

Philosophy of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya on Beauty and Phenomenological Love

Adil Hassan Abdelrhman Alagab^{1*}

¹Department of Education Policies, Faculty of Education, Makkah AlMukarramah, Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2025.v10i02.002> | Received: 05.01.2025 | Accepted: 10.02.2025 | Published: 13.02.2025

*Corresponding author: Adil Hassan Abdelrhman Alagab

Department of Education Policies, Faculty of Education, Makkah AlMukarramah, Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This study explores Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's philosophy on beauty and phenomenological love. Using a descriptive-analytic method, the research delves into Rabi'a's poetry and teachings to uncover her views on these profound themes. Rabi'a, a prominent figure in Islamic mysticism, is renowned for her intense longing for a direct connection with God, emphasising the beauty of the divine relationship and the transformative power of love. The study identifies key elements of Rabi'a's philosophy, including the duality of love, the beauty in divine connection, and the transformative power of divine love. It highlights how Rabi'a distinguishes between passionate, personal, and reverential love that acknowledges God's supreme worthiness. Her poetry often reflects the beauty found in the spiritual relationship with God, which brings inner peace and fulfilment. The research also examines Rabi'a's intense longing and devotion to God, expressing a desire for God's pleasure above all else. This devotion underscores her belief that true contentment and peace are found in divine love, transcending the material world. The study concludes by emphasising the importance of prioritising the divine relationship over worldly concerns and the transformative power of true divine love. Recommendations for further studies include conducting comparative analyses with other Sufi mystics and phenomenological philosophers, exploring the historical and cultural context of Rabi'a's teachings, and examining the contemporary relevance of her philosophy in modern Sufi thought and Islamic mysticism.

Keywords: Rabi'a, Islamic, Cultural, Historical.

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution **4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)** which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, a prominent figure in Islamic mysticism, is renowned for her profound philosophy on divine love and beauty. Born in Basra around 100 AH / 717 AD, Rabi'a's life was marked by hardship and spiritual devotion. Her teachings on divine love have significantly influenced Sufism, making her a central figure in the study of Islamic mysticism. Her poetry and philosophy emphasize the beauty found in the divine connection and the transformative power of love.

Human beings can seek love by purifying themselves from material needs and rational conclusions. This process, known as the phenomenological reduction of the heart, involves a deep purification. We have reached a pivotal moment: the journey that begins with love ultimately leads back to love. Rabi'a al-Adawiyya outlines the stages of this journey to love, both in unity and separation. There are numerous perspectives on the levels and stages of love. The highest level of love, however, is reserved for those

exalted by their thoughts and morality, chosen by God. Rabi'a is one such chosen individual. Her thoughts and spiritual states (haals) belong to someone who can reach the pinnacle of love.

Furthermore, the culmination of this journey is the moment of communion with God, the opportunity to perceive the Creator in all creatures. This is the state of Certainty (haal of Certainty). It is important to note that in this highest state, "at a distance of two bow lengths or nearer," a person remains human, not merely a spirit or body. The individual possesses a consciousness of survival in God (baqa') and perceives themselves as part of eternity.

In essence, the love experienced by Rabi'a is a process of moral and spiritual growth. She represents all stages of this journey as interconnected points. She does not refer to specific haals or levels. Over time, Sufi thinkers have classified haals and maqams, their sequences, and their means. However, in Rabi'a's poetry,

they appear more as points rather than a linear progression.

Problem Statement

Despite the significant influence of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's philosophy on Sufism and Islamic mysticism, there is a lack of comprehensive scholarly analysis on her views on beauty and phenomenological love. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring her poetry and teachings to understand her philosophy on these themes.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poetry to uncover her views on beauty and divine love.
2. To explore the concept of phenomenological love in Rabi'a's teachings.
3. To examine the influence of Rabi'a's philosophy on contemporary Sufi thought and Islamic mysticism.
4. To provide a comprehensive understanding of Rabi'a's contributions to the philosophy of love and beauty.

Research Questions

1. How does Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poetry reflect her views on beauty and divine love?
2. What is the concept of phenomenological love in Rabi'a's teachings?
3. How has Rabi'a's philosophy influenced contemporary Sufi thought and Islamic mysticism?
4. What are the key elements of Rabi'a's philosophy on love and beauty?

Limitations

1. The study is limited to the analysis of available poetry and teachings of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya.
2. The research may be constrained by the availability of primary sources and historical records.
3. Interpretations of Rabi'a's philosophy may vary, and the study aims to provide one perspective based on available data.

