



POSTSECULAR NARRATIVES OF FAITH AND LOVE: DICHOTOMY OF MYSTICISM AND SECULARISM IN SHAFAK'S *THE FORTY RULES OF LOVE*

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Abstract

This research examines Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) through the lens of postsecular theory to explore the interrelationship between spirituality, love, and personal transformation in a contemporary literary context. Challenging the rigid binaries of religion versus secularism, the study argues that Shafak's novel presents spirituality as an inclusive, inward, and experiential force that transcends institutional boundaries and cultural divisions. By analyzing the parallel narratives of Rumi and Shams in the thirteenth century and Ella Rubinstein in the modern world, the research highlights how true spiritual transformation requires breaking away from societal norms, rational constraints, and fixed identities. The novel portrays love as the central pathway to divine truth, emphasizing compassion, self-awareness, and inner awakening over dogma and ritual. Drawing on postsecular thought, this study demonstrates how Shafak harmonizes mystical Sufi traditions with modern secular sensibilities, offering a hybrid spiritual vision that responds to contemporary crises of meaning, alienation, and religious intolerance. Through close textual analysis, the research reveals that mysticism in the novel does not reject reason but complements it, suggesting that human fulfillment emerges from the coexistence of emotional depth, ethical responsibility, and spiritual openness. This study positions *The Forty Rules of Love* as a significant postsecular text that redefines faith as a universal, transformative experience rooted in love and inner change, rather than institutional allegiance.

Keywords: *Divine Love, Harmonizes Mystical, Mysticism, Postsecularism, Secularism, Spiritual Transformation, Sufism*

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1. Introduction

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009) uses the novel's 'secondary' American character, Ella, to tell the 'primary' Turkish character's, Shams, story. *The Forty Rules of Love* attempts to give balance to the stream of consciousness writing style and give the story character; however, the author has no grasp of the technique. The other character and protagonist of the novel is Jalal al-Din Rumi, a 13th-century Sufi poet. Rumi and Ella's similarity is that Rumi is in a creative and Ella is in a destructive functional marriage. Both characters are in a confined venue, and it is through Shams that Ella's and Rumi's consciousnesses are expanded, and it is Shams that Rumi's wife is a barrier to Rumi's creativity. Ella and Rumi are also similar. Each is in a spiritual and intellectual block; on the one hand, Ella's self-masochism is a block, while Rumi's is a barrier to deep thought. Shams and Ella are also similar, as Shams was a free and nomadic spirit, and Ella was also in a socio-spiritual confined space.

Having self-awareness and self-knowledge is a prerequisite to any creativity. Ella is self-aware, while Shams is the free spirit who is not confined. The other characters in the story are creative, while Rumi is the only one who is in a functional marriage and is not. Each character in the novel Rumi is in is mirrored in Ella's story. Each character has their own self-awareness and spiritual self-knowledge, while Shams is the free spirit of the novel. The novel's significance lies in its ability to connect the East with the West and the past with the present, demonstrating that the core of love and spirituality transcends all cultures and time periods. Shafak's writing illustrates the value of individual development and the incredible, emancipatory, and transformative power of love.

1.1. Problem Statement

Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) has been widely acclaimed for its exploration of themes such as love, spirituality, and Sufism. However, most existing studies have approached the novel through feminist, mystical, or postcolonial perspectives, often limiting its scope to thematic or historical readings. What remains underexplored is the novel's engagement with the intersection of modern secular life and religious spiritual traditions. The absence of a post-secular lens in prior scholarship creates a significant research gap. Through its parallel narratives Ella Rubinstein's contemporary American life and the thirteenth century companionship of Rumi and Shams the novel offers a powerful framework to examine how rationality and spirituality can coexist in dialogue. Without such analysis, the deeper philosophical and cultural implications of the text risk being overlooked. This study addresses that gap by applying Habermas's Post-Secular Theory to the novel, thereby highlighting its role as a site of reconciliation between faith and reason, and contributing to broader debates on pluralism, tolerance, and spirituality in modern societies.

