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Ken'ān Rifā'ī and the Dynamics of Late Ottoman Sufi Poetry: Continuity, Innovation, and Intellectual Engagement

Kenân Rifâî ve Son Dönem Osmanlı Tekke Şiiri: Süreklilik, Yenilik ve Entelektüel Katılım

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Abstract

This article examines the poetry of Ken'ān Rifā'ī (1867-1950), a late Ottoman sufi bureaucrat, poet, and musician. It explores Rifā'ī's contributions to Turkish Sufi poetry, focusing on his role as a bridge between the Ottoman Sufi tradition and the intellectual world of the late Ottoman period. In his work, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, Rifā'ī reinterprets traditional Sufi themes such as divine love, dervishhood, and the unity of being during the socio-political transformations of the Tanzimat and Constitutional eras, developing a voice, unique to his time. His poetry skillfully combines Sufi metaphysical concepts with contemporary issues like homeland, freedom, and progress, offering meaningful responses to changing social realities while preserving the spiritual essence of Ottoman Sufi thought. This study conducts a detailed textual analysis of *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, positioning Rifā'ī's works within their historical and socio-political contexts and highlighting his ability to engage tradition while addressing the needs of his era. Rifā'ī emerges not only as a guardian of Sufi ideals but also as a significant cultural figure, adapting and integrating these ideals into the contemporary realities of his time.

Keywords: Turkish Sufi Poetry, Late Ottoman Period, Sufism, Ken'ān Rifā'ī.

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Özet

Bu makale, geç Osmanlı dönemi sufi bürokratlarından, şair ve müzisyen Kenân Rifâî'nin (1867-1950) şiirlerini incelemektedir. Rifâî'nin Türk tasavvuf şiirine katkıları, onun Osmanlı tasavvuf geleneği ile geç Osmanlı entelektüel dünyası arasındaki köprü işleviyle ele alınmıştır. *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* adlı manzum eserinde Rifâî, Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet dönemlerinin sosyo-politik dönüşümleri sırasında, ilâhî aşk, dervişlik ve vahdet-i vücûd gibi temel tasavvufî temaları yeniden yorumlayarak dönemine özgü bir ses geliştirmiştir. Şiirlerinde, tasavvufî metafizik kavramları vatan, hürriyet ve terakkî gibi çağın meseleleriyle harmanlayarak, Osmanlı tasavvuf düşüncesinin mânevî özünü korurken, değişen toplumsal gerçeklere anlamlı cevaplar sunmuştur. Bu çalışma, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*'ın ayrıntılı bir metin analizini yaparak Rifâî'nin eserlerini tarihî ve sosyo-politik bağlamda konumlandırmakta ve onun şiirlerini hem gelenekle uyum içinde hem de dönemin ihtiyaçlarına yanıt verecek şekilde anlamlandırmaktadır. Rifâî, şiirleriyle sadece tasavvufî idealleri korumakla kalmamış, aynı zamanda bu idealleri çağın gerçekleriyle ustaca uyumlandırarak önemli bir kültürel figür olarak öne çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Tasavvuf Şiiri, Geç Osmanlı Dönemi, Tasavvuf, Kenân Rifâî

Introduction

The Turkish Sufi poetic tradition is a dynamic field wherein metaphysical inquiry, cultural identity, and poetic expression converge. This literary form, marked by its rich engagement with the perennial Sufi poetic themes of divine love (*ʿishq*), spiritual annihilation (*fanāʾ*), and the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), has long shaped and been shaped by the spiritual and socio-political currents of Anatolia and beyond.[1] During the late Ottoman period—a time marked by rapid modernization and intense cultural negotiation—Sufi poetry faced new challenges and opportunities as it sought to remain relevant amidst the shifting paradigms of the Tanzimat (1839-1876) and Constitutional eras. It was within this evolving landscape that Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī occupied a noteworthy position within the late Ottoman Sufi tradition, reflecting the broader dynamics of continuity and change in his work. His poetry, particularly in his collection, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, provides a valuable case study for examining how traditional Sufi motifs were adapted to engage with the intellectual and spiritual contexts of his time.[2] How did Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī's poetic innovations reflect and respond to the demands of an evolving society, while remaining deeply rooted in Ottoman Sufi poetic traditions? This article investigates how his work negotiates the tension inherent in making the tradition of Ottoman Sufi poetry speak to the socio-intellectual discourse of the late Ottoman Empire.

The late Ottoman era (1789-1918),[3] characterized by extensive socio-political transfor-

1 Mahmood Jamal, "Introduction," *Islamic Mystical Poetry*, *Sufi Verse from the Early Mystics to Rumi* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), xix-xxii.

2 Some of Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī's hymns and verses were first published in *Rehber-i Sālikīn* and *Tuḥfe-i Ken'ān* in 1911, followed by a further collection in 1924 in *Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî*, and later compiled with additions in *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* in 1925. A detailed analysis of the work will be provided in the relevant section. See Ken‘ân Rifâî, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* ed. Yusuf Ömürlü, Dinçer Dalkılıç, (Istanbul: Günlük Ticaret Gazetesi Tesisleri, 1988).

3 The late Ottoman period, spanning from 1789 to 1918, represents a historically turbulent interval characterized by profound societal transformation. Historians Hanioğlu and Quataert portrays it as an epoch of the Empire with its own dynamics and characteristics, rather than a mere transitional phase from traditional to modernized, or more factually, empire to republic. This contemporary historiography reevaluates the late Ottoman period, recognizing it as an epoch deserving examination on its own merits. For more information see Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 8, 150-7; Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54.

mations, significantly altered the landscape in which Sufi thought and expression had traditionally flourished.[4] As the Empire introduced top-down reform initiatives, spaces such as Sufi lodges—historically semi-autonomous centers of spiritual and cultural life—faced both direct state interventions and broader cultural shifts.[5] These changes redefined the role of these lodges in society, compelling them to navigate a subtle balance between preserving Sufi practices and responding to an emerging modernity imbued with rationalist and secular paradigms.[6] Sufi lodges (*tekkes*) played a crucial role in these transformations in urban space, especially in *Dersaādet*, the capital of the Empire, acting as dynamic hubs for spiritual, intellectual, and poetic production.[7] Sufi poetry, long a medium for articulating spiritual and communal identity, became a site of negotiation where the mystical lexicon met the era's intellectual challenges, reflecting the broader cultural dynamics at play. In this evolving context, questions arise about how Sufi poets, who were once the custodians of a distinct metaphysical tradition, adapted this tradition to these new ideological landscapes.

Ken'ān Rifā'ī's poetry reflects an interplay between the classical Sufi themes of divine love, spiritual annihilation, and unity, and the shifting intellectual and cultural contexts of the late Ottoman era. His *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, in particular, reflects this dynamic, where the established themes of divine love, spiritual annihilation, and unity are not merely repeated but creatively reinterpreted. Through his poetry, Rifā'ī extends the legacy of poets like Yūnus Emre (d. 720/1320 [?]) and Niyāzī Mışrī (d. 1105/1694);[8] yet he reinvigorates these motifs by blending ecstatic expression with didactic guidance. It diverges through a unique commitment to human experience in its raw complexity. Rifā'î's portrayal of divine love and unity transcends mere depiction, as he weaves into his verses the complexities of human existence—its sorrows, limitations, and aspirations—positioning empathy for the individual's plight alongside a profound spiritual resolve that seeks to illuminate the path toward transcendence. This engagement with human reality reflects a rhetorical strategy where Rifā'ī directly addresses his audience, framing individual struggles as part of larger spiritual and existential quests. Rifā'î's poetry explores the intersection of the divine and the human, presenting the sacred as an integral part of the profane and engaging with spiritual questions that resonate across temporal and cultural contexts

What distinguishes his poetic voice in its treatment of core Sufi themes—such as unity (*tawḥīd*), divine love, and dervihshood— and how does it engage with the pressing concerns of his contemporary audience?[9] Through

4 For the history of Sufism in the Ottoman Empire see John J. Curry, "Sufism in the Ottoman Empire," *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (London: Routledge, 2021), 399-413.

5 Carter Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte*, 1789-1922, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 152.

6 Mustafa Kara, *Metinlerle Günümüz Tasavvuf Hareketleri*, (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2010), 57, 163-175.

7 Mustafa Kara, *Din-Hayat Sanat Açısından Tekkeler ve Zaviyeler*, (Istanbul: Dergâh, 2013), 49-51; Mustafa Ülger, "XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Fikir Hayatında Konakların Yeri", *İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13, 1 (2008): 197-206.

8 Mustafa Tatçı, "Yunus Emre," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi,* 2013, XLIII: 600-606; Mustafa Aşkar, "Niyâzî-i Mısrî," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2007, XXXIII: 166-169; Derin Terzioğlu, "Sufi and the Dissident in the Ottoman Empire: Niyazī-i Mısrī 1618-1694," (PhD Diss, Harvard University, 1999).

9 Annemarie Schimmel's exploration of Sufi poetry highlights three major themes. First, the tension between mystical and worldly love is central, where the imagery of love, beauty, and longing transcends the earthly to reflect the divine. Second, Sufi poetry frequently merges religious and profane symbols, particularly in Persian and Turkish traditions, allowing for fluid interpretations of spiritual experiences through everyday images like roses and

careful textual analysis, framed within the broader intellectual and cultural shifts of the late Ottoman period, this study reveals how Rifā'ī's work stands as more than a continuation of earlier Turkish Ottoman Sufi poetry. Rather, it marks a critical reimagining of the tradition, one that resonates beyond its historical context. His poetic discourse distinctively navigates core Sufi themes like unity (*tawḥīd)*, divine love, and dervishood, engaging directly with the pressing issues of his era. This engagement is notably characterized by Rifā'ī's depiction of human love as a delineation, rather than an evolution, of Divine love, a portrayal that unveils the mystical depth within seemingly profane experiences. By exploring how his verses articulate the perennial human desire for divine connection while addressing contemporary challenges, this study positions Rifā'î's poetry as a living, breathing discourse—one that continues to offer insights to contemporary and future audiences.

1. Changing Dynamics of the Reforms Era and Their Impact on Sufi Lodges and Sufi Poetry: Positioning Turkish Sufi Poetry within the Late Ottoman Literary Context

Marked by a determined drive for modernization and centralization, grounded in the principle of *tajdīd* (renewal), the Tanzimat period (1839-1876), extending into the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1920), witnessed profound reforms in the Ottoman military, economy, and society, ultimately resulting in cultural conflict and bifurcation.[10] These reforms sought to reorganize a broad range of institutions, from administration to education, all with the aim of reinforcing state control and fostering integration into the broader international milieu.[11] Amidst these changes, the traditional structures of Sufi life, long-standing pillars of Ottoman spiritual and social order, faced increasing pressures.[12] As regulatory frameworks tightened, the autonomy and influence of Sufi institutions, particularly the *tekkes*, were significantly reduced, reshaping their role in the socio-religious fabric of Ottoman life.[13] Once bolstered by endowments (*waqf)* that granted them a degree of economic independence, many of these endowments were taken over by the state and lodges saw their autonomy erode under state-led reforms aimed at tightening control over religious and civic institutions.[14] Key among these measures was the establishment of the Assembly of Sheikhs (*Meclis-i Meşâyih*) in 1866, which introduced stricter regulatory oversight and curtailed their autonomy, drawing them deeper into the state's

nightingales. Lastly, in the Turkish-Ottoman context, the culmination of Sufi poetry centers on the transformation of the lover's soul, where human love evolves into divine love, reflecting the ultimate union of lover and Beloved. See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, ed. Carl, W. Ernst, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); A. J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), 5-19.

10 Selçuk Akşin Somel and Seyfi Kenan, "Introduction: The Issue of Transformation within the Ottoman Empire," *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage: Politics, Society and Economy*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Boğaç Ergene (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 2; Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Modernity from the Empire to the Republic," in *Islam and Modernity in Turkey*, ed. Brian Silverstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 65-6.

11 Peter Crooks and Timothy Parsons, "Empires, Bureaucracy and the Paradox of Power," in *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History: From Late Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Peter Crooks and Timothy Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 15.

12 Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Modernity from the Empire to the Republic," in *Islam and Modernity in Turkey*, ed. Brian Silverstein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 65-6.

13 Somel and Kenan, "Introduction: The Issue of Transformation," 2.

14 Nathan Hofer, "Endowments for Sufis and Their Institutions," *Sufi Institutions*, ed. Alexandre Papas (Leiden: Brill, 2021) 68.

orbit.[15] These reforms penetrated beyond the economic and administrative spheres, striking at the core of Sufi intellectual life. The very ethos of Sufi thought—rooted in concepts like contentment (*riḍā*) and trust in God's plan (*tawakkul*)—was increasingly framed by modernist reformers as antithetical to progress, demanding a recalibration of their role in a rapidly changing society.[16] Under such conditions, Sufi lodges were compelled not only to navigate the pressures of institutional control but also to confront an intellectual climate that was steadily targeted to redefine the contours of spiritual practices and their cultural expression.[17]

Sufi literary production at the time faced a kind of cultural shock, confronting both internal and external pressures to adapt. In numerous instances, the transformation was less about complete cessation and more about developing in response to the socio-political as well as literary landscape. The literary milieu of Sufi lodges, particularly their poetry, appears to have navigated a complex terrain—maintaining its traditional metaphysical focus while subtly having concerns to engaging with the evolving needs of its audience.[18] Despite the growing influence of Western literary models and the gradual decline of classical Ottoman forms, Sufi poets continued to produce works in traditional formats and genres, embodying classical themes through established literary motifs. While prominent figures like Mehmed Celâleddîn Dede (d. 1908) and Mehmed Es'ad Dede (d. 1911) of the Mevlevī Sufi order sustained this tradition through their poetry and biographical works, this era also witnessed the emergence of significant women poets who enriched this literary heritage.[19] Certain Sufi poets, in their engagement with the dynamics of the literary era, stand out for their contributions to the traditional poetic forms of the *mathnavī* and *ghazal*. Following in the footsteps of Şeyh Ġālib (d. 1213/1799),[20] whose *Hüsn ü Aşk* (Beauty and Love) revitalized the *mathnavī* genre, poets like Keçecizāde and Yenişehirli 'Avnî (d. 1884) incorporated these classical themes while layering them with allegorical representations and political critique.[21] His *Gülşen-i Aşk* illustrates a nuanced blend of spiritual guidance and reflections on the swiftly modernizing Ottoman world. Known for his aesthetic refinement and poetic skill, Osman Şems Efendi (d. 1893), further demonstrated this synthesis by merging *tekke* and *dīvān* poetry.[22] He appears to have bridged the classical concerns of the *dīvān* poets with the spiritual and ethical imperatives of Sufi literature in his

15 Melek Cevahiroğlu Ömür, "The Sufi Order in a Modernizing Empire: 1808-1876," *Tarih* 1, 1 (2009): 78-79.

16 Mehmet Akif Ersoy (d. 1936), a preeminent Islamist thinker, emphasizes how a particular religious mindset, born from ignorance, produces societal lethargy by misinterpreting major Islamic ideas like *tawakkul* and fate, reflecting Islamic civilization's stagnation. Mehmet Akif Ersoy, *Safahat* [Stages] ed. M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ (İstanbul: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1987), 413.

