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## Role of Sufism and Spirituality in Psychological Well Being: A Study of Elif Shafak's 'The Forty Rules of Love' From a Cognitive and Existential Perspective

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### Abstract

*Every individual faces existential crises at some point in life, especially when he or she is going through hard times. The human mind, human body, human health, and disease can be seen as directly or indirectly linked to spirituality. Past research has shown that spirituality is one of the most important determinants of physical and mental health. Spirituality has proved to be quite effective in the field of neuroscience. However, little work has been done on how it plays a role in the development of a healthy mind. Sufism is considered to be a prominent spiritual phenomenon in Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity. It is believed that Sufism plays a positive role in bringing harmony to people and their existence. Elif Shafak is one of those writers who are deeply moved by the Sufi phenomenon and how it plays its part in the positive transformation of the individual. This research analyses Sufism and spirituality and tries to explain how Sufism and Spirituality can help with existential crises and the healing of mental health problems, as illustrated in Elif Shafak's novel The Forty Rules of Love. This study employs a qualitative method of analysis and helps to understand the religious experiences and the love that affects the actions of the individual and how this brings about a positive change in one's life by providing a new perspective.*

**Keywords:** Sufism, Spirituality, Existential Crisis, Mental Health

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## **Introduction**

This paper aims to explain how Sufism and Spirituality can help with existential crises and the healing of mental health problems, as demonstrated by ElifShafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*. Existence has always been a fair question for people to know their inner self properly and finding the reason 'to be or not to be' has always been a struggle for people for decades. The history of human struggle with their existence goes as far as Adam, who wandered the earth after being banished from heaven for years (Karim, 2019). This journey of knowing 'self' has led men to find answers in philosophy, go through the vast chapters of empirical sciences, and dive deep into the religious dogmas. Humans have made progress in understanding life as it is; yet, the answer to the big question still remains in doubt as to why remain on the earth out of choice occupied with loss and distress (Nizamie et al, 2013). To find the answers to such questions, overwhelming the mind, the only way is starting from the beginning with the matters of 'creation' and the idea of 'divine love' which is known as Sufism. Sufism, whether in religion or in isolation, has been in the practice of mankind for the past decades. The last prophet of Allah, Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W) remained in Spirituality long before his first revelation. In fact, he is known as the first Sufi who sought guidance in spirituality (Bukhari, 1978).

Shafak (2011) in her novel *'The Forty Rules of Love'* explained that the

most important part of any belief or culture is to give humans a sense of purpose to guide them throughout life. She has presented the idea that this world takes away calmness of the human nature leading to frustration and unanswered depression as it is limited in its pleasures. Sufism offers more than just a normal religious belief by teaching the practices of patience and the ultimate union with God. The answers and the satisfaction that the Sufism provides to the humans ultimately becomes a reason for their mental peace, as it helps the people in understanding why the mental illness is there in the first place, in terms of cause and effect, the deeper meanings and interpretations and how to cure them. Moreover, with the guidance and the effects that Sufism provides for the human mind, it is, therefore, important for the psychiatrists and psychologists to keep in mind the spiritual aspect and be aware of the ways in which the Spirituality can affect the mental and the physical health (Karim, 2019).

This paper provides guidance on how Sufism resolves the existential crisis among humans and affects their mental health in a positive manner as depicted in the novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. The foundations of Sufism, that are used in this paper, are the specific kind of Islamic Sufism and Eastern Sufism as portrayed by Shafak (2011). By keeping the novel as a guide, this research aims to analyze, how Sufism influences the mental health of its followers and how it changes the perspective of the people going through depression by providing them a new perspective through answering

universal and divine mysteries.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This research aims to trace the aspects of Sufism and Spirituality with reference to cognitive and existential perspectives in the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak. The novel depicts that, Sufism builds up a higher connection with God and ultimately provides humans with love, guidance, and hope for the greater good which provides them with an essence of self-assurance ultimately helping them in solving their mental health issues. This research also provides the opportunity to highlight the aspects of the novel that demonstrate the effects of Sufism on mental health which will provide a guide for future psychological researches.

