

*Sufi Ghazal Operatic Poetry in the Light of Agape Love  
Theory with a Special Reference to Saira Peter's Collection*

*My Beloved Resides in my Heart*

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**Abstract:** *Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry's monothematic feature, agape love, has been discussed by philosophers, psychologists, and Sufi poets as the highest and purest form of love which is argued to offer the poets spiritual wellbeing. By relating the mystical and psychological contexts of agape love to the analysis of the Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry collection My Beloved Resides in My Heart (2015) by the first Christian Pakistani British Sufi opera singer Saira Peter (b 1975 -), this research paper investigates the positive influence of agape love on Peter's spiritual wellbeing. Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry is renowned for its profound expressions of agape love and longing for the Divine, providing a rich source for understanding the complexities of human emotions and their connection to spirituality through incorporating poetry and music. Therefore, Peter's Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry collection My Beloved Resides in My Heart is considered as a perfect example to illustrate the psychological dynamics and subjective experiences associated with agape love in her collection. This research paper aims to explore the mystical, psychological, and poetic interpretations of agape love, with a specific focus on Peter's poetic /musical depictions of agape love and her journey towards spiritual wellbeing.*

**Keywords:** Agape love theory, My Beloved Resides in My Heart, Poetry in music, Saira Peter, Sufi Ghazal Operatic Poetry.

الشعر الغزل الصوفي الأوبرالي في ضوء نظرية للمحبة الالهية مع إشارة خاصة إلى مجموعة

سائرة بيتر " حبيبي يسكن في قلبي "

**المخلص:** تمت مناقشة سمة الوحديّة في شعر الغزل الصوفي الأوبرالي ، وهي المحبة الالهية ، من قبل الفلاسفة وعلماء النفس وشعراء الصوفية كأعلى وأنقى أشكال الحب التي يُقال إنها توفر الرفاهية الروحية للشعراء . من خلال ربط السياقات الصوفية والنفسية للحب الأغابي بتحليل مجموعة الشعر الأوبرالي الصوفي الغزلي " حبيبي يسكن في قلبي " ( 2015 ) للمغنية الأوبرالية الصوفية البريطانية الباكستانية المسيحية الأولى، سائرة بيتر (١٩٧٥). يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة التأثير الإيجابي للمحبة الالهية على بيتر في مجموعتها الشعرية حيث ان الشعر الأوبرالي الصوفي الغزلي معروف بتعبيراته العميقة عن المحبة الالهية والشوق إلى الله، مما يوفر مصدرًا غنيًا لفهم تعقيدات العواطف البشرية وصلتها بالروحانية من خلال دمج الشعر والموسيقى . لذلك، تعتبر مجموعة اشعار الغزل الصوفي الأوبرالي " حبيبي يسكن في قلبي " لببيتر مثالاً لتوضيح الديناميات النفسية والتجارب الشخصية المرتبطة بالمحبة الالهية في مجموعتها . يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف التفسيرات الصوفية والنفسية والشعرية للمحبة الالهية، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على الصور الشعرية / الموسيقية لببيتر للمحبة الالهية ورحلتها نحو الاتزان الروحيني.

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## **I. Introduction**

Since the 1970s, the emergence of a tendency towards studying spirituality and psychology in relation to Sufi Ghazal poetry has been increased. There is a tied-up relationship between mysticism, psychology, and literature as demonstrated by Janet Sayers in *Divine Therapy: Love, Mysticism, and Psychoanalysis*. Sayers argues that divine therapy is seen as a wellbeing process that is mainly dependent on one factor namely unconditional love: “unconditional love / agape love that is acquired through spiritual / mystic experiences spiritual beliefs contribute to our well-being” (12). Accordingly, this research paper examines the tendency towards spiritual belonging in the intersection between Inayat Khan’s Universal Sufism and Eric Fromm’s (1900-1980) *The Arts of Love* (1965) with a special focus on Saira Peter’s *Morey Mann Mein Shah (My Beloved Resides in My Heart)* (2015). With regard to Saira Peter’s collection, *My Beloved Resides in My Heart*, this tendency towards spiritual belonging is demonstrated through clarifying the poet’s journey from despair to spiritual wellbeing in her experience of agape love and oneness with God.

The aim of this research paper is to read and examine Saria Peter’s poetry collection *My Beloved Resides in My Heart* in light of Eric Fromm’s theorization of agape love which is synonymous with: “respect, acceptance, and unconditional love” (43). The aspects of Fromm’s theory

of agape love are clear in Saira Peter's collection especially: "Mera Pakistan" (My Pakistan) (Appendix 1), "Unity, Faith, and Discipline" (Appendix 2), and "Skyfall" (Appendix 3), "Wind Beneath my Wings" (Appendix 4), "O Holy Night" (Appendix 5) "You Are my Friend" (Appendix 6), "Resplendent" (Appendix7), and "Oh Lord, My God" (Appendix 8).

Being a British Pakistani Christian poet, Peter is much influenced by the richness of her homeland's literature, the Pakistani Ghazal poetry; therefore, she presents her Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry all over the world giving the theme of agape love a new conception. Her Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry collection *Morey Mann Mein Shah (My Beloved Resides in my Heart)* introduces the theme of agape love for the Creator through her outstanding mesmerizing operatic performance of Sufi Ghazal poetry. Peter is well known for her Sufi Ghazal operatic performances to mainly highlight her homeland in a positive representation as clarified by Shah who states that: "she created the genre of Sufi Opera to take the universal spiritual message of our Pakistani elders to a global western audience" (50). Bringing her Ghazal opera poetry collection to analysis reveals amazingly the musical Ghazal characteristics which employ agape as the central context of her Sufi Ghazal operatic poems. As a soprano, The British Pakistani singer and songwriter Saira Peter successfully employs the musical operatic characteristics such as vocal techniques in singing poetry in her opera style which depicts her experience of agape love.