17 Kara, *Metinlerle Günümüz,* 57, 163-175.

18 A. Azmi Bilgin, "Tekke Edebiyatı," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2011, XL: 381-384.

19 Such as Leylâ Hanım (d. 1847) and Hatice Nakiye Hanım. See Mehmed Zihni, *Meşâhîrü'n-nisâ*, (İstanbul: Dârü'l-matbaati'l-âmire, 1295 [1877]), II: 195.

20 M. Muhsin Kalkışım, "Şeyh Galib," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2010, XXXIX: 54-57.

21 İbnülemin Mahmud Kemal İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*. 1-10 (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1970). As Ottoman society, particularly in urban centers like *Dersa'âdet*, grappled with the influx of Western literary forms and secular ideologies, Sufi poetry—especially in *mathnavī* genre—demonstrated its adaptability by absorbing Western aesthetics while retaining its mystical core. A. Azmi Bilgin, "Osmanlılar (Tekke Şiiri," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2007, XXXIII: 559-562.

22 Nihat Azamat, "Osman Şems Efendi," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2007, XXXIII: 473-475; Hüseyin Vassâf, *Sefîne-i Evliyâ*, ed. Mehmet Akkuş, Ali Yılmaz, (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2006), I: 171-190.

critical membership in the Council of Poets (*Encümen-i Şu'arâ*).

As the literary and political landscape shifted with the advent of the Tanzimat era (1839-1876), the *Encümen-i Şu'arâ*, a literary community formed by a group of poets in the second half of the 19th century, represented a pivotal starting point in the broader literary scene of the late Ottoman period, where the poets emerged as central figures.[23] Although its members were not formally affiliated with Sufi orders, they were known as *sufi-mashrab*, indicating their familiarity with the ethical and spiritual dimensions of Sufism, which had deeply permeated the socio-cultural fabric of Ottoman society, allowing them to infuse their works with Sufi themes and thought.[24] These poets developed a unique literary approach that blended this spiritual heritage with the rapidly modernizing political and literary atmosphere of the Tanzimat period, bridging the old with the new. Young Ottoman poets, particularly Nâmık Kemâl (d. 1888) and Şinâsî (d. 1871) became champions of a new literary expression that sought to reconcile the old with the new.[25] Educated in European literary and political thought, these intellectual penmen sought to fuse traditional Ottoman poetic forms with novel ideas and genres producing a literature that was both a continuation of tradition and a radical departure from it.[26] The Young Ottomans, with their revolutionary zeal, injected new life into Ottoman literature, encouraging debates around the concepts freedom (*hürriyet*), homeland (*vatan sevgisi*), and progress (*terakkî*).[27]

While mainstream literature began to embrace themes reflecting emerging socio-political values and introspective, emotional motifs inspired by European Romanticism, the dawn of the Second Constitutional era—a period marked by synthesis and introspection—intensified the cultural and literary tensions between *alaturka* (traditional Ottoman) and *alafranga* (Western European) sensibilities.[28] The period was thus marked not by wholesale Westernization but by the selective adaptation of Western ideas and forms, filtered through diverse ideological and cultural lenses.[29] The *Edebiyât-ı Cedîde* movement gained renewed momentum during this period through the efforts of the *Fecr-i Âtî* community. This group of writers leaned towards Western literary models, especially in poetry, and cultivated a style characterized by individualism, personal narratives, and an emphasis on aesthetic values. This inward-looking literature was heavily focused on the search for meaning in human existence. Emerging in

23 DİA, "Encümen-i Şuarâ," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1995, XI: 179-181

24 Tanpınar discusses the development of both traditional and new literary forms during this period within the framework of *Encümen-i Şu'ara*'s contributions. See Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *19. Asır Türk Edebiyatı*, (İstanbul: Çağlayan Kitabevi, 1988), 249-300.

25 Elias John Wilkinson Gibb, and Edward Granville Browne, *A History of Ottoman Poetry* (London: Luzac, 1907), 3-21.

26 Şerif Mardin, *Yeni Osmanlı Düşüncesinin Doğuşu* (The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought), trans. Mümtazer Türköne, Fahri Unan, İrfan Erdoğan, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2018).

27 With the Tanzimat and the First Constitution, new concepts like civilization, progress, law, freedom, and constitutionalism entered Ottoman thought. These ideas, particularly freedom and constitutional rule, were central in opposition to Abdulhamid II, prompting efforts to align Western concepts with Islamic principles. For more information, see Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Kalemiye'den Mülkiye'ye Tanzimat Zihniyeti," *Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası: Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi* 1, ed. Tanıl Bora, Murat Gültekingil, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2017), 55-60.

28 Emre Aracı, "The Turkish Music Reform: From Late Ottoman Times to the Early Republic," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Celia Kerslake and Kerem Öktem (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 336–48.

29 Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of Ottoman Empire,* 8, 150-157.

Ottoman discourse in the second half of the 19th century, materialist and positivist thought began to influence literary circles, inspiring works like *Ben Neyim?*, which sought to address existential questions through a scientific lens.[30] These currents asserted that an understanding of human reality could only be attained through modern science, particularly physiology, while deliberately excluding the religious and spiritual explanations that had long shaped conceptions of human nature. The debate regarding the means of understanding human meaning—whether through scientific inquiry or novel spritual explanations—became a global matter,[31] profoundly affecting art and literature, leading to a sensitive and defensive tone within these domains. This intellectual confrontation currents provoked reactionary stances among authors on many sides of these debates.

This context raises significant questions about the interaction between Sufi poetry, cultivated in the Sufi lodges (*tekkes*), and the broader literary and socio-political currents of the late Ottoman period. It is crucial to investigate whether and how these socio-political shifts resonated within Sufi poetic expression.[32] Did Sufi poets adapt their themes to align with emerging modern concerns, or did they persist in employing their traditional lexicon of divine love, unity, and spiritual annihilation (*fanāʾ*)? Did *tekke* poetry remain inward-facing or did it seek to engage a broader audience by responding to modern challenges? As Ottoman society underwent secularization, embraced nationalism, and implemented modernist reforms, Sufi poetry's response to these changes is particularly noteworthy. How did it cater to the dervishes who moved beyond the *tekke* and became part of the state bureaucracy? Were mystical themes like love and *tawḥīd* reimagined to address new social and intellectual realities? The intellectual atmosphere of the Sufi lodges was not unaffected by these transformations; indeed, the lodges had to engage, whether directly or indirectly, with the broader cultural currents of their time. Despite the shifting cultural landscape and relative marginalization of traditional Sufi forms, Sufi poets continued in their craft, ensuring that Sufi poetry evolved while preserving its essential characteristics. In an era increasingly seen as spiritually desolate, such a vision may have constituted a quiet but potent critique of a rapidly transforming society.

In exploring these questions, we aim to position late Ottoman Sufi poetry not as an isolated, static tradition but as a living, evolving practice that engaged—however selectively or cautiously—with the intellectual and cultural currents of its time. By examining Ken'ān Rifā'ī's poetry, we can delve deeper into these themes, as his works offer a unique vantage point from which to understand how Sufi poets might have responded to, or resisted, the pressing questions of their era. Rifā'ī's poetry thus serves a case study in this broader investigation, providing insights into the ways in which Sufi literary production could be both a reflection of continuity and a site of engagement with the rapidly shifting late Ottoman literary, intellectual, and socio-political landscape.

2. Formative Influences: The Early Life, Education, and Literary Foundations of Sheikh Ken'ān Rifā'ī

Ken'ān Rifā'ī Büyükaksoy (1867-1950), a multifaceted figure in late Ottoman and early

30 Ahmet Mithat, *Ben Neyim? Hikmet-i Maddiyeye Müdafaa*, (İstanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat Matbaası: 1891).

31 Özgür Türesay, "Between Science and Religion: Spiritism in the Ottoman Empire (1850s-1910s)," *Studia Islamica* 113, (2018): 175.

32 Necati Çavdar, "Ali Suavi'de Terakki ve Medeniyet Düşüncesi: Muhbir Yazıları," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 126, 149 (2020): 309.

Republican intellectual life, was not only an authorized Sufi sheikh of the Rifāiyya order but also a bureaucrat, poet, and musician. His early life and education deeply shaped his poetic and Sufi trajectory, providing the intellectual and spiritual foundation upon which his future contributions to Turkish literature and music would be built. To understand Rifâ'î's later poetic and musical endeavors, it is crucial to examine his formative years, particularly his early engagement with Ottoman poetic traditions. Born into a distinguished Ottoman family in Plovdiv, located in today's Bulgaria, Rifā'ī inherited a legacy steeped in both imperial administration and the spiritual traditions of Sufism.[33] His father, Hacı Abdülhalîm Bey (d. 1904),[34] was a high-ranking official, while his mother, Hatice Cenân Hanım (d. 1919), was his first spiritual guide. It was under her influence that Rifā'ī began his spiritual training at a young age. Cenân Hanım, a devout follower of Sufi thought, regularly studied Niyāzī Mışrī's *Dīvān* under the guidance of Sheikh Edhem Efendi, a renowned Qādirī-Uwaisī Sufi figure.[35] This maternal connection to Sufism fostered Rifā'ī's early exposure to the mystical dimensions of Islamic thought and poetry.[36]

Ken'ān Rifā'ī's formal education at the Galatasaray Imperial Lyceum (*Mekteb-i Sultânî*) further developed his intellectual and literary sensibilities.[37] Founded to train Ottoman bureaucrats, Galatasaray was one of the most prestigious schools in the empire, offering a unique curriculum that combined Western and Eastern subjects and pedagogies. As a student in the literary department, Rifā'ī was exposed to a rich blend of Ottoman, Persian, and Arabic poetry, the main literary languages of the empire, alongside instruction in French and German.[38] This dual exposure to classical Eastern poetry and emerging Western literary ideas would become a defining characteristic of Rifā'ī's own poetic output, which sought to synthesize various literary currents.

At Galatasaray, Rifā'ī studied under some of the most influential literary figures of the period, including Muallim Nâcî (d. 1893) and Recâizâde Mahmûd Ekrem (d. 1914), both of whom left an indelible mark on his poetic development. Nâcî, renowned for his classical *ghazals*, was dedicated to preserving the traditions of Ottoman *dīvān* poetry—situated, as Tanpınar describes, between the old and the new schools.[39] His mentorship of Rifā'ī, whom he dubbed "the orator" for his eloquent recitations of poetry, instilled in the young student a deep reverence for classical genres and themes. Nâcî's influence on Rifā'ī can be traced in the latter's early poetic compositions, as well as during the time the two had

33 The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry (BOA), Dahiliye Nezareti Sicill-i Ahvâl Komisyonu Defterleri (DH.SAİD.), folder no: 72, no: 405 (Zihicce 1310/July 1893).

34 The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry (BOA), Dahiliye Nezareti Sicill-i Ahvâl Komisyonu Defterleri (DH.SAİD.), folder no: 1: 37 (Zilhicce 1252/April 1837).

35 Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Tasavvuf Anlayışı*, (İstanbul: Nefes Yayınevi, 2021), 46-50.

36 Arzu Eylül Yalçınkaya, "Son Dönem Osmanlı Şeyhlerinden Ken'ân Rifâî: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Tasavvuf Anlayışı," *Şırnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 11, 24 (2020): 98-128.

37 Adnan Şişman, "Galatasaray Mekteb-i Sultânîsi," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2002, XIII: 323.

38 Arapça ve Farsça dersleri almaya ve her iki lisandan da Türk diline tercümeler yapmaya Galatasaray eğitimiyle başlamıştır. Arapça ve Farsçadan Türkçeye tercümeler yaptığı gibi, aynı şekilde Türkçe metinleri de bu dillere kuvvetli bir şekilde çevirebilmektedir. Galatasaray diplomasında, Farsça ve Arapça dilbilgisi ile çeviri derslerinin notları oldukça yüksek görünmektedir. See İsmet Binark, *Dost Kapısı: Ezel ve Ebed Arasında Ken'ân (Rifâi) Büyükaksoy* (İstanbul: Cenan Eğitim, Kültür ve Sağlık Vakfı Neşriyâtı, 2005), 41.

39 Tanpınar, *19. Asır Türk Edebiyatı,* 593-610; Abdullah Uçman, "Muallim Nâci," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi,* 2020, XXX: 313-316.

the contributer's of Ahmet Midhat Efendi's (d. 1912) *Tercümân-ı Hakîkat* towards the turn of the century.[40] Simultaneously, Recâizâde, who was instrumental in the Tanzimat-era efforts to modernize Ottoman literature by integrating Western forms and ideas, provided Rifā'ī with a broader literary framework that went beyond the confines of traditional Ottoman poetics. The dual poetic tradition he was introduced during these years—an emphasis on literary innovation alongside his deep respect for the classical canon—appears to have influenced Rifā'ī's later attempts to balance the preservation of Sufi poetic tradition with an engagement with the developing literary milieu.[41]

His early exposure to Ottoman literary culture was combined with spiritual education in the Qādiriyya Sufi order under the guidance of Sheikh Edhem Efendi with whom he studied Mışrī's *Dīvān*, during his post in Balıkesir.[42] It was during this period that Rifā'ī first began to develop his distinctive poetic voice, blending his formal education with his deepening Sufi consciousness. Niyāzī Mışrī's approach to Sufism centers on metaphysical themes such as the levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*), the relationship between unity (*waḥdat*) and multiplicity (*kathrat*), and the idea that all actions ultimately stem from the Divine as the sole actor. Mışrī's poetry, celebrated across many Sufi circles, became an essential part of dervish culture, with his *Dīvān* widely reproduced and studied. Ken'ān Rifā'ī described the influence of Niyāzī's *Dīvān* on his own collection, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, stating, "We have, in a sense, distilled its essence in *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*."[43] As evidenced by references in Rifā'ī's *Sohbetler* and *Mathnavī* commentary, Niyāzī's works continued to resonate throughout his life and works, especially in his poetry. This phase set the stage for Rifā'ī's later contributions to Turkish poetry.

