

**From Rābi‘a to Ibn al-Fāriḍ: Towards Some Paradigms of  
the Sufi Conception of Love**

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been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to investigate the significance of Divine Love in the Islamic tradition with reference to Sufis who used the medium of Arabic to communicate their ideas. Divine Love means the mutual love between God and man. It is commonly accepted that the Sufis were the forerunners in writing about Divine Love. However, there is a relative paucity of literature regarding the details of their conceptions of Love. Therefore, this attempt can be considered as one of the first of its kind in this field.

The first chapter will attempt to define the nature of love from various perspectives, such as, psychology, Islamic philosophy and theology. The roots of Divine Love in relation to human love will be explored in the context of the ideas that were prevalent amongst the Sufi authors regarded as authorities; for example, al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwirī and al-Kalābādhī.

The second chapter investigates the origins of Sufism with a view to establishing the role that Divine Love played in this. The etymological derivations of the term Sufi will be referred to as well as some early Sufi writings.

It is an undeniable fact that the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth are the bedrocks of the Islamic religion, and all Muslims seek to justify their ideas with reference to them. This was especially true for the Sufis. The third and fourth chapters will, therefore, focus on the concept of Divine Love in the textual sources of Islam in order to determine the role that these played in the development of the Sufi conceptions of love in general.

Having highlighted the origins and general context of Divine Love, the following five chapters will focus on selected Sufis whose contributions can be regarded as significant, original and representative of the Sufi tradition. The exclusive characteristics of each Sufi's concept of love will be analysed and an attempt will

be made to present them as a paradigm of Sufi love. The paradigms of love of the following Sufis will be presented: Rābi‘a, al-Ḥallāj, al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ. The concluding chapter will provide a synthesis of these paradigms of love by putting forward a framework which identifies the key stages in the development of the Sufi paradigm of love.

Regarding the scope and limitations of this study, it should not be seen as a historical or biographical research. The historical analysis and information are presented merely to give some insight into the social and historical context of the Sufi’s time. The primary aim of this research is to establish the different paradigms of love of the Sufis referred to above, by analysing the exclusive motives specific to each paradigm.

Finally, this research is by no means a comprehensive account of the Sufi paradigms of love. The development of the thesis showed that this research can be approached from many different angles. For example, the concept of love is closely associated with the concept of *ma‘rifa*, and the concept of God. The relationship of the two with the concept of love is a possible area of further research. In addition, the historical information available on each individual Sufi provides ample material for a detailed study of the concept of love in that particular Sufis paradigm. This work provides a general framework for further studies.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AD:	:	<i>(Anno Domini)</i> Christian era
AH	:	<i>(Anno Hegirae)</i>
c.	:	<i>(circa)</i> about
ed.	:	edited
ibid.	:	<i>(ibidem)</i> in the same book
JMIAS	:	Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society
K.T.	:	Kutub al-Tis'ah
n. p.	:	no place
n.d.	:	no date
Muh.	:	Muhammad edition
Y.A.	:	Yusuf Ali

### Transliteration Scheme

The Library of Congress (LC) system of transliteration has been followed throughout the thesis.

#### First: Consonants

Arabic	LC	Arabic	LC
ء	'	ض	ḍ
ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	'
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ي	y

#### Second: Diphthongs

ي (ay)	و (aw)
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#### Third: Vowels

Arabic (short vowels)	LC	Arabic (long vowels)	LC
ـِ	a	ا	ā
ـُ	u	و	ū
ـِ	i	ي	ī

#### Fourth: Other

أل al- (for article)



## CHAPTER ONE

### The Nature of Love

#### 1.1 Introduction

To study the nature of love is an intricate and complicated endeavour. The reason for this is that love is a phenomenon which falls into the ambit of many divergent disciplines, such as psychology, literature, medicine<sup>1</sup>, theology, biology and so on.<sup>2</sup> All these disciplines attempt to define this concept from their own perspectives. To give a few examples, literature considers love as the driving force behind the finest poetry; medieval medical science perceives it as a kind of disease<sup>3</sup>; theology sees it as a way of approaching and nearness to God; and in philosophy it is the desire of the imperfect to attain perfection.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, the concept of love will be studied from the Sufi perspective and with special reference to the Sufi classics. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the complex nature of the subject, we will from time to time refer to the insights gained from various disciplines. These disciplines include psychology, philosophy and theology. However, when these disciplines are studied, they will be confined to the boundaries of Sufi understanding. Otherwise, to study the concept of love independently according to these disciplines would be an immense work and would exceed the boundaries of this research. It is hoped that such an approach will offer a deeper and richer understanding of love and will, thus, provide a more comprehensive grasp of the subject of study. Our discussion will take as its starting point the development of love through the human life cycle beginning from birth through adolescence and into mature age. The status of love throughout the existence of an individual's life will be looked at from a psychological stance.

As a brief overview, it is possible to regard love as one of the most fundamental of the human emotions. As a working definition, love can be described as an emotion or a feeling that the lover has with regard to the beloved. This love can reveal itself in

<sup>1</sup> See al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Zahrah*, ed. by Nykl, A.,R & Tuqan, I., (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1932) pp.50-55

<sup>2</sup> G. Santas, *Plato and Freud Two Theories of Love*, (New York, Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.1

<sup>3</sup> Mas'ūdī, *Murīj al-Dhahab*, (Beirut, Dār al-Andalūs 1965-66), v.3, pp.370-75

<sup>4</sup> Ibn al-Khatīb, *Rawḍat al-Ta'rīf bi Ḥubb al-Sharīf*, (Beirut, Dār al-Saqafah, 1970), p.341

many diverse ways. The most prominent, being an attraction towards things which are pleasing to the eye, or in the words of Bammāt, as an “inclination of the heart towards the beauty of the forms.”<sup>5</sup> However, this beauty is not solely restricted to physical beauty. It also includes the appreciation of beauty in its spiritual form.

In addition, love also has an active dimension since love is not a mere thought in the mind or a feeling in the heart. Love also entails, particularly in the Sufi perspective, an act of obedience to the beloved. So much so that love without action in accordance with the will of the beloved is considered something that is not worthy of the name; love is tested through actions of the lover. These issues will be broached in more detail in the following pages.

## **1.2 The Nature of Love**

### **1.2:1 Love in Human Beings as an emotion**

As was hinted above, an inter-disciplinary approach can help us to place the concept of love in context. Following on with this line of thinking, the discipline of psychology can provide us with interesting insights into the nature of love as experienced by human beings. However, it is important to keep in mind that our objective is not to provide a psychological analysis of love. The aim is only to use psychology in so far as it will enable us to understand “Sufi love” as a human phenomenon. It should not be forgotten that the early Sufis themselves were human beings and thus experienced similar kind of emotions and feeling as the rest of mankind. The only difference was that they channelled their love in the direction of the Divine rather than in the direction of “mortals”. To further this aim, they refined and embellished the natural drives of love. The above perspective is supported by the fact that a perusal of Sufi literature will reveal the close interconnection of Sufi love with the basic human love. Examples will be provided below to illustrate this idea.

As a human emotion, love is closely associated with psychology. However, psychology does not have as clear a theory of love as one might expect. The reason for this is that love cannot be tested in the laboratory. Rubin quotes the following words of Harry Harlow, the president of the American Psychological Association, in

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<sup>5</sup> H. Bammāt, *Islamiyetin Manevi ve Kulturel Degerleri*, trans. by Bahadır Dulder, (Ankara, 1963)

order to emphasize this phenomenon. “So far as love or affection is concerned, psychologists have failed in their mission. The little we know about love does not transcend simple observation...”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it seems that observation is one of the most important means for gaining an understanding as far as the nature of love is concerned.

The first observations made by the psychologists were directed towards establishing the roots of love. The first thing, which attracted their attention, was the relationship between the mother and child.<sup>7</sup> Man’s first experience of love happens between birth and infancy; this is the natural bond of love between the mother and the baby. Suttie suggests, that love of the mother is primal in so far as it is the *first formed and directed* emotional relationship.<sup>8</sup> These words are important because according to him, the first emotion experienced by human beings, is that of love. Hence, love is an essential part of the human psyche.

From a Sufi perspective, the best definition of love is given by al-Ghazālī. He describes the love as “an inclination towards a thing, which gives pleasure”.<sup>9</sup> According to al-Ghazālī, in the early stage, a child’s love is directed exclusively towards the mother. As the child develops through his primary years of childhood, his love starts to explore different avenues. The love which was solely aimed at the mother in the beginning gradually starts to incline to games and toys. It further expands to include friends in its ambit. When the child reaches adolescence, he starts experiencing a natural inclination towards the opposite sex. The love of the opposite sex in the early stages of adulthood turns into the love of health and status in later ages. This process eventually culminates in the love of God.<sup>10</sup>

According to al-Ghazali, there is a progression along a continuum: from the concrete to the abstract. If carefully looked at, the first objects of love are very concrete, such as, mother, toys and friends. In the second stage of this continuum, the objects of

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p.252

<sup>6</sup> Z. Robin, ‘Preface’, in *The Psychology of Love*, ed. Robert J. Stenberg and Michael L. Barnes, (Yale Uni. Press, New Haven and London, 1988), p.vii

<sup>7</sup> Bernard I. Murstein, ‘A Taxonomy of Love’ in *The Psychology of Love*, ed. Robert J. Stenberg and Michael L. Barnes, (Yale Uni. Press, New Haven and London, 1988), p.14

<sup>8</sup> I. D. Suttie, *The Origins of Love and Hate*, (London, Short Run Press, 1988), p.31

<sup>9</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1992), v. 4, p.312

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.326

love become quasi-concrete objects such as power and status. The third and final stage of love is completely different, since its object is a Divine Being.

Al-Ghazali concludes that those who have the ability to experience these material loves respectively, are also competent to love immaterial objects. However, this can only be achieved if proper instruction and environment are supplied. As a matter of fact, the gradual development of material love prepares the heart for the reception of non-material love i.e. the love of God.<sup>11</sup>

As a further example of this psychological approach, it is instructive to look at the views of al-Daylamī<sup>12</sup>. He divides the concept of love into two parts. The first is natural love which is the love towards the opposite sex and the immediate environment. According to al-Daylamī, if God wishes to place Divine Love in the heart of one of His servants, He will first prepare the servant's heart. This preparation entails initially the acceptance of physical love by the servant. Only after the servant has digested the love of transient things, is he in a state to be elevated to the ranks of those who have the power to absorb the joy of Divine Love.

Al-Daylamī's views are in some ways similar to those of al-Ghazālī. For example, like al-Ghazālī he thinks that, as the human being passes through the various stages of the human life cycle, his focus of love, also matures, from physical forms to abstract concepts. The ultimate abstraction is the real agent, namely God who is the creator of all the forms. One who has achieved this level of love, in the eyes of al-Daylamī, has attained to the supreme form of love - love of the Divine. On the other hand, if a person lacks the ability of natural love in due proportion, he or she will not be able to attain Divine Love.<sup>13</sup> From this brief overview of al-Daylamī's understanding of love, it may be concluded that natural love is an archetype of Divine love. Hence, a person who cannot feel love for physical objects cannot love abstract objects.

This understanding of al-Daylamī's view of love can be illustrated by a famous and somewhat humorous anecdote widely circulated among the Sufis: One day a Sufi

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<sup>11</sup> M. Ozak, *The Unveiling of Love*, trans. by Muhtar Holland, (East West Publications, London and the Hague, 1981), p.27

<sup>12</sup> al-Daylamī, A. M., *Kitāb 'Aṭf al-Alif*, p.68

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68

Sheikh<sup>14</sup> was preaching in a mosque when one of the members of the audience stood up and enquired: “O Sheikh! I have lost my donkey, can you please ask the audience whether they have seen it or not”. In response to this awkward question, the Sheikh turned towards his audience and appealed to them: “O congregation! Is there among you anyone who does not know what love is, and who has never loved anything in his whole life?” Upon this, a small group of people stood up and proudly replied “We have never loved anyone in our lives.” On hearing this the Sheikh called the man who had lost his donkey and said to him: “Here are your donkeys” pointing to the men who said that they had never loved anyone!”<sup>15</sup>

According to this Sufi understanding, the ability to love others and in particular to love God, is the most distinctive characteristic of mankind. This oft-quoted story among the Sufis, although it should not be expected to happen necessarily in reality, indicates that to be able to love someone is an exclusive privilege of man, whether the object of love is directed towards a human being or to God.

This line of thinking did not conflict with the Qur’anic teachings; since the Sufi authors found examples of Divine Love which started initially as a human love. From amongst these examples is the story of Zulaykha’s love for the Prophet Joseph; how she passionately loved him in the beginning but later her love transformed into love of God.<sup>16</sup>

At this juncture, it would be useful to pause and highlight a few important points that may be derived from the Sufi explanation of the origin and development of love. Firstly the Sufi concept of love is firmly rooted in the natural emotions of mankind. The benefit of this was that people could instantly identify with the teachings of the Sufis as they struck a chord in their hearts and minds, since, the majority of the Sufis establish a connection between physical love and Divine Love. They think physical love is a transition period to Divine Love. This was one of the reasons for the popularity of the Sufi concept of love among the Muslim masses. The opinion of individual Sufis concerning the origins of love will be the subject of the following chapters.

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<sup>14</sup> According to one version this Sheikh was a Halwati Shaikh, named Jamāladdīn Ḥalwātī, see Ozak, M., *The Unveiling of Love*, p.37

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37

Having presented some examples concerning the origins of love, a few words of caution need to be sounded. Firstly, it should not be assumed that every person must follow every stage of the process of attaining Divine Love, outlined above. Secondly, it should not be assumed either, that everybody who follows these stages will necessarily attain the final stage of Divine Love. There is no deterministic connection between the various stages of love. Human effort alone cannot achieve this; an external source of Divine intervention is needed. Without this it is impossible to achieve distinction in the ranks of Divine Love. In Sufi terminology this Divine intervention is denoted by the term *wahbī* meaning, God's special favouring of the servant.

Another point which needs to be highlighted as far as Sufi love is concerned, is that many Sufi authors believe that love is a personal experience which cannot be described objectively. All the definitions are the result of personal taste and differ from each other greatly. Hence, there is no way to know love except through personal taste and experience.<sup>17</sup>

Sufi authors also point to the Divine origins of love. Love has its origins in God's existence. It originates from God and what man has as love, is nothing but the reflection of God's love for creation. If He did not have the attribute of love, we could not have it either.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the ability to love Him is a God-given gift which cannot be compared with any other talents and emotions of man.

To summarise, the Sufi authors accept that there is a close relationship between physical and Divine Love. In addition, love is a personal relationship and can differ from person to person. Finally, love is an exclusive privilege given to man by God and hence it has Divine origins.

## **1.2:2 Love in Philosophy and in Muslim Philosophers**

### **1.2:2:1 In Philosophy**

Another important branch of science which endeavours to define and explain the concept of love is undoubtedly philosophy. Unlike psychology, the concept of love

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<sup>16</sup> Makkī, Abū Ṭālib, *Qūṭ al-Qulūb*, v.2, p.52

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Qayyim, *Madārīj al-Sālikīn*, p.9

<sup>18</sup> al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāif al-Ishārāt*, (Taḥkik al-Thurās, Egypt, 1981) p.432

preoccupied the philosophers not only as a human phenomenon but also as a Divine entity. Because of this attitude, they also influenced the theologians to a great extent in their understanding of the love between God and man. This influence was not limited to the Muslim theologians only, it also engulfed the Sufi authors. Therefore, the focus will be on certain ideas of love in philosophy that influenced Islamic theology and in particular Sufism. Principal ideas included the theories that the Greek philosophers systematised, for example Plato and Aristotle whose theories influenced the theologians first and through them the Sufis. In Greek philosophy, love is an important concept that explains many secrets ranging from human behaviour to the creative act of God.

As one of the earliest and most systematic philosophers, Plato devoted three of his dialogues to love; the *Lysis* to friendship, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* to *Eros* love. In the *Symposium*, love is discussed in great detail. In Plato's system love is conveyed by the word *Eros* and it has a set of meanings. It expresses the craving of the soul for goodness and happiness. It is an absorbing passion for the immortal, for the beautiful both in mind and body i.e. not only physical beauty but also spiritual. This love of good and beauty in its higher phases becomes an adoration of the good, a rapture of really religious enthusiasm for eternity and truth.<sup>19</sup> The most prominent side of *Eros* is that it was always understood to be a selfish love only considering the interests of the lover and using the beloved only as a means for the satisfaction of the lover.

In Greek philosophy, the principles that seem to organise profane love are also used interchangeably for Divine Love i.e. love between man and the gods. For them the transcendence of the gods was not a issue, since their understanding of gods was very much anthropomorphic. Their gods were similar to human beings, feeling the same emotions and passions. Therefore, there are many mythologies in Greek culture describing the fights between Gods and mankind.

The theory of love, which is proposed by Plato, had an immense influence on all cultures. Nygren's famous book "*Agape and Eros*" was written in essence to refute Plato's ideas or to clean Christian love from the ideas that are borrowed from the

“*Eros*” of Plato. Similarly, all the theories of Sufi love do in one way or another refer to Plato’s theory of love. For example, almost all the Sufi classics deal with the issue of self-interest in love. They all downgrade the nature of *Eros* love, as being selfish.

It is important to bear in mind that whenever a philosophy developed and was formulated in one specific culture, and was then transferred into a different culture, there would inevitably be problems. This was particularly true for the transfer of Greek philosophy into Islamic thought. The problem of transference is exacerbated by the fact that ideas taken out of their original context tend to lose their meaning or take on meanings which were clearly not intended by the original authors. To give an example, Grecian society was embedded in a culture of polytheism with streaks of rationalistic thought. Whereas in Islam the culture was formed along strongly monotheistic lines, even the rationality was based upon scripture. Therefore, when these alien principles were imported into an Islamic context they needed to be explained differently in order to make them “fit” into the main stream of Islamic thinking. If this had not been done these ideas could not have survived in an Islamic environment.

There follows a summary of the Greek ideas that preoccupied the Muslim theologians and the Sufis. A detailed discussion of how these ideas were interpreted and transformed into Islamically acceptable forms, will be offered in the relevant chapters. The important themes that often recur in the Sufi books and are borrowed from the Greek philosophy are as follows:

- 1-Plato’s definition of passionate love (*ishq*) as excessive love or an excess of feeling.<sup>20</sup>
- 2-Love as a consequence of similarity or complementarity.<sup>21</sup>
- 3-The denial of love between God and man because of dissimilarity in their nature.<sup>22</sup>
- 4-The thesis that nothing which is possessed can be the object of desire or love.<sup>23</sup>
- 5- The question as to whether the happy and self-sufficient man needs friends and whether God as a self-sufficient Being can be described as loving others.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> J. Moffat, *Love in the New Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton Lim., London, n.d. p.36; Plato, *Lysis, Symposium*, trans. by Lamb, W. R. M., (London, William Heinemann Ltd, 1983),

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Fowler, H. N., (London, 1971), p.489-97

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Laws*, trans. by Bury, R. G., (London, William Heinemann Ltd, n.d.) v.3, p.153

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics*, v3. 7. 1159a

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Lamb, W. R. M., p.103

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, v3. 7. 1159a



These Greek philosophical ideas preoccupied the Muslim theologians and the Sufi authors alike and were borrowed by the Muslims most probably through the translations, firstly by the theologians and secondly through theologians by the Sufis. According to Van Den Bergh, the *Nicomachean Ethics* had been translated into Arabic and this work of Aristotle may have become common among the theologians.<sup>25</sup> It is also possible that some similar ideas might have been simultaneously present in Muslim culture.

### 1.2:2:2 Love in Muslim Philosophers:

At quite an early date, Muslim philosophers understood the importance of the concept of love. For example, Avicenna's (d.1037) *al-Risālah fi al-'Ishq* examines the various levels and kinds of 'ishq and culminates with a discussion of highest 'ishq, the passionate love for God. In the first chapter of his *Risālah*, he defines 'ishq as "in truth nothing but the whole-hearted approval of the pleasing (*al-ḥasan*) and the suitable (*al-mulā'im*), the source of yearning for it when it is absent and uniting with it when it is present." This understanding of 'ishq allows Avicenna in a subsequent chapter, to speak of 'ishq in inanimate simple beings as well as in vegetative, animal and rational souls. Thus, for Avicenna, it applies both to carnal forbidden love which he calls shameful (*qabīḥ*) and to intellectual love of the Absolute Good (*al-khayr al-muḥtaq*)<sup>26</sup>. This approach agrees with most Sufi authors' attitudes, since they also use the same terminology for profane and Divine Love.

However, it is this Absolute or Pure Good (*al-Khayr al-Maḥḍ*), which Avicenna identifies with the First Cause (*al-'Illah al-Ūlā*), that is the true object of 'ishq. Therefore, for him the perfect love is the love of God.<sup>27</sup> Love is the most perfect relationship between man and God. Avicenna also claims that the worship of the lover is different from the worship of ordinary people. In the treatise of *Māhiyat al-Ṣalāt*, Avicenna describes the true prayer which is the intellectual worship of God, the contemplation of God "with a pure heart and soul freed and cleansed of the desires." In this treatise he proposes that such a man, whose intellect controls his

<sup>25</sup> S. Van den Bergh, 'The Love of God in al-Ghazālī's Vivification of Theology', in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, I, (1956) p. 306

<sup>26</sup> S. Harvey, 'The meaning of terms designating love in Judaeo-Arabic Thought and some remarks on the Judaeo-Arabic interpretation of Maimonides', in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. by Norman Golb, (Harwood Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 1977), p.184

<sup>27</sup> M. Fakhry, *A history of Islamic Study*, p.180; Harvey, S, 'The Meaning of Terms Designating Love', in *Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, p.184

passions, need only turn to God in love (*bi 'ishqihī*) to attain highest happiness. By '*ishq* here Avicenna means the intellectual love and contemplation of God described in *Risālah fī al-'Ishq*.<sup>28</sup>

Another important theory of love is developed by the body of philosophers called the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā. They entitled one of their *Rasā'il*, "*Fī Māhiyat al-'Ishq*" The Ikhwān were very much aware of differing and opposing attitudes towards '*ishq*, of those who praised it as a spiritual virtue and of those who censured it as a shameful vice. They describe '*ishq* as "an excess of love, an intense yearning for union (*al-ittiḥād*), which leaves the soul empty of all concerns save for the one who is passionately loved (*al-ma'shūq*)". Like Avicenna, they believe that "God is the first object of passionate love".<sup>29</sup> The Ikhwān explicitly applied '*ishq* to love of God, to spiritual love as well as bodily love.

After this brief survey concerning the origin of human love the question now arises: "Is it possible to speak of God "loving" in the form of the human love which was outlined above? The following pages will investigate this question.

### 1.3 The Nature of Lover and the Beloved

So far the nature of love has been highlighted. Now, the two sides of love, the lover and the beloved will be discussed, since love is a relationship that involves two parties, someone who loves, *the lover*, and something that is loved, *the beloved*. The love relationship must be distinguished from other similar but distinct feelings and emotions. Some sorts of actions can be performed without a recipient to which or for which the action is done. One may feel afraid, without an identifiable object to be afraid of, one may feel sad, miserable or depressed, but not for or about another person. By contrast, love seems necessarily to be directed towards some object.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it can be said that love necessitates some form of knowledge about the object of love.

Therefore, in the Sufi understanding of love, knowledge of the Beloved (God) constitutes an essential part. The Sufis like al-Ghazālī establish a direct link between

<sup>28</sup> See S. Inati, *Ibn Sinā and Mysticism*, (London and N. York, Kegan Paul International, 1996), p.28-29, 78-79

<sup>29</sup> *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, (Beirut: Dār Sadr, 1957), v.3 p.270

<sup>30</sup> See C. Osborne, *Eros Unveiled Plato and the God of Love*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994), p.46-48

love of God and the knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of God.<sup>31</sup> This implies that the lover needs to have some form of capacity to appreciate the beloved. Although animals share with human beings the fact that they are both sentient, nevertheless, an important distinction must be made. The mere capacity to feel and respond is not enough to partake in the relationship of love. There is another dimension that distinguishes man from other creatures. This feature, in the words of al-Ghazālī, is called “the sixth sense”. This intellectual power to appreciate the beauty which is invisible to the external eye is the preserve of human and Divine beings only, e.g. angels.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, a question that might arise is whether the beloved also needs to possess the sixth sense. This question might be answered in two ways. Firstly, if the object of love is non-Divine, it seems the answer will be in the negative. There is not a universal agreement that the object of love should necessarily be a sentient being: apparently anything can be loved, including food, country, ideas, etc. Secondly, if the object of love is Divine then the answer might be in the affirmative. From the Islamic point of view, God is regarded as having the absolute perfection. Nothing is lacking from him including the ability to perceive, to feel and to respond. Therefore, it can be said that God necessarily possesses the “sixth sense” and more, in the sense that He knows all the secrets of His creation and nothing is hidden from His knowledge.

However, several fundamental arguments, all inherited from Greek philosophy and most probably Aristotle, are used to deny a possibility of love between man and God on the basis of their different natures.<sup>33</sup> The first is the argument that love requires a conformity or similarity (*munāsaba*) between the two lovers. It is clear that man is contingent whereas God is eternal, hence there is no affinity or similarity between them. The second argument is that love is the result of some need, hence it cannot be attributed to God, since He does not need anything. God is perfect in His nature and does not need anything whatsoever from His creation. For these and other reasons some Islamic theological sects, like the Mu'tazila and Ash'arites refused the possibility of love between man and God.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See, 7.3:1:d The Relationship between Knowledge (*Ma'rifā*) and Love

<sup>32</sup> See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, *The Niche for Lights*, trans. by Muhammad Ashraf, M, (Lahore, Ashraf Press, 1952), p.82

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, v3. 7. 1159a

<sup>34</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.319

To summarise, there are certain difficulties in applying the concept of love to man and God because of their fundamental differences in nature. To make a love possible between two fundamentally different beings will need some compromise. It could be argued that this compromise in Christianity is incarnation since through incarnation God comes to the level of humanity. In Islam this compromise will be made in re-shaping the meaning of the word love or changing it. In this way, questions, such as “whether love is possible between man and God, can man love God or can God love man?” will be answered by the Sufis and theologians in the following pages.

### 1.3.1 Application of Love to God

The above information about the nature of love basically reflected the ideas of various sources like psychology, Greek philosophy and possibly the traditions of the time. However, when love is attributed to God, it needs to be explained in a way that does not contradict the religious teachings of Islam. This entailed some difficulties for the Muslim theologians. As explained above, love entails need and lack of some attributes that are owned by the beloved. Muslim theologians experienced problems in explaining how God can love man because of the essential differences between their essences.<sup>35</sup> God who is eternal, uncreated and the creator of everything, does not need anything and has all the attributes of perfection (*kamāl*). Whereas man is created, ephemeral, imperfect and completely dependent on God for his existence. Keeping in mind also the idea that love in the human sense involves inclination to something which the lover lacks, the question arises: Is it possible to say that God can love man?

The notion that one cannot love anything which one already possesses was originally developed by Plato.<sup>36</sup> Under the influence of Plato and Greek philosophy,<sup>37</sup> Muslim theologians in general understood love as a concept which implies “need and dependence” of and on the beloved. Furthermore, for them love necessitated change in the lover. If we return to the origins of love, i.e. the infant-mother relationship, the infant always needs the mother. Another notion that is borrowed from Greek

<sup>35</sup> See Baqillāni, *al-Inṣāf*, ed. by al-Kawtharī, M., and al-Husayni, I., (Muassasa al-Khanji, 1382/1963), p.39-41

<sup>36</sup> G. Santas, *Plato and Freud*, p.27

<sup>37</sup> The Greeks were inclined to believe that God could not be spoken of as “loving” man, for if God felt the movement of love for any being other than Himself, He would be a needy creature, yearning to overcome some inadequacy in His own nature. Since God has no need in His Being, God remains unmoved. see P. Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, (Kentucky, 1993), p.105-106

philosophy is that love requires similarity and complementary elements between the lover and the beloved. The lover and the beloved always share common attributes. The gist of the matter for the theologians was to cleanse the concept of love from those human connotations. To accomplish this, they attempted to explain the concept of love in a refined way stripped of any notions which contradicted the fundamental principles of Islam.

Now, as an example, we can look at al-Bāqillāni's (d.1013) explanation of love. He tried to avoid attributing human features to God by explaining love in a modified way. He used terms that did not necessitate imperfection in God, like change in His essence or need for others. Understanding love in its literal sense, meant for him attributing imperfection to God. Hence he understood love or hate as a part of the will of God. According to him, God's love meant "God's will to reward those with whom He is satisfied, whom He loves and befriends, and to punish those with whom He is angered, whom He hates. Nothing else!" al-Bāqillāni justifies such a commentary on love for the following reason: "Anger (*ghaḍab*), good pleasure (*riḍā*), and the like must mean His will to do good or to do harm alone, or they must mean an aversion and a change arising in His nature when He is angered and a tenderness, an inclination, a tranquillity (*sukūn*) in his nature when he is pleased."<sup>38</sup> If we accept the latter, this means God can be subject to such sympathies and change, like His creatures<sup>39</sup>, which is against the principle that God is immutable. To prevent such a conclusion, al-Bāqillāni equates God's love with the will. Hence, he tries to prove that God's love, anger or pleasure are unchanging according to the eternal will of God. Therefore, God does not cease eternally to love a person whom He knows will die as a believer, even when that person is in a state of disobedience. Similarly, He does not cease to be angered at one whom He knows will die an unbeliever, even when that person is obedient.

According to this view of al-Bāqillāni, God's love and hatred are one insofar as they are both equivalent to His will, but they are clearly different with respect to their objects.<sup>40</sup> This commentary i.e. equating God's love with His will, to escape

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<sup>38</sup> Baqillāni, *al-Inṣāf*, p.40

<sup>39</sup> J. N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1979), p.57

<sup>40</sup> For the theological discussion of God's love for man and the relationship between God's will and love see J. N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*,

attributing God human characteristics seems to be an artificial attempt. However, al-Bāqillani seems to accept that will is eternal and does not imply change in God. In this way he tries to prove that love does not signify change in God.

A further example can be provided by Ibn Taymiyya. He firstly states that God, who is qualified with every loveable attribute, is clearly a proper and worthy object of love. Secondly, he explains the affinity between man and God in the following manner. For him “the *munāsaba*”, affinity, is the believer’s accord (*muwāfaqa*) with what God commands, through obedience in addition to love what God loves.<sup>41</sup>

These words of the theologians seem far from solving the problem of how God can love man or vice versa. The theological discussion of whether love is applicable to God or not is not the subject of this study. However, it is necessary to have a background of the theological aspects as they influenced the Sufi authors.

#### 1.4 Love in Islamic Terminology

In Islamic terminology love is fundamentally divided into two branches according to the object of the love. The mutual love between man and God is called Divine Love; if the object of love is a worldly entity other than God it is called profane love.<sup>42</sup> Divine Love is also named as real love and the profane love as the metaphorical love or *udhrī* Love. Divine Love falls primarily within the interests of the Sufis and partially within the interests of Islamic philosophers.

On the other hand, Islamic literature and poetry equally employ both kinds of love amongst their themes. This chapter, however, will study the Sufi understanding of love, hence excluding other kinds of loves. It should not be forgotten that there is a close relationship between the experience of physical love and Divine Love especially in the language that is used to convey the feelings. The terminology of profane love plays key roles in the terminology of Divine Love. As Schimmel rightly states, Sufis express their love towards God by symbols taken from human love.<sup>43</sup> This notion is supported by the classical Sufi authors’ treatment of Divine Love as well. The majority of Sufi authors who have written about love, such as al-Ḥujwīrī

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Tafsīl al-Ijmāl fi mā Yajib Lillāh min Šifāt al-Kamāl*, MRM, 3, (Short edition), p.66; J. N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, p.76

<sup>42</sup> See al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p.308

(d.1072) and al-Qushayrī (d.1074), explain Divine Love by examples derived from human love anecdotes. Therefore, the terms and phrases which are used to express human love are also used for Divine Love.

One thing also worthy of mention is that there is not a uniformity of terminology employed by the Sufis. Thus, Sufi authors defined Divine Love in different forms and these differences of expressions should not be understood as a controversy but as a difference of their psychology at the time of their experience. In addition, Ibn al-Khaṭīb states that these definitions are the result of the personal experiences of Sufis, and that none of these Sufis can experience love completely, but only partially in accordance with their states on the spiritual ladder.<sup>44</sup>

As it will be explained in the second chapter the early Sufis' fellowship with God was the result of fear of God's majesty. However, some later Sufis preferred a different approach in their relationship with God, based on love. In so doing they drew their support from the verses in the Qur'ān, especially the verses that describe God's attributes. In the Qur'ān two types of God's attributes are always mentioned together. These are the attributes of beauty (*jamāl*) and the attributes of majesty (*jalāl*). The latter indicates the awesome aspects of the Divine such as the "Revenger" (*al-muntaqim*), "Overpowering" (*al-Jabbār*)<sup>45</sup>, whereas the former indicates the loving and merciful aspects of the divinity such as "the Merciful" (*al-Rahmān*)<sup>46</sup>, the compassionate, (*al-Rahīm*)<sup>47</sup>.

In al-Ḥujwīrī's opinion, the seekers of God approach Him through entering one of these gates i.e., either from the door of *jamāl* or from the door of *jalāl*. Those who know God through the attributes of beauty, worship Him in love, whereas those who know Him through His majestic attributes, worship Him in fear.<sup>48</sup> With this short sentence, al-Ḥujwīrī almost explains the whole problem of Sufi love. Is the God of the Sufis a loveable God or is He someone that must be feared? It seems that it is

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<sup>43</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.5

<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawdat*, p. 376

<sup>45</sup> Qur'ān, 59:22-24 (Muh.) In this thesis three different translations of the Quran are used in order to emphasize the literal meaning of particular words which have a special significance for this study.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 55:1

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 27:29

<sup>48</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson, p.288

possible to prefer one of these approaches to Divine Being by looking into the Qur'ān, since it contains both the attributes of *majesty* and *beauty* in equal proportion.

It can also be useful to look at the theory of Solomon and Corbit in order to understand the shift of the emphasis from “fear” to “love of God” in the early Sufis. Solomon and Corbit’s psychological theory which is called “opponent-process theory” can illuminate the development of Sufism from being “fear-centred” to being “love-centred”. They state that most negative feelings are followed by their opposites once the initial stimulus which was the cause of the negative feelings has been overcome. For example, when the causes which create fear are successfully accomplished.<sup>49</sup> According to them, the feeling of fear can be turned into love. From this it can be concluded that the early Sufis who put more stress on fear of God, went to the extreme and finally this notion lost its appeal. After this process, they finally realised that God had other attributes which made a mutual love possible as well. In many of the Qur’anic verses, which will be the subject of the next chapter, God is described as a passionate, loving God. Hence they started to preach the loveable attributes of God more than the ones which inspired fear.

### 1.5 Love in the Sufi Classics

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to explain the nature of love from the Sufi Classics. By the Sufi classics are meant the early books written by Sufi authors, like al-Sarrāj, al-Ḥujwīrī, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Kalābādihī, al-Suhrawardī who aimed to teach about Sufi concepts in general, and these are more or less accepted as first hand reference books by the majority of the scholars. Also, the books which are written exclusively on love such as *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma* by Ibn Ḥazm, *Kitāb ‘Atf al-Alif* by al-Daylamī, *Rawdat al-Ta’rīf* by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, will be taken into consideration. In addition to the Islamic sources, Christian sources will be referred to in order to clarify the Sufi understanding of love.

In the following chapters Divine Love will be studied in two categories. Firstly, God’s love for man and secondly, man’s love for God. The reason for this is that the Sufis and Sufi Classics always deal with these two loves separately. According to



them, these two loves are not identical in their nature. The differences will become apparent in the following pages.

### 1.5.1 God's love for Man

Before understanding the Sufi approach to God's love for man, it is essential to have an understanding about the concept of God in Islam, since the understanding of God's love for man is very much related to the understanding of God in Islam. The Qur'ān, which is the most important source providing information about the nature of God, describes Him in two different ways; the first one declares that God is not comparable to any creature or concept we can perceive. This is called "*tanzīh*" and this idea finds its expression in the verses such as "There is nothing is like Him"<sup>50</sup> *Tanzīh* means that "God is not similar to His creation in any way".<sup>51</sup> However, such a description of God without any affirmative attributes could result in nihilism. This is because we could know no attribute of God in this way. Hence, the object of worship would be a mysterious unknown being.

To prevent such a thing the Qur'ān also follows a second method which is termed "*tashbīh*". Literally, *tashbīh* means "to declare something similar to something else." For example, the attributes such as life, knowledge, mercy, generosity which belong to God, are also found in creation. Hence, all Divine names suggest some sort of *tashbīh* because they allow us to think that God is such and such. As soon as we name God, we create a concept in our minds of what He is like. *Tashbīh* in contrast to *tanzīh*, allows us to describe Him in ways with which the human mind is already familiar. In essence, then, similarities in some shape or form and to some degree can be found for God. This makes God more accessible to the human mind. In particular, it allows man to identify himself with a God who is comprehensible by his faculties of the mind. The idea of *tashbīh* is interspersed throughout the Qur'ān in different verses and the extreme position of *tanzīh* is hence counterbalanced by the alternative concept of "*tashbīh*".

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<sup>49</sup> R. J. Stenberg, and Barnes, L. Michael (ed.) *The Psychology of Love*, (New Haven and London, Yale Uni. Press, 1988), p. 15

<sup>50</sup> Qur'ān, 42:11 (Muh.)

<sup>51</sup> S. Murata, & W. C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, (I.B. Tauris Publishers, London & New York, 1996), p.70

Although each Divine name suggests similarity with creation (*tashbīh*), they differ in strength and intensity. Some bear closer resemblance to man than the others. In this context, God's attributes are divided into two branches. The attributes of *jamāl* (beauty) and that of *jalāl* (majesty). The former stress *tashbīh* to a greater degree than they stress *tanzīh*. Hence the names that tell us about God's nearness to creation and concern for his creatures can be classified as names of *tashbīh*.<sup>52</sup>

However, to understand these attributes merely in human terms leads us into danger of anthropomorphism<sup>53</sup> which inherently contradicts the fundamental principles of Islam. This could mean that Muslims would be worshipping a god who was similar to themselves. To avoid such a blasphemous result, Muslim theologians often approach the attributes of *tashbīh* with caution. For example, saying God is omnipotent has little scope for a blasphemous interpretation, as it will be accepted without question that God in comparison to man is all powerful. On the other hand, the verse such as "The hand of God is above their hand"<sup>54</sup> can easily lead to an anthropomorphic interpretation as humans also possess hands. Does this mean that God has hands which are identical to the hands of humans?

The attribute of love is also an attribute of *tashbīh*. Therefore, it must be dealt with great caution. If not, then, God could be placed on the same level as that of a human lover who seeks beauty and perfection to compensate for his own lack of beauty and perfection. Since God is the most perfect being and He has the most beautiful names (attributes) *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*,<sup>55</sup> He does not need to love someone in the sense we love. Therefore, His love is understood differently in comparison with our love for Him.

Although the concepts of love have been understood by the Classical Sufi authors in different ways, there is one notion which is common to all of them: the idea that God has no comparison. This idea pervades all the Sufi interpretations of love that exists in the Sufi literature. Therefore, this idea constrained the Sufis into interpreting love

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.70-71

<sup>53</sup> Anthropomorphism: Describing God in human terms, see, I. A. Netton, *A Popular Dictionary*, p. 246

<sup>54</sup> Qur'ān, 48:9 (Muh.)

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 7:180

in a manner consistent with it. Such an approach may be easily demonstrated by looking at the works of some of the great Sufi authors.

When al-Sarrāj (d.998) deals with God's love for man, he is aware of this sensitivity.<sup>56</sup> Hence, he does not explain how God loves man except by quoting the ḥadīth that when Allah loves someone he becomes his sight, his hearing and so on. In addition to the ḥadīth, the verses he quotes are very often the ones quoted by the other Sufis such as: "then Allah will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him"<sup>57</sup> "But those of Faith are overflowing in their love for Allah."<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the two loves i.e. God's love for man and man's love for God are clearly separated in his exposition.

One of the major statements that he makes regarding God's love for man is that God's love for his creatures precedes their love for Him,<sup>59</sup> i.e. God's love for man is eternal and not temporary. This short sentence of al-Sarrāj neatly summarises the theological dogma that God is immutable. As a result, his actions are also immutable. To conclude, it could be said that al-Sarrāj does not provide a crystal clear picture regarding this issue. This is due to the fact that there is an absence of detail in his exposition. For instance, he does not explain the nature of God's love which precedes man's love for God. How does this process happen? Is it similar to human love?

However, not all authors follow al-Sarrāj's manner. Contrary to him, another Sufi author, al-Ḥujwīrī presents a clear idea about God's love for man. Firstly, he describes the love as "restless desire and inclination and passion for the object of love."<sup>60</sup> Hence, love in this sense cannot be applied to God who is exalted far above anything of this sort. Because human love involves need and lack of something, as Hall states, "Every theory of love, from Plato down, teaches that each individual loves in the other sex what he lacks in himself."<sup>61</sup> God who is perfect from all defects does not need others in that sense. His love, therefore must be understood in a sense which will not imply that God is in need of others.

<sup>56</sup> al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'*, p.58

<sup>57</sup> Qur'ān, 5:54 (Muh.)

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:165 (Y.A.)

<sup>59</sup> This statement resembles the Christian idea of "Agape"; God's unmotivated love for His creation.

<sup>60</sup> al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by M. A. Abū al-'Azāim, (Cairo, 1974), p.366

<sup>61</sup> G. Santas, *Plato and Freud*, p.26

As a result, al-Ḥujwīrī understands “God’s love (*maḥabbā*) for man” to mean His good will towards him and His having mercy upon him. According to al-Ḥujwīrī, love is among one of the aspects of God’s will, like satisfaction, anger, and mercy. All these are different manifestations of His will. If God wills good for someone, it means “He loves him”. The nature of this love consists of rewards, such as showing much favour to the servant (*‘abd*) and giving him a recompense in this world and the next, securing him from punishment and keeping him safe from sin. When God particularly distinguishes anyone in this way, that specialisation of His will is called love.<sup>62</sup> In al-Ḥujwīrī’s view, this singling out is a Divine gift; if the whole world wished to attract love, they could not, and if they made the utmost efforts to repel it, they could not.<sup>63</sup> Hence, God’s love is not the result of man’s good deeds. Perhaps due to the fact that God loves a person, this person is drawn towards good deeds. It may be concluded, from al-Ḥujwīrī’s remarks, that the reason why God loves some and does not love others, is a Divine secret.

Al-Ḥujwīrī also believes that God’s love for man and man’s love for God are fundamentally different in their natures. It is impossible that man’s love for God should be similar in kind to the love of human beings towards one another. As has been seen, al-Ḥujwīrī considers love as part of “His will” and nothing more. Al-Ḥujwīrī sticks strictly to the understanding of love by theologians, like al-Bāqillānī.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it may be concluded that al-Ḥujwīrī does not very much approve of a personal relationship of love between God and man.

Al-Qushayrī treats the subject of love in a similar way to al-Ḥujwīrī. He introduces the Qur’anic verses and the traditions of the Prophet on the subject of Divine Love and as a result, he deduces that God is characterised as loving the servant, and the servant is characterised as loving God. However, like al-Ḥujwīrī, he believes that the nature of God’s love for man and man’s love for God are substantially different. Love, as it is experienced among mankind, such as having affection for something, feeling an intimate liking for something, cannot be attributed to God.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by Abū al-‘Azāim, p.367

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.307

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.307

As a conclusion to this section, it can be said that almost all the Sufi authors share the same concerns with the theologians as far as the transcendence of God is concerned. Their understanding of God's love is especially in conformity with the Ash'arite theologians, i.e. to equate God's love with His will. They all believe that there are substantial differences between man's love for God and God's love for man. To understand these differences, the views of the Sufi authors concerning man's love for God will be presented below.

### 1.5.2 Man's love for God

In general, it is clear that the Sufi authors do not elaborate very much on the nature of God's love for man. However, they give a more detailed account concerning *man's love* for God. That is only natural because when they speak about man's love for God, it is their own experience, hence they are speaking on their own behalf. Whereas, when they describe God's love for man they are speaking, in a sense, on God's behalf. Therefore it is understandable that they are hesitant to give much detail.

All the Sufi classics confirm that God loves His believers. However, this does not mean that God loves everybody equally. He might love one believer more and another less but in its nature this love is the same. His love for one person is not different from His love for another person in its nature. On the other hand, the Sufi authors, without exception, inform us that each man has a different love for God, depending on the group to which he/she belongs. The believers, according to their stages in knowledge and other motives, have different degrees of love. They classify man's love for God into different categories and specifically into triple groups. For example, al-Sarrāj divides men's love for God into three categories according to their spiritual levels.<sup>66</sup>

The first and the lowest degree of love is that of the common people (*'amma*). Their love originates from the beneficence of God in this world and from the expectations of rewards in the next. Hence, this love seems to be a kind of selfish love; loving someone not for his or her intrinsic value but for the benefit that the lover will gain. In al-Sarrāj's opinion, this love is the most common one since it is natural to love

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<sup>66</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.318-19; *the Principles*, p.327

someone who renders benefits. He confirms this kind of love by a saying of the Prophet which is as follows; “Hearts are created with the nature to love those who benefit them, and to hate those who harm them”. According to al-Sarrāj, for this group of people, love means obedience and remembrance of the Benevolent at all times.<sup>67</sup>

The lovers of God in the first group of al-Sarrāj’s classification are simple believers who have no deep knowledge of God and they have no share in the Sufi knowledge (*ma’rifa*). For them love does not involve complex meanings. As al-Tustarī explains for this group; “Love consists in embracing the acts of obedience and in avoiding the acts of disobedience”<sup>68</sup>. It is only thanksgiving for the benefits which are already received or expected to be received in the future. This kind of love is one of the major themes that the Sufis such as Rābi‘a deal with and in general it is considered as a selfish love.<sup>69</sup>

However, for the second group of lovers, referred to as *al-sādiqīn*, the idea of benefit has no value. This group’s love originates from their contemplation of God’s beauty, majesty, omniscience and power. Hence, their love is the result of long contemplation, and acquiring knowledge of the nature of God. It is not similar to the simple thanksgiving of the first group. This group’s love involves deep Sufi knowledge about the secrets of Divine Being. The definition of love given by al-Sarrāj for this group is quoted from al-Nūrī, who describes love as “tearing down the veils and exposing the secrets”<sup>70</sup>. Although al-Sarrāj does not give clear explanation about the veils and secrets, it is clear that these concern a Sufi knowledge which needs special Sufi instruction. He also implies that this love involves contemplation which culminates in the obliteration (*fanā’*) of the lover’s characteristics, in addition to the replacement of the lover’s attributes with those of the Beloved.<sup>71</sup> By obliteration of man’s characteristics, Sufis generally mean the obliteration of bad characteristics and their replacement with the good ones. It also means complete

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<sup>66</sup> al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma’*, p.58

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58

<sup>68</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.311

<sup>69</sup> See, 5.4.2:a Selfish love (*Ḥubb al-Hawā*)

<sup>70</sup> al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma’*, p.59

<sup>71</sup> See for more on *Fanā’*, 9.3.3:2 Love and *Fanā’* (Annihilation)

submission of man's will to God's will i.e. full obedience to the commandments of God.<sup>72</sup>

The third and final kind of love is the love of Gnostics (*'arīfūn*). Their love originates from the contemplation of the knowledge that God's love for man precedes their love for Him. It seems that this group is the most privileged group, since they are chosen by God. In al-Sarrāj's view, this last kind of love manifests itself in complete annihilation of the lover. This annihilation is one step further from the previous group, since the lover in this group is so annihilated that he/she is even unaware of his/her love.

Al-Sarrāj strengthens his theory and classification of love, with sayings of other Sufis as well. For example, in connection with the last group, he refers to Dhu al-Nūn who describes love as "a pure love without any taint, with the heart's unawareness of this love."<sup>73</sup> Abū Ya'qūb al-Sūsī describes this love in the following way: "Love is only perfect when the one who loves ceases to realise his love, but at the same time realises the love of the Beloved, with the annihilation of the knowledge of love. When the lover reaches this state, he becomes a lover without love,"<sup>74</sup> i.e. he becomes so annihilated in his love; he does not even realise his love like the fish that lives in the water but does not know what water is.

Another important characteristic of this love in al-Sarrāj's view is that it has no selfish motives, in comparison to, say, the first group in his classification, so it does not change according to the favours of the Beloved. To this effect he refers to the statement of Yaḥyā b. Muādh; "Love is neither diminished by unkindness nor increased by kindness and bounty".<sup>75</sup> As God's love for them is spontaneous without any motives, in a similar way man's love for God is a reflection of this unmotivated love. This understanding of love corresponds with the Christian idea of *agape* since the most prominent character of "agape" love in Christianity is that it is spontaneous and unmotivated, having no motive outside itself. "...*Agape* has nothing to do with the kind of love that depends on the recognition of a valuable quality in its object. *Agape* does not recognise value but creates it. *Agape* loves and imparts value by

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.427

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

loving. The man who is loved by God has no value in himself; what gives him value is precisely the fact that God loves him”.<sup>76</sup> This resemblance might further explain the close relationship between Sufism and Christianity.

Hence, al-Sarrāj describes the different levels of the lovers of God according to their motives. He also seems to establish a close link between love and obliteration (*fanā'*). Love culminating in *fanā'* is a favourite theme of the Sufis like al-Ḥallāj and Ibn al-Fāriḍ who will be the subject matter of some of this research in later chapters.

Concerning man's love for God, al-Qushayrī places great emphasis on the differences between Divine Love and profane love(s). In the latter, there is an inclination (*mayl*) towards his beloved whereas in man's love for God, inclination cannot be possible. Human love also involves affection and enjoyment. However, Divine Love in this respect, too, is different from the species of human love; the love man feels for God is a state, experienced in the heart, too subtle for words. This state propels him to glorify God and to try to gain His pleasure. The servant's love for God does not imply affection or enjoyment in the human sense. For al-Qushayrī, man's love is his conformity (*muwāfāqa*) to Divine will.<sup>77</sup> Once again, like the other authors, he is supporting the understanding of the theologians.

Another classical scholar, al-Kalābādhi, understands love to be an inclination of the heart towards God, and an inclination towards what is of God, without any effort on the part of man.<sup>78</sup> It seems that for al-Kalābādhi love is a Divine gift; hence it is *wahbī*, i.e. it is not the result of human endeavour. God gives His love to the believers whom He likes. This theme is a major motif of Sufi love. Furthermore, man's love for God means reverence dwelling in his heart, so that it does not accommodate the love of any other than God.

By contrast al-Ḥujwīrī initially classifies the lovers of God according to their objects of love. He describes human love as, first, “Love of the like towards the like”, and second; “...love of the one who is unlike the object of his love i.e. God (Divine

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<sup>75</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.310

<sup>76</sup> A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. by Philip S. Watson, (Harper & Row, New York, 1969), p.78

<sup>77</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.319; *the Principles*, p.327

<sup>78</sup> al-Kalābādhi, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, (Cairo, 1960), p.109



Love)".<sup>79</sup> Concerning Divine Love al-Ḥujwīrī, like al-Sarrāj, begins by citing Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions. If we consider the criticism that Sufis faced from mainstream scholars concerning their conception of Divine Love, we understand better why Sufi authors always refer to the Qur'ān and Hadīth in the first place. By doing so they try to prove that the concept of love originated from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Therefore, these concepts should not be rejected outright as non-Islamic. In summary, they have quite an apologetic approach, in that they try to justify and defend their position against the attacks of hostile theologians.

After this first attempt, al-Ḥujwīrī divided love (*ḥubb*) into Divine and profane according to the objects of its direction. In his treatment of Divine Love, he classifies the lovers of God into two groups according to their motives. The first group are those who love God because of His favours and His beneficence towards them. The second group are the lovers of God because He is the Benefactor himself, not because of the beneficence received from the Benefactor. These people are so enraptured by love that they reckon all favours as a veil. Al-Ḥujwīrī regards the idea of benefit as a veil between the lover and beloved as well. He considers the second group more exalted than the former one.<sup>80</sup>

As a final example of the Sufi Classics, 'Umar al-Suhrawardī the author of *'Awārif* divides the love of God into two groups as well. This division goes back to the division of Muslims into two groups by the Sufis as *'awām* and *khawās*. *'Awām* as described before, means the generality of people who only understand the exterior of religion and cannot afford to understand very much about the internal wisdom which is hidden behind the exterior. On the other hand, *khawās* means the elite of the believers who can understand the wisdom of the hidden aspects of religion.<sup>81</sup>

The love of the first group, since they do not have a deep understanding of God, originates from the knowledge of God's favours and grace upon them. Because these benefits are received through the attributes of God, their love is related to the attributes, not to the essence of God. For this group love means obedience to His

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<sup>79</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.308

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308

<sup>81</sup> al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'*, p.504

commandments, as a thanksgiving for the benefits received. It is similar to al-Sarrāj's first group. This group's love is *kasbī*, that which is possible to attain through obedience to the Divine law.<sup>82</sup>

The second kind of love is that of the lovers who are chosen by God. This group is closer to al-Sarrāj's third group. This group's love is the result of their direct contemplation of the essence of God.<sup>83</sup> Hence, for them the material benefits received from God are not important. For them, the important issue is God without considering their own personal interests. These lovers are chosen by God so their love is *wahbī*, i.e. God-given. In a different approach from the other Sufis, al-Suhrawardī, makes a distinction between God's attributes (*ṣifāt*) and essence (*dhāt*).<sup>84</sup>

To conclude, the classical authors tend to view man's love for God from two main perspectives. The first evolves around the idea of benefit and interest within the love relationship. The second is based around, the dissimilarity of man's love for God and God's love for man. In this matter, Ash'arite theology predominates in the Sufi views: man's love for God is nothing but love of obedience and worship of God.

The reason why the Sufi Classics predominantly preoccupied themselves with the theological aspects of Sufi love is that they wrote these books for Sufis and non-Sufis alike: for this reason they did not want to attract hostility or get involved in controversial matters. To place the issue in context, theology (*kalām*) was considered as a guardian of real Islam protecting it from heretical ideas. For example by branding a book or a sect heretical, theologians could cause popular opinion to go against them. In the light of this, Sufi Classics thought it safer to follow the theologians in those matters of love, where theology was closely involved. In addition, the Sufi Classics followed an apologetic method: they wanted to prove that Sufism is no different from mainstream Islam.

The Sufi Classics divide man's love primarily into two categories: love of the lay people (*'awām*) and the love of the Gnostics (*khawās* or *'ārifun*). By contrast, the books which study love from both profane and Divine aspects, give more detailed

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.504

<sup>83</sup> al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārif*, p.504-505

<sup>84</sup> al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'*, p.504

stages of love. Books, such as, Ibn Ḥazm's *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma*, Ibn Dawūd's *Zahra*, Ibn al-Jawzi's *Dhamm al-Hawā'* may be given as examples of such books which are primarily written exclusively on the subject of love. The authors of these books seem to have agreed upon the idea that love is not an immediate emotion, but a gradual evolution of positive feelings towards an object. Therefore, they employed different concepts to show the different stages of this emotional process, selecting from almost sixty words conveying different levels of this inclination.

In this research, the most frequently and generally used words that convey the different levels of love, will be examined shortly. Sufi authors classified the process of love in different forms. As an illustrative example, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's classification of love will be presented. As far as the Arabic language is concerned the word *maḥabba* conveys a general meaning of love. However, Ibn al-Jawziyya<sup>85</sup> demarcates ten stages of *maḥabba*. An adaptation of his table of classification will be presented below so that we can gain some further insight into the synonyms of 'love'.

## 1.6 Stages of Love

**1.6.1 *al-'Alaqa*:** The first stage of love, connotes idea of the engagement of the heart with the beloved in a continuous way.<sup>86</sup> This word was also used by the Prophet in the meaning of love.<sup>87</sup> In his research on human love, Stendhal (d.1842) describes this stage as that of "admiration." Here the lover encounters the beloved and is attracted by the beloved's qualities. This first encounter is usually brief and the qualities that elicit the lover's attraction are relatively superficial ones.<sup>88</sup>

**1.6.2 *Irāda*:** After the first attraction, the heart starts to contemplate the attributes and characteristics of the beloved. Gradually it inclines towards the beloved. Stendhal explains this stage as where the lover imagines and contemplates the attributes of the beloved. This process can be understood as the period of "pregnancy" in love.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Madārij*, p.27-30

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, a'-lam-qaf entry,

<sup>87</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāyah*, v.3, 289

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Sharon S. Brehm, 'Passionate Love' in *The Psychology of Love*, edited by J. Robert Stenberg and L. Michael Barnes, Yale Uni. Press, New Haven and London, 1988, p.234

**1.6.3 *al-Ṣabāba*:** Flow of the heart towards the beloved without any control. After contemplating the attractiveness of the beloved the lover cannot help the flowing of his heart towards the object of love. This word is mentioned in the Qur'ān (12:33), with the meaning of inclination.

**1.6.4 *al-Gharām*:** The love which sticks to the heart and never leaves it for a moment.

**1.6.5 *al-Widād*:** The purest and most excessive kind of love is denoted by the word *wudd*.<sup>89</sup> *Wudd* is also one of the beautiful names of God, mentioned in the Qur'ān.<sup>90</sup> *al-Wadūd*; meaning both lover and beloved. Thus, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya admits that God as well as being loved by His servants, can also love them. *Widād* and its derivations are used in many places in the Qur'ān<sup>91</sup> and in the Prophetic traditions.<sup>92</sup>

**1.6.6 *al-Shaghaf*:** It is the name given to the skin of the heart. When the love reaches to the inner skin of the heart it is called *shaghaf*. This word is taken from the Qur'ān (12:30)

**1.6.7 *'Ishq*:** Excessiveness of love. This term will be studied in further detail later for it is the most important concept of love after *maḥabba*.

**1.6.8 *al-Tatayyum*:** It is being the slave of love to the extent that the lover does not care about the blame he gets from society. What he cares about is only to please the beloved.

**1.6.9 *al-Ta'abbud*:** Like the previous stage, this is another name for becoming a slave for love. When the beloved possesses all the body of the lover it is called *al-ta'abbud*. *Ta'abbud* also means to worship, hence it is the peak of love with complete submission to God.

**1.6.10 *al-Khulla*:** Exclusive attachment to the beloved, through emptying of the heart of all save the beloved. According to Ibn Qayyim, perfect love does not

<sup>89</sup> Ibn al-Khatīb, *al-Rawdat*, p.50-51

<sup>90</sup> Qur'ān, 85:14

<sup>91</sup> Qur'ān, 19:96; 11:90; 58:22; 85:14

<sup>92</sup> al-Bukhārī, *al-Saḥīḥ*, *Manāqib*, 1; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Birr*, 11-12

accept any associate. He clarifies this situation by giving the example of the Prophet Ibrāhīm. When the Prophet Ibrāhīm allocated in his heart a share of love to his son, God commanded him to slaughter his son Ismā‘il. When he decided to slaughter his son in obedience to God, the objective was achieved i.e. to empty his heart of love for his son. Because of this there was no need for Ismā‘il to be sacrificed.

In this culminating stage, love pervades both the heart and the soul of the lover without leaving any space for anything else. According to a Prophetic tradition, the Prophet Ibrāhīm and Muhammad possessed the highest level of this love. “Allah took me as his Friend like He took Ibrāhīm before.”<sup>93</sup>

Certain authors, such as, Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d.1375) organised these levels of love in different orders with different terms. For example, he explains the abundance of the expressions which signify love as “...the importance which is given to this concept by Arabs”, this is because, “when a concept or object is important for Arabs, they express it in many synonymous words.” He gives a fascinating example of this. “Someone insulted Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d.1057 ) by calling him a donkey. He replied to his offender: “We call someone a donkey if that person does not know a hundred different names for donkey”<sup>94</sup> Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s view on this matter is not a foreign concept to the philologists. It is common knowledge that Eskimos know many words for the different kinds of snow, since the latter is part and parcel of their everyday lives.

### 1.7 *Maḥabba* and *Ishq*

Among the words which signify love the most important ones which are used to characterise the love relationship between man and God are *maḥabba* and *ishq*. Because of their central importance to our study, the terms *maḥabba* and *ishq* will be studied further.

**1.7.1 *Maḥabba*:** Linguists and classical Sufi authors have produced various etymologies for the word *maḥabba*. Ibn Qayyim suggests that *maḥabba* derives from the word *ḥubāb* meaning purity. He writes: “*Maḥabba* is a name for the purest

<sup>92</sup> al-Bukhārī, *al-Saḥīḥ, Manāqib*, 1; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Birr*, 11-12

<sup>93</sup> see al-Bukhārī, *al-Saḥīḥ, Ṣalāt*, 455,456; *Sahābah*, 6

<sup>94</sup> See Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawdat*, p.333-351

kind of love and affection because the Arabs say of someone's pure white teeth "*ḥabāb al-asnān*"<sup>95</sup>

Ibn al-Manzūr, author of the largest encyclopaedic Arabic dictionary, writes that *maḥabba* comes from *ḥubāb* which are the bubbles that form on the surface of water during a strong rainstorm, so love is the bubbling up of the heart when it thirsts and is desperate to meet the Beloved.<sup>96</sup>

al-Ḥujwīrī says that *maḥabba* is said to be derived from *ḥibbat*, which are seeds that fall to the earth in the desert. The name *ḥubb* (love) was given to such desert seeds, because love is the source of life just as seeds are the origin of plants. Others say that *maḥabba* is derived from *ḥubb*, meaning "a jar full of stagnant water", because when love is collected in the heart and fills it, there is no room there for any thought except of the beloved. Others say *maḥabba* is derived from *ḥubb* meaning "the four conjoined pieces of wood on which a water-jug is placed, because a lover lightly bears whatever his beloved metes out to him - honour or disgrace, pain or pleasure, fair treatment or foul. According to others, *maḥabba* is derived from *ḥabb*, the plural of *ḥabbat*, and *ḥabbat* is the core of the heart, where love resides. In this case, *maḥabba* is called by the name of its dwelling-place, a principle of which there are numerous examples in Arabic.<sup>97</sup>

**1.7.2 'Ishq:** Our second word meaning love is '*ishq*, ardent love: the word '*ishq* is derived from '*ashqa* which is the creeper. A creeper by twining itself around a tree, deprives it of sunshine and leaves. Thus a few days later the tree dries up completely. Similarly, when love takes its root in the heart of a lover, everyone other than the beloved is effaced in the effulgence of the beloved's beauty.<sup>98</sup> The very being of the lover is annihilated and there remains nothing save the beloved. There has been much controversy over the usage of the term "*ishq*" (excessive love) for God among both Sufis and theologians. al-Ḥujwīrī summarises the problem as follows; some Sufis believe that excessive love (*'ishq*) towards God is allowable but it does not proceed from God. Such love is the attribute of one who is debarred from his beloved. Man is debarred from God but He is not debarred from man; therefore man may love God excessively, but the term is not applicable to God. There is still

<sup>95</sup> Ibn Qayyim, *Madārīj al-Sālikīn*, v.3, p.6; al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.328

<sup>96</sup> Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, ha-ba-ba entry

<sup>97</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.305-306

another group who reject the idea that God can be the object of excessive love. Such love involves a passing beyond limits, whereas God is not limited. According to this group, al-Ḥujwīrī explains that, excessive love is properly applied to the desire of attaining the essence, inasmuch as the essence of God is not attainable, the term *'ishq* is not rightly used in reference to man's love for God.<sup>99</sup> Al-Ḥujwīrī does not give the name of these Sufis but this matter will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb, like al-Qushayrī describes “*'ishq*” as passionate love exceeding all limits in *maḥabba*.<sup>100</sup> Al-Jāḥiẓ, one of the earliest authorws who has written a chapter on love, similarly describes *'ishq* as excessiveness of *maḥabba* According to him all kinds of *'ishq* can be termed as *maḥabba* but not vice versa.<sup>101</sup> This definition which is common among Muslim intellectuals and Sufis, seems to take its roots from Aristotle who described it as the excess of feeling exclusively for one person.<sup>102</sup>

The reason for giving different derivations of *maḥabba* and *'ishq* is that some of these connotations will be reflected in the language of the Sufis studied in this thesis.

## 1.8 Conclusion

1-In this context we can compare the position of Sufism vis-à-vis Islam with the position of Christianity with respect to Judaism. Anders suggests that Jesus does not come forward as the founder of a new religion, for he had not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil them. What Jesus seeks is not to bring a new concept of God, or new ideas about God, but a new fellowship with God, based on love, and not Jewish piety or righteousness. In the same way, Sufism is not a different religion, but a way of approaching God stressing love rather than fear.<sup>103</sup> Of course this approach is not valid for all Sufi sects for there were Sufi sects, at the beginning of the Sufi movement, who gave primary importance to the concept of the fear of God. This comparison should not lead us to the idea that Sufism is a Christian

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<sup>98</sup> Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, ha-ba-ba entry

<sup>99</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, p.310

<sup>100</sup> Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawḍat*, p.340

<sup>101</sup> al-Jāḥiẓ, A.B., *Rasā'il*, v.3, p.139-140

<sup>102</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.212, 1158a

<sup>103</sup> N. Anders, *Agape and Eros*, p.68

form of Islam because in the following chapters the differences between Christian and Sufi understanding of love will be highlighted.

2-Most Sufi classics are careful in their treatment of God's love for man, since they could ascribe attribution of human characteristics to God. They all seem to adhere to the theory of theological-Islam in this matter. This theory may be briefly divided into two parts. First, God's love for man which can be summarised as His rewarding of man. Second, man's love for God which can be summarised as obedience to God. Almost all the Sufi Classics seem to revolve around this paradigm of reward versus obedience. However, the individual Sufis like al-Ḥallāj, Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ seem not to bother very much with the theological concerns and whether love can be attributed to God or not.

3-Sufi authors were influenced by Greek philosophy through the Muslim theologians. This may be understood by the very nature of *kalām* itself. The science of theology was established in Islam to negate the questions that were put forward by the non-believers and foreign cultures. Hence, ideas were transported from Plato and Aristotle concerning the concept of love and it seems that the Sufi Classics were influenced by these ideas through these theologians.