1.2. Research Objectives

The aims of this research are

- To explore how *The Forty Rules of Love* illustrate the idea that true spiritual transformation often requires breaking away from societal norms and personal comfort zones?
- To expose the ways does the novel suggest that love is a path to God that transcends religious and cultural boundaries?
- To find out how is mysticism and secularism portrayed in contrast with each other.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How does *The Forty Rules of Love* illustrate the idea that true spiritual transformation often requires breaking away from societal norms and personal comfort zones?
2. How does Ella's encounter with Sweet Blasphemy challenge her understanding of loyalty, duty, and personal freedom?
3. How does Elif Shafak use the concept of "RULES" in the novel to paradoxically emphasize freedom rather than restriction?

1.4. Research Significance

The novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) by Elif Shafak has been widely studied for its themes of love, spirituality, and Sufism, yet its deeper engagement with contemporary theoretical frameworks remains underexplored. Many theories can be applied to this text such as postmodernism, pluralism, or feminist perspectives but examining the novel through the lens of Habermas's Post-Secular Theory offers a particularly significant contribution. This theoretical lens highlights the novel's ability to bridge the gap between modern rational-secular life and timeless religious-spiritual traditions. By analyzing the parallel stories of Ella Rubinstein, a modern American housewife, and the mystical companionship of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, the study underscores how Shafak's narrative embodies a post-secular vision where faith and reason coexist in dialogue.

The research is significant because it demonstrates how literature can function as a space of reconciliation between secular and religious discourses in an increasingly polarized world. It offers a model of circular dialogue in which modern individuals can engage with spirituality without rejecting rationality, and where religious traditions remain dynamic by adapting to new contexts. By applying Post-secular Theory, this study does not only enrich literary analysis but also contributes to broader discussions about pluralism, tolerance, and the role of spirituality in modern societies. Thus, the research has value both for literary scholarship and for contemporary cultural and philosophical debates, proving that Shafak's novel is not only a tale of love but also a post-secular text with profound social and intellectual implications.

2. Literature Review

Grira (2025) studies how Elif Shafak presents Sufism the spiritual side of Islam in her novel. The author explains that *The Forty Rules of Love* is a perfect example of modern

Turkish fiction that mixes spiritual teachings with storytelling. Through the characters of Rumi and Shams Tabrizi, Shafak shows how Sufi ideas like love, tolerance, peace, and unity can guide people in their personal and spiritual lives. Grira highlights that the novel connects past and present, using the friendship between Rumi and Shams to teach readers about inner transformation and divine love. The article explains that Sufism in the novel is not limited to religious rituals but focuses on purifying the heart and finding God through love and kindness. Shafak's storytelling helps readers understand complex spiritual ideas in a simple and emotional way (Grira, 2025).

Essafir (2025) discusses how Elif Shafak and her novel *The Forty Rules of Love* became popular all around the world. The writer explains that the book's success is not only because of its story but also because of its universal message of love, spirituality, and tolerance. Essafir shows how Shafak's writing connects readers from different cultures, religions, and backgrounds through simple but deep ideas about love and faith. The article highlights that *The Forty Rules of Love* gained international fame because it blends Eastern Sufi wisdom with Western storytelling. The mix of modern and historical settings Ella's story in the present and Rumi and Shams' story in the past makes it interesting for readers across the world. Essafir also points out that Shafak's use of English language, along with her poetic and emotional style, helped her reach a global audience. The study explains that this "Shafak Mania" reflects the growing interest in spiritual and cross-cultural literature. Readers are drawn to her message that true love leads to self-awareness and peace with God (Essafir, 2025).

Sri (2025) focuses on how Elif Shafak's novel explores mysticism and spiritual growth through its characters, especially Ella and Rumi. The article explains that *The Forty Rules of Love* is not just a love story but a spiritual journey. It shows how real love leads a person to understand their inner self and connection with God. The writer highlights that Shafak uses Sufism a mystical branch of Islam to teach readers that love, faith, and tolerance can change a person's life. Through the characters of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, the novel presents the idea that true knowledge does not come only from books, but from experience, devotion, and love. Shams's forty rules guide Rumi toward self-realization and spiritual awakening, helping him move from outer religion to inner truth (Sri, 2025).

Zulaikah, Kurniati, Widyani, & Magdalena (2025) study how Elif Shafak's novel shows the process of inner transformation through love and spirituality. The writers explain that the novel is not only about romantic love but also about spiritual awakening and personal growth. The authors focus on two main characters Ella Rubinstein and Rumi. Both go through a deep transformative journey that changes their understanding of life, faith, and love. Ella begins as an unhappy housewife living a dull, routine life. When she reads about Rumi and Shams, she slowly learns that love can be a path to self-discovery. Her meeting with Aziz, a modern Sufi, becomes a turning point that opens her heart and mind. Rumi's

journey is also discussed. Through Shams of Tabriz, Rumi learns the deeper meaning of faith, compassion, and divine love (Zulaikah, Kurniati, Widyani, & Magdalena, 2025).

