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Aesthetics of Religious Coexistence and Tolerance in the Shafak's Turkish Novel

MOHAMMED ABOU ADEL¹

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the novel "Forty Rules of Love" by Elif Shafak, which evokes the historical personality of the great scholar Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, dubbed by the West "the Shakespeare of the Islamic world". He was known for his moderation and tolerance, for his call to coexistence and fraternity between the members of different religions, and his condemnation of violence and extremism of all kinds. So, the novel strives to change the misconceptions of the West regarding the Asian countries of the East and to challenge the negative attitude towards Islam, known nowadays as Islamophobia. The paper aims to address the evil of fanaticism and violence and introduce the Western reader to the sublime spiritual aesthetics of the East, which starkly contrast to the savage image of Islam as presented by the media. By studying the novel, which has been translated into more than fifty languages, the paper also seeks to emphasise the role of literature, in general, in spreading cultural awareness among fellow human beings so that people can live in peace and safety.

Keywords: Discourse of hatred, Islamophobia, Sufism, Tolerance, Turkish novel.

The author has believed that novelists possess a particular contemplative awareness through which they view the world. For this reason, they can see reality objectively and, thus, portray and address human issues way impartially. Therefore, it is not surprising that in their writing, we encounter truths that go against the stereotypical depiction of different nations and their cultures, religions, convictions, views, and traditions. And although differences and disagreements between people continue to exist and need to be suppressed, or at least diminished, we can find, in the creativity of the novel, fertile ground for an alternative way of looking at the "other" - through an undistorted lens. So, the problem of the paper manifests in misunderstanding the culture of Eastern and the humane message of Islam, and the need to dedicate tolerance and religious coexistence between Eastern and Western.

As to the question, "why exactly is this novel by the academic Elif Shafak?", here is the answer: Because of the courageous, humane message of the novelist, she looks at the case of the beleaguered minorities in a way that enables us to hear the voices of the oppressed, the weak,

¹ **Mohammed Abou Adel**, Ph. D. Assoc. Prof at Faculty of Arabic & Literature, Department of Humanities, College of Law, Al-Yamamah University, King Fahd Branch Rd. Al-Qirawan, Riyadh 13541, SAUDI ARABIA. E-mail: m_aboadel@yu.edu.sa

and the marginalised, whose souls she hopes to uplift. Elif Shafak does that by adopting a compassionate attitude to the "other" without belittling him/her. She publicly asserts her loyalty and belonging to the human race, but not by using the familiar empty slogans. The novelist firmly believes in the individual, not the collective, identity - the one through which the individual is dignified and valued. In her work, the author opposes extremism in all its forms, including the extremist loyalty to one's own ego and the acceptance of everything that comes from it. On the contrary, Shafak stresses the importance of denouncing the arrogance of the self which prevents it from recognizing its own mistakes and leads it to reject the "other". It is precisely this self-aggrandizement that causes people to adopt a judgmental attitude toward others.

Perhaps one of the reasons people first read Shafak's novel is because they are curious to find out the secret to the enormous popularity of the novel *Forty Rules of Love*, which has been translated into fifty-five languages and is one of the best-selling novels across the world. The author, Elif Shafak (1971-) holds a Ph. D. in political science and she has taught at various universities in Turkey, the US, and the UK, including St Anne's College, Oxford University, where she is an honorary fellow.

The novel *Forty Rules of Love* evokes the personality of an extraordinary historical figure who had a unique philosophical vision, namely Jalal al-Din al-Rumi. His poetry has become well-known around the world, and he has been dubbed, "the Shakespeare of the Islamic world" (Faiyaz 2019). Apart from being a well-known poet, he was also a preacher known for his promotion of the principle of tolerance and love between people, and for his call to respect for all religions and all people, including the sinners among them. Because of his universal language of love for all people, regardless of the paths they follow in their connection to God, and the religion they adhere to in order to worship Him, he is loved by everyone. El-Zein (2000) argues that the Rumi phenomenon which took place during the last decade of the 20th century in America, in particular, is a result of a spiritual, as well as commercial, strategy, adopted by the country, in order to quell society's thirst for spiritual guidance.

