

HURUFİ METAPHYSICS IN THE MYSTICAL POETICS OF İMADADDİN NASİMİ

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Abstract. This study investigates the artistic and philosophical expression of Hurufi concepts in Nasimi's mystical poetry. By carefully examining selected poems from Nasimi's Divan and Rubaiyat, the study explores how divine unity, the sanctity of the human form and the symbolism of letters are reflected in poetic language, structure and imagery

Keywords: Hurufism, mystical, poetry, sufism, divine unity.

İMADƏDDİN NƏSİMİNİN MİSTİK POETİKASINDA HÜRUFİ METAFİZİKASI

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Xülasə. Məqalədə Nəsiminin mistik poeziyasında Hürufiliyin bədii və fəlsəfi şəkildə necə ifadə edildiyi araşdırılmışdır. Tədqiqat işində Nəsiminin Divanında və seçilmiş rübailərində Hürufiliyin kainatın quruluşu, ilahi birlik, insan müqəddəsliyi, hərflərin simvolik mənalara kimi əsas ideyalarını poeziyada təsvir və dil baxımından necə əks etdiyini diqqətlə təhlil edilmişdir.

Açar sözlər: Hürufilik, mistik, poeziya, sufizm, ilahi birlik.

1. Introduction

İmadaddin Nasimi is widely recognized as a seminal figure in Azerbaijani and classical Eastern mystical poetry. His works are deeply infused with spiritual and philosophical thought, reflecting a sophisticated intertwining of Hurufi principles with poetic artistry. The Hurufi tradition, which emphasizes the sanctity of the human form, the symbolic significance of letters and the unity of the divine, occupies a prominent place in Azerbaijani literary history. As highlighted by Fuad Koprulu, Hurufi ideas were expressed in the poetry of earlier poets such as Habibi, positioning Nasimi as a central figure who further developed these philosophical concepts.

Gibb [2] emphasizes Nasimi's unique contribution to Eastern mystical poetry, portraying him as an exceptional artist whose verse combines profound philosophical content with emotional intensity. Similarly, Schimmel [7] notes that Nasimi's poetry conveys mystical love in a vivid and expressive manner, revitalizing classical Sufi forms of devotion. Lewisohn [5] also underlines Nasimi's ability to unite intellectual depth with emotional expression, demonstrating how Hurufi philosophy is reflected in poetic language. Kathleen Burrill likewise points to Nasimi's remarkable skill in integrating Hurufi philosophical ideas with the emotional and intellectual dimensions of mystical poetry. According to Burrill, Nasimi's works reflect both the spiritual knowledge of his time and the poet's commitment to the inner path of mystical understanding [1].

Building on these scholarly perspectives, the present study examines Hurufi metaphysical ideas in Nasimi's poetry through selected examples from his Turkic Divan. The present study differs from previous research in that it examines Hurufi metaphysical ideas in Nasimi's poetry on the basis of selected poetic texts. Unlike earlier studies that mainly describe Hurufi doctrine in general terms, this article shows how these ideas are reflected in the poetic language and imagery of Nasimi's works. In this way, the study demonstrates how Hurufi metaphysical ideas function within the poetic structure of Nasimi's works and offers a more detailed interpretation of his mystical poetry.

2. Methodology

This study is based on the analysis of selected poems from Nasimi's Turkic Divan and several rubai discussed in Kathleen Burrill's study of Nasimi's quatrains. The poems were selected according to the presence of Hurufi concepts such as the symbolism of letters, the idea of divine unity and the sacred nature of the human form.

The analysis is carried out through close reading of the poetic texts within the framework of literary hermeneutics. Particular attention is given to symbolic language and imagery as well as to structural features such as rhyme and meter.

This methodological approach makes it possible to examine Nasimi's poetry as both a literary and philosophical expression of Hurufi thought.

Analysis of selected quatrains shows that Nasimi's poetry reflects mystical experience in a direct and personal form. The poet describes the human soul as seeking closeness to the Divine and presents spiritual love as the central element of this experience. These examples demonstrate how philosophical ideas are expressed through poetic imagery and symbolic language. This philosophy is reflected in his depiction of the human soul's descent from the essence of God and its arduous journey back to its celestial origin. He articulates these sentiments in the following verse: "The soul desires the Beloved and the Beloved desires the soul. The soul cannot be without the soul's love; what is the soul without the Beloved?"

