

From Everyday Words to Mystical Terms: Determination and Double-Coded Semantics in Central Asian Sufi Discourse

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Everyday Persian–Turkic lexemes become Sufi terms through discourse, not through word-form.
- Four operational criteria separate common vocabulary from mystical terminology.
- Sufi terminologization produces controlled polysemy rather than technical monosemy.
- Selected tavern-code items (may, sāqī, kharābāt, qadah, rind) show the same denotative shift; mughbacha is treated as a functional analogue.
- The model offers a practical tool for decoding double-coded Sufi semantics.

ABSTRACT

This article examines how everyday lexical items (may/wine, sāqī, kharābāt, qadah/jām, rind) acquire the status of specialized metaphysical terms in Sufi literary and religious discourse; mughbacha is treated only as a functional analogue. The study argues that terminological status is determined not by morphological form, but by discourse type, pragmatic purpose, and symbolic function. Using linguosemiotic marking, cognitive-discursive analysis, and semantic differentiation, the paper reconstructs the mechanism by which a word's primary material denotatum is dissolved and replaced by a transcendent concept. Four operational criteria are proposed for distinguishing common vocabulary from mystical terminology: denotative basis, discourse environment, pragmatic purpose, and symbolism. The analysis shows that Sufi terminologization differs from technical terminology: instead of monosemy and emotional neutrality, it produces controlled polysemy and affective connotation. The proposed model is intended as a tool for decoding the double-coded semantics of classical Persian and Turkic Sufi texts.

Keywords: Sufi terminology; linguosemiotics; denotatum; resemantization; cognitive metaphor; double-coded language; determination.

INTRODUCTION

Everyday words do not enter Sufi discourse as ready-made terms. Items such as may (wine), sāqī (cupbearer), kharābāt (tavern), qadah (cup) or rind (profligate) remain, in ordinary speech, names of objects, roles and socially marked types. In mystical lyric and in theoretical prose the same forms are used to speak of divine attraction, spiritual guidance, annihilation of the self and the rank of the perfected lover. The problem is not whether Sufi language

is symbolic — that has long been recognized — but how an everyday lexeme can be shown to have crossed the boundary into domain terminology.

Classical Oriental studies described this language mainly as a system of images. Bertels analysed the symbolic repertoire of Sufi literature and its Central Asian development [1].

Schimmel treated wine, the tavern and related figures as images whose ambiguity is intended: they oscillate between two levels of meaning and are not mere decorative metaphor [12, pp. 287–288]. In Persian philology Udam argued that Ḥāfiẓ's lexicon operates by two-level coding: a single word may denote a worldly scene and a metaphysical state at the same time [5]. Komilov and Haqqul interpreted fanā, 'ishq and faqr as conceptual centres of Navā'ī's thought [4, pp. 145–160; 6, pp. 125–140]. Dadaboyev, Khamidov and Kholmanova described semantic narrowing and expansion in the Old Uzbek literary vocabulary [2]. Leychik defines the specialized term as a common lexeme that acquires domain status in a professional environment [11]. De Certeau's analysis of mystic speech helps to describe this shift from ordinary nomination to a new symbolic space [10, pp. 79–90]. The historical setting of Central Asian Sufism is treated in Algar, Karamustafa and Sviri [7; 16; 3]; Fitrat remains the starting point for Mashrab's authorship [8]. Bābur's Bāburnāma belongs to the corpus even where tavern-lexemes are sparse [22].

What remains insufficiently specified is the boundary itself. Existing studies explain the richness of Sufi symbolism, yet they rarely state the linguistic markers by which a common word in a mystical text can be identified as a specialized term rather than an occasional metaphor. Without such markers, "Sufi terminology" remains an intuitive label. This article therefore asks: by what linguistic criteria can an everyday word in a Sufi text be recognized as a domain term?

The aim is to establish an operational model of determination in mystical discourse and to explain the cognitive-semantic mechanism of its double-coded functioning. The analysis tests four criteria — denotative basis, discourse environment, pragmatic purpose and symbolic scope — on a closed Central Asian corpus: Navā'ī's Nasāyim ul-muḥabbat and Lisān ut-tayr; Bābur's Mubayyin, Risāla-i vāliidiya, Bāburnāma and Dīvān; Mashrab's Mabda'-i nūr and Dīvān. Five high-frequency images of the tavern code (may/sharāb, sāqī, kharābāt, qadah/jām, rind-i kharābātī) form the main test-set. Mughbacha, which is rare in the selected didactic and narrative texts, is treated as a functional analogue of the mediating murshid / Hudhud figure in Lisān ut-tayr. Complementary terms (fanā, dhikr, murāqaba, tawḥīd, faqr) are drawn from the same sources. The hypothesis is that Sufi terminologization does not eliminate the worldly meaning. It subordinates that meaning to an esoteric code

which becomes fully actual only inside a mystical institutional discourse.

