

Divine Love and Sincere Devotion in the Mystical Poetry of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah

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Abstract (English)

This paper examines the concept of *mahabbah lillah* (divine love) in the poetry of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah from a literary perspective, drawing on biographical and cultural contexts. As an 8th-century female Sufi figure, Rabi'ah is known for her sincere love for God—motivated neither by fear of Hell nor desire for Paradise, but by pure devotion. The study analyzes ten selected poems that express themes of sacred love, spiritual longing, and total surrender. The findings reveal that her poetry not only possesses literary value but also holds deep spiritual significance within the early Islamic tradition. Her work demonstrates how literature can become a powerful medium for expressing inner experiences and the human relationship with the Divine.

Keyword: Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, divine love, Sufi poetry, Islamic literature, spirituality

Abstract (Indonesian)

Artikel ini membahas konsep cinta ilahi (*mahabbah lillah*) dalam puisi-puisi Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah melalui pendekatan sastra, dengan mempertimbangkan latar biografi dan konteks budaya penulis. Sebagai tokoh sufi perempuan dari abad ke-8, Rabi'ah dikenal karena kecintaannya kepada Tuhan yang tidak didasarkan pada ketakutan atau imbalan, melainkan pada keikhlasan murni. Penelitian ini menganalisis sepuluh puisi pilihannya yang mengandung tema cinta suci, kerinduan spiritual, dan penyerahan total. Hasil pembacaan menunjukkan bahwa puisi-puisi Rabi'ah bukan hanya memiliki nilai estetik, tetapi juga mencerminkan kedalaman spiritual dan keteguhan jiwa dalam tradisi Islam awal. Karyanya menjadi contoh penting tentang bagaimana sastra dapat menjadi media pengungkapan pengalaman batiniah dan pencarian Ilahi.

Kata Kunci: Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, cinta ilahi, puisi sufi, sastra Islam, spiritualitas.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic literature, especially in its formative period, served not only as a vehicle for transmitting religious doctrines but also as a vibrant and nuanced space for articulating personal, emotional, and spiritual experiences.¹ Among its many forms, Sufi poetry stands out as one of the most intimate and symbolically rich genres², where spiritual devotion is expressed through refined literary language. Rooted in the desire to unite the soul with the Divine, Sufi poets utilized metaphor, imagery, and rhythm to convey complex inner states such as longing (*shawq*), surrender (*khudu*), and unconditional love (*mahabbah*).

Within this tradition, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah emerges as a singular voice—a woman mystic whose poems transcend the boundaries of formal theology and speak directly to the heart of the spiritual seeker.³ Living in 8th-century Basra, she brought a radically sincere approach to worship: her poetry reflects a love for God that is free from fear of punishment or hope for reward. Her verses are marked by emotional clarity, spiritual urgency, and an unwavering focus on the Divine as the sole object of love.

By taking a literary perspective, this paper investigates how Rabi'ah's poetry combines aesthetic beauty with profound spiritual insights, offering readers both artistic pleasure and a path toward deeper reflection. Her work not only enriches the canon of Islamic literature but also provides a foundational model for female spiritual expression, marking her as a timeless figure in the landscape of Islamic mysticism.

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah was born in Basra in the 8th century, during the early Abbasid period—a time marked by rapid intellectual and spiritual growth in the Islamic world.⁴ Coming from a poor family and facing a life of hardship, including a period of enslavement after the death of her parents, Rabi'ah's early life was defined by suffering and social marginalization. However, these experiences did not hinder her spiritual development; rather, they became the foundation of her inner strength and mystical path. She eventually gained recognition not through institutional learning or formal religious authority, but through her intense piety and unwavering love for God.

¹ M Rozali, Solihah Titin (ed). (2020) *Metodologi Studi Islam Dalam Perspectives Multydisiplin Keilmuan*. Depok: Rajawali Buana Pusaka.

² Asarpin. (2011). *Puisi Sufi, Puisi Kesunyian*. <http://sastra-indonesia.com/2011/04/puisi-sufi-puisi-kesunyian/>

³ Yusuf, E. (2014). 'Akhlak-Tasawuf Sufi Wanita: Belajar dari Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah'. *Jurnal An Nûr*, VI (2), 355–369.