## CHAPTER TWO

### The Origins of the Term *Ṣūfī*

#### 2.1 Introduction

As a science, Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is a branch of Islamic study which encompasses the lives and teachings of the Mystics (*Sufis*) of Islam. The English word ‘Sufism’ is generally used to translate the word *taṣawwuf*. In this chapter, a general overview of the meaning of Sufism shall be presented, along with the historical background out of which Sufism arose. The starting point will be the derivation of the word *Ṣūfī*, i.e., Muslim mystic because a distinctive feature of the Arabic language is that the terminology of any Islamic science is closely associated with the etymological roots of the terms used to describe the science in question. Therefore, this chapter will begin with the examination of the etymology and derivation of the word *Ṣūfī*.

As an illustration, if we accept that Sufism is derived from the word *ṣūf* meaning wool, then we will perceive Sufism as a manifestation of an ascetic life style. This is because, wearing woollen garments was perceived by Sufi Classics as a symbol of otherworldliness.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, if we accept that Sufism is derived from the Greek word “*sophos*”,<sup>2</sup> meaning “wise”, then, the perspective with which Sufism is viewed, will be radically different. For Sufism will, now, be seen as having a philosophical base, originating from an alien and non-Islamic culture. The implications of this are profound, since Sufism will then be seen not as a product of indigenous Islamic thought but, as a refined development of foreign ideas.

From the previous paragraph it is clear that the study of the etymological origins of Sufism is necessary in order to gain a proper appreciation of its phenomenon. It therefore comes as no surprise that both classical and modern writers frequently introduce the subject of Sufism based on its etymological derivations. In what follows, a brief summary of the main origins of the word Sufism will be

<sup>1</sup> ‘A. Badawī, *Tārīkh al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī min al-Bidāya Ḥattā al-Qarn al-Thānī*, (Kuwait, Wakāla al-Matbū‘āt, 1975), p.7

presented. Priority will be given to early Ṣūfī authors, centring around the question: “How did the Sufis, themselves, interpret the term Sufism, linguistically and conceptually?”

Another important point, which must be kept in mind is that the central focus of this research will be the concept of love the intention being to establish whether it played a central role in the rise and development of the Sufī movement, or whether it was only in later times that the concept of love was introduced into the thought processes of the Sufi’s heart and mind and thus gained ascendancy.

## 2.2. The Origins of the Term *Ṣūfī*

Many words have been put forward, as the origin of the word *Ṣūfī*. However, the most important seem to be the following:

**2.2:1 *Ṣafā***: This literally means “purity” and in the Sufi sense denotes the cleanliness of the hearts and acts of Sufis.<sup>3</sup> A review of the Sufi literature reveals that, this derivation is seen in a favourable light by many Sufi writers. This is because this derivation of the word *Sufi* from *ṣafā* is in harmony with the goals and aspirations of Sufism viz. the purification of the mystic’s heart from the spiritual dirt which has accumulated on it. This purification process enables him not only to cleanse the evil thoughts which arise from time to time in his mind, but also to purify the actions committed by his limbs. As a culmination of this process, the obstacles which come between the Sufi and God are removed.

A grammatical analysis of the term *ṣafā* adds a further interesting dimension to the etymological derivation. Grammatically speaking, the term *Ṣūfī* is the passive form of the verb *ṣafā* according to the rules of Arabic grammar; hence, *ṣafā* means ‘to purify’ and *Ṣūfī* (passive voice) signifies ‘a person who has been purified.’ This analysis can lead to the conclusion that the Sufi plays a passive role in his quest for self-purification. However, it is important to realise that this in fact is not the true picture of the Sufi’s role. A Sufi must exert himself as far as it is in his capacity to do so, but the ultimate purification does not depend on the efforts

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<sup>2</sup> J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, (I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 1992), p.31

<sup>3</sup> ‘A. Badawī, *Tārīkh al-Taṣawwuf*, p.8

of the Sufi alone. Rather it is only by the help and intervention of Divine mercy that a Sufi can attain his goal of self-purification. It is in this sense only, that a Sufi can be viewed as a passive participant.

The above derivation of Sufism is given added impetus by the definitions propounded by some of the most eminent and influential personalities of Sufi thought. Like al-Qushayrī, al-Ḥujwīrī, the author of the one of the most important Sufi classics, “*Kashf al-Mahjūb*”, provides a detailed analysis concerning the relation between *ṣafā* and *Sufism*. al-Ḥujwīrī’s starting point is the tradition of the Prophet that: “The purity (*ṣafā*) of this world has gone, and only its impurity (*kadar*) remained.”<sup>4</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī goes on to establish a connection between this tradition and the nature of the Sufi quest: “Therefore, since the people of this persuasion [the Sufis] have purged their morals and conduct, and have sought to free themselves from natural taints, on that account they are called Sufis.”<sup>5</sup> It is interesting that in al-Ḥujwīrī’s definition of Sufism, there is a great emphasis on the practical side of Sufism, such as, good conduct, cleaning the heart from spiritual taints and so on. This type of definition of Sufism is characteristic of the early Sufis who mainly stressed the practical side of Sufism in contrast to the intellectual or Gnostic side of it. Thus, Sufism is an active process not a passive one.

Another important Sufi, Bishr al-Ḥafī (d.841) defines a Sufi as one “ whose heart is *ṣāfi* (sincere or pure) towards God.” It can be understood from this definition, that a Sufi is the person whose heart has been cleansed from all worldly desires and taints, which enables him to perceive Divine enlightenment. This definition is also supported by al-Ḥujwīrī who quotes another anonymous definition: “The Sufi is one whose conduct towards God is *ṣāfi* (pure, sincere), and towards whom God’s blessing is sincere”.<sup>6</sup>

It is worthwhile to pause at this juncture to note that there is a common theme around which the definitions of Sufism, based on the derivation from *ṣafā*, are centred. This common theme is the cleansing of the hearts and practices of the

<sup>4</sup> al-Hindi, *Kanz al- ‘Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af’āl*, (Haydar Abad, 1313), 15:551, no:42138, al-Ḥujwīrī *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson, (London, 1970), p.30

<sup>5</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, trans. by R.A. Nicholson, p.31

Sufis from the spiritual diseases and obstacles which may arise. As an illustration, Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-Kattānī<sup>7</sup> (d.934) defines Sufism in the following terms: “Sufism is good moral characteristics. Whoever surpasses you in good moral characteristics surpasses you in purity (*ṣafā*). According to this definition and others like it, the essence of Sufism is purifying the heart from vices, eliminating the bad moral characteristics and replacing them with good ones. Only then can the Sufi feel the nearness of God. In Abū ‘Ali al-Rudhbārī’s<sup>8</sup> (d. 934) words, “Sufism is the purity (*ṣafā*) of nearness after the impurity of remoteness.” This definition makes clear that until the purification of heart and actions (*a’māl*) occurs the Sufi will be distant from God. Only through purification will he get closer to God.

From the above definitions, it may be understood that these Sufis believe that Sufism is the discipline which enables the disciple to attain spiritual purification through ascetic and other practices, hence enabling the Sufi to obtain salvation. Thus, according to these definitions, Sufism is derived etymologically from *ṣafā*’ (purity).

However, certain Sufis do not accept this derivation on the basis of grammatical reasons. For example, according to al-Qushayrī<sup>9</sup> the word *ṣūfī* cannot be a derivative of *ṣafā*’ according to the rules of Arabic grammar. Whether the word *ṣafā*’ is the root of Sufism or not, it has, nevertheless, established itself strongly among the basic principles of Sufism: from the perspective of Sufi authors at least.

As far as the concept of Divine Love is concerned, this derivation is quite favourable since the love of God only flourishes in a heart which is pure from the base desires of the lower soul (*nafs*) and is dedicated to God.

**2.2:2 *al-Ṣaff al-Awwal***: This means, literally, the first rank of ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) in the mosque, indicating that the Sufis occupy the first line in all good

<sup>6</sup> al-Kalābādhi, *al-Ta’arruf li Madhhab ahl al-Ṭaṣawwuf*, trans. by A. J. Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, (Lahore, 1980), p.5

<sup>7</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.281; trans. by B.R. Von Schlegell *The Principles of Sufism*, (Berkeley, 1990), p.304

<sup>8</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.281; *The Principles*, p.304

<sup>9</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.279; *The Principles*, p.302

deeds as well as in the prayer. Explaining this phrase, al-Kalābādhi relates that “they are in the first rank (*ṣuff*) before God, through the elevation of their desires towards Him and the turning of their hearts only unto Him.”<sup>10</sup> al-Kalābādhi’s definition is very much related to the practical side of Sufism with its stress on devotional worship and attendance to other good acts always in the first ranks.

This derivation must be approached with caution as the observations of al-Kalābādhi might be biased in favour of the Sufis. This is reflected in his good opinion of Sufis i.e. showing them in the first rank of any good deed. It is possible that his opinion might be the result of his affiliation with Sufis rather than his scholarly observation of them. Furthermore, favouring the group, with which the author is affiliated, over others is quite common in the works of Sufi writers.

However, al-Kalābādhi does voice some reservations about this derivation. According to him the rules of Arabic Grammar do not permit such a derivation.<sup>11</sup> In line with this al-Qushayrī, also accepts this derivation as an option, nevertheless, asserting that “Sufi” cannot be the adjective derived from the word “*ṣuff*” for grammatical reasons.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, looking from the perspective of love in Sufi thought, this derivation of the word Sufism does not provide a strong basis for the concept of love to flourish. This is because it seems that the phrase “*ṣuff al-awwal*” denotes the supremacy of action and worship rather than love.

**2.2:3 *Ahl al-Ṣuffa*:** Literally, this word means “the people of the bench”: a reference to a group of poor people among the Prophet Muhammad’s friends who lived in the mosque and dedicated themselves to the worship and service of God. The Sufis like to identify themselves with the *Ahl al-Ṣuffa*. For example, Shihāb al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī<sup>13</sup> (d.1234) elucidates the similarities between the “*people of ṣuffa*” and Sufis in detail. According to him, the people of the *ṣuffa* were leading an ascetic life in the mosque for the sake of eternal bliss. Their example and master was the Prophet. In a similar fashion, Sufis gathered in *tekkes*

<sup>10</sup> al-Kalābādhi, *al-Ta’arruf*, p.28; trans. by *The Doctrines*, p.5

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>12</sup> al-Qushayrī, *The Principles*, p.302

<sup>13</sup> al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif al-Ma’ārif*, (Beirut, 1966) p.61

and *zāwiyas*<sup>14</sup> without having any worldly concerns. The collective life of the Sufis under the supervision of a master completely fits with this model of the Prophetic school.

The opinion that the people of *Ṣuffa* were the first prototype of the Sufis is especially accepted by the Sufis who struggled to establish a direct relationship between Sufism and the Prophet and his companions, thus proving that Sufism came exclusively from pure Islamic sources. Since the topic of this research is not the foreign influence on Sufism, this matter will not be discussed in great length.<sup>15</sup>

There is no doubt that the existence of the people of *Ṣuffa* gave enough justification for the Sufi movement and their systemisation, at least according to the Sufis' own statements. Although Suhrawardī finds parallels between Sufis and the people of *Ṣuffa*, he is cautious about this derivation for etymological reasons, as well. The majority of Sufi authors seem to be very observant of grammatical rules in their search for the derivation of the word Sufi. Hence, many derivations are rejected on this basis. This obsession with grammar does not always lead scholars to the correct solution, since social phenomena do not necessarily follow the rules constructed by grammarians.

Concerning the concept of love, 'the people of' the *Ṣuffa* seem to be concerned with ascetic practices such as self-mortification, poverty and total dedication to God. Hence on the face of it, it seems that they are not very much concerned with 'love'. This does not mean that they had no love for God, because it is possible to interpret their behaviour that they had love for God as much as they feared Him: they were motivated by a desire to seek the pleasure of God alone. In other words they were driven by love of God. However, the historical evidence indicates that the motivation for the ascetic practices was mostly due to fear of God.

**2.2:4 *Ṣūf***: This word literally means wool: "*Ṣūf*" is accepted generally as the root of Sufism, hence it is the most important option among other derivations. al-Sarrāj (d.988), the earliest writer on Sufism, gives a very reasonable explanation about the derivation of Sufism under the title of "*The chapter*

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<sup>14</sup> Buildings which are established for the convention of the Sufis, See, A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p.231

clarifying the name *al-Ṣūfiyyah*, why they were called by this name and why they were identified by wearing this garment'. According to him, they are not named after any of their interior qualities but by their exterior appearance, which is mostly wearing of wool as a symbol of asceticism and piety. al-Sarrāj justifies such naming by giving an example of describing people by their garments from the Qur'ān. In the Qur'ān, the disciples of Jesus are called after their garments. They are called "*Ḥawārī*"<sup>16</sup> meaning "people who wear white clothes". Although they had other more important distinctive attributes regarding their religious knowledge and conduct, yet they were named after their garments. Similarly, Sufis are named after their woollen garment which was the practice of the prophets and the righteous believers.<sup>17</sup>

al-Sarrāj also mentions other reasons; according to him, on their spiritual journey to God, the Sufis always pass through different stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*). Because the Sufi experience is personal, no two Sufis can share the same station. Their spiritual stations and states differ from each other at all times. Secondly, the Sufis are always in progress, they never stop for long in any station, hence it is impossible to name them after a certain station such as being repentant, ascetic and so on. Thirdly, because the Sufis possess, according to al-Sarrāj, all the praised qualities, they cannot be named after one specific characteristic. For these reasons it is impossible to name them after their interior qualities.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this, the most simple and effective way is to name them after some external quality which is shared by all Sufis. This quality is nothing but wearing wool.

In addition to al-Sarrāj, 'Umar al-Suhrawardī supports this opinion. Initially, he brings historical evidence from the life of the Prophet and his friends, that wearing wool symbolises asceticism. He relates that the Prophet used to ride a donkey (because of his humility) and wear woollen garments. He also relates a Prophetic

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<sup>15</sup> See A. 'Affifi, *al-Ṭaṣawwuf al-Thawra al-Rūḥiyya*, p.65-68

<sup>16</sup> Qur'ān, 3:52

<sup>17</sup> al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'*, p.20-21; al-Kalābādhi, Abū Bakr, *al-Ta'arruf*, p.34

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34

saying which confirms that a group of seventy prophets used the woollen garment before the Prophet Muhammad, as a sign of modesty.<sup>19</sup>

al-Suhrawardī considers wearing wool as a sign of renunciation of the world, in opposition to the lusts and comforts of the lower soul. Therefore he writes “both from the point of meaning and etymology, ‘*ṣūf*’ (wool) is the most appropriate root for the word Sufism.”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, he highlights another aspect of this nomenclature, saying that if Sufis had named themselves after their spiritual features such as repentance or patience, this would be boasting and making a claim which is against the Sufi modesty in particular. Since they called themselves after their exterior appearance, there is no boasting and making a false claim. This is nearer to humility which is an important element in Sufi philosophy.<sup>21</sup>

al- Kalābādī discusses all these etymologies from the perspective of grammar and meaning. He arrives at the conclusion that if the derivation from “*ṣūf*” is accepted then there is no problem from the grammatical point of view, while at the same time the word has all the necessary meanings which are implied by the other etymologies such as withdrawal from the world, inclining the soul away from it, denying the carnal soul of its pleasures, purifying conduct, cleansing the conscience etc.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, al-Qushayrī rejects the idea that the word Sufism came from *ṣūf* on the grounds that “...the Sufis are not distinguished by wearing wool...” He concludes that; “This group (the Sufis) are so well known that it is not necessary to find an analogy or derivation for their designation.”<sup>23</sup> According to him, the word Sufi is a proper name which has not been derived from any root. Hence, nothing can be deduced from the etymological analysis of the word Sufism concerning its origins.

<sup>19</sup> See Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Libās*, n.107; *Anṣār*, n.237, al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif*, p.59

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60-61

<sup>22</sup> al-Kalābādī, *The Doctrines*, p.10



A few comments are necessary regarding al-Qushayrī's conclusions. First, there are opinions against his conclusion that Sufis are not distinguished by wearing wool. For example, al-Junayd (d.911), one of the most influential personalities in the history of Sufism claims that the wearing of woollen garments is an essential part of Sufism.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, a perusal of much Sufi classical literature reveals that *ṣūf* was an essential part of Sufi custom and was generally worn by the Sufis. These opposing opinions show that there was no consensus among Sufi sources concerning an etymological derivation based on wool.

This dispute on the etymology and origin of 'Sufism' seems to have continued until the present day. Not only Muslim scholars and Sufi authors, but also Western scholars have been drawn into the argument about the etymological derivation. In 1818, Joseph von Hammer came up with the idea that Sufism derived from the Greek word "*sophos*"<sup>25</sup>, hence he implied that Sufism is a product of philosophical contemplation. This idea has been championed for a long time. However, this idea of one orientalist was rejected strongly by another orientalist i.e. Noldeke. He proves etymologically that this derivation is impossible. Additionally, he cites a number of passages showing that, in the first two centuries of Islam, woollen garments were worn especially by ascetics. The phrase *labisa al-ṣūf*, 'he clad himself in wool' signifying 'he renounced the world and become an ascetic' occur frequently in early literature; at a later period, when asceticism had evolved into mysticism, *labisa al-ṣūf* generally means 'he became a Sufi'. "In Persian", he writes, "the ascetic is often called *pashmīna-push*, i.e. 'wearing woollen garment.' These arguments by Noldeke left no doubt in the minds of Western scholars that Sufism basically started as an ascetic movement, originating from Islamic sources.<sup>26</sup>

Nowadays, the majority of modern western scholars such as Arberry<sup>27</sup>, E.G. Browne.<sup>28</sup>, A. Schimmel<sup>29</sup>, M. Smith<sup>30</sup> and so on, seem to accept this derivation.

<sup>23</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.289; *The Principles*, p.302

<sup>24</sup> al- Hūjwīrī, *Kashf*, p. 39-40; al-Kalābādī, A., *al-Ta'arruf*, p.31

<sup>25</sup> 'A. Badawī, *Tārīkh al-Taṣawwuf*, p.10; Joseph von Hammer, *Geshichte der Schonen Redekunste Persiens*, (Vienna, 1818), p.346

<sup>26</sup> A. R. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, (London; G. Bell and Sons LTD., 1979), p.3-4

<sup>27</sup> Arberry, *An account of the Mystics of Islam*, (London, 1990), p.35

<sup>28</sup> E.G.Browne, *Religious Systems of the World*, (London, 1908) p.314

<sup>29</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.35

Therefore, the dispute over the derivation and origins of Sufism seems to have reached a conclusion.

On the other hand, as discussed above, classical Sufi authors have no consensus on the derivation of Sufism. Some of them are in favour of “*ṣafā*” and others of “*ṣūf*” and others still prefer to accept Sufism as a proper name itself without any derivation. After considered reflection, it appears that the derivation of the word Sufism from “*ṣūf*” is the most plausible one. This is for the following reason: firstly, this possibility alone has no etymological problem in derivation. All other possible derivations have a problem from an etymological point of view in some way or another. Secondly, as cited above, the customs of that time support this theory; and finally as being a symbol of a certain life-style *ṣūf* does not exclude the meanings which are implied by the other derivational possibilities whereas these other options, once one of them is accepted, exclude the rest.

As a result, it may be said that the origins of the word Sufism point to the practices of an ascetic nature such as poverty, fasting, promptly following the commandments of the Divine law: They do not really point to Divine Love. The only derivation which might serve the flourishing of Divine Love in the Sufi’s heart seems to be the word *ṣafā*’ (purity) by its connotations of cleansing the heart from the sins and worldly desires hence, dedicating it to God only. With regard to our subject, “the concept of love”, we do not get much from the derivation suggested in the last option, either. All the derivations seem to revolve around the ascetic elements, although at times there are glimpses of Divine Love in the sayings of certain Sufis. Therefore, it may be said that in early Sufism, the theme of love of God did not play as large a role as it played in later ages when Sufism evolved into maturity. Not only the derivation but also the lives of the early Sufis support the concept that the notion of the love of God was not a first priority in the lives of the first Sufis. Hence a short review of the lives of the early Sufis will be given in the respective chapters of this study with special reference to their affinity with Divine love.

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<sup>30</sup> M. Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, (London, 1972), p.2

## **2.3 First Appearance of Sufism and the Dominant Element of Ascetic Understanding**

### **2.3.1 Asceticism in the Qur'ān and Prophetic Traditions**

#### **2.3:1:1 The Qur'ān**

Thus far, we have studied the word 'Sufism' solely from its etymological perspective. The purpose of this investigation was to establish and to identify the origins and nature of Sufism with particular reference to the role played by the concept of love in the derivation. We shall now turn to the investigation of Sufism from the textual sources of Islam viz., the Qur'ān and the Traditions. The reason for investigating from this perspective is due to the fact that Sufis essentially present themselves as Muslims, coupled with the fact that they adamantly claim that their teachings originate from the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

It is very possible that when the early Sufis looked at the Qur'ān, the first thing that struck their eyes and affected their souls, were the verses which refer to the worldly life as beguiling Muslims with its temptations. In these verses, the worldly life is described as an amusement which prevents the Muslim from his journey to God, vain desires which act as an obstacle, rivalry in multiplying wealth and children which hinder the remembrance of God, temporary enjoyment of deceitful things which are perishable as opposed to the life of the hereafter which is eternal and everlasting. They saw in the 'pages of the Qur'ān abundant testimony to support the belief that the amassing of worldly possessions and the inclination of the heart to worldly glitter incurred the displeasure of God. To give some examples from some of the possible verses which are employed by the Sufis:

"The life of this world is made to seem fair to those who disbelieve..."<sup>31</sup>

"And the life of this world is nothing but a sport and pastime. And surely the Abode of the Hereafter is better for those who are righteous. Will you not then understand?"<sup>32</sup>

".... But the enjoyment of the present life is but little compared to the Hereafter."<sup>33</sup>

"Know that the life of this world is only a sport and a pastime, and an adornment, and a source of boasting among yourselves, and of rivalry in multiplying riches

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<sup>31</sup> Qur'ān, 2:213 (Pickthall)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6: 33.

and children; ...And the life of this world is nothing but temporary enjoyment of delusive things.”<sup>34</sup>

After mentioning all the vices of the worldly life and its distraction of man from his real objective i.e., the pleasure of Allah, the Qur’ān warns the believers not to fall into this trap in the following verse: “. ...So let not worldly life beguile you.”<sup>35</sup>

Concerning the roots of the ascetic form of Sufism in the Qur’ān, there are plenty of similar verses, all to that effect. Those verses which are mentioned often in Sufi books were all of an ascetic nature i.e. admonishing its listeners to beware of worldly glitter and encouraging them to adopt an ascetic life style. Hence, they established rules to attain salvation through practices which are of an ascetic nature. Not only was asceticism a lifestyle for them, it was also an inspiration to develop other Sufi concepts. The concepts of Qur’anic teachings were also reconceptualised and moulded by this central motif of asceticism. For example, the concept of “*tawakkul*” meaning “trust in God” was defined from an ascetic point of view to the extent that some Sufis thought that having water and food during journeys through deserts would be against *tawakkul*.<sup>36</sup>

However, it cannot be said that the Qur’ān only contains verses which advise an ascetic lifestyle. It is true that there are many verses concerning this, however, this is only one side of the coin. The other side is that the Qur’ān allows the permissible (*ḥalāl*) things and says that all the best things are for Muslims both in this world and the next. For example: “Say: ‘Who has forbidden you to wear decent clothes or to eat the good things which God has provided for His servants?’ Say: These are for the enjoyment of the faithful in the life of this world; but they shall be theirs alone on the day of Resurrection.”<sup>37</sup>

What the Qur’ān forbids is a kind of extreme indulgence in the attractions of life and forgetting the purpose of life. In connection with the concept of ascetic life, a comparison can be drawn with Christian monasticism. The verses which refer to

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 9: 38 (Muh.)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 57:11

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 35:5 (Pickthall)

<sup>36</sup> See chapter on *tawakkul* in *al-Ta’arruf*, p.100-101

Christian monasticism can give us an idea about the Qur'ān's approach to asceticism, as well. The Qur'ān considers monasticism as an innovation in Christianity itself; "...and (as for) monasticism, they innovated it -We ordained it not for them- only seeking Allah's pleasure and they observed it not with right observance. So We give those of them who believe their reward, but many of them are evil-doers."<sup>38</sup>

However, the verse does not give a value judgement concerning whether monasticism is disliked or encouraged. The Qur'ān only says that the Christians invented it but did not apply it properly. In a sense the Qur'ān seems to approve of monasticism if it is applied in a proper way. However, this point, which is not clear in the Qur'ān, was explained by a tradition of the Prophet "Do not impose austerities on yourselves so that austerities will be imposed on you, for people have imposed austerities on themselves and Allah imposed austerities on them."<sup>39</sup> This clarifies the Islamic approach. To conclude, the Qur'ān advises an ascetic kind of lifestyle but seems to refuse an absolute asceticism deserting the worldly life totally. The traditions of the prophet will illuminate this point further.

### 2.3:1:2 The Traditions

It was not only the Qur'ān, that the Sufis used as their reference as far as asceticism was concerned. In addition to the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet was also heavily relied upon. Therefore, the early Sufis trace the origins of Sufi practices to the Prophet of Islam and take inspiration from his sayings and his conduct.

According to the Sufi perspective, the Prophet preferred an ascetic life and this is well recorded in Ḥadīth books. Among his sayings, the ones concerning asceticism and renunciation of the world constitute lengthy chapters. These sayings are collected under the name "The chapter pertaining to piety and softening of hearts (*Kitāb al-Zuhd wa al-Raqā'iq*) in the Ḥadīth books. In these chapters, renunciation of the world and poverty are praised; in contrast, collecting wealth is denounced. The following ḥadīth shows the attitude of the Prophet towards the worldly life by his comparison of the world with a dead lamb's ear.

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<sup>37</sup> Qur'ān, 7:32

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 57:27 (Pickthall)

“Allah’s Apostle (peace be upon him) happened to walk through the market coming from the side of Āliya and the people were on both sides of him. There he found a dead lamb with very short ears. He took hold of its ear and said: Who amongst you would like to have this for a dirham? They said: We would not like to have it even for less than that as it is of no use to us. He said: Do you wish to have it free of any cost? They said: By Allah, even if it were alive (we would not have liked to possess that), for there is defect in it as its ear is very short and now it is also dead. Thereupon Allah’s Apostle (peace be upon him) said: By Allah, this world is more insignificant in the eye of Allah than it (this dead lamb) is in your eyes”.<sup>40</sup> This ḥadīth vividly describes the value of the worldly life in comparison to the life in the hereafter.

According to Sufi teaching, because God does not give any significance to the world, the Sufi must follow the same path. He must see it as a prison house, not as a desirable place to live in. As narrated by Abu Hurayrah: “Allah’s Apostle (peace be upon him) said: “The world is a prison-house for a believer and Paradise for a non-believer.”<sup>41</sup> As nobody wants to stay in prison however comfortable it may be, so Sufis escape from it, never looking back at its temptations.

As a result, in many sayings of the Prophet, the poor who deserted the wealth of the world, are praised. In addition to this, it is related that they will enter Paradise five hundred years before the rich.<sup>42</sup> The Prophet also prayed to God to take his life as a poor man and resurrect him among the poor.<sup>43</sup>

In accordance with his teaching the Prophet led an ascetic lifestyle in practice. Information about the details of his ascetic life, has chiefly come through the accounts of the Prophet’s wife Ā’isha; she reports, for example, that they could not kindle a fire for many days (in order to cook food) because of the lack of food.

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<sup>39</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan, Adab*, n.4886

<sup>40</sup> Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Zuhd*, n. 7059

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, *Zuhd*, n. 7058:

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Majah, *al-Sunan*, n.4112

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 37, n.4136

During these days they satisfied their intense hunger with a few dates and some water.<sup>44</sup>

For the early ascetics, hunger was another essential principle. They consider hunger as the best tool for mortification and treatment of spiritual diseases. According to these early Sufis, poverty and hunger bring about many virtues. Not only, do they encourage abstemiousness and refrain from unlawful pleasure but they also stimulate trust in God. Trust in God, too, is an important element of early Sufism. Faith only has meaning when the believer has such trust in God that he confides in Him wholly, and leaves all his affairs in God's hands. The Prophet said "If you trusted in God as you should, He would sustain you even as He sustains the birds, which in the morning go forth hungry, and return in the evening filled."<sup>45</sup>

Not only was his diet of an ascetic nature but also the furniture and the dwelling of the Prophet were very simple. The Ḥadīth books, in describing the simplicity of his furniture, note that; "The mattress of the Prophet was made of a leather case stuffed with palm fibres".<sup>46</sup>

Before proceeding further, one important point must be made regarding the Prophet's lifestyle. It should not be thought that the Prophet chose such a way of living out of shortage. Rather the Prophet preferred it out of his personal inclination towards otherworldliness. This can be illustrated by the fact that, even after the victory of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, with the resultant power that this brought, the Prophet, nevertheless, still maintained an ascetic lifestyle. This inclination continued throughout the whole life span of the Prophet up to and including his death. According to 'Aisha's narration, when the Prophet died, there was nothing in their wooden tub which a living being could eat but a handful of barley.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Riqāq*, n. 465

<sup>45</sup> Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad, al-Mubashshirīn*, n.200, 348, 351 (K.T.)

<sup>46</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Riqāq*, n. 463

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, *Zuhd*, n. 7099

Taking inspiration from incidents such as these, the Sufis make much reference to the voluntary nature of the Prophet's asceticism. They imitated the Prophet to such an extent that they preferred a life of hardship, even if they had the opportunity and the means of leading a comfortable life. Illustrations of such practices will be provided in the later pages of this study.

To conclude this part of the discussion, there seems to be a consensus among Islamic sources to the effect that the Prophet lived an ascetic life. Hence on the basis of such a consensus, there appears to be no further necessity to provide yet more examples. Both the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions have ample and clear examples to determine the Sufis' attitude towards the worldly life and its attractions. As far as the worldly life is concerned, early Sufis tried to reflect these Qur'anic and Prophetic principles in their systems.

For the ascetic movement the second important issue was worshipping God constantly. They would spend much of the night awake praying (*ṣalāt*) and performing other religious duties recommended by the Prophet. They also found ample evidence in the life of the Prophet for such practice. Al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba relates that: "The Prophet used to pray so much that his feet became swollen, and when he was asked why he prayed so much, he would say, 'Shall I not be a thankful slave (to Allah)?"' <sup>48</sup> In conclusion, asceticism cannot merely be described as abandonment of the world, for there is also equal emphasis on continuous worship of God.

It is true that the Prophet stressed ascetic ideas and also provided examples of its highest form. However, he also benefited from the permissible things. In a famous ḥadīth, he forbade one of his companions to fast for a whole lifetime, not marry a woman, and to spend all the nights in worship. <sup>49</sup>

However, in later ages the intoxicated Sufis did not show the same attitude to the worldly life. They commented on these concepts and developed different approaches as well. Contrary to the literal understanding of the early Sufis they

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, *Riqāq*, n. 478

<sup>49</sup> See Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 22070 (K.T.)



gave metaphorical meanings to those concepts which hence increased their effectiveness.

#### 2.4 Social Background

It is important to analyse the factors which gave rise to asceticism and in which asceticism developed and flourished. This will reveal to us the reasons why asceticism gained ascendancy among the early Sufis, at the expense of other alternative concepts. It is known that in most religions, with the passage of the time, the followers might deviate from the original teachings. There might be several reasons for this deviation. Sometimes it might be the persecution of religious people and coercive emigrations (as in the case of Jews) making the practice of a religion difficult. On the other hand, the deviation might be the result of vast earthly opportunities which tempt the followers of the original faith. If we apply this model to the Islamic religion the latter reason was the cause of deviation i.e., the material wealth that the Muslims acquired within a short time of their emergence as a young faith. In fact the two essential sources of Islamic faith, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, warn the Muslims of these dangers. The Qur'ān says:

“Abundance (wealth and possessions) diverts you”<sup>50</sup> This formula seems to be a general theme underlying all religions, since all religions seek to combat the desire of hoarding wealth and riches at the expense of other peoples' suffering. Indicating the reality that people seek worldly wealth rather than spiritual wealth, the Qur'ān says “But you prefer the life of this world, whereas the Hereafter is better and more lasting.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the traditions of the Prophet contain warnings of the future dangers that wealth would bring for the then nascent Muslim community. The following ḥadith shows the concern of the Prophet about the future of his followers:

Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) said: “How would you be, O people, when Persia and Rome were conquered by you?” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf said: “We would say as Allah has commanded us and we would express our gratitude to Allah.” Thereupon Allah's messenger (peace be upon him) said: “Nothing else besides? You would (in fact) vie with one another, then you would feel jealous,

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<sup>50</sup> Qur'ān, 102:2(Muh.)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 87: 18. (Pickthall)

then your relations would be estranged and then you would bear enmity against one another, or something to the same effect. Then you would go to the poor emigrants and would make some the masters of the others.”<sup>52</sup>

This danger that the Prophet foretold, appeared to the Sufis to have been realised in their day and age. Certainly, the first century of Islam was singularly favourable to the growth of asceticism. Shortly after the passing away of the Prophet, Muslim armies invaded an immense territory stretching from Spain to the Indus Valley as early as 711 CE. This continuous expansion of the Empire brought vast amounts of wealth to the then poor and ascetic society. The ideal of spreading Islam turned into a desire for mere conquest and collecting wealth.<sup>53</sup> This shift in attitude shocked the conscience of the sensitive believers.

In addition to this, the unity of the Ummah began to weaken with theological and political disputes between different sects. The civil war between ‘Ali, the son in law of the Prophet and Mu‘āwiyah caused harsh theological disputes about the *imāmat* (leadership of the Muslims) leading to deep divisions in the Ummah. Consequently, the sincere people, deeply concerned about these adverse developments, turned to asceticism. In so doing they hoped to divorce themselves from intractable religious problems.<sup>54</sup>

Looking from their perspective, one may understand that those Muslims who had seen the Prophet’s and his friends’ simple life style would be upset by seeing the spread of luxury and religious insensitiveness as a result of the spread of wealth. These abrupt changes in the social, political and theological arena led a group of devout Muslims to turn to the simple and ascetic life of the Prophet as a reaction to the corruption of the Muslims.<sup>55</sup>

As a result, beginning from the eighth century CE. pious Muslims who remained faithful, to the high ideals of Islam and its prophet began to form themselves into small groups. Their common aim was to condemn the deceptive attractions of

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<sup>52</sup> Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Zuhd*, n. 7067

<sup>53</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.30

<sup>54</sup> ‘A. ‘Afīfī, *al-Tasawwuf al-Sawrah*, p.67-68

<sup>55</sup> al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif*, p.63

worldly life and encourage to taking up an ascetic life.<sup>56</sup> In the beginning, because their movement was the result of a reaction to the corruption of the rulers and society due to increasing wealth, they always stressed the abandonment of riches and preference of poverty. In preferring an ascetic life style, these groups had previous examples within their societies, from other religious traditions. The most prominent were Christians, therefore, their influence will be briefly looked at in the following section.

### 2.5 The Christian Element

There is a striking similarity between the appearance of Christian asceticism and Islamic asceticism. In the beginning because of severe persecution, the Christian community led an ascetic life. This earthly life was regarded as a trial and discipline for the life of the next world, in an age when the life of every Christian was liable to be cut short by intense persecution. However, the plight of the early Christians changed after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The persecution stopped and Christians could benefit from the privileges of the empire's resources. The Church closely associated itself with the State and as a result it started to lower its principles, therefore sacrificing the essentials. Hence corruption started amongst the clergy. As a reaction to this corruption, devout Christians developed an even more rigid asceticism in order to maintain the old standard of purity and renunciation. In that way, they wanted to express their rejection of the compromise with the world to which the Church had consented.<sup>57</sup>

There is a widespread tendency among the scholars of Sufism to say that the early ascetics were influenced by the Christian ascetics. And strong evidence is presented by them to support this theory. Almost two centuries before the advent of Islam there were Christian ascetics and their monasteries in North Arabia.<sup>58</sup> Many Arabs had at least a superficial knowledge of its rites and doctrines. These monks and other wandering hermits offered to the pagan Arabs a model of ascetic life and inspired certain individuals, known as *ḥanīfs*, to reject idolatry and

<sup>56</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, trans. by Arberry, (London, 1976), p.3

<sup>57</sup> See M. Smith, *Studies in the Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*, (Oxford, Oneworld, 1995), pp.10-34;

<sup>58</sup> 'A. Badawī, *Tārīkh al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*, p.32-35

profess monotheism. In addition, Sufi books relate many anecdotes in which a Muslim ascetic meets a Christian monk and they exchange ideas. As an example, it is narrated of Ibrāhīm b. Adham, a great ascetic, that he said: "I have learned the *ma'rifah* (knowledge of Allah) from a Christian monk called Sam'ān."<sup>59</sup> It must be remembered that many Christians converted to Islam, and they might have brought their religious convictions with them.<sup>60</sup>

For such close communication and relationships to exist between Christian and Muslim ascetics, certain social and theological conditions were present. First of all, Islam did not reject the old religions as totally wrong as one would suppose. In fact Islam only claimed to correct them. Besides, in the Qur'ān, the Christian monks who led an ascetic life were praised in very clear words:

"You will find that the most implacable of men in their enmity to the faithful are the Jews and the pagans, and that the nearest in affection to them are those who say: 'We are Christians.' That is because there are priests and monks among them; and because they are not proud."<sup>61</sup>

Christian monks are respected by the Prophet and by his friends. So it is quite possible that they influenced the Muslim ascetics. However, as Affifi<sup>62</sup> stresses, this influence was more in terms of organisation' rather than principles, for those principles were abundantly present in Islamic sources. Otherwise, there would have been a complete parallel between them, which was not the case. To give a few examples: Muslim ascetics married and had a family life; apart from that they did not desert society. Of course, there are extreme examples among them but this did not change the general atmosphere.

## 2.6 The Early Ascetics

A study of the biographies of the early Sufis at random, shows that they were mainly people of an extremely ascetic nature. They also came from diverse

<sup>59</sup> See 'Atṭār, *Muslim Saints*, pp.62-79

<sup>60</sup> E.E. Calverley, *Islam an Introduction*, (The American University Publications, Cairo), p.78; see I. R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, (London, George Alen & Unwin, 1982), p.70-71; A. J. Arberry, *The Mystics Of Islam*, p. 4

<sup>61</sup> Qur'ān, 5:82 (Pickthall)

<sup>62</sup> 'A. 'Afifi, *al-Tasawwuf, al-Thawrah*, p.71

backgrounds. There were among them Qur'ān-reciters (*qurrā'*), students of the ḥadīth and lay people who had repented and turned to the ascetic life. Their most prominent representative was the famous theologian, Ḥasan of Basra (d.728), who may be regarded as the founder of the Basrite school of ascetics and mystics. He spread ascetic ideals by giving emotionally charged sermons, describing the horrors of Hellfire. These first ascetic tendencies which formed the basis of Sufism lacked any interest in speculative thought. Ḥasan and his friends advocated strict renunciation of the world and permanent remembrance of their sins. They mostly relied on the Prophet's words;

“If you knew what I knew you would laugh little and weep much.”

Therefore the first Sufis were also called as *al-bakkā'ūn* “those who constantly weep” after their practice of meditation on their shortcomings and sins.<sup>63</sup>

Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d.777) is regarded as the best example of one who fled from the attraction of the worldly life. He was of noble birth, a prince of Balkh. According to al-Ḥujwiri's account, Ibrāhīm b. Adham repented, abandoned everything and entered on the path of asceticism and abstinence.<sup>64</sup> He is also well known for his classification of asceticism for the first time in the history of Sufism. According to him “asceticism” (*zuhd*) is divided into three stages: a-) renunciation of the world, b-) renunciation of 'the happy feeling of having achieved renunciation, c-)the stage in which the ascetic regards the world as so unimportant that he no longer looks at it.<sup>65</sup> All this shows the emphasis put on ascetic attitudes in this early age.

For Ibrāhīm salvation was dependent upon ascetic practices. In the hagiography books, almost all the early Sufis are described as taking up an ascetic lifestyle. 'Attar relates that Mālik b. Dīnār (d.748) applied himself to the Lord's work, taking up the life of austerity and discipline.<sup>66</sup> However, in the following ages of Sufism these attitudes would be criticised and the ascetics were ridiculed because they spent much of their energy fighting something which did not exist in reality.

<sup>63</sup> A. Schimmel, *M. Dimensions of Islam*, p. 30; *al-Ta'arruf*, p.29

<sup>64</sup> al-Ḥujwiri, *Kashf*, p.103

<sup>65</sup> A. Schimmel, *M. Dimensions*, p. 37; also see al-Qushayri, *al-Risālah*, p.291-92

<sup>66</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim saints*, p.100

Sometimes the negative attitude was so excessive that it went to the extremes; they not only hated the world but also the people living in it. For example al-Hujwiri summarises the philosophy of Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyāḍ (d.803) as follows; “...All this shows his hatred of the world and its people, and his contempt for its temptations, and his refusal to abase himself for the sake of worldly gain”.<sup>67</sup> Flight from the world was not enough for salvation according to the early Sufis. In addition to ascetic principles, these Sufis also greatly advocated fear of God. An example of such an attitude, is shown by al-Isfahānī who informs us that, Fuḍayl was a very thin man due to fear of God and a constant feeling of sadness.<sup>68</sup>

These Sufis seemed to understand the Qur’ān and Islam from one side only.<sup>69</sup> Certainly, in the Qur’ān there are passages which draw man to extreme fear but there are also verses which portray God’s mercy.

As shown in the examples above, the early Sufis generally lived an ascetic lifestyle in order to achieve spiritual realisation (perfection). They also understood asceticism in a literal and physical sense. Thus, it is possible to say that Sufism began as an Islamic, ascetic style of life, but it was not the only way of attaining perfection. Perhaps it was one of the best methods when Sufism appeared at the end of the eighth century. In later ages, Sufis developed different methods to accomplish their aims, including the adoption of Love as a method of attaining spiritual perfection. In this research the evolution of “Divine love” will be studied chronologically and with specific importance given to certain cornerstone Sufis who contributed to the development of this concept.

## 2.7 Conclusion

1- The general view among the Sufis concerning the derivation of the word Sufism is that it is from the word “*ṣūf*” (wool), as wool signifies and symbolises the abandonment of the world and its temptations. This gives us a clue to the early Sufis’ philosophy since their understanding of religion is centred mostly around

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<sup>67</sup> al-Hujwiri, *Kashf*, p.100

<sup>68</sup> al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-Awliyā*, (Cairo, Matba‘at al-Khanji, 1935), v.8, p.84

<sup>69</sup> A. J. Arberry, *The Mystics of Islam*, p.5

ascetic practices, self-mortification and the belief in salvation through these kind of practices.

2- Amongst the early Sufis, there was a tendency to react to the corruption of their age which was a result of the spread of wealth. In general, extreme actions produce extreme reactions. The early Sufis were not an exception to this rule and they produced an extreme attitude. Thus, their teaching was mainly concerned with an ascetic life style and denunciation of worldly life in order to balance the worldly desires and temptations of their time in the lives of the public as well as the ruling class.

3- The most important feature in early Sufi teachings was fear of God. It was the fuel which sustained the ascetic ideals. The following remarks of Sufyān al-Thawrī reflect this attitude explicitly: “Only extreme fear enables one to support the burden of devotion”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the early Sufis sought to find a basis in the Qur’ān for this way of life by stressing more the verses threatening wrongdoers. They also chose Qur’anic verses which described the awesome and majestic side of God. They did not speak much about the mercy of God, always drawing attention to the verses which described the vivid scenes of hellfire and the trials of the day of Judgement. However, this approach to worshipping God lost its appeal in later Sufism and was even met with contempt.

4- Their understanding of God is characterised by negativity. In their belief, God is ruthless, never forgiving any sin and punishing even the smallest sin. As a result their relationship with God seemed basically dependent on fear. This is in clear contrast to, say, the God of Ibn ‘Arabī or Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the all-loving God who created the universe and man out of His love for us.<sup>71</sup> Their God was a lover in all forms, the source of eternal love.

5- Emotionally, they were dry and very sober ascetics who favoured a literal understanding of religion. For example, the verses which advise the desertion of worldly life were interpreted in their strict literal sense: any alternative

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<sup>70</sup> al-Isfahānī, Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilyat al-Awliyā’*, v.6, p.362

<sup>71</sup> See 9.3.1 God’s Love for man; 8.3:4 Love as the Purpose of Creation

interpretation giving some flexibility to their strict renunciation was condemned. However, in later Sufism, Sufi concepts were re-interpreted in a more spiritual sense: As an example, poverty became spiritual poverty, i.e., to feel that we are in need of Allah at all times. As a result, even in extreme wealth one would be a poor person in the technical sense. Hence, an ascetic life, in the original sense almost came to an end.

6- As far as the relationship between ascetics and theologians is concerned, the ascetic ideals of the early Sufis were welcomed by Muslim theologians in general. They did not have the fierce conflicts with theologians which later Sufis did.

7- The ascetic teaching of the early Sufis later developed into many different teachings but in all ages an ascetic outlook preserved its central place amongst the new teachings. In all Sufi classics, the majority of Sufi practices take their basis from ascetic principles. It seems that asceticism was like the foundations of the building of Sufism. Even the Sufis who advocated intoxicated love did not exclude ascetic practices from their system. They gave it a different colour which will be discussed in later chapters.

8- The early Sufi ascetics seem not to have been greatly interested in the concept of Divine Love. There are some glimpses of love shining in their statements. However, these are extremely rare when compared to their words about fear of God. They were so preoccupied with fighting the attractions of the world, that they had no chance to contemplate the *Beauty of the Owner* of the world. This preoccupation was both their strength and weakness. It was a strength because it saved them from worldly concerns but it was a weakness because fear and ascetic practices are not ends in themselves. As a result, we do not find ecstatic words or actions attributed to these early Sufis.

9- For the Sufis who inclined more to intoxication and love of God, asceticism had two functions. First of all, in the beginning of mystical training, they all admitted the necessity of ascetic practices. Indeed we see that almost all the Sufis,



like Rābi‘a, al-Hallāj, al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ<sup>72</sup> who are the subjects of the following pages, practised extreme asceticism. However, for them, asceticism had a value only when it furthered the relationship of love between God and man. It was not an aim in itself as it seems to have been with the early ascetics. For the Sufis who were inclined to the love of God, asceticism was a means to clean the soul from all kinds of base desires, purifying the heart from worldly concerns. This was a process of emptying the heart and only the beginning of mystical instruction. The second important stage was to fill the heart and soul with the knowledge and love of God. Otherwise, ascetic practices did not benefit the mystic, and might even harm his relationship with people because of its negative attitude. In fact, many Sufis who preferred love and intoxication in God’s love to fighting with God’s world severely criticised dry and negative attitude of the ascetics in later ages to the extent that their ideals were ridiculed. They were blamed as harsh and senseless, and unsuccessful in attaining spiritual perfection. Because of their unnecessary preoccupation with asceticism and poverty, they could not reach the highest degrees of Sufism.<sup>73</sup>

A further positive aspect of asceticism for the intoxicated group was that in many cases the ascetic life style became a test for the genuineness of the Sufis’ claims because the Sufis of love sometimes made extreme claims which were suspected by the generality of the people. As a proof of their claims to love in extreme, they are expected to show an ascetic attitude to the worldly desires. Hence if a Sufi did not lead an ascetic life he was suspected of being a fake Sufi.

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<sup>72</sup> See the lives of the Sufis in the relevant chapters.

<sup>73</sup> See 8.3:4 Love as the purpose of creation; 9.4 Love and Asceticism

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Paradigms of Love in the Qur'ān and Bible

#### 3.1 Introduction

As the holy book of Islam, the Qur'ān plays an essential role in shaping the teachings of all Islamic sciences. All the sciences take their roots from the Qur'ān or at least claim to originate from it. Sufism in general and the concept of love in particular is not an exception to this rule. All the Sufis who have written about the concept of love, frequently referred to the Qur'ān. Therefore, it is imperative to search the Qur'ān thoroughly to find out what it says about the concept of love.

#### 3.2 The Paradigm of Love in the Qur'ān

In a broad sense, the Qur'ān, refers to three kinds of love. It describes the love between man and God, between man and the opposite sex and lastly between man and his worldly desires<sup>1</sup>. In all the passages in which this tertiary classification is mentioned, the most often used word is *ḥubb*. Other synonyms of the word “*ḥubb*” are also used occasionally to describe the concept of love. However, it is interesting to note that the most important word that describes the concept of love in Arabic, *‘ishq* (passionate love) is not used in the Qur'ān.

This is an interesting usage of the Qur'anic vocabulary regarding Divine Love as there is no specific word in the holy book which describes the love between God and man. For this reason, using the same terminology for both Divine and profane love can be said to have its origins in the Qur'ān. Therefore, the Sufis who used the terminology of profane love to express the themes of Divine Love are in a sense following the methodology of the Qur'ān. Among Sufis no one seems to refer to this usage in the Qur'ān i.e. the dual nature of the words used for love.

In order to understand the Qur'ān's position and terminology as far as Divine Love is concerned, it is necessary, therefore, to explore the verses that describe the relationship of love between man and God. Therefore, this chapter only aims to study the Qur'anic verses which illuminate the nature of love between God and man

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<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān, 3:14; 76:27

and as a result, will exclude the two other aspects of love *viz.*, the love between man and the opposite sex and the love of worldly desires. However, these two aspects will be referred to shortly since they possess an important relationship to Divine Love.

In the process of studying the Qur'anic verses, recourse will be made to some of the important and influential exegetes. On the other hand, the Sufi orientated exegetes will not be used frequently since the aim is to learn how the Qur'anic verses are understood by non-Sufis. As a result, the information gathered from these sources will be utilised to make a comparison of different Sufi understandings of love and that which is found in the Qur'ān. In addition, such an approach will also enable us to comprehend the nature and differences between the respective paradigms of the Qur'ān and Sufism.

It must be noted that the Qur'ān acknowledges a mutual loving relationship between God and man - both from God towards His creation and from His creation towards God. The following verse is the major verse that includes both of these respective loves; "O you who believe! whoever from among you turns back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people, He shall love them and they shall love Him."<sup>2</sup> This verse indicates two kinds of love: Firstly, God's love for mankind, secondly, mankind's love for God. In addition to this, the verse also refers to the order of love between man and God i.e. God's love precedes man's love. This paradigm (consequential order) will be used in the following chapters of this research. That is, first God's love for man will be studied, then man's love for God will follow.

### **3.3 God's Love For Man:**

By and large, the Exegetes of the Qur'ān, acknowledge that there is a mutual bond of love between God and man. However, the differences arise regarding the nature of this love which is outlined in the Holy Book. Although there have been many explanations made by exegetes, fundamentally, their views fall into two broad categories.

#### **3.3:1 The First Group of Exegetes:**

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:54 (Shakir)

The exegetes, like theologians, firstly discuss whether love as understood by human beings, can be attributed to God. This problem seems to be the most essential and controversial problem among the exegetes as well as theologians. On the one hand, there are those exegetes who defined the word *love* to mean; “inclination of the heart towards the beloved”.<sup>3</sup> For this group, therefore the only logical conclusion from this definition is: love cannot be applied to God in its literal sense. In other words, they think that it is impossible for God to love someone or something other than Himself since inclination of God to someone other than Himself suggests that God is not perfect and therefore desires to achieve perfection through His beloved.<sup>4</sup> This idea is in total disagreement with the transcendental nature of Islamic theology. As explained before,<sup>5</sup> in Islamic theology, God is the most perfect being and He is not in need of His creation. In this regard, it is of interest to note that some exegetes as well as theologians (especially the *Ash‘arites*) are both in agreement in sharing these concerns.

Among this group, al-Zamakhsharī (d.1144), is very important since he not only offers his own opinion as to how to apply love to the Divine being but he also clarifies his position as far as the Sufi understanding is concerned. He believes that God’s love for his creation is to reward them in the best way in return for their good deeds. In other words, God cannot love man Himself directly since this implies equality between man and God as two equal partners of love. He is far too exalted to be the object or subject of man’s love. On the other hand, this concept cannot be denied since it is clearly repeated in the Qur’ān. In order to handle this discord, the exegetes follow the footsteps of the theologians and give a different meaning to the concept of love.

The most favoured meaning that the exegetes burden the concept of love with is “forgiveness”. According to them, the concept of God’s love is interconnected with the idea of God’s forgiveness. For example, in al-Qurtūbī’s (d.1273) understanding, God’s love for man signifies His forgiveness of man. He draws this meaning from another verse. In his understanding, the verse that “Allah does not love the

<sup>3</sup> al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāif al-Ishārāt*, (Egypt, Taḥkik al-Thurās, 1981) p.145;

<sup>4</sup> See J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, (London, Lutterworth Press, 1947), v.2 p.61

<sup>5</sup> See, 1.3.1 Application of Love to God

unbelievers”<sup>6</sup> means; “Allah does not forgive the unbelievers.”<sup>7</sup> In short, it may be said that al-Qurtūbī equates God’s love for man with His forgiveness.

Similarly, al-Qāsimī shares the same opinion as al-Zamakhsharī and does not approve of the usage of love for God in its literal sense. For him love means the inclination of the like towards like, the feeling between the lover and the beloved.<sup>8</sup> It is evident that both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qāsimī are striving to evade attributing to God human features by rejecting the use of love for God in its literal sense. This kind of approach has become an important pattern among the exegetes to this day. As an example the author of an important commentary in the Turkish language, Hamdi Yazir, writes that God’s love for his creation means God’s willing His servant’s good both in this world and the next world.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it may be argued that this line of thought will always be alive among the exegetes at all times.

There is another approach to these oft-quoted verses which speak of God’s love. This approach is to understand the verses in the historical context and strive to find out whom God loved in person in the time of the Prophet. It seems that this approach is used for polemical reasons and especially to supply fuel to the discussion as to who is the rightful caliph after the Prophet. For example, Ibn Kathīr (d.1373), in his voluminous work, does not give any explanation about the nature of God’s love. However, he explains this verse in an historical context. He explores the question as to who the people were whom God loved when this verse was revealed. He mentions the names of some companions of the Prophet such as Abū Bakr.<sup>10</sup> This approach is not favoured among the exegetes since it restricts the verse to the boundaries of time and space. Consequently, such an approach would damage the claim that the Qur’ān has universality and validity in all ages. As a result, few exegetes emphasise the historical aspect of the verses that refer to love between God and man. They prefer to generalise such verses that might be restricted by time and space, in order to include the believers who might live at any time provided that they possess the required qualities.

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<sup>6</sup> Qur’ān; 3:32

<sup>7</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, (Beirut, 1993), v.3, p.60

<sup>8</sup> al-Qāsimī, Jamāl al-Dīn, *Maḥāsīn al-Ta’wīl*, ed. by M. Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, (Cairo, 1376/1957), v.6, p.612

<sup>9</sup> H. Yazir, *Hak Dini Quran Dili*, v.3, p.1717

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, (Beirut, 1992), v.2, p.69

To summarise, this group of exegetes accepts the existence of love between God and man, but they do not accept it in its literal sense with its human connotations. In order to achieve this end, they associate another meaning with the word “love” when it is used for God; they define it as will. “God loves” means “God wills something for someone in a favourable manner” or “God forgives”; on the other hand, they explain man’s love as “obedience” to God. Their understanding of God’s love for man may be explained in the paradigm of “reward in return for obedience”.

In order to clarify the understanding of the first group, the following example may be given. According to the exegetes in the former category the loving relationship between God and man is similar to that of a master and a servant’s relationship. The servant obeys the master and the master, as a result of this obedience, rewards the servant generously. Certainly, this shows that the Master cares for the servants by rewarding their obedience and forgiving their mistakes. However, this also shows that He does not enter into a personal relationship with them. He does not even show His face to His servants because He is high in His palace and is transcendent. Therefore, it is hardly suitable to name this kind of relationship as that of love. There is not much of a personal relationship in this understanding that the concept of love normally requires.

From the Sufi point of view this idea is not acceptable. According to them forgiving and favouring is the *outcome* of the bond of love and only one of the results of it. Therefore they are strongly against equating God’s love with His forgiveness or other bounties.

### **3.3:2 The Second Group of Exegetes**

The first Group of exegetes related God’s love to His actions (*af‘āl*) but not to His essence. God in a sense loved man through His forgiveness. On the other hand, the second group relates God’s love to His essence (*dhāt*). However, they cannot clarify the nature of God’s love. They believe that God loves us personally but in a way that we cannot explain as we cannot understand God’s love. This is because we cannot understand His essence. He loves us without a modality (*bilā kayf*). In their understanding, they go one step further from the basic understanding of the “reward versus obedience” paradigm. However, they do not qualify God’s love for man with

any adjective.<sup>11</sup> It is certain that God loves man as stated in the Qur'ān but His love is not similar to the human loves, as He is not similar to any created form.<sup>12</sup> His love is unique to Himself.

For them it is not sufficient to view the relationship between man and God as one that is confined to the boundaries of reward and punishment. For example, al-'Ālūsī states that God loves us with His essence.<sup>13</sup> This means that He tries to establish a kind of personal relationship between the *master* Himself and the servants. In this sense, it may be said that this group of exegetes are closer to the Sufi understanding of love, for Sufis too go beyond the mere paradigm of reward versus obedience and seek to go on to a higher plane which attempts to seek closeness and nearness to God. However, these exegetes, unlike Sufis, do not establish theories and systems regarding the concept of love. What they do in fact is to give material to the Sufis to elaborate on and transform into a theory.

There is, however, one aspect of love on which both the first and second group of exegetes agree; the precedence of God's love over man's love. They deduce such a conclusion from the order of the words used in the verse that describe the mutual love between man and God. It is a well known principle that commentators of the Qur'ān give importance to the order of the words. A word in a verse bears a different meaning depending on the order. To clarify this point with an example, al-Rāzi (d.1209) suggests that since God's love for men is mentioned before the love of man, it means that God's love precedes man's love. Consequently, if God had not loved man beforehand, there would be no way that man could love Him.<sup>14</sup> Thus, al-Rāzi shares the same opinion as the Sufis in his understanding of the verses, because what he said in plain words is reflected in the sayings of many Sufis.

As far as God's motive behind the creation is concerned, the Qur'ān does not give a clear answer. However, the following Qur'anic verse gives some clue as to the cause of the creation; "I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship

<sup>11</sup> Tabātabā'i, *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, 1983), v.5, p.383; 'Ālūsī, Shihāb al-Din, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, v.2, p. 34

<sup>12</sup> M. Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, v.6, p.438

<sup>13</sup> 'Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, v.6, p. 162

<sup>14</sup> al-Rāzi, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (Cairo, Matba'ah al-Baḥriyyah, 1938), v.12, p.23

Me.”<sup>15</sup>. However, since the concept of worship also includes love as explained in the verse 2:165 it can be indirectly stated that God created the world out of love and in order to be loved. This issue which is not clearly stated in the Qur’ān is clarified by a *ḥadīth* which is claimed to be authentic by the Sufis: “I was a secret treasure and I loved to be known, therefore I have created the creation.” This matter will be discussed further in a following chapter where the *ḥadīths* are studied.

### 3.4 Man’s love for God:

According to the Qur’ān, man has the power and the capability to love God. It may even be stated that only man has the privilege of loving God by His own will. In many places, the Qur’ān states that everything in the universe, be it animate or inanimate, worships God. However, to have a relationship of love with God seems to be only in man’s power. The verse “Verily we have honoured the Children of Adam”<sup>16</sup> might indicate this nature in man. This is also evident from the rich literature of love be it profane or Divine. In the previous chapters, information was provided in order to explain the nature of man’s love from the perspective of different sciences. Now, the Qur’anic guidelines as to man’s love for God will be studied.

It is interesting that the same pattern of thought which is outlined under the title of *God’s love for man* repeats itself also in this section. In other words, the exegetes who did not consider God’s love for man possible in a literal sense (the first group of exegetes), consequently thought that man cannot love God either. In the same way, the exegetes who thought that God may love man, believed that man may also love God. There follows an examination of their explanations and justifications.

#### 3.4:1 The First Group of Exegetes:

They defend the idea that loving God means obeying His law and following the example of the Prophet. This argument is clearly explained in the Qur’ān as “ Say: If you love Allah, then follow me (meaning the Prophet Mohammed) , Allah will love you and forgive your faults, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful”<sup>17</sup> This verse directly correlates man’s love for God with his obedience to the Divine law as described and

<sup>15</sup> Qur’ān, 51:56, (Pickthall)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:70 (Pickthall)



conducted by the Prophet. The cause behind the revelation of this verse (*sabab al-muzūl*) also assures this cognisance. As al-Qurtūbī narrates, when the Christians of Najrān, visited Madinah on their mission, they started to claim that their belief regarding Jesus was a true result of their intense love for God. Upon this the Muslims approached the Prophet and asked “O Prophet of God we also love God, do we not?” Then the archangel Gabriel appeared and revealed to the Prophet the above verse.<sup>18</sup> In this manner, God through Gabriel, clarified to Muslims how to fully demonstrate their love towards God.

The understanding of the first group of exegetes is much closer to the basic understanding of the Qur’ān.<sup>19</sup> As one of the most important exegetes, al-Zamakhsharī, strongly defends this understanding against other arguments. According to him, man’s love for God is to respect and to obey Him: anything which exceeds this boundary is wrong and unacceptable.<sup>20</sup> It appears that for al-Zamakhsharī and the exegetes who adhere to this argument, all accept that the servant should not demand a personal friendship with the master but must be satisfied with the rewards given to him. This is because to be able to love, one needs knowledge about the object of love in order to understand the characteristics of the Beloved’s essence. This is not possible for man as far as God is concerned. Therefore, al-Zamakhsharī denies any other possibility for the understanding of love and in particular the Sufi understanding. He criticises them severely since they claimed that it is possible to love God’s essence. He describes them as the most illiterate people who are the arch enemies of knowledge, as far as their understanding of love is concerned. The reason for this severe criticism is because of the Sufis’ contention that they love the very essence of God: they maintain that their love originates from the contemplation of the essence (*dhāt*) of God.<sup>21</sup> The answer to this allegation will be provided by al-Rāzi in his most detailed discussion of the issue in the following section.

### 3.4:2 The Second Group of Exegetes

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:31 (Pickthall)

<sup>18</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, v.3, p.60

<sup>19</sup> See, Qur’ān, 3:31

<sup>20</sup> al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, v.I, p. 326

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* v.I, p. 621

Their understanding is fundamentally different from the first group. It may also be understood as complementary to it. This is due to the fact that their understanding contains within it a definition based on the criteria of obedience. In their exposition, they in fact create a hierarchy of the definitions of love. As far as they are concerned, love which is solely defined in terms of obedience, is inferior to the concept of love which centres around loving God for his own sake.<sup>22</sup>

Their criticism is further developed for they go on to refute the other side of the argument by posing the question: “on what basis can the love be explained between man and God”. The former group of exegetes understood the cause of love in its literal sense: that is in order to escape pain and to attain pleasure. However, this is the first stage of love: it is not the only definition of love. The second group of exegetes brings another dimension into this understanding; in their opinion, love is not always concerned with attaining pleasure or escaping pain in the physical sense. Apart from these sensual motives there is another motive which seems more intellectual than physical. It is the appreciation of beauty and perfection without physical attachments through intellect only.<sup>23</sup> This manner of viewing and explaining the concept of love i.e. in an intellectual non-physical manner is followed by later Sufis of great repute, in particular by al-Ghazālī.<sup>24</sup>

In line with the above manner of reasoning, the most analytical commentary belongs to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. In his commentary, he treats the subject of love, beginning, by outlining the general attitude of the Muslim scholars towards the love between God and man: He states that “The *ummah* (the whole Muslim community) reached a consensus in using the term love (*al-ḥubb*) for God but they differentiated in its understanding. The majority of the theologians believe that love is an aspect of God’s will; thus it neither pertains to His essence nor to His attributes. When we say that “we love God” this means ‘We love obeying and serving God or we love Him rewarding us.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, v.2, p.34

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p. 34

<sup>24</sup> See 7.3 al-Ghazālī’s Understanding of Love

<sup>25</sup> al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Kabīr*, v.12, p.232

Al-Rāzi does not agree with this understanding and he further criticises it, i.e., to understand “love” merely as “obedience”. He criticises the theologians for being very literalist in their understanding. He states that “these theologians thought that the only loveable things are the physical pleasures such as eating and drinking for their sakes. However, there is another kind of love which is not related to physical enjoyment. It is the spiritual or intellectual appreciation of the object of love. Al-Rāzi thinks that the theologians could not understand that spiritual perfection (*al-kamāl*) may be loved for its sake as well. They thought that love is only related to physical love. To show the differences between intellectual and physical love he gives the following example: “We love prophets and heroes because of the attributes of perfection they hold and not because they benefit us physically. In comparison with God who is the most perfect in His attributes beyond comprehension, the perfection of man equals nothing. Even the perfection which is attributed to man is solely borrowed from God’s perfection. Hence the most perfect among the so-called perfects (*akmal al-kāmilīn*) is God. If we love man for the attributes of perfection such as heroism, generosity and so on, then God must be loved more for the attributes of perfection He possesses. Therefore God is loved and should be loved for His own sake, not for the sake of His rewards.”<sup>26</sup> In this manner al-Rāzi shuns the mere physical understanding of love and inclines more to the understanding of intellectual love.

