

The Sufi Symbol in Contemporary Algerian Poetry: A Study of Meanings and Aesthetics

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Abstract :

Sufism is a fundamental aspect of contemporary Arab thought, and its influence can be seen in various patterns of thinking and behavior. Sufi works have created a rich and diverse material incorporated into Algerian literary works in various ways. This has led to Sufism becoming an integral part of both poetry and prose, and literary and critical studies have confirmed that symbolic expression in contemporary poetry represents the highest form of stylistic development. It is through symbolism that poetic texts have achieved their current level of progress and richness. This research aims to examine how contemporary Algerian poetry draws on Sufi texts, and to explore the semantic and aesthetic dimensions of Sufi symbols in these poems, This is done by adopting a semiotic reading that would identify the deep connotations of literary texts.

KeyWords: Symbol, Sufism, Intertextuality, Marvelous, Sufi Vision

ملخص:

يعد التيار الصوفي معلما أساسيا من معالم الفكر العربي المعاصر، ومن ثم فإنه يفعل فعله في أنماط التفكير والسلوك، وبخاصة أن النتاجات الصوفية المختلفة قد خلقت مادة غنية وتجربة واسعة ومفتوحة لعديد النتاجات الأدبية الجزائرية على اختلافها، وكل ذلك وفق طرائق وأشكال متعددة انتهجها المبدعون، وقد أدى هذا الأمر إلى أن أصبحت الصوفية بمختلف مكوناتها جزءا لا يتجزأ من النص الأدبي شعريا كان أم نثريا، ولهذا تؤكد الدراسات الأدبية والنقدية أن الأداء الرمزي في النص الشعري المعاصر يمثل أسمى أشكال التطور الأسلوبي، إذ بفضل بلوغ النصوص الشعرية ما بلغته من تقدم وثراء. ينبغي من خلال هذا البحث معرفة الكيفية التي استقت بها من النصوص الصوفية، بالإضافة إلى الكشف عن الأبعاد الدلالية

والجمالية التي تكتسبها الرموز الصوفية في النصوص الشعرية الجزائرية المعاصرة، وذلك باعتماد القراءة السيميائية التي من شأنها الوقوف على الدلالات العميقة للنصوص الأدبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرمز، التصوف، التناس، العجائبية، الرؤية الصوفية.

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١. Introduction :

Symbolic analyses of the style of the Sufi poetic text hold an esteemed position in literary criticism. This pursuit is driven by the desire to unlock the secrets concealed within the enigmatic Sufi text, rich with suggestive meanings that beckon investigation and unraveling. It also delves into the connection between the self (referring to the poetic self) and things (meaning the tangible, material world). Recognizing the crucial role of symbolism in the creative process, numerous contemporary Algerian poetic works have embraced a symbolic approach in their literary expression. Throughout its various phases, Algerian poetry has engaged with a multitude of artistic concerns that contribute, in one way or another, to shaping and enriching its content.

٢. The relationship of poetry to Sufism:

Among these prominent influences is the Sufi experience, due to the strong relationships and links it shares with the poetic experience. Both experiences resonate with emotion and sentiment, evident in the fact that:

- The Sufi text, like the poetic text, distinguishes itself through the authenticity of its experience, born from suffering. The Sufi, an ardent lover, expresses their emotions using symbolic language dictated by the nature of spiritual meanings. They choose a language of particularity over that of generality.
- These two experiences (artistic and Sufi) are interconnected, though a poet may not necessarily be a Sufi, yet a Sufi is often also a poet (Boussekta, Al-Saeed, ٢٠٠٨, p. ١٣٧). Sufism sharpens the poet's sensitivity, enabling them to perceive things and the world beyond the immediate visible realm.

Furthermore, both the poetic and Sufi experiences rely on the inner world, prompting their language to diverge from ordinary usage. As evidence, consider the words of major Sufis like Al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Abi al-Faridh, Rabia al-Adawiyya, and others, who were also renowned poets. They utilized poetry to express many aspects of their Sufi experience, using it as a language of particularity, not generality, a language of metaphor and symbol, not explicitness and clarity (Mansour, Mohamed

Ibrahim, ١٩٩٩, p٢٧). The Sufi poet expresses their sensory world through symbolic language, to such an extent that the simple reader struggles to grasp its essence or comprehend its intentions.

Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the contemporary Algerian poem draws upon the Sufi experience to achieve artistic merit, transforming itself into a vast space that accommodates the poem's multifaceted meanings. For clarification, an orientation towards Sufism as a unique discourse does not imply that the Algerian poet becomes a Sufi. As Adonis eloquently expressed, "I am not a traditional Sufi, but Sufism sharpens my soul and makes it capable of introspection, intuition, longing, and vision." (See: Mohamed Ibrahim Mansour, ١٩٩٩, p. ٧)

In reality, the investment of the Sufi text in contemporary Algerian poetry is not a mere futile practice. It represents an openness to the Sufi vision, a practice with its artistic justifications and motivations. Starting with the saying of Al-Niffari, "The broader the vision, the narrower the expression," this statement has influenced the experience of the contemporary Algerian poet, directing them toward the practice of linguistic creation instead of merely relying on linguistic transmission. This is because the Sufi discourse is based on the idea of transcendence and disruption. In other words, Sufism is a "revolution against stability" (See: Boussekta, Al-Saeed, ٢٠٠٨, p. ٩) Therefore, the realization of the Sufi experience in contemporary Algerian poetry infuses it with a sense of liberation and a drive towards openness.

Hence, the Sufi experience represents a critique of Arab discourse from within. It explores the worlds of poetry and opens doors to questioning the aesthetic and the religious. It is an inner experience that takes its place in existence through language that transcends the boundaries of time and space. Its expression is characterized by a unique stylistic language that expresses a spiritual experience (See: Boussekta, Al-Saeed, ٢٠٠٨, p. ١٠). If we accept that Sufi-oriented poetic discourse breaks through all frameworks and barriers, it opens up a wide space for raising many religious and aesthetic questions alike.

The inclination of contemporary Algerian poets towards the Sufi symbol may seem somewhat unusual, especially in our time, just like the tendency towards mythology and legend, which are two of the most commonly used symbols in contemporary Arab poetry in general. This is because the scientific approach, which is based on the results of experimental sciences, is the dominant one today. On the other hand, Sufism, in the general sense, embodies the current of ecstasy and dreams, and the idealistic view of the world and man himself. In addition, it seeks to reconcile the soul and the body, which is perhaps what the contemporary Algerian poet also aims for.

٣. The Concept of Sufism:

٣,١ Linguistically:

Sufism is one of the most prominent Islamic sciences and has quickly acquired a special place and occupied an important position in the pyramid of Islamic thought. It is a term derived from the name Sufi, from which comes the word "safa" (purity). As Abd al-Mun'im Khafaji mentions, it is derived from the Greek word "Sophia," which means wisdom (See: Khafaji, Abdel Moneim, ٢٠٠١, p. ٨-٩). It may also mean the first ranks close to the divine essence.

٣,٢ Terminologically:

There are many different opinions on the concept of Sufism. However, as **Abd al-Malik Murtagh** said, its reference is "the sincerity of turning to God in a way that pleases Him and from where He pleases" (Murtagh, Mohamed, ٢٠٠٩, p. ٢٠) It is asceticism in this world and the purification of the soul from all impurities. Therefore, the Sufi is characterized by the purity of the heart from hatred, worry, and anxiety, and is far from the pleasures of life.

Ibn Khaldun, for his part, defines it as: "The devotion to worship and the seclusion to God Almighty, and the renunciation of the adornment and decoration of this world, and the asceticism from what the majority accepts of pleasure, money, and fame, and the isolation from people in solitude for worship." (Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman, ٢٠١٠, p. ٤٠٣-٤٠٤) This definition hardly differs from the first concept.

Muhammad Abbasa, on the other hand, defines Sufism as: "An introspective self-tendency that relies on the individual's imagination, experience, and taste, and is particularly interested in the soul and its qualities" (Abbasa, Mohamed, ٢٠١٠, p. ٥) This means that Sufism is a self-tendency, characterized by individuality and imagination, through which the individual embodies his psychological and individual experiences. This means that Sufism focuses on the human soul with all its secrets.

