



# Phenomenology and comparative study of ascetic and romantic mysticism in Islamic mysticism

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, it has been tried to investigate phenomenology of ascetic mysticism and romantic mysticism in Islamic mysticism. Generally, it can be deduced that mysticism and God-centeredness have a long history in the depths of mankind; and its background can be traced back to existence of human being on earth. The main purpose of phenomenological method of ascetic and romantic mysticism in Islam is acquainted to the monotheistic religion of Islam. In examining the structure of each of the two types of ascetic mysticism and romantic mysticism, we considered asceticism and love in each of them as the focus point, or the central reason; all of the drawn concepts have been shaped and drawn around these two concepts. Also we included components for ascetic mysticism and romantic mysticism, that considering these components, these two types of mysticism can be distinguished.*

**Key words:** *Islamic mysticism, ascetic mysticism, romantic mysticism, poverty, love.*

## INTRODUCTION

Mysticism is a general and universal concept that has been predicated to various instances. Therefore, in defining mysticism, as well as in rejecting and accepting it, the features of those instances should not be neglected and they should be put as the basis of this general concept (Yasrebi, 2012).

Mysticism and God-centeredness have a long history in the depths of mankind; and its background can be traced back to existence of human being on earth. With the advent of Islam religion and its teachings, and also with presence of the profound character of Khatam-al-Anbia (PBUH), an event has occurred in human history that, in addition to the great scientific and practical advances resulting from that, it has led to a fervent and long movement in line with mysticism and spiritual and mental revolving, which is referred to as Islamic mysticism (Qeysari, 1991).

The primary mystics considered various dimensions in defining mysticism. Some of them, in defining mysticism, paid attention to its issues such as fear, monotheism, mortality, love and affection, and so on, such that if sometimes the basis of mysticism had been love and affection, the definition of mysticism had also been based on that. In addition, the conditions of the time and the specific situation of audiences have also had a significant impact on the definition of mysticism. For example, in front of oppressors, they have emphasized on disapprobation of cruelty and oppression; in front of ambitious people, they have emphasized disapprobation of ambition, and regarding mammonism, they have emphasized disapprobation of mammon (Qeysari, 1991).

The present study examines the position of ascetic and romantic mysticism from the viewpoint of Islamic mystics. Also, in this article, in order to find a reliable and trustable answer, some of the main elements of mystical ascetic and romantic attitudes have been investigated. For this purpose, among several elements, some important and basic elements such as the world, poverty, affection, love, and lack of propensity, and ... have been presented along with mentioning various evidences in the main texts of Islamic mysticism as

the basic issues. In this way, the issues of love and asceticism as the most important mystical issue about love and Islamic affection and asceticism have a great base and position, and have covered the principles and the area of action and achievement, and great mystics of have based all their receives, interpretations, divine behavior, and the path to the goals on this love of God, and have based all things from monotheism to justification of creation system on this basis.

## **2. A review of mystic and mysticism**

One who wants to free his heart from all material constraints and does not look at anything in the world as a goal, and is interested to use everything in the path to reach the beloved, one who loves purity of soul and is attempting in this regard, one who wants to find the most passionate love for Mola and does not avoid any attempt in this regard, one who wants to surrender to God in all his actions and behaviors and adorns his heart with God's satisfaction, and does not rely on anything other than God, and does not obey the orders of anyone except for God and has no thought and notion other than God, has the mysticism status and is a mystic (Ansarian, 1989).

In fact, the true mystic is one who is aware of divine rules and obeys them in practice and tries to have the behavior of God, prophets, and Imams. A part of Qur'an and a great portion of Nahj al-Balaghah and an important part of prayers such as prayers of Komeyl, Arafa, Abu Hamza, Aminollah, the intone of Ali (PBUH) in Kufa mosque, and the prayer of Dawn form the Islamic mysticism (Ansarian, 1989).