### **Research Objectives**

Following are the research objectives of this study:

- To analyze Sufism and Spirituality and its effect on the mental health of the protagonist in the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak.
- To create awareness among the psychological researchers about the importance of spirituality in healing mental illnesses.
- **Research Questions**
- Following is the research question for this particular research:
- What are the effects of Sufism on

the mental health of the protagonist in the novel *'The Forty Rules of Love'* by Elif Shafak?

- Why is it important for psychologists and psychiatrists to be aware of Sufism and spirituality and their effects on mental health?

### **Significance of the study**

Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* exhibits the Sufi phenomenon and its effect on mental health, providing a new perspective, helping in overcoming the toxic social and domestic circle, and finding answers to the existential crisis. The work that has previously been done on this novel is only in the perspective of reflecting the Sufi phenomenon. This research explores the effects that the Sufi phenomenon has on the mental health of the people. The findings will provide the basis for future psychological researches in this area and will also provide the eastern and western psychologists and psychiatrists some solid grounds to cure mental illnesses keeping spirituality as the key factor.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Need to be Aware of Sufism**

As humans grow and become part of a society, their cognition that defines the way of their thinking and their actions is created by the set of ideals and the social and religious values they acquire. The ideals related to the world, which is seen by the eye, the vision related to the natural phenomenon, the physical aspects of

the universe, and logical thinking are supported by science and social norms. Furthermore, the values are derived from either religious or ancestral philosophies which include the theory of humanism and existentialism that support survival (Burston, 2003). Spirituality is something free of religion and within the practices of the religion, spirituality is the most important element, as it is the key to submitting yourself to the love of God Almighty. Almost all of the philosophies provided by all the religions are used to form the social norms and guidelines for the people who follow that religion. These philosophies provide complete social systems for the people and while running the systems in light of these values the people achieve both physical and mental well-being.

Although many scientists confirmed this fact that even if there was no God in the reality, humans would have the need to create one because practicing religion without the applications of science is blindness and practicing science without religion is stupidity (Einstein, 2012). However, the liberalism of the 20th century has put away the concept of spirituality and the only daily practice is to fight for the desires. Spirituality is the phenomenon, which makes people practice the control of their desires, and once a person has control over desires he has control of the entire world (Spinner-Halev, 2008). Moreover, after the researches of the health and neuroscience department, spirituality is now recognized as one of the key factors in the mental well-being of

people (Walach et al, 2011).

The reason is that it goes side by side with the social and cultural norms and it was considered and placed in one of the most important variables of maintaining good health by the World Health Organization in the session of 37th international assembly (Basu, 1995). Today, in the western world the holy teachings of Sufism/ spirituality and the unity with God or some higher power is mandatory in the basic college education for the students in order to maintain a broad perspective on the subject so that they may be able to maintain better mental health while having guidance through the spirituality (Sims, 1995). The young individuals are the ones who have been the victims of existential crisis in all the eras especially the youth of the 21st century who are facing the existential crisis more than any other generation and now the scholars see that spirituality affects the mind of the people in such a way that it solves their mental issues by 75% and the rest can be dealt with the psychological treatment (Puchaski et al, 2001).

In the past, the researchers also worked on the positive and the negative effects of spirituality on the minds of the people and how it derives the changes in their perspectives. The spiritual belief that people hold and the practices they practice, in the light of that belief system, have a profound impact on their physical as well as mental health (Fehring et al, 1987). Sufism is practiced all over the world with its followers belonging to all the religions i.e. among the Muslims

covering the areas of almost the entire east and few lands of the west, and among the non-Muslims where the idea of Spiritual healing is spreading with speed and people are developing an understanding towards Sufism and its effects on the mental health. Not only at the public level but the understanding and the implications of spirituality are rapidly influencing the yoga techniques (Ernst, 2005). If taken into account, Sufism gives the chance to understand the source of the religion and its importance. It gives its follower a proper sense of the creator and the creation. Similarly, it provides them the knowledge of their creator on a much deeper level and makes them understand the importance of the bond between humans and the cosmos. It provides an individual a sense that the creation is in its strongest form only when it is in unity with its creator- God in general (Bui & Bui 2015).