After serving as a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Education (*Maârif Nezâreti*), Ken'ān Rifā'ī requested to be assigned to Medina, where he established the a high school (*İdâdî-i Hamîdî*) reflecting the progressive educational reforms of the Hamidian era. During this time, his connection to both spiritual practice and poetry deepened. Medina, as the city of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.), became a pivotal site in Rifā'ī's spiritual and literary journey, providing fertile ground for his poetic and mystical development. It was in the spiritual atmosphere of Medina, near the Prophet's tomb, that Rifā'ī underwent profound personal transformation. Under the guidance of Sheikh Ḥamza er-Rifā'ī, he completed his sufi training in the Rifāiyya tradition and received his Sufi licence (*icāzah*). His time in the Rifā'ī *tekke* and his devotion to meditation at the the Prophet's Tomb (*within the Mascid al-Nabawī*), imbued his life with spiritual ecstasy, which is reflected in his poetry.[44] During these three years, Rifā'ī composed a significant number of

40 Mehmet Tekin, "Halkımızı Okumaya Alıştıran İlk Gazete: Tercümân-ı Hakikat," *Tarih ve Edebiyat Mecmuası* 18, 12 (1982): 28-33.

41 Muallim Nācī, a Tanzimat-era poet advocating for modernization without breaking ties with tradition, served as the literary editor for *Tercümân-ı Hakîkat* starting in 1883. As Aḥmet Midḥat Efendi began publishing works by the modernist Recāizāde Maḥmut Ekrem, Muallim Nācī, along with several of his associates, eventually parted ways with the newspaper. This tension exemplified the ongoing debates between traditionalists and reformists within the late Ottoman literary scene, which also influenced Rifā'ī's own poetry. See Neşe Oktay, "Recâizade Mahmut Ekrem ile Muallim Naci Tartışmasını Kanon Üzerinden Okumak," *RumeliDE Uluslararası Hakemli Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 38 (2024): 310-325.

42 Ekrem Demirli, "Niyâzî-i Mısrî (Tasavvufî Görüşleri)," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2007, XXXIII: 169.

43 Ken'ân Rifâî, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân, Notalarıyla Bestelenmiş İlâhiler*, ed. Yusuf Ömürlü, (İstanbul: Cenan Eğitim, Kültür ve Sağlık Vakfı Neşriyâtı, 2013), 14.

44 Mustafa Tahralı, "Kenân Rifâî," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2002, XXV: 254-255.

hymns (*ilāhī*) and praise poems (*na‘t*), many of which he composed within the traditional genres of Ottoman lodge music.[45] His poetry during this period embodies not just the technical mastery of a poet, but the emotional and spiritual fervor of a lover of the Divine. In his *na‘t*s, Rifā‘ī emerges not only as an administrator or educator but also as a poet profoundly moved by his proximity to the Prophet. His compositions humbly confess his human shortcomings, express his deep love for the Prophet, and articulate the sorrow of separation from the Divine Presence. Lines such as “A handful of soil from my body entered the sea of grace”[46] evoke the intimate spiritual states he experienced in Medina. The profound impact of this period on both his spiritual development and poetic output solidified his legacy as a key figure in Turkish Sufi literature.

Upon returning to Istanbul from Medina, Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī resumed his longstanding role as an educator while also assuming on new responsibilities as a spiritual leader, a position formally recognized by the Assembly of Sheikhs. Rifā‘ī’s years as a sheikh at the Ümmü Ken‘ān Lodge in Fatih were marked by extensive Sufi teaching and poetic engagement. His Sufi teachings, rooted in the classical works of luminaries such as Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, and Muḥyiddīn ibn al-‘Arabī were reflected and expanded upon through his use of poetry during the lodge’s gatherings.[47] Rifā‘ī drew extensively from the Seljuk-Ottoman poetic tradition, frequently citing works by Sulṭān Walad (d. 712/1312), Yūnus Emre, Fużūlī (d. 963/1556), and Mışrî. Among these, Mışrî’s *Dīvān* held particular significance, resonating profoundly with Rifā‘ī’s embrace of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being). In his lodge discourses and the *selamlık* gatherings at his residence, Rifā‘ī’s poetry served as a bridge between the Sufi traditions and the evolving intellectual landscape of early 20th-century Istanbul. Signs of maturity in Rifā‘ī s poetry began to appear during this period, reflecting his dual identity as a spiritual mentor and an educator. Drawing from the rich traditions of Turkish Ottoman Sufi poetry, his works balance instructive elements with lyrical expressions. His poetry opens a conversation between the old and the new by demonstrating the enduring nature of Sufi teachings while simultaneously addressing the contemporary concerns of his day.

Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī’s Poetic Vision in *İlâhiyât-ı Ken‘ân*

İlâhiyât-ı Ken‘ân, first published in 1925, is a significant compilation of Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī’s hymns and poetry, including those previously featured in works like *Rehber-i Sālikīn* and *Tuḥfe-i Ken‘ān*.[48] The collection presents a nuanced convergence of spiritual and literary elements, reflecting the deep-rooted tradition of Sufi poetics while integrating musical notations that highlight Rifā‘ī’s influence in both mystical and musical spheres. The subsequent editions, featuring musical corrections and additions, showcase an evolving engagement with the *maqām* system, underlining the dynamic adaptability of Rifā‘ī’s poetic and musical legacy in Turkish Ottoman Sufism.

İlâhiyât-ı Ken‘ân represents a critical juncture in the trajectory of Turkish Sufi poetry, merging traditional genres with subtle yet notable innovations. The poetic landscape of *İlâhiyât-ı Ken‘ân* is richly layered, incorpo-

45 Yalçınkaya, *Ken’ân Rifâî*, 77-80.

46 ibid. 85.

47 Hatice Dilek Güldütuna, Nazli Kayahan, “The Concept of the Goodly Life (Ḥayāt Ṭayyiba) in the Works of Kenan Rifā‘ī,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 7, 2 (2022): 50-82.

48 Ken‘ân Rifâî, *Tuhfe-i Ken’ân: Armağan*, ed. Mustafa Tahralı, (İstanbul: Cenan Eğitim, Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı, 2018).

rating genres from both the *dīvān poetry* and *tekke* traditions. Among these are the canonical forms like *tevhid* (hymns on divine unity), *na'ṭ* (praise of the Prophet), *münâcât* (intimate discourses), and *mersiye* (elegies), which are commonly found in classical Ottoman poetry. At the same time, Rifā'ī engages with genres particular to the Sufi lodge tradition, including *ilāhī* (devotional hymns), *medhiyye* (panegyrics), *nutuk* (didactic addresses), and *şathiye* (ecstatic utterances).[49] The work begins with poems about *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) and continues with *na'ṭ* (poems in praise of the Prophet). It then addresses the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family), the Four Caliphs, and other significant figures of Islam and the Sufi order, followed by eulogies dedicated to Aḥmed al-Rifā'ī and the saints of the order appear, which reveals a profound connection to traditional *dīvān* poetics and allows for an exploration of distinctly Sufi themes. The next section of the collection consists of hymns (*ilāhi*s) and the poetic genres that are typical of *tekke* (Sufi lodge) literature. These works explore various religious, mystical, and moral topics, conveying an involved discourse on devotion and ethical conduct. In *İlâhiyât*, the majority of the poems are composed in the classical forms of *ghazal*, *qaṣīda*, and *ḳıṭ'a*.[50] The *ghazal* form, as is well known, found its initial Sufi articulation through Yūnus in the 13th century, and was subsequently refined by Âşık Paşa (ö. 733/1332) and elevated further by Hacı Bayram Velî (d. 833/1430) who embedded it firmly within the repertoire of Sufi poetic tradition for later mystic poets. Rifā'ī emerges within this enduring lineage through his adept mastery of the *ghazal,* contributing significantly to the evolving Sufi expression within Ottoman literary culture.[51]

Rifā'ī's approach to prosody further underlines his poetic dexterity. His adept use of both '*arūż* (quantitative meter) and *hece* (syllabic meter) exemplifies his rootedness in the *tekke* literary tradition while showcasing a willingness to adapt and experiment. One of the dominant meters in his work is the *remel* meter (*fāʿilātün fāʿilātün fāʿilātün fāʿilün*), which is widely recognized within the Sufi poetic canon.[52] Additionally, his use of the *muṭadārik* meter (*mefāʿīlün mefāʿīlün feʿūlün*) highlights a convergence between the *'arūż* and Turkish syllabic meter (*4+4+3 = 11 syllables*), echoing the stylistic tendencies of earlier masters like 'Azīz Maḥmūd Hüdāyī (d. 1038/1628) and Mışrī.[53] This specific metrical choice is notable for its ability to evoke the rhythmic cadence necessary for the themes of divine love and longing that permeate Rifā'ī's poetry. His choice highlights his skill in weaving lyrical content seamlessly into musical form, a quality that makes it

49 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân, Tevhid, 26, Naat, 45, Mersiye 48-50*.

50 The term "ḳıṭ'a" in Turkish poetry refers to a type of lyric poem that typically consists of a single stanza with a mono-rhyme scheme, similar in structure to the poems of the famous Persian mystic al-Hallāj. Each line of a "ḳıṭ'a" ends in the same rhyme throughout the poem, and it often conveys a complete, self-contained expression or idea. This form allows the poet to focus intensely on a single theme or emotion, using concise and potent language to create a vivid impression in just a few lines. For a detailed exploration and examples of the ḳıṭ'a in classical Turkish poetry, see Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 65-67.

51 Mehmet Fuad Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1976), 232-236; Fikret, Turan, "Erken Dönem Türk Tasavvuf Şiirinde Dervişane Üslup ve Nazım Dili Tercihleri," *Âşık Paşa ve Anadolu'da Türk Yazı Dilinin Oluşumu Sempozyumu Bildiriler 1-2 Kasım 2013 Kırşehir,* ed. Fatih Köksal, (Kırşehir: 2013), 455-462.

52 Bilgin, "Tekke Edebiyatı," 381-84.

53 Indeed, the poem titled "Supplication to Rifâî Hazretleri," composed according to this meter, was later set to music by Ken'an Rifā'ī in the *Hüzzâm* mode. The conscious selection and application of the lyrics, poetic form, and musical composition by a single artist warrant examination as a noteworthy contemporary instance of integrated artistic expression. Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 45.

especially fitting for the *şarkı* genre, distinctive to Ottoman-Turkish poetry. Rifā'ī's use of the hezec meter reaches beyond mere form, embodying a synthesis of poetry and music deeply rooted in Persian and Turkish Sufi traditions.[54] This meter is particularly well-suited for compositions intended for musical performance, valued for its rhythmic repetition and melodic appeal.[55] In particular, the *sâlim* form of *hezec* (*bahr-i hezec*) with its recurring "mefāʿīlün" units (*tef'ile*), is employed by Rifā'ī with notable finesse in his musically infused poetry.[56] This harmonious blend of poetic structure, metrical cadence, and melodic adaptation elevates his work, transforming it into an intricate artistic composition that exceeds the sum of its parts.

Building on this synthesis, his selection of specific *hezec* meters—such as "*mefʿūlu mefāʿilun feʿūlun*" and "*mefʿūlu mefāīlu mefāīlu feūlun*"—reflects the enduring influence of his teacher Muallim Nâcî, anchoring *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* within the classical Turkish poetic tradition.[57] This choice of meters,[58] combined with Rifā'ī's expertise in musical composition, underscores the symbiotic relationship between his poetic and musical pursuits. A striking example of this harmony appears in the poem "My Pain is Grievous,"[59] which demonstrates how the *sâlim hezec* meter can achieve rhythmic and melodic coherence.[60] Here, the interplay between his poetic and musical expressions lends a dynamic quality to his work. Although the intricate relationship between form, meter, and theme in *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* invites further study, Rifā'ī's work undoubtedly represents a distinctive and original contribution to late Ottoman *tekke* poetry and music.[61]

Rifā'ī's language is notably more accessible than many of his predecessors, particularly when he adopts a didactic tone to address the spiritual and ethical responsibilities of the dervish. His thematic scope encompasses central Sufi concerns—ranging from the nature of divine unity (*tawḥīd*), love for the Prophet, devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt, and praise for Sufi masters to reflections on human existence, mystical states, the dervish ethos, and the complexities of divine love—which makes *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* a seminal work in the study of Ottoman Sufi poetry. Rifā'ī's poetic oeuvre stands out for its adept navigation between didacticism and ecstatic expression, achieving a dynamic balance between instructive guidance and mystical fervor. Rifā'ī not only preserves the core

54 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 26, 68, 78.

55 Tevfik Rüştü Topuzoğlu, "Hezec," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 1998, XVII: 302-304.

56 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 26.

57 Certain meters of the *hezec* in Turkish literature, akin to Persian literature, gained popularity due to their suitability for the Turkish language. For instance, "mef'ûlü mefâîlü mefâîlü feûlün" was frequently used in *müstezād* poems, and the *şarkı*, a form unique to Turkish literature, was also commonly composed in this meter. To gauge the popularity of the *hezec* meter, one can look at works such as Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Dīvān-ı Kebīr*, which prioritized *hezec*, and the poems of Nedîm, Abdülḥaḥ Ḥāmid, and Yaḥyā Kemāl. Notably, famous *mathnavī* works like Fużūlī's *Leylā vü Mecnūn*, Şeyh Ġālib's *Hüsn ü Aşk*, and Abdülhak Hâmid's *Makber* were also composed in the *hezec* meter. Topuzoğlu, "Hezec," 302-304.

58 The meter "mef'ûlü mefâilün feûlün" has been commonly used in *mathnavīs*. Famous works such as Ḳhāqānī Shirvānī's *Tuḥfetü'l-ʿIrāḳeyn*, Niẓāmī Ganjavī's *Leylā vü Mecnūn*, and Khwaja 'Abd Allah Anṣārī's *Zādü'l-ʿārifīn* are written in this meter, along with many other *mathnavīs* composed in response to these works; the poem "Âşıkın Tehassürleri (The Lamentations of the Lover)", composed in the "mefʿūlü mefāʿilün feʿūlün" meter and set to the Nihâvend maqām, provides a compelling instance of how Rifā'ī enhances the evocative power of language through musicality. Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 78.

59 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 68.

60 İbrahim Yılmaz, "Klasik Arap Şiirinde Nazım Şekilleri," *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 22 (2004): 109-136.

