

Research Article

The Feminine Aspect in Islamic Spirituality (A Study of the Thought of Annemarie Schimmel)

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Abstract

This research aims to explain the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality by using the study of Annemarie Schimmel's thoughts. The term feminine is generally interpreted as a trait, a characteristic possessed by women. In the context of Sufism, the terms feminine and masculine do not lie in literal gender, but rather in the characteristics or spiritual traits that are considered to have traits that are often identified with the concept of feminine or masculine. The type of research used in this study is a pure type of library research that examines various related information from both primary data sources (primary source) and supporting data sources (second source). The results of this study explain that women have a very important role in Sufism. The attributes of Jalal and Jamal are two aspects of Allah's attributes towards His Essence. This is what Annemarie Schimmel's thinking is based on, she shows various feminine elements, such as the archetype of the soul (nafs) which is represented and embodied in the form of a woman, because nafs in Islam has several meanings associated with traits that are considered female characteristics. In the Quran for example, nafs can mean "soul" that incites evil (QS Yusuf: 53), "accusing soul" (QS al-Qiyamah :2), or "peaceful soul" (QS al-Fajr: 27-28).

Keywords: : Women, Sufism, feminine, Islamic spirituality, Annemarie Schimmel.



INTRODUCTION

The study of women's issues has always been an intriguing discourse across various fields of knowledge, including Islamic discourse. The problems examined and confronted are very complex. These range from gender inequality, the exploitation of women, to interpretations of Quranic verses that are gender-biased and patriarchal, which have led to accusations against Islam as the source of injustices in society, including in male-female relationships. However, in reality, this argument contextually violates the essence of humanity because many feminine traits are not visible in Islamic discourse, particularly in the study of Sufism. In Sufi literature, male (masculine) Sufis are far more numerous and dominant compared to female Sufis.

The Sufi approach in the gender paradigm could be a solution to the question of whether men are more masculine and superior to women (feminine), or whether both are equal, because Sufism contains no inherent feminine or masculine elements. The condition of the human heart is most important, which is the essence of life. As Said Aqil Siroj, quoted by Achmad Faesol, stated, the feminine or masculine factor in Sufi dialogue is not a serious obstacle, and men and women have equal opportunities to receive *maqāmāt* and *aḥwāl* (spiritual states) to explore the path to becoming a true Sufi.

The understanding of male (masculine) and female (feminine) gender in Sufi discourse becomes clearer in the concept of love, ontologically, epistemologically, and axiologically. Many notable female Sufi figures have been well-known in the history of Sufism due to their dedication to the spiritual path. Examples include Rabia al-Adawiyyah, Maryam Al-Basriyyah, Bariyyah Al-Masuliyyah, and many others. This suggests that one who becomes a Sufi or a Waliullah (friend of God) does not have to be male. The fundamental requirement is the condition of the heart, which is the center of a person's life, both physically and spiritually.

Although in Sufism women hold the highest position in terms of spirituality and gender is not considered a barrier for reaching the highest level of servitude to God, the terms feminine and masculine in Sufism do not literally refer to biological sex but rather to spiritual characteristics or qualities associated with femininity or masculinity. Studies on women in Sufism mostly focus on this and still need to revisit how to express feminine qualities or the attribute of *jamāl* (beauty) in Sufism, such as love, compassion, and obedience, because many feminine traits are still not apparent

in Sufi studies.

Therefore, the researcher aims to study Annemarie Schimmel's thoughts on the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality within this context, as so far, no one has thoroughly investigated the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality according to Annemarie Schimmel. The researcher recognizes that studies of women in Islamic spirituality from an orientalist approach always attract attention, although many orientalist studies are partial and generally not objective. Unlike them, Annemarie Schimmel was able to position herself and study the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality objectively.

Studying Annemarie's views on the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality is important for several reasons: First, Annemarie Schimmel was the first female orientalist to study women in Sufism, particularly feminine traits, with academic integrity. This underpins her efforts to study women objectively in Sufism, trying to reconcile the subject with Islamic spirituality. Second, her discussion of the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality in her works is very interesting because, as an orientalist, she was able to deeply analyze and understand it objectively. Third, this research is expected to enrich the discussion on the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality according to Annemarie Schimmel, as the author observes that such studies are still very limited.

