Research Article

Unlocking Spiritual Enlightenment: A Critical Study of Idries Shah's *The Way of the Sufi*

Sherzad Shafie Babo Barzani / Department of English Language, College of Languages, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Sirwan Abudlkarim Ali / Department of English Language, College of Languages, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

CORRSPONDANCE
Sherzad Shafie Babo Barzani
Sherzad.shafie@su.edu.krd

Abstract

The Way of the Sufi (2015) stands as a significant signpost into Sufi literature, offering profound insights into the mystical tradition of Sufism, and introducing revered Sufi figures, their ideologies, and texts. This study analyses Shah's main work, focusing on its portrayal of Sufi philosophy, enlightenment practices, and transmission of spiritual knowledge through literary styles used in the book. The study argues that Sufi literature's effective method of spiritual guidance and enlightenment is empowered by the distinctive narrative style and philosophical themes presented by the Sufis in the form of poems or stories. This study highlights the significance of Sufi literature in general, its literary style, and the spiritual accomplishments presented. A comprehensive examination of Shah's thoughts is aimed at revealing the profound depths of Sufi teachings to offer new insights and develop an understanding of Sufi's philosophical tenets, deep divine love, and broader cultural implications of spiritual devotion.

1. Introduction

Sufi literature has long had a significant impact on the Western theological tradition and arts. The artistic and eloquent style in which Sufi literature is written captures and still enchants the Western literary and philosophical tradition of world literature. With its religion-based origins and spiritual practice, the Sufi literary tradition represents a window into the human experience intersecting with the other worldly connection between the soul and the divine. The essence of Sufism is presented in Shah's book together with its impact on the evolution of Sufi literature. The main research data in this study is Sufiism as presented in The Way of the Sufi by the Indian – British Muslim writer Idries Shah (1924-1996).

2. Methodology

Through Reader-Response Theory and Philosophical Inquiry, these two basic tools are utilized to analyze and interpret Shah's The Way of the Sufi. The theory of Reader-Response along with the Philosophical inquiry lends an excellent method to probe through issues like the reader's response and personal observation. Further, they allow for a thorough revision of stagnant discussion and an examination of varying perspectives. They also permit a reconsideration of the major ideas and notions in Shah's study experience. Through both lenses, deeper insights can be gained. With an emphasis on personal decoding over authorial intent or social norms, this theory widens the horizons for thoughtful analysis and encourages weighing many navigations when interpreting artistic creations.

Since Shah's literary text deals with an individual's spirituality, the Reader-Response literary theory as mentioned above can be the best theory to examine the text by reflecting on the reader's deeper understanding of the themes of enlightenment and spirituality in Sufi literature. According to Tyson (2006), Reader-Response Theory empowers readers to participate actively in the meaning-making process and acknowledges the subjectivity of interpretation while emphasizing the value of personal experiences and perspectives (177). This literary theory provides a valuable framework for studying Shah's book and examining the power of its enlightenment in Sufi literature and Sufism. Readers can actively engage with the text, explore their responses, and uncover deeper meaning within the scope of Sufi teachings.

Considering this theory while closely reading this book, readers will follow the transformative power of Sufi literature and begin with a personal spiritual journey. One of its key aspects is the recognition that meaning is not solely derived from the text itself but is co-created through the interaction between the reader and the text. In this context, Tyson indicates that "there is no purely individual subjective response. According to Fish (2006), what we take to be our individual subjective responses to literature are really products of the interpretive community to which we belong .(176) "

Within the framework of The Way of the Sufi, this theory allows readers to bring their own experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds into the interpretation process. Sufi literature often contains rich symbolism, allegory, and metaphors, and Reader Response theory encourages readers to reflect on how these elements resonate with their understanding of enlightenment and spirituality.

Ideas are presented as reflective of the reader's values, beliefs, and experiences. Reading the book mirrors those reflective moments of our lives, the question posed guiding us along unseen pathways towards understanding long hidden zones in the desert of self. On the one hand, philosophical inquiry deals with profound preconceptions and forcing fresh folds in the fabric of an individual's thinking. Together they lend an acute tool towards a profound critical practice to dissect Shah's philosophical and Sufi notions and practice. Multiple meanings emerge from the text The Way of the Sufi allowing for varying ideas, interpretations, and examination to smoothly flow and offering a wide scope for discussion .

Our individual life journeys are influenced by outside currents, together shifting our collective understanding of philosophical themes. Finally, the ever-flowing sea of meaning remains vast

yet fulfilling to explore through open-minded interpretations. Philosophical inquiry, on the other hand, provides a crucial understanding of Shah's work, because it permits a wide scope for the literary and figurative aspects of the text to be examined including deep allegory and symbolism. As Shah explains, philosophical questioning allows unearthing deeper meaning, and layering interpretation with depth and nuance. This is evident in Ibn al-ʿArabī's non-dualistic hermeneutics, navigating texts to draw connections between Christian and Islamic Sufi traditions, weaving a tapestry of dual heritage (Wolfe 2016 p.177).

Shah, in The Way of the Sufi, negotiates Jesus and Muḥammad's teachings, gaining comprehensive insights like a scholar providing a powerful lens to bring significant hidden details into focus. Thus, philosophical questioning not only enriches interpretations but bridges cultural perspectives in analysis, uniting differing views as streams joining to form a mighty river. In this sense, Shah says "The connection between the ancient practical philosophies and the present ones is seen to have been based upon the higher-level unity of knowledge, not upon appearances. This explains why the Muslim Rumi has Christian, Zoroastrian and other disciples….[and] why, indeed, Jesus is said to stand, in a sense, at the head of the Sufis"(2015, pp. 218-19). This means that the continuity between ancient and modern practical philosophies is rooted in a deep, unified, spiritual knowledge base rather than just superficial similarities. This connection across diverse beliefs explains why Rumi, though a Muslim, had followers from various religious backgrounds.

