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THE THEME OF *MAḤABBATULLĀH* (GOD'S  
LOVING) IN RĀBI'AH AL-'ADAWIYYAH'S  
MYSTICISM: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

BY

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# ABSTRACT

This study attempts to examine Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah’s conception and interpretation of the theme of *maḥabbatullāh* (God’s loving), and to analyse its nature, elements and distinctive characteristics, in light of her teachings in Sufism. Since this study deals with Rābi‘ah’s life and legacy, comprising her sayings, homilies, and supplications, thus it employs a historical approach, and data procured from early sources of Sufism comprising treatises, biography books, and relevant writings of Muslim scholars and Orientalists are analysed. In general, *maḥabbatullāh* is one of the teachings of Islam and the principal themes in Sufism. However, Rābi‘ah surpasses other *ṣūfīs* with her distinguished conception of *maḥabbah*, which emphasises on two main points. She expounds that God should be loved because He is worthy of that love, without no interest for any kinds of rewards or favours in return, and without fear of His punishments. She also propounds that God should be the sole object of love, thus, through self-renunciation and total devotion, one should avoid any kinds of hindrances and distractions. Rābi‘ah also distinguishes between the two kinds of love, the ‘selfish love’ which seeks the pleasure of Paradise and the ‘selfless love’ which seeks God’s satisfaction. This study also finds that legend had played a considerable part in Rābi‘ah’s biography, subsequently resulting in the incorrect perspective of her life.

## ملخص البحث

إن مدار هذه الدراسة هي مفهوم محبة الله عند رابعة العدوية، وبالتالي فهي تشمل طبيعة وعناصر وخصائص تلك المحبة في تعاليمها الصوفية. بما أن البحث بالخصوص قد حصر على حياة رابعة العدوية والتي تتضمن الأقوال والأفعال والأفكار ومناجاتها إلى الله، لذا فإن المنهج المسار عليه هو استعراض التاريخي وجمع المعلومات التي توجد في المصادر القديمة، ولا يمنع هذا من التعرّيج على الأبحاث ذات الصلة بالموضوع التي كتبها المحدثون من المسلمين والمستشرقين. لا شك أن مفهوم محبة الله من أهم تعاليم الدين الحنيف كما أنها تعتبر من أروع تعاليم الصوفية، وهذه النظرية بالتحديد هي التي جعلت رابعة تفوق جميع مشايخ الصوفية في القلم والحديث.

نظرية رابعة في محبة الله تركز على أمرين أساسيين. أولاً أن محبة العبد لله لا بد أن تكون خالصاً له والله مستحق محبة العبد بدون أي غرض سواء كان رغباً من نعيم الجنة أو خوفاً من النار. ثانياً أن يكون الله تعالى هو وحده المحبوب، وهذا يلزم من العبد أن لا يشغل باله بأمور سواه، وهذا يتحقق عن طريق الزهد والتعبد الخالص. بالإضافة إلى هذا فإن رابعة قامت بتفريق بين "الحب الهوى" الذي يرمي صاحبه إلى نعيم الجنة و"الحب الخالص" الذي لا يتبغي منه إلا وجه الله تعالى. وكذلك يتبين من هذا البحث أن الأسطورة قد لعبت دوراً هاماً في تكوين الصورة المشهورة عنها، مما أدت إلى وجود صورة مشوهة عن حياتها وأفكارها.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage.



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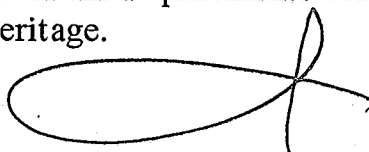
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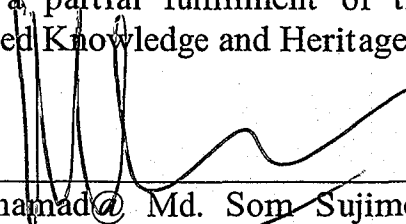
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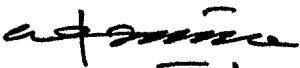
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# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

*Maḥabbatullāh* (God's Loving) is a distinctive theme in mysticism, and one of its most important subjects. It is the prime virtue and the highest stage to be attained by the *ṣūfīs* in paving their way (*tariqah*) in Sufism, through a variety of interpretations and practices. Notwithstanding, its interpretations, reflections and practices, as set forth by the renowned *ṣūfi* woman, Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah surpass the other *ṣūfi* fellows with her distinctive characteristics and qualities. Thus, this study attempts to give an extensive exposition and explication of Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah's interpretation and understanding of this theme in the light of her personal life, mystical experiences, spiritual teachings and exercises. It aims to analyse her conception of this theme and highlight its nature, its distinguished characteristics and its elements, and whether it conforms to the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (Prophetic Traditions). Nevertheless, this study tries to give an overview of the doctrine of love (*maḥabbah*) in Sufism, and reveal Rābi'ah's exalted rank among the *ṣūfīs*. Consequently, this study also attempts to accentuate the correlation between *maḥabbatullāh* with the faith (*īmān*), its importance and impact on it, so as to integrate the contemporary lives of Muslims.