61 Dânişzâde Şevket Gavsî, "Musikînin Edebiyata Tatbiki," *Peyâm-ı Edebî*, (1330 [1912]): 34/5.

motifs of Sufi poetry—divine love (*ʿishq*), unity (*waḥdat*), and the Sufi journey—but also reimagines them within contemporary context. His didactic poems, often framed as intimate conversations with his followers, convey moral and religious lessons through verse, offering practical guidance on the Sufi path. For example, his call, *"*Come O my companion! Let us say Allah,"[62] extends an invitation to collective spiritual reflection. On the other hand, Rifā'ī's ecstatic poems reflect the tradition of *şathiye* (ecstatic utterances), mirroring the mystical states of earlier Sufis. His line "Just a dot I was, He made me a tall Ṭūbā-Tree/ He, my Master, dressed me up from A to Z"[63] encapsulates the mystical experience of annihilation and unity in the Divine. This oscillation between didactic instruction and ecstatic utterance in *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* reveals Rifā'ī's strategic balance: his work is both a guide for spiritual seekers and a medium for expressing the ineffable. His poetry thus serves not only as artistic expression but also as a tool for spiritual transformation, encapsulating both the universal Sufi quest and the particularities of his social context.[64]

4. Ken'ān Rifā'ī's Engagement with the Concepts of Turkish Ottoman Sufi Poetry

4.1. Divine Love (*'ishq*)

Divine Love (*'ishq/maḥabba)* is a foundational theme in Sufi literature, shaping the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of Islamic mysticism from its earliest articulations. Rooted in the teachings of early mystics such as Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya al-Ḳaysiyya (d. 185/801 [?]) and further enriched by the poetic explorations of figures like Abū Sa'īd Abū al-Khayr (d. 1049) and Aḥmad al-Ghazzālī (d. 1126), the theme of love evolved to signify more than just an emotional or sentimental bond, culminating its apex with Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) *Dīvān*.[65] In the Turkish poetry of Yūnus Emre, *'ishq* signifies more than just emotional or sentimental attachment; it is an all-consuming devotion that transcends the self, ultimately merging the lover with the Divine. In the Turkish Sufi poetic traditon, divine love is expressed through a variety of metaphors, each aiming to capture its intensity and transformative power.[66] Rifā'ī's *İlâhiyât* engages deeply with this long-standing Sufi poetic tradition, drawing on metaphors and symbols that were well established by his predecessors, while simultaneously reimagining them within a contemporary framework.

Rifā'ī's *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* unfolds an intricate tapestry of love, with poems that explore its myriad dimensions, each piece reflecting the interwoven themes of lover, beloved, and the transcendent journey between them.[67] Rather than mere labels, the titles of his works reveal a nuanced engagement with classical Sufi motifs while opening windows into his dis-

62 "Yoldaşım gel Allah diyelim" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 62; Ken'ân Rifā'ī, *Listen from Love*, trans. Asuman Sargut Kulaksız, Aylin Yurdacan, (İstanbul: Nefes Yayınları, 2021), 52.

63 "Bir nokta idim kıldı beni kamet-i Tûbâ/Giydirdi eliften beni tâ yâye o Mevlâ" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 78; Rifā'ī, *Listen from Love*, 44.

64 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 78.

65 Ali b. Osman al-Hucvirî, *Hakikat Bilgisi: Keşfu'l-Mahcûb.* ed. Süleyman Uludağ, (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2018), 445-46; Ebu Bekir Kelâbâzî, *Doğuş Devrinde Tasavvuf, Ta'arruf*, ed. Süleyman Uludağ, (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1992), 161.

66 Süleyman Uludağ, "Aşk (*Tasavvuf*)," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1991, IV: 11-17.

67 These titles include: The Joy of Love, The States of the Lover, About Love, Love for the Prophet, The States of the Lover, What is Love?, Love, The Legacy of the People of Love, The Rapture of Love, The Conquest of Love, and The Lover Does Not Gain Freedom from Separation by Beholding the Beloved. Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 59, 76, 85, 110, 135, 146, 153, 146, 153, 155, 166, 169, 175.

tinct interpretive approach. Titles like The Glow of Love (*Aşkın Şavkı*), Spring in My Heart (*Gönlümde Bahar*), and Realm of Ecstasy (*Vecd-i Diyâr*) are not only thematic markers but also subtle invitations, each offering insight into his deeply personal yet tradition-rooted reflection on love's essence and the mystical path. These names encapsulate his systematic inquiry into love's essence, dynamics, and implications within a mystical framework, positioning his work as both a continuation and an innovative reimagining of the Sufi tradition. Through these titles, he signals an intention to approach love not only as a metaphysical quest but also as a deeply personal and transformative experience that remains tethered to human emotion. His systematic use of evocative language in the titles provides a framework within which each poem can unfold, illuminating love's role as both a divine attribute and an accessible human reality, bridging the sacred and the worldly. Each title's evocative quality underscores Rifā'ī's intentional reimagining of Sufi tradition within a modern, often secularized, Ottoman setting.

Rifā'ī's treatment of the theme of love in *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân* reflects an ongoing inquiry into the ontology and phenomenology of love. His exploration involves understanding the reality of love, the characteristics of the lover, and the intrinsic qualities of divine passion. He addresses the dichotomy between acquired (*kasbī*) and divinely bestowed (*wahbī)* love, emphasizing love's transformative and invasive nature, which engulfs the lover's whole being.[68] Moreover, Rifā'ī's poetry frequently highlights the conditions and spiritual states unique to those on the path of love. It positions lovers as a distinct group within the mystical journey, and focuses on the interplay between lover and beloved.[69] This relationship encapsulates both the struggles between the ego (*nafs*) and the divine will, as well as the complex, fluctuating dynamics of longing, union, and separation—core themes within Sufi poetics that Rifā'ī revisits with an insightful sensitivity.[70]

Rifā'ī's poetry portrays divine love as both the origin and sustainer of the universe, a theme that reflects a deep metaphysical perspective where love is the driving force behind all creation: "It is love that brings man into existence from nonexistence and makes him both nothing and everything."[71] The poem beautifully describes the spiritual journey through love (*aşk*), and reflects the Sufi concept that all of creation is an expression of divine love and that human beings find their

68 Rifā'ī's perspective follows the early Sufi belief that divine love is bestowed upon the seeker›s heart by divine grace. He asserts that the flame of divine love is sparked within the *sālik* (*seeker*) by a spark from the *murshid* (*spiritual guide*), who embodies the realization of Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*). Rifā'ī states: "The *murshid* is the iron transformed into fire, and the spark that leaps to pure hearts becomes the light of divine love." This description highlights the pivotal role of the *murshid* in transmitting divine love to the disciple. For detailed explanations, see Ken'ān Rifā'ī, *Şerhli Mesnevî-i Şerif*, (İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyâtı, 2000), 80.

69 Rifâî, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 144,

70 Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, The Mathnawī of Jalāluddīn Rūmī*, I-VI. ed. Reynold A. Nicholson, (London: The Cambridge University Press, 1925), I: 1-19; In his *Mathnawī* discourses, Ken'ān Rifāī posits that the ultimate station reached through renouncing one's *nafs* is union with the Beloved. By abandoning the *nafs*, an individual becomes revived by the divine breath and attains eternal existence. He explains, "The one who speaks is also the listener; the lover is the beloved. To be everlasting in Allāh, one must forget their own existence and surrender the desires of the *nafs*, ultimately dissolving into the greatest being." See Rifā'ī, *Şerhli Mesnevî-i Şerif*, 243-244.

71 "Aşkıdır insânı yoktan vâr, hem yok, vâr eden/ Aşkıdır insânı Hakk'a mazhar u mir'ât eden"; In another couplet, "With love, the heavens and both worlds, even the celestial sphere, take flight/By love, the Throne and the Footstool, man, and angel, endure (Aşk ile eyler semâ dünyâ vü uhrâ, nüh felek, Aşk ile kāimdir Arş u Kürsi vü insan, melek)" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 55-56.

true essence and connection to the Divine through this love. The line "makes him both nothing and everything" alludes to the mystical states of annihilation (*fanā'*) and subsistence (*baqā'*), where one becomes "nothing" in oneself and "everything" in the Divine.[72] The key detail in Rifā'ī's poetic approach is his translation of the Arabic terms associated with the Sufi concept of *fanā'* and *baqā'* into the Turkish phrase "*yok-var olmak*" (non-being and being), which is foundational in Sufi doctrine and literature. This choice aligns him with the enduring tradition of Turkish *tekke* poetry, which has always sought to embody the mystical journey in accessible language. By incorporating such Turkish terms, Rifā'ī binds himself to a poetic lineage that resonates deeply within the mystical Sufi tradition while simultaneously adapting it for the people of his time—who, distanced from the traditional lexicon, needed a more accessible articulation of these profound spiritual concepts.

For Rifā'ī, the beginning, purpose, and end of creation, or the circle of existence, is also love (*'ishq*). In one of his poems, he expresses this perspective with the following lines: "Love bursts forth from a single dot, radiant as the sun's bright light/ The purpose of creation is love, an eternal truth shining bright."[73] As the circle is completed only by returning to its beginning, the source and reason for the entire realm of existence is *'ishq*, its goal is *'ishq*, and the life between these two points is entirely sustained by *'ishq*. Here, we see that Ken'ān Rifā'ī strives to not only explain Sufi concepts beyond a mere theoretical understanding but also employs them in an ontological interpretation of *'ishq*. He draws practical conclusions for seekers on the Sufi path in light of this understanding. The most practical outcome of the proposition that *maḥabba* and *'ishq* are the sole reasons for the universe's constant motion is the belief that every event, from the tiniest to the greatest, occurs by the will, mercy, and love of the Real, *al-Ḥaqq*.[74]

Ken'ān Rifā'ī's approach to love, as presented in his poetry, particularly explores how worldly loves can serve as a bridge to the Divine. This concept is crucial in understanding Rifā'ī's Sufi perspective on love—wherein all forms of affection, be it for people, objects, or ideals, are seen not as ends in themselves but as steps leading towards the ultimate goal of Divine love. Unlike the romantic currents of the early twentieth century, which often elevated individual love and personal interest as ultimate ends, Rifā'ī emphasizes the transformative potential of these earthly attachments, positioning them as integral to the spiritual journey that leads to a higher, divine purpose. Love in its worldly form, when rightly understood and properly directed, serves as a bridge that leads to the Divine, echoing the

72 In the poem Rifā'ī uses Qur'anic terms to explain the methaphisical roots of the existente and cosmos to illustrate how love is the sustaining force of the cosmos. This aligns with the Sufi doctrine of the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), where the Divine is seen as manifesting through all of creation, and love becomes the divine attribute that both creates and sustains all beings. By invoking symbols like the Throne (*al-'Arsh*) and the *Footstool* (*al-Kursī*), Rifā'ī places love at the heart of cosmic existence, which reflects the metaphysical thought of Muḥyiddīn ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) who articulated that every facet of creation is a manifestation of God's love for Himself. "Aşk ile eyler semâ dünyâ vü uhrâ, nuh felek/Aşk ile kāimdir Arş u Kürsi vü insan, melek" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 54. A similar couplet reads as follows: "Aşkla kāim cümle âlem, cevher-i ervâhtır aşk/Cümleden giryân ü handan, can içinde candır aşk." Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 146.

73 Rifā'ī, *Listen from Love*, 28; "Bir nokta idim, kıldı beni kāmet-i Tûbâ/Giydirdi elifden beni tâ yâ`ye o Mevlâ/Âyanda iken gizlice bir gevher-i yektâ/ Rabbim beni kıldı ulu bir Kâbe-i ulyâ." Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 78.

74 Ken'ān Rifā'ī uses the Arabic word "*ġarām*" as the equivalent of the word *'ishq*. For him, the reality of *'ishq* remains a secret, and the Sheikh's expressions suggest that this secrecy is a requirement of its nature. For Rifā'ī's detailed explanations on the subject in his discourses, see Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 569, 632.

Sufi sentiment of "From Laylā to *Mevlā* (*The real Beloved*)."[75] This traditional expression captures the essence of Rifā'ī's approach: that the fervor which one feels for earthly beloved ones ultimately carries the potential to guide the seeker towards a love far greater and more encompassing.

> Whatever Laylā and Yūsuf's face revealed,
> Made Majnūn and Zulaykhā restless, their hearts unhealed.
> Love is the light that makes all lovers lose their way,
> Till dawn, the yearning for union keeps them weeping in sway.
> The lover's true wealth is giving his soul to the Beloved's call;
> Who does not, O Ken'ān, let him never speak of love at all![76]

This poem expresses the transformative potential embedded in worldly attachments. Just as Majnūn's devotion to Laylā or Zulaykhā's to the prophet Yūsuf represents a love so consuming it leads to divine madness, Rifā'ī's depiction of worldly love points toward the idea that human affections, when purified and transcended, can become vessels for a profound spiritual journey.[77] This perspective aligns with classical Sufi thought, where human love is seen as the first step in awakening the soul's deeper longing for its true origin. Contrasting with the early twentieth-century romantic idealization of individual love as the pinnacle of human experience, Rifā'ī's poetry instead, posits these earthly passions as part of a larger, more significant pursuit. The romantic movement of his time often focused on personal fulfillment through love stories, portraying the attainment of a beloved as the ultimate end. However, Rifā'ī challenges this notion by implying that love's true value lies in its capacity to elevate the soul beyond its immediate, tangible concerns.

As as we delve into the lyrical passages of his *Dīvān*, Rifā'ī transcends the realm of physicality, invoking the archetypal Sufi symbolism of the lover (*ʿāshiq)* and the beloved (*maʿshūq*). These figures are presented as manifestations of an eternal and abstract reality, their interaction symbolic of the soul's endless striving towards the Divine. The Persian-origin terms *cān* (soul) and *cānān* (beloved) are frequently employed in Rifā'ī's poetry, reflecting the dialectic of eternal love, where the lover and the Beloved are conceived as inseparable entities.[78] This conceptual pair evokes the dynamic of longing and fulfillment, where the soul, ever yearning, is drawn towards its Divine source. His preference for Turkish words like *sevgi* (love), *sevdiğim* (my beloved), and *sevgili* (the beloved) captures the essence of Divine love's interplay between the lover and the beloved, thus making his poetry more immediate and resonant for contemporary audiences, while maintaining the mystical depth of Sufi thought.[79] In such verses, metaphorical love is used as a mir-

75 This mysterious state of love finds its most prominent expression within Sufi symbolism in the love exchange between Laylā and Majnūn, which not only finds reflection in Rifā'ī's poetry but also frequently emerges in his discourses, particularly in the context of explaining the transformative states to which love can elevate an individual. Rifâ'î, *Sohbetler*, 182-206.

76 "Vech-i Leylâ vü Yûsuf da her ne gördülerse hem/ Oldu Mecnûn'la Züleyhâ bi-karâr, âşüfte-hâl/Aşk nûrudur bütün uşşâkı sergerdân eden/Subha dek âşıklar giryân eden şevk-i visâl/Aşka sermâyesi mâşûka cânın vermedir/Vermeyen Ken'ān, cân, urmasin aşktan makal!" Rifâ'î, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 76-77; The story of Laylā and Majnūn has been continually rejuvenated throughout history, taking on new scenes through the imagination of great poets. Rūmī, in his *Mathnawī*, presents the tale from various perspectives. Rūmī, *The Mathnavī*, V: 2716-2776.

77 The story of Yūsuf and Zulaykhā, and the matter of the nature of love within this context, are topics frequently addressed in Rifā'ī's Sufi discourses. Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 264, 267, 268.

78 "Cân mısın, cânân mısın, sayyâd-ı bî-âmân mısın? (Are you my soul, or my beloved, or a relentless hunter?)" Rifâî, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 208.

