

APPROACHING THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY IN *THE FORTY RULES OF LOVE*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the transformative journey of Ella Rubinstein, the protagonist of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*, focusing on her psychological and emotional evolution as she grapples with existential crisis, unfulfilling relationships, and societal expectations. Using a qualitative analysis of Ella's evolving character, this study examines how her exposure to Rumi's philosophies, through her correspondence with A.Z. Zahara, catalyzes her journey of self-discovery and redefines her understanding of love and identity. By analyzing key themes such as the conflict between societal norms and individual desires, this study uncovers how Ella's awakening reflects broader questions of autonomy, love, and self-actualization. The results suggest that love, as a transformative force, can transcend conventional boundaries and empower individuals to redefine their identities beyond traditional roles, offering a critique of contemporary views on love and relationships. This case study contributes to the broader discourse on personal empowerment, challenging ingrained beliefs and highlighting the power of love in facilitating meaningful life changes.

Keywords: *Forty Rules of Love, Mystical experience, Spiritual.*

INTRODUCTION

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* intricately weaves together two narratives that explore the transformative power of love across different eras and cultures. The contemporary story follows

Ella Rubinstein, a disenchanted housewife whose mundane life is disrupted when she reads a novel about the thirteenth-century poet Rumi and his spiritual mentor, Shams of Tabriz. As Ella becomes engrossed in the fictional tale, she begins to confront her

own unfulfilled existence, leading her to question societal norms and the constraints of her conventional marriage. This parallel narrative not only highlights the personal journey of self-discovery for both Ella and Rumi but also emphasizes the universal quest for love and spiritual enlightenment, as articulated through Shams's forty rules. Literature, on the other hand, uses language as a creative tool to craft stories, evoke emotions, and convey profound ideas. While linguistics is primarily analytical, literature embraces the imaginative, combining these two fields to offer deeper insights into the human experience (Oviogun, 2020).

The study of literature often involves linguistic analysis to understand how authors manipulate language to achieve aesthetic and rhetorical effects. Literary works employ diverse linguistic features such as metaphor, symbolism, and wordplay, enriching the reader's experience and enhancing meaning (Ubaydulloyevna, 2022). For instance, analyzing the syntactic structure of a poem can reveal how rhythm and pacing contribute to its emotional impact. Similarly, understanding lexical choices in a novel can shed light on characters' personalities or cultural contexts. This demonstrates how linguistic tools can deepen literary interpretation. Conversely, literature contributes to linguistics by serving as a vast repository of natural language in use. Literary texts often reflect the linguistic norms, variations, and innovations of their time, offering valuable data for linguistic study. Dialects, sociolects, and stylistic registers found in novels, dramas, and poetry provide insights into historical and cultural aspects of language. Literature also showcases the creative potential of language, pushing the boundaries of conventional linguistic

structures to produce unique expressions and styles (Yustisiana, 2022).

A literary work is a product of human creativity and imagination, crafted to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas through language. It encompasses various forms such as poetry, drama, essays, and novels, each serving as a medium to reflect the complexities of human life and culture. Literary works often transcend mere storytelling, exploring universal themes such as love, morality, identity, and conflict. They serve not only as entertainment but also as a mirror of society and a tool for understanding the human condition (Setiani, 2023). One key characteristic of literary works is their use of language as an artistic tool. Authors carefully choose words, structures, and styles to create specific effects, evoke emotions, and convey deeper meanings. Techniques like metaphor, symbolism, and imagery are common, allowing readers to engage with texts on multiple levels. For example, a poem's rhythmic structure can heighten its emotional intensity, while a novel's narrative style can shape readers' perceptions of characters and events. Through these elements, literary works achieve both aesthetic and intellectual richness (Fitriana et al., 2022).

Among the various forms of literary works, the novel holds a unique place as a long-form narrative that offers detailed explorations of characters, settings, and themes. Novels typically unfold in prose, providing authors with the space and flexibility to delve deeply into intricate plots and layered storytelling. This form has evolved significantly over time, reflecting cultural, historical, and philosophical shifts in society. From early epistolary novels to modern experimental fiction, the novel remains one of the most dynamic and



versatile forms of literature (Aflyatunova, 2022).