⁴ esneem Alkiek. (2017). *Sayedaty* Ep. 4: Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah. July 30, 2017. <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/watch/series/sayedaty-ep-4-rabi'ah-al-adawiyah>

What set Rabi'ah apart from her contemporaries was her radical focus on pure, selfless love for the Divine. She rejected the idea of worship motivated by fear of Hell or desire for Paradise, insisting instead that true devotion must arise from a sincere longing for God alone. This concept—*mahabbah lillah*—became the central theme of her poetry and spiritual legacy. Her life choices, such as remaining unmarried, living in seclusion, and embracing asceticism, were direct manifestations of this theological stance.

Her biography is deeply intertwined with her poetic expressions. The themes of longing, detachment, and divine intimacy found in her poems are not abstract ideas, but lived experiences. Thus, her verses gain power not only from their lyrical quality but also from their authenticity as reflections of a soul that had endured loss and chosen spiritual solitude. Rabi'ah's life and work together offer a profound example of how personal struggle and inner transformation can give rise to a powerful and enduring spiritual voice in Islamic literature.

This study centers on ten carefully selected poems by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah in order to examine how her expressions of divine love were shaped by the spiritual and cultural environment in which she lived.⁵ These poems do not stand in isolation; rather, they are products of a broader religious atmosphere in early Islamic society—particularly within the formative years of the Abbasid period—where discussions of piety, asceticism, and mystical experience were gaining ground. The ways in which worship was understood at the time—often grounded in obedience and fear—are challenged by Rabi'ah's radical emphasis on love as the highest form of devotion.

In addition, the cultural norms surrounding gender during this era typically limited women's roles in public religious discourse. Rabi'ah's poetic voice, however, breaks through these boundaries. Her ability to articulate deep spiritual truths from a position of marginalization reflects a quiet yet powerful spiritual resistance, making her contributions both theologically and culturally significant. Her poems can be read not only as personal devotions, but also as subtle commentaries on the spiritual expectations placed on women in her time.

The five selected poems consistently reflect motifs such as longing (*shawq*), submission (*khudu'*), and pure love for God (*mahabbah lillah*)⁶. These themes serve as both emotional and

⁵ Abitolkha, A. M., & Muvid, M. B. (2021). The Education of Love and its Relevance to Islam as a Religion of Compassion: A Study on the Concept of Mahabbah of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355996463_The_Education_of_Love_and_its_Relevance_to_Islam_as_a_Religion_of_Compassion_A_Study_on_the_Concept_of_Mahabbah_of_Rabi'ah_al-Adawiyah

⁶ Daltim reporter. (2017). Konsep Mahabbah Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah. September 4, 2017. <https://www.nuruljadid.net/1589/konsep-mahabbah-rabiah-al-adawiyah>

theological windows—revealing Rabi’ah’s inner world while simultaneously mirroring the larger values within Islamic mystical tradition. Through this poetic lens, her work provides valuable insight into how spiritual expression can transcend cultural constraints and offer a more universal message of divine love and sincerity.

By examining Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah’s poetry through a literary lens—enriched by an understanding of her life story and the cultural landscape of early Islamic society—this study seeks to demonstrate the enduring significance of her spiritual voice. Her poems, though brief and deceptively simple in form, contain layered meanings that speak to the heart of Islamic mysticism. The interplay between poetic structure, symbolic language, and lived spiritual experience allows her work to resonate far beyond its historical context.

Biographical insights shed light on the authenticity behind her words, revealing how her expressions of divine love were not merely theoretical, but deeply rooted in personal devotion and sacrifice. Cultural analysis, meanwhile, uncovers how her rejection of reward-based worship challenged dominant narratives of religiosity, particularly for women in the early Abbasid era. Through this multidimensional approach, Rabi’ah’s poetry emerges not only as a reflection of her inner faith but also as a subtle form of spiritual resistance and reform.

Ultimately, this paper underscores how Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah remains a vital figure in classical Islamic literature⁷. Her poetic legacy continues to inspire readers across time and space, offering a model of sincere, selfless love for the Divine that transcends historical, cultural, and gender boundaries.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach with an emphasis on literary analysis, aiming to explore the spiritual dimensions embedded within the poetic language of Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah. As her poetry is rich with symbolic expression and emotional depth, a close reading is essential to uncover the subtle ways in which divine love is communicated. The literary lens enables this analysis to focus not only on content, but also on the form—how metaphors, repetition, rhythm, and imagery work together to express a relationship with the Divine that is intimate, passionate, and sincere.

