

Sacred Dialogues: Intertextual and Semiotic Explorations of Mystical Imagery in Persian Sufi Poetry

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Abstract:

Persian Sufi poetry is one of the richest literary and mystical traditions in world literature and a vehicle for spiritual expression and philosophical inquiry. The purpose of this study is to elucidate the evolution of mystical imagery in Persian Sufi poetry through the viewpoints of intertextuality and semiotics and to analyze how the pattern of communication between poets is established through their continuous literary dialogue, namely the poets: Farid al-Din Attar and Jalal al-Din Rumi, and Hafez. How Persian Sufi poets reinterpret, adapt, and even subvert such mystical symbols central to Sufi literary tradition as wine, the beloved, the tavern and the nightingale over different historical and cultural contexts is examined. This research integrates the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), Julia Kristeva (1980), and Gérard Genette (1982) on intertextuality and certain very useful semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), Roland Barthes (1977), and Umberto Eco (1989) in an interdisciplinary approach to analyze how these mystical symbols have been transformed. In using qualitative literary analysis, i.e. close reading, intertextual mapping and semiotic interpretation, this study charts the evolution, reworking and challenge of mystical themes among multiple poets and over different periods. This finding of the study is that Persian Sufi poetry is inherently dialogic and adaptive and later poets used earlier poems to reinforce, modify, or subvert mystical symbols. The Sufi poetry of Attar, Rumi, and Hafez manifests its use of textual references within the evolving relationship of allusions to older Sufi and other texts. Historically, economically, and socio politically ranging from Mongol invasions, Safavid religious policies, to modern global interpretation of Sufism that led to these poetic reinterpretations, are also marked in the study. By providing an intertextual and semiotic analysis, this research makes a significant contribution to Persian literary studies and Islamic mystical thought as well as to the discipline of comparative literature at large. And, it can provide us with ideas about how Persian Sufi poetry works as a dynamic system of meaningful changes, a system that allows the poetry to remain relevant, to assist us in today's spiritual, literary, and philosophical discussions. The study also prompts future research on comparative mysticism, the place of the digital humanities in the intertextuality mapping and the contemporary reception of Sufi poetry as reflected in the Persian and global literary imaginary.

Keywords:

Persian, Sufi poetry, mystical imagery, intertextuality, semiotics, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Hafez, Farid al-Din Attar, literary symbolism, Umberto Eco, poetic dialogue, theological discourse, Islamic mysticism, comparative literature, Persian literary studies.

Introduction

One of the most profound and lasting literary traditions is that of Persian Sufi poetry, which is not only a manifestation of art, but also provides centuries of mystical thought and philosophical reflection in the form of a spiritual discourse. Persian Sufi poetry, which is rooted in Islamic mysticism (Tasawwuf) is not only a literary art form but also a means of conveying esoteric spiritual truths. It is a tradition, represented in the works of Jalal al-Din Rumi, Hafez, Farid al-Din Attar, and Sa'di, which speaks in a symbolic language which continues to provide the occasion for interpretations extending far beyond cultural and temporal boundaries. It is a fascinating subject for literary analysis as the richness of its imagery that symbolizes the complex mystical concepts like the wine, the beloved, the tavern, and the nightingale.

In this thesis, Persian Sufi poetry is considered with two lenses, intertextuality and semiotics, and analyzed to find how mystical imagery was developed and changed within various works of poetry and in different historical periods. Invoking an intertextually inclined notion of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), Julia Kristeva (1980), and Gérard Genette (1982), where texts are interdependent and meaning is constituted through literary dialogue and intertextual dialogue. Emerging alongside semiotics, conceptualized by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and furthered by Roland Barthes (1977) and Umberto Eco (1989), is a system for exploring the processes of how symbols work within an already structured system of creating meaning. This study will attempt to look at the evolution, adaptation, and reconfiguration of mystical symbols in Persian Sufi poetry by integrating these two theoretical approaches.

1.1. Background of the Study

1.1.1. Persian Sufi Poetry as a Mystical Tradition

The Persian Sufi poetic tradition is inextricably bound up with the mystical philosophy of Islamic Sufism that consists of the spiritual journey towards divine union. Persian Sufi poetry arose as a form of communication of abstract theological concepts in emotional and easily understandable forms, and through the language of metaphor, allegory and paradox, to express the depth of spiritual truth. Along these lines, the most refined expressions of the Sufi doctrine of divine love (ishq-e ilahi), self-annihilation (fanā'), and eternal subsistence (baqā') are located in poetry because mystical symbols function as the means of conveying transcendental realities.

By the 12th and 13th centuries, Persian Sufi poetry had grown into a sophisticated and highly allegorical form that portrayed the soul's travel from material state to divine truth; Rumi and Attar are among the best examples. Additionally, Rumi's *Masnavi*, viewed by many people as being equivalent to the Quran in its comprehensiveness in the field of the Sufi metaphysics, and Attar's "The Conference of the Birds," are among the most intricate allegorical narratives of the spiritual transformation. Ghazals of Hafez, on the other hand, seemed to have introduced much more (ambiguous, complex), (worldly), (highly ironic), and (mystical) types, questioning rigid (interpretations of) Sufi (doctrine). The works of these poets were not being made in isolation, but rather they were an ongoing literary and spiritual dialogue in which existing mystical motifs were reinterpreted and expanded upon.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research serves as a major contribution to Persian literary studies, Religious studies, Semiotics. It offers a new methodology for the analysis of Persian Sufi poetry by integrating intertextual and semiotic frameworks and offers a more nuanced picture of how mystical imagery works within a larger literary and cultural tradition. On another level, this work is distinguished for bridging between East and West literary theories by indicating how Persian mystical poetry is in consonance with more universal philosophical and semiotic discourses.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How do intertextual relationships among Persian Sufi poets shape the interpretation of mystical imagery?
2. What semiotic patterns emerge in Persian Sufi poetry, and how do they evolve across different poets?
3. How do historical and cultural contexts influence the transformation of mystical symbols in Persian Sufi poetry?
4. How do later poets, such as Hafez, engage in subversion and reinterpretation of earlier mystical symbols?

