



EXPLORING THE WORLD OF MYSTICISM AND THE DIVINE LOVE IN RAFAT'S TRANSLATED WORK, *BULLEH SHAH: A SELECTION*

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Abstract

This study undertakes a critical exploration of the ethical consciousness and mystical sensibility embedded in the translated poems of Bulleh Shah as rendered into English by Taufiq Rafat. Bulleh Shah, one of the most influential Sufi poets of the Punjabi literary tradition, articulated a profound philosophical vision that transcends rigid social hierarchies, sectarian divisions, and societal boundaries. This research investigates how Rafat's translations preserve, reinterpret, and communicate the ethical and mystical dimensions inherent in Bulleh Shah's poetic discourse. The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the principles of Mysticism, which interprets literary texts through the lens of Pantheism, Divine Love, the Divine Beauty, and the development of the golden principles of Islam. By incorporating these theoretical perspectives, the present research examines how Bulleh Shah's mystical poetry functions not merely as a spiritual expression but also as a profound ethical discourse that critiques hypocrisy, intolerance, and moral corruption in society. Particular attention is devoted to thematic elements such as divine love, human equality, spiritual purification, and the rejection of superficial religiosity. These themes constitute the core of Bulleh Shah's Sufi philosophy and reflect a broader ethical vision. Furthermore, the research evaluates the extent to which Rafat's translation strategies successfully preserve the ethical depth, symbolic richness, and philosophical subtlety of the original. In addition to examining the ethical dimensions of the translated texts, the study also highlights the significance of translation as an essential cultural and intellectual practice that facilitates cross-cultural dialogue. Moreover, the research presents the thought-provoking ideas of Rumi and Shabistari about Sufism and divine love. Translation serves as a bridge, enabling the transmission of ethical ideals, spiritual insights, and literary traditions across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Through Rafat's translations, the ethical and mystical legacy of Bulleh Shah becomes accessible to an international academic and literary community. Ultimately, this research argues that Rafat's translations effectively convey Bulleh Shah's universal ethical philosophy and mystical worldview while maintaining the aesthetic and thematic integrity of the original works.

Keywords: *Bulleh Shah, Ethical Literary Criticism, Mysticism, Sufi Poetry, Taufiq Rafat, Translation Studies.*

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, Sufism has become an essential theoretical framework for propagating the golden principles of Islam, emphasizing the internal transformation of the soul to develop a man's connection with the Divine. This research has been conducted on the Sufi and philosophical ideas of Rumi and Shabistari presented in M. M. Sharif's book *The History of Muslim Philosophy* (1963). The Sufi concepts of Divine Love, Pantheism, and Divine Beauty have been applied to Taufiq Rafat's translation of the poetic collection *Bulleh Shah: A Selection* (1982). Sufism presents a comprehensive vision of human development in which ethical conduct and mystical experience are closely linked. The relationship between ethics and mysticism occupies a central position in Sufi philosophy. Mysticism is generally concerned with the inward journey of the soul and the search for divine truth, and ethics focuses on guiding human behavior and shaping social relationships. Sufi literature frequently explores how individuals can achieve both moral betterment and spiritual enlightenment through self-discipline, love, and devotion. The philosophical foundations of this relationship can be observed in the works of prominent Sufi philosophers such as Rumi and Shabistari. Both scholars emphasize the importance of inner transformation and spiritual development as a process of self-discovery. Their writings highlight concepts such as divine love, self-realization, and the struggle against the ego. According to their understanding, human beings often remain distant from spiritual truth because they are trapped within worldly desires. These ideas provide an important theoretical foundation for the present study and offer a useful framework for examining the ethical and mystical dimensions of Bulleh Shah's poetry.

Among the most celebrated Sufi poets of South Asia, Shah occupies a distinctive place for communicating profound spiritual ideas in simple, accessible language. Living during a period marked by social divisions and religious tensions, he challenged rigid interpretations of faith. His poetry reflects a strong commitment to both spiritual enlightenment and ethical responsibility, making his work particularly relevant for contemporary readers. He directs attention toward inner transformation and the recognition of a shared human experience. In Sufism, divine love is considered the highest form of love because it enables individuals to transcend selfish interests. The research explores that divine love functions not only as a spiritual experience but also as an ethical

principle. Through the transformative power of love, individuals can overcome hatred, prejudice, and division. This study also reveals the idea of humility, which promotes the dignity and equality of all human beings regardless of all differences. By rejecting discrimination, Shah presents a vision of society founded upon mutual respect and understanding. Through this perspective, he establishes a strong connection between mystical experience and moral conduct.