Previous studies of Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* have focused on contemporary social and ethical questions, as well as on the various literary techniques that have enriched the novel (Saeed & Fatima 2018). However, previous studies have tended to overlook the humane mission of this novel. It is as if they have focused on the ailment and ignored the cure. According to Bakhtin (1973), the polyphony created by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) in his novelists not only an outstanding creative innovation but also develops artistic thinking on life. Polyphony not only benefits literature but also enriches daily human dialogue (Bakhtin 1984). It is worth mentioning that polyphony does not refer to a diversity of literary characters, but to a plurality of ideas, viewpoints, intellectual attitudes, beliefs, and directions, with all their differences, discrepancies, and inconsistencies.

This paper aims to address an urgent need for a human, as well as a literary, bridge between the people of the East and the West, regardless of their religions or convictions. Never has this been more important than today when we see the spread of extremism. It emphasizes the need for a type of religiosity that does not involve the labelling of the other "an infidel". (Furlanettom 2013). The power of narrative art consists of its ability to convey truths in a way that is deeply touching. It does that through the personalities of the characters whose lives the reader co-lives. It is the author sincere hope that the reader will benefit from the reading of this paper and that it will contribute to their journey of re-discovering the world of the East in its richness which is often concealed from the West. Above all, the author hopes that it will help put an end to the animosity between the East and the West.

Shafak's novel uses the polyphony technique to present the problem of intolerance. The term polyphony entered fiction from the field of music. It is the idea that diverse melodies should be arranged harmoniously to achieve beauty and pleasure. Likewise, in literature, different fictional characters should express the diversity of life (Ghandeharion & Khajavian 2019; Barthes 1977; Alqadi 2010). This paper applies the structuralist approach to answer the following research questions:

1. How well did the novel use the polyphony technique to express religious pluralism?
2. How did Shafak use aesthetics to attract and affect the reader?
3. What are the contemporary human issues which the novelist depicted via historical comparison and expressed in an artistic manner?

Discussion

The characters in Shafak's novel are distinguished by their various persuasions, cultures, and religions. The protagonist, Ella, a Jewish American in her forties, is suffering from a midlife crisis. She is bored of her monotonous life as a housewife, a mother of three children, and a wife to an unfaithful husband. However, her life changes after reading a novel as a reviewer for a literary agency (Abo Shehab 2022). The novel is titled *Sweet Blasphemy* and centers around a meeting in the thirteenth century of two great Islamic scholars. Shafak's novel can therefore be classified as a historical novel. Shafak's writing is not based on personal memory, but on historical events that occurred many centuries ago (Lindblad 2018).

The Forty Rules of Love is a novel overlapping another one. Whoever reads it feels as if he is reading two novels set in different places and periods, but intersecting on multiple occasions (Firdous 2014), with *Sweet Blasphemy* containing the universal and timeless wisdom for which Ella is searching. Upon completing her review of *Sweet Blasphemy* and being impressed by its topic, Ella contacts its author. She falls in love with the author, whom she conflates with one of the characters in his novel: Shams Tabrizi, a sufi scholar who lives a state of divine love, inner peace, and unique reconciliation with himself and the world. In her love for him, she feels that he is the person who will save her from her misery. A Jewish woman having fallen in love with a Muslim man, Ella represents a character open to acceptance and tolerance of others. When she reads this novel about the East, she admires its spirituality, which is so uncommon in her own material world. The world of the novel appears drawn from the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. As Aziz, the fictional author of *Sweet Blasphemy*, states, his book "cuts across countries, cultures, and centuries" (Shafak 2010: 17).