Naeem, Ghani, & Khalid (2024) explore how the novel reflects Islamic values, spirituality, and moral teachings. The authors explain that Elif Shafak presents Islam not as a strict or fearful religion but as a religion of love, peace, and inner purity. The study highlights that the novel uses Sufi philosophy, especially through the characters Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, to show the real spirit of Islam. Shams teaches that God can be found through love, kindness, and selflessness not only through rituals. The article points out that Shafak's writing helps readers understand the balance between religion and spirituality. The authors also discuss how Rumi's transformation under Shams's guidance represents the journey of every believer who moves from outer faith to inner truth. Through Rumi's story, the novel promotes tolerance, forgiveness, and equality, which are central ideas in Islamic philosophy (Naeem, Ghani, & Khalid, 2024).

Hussein (2022) explains how Elif Shafak shows inner peace through divine love in her novel. The writer focuses on how Sufi teachings help people find calmness, faith, and self-understanding. According to Hussein, the novel teaches that true peace comes from love for God, not from wealth, fame, or power. The characters Rumi and Shams of Tabriz show that real happiness lies in spiritual connection. Shams's forty rules guide Rumi to look inside his heart and discover the divine presence within himself. The article also mentions Ella's journey, showing how reading about Rumi and Shams changes her life. She learns that love can heal pain and bring spiritual peace (Hussein, 2022).

Saleh (2022) focuses on the character Ella Rubinstein and her struggle within marriage. The writer explains that Ella represents many women who feel trapped in routine and loveless relationships. Her life seems perfect on the outside, but inside she feels empty and disconnected. When Ella reads about Rumi and Shams, she begins to question her life and her role as a wife. Meeting Aziz, the author of the book she reads, awakens her emotions and shows her a new meaning of love and freedom. Saleh calls Ella a "rebellious wife" because she dares to break social and emotional limits to find her true self (Saleh, 2022).

Jabeen & Jamil (2021) explores how both novels use mystery and self-search in a philosophical way. The writers explain that these stories are not traditional detective tales but are metaphysical detective fiction, where the main search is for truth, identity, and meaning of life rather than a criminal case. In *The Forty Rules of Love*, the "mystery" is the spiritual journey of the soul. The characters, especially Ella and Rumi, try to discover their real selves and their connection to God through love and Sufi wisdom. The article shows how Shafak mixes mystery with spirituality to make readers think deeply about faith, self-knowledge, and divine love (Jabeen & Jamil, 2021).

Zouichene (2024) studies how Elif Shafak tells many stories within one main story. The writer explains that the novel uses embedded narratives stories inside other stories to

show different voices, experiences, and viewpoints. Zouichene uses the idea of polyphony, meaning “many voices,” to describe how the novel allows each character to express their own truth. In *The Forty Rules of Love*, voices from the past and present such as Rumi, Shams, and Ella are all connected through love and spirituality. These multiple stories together create a rich picture of human emotions, faith, and transformation (Zouichene, 2024).

Michael Dillon (2012) examines how Jürgen Habermas a famous German philosopher understands the role of religion in modern, secular societies. Habermas argues that even in the modern world, where science and reason dominate, religion still plays an important part in shaping people’s moral values and social life. He introduces the idea of a “post-secular society,” meaning a society that recognizes the continuing importance of religion instead of ignoring or rejecting it. Dillon appreciates Habermas’s effort to bring religion back into public discussion but also criticizes his approach. He says Habermas treats religion too narrowly as if its only value is to give moral lessons that can be translated into rational, secular language. Dillon believes religion is more than that; it provides meaning, identity, and community that cannot always be fully expressed in rational terms (Dillon, 2012).

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in **postsecular theory**, which serves as the principal analytical framework for examining Elif Shafak’s *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) as a literary text that negotiates the intersections of spirituality, secular modernity, and individual transformation. Postsecular theory emerges as a critical response to classical secularization theory, which predicted the gradual decline of religion with the rise of modernity, rationalism, and scientific thought. Contrary to this assumption, postsecular theorists argue that religion and spirituality have not disappeared but have instead re-emerged in transformed, individualized, and hybrid forms within contemporary secular societies (Habermas, 2008; Taylor, 2007).