## **II. Sufi Ghazal Operatic Poetry: Background, Contexts, and Poetic Depiction**

To begin with, Ghazal genre originated around the sixth century in the Arabic culture which was mainly concerned with traditional themes such as: "wine, women, songs, and the elegiac lamentation over lost love" (Alizadeh 143). By the time Ghazal passed into the Persian culture from the early eleventh century onward, the genre has witnessed grand changes in its form and themes, from being merely a secular love poetry genre to be more spiritually focusing on agape/ divine love presented by the Sufis saints/ poets. Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry has developed surprisingly in both its form and themes.

First, Sufi Ghazal poetry has utilized the aesthetic functions of the traditional and operatic Ghazal poetry. As a genre of spiritual writing, Ghazal has succeeded in not only invading the Western literatures as a genre that has evolved in its formal features as a lyrical poetic form, but also as a genre which has proved: "capable of an extraordinary variety of

expressions around its central theme of love” (Shackle 11). Consequently, the form of Ghazal is welcomed to join the modern western forms of poetry. Similarly, when Ghazal genre was brought to opera art, the formal features of Sufi Ghazal poetry have changed. For example, Saira Peter not only employed in her Sufi Ghazal operatic collection the musical classical Sufi Urdu Pakistani style of singing known as gayaki- which mainly tackles the recitation of classical Urdu poetry, but also expanded the gayaki style to include modern/ English poetry to explore the theme of agape love in her works. In other words, she added her experience as an Opera singer (soprano) to the genre and decided to include English and modern poetry as well. When Ghazal genre is set to music, there are new components that have contributed to the presentation of this poetic innovation of Ghazal poetry. The operatic form of Sufi Ghazal poetry involves: “only a solo voice, some kind of melodic accompaniment, shadowing the vocalist as well as filling in interludes between the couplets” (Siddiqi 2). In addition, the vocalist or the singer of the Ghazal poem is either reciting some classical poetry with the help of a musical accompaniment or he/she sings his/her poetry. Consequently, Saira Peter who is the first British Pakistani Ghazal opera singer explaining her role as an Opera singer by saying: “I compose, sing” (Siddiqi 2). Saira Peter (b 1975- ), the first Christian British Pakistani female Sufi Ghazal Opera singer, has utilized both the Pakistani Ghazal style of singing known as “gayaki” and the western art of the opera to introduce the 21st century Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry. Through expressing her honor as being part of the world’s largest Sufi music gathering Sufi musical family, Peter lives her life through embracing the spiritual values of: “selflessness, love, and drawing close to God through spiritual songs” (“Saira Peter’s Performance”).

Second, the Sufi Ghazal genre’s themes tend towards discussing the spiritual perception of love, such as agape love. Sufi Ghazal poetry’s mono-thematic distinction is found to be agape love. Agape love is the universal love and comprehensive feeling directed towards The Creator. This type of love in literature is more spiritually inclined, to search for and attain spiritual wellbeing and balance. Agape love which means love for the creator is a central theme of Ghazal poetry. Likewise, Saira Peter utilized the opera platform for the sake of introducing an unconventional depiction of Sufi Ghazal theme that is agape love for the Divine.

Agape love, a term that originates from ancient Greek philosophy, is argued by Homer to be the highest form of love that has a great therapeutic function to mankind (Forsythe). Agape love was later adopted within the framework of mysticism, modern psychology, and Sufi Ghazal



poetry for its significance in various contexts. First, in spiritual traditions, agape love gained significant prominence within mysticism, particularly in Inyat Khan's, the founder Sufi Order in the West, Sufi teachings that emphasized the importance of agape love as a central aspect of spiritual growth and connection with The Divine. Second, in psychology, Eric Fromm explains that agape love is characterized by: "its unconditional nature which is not dependent on the actions, qualities, or worthiness of the recipient. Instead, it is freely given and seeks the well-being and welfare of others without expecting anything in return" (Fromm 8). Third, in Saira Peter's Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry collection attempts to portray the transformative power of agape love which is argued to help Peter to reach spiritual wellbeing after recovering from an alienated self, and to depict her longing and devotion for the Divine through the language of love and the imagery of a beloved.

In Sufism, agape love, that is argued to be of a great impact on the poets' attempts to move from dealing with their fragmented psyches to reaching spiritual wellbeing, could be best understood within the framework of Universal Sufism. Since the intersection between Sufism /mysticism and Sufi Ghazal poetry is always expected, one of the most influential Sufi masters in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West known as Inyat Khan (1882-1927) offered four practices / major traditional paths of Sufism that are argued to demonstrate the paths of agape love. This research paper employs Inyat Khan's fourth Sufi practice which is by about the path of love through Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry. In other words, Khan called the fourth Sufi practice as Chishtiyya which is mainly about the path of love that: "represented the spiritual ideal in the realm of poetry and music" (50). Universal Sufism was first depicted in Inyat Khan's International Sufi Movement that promotes both the necessity of perceiving divine love as a core component to reach spiritual wellbeing and the notion of religious pluralism. Universal Sufism -a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western Sufi order perspective- is not only a diverse global movement: "with members from all religious, cultural and national backgrounds united through the spiritual sciences", but also a path to God that promotes: "enlightenment, awakening and unconditional agape love" (Khan 51). Some of the many lessons Khan tried to highlight in his Sufi Order International Movement are mainly to highlight the journey of how to awaken one's spiritual awareness to love The Divine. Thus, agape love is considered as a central concept in Universal Sufism which is seen as the transformative force that connects individuals with the divine and fosters unity and harmony among all beings. During this journey of self-