These three reasons motivate the author to explore Annemarie Schimmel's views on the feminine aspect in Islamic spirituality more deeply. Hence, the author formulates the title "Women in Sufism: The Feminine Aspect in Islamic Spirituality (A Study of Annemarie Schimmel's Thought)." It is an intriguing idea to be further explored to provide better understanding of how the feminine aspect manifests in Islamic spirituality.

METHOD

This research uses a pure library research method that examines various relevant information from both primary sources and supporting sources. According to Mardalis, a study is a type of research that utilizes a variety of available library materials, such as documents, books, magazines, historical accounts, and others, to gather information and data.

The primary data sources in this study are the books *My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam* and *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Meanwhile, the supporting sources consist of materials obtained from libraries, books, journals, or works related to the topic under study.

The data collection technique used in this research is literature study, which involves activities related to the method of collecting library data, reviewing, reading and note-taking, as well as processing research materials related to the problem being studied. This technique is carried out with the aim of finding various theories relevant to this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Nafs as a Symbol of Femininity in Islamic Spirituality

The word *nafs* is mentioned repeatedly in the Quran, appearing 295 times in various forms; some sources say 331 times, with 72 occurrences as *nafs* specifically standing alone. In the Hadith literature, the exact count of the word *nafs* is difficult to determine because the collections are spread across various books such as *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, and others.

The term *nafs* itself has diverse meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In Arabic, *nafs* has many meanings, one of which is "soul." In the Indonesian Dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*), *nafs* (or *nafsu*) is also understood as a strong urge or desire to commit wrong deeds. The term *nafs* here refers to the Arabic usage as found in the Quran.

Linguistically, according to the *Al-Munjid* dictionary cited by Ramadan Lubis, *nafs* (plural *nufus* or *anfus*) means "spirit" (*ruh*) and "self" (*'ain*). According to Ibn Kathir, *nafs* does not mean lust or evil but rather the soul or personality. Al-Ghazali describes *nafs* as the center of the human potential for anger and desire.

In its absolute meaning, the word *nafs* in religious texts almost exclusively carries the

connotation of "lower instincts," or evil human traits. Countless metaphors discuss the "taming of the rebellious woman," which relates to strict education of the nafs. One of its most important manifestations is in the form of a woman.

The story of Yusuf and Zulaikha is one such narrative highlighted in the Quran and is a central focus in Annemarie Schimmel's book *My Soul Is a Woman*. Zulaikha, full of love, ultimately becomes the personification of the human soul, the nafs, as described in the Quran in Surah Yusuf, ammarah bi'su ("inciting to evil"). However, through continuous inner struggle and relentless suffering, the nafs is purified and returns to its Lord as a "peaceful soul."

Zulaikha, the seductress or temptress, is portrayed in the Quran as such in Surah Yusuf, verses 23–35, and revisited in verses 50–52.

لَكَ تَ هَيَاتَ وَقَالَ بَ الْبُؤَاتِ وَغَلَقَ نَفْسِهِ عَنْ بَيْتِهَا فِي هَوَايَا وَرَاوَدَتْهُ
نَ مَوَاطِنَ حَقْلٍ لَ إِنَّهُ مَتَوَايَا نَ أَحْسَنَ يَ رَبِّ إِنَّهُ اللَّائِي دَ مَعَ قَالَ

"And the woman in whose house he was living sought to seduce him. She closed the doors and said, 'Come to me.' Yusuf said, 'I seek refuge in Allah; my Lord has made good my stay.'"

For those who live in ascetic fear of anything feminine, they would be quite satisfied that it is precisely Surah Yusuf which touches on the art of seduction in such a manner, discussing the nafs or "soul" understood as ammarah bi'sū—"inciting to evil"—because the grammatical gender of the word nafs itself is feminine. It should function as a symbol of the woman whose sensuality always obstructs religious tendencies and the harsh struggles of men oriented towards reason.

