
LOVE AS THE PATH OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE THOUGHT OF JALALUDDIN RUMI AND RĀBĪ‘AH AL-‘ADAWIYAH

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Abstrak: Cinta merupakan konsep fundamental dalam tradisi tasawuf Islam yang tidak hanya dipahami sebagai pengalaman emosional, tetapi sebagai jalan utama spiritualitas menuju kedekatan dengan Tuhan. Dalam konteks kehidupan modern yang ditandai oleh krisis makna, materialisme, dan keterasingan spiritual, pemikiran para sufi klasik tentang cinta menjadi relevan untuk dikaji kembali. Jalaluddin Rumi dan Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah merupakan dua tokoh penting tasawuf yang menempatkan cinta sebagai inti pengalaman religius dan penghambaan kepada Allah, meskipun dengan ekspresi dan pendekatan yang berbeda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep cinta sebagai jalan spiritualitas dalam pemikiran Jalaluddin Rumi dan Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah serta mengungkap persamaan dan perbedaannya dalam kerangka tasawuf Islam. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif, melalui analisis teks terhadap karya-karya utama Rumi dan literatur klasik yang merekam ajaran Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, serta sumber-sumber akademik yang relevan. Data dianalisis secara tematik dan komparatif untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang mendalam dan sistematis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Rumi memandang cinta (*‘ishq*) sebagai kekuatan kosmik dan ontologis yang menggerakkan seluruh eksistensi menuju penyatuan spiritual dengan Tuhan, sedangkan Rabi‘ah menekankan cinta murni (*mahabbah khālishah*) sebagai bentuk ibadah tertinggi yang bebas dari motif pahala dan hukuman. Meskipun berbeda dalam ekspresi spiritual, keduanya sepakat bahwa cinta merupakan inti transformasi batin dan orientasi teosentris kehidupan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa cinta dalam tasawuf Rumi dan Rabi‘ah bukan hanya pengalaman mistik individual, tetapi juga fondasi etika dan spiritualitas yang relevan bagi kehidupan modern. Kajian ini berkontribusi dalam memperkaya studi tasawuf dengan menghadirkan paradigma cinta sebagai jalan spiritual yang integratif, humanis, dan kontekstual.

Kata Kunci: Cinta, Tasawuf, Jalaluddin Rumi, Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, Spiritualitas

Abstract: Love is a fundamental concept in the Islamic mystical tradition (Sufism), understood not merely as an emotional experience but as a primary path of spirituality leading to closeness with God. In the context of modern life, marked by a crisis of meaning, materialism, and spiritual alienation, classical Sufi perspectives on love remain highly relevant. Jalaluddin Rumi and Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah are two prominent Sufi figures who place love at the center of religious experience and devotion to God, albeit through different expressions and spiritual approaches. This study aims to analyze the concept of love as a path of spirituality in the thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, as well as to identify their similarities and differences within the framework of Islamic Sufism. The research employs a qualitative descriptive library-based methodology, using textual analysis of Rumi’s major works, classical sources documenting Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah’s teachings, and relevant academic literature. The data are analyzed thematically and comparatively to achieve a systematic and in-depth understanding. The findings indicate that Rumi views love (*ishq*) as a cosmic and ontological force that moves all existence toward spiritual union with God, while Rabi‘ah emphasizes pure love (*mahabbah khālishah*) as the highest form of worship, free from expectations of reward or fear of punishment. Despite differences in spiritual expression, both figures agree that love is the core of inner transformation and a theocentric orientation of life. This study concludes that love in the Sufism of Rumi and Rabi‘ah is not merely an individual mystical experience but also a foundation for ethical and spiritual life relevant to the modern world. This research contributes to Sufi studies by presenting love as an integrative, humanistic, and contextual paradigm of Islamic spirituality.

Keywords: Love, Sufism, Jalaluddin Rumi, Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, Spirituality

A. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality constitutes an essential dimension of human life that appears across various cultures and religious traditions. Through spirituality, human beings seek to understand the meaning of life and the purpose of their existence. This dimension is not limited to religious rituals but also encompasses inner experience and the formation of values. In human life, spirituality often becomes a source of inner peace and moral direction. Therefore, spirituality continues to be a relevant theme in religious and humanitarian studies.

