



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: G
LINGUISTICS & EDUCATION
Volume 14 Issue 7 Version 1.0 Year 2014
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

The Sufi Phenomenon: The Case of Elifshafak's the Forty Rules of Love

By Fatima Anjum & Muhammad Ramzan

University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Abstract- This paper is intended to analyze the delineation of the Sufi Phenomenon in ElifShafak's novel "The Forty Rules of Love". The novel draws a correlation between the world of 13th century and that of 21st century through the parallel narratives of development of friendship of a renowned scholar-turned-poet, Rumi and a mystic Sufi, Shams, and that of a mystic writer, Aziz and a housewife, Ella. Emanating out of the precincts of religion, time and space, the concept of a Universal Spirituality is presented; the bedrock of which is Love. The tenets of this Universal spirituality are derived from Sufism. Shafak has depicted this Universal Spirituality a mutual platform of communion and relation for the mankind, be of East or West, and Love is that centripetal force that can bind them together. It is where all music attunes to the One symphony and Unity is realized.

Keywords: *sufi phenomenon, universal spirituality, sufism, sufi, love, unity.*

GJHSS-G Classification : FOR Code: 200499



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2014. Fatima Anjum & Muhammad Ramzan. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

The Sufi Phenomenon: The Case of Elifshafak's the Forty Rules of Love

Fatima Anjum^α & Muhammad Ramzan^σ

Abstract- This paper is intended to analyze the delineation of the Sufi Phenomenon in ElifShafak's novel "The Forty Rules of Love". The novel draws a correlation between the world of 13th century and that of 21st century through the parallel narratives of development of friendship of a renowned scholar-turned-poet, Rumi and a mystic Sufi, Shams, and that of a mystic writer, Aziz and a housewife, Ella. Emanating out of the precincts of religion, time and space, the concept of a Universal Spirituality is presented; the bedrock of which is Love. The tenets of this Universal spirituality are derived from Sufism. Shafak has depicted this Universal Spirituality a mutual platform of communion and relation for the mankind, be of East or West, and Love is that centripetal force that can bind them together. It is where all music attunes to the One symphony and Unity is realized.

Keywords: *sufi phenomenon, universal spirituality, sufism, sufi, love, unity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

ElifShafak is a much venerated writer of Turkey. Most of her work is celebrated for their treatment of the subjects of mysticism and Sufism. With an Islamic and Turkish background, along with her familiarity with Western mode of thought, she becomes the right kind of person to explore Sufism in a language understood by the West. Shafak holds that mystic tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity share many similarities.

Shafak's first novel, *Pinhan* (The Mystic) was awarded the "Rumi Prize" in 1998, which is given to the best work in mystical literature in Turkey. Her second novel, *Şehrin Aynaları* (Mirrors of the City), brings together Jewish and Islamic mysticism against a historical setting in the seventeenth century. Shafak's next novel, *The Forty Rules of Love*, focused on Love and love –East & West, past & present, spiritual & mundane, all in the light of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz (see, Shafak).

In the subsequent pages, the case of *The Forty Rules of Love* (TFROL) is dealt with special reference to its treatment of the Sufi Phenomenon and Love.

II. SUFISM AS UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY

Shafak has pictured Sufism as a Universal Spirituality devoid of any religious and social restraint. Anyone who has a pure heart teeming with Love for God

and humanity is a Sufi. A Muslim like Shams and a Christian like Francis can be Sufis. A concubine like Desert Rose and a social outcast beggar Hassan can achieve existence through their ego annihilation. If "whirling dervish" males are there, females can also join this circle. However another school of thought equates Sufism with Islamic Mysticism:

Sufism is nothing other than Islamic Mysticism. Those who insist that Sufism is 'free from shackles of religion' do so partly because they imagine that its universality is at stake. (Lings, Martin)

According to Lings, each theocratic civilization is a unique and homogeneous whole, different from others but just as fruits are different but taste alike in essence so are the ideologies of these civilizations. With their forms they are particular and unique. Temples and cathedrals are not destined to display the Islamic ideals, therefore religious boundaries remain intact. He then makes an analogy of a circle in which radius is the religion's dimension of mysticism—thus in case of Islam it is Sufism. Other religions have also their own respective versions of mysticisms but in ways differ from Sufism, which is Islamic mysticism. Whereas mysticism is universal, Sufism is particular. The writer also asserts that each mysticism should be seen in light of this particularity and universality: particular owing to their distinctions and universal by dint of their path leading to the central truth. All mysticisms are similar in their quintessence, though they differ in their superficialities.