3. Literature Review and Contributions to Sufism

Largely, the mystical tradition of Sufism is deeply rooted among Muslims and Islamic schools of thought and captivated scholars and seekers for centuries. This literature review aims to specify an insightful overview of the key works that have significantly contributed to the consideration of Sufism and its principles. These inspiring texts cover a range of topics, from historical development to philosophical underpinnings, and afford a comprehensive framework for recondite Sufi notions and practices.

In addition to *The Way of the Sufi*, Shah wrote other works that have played a crucial role in expanding the knowledge and understanding of Sufism. His books cover a wide range of topics, including Sufi poetry, philosophy, psychology, and the lives of renowned Sufi masters. His works have not only preserved the wisdom of Sufi tradition but also made it accessible to a global audience, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers. As Moore (1986, pp. 4-8) emphasizes Shah actively promoted innovative teaching methods to transmit the essence of Sufism. Through workshops, lectures, and storytelling sessions, Shah engaged with his listeners providing them with valuable experiential learning opportunities. He emphasized the importance of direct experience and personal transformation, encouraging individuals to embody the teachings of Sufism in their daily lives.

Globally, Shah's works and teachings have left a lasting impact on spiritual seekers and scholars from diverse backgrounds and cultures. His ability to bridge Eastern and Western perspectives has helped make Sufism more accessible to a broader readership. Shah's contribution and dedication to preserving and disseminating the wisdom of Sufism ensures that its teachings continue to benefit seekers of truth through his other works such as *The Sufis* (1964) which provides an extensive exploration of the history, traditions, and practices of Sufism. It introduces readers to the lives and teachings of notable Sufi masters and offers a valuable overview of the Sufi tariqah.

Secondly, *Caravan of Dreams*" (1968) embraces a collection of Sufi stories presenting a treasury of teachings and wisdom and conveying profound insights through captivating narratives. These stories serve as a means of transmitting Sufi knowledge and understanding. Finally, *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way* (1978) and *Sufi*

Thought and Action (1990) combine psychology and spirituality to explore the process of learning and personal transformation.

Regarding the Western Sufi scholars and researchers, probably among the most notable ones stands Carl W. Ernest. Ernst's *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (2017) stands as a foundational text in the field of Sufism studies. Through meticulous exploration, Ernst navigates discussions on various Sufi figures, Sufi tariqa, and philosophies. His book serves as an invaluable resource for those embarking on a journey to fathom the intricate dimensions of Sufi thoughts within Islamic tradition. Ernst's exploration of Islamic mystical traditions shares an extensive and accessible exploration of Sufism, encompassing its historical evolution, practices, and philosophies in the same way as Shah's *The Sufis*.

Abun-Nasr's *Understanding Sufism: Crossroads in Islam Scholarly Analysis of Sufism within the Broader Context of Islam* offers invaluable insights into its historical development and core conceptual ideas. This work played a key role in fostering a deeper comprehension of Sufism's integral position within the larger Islamic tradition, enriching the scholarly discourse on this mystical tradition.

Brewster (1976, pp. 31-47) explores Sufism's transience of cultural boundaries, examining how it became a universal phenomenon embraced across boundaries as absorbent as the permeable Sufi path itself. Overall, seeking truth within, Sufism flourished far beyond its birthplace through a shared quest for closeness to the divine.

Michon's *Sufism: Love and Wisdom* (2006) explores the various dimensions, practices, and underlying philosophy of Sufism. Through extensive interpretation, Michon offers readers a deeper insight into the heart of Sufi thoughts and practices. His work serves as an inspiration for those seeking to navigate the intricate pathways of Sufi wisdom.

Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (2010) Seductively lends an extensive examination of Sufi philosophy, particularly focusing on Ibn Arabi's teachings. While providing a deep insight into the philosophical underpinnings.

Moreover, Chittick's focused study on mysticism and Knysh's historical overview contribute to a holistic understanding of Sufi thought. Furthermore, Barks's (1914) translation of Rumi's poetry provides a beautiful artistic gateway to the mystical themes of Sufism. It is evident, from the previous discussion, that Western scholars assiduously attempt to study and examine the Eastern Sufi tradition. Ernst's comprehensive introduction, Shah's influential exploration of Sufism and, Abun-Nasr's contextual analysis offer rich embroidery of knowledge regarding the importance of Sufism as an Islamic school of thought. On the other hand, all are excellent examples of the meticulous efforts researchers and scholars attempted to offer a rich embroidery.

4. Sufism and Shah's Impact on English Literature

The impact of Sufism and Sufi literature on English Romantic poets and contemporary literary works can be attributed to the historical interactions. Sufi literature emerged as a significant aspect of Muslim culture and society during the Golden Age of the Islamic era. Initially, ceremonial oral traditions were practiced in Takia by groups of Darwish led by the Sheikh to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammed. These ceremonies are living examples where many didactic hymns are sung with teaching practices. According to Green (2012), Sufi ideas were eventually recorded in written form, with deep divine love being a prominent theme in these early writings, mostly in Baghdad during the second half of the ninth century. As time passed, Sufi literature evolved and drew inspiration from other literary genres, such as poetry and prose. This allowed the spread of Sufi ideas across different regions, including India, Persia, and Central Asia, as mystics used their writings to share their

spiritual experiences and offer guidance to those seeking enlightenment and otherworldly knowledge (p.15). Incorporating poetic language with philosophical concepts like deep divine love, Sufi literature became a captivating and enduring writing style.