The Sufis, while contemplating and meditating using the higher power of the brain and in such use of the brain, they come across the experiences a little closer to that of the revelation (the word of Islam) that was bestowed upon the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) (Green, 2012). In fact, the last messenger of Allah (S.A.W) is known to be the first Sufi of Islam as for the 40 years before revelation; he had the strongest and an unbeatable concept of his creator along with the awareness of the necessity of his bond with God. Sufism and spirituality awaken a deeper understanding of the creator among its followers. This provides the researchers an opportunity to dive deeper into it and discover the effects

that combine religious knowledge with science (Addas, 1993).

### **Sufism and The Forty Rules of Love**

Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* has portrayed Sufism as independent of religion and as a universal guide for everyone with a lost cause. Elif Shafak has pictured the kind of Spirituality that is not restricted to any social or religious norm but only joins the creation with the creator and gives them the answers of 'why I am'. Anyone who has a love of any kind and devoid of personal gains is a Sufi. Anyone stretching from the Muslim dervish Shams and Maulana Rumi to the Christian such as Francis can be a Sufi. The harlot Desert Rose and the social outcast beggar Hassan can achieve a purpose in life and existence in the universe through finding their connection with the creator, taking the step towards the greater good, and putting away 'self' while bringing down their ego. Male or female, a lost writer and a broken housewife like Ella or the wandering dervish of the Desert following the path of God Shams, can find the answers to their existence and understand their role in God's bigger plan. Everyone is allowed to join the Sufi circle (Shafak, 2011).

However, the second theme demonstrates that specifically, Islamic Sufism is the phenomenon that provides the answers to the existential crisis as Ella who is a practicing Christian, an unhappy housewife with a lost cause due to her disloyal husband seeks guidance in writing the review of Rumi and Shams book and after

communicating with its author who is also a Muslim Sufi Aziz Zahra, there comes a dramatic shift that changes her life completely and positively. The novel demonstrates that Sufism is actually Islamic mysticism and while understanding these values a person can find their ultimate mission in the world. Therefore, Sufism is not free of religion as understanding your creation is not free from connecting with God. Shafak (2011) conveys her message to the reader that Sufism is not just a phenomenon, it is a way of life that provides meaning to life. She further elaborates that, if a man and his God are not united, then it is similar to the camel which is lost in a desert without its master. No matter the material or social gains, as long as one is away from God one cannot live in harmony. Spirituality affects the individual thinking and the actions of the person and provides strength with coping up with the situation. It is not the idea; neither a fantasy nor it is a practice; it is a source of living a life, the way it needs to be lived. The reason is that, whatever the mind believes it reflects that on the personality and influences the individual personally and socially. "When a true lover of God goes into a tavern, the tavern becomes his chamber of the prayers, but when a wine bibber goes into the same chamber of prayers it becomes his tavern. In everything we do, it is our hearts that make the difference, nor our outer appearances" (Shafak, 2011).

Elif argues that the strength of the character is what provides humans with the purpose and that is how a strong personality is formed; the kind

of personality like Shams, who stood up for a harlot, standing alone in the middle of the crowd. A Sufi is well aware of the differences between right and wrong; and hence, a Sufi does not abide by the rules of conformity in a social circle, which ultimately frees him from the idea of being recognized or rewarded by human beings. Such a thought strengthens the Sufi's belief and intellect that all activities and thoughts the Sufis whatever the Sufi has to do, it should only be there to please God and the rest does not matter. Sufism also broadens the perspective of love. It tells people that love is universal, that it is the same for all, and that it is not something that binds the lover, but something that sets him free. Sufism is the guiding principle that love unites us all, ultimately, to unite us with God. In the novel, Shams tells Kerra that Muslims love Mother Mary and that their love for Mother Mary is full of purity and piety. This is the theme of unity that Sufism fills in the mind of the followers and for a Sufi love is not a human desire, which when rejected, turns into regret and remorse but it is something that teaches people to be sacrificial and pure. It is something that is the most important issue for the young generation. Shafak (2011) has demonstrated that Sufism is the solution to all the problems of mankind, especially the existential crisis. It is something like a cure to a pandemic.

