



# International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management

Volume 10, Issue 4, July 2023



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

**Impact Factor: 6.551**

# A Study of Mysticism and Metaphysics in Harivansh Rai Bachchan's Poetry

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to clarify the concepts of mysticism and metaphysical in the poems “Madhushala” and “Agneepath” by Harivansh Rai Bachchan. This article starts with an introduction about the mystical themes and poetry and poets who wrote with the theme of mysticism, including the uniqueness of Harivansh Rai Bachchan. Further, it talks about the life of the poet himself and then the explanation of the term’s ‘mysticism’ and metaphysical’. The paper then discusses the themes in the poems explaining with examples of lines from the poem.

**KEYWORDS :** Mysticism, Metaphysics, Madhushala, Agneepath, Harivansh Rai Bachchan.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mystical poetry is a genre of poetry that explores mystical or spiritual experiences, seeking to express the unknown aspect of human existence. It is characterized by the use of symbolic language, metaphors, and imagery to convey deep spiritual insights and a connection to divine power or the highest state of consciousness. This kind of poetry is found in various religious and spiritual traditions throughout history. Each tradition expresses mysticism differently but through poetry. Some of the traditions that follow mysticism are Sufism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christian mysticism.

One of the key themes in mystical poetry is the longing for union with the divine. Poets often use language that attracts the readers and in mystical poetry, they use the language in such a way that the reader is in awe and wonder. Poets also use paradoxes, metaphysical concepts, and vivid imagery for readers to be inspired from it. Mystical poetry serves as a means of expressing spiritual experiences which inspire readers to contemplate the nature of existence and the divine. It provides guidance and insight for those who question human existence and seek for deeper understanding of the mystical dimensions of life.

There have been many writers around the world that write Mystical poetry. Some of them are:

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, known as Rumi, was a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic. He wrote poetry that is filled with spiritual insights and longing for union with the divine. His poetry also included love and devotion.

St. John of the Cross was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish mystic and poet. He was a prominent figure in Christian mysticism and expressed the longing for union with God and spiritual challenges faced by people while on the spiritual path.

Kabir was a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Indian mystic poet and saint. His poetry had elements of Hinduism and Islam, emphasizing the unity of religions and direct experience of God. His poetry was written in Hindi.

Mirabai was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Indian mystic and poetess. She composed devotional poetry in praise of Lord Krishna, expressing her love and devotion. Mirabai's verses are filled with longing for spiritual union.

Rabindranath Tagore was a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Bengali-Indian poet and philosopher. He wrote mystical and spiritual poetry reflecting the deep connection to nature, human emotions, and the search for truth and beauty.



Emily Dickinson was an American poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century known for her unique and introspective style. She is not considered a mystical poet traditionally but her poems explore the themes of transcendence, the nature of soul, and the mysteries of existence.

This project is about the work of the poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan. He played a big part in contributing to Hindi literature and poetry. He is a poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He popularized Hindi as a literary language and brought it to the forefront of Indian literature. He blends the modern elements with the classical form of poetry which was the blend of Ghazal and Dohe, this made his work unique and different attracting readers.

His poetry often addressed socio-political issues, advocating change and promoting humanistic values. He used poetry as a way to raise awareness and inspire social transformation and his different thinking and unique way of writing poetry made him popular.

## II. THROUGH THE LIFE OF HARIVANSH RAI BACHCHAN

Harivansh Rai Srivastava was born at Babupatti, a village in Pratapgarh district, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in British India (province in India under British Raj) on 27 November 1907. He was born into an Awadhi Hindu Kayastha wealthy family, his family name was 'Srivastava' but when he started writing poetry he began using 'Bachchan' instead of his actual surname. He has always been interested in art but was particularly drawn to poetry, influenced by Rabindranath Nath Tagore and William Butler Yeats. He composed his first poetry at the age of 8.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan's mother's name was Saraswati Bachchan, and his father's name was Pratap Narayan Bachchan. His mother was a very spiritual person and played a significant role in his life by shaping him and teaching his values and worldview. While his father builds his interest in poetry. Harivansh Rai Bachchan spent his early childhood in a big family which included his grandparents, nine uncles, and nine aunts.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan completed his undergraduate degree at Allahabad University and then his master's In English literature from the same University. After completion of his studies, he travelled to Europe and Asia, teaching Indian culture and literature at various universities. He taught English at Allahabad University from 1941 to 1957 and later spent the next two years at St. Catherine Cambridge University and completed his Ph.D. in W.B. Yeats.