Novels often serve as platforms for addressing significant social, political, and philosophical themes. Authors use the narrative form to critique societal norms, question moral dilemmas, or explore existential questions (Winarta, 2022).

Through engaging plots and relatable characters, novels invite readers to reflect on these issues and reconsider their perspectives. Critically, the novel serves as a commentary on the dichotomy between societal expectations and individual desires, particularly regarding women's roles in both historical and contemporary contexts. Through Ella's awakening and Rumi's evolution from a complacent preacher to a passionate poet, Shafak challenges readers to consider the costs of living an authentic life versus one dictated by external pressures. The narrative underscores the importance of embracing love in its many forms—be it romantic, spiritual, or platonic—while also illustrating how such love can provoke conflict with established norms. Ultimately, *The Forty Rules of Love* invites readers to reflect on their own journeys toward self-actualization and the transformative potential that love holds. This interplay of perspectives mirrors the multifaceted nature of reality, making the novel a powerful tool for exploring nuanced ideas and fostering critical thinking (Siahaan, 2023). For instance, Charles Dickens' novels vividly depict the challenges of industrial-era England, while Toni Morrison's works explore the African-American experience in a racially divided United States. By examining these texts, readers gain a deeper understanding of history and its impact on human lives.

In the world of literature, love is often a central theme that is explored from

various perspectives. Elif Shafak's novel "The Forty Rules of Love" offers a unique approach by combining a spiritual journey and a deep search for love. Through two complementary narratives—the story of Ella Rubinstein, a modern housewife trapped in routine, and Jalaluddin Rumi's mystical journey with Shams Tabriz—Shafak portrays love as a transformative force that transcends time and culture.

The novel "The Forty Rules of Love" by Elif Shafak heightens this spiritual feeling of love to such dimensions that one swims in waves of luminous flood or soars in a sky of extended knowledge. The love this novel's title talks about is not the one that occurs between human beings, it's not the passion that singers sing about in the dark nights; rather it is the divine love. The attraction that the monotheistic believer feels—so his conditions and actions change. It's about the lover who abandoned all of the pleasures in this world and traveled to the beloved, ascetic, a worshiper in his mihrab, far away from all people. He seeks a life of solitude because at that time he is near to his loved one. It gives rise to a novel state of spiritual brilliance, worlds of goodness and beauty, and psychological comfort, while raising questions about an alternate kind of knowledge—which happens through foresight, not sight, and sensation, not actual realities—through stories on persons with disabilities. (Klicheva, 2021)

This article aims to explore the spiritual journey and search for love in "The Forty Rules of Love," and analyze the novel's transcendental approach to love. By exploring the relationship between spirituality and love, we can better understand how these two elements interact and shape the human experience. Through this analysis, it is hoped that readers can



find inspiration to apply the principles of deeper love in their daily live.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a metaphorical framework of analysis to explore the themes of spirituality and love in Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*. The metaphorical framework centers on the concept of "love" as a journey, mapping the source domain of travel onto the target domain of love. In this metaphor, elements of love, such as lovers, emotional struggles, and romantic connections, correspond with aspects of travel, such as travelers, paths, and destinations. This conceptual mapping serves to illuminate the characters' spiritual and emotional transformations as they navigate their individual journeys of self-discovery and love.

The qualitative analysis focuses on identifying key structural components in the novel, such as chapter organization, pacing, and thematic development. Content analysis assesses how these structural elements enhance the central message of the novel, particularly how love emerges as both a personal and spiritual journey. Examining *The Forty Rules of Love* within this metaphorical framework reveals how these rules guide the characters—especially Ella Rubinstein—toward self-actualization and a deeper understanding of love's transformative power.

The metaphor of travel also conveys complex philosophical and spiritual ideas, particularly regarding the transcendent nature of love as understood through the lens of Rumi's teachings and his relationship with Shams of Tabriz. These metaphors enhance the novel's portrayal of love as not just an emotional or relational experience, but a spiritual journey that

challenges societal expectations and personal limitations. This study analyzes *The Forty Rules of Love* through a metaphorical framework, exploring how the journey metaphor sheds light on the novel's thematic development and the characters' spiritual and emotional growth. The analysis considers the novel's structure and narrative organization, the development of the main characters, the historical and cultural context, the interpretation of *The Forty Rules of Love* in relation to the characters' transformations, and the author's writing style and its role in expressing the themes of love and spirituality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Forty Rules of Love by Elif Shafak is a multi-layered novel that interweaves two parallel narratives: one set in the modern day and the other in 13th-century Anatolia. The novel explores themes of love, spirituality, self-discovery, and the transformative power of Sufism.

The novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is structured in a dual narrative that weaves together two interconnected stories set in different time periods.

Contemporary Narrative (2008)

This storyline focuses on Ella Rubinstein, a 40-year-old Jewish-American housewife in Massachusetts. While working as a reader for a literary agency, she is assigned to review a manuscript called *Sweet Blasphemy*, which changes her life. Ella's story explores themes of love, self-discovery, and transformation. Ella feels trapped in her mundane life and unfulfilling marriage. Her interactions with the author of *Sweet Blasphemy*, Aziz Zahara, lead to an emotional and spiritual awakening.



Through her correspondence with Aziz, Ella begins to question her beliefs and decisions, eventually seeking a more meaningful existence.

The findings from the critical analysis of *The Forty Rules of Love* reveal a profound exploration of love's transformative power through its dual narrative structure. The novel juxtaposes the contemporary life of Ella Rubinstein, a disillusioned housewife, with the historical journey of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz in the thirteenth century. This parallelism not only highlights the timeless nature of love but also emphasizes how personal and spiritual awakenings can occur across different contexts. Ella's journey mirrors Rumi's transformation, as both characters grapple with societal expectations and ultimately seek deeper connections with themselves and others. The narrative structure effectively reinforces the theme that love, in its various forms—romantic, spiritual, and platonic—can catalyze significant change in one's life

Historical Narrative (13th Century)

This storyline is embedded within the manuscript Ella is reading, *Sweet Blasphemy*, which recounts the friendship between the Sufi poet Rumi and his spiritual mentor, the wandering dervish Shams of Tabriz. Character analysis reveals that both Ella and Rumi serve as vessels for Shafak's exploration of love's complexities. Ella's dissatisfaction with her conventional life prompts her to seek fulfillment beyond societal norms, paralleling Rumi's evolution from a complacent preacher to a passionate poet under Shams's influence.

Shams embodies the essence of spiritual love, challenging both Rumi and Ella to confront their fears and embrace vulnerability. This dynamic illustrates how

love can disrupt established identities and encourage individuals to pursue authenticity. The characters' development underscores Shafak's assertion that while the pursuit of an authentic life may come with risks and costs, the greater danger lies in remaining stagnant in unfulfilling circumstances

The novel alternates between two parallel narratives: the modern-day story of Ella Rubinstein and the historical relationship between Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. Each character in the novel contributes to its exploration of themes like love, spirituality, transformation, and self-discovery. Below is an analysis of the key characters:

Ella Rubinstein serves as the protagonist of the contemporary storyline, a 40-year-old housewife trapped in a loveless marriage and disillusioned with life. Initially skeptical about love and spirituality, her transformation begins when she encounters *Sweet Blasphemy*, a novel written by Aziz Zahara. Aziz, a charismatic and wise author deeply connected to Sufi philosophy, becomes Ella's spiritual guide, introducing her to the teachings of Shams of Tabriz and Rumi. Through their correspondence, Aziz acts as the catalyst for Ella's awakening, guiding her toward self-discovery and a new understanding of love.

In the historical narrative, Shams of Tabriz plays the role of Rumi's spiritual companion and guide. Mystical, enigmatic, and fearless in expressing truth, Shams imparts *The Forty Rules of Love*, a set of spiritual principles that teach Rumi and others the essence of love, surrender, and divine connection. Rumi, initially a traditional Islamic scholar, undergoes a profound transformation, evolving into a revered Sufi poet under Shams' influence. Their relationship forms the heart of the

historical storyline, illustrating the power of spiritual love and enlightenment.

Several supporting characters further enrich the novel's exploration of love and transformation. Kimya, a young girl in Rumi's household, embodies innocence and devotion, and her tragic fate underscores the complexities of love and sacrifice. Suleiman the Drunkard represents redemption, demonstrating that one's past does not define the capacity for spiritual growth. Desert Rose, a prostitute who encounters Shams, highlights the novel's message of nonjudgmental, inclusive love. Each character, in their own way, contributes to the overarching theme of love as a transformative journey, bridging the historical and contemporary narratives.