realization and spiritual awakening, there is a diversity of the mystical practices that lead to a connection with The Divine through loving The Almighty God. Therefore, according to Inyat Khan, the main concept of Universal Sufism is mainly about its inclusion of all heavenly / non heavenly religions to reach union with the creator, as highlighted by The Universal Sufi Order followers / thinkers: “Sufism, in a nutshell, is a path of mass transformation that fosters a personal, tangible relationship with divinity” (“Spirituality for Everyone”). Similarly, the relationship between Christianity and Sufism is profound as explained by Hazrat Inayat Khan: “Christianity is pure mysticism, a mysticism of love: to judge no one, to forgive everyone . . . to come to that knowledge which instead of making you clever makes you innocent” (50). Moreover, one highlighted rule from the rules known as the Ten Commandments is uncovering Jesus’ belief in God’s agape when one of his followers asked him which of the Ten Commandments Jesus believed was the most important, Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (qtd. in “Jesus’ Teachings about Agape”). Taking Jesus’ preference for agape love into account and attempting to assume that agape love could be of “a great help in recovering from the alienated self” (Pentecostalism) that is argued to lead to healing; this is investigated in relation to the female mystic path experience by Saira Peter.

In psychology, agape love is often referred to as altruistic love or compassionate love. It is a concept that has been studied within the field of positive psychology, which focuses on understanding and promoting well-being and positive emotions. Psychologists have explored the psychological and emotional aspects of agape love, examining its effects on individuals and their relationships. Among the psychologists who explore the concept of agape love is Eric Fromm, a German American social psychologist and psychoanalyst, who delved into the concept of Agape Love and its significance. In his book *The Art of Loving*, Fromm demonstrates different forms of love, including agape love. He discusses the importance of agape love as a transformative force that can bring about personal growth, compassion, and a sense of interconnectedness with others. Fromm emphasizes the selfless and unconditional nature of agape love, highlighting its potential to create harmonious and fulfilling relationships. His work provides insightful perspectives on the significance of agape love from a psychological standpoint. Agape love, which can be defined as a selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love that transcends personal interests and desires, is a love that is not based on reciprocity or the expectation of something in return. Agape love is often

seen as a divine or spiritual love that is directed towards all beings, regardless of their actions or qualities. According to Erich Fromm, agape love, which he refers to as "mature love" possesses several characteristics or features, such as: "respect, acceptance, unconditional love, empathy and understanding, and freedom and equality" (20).

In Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry, this research paper relates Eric Fromm's features of agape love paradigm, respect, acceptance, and unconditional love to Saira Peter's *My Beloved Resides in my Heart* (2015) to illustrate her journey from self-alienation to spiritual wellbeing. A closer look at her Sufi Ghazal collection reveals amazingly the musical Ghazal characteristics which employ agape as a central theme in her works.

The first feature of agape love paradigm in Peter's Sufi Ghazal opera is how respect and acceptance that are necessary features of agape love are connected to her homeland Pakistan; therefore, Peter dedicates four of her operas to her homeland, Pakistan, "Mera Pakistan" (My Pakistan) (Appendix 1), "Unity, Faith, and Discipline" (Appendix 2), "Skyfall Operatic Adaptation" (Appendix 3) and "Wind Beneath my Wings" (Appendix 4). In order to reach spiritual wellbeing, Fromm examines the part of agape love paradigm that is involved with a deep respect and acceptance of the other person's individuality and uniqueness as a major aspect of experiencing agape love which will lead to spiritual wellbeing. In other words, a selfless act of supporting one's culture could be considered as a step in this spiritual journey towards spiritual wellbeing. Saira was experiencing a state of despair especially during the Indian- Pakistani war period. Peter uses her Sufi Ghazal Operatic poetry to address the intolerant hatefulness that is being directed towards Pakistan especially after the Pakistani-Indian War to defend Pakistani heritage and image. Even though Saira Peter constructs the theme of agape love as a core concept in her works, she explores the idea of agape love in different ways; first, she chooses to support her homeland, Pakistan; and second, she expresses her love and gratitude for the Divine.

As a lyricist, composer, and singer, Peter truly tries to support her homeland Pakistan in every possible way, through singing a Sufi Ghazal opera "Mera Pakistan" (My Pakistan) (Appendix 1) in which she changes in the formal features of her usual performance by replacing the stage of performance to be filmed in Pakistan in the form of video. As a founder of this Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry, Peter chose to convey the theme of her pride for Pakistan by depicting the mesmerizing scenery of Pakistan/monuments and professions, and a list of the famous influential authors,



scientists, singers, businesswomen, businessmen, and professions, into a video mixing between her operatic performance of the Urdu version of the Pakistani national anthem with the photo of all Pakistani figures that represents Pakistan. Peter starts her performance through getting dressed a gown of Pakistan's flag with a crown to represent Pakistan. Here, the operatic poet speaks of Pakistan in Urdu Language without English subtitles to say implicitly one fact about Pakistan that its musical language, breathtaking scenery, strongly flashy green flag, spacious Islamic mosques, amazingly decorated monuments, tasty beverages and food, and all kinds of professions represent one notion about Pakistan that it is an independent country with lots of natural resources and technological advancement.

