



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.j.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

Elements of Love in Rumi's Mathnawi Manawi with
Reference to the Story of 'The King and the
Handmaiden'

Imtiyazbhai D. Ghanchi

Research Scholar,
C. U. Shah University
Wadhwan city

Dr. Bhaskar Pandya

Dean, CHARUSAT University, Changa



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

www.j.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

ABSTRACT

One of the major themes that serve as the chief motifs in works of Persian Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi is love. For Rumi, love is beyond mere physical attraction and fulfilling the carnal desires. The concept of love in works of Rumi transcends from 'ishk-e- majazi' to 'ishk-e- haqiqi'. By 'ishk-e-haqiqi', Rumi means the divine love, the ultimate 'makam' (stage) of the soul. This paper is based on the story of 'The King and the Handmaiden' from book I of *Mathnawi Manawi*. For Rumi, love is a motif of divine journey. The soul restlessly strives for this love in many stories of Rumi. The ultimate aim of this paper is to analyse the elements of love with reference to the mentioned story of *Mathnawi Manawi*.

Keywords: 'Mathnawi Manawi', Rumi, 'ishk-e- majazi', 'ishq-e-haqiqi', 'divine love', 'salik', The king, the handmaiden and the goldsmith of Samarcand.



1. Introduction: (Meaning of Love for Sufis)

“Love is bottomless ocean of life. Everlasting life is the least of its gifts.”

(Rumi, 1368/2003, D-23469)

Merriam Webster (love.n.d.) defines love as "strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties" or "affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests." For a Sufi love is a dynamic force that ascends his spiritual journey from worldly attachments to the divine Truth.

In order to explain the concept of love in Sufi literature, it is necessary to discuss two terms: 'ishq-e- majazi' and 'ishq-e-haqiqi'. *Rekhta dictionary* (ishq-e-majazi and ishq-e-haqiqi, n.d.) defines 'ishq-e-majazi' as 'mundane love' or 'carnal love' and 'ishq-e-haqiqi' is defined as 'divine love' or 'spiritual love of God'. Tyagi, (2011) in his article 'Ishq-e-Haqiqi (The True Love)' states:

"...we can differentiate the Love into two forms: Earthly Love or Ishq-e-Majazi and Real Love or Ishq – e – Haqiqi. The common man is in love with his earthly attachments, sensual pleasure, afflictions and passions while saints are in love with God. The ideal of human being is not mere gratifications of sensual desires but to attain permanent pleasure after self realization and God realization." (Tyagi, 2011)

This realisation comes like spiritual blessing that results into establishment of union with God, the ultimate 'maqam', a spiritual stage that ends the spiritual journey of 'salik', a traveler on spiritual journey. In Sufi literature, one can find the reference of both the types of love. Few Sufi philosophers and writers opine that 'ishq-e- majazi' is inferior to "Ishq-e- haqiqi". There are few others who consider the former as the first step towards the latter. However one must transcend from the former to the latter. If he gets stuck on the first stage, he invites spiritual degradation. (Tyagi, 2011)

Chittik (1983) describes 'ishq-e-haqiqi' as 'love for God' or 'true love' whereas 'ishq-e-majazi' is described as 'derivative love or love for anything else'.



This research paper aims to analyse the elements of love in *Mathnawi Manawi* through discussion on the elements of love in Sufism and how they are allegorically interwoven in the story of 'The King and the Handmaiden'.

2. Discussion and Findings:

Love is undoubtedly the central theme in all works of Rumi. Rumi has preferred his readers to experience the love rather than merely expressing the word through theory. For Rumi, love is 'a perfect thirst' and he has attempted to provide 'the Water of Life' in order to quench this thirst. (Chittik, 1983). In order to make the readers experience the 'Love', Rumi has made use of many allegories. Rumi States:

"Someone asked "What is love?" I replied, "Ask not about these meanings.

When you become like me, then you will know. When he calls you, you will recite its tale." (Rumi, 1368/2003, D-29050-51)

The story of 'The King and the Handmaiden' in Book I of *Mathnawi Manawi* deals with the elements of love. The story is characterised by a love triangle among the king, the handmaiden and the goldsmith of Samarcand. The character of spiritual physician who finds out the cause of the disease of the handmaiden also plays a key role in this story.

It is to be noted that Rumi has composed the stories in *Mathnawi Manawi* with the motif of teaching the Sufi principles. These are not simple tales that amuse the readers by their literal meaning. These stories have been used as allegories that tell simple stories at primary level but carry an insight of Sufi teachings as secondary meaning of signification. The same is the case with the story of 'The King and Handmaiden'.