What Shafak avers is that Sufism is a way of life. It is neither a philosophy, nor a ritual. Sacred Art like Mosques stand as an emblem of spirituality but do not fragmentize the humanity.

"When a true lover of God goes into a tavern, the tavern becomes his chamber of prayer, but when a wine bibber goes into the same chamber it becomes his tavern. In everything we do, it is our hearts that make the difference, not our outer appearances". (TFROL)

Religious boundaries are not that much integral as are made by the scholars. Religions are like rivers. They all flow to the same sea. Christians, Jews, Muslims while quarrel about the outer form, the Sufi is after the essence. Shams tells Kerra that love for Mary can be divulged by the Muslims, for she signifies compassion, piety and purity. In Divani Shamsi Tabriz, Rumi reiterates this theme of Unity;

.....All religions are only one religion,
Because all praises are directed towards God light,

Author ^α: University of Sargodha.

e-mails: star.staronsky.sky@gmail.com, mrbsgd23@gmail.com

These various forms and figures are borrowed from it. (Nicholson, R. A.)

Shafak has presented this Sufism as a remedy for all the problems of mankind. It is something like panacea for the diseases that infect contemporary society. The story of Rumi and Shams occurring somewhere in 13th century bears its relevance to the modern world of 21st century. Façade of problems can be different but roots are the same. Unprecedented religious clashes, cultural misunderstandings, insecurity and fears of the 'Others' had haunted and still haunt the mankind. Power struggles gave way to the Crusades and Mongolism in 13th century. It was a time of chaos and anarchy when there was no firm and absolute centers for the individuals and groups to adhere to; a time that witnessed Christians fighting Christians, Muslims fighting Muslims and Christians fighting Muslims. Hostility and anguish ruled the world. Amid such turbulent ambience, developed the unison between a Sufi dervish, Shams and renowned scholar-turned-poet, Rumi. Together they stood for a Universal Spirituality based on the cult of love. Its mouthpiece was Rumi; book was Rumi's poetry; subject was humanity and aim was to wither one's ego/Nafs. This affiliation cuts across all cultures, countries, centuries and religions. Such are the spirits needed today so to fight all odds from East to West and strive for a cosmopolitan global society just like Rumi who belongs to the whole world:

"Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi or zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not of the East, nor of the West...

My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless." (TFROL)

This Unity transcends from people to the whole universe in Sufism. Sufism holds a sturdy belief in the unitary nature of universe and the concept that everything in it is an aspect of God itself. Universe or nature as totality of everything is identical with divinity. (The New Oxford Dictionary of English). This view of unity is nigh unto Pantheism. Pantheism is derived from the Greek pan (meaning "all") and Theos (meaning "God"). Pantheism considers God and the world to be inter-related with the world being in God and God being in the world. Traditional theistic systems emphasize the difference between God and the world while pantheism stresses God's active presence in the world (Culp, John). In Islam theology, God (The Creator) is different from His creation. The idea of unity was presented as the doctrine of Wahdat-al-Wajo'od. It was criticized by mainstream Islamic clergy with vehemence. To counter this doctrine of unity, another doctrine, Wahdat-al-Shaho'od was put forward.

Pantheism encompasses the notion of All-is-One, Monism, and All-is-Now, Determinism. Monism stands for unity with Divinity and a Sufi seeks to efface the self in mystical union with God with the eventual

target of plunging into the Ocean of Infinite Oneness. All-is-Now idea establishes the notion of presence of Divine impulse of the moment where time becomes an illusion and division of time into past, present and future insignificant units. Albert Einstein who is considered pantheist corroborates this determinism by stating, "the past, present, future are an illusion" in a letter to his friend's family. Shafak has illustrated this vantage point through a rule of Shams;

"The past is an interpretation. The future is an illusion. The world does not move through times as if it were a straight line, proceeding from past to the future.