It is clear from these different definitions that the goals of Sufism "lie in the purification of the inner self first. Then, Sufism is in the outer self. Then, the man reaches the stage of being affected in the way of being acted upon, so he becomes a Sufi without affectation or hypocrisy, and is adorned with the symbol of the law and the morals of truth. And when purity is manifested in the inner self, the position of Sufism is magnified in the heart, and it tends to ascend the stages of degrees." (Al-Abbadi, Qutb al-Din, ٢٠٠٢, p. ٥٧)

٤. The Concept of Symbolism:

Webster defines a symbol as: "something that represents or stands for something else because of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance." (Fatouh Ahmed, Mohamed, ١٩٧٧, p. ٣٥) A symbol is a hint or allusion to something else based on a perceived similarity between the two.

For semioticians, a symbol is not "just a phonetic signifier, but rather a visual or mental image at best, and it is not agreed upon, but rather a sign that wanders in a vast semantic space that gives a greater semantic flow." (Boussalah, Nessima, ٢٠٠٣, p. ٧١) In other words, it is an artistic, suggestive means used by the writer to express things that cannot be spoken about explicitly or openly. It is "a convincing aspect of visual expression" (Ismail, Ezz El Din, ١٩٩٤, p. ١٩٥) and its value lies in its suggestiveness, "for it evokes in the soul what cannot be expressed explicitly" (Kaawan, Mohammed, ٢٠٠٩, p. ٣٥)

In this context, **Abdul Karim Yafi** emphasizes that: "The symbol is a style of expression that does not confront meaning or truth face to face. It is a definition that is characterized by comprehensiveness, unlike what we find with other researchers." (Yafi, Abdul Karim, ١٩٩٦, p. ٢٧١) He also agrees with the concepts that suggest that the styles of poets, regardless of their differences, are organized in the symbol, as they "do not confront the idea directly, but rather address it from behind a veil and express it through a flood of words or convey it through elegant and selected styles" (Yafi, Abdul Karim, ١٩٩٦, p. ٢٧٢) This is because the symbol has the potential to give the poetic text renewed energies that make it open to endless meanings that give the text its permanence.

◦. The Relationship Between Symbolism and Sufism:

Scholars, regardless of their orientations, agree that the Sufi experience is essentially: "A deep experience that is based on exploring the deep truths that transcend automatic sensory perception." (bin Amara, Mohammed, ٢٠٠٦, p. ١٣٩/١٤٠) Therefore, it can be said that the Sufi can see beyond what can be expressed in a direct, declarative style. Therefore, he finds himself forced to adopt a symbolic style to approximate meanings and convey the experience that ordinary language cannot do justice to. That is, the symbol "necessarily achieves an inference during reception that is equivalent to the Sufi call to explore the inner and neglect the outer." (bin Amara, Mohammed, ٢٠٠٦, p. ١٤٠) It is an attempt to dive into the depths of the human soul through this inference and then try to go out into the world and interact with it.

In light of this, it can be said that both Sufism and symbolism try to transcend the surface towards the depth. We mean by this the deep vision through which one can introspect the soul and reveal what is within it. The Sufi poet resorted to symbolic expression because it is the closest to their selves in expressing their experiences. In

addition to the fact that allusion has a greater impact on the recipient than explicitness, because allusion creates a kind of ambiguity that provokes the reader and urges him to reread to reach the meanings that cannot be revealed through superficial reading. The symbol is "suggestive in its essence. It does not stand on the feet of material things to depict them, but rather transcends them to convey the effect that these things leave on the soul."(Bin Amara, Mohammed, ٢٠٠٦, p. ١١٧.)

We understand from this opinion that there is an overlap between Sufism and symbolism, as both are based on depth, the depth of the idea (introspection of the self), and the depth (of meanings and significations). The symbol is dynamic because it is a continuous transition "and it is similar to the self of the knower who is never satisfied, because Sufism is a continuous movement. If stillness occurs, there is no Sufism, and the symbol is capable of giving life to inanimate objects, transforming them into precious beings"(Bin Amara, Mohammed, ٢٠٠٦, p. ١١٧) This is why we have previously indicated that the symbol is the only medium that can transmit spiritual experiences in Sufism and describe what is beyond the senses. Sufism also meets with symbolism in that Sufism "converts apparent meanings into spiritual inner meanings," (Nasr,Atif Joda, ١٩٧٨, p. ٥٠٢) and the symbol is based on "the similarity of the sensory to the spiritual, meaning that the sensory drawing of the image is a symbol that stands for the spiritual"(Kaawan, Mohammed, ١٩٩٥, p. ٩٩) That is, it transforms the tangible image into the spiritual image through the act of imagination.