Methodology of the Study

1. Literature Review: Conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature on Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, including her poetry, teachings, and scholarly analyses.
2. Textual Analysis: Analyze selected poems and writings of Rabi'a to uncover themes related to beauty and phenomenological love.
3. Historical Contextualization: Place Rabi'a's teachings within the historical and cultural context of her time to understand the influences on her philosophy

Related Literature

Rabi'a bint Ismail, known as Rabi'a al-Adawiyya al-Basriyyah, was a freedwoman of the Al-Atik family and was nicknamed "Umm al-Khayr" (Mother of Goodness) as mentioned by Ibn Khallikan in his book "Wafayat al-A'yan" (Deaths of Eminent Men). She was born in the city of Basra around 100 AH / 717 AD to a devout and poor father, and she was his fourth daughter, which explains her name, Rabi'a, meaning "the fourth." She belonged to the Qaysi tribe, including Riah al-Qaysi and Hayyan al-Qaysi, who played significant roles in her life. Despite the numerous biographies written about Rabi'a, there is often confusion between her and others with similar names, such as "Rabi'a bint Ismail," the wife of Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari. Therefore, scholars like Al-Sharawi and Ibn al-Jawzi distinguished her as Rabi'a al-Adawiyya al-Basriyyah from the other Rabi'a al-Shamiyyah.

Her father died when she was a child under ten years old, and soon after, her mother also passed away, leaving Rabi'a and her sisters without a guardian to support them through poverty, hunger, and weakness. Rabi'a experienced the full bitterness of orphanhood, with her parents leaving behind only a small boat to transport people for a few coins on one of Basra's rivers, as mentioned by the Sufi historian Farid al-Din Attar in "Tadhkirat al-Awliya" (Memorial of the Saints). Rabi'a would go out to work in place of her father and return after a long day, soothing herself with singing, which made her suffer from hardship and deprived her of parental affection and care.

Abdullah ibn Isa described her, saying: "I entered Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's house and saw a light on her face, and she was often weeping. A man recited a verse from the Quran mentioning Hellfire, and she screamed and then fainted." Ubayy ibn Marhum al-Attar said: "Abda bint Abi Shawwal, one of the best servants of God, who served Rabi'a, told me: Rabi'a would pray all night, and when dawn broke, she would take a brief nap in her prayer place until dawn fully broke. I would hear her say when she woke up in a panic: 'O soul, how long will you sleep? How long will you rise? Soon you will sleep a sleep from which you will not awaken until the Day of Resurrection.' This was her habit throughout her life until she died. When her death approached, she called me and said: 'O Abda, do not inform anyone of my death and shroud me in this woolen garment, which I used to wear when I prayed at night.' So, we shrouded her in that garment and a woolen veil she used to wear."

Many have differed in portraying the life and personality of the devout Rabi'a al-Adawiyya. She was depicted in an Egyptian film starring actress Nabila Obeid and actor Farid Shawqi, where she appeared in the first part of her life as a carefree girl indulging in a life of temptation, wine, and desires before turning to the worship and obedience of God. However, some argue

that this is an inaccurate and distorted image of Rabi'a in her early life, as she grew up in a pious Islamic environment, memorized the Quran, contemplated its verses, read and studied Hadith, and maintained her prayers.

As for writers, the philosopher Abdul Rahman Badawi in his book "Martyr of Divine Love" discusses his disagreement with the cinematic portrayal of Rabi'a, pointing to many indications such as heredity, environment, and personal readiness. Her father's neighbours called him "the devout," and it was unlikely, given Rabi'a's upbringing, that she would stray from the path. She also strongly refused marriage.

Opinions of Scholars and Thinkers

In the Encyclopedia of Islamic Knowledge, it is written that Rabi'a differed from the early Sufis, who were merely ascetics and worshippers, as she was a true Sufi driven by a powerful and overflowing love. She was at the forefront of the Sufis who spoke of pure love, a love that is not bound by any desire except the love of God alone. This view contrasts with the opinion of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, who believe that Sufism was not known at that time. Dr. Ibrahim Awad dedicated a book to explaining the Orientalist perspective and its fallacies and falsehoods.

In response to a question about Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi said: "Many contemporary writers have written books and articles about Rabi'a, and some have called her 'the martyr of divine love,' a term that repels the Islamic sensibility. The relationship between God and His servants is expressed in the language of the Quran and Sunnah as 'love,' not 'passion.' In the Quran: (He loves them, and they love Him) (Al-Ma'idah: 54). (And those who believe are stronger in love for Allah) (Al-Baqarah: 165). All of Rabi'a's poetry speaks of 'love for God,' and we should not go beyond that, out of respect for the etiquette with God, the Almighty."

