

Zanan-e Rejali “Women of the Invisible Men”: Their Attributes and Spiritual Graces in Persian Mystical Texts up to the ٧th Century AH

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Introduction

Among the key concepts in Persian mystical prose is that of the *Rejāl al-Ghayb* — chosen individuals whose spiritual nature dominates their worldly existence. The foundation of this concept in Islamic mysticism can be traced to the Holy Qur’an, from which it entered mystical literature, where authors discussed it through tales and miracles. Importantly, the term *Rejāl al-Ghayb* does not refer solely to men; in many mystical texts, its instances include women mystics, referred to in this study as “Women of the Invisible Men.”

This descriptive-analytical research, based on the principal Persian mystical prose works, aims to define the reality of these women and reveal their status in mystical writings by exploring their traits and characteristics.

Research Findings

The expression *Rejāl al-Ghayb* originates from Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical terminology. In Persian mystical literature, related terms such as *abdāl*, *awtād*, *abrār*, *akhyār*, or “hidden men and women” are used in similar senses. The Invisible Men are regarded as special saints of God; though imperceptible to others, they possess spiritual hierarchies, and their number is indeterminate.

In contrast to the *pir* (a visible and known guide), the Invisible Men — characterized by anonymity, selflessness, obscurity, and miraculous powers — represent a distinct spiritual reality.

Women of the Invisible Men fall into three categories in Persian mystical prose:

1. **Recognized mystical women drawn from scripture**, such as the Virgin Mary and Asiya (wife of Pharaoh), whose lives are examined with Qur’anic reference.
2. **Famous historical mystic women** whose stories carry mystical depth — like Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, Shawwāna, Salama al-Sawdā’, and ‘Ātika al-Majnūna — sometimes portrayed through their relation to notable figures (e.g., Fāṭima of Nishabur, wife of Shaykh Ahmad Khidrowiya; the sister of Bishr al-Ḥāfi; the wife of the ruler of Yemen; the fasting woman of the Israelites).

3. **Anonymous saintly women**, the major group in Persian mystical narratives, whose stories primarily describe their spiritual states and miraculous deeds.

Conclusion

Despite the misogynistic tendencies of certain Muslim mystics, most leading figures of Persian mystical literature spoke well of women and considered them spiritually exalted. Like the male Invisible Men, Women of the Invisible Men embody qualities such as servitude, trust in God, compassion, selflessness, humility, ecstatic experience (*junūn*), and guidance.

The dominant aspect of the *Rejāl al-Ghayb* and their spiritual presence in mystical texts is their continuous assistance and guidance of others. Their miraculous acts — including insight, teleportation, disappearance, conversation with divine voices, answered prayers, taming wild beasts, healing, and performing prayer upon water or air — serve as manifestations of divine nearness and compassion toward creation.

These miracles not only inspire seekers of the spiritual path but also reaffirm the constant presence and mercy of God through His Invisible Men and Women. Each such revelation enhances the saint's spiritual rank, leading to transformation into higher mystical states, even to the station of the *abdāl*.

Part of these women's miracles remind mystics of human frailty, vanity, and spiritual intoxication, ultimately prompting repentance, humility, and reverence for God's majesty and wisdom — thereby awakening and elevating their souls toward divine ascent.

Keywords: *Rejāl al-Ghayb*, Women of the Invisible Men, Miracles, Persian Mystical Texts.