Another important aspect of the research is the emphasis on self-realization and self-awakening. These concepts are fundamental to Sufi philosophy because they encourage individuals to look inward and develop a deeper understanding of their true nature. Self-realization involves recognizing one's strengths, weaknesses, and spiritual potential, while self-awakening refers to the process of becoming conscious of deeper truths about existence and the Divine. The study consistently encourages readers to engage in self-reflection and to question superficial understandings of identity and knowledge. As the research explains, the key concepts of both Rumi and Shabistari emphasize the necessity of overcoming the ego to achieve spiritual enlightenment, and similar ideas are reflected throughout Shah's poetry. By promoting humility and self-awareness, they encourage individuals to free themselves from arrogance and develop a more compassionate and ethical approach toward life.

The research becomes particularly evident when considered within the context of contemporary society. Modern youth often face challenges related to identity formation, emotional instability, social pressure, and the search for meaning. In such circumstances, the ethical and mystical teachings of Sufism offer valuable insights into personal growth and self-understanding. Concepts such as divine love, humility, self-awareness, and humanity give way to many of the personal and social challenges experienced by young people today. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining the relationship between ethical understanding and mystical consciousness in Taufiq Rafat's English translations of his poetry. Since translation is an important medium through which literary and philosophical ideas reach wider audiences, Rafat's translated poems give a valuable opportunity to explore how ethical and mystical concepts are communicated beyond their original linguistic context. Therefore, the present study analyzes Shah's selected translated poems from a literary perspective informed by the philosophical ideas of Rumi and Shabistari. The research investigates how these concepts contribute to the construction of ethical understanding within the selected texts. By examining the interaction between ethics and mysticism, the study seeks to demonstrate that Bulleh Shah's poetry offers more than spiritual reflection; it presents a comprehensive ethical vision by addressing both individual and social concerns. Ultimately, this research highlights the continuing relevance of Sufi literature and illustrates how its teachings can contribute to a deeper

understanding of human values, spiritual growth, and ethical responsibility in the modern world.

2. Textual Analysis

Bulleh Shah is a celebrated and revolutionary intellectual of Punjabi poetry who has told the true concept of Divine Love through thought-provoking poetry. His figurative visualization confronted society's hypocrisy. His poetry mainly focuses on Sufism, Mysticism, and Self-realization. His stimulating poetry also articulates the beautiful relation between God and the human being. He criticized social insincerity and inflexible conventions. Through simple and thoughtful language, he encouraged people to look beyond religion and caste and to spread love and tolerance everywhere. His poems are found in Punjabi as Kafis. One of his famous lines from poetry is: "*Bullah Ki Jaana Main Kaun*" ("Bulleh, to me, I know not who I am"). This verse represents his deep, divine thinking and quest for self. The poetry of Bulleh Shah remains popular among singers, scholars, and readers across the world.

The poem *Strange Are the Ways of My Love* presents a confusing and unpredictable experience of love, in which both the peace and pain of love are shown as things that cannot be explained by logic or reason. It highlights the emotional uncertainty that gives a romantic attachment to the text. This is an idea of love found in Sufism as well, where love lies beyond worldly thoughts. It gives the feeling that God is lying in Man's heart. Bulleh Shah's poetry is rich in symbolism, imagery, and spiritual depth. In this poem, he depicts love as complex, contradictory, and transformative force. Woven into the fabric of his verses is the theme of The Mystery of Divine Manifestation. Shah asserts that true love lies in the heart of Man. The poem reflects the idea of Mysticism that depicts the whole universe as mirror of God, and He sees Himself in the part of this universe. At the heart of Bulleh Shah's Sufi lines, he explains that divine love is spreading its fragrance through every breath of lover. People search for God here and there, but in reality, He is present in their hearts. He is as near as the neck vein. In this poem, the poet uses an awe-struck, mystical, and paradoxical tone, the poem has literary devices like Refrain, Metaphor, and Imagery by saying:

"Wah Wah Ramz Sajan Di Hor"

"Dam e Zulf De Ander Phatty"

Through these lines, he describes being caught in "Tangled Hair" of the beloved, meaning that the soul becomes trapped in the divine beauty.