By selecting specific poems that revolve around themes of longing (*shawq*), surrender (*khudu’*), and unconditional love (*mahabbah lillah*), the study identifies key patterns in her

⁷ IT, S. (2024a). Celestial Flames: Rabi’ah Al-Adawiyah’s Spiritual Journey Through Love. *Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, 4(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.22373/arj.v4i1.22860>

spiritual vocabulary and stylistic choices. These textual elements are not viewed in isolation, but in light of the poet's life story and historical context, as previously discussed. In doing so, this method ensures that interpretation remains faithful to both the poetic structure and the lived experience that inspired it.

Moreover, the descriptive aspect of the methodology allows space for a nuanced exploration of meaning without reducing the text to doctrine or dogma. It recognizes that Sufi poetry often operates on multiple levels—emotional, symbolic, and theological—and requires a method that is sensitive to ambiguity and depth. Therefore, this approach is best suited to examine how Rabi'ah's unique spiritual voice is reflected in her literary output and how it contributes to the broader tradition of Islamic mystical literature.

The primary data in this study comprises five selected poems attributed to Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, each carefully chosen for their clear articulation of *mahabbah lillah*—the pure love directed solely toward God. These poems serve as a textual foundation for exploring how divine love is not only expressed through poetic form but also intertwined with the poet's lived experience. The analysis adopts a thematic approach, allowing for the identification of recurring motifs such as longing (*shawq*), spiritual self-annihilation (*fana'*), detachment from worldly desires (*zuhd*), and sincere worship (*ikhlas*). These motifs are not merely poetic devices, but deeply embedded expressions of a spiritual worldview.

Importantly, these themes are analyzed in light of Rabi'ah's personal biography⁸, which offers invaluable insight into the emotional and spiritual intensity of her writings. Her life—marked by social marginalization, economic hardship, and profound personal loss—shaped the contemplative and deeply introspective tone of her poetry. Rather than viewing her verses in abstraction, the study situates them within her historical and spiritual context, acknowledging how her personal journey informed her theological position and poetic style.

By combining close textual analysis with biographical interpretation, the research aims to uncover how Rabi'ah's poetry functions as both a reflection of her inner state and a response to the cultural-religious structures of her time. This dual focus strengthens the analytical framework, positioning her poems as windows into a unique and enduring form of Islamic feminine spirituality.

⁸ Johnson, A. J. (2022). *Rābi'ah al-Adawiyah*. 2022. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/biography/rabiah-al-adawiyah>

To fully grasp the cultural dimension of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's poetry, this study takes into account the historical and social context of early Abbasid-era Basra, a city known for its vibrant intellectual, religious, and spiritual life. Basra during the 8th century was not only a center of theological debate and legal scholarship but also a space where ascetic movements and early Sufi ideas began to take shape. Within this environment, ideas about piety, detachment, and devotion evolved, and women's roles in spiritual discourse, though often limited, were not entirely absent. Rabi'ah's emergence as a female spiritual authority in this setting is both remarkable and deeply tied to the cultural climate of her time.

This study investigates how cultural values such as female piety, voluntary poverty (*zuhd*), and mystical longing influenced the poetic language and themes in Rabi'ah's verses. It also explores how these cultural frameworks shaped the reception of her work—how her poetry may have challenged or harmonized with dominant spiritual ideals. By doing so, the study highlights the interplay between personal spiritual experience and broader cultural expectations, showing how Rabi'ah's poetry simultaneously reflects and redefines the norms of her society.

To support the interpretation of the primary texts, this research incorporates secondary sources, including classical and contemporary works on Sufi literature, Islamic spirituality, historical records, and scholarly analysis. These materials help build a stronger analytical foundation, ensuring that the reading of her poetry is informed not only by literary sensitivity but also by cultural and historical understanding. The integration of these sources allows for a more nuanced and credible exploration of Rabi'ah's poetic legacy within the wider tradition of Islamic mysticism.

By integrating literary analysis with insights from biographical and cultural contexts, this study employs a multifaceted methodology that enables a rich and comprehensive reading of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's poetry. This approach allows the research to remain grounded in close textual interpretation—attending to symbolism, tone, and structure—while also situating each poem within the lived experience of the poet and the broader socio-religious dynamics of her time.