Moreover, in her Sufi Ghazal opera "My Pakistan", Peter changes the medium this time to utilize the visual and auditory technicalities to draw a realist attractive picture of Pakistan to the world. From the very beginning, Peter chooses adjectives connoting holiness to describe her homeland: "Blessed be sacred land/ Happy be bounteous realm / Symbol of high resolve/ Land of Pakistan / Blessed be thou citadel of faith" ("Saira Peter's Pakistan National Song Aye Sar Zameen"). Peter managed to give the audience a great exciting beat and rhythm to highlight the epic tone of her operatic poem to match the patriotic feeling the poet has. When describing Pakistan as a citadel of faith, Peter wants to highlight the fact that although some might accuse Pakistan of religious conservativeness as a Christian citizen, she clarifies that Pakistan is a place for faith in God with no prejudice against different religious beliefs. With regards to the fact that she could have sung in English, she chose to sing in Urdu, which is a classical version of the Persian language to show off the beauty and musicality of this language. She only uses the English subtitles when it comes to introduce the biography of the famous influential male / female Pakistani figure. As a soprano, Peter adds a new instrument (drums) to her band in this song particularly when she says: "this is My Pakistan" in order to empower the refrain: "Mera Pakistan/ My Pakistan" "Saira Peter's Pakistan National Song Aye Sar Zameen", she employs an extended metaphor when describing Pakistan as a dear person who belongs to the poet. Also, the operatic poet uses in this operatic poem the chorus to add more enthusiastic emphasis to the extended theme of Pakistan's image which is sung at the same time of displaying the famous / common people of Pakistan; this adds an epic element of performing the song as to show that all the citizens share the same mindsets. Then, the operatic poet goes on describing her homeland, Pakistan, in very positive images as if Pakistan is a kind of drink that is a

very popular drink that is preferred by all Pakistani people to show how Pakistan is loved among all genders, religions, and classes. Peter ends her Sufi Ghazal opera by a collage of all the figures previously introduced in the video drinking the same drink known as “Vital” and repeated the same refrain “My Pakistan” which show a great personal image of Pakistan the poet has in her mind. As a proud vocalist and lyricist, Peter ends her work with her aspirations for her homeland: “May the nation, the country, and the State / Shine in glory everlasting / Blessed be the glory everlasting” (“Saira Peter's Pakistan National Song Aye Sar Zameen”). Peter employed her role here as a soprano to stress the one wish she has for her homeland which is everlasting glory. This operatic filmed poem shows how Saira Peter loves her homeland, Pakistan, not only as her homeland, but as vital part of the globe that deserves more attention and appreciation. Peter doesn't reveal her identity or religion in this poem, as all she wanted to do is to attract the readers' attention to Pakistan in its best representation. Peter deliberately chooses to ignore talking about her “self” completely and she chooses to speak about Pakistan instead. To reconcile or get her soul back, she had to diminish the ego / self completely. The poet wants salvation, so she dies in Christ to relive through her homeland, Pakistan. Janet Sayers, a post Freudian critic, who emphasized the positive outcome of religion in an attempt to understand human behaviors, argues that: “the spiritual joinery that merges love, religious and mystical experience would lead to illumination of the oneness and exploration of divine therapy” (20).

Saira Peter dedicates another Sufi Ghazal opera to her homeland, Pakistan, in an empowering portrayal in her operatic poem “Unity, Faith, and Discipline” (Peter) (Appendix 2). Saira Peter utilized the Pakistani National Anthem, and she successfully performed it in the form of Sufi Ghazal Operatic poem. For example, Pakistani national anthem title is ordered in that sequence: “Unity, Discipline, Faith”; however, Peter chose to rename her Sufi Ghazal operatic poem in that order “Unity, Faith, and Discipline”. Additionally, Peter used that order of adjectives as the title of her Sufi Ghazal Operatic poem, the poem refrain, and as the signature couplet. Since Peter is a patriotic citizen of Pakistan, she not only follows the same theme of the Pakistani National Anthem that is the expression of pride and love of her homeland, but also dedicated another Sufi Ghazal operatic poem to Pakistan. Like the national anthem format that is a three – stanza poem, Peter wrote this poem in three couplets. She also imitated some imagery from the anthem but with some changes to the imagery, to suit the performance. For instance, the poet uses religious positive

metaphors to describe her homeland Pakistan, first representing it as the source of faith: “citadel of faith” (Riaz 2). Also, the poet employs another metaphor when describing Pakistan as the sun: “*Pakistan, The Light of the Planet*” (Peter). The poet describes Pakistan as the source of light / guidance in the whole planet to show how Pakistan has such an impact on the universe. Peter ended the performance with an emphasis on the three core concepts of Pakistan’s identity: “Unity, Faith, and Discipline”. Peter feels the urge to remind the audience of the importance of the notions: unity, faith, and discipline by giving us a rising intonation when she sang that part in her performance, as by sticking with these notions, Pakistani people can achieve anything they want to achieve. Despite the fact that Peter is a Christian British citizen too, she never abandons Pakistan in her performances. Knowing the fact that Pakistan is known for its Muslim identity has made Peter aware of the existence of difference inside one country; therefore, reminding her people of unity as a basic concept towards a promising country. Peter ends her poem with a direct message: “Let’s all start to believe that With Unity, Faith, and Discipline, / There’s nothing we cannot achieve”, in that respect, Peter shows the only way for the Pakistani people to reclaim their power is to accept their different religious beliefs and rise above their differences. Peter personified “unity, faith, and discipline” as money that can afford the Pakistani union and power.

