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## Love and Spirituality in *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak: A Textual Analysis through the Lens of Sufi Philosophy

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### Abstract

*This study examines how Shafak's novel reflects and reinterprets traditional Sufi principles. Shafak's novel intertwines two parallel stories: Ella Rubenstein's contemporary spiritual awakening and the historical relationship between Rumi and his mentor, Shams of Tabriz. The novel explores the themes of divine love, self-discovery, and spiritual enlightenment, mirroring Sufi beliefs. Using textual analysis, the present study compares the major themes of Shafak's novel with traditional Sufi principles of divine love (Ishq), self-annihilation (Fana), and unity of being (Wahdat al-Wujud). The analysis reveals that Shafak's portrayal of love and spirituality closely aligns with Sufi philosophy, emphasizing love's transformative power as a divine force leading to spiritual enlightenment. The characters such as Ella and Rumi undergo significant personal and spiritual growth, reflecting the Sufi's path of self-purification and divine connection. The study concludes that Shafak's novel bridges historical Sufi teachings with modern existential concerns, making profound spiritual concepts accessible and relevant to contemporary readers. By focusing on female spiritual experiences, the novel broadens Sufi philosophy's scope, thus emphasizing its universal applicability. This study enriches the understanding of how literature bridges cultural and spiritual paradigms, offering insights into the universal human quest for love and spiritual fulfillment, illustrating the enduring relevance of Sufi principles in modern life.*

### Keywords

Sufi Philosophy, Divine Love (*Ishq*), Self-annihilation (*Fana*), Contemporary Spirituality, Transformative Power of Love.

### Introduction

*The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is a compelling narrative that intertwines two parallel stories: one of the stories is set in the modern world and the other in the year 1300. The modern plot focuses on Ella Rubenstein, a forty-year-old woman who is a full-time housewife and seems to be bored with her life. Her life takes a turn for the better when she secures a position as a reader for an agency and is given a book about Rumi, the Sufi poet of Persia and his master, Shams. When she starts reading the manuscript, she finds herself in the world of Sufis and goes through a spiritual transformation where she begins to question the meaning and purpose of life and love (Shafak 13).

To this end, in the historical narrative, Shafak is able to paint the legend of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz in a realistic manner. This storyline goes into the dynamics of their relationship and how Rumi evolves from one of the many scholars of Shams's forty rules of love to a spiritual figure of love. Thus, the existence of both the narratives: the contemporary and the historical, lets Shafak show

the eternal and transcending nature of love and spirituality which makes the novel a complex and profound text which may be interesting to readers of different ages and countries.

It is worth-noting that within the context of Shafak's novel, the meaningful concept of love and spirituality remains the key focus. The text explores the theme of human feelings and the spiritual link that is beyond the body. For Shafak, love is not only a feeling but a force that can open new dimensions in a human's life and lead to the process of spiritual transformation. This juxtaposition of the secular and the sacred love is one of the major themes of the novel and gives readers a great deal of spiritual content and passion. Shafak's portrayal of love as a pathway to spiritual growth is reflective of the Sufi belief that true love is an essential component of the soul's journey towards God (Keshavarz 112).

Embedded in this story is the principle of Sufism, which is a branch of Islamic practice that focuses on the pursuit of the Divine, and the development of an individual connection with the Creator. Sufism preaches the process of purifying the soul through love, devotion, and following forty specific rules and regulations that are reflected through bio graphical information of Shams of Tabriz and his forty rules. These are rules which are meant to be guidelines or principles which point the way towards a belief system that is hoped to help further the individual's wisdom regarding himself and the world around him. Sufi philosophy, therefore, reveals that through annihilating the ego and replacing it with love, people can reach the state of rapture and merging with the divine (Schimmel 78).

Therefore, it is the aim of this study to compare and contrast the aspects of love and spirituality as presented in *The Forty Rules of Love* and as described in Sufism. Given such a concern, this study intends to reveal how the novel under discussion is at once a representation of Shafak's literary work and a reinterpretation of Sufi principles. According to the thesis of this research, it can be suggested that through the lens of love and spirituality, the novel of Shafak can be viewed as a post-modernist Sufi narrative that aims at connecting the historical and the existential plane of people's existences. This work will also demonstrate that the novel's themes of character evolution reflect the Sufi way to the truth, thus proving the timelessness of Sufi principles in the modern world.

#### **Existentialism in the Context of *The Forty Rules of Love***

Existentialism is a philosophy that underscores individual freedom, choice, and the search for meaning in an indifferent or even absurd universe. Grounded in the works such philosophers as Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, existentialism affirms that humans are inherently free and responsible for giving their lives meaning through their actions. The movement often centers on themes such as anxiety, alienation, the struggle for authenticity, and the quest for identity and purpose in a world that lacks intrinsic meaning.

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, existentialism is closely intertwined with the themes of spirituality, personal transformation, and the search for deeper meaning. The protagonist, Ella Rubenstein, represents the quintessential modern individual experiencing existential dissatisfaction. Stuck in a mundane life as a housewife, Ella faces feelings of emptiness and questions the purpose of her existence. This resonates with one of the core tenets of existentialism: the realization of the absurdity of one's life when it lacks authentic purpose or passion.

Ella's journey towards spiritual awakening, catalyzed by her encounter with the manuscript about Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, is reflective of an existential quest for self-discovery. Through the teachings of Sufism presented in the novel, Ella starts to make deliberate choices to change her life, aligning herself with a higher purpose. This mirrors existentialism's emphasis on freedom of choice and the importance of authentic living—making conscious decisions that reflect one's true self rather than conforming to societal expectations.

Similarly, the character of Rumi undergoes an existential transformation through his relationship with Shams of Tabriz. Before meeting Shams, Rumi is a respected scholar, yet he lacks a deeper spiritual connection. Shams acts as a catalyst for Rumi's spiritual and existential awakening, pushing him to break free from conventional beliefs and embrace a life of deeper meaning, aligned with divine love. This echoes the existential idea that meaning is not pre-determined but must be found or created through one's actions and relationships.

The novel, therefore, blends existentialist and Sufi philosophies, illustrating how the search for meaning, freedom, and authenticity is at the core of both approaches. Through love, spirituality, and self-discovery, both Ella and Rumi move beyond their initial states of dissatisfaction and

conventionality, embracing a path that allows them to find fulfilment and transcendence. This alignment between existentialism and Sufism in *The Forty Rules of Love* highlights the universal nature of the human struggle to find purpose in an often-indifferent world.