79 Rifâ'î, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 207.

ror reflecting divine beauty, illuminating the mystical states that arise from divine love—states that, by their very nature, elude straightforward expression. The poetic language thus serves as an intermediary, revealing what prose alone cannot fully articulate. Rifā'ī's imagery of the "beautiful" (*güzel*) and "beauty" (*güzellik)*—attributes frequently ascribed to the beloved—serves as an emblem of the purest, most abstract expression of divine beauty. For instance, in the lines:

> O my 'At your service' of love, O my being, my soul, O beautiful one,
> Tell me, is it fitting to burn my wound and then forsake me?[80]

In these verses, we find a reflection on the paradoxes of love, union, and separation. The Beloved is the poet's very being, and soul yet has forsaken him. How can his being and soul be absent from him? The presence of the beautiful Beloved is also likened to the burning of a wound, a second wounding that, like cauterization, paradoxically heals the first wound of intense longing produced by the beloved's beauty. But this brief kiss of burning passion is followed by the even greater pain of separation, of being "forsaken." This separation, which, in the Sufi tradition, is more than an emotional state—it becomes the perpetual catalyst that ignites and sustains the flame of love between the lover and the beloved. For Rifā'ī, separation is not merely a physical or emotional distance but an essential and dynamic element in the spiritual relationship, echoing the larger Sufi cosmology where longing and union exist in a cyclical relationship, each deepening the spiritual journey. This dialectic interplay between earthly and divine love, between presence and absence, illuminates the Sufi conviction that even in the depths of longing, divine proximity is palpably felt. Thus, every moment of separation becomes an opportunity for transcendence, a step toward the ultimate realization of union with the Divine.[81]

The dual nature of love in Rifā'ī's portrayal—the ability to lead toward the Divine and its capacity to mislead—reflects the ambivalence and complexity of the human predicament. This vision speaks to the timeless and universal aspects of human longing, while simultaneously offering a subtle critique of the intellectual milieu of his own time. By positioning love—whether earthly or divine—as the most authentic human pursuit, Rifā'ī challenges the reductionist tendencies of his era, suggesting that the mysteries of love lie beyond the scope of scientific dissection. Love, in its purest form, eludes the grasp of cold analysis, embodying instead the passionate quest for meaning and connection that lies at the heart of the human experience.[82]

4.2. Dervishood and Sufi Journey

Derived from the Persian language, the term *dervish* originally meant someone who was needy or poor. Within the Sufi lexicon, however, it signifies an aspirant who has embraced the *tarīqa*—the spiritual path—through a formal pledge of allegiance to a

80 "Ey Benim Lebbeyk-i aşkım, cismi cânım ey güzel/ Söyle, zahmım dağlayıp revâ mı benden ihtivâ?" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 207.

81 Rifā'ī's approach in this regard evokes the works of earlier luminaries like Rūmī, whose *Mathnawī* deftly wove tales of worldly lovers as allegories of divine aspiration, and Şeyh Ġālib, whose *Hüsn ü Aşk* (Beauty and Love) famously utilized romantic imagery as symbols of the mystical quest for union. In Ġālib's poetry, the pair "soul and beloved" (*cân ile cânân*) emerges as the most natural expression of the reflection of love: "He who knows the essence of beauty and love, understands both their warmth and their cold. His reflection, a lantern of gnosis, illuminates the secrets of soul and beloved." Şeyh Ġālib, *Hüsn ü Aşk*, ed. Muhammed Nur Doğan, (İstanbul: T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2002), 48.

82 For Rifā'ī's poems that explore different aspects of love and reflect them in their titles, see Rifâ'î, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 59, 76, 85, 110, 135, 146, 153, 146, 153, 155, 166, 169, 175.

sheikh, or a spiritual guide. This act of commitment initiates the dervish into a life dedicated to the rigorous discipline of the self, particularly in striving to subdue the *nafs* (the ego) that obstructs true understanding and spiritual ascent. The journey of a dervish is thus marked by a deliberate renunciation of worldly attachments and a gradual erasure of the self, culminating in a consciousness where one perceives the oneness of the Divine (*tawḥīd*) in all things. Through this transformative journey, the dervish not only seeks proximity to God but also commits to serving both the Creator and humanity, embodying the virtues of humility and devotion.[83]

In the literature of the Seljuk and Ottoman periods, dervishes are portrayed as figures whose mystical pursuits and societal roles are inseparably interwoven, embodying a holistic way of life. Their presence is central to the fabric of daily life, particularly within the *tekke* (Sufi lodges), which served as vital hubs for both spiritual instruction and community engagement.[84] In Rūmī's *Mathnawī,* the dervish appears in multiple guises—sometimes naïve, at other times passionately engaged—illustrating the seamless flow between inner spiritual journey and the tangible realities of the material world.[85] Yūnus Emre, on the other hand, provides a more structured depiction of the dervish, emphasizing their role within the organizational life of the *tekke*, and highlighting their service to both God and society.[86] As the institution of the *tekke* became more formalized, particularly during the Ottoman period, the dervish emerged as a central figure in the empire's socio-cultural environment. Far from being a marginal or isolated actor, the dervish, as part of the broader Ottoman social order, contributed to art, literature, and the intellectual currents of the time.[87] Their dynamic role, evolving over centuries, is especially evident in the works of poets like Eşrefoğlu Rūmī (ö. 874/1469-70 [?]) and Mıṣrī, who not only depicted the internal stages of the dervish's spiritual journey but also their important roles in the urban and frontier landscapes of Ottoman life.[88] In this way, the dervish became a symbol of both individual spiritual transformation and collective cultural identity, as Cemal Kafadar has demonstrated, standing alongside other key figures like the merchant and the janissary in shaping the contours of early modern Ottoman society.[89]

Ken'ān Rifāī offers a sophisticated reevaluation of dervishhood, especially evident in his works *Sohbetler* and *Şerhli Mesnevî-i Şerîf* (Commentary). Rifā'ī's treatment of the *murīd* centers predominantly on the theoretical dimensions of the Sufi journey, the spiritual progression within the Sufi path.[90] In contrast,

83 Tahsin Yazıcı, "Derviş," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1998, IX: 188-190.

84 By integrating Sufi principles into daily life, dervishes around *tekkes* and *zāwiyas* blended mystical and practical aspects of Islam, uniting urban and nomadic Turks in their shared Central Asian beliefs and the spirit of *ġazā* to defend their faith and state. See Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskân ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Vakıflar ve Temlikler, I. İstila Devirlerinin Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri ve Zâviyeler", *Vakıflar Dergisi* 2, 2 (1942): 279-387.

85 Rūmī, *The Mathnawī*, II: 160-200.

86 Yūnus Emre's poetry is imbued with a deep longing for *tawḥīd*, reflecting the stages of the Sufi spiritual journey (*sulūk*) and the principles of dervishhood. He emphasizes the necessity of having a clear and unwavering intention (*ḳaṣd*) and will (*irāde*) to reach the ultimate goal (*maḳṣad*), which is reunion with God. Yūnus Emre, *Yûnus Emre Hayatı ve Divânı*, ed. Mustafa Tatçı, (İstanbul: H Yayınları, 2023), 281, 413.

87 Kara, *Din-Hayat Sanat Açısından*, 197-216.

88 Ömer Faruk Güler, Merve Yıldız, "Eşrefoğlu Rûmî Dîvânı'ndaki Dinî Tipler Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," *RumeliDE Uluslararası Hakemli Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 32 (2023): 695-722.

89 Cemal Kafadar, *Kim Varmış Biz Burada Yoğ İken? Dört Osmanlı: Yeniçeri, Tüccar, Derviş ve Hatun*, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2017), 13-29.

90 Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 319, 509-510.

his discussions of dervishhood delve into the practical aspects of the journey, emphasizing the everyday challenges a dervish encounters and the dispositions they adopt—or are expected to adopt—in navigating these trials.[91] His reflections emerge during a time when the traditional Sufi lodge system faced increasing scrutiny, and dervishes were often portrayed as contributing to societal stagnation in critiques of Islamic civilization's perceived decline.[92] Dervishes, often sidelined in contemporary critiques, faced widespread disregard for their contributions, with their roles reduced to relics of a bygone era.[93] Through his works and teachings, Rifā'ī challenges these reductive perceptions, lamenting how the essence of dervishhood had been diminished to mere outward appearances—rituals, clothing, and other superficial markers—while ignoring the deeper spiritual essence that originally defined Sufi identity. In his works *Rehber-i Sālikīn* and particularly *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, Rifā'ī reimagines the dervish not as an ascetic detached from society, but as an active, ethical figure who, having conquered inner battles, embodies virtues such as humility, selflessness, and a commitment to the betterment of society.[94] He emphasizes that true dervishhood is not rooted in external forms but in cultivating an inner life. As he writes, "We are Rifā'ī dervishes, our honor lies in nonexistence (*yok-var*),"[95] pointing to the transformative journey of transcending the ego and attaining spiritual endurance. The opening lines of his poem, "Come, O dervish, let us make a pact,"[96] invoke the commitment to overcome the ego through divine love and fulfill one's predestined role in service to humanity. Ultimately, Rifā'ī's conception of dervishhood is one of being deeply immersed in divine love while actively serving society—offering a vision grounded in Anatolian Sufi ideals of love for God and selfless service (*Hakk'a muhabbet halka hizmet*). This vision emphasizes a seamless unity between spiritual and worldly realms, where each moment in life, however mundane, becomes a manifestation of the sacred, inviting a more expansive understanding of what it means to live a life of spiritual dedication.[97]

In this framework, Rifā'ī's poetic and philosophical exhortations deepen the concept of dervishhood, expanding its appeal to individ-

91 Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 380-85.

92 Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 151, 214, 612-13; Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 390-95.

93 During the 19th century, Sufi organizations faced heightened official oversight, and growing criticism from intellectuals portrayed them as major obstacles to the Empire's advancement. Orientalist philosophy perceived Sufi communities as incompatible with the notion of development due to their emphasis on a lifestyle characterized by passive submission rather than active endeavor, rationality, or will. This mentality, defined by dependence on divine providence, patience, acceptance, and satisfaction with a life of minimal requirements, contrasted sharply with the principles of diligence and proactivity. İsmail Kara, "İslamcılık," *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce VI: İslamcılık*, ed. Yasin Aktay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 38.

94 Rifā'ī's depiction of the dervish is not that of a disheveled individual who disregards *sharī'a* and is consequently condemned for such conduct. He depicts the dervish as an individual who embodies or seeks to achieve all moral traits of perfection and seeks to rehabilitate the image of the traditional dervish archetype with this depiction. See *Rehber-i Sālikīn* written by Ken'ān Rifā'ī for Turkish-speaking seekers, explains Sufi concepts and manners as a spiritual guide. Ken'ân Rifā'ī, *Rehber-i Sālikīn* (İstanbul: n.p., 1909); Ken'ân Rifā'ī, *Rehber-i Sālikīn*, ed. Mustafa Tahralı (İstanbul: Cenân Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı Yayınları, 2019).

95 "Kaçma dervişlikten ey bîçâre âvare/Biz Rifāī dervişiyiz, yok var olmak şanımız." Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 57-58.

96 "Gel ey derviş seninle sözleşelim" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 52-53.

97 Rifā'ī's *İlāhiyāt-ı Ken'ān* contains several poems that delve into various aspects of dervishhood, reflecting both its spiritual and moral dimensions. For titles and content that address the virtues, advice, and encouragement towards dervish life, see "Gel ey derviş seninle sözleşelim" (p. 52), "Kaçma dervişlikten ey biçâre âvâre kişi" (p. 57), "Derviş Öğüdü" (p. 62), "Derviş Sözleri" (p. 66), "Dervişliğe Tergib" (p. 70), and "Dervişlik Evsafı" (p. 72) in *İlāhiyāt-ı Ken'ân*.

uals outside the Sufi path while addressing the social upheavals of his time. In his poetry, the repeated invocation to "come" (*gel*) operates on multiple levels, addressing both prospective dervishes and individuals navigating the changing world of late Ottoman society. In the first instance, *gel* functions as an invitation to the *tekke* itself, a space where spiritual seekers engage with Sufi practices such as the spiritual journey (*seyr u sülûk*) under the guidance of an authorized guide, a sheikh.[98] However, Rifā'ī's command also extends beyond the *tekke* walls, calling individuals—whether they are immersed in the material world or seeking spiritual direction—to engage with the deeper values of Sufism. His poetry seeks to bridge the divide between those on the spiritual path and those grappling with modern life's complexities. The verse "Strip yourself of your possessions and purity, come and enter this arena,"[99] where Rifā'ī calls on the individual to strip themselves of worldly attachments, particularly wealth and pride, encapsulates the essence of this spiritual invitation. This line speaks directly to both dervishes and those living within a rapidly modernizing, secularizing society, urging them to relinquish material distractions and enter into a space of spiritual reflection and transformation. By doing so, Rifā'ī connects the spiritual discipline of the *tekke* with the larger, often chaotic, societal changes outside it, creating an accessible path for anyone willing to embrace the Sufi ethos and ideals. However, Rifā'ī's emphasis on surrendering to a *murshid* (spiritual guide) ran contrary to the ethos of the era in which concepts of liberty and individualism were gaining prominence in the Ottoman world.[100] As Rifā'ī writes, "Surrender with loyalty,"[101] he is offering a direct challenge to the modern ideals of personal autonomy, positioning the spiritual journey as one that cannot be completed without supervision from a spiritual guide. This aspect of Rifā'ī's teachings—submission to authority in a time of growing individual freedom—highlights the countercultural nature of his message, emphasizing that spiritual liberation requires the surrender of one's ego, which might seem at odds with the aspirations of modernizing Ottoman individuals.[102] Yet, for Rifā'ī, this surrender is crucial for the dervish to achieve a deeper connection with the Divine, reminding seekers that true freedom comes not through individualism but through submission to the Divine will, guided by the hand of the *murshid.*

Ken'ān Rifā'ī's poetry often also invites deep introspection, particularly with his call to "come" as an invitation to spiritual awakening. His use of "ten tekke, gönül makam (the body as a *tekke* and the heart as the seat of divine experience)," highlights the transformation of external practices into deeply personal, internal realizations.[103] This is evident in a poem written in the manner of giving counsel to his dervishes "Transcend this state, come and reflect on your future, O heart!,"[104]

98 For Rifā'ī's poems in which he addresses dervishes and potential audiences beyond the *tekke*, inviting them with the call come/*gel* see. Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 15, 52, 54, 70, 84, 142, 121, 122, 132, 138, 192.

99 "Soyun varından arından hele gel gir bu meydâne" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 70-71.