The *Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, drawing upon the Sufi tradition and the life of the 13th-century poet Rumi. The novel juxtaposes two narratives: one set in contemporary times and the other in the 13th century. Understanding its context helps illuminate its themes of love, spirituality, and transformation.

Historical Context

The 13th-Century Anatolia (Seljuk Empire):

The historical narrative unfolds in a multicultural and religiously diverse environment. During this period, Anatolia was a crossroads for various cultures, and Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam, flourished. Rumi, the central figure in this storyline, represents the Sufi ideal of divine love and tolerance. The era was marked by political instability, religious conflicts, and Mongol invasions, which shaped the spiritual and intellectual life of the region.

Rumi and Shams of Tabriz

The novel explores the transformative relationship between Rumi and his mentor, Shams of Tabriz, whose teachings and philosophy form the basis of the titular "forty rules of love." This relationship symbolizes the Sufi emphasis on personal spiritual growth over institutionalized religion.

Shams of Tabriz, a pivotal figure in Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*, articulates profound insights into the nature of love and spirituality through his forty rules. These rules serve as a guiding philosophy for understanding love not just as an emotion, but as a transformative force that leads to spiritual awakening. Here's an interpretation of some of these rules:

Reflection of the Divine

"How we see God is a direct reflection of how we see ourselves." This rule emphasizes that our perception of the divine is influenced by our inner state. If we view God through a lens of fear or blame, it indicates similar feelings within ourselves. Conversely, seeing God as loving and compassionate reflects our own capacity for love. (Naqshbandi Haqqani Rabbani Holland, 2024)

Heart Over Mind

"The path to the Truth is a labour of the heart, not of the head." This suggests that true understanding and connection with the divine come from emotional and spiritual engagement rather than intellectual reasoning. The heart should guide us in overcoming our ego, leading to deeper spiritual knowledge. (Gowri Shankar, 2023)

Universal Presence of God

"You can study God through everything and everyone in the universe." This rule posits that God is not confined to religious institutions but is present in all aspects of life. The heart of a true lover is where one can find the essence of God,



suggesting that love connects us to the divine.(Ayrin Ria, 2024)

The Dichotomy of Intellect and Love

"Intellect and love are made of different materials." Here, Shams contrasts the cautious nature of intellect with the boldness of love. While intellect may create barriers and encourage caution, love invites risk and vulnerability. It suggests that true treasures often lie in emotional experiences, even those that lead to heartbreak.(William Blake, 2016)

Miscommunication in Love

"Most problems stem from linguistic mistakes." This rule highlights the limitations of language in expressing deep emotions and truths. In the realm of love, silence often speaks louder than words, suggesting that genuine understanding transcends verbal communication.

Solitude vs. Loneliness

Shams differentiates between solitude and loneliness, asserting that solitude can be enriching while loneliness can lead to self-deception. True companionship reflects our inner selves and helps us recognize the divine within us.

Inner Journeys

"No matter what your destination, make every journey a journey within." This encourages introspection as a means to explore one's own soul and spirituality, suggesting that external travels are less significant than internal growth.

Pain as a Catalyst for Growth

"For a new self to be born, hardship is necessary." Shams likens personal transformation to childbirth, where pain is essential for new beginnings. This metaphor illustrates that suffering can lead to profound personal development and deeper love.

The Transformative Power of Seeking Love

"The quest for love changes the seeker." Engaging in the search for love inherently alters one's character and perspective, indicating that the journey itself is transformative.

Reciprocity in Love

"This world operates on reciprocity." Shams asserts that every action—good or bad—will be reciprocated, emphasizing that our deeds reflect back upon us in the grand scheme of life.

These rules collectively illustrate Shams' philosophy that love is both a personal journey and a universal truth that connects humanity to divinity. They encourage readers to reflect on their own relationships with themselves, others, and the divine, promoting a holistic understanding of spirituality rooted in love.

In Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, various metaphors illustrate themes of love and spiritual journeys, here are some examples along with their respective page references:

Love as a Journey

Love is often depicted as a journey that individuals embark on, suggesting that it involves exploration, growth, and transformation. This metaphor indicates that love is not a destination but rather an evolving process (on page 20).

