

**A Journey Towards Self-Discovery and  
Spiritual Enlightenment in Taufiq Rafat's  
"Mr. Nachiketa": A Spiritually-Informed  
Psychoanalytic Critique**

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**Abstract:**

This article discovers the subcontinental legacy of Sufism, a mystical and spiritual tradition to explore the unification of one's soul with the ultimate reality in Taufiq Rafat's poem "Mr. Nachiketa" present in his anthology *Arrival of the Monsoon: Collected Poems 1947-78* (1985) employing Baruch Spinoza's theory of Substance Monism (1949) at an interplay with Abraham Maslow's model Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Spinoza's metaphysics of Substance Monism postulates the presence of a singular ultimate entity in the universe, often referred to as "God" or "Nature" from which everything arises as modes and modifications. The detachment from worldly desires to achieve a deeper connection with the Divine, proposes Spinoza, is a way to discover inner peace. While Maslow's model of the pyramidal arrangement of man's wants establishes the milestones to reach Spinoza's spiritual destination in Rafat's "Mr. Nachiketa". The study seeps into the poem's narrative layers drawn upon the ancient Indian legend of Nachiketa, a young boy who seeks knowledge from Yama, the god of death, to analyze Nachiketa's spiritual journey. The references to the Hindu rituals, Abrahamic concepts, and Biblical verses, throughout the analysis, weave a rich context for the ultimate understanding of the poem which had been unexplored until now. Moreover, the paper also furthers the poem's technical narrative style of missing connections and multiple narrators, each offering their perspective on Nachiketa's encounter with Yama, to decipher the deeper meaning enfolded between various layers of this mysterious poem.

**Keywords:** *Divine Love, Physical and Emotional Needs, Religious Mythologies, Self-Transcendence, Substance Monism, Total-Awakening*

### Introduction

Sufism is a mystical and spiritual dimension. The term "Sufi" is thought to have roots in the Greek word "Sophia," signifying wisdom. The central themes of Sufism include unity, divine love, and the journey towards self-realization and enlightenment (Ahmed, 2008). These concerns focus on one's inner peace, experiential aspects of the credence, and a straight and private link with the Almighty. The fundamental concept of truth, or "haqiqa" in Sufism, holds great importance in this regard. For Sufis, there's a single truth embodied by the only God and the unification of one's soul with this Divine embodiment seems to be the only goal worthwhile (Taghizadeh & Jeihouni, 2016). Sufi's path aims to unite with this truth and attain union with the Creator. This state, according to Sufism, relates that God resides within oneself, as expressed by the saying, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." (Stoddart & Austin, 1976).

Sufism offers various methodologies for spiritual growth including different practices, teachings, and spiritual exercises (Lings, 1975). These methodologies include spiritual guidance, purification of the heart, Dhikr, meditation, dance, Sama, charity, Fana, and Baqa. A spiritual guide (Murshid or Sheikh) who has travelled the path before and can offer guidance invites a quest (Nurani, 2018). The purification of the heart involves letting go of negative traits like arrogance, jealousy, and anger to cultivate qualities such as humility, love, and compassion. Dhikr is the practice of remembering and mentioning the divine through the recitation of sacred phrases, names of God, or verses from holy texts (Khanam, 2011). Meditation and contemplation deepen the understanding of spiritual truths about self-awareness and inner knowledge through the experience of a profound sense of unity with the Divine. Whirling and dancing involve spinning in a meditative dance to symbolize the journey of spiritual ascent and union with the divine (Friedlander, 1975). Sama refers to the use of music, poetry, and chanting as tools for spiritual elevation to create an atmosphere conducive to spiritual experiences. Charity emphasizes the importance of selflessness and services to others as an expression of divine love and compassion. Fana – annihilation of self – and Baqa – subsistence in God – is practiced to seek not only the transcendence of one's ego but also to experience a sense of "oneness" with the Divine. (Quasem, 1993). All of such practices encourage a direct and personal connection with the divine allowing individuals to experience a sense of purpose and fulfillment beyond material pursuits (Homerin, 2014).