METHODS

The study combines linguosemiotic marking, cognitive-discursive analysis, semantic-field comparison, and semantic differentiation. The aim is not to catalogue Sufi images, but to determine when an everyday lexeme crosses the boundary into domain terminology.

The material is a closed Central Asian corpus: Alisher Navā'ī, Nasāyim ul-muḥabbat and Lisān ut-tayr; Zāhīr al-Dīn Muḥammad Bābur, Mubayyin, Risāla-i vāliidiya, Bāburnāma and Dīvān; Boborahim Mashrab, Mabda'-i nūr and Dīvān. The 1994 Fan edition of Mabda'-i nūr, prepared by G. Niyozov and Q. Ahmedov, is a selected corpus of ghazals and mustazods drawn from the work, not a complete critical text of the masnavi-commentary. Editions used are those listed in the References.

The main test-set consists of five high-frequency units of the tavern code: may/sharāb, sāqī, kharābāt, qadah/jām and rind-i kharābātī. These items were selected because they remain formally identical in everyday speech and in mystical texts, which makes the moment of determination observable. Mughbacha is rare in the selected didactic and narrative texts and is treated only as a functional analogue of the mediating murshid / Hudhud figure in Lisān ut-tayr. Complementary terms from the same sources — fanā, dhikr, murāqaba, tawajjuh, tawḥīd, faqr — are used where the tavern-set is thin.

Each lexeme was examined on four levels:

1. denotative basis — whether the word still refers to a material object or a social role;
2. discourse environment — whether the immediate context is domestic or realistic, or institutional-mystical (lyric, hagiography, risāla);
3. pragmatic purpose — information, aesthetic ornament, spiritual instruction, or esoteric coding;
4. symbolic scope — whether the word functions as an isolated metaphor or as a stable term-concept inside a hierarchical code.

Semantic differentiation was used to separate the worldly

and mystical readings of the same form. De Certeau's account of religious connotation supported the identification of the shift from ordinary nomination to a new symbolic space [10, p. 84]. Cabré and Temmerman supplied the general-terminological background: domain status is treated as a function of specialized communication and prototype structure, not of morphology alone [9, p. 85; 13, pp. 73–80].

The procedure is qualitative. No statistical frequency count is claimed, except where earlier studies already report figures (for example, the high frequency of *fanā* in *Lisān ut-tayr*). The tavern-images are denser in lyric than in didactic prose. The four-criterion model is therefore offered as an operational heuristic to be tested on a larger annotated Persian–Chagatai corpus.

RESULTS

The comparison of everyday and mystical uses of the same lexical forms yields a stable set of boundary markers. Four criteria were applied: denotative basis, text type and discourse, pragmatic purpose, and symbolic scope.

1. Denotative basis. In common usage the selected words refer to material objects or social roles: wine,

cupbearer, tavern, cup, profligate. In Sufi discourse the material denotatum is suspended or dissolved and replaced by a transcendent concept (divine attraction, spiritual master, annihilation of the self, the gnostic heart, the perfect lover).

2. Text type and discourse. The same form remains ordinary in domestic or realistic speech. When it enters Sufi lyric, hagiography or a *risāla*, it is absorbed into an institutional code and functions as a domain term.

3. Pragmatic purpose. Everyday use transmits information or describes a scene. Mystical use aims at a spiritual effect: instruction, concealment, catharsis and the coding of inner states.

4. Symbolic scope. Outside mystical discourse the word operates as a literal noun or a conventional metaphor. Inside that discourse it becomes a hierarchical symbol and a linguocultural concept.

The theoretical warrant for treating this shift as a change of discursive space, not merely of ornament, is de Certeau's account of mystic speech [10, p. 84].

These distinctions may be summarized as follows.

Table 1. Comparative-semantic classification

Criterion	Everyday (secular) lexicon	Religious-mystical lexicon
Nature of the sign	Relatively static; close to monosemy	Dynamic; discourse-activated polysemy
Semantic function	Nomination of objects and roles	Esoteric coding of inner realities
Emotional connotation	Neutral or physical	Affective states (<i>ḥāl</i> , <i>wajd</i> , <i>sukr</i>)
Denotatum	Material / social	Transcendent / spiritual
Pragmatic aim	Information	Purification and initiation

The test items confirm the same direction of change. *May/sharāb* shifts from drink to divine intoxication; *sāqī*

from servant to master; *kharābāt* from ruined tavern to the place of self-annihilation; *qadah/jām* from vessel to the receptive heart; *rind-i kharābātī* from social outsider to the

perfected lover. In each case determination is produced by discourse and function, not by a new morphological marker.