This statement implies that individuals who hold a negative view of feminine qualities—often seeing them as disruptive or harmful in spiritual or devout contexts—would find satisfaction in the discourse in Surah Yusuf about the nafs as a soul that incites evil. This is due to the feminine grammatical gender of the word nafs in Arabic.

It also indicates that in societies prioritizing logic and rationality—typically

associated with men—the feminine nature of the nafs can be perceived as an obstacle for individuals, especially men, in pursuing rigorous spiritual or religious struggles. Therefore, difficulty in embracing or understanding the sensual feminine aspect within oneself can be seen as a barrier in spiritual or religious journeys, particularly in contexts that emphasize the harshness of religious struggle, often viewed as a masculine, rational domain.

If in Surah Yusuf (53) the nafs is described as “inciting evil,” the same concept, but with different attributes, is found in two other places in the Quran: nafs lawwāmah (“the reproaching soul”) in Surah Al-Qiyamah [75]:2, and nafs muṭma’innah (“the peaceful soul”) in Surah Al-Fajr [89]:27. However, beyond these specific references, the word is value-neutral in the Quran and generally refers to the self in a broad sense.

Nafs ammarah is the biological soul that drives humans to satisfy their biological needs. In this respect, humans are no different from animals, thus nafs ammarah is also called nafs hayawaniyah. The nafs lawwāmah is explicitly mentioned once in the Quran and means the soul that blames itself, or in Sufi terms, the soul that has become aware of its faults. However, at this level, it is still easy to commit the same mistakes. After surpassing this second stage, one reaches the third level: nafs muṭma’innah, the peaceful soul.

According to Annemarie Schimmel, these three stages offer Sufis strong support to resist base instincts, gradually enabling them to hope to attain the highest level of perfection. Did not the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) say that the greatest enemy of man is himself and that the most formidable jihad is against the desires of the nafs?

In Sufi terminology, al-nafs refers to bad qualities or immoral behaviors, whereas al-ruh and al-qalb refer to the human essence. It is with this essence that Sufis strive to achieve the highest level of perfection. To reach this, they use al-zauq, the most important spiritual power, or union with God.

Meanwhile, from the Quranic perspective, nafs is created by Allah in a perfect state,

designed to harbor and motivate humans to perform both good and evil deeds. As stated in Surah Al-Shams [91]:7-8:

"And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it
And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness."

The word inspired here means that the nafs enables humans to understand good and evil and urges them to choose between them.

Referring to the Quran, the meanings of nafs are varied:

1. Nafs as self (QS. Ali Imran [3]:61; QS. Yusuf [12]:54; QS. al-Dzariyat [51]:21)
2. Nafs as God's self (QS. al-An'am [6]:12, 54)
3. Nafs as person (QS. al-Furqan [25]:3; QS. al-An'am [6]:130)
4. Nafs as spirit (QS. al-An'am [6]:93)
5. Nafs as soul (QS. al-Fajr [89]:27; QS. al-Shams [91]:7)
6. Nafs as total human (QS. al-Ma'idah [5]:32; QS. al-Qashash [28]:19,33)
7. Nafs as the inner side that gives rise to behavior (QS. al-Ra'd [13]:11; QS. al-Anfal [8]:53).

In Islamic mysticism, nafs often refers to selfish and lustful aspects within humans tending toward worldly and material things. "Lower instincts" can be interpreted as desires emerging from the base nafs, such as worldly cravings, greed, or carnal desires.

According to Annemarie Schimmel, the nafs as a feminine element is lower than 'aql (intellect), whose task is to tame or discipline it. The word nafs appears in many texts; Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Rūmī in the Masnavi describes it as the mother of humanity, while 'aql is the father.

Rūmī's earliest story in the Masnavi tells of a sick slave girl, which Schimmel

interprets as a metaphor for the separation of low worldly instincts, since all female figures in mystical stories and poems ultimately represent the nafs. This metaphor reveals the potential that women can attain a higher level of perfection.

Any initially worthless figure can become a true “man of God,” meaning one who achieves the goal of becoming a “peaceful soul.” Every woman can be seen as a personification of the nafs and thus be disparaged by the “man of God.” Many poetic depictions by medieval European Christian and Sufi writers portray the soul of a woman in similar ways, including the image of “Lady World,” an old and wicked prostitute.