Sufi literature often centers around themes of deep divine love "Ishq", mysticism, spirituality, and devotion to God, which hold great significance for Sufi followers and reflect their yearning for a reunion with the Divine. In a similar quest for divine love, as noted by Ezzeldin (2018) Romantic poets also seek to understand the essence of God and the passion, spiritual seekers aguishly hold (pp.121-127). A good example in this regard is pantheism in Romantic poetry especially in the works of William Blake (1757-1827) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850). Milani, (2011) referred to love as "Hubb or Ishq" and takes on a central theme in Sufism and mysticism starting from the ninth century onward. On this occasion, he brings two verses from Koliyat-e Shams-e Tabrizi, "Ghazal" 683 when Rumi sings:

مرا حق از می عشق آفریده است   همان عشقم اگر مرگم بساید "

"Created from the wine of love, Only love remains when I die (p.45)."

However, these themes are not presented at face value but are instead represented through symbols and allegories, allowing readers to think about their mystical meanings and spiritual lessons. This use of symbolism serves as a way for Sufis to impart important teachings about deep divine love, mysticism, spirituality, and devotion to God, all of which are crucial aspects of their pursuit of enlightenment.

In England and during the Romantic era, Sufi literature had a strong influence on English writers due to its focus on seeking truth and enlightenment. This cultural exchange can be observed in the works of renowned poets like William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), who incorporated elements from Persian mysticism. Love, known as "Hubb" in Arabic and "Ishq" in Persian, Kurdish, and Turkish, became a prominent theme for Muslim mystics in expressing their longing for God (Korteling 1928. P. 23). This concept remains relevant to modern readers, evident in the popularity of Rumi's translated works among English-speaking audiences. The shared pursuit of spiritual fulfillment through love is a significant connection between Sufi literature and Romanticism in English Literature. The focus of Sufism was on inner perfection through meditation, chanting, and dancing. Sijbrand (2012) states:

> Drawing on the work of Edward Said, Carl Ernst has demonstrated that it had its origins largely in the need of European colonialists to better understand the religions, cultures and beliefs of the people they governed. With the exception of some familiarity with the ideas of such figures as Rabia (d. 801), Ibn Al-Farid (d. 1235) or Sadi (d. 1292) in the pre-colonial period, very few in Europe or North America possessed any serious knowledge of the Sufi tradition (Chodkiewicz 12; Schimmel 7-8).

Despite their differences in religion and culture, Sufi literature and English Romanticism are two movements linked by their mutual emphasis on deep divine love as a means of connecting with loving, the Divine. Accordingly, Shah's *The Way of the Sufi* highlights the enduring appeal of mystical concepts that transcend language barriers and echo with readers worldwide. The infusion of Sufi philosophy into English literature as presented in the book has left a lasting impact on both traditions, enriching our understanding of different cultures and showcasing our shared human experiences. As *The Way of the Sufi* continues to engage with diverse perspectives, the English culture echoes the translation of Sufi's works, such as Rumi's works, that reminds readers of the beauty and power of cross-cultural exchange, even in seemingly unrelated fields like literature.

When it comes to contemporary English Literature the role of Shah's works becomes extraordinarily important. According to Webster when Shah published *The Sufis* (1964), the *Washington Post* declared it "A seminal book of the century", while writers such as Doris Lessing, JD Salinger, and Geoffrey Grigson praise its deep spiritual values. Hughes, while commenting on Shah's book, asserts that "The Sufis must be the biggest society of sensible men on Earth" (2014, p.25). Shah (2015) holds great significance for Muslim and Western readers alike, promoting cultural understanding between different societies. Through its exploration of universal themes like love, unity, and the search for spiritual truth, the book serves as a bridge between cultures through the presentation of a captivating genre, readers are reminded of their shared humanity and the potential for connection through shared experiences.

4.1 Clearing Ambiguities from Western Sufi Traditions and the Neo-Sufism

The mystical traditions of Sufism have long captured the interests of both Western scholars and spiritual pilgrims alike in their quest to understand Islamic esotericism in greater depth. Shah refers to *The Mystics of Islam* (1914) by Nicholson and identifies the Sufi scholar, Al-Ghazali, as the one who utilized a psychological method similar to Freud's interpretation of symbols nearly nine hundred years before Freud's time (2015, p. 77).

This shows that the Sufis were familiar with the principles of the "Jungian Archetypal theory" in ancient times, as evidenced by Landau's book *The Philosophy of Ibn Arabi* (1959). It is worth noting that Freud's indebtedness to Kabbalism[1] and Jewish mysticism, which some Jewish authorities associate with Sufism or consider identical to it, is discussed in Bakan's work Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition (1958).

In *The Way of Sufi*, Shah discusses the Sufi ideology in the second part of the book and labels the idea as "Neo-Sufism" highlighting *Islamic Mysticism and Neo-Sufism* stated by Mark Sedgwick in the 1960s. Shah provides philosophical insights into the ideas and influences of his works within the context of Neo-Sufism, a movement that emerged in the 1960s and sought to reinterpret and popularize Sufi teachings in a contemporary context (pp. 38-39).