The concept of love

Freud defined love in psychoanalysis as a powerful emotional force that shapes human behavior and experiences. His theory of love encompasses various aspects, including the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of love. He believed that love is a fundamental human drive that influences all aspects of life, from personal relationships to societal structures.

Freud identified two main types of love: erotic love and affectionate love. Erotic love is driven by sexual desire and the pursuit of pleasure, while affectionate love is characterized by deep emotional bonds and a sense of attachment. Freud argued that these two types of love are interconnected and often overlap in human relationships.

In his work, Freud also explored the role of love in the development of the human psyche. He believed that early childhood experiences with love and attachment play a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality and behavior. Freud's theory of love emphasizes the importance of understanding the unconscious motivations and desires that drive human behaviour.

Freud's concept of love has been influential in various fields, including psychology, sociology, and the humanities. His ideas have been expanded upon and critiqued by subsequent scholars, who have explored the complexities of love and its impact on human life.

Freud's theory of love provides a comprehensive framework for understanding its biological, psychological, and social dimensions. It highlights the importance of early childhood experiences and the unconscious motivations that shape human behaviour. Freud's work continues to be a foundational reference in the study of love and its influence on human life.

Data Analysis

The study uses a descriptive-analytic method to explore Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's philosophy of beauty and phenomenological love. This method involves analyzing Rabi'a's poetry and teachings to uncover her views on these profound themes. By examining her works, the study identifies key elements of her philosophy, such as the duality of love, the beauty in divine connection, and the transformative power of divine love.

*I knew love since I knew your love
And I closed my heart to all but you
I used to converse with you, O you who see
The secrets of hearts, yet we do not see you
I love you with two loves, a love of passion
And a love because you are worthy of that
As for the love of passion
It is my preoccupation with your remembrance over all
others
And as for the love you are worthy of
It is your unveiling of the veils so I may see you
So, no praise is due to me in this or that
But all praise is due to you in this and that*

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poem profoundly reflects her philosophy on divine love and beauty. Let's delve into the key themes and elements of this poem to better understand her philosophy.

Love as a Means to Spiritual Elevation

The poem begins with Rabi'a expressing her realization of love through her love for God:

*I knew love since I knew your love
And I closed my heart to all but you*

Here, Rabi'a acknowledges that her understanding of love is rooted in her love for God. This love is exclusive, as she has closed her heart to all but God. This exclusivity signifies the depth and intensity of her devotion.

Divine Intimacy and Communication

Rabi'a continues by describing her intimate conversations with God:

*I used to converse with you, O you who see
The secrets of hearts, yet we do not see you*

This line highlights the personal and direct relationship Rabi'a has with God. Despite not being able to see God, she feels His presence and believes that He sees the innermost secrets of her heart. This reflects her belief in the omnipresence and omniscience of God.

Duality of Love

Rabi'a then distinguishes between two types of love she has for God:

*I love you with two loves, a love of passion
And a love because you are worthy of that*

The first type of love is passionate and personal, while the second type is reverential and acknowledges God's supreme worthiness. This duality in her love reflects her belief that true love for God transcends mere emotional attachment and becomes a means of spiritual elevation.

Preoccupation with Divine Remembrance

Rabi'a elaborates on the passionate love:

*As for the love of passion
It is my preoccupation with your remembrance
over all others*

Her passionate love is characterized by her constant remembrance of God, which takes precedence over all other thoughts and concerns. This indicates her deep devotion and the centrality of God in her life.

Unveiling of Divine Mysteries

She then describes the reverential love:

*And as for the love, you are worthy of
It is your unveiling of the veils, so I may see you*

This love is based on God's worthiness and His ability to unveil the mysteries of the divine, allowing Rabi'a to perceive His presence more clearly. This reflects her desire for spiritual enlightenment and a deeper understanding of the divine.

Humility and Gratitude

The poem concludes with Rabi'a expressing humility and gratitude:

*So, no praise is due to me in this or that
But all praise is due to you in this and that*

Rabi'a acknowledges that any love or devotion she has is not due to her own merit but is a reflection of God's greatness. She attributes all praise to God, emphasizing her humility and recognition of God's supreme authority.