A logical result of intellectual love is certainly knowledge. Since for the intellect to function the fuel is knowledge. Therefore, the second element of al-Rāzi’s exposition is that he establishes a positive interconnection between love and knowledge. We cannot understand His perfection without gaining some knowledge about Him. For it is impossible to love something regarding which one has no knowledge. al-Rāzi who is not ignorant of this relationship between love and knowledge, holds that the most important cause of love is knowledge (*ma’rifa*) of God; hence he suggests observation of the Divine order in nature. According to him, the more one glances at the wonders that God has created in the universe, the more God’s perfection is recognised. Consequently, the more one knows God the more one loves Him. al-Rāzi also deduces that since God has infinite perfection, knowledge about Him is also infinite. Accordingly, there is no limit in knowing

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<sup>26</sup> al-Rāzi, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, v.12, p.232

(*ma'rifa*) God so there is no limit in loving God.<sup>27</sup> In this connection al-Rāzi implies that the path of love never ceases. The lovers always progress to higher and higher states. In this sense we note the words of al-Bistāmī who said concerning his love “I have drunk seven oceans and still ask is there any more?” It is of interest to note at this point the similarities between the views of al-Rāzi and al-Ghazālī. On reflection, it becomes clear that they share almost identical ideas as to the relationship between love and knowledge. However, al-Ghazālī develops this positive relationship between knowledge and love of God in more depth.<sup>28</sup>

al-Rāzi, also psychologically explains this exposition by giving an example from human life. Even love of despicable things such as love of money and hope of profit makes the merchant work very hard to the extent that he forgets his hunger and thirst. In comparison, for a Sufi it is possible to forget himself for the love of the creator; even the love of base things changes the psyche of the merchant, how, then, does the love for the highest object of love change the Sufi's life? According to al-Rāzi loving God is the highest level of love and should result in the annihilation of one's sensory and intellectual capacity. It may be concluded that for al-Rāzi, love's cause is knowledge and its end is annihilation (*fanā'*) of the lover. Thus al-Rāzi opens the way for Sufis to develop their understanding of love in relationship to annihilation (*fanā'*) and knowledge (*ma'rifa*).<sup>29</sup>

There are many other exegetes who also discussed the issue of the meaning of love in addition to al-Rāzi. Of these, al-Qushayrī is of interest as he sheds light on two further and divergent aspects of the same subject. The first emphasis regards the cause of love towards God. al-Qushayrī believes that the cause for man's love is a God given (*wahbī*) bounty. If God did not love us first we would be unable to love Him; how can humans who are created from mere lumps of clay speak about love? The answer is that our love for Him is a reflection of His eternal and original love for us. It is crucial to note that this notion would go on to form an essential theme concerning all the prominent theories of love which would be expounded in the centuries to follow.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, v.I, p. 233

<sup>28</sup> See, 7.3:1:d The Relationship between Knowledge (*Ma'rifa*) and Love

Secondly, al-Rāzi establishes a direct relationship between love of God and faith. According to him, loving God is an article of faith i.e. it is not possible to have faith in God without loving Him.<sup>30</sup> For him, to believe means to love. It is not enough to say with one's tongue or believe in one's heart that God is worthy of worship. This attitude will not achieve its pure culmination and sincerity if it is not supported by a firm and penetrating love for the reality which a person outwardly claims to worship. In this respect true devotion and worship is synonymous with loving the God to whom a believer turns in devotion.

al-Qushayrī's equation of love with faith reminds us of the following verse: "And there are some among men who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah, whom they love as they love Allah, and those who believe are stronger in love for Allah."<sup>31</sup> In this verse it may be deduced that God is boasting of the strength of love that His believers have for Him. The believers are distinguished from the non-believers by the intensity and power of love as far as their objects of worship are concerned.

In the light of the above verse, it is also of interest to note that the most unforgivable sin of Islam i.e. *shirk* (association of partners to God) is transformed by them into an alternative meaning. The exegetes deduce that this verse also informs the believers of another kind of association (*shirk*). This new concept is that if one contains in one's heart more love for something other than God then one has committed *shirk* in that one has associated partners in one's love for God. Hence the association of idols with God is not from the perspective of His unity only i.e. believing that there are other deities sharing the divinity of God. It is also a kind of association of partners to God to give a portion of that love to others which is only deserved by God.<sup>32</sup>

A comparison between these two groups gives us the essential differences in their understanding of love. For the first group, man's love manifests itself as obedience whereas the second group believes that obedience is not the love itself but a result and fruit of love for God. The former's understanding of love i.e. as obedience is

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 12, p. 233

<sup>30</sup> al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if*, p.421

<sup>31</sup> Qur'ān, 2:165, (Shakir)

<sup>32</sup> 'Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'āni*, v.2, p.34

considered by the second group as only one of the results of the process of love. According to them it is merely one product of the relationship of love. Although they accept the first group's understanding (love equals obedience - to love God is to obey God), they believe, in addition, that the real nature of love is to love God for His perfection (*kamāl*). As far as the Sufi understanding of love is concerned, it appears that the latter group of exegetes is closer to the Sufi understanding of love.

As a result of the above discussion we can summarise the position of the exegetes as follows. The commentators are divided into two groups as far as the concept of Divine Love is concerned. On the one hand, we have certain exegetes who believe that God's love for man may be equated with the goodwill and grace of God upon his creatures. In their understanding, God cannot love His creation in the literal sense of the meaning because this implies God's need of creation.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, we have exegetes who maintain that man's love for God is possible on the personal level. They do not stop at this contention, in fact they proceed one step further and claim that it is *necessary* to love God. They are closer to the Sufi theorists of love since they suggest a personal relationship between man and God.

### 3.5 The Characteristics that God loves in Man

After accepting the possibility of love between God and his creation, the Qur'ān also directs man to the principal qualities that attract God's love. To be suitable for the love of God, the Qur'ān requires Muslims to adorn themselves with good characteristics. The more these good characteristics are acquired, the more man deserves to be loved by God. The Qur'ān explains in great detail the characteristics that God loves or does not love in man.<sup>34</sup> These verses are not related to issues of how to pray and devote oneself to God only. Among the major issues addressed by these verses are the commands that serve to organise social life among the members of the Muslim community in a way characterised by justice and fairness. If an evil act is committed against another human being, it is still a reason to be construed as an obstacle between man and God.

<sup>33</sup> The reason is explained in the previous chapter, see, 1.3.1 Application of Love to God

<sup>34</sup> Tabātabā'i, *al-Mīzān fi tafsīr*, v.5, p.383

it is necessary that both wings are utilised in its flight. Similarly, it is essential for the lover of God to use the wings of fear and love equally. In summary the Qur'ān seems to suggest a balance of fear and love towards God. It is not pure love or pure fear, but a mixture of both in a balanced way.

Although Sufi Classics maintain this balance by mentioning fear and love of God in the same categories, it is interesting to note that this balance is not always kept by the early Sufis as was mentioned in the preceding chapters. Their main concern was fear of God.

4- Apart from that, God also confirms that He loves the servants who do good deeds and behave well: "God likes the servants who do good deeds. (*muḥsinīn*)"<sup>42</sup>

In short, God loves any good action and behaviour, for example, being just and repentant.<sup>43</sup> However, the good characteristics are not limited to the ones which are mentioned in the Qur'ān. In addition to the Qur'anic list, any other good characteristics which are practised by the Prophet must be added to this list since he is the best example for the believers as stated in the Qur'ān. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 3.6 The Characteristics that God does not Love in Man

In the above section, the positive steps to attract God's love were mentioned. In addition to this, the Qur'ān also informs us of the characteristics that would render Divine Love impossible. In general terms, it could be said that sins are the veils between man and God. Among them the one which must be avoided most, is *shirk* as explained below<sup>44</sup>. In order to establish a relationship with God which is strongly based on love, the second step is to refrain from bad characteristics and to strive to wipe them out totally.

The worst unforgivable sin in Islam is *shirk*, attributing partners to God in worship. Attributing partners to God is not only in worship it is also possible with regard to love. For example, the Qur'ān strongly rebukes the unbelievers because of their love

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<sup>42</sup> Qur'ān, 5:93

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:222

God explains to us the conditions of attracting His love in great detail. If man wants to be loved by God he needs to abide by the rules which are explained in the Qur'ān since God promises His love when these rules are accomplished. The following verse confirm this notion: "Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, for them will God bring about love."<sup>35</sup> al-Qurtūbī says that when the servant obeys the commandments, God plants in peoples' hearts a love towards this slave. He refers to the tradition of the Prophet that when God loves a servant he commands Gabriel to announce his love<sup>36</sup>. Al-Suyūṭī also supports this meaning.<sup>37</sup>

The phrase 'good deeds' that is mentioned in the above verse also logically recalls the 'bad deeds' as well. Therefore, the Qur'anic rules which describe the attainment of love may be divided into two sections. Firstly, the characteristics which God loves in His servants and secondly the ones which God does not love. For example, some characteristics which God loves in His servants are:

1- God loves the faithful who strive to be righteous and purify themselves; "for Allah loves the righteous", and, "Allah loves those who make themselves pure."<sup>38</sup>

2- The Believers are also described in the Qur'ān as those who do good deeds for the sole purpose of attaining God's love: "...And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive..."<sup>39</sup>

3- Interestingly, God loves those who fear Him.<sup>40</sup> This is a clear contrast with the Biblical teaching that speaks of a love which casts out fear.<sup>41</sup> It seems that Christian love excludes fear from its principles which form the bedrock of its system of belief. In contrast, the Qur'ān quite often stresses the importance of fear and seems to regard it as a complementary part of love. To give an analogy from the Qur'ān, fear and love can be likened to the two wings of a bird which flies to the Divine presence. Since a bird cannot arrive at its destination by using only one of his wings

<sup>35</sup> Qur'ān, 19:96 (Shakir)

<sup>36</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, v.3, p.136

<sup>37</sup> al-Suyūṭī, J., *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p.412

<sup>38</sup> Qur'ān, 9:108 (Y.A.)

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.8 (Y.A.)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:76; 9:4,7

<sup>41</sup> John, 4:18



for idols: “You have chosen only idols instead of Allah. The love between you is only in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will deny each other and curse each other, and your abode will be the Fire, and you will have no helpers.”<sup>45</sup> It may be deduced from this verse that the love between God and believers will continue even after the Day of Resurrection. All other forms of man’s love will disappear, except man’s love for God: moreover the worldly friendships and love which are not established through God’s love will even transform to hatred. There is also an indication that when the servant meets the creator, all worldly states, such as, fear of God and abstinence from pleasures, will disappear leaving only love. So love is eternal and abiding and is superior to other states because of its continuous and unchanging nature.

*Shirk* is a sin which is committed against God. In addition, there are also other crimes that are considered to be against God such as to be ungrateful to Him: “God does not love the traitor to faith and the thankless (to God).”<sup>46</sup> There is, in addition, another category of crime that is condemned by God. These are the crimes which are committed against Muslim fellows and humanity in general. Both of these are also obstacles between man and God’s love. In short, these characteristics constitute almost anything which harms fellow muslims, hence a believer should distance himself from such evils. To give a few examples of the characteristics that the Qur’ān condemns:

Transgressing the social rules: “for Allah loveth not transgressors.”<sup>47</sup> Wasting the riches given by God: “But waste not by excess: for Allah loveth not the wasters.”<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, it may be said that God’s love is very much related to personal conduct towards the community as well.<sup>49</sup> The more one is loved by society, the more one is loved by God. In other words, if someone is harming society, according to the Qur’anic principles, it may be said that this person is not loved by God. Therefore, loving God means perfecting one’s characteristics in the positive way. Hence, love

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:165, (Shakir)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 29:25 (Pickthall)

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22:38 (Y.A.)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:190 (Y.A.)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:141 (Y.A.)

<sup>49</sup> Tabātabā’i, *al-Mẓān fi Tafṣīr*, v.4, p.384

Secondly, the loving nature of the word Allah is also supported by other attributive names that He named Himself. These names are called by the Qur'ān the beautiful names of Allah<sup>54</sup>. In general scholars mention 99 beautiful names (*al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*) for God, depending on the verses in the Qur'ān. From these names the most often used ones are “*al-Raḥmān*”<sup>55</sup> and “*al-Raḥīm*”. They mean extremely compassionate and extremely merciful.<sup>56</sup> These two names of God are the parts of *Basmala*. *Basmala* is a phrase which is recommended to be recited at the beginning of all actions<sup>57</sup>, therefore it is one of the most recited phrases among the Muslims. It means “In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful” and this phrase appears in the beginning of every chapter in the Qur'ān.

Finally, among the other names that God calls Himself, there is one name which needs special attention. One of the beautiful names of God mentioned in the Qur'ān is “*al-Wadūd*” meaning “full of love”<sup>58</sup>. The word *al-Wadūd* is an example of a peculiar form in Arabic language i.e. that when a verb is put into a derivative form, it gives a meaning that may be both the subject and object of the verb. Therefore, God is first, the subject (the lover) and then, the object (the beloved) of the verb ‘love’. As a subject, God loves His friends and forgives their sins. He is also the object of their love; He is also loved by His believers.<sup>59</sup> Ibn al-Kathīr prefers to explain the word *al-Wadūd* by His forgiveness.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to this meaning mentioned, al-Qurtūbī gives a very different meaning to the word “*al-Wadūd*”, that is *Wadūd* means having “no son”. In this sense he says God has no son for whose sake He would forgive the sins of mankind<sup>61</sup>. In this sense although it is not mentioned by other exegetes, there is an implication of the Christian concept of atonement and love. The implication is that God forgives His servants directly without the intermediary of a son. Although the Qur'ān rejects

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 17:110

<sup>55</sup> See Qur'ān, 17:110

<sup>56</sup> see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v.1, p.19

<sup>57</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, v. 1, p.29

<sup>58</sup> Qur'ān: 85:14 (Y.A.)

<sup>59</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, v. 10, p.195

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v.4, p.497

<sup>61</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* v. 10, p.195

in the Qur'ān is an active process i.e. it requires actions which are beneficial to society. It is not only a mere emotion towards the Beloved. On the contrary, the Beloved demands from His lovers to translate their love for Him into useful actions towards society. This is also clear from the Qur'anic epithet which is often used to describe the Muslims: Those who believed and have done good deeds.<sup>50</sup> Faith and good deeds are often mentioned together, hence it can be argued that Islam is a religion of action rather than of dogma. This is also true for the Qur'anic concept of love.

### 3.7 The Origins of the Word *Allah*

In addition to the Qur'anic verses regarding love, there are other things which must be taken into consideration. For example how God describes Himself in the Qur'ān, is He a loving God or a destructive, vengeful God? In order to answer this question, the names that describe God will shortly be outlined. The issue that will be analysed in this section consists of three aspects. These are: firstly the search into the proper name that God is called in the Qur'ān, secondly other names that He named Himself and lastly among these names the one that directly invites associations with love.

Firstly, God's proper name in Islam is "Allah" meaning God. The derivation of the word Allah gives an important clue as far as the concept of love is concerned. The majority of lexicographers are of the opinion that it is derived from "*Walah*"<sup>51</sup> meaning anxiety, love and sympathy which a mother feels for her child. Later on the word signified "love" only. For that reason in some Indian translations of the Qur'ān "Allah" is translated as "*Man Mohān*" i.e., the Beloved of the hearts.<sup>52</sup> This point is also supported by the verse in which God equates His special name "Allah" with the attributive name "*al-Raḥmān*" (the Merciful). In the Qur'ān, God states: "Say: 'Call upon Allah, or call upon Raḥmān: by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names'.<sup>53</sup> God's proper name "Allah" is not like His other names. It is the greatest name (*al-Ism al-A'zam*) that God has chosen for Himself. The occurrence of these two names together shows that the name Allah has a merciful nature.

<sup>50</sup> Qur'ān, 2:82; 9:111

<sup>51</sup> al-Ṣābūnī, *Rawā'ī 'al-Bayān Tafsīr Āyāt Aḥkām min al-Qur'ān*, (Dimashq, 1977), v.1, p.20

<sup>52</sup> M. Valiuddin, *Love of God*, p.87

<sup>53</sup> Qur'ān, 17:110 (Y. A.)

incarnation, such a commentary on the word *al-Wadūd* seems to be peculiar to al-Qurtūbī only.

Depending on the Arabic grammar, there is another implication that the prefix “al” in the beginning of *al-Wadūd* renders. The prefix “al” also connotes “only” so it may even be said that God is the only lover and the Beloved, since He originates all the loves which are attributed to others<sup>62</sup>. Hence, in the real sense, all the love belongs to Him.

To conclude, God’s proper name as well as the most important attributive names which are deducible from the verses of the Qur’ān, all indicate that, God is a loving and caring God. Although, He named Himself with the names of wrath like *al-Muḍīl* (the Humiliator), *al-Munṭaqīm* (the Avenger), the names which indicate love are more often used by Him.

### 3.8 Profane Love

As stated above, this research does not intend to study profane love. However, since some Sufis draw parallels between Divine and profane love it is necessary to know the Qur’anic approach to profane love. It may be easily deduced from the Qur’ān that the love towards the opposite sex is something natural and created by God. This verse contradicts Sufis, such as Rābi’a, who think love for human beings is an obstacle in their way.

“And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.”<sup>63</sup> The verse clearly explains that it is perfectly natural to love and marry women since they are created for this purpose. Furthermore, this is a mercy of Allah, that he created man and women as complementary to each other. Because of their natures they attract each other.<sup>64</sup> As a result, the Qur’ān does not see marriage as an obstacle to the love of God. Therefore, Muslims and particularly the Sufis always married, and few Sufis like Rābi’a spoke against marriage as an obstacle to Divine Love.<sup>65</sup> In the

<sup>62</sup> T. Bayrak, *The Most Beautiful Names*, (Vermont, Threshold Books, 1985), p.60

<sup>63</sup> Qur’ān, 30:21 (Y.A.)

<sup>64</sup> al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, v.3, p.414

<sup>65</sup> See, 5.2:2 Rābi’a’s rejection of Marriage

light of these verses Rābi'a seems not to have any Qur'anic proofs to support her anti-marriage love theory.

Although the Qur'ān does not consider the love between man and woman as intrinsically evil, it tries to keep this love within its legal boundaries. The Qur'anic paradigm of love indicates that the loves that are directed to profane objects should not be more than the love that is shown to God. Therefore, the Qur'ān does not tolerate excessive love between man and woman, as well as love for other worldly desires. In the following verse God urges the believers that if their love of worldly desires exceeds their love for God, then they should await the calamities from God as promised clearly in the following verse: "Say: If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your mates and your kinsfolk and property which you have acquired, and the slackness of trade which you fear and dwellings which you like, are dearer [literally more beloved *aḥabba*] to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait till Allah brings about His command"<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, the Qur'ān encourages the principle that the love of worldly things should be beneficial to Divine Love and in agreement with it. The Qur'ān gives the example of the Prophet Solomon and such a love; "And he said, "Truly do I love the love of good, with a view to the glory of my Lord,"- until (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of night)."<sup>67</sup> In conclusion, the Qur'ān does not approve of excessive and blind enmity to worldly love as long as they do not obstruct the way to God's love. This idea was not welcomed by the early Sufi ascetics who hated all worldly gains.

In contrast, the Bible seems to discourage the love of women. The reason for this is that love is the first sin man committed in Paradise before the Fall. The idea of original sin and Eve's seductiveness are emphasised. As a result, married life is only tolerated on a utilitarian basis for the procreation of men and to increase the followers of the Church.<sup>68</sup> It may be argued that because of this attitude in the Bible, it is not possible to find a positive relationship between profane and Divine Love.

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<sup>66</sup> Qur'ān; 9:24 (Shakir)

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 38:032 (Y.A.)

<sup>68</sup> F. Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as a Way*, p.130

On the other hand, the Bible seems to direct this love to another channel i.e. the neighbour. In the Christian paradigm, to love the neighbour is an explicit commandment and specifically mentioned in the Bible. In comparison to the Bible, the Qur'ān does not stress the love of neighbour as a part of Divine Love. However, the Qur'ān does this in a more general sense by commanding good and forbidding evil to anyone as explained above.

### 3.9 The Concept of Love in the Bible

In order to understand the place that the concept of "love" occupies in the Qur'ān, a comparison with the Bible might be useful. When making a comparison of the holy books of Christianity and Islam, it must be remembered that the Qur'ān does not totally refuse the truthfulness of the Bible,<sup>69</sup> but it claims that some parts of the Bible are corrupted. Therefore, the similarities that may be expected from the two Holy books are of the same origin from the Qur'anic point of view. To serve this aim, the paradigm that is used for the Qur'ān will be used for the Bible as well. In this way it will be easy to follow and compare the patterns of thought in the two Holy books.

In the Qur'ān, love is considered as one of the modes of relationship between God and man. It is difficult to claim that love is the most essential relationship, since there are other kinds of relationships that overshadow the concept of love. For example, other terms such as *taqwā* (fear of God or refraining from the forbidden), *tawba* (repentance), occur more often than love does. Hence, love is not given primary importance among the other Qur'anic terms as it is one Qur'anic motif among many others. In addition to this, there is no direct commandment to love God as there is in the Bible. Also, in many verses, the Qur'ān warns man to fear God.<sup>70</sup> Under these circumstances, it seems that, in comparison, *love* plays a central role as a new understanding in the Bible: love is represented as the essence of religion and the most distinctive attribute of God. In particular, the verse "God is love", is the

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<sup>69</sup> The Qur'ān speaks of a single Gospel which is given to Jesus. Hence, Muslims think that there is only one Gospel that is revealed to Jesus and dictated by him as the Qur'ān was dictated. See, the Qur'ān, 5:47 However, from a Christian perspective the Gospels are the records of Jesus' sayings and life. In that sense they equal the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>70</sup> As an example the following verses might be cited. Qur'ān, 2:40; 6:72;

most fundamental concept<sup>71</sup> in Christianity. As a result, it may be said that love plays more of a central role in the Bible than in the Qur'ān.

### **3.9:1 God's Love for Man According to the New Testament**

The concept of love is repeated often in the Bible. However, according to Moffat, in the synoptic tradition, there is much more of the spirit than of the letter of 'love'. Especially the conception of God as Father in itself implies the love between Him and his creation.<sup>72</sup> Therefore in Moffat's view, the truth is implied rather than stated. In addition to the love of the Father the picture is completed with that of the Son.

As to the manifestation of this fatherly love, there are tremendous differences between the Islamic and Christian understanding. In the Qur'ān, God's love was manifested in His forgiveness of man. In a general sense this is also a valid understanding of the Bible. However, there is a great difference between the nature of these two types of forgiveness. In the Qur'anic concept of forgiveness, God forgives His slaves without being changed in His nature. Whereas in the Biblical understanding, God forgives His slaves rather differently. To cleanse humanity from sin and especially from original sin, He voluntarily takes on human form and lets Himself suffer the shortcomings of human nature. This is the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus and his eventual crucifixion.<sup>73</sup> Especially, through the crucifixion which is the ultimate manifestation of God's love, a new relationship between God and man is established, relying on the sacrificial love of God for man. Regarding God's love for humanity, John writes: "...not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning *sacrifice* for our sins."<sup>74</sup> This verse encapsulates the most distinctive features of God's love for man.

Hence, in the Biblical sense, God's love is active and self-sacrificial. It is active because it is totally God's gracious initiative. God has no expectations or any benefit from His love for us. He is the first initiator of love towards man and His sacrifice and love for humanity reaches its peak in the death of Christ. However, God's love does not carry the imperfections that our love possesses. His love is not a result of

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<sup>71</sup> C. R. Smith, *The Bible Doctrine of Grace*, (London; The Epworth Press, 1956), p.95

<sup>72</sup> J. Moffat, *Love in the New Testament*, p.67

<sup>73</sup> For the dual nature of God see, *Readings in Christian Theology*, ed. by Hodgson, P C.& King, Robert, (London, Fortress Press, 1985), p.205-236

need for the beloved. His love is totally gracious, He has nothing to gain by loving the works of His hands; whatever He does is out of sheer benevolence. He loves man although mankind possesses nothing valuable which attracts love. Furthermore, God sacrifices His only Son to atone for the sins of humanity. Hence the Son is the focal point of the Father's love.<sup>75</sup>

Paul especially emphasises the sacrificial aspect of God's love for man. According to him, there was an initial bond of love between God and Adam before the fall. However, the crime which Adam and Eve committed broke off this relationship. God, however, was not happy with the situation of man's separation for Him. To re-establish the initial bond of love and enable redemption, He introduced the crucifixion. Therefore, God's love is the source of reconciliation, which had been brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus. It seems that in the paradigm of Paul's love the central focus is the idea of Jesus' crucifixion.

The Qur'anic concept of love is completely different from the Biblical paradigm of love. It does not accept incarnation and trinity.<sup>76</sup> In order to see the differences, the Qur'anic paradigm of God's love may be applied to the Biblical one; the Qur'anic paradigm of love is depicted by the example of a master-servant relationship. If we apply the same example to Christian love, the following picture would emerge: the master having seen the miserable condition of His servants, degraded himself to the level of a servant. He disguised Himself in the dress of the servant and tasted the same shortcomings that they were suffering. In this way, God established the relationship which was broken before. From the Qur'anic perspective<sup>77</sup>, this kind of attitude is unthinkable for God. He does not need to sacrifice Himself, He cannot enter a son-father relationship with His creation and to believe this is absolute blasphemy.

This point brings us back to the understanding of Jesus according to the Qur'ān. From the Qur'anic point of view, Jesus is only a prophet of God<sup>78</sup> and like other Biblical prophets, he has no share whatsoever in the divinity of God. The miracles

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<sup>74</sup> John, 4:10

<sup>75</sup> D. J. Atkinson, *The Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, p.9

<sup>76</sup> Qur'ān, 5:17

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:17



attributed to Jesus do not make him God, they only prove that he is a true prophet. Concerning his suffering on the cross, firstly it is denied by the Qur'ān. Secondly, even if the crucifixion is accepted, this does not change anything as far as Jesus' nature is concerned. Because the Qur'ān mentions the stories of many prophets who were killed or injured by their people. Hence, the Biblical version of God's love for man is Islamically unacceptable for the reasons which have been explained above.

However, there are similarities between the two loves, as well. The Qur'ān agrees with Biblical love concerning several features. In the Qur'ān, it is God who instigates the love towards His creation. In the second feature, God informs us that "The Prophet Muhammad, like Jesus, was sent as a mercy from God for the worlds."<sup>79</sup> But the difference is that Jesus is a prophet only, having no Divine nature; there is no father and son relation between God and His messenger. Although the messenger is a manifestation of God's mercy and love for His creation, there is still a strict separation between God and Jesus as there is between God and other prophets.<sup>80</sup> The Prophet Muhammad is a human being, carrying the Divine message to humanity. Therefore in the Qur'ān, God's love is not particularly centred around the Prophet Muhammad. In the third place, God's love is active, since He has initiated the love towards His creation, but this is not self-sacrificial in the Christian sense. In the Qur'ān, God always confirms that He is quick to accept the repentance of believers and slow to punish them because of their sins but this does not mean sacrifice. It rather shows His grace towards humanity. In the last feature, the Qur'ān commands love between believers but does not command one to love the ungodly and unbelievers. This attitude of the Qur'ān is similar to the Old Testament understanding, rather than that of the New Testament's.

### **3.9:2 God's love for man according to the Old Testament**

In this connection, the understanding of love in Judaism might be of assistance, since the Qur'anic understanding of love is similar to this rather than to the Christian one. In comparison to the New Testament understanding of God's love for man, from a Judaistic perspective this love manifests itself differently. In Jewish belief, God's love is exclusive and particularistic. This means that the object of God's love

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:49-51

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:164

is generally the people of Israel. Even the prophets never say that the Lord loves other peoples, or that mankind is object of His love. God's love is the result of His election, manifested in the covenant he has made with Israel. This clearly appears in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, where the Divine Love for Israel is mentioned. His free and personal love for Israel is most strongly manifested especially by the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt.

Unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament states that God's love is not given freely to everybody. He loves the righteous and obedient.<sup>81</sup> If the people appear to be unworthy of God's love because of ingratitude and infidelity, His love will change into wrath.<sup>82</sup> Hence, if the sinner does not repent and give up sin, he cannot be an object of God's love. These ideas are almost identical with the Qur'anic understanding of God's love for man.

However, there are certain elements that the Qur'ān rejects in the Jewish understanding of God's love. Especially their claim of being the only loved ones of God. The Qur'ān refutes the exclusiveness of love for the Jews only: "And both the Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of Allah and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you. Nay, you are but human beings, of those He created..."<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the Qur'ān admits that previously the Jews occupied a special and privileged relationship with God. However when they broke their covenant<sup>84</sup> they lost their special place. They became equal with the rest of humanity. If they do good they are rewarded and if they do evil they are punished.<sup>85</sup> The implication of this verse is that the Beloved does not punish His lovers. This idea is very common among the exegetes<sup>86</sup> a beloved does not will evil for his lovers. Because the Christians and Jews will be punished, it is not a valid claim. Hence, the Qur'ān urges that they need to leave this vain hope and accept the truth.

The Qur'ān also suggests a test for the Jews and Christians who claim to be the sole loved ones of God "Say: If the future abode with Allah is specially for you to the

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<sup>80</sup> This matter will be discussed fully in the next chapter.

<sup>81</sup> Ps. 146:8, Prov, 15:29

<sup>82</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1971) v.2, p.525

<sup>83</sup> Qur'ān, 5:18

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:13-15

<sup>85</sup> Tabersī, *Majma' al-Bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Sayda, Matba'at al-'irfān, 1935), v.2, p.176

<sup>86</sup> al-Suyūti, *Tafsīr al-Jalālajn*, (Beirut, n.d.), p.145; Ibn Kathīr, *-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, v.2, p.33

exclusion of people, then invoke death if you are truthful.<sup>87</sup> In this way the Qur'ān seems to test the lovers of God by suggesting that they choose death, since death means union with the "lover". And a true beloved is always eager to meet his beloved. Thus, the Qur'ān uses the human paradigms of love to test the lovers of God.

In the Jewish scriptures, God's love does not extend to the enemy. In fact, the Old Testament in one place commands hatred of the enemy "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy"<sup>88</sup> Hence, it may be suggested that Judaism uses hatred as a value creating process. This notion is also supported by the description of God's nature in the Old Testament. Many verses in the Jewish Bible describe God as a jealous God who always takes His revenge from His enemies.<sup>89</sup> He commands them to take vengeance: "The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'You are to exact vengeance for Israel on the Midianites....'<sup>90</sup> At times, the Jewish God seems like a ruthless king who is giving commands to his army. This attitude is of course in complete disagreement with Christian love.<sup>91</sup> However, it is not dissimilar to the Qur'anic paradigm of love since the Qur'ān also mentions God's vengeance and punishment for the non-believers and enemies.

All these characteristics of Jewish love explain why Christianity places so much emphasis on love as a Divine and human form of relationship. Although, the same command is used in both the religions, it does not have the same meanings. Christian love gives a completely different meaning to the commandment. As Nygren states; "It is not the commandment that explains the idea of love but the quite new meaning that Christianity has given it."<sup>92</sup> This means that although, Christianity and Judaism take their philosophy of love from the same commandment, they differ very fundamentally in the understanding of the verse.

The reason for allocating such a long discussion to the Christian and Jewish concepts of love is that they have their parallels in the Qur'ān and Sufism. The Qur'anic conception of love is closer to that of the Old Testament in its simplicity and clearness. Whereas the Sufi paradigms are much closer to the Christian

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<sup>87</sup> Qur'ān; 2:94 (Shakir)

<sup>88</sup> Matthew, 5:43

<sup>89</sup> Exodus, 34:15; Numbers, 25:10-12

<sup>90</sup> Numbers, 31:1-2

<sup>91</sup> A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.64

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61

understandings of love. The details and possible reasons for these similarities will be dealt with in the following chapters.

### **3.9:3 Man's love for God according to Christianity**

Concerning man's love for God, the Bible contain many explicit verses. For example, there is a clear commandment to love God: "...and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."<sup>93</sup> So it may be argued that loving God is the fundamental pillar of Christianity. God's unmotivated and sacrificial love for man, described above, demands a reciprocal, imitative response from those who benefit from it.<sup>94</sup> This response is required, not only towards God but also towards neighbours.

As to the nature of man's love for God, the New Testament gives quite similar ideas to the Qur'anic conceptions of love. For example, loving God means serving Him and obeying the commandments. Jesus says; "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."<sup>95</sup> Secondly, the Bible states that loving God means preferring Him over worldly gains; "No one can serve two masters: Either he will hate one and love the other, or else he will stand by the one and despise the other, you cannot serve both, God and Mammon."<sup>96</sup> Therefore, loving God means sheer devotion to Him in a state of humble confidence and contentment with Him.

Some Christian theologians, like their Muslim counterparts, are concerned with the dissimilarity of man's love to God's love. For example, Nygren shares the same concerns with the Muslim theologians that we should not place God and man in the same level. Nygren stresses that these two loves possess completely different natures. "Therefore, we cannot speak of loving God in precisely the same sense as we speak of loving one another. Human love includes the motive of enriching and

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<sup>93</sup> Mark; 12:30

<sup>94</sup> D. J. Atkinson, *The Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, p.9

<sup>95</sup> John, 14:21.29

<sup>96</sup> Matthew, vi.24

developing other's lives. This meaning is absent from the thought of love for God."<sup>97</sup> He is the perfect Being and He is not in need of anyone's love.

Although there are similarities, the essential difference between Islam and Christianity is that the Christian concept of love is very much centred around dogma. Hence, it is more important to believe in the dogmas, such as crucifixion on the cross, resurrection and atonement. In other words, the theoretical side of man's love for God is stressed more than the practical requirements. In contrast, the Qur'anic paradigm of love emphasise the practical requirements of love. After believing in God, the Qur'ān, like Judaism, requires strict obedience to the law. Law and love are equally emphasised, whereas in the Biblical tradition the practice of the law is sacrificed for the dogmas of love.

### **3.9:4 Man's love for God according to Judaism**

It is quite safe to say that the manifestation of man's love for God according to Judaism, is almost identical with that of the first group of exegetes presented above. God loves Israel as His chosen people and favours them over others<sup>98</sup>. In return, Israel loves God because of the covenant they have made with Him. Therefore, God's love demands a corresponding love from the other. God's love for Israel is not free and absolute as it is in Christianity. His love for Israel is conditional, it is not shown to everybody, it is only directed to the believers who keep the covenant. Therefore man's love for God is manifested as obedience to the requirements of the law, and loyalty to Him.<sup>99</sup> It is also a love which is intimately related to fear and reverence.<sup>100</sup> God's love for man depends on man's adhering to these principles, otherwise, the love will quickly transform into wrath.

From the Qur'anic point of view, all these commentaries are without exception acceptable, there is nothing objectionable. Therefore the Qur'anic understanding of love is closer to the Jewish understanding. This similar attitude is also valid for the understanding of law as well. In both religions the law is Divine and must be

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<sup>97</sup> A. Nygren, *Agape*, p.94-95

<sup>98</sup> Psalms 78:68, 87:2

<sup>99</sup> Deutronomy, 4:4; 10:20, 11:22; 13:5

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:29; 6:24

observed to the letter. Both approaches require practical outcomes and are not centred around dogma.

It is interesting that both in the Old and New Testaments man is commanded to love God with all his heart and power. In the Qur'ān, however, there is no direct commandment to love God with the same emphasis, but there are indirect references to this effect. However this gap was filled by the traditions of the Prophet. In many *ḥadīths*, God through the medium of His Prophet openly commands man to love God.

### 3.10 Love of neighbour

Love of the neighbour, *per se*, is not a subject of this study. However, it is very important to love one's neighbour in both Christian and Jewish traditions, because neighbourly love seems to be a manifestation of man's love towards God. The commandment to love God is immediately followed by the love of one's neighbour. "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."<sup>101</sup> This verse shows the importance given to this love in Christianity. As Bornkamm asserts "the summary of the law in the double commandment of love is probably peculiar to the message of Jesus."<sup>102</sup>

The Old Testament also has the same commandment to love God and one's neighbour. However, in Jewish love it is not so closely associated with Divine love. It is one of the many obligations that might be considered in the scope of the law. However, in Christianity, loving the neighbour without any expectation became one of the essentials of the faith, since neighbourly love is considered as the reflection of God's freely given 'agape' love to humanity. The immediate occurrence of the commandment regarding loving one's neighbour after God, signifies that neighbourly love is a reflection of God's *agape*: as God loves us without any motive, in the same way the Christian should love his or her neighbour disinterestedly.

Neighbourly love does not discriminate between the righteous and the ungodly. It even extends to one's enemy. The New Testament insists this love must be the

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<sup>101</sup> Mark, 12:31

<sup>102</sup> cited in Schrage, Wolfgang, *The Ethics of the New Testament*, p.70

distinguishing feature of Christian love. To love your brother or sister in Christ is both a mark of obedience to the Lord and an appropriate response to the way in which God already loves you. In order to show this difference Jesus says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’<sup>103</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”<sup>104</sup>

Christian love is the exact imitation of God’s love: God lavishes His gifts even on the ungrateful, likewise the Christians should do favours to those who have no intention of returning them.

The priority of the law of love, as stated in Mark 12, means that love of God and one’s neighbour are no longer an ordinary requirement demanded by the Torah: it is “greater”<sup>105</sup> than the others and the “first”<sup>106</sup> of all. Of course, both the Qur’ān and the Old Testament do not talk of such a high level of neighbourly love. Therefore Christianity is quite unique in this matter. In comparison with the Qur’ān, the second part of the commandment concerning “neighbourly love” is the main difference between the two Holy books. We find similar commands in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, but they are more a matter of ethics rather than theology as in the Bible.

Another point of interest in the commandment of neighbourly love is that it even embraces enemies. (Luke 6:35 and Matt. 5:54) These enemies include both personal and religious enemies, the enemies of God and of God’s people. This commandment is in clear disagreement with the Qur’anic commandment of loving for the sake of God and hating for His sake e.g. to love the friends of God and hate His enemies. God openly commands the believers : “O you who believe! Take not my enemies and yours as friends (or protectors),- offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you...”<sup>107</sup> The Qur’ān claims that it commands a middle way (*ummatan wasaṭan*) between Judaism and Christianity. It

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<sup>103</sup> Matthew 5:43.10

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:45, Version: RSV

<sup>105</sup> Mark, 12:31

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 12:29; Schrage, W., *The Ethics of the New Testament*, p.71

does not command hate and revenge on the children of enemies, as in the Old Testament, or command one to love enemies as in the Bible. It commands a balanced love in the middle of these two extremes.

Secondly, the exegetes believe that the Christians and Jews distorted the meanings of “sonship”. This is also clearly mentioned in the Qur’ān.<sup>108</sup> For example Ibn Kathīr states that God addressed Jesus and Israel as His sons to honour them. However, distorting this metaphorical language they claimed that they are like sons of God in closeness to Him.<sup>109</sup>

In summary, although the Qur’ān stresses the importance of love both in relation to God and the creation, it is not as strong as in the New Testament. The Qur’ān also has many verses describing hell-fire, the dreadful end for sinners, and God’s attributive names which describe His majestic side.

### 3.11 Conclusion

1-A quick glance into the verses of the Qur’ān shows that the Qur’ān contains verses that make it possible to establish a close loving relationship between God and man.

2-The love between man and God is a mutual love. However, there is a difference between man’s love and God’s love.

3-If the commentaries are disregarded, the Qur’anic verses relating to the concept of love seem to define man’s love for God as obedience and piety. To use Nygren’s classification it could be called a “*nomos*” relationship. In such a relationship, God’s love for man is understood as his rewarding and favouring him above others.

4-The commentators on the Qur’ān have two inclinations, one group sides with the theologians and understands love as rewarding obedience. For the other group, love means appreciation of intrinsic values in the object of love, this is closer to the Sufi authors, However, the commentators who are closer to the Sufi Classics never divide

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<sup>107</sup> Qur’ān, 60:1 (Y.A.)

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:13

<sup>109</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, v.2, p.33;  
al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, p.145;  
al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi’*, v.3, p.80



people into different groups such as the *awām* and *khawāṣ* (the lay people and the elected ones) as in the Sufi classics.

5- The Qur'ān cannot be described as a book of love only. It equally uses the motif of fear as a relationship between God and man. In comparison, it is clear that the Bible gives an essential place to love in its system of belief.<sup>110</sup>

6-The Qur'anic paradigm of love is centred around the practical elements. It requires many good activities and the refraining from evil actions. To do this one needs to follow the Prophet in all matters of life. In this regard, the Qur'ān is in complete harmony with the Old Testament. On the other hand, the paradigm of love in the New Testament is more closely connected with dogma.

7-The Qur'anic paradigm of love does not disapprove of profane love if it is kept in its limits. The criterion of this limit is when there is a collision of these two loves i.e. Divine and worldly loves, one should sacrifice the latter for the former.

8-The Qur'anic paradigm of love does not accept any privileged status for any nation or ancestry. Everybody is equal in God's eyes and everybody is expected to show the same obedience towards Him.

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<sup>110</sup> A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.41

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Paradigm of Love in the Traditions of the Prophet

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the Qur'anic paradigm of love. In this chapter the concept of love will be explored from the perspective of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, since the Prophet himself also explained the subject of love extensively. This chapter can also be considered as a continuation of the previous chapter which is on the Qur'anic paradigm of love. The reason for this is that the Ḥadīth explains the ambiguous *mutashābihāt* remarks of the Qur'ān. Hence, this chapter will aim to look at the different aspects that the Ḥadīth brings and will endeavour to omit repetitions.

It must be also remembered that in Islam, the model of the Prophet is always taken as an example in all religious issues.<sup>1</sup> In the following verse, the Qur'ān commands the believers to follow the example of the Prophet. "Say: If you love God, then follow me (the Prophet)."<sup>2</sup> This command has two significant outcomes. The first is God commands believers to obey the Prophet, secondly the phrase "if you love God" directly relates obeying the Prophet to loving God. Hence, this verse makes the Prophet a channel of God's love. In effect, what this means is that one can attain the closeness and love of God through the Prophet.

The sayings of the Prophet, which are known as "ḥadīth", place special emphasis on the concept of love. In comparison to the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth contain abundant information which addresses the issue of love between God and man, as well as between human beings. One possible explanation for this fact is, perhaps due to the fact that the Prophet used a language which was grounded in the everyday experiences of the people. Furthermore, the Prophet lived amongst the people and this provided many opportunities for him to make pronouncements on many issues, including, on the nature and different aspects of love. On the other hand, the Qur'anic verses and pronouncements were few in number and employed a

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<sup>1</sup> J. Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam, Spirituality and the Religious lives of Muslims*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996) p.235

<sup>2</sup> Qur'ān, 3:31

language and vocabulary which inclined towards the transcendence of God. In contrast to the transcendental language of the Qur'ān, the Ḥadīth have the characteristics of an immanent language. Because the language of the Ḥadīths leaned more towards *tashbīh*, they are easily understood. This might be the reason why classical Sufi authors such as al-Ḥujwīrī, and Qushayrī, relate these traditions without making extensive commentaries on them<sup>3</sup>. They take it for granted that these traditions would be understood without any need for further exposition or explanation.

This chapter will be tackled in a similar manner to the previous ones as far as the structural organisation is concerned. We will begin by looking at God's love for man. This will be followed by man's love for God. This was the framework adopted in the previous chapters. However, in addition to this, we will also look at the issue of love between human beings and man's love for God through the Prophet. This final form of love is not the subject of our study *per se*, it is only covered because the Ḥadīth literature at times considers human love as an indication or manifestation of Divine Love.

Bearing in mind the compendious collections of Ḥadīth available to the researcher, this study will primarily rely on the traditions that Sufi classics extensively referred to in their writings. Secondly the authorised Ḥadīth collections will be used in order to escape the discussion of the authenticity of the ḥadīths used. These collections are *Bukhārī*, *Muslim*, *Abū Dawūd*, *Tirmidhī*, *Muwaṭṭa*. Hence this chapter will exclude some ḥadīths which are used quite often by the Sufis but not authenticated by the Ḥadīth authorities. For example the oft used ḥadīth by Ibn 'Arabi: "I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known...". However, such ḥadīths will be discussed, in the following chapters if they are discussed by the Sufis that this research covers. Hence this chapter will aim to depict the paradigm of love independently from the Sufi influences. In this way, the paradigm of love will be presented according to the traditions of the Prophet which are accepted authentic by the ḥadīth scholars. This will enable us to

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<sup>3</sup> See for these traditions; al-Ḥujwīrī *Kashf*, p.305; al-Qushayrī, *The Principles*, pp.325-26

compare different Sufi paradigms of love with the Prophetic one and see the development of the concept of love after the Prophet.

#### 4.2 God's love for man:

As a starting point for analysing the paradigm of love in the traditions of the Prophet, the following ḥadīth is of great interest from our perspective. For not only does it confirm passages in the Qur'ān but at the same time, it clarifies the Qur'anic text. In particular, it addresses the way in which 'God's love for man' manifests itself. As was explained in the previous chapter, the Qur'ān does not give much detail on how God's love for man is manifested. In contrast, the following ḥadīth gives some hints in this direction, namely, that God's love for man manifests itself gradually: starting from Himself this love is spread over all the angels and mankind:

“When Allah decides to love any of his servants, He summons Gabriel (on whom be peace) and commands him: “I love So-and-so, therefore you, too, love him”. So Gabriel begins to love him. Then Gabriel calls out in heaven, proclaiming: Allah loves so-and-so, therefore you, too, love him”. Following this the inhabitants of heaven begin to love him. Then acceptance [love] is established for him amongst the inhabitants of earth.”<sup>4</sup>

From this ḥadīth, several conclusions can be derived. First, this ḥadīth confirms that love can and does exist between man and God. This is a significant statement as it provides a strong foundation for later Sufis to build their paradigms of love. None of this would have been possible, if the basic assumption that love is not a phenomenon which merely exists amongst humans but it also possible to exist between God and man. To say that God loves man implies human characteristics attributed to God. This implication, fundamentally erodes the pivotal position that the concept of *tanzīh* has in Islam, i.e., that there can be no similarities between God and man. Therefore, although the ḥadīth is clearer and more detailed in its treatment of the concept of love than the Qur'ān, it nevertheless does not categorically state an unambiguous or clear position.

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<sup>4</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Tawḥīd*, n.577, trans. by Khan, M. M., (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1391/1973);

Secondly, this ḥadīth informs us of the criteria which can be used to determine whether a man is loved by God or not. One needs only look at the popularity and love that a man has amongst his fellow human beings. If a man is loved and respected amongst his fellow human beings then that is an indication that he is likely to be the beloved of God. This criterion is interesting for it takes love out of the realm of the Divine and immeasurable into the realm of humanity and that which is measurable. In a sense, this ḥadīth makes love more accessible and understandable by ordinary people and gets rid of the mystique which usually surrounds the concept of Divine Love. This is in stark contrast to the later Sufi understanding which develops complex, confusing systems and criteria of Divine Love which are incomprehensible to ordinary believers and only open to the selected few from amongst the Sufis.

The simplicity of this approach is commendable. Nevertheless, in this simplicity, too, there is scope for confusion. The mere fact that someone is popular and loved amongst the people does not necessarily mean that that person is the beloved of God. For example, does the fact that a movie star is popular amongst the people mean that they have traversed the stages of Divine Love? It would appear that this was not the intended meaning of this criterion. To fully understand the ambit and application of it we must make explicit the assumptions on which this criterion is based. Foremost amongst these is that the community must comprise pious Muslims: it is their opinion of the man in question which counts. In addition, it could be said that popularity amongst the people is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. In other words, popularity must exist but there is need for more, for example, the man in question must have a pious and obedient character. This function of witnessing the character of others has its roots in the Qur'ān. Muslims are called as *shuhadā'* witnesses of God on earth. This notion is also emphasised by the Prophet: "You are the witnesses of God on earth" supports this idea and confirms that the people's opinion about one another will be valued on Judgement day.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the ḥadīths place man in a high position in order to determine the

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Muslim, Abu al-Husayn, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ: Birr*, n.157

<sup>5</sup> al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.506; Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, al-Janā'iz*, n.448

value of love. Man is both the lover and the judge who decides on the validity and strength of love.

Thirdly, this ḥadīth stresses the mutual nature of the love between God and man. It is not a one way process either on the part of God or on the part of man. This notion is not new as it is also found in the Qur'ān. Indeed, this is one of the instances in which the ḥadīths reiterate and expand on the Qur'anic paradigm of love. The Qur'ān mentions that "He loves them and they love Him". As well as the ḥadīth quoted above, other ḥadīths provide us with additional elements which go to make up this mutual relationship. The most significant embellishment in this respect is that man's love is made a precondition of God's love. If man wants to be loved by God, then he himself must first love God. In other words, he must initiate the process. In a ḥadīth narrated by 'Ubāda bin al-Ṣāmit, it is reported that the Prophet said:

"Whoever loves to meet Allah, Allah (too) loves to meet him and whoever hates to meet Allah, Allah (too) hates to meet him".<sup>6</sup>

It is accepted by most of the exegetes that love is initiated by God. However, this ḥadīth seems to depict a different picture. According to this ḥadīth, man is the initiator of love and the existence of love depends on the actions of man rather than God. The choice that he makes, determines whether or not he will be the beloved of God. This position is interesting from another perspective. It indicates that man can become the beloved of God on the basis of his actions. This is in contrast to some of the later Sufis who claimed that man could only become the beloved of God on the basis of His favour alone. On the face of it, this seems to be a contradiction. Nevertheless, one possible synthesis between these two viewpoints can be suggested. Man's actions allow the possibility of him being entered into the register of the beloved. His actions do not mean that God is bound by the force of a causal relationship to make the man His beloved. In the final analysis, it is God's choice (or mercy) alone which determines the inclusion of man amongst the beloved of God.

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<sup>6</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Riqāq*, n.41

Another point which is hinted at by the aforementioned ḥadīth is the Sufi position regarding death. Does the desire to meet Allah mean the desire for death? For beyond that, lies the meeting with God. Necessarily this implies that to fear death indicates a strong weakness of love. An allusion to this idea is found in the Qur'ān when it advises the Jews to long for death if they are true in their assertion that they are the beloved of God.<sup>7</sup> In other words, fear of death is being presented as a criterion to judge the level of man's love for God.

This position would appear to go against the natural fear of death which exists amongst men and which is recognised in other ḥadīths. Furthermore, fear of death need not necessarily imply a weak love of God. The lover may fear death *because* of his love. For instance, the lover may be ashamed to face his beloved due to a sense of not fulfilling the duties and obligations of a lover. An alternative view put forward by al-Ḥattābī, while commenting on this ḥadīth, is that the longing to meet Allah referred to in the ḥadīth, does not refer to love of God. Rather, it implies a longing for the life of the hereafter in comparison to the desire to stay in the life of this world forever. This interpretation side-steps the need to enter into a judgement on the lover's quality of love.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning the relation between death and love, the Sufis in later ages developed very different concepts. As an example, al-Ḥallāj demanded his own death, pronouncing that in his death lies his life. They thought of death as the removal of the barrier between the lover and the Beloved.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.2:1 Causes of God's love for Man:**

In the Qur'anic paradigm of love, it is suggested that God loves those believers who do good deeds like charity, repentance, patience and so on. In addition, it was suggested that God loves those who refrain from the evil and selfish demands of the ego. All these principles are reinforced by the Ḥadīth tradition which provide a more detailed way of conduct. Most of the chapters of Ḥadīth books are devoted

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'ān, 62:6

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, Egypt, v.24, p.159

<sup>9</sup> See 6.4:2:1 Suffering in God's love.

to good conduct that will attract God's love for man. Since they are similar with the Qur'anic paradigm of love they will not be repeated again.

However, there is one ḥadīth which brings a new dimension to the good conducts that are described by the ḥadīth and the Qur'ān. This important tradition will now be analysed:

“Whoever despises any of My Friends, has declared war against Me.... And the most beloved things which My slave comes nearer to me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to me through performing *nawāfil* (works of Supererogation)<sup>10</sup>, until I love him; and when I love him I am, to him an ear, and an eye and a hand and a helper. Through Me he hears, through Me he sees and through Me he takes.”<sup>11</sup>

This ḥadīth highlights two ways in which man attains the rank of beloved: firstly, through obligatory acts of devotion (*farā'id*) and secondly through voluntary acts of devotion. However, it should be pointed out that the emphasis is on the latter in preference to the former.<sup>12</sup> Obligatory acts of worship make man approach God, however, they are only the preliminary acts. The real love is only established when man voluntarily dedicates himself to God.

This notion that man should voluntarily devote himself to God played an important role in shaping the concept of disinterested love. It is possible that this ḥadīth might have been present in the minds of Sufis when speaking about disinterested love. Obligatory acts of worship are seen as the duty of all believers as a thanksgiving to God, on the other hand, voluntary acts of worship are considered as the token of pure love for God.

Ḥadīth commentators understand “God's becoming the servant's ear, hand and eye” as God's protection of the believer's senses against sins. Such as preventing the servant's ear from listening to abhorrent words and preventing his hand from

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<sup>10</sup> Praying or doing extra deeds voluntarily.

<sup>11</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Riqāq*, n.509

<sup>12</sup> R. Kucuk, *Sevgi Medeniyeti*, (Ankara, 1991), p.150



things which are forbidden by Islam.<sup>13</sup> They did not understand the ḥadīth in an incarnationist way at all.

However, the Sufis understood many different things from this ḥadīth. Their understanding of this ḥadīth was that when a servant arrives to a certain degree of love, then his senses are annihilated in the Divine being. The above mentioned ḥadīth especially gave Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ much intuition in terms of the unity in love and unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Their understanding of this ḥadīth will be studied in the following chapters of this study.

The ideas surrounding the concept of Unity of Being were developed to such an extent that they became unacceptable in the eyes of mainstream scholars. Sufis themselves realised this; for example, al-Ghazālī, having grasped the potentially disastrous implications of this ḥadīth in terms of Islamic faith, warns the Muslims against a literal interpretation of the above ḥadīth. He felt this necessary in order to safeguard the Muslims from falling into the same mistakes as the Christians. For instance, the Muslim should not believe that God has become man, such as the Christians who in al-Ghazālī’s opinion understood Jesus to be God. However, al-Ghazālī’s warning is of a negative nature and he does not explain the implications or significance of this ḥadīth but only says that this ḥadīth has secret meanings which are revealed to only a few people.<sup>14</sup> The notion that some secret meanings are revealed to only a selected few, seems to be contrary to the Ḥadīth traditions which address all the believers and do not discriminate among the believers.

#### **4.3 Love of God and the Prophet:**

Concerning man’s love for God, the most important contribution of Ḥadīth is the clarification of the place that the Prophet Muhammad occupies in this relationship between man and God. In the Qur’anic paradigm of love, as explained before, there is no direct reference which commands believers to love the Prophet. It was, however, implied strongly that the Prophet must be obeyed and indirectly loved. In contrast to the Qur’ān, the traditions of the Prophet contain clear

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<sup>13</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, v.24, p.138; al-‘Aynī, ‘*Umdet al-Qārī*’, v.23, p.90

commandments for the Muslims to love the Prophet in addition to their duty to love God.

In addition, the sayings of the Prophet have the distinctive feature of mentioning the love of God and the Prophet together. The implication of this needs to be brought to light, namely, that love of the Prophet needs to be distinguished from the ordinary virtues and injunctions enjoined upon the believers. In fact this is not the case: love of the Prophet occupies a pivotal and important position. If loving the Prophet was regarded as an ordinary virtue among others, there was no need to study it under the heading of love for God. However, the ḥadīths regard loving the Prophet as an essential part of faith almost next to the love of God. Therefore, in this chapter love of God and the Prophet will be studied under the same title.

Another striking fact in the traditions is that whenever the word love is mentioned, it is usually followed by the word “believing in” or “having faith” in Islam. Hence, the ḥadīths relate love and faith closely to each other. There are abundant examples which need not all be enumerated here. Nevertheless, it will suffice to give a few representative illustrations. For example, the Prophet declared that “None among you can be a true believer unless he regards God and His Prophet as dearer to him than all others.”<sup>15</sup> This ḥadīth indicates that faith means loving God and his Prophet in the highest degree. Without the love of God and the Prophet one cannot be a believer. This kind of love can be regarded as the *love of faith*.

A further example of a ḥadīth is the following in which the perfection of faith is described in terms which are closely interconnected with love.

Narrated by Anas: The Prophet said, “Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith:

1. The one to whom Allah and His Apostle becomes dearer than anything else.
2. The one who loves a person and he loves him only for Allah's sake.
3. The one who hates to revert to disbelief as he hates to be thrown into the fire.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, v.4, p.382

<sup>15</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Īmān*, n.14

<sup>16</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Īmān*, n.15

The first two qualities relate to the love of God and his Prophet directly. As for the third, it makes clear that hate and love are closely related concepts; hating evil things increases one's love for God.

It is clear from the ḥadīths quoted above that the concept of love is mentioned throughout the Ḥadīth literature. The question arises, however, did the Prophet himself ask God to make himself a lover of God? In order to answer this, one must turn to the supplications of the Prophet. Furthermore bearing in mind that the supplications of the Prophet are greatly valued by the Muslims, it would appear that their influence on the later Muslims would be equally great.

There are a few narrations in the Ḥadīth collection in which the Prophet asks God to bless him with His love: "O Allah, vouchsafe to me your love and love of him who loves you, and the love of that which draws me closer to you and makes your love for me dearer than cool water."<sup>17</sup>

These ḥadīths again indicate the significance of attaining true love of God. The metaphor of cool water seems to have been chosen specifically by the Prophet. In the extreme hot climate of the Arabian peninsula, it possesses incalculable value to the continuance of one's life. Water is the source of life and it is only around an oasis that life is possible. Hence, it may be deduced, that love of God is the source of all religious activities. Without love for God no one can be a real believer.

Secondly, the Prophet asks not only for God's love but also for the love of those who love Him as well. Hence, it is not an obstacle according to the Prophetic paradigm of love, to give a share of love to others on the condition that they are loved by God. However, such a love should not act as an obstacle between man and his God.

Loving the Prophet is not only a requirement of faith, it is also a thanksgiving for the service he has provided to believers. As his reward for his services, the

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<sup>17</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan*, ed. by I. Awd, (Beirut, Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, nd.) *Da'awat*, n.3491

Prophet does not ask for material prizes but rather he asks for “love” from his followers. Indeed, this is a Divine decree for all the Prophets that they are only allowed to expect love in return for their services.: “Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it [my service] but love for my near relatives;”<sup>18</sup> Shakir’s Shi’i interpretation of the verse is also supported by the exegetes such as al-Razī<sup>19</sup> and Ibn Kathīr.<sup>20</sup> Hence Shi’i interpretation of the verse was taken by the mainstream exegetes as well.

From a different perspective, this ḥadīth contains in itself the germs of a theory which was developed by later Sufis, that is, one always loves the benefactor. Loving the benefactor is engraved in human nature. Since the greatest benefit is guidance to the truth, it follows that the prophets deserve the highest degree of love among any human beings.

In the Qur’anic paradigm of love, obedience and love have been mentioned together quite often. Some exegetes even accepted that loving God means to obey Him and nothing else. Therefore, the relationship between love and obedience should be clarified by the Ḥadīth since the Qur’ān did not put forward explicitly whether love only means obedience or something more than this. This ambiguity is clearly removed by the sayings of the Prophet. For example, the following ḥadīth clearly differentiates between obedience and love for God. The ḥadīth states that loving God is a more important duty than any other commandment. It is narrated that a Bedouin came to the Prophet and said, “When will the day of judgement come?” in reply the Prophet said: “What have you prepared for that day?” Feeling ashamed, the Bedouin said broken-heartedly: “O Prophet, I have not piled up prayers, fasts, charity and alms; the little I have in my possession is the love of God and His prophet only. The Prophet said “You will be with those whom you love.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Qur’ān, 42:23 (Shakir)

<sup>19</sup> Razī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, v.14, pp.166-67

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, v.4, p.100

<sup>21</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Adab*, 5702 (K.T.)

The criterion put forward by the ḥadīth in order to be with God and his messenger, is not mere worship and other good deeds but primarily love for God. The significance of this issue was understood by the companions of the Prophet . For example, Anas who is the narrator of this ḥadīth adds that “After the propagation of Islam I have not seen Muslims more pleased with anything than this good news that people will be with those whom they love”.<sup>22</sup>

From the discussion so far it may be concluded that the Ḥadīth literature provides some support to the propositions that love between God and man exists and is a fundamental element of the perfection of faith. Furthermore, this love culminates in the lover attaining ‘togetherness’ with God. This concept of togetherness with God played an important role in shaping the paradigm of Sufi love. As for them Being with God (*ma‘iyyat*) is explained in terms which cannot be found in the Ḥadīth literature, for example, *fanā’*, (annihilation) *jam’* (unification). Whatever the expression used by the Sufis there is one thing upon which they all agree: being with God is the highest aim for the Sufis not comparable with any other pleasures. Therefore, only the lovers of God will get the highest status, they will have the glory of both this and the next world by being with God.<sup>23</sup>

The Ḥadīth literature also indicates the reasons why we need to love God and His messenger. In a ḥadīth narrated by Tirmidhī, the Prophet addresses this question and says: “Love God on account of the boon He confers on you every morning, and love me owing to the love He has for me.”<sup>24</sup>

This ḥadīth clearly indicates that God’s limitless bounties on mankind is the motive behind our love for Him. According to Prophetic understanding, loving God for His beneficence to mankind is quite acceptable and there is nothing shameful in this, as some Sufis held.<sup>25</sup> They thought love for paradise opposes love for God. On the contrary, the Ḥadīth collections do not oppose love for paradise or the hereafter to love of God. In fact, the Qur’ān and the ḥadīths are full of descriptions which remind man of the bounties and favours given by God and those that will be given.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, n.5702

<sup>23</sup> al-Suhrawardī, ‘A., ‘*Awārif*, p.507

<sup>24</sup> al-Tirmidhī, *al-Sunan, Manāqib*, n.3789 (K.T.)

In addition, this ḥadīth indicates that we must love those who are beloveds of the Beloved i.e. the prophets, saints and pious Muslims who are loved by God. Though some Sufis such as Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz and Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya claim that their love for God left no space even for the love of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it can be definitely stated that according to the Ḥadīth collections, loving the Prophet Muhammad, since he is the most beloved of God, is an essential part of the Islamic faith.

#### 4.4 Love for God’s Sake:

The traditions of the Prophet also address the subject of human love. Due to the fact that the traditions place Divine Love at the basis of all human loves it may be possible to categorise this sort of love as “Love in God or love for the sake of God”. This love is regarded as the best connection that can exist between man and God. Similarly, it is also described as the best bond between human beings. Loving other human beings and creatures especially for the sake of God is considered as the best action in the ḥadīths. Hence, human love also has a close relationship with Divine Love. These issues are mentioned in the Qur’ān concisely.

In a ḥadīth the Prophet (pbuh) says: “There are people from the servants of Allah who are neither prophets nor martyrs; the prophets and martyrs will envy them on the Day of Resurrection for their rank from Allah, the Most High. The people asked: Tell us, Apostle of Allah, who are they? He replied: They are people who love one another for the sake of Allah without having any mutual kinship and material benefits. I swear by Allah, their faces will glow and they will be sitting in the light. They will have no fear (on the Day) when the people will have fear, and they will not grieve when the people grieve.”<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand the significance of this ḥadīth, it is important to bear in mind that according to the Qur’ān, the Prophets and martyrs have the highest rank

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<sup>25</sup> See 5.4:2:a Selfish Love (*Ḥubb al-Hawa*)

<sup>26</sup> See 5.4:3 Love for God’s Sake (*al-Ḥubb Lillāh*)

<sup>27</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, al-Ijārah*, n.3520 (K.T.)

in the Divine scheme. In addition, it is also believed by the Muslims that no one can reach the level of the prophets. Another important thing is that the Judgement day is described as a day of extreme fear and anxiety. Considering this background the *lovers in God* will get a very good treatment. The ḥadīth places lovers in an enviable place even by the most respected servants of God.<sup>28</sup>

On the authority of Abu Hurayra, the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said: On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will say:

“Where are those who love one another for the sake of My glory? Today I shall give them shade in My shade, it being a day when there will be no shade but My shade.”<sup>29</sup>

This ḥadīth confirms again that to love one another is one of the most rewarding acts in the eyes of God. Hence, believers should love each other for God’s sake. This is one of the most important conditions that attracts God’s love and therefore, the Prophet links the acquisition of God’s love to the acquisition of people’s love.

In order to establish a relationship of love between the faithful, the Prophet explains the means by which the believers can love each other. The nature of this method is at its fundamental level to help each other and to respect each other. The Prophet (pbuh) commanded the believers to love each other, and to salute each other.<sup>30</sup> As an example, the following ḥadīths can be given: “Shake hands and rancour will disappear. Give presents to each other and love each other and enmity will disappear.”<sup>31</sup>

Having said that the highest form of love for God’s sake is the one that does not involve any interest in the receiving end of love. The Ḥadīth literature accepts that there are motives among the Muslims to love each other but the most important motive should be the common faith that they share. This is explained in the following ḥadīth:

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<sup>28</sup> S. Dānā, *Altinoluk Sohbetleri*, (Erkam Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1992), p.155

<sup>29</sup> Bukhāri, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Āzān*, n.629

<sup>30</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, al-Ṣalāt*, n.996:

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Mālik, *Muwaṭṭa, Adab*, n.416:

Abu Hurayra narrates that: Allah's Apostle (pbuh) said: A person visited his brother in another town and Allah deputised an Angel to wait for him on his way and when he came to him he said: Where do you intend to go? He said: I intend to go to my brother in this town. He said: Have you done any favour to him (the repayment of which you intend to get)? He said: No, excepting this that I love him for the sake of Allah, the Exalted and Glorious. Thereupon he said: I am a Messenger to you from Allah (to inform you) that Allah loves you as you love him (for His sake).<sup>32</sup>

It could be said that the Prophet tries to establish a society on mutual and disinterested love among its members. These traditions are also the basis of the Islamic ethics. In short, these are in short to forgive the wrongdoers<sup>33</sup>, to treat them with mercy, tolerance and patience and not to be angry with them.<sup>34</sup> These rules seem to target the creation of a loving society. The biblical phrase "love thy neighbour as thyself" finds its translation in the sayings of the Prophet as "Narrated Anas: The Prophet said, "None of you will have faith till he wishes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself."<sup>35</sup>

Another extra dimension which the Ḥadīth paradigm of love provides is that of hate. The traditions state that the believers' hate should be for the sake of Allah i.e. hate the ones that are hated by God. In the Islamic traditions hate is brought alongside the conception of love and is presented as the corollary of love. The Prophet (pbuh) said: The best of the actions is to love for the sake of Allah and to hate for the sake of Allah.<sup>36</sup>

In sum, love is the best mode of conduct between the faithful. From the perspective of this study, the paradigm of love in the Ḥadīth literature has a very down to earth conception as opposed to a complicated and esoteric dimension. The most interesting element of this approach is the emphasis it places on defining loves in terms of love between the believers. It would appear that the

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<sup>32</sup> Muslim *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-Birr*, n.6226

<sup>33</sup> In the Qur'ān it is stated 91 times that God is most forgiving.

<sup>34</sup> O. R. Dogrul, *Tanri Buyrugü*, (Istanbul, 1980), p.104

<sup>35</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Īmān*, n.7

<sup>36</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *al-Sunnah*, n.4582



purpose of the prophetic message was reform of the morals of the people and to build a stable and peaceful society. Therefore to link the love of God who is the source of the Islamic faith, with the love of the people in society would result in a more healthy and strife-free society. If this approach is compared with that of the later Sufis, a slight difference may be discerned. For example, the later Sufis were not necessarily motivated by the desire to reform society or to present a simple and easily comprehended paradigm of love. The involved and more esoteric conceptions of the later Sufis will be discussed in their turn in later chapters.