## **3. The literal and idiomatic meaning of asceticism**

"Zohd" (asceticism) in Arabic language, comes from the root of "Zohd", and "Yazhad" means leaving and abandonment of something (Maloof et al., 2004). "Zahid" means something little and "Zahed" means someone who abandons something and have no willingness for it and is satisfied with a little of that thing; and this is from the same root (Ragheb et al., 2004).

"Zohd" has been used in the Holy Quran only once and as the subject plural form as "Zahedin" (Ragheb et al., 2004). Mohammad ibn Kasir San'ani said: "Zohd means sticking to the prophet's tradition and trying to be similar to his companions" (Ibn Juzzi, 2002).

## **4. Asceticism**

In order to achieve "what is adjoining God", there is no way other than leaving the commodity of deception, and this leaving is called "asceticism", that according to the late Mohaghegh Toosi, is one of the stages of removing the barriers of conduct. However, asceticism does not mean leaving the commodity of deception, but it means unwillingness, because unwillingness requires practice; firstly, one should leave the commodity of deception, then gradually he should get unwilling to that and for achieving unwillingness, there is need for knowledge and cognition. If human being knows that something is deceiving and will abandon him after taking his honor, so he leaves it (Javadi Amoli A., 2015).

The opposite point of being deceived by the world is "asceticism" and disillusion which is among the desirable features and that is human being's not being heart attached to anything but God and what helps him to reach God, and adhering to the principle of not using anything that makes him far from God. Whoever is like this, neither gets very happy for material things in the world, nor he gets very sad for lack of them (Naraghi et al., 2012).

God says: Translation: "So that you never miss what you lose and never get happy and proud of what you achieve".

Not being able to have things because of not having access to them is not asceticism, as not being heart attached to things and being attached to other things is not also asceticism. On the other hand, possessing things in the world without attachment to them or misusing them is not incompatible with asceticism (Naraghi et al., 2012).

## **5. Signs of asceticism**

One of the signs of asceticism is that if someone wants to understand whether he has reached the position of asceticism and has been allowed to get close to God, its sign is that he will not get happy when achieving the commodities of the world and will not get worried when losing it. Sometimes human being is, in fact, a merchant, but he considers himself an ascetic and this is not valid; that is, because he has greed for blessings of paradise, he is ascetic in the world; like a guest who eats a little so that he will be able to eat much in the party, that this is not asceticism but is lowliness of soul and a disapproved trade; it means that sometimes a person leaves the world because of the world or because of other people's praise, and he entertains himself with these speculations, and in this case, he is a merchant and is low level. But sometimes, man leaves worldly things and lives ascetically, in order to get released of hell fire or go to paradise, that in this case also, although hoping to go to paradise is good but it is not the highest degree of human perfection (Javadi Amoli A., 2015).

## **6. Achieving asceticism**

Achieving asceticism is one of the most difficult things a person faces and when it is obtained, according to Imam Sadegh (PBUH) the door of the other world and all its blessings will be opened to the person and the order will be issued for releasing the hell fire forever! Asceticism is the characteristic of lover, the feature of mystic, the color of worshipper, and the sign of truth on the forehead of the seeker. An ascetic is a pious human and a trim servant and a distinguished figure and a divine power, and a butterfly around the candle of beauty, and a discerning lover and a capable devotee. The truth of asceticism must be heard from the words of true ascetics and real mystics, since they have enjoyed the sweetness of this truth and have benefited from the spiritual breeze of this quintessential feature. Expression of the truth of asceticism is not within the abilities of us who are preoccupied and captive of the bonds of lusts and impressions; how can we ever interpret the greatest feature of the pious ones in the history and describe the ones who have signs of truth and the real friend (Ansarian, 1989).

In asceticism, you should not expect the world to turn to you and you should not say that now that I am ascetic, everything must be in my hands. Asceticism is for disburdenment, not for causing a heavier burden on your file. The ascetic, by any means, should not aim his asceticism for good manifestation among people so that people praise him and bless him because of his asceticism, and he should not seek a result for his asceticism, but leaving the material things of the world and its finery should cause the ascetic's comfort and the worldly things should seem as a blight for him, and asceticism as the reason for escaping of him from the blight and seeking refuge to comfort and safety (Ansarian, 1989).