## B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The premise of this study is to explore the theme of *maḥabbatullāh* (God's Loving) in Sufism, with special focus on Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah's conception and interpretation of it. In doing so, the researcher attempts to answer several questions and issues, which are related to this subject and encompass them in this study. First, an attempt has been made to present an exposition of the different stages in Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah's life, namely her childhood and early life, adolescence and her later life as a *ṣūfī*. Second, this study intends to discuss several controversial issues in her life, i.e. her involvement in music, the allegation of the period of disgraceful life and her repentance (conversion). Third, it also tries to give an explication of the themes of her spiritual teachings, her spiritual practices and mystical experiences. Most importantly, this study attempts to provide an analysis of Rābi'ah's conception of *maḥabbatullāh*, highlighting its nature, elements and factors through her supplications, prayers and sayings, and show its conformity with the tenets of Islam as reflected in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Subsequently, it tries to present a summary of the doctrine of this theme in Sufism, so as to distinguish Rābi'ah's conception from those of those of other *ṣūfī* figures.

## C. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to acquire a better understanding of the theme of *maḥabbatullāh* (God's Loving), as reflected by Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah in her *ṣūfī* life and teachings. It is also hoped to achieve several other objectives as follows:

1. To pave the way for fresh readers to be familiar with Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah’s thoughts and teachings in Sufism, her mystical experiences and her life.
2. To give a clear and inspiring perspective of this conception, and enlighten readers to it, thus enhancing the awareness of loving God.
3. To analyse some of the writings of modern scholars on Rābi‘ah, and re-evaluate some of their disputable arguments regarding Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah, in an effort to rectify any incorrect postulation about her.
4. To give a new and accurate perception on Rābi‘ah’s life to the readers.
5. To accentuate the importance of loving God in the faith and behaviour of Muslims in general and how its implementation can be integrated into and improve their lives.

#### D. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned earlier, an exposition of the theme of *maḥabbatullāh* (God’s Loving) in Sufism is presented in this study, with special focus on Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah’s teachings. Therefore, the historical approach is employed in this study, particularly in expounding the description of her biography in the second chapter. However, for the other chapters, the textual analysis method is also applied to give an extensive exposition of this very theme. Since the references for this study comprise both Arabic and English works on Rābi‘ah, the texts are translated and analysed. The comparative approach is also applied in presenting other *ṣūfīs* doctrines of *maḥabbatullāh*, in comparing Rābi‘ah’s conception with theirs.

## E. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is noted that there are a number of works and writings on Sufism, which are related to the subject. Many books are also written particularly on Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah by both Muslim and Western scholars, in Arabic and English respectively, and these works are indeed beneficial in this intended study. Consequently, an attempt has been made to select and review some of the important and relevant works and publications within the ambit of this study. In conclusion, these works can be divided into the two following categories.

The first category comprises several early empirical sources and publications on Sufism that are referred to with the aim of deriving the biography of Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah and her teachings in Mysticism. One of the earliest and most renowned treatises on Sufism, the *Qūt al-Qulūb* (The Food of Hearts),<sup>1</sup> a masterpiece of Abū Tālib al-Makkī (d.386 A.H./ 996 A.D.), mentions Rābi‘ah several times, giving accounts of her life, referring to her associates and quoting her well-known verses on the “two loves”. As a *ṣūfī* author of great authority, al-Makkī also made his own lengthy comments on these verses, which are included in this study.<sup>2</sup> In addition, this treatise also provides other *ṣūfīs*’ accounts and statements, which are related to and referred in this study. Whilst not going into great detail, Abū Nu‘aym al-Aṣfahānī (d.430 A.H./ 1038 A.D.) also refers to Rābi‘ah in accounts of other early *ṣūfīs* in his book entitled *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Makkī, Abū Tālib, *Qūt al-Qulūb fī Mu‘āmalat al-Maḥbūb*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Ḥafnī, Dār al-Irshād, Cairo, 1991. (Henceforth cited as *Qūt al-Qulūb*)

