

## BEDIL AND SUFI THOUGHT: A MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SELF AND THE DIVINE

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**Annotation:** Abdul-Qadir Bedil (1642–1720), a prominent Persian-language poet and philosopher from the Indian subcontinent, stands as a unique intellectual figure whose works blend Islamic mysticism, metaphysics, and poetic expression. Deeply influenced by Sufism, Neoplatonism, and classical Islamic philosophy, Bedil's philosophical system is marked by ontological ambiguity, self-inquiry, and a profound sense of metaphysical unity. This article explores the key tenets of Bedil's philosophical outlook, highlighting his contributions to Islamic thought and the Indo-Persian intellectual tradition.

**Key words:** Bedil, Sufism, metaphysics, mysticism, selfhood, ontology, Indo-Persian philosophy

## БЕДИЛЬ И СУФИЙСКАЯ МЫСЛЬ: МИСТИЧЕСКАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ Я И БОЖЕСТВЕННОГО

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**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается философско-мистическое наследие Абдулкадыра Бедиля (1642–1720) в контексте суфийской традиции, в частности — ордена Накшбандия-Муджаддия. Бедиль предстает не только как поэт, но и как глубокий мыслитель, стремившийся постичь суть бытия, природы "я" и пути к Божественному через самопознание (ма'рифат) и внутреннюю трансформацию. Особое внимание уделяется его связи с учением о единстве бытия (вахдат аль-вуджуд), его критике формального ритуализма и попытке выразить трансцендентные истины средствами парадоксального поэтического языка. Бедиль предстает как уникальный мост между восточной мистикой и рациональной философией, между шариатом и духовной истиной (хакикат), между словом и безмолвием.

**Ключевые слова:** Бедиль, суфизм, вахдат аль-вуджуд, ма'рифат, Накшбандия, поэзия, мистика, самопознание, исламская философия

Mirza Abdul-Qadir Bedil, born in Patna (India), is often celebrated as one of the most challenging and intellectually rich figures in Persian literature. Writing in an intricate and symbol-laden style, Bedil developed a philosophical and poetic system known as "Bedilism", which captivated thinkers in South Asia and Central Asia, particularly in Afghanistan, where his influence continues to thrive. His poetry, while aesthetically captivating, serves as a profound medium for metaphysical and ontological inquiry.

At the heart of Bedil's philosophy is the question of being (wujūd). Drawing on Ibn Arabi's concept of wahdat al-wujūd (unity of existence), Bedil posits that all perceived multiplicity is illusory. The apparent world is a shadow of the absolute, and reality is essentially non-dual. His work invites readers to contemplate the transient nature of the self and the universe, urging a return to the source of all being—God.

*"Every drop seeks the ocean because the ocean alone is real."*

Bedil's concept of the self (nafs) is heavily influenced by Sufi introspection. For Bedil, self-knowledge is both the path and the obstacle. He often questions the stability of identity, portraying the self as fluid, contingent, and ultimately an illusion in the face of divine unity. His poetry is filled with metaphors of mirrors, shadows, and veils—all symbolizing the soul's struggle to comprehend itself and the Real.

While Bedil is widely recognized as a poet of ornate complexity and imaginative richness, he must also be understood as a profound Sufi thinker. His worldview cannot be separated from Islamic mysticism—particularly the intellectual and silent disciplines of the Naqshbandi order. For Bedil, poetry became a vehicle of metaphysical exploration, with each verse offering a window into the soul's relation with the Absolute. Bedil was closely connected to the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order, a branch of Sufism that emphasizes:

Inner purification over outward ritual

Silent dhikr (remembrance of God)

Strict adherence to the Sharia while seeking inner transformation

Personal self-discipline, reflection, and spiritual guidance through a sheikh (murshid)

Unlike more ecstatic or antinomian Sufi orders, Naqshbandiyya teaches balance between sharia and haqīqa (external law and inner truth), and this harmony is clearly reflected in Bedil's ethical and philosophical writings.

One of the central pillars of Bedil's Sufi philosophy is the idea that true knowledge of God requires deep knowledge of the self. He echoes the famous Hadith:

*"He who knows himself, knows his Lord"*

For Bedil, this journey inward is not straightforward. The nafs (ego-self) is deceptive and must be stripped away layer by layer. His poetry is filled with metaphors of veils, mirrors, and mazes—symbolizing the labyrinth of selfhood that must be navigated to reach divine union.

*"In every form, my self was hidden,*

*I wandered to find me—then found Him instead."*

This mysticism is not passive or dreamy, but rigorous and disciplined, grounded in personal struggle (mujāhada) and self-negation.

Bedil's philosophical poetry is notoriously complex. He believed that language is inadequate to fully express metaphysical truths. Thus, he used paradox, allegory, and symbolic imagery not as rhetorical flourishes, but as necessary tools to hint at the ineffable. His verse invites contemplative engagement, often confounding logical interpretation in favor of mystical experience.

Bedil was deeply embedded in the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Sufi tradition, and his worldview reflects a synthesis of Islamic mysticism and philosophical rationalism. Unlike some earlier Sufi poets who emphasized divine love ('ishq), Bedil's mysticism leans toward intellectual mysticism, where gnosis (ma'rifa) is central. He emphasizes inner awareness, silence, and the dissolution of ego.

He often criticized superficial religiosity and dogma, advocating instead for inner transformation:



*"Not by the tongue, nor by the ear—true prayer is where the soul disappears."— Bedil*

Bedil's influence spread across the Islamic world, especially in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and India. His philosophy inspired poets like Ghalib, and scholars like Iqbal engaged critically with his metaphysical ideas. In Afghanistan, Bedil is revered as a national thinker, and "Bedilism" became a cultural phenomenon in the 18th–20th centuries.

Despite the obscurity of his style, modern scholarship increasingly recognizes Bedil's contribution as a bridge between philosophy, mysticism, and literature.

Abdul-Qadir Bedil's philosophy defies easy categorization. It is at once poetic, mystical, and metaphysical—rejecting dualities and embracing the paradoxes of existence. His legacy lies in his ability to express profound philosophical truths through evocative language, challenging readers to seek knowledge not only through reason but through inner reflection and transcendence.

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