### **Problem Statement**

In the novel titled *The Forty Rules of Love* Elif Shafak applies the Sufi principles of love for the contemporary readers and intertwines the story of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz with a modern woman's journey of self-discovery. The present study aims to assess how successfully Shafak adapts these spiritual ideas to the modern reader and how close the novel's representation of women's spiritual encounters is to the Sufi texts of the past. Through these aspects, the research proposes to further the understanding of the novel in regard to its effects on the current societal views of love and spirituality.

### **Objectives of the Research**

- i. In order to consider how the message has been changed and how accessible it currently is for a modern audience
- ii. To consider the reinterpretation of traditional Sufi ideas of love and spirituality in Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*
- iii. To analyze how the female protagonist's spiritual experience is portrayed in *The Forty Rules of Love* in contrast to the traditional Sufi texts and to reveal the changes in gender discourses within the Sufi tradition and its contemporary interpretations in Shafak's novel

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways does Elif Shafak in her novel *The Forty Rules of Love* recreate the Sufi concepts of love and spirituality for today's readers?
2. How is the depiction of female spirituality in *The Forty Rules of Love* different from or similar to other Sufi works depicting women?

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study aims to fill the gap in the literature by comparing historical Sufi teachings and existential questions posed in the twenty-first century with regards to Elif Shafak's "*The Forty Rules of Love*". The research thus compares the representation of a female's spiritual experiences in the novel with traditional Sufi texts, noting the shift in gender dynamics in Sufi discourses and stressing the inclusive nature of the process. This research expands the areas of literature, culture, and religious studies by providing information to people who want to find purpose and belonging in the modern world. It also has an educational function that contributes to the conversation about gender and spirituality.

### **Literature Review**

As for the plot, in the novel by Elif Shafak entitled *The Forty Rules of Love*, there is an opportunity to get acquainted with the brilliant story of the main character- the American housewife Aziz, Rumi, the great 13th-century poet, and his friend and teacher Shams of Tabriz. The book also deals with the concepts of love, spirituality and the search for an identity coated with Sufism. Therefore, the aim of this literature review is to analyse love and spirituality in Shafak's work and contrast them with the Sufi teachings, to identify the similarities and differences.

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* is celebrated for its unique narrative structure that juxtaposes two timelines: The two movies are therefore set in two different worlds; one is set in the modern America while the other is set in medieval Anatolia. Besides, this double storyline is not only helpful in the transition from past to present but also emphasizes the eternal relevance of spiritual searches and the search for divine love (Shafak, 2010).

Several scholars have examined the thematic depth of Shafak's novel. According to Tezcan (2012), the narrative structure of *The Forty Rules of Love* effectively reflects the Sufi belief in the interconnectedness of all life. The novel's portrayal of Ella Rubinstein's transformation parallels the spiritual journey of Rumi, thereby creating a multifaceted exploration of love and spirituality.

The characters in *The Forty Rules of Love* are pivotal in elucidating Sufi concepts. Shams of Tabriz, with his radical approach to spirituality, embodies the Sufi ideals of divine love and self-annihilation (fana). His relationship with Rumi serves as a catalyst for Rumi's transformation from a scholar to a mystic poet. As McLean (2011) notes, Shams represents the disruptive force of divine love that breaks through the mundane, leading to profound spiritual awakening.

Ella's journey is equally significant as it represents the modern individual's quest for meaning in a materialistic world. Through her correspondence with Aziz, she encounters the same spiritual

principles that guided Rumi and Shams, illustrating the novel's central message that true love transcends time and space (Smith, 2013).

### **Sufi Philosophy in Historical Context**

Sufism, often described as Islamic mysticism, has its roots in the early centuries of Islam. It emphasizes the inward search for God and the cultivation of spiritual values and love. Key figures in Sufism include poets and mystics such as Rumi, Hafiz, and Ibn Arabi, whose works have profoundly influenced Islamic spirituality (Chittick, 1989).

Rumi, in particular, is renowned for his poetry that celebrates divine love and the soul's yearning for union with the divine. His works, especially the "Masnavi", are considered some of the greatest literary expressions of Sufi thought (Schimmel, 1992). Shams of Tabriz, although less prolific, is celebrated for his spiritual influence on Rumi, which is well-documented in Rumi's "Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi" (Barks, 1995).

Central to Sufi philosophy are the concepts of divine love (*ishq*), self-annihilation (*fana*), and the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*). Divine love is seen as the driving force of the universe, a love that transcends the physical and seeks union with the divine. *Fana* involves the annihilation of the ego and the self in God, leading to spiritual rebirth and enlightenment. The unity of being posits that all existence is a manifestation of the divine, and realizing this unity is the goal of the Sufi path (Nasr, 2007).

### **Love in Shafak's Novel and Sufi Thought**

Shafak's novel portrays love as a transformative force that leads to spiritual awakening, mirroring the Sufi concept of divine love. Shams of Tabriz's teachings in the novel echo the Sufi idea that love is the path to God. His assertion that "the path to the Truth is a labor of the heart, not of the head" (Shafak, 2010) encapsulates the Sufi emphasis on experiential knowledge over intellectual understanding.

In comparison, Rumi's poetry is replete with references to love as the essence of the divine and the ultimate goal of human existence. As Schimmel (1992) points out, Rumi viewed love as the force that binds the universe together, a theme that resonates deeply in Shafak's portrayal of Shams and Rumi's relationship.

### **Spirituality and Self-Discovery**

Both Shafak's narrative and Sufi philosophy emphasize the importance of self-discovery and inner transformation. Ella's journey mirrors the Sufi path of enlightenment, where one must transcend the ego to attain spiritual fulfillment. This journey is usually one that is filled with tribulations as is seen in Shafak's account and the lives of the Sufi mystics (Ernst, 1997). Shams' part in the alteration of Rumi emphasizes the Sufi precept of the salik's requirement of a murshid. This aspect is depicted in the novel through Shams' approach to teaching Rumi, which challenges him to go beyond his thinking and the norms of the society (Chittick, 1989).