٦. The Aesthetic Dimension of the Sufi Symbol in Contemporary Algerian Poetry:

The Sufi experience is known to transcend the limits of matter and the tangible to reach worlds that the human mind cannot fathom, and no description can do it justice. It is a deep journey towards the self, which is impossible for anyone to fully understand, especially since it is a journey to reach the secrets of the divine self and a search for perfection.

It seems that contemporary Algerian poetry has come a long way through the language of Sufism, which is based primarily on revealing and diving deeply into the spiritual world. This Sufi obsession is strongly represented in the poetry of Othman Loucif, and it is most evident in his poem :(Lousif,Othman, ١٩٩٩, p. ٥١/٥٢)

*The night descends, all slumber lies, Except this madman, love-filled eyes.
From wells of sweetness, yours they gleam, I drink, and sigh, "Oh, love, my dream!"*

In whispers soft, your ear I reach, "I love you," twice, my passion's speech.

On knees pristine, a prayer I lay, Then close my eyes, to dream the day.

In you I melt, my spirit free, My dove of love, eternity.

Has any soul, such rapture known, To drink from depths, alone, unknown? A cup unlike all others' hold, In your embrace, freedom untold.

I cry aloud, with joyous might, My freedom found, in endless night.

In this passage, the poetic language adopts the method of Sufi symbolic reference, which is often laden with endless new meanings. The tangible meanings embody a form with a referential dimension towards what they allude to, which almost represents a new interpretation. The word or phrase no longer has the same meaning that we know, but rather acquires other meanings behind the words, which almost empties the meaning of the word and pours another meaning into it. The meaning becomes double, exceeding its conventional limit (Abed, Raja, ٢٠٠٣, p. ٢٧٩). This reveals that the Sufi experience is a deep in itself. Most of the contemporary Algerian poetic texts that have emerged and grown through this experience are so full of ambiguity and strangeness that it is not easy to reach their true meaning and hidden secret.

The language of Sufism is more evident in the above passage through the vocabulary used by Othman Loucif, such as "I love you," "the infatuated," "I drink," "the cup," etc., which directly refers to the breaths of Sufi love that he intends to use to approach the divine self. This is because "Sufism is only good by of love and is only corrupted by love." (Abed, Raja, ٢٠٠٣, p. ٢٧٩)

For this reason, the poet has created patterns of spiritual connection between God, the beloved, the earth, the human being, and nature (night, your eyes, your knees, your arms, etc.). This spiritual connection is often repeated in the language of the Sufis because it opens their language to an infinite number of concentrated meanings.

The same trend is followed by the poet Mustafa al-Ghamari when he deliberately resorts to Sufi symbolism through the symbol of "Qais and Laila." This is because he is convinced of "the difficulty of direct knowledge and makes him constantly think about finding linguistic and artistic means that enable him to explore what is hidden in the self and existence at the same time. This constant search has led to the discovery of the symbol, which is a medium based on suggesting the experience." (Kaawan, Mohammed, ١٩٩٥, p. ١٠). This is because direct and declarative speech cannot in any way achieve the aesthetic beauty of the literary text, which forces the poet to invent a new system of expression based on Sufi symbolism "to convey the inner experiences that are difficult to express, and the symbol is taken as the highest means of expressing them. What cannot be described or expressed in

words can be alluded to symbolically"(Kaawan, Mohammed, ١٩٩٥, p. ١٠).He says in his text:(Al-Ghamari, Mustafa, ١٩٨٢, p. ٢٣/٢٤)

Qais:

Between me and you, Laila, lies love and kinship, You are my face, the rose and the grape. You are my thoughts, when I think, my song, When I sing, you are the poetry and the anger. You are love itself, O Laila, blossoming, A river of light on your whispers, flowing.

Laila:

What good are sweet words and flirting, If the pulse of love is veiled in abandonment? Love is not mummified stories, In which the bitter mirage and boredom cloud. Love is a flame of sacred desires, Breathed, and the unknown horizon ignites.

This passage is based on a dense vocabulary that combines many Sufi terms that are hidden behind the symbol. In addition, the symbol of "Laila" alone is enough to give the text a Sufi vision through which many meanings flow. This is because this symbol in the Sufi tradition is used to express the eternal beloved. It is also noticeable that this passage draws from the illuminations of the Sufi language through the act of dialogue between Qais and Laila, in addition to what many expressions that represent the climax of divine love have achieved, such as saying (love is a flame of sacred desires, love is not stories... mummified... etc.).

