

## POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION IN MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF MURIEL MAUFROY'S *RUMI'S DAUGHTER*

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### Abstract

*The relationship between psychology and mysticism has gained a great deal of currency over the years. Various psychological models have provided theoretical foundations allowing the researchers to grasp profound varieties and nuances in mystical experiences across cultures and religious traditions. This has, in fact, broadened the canvass for mystical studies. The current paper attempts to carry out a psychological analysis of mystical experience of a character (mystic) named Kimya in Muriel Maufroy's novel "Rumi's Daughter". The study carries out an analysis of how the mystic's experience of the Divine can be translated in terms of a psychological process of personality disintegration initiated by a conflict, deconstruction of preconceived notions and beliefs and ultimately leading towards secondary integration of personality. Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration is employed as a framework to analyse her spiritual encounter. Through a minute textual analysis of the novel, the research reveals certain parallels between the process of personality development and mystical experience. It confirms the contention that the culmination of mystical union underlies psychological wellbeing and serenity on the part of mystic. The study also shows that mystics are those rare individuals who are capable of reaching the final level of personality development characterised by self-autonomy and higher level of consciousness.*

**Keywords:** Mysticism, mystical experience, mystic, theory of positive disintegration

### Introduction

Since the evolvement of critical faculties in humans, the broader ontological and epistemological questions have spurred human curiosity and wisdom. Incessant attempts, throughout the ages, have been made to understand the meaning of the life. Mysticism is marked by a perpetuation of the immortal human quest for seeking answers to these eternal questions. It consists in a conscious experience of peeling away the material constraints in the hope of getting at the Reality pervading the whole phenomena. It is characterised by trying to limit the limitless and to grasp what lies beyond the ordinary sensory experiences. Mystics often claim to have transcended the limitations of common sense perception, thereby making a union with the Reality. Along the same line, Evelyn Underhill defines mysticism as "the way of union with Reality"<sup>1</sup>. The notion of "union"

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<sup>1</sup>. Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, (New York: Dutton, 1943), 3.

with some higher principle or state of consciousness is a common feature to many definitions of mysticism. Mysticism, in fact, is the study of the mystical Truth after abolishing all the barriers not only of time and place but also those of reason. According to Margaret Smith mysticism refers to “an innate tendency of the human soul, which seeks to transcend reason and to attain a direct experience of God”<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of psychology as a full-fledged discipline has contributed a great deal in understanding the psychological tendencies, varying dispositions and the state of consciousness manifest in mystical struggle. <sup>3</sup>Following the work of Michel de Certeau, <sup>4</sup>Kripal claims that “whereas premodern mysticism was historically embedded deeply in traditional forms of liturgical, scriptural, and doctrinal contexts, modernity has witnessed an increasing deracination of the mystical from the traditional forms of authority and faith and an ever-increasing psychologization of its meanings”. Perhaps one of the most influential figures to study the psychology of mysticism is William James. According to King<sup>5</sup> “a dominant trajectory in the contemporary study of mysticism since James has been the study of altered states of consciousness and the phenomenon connected with their attainment” he further claims that this move to study “the mystical” in terms of “altered states of consciousness” has resulted in “the privatization of mysticism”<sup>6</sup>. That is, the experience of mystics began to be viewed as subjective mental states of psychological entities. Likewise, the union with the Reality, through psychological perspective, is observed as a result of psychological growth or emotional development whereby an individual is able to broaden his/her mental horizons. The higher state of consciousness, achieved through non-rational and super-sensory means, enables a mystic to locate the Reality deep in his/her consciousness rather than somewhere outside in time and place as Karen Armstrong deems the Divine not as an entity “out there” but all pervasive and omnipotent force. Mystic’s experience is “...always seen as a symbolic ascent through the mysterious regions of the mind”<sup>7</sup>. Ninian Smart also defines mysticism “as primarily consisting in an interior or introverted quest, culminating in certain interior experiences which are not described in terms of sense-experience or of mental images”<sup>8</sup>.