Thus, Ella, a woman of the twenty-first century finds her spiritual path and the person who would save her from the emptiness of her life. Indeed, through entertaining, exciting, and useful artistic literature, Aziz tries to provide a cure for hatred, intolerance, and violence. He introduces Eastern aesthetics, with its great spirituality, to the West to mitigate rising Islamophobia in an era when we especially need to recognize the humanity of the Other, rather than base our view of Islam on its negative representation in the media (Saeed 2018). This is a call for dialogue with the Other rather than reacting to it with prejudice and aggression (Nihad 2019). As Aziz states:

"In many ways the twenty-first century is not that different from the thirteenth century. Both will be recorded in history as times of unprecedented religious clashes, cultural misunderstandings, and a general sense of insecurity and fear of the Other. At times like these, the need for love is greater than ever." (Shafak 2010: 18).

For example, before reading *Sweet Blasphemy*, Ella had opposed the marriage of her Jewish daughter (Jeannette) to a Christian man (Scott), due to her belief that marriages between individuals of different religions are too risky (Shafak 2012). However, this change was not immediate, but the result of engaging with the ideas contained within *Sweet Blasphemy*, underlining the importance of persuasive arguments in changing the beliefs of characters in fiction (Elkins 2020). This is precisely how Ella's personality change occurred while reading *Sweet Blasphemy* (Aladaylah 2017; Dash 2019), prior to which she was rigid regarding her attitudes and ideas towards religion and in particular Islam:

"Though she was by no means an atheist and enjoyed performing a few rituals every now and then, Ella believed that the major problem consuming the world today, just as in the past, was religion. With their unparalleled arrogance and self-proclaimed belief in the supremacy of their ways, religious people got on her nerves. Fanatics of all religions were bad and

unbearable, but deep inside she thought that fanatics of Islam were the worst." (Shafak 2010: 108-109).

The problem is not religion or even the difference and diversity of religions and sects since religion serves humans and helps create a more comfortable and easier life. However, religious extremists are the real problem, since they consider themselves guardians of religion and believe they have the right to impose their views and thoughts on society, even by force. The conflation of Islam with Islamic fanaticism is common in Western discourse and is not exclusive to Ella's thinking. Ella of the twenty-first century meets Jalal al-Din Rumi of the thirteenth century. They both change their minds while searching for personal improvement, success, and inner peace (Kacey 2015). However, Aziz represents the key cause of Ella's character transformation, while Shams Tabrizi was the key cause of Rumi's character transformation. In both novels, changes in the main characters' behaviors become noticeable to the reader (Eaton 2017). They are also noticed by the other characters; for example, Rumi's wife describes her husband's change after his acquaintance with Shams:

"Either way, I cannot recognize my husband anymore. The man I have been married to for more than eight years now, the man whose children I have raised as if they were my own and with whom I had a baby, has turned into a stranger." (Shafak 2010: 121).

David, Ella's husband, also notices the changes in her character and mood:

"In the span of a few weeks, she had converted from a woman whose life was as transparent as the skin of a newborn baby into a woman wallowing in secrets and lies. What surprised her even more than this change was seeing that it did not disturb her in the least... It didn't take long for her husband to notice there was something strange about her, something so not Ella. Was this why suddenly, he wanted to spend more time with her? He came home earlier these days." (Shafak 2010: 118-119).

In this way, Aziz and Ella develop as characters in the novel (Nasr 2021). Their thinking and behavior evolve in a significantly positive manner, emphasizing the necessity of cultural interaction between divergent cultures, since such interaction and openness can enrich and strengthen both parties. Ella was an American woman enriched by contacting Aziz, the Dutch writer influenced by Eastern Islamic thought. In Konya, modern-day Turkey, Rumi was influenced by contacting Shams Tabrizi, who resided in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

It is considered that the beginning of Shafak's novel excels in its ability to capture the reader's attention by likening Ella's monotonous life to a stagnant lake, where any small movement can cause significant confusion and disturbance, unlike a river, which is not affected by such minor occurrences. Similarly, vigorous, and active people with strength and positivity are less affected by life's challenges (Shafak 2012). Furthermore, Shafak applies the flashforward technique, and starts the novel from the end of the story, depicting Tabrizi's murderer grieving his death:

"Four years have passed since I stabbed him in that courtyard and dumped his body in a well, waiting to hear the splash that never came. Not a sound. It was as if rather than falling down into the water he fell up toward the sky. I still cannot sleep without having nightmares, and if I look at water, any source of water, for more than a few seconds, a cold horror grips my whole body and I throw up". (Shafak 2010: 22).