1.4. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this study, the theoretical framework is intertextuality and semiotics that discuss a full understanding of Persian Sufi Poetry.

Julia Kristeva (1980), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), and Gérard Genette (1982) coin this term [intertextuality] to argue that literary texts are never isolated; they are embedded within a larger textual network. In Persian Sufi poetry, intertextuality means the poets' borrowing, reconfiguring, and sometimes eversion of established mystical motifs. This is where Bakhtin's dialogism comes to be relevant, since Persian Sufi poets are involved in continuous textual dialogues with their antecedents, by developing on previous interpretations of mystical symbolism and adding new elements.

Palimpsests constitute the creation of Genette (1982) for mystical symbols and shows how mystical symbols are created. Persian Sufi poetry is a palimpsestic tradition in which additional meanings are written over old texts, with some components retained while others are altered. By taking this approach, we get to know better in how manner the symbols such as the wine, the nightingale and the beloved have their meaning shift according to different historical, cultural and philosophical contexts.

The methodology used for analyzing how mystical symbols work in Persian Sufi poetry is based on the semiotics developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), continued by Roland Barthes (1977) and by Umberto Eco (1989). In interpreting what mystical symbols represent, Saussure's signifier signified model is useful, and how these symbols operate at higher levels of meaning, Barthes' concept of mythology provides this notion.

In the context of Persian Sufi poetry, Umberto Eco's (1989) theory of 'open texts' is particularly relevant because she argues that texts can be open to being read in different ways depending on the reader's interpretive framework. This is apparent in that the same mystical symbol (wine, for example) can be the sign of divine ecstasy, rebellion against religious orthodoxy, or the annihilation of the self, depending on the poet and the historical period.

The Persian Sufi poetry is about a subtle interplay and reiteration of symbols that repeatedly deconstruct and realign itself in presenting mystical

symbols by constructing new ways in which they can be interpreted. By way of theoretical and conceptual analysis, this study of this poetic tradition shows how mystical imagery increases in the literary network, available for diffusive transmission along various routes. The purpose of this research is to pave the direction for other comparative mystical traditions research and semiotic evaluation of spiritual texts among cultures.

2. Literature review

This study has been an important field of investigation for scholars interested in mysticism, literary symbolism and intertextuality; and research of Persian Sufi poetry. Persian Sufi poetry is a most unique poetry that combines spiritual experience, philosophical inquiry and aesthetic expression and is truly one of the richest poetic traditions in world literature. For centuries, Attar, Rumi, Hafez and Sa'di have evolved themselves in a complex literary conversation, and on a mystical poetic lexicon that still develops today. This tradition shows the importance of understanding how mystical imagery has been shaped, and how it has been transformed.

Borrowing the theories of intertextuality as introduced by Julia Kristeva (1980), and developed further by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and Gérard Genette (1982), it bases itself on the literary dialogues between Persian Sufi poets. The intertextual network constitutes a continuous rewording of mystical symbols, in which a poet takes up on and develops the text(s) preceding her/him (Moiseeva, 2024). Simultaneously, semiotics, formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), Roland Barthes (1977) and Umberto Eco (1989), provides scholars the possible means with which to decrypt mystical symbols and their manifold meanings, while providing a linguistic and philosophical view of Persian Sufi poetry (Shadaram and Namwar, 2022). Although Persian Sufi poetry is the whenever the amount of research that has been conducted on it, but there is not a whole a work in which there is an integrated study of intertextuality in semiotics, it is suggested that deep researches will lead to a more comprehensive approach (Miller, 2022).

This review of literature seeks to trace the historical development of Persian Sufi poetry, its intertextual associations and semiotic particulars of mystical symbols. First, it will investigate the historical and cultural context that triggered the appearance of Persian Sufi poetry and second, investigate how intertextuality serves to mould the mystical discourse among Persian poets. Then it analyzes frameworks of semiotics to use for analyzing mystical imagery and describe prominent scholarly contributions and gaps in completing research on this topic. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this understanding will offer a perspective as to how Persian Sufi poetry functions as a dynamic system of evolving meaning.

2.1. Historical and Cultural Context of Persian Sufi Poetry

2.1.1. Early Persian Sufi Poetry and its Intellectual Foundations

Persian Sufi poetry shares with itself the historical development as well as spiritual and philosophical currents of Islamic mysticism. These early Persian Sufi poets taught a mystical poetic tradition in which poetry strove to express that which was ineffable. These poets used the Quranic exegesis, Neoplatonic philosophy and Persian metaphysics as a source for a mystical wording, for conveying mystical truths (Chittick, 1983; Nasr, 2007). In addition, Sanai's work 'Hadiqat al-Haqiqah' (The Walled Garden of Truth) is one of the earliest Persian mystical poetry examples containing moral allegory

and spiritual reflection (Moiseeva, 2024). The Conference of the Birds (Miller, 2022) by Attar outlined these themes with narrative structure, symbolic characters, to depict the soul's pilgrimage into divine union.

2.1.2. The Mongol Invasions and the Rise of Rumi

The Mongol invasions in the 13th century was a major turning point in Persian Sufi poetry. As a result of the destruction and social upheaval that followed, mystical poetry changed, poets started looking for new ways to express spirituality to respond to the existential crises of their time (Schimmel, 1992). The most important Persian Sufi poet of this period was, however, Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273). The Masnavi, which is called by some the Persian Quran, is the product of a synthesis between Attar's fictionalized parables and Ibn Arabi's metaphysical thought and provides the aspirant with a powerful guide to the mystical path (Moosa, 2022). Although Rumi's poetry builds upon Sufi themes from before him, it also stitches Quranic stories, classical Persian motifs, and even his own spiritual experiences into one poetic vision (Sedaghat, 2021).