In various religious traditions, love is understood as an inner force that plays a central role in spiritual experience. Love is not merely viewed as an emotional feeling, but also as a driving force that moves human beings to transcend self-interest. Through love, individuals build deeper relationships with others and with the Transcendent. The concept of love is often associated with sacrifice, sincerity, and the search for meaning. Thus, love becomes an essential element in the human spiritual journey (Arhamar and Ismail 2025).

In the Islamic tradition, Sufism developed as a spiritual path emphasizing the inner dimension and closeness to God. Sufism regards love as the primary means in the process of drawing nearer to God. Love in Sufism is not merely an emotional experience, but a life orientation that directs all spiritual behavior. Through love, a *sālik* (spiritual seeker) undertakes a journey of self-purification and the strengthening of divine consciousness (Hanifiyah 2019). Therefore, love occupies a central position in Sufi teachings.

Love in Sufism is understood as a continuous process of spiritual transformation. This process includes purification of the soul, control of the ego, and the formation of a higher inner awareness. Love encourages human beings to detach from worldly attachments and turn toward divine orientation. Thus, love functions as the driving force in the spiritual journey. This perspective demonstrates that love possesses interconnected ethical and spiritual dimensions (GOLKARIAN 2024).

Within the context of Islamic Sufism, the thoughts of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah present distinctive and influential concepts of love as a spiritual path. Both place Divine love at the core of the journey toward God. Although they lived in different historical contexts, their teachings on love share similarities in emphasizing sincerity and total devotion. Their ideas make a significant contribution to understanding love as a spiritual path. Therefore, examining the concept of love in the thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah is highly relevant.

The concept of Divine love is a central theme in the Sufi tradition and has been widely discussed in various Islamic studies. However, these discussions are generally thematic and descriptive in nature. Love is often understood as an individual spiritual experience without in-depth analysis of its conceptual framework. As a result, love has not been fully positioned as a comprehensive spiritual path. This condition indicates a limitation in understanding the conceptual structure of love in Sufism.

The thoughts of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah are frequently used as primary references in the discourse of Sufi love. Nevertheless, studies of these two figures are generally conducted separately. This approach results in a lack of conceptual dialogue between the thought of Rumi and Rābi‘ah. In fact, both place love at the heart of spirituality. The absence of comparative studies constitutes a gap in the study of Sufi love.

Moreover, the differences in historical context and the expression of teachings on love between Rumi and Rābi‘ah have not been extensively analyzed in depth. Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah is known for her ascetic and radical expression of love (Albertini 2023), while Rumi presents love in symbolic and poetic forms. These differences are often described without systematic analysis (Siti ‘Alma Sajidah Fauziyah and Myrna Nur Sakinah 2025). Consequently, the dynamics of interpreting love as a spiritual path remain underexplored. This reveals a gap in the contextual understanding of their teachings on love.

The methodological dimension of understanding love as a process of spiritual transformation has also not received primary attention in existing studies. Love is often interpreted merely as an emotional state or mystical experience. In Sufism, however, love represents an ongoing process involving self-purification and transformation of consciousness (Krishan and Kumar 2025). The lack of methodological analysis leads to a partial understanding of love. Thus, love has not been fully comprehended as a structured spiritual path.

Overall, there remains a gap in studies that examine love as a comprehensive spiritual path in the thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah. This gap encompasses conceptual, comparative, and methodological aspects. Without an integrative study, their ideas on love risk being understood in isolation and incompletely. Therefore, research is needed that bridges the thought of Rumi and Rābi‘ah within a unified analytical framework. Such a study is expected to enrich the discourse on Sufi love within Islamic studies.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method to examine the concept of love as a spiritual path in the thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah. This approach is chosen because the object of the study consists of ideas, symbols, and spiritual narratives contained in classical Sufi works. The primary focus of the research is directed toward understanding the meaning of Divine love as the foundation of spiritual experience within the Sufi tradition. Through this approach, the study seeks to interpret texts in a deep and contextual manner (Bambang Suharto 2022).