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poetry stands as a powerful expression of her deep-seated beliefs about beauty and love. Her verses articulate that genuine love for the Divine is fervent and respectful, fostering spiritual ascent. The poetry accentuates the splendor inherent in the connection with the Divine, which yields tranquility and satisfaction. Rabi'a's fervent yearning and dedication to God emphasize her conviction that true happiness is found in divine love, surpassing the material.

*O my joy, my desire, my support
My companion, my promise, and my goal
You are the spirit of the heart, you are my hope
You are my companion, and your longing is my provision
Without you, O my life and my solace
I would not have wandered in the vast lands
How many favors have appeared, and how many
Gifts and blessings and hands you have given me
Your love is now my desire and my bliss
And a relief for the eye of my thirsty heart
If you are pleased with me, then indeed
O desire of the heart, my happiness has begun*

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poem profoundly reflects her philosophy on divine love and beauty. Let's delve into the key themes and elements of this poem to better understand her philosophy.

Divine Love as the Ultimate Source of Joy and Fulfillment

The poem begins with Rabi'a expressing her deep emotional connection with God:

*O my joy, my desire, my support
My companion, my promise, and my goal*

Here, Rabi'a identifies God as the ultimate source of her joy, desire, support, and purpose. This reflects her belief that true fulfillment and happiness can only be found in a close relationship with the divine.

Spiritual Intimacy and Companionship

Rabi'a continues by describing the intimate and supportive nature of her relationship with God:

*You are the spirit of the heart, you are my hope
You are my companion, and your longing is my provision*

These lines highlight her spiritual intimacy and companionship with God. She sees God as the very essence of her heart and her source of hope. The phrase "your longing is my provision" suggests that her spiritual

sustenance comes from her longing for God, emphasizing the depth of her devotion.

Dependence on Divine Guidance

Rabi'a acknowledges her dependence on God's guidance and support:

*Without you, O my life and my solace
I would not have wandered in the vast lands*

This line indicates that without God's presence and solace, she would be lost and aimless. It underscores her belief that God's guidance is essential for navigating life's challenges.

Gratitude for Divine Blessings

Rabi'a expresses her gratitude for the numerous blessings she has received from God:

*How many favors have appeared, and how many
Gifts and blessings and hands you have given me*

She acknowledges the countless favors and blessings bestowed upon her by God, reflecting her deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for the divine generosity.

Love as a Source of Bliss and Contentment

Rabi'a describes the transformative power of divine love:

*Your love is now my desire and my bliss
And a relief for the eye of my thirsty heart*

Here, she portrays God's love as her ultimate desire and source of bliss. The imagery of "a relief for the eye of my thirsty heart" suggests that divine love quenches her spiritual thirst and brings her inner peace and contentment.

Divine Approval as the Key to Happiness

The poem concludes with Rabi'a expressing the importance of divine approval:

*If you are pleased with me, then indeed
O desire of the heart, my happiness has begun*

Rabi'a emphasizes that her true happiness depends on God's pleasure and approval. This reflects her belief that divine approval is the ultimate measure of success and fulfillment in life.

Prioritizing the Divine Relationship

Rabi'a continues by expressing her wish for a flourishing relationship with God, even if it means a ruined relationship with the world:

*I wish that what is between me and you is flourishing
And what is between me and the world is ruined*

These lines highlight Rabi'a's prioritization of her relationship with God over her relationship with the

world. She values her spiritual connection with the divine above all else, even if it means facing difficulties and isolation in the material world. This underscores her deep devotion and commitment to God.

The Ease of True Divine Love

Rabi'a then emphasizes the transformative power of true divine love:

*If your love is true, then everything is easy
And all that is on the dust is dust*

In these lines, Rabi'a suggests that true love for God makes all challenges and hardships seem insignificant. The phrase "all that is on the dust is dust" implies that worldly concerns and material possessions are ultimately meaningless compared to the eternal and transcendent nature of divine love. This reflects her belief that true contentment and peace are found in the love of God, which transcends the material world.

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poem is a testament to her profound philosophy on love and beauty. Through her verses, she conveys that true love for God is the ultimate source of comfort and solace, transcending the bitterness and challenges of worldly life. Her poetry highlights the importance of prioritizing the divine relationship over worldly concerns and emphasizes the transformative power of true divine love. Rabi'a's intense longing and devotion to God underscore her belief that true contentment and peace are found in the love of God, which transcends the material world.

Summary

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, a prominent figure in Islamic mysticism, is renowned for her profound philosophy on divine love and beauty. Her poetry reflects an intense longing for a direct connection with God, emphasizing the beauty found in the divine relationship and the transformative power of love. Rabi'a's verses convey that true love for God is both passionate and reverential, leading to spiritual elevation and inner peace.