## **7. Asceticism levels**

There are levels for asceticism: asceticism in Haram (forbidden things), asceticism in illusory things, and asceticism in permitted things. The first step of asceticism in forbidden things is leaving forbidden things, but just leaving forbidden things is not enough for purity of soul. Someone who likes to do sins but because of fear of hell or achieving paradise does not do sins, is not a man of conduct; in addition to leaving the sin or forbidden things, man should be unwilling and ascetic to that left thing. After passing this level, he must be ascetic towards the illusory things. Some issues are clearly allowed; some are clearly forbidden; and some are illusory and something in between the allowed and the forbidden (Javadi Amoli A., 2015).

## **8. Asceticism in asceticism**

Those who have set up "Manazel as-Saerin" state that: asceticism is "closeness" for ordinary people, is "necessity" for the mystic, and is "humility" for special people. The ordinary people, in case of being ascetic, will get close to God, and this will cause their going to paradise; but those who are mystic, although this asceticism causes their closeness too, but they consider it a necessity and say there is no other way than that. If someone wants to reach the "eternal", he must get released from the trap of "mortal", and gets far

from that, not only in terms of action but also in terms of willingness. So, asceticism is a necessity for mystics (Javadi Amoli A., 2015).

### **9. Some elements of ascetical mysticism**

Considering virtuous concepts such as asceticism and piety and poverty and patience and trust to God and seclusion and abstraction and hunger and night wakefulness which have a close bond to concepts such as repressing the ego and leaving the world and its commodities, and denial of some concepts opposite to these ones, meaning richness and mammonism against poverty, and asceticism and piety and thanking God against patience, and trusting material things against trusting God, and companionship with all against isolation, and marriage against singleness, and enjoying food against endurance of hunger, and sleeping against night wakefulness, are among the basic elements of ascetic mysticism. For example, Sheikh Abu Taleb Makki as one of the mystics' scholars that ascetic tendency is a lot in his ideas and theories, in discussing the concept of patience and its virtue above other concepts such as thanking God, ultimately prefers patience, in the sense of fear and asceticism and self-restraining, to thanking God; and because in thanking God there are the features of blessing and richness and power, so he considers it lower than patience (Makki, 2007). In order to prove his claim, he quotes a narration from the Prophet (PBUH) that its meaning is praising destitution and friary above richness and power. The narration is that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "The last person entering paradise on the Day of Judgment is Soleiman Bin Dawood (PBUH) because of his kingdom, and among the prophet's companions, Abdol Rahman ibn Owf, due to his richness and power" (Makki, 2007). So, as can be seen, in explaining some mystical themes under discussion, some other concepts are also mentioned, and their relationship with each other is indicated. Regarding the theme of supremacy of poverty to richness, several quotations have been quoted from the Sheikhs of the second and the third centuries after Hijra, that among them this can be mentioned that Boshir bin Hares Hafi said: "The rich is not worthy of worshipping; the worshipping by a rich is like a flower in dustbin, and the worshipping by a dervish is like a pearl necklace on the neck of a beautiful woman" (Makki, 2007).

### **10 .Literal meaning of love**

In the dictionary it has been stated that: "love" is extreme love and extremist interest and high attachment toward an object or person, either because of chastity or by mischief. Some have considered "great desire and extreme passion for something" as extreme affection (Sajjadi, 1999).

#### **10.1. Denomination of love**

In mysticism, love is considered to be the most important pillar in the path, and among the fundamental issues, and the issue of love is among the deep and precise subjects of Islamic mysticism, and all mystical schools. Thus, mystics have defined love and affection in various ways.

Ghazali, in his Treatise of Savaneh considers "Love" as a kind of drunkenness and ebriety that its perfection prevents understanding the perfection of the beloved. In this position, the perfection of love and the beloved is the same and the unity between the lover and the beloved prevents any distinguishing and dichotomy, and the veil of characteristics is eliminated and real understanding in which no nominal and adjectival doubts can enter, is achieved in this position, that Ghazali has called that "Alajz an Dark ol-Edrak" (Ghazali, 2006).