Shafak then returns to the beginning of the story, recounting Tabrizi's journey to Allah. After using the flashforward technique, Shafak employs the motif of a dream. There is a transition between the technique of flashforward to that of "motifs" in the form of vague dreams, or unfinished stories which conceal the rest of the plot. Their purpose is to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and to cause a feeling of wonder in the soul of the reader, which in turn prompts him/her to carry on reading in order to arrive at the disclosure. The employment of this technique is very evident in

the story of Shams's murder, where it finds an expression in some quick, horrifying, and incomprehensible scenes which haunt Shams in his nightmares, and which turn to be prescient in view of the ensuing events. As someone who is among "the people of God", he has been bestowed with the ability to foresee the future and to see himself murdered and thrown into a well in the courtyard of a house from which a man goes out, looking for him to only find him in the well:

"The man slowly approached the well, bent over, and looked down below. "Shams, dearest," he whispered. "Are you there?" I opened my mouth to answer, but no sound came out of my lips. The man leaned closer and looked down into the well again. At first, he couldn't see anything other than the darkness of the water. But then, deep down at the bottom of the well, he caught sight of my hand floating aimlessly on the rippling water like a rickety raft after a heavy storm. Next, he recognized a pair of eyes—two shiny black stones, staring up at the full moon now coming out from behind thick, dark clouds. My eyes were fixed on the moon as if waiting for an explanation from the skies for my murder". (Shafak 2010: 23).

It is interesting that Rumi also had a very similar dream, though not as clear, in which he saw himself in the yard, crying intensely. The words of Shams of Tabriz are imbued with a love for humanity. He calls for the espousal of brotherly love between people of different affiliations, which makes him a unique preacher. His way of calling to God is not a traditional one because, unlike the traditional preachers, he doesn't call to a specific religion or creed. What he calls to is God and the love for Him. He does that in a persistent and indiscriminating fashion with all the sinful people he comes to meet (the prostitute, the drunk, the inn owner, the judge . . .). The following are his words to Sulayman, the drunk:

"There is a rule regarding this: We were all created in His image, and yet we were each created different and unique. No two people are alike. No two hearts beat to the same rhythm. If God had wanted everyone to be the same, He would have made it so. Therefore, disrespecting differences and imposing your thoughts on others is tantamount to disrespecting God's holy scheme." (Shafak 2010: 97).

Shams al-Tabrizi is a bearer of a humane message for all people. It is a message calling to an inner transformation and setting aside differences until we realise that they are a blessing. Tabrizi might as well have adopted this idea from the Quran:

"O, people! We created you from a male and a female, and We made you races and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. The best among you before Allah is the most righteous. Allah is Knowing and Aware" [al-Quran, Al-Hujurat 49: 13].

What this man is primarily concerned with is a transformation regardless of which religion or sect a person belongs to. Therefore, it is not surprising that he does not profess a particular creed:

"Never in my life have I arrived at a new place without getting the blessing of its saints first. It makes no difference to me whether that place belongs to Muslims, Christians, or Jews. I believe that the saints are beyond such trivial nominal distinctions. A saint belongs to all humanity." (Shafak 2010: 69).

He reveals the true and pure face of Islam - undistorted and unfamiliar. So, what is so unique about this character who is well loved by readers who belong to all kinds of different religions and nationalities? Shams of Tabriz defies societal prejudices and rejects them, just as he refuses to judge sinners according to their outward actions. Instead, he addresses them in a way which emphasises faith. This is the reason for this treatment of the prostitute, who was discovered by some men in the mosque on Friday, trying to hear the sermon, but prevented to do so by beating, insulting and throwing her out angrily. In their eyes she is a whore, therefore, without a right to

enter a holy place. They even go so far as to suggest that she be killed. Shams confronts and reproaches them. This causes the prostitute (Desert Rose) to wonder:

"Brothels have existed since the beginning of time. And so have women like me. But there is something that amazes me: Why is it that although people say they hate seeing women prostitute themselves, the same people make life hard for a prostitute who wants to repent and start life anew? It is as if they are telling us they are sorry that we have fallen so low, but now that we are where we are, we should stay there forever." (Shafak 2010: 79).

