

## **Qalandariyāt; Symbolic Sufi Poetry or Heterotopic Anti-Genre? (With an Analysis of a Ghazal by Attar)**

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### **Introduction**

The poets of Qalandari poetry critiqued social and religious structures by creating characters such as Qalandar, Rind, Ayyar, and Kharabati, while also highlighting the controversial figures of certain marginalized minorities and social classes, such as Zoroastrians, Christians, and even non-believers who lived in voluntary exile from the Islamic community. In Qalandari poetry, the transgressions and violations of the hegemonic symbolic order in alternative spaces like “Kharabat,” “Monastery,” or “Deyr-e-Moghan,” which are often located on the periphery of cities and outside urban gatherings, can be compared to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque world and Michel Foucault’s heterotopia. Although these Sufi alternative spaces cannot always be directly equated with Foucault’s concept of heterotopia or “contradictory places,” their marginal nature and the unconventional behaviors of their actors (Qalandar, Rind, Ayyar, Kharabati, etc.) in transgressing sacred taboos and disregarding common religious sentiments and norms indicate that they operate in discord and contrast with the public space of society, similar to Foucault’s heterotopia. These alternative spaces—much like Bakhtin’s notion of the “carnival”—are liminal spaces where characters, behaviors, and phenomena can be displayed in a caricatured, theatrical, absurd, and deviant manner, thus “reversing” the conventional relationships of society.

### **Purpose, Methodology and Literature Review**

Research related to Qalandariyat can be divided into three categories. The first category pertains to the historical issues of Qalandariyat and its antinomic aspects in the Islamic world. Among these works, Karami Mustafa (2020) discusses the ancient history of Qalandariyat, Miller (2021) in his article “Shah Qalandar,” and Shafiei Kadkani (2007) in “Qalandariyat in History” have addressed these topics. The second category adopts an interpretative approach, examining Qalandari poetry as symbolic and encoded mystical poetry. Notable contributions in this area include Pourjavadi’s (1993) article titled “The Rind of Hafez” and Louison’s (2010) article “An Introduction to the Study of Hafez.” The third category analyzes Qalandariyat from a typological perspective. One significant study in this domain is Miller’s (2023) article titled “Genre in Classical

Persian Poetry,” which explores the distinctive features of Qalandariyat among other literary genres. In another article, Miller (2022) examines “The Poetics of the Sufi Carnival in Qalandari Ghazals,” analyzing Qalandariyat as an anti-genre and providing a historical and literary examination of the poetics of Qalandari ghazals within the primary framework of Persian and Arabic poetry. The aim of this research is to investigate the formation of the distinct structure of Qalandari poetry and the mechanisms that create its generic identity using a descriptive-analytical method.

### **Discussion**

Qalandariyat was a significant literary genre in the late 4th and early 5th centuries that critiqued social and religious structures through innovations in language and expression, employing symbols and metaphors of mysticism. By creating characters such as Qalandar, Rind, Ayyar, and Kharabati, and by highlighting the controversial figures of certain marginalized minorities and social classes, such as Zoroastrians, Christians, and even non-believers who lived in voluntary exile from the Islamic community, these poets addressed the critiques of societal frameworks. Through this type of poetry, they depicted a different world in which the values and norms of the social and religious community were inverted. The central theme of this inverted world was the “humiliation of official social relations,” or, as Suhrawardi described it, the “destruction of customs”. This symbolic rebellion in Qalandariyat against the prevailing social laws and system can be likened to Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia,” where, much like the European carnivals, all social and cultural values and norms are turned upside down. In Western culture, the carnival refers to real or imagined spaces where social, cultural, political, and religious values, institutions, and normative laws are trampled upon and ridiculed, transforming them into an “inverted world.” Mikhail Bakhtin considers the carnival as a counter-culture, a free and unrestricted space in opposition to the prevailing social order. In this space of symbolic inversion, norms are questioned; social hierarchies are disrupted, and everything that is elevated and sacred is subjected to mockery and demeaning imitation. Bakhtin places significant importance on the concept of the carnival as a celebration of “inversion and freedom,” asserting that the carnival creates a space where diverse voices are heard equally, and social hierarchies are temporarily dismantled. Similar to Bakhtin’s carnival, Foucault’s notion of heterotopia encompasses spaces, places, or situations that fall outside the usual order of society, challenging the prevailing social norms and regulations. These alternative spaces are worlds within other worlds that reflect and disrupt external realities by upending established norms. According to Foucault, cemeteries, taverns, prisons, ancient gardens, museums, etc., are examples of heterotopias. Essentially, these diverse spaces are created for individuals to reconstruct their desired otherness and distance themselves from the spaces that have become “habitual” for them, allowing them to engage in new experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Qalandari poetry can be viewed as a reaction against the dominant poetic traditions of the Middle Persian poetry period (such as panegyric, boastful poetry, and ascetic poetry) and operates as an anti-genre heterotopia. Although the roots of this poetic style trace back to the early Qalandari poets, it gradually evolved into a dynamic and diverse

literary movement through the innovations of later poets. These poets utilized techniques of inversion and created heterotopic characters to critique social and religious structures, producing various subgenres of this style that reflect the diversity and complexity of Qalandari poetry.

**Keywords:** Qalandariyat, Sufi Literature, Anti-Genre, Heterotopia.