### **The Role of Suffering**

Suffering is another significant theme in both the novel and Sufi philosophy. Shafak's narrative suggests that suffering is an integral part of the spiritual journey, a concept deeply rooted in Sufi thought. Rumi's poetry often speaks of the pain of separation from the divine and the transformative power of suffering. As Lewis (2008) notes, Rumi believed that suffering purifies the soul and brings one closer to God, a theme that Shafak effectively weaves into her narrative through the trials faced by her characters.

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* offers a rich, multi-layered exploration of love and spirituality that resonates deeply with Sufi philosophy. Through a comparative analysis, it becomes evident that the novel not only draws inspiration from Sufi teachings but also adapts them to address contemporary spiritual concerns. In the case of the novel, the combined parallelism of the stories of Ella and Rumi/Shams is an effective means of emphasizing the eternal and contemporary aspect of the search for divine love and the self. Analyzing the novel in relation to standard Sufi ideas, we realize that there is a possibility of using literature for the purpose of transferring cultural and spiritual paradigms.

While numerous studies have analyzed *The Forty Rules of Love* in terms of its narrative structure, historical context, and the portrayal of Sufi philosophy, there is limited research on how Elif Shafak reinterprets Sufi concepts specifically for a modern audience, particularly focusing on the experiences of female spirituality. Existing literature often emphasizes the historical significance of

Rumi and Shams but lacks an in-depth exploration of how these teachings resonate with contemporary existential concerns and gender dynamics. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the adaptation of traditional Sufi principles in the modern context of Ella Rubenstein's journey, highlighting how Shafak makes these teachings accessible and relevant to today's readers, especially in terms of female spiritual experiences.

### **Research Methodology**

The current section describes the strategies used to achieve the objectives of this study. It comprises the following sections:

#### **Research Design**

This study uses a qualitative research approach and applies textual analysis to analyze the aspects of love and spirituality in Elif Shafak's novel, *The Forty Rules of Love* through the lens of traditional Sufi wisdom. The kind of analysis used in this study falls within the spheres of literary analysis and comparative literature, which forms part of humanities research methodologies (Sajjad et al., 2023 and Gul et al., 2022).

#### **Data Collection**

The analysis involves, the use of both primary and secondary data in generating the results. The primary data is the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak and the secondary data includes articles, reviews and critiques of the novel and the texts on Sufism by Sufis like Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. For convenience, the data-set includes various thematic aspects of the novel and Sufi texts to analyze during the research. Moreover, qualitative data has been collected with readers and specialists in Sufi literature to understand current interpretations and readings of the novel (Afaq et al., 2023).

#### **Analytical Framework**

Regarding the discussion of various themes, the research employs textual analysis to dissect and compare love and spirituality in the context of the Shafak's novel with reference to the conventional Sufi wisdom. The framework included:

##### **Thematic Analysis**

Grouping and classifying significant concepts such as Divine love or *Ishq*, human love or *Muhabbat*, *Sufism*, and its connection with the Divine.

##### **Comparative Analysis**

On this basis, the study compares the themes, motives, and the evolution of the characters in Shafak's novel with the traditional Sufi principles.

##### **Historical Contextualization**

The first aspect of the novel which can be analyzed in relation to the context of Sufism is the representation and reimagination of Sufi concepts.

##### **Data Analysis Procedure**

###### **Thematic Analysis**

In order to establish theming of the novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, the novel was analyzed for major themes concerning love and spirituality. The process included:

###### **Identifying Key Themes**

Explaining such phenomena as the possibility of changing the nature of love, spiritual awakening, and merging with the deity based on the material of the novel.

###### **Contextual Analysis**

Discussing these themes in the framework of Sufi metaphysics and, thus, explaining their meaning and representation.

###### **Comparative Analysis**

Regarding the thematic elements of the novel, they were compared to the available traditional Sufi texts to draw differences and similarities. This involved:

###### **Comparing Textual Elements**

The systematic process of comparing the themes, motifs, and character build-up in the novel with the works of Rumi and other Sufi poets.

###### **Data Analysis**

The gathered data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods: The gathered data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis of thematic issues and the narrative analysis in relation to the identified themes with the help of qualitative analyses.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Overview of *Sufism* and its key Principles**

Sufism is a way of worship that is found in Islam and which focuses on the individual's quest for the divine and his or her relationship with this divinity. Sufis are also in a constant pursuit of an increased knowledge of the attributes of God and an attempt at reaching communion with the divine through the use of prayers, chants and other forms of worship of the spirit. Thus, the major doctrines of Sufism are the desire to gain the inner knowledge, the process of the destruction of the selfish 'I' and the final stage of the attainment of the union with the Divine. Sufi followers adopt a way, *or tariqa*, that is led by a master, *or sheikh or murshid* who passes knowledge and advice.

The core of Sufism is the key of affection that is considered as the purpose of existence and the way to discover the divine characteristics. This love is spiritual and is characterized by commitment and submission to the divinity's plan for a couple. The proclamations of such Sufi masters as Rumi, Hafiz, and Attar speak of the redemptive force of love and its significance for the path. Sufism also emphasizes the importance of rituals such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *sama* (spiritual listening), and the whirling dance of the dervishes, which symbolize the soul's journey toward divine union (Schimmel 34).

### **Summary of Main Themes in *The Forty Rules of Love***

*The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is a richly layered novel that explores several interwoven themes, with love and spirituality at its core. The novel portrays love as a multifaceted force that transcends mere romanticism, encompassing divine love, self-love, and the love between friends and mentors. Shafak presents love as a catalyst for personal transformation and spiritual awakening, illustrating how it can lead individuals toward a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the universe.

The novel also delves into the theme of self-discovery, depicting the profound personal growth that characters, experience through their encounters with love and spirituality. Ella Rubenstein, the protagonist in the contemporary narrative, undergoes a significant transformation as she connects with the spiritual teachings of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. This journey of self-discovery is paralleled by the historical narrative, which depicts Rumi's transformation from a respected scholar to a spiritual poet under Shams's guidance.

Another significant theme in the novel is the mentor-disciple relationship, exemplified by the bond between Shams and Rumi. This relationship highlights the importance of spiritual guidance and companionship on the path to enlightenment. Shafak emphasizes the idea that true spiritual growth often requires the influence and wisdom of a mentor who can challenge conventional beliefs and encourage deeper introspection.

The novel also addresses themes of religious tolerance and the universal nature of spiritual truths. Through the teachings of Shams and the poetry of Rumi, Shafak illustrates that the essence of spirituality transcends religious and cultural boundaries, promoting a message of unity and interconnectedness among all human beings (Shafak 87).