Since Peter has revolutionized the Sufi Ghazal Operatic poetry by singing Urdu and modern poetry, she dedicated her operatic performance of Adele’s song “Skyfall” (“Saira Peter Sings Skyfall”) (Appendix 3) to glorify her homeland, Pakistan. Saira Peter takes every chance to draw positive attention to Pakistan and defend its image. Similarly, she tried to glorify her country, England when she was expressing her gratitude to England for its continuous support for Pakistan, she never skipped referring to Pakistan. Saira Peter’s main message is “My lifelong commitment is to disseminate Pakistan’s good values, wherever I am. When the opportunity comes, I take it” (“Saira Peter Sings Skyfall”). In Peter’s adaptation of Adele’s “Skyfall”, she employed vibrato tone which is an opera performance technique that is about “varying pitch slightly while holding a note for a long time” (“How to Sing Opera: Explore the Opera Singing Technique”). Peter performed an operatic version of the song “Skyfall”, originally sung by the British artist Adele. Although Adele’s voice is as sharp as a soprano should be, Peter has changed the tone of this song performance all of a sudden to align emotionally with the music moving to the soft tone to convey her sympathy with Pakistan. Peter sings this song specifically which is supposed to be about the end of

a young lady's love story. Since the speaker in the original song laments the end of her love story, she seems to be heartbroken because of the end of her love relationship, yet she tries to rise again after such a drastic loss. Similarly, Peter utilizes the same theme of rising after suffering from a heartbreak; however, Peter's reason of that heartbroken feeling was caused by dangers and current affairs of Pakistan. Peter says:

This is the end  
Hold your breath and count to ten  
Feel the Earth move and then  
Hear my heart burst again  
Let the sky fall  
When it crumbles  
We will stand tall  
Face it all together  
At Skyfall

At Skyfall ("Saira Peter Sings Skyfall")

Peter wanted to send a message to her homeland saying that no matter what happens they should stand up all together. What matters is their togetherness even during hard times like these. Pakistan's troubling current affairs were the reasons behind the soul loss Peter has gone through. Peter's alienated soul is argued to be caused by her inability to help Pakistan in its war time and political changes; therefore, she is going to use her newly created genre to remind the world of Pakistani rich culture and heritage, giving Pakistan the voice to speak up its problems. Although the poet suffers from the state of an alienated soul, she was determined and optimistic only when she chooses to speak about her homeland, Pakistan. The poet addresses implicitly her homeland by referring positively to the national security authority of Pakistan as a loving mother that protects her children as follows:

What you see, I see  
I know I'd never be me  
Without the security  
Of your loving arms  
Keeping me from harm  
Put your hand in my hand  
And we'll stand. ("Saira Peter Sings Skyfall")

Thus, the poet wants to highlight to the Pakistani people that when they choose unity over conflict, they will be a strong country which can protect its citizens everywhere in the universe. The poet chooses to sing

the ending part of her performance with reminding everyone that no matter what happens, the Pakistani people will stand united against all the odds. Hence, the poet ends her performance with highlighting the importance of the Pakistani people's unity: "Let the sky fall / We'll stand tall / At Skyfall / Ooh" ("Saira Peter Sings Skyfall"). Moving from the high to the lower pitch in the musical performance is intentionally done by Peter. In other words, Peter wants to end her faithful message to the Pakistani people with an epic tone to motivate and stir the audience's emotions as long as the performance is a kind of patriotic dedication to Pakistan.

Another example of the singer's alienated self is "Wind Beneath my Wings" (Appendix 4). The loss of lives and instability in her homeland has caused her to suffer but she decides to express her pain through her musical performances. Because Peter is tormented to see her country going through the same struggles every now and then, she dedicates another Sufi Ghazal opera to her homeland, Pakistan. In other words, Peter -a British citizen- attempts to identify herself with Pakistan to express her homeland's gratitude to the British missionaries and educationists who have served Pakistan. Saira Peter sings four complex and beautiful compositions, titled, "Wind Beneath my Wings", specially composed by her vocal coach Paul Knight who is a disciple of Benjamin Britten, 20th century iconic composer. The song's title "Wind Beneath my Wings" explains Peter's current mind state of Pakistan. As a British Pakistani citizen, (the singer) identifies herself with a free bird, yet the wind beneath its wing may be argued to refer to the poet's inability to find belonging in England. However, the singer wants to give thanks to the British missionaries and educationists for their efforts back there in Pakistan. The singer starts with the following couplets:

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh  
It must have been cold there in my shadow  
To never have sunlight on your face  
You were content to let me shine, that's your way  
You always walked a step behind  
So I was the one with all the glory  
While you were the one with all the strength ("Saira Peter Sings  
'Wind Beneath My Wings' at Pakistan High Commission  
London")

