PROCEEDINGS
International Conference on Literature
Himpunan Sarjana-Kesusastraan Indonesia (HISKI)
E-ISSN 2988-4357

The transformation of the meaning of human love into divine love in Nizami Ganjavi's Novel *Layla Majnun*

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Abstract: *Laila Majnun is a symbol of human love that teaches absolute devotion that transcends physical boundaries and logic. From a Sufi perspective, the story of Laila Majnun is not merely a tale of ordinary love, but rather an allegory of humanity's journey in seeking true love for Allah SWT. Building upon this allegory, this study focuses on an analysis aimed at revealing the transformation of love for humanity into love for God. The benefit of this study is to introduce readers of world literature to true love for God. The theories used in this study are Rabiah al-Adawiyah's theory of the transformation of love into love for God and the concept found in the Quran, Surah Al-Imran, verse 33. These two concepts align in achieving the objectives of this study. Rabiah al-Adawiyah shifts the orientation of human worship from a transactional relationship to a sincere, selfless love driven solely by the longing to draw closer to Allah SWT. The method employed is a qualitative approach using descriptive analysis. The results of this study indicate that the transformation of the meaning of love in the novel Laila Majnun consists of two forms: love for His Self and love for His Majesty.*

Keywords: *Laila Majnun, The Transformation of the Meaning of Love, Human Love, Divine Love, Rabiah al-Adawiyah.*

INTRODUCTION

Novels serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as an effective medium of communication. Novels can be used as a medium for da'wah. The uniqueness of the novel as a medium for da'wah lies in its ability to indirectly express cultural and artistic values from various social contexts, convey life lessons, and influence readers' emotions. Through these novels, readers can gain wisdom and determine how to proceed with their lives. In this regard, novels have the capacity to convey the same message simultaneously to a diverse audience across different religions, ethnicities, social statuses, ages, and places of residence.

Conveying messages through novels inherently triggers a process that has a meaningful impact on readers. When reading a novel, readers undergo a psychological identification with what they are reading. Readers seem to understand and empathize with the experiences of the characters in the novel. The messages

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How to cite (APA 7th): Erwany, L., Dardanila., Hidayat, F.O., & Fadhilah, F.R. (2026). The transformation of the meaning of human love into divine love in Nizami Ganjavi's novel Layla Majnun. *Proceedings 35th KIK, 35,* 1000-1014. https://doi.org/10.68634/kik.v35i.149

contained in the novel become ingrained in the reader's soul, ultimately shaping the reader's character.

As a medium of communication, the novel also serves as a vehicle for religious outreach aimed at spreading virtue. It is hoped that these messages will be conveyed and touch the hearts of readers. Unconsciously, readers may sometimes begin to behave like the characters in the novel they are reading. Through its characters, who serve as role models, it is hoped that the novel can guide its readers toward the truths of religious teachings.

The novel *Layla Majnun* is a religious novel that features many messages of da'wah in its story. Taking the theme of women and their roles in society, this novel tells a love story thwarted by the family's disapproval. This is a universal theme in world literature. However, in Sufi studies, the story of Laila and Majnun is likened to the love of a servant for his Lord. Majnun's (whose real name is Qais) love for Laila is regarded as an invincible and inseparable love, reflecting the divine love between humanity and Allah SWT. The story of Laila and Majnun is considered a metaphor for this divine love.

Majnun, which means "madman" in Arabic, is regarded as a symbol of one who has lost himself in love for Allah SWT. Divine love is considered the foundation of all existence. Divine love is an invincible and inseparable bond between humanity and Allah SWT. (NU Online, 2023)

Majnun's love for Layla can be seen as a representation of a servant's love for God. Majnun symbolizes the Beloved, while Layla symbolizes the lover. In the Sufi tradition, the relationship between the lover and the Beloved can only be forged through love (*mahabbah*). Excessive closeness is extremely dangerous for a pair of lovers. This is precisely what Nizami Ganjavi sought to depict: the sweet tragedy of suffering—a paradox in general. This differs from the Western perspective on the meaning of tragedy and suffering.

Thus, the lovers' suffering cannot be called tragic; it cannot be interpreted from the perspective of conventional morality. The lovers' suffering breaks the chains of human nature, enabling them to free themselves from the self that is bound to the transient world. Death is the gateway to the true world, to the home longed for by the souls of seekers, and Nizami reveals this through brilliant and dynamic metaphors.

Layla and Majnun symbolize true love. True love does not end, even after the lover has passed away; indeed, it endures eternally. True love seeks no return; it is defined by the act of loving rather than being loved. In other words, true love loves for the sake of the beloved, not for oneself. Everything is sacrificed for the beloved, and such sacrifice is not viewed as a source of suffering—for to one who truly loves, the pain and the remedy are one and the same(Erwany, 2009).