The story of Shams and Rumi goes as back as the 13th century, but the phenomenon they used to find their bond with God and the faith in life is the basic need of the 21st century. Today, people are searching back to these Sufis



to find the right path and understand the purpose of life. The problems of the people in the past were different from the people of today, with some different versions and more material gains; yet, the answer to everyone's problem is the same as before which is; the unity with God. The main reason for the existential crisis is the never-ending endeavor for satisfying selfish needs, wars on religion, misunderstandings, and rejection from society, insecurity, conformity, fear of being left alone, and the approval of others'. Sufism frees a man from all of these ideals, it provides the notion of 'Panthéism' which suggests that 'all is one', it provides 'Determinism' which suggests that 'all is now' and 'Monism' which defines that, the unity with only one Divine power is the unity of everything. The idea of 'Self' and 'Ego' is rejected in Sufism and while having control of 'Self' and personal desires, a Sufi seeks to fuse himself in a union with God (Smith, 1995).

What is now the only thing that really matters is that the Sufi doesn't even worry about the next meal. This set of ideals gives the Sufi a sense of inner satisfaction, and at no point is the Sufi dissatisfied or questioning his presence in the world (Shafak, 2011). This idea of Islamic Sufism was also seen in the writings of Einstein (2012), who in his letter to his family said, "the past, present, future is an illusion". Shafak has presented the same idea of freedom from time through one of the rules of Shams; "The past is an interpretation, the future is an illusion. The world does not move through times as if it were a straight

line, proceeding from past to the future. If you want to experience eternal illumination, put the past and the future out of your mind and remain within the present moment" (Shafak, 2011). Rumi in his writing presented a Sufi as, 'The Son of The Present' he belongs to 'Now' for him what matters is the present moment which frees him from all the worldly bonds, consequently, solving his existential crisis and keeping his mental well-being (Shafak, 2011).

The review of the literature shows that the researchers have been working on the importance of Sufism for a very long time. In the 21st century, neurologists also found out the benefits of Sufism on the minds of humans. Yet, even after such benefits, Sufism is not practiced in the world of psychology. Some psychologists believe in its effects but many avoid its importance and call it a delusional behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to make the psychologists understand the importance of Sufism and its effects on mental health so that in future studies the understanding of this phenomenon can help in therapeutic practices along with the applications of science.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The researcher used a qualitative research method for the data analysis. Moreover, contextual analysis is applied in order to analyze the data collected from the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* written by Turkish Writer, Elif Shafak. The parts that have

been analyzed are sentences, phrases, and paragraphs extracted from the novel. The researcher explored the text of the novel and carried out the analysis through an interpretive approach. The secondary data related to Sufism, mental health, and theories were collected from the published work in the field.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher used two theories for the analysis of the data. Firstly, the theory of attachment presented by Bowlby (1951) was used. According to Bowlby (1951), having an unbreakable attachment is the source of a person's mental wellbeing, enhanced self-esteem, and stronger relationship processes. In light of this theory, having a strong relationship with God is a healthy bond that is good for better psychological functioning as seen in the protagonist, Ella. After practicing Sufism, she becomes mentally strong and makes her own decisions.

Secondly, the theory applied in this research is of "neurotic needs" developed by psychoanalyst Horney (1942) in her book "Self-Analysis". The theory suggests that a person develops different types of neurotic behavior in order to overcome anxiety and depression (Vollmerhausen, 1961). Horney limited her theory to three basic needs for her research. Therefore, the theory explains neurotic behavior as the need for power, prestige, and affection. According to the theory, the neurotic needs are summed up into three main categories; needs that attract you

towards others; for love and affection, needs that move you away from others; antisocial behavior and needs that impose you to create distance from others; hostility towards others (Vollmerhausen, 1961).

