

LOST SPIRITUAL LAYERS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF “*FANĀ*,” “*BAQĀ*,” AND “*ILLUMINATION*”

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Abstract

This article explores the Sufi terms *fanā*, *baqā*, and illumination in their English translations, focusing on the semantic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions that are often lost. Differences between denotative and connotative levels are analyzed, highlighting the limitations of English equivalents. Drawing on translation theories (Bhabha, Bassnett, Venuti, Schimmel, among others), the paper discusses poetic transformation, semantic shifts, and the loss of spiritual layers. It concludes that translating Sufi terms requires not mere lexical equivalence but the creation of spiritual parallels to preserve their mystical depth.

Keywords: Sufism, *fanā*, *baqā*, illumination, translation, semantics, poetic transformation, spiritual dimension.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada tasavvufiy atamalar — “*fanā*”, “*baqā*” va “*nurlanish*”ning ingliz tiliga tarjimalarida yuzaga keladigan semantik, madaniy va ruhiy qatlamlar o‘rganiladi. Denotativ va konnotativ darajalardagi farqlar tahlil qilinib, ingliz tilidagi ekvivalentlarning chegaralari ko‘rsatiladi. Maqolada tarjimashunoslik nazariyalari (Bhabha, Bassnett, Venuti, Schimmel va boshqalar) asosida poetik transformatsiya, semantik siljish va ruhiy-ma’naviy qatlamlarning yo‘qolishi muhokama qilinadi. Xulosa sifatida, tasavvufiy terminlarni tarjima qilishda shunchaki lug‘aviy ekvivalent emas, balki ruhiy parallel yaratish zarurligi ta’kidlanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Tasavvuf, *fanā*, *baqā*, *nurlanish*, tarjima, semantika, poetik transformatsiya, ruhiy qatlam.

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматриваются суфийские термины — «*фанā*», «*бақā*» и «*нурланиш*» в английских переводах, а также возникающие при этом семантические, культурные и духовные потери. Анализируются различия на денотативном и коннотативном уровнях, выявляются ограничения английских эквивалентов. На основе теорий перевода (Бхабха,

Басснетт, Венути, Шиммель и др.) обсуждаются поэтическая трансформация, смещение значений и утрата духовных измерений. В заключение подчеркивается необходимость создания духовных параллелей при переводе, а не простого поиска лексического эквивалента.

Ключевые слова: Суфизм, фанā, бақā, нурланиш, перевод, семантика, поэтическая трансформация, духовный слой.

Introduction

The translation of Sufi terminology into English represents one of the most challenging aspects of intercultural communication. Terms such as fanā (annihilation in God), baqā (subsistence through God), and illumination (tajallī) are not only linguistic items but also carriers of profound metaphysical, spiritual, and aesthetic significance. Classical Uzbek and Persian poetry embeds these terms within both denotative (literal, doctrinal) and connotative (poetic, symbolic) layers. When rendered into English, however, much of this spiritual resonance is reduced or entirely lost. This paper examines how translation displaces the affective, symbolic, and mystical content of Sufi terms, thereby producing semantic shifts that alter the original poetic and spiritual experience.

Methods

The methodology of this study is based on comparative semantic analysis, intercultural translation studies, and hermeneutic interpretation. First, the denotative meanings of fanā, baqā, and illumination are identified through classical Sufi treatises and Qur'anic references. Second, the connotative transformations of these terms are traced in classical Uzbek poetry, with special attention to Alisher Navoi, Jami, and Lutfiy. Third, English translations of these terms are analyzed in light of translation theories, particularly Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural displacement, Susan Bassnett's view of metaphysical asymmetry, Lawrence Venuti's theory of domestication, Annemarie Schimmel's interpretation of mystical symbolism, and Mona Baker's framework of cultural gaps. Finally, the semantic and spiritual losses in translation are illustrated through examples.

Results

Fanā and its lost resonance. At the denotative level, fanā signifies the annihilation of the self in God. In English, it is often rendered as “annihilation,” “obliteration,” or “self-effacement.” However, these words carry nihilistic connotations, associating the concept with negative destruction rather than mystical transformation. In Navoi's poetry, fanā is portrayed as a moth consumed by the candle flame — a metaphor of love and devotion, not mere extinction. Translations such as “I annihilated myself in God's being” fail to capture the experiential dimensions of patience, struggle, and ecstatic surrender inherent in the Sufi context. *Baqā as spiritual continuation.* Following fanā fī-llāh comes baqā bi-llāh, a state of subsistence with God. Denotatively, English translations offer “eternity,”

“permanence,” or “subsistence.” Yet these convey only temporal continuity, missing the ontological renewal central to Sufi thought. Schimmel emphasizes that *baqā* is “a state of conscious divine being attained after the annihilation of the ego.” In Navoi, *baqā* symbolizes eternal union with the Beloved, transcendence beyond individuality, and mystical rebirth. English renderings reduce this to static presence, erasing the poetic dynamism and spiritual energy. *Illumination (nurlanish, tajallī) and symbolic reduction*. Illumination in Sufism refers to the divine manifestation of light within the heart and cosmos. Qur’anic imagery (“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth,” Q. 24:35) underpins its metaphysical essence. In poetry, illumination is reflected through the Beloved’s beauty, gaze, or natural phenomena. English translations like “divine light,” “radiance,” or “epiphany” fail to convey its ontological shift — the fusion of perception and existence. As Tilman Nagel notes, *tajallī* is not just vision but transformation of being itself. Yet English renderings often flatten this to lyrical descriptions, losing the mystical intensity.

Discussion

The findings indicate that English translations of *fanā*, *baqā*, and illumination consistently reduce their spiritual depth. The denotative core remains, but the connotative richness is diminished. This aligns with Bhabha’s theory of displacement, where cultural meaning is unsettled in translation. Bassnett highlights the metaphysical asymmetry between Sufi epistemology and Western categories, making equivalence impossible. Venuti’s concept of domestication explains why translators often neutralize spiritual energy into accessible lexical choices. Schimmel demonstrates that poetic imagery is essential to preserve mystical experience, while Baker stresses that culture-specific epistemologies produce translation gaps.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply linguistic but hermeneutic. Translators must employ strategies of creative equivalence, spiritual parallelism, and poetic reconstruction. Rather than treating these terms as static lexical items, they should be understood as dynamic carriers of mystical states. This requires a shift from literalism to functional and affective equivalence, where the goal is to reproduce the spiritual force rather than the lexical surface.

Conclusion

The analysis of *fanā*, *baqā*, and illumination demonstrates that the translation of Sufi terminology into English entails profound spiritual losses. While denotative meanings may be captured, connotative and affective layers often vanish. This indicates that Sufi terms cannot be fully expressed through mere lexical equivalence. Instead, translation must create spiritual parallels, preserving symbolic networks, poetic imagery, and mystical resonance. For Uzbek classical literature, particularly its Sufi layers, this means developing translation models that prioritize spiritual continuity and intercultural hermeneutics. Only through such

approaches can the universal and transcendent essence of Sufi poetics be communicated across languages.

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