Peter wants to thank the British missionaries for the work they have done for her homeland, Pakistan, and at the same time she appreciates the risk the British missionaries take as it is not safe in Pakistan. She says: "It



must have been cold there in my shadow” (Peter). The cold and shadow are two words with negative connotations the singer stresses to convey the critical situation Pakistan has been enduring for decades. Saira Peter wants to remind herself and the Pakistani people that no matter what struggles they have been enduring that prevented their country to move forward and flourish, she prefers to highlight the representation of Pakistan as the “one with all the glory” and England is depicted as the “one with all the strength”. Peter experiences a state of agony that is caused by her fear of the Pakistani- Indian conflict which led to disrupted sense of self that is described by Salman Akhtar, an American psychologist as: “disrupted sense of self can lead to a sense of loss, dislocation, and a constant search for belonging and identity” (Akhtar, *Broken Structures: Severe Personality Disorders and Their Treatment* 12). Though employing the musical performance of her operatic expression, Peter delves deep into describing her state of agony that is caused by the Pakistani- Indian conflict. Although she is a Pakistani citizen owns another powerful citizenship like the British citizenship, she changes the tempo and tone of singing that part to show that her agony made her feel like she is a beautiful face but with no name / identity. That’s why the singer changes her performance to go to a lower pitch to match her agony that is caused by her concerns about Pakistani – Indian conflict as follows:

A beautiful face without a name for so long  
A beautiful smile to hide the pain.  
Did you ever know that you're my hero  
And everything I would like to be?  
Oh, you, you, you, the wind beneath my wings.  
Fly, fly, fly high against the sky  
So high I almost touch the sky. ("Saira Peter Sings 'Wind Beneath My Wings' at Pakistan High Commission London")

Here, Peter addresses Pakistan as her hero who inspires her in her life. Also, she repeated the pronoun “you” to give credit to Pakistan for making her feel proud of her Pakistani roots. Peter celebrates her pride by employing her soprano performance to show her gratitude to Pakistan for getting any kinds of awards. In other words, she has been recognized internationally for her Sufi Ghazal opera that is mainly based on Pakistani music and literature. Therefore, she ends her performance with the refrain she used before “thank you, thank you” to express her gratitude towards Pakistan as follows:

Thank you, thank you

Oh, you, you, you, the wind beneath my wings.  
Fly, fly, fly high against the sky  
So high I almost touch the sky.  
Thank you, thank you. ("Saira Peter Sings 'Wind Beneath My  
Wings' at Pakistan High Commission London")

In order to recover from self –alienation, psychologists demonstrate that a mystical experience of oneness with God could heal the soul from alienation as Janet Sayers emphasized the possibility of finding: “recovery from self-alienation through mystical experience of oneness with God” (20). Also, William James, the father of modern Psychology, elaborates on the existence of therapeutic effects due to merging between religion and psychology through explaining: “the divided self’ or ‘the sick soul’ through love of, and oneness with, the goodness of God mediated through the unconscious” (54). Therefore, the upcoming Sufi Ghazal operatic poems will convey Peter’s experience of “love and oneness of God” to heal from the fragmented self.

The second distinctive feature of Eric Fromm paradigm of agape love is describing the nature of agape love to be “unconditional/ selfless” in relation to Peter’s four operas “O Holy Night” (Appendix 5) “You Are my Friend” (Appendix 6) “Resplendent” (Appendix 7) “Oh Lord, My God” (Appendix 8). Eric Fromm elaborates on defining this stage as: “Agape love is unconditional and does not depend on specific qualities, actions, or conditions of the loved one. It is not based on expectations or demands” (25). Likewise, Peter couldn’t do without expressing her deep love to The Divine through spreading peaceful teachings by Jesus.

As previously mentioned, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, psychologists emphasized spiritual wellbeing that could be attained through merging psychology with mysticism. Consequently, psychologists such as Eric Fromm, William James, Simone Weil, and others explore the possibility of spiritual wellbeing through mystical experience of oneness with God. Thus, William James, the father of modern Psychology, describes the awful state of dissociative disorder that is also known as sick soul as extremely harsh: “The melancholy of the morbid temperament / sick soul is the most familiar of all its forms, and often the one which awakens the least pity in the beholder. Yet its sufferings are as genuine as those of any other form. The victim of it is to be regarded as one more unfortunate than wicked” (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* 20). James argues that religion can be beneficial in one way when: “individual men in their solitude, apprehend themselves

to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* 20). Peter performed her Sufi Operatic poem “O Holy Night” (Appendix 5) to express her recovery from the fragmented psyche. Peter recited her Sufi opera to praise Jesus Christ and the Holy Night He was brought to our world to bring unconditional love. Peter celebrated the moment Jesus Christ was born for he had taught humanity about unconditional love. She sings through clear diction: “Till He appeared, and the soul felt its worth / A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices/Truly He taught us to love one another” (Peter). Regarding William James’ affirmation that we must not only consider our lives as merely materialistic or physical but also a spiritual world that has its laws and methods. James stresses that bond by saying “That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof be that spirit ‘God or ‘law ‘is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world” (52). James argued that the essence of religion lies not in dogma or rituals, but in individual, subjective experiences of the divine. This includes feelings of awe, wonder, peace, and connection to something beyond oneself. He called these experiences "varieties of religious experience" and believed they could be accessed through various paths, including prayer, meditation, and even mystical visions. James described divine love as a "cosmic consciousness" (58) a sense of belonging and union with a universal force of love and light. In other words, James rejected the concept of a punitive God and emphasized the all-encompassing nature of this love, available to all who seek Him regardless of their specific beliefs or practices. James recognized two main aspects of divine love: the mystical, characterized by ecstatic experiences and a sense of oneness with the divine, and the practical, where divine love manifests as ethical action and service to others. He believed these two aspects coexist and complement each other, with true religious experience leading to both inner transformation and positive contributions to the world. Hence, Peter’s Sufi operative performances relate to James’ first approach to divine love, which is about the mystical experiences that are characterized by a sense of oneness with The Divine. In other words, Peter’s mystical experience utilizes Remembrance, a Sufi practice, to reach God’ love.