In the Masnavi, Rūmī also tells of an old woman who hides her beauty by tearing Quranic verses and pasting the fragments on her wrinkles. Similarly, a 19th-century Punjabi Sufi poet described the duplicitous world as Banglam, a “witch woman from Bengal” who incites everyone to futile acts with magical flute songs.

In Muslim societies, Annemarie found ideas portraying women as imperfect (less rational and religious), as similarly expressed in medieval Christian teachings and Islamic theology, such as the role of Eve and how she is depicted in “Stories of the Prophets.”

She argues this has no basis in the Quran and is worsened by prohibitions against women reading the Quran during impurity days. Yet Rūmī knew God hears the prayers of menstruating women.

Such views that see women as low and dangerous encouraged the habit of calling anyone truly on God’s path a “man.” This implies mystics clearly knew a person walking God’s path was not a woman but a “man,” which is how they first described Rabi’ah. The noun “man” could signify anyone seriously striving toward God without direct reference to biological gender.

According to Ibn Arabi, true rajuliyyah (manliness) is perfected when a man is purified by intellect and spiritual guidance after leaving behind the darkness of

nature and base desires. Conversely, a man who cannot meet spiritual demands is worse than “women.”

Nonetheless, the three Quranic levels of the nafs provide a basis for a higher valuation of women’s potential to grow.

For true believers, there is no difference between man and woman in terms of God’s love. This means “man” and “woman” are worldly concepts tied to temporary forms made of dust, while the soul is unrelated to dust. When men and women reach perfect manifestation, they no longer have individual existence.

Annemarie Schimmel explains women’s important role in Sufism. Women are not only objects of love or beloveds but can reach the same spiritual perfection as men. She highlights that in Sufism, women have the opportunity to explore deep spirituality and attain truth individually.

Women in Sufism are often honored as influential figures with great spiritual insight. By studying classical Sufi texts and stories of women in Sufi history, Annemarie asserts women play a significant role in deepening understanding of spirituality and absolute truth in Sufi tradition.

Clearly, Sufism supports feminine development more than many other Islamic traditions. Even the Persian mystic poet Sana’i (d. 1131), not particularly favorable to women, said, “A pious woman is better than a thousand wicked men.” The symbol of the nafs as feminine can be illustrated through elements such as:

a. Nafs as Maternal Element

Nafs can be described as maternal. In Islam, the mother has great significance. Note that the word rahmah (compassion) derives from the divine names ar-Rahman (The Most Merciful) and ar-Rahim (The Most Compassionate), rooted in the same origin meaning “offspring,” which applies to all Quranic surahs except At-Taubah.

Compassion is synonymous with existence, and because love encompasses

everything, Rahim is called “a branch of the Most Merciful.” Nothing encompasses everything except extension because love encompasses all, even non-existence, as compassion is the name of existence.

According to Sri Suyanta et al., in Sufism, God is considered the Most Loving Being, from whom emanate Ar-Rahman and Ar-Rahim. Rahman is God’s universal love given to all (masculine love), while Rahim is love given to the truly beloved (feminine love). Everything in this world derives from God’s Rahman and Rahim because His Rahman encompasses all.

This shows extraordinary maternal potential. Asma Barlas argues the Quran honors mothers by including them within God’s symbolism because both are involved in creation and showing compassion. The Quran depicts a dynamic relationship between divinity and motherhood, making mothers respected in Muslim societies. This arises from the fact that divine attributes ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim appear in the mother’s womb, so the mother contains part of God’s creative energy.

Annemarie Schimmel says the symbol of nafs as maternal represents feminine aspects in Islamic mysticism. Maternal qualities in the human soul include compassion, generosity, gentleness, and gentle courage.

The concept of nafs in Islam is not only linked to desires and passions but also encompasses spiritual dimensions depicting gentleness and warmth, like a mother protecting and nurturing her children. This symbol reflects strength and tenderness simultaneously, as well as duality in the human soul, much like a mother’s role in protecting, understanding, and healing. According to Schimmel, this symbolism reveals the spiritual power inherent in feminine traits.

b. Longing as a Feminine Soul

In Ibn Arabi’s concept, woman is the highest and noblest object of masculine longing, personifying the Divine encompassing active and passive, masculine and feminine traits within Himself.