As far mystical experience, it is pertinent to mention Gellman who refers to it as “a (purportedly) *super* sense-perceptual or *sub* sense-perceptual experience granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection”<sup>9</sup>. Different religious traditions mould these experiences accordingly but the gist remains constant. Likewise, the concept of the Absolute or Ultimate Reality may take different names

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<sup>2</sup>. Margaret Smith, *The Nature and Meaning of Mysticism*, In *Understanding Mysticism*, Ed. Richard Woods, (New York: Image Books, 1980), 20.

<sup>3</sup>. Michel de Certeau, ( plz write title and ) ( place name, 1992).

<sup>4</sup>. Kripal, J. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>5</sup>. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and The Mystic East*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 22.

<sup>6</sup>. *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>7</sup>. Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, (London: Vintage, 1999), 253.

<sup>8</sup>. Ninian Smart, *Interpretation and Mystical Experience*, in *Understanding Mysticism*, Ed. Richard Woods (New York: Image Books, 1980), 78.

<sup>9</sup>. Jerome Gellman, *Mysticism and Religious Experience*, in the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Ed. William J. Wainwright, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 138.

according to cultural and linguistic varieties. Without going into the details about constructivist and perennialistic dimensions of mystical experiences, for it does not fall within the scope of this study, certain common features may be outlined for the sake of systematic study. According to Robert M. Gimello the following characteristics form the core of mysticism common to mystical experiences across regions, cultures, religious traditions and languages<sup>10</sup>.

- i. Profound sense of unity or contact with the Reality.
- ii. Conscious awareness on the part of mystic about his/her spiritual quest or journey.
- iii. Feeling that the experience can't be expressed through language.
- iv. Refinement of intuitive faculty and using intuition as a means to seeking an end.
- v. Ecstasy and sense of wholeness.

From this perspective, "mystical experience" can perhaps be defined as a unitive contact with Ultimate Reality that is marked by a kind of illumination or enlightenment. For the present study, Muriel Maufroy's *Rumi's Daughter* has been selected to analyse the mystical experience of a female mystic character named Kimya. Through this study, an important research gap will be filled as the novel understudy has not been studied in this perspective. Further, the study will give a new angle to the work and a psychological explanation to mystical experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Dabrowski is accredited with formulating a psychological theory of personality development, which envisages individuals capable of passing through different levels of development by means of materializing their ideals<sup>11</sup>. The theory comprises of five levels of personality development: the first level involves primitive integration where emotional, mental and imaginal activities are subservient to biological drives. The last level entails a final reintegration of personality marked by self-possession, responsibility, autonomy and authenticity, all of which flow effortlessly from a centre of consciousness that Dabrowski refers to as the "personality ideal." There are three intermediate levels between the two extremes, and these levels are mainly focused on the process of disintegration. It also deserves mention that there is no automatic transition of individuals from one to the next stage. Rather, some remain in the first level throughout their lives; others may find themselves in the second stage. Small number of people reaches the next stage and very rare, in fact, are the individuals who progress to the fourth and fifth levels.

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<sup>10</sup>. Robert M. Gimello, *Mysticism and Meditation. Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. Ed. Steven T. Katz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Personality-shaping Through Positive Disintegration*, (Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1967).

The following chief characteristics of Dabrowski's theory may be outlined:

1. The development is sequential and is characterized by an elevated level of consciousness which in turn is a corollary of the fusion of intellectual and emotional capabilities and functions. Individuals with higher consciousness are enabled to make choices and set ideals. This progression leads to the production of a unique and more authentic individual. The developmental progression is made possible through Dabrowski's phenomenon of "multilevelness".
2. During the developmental process, individuals, particularly those who are progressing, can capitalize on what Dabrowski refers to as "the third factor". It is a transformative factor in the theory that carries within it the potential for the new personality ideal to emerge through "inner psychic transformation, self-awareness, self-control, education-of-oneself and autopsychotherapy"<sup>12</sup>.
3. Dabrowski's theory consists of five levels with various sub-levels. "Values appeared to represent different levels. The span between the levels of a given phenomenon became by far more significant than the content of the term defining the phenomenon"<sup>13</sup>.
4. Conflict holds key position in this theory. The development initiates as a result of conflict. No progression or growth is possible without it. Conflicts exert varying impacts on people in accordance with their psychic make-up. However, in the individuals with higher developmental potential, they trigger progression and tendency towards self-transformation.
5. The theory also adheres to the idea of breaking the existing structures and replacing them with the idealized ones. In the final level, conflicts are resolved and the Self achieves autonomy and authenticity.