If you want to experience eternal illumination, put the past and future out of your mind and remain within the present moment." (TFROL)

Rumi in his MasnaviMa'navi has called Sufi, "the son of time present", for he lives in the present moment and experiences it only.

III. WHAT SUFISM IS?

Sufism (or Islamic mysticism) is all about an inner journey of Love. Love is a vast ocean where a sufi heart sails in the boat of submission and patience from the point of "Know Thyself" to "know Thy God". Sufis claim to have methods of finding the mystic knowledge of God. For this purpose, they take a journey in which there are seven stages. The stages are: repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, and acquiescence to the will of God. Then, with the grace of God, a higher level of consciousness is attained, in which knowledge, the knower, and the known are realized as one.

Submission is a form of peaceful acceptance of the terms of the universe and a surrender of one's Nafs/ego. It cannot be equated with weakness or inaction. It is like doing your part and leaving the rest to God, for there are certain things in this scheme of cosmos where the limits of humans are marked. The Sufis call this inexplicable and uncontrollable divine element "Void", the other four being fire, earth, water and wind. Patience means putting up with pain and hardships with all consent. Only then love can be perfected.

Love is a great transformational force. It leaves its prints on its seeker. This quest of love is not a passive one; it changes the seeker.

"The moment you start looking for Love, you start to change within and without." (TFROL)

And for Sufi each new moment brings a new life.

Sufism purges the inner soul of the seeker of all filth present inside. Filth of bigotry, hatred and pride contaminates the soul. Where fasting and worship purifies the outer body, soul is cleansed by Love. It is the devil inside which needs to be shunned out. Attributing human mischiefs to Shaitan (Satan) or devil is just a naïve way of escaping self-examination.

Comparison of the characters of Desert Rose and Baybars clarifies the matter of such purgation: Desert Rose is a harlot; her body is tormented by lust-seekers like those of Baybars but so far her heart has a place for Love she is considered pure by Sufi like Shams. Baybars is a nephew of renowned religious zealot. For him passivity and submission are the symbols of cowardice. War is the core of life and hatred the only way to treat infidels and enemies of Islam. He loves to name himself "BaybarsThe Warrior". Baybars like people deem Sharia at the highest post for humanity. They hate seeing women as prostitutes but make life of repentance hard for them as well. It is death for them to believe that Desert Rose lives under the roof of Rumi after abandoning brothel. They search for love in mosques and God in prayers. Sufism believes that God is in heart of a true lover, be it is a tavern or a mosque.

Sufism draws a direct line between God and His lover. All the idols that stand between them, including fame, wealth, rank, even religion are demolished.

"Nothing should stand between yourself and God. Not imams, priests, rabbis, or any other custodians of moral or religious leadership. Not spiritual masters, not even your faith."(TFROL)

This point should not be confused as if Sufism has nothing to do with the need of a mentor or a spiritual companion. It does have with certain conditions. A genuine mentor guides and teaches not his rules but the rules of Love. He helps appreciate the seeker's inner self by reflecting that which is absent and ignoring the present. True mentor is transparent as a glass and lets the light of God pass through the seeker. The association of Shams and Rumi as portrayed in the novel verifies this point. Shams abets Rumi in realization of how much his cup is filled with Love. He helps Rumi unlearn the learnt, secedes from all temporal attachments and then he brings him in touch with the laymen, the scum of the scum. These trials Rumi has put in such words;

"Whatever you see as profitable, flee from it!

Drink poison and pour away the water of life!

Abandon security and stay in frightful places!

Throw away reputation, become disgraced and shameless!"(TFROL)

Only in this way ego is murdered and seeker plunges deep into the ocean of the Oneness. Sufis have identified seven Stages every ego has to undergo on the path of truth and love so to achieve Unity and Oneness:

Depraved Nafs

Accusing Nafs

Inspired Nafs

Serene Nafs

Pleased Nafs

Pleasing Nafs

Purified Nafs(TFROL)

Each stage has its trials and tests; simple to state but difficult to experience.