After the character analysis of Ella, in the novel 'The Forty Rules of Love' the researcher has executed the study on the first neurotic behavior i.e. the needs that move you towards others. According to the previous researches, the need to be loved and praised takes people down into anxiety and existential issues and for that most, the people try to find closure in other people or the approval of the society (Greenberg et al, 1992). The theory of Sufism talks about divine love, which provides the person love for themselves and others. Ella, a forty years old married woman was facing anxiety, and existential crisis due to her unhappy marriage and loss of control, and the need for love moved her away from her crisis, in the direction of divine love through Sufism. The theory of Sufism suggests love between the creator and the creation that helps men to get rid of all the evil and bad emotions.

Horney (1942) suggests that in order to overcome anxiety, a person develops a need for love towards others, and Bowlby (1951) suggests that a person needs a strong and healthy attachment for better self-esteem and mental well-being. Sufism gives people a sense of love and a spiritual bond that helps them overcome bad emotions. Therefore, according to both theories, in order to overcome anxiety,



existential crisis, and other mental problems, a person needs to develop a spiritual bond of love with someone who comes to the study of Sufism.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of some of the parts derived from 'The Forty Rules of Love' by Shafak (2011) is as follows;

According to Shafak (2011), he who is purified by love is pure, and he who is absorbed in the Beloved and has forsaken everything else is a Sufi. Shafak in this novel narrates the story of a Woman, Ella who is lost in her sad life. She happens to read the story of Shams of Tabrizin Sweet Blasphemy and makes a real connection with the author of the book, Aziz Al Zahra, through emails, who explainsto herabout the union of God with men as the key concept of Sufism. She learns that nothing should come between her and her God. The involvement in the Sufi ways helps Ella regain her connection with God:

“...Ella did something she hadn't done in a long while. She prayed. She asked God to either provide her with a love that would absorb her whole being or else make her tough and careless enough not to mind the absence of love in her life”(Shafak, 2011)

As Ella continues reading Sweet Blasphemy,she realizes that through Sufism a person understands the rules of love which provides him with answers to the purpose of his existence.She reads thatShams helps

Rumi to unlearn the things that he already knows, get rid of the attachments and he brings him closer to the common universal phenomenon which Rumi explains as; “Whatever you see as profitable, flee from it! Drink poison and pour away the water of life! Abandon security and stay in frightful places! Throw away a reputation, b e c o m e d i s g r a c e d a n d shameless!”(Shafak, 2011) These words from Shams, help Ella in taking a step forward towards Aziz and a step back from her dysfunctional family.

Through reading about Shams, Ella learns that Sufism is related to the journey of the soul for love. She understands the standards of love “Love is just like a sea where the heart of the Sufi is like a boat of submission and patience”. While Ella is understanding the Sufi phenomenon she also reads seven stages to achieve the upper level of Sufism as told by Aziz Al Zahra; “repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God and acquiescence to the will of God” (Shafak, 2011). After reading these Ella tries to follow the instructions and with the practice of these elements,she achieves a higher level of consciousness where her worldly matters stop bothering her.

In the novel,Ella further reads that love is the most important element in Sufi's transformation as explained by Shams. Through the rules of Shams, Shafak(2011) suggests that love leaves its prints on the mind throughout the journey of the seekerthat is how the mind of an individual is entirely changed; “The quest for Love changes us. There is no seeker among those who

search for Love who has not matured on the way. The moment you start looking for Love, you start to change within and without.” These lines show that by making a strong attachment a person can change his perspective. The novel proceeds further and the love of God is explained more in terms of a complete transformation of the Sufi, as Ella reads, Sham's rule number 5 tells that; “Intellect ties people in knots and risks nothing, but love dissolves all tangles and risks everything. Intellect is always cautious and advises, 'Beware too much ecstasy,' whereas love says, 'Oh, never mind! Take the plunge! ' Intellect does not easily break down, whereas love can effortlessly reduce itself to rubble. But treasures are hidden among ruins. A broken heart hides treasures.” (Shafak, 2011)