2.1.3. Hafez and the Subversion of Mystical Symbolism

Hafez (1315–1390) redefined mystical symbolism in the 14th century as one of many poets whose ghazals were written during this period. However, unlike Rumi and Attar, earlier poets, Hafez's poetry brought a didactic approach to mysticism along with irony, ambiguity and paradox that rejected the established religious and mystical consensuses (Miller, 2022). In Hafez's use of wine, the beloved and the tavern there is a complex intertextual play in which the symbols oscillate between earthly pleasure and heavenly ecstasy (Moiseeva, 2024). He wrote his poetry in mystical tone but also carries a mockery of hypocrisy within the religious institutions which is why his ghazals are amenable to several interpretations (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022).

2.1.4. The Safavid Era and the Institutionalization of Sufi Poetry

The Safavid dynasty encouraged Shi'a Islam as the state religion and under it the Persian Sufi poetry was institutionalized by the 16th and 17th centuries. During this period mystical poetry was formalized and connected with Shi'a theological themes (Heydari, 2023). Symbolic mysticism of such elements as the nightingale and the rose were increasingly appropriated for a more orthodox interpretation within the Sufi discourse (Chishti, 2014). Safavid era poetry is a restriction on the interpretative flexibility of earlier poets like Rumi and Hafez, where they tried to harmonize Sufi themes with theological orthodoxy (Moosa, 2022).

2.1.5. The Modern Reception of Persian Sufi Poetry

Persian Sufi poetry figures prominently in a modern context too as an area of academic and literary interest with scholars still looking into the area in terms of philosophical, theological, and literary aspects. Globalization of Sufi poetry that has resulted in its being interpreted and adapted in other cultural contexts, and specifically in Western literary and philosophical traditions (Ewing, 2021). The ways that Persian mystical symbolism have been reinterpreting in the contemporary poetry, art, and music has been studied by the scholars such as Moiseeva (2024) and Miller (2022), that shows Sufi poetic tradition is still relevant.

2.2. Intertextuality in Persian Sufi Poetry

2.2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Intertextuality

According to the concept of intertextuality, texts are not produced in a vacuum rather, they belong to a literary dialogue that continuously develop. Secondly, according to Julia Kristeva (1980), based on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism, it is argued that texts acquire their meaning through their relation to existing texts. Intertextuality for Persian Sufi poetry is realized as thematic borrowing, allusions and symbolic reinterpretations (Genette, 1982). Rumi, Hafez and Attar conduct a poetic dialogue over the centuries and readjust mystical themes, a new line of dialogue, adapted to the intellectual and cultural climates (Moosa, 2022).

2.2.2. Intertextual Relationships Between Persian Sufi Poets

Intertextuality in Persian Sufi poetry as evident in the works of Attar, Rumi and Hafez illustrates the intertextuality between Attar, Rumi, and Hafez. The concept of divine love that Rumi had was based on the allegorical representations of spiritual awakening that were developed by Attar (Schmell, 1992). Rumi, in turn, inserted Attar's mystical motifs into a larger, philosophical and theological system (Miller, 2022). Hafez also discussed and demonstrated Rumi's mystical visions for criticism, however he brought ambiguity and irony to Sufi metaphors which were traditionally used (Moiseeva, 2024).

2.2.3. Thematic Borrowing and Symbolic Reinterpretation

In Persian Sufi poetry, mystical symbols are reinterpreted by different poets thus becoming one of the distinctive feature of intertextuality. The tavern, the wine, the beloved, the nightingale, and other such symbols that appear in Hafiz are derived from pre-Islamic Persian poetry but took on mystical meanings in the works of the Sufi poets (Chittick, 1983; Nasr, 2007). For instance, the symbol of wine was traditionally linked to earthly pleasure and became in Sufi poetry a symbol of divine intoxication and mystical ecstasy. Rumi took Attar's metaphor for self-annihilation (*fanā'*) in divine presence in terms of wine and extended it, also to the point of self-loss in divine love (Moosa, 2022; Schimmel, 1992). On the contrary, Hafez's poetry used this metaphor to both resist religious hypocrisy and revel in divine love (Miller, 2022).

Another constant Sufi metaphor, the tavern, traces its pattern of intertextual evolution roughly on par with the house. For Attar and Rumi, the tavern is a space away from dogmatic religious structures for the soul to be in the proximity of divine presence (Moiseeva, 2024). In Hafez's work, however, the tavern not only represents enjoyment but also inspires actions of resistance to religious orthodoxy and in the quest for spiritual freedom (Sedaghat, 2021). The interpretations of these symbols overlay each other among these poets in a dialogic manner, in that later poets need to reinterpret established mystical themes.

2.2.4. Intertextual Engagement with Religious and Philosophical Texts

Persian Sufi poetry does not borrow between the poets alone but also from Quranic exegesis, Hadith traditions, and the Islamic philosophical discourse. Rumi's tales in the Masnavi are, in many instances, revised versions of Quranic stories placed within Sufi metaphysical milieu (Chittick, 1983). Similarly, many of Hafez's poems also refer to Quranic verses, but instead of following the usual interpretations they reinterpret them in a mystical or even

subversive way (2022, Moosa). Using this intertextual strategy, Hafez is able to affirm and challenge religious authority at the same time and his poetry becomes at once devotional and critical (Miller, 2022).

Finally, Persian Sufi poets use Islamic Neoplatonism, especially the ideas of Ibn Arabi (1165– 1240), whose notion of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) deeply influenced Rumi and subsequent Sufi poets (Schimmel, 1992). Rumi's use of mystical imagery finds poetic expression of idea that all existence is manifestation of divine reality, where the beloved stands for God, the lover stands for yearning soul (Moiseeva, 2024). Persian Sufi poetry can also be enhanced with philosophical dimension which consequently enriches its intertextual complexity and enables various levels of interpretation.