The theory identifies the following levels.

Level I:	Primary Integration
Level II:	Uni-level Disintegration
Level III:	Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration
Level IV:	Organized Multilevel Disintegration
Level V:	Secondary Integration

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<sup>12</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Multilevelness of Emotional and Instinctive Functions*, (Poland: Lublin, 1996), 19.

<sup>13</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski & Michael M. Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development: Volume 1 - Multilevelness and Positive Disintegration*, (Oceanside, New York: Dabor Science Publications, 1977), xii.

### **Level I: Primary Integration**

The first level is devoid of any kind of conflict. A person finds himself perfectly attuned to his environment. At this level people are driven by their instincts and biological needs. "Behaviour is controlled by primitive drives and by externality. Intelligence neither controls nor transforms basic drives; it serves the ends determined by primitive drives"<sup>14</sup>. Indulged in an animal-like way of living, individuals have no concern for self-reflection or self-correction. They show a conforming, uncritical attitude towards life. Their primary focus is to adapt themselves according to the external environment. Dabrowski views two kinds of adjustment – the negative adjustment and negative maladjustment. While the negative adjustment indicates people's adherence to the societal norms in an unthinking manner, the negative maladjustment refers to a person's disregard for the norms but choosing a degrading and mean things in their place. Criminals and psychopaths can be seen as the examples of negative maladjustment.<sup>15</sup>

### **Level II: Uni-level Disintegration**

This level is called as Uni-level or one level because a person at this stage has no intrinsic criterion whereby he/she could determine which demands should take priority over the others. In addition to the biological needs, at this level there are also the demands of others, to which one is susceptible. Moreover, the inner conflict emerges and becomes inevitable where psychic overexcitability is strong. It gets intensified with the passage of time; however, individual has no idea how to cope with it. ". . . there is continual vacillation between "pros" and "cons" with no clear direction out of the vicious circle"<sup>16</sup>. The conflict demands an appropriate action and if it is not managed, it can result into some grave psychic disorder(s).As Dabrowski points out that the severity of internal conflicts at this level can take an individual to a "no exit situation. Severe mental disorders are associated with unilevel developmental structure"<sup>17</sup>. Those who can somehow manage the conflict can progress into the third level.

### **Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration**

The structure of spontaneous multilevel disintegration (level III) is composed of hierarchization, or the critical perception and assessment of experience, behaviour, attitudes and orientations in terms of higher and lower values; a set of self-critical dynamisms, such as guilt, shame, astonishment and disquietude with oneself; and empathy. The inner conflict that emerges in level II lacks a direction; here the direction is provided by the hierarchy of values. At this level an individual passes through the process of "... self-evaluation, reflection, intense moral conflict, perception of the uniqueness of others, and existential anxiety"<sup>18</sup>. He is enabled to discern the higher and lower feelings and develops a sense of "what ought to be". As the idealized self-entails better choices, it is positive maladjustment; and as the existing dynamisms have to be shattered, it is called

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<sup>14</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Op.Cit.*, 18

<sup>15</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>. *Ibid.*, 19.

disintegration. Experiences such as “inner conflict, sadness, anxiety, obsession, depression, and psychic tension all cooperate in the promotion of humanistic development”<sup>19</sup>.

#### **Level IV: Organized Multilevel Disintegration**

This level is determined by dynamisms that reflect an increasing capacity of individuals to direct their own developmental processes. An individual consciously oversees his psychological development. He possesses a heightened sense of self-awareness and self-control. He is psychologically empowered enough to keep a check over regressive tendencies and to convert different experience and behaviour into means of personal growth. A well-formed vision of life takes the place of various involuntary spontaneous reactions. The criteria set at level III are materialized in this level and developmental potential gets even stronger. This level is called “organized” owing to the fact that the haphazard dynamisms are properly and consciously adjusted in accordance with the set idealized choices. Besides, the societal norms are followed only if they are not contradicting with the individual's criterion. The lower and base ones are either discarded or replaced by higher values.