The love story of Layla and Majnun is regarded by society as an eternal and legendary love. It is a love that is both the most beautiful and heart-wrenching, bringing tears to the eyes, yet it is also a beautiful love story that ends tragically. Their love story has inspired many of the world's greatest writers to pen similar tales of eternal love, such as William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, "*Romi and Juli*," or the love story of "*Magdalena and Stevan*" by Alphonse Karr, titled *Sous les Tilleuls* (which in French means "*Under the Linden Trees*"), which was later beautifully translated or adapted by Musthafa al-Manfaluthi into "*Majdulin*." The love story of Hayati and Zainuddin in the famous novel "*The Sinking of the Vanderwijck*," by the great Indonesian scholar Buya Hamka, caused quite a stir. "*Baridin-Ratminah*" in Cirebon, West Java, and others. The love story of Layla and Qais has been written by

numerous world-renowned authors and great Sufi masters from various Arab, Persian, Turkish, Indian, and other countries, each in their own distinct versions. Among them are: Al-Ashmu'i (d. 215 AH), Arab; Nizami Ganjavi, Nizam al-Din (d. 599 AH), Persian; Sa'd al-Syirazi (d. 1291 CE) Persia, Abd al-Rahman al-Jami (d. 1492 CE), Persia, Amir Khasru al-Dihlawi (d. 1325 CE), originally from Turkey but later moved to Delhi, Ahmad Shawqi (1932 CE), Egypt, and others. (NU Online Jabar, 2023).

In Nizami Ganjavi's 'Layla and Majnun', human love (Qais's love for Layla) transforms into universal divine love. Qais transcends the limits of the human ego through madness (majnun), suffering, and profound longing. This worldly suffering serves as a Sufi allegory (*mahabbah*) in which Layla symbolizes the essence of God's beauty and the seeker of love becomes one with the Beloved. The Sufi symbolism in the character of Qais (Majnun) portrays him as *al-salik*, or the spiritual seeker who abandons worldly reason in pursuit of *fana* (the dissolution of the ego). Layla is symbolized as *al-ma'shuq*—the manifestation of divine, absolute beauty that cannot be possessed on earth. The desert is a place of inner journey that separates humans from social and material bonds, leading them toward transcendental consciousness. Through the story of Layla and Majnun, love undergoes a transformation. The stages of the transformation of love (*Mahabbah*) begin with physical attraction, which shifts into a love that burns the very core of the heart. *Fana* (Self-Annihilation) is when Majnun loses his sense of self to the point where he no longer distinguishes between himself and Layla—a symbol of the ego's dissolution in the presence of God. Then, *Ittihad / Baqa* (Eternal Union) is the true unionthat is only achievedspirituallythrough physical death, uniting the lover with the beloved eternally. It is this aspect that will be analyzed in this study, not merely the passionate love between Layla and Majnun in their daily lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of the Transformation of Love According to Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah

The theory of the transformation of love states that true love is not merely a lasting feeling of affection, but an active force that transforms a person into someone more mature, caring, and strong. In psychology and sociology, love drives a shift from selfishness toward genuine care and inner growth. The Main Concept of the Transformation of Love is the shift from selfishness to sincerity. Love shifts the focus of life from self-centeredness to the desire to bring happiness to others. The transformation of love leads to spiritual and emotional growth. The experience of loving helps a person develop greater self-control and emotional maturity. Love provides positive energy that makes both a person and their partner stronger individuals when facing challenges.

In the study of Sufism, love is an expression of the soul's feelings, the heart's emotions, and the surge of instinct that envelops a person's heart toward something they love. True love cannot be understood except through sacrifice. In the world of Sufism, there is no definitive definition of love, yet Sufis offer various definitions regarding it (Suciana & Encung, 2025). Sufis such as Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah view love as something pure.

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah is one of the most famous female Sufi figures in Islamic history, known primarily for her profound insights into divine love. Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah was born Rabi'ah bint Isma'il bin Hasan bin Zaid bin 'Ali bin Abi Thalib. Rabi'ah was a leading Sufi figure in the second century of the Hijri calendar during the Umayyad dynasty. She was born in Basra in 713 CE/95 AH and died in 801

CE/185 AH. She lived to be approximately 90 years old. She was born into a poor family, yet her family lived with deep piety and faith in Allah SWT. They never ceasedto engage in dhikr and worship, practicing the teachings of Islam (Fikri, 2020).

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's concept of love differs from the concept of love commonly understood in a human context. For her, love is a deep and absolute spiritual commitment to God. This love is not romantic love or love based on desire and physical needs, but rather a love that is pure, selfless, and sacred. Rabi'ah believed that love for God must be unconditional, without hoping for the reward of paradise or fearing the torments of hell. She described divine love as a direct and personal relationship between the individual and God—a love unbound by worldly motives or expectations of reciprocity.