Neo-Sufism is defined as a term to describe a modern movement that emerged in the 20th century, primarily in the West, which seeks to reinterpret and popularize the teachings of traditional Islamic Sufism in a contemporary context. Shah discusses the fusion of traditional Sufi ideas and practices with elements of Western spirituality, psychology, and self-knowledge. He, further, shows that the relationship between Neo-Sufism and traditional Islamic Sufism is complex and varies among different individuals and groups associated with Neo-Sufism. Some proponents of Neo-Sufism aim to present Sufi teachings in a more accessible and contemporary language, making them relevant to a broader audience. They often emphasize the universal aspects of Sufism, such as love, spirituality, and inner transformation, while downplaying the specific Islamic religious and cultural context.

However, it is important to note that traditional Islamic Sufism has a long history and is deeply rooted in Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and spirituality. It encompasses a wide range of practices, teachings, and orders that have evolved over centuries within the framework of Islamic faith and tradition. Traditional Sufis emphasize adherence to Islamic rituals, the study of Islamic texts, and the guidance of qualified spiritual educators.

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[1] Kabbalism, also spelled as "Kabbalah," is a mystical and esoteric tradition within Judaism that seeks to understand the nature of the universe and the human soul. The word "Kabbalah" means "receiving" or "tradition," indicating the transmission of hidden knowledge from teacher to student.

Critics of Neo-Sufism argue that it sometimes oversimplifies or dilutes the depth and richness of traditional Sufi teachings, reducing them to self-knowledge techniques or New Age spirituality. They caution against divorcing Sufism from its Islamic roots and argue that a proper understanding of Sufism requires a comprehensive knowledge of Islamic theology and practices. It is worth noting that the term "Neo-Sufism" is not universally accepted within academic circles, and there is ongoing debate about its significance and boundaries. Some scholars prefer to analyze the various manifestations of Sufism in the modern world without using the term "Neo-Sufism" as a distinct category.

The second part of *The Way of the Sufi* introduces a group of classical writers who prioritized inner spirituality over material wealth. These writers have had a profound impact on both the Islamic and Western perspectives. Early Sufi literature is most notably shaped by Al-Ghazali, who emphasized the importance of self-awareness and devotion to God, and Rumi, renowned for his teachings on love and connection with the divine. This part of the book discusses the valuable contributions of these two classical authors to Sufi literature and philosophy, for instance, Shah states that the "Perfected Man" has three types of interactions with people based on their situations:

> (1) The form of belief which surrounds the Sufi;
>
> (2) The capacity of students, who are taught in accordance with their ability to understand;
>
> (3) A special circle of people who will share an understanding of the knowledge which is derived from direct inner experience (Shah, 113).

Shah also asserts the differences between Al-Ghazali's teachings which emphasize introspection and Rumi's approach which lays focus on love. Al-Ghazali's teachings focused on introspection, while Rumi's works emphasized the significance of love. Shah explores insights from their collected works, providing glimpses into their guidance and teachings. Al-Ghazali's writings encouraged self-reflection, peeling back the layers of the self, while Rumi's poems overflowed with love for God, giving life to the quest for unity. Their ideas have transcended time and cultures, shaped minds, and touched hearts (Shah 55).

In a similar vein, the writings of Jami (1414-1492) are imbued with a sense of divine love, guiding the soul. Through his works *Haft Awrang* and *Baharestan* secrets are unveiled, with his expertise, molded the Sufi tradition, influenced by the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi which was originally his writing. Jami's beliefs, explored in his works continue to hold significance in communities that value his interpretations as in this example under the title of "The Poet and the Physician":

> A poet went to see a doctor. He said to him: 'I have all kinds of terrible symptoms. I am unhappy and uncomfortable; my hair and my arms and legs are as if tortured.'
>
> The doctor answered: 'Is it not true that you have not yet given out your latest poetic composition?'
>
> 'That is true,' said the poet.
>
> 'Very well,' said the physician, 'be good enough to recite.' He did so, and, at the doctor's orders, said his lines again and again. Then the doctor said: 'Stand up, for you are now cured. What you had inside had affected your outside. Now that it is released, you are well again' (Shah 186).

Shah comments on this example which demonstrates the power of spiritual teachings, when both poetry and medicine require an understanding of humans. A surprising fact is this connection between poetry and spirituality is also caught in many of the Romantic poets such as highlighted by Keats in his work "Negative Capability as an Ethic of Empathy."

Through his poetry, Keats demonstrated the importance of a profound understanding of human experience in both physician and poetry, meanwhile, Keats himself received formal training to become a physician. There are several references to this profession in his poetry including Endymion. According to Mann (2016), physicians must have the ability to empathize with their patients and experience their pain to offer them comfort and support. He expresses: "The narrative medicine movement endeavours to cultivate physicians' ability to listen to their patients, to understand the extent of their patients' troubles and suffering" (p. 21).

Jami's works touch upon concepts such as the unity of God and the pursuit of enlightenment, inviting readers to reflect and expand their horizons. The short meaningful conversation between the poet and the physician proves the spiritual recovery under the influence of Sufism as mentioned by Shah previously. Jami's explanations and commentaries encourage introspection and a stronger connection to one's faith. Throughout history, writers like him serve as a reminder that true treasures are found within oneself, rather than in material possessions. In a world filled with distractions, it is vital to remember writers who inspire self-reflection. Jami's writing created a sanctuary where one can find inner clarity, rather than being consumed by chaos. Jami's literary works illuminate the essence of Sufism and guide wanderers back to their spiritual homes.