IV. SUFISM AND RELIGION

Religion and Sufism are different entities. Divides created by religion have made this world a quandary where clashes and conflicts supersede the harmony wished to be found among humans. Religions have categorized them as Muslims, Christians, Jews and others, and have ranked them as Catholic, Protestant, Shia and Sunni, to name just a few. Sufism has just one thing to offer to its follower and that is "a true love". The widened gap between religion and spirituality has destroyed the interconnection among the humans. Consequently humanity has suffered and separation from the One has put common man in a malady. The world is divided into WE and THEM; I and YOU. But Sufism is devoid of any such linguistic misunderstandings. It propagates that there is no such thing as I and THEM, for.

"All you need to do is keep in mind how everything and everyone in this universe is interconnected. We are not hundreds and thousands of different beings. We are all One". (TFROL)

All religious wars are in essence a linguistic problem. Language does more to hide than tell the truth which is source of misunderstandings. Language is the tool of exploitation used by the religious scholars to grind their own axe. The author has quoted the example of translation of an ayat from Surah Al Nisa of the Holy Quran. The literal translation given by the scholars implies that man is superior to woman but in depth analysis reveals that ayat is about equality of both through the concept of oneness of all where masculinity and femininity reside in both sexes. Face value of the words destroys the true meanings. Similarly God has been given different names by different languages like Bhagwan, Allah, Father but essence of all is same; all point towards the absolute and ultimate reality.

Religious scholars have done much harm to the teachings of religion with their own constrictive and narrow-minded view of the words. They have much to say about Faith. They criticize Christianity for its trinity concept and the Christian scholars suspect the perfection of the Quran. However when it comes to basics, many similarities can be found. Not many differences can be seen among Christians and Muslims living together in one place than focused by the scholars sitting in their ivory towers. What is the use of such faith displayed on prayer rugs or in church when there is no love at its center? Followers are incited to worship by creating horrors about the flames of Hell prepared for those who sinned and picturing the rewards of Heaven waiting for those who hold Sharia high. So much obsession is crafted that followers forget their present and fret for an imaginary future. Zealots have decorated their shops of religion with dreads where God is fashioned as a Moody Patriarch ready to curse the sinners and reward the virtuous. Here, whole is

sacrificed for the parts, love for the trepidation and present for the future. Sufism is about embracing religion in its entirety as the whole is concealed in the essence. Hell and Heaven are just connotations. Both are present inside the very moment,

"Every time we fall in love, we ascend to heaven. Every time we hate, envy, or fight someone, we tumble straight into the fires of hell." (TFROL)

Sufism preaches to love God not out of apprehensions but simply because love is the reason and love is the goal of life –an untainted and nonnegotiable love. Rumi says;

Love is musk. Don't deny it

When you smell the scent! (Espada, Jason)

V. LOVE: THE CORNERSTONE OF SUFISM

"Sufism has often been called the creed of love. All Sufis, irrespective of the external appearance of their schools have made this theme a matter of essential concern". (Shah, Idries)

Love is a common denominator for mankind. It dissolves all digressions and divergences. It has such a power which can bind opposing entities together and patch up all clashes. That is what happened to Aziz and Ella when they fall in a spiritual relationship despite of geographical, religious and social manacles. Then their life is led from predictability to unpredictability, certainty to uncertainty and presence to nothingness. But in this consciousness of nothingness they find their Baqa/existence.

"Love cannot be explained, it can only be experienced Love cannot be explained, yet it explains all". (TFROL)

It is experienced by the seekers, for they are the travellers of inner journey of love. This love is not preserved just for God but also for His creations, mean or sublime. Spirituality cannot be attained without achieving a sense of humanity. The entire universe is one being where all are interconnected Love develops the delicate yet strong fabric of this interconnection so much so that one man's pain hurts all humans and one man's joy makes all smile. It is easy to love a perfect God but real spirituality lies in loving humans replete with faults and blemishes:

"Unless we learn to love God's creation, we can neither truly love nor truly know God (TFROL)".

