazal* poetry of Ḥāfeẓ and the Religion of Love, see Leonard Lewisohn, “The Mystical Milieu: Ḥāfiz’s Erotic

Sufi tradition was not only alive and flourishing during Lāhijī's own era of the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, but continued to operate side by side with the Akbarī stream of Sufism as well. Indeed, one can state that the "Creed of Love" with its unique system of esoteric and mystical lexicons, poetic metaphors, symbols, and ideas continued to exercise an unchallenged hegemony over the collective minds of the wider Persian Sufi community. Evidence of this historical reality, is the various commentaries that different Sufis wrote upon Rūmī's *Mathnawī*; along with other classical works of the genre that deployed the specific terminology and unique mystical ideas associated with the Religion of Love.⁶⁹² These influential Sufi masters, who were passionate followers of this "Religion of Love," presented distinct insights about love that were amorous, poetic, relatable, and personal for both the pious Muslims and the devoted Sufis. They accomplished this through their respective literary works that creatively reimagined and redefined the relationship between the human servant and God, but crowned with the qualities and descriptions of passionate love and beauty. Their many prose and poetic masterpieces enjoyed widespread popularity even beyond Sufi circles, which contributed to the popularisation and even mainstream acceptance of the specific views and teachings associated with this specific stream of the Persian Sufi tradition throughout the Persianate-Islamic world.⁶⁹³

Spirituality." In *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn. New paperback edition (London & New York: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd.), 31-55. For a sample of the poetry of Kamāl Khujandī and Shams Māghrebī, see Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia. The Tartar Dominion (1265-1502)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 320-44. And for more on 'Alī Hamadānī's adherence to the Religion of Love, see Amir Seyyed 'Alī Hamadānī, *Mashāreb al-aḍwāq: sharḥ-e Qaṣida-ye kamriya-ye Ebn-e Fāreẓ Meṣrī dar bayān-e sharāb-e maḥabbat*, edited and translated by Moḥammad Kwājavi (Tehran, 1362/1983), 35-48.

⁶⁹² For more information on the different commentaries written upon Rūmī's *Maṣnavī* during the fifteenth century within Iran and Central Asia, see Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, 475-82. And see also Lloyd Ridgeon, "Naqshbandī Admirers of Rūmī in the Late Timurid Period", *Mawlana Rumi Review* 3, 1 (2012): 124-168.

⁶⁹³ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 32-42. In Ahmed's own words regarding the popularity and influence of Ḥāfeẓ's ghazal's throughout the Persianate world, he states "The *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ was, in the period between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries, a pervasive poetical, conceptual and lexical presence in the discourse of educated Muslims in the vast geographical region from the Balkans through Anatolia, Iran and Central Asia down and across Afghanistan and North India to the Bay of Bengal that was home to the absolute demographic majority of Muslims on the planet." Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 32. The *Dīvān* of Ḥāfeẓ is like the perfect distillation of the principles, ethos and ideals of the Religion of Love, where Ḥāfeẓ was able to express much of the teachings and ethos associated with this Way of passionate love in sublime poetic verses. Although Jāmī himself in his *Nafahāt al-uns* admits that there is no evidence that Ḥāfeẓ had any connection with any Sufi *ṭarīqa* or shaykh, nevertheless, he agrees with the opinion of one of his companions from the Naqshbandiyya *ṭarīqa*, who stated that if Ḥāfeẓ had been a Sufi, then "there is no *Dīvān* better than the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfeẓ," and that no poet had ever expressed the doctrines and teachings of the Sufi's so

For the followers of the “Religion of Love”, the relationship between the human creature and God was no longer exclusively defined as a relationship between a weak servant and its transcendent, unknowable, and unreachable Lord. This utterly transcendent God may have been what was characterised and described to the pious Muslim in the Quran and the Hadith. Still, the Persian tradition of love-mysticism brought forth those aspects and dimensions of the human-divine relationship that may be argued to have been inherent within the Islamic revelation and teachings of the Hadith. In any case, the exponents of the “Religion of Love” took what was already emphasised by the speculative theologians and exoteric *fuqahā*’ and reimagined this relationship between the human servant and God as a passionate and intense relationship of divine love between the human lover and the Divine Beloved. Some of the greatest masterpieces of the Persian Sufi literary tradition were texts that exclusively expounded the viewpoints and teachings associated with this “Religion of Love”. In fact, it is possible to say that from the middle of the fifth/eleventh century onwards, we see no influential work of Persian Sufism being produced that was not deeply affected by the ideas associated with this specific tradition. This can be visible when observing the lessons, lexicon, poetic images, and symbolism associated with this particular strand of the Sufi tradition as found in most major works during the Medieval Period.⁶⁹⁴ And Lāhijī’s masterpiece—as the most influential and widely read commentary ever written on the *Gulshan*—is no exception.

One significant feature of Lāhijī’s commentary is the seemingly effortless manner in which he synthesises these two important intellectual and spiritual streams of Sufism together—the Akbarī tradition and the Religion of Love—into a unified spiritual vision of the

eloquently in poetry like Ḥāfeẓ. See more in Nūr-al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns men Ḥazrāt al-Quds*, edited by Maḥmūd ‘Ābedī (Tehran: Entershārāt Sukhan, 1394/2015), 611-12.

⁶⁹⁴ The clearest examples of this would be the Sufi treatises of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, Abū’l-Mafākher Yaḥyā Bākharzī (d. 736/1335-6), Maḥmūd ‘Ezz-al-Dīn Kāshānī (d. 735/1334-35). Although the influential works of each of these respective Sufi shaykhs were written as Sufi training manuals for Sufi dervishes residing within the *Khānaqāh*, there are in fact whole sections and chapters within each of their works that clearly display the influences of the “Religion of Love” upon the Sufi doctrine and practice of these Sufi masters, who were themselves followers of the more sober Baghdadi tradition of Sufism. For more details on this specific subject, see ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *The Path of God’s Bondsmen from Origin to Return: (Merṣād al-‘ebād Men al-Mabdā Elāl-ma’ād): A Sufi Compendium*. Vol. 35. (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1982), 66-69, 88-89, 208-9, 226-7. And for Kāshānī, see Ezz-al-Dīn Maḥmūd Kāshānī, *Meṣbāḥ al-hedāya wa meftāḥ al-kefāya*, edited by Muhammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and ‘Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār 1381/2003), 281-91. For Bākharzī, see more in Abū’l-Mafākher Yaḥyā Bākharzī, *Awrad al-ahbāb wa Fusūs al-ādāb*, 2 Vols, edited by Irāj Afshār (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e dāneshgā-ye Tehrān, 1383/2004) II: 239-53.

Sufi path. This might suggest that the Religion of Love, not unlike the Akbarī tradition, was already well established by the time of Lāhijī, and thus his Sufi writing would simply reflect the preeminent features of Sufi thought rather than be his own independent effort to introduce something previously unknown. As we have seen, Lāhijī was not an innovator or originator of ideas; he was a commentator and transmitter of key Sufi doctrines. Therefore, it is impossible for any reader to approach Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* and gain a deeper understanding of the content contained within this work without possessing some prior familiarity and knowledge of the essential principles that underline the Religion of Love, which was sometimes referred to by its followers as the "Creed of Lovers" (*dīn-e 'āsheqān*).

For this reason, one of the aims of this chapter is to contextualise Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* in order to discern the many different textual sources that influenced Lāhijī's text. Many of Lāhijī's own metaphysical and mystical views on love and beauty can be traced back to the ideas and teachings of the great classical Sufi masters that had preceded him. One way of understanding Lāhijī's seminal masterpiece on Sufi doctrine and praxis is to read it as a text that, on every page, enters into an intertextual and dialogic relationship with the great classics of the genre of Persian Sufi literature. The surface of the Lāhijī's text is an intersection where multiple texts from the same tradition and genre intersect with one another. However, an accurate and more in-depth grasp of Lāhijī's work cannot be accomplished by the reader without discerning the many different textual influences from past sources. In a sense, Lāhijī's Sufi discourse on the divine mysteries of love and beauty can be read as his personal and insightful commentary on earlier classical works of the genre.

The five Sufi masters who have most influenced Lāhijī's views on love, beauty and witnessing (*shuhūd*)—judging by the number of explicit and implicit references to these great Sufi masters that can be found within his commentary—are Aḥmad Ghazālī, 'Irāqī, Rūmī, Shabistārī, and Ibn Al-Fāreż. In the following sections, I will show how much Lāhijī's own views and teachings on this subject were influenced by the mystical insights and teachings of these past Sufi masters, however, owing to a lack of space, this analysis will be limited to the influence of Ghazālī, 'Irāqī and Rūmī. Lāhijī masterfully adopts and transposes the views of his great Sufi predecessors from the Religion of Love. Still, he adopts them for his own purposes

within his text. Therefore, he occasionally offers his own unique and fresh insights to the holy triad of Love, beauty, and witnessing that cannot be found in earlier works of the genre. Lāhijī's genius is that he adds another layer of esoteric meaning to the poetic symbols, concepts, and imagery associated with the "Religion of Love".

The present analysis of Lāhijī's discourse on Divine Love, therefore, represents the final piece of the puzzle in our attempts to discover who Lāhijī was as an influential historical figure that left a lasting legacy on the theoretical and even literary dimensions of the Persian Sufi tradition.

10.1 The Metaphysical Origins of Divine Love and Love as a Cosmic Force that Incites Everything into Motion and Being

To grasp the role, significance, and nature of Divine Love and Beauty—in all modes of their manifestations—within Lāhijī's metaphysics, we need to understand the relationship between God's Love and the metaphysical origins of the cosmos. For Lāhijī, two Hadith Qudsi serve as the scriptural basis and justify his theories and views on divine-human love. The first is well-known and often cited within the literature of Sufism, and that is "*I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known. So I created the cosmos in order to be Known*".⁶⁹⁵ The second is "*My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious obligations I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks*".⁶⁹⁶ These two hadiths are frequently cited and mentioned by Lāhijī, for they provide the necessary scriptural proofs for his doctrine on divine-human love. According to Lāhijī, the first hadith is proof that the ontological origin of all things is Divine Love, which means that God's purpose in bringing the possible entities from the darkness of non-existence into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* was

⁶⁹⁵ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad 'ebn Yaḥyā Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*, edited by Muḥammad Reżā Barzgār Khāleqī and 'Effat Karbāsī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Zavvār, 1391/2012) (From now it will be cited as *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*), 7, 95 & 252. This Hadith is not found in any of the authentic Sunnī hadith collections, yet has historically been widely referenced by the Sufis.

⁶⁹⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 98 & 294. This Hadith is related by Abū Hurayra, and is found in the Hadith collection of Bukhārī.

an eternal love to be known by his own creation. So for Lāhijī and other Sufis who are followers of the Religion of Love, love is not just the divine origin of the human being but is equivalent to *wujūd* itself. Indeed, ever since Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's lifetime, the followers of this tradition even went as far as to posit God's very Essence—the ultimate and highest ontological degree of *Wujūd*—to be Love itself.⁶⁹⁷ So for the Sufi followers of Love, God's supreme Name is Love—or His Essence is nothing but Love. As Ghazālī states in his *Sawāneḥ*, "Love (‘*eshq*) as it is, is the edifice of holiness, [established] upon [absolute] purity and cleanliness and which is far removed from all defects and accidents".⁶⁹⁸ This statement of his is an obvious allusion to the undelimited Divine Essence. This view differs from the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers. For Ibn al-‘Arabī, the greatest Name after the all-comprehensive Name "*Allah*" is His Name the "All-Merciful" (*ar-rahmān*). This means that in the hierarchy of God's ninety-nine Names, His Name, the "All-Merciful" reigns supreme over the rest of God's Beautiful Names, and even comprehends and contains within itself the universal realities of the other Names as well.⁶⁹⁹ This is why, for Ibn al-‘Arabī, not only is God's Mercy equivalent to His *Wujūd*, but it is the ultimate beginning and origin of all things.⁷⁰⁰ Within the cosmology of the Akbarīs, the very act of creation is considered an act of sheer Mercy on God's part. Hence, Mercy flows and

⁶⁹⁷ The first Sufi in history who may have identified the Divine Essence with passionate love itself (‘*eshq*) was Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), according to Abu'l Hasan al-Daylamī in his treatise on Mystical Love. For more information, see Abu'l Hasan 'Alī b. Muhammad al-Daylamī, *A Treatise on Mystical Love*. Translated by Joseph Norment Bell and Hassan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 70-72. This unique definition of Love as being the very Divine Essence itself, and not just one amongst many of God's different Attributes, seems to have become more prevalent amongst the Persian Sufi community with the lasting impact and influence of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's own mystical understanding of love as it was expressed in his masterpiece the *Sawāneḥ*. For more information, see Lumbard, *Aḥmad Al-Ghazali*, 51-79 & 151-85.

⁶⁹⁸ Aḥmad, Ghazālī, *Sawāneḥ*, edited by Helmut Ritter (Tehran: Markez-e Nashr-e Dāneshgāhī, 1368/1989) (From now on it will be cited as *Sawāneḥ*), 82, Chapter 57. Nasrollah Pourjavady's English translations, taken from Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits the Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love*. Translated by Nasr-Allāh Purjavādi (London: KPI. 1986) (From now on it will be cited as *Sawānīḥ: Inspirations*), 68.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabī and Caner K. Dagli, *The Ringstones of Wisdom: Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam* (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2004), 219-20. See especially the notes by Caner K-Dagli in the footnotes below.

⁷⁰⁰ In *Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-‘Arabī states that, "the cosmos is identical to mercy, nothing else." (*Futūḥāt*. II 437.24). And, "hence the abode of mercy is the abode of *wujūd*" (*Futūḥāt*. IV 4.32). And, "the name All-Merciful protects us... *Wujūd* accompanies us, so our final issue will be at mercy and its property" (*Futūḥāt*. II 157.23). See more William C. Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 131-2.

pervades every level of Manifest *Wujūd*—there is absolutely nothing in the cosmos that escapes being pervaded and penetrated by God’s Mercy.⁷⁰¹

On the other hand, for the followers of the Religion of Love, God’s Mercy is replaced by His Divine Love as the central Attribute and Name within their cosmologies and metaphysics. For them, it is God’s Love that is His very *Wujūd*. Rather, it constitutes His very Essence itself. Love for God is perceived by the Sufis of this particular school of thought as being the underlying cosmic force that incites and moves everything into endless motion within Manifest *Wujūd*. While Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers are quite explicit in their claims that it is God’s Mercy that pervades every existent thing and level of the cosmos, for the Sufis who adhere to the principles of *mazhab-e ‘eshq*, it is God’s Love which instead permeates the entire creation—even the smallest atom of the cosmos is incited to passionate love for God. For according to ‘Irāqī, “Love (‘eshq) courses through all things.....No, it *is* all things. How deny it when nothing else exists? What has appeared—if not for Love—would not have been. All has appeared from Love, through Love, and Love courses through it.....No all of it is Love”.⁷⁰² Lāhijī explains the role of Divine Love and its connection to the very act of creation in the following passage taken from his commentary on the *Gulshan*:

Since the cause of the creation of the cosmos—according to the [Hadith Qudsi] “*I loved to be known*”—was the divine love [*maḥabbat*] for self-manifestation and self-disclosure [*eẓhār*], certainly that divine love flows into and pervades every atom. Therefore, everything in the cosmos is bewildered and distraught with love [*maḥabbat*] and passionate love [*‘eshq*] and they [the creatures] are constant seekers for their Real Originator (*mabda’-e ḥaqīqī*) and “*verily, the angels of the higher world search for Him in*

⁷⁰¹ According to a poem by Ibn al-‘Arabī in his *Fuṣūṣ*, which seems to encapsulate the gist of this particular idea of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s metaphysical world-view:

*God’s Mercy flows in beings
And runs its course through essences and entities
Mercy’s superior rank, if thou comest to know it
By witnessing with meditation, is exalted.*

See more in al-‘Arabī, *The Ringstones*, 221. Translated into English by Dagli.

⁷⁰² Fakr-al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ‘Irāqī, *Lama’āt*, edited by Muḥammad Khwājawī, 4th edn (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 1390/2011) (From now on it will be cited as *Lama’āt*), 62. Chittick’s English Translations, taken from Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ‘Irāqī, *Divine Flashes: Translation and Introduction by William C. Chittick And Peter Lamborn Wilson* (London: Paulist Press, 1982) (From now on it will be cited as *Divine Flashes*), 84.

the same manner that you search for Him" [Hadith] is an allusion to this spiritual reality (*ma'nī*). And if they [the '*urafā*'] spiritually contemplate all the degrees of the existent things with their apparent vision (*dīde-ye 'ayān*), they will realise that the arrangement for the self-emanation and reception of divine effusion is as a result of this divine love.⁷⁰³

It is worth comparing the above passage with some verses from the *Maṣnavī* of Rūmī, for it likely constitutes the textual source for Lāhijī's teaching that God's Eternal Love serves as the origin for the entire cosmos. Divine Love is, therefore, the underlying universal force that incites everything within the cosmos into perpetual motion and being:

Know that the turning of the heavens is because of the waves of love
Were it not for passionate love, the cosmos would be frozen
How would an inorganic thing disappear into a plant?
How would a vegetative thing sacrifice itself to become spirit?
Each one would be stiff and immovable as ice.
How should they be flying and seeking like locusts?
Each atom is a passionate lover of that Perfect One
And are hastening upwards like a sapling.⁷⁰⁴

For Lāhijī then, when the Real bestows the light of His *Wujūd* upon any immutable entity, thereby bringing it out of the darkness of non-existence and into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*, what the Beloved does in describing it in poetic and symbolic terms, is pour the wine of His primordial and divine love into the wine-cups of the immutable entities.⁷⁰⁵ The wine-cups signify the hearts of the possible entities, or in more specific terms, the unique and different preparedness and receptivity for *wujūd* that is contained within the heart of every creature.⁷⁰⁶ So when the immutable entity receives the first pouring of the wine of divine love, and tastes it

⁷⁰³ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 108. The above passage is Lāhijī's commentary on verse 159 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁷⁰⁴ Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Rūmī, *Maṣnavī-ye ma'navī*, edited by Kāẓem 'Ābedīnī Muṭṭāq and based upon the Reynold A. Nicholson edition (Tehran: zehn-e āvīz, 1394/2015) (From now on it will be cited as *Maṣnavī*), Book V, 849. Verses 3854-3855 & 3857-3858. My own English translations.

⁷⁰⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 514-15.

⁷⁰⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 516.

for the first time in pre-eternity, this intoxicates it with Love for the Divine Beloved, and brings him out into the light of Manifest *Wujūd*. This is why everything in the cosmos is constantly intoxicated with the wine of love and is constantly worshiping and praising the One Beloved out of passionate love, for the Real Beloved never ceases to pour the wine of his love into the wine-cups of the preparedness of their hearts; or in more specific terms, never ceases to self-disclose Himself through all their entities, so as to preserve them forever within the different levels of the cosmos.⁷⁰⁷ Lāhijī makes this specific point in his Sufi doctrine clear in the following passage, which is his exegesis upon verse 825 of the *Gulshan*:

The intellect is drunk, the angels are drunk, and the soul is drunk

The air and the earth is drunk, and the heavens are drunk as well!

This means that because of that wine of primordial divine love (*may-e maḥabbat-e feṭrī*), reason—which is the intellect—is drunk, and the angels—which is meant by the nearest angels—are drunk, and the soul—which is meant by the spirit—is drunk, and the air, earth, and heavens, all of them are drunk as well. And whatever exists [in Manifest *Wujūd*] is intoxicated from this wine; and why is this so? For each one [of the possible entities] from that wine which the [Divine] *Sāqī* of “*it is We who have dispensed amongst them*” [Q 43:32]⁷⁰⁸ has poured into the wine-cups of their preparedness, and as long as they continue to be, they will be intoxicated and infatuated [with this wine], and they will never become sober again. And this is the universal drunkenness (*ām-e mastī*) which has made all of the existent things ecstatic (*bīkhūd*).⁷⁰⁹

The likely textual source for this specific metaphysical and esoteric idea of Lāhijī is Ibn al-Fāreż’s *al-Khamrīyah* (“Wine Ode”) and the *Lama’āt* (“Flashes”) of ‘Irāqī. According to the opening verse of the *al-Khamrīyah*—and this specific poem has been much commented upon and studied by the later followers of Ibn al-‘Arabī—like Qaysarī, ‘Alī Hamadānī and Jāmī—Fāreż states:

⁷⁰⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 515-18.

⁷⁰⁸ ‘Alī Qulī Qara’s English translation.

⁷⁰⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 516.

*In memory of the beloved
We drank wine;
We were drunk with it
Before creation of the vine.*⁷¹⁰

The apparent meaning of this opening verse may seem extremely allusive and cryptic, but the following passage below by ‘Irāqī from his *Lama‘āt*, should help us decipher its underlying meaning and connect it to our previous discussions:

When the lover grasped the joy of witnessing He caught the taste of existence. He heard the whispered command—“BE!”—and dancing to Love’s tavern door he exclaimed,

Oh Saqī, fill a goblet with that wine;
My heart, religion and life.
Can wine-drinking be my creed and way?
Then my faith will be to drink the Beloved
From this wine-goblet

Then in an instant the Saqī poured so much of the wine of Being into that goblet of non-existence.⁷¹¹

Within this particular passage ‘Irāqī is describing the manner by which the immutable entities come into the light of Manifest *Wujūd* from the darkness of non-existence. According to ‘Irāqī, when God says the divine command “Be!” to any immutable entity within their original state of non-existence, the Saqī—meaning the Real—at that very moment pours the wine of his own *Wujūd*—His eternal, divine love for self-manifestation—into the goblets of the non-existent and immutable entities. So the prerequisite for any possible entity to enter the realm of Manifest *Wujūd* is to drink and taste the wine of God’s infinite Love. This wine of Divine Love is the self-disclosure of the Beloved’s One *Wujūd* into their forms or immutable entities, where the creatures can witness the Divine Beauty of the Beloved for the first time. The spiritual

⁷¹⁰ ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī, Ṣibt ibn al-Fārid, *Umar ibn al-Fārid: Sufi verse, saintly life*. Translated and introduced by Th. Emil Homerin; preface by Michael A. Sells (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 47. Verse 1. English translation provided by Th. Emil Homerin.

⁷¹¹ *Lama‘āt*, 48-9. Chittick’s English translation, taken from *Divine Flashes*, 75.

contemplation of creaturely beauty practiced by certain Sufis and labeled as the practice of *shāhidbāzī* (“playing the witness”) may be an attempt to relive or recapture that primordial experience, when in a state of mystical rapture and intoxication they witnessed the Divine Beauty of the One Beloved for the first time, prior to their descent into the material world of forms. This brings us to the next section of our discussion, on one of the essential principles of the Religion of Love: the impossibility for the occurrence of love without the witnessing and contemplation of beauty—especially the formal beauty of the human face.

10.2 Lāhijī’s Exposition on Lover, Beloved and Love in Relation to the Religion of Love

As articulated within Aḥmad Ghazālī’s seminal masterpiece the *Sawāneḥ*, “which is justly considered the founding text of the School of Love in Sufism and the tradition of love poetry in Persian,”⁷¹² three core concepts underpin his metaphysics of love: love (*‘eshq*), lover (*‘āsheq*) and beloved (*ma‘shūq*). These three concepts form a kind of triplicity which, although from one perspective hold separate meanings, from another deeper perspective are interconnected and exist in continuous, subtle, and ontological relationship with each another. For, according to Ghazālī, Love—as a symbol of the nondelimited Divine Essence within Ghazālī’s discourse—is that degree of the Divine Reality which cannot be grasped and known by the rational intellect or by the knowledge acquired through the intellect (*‘elm*). For Love is the metaphysical origin of both the beloved and the lover, and the beloved and the lover are different manifestations and entifications of the one primordial Reality of Love.⁷¹³ In the context of the *Sawāneḥ*, as well as the *Lama’āt* of ‘Irāqī (which is heavily influenced and even modeled after the form and content of the *Sawāneḥ*), the lover is a poetic symbol for the human servant, and the Beloved is a symbol for God, more specifically the Divinity characterised by His many Attributes and Names. The many perfections and realities of Love’s Essence require both the duality of the Beloved and the lover, for they both manifest and actualise certain perfections of Love’s Reality that the other cannot on its own. Therefore, both the lover and beloved exist as opposites that perfectly complement one another, and from a certain perspective are dependent on one another in

⁷¹² Leili Anvar, “The Radiance of Epiphany: The Vision of Beauty and Love in Ḥāfiẓ’s Poem of Pre-Eternity.” In *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry: Iran and the Persianate World*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 124.

⁷¹³ *Sawāneḥ*, 80, chapter 54.

order to experience the many states and mysteries related to Love.⁷¹⁴ For example, the lover cannot taste the mystical states of love outside of the context of its relationship with the Beloved. For it is the Beloved's qualities that belong to Him alone—His beauty, needlessness, glory, coquetry, and even cruelty—which sparks the fires of passionate love within the lover, and these specific Attributes of the Beloved even help to sustain and perfect the states of love within the human lover. For Ghazālī and the followers of the Religion of Love, what ultimately binds the human servant—who, in their eyes, is essentially nothing more than a handful of wretched dust—to the Transcendent Beloved—who is utterly needless of all the worlds—is ultimately love. If not for love, there would be no relationship between God and the human being, nor any possibility for union between the two. According to Ghazālī, “Love is the connecting relationship which joins the two sides with each other [the lover and beloved]. If its relation on the side of the lover is established correctly, then the connection is necessarily established on both sides, for it itself is the prelude to Oneness [the Oneness of Love]”.⁷¹⁵ Lāhijī states something very similar to the above passage on the same issue within his text, as he states that “since without perfect Divine love; which is the intermediary between the Real and creation, it is not possible to arrive at union to the station of spiritual perfection”.⁷¹⁶ Love is, therefore, the means of not only establishing any sort of relationship between the beloved and the lover, but is also the necessary intermediary for the lover to achieve a state of mystical annihilation and union with the primordial Oneness and Unity of Love. As envisioned by the exponents of the Religion of Love, the ultimate goal of the Sufi path is for the irreconcilable duality of the lover and the Beloved to be annihilated and reintegrated into the original Oneness of Love (the Divine Essence)—and this is not possible without the force, power and mystical state of love.