Taufiq Rafat (1927-1998), a renowned Pakistani English poet and father of Pakistani idiom, is highly regarded for his ability to capture the everyday experiences of his people across a wide range of topics including culture, tradition, convention, warfare, departure, family circle, friendship, occupations, codes of belief, polity, psychology along with manners to inculcate national identity. Simultaneously, he explores the traditional customs, geographical backdrop, and the natural disasters prevalent in Pakistan. Rafat's poetry is replete with enigmatic occurrences, unexplained connections, irrational statements, and unfathomable thinking courses that seamlessly intertwine previous, current, and upcoming events. Similarly, Rafat does not keep himself from unravelling the legacy of the Subcontinent in Sufism, yet another unexplored facet of Rafat's poetry, which this paper attempts to unveil.

Sufi literature has embraced contributions from all corners of the world to elaborate the multifaceted term Sufism. Topics related to theology, beliefs, practices, and spirituality reconcile Islamic orthodoxy with Sufi practice (Salleh, 1996). Since the commencement of Islamic consciousness, both males and females have participated anxiously in the reunion and recognition of divine beings (Helminski, 2003). Correspondingly, Ibn-ul-Arbi's theosophy of Wahdat-ul-Wajood suggests that all existence is essentially a manifestation of the single divine reality with a focus on unity and oneness with the divine, known as "Oneness of being" (Ansari, 1999). Moving away from worldly wealth while surrendering affection and relishing the riches is the primary step towards spirituality (Ramazonov et al., 2021). Identically, Rumi's mystic poetry explores the themes of divine love, tolerance, compassion, sympathy, and spiritual longing with an emphasis on the importance of inner reflections, devotion, and a personal connection with the Divine without setting religious boundaries (Zahra et al., 2021). While, the exploration of artistic elements in Sufi poetry reveals the intricate use of metaphors, symbols, and allegories to convey profound spiritual insights (Kabiri, 2022). Following similar lines, *The Conference of the Birds*, a poetic allegory to the journey of seekers' souls towards God, seems to be the cornerstone of Sufi literature to reflect the themes of self-purification, detachment from materialism and the stages of spiritual evolution. The birds' realization on reaching the abode of Simurgh that they themselves are the Simurgh symbolizes the concept of self-realization and the idea that the Divine is not separate from the individual seeker (Baxter-Tabriztchi, 2003). Diversely, ecological Sufism emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and aims to promote harmony between humans, nature, and the Divine to cultivate an in-depth regard for the

environment (Sururi et al., 2020).

The diverse and multifaceted analysis of Taufiq Rafat's poetry showcases its rich tapestry of themes and perspectives. Authors have delved into an array of angles, including intertextuality (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022a), metapoetry (Aqeel et al., 2022), sensuality (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022b), cultural psychology (Rasheed et al., 2022), autobiographical poetry (Rasheed & Javaid, 2022) and eco-poetry (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022c). However, one notable absence is the comprehensive exploration of Sufism, a significant facet of spiritual and mystical tradition. This article fills this gap in the significance of Sufism in Taufiq Rafat.

### Methodology

Baruch (de) Spinoza (1632-1677) is famous for his metaphysics of *Substance Monism*, presented in his book *Ethics* (1949), which comprises one substance, a thing and its modification (modes). Spinoza declares that there is one object or substance, which is self-caused, infinite, and eternal. Spinoza calls this stuff 'God' and 'Nature' (Curley, 1969). The whole universe is fabricated of one object or substance (God). Spinoza asserts that the personality of God has unlimited characteristics inculcating unremitting and absolute elements of revelation to which no other power has the potential to undo. The existence of such an imperishable being, then, makes Himself the infinite and immortal one (De Spinoza, 1949). One's attachment only to such a mighty being can create a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction, joy, and freedom., which is the result of detachment from transient desires and emotions, leading to a more intellectual and harmonious life (Rutherford, 2017) to achieve total awakening, i. e., to be with the ultimate reality / absolute truth.

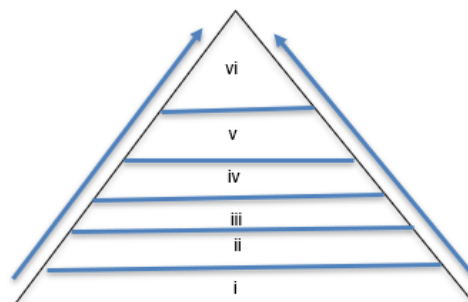


Figure 1.