#### **4.5 Love Between Man and Inanimate Beings:**

The Ḥadīth paradigm of love, in addition to the element of hate, introduces a further dimension which extends the ambit of love to include not only, God, man, and animate beings but also inanimate beings. In this connection, the traditions describe mountains, trees and even cities as objects which cannot only be loved but which also can love in their own right. The following ḥadīths can be taken as the examples of such love between the inanimate items and the Prophet: Yaḥyā related to me from Mālik from Hishām Ibn ‘Urwa from his father that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came in view of Uhud and said: “This is a mountain which loves us and we love it.”<sup>37</sup>

In human terms, we think that we can love an inanimate thing but how can an inanimate thing love a living human being. It was mostly Sufis who tried to solve this dilemma. This last group of ḥadīths played an important role in Sufi paradigms of love. Especially, Sufis who believed in *waḥdat al-wujūd* referred to such ḥadīths which attribute a kind of life form to inanimate beings. This helped them to develop their ideas that everything in the universe is alive. However, only the elected people can understand their speech like the Prophet or the friends of God. In this sense, the whole universe became a living being singing the praise of God to the Sufi.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

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<sup>37</sup> Imām Mālik, *Muwatta* , (Beirut, Dār al-Nafā’is, 1971), n.1602

1-The Prophetic paradigm of love can be described as the love of faith. The main emphasis is mainly the relationship between love and faith. The perfection of faith necessitates exclusive love for God and the things He loves, such as His Prophets and His speech (the Qur'ān).

2-The language contained in the Ḥadīth literature points more towards the immanence (*tashbīh*) of God as opposed to His transcendence. That is God is described in human terms. For this reason, they clarify the Qur'anic paradigm of love, since these paradigms are more transcendental in nature and hence more ambiguous.

3- In addition to loving God, the traditions also emphasise the significance of loving the Prophet. Although implied, there was no clear commandment in the Qur'ān, that loving the Prophet is a part of the faith. This is a new dimension that the Prophetic paradigm of love brings to the Qur'anic one.

4-The traditions sets as the cause of man's love towards God, the bounties that God has supplied man with. Hence there is no blame for man for having selfish considerations in his obedience. There is no harm in loving Paradise and the bounties in it. The Ḥadīth even praised the love, of the hereafter, since it is in the hereafter that the believer will meet his Lord.

5- The paradigm of love according to the ḥadīths, requires moderation in the gratification of bodily needs. This love is strengthened by preaching and working for God's religion. It does not target personal salvation only, it also takes interest in the well-being of the society.

6- The prophetic understanding of love is equally concerned with the outer and inner aspects of the Shari'ah. It commands obedience to the Qur'ān and the Prophet. Hence, it does not approve of ecstatic words which ignore obedience to Shari'ah.

7- In the Prophetic paradigm of love, human beings are the channel of love between man and God in both directions. If God loves an individual, He makes

others love him/her, as well. Similarly, if an individual loves God, s/he also loves others for His sake.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Rābi'a's Paradigm of Love

#### 5.1 Introduction

We have surveyed in the previous chapters the general framework of love according to the Sufi classics, the Qur'ān and the Prophetic traditions. This analysis will now further broaden this framework but with a more focused perspective. We will now turn to the lives of the individual Sufis. This perspective will enable us to see Sufism as it was practised in the daily life as a reality, and not merely as an abstract theory. Furthermore, it will reveal to us how the Sufis shaped, moulded, and refined their basic ideas of Divine love found in the sources of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth traditions.

The spotlight will be focused on a selection of Sufis. However, one is faced with an acute dilemma, namely, who will be included and who will not. To justify the selection one needs to establish certain criteria. This research will rely on three broad criteria. The first is to select those utilising the Arabic language in their works. This excludes the Sufis who have written, for example, in Persian or in Turkish. This approach confines the scope of this study to the original language of Islam.

The second criterion is the degree of their contribution to the concept of love. This is significant because we need to focus solely upon those Sufis who had an impact and enduring influence on this concept. Therefore, this criterion will bestow a clearer and focused direction to our study. The third is originality, in other words the new dimensions that the Sufi brought to the understanding of Divine Love.

As far as methodology is concerned, the theories of love by these selected Sufis, will be presented in paradigms, and the prominent and different sides of their understanding will be emphasised. In addition to this, they will be compared with one another.

According to the above criteria, the first Sufi who will be studied is Rābi'a al-'Adawiyyah since she is known as one of the first Sufis to present an organised system of love. Therefore she stands out among the early ascetics like a star of

Divine love. Al-Badawī goes so far as to call her a martyr of Divine love, which is generally attributed to Al-Ḥallāj.<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that Rābi‘a had not completely built an original system of love to deserve such a title. What she did was to emphasise the importance of disinterested love for God; and this was much needed at her time. She basically divided love on the basis of its motives, that is, whether the love is motivated by self-interest or not. This simple division proved to be very successful: it became a central theme in almost all Sufi books, and inspired individual Sufis’ theories on love,<sup>2</sup> to the extent that almost all Sufis employed it.

In addition to her contribution to the concept of love, Rābi‘a is also important inasmuch as she is one of the original female Sufis emerging in the eighth century. This is important since it shows that Sufism gave women the greatest opportunity to attain the rank of sainthood. As a result, the title of saint was bestowed upon women equally with men.<sup>3</sup> This is due to the fact that in Islam there is no formal canonisation; it is only a general acceptance among the Muslims in addition to some well-known Sufis of the time.

## 5.2. Rābi‘a’s life

Her full name is Rābi‘a Bint Ismāil al-‘Adawiyah al-Basriyyah. According to the one account given by Smith, she was the fourth daughter of the family, so she was called Rābi‘a meaning “the fourth”. Her father’s name was Ismā‘il, and he was a poor man but at the same time he was intensely pious. As far as her titles are concerned “Al-‘Adawiyah and Al-Qaysiyyah” are words that originate from the tribe of Qays b. ‘Adī, to which she belonged. The first title refers to the ‘Adī part of the name while the second refers to the Qays in the name of the tribe. Furthermore her other title, al-Basriyyah, is derived from her birth place al-Basra .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘A. Badawī, *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyah Shahīdat al-‘Ishq al-ilāhī*, (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Nahda, n.d), p.6

<sup>2</sup> A. ‘Affifi, *al-Ṭaṣawwuf al-Thawra al-Rūḥiyya*, p.198

<sup>3</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*, edited by Nicholson, R., A., (Caphane-i Markazi, 1905), p.59; M. Smith, *Rābi‘a*, p.1; Although ‘Aṭṭār (12th century) like al-Sha‘rānī (16th century) are not the best sources as far as Rābi‘a’s life and sayings are concerned, nevertheless they are important since they help us to understand how Rābi‘a’s paradigm of love is conceived in the later centuries. Therefore, they are referred to in this research.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn al-Mulaqqīn, U A, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā*, p.408

The biography and history of Rābi'a have been objects of scholarly questioning. An example of such an approach is found in the writings of Baldick. He claimed that Rābi'a's existence as a historical figure is questionable. Not only does he deny the words ascribed to Rābi'a, he also fundamentally questions whether or not she existed.<sup>5</sup> This is a claim with the potential to weaken the structure of Rābi'a's influence at its foundations. However, there are limitations and flaws in Baldick's arguments. The first limitation is that Baldick overgeneralise his ideas and presents them as if they are proven. He picks up on any similarity between two personalities and immediately rushes to conclude that one is the product of the other. Such an approach cannot be acceptable at all times. Hence, Baldick first preconceive the hagiographical sources as unreliable and doubts their authenticity, then, he bases great theories on the basis of these inauthentic sources. For example, he argues that religious prostitution has continued in Islamic tradition but he cannot present any Islamic source to support his claim. As a result, Baldick uses a modern French source to back his claim that religious prostitution continued in Islam under the disguise of religious piety, he cannot bring any Islamic source.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from Baldick's methodological flaws, he also ignores the vast amount of references to Rābi'a in almost all Sufi literature. Especially the reference al-Jāhiz (d.868C.E.) made to Rābi'a is very significant<sup>7</sup> since al-Jāhiz is known as a trustworthy author. In addition to the fact that he was not known as a Sufi author it is also a significant indication as to his objectivity. This indicates with some degree of certainty that Rābi'a was not a fictitious figure.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, this research aims to highlight her contribution to the development of 'the concept of love' rather than to discuss her history. Even if we assume for a moment that she did not exist, or the words attributed to her are not hers, this does not change her importance. This is because Rābi'a is perceived by her contemporaries and later Sufis as exerting a significant influence in some perspectives not matched by any other individual. Therefore, for the aims of this

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<sup>5</sup> See J. Baldick, 'The legend of Rābi'a of Baṣra: Christian antecedents, Muslim counterparts.' *Religion*. v. 20, 1990. pp.233-247; J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1992), p.29

<sup>6</sup> J. Baldick, 'The legend of Rābi'a of Baṣra: Christian antecedents, Muslim counterparts.' *Religion*. v. 20, (1990), p.237

<sup>7</sup> al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, ed. 'Abd Al-Salām, M., (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1968), v.3, p.163

<sup>8</sup> Badawi also discusses this problem in detail. See 'A. Badawī, *Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya*, p.71-75

research, what is important is the perception of the Sufis rather than a study of her life.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.2:1 Her Birth

Rābi'a was born about 95 or 99 A.H. (717 A.D.) in Basra and spent the greater part of her life there. She died in 185 A.H. (801 A.D.) and was buried at Basra.<sup>10</sup> According to 'Aṭṭār, she was born into a poor family and when she was young her parents died and she was orphaned. This helpless situation was made even worse by a famine in Basra: She and her sisters are separated. Rābi'a was then alone, and was captivated by an evil man who sold her as a slave.<sup>11</sup>

Rābi'a was forced to work very hard in her master's house. Nevertheless, she spent all the night in the worship of God. Rābi'a's master on seeing her devotion to God was deeply moved. In addition to this, Aṭṭār narrates that her master witnessed some miraculous happenings, such as a lamp on her head suspended without a chain while she was in ritual prayer. In the end, her master set her free. Being a free woman, Rābi'a journeyed into the desert. After spending some time there she left and obtained a cell in Basra wherein she engaged in devotional worship.<sup>12</sup>

If this narration is accepted as a true reflection of her life, it seems that she suffered as a slave in her childhood as well as in her adulthood. This fact might give some insight into the psychology of Rābi'a's mind. For example, it might provide an explanation for Rābi'a's reasons for devoting herself wholeheartedly to her God. The nature of Islamic society in her time was that it was essential for *free* females to be under the protection and guardianship of some male relation. In the case of Rābi'a, such a protector did not exist; her father had died when she was young and as a result she had been forced to wear the shackles of slavery. She replaced her intense loneliness with God's closeness. In this way she satisfied the psychological gap which she suffered painfully. It can be argued that if Rābi'a had not suffered this painful episode in her early life it would have been less likely that she would

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<sup>9</sup> M. A. Sells, (ed.) *Early Islamic Mysticism*, (Paulist Press, Newyork, 1996), p.155

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, p.287; Ibn Al- 'Imād, *Shadharāt Al-Dhahab* v.2 p.157

<sup>11</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, edited by Nicholson, R., p.60.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61

turn towards God so sincerely: thus Sufism would have been deprived of her valuable contribution.

There are also stories about her pilgrimage to Mecca and her encounter with Ibrāhīm b. Adham. These show a clear picture of a woman renouncing this world and its attractions and giving up her life to the service of God. However, her remarks about the Ka'ba as "this is an idol worshipped" created discussions amongst the theologians. If her words are accepted as authentic then it is forerunner to al-Ḥallāj's understanding of pilgrimage and Ka'ba.<sup>13</sup>

Once Rābi'a had determined to lead a life of devotion, she manifested her choice by strictly following the popular form of Sufism of her time. The characteristic features of this were a life of denial, abstention and asceticism.<sup>14</sup> This attitude also determined her perception of marriage. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Rābi'a's approach towards marriage was highly negative.

### 5.2:2 Rābi'a's rejection of Marriage

As far as marriage is concerned, it has very little relevance in the discussion of the philosophies and ideas of great historical personalities. If Rābi'a's views on marriage were merely personal and private to her, it would be of little interest as a subject for academic research. For Rābi'a, however, this is not the case. Marriage has some negative implications in her understanding of love. Therefore it is a legitimate avenue of investigation for the scholar.

In sum, Rābi'a could safely be described as being anti-marriage. She would think of marriage as an obstacle in the path of Divine love: and anything hindering achieving this was to be shunned. This was not merely out of personal desire on Rābi'a's part: such a stance was the natural result of her love. This meant that an anti-marriage attitude was a fundamental component in her philosophy.

It is ironic to note that despite Rābi'a's strong dislike of marriage she received many proposals of marriage. She rejected all of these proposals. Among those who

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<sup>13</sup> See for a detailed discussion, 'A. Badawī, *Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya*, p.80-82



wanted to marry her was ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d.793). Rābi‘a did not welcome his offer and answered him: “O sensual one, seek another sensual one like yourself. Have you seen any sign of desire in me?”<sup>15</sup>

This strong reproach is remarkable for ‘Abd al-Wāḥid was not a sensual person. Nevertheless, this answer indicates that for Rābi‘a marriage meant sensuality even though ‘Abd al-Wāḥid is not known to be a man of sensuality. This can be supported by the fact that he was the founder of one of the first monastic communities near Basra.

It was not only ascetics who wanted to marry her. There were also richer and influential men making proposals. For example, the ‘Abbāsīd Amīr of Basra, (from 145 A.H. to his death) Muhammad b. Sulaymān al-Hāshimī (d.172 A.H.) proposed marriage to her. He even offered a great sum of money as a dowry. Rābi‘a replied to him:

“It does not please me that you should be my slave and that all you possess should be mine, or you should distract me from God for a single moment”<sup>16</sup>

This answer again proves that for Rābi‘a, marriage is a hindrance and distraction from the path. It is also understood that she considers marriage as slavery to the spouse. Hence it is incompatible to give absolute devotion to God while maintaining the ties of husband and wife.

Another proposal is attributed to the great mystic saint Ḥasan of Basra (d.728). Although chronologically it is impossible that Ḥasan of Basra proposed to Rābi‘a for the simple reason that he died some 70 years before her death. However, this story is given in more than one account. In her reply to him, another significant part of her understanding of marriage is found:

“The contract of marriage is for those who have a phenomenal existence (i.e. who are concerned with the affairs of this material world.) Here (i.e. in my case)

<sup>14</sup> al-Sha‘rānī, *Lawāqih al-Anwār fi Ṭabaqāt al-Akhyār*, (Cairo, Maktabat al-Adab, 1993), p.153

<sup>15</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makkī *Qūṭ*, v. II, p.57

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Khallikan, *Wafayāt*, p. 286; Munawī, *Al-Kawākib*, p.201, Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūṭ*, p.57

existence has ceased, since I have ceased to exist and have passed out of Self. My existence is in Him, and I am altogether His. I am in the shadow of His command. The marriage contract must be asked from Him, not from me.”<sup>17</sup>

This quotation has the potential to be understood in many different ways. The ambiguity opens up different possibilities. For instance, there are some scholars who argue on the basis of this dictum that Rābi‘a was a proponent of the concept of spiritual marriage. Spiritual marriage can be defined as the rejection of marriage in its ordinary sense. Spiritual marriage makes the object of devotion not earthly spouse but heavenly God.

al-Badawī concludes from her last remarks that Rābi‘a was in fact married but her marriage was with God, in a spiritual marriage (*al-zawāj al-rūḥī*). He also finds some other supportive dialogues for this claim about Rābi‘a’s life. One such dialogue is that of her friend Hayūnah. Her words to Rābi‘a were: “Stand up, surely the bridegroom of the guided has arrived”<sup>18</sup>

By these words, according to al-Badawī’s understanding, Ḥaynūna implied that “God has arrived.” This causes al-Badawī to think that some female Sufis developed the idea of spiritual marriage. al-Badawī questions whether Sufis also influenced the Christian Mystics.<sup>19</sup> al-Badawī’s conclusion is interesting, as it is generally assumed that Sufism took some of its ideas from Christianity. In a sense, this is a reversal of roles. al-Badawī in this regard refers to St. Teresa of Avila and her ideas on spiritual love. These have some resemblance to the ideas expressed by Rābi‘a. Possibly al-Badawī was referring to the following words of St. Teresa:

“It [spiritual marriage] will demand total, unswerving, exclusive fidelity to God, and if the soul is so careless as to set her affections on anything which is not God, she will risk losing all. Spiritual marriage is the highest summit of spiritual progress possible in this earthly life. The state of spiritual marriage is utterly ineffable, for this secret union takes place in the inmost centre of the soul, and the

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<sup>17</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, p.201; ‘Aṭṭār, F, *Tadhkirat*, p.59

<sup>18</sup> H. M. al-Nishābūrī, ‘*Uqalā*’, p.288; Badawī, ‘A., *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya*, p.26

<sup>19</sup> ‘A. Badawī, *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya*, p.26-27

soul is so completely detached from all created things that it has no frame of reference within which it might describe its experience of God.”<sup>20</sup>

Although strong parallels can be drawn between the thoughts of St. Teresa and Rābi‘a, it is still difficult to claim the presence of spiritual marriage in Sufism generally and in Rābi‘a’s life particularly.<sup>21</sup> The most that can be said is that there is a superficial similarity between the two. However as far as Sufi thought is concerned, this theory did not receive a general acceptance by the Sufi authors. It appears that this kind of interpretation is a fairly new phenomenon since there is no mention of such a theory in the Sufi classics.<sup>22</sup>

It is more plausible in the light of the historical circumstances and the general Sufi literature to argue that it was Rābi‘a who was influenced by the Christian mystics and not the other way round. This was for the simple reason that Christian monks were common at the time of Rābi‘a and there is evidence to suggest that there was inter faith communication between the two.<sup>23</sup> In addition to this, there are many incidents of Christian mystics embracing Islam. Therefore, it can be said with a great deal of probability that these Christians introduced some of their previous ideas into their new faith. Otherwise, such attitudes would not have been expected from Muslim ascetics. It must be noted that Islam places a great emphasis on the institution of marriage. It extols its virtues and encourages its widespread existence within the Islamic society.

The origins of the concept of spiritual marriage can shed further light onto the way Rābi‘a is viewed by Sufi scholars. According to Islamic tradition, Mary the mother of Jesus did not marry and devoted herself to God, this belief lends itself towards the idea of a spiritual marriage. Some of the biographers of Rābi‘a found similar narration in the Qur’ān. For example, her chief biographer ‘Aṭṭār, compares her with the mother of Jesus, Mary<sup>24</sup> and refers to her as the second Mary. In this way ‘Aṭṭār emphasises that there is nothing wrong in Rābi‘a’s rejection of marriage, as

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<sup>20</sup> E. W. T. Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, (Longman and Todd Ltd, London, 1963), p. 428

<sup>21</sup> ‘A. Ḥifnī, *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya*, (Cairo, Dār al-Rashād), p.100

<sup>22</sup> See ‘A. al-Nashshār, *Nash’ Al-Fikr Al-Falsafi*, v.2I, p.202

<sup>23</sup> See, 2.5 The Christian Element

<sup>24</sup> According to Islamic sources Mary is known to have never married.

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<sup>20</sup> E. W. T. Dicken, *The Crucible of Love*, (Longman and Todd Ltd, London, 1963), p. 428

<sup>21</sup> ‘A. Ḥifnī, *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya*, (Cairo, Dār al-Rashād) , p.100

<sup>22</sup> See ‘A. al-Nashshār, *Nash’ Al-Fikr Al-Falsafi*, v.2I, p.202

<sup>23</sup> See, 2.5 The Christian Element

<sup>24</sup> According to Islamic sources Mary is known to have never married.

Mary constitutes a Qur'anic example to Rābi'a's situation, hence her choice of non-marriage must be respected.

As a conclusion, from all her rejections it is understood that she considers marriage as an obstacle in the Sufi way to God. Marriage is sensuality, following the desires of base sentiments. Secondly, she considers herself as not suitable for marriage since she has lost herself in God wholly. This last idea also opens up possibilities that later exert a great influence on the development and thought of the later Sufi conceptions of love. The most obvious one was the concept of *fanā'* (self-annihilation) in God as the ultimate end of the path of love.<sup>25</sup>

### 5.2:3 Her students

Rābi'a had many disciples and associates, who visited her to benefit from her advice and teachings. Her biographers constantly associate her with Ḥasan of Basra, whom they portray as her disciple and follower.<sup>26</sup> Again this is historically impossible since he died long before she was born. Either her name was introduced into anecdotes relating to Ḥasan, or Ḥasan's name has been substituted for that of one of her contemporaries. It seems that the latter happened. However, the importance of these supposed meetings is found not in their historicity but in its implication. The implication is that the Sufi biographers favoured Rābi'a's understanding of Sufism and disliked Ḥasan's gloomy approach to religion and Sufism. They portrayed them in certain times as having met on several occasions. During these meetings they debated on the problems that related to the mystical path. In all of these meetings, Rābi'a was presented as the victor and Ḥasan as the vanquished. Confirming this idea Sells writes:

“A large number of anecdotes consist of verbal jousts amongst Rābi'a and several early Sufis, including Ḥasan of Basra and Ibrahīm Adham. In comparison with her, these great men of the age are shown as still held down by affectation and egoism.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See 9.3.3:2 Love and *Fanā'*

<sup>26</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, p.200

<sup>27</sup> M. A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p.153

Behind this attitude, it can be deduced that her philosophy of love is favoured over the strongly ascetic and gloomy worldly view of the above mentioned Sufis and the likes.

Another ascetic with whom she is associated, and with greater probability, is Rabāḥ al-Qays of Basra (d.810). They both are contemporaries and also of the same school of thought. In addition, among Rābi'a's important associates, Sufyān Thawrī (d.778) is mentioned in hagiography books. He was a great authority on the Traditions. He was even rebuked by Rābi'a for his excessive interest in the study of the Traditions and therefore being distracted from the life of devotion to God.<sup>28</sup> This also shows the general Sufi attitude to the scholars of exoteric sciences. In general the Sufis see the scholars of exoteric sciences as insincere and literalist i.e. only following the letter of the law and ignoring the spiritual side of it.

There are some stories that Rābi'a met the famous Sufi Dhu al-Nūn Al-Misrī. He died A.D. 856 and therefore survived Rābi'a by nearly half a century. It is possible that he may have met her in his early years.<sup>29</sup> Beside these personalities, she had also many visitors to her house who came to benefit from her advice, such as Al-Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-'Aziz and Kilāb b. Ḥārī, Mālik bin Dīnār.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that her disciples and friends were mainly men. Nevertheless, sources indicate that she had some female associates and followers: Mu'ādha al-'Adawiyah, Laylā al-Qaysiyah, Umm al-Dardā and her servants, Mariam of Basrā and 'Abda bint Shuwāl are mentioned in hagiography books.<sup>31</sup>

From all the above it is very clear that Rābi'a was acquainted with the current Sufi movements; since all her associates were the leaders of the Sufi thought at that time. Contrary to the advantageous position of men in religious issues, she was given pre-eminence above her male contemporaries. As a result, it can be said that

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<sup>28</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makki, *Qūṭ*, v.2, p. 57; 'Aṭṭār, F, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, trans. by A. J. Arberry, (Redwood Burn, London, 1976), p.49

<sup>29</sup> M. Smith, *Rābi'a*, 17

<sup>30</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makki, *Qūṭ*, p.57

<sup>31</sup> M. Smith, *Rābi'a*, 19

her philosophy of love influenced her contemporaries greatly. It is now relevant to look in detail at the elements of Rābi'a's conception of love.

### 5.3 The characteristics of Rābi'a's understanding of love

#### 5.3:1 Her background

Rābi'a's era was marked with a strong sense of ascetic flavour as explained before. In this respect, Rābi'a is like a bridge connecting the ascetic form of Sufism with its love dominated form. The majority of her associates, some of whom are mentioned above, are the Sufis who concentrate on ascetic life and fear of God as the main route to salvation.

As an example of this understanding and Rābi'a's background, Ḥasan al-Basrī can be considered. He is nicknamed *misanthropic* by Margaret Smith. He describes *zuhd* in the following manner: “*Zuhd* in this world is to hate its people and all who are in it and to leave what is in it to those who dwell in it.”<sup>32</sup>

Rābi'a, who belonged to this early school, was an ascetic of extreme otherworldliness but her asceticism was directed to and resulted from the love of God. Although seemingly she and the other ascetics of her time had the same ascetic view of the world, the motive behind this was quite different. This is indicated in one of her dialogues, that once one of her friends prayed in her presence: “O my God! I ask You for freedom from this world (earthly things)”

On hearing her friend's words she replied:

“You must be very fond of this world, if you were not fond of it, you would not speak of it, either good or ill, remember the saying ‘whoso loves a thing speaks much of it’”.<sup>33</sup>

In Rābi'a's background the ascetic approach to Sufism, concentrating on poverty, sadness and the fear of God, dominated her time. Rābi'a was a different voice in this context by introducing “love of God” to Sufism. It cannot be ignored that an ascetic approach to the worldly life is, and always has been, the indisputable element of all the main mystic movements of almost all religions. In that sense, Rābi'a is not different from the main stream understanding. However, her

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<sup>32</sup> al-Qushayrī, *al-Risālah*, p.118

asceticism was different from the main stream Sufism of her day. The motive distinguishing her from the others was her love for God. This is clearly expressed in the anecdotes attributed to her.

They show clearly that Rābi‘a lived the life of a true ascetic. For example, Jāhiz, in his famous book *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, classifies her name under the chapter of “*mentioning of the female ascetics and pious of Basra.*”<sup>34</sup>

Al-Jāhiz’s account of Rābi‘a is very important since they were contemporaries, and Jāhiz is known to be a trustworthy author. By contrast, some writers such as Melchert believes that her sayings are nothing but expressions of the common ascetical concern prevalent at that time for single-minded devotion to God.<sup>35</sup> In this way, the author seems to diminish the uniqueness of Rābi‘a’s contribution. However, in the light of her life and sayings, it can be argued that Melchert’s statements do not reflect a complete picture of her. Furthermore, the majority of the modern authors regards Rābi‘a as the foremost person who introduced the element of selfless love into the austere teachings of the early period. In this way, she gave Sufism the true colour of mysticism.<sup>36</sup>

One can argue that there were many Sufis in Rābi‘a’s time that spoke on the concept of love. The question arises of which features distinguish Rābi‘a from her contemporaries. Broadly speaking, it is the fact that Rābi‘a presented a well organised theory of love; although Rābi‘a was not the first among the Sufis who discovered that the way to God must be sought through love. In addition to this, it is also true that she was perhaps the first to lay stress on the doctrine of the “*disinterested love*” of God. This was a new concept to many of her fellow-Sufis who mostly worshipped God in hope of eternal reward, or in fear of hell fire. She developed the understanding of Divine love and blended it carefully with asceticism having lost none of the feelings of love and sentiment.

#### 5.4 Her understanding of Love:

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, trans. by A. J. Arberry, p.51; Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, p.202

<sup>34</sup> al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, ed. ‘Abd Al-Salām, M., (Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1968), v.3, p.163

<sup>35</sup> M. Christopher, ‘The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.’, *Studia Islamica*, 1996/1, ed. A.L. Udovitch and A. M. Turki, (Paris), p. 61

<sup>36</sup> S. A. Nadeem, *A Critical Appreciation of the Arabic Mystical Poetry*, (Lahore, 1979), p.18



#### 5.4:1 God's love for man:

The general position of the majority of the Sufis regarding this matter is that they mostly focus on their love for God. On the other hand, they do not speak much about God's love for His creation. In this respect, Rābi'a is not an exception: she does not speak very much about God's love for man. Instead, she mostly speaks of her love for God. It can be said that this is the prominent feature distinguishing Sufi love. In contrast, Christian mystics put more emphasis on God's love for man.

Looking at love as a relationship we need to determine from which side this relationship is initiated, the lover or the beloved. The majority of Sufi classics suggested that Rābi'a believed it is God alone who begins the relationship of love. We can find evidence for such a suggestion in some of Rābi'a's poems. For example, there may be an indication in the last verse of her poem in which she attributes the cause of both of her loves to God: "So there is nothing to thank me for in either love: the thanks are to You in both."<sup>37</sup>

Not only is God the initiator of love, He is also the one who bestows the special kind of love which distinguishes Rābi'a's philosophy of love, namely, disinterested love. By both kinds of love Rābi'a is referring to the love which is based on self-interest, and to the love that is disinterested and above any selfish motives. God is the sole agent in putting both kinds of love into the hearts of His creation. As God placed selfish love into the nature of man, He also places the disinterested love into the hearts of those who love Him. The following definition of love by Rābi'a confirms this idea:

"Love has emanated from pre-eternity (*azal*), passed unto post-eternity (*abad*) and perceived no one among the eighteen thousand worlds competent to imbibe even a draught of its sherbet. When at last Love reached the truth, this maxim alone remained: 'he loves them and they love Him.'"<sup>38</sup>

Among many implications, this definition shows that love emanates from God first. Therefore, it is not possible that this kind of love can be attained merely on the

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<sup>37</sup> al-Makkī, *Qūṭb*, v.2, p.57

basis of one's efforts and devotions alone. Rābi'a's pronouncements, on the other hand, contain a small vacuum, in that she does not address the issue of the motives behind God's love for man. It is only a one sided representation of a relationship which is in its essence based upon two actors, viz. God and man.

The primacy given to the idea that God is the initiator is quite central to Rābi'a's understanding and finds expression in her explanation of other Islamic ideas. For example, her answer to the question whether the repentance of the sinner is acceptable or not, is that: "No one can turn [in Arabic to repent also means to turn] to God before He turns to them."<sup>39</sup>

This supports the view that God always makes the first move, in this case, to the heart of the man. The choice, then, ultimately lies with man: either to return this love back to God or to ignore it.

Rābi'a is not alone in giving precedence of God's love over and above human love. For example, Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām (d.875) echoes the same sentiments as Rābi'a in the following statement, the only difference is in his choice of words and style of expression. He says: "I fancied that I loved Him, but on consideration I saw that His love preceded mine."<sup>40</sup>

Rābi'a's God is also characterised by a certain degree of jealousy. Her God is a jealous God. His jealousy requires that His devotees should love Him and Him alone. Devotion should be undivided and focused for God wholly. Therefore, Rābi'a emphasises loving God solely, without making partners to Him. In a sense this is an extension of the concept of *shirk* in Islam into the arena of love. Whereas the jealous God of the orthodox does not allow anybody to worship anything besides Him, Rābi'a's God will not allow any to share with Him that love which is due to Him alone."<sup>41</sup> These ideas of Rābi'a can be exemplified with reference to an excerpt from one of her poems:

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<sup>38</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, p.67; Qur'ān, 5:54

<sup>39</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v. I, p.202

<sup>40</sup> al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, p.34; al-Sulamī, A., *Ṭabaqāt*, p.72

“O Beloved of the hearts, I have none like unto thee.

Therefore have a pity this day on the sinner who comes to thee.

O my hope and my Rest and my Delight

The heart can love none other but thee.”<sup>42</sup>

In summary, Rābi‘a’s conception of God’s love consists of three essential elements. First, God is the originator and initiator of Love. Second, He alone is the bestower of His love on His creatures. Finally, He is a jealous God who will not admit any partners in the love due to Him.

#### 5.4:2 Man’s love for God

Sufis selected different criteria in their analysis of man’s love for God. Some selected the final culmination of the process of love as a criterion.<sup>43</sup> Some selected the knowledge of love. It is possible to increase these criteria. With regard to Rābi‘a, her analysis of man’s love towards God is based on man’s motives. She broadly classifies these motives into two groups. If the first priority of man’s love is his own self interest then she names this love as selfish love. On the other hand, if man’s love stems from his realisation of the wonder and glory of God and is divorced from self-interest it is classified as disinterested love.

##### 5.4:2:a Selfish love (*Ḥubb Al-Hawa*):

The first component of Rābi‘a’s philosophy of love is selfish love as opposed to disinterested love. Rābi‘a neatly describes the selfish love in the following piece of her poetry:

“I have loved You with two loves, a selfish love and a love that is worthy of You. As for the love which is selfish, I occupy myself therein with remembrance of You to the exclusion of all others,<sup>44</sup>

Rābi‘a was aware of this selfish love in the nature of human beings, therefore she does not deny that she loves God for her own good. Whilst Rābi‘a accepts this

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<sup>41</sup> M. Smith, *Rābi‘a*, p.108

<sup>42</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, p.202; trans. by Smith, M., *Rābi‘a*, p.55

<sup>43</sup> See 6.4 al- al-Ḥallāj’s Paradigm of Love

selfish love, she does not approve of it. She draws an analogy to explain the selfish love and its defects. She depicts the selfish lover of God, that is, the person who loves God for his own ends, as a bad employee. In an anecdote related by ‘Aṭṭār, we see the differences in the motives of devotion between her and her associates. ‘Aṭṭār relates that once a number of elders came to Rābi‘a, and she asked one of them:

“Why do you worship God?” He answered: “There are seven degrees in Hell, which are a source of dread and threat to me; and everyone must pass by them in fear and terror”. Another said: “The different spheres of Paradise are places of rare delight, and much rest is promised”. Then, Rābi‘a rejoined: “He is an evil servant who worships God from fear and terror, or from the desire of reward; but there are many of these”. They asked her: “Why do you worship God; have you no desire for Paradise?” She replied: “The neighbour first, and then the house. Is it not enough for me that I am given leave to worship him? Even if Heaven and Hell were not, does it not behove us to obey Him? He is worthy of worship without any intermediary.”<sup>45</sup>

From this anecdote it can be deduced that man should not love God for the sake of paradise or hell. She believes that God deserves worship even if He did not have paradise and hell. Otherwise, God is lowered to a degree that He becomes an object of love like many others. God has no more value than a doctor that gives medicine or a person who helps man in some way or another. In this respect some other Sufis like Shiblī (d.945) went to extremes by equating selfish love with polytheism. Shiblī asserts that: “To love Him for His acts of grace means to be a polytheist.”<sup>46</sup>

Rābi‘a’s words on selfish love also attracted the attention of al-Ghazālī. According to him by selfish love Rābi‘a means: “The love of God which is resulted from the material benefits that He showers upon His servants.”

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<sup>44</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūṭ*, v.2, p.57

<sup>45</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*, p.69; trans. by P. Losensky & M. Sells, ‘Rābi‘a: Her words and Life in Attar’s Memorial of the Friends of God’ in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, ed. Michael A. Sells, p.166

<sup>46</sup> al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-Awliyā*, v.10, p. 369; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p.78

However, al-Ghazālī asserts that compared to the eternal happiness from the favours of God the ephemeral happiness pales into insignificance. This commentary of al-Ghazālī is also supported by al-Zabidī. He also states that Rābi‘a might mean by her selfish love; the love of God because of the favour and worldly pleasures received from Him.<sup>47</sup>

From the Prophetic perspective there is nothing wrong in loving God for the benefits that He supplies for man. In one ḥadīth the Prophet says: “Love God for His bounties on you”.<sup>48</sup>

The motive behind this love is in the nature of all creatures. Therefore, man, too, loves God for His favours and bounties upon man. Rābi‘a regards this love as selfish love since it is self-centred and perceives everything from the narrow perspective of its self. It regards itself alone as its point of reference. For Rābi‘a, since this love is always bound with the favours received from the Beloved, it is not accepted with high regard. In a sense it lacks the purity defined by Rābi‘a’s outlook.

There is nevertheless a place for selfish love in Rābi‘a’s scheme; although love which evolves from one’s self may be something despicable, it does have some benefits. For example, does it not show that the person is in fact capable of some kind of love; even if it is selfish love? Developing this train of thought further one can view selfish love as a stepping stone to real love, that is, disinterested love. Support for such a view can be derived from scholars such as al-Sakkākinī. If we take al-Sakkākinī’s opinion that:

“At the beginning, Rābi‘a was like any other ascetic, praying to God from fear of His punishment and in expectation of His reward; then she progressed from asceticism to Sufism...”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> ‘A. Ḥifnī, *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyyah*, p.18

<sup>48</sup> Tirmidhī, *Manāqib*, 31; See 7.3:1:b The causes of love according to al-Ghazali.

<sup>49</sup> W. al-Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, trans. by Safwat, N., (Octagon Press, London, 1982), p.53

It might be thought that selfish love is a necessary step in the process of arriving at disinterested love for God. There is much evidence in Rābi'a's life to prove this hypothesis, such as she fainted at hearing the mention of hell or fire. Her close friendship with the ascetics of her time also make us think that she was an ascetic before becoming an advocate of disinterested love.

However, this particular point concerning the interrelation between selfish love and Divine love is developed into completed theories by the later Sufis like Ibn Al-Fāriḍ and Ibn 'Arabī. They remove the clouds of suspicion about physical love and make it one of the pillars of their love theories.<sup>50</sup>

Rābi'a's influence can be noted in later Sufi writings. As an illustration Ḥujwīri writes: "Believers who love God are of two kinds: those who regard the favour and beneficence of God towards them, and those who are led by that regard to love the Benefactor..."<sup>51</sup>

Thus far, we have relied upon Rābi'a's poetry as a source of her philosophy. In this respect the researcher is faced with a problem of historical accuracy. Did Rābi'a herself produce the poetry that is attributed to her or is it the invention of her biographers and followers? Historically, it is not clear whether Rābi'a actually composed the poetry which is attributed to her, or merely learnt the poems of various poets and later recited them on appropriate occasions and in appropriate context. It seems that the latter conjecture is more likely: because the same verses are attributed to other Sufis as well.<sup>52</sup> Having said that this does not change the reality of Rābi'a. The vast influence she left concerning the concept of love is a good example of this.

Moving on to another idea, the question arises: "How does Rābi'a's view of love compare with the conceptions of love found within other faith traditions?" This study will focus on the tradition of love found within the religion of Christianity; due to the fact that many similarities can be found between Rābi'a's love and the

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<sup>50</sup> See 8.5:2 Natural Love

<sup>51</sup> al-Ḥujwīri *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by Nicholson, p.307-308; see M. Smith, *Rābi'a*, p.93

<sup>52</sup> J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, p.81

Christian traditions. Muslim scholars seem to be aware of Jesus' message of love. The story that Jesus Christ came across three groups of pious people, one said we worship for the fear of Hell, the other group said we worship for the hope of paradise and the last group said we worship for our love for God. Jesus said: "You are the closest people to God on the day of the judgement."<sup>53</sup>

Among Christian theologians almost the same idea was put forward by Gregory of Nyssa. There are some parallels between Rābi'a's selfish love and love which is called "Eros love" in Christianity. Eros love is considered as human-centred and selfish. It regards the benefit and satisfaction of the lover (man) as the first priority. Therefore, Eros love is condemned by the famous theologian Nygren.<sup>54</sup>

#### **5.4:2:b Love of God because of His Worthiness: (*al-Ḥubb Huwa Ahlun Lahu*)**

The first part of her theory of love, that is selfish love, was a starting point. It is not the essential part of her system rather it is the negative attitude that must be cleaned away from the heart of the one who loves. After this purifying comes disinterested love, the real body of love that Rābi'a strongly defends. All Rābi'a's teachings about Sufism centre on the idea of disinterested love for God. This great achievement, might not solely belong to Rābi'a: but no other Sufi had given it as much emphasis. Many of her dialogues with her associates and her anecdotes strongly stress this side of love for God.

What does disinterested love for God means? Very basically Rābi'a answers this question as: "God deserves (*ahlun*) being loved by His creation for Himself only, that is, without any extra motive. God is worthy of worship and love for the qualities of perfection and beauty that He possesses. Therefore, even if He did not have paradise to reward or hell to punish them He still should be loved."<sup>55</sup>

Hence her love originates from appreciation of the beauty, and perfection and other qualities that God possesses, whereas the selfish love does not regard such high

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<sup>53</sup> al-Fakhr al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-Kabīr*, v.12, p.231; Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūṭ*, v.2, p.56

<sup>54</sup> Throughout his work *Agape and Eros*, Nygren strives to prove Eros is not a Christian concept of love. Instead, he claims that *Agape* is the only way to describe Christian love.

<sup>55</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūṭ*, v.2, p.57; M. Smith, *Rābi'a*, p.126

matters. It only regards the benefits that it receives from the benefactor. This conception of disinterested love is deduced from this following piece of her poetry:

“I have loved You with two loves, a selfish love and a love that is *worthy of You*.....

As for that which is worthy of You, therein You lift the veil that I may see You.  
Yet is there no praise to me in this or that,  
But the praise is to You, whether in that or this.”<sup>56</sup>

Regardless of the difficulty of ascertaining her exact formulations out of this short couplet, Rābi‘a gained fame as the one who distinguished between the selfish love of God who seeks paradise and the selfless love who thinks only of the Divine Beloved. One can think that this short couplet cannot address so many diverse issues and cannot be taken as the basis of disinterested love. However, this couplet gave inspiration to many important Sufis and they always referred to this couplet when they explained Rābi‘a’s theory of love. For example, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī interprets this love in his *Qūt Al-Qulūb*: “This is the sublime love for the majesty of God. It comes not from ambition nor from any sensory joy. Nor does it deserve any reward for that.”<sup>57</sup>

Al-Ghazālī, who will be studied in his own accord in the following pages, also comments on Rābi‘a’s couplet. According to him, Rābi‘a’s second kind of love, that is, the love ‘worthy of Him’ is the love of God’s beauty which was revealed to her; and this is the higher of the two loves, and the finer of them. The delight arising from the beauty of the Lord is that which the Prophet of God explained, speaking of his Lord Most High:

“I have prepared for my faithful servants what eye has not seen nor ear heard and what has not entered into the heart of man.”<sup>58</sup>

al-Ghazālī further illuminates the discussion by adding that when this vision is attained all anxieties and sensual desires seep out from the heart and mind of man.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2 p.57

<sup>57</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūt*, v.2, p.57

<sup>58</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p.267



In other words they are completely annihilated into non-existence. Furthermore, the heart becomes filled with its grace. Even if the Gnostic (*'ārif*) were cast into the fire he would not feel it because of the absorption that he has attained in the path of Divine love. It has in a sense made him oblivious to anything associated to his personal self. He recognises nothing nor does he perceive anything apart from the majesty and beauty of God. Even if the favours of Paradise were spread out before him, he would not turn towards them because of the perfection of the grace he receives. In support of al-Ghazālī's ideas, al-Zabīdī added that this kind of love is the strongest kind of love as it continues to exist under all circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

The analysis of Rābi'a's words by the Sufi authorities indicates that Rābi'a's love for God does not result from His beneficence to her. This idea is also supported in many anecdotes about her. In a conversation related by 'Aṭṭār:

Ja'far asks her: "When is the servant satisfied (*rāḍī*) with God Most High?"

The answer comes: "When his/her pleasure in misfortune is equal to his/her pleasure in prosperity."<sup>60</sup>

With these words, she means that God must be loved not only in prosperous times but also in times of severity and hardship. In other words, the person should not think of his/her well-being rather he/she must give full attention to God's worthiness. This notion is more explicitly stated in her famous prayer:

"O My Lord! If I am worshipping you from fear of fire, burn me in the fires of hell; and if I am worshipping you from desire for paradise, deny me paradise. But if I am worshipping you for yourself alone, then do not deny me the sight of your magnanimous face."<sup>61</sup>

These ideas have very close parallels in the Christian understanding of love. A comparison with Christian notions of Divine love is instructive in relation to the light that it sheds on our understanding of Rābi'a's philosophy. For example, as far

<sup>59</sup> 'A. Ḥifnī, A., *Rābi'a al-Adawiyyah*, p.18

<sup>60</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūṭ*, II, p.40; al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.1, p.201

<sup>61</sup> See Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūṭ*, v.2, p.57; W. al-Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, p.54

as the problem of motives was concerned the Christian mystics have also dealt with this. It is interesting that Gregory of Nyssa has made the same analysis as Rābi‘a concerning the worship and pious acts of man:

“...the most perfect and blessed manner of salvation-- I mean salvation through love. For salvation occurs through fear for some people, when we look at the threats of punishment in Hell and separate ourselves from evil for that reason. And there are others who also act in accordance with virtue through the hope of rewards that is received for those who live well; they are won over not by the love of the good but by the expectation of the returns. But the one who achieves perfection casts aside fear. (For, when it is not out of love that one stays with the master; but through fear of the beating that one does not run away: that is the condition of a slave). And he disdains the actual rewards that he might not seem to consider the reward as more important than the one who gives benefit. Rather, he loves with heart and soul and might, not one of the things that come from God, but of himself who is the source of the good things.”<sup>62</sup>

There is a close resemblance between Rābi‘a’s disinterested love and “*Agape*” love in Christianity. Both of them are “God-centred” in contrast to selfish human love. This kind of love for God does not give priority to the interests of the human. Besides, it rejects the idea of any kind of benefit, whether it is material or spiritual. Therefore, Rābi‘a’s understanding of love is quite similar to the *Agape* motif in Christian theology. According to her, God is not a mere instrument to satisfy the desires of men in the hereafter. In Christian *Agape* the disinterested love originates from God; God loves His creation disinterestedly, and the Christian mystics imitate this. Rābi‘a also admits that God is the source of all the love.

Bringing the discussion towards the modern era, it seems that Rābi‘a’s philosophy has re-emerged. In modern times a parallel of Rābi‘a’s disinterested love is found in the Quietists’ understanding of love. They contend that our love for God must be utterly and completely pure of all self-interest whatsoever: “We must desire nothing for ourselves; nor take any personal satisfaction in making the

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in C. Osborne, *Eros Unveiled, Plato and the God of Love*, p.77

renunciation. We must leave everything to God in perfect trust. We may not even desire to gain heaven or to avoid hell for to do so would import an element of self-interest in our service of God.”<sup>63</sup>

A poem by the Lebanese Christian poet and philosopher from our modern time addresses the same issue in the following manner. Gibran portrays the covetousness behind worship and the shackles of self-interest as the driving force behind one’s worship. It is not an unconditional love but a love that expects rewards and benefits; and, in the absence of these, will not perform worship. One could characterise this as a *business relationship* with God based on worship and return of favours. In the words of Gibran these ‘Rābi‘aistic’ sentiments are echoed in beautiful poetic language:

“Religion is a field unplanted except by those who accomplish an interest from it - return.

If it were not from fear of hell, none would worship any God;  
And if not for the expected rewards, they would deny God.”<sup>64</sup>

Having looked at the theoretical aspects of Rābi‘a’s philosophy of disinterested love, there remains one other issue regarding the practicality of it; bearing in mind the weaknesses found within the human species, especially the desire for self promotion and self interest. The question is Rābi‘a’s disinterested love might be idealistic but is it realistically speaking capable of implementation in life? Is it really possible to love someone completely disinterestedly? Is it possible to have no selfish interest at all in loving God? Is it not indispensable for the lover to have a certain amount of self-interest in the beginning of his/her love. A realistic view of human nature demands recognition of the fact that without self-interest the soul will never have any adequate initial motive, although it is to be hoped that this self-interest will give rise to some better motives. Therefore, the idea of self-interest should not be regarded as a kind of necessary evil.<sup>65</sup> It must be regarded as a step to disinterested love of God. In the Qur’ān, there are many verses which explain in

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<sup>63</sup> E. W. Dicken, *The Crucible of love*, (London, Longman and Todd ltd, 1963), p.495

<sup>64</sup> W. al-Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, p.72

<sup>65</sup> E. W. Dicken, *The Crucible of love*, p.497

great detail the reward the obedient servants get as well as the punishment for the disobedient. In a sense the Qur'ān accepts the selfish behaviour of the servants as normal. It might be thought that Rābi'a's disinterested love is not for the beginners but for the Sufis who have gone a long way on the Sufi path.

#### 5.4:2:c Practical Examples of Disinterested Love in Rābi'a's Philosophy

Rābi'a conveys her message of Divine love through different channels: poetry, Arab proverbs, and, short puns. In addition to these, she uses a distinctive method: Rābi'a, not only by her words but also by her actions, tries to communicate her disinterested love to her friends. In an anecdote related by Aflāki:

“One day a number of her friends saw Rābi'a walking hastily; carrying in one hand water and in the other fire. Upon being asked where she was going, she answered: ‘I want to throw fire into Paradise and pour water into Hell so that these two veils disappear, and it becomes clear who worships God out of love, not out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise. What if the hope of Paradise and the fear of Hell did not exist? Not one would worship his Lord or obey Him.’”<sup>66</sup>

In this anecdote Rābi'a tried to show vividly that worshipping God must be out of pure love, unadulterated with other thoughts. In this way, Rābi'a liberated the religious life from all kinds of shackles: including both spiritual and material gains. Because she was the first person to introduce this motif there were doubts as to her Islamic background. Some went so far as to suggest that Rābi'a was not a Muslim. They accused her of bringing Christian ideas into Islam.

Rābi'a did not reject paradise completely as an evil. It was good, but for her it was an obstacle for the highest good, that is, the love of God. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to note that Rābi'a did not desire paradise as it acted as a hindrance to her devotion to God. Asked what she thought of Paradise, Rābi'a replied with an Arabic proverb: “First the neighbour, then the house”.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> see al-Aflāki, *Manāqib al- 'Ārifin* p.114a, quoted in Smith, M., *Rābi'a*, p.98

<sup>67</sup> Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al- Awliyā'*, p.69; See al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.1, p.203;

To her, God is a jealous God, who detests His servants' distractions away from Him. On one occasion explaining the reason of her illness she tells: "All I know, I swear to God, is that recently Heaven was revealed to me, and I felt a slight inclination of heart towards it. I reckon that the Almighty's jealousy has chastised me through this sickness. It is a sort of Divine reproof."<sup>68</sup>

As a result, it is easy to get the impression that Rābi'a's philosophy of love is full of negative characteristics; for example, the denial of any kind of self-satisfaction or any of the pleasures allowed in Islamic law. Nevertheless, there are positive elements in Rābi'a's philosophy. It is to these that we shall now turn our attention. It could be argued that Rābi'a's understanding of love was of a positive nature as well as having some negative elements. One example of the approach to seeing the positive in Rābi'a's philosophy is to consider attitude and outlook to the problems and vicissitudes of life which inevitably fall upon man at some time or other in his existence in the world. Like her contemporaries she did not blame the world, or other things, to show her love for God. On one occasion, it is reported that she visited a man of knowledge from Basra who started talking about the wretchedness of the world. She gave a deep sigh and said:

"You are a man who must love this world, for he who greatly loves something, keeps talking about it... if you had completely freed yourself from this world, it would not have mattered to you: neither its wretchedness nor its goodness".<sup>69</sup>

In the same way, she reprimanded her spiritual brethren, Sufiān Al-Thawrī, Mālik b. Dīnār and Šāliḥ b. 'Abd al-Jalīl, when in her presence they talked about the devils of the world.<sup>70</sup> She strives to change the negative approach of her friends to the world and its affairs. The mere asceticism of her friends that lacked any kind of flexibility and theosophy was gradually transformed by her philosophy. Therefore she was an activist not a reactionist. Instead of blaming things she tried to change herself. She removed the word *hate* from her vocabulary.

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<sup>68</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.1, p.203; J. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Woman*, (New York, Nimatullahi Publications, 1983), p.45

<sup>69</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.I, p.202

<sup>70</sup> Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūt*, v.2, p.57; W. al-Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, p.56

Once she was asked: “Do you hold Satan as an enemy?” She replied: “No”. The other, astonished, asked: “How is that?” Rābi‘a said: “My love for God leaves no place for hating Satan”<sup>71</sup>

According to her hating Satan is wasting energy and time which might be used in more positive activities, that is, for the love of God. Further, Rābi‘a’s love-philosophy also shapes her understanding of other Sufi terms and she explains them from the perspective of her love for God. For example she describes *ṣidq* (truthfulness) in the following way: “Truthfulness is to forget punishment while seeing the Lord.”<sup>72</sup>

In other words, only those who truly love, can be truthful since they do not realise pain in the presence of their beloved.<sup>73</sup> This ‘Rābi‘anisitic’ idea not to feel pain in the presence of the Beloved seems to influence al-Ḥallāj. However, al-Ḥallāj developed the idea of forgetting the punishment in the presence of God to far extremes as will be discussed later.<sup>74</sup>

In these examples, it is clearly seen that she always defines spiritual states of Sufism from the perspective of love. Although at times al-Sakkākīni exaggerates Rābi‘a’s position, it seems right that she depicts Rābi‘a as the mentor of her Sufi friends, and always having the last say in the discussions.<sup>75</sup>

Rābi‘a’s conception of love is inextricably bound with her notions of worship and obedience to God. In this regard she seems to equate love with the obedience of the beloved. Looking from the perspective of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, she seems to be in conformity with them. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that Rābi‘a’s understanding was alien and different to the orthodox opinions of Islam. According to Rābi‘a, love for God means obeying His commands. In the following couplet she clearly states this:

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, ‘Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’, in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, ed. Michael A. Sells, p.163

<sup>72</sup> Nurbakhsh, *Muslim Women*, p.48

<sup>73</sup> See Qur’ān, 12:31

<sup>74</sup> 6.4:2:1 Suffering in God’s love .

<sup>75</sup> W. al-Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, p.66

“You rebel against God, yet claim to love Him. I swear by my faith that that is most strange. If your love were sincere, you would have obeyed Him, since the one who loves obeys the one he loves.”<sup>76</sup>

Divine Love in Rābi‘a’s understanding also serves another purpose. It is a method by which one can not only attain closeness to God but can also acquire the knowledge of him. This cannot be achieved by merely fearing God. To gain an understanding and knowledge of something requires some form of love for it. Thus, it appears that her philosophy inclines towards the view that it is impossible to gain the knowledge of God in a state of despair and fear. God can only be appreciated in the best way if His love for his creation is stressed. Her philosophy of love was to love God for His Sake and not for anything else.

Due to her contribution to Islamic understanding in general and to the Sufi perception in particular, the verse: “He loves them and they love Him”<sup>77</sup> became the central focus of Sufis and poets. They tried to find out the secrets and features of this love (*maḥabbā*) instead of His wrath and the punishment of His creation.

To sum up Rābi‘a’s teaching on love; she teaches first that love must shut out all but the Beloved: that is, the saint must turn his back on the world and all its attractions. Secondly, she teaches that this love must be disinterested, that it must look neither for reward, nor for relief from punishment: but it must seek only to do the Will of God and to accomplish what is pleasing to Him.

It is also necessary to look at the ultimate culmination of Rābi‘a’s Divine love. In other words, what is the final destination of the one who loves, having begun this journey of devotion and disinterested love? Will it result in being absorbed in the beloved, for example, or will it be some form of closeness with the beloved without unification. According to Rābi‘a, the Sufi mystic attains his goal through the stages of love when at last he beholds the Divine Beauty unveiled. Rābi‘a thus combines

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<sup>76</sup> M. Smith, *Rābi‘a*, p.98 quoting *Kashf Al-Maḥjūb*, p.58,

<sup>77</sup> Qur’ān, 5:59 (Pickthal)

her teaching on love with the doctrine of al-Kashf, the unveiling of the Beatific vision to the one who loves.<sup>78</sup>

This is in line with the prophetic tradition stating that the believers will see God in the hereafter as plainly as they see the moon in its fullness on a cloudless night.<sup>79</sup>

By means of love, the Sufi attains to mystic gnosis and “the heart becomes filled with its grace”. That knowledge comes directly as a gift from God and from it the Gnostic proceeds to contemplation of the unveiled Essence of God. Rābi‘a throughout her life had her eyes fixed upon that goal. In one of her poems she says: “My hope is for union with You, for that is the goal of my desire.”<sup>80</sup>

Rābi‘a understands love as obedience and submission to the will of God. Sufyān Al-Thawrī asked her: “Why don’t you ask God to alleviate your pain?”

She answers: “He Himself wills that I suffer, isn’t that obvious to you? Still despite your knowledge you urge me to pursue my own desire in defiance of His, though it is wrong to oppose the Beloved’s Will.”<sup>81</sup>

All Sufis who keep the way of love see death as the meeting time with God. Some even called it “The wedding night”. Rābi‘a also found nothing to be afraid of in death: “Death is a bridge between friends. The time now nears that I cross that bridge, and friend meets Friend.”<sup>82</sup>

From the perspective of the Qur’ān, it can be said that Rābi‘a’s understanding of selfish love is not consistent; as the Qur’ān uses on innumerable occasions the promise of reward for the obedient and the threats against the disobedient servants. If Rābi‘a, without criticising these two elements, had brought the third way of relationship with God, that is, of disinterested love it would be perfectly suitable to the Qur’anic paradigm.

#### 5.4:3 Love for God’s sake (*al-Ḥubb lillāh*):

<sup>78</sup> *The Islamic Encyclopaedia*, v. 3, p. 70

<sup>79</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Tawḥīd*, n.6882 (K.T.)

<sup>80</sup> al-Hurayfish, *Al-Rawḍ Al-Fāiq*, (Cairo, AH. 1279), p.214

<sup>81</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, trans. by A. J. Arberry, p.40; J. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Woman*, p.46

<sup>82</sup> J. Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Woman*, p.66



Having surveyed Rābi‘a’s love for God, there remains for us another perspective of Rābi‘a’s philosophy: this is regarding the implications of her philosophy of love as far as it related to the rest of mankind. Although Rābi‘a does not give us a clear idea about her love for her human-fellows, there are a few anecdotes that reveal her attitude to human love. These anecdotes all indicate that she has a negative approach to human love. For example, on seeing Rabāh al-Qays carrying a relative’s child she says: “Never would I have imagined that there was a place in your heart available for other than God.”<sup>83</sup>

If Rābi‘a’s love had only excluded normal people from her system there would not have been a big problem. However, there is one idea in Rābi‘a’s philosophy of love that created a controversy amongst the orthodox scholars and theologians. This related to her exclusion of the Prophet in her system of Divine love. Although in the traditions of the Prophet, it is clearly commanded to love him, Rābi‘a states that her love for God left no space to love the Prophet. Rābi‘a’s love of God was to such an extent that there was no room for any other kind of love, even for the love of the Prophet. On one occasion she said that: “I saw the Prophet in a dream, and he said to me: ‘O Rābi‘a, do you love me?’ I said: ‘O Prophet of God who is there that does not love you? But my love to God has possessed me so much so that no place remains for loving or hating any, save Him.’”<sup>84</sup>

This concept is contrary to the orthodox understanding of Islam, in which both the Prophet and God are loved together. To separate between God and the Prophet seems to disagree with the injunction of the Qur’ān. In addition, it can be argued that although Rābi‘a had many similar, and at times identical ideas, with Christian love, she is singularly different in excluding the love of the Prophet. Turning back to Christian love, it is essential to love Jesus to the extent that the absence of love for Christ means that one cannot be accepted as a Christian. This idea differentiates her from her Christian counterparts.

### 5.5. Traces of the Other Sufis on Rābi‘a

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62

<sup>84</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, ‘Rābi‘a: Her words and Life in Attar’s Memorial of the Friends of God.’ trans. by Losensky, P., in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p.163

Rābi‘a had a close circle of Sufis around her but none of the biographers identify them as her teacher or masters. The main reason must be that she lived in the formative period of Sufism and at that time Sufism did not establish itself as an institution. It was rather a movement of individual ascetics who renounced the worldly life to devote all their time for the worship of God. Later in the III. Century of the Hijrah these early ascetics tended to establish institutions for their followers, and the Sheikh-Murīd, (master-disciple) relationship began to establish itself among the Sufi circles.

As the resources always show Rābi‘a as the leader of her contemporaries it might be possible that the poems which she used to express her ideas are borrowed from others. In that sense we see the traces of other Sufis such as Dhū al-Nūn.

‘Abdurrahmān al-Badawī suggests that Rābi‘a may have been influenced by Christian Mystics. He even compares her with Teresa de Avila, a Christian Mystic of the 16th century. Teresa believes that the man has initially fear and terror at seeing God’s majesty. This fear later transforms into a deeper fear of offending God; but not a fear of punishment, for that is of no account in comparison to the loss of God.<sup>85</sup> She says: “O death, I know not why anyone fears thee, since life is in thee!”<sup>86</sup>

Al-Ḥifnī rejects this idea for the simple reason that the objectives of love in Christianity and Islam are different. Islam absolutely denounces the idea of incarnation, so there is no possibility for that influence.<sup>87</sup>

The close resemblance between Rābi‘a and some other Christian mystics might be because of the influence of the Christian mystics or Christian converts to Islam. However, taking her biography into consideration there is no historical evidence that Rābi‘a herself came from a Christian background or she was in any close relationships with Christians. This does not mean, of course, that she was not

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<sup>85</sup>St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Complete works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, trans. edit. by Peers, E. Allison, (London, Sheed & Ward, 1946), v.I p.263-64

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, v.2, 407

<sup>87</sup> ‘A. Ḥifnī, *Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyah*, p.100

indirectly influenced from their ideas since the Christian and Muslim population lived side by side for centuries and influenced each other.

### 5.6. The Influence and the Contribution of Rābi'a on the Other Sufis

Rābi'a undoubtedly had the utmost influence in respect of the following centuries of Sufism. From this influence, this research will concentrate on her influence particularly on the concepts of love in the following centuries. Again to narrow down the scope, the study of her influence will be restricted to the Sufis who are specifically studied in this research.

Rābi'a's paradigm of love was received warmly by most Sufi authors. The reason why she received such a wide welcome is that Sufis found in her a different understanding of the Sufi way. She was a devoted ascetic, practising all kinds of renunciations. On the other hand, she was looking at God from the perspective of love. Almost all Sufi classics refer to her ideas concerning the love of God. Her ideas played an important role in both practical and theoretical Sufism. Confirming this idea Smith writes:

“As a teacher and guide along the mystic way, Rābi'a is greatly revered by the Sufis and practically all the Sufi writers speak of her teaching, and quote her sayings, as being the highest authority.”<sup>88</sup>

All the classic writers, such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Qushayrī, al-Suhrawardī, al-Ghazālī, refer to her teaching in general and on love in particular. Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, the author of *Qūt al-Qulūb* a Sufi book which mainly deals with the practical side of Sufism, and others from these Sufi authors, elevate her to the peak of Mystical stations. In his chapter dedicated to the concept of love, al-Makkī almost exclusively analyses the thoughts of Rābi'a. Furthermore, al-Makkī gives her a more prominent position over Sufyān al-Thawrī by showing Rābi'a in the station of “*al-Khullah*” (friendship) with God.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> M. Smith, *Rābi'a*, p.47

<sup>89</sup> See Abū Ṭālib Makkī, *Qūt*, v.2, p.55

Al-Ḥallāj's understanding of love is also similar to Rābi'a's disinterested love in essence. He accepts that the one should not think of one's own interest in the mystical path. However, he goes one step further than Rābi'a and defends the view that the one who loves God must sacrifice himself in the path of love.<sup>90</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī accepts she is on the same level as: 'Abd al-Qādir Al-Gaylānī; and, Abū Su'ūd b. al-Shiblī. They are accepted as the most important Sufis of their times. Ibn 'Arabī remarked of Rābi'a: "She is the one who analyses and classes the categories of love to the point of being the most famous interpreter of love."<sup>91</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī also deals with issues Rābi'a spoke on. It can be argued that Rābi'a's division of disinterested love and interested love provided the material and basis for Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual love and natural love respectively. However, Ibn 'Arabī develops Rābi'a's ideas and does not copy her directly.

Her theory of love for God's sake without any other motive such as hope of paradise or fear of hell has become the central topic of Sufism and in particular in Sufi poetry. Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār, the biographer of Rābi'a says that: "When He fills your mind with paradise and *houris* know that by certain that He keeps you far from Himself."<sup>92</sup>

Interestingly, her fame and influence are not restricted to the Islamic lands only. The legend of Rābi'a was brought to Europe by Joinville, the chancellor of Louis IX, in the late thirteenth century. Rābi'a's figure was used in a seventeenth-century French treatise on pure love as a model of Divine love.<sup>93</sup> This shows that she was known as a model of pure love among the Muslim lands to the extent that she was chosen as a representative. As a result, her fame reached Europe.

## 5.7 Conclusion

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<sup>90</sup> 6.4:2:1 Suffering in God's Love

<sup>91</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, p.203-204; C. W. Ernst, The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rābi'a to Ruzbihān, p.439, in *The Heritage of Sufism vol.1, Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. by Leonard Lewisohn, (Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Pub., London, 1993)

<sup>92</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq Al-Ṭayr*, edited by M. Jawād Shakūr, (Tehran, 1962), quoted in *Mystical Dimensions*, p.204

<sup>93</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.8

1-She was unanimously accepted as one of the earliest Sufis who spoke on love with such a strong emphasis. Therefore her philosophy of love overshadowed the theories of her contemporaries in regard to Divine love.

2- Rābi'a's originality and contribution to Sufi understanding of love lies in her division of love into the branches: interested (selfish) and disinterested love. This issue is the core of her philosophy.

3-Her paradigm of love can be summarised in the shortest terms as "love God for His worthiness and do not expect anything in return for your worship."

4-Her love is exclusive and absolute love for God alone. In Rābi'a's paradigm of love there is no place for human love. She gives a negative attitude to profane love and consequently, her understanding of marriage is also of a negative nature. She considers marriage as an obstacle to full devotion to Divine love. On the contrary, mainstream Islam encourages marriage and dislikes anti-marriage attitudes.

5-Her exclusion of the Prophet from the scope of Divine love also supports the previous paragraph that she had opposing ideas with mainstream Islam. From the Qur'anic and Prophetic points of view, this idea is open to criticism, since both these sources seem to consider both these loves (love of God and the Prophet) in the same category.

6-In her understanding of the mystical path, the concept of fear has also played an equally important role. She does not exclusively speak of love but also makes use of the element of fear quite often. Therefore, she can be accepted as a bridge between two opposing poles of Sufism, that is, fear-centred Sufism and love-centred Sufism.

7-Her understanding of love is quite simplistic as a result, preferred over the complex theories of love like al-Ḥallāj or Ibn al-Fāriḍ. The latter's understanding of love has deep philosophical roots, hence open to the few who have a command of philosophical thinking. Simplicity of understanding is one of the reasons why Rābi'a's theory is acceptable by the majority.