Lāhijī transposes the same fundamental principles underlying the entire mystical metaphysics of the Creed of Love within his own commentary on the *Gulshan*. Still, he also provides a different interpretation of the twin core concepts of lover and beloved. Although “the beloved” within Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī’s works usually refers to God as the Divinity, at times

⁷¹⁴ *Sawāneh*, 69-70, chapters 42-44.

⁷¹⁵ *Sawāneh*, 28. Chapter 11. Nasrollah Pourjavady’s English translations, taken from *Sawānih: Inspirations*, 33.

⁷¹⁶ *Mafātīh al-e’jāz*, 239.

when both authors allude to “the beloved” they also mean the human *shāhīd* or beloved who serves as a substitute for the One Real Beloved. Both Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī were famous for the controversial Sufi practice of *shāhīd-bāzī* (“playing with the witness”). In this spiritual practice, certain Sufis claimed that it was possible to contemplate and witness the Divine Beauty of the Real through the intermediary of a beautiful human face. In most instances, the object of their contemplative gaze was a handsome, beardless adolescent boy.⁷¹⁷ Since God’s transcendent Beauty cannot be witnessed directly, it—as the proponents of *shāhīd-bāzī* like to claim—can only be witnessed when it is reflected upon a locus or a form that serves as a mirror and intermediary for the contemplative gaze of the Sufi lover. This intermediary for the Sufi practitioners of *shāhīd-bāzī* is none other than a beautiful human face and form. They were of the firm belief that the human face was the supreme locus for the spiritual contemplation and witnessing of God’s Beauty.⁷¹⁸ For these reasons, “the Beloved” within both Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī’s works is sometimes used to refer to a human *shāhīd* or beloved. However, Lāhijī does not deny this particular Sufi practice of the Religion of Love, where through ‘*eshq-bāzī*’ (“playing in amorous love”) with a human *shāhīd*, the Sufi may attain “Real Love” (‘*eshq-e ḥaqīqī*’) through the “metaphorical love” (‘*eshq-e majāzī*’) of a human *shāhīd*.⁷¹⁹ However, within the framework of Lāhijī’s Sufi teachings, “the beloved” does not have the same meaning as it does in Ghazālī’s and ‘Irāqī’s poetic and prose works. Instead, for Lāhijī, “the beloved” is an allusion to the perfect Sufi shaykh. More specifically, the Sufi saint who is an inheritor and follower of the

⁷¹⁷ For more information on this particular Sufi practice and why it was considered so controversial amongst both the wider Muslim community and even amongst the Sufi community, see Lloyd Ridgeon, *Awḥad Al-Dīn Kirmānī and the Controversy of the Sufi Gaze*. Routledge Sufi Series; 21 (New York: Routledge, 2017), 61-79. Hellmut Ritter provides probably the most in-depth and broadest historical overview of this particular Sufi practice in his study on ‘Aṭṭār, see more in Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār*. Translated by John O’Kane with editorial assistance by Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 448-520. For a more recent and up to date research done upon this same subject—especially in relation to Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī, see Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Iraqi*. Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, S.C.) (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 85-120.

⁷¹⁸ Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 52-62 & 84-105. Lāhijī also expresses a view identical to his Sufi love-intoxicated predecessors, see in *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 83-5 & 90-5. According to a poem attributed to Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 634/1237 or 635/1238)—who along with Aḥmad Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī earned a reputation for engaging in *shāhīd-bāzī* with adolescent boys—he states that, “when my soul with the heart’s eye looked into that meaning, I saw form, but the heart saw meaning./ Do you know why I gaze at form?/ Meaning cannot be seen except in form.” Kermānī, *Dīvān-e rubā’eyāt*, 233, Poem 1144. Translated into English by Zargar and taken from Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 197. This particular poem can be viewed as a doctrinal justification for this controversial Sufi practice of *shāhīd-bāzī* provided by Kermānī against its many detractors from amongst the wider Muslim community.

⁷¹⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 409-10.

Prophet Muḥammad and who has inherited the spiritual states and station associated with the spiritual rank of the Prophet Muḥammad, who is, according to Sufis like Lāhijī, the “Beloved of God” (*ḥabīballāh*).

In continuing our discussion on why Lāhijī considers the perfect and realised Sufi shaykh to be the “metaphorical beloved” for the Sufi disciple, we need to recall Lāhijī’s exposition and understanding of the Akbarī concepts of prophethood and sainthood that we outlined in Chapter Eight. The reason why Lāhijī considers the Prophet Muḥammad to be the Beloved of God is based on the teachings of the Akbarīs, where the Prophet Muḥammad is understood to be the Perfect Man, and therefore the greatest of God’s creation. The Prophet Muḥammad as the Perfect Man is the locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*, the Name that is synonymous with the level of the Divinity, and is the only Name of God which can comprehend within itself the realities of all the other Divine Names.⁷²⁰ Since the Real can contemplate and witness all of His Perfections, Names, and Realities through the form of Muḥammad in an all-comprehensive manner—that He cannot witness in any other creation—Muḥammad is, therefore, the Beloved of God.⁷²¹ But we must also remember that according to Lāhijī and the Akbarī school of thought, every saint is a saint owing to the fact that he is a follower and spiritual inheritor of a particular prophet. This means that he actualises the spiritual rank and reality of sainthood through the lamp of the prophethood of a particular prophet. In other words, for Lāhijī every saint currently living or deceased who is part of Muḥammad’s *umma* is a saint who inherits the spiritual charisma, states, and station belonging to a particular prophet.⁷²² The *quṭb* of every age, according to Lāhijī’s explanations, is a saint who follows in the footsteps of the Prophet Muḥammad and inherits his exalted spiritual station, states, and virtues. After achieving the states and stations of annihilation and subsistence in God through his perfect and sincere following of Muḥammad, this particular saint—whoever he may be—also inherits the spiritual rank of “being-a-beloved” (*maḥbūbī*) that is the exclusive purview of Muḥammad alone out of all the prophets.⁷²³ Like Muḥammad, he

⁷²⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 20.

⁷²¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 21-22.

⁷²² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 232-38.

⁷²³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 239-42.

alone out of all the Friends of God in every generation is a theophanic-mirror for the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*. Therefore, he is the supreme *quṭb* of the age, where all the other Friends of God are subordinate to his ruling, spiritual authority as the supreme vice-regent of God.⁷²⁴ Below is a passage taken from Lāhijī's text which should further clarify this particular point:

And just as the Prophet Muḥammad has arrived at union with the spiritual station of "being-a-beloved" (*maḥbūbeyyat*), the Friend of God (*wālī*), because of the perfect beauty of his following [the Prophet Muḥammad], arrives at the spiritual station of "being-a-beloved" (*maḥbūbī*) from the spiritual station of "being-a-lover" (*muḥebī*). Why is this so? For the quality of "being-a-beloved" has flowed into the Friend of God from the Prophet Muḥammad through his following [of his sunnah], verily, the Friend of God becomes an intimate confidant of the sainthood of the Prophet Muḥammad and becomes [spiritually] close to him.⁷²⁵

And:

Oh Muḥammad! Say [to the believers] that if you love God, follow me, for I am Muḥammad who God has sent, and do not transgress beyond what I command of you until, because of love for me, the quality of "being-a-beloved" (*maḥbūbī*) will flow into you [and be transmitted to you]. And just as I am the Beloved of God, you will also have a corresponding relationship with me, and become the beloved of the Real, and God will take you as a friend, "*I will become his hearing through which he hears, his eyesight through which he sees, his grasping through which he takes...*"... You will then find union with the degree of spiritual perfection, which is the spiritual station of the sainthood (*velāyat*) of the Prophet Muḥammad—[this station] is the Unity of the Divine Essence (*taḥwīd-e dhātī*). For this [Hadith]—"*I have a spiritual moment with God that neither no angel nor sent Messenger can fit into,*"—is a description of this particular spiritual

⁷²⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 238-9.

⁷²⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 238. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 341 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

station that you will attain, and therefore you will become the locus-of-manifestation for the Muḥammadan perfections (*kamālāt-e muḥammadī*).⁷²⁶

When Lāhijī states in the passage above that Muḥammad’s spiritual station is the “Unity of the Divine Essence,” this is another expression for the ontological degree of Love’s Essence, which transcends the duality and limiting entifications of both the lover and the Beloved. For this degree of Muḥammad’s rank—the degree of “being-a-beloved’ —“is the spiritual station of sainthood and the unification of the lover (*muḥebb*) with the Beloved (*maḥbūb*), the passionate lover (*‘āsheq*) with the yearned for Beloved (*ma’shūq*), and the [annihilation] of the prophets along with the Friends of God. There is no room here for [anything] other [than Love], for it is the degree of the bringing together of all opposites and the unification of all things.”⁷²⁷ So by following the Prophet Muḥammad and becoming his spiritual successor, that particular saint has attained the degree in which his individual entification has become annihilated and reunited with Love’s Oneness and Reality, which is the ontological degree of the nondelimited Divine Essence. From another perspective, this particular saint of Muḥammad’s spiritual genealogy is none other than the Real, or he is a theophanic mirror for His self-manifestation. So the Sufi lover who devotes himself to the Muḥammadan saint who is the metaphorical beloved, in reality loves none other than the Real Beloved who self-discloses Himself through the all-comprehensive mirror of this Muḥammadan saint.

10.3 The Human Form as the Ultimate Locus for the Contemplation of Divine Beauty, and Lāhijī’s Encouragement of the Spiritual Seeker to Contemplate the Divine Beauty through the Face of the Sufi Master

Based on this metaphysical belief that the Perfect Man or Muḥammadan saint is the locus-of-manifestation for the all-comprehensive Name *Allāh*, Lāhijī encourages his readers to engage in the spiritual practice of constant spiritual contemplation of the visage of the Sufi shaykh. According to Lāhijī, there exists no spiritual practice for the Sufi which can help him progress more quickly on the way of the *ṭarīqat*, and help him to quickly attain the supreme goal of union with the Real Beloved, than the spiritual practice of contemplating the face of the Sufi

⁷²⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 240. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 342 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁷²⁷ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 241.

shaykh. To help us understand the importance of this particular Sufi practice within the paradigm of Lāhījī's Sufi doctrine and praxis, we first need to clarify Lāhījī's teachings concerning the direct relationship, correspondence, and even similarity (*tasbīh*) that exists between the human form and God—or in more exact terms, the Divinity which is characterised by its many Names and Attributes.

As a realised knower of God, Lāhījī's perception of the world around him is totally different to ours in the modern period. For Lāhījī, like most adherents of the Sufi Way, the entire cosmos is like a book, each entity a word of God. Or, it is like a system of interconnected symbols and signs that is waiting to be decoded by the human servant who has awakened from the slumber of heedlessness and forgetfulness of God. The greatest of all these signs in the cosmos is the human form, especially the various features of the human face that contribute to the perfection and harmonious beauty of the human form. For Lāhījī, everything in the world around us comprises two dimensions or levels of *wujūd*, the formal/material and the spiritual/unseen. Anything that exists here in the material world is a sign that signifies a reality beyond itself and which exists concurrently in a higher and unseen level of *wujūd*. This means that all the material forms that our senses can perceive allude to spiritual realities from the world of pure, disengaged intellects and, more importantly, different aspects of the Divine Reality as well.⁷²⁸ This is particularly true for the human form and face. Lāhījī strongly emphasises this particular point in the latter parts of his commentary on the *Gulshan* when he writes about the issue of the correct hermeneutics of the various poetic symbols associated with the Religion of Love, primarily through their expressions within the literary genre of Persian Sufi love poetry. Passionate and romantic love with the human form—as the most perfect and loveliest form out of all of God's creation—is an intermediary through which the Sufi Lover can attain the Real Love of the Divine (*'eshq-e ḥaqīqī*). For according to Lāhījī:

For the Divine Presence of the Real—Transcendent is His rank—there exists the Attributes of Grace (*luṭf*), like the Subtle, Light, the Guide, the Sustainer, the Reviver; and the Attributes of Severity (*qahr*), like The Withholder, the Contractor, The Wrathful,

⁷²⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 434-35 & 469-70.

the Abaser and the One Who Leads Astray. And the heart-alluring faces and tresses of the moon-faced idols, based on the all-comprehensive human form that they possess, have a share and portion from these two contrasting Divine Attributes [of the Divine Majesty and Beauty]. Poem:

For me there is a self-disclosure of His Face
From the face of every heart-ravisher.
It is not from only one direction that I see this:
For I see Him from every direction.
In every moment He drags me towards a certain direction
Through the bridle of the curls of a moon-faced one—
For in every tress tip
I see nothing else except His locks of Hair.⁷²⁹

Lāhijī also justifies his position on Love and beauty by referencing the following Hadith, in which God states that, “*God created Adam upon His own Form*”.⁷³⁰ This means that Adam—and by extension all human beings who are descended from him—is the supreme locus-of-manifestation for the self-disclosure of the Real. Nothing in the cosmos signifies the One Real Beloved more clearly and significantly than the human form and face. In Lāhijī’s own words:

Since it is now established that the atoms of the existent things, which are [collectively] termed “the cosmos”, are reflections and rays from the lights of the sun of the Divine Essence, Attributes and Names, where they have become manifest and witnessed through the Real’s witnessed and manifest self-disclosure (*tajallī-ye zuhūrī-ye shuhūdī*), so verily, within the all-comprehensive human form, which is the epitome and compendium of all the forms of the engendered things, the “eye” (*chashm*), “lip” (*lab*), “tresses” (*zulf*), “down” (*khaṭ*) and “black mole” (*khāl*), which are the occasions for [contributing to] the perfection of the human creation; and without these features there would exist a deficiency within the human form. Each one of these things is certainly a

⁷²⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 467. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 721 of the *Gulshan*. The above poem is by Shams Maghrebī. Poem no. 108 from the *Dīvān-e Shams-e Magrebī*.

⁷³⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 9, 97, 181, 310, 377 & 492.

sign and locus-of-manifestation for a particular reality from the One, Real Divine Essence (*dhāt-e wāḥed-e ḥaqīqī*).⁷³¹

Since for Lāhijī every sensible form in the cosmos signifies a specific spiritual meaning—where the sensible forms are understood to be the embodiment of an inner and unseen spiritual meaning—a constantly recurring question amongst readers of Persian Sufi works throughout history is what do the various poetic images and symbols in Sufi literary works actually mean, or to what realities do these metaphors and symbols allude to? According to Lāhijī, because the great Persian Sufi poets have attained spiritual realization—which results in the illumination of their spiritual vision (*baṣīrat*) with God’s light—the various features of the human face and form signify the various Attributes and Acts of the Divine Beloved. This is how Lāhijī explains the inner meaning of these different poetic symbols found within the genre of Persian Sufi poetry:

Know that the eye (*chashm*) is an allusion to the witnessing of the Real of the immutable entities and their preparedness, and that particular form of witnessing is interpreted as His Attribute of Seeing (*be ṣafat-e baṣīrī*). And the Divine Attributes, from the perspective that they are the veils over the Divine Essence, are interpreted as His Eyebrows (*abrū*). The Lips (*lab*) are an esoteric allusion (*eshārāt*) to the Breath of the All-Merciful, which is the Act of *Wujūd* being infused into the entities. And the tresses (*zulf*) is an esoteric allusion to the self-disclosures of the Divine Majesty in corporeal and bodily forms. And the down (*khaṭ*) is an esoteric allusion to the manifestation of those Divine Realities in the spiritual loci-of-manifestation [the angels and the world of command]. And the face (*rukh*) is an esoteric allusion to the Divine Reality from the perspective of *Ḥayy*, *Ḥayy* (“the Ever Living One”); which encompasses within itself all that is hidden, manifest, potential and what eventually emerges into being (*berūz*). And the black mole (*khāl*) is an esoteric allusion to the single point of the Divine Unity. And from the perspective of extreme hiddenness, [this Divine Unity] is the source and final return of the multiplicities of creation. “From Him is the beginning and towards Him is the final return” [Hadith], and “to Him will be returned all of your affairs” [Q 11:123].⁷³²

⁷³¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 465. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 719 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁷³² ‘Alī Qulī Qara’ī’s English translation.

Hence, the correspondence between them all is openly manifest [meaning between the various human features and the different aspects of the Divine Reality].⁷³³

For Lāhijī then, when the Sufi lover takes a beautiful human face as the constant object for its spiritual contemplation in order to witness the Divine Beauty of the Real—especially the face of the perfect Sufi shaykh—not only will the hidden spiritual meanings corresponding to each of the sensible human features be revealed to his spiritual insight, but eventually through the deepening of his spiritual contemplation of the sacred beauty of the metaphorical Beloved, the transcendent Divine Realities too—or the Divine Names and Attributes—will also be witnessed by the Sufi lover through the mystical experience of unveiling and witnessing.⁷³⁴ This direct witnessing of the Beloved’s Divine realities by the Sufi lover constitutes the highest goal in the Sufi path. Therefore, the contemplation of the Sufi shaykh’s face comprises the first and necessary rungs of a ladder that need to be mounted before the Sufi can ascend any further on the mystical path of Love. The Sufi lover’s deepening immersion in the act of contemplating God’s Beauty—whether that Beauty is witnessed through the intermediary of sensible, imaginal or spiritual forms—eventually culminates in the Sufi’s Beatific Vision of the Real Beloved, as well as in his complete annihilation in the transcendent Reality of Love. This aspect of Lāhijī’s Sufi teachings concerning love, beauty, and witnessing will be made more evident as we delve deeper into his discourse on love.

10.4 How Love is Born and Nurtured Into a State of Perfection Through the Witnessing of Beauty

Now it is appropriate to introduce the connection between love, beauty, and witnessing in order to illustrate why Lāhijī considers human beauty to be a bridge between the corporeal world of sensible forms and the Divine Beauty of the Real. Lāhijī’s views on this subject were influenced by the views of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, ‘Irāqī, Rūmī and Shabistarī. According to Ghazālī in his *Sawāneḥ*:

The beginning of passionate love (*‘eshq*) lies in this: that the seed of Beauty (*jamāl*) is planted into the earth of the heart’s seclusion in the hands of spiritual contemplation,

⁷³³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 465-66. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 719 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁷³⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 466-76.

and is then nurtured by the shining of the gaze, but it is not one colour. The planting of the seed and its picking must be one. And in relation to this they have said:

The origin of every passionate love occurred from witnessing

When the eyes see then the affair begins.⁷³⁵

Elsewhere, Ghazālī states that love begins with “the eyes and seeing”.⁷³⁶ For Ghazālī, all love, whether creaturely love or for God, is one and the same, the only difference between the various kinds of love is in their different degrees of intensity and depth. Ghazālī, therefore, may have been one of the earliest Sufi authors to establish this critical and inseparable connection between love and the witnessing of beauty. In the *Sawāneh*, Ghazālī teaches that passionate love (*‘eshq*) first takes root within the heart of the lover in the moment when the Beloved’s beauty is witnessed in “the hands of spiritual contemplation”. Love, as an inward state or attribute of the human lover, can only be nurtured to a state of perfection through the continuous witnessing of beauty, and for Ghazālī and the followers of the Religion of Love, all beauty is a reflection of the Infinite Beauty of the One Beloved, since all forms of human beauty are manifestations of the One, Real Beauty of God. As ‘Irāqī states in his *Lama’āt*:

Majnun may gaze at Layla’s loveliness, but this Layla is only a mirror... Majnun’s contemplation of her loveliness is aimed at the Divine Beauty besides which all else is ugliness. He may not know that “*God is beautiful*” [Hadith]—but other than Him, who else is worthy of Beauty?” and, “All that exists is a mirror for His Divine Beauty; so everything is beautiful.”⁷³⁷

‘Irāqī states here that the reason why Majnun is intoxicated with Layla’s beauty—as all pairs of human lovers and beloveds are with each other—is because he is witnessing the Divine Beauty of the Real Beloved through the intermediary of Layla’s human beauty—whether he is aware of this underlying ontological truth or not. Because of this irrefutable and timeless truth born from the spiritual insights and mystical unveilings of the Sufi lovers, the witnessing of God’s Beauty

⁷³⁵ *Sawāneh*, 39-40. My own translations, but I have also relied on Pourjavady’s English translation for this specific passage.

⁷³⁶ *Sawāneh*, 80.

⁷³⁷ *Lama’āt*, 63-64. Chittick’s English translation, taken from *Divine Flashes*, 85-6.

through the intermediary of the human face and form was believed to be wholly legitimate by the practitioners of *shāhīdbāzī*. Despite the harsh criticisms of some amongst the *fuqahā*’ and even from amongst the Sufi community, who have opposed this particular Sufi practice as heretical and even un-Islamic.⁷³⁸

Yet unlike Ghazālī, ‘Irāqī, and other Sufis who were also known to engage in *shāhīdbāzī* with adolescent boys—like Ahwad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1238) and Kamāl Khujandi (d. 803/1400-01)—Lāhijī teaches that it was the face of the perfect and realised Sufi shaykh that was the supreme locus for the contemplation of God’s Beauty.⁷³⁹ In another section of his commentary, Lāhijī attempts to decipher the inner meaning of another pair of poetic symbols commonly used within the genre of Persian Sufi poetry. These poetic symbols are “kissing the lips of the wine-goblet” (*būsīdan-e lab-e jān*) and “wine drinking” (*sharābī khūrdan*). What do the Persian Sufi poets mean when they cite these familiar literary tropes in their mystical poetry? As mentioned previously, the “wine of love” within the context of Persian Sufi literature alludes to “the self-disclosure of the Face of the Beloved”—according to the Lāhijī’s personal hermeneutics—which is the very *Wujūd* of the Real.⁷⁴⁰ The wine cup and goblet alludes to the human form of the beloved or the *shāhīd* that contains the wine of Divine Love which God pours—as the Eternal *Sāqī*—in every instant when He perpetually bestows His *Wujūd* upon their entities. When the Persian Sufi poets state they are drinking wine from the

⁷³⁸ It’s not just the *sharī‘ah*-orientated *fuqahā*’ and ‘*ulamā*’ who have strongly opposed this specific Sufi practice of *shāhīdbāzī* as being a heretical innovation (*bīd‘ah*), but even some of the greatest figures of the Persian Sufi tradition have denounced this Sufi practice as well; like Hujwīrī, Qushayrī, Imam al-Ghazālī and Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), and even Rūmī. For more information on Suhrawardī’s opposition to the practice of *shāhīdbāzī*, especially in relation to Awhad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1238), see Ridgeon, *Awhad Al-Dīn Kirmānī*, 61-79. For more information on the criticism of certain *fuqahā*’, like Ibn al-Jawzi, see Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, 455-59 & 471-72.

⁷³⁹ Evidence for Lāhijī’s belief that the face of the perfect and realised Sufi master is the supreme locus for the contemplation of the Real is in his personal interpretation of the Persian poetic symbol of the Christian child (*but-e tarsābache*). This particular poetic symbol of the Christian child or boy is quite common within the literature of the Persian Sufi poets. Within the context of the poetry of ‘Irāqī and possibly ‘Aṭṭār as well, the Christian child usually alludes to a handsome youth who is the object of the Sufi’s loving gaze and contemplation. But Lāhijī, when commenting and explaining the true meaning of this specific Persian poetic symbol within his own work, interprets the Christian Child to be “the perfect spiritual master who is also the lord of the age and is an idol who is especially [a locus-of-manifestation for] the all-comprehensive Unity of the Divine Essence.” See more in *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz*, 588. Elsewhere Lāhijī claims that the Christian Child is the Sufi *quṭb*, towards whom the aspiring Sufi should direct his gaze and contemplate the spiritual beauty of his face as an act of worship. For more details on Christian or Magian boy within the context of ‘Irāqī’s poetry, see Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 108-14.

⁷⁴⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz*, 510.

goblet or kissing the lips of the wine goblet, they are referring to the act of witnessing the Divine Beauty of the Real Beloved, by constantly gazing at the human beauty of their *shāhīds*. Or in other words, they are drinking the wine of the Real's *Wujud*—which is synonymous with his Divine Love—from the wine goblets of their human beloveds, i.e., from their sensible, witnessed forms and faces. The more they gaze upon the lovely features of their metaphorical beloveds, the more they drink of the wine of divine love, and the more intoxicated and selfless they become in His Love. For in Lāhijī's own words, "the wine of the self-disclosure of the Divine Beauty of the [Real] Beloved (*sharāb-e tajallī-ye jamāl-e maḥbūb*) drink from the wine-cup of the eyes of the [metaphorical] Beloved!"⁷⁴¹ For Sufis like Ghazālī and 'Irāqī, and others who were of the same temperament as them, their wine-goblets were the faces of beardless youths or heart-ravishing mistresses.⁷⁴² For Lāhijī and other Sufis of a similar disposition—such as Rūmī—their wine-cups of choice were the radiant and beautiful faces of their Sufi masters.⁷⁴³ Lāhijī most likely derived this particular esoteric idea of his love-based mysticism from Rūmī's *Maṣnavī*, as these two passages should help illustrate:

The fools in their ignorance said to Majnun

"The beauty of Layla is not so much, it is but little.

There are hundreds of thousands of heart-ravishers superior to her
who are like moons in our city."

He replied, "the outward form is a jug and her beauty is the wine.

⁷⁴¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 510.