For Rabi'ah, worshiping God out of fear of hell or in hope of paradise is a form of love that is still selfish in nature. True love for God, she argued, must be for God's sake alone, without any hidden motives. Rabi'ah also emphasized the importance of love as a path to knowledge and understanding of God. She believed that through sincere and pure love, one can attain a higher spiritual station (maqam), bringingthem closer to God. Love becomes a means of dissolving oneself into the oneness of God—a process of union in which the ego and personal interests vanish, replaced by the all-encompassing divine presence. (Tebuireng Online, 2024)

Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah divides love for Allah into three main categories that illustrate the concept of sincere and pure love in her spiritual approach. The following is Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah's classification of love: **(a)** ***Selfish love (Hubb al-Nafs).*** This type of love is still influenced by self-interest, where a believer's primary motivation for loving Allah centers on the personal benefits to be gained—whether in the form of the hope for reward or paradise, or the fear of the torments of hell. In the view of Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah, although this is good, its orientation is still too low, because true love should not expect any reward, whether material or spiritual. In the teachings of Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah, this love is considered immature, or still in the early stages of a servant's spiritual journey. Although this love is the initial stage in a servant's relationship with Allah, it does not reflect true or pure love. And as time goes on, this love must evolve into true love (Tasman & Hadi, 2024); **(b)** ***Love for Allah.*** For Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah, love for Allah is a pure and sincere love, free from any ulterior motive and not driven by fear of hellfire or hope for paradise; for Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah, a relationship with Allah must be based on pure and sincere love, untainted by any other material or spiritual considerations (Azeez Naviel Malakian, 2022); **(c)** ***Love for the Sake of Allah.*** Love for the sake of Allah is a concept of love that possesses profound spiritual depth in Islamic teachings, particularly in the teachings of Sufism. This type of love arises from faith and devotion to Allah. In this context, love for the sake of Allah is love for all of Allah's creatures—whether human or other creations—expressed as a manifestation of a servant's love for Allah. This type of love is not based on personal interests, worldly relationships, or material attachments, but is driven by an awareness of Allah's majesty and greatness as the Creator. Love for the sake of Allah is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, in Surah Al-Imran [3:31]: "Say, O Muhammad, 'If you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you and forgive your sins.'"

This verse affirms that love for Allah is the foundation for all other forms of love, including love for the Messenger and for fellow human beings. As for the hadith narrated by Muslim, it reads as follows: "There are seven groups who will be under

Allah's shade on the Day of Judgment; one of them is two people who love one another for Allah's sake—they meet and part for Allah's sake." For Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah, love for the sake of Allah is one expression of pure love; when a person loves Allah with all their heart, they will love all of His creatures for the sake of Allah (Hijjas, 2018).

This love involves the recognition that everything in the world is a creation of Allah that deserves to be respected and cherished. Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah viewed love for the sake of Allah as the embodiment of the awareness that everything that is loved is merely a reflection of love for Allah. Therefore, loving someone or something for the sake of Allah means loving them within the framework of goodness, justice, and compassion—all of which stem from the attributes of Allah SWT (Ach. Maimun, 2004).

Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah described this love through her famous statement as follows: "*O Lord! If I worship You only out of fear of Your Hellfire, then burn me in Your Hellfire. And if I worship You only to attain Your Paradise, then cast me out of Your Paradise. But if I worship You solely for Your sake, grant me Your eternal beauty*" (Owie, 2022).

This poem reflects Rabi'ah's view that true love for God is a pure love, unbound by fear or the hope of reward. Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah regarded love for Allah as the highest pinnacle of worship and the spiritual goal of a servant—where all forms of self-interest, such as the hope for Paradise or the fear of Hell's punishment, have vanished. In this love, there is nothing but a servant's love for Allah alone, for He is the only Being worthy of a servant's love. It is with such perfect love that Rabi'ah Al-'Adawiyyah dedicated herself to serving the Creator. Rabiah divided love for God into two main categories: (1) Love for His Sake (*Hubb al-Hawa*): Love that arises because a person experiences God's blessings, bounties, and kindness in fulfilling all of life's needs; (2) Love for God's Majesty (*Hubb Li-Khafri*): The highest form of love, in which a servant loves Allah for His beauty and His Perfect Essence, transcending all forms of worldly or otherworldly self-interest (Anggraeni, 2025).

Someone who is overcome by love will always long for a reunion and will always wait for it. That is what is called longing. Sadness, on the other hand, is a feeling or state that unintentionally arises in the heart of someone who longs to be reunited with their beloved. Divine love led Rabi'ah to experience both of these feelings. Rabi'ah viewed God's love for all His creatures as a test; this indicated that within Rabi'ah there was a feeling of jealousy toward others. However, Rabi'ah would always love Allah with complete sincerity (Rahma.id, 2020).

The Concept of Love in the Quran, Surah Al-Imran, Verse 31

قُلْ إِنْ كُنتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"Say: 'If you (truly) love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you and forgive your sins.' Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Q.S. Ali 'Imran [3]: 31) (penerbitjabal.com, 2024).

Surah Ali 'Imran, Verse 31, conveys a profound message about the concept of love in Islam. In this verse, Allah asks His servants to demonstrate their love for Him by following the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (peace be upon him). Love for Allah is not merely an emotional feeling but must be manifested in concrete actions. Following the teachings and Sunnah of the Messenger is a tangible expression of that

love. By doing so, a person not only demonstrates the sincerity of their love for Allah but also strives to live a life in accordance with Islamic values (NU Online, 2024).