Rather than treating her verses as isolated literary artifacts, the method acknowledges that Rabi'ah's expressions of divine love were deeply shaped by her personal journey and the spiritual currents of the early Abbasid period⁹. Her language, though simple and direct, carries

⁹ Hawari, H. (2025). *Rabiah Al Adawiyah: Kisah Sufi yang Mengajarkan Cinta Ilahi*. Sabtu 03 Mei, 2025. <https://www.detik.com/hikmah/kisah/d-7896855/rabiah-al-adawiyah-kisah-sufi-yang-mengajarkan-cinta-ilahi>

a profound depth that reflects not only mystical insight but also cultural meaning. Through this layered approach, the study aims to uncover how her poetic voice bridges the personal and the universal, offering both an intimate glimpse into her soul and a broader commentary on Islamic spirituality.

Ultimately, this methodology ensures that Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's work is appreciated not only for its aesthetic and emotional power, but also for its enduring spiritual relevance and cultural significance within the classical Islamic literary tradition.¹⁰

DISCUSSION

The ten selected poems of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah collectively convey a unified and profound spiritual message: that true love (*mahabbah*) must be offered exclusively to God, free from personal gain, fear of punishment, or hope for reward¹¹. This vision of divine love, radical for her time, lies at the heart of her poetic legacy and reflects her position as a spiritual reformer within the early Sufi tradition. Unlike theological discourses that often emphasize obedience and consequence, Rabi'ah's poems call for love as a selfless act of devotion—a spiritual state grounded in sincerity and inner transformation.

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of her poetry, grouping the ten selected verses into key spiritual and cultural motifs that recur across her work. Each theme reflects not only mystical concepts such as longing (*shawq*), submission (*khudu'*), and divine intimacy, but also cultural tensions around female piety and spiritual authority in early Abbasid society. These themes are deeply informed by Rabi'ah's personal biography, where her life of poverty, solitude, and devotion shaped the emotional and theological content of her verses.

By organizing the discussion around these major themes, the chapter aims to reveal how Rabi'ah's poetry serves as both a mirror of her inner world and a voice within the broader Islamic mystic tradition. Her poems are not merely spiritual reflections, but also cultural responses—quiet yet powerful expressions of resistance, longing, and sacred love that continue to resonate across centuries.

¹⁰ IT, S. (2024b). Celestial Flames: Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah's Spiritual Journey Through Love. *Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, 4. <https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/abrahamic/article/view/22860>

¹¹ Owie, A. A. (2022). Prophetic Value in Da'wah Islamiyah Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah (Paul Ricoeur ' s Hermeneutical Study in the Book Mahabbah Cinta Rabi'ah Al Adawiyah Written by Asfari MS and Otto Sukatno). 6(2), 196–212. <https://doi.org/10.30762/mediakita.v6i2.48>

1. Divine Love beyond Reward or Fear

Among the most celebrated and frequently cited verses attributed to Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah is the following:

*"O Lord, if I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell;
and if I worship You for hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise.
But if I worship You for Your own sake,
do not deny me Your eternal beauty."
([O My Lord] TRANSLATED BY JANE HIRSHFIELD, 1994)*

This poem is perhaps the clearest and most powerful articulation of Rabi'ah's core spiritual philosophy: that love for God must be pure and unconditional, unmotivated by personal gain or fear of punishment. In just a few lines, she completely reframes the common religious mindset of her era, which often emphasized reward and punishment as central motivators for devotion. Instead, Rabi'ah presents a radical alternative—one that aligns with the highest ideals of Sufi spirituality, where the lover seeks only the presence and pleasure of the Beloved, without asking for anything in return.

From a literary perspective, the poem is striking in its clarity, rhythm, and structure. The use of repetition and contrast—"if... then..."—creates a rhythmic build-up that mirrors the intensity of her conviction. The progression from Hell to Paradise and finally to God's beauty (*jamāl*) also traces a spiritual ascent, from fear to hope, and finally to *love*, the highest spiritual state in Sufi cosmology.

Biographically, this declaration gains even more weight. Rabi'ah, having endured poverty, slavery, and loss, had no worldly attachments left to cling to. Her detachment was not just spiritual but also practical—she truly had nothing but God. As such, this poem can be read as an authentic voice of surrender, one that expresses a heart stripped of all expectations except the longing for Divine presence.

Culturally, this stance was extraordinary. In a time when religious practice was often ritualistic and external, Rabi'ah called for an inward reformation, for worship grounded in love rather than fear or duty. Her message challenged not only male-dominated religious norms but also broader societal expectations about what women could express in spiritual literature.