Indeed, one of the paradoxes of society is its indiscriminate treatment of the victim regardless of the motive that might have driven them to take the wrong path. So, for example, we find that what led Desert Rose to commit sinful acts was her early upbringing and chaotic family life: the death of her mother while giving birth to her brother, her father's harsh treatment of her brother, as a result of which he ends up in the street, resulting in him killing his father and his new wife. As a consequence of all of this, the thirteen-year-old orphan girl finds herself on the way to Constantinople only to be kidnapped by a gang and sold as a prostitute in a brothel (Akbar et al. 2020).

What distinguishes this novel is, its reliance and resort to historical events of the past and its rendering of history in a relatable manner, whereby the modern reader can make sense of it. This is directly related to the conviction that, "history repeats itself" (Widdowson 2004), so that the religious conflicts and differences which humanity witnessed a long time ago are once again brought to the fore in the modern Middle East of the twenty first century. In order to find an adequate way of solving those challenges, the author turns to one of the foremost authorities of a period in Islamic history who was known for his humane call to Islam, his rejection of violence, and his generosity and acceptance of the "other", namely Jalal al-Din Rumi:

"In an age of deeply embedded bigotries and clashes, he stood for a universal spirituality, opening his doors to people of all backgrounds. Instead of an outer-oriented jihad—defined as "the war against infidels" and carried out by many in those days just as in the present—Rumi stood up for an inner-oriented jihad where the aim was to struggle against and ultimately prevail over one's ego". (Shafak 2010: 19).

Elif Shafak then goes on to touch upon the process of historical forecasting through which the present is seen through the prism of the past. The latter is thus presented as a source of beneficial lessons for modern humanity. It was a time of unprecedented chaos when Christians fought Christians, Christians fought Muslims, and Muslims fought Muslims. Everywhere one turned, there was hostility and anguish and an intense fear of what might happen next. In the midst of this chaos lived a distinguished Islamic scholar, known as Jalal ad-Din Rumi (Shafak 2010: 19)

The novel ventures to suggest the notion of doing away with boundaries, portraying them as barriers and obstacles to human interaction and interreligious love and understanding. At the same time, the author recognises the immensity of the task and the significant difficulties it entails. To illustrate this, she presents the viewpoints of people who are hostile to the idea of the abolishment of religious boundaries. Such an example is the family of Ella who is opposed to her marrying the man she loves on account of him not being Jewish. Upon their refusal, she proclaims passionately: "Is this because Scott isn't Jewish?" David rolled his eyes in disbelief. He had always taken pride in being an open-minded and cultured father, avoiding negative remarks about race, religion, or gender in the house." (Shafak 2010: 13). The novelist manages to achieve a neutral portrayal of its characters by employing a literary technique known as "polyphony", which Mikhail Bakhtin describes as a technique which allows the main characters to speak of themselves in their unique voices, thus creating the impression of a multiplicity of authors.

Unlike the authorial narrative, in which the author expresses the thoughts and convictions of the characters which might stand in stark contrast to those espoused by the writer, polyphony gives the characters freedom of expressing their own personalities. Herein lies the vitality of the narrative and its power of persuasion. By way of it, a vivid display of the religious zealot becomes

possible: the fanatic who supports the use of violence against adherents of other faiths because he sees them as enemies of Islam and refuses, therefore, to coexist with them. They claim that following a war campaign, the Prophet Muhammad had announced that his people were henceforth abandoning the small jihad for the greater jihad—the struggle against one's own ego. Sufis argue that ever since then the ego is the only adversary a Muslim should be warring against. Sounds nice, but how is that going to help to fight the enemies of Islam? I wonder (Shafak 2010). Indeed, the discourse of the fanatic tends always to revolve around force, and not dialogue, as a way of calling to Islam. Thus, we find him in a perpetual state of paranoid conviction that the rest of humanity is plotting against his religion, aiming to end and destroy it. It is no surprise, therefore, that a person with such a mentality finds it exceedingly hard to maintain any meaningful human relationship with people who are different from him. Once the rejection of the religious "other" has taken place, the zealot proceeds to decry all those people who refuse to accept Islam as "unbelievers". What is more, he views anyone who interacts with them as suspicious. Indeed, this attitude of distrust is the reason why Rumi was criticised for marrying a Christian woman, despite the fact that she had embraced Islam:

"The man has a Christian wife, for starters. I don't care if she has converted to Islam. It is in her blood and in the blood of her child. Unfortunately, the townspeople don't take the threat of Christianity as seriously as they should, and they assume that we can live side by side. To those who are naïve enough to believe that I always say, "Can water and oil ever mix? That is the extent to which Muslims and Christians can." (Shafak 2010: 167).

The fanatic sees himself as someone who's been entrusted with the task of guarding the religion on account of his superior understanding of it, which enables him to perceive what others cannot. In stark contrast to the stern zealot, we see the moderate sufi Muslim with his forgiving and generous attitude to humanity's follies and acrimony. Shams al-Tabriz says:

"As a sufi I had sworn to protect life and do no harm. In this world of illusions, so many people were ready to fight without any reason, and so many others fought for a reason. But the sufi was the one who wouldn't fight even if he had a reason. There was no way I could resort to violence." (Shafak 2010: 26).

With these words, the character of Shams al-Tabriz expresses an Islamic truth. What enables him to grasp its essence is his deep understanding of the purpose of Islam and all the rest of the revealed religions, which is the pursuit of good. This worldview is the complete opposite to that of the religious fanatic whose motivation stems primarily from his hostile attitude to the "other". Shams shares his views on religious zealotry in an honest way, by saying: "In this life stay away from all kinds of extremities, for they will destroy your inner balance. Sufis do not go to extremes. A sufi always remains mild and moderate" (Safak 2010: 104). He calls for the adoption of kindness and softness as antidotes to violence and harshness, and for moderation instead of extremism. This arises from the conviction that the "middle way" is the only one capable of bringing about an inner integrity as well as a social flourishing. Extremism, on the other hand, is nothing more than a consequence of feelings of resentment, bitterness, and animosity which harm the people who harbour them and upset their inner states. It is precisely because of this inner instability that the zealot often resolves to hurting other fellow human beings.

Therefore, Al-Rumi gets married to a Christian woman regardless of the social norm's rejection which does not agree with the truth of Islam: "Kerra is a Christian. Even if she converts to Islam, she'll never be one of us," people had gossiped when they first got wind of our impending marriage. "A leading scholar of Islam should not marry a woman outside his faith" (Shafak 2010: 121). This is an epitome of the rejection of the "other" and the discouragement of any attempts at reaching out to him/her. Indeed, this rigid understanding is not supported by Islam, and is denounced not only by Rumi, but also by the Holy Prophet of Islam who himself married a Christian woman (Maria). The act of marrying someone outside of one's own religion serves as an expression of human kinship with those who belong to different denominations. It also

emphasises the tolerance which Islam advocates as a religion of reason, as well as a way of life and revelation. This is especially evident in a milieu such as Jalal al-Din Rumi's which was one of ethnic and religious diversity of people sharing a common culture:

"Anatolia is made up of a mixture of religions, peoples, and cuisines. If we can eat the same food, sing the same sad songs, believe in the same superstitions, and dream the same dreams at night, why shouldn't we be able to live together? I have known Christian babies with Muslim names and Muslim babies fed by Christian milk mothers. Ours is an ever-liquid world where everything flows and mixes. If there is a frontier between Christianity and Islam, it has to be more flexible than scholars on both sides think it is" (Shafak 2010: 121).