#### **Level V: Secondary Integration**

This level can be best considered as a stage where one intuitively and spontaneously unites oneself with the highest levels discovered in one's experience. This milestone is achieved only by a very few people. At this stage the process of personality development is complete. It is called secondary integration because it is followed by disintegration. According to Dabrowski the developmental dynamisms present at level V are “responsibility, autonomy, authenticity and personality ideal”<sup>20</sup>. The latter which emerges in level III in embryonic form also undergoes its own development in the final level. An individual attains self-realization and is in charge of his psychological cum emotional dynamisms. Individual idealized choices are prioritized and worldviews are developed or changed accordingly. All the petty follies like anger, violence, short-temper, short-sightedness and selfishness are replaced by self-autonomy, self-education and broader vision. Individuals at this stage very often are the trend-setters and may have increasing followers.

#### **Analysis**

*Rumi's Daughter* is authored by a French-born novelist Muriel Maufroy. It is one of her famous novels that has been translated into nine languages. The novel is based on a historical account of great Persian Mystic poet, Jalaluddin Rumi. Set in the thirteenth century Anatolia, the novel narrates how a mystic girl Kimya undergoes her spiritual struggle under the supervision of the great master. During her later childhood, Kimya exhibits certain behavioural patterns which take many aback. “The Christian Priest in her village always used to say that she is gifted despite the fact that he himself did not

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<sup>19</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Personality-shaping through Positive Disintegration*, (Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1967), vi.

<sup>20</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Multilevelness*, *Op.cit.*, 20.

understand what sort of encounters she has had. Kimya had always wanted to study and for this she persuaded her parents to let her visit a man who lived in a cave nearby<sup>21</sup>. To help her channelize the eccentric tendencies, she is sent to Konya where Rumi becomes her teacher and later, Shams her spouse. She witnesses some extraordinary experiences in their company. Both serve as catalysts to her mystical struggle. Her marriage with Shams is highly symbolic of the mystical union. Initially in her childhood, she leads a routine life and develops, though unwillingly at times, a conforming attitude towards life. Though she is by temperament an introvertive child, she hardly experiences any inner conflict at this stage notwithstanding her hallucinatory episodes. In her early childhood she lives a traditional life with her family which in Dabrowskian terms indicates the first level of personality development. At this level there is a “concern for the preservation of one’s line or tradition”<sup>22</sup>. However, it does not take her long to progress into level II which is heralded by her growing internal conflict and the habit of questioning. During her time outdoors with friends, she remains mostly passive and does not take any interest in games and chats. Prompted by a penchant for knowing, she raises the broader human questions like “why am I alive? Where was I before I was born?”<sup>23</sup>. This surprises everyone especially Father Chrisostom who is led into thinking that “Kimya is different”<sup>24</sup>. Her introvertive and self-contemplative disposition renders her unique and different. Intermittent episodes of auditory hallucinations add to her unusual behaviour. “Kimya (herself) did not understand what happened to her in those moments, nor did she ever know when they would come”<sup>25</sup>. Placed in Dabrowski’s model, such mental state is characteristic of the unilevel disintegration – the emergence of inner conflict, doubts and mood swings. Also characteristic of level II are what Dabrowski and Piechowski refer to as “ambitendencies: indecision, wanting and not wanting, or wanting two irreconcilable things at once”<sup>26</sup>. This dynamism is clearly observable in Kimya’s indecisiveness as to which line of action may be followed and her inability to discern her obsessions as Maufroy puts in: “There was sadness in her heart she didn’t quite understand...”<sup>27</sup>. In addition, another striking feature of unilevel disintegration is “... the susceptibility to social opinion, guidance of one’s behaviour based on a need for recognition and approval, and internalization of values from external sources”<sup>28</sup>. Kimya in her mystical struggle which is in its embryonic stage, capitalizes on different sources. She is all the more receptive whether it is her parent’s thinking of Konya or Ahmed’s teaching her reading and writing or Father Chrisostom insisting on her schooling. She acknowledges and values their suggestions and decisions as reflected by her positive response to the decision of being sent away. Her inner conflict grows with time and during the next few years, she begins to experience what Dabrowski calls an existential crisis or more plainly, she views a gap between “what is” and “what ought to be”. This is an instance of the