This poem, then, is not only a testament to Rabi'ah's theological insight but also a literary and cultural milestone—offering a vision of devotion that remains timeless in its beauty and transformative power.

2. Longing and Spiritual Yearning (Shawq)

Another recurring theme in Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's poetry is longing (*shawq*)—an emotional and spiritual condition characterized by deep yearning for union with the Divine. This longing is not rooted in absence alone, but in the awareness of separation from the Beloved that fuels the soul's desire to return to its true source. In one of her most intimate verses, she writes:

*"I have made You the companion of my heart,
but my body is for those who seek its company.
And my body is friendly to its guests,
but the Beloved of my heart is the guest of my soul."
(No Title, 2015)*

This poem reflects a clear division between the external and internal self. Rabi'ah acknowledges that while her physical body may exist in the world and interact with others, her soul belongs only to God. The dichotomy she presents—between bodily presence and spiritual intimacy—mirrors a broader Sufi motif where the outer world is a veil and the inner world is the true domain of divine encounter. Here, *shawq* is not simply longing in a romantic sense, but a spiritual force that directs the soul away from creation and toward the Creator.

From a literary standpoint, the poem uses the metaphor of hospitality—"guests" and "companionship"—to highlight the contrast between fleeting worldly interactions and the enduring presence of God within. The "guest of the soul" is a powerful image, suggesting that God is not distant but intimately present within her spiritual core, waiting to be welcomed with love and surrender.

Biographically, this theme is consistent with Rabi'ah's chosen lifestyle. She never married, deliberately avoiding emotional or material attachments that might distract her from her devotion. Her embrace of celibacy, solitude, and asceticism was not simply a withdrawal from the world, but a deliberate choice to focus entirely on her inner life and relationship with God. In this context, the longing she expresses is not a sign of weakness or lack, but a spiritual engine—a longing that purifies, sustains, and directs the seeker on the path of divine nearness.

Culturally, her expression of *shawq* offers a feminine counterpoint to the male-dominated Sufi tradition. Her voice is neither submissive nor decorative—it is assertive in its devotion and clarity. Through her poetry, Rabi’ah reminds readers that longing for the Divine is not a sign of distance, but of profound awareness, and that the journey of return begins with yearning.

3. Cultural Resistance and Feminine Spirituality

Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah’s poetry is not only a spiritual declaration—it is also a subtle form of cultural resistance, particularly in the way it redefines the boundaries of feminine religious expression in early Islamic society. In an era where women’s piety was often confined to the domestic sphere and valued for its silence and obedience, Rabi’ah boldly inserted herself into the heart of mystical discourse. Yet she did so not through institutional power or scholarly debate, but through the gentle strength of personal devotion and poetic clarity.

Her poetry consistently affirms an inner relationship with God that transcends social expectations. One of her deeply personal verses reveals this quiet defiance:

*"My joy, O my life, is to be close to You,
I wish no one knew of my love but You."
(My Joy English Version by Charles Upton, n.d.)*

Here, the speaker finds joy not in public recognition or validation, but in a private and direct connection with the Divine. This intimacy is revolutionary in its own way: in a religious culture that emphasized outward ritual, community roles, and visible piety, Rabi’ah turns inward. She embraces a spiritual autonomy where her worth is defined by sincerity, not visibility.

From a literary perspective, this poem displays the strength of understatement. The language is simple and unadorned, yet carries profound emotional and spiritual resonance. The desire to hide one’s love from all but the Beloved suggests an almost sacramental privacy, where the truest acts of devotion are those unseen and unspoken—intended for God alone. This echoes the Sufi ideal of *ikhlas* (sincerity), but with a distinctly feminine voice: nurturing, quiet, but unwavering.

Biographically, Rabi’ah’s life choices reflect this theme of resistance. Her decision not to marry, her refusal to align with social or religious expectations of women, and her status as a spiritual teacher to men all point to an unspoken defiance against gendered limitations. And yet, her resistance was never confrontational. It

was rooted in spiritual certainty, in the unshakable belief that closeness to God was available to all—regardless of status or gender.

Culturally, her poetry created space for female agency within Islamic mysticism. Without directly challenging the male-dominated religious structures, she carved out her own place simply by embodying spiritual authority. Her legacy demonstrates that genuine devotion, expressed with clarity and humility, carries its own power—a power that earned her the respect of male Sufi scholars and secured her voice in the canon of classical Islamic literature.