It soon becomes clear that many of the ordinary people who belong to this world derive their zealotry from the fanatical religious scholars from every sect, who take it upon themselves to reinforce the boundaries and distinctions, so that every religion has its own specific, albeit, hostile and distorted character. The result of this is the uncritical repetition and acceptance of those views, even if they happen to clash with people's upbringing and their innate instinct which might refuse to accept and succumb to this exaggerated divisive vision. Rumi and Shams adopt a concept which is not shared by the majority of religious people. According to it, belonging to a certain religion while harbouring animosity towards those who adhere to other sects is not the way to establish peaceful co-existence. On the contrary, only through the love of God and his creation can disagreements and conflicts between people be overcome:

"And when you love God so much, when you love each and every one of His creations because of Him and thanks to Him, extraneous categories melt into thin air. From that point on, there can be no "I" anymore. All you amount to is a zero so big it covers your whole being". (Shafak 2010: 124).

Both are firm believers in the idea of the promotion of tolerance and love for all people, regardless of their religious affiliation, ethnic and racial background, as the only solution to the ancient divisions between them. Indeed, this is one of the principles which the followers of sufism embrace and preach upon (Peeran 2015; Dickson 2022). On the opposite pole of that of Rumi and Shams who advocate tolerance, acceptance, and co-existence with the "other", stands the character of Baybars, the warrior, and his uncle, who see war and violence as an essential component of life. As far as they are concerned, it represents a primordial feature of humanity, symbolised by the killing of Abel by his brother Cain. Here is where the polyphony technique, adopted by Shafak, gives the characters the freedom to express two diametrically opposite views, without any censorship on the part of the author (Pandya 2019). From the point of view of the fanatic, Rumi's call to meekness is a call to submissiveness and surrender and not a call to peace. They vehemently oppose this way of thinking which they see as subversive, especially in a period when, as they perceive it, people are ganging up on Islam and Muslims (Shafak 2010).

The book engages with historical parallels, so that the personality of Shams of the 13th century is mirrored by that of Aziz of the 21st century (Simpson 2019) whose book "Sweet Blasphemy" Ella reads to provide a critical review for a literary agency:

"Aziz believed that all religious wars were in essence a "linguistic problem." Language, he said, did more to hide than reveal the Truth, and as a result people constantly misunderstood and misjudged one another. In a world beset with mistranslations, there was no use in being resolute about any topic, because it might as well be that even our strongest convictions were caused by a simple misunderstanding. In general, one shouldn't be too rigid about anything because "to live meant to constantly shift colors." (Shafak 2010: 109).

The character of Aziz represents the enlightened Muslim who sees that the enmity between different people is a direct result of the crisis of interaction and the lack of dialogue between them. Indeed, flexibility and an openness to the existential changes is a necessary requirement for a wholesome attitude towards life. The tavern owner is another character who has his own

worldview, and that's completely natural, since every human being has their own life philosophy which they adopt and then enact in their lives, be they dominated by compassion or resentment. Not a single one of us embraces a path that is not to our liking. Once endorsed, this chosen worldview, whether true or false, starts to motivate our thinking and actions. Every human being is a mixture of good and evil, but since human nature is in a state of flux, and not fixed, there can be no absolute goodness or evil (Sherwani 2020). This self-evident truth is displayed by the characters of the book, among whom the executioner, the sufi victim, David - the doctor and husband of Ella, the man who cheats on his wife but still loves his family and is devoted to them.

The novel employs intertextuality which posits that no text of a novelist is completely original, and independent from the texts of his/her predecessors. Rather, it is a mere re-fashioning of other texts of previous authors (Kristeva 1980; Barthes 1975; Bakhtin 1973). It enables the novel to benefit from the accumulated literary heritage which is what *Forty Rules of Love* does in its weaving of the person of Jalal al-Din Rumi into the plots of the novel. This technique facilitates the introduction of the problem of the relationship of humanity with their Creator and the ensuing path to eradicating evil. Indeed, it provides answers to all the existential questions man has been pondering on but does that through the characters of the novel whom we can easily recognise and identify with in our daily lives. It is precisely this feature of the novel that makes it highly effective and convincing.

