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Research Paper

Formal Analysis of the Mystical Language: Types, Objects, and Solutions

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Abstract

In the Persian language, formal analyses of the mystical language are not in one type. Some studies analyze the mystical language by *a formal approach* and others follow *a formal attitude* toward the mystical language. A great group of these studies aims to introduce an explanation of the mystical language based on the properties of the mystical tradition. Many of these studies, despite their differences, have common properties that bring up some criticisms. Introducing the various types of formal analyses of the mystical language in the Persian language in this study, we have classified different criticisms and objects. The most important of these criticisms are inattention to mystical experience, the disproportionate and unjustified position of mystical experience in formal explanations, the inextensibility of some results, and the confusion of literary language with the language of mysticism. Introducing a formal explanation of the mystical language, the exegesis model of the mystical language could respond to the above objects. Ignoring the conventional ontological and phenomenological properties in this model, exegesis is defined as passing from one context to another. Despite different genres and structures, this exegetic construct has been found in mystical texts. Therefore, this pattern can be considered as the main and fundamental feature of the mystical language, which is also connected with the content elements of the mystical tradition, without having a mandatory role

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in the linguistic and formal explanations of the mystical language. Transcendence, becoming, and passing from the exoteric layer to the esoteric layer are among contentual features which do not have any obligatory function in the linguistic and formal explanations of the mystical language.

Keywords: The Mystical Language, Exegesis, Context of Meaning, Formalism, Mystical Tradition.

Introduction

The mystical language is studied from various points of view. Studies, traditionally, have been limited to the philosophical, ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological perspectives. However, in recent decades, some of the formal studies in mystical texts have been developed in the Persian language. It seems that [Shafiei Kadkani](#)'s (2013) ideas have been the first of these works. Despite their differences, many of the subsequent studies have common properties that bring up some criticisms.

This research is a study of the various kinds of formal analyses of mystical texts and their drawbacks. Therefore, this study intends to 1) classify the various types of formal analyses of the mystical language in the Persian language, 2) classify their different criticisms and objections, and 3) propose a new model to analyze the mystical language and texts.

The four research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are the major kinds of formal studies in the scope of the mystical tradition and language?
2. What are their major arguments?
3. What are their most crucial drawbacks?
4. Is there an alternative model in the formal approach to the mystical language and texts?

Review of the Literature

In fact, after the publication of Shafiei Kadkani's formal theory, some critical studies have been prevalent. Thus, most of these studies are based on his works. For example, [Mir-Bagheri Fard and Algooneh Juneghani \(2010\)](#) in their article 'A Formalistic Analysis of the Mystical Language Foundations and Outcomes' try to point out that the connection between formalistic perspective and mystical tradition involves some paradoxes and discrepancies. However, other studies, with a more limited perspective, have concentrated on the works of [Shafiei Kadkani \(2013\)](#) and his attitude toward the mystical language.

Methodology

The present study is a review and critical article. From a methodological point of view, it is worth mentioning that by 'formal' or 'formalism', we mean beyond only Russian Formalism as a school in the history of literary theories. We pick out this term as a concept that mentions every method based on the formal criticism, linguistic, or aesthetic aspects of texts. Therefore, the mystical traditionally prominent characteristics are not taken as formal cases.

Results

Formal analyses of the mystical language and tradition can be categorized into three types:

- (1) Investigating mystical text by a formalistic approach. The main aim of these types of studies is to achieve literary and linguistic devices and techniques.
- (2) Proposing a formal attitude to the mystical tradition. This type of study does not, particularly, aim to analyze the special texts.
- (3) Proposing a formal explanation to mysticism. This type is related to connections

between mystical experiences and formal aspects of the mystical language. The Third type of study is based on the binary of literary or poetic language and every day or ordinary one. They take the poetic languages and attribute them to spiritual mystical experiences (*Sokr*). The roots of this classification can be found in the traditional binary of the language of *Eshārat* (*Zabān-e Eshārat*) and the language of *Ebārat* (*Zabān-e Ebārat*).

However, these studies have aroused various objections. The most important of these objections and criticisms is inattention to mystical experience. These objections can be classified into three levels: 1) the disproportionate and unjustified position of mystical experience in formal explanations (What kind of relations is there between mystical experience and the mystical language?), 2) the inextensibility of results of these studies to the various types of mystical texts (these results are, only, correspond with *Zabān-e Eshārat* or the poetic aspect of mystical texts), and 3) the confusion of literary language with the language of mysticism (the vague boundaries of these languages). Introducing a formal explanation of the mystical language, the exegesis model of the mystical language could respond to the above objections. Ignoring the conventional ontological and phenomenological properties, exegesis, in this model, is described as passing from one context to another. Despite different genres and structures, this exegetic construction can be found in any kind of Persian mystical text. Therefore, it can be argued that this model is the characteristic of the mystical language that has connections with contentual features of the mystical tradition. Transcendence, becoming, and passing from the exoteric layer to the esoteric layer are among contentual features which do not have any obligatory function in the linguistic and formal explanations of the mystical language. The exegesis model of the mystical language can open a new way to the studies in the scope of mysticism.