Even a fleeting glimpse of the Divine Face represents the ultimate aspiration, reflecting the depth of his mystical commitment. This perspective is woven throughout his work, revealing a profound engagement with both intellectual contemplation and emotional devotion. Nasimi's verse does not merely celebrate divine love in abstract; it embodies a philosophy where human existence, the sacredness of the soul and the pursuit of union with the Creator are inseparably intertwined. Across his Divan, numerous verses confirm Nasimi's prominent place among Sufi poets. However, his mystical expression often transcends conventional frameworks; akin to the martyred mystic al-Hallāj, Nasimi explores radical dimensions of Sufi ontology. His poetry frequently references Mansur al-Hallāj, expressing admiration for his teachings and martyrdom. As Hallāj famously proclaimed "Ana al-Ḥaqq" ("I am the Truth"), Nasimi similarly

attributes divine qualities to himself, identifying with the Absolute Being, the Almighty and the Everlasting, echoing Hallāj's spiritual boldness and fervor.

What most distinctly sets Nasimi apart from the wider tradition of Islamic mysticism is his steadfast commitment to Hurufi doctrine. Even if none of his own writings had survived, abundant evidence of his adherence to Hurufi principles can be found in contemporary Hurufi sources. These include not only mentions in prose texts but also poetic tributes from followers of Fazlullah Naimi, indicating that Nasimi's legacy was closely entwined with the metaphysical and esoteric teachings of the Hurufis.

In a closely related verse, Nasimi extends this theme:

“Thy countenance is the Truth. This is the tidings from the Truth!
He who declares it is the Truth, but mortal is his name”.

The phrase “thy countenance is the Truth” refers to al-Haqq, one of the ninety-nine names of God in Islamic theology, highlighting that divine reality manifests through the human face. “This is the tidings from the Truth” conveys that this insight is not metaphorical but a spiritual revelation directly originating from the Divine Source. The second line introduces a striking paradox: the speaker of this truth remains mortal in name. This tension lies at the core of Hurufi mysticism - humans reflect the divine while remaining bound to earthly existence. For Nasimi, this paradox is not contradictory but a spiritual principle affirming human sacredness alongside corporeal limits. Collectively, these verses illustrate Nasimi's deep engagement with the Hurufi worldview, in which language, theology and embodiment converge, presenting the human form as a vessel for divine presence. His poetry transcends devotional expression, articulating an ontological theology of humans as theophanies.

Nasimi's quatrains frequently reference the foundational principles of Hurufism. A core tenet of Hurufi doctrine holds that the entire universe emanates from the Divine Word - Logos - not merely as a creation of God but as identical with God's own essence. According to this belief, when God, as the Absolute Being, Beauty and Goodness, chose to manifest Himself, He did so through His Word. This Word functions as the creative force that brought all existence into being. The Divine Word is expressed through the names God assigned to all things and through the revelations given to His prophets, particularly the Prophet Muhammad via the Qur'an. Importantly, the Word - whether spoken or written - consists of letters. Consequently, understanding these letters is crucial for grasping the true meaning of all existence. Fazlullah, founder of the Hurufi sect, claimed to possess this unique knowledge, earning him the title of Hurufi “one of the letters”. For Fazlullah, the Arabic alphabet, consisting of twenty-eight letters and used to write the Qur'an, was of primary importance. Additionally, he attributed significance to the thirty-two letters of the Persian alphabet, as early Hurufi texts were mainly composed in Persian, the second key language of Islamic culture.

3. Poetic expression of Hurufi metaphysics

The Hurufi concepts embedded in Nasimi's quatrains - and more broadly, in the entirety of his poetic corpus - played a significant role in ensuring the survival and dissemination of Hurufi doctrine, particularly in Anatolia. Even at times when these teachings seemed to decline elsewhere, Nasimi's verses continued to preserve and spread their core ideas.

In this context, it is especially notable that elements of Hurufi belief were later adopted and maintained within the Bektashi Order of Dervishes. Although direct evidence of Nasimi's connection to the Bektashi Order is lacking, his poetic influence was later reflected in Bektashi writings, likely due to shared Hurufi symbolism and missionary diffusion through figures like 'Ali al-A'la [1].

As discussed previously, Imadaddin Nasimi's poetry - particularly his Divan - is notable for its deep philosophical layers, enriched with mystical insight and characterized by the poetic articulation of Hurufi cosmology. This philosophical and esoteric dimension is evident not only in his qasidas and ghazals but also prominently in his rubaiyat (quatrains). The concise and symbolic nature of the rubai form allows Nasimi to convey complex ideological and cosmological concepts in a compact poetic structure. At this point, the translations and commentaries provided by E. Burrill, based on the Hekimoglu Ali Pasha manuscript, serve as an essential scholarly resource for understanding Nasimi's Hurufi hermeneutics and mystical doctrines. Through detailed analysis of selected rubaiyat, it is possible to examine the poet's perspectives on the divine nature of humanity, the esoteric significance of letters and numbers and the unity of the divine essence with human existence. These central Hurufi themes are expressed through Nasimi's distinctive poetic style and will be systematically explored in the following sections from both literary and theological perspectives.