The distribution inside the corpus is uneven. May, sāqī, qadah and rind are active in Mashrab and in Bābur's Dīvān; kharābāt is explicit in Bābur's Persian fragment. Mughbacha is rare in the selected didactic texts and is therefore treated only as a functional analogue of the mediating murshid / Hudhud figure. This distribution is documented in the Discussion; it does not cancel the four-criterion pattern.

DISCUSSION

The movement of everyday words into Sufi discourse is a special case of terminologization. In technical languages a common lexeme usually acquires domain status by moving toward monosemy and emotional neutrality [11]. In Sufi texts the opposite occurs. The word keeps its worldly form, but its meaning is reorganized through cognitive metaphor, controlled polysemy and affective connotation. Udam's account of two-level coding is therefore more precise than the classical demand for a context-free term: the Sufi unit works on an exoteric and an esoteric plane at once, and the second plane is activated only inside mystical discourse [5].

The tavern-images are most densely attested in the ghazal tradition. In the present corpus they appear unevenly: may, sāqī, qadah and rind are active in Mashrab and in Bābur's Dīvān; kharābāt is explicit in Bābur's Persian fragment. Mughbacha is rare in the didactic texts and is treated as a functional analogue of the mediating murshid / Hudhud figure in Lisān ut-tayr.

May / sharāb. In ordinary speech the word names an intoxicating drink. Mashrab uses it as a code of love-intoxication in two couplets of the ghazal "Devona bo'ldum":

Kavsar sharobi yodimg'a kelmas,

La'li labingdin mastona bo'ldum.

[...]

Ishqing mayini simdi bu jismim,

Ham soqiyu ham paymona bo'ldum.

"The wine of Kawthar no longer comes to my mind;

I became drunk from the ruby of your lip.

[...]

The wine of your love was held out to this body;

I became both cupbearer and cup" [17].

The material denotatum is suspended. The discourse is mystical lyric; the pragmatic aim is the coding of wajd, not the nomination of alcohol. Bābur keeps the same pair of images in a lyrical key:

Bahor fasliduru may havosi boshimda,

Ayoq tut menga soqiyki, xush havoedur.

"It is springtime, and the mood of wine is in my head;

Hold the cup to me, cupbearer — the air is fair" [18].

Cabré's communicative view of terminology applies here: domain status is produced by context, not by word-form [9, p. 85]. Schimmel treats the ambiguity of wine imagery as intended: the word oscillates between two levels and is not mere ornament [12, pp. 287–288].

Sāqī. The everyday cupbearer is a servant. Mashrab turns the word into the agent of wahdat:

Soqiy, qadahni qilg'il muhayyo,

Vahdat mayidin ichgoli keldim.

"Cupbearer, make the cup ready;

I have come to drink the wine of oneness" [17].

Temmerman's prototype model explains the shift: the term is organized around a spiritual catalyst, not around a closed definition [13, pp. 73–80]. Bābur binds the same code to union:

Necha firoq humori aro azob chekay,

Qachon visol mayidin dami usurgaymen?!

"How long shall I suffer in the hangover of separation?

When shall I draw a breath from the wine of union?" [18].

In a tavern scene the form remains common vocabulary; in this lyric it is an institutional term.

Kharābāt. In common usage the word names a ruined drinking-place. Bābur reverses the evaluation:

Kharābātīvu rindu butparastam,

Ba ‘ālam har chi mēgūyand, hastam.

"I am of the tavern, a rind and an idolater;

Whatever the world says of me, that I am" [18].

Purnamdariyan notes that a negatively marked worldly image can serve as a concealment code [14, p. 510]. In Nasāyīm ul-muḥabbat ruined or withdrawn sites appear in notices of early saints; only mystical discourse turns the site into a term of sincerity and annihilation of the self [19].

Mughbacha. The lexeme is not productive in the didactic works of the corpus. Its dense use belongs to Navā’ī’s ghazal dīvāns. The comparable function in Lisān ut-tayr is the guide-bird Hudhud, the mediating murshid who leads the seekers across the seven valleys [20]. The analogy is functional, not lexical. Determination is still produced by role and discourse: a worldly servant-boy in one text-type, a spiritual intermediary in another.