8- Rābi'a's paradigm of love and worship is quite in harmony with that of the Qur'ān except in the understanding of the rewards. The Qur'anic paradigm "obedience versus reward" is not received warmly by Rābi'a. If we classify this concept it can be as selfish love in Rābi'a's understanding.

## CHAPTER SIX

## Al-Ḥallāj's Paradigm of Love

**6.1. Introduction**

It seems that for the early Sufis including Rābi'a, the concept of love was generally defined as a feature of their worship of God. In other words, the concept of love had been understood to be the exclusive motive behind worshipping and obeying Him. These early Sufis thought that their worship and devotion to God were motivated either by the fear of God or by the love for God. The former motive can be illustrated with reference to the personality of Ḥasan al-Basrī. His view was that the driving force behind his worship was due to the fear of God, coupled with God's chastisement of those who disobeyed him.<sup>1</sup>

These two different motives played different roles in the lives of the Sufis. As for the latter view, i.e., love as the basis of worship, Rābi'a is represented as the best example. Rābi'a's main achievement was to exclude the love for paradise as a legitimate goal of mysticism on the grounds that it is a selfish desire and not a good motive for the Sufi wayfarer. However, Rābi'a and her contemporaries did not place the notion of love in the centre of their philosophy. As a consequence, Rābi'a was more or less an ascetic Sufi, who did not utter controversial utterances which will cause quarrel among the mainstream scholars.<sup>2</sup> In general, what she preached about love did not conflict with the Qur'anic principles. She had reasonable grounds based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah of the Prophet, on which she laid the foundations of her understanding of love. This fact meant that she received a general acceptance by Sufis as well as the orthodox scholars in this matter.

However, in the following ages, the concept of love followed a dangerous path. This dangerous expansion was most acute, where it concerned the nature of the relationship between the lover and beloved. In other words, do lover and Beloved preserve their independence? Or does love entail the complete obliteration of the lover's soul in the Beloved? If the answer leans towards the former position then the Sufis love is of a sober nature, for he still maintains his own separate identity.

<sup>1</sup> See al-Qushayrī, *Risālah*, p. 118, 140, 275

<sup>2</sup> See al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.3, p.201

On the other hand, if the answer leans more to the latter position, then the Sufi's love is of an "intoxicated nature", in that the lover has completely lost his identity and annihilated himself in the Beloved. Therefore, it is possible to divide the Sufis into two broad categories; the sober and the intoxicated. Both of these groups are associated with some famous Sufis. For example, Junayd is known as the leader of the sober Sufis and al-Ḥallāj as the protagonist of intoxicated love.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, al-Ḥallāj attempted to solve many theological questions on the basis of his conception of the role of love. Nothing escaped al-Ḥallāj and in this connection he discussed issues such as, 'the understanding of unity of God', 'the motive behind the act of creation', the status of Satan as far as love is concerned'. Before a detailed analysis of al-Ḥallāj's methodology and views is provided, it would be useful to provide some indication of al-Ḥallāj's life and background. This will allow us to place al-Ḥallāj in context and may provide us with some useful insight into understanding his ideas.

## 6.2. His Life:

Abū al-Mughīth al-Ḥusayn Ibn Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj was born around 858 AD in the southern Iranian community of Ṭūr in the province of Fars. His grandfather was a Zoroastrian<sup>4</sup> and a descendant of Abū Ayyūb, who was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad. At an early age al-Ḥallāj went to live in the city of Wāsīt, an important Iraqi centre for textiles, trade and Arab culture. As understood from the word 'al-Ḥallāj' (meaning cotton-carder), his father may have supported the family by carding cotton.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Ḥallāj's inclination towards an ascetic way of life began at an early age when he was 16. His intense curiosity and deep interest pushed him further and further along the path of devotion. He was not content with memorising the Qur'ān only, he strove to gain an appreciation of its deep and profound mysteries. This trend

<sup>3</sup> al-Ḥallāj himself declares that God made him intoxicated with His love in, *Akḥbār al-Ḥallāj*, ed. by L. Massignon, (Paris 1936), p.17; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*, p.311

<sup>4</sup> al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, (Maktabat al-Khanci, Cairo, 1931) v.8 p.112; According to Ibn Nadīm he was a Persian, but whether of Nishapur, Marw, Tāliqan, Rayy or Kuhistan is uncertain, see *al-Fihrist*, p.283

<sup>5</sup> al-Sulamī, A., *Ṭabaqāt*, p.307; 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, 'I., 'al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj', *Majallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb wa al-Tarbiya*, no;3-4, (Jāmiat al-Kuwait, 1973), p.304; See for a full account of al-Hallaj's life H. W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, (Surrey, Curzon Press, 1995); Browne, E., G., *A Literary History of Persia*, v.I, p.428-436



continued into his adolescence during which he began to withdraw from the world and to seek the company of individuals who were able to instruct him in the Sufi way.<sup>6</sup>

There are many accounts in *the Akhbār al-Ḥallāj* which report that he exposed himself to very extensive mystical activities such as fasting for days on end and worshipping in excessive heat in Mecca. This information from his biography should not be dismissed lightly, for it provides us with an insight into the nature of al-Ḥallāj's thinking. Contrary to the stereotype of al-Ḥallāj as a theosophical Sufi, these practices indicate that al-Ḥallāj did not reject the practical side of Sufism and the methods which were developed by those who preceded him.<sup>7</sup> Where al-Ḥallāj parted company was, with the conclusions and culmination of these practices. This will be explained in the following pages.

### 6.2:1 His Masters

al-Ḥallāj studied under many Sufis; the first of his masters was Sahl b. 'Abdullah al-Tustarī (d.896). Known as the author of the first Sufi exegesis of the Qur'ān, al-Tustarī taught al-Ḥallāj for two years<sup>8</sup> when he was 16. Two years later, he moved to Basra, where he became a disciple of 'Amr b. Uthmān al-Makkī.<sup>9</sup> 'Amr was a scholar of *Ḥadīth* as well as being an authority on Sufism. However, their relationship did not last long and they separated soon because of some disagreements between them.<sup>10</sup> As a result of a dispute, 'Amr became a staunch enemy of al-Ḥallāj. In the end al-Ḥallāj left Basra and sought the advice of Junayd of Bagdād, under whom al-Makkī had likewise studied.<sup>11</sup> Junayd advised him to be patient.<sup>12</sup> For a brief spell of time al-Ḥallāj stayed under the guidance and discipleship of Junayd. However, as had happened with previous masters, al-Ḥallāj broke away from Junayd as well.

From this brief survey a few interesting deductions can be made. It seems that al-Ḥallāj did not have a conventional *Sheikh-Murid* relationship with his masters. In

<sup>6</sup> al-Sa'īdī, S., *al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Hayātuhu, Shi'ruhu wa Nathruhu*, (Dār 'Alā' al-Dīn, Dimashq, 1996), p.50

<sup>7</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akhbār al-Ḥallāj*, p.18-19, 43

<sup>8</sup> al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v.8 p.112

<sup>9</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, p.265; al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v.8, p.112

<sup>10</sup> See al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'*, p.499; al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.I, p.545

<sup>11</sup> al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.307; al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v.8, p.112

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, v.8 p.112

one way or another he always broke away from them. This attitude shows us that he had an uncompromising and a rebellious nature acting against the established customs. He did not accept the truths of others as his own but always stamped his own mark on these matters. As al-Ḥujwīrī<sup>13</sup> states, it was not his beliefs which made him unpopular among the Sufi Sheikhs of his time, but it was his rebellious and outspoken nature which did not allow him to develop an enduring relationship with his masters and colleagues.<sup>14</sup> This attitude of al-Ḥallāj, is described by Mason as “individualism”<sup>15</sup>. In sum, he was an original personality and it is difficult to say that he was easily influenced by his masters.

### 6.2:2 His Travels:

It would seem to be possible to find a connection between al-Ḥallāj’s dynamic personality and his travels. The most likely inference is that his outlook on life was strengthened and reinforced by the experiences gained and contacts made during his travels. Furthermore, it is also true that al-Ḥallāj’s dynamic character reveals itself in his lifestyle. He travelled extensively in the Islamic lands; preaching, teaching and writing between the years c.895-910. He made a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he followed a strict course of mystical practices and exercises for a year. He travelled to such regions as Fars, Khuzistan, Khorasan, Transoxiana and Sistan.<sup>16</sup> One distinctive characteristic of al-Ḥallāj is that he did not attach himself to any place he visited; for example, he never settled in any place for a long time just as he never settled with a master for any length of time.

During his travels, he expounded his views on the nature of the relationship between man and God to receptive audiences. Thus, he preached and wrote about the way to an intimate relationship with God. Needless to say, in the course of his journeys he attracted large numbers of disciples, some of whom accompanied him on a second pilgrimage to Mecca. Following this he returned to his family in Baghdad. Shortly afterwards, he set out by sea for a mission to territories hitherto not penetrated by Islam i.e. India and Turkistan. According to his own account, his aim was to preach Islam. However, his adversaries interpreted these visits as

<sup>13</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, trans. by Abū al-‘Azā’im, p.180

<sup>14</sup> al-Sha’rānī, *Lawāqih*, p.234; al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.307

<sup>15</sup> H. Mason, ‘Hallaj and the Baghdad School of Sufism’, in *Sufi Magazine*, (Autumn 1992), p. 21

<sup>16</sup> Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, by A. J. Arberry, p.266; al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v.8 p.113

quests to learn the art of black magic.<sup>17</sup> Following a third pilgrimage to Mecca, he again returned to Baghdad and began to invite people to his way of Sufism (c.908).

It is quite possible that during his travels, he came into contact with sages and religious leaders from a number of other religious traditions. This could perhaps account for the nature of his ideas which to his orthodox contemporaries smacked of heresy. Indeed one of the charges at his trial was that he had borrowed ideas alien to Islam, for example, from India, and had mixed them with his own in order to come up with an outlook on Islam which was wholly out of keeping with its orthodox character.<sup>18</sup>

### 6.2:3 His execution

It would be no exaggeration to say that al-Ḥallāj is most commonly associated with his dramatic trial and execution. The inevitable conclusion of al-Ḥallāj's approach to Sufism meant that he offended the existing religious authorities of his time. This led him to live a life of suffering and constant rebuke ultimately leading to his death. Although it is not necessary to go into great detail about the nature of the execution and the preceding events, it would be useful in passing to briefly highlight some of the events.

It was not merely the ideas of al-Ḥallāj which led to his execution: the impact and influence of his ideas was a far more worrying thing for the religious authorities. For wherever he went, al-Ḥallāj succeeded in attracting people towards his ideas. After making his third and final pilgrimage to Mecca, he returned to Baghdad and attracted a large group of followers.<sup>19</sup> Because of his controversial personality and sayings as well as his involvement in the political intrigue of the Abbasid court, he was imprisoned. After eight years imprisonment he was ultimately sentenced to death and executed in the year 309/913.<sup>20</sup> There is an abundant amount of literature available which documents the minute proceedings of al-Ḥallāj's time in

<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, (Cairo, Matba'at al-Istiḳamah), p.283

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283

<sup>19</sup> al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v.8 p.114

<sup>20</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, p.264; Michael, A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p.266;

captivity and his subsequent execution. In the light of this, there seems to be no necessity to labour the narrative of these events.<sup>21</sup>

From the perspective of this study, however, a few general comments about the execution can be made. The first thing that faces the observer is that the motives of his execution were not clear cut. In this respect, the historical issues surrounding his execution are complex and are far from providing a true picture. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some underlying themes. For example, the general notion that al-Ḥallāj was executed because he claimed to be the Divine truth (*ana al-ḥaqq*) seems no longer to be popular, at least, in modern scholarship which favours a more political interpretation of the events. It was not the utterances of al-Ḥallāj but the political implications and connotations of them which led to his trial. As Nicholson states, the legal members of the court insisted that he should be accused of having included the pilgrimage to Mecca amongst the class of religious obligations that are not absolutely binding. However, more important than this was the charge that al-Ḥallāj was a Qarāmita agent.<sup>22</sup> This was a major accusation pronounced in order to destroy al-Ḥallāj bearing in mind the Qarāmita were regarded as a heretical and dangerous sect at that time. Their importance can be seen from the fact that shortly after al-Ḥallāj's execution, the Qarāmita sacked Mecca and carried off the Black Stone the sanctity of which is so great in the eyes of the Muslims.

Such an interpretation of the execution of al-Ḥallāj is further supported, if one compares him to other Sufis in former times like Abū Yazid al-Bistāmī, who made similar ecstatic utterances. In those cases, the owners of such statements did not suffer the fate that was allotted to al-Ḥallāj. They were certainly not executed. In a similar manner later Sufis, including Ibn 'Arabī whose ecstatic utterances were widely known, were spared such treatment. Indeed, Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī gained support and encouragement from the political leaders of the time.

<sup>21</sup> See al-Sha'rānī, *Lawāqih al-Anwār*, p.236; al-Munawī, A., *al-Kawākib*, v.I, p.544

<sup>22</sup> R. A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality in Sufism*, (Cambridge, 1922); Qarmatians are the sect who fought against the injustices of the Abbasid court. The leader of this movement was Hamdan b. Esh'as al-Qarmat. The followers of this movement were Shiites consisted of workers and traders. (see Mirali, Ismail, *al-Qarāmita wa al-Haraka al-Qarmatiyya*, (Beirut, 1983); also see M. J. Sharaf, *A'lām al-Taṣawwuf fi al-Islām*, (Iskandariyyah, Dār al-Jamā'āt al-Misriyyah, p.119-21

In the light of the above, it is possible to regard al-Ḥallāj's execution as driven by political considerations under the pretext of religion and heresy.<sup>23</sup> Al-Ḥallāj can therefore be seen as a victim of politics and it is open to speculation that; had he been alive in more politically stable times, he would have been treated more favourably. This mixing of politics with the history of Sufism left a negative scar on its history. The execution of al-Ḥallāj was seen as a landmark event. It provided the opponents of Sufism with the support of the state in their animosity and hatred of the movement. However, it is unfortunate that very few people actually saw the political motives behind the execution at the time.

Another recurring theme in the Sufi literature is that, although al-Ḥallāj genuinely experienced his Divine ecstasies, he was wrong to divulge these experiences and he certainly should not have proclaimed them in public. According to Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d.945) : "al-Ḥallāj and I are of one belief, but I kept silent while he spoke openly."<sup>24</sup> It is also narrated that al-Shiblī saw God in his dream. He asked God why He had allowed His devotee, al-Ḥallāj, to be executed so cruelly, and God's answer was: 'Whom my love kills, I will be his blood money'<sup>25</sup>.

From al-Shiblī's words it can be deduced that the mysteries of the Sufis should be kept secret. This is because, he guessed, mainstream Islam and the jurists will not tolerate the open revelation of Sufi mysteries at that time. As for al-Ḥallāj, he violated this principle and went public. Similarly, the execution of Sheikh al-Ishrāq al-Suhrawardī (d.1191) confirms this attitude of mainstream Islam towards Sufis who openly reveal their inner states. However, the above mentioned persecutions and executions often had counterproductive results and in some ways helped to promote the ideas of the Sufis. In this regard it is interesting to note that Netton emphasises the fact that the execution of the Sufis did not always succeed in curtailing their ideas. As an example, he highlights the position of Shihāb al-Dīn and al-Ḥallāj and states that their tragic ends increased the significance of their messages after their deaths.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A. al-Saqqāf, *al-Ḥallāj aw Ṣawt al-Damīr*, (Ramtan, Egypt, 1995), p.58

<sup>24</sup> al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v.8, p.121; al-Ḥūjwīrī, *Kashf*, trans by Abū al-'Azā'im, p.180

<sup>25</sup> Schimmel, A., *Deciphering the Signs of God*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p.124

<sup>26</sup> I.R. Netton, *Seek Knowledge*, p.44

Moving on to the second group of scholars, that is, those who opposed him, the views of Ibn al-Nadīm are revealing as a representative example of this class. In his words: “al-Ḥusayn Ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj was a crafty man and a conjurer who ventured into the Sufi school of thought, affecting their ways of speech. He laid claim to every science, but nevertheless (his claims) were futile. He even knew something about the science of alchemy. He was ignorant, bold, obsequious but courageous in the presence of the sultans, attempting great things and ardently desiring a change of government. Among his adherents he claimed divinity, speaking of Divine union...”<sup>27</sup>

Because of prohibition and the burning of his books few texts have come down to us intact, although numerous anecdotes and aphorisms have been collected as the *Akhbar al-Ḥallāj*. Aside from these, we have a collection of poetry attributed to al-Ḥallāj, and a single sustained text, the *Ṭawāsīn*, with a very thin set of surviving manuscripts. The *Ṭawāsīn* was written in prison in his last years therefore it is the most important document which transmits his philosophy.

#### 6.2:4 His background

The age in which al-Ḥallāj lived, namely the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century may be seen as the pinnacle of the Islamic religious sciences. For example, the famous collections of the traditions of the Prophet were compiled in that period. The period also witnessed the systematisation of Sufi doctrines which were developed into fully-fledged theories. In other words, the ascetic teachings of the early Sufis gave way to the other theories and teachings such as annihilation, unity of the Being, passionate love of God and so on<sup>28</sup>. Many of al-Ḥallāj’s contemporaries played a crucial role in this process. The one common factor between them was that love was the primary way of approaching God.

Some of the views of al-Ḥallāj’s contemporaries will be presented below in order to understand the climate of ideas in which he was developing his theory of love. According to Yaḥyā b. Muādh al-Rāzī (d.871): “One mustard seed of love is

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p.284

<sup>28</sup> See Ozturk, Yasar Nuri, *Hallac-i Mansur ve Eseri*, (Istanbul, Yeni Boyut, 1997), p.18-21

dearer to me than seventy years of worship without love.”<sup>29</sup> Yaḥyā’s preference for love is better understood in the context of the rigid understanding of the worship by jurists who emphasised the outward rituals and formalities of worship. He was against the ritualism and dry devotion which lacks sentimental dimensions. According to him love is the most important thing behind devotion.

The views of Abū Yazīd Bistāmī also provide us with insight into the climate of mystical ideas which prevailed at the time. He is the closest person to al-Ḥallāj as far as the understanding of love is concerned. He is accepted as the representative of intoxicated Sufism, preferring ecstasy and loss of senses in Divine love, to the sober understanding of Sufism.<sup>30</sup> Al-Ḥallāj followed his footsteps, in other words al-Bistāmī’s understanding of love and unity opened the way for al-Ḥallāj’s rise. Abū Yazīd’s teachings insisted on the love of God, absolute unity of God and annihilation *fanā’* of the soul in God.<sup>31</sup>

Although Abū Yazīd was regarded as one of the first intoxicated Sufis who uttered ecstatic words on Divine love, he was overshadowed by al-Ḥallāj. Abū Yazīd’s expressions of the total identification of the lover with the Beloved such as “*Subḥānī!*” (Glory be to me!) “*Mā A ‘ẓama Sha’ni*” (How great is my majesty), were reflected more strongly in al-Ḥallāj’s utterances. Al-Bistāmī’s words about unity and love were accepted as being imparted in the state of intoxication therefore they were not regarded as fully responsible utterances.<sup>32</sup> Whereas al-Ḥallāj with his insistence on his words, accepted the full responsibility of his philosophy. Therefore, none of the early Sufis were as daring as al-Ḥallāj in their exposition of the concept of love. This degree of daring reached to the extent that he is known as the first Sufi who shed his blood for the sake of his love. His own words that depict the lovers’ devotional ablution (*wuḍū’*) as performed with their own blood (alluding to his bloody execution) also supports this notion i.e. he is a martyr of love.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> al-Qushayrī, Abū al-Qāsim, *al-Risālah*; p.326; Bhatnagar, R. S., *Dimensions of Classical Sufi Thought*, (London and the Hague, East West Publications,) p.56

<sup>30</sup> al-Ḥūjwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by Abū al-‘Azā’im, p.219

<sup>31</sup> R. S. Bhatnagar, *Dimensions of Classical Sufi Thought*, p.56

<sup>32</sup> See al-Sha’rānī, *Lawāqih al-Anwār*, p.175

<sup>33</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, p.270

To Bistāmī, pure love of God is only possible when the lover completely denies his own self. He states that: “When I considered the world to be my enemy and I went to God, His love possessed me to such an extent that I became an enemy of myself.” Similarly, because of his love al-Ḥallāj becomes an enemy to himself and in one of his ecstatic utterances asks the Muslims to kill him. Both Sufis understood the existence of the lover’s identity as the biggest block that separates the lover from the beloved.<sup>34</sup>

Abū Ḥasan Sumnūn al-Muḥibb (d.905) as understood from his sobriquet “*al-Muḥibb*” (the lover), regarded the station of love to be higher than the station of gnosis on the path of God. He asserts that love is the foundation and principle of the way to God, that all ‘states’ and ‘stations’ are stages of love, and that every stage and abode in which the seeker may be admits the possibility of destruction, except the abode of love, which is not destructible in any circumstances so long as the way itself remains in existence.”<sup>35</sup> Quoting this statement of Sumnūn, al-Ḥujwīrī comments that this is a peculiar doctrine to the Sufi sheikhs. Al-Ḥujwīrī’s comments seem to be reasonable since it is only Sufis who elevated the concept of love to such great heights. It is again Sufis who made love ‘cast out fear’.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to mainstream Islam, they made the role of fear less and less important a subject in their books and talks.

Sumnūn also states that the path of love towards God is full of affliction, “so that every common man may not claim for love and may run away seeing its agony.”<sup>37</sup> This concept of suffering for the sake of God’s love would have an important role in al-Ḥallāj’s system.

Another associate of al-Ḥallāj, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī, believes that the real proximity to God (*qurb*) is enjoyed by the seeker at the stage of Pure Love. He describes love “as the rending of the veil and the revelation of what is hidden from

<sup>34</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār*, p.75

<sup>35</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. by Abū al-‘Azā’im, p.309

<sup>36</sup> O. P. Cyprian Rice, *The Persian Sufis*, (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1969), p.61

<sup>37</sup> R. S. Bhatnagar, *Dimensions of Classical Sufi thought*, p.56 quoting ‘Aṭṭār, F., *Muslim Saints*



the eyes of men.”<sup>38</sup> Likewise al-Ḥallāj reveals his love bravely, following al-Nūrī’s statement.

‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān al-Makkī (d.909), one of the masters of al-Ḥallāj, was an eminent theologian and was considered a great authority in Sufi circles. Hujwiri even attributes to him “*Kitāb al-Maḥabbah*”<sup>39</sup> meaning *The Book of Love*. This also shows the importance of the love among the Sufi Sheikhs of the time. Although al-Makkī is known to be an author who defends a kind of Sufism which does not conflict with mainstream Islam, he nevertheless devoted much importance to the concept of love.

Abū al-Qāsim b. Junayd of Baghdād was one of the most important personalities in al-Ḥallāj’s period. He was recognised as a leading Sheikh or the spiritual master of his time. The Sufis of the later centuries were deeply influenced by his mystical views on the love of God, gnosis, self-annihilation and the Soul’s unification with God. Junayd developed the sober understanding of Sufism. His understanding of Sufism and in particular love is important since his ideas contrast with al-Ḥallāj’s understanding, al-Junayd being champion of the sober understanding of Sufism and al-Ḥallāj championing the intoxicated approach.

### 6.3 Sobriety and Intoxication

These two terms connote two different modes of Sufism. Sobriety means keeping full control of one’s consciousness in the presence of Divine manifestations as opposed to intoxication which means losing consciousness. Intoxication involves a loss of personal identity; the soul is completely filled with spiritual power, and the boundaries of legal prescriptions are no longer observed. The Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj advocated a spiritual life which was marked by ecstasy<sup>40</sup> (*wajd*) and preferred intoxication over sobriety. Rumi refers to this intoxication as *Manṣūrī* wine, not *angūrī* wine. *Angūrī* wine meaning the wine which is made out of grape. It is also interesting that Schimmel states that the metaphor of intoxication and

<sup>38</sup> M. Smith, *Readings from the mystics of Islam*, p.33

<sup>39</sup> al-Ḥūjwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by Abū al-‘Azā’im, p.309; see M. Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, no46, p.44

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed study of al-Ḥallāj’s ecstatic words see C. W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1985)

wine provide a strange paradox since Islam prohibits all kinds of intoxicants.<sup>41</sup> Even this offers us an idea about the controversial character of intoxicated Sufism.

Against the intoxicated disposition of the Sufism of al-Ḥallāj and Abu Yazid, al-Hujwīrī presents Junayd's methodology, which he names as *Junaydiyya*.<sup>42</sup> Al-Junayd's understanding of love will, therefore, be presented in order to comprehend al-Ḥallāj more clearly.

Junayd's understanding of love is very closely connected with his understanding of the concept of *fanā'* (annihilation). According to him before God created this world, our souls were with Him without our worldly bodies and senses. God dressed our souls with bodies and sent us to this world to test us. Some souls have forgotten their pledge (*mīthāq*) to God<sup>43</sup> and engaged only with the affairs of this world, whereas some yearned to return to the state of unity with God, as was their situation before the creation took place. This return to the proximity of God in Junayd's understanding, depends on the soul's progress on the path of the Love.<sup>44</sup> Love is the sole connecting link between a Sufi and his Lord. In al-Junayd's teaching love means that the attributes of the lover are changed into those of the Beloved.<sup>45</sup>

Junayd, like Bayazīd understood the love between God and man to be the annihilation of the lover's attributes in the Beloved. Up until now, whatever has been said about the mutual love between man and God by the Sufis did not contradict the Qur'ān and Sunnah, in other words it was not difficult to compromise between them.

However, al-Ḥallāj's statements about love were quite different. He was not speaking of the annihilation of the characteristics of the lover in the Beloved only. He was going further and in a sense saying that the body of the lover should be

<sup>41</sup> A. Schimmel, *Deciphering the signs of God*, p.108

<sup>42</sup> al-Ḥujwīrī, *Kashf*, trans. by Abu al-'Azā'im, p.225; For more on al-Junayd's Sufism see 'A. Ḥassan, *The life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd*, (London; Lowe & Brydone, 1976)

<sup>43</sup> According to the Qur'ān the souls accepted God's lordship before they were sent to the world. See Qur'ān, 7:166; A, 'Ali Ḥassan, *The life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd*, p.76

<sup>44</sup> A. 'Affīfī, , *al-Taṣawwuf al-Thawra al-Rūḥiyya*, p.208

<sup>45</sup> M. Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, p.35

annihilated in the body of the Beloved, which was anathema to the orthodox Sufis as well as scholars.

Secondly, what made al-Ḥallāj different from the other Sufi masters of his generation was that he insisted on announcing publicly his vision of mystical love. This was contrary to the cardinal principle that the accomplished mystic was never to divulge to the public experiences that were beyond their comprehension. Such elitism did not conform to al-Ḥallāj's more populist notion of mysticism. As al-Baqlī relates, al-Ḥallāj believes that "the intoxicated Sufi exposes all the secrets."<sup>46</sup>

However, the attitude of al-Ḥallāj was unwelcome not only to the theologians but also by eminent Sufis of his time. For his lack of caution, he was ostracised by his former teacher Junayd.<sup>47</sup> For Junayd knew very well that mystical experience and thought cannot be rationalised and that it is dangerous to speak openly about the deepest mysteries of faith in the presence of the uninitiated. Junayd, therefore, refined the art of speaking in *Ishārāt*, that is subtle allusion to the truth. This trend was first attributed to Kharrāz (d.890 or 899) but it became characteristic of later Sufi writings.<sup>48</sup> al-Ḥallāj did not comply this rule of secrecy and this was the cause of his separation from his master Junayd.

This brief survey of al-Ḥallāj's contemporaries and immediate predecessors indicates that before al-Ḥallāj's appearance in the Sufi circles, the concept of love was widely accepted as a cardinal way in the Sufi journey to God. The abundance of their sayings provide enough evidence to support this. It can be argued that love had even won the upper hand in comparison to other Sufi concepts which were favoured before, such as asceticism. This continuous rise of the role of love in the Sufi way from the ascetic and fear centred understanding of the early Sufis, reached a different level with al-Ḥallāj. Now it was the time for al-Ḥallāj to come in to the arena with a different kind of love. In the following pages his understanding of this love will be studied in more detail.

<sup>46</sup> See *Akḥbār*, p.86; al-Baqlī, *Kitāb Mashrab al-Arwāḥ*, edited by Nazif M., (Edebiyat Fakultesi Matbaasi, Istanbul, 1973), p.122; al-Sha'rānī, *Lawāqih al-Anwār*, p.235

<sup>47</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār*, p.38

<sup>48</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.59

#### 6.4 al-Ḥallāj's Paradigm of Love

Having briefly looked at the background of al-Ḥallāj and the context in which he lived, it is now time to shed light on his paradigm of love. As in the previous chapter the following structure will be adopted: firstly his understanding of God's love for man and secondly man's love for God will be analysed.

##### 6.4:1 God's love for man:

It may be strongly asserted that the foundations upon which al-Ḥallāj builds his comprehensive system of Sufism is the concept of love. He takes as his starting point the mystery of creation. This also includes his ontology. In al-Ḥallāj's view the mystery of creation can be explained on the basis of God's love:

“Before all things, before the creation, before his knowledge of the creation, God in His unity was holding an ineffable discourse with Himself and contemplating the splendour of His essence in itself. That pure simplicity of his self-admiration is Love, which in His essence is the essence of the essence, beyond all limitations of attributes. In His perfect isolation God loves Himself, praises Himself, and manifests Himself by Love. And it was this first manifestation of Love in the Divine Absolute that determined the multiplicity of his attributes, and His names. Then God, by His essence in His essence, desired to project out of Himself His supreme joy, that Love in aloneness, that He might behold it and speak to it. He looked in eternity and brought forth from non-existence an image, an image of Himself, endowed with all His attributes and all His names: Adam. He created Adam in His own image, thus the human became the place of His manifestation”<sup>49</sup>

This lengthy passage has been quoted directly as it encapsulates the building blocks of al-Ḥallāj's paradigm of love. The fundamental notion which can be extracted from the above is that al-Ḥallāj's cosmological outlook links the existence of man with the attributes of God. The reasons for man's existence are closely tied up with the existence of God's love for man. God created man in order to see a manifestation of himself. As a consequence, man will surely be

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<sup>49</sup> L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, trans. by Herbert Mason, (Princeton University Press, 1982), p.103-104 ; Nicholson, R. A., *The Idea of Personality*, p.40

loved by God as he is a manifestation of God. In other words the quotation makes clear that God's love for His essence (*dhāt*), is manifested in the creation of man and His love for man. Therefore, God will inevitably love man.

Another point which is hinted at in the above quotation concerns the essence of God. The above quotation is distinctly characterised by the repetition of the word *essence* several times. According to al-Ḥallāj, the essence of God in his isolation is to praise Himself and to manifest Himself through love. This leads to an important conclusion, namely, that the essence of God is manifested through love. Love is the distinctive characteristic and feature of God's essence. Therefore God is all about love.

The significance of his paradigm of love is that it is very comprehensive and explicit. No Sufi before him had articulated such views in such clear and forceful language. This fact is acknowledged by many others. For example, al-Baqlī notes that al-Ḥallāj is the first to put forward the paradigm that God created man to participate in his essential love without any motive other than that of pure Divine generosity.<sup>50</sup> The consequence of this theory is that if God created us with love, then, it must be love that He wants back from us. The other things he commands us to do, such as worshipping, obeying and fearing Him, must all comply with our love for Him.

However, al-Ḥallāj's ideas were not welcomed by everybody; theologians and jurists thought differently, al-Ḥallāj's words about creation carried different connotations. When these were combined with other sayings of al-Ḥallāj, in particular, his poetry, his position began to seem more heretical than ever and he was accused of introducing concepts antithetical to the essence of Islam. For instance consider the following line from one of al-Ḥallāj's poems: "Glory to God who revealed in His humanity (*nāsūt*) the secret of His radiant divinity (*lāhūt*)."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, v.3, p.104; (*Akhbār*, no;10, p.26)

<sup>51</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akhbār*, p.26; Nicholson, R. A., *The Idea of Personality*, p.40

Theologians such as Ibn Dawūd al-Isfahānī and Abū ‘Umar Ibn Yūsuf accused al-Ḥallāj of promoting the Christian concept of incarnation (*ḥulūl*).<sup>52</sup> In their opinion, al-Ḥallāj’s words eradicate the distinction between the Divine and the human. The end result of this is a type of pantheism which is out of character with the mainstream teachings of Islam. Al-Ḥallāj was open to attack in this way, especially as he employed terms which were also utilised by the Christians. For example, terms such as “*lāhūt*” and “*nāsūt*”<sup>53</sup> were Christian terms used to identify Jesus’ Divine and human nature. He was, consequently, accused of believing in the incarnation (*ḥulūl*) of Divine in man as in the case of Jesus.<sup>54</sup>

To what extent are the criticisms of the theologians justified? This question can best be answered by bearing in mind the nature of al-Ḥallāj’s utterances. When al-Ḥallāj’s work is looked at as a whole one can find passages which show that at times he talks of the absolute transcendence of God, at others he discusses His incarnation (*ḥulūl*), and at others still he expounds on the oneness of God. He very often admits that God is God and man is man and both are clearly distinct from each other. For example, he says: “Allah does not mix with the human, he does not resemble them in any respect.”<sup>55</sup>

However, all of these utterances were dependent on the mystical state that al-Ḥallāj was in at the time. Therefore, to focus only on one aspect of al-Ḥallāj and to characterise him under one category is to fail to understand al-Ḥallāj as a whole. In sum then, al-Ḥallāj’s thought is a complex mix of opposites and paradoxes which must be understood in the context of his spiritual state at the time of utterance.

Following such an approach would lead to a more balanced and clear understanding of al-Ḥallāj. This can be exemplified by the writings of some Sufi scholars who took this approach. Their treatment of al-Ḥallāj is not one of criticism but one of synthesis; they attempt to find a solution which will explain and excuse al-Ḥallāj’s actions whilst at the same time conforming to the

<sup>52</sup> H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, (Kegan Paul International, London, 1993), p.198

<sup>53</sup> *Lāhūt* and *Nāsūt* are two Syriac words that are used to describe Jesus’s Divine and human natures. These phrases seem to have passed into Arabic through Syriac Christians.

<sup>54</sup> ‘I. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, *al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr*, p.312; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘at al-Rasa‘il*, v.I, p.179; S. Dayf, *Tarikh al-Adab*, p.480; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.72

<sup>55</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akhhār*, p.47, al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāsīn*, p.78

normative rules of the *sharī'a*. The most prominent of these is al-Ghazālī whose views are presented below.

Al-Ghazālī tried to solve the position of al-Ḥallāj by excusing his words in the state of ecstasy and excluding them from theological responsibility. In al-Ghazālī's analysis, all the sayings of Sufis can be differentiated into certain types. Broadly stated, these are firstly, statements which are uttered in a state of sobriety and secondly, those uttered in a state of intoxication or ecstasy. Following his binary classification in the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, al-Ghazālī classifies Abū Yazīd, al-Bistāmi and al-Ḥallāj in the same group of ecstatic Sufis. He writes:

“All the Gnostics (*Ārifun*) have a consensus that after arriving to the sky of truth they have seen nothing as existent but the one reality that is Allah. The perception of plurality disappeared in their eyes and their reason stopped, in a state of bewilderment they could not think of anything but only God. In this state of intoxication, one of them said ‘I am the truth’ (alluding to al-Ḥallāj), the other one said ‘Glory be to me’ (alluding to Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmi).”<sup>56</sup>

However, al-Ghazālī believes that these kind of statements of intoxicated lovers should not be revealed for the public good. In sum, al-Ghazālī wants to convey to the theologians that a mystic can have a different experience of *tawḥīd* in the state of Divine intoxication and he cannot be held accountable for the expression of that experience as long as it is kept secret. In his *al-Futūḥat* Ibn ‘Arabī also has the same stance as al-Ghazālī, according to him al-Ḥallāj's ecstatic words were uttered when he was in the state of intoxication. Although many people deviated from the true path by such words, he did not deviate.<sup>57</sup> This position of al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī is further echoed in the writings of other eminent Sufis. For example, al-Ḥujwīrī also believes that al-Ḥallāj's words are true as far as their meaning is concerned. However, because he uttered them in a state of intoxication there might be some inaccuracy in the expression of these meanings by al-Ḥallāj. al-Ḥujwīrī also believes that al-Ḥallāj's words should not be accepted as evidence to base a verdict against him, since he was an intoxicated Sufi most of the time.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> al-Ghazzali, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, ed. by ‘A. Badawi, (Cairo, 1964), p.57-58

<sup>57</sup> K. M. al-Shaybī, *Sharh Dīwān al-Ḥallāj*, (Beirut & Baghdad, 1974), p.180

There is one other major component of al-Ḥallāj's paradigm of love that needs to be highlighted. This is the notion that God's love for man is eternal: it always existed and will always continue to exist. This idea corresponds to the Qur'anic notion that God's love precedes man's love.<sup>59</sup> According to al-Ḥallāj, as God has created man in love, it therefore follows that God's love for man precedes man's love for God. From this, we can infer that God takes the first initiative towards man. In other words, God's love for man precedes man's love for God.

Having established that God's love is antecedent to man's love for God, al-Ḥallāj, then, explores the nature of the manifestation of God's love. What does man experience in practical terms in this relationship as a lover? The key idea here is that God's love manifests itself in a negative manner. In the opinion of al-Ḥallāj, God tests the servants whom He loves: if God loves someone He drives others to attack him. This is done so that the person concerned turns his face solely towards God. As a consequence, the lover of God faces enmity and hatred.<sup>60</sup> It is characteristic of al-Ḥallāj's theory of love that "enduring pain and calamities" plays an important role. In Ibn Arabi's terminology this phenomenon could be described as God's manifestation of His love in the state of *jalāl*.

What are the motives behind the suffering of the lover of God? The answer to this has been partially hinted at in the last paragraph, namely, that the lover of God turns his attention solely to Allah. Linked with this is the idea that God sends these calamities in order to perfect the human soul that loves Him. The more the lover suffers, the more he will realise that others cannot help him, and in time he will learn to be pleased with the Divine Will, treating both suffering and ease alike. The lover is pleased with any condition as long as God has wished for it.

It is interesting to note the stark similarities this view has with the Qur'anic view. In fact, it can be argued that this idea is in complete conformity with the Qur'anic and Prophetic paradigms of love. Many illustrations of this idea can be provided from the Qur'ān. A few examples will illustrate the point. God states that he will

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<sup>58</sup> See al-Hūjwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by Abū al-'Azā'im, p.181

<sup>59</sup> al-Qur'ān, 5:54

<sup>60</sup> K. M. al-Shaybī, *Sharh Dīwān al-Ḥallāj*, p.202



test His servants through trials and calamities.<sup>61</sup> In the traditions of the Prophet, it is also stated that God tests his beloved servants. For al-Ḥallāj, therefore, love means to suffer in the way of the Beloved.<sup>62</sup>

Before proceeding, it is necessary to mention that, al-Ḥallāj's idea of the suffering of the lover contrasts to the notion of suffering in Christianity. In al-Ḥallāj's paradigm, it is man who suffers for the sake of God. However, in Christianity the roles are reversed and it is God who suffers because of His love for man. In both traditions, God loves man but the nature and expression of this love manifests itself in a different way. As far as al-Ḥallāj is concerned this difference helps to illuminate his position. If, as his opponents claim, al-Ḥallāj was introducing Christian ideas into Islam, then, there would be little difference in the notion of love and suffering in both al-Ḥallāj's view and that of Christianity. However, as there is a great difference, this points towards the fact that al-Ḥallāj was not copying the Christian understanding of love.

#### 6.4:2 Man's love for God

From a historical perspective earlier Sufis, such as, Rābi'a and Dhu'l-Nūn al-Misrī had tried to establish the supremacy of disinterested love towards God. The reason was that the early ascetic Sufis loved God for reasons that could be described as selfish. Although the attitude of Rābi'a kept its freshness in al-Ḥallāj's milieu (third/ninth century), al-Ḥallāj shifted the emphasis of love from practical matters of worship into theological discussions of *tawḥīd*. This position can be exemplified by Sufis such as al-Nūrī, al-Bistāmi and Junayd. This development reached its climax with al-Ḥallāj and from then on, the concept of Divine love took on a different character.

In Rābi'a's love, there was a lover and a beloved as separate entities, and the lover loved the beloved for his own benefit. Rābi'a's love indicated as a target and end-result the vision of God. According to the Prophetic paradigm of love, there was nothing wrong in desiring to see God, only few groups like Mu'tazilah refused

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<sup>61</sup> See Qur'ān, 3:154; 34:21

<sup>62</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār*, p.54

it.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, al-Ḥallāj replaced Rābi‘a’s aim with another one. The target was to unite with God’s essence by means of love. The lover only desired to annihilate himself in the attributes of the Beloved in order to be united with Him. In his famous book *Kitāb al-Ṭawāṣīn*, al-Ḥallāj describes this kind of love beautifully with the metaphor of the moth and the fire; the moth signifying the lover and the fire signifying the Beloved:

“The moth flies about the flame until morning, then he returns to his fellows and tells them of his spiritual state with the most eloquent expressions. Then he mixes with the coquetry of the flame in his desire to reach perfect union.”<sup>64</sup>

However, the path to achieving unity with God is not an easy task. The mystic has to go through certain stages. According to al-Ḥallāj the way to unity must be achieved through three phases. The first phase consists of ascetic practices; the second is the stage of passive purification; the final stage is the life of union in love with God. The method of al-Ḥallāj has been documented by contemporary sources at that time. There follows one such statement which gives some insight into the method of al-Ḥallāj:

“Ḥallāj maintained that he who trains his body by adherence to the rites, fills his heart with pious works, endures the loss of pleasure, and masters his soul by forbidding himself desires, thereby raises himself to the station of ‘those who are being drawn closer’ (to God). Thereafter the steps of the distances that separate the lover from the beloved gradually recede, until his nature is purified of what is carnal. Then, if there is no carnal bond left in him, the spirit of God, by whom Jesus the son of Mary was born, descends into him. Then he becomes ‘he whom everything obeys (*Mutā‘*)’; he wants nothing more than what carries out the commandment of God; every act of his from that time onwards is God’s act, and every commandment of his is God’s commandment.”<sup>65</sup>

It appears therefore that union with God can only come about by first ridding oneself of all carnal desires. Success in this leads to the spirit of God entering the

<sup>63</sup>The Mu‘tazilah claim that it is impossible to see God.

<sup>64</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāṣīn*, trans. by al-Tarjūmana, A., (Lahore, Islamic Book Foundation, 1978), p.24

lover. As a result, the actions of the lover cannot be separated from the actions of the Beloved. In other words, man loses his own identity completely and becomes a mere automaton, as it were, of God.

Indeed, similar concepts had been developed by the Sufi leaders before al-Ḥallāj. For example, Junayd's definition of love as "Substitution of the lover's attributes with the attributes of the Beloved"<sup>66</sup> In other words man should take on the characteristics of God. This approach alludes to the hadīth of the prophet, which encourages the believers to adorn themselves with the attributes of God.

Junayd's way of expressing the fact of union with God limits itself to the attributes of God. al-Ḥallāj, on the other hand, expands his terminology to include the essence of God. The former's position can be described as more cautious whereas the latter's can be seen as more outspoken and open to misinterpretation. The following couplet of al-Ḥallāj lends some justification to the above view.<sup>67</sup>

"I have become the One I love, and the One I love has become me!  
We are two souls infused in a (single) body.  
And to see me is to see Him, and to see Him is to see us."<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, al-Qushayri brings al-Ḥallāj's understanding of love closer to Junayd's: He writes "to al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣūn the inner reality of love is that you remain always with your Beloved and strip off your own qualities."<sup>69</sup> According to this opinion al-Ḥallāj did not say anything different from Junayd, the difference was only in appearance. Whereas Junayd hid the inner depths of his experience al-Ḥallāj revealed the secrets, sometimes using controversial words leading to the misunderstanding from others.<sup>70</sup>

#### 6.4:2:1 Suffering in God's love

<sup>65</sup> L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, v.3, p.40

<sup>66</sup> al-Qushayri, p.321

<sup>67</sup> al-Suhrawardī, A. *ʿAwārif*, p.508

<sup>68</sup> L. Massignon, *The Passion*, v.3, p.42, see for similar verses, al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār*, p. 75

<sup>69</sup> al-Qushayri, *Risālah*, trans. by B.R. Von Schlegell, p.323

<sup>70</sup> See al-Ḥijwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. by Abū al-ʿAzā'im, p.181

In the previous section, we alluded to the significance of suffering in al-Ḥallāj's paradigm of love from the perspective of God's love for man. This section will explore the suffering from the viewpoint of man's love for God. For al-Ḥallāj man's love for God involves suffering in God's love. The following dialogue between al-Ḥallāj and a dervish shortly before his execution, reveals this aspect of al-Ḥallāj's concept of love. It is reported that someone asked al-Ḥallāj, 'What is love?' He answered, 'You will see it today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.' That day he was killed, the next day he was burned, and on the third day his ashes were scattered in the wind."<sup>71</sup>

By these words, al-Ḥallāj implies that the lover should be ready to pay the price of his love, even if it leads to death. He personally gives a living example of such self-sacrificing love. For him the pleasure of the Beloved is more important than his personal well-being. Al-Ḥallāj is in this respect unique when compared to other Sufis. For him the lover should under no circumstances hide his love for the fear of offending others or averting harms to himself. For example, the advice of al-Hujwīrī and al-Ghazālī that al-Ḥallāj should not have revealed his ecstatic experiences has no value in the eyes of al-Ḥallāj. If he had followed such advice, he would then have concealed his love for God and like many other Sufis would have escaped a tragic end. Even his last words on the scaffold reflect his deep devotion to the notion of self-sacrifice. "It is enough for the lover that he should make the One single." Al-Hujwīrī explains this statement "i.e. that his existence should be cleared away from the path of love and that the dominion of his lower soul should be utterly destroyed."<sup>72</sup> Al-Ḥallāj carried this opinion to its extreme ends, so much so that he asserts that the ablution of the lovers is not perfect unless it is performed with one's own blood.<sup>73</sup> However, al-Ḥallāj's sacrifice does not stop at this point: he goes further and declares that the lover even prefers eternal punishment for the sake of His love. Al-Ḥallāj alluded to the position of Satan in this respect.

Finally, al-Ḥallāj's concept of sacrificial love also has its parallels in the themes of Christian love. For example, Cowper says: "It is better to reign in hell with

<sup>71</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints*, p.270; see al-Munawī, A., *al-Kawākib*, p.546

<sup>72</sup> al-Ḥūjwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans by Abū al-'Azā'im, p.311

<sup>73</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Muslim saints and Mystics*, p.270

Christ than to be without him in heaven”<sup>74</sup> This indicates that suffering in God’s love is a general subject, not only in Islamic Sufism but also in other mystical disciplines.

#### 6.4:2:2 Iblīs

It may be strongly argued that, al-Ḥallāj’s most important contribution to the understanding of love is his *Satanology*. In *Ṭawāsīn* al-Ḥallāj depicts Satan as a sincere lover of God and criticises the previous Sufis for being silent regarding his position in the scheme of love. He says:

“The most eloquent of mystics kept silent about Satan, and the sages lacked the strength to utter what they learned about him. Satan is more informed (‘ārif) than they about worship; he is closer than they to the Being, he has devoted himself more zealously to serve Him; he has kept more to his vow than they; he has drawn nearer than they to the Beloved.”<sup>75</sup>

Continuing in this manner, al-Ḥallāj boldly declares his beliefs about Satan contrary to the silence of his contemporaries and predecessors. His account, is in many ways unique and does not correspond to the traditional interpretations of the story of Iblīs (Satan). The common interpretation of the Qur’anic story is that Iblīs refused out of pride to bow down before a human being made of an inferior substance. Satan reasoned that: Adam was created out of clay and he was created out of fire; clay is inferior to fire; it must, therefore follow that Adam was inferior to him. This was the logical conclusion of the syllogism based on those premises. As a result of this, Satan refused to bow down to Adam on account of his superior nature. The consequence of this refusal of a Divine command was his banishment from Paradise.<sup>76</sup>

In al-Ḥallāj’s retelling of the story, the character of Iblīs is portrayed in a different light; Satan is seen as a positive character in contrast to his negative portrayal in the Qur’ān. al-Ḥallāj does not deny Iblīs’ pride and disobedience; these are clearly present in his version of the story. However, the themes of story go beyond the

<sup>74</sup> J. Moffat, *Love in the New Testament*, (Hodder & Stoughton Lim., London), p.27

<sup>75</sup> K. M. al-Shaybī, *Sharh Dīwān al-Ḥallāj*, p.175; *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, trans. by M. Herbert, v.3, p.315; al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāsīn*, p.55

<sup>76</sup> Qur’ān, 2:34; 7:11,12,15

bare categories of pride and disobedience. They are expanded to include the further dimensions like intricacies of love, and love madness.

From the Islamic point of view, to prostrate before a human being, is idolatry even though Adam can be regarded as being a manifestation of the Divine image. The reasons for Satan's refusal are interestingly explored by al-Ḥallāj. According to him Iblis disobeyed the Divine Command because he would not acknowledge any object of adoration other than the one God. When God threatened him with everlasting punishment, Iblis asked, "Will You behold me when You are punishing me?" God answered "Yes". "Then" said Iblis; "Your beholding me will take away from me consciousness of the punishment. Do unto me as you wish!"<sup>77</sup>

On such grounds Iblis refused to obey the command to prostrate himself before Adam, he cared nothing for threat of eternal condemnation. In the eyes of al-Ḥallāj, therefore, Satan became a martyr of love and accepted the path of suffering in the knowledge that God will be beholding him eternally whilst punishing him.

Al-Ḥallāj develops an interesting method by which to defend the action of Satan and to cast it in a more positive light. He achieves this by making an important and fundamental distinction between God's eternal will and His temporal command. Normally, God's eternal will and command seem to be one and the same thing.

For al-Ḥallāj, however, this is not always the case, and on some occasions they might be different. Applying this to the story of Iblis, God's eternal will is that no one should be worshipped except Him. Therefore, His command that Iblis prostrate himself before Adam seems to be contrary to His will. Satan having understood this Divine will by his wisdom (*'irfān*), faced two choices: either he could obey the eternal Divine will or the Divine command. He had to make a choice as both of these were incompatible to each other. Satan decided, therefore, to obey the Divine Eternal will and as a result became a model of love sacrifice. This choice of Satan and the reasoning behind it, is beautifully echoed in the

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<sup>77</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Tawāssūn*, p.46, 53; Nicholson, R. A, *The Idea of Personality*, p.43

words of Aṭṭār. Satan proclaims: “to be cursed by Thee, is a thousand times dearer to me than to turn my head away from Thee to anything else.”<sup>78</sup>

Iblīs is not the only example presented by al-Ḥallāj to explain the concept of suffering in love. He adds Pharaoh into the list of his teachers and friends.<sup>79</sup> In his choice of examples, al-Ḥallāj selects those personalities who are generally portrayed as disobedient and cursed by God. Al-Ḥallāj transforms them into “martyrs of love” and strongly identifies himself with them. Pharaoh is one such character in addition to Satan. In the words of al-Ḥallāj: “Iblīs was threatened with hell-fire, yet he did not recant. Pharaoh was drowned in the sea, yet he did not recant, for he would not acknowledge anything between him and God. And I, though I am killed and crucified, and though my hands and feet are cut off, I do not recant!”<sup>80</sup> In conclusion, Satan, Pharaoh and al-Ḥallāj became outcasts who transgressed the formal law to attain a higher goal. Yet the reason for the transgression was each one’s love relationship with God; this bond functioned as a higher law for the Sufi who had attained perfection.<sup>81</sup>

This idea of al-Ḥallāj was further developed by later mystics who followed his approach to the status of Satan in the scheme of love. From amongst these the most important were mystics, such as, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī<sup>82</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī, Sarmad in Delhi, Shah ‘Abd al-Laṭīf in Sind.<sup>83</sup>

Al-Ḥallāj’s suffering also had a noble and forbearing element in it. If it was God’s will that the lover should suffer, then, it was futile to blame and curse those who inflicted the pain on him; They were merely the means employed by God, and therefore instead of cursing them they should be showered with praise. Al-Ḥallāj demonstrated this when he spoke on the scaffold moments before he was executed. “...And these thy servants who are gathered to slay me, in zeal for thy religion and in desire to win thy favour, pardon them and have mercy upon them; for verily if You had revealed to them that which you have revealed to me, they

<sup>78</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāṣīn*, p.46; Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions*, p.195

<sup>79</sup> See al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāṣīn*, p.51

<sup>80</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Ṭawāṣīn*, p.54-55; *The Idea of Personality*, p.44

<sup>81</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York; 1987), by Peter J. Awn, p.109

<sup>82</sup> W. C. Chittick, *Faith and Practise of Islam*, p.208

<sup>83</sup> A. Schimmel, *As Through a Veil Mystical Poetry in Islam*, (Columbia U. Press, Newyork, 1982), p.33

would not have done what they have done; and if you had hidden from me that which you have hidden from them, I should not have suffered this tribulation. Glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou doest, and glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou willest!”<sup>84</sup>

However, al-Ḥallāj in his paradigm of love gives the lover a weapon which allows him to endure the pains and suffering inflicted upon him. This weapon is none other than the Sufi’s love for God. Al-Ḥallāj considers God’s love as a shield against all kind of difficulties and calamities. He claims that he does not feel the pain of the calamities and persecution of his enemies because of his love for God. The following couplet sums up this element of al-Ḥallāj’s paradigm:

“Nothing harmful effected me when the calamities attacked on me  
No harm touched me because of my love.”<sup>85</sup>

Rābi‘a’s emphasis on loving God for His own sake is also another component of al-Ḥallāj’s love. In one of his prayer to God he says: “O God, because of what I feel of the sweet breaths of thy love .... I despise the solid mountains and hold the earths and thy heavens in contempt. By Thy truth, if Thou sell me Paradise in exchange for a single moment of my ecstasy or for one passing gleam of the least of my spiritual states, I would not buy it! And if Thou wert to set Hell-fire before me, with all the diverse kinds of torment that are contained therein, I would deem it of no account in comparison with my suffering when Thou hidest thyself from me!”<sup>86</sup> These words are nothing but a paraphrase of Rābi‘a’s following prayer :

“O My Lord! If I am worshipping you from fear of fire, burn me in the fires of hell; and if I am worshipping you from desire for paradise, deny me paradise. But if I am worshipping you for yourself alone, then do not deny me the sight of your magnanimous face.”<sup>87</sup>

This also proves that al-Ḥallāj did not refuse the heritage of his ancestors as far as the concept of love is concerned. However, he sealed them with his unique stamp. Therefore, he is not an imitator but an original person who can add his own flavour to the ideas of others.

<sup>84</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār*, p.8; *The Idea of Personality*, p.47; al-Munawī, *Kawākib*, p.545

<sup>85</sup> K. M. al-Shaybī, *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥallāj*, (Beirud & Baghdad, 1974), p.206

<sup>86</sup> al-Ḥallāj, *Akḥbār*, p.68; *The Idea of Personality*, p.50

<sup>87</sup> W. al-Sakkakini, *First Among Sufis*, p.54



### 6.5 His influence

The execution of al-Ḥallāj by the authorities seemed to be counter productive. It failed to put an end to the views and ideas of al-Ḥallāj. Indeed, his influence became even stronger after his execution even stronger than it had been during his life time.<sup>88</sup> His ideas seeped into all walks of life: poets, theoreticians, public preachers, and other Sufis constantly referred to him. Sometimes they admired him and at other times they rejected him. Praise or blame did not matter, the important thing was that al-Ḥallāj was being discussed and his name became a symbol of “mystic love”. Furthermore, his influence was not confined to the Arab world only, he was equally well known in India perhaps because of his travels in this region. The following folk song from Sind is a testimony to this:

“When you want to know the way of love,  
Ask those who are like Mansur”<sup>89</sup>

In Nicholson’s words “the power and vitality of this man’s ideas are attested by the influence which they exerted upon his successors. His ashes were scattered, swept away, as he prophesied, by rushing winds and running waters, but his words lived after him.”<sup>90</sup>

Al-Ḥallāj’s metaphors and symbols became a common feature of later Sufi poetry and literature. This is one of the lasting influences of al-Ḥallāj. As an illustration, the metaphor of the moth was often used by the later Sufis especially in Persian poetry. Through these means al-Ḥallāj’s symbols entered the literature of the West. For example, Goethe used the metaphor of the moth in his *West-Ostlicher Diwan*.<sup>91</sup>

In addition to his metaphors and symbols, the stylistic features of al-Ḥallāj’s poems also trickled into later times. His most distinctive feature is the direct and intimate manner in which he addresses God. His poetry is sprinkled with the pronouns of “me and you”, in a sense this is the voice of love itself, in which the true intimacy of the lover and the beloved is conceived mutually. The gulf and distance between the lover and beloved is minimalised. This unique feature of al-

<sup>88</sup> E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, v.I, p.436

<sup>89</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p.76

<sup>90</sup> R. A. Nicholson, *The idea of Personality*, p.26-37

<sup>91</sup> A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.70

Ḥallāj is reflected and echoed in the love dialogues of the later mystical poets.<sup>92</sup> Even though much of his subtle theology is not properly understood by the general populace, his joy in suffering for love of God has made him a favourite symbol for those who believe in personal piety and for those who are willing to suffer for their ideals.<sup>93</sup>

Taking the major Sufis, studied in this research, it seems that al-Ḥallāj had a most lasting influence upon Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn Fāriq.<sup>94</sup> In particular, the following ideas recurred in a more refined way in both Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Ibn al-Fāriq’s works. First, the idea that love is the motive behind the act of creation. Second, man is the highest manifestation of God. Third, the positive portrayal of Satan and Pharaoh as martyrs of love. These ideas will be elaborated under the respective chapters.

## 6.6 Conclusion

1-In al-Ḥallāj’s paradigm of love, God is not a remote Potentate<sup>95</sup>. In the relationship of love, God seems to be an equal partner to man. They mutually share the same ecstasy of love.

2-The second important element of al-Ḥallāj’s paradigm is the idea of suffering. Love can be seen as synonymous to suffering. Only through suffering, is man purified from all other false loves and is drawn into the direction of Gods love alone.

3-Linking with the last point is al-Ḥallāj’s dislike of the elitism of the Sufi Masters of His time who advocated that the lover must conceal his love from all others. On the contrary, al-Ḥallāj maintained that the Divine secrets of love should not be kept to the Sufi circles only, they can be revealed to the public. This self exposure element of al-Ḥallāj could equally be interpreted as a result of his complete annihilation in God and therefore his consequent loss of conscious control over himself.

4- Al-Ḥallāj’s view can be clearly contrasted with that of Rābi‘a. Contrary to her view, there is little if any mention of the fear of God in al-Ḥallāj’s paradigm. Through al-Ḥallāj, the concept of fear seems to lose its power on the Sufi piety.

<sup>92</sup> L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, v.3, p.51-2

<sup>93</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Religion, al-Hallaj*, by Schimmel, A., (New York, 1987), v.6, p.176

<sup>94</sup> al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib* v.I, p.548

<sup>95</sup> I. R. Netton, *Seek Knowledge*, p.76

5- Al-Ḥallāj was accused by his opponents of importing Christian ideas into Islam. This accusation was given added support by the similarities that existed between al-Ḥallāj and Jesus. For example, the similarities of their respective executions, their emphasis on suffering in love, their preaching of pure love and al-Ḥallāj's saying that " I will be killed on the religion of Jesus". For these reasons he was accused of being a secret Christian.<sup>96</sup>

6- Al-Ḥallāj had a tolerant outlook to those that did not understand him. In this respect he had a magnanimous personality. For instance, although he claimed that he had the truth and love of God he did not blame the general people as ignorant. He tried to settle the dispute by explaining that those members of the general public who executed him were right in so doing since the exterior of the law commanded this. This shows that al-Ḥallāj respected the formal law; he did not believe that he was above it.

7- Al-Ḥallāj can be seen as the originator of the idea that *Satan* and *Pharaoh* were sincere lovers of God and should, therefore, be seen in a positive way. This idea was seen as deeply controversial and dangerous by his opponents. Al-Ḥallāj's exposition of such ideas shows his daring and bold nature.

8- Al-Ḥallāj's influence was enhanced by his execution, whereby His ideas gained more popular acceptance seeping in to the cultural dimensions of Islam. For example, the poetry and prose of later times. Furthermore, his symbols, metaphors and imagery became embedded in the thought and speech patterns of society.

9- Al-Ḥallāj became a symbol of martyrdom in the path of Divine love. His meeting with and especially his attitude towards his own death played an important role in this image. He displayed himself to be a man utterly fearless of death. It is this notion that if a person does not fear his/her death, then the ultimate has been conquered; how can the mortal powers control the one who laughs in face of death. His execution set an unprecedented example of how Sufis should react regarding their own temporal demise.

10-It can be also argued that al-Ḥallāj through his openness and bravery has paved the way for later Sufis to express their mystical union openly. By the time of Rūmī we seem to be embarking upon a more liberal age, where intoxicating expression is met with less controversy.

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<sup>96</sup> M.J. Sharaf, *A 'lām al-Taṣawwuf*, p.134

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### al-Ghazālī's Paradigm of Love

#### 7.1 Introduction

Among the Sufis we have covered so far, the most systematic and clear idea of love belongs to the famous mystic and theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. In comparison to foregoing Sufis, al-Ghazālī's thought is presented in a more systematic way. He presents his theory of love in the clearest way, using brilliant illustrations embedded in a strong psychological analysis. In his *magnus opus*, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, he presents his mystical teaching of love in an ordered sequence of thought: original, profound and mature.

In addition to his methodical originality, there is another feature setting him apart from other Sufis. His predecessors did not concern themselves very much with reconciling Sufi ideas with mainstream Islam, but al-Ghazālī did strive to reconcile<sup>1</sup> the two. This underlying theme permeates most of his writings. As a result of this approach, he succeeded to some extent in influencing the attitudes of both schools of thought. Before him, the orthodox scholars looked upon the Sufis with suspicion; they thought Sufis such as al-Hallaj mixed Islamic teachings with innovations, foreign elements and heresies. Al-Ghazālī limited this hostile tension and made Sufism acceptable to the main body of Islam.

In addition, al-Ghazālī, attempted to prove that love for God is necessary from the point of view of human nature. This position and approach of al-Ghazālī put him in an important place as far as this study is concerned. In the light of these general principles, the following pages will attempt to present and analyse his paradigm of love.

#### 7.2 His Life:

His full name was Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī al-Ghazālī. Al-Ghazālī was born at Ṭūs (near Meshed in eastern Iran) in 450/1058 A.D. and was educated there. He continued his education in Jurjan, and completed it at Nishāpūr. While at Nishāpūr, he was taught by al-Juwaynī who is famous as

“*Imām al-Ḥaramayn*” (the imam of the two sacred cities of Mecca and Medina). After the latter's death in 1085, al-Ghazālī was invited to go to the court of Nizām al-Mulk, the powerful vizier of the Seljuq sultans. The vizier was so impressed by al-Ghazālī's scholarship that in 1091 he appointed him chief professor in the Nizāmiyah College in Baghdad.<sup>2</sup>

During his time at the Nizāmiyah college, he passed through a deep spiritual crisis<sup>3</sup> which also left him physically incapable of lecturing for a time. As a result, in November 488/1095, he abandoned his academic career and left Baghdad on the pretext of going on pilgrimage to Mecca. He disposed of his wealth and adopted the life of a Sufi. After spending some time in Damascus and Jerusalem, followed by a pilgrimage to Mecca<sup>4</sup> in November 1096, al-Ghazālī settled in Tus. It is here that he started to train his disciples. He led a kind of monastic communal life with them.

Al-Ghazālī defends the abandonment of his career and adoption of a mystical monastic life in his autobiographical work *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* (*The Deliverer from Error*). Therefore, we are fortunate enough to have first-hand information about his experience of Sufism. Most biographers of al-Ghazālī do not doubt the authenticity of this spiritual crisis. According to ‘Umaruddīn the reason for the truthfulness of this experience is that al-Ghazālī was inherently very inquisitive, and filled with an intense earnestness for truth.<sup>5</sup> Hence, such a spiritual crisis could be expected from al-Ghazālī. Contrary to ‘Umaruddīn, Lazarus-Yafeh questions the originality of *al-Munqidh*. He thinks that there are remarkable resemblance between *al-Munqidh* and the opening pages of *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā* by al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d.243/857). Hence the *Munqidh* is not an original work but a compilation of other works.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand Watt's approach is a synthesis of the two whereby he brings them both together. He does not doubt that al-Ghazālī had an actual

<sup>1</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Faith and Practice*, trans. by W. M. Watt, p.13; Schimmel calls this a marriage between mysticism and law. See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p.95; P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p.436

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, p.21-3

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed commentary of al-Ghazālī's spiritual crisis, see M. ‘Umaruddīn, *The ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzali*, (Lahore, Ashraf Printing Press, Reprinted 1982), pp.59-67; Macdonald, D.B., ‘The Life of al-Ghazzal’, *JAOS*, XX, (1899) (71-132) p.75

<sup>4</sup> al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, ed. by Thaliba, Jamil and ‘Iyād, (Matba‘ah Jāmi‘ah al-Suriyah, 1956), p.99-100

<sup>5</sup> M. ‘Umaruddīn, *The ethical Philosophy*, p.60

experience. However, he believes that al-Ghazālī added his intellectual findings to his experience. Hence, *al-Munqidh* is not solely a presentation of his experience but also his intellectual studies.

Almost ten years later, in 1106, he was persuaded to return to teaching at the *Nizāmiyah* College at Nishāpūr. One reason put forward to explain al-Ghazālī's return to active teaching was that a "renewer"<sup>7</sup> of the life of Islam was expected at the beginning of each century. His friends argued that he was the "renewer" for the fifth Islamic century. As a result he returned to his post a second time and continued lecturing in Nishāpūr until 1110.<sup>8</sup> Later, in that same year, he returned to Tus where he died the following year in 505/1111.<sup>9</sup>

The above mentioned claim that al-Ghazālī was the renewer of the century seems to have been accepted by al-Ghazālī himself. It is not the aim of this research to determine whether al-Ghazālī is a renewer *mujaddid* or not. Nevertheless, it can be mentioned in passing that the evidence among the scholars indicates that he revived Sufism as well as other Islamic sciences. Al-Ghazālī's own belief regarding himself as a renewer, might explain the motivation behind his prolific literary output encompassing a wide range of disciplines such as philosophy, theology, logic, Sufism, law and so on. However, this research will restrict itself to its main aim, that is, a study his understanding of love.