⁷⁴² In Leonard Lewisohn's research on the possible connections between the Sufi practice of *shahīdbāzī* and the *ghazals* of Ḥāfeẓ, Lewisohn believes that many references and allusions made to the beloved or *shahīd* within the poetry of Sa'dī and Ḥāfeẓ, were not handsome male youths, but beautiful female mistresses. For more details on Lewisohn's views on this particular subject matter, see Leonard Lewisohn, "Prolegomenon to the Study of Ḥāfeẓ 2—The Mystical Milieu: Ḥāfeẓ's Erotic Spirituality." In *Hafiz and The Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 71.

⁷⁴³ Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 588-98. Although Rūmī rejects and even criticises the heterodox practice of *shahīdbāzī*—most likely because the object of these practitioners' gaze was a handsome, beardless adolescent boy—Rūmī nevertheless expresses mystical states of rapture and intoxication as a result of gazing upon and witnessing the human and spiritual beauty of his Sufi Master and companion Shams-e Tabrīzī (d. 646/1248). Rūmī himself may have participated in a Sufi practice very similar to *rābetah* ('spiritual bonding'), the Naqshbandi practice where the Sufi disciple visualises the face or mental image of His own Sufi master within his imagination, and meditates and gazes upon it as a means to receive the transmission of spiritual *barakah* from the heart of his Sufi shaykh. For more information, see Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Quatrains of Rūmī Rubā'iyāt-e Jalāluddīn Muhammad Balkhī-Rūmī*, Translated by Ibrāhīm W. Garmard and A.G Rawān Farhādī (San Rafael: Sufi Dari Books, 2008), 222-26 & 51-70.

God is giving me wine from her form.

You see the jug, but that wine does not reveal itself to the crooked-seeing eye.⁷⁴⁴

And:

The form of Joseph was like a beautiful wine-goblet

From it his father drank a hundred joy-bestowing wines...

The wine is from the unseen, and the jug is from this world:

The jug is apparent and visible, and the wine is thoroughly concealed within it,

Extremely hidden from the eyes of the non-confidants

But is apparent and manifest for the initiated.⁷⁴⁵

For all of the reasons listed above, Lāhijī considers the perfect Sufi shaykh to be the ultimate “theophanic witness” (*shahīd*)—to use Leonard Lewisohn’s terms—for the spiritual contemplation of the Divine Beauty of the Real Beloved.⁷⁴⁶ At times throughout his commentary, Lāhijī also uses the more antinomian and apparently heretical vocabulary of the Religion of Love in referring to the theophanic witness of the Sufi shaykh as an “idol” (*but*) that demands “idol-worshipping” (*butparastī*) on the part of the Sufi devotee. The term “idol-worshipping” being a metaphor for the Sufi practice of gazing lovingly upon the face of the metaphorical beloved—which for the adherents of the Religion of Love constitutes a form of worship—where the Sufi disciple can witness the Divine Beauty of the Real Beloved. This is why Lāhijī states that “the religion of the Real is in idol worshipping; the reason being that the idol is essentially a locus-of-manifestation for the Absolute *Wujūd*—which is the Real”.⁷⁴⁷ It is now relevant to quote a passage from Lāhijī’s text to further clarify this significant aspect of Lāhijī’s highly esoteric idea that the idol of the Sufi lover is essentially the locus-of-manifestation for the Divine Face. So the Sufi’s intense love and attachment for his idol—i.e., for his Sufi shaykh—is actually love and devotion towards the Real Beloved. And without recognising this innermost

⁷⁴⁴ *Maṣnavī Book V*, 825. Verses 3286-3288 & 3291. My own English translations but I have also relied upon Nicholson’s translations for guidance.

⁷⁴⁵ *Maṣnavī Book V*, 826. Verses 3300 & 3305-06. My own English translations but I have also relied upon Nicholson’s translations as well for guidance.

⁷⁴⁶ Lewisohn, “the Mystical Milieu,” 49-55.

⁷⁴⁷ *Mafātīh al-e’jāz*, 539.

secret, the Sufi lover is prevented from making any further spiritual progress on the Sufi Way of Love:

The idol here is a locus-of-manifestation for passionate love and divine unity

Tying the infidel's girdle is the very reality of service

Know that what is meant by "passionate love" (*'eshq*) here is the Absolute Reality (*ḥaqīqat-e muṭlaq*); just as Shaykh 'Irāqī—may his inner secret be sanctified— has stated in the *Lama'āt*. And in the view of the people of unveiling and witnessing—who are the pure Sufis of the heart—all of the atoms of the existent things are the loci-of-manifestation and locations that receive the self-disclosure of that Reality (*majlā-ye ān ḥaqīqat*). And it is none other than He who has self-disclosed and manifested Himself within the forms of all the existent things, so therefore, he [Shabistarī] has stated, "the idol here is a locus-of-manifestation for passionate love and divine unity". Meaning that for the pure drinkers who are the people of spiritual perfection, the "idol" is a locus-of-manifestation for passionate love, meaning the Absolute Divine Essence. And the Divine Unity (*waḥdat*) is also a particular interpretation also connected to love (*'eshq*). Since it is the Real who is manifest in the form of the idol, so verily the possessors of spiritual perfection have turned their complete attention towards the idol in this particular respect. And every locus-of-manifestation in this respect can be said to be an idol. Why is this the case? For it is none other than the Real Beloved who is manifest within its form.⁷⁴⁸

Once Lāhijī establishes the ontological fact that it is none other than the One Real Beloved who is manifest through the forms of the human beloveds or idols, he then proceeds to explain why the face of the saintly Sufi master is the supreme locus for the contemplation of the Divine Beauty. He does this within the latter sections of his commentary, which deals with the hermeneutics of the Persian Sufi symbol of the "Christian child" (*tarsā bache*). He devotes a few passages exulting the many virtues of the Sufi practice of gazing upon the face of the realised

⁷⁴⁸*Mafātih al-e'jāz*, 536-37. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse 865 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

and perfect Sufi master within these sections of his commentary. In the following passage he states:

That perfect spiritual master (*murshed-e kāmel*) has stated: gaze (*naẓar*) upon my face for half an hour—for I am the spiritual guide of the age (*hādī-ye zamānam*)—for it is worth a thousand years of devotion and worship, why is this so? For it is impossible to attain real nearness and union with the Real only through devotion and worship without a perfect spiritual master. So verily, beholding the Master of spiritual perfection (*dīdār-e šāheb-e kāmel*) along with the contemplation of his spiritual beauty (*mushāhada-ye jamāl-e ū*) is better than all of your religious devotions. And the people of spiritual perfection are in agreement about this meaning, that continuous service to the perfect one of the age (*kāmel-e zamān*) is the best of all acts of obedience.⁷⁴⁹

And:

In summary, that world-adorning face
Revealed to me in that moment my entire existence.

The face of that perfect spiritual master who through his own perfection adorns the entire world, and the ornament of the world is in reality he. And “revealed to me in that moment my entire existence,” means that he revealed to me my entire self (*sar tā qadam-e mā*). And [in that moment] I knew that I had not known myself before and that I had not attained any mystical knowledge (*‘erfān*) of myself nor of God at all. And all of this religious knowledge (*‘ulūm*), along with my [dry] asceticism and religious devotions which I had acquired in the past, cannot possibly compare to a single glance and a single moment of contemplating the perfect beauty of that spiritual master (*yek naẓar va yek mushāhada-ye jamāl bā kamāl ān ḥaẓrat*). Why is this the case? For self-realization (*shenākht-e khūd*) is, in reality, equivalent to realised knowledge of the Real (*shenākht-e ḥaqq*). And we had not previously attained any of this before, but now from a single

⁷⁴⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 595. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 988 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

glance cast upon that world-adorning face of his [the perfect Sufi master], it was all attained.⁷⁵⁰

Lāhijī seems to indicate from the above passage that the act of contemplating the spiritual and human beauty of the Sufi shaykh's countenance is even superior to the Sufi practice of *zēkr* ("remembrance of God") and every other act of worship associated with the Sufi path.⁷⁵¹ The above passage also reveals how much value Lāhijī gives to the Sufi practice of gazing and contemplating the face of the saintly Sufi master. For Lāhijī even claims that this specific practice eventually leads to self-realisation, and hence, to the higher degree of realised knowledge which is realised knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*). And as we discussed in the previous chapter, the attainment of *ma'rifat* was considered by Lāhijī to be the ultimate purpose for our human creation.

Although Lāhijī considers the perfect Sufi shaykh to be the greatest and most effective intermediary between the corporeal world of forms and the Transcendant Beauty of the Real, he also devotes sections of his text to the higher levels of witnessing of God that are achievable for the Sufi wayfarer. According to Lāhijī, sporting in love (*shahīdbāzī*) with the Sufi master in order to witness God's Beauty is only the first step in a ladder of ascending rungs, where the Lover is able to witness higher and more intense forms of God's self-disclosures through the intermediary of different beautiful forms and entities. As mentioned before, within Lāhijī's mystical vision of the cosmos, every possible entity is a wine-cup that is filled to the brim with the Real's *Wujūd*, which is identical with His Love. When the Sufi initiate is able to attain a higher level of witnessing of the Real beyond that of the sensible and imaginary form of his Sufi master, he is able to enter into the realm of imagination and witness the Divine Beauty through

⁷⁵⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 595-96. This passage is Lāhijī's commentary upon verse Verse 989 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁷⁵¹ Lāhijī seems to be in agreement with his fellow Naqshbandi contemporaries, like Jāmī and Fakhr al-Dīn Ṣafī 'Alī al-Kāshifī, that the spiritual practice of meditating upon the face of one's own Sufi master is the most effective of all spiritual practices on the Sufi path. See more in Fakhrudīn Ṣafī 'Alī Kāshefī, *Rashaḥāt 'Ayn al-Ḥayāt*. 2 vols, edited by 'Alī Aṣghar Mu'īnīyān (Tehran: Bunyad-e Nekūkārī-ye Nūrānī, 1356/1977), I: 144-53 & 169. And see also Nūr-al-Dīn 'Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Sharḥ-e rubā'īyyāt*, edited by M. Heravī (Kabul: Anjuman-e Jāmī, 1343/1964), 65-69. For more information on the views of the Persian and Central Asian Naqshbandī masters on the superiority of the Sufi practice of *rābeṭah* over *zēkr*, see Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi shaykh*. Foreword by Annermarie Schimmel. Studies in Comparative Religion. Frederick M. Denny, Series Editor (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 131-7.

the intermediary of heart-ravishing forms that populate the world of imagination. In his explanation for the inner and true meaning of the Persian Sufi poetic symbol of the glass of wine (*zujājah*) found within literature, he states:

The “glasses of wine” (*zujājah*) are those beautiful forms of the loci-of-manifestation where the Real in the world of imagination—which is the intermediary realm (*barzakh*) between the unseen and the witnessed and corporeal forms and spiritual meanings—for the sake of bestowing intimacy upon the novice spiritual wayfarer who still has not arrived at the degree of directly witnessing the Absolute Divine Beauty, He manifests Himself through those forms [within the world of imagination], and they name this [kind of self-disclosure of the Real in the world of imagination] “the self-disclosures of the Divine Acts” (*tajallīyāt-e af‘ālī*). This is because the Real has become manifest in the forms of the secondary causes, and this kind of self-disclosure of the Real they call “the bestowal of intimacy” (*tanīs*) in the terminology of the Sufis.⁷⁵²

In order to further perfect the inner state and reality of love, the Lover needs to pass beyond the witnessing of Divine Beauty through the intermediary forms of heart-ravishing *shahīds* that populate the world of imagination and ascend into the higher degree of witnessing which occurs within the higher realm of the pure spirits and intellects, where he is able to begin witnessing the Divine Beauty of the One Beloved through the luminous spirits and intellects that populate this level of Manifest *Wujūd*. This is the esoteric meaning behind the “candle” (*sham‘*) and the “lamp” (*meṣbāḥ*) when mentioned in the literature, and this level of witnessing Lāhijī terms “the self-disclosure of lights (*tajallī-ye nūrī*)”.⁷⁵³ Finally, once the lover has achieved a degree of maturity and perfection in that degree of *wujūd* and is ready to ascend to a higher level of witnessing, he is now able to directly witness the Divine Beauty of the One, Real Beloved without any intermediary. In this station, the Lover no longer needs nor desires to witness the Divine Beauty of the Beloved through the intermediary of the possible entities by practicing *shahīdbāzī*. Instead, he yearns to witness the Beloved’s Beauty directly from Him

⁷⁵² *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 508. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary upon verse 807 of the *Gulshane-Rāz*.

⁷⁵³ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 508.

without any veil nor intermediary in between it and the One Beloved, as Lāhijī states in the following passage and which is his commentary upon verse 700 of the *Gulshan*:

What worth does Paradise, the houris and the eternal gardens possess?

For strangers have no place in that secluded abode of Divine Unity

In the spiritual station of contemplating the Divine Beauty of the Beloved; which consists of the intoxication (*sukr*) and absorption of the lover (*esteghrāq-e 'āsheq*), Paradise, the houris and the heavenly gardens—even though they possess eternal subsistence—what value and worth do they ultimately have? And in the secluded house of the Divine Unity, the strangers who are Paradise and the houris, rather, where is there also room for the entification of the spiritual seeker? [within this specific degree of Divine Unity]. Since in the degree of Divine Unity and Unbounded *Wujūd* (*eṭlāq*), the multiplicities and bindings of the entifications are a sheer impossibility, and in relation to the realised knowers of God who have arrived at union, gazing at the lovely-eyed houris is the essence of deficiency. And just as the people of Paradise abhor the hell-fire and they seek refuge from it, the people of spiritual perfection (*ahl-e kamāl*)—who have arrived at union with the Real—are disgusted with the gardens of Paradise and their enjoyments. And in their view, gazing upon anything besides the Real Beloved is unbelief (*kufr*).⁷⁵⁴

With the preceding passages taken from Lāhijī's text, Lāhijī establishes a deep-seated connection between the progression or maturity of love as a mystical state and the witnessing and spiritual contemplation of beauty by the Sufi within the framework of his Sufi teachings. The different unveilings of the Divine Beauty of the One Beloved and its contemplation through the various intermediary forms by the Sufi lover is unquestionably connected to the unfolding and perfecting of love's reality or mystery within the inner being of the human lover. According to Lāhijī, the continual witnessing and contemplation of God's Beauty is the key to unlocking the divine mysteries of love and realising the Oneness and Unity of Love's pure Essence.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 451.

⁷⁵⁵ *Mafātīh al-e'jāz*, 506-10.

It may now seem that the lover has achieved the highest and purest state of love, since there is no higher level for the witnessing of the Divine Beauty which the lover can possibly achieve. Yet, for adherents of the Religion of Love, one of the principles of this school of thought is the idea that union with the Beloved is not the ultimate goal of the Sufi path. Rather, it is the lover's annihilation and return to the primordial Oneness of Love's Essence which constitutes the final goal. Pure love is to be realised in the ontological degree of the Divine Essence, and not at the level of the Divinity. Even the Beloved is a kind of intermediary and a veil separating the lover from the Divine Essence, which is Love itself. The highest station or rank that any servant of God can achieve is the station where the lover drinks the wine of Divine Love from Love itself, i.e., the undelimited and non-entified Divine Essence, and not from the wine-cup of the Beloved, which is the level of the Divinity.⁷⁵⁶

10.5 The Lover's Return to the Divine Essence of Love, and the Lover's Becoming an Inhabitant of the Tavern of Ruin

For the followers of the Religion of Love, the highest ontological degree within their cosmology is Love, i.e. the nonentified and nondelimited Divine Essence. Both the Beloved and the lover (meaning the Divinity and the human being) are understood to be emanations derived from the One Reality of Love. The highest goal on the Sufi path for the followers of this particular tradition is not, then, union with the Beloved, but the lover's return to their original primordial state of unification (*etteḥād*) with Love, or the Divine Essence. According to Ghazālī in his *Sawāneḥ*, the lover will reach a point on his spiritual wayfaring where he realises his love and attachment to the Beloved becomes an obstacle that prevents further progress on the mystical path of love. As long as the human lover remains within his individual entification as a separate being apart from the Beloved, the lover-Beloved duality will never be transcended. Hence, the supreme goal on the path of love will not be achieved by the lover. Because of the endurance of the lover-Beloved duality, the lover will constantly be subjected to the dictates of the "metaphysical moment" (*waqt*), fluctuating states that the heart transmutes into within each passing moment and which are beyond its control, such as union (*wasl*) and separation (*ferāq*);

⁷⁵⁶ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 521.

dispersion (*parīshān*) and collectedness (*jam*’); hope (*rajā*) and fear (*khawf*); expansion (*bast*) and contraction (*qabẓ*), which frustrate the lover’s longing for union with the Beloved. The only remedy for the desperate lover in this troubling situation—according to both Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī—is to finally reject the Beloved as the supreme goal, and surrender oneself to the sharp sword of Love’s jealousy (*ghayrat*). The Oneness of Love will itself do the final work and remove the unsurmountable distinction of the lover-Beloved duality, and restore both to the holy sanctuary of Love’s pre-eternal Oneness and Unity. This is how Ghazālī describes the final stages of the lover’s spiritual journey from the *Sawāneh*, where the lover’s attention is turned away from the Beloved and now exclusively turned towards the Oneness of Love’s Essence with the sword of Love’s jealousy:

Once again, the jealousy of love will shine forth and cause him to turn his face from the beloved, because his motive for the renunciation of his self was his coveting the beloved. Now, his covetousness is scorched (desiring) neither the world of creation, nor the self, nor the beloved. Perfect detachment (*tajrīd*) will shine on Love’s singularity (*tafrīd*). (Absolute) unification (*tawhīd*) belongs only to it and it belongs to unification. Nothing (other than love) can have room in it. So long as it is with it, subsists on it and eats from it. From its point of view the lover and beloved are both “other”, just like strangers.⁷⁵⁷

‘Irāqī in his *Lama’āt*, states something very similar when the lover is confronted by the obstacle of the unremovable lover-Beloved duality during his spiritual wayfaring. Since the abiding duality prevents the Lover from reaching the final goal of the Sufi Way, which is Love, the lover at this particular station must shun the Beloved and turn exclusively towards Love, as he states in the following passage:

I shall explain this mystery: Love first shows itself in the lover’s robe, then clings to the Beloved’s skirt. When it finds both sealed with the brand of duality and multiplicity it

⁷⁵⁷ *Sawāneh*, Chapter 4, 16-17. English translations by N. Pourjavady. Taken from *Sawānih: Inspirations*, 26.

forces them to turn their eyes away from each other. Then it strips them of the tatters of many-ness and restores to them their true colour, the hue of Unity.⁷⁵⁸

The “hue of Unity” is an apparent allusion to the Divine Essence—which is Love itself—the ontological degree of *Wujūd* that is free from all self-entifications and self-delimitations.

Within his own work Lāhijī follows the same schema of Love’s ultimate unfolding and return to its original Divine Essence as stated above by both Ghazālī and ‘Irāqī. But there is a slight yet noticeable difference between Lāhijī’s discourse on the divine secrets of Love when situated beside the discourse of his legendary predecessors. Instead of using the term “Love” (*‘eshq* or *maḥabbat*) when alluding to the Divine Essence in his discourse on the Religion of Love, Lāhijī uses the term “tavern of ruin” (*kharābāt*), which is also prevalent within the literary genre of the Persian Sufi tradition—as evidenced in the *ghazals* of ‘Aṭṭār, ‘Irāqī, Rūmī, and Ḥāfeẓ. Yet a closer examination of Lāhijī’s own writing will reveal that although these two terms appear to be distinct, these differences are only superficial, for they are esoteric allusions whose meanings are synonymous within the cosmology and metaphysics of the Love tradition of Persian Sufism. This will be made abundantly clear in the following paragraphs.

In the sections of Lāhijī’s commentary that deal with the poetic symbol of the “tavern of ruin”, this is how he describes the true meaning of this esoteric and poetic symbol:

The “tavern of ruin” (*kharābāt*) is an esoteric allusion to the Divine Unity, and this generally means the Divine Unity of the Acts, Attributes, and Essence, and it [the tavern of ruin] is another expression for the spiritual station of the annihilation of the Acts and the Attributes. And the “inhabitants of the Tavern of Ruin” (*kharābātī*) are the reckless and profligate spiritual wayfarers and passionate lovers who have been liberated from the chains of reflective thinking and the need to make distinctions between the acts and attributes of Necessary [Being] and possible [being]. And they comprehend and witness the effacement of the acts and attributes of all the existent things in the Divine Acts and Attributes. And they attribute no attributes whatsoever to their own selves nor to others, and the utmost boundary of this “tavern of ruin”, is the station of annihilation in

⁷⁵⁸ *Lama‘āt*, 105. Chittick’s English translations, taken from *Divine Flashes*, 118.

the Divine Essence (*maqām-e fanā’-ye dhāt*), where they discover that the essences of all the existent things is effaced and annihilated in the Divine Essence of the Real, “*And to Him will be returned all of your affairs, all of it*” [Q 11:123].⁷⁵⁹

The above passage by Lāhijī makes it clear to the reader that the Sufi can only enter the “tavern of ruin” after experiencing his complete annihilation in the Divine Essence. The “tavern of ruin” therefore signifies the Absolute Essence of the Real—which is synonymous with the ontological degree or Reality of Love within Ghazālī’s and ‘Irāqī’s love-based metaphysics. For Lāhijī, there is no higher degree or station above the “tavern of ruin”, for following the station of annihilation within the Divine Essence there is no higher degree of annihilation to be experienced by the lover. This is why Lāhijī sometimes refers to the Sufi wayfarer’s annihilation in the “tavern of ruin” as “annihilation within annihilation”.⁷⁶⁰ If we need further proof that for Lāhijī the “tavern of ruin” is a symbol that shares the same meaning as “Love” (*‘eshq*) as it is defined within the theoretical context of the Religion of Love, we shall quote from Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 840 of the *Gulshan*:

The tavern of ruin is of that world which is without likeness
It is the station of the profligate and reckless lovers

This means that tavern of ruin is the station of Divine Unity, because it is the degree of the effacement and annihilation of all images and forms, so it is of the world without likeness (*bīmeṣālī*)—which means that it is pure and free from all forms. Whether it be of sensible, imaginary, or illusionary forms, the reason being that to imagine any otherness or duality in the station of the Divine Unity is an impossibility and the essence of error and going astray. This tavern of ruin is the spiritual station of the reckless lovers who have gambled their lives away, and who have not bound themselves in any of the chains from amongst the chains of material forms and spiritual realities, and from

⁷⁵⁹ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 524. ‘Ali Quli Qara’i’s English translation. This passage forms part of Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 837 of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

⁷⁶⁰ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 526-7.

whatever enters into the bondage of entification, they have recklessly passed over and do not stop in any of the waystations.⁷⁶¹

Within the same section of his hermeneutics that deals with the poetic symbols of wine, wine-drinking and the wine tavern, Lāhijī introduces the figure of the *rend*, who in Lāhijī's eyes possesses the highest rank amongst the spiritual wayfarers that journey towards God. Just like the *malāmatī* ("people of blame") who are highly esteemed and considered the highest-ranking of God's servants within Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings,⁷⁶² Lāhijī considers the *rend* to be of a higher rank than both the Sufi and the passionate lover.⁷⁶³ In fact, any Sufi wayfarer who attains annihilation within the Divine Essence; and hence, becomes an inhabitant of the "tavern of ruin", loses his former status as a conventional Sufi and becomes a reckless *rend*. According to Lāhijī, the *rend*, in completely losing his personal entification, is liberated from all the distinctions and dualities that still rule over the rest of God's creatures—like the duality of good (*khair*) and evil (*sharr*), faith (*īmān*) and unbelief (*kufṛ*), fame (*nām*) and ill-repute (*nang*), etc. This is because at the ontological degree of the Pure Essence of Love, although these distinctions exist as necessary opposites of one another within the cosmos, have no reality, let alone any kind of mental conception of their very existence within the pure abode of Love's sheer Oneness. The only thing that exists at the ontological degree of Love is Love itself. Not even the *rend* exist over there. Therefore, the *rends* "are neither Muslims nor infidels, because they have attained annihilation from their own existences (*hastī*) and entifications, and the ruling property of infidelity and faith over a person is derived for that one who still possesses any *wujūd* and an individual entification; therefore, through the non-existence of [their own]

⁷⁶¹ *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, 525-26.

⁷⁶² For more on Ibn al-'Arabī's views on the "people of blame" and his high esteem of them as the highest ranking amongst God's elect servants, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 372-5.

