Analyzing the Words of Hallaj
An Investigation and Analysis on the Book “Explaining Shathiat” by
Sheikh Rouzbahan Baghli

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Abstract

The word shath has a Syriac origin and means being developed in a literal sense, it also means being moved in the Arabic language. However, in mysticism the word shath refers to those seemingly blasphemous words which one might utter in times of drunkenness or thoughtlessness, that have artistic values as well. The paradoxical language, use of imagination, romanticism and the rhythm of words in them are the reason that shathiat are also known as “Prose like poems”. Therefore, the cryptic nature of those words would be inevitable, and the chief characteristic of cryptic language is that it is open to interpretation. This has made some enthusiasts of this language like Sheikh Rouzbahan Baghli to make an attempt in its interpretation. In his book “Explaining Shathiat” he has tried to decipher and interpret shathiat and some strange and unconventional acts and attitudes of forty mystics, particularly one named Hallaj.

Keywords: Rouzbahan Baghli, Hallaj, shathiat, people of drunkenness, interpretation.
Introduction
Abu Muhammad Rouzbahan Baghli Fasaie, also known as “Sheikh Shattah” or the shattah of Fars, was the most famous mystic and sophist of the 6th century H.Q. He was amongst those mystics whose principle of mysticism was based on love and admiration of beauty. As Zarrin Khoub points out: “His way in mysticism was based on love, discovery and shtah. He gave great value to love, in his spiritual being. In fact his dreams, discoveries and shathiat are derived from his attention to love and its consequences,” (ZArin Koub, 1996).

Rouzbahan’s exceptional personality and way of truth seeking has attracted many great names. Amongst those, are the two most famous figures of the literary world: Hafiz and Sa’die. Therefore, they have declared their fondness for him in their works and have followed his way of truth seeking as well.

In his book, “Rouzbahan Baghli”, Carl Ernest points out forty-five supposed works of Rouzbahan out of which eighteen no longer exist today, and out of the remaining twenty seven book, nineteen are in Arabic and eight of them have been translated to Farsi (Ernest, 1997).

Even though Rouzbahan has been dubbed as “Sheikh Shatah”, and uttering shath is a prophetic characteristic, but he has gained this fame due to writing his well known book “The Logic of Mysteries”. The book “Explaining Shathiat” is in fact Rouzbahan’s interpretation of other mystics’ shaths and its chief point is to decipher and interpret Hallaj’s shathiat.

The Definition of Shath
In his book “Al Lama” or “The Light”. Abu Nasr Serraj Tusi writes the following: “In the Arabic language the word shath can be defined as movement, as Shath Yashatah means to hurry up. Mystic’s shath is also derived from this definition of the word, because it is also the movement of the secret mysteries of enthusiastic people, in times when their enthusiasm reaches its peak.” He continues: “Shath is like a storm of water poured into a narrow lake, which overflows and creates destruction and devastations. Arabs refer to such incidence as “Shath alma’ fi al nahr “ The mystics too, when becomes overwhelmed with enthusiasm utter such words to describe his inner feelings that only a few might be able to decipher their meaning,” (Serajj, 2003).

Thus, according to Serraj shath is a reflection of the movements going on in the heart of mystics, which provokes them to utter seemingly strange and blasphemous words known as shathiats. Sheikh Rouzbahan has a similar definition of shath as well. In the tenth chapter of his book he has defined shath as the following:” Shath means movement, which is why a flour mill in which the flour moves to be grinded is called a meshtah, thus, shath is derived from the secrets of sophists’ hearts. When a mystic becomes overwhelmed with enthusiasm he might utter such words that even the wisest men of science would not be able to comprehend, thus they would describe them as nonsense or might deny their sensibility and mock the ones who utters them. However, in reality shath is similar to Quran verses and Hadith (Rouzbahan Baghli, 2001).

