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The Spiritual Intersection of Shams and Sufism: A Comparative Analysis of Shams' Character in the Forty Rules of Love and the Sufi Teachings in Kashf al-Mahjoob by Ali Hajweri

Shehbaz Siraj

Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, Lincoln College University, Malaysia

Correspondence: shexy993@gmail.com

Mehak

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Qurtaba University Peshawar, KPK, Pakistan

Email: mehakhussain100@gmail.com

Ihsan Ullah

Ph.D Scholar, Islamia College University, Peshawar, Pakistan

Email: ihsanpmdc88@gmail.com

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Abstract

The spiritual cross-path of Shams of Tabraiz, portrayed by Elif Shafak in her ground breaking work “The Forty Rules of Love”, and Sufism as explained in Kashaf ul Majooob by Ali Hajweri puts forth a compelling and eye catching lens to investigate the mystical perspectives of self-transcendence and diving love. This study explores how the transformative character of Shams as Spiritual mentor in the mentioned novel correspond with the basic principle of Sufism and particular a Sufi, expounded by Ali Hajweri in his book. With his unconventional preaching and radical wisdom, Shams recapitulates the Sufi path by accepting the divine love and deconstructing the ego as the ultimate truth. In the book, his “forty rules” shapes the crux of Sufi teaching by highlighting the very importance of humility, spiritual awakening and true love and this in turns forms the essence of the doctrine that Kashf ul Majoob presents. This forms a theoretical framework to explore the life of shams as a spiritual example. This analysis in comparison presents the character of Shams as a bridging a gap between ideals of Sufism and contemporary critics which not only makes the universal teaching of Sufism accessible beyond time but also emotionally resonant.

Keywords: Shams of Tabraiz, Elif Shafak, Kashaf ul Majoob, Self-transcendence, Sufism.



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Introduction

According to Ali Hajweri, the Sufism explained in *Kashaf-ul-Majoob* is the ultimate goal where the person striving for knowledge and seeking God, has to purify himself, love God and completely 'die' (fana). Koh (2022) explained a Sufi disengages from his or her vanity, greed, and pride and sets on the quest for annihilation of self. In the work, he described the particular guidelines and the features of a Sufi, and the main of them are patience, generosity, and abstinence and orientation on the internal purity rather than on the external appearance. In this research, Shams of Tabriz presented in *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak possesses such qualities and acts as a revolutionary spiritual master of Rumi (Shafak, 2010). As such, this research aims at offering an understanding of Shams from the vantage of the Sufi treatise *Kashaf-ul-Majoob* in order to present the mystifying personality of Shams together with the change he brought to Rumi and the other individuals around him (Azizi, Faizi, & Ziabakhsh, 2015). This research intends to examine how and to what extent Shams conforms to or departs from the typical Sufi principles where ideas of love, spirituality, or the ability to actualise oneself is concerned.

Research Questions

1. How can the character of Shams of Tabriz be described in terms of the principles of classical Sufism presented in the *Kashaf-ul-Majoob*?
2. How far does Shams meet or deviate from the standards of a Sufi according to Ali Hajweri *Sufism Rules of Engagement*?
3. In what manner and what importance can be golfed to Shams' practices and philosophy in context of Sufi mysticism and their interpretations during the historical period.

Research Objectives

1. This research will compare Shams of Tabriz with the principles highlighted on Sufism by Ali Hajweri in *Kashaf-ul-Majoob*.
2. In order to determine the conformity and contradiction of actions and attitudes of Shams with the concepts of classical Sufism, including self-annihilation, humility, and love for God.
3. To enable a comparative study of actual Sufi teachings and the portrayal of these teachings in works of fiction.