100 Ken'ān Rifā'ī, similar to many Sufis, believes that *seyr u sulūk* (spritual journey) requires a *murshid*. In his works, he provides a detailed description of the ideal *murshid*. Rifā'ī expressed his fatigue regarding the "cradle sheikhdom" problem associated with the lodge institution in the later years of the Ottoman Empire. The sheikh typically endorses a *murshid* in *sulūk*, yet he emphasizes that yielding to the spiritual guide is essential for uncovering truth. Ken'ân Rifā'ī, *Seyyid Ahmed er-Rifâî*, ed. Mustafa Tahralı, (İstanbul: Cenan Eğitim Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı Yayınları, 2015), 176.

101 "Sadâkatle gerek teslîm" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân,* 70.

102 Yalçınkaya, *Ken'an Rifâî*, 380-395.

103 Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 306, 324, 393.

104 "Geç bu hâli, gel teemmül eyle ferdânı gönül!" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 132.

which encourages the heart to rise above the present condition and contemplate what lies beyond. Here, the heart becomes the center of spiritual reflection, inviting the dervish to look past worldly preoccupations and material distractions. This call to transcendence highlights the Sufi emphasis on inner growth and the journey towards divine understanding, urging the seeker to engage in deeper introspection beyond the transient concerns of the material world.[105] This urges the heart to transcend the present state and reflect on what lies beyond. Here, the heart becomes the locus of spiritual contemplation that urges the dervish to look beyond worldly concerns and material distractions. The world, according to Rifā'ī, is not simply a physical place but a realm where seekers can uncover divine wisdom through the remeberence of God all the time and spiritual discources (*sohbet*).[106] His poetry emphasizes that while outward forms, like attending a *tekke* or performing rituals, are important, the true essence of dervishhood lies in the purification of the heart. When the heart is cleansed, every moment and every place can become a *tekke* (Sufi lodge) where one can experience divine presence. Rifā'ī's call, therefore, transcends time, encouraging the seeker to move beyond the transient concerns of past, present, and future, and to embrace the eternal presence of the divine in their heart.[107]

5. Engaging with the Late Ottoman Discourse Through Sufi Poetry

This section examines how Ken'ān Rifâ'ī's poetry intersects with the broader intellectual, cultural, and political discourses of the late Ottoman period, particularly as the empire underwent profound transformations. During this era, the themes of *vatan* (homeland), *hürriyet* (freedom), and *terakkî* (progress) became central to the rhetoric of both the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks, reflecting shifting conceptions of identity and belonging. The critical question is whether Rifâ'ī's poetic works engage directly or indirectly with these emergent themes, and how he incorporates such notions into his Sufi lexicon while maintaining his spiritual focus.[108]

To understand this integration, it is crucial to first consider how these themes, particularly *vatan*, were conceptualized within Sufi literature and in the late Ottoman context. In Sufi literature, *vatan* traditionally held a deeply spiritual meaning, signifying the soul's yearning for its divine origin rather than a physical homeland. Early Sufi figures such as Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/908) and Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830) conceptualized *vatan* as the ultimate destination of the soul—a return to the divine unity that transcended material attachments.[109] This interpretation framed earthly life as a state of exile, with the true *vatan* representing spiritual intimacy with God.[110] Such a conception imbued *vatan* in the novel phrase of profound emotional and spiritual resonance that persisted throughout

105 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 132-133.

106 When asked "What is a *tekke*?," Rifā'ī explained that the *tekke* is not merely a physical place; rather, for one who attains the essence of *samāʿ* (mystical dance) and *dhikr* (remembrance), the body becomes the *tekke* and the heart becomes the true spiritual station (*maqām*). Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 615.

107 "Üç zaman var: Mâzi vü müstakbel ile [bir de] hâl!/ Bir düşün mâzîde neydin, yâ ne oldun, işte hâl!/ Geç bu hâli, gel teemmül eyle ferdânı gönül!/Kendi nefsin hem yeter artar, ne hâcet kıyl ü kāl!" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 132.

108 Mardin, *Yeni Osmanlı Düşüncesinin Doğuşu*, 17-39; Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarzı Siyaset*, (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2018), 18, 19-40.

109 Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *el-Lumaʿ fī al-taṣawwuf*, trans. R. A. Nicholson, (Leiden: Brill, 1914), 367-369.

110 In Sufi literature, *vatan* (homeland) has also been used to refer to the stages and stations reached by the seeker on their spiritual journey. For accounts from early Sufis on this subject, see Hucvirî, *Hakikat Bilgisi,* 79, 247, 535.

Islamic mystical literature. One such central concept that embodies the essential themes of Sufism is the *aslī vatan* (the original homeland). From the time of Junayd of Baghdād (d. 297/909), the idea of *aslī vatan* has been articulated within Sufi discourse in relation to notions like the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*), divine unity (*tawḥīd*), and annihilation and subsistence (*fanā'-baqā'*).[111] With Muḥyiddīn ibn al-'Arabī the concept of *aslī vatan* further expanded, offering insights into the relationship between the Divine and the cosmos, as well as addressing the question of the universe's eternity. Ibn al-'Arabī's doctrine of *a'yān al-thābita* (immutable entities) emphasizes the timeless relationship between existence and the Divine.[112] The notion of eternal homeland *(aslî vatan)*, as reflected in the writings of Turkish Sufi poets such as Yūnus, Mışrī, and Uftāde (d. 988/1580) consistently refers either directly to God or to the state of being with God before earthly existence.[113]

The concept of *vatan* (homeland) began to acquire its current sociopolitical meaning in the Islamic world in the early 19th century, influenced by modern Western notions of the nation-state. During this era, as Ottoman territories were fragmented and Muslim lands experienced attacks and occupations, terms like "homeland," "patriotism," and "defense of the homeland" gained prominence in the political, educational, military, moral, and religious literature of Islamic societies. Most Ottoman intellectuals followed Nâmık Kemâl in increasingly viewing *vatan* as a powerful source of collective identity.[114] Kemâl's influential work, *Vatan Yahut Silistre*, exemplified this new understanding by elevating the homeland to a sacred entity, intertwining its defense with the principles of freedom (*hürriyet*) and civic responsibility.[115] In this reimagining, *vatan* became not only a geographical domain but also an emblem of the Ottoman community's shared fate, one that demanded both personal sacrifice and collective solidarity, marking a departure from its earlier metaphysical roots in Sufi thought. This duality—where *vatan* encapsulates both a metaphysical longing for divine unity and a political call to action—reflects the broader tensions of the late Ottoman intellectual landscape.[116]

Ken'ān Rifā'ī's poetry offers a nuanced exploration of the concept of *vatan*, intertwining its timeless Sufi interpretation with the burgeoning nationalist discourse of the Ottoman Empire's last and "longest century."[117] In Rifā'ī's verse, *vatan* carries layered meanings—reflecting its metaphysical origins in Sufi literature while also resonating with the secular, political connotations that

111 Süleyman Ateş, *Cüneyd-i Bağdâdî: Hayatı, Eserleri ve Mektupları*, (İstanbul: Sönmez Neşriyat, 1969), 111.

112 Muhyiddin İbnü'l-Arabî, *Resâilu İbnü'l-Arabî: İbni Arabî'nin Risâleleri*, trans. Vahdettin İnce, İstanbul: Kitsan Yayınevi, I, (t.y.) s. 268-270.

113 Ekrem Demirli, "Yunus Emre'de İnsanın Kadîmliği Sorunu: 'Ezelî Vatanda İdik'," *Doğumunun 770. Yıldönümünde Uluslararası Yunus Emre Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, (İstanbul: İBB Kültürel ve Sosyal İşler Daire Başkanlığı Kültür Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2010), 98-109; Feyza Güler, "Şeyh Üftâde'nin Tasavvuf Anlayışında Aslî Vatan Düşüncesi ve Kaynakları," *Bülent Ecevit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* IV, 2 (2017): 191-207.

114 Mustafa Çağrıcı, "Vatan," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 2012, XLII: 563-564.

115 Nâmık Kemâl's impactful remarks on the importance of understanding the meaning of the concept of *vatan* (homeland) through the words of his protagonist can be found in Nâmık Kemâl, *Vatan Yahut Silistre*, (İstanbul: Trend Yayınları, 2004), 34-35.

116 Mehmet Ünal, Nurettin Çalışkan, "Türk Şiirinde Vatan Kavramının Anlam Seyri," *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4/11 (2017), 264-286.

117 The phrase "The Empire's Longest Century," coined by historian İlber Ortaylı, has found a place in the literature as a term referring to the reform and transformation processes experienced by the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, as well as the significant historical events that occurred during this period. İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı,* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2003), 13-33.

were gaining prominence in contemporary thought. At first glance, the Sufi concept of *aslī vatan* unfolds in Rifā'ī's poetry through the evocative phrase *canlar vatanı*—the homeland of souls. Rifā'ī's rendering of *aslī vatan* articulates a profound vision of existence, where origin and return converge within a singular ontological framework, underscoring the unity of cause and purpose in the divine reality. His poetry embodies a profound sense of *hicrân*—separation from the divine origin—experienced by the soul upon its descent into the material world. The couplet from his poem "Canlar Vatanı" captures this sentiment with vivid imagery:

> Canlar vatanından kopup hicrân ile geldim
> Sûz-i derûn hem nâle vü efgān ile geldim
> Aşktan beni men' ettiler âh, aşk beni yaktı
> Hasretkeş-i cân, firkat ü nâlân ile geldim[118]
>
> Torn from the homeland of souls, I came, burdened with the sorrow of longing,
> With the fire of the heart, with laments, and with cries, I came.
> They sought to keep me from love—yet love devoured me still,
> As a soul steeped in yearning, I came, wailing, lost, and forlorn.

Rifā'ī's depiction of the soul's journey from the homeland of souls (*canlar vatanı*) serves as a symbolic reflection of the metaphysical Sufi idea that life in this world represents a state of exile—a departure from the unity with the Divine. This poetic rendering resonates with the concept of *aslī vatan* (the original homeland), described by early Sufi figures like Junayd of Baghdād, whose interpretation of this original homeland ties into the mystical journey back to the Divine after separation. This longing to return is connected to the *mīthāq* (pre-eternal covenant) mentioned in the Qur'ān (7/172), wherein souls bear witness to God's lordship before being sent into the material plane. While Rifâ'î's poetry may not explicitly invoke the concept of *aslî vatan* from Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical framework, his discourses and *Mathnavī* commentaries make deliberate use of the term in full accord with its doctrinal context, as demonstrated by his clear expression: "The lover forever yearns for his original homeland."[119] In addition, Rifā'ī poetic narrative aligns with the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī, who conceived of *aslī vatan* in terms of the *aʿyān al-thābita* (immutable entities)—archetypal realities whose existence finds completion only through manifestation in the material world and ultimate return to their origin.[120] The fire referenced in "With the fire of the heart, with laments, and with cries, I came"[121] symbolizes the transformative force of *ʿishq* (divine love), which is at the core of Sufi striving. Love becomes both a burden and a means of purification, as seen in the works of Anatolian Sufi poets, who similarly evoked the image of burning in love as a necessary means of spiritual progression.[122] This internal fire, or *sûz-i derûn*, represents the unquenchable yearning of the heart for union with the beloved. Rifā'ī's poetic articulation of *vatan* as the homeland of souls not only evokes this esoteric journey of return but also carries the inherent tension between earthly existence and the soul's inherent drive for transcendence. The imagery of being "torn

118 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 154.

119 Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 25, 494.

120 While defining the spiritual unchanging reality (*haqīqa*) of an object, Qunawī refers to it as "the fixed truth in divine knowledge." Accordingly, *aʿyān thābita* has been defined as "the *haqīqa* of the object in the divine knowledge." Ekrem Demirli, *İslâm Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan (God and Human in Islamic Metaphysics)*, (İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2017), 207; Sadrettin Konevi, *Vahdet-i Vücûd ve Esasları*, tran. Ekrem Demirli, (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2008), 108.

121 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 154

122 For Rifā'ī's perspectives on *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being) and the immutable entities, see Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 5, 87, 108, 122, 183,239, 400, 477; Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 314-320.

from the homeland" reflects an ontological rupture—a motif that permeates classical Sufi literature. By referring to the "wailing, lost, and forlorn" state, Rifā'ī speaks to the deep sense of *gariplik* (estrangement), a feeling that encapsulates the existential plight of the human condition as understood by Sufis.[123] This theme of estrangement underscores the temporary nature of earthly life and the soul's restless yearning for reabsorption into the Divine.

In the poem "Nefisle Hasbihâl,"[124] Rifā'ī masterfully constructs a dual narrative of displacement, transforming *vatan* into a multilayered symbol of both literal and spiritual exile. Through expressions like,

> Ben cüdâ düştüm vatandan bu garîb hâke
> Bir garîb âvâreyim, rahmeyleyin siz, dâd
> Ahd ü peymân eylemiştim sabr için ammâ
> Pek yamanmış firkat-i cân olmadım hiç şâd,[125]
>
> I've been cast far from my homeland, to this desolate soil,
> A lone wanderer, adrift—show mercy, bring me justice.
> I swore to patience, pledged to endure, yet,
> The pain of parting is fierce, and my heart has never known joy.

Rifā'ī entwines themes of estrangement and longing with a poetic resonance that underscores both spiritual and physical displacement. Rifā'ī's poetry vividly constructs the soul's journey from the homeland of souls (*canlar vatanı*) to this world as a profound exile, capturing the Sufi notion of separation from the Divine. In "Canlar vatanından kopup hicrân ile geldim/Sûz-i derûn hem nâle vü efgân ile geldim"[126] he reinforces this symbolism, with "*sûz-i derûn*" (inner burning) and "*hicrân*" (separation*)* portraying a heart in constant yearning for its Divine origin. While Rifâ'ī's verses resonate with the broader Ottoman experience of territorial loss, his poetic rhetoric resists engaging directly with political polemics, instead situating such symbols within a mystical framework that seeks to reconcile socio-political realities with metaphysical truths. Phrases like "Vatandan oldu hicrânım (My separation is from the homeland)"[127] and "Garibim ben, cüdâ düştüm vatandan (I am a stranger, exiled from the homeland)"[128] position *vatan* as both the homeland of souls and a tangible physical realm, where the estrangement of empire resonates with the Sufi concept of *gurbet* (spiritual exile). The recurring motifs of *efgān* (lament), *nâle* (wail), *hicrân* (separation), *firkat* (estrangement), *gariplik* (solitude), and *gurbet* (exile) thread through his verses, each evoking the duality of earthly displacement and spiritual longing. This usage calls to mind Nâmık Kemâl's nationalist poetry, where the loss of Balkan lands similarly intertwines the notions of *vatan* and *gurbet* in a masterful allegory of displacement. Rifā'ī's layered representation of *vatan*, while situated within the *tekke* poetry tradition, avoids engaging in direct political discourse, instead inviting a dual contemplation of personal and collective estrangement within a mystical framework. His articulation of longing and rupture not only mourns the physical loss of Ottoman territories but uses the language of Sufi mysticism to speak to a metaphysical estrangement, encapsulating

123 İsmâil Rusûhî Ankaravî, *Minhâcü'l-Fukarâ*, ed. Sâfi Arpaguş, (İstanbul: Vefa Yayınları, 2008), 436-8; Herawī records that *'ārif* experiences a constant sense of estrangement, for he is a stranger (*ġarīb*) both in this world and in the hereafter. Hâce Abdullah el-Herevî, *Menâzilü's-sâirîn*, trans. Abdürrezzak Tek, (Bursa: Emin Yayınları, 2008), 131-2.