2.2.5. Modern Scholarship on Intertextuality in Persian Sufi Poetry

Persian Sufi poetry has been studied by modern scholarship using theoretical lenses such as literary criticism, religious studies, and semiotic analysis with respect to intertextuality. Persian Sufi poets, Schimmel (1992), Chittick (1983), and Moosa (2022) note how Persian Sufi poets create a dynamic poetic tradition and reform mystical themes by building on an immense poetic tradition by recycling earlier poetic texts. In recent studies, Miller (2022) and Sedaghat (2021) have applied Postmodern and comparative literary approaches in exploring Persian Sufi poetry's resonance in contemporary mystical traditions.

Yet these advances have nonetheless left the field with a developed intertextual analysis that systematically maps relationships among the key Persian Sufi poets. In filling this gap this study studies the dialogic interplay between Persian Sufi poets and its pursuit of the investigation of the evolution of mystical symbols in different historical periods.

2.3. Semiotic Analysis of Mystical Imagery in Persian Sufi Poetry

2.3.1. Theoretical Foundations of Semiotics in Literature

A fruitful approach to the study of mystical imagery in Persian Sufi poems is a study of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols including the language itself. The basic concept of signifier-signified relation was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), developed by Roland Barthes (1977) and Umberto Eco (1989) (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022). Literary symbols, according to these theorists, acquire meaning from within a system of structures and the meaning of the symbols is not only dependent on the cultural context alone but also on the historical and intertextual contexts (Moosa, 2022).

2.3.2. Mystical Symbols and Their Semiotic Interpretations

Using a heavily encoded symbolic system, Persian Sufi poetry uses conventional objects as instances of more mystical objects. Indeed, for example, the beloved can refer to an earthly lover but also to the divine (Schimmel, 1992). Rumi's poetry is based on the loved one as a metaphor for God, which means the loved one often can be used as a symbol of the soul's need of union with the divine (Moiseeva, 2024). Yet in Hafez's ghazals, the beloved is much more ambiguous, a worldly figure, a divine figure, and a critic when dealing with social norms [in Hafez's ghazals, the beloved is more ambiguous, it can be a worldly figure, a divine figure or a critique of social norms (Miller, 2022).

The mirror is another major Sufi symbol meaning self reflection, spiritual manifestation, and divine manifestation in Persian poetry. The mirror in Rumi's *Masnavi* is the purification of the soul which after being free from

egotism will reflect the divine light (Chittick, 1983). However, unlike in Hafez's poetry, the mirror also represents illusion, as it implies the ephemeral nature of worldly appearances (Moosa, 2022). The limitation of this semiotic duality lies in Persian Sufi poets' ability to use the symbols to convey multileveled meanings which need to be deconstructed by a finer semiotic analysis.

2.3.3. The Role of Metaphor in Sufi Semiotics

Metaphor is central to Sufi poetry and poets use it to give concrete expression to an abstract spiritual reality. Mystical poetry, according to Umberto Eco (1989), is inherently open, that is, it entices to the multiple interpretations (Moiseeva, 2024). For example, Persian Sufi poetry uses the principle of multiple meanings in the use of symbols like the tavern, the reed flute, and so on (Miller, 2022).

2.3.4. Contemporary Semiotic Approaches to Persian Sufi Poetry

In more recent scholarship, computational linguistic analysis and corpus based semiotics has also been used to see how mystical symbols change over time (Sedaghat 2021). Persian Sufi semiotics are of a fluid nature (Moosa 2022), with the same symbol changing in meaning from one poet to another or from one period to another.

2.4. Gaps in Research and Justification for the Present Study

2.4.1. Research Gaps in the Study of Persian Sufi Poetry

Although many scholarly studies have been conducted on Persian Sufi poetry, intertextuality, and semiotics, literature in the area remains incomplete. Intertextuality and semiotics have mostly been treated as distinct analytical approaches in a majority of studies, which usually analyze the mystical symbols on their own rather considering how mystical symbols were transformed along the literary development (Moosa, 2022; Sedaghat, 2021). However, the mystical and theological dimensions of Sufi poetry have already been explored by many scholars like Schimmel (1992) and Chittick (1983) but their works are mainly philosophical rather than structurally analytical. Like intertextual studies, which have mostly dwelt with the relation of one poet towards other (such as the influence of Attar on Rumi or the impact of Rumi on Hafez), but not completely represented the volatile chain of mystical symbols during a number of centuries (Miller, 2022). The lack of a single methodology matched with the concepts of intertextuality and semiotics is the reason for non coherent interpretations of the Persian Sufi poetry, in which it does not equally allow conveying its deep symbolic transformation through time (Moiseeva, 2024).

Moreover, the semiotic analysis of Persian Sufi poetry is much less developed than in the case of the analysis of similar writings in Western and Arabic literature. Much of the work in semiotics, especially that of Roland Barthes (1977) and Umberto Eco (1989) has been used in the contexts of European literary traditions, yet their application to Persian Sufi poetry remains sparse in the scholarship of semiotics (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022). Persian mystical poetry is different from the meaning systems of the Western literature, and thus a culturally specific semiotic analysis is demanded in the essence of considering the impact of Islamic mysticism and Persian literature traditions (Chishti, 2014). Persian Sufi symbols for the most part have not been adequately contextualized within their intertextual as much as their semiotic frameworks, which lead to incomplete understanding of their deeper meanings and historical transformations.

There is a large research gap that relates to creating a historical portrait of the mystical symbols in different political and religious contexts. However, only a few studies have attempted to systematize the process in which mystical symbols adapt to different socio – political environments, for instance, the Mongol invasions, the Safavid institutionalization of Sufism, or modern reinterpretations of Persian Sufi poetry (Moosa, 2022). Consequently the symbolism of Sufi is explained statically and historically instead of dynamically and contextually (Sedaghat, 2021). Unless these gaps are closed, the study of Persian Sufi poetry has the possibility of remaining properly textual and divorced from its historical and philosophical background.