Postsecularism recognizes the **coexistence and dialogue between secular rationality and religious meaning-making**, rather than positioning them as mutually exclusive systems. In literary and cultural studies, postsecular theory is particularly concerned with texts that revisit spiritual questions in non-dogmatic ways, foregrounding personal belief, ethical responsibility, affect, and transcendence over institutionalized religion (McClure, 2007). This framework is especially relevant to *The Forty Rules of Love*, which presents spirituality not as rigid religious observance but as an inward, love-centered, and transformative journey (Habermas, 2008).

Within a postsecular framework, Shafak’s representation of **Sufi mysticism** functions as an alternative spiritual discourse that challenges both orthodox religiosity and secular materialism. The novel portrays mysticism as a lived, experiential form of faith that emphasizes inner purification, love, and self-knowledge rather than doctrinal

conformity. This aligns with postsecular thought, which views contemporary spirituality as increasingly individualized and detached from institutional authority (Taylor, 2007). Characters such as Rumi and Ella are depicted not as conventional believers but as spiritual seekers whose transformations occur through emotional rupture, ethical questioning, and encounters that disrupt social and religious norms (Shafak, 2011).

Postsecular theory also enables a critical examination of the novel's **engagement with secular rationalism**. Modern secularism, while privileging reason, progress, and autonomy, often marginalizes transcendence, emotional depth, and metaphysical inquiry (Habermas, 2008). In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Ella's initially secular, materially comfortable life is portrayed as spiritually hollow, illustrating the limitations of a purely rational and material worldview. Her gradual attraction to mystical thought does not reject modernity outright but exposes the existential void that secular life can produce when disconnected from spiritual meaning. This narrative movement reflects a postsecular sensibility in which secular and spiritual modes of understanding are brought into conversation rather than opposition (McClure, 2007).

Furthermore, postsecular theory foregrounds the **ethical dimension of spirituality**, emphasizing compassion, relationality, and responsibility over dogma and ritual. Shafak's depiction of divine love as the path to God reflects a postsecular ethic in which faith is measured by empathy and moral action rather than religious identity (Shafak, 2011). The novel consistently dissolves boundaries between religions, cultures, and identities, presenting love as a universal spiritual language capable of uniting humanity. This ethical universalism resonates strongly with postsecular thought, which seeks to recover the moral and affective resources of religion without reinforcing exclusionary or authoritarian structures (Taylor, 2007). Ultimately, postsecular theory provides the conceptual foundation for understanding Shafak's novel as advocating neither a return to traditional religiosity nor a rejection of modernity, but rather a **transformative, inclusive, and love-centered spirituality** capable of addressing the existential and ethical crises of the modern age.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The study explores how Shafak combines mystical spirituality with modern secular perspectives, creating a literary space where faith, love, and human connection transcend religious and cultural boundaries. Through a comparative portrayal of the thirteenth-century mystic Rumi and the twenty-first-century housewife Ella, the novel investigates how true transformation comes not from rigid religious practice but from the freedom of love and spiritual awakening. The chapter has been divided according to the three research questions developed for this study. Each question is discussed with reference to Shafak's text, relevant quotations, and the symbolic significance behind them. The analysis also

highlights how Shafak's novel functions as a postsecular narrative one that reintroduces spirituality in an age dominated by rationalism, materialism, and disbelief (Shafak, 2011).

4.1. Spiritual Transformation as a Break from Social Norms

First research question discusses how *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) illustrate the idea that true spiritual transformation often requires breaking away from societal norms and personal zones. Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) beautifully explores the concept of spiritual transformation as an inward and liberating process. The novel's dual structure the story of Rumi and Shams in the thirteenth century and Ella in the modern world reveals how genuine change always begins with the heart, not with obedience to social expectations. Both characters, Rumi and Ella, undergo a personal awakening when they dare to break the boundaries that society, religion, and family have placed upon them. The mystical philosophy of the novel is expressed through the profound rule: "How we see God is our direct reflection of how we see ourselves. If God brings to mind mostly fear and blame, it means there is too much fear and blame welled inside us. If we see God as full of love and compassion, so are we." (Shafak, 2011, p. 30)

