

## KURAN AND SUFİ POETRY

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### **ABSTRACT**

*After recitation of Kuran that is considered the greatest miracle of our beloved prophet who was sent as a mercy to the world sufi poetry began to thrive. The poets who admired rhetoric and fluency of our holy book were trying to say poetry about wisdom in accordance with special messages given to the poets in sura Al-shu'ara' and convey the internal nature of Islam to society in their works. Usually, this great literary case was breaching out some directions:1) In point of poetic works based on Kuran alphabet; the forms, being dotted and undotted , grammatical features, wise meaning of letters, range of images , metaphors and similes was being made. Especially, some sufi works concerned meaning and content given to Kuran letters with influence of "Esrarul-Huruf" by Ibni Arabi and other works in this topic began to appear. In sufi poetry we also often see codifying of many words their letters and giving of them in attributes appropriate to every letter. In terms of forms, letters were used to as elements of mimesis and as subject in literary works . For instance, sweetheart's figure is liken to " elif" for its flatness. Sweetheart's mouth is described like letter mim and her eyebrows are shown like letter nune. As human's face is likening to Kuran, each line of face is assimilated to different ayes.2) Define meaning and content are expressed by means of alliteration –association of sound and harmonies in Kuran. For example, in sura Adiyat the majority of dal and ta sounds resembles the sound of feet of war-horses that were mentioned in the sura, the sounds which make vibration effect in sura Zilzal reminds of earthquake. This feature did not escape poets' attention. We see very beautiful examples of associations of sound and harmony at activities of poets such as Mevlana, Fuzuli, and Yunus Emre. 3) Stories based on Kuran tales and references to these tales in the poem. Turkish Sufi poets mostly wrote works concerned tales that were about prophets' lives such as Yusuf, Suleyman, Davus, Musa, Isa and etc. in Kuran, and they used characters such as Hazreti Musa, Isa, and Meryem in order to express sufistic meanings, divine truth. 4) Esoteric meaning, comments, and interpretations of Kuran have been described with poetic language. For instance, Yunus Emre translated into Turkish language and describes in poetic language the suras el-gasiye, en-Nebe, en Naziat and other surahs that tell of judgement day and its horrors in order to prevent people from sins. Pamphlets written in poetic form in order to explain Kuran philosophy, Islamic morals. Definite steps of sufistic journey, various religious-philosophic issues to readers, especially adherents. 5) Sufi treatises written by the poets of Sufi sect in order the readers, especially the Sufi followers to easily understand and remember the philosophy of the Noble Quran, morality of Islam, some stages and points of the*

*mystical journey, and different religious and philosophical issues. These treatises contain many examples from the Noble Quran.*

**Keywords:** *Kuran, Sufi, poet, poetry, poem*

## **SUFI POETRY IN AZERBAIJANI AND TURKISH LITERATURE**

Sufi poetry began to develop in Azerbaijani literature after revelation of the Noble Quran which is considered the greatest wonder of the Prophet Muhammad. In accordance with the special messages given to the poets in the surah “Ash-Shuara” the poets admiring eloquence and expressiveness of our holy book tried to write poems about wisdom and to convey inner essence of Islam to people in their works. This great literary event had several directions:

1) Poetical works written on the basis of Quran alphabet; a series of images, metaphors and similes were created based on forms, dotted and undotted kinds, grammatical features and secrets of the letters. Many Sufi works were written especially in respect to mystical meaning and content attributed to the Quran letters under the influence of Ibn Arabi’s “Asrarul-Huruf” and other works in this regard. In Sufi literature we often see that many words were encrypted in connection with the letters, and attributes and features were reflected for each letter. Human’s facial features were compared with the Quran letters. In terms of their forms letters were used as an element of assimilation on the works. For example, lover’s figure was likened to *elif* in terms of its straightness. Salik’s, God’s lover’s way was also compared with *elif*. For its form *Dal* was associated with a lover bending due to longing for his sweetheart. Sweetheart’s mouth was compared with *mim*, and her eyebrows were likened to *nun*. As the sweetheart’s face was shining it was compared with mostly the surahs “Ash-Shams” and “Ad-Duha”, her lips were compared with the surah “Al-Kawthar”, and her hair was likened to the surah “Al-Layl”. For example, Nasimi:

Get rid of duality, be single like *Alif*

Find truth in Adam, prostrate before the Truth (Nesimi Rubailer, p.434)

For example, Rovshani:

If your heart beats together with Hu (one of God’s names)

You will be Enga of the closest (*Qaf*) mountain to God (Rovsheni, 528)

Or:

The Sweetheart's figure looks like *Alif*, her hair is curly like *Cim*  
God drew her eyebrows in the form of crescent like *nun*, and her mouth resembles *mim*  
(Rovsheni, p. 529).

Dede Omer Rovshani, the prominent representative of XV century Khalwati order, used both the Quran letters, and names of God mentioned in the surah "Al-Fatiha" in his ghazal glorifying the Prophet Muhammad:

O messenger of God, your name is Ahmed,  
You resemble the divine light of God.(Rocsheni, p.525)  
After seeing your eyes resembling *Sad*, mouth looking like *Mim* and hair resembling *Dal*  
I mention God in my every breath,  
This poor Rovshani will be in desperate  
If your lips looking like *Mim* don't help him (Rovsheni,p.457)

Or the surah "Al-Kawthar" is mentioned in Rovshani's ghazal beginning with "The Sun rose, the Sun of your Face shined in the world; there is nobody who doesn't love you and your shining face":

If someone struggles against you –Abulgasim  
His family will be in destitute (cut-off) like Abu Jahl,  
I will read *Vaddüha* (the surah "Al-Fajr") for your face, and *välleyl* (the surah "Al-Layl")  
for your hair

Rovshani repeats: "*Kulli izzätin vaaşı*"(Rovsheni, p.499).

In Nasimi works we see a broader interpretation of that verse:

I drank a glass of water from Kawthar and found divine friendship that cannot be described with words and explanations,

I began to step on the way leading to God and saw the faith in 12 Imams.

(,Rovsheni, Kolliyat, p.78-79)

In accordance with most interpretations of the Quran the poet stressed that "Al-Kawthar" had been revealed to the glory of Ahlul-Bayt and mentioned the Twelve Imams and noted that he

had strong faith in the Twelve Imams. He expressly wrote that he was a successor to the school founded by the Prophet Muhammad and Hazrat Ali.

Overall, in classical literature all features of a beautiful face are separately glorified with different poetical figures of speech. In Arabic literature “*Nasib*” of (*a beginning part of a qasida*) qasidas were dedicated to glorification of a beautiful one. After rise of Islam human face was considered sacred, and it had mystical meaning as it was a place where attributes of God were reflected. Its obvious examples are described in the works of Fuzuli, Nasimi, Shah Ismayil Khatai and others in Azerbaijani literature. For instance, in the following ghazal of Shah Ismayil Khatai the sweetheart’s face is compared with the surahs of the Quran:

Your face is the surah “Yusuf”, your lip is the water of Kawthar,  
Your face is Tuba (a tree in Jannah), and your hair is a flower.  
Your face is the verse “Here is Jannah”, God commanded to enter Jannah,  
Thanks for the Creator of this beauty; your cheeks are as if a red rose      your face is the surah “Yasin”, thanks for its glory!

Your lip is a red ruby, and your tooth is a pearl.  
Your eyebrow is the verse “*qabi-qövseyini*”, your hair is the shade of God,  
Oh my dear, the divine light of your face is more shining than the Sun rising in the east.  
Mighty God have written the surah “Al-Anam” on your face, reading it  
Khatai can’t help saying “God is great”.( Khatai, Eserleri I , p.294)

Or famous poet Hidayet expressed this thought in the following poetic form:  
Don’t give up remembering her mole and facial features,  
Oh Hidayet, you are a Muslim, don’t stop reading the Quran.(Hidayet, Divan, 372)

Or Habibi:  
You lip was like a soul for me,  
I saw your pain in the place of remedy.  
I considered your hair on the Sun as faith.  
Beauty of your facial features in the Quran  
Was like the letters of the Quran for me (Habibi, Sheirler, p.32).  
A person valuing your eyebrows, eyelashes and hair in terms of meaning  
Would say that they are verses of Koran (Habibi, Sheirler,44).

