

**ILLUMINATION OF DIVINE LOVE:  
REDISCOVERING THE *HIKMATS* OF SUFI  
AHMAD YASAWI**

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**Abstract**

Divine love, rooted in religious and spiritual traditions, remains relevant today as it represents unconditional, selfless love and fosters empathy, compassion, and understanding among individuals. Embracing the principles of divine love can promote unity, tolerance, and interdependence, fostering global harmony and peace. This study uses a philosophical framework to examine the complex concept of divine love, specifically looking at the historical development and subtle meanings of love-related terms in Islamic Sufi literature. Special attention is given to Sufi poetry, specifically the works of the renowned mystic Shaykh Ahmad Yasawi and his 12th-century collection, *Devon-i Hikmat* or *Hikmats*, which are highly respected in Turkish culture. The research explores the stages of love and offers philosophical interpretations to understand the complex implications and profound nature of this concept. This study enhances our understanding of Sufi literature's perspective on divine love by emphasizing its enduring significance as a universal and timeless facet of human experience that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. Consequently, it fosters a profound understanding and appreciation for the enduring themes and cultural heritage found in Turkic Sufi poetry. The research highlights the lasting significance of divine love and

the cultivation of deep respect for the timeless themes and rich cultural heritage found in Turkic Sufi poetry.

**Keywords:** Sufi poetry; Ahmad Yasawi; Mysticism; Islam; Divine love.

### **Khulasah**

Cinta Ilahi, yang berakar dalam tradisi agama dan spiritual, mempunyai relevansi yang berkekalan sehingga ke zaman kontemporari kerana ia mencerminkan kasih yang tidak bersyarat dan altruistik sambil memupuk empati, belas kasihan, dan pemahaman dalam kalangan individu. Penghayatan terhadap prinsip Cinta Ilahi berpotensi untuk memacu perpaduan, toleransi, dan ketergantungan antara satu sama lain, dengan itu mampu memupuk keharmonian dan keamanan global. Kajian ini menggunakan rangka falsafah untuk meneliti konsep Cinta Ilahi yang rumit, dengan tumpuan khusus kepada perkembangan sejarah dan makna maknawi terma berkaitan dengan Cinta dalam literatur tasawuf Islam. Perhatian khusus diberikan kepada puisi tasawuf, terutamanya karya tokoh sufi terkenal, Shaykh Ahmad Yasawi, dan koleksinya yang masyhur pada abad ke-12 iaitu *Devon-i Hikmat* atau *Hikmats* yang sangat dikagumi dalam budaya Turki. Kajian ini meneliti kepelbagaian peringkat Cinta menggunakan interpretasi falsafah untuk memahami konsepnya yang rumit dan mendalam. Ia juga berusaha memperkukuhkan pemahaman pembaca mengenai pandangan Sufi terhadap konsep Cinta Ilahi dengan menekankan kepentingan pengekalannya sebagai suatu aspek universal dalam pengalaman manusia yang merentasi sempadan masa dan budaya. Oleh yang demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahawa kajian ini telah berusaha memupuk pemahaman dan penghargaan yang tinggi terhadap konsep Cinta Illahi agar kekal sebagai warisan budaya yang kaya sebagaimana tertuang dalam puisi tasawuf Turki.

**Kata kunci:** Syair sufi; Ahmad Yasawi; mistik; Islam; cinta ilahi.

## Introduction

This study is concerned with the representation of divine love in classical literature. Special attention is given to Sufi poetry, particularly the writings of the famous Sufi mystic Shaykh Ahmad Yasawi and his famous collection known as *Devon-i Hikmat* or *Hikmats*. The study explores the historical origins and etymology of the term 'love' and examines the mystical language and significance of terms like *'ishq* (love) and *oshiq* (lover) in Turkic Sufi Poetry. Additionally, it examines the poetry of Sufi Yasawi, analyzing its structure, literal meanings, and mystical essence. Through an examination of the concept of divine love, as it is presented in Sufi literature, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the transformative power of love and to promote a deeper respect for this timeless theme. Islamic Sufism is spread via the use of both poetic poetry and prose in Sufi literature, with a primary focus on Divine Love for God Almighty.

This research employs an observational approach to explore the philosophical dimensions of divine love within Sufi literature. It delves into the roles of the devotee as a servant, the varying gradations of love, and the reciprocal nature of the love shared between God and humanity. To provide a comprehensive context, carefully selected excerpts from Sufi Yasawi's *Hikmats* are incorporated. The main purpose is to shed light on the notion of divine love in Sufi literature, unraveling its core and acting as a poignant reminder of the great significance inherent within these teachings.

This study seeks to fathom the philosophical foundations of divine love and its profound importance in Sufi literature. Additionally, it aims to explore the complex themes and deep meanings associated with the concept of divine love, using Sufi Yasawi's poetry as a means to gain an understanding of the fundamental principles of Sufism. Our objective is to deepen our understanding of the

transformative power of love and its enduring significance in the human experience.

### **Theoretical Background**

This study examines the intricate connection between classical and contemporary literary studies in the realm of Sufi literature. The text incorporates well-regarded literary theories and relevant perspectives to provide a thorough analysis. One significant theoretical framework relevant to the study of Sufi literature is intertextuality, a concept introduced by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. Intertextuality examines the connections and conversations between various texts across different periods and locations.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Sufi literature, intertextuality allows for an exploration of the influences, resonances, and harmonies between Sufi works and other literary traditions.<sup>2</sup> This approach provides insights into the cultural and intellectual influences that have shaped Sufi literature over time. Another relevant theoretical perspective is the hermeneutics of suspicion, advocated by Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida. This approach involves delving deeper into texts to uncover underlying motivations, ideologies, and power structures that are embedded within them.<sup>3</sup>

Postcolonial literary theory, advocated by scholars such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, offers a valuable framework for analyzing Sufi literature in colonial

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<sup>1</sup> Nwadike, Chinedu, "Intertextuality and Spirotextuality: Rethinking Textual Interconnections," *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics* 47(1) (2018), 76-83.