This rule reveals Shafak's belief that one's perception of the divine mirrors one's inner emotional state. It challenges the conventional religious teaching that views God as a distant authority figure. Shafak's mysticism teaches that God dwells within the self, and transformation begins when one purifies the heart from fear and guilt. This interpretation also critiques social and religious systems that encourage control through fear rather than love. Another rule deepens this idea of inward transformation: "The path to the truth is a labor of the heart, not of the head. Make your heart your primary guide, not your mind. Meet challenges and ultimately prevail over your nerves with your heart. Knowing yourself will lead you to the knowledge of God." (Shafak, 2011, p. 40)

This statement directly opposes modern secular rationality, which values logic and intellect above emotion and faith. Shafak insists that divine truth cannot be discovered through reasoning alone; it requires emotional courage and self-awareness. The rule reflects the Sufi understanding that the heart is the true seat of wisdom. For both Rumi and Ella, self-knowledge becomes the first step toward knowing God. Ella's transformation from a discontented wife living within societal expectations to a spiritually awakened woman illustrates this rule perfectly. Similarly, Shafak reinforces the idea of the inward journey in the rule: "East, West, South, or North makes little difference. No matter what your destination, just be sure to make every journey a journey within. If you travel within, you will travel the whole wide world and beyond." (Shafak, 2011, p. 86)

This quotation reflects the universality of the mystical path. It shows that spiritual enlightenment is not tied to geography, religion, or social status; it is a journey of self-discovery that transcends worldly boundaries. Rumi's meeting with Shams marks the beginning of such a journey a radical act that breaks away from social conformity and

leads to divine love. Lastly, Shafak's message of transformation through surrender is captured in the rule: "Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead, let life live through you and do not worry that your life is turning upside down. How do you know that the side you are used to is better than the one to come?" (Shafak, 2011, p. 101)

This rule reflects the Sufi concept of *tawakkul* (trust in divine will). Transformation demands acceptance of change, even when it brings uncertainty. Both Rumi and Ella experience the breaking of their old identities Rumi as a respected scholar, and Ella as a conventional wife to be reborn as seekers of divine truth. Shafak thus shows that true spiritual transformation requires stepping beyond comfort, reason, and societal approval. In essence, *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) teaches that spiritual growth is not found in strict obedience to tradition but in the courage to question, love, and embrace change. Transformation begins within the heart, where fear turns into love and separation dissolves into divine unity.

4.2. Love as a Tool to Transcend Religious and Cultural Boundaries

Second research question talks about how *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011) suggest that love is a path to God that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. In *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011), Shafak presents love as the most powerful and universal path to divine truth. Through both historical and contemporary narratives, she demonstrates that love unites people across differences in faith, culture, and time. For Shafak, divine love is not bound by ritual or dogma; it is a living, transformative force that allows human beings to see the divine in all creation. The novel expresses this through the reflection:

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 others. At times like these, the need for love is greater than ever (Shafak, 2011, p. 15).

Through this observation, Shafak connects two distant eras Rumi's and Ella's to show that despite centuries of progress, humanity still struggles with division and intolerance. The statement reflects her postsecular concern: in a world increasingly secular and fragmented, love remains the only spiritual language that all can understand. This love, however, is not romantic or superficial; it is divine, uniting all humanity under one Creator. The mystical foundation of this idea is expressed in the rule

You can study God through everything and everyone in the universe, because God is not confined in a mosque, synagogue, or church. But if you are still in need of knowing where exactly His abode is, there is only one place to look for him in the heart of a true lover (Shafak, 2011, p. 58).

This rule rejects the notion that God belongs to any one religion or institution. Shafak portrays Shams as a spiritual revolutionary who reminds Rumi that the divine resides not in temples or books but in love itself. Mysticism, offers an inclusive faith that

transcends boundaries. The “true lover” becomes a vessel of divine presence, capable of finding God in every human being regardless of culture or creed. Love in Shafak’s novel also begins with self-love. This truth is highlighted in the rule:

“If you want to change the way others treat you, you should first change the way you treat yourself. Unless you learn to love yourself fully and sincerely, there is no way you can be loved. Once you achieve that stage, be thankful for every thorn that others might throw at you. It is a sign that you will soon be showered in roses.” (Shafak, 2011, p. 135)