### **Introduction to the Historical and Cultural Context of the Novel**

*The Forty Rules of Love* is set against a rich historical and cultural backdrop, spanning contemporary America and thirteenth-century Persia. The historical story occurs in the epoch of the brilliant development of science and art in the Islamic civilization. Sufism became a strong spiritual movement in the thirteenth century and a lot of tariqas or Sufi orders were set up throughout the Islamic world. This period is characterized by the production of Sufi poetry and literature with the main themes being of spiritual significance and the role of love.

The novel presents the spirit of this epoch describing the intellectual and spiritual life of the people and the impact of Sufism. Thus, Shafak introduces the readers to the historical characters of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz and depicts the influence of these two personalities on the spiritual and cultural development of the society. Through this setting the authors paint a picture to the readers on the nature of the society and religious environment of the figures in question making the teachings timeless.

Reading the story of Ella Rubenstein, one can but recall the eternal search for the meaning of life and the process of a person's spiritual transformation. Her story is located in the contemporary America, and she is struggling with the problems concerning the search of the identity and meaning of life. Thus, by connecting these two completely different eras, Shafak emphasizes the timeliness of

Sufi's teaching and the search for love as the primary motivation of humanity. The dual narrative of the novel also enables a deeper inquiry about the modern possibilities of applying the ancient spiritual wisdom, thereby underlining the eternal relevance of the spiritual search (Keshavarz 123).

### **Exploration of the Sufi Understanding of Love**

According to Sufi tradition love is considered as perhaps the greatest force in the universe. It is at the same time the process and goal of spiritual transformation. As for Sufism, it avails that love is the primary goal of creation and it is the intermediary between man's soul and God. Sufi Way is characterized by a process of purification and the effort to reach the divine beloved, the quest is initiated by one's passionate love. This process entails the process of spiritual transformation that entails the process of the death of the ego, humility, and total submission to the divine will.

For Sufis, love is considered as a fundamental part of human nature and something that can transform the individual and take him closer to the divine. This love is not just physical or romantic, but a spiritual kind of love that people have in them. Hence, Sufi love aims at making the lovers and the beloved one and the same with the ultimate goal of merging with the divine being. This means of union is often described in Sufi poetry and literature, where the lover (in this case the seeker) and the Beloved (or God) are shown as being in an endless embrace (Schimmel 57).

### **Evaluation of the Ideas of *Ishq* and *Muhabbat***

In Sufi context "*Ishq*" is understood as a passionate love affair with the divine which cannot be categorized as a normal human feeling. It is a love that is intense, zealous and has been defined as the eagerness to be united with the divine. In the tradition of Sufi poetry, the term "*Ishq*" is best translated as the burning desire and a specific kind of love relationship with the Divine. This idea is well described in Rumi and other Sufi poets who use tropes of lovers and the beloved to express their love towards Allah. In the context of "*Ishq*" one gets the feeling that it is a force that cleanses the soul and takes the seeker to the ultimate state of total submission to the will of God and to experience the nearness of the divine in every moment of one's life (Keshavarz 89). "*Muhabbat*" is the sort of love which is tender, normally connected with human relationships and the people's affection to the friends, relatives and beloved persons. In the Sufi context, "*Muhabbat*" is still deeply spiritual, as it reflects the divine love that permeates all creation. Sufis believe that human love is a reflection of divine love and that by loving others selflessly and compassionately, individuals can experience a glimpse of the divine. "*Muhabbat*" serves as a stepping stone to "*Ishq*", teaching the seeker about selflessness, compassion, and the importance of nurturing loving relationships as part of their spiritual journey (Schimmel 112).

### **Comparison with Western Notions of Love**

The Sufi understanding of love, particularly concepts like "*Ishq*" and "*Muhabbat*", presents a stark contrast to many Western notions of love. In Western culture, love is often portrayed in a more secular and romantic context, focusing on the emotional and physical aspects of relationships between individuals. Romantic love in Western literature and media tends to emphasize personal happiness, physical attraction, and emotional fulfillment. While these elements are not absent in Sufi love, the Sufi approach goes much deeper, viewing love as a sacred, transformative force that ultimately leads to spiritual enlightenment and union with the divine.

Western perceptions of love are also more focused on the individuality and pleasure, while Sufi love is based on sacrifice, obedience, and adoration. Love in Sufism is a way; it is a method through which the divine goal can be achieved. The Sufi lover desires to die to the self and become one with the beloved, to feel that he or she and the beloved are one with everything else that exists. This aspect of love is usually lacking in Western forms of love, which stress the self-fulfilment of the lovers and the emotions they feel for each other (Chittick 145). In *The Forty Rules of Love* Elif Shafak is also able to bring together these cultural and philosophical contrasts and make a storyline that focuses on love as a powerful tool capable to change people. Using the characters of Ella, Rumi, and Shams, Shafak shows that the Sufi understanding of love can result in a transformative process of the self and one's soul, thus, presenting her readers with the more complex and meaningful notion of love.

### **Spiritual Journey in "*The Forty Rules of Love*"**

#### **Examination of the Spiritual Transformation Experienced by the Characters**

In the work *The Forty Rules of Love* Elif Shafak accurately conveys the character's spiritual awakening through the theme of love and spirituality. Ella Rubenstein is the main character of the

story who initially is a disillusioned wife and mother who has lost touch with herself. The initiated when she started reading a manuscript of a novel based on the life of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, and the Sufi path is opened for her. Thus, reading the novel, Ella starts experiencing life crises, doubting her decisions, the concept of love, and faith. This change in her is characterized by a progressive self-erotic dimension, self-discovery and a search for the true self. In the same manner, there is a historical story of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz that portrays a dramatic spiritual change. The protagonist of this story, Rumi, is a famous Persian poet and a great Sufi teacher who transforms dramatically after meeting his mentor, Shams. Shams's knowledge and his forty principles of love, after which he names the book, free Rumi from the traditional approach to life and open his spiritual awareness. This transformation makes Rumi to shift from the conventional religion and explore the mystical side of worship, making him one of the most famous and respected Sufi poets whose works are still inspiring people in search of truth and divine love (Shafak 127).