⁷⁶³ Although Lewisohn, in his own essays on Sufism, especially in regard to Ḥāfeẓ, has chosen to translate this particular term into English as "inspired libertine", I have chosen to keep this term untranslated within my thesis. The reason being that, like most terms within the lexicon of the Persian Sufi tradition, it possesses multiple meanings that a single translation does not completely capture. The term *rend*, especially within the context of classical Persian literature, can mean rogue, scoundrel, knave, dissolute drunkard, wandering vagabond, libertine and can even be an allusion to antinomian Sufis and roaming *qalandars* that flaunted the legal rulings of the *sharī'ah* binding upon all Muslims. Lāhijī's also positing of the figure of the *rend* as the highest ranking of God's servants or spiritual wayfarers within his commentary also raises the question of the possible influence of Ḥāfeẓ upon Lāhijī. And Ḥāfeẓ's literary influence upon Lāhijī was also highly likely since he spent much of his life in Shīrāz as a Sufi shaykh guiding a community of dervishes at his *khānaqāh*.

entification; verily, unbelief and faith cannot be attributed to them”.⁷⁶⁴ What Lāhijī means by this statement is that the dualities and apparent opposition of good and evil, faith and unbelief, while very important and real for the Muslim believer—although through the spiritual insight of the realised Sufis they only possess a relative existence in relation to the One, Real *Wujūd*—can only exist within the realm of multiplicity, i.e., the realm of Manifest *Wujūd*. The inner being of the *rend* who has become a permanent inhabitant of the “tavern of ruin” is now firmly established within Love’s pure abode—which is the undelimited Divine Essence itself.⁷⁶⁵

Similar ideas about the Oneness of Love’s Essence and the tavern of ruin, can be found in the poetic works of Rūmī, and may serve as a likely textual source of influence for Lāhijī’s own discourse on the subject matter. In a *rubā’iyyāt* from his *Divān-e Shams-e Tabrīzī*, Rūmī states that:

There exists an open field beyond unbelief and Islam
 There is an intense longing for us in the midst of that open space
 The realised knower, when he reaches that place, will lay his head there
 For neither unbelief nor Islam has any place over there.⁷⁶⁶

And in the *Maṣnavī*, Rūmī states in connection to this topic:

Since the passionate lover is intoxicated in the present moment
 Therefore, he is superior to both infidelity and faith
 Now both infidelity and faith are his door-keepers;
 For he is the inner kernel, while infidelity and faith are the outer skins.⁷⁶⁷

For Rūmī, when the Lover becomes intoxicated with and annihilated by Love itself, which is the transcendent Divine Essence symbolised by the “inner kernel”, the duality of infidelity and faith, which are the “outer skins” external to the Divine Essence, are transcended by the lover. Now the final abode or station of the *rend* is in the Divine Essence itself. Here, the properties associated with faith and infidelity hold no meaning for the *rend*, who has become annihilated in Love, for as a resident of the “tavern of ruin” he completely transcends the world of material

⁷⁶⁴ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 527.

⁷⁶⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 524-35.

⁷⁶⁶ Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Mulāvī Rūmī, *Kullīyāt-e Shams-e Tabrīzī* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Payām-e ‘Edālat, 1388/2009), *rubā’iyyāt* no. 158, 1363. My own English translations.

⁷⁶⁷ *Maṣnavī Book IV*, 659. Verses 3280-3283. My own English translations.

forms and even the world of intelligible meanings and spiritual realities. Rūmī, Lāhijī and the followers of the Religion of Love allude to this divine mystery or metaphysical truth with the poetic symbols of the “tavern of ruin” or “Love”. Within the illuminated vision of these *rends* or perfect lovers, they only witness, recognise and experience Love—or the never-ending and diverse self-disclosures of the infinite Beauty of the One Real Beloved through the wine-goblets of the possible entities. The lover in this supreme spiritual station now consistently drinks the wine of divine love from the goblets of the possible entities—who are all witnesses (*shahīdān*) who testify to the Only Real Beloved in *Wujūd*—or he drinks the wine of Love directly from the Divine Essence—without any reliance upon the wine-goblets of the possible entities. This means he can now drink and “spiritually taste” (*dhawq*) love directly from Love itself. Even the wine-goblet of the Beloved becomes a veil and an intermediary between the *rend* and the One Essence of Love. And according to Lāhijī’s mystical vision of the cosmos, which is defined and experienced through the qualities of love, beauty and witnessing, it is the Divine Essence as symbolised by Love that is the supreme *Sāqī* (“Cup-Bearer”) for the passionate lovers and *rends*.⁷⁶⁸

10.6 Conclusion

One quality of Lāhijī’s text that soon becomes apparent to the reader is its intertextuality. The use of this term may imply that Lāhijī’s work was lacking in originality and that much of the meaning of the text could only be understood in relation to the older, classical works of the

⁷⁶⁸ *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 516-21. The following passage taken from Lāhijī’s text highlights this important aspect of Lāhijī’s teachings on Love: that the purest degree of Love is Love itself, and not the Beloved. The true lover must strive to attain the station of Love, and not be satisfied with the station of the Beloved. “Through the wideness of the field of their primordial receptivity and preparedness, they [the *rends*] have been liberated from all of the delimitations of the degrees of the multiplicities of the Divine Acts, Names and Attributes, and have now become joined to the spiritual station of the Unbounded Divine Essence, where they are now intoxicated with the wine from the goblets of the self-disclosures of the Divine Essence. [And this degree of wine-drinking] requires the complete removal of all duality [between the Lover and the Beloved]. And they have now become actualised in the station of annihilation in God and subsistence in God, and suddenly—or in other words, completely in a single instant—he gulps down the wine-jug (*khum*) which is the multiple entities, and the wine-tavern (*khumkhāneh*) which is the degree of the Divine Knowledge where the Divine Names and immutable entities become discerned and distinguished from one another, and the Cup-Bearer (*sāqī*) who is the Divine Essence in respect to His Love for Self-Manifestation, and the wine-drinker (*maykhār*), which is his own self. This means that he drinks all of these previously mentioned things in a single moment and thereby becomes intoxicated from pre-eternity to post-eternity.” *Mafātīḥ al-e’jāz*, 521. This passage is Lāhijī’s commentary on verse 834 pf the *Gulshan-e Rāz*.

Persian Sufi tradition that Lāhijī's own work was a product of (and for the most part this assumption is not too far off the mark). This is why this chapter has devoted much space to a comparative analysis between Lāhijī's work and those older texts which have most impacted the Persian Sufi tradition, and may have served as likely sources of inspiration for Lāhijī's own ideas, theories, and teachings on divine love. Indeed, Lāhijī's text is like an elegant Persian carpet where he weaves threads from various textual sources in order to create something entirely new, and uniquely his own. Although much of Lāhijī's ideas and teachings on love and its connection to beauty may have been repeated many times before by past masters of this tradition, it would be quite unfair to judge Lāhijī as being nothing more than a slavish imitator of the great masters from the past. Indeed, when performing our comparative analysis between Lāhijī's own discourse on love with the other masters of the love tradition, Lāhijī was able to establish his own voice and authority as a Sufi shaykh in his own right. This may not be a manifestation of Lāhijī's originality as a Sufi thinker and writer, yet it does display a certain kind of creative genius. For while Lāhijī follows the fundamental principles of the Religion of Love quite faithfully within his own discourse, he also uses the ideas and teachings of the great masters of this tradition for his own purposes. In other words, he not only successfully synthesises and interweaves a coherent tapestry of teachings concerning the reality and mysteries of love, but he also expands upon this beautiful tapestry of ideas by giving it new layers of meaning. This is evident in his arguments for the saintly Sufi master as being the *shahīd* where the Sufi disciple can contemplate the Beauty of the Real from the theophanic mirror of the shaykh's face. This is in stark contrast to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and 'Irāqī, where for them the theophanic-mirror was an adolescent boy with a pretty face. This may not be all too surprising, since Sufism as a distinct spiritual tradition and Way of being within Islamic civilization was largely defined by its adherents throughout its history as being an experiential path in nature. This may be why Sufis always liked to claim that the path of Sufism is the path of spiritual tasting, and not the path of book learning or rational argumentation.⁷⁶⁹ Lāhijī's interpretations of certain principles relating to the love tradition may be a product of his own personal spiritual and mystical experiences as a practicing Sufi—which he was for much of his

⁷⁶⁹ See more in Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 169.

long life. Undoubtedly, the ideas of the great masters of the love tradition must have resonated with Lāhijī on a deeper emotional and spiritual level. His devotion to this specific spiritual stream of Sufism is beyond doubt. At the same time, Lāhijī was quite confident in articulating his own mystical insights when discoursing on those matters relating to love and beauty.

Perhaps Lāhijī's lasting legacy was that he was a systematic expounder and collator of the entire theoretical tradition of medieval Persian Sufism, a legacy that he transmitted to future generations of Sufis in the form of his commentary on the *Gulshan*. As we have illustrated in this chapter and in the previous ones as well, what gives Lāhijī's work such a comprehensive quality is his systematic exposition on what can be considered the essential principles and ideas that make up the Sufi Way. This includes his exposition on the Sufi teachings on human and divine love, and especially on love's inseparable connection with the perception and witnessing of beauty. Although the Akbarī school of thought came to exercise a hegemonic influence over the collective minds of Iranian Sufis during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period, discussions concerning love and beauty always maintained their central position within the shared discourse of the Persian Sufis during this period. Perhaps as a response to the demands of his contemporary audiences, Lāhijī devotes much space within his commentary to those ideas and teachings traditionally associated with the Religion of Love. Combined with his systematic exposition on the Akbarī school of thought, which we have demonstrated in previous chapters, it becomes quite clear why future generations of Iranian Sufis would come to consider and even revere Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan* as an encyclopedic work of Persian Sufi doctrines and teachings. A comprehensive work that successfully—and with peerless elegance—provides a systematic exposition of all the essential principles of the Sufi Way.

One of the aims of this thesis is to provide our own systematic exposition of Lāhijī's Sufism as it was expressed within the pages of his commentary on the *Gulshan*, and to contextualise both Lāhijī's monumental work of Persian Sufi doctrine and thought, as well as Lāhijī as an understudied but highly relevant historical individual of the Persian Sufi tradition within Iran during the latter decades of the fifteenth century. Through our in-depth analysis on those aspects of Lāhijī's discourse which were centred upon love, we have aimed to provide a

more complete picture of who Lāhījī was as a Persian Sufi living in the closing decades of the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. As the previous chapters have illustrated, Lāhījī was undoubtedly a devoted Akbarī in terms of his metaphysics, cosmology, and anthropology. Throughout the thesis, we have also argued that Lāhījī's work can also be grouped together with other works of the Akbarī tradition that were produced during the medieval period. In terms of his eschatology, Lāhījī was deeply influenced by elements of Shī'ī messianism and apocalypticism that were increasingly pervading Iranian society during the fifteenth century. This is evident in his discourse on the identity of the Seal of Saints and his linking of the Seal of Saints as the greatest of God's saints with Muḥammad al-Maḥdī, the twelfth Holy Imam. In his lengthy and systematic discourse on the different categories of knowledge, Lāhījī revealed himself to be a staunch proponent of *ṭarīqa* based Sufism. Lāhījī strongly argues that it was only through the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat* that the seeker of knowledge could gain any real and authentic knowledge of God. Yet without providing a systematic exposition on Lāhījī's passionate views and teachings on love, any comprehensive understanding of who Lāhījī was as a crucial historical figure of the Persian Sufi tradition during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era would remain incomplete. Therefore, the work we have done in this chapter represents the final piece of the puzzle, for now we have a clearer and more complete picture of who Lāhījī was as an influential Sufi shaykh living within Iran during the closing decades of the fifteenth century. Indeed, Lāhījī believed, as did most of the great masters of the Persian Sufi tradition, that love was indispensable for the wayfaring Sufi, and it has always played a central role in the spiritual life of the aspiring Sufi. For Lāhījī then, without love, no kind of relationship would exist between the Creator and the human servant at all. And without love, mystical union with God would be impossible as well. Love, therefore, constitutes an essential element within Lāhījī's world-view. Rather much like his revered predecessor Rūmī—who was perhaps the Sufi master of the love tradition who most influenced Lāhījī's teachings on love—his discourse on love serves as one of the fundamental pillars of the entire structure of his Sufi doctrine and vision. Without love and its connection to beauty and witnessing, the structure of Lāhījī's Sufism would perhaps implode on itself. For it is this crucial element of love—whether it be the spiritual love for a perfect Sufi shaykh, or the divine love for the Real Beloved—that binds all the different components of his

multifaceted vision of Sufism together. Where Lāhijī was able to successfully produce an entirely cohesive, unified and attractive vision of the Sufi path for generations of readers within Iran and the Persianate world.

Chapter Eleven

The Survival of the Persian Sufi Tradition during the Safavid Era

When Shāh Ismāʿīl (d. 930/1524) proclaimed himself as the Shāh of Iran in the former capital of the Āq Quyunlū Empire, Tabrīz, in 907/1501, this historical event was in hindsight one of the epochal moments in Iran's history, for it marked the end of Iran's tumultuous medieval period where various Turco-Mongol dynasties competed with each other in order to dominate Iran, and was replaced with an era throughout which Iran was ruled by the more centralised and absolutist state of the Safavids. Perhaps more significant for Iran's spiritual-religious history, Shāh Ismāʿīl's coronation represents the beginning of Iran's transformation into a predominately Twelver Shīʿite nation, which it continues to be today. This epochal event, therefore, marks the end of that phase of Iran's history during which it was predominantly Sunnī, and the beginning of another phase of Iran's history during which it was the centre of Twelver Shīʿism. According to both primary and secondary historical sources, prior to the Safavid period Iran was one of the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual centres of Sunnīsm within the Islamic world.⁷⁷⁰ The religious, social, cultural and political transformation of Iran which

⁷⁷⁰ For more information on this particular period of Iran as one of the centres of Sunnīsm, along with the great contributions that the peoples of Iran have made to Sunnī civilisation during the medieval period, see Peacock, A. C. S, *Early Seljūq History: A New Interpretation*. Vol. 7 (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), 99-128. And see also David Durand-Guedy, *Iranian Elites and Turkish Rulers: A History of Isfahan in the Saljuq Period* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 162-205. And see too Jan Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ashʿarism (Fourth–Fifth/Tenth–Eleventh Century)." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225-242.

occurred during the Safavid period through the conversion of the Iranian masses to Twelver Shī'ism had a drastic effect on all the different religious, ethnic and social groups that populated the Iranian plateau in the early modern period of the sixteenth to early 18th centuries. This conversion was wholly sanctioned by the Safavid state and shāhs, and was not entirely peaceful; in fact, according to most historians, it was quite violent, brutal, and coercive.⁷⁷¹ The wider Persian Sufi community was also deeply impacted. This is evidenced by the fact that Sufism as a distinct religious movement and intellectual school of thought flourished and even rose to social, cultural, and spiritual preeminence in Iranian society during the preceding medieval period, but then began an irreversible decline during the Safavid period. By the end of the Safavid period, which saw the collapse of the Safavid state because of the Afghan invasions in 1134/1722, nearly all the Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* had been either eradicated from the religious-social milieu of Safavid Iran through the missionary polemics of the puritanical Twelver Shī'ī jurist and clerics allied with a hostile or indifferent Safavid court, or driven entirely underground. The Sufi *ṭarīqas* only survived in the peripheral provinces and cities of the Safavid polity as a shadow of their former glory.⁷⁷²

Undoubtedly, the story of Sufism's meteoric rise and downfall throughout Iran's history is fascinating. This chapter will illustrate the different historical causes of Sufism's decline during the Safavid period while simultaneously inquiring how Sufism—as a distinct Islamic tradition of mysticism that was deeply rooted in Sunnīsm—was able to survive for centuries in the hostile environment of Safavid and Qajar Shī'ī Iran, and in some cases continue to attract the devotion of certain social classes of Iranian society much to the frustration of specific

⁷⁷¹ Hamid Algar, "Iran ix. Religions in Iran (2) Islam in Iran (2.3) Shi'ism in Iran Since the Safavids." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. XIII, Fasc. 5, (2006): 456-474, accessed December 18, 2018. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-ix23-shiism-in-iran-since-the-safavids>.

⁷⁷² Leonard Lewisohn, "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part I: The Ni'matullāhī Order: Persecution, Revival and Schism." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 3 (1998): 440-41. According to Zayn al-'Abīdīn Shīrvānī, a Nimatullahi Sufi, traveller and contemporary historian of the early eighteenth century, he states in regards to the lamentable situation of Sufism during the decades after the fall of Isfahan to the invading Afghans, that "in the whole land of Iran there is neither abode nor site where a dervish can lay his head... In the rest of the inhabited quarter of the world, among all its different races and peoples, hospitals for the sick and *khānaqāhs* for the dervish are built—except in Iran, where there is neither *khānaqāh* nor hospital!" Shīrvānī, *Hadā'iq al-siyāha* (Tehran 1348/1929), 258. Taken from Lewisohn, "An introduction to," 441.

segments of the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā* and *'ulamā*.⁷⁷³ Sufism, in the view of a majority of Sunnī Muslims throughout history, was considered the mystical dimension *par excellence* of the Islamic faith. In other words, for most Sunnīs who were inclined towards the more esoteric and mystical dimensions of the Islamic religion and who were not satisfied with the mere rote observance of the externals of the faith, Sufism was usually the path that they devoted themselves to, while simultaneously remaining faithful to the orthodox dogmas and divine rulings of the Islamic faith.⁷⁷⁴ For those newly converted Shī'ite Iranians living in the Safavid period who were not willing to completely abandon the Sufi tradition on the insistence of a hostile but newly emergent dominant class of Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā* and *'ulamā*, these Sufi Shī'ites needed to devise specific strategies to adapt and harmonise the Persian Sufi tradition within an entirely different religious framework to that within which it had previously operated. What these Persian Sufis needed to do was shear the Persian Sufi tradition of its centuries-old Sunnī elements—a difficult task, since Sufism as a spiritual tradition emerged from the very bosom of Sunnīsm, illustrated by the historical fact that all of the great Sufi masters of this tradition were of the Sunnī faith—and convince the many hostile critics of the Sufi tradition that Sufism was completely compatible with Twelver Shī'ism, the only officially sanctioned faith of the Safavid state throughout the dynasty's political history.

11.1 The Destruction of Sunnīsm and the Weakening and Decline of the Sufi Ṭarīqas under the Safavids

According to the Safavid historian Hasan Beg Rūmlū (d. 986/1578), in his account of the coronation of Shāh Ismā'īl I after his conquest of the city of Tabrīz in 907/1501, he states that Shāh Ismā'īl ordered that the prayer leaders read the sermon in the name of the Twelve Holy Imams, and that afterward “everyone should speak out to vilify and curse Abū Bakr, 'Umar and

⁷⁷³ Kathryn Babayan and Harvard University Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiah: Cultural Landscape of Early Modern Iran*. Vol. 35 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 403-39.

⁷⁷⁴ For more information on the historical connections between Sufism and the Sunnī tradition during the medieval period, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 83-143. And see also Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism a Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 116-40 & 169-239.

‘Uthman in the streets and squares and decapitate those who refuse”.⁷⁷⁵ And so began the bloody reign of terror unleashed upon the Sunnī populace of Iran by Shāh Ismā‘īl and his fanatical Qizilbāsh followers. A general pattern followed in every province and city that Shāh Ismā‘īl and his Qizilbash army entered and imposed their rule upon. Shāh Ismā‘īl would give his newly conquered subjects two simple choices, convert to Shī‘ism by renouncing the Sunnī faith—which also involved cursing the three righteous Caliphs—or face death at the hands of his Qizilbāsh followers.⁷⁷⁶ Although it is not our intention to lay out in detail the entire history of Shāh Ismā‘īl’s conquest of Iran, it would be helpful to note a few examples of Shāh Ismā‘īl’s conquest of various cities and provinces, and the massacres conducted by Shāh Ismā‘īl and the Qizilbāsh against those Sunnīs who refused to convert, so as to understand the historical context for the decline of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

In 1503, after conquering the two important historical cities of Isfahan and Shīrāz—where he ordered the slaughter of the Sunnī *‘ulamā’* and Sufi shaykhs, and other Sunnīs who refused to convert within those cities—Shāh Ismā‘īl turned his attention towards the central lands of Iran in order to defeat the last remnants of the Āq Quyunlū dynasty.⁷⁷⁷ Once Shāh Ismā‘īl entered the city of Kāzarun, he ordered its complete destruction and pillaging by his Qizilbāsh Turkmen soldiers because of its Sunnī reputation and inhabitants. In a short time, all of its beautiful holy shrines, tombs, madrassas, and mosques were reduced to ruin.⁷⁷⁸ The entire population of the city of Kāzarun was massacred in the resulting pillaging by the ferocious Qizilbāsh, and only one person from the city survived because he was able to escape during the massacre of the town’s Sunnī inhabitants.⁷⁷⁹ The town of Fīrūzābād and the surrounding towns of Fārs province all met similar fates to Kāzarun and Shirāz, their crime being adherence to the Sunnism and being followers of the hated Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. Kāzarun was

⁷⁷⁵ Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīk*, I: 69. Taken from Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, “The Tabarra’iyan and the Early Safavids.” *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2004): 57.

⁷⁷⁶ Anonymous, *‘Ālamārā-ye Ṣafavī (‘Ālamārā-ye Shāh Ismā‘īl)*, edited by Yadullah Shukrī (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e bunyād-e farhang-e Irān, 1350/1971), 344-47.

⁷⁷⁷ Zabīḥ-Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-e Adabīyāt dar Irān: Volume V* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Ferdūs, 1370/1991), 160 & Masashi Haneda and Rudi Matthee, “Isfahan vii. Safavid Period.” In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. XIII, Fasc. 6, (2006): 650-57, accessed May 30, 2018, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/isfahan-vii-safavid-period>.

⁷⁷⁸ Anonymous, *Jahāngushā-ye khāqān: Tārīkh Shāh Ismā‘īl*, edited by Ne‘mat Aḥmadī, Nīlūfar Jafrūdī and introduced by Reżā Sha‘bānī (Tehran: Tārīkh-e Irān, 1400/2020), 188.

⁷⁷⁹ Anonymous, *Jahāngushā-ye khāqān*, 188.

so devastated by the pillaging and massacre by the Qizilbāsh army of Shāh Ismā'īl that it never again experienced the former prosperity that it was famously known for during the medieval period.⁷⁸⁰

Other cities and villages of Iran—such as Astā, Abarqūh, Yazd, and Tabas—experienced the same dreadful fate between 909/1504-910/1505.⁷⁸¹ During his conquest of Fars, Shāh Ismā'īl put to an end to the Sufi activities of the Kāzarunīya *ṭarīqa*—the followers of Abū Eshāq Kazārūnī (d. 426/1023)—when he and his Qizilbāsh forces slaughtered four thousand dervishes of that Sufi order and desecrated and demolished the tombs of Abū Eshāq Kazārūnī, as well as the graves of his descendants and followers.⁷⁸²

What were the reasons for this deep-rooted fanatical hatred and intolerance for Sunnīs that characterised the newly emergent Safavid forces and state? For according to the Iranian historian 'Aref Azerumī, the religious creed of Shāh Ismā'īl and his Qizilbāsh followers was a combination of their reverence for Imām 'Alī and the *ahl al-bayt* along with “their hatred for Sunnīs, whom they considered the enemies of the house of 'Alī and referred to as ‘dogs’”. Similarly, the Safavid Qizilbāsh “believed that the spiritual recompense or Divine reward (*ṣavāb*) for killing a Sunnī was the equivalent of slaying five disbelievers waging war against Islam”.⁷⁸³ They also did not regard it permissible to marry a Sunnī, for Sunnīs were not considered free members of the Islamic community. Therefore, it was wholly acceptable to sell them as slaves. According to their distorted version of the *sharī'ah*, the pillaging and expropriation of Sunnī property was considered permissible (*ḥalāl*), and it was also permissible to shed their blood without suffering any religious retributions.⁷⁸⁴ According to the historical research done by Riza Yildirim on the early origins of the Safavid-Qizilbāsh movement in the regions of eastern

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ Colin P. Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 25-6.

⁷⁸² Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*. Publications of the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies; No. 17 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) (From now on it will be cited as *The Shadow of God*), 112.

⁷⁸³ Ali Rahnema, *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics: From Majlesi to Ahmadinejad* Cambridge Middle East Studies. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)(From now on it will be cited as *Superstition as Ideology*), 138.

⁷⁸⁴ 'Aref Azerumī, *Enqelab al-Eslami Beyn al-Khass va al-'Am*, I: 34. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 138.

Anatolia, during recitations of Karbala-oriented epic works of literature on the tragic martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn and his family members, the Turkmen Qizilbāsh would identify themselves with the immense suffering of Imam Ḥusayn and his family and be whipped up into an emotional frenzy, which would then incite them to wage holy *jehād* against the hated Sunnī enemies and oppressors of the *Ahl al-bayt*, in order to exact due vengeance for the injustices that Imam Ḥusayn and the *Ahl al-bayt* had suffered under the Sunnīs.⁷⁸⁵

One distinguishing feature of the Safavid-Qizilbāsh fanatical hatred for Sunnīs and the Sunnī religion was the desecration of the shrines and tombs of revered Sunnī figures and Sufi shaykhs, which were relentlessly conducted in every town and city that they conquered. This was ultimately done for the purpose of humiliating the Sunnīs and taking revenge on behalf of Imam Ḥusayn and the other martyred Holy Imams, and to establish the true religion of Twelver Shīʿism over the false and corrupt religion of Sunnism within the domains of the Safavids. This is illustrated by two cases provided in the following passages, when Shāh Ismāʿīl and his Qizilbāsh troops entered the city of Baghdad in 914/1508 and the city of Herat in 916/1510. Sunnīs were the majority of the inhabitants within both cities, and these two cities had earned reputations for being major intellectual, cultural, and spiritual centres for the Sunnī faith during the medieval period. When Shāh Ismāʿīl entered the city of Baghdad, he immediately gave orders to the Qizilbāsh to entirely demolish the religious complex surrounding the tomb of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa which was one of the most magnificent historical collections of buildings within the city of Baghdad, and one of the holiest for the Sunnī residents of Baghdad.

Nevertheless, Shāh Ismāʿīl ordered the mosque, dome, and madrasa attached to it to be destroyed. They desecrated the revered tomb of Imam Abū Ḥanīfa by digging up his grave and exhuming his corpse. In place of Abū Ḥanīfa's remains, they put in the carcass of a dead dog. The Qizilbāsh then announced to the people of Baghdad that whoever wished to use the grave of Abū Ḥanīfa as a toilet, would receive the rewards of 25 Tabrizī dinars.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸⁵ For more information on this specific subject, see Riza Yildirim, "In the Name of Hosayn's Blood: The Memory of Karbala as Ideological Stimulus to the Safavid Revolution," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 8, no. 2 (2015): 127-154.

⁷⁸⁶ Anonymous, *ʿĀlamārā-ye Ṣafavī*, 477.