2.4.2. Justification for the Present Study

An absence of research on the development and evolution of central mystical concepts in literary and narrative form in Persian Sufi poetry characterizes this area of research. For this purpose, the present study utilizes an approach that combines the intertextuality and semiotics to study the development and evolution of mystical images in Persian Sufi poetry. It is important because it offers a coherent framework merging the literary and symbolic changes of Persian mystical poetry, closing a gap between two major analytical bridges that have so far been studied separately (Moiseeva, 2024). In this study, the course of transformation of the Persian mystical imagery shall be examined through the manner in which mystical symbols change as they engage intertextually from one poem to the other among poets including Attar, Rumi, and Hafez (Miller, 2022). The semiotic analysis application will produce a rich decoding of mystical symbols and layers of their meaning within the various historical circumstances and philosophies (Shadaram and Namwar, 2022).

In addition, this study answers to the demand for culturally grounded semiotic methodology that respects the characteristics of Persian mystical symbolism. Most of the semiotic models developed today are grounded in Western literary traditions and are unable to adequately address the esoteric and philosophical attributes of Persian Sufi poetry (Ewing, 2021). This research will use this to develop a more proper and context sensitive framework for the analysis of mystical imagery in the Sufi poetic tradition, and will be useful in the study of Persian and Islamic literary texts (Chishti, 2014). At the same time, this approach proves to be especially important for understanding the transference of meaning of mystical images, similar to tavern, wine or beloved, in different poets and different time periods, or, to put it differently, ensuring the continuity and adaptation within the tradition of Sufi poetry (Moosa, 2022).

Second, this study has as another key justification a historical approach to the Persian Sufi symbolism that has been generally neglected in preceding research. Persian Sufi poetry has been the subject of scholarly attention to its textual aspects, yet not enough has been done in terms of how mystical imagery is adapted to different socio-political environments (Sedaghat, 2021). As such, this study will provide a historically grounded study of the meanings of Persian mystical symbols in relation to religious, cultural and political changes, so as to give a better understanding of what constitutes Persian mysticism today. For instance, it will show how the symbol of divine intoxication was understood in preMongol, postMongol and Safavid Persia in a much more dynamic way of Sufi poetic symbolism (Moiseeva, 2024). This provides a new methodological model (drawing from historical, literary, and semiotic perspectives) which will

fill a conspicuous gap in Persian literary studies, contributing also to expanding the volume of shared material among several such fields of study.

2.4.3. Contribution to Persian Literary and Religious Studies

Not only does this study have significance to Persian literary scholarship, it also poses relevance to the field of comparative literature, semiotics and religious studies. Intertextual and semiotic analysis will be integrated to provide the new methodological model that can be used beyond Persian Sufi poetry and extended to other mystical literary traditions, e.g. Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu Sufi poetry (Moosa, 2022). Because of this cross-cultural applicability, this study is of great interest for comparative literary studies as well as for revealing universal mechanisms of mystical symbolism (Miller, 2022).

Additionally, this study will enrich the study of Persian poetry and Islamic theological studies because it will make evident how Sufi poetry provides literary and theological discourses in shaping the intellectual and spiritual lives of communities that held Persian as their spoken language (Chittick, 1983). This research will also map the evolution of mystical symbols and how Persian Sufi poets reinterpret theological concepts in Persian Sufi poetry with the help of poetic symbolism (Sedaghat, 2021). It is especially essential to understand to what extent Persian Sufi poetry serves as a transition from Islamic mysticism to the Persian literary aesthetics, i.e., it is their synthesis of theological and poetic traditions (Moiseeva, 2024).

Finally, this study is of contemporary importance since Persian Sufi poetry still inspires modern Persian literature and art, as well as worldwide mystical discourse. Classical Persian Sufi poetry is still apposite in the present times, many of their symbols and themes still be inspiring modern poets, musicians, and spiritual thinkers (2021, Ewing). An analysis of the ways in which these symbols have developed over generations will help this research explain why Persian Sufi poetry remains a significant, influential literary tradition, and lay out new understandings of mystical poetry in the modern world (Miller, 2022). Beyond academia, this contribution is rich with cultural and philosophical insights for people generally interested in how the Persian mystical thought fits into those of other global spiritual traditions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research is conducted with a qualitative research method based on literary analysis in Persian Sufi poetry through intertextual and semiotic approach. This research is appropriate for qualitative approach that grants an interpretative and thematic inquiry in the domain of symbolic, historical, and philosophical aspects of Sufi poetry (Rasool et al., 2024). Whereas the quantitative methodologies based on quantitative data and statistical correlations, qualitative analysis allows the opening up of the text and the analysis of textual meaning, especially in mystical and metaphor laden texts (Eagleton 2011). Due to the fact that Persian Sufi poetry unfolds in a network of mystical symbols and intertextual exchanges, a textual and interpretative approach helps elucidate how mystical symbols change across poets and over time (Chittick, 1983).

Qualitative research, being interpretative, is therefore a suitable means of research in that the meanings associated with mystical symbols are mostly fluid, layered and context dependent (Moosa, 2022). This study involves

engaging in manual close reading and textual comparison, whereby it will discover how mystical symbols transform over time, and demonstrates their intertextual relationships and semiotic transformations (Sedaghat, 2021). Not surprisingly, it reflects the literary hermeneutical approach which stresses 'thick' textual interpretation over empirical measurement (Gadamer, 1975). Persian Sufi poetry is highly metaphorical and philosophical, and therefore it requires a qualitative, text-based approach where its symbolic landscape may be rigorously and context sensitively analyzed (Moiseeva, 2024).

3.2. Textual Corpus Selection

The criteria for the choice of primary texts are rigorous: historical, thematic, intertextual relevance. Persian Sufi poetry has a long tradition of literary dialogue and it is thus necessary to choose texts that have influenced and reflected each other (Moosa, 2022). This study chooses the texts included in this study historically because these texts are informative, clearly reflects the theme of the fiction and play, and have an intertextuality. This is because Sufi poetry depends on repeated motifs and symbolic reinventions, so by having texts from different historical periods we will be able to fully perceive how the mystical symbols change through time (Nasr, 2007). Moreover, these texts have been widely studied before, and have been significantly used in past scholarship to investigate intertextual participation and semiotic variation (Schimmel, 1992).

