

The Hierarchy of the Symbolism of Sexual Love in Bahā' al-Dīn Walad's (d. 628/1230) Mysticism and Its Possible Relationship with Hindu Shivalingam¹

SASSAN ZAND MOQADDAM



INTRODUCTION

Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad Walad (d. 628/1230), Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's father, was a great scholar and mystic. Known as 'Sultān al-'Ulamā' (King of the Scholars) during his lifetime and thereafter, he was a very much revered figure. Hagiographies often trace his line of descent back to the first caliph, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, though modern scholars doubt the veracity of this claim. Bahā' al-Dīn Walad spent most of his life in historical Khurāsān, where he was regarded as a highly esteemed scholar by many people, and as an object of hostility by rival theologians. Sometime around 610/1213, he decided to leave Khurāsān with his family for good, probably because of mounting hostilities, or maybe because he was wary of advancing Mongol armies. The family had a long journey that lasted several years, going first to Baghdad, then to Mecca for pilgrimage, before finally arriving and residing in Konya sometime around 626/1228. Very soon many notables in Konya became his ardent followers. However, he died two years after his arrival, leaving his family and his disciples in the care of his favourite disciple, Burhān al-Dīn Tirmidhī (d. 637/1239–1240). Tirmidhī gave special

¹ The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Ms Wendy Robinson and Dr Reza Shah-Kazemi from the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London for their thorough and in-depth editing of this essay. He would also like to thank Prof. Carl Ernst from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Prof. William C. Chittick from Stony Brook University in New York for reading the first draft of the paper and giving very useful feedback. The author had originally suggested a possible link between Bahā'-i Walad and some more mystical sects of Hinduism (Tantrism, for example), to which suggestion both knowledgeable scholars had reservations. Accordingly, the author omitted that conclusion. Although Prof. Carl Ernst also had misgivings about assuming any link whatsoever to Hinduism, the author thinks that the evidence presented here establishes such a link beyond reasonable doubt.

MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

D 3880



attention to Bahā' al-Dīn Walad's son, Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, to whom he once said: 'I wish you become one day a man as great as your father was; not greater, because greater than your father is not possible.' It was through Tirmidhī that Jalāl al-Dīn obtained much of the teachings of his father. However, he also had at his disposal the only book written by his father, called the *Gnostic Intimations (Ma'arif)*, which Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (henceforth Rūmī) read regularly throughout his life. The *Ma'arif* is a collection of Bahā' al-Dīn Walad's discourses and short notēs on his own spiritual experiences, and it had a significant influence on Rūmī and his disciples. This book is rather unique in the realm of Sufi mystical books for the kind of language it uses. It seems it was not intended for the general public, but rather for Bahā' al-Dīn Walad (henceforth Bahā'-i Walad) himself and perhaps for those disciples closest to him.

Using the symbolism of love to describe mystical subtleties is very common in Islamic spirituality, although significantly this nearly always pertains to a description of the beauty of the beloved: his or her lips, eyes, mole, and so on – and ultimately of union with the divine beloved, each metaphor having its own symbolic meaning in mystical interpretation. This article, however, refers to a subject matter relating to love that is somewhat different, namely *shahwat* (sexual desire)² and sexual intercourse, which is usually understood by Bahā'-i Walad in a positive sense. Such a topic has rarely been accorded a place in the aforementioned symbolism. Mystical texts of the Islamic tradition have very often viewed immersion in desire, particularly sexual desire, as spiritually destructive and morally detrimental in effect. In fact, all of the major world religions, in their legal, moral, and spiritual teachings, have more often than not warned against succumbing to sexual desire.

It is therefore surprising that the *Ma'arif* of Bahā'-i Walad seldom reproaches *shahwat*. Indeed, in the many instances where he mentions it (one hundred and ninety-three times in fact!) he almost always points to its having a positive dimension. In this, he can be distinguished from the way his son, Rūmī, deals with the issue: of the seventy-two occurrences of the word *shahwat* in the *Mathnawī* and the forty-two occurrences in the *Divān-i Shams*, almost all are in the context of reproaches; with the exception of some rare instances,³ there is no other direct evidence in any of his

² *Shahwat* can be translated as lust, concupiscence, appetite, desire, passion, or sexual desire, depending on the context. As no exact translation is possible, and as it is an important term in Bahā'-i Walad's work, the term has sometimes been left untranslated in this article.

³ Sassān Zand Moqaddam, 'Izdiwāj: Namad-i tabyīn-i ma'iyyat va idrāk-i 'ilm-i ladunni dar āthār-i Mawlawī, *Nāma-yi Farhangistān* 14/4 (1394 A.Hsh./2015), pp. 24–51 (p. 42).