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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**The Mystical Element of Human Love in Leigh Hunt's Abou Ben Adhem-An Analysis****Dr. Abdul Waheed Jatoi**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a textual analysis of the poem Abou Ben Adhem. The critics have different dimensions of the poem to deal with while the mystical element of Human Love is the meeting point of thought for them all. The essence of the poem revolves around the triangle of Love-Lover and Beloved resulting in the two directions of Divine Love and Human Love. This rendezvous is the mystical truth manifesting love. The mystic thought and religious belief have been woven together under the aegis of Love and Reason. The art of versification in combination of narrative and lyrical vigour makes it clear that love is the utmost human and divine impulse which needs to be covered with images of beatitude and the service of mankind hidden or visible. The assumption that God likes to be loved, of course, is true but what is truer is yet to be known. Lovers of God for the supreme merger and annihilation consumed their lives undergoing the bitter tests of sacrifice, it is still something missing what God wants man to pass through and get at Him. This paper explores the mystical and humanistic dimensions of Leigh Hunt's "Abou Ben Adhem". The poem presents an ideal of spiritual enlightenment rooted in love for humanity rather than in ritualistic devotion. Hunt blends Romantic spirituality with Sufi mysticism, emphasizing the universality of divine love and moral compassion as the truest forms of faith.

Key words: Human Love - Divine Love - Beatitude - Sobriety – Intoxication.

1. INTRODUCTION

James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784 – 1859) has been an English poet of great repute besides being critic and essayist. 'Abou Ben Adhem' is one of his mystical sort of poems which is a narrative of Ibrahim Bin Adhem Balkhi (C 718 –C 782) one of the greatest rank of the ascetic Sufi saints who renounced his throne and chose asceticism. This poem contains the legend of his conversation with an angel. The poem is written in metaphysical overtones reflecting the profundity of human love considered to be virtuous element. To make the narrative give the literary flavor, Hunt has used the figurative language a great deal, and to maintain the soft rhythmic beat he has used iambic pentameter.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

William C. Chittick's Sufism –A short Introduction S.L. Gajwani's- A Sufi Galaxy, Abu Talha's an Objective Appraisal of the Sublime Sufi path, contain the mystical element of Human love. These studies describe that the journey towards God requires the love of mankind. The travelers on this journey are either sober or intoxicated. The sober ones are given priority over the later. Syed Hussain Nasr's Living Sufism and

M.Damadi's-A Sufi Galaxy can also be referred in this context. Qutbi (1992) describes all this in his 'Fragrance of Sufism' under 'Service to Fellow Beings'. It makes clear what pass for acts of piety such as Salat or prescribed prayers will bear no value to anyone unless he fulfilled his obligation to the poor by letting them share with him what wealth he has earned.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employs textual analysis as its primary methodology to explore the mystical element of human love in Leigh Hunt's poem Abou Ben Adhem. The poem serves as the primary source of investigation. Critical commentaries, both in print and digital form, including scholarly articles, literary critiques, and electronic hypertexts that discuss themes of love, mysticism, and spirituality in the poem, have been utilized as secondary sources. These sources provide diverse perspectives and interpretive frameworks that inform and support the close reading of the text. The study adopts the APA citation style for referencing all sources.

4. ANALYSING THE POEM

The poem consists of eighteen lines starting with the scene of a room in which a great mystic Ibrahim Bin Adhem was asleep. All of a sudden he woke up and saw an angel write something. The poem starts with the opening lines of:

Abou Ben Adhem (May his tribe increase)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace
And saw within the moonlight in his room
Making it rich and like a lily in bloom

The very scene seems to have been designed and depicted with 'peace' and 'peace bringing' traits. The emphasis put on peace attributes the qualities of the mystical beauty through which a mystic gathers Divine knowledge-a tranquility and power. The esoteric knowledge is the ideation to illuminate the inner soul which seems to be hovering over the very scene when Ben Adhem wakes he remains sober not intoxicated and falls in conversation with the angel very calmly as if he were acquainted with him. "The Book of Gold" is another mystic attribute through which it has been shown how temporal love is preserved in the eternal records. Chittick Elaborates saying "Intoxication and Sobriety are the two urges in Sufism. Intoxication gets revealed outwardly because of joy that happens on its consequent results whereas sobriety shows to faith. This world is termed to be the proper place for doing the practice of the works which are allowed to do and prohibited to pursue. In this context, the sober awareness plays the proper role to be accepted to handle the real situation in society. This way sobriety shows its intimacy of living with God having enthusiastic way within while intoxication appears to be the outcome of looking for God. Sufis find the way to God befitting to the deepest and most intense language of love. But the love of God is conditioned on the love of the Prophet which is mentioned in the Koran as "Say [O Muhammad] follow me if you love God, and then God will love you" (3:31). This verse retains significance to a great extent because that focuses the rationale for Islamic and Sufi praxis. Through the following of the path of the Prophet, the Sufi acquires to have love of God (Chittick, 2007. 52). Sobriety is preferred for it is the way leading to the nearness of God. Abou Ben Adhem made some queries having got answers, and the questions go as follows:

And to the presence in the room he said

“What writest thou” the vision raised its head
 And with the look made of all sweet accord
 Answered the names of those who love the Lord.