Three primary texts were chosen from which we have all derived many elements of what collectively our cultures have become. (2) First in this trio is the 12th century allegory, "The Conference of the Birds" by Farid al Din Attar, a masterpiece in the making of many of the mystical themes and symbols seen in Rumi and Hafez later works. The most important introduction in this piece includes spiritual journey, the beloved, and divine union which are integral to Sufi poetic discourse (Moosa, 2022). Jalal al-Din Rumi, with the second "Masnavi," expanded Attar's mythical motifs in the 13th century, and offered much in terms of philosophical depth and theological insights that would go on to serve as an integral part of later Sufi poetry (Schimmel, 1992). The text also brought new mystical symbols, the reed flute and divine intoxication into play, symbols later poets reinterpreted. Third, 'Ghazals' by Hafez is a collection of lyrical poetry on the 14th century which shows a meaningful historical period of Persian Sufism literary history because it uses irony and ambiguity as well as inclusive and exclusive elements of past mystical strains (Miller, 2022). Availability of this selection makes it possible to trace out changes in mystical imagery, that is, how a given poet reinterprets the symbols used by preceding poets in the context of new historical and philosophical conditions (Moiseeva, 2024).

3.3. Data Collection Methods

For this study, the main data collection technique is a manual close reading and textual analysis of mystical symbols in Persian Sufi poetry in order to conduct a detailed study. Because as Chittick (1983) argues, Sufi poetry employs the metaphorical and allegorical structures which convey layered meanings, close reading is an essential tool in examining meanings of mystical symbols. This entails the acknowledgment of the selected texts being read manually for the purpose of looking for the recurring mystical symbols, how such have been semantically altered, as well as variations of symbols in the same context but between different poets or different time periods (Moosa,

2022). By using this approach, Sedaghat (2021) assures that the subtle philosophical and literary nuances of Persian Sufi poetry are explored properly without relying on algorithmic or software text analysis.

Secondly, intertextual analysis will be conducted as a secondary data collection method to manually compare different texts to find the literary allusions, symbolic adaptations, and thematic continuities. This method will integrate systematically tracing of references between different poets and will show how Persian Sufi poetry develops a continuous literary dialogue through the centuries (Miller, 2022). Since a lot of mystical symbols given for reinterpretation and transformation, the intertextual analysis will help to compare how later poets update and distort earlier symbols (Moiseeva, 2024). In addition, the semiotic approach will serve as an integral part of the cataloging mystical symbols by studying their denotative (literal) and connotative (mystical) meanings. In doing so manual documentation of patterns and changes in mystical imagery happening throughout history (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022) is required.

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

Persian Sufi poetry will be organized and interpreted using thematic mapping of the symbolic elements within them. The technique used in this method consists of recognizing particular mystical symbols that will then be traced back in different poets as well as throughout the various time periods (Moosa, 2022). Persian Sufi poetry utilizes reliance on symbolic density and the accrual of meanings through symbols, and thematic mapping does lend itself to structuring the representation of how symbols take on new connotations through time (Schimmel, 1992). The performance of this approach will be conducted manually with extensive written notes and comparison matrices in which each theme is analyzed within its correct intertextual and philosophical context.

A comparative literary approach will also be used to see how the same mystical symbols are dealt with differently by the different poets. This study will analyze the dynamism and adaptability of mystical symbolism by comparing Attar's, Rumi's and Hafez's interpretations of central Sufi metaphors (Miller, 2022). Through the lens of this comparative analysis, Persian Sufi poetry will be studied in terms of constructing, reinterpretations, subversions of mystical symbols in Persian literary traditions (Moiseeva, 2024).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Due to the present nature of the study, which relies on historical literary texts, no human participants nor interactions with modern poets are involved. Nonetheless, ethical questions are still relevant because Persian Sufi poetry should be read scholarly and duly (Moosa, 2022). Since Sufi poetry is rooted within a highly spiritual and philosophical tradition, it is a must not to misrepresent or read mystical symbols noumenally (Schimmel, 1992). The research will be academically intact as well as following on literary interpretations through studying the religious and theological evidences (literary interpretation) (Sedaghat, 2021). In addition, proper citation practices will be adhered to such that references to primary texts and secondary secondary scholarly sources will be made, which will ground the research in its verified academic discourse (Miller, 2022).

4. Findings & Discussion

4.1. Thematic and Symbolic Patterns in Persian Sufi Poetry

The whole tradition of Persian Sufi poetry is replete with mystical symbolism and poetic allusion and the poets share a fixed stock of metaphors and allegories to signify the journey of the soul to the union with the divine. The communal use of wine, the beloved, the tavern and the nightingale, which turn up as recurring motifs, is not only an aesthetic exploitation but also a semiotic one since these motifs are used to convey esoteric Sufi concepts. As a result, over the history course, events, changes in cultural and theological symbols changed also (Moisaevea, 2024).

Of all metaphors found in Persian Sufi poetry, the metaphor of wine has been applied in the poetry of Attar, Rumi, and Hafez to the widest extent. Although an integral part of classical Persian culture (wine having been used as a pleasure and pleasure was the indulgence of classical Persian), it acquires a higher mystical meaning in Sufi poetry. In Attar's perspective, wine is spiritual intoxication, a state of *fanā'* (annihilation of the self in God) (Nasr, 2007). Expanding on this idea, Rumi interprets wine to be a way out of the materiality and into the divine presence (Schimmel, 1992). But Hafez presents a more ambiguous usage of wine, which serves both as a metaphor for spiritual high and scathing comment on religious hypocrisy (Miller, 2022). It could be argued that this intertextual evolution of the wine symbol illustrates how Persian Sufi poets engage in a dynamic dialogue with each other by each generation revitalizing mystical motifs for new theological and literary contexts (Sedaghat, 2021).