124 "Ben cüdâ düştüm vatandan bu garîb hâke, Bir garîb âvâreyim, rahmeyleyin siz, dâd!" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 122.

125 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 122.

126 ibid. 154.

127 ibid. 110.

128 ibid. 45.

a uniquely Ottoman blend of national and spiritual consciousness.

This duality situates his work within the broader Ottoman experience of *hicrân*—estrangement experienced in the face of territorial disintegration—while also drawing from the Sufi conception of *gurbet*, the ontological alienation that characterizes the soul's descent into the material world.[129] In blending these dimensions, Rifā'ī's poetic discourse can be read as a tapestry of national and mystical longing.[130] The motifs of *firâk (*separation) and *figān* (lamentation) serve as potent emblematic representations of both the empire's socio-political crises and the perennial estrangement of the soul. His works, therefore, function on multiple interpretive levels—simultaneously mourning the loss of an earthly homeland while evoking the timeless, spiritual journey towards union with the Divine. Rifā'ī's unique approach to the theme of *vatan* reconfigures national grief into a profound spiritual reflection, transforming the historical trauma of territorial disintegration into an allegory for the trials of the material world and the ongoing quest for divine reunion. In this poetic vision, the loss of physical space becomes more than a political lament; it is recast as a meditation on the inherent struggles of human existence—interpreted through the Sufi understanding of separation and return. Rifâ'ī's discourses, as reflected in his poetic and exegetical works, demonstrate a consistent effort to preserve the sanctity of Sufi tradition while subtly navigating the intellectual and socio-political undercurrents of his era, without reducing mystical themes to political polemics

The theme of *hürriyet* (freedom) is closely related to that of *vatan* in Ken'ān Rifā'ī's poetry, particularly within its late Ottoman context, where these twin concepts were central to political, philosophical, and literary discourse.[131] For the youth of the late Ottoman Empire, *vatan* was not merely a geographical entity to be defended, but a space where liberties—both constitutional and individual—could thrive, embodying the aspirations of the emerging modern Ottoman consciousness. Since the Tanzimat era, *hürriyet* (freedom) had become a significant concept in Ottoman intellectual and political discourse, symbolizing the aspirations of a society undergoing profound transformation. As an Ottoman bureaucrat and Sufi sheikh, Ken'ān Rifā'ī engaged deeply with this term, reflecting both the intellectual trends of his time and the enduring metaphysical dimensions rooted in Sufi tradition. His reflections reveal a sustained concern with the proper understanding and application of freedom particularly as its misinterpretations gained prominence following the Hamidian period and into the Second Constitutional Era. Rifā'ī's discourses indicate his awareness of the risks of conflating *hürriyet* with unbounded license, an

129 Robert Martran, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, trans. Server Tanilli, (İstanbul: İs Bankası Yayınları, 1989), 618.

130 Ken'ān Rifā'ī's profound sense of homeland, both in his poetry and personal life, is deeply influenced by his direct experience of the Ottoman Empire's territorial losses, being a member of a notable family that migrated from Rumelia. An anecdote recounts how, upon returning to his homeland, Rifā'ī would disembark from the train as soon as it crossed into Turkish territory, kiss the soil, and embrace the first gendarme he saw—an expression of his attachment to the homeland. This reflects how his understanding of *vatan* (homeland) and *millet* (nation), central concepts of the Tanzimat era, was shaped not by written discourse but through the lived experience of loss. He visited Plovdiv, now in Bulgaria, multiple times as an adult to oversee the condition of his family's abandoned property, further emphasizing his enduring bond to his ancestral lands. Sâmiha Ayverdi, Nezihe Araz, Safiye Erol, Sofi Huri, *Kenan Rifai ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık* (İstanbul: Kubbealtı, 2003), 536.

131 Figures like Nâmık Kemâl and the Young Ottomans, who saw the defense of homeland as intimately linked with the pursuit of political freedom. Mustafa Çağrıcı, "Hürriyet," *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 1998, XVIII: 502-505

error he frequently sought to address. In his *Sohbetler*, Rifā'ī emphasized that *hürriyet* must be understood within the boundaries of ethical and spiritual discipline. "Freedom," he stated, "is only meaningful within the boundaries granted to man."[132] This perspective underscores his insistence that true freedom is inseparable from self-restraint and responsibility. For Rifā'ī, the liberty celebrated in his era often lacked a deeper understanding of its limits, leading individuals to perceive it as the mere ability to act without constraint. Such misunderstandings, he argued, were rooted in an incomplete grasp of *hürriyet*'s true essence: the liberation of the self from the ego (*nafs*) and the attachments of worldly desires.

This understanding is mirrored in Rifā'ī's poetry, where the term *âzâd* (liberation) frequently substitutes for *hürriyet*, anchoring his reflections in the Sufi tradition. In his verses, *âzâd* is not a political condition but a spiritual achievement, realized through the soul's emancipation from the lower self. For instance:

> Love frees one from the self,
> Your lovers are always free.[133]

Here, Rifā'ī frames *âzâd* as the outcome of devotion and love—a state of inner liberation that transcends the constraints of the ego. Similarly, he connects *âzâd* to ethical and spiritual guidance, as in:

> Do not exhaust me, or you will tire in the end,
> Hear my advice if you seek to be free.[134]

These lines illustrate Rifā'ī's alignment with Sufi ideals, where freedom is not merely a release from external constraints but a disciplined journey toward self-awareness and divine proximity. His poetic articulation of *âzâd* reveals his concern with the *zıdd* (antithesis) of freedom—servitude to the ego and material desires—and his effort to clarify *hürriyet* through contrasts. In his discourses, Rifā'ī addresses this dynamic explicitly, lamenting how humanity's misunderstanding of freedom leads to chaos and self-destruction:

> They call this freedom—spilling blood, destroying the achievements of centuries, and boasting of these vile acts. Such beings are far removed from the concept of humanity. True freedom requires rising above these animalistic traits, finding one's higher self, and, through this process, discovering and surrendering to the Creator.[135]

When considered alongside Rifā'ī's discussions on freedom in his *Sohbetler* (Discourses), it becomes evident that he approached the concept not merely as a matter of individual or societal rights, which had gained prominence since the Tanzimat period, but as a quality that could only be fully understood and implemented through elevated education and self-awareness.[136]

This perspective underscores Rifā'ī's insistence on defining freedom with clarity and precision, suggesting that it must be understood within its natural limits before it can be properly exercised. Such an approach reflects his recognition of the challenges faced by individuals of the modern age, who were just beginning to navigate the complexities of individuality. Particularly attentive to the misunderstandings surrounding *hürriyet* after the proclamation of the Second

132 Ayverdi et al., *Ken'ân Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, 498.

133 "Kılar benlikten aşk âzâd, Senin âşıkların her dem" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 95.

134 "Gel beni yorma, olursun âkıbet bîtâb/Dinle pendim ger dilersen olmaya âzâd; Vuslat-ı yârdir benim ancak işim, bil sen!/Yârimin fermânına ben şübhesiz münkâd" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 122.

135 Ayverdi et al., *Ken'ân Rifâî ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, 498.

136 For Rifā'ī's perspectives on the concept of freedom, see Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 6, 508, 516.

Constitutional Era (1908), Rifā'ī observed that many equated freedom with unrestricted license—the ability to act according to one's desires. However, in his poetry and discourses, he refrained from addressing *hürriyet* as a concept that could be granted or revoked by political authorities.[137] Instead, he emphasized its deeper Sufi meaning: liberation from the desires of the *nafs* (ego). For Rifā'ī, this inner freedom represented the most authentic form of *hürriyet* and the foundation upon which any societal or individual application of the concept should be built. His reflections and writings consistently highlight this spiritual understanding, offering it as a critical contribution to the broader discourse on freedom in his era. Indeed, in both his official capacity and personal life, Rifā'ī approached the various ideas and movements present in society with a pragmatic tolerance, grounded in a sense of *maslahat* (public interest). Much like in the tradition of Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (d. 1895), he appears to have favored the gradual application of personal and social freedoms, contingent upon the strengthening of education. This emphasis is also notably evident in his poetry, where the idea of progress and liberty through education takes precedence

Having explored *vatan* and *hürriyet*, examining *terakkî* (progress) in Ken'ān Rifā'ī's work further reveals his engagement with late Ottoman intellectual discourse while remaining rooted in his Sufi worldview. The concept of progress was a central and often contentious element within the broader intellectual upheavals of the late Ottoman period. Initially understood as internal reform aimed at restoring Islamic governance, *terakkî* gradually adopted the material connotations associated with European scientific and technological advancements.[138] Ottoman intellectuals were influenced by new Eurocentric declinist perspectives, which replaced the Haldunian cyclic view of history with a linear notion of progress. These novel views prompted an internal critique, challenging whether aligning with European models was appropriate for Ottoman society.

While figures like Ahmed Midhat Efendi approached progress as primarily a technical pursuit, focusing on scientific and material advancements, Rifā'ī offered a counter-narrative that emphasized the ethical and spiritual progress.[139] Although Sufis were often viewed as embodiments of backwardness during this period,[140] it is important to note that Rifā'ī, as an Ottoman bureaucrat, played a role in enacting educational reforms and actively worked to incorporate the new methods (*usûl-i cedîd*) into the curriculum during the Hamidian and Young Turk Era.[141] For Rifâ'ī, progress could

137 Rifā'ī's Sufi discourses encompass a variety of reflections on the metaphorical and spiritual interpretations of freedom. Statements such as, "True perfection and freedom for a person come only through reaching maturity that connects them to their origin," and "How can a person who cannot resist even the smallest desire of their own ego claim to be free?" illustrate profound insights into the nature of personal growth and autonomy. For further details, see Rifâ'î, *Sohbetler*, 11, 168, 245, 516.

138 Regarding the entry of progress in the Ottoman intellectual life and its representatives, Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Tanzimat'tan Sonra Fikir Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Maarif Vekaleti, 1940), 70-80.

139 Erdoğan Erbay, "Terakki, İslam ve Ahmed Midhat Efendi," *Ahmet Midhat Efendi*, ed. Mustafa Miyasoğlu (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2012), 333.

140 An Orientalist discourse, Sufi orders were often depicted as inherently incompatible with the notion of progress, largely due to their emphasis on a mode of existence centered around passive submission rather than active exertion, rational inquiry, or individual volition. This worldview, marked by reliance on divine providence, patience, acceptance, and contentment with a modest life, was construed as fundamentally at odds with the values of industriousness, initiative, and the drive for material advancement that underpinned modernist ideals. See Kara, "İslamcılık," 38.

141 *Usûl-i cedîd* was a term coined by Selim Sabit Effendi and it referred to the educational reforms dictated by the Statute of Education. It is a comprehensive term that represented "all kinds of innovations"

not be reduced to technological development alone; it required a holistic transformation that included personal moral and spiritual growth. His perspective diverged significantly from the Tanzimat-era model, which increasingly centered on Western-inspired material development, reflecting the prevailing fascination with European notions of progress.

In contrast, Rifā'ī argued that material progress should be subordinate to spiritual elevation rather than an end in itself. His poem, "Man Is the Essence of All Things" illustrates this viewpoint, declaring: "Man is the source of wisdom, bearer of knowledge and perfection; Within him resides, without doubt, the Creator's power."[142] Here, Rifâ'ī emphasizes that human progress must unfold from the recognition and embodiment of divine attributes inherent in the self. The microcosmic reality of humanity, as reflected in the lines: "The earth and throne, tablet and pen, heaven, hell, and skies; Plants, animals, angels, devils—all are reflected in man."[143] These verses suggest that the human being, as a mirror of creation, carries the potential for both worldly and spiritual advancements. Rifâ'ī's thought aligns with the classical Sufi notion that the macrocosmos is a reflection of the human soul's inner journey. By purifying the self and striving for ethical excellence, humanity can unlock its divine potential, manifesting both material and spiritual progress. For him spiritual refinement leads to a broader unveiling of truths in the material realm, creating a dynamic interplay between inner enlightenment and external advancements. Unlike the modernist focus on material wealth and technological superiority, Rifâ'ī advocates for a holistic vision of *terakkî* (progress), wherein ethical and spiritual growth take precedence.

This perspective diverged notably from the rationalist inclinations of modernist currents within late Ottoman intellectual circles, which often prioritized Western-inspired material progress and empirical knowledge over the pursuit of spiritual insight. Rifā'ī's critiqued such rationalist approaches, asserting that genuine knowledge (*ma'rifa*) begins with self-realization and culminates in divine understanding. In his poem, "Know yourself, know yourself, they always ask you about you,"[144] reminding the prophetic message he challenges the view that separates intellectual pursuit from spiritual introspection. Rifā'ī held that self-awareness was the foundation of true wisdom and that knowledge devoid of spiritual depth remained incomplete. He emphasized: "A sound heart is achieved through knowledge and actions,"[145] linking intellectual pursuit to ethical conduct and spiritual practice. Rifā'ī's concept of *terakkî* was deeply embedded in the classical Sufi framework, where *'ilm* (knowledge) is tied to moral cultivation and the purification of the heart. He contended that the pursuit of modern sciences or empirical knowledge could not independently constitute a worthy objective but could become beneficial when employed as tools to aid in the ultimate Sufi

in the field of education, ranging from the number of students in the classrooms to the required qualifications of teachers. Selçuk Akşin Somel, *Osmanlı'da Eğitimin Modernleşmesi (1839-1908) İslâmlaşma, Otokrasi ve Disiplin*, trans. Osman Yener, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2010). Mustafa Ergün, Barış Çiftçi, "Türk Dünyasının İlk Ortak Eğitim Reformu: Usûl-i Cedîd Hareketi," *I. Uluslararası Türk Dünyası Kültür Kurultayı*, (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, 2006), 1-14; Rifā'ī was a member of the executive and legislative staff of the late Ottoman education reforms, serving as the director and inspector of the Ministry of Education. For detailed information and evaluations on the subject, see Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 243-251.

142 "Menba-ı hikmettir âdem, sâhib-i ilm ü kemâl/ Onda mahfîdir bilâ-şek kudret-i Perverdigâr" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 127.

143 "Arz u Arş, Levh u Kalem, cennet, cehennemle semâ/Hem nebât, hayvan, melek, şeytan sıfâtı onda var" ibid. 27.

144 "Nefsini bil nefsini, senden sorarlar hep seni/İlm ü irfandır hemen, dünyâya gelmekten garaz!" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 130.