Significance of the Research

This research situates Sufi concepts within the modern literary context by using classical Sufism along with theoretical frameworks pertaining to literature. This study, therefore, adds to understanding the appropriateness of Sufi principles when applied to the life of Shams of Tabriz through information gathered from Ali Hajweri's *Kashaf-ul-Majoob*, to today's society. With themes of Gospel androgyny, love, spiritual awakening, it talks of man's continual search for True Love, divinity, meaning and purpose in his life, relating to all people (Ashraf, Khan, & Mehmood, 2022). Besides, this research serves the enhancement of the general scholarly discussions on spirituality in literary works; it adds value to debates on Sufism and its philosophical and cultural heritage. This study also compares the modern approaches of the meaning of Sufism to the traditional perspectives and considers the applicability of what might seem innovative concepts, like purification of the soul, tawhid, and love in the modern world. Shams of Tabriz is depicted not only as a master, but as a rebel and a rebel against the customary ways of the society, which opens up an opportunity to trace the liberating functions of Sufism in the modern world. Application of Ali Hajweri's principles in this context establish continuity between historical Sufi and literary formations in the Modern World through the influence of Rumi (Roodgar, 2024).

Furthermore, the study goes beyond providing theoretical contribution and mostly, inspires the readers to consider their own spiritual paths and relationships to higher principles such as love, kindness, moderation and harmony. In so doing, the study goes beyond the contextualization of classical Sufi doctrines in contemporary literatures but also opens up a number of possibilities for additional research in literary analysis and philosophy. It underlines the timeless pertinence of spiritual guidance and search for guidance, thus fitting into a world that is slowly losing its way and demanding more of profound contemplation and discourse over the ideas of love and life. In this regard, the study does not only advance the body of academic knowledge, but also raises an appreciation of development and existence in a progressive temporal and geographical context.

Literature Review

The exploration of path of Sufism as a mystical perspective in Islam has produced a good amount of scholarly interest, specifically the essence of its spirituality and its embodiment in contemporary literary works.

Sufism advocates a journey focused on an inner self to get closed to God with its emphasis on cleansing the heart, the heavenly love and to become united with One-the true God. *Kashaf ul Majoob* (The Unveiling of the Veiled) by Ali Hajweri is traced back as one the comprehensive and earliest treatise of the philosophy and teachings of Sufism, providing a structured and detailed view of the depths of various dimensions and theologies of Sufism (Nasr,2007). Ali Hajweri expounds the core principles of Sufism like Fana (Annihilation of the self), Tawhid (Unity of God) and *ishq e haqiqi* (divine love). He presents the universality of Sufism by focusing on the ethical conduct and practical guide of it.

Elif Shafaq has portrayed Shams of Tabriz in her novel, *The Forty Rules of Love*, as a mystic encapsulating almost all the principles of being a Sufi put forwarded by Ali Hajweri. He his way of approaching divine love by preaching unconventionally reflects the transformative and transitional aspects of Sufism. This is what has also been observed in the discourses of Ali Hajweri.

Shams Tabraiz, as history says, had been a true mentor for Rumi, a renowned poet of his kind. This is what Elif Shafaq has also portrayed in her by giving her artistic and fictionalized narrative. Shams, in the book, is delineated as the spiritual guide of Rumi. He challenged and denounces the societal norms by leading different individual on the journey of self-realization. Lewis (2024) states that Shams serves as symbolization of all the masters of Sufism who assimilate heavenly love and act as spiritual intercessors.

Shams' main principle is to lead the masses and particularly Rumi to the path of enlightenment but his way unorthodox. This is what Elif shafq has depicted in her work and is in true alignment with the description produced by Ali Hajweri as this intensity and unpredictability connect it directly to the Sufi Path. For example, the Hajweri (1911) talks about destroying the ego and nurturing inner purity for attaining divine love. The rules laid by Shams in “*The Forty Rules of Love*” expounds the importance of transgressing the societal judgments and worldly attachments to be on the true path of spirituality (Shafaq 2009).

The text of both these works present Love as an anchor in spiritual transformation. Ali Hajweri talks about love as the highest and purest form of surrender by going over all these worldly rituals and moving towards attaining union with One. Hajweri writes “The lover’s heart is a mirror that reflects the Beloved’s light” (Hajweri 1911). This description highlights the necessity of receptiveness and purity in the experience of love which is divine in nature.

The character of Shams epitomizes this philosophy and to attain unconditional love he challenges the orthodox approaches in his surroundings. Elif Shafak in her book writes “the path to truth is a labor of the heart, not of the head” (Shafak 2009). This presents a dimensions of what Hajweri asserts in his book the knowledge which is intellectual but alone is not sufficient for awakening spiritually and thus highlighting the power of love as not a single entity but a shared tenet.