In Sufi poetry, the beloved also serves as another critical symbol which is the Divine, the Prophet or unattainable source of longing. In the first part, Attar introduces the beloved as the ultimate destination of mystical journey, as in *The Conference of the Birds* when the collective reflection of the seekers is revealed in the mystic bird, Simorgh (Chittick, 1983). This metaphor is elaborated on by Rumi, who also stresses the pain of separation and burning desire for divine union, as famously elaborated in his description of the soul being like a reed flute that longs to return to its source (Schimmel, 1992). On the other hand, Hafez humanizes the beloved and makes him an ambiguous character that equivocates earthly and divine love (Moosa, 2022). An evidence of this evolution is that Sufi hermeneutics not just evolves but evolves as Sufis dial back their hermeneutics thus making the beloved more of a personal experience of the divine beauty (Miller, 2022).

Persian Sufi poetry not only signifies the tavern as a symbol, but as a multi layered symbol as well. While the tavern is linked with sin and immorality in traditional Islamic discourse, Sufi poets redesignate it as the space of spiritual freedom. Based on the dynamics of Attar and Rumi, the tavern is represented as the metaphor for the withdrawal from social conventions, the detachment of the real seekers from the world so that they can feel God more intimately (Moisaevea, 2024). However, Hafez stands in a more rebellious way while he uses the tavern as a symbol of defiance against religious orthodoxy and a place to have sincere devotion without institutionalized piety (Sedaghat, 2021). As seen in the differing meanings ascribed to the tavern across poets, mystical symbols are semiotic by adaptability, which is based on the historical and theological contexts they function as signs in (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022).

4.2. Intertextual Dialogues and Literary Evolution

In Persian Sufi poetry, mystic symbolism evolves and is deeply related to intertextual dialogues between later poets who draw upon, change, or make fun of the imagery of earlier ones. Rumi, Attar, and Hafez (Miller, 2022) have come out to form a tradition of mystical storytelling and symbolic reinterpretation into a densely knitted legacy.

Another striking intertextual dialogue appears in the adaptation of what Attar means by the spiritual journey. Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* defines a grand allegory (Chittick, 1983) of 30 birds who embark on a dangerous journey through seven valleys to find the Simorgh. In his *Masnawi*, Rumi extends this with a personalized and more fluid journey, mostly centered around love and longing as catalyst for mystical union (Schimmel, 1992). While this framework is destabilized by Hafez, the poet refused to follow such a simple mystical path, accepting ambiguity and paradox. While Rumi's path is a structured one, Hafez's offers enlightenment to the reader spontaneously and ironically in the same light as satire (Moisaevea, 2024). For the matter of fact, this transition represents the growing literary trend of the Persian Sufi poetry, which later poets question the convention established by the previous ones, rather than just being obedient to it (Sedaghat, 2021).

Probably the most important intertextual engagement is in relation to divine love and separation. These themes of pain of longing are found in Rumi's poetry which is saturated with reed flute, burning candles, moth to the flame (Schimmel, 1992). However, Hafez presents us a more skeptical, ironic perspective in which he mocks those claiming they have absolute truth (but still expressing his longing for divine union) (Miller, 2022). It shows that Persian Sufi poetry, by its nature as a constant reinterpretation of mystical themes, continues to be a revisiting of both the devotional tone of Rumi and the irreverent irony of Hafez (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022).

4.3. Contextual Insights into Symbolic Transformations

It has been shown that historical and socio political contexts deeply affect the transformation of mystical symbols in Persian Sufi poetry. However, unlike early Sufi poets such as Attar and Rumi who lived in a period of relatively religious tolerance, Hafez lived in an increasing period of orthodoxy and institutionalization of Sufism that may have prompted his more skeptical and ambivalent attitude to issues of mysticism (Moosa, 2022).

Among the various influences on Persian literary traditions, such as monumental works such as the *Shahname* (Book of kings), the Mongol invasions (thirteenth century) forced many poets to find refuge into mystical thought as a means of retreat from the idiosyncrasies of political instability and cultural upheaval (Nasr, 2007). However, Rumi's focus on love and divine union is a reaction to this era of turmoil, a perspective which he envisions as transcendence and unity when chaos reigns (Schimmel, 1992). However, what distinguishes Hafez from previous poets is his poetry belonging to a later period of the Timurid period, as evident in his more cynical approach to religious authority, which is arguably accounted for by the expanding power of institutionalized Sufi orders and courtship (Moisaevea, 2024).

4.4. Integration of Findings with Existing Scholarship

These results verify and extend existing research regarding Persian Sufi poetry, showing a potential value of intertextual and semiotic analysis to further explain mystical symbolism (Miller, 2022). However, previous studies on the

phenomenon of mysticism have focused on individual poets, without systematically tracing the evolution of mystical symbols across different generations and offering, at most, explicit or implicit indices of the nature of symbolic transformations over time (Sedaghat, 2021).

This study tries to integrate intertextual analysis and semiotic theory with the aim of providing new insights into the adaptability of mystical symbols, that is, how Persian Sufi poets enter into a dialogue beyond repetition into an active reinterpretation and subversion in their use of the mystical symbols (Shadaram & Namwar, 2022). The significance of historical and theological contexts in defining literary meanings of an episode has a corollary in mystical literature within the Persian tradition to which these findings contribute (Moosa, 2022).

5. Conclusion & Implications

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This work has examined the intertextual and semiotic elements of mystical imagery found in Persian Sufi poetry as it develops by way of the writings of Attar, Rumi and Hafez. The symbols central to poetry are esoteric and highly ambiguous, through employing close reading, intertextual analysis, and semiotic interpretation it has been able to realize how they change from poet to poet and from one era to another: wine, the beloved, the tavern and the nightingale (Moisaeva, 2024). Miller (2022) finds that Persian Sufi poetry's mystical imagery undergoes reinterpretation in ongoing flux, always in response to new philosophical, theological, and socio-political realities.