#### **Analysis of *The Forty Rules of Love* and Their Significance in the Characters' Development**

The forty rules told by Shams of Tabriz in the novel are the principles that enable the change and transformation of the characters, in terms of spiritual evolution. These rules include love, modesty, tolerance, and the requirement of the spiritual transformation of the Sufi. Every rule is an allegory of some spiritual meaning, which makes the characters focus on the vital aspects of life and develop a strong bond with the higher power.

For instance, one of them says, "The path to the Truth is a labor of the heart, not of the head. Make your heart your primary guide! Not your mind. Meet, challenge, and ultimately prevail over your nafs (ego) with your heart." This rule reflects on the Sufi way of spirituality, especially on the aspect of negating the self. Thus, internalizing such principles allows the characters like Rumi and Ella follow their spiritual path with defined focus and meaning and, therefore, undergo a deep transformative process (Shafak 213).

#### **Comparison with the Stages of Spiritual Enlightenment in Sufi Philosophy**

The spiritual transformation of the characters in *The Forty Rules of Love* encompasses all the stages of Sufi path, which are described in Sufi traditions. Sufism presents a systematic way of reaching the ultimate goal of union with the divine, which is, in most cases, represented by stages or spiritual stations (*maqamat*). These stages typically include:

1. "Sharia (the outer path)": Observance of the law and moral standards.
2. "Tariqa (the inner path)": Praising the Lord and looking for a spiritual director.
3. "Haqiqah (the truth)": Acquiring firsthand experience of the deity and the nature of divinity.
4. "Marifa (gnosis)": A mystical sense of the attainment of complete subjective insight and knowingness.
5. "Fana (annihilation)": Self-annihilation and the ego's loss in the face of the divine.
6. "Baqah (subsistence)": Coming back to the world with such a new perception of reality, being in this world but not of it, always aware of the divine presence.

Considering the stages of the rite of passage, one can identify them in Shafak's novel as far as Ella is concerned. At first, she has to follow the norms of her life which is *Shariah*. These are the reading of the manuscript followed by her reflections which allow her to join the path or *Tariqa*. As she starts assimilating the teachings of Shams and Rumi, she starts to develop mystical insights (*Haqiqah*) and attains the state of understanding of love and spirituality (*Marifa*). Thus, towards the novel's end Ella undergoes a change that hints at her proximity to *Fana* and *Baqah* as she begins to live in accordance with the spiritual lessons she has learned.

Rumi's transformation under Shams's guidance mirrors these stages as well. Shams acts as Rumi's spiritual mentor, leading him from the outer practices of religion to the inner depths of mystical experience. Through their relationship, Rumi experiences moments of *Haqiqah* and *Marifa*, culminating in his poetic expressions of divine love and unity. The intense bond between Rumi and Shams serves as a catalyst for Rumi's spiritual annihilation (*Fana*) and his subsequent subsistence (*Baqah*), where he returns to the world transformed, his poetry reflecting his continuous awareness of the divine (Keshavarz 156).

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Shafak masterfully intertwines the themes of love and spirituality in a way that resonates deeply with contemporary readers. The novel's exploration of these universal themes speaks to the intrinsic human quest for meaning, connection, and transcendence beyond the material world. Modern readers, often caught in the whirlwind of a fast-paced, technology-driven



society, find solace and inspiration in the novel's portrayal of love as a transformative and spiritual force. The depiction of characters like Ella Rubenstein, who experiences a profound personal and spiritual awakening, mirrors the experiences of many individuals seeking deeper fulfillment and understanding in their own lives.

As with many postmodern authors, Shafak sets up a meeting between history's metaphysical realities and the contemporary existential questions; Sufi philosophy is translated into modern language for today's audience. The presence of two narrators in the novel leads to the readers establishing connections between the characters' spiritual experiences and the readers' own lives, thus strengthening the book's timeless themes of love and spirituality.

#### **Analysis of the Novel's Relevance to Contemporary Issues and Concerns**

Several of the issues and concerns depicted in *The Forty Rules of Love* are very current, which makes the book very topical. A major theme that the novel touches upon is the question of an individual's self-actualization and the pursuit of meaning in life in a world dominated by the values of wealth. By narrating Ella's story, Shafak raises the issue of the feeling of void and meaninglessness, which may come from devoting one's life to perfecting the exterior world, and stresses on the need for self-searching and spiritual evolution.

Furthermore, religious tolerance and the unity of religious truths are the other topics that can be distinguished in the context of the given novel. Indeed, Shafak's representation of Sufi philosophy in the book is a call for tolerance as the novel is written in the context of religious and cultural crises. On the one hand, thus, the novel makes people accept the ideas of tolerance since it unites different spiritualities and show the readers that people need love and understanding each other.

This novel also teaches readers how love is a multifaceted feeling that can be romantic, brotherly, and divine, as well as how true friendship can change one's life and inspire to be a better person. The concept of love as a means to the spiritual development is rather topical for today's society, as many marriages and partnerships fail due to the stresses of modern living.

#### **Examination of the Impact of the Novel on Readers' Perspectives on Love and Spirituality**

*The Forty Rules of Love* contains the readers' mindset-shifting vision on love and spirituality. In so doing, the novel's positive representation of love as the force that empowers and changes lives adds a higher meaning to relationships and experiences. The concept of the divine love "*Ishq*" and the human love "*Muhabbat*" enrich the understanding of the love as not solely a romantic feeling, but a sacred experience.

Through the presentation of such spiritual quests and changes, the novel motivates people to follow their own roads to self-improvement and spiritual development. Most readers are able to identify themselves and are touched by the themes addressed in the novel which are the theme of human relationships and the search for the divine. The detailed descriptions and the imagery used by Shafak capture the reader's attention and the forty rules remain engraved in one's mind to be applied to everyday life.

Therefore, *The Forty Rules of Love* could be considered as the linking between the Sufism as the wisdom tradition and the modern world's longing for purpose and happiness.

#### **Findings of the Study**

The main message of Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* is built around several major themes that are tightly connected with Sufism: the idea of the redeeming nature of love, the search for the spiritual liberation and the idea of the unity with the Divine.