2) Alliteration in holy Koran expressed a meaning through sound and harmony associations. For example, in the surah “Al-Adiyat” *dal* and *ta* sounds are used for many times, these sounds look like the sounds emerging as a result of run of war horses. The majority of the sounds creating vibration association in the surah “Al-Zilzal” reminds of an earthquake. The poets didn’t miss this point. We can see very beautiful examples of sound and harmony associations in the works of the poets such as Mevlana, Fuzuli, Yunus Emre, Nasimi, and Seyid Nigari. For instance, let’s look through a piece of “Leyli and Majnun” of Fuzuli:

*Yarı geceler ki çeşmeyi-xab*

*Gözler çemenin qılanda sirab*

*Zulmate gederdi nuri-binish*

*Aram bulurdu aferinish*(Fuzuli, *Leyla and Majnun*, p.107)

At night from the spring of dream

The water flowed and filled the lawn of eyes.

The light of eye was covered with darkness,

All the creation became silent and calm.

Here the metaphoric combinations such as *spring of dream* and *the lawn of eyes* are very original and they are found only in Fuzuli’s works, as if the poet tried to create a poetic view: The water of the spring flows and fills the lawn with water. In the section called “Majnun rescues gazelle” we see that eye is likened to a spring and eyelashes are compared to a lawn. It seems under the expression “the lawn of eyes” the comparison of eyelashes with plants is mentioned, and close of eyes while a person is sleepy is described. “Sh” sound in “binish” və “aferinish” used at the end of the verses looks like “sh sh sh” sound used to make somebody sleep.

3) Turkish Sufi poets mostly wrote works related to stories about the lives of Yusuf, Suleiman, Dawud, Moses, Jesus, etc. in the Quran. Prophet Moses, Pharaoh, Prophet Jesus, Hazrat Maryam, and other characters in the Quran were used to express mystical meanings and divine truths.

As well as reference to the events in the Quran stories in Sheikh Attar’s works the importance of these stories was transferred to the character and features of God’s lover. And secret meaning of each story or verse of the Quran is explained:

آلا ای یوسیف قدسی بر آی از چاه ظلمانی  
به مصر عالم جان شو که مرد عالم جانی  
به کنعان بی تو وا شو قاهمی گوید پیوسته  
تو که بستۀ چاهی و گه در بند زندانی  
تو خوش بنشسته با گرگی و خون آلوده پیراهن  
(Attar, Divan p.126) برادر برده از تهمت به پیش پیر کنعانی

(Hey Holy Yusuf, get out of the dark well; Go to Egypt of the world of souls, because you belong to the world of souls. The Canaan is in mourning without you. Sometimes you are in the dark well, and sometimes in the closed prison. You sit there silently; as your brother was afraid of reproach and fear they took your bloody shirt to the old and wise man of the Canaan (the Prophet Ayyub)).

Here the following events described in the surah “Yusuf” of the Noble Quran were referred: “The Prophet Yusuf’s brothers threw him into a well; after being reproached by their father Prophet Ayyub his brothers took his bloody shirt to the Prophet Ayyub and told that a wolf had eaten Yusuf; Yusuf went to Egypt and became a ruler of that country.

In fact, here the poet addressed people. Here the dark well symbolizes nafs (*self; desire*) pulling down a human with worldly passions and physical affections; the wolf and treacherous brothers represent obstacles and the forces of evil on the way to the Truth (*God*). And Egypt here symbolizes the world of souls. Addressing to human being the poet wanted to say: “Hey human being, get rid of your nafs, get out of the well, and reach to the high stage and the spiritual world. You belong to the world of souls, your nature is supreme, and your purpose is divine.