4. Symbolism: Fire, Light, and the Heart

Symbolism plays a central role in Sufi poetry, and Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's verses are no exception. Her use of imagery such as fire, light, and the heart reflects not only poetic elegance, but also profound spiritual metaphors rooted in the language of Islamic mysticism. These symbols are not ornamental—they carry theological meaning, illustrating the intensity of divine love and the transformative journey of the soul.

In one of her most evocative lines, she writes:

*"Your love has lit a fire in my heart.
It burns away everything but You."
(The Quotes of Rabia Al-Adawiyya, n.d.)*

In this brief yet powerful verse, fire becomes a symbol of purification, not punishment. Unlike the image of fire as torment—commonly associated with Hell—Rabi'ah reimagines fire as a creative and cleansing force, one that strips the soul of worldly attachments and distractions (*ghaflah*) until only God remains. This aligns with the Sufi concept of annihilation of the ego (*fana'*), where the self is burned away in the flame of divine presence.

The heart (*qalb*) in Islamic spirituality is regarded as the seat of inner knowledge and spiritual perception. When she speaks of fire burning in her heart, Rabi'ah signals that the transformation she undergoes is not external, but internal and deeply emotional. Her heart, once filled with worldly concerns, is now entirely consumed by divine longing. The process of burning is painful, but necessary—a trial that leads to clarity, sincerity, and union with the Beloved.

Light, though not explicitly mentioned in this quote, is closely associated with fire and often appears in Sufi writings as a metaphor for divine guidance (*nur*). Fire

produces light, and in the Sufi tradition, this light dispels the darkness of the ego and reveals the path to truth. Rabi'ah's inner fire thus becomes a source of both pain and illumination—an internal blaze that clears the way for closeness to God.

From a literary perspective, her minimalistic use of symbols demonstrates the power of simplicity in conveying spiritual depth. With just a few words, she captures an entire mystical process: love as ignition, suffering as purification, and the heart as the sacred space where the Divine dwells.

Culturally, her use of these symbols places her firmly within the Sufi tradition, yet her expressions are unique. As a woman writing from the margins of public religious life, Rabi'ah draws on familiar spiritual imagery and reclaims it through intimate, personal experience. Her fire is not that of male ascetics or martyrs—it is the quiet, inward flame of the lover, burning silently but intensely for no one else but God.

5. Stillness, Silence, and God Alone

A powerful yet often overlooked aspect of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's poetry is her emphasis on silence, solitude, and absolute trust in God. These qualities are not just personal preferences, but reflect the deeper spiritual orientation of *zuhd*—a form of renunciation and inner detachment that was central to early Islamic mysticism. Her poetic voice, though quiet, speaks volumes about a soul that has withdrawn from the noise of the world to find clarity and presence in the stillness of divine love.

In one of her most emotionally direct lines, she writes:

*"I am not afraid of anything but of being separated from You.
My only fear is that You hide Your face from me."
(The Quotes of Rabia Al-Adawiyya, n.d.)*

This verse captures one of the most essential themes in Sufi theology: the real fear is not worldly suffering or divine punishment, but the loss of intimacy with the Beloved. In this statement, Rabi'ah expresses a complete surrender—she no longer fears material hardship, social judgment, or even death. Her only concern is spiritual distance, the possibility that God might veil Himself from her heart. This represents the Sufi condition of *hijab* (veiling), where the soul longs for nearness but feels exiled from divine presence.

The literary simplicity of this poem heightens its emotional weight. The repetition of "fear" does not convey anxiety in the ordinary sense, but a spiritual

reverence, a trembling awareness of how precious divine closeness is. Rabi'ah does not beg for worldly comforts, nor does she seek external validation. Her words emerge from silence—both literal and spiritual—where the only voice she listens for is God's.

Biographically, this attitude is consistent with her ascetic lifestyle. She deliberately chose to live in isolation, free from marriage, wealth, or status. This physical detachment mirrored her inner commitment to silence and surrender. Her solitude was not a rejection of humanity, but a space of spiritual discipline—a sanctuary where divine love could be cultivated without distraction.

Culturally, her focus on inwardness and stillness contrasted with the increasingly public and performative nature of religious practice during the early Abbasid period. Rabi'ah's poetry models an alternative form of piety—one that values quiet depth over external display, and interior truth over ritual formality. In this sense, her poetry is both timeless and countercultural.