### 7.2:1 His Works:

Al-Ghazālī was a prolific writer. More than 400 works are ascribed to him, but he probably did not write so many. Frequently the same work is found with different titles in different manuscripts. However, many of the numerous manuscripts have not yet been carefully examined. Furthermore, several works have also been falsely ascribed to him, and others are of doubtful authenticity. Nevertheless, at least 50 genuine works are extant.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew Press, 1975), p. 19; See W. M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, p.51

<sup>7</sup> According to a hadith God sends a renewer (*mujaddid*) in every century. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, al-Malāhim*, n.3740 (K. T.)

<sup>8</sup> al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, p.99-115

<sup>9</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Faith and Practice*, trans. by Watt, W. M, p.9

<sup>10</sup> For the assessment of al-Ghazālī's works in detail, see 'A. Badawī, *Tārikh al-Taṣawwuf*

From al-Ghazālī's vast collection of writings the greatest work seems to be the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. In forty "chapters" he explains the doctrines and practices of Islam and shows how these can be made the basis of a profound devotional life, leading to the higher stages of Sufism. Among these mystical stations, one whole chapter is devoted to the concept of love. Because of this, the *Iḥyā'* will be the main reference for this study. Although he considers this concept in his other works, they are but a summary of what he has written in *Iḥyā'*.

The fact that al-Ghazālī was a professor by profession distinguishes his style and approach to the Sufi concept of love. Before him, the Sufis like Rābi'a and al-Ḥallāj took for granted that God should be loved, without really giving the reasons. However, al-Ghazālī's approach is different from the rest of the Sufis. He does not force the believers to accept blindly that God is the only real object of love; on the contrary, he intellectually tries to prove and persuade his readers that we need to love God. As a result, his chapter on Divine Love is presented in a logical and intellectual way. This point will be further explained in the following stages of this chapter.

Although the *Iḥyā'* is the *magnum opus* regarding the concept of love, *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (*The Niche for Lights*) is also a significant work dealing with the subject of Divine love. This work sheds further light on the relation of mystical love to knowledge (*ma'rifa*).

### **7.2:2 His teachers and background:**

Al-Ghazālī does not give much information about his Sufi masters. He refers to many Sufis who lived before him but he does not admit to a master-disciple relationship. However he gives some clues in the *Munqidh* as to the sources of his Sufism. He states that he became acquainted with Sufi beliefs by reading their books. Among these books, he expressly mentions, *Qūt al-Qulūb* (*The Food of the Hearts*) by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d.857), al-Junayd, al-Shiblī (d.945), Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and other discourses of the leading Sufis of his time.<sup>11</sup> In his works, there are references to be found to all the great mystics of his time. Indeed, Fazlur Rahman argues that al-Ghazālī's writings are the

culmination of the movement to bring Sufism into the orthodox fold, a movement triggered by Sufi authors like al-Sarrāj (d.987), al-Kalābādhī, and al-Qushayrī.<sup>12</sup>

After comprehending the intellectual side of their fundamental teachings, al-Ghazālī understood that what was most distinctive of Sufism is something that cannot be apprehended by study: but only by immediate experience (*dhawq*), by ecstasy and by a moral change. His own writings on his spiritual training indicate that his guide and masters were the Sufi books that he had studied before. In addition, his strong will allowed him to further his understanding and gain insight into the ecstatic experiences of Sufism. Therefore, after a period of indecisiveness, he left Baghdad for Damascus, to practise what he learned from Sufi books:

“In due course I entered Damascus. And there I remained for nearly two years with no other occupation than the cultivation of retirement and solitude, together with religious and ascetic exercises, as I busied myself purifying my soul, improving my character and cleansing my heart for the constant recollection of God most High. As I had learnt from my study of Sufism. I used to go into retreat for a period in the mosque of Damascus, going up the minaret of the mosque for the whole day and shutting myself in so as to be alone.”<sup>13</sup>

Al-Ghazālī’s lasting influence can be still seen today in the same mosque that he frequented. The “al-Ghazālī corner” can be seen crowded by Sufi minded people.

However, some scholars disagree with the notion that al-Ghazālī did not have Sufi masters. For example, M. Saeed claims that al-Ghazālī did have masters. He also rejects the view that al-Ghazālī’s final resort to Sufism was merely the result of his disillusionment with philosophy and dissatisfaction of scholastic theology. He claims that this is only part of the truth. In support of this M Saeed presents the following evidence to show that al-Ghazālī was not totally foreign to Sufism.

Firstly, after his father’s death, al-Ghazālī’s guardian was a Sufi devotee. Further, al-Ghazālī in his youth studied and even practised Sufism, first, under Yusuf al-

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<sup>11</sup> al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, p.96

<sup>12</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979) p.140



Nassāj in Ṭūs and then under al-Farmadhi at Nishāpūr. Secondly, his brother Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d.1126) made a name as a great Sufi; likewise his teacher al-Juwaynī. All of this indicates al-Ghazālī inclined towards the Sufi way of thinking. As a result of this, Saeed accepts al-Ghazālī's adoption of Sufism as the continuation of these early influences and not simply the consequence of his failure to find the philosophical solution to the problems of theology.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Ghazālī was acquainted with Sufis and Sufism in his youth, however, this does not necessarily mean that he would accept Sufi thought. Furthermore, it was quite normal to have an acquaintance with Sufism in that period. However, it is submitted that his real encounter and return to Sufism was due to the scepticism that he later experienced in life. As Macdonald rightly states, until the time of his conversion, al-Ghazālī's approach to theological and legal studies were business-minded, that is, to get material wealth, fame and respect.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Ghazālī's background was that he lived during the period of the Abbasid caliphate, which at the time was in decline having lost much of its central power to local dynasties. These dynasties often invaded and, at times, controlled the capital of the Abbasid Empire located in Baghdad. For example, a few years before the birth of al-Ghazālī, Baghdad was under the control of the Buwayhid dynasty, a Shiite sect who believed in the infallibility of the Imam. In 1055, the Seljuqs overthrew the Buwayhids and effectively governed Baghdad during the formative years of al-Ghazālī. The rule of the Seljuqs was a prosperous one and reached its peak under the reign of Alp-Arslān (1063-1072) and Mālik-Shāh (1072-92).<sup>16</sup>

During this period, Niẓām al-Mulk (1063-1092), the Grand Vizier played a crucial role in stabilising the educational atmosphere under the background of the great controversies and sectarianism of the time. In particular, the advent of Greek philosophy and the contact with different cultures had given rise to sects such as the Batinis. He did this by formalising Islamic education through the establishment of formal schools known as *madrasas*, which followed a strictly prescribed

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<sup>13</sup> al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, p.100; *The Faith and Practice*, trans. by W. M. Watt, p.62

<sup>14</sup> M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, v.I, p.617

<sup>15</sup> D. B. Macdonald, 'The Life of al-Ghazzalī', *JAOS*, XX, (1899) (71-132) p.75

<sup>16</sup> W. M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, p.12-14

curriculum. The first *madrasa* was opened around 960 A.D. followed by many others. This movement saw its climax during the viziership of Niẓām al-Mulk, who founded at least nine *Niẓāmiyya colleges*, scattered from Mosul to Herat. In addition, he provided scholarships for students.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose behind the establishment of these colleges was, primarily, to challenge the growth of the Ismailies. According to them, revelation (that is the Qur'ān) can only be understood through the mediation of an infallible Imam. In other words, the power and authority of the Qur'ān and Sunnah was made subservient to the interpretation of the Imam. In contrast, Sunni Islam insisted that the Qur'ān and Sunnah were supreme: the Caliph's duty was merely to oversee their implementation in real life.

It appears from the writings of the time, that the Ismailites were propagating their ideas with some success. As a response, al-Ghazālī, now a professor in one of the most respected *Niẓāmiyya colleges*, took up the challenge to defend Sunni Islam against these heresies.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, al-Ghazālī, relied predominantly on the Qur'ān supplemented by intellectual analysis. He did not speak with *ishārāt* and ambiguous words since they might be construed to support Batini ideas. This background should be kept in mind in order to understand al-Ghazālī's intellectual approach to the concept of Divine love that will be the subject of following pages.

### 7.3 al-Ghazālī's Understanding of Love

In his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī devotes a large chapter to the study of the concept of Divine love. It is entitled *Kitāb al-Maḥabbah wa al-Shawq wa al-Uns wa al-Riḍā* which can be translated as "The book of Love, Yearning, Intimacy and Satisfaction."<sup>19</sup> In this chapter, al-Ghazālī handles the subject by analysing the roots of human psychology. In particular, he studies the relationship between the human psyche and love. It can be argued that this is one of the most original contributions that he has made. As a consequence, his analysis of love is dominated by an

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22

<sup>18</sup> See al-Ghazālī, *The Faith and Practice*, trans. by W. M. Watt, p.26-29

intellectual approach. He, step by step, explains the concept of love based on rational methods and techniques of enquiry, *inter alia*, why rational human beings love one another? What are the motives behind love? However, the downside of this approach, in some ways, is that it lacks the emotional elements that are generally associated with the concept of love. For example, we do not see the ecstatic utterances in his study of love, as we have seen in al-Hallāj or Ibn al-Fāriḍ.

In the previous chapters, we presented God's love for man first and man's love for God second. However, al-Ghazālī presents his theory in the opposite way. To reflect his theory more clearly, as an exception, we will follow his style and study man's love for God in the first place.

### 7.3:1 Man's Love for God:

In order to understand the importance that al-Ghazālī places on the concept of love as a Sufi mode of relationship with God, it is necessary to begin with his theory of mystical states and stations. Al-Ghazālī gives a long list of mystical states and stations. All mystical virtues, according to al-Ghazālī, need to be acquired by the disciple on the Sufi path. However, these mystical stations and virtues do not possess an equal amount of importance. Some virtues or stations act only as a means for higher virtues and stations. Hence, he divides them into two main groups: a) those which are 'means stations' and b) those which are 'end stations.'<sup>20</sup>

The first group are only means for the second group of states. Therefore the first group of states have a limited value as being channels in order to reach the end stations. Means stations prepare the disciple for the perfection that the end stations require. For example, the stations like repentance, patience, and asceticism are the means stations to purify the heart and prepare it for the knowledge and love of God. Their only function is to help the novice acquire those stations regarded as ends.

The 'end stations', however, are sought for their own sake and not for any other objectives. Consequently, they are an end and not a means for other purposes. By the virtue of being end stations, they are eternal and everlasting. In contrast, the means stations are ephemeral. Whereas the means stations possess a temporary use

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<sup>19</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* v.4, p.311-381

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.311

and benefit to man in this world, the end stations are eternally valuable and will not leave the soul even at death. They will remain in the soul eternally. Among these end stations the most significant one, according to al-Ghazālī, is the station of love. In addition to love, amongst the other end stations are gratitude (*shukr*), unity (*tawhīd*), trust (*tawakkul*), love (*maḥabbah*), yearning (*shawq*), intimacy (*uns*) and satisfaction (*riḍā*).<sup>21</sup>

This division also determines the methodology of al-Ghazālī in the Sufi path. In close resemblance to his division of the states and stations into two groups, he divides the Sufi training into two stages. The first stage is to remove the evil qualities of the soul that constitute obstacles on the path to God by self-mortification and self-training. After purification of the inner self, the second stage begins. This is the stage of acquiring praiseworthy qualities, namely, repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, poverty, asceticism, trust, love, yearning, intimacy, satisfaction, intention, sincerity, truthfulness, vigilance, self-examination, and meditation. Without acquiring these virtues in perfection, no one can attain nearness to God. Many of these virtues are also called the stations of those who traverse the way to God (*maqāmāt al-sālikīn*).<sup>22</sup> It can be argued that in the first stage, the Sufi concentrates on the *means stations* in order to cleanse the heart and the soul. Only after this preparation, the mystic becomes ready to acquire the end stations.

In order to demonstrate the gradual development of the mystic from one station to another, al-Ghazālī presents the stages of the Sufi path in a gradually ascending order. He puts repentance at the bottom of this ladder, as many Sufis do, and love at the top. In summary, two things can be deduced from al-Ghazālī's approach to the mystical stations: Firstly, love is not a 'means station' used temporarily but is an 'end station.' Secondly, love as a station is the highest one among its sister stations. There is no higher stage than the acquisition of the love of God.

As a consequence of this general outlook, he ranks other mystical stations in their standing to love of God. In his view; repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, poverty, asceticism, Divine unity, and trust, in this order, all lead to love; whereas

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.311

<sup>22</sup> see al-Ghazālī, *Minhāj al-ʿĀbidīn*, (Damascus, 1994)

yearning, intimacy, and satisfaction are the fruits or by-products of love. Therefore his central focus is on love when he evaluates the rest of the mystical stations. In addition to this general role of love among all these stations, love also plays a special role in the evolution of each single stage. For example, he presents the evolution of the station of asceticism in three stages in relation to the concept of love: The lowest grade is the abandonment of the world in order to escape from punishment, this is the asceticism of those in whom fear predominates (*khā'ifūm*). The second stage is a little higher and more virtuous than the first one and it is the abandonment of the world in order to enter Paradise. Therefore in the second stage, the motive of asceticism is hope and not fear. However, there is another stage of asceticism that is the highest grade of all. This consists of forsaking the world for the love of God and not for any other reason, such as fear or hope. In summary, only the lovers of God possess the highest grades of asceticism and the highest grades of other mystical stations.<sup>23</sup>

This classification reminds us of Rābi'a's understanding of love. However, al-Ghazālī is more realistic than Rābi'a. Unlike her, he does not reject the motives of hell and paradise (fear and hope) completely in worshipping God: rather he stresses that the motive of pure love is the highest of all the motives in the Sufi path to God. Thus, he accommodates all sorts of lovers without excluding any of them -whatever their motivation might be.

It can be suggested that according to al-Ghazālī, the Sufi path can be divided into two stages. Those placed before the station of love and those after it. The stations before love, such as repentance, patience, asceticism, only prepare for it. Any station beyond love of God, such as yearning and intimacy are only manifestations of love and its by-products.<sup>24</sup> It is clear that love is the central criterion in the evaluation of al-Ghazālī's mysticism.

After this general introduction into the mystical system of al-Ghazālī, we can confidently speak of the significance and place of love of God. In accordance with his general methodology of Sufism, he first starts to remove the doubts concerning the possibility of love between man and God. Hence, he starts the discussion from

<sup>23</sup> A. Muhammad, *The Ethics of al-Ghazālī*, (Petaling Java; Central printing, 1975); al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* v.4, p.365

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.311

the theological side and quotes the argument of the theologians who believe that man cannot love God. al-Ghazālī describes these theologians as *Zāhirites*,<sup>25</sup> and their argument is that ‘love is only possible among the members of the same genus, between individuals having the same degree and level of existence’.<sup>26</sup> As a direct consequence of this belief, the *Zāhirites* understand the word love (*ḥubb*) as meaning obedience. According to them, love is nothing but obedience to God.<sup>27</sup> To al-Ghazālī this understanding is completely wrong and those who hold such views do not grasp the reality of religion. Al-Ghazālī after presenting their arguments sets out to refute them and attempts to show that love is perfectly possible between man and God.

In order to refute his rivals, al-Ghazālī employs two main methods: one is rational persuasion and the other is reliance upon the revelation. Concerning the first one, al-Ghazālī uses this method very effectively because of his grasp of the Greek and Islamic philosophy of his time.<sup>28</sup> In addition to this, he also uses human love and human psychology as a basis in order to explain Divine love. Consequently, he often exemplifies the characteristics of human love in order to explain the concepts of Divine love.

In order to clarify the concept of love and worship, he first analyses the concept of worship. According to him a person obeys someone only after loving him. Obedience is dependent upon love and, therefore, love precedes obedience. In other words, worship is not the love itself but only one of the fruits of the love for God.

In addition to this rational explanation, he adds evidence from the two sources of Islam; the Qur’ān and the sayings of the Prophet. This is the second part of his methodology. The existence of the love of God is mentioned in God’s own words

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.311

<sup>25</sup> In *Kāmiyā*’ he specifies this group as the sect of *Zāhirites*, the sect that believes in the letter of the law only. see al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy*, p. 66-7

<sup>26</sup> Van Den Bergh claims that this notion, that there can be no love between God and man because of the too great distance between them, had been already affirmed by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. He thinks that the *Nicomachean Ethics* had been translated into Arabic and this saying of Aristotle may have become a common notion among the theologians. See Van den Bergh, S., ‘The Love of God in al-Ghazālī’s Vivification of Theology’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, v.I, (1956) p.306

<sup>27</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy*, p. 105

<sup>28</sup> al-Ghazālī’s works on philosophy, such as *Taḥāfut al-Falāsifa* indicate that he has studied the philosophy of his time. The refutations which are written against his *Taḥāfut al-Falāsifa* also show his influence on the development of Islamic philosophy.

which supports the possibility of Divine love (*maḥabba*), The following verses form the basis of his evidence from the Qur’ān: “He (God) loves them and they love Him”<sup>29</sup> “Those who are believers love God much”.<sup>30</sup>

According to him these verses clearly prove, not only the possibility, but the necessity of a mutual love between God and man.<sup>31</sup> Al-Ghazālī buttresses these Qur’anic evidences with that derived from the Ḥadīth. He gives a number of examples from the sayings of the Prophet that make love of God a condition of the Muslim faith such as: “No-one can be a believer until God and his apostle become dearer to him than his family, riches and all mankind.”<sup>32</sup> In another ḥadīth, the Prophet reminds the believers to love God because of His benevolence, and to love the Prophet because of God’s love for him.”<sup>33</sup> Based on these sources of evidence and others similar to them, he refutes the idea that love for God is not possible from a theological point of view.

Having proved the possibility of Divine love from Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, he sets out to investigate the psychological and rational reasons behind the concept of love. Thus, it can be argued that al-Ghazālī is not a mere relator of the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet. He is actively engaged in plucking out deeper meanings from the textual sources by employing rational methods, coupled with a psychologically orientated approach. In order to see how al-Ghazālī harmonises the revelation with logic, one need only compare al-Ghazālī’s account of love of God with that of al-Makki and al-Qushayri,<sup>34</sup> both of whom were studied by al-Ghazālī. Contrary to them, al-Ghazālī’s originality lies in his deep analysis of human love and its application to Divine love. Whereas the Sufi authors before him did not enter a deep analysis of love; they rather chose to quote the words of others.

### 7.3:1:a Nature of Love

Al-Ghazālī, before entering the subject of Divine love, first of all furnishes us with the background information about the nature of human love. According to him, love

<sup>29</sup> Qur’ān; 5:54 (Pickthal)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:165

<sup>31</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p.312

<sup>32</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Īmān*, n.14

<sup>33</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p.312

<sup>34</sup> See al-Qushayrī, *Risālah al-Qushayriyya*, trans. by B.R. Von Schlegell, p.325-342

is an instinctive emotion which exists in every human being. In his words, 'love is a natural inclination of the subject towards objects that give pleasure.' Following this definition, the opposite of love, i.e. hate, is 'a natural repulsion to objects that give pain.' Thus, al-Ghazālī places pleasure and pain as the basis of the love that is an instinctive human emotion. In addition to these two essentials, there is another component of the emotion of love, namely, knowledge. Both, love and hate imply knowledge of objects that give pleasure or pain. Unless objects become known to a human being there can be no occasion for either inclination to or repulsion from them.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, al-Ghazālī's understanding of love is closely connected with the knowledge (*'ilm*) of the nature of the beloved.

Knowledge, in this perspective, means to know the attributes of the beloved. In order to decide whether the object of love deserves to be loved or not, one first needs to know the nature of the beloved. Hence, knowledge precedes love and determines its intensity. God possesses all the necessary requirements to be the object of man's love. Therefore, as far as Divine love is concerned, knowledge of God is almost synonymous with love of God, in other words, without first knowing God no one can love Him.

Due to the significant importance that knowledge occupies in his theory of love, al-Ghazālī further elaborates on his understanding of epistemology. According to him, knowledge is gained through two channels. The first revolves around the faculties of sense perception, viz, sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. These, he points out, are not in the sole possession of man, they are common to all living beings; humans as well as animals. As far as his second channel is concerned, this is exclusive to mankind. He calls this sense "the sixth sense". He names this faculty alternatively as intellect (*'aql*), light (*nūr*), and heart (*qalb*). This sense is centred in the heart.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Ghazālī pays special attention to prove that this internal perception is superior to the perception of the five senses. He thinks that this internal perception is more

<sup>35</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p.313

<sup>36</sup> al-Ghazālī, makes clear in his *al-Munqidh* that man consists of body and heart and by heart he means the reality of the spirit (*rūḥ*) not the physical heart which is owned by the dead as well the animals. See *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p.110; al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy*, p. 83



powerful and reliable than the external eye that can be seen as the most potent means of acquiring knowledge. People, who accept that the five senses are their sole means of perception, are on the same level as the animals.<sup>37</sup> Since these people are habituated to the temptations of the flesh their hearts are thereby burdened with hindrances which will not let them feel pleasure in the knowledge of God.<sup>38</sup>

After having presented the arguments to prove the superiority of the heart as far as epistemology is concerned, al-Ghazālī goes on to utilise this position of the heart in his remaining discourses. He attempts to appeal to our sixth sense (heart) whilst at the same time providing an intellectual underpinning for his arguments. For example, he examines the causes of human love towards others and suggests that there are five causes. From these he proves the necessity of Divine love since all these causes are fulfilled by love of God in the most perfect way.

### **7.3:1:b The causes of love according to al-Ghazali:**

Al-Ghazālī's uniqueness stems from his practical and realistic approach to mystical issues. Even a subject which is difficult to define, such as love, in the hands of al-Ghazālī becomes structured, organised and coherent. Al-Ghazālī, at times, tends to take on the role of a psychologist and in this connection, he makes reference to human life and experience. The psychological background of love is broached and developed by al-Ghazālī; in particular the conditions in which love can prosper. The information and insight gained from this endeavour are later utilised to clarify Divine love and to prove that loving God is as necessary as loving one's own self. al-Ghazālī's pondering and reflections at this stage culminate in his five causes that engender love in the lover. These will be dealt with in the order that they are presented by him.

According to al-Ghazālī the **first cause** of love is love of the self and the conditions which enable one to survive. This is inherent in the nature of every living being. All living beings desire to exist and to be alive. In other words, this can be termed as the love of permanent survival.<sup>39</sup> In connection with the love of survival, human beings desire to survive in a way that will maximise their enjoyment. *A fortiori* they

<sup>37</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p.314

<sup>38</sup> M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy*, p.122

long for things that will lead to this enjoyment and will despise the things that will diminish this enjoyment. As for the latter, the ultimate thing that is disliked by man is death. However, under extraordinary circumstances, such as suicide, man prefers death to life. The reason for this is not because death is intrinsically good but because it enables one to escape pain; and escape is deemed to be more “enjoyable” than painful existence. In summary, life forms the basis of all kinds of pleasure for man; and it is an ‘end’ *per se*. Moreover, all things that lead to this ‘end’ are also loved and desired: things that help self-preservation such as wealth, health, offspring, friends, and relatives. These are only loved because they are bound up with the continuance of a man’s own existence and perfection. Hence, if one has to prefer between his life and the other, one would choose his own life in normal circumstances.<sup>40</sup>

The **second cause** of love is beneficence. It is in the nature of man to love one’s benefactor or something giving benefit to him. We love our benefactor because of the benefits that we receive from him. Eventually, this too, comes back to self-interest, for the benefactor is not regarded as an end but as a means to continuation and perfection of life. A person does not love his benefactor for his own sake as he loves his own self. Therefore, if the benefits which are received from the benefactor cease, so the love for him or her stops. In a sense this type of love can be characterised as conditional love. In order to clarify this, he provides the following example: a patient loves the physician, not for his own sake but because he is a means to health. Similarly man loves money because of what it will buy not because it is a piece of paper.<sup>41</sup> The love for these objects of means is directly proportionate to the urgency of a person’s need for the benefactor’s benefits.

Loving God for the benefit he bestows upon us, is always met with caution, because to love God for His favours is to make Him a means like the others for the good of man. In al-Ghazālī’s opinion, God must be the end of man’s love not a means of his satisfaction. In order to further this notion, he also refers to some Biblical sources to show that loving God for secondary reasons is unacceptable. He writes:

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<sup>39</sup> M. Smith, *al-Ghazālī, the Mystic* (Lahore; Hijra International Publishers, 1983) p.175

<sup>40</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p.314

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.314

<sup>41</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p.315

“God revealed to the Prophet David that: ‘The dearest of my servants are those servants who worship Me without receiving any favour from Me. Who is a greater sinner than one who worships Me in greed of Paradise and in fear of Hell. If I had not created paradise and hell, should I not be entitled to your worship?’”<sup>42</sup>

In addition to David, he relates a story regarding Jesus. “Once Jesus was passing by a group of people worshipping God in devotion. They said, ‘we worship God for fear of Hell and for the hope of paradise.’ Jesus answered; ‘You are afraid of a created thing and hopeful of a created thing.’ He showed his dissatisfaction with their understanding of worship. Later, he met another group of people saying; ‘We worship God because of our love for Him and His glory.’ He showed satisfaction with their approach to God and said; ‘You are, then, the real friends of God. I have been ordered to live in your company.’”<sup>43</sup> Al-Ghazālī’s quotation of this incident also indicates that he was aware that the essence of Christianity revolved around disinterested love. This episode also indicates al-Ghazālī’s broad approach to support his ideas, even from non-Islamic sources such as Christianity.

**The Third cause** of love is to love well-doers and benefactors (*al-muḥsin*) without taking self-interest into consideration. The previous cause was a selfish cause since the lover loved his beloved for the benefit he derived. However, a human being can love unselfishly as well. Human nature loves well doers because of their good actions even if one does not benefit personally from the favours of these well doers. As always, al-Ghazālī presents an example to explain: “When you hear the good and just conduct of a certain king in a far away country, you love him, even though his goodness or wickedness cannot reach you because of his distance or because the king died long before.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, al-Ghazālī shows that human nature loves the well doers disinterestedly.

Although disinterested love in the Sufi circles is usually associated with Rābi‘a’s name, the argument was not presented in an intellectual and systematic way before al-Ghazālī. He proved the shortcomings of loving God for worldly benefits and for

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.323

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.323

His benevolence. He argued that because benevolence increases and decreases it is not a reliable motive as far as love of God is concerned.

The **fourth cause** of love is beauty (*jamāl*) and goodness (*ḥusn*). Human nature loves beauty and goodness instinctively. Al-Ghazālī's opinion is reflected in the words of the contemporary scholar Schuon who states: "The soul loves beauty, and it is thereby constrained to virtue, which is the beauty and happiness of the soul; beauty and the love of beauty, give the soul the happiness to which it aspires by its nature."<sup>45</sup> In a sense 'Loving beauty' is the characteristic of mankind which differentiates him from the rest of creation.

Having asserted that human nature loves beauty intrinsically, al-Ghazālī sets out to investigate the nature of beauty. According to him beauty is of two kinds: external and internal beauty. **External beauty** is the physical beauty appreciated by the external eye, such as the beauty of birds, trees, women and so on. al-Ghazālī explains the concept of external beauty by giving the example of the enjoyment a person gets when s/he watches green scenery and running water; he argues that they are loved for themselves, not for the sake of drinking the water or eating the green things. It is true that man loves drinking water but the appreciation of the running water is a different sort of aesthetical pleasure.

In summary, where Beauty is perceived, it is natural to love it. Consequently, if God is beauty, He must be loved by the one to whom His Beauty is revealed. Schuon names this beauty as sensible beauties,<sup>46</sup> which is more to the point since they are the beauties perceived by the senses. However, God's beauty is not sensory in this world but will be seen in the next world.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the lover of God indirectly learns from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah that God is most beautiful and the most perfect.

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<sup>45</sup> F. Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, trans. by Stoddart, W., (Middlesex, Perennial books limited, 1981), p.94

<sup>46</sup> Schuon gives the same name to the second kind of beauty with that of al-Ghazālī, that is internal beauty, *Ibid.*, p.94

<sup>47</sup> See more on the vision of God in al-Ghazālī's theology, M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy*, p.190-191

Al-Ghazālī recognises the limits of external beauty in contrast to ‘internal beauty’. It is the beauty of inward qualities that do not have a physical form in the physical world and cannot be comprehended by means of the five senses. However, it is perceived by another sense. al-Ghazālī calls this sense variously as the reason, the light, or the heart. Internal beauty is difficult to understand. Most people only perceive and appreciate external beauty; since this is apparent to the eye and does not need any extra endeavour. Furthermore, since it is easy to detect external beauty even children perceive it. However, only those who have equipped their souls with spiritual qualities perceive internal beauty; in other words, those who have been through mystical training. In his *Mishkāt*, al-Ghazālī also compares the degrees of certainty that we receive from the internal and external eye. He concludes that the perception of the heart is more reliable than the perception of the external eye and he explains the details of the defects of the external eye.<sup>48</sup>

At this juncture, it can be noted that the third and fourth causes of love are quite similar, in the sense that they do not benefit the lover physically and directly. Hence, they do not carry selfish motives that will motivate the lover. For this reason, Umaruddin, an important author on al-Ghazālī, regards the third and the fourth cause as identical.<sup>49</sup> Although it may be reasonable to join these two causes under one heading, their reclassification is against the author’s original classification.<sup>50</sup> Thus, these two causes are analysed separately.

**The fifth and final cause** of love is similarity and affinity existing between the lover and the beloved. Love normally flourishes amongst persons of similar nature and habits. Al-Ghazālī’s final cause has psychological value as well. Furthermore, it indicates that al-Ghazālī was a keen observer of his surroundings. To exemplify this cause of love he draws our attention to the phenomenon of how friendship forms and develops amongst people. He states: “The young make friends with the young and the elderly befriend others like themselves.” This rule of friendship formation is not confined to humans alone: al-Ghazālī even extends it to the animal kingdom.

<sup>48</sup> See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkat al-Anwār*, trans. by Muhammad Ashraf, *The Niche for Lights*, (Lahore, Ashraf Press, 1952) p. 83

<sup>49</sup> M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy*, p.122,

<sup>50</sup> See al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p.318

“The animals, too, make this distinction; so that the same species are drawn to each other, whereas different species attack one another.”<sup>51</sup>

Al-Ghazālī’s study of the psychological reasons behind love sets his paradigm of Divine love on a rational footing. Therefore, its overall character is more intellectual rather than emotional in comparison, for example, with al-Ḥallāj or Ibn al-Fāriḍ. As a result, he seems to perceive love as being something attainable (*kasbī*) by personal striving and effort. This opinion is divergent from the popular view among Sufis that Divine love is a gift of God and is not attainable on the basis of human effort alone.

### 7.3:1:c The Only Object of Love

After explaining the causes of love, al-Ghazālī concludes that a man should turn all his love to the direction of God. For, in reality all love should be due to God; for the simple reason that, in essence, God possesses all the causes of “love” in their entirety and in perfection. These causes are fulfilled by God in a real sense whereas human beings possess these characteristics only in a metaphorical sense. In other words, they do not intrinsically possess the aforementioned causes of love but they merely reflect Divine perfection. Al-Ghazālī enumerates these causes of love and attempts to demonstrate that all of these are fulfilled by God. Thus, in his paradigm of love only God deserves to be loved in this extreme way.<sup>52</sup> His explanations, illustrations and arguments are now presented.

Taking the first cause of love, namely, the love of existence and survival, al-Ghazālī believes that the love of God is a logical corollary for mankind. If one loves his existence, then, he must, of necessity, love God the creator of it. Man is absolutely dependent on God not only for the initial act of creation, but also for the continuous maintenance of his life. Like everything in the universe, man only survives by the virtue of Divine grace. Therefore, it is nothing but ignorance to love life alone and to forget God who creates life and sustains it, *viz.* to forget that existence, perfection and the sustenance of mankind are gifts of God. It is only God who gives life and if He did not sustain this act of creation man would have never survived beyond his

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, 324

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.319

own coming into existence. In summary, creation exists only through His grace and mercy.<sup>53</sup> Hence, they are obliged to love God for this great favour.

Moving on to the second cause of love, that for the benefactor due to his gifts and bounties, al-Ghazālī maintains that it is God alone who bestows all benefits and bounties on man. There is no other partner to God who can provide man with sustenance and rewards. This fact is testified in the Qur'ān, for God says: "If you count the favours of God, you will never be able to number them."<sup>54</sup> Again, if one loves one's benefactor, one must love God who is the real benefactor and the sole cause of every benefit received by mankind. The benefits that men provide to each other are in essence from God; man cannot be a real benefactor, he is only the means of God's beneficence.<sup>55</sup>

It follows from these statements that every single person should be a lover of God. The reality, however, is different. Al-Ghazālī, explains this phenomenon by resorting to man's lack of knowledge. Anyone who loves anything other than God, loves the thing because of ignorance. The good deeds that people perform for one another are really deeds done by God through the servants' actions. Al-Ghazālī, as always, provides illustrations to support his ideas and to make them acceptable to his readers. For example, he states: "Suppose a man donates all his wealth to you. From this you may think that he has brought benefit to you. This is a wrong notion. Who created the benefactor and his wealth? Who made you dear to him and turned his face towards you? Who threw the thought in his mind that in this donation, which benefited you, lies his worldly and after-worldly good? So the real benefactor is only God himself."<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, benevolence in the real sense can only be attributed to God. Human benevolence is motivated by all kinds of expectations, be it material or spiritual but only God's benevolence is perfectly disinterested and consequently can be classed as true benevolence.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.318

<sup>54</sup> Qur'ān, 14;34 (Y.A.)

<sup>55</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p. 319

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 320

As for **the third cause** of love, namely, the love and admiration of a benefactor even though his beneficence does not reach you, al-Ghazālī asserts that God again deserves to be loved under this heading. The lover admires the qualities of the benefactor. For example, if one hears of a king who has been generous to his subjects he will love the king for his quality of kindness even though the king's generosity has not affected him. al-Ghazālī claims that *a fortiori*, God must be loved as He created the benefactor in the first place. The benefactor is only reflecting a small portion of the perfect qualities of God.

This line of thought leads to **the fourth cause**, namely, love of all that possess beauty. One loves the elegance and the perfection of another even though there is no physical benefit to the lover. In a similar manner to the third cause al-Ghazālī, believes that in reality God is the source of all beauty. The beauty of others was bestowed by God. In fact, their beauty is only a mere reflection of the Divine attributes of God. Al-Ghazālī goes to great lengths to stress the absolute perfection of God. The logical outcome of all this is that 'He is pure from defects and evils and therefore He alone deserves to be loved in the real sense.'<sup>57</sup>

**The fifth** and final cause of love is the love based on affinity and similarity between the lover and beloved. This, also, in al-Ghazālī's view, necessitates the need to love God. Man loves God because of the affinity between the human soul and God. This position creates a slight dilemma from the perspective of mainstream Islam. This is due to the great importance attached to the concept of *tanzīh* that demands complete 'separateness' between man and God. In order to arrive at a synthesis of these two apparently conflicting ideas, al-Ghazālī relies on a source that must be accepted by all Muslims, namely, the Qur'ān. Al-Ghazālī refers to the passages in the Qur'ān where God has alluded to the affinity between man and God: "When I fashioned him (man) and breathed (*nafkh*) into him of my spirit."<sup>58</sup> This relation or affinity is further amplified in the following verse: "I have made you My vicegerent on earth"<sup>59</sup> For al-Ghazālī the reason why man is able to be the successor of God is due

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.321-23

<sup>58</sup> Qur'ān, 15:29 (Y.A.)

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 38:26 (Y.A.)



to the affinity between him and God. He also relies upon ḥadīth literature to provide further support for this position: “God created Adam according to His image.”<sup>60</sup>

A few important points, regarding al-Ghazālī’s position, should be made at this point. Firstly, it must not be assumed that al-Ghazālī believed that man was created in the physical image of God. Rather, in his view man, was created in the spiritual image of God, in the sense that man reflects God’s attributes and perfection in the best way. It was for this reason that God commanded the angels to bow down to Adam. This interpretation distinguishes al-Ghazālī from the alternative view that is most prominently associated with Christianity. In this view, man was created in the physical image of God. The Christians also further deviated in this matter and held Jesus to be the Son of God. It is only a small number of people who understand the secret of this affinity in its true sense. They are those whose only method is to follow the Commands of God.”<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, al-Ghazālī’s conception of man being created in God’s image must be distinguished not only from the Christian perspective but also from the perspective of other Sufis, such as al-Ḥallāj. There is a danger, that statements, such as these made by al-Ghazālī, could be misinterpreted. For example, in the case of al-Ḥallāj, his statements resulted in dangerous consequences as explained before. Therefore al-Ghazālī clarifies what he meant by the word ‘image’. He explains that the image (*ṣurah*) is not the exterior appearance that is perceived by the five senses, but is the internal affinity. Al-Ghazālī warns against misunderstandings about the nature of this affinity because, in his opinion, this notion has misled countless number of people and Sufis before. Some inclined to anthropomorphism whilst others turned to pantheism, and went so far as to claim that: “I am God.”<sup>62</sup>

This notion that man was created in the spiritual image of God also had repercussions on the history of Sufi ideas and the thinking of Sufis who came later. Most importantly, Ibn ‘Arabī took up this emphasis and accorded it a prominent position in his conception of love. The details of al-Ghazālī’s influence and Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas in general will be analysed in later chapters.

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<sup>60</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p. 324

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 324

The foregoing paragraphs have detailed al-Ghazālī's five causes of love and their application to Divine love. It further remains to point out that al-Ghazālī did not accord all of these causes equal prominence or ranking. In his opinion, two of the above causes have a special significance. These are the second and the fourth causes. As for the former, namely, love for the benefactor due to his bounties and gifts, al-Ghazālī believes that this occupies a prominent position amongst general people. As for the latter, namely, love of God because of His beauty, al-Ghazālī similarly accords this a high ranking. Furthermore, he goes on to rank these two causes in the order of their spiritual value. Quoting al-Junayd's words, he states that the first kind of love belongs to the general people, whereas the few elect own the second. Hence, al-Ghazālī admits that most people love God because of selfish reasons. The ones who love God only for the sake of God's worthiness and beauty are really few.<sup>63</sup> It seems al-Ghazālī's dual classification based on benefit and beauty has its roots in the approach of Rābi'a, for al-Ghazālī held her in high esteem as a spiritual guide.

### 7.3:1:d The Relationship between Knowledge (*Ma'rifa*) and Love

According to al-Ghazālī, all the physical and spiritual senses are created for specific purposes. For example, the desire for food has been created so that man may have the urge to earn food, and preservation of life, for without food one will die. In a similar vein, the aim behind the creation of the intellect is to recognise the creator and then to love Him.<sup>64</sup> Hence, intellect has the power to understand the Divine realm.

As a consequence, al-Ghazālī gives precedence to knowledge (*ma'rifa*) over love. This knowledge is essential because without it, there can be no love. The stronger the knowledge, the stronger the love. In al-Ghazālī's paradigm, love is not merely an emotion: rather, it is the highest form of cognition, as well. Both emotion and cognition are united; to love God is to know Him and to know Him in a real sense is to love Him. Al-Ghazālī supports this relationship by Ḥasan al-Basrī's words: "He who recognises his Lord, loves Him, he who recognises the world adapts to

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 324

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 323

<sup>64</sup> See *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 325

renunciation.”<sup>65</sup> This statement of Ḥasan neatly summarises al-Ghazālī’s understanding of love and knowledge. It follows from this statement that he who does not know that he comes from God, cannot love God. For this reason fools cannot love God.<sup>66</sup> With these sharp words al-Ghazālī indicates the significance of intellect in his paradigm of love.

In al-Ghazālī’s paradigm knowledge also has other functions. For example, it is a seed of the next world’s *mushāhada*. He who does not sow this seed in this world can not expect fruits in that world.<sup>67</sup> To al-Ghazālī the fruit of knowledge is love and its fruit is beatific vision. Beatific vision is only given to the believers who acquire knowledge and love of God in this world. The faithful who did not arrive at that level, remain content only with the beauties of the Paradise.<sup>68</sup>

Al-Ghazālī presents Rābi‘a as the model of a perfect lover of God, who desires the vision of God rather than the beauties of Paradise, by quoting her famous words about Paradise: “First the neighbour then the house.”<sup>69</sup> He also asserts that the rewards of Paradise are in proportion with the love of God. Similarly, love of God is in proportion with the knowledge of God. So *ma‘rifa* is the source of eternal bliss.<sup>70</sup> The happiest man in the hereafter is the one who loves God most during this life.

An important distinction must be made between al-Ghazālī and other Sufis regarding the vision of God. According to him the vision of God is only possible in the hereafter and not in this world as some of the Sufis supposed. Even the Prophet himself did not see God on the night of ascension. In this matter al-Ghazālī agrees with Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyyah, and refutes al-Ḥallāj. Although he does not denounce al-Ḥallāj and the likes of him as verging on infidelity, he believes that their controversial utterances were uttered in moments of ecstasy. Hence, they must be excused and their statements should be ignored.

<sup>65</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy*, p.106

<sup>66</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, (Beirut, Dār al-Afāq al-Jadīdah, 1979), p.50

<sup>67</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p. 331

<sup>68</sup> See al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir*, p.50-1; al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, ed. by Abū al-‘Alā ‘Afīfī, p.47-8

<sup>69</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p. 331

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 331

This position of al-Ghazālī is closely connected with his conception of the hereafter. It leads him to describe the hereafter as the day of meeting with God. It is, therefore, a joyous day in which the lover meets his or her Beloved. For the lover of the life of this world, in contrast, it is like a life of imprisonment in the cage of the world. Death is a release from this cage.<sup>71</sup>

### 7.3:1:e Causes of Increase in the Love of God

It was mentioned earlier that al-Ghazālī's love is of a more intellectual nature. Hence, he explains the rationale behind different aspects of love. In this context, he also mentions the methods of acquiring love of God and increasing it. There are chiefly two ways of strengthening love of God in man. In accordance with his general Sufi training, one of these ways is negative and the other is positive.

1-Ousting the love of mundane concerns other than God from the mind, is the first cause of increasing Divine love. Al-Ghazālī likens mundane concerns to weeds. For a good harvest, all weeds must first be ousted. He further explains his argument: "The mind is like a cup, if it is full with water you can not fill it with vinegar, that is to say, if it is full of worldly concerns and with their love you can not fill it with Divine love."<sup>72</sup> He regards love of the world not only a great vice but also as the vice from which all other vices proceed.<sup>73</sup> For al-Ghazālī the words of unity (*kalima al-tawḥīd*): "There is no Deity but God" means "*Lā Maḥbūba illā Allāh*" that is, "There is no object of love except God." Concerning the worldly desires, God says: "Have you seen a person who took his low desires for his god."<sup>74</sup> From this verse, it is understood that all the low desires that cause the servant to deviate from God are considered metaphorically as deities even though they are not worshipped literally.

The more a Sufi inclines to worldly desires and concerns, the more he is distanced from the love of God. Al-Ghazālī draws our attention to the practice of "*zuhd*",

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 333

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 334

<sup>73</sup> See A. Muhammad, *The Ethics of al-Ghazālī*, p. 124

<sup>74</sup> *Qur'ān*, 25: 43

(renunciation of the world) to achieve the goal.<sup>75</sup> Al-Ghazālī is not very different from the early Sufis in using asceticism, but with a different aim in mind. The early Sufis renounced the world because of their fear of hell or hope for paradise whereas al-Ghazālī advises to renounce it for the sake of God's love.

2-The second way of increasing love is to increase *ma'rifa* by pondering over the creation of God. In his characteristic style al-Ghazālī gives a further example from the world of animals: "Consider the creation of a mosquito, think of its power in spite of its smallness in size. How God created it in the form of an elephant, the largest of animals. It has been given a trunk like that of an elephant. In addition, a mosquito has been supplied with two wings. Everything an elephant has was given to it as well. Although it is a petty creature, yet there are lessons to be learnt by mankind."<sup>76</sup>

Apart from these suggestions al-Ghazālī accepts the legitimacy of the use of music and dancing to stir up the emotions of love. In *Kīmīyā'* he writes: "We come now to the purely religious use of music and dancing: such as that of the Sufis, who by this means stir up in themselves greater love towards God, and, by means of music, often obtain spiritual visions and ecstasies, their heart becoming in this condition as clean as silver in the flame of a furnace, and attaining a degree of purity which could never be attained by any amount of mere outward austerities."<sup>77</sup> This statement clearly indicates that al-Ghazālī is different from the early ascetics by regarding asceticism alone to be not sufficient in the Sufi path.

From al-Ghazālī's above mentioned advice it seems that, in his understanding, love is something that could be acquired by human endeavour and not simply something bestowed upon man by God. For if that was the case, then, he would not indicate the ways of increasing it. This distinguishes him from the Sufis who believe that love is out of reach of man's personal efforts but only God's gift to His elected servants.

### **7.3:1:f Signs of the Servant's Love for God**

Al-Ghazālī establishes some criteria for determining the validity of those who claim to love God. In his *Kīmīyā'* he writes: "Many profess to love God. However, a man can easily test himself by watching which way the balance of his affection inclines when the commands of God come into collision with some of his desires. The

<sup>75</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, p.33

<sup>76</sup> See for more, al-Ghazālī, *al-Hikmat fi Makhlūqāt Allah*, (Beirut, 1978)

profession of love to God which is insufficient to prevent him from disobedience to God is a lie.”<sup>78</sup> According to him love should show its signs on the mind, tongue and bodily limbs of the lover. These will now be presented.

The desire to meet God; for example, to long for death in order to meet with the Beloved. “A lover does not feel difficulty in going from his house to the house of his Beloved to meet Him. Death is the key to this meeting. On the other hand, if a lover dislikes death because he is not prepared to meet God yet, it is not a sign that he does not love God.”<sup>79</sup> Al-Ghazālī often relates the story of Abraham: when the angel of death came to take the soul of Abraham, he said: “Have you ever seen a friend take his friend’s life?” God answered him: “Have you ever seen a friend unwilling to see his friend?”<sup>80</sup> This notion was later developed in the poems of Rūmī who sees death as a day of meeting between a bride and bridegroom.

Another sign of love for God is to prefer God’s will over man’s low desires; for a true lover’s will is in harmony with his Beloved’s. That is s/he refrains from committing sin and persists in good deeds however difficult they are. Answering the hypothetical question whether committing sin is compatible with love or not, al-Ghazālī answers that committing sin is incompatible with the perfection of love. However, when love is weak it is possible that a man might commit sin. Further, al-Ghazālī clarifies this dilemma with an example:

“A sick person despite loving his health, still eats things which harm his health. One cannot infer from this that he does not like his health but the fact is that he cannot overpower his baser desires. Similarly, a lover of God in the beginning commits sin but when his love reaches perfection he does not commit sin.”<sup>81</sup> However, these words should be understood cautiously in the Islamic context. Since in Islamic thought, everybody is prone to commit sins and nobody is considered perfect. Hence, what al-Ghazālī means is that the lovers of God do not commit sins deliberately.

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<sup>77</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy*, trans. by C. Field, p. 69

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>79</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v.4, p. 348-9

<sup>80</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy*, p. 106

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 350

Another sign of love is to remember (*dhikr*) God at all times. A lover's tongue does not become tired of mentioning the name of the Beloved.<sup>82</sup> The lover's love encompasses the Beloved's works and friends, indeed everything which has any connection whatsoever with the Beloved. For example, to love the Prophet because he is God's messenger or to love the Qur'ān because it is His word indicates the perfection of love. In this matter, al-Ghazālī is refuting Rābi'a's understanding of love. Rābi'a had maintained that her love for God did not leave any place even for His messenger. In contrast, al-Ghazālī says that the lovers of the Beloved must be loved, as well. This does not imply a division or distribution of the love that is due to God, since in reality all these loves go back to Him. Man's love for God necessitates the need to love all creatures of God, even sinners, because they are God's creation. He loves sinners for they are God's creatures though he hates their bad conduct.<sup>83</sup> It can be argued that this positive approach prepared the way for al-Ghazālī's success and fame.

Another sign of the true lover is the performance of devotional acts in solitude. The nights must be most desired because they do not contain distractions and obstacles to pray to God. If the lover enjoys the company of others and enjoys sleeping his love is considered imperfect.<sup>84</sup>

In al-Ghazālī's paradigm of love, fear also plays a role alongside with love. Both love and fear of God are compatible and possible to exist simultaneously. However, fear in al-Ghazālī's teaching is very different from the early Sufis'. It is not the fear of hell-fire but the fear of being veiled from God, that is, God's distancing (*ib'ād*) the lover from Himself. Only the lovers of God feel this fear, since the people who have not tasted the proximity of God have never known its pleasures. In short this fear is the fear of losing the Beloved. Al-Ghazālī is in favour of balancing the love of God with fear. He thinks that if the worship of God lacks fear, the worshipper is deviated by laziness; if the worship of God only involves fear and lacks love, the worshipper alienates himself from God.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Dhikr* literally means remembrance, 'recollection', 'mention'. In Sufism the word has acquired a technical sense of 'litany' in which the name of God, or formula like 'God is Most Great' (*Allahu Akbar*), are repeated over and over again in either a high or a low voice. See. I. R. Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*, p.70-71; al-Ghazālī uses this concept both in its literal and technical sense.

<sup>83</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p. 350-1

<sup>84</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, p.119-20; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p. 351

<sup>85</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p. 353

Finally, the lover of God must keep his love secret: he must not publicise it or make any claim to it. The disclosing of the secret is improper as well as disrespectful to the Beloved. It is only excused when the lover is intoxicated by his love and unintentionally reveals it.<sup>86</sup> However, it is important to note that al-Ghazālī is against revealing the love of God with words alone. Therefore, disclosure which becomes apparent via one's character and actions does not fall under the ambit of this prohibition. This distinction seems to be an allusion to al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī. He excuses their revealing love for God in the state of intoxication. However, it seems that he indicates a preference for al-Junayd's teachings regarding this matter, namely, that a state of sobriety is preferable to a state of intoxication.

#### 7.4 God's Love for Man

In the previous chapters, we began with the study of 'God's love for man' but since al-Ghazālī places this section after 'man's love for God', we have decided to follow his sequencing.

al-Ghazālī starts this subject by looking into the Qur'ān to find evidences that God loves His servants: "He loves them and they also love Him."<sup>87</sup> In this verse it is clear that God loves us as we love Him. However, the nature of God's love is not same as man's love for God even though the Qur'ān uses the Arabic word "*ḥubb*" for both kinds of loves. al-Ghazālī, as was mentioned above, describes love as an "inclination towards an object which gives pleasure to the nature of man". This inclination is an impulse to satisfy a need, and need logically implies a defect; an urge towards the perfection of what is an imperfection. Since God is far from all kinds of imperfections the literal sense of "*ḥubb*" (love) cannot be applied to God. Only in a metaphorical sense it can be said that: "God loves His Servants". On the other hand, man's love for God is used in a real sense.

Al-Ghazālī elaborates on this point and argues that all the concepts used in the Qur'ān to describe God and man are not employed with identical meanings. For example, the attribute of God's "existence" (*wujūd*) is also used for man but the

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 355

<sup>87</sup> Qur'ān, 5:54



existence of man is very different from the existence of God. Whereas our existence is dependent on God, His existence is from Himself. Therefore, the meaning of existence of the Creator and the created are very different. This rule applies to all other attributes of God such as His knowledge, will, power. When used for God, they carry different meanings from their normal usage. God possesses these attributes in an absolute and perfect manner whereas man possesses them imperfectly.<sup>88</sup>

The reason for this variance in meaning is due to the shortcomings of human language. The languages we use today are created according to human capacity and are deficient to describe the Divine. Thus, when they are used for the Creator, they are further restricted and explained with the Divine revelation. Therefore God's love for man cannot merely be understood from our daily usage of the word "*ḥubb*" (love). The Qur'anic data defines God's love as God's forgiveness, His purification of the believers' hearts from worldly desires. Hence God's love towards us signifies His removal of the veils between Him and man so the lovers' hearts may get a clear vision of Him.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to this, al-Ghazālī thinks that when God loves his creatures, He loves them not as separate beings from Himself; for affection to anything other than Himself would imply an imperfection or need in Him. It may be said that God's love for man is like His love for His own work.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, al-Ghazālī did not say very much in his commentary about God's Divine Names, which include the name "*al-Wadūd*" (the lover), in his *Maqṣad al-Asnā'*. Commenting on this name he only says that this Divine Name means that God desires only goodness for his creation.<sup>91</sup> This can be an indication that al-Ghazālī's understanding of God has more positive features.

To conclude, al-Ghazālī believes that God's love is attained after man has purified his heart. It is only then that God admits him to His proximity and removes the veil from his heart in order to enable him to observe Him with his heart's eye. But, nearness to God does not mean that any change takes place in God, for God is

<sup>88</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p. 345

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 336-7

<sup>90</sup> M. Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy*, p.125

unchangeable. So whatever happens, happens to man. Man achieves proximity to God, not in a physical or spatial sense: proximity to God can only be achieved through the goodness of the man's character. Al-Ghazālī explains this proximity to God by an example. He says a student goes towards his master through learning and acquiring his knowledge. The teacher does not descend to the level of student, but the student ascends gradually to the level of his teacher. It is even possible that the student surpasses his teacher in knowledge. In the same way, the servant approaches God in proportion with his striving, however, the difference is that this movement of man towards God never ends, since God is infinite. This means that man cannot be an equal of God.<sup>92</sup> Al-Ghazālī's teaching of love, therefore, refuses al-Hallaj's claim that he and his Beloved are the same. al-Ghazālī adheres to the mainstream Islamic view which always stresses the transcendence of God.

#### **7.4:1 The Signs of God's Love for Man**

Similar to al-Ghazālī's criteria for establishing whether a man loves God or not, he also presents some criteria to determine whether man is loved by God or not. In this connection, he enumerates some signs of God's love for His servant with the words of the Prophet who said: "When God loves a servant, He throws him into dangers and difficulties. If the servant loves Him with full love, He purifies him by making him sincere". The Prophet goes on to clarify the meaning of "making him sincere" as "God does not leave for him any family and property to distract his attention away". So the sign of the love of God for His servant is that He separates him from others and comes between him and other people and things.<sup>93</sup>

Another sign is that God takes responsibility for his servant's open and secret deeds upon Himself; admonishes the servant and makes his conduct beautiful. God creates in him hatred towards the world, gives him a taste for his invocation in solitude and lifts the veil from the servant.<sup>94</sup>

These are a few examples of the signs of God's love for man and more examples can be found. They all turn around the concept of testing the lover by trials. The lovers of God prevail over all the difficulties. Furthermore, they possess all the beautiful characteristics that the Qur'ān and the ḥadīths advise.

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<sup>91</sup> al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fi Sharh Ma'āni Asmā Allah al-Ḥusnā*, (Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut, 1971) p.132

<sup>92</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v.4, p. 347

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 247

### 7.5 The influence of other Sufis on al-Ghazali

From the foregoing discussion on the various aspects of al-Ghazālī's paradigm of love, it becomes apparent that he was not a pioneer who struck out a totally new path concerning the concept of love. Rather he built upon and refined the ideas of his predecessors. For instance, al-Ghazālī in his large chapter on 'love' refers to many Sufis who lived before him. Among these Sufis, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyah's disinterested love has an important place. Although he quotes some sayings of Sufis about love like Suleiman al-Dārānī, Ma'rūf al-Karhī, he specifically relates and comments on Rābi'a's statements on love. His explanation of Rabia's two types of love indicates how much he benefited from her.

Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī who wrote a book on love, was also used by al-Ghazālī to the extent that he reproduces much of al-Muhasibi's teaching on the subject word for word. Alongside these sober Sufis al-Ghazālī refers to intoxicated Sufis like Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and al-Ḥallāj. He defends these Sufis from the criticism of the theologians.<sup>95</sup>

Al-Ghazālī had found such teachings on mystic love available to him: it was therefore no new doctrine. However, what al-Ghazālī did was to develop and systematise these existing ideas in a new and unique fashion. He analyses the types of love and the causes of love, not only using his Sufi experience, but also resorting to non-mystical resources such as psychology, philosophy, and so on. There is a strong possibility that al-Ghazālī not only benefited from the systematic fashion of the philosophy books but also derived some of his teachings from them. For example, it is possible that from Neo-Platonism he took the idea that God is Supreme Beauty and love is the natural inclination of the soul towards beauty, whether terrestrial or Divine. Although he does not admit so, it is known that he studied philosophy and even mastered it to the extent of refuting the Muslim philosophers.

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, v 4, p. 347

<sup>95</sup> See *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 386

As well as using materials from the Sufis, al-Ghazālī also refer to Christian sources. He always depicts Jesus Christ as a defender of disinterested love of God.<sup>96</sup> But this reference to Jesus must not be misconstrued in a Christian sense as “the Son of God”, but a prophet of God like the rest of the prophets.<sup>97</sup>

## 7.6 Conclusion

1-) Al-Ghazālī for the first time systematised the concept of love with clarity and by his great influence enabled “Divine Love” acceptable to the public and scholars alike. This development was aided by the clarity of al-Ghazālī’s works which were accessible not only to scholars but also to the lay people. In this regard, he is in stark contrast to the complex systems of al-Ḥallāj or Ibn ‘Arabī.

2-) Al-Ghazālī discusses and analyses the concept of love in depth and breadth, that is, from religious, mystical, philosophical and psychological perspectives. This is the most prominent feature of al-Ghazālī. Before and even after al-Ghazālī most Sufis discussed the concept of love only in mystical or religious perspectives. Hence, they were never as comprehensive as al-Ghazālī.

3-His teaching of love utilises the legacy of the earlier Sufis who had contributed to the concept of love. This makes him into a sound transmitter of the views of his predecessors on love.

4-His study of love is predominated by his well-reasoned, psychological and philosophical analysis of love. The emotional elements and the *shatahāt* (excessive claims of Sufis) of al-Ḥallāj, or Ibn al-Fāriḍ will not be found in his paradigm of love. Hence, the mainstream theologians and scholars could not find many things to reject in his understanding of Sufism in general and in particular in his understanding of love.

5- He enabled others, who came after him, to build on the foundations he had laid. Especially, his method of using psychological knowledge.

6-His teaching on love hovers between the sober and intoxicated form of it. However, in general terms, he inclines towards al-Junayd’s sober way in this matter. He does so without severely criticising the intoxicated Sufis. He finds mitigating circumstances for the conduct of those intoxicated Sufis like al-Ḥallāj

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p. 323

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, v.4, p.323

and al-Bisṭāmī: saying that their words of “*shath*” are not condemned because they were uttered in a state of ecstasy, therefore they are not accountable.

7-As a result of this attitude, al-Ghazālī brings Sufi love into the realm of orthodox Islam. In his paradigm of love, there is no *mad love*<sup>98</sup> and its eventual aberrations as in al-Ḥallāj.

8- Al-Ghazālī believes that sensual love is an essential part of human development; and for this reason he imports the explanations of the sensual love into the realms of Divine love.

9- Al-Ghazālī’s love is a sort of intellectual love as opposed to Ibn al-Arabi who says: “I call God to witness that if we confined ourselves to the rational arguments of philosophy, ...no creature would ever have experienced the love of God.”<sup>99</sup> However, al-Ghazālī also uses emotional elements in his paradigm of love.

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<sup>98</sup> This phrase is minted by M. Chodkiewicz, see his *Seal of the Saints*, trans. by L. Sherrard, (The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1993), p.45

<sup>99</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, (Cairo, 1911), v.2, p.326

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Ibn 'Arabī's Paradigm of Love

#### 8.1 Introduction

It is generally accepted throughout the history of Sufism that Ibn 'Arabī was one of the most influential and controversial Sufis.<sup>1</sup> For most of the Sufis after the 13th century AD, his writings constitute the apex of doctrinal Sufism. In particular, through his extensive works on Sufism, many loose ideas that were cherished by the Sufis were transformed into well-defined doctrines. As Dr Austin, a translator of Ibn 'Arabī's works, has put it:

“Ibn 'Arabī gave expression to teachings and insights of the generations of Sufis who preceded him, recording for the first time, systematically and in detail, the vast fund of Sufi experience and oral tradition, by drawing on a treasury of technical terms and symbols greatly enriched by centuries of intercourse between the Muslim and Neo-Hellenistic worlds... all who came after him received it through the filter of his synthetic expression”.<sup>2</sup>

His thoughts have attracted the attention of many scholars and Sufis throughout time. Due to his immense contribution to Sufi thought, he is called *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* “the greatest master”, a title not given to anyone else after him. What Dr. Austin stated about Ibn 'Arabī's position within Sufi doctrine is also true concerning the concept of love. He wrote a very long chapter on the nature and different kinds of love. He transposed love as the central focus of his philosophy. Therefore, no study of the concept of love would be complete without referring to his works.

#### 8.2 His Life

Muhammad Ibn 'Alī Ibn 'Arabī was born in Murcia in southern Spain in 1165 AD (560 AH). He came from an ancient Arab family, Banū Ṭayy, who emigrated to the peninsula. This is confirmed by his own words in the *Dīwān*.<sup>3</sup> His father 'Alī

<sup>1</sup> The correct form of Shaykh Akbar's name is Ibn al-'Arabī, however, to distinguish him from Qādi Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn al-'Arabī (d.1148), he is referred to as Ibn 'Arabī without the prefix “al”. See *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1965-71), v.2I, p.707

<sup>2</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia*, Trans. by R. W. J. Austin, (Beshara Publications, 1988), p48.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīwān*, Bulaq, 1271 H., p.47, *Muḥāḍarāt*, I, p.155; quoted in *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p.17

Ibn al-‘Arabī was clearly a man of standing and influence as he was a friend of the famous philosopher, Ibn Rushd (d.1198) known as Averroes.<sup>4</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī lived in the far west end of the Muslim world of his time. He grew up in an atmosphere steeped in the most important ideas - scientific, religious and philosophical - of his day. The Iberian Peninsula was invaded by the Moors in 711 AD and the southern half of Spain had been ‘Arabised’ under Islamic rule. Arabic became the common language of all educated people. Here in al-Andalus the three major traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam flourished side by side. The result of this was an immensely rich and talented world, that we can still see signs of today in buildings like the Alhambra in Granada, or the Great Mosque at Cordoba. This was a world where the great classics of Greek literature, especially Aristotle and Plato, were translated (first into Arabic and then into Latin) and studied alongside the spiritual teachings of the three *Abrahamic* religions.<sup>5</sup>

After the occupation of Murcia by the Almohads, his family moved to Seville which became home to Ibn ‘Arabī for nearly thirty years, although he spent some ten years in various towns of Spain and North Africa. Through his family connections, Ibn ‘Arabī seems to have met several of the celebrated scholars and philosophers of his time. For example, Ibn ‘Arabī writes of his meeting with the chief judge of Seville, the celebrated jurist and philosopher Ibn Rushd.

Due to the fact that several comprehensive works have been written regarding Ibn ‘Arabī’s biography, it is not necessary to dwell upon these issues.<sup>6</sup> A brief snapshot of the important milestones in Ibn ‘Arabī’s life will suffice for our purpose. One factor overshadowing the life of Ibn ‘Arabī was his passion for travel. In this connection, a parallel can be drawn to another great Sufi traveller, al-Ḥallāj. Both of them travelled extensively in the direction of their respective ‘Easts’. There is however one important difference between them: al-Ḥallāj always returned back to his hometown, whereas Ibn ‘Arabī left his homeland at the age of 35 never to return.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* v.I, p.153

<sup>5</sup> S. Hirtenstein, *Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi: The Treasure of Compassion*, article in the World web at <http://www.IbnArabisociety.org/TreasureofCompassion.html>

Ibn ‘Arabī made his way via Cairo and Jerusalem to Mecca, where he performed the first pilgrimage in 1202. There he spent some two years in the company of the most influential and learned families in the city, studying and writing. It was here that he was inspired to compose his famous collection of poems, *Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq* the ‘The Interpreter of Desires’ - love poems that give astonishing insight into the moods and conditions of the spiritual path.

### 8.2.1 His Works

Among many other characteristics, Ibn ‘Arabī is also distinguished from other Sufis by the huge amount of his works. He is described by Brockelmann as a writer of “colossal fecundity”.<sup>7</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī is one of the most prolific authors of Sufism both quantitatively and qualitatively. He wrote over 400 works<sup>8</sup> including the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, an exposition of the inner meaning of the wisdom of the prophets.

However, his seminal work is assuredly *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, a vast encyclopaedia of spiritual knowledge. In addition to the prose works, he wrote poetry as well. In his *Dīwān* and *Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*, he wrote some of the finest poetry in the Arabic language. Many people were scandalised by the apparently erotic and sensuous imagery in these poems; and he was compelled to write a commentary on them in his own defence. It is fortunate for us that he did so, since his comments do much to illuminate the extraordinary depth of meaning that he brings to bear on poetic images.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst it can be accepted that Ibn ‘Arabī’s views were based upon his own experiences, it should be borne in mind that the experiences were deeply rooted in the textual sources of Islam. This is evidenced by the abundant use of the Qur’anic

<sup>6</sup> Especially C. Addas, *Quest for Red Sulphur*, trans. by P. Kingsley, (Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1993)

<sup>7</sup> A. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, p.12

<sup>8</sup> U. Farrukh, *Tārikh al-Adab al-Arabī*, (Beirut, Dār al-‘Ilm, 1985), v.5, p.720

<sup>9</sup> See Ibn ‘Arabī, *Dhakhār al-‘Alāq Sharḥ Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*, ed. by M.A Karwi, 1986, ; *The Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*, translated by R. A. Nicholson; S. Dayf, *‘Asr al-Duwal wa Imārāt al-Andalūs*, (Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1989), p.366



verses and Ḥadīth traditions, which are generously distributed in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī.