According to al-Qushayri, this verse is an indication that a servant's love for his Lord should be unconditional—not contingent on his obedience to God or on seeking protection from harm— as Allah says, "*yuhibbukumullah wa yaghfir lakum dhunubakum*," which explains that a servant, in his love, must dissolve into a profound state of self-effacement so that Allah will love him. The phrase "*yuhibbukumullah*" is mentioned before the phrase "*wa yaghfir lakum dhunubakum*," and the conjunction "*wa*" in that sentence indicates that love (*maḥabbah*) is mentioned before forgiveness (ghufran), because forgiveness requires love at its core. *Maḥabbah* requires a servant to savor solitude by bringing his Beloved into that very stillness. Linguistically, "*hubb*" derives from the two letters "*ha*" and "*ba*"; "*ha*" signifies the the spirit, and "*ba*" signifies the body. As for the lover, he will be immersed in his beloved with all his heart and soul. If a person's love is motivated by a specific reason, it will certainly diminish the sincerity of his love for his beloved, because there is self-interest in that love. A person's sincere love for their beloved will cause their heart and mind to be completely immersed in that love, and they will find joy in that immersion (Muttaqin, 2021).

Love for Allah should be the motivation behind every action of a Muslim. This includes a love for doing good to others, maintaining good relationships, and making positive contributions to society. This love fosters empathy and concern for others, making each individual more sensitive to the needs and hardships of others. Thus, the concept of love in Surah Al-Imran, Verse 31, calls upon Muslims to internalize love for Allah through concrete actions, particularly by following the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. This love not only leads to a close relationship with Allah but also fosters a better social environment (Unaisyah et al., 2025)

Love is one of Islam's teachings that serves as a blessing for all of creation. Allah created humanity with diverse races, tribes, and nations so that they might love and care for one another. Loving His creatures is an expression of a servant's love for his Lord. To ensure that love between the Creator (*Khaliq*) and His creatures (*makhluq*) is realized, Allah sent His Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him), as a guide for all of creation. When this kind of love grows within a person, it is directed solely toward Allah as the source of love. This is because everything one does is not for one's own sake; rather, all personal interests dissolve into the will of Allah SWT.

Furthermore, (Mujteba, 2020) states that a servant's love for his Lord is a manifestation that can elevate him to a higher, more perfect, and purer state. This exalted status demands that a person make sacrifices for his Creator, just as one would do for a beloved. A lover must love the object of his affection with a sincere heart. They must be willing to make sacrifices for the beloved as proof of their love. From a Sufi perspective, *maḥabbah* is an intuition of beauty inherent within human beings; however, the essential and most sublime form of love is love for the Dhat who created love itself. In the Sufi tradition, this is called maḥabbatillah.

(Muttaqin, 2021) states: "For the Sufis, a servant is a lover, while Allah is the Beloved. For in essence, every action must be directed toward Allah; He is also the Giver of love. Allah's love for the Sufis precedes their love for Allah." Furthermore, Sufis very rarely speak of Allah's love for humanity; instead, they often speak of humanity's love for Allah. This love of humanity for Allah is a duty of the servant, whereas Allah's love for humanity is a mercy for which the servant has absolutely no claim. For Sufis, Allah is a unique object of worship, and His worship is incomparable.

METHOD

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive analysis approach and a literature review. According to (Sahir, 2021), qualitative research involves a deep understanding of the phenomena under study by examining them in greater detail on a case-by-case basis, as the nature of the issues being studied may vary. This is a highly useful approach for understanding the current state of research, identifying research gaps, and supporting arguments with a strong theoretical foundation. According to (Sari & Asmendri, 2020), a literature review is a technique for collecting data and supporting information—such as references, books, notes, previous research findings, articles, and scientific papers. Research activities are carried out systematically to formulate, categorize, and analysed existing data by applying programs or methods to find solutions to a problem.

The primary data source for this study is the novel Layla Majnun by Nizami Ganjavi, adapted by Sholeh Gisymar and published by Navila in 2005. In addition to this primary source, this study also utilizes secondary sources, including academic studies, journals, books, and Google searches , data collection was conducted through a literature review by reading, analysing, and recording relevant information from the two main texts as well as other supporting references. The collected data was then analysed in accordance with the research questions that had been formulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study focuses on the transformation of love in the novel Layla Majnun. Majnun's love for Layla can be interpreted as the love of a servant for God. Majnun symbolizes the Beloved, while Layla symbolizes the lover. In the Sufi tradition, the relationship between the lover and the Beloved can only be established through love (mahabbah). Ultimately, Layla and Majnun are the bride and groom of paradise. When they were born into this world, they loved and remained faithful to one another despite being constantly separated. Finally, God reunited them in the embrace of death. The analysis of the research data revealed the following:

Table 1. Forms of the Transformation of Love in the Novel Laila Majnun

Research Findings	Novel Evidence	Interpretation
Transformation of love according to Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah	*Syed Omri's love for Qays; Layla's father's decision concerning her marriage; Naufal's response to Qays; Majnun's compassion toward the deer; and Majnun's devotion, suffering, and renunciation of worldly life (LM: 10, 119, 120, 122,).*	*The novel presents forms of love shaped by worldly/familial interests and a movement toward sincere devotion, interpreted through the Sufi concept of divine love.*
Symbolism in the representation of divine love	*Layla and Majnun; Majnun's suffering and madness; his withdrawal to the desert; and the journey to Meccaor Hajj (LM: 132, 136, 163, 206)*	*The characters, experiences, and settings are interpreted as symbols of the seeker's spiritual journey, including mahabbah, fana, zuhud, and longing for the Divine.*