The same definition of divine love and its effects on the transformation is discussed by Hadland (2007), where he explained love as a divine force which flows through all the creatures at the same time and Sufism requires, 'to love the essence of God in men'. In the novel, when Ella reads such ideas from Rumi and Shams she finds her true purpose and decides to leave her unhappy marriage in the end in order to find her purpose. She even tells her unfaithful husband directly that 'I'm in love with another man'; Her need for love develops a positive psychosocial development in her to leave her toxic life and take a stand for her better life; while she is stepping out the door she repeats the words of Sham's rules

“It is never too late to ask yourself, 'Am I ready to change the life I

am living? Am I ready to change within? Even if a single day in your life is the same as the day before, it surely is a pity. At every moment and with each new breath, one should be renewed and renewed again. There is only way to be born into a new life; to die before death” (Shafak, 2011).

At the start of the novel, Ella is restless due to terrible incidents and constant loss in her life:

“Calmness being a state she had been lately finding harder and harder to achieve... Ella felt a strange, sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach as if she had a giant rock sitting there... she started to cry unable to hold back this continuing sadness that had, without her knowledge become a part of who she was...” (Shafak, 2011).

These lines show how much anxious Ella is in life and she is constantly suffering. Later, Ella reads the story of Shams and Rumi, in which after the death of Shams, Rumi says that,

“This is what losing your beloved does to you...It dissolves your king-self into dust and brings out your dervish-self. Now that Shams is gone forever, I am gone, too. I am not a scholar or a preacher anymore. I am the embodiment of nothingness. Here is my fana, herein my baqa.” (Shafak, 2011)

Through these lines, Ella learns that with the loss of loved ones, a person is crushed into nothingness and that is when he finds out the secret of

being merged with his God. The apparent objects that a person loves are nothing more than the light of God that attracts the love of that person and by denying the selfish desire of wanting a person dissolves into the divine love.

The effects of Sufism and love are seen in Ella after she completes reading *Sweet Blasphemy*; “There was something else that occupied her mind.....it had been such a long time since she'd last felt it that it took her a few extra seconds to recognize the feeling. But it was there... strong, prodding and disobedient.” Moreover, after applying the rules of Sufism to her life Ella's perspective about the world changes completely “...Boston has never been this colorful and vibrant, Ella thought. Had she been blind to the city's beauty all his time?”

Later, change in her mental health and effects of Sufism is seen after the death of Aziz Al Zahra;

“Ella took care of ...every little detail...but also trusting God would help her with the ones she couldn't handle...closing her eyes for a moment, Ella prophesied to her with jubilant conviction and confidence what the days ahead would bring her. She had never been on her own like this before, and yet, oddly enough, she didn't feel lonely” (Shafak, 2011).

These lines show Ella's psychological satisfaction that was invoked in her through practicing Sufism. She accepts the death of Aziz Zahra and does not lose her purpose in life again but she decides to move to

Canada to start a new life.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

Using contextual analysis this section discusses the effects of Sufism on the mental health of Ella as depicted in the novel 'The Forty Rules of Love' by Elif Shafak. Through the discussion, the researchers will answer the questions raised in the research to fill the gaps in the study of Sufism and psychology.

### **Forty Rules of Love and Sufism**

The most impressive demonstration of the Sufi phenomenon can be seen in the novel 'The Forty Rules of Love' written by Turkish writer Elif Shafak. The whole novel revolves around the essence of spirituality, love, and the essence of bonding with God in practicing religion. It is rather difficult to understand the relationship between Sufism and Psychology, but it can be understood quite effectively by understanding the philosophy of Sufism based on humanity and love. This novel is based on the same philosophy. After reading the Sufism practices, Ella understands that this is the way of life. Shafak simplifies the concept through her novel:

“When a true lover of God goes into a tavern, the tavern becomes his chamber of prayer, but when a wine bibber goes into the same chamber, it becomes his tavern. In everything we do, it is our hearts that make the difference, not our outer

appearances”(Shafak, 2011).