Despite the seemingly blasphemous and impolite nature of their words, but Rumi (Mowlavi), has stated the following about sophists:
If he tells you blasphemy
Reminds him of religion
If he says it with doubt
Then his doubt will turn into
a certain
premonition (Rumi or Mowlavi, The First Book)

Dr. Shafie Kadkani, regards shath as something that is open to interpretation and possesses “an afterward” trait, which means that unlike other forms of poems written in a simple structure, shaths become meaningful after their creation (Shafie Kadkani, 1997).

Therefore, something that becomes meaningful after its creation is what sophist and mystics call being open to analysis and interpretation.

Louis Massignon, suggest shath to be translated as “the utterances of lovers of the Lord’. He believed that Rouzbahan’s shaths were not uttered in times of drunkenness and unconsciousness but were expressed in full sobriety and control (Shayegan, 1994).

Corbin also translates shath as “the insensible revelations” (Shayegan, 1994 P:371)

Problem Statement
The province of Fars which has always been the place of sages and is dubbed as the “house of teachers” is hometown to big names such as Hallaj and Rouzbahan Baghli whose romantic mysticism was inherited by Hafuz and Sa’die. Those two were able to become the masters of romantic mysticism and present its best to the world. However, with the passage of time the importance and value of those respected people became forgotten and hugely ignored, to such extent that even some scholars confused them or reported false information about them, amongst which was the French east scholar Paul Ballanfat who has published four Arabic books of Sheikh Rouzbahan Baghli. In their prelouge he had falsely introduced the book “The Errors of Mystics”, as Sheikh Rouzbahan’s translated name for the book “The logic of Mysteries” and has written the following:” It was during his residence in Fasa that Sheikh Rouzbahan wrote “The logic of Mysteries” which later became known as “The Errors of Mystics” in its Persian translation (Ballanfat, Prelouge, P: 1). However, in truth as Rouzbahan stated himself “The logic of Mysteries” ‘s other name is “Explaining Shathiat” which is also the subject of this paper.

Discussions and Conversations
Sheikh Rouzbahan translated the Arabic version of his book “The logic of Mysteries” into Persian (Farsi) and named it “Explaining Shathiat”. In its first chapter, after a brief introduction of himself, he states that after studying books of “masters of knowledge” he had found differences in opinion with them and found them and particularly the language of people of drunkenness (shathiat) hard to comprehend, so he decides to collect and decipher the mentioned shathias during his stay in Fasa. Thus, he published an explanation on shathiat in Arabic first in a book called “The logic of Mysteries of Bayan Al Anwar” and upon his return to Shiraz translates it into Farsi and names it “Explaining Shathiat” honoring the request of a dear friend. He has not only translated the book, but he has added new parts to it which has tripled its size. He says the following on this subject:” First, it occurred to me that I should collect Sheikhs’ shathiat and explain and interpret them in Arabic, I did so and named it “The logic of Mysteries
"of Bayan Al Anwar” as I returned to Shiraz one dear friend and follower of mine, asked to translate it into Persian, hopefully I was able to translate it into a smooth language, “ (Baghli, 1981).

In his book, he has attempted to interpret and explain shathiats of more than forty mystics and sophists, in his words: he tended to present a smooth and unusual interoperation of them by referring to the hadiths and Quran verses, so he could save them from the anonymity of ignoramus people. :”The braves had called to me from the world beyond: that o thou the witness of secrets and the origin of wisdom! Save the holy spirits from the mockery of pathetic fools! Decipher the mysteries of lovers and explain the enthusiasm of drunks in words of truth and religion, and use Quran and Hadith whenever it requires, in doing so!” (Baghli, 1981, P:12). In this book, Sheikh both interprets shathiats of sophist and mystics and presents justification for their eccentric behavior. In fact the act of shath itself is a kind of language open to interpretation and deriving messages and this is its way of communication with its audience.

The Structure and Content of “Explaining Shathiat”

“Explaining Shathiat” written by Sheikh Rouzbahn Baghli Shirazi, consists of many enthusiastic and mysterious utterances of Sophists. The mentioned book is divided into seven parts and has 446 pages. It is worth mentioning that the original text along with its ten page long prologue, has a total number of 637 pages. It has been edited and corrected by French philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin in France’s guild of PERSIA-LOGY in Tehran, and was published in the year 1981 by Zouhori publications. By including the terminology page which is seventy-six pages (from page 639 to 718) and the 46 pages long prologue of Corbin the book would be 784 pages long.