<sup>2</sup> Gattling, Benjamin, "Historical Narrative, Intertextuality, and Cultural Continuity in Post-Soviet Tajikistan," *Journal of Folklore Research: An International Journal of Folklore and Ethnomusicology* 53(1) (2016), 41-65.

<sup>3</sup> Ford, Martin E., *Motivating Humans: Goals, Emotions, and Personal Agency Beliefs* (California: Sage, 1992), 21.

and postcolonial societies.<sup>4</sup> This perspective highlights the influence of colonialism on culture, identity, and the production of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The study examines how Sufi literature responds to and adapts to colonial influences, navigates hybrid identities and cultural blending, and influences discussions on resistance, empowerment, and decolonization. Feminist literary theory provides valuable insights into the gender dynamics present in Sufi literature. Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Bell Hooks have examined how literary texts can perpetuate or challenge patriarchal structures and ideologies.<sup>6</sup>

Adopting a feminist perspective allows one to investigate the development of gender roles and representations, study the marginalization of female voices and agency, and investigate the links between the notion of divine love and gender and power relations. Contemporary literary studies encompass a range of critical perspectives, including reader-response theory, eco-criticism, feminism, and postmodernism.<sup>7</sup>

These perspectives provide valuable tools for analyzing and interpreting Sufi literature in the modern era. These perspectives provide a nuanced understanding of the importance and ongoing discussions surrounding Sufi texts in modern literary discourse. This article aims to bridge the gap between classical and contemporary literary studies by incorporating these theoretical frameworks. It recognizes

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<sup>4</sup> Bhambra, Gurinder, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogs," *Postcolonial Studies* 17(2) (2014), 115-121.

<sup>5</sup> Gani, Jasmine K., & Jenna Marshall, "The Impact of Colonialism on Policy and Knowledge Production in International Relations," *International Affairs* 98(1) (2022), 5-22.

<sup>6</sup> Bell, Hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 2000), 100-110.

<sup>7</sup> Ibarra Cordero, Andrés, "Queer Critical Intersections with Ecology and Religion: Review of Bauman, W. A. (Ed.) (2018). Meaningful Flesh: Reflections on Religion and Nature for a Queer Planet. Goleta, California: Punctum Books," *Descetrada* 5(2) (2021), e158.

the importance of engaging with diverse perspectives and critical approaches to deepen our understanding of the enduring impact of Sufi literature in the past and present.

### ***Hikmats* as the Sufi Literature**

This study examines the Sufi literature, focusing on the *Hikmats*, using both primary and secondary sources. The study focuses on three central themes: divine love, self-mastery, and spiritual development. The study also examines the integration of Arabic vocabulary into Turkic world literature and highlights its importance in contemporary Sufi literature. Exploring Sufi literature through the example of the *Hikmats* reveals profound teachings and lyrical expressions that highlight the irresistible attraction of divine love and the path to self-transcendence. The integration of Arabic language elements into the Turkic language symbolizes the cultural fusion of Sufism and its enduring influence on Central Asian literature.

The study highlights the lasting influence of Sufi literature on literary history and the Islamic faith by preserving religious and spiritual principles while promoting awareness. The analysis of Arabic terms in Sufi literature reveals various interpretations that enrich the eloquence and depth of Sufi poetry and prose. The study underscores the contemporary relevance of Sufi literature by exploring timeless themes such as the enigmatic nature of love, self-reflection, and overcoming the ego. The findings offer valuable insights for scholars and readers alike, underscoring the enduring importance of Sufi literature and its ability to inspire profound spiritual journeys.

### **Philosophical Exploration of Divine Love**

The concept of divine love holds profound significance within the realm of the Uzbek language, encompassing a spectrum of profound meanings. In Uzbek literature, the term for love is *muhabbat*, which is derived from the Arabic

language. As mentioned earlier, the primary term for love is *hubb*. Arabic has multiple words for love, with *hubb* or *habba* being particularly significant. The Uzbek word *muhabbat* is derived from the word *hubb*.<sup>8</sup> In a literary sense, love represents satisfaction and contentment with a person or thing.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, an intriguing parallel can be drawn between the English verb "to believe" and love. Typically, one believes in what one finds pleasing and desirable. Thus, what the heart embraces becomes a matter of belief.

Exploring one of the fundamental connotations of the Arabic words *hubb* and *habba*, they also connote 'seed' in the English language. Thus, love may be likened to a 'seed' that thrives and matures through a profound comprehension of the *ma'shuq* or beloved. The greater one's knowledge of the subject of their affection, the more profound their connection develops.<sup>10</sup> Love, according to one definition, can be seen as a "friendship in fire," an intense force that consumes the beloved.<sup>11</sup> In many romantic literary works, characters are depicted as dying from love, and this has also happened in real life. Some individuals, overwhelmed by the intensity of love, shed tears of blood, where the rupture of small blood vessels in their eyes leads to a mingling of tears and blood. This phenomenon, known as "crying blood," is a tangible manifestation. The eyes of the lovesick individual may turn bloodshot from reminiscing about shared experiences, causing tears and a fusion of blood to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibrohimov, Nematullo, *al-Qamoos: Arabic-Uzbek Encyclopedic Dictionary*, vol. 2 (Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Gafur Ghulam, 2022), 234-236.

<sup>9</sup> Komilov, Najmiddin, *Tasawwuf* (Tashkent: Movarounnahr, 2009), 48-51.

<sup>10</sup> Lunde, Paul & Justin Wintle, *A Dictionary of Arabic and Islamic Proverbs*, 1st ed., vol. 6 (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1984), 23-42.