The full dependence on the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth gives Ibn ‘Arabī a different quality from the philosophers of Islam. The philosophers’ main sources of inspiration were their intellect and the principles of Greek philosophy. In contrast Ibn ‘Arabī gave little consideration to the intellect as an epistemological tool. He did not regard the intellect as being capable of providing answers to spiritual and mystical problems. However, this does not mean that the intellect played no part in his system of belief. In fact, it can be argued that the intellect played a crucial role in that it allowed Ibn ‘Arabī to communicate his visions in the most refined language of his time. Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to Divine love is not purely emotional. His approach is more intellectual in comparison with Rābi‘a or al-Ḥallāj<sup>10</sup>

### 8.2.2 His Masters and Students

Ibn ‘Arabī was eight years old at the time his family moved to Seville. There he received his formal education. He studied the Qur’ān, Qur’anic exegesis, the Traditions of the Prophet, Law, and Arabic grammar from contemporary scholars. These subjects were the normal curriculum of any Muslim student. He seems to have benefited from the best of the teachers.<sup>11</sup> His knowledge and frequent references to Qur’anic verses, the analysis of vocabulary with linguistic methods and his deep knowledge of Ḥadīth, all show that he had the rigorous formal education of his time. Even a quick glance at his works prove that Ibn ‘Arabī had a very good education.

It is also important to note that among the teachers during his early education were Sufī scholars as well. However, his real contact with Sufism came when he was older. According to his own account, he was initiated into the Sufi Way in 1184, when he was twenty years of age<sup>12</sup>. The early stage of his life prior to his initiation was called by him a time of *Jāhiliyya* this was the period in which the young Ibn ‘Arabī remained divided between the attraction of this world and the

<sup>10</sup> T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufism, The Mystical Dimension of Islam*, Trans. by D. M. Matheson Mackays of Chatham, (Kent, 1990), p.31

<sup>11</sup> Due to the length of the list of his teachers, we do not give their names. To give an idea, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions about ninety of his masters in Ḥadīth science in an autobiographical note. For the list see *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p.312-314

<sup>12</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.425;

other world. In that way, he reminds us of another great Sufi's work; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's autobiography *al-Munqidh*. Ibn 'Arabī, like al-Ghazālī describes this tie of *Jāhiliyya* in the beginning of his *Rūḥ al-Quds*.<sup>13</sup>

Another important aspect of his mystical training is what is called *Uwaysī* since in many places he states that his conversion was accomplished through visions. *Uwaysī* is the mystic who has attained illumination outside the regular mystical path, with the mediation of a dead master mostly through visions. Ibn 'Arabī claims that in his visions many important personalities became his masters, such as the Prophet Jesus, Moses and Muhammad. For example, he relates in the *al-Futūḥāt* that he repented at the hands of Jesus. He says: "He (Jesus) prayed for me and commanded me to practise renunciation (*zuhd*) and self-denial (*tajrīd*)."<sup>14</sup> All these show that Ibn 'Arabī's mystical training has two aspects which are always apparent in his writings. In many places, he relates a truth that he attained due to a vision.

As to his terrestrial masters, Ibn 'Arabī benefited from many of them from an early age. It is clear that much of his early youth was spent in the company of Sufis of his time. For example, among some of the Masters that he names in his books were: Abū al-'Abbās al-'Uryābi<sup>15</sup>; Aḥmed Ya'qūb al-Kūmi<sup>16</sup>; Ṣāliḥ al-'Adawī<sup>17</sup>; Abū Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Shubarbūli<sup>18</sup>. The list goes on and on, and therefore only a few examples of his masters have been given here. In addition to these masters, it is interesting that he also shows Jesus<sup>19</sup> as his master. His books *Rūḥ al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fākhirah* would give a better idea of the Sufi masters he met.

It must also be added that Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of what a master is, is not quite the same as the one we normally understand in Sufism. It might be argued

<sup>13</sup> See for more detail, C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p.27-33

<sup>14</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.49 (Yahya ed.)

<sup>15</sup> Ibn 'Arabī refers to his understanding of love as well, see *al-Futūḥāt*, 2, 325

<sup>16</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Rūḥ al-Quds*, trans. R. W. J. Austin, p.69

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79; *al-Durrat al-Fākhirah*, p.82

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly in *al-Futūḥāt*, he draws attention to the fact that his terrestrial master was also Christic (*Īsawī*) nature. *al-Futūḥāt*, v.1, p.233; "My master Abū al-'Abbās al-'Uryābi was on the foot of Jesus". *al-Futūḥāt*, v.3, p.208; C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p.51

that for him the master is not a guide to take him to the Divine being. He seems to have found that Reality by himself. The masters only served Ibn ‘Arabī to explain whatever he got through his visions. It is possible for that reason Ibn ‘Arabī did not just have one master, as was the custom of later ages; instead he tried to benefit from all the masters he could reach.<sup>20</sup> In that sense he reminds us of al-Ḥallāj.

One final reminder concerning his mystical teachers is that it was not only men who were Ibn ‘Arabī’s spiritual masters: many female Sufis played an important role in his upbringing. In particular, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions Fāṭima b. al-Muthannā<sup>21</sup> and Shams Umm al-Fuqarā’.<sup>22</sup> This factor is of immense significance in the formation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical thought. Ibn ‘Arabī, unlike his predecessors, views women in a positive light. Furthermore, this explains the great use of feminine symbolism in his works.

### 8.3 His Understanding of Love (*maḥabbah*)

#### 8.3:1 The Nature of Love

In his *Futūḥāt* Ibn ‘Arabī gives quite a detailed, involved and protracted exposition of love. He begins his discussion by looking at the question of whether love is definable or not. The answer in his view is that the essence of love is indescribable: it is a phenomenon that can be only understood through experience and what Sufis name as ‘tasting (*dhawq*)’<sup>23</sup>. The corollary of such a view is that Ibn ‘Arabī takes a somewhat sceptical attitude towards those who put their love experiences into words. According to him, those who claim to describe love are in reality ignorant of the true nature of love. In effect it is not love that they are describing, but rather the mere appearance or reflection of love.<sup>24</sup>

The above conclusion is a direct result of Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemological approach. Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemological framework is characterised by a dual classification. He divides the objects of perception into two parts: definable and indefinable. The

<sup>20</sup> C. Addas, gives a remarkable picture of Ibn ‘Arabī’s relation with his masters throughout her *Quest for the Red Sulphur*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *Rūḥ al-Quds*, trans. by R.W.J Austin, p.143; *Durrat al- al-Fākhirah*, p.144

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.142

<sup>23</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2, p.315

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.325

former, as the name suggests are susceptible to language and can be imparted to others without the loss of any meaning. As for the latter, the opposite is true in that they transcend forms of language and cannot be translated into such terms. They are in fact in a class of their own. In other words they can be described as *sui generis*.<sup>25</sup>

Before going further, it is crucial to point out that Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of love is intimately contingent upon his general philosophical outlook which is based firmly on the concept of “Unity of Being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Indeed, it could be said that his ‘philosophy of love’ is the natural conclusion of his teaching of the “Oneness of Being”. In order to fully grasp Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to love it is necessary to understand this concept first.

### 8.3.2 *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*

*Waḥdat al-wujūd* is the concept at the heart of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmological outlook. It is an immense subject to study in the limited space of this research. However, some insight is needed in order to grasp the concept of love in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system. In this connection, a limited amount of this discussion will focus on the intricacies of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in so far as this furthers our understanding of love.

This concept created an immense dispute among scholars and lay people alike. As a result many scholars charged Ibn ‘Arabī with heresy.<sup>26</sup>

The phrase *waḥdat al-wujūd* literally means “the unity of being”<sup>27</sup>. It is an approach to the understanding of the relationship between God and the creation. To place the discussion in context, it would be useful to say a few words regarding the mainstream Islamic understanding of creation and to see how far Ibn ‘Arabī differed from this. The mainstream position was predicated upon the premise that God created the universe out of nothing, that is, *ex nihilo*. It follows from this premise that there is a duality between God and man: they have separate entities. It is not possible for any intermingling to occur between them. They remain in their respective domains of existence. Furthermore, creation has an

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.325

<sup>26</sup> See for more discussion about the outcomes of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Z. Mubārak, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*, pp.134-176

objective existence i.e. it exists *per se* and is real as opposed to being imaginary. In Ibn 'Arabī's view, however, creation does not have a real existence of itself. It can be compared to the rays of the sun, wherein the real existence belongs to the sun, and the rays do not possess any existence *per se*. Ibn 'Arabī is quite unique when compared to his Sufi predecessors who also held similar views to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. For example Hallaj and Abū Yazīd Bistāmī. Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes himself from them by being the first to systematise the disjointed utterances.

Expounding his concept further, Ibn 'Arabī suggests that there is only one Being, and all existence is nothing but the manifestation or outward radiance of that One Being. Hence, everything other than the One Being, that is the whole cosmos in all its spatial and temporal extension, is non-existent *per se*. However, it may be considered to exist through the self-existent Being.<sup>28</sup>

As far as the concept of love is concerned, the natural consequence of this teaching is that it is not possible to love something exclusive of God. Loving any created object automatically entails loving God since He is hidden in all the objects manifested in the universe: there is only the One Being in reality; and there is only one Beloved in reality, that is, God. From this Ibn 'Arabī's view of *waḥdat al-wujūd* can be more accurately described as "*waḥdat al-ḥubb*" that is the oneness of love. Therefore whatever it is we love, we love God in it. In the words of Ibn 'Arabī these objects of love are only veils between man and God: "In reality everybody only loves the Creator but God is veiled by Zainab, Suād, Hind, money or position."<sup>29</sup>

It may be understood from this remark that all mankind loves God and are therefore all Gnostics (*'arīfūn*). However, Ibn 'Arabī does not imply this. According to him, the important thing is that man needs to be consciously aware of the relationship between the Creator and the creation. It is in this recognition that men are distinguished from each other as far as divine love is concerned. This position of Ibn 'Arabī makes him a unique contributor to the paradigms of Divine

<sup>27</sup> Husaini translates this as "unity of existence" see S. A. Q. Husaini, *The Pantheistic Monism of Ibn al-'Arabī*, (Lahore, 1970), p.175

<sup>28</sup> W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989), p.79

love. However, this love must be brought to the level of consciousness. In other words man must realise that, in essence, all his love is directed to God even though on the surface it appears to be the love for a non-divine object.

This paradigm of love also has another corollary in that it shapes the choice of language employed by Ibn 'Arabī as is apparent in the quotation in the last paragraph. As Divine love is interconnected with creation and it is evident there exists among mankind a body of language used to describe love towards his fellow creatures, it raises the issue of whether the language of profane love can be utilised to explain the experiences of Divine love. Ibn 'Arabī resolved this conflict by accepting that it can. In Ibn 'Arabī's writings the language of Divine love is mixed with the language of profane love since the profane objects of love are in reality divine.

This aspect of Ibn 'Arabī's writing necessitates that those who approach it must do so cautiously. For it can easily lead to misinformed conclusions derived from the face value of the terminology employed by Ibn 'Arabī. Therefore, many people were scandalised by his writing's apparently erotic and sensuous imagery; and he was compelled to write a commentary on them in his own defence.<sup>30</sup> Ibn 'Arabī's use of profane language, for example, the praise of feminine beauty has always alluded to divine realities. One can then answer Nicholson's question regarding the *Tarjumān al-'Ashwāq*: "Is this a love poem disguised as a mystical ode, or a mystical ode expressed in the language of human love?"<sup>31</sup> It is both, since in Ibn 'Arabī's paradigm of love all kinds of love are divine.

At this juncture it is of interest to compare Ibn 'Arabī and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in order to illuminate Ibn 'Arabī's approach. One can detect a clear contrast between both these personalities. Al-Ghazālī strove to persuade people that God is the only one who deserves to be loved, by proving that it is God who fulfils all the

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<sup>29</sup> 'A. Ḥifnī, *al-Mawsū'ah al-Ṣūfīyyah*, (Dār al-Irshād, Cairo, 1992), p.290

<sup>30</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Zakhāir al-'Alāq Sharḥ Tarjumān al-'Ashwāq*, ed. by M.A Karwi, p.4-5

<sup>31</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Tarjumān al-'Ashwāq*, ed. and trans. by R.A. Nicholson, (London, Theosophical Publishing House, 1978), p.7

causes of love in perfection, thus He should be loved.<sup>32</sup> Whereas Ibn ‘Arabī’s concerns were

different: to him all the lovers already love God in different manifestations and they have no power to exclude God from their love. However, those people are not aware of this love, hence the duty is to awaken them and make them conscious of God’s presence everywhere and in everything. Only this conscious love makes the lover see God in his or her beloved in Zaynab or Fāṭima or Lailā.

To give another example, God states in the Qur’ān “We are closer to man than his jugular vein”.<sup>33</sup> However, most people are not aware of this proximity and as a result do not benefit from it. Only those who feel this affinity, attain a higher status in the mystical path. In contrast, those who are heedless of this closeness do not benefit from divine love simply because they are not realising or internalising their profane love.

As well as dwelling on the choice of language, Ibn ‘Arabī also deals with the domain of love within the human being. In other words, does it originate as a result of intellectual activity or from the depths of the heart? In short, is it the heart or the mind that generates and accommodates love? According to Ibn ‘Arabī love relates to the heart, that is, the spiritual part of man and not to the intellectual faculties: because reason has no power to generate love, it is a product of the heart only. The rational arguments of philosophy, though they enable us to know the divine Essence, do so in a negative way: that is, God is not like this, nor like that. Due to the negative nature of rational thought no creature would ever have experienced the love of God through rational arguments.<sup>34</sup>

This problem relates to the epistemological outlook of Ibn ‘Arabī, in which reason plays a secondary and limited role. In fact reason plays no part at all in the generation of love. Furthermore, reason is powerless in the face of love for love curtails the functioning of reason. If a lover can still manage to use his reason

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<sup>32</sup> See 7.3:1:b The Causes of Love According to al-Ghazālī

<sup>33</sup> Qur’ān, 50:16

<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.326

after falling in love, then his love is not genuine.<sup>35</sup> This conflict between reason and love will be dealt with in the following pages of this research.

### 8.3:4 Love as the Purpose of Creation

The concept of purpose behind creation engaged the minds of philosophers and theologians for centuries. This question has been answered differently depending on the sources employed by the disputants in this debate. As a universal religion, the holy book of Islam did not remain aloof in providing an answer to this question. From an Islamic point of view it appears that God created mankind in order that they worship Him: the focus is on worship around which everything else revolves.<sup>36</sup> As far as the purpose of creation is concerned, this seems to be the only answer that the Qur'ān provides. However, Ibn 'Arabī by his analysis of the meaning of worship arrives at a more refined interpretation which is embedded in his philosophy of love. According to this interpretation he proposes that the motive behind God's creation of the universe and mankind is His initial love. It is solely His love that triggered the process of the creation. To support this position he relies on two main sources as evidence.

Firstly, Ibn 'Arabī draws support from the following Qur'anic verse: "I have only created mankind and the jinn to worship me." (51:56) On the face of it, there appears to be no direct relation between this verse and the concept of love. However, for Ibn 'Arabī this verse has a more profound meaning. By analysing the word worship (*ibādah*) he arrives at an understanding which is in harmony with his ontological outlook. He draws a direct connection between worship (*ibādah*) and love. For him the word worship means "to love in the extreme" consequently, the verse signifies: "I have created man and jinn so that they should love me in the extreme." Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of this verse can be contrasted with the opinion of the mainstream exegetes. A vast majority of exegetes, following the interpretation of the Prophet's companion Ibn 'Abbās, interpreted "to worship Me" as having the meaning "to know Me."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.326

<sup>36</sup> Qur'ān, 51:56

<sup>37</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2, p.318



The second major strand in support of Ibn ‘Arabī’s view depends on the Ḥadīth narrations. Throughout his books there is constant reference to a ḥadīth famous among the Sufis: “I was a hidden treasure and wanted to be known...”<sup>38</sup> In the *al-Futūḥāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī explains this ḥadīth in the following way: “God described Himself by saying that He loved to be known by the possible things, since He was not known.” We can infer two possible conclusions from this: one is that God is constantly being known and praised by His creation; and secondly God’s love is equal to His act of creation. Where there is the act of creation, it is inevitable that the act of God’s love will also be present. They are simultaneous and interdependent. Therefore Ibn ‘Arabī concludes that everything in the Universe is either a lover or a beloved.

One possible consequence that can be inferred from the above is that, if one considers that the manifestation of creation started by love, then it follows that the channel of love provides the most suitable way of returning to God.

The purpose of creation merely provides the context of Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy of love. What needs to be looked at is the nature of this love. In the following section an attempt will be made to address this issue.

In this respect, we find a close resemblance between Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Ḥallāj, who also claims that the cause behind creation is love. It can be said that Ibn ‘Arabī develops this basic and crude idea of al-Ḥallāj into a universal principle. By extending the scope of this principle to encompass the actions of all creation, he makes love the absolute basis, by which all phenomena are explicable. In his own words: “Every movement, every action in the universe is only directed by love.” In one of his magnificent verses, he summarises all of his philosophy: “We came from love, we are created in love”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The text of the ḥadīth attributed to the Prophet by the Sufis is “I was a hidden treasure, so I loved to be known. Hence I created the creation that I might be known.” The scholars of ḥadīth consider it a forgery but for Ibn al-‘Arabī this ḥadīth is proven to be authentic through *kashf* (vision of the Prophet in dream), Ibn al-‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.399.28, trans. by W. Chittick, in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p.391; also for more about the cosmology of Ibn al-‘Arabī see W. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988), p.1-162

<sup>39</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.318

Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings always have two facets: *tashbīh* (immanence) and *tanzīh* (transcendence). He always mentions these two facets of the Divinity side by side. Concerning the transcendental side of love, he thinks that although God created us out of love, we can not attribute a beginning or a purpose to God’s love for us.<sup>40</sup> As we were always in his Divine Knowledge, we are always under His love even prior to our existence. As there is no beginning to His existence, there is no beginning to His love for us, as well. Hence God’s love is eternal. We cannot attribute changes to God. Thus it seems that Ibn ‘Arabī is balancing his immanental words mentioned above by these transcendental words.

#### 8.4 God’s Love for Man (*al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*)

In the beginning of chapter 178 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* which is dedicated to love under the title of “*Fī Ma’rifat Maqām al-Maḥabbā*”<sup>41</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī states that love is a characteristic which is attributed to both God and man. However the reality of this mutual love is unknown to us. Ibn ‘Arabī calls God’s love for man “Divine Love” (*al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*). Ibn ‘Arabī like many other Sufis and classical authors, such as al-Ghazālī and al-Qushayrī, attempts to prove existence of a mutual love firstly by referring to the Qur’anic verses, then to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. The verses he refers to are 3:31, 5:54, and many others, which stress the existence of a mutual love between God and man. In addition to these verses, he also lists another group of verses that inform us of the characteristics which attracts God’s love towards His slaves. This style is very similar to the Qur’anic paradigm of love as far as methodology is concerned.

Having looked at the general outlook of his philosophy of love, it would be useful to determine the role of love in the process of creation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontological framework. Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of love is the direct result of his understanding of God. These are both inextricably linked and for him God is, in some respects, a God of love, whose most fundamental activity is underpinned by love. The essence of his God is love and not wrath. This approach can be contrasted with the early Sufis who thought of God mostly as a wrathful and vengeful God. The first Sufis’ understanding of God was ‘a God of punishment

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.329

who disliked the world so much that he even did not give a second glance to the world.’ As a result the concept of fear was the dominant emotion towards God. For example, some of those Sufis went so far as to wish that they were not created so as not to suffer the tribulations of Judgement Day.<sup>42</sup> Gradually, the pessimists’ understanding of God and the world was replaced by a more optimistic view; and with Ibn ‘Arabī’s unique contribution, love became the sole reason behind creation not to mention worship.

Another interesting facet of God’s love for man is its analogous nature with love between humans which is characterised by reciprocity; if the lover is to submit himself to his beloved, then, in the same way the Beloved must submit himself to the lover. Ibn ‘Arabī does not refrain from charging God to fulfil His responsibilities as a lover; according to him the act of creation is God’s submission to His beloved. In other words, the creation constantly *asks* God, with the “tongue of its state” (*lisān al-ḥāl*) to do this or that and God constantly creates these things. This is the necessity of God’s name *al-Wadūd*.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, because God is *al-Wadūd* (the lover) this makes God satisfy the needs of His beloved. This does not mean that God is being coerced to obey the commands of another being. However, in reality, He only submitted to Himself since the *possible thing* is a means of Divine seeking.<sup>44</sup>

Having established that God indeed does love man the question now arises how this love manifests itself? In answer to this, he divides God’s love for man into two branches. The first is God’s love for man for His own sake and the second is God’s love for man for man’s sake.

#### 8.4:1 God’s Love of Man for God’s Sake

Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes three kinds of love. The first one is called Divine love (*al-Ḥubb al-Ilahī*) and God’s love for man falls in this group. Interestingly, man’s love for God is also studied in this category. That is an important element since Ibn ‘Arabī believes that this mutual love between God and man is in reality a

<sup>41</sup> This chapter will be used as the basis of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s idea of love in this research for the reason that among his books this is the most comprehensive work of him about love.

<sup>42</sup> See 2.6 The Early Ascetics

<sup>43</sup> M. M. al-Ghurāb, *al-Ḥubb wa al-Maḥabbah al-Ilāhiyya min Kalām al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, p.14

unilateral love. *al-Ḥubb al-Ilahī* is, on the one hand the love of the creator for the creature in which He manifests Himself, and on the other hand the love of the creature for his creator. Which is nothing other than the desire of the revealed God within the creature yearning to return to Himself<sup>45</sup>. He bases God's love for man on the prophetic tradition which is: "I loved to be known therefore I created the creation" and the Qur'anic verse: "I have only created mankind and the Jinn, that they should worship Me."<sup>46</sup> Ibn 'Arabī thinks that God created the world in His image as a mirror to see His own greatness and beauty. Therefore, for Ibn 'Arabī, the Qur'anic verse which reads; "...He loves you." means "He loves Himself."<sup>47</sup>

This theory is exemplified by an analogy contained in the *Fuṣūṣ*, wherein Ibn 'Arabī makes an interesting comparison and analysis between man's attraction to women and God's attraction to man. Ibn 'Arabī obtains inspiration from a ḥadīth in which the Prophet remarks that there are "Three things made beloved to me in this world of yours; women, perfume and prayer in which I find solace."<sup>48</sup> This ḥadīth makes clear that women are beloved of the Prophet. However, the question that needs to be asked is why was this the case? Surely, there must be some significance in this? Otherwise the Prophet would not have mentioned this factor in the above quoted ḥadīth? Ibn 'Arabī's explanation revolves around the idea that man loves woman because woman is a part of man. For, is it not true according to a tradition of the prophet that she is created from the left rib of Adam? Transposing this analogy to God, Ibn 'Arabī believes that God loves man because man is a part of Him. Ibn 'Arabī bases his evidence on the verse that God says: "We breathed into him (man) of My [His] spirit".<sup>49</sup> In summary, the whole longs for its part as the part longs for the whole.

Ibn 'Arabī further illuminates the analogy drawn in the last paragraph: he draws a close connection between God's love for man from a different perspective. God loves man because in him He contemplates His own beauty and perfection, since

<sup>44</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2I, p.217.7, trans. by W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p.82

<sup>45</sup> H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabī*, trans. by R. Manheim, (Princeton U. Press, 1969), p.149

<sup>46</sup> Qur'ān, 51:56

<sup>47</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.326-27

<sup>48</sup> Nasāī, *Sunan, Ishrat al-Nisā'*, n.3878; (K.T.)

<sup>49</sup> Qur'ān 15:29 (Y.A)

He created man in His own form. This is similar to the reason why man loves woman: through her he produces his offspring, which is in man's own form.

The culmination of this is that God describes Himself as having a deep longing for contact with man. As an illustration, He says, in answer to a supplication by David: "O David, I long for them even more than they long for me". Ibn 'Arabī sheds light on this in the following manner: "Since God has explained that He breathed into man of His spirit, He is yearning in reality for Himself."<sup>50</sup> Dawūd al-Qaysārī, a famous interpreter of Ibn 'Arabī, explains the reason why God longs for man more than man longs for Him. He writes that the intensity of longing depends on the knowledge of *mushtāq* (the one who is yearned for). Since God is the source of all knowledge, His knowledge about the beloved (man) is more perfect.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, God's love is stauncher for those who long for Him.

This kind of love is for the first time defined by Ibn 'Arabī. However, traces of it can be found in the works of al-Ghazālī, pointing vaguely to this. A contrast can be made: al-Ghazālī thought of creation as God's handiwork whereas Ibn 'Arabī considers creation as God's manifestation.

Secondly, God loves humankind because they worship and praise Him. Many verses of the Qur'ān declare that everything in the universe, in the seven heavens and the seven Earths worship and praise God constantly.<sup>52</sup> All have their own praise for God<sup>53</sup>, so much so that no existent being is excluded from this system of "natural worship" of God.<sup>54</sup> In short, God loves us primarily for two reasons: firstly, as his handiwork; and, secondly, due to the fact that humankind constantly praise and glorify His greatness. In this love, man's role is as a kind of mirror to reflect God's beauty and secondly to worship and praise Him. This kind of love can be named, according to his terminology "natural love": The love in which the emphasis is on the interests of the Lover, that is, God.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, trans. by R.W.J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, (New York, Paulist Press), p. 272-273

<sup>51</sup> al-Qaysārī, p.459

<sup>52</sup> Qur'ān, 17:44

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:41

<sup>54</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.328

It must not, however, be thought that these are the only reasons why God loves man. The above mentioned reasons seem to be “God centred”, in that, God is taken as the starting point. However, there are other more altruistic reasons: God also loves man for man’s own good as well. This love can be classified under the name of spiritual love. In other words, God also loves man spiritually by taking into consideration the interests of man.

#### **8.4:2 God’s Love for Man for Man’s Sake**

According to Ibn ‘Arabī God also loves man for man’s own sake. The proof of this love is that even though mankind serves Him, it could be said, in a sense, God too “serves” man. Ibn ‘Arabī illustrates this by enumerating a long list of favours that God bestows upon us. These favours are further classified into two kinds: those that concern this world; and, those that concern the next world. As for the former, whatever we have in this world is God’s favour to us, for example, wealth, health, sustenance, and most importantly our life (being created by God). Concerning the favours that are concerned with the hereafter, they manifest themselves in many different ways: He sends prophets, gives guidance, keeps supplying whatever we need both for this world and the next. Despite the fact that only few people give thanks or show gratitude in return for these favours, God, nevertheless, continues to shower these blessings on mankind. This is God’s love for man for man’s own sake, because He wants man’s good by guiding him to truth. Furthermore, out of His love for man He has shown the proofs of His existence to him. This love goes to such an extent that God has given us all kind of bounties, even though we could not give enough thanks (*shukr*) back to God no matter how hard we tried.<sup>55</sup>

From another perspective, this kind of love, could be seen to be synonymous with God’s mercy for man. In the preceding chapter, it was shown how God loves man for the praise that he gives to Him. However, in the second kind of love God loves man for his intrinsic value: man is worthy of being loved because of the (apparent) similarity he has with God. This is irrespective of the goodness or badness of man’s actions. God loves man qua man. In this respect, Ibn ‘Arabī does not see man as merely a creature like the rest of the creation. He attributes to

man a kind of ‘added value’, making him valuable in God’s eyes without a secondary motive. In fact in his system man for God can be compared to the eye for man. Man is the pupil of God’s eye.<sup>56</sup>

If God’s love is synonymous with His mercy, this leaves the phenomenon of God’s wrath unexplained. However, to Ibn ‘Arabī God, out of his love for man, mainly manifests Himself through His mercy: the use of wrath is minimal indeed. Ibn ‘Arabī utilises the following verse in order to support this contention: “God’s mercy encompasses all things.”<sup>57</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī goes so far as to suggest that even God’s wrath can be described in terms of his mercy. This unique outlook led the sheikh, for the first time among the Sufis, to extend God’s love even to the people who are punished eternally in Hell. These inhabitants who are doomed for eternal suffering in Hell, are shown mercy in it. For after a while they become accustomed to the fire and torture and even enjoy it. This is because it is not befitting for Ibn ‘Arabī’s God, in the light of His mercy, to mete out eternal punishment.<sup>58</sup> It must be noted that Ibn ‘Arabī does not reject the idea that some people will stay in Hell for eternity: what he does is to change the nature of Hell so that it becomes a more comfortable place for sinners. The concept that even the people of eternal punishment will be shown mercy in Hell, is peculiar to Ibn ‘Arabī and is a very controversial theme among scholars as well as Sufis.

From Ibn ‘Arabī’s terminology, it thus appears that this kind of love is God’s spiritual love for man, a love that considers the good of the beloved, namely, the good of man. With this dual expression of God’s love towards man Ibn ‘Arabī seems to combine the two groups of exegetes mentioned earlier in this study. His explanation of God’s love for man for man’s sake corresponds to the first group of exegetes like al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qāsimī who interpreted love as “mercy”. On the other hand, his first branch that is God’s love for man for His sake corresponds to the second group of exegetes like al-Razi, and al-Qushayri. Ibn ‘Arabī with his division has done what they clearly could not do. By joining both groups he created a unique new philosophy of God’s love for man.

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<sup>56</sup> S. Uludag, *Ibn al-‘Arabī*, (Turkiye Diyanet Vakfi Yayinlari, Ankara, 1995), p.165

<sup>57</sup> Qur’ān, 7:156

<sup>58</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.329

### 8.5 Man's love for God

Ibn 'Arabī names man's love for God as "divine love", too. So the mutual relationship of love originating both from man and God are called Divine love. He has named it like this, possibly because in the verse these two loves are mentioned together: "He loves them, and they love Him".<sup>59</sup> In this section, Ibn 'Arabī uses exactly the same paradigm that he used for God's love. However, he does this by reversing the paradigm. The two main reasons in the previous section are reversed. Firstly, it was stated that God loves man because he is a part of God's spirit, namely, God loves man as the whole loves its part. The corollary of this is that the same must be true for the part. If the whole longs for the part in the same way the part must also love the whole. The relationship of 'wholeness' with 'partness' depends on the Qur'anic verse which states that: "*wa nafakhtu min rūḥī*" meaning "I (God) have breathed into him (man)."<sup>60</sup>

The second element, which was also reversed, that confirms man's love for God is the oft-mentioned ḥadīth: "God created Adam in His own form."<sup>61</sup> For Ibn 'Arabī this means that man has similar attributes to God; if God has the attribute of love then man necessarily needs to have this attribute as well, since he is created in God's image. However, according to Ibn 'Arabī, man's potential to love is granted to him by God: as God's love for us comes first it follows that we also have the ability to love. In this sense our love for Him is like the reflection of the divine attributes.<sup>62</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī draws some important conclusions as to the full realisation of love. In other words, under what circumstances can man activate and realise his capacity to love to its fullest possible extent? Ibn 'Arabī states that love can only be fully realised if man directs his love towards God or towards another human being. In the former, as a result of the before-mentioned resemblance, love engulfs (*yastaghriq*) the lover absolutely.<sup>63</sup> Whereas other loves, such as love of wealth, and position, only partly engage man's potential and do not engulf man's full

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, v.12, p. 564, (Yahya ed.)

<sup>60</sup> Qur'ān, 38:72; 15:29

<sup>61</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ Isti'zān*, n.5759; Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v. 2, p.490

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 7, p. 152, (Yahya ed.)



potential of love. Hence he only loves created things with a part of his self. The position of other human beings is different, as man can love another human being with his whole self. This is possible due to the reason that the other person is also created in God's form. It can be inferred from Ibn 'Arabī's words that a human being and God can be equally the objects of man's love.

To illuminate the relationship further he gives the example of woman and man's love for each other. Ibn 'Arabī claims that the love between man and woman especially in sexual intercourse is the highest point of man's love and the most similar to Divine love. This similarity is not from the perspective of pleasure, but is from the perspective of the annihilation of the two personalities in each other. However, man and woman and all their limbs are annihilated, and completely lost in each other, as a result of the pleasure derived from the act of sexual intercourse. This impinges upon the love that is due to God, and therefore, the divine law prescribes a major ablution to be performed following the act. In Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation, this is a form of punishment. This is because Ibn 'Arabī's God is a jealous God who does not like man to enjoy and give his full attention to another human being.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, complete annihilation in love is only due to God.

Ibn 'Arabī's view also has a bearing on the way that profane love can be described. For with these words he brings a new dimension to the concept of profane love, namely, that the love between man and woman is a direct consequence of their divine forms. This idea is in stark contrast to the general view, that love between men and women is a result of a contemplation of beauty in the other. In Ibn 'Arabī's view, the essential basis of this love is because men and women are created in the divine form, and thus beauty is relegated to a secondary role. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabī believes that man's love is fully satisfied only when the object of love is God. On the other hand, if the object of love is another human being this love will not attain its complete fulfilment. The reason is that the similitude between God and man is stronger than between man and another human being.<sup>65</sup> In a sense Ibn 'Arabī implies that if we think in human

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.325

<sup>64</sup> See the commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* by D. al-Qayṣarī, *Matla' Khusūs al-Kalim fī Ma'ānī Fuṣūṣ al-Fikam*, v.2, p.464-469

<sup>65</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.14, p.64

terms God is the original form whereas man is a copy of this form. It is, therefore, more probable that the copies will have a closer resemblance to the original than to other copies.

Affifi comments that Ibn 'Arabī's mystical system is the full realisation of the union of the lover and the Beloved. If we look deeply into the nature of worship, we find that love forms its very basis. According to Ibn 'Arabī, the meaning of our worship is to love God in the extreme. No object is worshipped unless it is invested with some sort of love; therefore it seems that for Ibn 'Arabī the worshipped (*al-Ma'būd*) is a synonym of the Beloved (*al-Maḥbūb*). This is summed up in the following verse: "I swear by the reality of love that Love is the cause of all love. Were it not for love (residing) in the heart, Love (God) would not be worshipped."<sup>66</sup> The first and foremost drive behind worship is love, not fear or any other feeling. Hence God, as an object of worship, resides in the heart as the supreme object of love. For Ibn 'Arabī love is not only a decisive factor behind the divine will but also the most important motive behind human actions. Ibn 'Arabī thinks that all actions and activities, any movement in the universe, including the actions of man, everything without exception is fuelled by love for perfection. Therefore, there is no motive behind any action but love. Giving an example from the life of the Prophet Moses, he says: "Moses escaped from Egypt when he killed the Copt not because he feared retribution but because of his love of salvation."<sup>67</sup> This idea of Ibn 'Arabī is a very important contribution since he relates all the actions of man, however seemingly negative, to love. As love is the main motive behind the actions of man it is also the main factor in the relationship between God and him.

In our relationship with God, the dominant factor is love; superiority of love over fear is quite clear. Furthermore, the concept of love is much more comprehensive in its scope than the concept of fear. We can attribute the concept of love to both God and man whereas fear cannot be ascribed to God but to man only. In addition, love explains both the existence of creation as well as the return of creation back

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<sup>66</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, Ed. A. E. Affifi, p.194; the translation is taken from Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, p.171

<sup>67</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, v.I, p.204

to its original source. All these qualities do not exist in fear as a relationship between the two. Therefore, Ibn ‘Arabī calls his religion the religion of love:

“I follow the religion of love whichever way its camels take,  
For this is my religion and my faith.”<sup>68</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī, commenting on this verse of his, says: “No religion is more sublime than a religion based on love and longing for Him whom I worship and in whom I have faith.”<sup>69</sup> In this way, he indicates very strongly that he prefers love as a relationship between man and God to other concepts. He even places a mystical station in his system called: “The station of abandoning fear”. In this chapter he discusses the abandoning of fear.<sup>70</sup> In other words Ibn ‘Arabī does not give a permanent place to the concept of fear as a mystical station. All these indicate that love is the most prominent relationship between God and man in his system.

In addition to the relationship of ‘partness’ and ‘wholeness’ and likeness between the lover and the beloved, Ibn ‘Arabī presents two further reasons as an explanation of love in general. These are beauty and beneficence; common motives which are accepted by many Sufi authors like al-Ḥujwīrī, al-Ghazālī, Rābī‘a.

A lover loves someone because the beloved seems to him or her the most beautiful. In other words, beauty is the fundamental element in the relationship of love. The sheikh presents a ḥadīth to further support this notion. In this tradition the Prophet states: “God is beautiful and He loves beauty.” It appears, then, that Ibn ‘Arabī regards beauty as the cause of love as an explanation for both God and man. God loves man because he is the manifestation of His own beauty. There is nothing more beautiful and perfect than God’s creation. Otherwise this would be an imperfection for God. If God did not have beauty there would not be any beauty in creation; likewise if the creation had no beauty, His beauty would not have been known: man needs to love God because He is the owner of absolute and

<sup>68</sup> *The Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*, trans. by R. A. Nicholson, p.67

<sup>69</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *Zahkhāir al-‘Alāq*, p.50; *The Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*, trans. by R. A. Nicholson, p.69

<sup>70</sup> Chapter 101 of *al-Futūḥāt*.

real beauty. Muḥyi'l-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, in His book *Tarjumān al-'Ashwāq* deals with this relationship. In it he uses Niẓām as the manifestation of divine beauty.<sup>71</sup>

Beauty is not the only factor that attracts love. It is rather a motive for the few chosen people who are endowed with the intellectual and emotional faculties to understand and appreciate beauty. There is another motive more effective to most of people. This is beneficence (*iḥsān*). Beauty satisfies the spiritual needs of man. However, it does not satisfy the physical requirements of man. For example, a man's hunger will not be satiated by the mere contemplation of beauty. In the light of this, the element of beneficence is introduced to fill this vacuum. In this sense love is described in less spiritual and less elevated terms and more on a pragmatic basis. This line of thinking is beautifully captured in a Turkish phrase: "Beauty does not satiate the stomach". Ibn 'Arabī's concept of beauty and beneficence as motives of love have some striking similarities to the views of al-Ghazālī. He makes these factors focal points of his theory of love. However, for Ibn 'Arabī these matters are of a more peripheral importance. In summary, Ibn 'Arabī believes that God is the only beautiful and the only benefactor in reality. Therefore he is the only real object of love.<sup>72</sup>

At this point a few words regarding the perception of beauty would be beneficial. Beauty as a concept is addressed primarily to the visual faculty of man. In other words, its main focus is the eye. The majority of Muslim theologians accept that man cannot see God in this world. How, then, can man love God without first seeing Him? Ibn 'Arabī deals with this issue in an interesting way. He believes that the origin of our love for God is not vision but audition; the hearing of the word "*kun*", God's command to us to appear in the phenomenal world. Ibn 'Arabī alludes here to the Qur'anic verse: "When God wants to create something, He just says "be", and it is."<sup>73</sup>

Evidently, the souls heard God's command even though they did not see Him. In consequence, our love for God is not caused by seeing Him but by hearing Him

<sup>71</sup> R.W.J. Austin, 'The Lady Nizam- an image of love and knowledge', in *JMLAS*, V.7, year 1988, 35-48

<sup>72</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.326

<sup>73</sup> Qur'ān, 16:40

(His words). The Sheikh thinks that this is the reason why people are moved on hearing music: for music reminds us of the divine command which was directed to us in our creation process.<sup>74</sup>

The motive of beneficence which is received from the beloved naturally follows: “Is it for the sake of benefit that the lover loves the Beloved or is it possible to love in total disregard of the benefit to the lover?” Ibn ‘Arabī answers this question in a unique way. Sufis before him like Rābi‘a and al-Ḥallāj thought that the lover should totally disregard his own benefit. The love should be for the sake of the beloved only without any other motive. Ibn ‘Arabī in the following pages gives his own account of the problem of interest in the relationship of love: he classifies man’s love for God according to its motives as spiritual (*rūḥāni*) love and natural (*tabī‘i*) love. In essence, this division is similar to that of Rābi‘a’s classification.<sup>75</sup>

### 8.5:1 Spiritual love

Pure spiritual love is to love the Beloved for the beloved’s sake. However, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s version of spiritual love, it includes love for the lover’s sake as well. In a sense there is a unification of the interests of the lover and the beloved. From the perspective of man, he worships God because of God’s worthiness of being worshipped. Furthermore, he simultaneously worships Him for the benefit he can receive from God for his own good<sup>76</sup>. With this characteristic, man is distinguished from the animals because they can only love something for their own sakes, whereas man can join between these two, at times opposite, kinds of love.

This concept of love would appear to be identical to that of Rābi‘a’s. It could be argued that in spiritual love Ibn ‘Arabī combines Rābi‘a’s unselfish love with selfish love. However, an important distinction from Rābi‘a needs to be highlighted. The Sheikh does not totally disregard the interests of the lover: furthermore, unlike Rābi‘a, he does not see natural love in a negative way. In this

<sup>74</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.331

<sup>75</sup> See 5.4:2:a Selfish Love (*Ḥubb al-Hawa*): 5.4:2:b Love of God because of His Worthiness

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.331

sense he is more realistic than Rābi‘a for he recognises that it is against the nature of man to turn a blind eye to his own interests no matter how slight.

What is the relationship of spiritual love to natural and divine love? It seems that in Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding spiritual love is a middle way between divine and natural love: it contains elements of both loves. In his own words the possessor of divine love has a soul without a body. The possessor of natural love, on the other hand, has a body without a soul. In contrast, the possessor of spiritual love has both body and soul.<sup>77</sup> In this regard, he believes that the most perfect of mystic lovers are those who love God simultaneously for Him and for themselves as this reveals in them the unification of their two fold nature.<sup>78</sup> This is because the objective of spiritual love is to attain unity with God (*ittiḥād*). In other words, the uniting of the essences of the lover and the Beloved.<sup>79</sup> Spiritual love aims at “becoming like the Beloved, accomplishing what is the Beloved’s due and knowing His decree”. It implies a knowledge of what the Beloved is like and also not like – what qualities are proper and what are not – and of what the Beloved desires or does not desire.<sup>80</sup>

### 8.5:2 Natural Love

It consists of two types: natural (*ṭabī‘ī*) and elemental (*‘unṣurī*). Although they have similarities in their nature they differ in their objects. In natural love, the lover only regards the fulfilment of his self-satisfaction; the lover does not love the beloved but he loves his own good in the body of the beloved. Therefore, natural love has been built on the benefits and pleasure which are received from the beloved. The beloved is only a means of self-satisfaction not an end in itself. If the benefits ceases to come then the lover cease to love the beloved. Such a love is in the nature<sup>81</sup> of all creatures; Ibn ‘Arabī calls it natural love. This love is innate in human nature since it cannot love things exclusively for their sakes. Natural

<sup>77</sup> M. M. al-Ghurāb, *al-Ḥubb wa al-Maḥabba al-Ilāhiyya*, p.170

<sup>78</sup> H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn al-‘Arabī*, trans. by Manheim, R., p.150

<sup>79</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.334

<sup>80</sup> S. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier, the Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn Arabi*, (Oxford, Anqa Publishing House 1999), p.197

<sup>81</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 11, 442, (Yahya ed.)

love is a common point between human beings and animals since man also has an animal side.<sup>82</sup>

Natural love targets self-satisfaction, regardless of the object that is loved. Therefore, in natural love man worships God for the reward of paradise or to escape the punishment of Hell-fire; since in man's nature there is a tendency to get pleasurable things and to escape harmful things.<sup>83</sup> Ibn 'Arabī calls these people the slaves of the fire and slaves of paradise meaning that the motive behind their obedience is these two elements and not love of God's pure beauty.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, in spiritual love, the "self" and all its desires are sacrificed in the interest of the Beloved, that is the lover is sacrificed for the sake of the Beloved. However, in natural love the beloved is sacrificed for the sake of the lover. With regards to the object of the natural love, the beloved is also from the realm of the material world, because natural love is a product of hearing or seeing. Natural love is the love of the general people (*'awāmm*) who have no grasp of mystical knowledge. Its aim is to be united with the beloved through the animal soul.<sup>85</sup> These negative statements about natural love do not contradict the general outline of Ibn 'Arabī's concept of love that is: "God is the real Beloved behind all illusionary beloveds" Therefore, Ibn 'Arabī regards natural love as a manifestation of the divine love in its lowest and crudest form.<sup>1</sup>

### 8.5:3 '*Unṣurī* (elemental) love

Ibn 'Arabī subdivides natural love into '*Unṣurī* love as well. It is basically the same as natural love. The difference is that elemental love is limited by only one natural form and generally by one from the opposite sex. For example, Qays and Lailā, Qays and Lubna, Jamīl and Buthaynā are examples of this kind of love.

Ibn 'Arabī, unlike most Sufis such as Rābī'a, does not reprimand elemental love as a necessary evil. He even suggests that for the true Gnostic it is necessary to love women. This is quite a revolutionary idea if compared to the early Sufis who

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.334

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.331

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.219, (Yahya ed.)

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, v.12, p.565

hated the world and marriage. For Ibn ‘Arabī the real Gnostic (‘*ārif*) loves women because, as stated in the ḥadīth, the Prophet declares that he loves women. Ibn ‘Arabī’s argument is that the Prophet would not love something that would distance him from God. Therefore the idea: “Marriage or love of women in general are the cause of separation from God” is an error and not consistent with the Prophetic paradigm of love.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, he states in the commentary of the *Tarjumān* that the nature of elemental love is the same as divine love, that is, the love with which we love God. The only difference is in their objects. Whereas in elemental love the lover loves a phenomenon (*kawn*), in divine love the lover loves the essential, the real (*aṣl*). In his opinion, God afflicted them with love for human beings like themselves in order that He might show, by means of them, the falseness of those who pretend to love Him. In the elemental, there have always been the most excellent examples of ecstasy, rapture and losing consciousness and reasoning in their love of the human beloved.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the claimants of love of God should at least love God to the same degree as those lovers of human beings. Otherwise God will show them as proofs (*ḥujaj*) against the false lovers of Him.

Another important conclusion from Ibn ‘Arabī’s remarks is that we do not need to change the whole nature of our love when it is directed to God. Only changing the object of love from a profane to a divine object is enough. The transfer of the feeling of love from mortals to God is not specific to Ibn ‘Arabī only since in Nifari’s work on *Maḥabbā* there are similar themes.<sup>88</sup> However, this concept is in complete harmony with Ibn ‘Arabī’s overall mystical system. Spiritual and natural love are interrelated with one of God’s most beautiful names, *al-Wadūd* (the all loving). Therefore, since God describes Himself as loving then love is one of God’s characteristics. However, when man is put into the picture he also possesses the capacity to return this love. In summary of this section, we may say that this love is projected back mainly for two reasons. First, man is created in God’s form and, secondly, he is commanded to adorn himself with God’s

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, v.14, p.67-68, (Yahya ed.)

<sup>87</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *Zaḥkhāir al-‘Alāq Sharḥ*, p.51; *The Tarjumān al-‘Ashwāq*, trans. by R. A. Nicholson, p.69-70



characteristics. Therefore, all the different kinds of love in the universe originate from Divine Love. If God did not have the attribute of love then man's love would not have manifested itself.

In conclusion, Ibn 'Arabī thinks that we love God for four reasons:

1-We love Him for His sake. If we love things because they are loved by God and if we dislike things (enmity) because they are not liked by God: and when we freely and happily obey what He wants us to do, as our limbs obey us without having a choice of disobeying.

2-We love Him for our sake if we love God because of the bounties He has given us.

3-We love Him for both reasons. That is, both for the sake of Him without regarding our interest in God, as well as for the sake of our interest in God.

4-We love Him with a love which is totally different from the before-mentioned reasons.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, Ibn 'Arabī does not give any details about this final reason.

**8.6 Stages of love:** Ibn 'Arabī classifies the concept of love from different angles. The first one was made according to the objects and subject of love. The second one was considering the issue of interest in love. In the third one, Ibn 'Arabī classifies our love towards God according to its intensity, strength and continuity. Therefore this classification can be given under the branch of Man's love for God. Ibn 'Arabī studies love in its different stages of strength. As such he has a quatrain grouping. These are *hawā*, *ḥubb*, *'ishq* and *wudd*.

**8.6:1 Hawā:** The first stage of love is named as *hawā*. Literally *hawā* means to fall. It is the falling of love or any kind of passion into the heart. A man falls in love for three reasons. 1- Seeing; 2- Hearing; and, 3- Bounties received from the beloved. The strongest cause of *hawā* is seeing since it does not change by meeting the beloved. On the other hand, the second and third causes of the *hawā*

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<sup>88</sup> See *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, ed. by M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p.72

<sup>89</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.330

are not so perfect because love caused by hearing changes by seeing and love caused by beneficence can cease or weaken by the ceasing of the bounties.<sup>90</sup>

*Hawā's* objects might be many things and not necessarily God. Therefore, in the Qur'ān God commands the believers, not to follow "*hawā*"<sup>91</sup>. *Hawā* is a kind of love for God polluted with associating partners with the love of God. Therefore it is not a pure love of God.

Knowing that Allah commands His slaves to purify their *hawā* and direct it to God, Ibn 'Arabī admits that it is impossible to eradicate *hawā* from the heart since it is nothing but a natural sentiment. All human beings have *hawā* for, a different beloved. Allah commands His servants to direct this *hawā* to Him. Since it is impossible not to have *hawā* God commands, not to follow "*hawā*".<sup>92</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī believes that the non-believers have this kind of love. Since their love for God is mixed with the love of the partners they associate with God.

**8.6:2 *Ḥubb*:** *Ḥubb* is the purification of *hawā*. Purification of *hawā* is realised by eliminating other loves and directing it only to God. Therefore, *ḥubb* is a pure and unpolluted love for God cleansed from all kind of spiritual dirt. Ibn 'Arabī justifies this meaning of *ḥubb* from its etymology: In Arabic a water pot is called "*ḥubb*" since the water rests in it and its dirt sinks to the bottom. In this way the water becomes purified from dirt. Ibn 'Arabī says that because the believer's love for God is pure it will remain even in the hereafter whereas the unbeliever's love which is contaminated by other loves, will be cleansed.<sup>93</sup>

**8.6:3 *'Ishq*:** Ibn 'Arabī accepts '*ishq* as the excessive form of *ḥubb*. When *ḥubb* pervades all the body and blinds the lover's eyes except to the Beloved and circulates in the veins like blood it is called "*'ishq*". The lover sees nothing but his beloved in everything, he only hears the voice of his beloved in all sounds. If the lover speaks he only speaks to his Beloved, wherever he looks he only sees his

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.336

<sup>91</sup> Qur'ān, 4:135

<sup>92</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.336

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.336

Beloved, whatever he sees he says: “this is Him.” The word *‘ishq* does not occur in the Qur’ān, but Ibn ‘Arabī thinks that the phrase mentioned in the Qur’ān “*‘ashaddu ḥubban lillāh*” “Those who believe are stauncher in their love for God” means *‘ishq*, the excessive love for God.

Ibn ‘Arabī gives us two examples; one is the story of the prophet Joseph and Zuleykha and the other is our famous Sufi al-Ḥallāj. As such he confirms al-Ḥallāj’s much debated position as a martyr of *‘ishq*.<sup>94</sup>

**8.6:4 *al-Wudd*:** is a general attribute of the three above-mentioned stages of love; it is the permanency of *hubb*, *‘ishq* or *hawā* in the heart of the lover. As used in the Qur’ān, *wudd* means firmness (*thabāt*). When love attains to the degree of *wudd*, nothing can harm love.<sup>95</sup>

According to Ibn ‘Arabī the lovers have certain features that distinguish them from others who claim to be lovers. These are as follows:

### 8.7 The Characteristics of the lovers:

**8.7:1 *al-Bass*:** Love stops the functions of the intellect. *‘Aql* has the power of collecting the thoughts and restricting the behaviour of a person; on the other hand, love distracts the attention and it causes the lover to fall into bewilderment.

**8.7:2 *al-Nuḥūl*:** It literally means thinness of the body because of lovers’ preoccupation in order to attain the satisfaction of the Beloved. While they do so they ignore their own needs and they do not give enough care to themselves. Their only concern is to keep their covenant with their Beloved (God) as mentioned in the Qur’ān.<sup>96</sup> As a result of this preoccupation with the beloved, their bodies get thinner. To explain the *nuḥūl* of the existence of the lovers Ibn ‘Arabī uses the Qur’anic metaphor of the mirage.<sup>97</sup> In the Qur’ān God describes the deeds of the unbelievers as ‘a mirage, seen in the desert having no real existence in reality.’ Similarly the lovers of God understand that their existence is in reality a mirage;

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.337

<sup>95</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī also confirms this quatrain division of love in the *al-Futūḥāt* with his commentary on the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*” see Ibn ‘Arabī, *Zakhāir al-‘Alāq* p.10

<sup>96</sup> Qur’ān, 5:1, 2:40

quality that includes all the rest is to be beloved, just as Muhammad is called beloved of God. The most beloved of God is the “place of manifestation” that reflects Him as He is, without the slightest deviation or distortion: so on the one hand, all the Divine qualities are displayed and savoured; on the other, there is no “place” that interposes itself as other.<sup>102</sup> His list will be given below and the important ones will be analysed further.

1- To follow the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad, as stated in the Qur’ān God declares: “Say: ‘If you love God, follow me. God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is forgiving and merciful.’”<sup>103</sup> Following the Prophet means to obey his commands and refraining from what he forbids. He does not speak out of his own fancy: what he says is a revelation from God.<sup>104</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī says: “Even if God did not ask us to follow him we needed to follow him.”<sup>105</sup> According to Ibn ‘Arabī one’s love for God is in proportion to one’s following the Prophet’s Sunnah. The more one follows the Prophet, the more one loves God.<sup>106</sup>

2- God loves the repentant one who turns back to Him. One of His divine names is “*al-Tawwāb*” meaning “He who accepts repentance”. Therefore, Ibn ‘Arabī concludes that God in reality loves His own attribute. The repentance of lovers is to turn from rejection to acceptance, from disobedience to obedience.<sup>107</sup> This is important since it indicates that Ibn Arabī’s system of love does not ignore piety and ascetic paradigms of love.

3- God loves people who cleanse themselves from all spiritual vices, such as ignorance, pretentiousness and so on.<sup>108</sup> Whoever cleans himself or herself from these vices will be loved by God, as stated by the Qur’ān: “God loves those who cleanse themselves.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.340-45

<sup>102</sup> S. Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*, p.198

<sup>103</sup> Qur’ān, 3:31 (Y.A.)

<sup>104</sup> Qur’ān, 53:3-4

<sup>105</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.341

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, v.10, 410-11, (Yahya ed.)

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.340

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2 p.342

<sup>109</sup> Qur’ān, 2:222 (Y.A.)

their existence will one day end and only God's existence will remain.<sup>98</sup> The interesting point in this example is that Ibn 'Arabī is applying a verse meant for the unbelievers, to the lovers of God. This shows that Ibn 'Arabī uses a special kind of exegesis to prove his ideas from Qur'ān.

**8.7:3 *Gharām*:** *Gharām* means annihilation in the Beloved with constant grief. It is the most effective attribute of love, which can be applied to the all stages of love since it connotes continuity.<sup>99</sup>

**8.7:4 *Shawq*:** This is the motion of the spirit towards the beloved to meet her. If the lover and the beloved are from the same genre this motion may be physical as well as spiritual. If the love is profane, the lover feels the fear of separation from the beloved after meeting. But in divine love there is no such fear of separation, because God is nearer to the lover than his jugular vein as stated in Qur'ān, and the lover of God feels this nearness.<sup>100</sup> Ibn 'Arabī's belief in the unity of being shows itself here; he says: "There is nothing in the universe except the existence of God." Therefore the lover never feels separation.

### **8.8 The attributes of lovers in the Qur'ān:**

Ibn 'Arabi also gives a long list of the characteristics<sup>101</sup> that God loves in His slaves, such as: repentance; purification; and, thankfulness, along with those which God does not love, such as: corruption; and cheating. However, in Ibn Arabi's paradigm of love attaining these characteristics is not considered as a matter of a pious act as in mainstream Islam. This is not a simple scriptural validation for what he is going to say in the chapter but rather a pointer to the necessity of discrimination if we are to "become like the Beloved". All are loved, but essentially only those who exhibit good and loveable qualities are able to be a perfect locus of God's manifestation. Desirable qualities are nothing but the positive qualities of existence, such as, beauty, truthfulness, generosity. These are epitomised in the lives of the prophets – Abraham is identified with the principle of thankfulness, Job with the quality of patience and so on. The most desirable

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 24:39

<sup>98</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.338

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.340

<sup>100</sup> Qur'ān, 50:16

Ibn ‘Arabī in this connection also emphasises the importance of the “*farā'id*” and “*nawāfil*” commandments, referring to the ḥadīth al-Qudsī which states: “My servant seeks to win My favour by works of Supererogation<sup>116</sup> (*nafl*), until I love him; and when I love him I am to him an ear, and an eye and a hand and a helper. Through Me he hears, through Me he sees and through me he takes.<sup>117</sup> “*Farā'id* are the commanded or obligatory prayers in Islam and *Nawāfil* are the voluntary acts of worship. According to him voluntary acts of worship attract God’s love more than the other. As in the voluntary act, there is the role of will whereas the *farā'id* are obligatory and there is no place for free will. Since free will is one of God’s attributes, by doing the *nawāfil* man reflects more of God’s attributes.<sup>118</sup>

Secondly, the outcome of the voluntary worship is that God becomes the hearing and seeing of the worshipper.<sup>119</sup> This also shows that Ibn ‘Arabī values more the voluntary acts of worship since the voluntary acts are only the result of love whereas the obligatory ones might be the result of fear and other motives.

In this theory of Love he sums up his whole system. Love is the cause of the return of all manifestations to the One.

Ibn ‘Arabī seems to have benefited many of al-Ḥallāj’s ideas in his system of love; especially concerning the perfection of man among creation in answering God’s love. The concepts of the *lāḥūt* and *nāsūt* are also taken by Ibn ‘Arabī and developed. However, unlike al-Ḥallāj he regarded not only man but the rest of the creation have *lāḥūti* and *nāsūti* aspects. The *nāsūt* represents the material aspect of a thing, the *lāḥūt* represents the divine aspects of the creation.<sup>120</sup>

### 8.9 Influences of other Sufis on Ibn ‘Arabī:

Among the Sufis that this study covered, possibly al-Ḥallāj played the most significant role in Ibn ‘Arabī’s building the paradigm of love as well as his mystical theology.<sup>121</sup> Especially, the ideas about the “*Nūr al-Muhammadī*”, the

<sup>116</sup> Non-obligatory prayers, but strongly recommended by the Prophet.

<sup>117</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Rikāʿ*, 38

<sup>118</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.13, p.483, (Yahya ed.)

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, v.13, p.485, (Yahya ed.)

<sup>120</sup> M. M. Sharif, *A history of Muslim Philosophy*, v.I p 415

<sup>121</sup> A. ‘Affīfi, *The Mystical Philosophy*, p.189

4- God loves believers who are patient in the face of calamities, who only ask help from God.<sup>110</sup>

5- God loves those who are thankful for the favours of God.<sup>111</sup>

6- God loves those who are charitable and make gifts to others.

7- God loves those who fight for His cause.<sup>112</sup>

8- God loves beauty, since the universe is the manifestation of the beauty of God; in reality God loves Himself.<sup>113</sup>

Although this list has an ethical nature, Ibn ‘Arabī gives another meaning to these verses by alluding to the ḥadith: “Assume the traits of God”.<sup>114</sup> Of the above mentioned commandments many of them are also ‘divine attributes’. Such as: repentance of man corresponds to the divine attribute *al-Tawwāb*; man’s generosity corresponds to *al-Karīm*; forgiveness corresponds to *al-Ghaffār*; and love corresponds to *al-Wadūd*. Only by actualising and internalising such qualities one can participate in the fullness of existence and reflect the qualities of the real Being. The more one assumes these divine characteristics, the more one becomes close to God in the sense that the lover reflects the divine qualities in the mirror of his body and soul. Hence man becomes the locus of God’s love.<sup>115</sup>

Another connection between following these commandments and love is that most of these names correspond to the beautiful names of God. By assuming these qualities, man increases in beauty. And beauty, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, is the basis and the cause of all love. “We love God because God is Beautiful, and He loves us and all his creation because He loves the Beautiful.” Here, he refers to the Prophetic tradition: “God is Beautiful and loves the Beautiful.”

<sup>110</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.342

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.343

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.345

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2, p.345

<sup>114</sup> see W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p.21-26

<sup>115</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, v.2, p.350

unity of religions, are taken from al-Ḥallāj and developed further by Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>122</sup> Although he quotes many verses generally attributed to Hallaj, which point to a theory of incarnation (*ḥulūl*) or fusion, he tries to explain them in his own pantheistic way. So it could be said that Ibn ‘Arabī improved on Hallaj’s theory of love to a great extent and did not imitate him.

It can be also argued that Rābi‘a’s selfish and unselfish love is at the root of Ibn ‘Arabī’s classification, but with a different name. Selfish love is natural, unselfish love is spiritual love. This naming also shows that Ibn ‘Arabī gives a completely new colour to Rābi‘a’s division. That is, naming her selfish love as natural signifies that he does not reject and reprimand profane love. For him it is not an obstacle in the Sufi path of love: on the contrary, it is one of the most efficient ways of arriving at the Real Beloved.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s systematic approach also corresponds very much to al-Ghazālī’s methodology. Both are very much intellectual in their analysis of love. However, unlike al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of love is not restricted to the intellectual boundaries. His theory of love is distinguished by the existentialist (*wujūdī*), and by the ecstatical (*dhawqī*). In this sense al-Ghazālī’s methodology plays a partial role in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system.<sup>123</sup>

Theoretically, Ibn ‘Arabī claims to have written things that were inspired by God (*Futūḥāī*); or given directly by the Prophet (*Fuṣūṣ*). Nevertheless, he uses the terminology of worldly life to put his divinely originated ideas into human form. He uses the language of theology and philosophy quite efficiently.

Asin Palacios, claims that Ibn ‘Arabī borrowed many ideas from New Platonism and the Christian concept of love. Firstly from the Islamic point of view there is no borrowing since all religions come from the same source, Secondly, Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to the prophets permitted him to do so. He clearly states in many

<sup>122</sup> O. R. Dogrul, *Islamiyetin Gelistirdigi Tasavvuf*, (Ahmet Halit Kitabevi, Istanbul, 1948), p.106-7; See M. Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean Without Shore*, translated by Streight, D., (State University of New York Press, 1993), p.87

<sup>123</sup> al-Munawī states that Ibn ‘Arabī studied al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’* in Makka. See al-Munawī, *al-Kawākib*, v.1, p.706



places that among his masters he mentions Jesus, Moses and many other prophets.<sup>124</sup>

### 8.10 His Influence:

Ibn 'Arabī indeed left his mark on later Sufism. His ideas about the universality of being, love, and religion may be considered as landmarks in the history of Sufi thought. Even though some of his theories are very controversial the fact remains that in production and influence he is one of the greatest Arabic-speaking mystics Islam has ever produced.<sup>125</sup>

The title given to Ibn 'Arabī by his admirers 'al-Shaykh al-Akbar' (the Greatest Master), has never been conferred on another Sufi since his time. Concerning the concept of love his influence seems to show itself most clearly in the delightful works of the mystic poets of Persia and Turkey.<sup>126</sup> For example, Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d.1289 C.E.), Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d.1320 C.E.) and 'Abdu'r-Raḥmān Jāmī (d.1492 C.E.) were all inspired by Ibn 'Arabī. Their odes reflect Ibn 'Arabī's teaching of Divine Love and Beauty in the form of subtle genius of the Persian mind.<sup>127</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of love had a great impact on Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d.1273 C.E.) through his disciple Sadr al-Dīn Qunawī.(d.1274 C.E.) Even some have called the *Mathnawī* as the *Fuṭūḥat* translated into Persian verse.<sup>128</sup> In modern times the influence of Ibn 'Arabī can be seen wherever Sufism continues to flourish. In the East, his writings are still taught and read in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Persia. In addition, commentaries continue to be written on them.<sup>129</sup>

### 8.11 Conclusion

<sup>124</sup> A. Palacios, Ibn al-'Arabī *Madhhabuhū wa ḥayātuhū*, trans. into Arabic by 'A. Badawi, p.246-247

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, v.I p.420

<sup>126</sup> Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, v.I, p.8

<sup>127</sup> M. M. Sharif, *A history of Muslim Philosophy*, v.I p.408

<sup>128</sup> S. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p.118

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118

1- Ibn 'Arabī's paradigm of love is the most comprehensive metaphysical, cosmological and psychological paradigm of love.<sup>130</sup>

2-In Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology, the concept of love plays an important role. It is the unique motive behind the creation. According to Him it is God's eternal love that caused the creation.

3- Very basically, Ibn 'Arabī divides love into two branches as natural and spiritual love. The dual interpretations of love, both from the point of view of lover and the beloved as spiritual and natural, is applied to God and man. This is quite unique in the theories of love. For example nobody before him attributed selfish motives to God in their paradigms of love.

4- Concerning God's love for man the most important factor is that man is created upon God's form. Amongst God's creation man has the most traits resembling God. In other words God manifest Himself most fully in man amongst other creatures.

5- God also loves man as a part of His spirit, as man is nothing but a *nafkh* (breathing out) of God. The whole longs for its part. In that regards it is interesting that he gives the example of love between man and woman paradigm in which man loves woman as his part.

6- God also loves man for man's own sake, therefore in His dealing with mankind His mercy exceeds His wrath. This love goes to the extent that God will not punish His servants eternally.

7- He stresses that God manifests Himself best in woman. In contrast to the early Sufis who held women in contempt by equating them with the evil of the world, Ibn 'Arabī completely denies their idea and declares woman as the most perfect locus of God's manifestation.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> See S. Nasr, *Three Sages*, p.90

<sup>131</sup> Austin gives a clear exposition of feminine elements in Ibn Arābī's thought, comparing him with other philosophies as well. See R. W. J. Austin, 'The feminine dimensions in Ibn al-'Arabī's

8- Man loves God because he is created in God's form. Man is attracted to God as a part is attracted to its whole. Man's love is fully fulfilled only when his object of love is God or another human being, since all human beings are created in God's form.

9- Man always loves God in different manifestations even though he is not aware of it. It is likened to a fish living in the ocean and not realising the existence of water. However, to fully benefit from such a love, man needs to realise that all loves return to God.

10- Therefore for the real mystic all loves are divine and the division between profane and divine love is only on the surface. If men love women because of the divine manifestations in her, this love becomes a divine love. While those who love them for natural lust only are ignorant of the reality of creation.

11- Ibn 'Arabi used all the previous paradigms of love very efficiently. The ideas of the exegetes, the philosophers, the theologians, the poets are used and made into a synthesis. Therefore Ibn 'Arabi's paradigm of love reflects the diverse tastes of the above mentioned disciplines.