#### **10.2. Love in Hadiths**

In hadiths, and especially in Shia prayers that are a manifestation of love, some states of love have been described in some way.

1. Ali bin al-Hosseini in Mafatih ol-Janan in the intone of Khams Ashar (Monajat ol-mohebbin) says:

"Elahi Man za-Allazi Zagha Halavata Mohabbatek Farama Menk Badalan va man za-Allazi Anasa Beghorbek Fabtagha Anka Havlan Elahi Fajalna Memman Asfaytahoo Lavdaka va Mahabbataka va

Shavghatahoo ela Leghaeka va Raziatehe Beghazaeka va Manhatahoo Ben-Nazar ela Vajheka va Hobootehe Berezak va aedatehe men Hejrek..." (Qomi, 2005).

2. Imam Ali (PBUH) says: "So, my dear, my lord, my master and my God, even if I can be patient at your torments, but how can I tolerate your separation?" (ibid: 54).

3. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) says: "O Allah, grant me your love and the love of the one who loves you, and the love for anything that closes me to your love; and put your love for me as more lovely than cold water (Feyz Kashani, 1936).

4. Seyyed al-Shohada (PBUH) in "Arafeh Prayer" says: "O Allah, you are the one who has removed the aliens from the scene of the heart of your lovers, so that they do not love any other one than yourself, and do not seek refuge to any other one than you" (Qomi, 2005).

### **10.3. Love for truth**

Although the issue of love for truth and affection for God, which is rooted in cognition of the names and attributes of him, thinking to the blessings and gifts and the impacts of his infinite existence in the realm of creation and existence; love for God and the sacred existence who is an infinite beauty, is the product of human's movement in the realm of cognition and that realm is consisted of the conscience of Qur'an and the divine valuable words of prophets and saints and good people. The truth that purifies the soul and lightens the soul and drowns the heart in the sea of purity, and establishes full security inside and turns human being to a divine being who is blessed, servant, honest, devotee, ascetic, witness, virtuous, and having awareness, inspiration, perfection, virtue, honor, authenticity, and honesty is love for God and nothing else; and undoubtedly, in order to achieve these realities, there is no way other than connecting to love; and everyone who claims to have any other solution other than this one is a liar and a thief in the path of the God's worshippers; and this is the reason why in the title of the subject, this love was called as the best divine fruit. When a real love by the real beloved beams in the inner part of the soul and the essence of the heart, man does not end up in the way toward him and for him and in order for reaching his alliance; and he will devote all he has for that beloved of all lovers (Ansarian, 1989).

From the point of view of religion, "God" is pure perfection, absolute beauty, has the best of attributes, the first lover that all which exists is a sign of him, originates from him and goes to him. As human seeks perfection and beauty, and his existence is from the spirit of God, he will fall from that position and returns to him. Man has a soul which is the manifestation of all attributes of God. These show this truth that true love is a love which is rooted in man's soul and its origin and goal is God and human's extreme willingness for the manifestations of creation is also just love for God, that have been manifested in his creatures, and if love is something other than these, it will not be love. According to Ghazali, true love is: "Positioning of a creature seeking perfection (human) in the gravity of absolute perfection (the Almighty God), meaning a beautiful, absolute God and a beloved who all are looking toward him and seek him" (Ghazali, 2006).

