

## Allah Hu! (God, Just He!)

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In spite of their profound effect upon South Asian devotional traditions, the literary merits of the qawwali (*qawwālī*) genre have gone critically unnoticed. The word “qawwali” derives from the Arabic word “*qaul*,” which in general means “saying,” but more specifically refers to the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad; though the qawwali texts take stock of works of literature beyond those ascribed to the Prophet. In fact, it is through the qawwali tradition that many classical mystical texts are routed for mass consumption in South Asia. Qawwalis are instructional as well as entertaining. They frequently provide a significant counterweight to discourses generated from other sites of religious knowledge production, such as mosques and madrasas, thereby leading their audiences into an alternative world of spirituality—a world in which the gender divide is not as rigid, where ideological differences pertaining to an understanding of God and religion are accommodated, and where a circumvention of hyper-theosophical and scholastic discourse is possible through simple heartfelt sentiments.

The poetic strands that tie together many qawwali narratives through the technique of *girah bandī* (knot-tying) range from classical works of Sufism, such as the *Masnavī* of Jalālu' d-Dīn Rūmī and the ghazals of Amīr Khusrau, to verses composed by local poets. *Girah bandī* allows qawwals (qawwali singers) to embed invigorating variations on a single theme by interpolating poetry from disparate sources in order to create a coherent narrative.

The qawwali that is translated here was made popular by the acclaimed Hyderabadī qawwal, ‘Azīz Aḥmad Khān Varsī. The first stanza of the qawwali is a quatrain composed by Hyderabad’s most renowned Sufi poet Amjad Ḥaidarābādī (d. 1961), and the second stanza is the quatrain of the greatest Urdu elegist, Mīr Anīs (d. 1872). This qawwali impresses complex ideals on its audience by adopting finely wrought parables: the first (stanza 3) is a translation of a section of Rūmī’s *Masnavī*, and the second (stanza 5) and third (stanza 6) are

the exegeses of the ideas of *vahdat al-vujūd* (Unity of Being) closely tied to Muḥīu' d-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, the grand master of theosophical Sufism. The translators of these parables, Bēdam Vārsī (d. 1936) and Zāmin ʿAlī (d. 1855), are Urdu poets known for their lucid expressions of complex Sufi ideas.

The main locus of the first parable valorizes devotion as an intimately personal experience that is beyond even a prophet's comprehension. Also threaded into this parable is a devotional allusion to Lord Krishna, a manifestation of the Divine who at times appears as an adorable youth in his cradle. The second and third parables help the audience understand the ideal that all appearances are a manifestation of the One Real Being. The pivot of Muslim devotional life, the Ka'ba in Mecca, is itself invoked in the symbolic language of Lailā's veil, as God compares Himself to this dark-skinned, moon-like sweetheart of Islamic literature who drove mad her lover Qais (Majnūn). The mystical cadences that lace this qawwali come to life most notably through the tension-laden elision and reinforcement of differences in the relationship between God and His creation: Moses must recognize that his devotional path is different from that of the shepherd and Majnūn must come to terms with his Lailā by accepting her as God's splendid manifestation, a variation of Himself.]

### Stanza 1

From within my body's abode I called,  
 "Who dwells within this house?"  
 From the heart's threshold was heard a cry,  
 "God, there is none else but God!"  
 God, just He  
 God, just He  
 God, just He  
 God, just He

You, the One, ever lavishing mercy  
 Amjad, the one adrift on the path  
 habituated to transgressions  
 You, accustomed to clemency  
 Let us see who can exceed the other

**Stanza 2**

In the rose garden the zephyr yearns for You  
From the nightingale's lips Your talk springs  
In every hue Your majesty shines  
From every flower, Your fragrance emanates  
Neither will the roses last in the garden  
Nor their perfumes dwell there  
All these will perish for Your sake  
You alone will stay

God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He

**Stanza 3**

Once upon a time, a shepherd lived in a forest  
Like a full moon, eclipsed by clouds  
Always drunk with the memory of his Master  
The canopy of heaven, lying low on his earth  
Entangled in His remembrance, he grew weary one day  
In agony he cried out in dismay:  
“Why do You not come to my small hut?  
Does not my wilderness hold some charm?  
Come, come down from the heavenly throne to my home  
I'll quench my thirst by washing Your feet  
Waking up in the morning, I'll cleanse Your face  
Night and day I'll rock Your cradle  
Begging door to door, I'll gather goods for You  
Only after feeding You will I eat my fill”  
Such were his cries and rants  
When the honorable Moses passed his home  
With an anger-ridden voice roared this God's Prophet:  
“Watch the words you recklessly utter  
Imprisoned you hold this limitless light  
How wretched you are, O silly fool!  
Is God a mere human just like you?  
Certainly, you'll reap the wrath of this breach

By the rage of the Truth, you'll turn to ashes"  
Just when Moses racked his heart through  
God's revelation echoed:  
"What have you done Moses, what have you done  
From the Master you have sundered His slave  
You were sent to mend hearts  
You exist not to break hearts  
O you! Prescribed for the clever is their own path,  
A different way designed for the smoldering hearts

God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He

#### Stanza 4

One night, turning to the Truth, Majnun said:  
"My Master, Lord of all directions  
My pitiful state deserves clemency  
Have mercy on me, my Sustainer  
The cloak of my heart is sullied by infidelity  
Your slave has become Laila's lover  
Why did You make me Laila's lover  
Why did You disgrace me in Your eyes"  
Suddenly, a voice from the invisible issued:  
"My Majnun, do not bewail with such hurt  
If Laila's love fills you with anguish,  
Grieve not, for your Lord is with you  
It is love's calling to make Majnuns,  
It is my disclosure named Laila"  
Hidden behind that curtain is the Laila of both worlds  
Oh Bedam, there is a reason the Ka'ba dons the black cloak

God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He

**Stanza 5**

The moon-faced Laila asked Qais one day:  
“Whom do you pursue besides this dark one?”  
Enraptured, Qais rendered into words:  
“T’is but a secret, listen O Moon-lit one  
I am not Majnun, neither are you Laila  
I am not mad, neither are you black

God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He

**Stanza 6**

There is no quarrel over the “I”—  
This matter, free of qualms  
Those vanished in You alone gain honor  
Your presence looms at every turn  
No Other subsists, You and only You

God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He  
God, just He

Zamin Ali, annihilated in remembering  
God, just He, God, just He

—*Translated by Syed Akbar Hyder*