4.2 The Concealed Depths of Teaching Stories
In Sufism, the path to enlightenment is known as the "true knowledge," "the knowledge of God," and "the knowledge of mystery." These concepts are typically expounded upon in Shah's writings through anecdotes from notable mystics throughout history, as has previously been mentioned. These stories can be utilized at all levels and serve as a multi-purpose tool for learners. Acknowledging the significance of these narratives can connect the inherent power of teaching stories to foster a continuous quest for self-knowledge and enlightenment throughout individuals' lifelong journey.

In Sufism, instructive stories are highly valued and serve as a way to introduce spiritual seekers to the principles and techniques of the Sufi tradition. These stories hold more significance than just being teaching tools, as they can offer different levels of understanding based on the individual's progress in Sufism. This variation suggests that even as one becomes more advanced in their understanding, these stories continue to provide valuable insights and lessons. As Malik (2006) suggests, the multi-faceted nature of these stories allows for deeper understanding and growth at various stages.

This emphasizes that there is always more to learn and discover from these seemingly simple tales, much like a diamond that reveals new facets when examined closely. Whether someone is just starting their journey or has reached advanced levels in Sufism, these instructive stories have something meaningful to offer at every stage, acting as a guide along the way. They hold endless mysteries that unfold gradually, much like the rings of a tree that have witnessed countless seasons. Whether one is just beginning to understand or delving into spiritual depths, these stories nourish the soul like a mother's milk.

Teaching stories act as a gateway, not just for instruction, but also for revealing deeper meanings throughout one's journey. While they have a special place in tradition, teaching stories also serves to unpack the complex thought processes of Sufism, allowing individuals to interpret them at their own pace and level of understanding. The power of these stories flows like a river through time and cultures, touching all who seek wisdom and enlightenment. This is seen in how public dervishes use them to lay the groundwork for appreciation. It is important to share their teachings so that they may quench the thirst for

greater understanding. This thought highlights the multifaceted nature of Sufi teachings, as they transcend barriers to convey universal truths.

It is quite challenging to transmit meaning, particularly spiritual meaning, to readers. Shah typically employs allegories to help this process. As a mystic, he deploys language and literary devices as a means of transferring thinking, but it is insufficient for comprehending reality, and readers' perceptions of the stories vary from one reader to another. The literary devices and poetic language used by Shah are tolerable to convey intellectual and philosophical viewpoints but inadequate when it comes to mysticism.

To illustrate this point, part five of Shah's book (229-252) covers a range of stories that mainly carry didactical themes and spiritual guidance. These teaching stories are significant in the world of Sufism, as their multi-layered nature allows for continuous insights to be revealed. These tales, told by dervishes in public spaces, serve to teach about Sufi beliefs and practices, using either lengthy or concise language guiding individuals to depend on God. Despite brevity, not always conveying the desired depth of meaning, these teaching stories offer glimpses into profound truths and serve as a source of spiritual nourishment for students at different stages of their journey. Rumi uses allegories in *Masnavi*[2] that are parables since they conclude with a moral instruction for the readers. Shah provides the following explanation of the Masnavian allegory of "The Elephant in the Dark Room":

> Rumi, …. has emphasised and strikingly illustrated the last contention in his tale of the men who sought to examine an elephant by the sense of touch alone. Each thought that one part was the whole, and experienced it, moreover, in a manner slightly different from reality. The elephant was only, for one a fan (an ear), for another a rope (the tail), for a third a pillar (a leg) and so on (1974, pp. 11-12).

This parable demonstrates how all faiths have the same root, yet people interpret various things because they lack a holistic view that allows them to perceive reality as it truly is. Since our senses are unable to perceive reality, mystics typically employ symbolic language to communicate meaning. Therefore, the oblique language of symbolism is a noticeable technique in Sufism, as the writer's adept use of symbolism in *The Way of the Sufi* serves as a vehicle for the transmission of deeper spiritual truths. By examining such underlying principles, this paper can uncover the role Sufi literature plays in guiding individuals along their spiritual path, which may vary in direction and intensity. This shows the crucial role of teaching stories in transmitting Sufi teachings and methods to learners, while also providing new perspectives for contemplation on the mysteries of the faith. The teaching stories presented by Shah in the book are vital tools in Sufism, going beyond basic educational tools and understanding.

Accordingly interpreting the main themes of these stories is similar to the depths of an ocean, revealing deeper meanings based on learners' level of developing spirituality within the inner side. As dervishes share these stories in public spaces filled with eager listeners, they become an accessible means for individuals to comprehend complex Sufi principles. This makes them powerful instruments in conveying multifaceted spiritual thoughts, much like a cut diamond with many illuminating facets. Rather than simply didactic tools, teaching stories should be seen as profound vessels for spiritual growth, carrying seekers across the turbulent waters of ignorance towards enlightened shores as presented by Shah.

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[2] Masnavi, also spelled Mathnawi or Mesnevi, is a poetic form in Persian literature. One of the most famous examples of Masnavi is Rumi's "Masnavi-i Ma'navi" or "Mathnawi-i Ma'nawi" (Spiritual Couplets), commonly referred to as the "Masnavi," which is a six-volume poetic masterpiece. Written in the 13th century by the Persian poet Rumi, the Masnavi is considered one of the greatest works of mystical poetry.

Seeking true knowledge is of utmost importance in Sufi teaching stories. True understanding can only be achieved through constant learning and acquiring wisdom, according to Khan (2021): "The true peace comes from a knowledge of the self, and from an understanding of the whole law of action" (p.19).

This idea is further supported by Werner (2008, p.65), who states: "Uwaiysis warn in Particular against teachers driven by ego or desire for profit, who are not motivated to lead the student into freedom of unity but rather to keep the student bonded in chains of reliance to limited ideas which do not lead to knowledge of the self." He shares his experience of finding a sense of wonder for creation through contemplation during track practice, like the moon illuminating the night sky with its gentle glow.