On the other hand, Abraham Maslow has to his credit the model *Hierarchy of Needs* (1943) which establishes a hierarchy of human necessities at six levels, ranging from the most basic to the highest ones, i. e., (i) physiological needs, (ii) safety needs, (iii) love and belongings, (iv) esteem needs, (v) self-actualization, and (vi) self-transcendence (McLeod, 2007). These six essentials move from bottom to top as shown in the following Figure 1:

Each level of essentials must be at least partially satisfied before a person can move on to the next level. Air, water, foodstuff, lodging, and rest make the earliest prerequisites vital for subsistence at the foremost step. In the second step, the people find defence and protection such as personal shielding, employment, healthiness, and property, etc. In the third step, humans look for communal junctions, affection, and associating contact through relationships, friendships, and community involvement. The acquisition of confidence, achievement, respect, and a sense of accomplishment is the fourth stage of development (Goldstein, 1995). At the fifth stage of the hierarchy, people go for their complete aspirations and attain personal growth. This comprises pursuing creativeness, problem-solving, morality, and the realization of particular capabilities. At the top of the hierarchy, there reaches the sixth and the last stage of self-transcendence, where individuals focus on helping others and experiencing a sense of unity with all the life forms. This viewpoint illustrates how human motivations, while guiding one's behaviour and personal development, evolve as fundamental needs are met (Maslow & Lewis, 1987).

Spinoza's metaphysical underpinnings correlate with Maslow's underpinnings to come up with a solid ground for the analysis of Rafat's poem in this paper.

### Discussion

This section delves into a comprehensive analysis of Taufiq Rafat's poem "Mr. Nachiketa," from two distinct lenses: *the substance Monism* of Spinoza and the *Hierarchy of Needs* of Maslow. It uncovers the poem's inexplicable content while validating Spinoza's metaphysics with Maslow's physics. Rafat's modern writing style employs the distancing technique in this narrative which comprises simple and short writing with disjointed connections between different points of view presented in a fragmented manner (Hemingway et al., 2011) making the narrative ambiguous and misleading. Providing limited information with missing links between different narrators, this technique, rather, allows the reader to engage with the text in a unique way. The poem features Nachiketa's adventures carried through three narrators – Nachiketa, Steward, and Yama. They narrate Nachiketa's encounter with Yama, his request for three boons, Yama's teachings, and the lessons on the immortality of the soul, life, and death to explore themes of spirituality, materialism, and the consequences of one's actions.

Spinoza's metaphysics is characterized by his concept of *Substance Monism*, where he posits that there is only one ultimate substance in the universe, i.e., "God" or "Nature", that is infinite and comprises all the reality, including both

physical and mental aspects. Becoming the part of this Reality transcends one through one's self-awakening (Curley & Moreau, 1990). While, Maslow suggests that people aim to satiate their basic physical requirements first before pursuing the higher-order desires validating Spinoza's metaphysics (McLeod, 2007). These theoretical frameworks help dissect Rafat's "Mr. Nachiketa" in examining its layers of meaning and narrative intricacies.

The story of Nachiketa, from the ancient Indian scripture Katha Upanishad (Chandra & Ranjan, 2022), is a journey of self-discovery. A young boy bravely seeks knowledge of the ultimate truth from Yama, the god of death there. Yama tests the boy's determination by offering him worldly temptations, which he wisely rejects. Ultimately, Yama grants his wish and imparts profound wisdom about immortality. This story illustrates the importance of seeking deeper truths and realizing the immortal essence within oneself – a journey of self-discovery that leads to spiritual enlightenment.

The poem opens with the first narrator who introduces himself as Nachiketa. He suggests that the reader may have encountered his father before. His father is portrayed as a wealthy landowner in the village. He is overweight, cautious, and perhaps secretive in his dealings. During a difficult period, the father prays to God, promising to donate all his possessions if the weather gets better. This indicates a kind of desperate bargain or plea assistance as Spinoza emphasizes survival instincts and self-preservation being the foundational aspects of human nature (Rutherford, 2017). Nachiketa acknowledges that God comprehends his father's prayer, but there is a different plan or intention at play. God opens His 'Sluices' (Rafat, 1985, p. 183) in response to the father's plea. 'Sluices' metaphorically refers to the gates that control the flow of water. God responds by causing a significant amount of rain or a flood. Nachiketa notices that his father is giving away only old and barren cattle as a result of excessive rain.