Ibn Arabi also explains that a man's longing for a woman mirrors God's longing for humans, rooted in His word: "I breathed into him My spirit" (QS. Al-Hijr 15:29). Simply put, God longs for Himself in humans.

Annemarie Schimmel states another way to restore a woman's true essence is to form her into the "man of God" aspired to. After all, like her worldly counterpart, the soul, woman is also a subject who seeks and longs, continuously searching for the path to the Divine Beloved.

Sufis turn away from the material world and focus on the soul's mystery because they long to meet their Beloved. Longing is also the feminine side of love. It has been said that only women can truly experience love as sacred devotion that burns with passion while denying hope of fulfillment.

Schimmel explains longing is feminine because in Islamic mysticism it is often linked with love for God. Here, longing is a deep, compassionate feeling marking the relationship between humans and God. Women are thought to have greater emotional sensitivity than men and thus tend to experience and express spiritual longing more readily.

These qualities correspond with the caring, loving, and empathetic feminine nature. In Islamic mysticism, longing is also an inner urge to approach God, seek truth, and feel His presence more deeply. Schimmel therefore views longing as a feminine trait supporting the mystical paradigm emphasizing the inner relationship between humans and God.

To fully understand the ideas of feminine longing and acceptance, Annemarie suggests reconsidering symbols, poets, and mystics who describe a person's relationship with their beloved.

Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Rūmī, for instance, uses the mirror as a distinctive feminine symbol because a mirror reflects the image of the beloved without adding anything of its own.

According to Rūmī, the mirror represents love's dual form: love as a mirror for the self and for God. In the mirror, God manifests Himself as a shining reflection showing His beauty and majesty. Thus, the mirror symbolizes love connecting the individual with God and depicting God's beauty and majesty in the individual.

Sufis following Ibn Arabi's ideas compare creation to a mirror, meaning the mirror tries to assert its own existence amid the absence of divine manifestation. Only by turning creation back toward God can one gradually gather ideas of the Creator's glory through a mirror, at least for those "with eyes to see."

Sufis consider the material world a representation (mirror) of God's beautiful names (al-asmā' al-husnā). Certain divine attributes manifest at each level of existence: mineral, plant, and animal. At the mineral level, God's beauty is reflected somewhat in stones and precious metals.

In the plant world, thousands of flower species with stunning colors inspire poets profoundly. Likewise, different animal species have distinct beauty and posture. However, humans uniquely reflect God's attributes perfectly because humans are an integrated microcosm.

Yet, the mirror is not the only symbol of the receptive feminine soul. Other metaphors appear in Schimmel's thought, such as musical instruments. Again, Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Rūmī's compositions, centered on music, attract attention. It is no coincidence the Masnavi opens with "The Song of the Reed Flute."

Rūmī identifies himself as a flute producing music only when touched by the breath of the beloved. The metaphors of the flute and other instruments serve the same purpose of embodying the longing soul.

2. Analysis of Annemarie Schimmel's Thought on Feminine Traits in Sufism

From the above, Annemarie Schimmel uses nafs as a symbol of femininity because in

Islam nafs has several meanings related to traits considered feminine. In the Quran, nafs can mean “soul inciting evil” (QS Yusuf: 53), “the reproaching soul” (QS al-Qiyamah: 2), or “the peaceful soul” (QS al-Fajr: 27–28), as previously explained.

Schimmel identifies these meanings as tending toward nafs with base worldly traits such as desires and imbalanced tendencies. Thus, nafs can be seen as representing traits considered feminine in Islamic culture and theology, such as lack of intellect and religion. Schimmel uses nafs as a feminine symbol to show how women in Islam are often regarded as personifications of deficient traits and to critique social-cultural constructs that view women as less valuable in Muslim society.