In the prologue, Sheikh has offered his adoration and gratitude to the Lord, and then adores the Prophet (salute to his holy spirit), caliphs, Imam Ali (salute to his holy spirit), and Imams Hassan and Husain (salute to their holy spirits) and also their followers and disciples and at the end salutes the respected sheikhs as well (Rouzbahan Baghli, 1981).

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In doing so, Sheikh had begun from something he calls the shath of truth and deciphers the shaths in Ahadith of the prophet, and caliphs and their disciples in order to move on to interpret and explain the shaths of the infatuated. It is because he and other sophists deemed shathiats and Quran and Hadith verses similar due to their divine nature.

Therefore, Sheikh Rouzbahan began his book by referring to the shaths of truth which are the cryptic letters of Quran. Those are the shortest shaths mentioned in his book. Then he states:” First I wrote about the shath of truth and secrets of letters and mentioned the principles for the shaths of similar nature. Then I deciphered the shaths of caliphs, so it would help me to write the
book more effectively, then I moved on to the shaths of the infatuated men, first I explained the words of Ibrahim Ibn Adham and Abu Ali Sandi and Abu Yazid Kardum and lastly Abu Alqeis. Because three of them belonged to three different categories, three different sciences and three of them were complex as well, which are the three chief points of the book: introducing masters of unconformity, uttering their shathiat and explaining them, which was the most difficult part,” (Baghli, 1981).

In addition to explaining those triangular shaths (Shath of truth, shath of prophet and his followers and shaths of mystics), the book discusses other subjects as well. We have divided those discussions into the seven following categories:

1. Shath of truth (chapters ; 11,12,13,14,15,16)
2. Shath of the Prophet and His disciples
   2.1 Prophetic shath (chapters: 17,18,19,20)
   2.2 Shaths of the disciples (Chapter 21)
   2.3 Shaths of caliphs (chapters: 23,25,27)
   2.4 Shaths of followers (chapter 29)
3. Shath of Mystics
   3.1 Shathiat of forty six mystic including Bayazid (31 chapters) Shabli (22 chapters), Hasri (15 chapters), Abi Bakr Vaseti (13 chapters)
   3.2 Shathiat of Hallaj
      3.2.1 In Rawaya (23 chapters)
      3.2.2 In Shathiat (45 chapters)
      3.2.3 In explanation of the book “Tavasin” (20 chapters)
4. On the act of shath
5. The Sophism terminology (chapter 162), this terminology, in the words of Louis Massignon :” Is more accurate and superb than Hajwiri (died on 466 H.Q), Ibn Arabi (died on 637 H.Q), Abdul Razagh Kashi (died on 730 H.Q), and Jorjani (died on 816 H.Q) dictionaries (Louis Massignon, 2000).
6. Some chapters are dedicated to the description of Sheikh’s life and his prayers (22 chapters) these chapters, which are scattered here and there between the shathiat of mystics, have been written in a novel style different from the rest of the book which reminds one of Sheikh Abhar Alasheghin’s style that is a literary, technical and complex prose.
7. Other chapters include, chapters on the oneness of the Lord, (8 chapters), knowledge (7 chapters), description of famous mystics (2 chapters), on the test of Loqhoum va Vagh’ tahom (2 chapters), admiring the Prophet (1 chapter), on the literary definition of shath (1 chapter), on the destination of the journey (1 chapter), on way of clothing (1 chapter) and on liberty (1 chapter/).