<sup>2</sup> The verses of ‘two loves’ are discussed extensively in Chapter Five.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Aṣfahānī, Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’ wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā’*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1989. (Henceforth cited as *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’*)

Another important authority is Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465A.H./ 1072 A.D.). His *al-Risālah* (The Treatise)<sup>4</sup> is considered one of the most valuable references on Sufism written in Arabic. In this book, al-Qushayrī mentions Rābi‘ah frequently, quoting her teaching or anecdotes and illustrating her practices, in connection with most of the stages of the mystic way. Reference is also made to other no less important sources as al-Kalābadhī’s (d.380 A.H./ 990 A.D.) *Kitāb al-Ta‘arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*,<sup>5</sup> the *al-Luma‘* which is attributed to Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d.378 A.H./998 A.D.), and the renowned Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī’s (d. 505 A.H./ 1111 A.D.) greatest work, the *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revivification of the Sciences of Religion) . Apart from giving his own interpretation of some of Rābi‘ah’s verses, it is on the stage of Love that he acknowledges her views as the most important in Sufism. There is another source of reference, which is inevitable and important in this study, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb fi Mu‘āmalat al-Maḥbūb*,<sup>6</sup> a treatise by an eminent *ṣūfī*, ‘Alī al-Hujwīrī (d. 463 A.H./1071 A.D.), translated by R.A. Nicholson, which gives a broad exposition of several themes in Sufism, in particular *zuhd* (renunciation), *maḥabbah* (love) and other themes in Sufism as *al-rajā’* (hope), *al-khawf*(fear) and *riḍā* (satisfaction).

Apparently, the most extensive and complete biography of Rābi‘ah is gained from a Persian historian and *ṣūfī*, Farīd al-Dīn al-‘Aṭṭār’s (d. 618 A.H./1221 A.D.) book, the

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<sup>4</sup>Al-Qushayrī, Abū al-Qāsim, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, ed. Dr. ‘Abd Ḥalīm Maḥmūd & Maḥmūd Ibn al-Sharīf, Maṭba‘at Ḥassān, Cairo, 1974. (Henceforth cited as *al-Risālah*)

<sup>5</sup>Al-Kalābadhī, Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *al-Ta‘arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Maḥmūd Amīn al-Nawawī, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, Cairo, 1980. (Henceforth cited as *al-Ta‘arruf*)

<sup>6</sup>Al-Hujwīrī, ‘Alī ‘Uthmān, *The Kashf al-Maḥjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise On Sufism*, trans., R.A. Nicholson, Islamic Book Foundation, Lahore, 1980. (Henceforth cited as *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*)

*Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* (The Memoirs of the Saints), which deals exclusively with the lives of saints. Originally written in Persian, this great work has been compiled, edited and translated into English by A. J. Arberry.<sup>7</sup> Though it doesn't provide us any precise indication of the sources upon which he drew the data, and there is a possibility of legends included in his narration, undoubtedly most of it is derived from early biographies or treatises. Notwithstanding, we rely most on al-'Aṭṭār's writing, inasmuch that he provide us a full account of Rābi'ah's life, anecdotes of miracles, prayers and supplications. Besides these, we have also obtained valuable materials concerning Rābi'ah from other early encyclopaedias of historical events, peoples and *ṣūfīs*.<sup>8</sup>

The second category consists of contemporary publications and writings on Rābi'ah by various contemporary Muslim scholars. With regard to this, several books on the history and life of Rābi'ah are chosen. The book which is written by *Su'ād 'Alī 'Abd al-Rafīq*, entitled *Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah bayna al-Ghinā' wa al-Bukā'*<sup>9</sup> gives us a general description of Rābi'ah's life, before and after the conversion stage. The accounts of her life experiences before she became a mystic and started to practice *taṣawwuf* seriously are well described by the author, particularly her career as a flute player and a dancer. Unfortunately, she does not discuss the spiritual experiences in detail, which is our main focus in this study. However, this book is quite useful as it

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<sup>7</sup>Al-'Aṭṭār, Farīd al-Dīn, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes From The Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, trans. A. J. Arberry, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1966.