The poet Al-Akhdar Flos does not deviate from this writing style, which draws from the Sufi experience to enrich his text and condense its meanings. He says in one of the passages: (Filous, Al-Akhdar, ٢٠٠٢, p. ٨١-٨٣)

I am like lightning, I strike the clouds Then I light my torch, swaying above the fractures of the horizon Do not wrong the strangers, they are The seeds of God in the sick earth and the deserts.. Here I am like lightning, I flash... or I die So that the phoenix may emerge radiant on the surface of the planets and houses The roar stopped and it was not morning, and prayer came upon me My prayer stopped, it was not morning And the writing and the pulpits deceived me Above the ruins of the city So I washed myself with the lily of sorrows again I dipped my hand in the sun once The chanting of the drunkards intoxicates from the murmurs of the inkwell.

It seems that the poet relied in this passage on the Sufi vocabulary to alleviate the intensity of his anxiety (lightning, flash, die, drunkards, prayer... etc.). It is clear

that the poet's celebration of the Sufi symbol to this extent is due to "its unification of the worldly and the metaphysical because of its characteristics"(Kaawan, Mohammed, ١٩٩٥, p. ٤٢٧). Because ordinary language is not capable of encompassing the Sufi experience, as it is characterized by ambiguity, which pushes the poet to resort to symbolic language to come out with it "from linguistic conventions and ordinary terminologies to clothe them with their meanings and secrets"(Lamouri,Zaoui, ٢٠١٠, p. ١٩١). This explains the poet's resort to using the symbol of the phoenix, which mostly signifies life after death (so that the phoenix may emerge radiant on the surface of the planets and houses/the roar stopped and it was not morning, and prayer came upon me).

So the Sufi language, which is based on symbolism, remains an open language that is open to meanings, which gives the contemporary Algerian poetic text a beautiful dimension. This dimension is achieved through the participation of the reader's conscience as he performs the act of reading this poetic text, and hence his deepening in exploring the suggestive meanings that the Sufi symbol achieves, which in turn generates ambiguity. The reader finds himself in front of a Sufi reading that is open semantically and aesthetically rich, urging him indirectly to search for the secrets of this divine love in the poetic text. Therefore, it can be said that Sufi writing "is an exciting writing that attracts the interested reader towards it as the moth is attracted to the source of light or as the Sufi's self is attracted to the divine truth"(Kaawan, Mohammed, ١٩٩٥, p. ٢٢٦)

V. Conclusion:

Among the results we have reached through this research are the following:

- The symbolic performance in the contemporary poetic text is considered the highest form of stylistic development, granting the text tremendous semantic energies that are renewed with each reading.
- The Sufi heritage constitutes a rich material, a vast and open experience for many different Algerian literary productions.
- The poetic experience shares many points with the Sufi experience, including emotion, feelings, and the departure from ordinary language.
- One of the reasons that prompted contemporary Algerian poets to draw from the Sufi experience is their need for new linguistic creation that gives the text open meanings.
- Sufism and symbolism intersect in that they are both based on depth (depth of idea/depth of meaning).
- The symbol is considered the only medium that can convey spiritual experiences in Sufism and describe what is beyond sensory perceptions.
- Many Algerian poetic texts have tried to borrow the Sufi symbol, as is the case in the texts of Othman Loucif, Al-akhder Flos, and Mustafa Al-Ghamari.

- The poetic text that draws its symbols from the Sufi experience acquires an intensive aesthetic dimension since its language is characterized by openness to multiple interpretations.
- The reader contributes to the realization of the aesthetic dimension of the poetic text laden with Sufi symbols by deepening their exploration of the suggestive meanings that these Sufi symbols achieve.

From the foregoing, we find that symbolism is the dominant feature in contemporary Algerian poetic writings that draw from the wellspring of the Sufi experience. This is evident from the examples we have mentioned above, as they fall within an imagined literary space dominated by Sufi symbolism with all its connotations and Sufi ecstasies. The symbol remains the pillar on which poetic texts with a Sufi orientation are based, as it breathes life into the folds of the poetic text and plays a fundamental role in the flow of poetic sentences that give the text tremendous semantic energy.

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