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<sup>21</sup>. Muhammad Sohail, *Book Review: Love is an ocean without shores, you have to learn to bear it*, (Posted on September 17, 2017).

<sup>22</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski & Michael M. Piechowski, 178.

<sup>23</sup>. Muriel Maufroy, *Rumi’s Daughter*, (Rider Publishers, 2005), 1.

<sup>24</sup>. *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>26</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski & Michael M. Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development: Volume 1 - Multilevelness and Positive Disintegration*, (Oceanside, New York: Dabor Science Publications, 1977), 41.

<sup>27</sup>. Muriel Maufroy, *Op.Cit.*, 54.

<sup>28</sup>. Kazimierz Dabrowski & Michael M. Piechowski (1977), 41.

third level – spontaneous multilevel disintegration. Her coming of age develops her rational and irrational faculties allowing her to create a balance between them. The theory of positive disintegration argues that in this level, an individual sets a personality ideal as an alternate course of action, which in Kimya's case can be seen in the form of Shams. Notwithstanding latter's notorious image among the people, she believes in, approves of and follows his worldviews. In response to criticism, she remarks, "he is no devil; he is a great wind, igniting everything he touches; he is the carrier of unspoken news"<sup>29</sup>. Her marriage with Shams is highly symbolic as it underpins a spiritual union with her idealized self. The final two levels share a common denominator particularly that of an individual becoming who he/she really is. The organized phase of multilevel disintegration is manifested through heightened sense of self, freedom and self-control. Kimya's decision to marry Shams indicates her self-autonomy as the novelist puts in: "She (Kimya) herself had had a taste of this freedom that day she had agreed to marry Shams"<sup>30</sup> – and incorporating the higher idealized choice. Her body language, decisions and worldviews bear witness to the fact that she succeeds in developing a seminal self-directed view of life. Psychologically, she becomes in charge of her developmental process and psychic dynamisms. According to Dabrowski's theory of personality development, the secondary integration often renders individuals the object of sheer criticism and disapproval but they remain calm and confident. Kimya realized "... there was a point of stillness where, most incredibly, a dark, silent joy was waiting". Kimya frees herself not only from need for social recognitions and titles but also from the petty foibles like self-centeredness, hatred, pride and violence. The mystical union with the Reality is reflected in her spiritual uplift whereby she attains both the balance in personality and the psychological wholeness.

### Conclusion

The application of the theory of positive disintegration to the mystical experience of Kimya, the mystic in the novel *Rumi's Daughter* reveals that the mystical journey and the process of personality development envisioned by Dabrowski share a few common denominators with regard to their emotional cum psychological growth. The theory's claim that only a few rare individuals can pass through Level IV and achieve self-autonomy and can translate their personality ideal into reality at Level V proves to be true in case of mystics. The research confirms the contention that mystical journey is initiated by a conflict, scepticism and curiosity that lead a mystic to break the existing structures and substitute the prevalent beliefs with his/her personality ideal. Kimya (mystic) is initially driven and overwhelmed by broader human questions. When she succeeds, through her efforts and under the tutelage of Rumi and Shams, in throwing away the social masks, her existing beliefs and psychic structures are automatically replaced by her idealized self. She experiences a state of mind that is characterized by psychological wellbeing, health and serenity. This study fills an important research gap by giving an explanation to the study of mystical experience and also by adding to the literary criticism on the novel not hitherto been studied through this angle.

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<sup>29</sup>. Muriel Maufroy, *Op.Cit.*, 121

<sup>30</sup>. *Ibid.*, 18-203

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