<sup>11</sup> Zamim, Maryam & Yousef Sahari, "A Contrastive Analysis of the Use of Love Expressions in Arabic and English," *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* 9(6) (2020), 332-336.

flow (a deeper exploration of the philosophy and interpretation of this occurrence will be undertaken later).

Some individuals have genuinely surrendered to the power of love. It is essential to delve deeper into the term '*ishq*' within Sufi literary works, particularly in the context of Turkic Sufi poetry.<sup>12</sup> From Arabic, this phrase has also made its way into Turkic. The Arabic word '*ashaqa*' refers to a form of plant that looks like intertwined grapes that entwine and encircle a tree, eventually causing it to wither and die. Arabs use the term '*ishq*' to depict a profound state of being in love. In Sufi literature, '*ishq*' is portrayed as a malady that can only find remedy through 'union'. This suggests that it can be 'cured' by merging with the '*oshiq*' or beloved, or by attaining unity with the *habib* (another Arabic term for beloved). This therapeutic approach for the love-stricken, referred to as *oshiq*, is also prominent in Uzbek and Turkic world literature.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the renowned Sufi Ahmad Yasawi offers illustrations of these remedial techniques within his work *Hikmats*. For instance, Sufi Ahmad writes:<sup>14</sup>

*"Haqqa oshiq bo'lg'an qullar doim bedor,  
Rizvon emas, maqsudlari erur diydor"*

Meaning:

Devoted souls, enamored by Truth's embrace  
(God Almighty), stay ever vigilant,  
Not seeking mere Paradise but striving to meet  
the divine Face (of God) resplendent.

Fundamentally, those who ardently pursue the Truth, God Almighty (referred to as *Haqq*), possess a singular

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<sup>12</sup> Abashin, Sergei, "Descendants of Saints in Modern Central Asia," *ĖtnografičEskoe Obozrenie* 4(1) (2001), 62-83.

<sup>13</sup> Haqqul, Ibrohim, *Ahmad Yasawi* (Tashkent: Literature and Arts, 2001), 12-63.

<sup>14</sup> Yasawi, Ahmad Sufi, *Devoni Hikmat* (Tashkent: Gafur Ghulam, 1992), 97.



goal: to behold the radiant beauty of their beloved.<sup>15</sup> These individuals, known as novices (i.e., *salik*), display unwavering resilience amid hardships and trials on their spiritual journey.<sup>16</sup> Those enraptured by their love for God maintain constant vigilance, their hearts ever-awake, immersed in unceasing remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Divine Truth. Their purpose in this remembrance is to bear witness to the extraordinary magnificence of God, desiring no other recompense. Even the attainment of paradise, a pursuit of devout believers, appears insignificant in comparison if it deprives them of beholding the Divine beauty. Their prayers and devotional remembrance are not solely aimed at securing a place in paradise; rather, they are driven by an intense longing to gaze upon the Divine face of their beloved.

An endless remembering is another feature of love. When someone is truly in love, their thoughts will always turn to their partner. Love consumes the mind to the point that thinking about the beloved all the time becomes automatic. They might express, "I cannot stop thinking about my beloved" or "My mind is consumed by the object of my affection." This infatuation places a strain on the heart. Someone in love engages in internal conversations with their beloved, creates poetry, and persistently dwells on thoughts of love. This raises the question: What drives one to compose poetry? People often produce 'imperfect' poems when in love, yet the imperfection matters little. They would not do so if not deeply in love.

This phenomenon finds resonance in the Sufi concept of *ta'bir*. This word an Arabic word derived from *yu'abbir*,

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<sup>15</sup> Knysh, Alexander, "Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm: The Issue of the Motivations of Sufi Resistance Movements in Western and Russian Scholarship," *Die Welt Des Islams* 42(2) (2002), 139-173.

<sup>16</sup> Komilov, *Tasawwuf*, Chapter 1, 261-333.

conveys the notion of "connection".<sup>17</sup> It is akin to *'ibrat* in Uzbek, as found in Sufi Yasawi's poetry. In Uzbek, *'ibrat* signifies an "example" within a specific context.<sup>18</sup> This concept encapsulates an action or behavior that serves as an exemplar, imparting a valuable lesson known as *'ibrat* in Uzbek. The origin of this term, the Arabic verb *abra*, carries with it the connotation of "tears". It's closely connected to *e'tibor*, which primarily denotes "attention", encompassing notions of respect and esteem. In the Uzbek language, *e'tibor* can be understood as "assigning importance". Consequently, when something assumes significance (i.e., *e'tibor*) and meaning for an individual, it leaves a lasting impression on their heart. The entire existence of the beloved holds profound significance for the lover.

It's worth noting that during the seventh and eighth centuries, as Islam expanded, the Arabic language found its way into the regions of Transoxiana. This led to the integration of various Arabic words and expressions into Turkic languages. As mentioned earlier, the importance of these words in the Turkic language is evident from their usage in literary works dating back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Sufi Yasawi conveys this significance:<sup>19</sup>

*"Ketganlarni ko'rub sen ham ibrat olg'il,  
Ibrat olsang, yotmish yering bo'lur gulzor"*

Meaning:

Learn from those who've departed this world's  
fleeting shore,

When you heed this lesson, your resting  
place shall bloom, a garden evermore.

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<sup>17</sup> Nurbakhsh, Javad, *Sufi Symbolism: The Nurbakhsh Encyclopedia of Sufi Terminology*, vol. III (n.p: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications (KNP), 1998), 68-106.

<sup>18</sup> Saidova, Sitora Sayfiddin qizi, "Arab Tilidan O'zlashgan Atamalarining Lug'aviy-Ma'noviy Xususiyatlari," *Oriental Renaissance: Innovative, Educational, Natural and Social Sciences 2* (Special Issue 24) (2022), 337-348.

<sup>19</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 35.