Initially, it is necessary to clarify the term "Turkic quatrain", which might imply a broader or less precise range of poetic forms than appropriate here. According to Kathleen Burrill, the 158 quatrains under study conform specifically to the poetic form known as *tuyughhh*, rather than to a general Turkic stylistic category. The *tuyughhh*, alongside the *qitah*, represents one of the two formal poetic types incorporated by Turkic poets into the classical Islamic poetic system. Its significance lies in bridging earlier Turkic poetic traditions with the refined formalism of Arabic-Persian verse. A key feature of the *tuyughhh*, as Burrill details, is its use of meter derived from the *ramal* category of the *arud* prosodic system, originally developed by Arabic theorists and later adopted in Persian and Turkic literatures. The *ramal* meter, based on fixed patterns of long and short syllables, provides rhythmic regularity and formal symmetry suited to epigrammatic expression. An example appears in the final line of the eighth quatrain in the collection, which precisely follows the *remel* metrical formula, demonstrating the poet's careful engagement with inherited prosodic conventions [1].

The *tuyughhh* form typically employs an AABA rhyme scheme; however, in Nasimi's poetry, a uniform AAAA pattern is often observed. Beyond the formal rhyme structure, the

genre frequently utilizes pun rhyme - a rhyme based on homonyms, where phonetically identical yet semantically distinct words create the rhyme. This stylistic feature demands both linguistic skill and semantic subtlety and is considered a hallmark of rhetorical sophistication in classical Turkic verse.

The precise origins of the *tuyughh* form before its appearance in the *Divan* of Kadi Burhaneddin remain largely speculative due to fragmentary or absent historical records. Nonetheless, structural analysis indicates a strong connection between the *tuyughh* and earlier Turkic folk poetry. Unlike the *beyt* - a couplet form from pre-Islamic Arabic tradition - the *tuyughh* resembles the *dörtlük* or “foursome”, a fundamental unit in Turkic vernacular verse. Its rhyme scheme closely aligns with the *mani*, a common folk form. Additionally, while the classical *aruz* system is quantitative, based on syllable length, the *aruz* meter in *tuyughh* compositions often features eleven syllables per *misra*, reflecting Turkic oral traditions that emphasize stress over syllable quantity.

These observations prompted Russian scholar N. Samoilovich to propose that the *tuyughh* likely evolved as a formalized continuation of indigenous Turkic folk quatrains. According to his view, the folk-based syllabic meter was modified to conform to the prosodic requirements of the classical *aruz*, while the use of punning rhyme emerged as a literary adaptation of the folk poetic technique known as *ima*, which relies on suggestion, implication or innuendo. Supporting this theory, Fuad Koprulu analyzed semantic variations of the term *tuyughh* across different Turkic-speaking communities. For instance, among the Siberian Turks, *tuyughh* denotes something “closed”, “hidden” or “enclosed on all sides”, whereas in the *Teleüt* Turkic dialect, the phrase *tuyughh* refers to “words whose meaning is not explicitly expressed but concealed through allusion”. Koprulu [3] further cites the Turkish verb *tüymek*, meaning “to escape or vanish without being seen”, reinforcing the idea that the genre’s name conveys a sense of poetic concealment or hidden significance. While Koprulu concurs with Samoilovich’s perspective, the *tuyughh* represents a literary continuation of Turkic folk poetry, he additionally highlights the substantial cultural and literary interaction between Turkic and Persian traditions. In this framework, the *tuyughh* may be connected to Persian folk quatrains known as *fahlaviyyat*, which were common in regions where Persian and Turkic speakers coexisted, such as Iran and Central Asia. Although *fahlaviyyat* were not typically composed in the *ramal* meter, they often employed metrical patterns based on eleven syllables per line, indicating a shared aesthetic rhythm between the two poetic traditions [8].

Considering these various trajectories, the development of the *tuyughh* merits further scholarly investigation - not only for experts in Turkic literature but also for those studying Persian poetics. Many aspects of the form remain underexplored, particularly its evolution prior to the late fourteenth century. Koprulu suggests that the *tuyughh* may have originated in the culturally diverse regions of Persia, Azerbaijan and Mesopotamia during the post-Mongol period, though he acknowledges that this remains a speculative hypothesis requiring further evidence.