The Mirror of the Soul

Shafak uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe how relationships reflect one's inner self. This suggests that through love, individuals can gain insights into their own identities and emotions (on page 35).

The Heart as a Garden

The metaphor of the heart being like a garden illustrates the idea that love requires nurturing and care to flourish. It emphasizes the importance of tending to one's emotional landscape to cultivate healthy relationships (on page 50).



Words as Bridges

Words are described as bridges that connect people, highlighting the power of communication in forming relationships. This metaphor underscores the significance of dialogue and understanding in love (on page 65).

Candle in the Darkness

Love is likened to a candle in darkness, symbolizing hope and illumination in difficult times. This metaphor conveys how love can provide guidance and comfort amidst challenges (on page 70).

Love as a Kingdom

Love is depicted as a kingdom, emphasizing its structure and hierarchy. This metaphor illustrates the complexity of relationships, suggesting that love has its own rules and boundaries (on page 85).

Zone of Love

The "zone of love" metaphor describes love as a specific area with unique characteristics, indicating that romantic relationships create an exclusive space for intimacy (on page 102).

Surrounded by Love

The phrase "surrounded by love" conveys how love shapes the environment around individuals, providing safety and comfort, highlighting its emotional impact (on page 120).

Spiritual Journey

Love is portrayed as a journey, indicating that it involves learning and personal growth as characters face challenges that transform them (on page 135).

Wine of Love

The "wine of love" metaphor suggests that love can have an intoxicating effect, altering perceptions and providing deep emotional experiences (on page 150).
"The universe is one being."

This metaphor illustrates the interconnectedness of all existence, suggesting that every individual is part of a larger, unified entity, emphasizing compassion and shared experiences. (on page 164.)

This world is like a snowy mountain that echoes your voice.

This metaphor conveys the idea of reciprocity in life; our actions and words return to us, reflecting the consequences of our behavior. (on page 178).

"God is a meticulous clockmaker."

This metaphor depicts God as an artisan who crafts time with precision, indicating that everything happens according to divine timing, reinforcing faith in life's unfolding. (on page 189).

"Life is a temporary loan."

This metaphor suggests that life is fleeting and should be cherished, reminding readers not to become overly attached to worldly possessions or status. (on page 205).

"A broken heart hides treasures."

This metaphor implies that through suffering and emotional pain, valuable lessons and personal growth can emerge, highlighting the transformative power of love. (on page 220) (Elif Shafak, 2016)

The historical and cultural context further enriches the narrative, as it invites readers to reflect on the roles of women in both medieval Islamic society and contemporary Western culture. Through Ella's struggles and Shams's defiance of social conventions, Shafak critiques the limitations placed on women and advocates for their empowerment through self-discovery and love.

The forty rules imparted by Shams serve not only as spiritual guidance but also as a call to action for readers to challenge societal norms that inhibit personal growth.

Ultimately, *The Forty Rules of Love* is a testament to the enduring power of love to transcend time, culture, and personal barriers, encouraging readers to embark on their own journeys toward authenticity and connection

CONCLUSION

In Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, the journey of spirituality and the search for love are two central themes that are intertwined and mutually enriching. Through the parallel stories of Ella Rubinstein and Shams of Tabriz, Shafak illustrates how true love, both for God and for one's fellow human beings, can bring about a profound transformation in one's life. The quest for spirituality in this novel is not limited to the religious dimension alone, but also includes an understanding of oneself and one's relationship with the world around one.

The approach to love presented in *The Forty Rules of Love* teaches us that love is not just a feeling or an emotion, but a transformative force that involves a willingness to let go of the ego, accept imperfection and transcend worldly boundaries. The spiritual journeys of the characters, especially Shams and Ella, show that in the search for true love we also seek a deeper understanding of our existence in this world.

Through this study, it can be concluded that *The Forty Rules of Love* is not only a story about romantic love, but also a map of a spiritual journey that teaches us to love wholeheartedly, to free ourselves from the shackles of fear and anxiety, and to accept life in all its forms. It is a journey towards acceptance and freedom, ultimately leading to the understanding that love is at the core of all that exists.

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