Moreover, Ridgeon (1996) explains how important figures integrated various ideas into a coherent whole, providing Persian-speaking Sufis with a way to explore deeper into both speculative and practical aspects of Sufism, allowing one to gaze upon reality's hidden facets. He expresses "Nasafi ranks the Philosopher, prophet and friend of God in order, that is the philosopher having the least degree of knowledge and the friend of God the greatest degree of knowledge" (p.225). Nasafi's idea is very close to Rumi who also refers to philosophy as not stable in the realm of illumination and enlightenment he says:

"(۴۴) پای استدلالیان چوبین بود   پای چوبین سخت بی تمکین بود"

The leg of the syllogizers is of wood: a wooden leg is very infirm (Rumi, p.177)."

Syllogisms[1] and philosophical perspectives that view the world subjectively are unable to lead to enlightenment, as Rumi's poem in Sufism makes evident. A true Sufi is someone who views reality objectively, that is, someone who sees things as they are instead of how he would like them to be. According to Chittick, quoting from Iban-Arabi, different types of knowledge are destructive and would not lead to enlightenment:

> When I opened the locks and became apprised of what was in the chests, there appeared to me the forms of knowledges to the number of the movements of the keys of each chest, no more and no less. I saw destructive knowledges. No one occupied himself with them without being destroyed-knowledges pertaining to the rational faculty and belonging exclusively to the reflective thinkers, the philosophers and theologians. Among them I saw a knowledge which takes its possessor to perpetual destruction, and another knowledge which takes him first to destruction, then he is saved, though of course there is none of the light of the law within it and its possessor is deprived of felicity. Among these knowledges were many of the sciences of the Brahmins, the sciences of sorcery, and others. I gained all the sciences contained therein, so that I might avoid them. These are mysteries which cannot be made manifest. They are called the "sciences of the mystery" (1989, p. 269-270).

The idea of the "science of the mysteries," or "ilm al-asrar" in Arabic, was frequently discussed by Ibn Arabi. This word describes mystical or inner knowledge that explores the secrets of life, awareness, and the divine and goes beyond common comprehension. To reveal the secrets of the cosmos and the human soul, it incorporates several academic fields, including metaphysics, spiritual psychology, and Sufism.

4.3 Sufism and Spiritual Enlightenment
In *The Way of the Sufi*, Shah dedicates a large part of the book to discuss the significance of the use of literary and aesthetic devices such as allegories, and symbolism in storytelling techniques and Sufis' self-discovery journeys. Furthermore, various chapters place a significant emphasis on the pivotal role of the Sufi teacher who serves as a guiding light in the seeker's quest for spiritual enlightenment.

Shah's introduction to theories about Sufism, he discusses that "Sufi is traceable to the Arabic word, pronounced soof, which literally means wool, referring to the material from which the simple robes of the early Muslim mystics were made" (2015, 19). This definition serves etymological purposes, rather than the mystical connotations of the term. A Sufi is a person who has attained spiritual enlightenment through mysticism. Although many Sufis who wear wool are not illuminated Sufis, as Hafez explains in the following verses, being a true Sufi has nothing to do with appearances but rather is an inborn process linked to the enlightened Sufi:

<div dir="rtl">
پشمینه پوش تند خو از عشق نشنیده است بو   از مستیش روزی بگو تا ترک هشیاری کند
</div>

(O Murshid !) the wool-wearer, sullen of disposition (the hypocrite, captive to lust, in whom love hath no part) hath not perceived love's perfume:

of its (love's) intoxication, utter a hint, that, abandonment of sensibleness (and the choosing of intoxication of love) he may make (Hafiz, 437).

<div dir="rtl">
صوفی نهاد دام و سر حقه باز کرد   بنیاد مکر با فلک حقه باز کرد
</div>

The Sufi (outward worshiper and hypocrite) laid the snare (of deceit), and open, the cover of his box (of sorcery), made. With (against) the sky one of mystery, the presentments of sorcery, he made (Hafiz, 256).

<div dir="rtl">
نقد صوفی نه همه صافی بی غش باشد   ای بسا خرقه که مستوجب اتش باشد
</div>

Not all purity without alloy is the coast of the Sufi;

O many a Khirka, that is worthy of the fire (348).

Shah explains further meanings associated with the term of Sufi, derivations like "the Companions of the Bench. Although some grammarians have pointed out that the 'wool' origin is etymologically more likely – and more probable than, say, the derivation from safwa ('piety'), or even Saff First Rank of the Worthy (2015, p. 18). Sufis believe that through meditation one can reach higher levels of consciousness. Shah defines "Sufism is therefore the transcending of ordinary limitations" (18). Other scholars like Nöldeke connect the term with Christian hermits who used the woolen cloth "as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities" (Nicholson, 2002, p. 2). Shah refers to Ernst's use of two keywords to explain Sufism which are more connected to the meaning of the term as mentioned by Nöldeke:

> The two terms that best sum up early European attitudes to Sufism are fakir (Arabic faqir) and dervish (the Turkish pronunciation of Persian darvish). Both words mean more or less the same: faqir is the Arabic word for "poor man," and dervish (probably derived from a term meaning "standing by the door") is the Persian equivalent… both dervish and fakir were terms that signified spiritual poverty, being poor in relation to God, and hence being dependent upon him. As in other religious traditions, poverty for the Sufis was a sign of turning away from the world and focusing on the divine reality. "Poverty is my pride," the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said (2016, pp. 40-42).

