

An Investigation into Taboo-Breaking in the Didactic Language of Rumi Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi

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ABSTRACT

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The spiritual Masnavi, as one of the most prominent classic works in world literature and Iranian mystical literature, has the most amazing type of narrative. In the psychological and sociological structure of this work, with the help of realistic and meaning-oriented taboo-breaking, Rumi has transformed it into one of the unique types of educational and training literature. Humor, satire, and the use of obscene words, although on the surface, create an unpleasant feeling in the modern audience of the Masnavi; But deep thought and reflection in its humorous verses open up the obscure points of a person's life like a corridor, connecting him from the sad depths of ignorance to a bright world. Beauty and ugliness in speech do not have intrinsic validity. For this reason, these two characteristics are relative. Based on this thinking, the audience considers the inner value of a subject, regardless of what form of speech the creator of the literary work presents to him on the surface. Therefore, the validity of the sense and the originality of the meaning explain literature in Rumi's view in a way that does not correspond to the customs of the people of the time. The reason for Rumi's transfer of concepts in this way can be identified in several environmental, educational, jurisprudential and situational types. In addition to analyzing the motives for Rumi's taboo-breaking, this essay also aims to examine these types using a descriptive-analytical and library method.

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Introduction

Masnavi-ye Ma'navi is one of the most profound classics of world literature and Persian mysticism, distinguished by its unique narrative structure. Within this work, Rumi employs a realistic and meaning-oriented form of “taboo-breaking” to establish a highly effective didactic and pedagogical framework. While the use of ribaldry, satire, and harsh language may evoke discomfort in a contemporary reader, a deeper reflection reveals that these elements serve as a labyrinthine path, guiding the reader from the darkness of ignorance toward spiritual enlightenment. The research addresses the fundamental question: How does Rumi utilize norm-breaking language to direct the reader toward self-knowledge and divine gnosis? Furthermore, it investigates how Rumi distinguishes his didactic taboo-breaking from mere vulgarity.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical, and library-based methodology. It examines the motives behind Rumi’s taboo-breaking, categorizing them into four dimensions: environmental, educational, *jurisprudential*, and situational. By analyzing Rumi’s specific stylistic choices within the *Masnavi*, the paper explores the functional role of harsh language in dismantling the audience’s conventional habits and expectations to facilitate a transformative spiritual experience.

Results

The research yields several key findings:

١. **Didactic Intent vs. Vulgarity:** Taboo-breaking is not an end in itself for Rumi, but a strategic pedagogical tool. Rumi purposefully utilizes shocking language to disrupt the reader’s complacency, compelling them to look past the “shell” (the literal, often offensive language) to grasp the “nut” (the spiritual truth).
٢. **Motives for Taboo-Breaking:** The study identifies that these linguistic disruptions are driven by specific needs:
 - *Environmental:* Reflecting the social norms of Rumi’s time, where explicit language regarding bodily functions was less taboo than in modern, reserved cultural contexts.

- *Educational*: Rumi employs “shock therapy” to confront the ego, particularly when standard moralizing fails to reach the seeker.
 - *Jurisprudential/Situational*: By following the tradition of other mystics (like Sana’i) and even jurisprudential precedents where explicit language served clarity, Rumi legitimizes his approach as a tool for guidance.
۳. **Deconstruction of Stagnation**: Rumi’s narrative structure is inherently fluid; he deliberately disrupts the listener’s expectations, moving from serious moral discourse to jarring satire. This fluctuation prevents the listener from becoming intellectually stagnant, forcing them to remain attentive and engaged in the dialectical movement toward God.
۴. **Historical Continuity**: The analysis places Rumi within a tradition of Persian mystical literature—influences such as Sana’i are evident—where harsh or “indecent” language is deployed to expose hypocrisy and force the seeker to confront the naked reality of the self.

Conclusion

Rumi’s taboo-breaking is a purposeful didactic methodology designed to shatter the ego’s defenses and conventional expectations. By employing language that challenges social norms, Rumi acts as a spiritual physician who prescribes harsh medicine to cure the disease of ignorance. The research concludes that Rumi’s norm-breaking is structurally and teleologically distinct from vulgarity; it is a *sophisticated* literary strategy meant to deconstruct stagnant habits and propel the seeker toward the divine. Thus, the “indecent” in Rumi’s language is ultimately a mechanism of “truth-telling” (*Haqiqat-namayi*), confirming that for Rumi, the ultimate objective—divine guidance—justifies the linguistic means.