

Haqiqat al-Fuqara:  
*Poetic Biography of “Madho Lal”*  
*Hussayn (Persian)*



*Commentary and translation by Scott Kugle*

*with Hussayn’s Poems (Punjabi)*

*Translated by Aditya Behl*

Sufi mystic Shah Hussayn was born ca. 1539 into a Muslim weaver family. When he was about ten years old, he was initiated into the Qadiri Sufi lineage by Shaikh Bahlul Darya’i, who lived in Chiniot, a village outside Lahore. He lived as a mendicant student, wandering in the empty lands outside the city walls by day and returning to stay at the shrine of Lahore’s patron saint, Ali Hujwiri, by night. At the age of thirty-six he had a profound spiritual experience while studying the Quran, when his teacher Sa’dullah recited the verse, “the life of the world is nothing but play and pleasurable distraction.”<sup>1</sup> Hussayn immediately resolved to throw off all constraints of piety and instead to live like a child at play, abandoning hypocrisy and ambition as well as fear of social disrepute.

Hussayn’s biography is preserved largely in one source, a lengthy Persian poem entitled *Haqiqat al-Fuqara* (The Truth of those Impoverished by Love), written by Shaikh Mahmud ibn Muhammad Pir, ca. 1662, just sixty-two years after Shah Hussayn’s death. The author’s father had been a companion of Shah Hussayn, while the author himself was a close attendant

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1. *Ma Hayyat al-Dunya ila Lab wa Lahw*. Quran: Surat al-Anam 6: 32. The Quran contains two separate verses that echo this phrase closely in *Surat al-Ankabut* 29: 64 and *Surat Muhammad* 47: 36.

of Hussayn's companion Madho. Although this source is quoted by all subsequent biographers in Persian and Urdu, biographers in English have ignored it. Passages are translated here for the first time into English.<sup>2</sup>

The poem recounts how Hussayn met and fell in love with Madho, a Brahman youth:



Madho was wondrous in his beauty and his grace,  
 A young man refined, noble Brahman by descent,  
 Tender and delicate—from the liquor of this youth's wink  
 the worshiper of grace would fall down flat drunk.  
 Raised as a Hindu, his faith was pure haughty infidelity—  
 stone-hearted, he flaunted beauty to oppress those ensnared.  
 Madho went out one day to steal hearts for sport,  
 riding through the streets with alluring arrogance and captivating pride.  
 On that same street Hussayn was reeling,  
 drunk with wine, surrounded by his loving companions.  
 In that state of ecstasy, he saw Madho's glowing face  
 and his heart wailed with a cry of delicious pain.  
 My friends, he cried out, look over there—  
 that young man has just stolen away my heart!  
 He lifted everything I had from me with a glance  
 he snatched my heart from my soul, swiped my soul from my body.  
 I'm dazzled with passion for this youth,  
 my friends, what should I do, I'm helpless in his grasp,  
 I'm a captive to the sorrow of being separated from him  
 I can't bear the burning fever of not seeing him for an instant!  
 When his companions heard him reveal this secret  
 they replied by revealing another secret:  
 O God, our friend Hussayn doesn't even know  
 who this boy is who is playing with his heart.  
 I know, insisted Hussayn, that my heart's curse  
 is a young infidel, who will raze the house of my faith to the ground.  
 With the graceful curls of his hair, this bare-chested idol  
 has tied up my heart, hung it from the sacred thread on his shoulder.<sup>3</sup>



He soon began to follow Madho wherever he went, and spent nights on his doorstep:



2. *Haqiqat al-Fuqara*, folio 30. The Persian manuscript is housed in Pakistan in Punjab University Library, number 3253/248 Farsi.

3. *Haqiqat al-Fuqara*, folio 38.