The research data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the major works of Jalaluddin Rumi, such as the *Mathnawi* and the *Dīwān of Shams-i Tabrizi*, as well as literature representing the teachings and spiritual expressions of Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah. The secondary sources comprise books, journal articles, and scholarly studies discussing Sufism, Divine love, and the thought of both figures. All data are collected through a review of relevant and credible literature to support a comprehensive analysis.

Data analysis is conducted using descriptive-analytical and comparative methods. The classified data are analyzed to uncover the concepts, themes, and spiritual orientations of love in the thought of each figure (Tasman and Hadi 2024). Subsequently, a comparison is carried out to identify the similarities and differences between Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah in interpreting love as the path toward God. The results of this analysis are then systematically organized to explain the relevance of their thought within the broader context of Islamic spirituality.

C. DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review indicate that love occupies a central position in the Islamic Sufi tradition as the primary path toward God. In both the

thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, love is not understood merely as a psychological emotion, but as a spiritual energy that directs the entire orientation of human life. Love becomes the foundation of the transformative relationship between the servant and God. Through love, human beings undergo profound and continuous inner transformation (Tasman and Hadi 2024).

In Jalaluddin Rumi’s thought, love (*‘ishq*) is understood as a cosmic force that animates all reality. Rumi portrays love as an ontological principle that transcends reason and formal law. Love serves as the means by which human beings move beyond the limitations of the ego and toward divine consciousness. Thus, love is not only personally spiritual but also universal and existential in nature (GOLKARIAN 2024).

Rumi emphasizes that love is the path of *fanā’*, the process of self-annihilation in the presence of God. In the experience of love, individual human identity gradually dissolves and is replaced by divine awareness. Love compels the seeker to transcend the duality between “I” and “Thou.” This process is understood as a crucial stage in the spiritual journey of a Sufi (Shruthi T 2024).

Beyond *fanā’*, love in Rumi’s thought also leads to *baqā’*, the state of spiritual subsistence in God. After the ego is dissolved, the human being does not lose existence but attains a new and more meaningful form of being. Love thus functions as a bridge between self-annihilation and spiritual rebirth (Siti ‘Alma Sajidah Fauziyah and Myrna Nur Sakinah 2025). In this sense, love is both destructive and constructive.

In contrast to Rumi, Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah presents a more ascetic and radical concept of love. Divine love is understood as pure servitude, entirely free from worldly interests. Rābi‘ah rejects forms of worship motivated by hope for paradise or fear of hell. Love for God must rest upon absolute sincerity (IT 2024).

For Rābi‘ah, love is the ultimate goal of spirituality, not merely a means. Worship that is not grounded in love has not reached perfection. Pure love requires the emptying of the self from all motives other than God. Thus, love becomes the core of spiritual ethics in the life of a Sufi (Tasman and Hadi 2024).

The findings show that although Rumi and Rābi‘ah differ in style and spiritual expression, both agree that love is the essence of divine experience. Rumi expresses love through symbols, poetry, and cosmic metaphors, whereas Rābi‘ah embodies love through a life of simplicity and prayers filled with sincerity. This difference reflects the diversity of love’s expression within the Sufi tradition.

In Rumi’s thought, love is dynamic and dialogical. It involves inner struggle, longing, and even spiritual suffering. Suffering is not viewed as something to be avoided, but as part of the process of purifying love (Chittick 2014). In this way, love becomes a profound and transformative existential experience.

By contrast, love in Rābi‘ah’s teaching is more contemplative and stable. It is not marked by excessive emotional turbulence, but by steadfast devotion to God.

The ascetic life (*zuhd*) becomes the arena for the actualization of divine love. Love is embodied in consistent loyalty and sincerity (Maimun 2016).

The study also shows that love in Sufism cannot be separated from spiritual ethics. Love gives rise to humility, patience, and self-control. Both Rumi and Rābi‘ah position love as the foundation of moral character formation. Thus, love carries practical implications for everyday life.