Around this time, he started writing English poetry and later translated them into Hindi. He was also the founder of the modern Hindi language poetry movement.

His poetry helped in changing political and social problems in India in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he was also one of the most active members Indian national congresses and was part of the progressive writer's movement. Harivansh Rai Bachchan didn't know Persian but he was influenced by Persian and Urdu Poetry. He married Shyama Bachchan in 1962, who later died of tuberculosis in 1936. In 1941, he married Teji Suri.

Harivansh Rai Bachchan was also a Bollywood lyricist. He has written more than 1000 songs for Hindi films. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan and the Padma Vibhushan for his contribution to Hindi literature. He was also awarded Sahitya Akademi Award for

'Madhushala', the Soviet Land Nehru Award for recognition of his literary achievements, Kavi Pradeep Sammam, and Saraswati Sammam for his magnum opus 'Kya Bhulu Kya Yaad Karu'.

His work has also been used in movies. Couplets of his work "Agneepath" was used throughout the movie featuring his son Amitabh Bachchan and again later in the remake of the movie, starring Hrithik Roshan.

In the TV serial, Ishqbaaz these lines were used-

Mitti ka tan, masti ka man, kshan-bhar jivan- mera parichay.

*(A body of clay, a mind full of play, a life of a moment – that's me)*



### III. MYSTICISM

It is a spiritual belief that requires looking for deep meanings and understandings of the universe and its mysteries of life. Mysticism is found in various religions and traditions around the world. It explains the inner journey of an individual to connect with the higher power. Believers of mysticism believe that there's another dimension that they can get to through meditation, prayers, and other spiritual practices.

The core idea of mysticism is that the ordinary, everyday experience of reality is just something on the surface that ordinary people see. Mystics believe in going beyond the boundaries of the physical world and exploring the realms of the spiritual world. They believe in the state of oneness, unity, or enlightenment. It is to self-merge with a higher power or divine presence and limit ego. Union brings inner peace, love, and connectedness with all of creation.

Mysticism is not limited to religion and traditions but can also be found in art, literature, and philosophy through which people explore or express the unknown.

### IV. METAPHYSICAL

It is a philosophical study of the nature of reality, existence, and the fundamental principles that govern the universe. It explores questions that go way beyond the physical world.

In metaphysics, philosophers contemplate the nature of being, identity, time and space, and the relationship between mind and matter. They focus on understanding the reality that shapes everyday experiences. Questions that metaphysicians ponder on are:

What does it mean for something to exist?

Are there different levels or dimensions of existence?

Does reality consist solely of the physical world, or are there non-physical or spiritual dimensions as well?

Time and space are also talked about in the metaphysical.

Metaphysical focuses on various key areas some of which are:

1. Epistemology: It is the study of knowledge and understanding. Questions about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is required. It delves into the question of perception, reason, belief, and truth.
2. Metaphysics of free will: This focuses on the nature of human agency and the concept of free will. It explores questions about determination, causality, and the extent to which individuals have control over their actions and choices.
3. Cosmology: It is the study of the origins, structure, and overall nature of the universe. Questions about the nature of time, space, casualty, and the fundamental principles that govern the cosmos.
4. Mind-body problem: it is about understanding the relationship between the mind and the body. It explores the nature of consciousness, mental states, and the interactions between physical and mental realness.
5. Ontology: it is the study of existence, which examines the fundamental categories of existence, such as substances, properties, events, and relationships. It questions what exists, what it means to exist, and what it means for something to be real.