In his poem, *The Story of Creation* he describes the existence of Go (*Wahdat-al-Wujud*), stating that all human beings are created from one divine light (Noor). Moreover, his poem reflects the dark aspects of modernity and the materialistic nature of today's men. He reminds us of the real origin of our existence through his elegant poem by saying:

"Peer paighambar us dy barde, Ins Malaik sajde karde,

Sirr qadam de utty dherde, sab tu vaddi oh serkaar,”

These lines show that only God is the ultimate power before whom every man has to bow his head to remember his original place. The core idea of his poem is to realize that modern man is stuck in material things in this so-called world and forgets that he has to return to another world after death. Modern man has no time for self-realization because he has narrow visualization. There is a big gap between Shah's teachings and modern life. While he taught us to destroy our ego and find God within, modern society focuses on showing off and buying things. Sufism has become just 'aesthetic' instead of a true spiritual journey. The writer says that God is everything; He is thief who has stolen into the human heart and hidden Himself there. The writer also tells that today's man has a huge veil in which he hides his inner self and shows off his ego and pride. The poet gives an authentic message to modern youth to realize their inner self and understand true meaning of their existence. In this poem, he uses a contemplative and reverent tone.

Dogs are Better than You is also a powerful poem that shows the Sufi idea of Fana and Ita'at. In this poem, Shah adopts a subversive stance toward the harsh reality of a secularized world, where everyone is running after materialistic things and forgets their religious and social values. Modern man has become unfaithful and has no feelings like sympathy and love for others. One of the strong themes in this poem is True Devotion Vs Ritualism. It explains that people are pushing themselves in money-based worlds. They have become filled with hypocrisy that hides behind a facade of virtue. He depicts the dark and harsh reality of hypocritical society by saying:

*“You stay up all night to pray,
But dogs are sleepless too;
They're better than you.”*

Through these lines, he is portraying social injustice through the comparison of animals and human beings. In society, dogs seem to be profane, and humans to be sacred, but Shah uses Irony here to show that real sacrality lies in self-realization. In the thinking of Shah's poetry, “Ego” and “Greed” are real profanities that are commonly present in human beings. Simultaneously, the masses are obsessed with ostentatious material assets and external appearance, and the spiritual core has evolved into morally depleted, validating the poet's assertion that authentic significance is inherent, rather than superficial ostentation. The tone of this poem is biting and provocative. The writer juxtaposes human beings with animals, particularly dogs, to highlight human deficiencies such as betrayal, insincerity, and moral inconsistency.

Shah's poem, ***With Love My Heart Overflows***, serves as a radical manifesto for internal transformation. In an era where contemporary society is increasingly tethered to material accumulation and superficial data, Shah advocates for perpetual spiritual spring that defies the stagnation of the soul. He contends that the pursuit of Divine love is not a

static ritual but an ever-evolving revolution that begins only when the ego is dismantled. It explores how Bulleh Shah's call for 'grasping the point' (Phar nuqta) highlights the spiritual erosion caused by modern consumerist values. This is a powerful call for internal change. In today's world, we are obsessed with gathering money and possession but Bulleh Shah teaches us that true happiness comes from the soul's freshness. He explains that spiritual love is not a boring or static thing; instead, it is always growing and renewing itself (ever-evolving). The famous line,

"Reading thousands of books."

is a direct attack on how we view education today. We think that degrees and facts are only signs of "Success". The poem uses a jubilant tone to celebrate the perpetual nature of love, while the metaphor of the "Nuqta" serves as a critique of our modern, complex, and materialistic society.

3. Theoretical Framework

The current study has been done under the philosophical ideas of Rumi and Shabistari to propagate the ideas of the Divine Love, Divine Beauty, and Pantheism presented in M. M. Sharif's mystical work *The History of Muslim Philosophy* (1963). According to Sharif, Rumi's philosophical education is highly embedded in the Islamic teachings of Qur'an, Hadith, Jurisprudence, language and language. (p.51). Jalaluddin Rumi perceives Love as a transformative energy that transcends the constraints of reason to merge the human soul with the Divine, Mahmud Shabistari formulates the ontological structure by defining the physical realm as a diverse array of reflections of the one Divine Reality. Bulleh Shah proficiently translated these sophisticated Persian concepts into the accessible Punjabi tongue, challenging religious institutionalization and teaching that the Divine resides within the sanctuary of the heart.

