

Attar's Seven Valleys of Love and Seven Waves of Human Society: A Hermeneutical Perspective

Sepehr Ghazinoory*, Masoud Afshari-Mofrad*,
Gholam Ali Montazer**, Mona Rashidirad§

* Department of IT Management, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

** Faculty of Engineering, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

§ Brighton Business School, University of Brighton, Brighton, East Sussex, UK

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ABSTRACT. Attar Neyshaburi is one of the major Persian poets and mystics who lived about 800 years ago. The main characteristic of his works is the simplicity and impressiveness of the language that he used. He tried to express his eminent mystical concepts by utilization of simple symbolic stories, meant to be comprehensible for everyone. He has left behind many poetic works, such as *Massnavi*, *Asrarnameh* and *Elahiname*. But many scholars believe that his masterwork is 'The Conference of the Birds' in which Attar narrates a journey of thousands of birds towards invincible Simurgh; a journey in which the birds experience seven valleys of love and most of them cannot survive. According to his point of view, the symbolic language of this work makes it possible for every single reader to comprehend one aspect of Attar's thoughts. In this study, we have used the seven valleys of love as a metaphor to seven waves of human society in order to present a new perspective of the future. A Hermeneutical method has been used to extract the meaning of Attar's texts. The findings show that the aforementioned metaphor could provide a fruitful source of vision for better understanding of the evolution of human society. The findings also imply that we can use the experiences and notions concealed in our rich literature to learn and build a better life for everyone. © 2013 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

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Born in Neyshabur (a historical city in Iran), Fariduddin Mohammad ibne Attar Neyshaburi, the famous Persian poet and mystic lived around the 13th century A.D. He had an immense influence on Persian poetry and Sufism [1]. In spite of his genius, there is little information about his life compared to other renowned poets such as Rumi and Hafez. He was a grocer and according to historical evidences,

he was not well-known as a poet in his lifetime. During the invasion of the Mongolians to Persia, Attar was killed by a Mongolian soldier. His mausoleum is located in Neyshabur.

Attar possessed a great wealth of literature and genius in poetry, especially in mystical science. To demonstrate Attar's value as a great teacher of mystical science, it is sufficient to quote the following



Fig. 1. Si (thirty) Murgh (birds) shape Simurgh

couplet from Molana Jalaluddin Rumi (one of the greatest Persian poets):

“Attar roamed through the seven cities of love
While we have barely turned down the first street”

Attar has left behind many poetic works, such as 40000 lines of *Massnavis*, *Asrarnamēh* and *Elahinamēh* [2]. The main characteristic of his work is the simplicity and impressiveness of the language he used. He tried to express his eminent mystical concepts by the utilization of simple symbolic stories to be comprehensible for everyone. Attar believed that theosophy is a ‘path’, which begins by ‘going’. Theosophy is not a predetermined path, but a path that would be shaped by going.

The Conference of the Birds (Manteq At-tair) is one of his impressive works, in which Attar narrated symbolic stories and short tales. This book is sung in iambic hexameter. It describes a journey of thousands of birds, which are trying to fly high towards Mount Qaf, which was supposed to be the highest peak in the world in search of the invincible Simurgh. After much wrangling about the difficulties of the path, the birds set out and crossed the seven valleys of love. But along the way, most of the birds faltered and perished. At last, out of thousands of fowls, only thirty birds survived and arrived at the court of the Prince of the Universe (Simurgh). Here, the Simurgh’s

herald keeps them waiting for Simurgh long enough for the birds to figure out that they themselves are the Si (thirty) Murgh (birds). When they turn to address the king, they saw an enormous phantom mirror, which reflected their own image where the Simurgh should be [3].

The journey of birds towards the Simurgh could be a symbol of mankind’s efforts to achieve perfection. In other words, Attar describes a path which every wayfarer must pass to accomplish his theosophical duties and become a perfect man. In this paper, we tried to generalize Attar’s idea from an individual theme to a public theme. In fact, we used the seven valleys of love as a metaphor to grope the next waves of human society.

Seven Valleys

In this section, a brief description of seven valleys of love is presented.

It is important to note that in Attar’s book, every valley has been described by using about 18 verses in average; but in the following sections, about three verses are excerpted to describe each valley.

1. The Valley of Quest: This valley is the first, the longest and the hardest valley to be passed. Attar says that:

“When you descend into the valley of quest
A hundred difficulties will assail you in that empire;
Here for years you must endeavour, you must try
Because in this field elements inverted lie ...”

Also in his *Masnavi*, Rumi has mentioned the ‘Quest’ as a prerequisite for moving toward perfection. He says that:

“Whatever you have from chattel and vocation
It was a quest and a thought at the beginning”

2. The Valley of Love: In a Persian dictionary (Dehkhoda), love means “adhesion to something”. In his *Symposium*, Plato argues that love is the progeny of need. Lovers need to attain what they want or protect what they have. Likewise, Attar believes that a lover only thinks about his love and may not care about anything else. He says that:

"Next the tempting valley of love displays itself
Whoever enters that field burns in the furnace;
A true lover stakes his cash and his head
For union with his beloved and his mate;
Others are content with another day's promise to wait

But the lover finds his beloved here ..."

Also Hafez states that a lover thinks only about his beloved:

"There is nothing in my heart except the beloved
I cannot help it because my mentor didn't teach me anything else"

3. The Valley of Knowledge: Paths in the valley of knowledge are abundant, therefore every wayfarer can gain knowledge based on his capacity. No path is similar to another path, hence there could be a total difference between the pathways of different wayfarers. Attar says:

"No one can find a fixed road in this place

Because there are many roads and different destinations;

And since many paths the wanderer sees

Each rise as his wisdom guides or foresees;

Each person marches till he attain his own perfection

Yet moods dictate friendship and one's action ..."