The king developed keen desire to marry a handmaiden whom he found on his highway. This incident sowed the seeds of love in his heart. However, he got depressed when the handmaiden got such a disease that many physicians failed to cure. Despite of innumerable efforts, he could not find either cause or treatment for the mysterious illness. He knelt before the God and prayed with tears in his eyes. His prayer was answered and a holy physician



approached him who claimed to discover the cause of mysterious ailment. He informed the king that the handmaiden was suffering from the illness of love. The cause behind this illness was a goldsmith who lived in a town known as Samarcand. Thus the king came to know that it was not a physical disease but an ailment of 'Love'.

Hurriedly, the kings sent his messengers to Samarcand in order to find the goldsmith and bring him to his court. When he was brought to the court of the king, the holy physician instructed him to wed him with the handmaiden. As the king had keen desire to marry her, it was very difficult job to perform for him. However he had established trust in the holy healer so he followed his instruction and marry the handmaiden with the goldsmith. This decision established respect for the king in heart of the handmaiden who allowed her to marry with the person of her choice.

For six months the newly married couple lived with utmost happiness. Then the physician received a divine message to give the young goldsmith a special kind of potion that would decrease the physical appearance of him. With passing of time, the potion showed its effect. The goldsmith lost his beauty. Now he was not so attractive as he was before. As a result the handmaiden also lost her interest in him. On another side, she had already established respect for the king who had sacrificed his desire to marry her in order to fulfill her wish and treat her illness. Ultimately, she accepted his love and married the king.

At primary level of signification, this happy ending story is purely about physical love or what is known as 'ishq-e-majazi' in Sufi terminology. It is characterized by the king who fell in love with the handmaiden on first sight. On another hand the love of handmaiden was also out of her attraction which vanished with the declining beauty of the goldsmith. However when she realised that her passion was only for physical appearance, she accepted the love of the king.

Beyond the primary level of signification, the story is characterized by the divine touch. The element of divine love enters the story when the king prayed for the divine mercy when



all the physicians failed to cure his beloved. The holy physician also appeared as a divine figure who received divine message to find out the solution.

Allegorically this story relates the spiritual journey of gaining the divine love. Like the handmaiden, at a time, 'salik', may get deceived by the attractions for worldly desires. This results into spiritual sickness. On one side the divine love of God fulfills all the desires of 'salik'. This is allegorised by the decision of the king to get the handmaiden married with the goldsmith. Unless 'salik' realises the importance of the divine love, he does not establish the desire of the divine journey. When the realisation comes, 'salik' understands the futility of his likings for the worldly attractions. However, this realisation is not gained easily. Many physicians failed to cure or even identify the disease of the handmaiden. . It was the divine grace that sent the holy physician to identify and cure the disease. The holy physician symbolises the spiritual guide, 'a pir', in Sufi terminology. . Through, the spiritual guide, 'salik' receives the realisation that he should destined towards the divine love and the love for worldly belongings is nothing but the deviating forces from the holy path. This realisation ends with the union with the divine love.

2.1. 'Ishq-e-Majazi' and 'Ishq-e-Haqiqi':

"In the eyes of the elect, love is a tremendous eternal light, even though the vulgar see it as but form and sensuality." (Rumi, 1368/2003, D-18997)

The Handmaiden would not have realised that her attraction for the goldsmith was due to mere physical beauty, if she would not have seen the declining beauty of her lover. She had not felt the sacrificing nature of the king if she would not have got married with the goldsmith. It is the love for the goldsmith that created the base for her union with the king in the end. In terms of divine love, as many Sufi consider it, the love for the people around us or the love for the things around us are in one way or another 'desires for God'. This desire takes birth when 'salik' starts to love. As Rumi (2009) discusses, these people and things that man loves in this world are nothing but veils. Behind these veils, there is ultimate Truth, the divine love.



However it is not advisable for a person to limit himself or herself till the love of this world. These people and the things he or she loves in this world are just reflection of the divine love. When the soul and the heart of 'salik' lack the spirituality, these things and people appear more beautiful and lovable to him. When he attains spirituality, he understands the true nature of what he loved earlier in this world. For the handmaiden, the goldsmith was so dear that she developed cureless disease for him. When she saw his declining physical beauty, she realised that her love for this person was mere physical attraction. Rumi (2009) compares divine love with the hunger and love for the people and things are compared with different dishes.