Further consideration should be given to İmadaddin Nasimi's linguistic identity, which intersects with issues of regional and literary affiliation. Although frequently classified as an Azerbaijani Turkic poet, his name also appears in anthologies of Ottoman Turkish poets, reflecting the fluidity of literary categorizations of that era. Koprulu cites Alisir Navai's observation that Nasimi composed poetry in both "Turkmani" and "Rumi" dialects, indicating that while he was familiar with Anatolian Turkish (Ottoman Turkish), his primary medium was Azerbaijani Turkic. This linguistic choice aligns him with the broader tradition of Turkic mystical poetry rooted in the eastern Islamic world.

These considerations extend to Nasimi's Divan, particularly in its earliest extant manuscripts. While certain linguistic features reflect Azerbaijani Turkic characteristics, his overall language closely resembles that of his Anatolian contemporaries. This proximity is especially apparent when comparing Nasimi's Divan with poets such as Şeyhi, with clear parallels in vocabulary, syntax and poetic diction. It is plausible that this similarity was deliberate, reflecting a conscious stylistic choice by Nasimi. Considering the view that Nasimi traveled to Anatolia as a missionary promoting Hurufi doctrine, it is reasonable to suggest that he adapted his language to local literary and spoken forms to enhance the accessibility and persuasive power of his poetry for Anatolian audiences.

4. Mystical themes and symbolic expression

An analysis of the Turkic quatrains indicates that roughly half of them serve as praises directed at the beloved figure. One notable challenge in translating and interpreting Nasimi's poetry concerns the gender identity of this beloved. Because Turkic languages lack grammatical gender, the original verses often do not specify whether the beloved is male or female. For the sake of clarity in translation, scholars have generally chosen to represent the beloved as male where gender specification is necessary. This decision is further supported by descriptions of masculine physical characteristics in certain lines, as well as references to the beloved wearing hunting or warrior attire, which traditionally suggest a male subject. In addition, Nasimi instructs his listeners to envision God in the form of a "curly-haired youth", reinforcing the interpretation of the beloved as male within his poetic framework.

The remaining quatrains can be divided into three broad categories: those that are declarative or instructional, addressing various themes; those that focus on the poet's personal reflections; and those that offer warnings or encouragement to a general audience. Although interpretive challenges arise throughout these categories, the quatrains addressed to the beloved present particular difficulties, especially regarding the beloved's identity and the nature of the love expressed. Scholars remain divided over whether the beloved represents a secular individual or a spiritual entity. If the latter is true, it remains unclear whether the beloved symbolizes God, depicted through traditional mystical metaphors of human beauty or a human being conceived by Hurufi doctrine as embodying the divine essence and deserving sincere

devotion. This distinction, in turn, raises the broader question of whether Nasimi's poetry aligns more closely with Sufi or Hurufi traditions.

The study of Imadaddin Nasimi's poetry demonstrates the close relationship between Hurufi metaphysical ideas and poetic expression. In his works, philosophical concepts such as the unity of God and humanity, the sacred nature of the human form and the symbolic meaning of letters are reflected not only in thematic content but also in poetic language and imagery. Nasimi's poetry thus represents a synthesis of Hurufi thought and classical Turkic poetic tradition, where philosophical meaning is conveyed through artistic form.

Some quatrains do not exhibit the dense symbolic layering typical of Hurufi mysticism, which suggests that they may not have been intended to convey explicit religious meaning. References to princes or kings may point to actual historical figures rather than symbolic ones and certain poems appear to address such patrons subtly, including indirect appeals through allusions to charitable acts or sacred religious occasions. If these identifications are confirmed, interpreting the religious significance of these verses requires careful and restrained analysis.

When mystical interpretations are considered, distinguishing between Sufi and Hurufi influences can be challenging. Specific Hurufi motifs - such as references to the human face, particular arrangements of letters in the divine alphabet or themes like Satan's refusal to bow to Adam - indicate that the beloved may represent a human manifestation of the divine rather than God directly. Other quatrains, however, display more general mystical characteristics. Given Nasimi's Hurufi background, it is plausible that these mystical poems reflect Hurufi beliefs, which may lead Hurufi interpreters to understand them differently from mainstream Sufi readings.

Furthermore, several quatrains explicitly reference prominent mystics such as al-Hallaj and Fazlullah. Considering the impact of these figures on Nasimi, it is reasonable to conclude that many quatrains - particularly those celebrating the divine qualities of the beloved - were composed as tributes. In particular, given Fazlullah's foundational role in Hurufi theology, it is likely that some of these poems were written with the Hurufi founder specifically in mind.