In these limes the first theme comes that the angel was writing the name of those people who Love God, so here the concept of man’s love comes. There are certain parameters fixed by man for this Love of God on their own and this situation in Sufi context is very different. They think man’s loving God in direct manners is not possible

And is mine said Abou? Nay not so
 Replied the angel Abou spoke more low
 But cheerily still and said “I pray the then
 Write me as a one that loves His fellowmen”.

This part of the poem gives the very second idea through which Abou comes to know that his name is not included in the list of God’s lovers. Despite that he is hopeful and requests the angel to enter his name in another list carrying the names of those who love mankind. Here the second theme of human love becomes clear. But when Abou declares it, he utters the word ‘His fellowmen’, that means he knows that loving His best creature can also win the proximity of God. Human love does not mean mere an affection, it means to serve human beings from all angles. Sufism has highly emphasized this element. If it is said, the entire structure of Sufism is based on this element; it would not rather be incorrect. Dr Syed Abdul Latif is quoted to have said “of the obligation cited in the verse, which man has to fulfill in life, the Quran attaches the greatest importance to the offering of the economic and to the needy and poor. According to Qutbi “were it not for love (residing) in heart, love (God) would not be worshiped.” Though love according to him is the main purpose of life yet beyond it there is one more thing than beauty. “Man Loves God because God is beautiful”. He loves visible beauty because His beauty only is reflected, from the visible forms. In this connection Ibn-Arabi refers to the utterance of God “O David, my yearning for them is greater than their yearning for me” (Qutbi, 1992. 104). This shows that it is all love which ignites hope to make the tenor of life meaningful.

He aims at saying that Holy Scriptures carry the message of service to mankind and he declares it as the soul of worship. Not only economic aid that fulfills their basic needs but also they should be protected from the vices including wickedness, insularity, greed, hatred and envy. There are heavy and strong notes struck in this context. Thus the last lines go this way:

The angel wrote and vanished the next night
 It came again with the great wakening light
 And showed the names whom love of God had blessed
 And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest!

The poem here comes to an end with the declaration of God, which the angel brings while coming back. The declaration contains the love of God. God loves those who love mankind. Devine love is no way the outcome of innovation, meditation and other nexus coming in this direction, it can be achieved through extending the benevolence to the poor and the needy ones. More over this benevolence is considered as a debt advanced to God which is promised to be repaired in double and multiple. This state, of course, implies that the satisfaction of God’s right can only be realised through the Human Rights irrespective of

caste and creed. Gajwani in this regard says “Love is the essence of the universe. It exists in everybody. But because man has diffused and distributed it in all directions, he cannot perceive that. He can realize it when he focuses it in one direction Love and God are identical. Love exists in human body in the form of primordial power (Brahm agni) that is latent in man but is dormant. When that becomes potent, it may be said that love is awakened. Love does not dawn from anywhere outside. Love manifests itself when a jiva annihilates his self, not otherwise. Love exists as a spark in everybody. One has to fan it or use bellows- the fans or bellows of breath so that the spark may grow into a blaze. Then one should be able to hold the divine fire within and contain the unrest and upsurge. Brahm Agni also grows by other means such as maturity of bhakti or of gyan. There is yet another method, and that is if a jiva is lucky he may earn the grace of a saint. In that event the blaze is so powerful that is difficult to describe it; it is beyond comparison (Gajwani, 2000.222). It is rather clear here that real love grows when man loves his fellow beings.

Mysticism and Human Love

Hunt’s “Abou Ben Adhem” harmoniously blends mysticism and humanism, revealing that true spirituality lies not in ritualistic devotion but in divine love expressed through compassion for humanity. The poem exemplifies ethical mysticism, where moral virtue and empathy become the very channels of divine realization. Abou Ben Adhem’s calm faith and love for his fellow men illustrate a form of transcendence, as he rises above dogmatic piety to embrace a universal sense of brotherhood. The angelic visitation serves as a theophany, symbolizing divine approval of human-centered love, while the serene “lily in bloom” imagery reflects inner illumination, the light of the soul touched by divine grace. Hunt redefines spiritual merit by suggesting that divine recognition is earned through the selfless practice of goodness, not through outward expressions of religiosity. In this sense, the poem becomes a celebration of universal love — an affirmation that in loving humankind, one partakes in the essence of the Divine itself.