3.1. Rumi's Mystical Philosophy and His Perception of Divine Love

Jalaluddin Rumi occupies an extraordinarily distinguished position for his profound interpretations of Divine Love, spiritual enlightenment, and the metaphysical relationship between humanity and Allah Almighty. His literary masterpieces, particularly the *Masnavi* (1926) and *Diwan-e-Shams Tabrizi* (1838), are not merely poetic compositions but spiritual discourses that explore the hidden dimensions of existence and the soul. Rumi's mystical worldview revolves around themes such as spiritual yearning, inner purification, transcendence of the ego, and reunion with the Divine source. According to him, the human soul experiences perpetual restlessness because it has become detached from its celestial origin. Consequently, worldly existence is perceived as a temporary state of separation, while humanity's ultimate aspiration is spiritual reunion with Allah Almighty.

3.2. The Cosmic Reality of Divine Love

The cornerstone of Rumi's mystical philosophy is the concept of Divine Love (*Ishq-e-Haqiqi*). He perceives love as the supreme force governing the cosmos and the most powerful means of attaining spiritual illumination. Unlike temporal and worldly affection, which is associated with physical attraction and selfish attachment, Divine Love is eternal, transformative, and spiritually purifying. According to Sharif (1963), Rumi's cosmic love "transcends all creeds and all philosophies" (Sharif, 1963, p.61) Rumi believes that love possesses the ability to eradicate arrogance, greed, hatred, and egotism from the human heart. Through the experience of Divine Love, the seeker gradually transcends material limitations and develops spiritual virtues such as humility, sincerity, compassion, patience, and wisdom.

In the Islamic mystical tradition, *Ishq-e-Haqiqi* (Divine Love) is conceptualized not merely as a sentiment but as a fundamental ontological pursuit. The Divine Love represents an exclusive orientation of the soul toward the Creator. Rumi illustrates this existential longing through the metaphor of the reed flute symbolizing the soul's inherent yearning to return to its divine origin. Divine Love acts as a transformative catalyst that eradicates the ego (*nafs*) and redirects the seeker's existence towards God's pleasure. Love possesses the metaphysical attributes transcending rational boundaries, allowing for a total surrender to the Divine.

3.3. Concept of Pantheism

Pantheism is a philosophy that brings reality and God together. According to pantheists, God is present in everything and everything is present in God. If we see the world, we see the manifestations of God in everything and every glance. Shabistari calls this world 'the mirror' in which God sees Himself. According to other religions, God created this world, but this world is a separate thing. In contrast to this idea, Pantheism holds that God and His creations are not separate. Basically, the word Pantheism is a combination of two Greek words: Pan (all) and Theos (God). It means that "God is everything."

3.4. The Mirror Metaphor

One of Shabistari's most famous mystical symbols is the Mirror Metaphor. He frequently describes the universe as a mirror reflecting divine beauty. Just as a mirror possesses no image of its own and only reflects whatever stands before it, creation cannot exist independent existence apart from Allah Almighty. First, it demonstrates that the creation cannot exist independently because a reflection depends entirely upon its source. Second, it suggests that the beauty visible in the world originates from **Divine Beauty** itself. Third, it teaches that external forms should not distract humanity from recognizing the spiritual reality reflected within them. The Holy Prophet (SAW) has said;

Allah is Beautiful, and He loves Beauty (Hadith).

According to Shabistari, this materialistic world is a mirror that beautifies the hidden characteristics of Allah Almighty. The universe has no independent existence, but it is the shadow of the Divine Light of Allah Almighty. He says that a mirror itself is nothing in reality, but it reflects the personality of the standing person in front of it, just as it is the world is nothing by itself, but it reflects the beauty of the essence of Allah Almighty. So, whenever we see anything (trees, stars, etc.), we actually see the attributes of God. Shabistari's famous idea is that we do not need to go far away in search of God; in fact, this Hidden Treasure (God) is present in every substance of the world. The entire world is proof of His presence.