In these verses extracted from his *Hikmats*, Sufi Yasawi accentuates the paramount importance of emancipating oneself from the entanglements of worldly preoccupations and attaining mastery over the ego, or *nafs*. He imparts the message that transient worldly positions and material wealth fail to bestow genuine loyalty or true fulfillment. Rather, one's endeavors ought to be wholly directed toward the veneration and devotion of God. Within the realm of this specific poem, the term *'ibrat* assumes the role of a beacon, illuminating the path of acquiring insightful lessons from the follies of others and rectifying one's own errors. Sufi Yasawi adroitly weaves similar verses imbued with wisdom throughout his poetic oeuvre, subtly alluding to the concept of *'ibrat* by imparting profound ruminations and discerning revelations. Hikmat poem.<sup>20</sup>

*"Ota-ona, qarindosh, qayon ketti, fikr qil,  
To'rt oyog'lig' cho'bin ot bir kun senga  
yetaro."*

Meaning:

Contemplate where your kin, parents, and  
friends have trod,

A "four-legged wooden steed" will arrive at  
your abode.

Sufi Yasawi imparts a timeless message, urging readers to seek wisdom from the experiences of others, including their deceased forebears. Islamic tradition holds that material possessions hold no significance beyond mortality, as only one's virtuous and sinful deeds endure in the eternal realm.<sup>21</sup> Through a metaphorical tale involving Alexander the Great, Sufi Yasawi emphasizes the ephemeral nature of worldly wealth, symbolizing it as a

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<sup>20</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Paya, Ali, "Islamic Philosophy: Past, Present and Future," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 74 (2014), 265–321.

"four-legged wooden steed". This serves as a poignant reminder that material possessions cannot transcend the threshold of mortality. Sufi Yasawi's verses offer profound insights into the transient nature of attachments to worldly riches.

Love has long been a central theme in poetry, dating back to the era of Jahiliyya among Arab poets. The Arabs of that time, despite being labeled *jahili* or ignorant, possessed a deep understanding of love, epitomized by the term *hubb* or *habba*. Literary works, including epic tales, exalt the significance of places associated with the beloved, evoking a profound sense of yearning and even tears.

The legendary story of Layla and Majnoon epitomizes the essence of love. An anecdote reveals Majnoon's deep attachment as he tenderly kisses walls, expressing that his affection is not for the physical structures themselves but for the beloved who once inhabited them.<sup>22</sup> In various faiths, individuals undertake pilgrimages to sacred sites as an expression of profound love and reverence. As an example, Muslims embark on journeys to sacred sites such as Hajj and Umra not solely to witness the physical locations of the Kaaba and the Prophet's grave. Their travels are motivated by a deep-seated love for God and a profound respect for the Prophet. In light of these profound contemplations, it is apropos to underscore the exemplary contributions of Sufi Babarrahim Mashrab (1640-1711), as illustrated below:<sup>23</sup>

*"Yorsiz ham bodasiz Makkaga bormoq na kerak?"*

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<sup>22</sup> Sabir, Z., & Said, S. B., "A Fractional Order Nonlinear Model of the Love Story of Layla and Majnun," *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023), article number: 5402, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-32497-5>.

<sup>23</sup> Boborahim Mashrab & Mehribonim Qaydasan, *Where Are You My Dear*, ed. Najmiddin Komilov (Tashkent: Gofur Ghulam, 1990), 62. *Note:* This excerpt from the *ghazal* (amatory poem/ode) called "*Na qilay*" ("What should I do?"); 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> lines of total 12 lines.

*Ibrohimdan qolg'on ul eski do'konni na qilay?!"*

Meaning:

Why journey to Makkah if not for Yor – Allah's love call?

What worth holds Abraham's (PBUH) old shoppe (Kaaba), after all?

Muslims undertake the sacred pilgrimage to Hajj driven by an ardent love that permeates their hearts for God, the Sovereign of the magnificent Kaaba. The pilgrimage transcends the physicality of the Kaaba itself, serving as a testament to their unwavering devotion to the divine Creator. An enlightening anecdote surrounding Majnoon further illuminates the power and depth of love. It is recounted that witnesses beheld Majnoon showering affection upon a dog, tenderly kissing, feeding, and caressing the creature. Perplexed by his behavior, they inquired, "Why do you show such extraordinary attention to this dog?" Majnoon responded with heartfelt conviction, "Do not fault or reproach me, for it was through these very eyes that I beheld this dog in the company of Layla. This very dog was the steadfast companion of my beloved Layla." Majnoon's love for the dog served as a profound manifestation of his love for Layla, attesting to the authenticity and profoundness of his affection.<sup>24</sup> This narrative underscores that true love is not a mere figment of imagination but a deeply felt sentiment, a genuine and profound emotion that resonates within the core of one's being.<sup>25</sup>

In the realm of love, many individuals in the contemporary era have become disconnected from its

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<sup>24</sup> Nizami, Ganjavi, *The Story of Layla and Majnun* (London, UK: Bruno Cassirer, 1966).

<sup>25</sup> Satsangi, Dharna, & Arun K. Sinha, "Dynamics of Love and Happiness: A Mathematical Analysis," *International Journal of Modern Education and Computer Science (IJMECS)* 5 (2011), 31-37.

essence, struggling to grasp its true meaning. In its purest form, the heart holds the key to understanding love's intricacies. Venerable Companion Bilal's profound attachment to the Prophet Muhammad, evident in his emotional difficulty when reciting the call to prayer after the Prophet's departure, exemplifies the core teachings of Islam: loving God necessitates loving what God loves. Emulating the Prophet Muhammad becomes a tangible expression of this love. Sacred places such as Mecca and Medina hold significance in their physicality and the profound love for God that elevates them.