5. FINDINGS

The following findings have been drawn from the analysis of the poem Abou Ben Adhem:

1. The poem reveals that love for humanity is the purest form of devotion, where compassion itself becomes an act of divine worship beyond ritual and creed.
2. Hunt blends mysticism with humanism, showing that divine truth is reflected through moral virtue and selfless love for others.
3. The poet rejects ritual formalism, emphasizing an inward and sincere relationship with the Divine founded on goodness of heart.
4. The angel and the “Book of Gold” symbolize divine recognition, affirming that inner purity outweighs outward expressions of faith.
5. Reflecting Romantic ideals, Hunt celebrates personal spirituality and moral imagination, locating sacredness within the human spirit.
6. The poem echoes the Sufi concept of Ishq-e-Haqiqi, presenting love for humanity as a mirror of divine love and as a universal spiritual truth.
7. The imagery of light signifies inner illumination, turning ethical conduct into a reflection of mystical enlightenment and grace.

8. Through an Eastern figure and universal message, Hunt harmonizes Western Romantic spirituality with Eastern mysticism in a shared vision of love.
9. The poem concludes with the affirmation that divine reward belongs to those who live with compassion and moral purity.
10. Hunt's message retains timeless humanistic relevance, reminding readers that empathy, humility, and universal love form the foundation of true spiritual fulfillment.

6. DISCUSSION

In the light of findings, it is revealed that the poem is a profound synthesis of mysticism, humanism, and divine love. The central message that emerges is the poet's conviction that love for humanity is the highest and purest expression of love for God. Through the character of Abou Ben Adhem, Hunt presents a model of spiritual excellence grounded in compassion and moral virtue rather than ritualistic devotion. This finding highlights the poet's rejection of formal or institutional religion in favor of inner spirituality — a theme deeply rooted in both Romantic and Sufi traditions. The choice of persona of Ben Adhem makes it more clear that Leigh Hunt wanted to prove the importance of human love through an extraordinary character. If the selection of an ordinary person had been made, the theme would not been that much impactful. Therefore such a world famous character was made the central theme to prove the point.

The poem embodies ethical mysticism, where human kindness becomes a channel for divine realization. Abou's love for his fellow beings signifies the transcendent unity between the human and the divine, suggesting that genuine faith manifests through moral action. The angel's appearance functions as a theophany, symbolizing divine acknowledgment of inner goodness. The "Book of Gold" further represents the spiritual record of human deeds, where the supremacy of love and benevolence is affirmed through divine recognition. The formation of the world apparently remains based on the existence of human beings. The presence of this entity guarantees the stability and durability of the world; and it is believed that God- the creator loves humans more than any other creature. So loving humans is to love the Creator.

Hunt's spiritual philosophy reflects the Romantic ideal of individual revelation. Like Wordsworth, he finds holiness in human affection and simplicity rather than in ecclesiastical authority. Simultaneously, the poem echoes with Sufi mystical philosophy, particularly the concept of *Ishq-e-Haqiqi* — the belief that love for humankind mirrors love for the Creator. Hunt's merging of Western Romanticism with Eastern mysticism reinforces his universal spiritual vision, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. The natural feeling of love goes with the same gender; it does not come with the other gender. A human love a human, is a natural feeling and phenomenon. Like wise an animal love animal or more exactly an animal will love an animal. God also wants a human to love humans. Gajwani (2000) states:

Love is the essence of the universe. It exists in everybody. But because man has diffused and distributed it in all directions, he cannot perceive that. He can realize it when he focuses it in one direction. Love and God are identical. Love exists in human body in the form of primordial power (*Brahm agni*) that is latent in man but is dormant. When that becomes potent, it may be said that love is awakened. Love does not dawn from anywhere outside. Love manifests itself when a *jiva* annihilates his self, not otherwise. Love exists as a spark in everybody. One has to fan it or use bellows—the fans or bellows of

breath so that the spark may grow into a blaze. Then one should be able to hold the divine fire within and contain the unrest and upsurge. Brahm agni also grows by other means such as maturity of bhakti or of gyan. There is yet another method, and that is if a jiva is lucky he may earn the grace of a saint. In that event the blaze is so powerful that is difficult to describe it; it is beyond comparison (p.222).