#### **Transformative Power of Love**

A possibility for spiritual transformation is an important and unifying theme in female-authored Middle Eastern novels, and Shafak's novel is no exception to explore the journey to self-creation and personal metamorphosis, which is *Tazkiyah*. Some of the characters like Ella Rubenstein transform a lot personally due to the interaction with the lessons of Rumi and Shams. This is in line with Sufism where the outside and the physical are changed to align with the inside and the spiritual. Sufis teach the importance of being conscious of one's self, feeling remorse for one's sins, and the development of moral characteristics to overcome the ego (*Nafs*) in order to draw nearer to God. In Shafak's novel, the aspect of love is depicted as an entity that can produce significant changes. Thus, love as an important theme in the books is presented as transforming the characters both personally and spiritually. This can be paralleled with the Sufi concept of love (*ishq*) as a force that results in the change of the human being. In Rumi's work, love is defined as a way, through which the soul is

connected with the divine; therefore, it is not a mere feeling but a way to spirituality (Schimmel, 1992).

### **Self-Discovery and Inner Transformation: Love as a Path to Spiritual Enlightenment**

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Shafak explores love as a fundamental path to spiritual enlightenment, mirroring Sufi philosophy. Shafak's narrative intertwines the lives of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, showcasing how their profound bond transcends physical love, evolving into a deeper, spiritual connection. Similarly, Sufi teachings emphasize that true love (*Ishq*) is a divine force that leads to union with God. The love between Rumi and Shams symbolizes the transformative power of divine love, a core tenet in Sufism.

Both Shafak's narrative and Sufi philosophy emphasize the journey towards spiritual enlightenment. In the novel, Ella Rubinstein's interactions with the teachings of Shams of Tabriz lead her to a profound personal and spiritual awakening. This journey is reflective of the Sufi path (*tariqa*), where the seeker (*salik*) moves towards a deeper understanding of God and the self through stages of spiritual development (Chittick, 1989).

### **Unity with the Divine**

The theme of unity (*tawhid*) is central to both Shafak's novel and Sufi thought. Shams of Tabriz teaches that all existence is interconnected and that true enlightenment comes from recognizing the divine presence in everything. This concept is aligned with the Sufi doctrine of the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*), which posits that all creation is a manifestation of the divine, and realizing this unity is the goal of spiritual practice (Nasr, 2007).

### **Findings Concerning Characters in *The Forty Rules of Love***

The characters in *The Forty Rules of Love* serve as vehicles for exploring and embodying Sufi principles.

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Rumi and Shams represent the quintessential teacher-disciple relationship in Sufism. Shams embodies the role of a spiritual guide (*Murshid*), leading Rumi towards spiritual awakening. This dynamic parallels the Sufi tradition, where the *Murshid* provides guidance, wisdom, and challenges to the seeker (*Murid*) to facilitate their spiritual growth. Shafak's portrayal of their relationship highlights the importance of mentorship and the exchange of spiritual insights in the Sufi path.

### **Shams of Tabriz**

In Shafak's novel, Shams is portrayed as a radical and unconventional spiritual guide who embodies the Sufi principles of love and self-annihilation. His teachings and actions are disruptive, pushing Rumi and others towards a deeper understanding of divine love. This character is historically known for his influence on Rumi, leading to Rumi's transformation into a mystic poet whose works celebrate divine love (Barks, 1995).

### **Rumi**

Rumi's character in the novel is depicted as undergoing a profound transformation under Shams' guidance, moving from a respected scholar to a mystic poet. This mirrors Rumi's historical transformation and his subsequent poetic exploration of Sufi themes, particularly the nature of divine love and the soul's longing for union with God (Lewis, 2008).

### **Ella Rubinstein**

Ella's character serves as a bridge between contemporary readers and Sufi philosophy. Her journey from a mundane, unfulfilled life to a spiritually awakened state mirrors the transformative potential of Sufi teachings. Her experiences echo the Sufi emphasis on breaking free from worldly attachments and seeking a deeper, more meaningful existence. Through Ella, Shafak illustrates the timeless relevance of Sufi wisdom in modern life.

Ella's character represents the modern seeker of truth. Her journey of self-discovery through the teachings of Shams and Rumi parallels the Sufi path of spiritual awakening. Her transformation reflects the universal applicability of Sufi teachings to contemporary spiritual quests (Smith, 2013).

### **Other Findings**

Several recurring motifs in Shafak's novel resonate with Sufi philosophy are discussed as follows:

### **Music and Poetry**

Music and poetry play pivotal roles in *The Forty Rules of Love* mirroring their significance in Sufi practices. The whirling dervishes' dance and the poetic expressions of Rumi capture the essence of Sufi rituals, which utilize artistic forms to express divine love and ecstasy. Shafak's incorporation of

these elements highlights the cultural and spiritual richness of Sufism, emphasizing the importance of artistic expressions in the Sufi path.

Both the novel and Sufi tradition emphasize the importance of music and poetry as expressions of divine love. Rumi's poetry is often sung or recited with musical accompaniment in Sufi rituals, reflecting the belief that music can elevate the soul and bring it closer to the divine (Schimmel, 1992).

### **Suffering and Sacrifice**

The concept of suffering as the way to enlightenment is the other one that is recurrent in the novel and Sufism. Suffering in the case of Shafak's characters appears to be a personal ordeal which the characters undergo in order to attain a state of spirituality, thus aligning with Sufi philosophy which states that hardships are essential in the purification of the soul and the attainment of divine grace (Ernst, 1997).

### **Metaphors and Symbolism**

There are many instances where Shafak uses eloquent and vivid imagery and symbols that are similar to Sufi writings. The reed that is represented throughout the poem is a symbol known from the work of Rumi and represents the soul searching for the divine. Likewise, the significance of the motif of the 'mirror' is linked to the Sufi process of self-illumination and the attempts to reach the state of purity. These motifs call for the connection between the themes of Shafak's narrative and the Sufism that stresses self-search and the longing for the Divine.

### **Mystical Union**

The subject of the mystical unity with the divine, which is an essential tenet of Sufism, is mentioned in the novel quite often. This is evident in the mystic bond between Shams and Rumi and in the developing process of Ella's perception of divine love through the film's narration (Chittick, 1989).

### **Identification of Similarities and Differences Between Shafak's Portrayal of Love and Spirituality and Traditional Sufi Teachings.**

#### **Similarities**

#### **Concept of Divine Love**

Both Shafak's novel and traditional Sufi teachings emphasize the unity of love and God. In Sufism, love (*Ishq*) is seen as a divine attribute, and the lover's journey is towards merging with the Beloved (God). Shafak's portrayal of the relationship between Rumi and Shams encapsulates this belief, where their love transcends the personal and becomes a means of experiencing the divine. The concept of divine love as a path to God is central in both Shafak's narrative and Sufi philosophy.