After Shāh Ismāʿīl conquered Herāt from the Uzbeks in 926/1520, it was now turn for the Sunnīs of Herat to experience the same pattern of humiliation, mass religious violence and oppression at the hands of the Qizilbāsh, like the Sunnī residents of Baghdad and other cities of Iran. According to the first-hand and vivid accounts of the Safavid conquest of Herāt by the Timurid literary figure and historian Zayn al-Dīn Maḥmūd Vāṣefī (d. 973/1566), after the victory proclamation of the conquering Safavids was read at the congregational mosque of Herāt, again a good number of Sunnīs were massacred by the Qizilbāsh. Vāṣefī continues his personal account in the following manner:

Mir Shanehtarash, a well-known Shīʿī heretic, was loudly cursing the companions in the ritual style of Iraq. About a thousand people had gathered around him, and shouting obscenities together, they set off toward the end of the street. Everyone moved with them, for no one had the courage to turn around. They kept waving the speared heads until we got to the shrine of Mawlanā Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jāmī. A crowd of about ten thousand had assembled there. On the grave of the *Mawlavī*, they had piled up anything they could find of woods—doors, windows, beds—almost to the vault’s height. Then they lit it up. When the fire took hold, you could not stand within an arrow shot of the place. It reminded one of the flames of Nimrod.⁷⁸⁷

Jāmī’s tomb was an obvious target for the Qizilbāsh since he was known in his lifetime to be an opponent of the Shīʿites.⁷⁸⁸ Both Sunnīs and Sufis universally revered Jāmī, and his tomb must have become a holy site soon after his death for the Sunnī residents of Herāt; destroying his revered tomb would have therefore humiliated the Sunnīs of Herāt.

The rise to political domination of the Safavids profoundly changed the religious-cultural environment of Iran forever. No longer would Iran be defined by the spirit of confessional ambiguity as it had been ever since the era of Mongol domination from the mid-

⁷⁸⁷ Vāṣefī, *Badayīʾ al-Vaqayī*, 95. Translated into English by Azfar Moin. Taken from “Shāh Ismaʿīl comes to Herat: An Anecdote from Vasefī’s ‘Amazing Events’ (*Badayīʾ al-Vaqayī*).” In *A Persian Mosaic: Essays on Persian Language, Literature and Film in Honor of M.R. Ghanoonparvar*, edited by Behrad Aghaei and Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami (Bethesda; Maryland: Ibex publishers, 2015), 95

⁷⁸⁸ For Jāmī’s hostile and negative views of the Twelver Shīʿites and their religious creed, see Hamid Algar, “Naqshbandis and Safavids: A Contribution to the Religious History of Iran and Its Neighbors.” In *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors*, edited by Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 28-31.

thirteenth century; Iranians could no longer remain Sunnīs while flirting with a variety of Shī'ī ideas and concepts as they had done for centuries previously before. Shāh Ismā'īl, with the full support of his militant and fanatically devoted army of Qizilbāsh Turkmens, coerced and forced the Iranian masses to convert to Twelver Shī'ism on pain of death by inflicting unrelenting terror and political but religiously-inspired violence upon Sunnī subjects who refused to convert to his extremist and *ghulāt* form of Shī'ism. As Hamid Algar states, “the slaughter of Sunnī scholars and Shaykhs was an essential part of establishing Shī'ī supremacy”.⁷⁸⁹ These acts of terror perpetrated against defenceless Sunnīs were not simply perpetrated by the Turkmen army out of greed for conquest and lust for pillaging—although this may have been the primary motive for a good proportion of the barbaric Qizilbāsh hordes—there may have also been a more rational and methodological purpose behind these acts of mass violence. Since the Qizilbāsh only perpetrated these atrocities through the permission and command of their Sufi shaykh, Shāh Ismā'īl, whom they considered a divine incarnation of God as well as the incarnation of both the Hidden Imam and Imam 'Alī as well.⁷⁹⁰ In the view of Sa'īd Amir Arjomand and Colin Turner, there was an underlying political objective behind the massacre of Sunnīs and the destruction of the sacred sites and traditional institutions associated with the Sunnī faith, and that was for the purpose of converting the Iranian masses to Twelver Shī'ism and establishing Twelver Shī'ism as the exclusive religion of the newly emergent state. The Safavid rulers were convinced that in order for the Safavid dynasty to maintain their hold over their newly formed empire, they needed to bind the religious loyalties of the newly conquered Iranian masses to a religious creed shared with their rulers and religiously and spiritually separate their subjects from their Sunnī neighbours, especially the rival Sunnī states of the Ottomans to the west and Uzbek Shaybānids of Central Asia to the east, with whom the Safavids were in a constant state of warfare over territory for close to 150 years.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁹ Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*. SUNY series in Medieval Middle East History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 25.

⁷⁹⁰ For more on the religious, extremist beliefs of the Qizilbāsh and the manner in which they perceived their Safavid Sufi shaykhs, especially Shaykh Junayd and Shāh Ismā'īl, see Riza Yildirim, “Turkomans between Two Empires: The Origins of the Qizilbash Identity in Anatolia (1447-1514).” (Bilkent University, Ankara, PhD dissertation, 2008) 231-42 & 268-303.

⁷⁹¹ Colin Turner, *Islam Without Allah?: The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000; 2001) (From now on it will be cited as *Islam Without*), 73-5. And see also *The Shadow of God*, 119-22.

According to Arjomand's research, the achievement of this political objective rested on four main prerequisites: "the eradication of millenarian extremism, persecution of popular Sufism, suppression of Sunnism, and finally, the propagation of Twelver Shī'ism".⁷⁹² Shāh Ismā'īl (r. 907-30/1501-24), Shāh Tahmāsp (r. 930-84/1524-76) and Shāh 'Abbās the Great (r. 996-1038/1588-1629) all pursued the fulfillment of the Safavid's ideological goal with utmost ruthlessness and relentless energy, so that by the beginning of the seventeenth century, Iran, which had formerly been a majority Sunnī country for close to nine hundred years before the rise of the Safavids, had—maybe only formally—become a state which followed the Twelver Shī'ī creed.⁷⁹³ The next sections of this chapter will be devoted to how Shāh Tahmāsp continued his father's religious policy of converting the Iranian masses to Twelver Shī'ism. Although he no longer employed the mass terror and violence of his fanatical Qizilbāsh followers, he nevertheless maintained the coercive tools that were within the means of the centralised Safavid state to achieve this specific political-religious objective. Recent research done by various scholars highlights this important historical fact—that it was under the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp during the middle of the sixteenth century that saw the gradual decline and complete disappearance of many of the traditional Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas* from the religious-social landscape of Iran.

11.2 The Gradual Elimination of Sunnism under Shāh Tahmāsp and the Response of the Sunnī-Sufi Ṭarīqas

What effects did the continuing suppression of Sunnism throughout the sixteenth century have upon the Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas* that populated the Iranian landscape during the Safavid period? A reading of the available historical sources may suggest that the various Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas* were eliminated through Shāh Ismā'īl's massacre of Sunnīs throughout all the major cities and towns of Iran, as the sixteenth century Sufi historian Ibn Karbalā'ī Tabrīzī states in his *Rawżāt al-jenān* that, "Ismā'īl crushed all the *silsilas*; the graves of their ancestors were destroyed, not to mention what befell their successors... He made despondent and eradicated most of the *silsilas*

⁷⁹² *The Shadow of God*, 109.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.* And *Islam Without*, 84-5.

of the sayyids and shaykhs”.⁷⁹⁴ Yet according to the research of Hamid Algar and Dina Le Gall on the history of the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa* during the early decades of the Safavid period, Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas* like the Naqshbandīya managed to survive in Herāt and Qazvīn until the mid-sixteenth century, well into the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp. According to Algar and Le Gall, the Naqshbandīya did not disappear from Azerbaijan and Tabrīz until the end of the sixteenth century, although a good majority of the popular Sufi *ṭarīqas* in Iran eventually perished and vanished from the religious-social milieu of Safavid Iran by the latter half of the sixteenth century.⁷⁹⁵ The only *ṭarīqas* that managed to survive under the rule of the Safavids were the Nūrbakshīyah, Dahabāīyyah—which was an off-shoot of the Kubrawīya-Barzishābādī *ṭarīqa*—and the Ne‘matullāhīya, and it soon too fell under the suspicion of Shāh ‘Abbās and become targeted for state prosecution.⁷⁹⁶ The main reason these three Sufi *ṭarīqas* survived was because they were willing to convert—at least nominally—to Twelver Shī‘ism.⁷⁹⁷ The Zaynīya, Jamālīya, Khalvatīya, Naqshbandīya and other branches of the Suhrawardīya and Kubrawīya *ṭarīqas* that had populated the religious-social milieu of Iran were all active and flourishing in the decades preceding the rise of the Safavids, yet they all eventually vanished from Iran throughout the sixteenth century.⁷⁹⁸ This process of the gradual decline and elimination of the

⁷⁹⁴ Tabrīzī, *Rawzāt al-jenān*, II: 159 & 491. Taken from Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism and the School of Isfahan Tasawwuf and ‘Irfan in Late Safavid Iran (‘Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji and Fayz-i Kashani on the Relation of Tasawwuf, Hikmat and ‘Irfan).” In *The Heritage of Sufism: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)* Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2018), 76.

⁷⁹⁵ Le Gall, *Culture of Sufism*, 23-8. And Algar, “The Naqshbandis and Safavids,” 21-6.

⁷⁹⁶ For more information on the persecution of the Ne‘matullāhīs under the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās I, see *The Shadow of God*, 116-18.

⁷⁹⁷ For a brief overview of the histories of these three Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* during the Safavid period, see *The Shadow of God*, 114-19. Ata Anzali has done excellent research showing the historical process whereby the Kubrawīyah-Barzishābādī *ṭarīqa*, which was Sunnī with the inception of the Safavid rule over Iran, gradually became a Twelver Shī‘ite Sufi order during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For more information, see Ata Anzali. “The Emergence of the Zahabiyya in Safavid Iran.” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 2, no. 2 (2013): 149-75.

⁷⁹⁸ Azerumī, *Enqelāb al-Eslami*, 54. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 139. For information regarding the popularity of the Khalvatīya *ṭarīqa* in Āq Quyunlū Tabrīz and Shervān in the latter half of the fifteenth century, see Chad G. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī’s Salāmān Va Absāl* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 82-95. And see as well John J. Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire the Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350-1750* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 50-89. For more information regarding the situation of the Zaynīya *ṭarīqa* under the leadership of Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī, see Beatrice Forbes Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran: Beatrice Forbes Manz*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 228-38. For information regarding the ascendance to position of spiritual dominance of the Naqshbandīya in Timurid Herat during the latter half of the fifteenth century, see Jürgen Paul, “The Rise of the

various Sufi *ṭarīqas* was not only a result of the frequent massacres and persecutions conducted by Shāh Ismāʿīl and his Qizilbāsh troops, but was also one of the historical consequences of the long-lasting transformation of a predominately Sunnī Iran into a state dominated by more rigid and sectarian form of Twelver Shīʿism. This new faith was often intolerant of all forms of Sunnism, including the traditional Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas*. According to Alger and Le Gall, one explanation for why the Naqshbandīya eventually vanished as an active and organised *ṭarīqa* from the city of Herāt during the Safavid period, is that it was a result of the continuing migration of the Naqshbandī Sufis who were part of the influential circle of Mawlana Saʿd al-Dīn Kashgarī (d. 860/1456) and Jāmī. During the period when the Safavids imposed their domination over the residents of Herāt, numerous followers of Kashgarī and Jāmī fled the city for more hospitable lands in Sunnī-ruled Central Asia and Mughal India.⁷⁹⁹ These included Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Jāmī, the third son of Jāmī and one of his few spiritual successors in the Naqshbandīya *ṭarīqa*, who fled towards the remote region of Ubah. Shahīd Qummī, another devoted follower of Jāmī, migrated to Gujarat in India. Two *khalīfas* of Shams al-Dīn Rūjī—who was one of the main spiritual successors to Kashgarī—also fled Herāt for Bukhārā, which was under the rule of the Uzbek Shibānids. Fakhr al-Dīn ʿAlī Ṣāfī, the son of the famous Heratī preacher and literary celebrity Mawlānā Wāʿeẓ Kāshefī, and the author of the aforementioned *Rashaḥāt ʿayn al-ḥayāt*, fled both the Uzbeks and Safavids to Ubah in the region of Gharjestan. He eventually tried to return to Herāt but ended up collapsing and dying before Herāt’s city gates.⁸⁰⁰ The Sufi followers of the Kubrawīyah-Barzishābādī *ṭarīqa* also migrated to the neighboring Sunnī lands of Central Asia and northern India.⁸⁰¹ These same historical factors may have also motivated other Sufis from the different *ṭarīqas* to permanently emigrate from their Iranian homeland, for they were not willing to abandon their Sunnī faith for the new faith of Twelver Shīʿism. Ibrāhīm

Khawajagan-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in Timurid Herat." In *Afghanistan's Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*, edited by Green Nile. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 71-86. And for more information on the Jamālīya *ṭarīqa*, which was founded by the charismatic Sufi shaykh Pir Jamāl Ardestānī (d. 1474-75), see Soroory, O. "Introduction to a manuscript of the general works of Pir-Jamal Ardestani as preserved in the manuscript chamber of Central Library of the University of Tehran along with a brief summary of his works and biography," *Journal of Academic librarianship and Information Research*, 43, no.1 (2009): 51-71.

⁷⁹⁹ Le Gall, *Culture of Sufism*, 25-6.

⁸⁰⁰ Alger, "The Naqshbandis and Safavids," 25.

⁸⁰¹ Devin Deweese, "The Eclipse of the Kubrawiyah in Central Asia." *Iranian Studies*, 21:1-2, (1988): 62-73.

Gulshanī of the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa* and Ibn Ḥāfeẓ Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī Tabrīzī (d. 997/1589) of the Kubrawīya-Lālā *ṭarīqa* come to mind.⁸⁰²

Rosemary Stanfield Johnson has done much valuable research on the culture of the *tabarrā* ('ritual cursing') as it had existed during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp. Her research provides us with possible historical reasons why many Sunnī Sufis decided it was best to flee Safavid Iran for the more hospitable Sunnī lands neighboring Iran.⁸⁰³ Shāh Tahmāsp did attempt to reign in the powerful and unruly Qizilbāsh Turkmen tribes, as well as downplay the *ghulāt* Shī'ism associated with his Qizilbāsh devotees, as it had become a major destabilising force within the very heart of the Safavid polity.⁸⁰⁴ Shāh Tahmāsp nevertheless continued his father's policy of converting the Iranian masses to Twelver Shī'ism by suppressing all manifestations of Sunnism within the Safavid domains.⁸⁰⁵ One way he did this was through the financial and political support he directly provided to the *tabarrā'īyyān*.⁸⁰⁶ These were groups of people (or hoodlums) whose duty was to wander around the major urban centres of Safavid Iran and demand people—especially Sunnīs or Sunnīs suspected of doing *taqīyya*—to ritually curse the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, especially the three righteous Caliphs. Failure to do so could invite violent retaliation, even sometimes resulting in execution and death by the royal guards (*Qurchī*).⁸⁰⁷ According to Stanfield-Johnson's research, the *tabarrā'īyyān* created an oppressive and intolerable social-cultural atmosphere for Shāh Tahmāsp's Sunnī subjects. Any cursing of the three rightly guided Caliphs—who were deeply revered by Sunnīs as being the greatest companions of the Prophet Muḥammad—would have violated the moral consciences

⁸⁰² For more information on the Khalwātī Shaykh Ibrāhīm Gulshenī and his fleeing Tabrīz with the conquest of the Safavids, see Side Emre, *Ibrahim-i Gulshani and the Khalwati-Gulshani Order: Power Brokers in Ottoman Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 60-3. In regards to why Ibn Karbalā'ī fled his homeland to permanently settle in Damascus, see more in Shahzad Bashir, "The Living Dead of Tabriz: Explorations in Chronotopic Imagination." *History of Religions*, vol. 59, no. 3 (2020): 169-192.

⁸⁰³ For more by Stanfield-Johnson on the continuing suppression of Sunnism during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp through the *tabarrā'īyyān*, see Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, "Sunnī Survival in Safavid Iran: Anti-Sunnī Activities during the Reign of Tahmasp I." *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1-4 (1994): 123-33. And see as well Stanfield-Johnson, "The Tabarra'īyan," 47-71.

⁸⁰⁴ Mitchell, *The Practice of Politics*, 101-3.

⁸⁰⁵ *The Shadow of God*, 119-21.

⁸⁰⁶ Stanfield-Johnson, "The Tabarra'īyan," 48-9.

⁸⁰⁷ Maryam Moazzen, *Formation of a Religious Landscape: Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 4-5.

of devout Sunnīs.⁸⁰⁸ So while Shāh Tahmāsp abandoned his father's more brutal and violent methods of committing mass slaughter of Iranian Sunnīs who were unwilling to convert, he still adopted methods—through the intermediary of the gangs of the *tabarrā'īyyān*, who also served as state spies—that were coercive and oppressive.⁸⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Shāh Tahmāsp's support for the *tabarrā'īyyān* fulfilled an essential state policy of the ruling Safavids: the elimination of Sunnīsm from the religious-cultural landscape of Iran and conversion of their subjects to the state-sanctioned faith of Twelver Shī'ism.⁸¹⁰ According to Mīrzā Makhdūm Sharīfī, the exiled Safavid bureaucrat and Sunnī, during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, “the curse was recited in all of the public venues of Qazvīn, including the mosques, the shāh's *majlises*, the city streets and markets”.⁸¹¹ And according to Johnson's research, “the practice of cursing in the mosques and other public gatherings places apparently was widely implemented throughout the provinces by 940/1533-34”.⁸¹² It's no wonder why, throughout the sixteenth century, especially during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, Persian Sunnīs continued to leave Safavid territory for Sunnī lands more tolerant of their Sunnī faith.⁸¹³

⁸⁰⁸ Stanfield-Johnson, “The Tabarra'īyan,” 54-55. According to Stanfield-Johnson's research on the culture of *tabarrā* within Safavid-Iranian society during this particular period in question, the *tabarrā'īyyān* also had a list of about 90 individuals' names, who were all revered and important historical figures for Sunnīs, which they would ritually curse and demand other Iranians—especially Sunnīs or suspected closet Sunnīs—to do as well. In Stanfield-Johnson's own words, “one occasion for ritualised cursing was the Shi'ite substitution of the Friday prayer and congregational meetings in formerly Sunnīte mosques with an observance led by Shi'ite preacher who vilified the ten companions to whom the prophet had promised heaven... (excluding Ali); the Prophets' wives Aisha and Hafsa, and the Four Sunnīte Imams, Malik, Abū Ḥanīfah, Al-Shāfi'ī, and Ibn-Hanbal. The sermon was replaced by the *tabarru*. In addition to the list of names read in the mosques, Tahmāsp created his own list in which the curse was followed by a litany of ninety-nine personally selected individuals starting with Hārūn al-Rashīd and ending with 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Jāmī.” Ibid, 64.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ Stanfield-Johnson, “Sunnī Survival,” 128-31.

⁸¹¹ Stanfield-Johnson, “The Tabarra'īyan,” 64.

⁸¹² Ibid., 63.

⁸¹³ For more information on the history of the migration of Persian Sunnīs from Safavid Iran to the neighbouring Ottoman lands during the sixteenth century, see Kioumars Ghereghlou. “A Safavid Bureaucrat in the Ottoman World: Mirza Makhdum Sharifi Shirazi and the Quest for Upward Mobility in the İlmiye Hierarchy.” In *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, LIII (2019): 153-194. The well-known Shīrāzī philosopher and scientist Muslih al-Dīn Muhammad b. Salāh al-Lārī (d. 979/1572), who was a student of the famous Shīrāzī philosopher Ghiyāth al-Dīn al-Dashtakī (d. 949/1542), and who immigrated from his hometown of Shiraz, first to Mughal India before settling in the Ottoman Empire, may have also immigrated because of the inhospitable religious-social environment caused by Shāh Tahmāsp's religious policies. He offers a possible motive for his permanent migration for the Sunnī lands of the Mughal and Ottoman Empires, when he states that, “he (Shāh Tahmāsp) has a strong tendency to eliminate Sunnī scholars or hurt them, or attribute wrong and immoral things to them... It is for this reason that the greater part of his territory is without scientists and scholars but full of foolish people. Only a few true scholars have

According to Anta Azali, in his research on the possible historical causes for the continuing migration of Sunnī Sufis from Safavid Iran during the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, while many Sunnī-Sufi shaykhs were willing to express love and devotion for the Twelve Holy Imams, they were not willing to curse the righteous companions of the Prophet Muḥammad as demanded by their Safavid rulers and the *tabarrāʾiyyān*. They, therefore, chose to keep a low profile within their respective societies and communities or opted to leave their homelands, which had become intolerant of their Sunnī faith.⁸¹⁴

De Gall also believes that the transformation of Iran from a majority Sunnī land to a sectarian and antagonistic Twelver Shīʿī state may have also motivated many Sunnī Naqshbandīs to leave their Iranian homelands forever. The outright violent repression by the Safavid State perhaps playing less of a role for their migration as time went by.⁸¹⁵ Now that Iran was ruled by an entirely new religious dispensation, the Naqshbandīs and other Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas* like them would have lost a major source of patronage. The upkeep and expansion of the Sufi social institutions depended on generous donations and waqf endowments by Sunnī ruling elites who desired to earn the spiritual support and blessings of influential Sufi saints.⁸¹⁶ These traditional ties of patronage and support that had formerly existed between ruling Sunnī elites—usually of Turkmen and Mongol ethnic origin—and the Persian Sufi shaykhs that had formerly existed during the medieval period, was forever shattered with the rise to power of the Safavids. The Safavid shahs, with their devotion to Twelver Shīʿism as the exclusive state-religion of their empire, chose instead to financially support and provide lavish patronage to the Twelver Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ*. The Twelver Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* in exchange fully supported and assisted the

remained in the entire land of Iran.” Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Muḥammad Lārī and ʿArif Nawshāhī (editor), “Mirʾāt al-adwār wa-mirqātal-akhbār: Fasli dar sharḥ-i ḥāl-i buzurgān-i Khurāsān u Mā-warāʾ al-nahr u Fārs,” *Maʿārif*, 13 iii (Isfand 1375/March 1997), 91–113, esp. 109. Translated into English by Reza Pourjavady. Taken from Reza Pourjavady, “Muṣliḥ Al-Dīn Al-Lārī and His Sample of the Sciences.” *Oriens*, 42, 3-4 (2014): 295.

⁸¹⁴ Ata Anzali, *‘Mysticism’ in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, S.C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017) (From now on it will be cited as *‘Mysticism’ in Iran*), 27-8.

⁸¹⁵ Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, 25-9.

⁸¹⁶ For more information on this particular dynamic or relationship where both sides benefited from this relationship of patronage—the ruling Turkic or Mongol sultans benefiting spiritually, and the patronised Sufi shaykhs benefiting materially—see Manz, *Power, Politics*, 219-45. And see also Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry*, 82-100 & 107-11.

efforts of the Safavid shāhs to convert all Iranians to Twelver Shī'ism every step along the way.⁸¹⁷

The arguments made by these researchers are no doubt quite convincing in providing a historical explanation for why the many different Sunnī-Sufi *ṭarīqas* eventually vanished from the religious-social milieu of Safavid Iran, but these authors do not mention one major factor, and that is the rise of the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' and *fuqahā*' as the dominant social-religious class within Safavid society as rivals to the Sufis in their claims to being the spiritual guides and supreme religious authorities for the Iranian Muslim masses. Ever since the earliest days of the Safavid period the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' shared the ideological goals of the Safavid shāhs: the conversion of the Iranian masses to Twelver Shī'ism. This supreme political-religious objective could not be achieved without the constant and ruthless suppression of Sunnism and Sufism; especially in those aspects of Sufism that manifested through the traditional social institutions associated with the Sufis, such as the *khānaqāh* and the shared, corporate identities of the Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas*.⁸¹⁸ The next section of this chapter will therefore explore the possible role that the newly emergent Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā*' may have had in the declining fortunes of Sufism during the Safavid period through their collective hostility and doctrinal opposition to the Persian Sufi tradition.

11.3 The Rise of the Externalist Twelver Shī'ī 'Ulamā' and their Opposition to the Sufis

One of the most significant moments in the history of the rise of the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā*' during the Safavid period was the permanent migration to Iran of the Lebanese Twelver Shī'ī scholar and jurist Shaykh 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 940/1533-34). Shaykh al-Karakī accepted Shāh Ismā'il's invitation to settle in Iran and propagate the new faith to his Iranian subjects in 917/1511, when he was present at Shāh Ismā'il's capture of Herāt from the Uzbek

⁸¹⁷ Andrew J. Newman, "The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safawid Iran: Arab Shiite Opposition to 'Alī al-Karakī and Safawid Shiism." *Die Welt Des Islams* 33, no. 1 (1993): 78-81. And see also Moazzen, *Formation of a Religious*, 15-30.

⁸¹⁸ For more on the allegiance and shared ideological-religious goals of the Safavid shāhs and the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā*' in the propagation of Twelver Shī'ism and the conversion of the Iranian masses to the new faith—especially those Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā*' who migrated from Jabal 'Āmil in the earliest days with the establishment of the Safavid empire—see *Islam Without Allah?*, 72-148.