145 "İlm ile, a'mâl ile hâsıl olur kalb-i selîm" ibid. 177.

goal of "knowing oneself, knowing one's humanity." He critiqued secular materialism for its neglect of ethical considerations in technological advancement. Rifā'ī saw scientific development (*fennân*) meaningful only when it served spiritual goals. In his verse, "The [source of] power and craftsmanship (fennân) unique to the Divine Essence,"[146] he portrays the sciences as possessing divine significance when aligned with spiritual principles. Technological advancements were not ultimate ends but instruments to serve humanity's ethical and spiritual upliftment. His disillusionment with unrestrained technological advancement, particularly during the empire's early twentieth-century conflicts, highlights his belief that genuine progress must encompass both practical and spiritual dimensions. This perspective appears to have served as a critique of the growing secular materialism and rationalist tendencies of his time.[147]

5.1. The Sufi Response to Crisis: Ken'ān Rifāī's Reclamation of Human Purpose in Modern Times

Amid the intellectual ferment and ideological shifts of the late Ottoman period, Ken'ān Rifâ'ī's poetry emerged as a profound counter-narrative to the prevailing disenchanted rationalism and materialism of his time. As the empire faced immense social, cultural, and political transformations, traditional metaphysical frameworks were increasingly marginalized. Engaging both the metaphysical heritage of Sufism and the anxieties brought about by modernity, Rifā'ī's poetry and his general discourse offers a critical examination of human existence and an existential quest for meaning that speaks to a broader Ottoman audience struggling with dislocation and identity loss. His verses address the human condition within a cosmic framework, positioning humanity not merely as an autonomous entity but as an integral part of a divinely orchestrated narrative, deeply connected to the sacred.[148] Rifā'ī's depiction of human existence is, therefore, an antidote to the modern portrayal of individuals as independent, self-contained beings—a perception that gained ground through the rationalistic and secular ideologies that permeated Ottoman intellectual circles during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[149] By returning to traditional Sufi perspectives, Rifā'ī presents humanity as the focal point within a broader spiritual cosmology and metaphysics.[150] His poetic work thus critiques the intellectual currents of the era, emphasizing that human life cannot be reduced to material existence or empirical achievements but should be understood in its spiritual and divine context. This interplay between the individual and the divine cosmos is vividly illustrated in Rifā'ī's verses, where he poetically articulates the metaphysical dimensions of humanity's sacred origins and existential purpose:

> Man is the fountain of wisdom, bearer of knowledge and grace,

146 "Cümleden al gönlünü, sen Allâh'a dayan/*Zât-ı ulûhiyyete hâs kudret ü fennân*," ibid. 111.

147 Rifā'ī posits that the pursuit of self-knowledge and ethical development must take precedence over the singular pursuit of material gains. His critique aligns with a broader Sufi understanding of existence—where the true essence of progress is characterized by the soul's journey towards divine unity. This duality, which balances material progress with spiritual fulfillment, places Rifā'ī's work as a significant counterpoint to the secularization and rationalism increasingly prominent in the late Ottoman intellectual world. Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 15, 37, 49, 473.

148 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 99-100; Rifā'ī, *Şerhli Mesnevî-i Şerîf*, 3-4; Rifā'ī, *Sohbetler*, 149.

149 For information on the growing individualism and rationalism that influenced Ottoman intellectual circles, challenging traditional metaphysical frameworks see M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145-150.

150 Yalçınkaya, *Ken'ân Rifâî*, 351-361; 263-266.

> Within him lies, beyond doubt, the Creator's hidden embrace.
> Though his form is small, frail, and weak in design,
> The Creator has placed all things within his confined line.
> Seek what you will, noble one, in humankind's sphere,
> He is the grand mirror of the cosmos, noble and clear.[151]

Ken'ān Rifā'ī's verses articulate a deeply rooted Sufi perspective on the human condition, presenting humanity as both a microcosm (*nüsha-yı kübra*) and a reflection of divine wisdom. The opening line, "Man is the fountain of wisdom, bearer of knowledge and grace," reaffirms the Sufi principle that humanity embodies the potential for divine insight and knowledge. This is not merely an intellectual assertion but a metaphysical claim that positions humanity as a conduit for divine attributes. Rifā'ī elevates humanity's spiritual station, situating it as the *nüsha-yı kübra,* the great mirror of the cosmos, where all divine names and attributes converge and find expression. The second couplet highlights the paradoxical nature of human existence: despite humanity's small physical stature (*frail and weak in design*), it serves as the repository of all creation's essence. This duality—of frailty and divine encapsulation—encapsulates the Sufi worldview, which sees the human being not as a mere physical organism but as a site where the divine reality manifests. Rifā'ī critiques the reductionist tendencies of modernist thought, which increasingly viewed humanity through materialist paradigms, and reasserts the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of existence. By asserting that humanity contains the "grand mirror of the cosmos" Rifā'ī offers a counter-narrative to the disenchanted view of human beings as autonomous, self-contained entities. Instead, he positions humanity within a sacred cosmology, deeply interwoven with divine purpose and the fabric of the universe.

This rhetorical strategy reflects Rifā'ī's broader engagement with the philosophical and existential crises of his time. His poetry not only critiques the intellectual frameworks that sidelined metaphysical perspectives but also reclaims human purpose by reconnecting it to its divine origins. In doing so, Rifā'ī underscores that understanding humanity necessitates an acknowledgment of its sacred dimension—where intellect, body, and soul converge as integral components of a divinely orchestrated whole. Through these verses, Rifā'ī's work exemplifies a profound Sufi response to the crises of modernity, affirming that true wisdom lies not in material or empirical achievements but in recognizing and embodying humanity's divine potential.

While Rifā'ī frequently elaborates on humanity's role as the fountain of divine wisdom (*menba-ı hikmet*) in his poetry, he also shifts his focus to its darker capacities, portraying human nature as the source of destructive tendencies (*menba-ı vahşet*). In the following poem, he critiques these base instincts and questions whether such behaviors are worthy of humanity's exalted position as the pinnacle of creation:

> Man is the source of wildness, frail and powerless in his form,
> Yet takes pride in spilling blood, boasting with alarming scorn.
> Tyranny, theft, arrogance, slander, disbelief, and rebellion,
> All disgrace humanity, rendering it bound for damnation.
> How fitting is it to name such a creature "man"?
> From such vile beings, disgrace flows again and again.[152]

151 Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 128-129.

152 Menba'-ı vahşettir insan âciz ü bî-iktidâr/Birbirin boğazlayıp kanın içer bi'l-iftihâr.

Rifā'ī's exploration of humanity's darker capacities highlights the inherent paradox of human existence: a being imbued with divine wisdom yet susceptible to destructive impulses. This duality, central to his poetic and philosophical reflections, aligns with the Sufi perspective of the human condition as a realm of both challenge and spiritual opportunity. In his book *Sohbetler*, Rifā'ī mourns humanity's moral decline, particularly in reference to the wars and widespread devastation experienced during the first half of the 20th century. He expresses profound dismay at humanity's capacity for violence and self-destruction, observing that people destroy the very civilizations they have painstakingly built over centuries, acting in ways far removed from the true essence of humanity.[153] Through this lens, Rifā'ī underscores that overcoming such destructive tendencies is imperative for reclaiming the higher self. He emphasizes that transcending such animalistic traits necessitates a conscious effort to rediscover humanity's divine purpose and work toward spiritual fulfillment, illuminating a path away from destruction and toward inner peace.

Rifā'ī's poetry grapples with humanity's existential quest for meaning, weaving questions of origin and purpose into a Sufi framework. In lines such as "Who spoke us into being when our name did not yet exist?,"[154] he probes the metaphysical dimensions of creation, portraying it as an act inseparable from divine will. This reflection extends to questions like "Why have you come to this world, what is sought?,"[155] echoing classical Sufi traditions that consider introspection central to understanding one's divine purpose. By situating humanity within a sacred cosmology, Rifā'ī affirms the interconnectedness of intellect, soul, and body as reflections of divine attributes. Such inquiry transcends individual spirituality, offering a profound counterpoint to the distractions of material existence. For Rifā'ī, self-realization emerges as the rediscovery of humanity's divine origins, a process that realigns the human condition with its metaphysical roots. His emphasis on reflective practice aligns with classical Sufi traditions, where the journey of self-realization is considered a pathway to understanding one's existential purpose within the divine order.[156]

The human quest for meaning, disoriented by rapid social and cultural shifts, is one of the central themes Rifā'ī explores. How can an individual, submerged in the turbulence of modernity, rediscover their essence? By invoking the Sufi concept of the *garîb* (stranger), he crafts an evocative metaphor for the soul's exile in the material world. His verse, "We are strangers in this world, let us know"[157] calls attention to the displacement, many felt in the face of rapid modernization. This line is more than a lament—it's a challenge to the dominant intellectual trends of his time, a reminder that human existence transcends the physical world. Rifā'ī's use of the bridge (*köprü*) metaphor further develops this critique. In urging his audience to "gracefully cross the bridge of existence,"[158] he reframes

Zulm ü sirkat, kibr ü gıybet, küfr ü isyândır bütün/ Eyleyen insânı rüsvâ, âkıbet mahkûm-i nâr!

Hiç sezâ mı böyle bir mahlûka âdem koymak ad?/ Böyle alçak zümreden insan demâdem eyler âr" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 204.

153 Ayverdi et al., *Kenan Rifai ve Yirminci Asrın Işığında Müslümanlık*, 498.

154 "Namımız yokken ademde, var eden kimdir bizi?" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 98.

155 "Tefekkür et, niçin geldin bu dünyâya, nedir matlûb?" ibid. 115.

156 For more information on the socio-cultural shifts of the late Ottoman period, particularly the tension between material progress and spiritual needs during modernization efforts, see Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 223-230.

157 "Bu fânî cihânda garîbiz biz" Rifā'ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken'ân*, 52.

158 ibid. 52-54.

life as a transitional state, a journey, rather than an end in itself. The bridge becomes a symbolic passage, representing the spiritual path that leads beyond the material world. Rifā‘ī’s poetic imagery invites readers to question: if life is but a bridge, what lies on the other side? And how does one walk this bridge gracefully, without succumbing to the distractions of the secular world? In one of his contemplative lines, Rifā‘ī writes, “In humanity is the perfection of love, in humanity is beauty”[159] Rifā‘ī’s portrayal of humanity as an integral part of the cosmic narrative further expands his exploration of the human condition. He envisions humanity as the beloved within the grand narrative of existence, suggesting that “time and the cosmos are enamored” with human potential.

In this context, humanity transcends the role of a passive recipient of divine grace, taking on the role of an active participant in the ongoing recreation by love that invigorates the universe. This vision challenges the reductionist views of his contemporaries, which often prioritized empirical progress and disregarded the sacredness of existence. Instead, Rifā‘ī advocates for a cyclical, sacred understanding of existence—one that brings individuals closer to the Divine rather than leading them astray in the pursuit of mere worldly gains. Through the integration of these elements, his poetry extends an invitation and a challenge to everyone who face the modern world’s unknowns, both his dervishes and those beyond the *tekke*. Rifā‘ī’s lyrical reaction, by reconnecting with the soul and acknowledging the impermanence of the material world, offers a framework for managing the complicated search for meaning both in his time and beyond.

159 “İnsandadır aşkın kemâli, insandadır cemâli” Rifā‘ī, *İlâhiyât-ı Ken‘ân*, 161.

Conlusion

Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī’s poetry emerges as a remarkable synthesis of the Ottoman Sufi poetic tradition and the intellectual and cultural shifts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In *İlâhiyât-ı Ken‘ân*, Rifā‘ī preserves the formal richness of classical *dīvān* and *tekke* poetry while creatively engaging with the socio-intellectual challenges of his era. By addressing perennial Sufi themes such as divine love, unity, and the human condition, his work bridges the continuity of the Ottoman poetic canon with the transformative demands of a rapidly modernizing society. The findings of this study answer the research question—“How did Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī’s poetic innovations maintain the Ottoman Sufi poetic tradition while responding to modern concerns?”—by highlighting the duality of preservation and adaptation in his work. Formally, Rifā‘ī’s use of traditional meters such as *remel* and *hezec* demonstrates his rootedness in classical poetic structures, yet his rare ability to seamlessly align his poetry with musical compositions highlights an innovative synergy, making his works a distinguished representation of the late Ottoman *tekke* poetry and music tradition at its full potential. His poetry transcends mere textuality, becoming an auditory and spiritual experience.

Thematically, his portrayal of love—encompassing both its earthly and divine aspects—reframes traditional Sufi ideals for a modern audience. By presenting worldly love as a bridge to divine union, Rifā‘ī modernizes the classical Sufi discourse, making it accessible and relevant to the individual struggles of his contemporaries. Rifā‘ī’s engagement with concepts such as progress (*terakkî*), freedom (*hürriyet*), and homeland (*vatan*) reflects his nuanced response to the intellectual currents of his time. His poetry critiques the rationalist and materialist tendencies of the

late Ottoman intellectual landscape, offering instead a holistic vision where self-realization and spiritual refinement are integral to meaningful progress. Similarly, his reinterpretation of *vatan* bridges its traditional Sufi meaning—denoting the soul's return to its divine origin—with the emerging nationalist discourse of the period, situating his work within a complex interplay of metaphysical and political thought. Crucially, Rifâ'ī's poetic vocabulary elevates the potential of Turkish within the Sufi tradition, as he develops a lexicon that harmonizes Turkish expressions with profound mystical themes. His use of terms like *sevgili* (beloved) and *sevdiğim* (my beloved) reimagines the expression of divine love, while phrases such as *yok-var olmak* (to be in nonexistence-existence) provide an accessible articulation of core Sufi concepts like annihilation (*fanâʾ*) and subsistence (*baqâʾ*). By synthesizing the linguistic heritage of earlier Turkish Sufi poets such as Yûnus Emre, Niyāzī Mıṣrī, and Uftāde, Rifâ'ī not only strengthens the continuity of this tradition but also expands its expressive capacity, demonstrating the adaptability of Sufi poetry to the evolving needs of its audience. Ultimately, Rifâ'ī's poetry does more than sustain the Ottoman Sufi poetic tradition; it reimagines it in ways that resonate with the shifting intellectual and cultural dynamics of his time. His ability to balance instructive, didactic elements with lyrical and ecstatic expression positions his work as both a continuation of Sufi heritage and a medium for addressing modern existential and social questions. This duality—rooted in both classical forms and creative reinterpretation—exemplifies Rifâ'ī's unique contribution to late Ottoman *tekke* poetry. His works stand as both a testimony to the enduring relevance of Sufi thought and as a model of how spiritual and cultural traditions can evolve without losing their essence. By engaging thoughtfully with the dynamics of contemporary discourse, Rifâ'ī revitalizes Turkish Ottoman Sufi poetry and weaves it seamlessly into the fabric of modern contexts.

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