The concept of nafs as a symbol of femininity has depth and complexity fitting the complexity of women. In the Sufi tradition extensively explained by Schimmel, nafs represents the spiritual and psychological hidden side of humans, often linked with emotions, instincts, and desires. Nafs is understood as the center of desire and motivation driving individuals. In terms of feminine traits, this refers to gentleness, wisdom, and intuitive qualities often associated with women.

Schimmel likely sees the connection between nafs and femininity as a way to highlight the inner depth women possess. By using nafs as a symbol of femininity, Schimmel aims to show that beyond narrow stereotypes, women have rich spiritual and psychological dimensions. In this view, women are beings with great inner strength, capable of facing life’s challenges with wisdom and deep gentleness.

In her thought, Annemarie Schimmel is influenced by Ibn Arabi, Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Rūmī, and other mystic poets, especially regarding feminine traits in Sufism. She discusses the concept of the feminine soul profoundly, particularly related to nafs in Islamic tradition. Schimmel explains that nafs, often seen as the lustful soul, also has a rich and complex feminine dimension.

This is because Sufism focuses on the inner dimension and addresses core issues: the nature of the human soul and its purification. Although outwardly men are symbolized as masculine and women as feminine, each person has feminine or

beautiful qualities within.

According to Irawati and Burhanuddin, Sufism presents God very kindly and emphasizes His feminine side. Thus, women, with their femininity, have a high status because God's feminine aspect exists within them.

The view that women have low spirituality is incorrect; women more easily establish a relationship with God due to their feminine nature. Actually, Sufism does not prioritize gender but rather one's status before God.

The soul is seen as full of gentleness and emotional depth, like traits often stereotyped as feminine. Emphasizing femininity in the symbol of the soul can also depict the profound relationship between humans and God in Islamic spirituality.

According to Ibn Arabi, humans are created based on God's names, His majestic (jalal) and beautiful (jamal) attributes, making humans the most perfect beings. Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Rūmī believed women embody God's beauty, gentleness, and mercy. Men embody qahr (might) and universal intellectual activity, while women embody luthf (grace), receptivity, and the peaceful soul's beauty, where God clearly manifests.

Sachiko Murata also recognized the yin qualities identified with beautiful names (jamal, luthf, rahmah) and yang qualities with majestic names (jalal, qohar, ghadab). She said a soul submitting to the lower is a negative feminine trait, while submitting to the higher—intellect, God—is a positive feminine trait, because it submits only to the higher. A soul wanting to dominate and exalt itself is negative masculine, while a soul overcoming nafs ammarah and reaching nafs muṭma'innah is positive masculine.

Once reaching the peaceful soul, one becomes the "true man" merging spirit and intellect, thus becoming an active spirit (positive masculine) controlling body and soul in harmony.

Al-Ghazali, in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, divides the soul into two: nafs lawwāmah (always mastering evil) and nafs muṭma'innah (always inviting goodness). Schimmel also

explains the nafs in three senses from the Quran: “inciting evil” (ammarah bi’sū), “the reproaching soul” (nafs lawwāmah), and “the peaceful soul” (nafs muṭma’innah).

This journey from lower to higher spiritual levels aims for greater spiritual awareness and deeper self-consciousness.

According to Al-Kindi, the soul is within humans, originating from God’s substance and distinct from the body (jism). He differentiates the two by saying the body has passions and anger, while the soul restrains these desires. The nafs is a simple entity created by God, like sunlight emanates from Him.

In *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel explains that in Islamic mysticism the soul is often symbolized as feminine, referring to gender roles in symbolism and soul representation in Islamic mysticism. The soul is associated with feminine traits such as gentleness, compassion, intimacy, and sincerity.

Thus, the feminine soul is often considered capable of bringing one closer to God. The depiction of the soul as feminine in Islamic mysticism reflects the complex relationship between gender, spirituality, and the quest for meaning in Islam.

Schimmel portrays the female soul’s key role in Islamic spirituality and mysticism. She highlights that although women face social obstacles, they often play a strong, important role in mysticism. She explains how female Sufis like Rabi’ah al-Adawiyya and Siti Zainab have had great influence in Islamic mysticism.