Remembrance, also known as "dhikr" in Sufism, is: “a central practice that plays a significant role in reaching Allah's love. It involves the repetition or remembrance of the names, attributes, or phrases associated with Allah” (Khan 12). Inayat Khan, a prominent Sufi teacher and founder of the Sufi Order in the West, emphasized the importance of

remembrance in his teachings. Khan viewed remembrance as: “a transformative practice that leads to spiritual growth and union with the divine” (13). According to Inayat Khan, remembrance is not merely a mechanical repetition of words or phrases, but a way to awaken the heart and make it receptive to the divine presence. He believed that through sincere and focused remembrance, one could experience a profound connection with Allah and attain spiritual enlightenment. Similarly, Peter dedicated some of her Sufi Ghazal operatic poems to reflect on her mystical experience through first mentioning the Christ and The Divine and second expressing her love and longing to Christ and The Divine. For example, in “You Are my Friend” (Appendix 6), while Peter suffered from the dissociative disorder due to her grief over what has been going on in her homeland, Pakistan, she expresses her attempt to find peace by singing attributes to Pakistan which helped her to detect love again. Therefore, she directed her attention more to Christ as the Savior in “You Are my Friend” as follows:

You Are my Friend  
You make me a start of the universe  
*All that exist, because of you,*  
Music in the air but the songs in my dreams  
My voice is for you (Peter)

As Simone Weil highlights our need for faith in this world to overcome life, Peter does that too. Weil believed that: “the beauty we continually search for in the created world and in relation to other human beings is at its heart our longing for a tangible God” (113). The singer starts with addressing Allah and reminds us and herself of the one fact about Allah that “*All that exist, because of you*”. She deliberately changed her intonation when singing that line to emphasize the fact that our existence was a gift from Allah. The singer praises Allah for our existence. The singer continues describing how experiencing unconditional love to Christ and The Divine looks like: “Music in the air but the songs in my dreams / Music in the air but the songs in my dreams” (Peter). Peter compares music with oxygen to celebrate the positive mental state she experiences when going through the stage of remembering Christ and The Divine. Spiritual wellbeing is experienced due to being involved in a mystical experience of oneness with God.

Another Sufi opera titled “Resplendent” (Appendix 7, Peter praises Christ through using both legato and staccato articulation in singing: “Resplendent is He / Gracious is He / How loving is He / He is the wisest of all / He just creates the beauty with us all” (Peter) to indicate positive

loving side of Allah since agape in its Greek explanation is the kind of love directed to Allah, in Christianity agape love refers to Allah's love to us. This is clear why Peter said: "How loving is He" (1). Peter composes and sings Sufi operas by her, and one example is the Sufi Ghazal opera and "Resplendent" is a very creative work to show the mystical experience Peter has been through. Focusing on the adjective of "loving" to show how Christ is a significant symbol of love and that source of love creates inner beauty inside her and everyone else. The last example Peter starts with contemplating Allah then sends her sincere prayer to the Christ, the Savior to help her. In other words, through employing remembrance when singing "Oh Lord, My God" (Appendix 8), Peter celebrates her praise and love to Allah and oneness with God, as follows:

Oh Lord, My God  
When I wonder, I see it all  
I see the stars  
I hear the mighty God  
The universe is painted  
...  
Dancing with my soul  
*How great thou art?*  
*How great thou art?*

I hear the bird sings sweetly on the trees  
When I looked down from the mountains and hear the universe  
sing gently  
*How great thou art?*  
*How great thou art?*  
That makes my soul dances freely  
When Christ shall come,  
And take me home, that I shall bide  
*How great thou art?*  
*How great thou art? (Peter)*

The poet sings one refrain in vibrato tone as her signature in the poem "*How great thou art?*" (2) for an emphatic purpose. To highlight this refrain, the singer changed her tempo of the opera when she sings that refrain. Through praising Allah, Peter recalls the natural elements as pieces of art. The singer ends her opera with a positive feeling that she will be taken home with Christ: "When Christ shall come, and take me home, that I shall bide" (2). The singer starts her poem by describing how she acknowledges the existence of Allah around her. First, seeing the



elements of nature, such as stars that only shine during the midnight / darkness, helps the poet to be sure of feeling Allah is always around us. When she looks at nature and the giant natural elements, her soul starts to be in the mood of perceiving the Almighty God's existence. The poets could relate the existence of nature, animals, mountains, stars, etc. with the absolute existence of Allah around her. Peter manages to express her state of oneness with God when she attempts to praise Allah and Christ and feel their existence around her. Her soul is no longer wandering, no suffering, but dancing.

Thus, the title of Peter's collection *My Beloved Resides in My Heart* could show Peter's mystical experience of agape love to God. The singer employs an extended metaphor in which she describes The Divine as the Beloved who resides inside her heart as a Sufi conception of "Heart of the Faithful is the Throne of the All-Merciful" (Cutsinger 20).