### **11. Criticisms by the scholars of Islamic world about the application of loving and love**

Mystical or divine love which includes the love of human to God and the love of God to human has been criticized by many scholars of Islamic world. These people believe that since the essence of God is out of the realm of human perception, it is not possible to love him. On the other hand, there is always a kind of homogenization and congruence between lover and beloved, while, God has no similar being; God with all his nature is incompatible with the creatures, so there is no congruence between him and the creature so that any affection can be assumed. Ibn Teymieh Hanbali about whom there are various quotations of scholars, at the eighth century has mentioned the same point and has emphasized it forcefully: "Faith and cognition of God is albeit guaranteeing love and affection too, but the beloved of the faithful man is not God, namely it is not the nature and attributes of God, because God cannot be known, while emergence of love requires existence of homogeneity and unity or oneness between the lover and the beloved, that assuming such thing between the creator and the creature is impossible; Instead, what the faithful person can like

with all his essence is the order of God and his religion and rules which is all justice and goodness and expedience” (Makki, 2007).

Denial of love between human and God is not just restricted to the appear-oriented scholars. Some of the scholars and sheikhs of Sufism consider the love of the creature for God to be allowed but consider the love of God for the creature not admissible. The reason of this group is that love is a feature of prohibition and as the creature is prohibited from his beloved namely, God, so this is allowed that the creature loves his God who is his beloved; but the love of God for the creature is not permissible because creature is not prohibited for God (Makki, 2007).

Another group of people believe that the love of creature for God is not true because love means violation of the restrictions and God is not restricted. The opponents of giving permission of love of creature for God have some other arguments that among them the following reason can be mentioned:

One is that love is in fact seeking cognition of essence and as the essence of God cannot be understood, so love for him does not make sense. Another reason is that love occurs as a result of seeing and observing and as seeing God is not possible, so love for him is not true too. According to these reasons, as the essence of God cannot be seen and understood, so he cannot be put as a beloved; but affection of the creature toward God is true and God can be liked by the creature, as affection can occur without seeing too. The writer of the book *Kashf ol-Mahjoob* has distinguished between love and affection and has considered the affection of creature toward God allowed; and affection has various grades and levels and the highest level of affection is the same thing which is called love. In emergence of love, he has considered seeing as a pre-requirement, but in realization of affection, he does not consider seeing as a precondition. But those who consider extreme affection as equivalent with love do not agree with the words of the author of *Kashf ol-Mahjoob* in this regard; and the reasons which have been presented for prohibition of love of creature for God are not equal, because according to some of these reasons, just as the love of creature for God is recognized, affection of creature for God is also prohibited. In one of the previous reasons it had come that love is in fact seeking to understand God essence and as the essence of God cannot be understood, so loving him does not make sense. This reason also applies to affection. If love is seeking to understand God, affection is also seeking to understand God and therefore, as the essence of God is out of understanding of human being, so affection for his essence is not possible to be realized. The author of the book of *Kashf ol-Mahjoob* justified the affection of human to the great God (Hajviri, 2004).

Sheikh Abolhasan Hajwiri criticizes using the term love in the sense of affection of creature for God for some reasons that are briefly mentioned below:

1. Love is violation of restrictions and God is not restricted, so it is not true to consider the creatures as the lover of God.
2. Love requires understanding of the essence and the God's essence cannot be understood, but his attributes can be understood that this understanding of attributes occurs through affection.
3. Love occurs for something which can be seen, while God cannot be seen in this world.
4. Love has opposite and God has no opposite so that he can be understood by love (Hajviri, 2004).

In fact, due to the same issue of not using love in the sense of what is willed, in the quotations and works of sheikhs till the fifth century, this era has been distinguished from the previous centuries in terms of viewpoint and cognition method. Love has entered mysticism and the mystical verses and proses including the works of Khaje Abdollah Ansari and the poetries attributed to Abu Saeed Abu Kheir (Sajjadi, 1999). He mentions the mystical verses and proses which have been created in the sixth century, including *Book of Love* by Sanayee and *Savaneh al-Oshagh* by Ahmad Ghazali, and *Tamhidat* by Eyn ol-Ghozat Hamedani, and *Resalah fi-Haghighat al-Esgh* by Sheikh Shahab od-Din Sohrevardi that in all of them as can be seen in the name of some of them, there has been talked about love and its different moods and kinds.