Women are often regarded as “spiritual teachers” with the ability to bring individuals closer to God through empathy, gentleness, and spiritual guidance. Schimmel also discusses historical female Islamic figures such as female Sufis and spiritual leaders who contributed significantly to Islamic spirituality and mysticism.

According to Schimmel, women are the secret manifestation of Allah SWT. The existence of women is indicated by the presence of the nafs. It is thus easy to determine whether a person is feminine or masculine because it depends on behavior

(not physical form).

However, Ibn Arabi goes further, seeing the nafs not only as feminine but extending the concept to the divine essence. The feminine aspect is the best way to find God or where God is most knowable.

One way to show femininity in Sufism is by observing how a person can move from nafs ammarah to nafs muṭma'innah. In Sufism, the issue is not demanding women's rights as set by men, as feminist movements proclaim, but rather revealing femininity as love and compassion.

As Said Aqil Siradj states in *Tasawuf Sebagai Kritik Sosial*, gender identity is unknown among Sufis. Sufism is free of feminine or masculine elements, as the heart's condition is the main component and center of life.

According to Schimmel, there is one domain in women where they have equal rights, namely mysticism. Though the perfect woman in Schimmel's thought is still called "man of God," pious and learned women inspire admiration and are widely recognized in Islamic history. Her study of the female soul in Schimmel's thought serves as a historical figure outline and a symbol of the human soul longing for God.

Ibn Arabi also states that women were created to be loved and cherished, not objects of lust or sources of evil. This view is based on Prophet Muhammad's words:

الصلوة ينفيني قرة وجعل والطيب النساء: الدن يا من إلي د ب

"I have been made to love three things in this world: women, perfume, and the comfort of my heart during prayer." (Hadith narrated by An-Nasa'i No. 3879 and Ahmad No. 11845).

In the above hadith, the Prophet emphasizes, "I have been made to love women," meaning that his love is in the name of God, not "I love women" driven by lust or selfishness. Therefore, a man's longing and love for a woman should be comparable to his longing and love for God. According to Frithjof Schuon, perfume or fragrant oil, like music, symbolizes formless beauty, while woman is the symbol of beauty in

form.

Nevertheless, there is no difference between the two genders (male and female) in the realm of spiritual life. As expressed by Maulana Abdul Rahman Jami, a Persian poet, philosopher, and Sufi historian, regarding Rabi'ah, "If all women were as we have described, then women would be preferred over men. For femininity is not a shame for the sun, nor is masculinity an honor for the moon."

Husein Muhammad states in his book *Women Scholars on the Stage of History* that it is very important not to restrict certain traits within the context of gender to only "masculine" or "feminine." According to Husein, these traits should be possessed by anyone regardless of traditional gender stereotypes. It is crucial to understand that both men and women have diverse traits that do not always have to be linked to their gender.

Moreover, Husein Muhammad offers a somewhat progressive perspective on the relationship between men and women. He believes that both should have equal roles in society. He emphasizes the importance of giving women equal opportunities to participate in various matters, including religious affairs. He stresses respecting women's rights and providing opportunities for their development without gender discrimination. Husein also highlights the role of men in supporting gender equality within families and society as a whole.

As explained in the previous chapter, the concepts of feminine and masculine, besides functioning as dualities underlying the *sunnatullah* (law of nature) of the universe, can also be understood from the names of Allah, the *asmā' al-ḥusnā* (the beautiful names), which are representations of God's attributes toward Himself. According to Nasaruddin Umar, approximately 80% of the *asmā' al-ḥusnā* consist of gentle or maternal (feminine) attributes rather than paternal attributes, known as *jalāl* and *jamāl*. This means knowledge with masculine qualities implies power relations, while knowledge with feminine qualities implies compassion and love.

Jalāl and *Jamāl* represent duality in life. *Jalāl* symbolizes masculine qualities: strength,

majesty, and glory, whereas Jamal symbolizes feminine qualities: gentleness, compassion, and intimacy. Jalāl is the manifestation of strong, dominant divine attributes, while Jamal represents the soft and receptive feminine traits.