### V. MADHUSHALA

Madhushala is a renowned poem by Harivansh Rai Bachchan published in 1935. It is a poem from the 20<sup>th</sup> century written in Hindi. The title of the poem "Madhushala" translates to "The House of Wine" in English. The poem talks a lot about wine but it does not support alcohol rather the word 'wine' is understood as 'life' in the poem. Alcohol in the poem symbolizes experiences, emotions, and the essence of life. The wine house in the poem is a place where people can delve into thought and question their existence and discover one's true selves.





“Discovering one’s true self” here can be both Mysticism and Metaphysical because the spiritual world is talked about. Metaphysical, is about exploring philosophical concepts like the relationship between mind and body or personal identity but when it comes to Mysticism, it may involve going deep into one’s consciousness and meditating, trying to connect with a divine being or someone higher above, and when we see that the people sit in the tavern and try to ‘discover their true selves’, I think its mysticism.

The poem emphasizes the nature of life and encourages us to accept the beauty of life and appreciate the moments of joy and sorrow. The themes focused on in the poem are mortality, freedom, individuality, and pursuing one’s passion. The poem suggests breaking free from societal norms and expectations and living life to the fullest and embracing their differences and uniqueness rather than questioning them. It tells us to take risks, explore new paths and cherish the journey of life however unhappy or happy it may be.

Madhushala is an original piece by Omar Khayyam, which later was translated by Edward Fitzgerald. Harivansh Rai Bachchan translated the original piece of Omar Khayyam to Hindi. The poem is of 135 lines, each verse ends with the word ‘Madhushala’. The words Madhushala (The tavern), Saaki (The wine bearer), Haala (The wine), and Pyala (the cup) are repeated in the poem total of 139 times but each time it is used beautifully. Madhushala is one of the beloved pieces of literature in Indian culture.

#### The metaphysical and mysticism themes in the poem

*Madiraalaya jaane ko Ghar se  
chalta hai peenewaala,  
‘kis path par jaaon ?’ asamanjas  
me hai wah bholaa bhaalaa;  
alag alag path batlaate sab  
par mai yah batlaataa hun –  
‘raah pakad tu ek chala chal,  
paa jayegaa madhushala.’*

The poem Madhushala reflects the Existential quest for meaning and purpose in life. The line above says that the wine drinker sets out from his home leaving his everything behind in search of the tavern. He is very confused about which path to take, and the people he asks for directions tell him different paths. The above lines suggest that the drinker is innocent and simple-minded. The poet suggests the drinker keep moving and go for a single path, saying that the drinker will eventually find the tavern. The term “wine” in the poem symbolizes the journey of life and the search for fulfillment and to reach one’s objective and the tavern in the poem is a spiritual place for spiritual awakening, like a temple or an ultimate destination for enlightenment. The drinking of wine in the poem is experiencing life, with its happy and sad moments. This suggests that people should listen to their intuition and follow one path a

nd keep their focus on it, working hard for that because that will eventually lead to their success, where wisdom and joy reside.

*Chalne hi chalne me kitna  
jivan haay, bita dala!  
‘door abhi hai’, par, kahta hai  
har path batlaane waalaa;  
himmat hai na badhu aage ko,  
saahas hai a phiru peeche;  
kinkartavyavimoodh mujhe kar  
door khadhee hai madhushala.*

The above lines say that in the mere act of moving forward, so much life has passed by, this line emphasizes the continuity of time as life goes on. The path keeps saying ‘It’s not too far’ Keep moving despite the difficulties. Further, the lines say that the person lacks the courage to move forward but he has come so far that he doesn’t have the audacity



to go back, and then the person finds himself standing near the tavern. Madhushala poem explores the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom and leaving behind the material world. It encourages people to seek

spiritual growth, delves into the mysteries of life, and constantly learns and evolves, to go on a quest for knowledge even if you might lose a lot of things. There will be a time when you eventually reach your destination. But according to mysticism the man lacking the courage to reach forward is self-realization, even though he is scared, he is ready to seek enlightenment and a deep understanding of life by moving forward which resonates with the mystical path of self-discovery.