Discussion

The Transformation of Love in Layla Majnun's Novel

Love for Oneself (hubb al-hawa)

Hubb al-hawa is a form of love that arises from the blessings bestowed by Allah, whether material or spiritual, as shown in Table 1. Although this love is sensory in nature, Rabi'ah emphasizes that *hubb al-hawa* does not change, increase, or decrease in tandem with the increase or decrease of these blessings. This is because Rabi'ah does not focus on the blessings themselves, but rather on the essence that lies behind them.

This type of love is based on carnal desires, personal inclinations, or the motive of seeking specific benefits and pleasures from the beloved. In a spiritual context, hubb al-hawa often refers to love for Allah or fellow creatures that is still mixed with worldly or otherworldly motives (such as merely seeking reward or fearing punishment, rather than purely because of His majesty), honor, and self-respect. This form of love can be seen in Syed Omri's love for his son, Qays. Syed Omri loved his son deeply. He provided his son with the best education, as can be seen in the following quote:

> *"Sejak kelahiran Qays, Syed Omri seolah tidak ingin sekejap pun melewatkan kebahagiaan bersama putera kesayangannya.... Karena anak adalah kebanggaan orang tua, yang mampu mengangkat nama baik keluarga. Anak adalah kebanggan kaum lelaki untuk meneruskan nasab dan keturunan."* (LM, 2005: 10-13)
>
> [Ever since Qays was born, it was as if Syed Omri did not want to miss even a single moment of the joy he shared with his beloved son. After all, a child is a source of pride for parents—one capable of upholding the family's good name. For a man, a son is a point of pride, ensuring the continuation of his lineage and descent].

Another form of love is the love Layla's father has for his daughter. He does not want his daughter to suffer by marrying a madman. Therefore, he strives to give Layla the best— namely, by marrying her off to Ibn Salam, as shown in the following excerpt from the novel:

> *"Aku tidak akan memberikan anakku pada iblis, aku tidak akan menyerahkan anakku kedalam pelukan lelaki gila yang akan menodai kebanggaan dan kehormatan kabilahku. Aku tidak mau menikahkan Layla pada kehinaan dan aib."* (LM, 2005: 118-119)
>
> ["I will not hand my child over to a devil; I will not surrender my child into the arms of a madman who would tarnish the pride and honor of my tribe. I will not marry Layla off to disgrace and shame."]

Selfish love is also evident in the way Naufal loves Qays. Naufal helps Qays win Layla's hand solely because he feels sorry for Qays's suffering. He is willing to go to war against a tribe to secure Layla and give her to Qays. However, Naufal's pity for Qays changes when Layla's father says he will not allow his daughter Layla to be given to Qays, the Majnun. Her father could not bear to see his daughter suffer if she were married to a madman. This made Naufal hesitate, so he ultimately did not hand Layla over to Majnun. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *"Peperangan ini dipicu oleh cinta. Dan saat kemenangan telah kuraih, kutemukan cinta yang lain. Satu cinta seorang pemuda pada kekasihnya, sedang yang lain adalah cinta orang tua pada anak gadisnya, cinta seorang lelaki pada martabat kabilahnya"* (LM, 2005:119-120).
>
> ["This war was ignited by love. And just as I attained victory, I discovered another kind of love—the love of a young man for his beloved, the love of a parent for his daughter, and a man's love for the honor of his tribe."]

In Sufi studies, Majnun's solitary behaviour in the desert and the forest carries important implications for human relationships. It teaches that love for God must be reflected in love for the surrounding natural world. Divine love is not an isolated love or one limited solely to the relationship between an individual and God; rather, it must extend and permeate relationships with others. Rabi'ah believed that loving God also means loving His creation, and this includes love and compassion for fellow human beings and the natural world. This can be seen in the following quote:

> "*Saat melewati hutan, Majnun menyaksikan seekor rusa terjerat dalam perangkap. Sang pemburu berusaha menagkap dan mengarahkan pisau ke leher rusa.... Setelah tiba di dekat pemburu, Majnun berkata, "Jika dadamu masih memiliki perasaan, tahanlah tanganmu! Janganlah engkau melakukan perbuatan kejam, mengalirkan darah rusa. Dia akan merasa kesakitan...*" (LM, 2005:121-122)
>
> [While passing through the forest, Majnun witnessed a deer caught in a trap. The hunter tried to catch and point the knife at the deer's neck.... After arriving near the hunter, Majnun said, "If you still have feeling in your chest, hold your hands! Don't do cruel things, let the deer's blood flow. He will feel pain...]