Annemarie Schimmel uses the distinction between Jalāl and Jamal to illustrate relationships between men and women as well as between humans and God. She conveys the message of the importance of balance in life using these concepts. She shows that masculine and feminine traits have equally vital roles in creating and maintaining harmonious life.

Furthermore, Schimmel explores the relationship between men and women in her book *My Soul is a Woman*. Her study of female figures in Islamic tradition—especially in the context of Islamic mysticism—helps her explore this relationship. She demonstrates how women, possessing spiritual strength and wisdom, can achieve unity with God through love and devotion.

Additionally, Schimmel stresses that equality between men and women is crucial for attaining deep understanding of God. She emphasizes that in Islamic mysticism, gender differences do not affect one's ability to reach unity with God.

This shows that Annemarie Schimmel holds a very important view of the relationship between men and women in the context of Islamic mysticism. She highlights that within the mystical tradition, the relationship between men and women can serve as a channel for achieving deeper understanding of God.

In other words, in Islamic mysticism, the relationship between men and women can be seen as a reflection of the relationship between humans and God. For example, the relationship between a spiritual teacher (sheikh) and his student, or between a male and female Sufi, is often considered a representation of the love relationship between humans and God. Schimmel also points out that Islamic mysticism includes the concept of unity (*wahdat al-wujūd*), which leads to the understanding that everything in the universe originates from God.

Within this context, the relationship between men and women is seen as part of a greater unity and as a means to achieve unity with God. Thus, Schimmel demonstrates that the relationship between men and women in Islamic mysticism is not limited to physical or social dimensions but also contains a deep spiritual dimension with transformative potential for reaching a higher understanding of God's essence.

Schimmel argues that feminine traits are not limited to a particular gender but are universal aspects of humanity that can profoundly affect a person's soul regardless of sex or gender identity. For Schimmel, achieving balance between feminine and masculine traits is important as it helps one become a whole and spiritually and psychologically balanced individual. This balance does not mean erasing differences between feminine and masculine traits but rather integrating them to create harmony within a person.

In the dimension of Islamic mysticism, balance between *jalāl* and *jamāl* is key to attaining higher spiritual stations (*maqām*). Sufi scholars believe that by combining these aspects, one can achieve deeper understanding of God's existence and the relationship between humans and Him. Therefore, it is important for a Sufi to maintain balance between strength and compassion, dignity and gentleness, in their spiritual journey.

This aligns with the principle of Islamic cosmology that describes the creation of the universe as a representation of God's attributes, such as His *jalāl* and *jamāl*. In creating the universe, God reflects these attributes through the masculine qualities of *jalāl* and the feminine qualities of *jamāl*. The relationship between men and women is described by Rumi as a beneficial symbiosis between the heavens and the earth. Meaning, the earth nurtures all that is sent down or entrusted to it from the heavens.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion previously outlined by the researcher, it can be concluded that women hold an important and respected position in Sufism. This mystical branch emerged in the early eighth century, roughly a century after the

Prophet's passing. Women played a central role in this movement; Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyyah, also known as Rabi'ah of Basrah, marked the true beginning of the mystical movement within Islam. In the realm of Sufism, there are two qualities that correspond to masculine and feminine traits: *jalal* represents masculine qualities, and *jamal* represents feminine qualities.

Annemarie Schimmel uses *nafs* as a symbol of femininity to demonstrate how women in Islam are often regarded as personifications of deficient traits and to critique the socio-cultural constructs that view women as less valuable in Muslim societies. The story of Yusuf and Zulaikha is one of the narratives highlighted in the Quran and is a primary focus in her thought. All female figures from mystical stories and poetry ultimately represent the *nafs*, as this metaphor reveals the potential women can achieve higher levels of spiritual perfection, and that each initially undervalued figure can become a "true man of God," meaning one who attains the goal of becoming a "peaceful soul." Similarly, each individual woman can be seen as a personification of the *nafs* and therefore may be looked down upon and criticized by the "men of God."

According to Annemarie Schimmel, Sufism supports the development of feminine activity more than many other lateral roots of Islam. The symbol of the *nafs* as feminine can be illustrated by elements such as motherhood, longing, mirrors, and musical instruments. These elements serve the same purpose as manifestations of the longing soul.

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