The geographical position of Rumi's Konya which is situated between two continents, inhabited by people who belong to two different cultures, renders it a place of a multitude of ethnicities, religions, and cultures (Al-Sammarraie 2019). This unique situation necessitates the principle of the acceptance of the "other" and the co-existence with him/her:

"Having thus settled down, I roamed the streets, amazed at the mixture of religions, customs, and languages permeating the air. I ran into Gypsy musicians, Arab travelers, Christian pilgrims, Jewish merchants, Buddhist priests, Frankish troubadours, Persian artists, Chinese acrobats, Indian snake charmers, Zoroastrian magicians, and Greek philosophers" (Shafak 2010: 75)

There is no denying that such diversity enriches any society and makes it more tolerant. Indeed, barriers between people can only be overcome when they truly know each other. A person can never be utterly evil, and outward human behaviour is not an indication to the inward state of its possessor. It is the heart which carries the ultimate significance. Or, as Prophet Muhammad (may God's peace and blessings be upon him) says: "In the body there is a piece of flesh, and the whole body is sound if it is sound, but the whole body is corrupt if it is corrupt. It is the heart" (al-Bukhari 2002). Upon the arrival of the *sufi* man (Shams al-Tabriz), the owner of the brothel, thinking he has come for bodily favours, says:

"People think I wallow in sin here, but I give my alms and close my doors in the month of Ramadan. And now I'm saving you. Stay away from us. This is the filthiest corner in town" (Shafak 2010: 76).

Shams al-Tabriz proceeds to reassure her by saying:

"Real filth is the one inside. The rest simply washes off. There is only one type of dirt that cannot be cleansed with pure waters, and that is the stain of hatred and bigotry contaminating the soul. You can purify your body through abstinence and fasting, but only love will purify your heart" (Shafak 2010: 76).

Despite the depth of his words, we feel that he does not excuse or justify her sinful acts. At the same time, however, we cannot deny the gentleness of Shams's words and his emphasis on the inward purification of the soul, only by means of which one could abandon sinfulness. And we cannot but heed his warning that the most perilous states are the ones caused by fanaticism and hatred. Thus, real human contact, the promotion of tolerance between members of different sects,

and the abandonment of the discourse of resentment is the only way of eradicating conflicts and wars between civilisations and states, and the only guarantee of security and peace.

To conclude, one of the characteristic features of the novel *Forty Rules of Love* is its use of richly expressive language. This is one of the reasons why the novel has attracted so many readers across the world. Another reason for this is its ability to discuss matters of great importance by the use of a simple narrative, and to convey, in an elegant fashion, the urgent need for more tolerance and human coexistence, especially in our current century. The novel utilises the polyphony technique successfully, by means of which it expresses the idea of the beauty of diversity that ensues from simple human interaction. The effectiveness of this approach consists in its ability to display the characters neutrally, giving them the opportunity to speak for themselves, in their unique human voices. The result of this is the creation of memorable characters, among them the moderate Muslim, the fanatic, the Jew, the Christian, the infidel, the prostitute, the drunk, etc.).

The positive impact the reading of the historical novel, contained within Shafak's novel, has on Ella, the American, in the way she sees the Arab, his culture and convictions in the world of fiction, is as significant as the impact Shafak's novel has on the reader in the real world. The creative impetus of the novel *Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is considered one of the best examples of the potential of the "soft power" approach in bringing about world peace and security. This is the power of the pen and knowledge, and not the military power which always proves unsuccessful and bloody. The worldwide popularity which the novel witnessed is a proof of the power of the narrative art to overcome the obstinacy of the human soul. It can achieve this due to its ability to penetrate deep into the soul and the mind, and to subdue the ego in a way that the traditional dialogues and discussions cannot. Only the enlightened path of love is capable of abolishing the discourse of hatred. The ability of the novel to relay its humane vision of the world is a result of its creative power of persuasion. Indeed, its main aim is to serve as an illustration of the importance of the adoption of love, respect, and acceptance of the "other". It also serves to emphasise the importance of the endorsement of the "middle way" as a way of putting an end to violence.

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