In Sufi literature, the Arabic terms *dunya* and *'alam* illuminate worldly existence's transient nature and the universe's deeper meaning.<sup>26</sup> Objects linked with Prophet Muhammad symbolize the love and devotion people hold for him. The act of naming these objects carries inherent significance, imbuing them with meaning and reflecting the interconnectedness of life and love. In Sufi tradition, there's a strong emphasis on the idea that genuine understanding and connection with the divine love of God can be attained through a deep comprehension of Prophet Mohammad. He is seen as the transcendent bridge to divine love.

Sufi Yasawi eloquently expresses his love and reverence for the Prophet in his *Hikmats*. Yasawi portrays the Prophet as the ultimate guide and master, using the term *Pir-i Mughan* to signify his exalted status. He confirms that the journey towards experiencing divine love commences with wholehearted devotion and love for the Prophet Muhammad. His writings vividly illustrate the profound significance of the Prophet's role as the gateway to divine love and the path to spiritual enlightenment:<sup>27</sup>

*“Ko ’nglumga solib ishq-u muhabbatni Ilohim,  
Qilg ’il mani sen oshiqi yaktoyi Muhammad.”*

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<sup>26</sup> Yusuf, Hamza, "Buddha in the Qur'an?" in *Common Ground Between Islam and Buddhism*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), 113-136.

<sup>27</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 75.

Meaning:

Oh, my God, infuse love deep within my heart's  
core,  
Let me be the devoted lover of Muhammad  
evermore.

The exploration of love encompasses extensive dimensions, often involving hardship and self-sacrifice. Love requires the lover to engage in battles and make sacrifices along their journey. It is through these challenges that love is tested and confirmed as authentic. This sentiment is succinctly captured in a proverb found in Turkic languages: "*Jon bermasang, jonona qayda*" — meaning that if you do not sacrifice your life, there is no way to attain the beloved (similar to the English proverb, "No pain, no gain"). True love demands a struggle that goes beyond the self-centered "me" mentality.

In this section, we will delve into the ten stages of *muhabbat* – love, with each stage representing a facet of love conveyed through various terms found in Turkic languages, primarily influenced by Arabic and commonly employed in prose, poetry, and Sufi (mystic) literature.<sup>28</sup>

1. The initial stage is referred to as *aloqa*, which can be translated as attachment in English. According to Sufi scholars, this stage represents the profound emotional connection and bond between the lover and the beloved. *Aloqa* implies a deep and nurturing attachment in which one's affection extends towards someone or something, signifying a strong emotional intertwining.

2. The second stage is named *iroda*, meaning free will in English. At this stage, the lover embarks on a quest for the beloved. In Sufism, the term *murid* describes a person who sets out with the *iroda* – the will and determination to

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<sup>28</sup> Komilov, *Tasawwuf*, Chapter 1, 48-51, 261-333.

embark on the path of love.<sup>29</sup> The lover develops an intense desire and intent to unite with the beloved.

3. The third stage is known as *al-siba*, an Arabic term signifying "falling" like water. In English, when someone experiences love, it is often said that they "fall" in love. This stage represents the lover's loss of control as they yield themselves to the overwhelming power of love.

4. The fourth stage is termed *gharam*, derived from the Arabic language and associated with a form of punishment in Jahannam (Hell). *Gharam* describes an unrelenting and constant intensity of love. The lover yearns for a continuous and unceasing union with the beloved. Sufi Yasawi expresses this stage:<sup>30</sup>

*"Qoydin Topay, ishqing tushdi, qarorim yo 'q,  
Ishq sanosin tuni-kuni qo 'yori yo 'q,  
Dargohingdan o 'zga yerga bororim yo 'q  
Har na qilsang, oshiq qilg 'il, Parvardigor."*

Meaning:

I've lost my mind, in love with You, I am bound,

Days and nights, this song of love knows no end, it surrounds.

I can't journey elsewhere but to Your sacred domain,

Oh Lord, may I be Your ardent lover, my plea I sustain.

A popular narrative from Sufi literature portrays a meeting between Jesus (PBUH) and a young one (male) tending a garden in the realm of divine love. Although Jesus cautioned him of the tremendous intensity of divine love, the young man longed for even a little fraction of it. Eventually, Jesus prayed for half of that tiny bit, which led the young man to become deranged and withdraw to the

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<sup>29</sup> Knysh, "Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm," 139-173.

<sup>30</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 38.



mountains. When Jesus found him, God revealed that someone harboring even half of the tiniest portion of divine love would be absorbed in their own inner world. Sufi Ahmad Yasawi beautifully encapsulates the transformative power of divine love:<sup>31</sup>

*"Haq rahmati ulug' daryo, bir qatra bas,  
Qatrasidin bahra olg'an qilmas havas,  
Movumanlik sendin ketar misli magas,  
Haq jamolin ko'rsatmasa zomin bo'lay.:*

Meaning:

God's mercy, a vast river, a single drop shall suffice,

In possession of that droplet, envy takes no slice.

Calamities scatter like a fleeting fly in flight,  
Without God's divine "Presence", I remain in plight.

Sufi Yasawi likens the mercy of God to a gorgeous river that never stops flowing and is constantly overflowing with water. This heavenly river bestows riches on those who seek it in accordance with their wishes. A single drop from this river suffices for someone who yearns for true divine love from God. As one experiences even a droplet of divine love, they willingly renounce worldly desires and pleasures, detaching themselves from all worldly calamities. Their heart becomes solely filled with the purity of divine love.<sup>32</sup> A heart brimming with divine love leaves no room for anything else. The ego, known as the *nafs*, and its desires dissipate. Sufi Yasawi illustrates this condition as a sensation of being adrift. In simpler terms, pride and ignorance, which symbolize the most detrimental aspects of one's ego, dissipate in the presence of divine love. When a

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<sup>31</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 188.