3.5. The Superiority of Love (Ishq) over Intellect (Aql)

Another fundamental aspect of Rumi's philosophy is his emphasis on the supremacy of love (Ishq) over intellect (Aql). Although reason is valuable for understanding the external world, Rumi argues that it remains insufficient for comprehending Divine Reality.

3.6. Fana: The Annihilation of Ego

One of the most significant concepts in Rumi's mystical doctrine is Fana, which refers to the annihilation of the ego and selfish identity. According to Rumi, annihilation refers to a complete "surrender to the will of God" (Sharif, 1963, p.50). Pride, greed, jealousy, and attachment to worldly pursuits strengthen create spiritual distance from Divine Reality. Therefore, the seeker must undergo inner purification to attain spiritual enlightenment.

3.7. Shabistari's Mystical Philosophy and His Concept of Divine Reality

Shabistari occupies a highly distinguished position because of his profound interpretation of Divine Reality, spiritual consciousness, and metaphysical unity. His celebrated Persian masterpiece *Gulshan-i-Raz* (1311) is regarded as one of the most intellectually sophisticated texts of Persian Sufi philosophy. Imagery. Shabistari explains some of the deepest questions concerning existence, the soul, Divine manifestation, and the relationship between humanity and Allah Almighty.

3.8. Unity of Existence (Wahdat al-Wujud)

One of the central foundations of Shabistari's philosophy is the doctrine of Monotheism. *Wahdat al-Wujud*, or Unity of Existence. According to him, true existence belongs only to Allah Almighty, while the universe possesses no independent reality of its own. Sharif highlights Shabistari's monotheistic belief in the following words:

"There is nothing in existence except the One" (Sharif, p.61). Shabistari argues that human beings remain trapped in illusion because they focus only upon separation and external form. People see mountains, rivers, stars, animals, and human beings as isolated entities because ordinary perception cannot penetrate spiritual truth. However, enlightened individuals recognize that all existence emerges from one eternal source. According to

Shabistari, creation resembles waves appearing upon the surface of an ocean. Each wave seems separate for a brief moment, yet all waves ultimately belong to the same ocean. Similarly, all created things emerge from Divine Reality and eventually return toward it.

3.9. Hidden Treasure and Spiritual Awakening

Another profound aspect of Shabistari's philosophy is his interpretation of the mystical concept known as the Hidden Treasure. Creation emerged because Divine Beauty desired manifestation. The universe therefore serves as the arena through which Divine attributes become visible and recognized. Sharif highlights Shabistari's idea of the Divine Light in the following words:

“The divine light as pure light was a hidden treasure”. (Sharif, p.67)

According to Shabistari, spiritual realization cannot be achieved instantly. The seeker must pass through different stages of purification before attaining higher awareness. This inward journey requires discipline, sincerity, humility, patience, remembrance of Allah, and Divine Love. Therefore, the seeker must gradually purify the heart through spiritual struggle. As selfish desires weaken, Divine awareness increases. The heart becomes illuminated through remembrance and contemplation until the seeker begins witnessing Divine signs everywhere.

4. Literature Review

Chowdury (2026) explores the significance of Sufism in a world increasingly shaped by modern values, personal choice, and rational thought. The researcher suggests that Sufism offers a spiritual perspective that helps people to seek goals and inner fulfillment beyond material success and worldly desires. Sufi thought emphasizes the importance of spiritual experience alongside intellectual understanding. The study further indicates that Sufi values, including gratitude, patience, and humility, can help individuals cope with feelings of anxiety, dissatisfaction, and emotional uncertainty that often accompany contemporary life. In addition, Sufism promotes compassion, generosity, and concern for others' betterment, strengthening social bonds and encouraging a sense of collective responsibility. By providing both spiritual guidance and ethical direction, it enables individuals to develop a stronger sense of identity, achieve inner balance, and find meaning in an increasingly complex social environment.

Nasar (2025) researched Shah's translated poetry to highlight the socio-cultural variations of translation. She pays great homage to the popularity of Shah's poetry, which lies in his ability to challenge societal norms, religious dogmatism, and class distinction. Shah advocates a humanistic approach and emphasizes the individual's spiritual bonding with the Divine. According to her, the real essence of Punjabi poetry lies in its linguistic accuracy and cultural diversity.

