

## **Elif Shafaq's Novel *The Forty Rules of Love*: A Universal Mirror of Sufism and Love for Humanity**

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### **Abstract**

*The present paper is intended to bring forth the Sufi facets in ElifShafak's novel The Forty Rules of Love (2010). There are multiple occasions where there is the reflection of Sufi metaphysical sensibility. The novel mainly leads a reader to an inner journey for the purpose to recognise the self and the God as well. There is no barrier of geography, culture or religion etc. The novel explores the oneness of humanity, the unity of ideologies for the sake of divine pursuits. The Ladder of knowledge is the requirement for humans to acquire the elevation of mysticism. There is a character, Shams of Tabrez, a Sufi, whose pronouncements advocate the mysticism at a universal level. The novel puts the pivotal stress on the human harmony and noble being of a man. It follows the two paths of life of Tabrez and Rumi which are parallel to each other.*

**Keywords:** Sufism, Humanity, Unity, Knowledge, Love

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## **Introduction**

*The Forty Rules of Love* (2010) is a novel which is in vogue for its unique subject matter. The novel mostly throws the light on the mystical perspectives. It has the time setting of 13<sup>th</sup> century; it is the account of famous Sufis, Rumi and Shams Tabrez. The two main characters Ella and Aziz are employed to explore the pertinence of the philosophy of medieval times, such characters teach us about the value of medieval philosophy in concern with modern times. Shafak has beautifully portrayed the historical figures like Rumi and Tabrez to bring some assessment with special regards to the contemporary times. It is mandatory here to take in account that how Ella, a middle aged woman meets the changes and developments after imbibing the deeper impression from the 13<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, which is a very rare happening in modern times. It is the force of love which makes Ella to meet her own self. The Sufism emphasizes not on any particular religion, a Sufi cannot be a Muslim only, and it can be anyone, it is just a way of life to live with utter harmony and peace. Shafak is with the concern that Sufism is not rooted to the mosques only, the places doesn't matter. It is the heart of a man which can sanctify any place as a result the humanity gets sheltered under the umbrella of unity:

*You can study god through everything and everyone in the universe because God is not confined in a mosque, synagogue or church. But if you still in a need of knowing where exactly his abode is, there is only one place to look for him in a heart of a true lover. There is no one who has lived after seeing him just like there is no one who has died after seeing him. Whoever finds him will remain with him forever. (TFROL, 43)*

The Sufism is inner journey of love for the self-purification and the attainment of oneness. The humanity has suffered from a malady due the consideration of difference from one person to another, one religion to another, particularly the modern world is divided in MINE and THINE, YOURS and OURS which very dangerous for our existence. It is Sufism, which binds us together; there is not any religious or linguistic bound. The novel affirms the heart full love can conquer the abhorrence and sectarianism.

The novel *The Forty Rules of Love* fills the reader with the ambrosial passion to be in solitude, the pursuance of spirituality. There is a stress on refuting of the pleasures and seductions for the purpose to know one's self and God as well. Sufism is rooted to love and calls for a crusade with vices within the man. As Hujwiri states, "*Love is a central doctrine of Sufis. They dismantle all disjunctions among different faiths and announce love for all human beings as the foundation of their ideology*". (288-297)

The portrayal of Sufism in the novel with its perspectives of spirituality

alongside the tremendous range of humane depth which carries the force to set the humans free from the grip of materialism and the tormenting affairs of day to day life. It barricades a man from any kind of violence; it insists him to delve deeply into one's own self to achieve the propensity to love and to be patient. The novel wiggles in between the times of past and present with the primal focus on the concept of love in its sheer form. The universality of Sufism is call of oneness and uniformity to everyone whether a Muslim or a Jew etc. Annemarie has thrown some light on the said concept as:

*The messages of Sufis are universal are universal and they illumine the mind and soul. They love every one without any discrimination. People faith on them because they are the part of Islam and they have great contribution in the preaching of teachings of Islam. Sufi philosophy is based upon universal love and brotherhood. (40)*

Sufism in the novel is depicted to make the readers realize that the religion is not barrier because Sufism teaches us to love the whole humanity and has the strong emphasis on peace in the whole universe. Sufism is against terrorism or any other kind of violence. The Sufis don't advise to go to the mosques and churches etc. they stress only the heart to be purified. The heart must be purified with knowledge, which is the only way to know the God. Such a fact is beautifully stated by Seyyed Nasr:

*In Sufism the highest form of worship is knowledge of God, which is always combined with love. The mission of Sufism is to get across all the religions to develop the bond of love with all. Because when such kind of bonding prevails in our societies, there will be no war, no intolerance.*

Shafak steers the attention of the reader to the happenings of 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century people were fighting for the racial, political and religious reasons and the social set up was somehow anarchic in nature, all it was because of the prevalence of theocracy. This kind of social system had utterly failed to form a harmonious world. So the Sufis like Rumi and Shams Tabrez came to preach the love for humanity in a mystified way. Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* in the contemporary times came to rescue the world from the extremism of religion. Its motive is to subtract the society from the rising crises in the contemporary world. John Trimmingham in his *The Sufi Orders in Islam* says, "Sufis are the people who represent Islam with peace and love in every region of the world. Sufi saints have played a significant role in preaching the Islam".(21)

The Sufis have considered Sufism as the cult of love because love is the only force which can save the world from any destruction. The rule of love on

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human hearts can bring the peace and welfare for all. There will be no lawlessness and chaos; the man can breathe in a philanthropic atmosphere. The modern scientific world is on the tip of war due excessive misuse of technology, so the need of the time is to spread love and that is what the Sufism preaches. It is a mission to demolish all the barriers in the way of peace and progress of humanity as Shah Idries has stated: Sufism has been often called the creed of love. Love is the only way which can mitigate all the distinctions and divergences; it can even transform the hatred into kindness. That is what we see in the novel when Aziz and Ella after agreement of their spiritual union despite they are so distinct in they are contra-distinct in their religious and geographical grounds. Though they are different from each other but their spiritual journey unified the couple and filled their hearts with love. The religious differences are merged into one to form a peaceful and a unified world. Elifshafak has mentioned in her novel *The Forty Rules of Love* as, "Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, nor Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi or Zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not of the East, nor of the West. My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless". (183)

The Sufis in the novel are the staunch representatives to spread love and harmony to create uniformity among all the humans; it preaches the similarities among of all the religions and societies for the sake of peace and welfare.

### **Conclusion**

*The Forty Rules of Love* is very appealing in regards of peace and unity for the world. The novel presents the famous Sufis like Rumi and Tabrez, whose inspiration motivates others to take the route to spiritual journey. The rule of love is the way which can bind the people together. The diversity of religions and races has been a question mark in terms of peace and welfare. The novel puts forth the message of unity, humanity and makes one not to be the slave of worldly comforts. The novel manifests how the Sufis of 13<sup>th</sup> century like Rumi and Shams Tabrez, were inspirational not only in the contemporary times but their inspiration is of all times. The preaching of Sufism transforms the characters and leads them to spiritual (inner) journey where there are no desires, prejudices etc. Shafak has successfully demonstrated the society where people live with peace and humanity after they develop the knacks to identify their own self by the force of knowledge.

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