<sup>32</sup> Yusuf, Hamza, *Purification of the Heart: Signs, Symptoms and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart* (California: Sandala, 2010), 27-29.

drop from the river of divine love enters a person's heart, these vices and calamities scatter away from them like a fleeing fly. Sufi Yasawi expresses in his unique style that a heart filled with God's love can no longer harbor such traits. Arrogance flees far from such a person, becoming an attribute they can no longer possess.

5. Proceeding to the fifth stage, termed *widad*, which signifies pure love, the lover attains a distinct state. In the preceding stages, desires (*nafs*) held prominence, with the lover yearning to continually behold their beloved. However, the *widad* stage shifts the focus from the beloved (*ma 'shuq*) to the lover (*oshiq*).

In Islamic teachings, God is referred to as *al-Wadud* (The Most Loving), sharing the same linguistic root as the term *widad*. In Sufi tradition, the name of God, *al-Wadud* carries two significances. First, it signifies the One who loves His servants intensely. Second, *al-Wadud* denotes the only God whom His servants love profoundly. Moreover, in the prophetic tradition, a noteworthy insight emerges when a married man and woman wish to remain united. God instills *al-mawaddah* or "pure love" between them. This pure love is so profound that even in the face of incurable illness or the natural aging process, where one's physical beauty may diminish, neither spouse contemplates divorce or separation.

Let's take a closer look at this topic as we delve into the philosophical understanding of love and the essence of the stage referred to as *wodd*, *wudd*, or *widad*. Thus, how does Allah define genuine love? It encompasses the purpose of the union between a man and a woman. Sufi poetry and prose eloquently convey that God bestows *mawaddah* as the pure love that unites a man and a woman. It is a love that ensures that a husband does not abandon his wife in sickness or when she no longer possesses the same physical beauty.

Sufi literature consistently draws upon Qur'an and Sunnah to provide profound insights. One such hadith states that "In this world, women and perfume have been made dear to me [...]"<sup>33</sup> This statement is not about lust but holds a deeper meaning. This statement also alludes to "perfume". But what is the association between women and fragrance? Perfume, fundamentally, exudes a delightful aroma and selflessly offers a pleasant experience to those in its vicinity. From a philosophical perspective, when an individual applies perfume, it diffuses and imparts pleasure to those around them. We can see that the Prophet regarded women in high respect because of their intrinsic feature of sacrifice, which comes naturally to women but can be difficult for males.<sup>34</sup> This sacrifice is exemplified by the remarkable selflessness inherent in women and instilled by our mothers, serving as a powerful lesson for us all. Hence, to honor and elevate the status of women, Sufi literature quotes prophetic traditions that emphasize the elevated position of mothers, stating, "[...] Paradise is beneath her (mother's) feet"<sup>35</sup> Shaykh Hamza Yusuf also explains that this hadith means paradise lies beneath the feet of mothers. It is through our mothers that we learn best and witness the embodiment of such virtues.<sup>36</sup>

In Sufism, Hadith al-Qudsi refers to the term *rahm*. This word originates from the root letters 'r', 'h' and 'm', which are also present in the Divine Names of God: *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*. *Rahman* and *Rahim* are two of the characteristics and names of Allah Almighty. Both terms

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<sup>33</sup> Al-Nasaie, Sunan an-Nasa'i, "The Book of the Kind Treatment of Women," Hadith No. 3939, <https://sunnah.com/nasai/36>.

<sup>34</sup> Yusuf, Hamza, "Generous Tolerance in Islam and Its Effects on the Life of a Muslim," *Seasons: Semiannual Journal of Zaytuna Institute* 2(2) (2005), 26-42.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Nasaie, Sunan an-Nasa'i, The Book of Jihad, "Concession Allowing One who has a Mother to Stay Behind," Hadith No. 3104, <https://sunnah.com/nasai:3104>.

<sup>36</sup> Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*, 27-29.

signify The Most Merciful or The Most Gracious. In its tangible form, *rahm* denotes a woman's womb, a distinctive element of the female anatomy.<sup>37</sup> From a philosophical standpoint, this womb represents the 'origin of mercy' in the world. It is found in the heart of a woman's essence and represents compassion. This womb, known as *rahm*, was the initial abode for all human beings, as we were nurtured and formed within it. Both men and women were encompassed by this abode called *rahm*, which is intricately connected to the concept of compassion. It is a quality that can be expanded to cater to the needs of others. Therefore, *wudd* or *widad* truly signifies pure love.<sup>38</sup> This type of love is not tainted by utilitarianism, as it is not driven by self-interest or personal gain.<sup>39</sup>

6. The sixth stage is referred to as the "pericardium" in modern terms. In this stage, love encompasses the heart, surrounding it completely. It is as if love forms a protective layer around the heart, shielding it from external influences.

7. Moving on to the seventh stage, which we briefly touched upon earlier, known as *'ishq*. In Sufism, the intense love for God Almighty is referred to as *'ishq*, while affection for a person is termed *oshiq* — the lover. This stage carries inherent risks, as the lovers can become utterly consumed, to the extent of losing their sanity. The Arabic term *al-'ashaqa* alludes to a suffocating wild plant that envelops and eventually kills a tree. In a similar manner, *'ishq* characterizes a type of love marked by intense

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<sup>37</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Good Manners and Form, Chapter: Allah Will Keep Good Relations with Him Who Keeps Good Relations with Kith and Kin, Hadith No. 5988: "Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated that the word "*Rahm*" (womb) is derived from "Ar-Rahman" [...], <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:5988>.

<sup>38</sup> Chittick, William C., "Themes of Love in Islamic Mystical Theology," in *Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Mystical Perspectives on the Love of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 155-180.

<sup>39</sup> Bowden, Peter, "In Defense of Utilitarianism," *SSRN* 1 (2009), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1534305>

constriction or suffocation. To find solace in this overwhelming love, it is crucial to maintain a profound connection with the beloved.