Muhammad (2025) highlights the concern of trauma and identity loss among young people. Psychology suggests that trauma can disrupt an individual's sense of self,

cause confusion, emotional stress, and mental health issues. Sufism emphasizes inner purification, self-awakening, and a deep link with the Divine. The studies indicate that practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), meditation, reflection, and participation in spiritual communities can reduce stress, improve emotional stability, and strengthen a sense of personal meaning. The researcher contributes to this growing body of literature by examining how Sufi teachings support young people facing psychological and identity-related challenges. The study suggests that spiritual engagement can help individuals rebuild self-confidence, regain a sense of belonging, and transform traumatic experiences into opportunities for personal growth.

Akhtar and Hayat (2022), explore the idea of self and identity in the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal and Rabindranath Tagore. The study also argues that although both poets belong to different religious customs, they share a common idea of dignity, self-awareness, and confidence among the people. The study explains that spirituality plays a vital role in the poetic philosophies of both poets. Iqbal emphasizes the idea of *Khudi* (selfhood) through faith, moral power, and self-realization, while Tagore promotes humanism, love, and unity with nature as paths to spiritual growth. The researchers suggest that both poets view spirituality as a means of cultural identity.

Asghar (2021) also explores the complexities of translating Bulleh Shah's Punjabi poetry, particularly the cultural metaphors that carry deep social and spiritual meanings. The study suggests that language acts as a true representation of national identity and cultural preservation. Shah's poems are exquisitely rooted in Punjabi culture and local traditions. Shah's Sufi poetry is highly saturated with spiritual truths, pantheistic ideas, and a connection with the Divine.

Rasool, Akram, and Fatima (2020) analyze Bulleh Shah's poetry within the cultural and political landscape of the Mughal Era. They believe that Shah's poetic genius functions as a vital source for understanding the socio-religious forces of eighteenth-century Punjab. According to the authors, the Mughal Empire was marked by ethnic, cultural, and religious heterogeneity, which impacts the communal identities in the South Asian region. Against this backdrop, Bulleh Shah manifested as an influential poetic force who advocated concord and inter-communal empathy among differing spiritual denominations. (Rasool et al., 2020)

Sattar (2016) shows that Bulleh Shah's poetry is a path of resisting social, religious, and political pressures from his time. The study argues that his work is based on strict class systems, religious separation, and unfair power structures, and instead supports equal spiritual value and connection between people. Shah's poems are not just about mysticism; they also push for change by challenging common beliefs and inspiring personal spiritual growth. The researcher also highlights important ideas like love for God, freedom within

oneself, and standing up against dishonesty, which help shape Shah's image as both a spiritual teacher and a voice for social justice.

Saifullah (2016) analyzes the poetry of Rumi and Bulleh Shah. The study explores how both Sufi poets use poetic language to inspire people through the teachings of divine love. The researcher finds that both poets share common themes of universal love, purification of the soul, humility, and devotion to God. The study argues that love is presented as a path to spiritual growth and closeness to Allah, and purification of the heart helps a person overcome self-pride, hypocrisy, and worldly desires. The research concludes that the poetry of Rumi and Bulleh Shah promotes spiritual transformation, self-realization, and the ultimate goal of union with God.

5. Conclusion

This study examines philosophical concepts like mysticism, pantheism, divine love, and the divine beauty. Using mystical approaches of Rumi and Shabistari, the research highlighted that Bulleh Shah's poetry blends spirituality with moral guidance, showing that both are closely linked in shaping human behavior and understanding. The analysis shows that divine love plays a central role in promoting ethical values such as kindness, patience, and empathy. Love in these poems is not only a spiritual feeling but also a way of improving human conduct. The study also found that the idea of humanity is strongly emphasized, encouraging respect, equality, and tolerance among all people. In addition, self-realization and self-awakening are presented as important steps toward inner growth, while ego and pride are shown as barriers to moral and spiritual development. Finally, Taufiq Rafat's translation helps make these ideas accessible to a wider audience. Overall, the study concludes that Bulleh Shah's poetry offers meaningful ethical and spiritual lessons that remain relevant for modern readers, especially youth seeking purpose and identity.

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