Shaybānids.⁸¹⁹ Other Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' and *fuqahā*' from the important Arab centres of Twelver Shī'ism—especially from Bahrain and Jabal 'Āmil of Southern Lebanon—would follow in the footsteps of Shaykh al-Karakī throughout the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries in their migration and permanent settlement in Safavid Iran. This class of Arab Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' played a critical role in the propagation of Twelver Shī'ism to the Iranian masses and thereby facilitated their permanent and complete conversion to the Twelver Shī'ī faith.⁸²⁰ They were also responsible for transmitting to their recently converted Iranian students a form of Islam that was completely externalist, dogmatic, and *sharī'ah*-orientated. This puritanical disposition was combined with deep suspicion and hostility towards all forms of Islamic mysticism, especially Sufism, which they considered deviant and heretical, primarily because of Sufism's deep historical ties to Sunnism.⁸²¹

Shaykh al-Karakī not only received lavish patronage by both Shāh Ismā'īl and Shāh Tahmāsp—which enabled him to fund the religious madrassas under his control where he trained new students in the Twelver Shī'ī religious sciences—but he was also elevated to the exalted religious position of being the supreme *mujtahid* of the age when Shāh Tahmāsp, in the year 938/1532-33, appointed him as the supreme deputy of the Hidden Imām.⁸²² Shāh Tahmāsp was much more sincerely devoted to the Twelver Shī'ī faith than his father. The available historical sources tell us that Tahmāsp formed a close relationship with Shaykh al-Karakī, so much so that he always took Shaykh al-Karakī's side in his feuds with other members of the ruling religious establishment.⁸²³ He considered Shaykh al-Karakī's legal rulings to be binding upon all of his Muslim subjects, so much so that "Shāh Tahmāsp issued a *farmān* (decree), confirming Karakī's self-appointed rank of deputy (*nā'ib*) to the Hidden Imam and according him responsibility for maintaining the *sharī'a* as the supreme religious authority of the realm. Copies of the decree were dispatched to all major towns and cities of the kingdom,

⁸¹⁹ Newman, "The Myth of Clerical," 79.

⁸²⁰ *The Shadow of God*, 122-55.

⁸²¹ *Islam Without Allah*, 90-116. And '*Mysticism*' in *Iran*, 24-31 & 69.

⁸²² *The Shadow of God*, 133-35. According to Arjomand, Shāh Tahmāsp's royal decree (*farmān*) designating Al-Karakī as the deputy of the Hidden Imam for the Shī'ī masses also bestowed upon him the exalted title of the "Seal of the *Mujtahids*" (*khatam al-mujtahidin*) and also, as the "guardian of the heritage of the Seal of Prophets" (Muhammad). See more in *The Shadow of God*, 134-5.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, 135.

and people were enjoined to follow the rulings of Karakī or face punishment.”⁸²⁴ This passage by Colin Turner makes clear that every one of al-Karakī’s legal rulings, based upon his own personal *ejteḥād* as a qualified Twelver Shī’ī *faqīh*, had the full backing and support of the Shāh Tahmāsp royal authority along with the bureaucratic Safavid state. Al-Karakī, and those Twelver Shī’ī *fuqahā’* who succeeded him, were responsible for formulating the legal foundations of the newly emergent Safavid state. Historians consider the Safavid empire the first governing Islamic state closely based upon the *feqh* (“jurisprudence”) and theological creed of Twelver Shī’ism in history.⁸²⁵

One of the historical consequences of Shāh Tahmāsp’s royal decree was that something of the sacred authority that was imagined to radiate from the person of the Safavid shāh—ever since the rule of Shāh Ismā’īl —was now shared by the Twelver Shī’ī *fuqahā’*, beginning with the symbiotic relationship that developed between Shaykh Al-Karakī and Shāh Tahmāsp. However we must remember that although the Safavid shāhs eventually abandoned the *ghulāt* Shī’ism of their forefathers for Twelver Shī’ism, they never completely abandoned their claims to sacred authority as being the servants and representatives of the Holy Imams.⁸²⁶ Nevertheless, with the issuing of Shāh Tahmāsp’s royal decree, a sacred authority would be deeply linked with the Twelver Shī’ *fuqahā’* within the collective minds of Iranian Shī’ites, as evidenced by their increasing claims throughout the following centuries that they were the exclusive representatives of the Hidden Imam for the Shī’ī masses.⁸²⁷

What is most interesting about Shāh Tahmāsp’s royal decree—where Shaykh al-Karakī became co-partners and even equals with the Safavid shāh as the direct representative of the Hidden Imam—are its historical ramifications upon the wider Persian Sufi community, and especially on the tradition of the “cult of Sufi saints” which had deep historical roots in Iranian society and culture.⁸²⁸ Before the rise of the Safavids, when Iran was still a majority Sunnī

⁸²⁴ *Islam without Allah*, 89.

⁸²⁵ *Islam without Allah*, 73 & Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 10-24, 55-8.

⁸²⁶ *Islam without Allah*, 178-85.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-44.

⁸²⁸ For more details on the prevalence and influence of the “cult of Sufi saints” upon Iranian society and culture during the later medieval period, especially in Timurid Khorasan, see Maria E. Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition:*

nation, the Sufi saint was the figure who held supreme sacred authority over the Iranian Sunnī masses. For the Sufi saint was believed to be the *qutb* of his age, an intimate Friend of God and His spiritual *khalīfa* as well.⁸²⁹ The Persian Sunnī masses revered the Sufi saints because they believed that they could attain a degree of nearness to God through the Sufi saint's *barakāt*. Indeed, throughout the entire medieval period up until this point, Persian Sunnīs had believed that their worldly and otherworldly needs could be fulfilled through the prayers and invocations of a living or dead Sufi saint, because of the exalted status that the Sufi saints were believed to possess in the unseen world.⁸³⁰

This purview of the charismatic Sufi master would eventually be robbed from them, or transferred to the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'*. This meant that the reverence and devotion that the Iranian masses formerly directed towards the Sufi saints—both dead and living—would now be directed towards the social-religious class of the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* as the deputies of the Hidden Imam. Since it was now the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* who were the direct representatives and intermediaries between the Iranian Shī'ī masses and the Hidden Imam, something of the *barakāt* and charismatic, sacred authority of the Hidden Imam would inevitably be transferred to the highest-ranking of the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* as his sole representative.⁸³¹ The average, pious Iranian Muslim would still have had the same emotional-spiritual needs as in the past, to have both his worldly and otherworldly needs to be fulfilled through the intermediary of a saintly figure who was considered to be closer to God than them, and that person was no longer the charismatic Sunnī-Sufi *pīr*, but the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'*. Arjomand, who has done much relevant research on this subject, describes in detail the changing perceptions of the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* by the pious Iranian Shī'ītes throughout the Safavid period:

In the eyes of the Shī'ītes, something of a charismatic quality had always inhered in the persons of the great theologians by virtue of the great favors bestowed upon them by

Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 192-220. And for a brief, succinct and very insightful overview of this particular aspect of Sufism's culture and history during the medieval period, see Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 71-125.

⁸²⁹ Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 85-7.

⁸³⁰ Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition*, 192-8.

⁸³¹ *The Shadow of God*, 138-44.

the Hidden Imam. Numerous “charismatic” or minor miraculous deeds (*karāmāt*), not the least of which consisted of attenuated forms of contact with the Hidden Imam in dreams, visions, and during the *Hajj* ceremonies in Mecca, came to be attributed to the ‘*ulamā*’. They were said to be the means of clinging to the infallible Imams as the “Ark of Salvation”: their pen was superior to the blood of martyrs; they were doors to heaven, and insulting them would bring the wrath of God upon the offender... In addition, the ‘*ulamā*’ arrogated to themselves the function of *sharfā’a* or intercession in the hereafter.⁸³²

Following on from this, it is not hard to imagine why the various Sufi *ṭarīqas* eventually declined in fortune during the Safavid period. Much of Sufism’s popularity with the Iranian masses was dependent on the fact that Sunnī Iranians—for centuries deeply influenced and affected by the teachings, customs and rich literature of the Persian Sufi tradition—held strong convictions in the sainthood of the charismatic Sufi shaykhs. The Sufi shaykh was believed to be the ultimate intermediary between the average pious Muslim and a transcendent and unknowable God. Something of God’s mysterious Presence could be directly experienced and spiritually tasted by the Sufi disciple or pious Muslim through the *barakāt* of the Sufi saint.⁸³³ This fact alone may have contributed to Sufism’s mass popularity with Iranian Sunnīs in the previous centuries, yet it is this dynamic that would eventually change with the gradual conversion of Iranians to Twelver Shī’ism during the Safavid era.

There is another critical factor that contributed to the decline in popularity of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* relative to the rise to social and religious prominence of the Twelver Shī’ī ‘*ulamā*’, and which also impacted the relations between the Sufis and the ‘*ulamā*’—a relationship that was historically defined by rivalry, suspicion and outright hostility between the two groups throughout the Safavid and Qajar period—and that was the struggle between the two groups to win the financial support and patronage of the Safavid ruling establishment for themselves.⁸³⁴

⁸³² *The Shadow of God*, 138.

⁸³³ ‘*Mysticism*’ in *Iran*, 64-65.

⁸³⁴ The hostility of the Twelver Shī’ī ‘*ulamā*’ against Sufism and practicing Sufis persisted well into the Qajar period, and much of the polemics and criticism of the Twelver Shī’ī ‘*ulamā*’ against Persian Sufis during the Qajar era was based on the polemics and doctrinal hostility of the Twelver Shī’ī ‘*ulamā*’ from the Safavid period. For more details

What is important to highlight is that the Sufis and the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' followed two opposing Ways of Islam—this is most exemplified by their different methodological approach to “true knowledge”. According to the Persian Sufis, who were the heirs of the same spiritual tradition as Lāhijī, real knowledge was the inner, mystical knowledge defined as *ma'rifat* by the Sufis. This category of knowledge was only accessible by Sufis who were initiated into the path of the *ṭarīqat* under the spiritual guidance of a living Sufi shaykh, and who followed the mystical path of *ṭarīqat* within the social setting of the *khānaqāh*. Real knowledge of God's Reality and *Wujūd* was entirely possible for the initiated Sufi through the consistent practice of various spiritual practices associated with the Sufi path.⁸³⁵ This mystical, experiential knowledge associated with the Sufi Way was considered superior to the exoteric, rationalist, and textual knowledge of the '*ulamā*', speculative theologians and philosophers, who all pursued their separate ways of knowledge within the educational institutions of the *madrasa*.⁸³⁶ For the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' on the other hand, the claims of the Sufis were completely false, and even heretical, since Sufism in their eyes was too associated with the Sunnī tradition. Indeed, for some from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*', many Sufis were just closet Sunnīs and were only formally and superficially Shī'ītes.⁸³⁷ The only valid knowledge in their eyes was the knowledge that they taught and were guardians of: the religious sciences dealing with *Feqh*, the study of the Hadiths of the Holy Imams and the Prophet Muḥammad, along with Imāmī theology rooted in the exegetical tradition of the Twelver Shī'ī tradition.⁸³⁸ For the opponents of the Sufis from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*', the sources from which the Sufis derived their mystical teachings and beliefs were considered to be unorthodox and even heretical, since they were largely Sunnī sources.⁸³⁹ In their minds, the only valid source for true knowledge and correct dogmatic beliefs for the Shī'ī believer, was the Quran and the numerous collections of narrated

see Oliver Scharbrodt. “Anti-Sufism in Early Qajar Iran: Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī (1732–1801) and His Risāla-yi khayrātiyya.” In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn (Irvine; California: Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2020), 327-363.

⁸³⁵ For a Persian Shī'ī-Sufi perspective on this important subject matter of *ma'rifat* and '*elm*', see Muḥammad 'Alī. Sabzvārī, Faghfoory, Mohammad Hassan, and Tabrizī, Najīb Al-Dīn Ridā, *Tuḥfah Yi-'Abbāsī: The Golden Chain of Sufism in Shī'ite Islam* (Plymouth: University Press of America, 2008), 95-120. And '*Mysticism*' in *Iran*, 83-86.

⁸³⁶ For more information on the way or methodology of knowledge of the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' and the specialised educational curriculum of the *madrasa* during the Safavid period, see Moazzen, *Formation of a Religious*, 208.

⁸³⁷ '*Mysticism*' in *Iran*, 69-70. And Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 425-24.

⁸³⁸ *Islam without Allah*, 106-14. And Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 581-82.

⁸³⁹ '*Mysticism*' in *Iran*, 48-51.

sayings of the Twelve Holy Imams and the Prophet Muḥammad. Since the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' specialised in the study and interpretation of Shī'ī hadiths to derive legal rulings and formulate the correct theological beliefs that every Shī'ī must abide by, it was they alone who possessed true and valid knowledge, and not the Sufis with their claims to direct spiritual inspiration, *ma'rifat* and unveiling.⁸⁴⁰ The Sufis and the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' then, on the level of epistemology and spiritual practice—and even in the way of *being* Muslims—were irreconcilably opposed. That is why there were few from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' who followed the Sufi Way, or identified themselves as Sufis during the Safavid period, in contrast to the comparative situation in Iran's Sunnī past, or the neighboring Sunnī states of the Ottoman, Uzbek and Mughal empires where many from amongst the '*ulamā*' were also practicing and devout Sufis.⁸⁴¹

Turner believes that the irreconcilable dichotomy that existed between the Sufis and the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' during the Safavid period came down to the fundamental difference of outlook and innate dispositions of the two different groups of Muslims. Turner characterises the outlook of the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*'—beginning with Shaykh al-Karakī, but also including such luminaries amongst the Twelver Shī'ī clerics as Mir Lawhī (d. after 1671), Muḥammad-Ṭāher Qummī (d. 1100/1689), and Muḥammad Bāqer Majlesī (d. 1110/1699)—as being

⁸⁴⁰ Andrew J. Newman, "Glimpses Into Late-Safavid Spiritual Discourse: An Akhbari Critique of Sufism and Philosophy." In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh & Leonard Lewisohn, (Irvine: Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2020), 275-84. And Sajjad Rizvi, "The Takfir of the Philosophers (and Sufis) in Safavid Iran." In *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam*, edited by Camilla Adang & et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 256.

⁸⁴¹ According to a recent research article written by Devin Deweese, the opposition, hostility and rivalry that defined the relationship between the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' and Sufis throughout most of the Safavid period was largely absent in Sunnī Central Asia. He states that, "the great majority of the Sufis of Central Asia whom we find mentioned in hagiographical sources that were produced in the region during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were also steeped in traditional Muslim learning—including sciences classed as exoteric—and quite often served in official or unofficial roles typically 'reserved' for the ulama." For more details, see Devin Deweese, "Sufis as the Ulama in Seventeenth-century Central Asia: 'Alīm Shaykh of 'Alīyābād and Mawlānā Muhammad Sharīf of Bukhārā." In *Sufis and their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn (Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2020), 89-100. And according to Michael Winter's research on Sufism during the Ottoman period of Egypt's history, many students studying at al-Ahzar during the Ottoman period, especially during the eighteenth-twentieth centuries, became affiliates of the Khalvatī *ṭarīqa*. He states that "the Khalwatiyya had a very elaborate system of mysticism and demanded a high intellectual and religious level of its adherents. The *ṭarīqa* became the dominant order among the senior ulama; Khalwati training became an integral part of the spiritual foundation of the Azhari elite... in many cases being admitted to the Khalwatiyya was a vehicle for the newcomer's socialisation as an Azhari '*alim*.'" For more details see Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society Under Ottoman Rule, 1517-1798* (London; New York: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 133-39.

“externalist”. What Turner means by this specific term is that the entire focus or approach of these individuals to the Islamic revelation was based purely upon the externals of the religion—the secondary branches of the faith that dealt with the teaching and propagation of the *sharī‘ah* that governed every aspect of the Muslim believer’s daily behavior and actions.⁸⁴² These externalists were preoccupied with the study and teaching of the massive corpus of Hadiths supposedly transmitted from the Twelve Holy Imams, and espoused to the Shī‘ī masses the correct theological beliefs of their Imamocentric theology, in which the fourteen immaculate ones were exulted far above the rest of creation, and Sunnīs and the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad were cursed.⁸⁴³ Those Muslims who were “internalist” on the other hand, best exemplified by the Sufis, were more concerned with the subtle, inner layers of mystical and esoteric meaning concealed within the revelation of the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. What was important for the Sufis and other internalists—such as the famous Safavid philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā—was the possibility of gaining a direct mystical experience of God’s Presence; as well as realised knowledge of His Reality that bypassed the workings of the limited rational faculty. The internalists, according to Turner, were concerned with the fundamentals of the faith, the Way that eventually leads to *ma‘rifat al-naḥs* and Realised knowledge of God (*ma‘rifat*).⁸⁴⁴

In contrast, the externalist opponents of the Sufis from amongst the Twelver Shī‘ī *fuqahā’* were only concerned with formulating religious rulings for the believer to abide by. The authority of the externalist was based upon their knowledge and mastery of the authentic sources of the Twelver Shī‘ī Hadiths, along with their knowledge of the classical, Imāmī exegetical tradition.⁸⁴⁵ Naturally, each group considered their Way of Knowledge as being superior to the other. In the case of the Twelver Shī‘ī *fuqahā’*, they did not accept the orthodoxy and validity of the Way of Knowledge of the Sufis and other internalists like them. The ability of the Twelver Shī‘ī ‘*ulamā’* and *fuqahā’* to propagate what they considered to be the true version of Islam—which was the externalist and dogmatic form—depended to a large

⁸⁴² *Islam without Allah*, 91.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid.*, 108-12, 116.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 120-34.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 173-80. And ‘*Mysticism’ in Iran*, 42-52.

degree on the continuing favour of the Safavid monarchs and court. The continuing financial patronage of the Safavid court was crucial not just for the rise of the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*', but also in maintaining their new found position of religious-social dominance and influence throughout the Safavid polity.⁸⁴⁶ The continuing patronage of the Safavid shāhs and other members of the ruling establishment also ensured that it was the externalist version of Shī'ism favoured by the Twelver Shī'ī '*fuqahā*' that became the dominant and exclusive religious creed of the Safavid state. This may be the reason why certain individuals from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*' reacted with such hostility to Shāh Abbas II's constant patronage of Sufis and those religious scholars of Sufi inclinations, such as Mullā Fayz -e Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679).⁸⁴⁷ The displeasure of the externalists to this increasing atmosphere of acceptability for all things related to Sufism during the latter half of the seventeenth century was made apparent with the growing frequency of anti-Sufi polemical books that were written by the externalists during this period. These books by the externalist opponents of the Sufis denounced Sufism's very religious legality and orthodoxy in the harshest of terms. We will now turn our attention to this chapter of the religious history of the Safavid dynasty in the following sections below.

11.4 The Twelver Shī'ī Fuqahā's Ideological-Religious Struggle against the Sufis during the Seventeenth Century

A curious but very important phenomenon occurred within the religious-spiritual culture of Safavid Iran during the latter half of the seventeenth century: the rise in authorship of anti-Sufi works by externalist Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*'. This attempt to discredit the Sufi movement in the eyes of the Iranian Shī'ī masses seems to have begun with the *Ḥadīqat al-Shī'a*, a Persian

⁸⁴⁶ *Superstition as Ideology*, 179-83. According to Ali Rahnema's research, Majlesī's lifework—his massive hadith compilation the *Behār al Anwār*—was only possible because of the massive financial support provided by the Safavid shāhs, either Shāh 'Abbas II or Shāh Suleyman. In Rahnema's own words, this is how far the Safavid shāhs went in their support for Majlesī's religious endeavours: "the Safavid King is said to have placed several pieces of his personal estate into an endowment, the proceeds of which were spent on the realisation of the *Bahār al Anwār* project. The wages paid to scribes also came from this fund. It has been suggested that a large majority of prominent sources of imitation (*marja'*) and learned scholars (*mujtaheds*), received a regular salary from the Safavi Kings, and at times the King even ordered a residential house to be purchased for them. The special attention that was given to Majlesī's project seems to have well surpassed the normal court-clergy financial relations." See more in *Superstition as Ideology*, 169.

⁸⁴⁷ Rudolph P. Matthee and Iran Heritage Foundation, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*. Vol. 17 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 183. For more details on Kāshānī's conflicting relationship with Sufism, see more in Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of," 84-134.

language work written by Pseudo-Ardabīlī in the Deccan in 1058/1648.⁸⁴⁸ This work contains an entire section which describes the “evil” characteristics of twenty-one Sufi sects that the author claimed were operating during his own time. The *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿa* is noteworthy within the history of anti-Sufi polemics written during the Safavid period, for as Andrew J. Newman’s research reveals, the *Radd bar Sūfiyān* by Ṭāher Qummī, another major anti-Sufi work written in Persian, was much influenced by and indeed followed closely the structure and ideas contained within the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿa*.⁸⁴⁹ Qummī’s other various anti-Sufi works are adaptations, reworkings, and further expansion upon his first major anti-Sufi work, the *Radd*.⁸⁵⁰ In his own research, Ata Anzali compiled a list of 26 anti-Sufi manuscripts written by the externalist Twelver Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* between the year 1633 to 1733.⁸⁵¹ Most of these works were written in Persian and reveal the depth of their animosity towards Sufism and its followers. The decision by these writers to write in the Persian language is significant, for it reveals the underlying motive of these authors, and that was to make their “writing more accessible to the Persian-speaking public under Safavid rule, and it reveals the authors desire to reach a broader audience. The anti-Sufi campaign was not aimed primarily at elite learned circles. Its goal was to change public perceptions of Sufism, thereby creating a hostile environment for the dervishes and Sufis.”⁸⁵² Newman considers that the number of anti-Sufi polemical works written by Twelver Shīʿī *fuqahāʾ* increased during this period in reaction to the increasing popularity of Sufi doctrines and practices amongst the Iranian Shīʿī masses, for “popular Sufi doctrine and Sufi-style practices were clearly spreading in this period... especially among the commercial and artisanal classes”.⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁸ Although this work was originally thought to have been authored by the Twelver Shīʿī faqīh and theologian Muqaddas Ardabīlī, recent research suggests that this work was not in fact authored by Muqaddas Ardabīlī. In the opinion of Kathryn Babayan, it is quite probable that Mīr Lawhī may have written the polemical section criticising the Sufis within the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿa*. See more in Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 284. J. Newman, who has done much research on this particular aspect of the religious culture of the seventeenth century Safavid Iran, believes that the polemical section of the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿa* is likely to have been written by Ṭāher Qummī. See more in Andrew J. Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran: The Authorship of the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿa* Revisited.” *Iran* 37 (1999): 102.

⁸⁴⁹ Newman, *Sufism and Anti-Sufism*, 99.

⁸⁵⁰ Newman, *Glimpses into Late-Safawid*, 264-92.

⁸⁵¹ ‘Mysticism’ in Iran, 38-42.

⁸⁵² Ibid, 42.

⁸⁵³ Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism,” 103.

What was it about Sufism, though, that their opponents found so objectionable, and why was compromise between the two groups utterly impossible? Both pseudo-Ardabīlī and Qummī, within their respective works, accuse the Sufis of numerous heresies, deviant beliefs, antinomian practices, and heretical innovations that are contrary to the teachings of the Holy Imams and the core religious beliefs of the Twelver Shī'ī community. They accuse the Sufis—since they are essentially the followers of Bāyazīd al-Besṭāmī (d. d. 234/848 or 261/875) and Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj—of believing in *ḥulūl* ('divine incarnation') and *ettihād* ("unification with God").⁸⁵⁴ They also condemn the Sufis for believing in the heretical teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī, mainly *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and for believing in predestination and *jabr* ("compulsion"), and denying the reality of free will, which is contrary to the correct views of the Twelver Shī'ī community and the Holy Imams.⁸⁵⁵ Qummī claims that since most Sufis followed Shabistarī and Ibn al-'Arabī—both believed in predestination as can be found in their writing—the Sufis, therefore, shared the same erroneous opinion as their deviant Imams.⁸⁵⁶ Qummī also strongly condemns the Sufi doctrine of passionate love (*'eshq*), which he considers to be a heretical innovation having nothing to do with the pure teachings of the Holy Imams.⁸⁵⁷ Because of this, Rumi, the most famous exponent of this particular doctrine of the Sufis, is condemned numerous times within Qummī's writing.⁸⁵⁸ For Qummī, love meant love for the Holy Imams only (and he uses the term *maḥabbat* instead of *'eshq*) where love was understood to be simply the expression of devotion and love for the fourteen Immaculate Ones by the Shī'ī believer. This love for the Holy Imams was limited to the religious pilgrimage of the Shī'ī faithful to the holy tombs of the different Imams and their family members, remembered and mourned their martyrdoms, exalted their virtues, and hated their Sunnī oppressors and enemies.⁸⁵⁹ Pseudo-Ardabīlī and Qummī also condemn the Sufi teachings on sainthood, especially Ibn al-'Arabī's teachings regarding the Seal of Saints. To Sufism's opponents, sainthood was nothing more than the Sufis acting like charlatans and claiming a sacred authority for themselves that

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., 97-99. And Newman, "Glimpses into Late Safawid," 264, 276.

⁸⁵⁵ Newman, "Glimpses into Late Safawid," 277, 291. And *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran*, edited by Ata Anzali and S.M. Hadi Gerami (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 41-42.

⁸⁵⁶ Newman, "Glimpses into Late Safawid," 265.

⁸⁵⁷ 'Mysticism' in Iran, 48-50.

⁸⁵⁸ Qummī, *Risāla-ye Radd bar Sufiyyān*, f 81b. Taken from Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 449.