**Shathiat of Hallaj**

In his body of work, and particularly the book “Explaining Shathiat”, Sheikh Rouzbahan had mentioned his fondness for Hallaj and declares himself a follower of his style, to such extend that he has written in the page 14 of the first chapter that the chief motivation behind writing the book was to decipher and explain Hallaj’s shathiat. Thus, he has tried to explain and interpret
shathiat of Hallaj on pages 335 to 545 of his book and has categorized them into the three following parts:

On rawaya: (pages 355 to 367), (22 chapters) which include 22 quotes of Hallaj
On Shathiah /l (pages 373 to 453), 45 chapters, which include 45 shath of Hallaj

On expaling the book: Tavasin al-Hallaj:

The most important part of this book is the explanation of Hallaj’s tavasin, which has been discussed by Rouzbahan on pages 454 to 541 and in 20 chapters. They consist of 11 tassins including: Tassin of the Serraj, Tassin of comprehension, tassin of Saffa, tassin of circle, tassins of infinity and eltebas, tassin of mashie’, tassin of oneness of Lord, Tassin of mysteries of the Lord’s oneness, Tassin of tanzarieh and bostan al-ma’rafah.

Now a summary of the mentioned triangular parts:

A: On Rawaya: This part analyzes the quotes and speeches of Hallaj, by means of referring to Quran and Hadith, it is worth mentioning that Rouzbahan has given longer explanations and interpretations on Hallaj’s words than other mystics’ words, it might be a sign of his inability to understand them thoroughly in such way that he has given comments such as: “God only knows if this interpretation is true or the other one” which indicates his doubts about the real meanings of Hallaj’s words.

B: On Shathiah: Rouzbahan has interpreted Hallaj’s shathiat in this part and as Louis Massignon points out: “No one is more qualified than Rouzbahan for explaining those shathiat” (Massignon, 2005).

Hallaj’s most famous shath would be the phrase” I am the truth” which has been repeated with this content but different words in his other shathiat including shaths: 4, 16, 6, 32, 37, 39, 41 of the book, this has been mentioned in Tassins Al-saffa as well. In this phrase Hallaj assumes himself as a sign of God:” I said, if they do not know Him, then let them know his sign, I am a sign of God, I am the truth,” (Baghli, 1980).

In another part, by referring to the story of Moses and his conversation with the Lord by means of a tree, states:” I am as much a sign of God as the tree which Moses talked to was “Then Rouzbhana explains:” From that tree, came the words of “I am indeed the Lord, and From me:” I am the truth”, if it is wrong to cut down the trees, then why are they kill and burn us?” (Baghli, 1980, P: 475).

By saying “I am the truth” that is “I am the tree of strength” my tongue utters the words of the truth, that tree said “I am indeed the Lord” and this tree says:” I am the truth” (Baghli, 1980, P: 477).

In his Tzakarah Al-olia” Attar has stated the following on this subject as well:” I was surprised by a person who believed that a tree uttered the words:” I am the Lord” not a tree in nature, but does not believe Husain when he uttered “I am the truth” not Husain in nature (Attar, 1996).

By referring to the phrase “I am the truth “Shabestary has also written the followings on what he believes to be the unity between the mystic and his Lord:

He who says I am the truth
Is going after some secrets
Who would says it after all
If he was not the truth himself
Go some place in which
A tree would tell you
I am the Lord Indeed
If I am the truth myself
Why shouldn’t I believe
a good tree
To be the Lord indeed (Shabestary, 1992)

One of the most controversial shath and tavasin of Hallaj is the “conversation between devil and Pharaoh” in which Hallaj seemingly defends them and goes to such extreme as calling himself their disciple: I had a conversation with the devil and Pharaoh about dignity. The devil told me:”
If I had bowed to Humans I would’ve lost my dignity, Pharaoh said: “If I had bowed to the prophet I would’ve lost my dignity.” So I said:” If I back down from my argument, I would lose my dignity.” The devil and pharaoh are my Lords and masters. Threaten the devil with fire, but he would not back down from his argument, they drowned pharaoh but he did not back down from his argument, and if they kill me or hang me or dismember me I would never back down from my argument,” (Baghli, 1981).
Interpreting the above words, Rouzbahan states that Hallaj merely admires their bravery (something that has been admired in ahadith as well), not their beliefs and religion:” His point is the concept of not backing down from your argument. He admires their bravery, not their religion,” (Baghli, 1981, P: 375).