## 12. Comparison of ascetic and romantic mysticism

### 12.1. "Al-Zohd is Sayar and Al-Aref is Tayyar" (Asceticism is like a car and mysticism is like airplane)

It means that in moving toward the desired one, the mystic moves faster than ascetic. In the second century after Hijrat, all the ones who the fear from being polluted to sin had caused them to withdraw social engagements and get involved with asceticism and piety in isolation, such as Hasan Basari, Vasel ibn Ata, and Rabe'e Advieh, were called ascetics. An ascetic leaves the world because of the other world; the ascetic fears from the God's anger and wrath. The one who withdraws from the world and its enjoyments is known as an ascetic (Ansarian, 1989).

Khaje Nasir al-Din Tusi says: "the one who seeks and wants something, firstly tries to turn away from the agents of getting far from that and turn to the agents of getting close to that, in order to reach the position of attaining the desired. Therefore, the seeker of God firstly turns away from the things which prevent him from it, that these things are the same commodities of the world and its pleasures, and then he turns to the factors for closeness to God that are the same worshipping. This asceticism and worshipping is called "Tabarra and Tavalla", and when it reaches the level of reaching God, its first level will be the same cognition" (Toosi, 1994).

According to the statements of Khajeh who considers mysticism as the final stage of this movement, "from the point of view of those who have not reached the level of mysticism, an ascetic performs some kind of trade in which he exchanges the commodities of this world with the commodities of afterlife". But from the viewpoint of a mystic, true asceticism means cleaning the soul from everything which is a barrier in the route toward "God" and not surrendering to this world and considering the other world as the highest thing above "whatever other than God"; and the worshipping of non-mystics is also some kind of trade in which they work in this world in order to receive a reward which is the same reward in the other world" (ibid).

Ascetical mystic is an isolated austere person who fears very much from God and the other world's suffering, and only pays attention to God and his beauty characteristics. It is apparent that in the viewpoint of ascetical mysticism, that leaving and criticism of this world is one of its main themes, criticizing this world has a special prominence. This theme was common in the second century after Hijrah, which is in fact the century of prevalence of ascetical thoughts and practices (Attar, 2006).

But in the third century after Hijrah, despite the fact that still there were themes regarding leaving and criticizing the world, but by emergence of mystics who culminate the idea of love and unity with the unique creator, the attitude toward this world and whatever inside it was changed from ascetical theme, and in line with this, the same concept of asceticism itself was criticized. Previously, this theme of meaninglessness of asceticism in the world in the quotations of Shebeli and Bayazid and also the change in the attitudes of some Sufism scholars such as Sofian Soori and hares Mahasebi from the concept of surface and physical asceticism to heart asceticism was mentioned. There is theme of criticizing asceticism in thoughts of some of the Sufism scholars and the point that the position of a Sufi and mystic is higher than an ascetic (Qosheyri, 2006).

But the mystic's worship is some kind of austerity and training of the aspirations and tendencies and forces of one's soul, such as illusion and imagination (Motavaheme and Motakhaye), in order to make them to get used to and learn to withdraw the threshold of the agents of deception and to pay attention to "God", because when asking manifestation from God, these tendencies and forces will accompany him and will not oppose and fight so that the mystic's soul will be ready only for shining of the glories of God, without any disturbance by tendencies and forces, so that his soul will be put with all forces and tendencies in line with paying attention and focusing on the sacred doorway of God (Toosi, 1994).

## 13. Conclusion

After the investigations, it can be deduced that asceticism in the early centuries of Islam had been often quitting and denial of this world, and the scholars of Islamic mysticism have propagated their thoughts regarding praising poverty and dervish being and condemning richness according to the principles of these teachings in the main sources of ascetical mysticism, namely, the holy Qr'an and the prophet's tradition (PBUH). Praising poverty and dervish being and leaving and condemning the world is among the basic elements of ascetical mysticism. In the Islamic mysticism, love is the base of creation and the great pillar of Islamic mysticism; love and affection are among the greatest states of mystics and romantic mysticism has been described as one of the phenomena based on monotheistic message.

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