According to the story of Nachiketa from the ancient Hindu scripture, Nachiketa's father Vajasravasa, decided to perform a sacred ritual known as a *Yagna* or *Homa* (sacrificial offering). In Hinduism, people perform the fire ritual which involves the offering of various materials into a consecrated fire symbolizing the connection between the material and spiritual worlds to seek blessings. The fire is considered a divine entity and a mediator between humans and the gods. Homa ceremonies are performed for various purposes, including seeking blessings, purification, and invoking positive energies (Sushrutha et al., 2014). As part of the ritual, he was supposed to give away all his possessions to the priests. However, he ended up giving away only old and useless cows, withholding the best ones. The irony in Nachiketa's father's intention and action proves that the father is completely a worldly being who only cares about his

safety needs of business and wealth, i.e., his spiritual development ceases at the second stage in the model of Maslow (Maslow & Lewis, 1987).

Such action, sees Nachiketa, threatens his family's livelihood and their basic needs for sustenance since one who aspires for unfair benefits, brings problems to one's own clan but one who condemns unfair ways, stays (Kapfer, 2013). Nachiketa appears to be very inquisitive about everything happening around him. Spinoza's idea of seeking mental tranquility through understanding and rationality can be seen in Nachiketa's quest for truth. Nachiketa's pursuit of knowledge corresponds to Spinoza's belief that understanding the nature of the world can lead one to a sense of security and inner peace.

Feeling disappointed and concerned about the consequences of his father's actions, Nachiketa approaches his father and asks whom the father will give Nachiketa since the father had prayed that he would give away all his belongings. Nachiketa's inquiry into the fate of cows and whether he himself is being offered shows his concern for safety and security. He wants to ensure that his family's future is stable representing Maslow's second stage of safety needs (McLeod, 2007). Moreover, Nachiketa's insistence on understanding the truth behind the cow offerings is an act driven by his deep sense of love and belongingness, the third stage, to his family. His courage to confront his father and explore the truth stems from the need for love and belongingness. Frustrated with Nachiketa's persistence in answering, his father replies, "I give you to death" (Rafat, 1985, p. 183). This sentence from the father plunges Nachiketa into the widening gyre of self-discovery, the stage of self-esteem through some great achievement, by leaving psychological, safety, and belongingness needs – which are described by Maslow to which Spinoza responds as earthly desires.

At this stage of self-esteem combined with Spinoza's renunciation of worldly desires, Nachiketa goes on to describe his journey in search of the "house of death" ( Rafat, 1985, p. 184) and the various places he explores in his quest. Nachiketa begins his search from the mountains which might symbolize places of spiritual significance and insight as Nachiketa says: "I saw many a temple clinging perilously to cliff sides" ( Rafat, 1985, p. 184). Nachiketa observes temples built precariously indicating devotion and spiritual practices taking place in such challenging and inaccessible locations. He continues his search by venturing into Marsh areas which symbolize the challenges and uncertainties of life's journey. Nachiketa explores both the dense jungles and the barren deserts resenting different facets of life's experiences. In these places, he encounters danger which is depicted as quicksand and whirlwinds symbolizing the chaotic and unpredictable nature of life in the wilderness. In these treacherous places, he meets Sadhus <sup>i</sup> (Oman, 1903), Buddhists <sup>ii</sup> (Harvey, <https://journalsriuf.com/index.php/IJLL/index>

2013) (Anderson, 2016), and Sufis <sup>iii</sup>. They are respected for their devotion towards God and are sought after for their blessings and spiritual guidance. All the Sadhus, Buddhists, and Sufis emphasize the inner journey of self-discovery and self-realization. Nachiketa visits them to explore about death and develops his understanding about self-actualization by serving others.

Nachiketa seeks guidance from these Holy men who have renounced worldly possessions. While these ascetics can share insights about life and spirituality, they are unable to provide answers about death, which is Nachiketa's primary quest. This quest reflects the challenges he encounters in finding answers from various sources, even from the ones who are deeply immersed in the spiritual practices. This seems to highlight the idea that true understanding of death and its mysteries may require a more profound spiritual insight which Nachiketa is yet to find in his exploration.