This rule reflects both psychological and spiritual insight. By linking divine love to self-compassion, Shafak bridges modern secular ideas of self-care with ancient mystical teachings of acceptance and humility. The ability to love oneself becomes the foundation for loving others and, ultimately, God. It also represents an important step toward inner healing and universal empathy both key themes of the novel. The final rule related to this question demonstrates the transformative and healing nature of divine love: “In the next stage, the pleasing enough one becomes a lantern to humanity, radiating energy to everyone who asks for it, teaching and illuminating like a true master. Sometimes such a person can also have healing powers.” (Shafak, 2011, p. 166)

Shafak portrays love as light a source of guidance and comfort that can heal spiritual and emotional wounds. The mystic who reaches this stage of love becomes a teacher and healer for humanity, spreading compassion instead of judgment. This image of love as divine illumination transcends all religions and cultures, making the novel a true postsecular text that unites spirituality and humanism. Shafak redefines love as the universal essence of faith. Love, in her view, is not limited by labels of religion or culture; it is the living connection between the human heart and the divine spirit.

4.3. Parallelism between Mysticism and Secularism

Third research question discusses how mysticism and secularism are portrayed in contrast with each other in *The Forty Rules of Love* (2011). Shafak’s novel provides a meaningful contrast between mystical spirituality and secular rationalism. Through the intertwined stories of Rumi and Ella, she reveals that while secularism focuses on logic, intellect, and external order, mysticism celebrates intuition, faith, and the unseen. Shafak’s narrative does not completely reject modern secular thought; instead, it harmonizes the two by suggesting that human existence becomes complete only when reason and spirituality coexist. The mystical worldview is beautifully captured in the rule: “Each and every reader comprehends the Holy Qur’an on a different level in tandem with the depth of his understanding... The fourth level is so deep it cannot be put into words and is therefore bound to remain indescribable.” (Shafak, 2011, p. 50)

This rule represents the essence of mystical interpretation truth exists in layers, and only those who look inward can access the deeper meanings. The secular mindset, in

contrast, seeks clear and objective explanations. By contrasting these two approaches, Shafak shows that mysticism accepts ambiguity and silence as sacred, while secularism often fears what cannot be measured or defined. Rumi's universal declaration further strengthens this mystical perspective: "Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi, or Zin. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not of the East nor of the West. My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless." (Shafak, 2011, p. 183)

This quotation reflects the Sufi philosophy of unity the belief that all distinctions of religion and culture are illusions that separate humanity from divine truth. Through these words, Shafak contrasts the open, inclusive spirit of mysticism with the fixed boundaries of secular and institutional thought. The mystic becomes "placeless," belonging everywhere and nowhere, while the secular individual remains bound by identity, ideology, and reason. The third quotation deepens this comparison between mystical compassion and secular judgment: "Whenever you get angry with someone, you should replace the face of that person in your mind with the face of someone you love. Have you tried replacing Shams's face with our mother's face? Perhaps you could find something to like in him." (Shafak, 2011, p. 210)

This rule captures the essence of mystic empathy the ability to replace anger with love. Mysticism teaches understanding and forgiveness, while secular reasoning often reacts with pride, ego, or resentment. By transforming anger into compassion, Shafak shows that love is not only a spiritual ideal but also a practical way of living. It connects the human and the divine by overcoming the limits of logic and self-centeredness. Through Ella's transformation, Shafak also portrays the struggle between secular emptiness and mystical fulfillment. At the beginning of the novel, Ella lives a materially comfortable yet spiritually hollow life. Her encounter with Aziz and Rumi's story pulls her toward a mystical worldview, one that values emotional truth over social reputation. In this way, Shafak bridges the historical and modern worlds, showing that the tension between mysticism and secularism remains timeless.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, *The Forty Rules of Love* serves as a profound postsecular narrative that harmonizes faith, love, and modern life. Shafak reimagines spirituality as a living experience that transcends organized religion and cultural divisions. Through her portrayal of Rumi, Shams, and Ella, she demonstrates that true transformation begins when individuals break free from societal norms and listen to the voice of the heart. The analysis of the three research questions shows that: Spiritual transformation requires stepping beyond fear, tradition, and social conformity. Love is the universal path to God that unites humanity beyond boundaries. Mysticism and secularism, though different, can coexist with mysticism bringing meaning to the rational world.

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