<sup>8</sup>Some of the encyclopedias referred are: *Al-Akhbār wa al-Āthār* by Sālim 'Abdullāh al-Bus'aydī, the *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān* by Ibn Khallikān, *Jāmi' Karāmāt al-Awliyā'* by Yūsuf Ismā'il al-Nabhānī and *Shahīrāt al-Nisā' al-'Arabiyyāt wa al-Muslimāt* by Muḥammad Raf'at.

<sup>9</sup>'Abd al-Rafīq, *Su'ād 'Alī, Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah bayna al-Ghinā' wa al-Bukā'*, Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣriyyah, Egypt, 1982. (Henceforth cited as *Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah*)



focuses on the factors that led Rābi‘ah to the mystical life, and it provides some answers to some questions about Rābi‘ah’s conversion and how it took place.

Meanwhile, ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Quzāyl wrote a small book entitled *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah ‘Azrā’ al-Başrah al-Batūl*.<sup>10</sup> Adopting the descriptive method in his book too, he gives an elaboration of Rābi‘ah’s childhood and the myth of her miraculous birth in quite an explicit way. The importance of this reference in comparison to others is that it helps us to acquire information about the early stages of Rābi‘ah’s life. Another book which should be mentioned as well, is *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah wa al-Ḥayāt al-Rūḥiyyah fī al-Islām*,<sup>11</sup> which is written by Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Bāqī Surūr. Although it only provides us the biography of Rābi‘ah’s life, it is quite indispensable, since Surūr quite excellently discusses and argues the controversial issue of Rābi‘ah’s career as a flute player and a dancer.

In general, it is noticeable that most of the above-mentioned books make full use of early encyclopaedias and works, in particular al-‘Aṭṭār’s. Furthermore, it also seems that the writers were keen to be influenced by one another in their writings, and in some occasions, others views are merely quoted and discussed by them. For instance, Su‘ād ‘Alī and ‘Abd al-Mun‘im seem to be influenced by the writing of a contemporary scholar, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī.

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<sup>10</sup> Quzāyl, ‘Abd al-Mun‘im, *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah ‘Azrā’ al-Başrah al-Batūl*, Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī, Cairo, 1986. (Henceforth cited as *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah*)

<sup>11</sup> Surūr, Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Bāqī, *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah wa al-Ḥayāt al-Rūḥiyyah fī al-Islām*, Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, n.l., n.d. (Henceforth cited as *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah*)

Another reference which has an inevitable impact on the study is *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah Shahīdah al-‘Ishq al-Ilāhī*,<sup>12</sup> written by ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, a competent contemporary Muslim scholar and thinker. This book is considered a complete reference for Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah written by a contemporary writer. Unlike other references, in his book, Badawī raises some controversial issues regarding Rābi‘ah’s disgraceful behaviour and misconduct during her adolescent days, i.e. her involvement in music, and tries to relate it to her total and pure repentance.<sup>13</sup> Badawī asserts that the strongest motive for Rābi‘ah’s conversion was her feeling of despair, frustration and hopelessness towards life as well as her deep-rooted feeling of sinfulness and guilt. He adopts a psychological theory, which claims that a great love that one has towards the Divinity or God, is normally the consequence of the consciousness of being guilty and sinful. In addition, he assumes that, seekers or mystics can only reach the highest stage of Divine love after repenting from a very different life style

Here, to a certain extent, Badawī’s view meets some of the other Muslim scholars’ speculation and hypotheses on this issue. Although Badawī’s assertions are quite disputable; he supports his ideas with valid arguments, from early Islamic history books and manuscripts. Apart from descriptive and historical approaches, he also employs the comparative method in his work, which is clearly seen as he highlights some comparison between Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah and Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-

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<sup>12</sup> Badawī, ‘Abd al-Rahmān, *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah Shahīdah al-‘Ishq al-Ilāhī*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., al-Nāshir Wikālāt al-Maṭbū‘at, Kuwait, 1978. (Henceforth cited as *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah*)

<sup>13</sup>The issue of Rābi‘ah’s career as a flute player is quite polemic. Some scholars refute it totally while others relate it with her great conversion and repentance. The former group illustrate her as a devotee, who worshipped God whole-heartedly, and reject any form of disgraceful conduct and

1582 A.D.),<sup>14</sup> a Christian mystic of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in certain aspects. Thus, this book is regarded as a significant reference for this study, as it provides some information, which is not discussed in other books. However, his hypothesis is discussed, analysed and refuted in this research.

