

The *Insan Kamil* of Bawa: The Metaphysics of a Tamil Sufi Sheikh
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Abstract

Al-insan al-kamal or *insan kamil* is commonly translated as the perfect being, the servant, the universal man, or the perfected being in Islamic mysticism (Buckhardt 1959, 1979; Izutsu 1983; Baldick 1989; Schimmel 1992; Chittick 2000, 2005; Dagli 2004). In this doctrine, the human being is positioned as the isthmus between Allah (God) and the cosmos. A mirror that reflects *tawhid* (unity) (Chittick 2000) and the *barzakh* (interface) between God and the world, an *insan kamil* is the perfected being who preserves the existence of the universe (Baldick 1989). The Tamil Sufi Sheikh Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986) reformulated the doctrine of *insan kamil* when he taught his followers in Sri Lanka, United States and Canada. Bawa, as his adherents referred to him, was a teacher of Sufi-Islam from Sri Lanka who migrated to Philadelphia in the 1970s. The paper explores the paradigm of *insan kamil* as taught by Bawa, while situating this figure of the *insan kamil* within classical Sufi thought. The primary goal of this paper is to explore Bawa's metaphysical understanding of the human being through themes of the *insan kamil* as *al-qutb* (spiritual mediator), the perfect being and the *qalb* (heart).

Keywords: *Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, Sufism in North America, Insan Kamil, Perfected being, Sufism, Metaphysics*