Theoretical Framework

The most important framework used for this research is that of Kashaf ul Majoob by Ali Hajweri. In addition to this there are some other frameworks used as well which are discussed in the following lines. The book has a number of arguments but this research has used only one aspect of the book that is the Sufi principles used in outlining the character of Shams and The Recognizable character features to be outlined and analyzed are based on Sufism principles outlined by Ali Hajweri in Kashaf-ul-Majoob (Hajweri, 2001). These principles are; fumigation or putting off, crucifixion or putting off the old man or the adamic nature, and passion or the love of God (Shafak, 2010). Drawing on the methodologies of character analysis derived from the methodologies of literary analysis, the study explores both how Shams’ character is built and how the actions and beliefs of the titular character advance the key narrative goals. The function of Shams as a spiritual mentor fits into the characteristics of transformational leadership: his ability to stimulate individuals to develop and change for the better, spiritually (Tariq & Abdi, 2023). They can also be used in the analysis of the mentorship he provided to Rumi. In building on extensive comparability of different forms of mysticisms, the analysis places Sufi practices within a more global context and analyses concepts of love harmony, and ever after in Sufi ways.

Research Methodology

The method used for analysis the work is of textual analysis and the model is Catherine Belsy’s textual analysis method. It will involve close reading of “The Forty Rules of Love” by Elif Shafak in understanding the personality of Shams of Tabraiz and the principles that he expounds. Also, there will be in-depth reading of the chapter of Sufism from “Kashaf ul Majoob” written by Ali Hajweri but translated by Reynold Nicholson.

Theoretical Framework

The research is grounded in the following theoretical approaches:

Sufi Philosophy:

The principles used in outlining the character of Shams and The Recognizable character features to be outlined and analysed are based on Sufism principles outlined by Ali Hajweri in Kashaf-ul-Majoob (Hajweri, 2001). These principles are; fumigation or putting off, crucifixion or putting off the old man or the adamic nature, and passion or the love of God (Shafak, 2010).

Character Analysis in Literature:

Drawing on the methodologies of character analysis derived from the methodologies of literary analysis, the study explores both how Shams’ character is built and how the actions and beliefs of the titular character advance the key narrative goals.

Transformational Leadership Theory:

The function of Shams as a spiritual mentor fits into the characteristics of transformational leadership: his ability to stimulate individuals to develop and change for the better, spiritually

(Tariq & Abdi, 2023). They can also be used in the analysis of the mentorship he provided to Rumi.

Comparative Mysticism:

In building on extensive comparability of different forms of mysticisms, the analysis places Sufi practices within a more global context and analyses concepts of love harmony, and ever after in Sufi ways.

Textual Analysis

Shams of Tabriz represents part of the principles of classical Sufism expounded in Ali Hajweri's *Kashaf-ul-Majoob* such as: annihilation in God (*fana*) love (*ishq*), guidance and humility. His outlook and actions are typical examples of Sufi principles based on learning and predilection, theoretical and practical points of view.

Self-Annihilation (Fana): Shams is the best example *fana* because like Salek he submits himself to the divine authority and denies ego. Hajweri argues that the so-called Sufis have to deny or lose him and the self-desire in order to achieve proximity to God (Hajweri, 2001). Shams' life illustrates this principle: He gives up social acceptance, amenities, and in some cases, security to take the God's chosen way. Sheila's interaction with Rumi conveys this teaching since he tries to compel Rumi to shed his academic arrogance and materialism which he does. Shams expects people to embrace the act of submission and accepting change in order to attain oneness with the divine by stating: "Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead let life live through you. And do not worry that your life is turning upside down. How do you know that the side you are used to is better than the one to come? (Shafak, 2010 pg. 65). These lines clearly state Shams belief in the divine and the way he approaches the reality of life and how life's changes must be handled because they give a lesson on each and every step.