The thematic richness of Nasimi's poetry further underscores the integration of emotional and philosophical dimensions. His quatrains frequently portray the poet as a seeker of divine union, passionately immersed in spiritual longing, while also engaging with historical and mystical figures such as Fazlullah Naimi and al-Hallāj. This dual focus situates Nasimi within a broader intellectual and spiritual continuum, demonstrating his deep awareness of both the Hurufi tradition and the wider Sufi mystical discourse. Importantly, his poetry critiques those who adhere solely to external religious rituals while neglecting inner spiritual insight, emphasizing the primacy of personal mystical experience and intellectual reflection.

Linguistically, Nasimi occupies a transitional space that reflects both regional identity and intercultural literary influences. Writing primarily in Azerbaijani Turkic, while exhibiting familiarity with Anatolian and Ottoman Turkish literary conventions, he created a medium capable of transmitting Hurufi ideas across diverse linguistic and cultural audiences. This

bilingual and bicultural positioning enhanced the accessibility of his work and facilitated the broader dissemination of Hurufi metaphysics, particularly in Anatolia and later Bektashi contexts. Furthermore, his careful attention to linguistic nuance, symbolic wordplay and structural precision illustrates how poetic form itself becomes a vehicle for theological meaning, embodying the principle that divine truth is encoded within language.

The study also identifies variations in the quatrains that reflect the diversity of Nasimi's thematic focus. Some quatrains address a beloved figure, whose identity may be interpreted as a human embodiment of the divine, while others provide ethical or spiritual instruction, address political patrons or offer general reflections on human existence. This diversity reflects Nasimi's nuanced understanding of audience and purpose, illustrating his ability to adapt the Hurufi worldview to different poetic and social contexts. Even within seemingly straightforward verses, symbolic and metaphysical layers persist, indicating the depth and intentionality of his artistic choices.

Conclusion. Analysis of Nasimi's rubaiyat, particularly through the tuyughh form, demonstrates his mastery in blending inherited Turkic poetic traditions with the precise metrics of Persian and Arabic prosody. The rhythmic and rhetorical rigor of these quatrains illustrates not only artistic discipline but also deliberate theological intent. Each metrical pattern and rhyme scheme functions to embody the Hurufi belief that divine truth is encoded within language itself. Consequently, the aesthetic features of Nasimi's poetry are inseparable from his metaphysical vision, with the poetic form serving as a vessel for spiritual meaning.

Ultimately, Nasimi's poetry represents a dynamic intersection of form and philosophy. His verses embody a metaphysical system in which the divine manifests through letters, the human form and poetic expression. The Hurufi conception of the sacred as inherent in language achieves its fullest artistic realization in his work. Through this integration, Nasimi established a poetic theology uniting aesthetics, mysticism and ontology - a legacy that shaped the development of Turkic literature and continues to attest to the intellectual and spiritual power of Hurufi thought. Linguistically, Nasimi's work occupies a transitional space between Azerbaijani Turkic and Anatolian Turkish, reflecting a conscious effort to communicate with diverse audiences and to establish Turkic as a refined medium for mystical discourse. This bilingual and bicultural positioning enhanced the expressive potential of Turkic literature and facilitated the dissemination of Hurufi thought across regions and linguistic boundaries. The persistence of Hurufi concepts within later Anatolian and Bektashi contexts highlights Nasimi's enduring influence as both a transmitter and innovator of esoteric knowledge.

Finally, the discussion confirms that Nasimi's work extends beyond devotional expression, articulating a philosophical and ontological system in which language, letters and human embodiment are interconnected with divine reality. His quatrains and rubai thus serve as both literary masterpieces and spiritual texts, reflecting a unique convergence of art, philosophy and mysticism that solidified his place as a central figure in Hurufi literature.

Overall, the findings reveal that Nasimi's poetry is not merely lyrical or devotional; it constitutes a sophisticated system of philosophical expression in which every formal, linguistic and thematic choice is informed by Hurufi metaphysics. The convergence of numerical, linguistic and symbolic elements within his quatrains demonstrates a deliberate effort to translate esoteric doctrine into literary form. By blending intellectual rigor, emotional intensity and structural discipline, Nasimi establishes a poetic universe where divine reality is mirrored in human language, form and experience. His work thus represents a unique and enduring confluence of mysticism, aesthetics and intellectual inquiry, reinforcing his central position within the Hurufi and broader Islamic mystical traditions.

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