Within the context of Islamic spirituality, love functions as a means of uniting the inner dimension with practical life. Love does not remain confined to individual mystical experience but shapes how human beings relate to others and to the world. This is clearly reflected in Rumi’s teaching on universal compassion. Love becomes the basis of humanitarian ethics.

Overall, the findings affirm that love in the thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah constitutes the primary path of spirituality—transformative, ethical, and theocentric in nature. Differences in the expression of love do not negate their shared orientation toward God. Love becomes the central medium of encounter between humanity and divine reality. Thus, love holds a fundamental position in Islamic Sufism.

These findings are consistent with classical Sufi theory, which places love as the highest spiritual *maqām* (station). Sufi figures such as al-Ghazali and Ibn ‘Arabi likewise emphasized that love is the essence of the human relationship with God. In this context, Rumi and Rābi‘ah represent two complementary models of expressing love: Rumi within a cosmological framework, and Rābi‘ah within an ascetic one.

Previous studies on Rumi often highlight the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of love, while research on Rābi‘ah tends to emphasize ethical aspects and sincerity. The results of this study reinforce these findings by demonstrating that such differences are expressive rather than substantive. Both remain firmly grounded in love as the singular orientation toward God. Love thus becomes the meeting point between mystical experience and ethical praxis.

The dialogue between these findings and modern theories of spirituality demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the Sufi concept of love. Amid crises of meaning and spirituality, the love articulated by Rumi and Rābi‘ah offers a path of inner liberation. Love is not merely a religious experience but also a source of human values. This broadens the understanding of Sufism as a living and contextual spirituality.

Therefore, this study affirms that love in Sufism is not merely a theological theme but a comprehensive spiritual paradigm. These findings enrich academic discourse on Sufism by presenting a dialogue between figures, theory, and historical context. Love becomes the bridge between the divine and the human dimensions. This constitutes the primary contribution of this study to the field of Sufi and Islamic spirituality studies.

D. CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the concept of love occupies a central position in Islamic spirituality, particularly within the Sufi tradition, which emphasizes inner experience as the path toward closeness to God. Through a literature-based examination of the works and teachings of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah, this research demonstrates that love is not merely an emotional expression or poetic symbol, but a spiritual principle that shapes a Sufi’s life orientation, ethics, and divine consciousness. Love becomes the medium of self-transformation, guiding human beings from ego-centered attachment toward sincere and total devotion to God.

The objective of this study has been achieved by showing that love in the thought of Jalaluddin Rumi and Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah functions as the primary path of spirituality, integrating mystical experience, inner transformation, and theocentric orientation in human life. The findings reveal that although Rumi and Rābi‘ah differ in historical background, style of expression, and spiritual emphasis, both agree that love is the essence of the human relationship with God—one that transcends formal rationality and worldly interests.

Rumi presents love as a dynamic cosmic force that leads human beings toward *fanā’* (annihilation of the self) and *baqā’* (subsistence in God), while Rābi‘ah emphasizes pure love as the highest form of worship, free from the expectation of reward or fear of punishment. These differing approaches do not indicate contradiction, but rather enrich the understanding of the diverse expressions of love within Islamic Sufism. In Rumi’s perspective, love is symbolic, dialogical, and universal; in Rābi‘ah’s teaching, it is ascetic, personal, and ethical. Yet both converge on the same ultimate goal: existential closeness to God.

In the context of modern life—marked by crises of meaning, spirituality, and human relationships—the concept of love articulated by Rumi and Rābi‘ah remains profoundly relevant. Love functions not only as an individual mystical experience, but also as the foundation for moral character, empathy, and ethical responsibility. Thus, the Sufism of love offers a spiritual alternative capable of bridging the inner dimension and social reality.

This study contributes to the enrichment of Sufi scholarship through a comparative reading that positions love as an integrative spiritual paradigm—uniting mystical experience and ethical living—thereby opening new avenues for the development of contextual and humanistic Islamic spirituality studies.

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