FINDINGS

1. **Duality of Love:** Rabi'a distinguishes between two types of love for God: a passionate, personal love and a reverential love that acknowledges God's supreme worthiness. This duality reflects her belief that true love for God transcends mere emotional attachment and becomes a means of spiritual elevation.
2. **Beauty in Divine Connection:** Rabi'a's poetry highlights the beauty found in the divine connection. She sees beauty not in the material world but in the spiritual relationship with God, which brings inner peace and fulfillment.
3. **Longing and Devotion:** Rabi'a's intense longing and devotion to God are evident in her poetry. She expresses a desire for God's pleasure above all else,

willing to endure worldly hardships as long as her relationship with God remains strong.

4. **Transformative Power of Divine Love:** Rabi'a suggests that true love for God makes all challenges and hardships seem insignificant. Her poetry conveys that divine love is the ultimate source of comfort, solace, and spiritual sustenance.

CONCLUSION

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poem is a testament to her profound philosophy on love and beauty. Through her verses, she conveys that true love for God is the ultimate source of joy, fulfillment, and spiritual sustenance. Her poetry highlights the beauty found in the divine connection, which brings inner peace and contentment. Rabi'a's intense longing and devotion to God underscore her belief that true happiness lies in divine love and approval, transcending the material world.

*I wish you would be sweet, and life is bitter
I wish you would be pleased, and people are angry
I wish that what is between me and you is flourishing
And what is between me and the world is ruined
If your love is true, then everything is easy
And all that is on the dust is dust*

The poem begins with Rabi'a expressing her desire for divine sweetness amidst the bitterness of life:

*I wish you would be sweet, and life is bitter
I wish you would be pleased, and people are angry*

Here, Rabi'a contrasts the sweetness of divine love with the bitterness of worldly life. She seeks God's pleasure and approval, even when faced with the anger and disapproval of people. This reflects her belief that divine love is the ultimate source of comfort and solace, transcending the challenges and hardships of the material world.

CONCLUSION

Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's poetry is a testament to her profound philosophy on love and beauty. Through her verses, she conveys that true love for God is the ultimate source of joy, fulfillment, and spiritual sustenance. Her poetry highlights the importance of prioritizing the divine relationship over worldly concerns and emphasizes the transformative power of true divine love. Rabi'a's intense longing and devotion to God underscore her belief that true contentment and peace are found in the love of God, which transcends the material world.

Recommendations for Further Studies

1. **Comparative Analysis:** Compare Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's philosophy with that of other Sufi mystics and phenomenological philosophers to highlight unique aspects of her teachings.
2. **Historical Contextualization:** Rabi'a's teachings must be placed within the historical and cultural context of her time to understand the influences on her philosophy and how they shaped her views on love and beauty.
3. **Impact on Contemporary Sufi Thought:** Explore the influence of Rabi'a's philosophy on contemporary Sufi thought and Islamic mysticism, examining how her teachings continue to resonate with modern practitioners.
4. **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Study Rabi'a's philosophy using an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from psychology, sociology, and the humanities to provide a comprehensive understanding of her views on love and beauty.
5. **Translation and Interpretation:** Encourage the translation and interpretation of Rabi'a's poetry into various languages to make her teachings more accessible to a global audience and to facilitate cross-cultural studies.

REFERENCES

- A Brief Biography of Rabi'a al-Adawiyya". Islam Web - Fatwa Center. June 5, 2021. Archived from the original on June 5, 2021. Retrieved on June 5, 2021.
- Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzi (2000), Sifat al-Safwa, Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, Volume 2, Page 243
- Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin - Al-Jahiz, Volume 3, Page 122.
- Dictionary of Philosophy - Dar Al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1320 AH, p. 22.
- Freud, Sigmund - The Interpretation of Dreams, translated by Ismail Zahran, Cairo, Al-Ma'arif Publishing House, 1322 AH, p. 48.
- Freud's Introduction to Psychoanalysis - Translated by Milad Emile, Cairo, 1322 AH, p. 8.
- Ibn Fadl Allah al-Omari. Book of Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar. Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi. Page 24.
- Siham Khudr. Rabi'a al-Adawiyya between Myth and Reality. Dar al-Kutub al-Alamiya - Lebanon. Page 18.
- Tadhkirat al-Awliya - Farid al-Din Attar.
- The Source of the Self - Cairo, 1322 AH, p. 8.
- The Woman and the Snake - Baghdad, Al-Ma'arif Publishing House, 1382 AH, p. 330.