In Shah's narrative, the oblique language of allegory stands out as a noticeable technique, serving as a vehicle for the transmission of deeper spiritual truths. Shah himself affirms that "An allegory is used to explain some of the amazing acts of Sufi initiates, based upon super sensory powers" (1964, p. 176), Shah highlights the deliberate choice of allegory as a means to convey concepts that transcend the limitations of literal language. Through allegorical narratives, Shah not only invites readers to engage in a process of interpretation but also to

embark on a personal journey of self-discovery, enabling them to unearth profound spiritual insights. The text thus becomes a reflective mirror, not only of the reader's understanding but also of their inner journey towards higher levels of consciousness.

When defining a Sufi, Shah claims: "A man endowed with supernatural powers, inheritor of secrets handed down from uncounted ages, symbolic of wisdom and timelessness" (1964, p. 54). This statement underscores the deliberate choice of symbol as a means to convey concepts that transcend the limitations of literal language. Through allegorical and symbolic narratives, Shah invites readers to engage in a process of interpretation and self-discovery, enabling them to unearth profound spiritual insights. The text becomes a mirror, reflecting not only the reader's understanding but also their inner journey toward higher levels of consciousness.

The second significant technique, Shah uses is the prominent role of the Sufi teacher, which is central to the narrative. This shows the emphasis on the indispensable role of the Sufi teacher in the truth seeker's journey. Shah elucidates, "It would, however, be false to Sufism not to affirm that it cannot be appreciated beyond a certain point except within the real teaching situation, which requires the physical presence of a Sufi teacher" (1968, pp.13-14). This distinction underscores the transformative nature of the teacher-student dynamic in Sufism. The teacher, possessing a deep well of secret knowledge, serves as an outlet for the transmission of wisdom, guiding the seeker toward self-realization. Through the teacher's guidance, the seeker navigates the intricate labyrinth of spiritual growth, gaining insight into the hidden dimensions of existence.

Unity in diversity as a multifaceted tradition, as viewed by Shah's work, illuminates the diverse range of Sufi practices and philosophies. Through various narratives and teachings, readers encounter a mosaic of approaches to spiritual realization. As Shah states, "Sufism is not a dogma, but an attitude... a tradition which, as its apex, has no doctrine" (Shah, 2015, p. 37). This highlights the inclusive nature of Sufism, underscoring the unity that transcends cultural and theological boundaries.

The inner path of self-realization and enlightenment is another trend in Shah's section *The Three Functions of the Perfected Man* (59) as he places a strong emphasis on the inner journey towards self-realization. Shah's narratives guide readers through the transformative process of inner awakening, urging them to seek enlightenment within themselves. One of the Sufi masters in the book imparts, "The secret of secrets is inside you" (Shah, 2015, p.72), emphasizing the profound wisdom that lies within every individual.

Additionally, paradox and parable provoke insight through the story as Shah smartly employs them as two powerful tools to provoke insight and challenge conventional modes of thought. Through enigmatic teachings and seemingly contradictory statements, readers are compelled to transcend dualistic thinking. As Shah asserts, "Paradox is the path of transcendence" (Shah, 2015, p. 112), inviting readers to embrace ambiguity as a means to deeper understanding.

Moreover, the art of storytelling functions as a vehicle for spiritual wisdom. This technique is central to Shah's narrative style is the use of stories and anecdotes. These tales serve as vessels for conveying profound spiritual truths, allowing readers to engage with the material on multiple levels. Shah himself acknowledges, "The story has never been simply a way of telling, still less a mere amusement; it has been the prime medium for the conveyance of significant knowledge" (Shah, 2015, p. 189). Through storytelling, Shah bridges the gap between abstract philosophy and lived experience.

It can be said that Shah's thought and narrative stand as a testament to the enduring relevance of Sufi guidance and literature in the contemporary world. Through its allegorical narratives,

philosophical insights, and emphasis on the inner journey, the book invites readers to embark on a transformative quest for spiritual realization.

5. Conclusion

Shah's *The Way of the Sufi* is an influential work that transcends conventional boundaries of religious and spiritual discourse. This critical study has argued that various facets of Shah's book lend a profound understanding of recondite spiritual issues and practices, and the transmission of mysterious cognition. Through a comprehensive examination of Shah's distinctive narrative style and the overarching themes presented in his book, significant notions, and complex spiritual ideas and practices are clarified and rendered easily for understanding Sufism in the realm of spiritual literature.

Through Shah's masterful combination of allegorical storytelling and profound spiritual insights, spiritual seekers and scholars are encouraged to a transformative journey toward self-realization. The oblique language of allegory serves as a medium for readers to engage in a process of interpretation and self-discovery, enabling them to unearth profound spiritual insights. Simultaneously, the narrative underscores the pivotal role of the Sufi educator as an awakener, illuminating the path to self-realization. Shah's legacy endures as his methodology continues to inspire seekers on their quest for spiritual enlightenment.

Shah's portrayal of Sufi philosophy and practices in *The Way of the Sufi* is a unique representation of unity in diversity within this multifaceted tradition. The exploration of diverse Sufi approaches, the emphasis on the inner journey towards self-realization, and the utilization of paradox and storytelling, collectively highlight the enduring relevance of Sufi wisdom in the contemporary world. Shah's work transcends cultural and theological boundaries, offering readers a profound invitation to engage with the depths of spiritual realization and enlightenment.