⁸⁵⁹ 'Mysticism' in Iran, 48-50.

usurped the rightful and legitimate sacred authority that belonged exclusively to the family of the Prophet alone, especially the Twelve Imams. These Sufis were claiming co-partnership with God in their claims and teachings regarding sainthood, which was another proof of their heresy.⁸⁶⁰

Concerning the various Sufi customs and practices that they condemned in their writing, both Psuedo-Ardabīlī and Qummī condemned the Sufi practice of *raqs* (“dancing”), *ghinā* (“singing”), and the *samā’* (Sufi rituals of listening to poetry and music). These writers also condemned the Sufi custom of handclapping during the *samā’* and swooning in states of ecstasy.⁸⁶¹ Qummī also claims that Sufis like Rūzbehān and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, practiced free-love with boys and girls in order to attain the Divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*).⁸⁶² Both Qummī and pseudo-Ardabīlī also condemned the Sufi practice of seclusion and forty-day retreats and the distinctive dress adopted by the various Sufi sects.⁸⁶³ Qummī and pseudo-Ardabīlī also accuse the Sufis of engaging in antinomian practices that undermine the *sharī’ah*, like drinking wine, free-mixing with the opposite sex, and love-playing (*‘eshq-bāzī*) with adolescent boys—practices usually associated with the Qalandars and not traditional Sufi *ṭarīqas*.⁸⁶⁴ They also accuse the Sufis of dismissing the religious learning and exoteric knowledge of the Twelver Shī’ī ‘*ulamā’* in favor of the non-rationalist and mystical method of gaining knowledge of God’s *wujūd* which the Sufis favored above the formal learning of the ‘*ulamā’*. This attitude of the Sufis reveals their heretical nature and disrespect for the *sharī’ah* of Islam.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁰ Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism,” 97, 99. And Newman, “Glimpses into Late Safawid,” 280 & 291.

⁸⁶¹ Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism,” 97, 100. And Newman, “Glimpses into Late Safawid,” 263.

⁸⁶² Newman, “Glimpses into Late Safawid,” 267.

⁸⁶³ Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism,” 98. And Newman, “Glimpses into Late Safawid,” 265-66, 268.

⁸⁶⁴ Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism,” 98. And Newman, “Glimpses into Late Safawid,” 278. Rizvi, “The *Takfīr* of the Philosophers,” 255. It is highly likely as well that these critics and opponents of Sufism did not make any distinction between the traditional Sufi *ṭarīqas* who abided by the *sharī’ah* and the many different antinomian Qalandar groups that populated the religious-social milieu of seventeenth century Safavid Iran. According to the recent research of Lloyd Ridgeon, the antinomian Qalandars during the Safavid period started adopting the traditional habits and customs associated with the traditional Sufi *ṭarīqas* by residing in their own *khānaqāhs*. For more information on this fascinating subject, see Lloyd Ridgeon, “Short back and sides: were the Qalandars of late Safavid Iran domesticated?” *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2017): 82-115.

⁸⁶⁵ Qummī, *Tuhfat al-akhyār* (Qum: Intishārāt-I Nūr, 1973) 13-14. And Ardabīlī, *Hadīqat al- Shī’ī* (Tehran: n.p), 581. Taken from Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 419.

The above passages show that the criticism of Qummī and other like-minded Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* was quite thorough in its condemnation of the entirety of the Persian Sufi tradition. Newman's explanation for the possible historical causes of this anti-Sufi polemical movement which gathered force within the Twelver Shī'ī *'ulamā'* does hold certain weight. There certainly existed a growing interest amongst certain classes of Safavid Iranian society—especially from the urban classes—for Sufi-inspired practices and ideas. Anzali's arguments, on the other hand, are more convincing. He argues that the more puritanical individuals from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī *'ulamā'* wished to impose a more orthodox version of Twelver Shī'ism that was rooted in “rediscovered” classical Hadith collections of the Twelve Holy Imams, and which was not tainted by Iran's Sunnī past, especially by the remnants of Iran's Sufi culture and heritage that was actively preserved and even practiced and followed by the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* that were still in existence in Qummī's time.⁸⁶⁶ In order to achieve this social-religious vision for Safavid society, these puritanical Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* also tirelessly engaged in missionary activities wherein they promoted their exclusivist versions of Islam through their religious sermons from the *menbar*, and wrote numerous religious works propagating the true version of the faith to the masses. All of this was concurrent to their increasing doctrinal attacks and numerous polemics written in harsh denunciation of the entire Sufi movement and tradition.⁸⁶⁷ What pseudo-Ardabīlī and Qummī—and the highly influential Bāqer Majlesī in following generations—were attempting to do with their anti-Sufi works was discredit the entire discourse of the Sufis which, for centuries prior to the Safavid era, was one of the dominant Islamic discourses within Iranian society. The opponents of the Sufis wished to displace and delegitimise Sufi discourse with a new Islamic discourse that was deeply rooted in the rediscovered authentic Hadiths of the Twelver Shī'ī tradition. During this same period there was a growing movement amongst the Twelver Shī'ī *'ulamā'* to revive forgotten sources of Twelver Shī'ī Hadiths.⁸⁶⁸ Qummī and Majlesī were trying to propagate a form of Islam that they

⁸⁶⁶ *'Mysticism' in Iran*, 36-42, 49-51.

⁸⁶⁷ *Islam Without Allah*, 108, 173. And *'Mysticism' in Iran*, 36-51.

⁸⁶⁸ When commenting upon this particular aspect of religious-culture of Safavid Iran, Anzali states that “one of the most striking features of Shī'ī intellectual life in Safavid Iran from the decades of the seventeenth century till the fall of Isfahan in 1722 is the stunning pace at which the study of hadith became the dominant business of the ulama. In the frantic race to contribute to the formation of a new religious framework for the newly converted

considered to be the only true version of the faith, for they claimed that their version of Islam was derived from the legacy of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Twelve Holy Imams. In comparison, the Islam of the Sufis was heretical because it was derived from deviant Sunnī sources; mainly the four authentic collections of Sunnī Hadiths that pervades the earlier classical works of the Sufi genre. The Sufis also derived their teachings and ideas from Sufi figures who were well-known to be Sunnīs, like Rūmī and Ibn al-‘Arabī and others like them. In the eyes of the puritanical Shī‘ī ‘*ulamā*’, this Sufi version of Islam was not the Islam that was taught and practiced by the Twelve Imams and their faithful Shī‘ī followers.⁸⁶⁹

11.5 The Ascendancy and Dominance of Majlesī’s Brand of Twelver Shī‘ism and the Declining Influence of Sufism in the Closing Decades of the Safavid Period

Muḥammad Bāqer Majlesī is no doubt the most influential Twelver Shī‘ī religious scholar of the Safavid era, so much so that certain historians and scholars consider him to be the true founder of Iranian Twelver Shī‘ism.⁸⁷⁰ It would therefore be relevant to compare his discourse with that of the Sufis in order to discover why the two sects were so antithetical within the socio-religious culture of late seventeenth century Safavid Iran. For lack of space, we cannot analyse Majlesī’s entire Islamic discourse, yet it is nonetheless useful to make a brief comparison, as it is safe to say the form of Shī‘ism that is predominant in contemporary Iran today could be considered the legacy of Majlesī’s writing and missionary activities, which he had propagated and even imposed upon the Iranian masses in the closing decades of the Safavid era with the full political backing of the Safavid ruling establishment.⁸⁷¹ According to Moojan Momen, it was not until Majlesī arrived on the scene as the most influential *mujtahid* and ‘*alīm*’ during the reigns of Shāh Sulaymān I (r. 1076-1105/1666-94) and Sultān Ḥusayn (r. 1105-35/1694-1722)

people of Iran, the most pressing issue was not the reliability of the collected sayings but the need to find and popularise enough of them to replace the Sunnī canon with a new foundation of legitimacy and authority.” See more in ‘*Mysticism in Iran*, 36.

⁸⁶⁹ Newman, “Glimpses into Late Safawid,” 282. And *Mysticism in Iran*, 69-70. And *Islam without Allah*, 174-6.

⁸⁷⁰ According to the highly influential Indian Sunnī religious scholar and Sufi, ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz Dehlavī (d. 1176/1762), “it would be fair to call the Shī‘ī religion, Majlesī’s religion”. A.A. Talafiy-e Daryani, “Bahar al-Anvar, Dareyatolma’aref Shī‘ī in M. Mohrezi and H. Rabbani (eds.), *Shenakt nameh Allameh Majlesi*, vol. 2 (Tehran, 1378), 147. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 187.

⁸⁷¹ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi‘ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 114-18. And *Superstition as Ideology*, 184-99.

that Iranians had truly converted to Twelver Shī'ism. For "Majlesī exerted himself in the propagation of the dry, dogmatic, legalistic style of Shī'ism that he considered to be true Shī'ism. Up to this time, it would be true to say that Shī'ism had sat lightly on the population of Iran, consisting mostly of mere expressions of love for 'Alī and hatred for the first three Caliphs. Majlesī sought to establish Shī'ism firmly in the minds and hearts of the people."⁸⁷² Majlesī was largely successful, in part because of the vast political influence that he exerted upon the Safavid court during the reign of Sultān Ḥusayn. Through this influence he was able to impose his exclusivist and intolerant version of Twelver Shī'ism throughout the provinces and cities of Safavid Iran, especially in the capital of Iṣfahān where he also unleashed a pogrom against the Sufis of the city, forcibly shutting down their *khānaqāhs* and expelling them from the capital, even killing some Sufis in the process.⁸⁷³ His success was also a result of his tireless missionary efforts to propagate his exclusivist Islamic discourse through the many books he wrote in Persian—largely derived from his major life's work, the *Behār al-Anwār*, his encyclopedic compilation of Arabic hadiths of the Twelver Shī'ī tradition which were largely forgotten and discarded by preceding generations of Twelver Shī'ī *ulama*, and which runs to 111 volumes in its modern edition.⁸⁷⁴ His many works—in which he expounded the Twelver Shī'ī creed, primarily in simple Persian, for a popular audience—played a significant role in establishing the supremacy of his version of Twelver Shī'ism as the dominant form of the Shī'ī faith within the Safavid domains. This version of the faith would continue to be the dominant form amongst the majority of practicing and believing Shī'ī Iranians, even up to the present day. One major reason why Majlesī's numerous works found such a wide readership amongst the masses was because "his simplistic and rigidly dogmatic statements of what he saw as the tenets of the Twelver Shī'ite creed were more digestible for the masses than the teachings of the philosophers".⁸⁷⁵ Majlesī is also an important historical figure when considering the changing dynamics between the '*ulamā*' and the Sufis in the closing decades of the Safavid period. Majlesī himself was a student of Qummī—arguably the intellectual driving force behind the anti-Sufi movement—and

⁸⁷² Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'ī*, 116.

⁸⁷³ Lewisohn, "An Introduction to the History", 440. And Michael Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nader Shah from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 29-30.

⁸⁷⁴ *Superstition as Ideology*, 167-73.

⁸⁷⁵ *Islam without Allah*, 169.

as Qummī's student he inherited the religious cause of his teacher and his puritanical predecessors amongst the Twelver Shī'ī '*ulamā*'.⁸⁷⁶ This mission consisted of the need to purge the heretical stain of Sufism—the last vestiges of Iran's Sunnī past—from the spiritual-religious landscape of Safavid Iran. Majlesī, therefore, assimilated into his Islamic discourse the anti-Sufi polemics of pseudo-Ardabīlī, Mir Lawhī, and Qummī, and made this component of his religious message an essential aspect of his own discourse and theology on the Twelver Shī'ī creed.⁸⁷⁷ One proof of Majlesī's intolerance towards the Sufis was his uncompromising hostility to the Sufi belief and teaching of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. In his short work the '*Aqā'id al-Islām*', he condemns the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as constituting "the greatest unbelief".⁸⁷⁸

Other than the most distinguishing feature of Majlesī's Shī'ism—its externalist and exoteric outlook—Majlesī devoted much space within his books, such as *Ḥelyat al-Muttaqīn*, to detailing the proper etiquette of the Shī'ī believer in his everyday life, down to the most mundane of tasks, such as "how he should dress, eat, take ablutions, cut his nails, urinate, and so on; the prayers he should recite on entering the bathroom, the verses he should repeat when blowing his nose, in short, everything pertinent to the most minute and seemingly trivial of personal acts".⁸⁷⁹ Of course all of these recommendations and religious obligations are sanctioned according to the narrated reports of the Holy Imams themselves, even though Majlesī did not seem too concerned with verifying the authenticity of the reports that he personally compiled, and which he relied upon as the foundation for his theology and legal rulings.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., 154-9.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., 174-6. And Rizvi, "The Takfir of the Philosophers," 252-3. According to Turner, Majlesī's own views on the Sufis and the spiritual tradition of Persian Sufism is almost identical to the hostile views of his puritanical predecessors. In Turner's own words, "the practice of silent and loud zikr is condemned as a heretical innovation by Majlesī for it has no scriptural basis. All innovations, Majlesī asserts, are forms of misguidance, and misguidance leads to the hellfire. Not content with such heresies, the Sufis have also violated the fundamentals of belief; Majlesī vehemently attacks the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and accuses the Sufis of believing in predestination." See more in *Islam Without Allah*, 174. On the same page, Majlesī—like pseudo-Ardabīlī and Qummī before him—also condemns the different Sufi *ṭarīqas* for such heretical innovations and practices as "singing and dancing (*sama*), group invocation and recitation (*dhikr-e jallī*), abstention from meat, laxity in the observance of *shari'a* regulations, seclusion from society and so on." Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Majlesī, '*Aqā'id al-Islām*', 48. Taken from Rizvi, "The Takfir of the Philosophers," 252.

⁸⁷⁹ *Islam without Allah*, 167.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 171-2. And *Superstition as Ideology*, 184-9.

One essential aspect of Majlesī's religious discourse is his deep sectarianism and intolerance of Sunnīs and their faith. The sectarian nature of Majlesī's discourse is apparent in his hatred and cursing of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and Uthman, who he blamed for usurping the Caliphate from Imām 'Alī. Majlesī also teaches his Shī'ī readers that they must also hate and curse the enemies of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, meaning the Sunnīs.⁸⁸¹ According to Majlesī, one cannot claim to love the family of the Prophet if you do not also hate their enemies. Therefore, to be a proper and true Shī'ī, according to Majlesī's teachings, it was necessary for the pious Shī'ī to hate the most revered companions of the Prophet Muḥammad. Even though it was well-known by their Shī'ī rivals that the Sunnīs universally revered the closest companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, yet according to Majlesī, "the real sources of abomination, evil, disbelief, sin, and transgression are Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and Uthman, who should also be held responsible for the endurance and persistence of disbelief on earth".⁸⁸² And according to numerous Hadith narrations attributed to the Holy Imams, Majlesī argues that "the followers of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and Uthman will go to hell".⁸⁸³ Majlesī also states numerous times through his books that there was no doubt 'Umar and Abū Bakr and those Muslims who believed that they were Muslims were infidels.⁸⁸⁴ What Majlesī has effectively done within the passages of his book is to pronounce *takfīr* upon the entire Sunnī community. For it was well-known that revering and loving the closest companions of the Prophet Muḥammad was essential to the belief and faith of all self-identifying Sunnīs. Indeed, for most Sunnīs, they considered it impossible for anyone to be a sincere Muslim without loving the closest companions of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Besides his promotion of sectarianism and intolerance of Sunnīs that Majlesī identifies as being central to the Twelver Shī'ī faith, Majlesī also promoted pilgrimage towards the holy tombs and shrines of the Holy Imams and their descendants. Majlesī seems to have placed the pilgrimage towards the shrines of the Holy Imams and the Imāmzādas as being of equal or even superior value to the pilgrimage towards the Ka'bah.⁸⁸⁵ He also emphasised the mourning rituals over Imam Ḥusayn's martyrdom during 'Āshurā, and even states that weeping over the

⁸⁸¹ Majlesī, *E'teqādat*, 28. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 272.

⁸⁸² Majlesī, *'Ayn al-ḥayāt*, 453. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 279.

⁸⁸³ Majlesī, *Hayāt al-qolūb*, Vol. 5, 60. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 279.

⁸⁸⁴ Majlesī, *Jalā' al-'oyūn*, 88. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 287.

⁸⁸⁵ Majlesī, *Jalā' al-'oyūn*, 523, 525. Majlesī, *Hayāt al-qolūb*, Vol. 5, 497. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 278.

injustice suffered by Imam Ḥusayn and his family members was “the supreme act of worship” and the means to attaining paradise and salvation in the hereafter. Weeping over Imam Ḥusayn also increased the certitude and belief of the Muslim believer.⁸⁸⁶ Majlesi also argues that every Muslim must believe in the Imamate, and without believing in the Imamate of the family of the Prophet, no Muslim will be saved in the next life.⁸⁸⁷ This means that the Sunnīs will not be saved in the next life and will end up in eternal hell-fire, according to Majlesi’s religious creed, even if they believe in God and his Messenger. He also praised the virtues of temporary marriage (*mut’a*).⁸⁸⁸ He exalted the spiritual status and ranks of the Holy Imams above the rest of creation, even above the other Messengers and Prophets. He states that the Holy Imams possessed perfect and complete knowledge of all that existed in the past and all that will occur until the Day of Judgment.⁸⁸⁹ Majlesi also states that the current version of the Quran that Muslims read every day is not the complete and authentic version. The complete Quran will only be revealed to the Muslim community once the Hidden Imam returns—holding the real copy of the Quran in his hands—to govern the *ummah* at the End of Days.⁸⁹⁰ Majlesi, therefore, shares the belief of certain members of the Twelver Shī‘ī ‘*ulamā*’ who stated that the current Quran was corrupted by ‘Uthmān, and the real Quran—which only Imām ‘Alī was in possession of—disappeared for unknown reasons with the occultation of the Hidden Imam. Of course, this presents unavoidable problems for those Twelver Shī‘īte religious scholars who held such a view, for then it would imply that God had failed to preserve the Quran—which he promised to do so to his Messenger. And believing in the corruption of the Quran—for Sunnīs, who constitute an overwhelming majority of Muslims in the world—amounts to a form of unbelief. That may be the reason why an overwhelming majority of Twelver Shī‘ītes today do not share this problematic belief in the corruption of the Quran, even though their greatest theologian and jurist of the Safavid period, Majlesi, expressed this view in his own writings. Majlesi seems

⁸⁸⁶ Majlesi, *Jalā’ al-‘oyūn*, 21-22, 522. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 279.

⁸⁸⁷ Majlesi, *E’teqādat*, 28. Majlesi, *‘Ayn al-ḥayāt*, 109. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 271.

⁸⁸⁸ Majlesi, *Haqq al-yaqīn*, 354. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 272.

⁸⁸⁹ Majlesi, *E’teqādat*, 28-9. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 270.

⁸⁹⁰ Majlesi, *‘Ayn al-ḥayāt*, 92, 450. Majlesi, *Majmu‘a-ye Rasael-e E’teqādī*, 110. Taken from *Superstition as Ideology*, 276-77.

to place a higher value upon the transmitted narrations of the Holy Imams above the Quran itself, as a source of Twelver Shī'ī religious beliefs, practices, teachings, rituals, and customs.⁸⁹¹

11.6 Conclusion

This previous section of this chapter has presented a concise summary of the essential principles of Twelver Shī'ism as propagated and taught by Majlesī to the recently converted people of Safavid Iran. What should become apparent is how different this form of Islam is to the Sunnī Islam practiced by the overwhelming majority of Muslims and the mystical Islam of the Persian Sufi tradition. If one were to read the most influential works of the Persian Sufis—the *Gulshan-e Rāz* of Shabistarī, the *Maṣnavī* of Rūmī, the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn al-ʿArabī, and the many Persian commentaries written on the *Fuṣūṣ* during the medieval period—or the earlier classical works of the genre which were written as treatises and guiding manuals for Sufi initiates—such as the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* by ʿAlī Hujwīrī, *ʿAwāref al-maʿāref* by Abū Hafs ʿUmar Suhrawardī (d. 632/1245) or the *Merṣād al-ʿebād* by Najm-al-Dīn Rāzī—they would be hard-pressed to find the core beliefs, teachings, or religious rituals that constitute the dogmatic, *sharīʿah*-orientated and sectarian form of Twelver Shī'ism preached by Majlesī and Qummī. The numerous opponents of the Sufis from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī *ʿulamāʾ* in the closing decades of the Safavid Empire were not completely wrong in their convictions that the Islam of the Sufis was entirely incompatible with Twelver Shī'ism, especially on the plane of doctrine and theological beliefs. Shī'ism's externalist version of the faith was a particular point of difference, and this eventually became the dominant version within the Safavid socio-religious milieu through the missionary efforts of Majlesī and his like-minded followers and predecessors from amongst the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahāʾ*. The principal reason why the Sufis and the externalist Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahāʾ* conflicted during the Safavid period was because they inherited two entirely different spiritual traditions of Islam. The Persian Sufis of the Safavid era—and by extension in the following Qajar period—were inheritors of a spiritual tradition deeply rooted in Iran's Sunnī past. Sufism had for centuries developed within the theological and legalistic framework of the mainstream Sunnī tradition, as exemplified in the life and works of the Imām al-Ghazālī, who harmonised

⁸⁹¹ *Superstition as Ideology*, 204-13.

the Persian Sufi tradition with mainstream Sunnīsm through his influential works, the *Ehyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* and the *Kīmīā-ye sa’ādat*.⁸⁹² Before the Safavid era, the Persian Sufi tradition was accepted as a legitimate branch of the various Islamic sciences within most Sunnī societies, especially in Iran. This is why it is difficult or even impossible to discover any trace of Twelver Shī’ī beliefs and teachings within most of the Persian Sufi works produced prior to the Safavid era. This historical connection between the Persian Sufi tradition and Iran’s long Sunnī past was undeniable and could not be argued away, regardless of the revisionist attempts made by certain Sufis during the Safavid and Qajar period.⁸⁹³

Those elements that constitute the core of Majlesī’s Twelver Shī’ism—such as cursing and hating the closest companions of the Prophet; weeping over the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn, which Majlesī teaches to the pious Shī’ī masses is the highest act of worship in God’s eyes; his Imamocentric theology where the Holy Imams are considered the greatest out of all of God’s creatures, only after the Prophet Muḥammad himself; and the necessity of believing in the Twelver Shī’ī concept of Imamate in order for any Muslim to be saved from the hell-fire in the next life—are completely absent from the greatest and most influential works of the Persian Sufi tradition. You would be hard-pressed to find any such identical Twelver Shī’ī beliefs in the works of Lāhījī, the Persian Sufi prior to the Safavid era who was most likely to have been a Twelver Shī’ī. But even Lāhījī’s alignment with Twelver Shī’ism is doubtful. As for Majlesī, Qummī, Mir Lawhī, and other like-minded Twelver Shī’ī *fuqahā’* who shared their externalist outlook, there was no doubt that the Islam promoted by the Sufis was entirely different from their own version of the faith. They, therefore, considered the teachings of the Sufis to be a rival discourse for the Iranian Shī’ī masses. Most troubling for the opponents of the Sufis was

⁸⁹² For more information on the impact that Imām al-Ghazālī’s wedding of the Sufi tradition with mainstream Sunnīsm had on Sunnī societies and communities throughout history, see Al-Musleh, Mohamed Abu Bakr A. *Al-Ghazali the Islamic Reformer*. (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2019), 255-60. And see also Alexander D. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 140-9.

⁸⁹³ Qāzī Nūrullāh Shūshtārī, the Safavid historian and religious scholar who was also an initiate of the Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*, is perhaps the first and most important historical figure to write a revisionist history for the Persian Sufi tradition—where he presents all of the great masters of the Persian Sufi tradition as being Twelver Shī’ites who were doing *taqīyya* in order to disguise their true faith in his *Majāles al-mu’menīn*. See more in ‘*Mysticism*’ in *Iran*, 70. And also Reza Tabandeh, “Enraptured Sufi and Shi’ite Philosopher: Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh, Champion of Theological Reconciliation between Sufism and Shi’ism.” In *Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World*, edited by Reza Tabandeh and Leonard Lewisohn (Irvine: Jordan Centre for Persian Studies, 2020), 390-92.

the fact that the Sufis' internalist discourse was not rooted in the authentic sources of Twelver Shī'ī Hadiths. The externalist Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* were probably correct in their views that the teachings of the Sufis bore no historical relation to the Twelver Shī'ī tradition. For Sufism had emerged within distinctly Sunnī societies, mainly in the predominately Sunnī regions of greater Khurāsān and Abbasid Baghdād during the ninth to thirteenth centuries. Iranian cities that eventually became notable centres for the Persian Sufi tradition during the medieval period, like Baghdād, Nīshāpūr, Shīrāz, Kāzerūn, Tabrīz, Herāt, Yazd, Shervān, and Azarbāyjān, were inhabited by people of the Sunnī faith; either of the Ḥanafī or Shafe'ī *māzhabs*.⁸⁹⁴ The Persian Sufi tradition's inescapable Sunnī heritage may have been the primary reason they endured such implacable hostility and criticism from their opponents within the Twelver Shī'ī *fuqahā'* during the Safavid era.

⁸⁹⁴ I. P. Petrushevskii, *Islam in Iran*, translated by Hubert Evans (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 303. For more information on the historical development of how Baghdād and Nīshāpūr became important centres for Sufism during the tenth to twelfth centuries, see more in Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 7-19, 60-71 & 96-98. And Margaret Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (1994): 427-42. For more information on Sufism in the cities of Shīrāz, Kāzerūn, Tabrīz, Herāt, Yazd, and the region of Azarbāyjān during the medieval period, see more in Muhsen Kiānī, *Tārīkh-e khānaqāh dar Irān* (Tehran: Ketābkhāneh-ye Tahūrī, 1369/1990), 199-234. Qummī was himself aware of this fact, as he states in his *Radd bar Sūfiyān*: "an important indicator is that in all those cities that are known to be centres of Shī'ism, such as Qum, Astarābād, Sabzavār, Jabal Amil, and Hilla, one cannot find a single ancient cloister [*khānaqāh*]. Even famous mystics like 'Aṭṭār and Jāmī, who have written books about Sufi masters and consider Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī as Friends of God [*awliyāh*], have not mentioned a single spiritual master from Qum, Astarābād, Sabzavār, Hilla or Jabal Amil." Qummī, *Risālah-ye Radd bar Sūfiyān*, Mar'ashī Library, MS 4014, ff 76a-b. Taken from Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs*, 424-25.