"Do you not see how a man desires a hundred different things? He says, "I want 'tutmaj stew'¹, I want 'burak'², I want halwa, I want fruit, I want dates." He enumerates and names all these things but the root is one thing: hunger. Do you not see that after he is surfeited with a single thing, he says "None of these is necessary". (Rumi, 2009, pp. 9-14)

2.2 Pain and Sufferings in Love:

Where there is love, there are pain and sufferings. The person may get everything else yet he cannot overcome the pain of love until he gets what he loves. The handmaiden was given all luxuries of royal life. Many expert physicians were also called but her illness could not be cured. When she got married with her lover, the goldsmith, the disease disappeared. The 'salik' also passes through a number of pains and sufferings when he is destined towards the divine love. These sufferings and pains come to an end with he gets united with the divine truth. Like Christian, in Bunyan's (2015) *Pilgrim's Progress*, salik has to bear the sufferings and even passes through the stages like 'Valley of Death' before reaching to 'the Celestial City' of divine love. Rumi states: "Where there is pain, cures will come: where there is poverty wealth will follow." (Rumi 1273/2004 pp. 193)

2.3. To Be Worthy for Love:

Unless 'salik' makes himself worthy for the divine love, he does not gain it. He needs to go through self-annihilation in order to make himself worthy for divine journey. The king



had keen desire to get married with the handmaiden. When he realised that he was not worthy for her, he fulfilled her desire through sacrificing his will. Through this sacrifice, he made himself worthy in eyes of his beloved. When she came to know about this nature of the king, she developed respect for him and accepted him as her husband in the end. Like, the king who made himself worthy for the love of the handmaiden, 'salik' needs to go through self-annihilation in order to be worthy for divine love.

2.4. Love Demands Sacrifice:

One does not be worthy for the love unless he sacrifices his will for the beloved. The king did the same to earn the feelings of the handmaiden. 'Salik' needs to sacrifice his carnal desires and attachment to worldly possessions in order to be worthy for divine love. He needs to sacrifice his 'self' through annihilating it.

Chittick(1983) writes that the realisation of annihilating 'self' or sacrificing desires preceded by implementation of theory and practice. Under the guidance of 'a pir', the spiritual guide, the seeker of divine Truth adheres spiritual discipline. The guide makes him to learn to neglect everything for the sake of the beloved, including himself. Under the guidance of the holy physician, the king adhered spiritual discipline of love. For the sake of his beloved, the handmaiden, he neglected his own desire to marry her.

2.5. Separation and Union:

The divine path or path of love has two fundamental stations: separation which Sufis call 'firaq' and union known as 'visal' in Sufi terminology. Separation from divine love results into self existence and any annihilation of self leads to union with God.

In *Mathnawi Manawi*, Rumi has used many allegories to symbolically narrate the journey from separation to union. For example in the first song, lamenting of reed for the reed-bed allegorises the lamenting soul that weeps for divine love after separation. Annihilation from the self gives the parrot freedom from the case of green-grocer in the story of 'The Green-



grocer and the Parrot'. The parrot needed to go through the death before the death in order to get united with his friend parrots in India.

The present story also deals with separation and union through love triangle of the king, the handmaiden and goldsmith of Samarcand. The king fell in love with the handmaiden and developed desire to marry her. The knowledge of her being in love with goldsmith developed the feeling of separation. This pang of separation got deeper when he had to sacrifice his desire of marrying her in order to fulfill the desire of his beloved. However, the guidance of holy physician ultimately results in to his union with the handmaiden. Thus, this story deals with the journey from separation to union allegorising the separation from divine love and establishing union with divine Truth. Rumi comments:

"The lover has received two hundred spirits from the Spirit of Guidance, and he sacrifices them all at every instant." (Rumi, 2004, pp. 207)

3. Conclusion:

Love, is the central theme in all works of Rumi. It is the central theme in the story of 'The King and Handmaiden' too. Major elements of love have been allegorically presented through this interesting story. At primary level of signification it narrates the love triangle of the king, the handmaiden and the goldsmith. On the secondary level it narrates the journey of a 'salik' towards attaining the divine Love.



References:

1. Bunyan, John. (2015) *Pilgrim's Progress*, Abbotsford, Wisconsin, Aneko Press.
2. Chittick, W. (1983). *The Sufi Path Of Love*, State University of New York Press, Albany.
3. Ishq-e-haqiqi and ishq-e-haqiqi. (n.d.). In Rekhta Dictionary. <http://www.rekhtadictionary.com/dictionary/Ishq-e-haqiqi>
4. Ishq-e-majazi. (n.d.). In Rekhta Dictionary. <http://www.rekhtadictionary.com/dictionary/Ishq-e-majazi>
5. Love. (n.d.). In Merriam Webster's online Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>
6. Rumi, J. (2004). *Divan-I;Kebir* (N.Ergin Trans.). Echo Publication. (Original work published 1368)
7. Rumi, J. (2004). *Mathnawi Manawi* (R.A. Nicholson, Trans.) Srinagar, Alfa Publishers and Distributers (Original work published 1273)
8. Rumi, J. (2009). *Discourses of Rumi* (A. Berry Trans.). Taylor and Frances e-Library (online) retrieved from http://books.google.co.in/books/about/Discourses_of_Rumi
9. Tyagi, V. (2011, March 01). 'Ishq-e;Haqiqi (The True Love). Speaking Tree.In. <http://www-speakingtree-in.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.speakingtree.in/blog/ishq-e-haqiqi-the-true-love>