*Priyatam, tumeri haala hai,  
mai tera pyaasa pyaala,  
apne ko mujhme bharkar  
tubanta hai peenevaala;  
mai tujhko chak chalka karta  
mast mujhe pee tu hota  
ek doosre ko ham dono  
aaj paraspar madhushala*

The above lines show the connection between two people as the word 'Priyatam' is used. The poet sees himself as an empty container (pyaasa pyaala) waiting to be filled with the love of his lover, and the beloved fills the poet's emptiness with their presence which makes the poet intoxicated with their presence. The poet says that he becomes intoxicated by drinking his lover and at the end of the verse they become one. And become each other's 'madhushala'. Wine in the poem represents the spiritual intoxication that comes from embracing life's experiences and love and finding joy in the present. It says that one can achieve spiritual ecstasy and liberation by immersing oneself in the depths of life and by falling in love. The poem also talks about unity and oneness in this same stanza as the lover and poet become at the end of the verse. The poem also talks about unity and oneness with the divine as the person tries to reach his destination, he'll meet the divine one because that is what achieving your objective is being free but earning something big, but unity and oneness change to oneness with the divine when talked about mysticism, that one can transcend the limitations of the material world and unite with the ultimate reality. Spiritual intoxication in this verse also aligns with the mystical traditions where seekers strive for a state of divine intoxication to achieve something that is outwardly.

At some point in the poem, it is also said to live in the present and appreciate the transience of life, live the moment to the fullest. It also encourages people to embrace the duality of life and find harmony in conflicts which is a metaphysical concept but in mysticism, the poem madhushala says to leave the state of ego behind and merge with a higher reality, suggesting that spiritual intoxication can dissolve the boundaries of oneself and unite with universal consciousness, which is a central theme of mysticism.

## VI. AGNEEPATH

Agneepath is a poem by Harivansh Rai Bachchan. The poem is about the path of fire which is Agneepath in Hindi. A path on which a man has to walk all his life, crossing all the difficult situations but he has to keep moving forward the challenge is that they shouldn't stop, and also at the same time, it makes an individual grow mentally. The poem also suggests that everyone faces problems and that everyone has to overcome those problems. The poet finds a man fighting his life challenges inspiring and beautiful and tries to tell that it is very amazing to see a man fighting and come as a winner. The suffering makes the winning worth it and sweet. The poem Agneepath focuses on the themes of determination, resilience, and the unsurpassable spirit of the human will. The poem doesn't entirely focus on the theme of mysticism but the metaphorical elements used like the imagery of fire and flames are associated with transformation, publication, and the inner strength of the soul. The repeated mantra of Agneepath suggests the spiritual journey of an individual through difficult situations and hardships that will lead to self-realization and growth which is what mysticism is about.



In a mystical sense, the poem could be seen as a journey of one's soul to self-discovery, symbolizing the spiritual quest, where one must go through hardships to reach a higher state of consciousness or enlightenment.

*"I will write my own fate,*

*With each step I take,*

*I will shape my own future,*

*For I am the master of my soul."*

The above lines are from the English-translated version of Agneepath. They mean that the individual has the ability to shape their destiny and write their own fate reflecting the mystical belief in the power of human will and the connection between the individual and the divine. Any individual writes their own fate with every step they take because their soul is theirs and only, they can shape their future. These lines give the idea that through inner strength and constant determination, any individual can align their actions with their purpose and manifest their own destiny.

Metaphysical themes in the poem-

Overcoming obstacles for achieving goals emphasizes the transformative power of the human spirit to rise above and reach higher is the idea of **transcendence** in the poem which will make a person superior after reaching their destination.

The poem questions **existentialism** about the purpose and meaning of life. It acknowledges the challenges encountered on the journey and encourages people to create their own destinies.

The poem suggests that people have the power to influence their own life and overcome obstacles through their choices and their made actions, this is **self-determination** because people have the ability to shape their own fate.

The poem is not religious but carries **spiritual** undertones, it alludes to the idea of a higher power. The repeated chant of Agneepath can be seen as a spiritual mantra, invoking the connection within the deeper sense of self.

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