

Design and Examination of a Semantic Pattern in the Interpretation of Poetry (Case Study: Verses Containing the Keyword “Jān” in the Ghazals of ‘Aṭṭār)

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Introduction

Textual interpretation functions as a method of traditional commentary and is generally conducted through a qualitative approach. While qualitative analysis facilitates comprehension of a work’s meaning and the presentation of general findings, it remains inadequate for specialized examination requiring detailed textual analysis, particularly in extensive literary corpora. To address this limitation, methodologists propose mixed or composite research approaches that integrate quantitative and qualitative methods.

By employing a composite approach in interpreting ‘Aṭṭār’s ghazals, the present study demonstrates the methodological value of this model for literary analysis. It identifies the most frequent and significant themes in the ghazals and examines how ‘Aṭṭār articulates themes related to the keyword jān through specific semantic elements. In this interpretive model, textual selection is based on keywords rather than researcher preference, and verse interpretation proceeds through a phenomenological approach across ‘Aṭṭār’s ghazals, selected works by the poet, and related discursive sources.

Research Findings

Analysis of verses containing the keyword *jān* in ‘Attār’s ghazals reveals twelve principal thematic categories: care for or disregard of the soul; the light and transcendence of the soul; soul-sacrifice; the lover’s soul; the existence and nonexistence of the soul; the affliction of the soul; the pearl-shell of the soul; the burning of the soul; the quintessence of the soul; the hardship of the soul; the other soul; and the proximity and unity of the soul. Among these, the first five occur most frequently and constitute the core conceptual foundations of ‘Attār’s poetry.

In verses related to soul-sacrifice, the poet typically exhorts self-sacrifice or presents himself as prepared for self-offering without regard for the soul. The prominence of this concept in mystical discourse and its importance in the spiritual journey toward God (*sulūk ilā Allāh*) derive from the belief that union with the Beloved is achieved through soul-sacrifice. Yet this notion appears primarily theoretical, as even the soul is portrayed as insufficient for union with the Beloved in practice.

Despite numerous instances emphasizing the soul’s insufficiency on the path of love, other verses depict the soul attaining dignity through proximity to the Truth, classified under the theme of proximity and unity of the soul. This apparent contradiction may suggest inconsistency or transformation in ‘Attār’s spiritual states; however, closer analysis indicates a form of semantic inclusiveness grounded in the soul’s encompassing of the secret (*sirr*). In such cases, the poet privileges the secret—located within the soul—as uniquely worthy of union, relegating the soul itself to a lower rank.

Examination of semantic elements accompanying soul-sacrifice identifies love as the dominant semantic unit, consistently depicted through a unified semantic network across ‘Attār’s works. Additionally, the recurrent use of the numbers hundred and thousand in expressions of soul-sacrifice signifies not only multiplicity but also stages of the spiritual path.

Conclusion

Composite analysis of ‘Attār’s ghazals demonstrates that care for or disregard of the soul, the light and transcendence of the soul, soul-sacrifice, the lover’s soul, and the existence and nonexistence of the soul form the most significant thematic structures of his poetry. The quantitative–qualitative model enables precise examination at both detailed and general levels and assists in resolving apparent contradictions, such as the opposition between the soul’s insufficiency on the path of love and its dignity through proximity to the Truth.

The interpretive model proposed here provides an effective framework for analyzing extensive literary texts. By selecting material based on keywords rather than authorial preference, this method reduces textual volume systematically while ensuring comprehensive examination of a work’s principal themes.

Keywords: interpretation, *jān*, ‘Attār, ghazals, theme.