Love for Allah (hubbun liannaka ahlun lidzaka)

This love (*hubb*) is not driven by sensory gratification, but by the essence of the Beloved. This second kind of love is the most noble and profound, and it brings delight in beholding the beauty of Allah. Such love expects no reward whatsoever. Rabi'ah fulfilled her duties solely out of her love for the Beloved.

The story of Layla and Majnun is an allegory of a Sufi's journey to God, leading through the process of loving. This love led Majnun (the servant) to willingly shed his ego, viewing himself and his Creator as an inseparable unity, until he reached the stage of self-annihilation. By loving Layla, Majnun was in fact loving God. In other words, Majnun's love for Layla is a metaphor for a servant's love for God. Sufis regard the story of Majnun and Layla as a tale of a lover's devotion to his Lord. Majnun—whose name means "one possessed by madness"—represents a lover of God who has lost his worldly sanity due to his boundless love.

This quote shows that Majnun's love is more than just a human emotion; it is a total devotion that transcends worldly logic. This kind of love is considered "*fana*," or self-annihilation, in which the lover loses his identity to become one with the

Beloved. Nizami uses this storyto teach that true love is love that leads to Divine truth, since Layla becomes a symbol of God in this context. Majnun's suffering also illustrates the challenging spiritual life of a Sufi. He hid himself in the desert, lived among wild animals, and rejected all worldly pleasures, as in the following excerpt:

> *"Tubuh Majnun semakin kurus, rambutnya panjang mencapai punggung dan tak terurus, bila ada orang yang bertemu, tentu mereka tidak akan mampu lagi melihat bahwa yang berada di sampingnya adalah sosok manusia. Namun dibalik tampilan tubuhnya yang mengerikan, jiwa pemuda itu dipenuhi oleh cinta dan kasih sayang. Terbukti binatang-binatang liar dan buas yang ada di sekitarnya dapat merasakan bagaimana kemuliaan hati Majnun"*(LM, 2005: 163)
>
> [Majnun's body grew increasingly emaciated; his unkempt hair hung all the way down to his back. Anyone who encountered him would surely no longer be able to recognize that the figure before them was even human. Yet, beneath this harrowing exterior, the young man's soul was brimming with love and compassion—so much so that even the wild and ferocious beasts around him could sense the nobility of his heart.]

In the novel Layla and Majnun, there are several stages of love in the Sufi tradition, namely *fana* and *baqa*, suffering, devotion, and union with the attributes of Allah. These will be explained one by one below.

Fana and Baqa as Stages of Love

Two important stages in the spiritual journey toward Allah are defined in the Sufi tradition as the concepts of *fana* (self-annihilation) and baqa' (eternity in God). Majnun reached the stage of *fana fi al-mahbub*; he made Layla the center of his devotion. This expression describes *baqa* as a state in which a *salik* has attained inner tranquility (*sakina*) while continuing to function socially.

In Sufism, the concepts of *fana* (self-loss) and *baqa* (eternity) are of paramount importance. *Fana* is the loss of self in love for Allah SWT, while baqa is the eternity attained through divine love. Majnun, who has lost himself in love for Layla, is considered to have attained the state of *fana*. However, his love for Layla also leads him to attain the state of baqa, because his love has become one with divine love, as in the following excerpt:

> *Bagiku dunia telah lenyap, aku tidak melihat apapun selain Layla, semua yang aku miliki telah hilang, kecuali kenanganku pada Layla. Ayah, ibu, rumah, semua hilang dalam kesuraman yang tidak bisa ditembus oleh cahaya. Aku menagis karena kasih sayangmu. Tapi apa gunanya air mata, meskipun itu di atas batu nisan seorang ayah?* (LM, 2005: 144).
>
> [For me the world has disappeared, I see nothing but Layla, everything I have is gone, except my memories of Layla. Father, mother, home, all lost in a gloom that no light could penetrate. I cry because of your love. But what use are tears, even if they are on a father's tombstone?]

Suffering as a Path to the Purification of the Soul

Majnun in the Sufi tradition, suffering is not a weakness or a failure, but rather an integral part of the process of purifying the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). Divine love demands sacrifice, self-emptying (*fana*), and a willingness to walk a path filled with suffering in order to draw closer to God. Both Layla and Majnun present suffering as a spiritual practice that leads their characters to a higher divine consciousness. This suffering, in a spiritual context, is often regarded as a means to attain enlightenment and a deeper understanding of existence and one's relationship with God.

Majnun suffers not only because of his unrequited love but also because he realizes that this love has consumed his entire being. The suffering he experiences is a form of fana'—the dissolution of the ego—which is a prerequisite on the Sufi path. He chose isolation and suffering as his path. When separated from Layla, he lost not only his love but also his purpose in life. In that isolation, Majnun discovered depths of the soul he had never before realized—a journey toward enlightenment that could only be attained through profound sorrow . In solitude and sorrow, he discovered an inner voice that guided him toward a higher understanding of love and existence.

This suffering teaches that through sorrow, individuals can achieve spiritual transformation and a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. The suffering experienced by Majnun reflects a universal spiritual journey, in which sorrow becomes a bridge to enlightenment and a deeper understanding of the self.

