

“Šūfī Women and Chivalric Spirituality”
Gendered Piety and Spiritual Authority in the writings of
Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (ca. 1145-1221) and Jāmī (1414-1492)

CSR No More than a Page

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This No More than a Page is about my dissertation I am writing based on my research interests which is mystical narratives of female mystics in literature precisely Šūfī Women and their representatives in Šūfī biography texts. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, has predominantly been represented by prominent male Šūfī figures. Throughout the history of available mystical literary texts, one can observe that female Šūfīs have often overshadowed by their male counterparts. In this regard, I will be discussing the extent to which female mystics have been featured in Sufi literature, their engagement within the texts through their mystical experiences, how male artists have defined them, and whether there have been instances of exceptional Sufi women being reinterpreted as “men” in Persian literature.

I will focus on two specific texts, *Tazkirat al-awliyā*’ by ‘Aṭṭār of Nīshāpūr (1145-1221), and *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥazarāt al-quds* by Jāmī of Herat (1414-1492). The depiction of female Sufi figures within this genre of literature have yet to be comprehensively addressed in modern scholarship. An overarching theme in literary mystical texts has been portraying Sufi women as de-feminized and sufficiently masculine to attain higher spiritual stations. For this research, I plan to employ a textual study approach, including: an in-depth analysis and translation of sections pertinent to female Sufis and how gendered piety, especially the chivalric spirituality term *javānmardī* (lit., ‘youthful manliness’), has been portrayed in the two aforementioned texts. While women often play a subtle role in mystical texts, there are examples of women asserting their independence and authority—uncommon occurrences within the patriarchal societies of that era.

My study is focused on the depictions of Šūfī women in two mystical texts in 13th and 15th century and the role of mystic women and their authority in patriarchal societies. The idea that Sufi women must be seen as genderless is a prominent theme in most mystical literary texts discussing them. In that case, I would find evidence of permissible and /or practical contact between male and female genders. In patriarchal societies, power and authority have always been vested in men, and those in positions of power were primarily men. Some stories about mystic women's spiritual experiences seem unreal. These can be categorized as myths or a genre closely related to magic, but they are primarily found in mystical literary texts.

I will argue that exclusion of women is not an issue only in books like Šūfī hagiographies but also in the *akhlāq* (ethics) books. Also, social characteristics were male-dominated and male centered; thus, one can see that women were marginalized, just as the term means “young manliness.” The very essence of “*javānmardī*” in these works reinforces the idea that women's voices and contributions were often sidelined in the intellectual and ethical discourse of their times.