Moreover, Shah's contribution to Sufism encourages the exploration of the emotional and psychological dimensions of religious experience. Followers of diverse faiths may respond to Sufi poetry and teachings with feelings of awe, inspiration, and a deep sense of connection to the divine. These personal responses not only enrich individual spirituality but also contribute to the broader textile of religious diversity and dialogue.

Effectively, Shah's works on mysticism underscores the fluidity and adaptability of Sufism as it transcends traditional religious boundaries. By embracing multiple interpretations and engaging with the subjective experiences of believers from different backgrounds, one can appreciate the universality and inclusivity of Sufi spirituality in fostering interfaith understanding and harmony and this is what the world desperately needs to bring people together despite all their differences.

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کردنەوەی قفڵی ڕۆشنگەری ڕۆحی: لێکۆڵینەوەیەکی ڕەخنەگرانە لە کتێبی ڕێگای سۆفیەکانی ئیدریس شا

سیروان عبدالکریم علی   شێرزاد شفیع بابۆ بارزانی

کولێژی زمان،بەشی ئینگلیزی،زانکۆی سەلاحەدین-   کولێژی زمان،بەشی ئینگلیزی،زانکۆی سەلاحەدین-

هەولێر،هەولێر،هەرێمی کوردستان،عێراق   هەولێر،هەولێر،هەرێمی کوردستان،عێراق

مامۆستا لە زانکۆی کاسۆلیکی،هەولێر

Sirwan.a.ali@su.edu.krd   sherzad.barzan@su.edu.krd

پوختە

ڕێگای سۆفیەکان (٢٠١٥) وەک ئاماژەیەکی بەرچاو لە ئەدەبیاتی سۆفیدا وەستاوە، تێڕوانینێکی قووڵ لە نەریتی عیرفانی سۆفیگەری پێشکەش دەکات و کەسایەتیە سۆفیە ڕێزدارەکان و ئایدۆلۆژیا و دەقەکانیان دەناسێنێت. ئەم لێکۆڵینەوەیە لە نزیکەوە لە شاکارەکەی ئیدریس شا دەکۆڵێتەوە و تیشک دەخاتە سەر وێناکردنی فەلسەفەی سۆفیگەری و پراکتیزەکردنی ڕۆشنگەری و گواستنەوەی زانستی نهێنی لە ڕێگەی شێوازە ئەدەبییەکانەوە. توێژینەوەکە باس لەوە دەکات کە شێوازی کاریگەری ئەدەبیاتی سۆفیگەری بۆ ڕێنمایی ڕۆحی و ڕۆشنگەری بەهێز دەکرێت بەهۆی شێوازی گێڕانەوەی جیاواز و تەوەرە فەلسەفیەکانەوە کە لەلایەن سۆفیەکانەوە لە شێوەی شیعر یان چیرۆکدا پێشکەش دەکرێن. ئەم توێژینەوەیە تیشک دەخاتە سەر گرنگی ئەدەبیاتی سۆفیگەری بە گشتی و شێوازی ئەدەبی و دەستکەوتە ڕۆحییەکانی پێشکەشکراو. پشکنینی گشتگیر بۆ بیرکردنەوەکانی شا بەدوای قووڵایی فێرکاریەکانی سۆفیگەریدا دەگەڕێت بۆ پێشکەشکردنی تێڕوانینێکی نوێ و پەرەپێدانی تێگەیشتن لە بنەما فەلسەفیەکانی سۆفیگەری، خۆشەویستی قووڵ خودایی و کاریگەریە کولتوورییە فراوانەکانی پەرستنی ڕۆحی.

ووشە سەرەکییەکان: سۆفیگەری، شا، تێڕوانینە عیرفانییەکان، نەریتی ڕۆحی، کاریگەریە کولتوورییەکان

فتح التنوير الروحي: دراسة نقدية على كتاب ادريس شاه "الطريق الصوفي"

سيروان عبدالكريم علي   شيرزاد شفيع بابو بارزاني

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية،كلية اللغات،جامعة صلاح الدين-   قسم اللغة الإنجليزية،كلية اللغات،جامعة صلاح الدين-

أربيل،اقليم كوردستان،العراق   أربيل،اقليم كوردستان،العراق

محاضر في جامعة الكاثوليكية،أربيل

Sirwan.a.ali@su.edu.krd   sherzad.barzan@su.edu.krd

الملخص

"طريق الصوفي" (2015) يمثل علامة هامة في الأدب الصوفي، حيث يقدم رؤى عميقة حول التقليد الصوفي للصوفية، ويقدم شخصيات صوفية موقرة وأيديولوجياتها ونصوصها. تتناول هذه الدراسة تحفة ادريس شاه عن كثب، مع التركيز على تصويرها للفلسفة الصوفية، وممارسات التنوير، ونقل المعرفة الغامضة من خلال الأساليب الأدبية. وترى الدراسة أن الأسلوب الفعال للأدب الصوفي في التوجيه الروحي والتنوير معزز بالأسلوب السردي المميز والموضوعات الفلسفية التي يقدمها الصوفيون في شكل قصائد أو قصص. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على أهمية الأدب الصوفي بشكل عام، وأسلوبه الأدبي، وما قدمه من إنجازات روحية. يبحث الفحص الشامل لأفكار شاه عن الأعماق العميقة للتعاليم الصوفية لتقديم رؤى جديدة وتطوير فهم لمبادئ الصوفية الفلسفية، والحب الإلهي العميق، والآثار الثقافية الأوسع للتفاني الروحي.

الكلمات الدالة: الصوفية، الشاه، رؤى صوفية، التقاليد الروحية، المضامين الثقافية