Or in the other ghazal of the poet:  
کسی با شوق روحانی نخواهد زوق جسمانی  
برای گلبن وصلش رها کن منّ وسلوارا  
(Attar, Divan, p.138)

This couplet also mentions some surahs of the Noble Quran, including the 57<sup>th</sup> verse (we sent down to you manna and quails) of the surah “Al-Baqarah” in which it is said that during

Israelites' travel God did them a favour and sent quails and manna to them, but they showed ingratitude and wanted earthly vegetables and food products (radish, garlic, onion, etc.). Here the poet compares the sacred foods sent from the heaven and the foods belonging to the earth as "*Shovqi-ruhani*" (Favour of God) and "*Zovqi-cismani*" (Physical taste).

The people being imperfect and having strife, godlessness and ingratitude in their hearts prefer material pleasures to divine beauties and supreme spiritual feelings. Addressing to people the poet said: "You should not refuse the manna in order to reach and to meet God." According to Attar this manna bringing together a human with God, in fact, is a divine grief, because, only grief can perfect a human and can him direct to the way leading to God.

Although "*Anisul-ushsaq*" of Rami Tabrizi is a work related to poetics the author refers to the verses of the Quran both in narration and in the examples he made. For instance, in the following example the poet used the verse of the Quran as a metaphorical character:

گل در لها ف غنچه خوش خفته بود سهرگاه

باد صبا بر او خواند یا عیوہل زمیل

(Rami, *Enisul-Ushshak*, p.45)

(Blanketed with its bud the flower was sound asleep in the morning;

Breeze said to the flower: "Ya eyyuhel-muzammil!")

As you see this couplet mentions the surah "*Al- Muzammil*" of the Noble Quran. After Hazrat Jabrayil said "Read" to our Prophet he began to shiver from fear and wrapped himself in a blanket in order to get rid of shivering. Here the poet metaphorically assimilates the flower inside the bud to the Prophet Muhammad sleeping by wrapping himself in the blanket before rewarding with prophecy. Taking into consideration that the rose symbolizes the Prophet Muhammad this assimilation is justified in terms of logics. Here the Prophet announcing the Quran and divine truths to people after prophecy is compared with the rose opening up and spreading sweet smell around.

4) The secret meanings, interpretations and commentaries of the Noble Quran were explained in the poetic language. Regarding it there are very beautiful examples in the works of Sanai, Nizami Ganjavi, Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Gayghisiz Abdal, and other poets. For

instance, Yunus Emre translated the surahs “Al-Ghashiyah”, “An-Naba”, “An-Naziat” and others discussing the Day of Judgment and its horrors into Turkish language and expressed them with poetry as if in order to prevent people from committing sins. One of the noteworthy points is that Yunus Emre often referred to the surahs “Al-Qariah”, “Al-Zilzal”, “Al-Ghashiyah”, “Al-Abasa”, “An-Naba”, “An-Naziat”, “Al-Mursalat”, and “At-Takwir” speaking about mostly the Day of Judgment:

*Daglar yerinden ayrıla, heybetinden gok yarıla,*

*Yıldızlar bagrı kırıla, düşe yere perran ola*(Yunus Emre, Divan, p.235)

When mountains are blown, and the sky is stripped off due to fear from you,

The stars will fall and disperse.

Let’s look through the 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> verses of the surah “At-Takwir”: 1. *İzəşşəmsun kuvvirət*

2. *Vua izənnucumun kədərət* 3. *Vua izəl-cibəlu suyyirət.*

1. When the Sun is wrapped up in darkness;
2. And when the stars fall, dispersing (like raindrops)
3. When the mountains are removed.

Or let’s look through the surah “Al-Infitar” (the cleaving): 1. *Izəssəməun fətarət* 2.

*Vua izəl kəvakibun təsərat* 3. *Vua izə biharu fuccirat*

1. When the sky breaks apart
2. And when the stars fall, scattering,
3. And when the seas are erupted

The above-mentioned surahs of the Quran contain almost this type of verses. Mentioning these verses Yunus called on his readers not to forget the Day of Judgment full of horror and fear:

Don’t forget that Day, all people will be in a rush,

They won’t know what to do and will be like an inebriate.

Israfil will blow his sur, all creatures will stand up.

All dead people will be resurrected and come to the place of judgment.