Shafak smartly generates the relation between Sufism and Psychology. She has portrayed the idea that positive change of mind is dependent on personal intentions (Karamatilloevich et al, 2020). And no matter who the person is, and what the religion is the most important thing is that; all humans are the same, which is the main essence of Sufism (Lumbard, 2007). Psychology also presents the same idea of humanity (Cooper&Ratele, 2014). Sufism is filled with love which heals a person from the damage that has been caused due to the absence of love and that is what the theory of neurotic needs by Horney (1942) discusses that when a person does not get the love they question their own existence and with time under the right guidance they move towards the places or entities that can provide them love (Mitha, 2019).

According to Faiyaz(2019),Elif's belief is a proper and true medicine for all the issues of mankind. The love invoked inside Ella, as demonstrated in the novel is the answer to all the love needs. The same idea is discussed by Bowlby (1951) and Horney (1942) that a person can only be able to survive by fulfilling the needs for love. For this, they either move towards others or move away from others (Vollmerhausen, 1961). Elif showed that, through Sufism, the divine love that rose in the heart of Ella was so powerful that it helped her to get out of her marital crisis and to unite with love at the universal level.

The important factor to analyze, however, is that psychology is talking about love without religion, and Sufism is talking about love with the intervention of benevolence that serves as a neurotic need (Vollmerhausen, 1961). According to Akbar, Asif, and Nosra (2019), the idea of Sufi love, which Shafak discussed in her novel, was more of a divine nature.As a result, the fundamentals of this love involved people and their happiness. Moreover, the aspects of Sufism explain that, if one human is happy within, it is only then that they can keep their loved ones happy. And likewise, if one person is sad from the inside, he will transfer that sadness, pain, distress to his fellow human beings. “Unless we learn to love God's creation, we can neither truly love nor truly know God” (Shafak, 2011)

Thus, the understanding of spiritual love and the bond with God, and the application of it to individual life, helps to give relief to mankind. Without a strong foundation of love, a person falls into an existential crisis and loses the meaning of life (Greenberg et al, 1992). The idea was presented by Elif without discrimination of religion and race.

### **Sufism and Psychiatry**

Psychiatry has played its part in reprimanding symptoms that damage behavioral and mental patterns through a sophisticated combination of psychoactive drugs and pharmaceuticals based on scientific explanations and diagnostics. However, the relationship between

religious existentialism and psychiatric procedures has so far been antagonistic and contradictory (Deikman, 1977). The most famous psychiatrists, including Freud, were convinced that religion was a neurotic need. Sufism, as shown in 'The Forty Rules of Love,' is a wonderful journey of prophesying the same knowledge into empiricism that somehow creates an isle that is common to the path of religion and psychology.

Psychiatry takes its course in daily life, mostly in the footsteps carved on the thumb rules of what the universal religion says. A long journey of research into psycho-physio-social normality to abnormality discovers the path of principles that somehow delineates both, psychiatry and religion (Fulford, 1997). Sufism is somehow a negotiator perpetuating the preaching of these two unknown brotherly twins. Thus, the analysis of psychiatry in the realm of religion and spirituality can open the door to new dimensions of dramatic positivity and recovery from psycho-social aberrations.

### **Sufism and Psychotherapy**

The dilemma is that mental health practitioners find psychology detached from one of the main areas of religious and spiritual practices. The practitioners of Sufism have not yet been provided with a platform where they can inaugurate the realm of beneficiaries emerging from the practices of spirituality and exacerbation of positive mental health. As a consequence, mental health professionals appear to be in some way

desolating from the nature of spirituality due to supposedly less awareness or study and maybe both. According to Foskett (2004), approximately 45 percent of mental health practitioners as a population in this field have overcome mental health problems with spirituality.

As the novel 'The Forty Rules of Love' depicts, if a person is only provided with religious help without even following the religious scripture as it is, a person can find positivity by the very essence of it (Foskett et al, 2004). A certain sophisticated balance between therapists who prescribe adequate spiritual practices to their clients, with proper research and development based on extempore, equally considered in the light of clients, and a belief model can prove to be effective (Keating & Fretz, 1990). The delineation of spiritual context can improve psycho-social recovery if added into therapy.