Majnun did not reject this suffering; rather, he embraced it, for it was through it that his soul was purified and transformed. Suffering in Sufi love is a form of spiritual discipline leading to God. Majnun's suffering reflects Sufi teachings that emphasize the importance of the emotional journey in attaining spiritual awareness as in the following quote,

> "*Sekarang Majnun benar-benar merasa sendirian, dan memang demikianlah suratan takdir. Dengan tubuh lemah ia telentang di tanah, menatap satu titik yang seolah dapat membawanya berjumpa dengan sang bidadari. Kemudian dengan nada sendu dia berkata, "Cinta menyala di sekujur tubuhku, bersama desah nafas dan aliran darah. Sementara cintamu hanya di lidah, tidak pernah berada di dalam hatimu. Cinta dalam jiwaku setiap hari bertambah....*" (LM, 2005: 136).
>
> ["Now Majnun really felt alone, and that was fate. With a weak body, he lay on his back on the ground, staring at a point that seemed to be able to take him to meet the angel. Then in a sad tone he said, "Love burns all over my body, along with the breath and the flow of blood. While your love is only on the tongue, never in your heart. The love in my soul increases every day....]

Majnun experiences suffering not as a curse, but as a maqam, or spiritual stage. Suffering in both of these texts is not a sign of ruin, but a process of "emptying oneself" so that one may be filled with Divine love. This process allows them to achieve a deeper closeness to God and to understand the essence of true love. Yet the darkness and suffering experienced by both are nothing compared to—and even feel like a blessing— every single day. If we were to draw a lesson from this, it is that a

servant who loves his Lord is not in the least affected by suffering, nor does it diminish that love.

Majnun willingly braves the sea of suffering for the sake of his beloved. Although trials and tribulations constantly beset lovers, in reality they remain steadfast, savouring the sweetness of faith because of their love for God. The story of Qais and Laila also tells us that their bodies were never united. A servant who becomes a lover of God is willing to leave everything behind—even the entire world and all it contains. All he possesses is love and faith. It is as if he has become humble and surrenders himself entirely to his Lord. Whether in joy or suffering, they choose nothing—only the love they wish to convey to Him. They no longer think of heaven or hell, for the greatest blessing is the moment they can meet and see their Lord.

Devotion to Attain Divine Love

In Sufism, devotion is considered one of the ways to attain divine love. Majnun, who has lost himself in his love for Laila, is regarded as an example of perfect devotion. Majnun did not think about himself, but only about Laila and his love for her. This is an example of perfect devotion, because Majnun had detached himself from all personal interests and thought only of his love for Laila.

The story of Qays's life is filled with sacrifice and his total dedication to God. Qays spent most of his time in prayer and meditation, often weeping out of longing for God's presence. He chose to live in solitude and in complete devotion to God. This decision demonstrates how deep and absolute his love for God is—a love that transcends all human desires and needs,

> "*Majnun terus berteriak, memanggil Layla, meratapi tangan takdir yang telah memisahkan mereka. Tiada lagi air mata yang dapat membasahi pipinya, karena derita telah menguras seluruh air mata yang tersisa. Tiada lagi mimpi buruk yang akan mengganggu Majnun....*" (LM, 2005: 132)
>
> [Majnun continued to cry out, calling for Layla, lamenting the hand of fate that had torn them apart. There were no tears left to dampen his cheeks, for his suffering had drained every last drop. No more nightmares could trouble Majnun now...]

Union with the Attributes of God

Union with the attributes of Allah SWT—emulating His attributes—is considered the ultimate goal of all spiritual quests: to attain His Pleasure. Majnun, who lost himself in his love for Laila, is considered to have attained union with the attributes of Allah SWT. His love for Laila has become one with divine love, so that Majnun has attained union with the love of Allah SWT. This is an example of perfect union, because Majnun has detached himself from all personal interests and thinks only of his love for Laila, which has become one with divine love. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the novel:

The only path that unites them is the spiritual path, which can only be realized after death claims him. This serves as a lesson that God can be loved by all humanity, yet He cannot be possessed due to His transcendent nature. The only path that can connect lovers to their Lord is the spiritual path or the path after death. A servant who loves his Lord will deeply long for death in order to meet his Beloved, as illustrated by the following excerpt from the novel:

"*Tiba-tiba Majnun melepaskan pelukannya dari nisan Layla, tangannya tengadah ke atas, berdoa pada Pemilik Kehidupan..."*
Semakin lama suara Majnun semakin melemah. Sayap-sayap kematian telah mengajaknya terbang menemui Layla sang kekasih di alam keabadian. Gerbang kematian telah terbuka dan mengajaknya pergi meninggalkan dunia fana" (LM, 2005:206).

[Suddenly Majnun released his embrace from Layla's gravestone, his hands turned upwards, praying to the Owner of Life..."
As time went on, Majnun's voice grew weaker. The wings of death had invited him to fly to meet his lover Layla in the realm of eternity. The gates of death have opened and invited him to leave the mortal world].