Within Sufi literature, there are accounts of individuals known as "the *shahid* from '*ishq*' — the martyrs of love. These stories depict individuals who have metaphorically sacrificed their lives for love. Sufi Yasawi's poems provide profound insights into the profound nature of this love in Sufism, illustrating the depths and complexities of this experience:<sup>40</sup>

*"Qul Xoja Ahmad, ishqdin qattiq balo bo'lmas,  
Marham so'rma, ishq dardig'a davo bo'lmas,  
Ko'zyoshidin o'zga hech kim guvoh bo'lmas,  
Har na qilsang, oshiq qilg'il, Parvardigor."*

Meaning:

Oh, servant Khwaja Ahmad, there's no burden  
heavy, save for "ishq" profound,  
Seek not a remedy; there's none for love's pain  
that's found.  
Only your tears shall bear witness, none else in  
sight,  
Oh Lord, make me Your ardent "oshiq," grant  
me this light.

8. The eighth stage, referred to as *tatayyum*, embodies the idea of deriving profound satisfaction from being a devoted servant to the beloved. It signifies a state of absolute surrender and unwavering devotion.

9. Advancing to the ninth stage, *ta'abbud*, the lover takes on the role of a devoted 'slave' to their beloved. This stage holds great esteem in Sufi literature, and in Islamic tradition, bestowing the title of servitude to God is a revered honor, one that was bestowed upon the Prophet. It signifies an intense love, admiration, and a profound level of worship.

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<sup>40</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 38.

10. The ultimate stage, *hullah*, signifies the pinnacle of love and the complete immersion of the soul. It is closely related to the concept of *khalil* or the closest friendship, as exemplified by Prophets Mohammad and Abraham (peace be upon them) as *Khalilullah* - the closest friends of God. This stage also underscores the significance of loving the Prophet Muhammad as the bridge to loving God. It's imperative to note that progression through these stages demands knowledge, patience, tenacity, and the capacity to transcend one's ego, as Sufi Ahmad eloquently expresses these sentiments:<sup>41</sup>

*"Qul Xoja Ahmad, o'z din kechmay da'vo qilma,  
Xalq ichida oshiqmen deb tilga olma,  
Oshiqlik' ulug' ishdir, g'ofil bo'lma,  
G'ofil bo'lub Haq diydorin ko'rmang, do'stlar"*

Meaning:

Oh, servant Khwaja Ahmad, first depart from self's disguise,

Refrain from proclaiming openly, "I am an oshiq", be wise.

To be a fervent lover holds great significance, stay aware,

Oh friends, heedlessness veils God's divine Presence with despair.

### **Discussion on the Linguistic Semantics and Mystical Connotations of Arabic Terms**

Analyzing the linguistic semantics of Arabic words and their mystical connotations offers valuable insights into the concepts of love, devotion,<sup>42</sup> and spirituality within the Uzbek and Sufi literary context.<sup>43</sup> The Arabic language,

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<sup>41</sup> Yasawi, *Devoni Hikmat*, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Hamori, Andras, "Review of Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93(4) (1973), 568-569.

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Yusuf, Muhammad Sodiq, *Tasavvuf Haqida Tasavvur (Imagination about Sufism)* (Tashkent: Hilol, 2021), 240-276.

with its rich heritage and deep association with Sufi traditions, provides a profound understanding of these concepts. The word *muhabbat*, derived from the Arabic word *hubb*, conveys the meaning of being satisfied and content with a person or thing.<sup>44</sup> The connection between satisfaction and love highlights the notion that true love involves feeling completely content with the person you love. This interpretation is supported by Arabic dictionaries and Sufi literature.

The term *'ishq* carries profound significance in Sufi literature. It represents an intense and fervent love, often portrayed as a profound affliction. The concept of establishing a deep and enduring connection with the beloved is essential for alleviating this state. The Arabic root *'ashaqa*, which describes a plant that suffocates and withers a tree it grows around, serves as a powerful symbol of the all-consuming and overpowering nature of love. This understanding deepens our understanding of the mystical meanings associated with *'ishq*.<sup>45</sup> The term *habib*, frequently used in Sufi literature, refers to the beloved and represents the profound love and longing for union with the beloved. The profound significance and intense desire embodied in the term are evident through its usage in Arabic dictionaries and Sufi texts.<sup>46</sup>

The Arabic word *'ibrat* has a fascinating layer of meaning. In Arabic, it refers to an example or a lesson, while in Uzbek, it represents an act or behavior that serves as a clear lesson.<sup>47</sup> The root *abra* is associated with the

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<sup>44</sup> Singh, Ashish, "The Psychology of Love: Exploring the Gender Differences in Unmarried and Married Couples," *SSRN*, 2012, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2325910](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2325910)

<sup>45</sup> Hasan, Botirbek, *Arabic-Uzbek Elementary Dictionary*, Movarounnahr, <https://n.ziyouz.com/kutubxona/category/30-lug-atlar>.

<sup>46</sup> Rice, Karen, "Dictionary of Mysticism and the Esoteric Traditions," *RQ* 32(4) (1993), 564-565.

<sup>47</sup> Ibrohimov, *Al-Qamoos*, 289.

concepts of "tears" and "*e'tibor*" (attention/giving importance), highlighting the importance of something that deeply affects the heart. This linguistic analysis explores the transformative impact of *'ibrat* and its effect on how the lover perceives the beloved. The term *ta'bir*, derived from the Arabic verb *yu'abbir*, conveys the idea of "connection." In Sufi terminology, *ta'bir* refers to the process of drawing clear lessons and establishing connections between various elements.<sup>48</sup> This understanding allows for a deeper comprehension of the Sufi practice of interpreting experiences, which is often conveyed through poetry or symbolic language.<sup>49</sup>

The term *nafs* is often used in Sufi literature to describe the ego or lower self. It emphasizes the significance of managing and surpassing internal desires and impulses to achieve spiritual enlightenment. This interpretation aligns with the mystical connotations attributed to *nafs* in Sufi dictionaries and texts.<sup>50</sup> *Dunya* and *'alam*, both Arabic words, emphasize the transient nature of worldly life and the broader universe. Within Sufi literature, they symbolize the impermanence of material possessions and stress the significance of focusing on the realm of meaning and spirituality.<sup>51</sup> This understanding enhances our comprehension of the deep meaning conveyed by these terms in the mystical context.