Angels of hell will throw the guilty people into the hell,

Their skins will burn, their bones will take fire, and they will only cry day and

night.(Yunus Emre, Divan, p.255)

In one of his rubais (*quatrain*) Imadaddin Nasimi wrote:



If you want to know the Truth,  
Learn from Nasimi and find the way.  
Explain the surah “Mount Sinai”,  
If you want to be one of believers (Nesimi, Rubailer, 457).  
This rubai is referred to the surah “At-Tin”.  
In another rubai:  
The Truth (*God*) uncovered the Quran and it became apparent,  
The mysteries of the Quran became known.  
Israfil’s sur (*trumpet*) is blown, wake up,  
You having 32 signs of the Truth. (Nesimi, Rubailer, 458)

5) Sufi treatises written by the poets of Sufi sect in order the readers, especially the Sufi followers to easily understand and remember the philosophy of the Noble Quran, morality of Islam, some stages and points of the mystical journey, and different religious and philosophical issues. These treatises contain many examples from the Noble Quran; during explanation of any stage and case the Noble Quran was referred, as well as stories interpreting separate verses and hadiths (*Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*) were discussed. Seyid Yahya Bakuvi’s “Heft meqam ve chehel menazil”, Yusif Muskuri’s “Beyanal-esrarut-talibin”, Fuzuli’s “Heft cam”, and Nigari’s “Heshtbehishname” can be examples for it.

This is no accident that in most Sufi treatises the Truth’s lover’s spiritual evolution consists of seven stages. The Sufis associated it with the surah “Al-Fatiha” consisting of seven verses. In this regard “Heft meqam ve chehel menazil” of Seyid Yahya Bakuvi, one of great representatives of Khalwati order says:

Be informed that there are seven stages before you,  
If you can enter this world everything will be alright.  
Understand, I will interpret your heart  
In order you to open all the doors and to know the mystery of each door.  
Your heart is Umm-al Kitab (the Mother Book) of God,  
Without heart it is impossible to understand deep meaning.  
Remember, the surah “Al-Fatiha” consists of seven verses,  
And your heart consists of seven treasures full of meanings.

Each treasure has a spell,  
And these spells have their own keywords to open them.  
Each name is Ismi-Azam (*Greatest name*),  
They are keys to the door of the divine world.  
This spectacular and great porch has seven arches,  
All of them stand steady on this name.  
If you keep open the stages of your heart,  
You will be aware of all mysteries of the meanings.  
There are countless angles in the sky  
Engaging in these names and prayers.  
There is a folk in each layer of the sky,  
Each of them mentions God in a different manner.  
Your heart also consists of countless folks,  
All of them are busy with their own work.  
If you want to learn the meaning of the Quran,  
You need to read everything from the board of your heart.  
All meanings of the Quran are in your heart,  
That's why, the treasure of meaning has been granted to you.  
(Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, p.23-24)

Therefore, in accordance with “Whosoever knows himself knows his God” hadith of our Prophet Muhammad the Sufi literature called on a human to see his heart and to clean the mirror of his heart from dusts of the material things.

## **RESULTS**

In Turkish sufi poetry we often see codifying of many words their letters and giving of them in attributes appropriate to every letter. The lines of human face are liken to Quran letters,too. In terms of forms, letters were used to as elements of mimesis and as subject in literary works . Define meaning and content are expressed by means of alliteration –associations of sound and harmonies in Quran. In point of poetic works based on Quran alphabet; the forms, being dotted and undotted, grammatical features, wise meaning of letters, range of images, metaphors and similes was being made. Especially, some sufi works concerned meaning and content given to

Quran letters with influence of “ Esrarul-Huruf” by Ibni Arabi and other works in this topic began to appear.

Stories written on the basis of the Quran stories, and references made to these stories in the poem. The secret meanings, interpretations and commentaries of the Noble Quran were explained in the poetic language. Sufi treatises written by the poets of Sufi sect in order the readers, especially the Sufi followers to easily understand and remember the philosophy of the Noble Quran, morality of Islam, some stages and points of the mystical journey, and different religious and philosophical issues.

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