Both Shafak's portrayal and traditional Sufi teachings emphasize the centrality of divine love. Shams' teachings in the novel and Rumi's poetry both celebrate love as the essence of the divine and the ultimate goal of human existence (Schimmel, 1992). Love is depicted as transformative, leading to personal and spiritual growth, a theme deeply rooted in Sufi tradition.

#### **The Role of Spiritual Guide**

In both the novel and Sufi practice, the spiritual guide (*murshid*) plays a crucial role in the seeker's journey. Shams of Tabriz serves as Rumi's guide, challenging him to transcend his ego and societal norms to achieve spiritual enlightenment. This dynamic is reflective of the traditional Sufi relationship between the *murshid* and the disciple (Chittick, 1989).

#### **Unity with the Divine**

Shafak's narrative and Sufi philosophy both stress the importance of recognizing the divine presence in all aspects of life. The novel's depiction of this concept aligns with the Sufi belief in the unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*), where realizing this unity is seen as the ultimate goal of the spiritual path (Nasr, 2007).

#### **Transformational Power of Love**

Shafak and Sufi teachings both underscore the transformative power of love. In *The Forty Rules of Love*, characters experience profound changes through love, mirroring the Sufi belief that love purifies the soul and brings one closer to God. The emphasis on love as a catalyst for spiritual growth and inner transformation is a shared theme, highlighting the redemptive and elevating nature of true love.

#### **Spiritual Mentorship**

The theme of spiritual mentorship in Shafak's novel aligns with the Sufi tradition of the *Murshid-Murid* relationship. Shams' guidance to Rumi reflects the role of a Sufi guide who leads the seeker

towards enlightenment. This mentorship is crucial in Sufism, where the guide helps the disciple navigate the spiritual journey, overcome ego, and attain a deeper understanding of divine truths.

### **Differences**

#### **Modern Contextualization**

Shafak's novel contextualizes Sufi teachings within a modern framework, making them accessible to contemporary readers. Ella Rubinstein's journey, set in the modern world, demonstrates the relevance of Sufi principles in today's context. Traditional Sufi teachings, while timeless, are often rooted in historical and cultural contexts that may seem distant to modern readers (Smith, 2013).

#### **Narrative Structure**

The novel's dual narrative structure, alternating between past and present, provides a unique literary approach to exploring Sufi themes. This structure contrasts with traditional Sufi texts, which are typically more linear and focused on the teachings and experiences of individual mystics (Tezcan, 2012).

#### **Personal Vs. Universal Experience**

Spirituality in the works of Shafak is depicted as a rather private, individualistic process of growth associated with love, as it is the case with Ella. Similarly to the individualistic process and goal of theurgy, traditional Sufi practices also have a more pronounced group aspect and emphasize the set of practices that would lead to the awakening (Ernst, 1997).

#### **Contextualization in Modern Life**

Although Sufi conversion of love and spirituality is integrated in the historical and cultural perspective, Shafak has given a modern touch to it. Having real life characters such as Ella Rubinstein and her issues of the present generation, makes Sufi works understandable and applicable in the present generation. This adaptation may not necessarily refer to the conventional and traditional ways of presenting the Sufi philosophies

#### **Focus on Female Experience**

Hence, Shafak's novel pays special attention to the female perspective on the world, as exemplified by the characters of Ella and Desert Rose. Conventional Sufi literature principally presents male spiritual and scholarly icons while Shafak opens up the possibility of contemplating women's spiritual paths and their search for the divine love. On a related note, the above inclusive approach extends the range of Sufi philosophy while at the same time underlining the relevance of the subject matter. While analyzing the novel in relation to the concept of love and spirituality, it can be noted that the novel by Elif Shafak has strong Sufi influences, which is reflected in themes, characters, and motifs of the novel. It is found that the novel under discussion and Sufi concept are close in their common message and values of love, guidance, and the purpose of merging with the divine. Nonetheless, with the modern contextualization of the ideas and the usage of narrative approach, Shafak's work presents a more vivid and easy to comprehend interpretation of these axioms and their relation to the current spiritual journeys. From this comparative analysis, we are able to get a better understanding on how literature can help in the breaking of barriers in the historical and cultural sense in an attempt to acquire a better understanding on life and the search for love and spirituality. There are many reasons why Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* is a novel that deserves to be read and appreciated; the novel is a vivid attempt at the understanding of love and spirituality that permeates Sufiism. By its thematic connection, characters' representations, and leitmotifs, the novel recreates the principles of Sufism, focusing on the redemptive nature of love, the role of a spiritual master, and the search for unity with the Divine. As such, it can be noted that despite the liberal use of these elements by Shafak to tell a modern story, they are still Sufi at their core. The comparative analysis shows that, on the one hand, the novel lies in the tradition of Sufi philosophy as a timeless phenomenon, on the other hand, it denotes the specific contribution to the further interpretation and appreciation of this tradition in the contemporary world.

### **Discussion**

The main ideas of *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak are love, spirituality, and divine unity that have connections to Sufism. In essence, the novel's message is about the redemptive nature of love, a theme that is reminiscent of the Sufi concept of love (*ishq*) that sanctifies and uplifts the spirit. Some of the characters, such as Ella Rubinstein, are transformed and begin a spiritual search for truth and meaning through interactions with Rumi and Shams: a process that mirrors the Sufi concept of *tazkiyah* or purification of the self and the striving for unity with the divine. The novel also explores

the themes of character's development and spiritual awakening, which can be compared to the process of Sufism when the seeker (*salik*) is guided by the master (*murshid*). Shams of Tabriz acts as Rumi's master and tests him by encouraging him into a new level of comprehension of divine love, which fits the *murshid-murid* dynamic in Sufism. This specific form of mentorship focuses on the spiritual aspect and the role it plays in the seeker's path towards the attainment of the ultimate goal.

*Tawhid* is another main concept of Shams; using the idea of the unity of the world and calling for people to realize the divine essence of everything. This is in line with the Sufi belief on *wahdat al-wujud* which holds the view that everything in the universe is a creation of God. Shafak does this through the characters' changing point of view, stressing that such an awareness is the purpose of spiritual work.