Gajwani considers that it is not in the capacity of every man to recognise love for most of the soul are not illuminated and awake though love exists within every soul. Most of them are not calm and composed but are scattered and unaware of love. The one with calm and composed soul works in one direction eventually recognises love and by knowing love he recognises God. According to Gojwani love is purely a subjective state, not an objective state.

Moreover, the imagery of light in the poem — Abou's "face like a lily in bloom" — symbolizes inner illumination, the radiance of a soul touched by divine grace. This inner light becomes the poet's metaphor for moral purity and spiritual awakening. In this way, Hunt presents a spirituality that is active, ethical, and inclusive, reminding readers that human goodness itself is a form of divine worship. The depiction of very scene is filled with spiritual situation and significance that includes reader within and from the start to end the theme of the text looks like the valley of light in full swing that carries the reader in its flow. The focus is on one's being a good human being rather than a good worshiper for worshipping benefits only an individual whereas human love spreads welfare perpetually. That's what Shah Latif expresses in on of his baits (poems):

'Worshipping God is good indeed yet there is an other task better than that'.

Shah refers this to the service of mankind. To him, to give is to live.

The poem's conclusion reinforces its moral and spiritual lesson: divine favor belongs not to those who pray merely in form, but to those who love in deed. Abou's name, written "at the top of the list," signifies that humanity, compassion, and moral action are central to divine recognition. Thus, Hunt transforms a simple narrative into a universal parable of love, humility, and faith which affirms that true religion lies in the heart's benevolence and the soul's capacity for love. This element attracts the attention of the Creator and most probably centres the hub of divine affection and blessings.

6. ROMANTIC AND SUFI CONTEXT

Hunt's "Abou Ben Adhem" reflects both the Romantic ideal of spiritual individualism and the Sufi vision of divine unity. This amalgamation is a direct connection of human mind and God's vision. Like many Romantic poets, Hunt perceives divinity not as distant or institutional but as immanent within human love and moral action. This notion parallels Wordsworth's belief in the "spirit that rolls through all things," suggesting that moral purity and empathy connect humanity to the sacred order of nature. Simultaneously, Hunt's portrayal of Abou Ben Adhem evokes the Sufi mystical principle of Ishq-e-Haqiqi — the concept of divine love realized through love for creation. The poem's emphasis on the heart's purity, serenity, and service echoes with the Sufi teaching that the path to God passes through compassion for His creatures. Thus, Hunt's verse bridges Western Romantic spirituality and Eastern mysticism, portraying a universal truth: that the divine resides not in abstract worship but in the living pulse of human kindness. The God within conception is revealed here which the Eastern mystical powers are based upon. The Eastern mystic poets message through their poetry saying: "Do not look for God without / Look for Him within always".

Through this synthesis, “Abou Ben Adhem” becomes a timeless reflection on the unity of love, faith, and humanity. This synthesis embodies the romantic philosophy of Satyam Shivum Sundaram- Truth Love Beauty. Here beauty becomes the nest of love that attracts the Truth. God is beautiful and loves truth.

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it has come to light that some people love God; some people love human beings; God loves those who love Human beings. Human love is the way to God in achieving the divine Love.

God appreciates human love and declares His love on the lovers of mankind. It is also found out that Abou Ben Adhem was a sober Sufi.

The love of God is based on human love and sobriety. If a man is regular worshipper and remains pious all his life and is void of Human Love, he cannot achieve love of God in straight and direct way. But the one who loves mankind the best creation of God, can achieve Divine Love which is the real quest of Man for the Divine Love. Here there appear the two elements getting emerged that is ‘Muamlat’ (human rights) and Ibadat. The one who tries to solve ‘Muamlat’ (human rights) is preferred to Ibadat (worship) and qualifies Divine Love. This shows God’s moulding man after His own image and loving them. The mystic believe the “unity of being” and the “Divine Love” by way of human love. The poem suggests the nexus of Human love, Divine love, Peace, Satisfaction of Rights of God, Human rights, the real path and spiritual beatitude.

In essence, Leigh Hunt’s “Abou Ben Adhem” transcends the boundaries of creed and culture to reveal a universal message — that love for humanity is the highest form of devotion. Through the figure of Abou Ben Adhem, Hunt presents a spirituality grounded in compassion, humility, and moral action rather than ritual or dogma. His fusion of mysticism, humanism, and divine love illustrates that the soul attains true illumination when it recognizes divinity in others. By aligning the Romantic reverence for the individual spirit with the Sufi ideal of unity through love, Hunt’s poem stands as a bridge between Western and Eastern mystical thought. Ultimately, it celebrates the eternal truth that to love one’s fellow beings is to dwell in the presence of God — a theme as spiritually profound as it is poetically simple.

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