Qadah / jāṃ. Mashrab’s couplet already detaches the cup from objecthood and binds it to may-i waḥdat. The prototype is the receptive heart. Symbolism, not denotation, becomes the dominant criterion [13, pp. 73–80].

Rind. In common speech the rind is a morally unmarked or condemned outsider. Mashrab inverts the stigma:

Yumdum ko‘zumni sendin bo‘lakdin,

Kechdim baridin, rindona bo‘ldum.

[...]

Mashrabga may sun mayxona ichra,

Kechtim baridin — rindona bo‘ldum.

[...]

"I closed my eye to all but you;

I passed beyond everything and became a rind.

Mashrab, pour wine in the tavern;

I have passed beyond everything — I became a rind" [17].

The denotatum is no longer a social outcast. The discourse is mystical lyric; the pragmatic aim is self-annihilation and sincerity. The same form, once it enters this institutional code, functions as a domain term.

Leychik’s dynamic terminology and Aksan’s cultural-psychological layer help to explain why a socially condemned label becomes a highest-value term inside a closed symbolic system [11, pp. 31–32; 15]. The pragmatic purpose is rank-coding within a Qalandarī–malāmatī idiom.

The same corpus supplies complementary evidence where the tavern-set is thin. In Lisān ut-tayr the seventh valley is faqr va fanā; fanā is used with exceptional frequency and the poem is signed Fānī [20]. In Nasāyīm the utmost degree of dhikr is the disappearance of the rememberer in the remembered [19]. Bābur’s Risāla-i vālidīya operationalizes dhikr-i khafī, murāqaba, tawajjuh and rābiṭa [18], while Mubayyin aligns tawḥīd, taqwā, ṣabr, riḍā, tawakkul, zuhd and faqr with Ḥanafī ethics [18]. Mashrab’s Mabda’-i nūr names the source-light itself: Kiribsan Mabdayi nuri haqiqat bahriga Mashrab [21].

Three observations follow. First, Sufi determination does not erase the worldly meaning; it places that meaning under an esoteric code. Second, the same phonetic form may remain ordinary or become terminological according to text type. Third, the four-criterion model is more operational than a purely stylistic account of "Sufi metaphor," because it specifies when metaphor has crossed into domain terminology. The present reading, however, remains qualitative and limited by the size of the sample.

CONCLUSION

The analysis supports three conclusions.

First, an everyday word becomes a Sufi term not because of its morphological shape, but because it enters a specialized discourse and acquires a new pragmatic function. The same phonetic form may remain a common

noun in a realistic scene and operate as a domain term in a mystical lyric or treatise.

Second, Sufi resemantization dissolves or suspends the primary material denotatum and replaces it with a transcendent concept. This process does not produce the monosemy expected of technical terminology. It produces controlled polysemy: the worldly meaning remains visible, while the esoteric meaning becomes dominant. Udam's two-level coding is the most adequate description of this mechanism [5].

Third, the four criteria — denotative basis, discourse type, pragmatic purpose and symbolic scope — offer a practical means of distinguishing common vocabulary from religious-mystical terminology. Applied to may, sāqī, kharābāt, qadah and rind, and supported by complementary terms from Navā'ī, Bābur and Mashrab, they show a regular pattern: loss or suspension of the material referent, institutional contextualization, affective purpose, and elevation from occasional metaphor to systematic symbol. Mughbacha is cited only as a functional analogue of the mediating guide.

The value of the model lies in making the boundary between everyday lexicon and Sufi terminology empirically discussable rather than purely intuitive.

LIMITATIONS

The study is qualitative and based on a closed corpus: Navā'ī's *Nasāyim ul-muḥabbat* and *Lisān ut-tayr*; Bābur's *Mubayyin*, *Risāla-i vāliidiya*, *Bāburnāma* and *Dīvān*; Mashrab's *Mabda'-i nūr* and *Dīvān*. Quotations from *Mabda'-i nūr* follow the 1994 selected edition rather than a complete critical text. Lyric quotations from Mashrab and Bābur follow the standard printed recensions (1980 Devon; 1993 *Asarlar*), as checked against accessible digital publications; exact page numbers are not claimed where a copy was not in hand. No statistical frequency count is claimed, except where earlier research already reports figures. The tavern-images are denser in lyric than in didactic prose. Mughbacha is rare in the selected texts and is discussed only as a functional analogue of the mediating *murshid* / *Hudhud* figure. The four-criterion model is therefore offered as a heuristic. It should be tested on a larger annotated Persian–Chagatai corpus and compared across Kubrawī, Naqshbandī and Qalandarī treatises.

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