Failure in search of death leaves Nachiketa exhausted, hungry, and desperate but his insistence on the quest of truth does not die. Nachiketa's struggle to find death through renunciation of all the worldly desires leads him to the house of Yama (the Lord of death). He doesn't let obstacles deter him from seeking knowledge and answer to his question. His journey reflects his desire for personal growth and self-respect. Nachiketa approaches the house by knocking at its door. On being asked about his name by the steward of the house, Nachiketa questions the importance of his name, suggesting that it might not hold much significance. His heart-rendering experiences which he has been faced with until he finds this house have turned him into a selfless man serving others since he has attained Maslow's 5<sup>th</sup> stage of self-actualization. Reaching this stage, Nachiketa has not only lost all his individual traits but also submitted to the selfless universal identity. This is the reason he finds himself at loss when is asked about his individual name. He goes onto reflect on how even the most benevolent master, in a casual or unguarded moment, might ask for the name of a stranger. Nachiketa's reflection instead of any answer to the steward represents his growing understanding of the world and its transient roles.

The narrative shift occurs after Nachiketa's narration of his adventures until now. The poem shifts the scene to three days later. We see the steward, now, reporting to his master Yama, who has returned after three days, about the arrival of a strange man who has been awaiting Yama for last three days. The steward informs Yama that he has opened the door to find a strange man of refined and cultured appearance. But the man's eyes look particularly unique and striking enough not to pay heed to the ordinary questions of the steward as the steward relates: "He had a civilized face, but the eyes, never have I seen such an eye!" (Rafat, 1985, p 185). The steward relates that arguing with the

man seems to be futile since he tells the man that Yama, for whom the man has come, is not home only to guess the man's conviction for waiting till Yama's return. The man pushes the steward aside and walks past him into space.

The steward further lets the master know the condition of the man. The man has been waiting for the steward's master for three days. During these three days, he has been indifferent to the comfort, food, and amenities of life being offered to him as a guest. The man keeps on dismissing the servants' offer to provide him with delicious food. The man seems to be preoccupied with unusual questions and thoughts sitting in a crouched position in a corner of the room as Rafat says: "Now he is squatting in a corner / growing into it like a statue" (Rafat, 1985, p. 185). This inexplicable behaviour annoys the steward as his motionless actions create a gradual irritation for the steward. This man is Nachiketa who is in the house of Yamraj and waiting for him to know about the secrets of immortality to achieve the stage of self-transcendence. Spinoza's philosophy encourages the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual growth as a path to self-esteem and self-empowerment in this regard (Lin, 2019). Nachiketa's decision to engage in deep philosophical conversations with Yama aligns with the aspect of Spinoza's thought.

Nachiketa's outer appearance is changing. The Sufis engage in a variety of spiritual practices like Sufi music, poetry, and whirling dances, a way to achieve a trance-like state transcending the self and connecting to the Divine (Harel et al., 2021), which may invite odd changes in their appearances strange to the worldly people. Likewise, the Sadhus, ascetic in Hinduism, undergo significant changes in their outer appearance as a result of their commitment to a life of spirituality and detachment from worldly possessions (Oman, 1903). These practices are believed to induce ecstatic states important for spiritual union with the Divine. Rumi sees these practices as opportunities disguised as challenges for one's growth and spiritual advancement to achieve the pursuit of Divine love, spiritual transformation, and inner purification (Suharto, 2022). Just as the path to connect to the Divine involves facing challenges to deepen one's connection with God, the challenges faced by Nachiketa serve as stepping stones towards understanding self-transcendence.

The narrative in the poem now shifts to the reaction of Yama, the lord of death, who has reached his home after three days, to the arrival of strange Nachiketa after listening to the above account by his steward. Yama is known by various names and titles in different mythological and philosophical contexts. Yama's presence marks the ultimate conclusion of human life, and his name (Yama) in itself is a monosyllabic representation of death. Self-transcendence is the final human need according to Maslow. Nachiketa's

conversation with Yama, a dreadful desire that may blossom the agency to create a small change for good carried through the fear of God is better than huge fortune which can cause turbulence (Gârbea, 2018), leads to profound spiritual insights. This journey toward self-discovery and understanding the purpose of life mirrors the self-transcendence stage where an individual seeks personal growth, meaning and fulfillment (McLeod, 2007). Through Yama's teachings, Nachiketa attains spiritual wisdom that transcends ordinary concerns, reaching a level of self-transcendence to gain insights beyond the material world.