There is also a book, which is written by ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Ḥafnī, entitled *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawīyah al-‘Abidah al-Khāshi‘ah Imāmah al-Maḥzūnīn*.<sup>15</sup> The distinctive characteristic of this book is that there is a chapter on “*maḥabbatullāh*” or the concept of (God’s Loving) in Islam and Christianity. Albeit briefly, the author mentions the stages, divisions and types of love including a comparison between the two renowned mystics of Islamic and Christian mysticism, i.e. Rābi‘ah and Saint Teresa of Avila. In addition, besides the prevailing sources, we also take into consideration a book written by a competent Western scholar, Margaret Smith, which has a direct impact on this study. The book, entitled *Rābi‘a: the Mystic and her Fellow Saints in Islam*,<sup>16</sup> originally her thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London, provides a complete biography of Rābi‘ah’s life, teachings and accounts of her written in English. It distinguishes itself from the other references of its kind, in that it discusses the themes in Rābi‘ah’s teachings in a more systematic mode of academic writing, providing citation and bibliographic information for the sources.

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behaviour, while on the other hand, the latter group of scholars reckon it as the main factor for her conversion.

<sup>14</sup>Sain Teresa of Avila (1515- 1582), a Christian mystic in Spain who was renowned for her devotion to God with her fervor for Divine Love.

<sup>15</sup>Al-Ḥafnī, ‘Abd al-Mun‘im, *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawīyah al-‘Abidah al-Khāshi‘ah Imāmah al-Maḥzūnīn*, Dār al-Irshād, Cairo 1991. (Henceforth cited as *Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawīyah*)

<sup>16</sup> Smith, Margaret, *Rābi‘a: the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam*, Hijra International Publishers, Lahore, 1983. (Henceforth cited as *Rābi‘a: the Mystic*)

Regarding references on *taṣawwuf*, several books by various Muslim and Western scholars are referred to. Albīr Naṣrī Nādir's book entitled *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*,<sup>17</sup> deals with the major themes of *taṣawwuf* for instance, *al-zuhd* (asceticism), *maḥabbah* (love), *dhikr* (invocation) and *fanā'* (annihilation), as well as discussing some of the Muslim *ṣūfīs'* teachings and interpretations of those themes. Meanwhile, other important books on Sufism or Mysticism which are deemed beneficial in expounding *maḥabbatullāh* as one of the themes in Sufism include Aḥmad Naṣīb al-Maḥāmid's book on love entitled *Al-Ḥubb bayna al-'Abd wa al-Rabb*.<sup>18</sup> In his work, al-Maḥāmid talks about love, the teachings in Islam on this subject, the difference between love towards God and love towards mankind, and to what extent the latter type of love is allowed in Islam. In addition, reliable works by Western scholars on Sufism and mysticism are also considered as references, for instance *The Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, written by A. J. Arberry, Margaret Smith's book, *An Introduction to Mysticism*, and L. Massignon's book entitled *al-Islam wa al-Taṣawwuf*.

In conclusion, the above-mentioned references are relevant to this study, and the topics discussed fall within the ambit of this research. These references give us a variety of approaches and look at the subject from different perspectives, which are deemed relevant for this study. However, these references are not the only sources for this study, but they are only some examples, which represent some of the selected references.

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<sup>17</sup> Nādir, Albīr Naṣrī, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*, al-Maṭba'ah al-Kāthūlikiyyah, Beirut, 1960. (Henceforth cited as *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*)

<sup>18</sup> Al-Maḥāmid, Aḥmad Naṣīb, *Al-Ḥubb bayna al-'Abd wa al-Rabb*, Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 1991.

## F. CHAPTER OUTLINE

In general, this study comprises five Chapters. Chapter One is the introduction of this study, which consists of the problem statement, the research questions, objectives of the study, the methodology adopted, and the literature review. Subsequently, Chapter Two provides an extensive biographical sketch of Rābi‘ah’s life, from her childhood days to her life as a *ṣūfī*, in order to understand her background and follow her development as a *ṣūfī*. In this chapter, the researcher tries to put together clues which indicate the factors and motives of Rābi‘ah’s practice of Sufism. The third chapter presents an exposition of the themes in Rābi‘ah’s Sufism, which comprises *al-tawbah* (repentance), *al-khawf wa al-rajā’* (hope and fear), *al-ṣabr wa al-shukr* (patience and gratitude) and *al-riḍā* (satisfaction). In an attempt to comprehend Rābi‘ah’s interpretation of these themes, her anecdotes, supplications and sayings, which are reported by her biographers are analysed. This chapter also discuss the controversial issue of Rābi‘ah’s involvement in the vocation of a dancer, and her total conversion in her life. During this exposition, the researcher also includes other *ṣūfīs*’ conceptions and perspectives, so as to compare Rābi‘ah’s comprehension with theirs. This is noteworthy since it shows Rābi‘ah’s distinction in her spiritual thought.