In the light of the novel 'Forty Rules of Love,' spiritualism and faith confidently react to most of the tantrums of 'life and death' among the common people of all faiths. The powerful belief system is taking its cape off to shore up the desperate skepticism that has taken death and suicide rates to their lowest. Koenig and Pritchett (1998) proposed that four elements should be taken as a requirement for the client to consider their true psychosocial needs, including:

- a) The faith of the client and its importance in the long run of



- everyday life
- b) The practical influence of that faith in the past and present of the client
- c) Affiliation of the client with any religious or spiritual community
- d) The addressing of the spiritual needs if so far done or needs to be done

Thus, in the behavior of the protagonist of the novel, spirituality-enhanced cognitive behavioral therapy focusing on cognitive reconstruction in patients, such as psycho-social needs based on the magnificent elements of the religious and spiritual realm, in order to combat their cognitive errors, such as the need for love, patience, faith in God, time and contentment, can be observed. Moreover, therapeutic practices ultimately involve meditative remembrance of God through prayer, thankfulness or gratitude, and a thoughtful focus on positivity (Swinton, 2001). Whereas, in transpersonal therapy, clients see themselves as spiritual beings and engage resourcefully in varying meditative practices that awaken their loneliness and positive psychic energies in order to recover their thoughts and behavior from aberration (Lukoff& Lu, 2005) as practiced by Shams and Rumi in the novel 'The Forty Rules of Love.' With great care and sophistication, a great deal of conjugation can take place to fill the gaps between spiritual and psychological desperation in society, leaving more contended, individualized, and collective solutions to deal with daily life. Thus, traumas,

psychosocial tragedies, and psychosocial deprivation can all be gradually remedied across the population, if taken with a spiritual approach glued to psychotherapy for an alluring collage designed to make life a better journey and the world a better place to live (Swinton, 2001).

## **Conclusions**

This research aimed to analyze the phenomenon of Sufism and its effect on mental health, in particular the overcoming of existential issues with reference to the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by ElifShafak, as it depicted the positive effects of Sufism on mental health through its protagonist, Ella. The novel connects psychology and Sufism, and brings us a blend of spirituality and thought processes, and how religion helps to overcome psychological problems. Keeping the novel as the focal point and discussing Sufism in detail, the researchers discovered the link between Sufism and Psychology in order to solve the mental crisis.

Shafak is profoundly influenced by the essence of Sufism. Her novel revolves around the main themes of Sufism. This study focused on the areas in which Sufism played its part in the transformation of the protagonist. Sufism teaches union with God and love, as the novel demonstrates. Love is not ordinary love, wishing affection in return, but a strong attachment where love is an ocean and the heart of the seeker is like a ship of submission. This kind of spirituality and the essence of love makes a person look at the universe and

understand the divine mysteries beyond the limits that help him understand the purpose of life and existence.

The answers that Sufism provides are not only important for the spiritual bond but are also important for the daily dealings of life, as stated in the novel 'Forty Rules of Love.' In addition, while providing all kinds of understanding, it becomes a source of mental peace and provides answers to the existential crisis, and helps to clear the mind for developing stable thoughts. The sense of connectedness with divine power, sought in Sufism, brings peace, balance, and harmony to life as reflected in the novel. The essence of Sufism's love helps to find a true path. In this way, the need to move towards the right source of love and living life is fulfilled. After finding the right answers through Sufism, Ella realizes her worth and leaves her dysfunctional marriage to find real love. The study aimed to discover the positive psychological effect of Sufism on an individual with the help of a novel and also highlighted the aspects of the novel which reflected the effects of Sufism.

Thus, the religious belief system and the scientific theories are to stay on their grounds, which is the right way to deal with mental disorders, but psychologists and psychologists should have a better understanding of the knowledge of Sufism and how it influences people's mental wellbeing and directs those who have lost their way.

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