Divine Love (Ishq): One of the major themes of Shams' teachings is the use of love as the way of finding God. In this respect he declares time and again that love is the truth which breaks through the confines and divisions of the world. In *The Forty Rules of Wisdom*, Shams states that the material and the divine love are related as he says, "The path to the Truth is a labor of the heart, not of the head. Make your heart your primary guide" (Shafak, 2010 pg. 30). Sufis say that God lies in the heart and this is what Shams says as well to make the heart the primary guide because He lies there and who is better guide than Him. However, it is in this context that I find consensus with Hajweri's *ishq* as the force that glues the seeker to Allah and fuels the path of spiritual purification (Khan, 2022).

Spiritual Guidance (Murshid-Disciple Relationship): Shams is portrayed as a murshid, or teacher, a realistic depiction of Sufi tradition in teaching a discal student like Rumi. Hajweri, thus, emphasizes the essential role of a master to guide his learners through several challenges that are realized while practicing an aspect of sufism specifically spiritual guidance (Hajweri, 2001). Shams serves such a purpose and forces Rumi to become the Great Mystic poet who memorialized Divine Love.

Bridging Shams of Tabriz with classical elements of Sufism comparable to *Kashaf-ul-Majoob* appealing to all classes and sexes of the society, Shams of Tabriz proves to be an epitome of the principles depicted in *Kashaf-ul-Majoob*. Shams also set the example of detachment from worldly desires by narrowing his own life experiences to a minimal level and teaching that: "Whatever happens in your life, no matter how troubling things might seem, do not enter the neighborhood

of despair” (Shafak, 2010 pg. 50). His instructions on self-destruction, divine passion, and advise of novices are great proof compatible with Sufi tradition, showing people the example of lifelong devoted.

Shams of Tabriz conforms to some of those conducts expected of a Sufi as described in Ali Hajweri’s *Kashaf-ul-Majoob* and at the same time disobey. His philosophy and actions give evidence of the great principle of Sufism which suggests that Sufism can assume any shape depending within the terrain.

Alignment with Sufi Standards:

Shams is similar to many classical Sufi masters most specifically in his emphasis on purity of heart, lack of ego and the supremacy of God’s love over all else. However, self-effacing attitude is deemed a proper Sufi orientation; Sufis are enjoined to reject [the] ostentation of riches or indulgence in pompous trappings (Hajweri, 2001). Shams does this through providing food for outcasts, not paying attention to people’s status, and reminding us that what is inside counts. He remarks: “Do not go with the flow. Be the flow” (Shafak, 2010 pg. 88). Shams also applies altruism extent to a great extent — he deliberately puts himself in harm’s way for Rumi’s sake because of the young man’s spiritual awakening.

Deviations from Sufi Standards:

Thus it is seen that though Shams belongs to Sufi framework, his approaches are seemingly unconventional. Hajweri instructs a Sufi to be patient and moderate in his behaviour and actions but Shams takes it to the extreme. He remarks: “The words that come out of our mouths do not vanish but are perpetually stored in infinite space, and they will come back to us in due time” (Shafak, 2010 pg. 136). Such an ability to offend society and the clergy can be explained by the fact that the Sufi is quite different from what people expect from him, having a quite restrained disposition. For instance, Shams confronts those whose biggest vices are intolerance and hypocrisy and thus, disturbs them but he also takes from them their vice or distraction. Although this is in good order with his desire to shake people out of their lethargy, the techniques that he uses are not as soft as those promoted by Hajweri (Azizi, Faizi, & Ziaakhsh, 2015).

Revolutionary Approach:

Shams also broke the traditional Sufi norms in his ideas that were revolutionary in his days. As to the Sufism, it is divided into regular and grand, the former being characterized by the step-by-step revelation of truth, while the second, in this case represented by Shams, calls for change in an instant. His preferring ‘learning by doing’ to ‘learning concepts’ is as a result of combined traditional and modern interpretation of Sufism (Roodgar, 2024). All in all, Shams was a Sufi who did exactly what Sufism entails, but not in a conventional way. As a Sufi reflects god’s love by stating: “If we see God as full of love and compassion, so are we” (Shafak, 2010 pg. 25). His radicalism is proof of the ability of Sufi tenets to morph with circumstances in an effort to best serve the purposes of the people as well as the communities they live in.