The Arabic term *haqq* holds immense importance in Islamic and Sufi traditions. The term *haqq* refers to the Truth or the Divine, symbolizing the ultimate reality. Within Sufi literature, comprehending and encountering the

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<sup>48</sup> Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Literature and Folklore, *Annotated Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* (Tashkent: Institute of Uzbek Language, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Symbolism*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Maliki, Menal, "The 11 Levels of Love in Arabic," *Arab America*, February 10, 2022, <https://www.arabamerica.com/the-11-levels-of-love-in-arabic/>

<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Yusuf, *Tasavvuf Haqida Tasavvur*, 240-276.



divine love of Allah – *al-Haqq*, is seen as the most elevated spiritual objective. This interpretation, rooted in Arabic dictionaries and Sufi literature, enhances our understanding of the pivotal role that *haqq* occupies in Sufi philosophy.<sup>52</sup>

*Pir-i Mughan*, a Persian phrase coined by Sufi Ahmad Yasawi, is an affectionate term used to reference the Prophet Mohammad. It underscores his position as the supreme teacher and master.<sup>53</sup> It highlights his role as a bridge to divine love and spiritual enlightenment. This term, found in Sufi dictionaries and writings, reinforces the profound significance of the Prophet in the realm of Sufi spirituality. Thus, by thoroughly analyzing the linguistic semantics of Arabic words and their mystical connotations, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate concepts of love, devotion, and spirituality in Turkic and Sufi literary contexts. Consulting Arabic dictionaries and delving into Sufi literature enables a deeper exploration of the meaning and significance of these terms in the context of divine love and Sufi philosophy.

## Conclusion

Exploring the phases of love in Sufi literature offers valuable insights into spiritual matters and their relevance to contemporary behavioral issues. These phases, which range from initial attraction to selfless devotion, provide a deep exploration of the heart that illuminates the enduring relevance of human nature and relationships. The Sufi concept of love offers an alternative perspective in a fast-paced and materialistic world where self-centeredness and instant gratification prevail. The first stages of love reveal the transience and superficiality of worldly desires. They question the prevailing consumer culture and challenge individuals to seek deeper, more meaningful connections

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<sup>52</sup> Komilov, *Tasawwuf*, Chapter 1, 48-51, 261-333.

<sup>53</sup> Oğuz, Öcal, "Ahmed Yasawi: Narrated Life and Wisdom Generated in His Name," *Millî Folklor* 28(112) (2016), 7-11.

beyond material possessions. As they progress, the focus shifts to selflessness and sacrifice.

The linguistic semantics of Arabic terms in Sufi literature deepen our understanding of these stages of love. Words like *muhabbat* (love), *'ishq* (passionate love), "*habib* (beloved), and *'ibrat* (lesson) carry profound meanings and connotations that emphasize the transformative nature of love and the significance of self-reflection and personal development. These terms, derived from Arabic dictionaries and Sufi literature, enhance our understanding of the stages of love and its significance in the context of divine love and spiritual growth. In addition to linguistic insights, the concept of love in Sufism is consistent with famous literary theories or concepts such as Romanticism. The Romantic movement, characterized by its focus on passion, individuality, and the sublime, is reflected in the stages of love depicted in Sufi literature. Both traditions celebrate the intensity of feeling, the longing for transcendence, and the quest for a deeper understanding of the self and the world. Drawing parallels between Sufi literature and Romanticism reveals the universal nature of the human experience and the timeless allure of these themes throughout history.

The concept of love in Sufism goes beyond human connections and represents the ultimate bond between individuals and the divine. This spiritual dimension speaks to the existential longing for deeper meaning and fulfillment beyond material striving. In today's context, Sufi teachings offer an alternative perspective on pressing debates and behavioral issues. They provide a framework for addressing self-centeredness, gender dynamics, and the search for meaningful connections. The stages of love in Sufi literature emphasize the significance of self-transcendence and surpassing the limitations of the ego. These teachings inspire individuals to prioritize the welfare of others, fostering unity, empathy, and collective progress

in a society often hindered by selfishness and individualism. By embracing qualities such as sacrifice, service, and devotion, they can foster healthier relationships, address gender dynamics, and contribute to a more compassionate and connected society.

The study of Sufi literature, specifically the works of Sufi Ahmad Yasawi and his *Hikmats*, uncovers a rich collection of poetic ideas and profound teachings. The fusion of Arabic and Turkic words in Sufi literature exemplifies the distinctive amalgamation of cultures and languages. The Yasawi Order, a prominent Sufi tradition in Central Asia, has had a lasting impact by promoting spirituality, and enlightenment and preserving the fundamental principles of religion. The exploration of divine love, self-mastery, and the path to spiritual maturity in Sufi literature is relevant to contemporary society. These concepts encourage individuals to reflect on their journey, the importance of self-reflection, and the pursuit of spiritual growth.

The influence of Sufi literature extends beyond its religious importance, leaving an enduring imprint on the literature and history of Islam. Sufi literature imparts enduring guidance and inspiration that transcends cultural boundaries. The universal themes of love, self-transcendence, and the conquest of the ego provide profound insights into the human experience and offer pathways to personal and spiritual development. Individuals can find inspiration, insight, and guidance in their search for self-discovery, spiritual enlightenment, and divine love by reading Sufi literature and linking its lessons to contemporary issues. In the complex web of Sufi literature, people can discover timeless wisdom and profound truths that illuminate their journeys and contribute to a more compassionate and connected world.

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