Love has a transformational power. It changes the seeker during the journey through its function of purifying the putrid soul. Where intellect makes one cautious, love makes one courageous:

"Intellect ties people in knots and risks nothing, but love dissolves all tangles and risks everything. Intellect is always cautious and advises, 'Beware too much ecstasy,' whereas love says, 'Oh, never mind! Take the plunge!' Intellect does not easily break down, whereas love can effortlessly reduce itself to rubble. But

treasures are hidden among ruins. A broken heart hides treasures." (TFROL)

In fact love is that Divine essence which works through and through innumerable lives for its own eternal glory. Sufism, the religion of Love urges seekers to love God's light in man. And as per Unity concept, man is a part of God and a fragment of the whole (Davis.F. Hadland).

VI. WHO IS SUFI?

"He that is purified by love is pure and he that is absorbed in the Beloved and has abandoned all else is a Sufi".

"Purity is the attribute of those who love and the lover is he that is dead (fani) in his own attributes and living (baqi) in the attributes of his Beloved." (Kash Al Mahjub)

Shafak has depicted many features of a Sufi through the forty rules of Shams and his character.

These forty rules, Shams have called The Basic Principles of Itinerant Mystic of Islam.

A sufi is the one who struggles against his ego/Nafs and enters into the ocean of Infinite Oneness. Andalusian Sufi, Muhyudin Ibn-e-Arabi used to pray which begins, "Enter me O Lord into the deep of the Ocean of thine Infinite Oneness". In treatise of the Sufis this Ocean is mentioned again and again (Lings, Martin). This Ocean symbolizes End towards which the Path of Sufism is directed. And this End is the ultimate truth, Sufi quests for. During this journey of love, he sails on the boat of Sharia but as Shams states that sooner or later the true seeker would abandon the boat and dive into the Ocean. At this stage there is no "I", just the "One". He aims for this supreme stage of nothingness by living a life as light and empty as zero.

However, he does not restrict himself in a mosque/church/synagogue/temple or a prayer rug so to know God. He studies God through his creation and out of these buildings he finds Him in the heart of a true lover. A Sufi heart is leavened with love for humanity. Semblances and outer faiths of the mankind hold no importance before him. He looks at others from the eye of heart which demolishes all discrepancies.

The man of God is drunken without wine,

The man of God is full without meat.

The man of God is distraught and bewildered,

The man of God has no food or sleep.

The man of God is a king "neath dervish-cloak,

The man of God is a treasure in a ruin.

The man of God is not of air and earth,

The man of God is not of fire and water. (Rumi-Nicholson R.A)

VII. CONCLUSION

The novel can be seen as an effort of the author to bridge-up the fissure created by the socio-religious

collisions between the East and the West. Universal Spirituality, known to the world as Sufism stomachs the power to dissolve all the incongruities and raise the world to the platform of Unity above the divisions of pluralistic visions. The venture starts from the self: the rays of positive aura filters all impurities of heart and what remains behind is Love. Love has no labels and imparities; its blessings are meant for all.

REFERENCES RÉFÉRENCES REFERENCIAS

1. Shafak, Elif (2010). The Forty Rules of Love. New York: Penguin
2. Shafak, Elif <<http://www.elifshafak.com/biography.asp>>
3. Lings, Martin. What is Sufism? Produced and distributed by Suhail Academy, Chowk Urdu Bazar, Lahore,
4. Nicholson R.A, The Kash Al Mahjub by Hazrat Ali Bin Usamn Al Hijviri English Translation
5. Nicholson R. A, Selected Poems From The DivaniShamsiTabraiz, reprinted Oxford university 1973
6. E.H Whinfied, M. AMasnaviMa'naviTeachings of Rumi, Translated and Abridged
7. DavisF. Hadland , Wisdom of the East The Persian Mystics Jalaludin Rumi, London, John Murray
8. Culp, John, "Panentheism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/panentheism/>>.
9. Shah, Idries, The Sufis, ebookversio by Occult Digital Mobilization
10. Espada,Jason, My Favourite Rumi .Published 2009.