The contemporary Sufi practices and ideas of Attar of Tabriz reconstruct the role of Sufi mystique in spiritual development, expressing the significance of personal change and its genial significance for everyone. His teachings show that Sufism has ancient values it upholds but also it is a dynamic package that seeks solutions to issues within society and world at various stages.

Historical Context:

Shams was born in a time when authoritarianism and conformity dominated and faith searching was suppressed. Some of his practices for instance, debunking of orthodoxy, the rejection of bigotry as well as encouragement of tolerance are some of the radical features of early Sufism. Hajweri, in *Kashaf-ul-Majoob*, still underscore to those interested in Sufism as a disciplined method of freeing people from a conventional culture's shackles to have a more personal relationship with the Divine (Hajweri, 2001). Shams' purpose is also in line with this goal; he said: "East, West, South, or North makes little difference. No matter what your destination, just be sure to make every journey a journey within" (Shafak, 2010 pg. 57). Shams' rebellion against the conventions of Sufism, and his individualism against the authoritarian establishment of the institution made him a revolutionist in the Sufism. In this case, he rejected the emphasis on superficial religious formalities and instead urged people to cultivate inner spirituality. His message also advocated tolerance and inclusivity, promoting a sense of spiritual unity that transcended distinctions between locals and foreigners.

Philosophical Contributions:

Shams broadened the AHADIC Sufi idea of *ishq* (the beloved, love) to include everything. He also insisted that love is beyond the division of religious, cultural or social discriminators, which further strengthens the argument as this is typical Sufism. Through these relations, the former impacted on the later to become a poet of divine love under the grace of his works especially the *Masnavi*. This transformation has proved the fact that Shams' philosophy is good enough to transform not only ordinary person but movements for spiritual thought (Ashraf, Khan, & Mehmood, 2022). And with his fundamentals, Shams explain how *ishq* is not mere passion for God but it is the connector of the world to bring forth harmony and come together in this search for truth. He further stated: "The universe is one being. Everything and everyone is interconnected through an invisible web of stories. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are all in a silent conversation" (Shafak, 2010 pg. 136). He let his people free from the prejudices' confines and love for fellow beings as the core purpose of life. Thus, assisting Rumi's spiritual growth, Shams showed it was possible for love to spread beyond the individual and become a means to change the world.

Relevance and Significance:

By practicing some of the Sufi Principles Shams has epitomized that love, equality and growing spiritually are relevant in any society at any given time. Criticisms of his aggressive approach even can be considered perfect to wake people up when they are trapped in the stale. This corresponds with the conventional practice of the Sufi from the earliest times of provoking controversy in society to prompt the spiritual development of people (Roodgar, 2024). Moreover, the articularity of love and the call for an individual change of the heart are even more relevant to the contemporary society with Shams. He remarks: "The whole universe is contained within a single human being—you. Everything that you see around, including the things you might not be fond of and even the people you despise or abhor, is present within you in varying degrees" (Shafak, 2010 pg. 71). His method promotes a reminder of practices and commitment to the course of devotion, innovation, and unity of the people of different cultures and religions across the world.

Conclusion

A deep connection between classical mysticism and literature is manifested by the investigation of spiritual relationship between the teachings of Sufism in *Kashaf ul Mahjoob* by Ali Hajweri and the character of Shams in “The Forty Rules of Love” by Elif Shafak. The text of both these books emphasize the presence of spiritual mentor in the journey of enlightenment, and attainment of heavenly love, the importance of Fana. *Kashaf ul Mahjoob* presents the doctrine of Sufism in a methodological sequence while these doctrines are embodied in character of Shams by Elif Shafak in a more narrative driven and poetic way.

The adaptability and universality of Sufi teachings beyond context and time are presented by this comparative research work. Through the dynamic character Shams, the set patterns of society are challenged in unorthodox way and spiritual enlightenment is advocated. This approach is reflected in this non-traditional approach of Shams.

To conclude, the intersection of the two ground breaking works present the timeless relevance of Mysticism both as a tradition of spirituality and an inspiration of philosophical and literary motivation. By analyzing the character of Shams in the light of the rules laid by Hajweri, the study presents the Sufism in its pure way as it elevated the cultural origins and historical roots to offer depth into the quest of human beings for self-realization and divine love.

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