Consequently, the fourth chapter deals with her spiritual exercises and practices. It attempts to demonstrate her practice of *zuhd* (renunciation), *tahajjud* (night prayers), *dhikr* (invocation or remembrance of God), *ṣawm* (fasting), *tafakkur* (contemplation and meditation). It also discusses the *karāmāt* (miraculous accounts and supernatural powers) which are attributed to her, although some of them are legendary, to place

her in the high rank among the saints. Meanwhile, the last chapter, is the core of this study as it focuses on Rābi‘ah’s conception of the theme of *maḥabbatullāh*. This chapter elaborates, explores, analyses and scrutinizes this theme as interpreted, understood and practiced by her, in her teachings of *taṣawwuf*. It highlights the nature of Rābi‘ah’s well-known disinterested love, the elements of her love of God, which emphasizes loving God without any interest and hope for rewards, and focusing love on God alone. It also investigates Rābi‘ah’s spiritual basis and factors for this remarkable love, through her spiritual practices. Rābi‘ah’s famous poem on the “two loves” is also highlighted and discussed, since it is one of her distinguished attributions in Sufism. And lastly, this same chapter provides a summary of the doctrine of love in Sufism, concentrating on other *ṣūfī* figures’ views and conceptions.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LIFE OF RĀBI‘AH AL-‘ADAWIYYAH

#### A. MIRACULOUS BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah belongs to that selected company of *ṣūfī* women who have surpassed most of the contemporary *ṣūfī* masters of their time in loving God and devotion to Him. The excellence of her piety, *taqwā*, *ma‘rifah* (gnosis) and *zuhd* (asceticism) elevated her to one of the great *ṣūfī* women with an unparalleled status, who was accredited by all the great men of her time.

Before discussing Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah’s life, it is necessary to note that there is no writer or biographer who is contemporary with Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah to provide us her biography explicitly and in detail. Thus, it is undeniable that legend could have played a considerable part in it. Moreover, the material of the accounts of her life and teachings are derived from scattered sources, written by Persian and Arab writers, including biographical references and treatises of Sufism. And for the account of her life, most of the information is taken from the renowned *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā’* (Memoirs of the Saints) of Farīd al-Dīn al-‘Aṭṭār (d. 618 A.H./1221 A.D)<sup>19</sup> who lived about 400 years after Rābi‘ah. Though much of the information about her in the *Tadhkirah* can be regarded as legendary, nonetheless it gives us an overall idea of her life and personality.

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<sup>19</sup>Farīd al-Dīn al-‘Aṭṭār was a Persian poet, historian and biographer who was born near Nishāpūr. He died in 618 A.H. or 1221 A.D.

When discussing Rābi‘ah’s early life, it is essential to take into account the existing apparent confusion among biographers and historians regarding Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah’s identity and family roots. This confusion is worth discussing and is literally important albeit most of the contemporary scholars seem to neglect her in their writings. Fundamentally, the bewilderment is mainly due to the indistinct and vague reports of her father’s name and tribe in the early sources, considering the fact that some of these sources only mention her as one of the prominent mystics of the second century of *Hijrah* and her teachings in *taṣawwuf*, without providing any biographic data, as we can see in Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 386 A.H./996 A.D.) *Qūt al-Qulūb* (The Food of Heart) and al-Qushayrī’s (d.465 A.H./ 1074 A.D.) *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah* (The Treatise). On the other hand, sources that provide her biography seem to contradict each other in determining her family roots.

Consequently, as an outcome of this, two viewpoints can be summarized regarding this issue. The former group of scholars supposes her to be Rābi‘ah bint Ismā‘īl, from the clan of *Qays*, and the tribe of *Āl ‘Atīk*, without any clarification of distinguishing her from other *ṣūfī* of the same name. This generalization, without a shred of doubt leads to the erroneous attribution of some of the accounts to Rābi‘ah. Among those who share this inference are Ibn Khallikān (d.681 A.H./ 1284 A.D.),<sup>20</sup> *al-Jāhiz*

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<sup>20</sup>Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A‘yān wa Anbā’ Abnā’ al-Zamān*, ed. Dr. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 1969, vol.2. (Henceforth cited as *Wafayāt al-A‘yān*)