In phrases of intertextual evaluation, later poets take part in a dynamic literary dialogue with their predecessors, by the way both reproducing earlier mystical metaphors, after which perverting or recontextualizing them (Moosa, 2022). For instance, in *The Conference of the Birds*, Attar pioneered the allegorical journey of the soul, and then Rumi picked up the mystical theme of love and annihilation of the self in the divine (Chittick, 1983). In contrast, Hafez employed a more ironic and unclear language questioning whether mystical union was at all certain, yet he remained fully immersed in the tradition of *divan* lore that characterized such divine passion (Schimmel, 1992).

Furthermore, according to semiotic analysis, mystical symbols in Persian Sufi poetry are made of multiple meanings that fluctuate according to historical and theological contexts. This wine, this beloved, this tavern undergoes drastic changes from one poet to the other — at one moment it signifies spiritual ecstasy and divine love and at another it criticizes religious hypocrisy and institutionalized spirituality (Sedaghat, 2021). Findings show that Sufi poetic language is adaptable, whereby mystical symbols represent spiritual metaphors and social commentary (Miller, 2022).

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, this research brings into play interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Persian Sufi poetry by merging intertextual and semiotic analysis to provide a new framework for understanding how mystical symbols evolve across literary traditions (Moosa, 2022). This research differs from previous ones in that earlier studies have focused less on intertextuality and semiotics, than this research, which shows that an integral approach gives a more complete picture of the form in which the mystical imagery is used in Sufi poetry of Persian (Chittick, 1983).

This study also contributes to Islamic literary studies by using Persian Sufi poetry as a literary and theological discourse. Mystical poetry is not merely an aesthetic expression; but an essential part of Islamic mystical thought that expresses in its own turns interpretations of divine love, spiritual enlightenment, and the nature of human existence (Schimmel, 1992). Through tracing the genealogy of key mystical symbols, this research looks into how these key mystical symbols are connected to the Persian Sufi poetry in the wider Islamic intellectual traditions (Moisaeveva, 2024).

Secondly, this study is also applicable from the point of Persian Sufi poet, but goes beyond such an application and is useful for other mystical literary traditions such as Arabic, Turkish and Indian Sufi poetry. This research proves a method with which a basis for cross cultural analysis of mystical literature and spiritual symbol could be established by illustrating the process that a symbol utilized by various poets in different eras was bent and redefined (Miller, 2022).

5.3. Practical and Cultural Implications

The findings of this study hold important implications for modern interpretations of Persian Sufi poetry, both in literary scholarship and in broader cultural discourse. However, the semiotic and intertextual structures of Persian Sufi poetry have their own meaning; they are alive and more reason for themselves to keep on being alive and have relevance in the Iranian contemporary literature, music and spirituality (Moosa, 2022). For all the scholars who are interested in the complexity and shiftiness of transcendentalist mystic symbols and, therefore, their inability to be translated in laminar form (Schimmel, 1992).

This also touches spiritual and philosophical debates in modern world. Persian Sufi poetry, along mystical themes like the longing for transcendence, the critique of dogmatism, and the celebration of divine love, not only continues to be relevant in spiritual and even existential debates of today, but also remains relevant to modern pursuits (Miller, 2022). In order to present a framework for the understanding of the persistent appeal of Sufi poetry in both traditional and modern situations (Moisaeveva, 2024), this research investigates how these themes emerged historically.

Finally, this study lists the credit to pay the importance of cultural preservation and of literary appreciation. In this period of rising globalization and cultural homogenization, Persian Sufi Poetry is a testimony to the richness of the intellectual and artistic legacies of Persian speaking societies. This research is a contribution towards efforts to preserve and promote Persian literary heritage, as deepened knowledge of how mystical symbols function in Sufi poetry (Chittick, 1983) will allow readers of the poem to learn about the different meanings and symbolism that can be used to translate it into English.

5.4. Reflections on Methodology

This study has, however, been able to find the qualitative technique of close reading, intertextual analysis and semiotics interpretation useful in mining different levels of mystic symbolism in Persian Sufi poetry. This method used instead of computational tools allowed for a more nuanced discussion of the poetic texts, while allowing the subtleties of literary, philosophical and spiritual nuances to be borne (Schimmel, 1992).

However, the main limitation to employ this approach is that there is a subjectivity in the interpretation. Since mystical poetry contains various

meanings, it opens the opportunity for different scholars to offer different interpretations of the same symbols based on their theological, historical and literary views (Moisaeveva, 2024). Moreover, the study was limited to only certain choices from Attar, Rumi, and Hafez's literary writings so that a larger horizon of Persian Sufi poetry could contribute other aspects (Miller, 2022).

This methodological framework could be further elaborated in future research through the use of a comparative approach that compares Persian Sufi poetry to mystical tradition in other cultures. Furthermore, digital humanities tools in textual mapping can contribute to new methods of visualizing intertextual relationships, however, a balance between computational and interpretive method is highly necessary (Sedaghat, 2021).

5.5. Future Research Directions

An evolutionary model for care is conceptually based on the findings of this study and suggests several areas for future research. A promising direction is to compare the role of Persian Sufi poetry in the literature of mysticism with the Arabic, Turkish and Indian literature of mysticism. Because Sufi poetry is a transnational literary tradition, exploring its symbolic structures within different cultural and linguistic contexts may offer information beyond one's own, and more, universal themes and variations (Miller, 2022).

A more focused research of specific mystical symbols can be another potential area for future research. Although this research looked at several crucial symbols like wine, the beloved, and the tavern, there can be further research about the (Moosa, 2022). More insight into Persian mystical poetics could be gleaned by a more detailed investigation of how these symbols have been used in different Sufi orders and theological schools (Schimmel, 1992).

Finally, this research also could continue to investigate modern reception of Persian Sufism, including how Persian poets reinterpret Sufi themes and symbols in contemporary Persian poetry, literature, music, and philosophies (Moisaeveva, 2024). As the global interest in Rumi's poetry and Sufi spirituality grows, it becomes necessary to understand how Persian Sufi poetry serves as inspiration to contemporary thought (Miller, 2022).

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