### III. Conclusion

To conclude, Saira Peter gives us an excellent example of how, with regard to the mystic context of agape love, one may go from spiritual disorders to regain spiritual well-being. Since Fromm emphasizes that agape love is a skill that can be developed through self-awareness, self-love, and practice, Peter's Sufi Ghazal operatic poetry shows the process of becoming aware of her true nature, the Divine reality, the realization of her deeper spiritual truths and the awakening of her soul to its inherent connection with the Divine. Although Saira Peter's main cause of the spiritual disorder is an external factor, Pakistani – Indian military clashes, she defends her homeland, Pakistan's Islamic good positive representation, through celebrating Jesus' Christian peace-loving and unconditional love teachings. She communicates a peaceful message to humanity to remind humanity of the Holy night of Jesus Christ who brought unlimited forgiveness and unconditional love to humanity at large.

**Appendices**

**Appendix 1**

**“Mera Pakistan” (My Pakistan)**

Pakistan National Anthem

Blessed be sacred land,

Happy be bounteous realm,

Symbol of high resolve, Land of Pakistan.

Blessed be thou citadel of faith.

The Order of this Scared Land

Is the might of the brotherhood of the people.

May the nation, the country, and the State

Shine in glory everlasting.

Blessed be the glory everlasting.

This flag of the Crescent and the Star

Leads the way to progress and perfection,

Interpreter of our past, glory of our present, Inspiration of our future,

Symbol of Almighty's protection.

Appendix 2

**“Unity, Faith, and Discipline”**

Unity, Faith, and Discipline, words that have filled Pakistan,  
The light of the planet, The voice of freedom,

Unity, Faith, and Discipline, words of the light, lets reach out the light  
As we know, the voice of freedom.

Unity, Faith, and Discipline  
Lets’ all start to believe that With Unity, Faith, and Discipline,  
There’s nothing we cannot achieve.  
Unity, Faith, and Discipline.

**Appendix 3  
"Skyfall"**

This is the end  
Hold your breath and count to ten  
Feel the Earth move and then  
Hear my heart burst again  
For this is the end  
I've drowned and dreamt this moment  
So overdue, I owe them  
Swept away, I'm stolen  
Let the sky fall  
When it crumbles  
We will stand tall  
Face it all together  
Let the sky fall  
When it crumbles  
We will stand tall  
Face it all together  
At Skyfall  
At Skyfall  
Where you go, I go  
What you see, I see  
I know I'd never be me  
Without the security  
Of your loving arms  
Keeping me from harm  
Put your hand in my hand  
And we'll stand  
Let the sky fall (let the sky fall)  
When it crumbles (when it crumbles)  
We will stand tall (we will stand tall)  
Face it all together  
Let the sky fall (let the sky fall)  
When it crumbles (when it crumbles)  
We will stand tall (we will stand tall)  
Face it all together  
At Skyfall  
Let the sky fall  
We'll stand tall  
At Skyfall  
Ooh

## Appendix 4

Saira Peter

## “Wind Beneath My Wings”

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh

It must have been cold there in my shadow  
To never have sunlight on your face

You were content to let me shine, that's your way  
You always walked a step behind

So I was the one with all the glory  
While you were the one with all the strength

A beautiful face without a name for so long  
A beautiful smile to hide the pain  
Did you ever know that you're my hero  
And everything I would like to be?

I can fly higher than an eagle  
For you are the wind beneath my wings  
It might have appeared to go unnoticed  
But I've got it all here in my heart

I want you to know I know the truth, of course I know it  
I would be nothing without you  
Did you ever know that you're my hero?  
You're everything I wish I could be

I could fly higher than an eagle  
For you are the wind beneath my wings  
Did I ever tell you you're my hero?  
You're everything, everything I wish I could be

Oh, and I, I could fly higher than an eagle  
For you are the wind beneath my wings, 'Cause you are the wind beneath my wings  
Oh, the wind beneath my wings  
You, you, you, you are the wind beneath my wings

Fly, fly, fly away, you let me fly so high  
Oh, you, you, you, the wind beneath my wings

Oh, you, you, you, the wind beneath my wings  
Fly, fly, fly high against the sky  
So high I almost touch the sky

Thank you, thank you



**Appendix 5  
"O Holy Night"**

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining  
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining  
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn

Fall on your knees  
O hear the angel voices  
O night divine!  
O night when Christ was born  
O holy night  
O night divine  
Night divine

Truly He taught us to love one another  
His law is love and his gospel is peace  
Chains He shall break, for the slave is our brother  
And in His name, all oppression shall cease  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful raise we  
Let all within us praise His holy name  
Christ is the Lord  
O praise His name forever

Noel, Noel  
O night, when christ was born  
Noel, Noel  
O night, O night divine  
Noel, Noel  
O night divine

Appendix 6

**“You Are my Friend”**

You make me a start of the universe

*All that exist, because of you,*

Music in the air but the songs in my dreams

My voice is for you

**Appendix 7**

**“Resplendent”**

Resplendent is He

Gracious is He

How loving is He

He is the wisest of all

He just creates the beauty with us all.

**Appendix 8**  
**“Oh Lord, My God”**

Oh Lord, My God  
When I wonder, I see it all  
I see the stars  
I hear the mighty God  
The universe is painted  
...

Dancing with my soul  
*How great thou art?*  
I hear the bird sings sweetly on the trees  
When I looked down from the mountains and hear the universe sing  
gently  
That makes my soul dances freely  
When Christ shall come  
And take me home, that I shall I bide  
*How great thou art?*  
*How great thou art?*

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