By expressing her deepest longing through silence, stillness, and spiritual fear—not of wrath, but of separation—Rabi'ah offers a vision of devotion that is stripped of noise, fear, and ambition. What remains is the soul, face turned toward God, waiting—not for reward, but for the grace of nearness.

Taken together, the ten selected poems by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah form a coherent spiritual vision centered on unconditional love for God as the highest aim of human existence. Throughout her poetry, Rabi'ah consistently portrays divine love as the only true source of joy, peace, and fulfillment—far beyond the rewards of Paradise or the fear of Hell¹². This unwavering focus distinguishes her voice in the early Sufi tradition, offering a model of devotion rooted in sincerity (*ikhlas*), detachment (*zuhd*), and longing (*shawq*).

Her poems blend symbolism, simplicity, and spiritual clarity, using fire, light, silence, and the heart as metaphors for inner transformation and divine proximity. These poetic elements are deeply personal, yet they also speak to universal spiritual experiences within the broader cultural and mystical framework of early Islam. Her repeated emphasis on solitude, inner

¹² Barbara Lois Helms. (1993). "Rabiah al-Adawiyah as Mystic Muslim and Woman" [Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University Montreal]. https://archive.org/stream/RabiahAlAdawiyahAsMysticMuslimAndWomanByBarbaraLoisHelms/Rabiah-al-Adawiyah-as-mystic-Muslim-and-woman-by-Barbara-Lois-Helms_djvu.txt

stillness, and hidden worship reveals a spirituality that is inward-focused and authentic, resisting both worldly distractions and religious formalism.

Biographically, Rabi'ah's life lends weight to the sincerity of her verses. Her choice of celibacy, poverty, and seclusion was not merely circumstantial, but a deliberate spiritual path that shaped her poetic expression. Her poetry is not the result of abstract theory—it is the voice of a woman who lived what she wrote, and who experienced divine love as both longing and fulfillment.

When examined through literary analysis, enriched by biographical and cultural understanding, her poems emerge not only as refined expressions of devotional literature, but as lasting testimonies of spiritual autonomy, emotional depth, and theological insight. Her voice remains powerful because it is personal, sincere, and uncompromising. Even today, centuries later, Rabi'ah's poetry continues to resonate—inviting readers into a space of stillness, love, and complete surrender to the Divine.

No.	Excerpt (English Translation)	Theme	Spiritual Meaning
1.	<i>If I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell...</i>	Unconditional devotion	Worship should come from pure love, not fear or reward
2.	<i>Your love has lit a fire in my heart. It burns away everything but You.</i>	Purification through love	Divine love erases ego and worldly distractions
3.	<i>I have made You the companion of my heart...</i>	Longing (shawq)	The soul seeks intimacy with God, beyond physical company
4.	<i>My only fear is that You hide Your face from me.</i>	Fear of separation (fana')	The greatest fear is losing connection with the Divine
5.	<i>I wish no one knew of my love but You.</i>	Hidden worship (ikhlas)	Sincerity is shown through quiet, private devotion

Table 1. Excerpt, Theme, and Spiritual Meaning

CONCLUSION

The poems of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah provide a unique perspective on the early growth of Islamic mystical literature, especially in how they reflect deep and sincere love for God. After analyzing ten of her poems, it becomes clear that her focus on *mahabbah lillah*—loving

God purely for who He is—forms the heart of her message. This kind of love, free from the desire for reward or fear of punishment, makes her one of the first figures to express true spiritual devotion in Islamic poetry.

By using a literary perspective, we can see how Rabi'ah's poetic language—rich in symbols and emotional expression—gives voice to her inner spiritual state. Her poems are closely tied to her personal life story: a woman who experienced loss and hardship, chose to live simply, and devoted herself fully to worship. This background gives her poetry both depth and honesty.

Culturally, her work also reflects the spiritual environment of her time. She lived during a period when devotion was becoming more personal, and her poems show how spiritual women could challenge common ideas through silent, heartfelt expression. Her verses are simple, but their messages are timeless and still meaningful for readers today.

In short, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah's poetry is more than just beautiful writing—it is a sincere reflection of a deep spiritual journey. Her life and her words show that love for God can go beyond fear and reward, becoming a pure and lasting connection. Through her poems, she continues to inspire hearts across generations.

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