Conclusion

One of the main research aims for this thesis was to provide a historical contextualisation of Lāhijī and his seminal work of Sufism, the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz fī Sharḥ-e Gulshan-e Rāz*. While Lāhijī's historical importance within Sufism is recognised by most scholars in Iran today, he remains a relatively unknown figure in Western academia. Since Lāhijī was the author of the most popular and influential work of Sufism written in Persian during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era—the popularity of his commentary on the *Gulshan* perhaps even rivalling the works of Jāmī amongst the Sufis of the Persianate world at the time—I believe it is vital to introduce Lāhijī and his most significant work to a wider audience, especially in the West. Of course, Lāhijī was not merely an author of Sufi texts, he was also the most sought out *khalīfa* of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh. For most of his life Lāhijī dedicated himself to his role as an appointed Sufi shaykh of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakshīya *ṭarīqa* in the city of Shīrāz, where he guided a community of loyal dervishes at his *Nūrīya khānaqāh* close to five decades. Lāhijī, therefore, was also one of a number of charismatic and influential Persian Sufi shaykhs who exerted a spiritual, cultural, and even intellectual influence upon their local Iranian societies during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. It is time to shine a spotlight on Lāhijī and his masterpiece of theoretical Sufism which has undoubtedly left a lasting impact on the literary and theoretical aspects of the Persian Sufi tradition.

In the process of contextualising Lāhijī's role within the history of the Persian Sufi tradition, which I have done by providing a systematic exposition of Lāhijī's Sufi discourse in the *Mafātīḥ al-e'jāz*, I encountered a few historical problems. The first and most obvious problem was the exact nature of Lāhijī's religious faith, or in other words, the question of Lāhijī's true

confessional identity. In Iran today there exists a widely held assumption that Lāhījī was a Sufi affiliated with the Twelver Shīʿī tradition, along with the rest of the followers of the Nūrbakshīya *ṭarīqa*. Since the Sufis of the Nūrbakshīya *ṭarīqa* were one of the only few Sufi *ṭarīqas*, along with the Neʿmatullāhīya, to eagerly embrace the new Twelver Shīʿī faith during the early days of the Safavid era.⁸⁹⁵ Following this line of reasoning, many modern Iranian scholars and historians have therefore assumed that Lāhījī—as one of the most famous shaykhs and representatives of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakshīya *ṭarīqa* in the late fifteenth century—was undoubtedly a Twelver Shīʿīte himself. Yet if we attempt to make any claims regarding Lāhījī's true confessional identity based upon the available textual evidences, especially his commentary on the *Gulshan*, it is difficult to uphold the position that Lāhījī was exclusively a Twelver Shīʿīte Sufi. Instead, as for many Iranian Muslims living in the latter half of the fifteenth century, what ultimately defined Lāhījī's own religiosity was the quality of confessional ambiguity that permeated the socio-religious milieu of his era. In other words, one can discover elements of both Shīʿism and Sunnism within Lāhījī's Sufi discourse, without much doctrinal contradiction. To continue to identify Lāhījī strictly as a Twelver Shīʿīte Sufi is an anachronistic view that is untenable if we look at not only the available primary and secondary sources on the religious history of Iran during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era, but the textual evidence in Lāhījī's writing as well.

If Lāhījī was not a Muslim of the Twelver Shīʿī faith, is it possible he was a Sunnī like most Persian Sufis during the medieval period? Although this is not entirely outside the realm of possibility—judging by the fact that some of his teachings do align with the creedal beliefs of the Sunnī tradition—it is also difficult to make the case that Lāhījī was exclusively a Sunnī Sufi. Of course, when historians and scholars state that a certain Sufi of the past was a Muslim, we must also ask ourselves what kind of Muslim he or she was. For we know that throughout most of the history of Islamic civilisation there existed a diversity of Islamic traditions and sectarian identities that were in continuous co-existence. For example, most scholars today would define

⁸⁹⁵ For more information on the conversion of the Nūrbakshīya and Neʿmatullāhīya communities to the new Twelver Shīʿī faith in the early days of the Safavid period, see Ata Anzali, *'Mysticism' in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, S.C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 27-29 & Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 186-97

Rūmī's Muslim identity as a Sunnī-Ḥanafī-Sufi.⁸⁹⁶ This categorisation is not too far off the mark, since the available historical sources tell us that Rūmī was a devout Sunnī who closely followed the Ḥanafī *maḏhab*, and who also followed the teachings, customs and spiritual practices of Sufism. This same label could also apply to other influential Persian Sufi figures who were followers of the Ḥanafī *maḏhab*, such as Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jām and Hujwīrī.⁸⁹⁷ For those Persian Sufis who were followers of the Shāfē'ī *maḏhab*, like Imam al-Ghazālī and his brother Aḥmad Ghazālī, al-Qushayrī, Abū Sa'īd Abū'l-Khayr, Ibn Khafīf Shīrāzī (d. 371/982), Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Suhrawardī and many more, some researchers have applied the label of Sunnī-Shāfē'ī-Ash'arī-Sufi in their attempts to define their religious identity.⁸⁹⁸ And this is quite acceptable based upon what the available sources tell us, as Sufis like al-Qushayrī, Imam al-Ghazālī and Suhrawardī were devout Muslims strictly devoted to the Sunnī tradition, and happened to be followers of the Shāfē'ī *maḏhab* in matters relating to the *sharī'ah*, while in their theology they were known adherents of Ash'arism, and were simultaneously clearly affiliated with the mystical tradition of Sufism. Indeed, even during the later Ilkhanate period (which scholars like Judith Pfeiffer believe constituted the beginning of the era of confessional ambiguity in Iran's religious history), one can still apply the creative labels of Sunnī-Shāfē'ī-Ash'arī-Sufi to most of the influential Persian Sufi figures of this era. For example, important figures like Najīb-al-Dīn

⁸⁹⁶ For more information on Rūmī as a Sunnī who followed the Ḥanafī *maḏhab*, see Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West; the Life, Teaching and Poetry of Jalāl Al-Dīn Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 14-16. According to Lewis's extensive research on Rūmī, it is highly likely that in terms of theology, Rūmī was a follower of Māturīdism, like the overwhelming majority of Ḥanafite Sunnīs of Anatolia, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. For more details, see Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, 15-16.

⁸⁹⁷ For more information on Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jām as a Sunnī who followed the Ḥanafī *maḏhab*, see Shivan Mahendrarajah, *The Sufi Saint of Jam: History, Religion, and Politics of a Sunnī Shrine in Shi'i Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 29-32. And for more information on Hujwīrī as a Sunnī who followed the Ḥanafī *maḏhab* and the Māturīdī theological school of thought, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 104-107.

⁸⁹⁸ For more information on Imam al-Ghazālī and his relationship with the Shāfē'ī *maḏhab* and the Ash'arī theological school of thought, see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25-49. For more information on Aḥmad Ghazālī and his relationship with the Shāfē'ī *maḏhab* and the Ash'arī theological school of thought, see Joseph E. Lumbard, *Aḥmad Al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 26-47 & 54-64. For more information on al-Qushayrī, Abū Sa'īd Abū'l-Khayr and Ibn Khafīf, and their relationship with the Shāfē'ī *maḏhab* and the Ash'arī theological school of thought, see Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative*, 57-58, 98-99, 123-25. For more details concerning Suhrawardī as a Sunnī-Shāfē'ī-Ash'arī, see Erik S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: 'Umar Al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods*. Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, v. 71 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 57-136.

‘Alī b. Buzgush Shīrāzī, Ṣāfi ad-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334), Shabistarī and Ezz al-Dīn Maḥmūd Kāshānī can easily be described in this manner without much ambiguity and confusion.⁸⁹⁹

Yet the more we investigate the later medieval period, the more the categorisations used to define a Sufi’s “Muslimness” become problematic. This is especially the case for Lāhījī, as well as for many other Iranian historical figures who lived during the fifteenth century. Before we take our discussion further, we need to reject any notion that Lāhījī may have been an antinomian Sufi because of the difficulty of linking him with either the Twelver Shī‘ī or Sunnī branch of Islam. Nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout his commentary Lāhījī reveals himself to be a pious Muslim deeply devoted to the Islamic faith and the two main texts of the Islamic religion. Lāhījī quotes from the Quran and the Hadiths (mainly from Sunnī sources) on nearly every page of his commentary, and this shows that Lāhījī emphasised the need for the Sufi disciple to abide by the *sharī‘ah* and Sunnah at all times if he or she wishes to progress upon the mystical path of the *ṭarīqat*.

Where then does this leave us concerning Lāhījī’s religious identity? My textual analysis of the *Mafātīḥ al-e-jāz* reveals certain important facts concerning who Lāhījī was as a Muslim. Although there are clear Shī‘ī tendencies within Lāhījī’s discourse—especially in his reverence and love for Imam ‘Alī, and the exalted position that he gives to Muḥammad Al-Mahdī within the hierarchy of God’s Friends—the Shī‘ī nature of Lāhījī’s work is restricted chiefly to his discourse surrounding the identity of the Seal of Saints. In terms of his eschatology and theories concerning sainthood, there are clear elements of Shī‘ī messianism and millenarism that are discernible. However, in connection to his metaphysics and cosmology—which was heavily

⁸⁹⁹ For more details concerning Ṣāfi ad-Dīn Ardabīlī and his connection to the Shāfe‘ī *mazhab*, see Colin Turner, *Islam Without Allah?: The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000; 2001), 59. And for more information on Shabistarī as a Sunnī who was a follower of the Shāfe‘ī *mazhab* and the Ash‘arī creed, see Leonard Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistarī* (Guildford: Curzon Press, 1995), 33-39. And for more details concerning Kāshānī as a Sunnī-Shāfe‘ī-Ash‘arī, see Eve Feuillebois-Pierunek, “Izz al-Dīn Kāshānī and Abū al-Mafākhīr Yaḥyā Bākhārī: Proper Sufi conduct (adab) through the Eyes of Two Persian Authors from Different Brotherhoods in the 13th–14th Century.” In *Ethics and Spirituality in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 451. For more on Najīb-al-Dīn Buzgush, see Nūr-al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns men Ḥazrat al-Quds*, edited by Maḥmūd ‘Ābedī (Tehran: Entershārāt Sukhan, 1394/2015), 474-76.

reliant upon the specific terminology, ideas, and teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and his followers—Lāhijī was without a doubt a devoted Akbarī. This is proven by our systematic exposition of those sections of Lāhijī’s commentary which dealt with the important subject matters of the Perfect Man, the theological issue of predestination and free will and *waḥdat al-wujūd*. In his theological beliefs—especially concerning the contested issue of predestination and free will—he was much closer to the position of the Ash‘arites than the Mu‘tazilites. And in terms of his epistemology, Lāhijī was a clear exponent of *ṭarīqa*-based Sufism. He clearly disparaged the Way of Knowledge of the peripatetic philosophers and speculative theologians as being utterly useless and lacking of any real value for the seeker of knowledge. In the second last chapter of this thesis, our exposition reveals that Lāhijī was deeply influenced by the Love tradition of Persian Sufism. With its connection to beauty and witnessing, love played a fundamental role within Lāhijī’s form of Islam. Lāhijī himself could even be considered to be a follower of Rūmī in his adherence to the Religion of Love (*mazhab-e ‘eshq*), but within the strict framework of the Islamic tradition.

Where does this leave us concerning Lāhijī’s confessional identity? Or how are we to categorise Lāhijī’s own “Muslimness” within the historical context of later medieval and early modern Iran, which was also a phase of historical transition for most of the Islamic world? I believe the inability to clearly define Lāhijī’s “Muslimness” is an indication of broader hidden patterns of historical change which were occurring within Iran during the late fifteenth century, especially within the spiritual-religious domain of Persian civilisation. As most contemporary scholars have duly noted, the Safavid period constitutes one of the most important chapters of Iran’s long history. On the surface, the rise to power of the Safavids and the complete religious transformation of Iran from a predominately Sunnī land to a centre of the Twelver Shī‘ī faith, appears to be a complete rupture from Iran’s medieval Sunnī past. If we look at the early beginnings of the Safavid period from a different perspective, however, what appears to be a historical moment of complete rupture may have been a culmination of historical forces that were already at work during the fifteenth century. While I do not agree with scholars such as Jean Aubin, Marjane Mollé, Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr that Iran’s conversion to the Twelver Shī‘ī faith in the early modern period was somehow a natural progression beginning in

the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū era—for one cannot ignore the fact that much coercion, force and state-sanctioned violence was involved in compelling Iranians to convert to the new faith—nevertheless, as our research and textual analysis of Lāhijī’s text reveals, subtle, profound and broader changes were definitely occurring within the spiritual-religious domain of Iranian society during the closing decades of the fifteenth century.⁹⁰⁰ This thesis considers that the future transformation of Iran’s religious culture could already be discerned within Lāhijī’s text. Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan* was very much a product of its time, and since Sufism undoubtedly exercised an all-pervasive influence on the medieval Persianate societies of the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era, Lāhijī’s text can therefore serve as a valuable historical document that offers us a glimpse into the shared Islamic culture and world-view of large segments of the Iranian population in the closing decades of the fifteenth century—just on the eve of the Safavid revolution.

Perhaps the most notable feature of Lāhijī’s text, which also reflected the deeper historical changes that occurred within the Persian Sufi tradition during this era, was how deeply it was influenced by the Akbarī school of thought. From the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period onwards, the discourse of the Persian Sufis would be so profoundly intertwined with the terminology, ideas, and teachings of the Akbarī tradition, and from this moment onwards, it would be impossible to separate these two formerly distinct traditions of Islamic mysticism. This means that the discourse of the Persian Sufis within the following generations had essentially become Akbarīan in nature and content, but expressed in the Persian language and sometimes mixed with the poetic symbolism, imagery, and style of prose favoured by the Persian Sufi followers of the Love tradition.⁹⁰¹

⁹⁰⁰ Hamid Algar states that these scholars “have propounded the thesis that a heightened and reverential awareness of the Twelver Imams on the part of the Sufi orders active in post-Mongol times helped prepare the way for the acceptance of Shi’ism under the Safavids.” See more in Hamid Algar, “Naqshbandis and Safavids: A Contribution to the Religious History of Iran and Its Neighbours.” In *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbours*, edited by Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 32. For Nasr’s own views on this particular subject on the role that the Persian Sufi *ṭarīqas* played in preparing the Iranian peoples for the adoption of the Twelver Shī’ī creed during the Safavid period, see more in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Shi’ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History.” *Religious Studies* 6, no. 3 (1970): 229–42.

⁹⁰¹ In commenting upon the modern features of the Dhahabiyya and Ne’matullāhī Sufi *ṭarīqas* in Iran today, Leonard Lewisohn states that “finally the intellectual universe of both orders is still largely defined by the *wahdat al-wujūd* doctrines of Ibn al-‘Arabī as interpreted by his followers such as Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī.” See more in

Finally, what contributions has this thesis made to the growing literature on Sufism, especially Sufism in the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era? I have made clear in the introduction that while Leonard Lewisohn, Toshihiko Izutsu, and Henry Corbin have all mentioned the historical importance of Lāhijī and his commentary on the *Gulshan* to the history of the Persian Sufi tradition—especially in its theoretical and literary dimensions—there still exists a huge gap in knowledge. In the research done by these scholars, Lāhijī is largely presented as a peerless commentator on Shabistarī's *Gulshan-e Rāz*. Unfortunately, this has reduced Lāhijī to being a loyal follower of Shabistarī's Sufi doctrines and teachings, who rarely strays from Shabistarī's views as expressed in the *Gulshan*, and who until now has existed perpetually within the shadow of his more famous Sufi predecessor. Through my systematic exposition of Lāhijī's Sufi doctrine and thought in this thesis, I intend to bring Lāhijī out of Shabistarī's shadow and present him as an important historical figure of the Persian Sufi tradition. Lāhijī and his masterpiece of theoretical Sufism, the *Mafātih al-e'jāz*, are both worthy of research in their own right. Some may claim that Lāhijī's body of work, much like the other works of Sufism produced during the Timurid/Āq Quyunlū era, lacks originality. In other words, that Lāhijī's text does not make any significant contributions to the literature of the Persian Sufi tradition. While these claims are valid from a certain perspective, as Lāhijī's commentary repeats what has already been stated in older works of the genre, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Lāhijī's text was a highly influential work within the textual tradition of Persian Sufism. The continuing popularity of Lāhijī's commentary in Iran today, half a millennium after it was written, is indication of the impact Lāhijī's masterpiece of theoretical Sufism has had upon the wider Persian Sufi community, and even upon those Iranian Muslims with mystical inclinations who do not necessarily identify themselves with the culture and practice of Sufism.

During the course of my analysis of Lāhijī's commentary on the *Gulshan*, one research question I felt necessary to answer was: what were the historical reasons for the enduring popularity of Lāhijī's text amongst the wider Persian Sufi community, even up to the present day? Lāhijī was far from being the only author to write works on Sufism in the Persian language

Leonard Lewisohn, "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part II: A Socio-Cultural Profile of Sufism, from the Dhahabī Revival to the Present Day." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62, no. 1 (1999): 47.

during the later Timurid/Āq Quyunlū period. We can also mention the numerous works of Sufism that were written in Persian by such notable Sufis as Shāh Ne‘mat-Allāh Walī, ‘Alī Hamadānī, Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khwārazmī, Pīr Jamāl Ardestānī and Jāmī. The ideas articulated in these different works of Sufism were almost identical to each other. This should not be surprising, since the authors of these works were deeply immersed in the same intellectual-literary and mystical tradition of Persian Sufism. Then why was it that Lāhijī’s work eventually became more enduring in its popularity amongst Iranian Sufis of following generations than the works of these other authors who were perhaps more influential as shaykhs of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* than Lāhijī was himself? When comparing these works, the first thing that comes to mind is Lāhijī’s style of prose. His manner of expression is simple and possesses a clarity and lucidity that not only makes his lengthy expositions on the sciences of Sufism easy to comprehend, but at times also a joy to read. He maintains this quality of prose throughout the entirety of his text, which is a lengthy body of work consisting of 600 to 800 pages in its modern printed edition. Considering Lāhijī’s commentary on the *Gulshan* is thought by many to be a fully comprehensive work of the Persian Sufi tradition, this is quite an accomplishment. Henry Corbin is correct in his estimation of Lāhijī’s commentary as a kind of Summa Theologica of Persian Sufi doctrines, teachings, and beliefs, as it skilfully synthesises the two different streams of the Akbarī and Persian love traditions, producing a unified vision of the Sufi path which has attracted many generations of Sufis. One important factor that has contributed to the enduring popularity of Lāhijī’s work over and above the works of his Sufi contemporaries, is not only its reputation as the best commentary written on the *Gulshan*—which perfectly supplements the short work of the *Gulshan-e Rāz*—but also its reputation as an excellent independent work of theoretical Sufism. Lāhijī masterfully, and in simple and fluid Persian prose, provides systematic expositions on all the key ideas and teachings related to the Persian Sufi tradition within one body of work.

This brings us to another important feature of Lāhijī’s commentary: its intertextuality. Lāhijī’s work—very much like himself—was deeply embedded in the textual tradition of Persian Sufism. Lāhijī’s mind obviously lived in a large intellectual universe; a mental landscape that was deeply engrossed with the many classics of the Sufi genre. Lāhijī had a gift for effortlessly

weaving into his discourse the teachings and ideas of Sufi masters from the past, yet he did not engage in blind imitation; he assimilated and integrated their teachings into his own comprehension of Shabistarī's text. As a result of his mastery of past Sufi works, Lāhījī was able to produce his own fresh insights into various Sufi ideas, teachings, and practices that were being discussed amongst the wider Persian Sufi community of the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū era. For example, at times he simply quotes specific passages from older works of the Sufi tradition without adding his own interpretations or comments. At other times he reinterprets their ideas in a different light and employs them for his own purposes, often to harmonise with his own mystical experiences and spiritual insights as a qualified Sufi shaykh of the Kubrawīya-Nūrbakhshīya *ṭarīqa*. This is most evident in his discourse on *shāhīdbāzī* and in matters pertaining to human and divine love. Writing a commentary upon the short text of the *Gulshan*, therefore, presented Lāhījī a precious opportunity to present his own body of independent Sufi teachings to his contemporary disciples and readers. Those aspects of his teachings that happen to agree with Shabistarī's own teachings, should also be considered to be Lāhījī's own position on a particular subject matter relating to the Sufi sciences. But this should not be taken as an indication that Lāhījī was nothing more than a slavish imitator of his more famous Sufi predecessor and was wholly lacking in any creative insights or independent ideas of his own.

Lāhījī's work—as a concise summary, synthesis, and elaboration of the entire theoretical dimension of the medieval Persian Sufi tradition—is one of the most comprehensive works of Sufism written in the Persian language. This thesis, however, is necessarily limited in its scope and takes as its central argument that Lāhījī's commentary on the *Gulshan* was the most significant and influential work of Sufism written in Persian during the fifteenth century. Although I have attempted to provide the first systematic exposition of Lāhījī's Sufi doctrine and world-view in English, due to a limitation of space, certain aspects of Lāhījī's Sufi teachings were omitted from my analysis. One aspect of his Sufi doctrine that would have been worthwhile examining was his discourse on the world of imagination and its connection to his own mystical interpretations of Islamic eschatology and the afterlife. Another limitation of my thesis is that I did not rely upon the other written works of Lāhījī's—such as his *maṣnavī* poem the *Asrār al-*

shuhūd, and his *dīvān* collection of *ghazals*—as primary source materials when making research arguments and claims.

In future research, one might interrogate the research question of whether Lāhijī and his commentary on the *Gulshan* had any influence on the Twelver Shīʿī *ʿerfān* tradition.⁹⁰² The followers of this mystical and esoteric dimension of Twelver Shīʿism have historically been contrasted with the tradition of Sufism, traditionally associated with the Sunnī faith. Yet many scholars are also aware of historical connections between the Persian Sufi tradition and the Shīʿī *ʿerfān* tradition. Indeed, Ata Anzali, in his landmark study on the historical origins of the concept of *ʿerfān* during the Safavid and Qajar periods, states that the Shīʿī *ʿerfān* tradition is essentially a continuation of intellectual and theoretical Sufism, but bereft of its traditional institutional elements.⁹⁰³ During the Safavid period, institutional Sufism—represented by the various Sufi *ṭarīqas* and the *khānaqāhs*—certainly underwent an irreversible decline. Yet the heritage of medieval Persian Sufism did not completely vanish from the social-religious milieu of Twelver Shīʿī Iran. Theoretical and metaphysical Sufism survived and was, over time, decoupled from Sunnism and instead wedded to the Twelver Shīʿī tradition during the Safavid and Qajar periods. If the Shīʿī *ʿerfān* tradition can be considered a continuation of Sufism in its theoretical and intellectual aspects—but in another form—then one research question worth interrogating in the future is: did Lāhijī and his commentary on the *Gulshan* influence the formation of the Shīʿī *ʿerfān* tradition within Iran during the Safavid and Qajar periods?⁹⁰⁴ And since Lāhijī is considered by many within Iran today to have been a Twelver Shīʿī-Sufi, is it possible that those historical figures most responsible for the creation of the *ʿerfān* tradition within Iran—most notably Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1635-36) and Hādī Sabzavārī (d. 1289/1873)—were familiar with

⁹⁰² For more information on the historical relations between the Persian Sufi tradition and the Twelver Shīʿī *ʿerfān* tradition, see Mathieu Terrier, “The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shīʿī Scholars of Early Modern and Modern Times: Topics and Arguments” In *Shīʿī Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives*, edited by Denis Hermann and Mathieu Terrier (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 27-64.

⁹⁰³ Anzali, *‘Mysticism’ in Iran*, 232-34.

⁹⁰⁴ For more information on the relations between *ʿerfān* and the Persian Sufi tradition, see Alexander Knysh, “Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the legacy of Islamic mystical philosophy.” *Middle East Journal*, 46(4) (1992): 631-53. And see as well, Anzali, *‘Mysticism’ in Iran*, 69-156.

Lāhijī's work and drew inspiration from his commentary on the *Gulshan* to articulate their own philosophical-mystical teachings that were deeply rooted in the Twelver Shī'ī faith?⁹⁰⁵

Lāhijī passed away in Shīrāz the year 912/1507, which coincided with Shāh Ismā'īl's continuing conquest of *Iranshar* and the early consolidation and establishment of the Safavid empire. Since Lāhijī passed away at the dawn of the Safavid era, he lived most of his life in an age of historical transition from the later medieval to the early modern period. During the Safavid period, all aspects of Perso-Islamic civilisation would undergo profound—in some cases revolutionary—change as a result of the Iranian people accepting an entirely new religious dispensation, Twelver Shī'ism. As an integral component of medieval Iranian societies, Sufism would also experience long-term and permanent historical transformation during the Safavid era. Lāhijī's importance to the history of Sufism in Iran was not because he was an original and innovative Sufi thinker, but because he was the author of the most widely read work of Sufism produced during the Timurid/ Āq Quyunlū era, and fulfilled an indispensable role as transmitter, collator, and systematiser of the entire theoretical and scholarly dimension of the medieval Persian Sufi tradition for future generations of Sufis. Although the medieval form of Sufism would gradually vanish during the Safavid era, the ideals, ethos, doctrines, and teachings of the medieval Persian Sufi community were immortalised by Lāhijī within the pages of his famous commentary on the *Gulshan e-rāz*.

⁹⁰⁵ For more information on Mullā Ṣadrā and his connection to Sufism, especially to the Akbarī tradition which had a deep influence on Mullā Ṣadrā's mystical philosophy, see Zailan Moris, *Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason in the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra: An Analysis of the Al-Hikmah Al-'Arshiyyah* (London; New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 51-66. For more on Hādī Sabzavārī and his place within the Shī'ī *'erfān* tradition as well as his possible connections to Sufism, see Sajjad H. Rizvi, "Hikma Muta'Aliya in Qajar Iran: Locating the Life and Work of Mulla Hadi Sabzawari (d. 1289/1873)." *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2011): 473-496.

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