Thus, although the story being told by Shafak is based on a Sufi philosophy, the novel is a work of modern literature and as such, the ideas being conveyed by the author are explained to the readers in a manner which will be easily comprehensible by people of today. Ella Rubinstein's character is the one who connects Sufism of the past and the modern people's longing for truth. The novel has two parallel stories presenting a historical real-life relationship between Rumi and Shams, and Ella's modern world's search for meaning, which makes the reader learn more about Sufi wisdom.

In spite of the close connection with Sufi traditions, Shafak's representation contains some aspects which do not fit into the context of the Sufi literature. Her writing is less formal and her focus on the female experience and the role of women in Sufism through characters such as Ella and Desert Rose gives a new twist to the Sufi literature. This inclusiveness is also helpful in expanding the spectrum of Sufi philosophy and relating it to various people's spiritual experiences and the contemporary world. Thus, *The Forty Rules of Love* is a work that investigates love and spirituality intimately connected with Sufism. Thus, themes, character portrayals, and motifs of the novel provide the reader with an understanding of the basic tenets of Sufism as well as their modern interpretation. The main points of the work of Shafak are in the relevance of the search for love, meaning, and spiritual enlightenment, which is typical for any period of human existence, as well as the proper representation of Sufi philosophy and the role of the novel in revealing its importance for the modern world.

### **Conclusion**

The present study concludes that Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* manages to convey the Sufi principles and modern anxieties. Shafak gives the Sufi ideas of *ishq* and *fana* new meanings and offers them in a form that is familiar to contemporary audiences. Thus, by combining the real history of Rumi and Shams with the present-day experience of Ella Rubenstein, Shafak translates these abstract philosophical ideas into the language that the reader of the 21st century will understand. The ideal of love and spiritual self-evolution is illustrated as the primary message of the novel, which is rooted in Sufism but translated into today's world and personal experience.

The study identifies that the representation of a female's spiritual experience by Shafak is new to the Sufi literature where male Sufis and scholars are usually described. The major characters such as Ella Rubenstein and Desert Rose are also given significant roles in the novel focusing on their inner spiritual change. Such an approach extends the concept of Sufism and its use for the gender-sensitive spirituality and stresses the role of women in the Sufi discourse. The women's submission is portrayed by Shafak as being as spiritual as that of the men, and the book also raises questions about the position of women in relation to religion.

Sufism, as seen in the relations of love in Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Lov*, is a beautiful tint added to the sublime feeling of love. The novel presents a very beautiful interweaving of the characters' lives, and their spiritual growth, with a most poignant focus on their inner evolutions, and their spiritual development, all of which has been set against the backdrop of Sufi principles. By analyzing the literary elements of Shafak's narrative and its relation to the Sufi teachings it encapsulates, it is clear that Shafak is a modern Sufi writer who writing has the power to transform ideas and make them accessible to contemporary readers.

Thus, the novel's thematic focus lies in the potential of love. Shafak develops this theme to the deepest extent; love is portrayed as the means of transformation and spiritual awakening. Ella Rubenstein and Rumi are the characters who get transformed through their interactions with the lessons and events related to love. She starts as a shallow, frustrated woman who is given a spiritual

awakening that represents the Sufi process of purification in which love is not only a feeling but also a force resulting in the discovery of the self. This portrayal can be readily associated with the Sufi concepts of love or *ishq* that is regarded as a purifying factor that helps one draw closer to the Almighty.

The novel also gives an account of the figure of the spiritual guide, which is a key concept in Sufism. Shams of Tabriz, as Rumi's master, is the perfect example of *murshid-murid tariqa* in which the master provokes the seeker to move beyond the self and the conventions of society in order to attain spiritual awakening. This aspect is well illustrated by Shafak in the narrative where she emphasizes the significance of the guide, especially in a spiritual quest where a spiritual guide can influence one's destiny by opening up the path to the divine knowledge. The given story of Shams and Rumi as friends is presented not only on the personal level but as the spiritual one which is at the core of Sufi mysticism.

Another Sufi value that runs through the novel is the concept of unity with the divine which represents the ultimate goal of *Sufi path*. *Tawhid* is defined as the acknowledgement of the existence of God in every aspect of life, which is reflected in the characters' awakening and Shams' instructions. This theme relates to *Sufism's wahdat al-wujud* or unity of being concept in which everything in existence is considered to have emanated from the divine. A few of the novel's characters discover this unity in the course of their spiritual transformation, and this aspect highlights the purpose of spiritual work in *Sufism*.

Thus, Shafak's narrative is not a mere reproduction of the traditional Sufi motifs but an update that will find listeners among contemporary audiences. Thus, by situating these teachings in the context of today's world, Shafak brings Sufi precepts to the world of the present-day audience. The present study aims to argue that the principles of Sufism are universally relevant through the example of Ella Rubinstein's present-day issues and her metamorphosis. The use of the two different time frames, past and present, which is a literary technique that stands out in differing with the Sufi literature strategies; can be seen as Shafak's contribution to the Sufi tradition.

The novel also has a strong representation of women through the characters such as Ella and Desert Rose whose experiences are well depicted in the novel. As for the representation of Sufi figures in the literature, Shafak extends the canon of Sufi literature beyond the representation of male scholars and mystics only, including women's spiritual journeys, which illustrates that Sufism is for everyone. This approach of incorporating intersexual love and the spiritual message of Sufism is quite relevant to the modern world and shows that people of different sexes can be spiritual and inspired by the Divine love.

The elements of music, poetry, pain, and offering are also used continually in the novel just like in Sufism. These motifs are useful in the context of the novel as they give a more profound association of Shafak's novel with Sufi practices and artistry. The idea of music and poetry as manifestations of divine affection, the theme of the reed symbolizing the soul's desire to be with the divine and the notion of suffering as a means toward spiritual development are all paradigmatic of Sufism. Besides deepening the novel's thematic layering, these elements contribute to the reader's cultural and spiritual experience of Sufism.

Thus, *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is a rather multi-layered text, which reveals the layers of love with the help of Sufi notions. Due to its compatibility with Sufi principles, depiction of redemptive love, spiritual guiding and merging with the divine, and the modern setting, it is a valuable addition to the growing genre of spiritual fiction. The reader is consequently challenged by Shafak's novel to explore the path towards self-realization and the rediscovery of the spiritual self, thus highlighting values that continue to be as contemporary as ever. By comparing the plots of the two stories, one is able to realize how the literature is able to cross the barriers of history and culture to give the reader a fresh view of the search for love and spiritual comfort.

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