Yama has reached his house where Nachiketa has been waiting for him for three days. Yama inserts a key into the lock to open it. However, it opens on its own without the key being turned around. The already open door made Yama suspicious about something unusual happening at his place in his absence. The steward informs Yama about the client waiting for him. The client's insistence on seeing Yama is symbolically conveyed as "The heat comes from him in waves" (Rafat, 1985, p. 186) to show his strong conviction. Yama reflects after listening to these things about him that the client is not an ordinary fellow. His extreme curiosity makes him a problematic individual Yama feels to confront at this hour. Yama knows that only a few possess the intelligence and determination to locate his house. However, Yama knows very well how to tackle such visitors and Yama quickly approaches Mr. Nachiketa.

The conversation between Yama and Nachiketa begins with courteous greetings and small talks. Yama, the God of Death, feels sorry for keeping Nachiketa await him for three days. Yama relates the reason of the business in Kosala (ancient Indian kingdom) about his delay. Yama had been busy in giving deaths to the people of Kosala<sup>iv</sup> because after a series of wars with neighbouring countries, it was finally defeated and absorbed into the Magadha kingdom (Kumar, 2019). Yama finds a way out to make up for his unknown mistake to keep Nachiketa await for three days by offering Nachiketa three wishes (Lemos, 2016). Nachiketa's first wish is that his father must not getting angry with him for returning alive. He wants his father to welcome him back with love when he returns to Earth instead of asking for the capital punishment the father had pronounced upon him. Nachiketa's second wish is that his father must concede to the fact that Nachiketa's sacrifice has been accepted. Yama grants both of wishes. He gives a couple of aphorism in this regard: "If the slayer thinks he slays / If the slain thinks he is slain / Neither of them knows the truth" (Rafat, 1985, p. 187). When Hazrat Ibrahim was commanded by God to sacrifice his son Ismail, he prepared to carry out the act, following God's command. Here, Hazrat Ibrahim could be seen as the "slayer" in the sense that he was the one

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about to perform the act of sacrifice. Ismail, on the other hand, submitted willingly to God's will and allowed himself to be placed in a position of sacrifice. He might be viewed as the "slain" since he was the one in the vulnerable position of being offered for sacrifice. In this interpretation, neither Hazrat Ibrahim nor Ismail knew the ultimate truth of the situation. They both acted in complete submission to God's will, and their perceptions were limited to their roles in the act of sacrifice. The ultimate truth was known only to God since the sacrifice was accepted with Ismail alive.

### Result

Spinoza's ideology of Self-Monism mingles with Maslow's Self-Transcendence towards the end of Rafat's poem "Mr. Nachiketa" carried through the discussion about immortality. In the poem, the third wish of Nachiketa is about the truth of immortality, i.e., if there is life after death. Yama does not want to answer this question because it is a very complex query. Yama tries to wave Nachiketa away by discussing common distinctions like 'good' and 'pleasant' offerings, some philosophical ideas, rambling stories, and statements. But Nachiketa is determined to find out the truth. He knows that worldly pleasures are short-lived and cannot bring lasting happiness. That is why he wants to understand the secrets of life and death, and nothing else since the right path of the honest sets them free but the dishonest are condemned for their treachery (Huston, 1983). So, after some persuasion by Nachiketa, Yama agrees to share this knowledge. Yama discloses that:

1. The *self* inside us is forever. It neither starts nor ends. It is always there. Even if our body breaks, our inner self stays unharmed. It is smaller than the smallest thing and bigger than the biggest. It lives in everyone. Just reading books or being smart is not enough to understand it. We need to separate our inner *self* from our body's desires. It reveals itself to those who truly seek it. The goal for wise people is to know this inner *self*.
2. Our body is like a chariot, our intelligence the operator, our perceptions the wheels, our morality the ropes, and the inner *self* the vehicle boss. The inner *self* is more important than our body, mind, or senses.
3. Beyond our soul, there exists a huge consciousness that is like the seed of everything in the universe. Even greater is that Ultimate Reality, the most important goal for us. When we understand and realize this Supreme Self, we won't be scared of death anymore and we become immortal.
4. Finding the path to understand all this is hard and takes a long time. If we cannot understand the ultimate Reality (Brahman), we shall keep

being born again and again. But when we truly understand our inner Self, we reach a state of freedom called moksha. Achieving moksha is to free a person from the cycle of suffering and lead to eternal peace and unity with the Divine. Various paths and practices, such as meditation, devotion, and self-realization, are pursued by individuals to attain moksha for if asked, it is bestowed; if searched, it is found out; and if sought for, it is opened. (Gentry, 2017)

The answer to the question of being mortal makes Nachiketa wiser about the mysteries of life and death to achieve the state of self-transcendence. In similar terms, Spinoza's concept of *Substance Monism* holds weight as Nachiketa seeks to understand the nature of self and the ultimate truth.

### Conclusion

The whole debate deduces that mysticism emerges as a multifaceted spiritual path that offers individuals a profound journey facing personal discovery, internal contentment, and a more intense connectedness with the Divine. Illuminating its spiritual essence, this paper attempts to provide a comprehensive exploration of Sufism present in Taufiq Rafat's narrative "Mr. Nachiketa". The lenses of *Substance Monism* by Spinoza and the *Hierarchy of Needs* by Maslow reveal a profound self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment in this regard. It emphasizes Mr. Nachiketa's quest for a direct and personal connection with the Divine, promoting unity, divine love, and self-realization following Spinoza's spiritual philosophy of *Substance Monism* emphasizing the oneness of God. Spinoza's metaphysical concepts of oneness and the search for ultimate reality aligned with Nachiketa's exploration of the nature of the *self* bestow Nachiketa with the profound wisdom he gains through his encounter with Yama, the god of death. This journey of self-discovery analyzes Nachiketa's *Hierarchy of Needs*, given by Maslow, involving the lowest to the highest need stage to reach the ultimate truth. Nachiketa's travelogue engages the diverse practices and paths within mysticism from spiritual guides to the purification of the heart involving the practice of remembrance, quest for truth and understanding, and transcending material desires towards self-transcendence. The story of Nachiketa mirrors the universal quest for knowledge, meaning, and an in-depth link to the Almighty, going beyond the limits of time and space. Ultimately, "Mr. Nachiketa" serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring human journey towards self-discovery and spiritual awakening carried through the timeless quest for inner truth and enlightenment.

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<sup>i</sup> Sadhus are ascetic individuals in Hinduism who renounce worldly possessions and dedicate their lives to the spiritual pursuits by following a path of austerity, meditation, and devotion to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation from the rotation of arrival and departure (samsara). They reside in temples, caves, or wander as itinerant monks wearing saffron-colored robes with bodies covered with sacred ash and matted hair (jata) as symbols of their renunciation.

<sup>ii</sup> Buddhists go in the wilderness leaving behind the worldly desires as a means to attain liberation from suffering and in search of *Nirvana* – the avatar of ‘God’ or nature. Achieving *Nirvana* involves transcending desires and attachments which leads to a state of complete spiritual awakening and freedom from the worldly suffering. The core concepts of Buddhism include the truthfulness of agony (Dukkha) – lifetime is filled with torment and annoyance –, the trustworthiness of agony source (Samudaya) – attachment and wish are responsible for agony –, the truthfulness of the agony ending (Nirodha) – the possibility to avoid agony through the ignorance of want and connectedness –, and the worthiness of the way to stop agony (Magga).

<sup>iii</sup> Sufis are the seekers to get liberation from material distractions with a focus on the Divine aiming for a higher spiritual state of union with God.

<sup>iv</sup> The War of Kosala is a significant event in ancient Indian history, specifically in the context of the Mahabharata, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India. Kosala was a prominent kingdom in ancient India, and the war involved various characters and factions, including the Pandavas and Kauravas, who were central figures in the Mahabharata. This war was a key part of the larger conflict known as the Kurukshetra War, which was fought over issues of succession, power, and righteousness.