## CHAPTER NINE

## Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Paradigm of Love

## 9.1 Introduction

One cannot fail to notice the titles and appellations which adorn the names of the great Sufi masters, for example, *Shahīda al-'Ishq al-Ilāhī* (Rābi'a), *Imām and Mujaddid* (al-Ghazālī) and *Sheikh al-Akbar* (Ibn 'Arabi). From these, perhaps, the most striking appellation belongs to the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ: "*Ṣulṭān al-'Āshiqm*" or the 'Prince of the Lovers'.<sup>1</sup> This may be explained by the fact that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was regarded by many authorities on Sufism, as the greatest and finest poet to write mystic poetry in Arabic.<sup>2</sup> This reputation of the 'Prince of Lovers' justifies his inclusion in this research.

However, it must be pointed out that this research does not aim to illuminate this Sufi master's poetry from a literary point of view, as this has been studied quite sufficiently.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it aims to illuminate and analyse his understanding and conception of love. This aim will be tackled according to the same binary classification adopted in the previous chapters, namely, God's love for man followed by man's love for God. However, before this is done, it would be useful to give a brief account of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's background and life. This will allow us to see this eminent Sufi in context and may perhaps give us some clues to the origin, formation and development of his ideas.

9.2 His Life<sup>4</sup>

There are a number of important sources which give details about Ibn al-Fāriḍ's life. However, it seems that from among the sources providing information about the life of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the "*Wafayāt al-A'yān*" of Ibn Khallikān is the most

<sup>1</sup> S. Zalam, 'Ibn al-Fāriḍ Ṣulṭān al-'Āshiqm', in *Majallat al-Azhar*, (Cairo, 1974), v.51, p.714

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Sufism, an Account of the Mystics of Islam*, p.94; Amin, B. S., *Mutālaāt fī al-Shi'r al-Mamlūkī wa al-Uthmānī*, (Beirut, nd.), p.242; M. R. Dayyāh, *Al-'Ām al-Adab al-'Abbāsī*, (Beirut, Muassasa al-Risālah, 1987), p.111

<sup>3</sup> See S. H. Nadeem, *A Critical Appreciation of Arabic Mystical Poetry*, p.184ff.; O. Farrūkh, *al-Taṣawwuf fī al-Islām*, p.143ff.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed and fully documented study of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's life, see T. E. Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint: Ibn al-Farid, His Verse, And His Tomb*, (University of South Carolina Press, 1994); also Issa J. Boulatta, 'Toward a Biography of Ibn al-Farid', *Arabica*, (Leiden, 1981), p.38-56

objective: in the sense that it does not rely heavily on mere anecdotes and stories for its coverage. However, one limitation of this source is that it is rather brief in its dealing of Ibn al-Fāriḍ and thus, does not give a great amount of detail. Nevertheless, in the following biographical sketch that follows the *Wafayāt al-A'yān* will be the main source relied upon.

The other major source of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's biography is his grandson. Although Ibn al-Fāriḍ's grandson has given a detailed account of his life, the researcher must approach this source with a certain amount of caution. This is due to the fact that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's grandson may have a personal interest in portraying the greatness of his grandfather, and could, at times, be a little biased. For example, in his introduction to Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, one finds the pages filled with fantastic and exaggerated tales. One can explain this as a desire to exonerate the poet from the accusations of heresy at that time.<sup>5</sup> However, it would be unfair to reject everything that comes from Ibn al-Fāriḍ's grandson just for this reason. An alternative and more constructive approach would be to accept only those parts which can be corroborated by other evidence.

He was born in Cairo 576/1182<sup>6</sup>; and his father's name was 'Ali who was originally from Hama in Syria, we do not know why and when he emigrated to Egypt. Ibn al-Fāriḍ's full name was Abū Ḥafs or Abū al-Qāsim 'Umar b. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Ali b. al-Murshid b. 'Ali. His honorific title is Sharaf al-Dīn (Nobility of Religion) and he is generally known as Ibn al-Fāriḍ<sup>7</sup> or "son of the distributor of estates": a reference to the profession of his father.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ spent his childhood in an atmosphere of deep religious conscience, mainly due to the influence of his father. At an early age he was attracted to Sufism and its practices, such as solitude and the taking up of an ascetic life.<sup>8</sup> As far as his personality is concerned, he had a strong character. This fact is confirmed by Ibn Khallikān who states that he was a righteous and virtuous personality with a sense of self-assurance.

<sup>5</sup> Especially from the attacks of Ibn al-Taymiyyah, see *Ibtāl Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, p.40-42

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, v.I, p.383; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*, p.465

<sup>7</sup> As explained by Ibn al-Khallikān, *al-Fāriḍ* is the name given to the person who draws up contracts for women in their dealings with men, De Slane, *Biographical Dictionary*, v.2, p.390

According to some commentators, for example Arberry, the *Tāyyah* is considered the masterpiece of Ibn al-Fāriḍ.<sup>14</sup> The contents of both the *Khamriyya* and *Tāyya* are the basis of the following discussion.

Not only the content of his *Dīwān* but also the method by which it was written is of significance. The latter provides some insight into the character of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. It is said that he dictated his *Dīwān* in times of ecstasy and intoxication. In other words, it was not the result of a conscious effort on the part of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. In this connection, it is of interest to note the similarities which exist between mysticism in other religions and Islam. For example, it appears that this method is also found in the mystical experience of other religions. As an illustration, Nicholson mentions that St. Catherine of Sienna dictated her great Dialogue to her secretaries whilst in the state of ecstasy. Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, Jalāladdin Rūmī whilst drowned in the ocean of love, used to take hold of a pillar in his house and set himself turning around it. Meanwhile, he versified and dictated, and people wrote down the verses of his great work *Mathnawī*.<sup>15</sup>

### 9.2:2 His Teachers

Ibn al-Fāriḍ's grandson, relates that Ibn al-Fāriḍ went through a long period of ascetic practices in order to seek some kind of self realisation. However, he experienced no illumination or revelation during his time in Egypt. This raises the question; was Ibn al-Fāriḍ given support or guidance by any Sufi Master in his quest for Divine illumination or was he merely "experimenting" on his own? There is little evidence to suggest that the former was the case, especially during his early period in Egypt. On the other hand, if we accept the account related by his grandson, 'Alī, then, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's first Sufi master was a certain illiterate and old man. According to his report, one day in the *Suyūfiyya madrasa*, in Cairo, Ibn al-Fāriḍ met an old man who was a green grocer (*Baqqāl*). He advised him "O 'Umar, you will receive no revelation in Egypt but rather in Hijaz, at Mecca -may God honour it. Go there, then, for the time of your revelation has come." The name of this old *Baqqāl* is not given by 'Alī. However, Ibn al-Zayyāt

<sup>14</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Sufism, an Account of the Mystics*, p.96

<sup>15</sup> R.A., Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p.167

Ibn Khallikān ends his biographical notice by saying that Ibn al-Fāriḍ died in 632/1235 and was buried at the foot of Mount al-Muqattam.<sup>9</sup>

### 9.2:1 His works

It comes as some surprise that the volume of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's work is not proportional to his fame. Unlike Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's only work is his *Dīwān* which forms the major source concerning his ideas and understanding for the purposes of our study.

Focusing particularly on the issue of love, the *Dīwān* contains two important odes which give an insight into his paradigm of love. The first, entitled *Khamriyya*, can be categorised as falling under the accepted Arabic genre of Bacchic or wine poetry. This reflects the general Sufi approach of taking possession of a well-established framework and reforming it by substituting hedonistic motivations with religious undertones, such as, the decisive quest for happiness in God. Ibn al-Fāriḍ does exactly this: he re-interprets the whole bacchic theme and deepens its symbolic range.<sup>10</sup> For example, the phenomenon of 'drunkenness' is used in the sense that the Sufi is drunk with his love for God, thus, giving a new impetus to the genre of *Khamriyya*. Furthermore, in the *Khamriyya* Ibn al-Fāriḍ employs conventional language and imagery of the Bacchic poets, especially that of Abū Nuwās<sup>11</sup> and 'Umar Khayyām,<sup>12</sup> both are regarded as the finest wine poets of Arabic poetry.<sup>13</sup> In sum, in the *Khamriyya*, the Ṣultān al-'Āshiqīn, develops a symbolism based on Bacchanalian imagery of wine charged with a spiritual sense. In this respect, Ibn al-Fāriḍ continues in the tradition of the early profane poets with the added dimension of mystical love.

Moving on to the second important ode, entitled *al-Ṭāyyah al-Kubrā* (a poem ending in the letter *ta*) this also, shows the poetical genius of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. It contains 761 verses and is nearly as long as all the other poems put together.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Al- 'Imād, *Shadharāt Al-Dhahab*, v.5, p.149

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, v.I, p.383; Ibn al-Mulaqqīn, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*, p.465

<sup>10</sup> The Encyclopaedia of Islam, (New Edition, Leiden, 1978), v.4, p.1006

<sup>11</sup> See for the historical development of *Khamriyya*, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, v.4, p.998-1009

<sup>12</sup> See for his poetry J. Payne, *The Quatrains of Omar Kheyyam*, (London, 1898); E. F. Whinfield, *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam*, (London: Octagon Press, 1980)

<sup>13</sup> P. F. Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997), p.1

(d.814/1411) gives his name as Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Ali al-Baqqāl.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Ibn ‘Iyās (d.1524C.E.) states that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was buried at the feet of his sheikh whom he names differently as “Mohammed al-Baqqāl”<sup>17</sup>. This inconsistency casts some doubt on the narration of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s grandson. For instance it seems possible that this name might have been invented by Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s grandson in order to mystify and magnify the reputation of the great Sufi poet. In summary, the contradictory historical evidence makes it difficult to say definitively, whether this old man was a true historical figure or merely a figment of Ibn al-Farid’s grandson’s imagination.

Other commentators, too, have grappled with the issue of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s masters and teachers. For example, Nābulusī suggests that the great Sufi of Andulus, Ibn ‘Arabī was his teacher. However, Nābulusī’s position rests upon tentative interpretation of a couplet of poetry from the Diwan of Ibn al-Farid:

O camel-driver crossing the wilderness with howdahs,  
Kindly halt beside the hills of Tayyi’!<sup>18</sup>

Nābulusī, in this verse, detects an allusion to Ibn ‘Arabī who belonged to the tribe of Tayyi’.<sup>19</sup> This may be a possible interpretation of this verse. However, it must be pointed out that it is the nature of poetry to be vague and suggestive of many alternative meanings. To rely upon it as a source of solid historical fact clearly ignores the nature and function of poetry. In addition, there is not a single piece of historical evidence to suggest that they ever met. Nevertheless, Nābulusī’s view may have been influenced by the close resemblance found between the ideas and styles of these two great Sufis.

Putting aside Ibn ‘Arabi, there is evidence to suggest that Ibn al-Fāriḍ met important Sufis of his time. For example, Burhān al-Dīn al-Ja‘fari (d.687A.H.), an ascetic with miracles and high states attributed to him; Shihāb al-Dīn Muhammad b. al-Khaymī (d.685A.H.), a prominent poet; and Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d.632/1234) the author of the *‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif*.<sup>20</sup> These are a

<sup>16</sup> Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Kawākib al-Sayyāra fi Tartīb al-Ziyāra*, (Baghdad, Maktabat al-Muthannā, n.d.), p.297

<sup>17</sup> Ibn al-Iyās, *Badā’i al-Zuhur fi Waqā’i al-Duhūr*, (Bulaq, 1311 A.H.) v.I, p.81

<sup>18</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Diwān*, p.4 1

<sup>19</sup> R.A.,Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p.164

<sup>20</sup> M. Ḥilmī, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ wa al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*, (Cairo, n.d.), p.40



few names indicated by the sources. However, it should also be borne in mind that the long years Ibn al-Fāriḍ spent in the Holy lands, raise the possibility that he may have met with the important Sufi personalities of his time. This is due to the fact that Mecca was a focal point for the Muslims and a place regarded as a source of spiritual blessing.

### **9.2:3 His Travels**

The role that 'travelling' played in Ibn al- Fāriḍ's life should be noted. In this respect, he can be compared to Ibn 'Arabī and al-Ḥallāj in terms of his travels. For example, he spent some important part of his life in Mecca for his training in the Sufi way. The majority of sources confirm that he stayed in the Holy Land for 15 years between 1215-1230 C.E.<sup>21</sup> This period can be classed as being an important part of his Sufi training and development as he engaged himself in all kinds of religious worship and ascetic practices. It appears that travelling in itself is an important aspect of mystical training in the Sufi path. For instance, Rābī'a used to go to the deserts; al-Ḥallāj travelled to India; al-Ghazālī emigrated to Damascus and had his Sufi illumination there; and Ibn 'Arabī travelled the Islamic world from Spain in the West, to Damascus in the East. It can, thus, be seen that travelling holds a prominent part in the Sufi's quest towards his goal. This is not explicitly stated by the Sufis, but on closer analysis a possible rationale can be suggested. Being distanced from ones relatives and loved ones results in the feeling of solitude. Consequently, all the distractions which tie down the Sufi and hinder his progress on the spiritual path, are removed: freeing the Sufi to become more sensitive to Divine illumination and to focus his attention only on his Beloved, that is God.

### **His Understanding of Love:**

#### **1-God's love for man:**

In comparison to Ibn 'Arabī, one does not find an abundance of material shedding light on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's paradigm of God's love for man. In a similar fashion to other Sufis before him, the 'Prince of Lovers' attempts to establish a strong relationship of love between God and man. Furthermore, he supports his position

by making reference to the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. As an illustration, he alludes in his *Tāyyya* to the well known ḥadīth al-Qudṣī: “Whoever despises any of My Friends has declared war against Me. I do not hesitate in anything as I hesitate to seize the soul of My faithful servant who dislikes death and whom I dislike to hurt, but he can not escape therefrom. My servant seeks to win My favour by works of Supererogation, until I love him; and when I love him I am to him an ear, and an eye and a hand and a helper. Through Me he hears, through Me he sees and through me he takes.”<sup>22</sup>

It is worth noting that this ḥadīth is regularly referred to by many Sufis to show the mutual nature of love between man and God. Ibn al-Fāriḍ follows a similar pattern and draws some conclusions from the aforementioned ḥadīth. Firstly, relying upon the first part of the Ḥadīth he concludes that God loves his creation as they love Him. Secondly, Ibn al-Fāriḍ finds a basis for his “love leading to unity” in the last part of the ḥadīth which says “I (God) am to him (mankind) an ear and an eye...”. He infers that when God loves man He becomes man’s sight, hearing and so on. For Ibn al-Fāriḍ this means that when God loves His servant, He opens the door to unity (*ittiḥād*) with him.

The following couplets of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry allude to the above ḥadīth:

“And touching my oneness (*ittiḥād*) there hath come down a sure Tradition, whose oral transmission is not infirm.”

“Declaring that God loves (His creatures) after they draw nigh unto Him by works of voluntary works or by the observance of that which is obligatory”<sup>23</sup>

The term “*ittiḥād*” among the theologians aroused contempt and suspicion because it can easily lead to the doctrine of incarnation (*ḥulūl*). In fact he was charged with this heretical belief after his death by Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>24</sup> However, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, during his lifetime, vehemently opposed this accusation and openly rejected the idea of *ḥulūl* (incarnation).

<sup>21</sup> See Ibn al-Mulaqqīn, *Ṭabaqāt*, p.465; M. Ḥilmī, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ wa al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*, p.48

<sup>22</sup> Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Riqāq, n.38

<sup>23</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, *Tāyyya*, v.719-720

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, T., *Ibṭāl Waḥdat al-Wujūd wa al-Radd ‘alā al-Qāilīna Bihā*, edited by al-Najdi, M., (Kuwait, Jam‘iyyat ihyā’ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1992), p.25-44

“And in the truer of the two visions I find a hint that removes my creed far from the doctrine of incarnation (*ḥulūl*)”

On the contrary, he bases the idea of *ittiḥād* with another Qur’anic concept of *labb*:

“In the Qur’ān there is mention of “covering” (*labb*), and it can not be denied, for I have not gone beyond the double authority of the Book and the Apostolic Traditions.”<sup>25</sup>

It follows from this quotation that the word ‘*labb*’ is of utmost significance in order to establish the true limits and definitions of his paradigm of love. By relying on the authority of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth Ibn al-Fāriḍ attempts to defend himself. His claim is that whatever he has written he has done so within the boundaries of the Shari‘ah. With particular reference to the above verse, it can be inferred that the love relationship between man and God is hidden (*labb*) from others, just as God is hidden behind creation. The nature of this relationship can be described by words that look similar to the concept of incarnation but are quite different. Ibn al-Fāriḍ is aware of the Christian concept of incarnation and its followers’ intoxication with love of God. However, he regards their doctrine of God revealing Himself in Christ as a mere glimpse of the truth, that is more fully realised by Muslim saints, who believe that God reveals Himself in every atom of existence.

Reference to the creation leads on to another element found in the love paradigm of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, namely the explanation that the cause of Creation is God’s love for man. This idea was also central to the paradigms of al-Ḥallāj and Ibn al-‘Arabi. Hilmi, a modern researcher on Ibn al-Fāriḍ suggests that the second verse of the *Khamriyya* states in metaphorical language the idea that Divine love is the cause of the creation:

“Its cup the full-moon; itself a sun which a new moon causes to circle. When it is mingled (with water), how many stars appear.”

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<sup>25</sup> R.A., Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p.187 (footnote 4)

According to Hilmi, the Sun symbolises Divine Love, and the stars signify creation. As the sun is source of life, in the same way Divine Love, too, is the cause and sustaining force behind creation.<sup>26</sup> Although this interpretation of the verse may seem quite far-fetched, it does not, in general sense contradict Ibn al-Fāriḍ's philosophy.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ also deals with the issue of whether God's love precedes man's love or vice versa. If the former position holds then God's love will be considered to be eternal. This key idea that is also held by Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and al-Ḥallāj "God's love for man is eternal and without beginning" is expressed in the very first verse of the *Khamriyya*: "We quaffed upon the remembrance of the Beloved a wine where with we were drunken, before even the vine is created."<sup>27</sup> According to Arberry, the wine symbolises the source of holy rapture, the love of God manifested in His creation. The phrase "before even the vine is created" refers to the timelessness of God's love for His creation.<sup>28</sup> This issue was always emphasised by the Sufis before Ibn al-Fāriḍ, thus, it was not a novel concept. However, Ibn al-Fāriḍ's distinction from his predecessors lies in his use of the language of poetry. As an illustration the following verse is worthy of note: "Before it, is no "before" and after it is no "after"; it is the "before of every "after" by the necessity of its nature."<sup>29</sup>

In the ode of *Khamriyya*, Ibn al-Fāriḍ gives further clues to the nature of God's love for man. He adds another dimension, God's love for man is not a material but a spiritual love:

"They say to me, "Describe it, for thou art acquainted with its description." Ay, well do I know its attributes;  
Pure but not as water; subtle, but not as air; luminous, but not as fire; spirit, but not (joined to) body."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> M. Hilmi, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ wa al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*, p.174

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, p.179, v.1; trans. by Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Farid*, (Emery Walker Ltd., Dublin, 1956), p.81

<sup>28</sup> A. J. Arberry, *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Farid*, p.85

<sup>29</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, *Khamriyya*, v.29; Nicholson, p.187

<sup>30</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, *Khamriyya*, v.21-22, Nicholson, p.186

From this verse the conclusion that love is non material becomes clear. For instance Ibn al-Fāriḍ selects the qualities of material, corporeal objects but denies their materiality and instead focuses on the abstract qualities derivable from these. By implication, love too is spiritual whilst at the same time containing all the abstract qualities of the material. This definition of love is interesting as it clearly sets itself apart from the “worldly” loves which are embedded in a material source and can be defined by reference to the material. From a different angle this position is full of irony, for Ibn al-Fāriḍ utilises the worldly or profane language which is embedded in the material, and transforms its essence into a spiritual reality. In short, the profane is being utilised for the service of the spiritual.

Finally, there is strong evidence in the *Tāyyya* that all the actions of man are derived from the power and will of God. In the following verse Ibn al-Fāriḍ states: “None lives but his life is from mine, and every living soul is obedient to my will”. This idea is of profound importance for it implies that the Sufi’s actions are not his own but are from God, consequently, it is God that motivates man’s love.

Having studied God’s love for man, it is now time to turn to the related issue of man’s love for God. However, before looking at man’s love for God, it is essential to look at the language Ibn al-Fāriḍ uses to refer to God, as this has further implications for his paradigm of love.

### 9.3.2 His language

The most important feature in Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s style is that he expresses his love for God by using the words and styles of profane love. His odes have all the characteristics of profane love, but are loaded with spiritual meanings. As a result of this, he uses both the masculine and feminine pronouns to refer to God, even though the generally accepted pronoun for God is the masculine one. He refers to his Beloved (God) with the names of women, mentioned by the Arab poets such as “Lailā”, “Suād”, “Salmā” and so on. This novel usage of feminine imagery from Arabic poetry, sets Ibn al-Fāriḍ apart from other Sufis. From a modern

perspective, the employment of the feminine pronoun and the feminine imagery for God hints towards, what might be termed as, the feminist aspect of his paradigm of love. By freeing God from being referred to solely with the masculine pronoun, he undermines, in a sense, the position of men as the ones who can attain closeness to God alone. On the other hand, it must be said Muslim theologians were at pains to point out that the use of a masculine pronoun did not imply that God had male attributes: it was a mere convention. Although this might have been the case, it is nevertheless true that referring to God in a masculine gender passed the wrong message to the general believers and hinted towards the subsidiary role of women. Thus, Ibn al-Fāriḍ was, by his use of the feminine pronoun, indirectly challenging the presumed ascendancy of men over women in the spiritual realm.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ is, therefore, an original and unique poet in comparison to other Sufi poets.<sup>31</sup> There are some commentators who regard Ibn al-Fāriḍ's greatness to lie in his application of the existing frameworks and ideas. For example, Homerin, proposes that Ibn al-Fāriḍ's importance as a mystical poet and saint does not lie in his beliefs, as he was not an original thinker. Rather, his genius lies in his ability to use the largely secular Arabic poetic tradition for religious ends and to voice a mystical view of existence that was shared by much of his audience<sup>32</sup>, if not by the mainstream scholars and theologians of that time. However, it must not be forgotten that during Ibn al-Fāriḍ's time Arabic erotic poetry had already been adopted by Sufis to express their mystical love. For example, the poetical romantic lovers Majnūn and Laylā, the famous symbol of lovers in Arabic literature, had already become the symbol of the Sufi lost in the love of God.<sup>33</sup>

Homerin's argument regarding Ibn al-Fāriḍ's genius needs to be examined in further detail. There is a possibility that Homerin's reasoning, that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was not an original thinker, may have some flaws in it. Firstly, Homerin's

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<sup>31</sup> This research only contains the Sufis writing in Arabic therefore the Great Sufi poets Such as Jalāladdin Rūmī, Ruzbihān are not included and the comparison is only valid among the Arabic Sufis.

<sup>32</sup> T. E. Homerin, 'Ibn al-Farid, A Saint of Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt', in *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*, ed. by Martin, G., & Ernst, C., (Istanbul, 1993), p.85

<sup>33</sup> G. Scattolin, 'The Mystical experience of 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, or the realization of self (ana, I), the poet and his mystery', in *The Muslim World*, (July-October, 1992), v.82, p.285

assumption that Ibn al-Fāriḍ has contributed no new ideas ignores the fact that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a Sufi of “experience” (*dhawq*). In other words, his greatness lies in his ecstatic experiences. This kind of genius can be contrasted with that of other Sufis, such as, al-Ḥallāj , al-Ghazālī and Ibn Arabi, whose genius lay in the intellectual sphere. From this it can be concluded that it would be wrong to expect Ibn al-Fāriḍ to produce voluminous amounts of prose and writing which illuminates and categorises his paradigm of love. To the contrary, what can be expected of a Sufi, whose greatness lies not in his theory but in his practice, is that he should write about what he experiences. This is precisely what Ibn al-Fāriḍ does.

Secondly, assuming for the sake of argument that Ibn al-Fāriḍ did not produce any original ideas, the fact that his *Diwān* has attracted a huge amount of commentary and has been frequently referred to in later Sufi writings points, in reality, to the genius of the single work of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. It therefore appears that Homerin’s position becomes untenable in the light of the comments made above.

It has been frequently mentioned in the analysis so far that Ibn al-Fāriḍ used the vehicle of profane love to promote and convey his spiritual experiences so far as his paradigm of love is concerned. The issue that arises from this reality is regarding the intentions of Ibn al-Fāriḍ. For instance, what were the motives behind using the language of profane love poetry in order to convey divine meanings?

The answer to this question cannot be definitively given and must inevitably be a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, some commentators have attempted to provide an explanation. For example Hilmi, in his extensive study of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s life and work is of the view that Ibn al-Farid’s’ usage of love poetry was based on the grounds that the Sufis in general find it easy to express their internal experiences through the utilisation of love poetry. A number of reasons can be given for this. For instance, the experiences of the Sufis cannot be explained by the use of precise and clearly defined terminology. On the other hand, poetry by its nature is not confined by logical categories and is thus amenable to convey ideas which by their nature are beyond the confines of reason and logic.

Furthermore, and linked with the previous point, is the idea that the Sufis in general do not target the minds or reasons of their listeners. Rather, their focus is on the heart or the emotional aspect of the human being. For this reason the vehicle of poetry is an ideal tool, as it has a magical quality of moving the feelings and hearts of its listeners. This interpretation may also help to explain the popular appeal that the Sufis had in their times.<sup>34</sup>

The positive aspects of using poetry mentioned in the last paragraph must be balanced with the possible negative effects of utilising profane poetry for the service of the divine, especially from the Sufis point of view. The most obvious and perhaps the most strongest disadvantage appears to be the scope for confusion and misunderstanding that could potentially occur in the minds of the ordinary recipients of the Sufis poetry. Since the vocabulary used to describe the divine realities are borrowed from the realm of mundane love, such as, separation and union, wine and goblet, tavern and drink companions, it is easy for the layman to misunderstand the real meaning behind the words. Furthermore, due to the ambiguous nature of the poetry which was open to many contradictory interpretations, the mainstream theologians of the time were provided with ample ammunition to accuse the Sufis of heresy and the worst possible crime in Islam, that of associating partners with Allah (*shirk*).

It was for reasons of this nature that Ibn 'Arabī felt compelled to write a commentary on his *Tarjumān al-'Ashwāq* in order to clarify his real intentions. In contrast to this example, Ibn al-Fāriḍ did not take up the task of writing any comments or explanations to illuminate readers as to his true intentions. As a consequence of this, his poetry remains open to diverse interpretations. In other words, it can mean many things to different people: divine to the spiritual and profane to the worldly.

On the other hand, some portion of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry is such that it is almost necessary to employ a divine interpretation to the imagery and symbolism that they contain. To do otherwise would lead to mere nonsense. The two famous odes which have formed the basis of his chapter, the *Tāyya al-Kubrā* and *al-*

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<sup>34</sup> M. Hilmī, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p.144-45



*Khamriyya*, are of this nature. They are totally mystical poems singing his love for God. The elements of human love present in these two poems only make sense when they are understood in reference to Divine Love.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to this, Ibn al-Fāriḍ gives clues as to the workings of his mind within his poetry. For example, in the following verse Ibn al-Fāriḍ justifies his use of allegorical language where the plain words are not capable of conveying the desired meaning.

“I have indicated (the truth concerning phenomenal relations) by the means which language yields, and that which is obscure I have made clear by a subtle allegory”.<sup>36</sup>

With particular reference to the use of allegory by Ibn al-Fāriḍ, another alternative rationale, indications of which can be found in his poetry, is possible. In order to disguise his love and to guard himself from the reproach of his friends who are alien to such intimate love relationships, Ibn al-Fāriḍ utilises ambiguous and allegorical language. As an illustration of this, consider the following poetical utterances:

“And in my drunkenness, by means of a glance I caused my comrades to fancy that it was the quaffing of *their* wine that gladdened my soul”<sup>37</sup>

From this, it appears that Ibn al-Fāriḍ is engaged in a form of deliberate “deception” by trying to conceal, the true nature of his happiness and joy from his comrades that is the votaries of vulgar love, consequently, enabling himself to hide his love from the ignorant. This strategy can be seen as one way of safeguarding himself from their attacks.

In order to make our analysis of Ibn al-Fāriḍ as objective as possible, it is important to make explicit some of the assumptions that have been made during the course of the previous analysis. The most fundamental one would appear to be that we have accepted without any question the fact that Ibn Arabi was a sincere

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151

<sup>36</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān, Tāīyya*, v.494

Sufi and lover of God. We have not, for example, interpreted his profane poetry to be the consequence of Ibn al-Fāriq's love for someone other than the Divine: in other words, that inspiration and motivation behind Ibn al-Fāriq's love was purely temporal and had nothing to do with Divine Love. One possible line of attack which can be suggested is: "Could it not be possible that Ibn al-Fāriq was passionately in love with another human being and his poetry was all about profane love but later his beloved became God and therefore his poetry has a double dimension.?"

In order to provide a solution to this form of reasoning, it is necessary to refer back to the historical sources relating to the life of Ibn al-Fāriq. Such an investigation reveals that there is not a single testimony to substantiate the idea that Ibn al-Fāriq fell in love with a human being and that this love later metamorphosed into Divine Love. From a logical standpoint, if such an incident had occurred then it is more than likely that Ibn al-Fāriq's commentators, especially his enemies, would have made great capital of this fact. On the other hand, it is equally possible that such an incident may have occurred and that Ibn al-Fāriq kept it a closely guarded secret. On balance, however, it would appear that the argument against such an incident occurring and being reported is of a more persuasive nature. Nevertheless, there is also a strong possibility that Ibn al-Fāriq used profane love as a stepping stone to Divine love as many Sufis before him had advocated. However, all this does not alter the fact that whatever the source and cause of Ibn al-Fāriq's love, the vocabulary of profane love is used to express mystical love.

### 9.3.3 Man's love for God

According to Ibn al-Fāriq love is the most perfect relationship between man and his creator and refers to the religion of love. The believers of this religion are the lovers of God. "And I was never bewildered until I chose love of thee as a religion. Woe to me for my bewilderment, had it not been on account of thee."<sup>37</sup> In another verse of *Tāyya* he implies that he is the "*Sultān al-‘Āshiqīn*" (Prince of lovers) by mentioning that to him belongs a kingdom which contains subjects.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, v.2

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, v.83

“And the realm of the high degrees of Love is my kingdom, the realities (of love) are my army, and all lovers are my subjects”<sup>39</sup>

Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s paradigm love is not merely an isolated and abstracted experience. Rather it pervades all aspects of life and in fact acts as a healing medicine for many problems both material and spiritual. In Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s kingdom, love is a solution to all kinds of problems that might obstruct the path that leads to God. It seems that love is not merely the best solution for those problems but it is also the only solution for them. In strong terms, Ibn al-Fāriḍ asserts the power of love claiming that; love brings the dead to life, heals the sick, makes the paralysed to walk, and the dumb to speak. Love’s perfume gives the sense of smelling to the one who lost it, illuminates the lover’s way in darkness, it restores sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf; even writing the letters of love on the forehead of one who is afflicted by madness will cure him. Love amends the manners of the boon companions and guides the irresolute to the path of firm resolve. It makes the meanest man the most generous and provides the strength to be patient during times of anger and outrage, it turns the most ignorant of the tribe into the wisest.<sup>40</sup> In short, for him, love for God is a unique solution to the spiritual as well as material needs of mankind.

It is interesting to note that this position of Ibn al-Fāriḍ distinguishes him from other Sufis, such as Rābi‘a who emphasised the ascetic aspect. For Ibn al-Fāriḍ all other states in the mystical path to God such as fear, asceticism and the like, can help the Sufi to some extent but in some limited measure. Whereas love has endless power and endless solution for all kinds of spiritual diseases.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry does not confine itself to a mere narration of his spiritual experiences. It also exhorts and at times strongly urges his listeners to follow his way and to drink the wine of love. This is not mere advice, for it is also backed up by the threat that to drink from this wine of love is no sin, rather it is the unforgivable sin not to taste this wine of love:

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, v.293

<sup>40</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, p.180-182, *Khamriyyah* v.9-20

“They said, ‘Thou hast drunk the draught of sin.’ Nay, I have only drunk what, in my judgement, ‘twere the greatest sin to renounce.”<sup>41</sup>

Another dimension of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s paradigm of love, as far as man’s love for God is concerned, is that God does not accept any partner in the love that is due to Him. When man claims to love God he should not keep any equals in his love to God. In other words man’s love must be pure and focused only on the Divine, it must admit of no partners. Speaking on behalf of the Beloved Ibn al-Fāriḍ proclaims:

“She said, ‘Another’s love thou hast sought and hast taken the wrong path, forsaking in thy blindness the highway unto me.”<sup>42</sup>

### 9.3.3:1 The causes of love

Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s love is born out of contemplating divine Beauty in everything. According to him all beauties are borrowed from the Beauty of God.

“And declare the absoluteness of beauty and be not moved to deem it finite by thy longing for a tinselled gaud,  
For the charm of every fair youth or lovely woman is lent to them from her beauty”<sup>43</sup>

God manifests Himself in all his creation. However, at the same time, He veils Himself through this creation. This means that people are ignorant to the reality that everything, including themselves, are nothing but a manifestation of God.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, Ibn al-Fāriḍ loved beauty in all its forms, and his love was sometimes kindled by beautiful human beings. As Ibn Khallikān remarks, he wrote a verse about a handsome butcher boy. This idea is very similar and even identical with what Ibn al-‘Arabī and Abdulkarīm al-Jilī thought of created beings

<sup>41</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, p.184 in *Khamriyyah*, v.33; trans. by Massignon, *The Odes of Ibnu'l-Farid*, p.187

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, *Tāyyya* v.84, (Trans. Nicholson, p.208)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, v.241-42, (Trans. Nicholson, p.222)

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, v.245-46

and creation in general. All of these eminent Sufis are inclined to the view that the beauty in creation is borrowed from the real Beloved's beauty.<sup>45</sup>

To illustrate Ibn al-Fāriq's approach it is instructive to look at his views on *samā'* or music. For Ibn al-Fāriq *samā'* is considered as an acceptable practice since it is a cause which reminds one of the Beloved. Ibn al-Fāriq justifies it on the grounds that it is an anodyne to the fever of the soul: its violent movements calm the agitating reminiscences awakened by music and rock the soul to rest. He says; "I have felt, when She is called to mind by the beautiful tones of a reciter (of the Qur'ān) or the piercing notes of a singer"<sup>46</sup>

Even if one accepts that the contemplation of beauty is the source of love and that the beauty exhibited in creation is a manifestation of God's beauty, there remains the important issue regarding the attainment of love. In other words, is love attainable by human endeavour or is it only attained by the grace of God? As far as Ibn al-Fāriq is concerned, he does not give a clear idea whether love is a *kasbī* state, acquired by human endeavour, or a *wahbī* one given by God as a grace. However, concerning his own love there is strong evidences from his poems that it is God-given (*wahbī*) and not a result of his endeavour.

"I gained my fealty to Her neither by hearing nor by sight nor by acquisition nor by the attraction of my nature,

But I was enamoured of Her in the world of command where is no manifestation, and my intoxication was prior to my appearance (in the created world)."<sup>47</sup>

It is possible to infer from these remarks that he believes that God's lovers are chosen pre-eternally. Hence, the attainment of Divine Love is *wahbī*, that is, God given and not *kasbī*, i.e., the result of personal endeavour.

This fact is important as it gives the Sufi a legitimacy which allows him to feel secure in the face of criticism and abuse. In Ibn al-Fāriq's understanding of love, therefore, there is no room for formality and pretence. In his religion of love his

<sup>45</sup> Hilmī, M, *Ibn al-Fāriq wa al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*, p.168

<sup>46</sup> Nicholson, *Studies*, p.237, v.437

<sup>47</sup> Ibn al-Fāriq, *Dīwān, Tāyyya*, v.157-58, (Trans. Nicholson, p.214)

friends are those who approved his ignominy.<sup>48</sup> As a result the lovers of God should not think of their honour and well-being rather that of the Beloved.<sup>49</sup> The lover should not care for the insults and criticism of others which he suffers in the way of love. In short, Ibn al-Fāriḍ inclines towards the sect of *Malāmatiyya*<sup>50</sup> who were of a similar persuasion. In addition, a striking comparison can be drawn between Ibn al-Fāriḍ's conception of ignominy and that of al-Ḥallāj who was also unmindful of the criticism of his friends.

### 9.3.3:2 Love and *Fanā'* (Annihilation)

Due to the importance that this concept has in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's paradigm of love, it is necessary to deal with it in some detail. This sub-section will, therefore, begin by looking at the definitions of *fanā'*, the nature of *fanā'*, the textual evidence for it and its different stages .

*Fanā'* can be classified under two levels according to al-Jurjāni. The first level of *fanā'* is the eradication of the vices through worship and striving. The second level is the loss of the senses through absorption by God. In the former level, it is the action of man which is dominant, whereas, in the latter it is love that causes the loss of the senses.<sup>51</sup> According to the above classification Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *fanā'* is that of the second kind, i.e., losing ones self in God's contemplation.

According to Ibn al-Fāriḍ real love is nothing less than *fanā'*, passing away in God . What this passing away in God means is that God's attributes are reflected in the lover<sup>52</sup> i.e. the lover gives up his will and surrenders to the will of the Beloved. *Fanā'* is a return to the original state in the "world of command" (*'ālam al-amr*), where we existed in God's knowledge without bodies. According to Ibn al-Fāriḍ, during that period of our existence, the soul was not alloyed in the shadow of the clay.<sup>53</sup> He maintains that after the souls are dressed with the clay of

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, v.80, 87

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, v.93

<sup>50</sup> *Malāmatiyyah* is a sect of Sufis who invite deliberate blame on themselves in order to avoid any kind of worldly fame and direct their attention exclusively for God. See al-Ḥūjwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, trans. Arabic by Abū al-'Azā'im. p.75

<sup>51</sup> al-Jurjāni, *Ta'rifāt*,

<sup>52</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān, Tā'iyya*, v.99, (Trans. Nicholson, p.210)

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, v.68

the body in this created world, they then became an obstacle between God and man. The only way to clear these obstacles is by loving God:

“The attributes dividing us which were not subsistent *there* (in the world of command) Love caused to pass away *here* (in the created world) and they vanished.”<sup>54</sup> After the removal of the attributes the lover and the beloved becomes the same: “And I saw that I was indubitably She whom I loved”<sup>55</sup>

Ibn al-Fāriḍ with these verses allude to the passage in the Qur’ān (7:171) where it is stated that God, having drawn forth from the loins of Adam all the future generations of mankind, said to them, “*Alastu bi Rabbikum*” “Am I not your Lord?”. The reply was “Indeed, yes”. This, in the view of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, was the first covenant of mutual love between God and His creatures.<sup>56</sup> In other words, Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s conception of love is not a new thing: it is merely a return to the primordial covenant made by all human beings with God.

These words have a striking similarity with the conception of love according to al-Hallaj. The only difference is that what al-Ḥallāj said publicly and clearly is said by Ibn al-Fāriḍ under the guise of poetry and erotic love.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s conception of *fanā’* must not be seen as the complete annihilation of the lover in the beloved. On the contrary, by passing away (*fanā’*) the mystic wins immortal life in God which is named as (*baqā’*); “By my life, though I lose my life in exchange for Her love, I am the gainer; and if She wastes away my heart, she will make it whole once more.”<sup>57</sup>

According to Ibn al-Fāriḍ the processes of *fanā’* and *baqā’* in God are realised through three stages:

- a) “sobriety” (*ṣaḥw*),
- b) “intoxication” (*sukr*),
- c) “the sobriety of union” (*ṣaḥwu ‘l-jam‘* or *al-ṣaḥw al-thāni*).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, v.159, (Trans. Nicholson, p.214)

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, v.162, (Trans. Nicholson, p.215)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, v.68

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, v.121

These levels must not be seen as unified and indivisible chunks: within each of these three levels there are sub-levels. A brief discussion of each of the stages will now follow in turn.

Taking the level of sobriety first, this is the ordinary level characterised by multiple and shifting consciousness as exhibited by ordinary men. This stage is the foundation on which the other levels and stages are built.

Moving on to the second stage, that of intoxication, this is characterised by the loss of consciousness in ecstasy. Its highest level is called “the greatest absence from the self” (*al-ghaybiyya al-kubrā*). To the extent that he even would not realise his death even if he died that very moment. The following verses aptly explain this situation;

“Through Her I became oblivious of myself, so that I thought myself another and did not seek the path that leads to thinking myself existent.”

“And I was so preoccupied with Her as to forget the preoccupation that made me forget myself: had I died for Her, I should not have been aware of my departure (from the world).”<sup>58</sup>

According to Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Moses represents this state since he fainted on hearing God’s voice.

This leads on to the last and highest mode of experience for Ibn al-Fāriḍ: *ṣaḥwu’l-jam’*, that is, returning to normal consciousness after intoxication.<sup>59</sup> This state belongs to the Prophet Mohammed since he visited the celestial realm in his *mi’rāj* whilst he was sober. He bore the majesty of the world of *amr*. Ibn al-Fāriḍ also claims this state for himself saying:

“All men are the sons of Adam, (and I am as they) save that I alone amongst my brethren have attained to the sobriety of union.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, v.509, (Trans. Nicholson, p.246)

<sup>59</sup> R.A. Nicholson, *The Idea of Personality*, p.26



Ibn al-Fāriḍ illustrates his experience of *fana* by giving an example of a woman possessed by a *jinn*. Such a woman can foretell the future, speak a foreign language that she did not speak before and numerous other miraculous events become possible. If this relationship can exist between a woman and a *Jinn*, notwithstanding the difference of their forms and qualities and despite the fact that both of them are contingent beings, surely, no one will deny that it may exist between the omnipotent Creator and the creature whom He has created in His own image.<sup>61</sup>

Having looked at some aspects of the conception of *fanā'* in Ibn al-Fāriḍ's paradigm of love, it is necessary to briefly look at the position of "*waḥdat al-wujūd*" or unity of being, within his framework. Contrary to al-Affifi's opinion, it seems that Ibn al-Fāriḍ follows Ibn Arabi in his terminology regarding the concept of unity of Being. al-Affifi<sup>62</sup> considers Ibn al-Fāriḍ as a believer of "unity of vision" (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*). However, there is strong evidence in his poetry which indicates the approach of Ibn 'Arabī in this matter. As an example he sings:

"She was appearing to Her lovers in every form of disguise in shapes of wondrous beauty,  
Now as Lubnā, anon as Buthaynā, and sometimes She was called 'Azza, who was so dear (to Kuthayyir)."<sup>63</sup>

It is quite clear that the worldly beloveds are manifestations of Divine Beauty in physical forms. This is confirmed in the following verse:

"They (fair women) are not other than She; no, and they never were. She hath no partner in Her beauty."<sup>64</sup>

In sum, therefore, it is apparent that Ibn al-Fāriḍ has leanings towards Ibn 'Arabī's conception of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. However, if one tries to find the exact terminology of Ibn 'Arabī, then this is not possible. Nevertheless, the essence and

<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān, Tāyyya*, v.311

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, v.223-225; Nicholson, *Studies*, p.219 (footnote 223-5)

<sup>62</sup> A. 'Affifi, *al-Ṭaṣawwuf al-Thawra al-Rūḥiyya*, p.216

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, trans. by Nicholson, *The Odes of Ibnu'l-Farid*, p.223, v.251-52

form of his poetry can be interpreted in a way so as to conform with the conception of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

Not only can Ibn al-Fāriḍ be compared with Ibn ‘Arabī, he can equally be compared with al-Ḥallāj as it is possible to find some similarities between them. For instance, in a similar fashion to al-Ḥallāj he believes in a kind of self-sacrificing love; giving away the *nafs* freely without expecting anything in return. Consider the following verse:

“What should I hope to be said of me except ‘Such a one died of love’? Who will ensure me of that (death)?-for it is that I seek.”<sup>65</sup>

The position of Satan is another common point between al-Ḥallāj and Ibn al-Fāriḍ. For example, al-Ḥallāj considered “Satan” as a true lover of God because he did not prostrate before Adam. Similarly Ibn al-Fāriḍ says:

“A soul [Satan]that would not let go the true love I bear, even though it were removed far (from Thee) by scorn and absence and hatred and the cutting-off of hope.”<sup>66</sup>

This verse clearly reminds us of Satan’s love in al-Ḥallāj’s paradigm: Satan was prepared to be hated and scorned if this was the price that love demanded. It might be said that Ibn al-Fāriḍ, among the Sufis whose philosophy of love has been considered, is closer to al-Ḥallāj than others.

#### 9.4 Love and Asceticism

Ibn al-Fāriḍ, like many of the Sufis, led an ascetic life style. His early retreats to Mount Mukattam and also his solitude later in Mecca show us that he was an ascetic . In his *Tāyyah* he mentions the difficult tasks and worships he went through, such as denying the pleasures of the body, fasting continuously, solitude

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.223, v,253

<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, v.105, trans. by Nicholson, p.210

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, v.63

and isolation.<sup>67</sup> However, an ascetic way of life was not an end in itself: it was a means to attaining closeness to God.

Ibn al-Fāriḍ provides us with a rationale for asceticism. The justification for this is: love was bestowed to the spirits in the world of *amr* ('*ālam al-amr*). However, this love later became adulterated with vices when the spirits descended into their worldly forms. Therefore, in order to cleanse it, it is necessary to go through ascetic practices. .

Although Ibn al-Fāriḍ led an ascetic life, he nevertheless deemed ascetic practices alone to be insufficient in attaining closeness to God. On the contrary, he believed that, if one has a choice between love and asceticism, then, love alone is sufficient. In other words, love is far superior to all other methods including asceticism, philosophy and theology . In his view lovers are kings over others.

“But do thou be happy with love, for (thereby) thou hast been made a chief over the best of God’s creatures who serve Him (by devotion and piety) in every nation.”<sup>68</sup>

He even finds nothing wrong in making lovers boast at the ascetics.

“Win those heights and vaunt thyself above an ascetic who was exalted by works and by a soul that purged itself (of worldly desires)”<sup>69</sup>

Ibn al-Fāriḍ provides a justification for the superiority of love over asceticism. In his opinion, ascetics love God for his mercy and reward which He bestows on them, but true mystics love Him for all His attributes: His wrath and vengeance no less than His mercy and forgiveness. From this perspective he criticises the ascetics. For example, he addresses God and says : “If the ascetics are fascinated by some of the beauties that are Thine, everything in Thee is the source of my fascination.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See *Ibid.*, v.197-203 and 268-276

<sup>68</sup> Nicholson, p.227, v.296

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227, v.297

<sup>70</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān, Tāīyya*, v.82

This approach has a close resemblance with Rābi‘a’s paradigm of love which excludes any kind of (self)interest in one’s devotion to God. For example, he proclaims:

“Thou are worthier of this glory than one who strives and exerts himself in hope (of reward) and in fear (of punishment).”<sup>71</sup>

In short, Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s love is not the result of any kind of interest or benefit received from the Beloved. His love for the Beloved is above all kind of worldly concerns.

### 9.5 The characteristics of lovers according to Ibn al-Fāriḍ:

Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s paradigm of love can be encapsulated in his description of the characteristics of the lover of God. Examples of these will be now enumerated.

1-The lover of God must be happy with the actions of God. He must be thankful, even, against calamities, instead of complaining as long as those calamities do not affect his love.<sup>72</sup> Ibn al-Fāriḍ sees the positive role that these calamities can play in strengthening one’s love.

2-The lover of God must be annihilated (*fāni*) in God’s love and nothing should remain existent. The annihilation must be such that, even if death seeks the lover, it should not be able to find him.<sup>73</sup>

3-The lover must show his weakness and his sense of need to his Beloved. In addition, the lover must be modest in the presence of His Beloved.<sup>74</sup>

6-The lover’s whole attention must be directed towards the Beloved; “Verily, thou art the desire of my heart, and the end of my search, and the goal of my aim, and my choice and my chosen.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, v.304

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, v.46-49

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, v.31, 39

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, v.45

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, v 76

In sum, the lover should present a picture of complete devotion, loyalty and longing. His life must cease to exist for his own self: only the existence of the beloved must be affirmed.

### 9.6 The Influence of Other Sufis on Ibn al-Fāriḍ

This section will attempt to provide some insight into the sources that influenced Ibn al-Fāriḍ, not from a poetical point of view, but from the evolution of his understanding of love.

Beginning with Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, there is no direct reference to her name in Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s work. However, he appears to share certain aspects of her paradigm of Divine love. For example, Rābi‘a’s notion of disinterested love is reflected in Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s *Tāyya* (p.141). This resemblance alone does not definitively prove that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was influenced by Rābi‘a: it is possible that they both reached the same ideas independently.

The influence of al-Ḥallāj on Ibn al-Fāriḍ has been hinted at earlier in connection with the former’s notion of suffering in love. Therefore it is not necessary to repeat it here.

Moving on to Ibn ‘Arabī, there seems to be a very close resemblance between their paradigms of love. Although Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry, and especially his *Tāyya*, reflects the doctrines of Ibn ‘Arabī, there is controversy as to whether or not they ever met. An assumption that they did meet is accepted by the Arab commentators and scholars. However, Scattolin and many other orientalisks dismiss the idea on the grounds of lack of historical evidence.<sup>76</sup> In al-Maqqārī’s (d./1632) account of this relationship he says that al-Maqrīzī (d.1422) related that Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī (d.1240) sent word to Ibn al-Fāriḍ asking his permission to write a commentary on his *Tāyya* and the latter answered: “Your book entitled *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* is such a commentary on it”. This report might be true or false, but it proves that there are a close similarities between Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Ibn

Arabi. The influence of Sheikh al-Akbar is evident to even a casual reader of them both. However, even if one does not incline to believe in the influence of the one on the other, then it is logical to conclude that they held similar views independently from each other as proposed by D. B. Macdonald and Scattolin.<sup>77</sup>

As for the similarities between the two Sheikhs, they both believe in the religion of love and accept the primary importance of love in the religion. In addition, they both utilise the terms of profane love in their poetry, in order to indicate their mystical love for God. However, the important difference between them is that Ibn al-Fāriḍ, like al-Ḥallāj, is very intoxicated in his love: his poetry cannot be regarded as the fruit of rational thinking. On the other hand, in Ibn ‘Arabī, besides his mystical experience, we see the traces of philosophical and rational thought.

### 9.7 His influence

Having briefly looked at the influences which shaped the thinking of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, it is now time to look at the influence of Ibn al-Fāriḍ on others. As a general comment, Ibn al-Fāriḍ left a lasting influence on many of the Sufis after him. For example, his *Tāyya* and *Khamriyya* are among the most commented pieces of poetry in the Sufi tradition.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, his tomb, located at the foot of al-Muqattam mountain, is still an attractive centre for pilgrimage. The following verses, often recited at his tomb, are a witness of his influence even today:

“Pass by the cemetery at the foot of al-‘Ārid,  
Say: Peace upon you, oh Ibn al-Fāriḍ!  
You have shown in your Naẓm al-Sulūk marvels  
You have revealed a deep, well-guarded mystery.  
You have drunk from a Sea of love and friendship,  
You have quaffed from a bounteous, unlimited Ocean.”<sup>79</sup>

Although slim in size, his *Dīwān* attracted great interest in later times. Many important Sufis such as al-Farghānī (d.1300), al-Qāshānī, (d.1334), al-Qaysarī

<sup>76</sup> G. Scattolin, ‘The Mystical experience of ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ,’ v.82, p.275

<sup>77</sup> R.A.Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, p.23; G. Scattolin, ‘The Mystical experience of ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ,’ p.285

<sup>78</sup> See for the commentaries on his *Dīwān*, M. Ḥilmī, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ wa al-Ḥubb al-Ilāhī*, p.90 ff

(d.1350), Jāmi‘ (d.1492), al-Birūnī (d.1615), and al-Nābulusī (d.1730) have written large volumes of commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ.<sup>80</sup> As a result of these continuous commentaries, his conception of Divine Love reached all the corners of Islamic world.

However, one point to note is that Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry is overshadowed by Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy. Due to overwhelming influence of Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s commentators translated the same mystical philosophy into his poetry. In this way, concepts and terms foreign to Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s philosophy, were introduced into his work.

### 9.8 Conclusion

1-Ibn al-Fāriḍ is considered the master of the genre of mystical love poetry in the Arabic language. He showed that poetry can be used to express the most delicate feelings and beliefs with the genre of prose.

2-He employs the metaphors of wine and profane love poetry. These meanings are so interwoven into his poetry, that they may be read either as love poems or as mystical hymns.<sup>81</sup> Although this style was very common in Persian literature, in Arabic literature it was rare and Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a pioneer in the utilisation of profane love poetry to express love for God.

3-For Ibn al-Fāriḍ love is not a mere way worshipping God, furthermore, it is a vehicle to reach at unity (*ittiḥād*) with God.

4-His style of expressing his love, in general terms, is not in complete harmony with the Qur’anic depiction of God. In the Qur’ān, one can not find verses which describes God’s relationship with man in terms of profane love.

5-Although there appears to be some similarities between Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj and Ibn Arabī, there is no concrete evidence that Ibn al-Fāriḍ

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<sup>79</sup> G. Scattolin, ‘The Mystical experience of ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ’, p.274

<sup>80</sup> I. J. Boullata, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, New York, 1987, v.7, p.557

<sup>81</sup> R.A. Nicholson, ‘Ibn al-Fāriḍ’ in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Ed., Leiden, 1971), v.3, p.763

was directly influenced by such Sufis. It is possible that Ibn al-Fāriḍ reached these similar ideas independently.



## CHAPTER TEN

### The Conclusion

#### 10.1 The Historical Phases of the Concept of Sufi Love

The aim of this research was to analyse the paradigms of love that appeared during the historical development of Islam. The popular conception of Islam, compared with, say, Christianity, is that it is a cold and abstract religion with little room for love. In order to determine the validity of this assumption, this research set out to explore the phenomenon of Sufism which appears to go against this common perception. It can be said, without any fear of exaggeration, that Sufism has had a far reaching impact not only on Islamic ideas and theology but also on the Islamic way of life.

The originality of this research lies in the fact that it is the first attempt to presents the Sufis' concept of love in the form of paradigms. Although there are references to be found in books related to Sufism, before now there was no research fully devoted to the study of Sufi love. This research exclusively attempts to present different conceptions of love in paradigms. Hence it can be used as a starting point for more detailed studies as well.

Traditionally, among Islamic sciences, Sufism has generally been equated with the notion of *zuhd*, that is, extreme fear of God and renunciation of the world. As was indicated in the introductory chapters, the derivations of the term *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) from *ṣūf* (woollen dress worn by ascetics) also supports this notion. However, the fundamental thesis of this study is that this conventional depiction ignores a very important facet of Sufism: the role that the concept of love plays. In fact, a closer analysis of Sufi thought reveals that the notion of love is a fundamental basis of Sufism since it permeated all aspects of a Sufi's life. Furthermore, it trickled down into popular culture and showed itself in such realms as that of poetry. Therefore, it can be said with a certain degree of conviction that it was the Sufis who developed Islam as a religion of love. The concept of love in their paradigms reached a peak which has not been paralleled in the Islamic tradition.

The Sufis built what we have characterised as their paradigms of love on the foundations of the Quran and Prophetic Traditions. The Quran, as was shown in the third chapter, cannot be seen purely as a book of love; nevertheless, it employs the word love (*ḥubb*) and several of its synonyms such as (*wudd*). Furthermore, its verses hold out the possibility that love could exist between man and God. The Quranic paradigm of love was defined in terms of obedience to God and the Prophet. In the early days of Islam, these verses were not given prominence as the emphasis was on strict obedience to Islam. However, later Sufis read their own interpretations into the Quranic paradigm and sought to legitimise their positions by referring to the Quran, thus bringing these verses into prominence.

For the Sufis the Prophetic traditions were an even greater source of inspiration. They supplied additional information which was apparently absent from the Quran. Love between God and man was described in human terms; even the possibility of becoming one with God was implied. For example the ḥadīth that God becomes the eyes, ears etc. of man, provided a strong basis for Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Ḥallāj to develop their paradigms of love, centred around the concept of unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). Furthermore, the Prophetic traditions also provided the Sufis with the fundamental basis of their cosmological approach. For example, the foundation for the Sufis’ system of love was the ḥadīth, “ I was a hidden treasure and loved (*aḥbabtu*) to be known, therefore I created the creation so that they may know me.”

Although the Sufi paradigms of love relied upon the Quran and Ḥadīth, they did not remain uniform. The Quran and Ḥadīth were open to interpretation and each individual Sufi brought his own personality and social conditioning to bear on these interpretations. For example, some Sufis, such as al-Ghazālī inclined to a cautious and intellectual approach, whereas others, such as al-Ḥallāj, exhibited a bold and strongly emotional one. Nevertheless, it is possible to pick out key phases in the development of the Sufi paradigms of love. In this conclusion the outline of the different stages of the concept of love will be presented in its developmental continuum. In addition, the general features of each particular stage will be outlined.

**10.1:1 The First Stage:** This stage is characterized by the early ascetics. It was predominantly characterised by the movement of asceticism which was gaining ascendancy during this period. The early ascetics did not employ the concept of love as often as they did the concept of fear. The love of God was overshadowed by the fear of God. The social circumstances of the time certainly had a role to play in this; and Sufism was a reaction to the corruption and decadence of the society which was a result of the Islamic Conquests and their resultant prosperity. As a result of this, the Sufis employed the tool of excessive fear in order to turn people away from indulgence in the pleasures of the world.

However, this excessive use of the concept of fear proved somewhat transitory as it failed to retain its appeal for long and alternative paradigms began to appear. The early Sufis' one-sided promotion of the concept of fear did not reflect a balanced view of the Quranic verses. As a result some Sufis presented the concept of love as a new dimension to the conventional Sufi teachings of the time.

**10.1:2 The Second stage:** This stage in the development of love was a direct reaction to the paradigm of fear. A strong emphasis on fear resulted in a very egoistic outlook to religious life: everyone was concerned to save themselves from the punishment of hell and to gain the reward of Paradise. To some Sufis the essence of religion was being ignored with this emphasis on personal interest. This state of affairs evoked a powerful reaction from certain individual Sufis. The most prominent was that of Rābi'a who reacted to these Sufis' approach on the basis that they worshipped God because of their own selfish interests. For her, it seemed that the early ascetics used God to protect themselves from His punishment or to attain His paradise; hence their sole purpose was their own salvation. The beauty, majesty and glory of God was ignored.

In response, Rābi'a developed the concept of disinterested love. As the forerunner of the concept of love Rābi'a developed a dual classification of love: interested (self centred) and disinterested. Rābi'a's paradigm of love had the beauty of being simple and easily understood. Throughout the following centuries the influence of her paradigm of love can be seen again and again. At times it is repeated almost

verbatim, and at others it is reflected in new terminology. In addition to her groundbreaking classification, Rābi'a's methodological approach of classifying lovers of God according to their motives, opened up the possibility that love between God and man can be experienced and communicated. In short, it paved the way for the later generation of Sufis to construct their paradigms of love based on their personal experiences. A precedent had been set.

In summary, Rābi'a's paradigm of love was centred around the concept of disinterested love. She strongly believed that our love for God should be purely for His sake. In this way she aimed to cleanse religious life from the "evil" of egoistic desires. This emphasis was welcomed, not only by the Sufis, but also, by the mainstream scholars of Islam. It is also interesting to note that Rābi'a was accepted among the Sufi circles as the originator of Divine love. This indicates the Sufis readiness to admit female adepts into their inner circles.

The second stage in the development of the paradigm of love shows the first signs of a theory of love being developed by Rābi'a. This stage is also characterised by simplicity in comparison to the complex systems which were to come later.

**10.1:3 The Third Stage:** The simple division of Rābi'a's theory of love was evolved by other Sufis into increasingly systematic and complex theories. Rābi'a had limited the application of her paradigm of love to the field of worship. Later Sufis placed their paradigms of love as the basis of their cosmologies, making love the central focus of creation, so much so that, love became the cause of all creation. Furthermore, Rābi'a had not delved into the intricacies of the process and nature of love between man and God. This untrodden path was traversed by the later Sufis. In short, no stone was left unturned and every possible avenue was explored. During this process the paradigm of love became the preserve of a select few. For the scholars of mainstream Islam the Sufis were moving into dangerous territory, bordering on heresy and blasphemy. The third stage led to the deterioration of the good relations that had existed between the Sufis and the mainstream scholars after Rābi'a's time.

The Sufi mystic al-Ḥallāj best exemplifies this trend. His pronouncements, such as “ I am the reality” (*ana al-Ḥaqq*) and concepts such as *fanā*’ (annihilation in the beloved) and the unification of the lover and beloved, posed a threat to the mainstream scholars. In the end al-Ḥallāj was executed for his views. This stage is marked by the increasing hatred and suspicion between the Sufis and the scholars. Suspicion grew as the Sufis developed their views and became bolder in giving expression to them<sup>1</sup>. The brutal execution of al-Ḥallāj was the culmination of this rift.

In addition to this, Sufi love became more complex and structured. Rābi‘a’s paradigm of love, drew a sharp division between worldly love and Divine love: the two were not compatible. For example, one could not claim to love a worldly object with a religious intention or motive. Contrary to this, the paradigms of love of later Sufis, such as Ibn ‘Arabī, allowed for the possibility of loving anything as long as one remembered that God is manifested in everything. Although the dichotomy of Rābi‘a’s paradigm of love lost much of its significance, the two paradigms still retained certain similarities. However, it is clear that the paradigms of love of al-Ḥallāj and Ibn ‘Arabī, for example, evolved further away from the original paradigm of love expounded by Rābi‘a.

**10.1:4 The Fourth Stage:** The next phase of development can be characterised by the movement for synthesis and harmonisation between the scholars of mainstream Islam and the Sufis. The gulf of hatred, that had been arisen in the third stage, needed to be bridged. The personality of al-Ghazālī played a leading role in this process of reconciliation. He was the voice that would soften the attacks of the orthodox scholars against Sufi love.

In order to make his position acceptable to mainstream Islam, al-Ghazālī based his arguments on the authority of the Quran and Ḥadīth. In addition, he employed rational arguments extensively. Furthermore, within his paradigm of Divine love everything is explicable in terms of human love. For example, the causes of Divine love are all exemplified, or their counterparts are found, in the field of human love. This would explain the success of al-Ghazālī in making Sufi love acceptable, both to the Scholars and ordinary people. In other words he targeted

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<sup>1</sup> Gibb, H. A. R., *Islam*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984), p.91

both the mind and the heart without sacrificing one for the other. In contrast, al-Ghazālī's Sufi predecessors had sacrificed the intellect over the ecstatic experiences of the heart, and were thus misunderstood by the mainstream scholars who relied more on the mind than the heart. Furthermore, the importance of communicating their ideas in a clear way was not an important consideration for the earlier Sufis. For al-Ghazālī, presentation of his ideas in a structured and simple manner was crucial. His teaching experience will most certainly have played a role in his methodological approach.

**10.1:5 The Fifth Stage:** The culmination and final synthesis of the Sufi paradigms of love is found in the writings of the great Sheikh Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī, the famous mystic of Murcia. His paradigm of love has influenced the history and development of Islam greatly. This is because his paradigm of love is the most comprehensive both in terms of metaphysics and cosmology one. For this reason our research devoted a comparatively greater space to him than other Sufis.

The four basic currents, highlighted in the previous four stages, revealed themselves at different times and in varying degrees of intensity. The prime example of their synthesis can be seen in the Paradigm of love of Ibn 'Arabī, who harmonised these currents. For example, the main motives of his paradigm appear to be taken from the teachings of al-Ḥallāj. This manifests itself in the concept of unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), that is, everything is a manifestation of God. Consequently, every form of love is a reflection of God's love. In other words God's love permeates every aspect of creation. Therefore, in Ibn 'Arabī's understanding mercy and love are the essence of God as well as that of religion.

On the other hand, the style of Ibn Arabī, reflects the intellectual methodology of al-Ghazālī. The Shaykh al-Akbar's paradigm of love is presented in an organised and a rational manner.

**10.1:6 The Sixth Stage:** Finally, with regard to Ibn Fāriḍ, his significance in the development of the paradigms of love lies not in any novel ideas but in his style of expression. His utilisation of profane poetry as a medium of expression for his

views inadvertently led to the mass popularisation and dissemination of Sufi ideas. The key distinction between Ibn Fāriq's poetry and that of earlier Sufi attempts are his mastery of Arabic poetry and his exclusive usage of poetry to propagate his beliefs. In many other respects, the love paradigm of *Ṣulṭān al-ʿĀshiqīm* (Prince of lovers) was similar to that of Ibn ʿArabī.

Having presented a brief summary of the Sufi paradigms of love from a theoretical perspective, our conclusion would remain incomplete without mentioning the practical consequences that these paradigms produced in the hearts and minds of Muslims both in the past and present. Beginning with the early Sufis, the emphasis on the concept of fear of God and the baselessness of human beings, led to a pessimistic outlook to life in general. In their belief, the world had no value in the eyes of God. On the social level this resulted in their isolation from society; which they believed was innately wicked. In short, the society envisaged by the early Sufis was one characterised by a gloomy view of religion and God. This social ideal can be seen even today in some parts of the Muslim world, especially in the areas where Sufism is not popular.

The later stages of development of the paradigms of love have had an enormous impact on Islamic thought in general. The shift of emphasis to the positive aspects of God, centred around the notion of love, proved popular: God created us because he loved us. As a result humanity became a centre of God's love and its manifestation. Humanity was now considered innately good and the Creation as the manifestation of God's beauty. This approach shows elements of the philosophy of humanism, that is, putting the fulfilment of humanity at the centre.

This shift in emphasis, naturally necessitated a reappraisal of the way in which God was perceived. God was no longer seen as a stern judge on the lookout for mankind's errors, in order to inflict his wrath on them. On the contrary, the conception of God was transformed into an exceedingly merciful and beneficent God, whose mercy extended over all humanity irrespective of their perceived evil. For example, Ibn Arabī and al-Ḥallāj brought Pharaoh and Satan, the embodiments of evil in Islamic tradition, under the ambit of God's all-encompassing mercy.

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This approach to religion and humanity opened up new dimensions in the development of Islamic thought, providing an alternative to the strict asceticism and formal piety of some Muslim groups. An alternative which had lasting appeal to the Islamic world both in the past and the present. The strong humanistic undertones of the Sufi paradigms of love also attracted great interest in the academic circles of the non-Islamic world, in particular the western world. The voluminous amount of literature and translations of Sufi Masters whose works centred around the concept of love provides evidence of their enduring validity and appeal.

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