They no longer care about the world and all it contains, for all they long for is death so they maybe united with Him. As revealed in Qais's letter to Laila, he has severed all ties to the world and its contents. He chose instead to surrender himself to Laila and expressed just how "*Majnun*" his love for her was. In this regard, it is like how a lover leaves everything behind for the sake of the one they love. Truly, such love is very difficult for most people to bear. It is a love that is always accompanied by an ocean of sorrow, a love capable of leaving everything behind, even a love that causes them to dissolve themselves for the sake of their beloved—a love that knows no identity and a love whose magnitude cannot be measured. They no longer regard the world and all it contains, for in their hearts there is only love—love for their beloved.

Symbolism in the Representation of Divine Love

Symbolism in Sufi literature is not merely a literary style, but a reflection of the spiritual journey. In the story of *Layla Majnun*, Layla is not just a woman, but a symbol of God—beautiful, distant, and unattainable. Conversely, Majnun symbolizes the *salik*, the spiritual traveller consumed by *fana'* (self-annihilation) in pursuit of ma'rifat (gnosis).

Layla as a Symbol of the Mysterious and Majestic Divine.

Layla is depicted as the most beautiful being, whose beauty captivates all hearts yet remains untouchable to Majnun. This reflects the *tajalli jamal* —the manifestation of beauty. However, that beauty becomes an existential burden. Majnun can only love from afar, just as a servant can only love God through inner contemplation, not through possession. Layla is never truly present to save Majnun. She is always absent—an allegory of God, the All-Distant, beyond the reach of reason and the senses.

Majnun as a Salik (Seeker of God)

Majnun, which literally means "the madman," is interpreted as a symbol of the *salik*—a seeker of God who undergoes an inner journey through suffering, alienation, and madness. This paper aims to conduct an in-depth examination of the symbolic meaning of Majnun as a *salik* within the Sufi context, focusing on the concepts of *fana'* (the dissolution of the ego), the practice of *zuhud* (renunciation of the world), and divine love (*mahabbah*).

Suffering and Madness as Manifestations of Fana.

Majnun experienced intense suffering and madness as a result of his love for Layla. In the context of Sufism, this madness is not merely an outward loss of reason, but a symbolic representation of the process of *fana*—the dissolution of the ego and self-identity in Divine love. Majnun's inseparable love for Layla symbolizes *mahabbah*, the divine love that binds the heart of the seeker so that he willingly renounces all worldly things to become one with the Divine Beloved. This process of *fana* is an essential stage in the Sufi spiritual journey, in which the ego and worldly desires are destroyed to make room for the awareness of God.

The Practices of Zuhud and Self-Exile in the Desert.

Majnun abandoned social life and chose to live in the desert, a quiet place far from the hustle and bustle of the world. This is in line with the practice of *zuhud* in Sufism, which is the act ofletting go of worldly attachments to focus on the search for and devotion to God. The desert becomes a symbol of an empty and sacred spiritual space, allowing the *salik* to pray and meditate without distraction. This self-imposed exile was not an act of escape, but a conscious step toward the purification of the soul and a deepening of divine love.

The forest and the desert were places of self-exile, wandering, and contemplation for Qays due to the anguish of his love for Layla. Qays left his home and community because of a deep heartbreak after his proposal to Layla was rejected by her family, and Layla was forced to marry another man. In the midst of the barren and silent desert, Qays lived in solitude, turning his back on worldly affairs, reciting poems of longing, and kept company by wild animals. Because of this behaviour, he was considered to have lost his sanity and was nicknamed Majnun, or "the madman." The desert became a silent witness to Qays's faithful love, where he spent the rest of his life lamenting a longing so intense that it lasted until his very end.

Hajj as a Symbol of Divine Love.

The journey to Mecca is not merely a ritual, but an expression of deep longing for God. *Tawaf* becomes a spiritual act, circling the centre of love, just as the heart of the seeker circles God. This *tawaf* reflects the soul's journey as it strives to unite with the Creator, in line with the spiritual values emphasized in Islamic teachings. This journey not only brings about physical change but also fosters a profound inner transformation, cultivating a higher level of spiritual awareness in every pilgrim.

CONCLUSION

From a Sufi perspective, the story of *Layla and Majnun* depicts the love (*al-Mahabbah*) of the servant (*Salik*) for God. Layla represents God, while Majnun represents the lover (*al-Muhibb*). A servant should love his Lord with pure devotion. There is nothing to be loved except Him. Worldly interests and adornments become abstract; all that remains are the deeds performed to draw closer to God. Overall, the story of Layla and Majnun is regarded as a metaphor for divine love, transience, eternity, devotion, and union with Allah SWT. This story has inspired many people to seek divine love and union with the attributes of Allah SWT.

The madness of Qays, as depicted by Nizami, is the embodiment of love without reason. Qays loved sincerely and purely. He loved God so deeply that he was

unable to articulate a logical reason for it. When a servant attains the essence of *maḥabbah* toward Allah, he will always obey everything Allah commands of him without the slightest coercion. For in truth, the consequence of a servant's *maḥabbah* toward Allah SWT is obedience to "—the Being whom he loves. Such is the nature of a servant's love for his Lord: a love that neither seeks paradise nor fears hell.

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