C: On explaining the book of Tavasin
The word tavasin is the plural form of letters T and S which are among the broken letters of Quran mentioned in the beginning of Sourahs: Sho’ara, Ant (naml) and qessas (stories). Hallaj believes them to be the symbols for two words (P:456) which start with T symbol of Taharah (purity) and S a symbol for the Senate of eternity, and N the last letter of tavasin to be a symbol for nawal, that is the blessing which blows the truth into dead bodies and spirits.
One of the most interesting points of Hallaj’s tavasin is his use of geometrical shapes and symbolic letters in them, which he had used in order to describe his feelings in seven tassins of : circle, dot, mashie; oneness of the Lord, secrets of the oneness of the Lord, Al-tanziah Alnafi and Alesbat. His style has been mimicked by other mystics and sophists as well. Hallaj’s style which could be referred to as the sensual geometry of inner witnessing and spiritual knowledge,. In the Shia’ mysticism geometrical mysticism was introduced in the twelfth century H.Q, and portrayed the circles of the love of prophet Muhammad and human’s existentialist relations in the era of Majd Al-ashraf Shirazi.
As Massignon points out:” The use of geometrical curves , which has been used by Hallaj throughout his tavasin in order to explain his mystic phrases, became prevalent after Hallaj , especially by writers of the book :”Circles and Dots” and in the new school of Ibn Arabi to Abu-alkheyr Alsoeidi (died on 1788 BC 1200 H.Q) in the analysis of “ The prayer of Mashishah” and its symbolic use in “ The Frame of Curves” (Massignon, 2005, P: 219).

On the Act of Shath (Analyzing Some Actions of Sophists)
In this book, not only he interprets the shathiat of mystics and sophists but tends to justify their erratic behaviors and unusual actions as well.
In fact the act of shath is a kind of language which is open to interpretation, and that is its of communication with its audience. The followings are some examples of that: 

“According to legend, Ibrahim A’raj was Shiraz’s congregational Salah Imam. One day he established Salah with the peoples, then it occurred to him that he was the IMAM of Shiraz’s congregational Salah, thus he put his hands on the ground and stood on them, legs in the air, everyone laughed, so he never leaded congregational Salah again. Sheikh interprets that action as fighting against hypocrisy, and says the following in its justification:” This is an action unique to the cult of Malamaten, whom do a strange thing in order to stop themselves from committing hypocrisy,” (Baghli, 1981).

The Book of Rouzbahan’s Points of Sophism
Like his predecessors, Rouzbahan has dedicated the finishing parts of his book to defining and analyzing the mystic terms based on the school of “love and mysticism”. Mysticism terminology has also been mentioned in books such as:” The Light” by Abu Nasr Al-Serraj, “Al-Ta’arof” by Kalabazi, “Kashf al-Mahjoub” by Hajwiri, “The Book of Ghoshiri” etc. But as Massignon points out this is by far the best dictionary of mystic terms (Massignon, 2000). This is in fact a dictionary for defining the terms of sophism which sheikh had provided in two parts of: “on explaining the points of Sophism” and “Explanation of the Complex words”.

Conclusions:
In the world of sophists, shath is defined as seemingly blasphemous words which one might utter in times of drunkenness and uncountable enthusiasm. Those words not only have artistic value but their cryptic nature makes them open to interpretation as well. One of the people who had attempted to interpret them was Sheikh Rouzbahan Baghli the great mystic of 6th century who was also known as Sheikh Shattah. In doing so, first he wrote the book “The Logic of Mysteries” in Arabic, and translated it into Persian after a while, under the name of “Explaining Shathiat” This book consists of his interpretations on shathiat of forty sophist particularly one called Hallaj, something that makes this book the best source for understanding and finding out about the life and works of Hallaj. In his book, Sheikh both interprets shathiat and justifies the eccentric action of sophists and mystics as well. He describes his motivation for writing this book as “to free the mystics from the mockery of their ignoramus foes” in other words; he wanted to remove the stigma of blasphemy from the image of mystics.
References