4. The Valley of Independence: After passing previous valleys, when the wayfarer comes to this valley, he feels free from everything and everybody, but God. In his point of view, the world and its components are very small compared to the endless magnificence of his beloved. Attar says:

"Seven oceans here in one breath turn into a pool

Seven burning globes turn here to a fire ball, the whole;

If a part or the whole system perish here

It seems that a straw is lost in the sphere ..."

Hafez says that:

"Hafez's weeping means nothing before the independence of the beloved

Because it is like dew before seven seas"

5. The Valley of Unity: The meaning of this valley is conspicuous in its name. In this valley, everything comes into one. Attar says:

"When faces are turned to this desert and wake

All heads are raised from a single neck;

If many you behold or few in the valley

They are all but one, they are one wholly ..."

In another story, Attar argues that all the universe, even in various appearances, come into one:

"Everything can be summarized into one substance

Everything is one word, even in different shapes"

6. The Valley of Bewilderment: In this valley, the wayfarer experiences pain and regret. When he enters this valley, it is like a new world for him where he is wondered and bewildered. Attar says:

"Behold! The next is the valley of bewilderment

Here pain and regret ever rave and thunder;

When the pilgrim in this vortex descends

He loses the path in amazement and awe;

He will say 'I know nothing of such riddle,

I know not this or that, I'm blank in the middle' ..."

Also Saadi characterizes the bewilderment valley:

"I am not silent because I forget you

It's because I am bewildered from your thought"

7. The Valley of Deprivation and Doom: The seventh valley is the valley of mergence where the wayfarer loses his previous identity and becomes one part of a whole. In Attar's words, the wayfarer drowns in absolute sea of bliss and sees by revelation. Attar says:

"He who is drowned in the absolute sea of bliss

Forever is lost, forever is in peace;

And if he manages to emerge from the ocean

He will be gifted to see by revelation ..."

This is the valley in which out of thousands fowls, only thirty birds arrive at the court of the Simurgh.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a research method that is primarily concerned with the meaning of a text [4]. Its main

question is: 'What is the meaning of this text?'. Hermeneutics focuses on a text as a non-ostensive discourse with a reader and helps to understand and interpret the text [5]. Hermeneutics strives to elicit the ideas which are nested in historical, linguistic and cultural horizons of meaning. The aim of hermeneutics is not to re-construct the past for its own sake, but to understand how a historical issue engages the present [6]. For instance, when we read one of Shakespeare's works, we do not focus on Shakespeare's aim of that work, but we feel its effect on our own (as a reader) at the present.

As mentioned earlier, '*The Conference of the Birds*' is sung using a symbolic method. It is full of symbols, enigmas and paraphrases that should be interpreted and hermeneutics could be a proper tool for the interpretation. Attar himself claims that his poetry can be interpreted in various ways in different times:

"My poetry has a marvellous characteristic
Because every time it provides more insight
If you can read it more
Undoubtedly you will enjoy it more"

In this paper, we used a seven steps hermeneutics method, which is presented by Klein and Myers [7].

1- Hermeneutic circle: Understanding the meaning by considering the interdependence between different parts and the whole text. This principle of human understanding is the basis of all other principles.

2- Contextualization: Studying the social and historical background of a text.

3- Interaction between researcher (s) and experts.

4- Abstraction and generalization: Relating the idiographic results of previous steps to some theoretical and general concepts.

5- Dialogical reasoning: Realizing possible contradictions between the hypotheses and findings

6- Multiple interpretations: Being sensitive to possible differences in interpretations among experts.

7- Suspicion: Considering possible biases and distortions in findings and avoiding prejudice.

In this study, we followed the aforementioned seven steps. Firstly, we read the whole story and

extracted the meaning of its unfamiliar parts from Persian dictionaries. Considering the interdependence between the whole story and its parts, we tried to comprehend the meaning of text and identify some similarities between valleys of love and waves of human society. Secondly, we studied the works of poets and theosophists such as Hafez, Rumi and Saadi who were contemporary or like-minded with Attar. Thirdly, we used 'critical rationalism' approach for interviews with experts. Critical rationalists believe that theories and hypotheses should be rationally criticized in order to be accepted or rejected. Those hypotheses which best survive these tests are the best theories [8]. In fact, critical rationalism refers to openness to critiques and finding proper answers for these critiques [9]. Thus, in our interviews with experts, we asked them to challenge our hypotheses and we tried to find proper answers to their critiques.

Our experts were five professors who were all familiar with both future studies and theosophy. Considering the results of our interviews, we tried to modify our hypotheses using previous concepts, such as singularity and post-humanity –which will be discussed later. The results of this fourth step, helped us to discover some flaws in our hypotheses which was the aim of the fifth step. By conducting a meeting with our experts, we tried to decrease the differences in interpretations of experts and find a unanimous perspective among them in the sixth step. As mentioned in the seventh step, we tried to be open to critiques and understand that our findings might have some biases. In other words, we do not claim that our findings are necessarily the way that human society will pass in the future. It is obvious that every forecasting effort deals with some degree of uncertainty, therefore, different features of the future could be predicted by a degree of reliability and precision. While we have insufficient knowledge to narrow down the space of different possibilities of the future human society, we are aware of many arguments and considerations, which in combination could provide a plausible vision of the future [10]. In other words, in this study we tried to make an integrative 'big picture' by thinking about

trends and visions of the probable, possible and preferable future.

Findings

In this section, seven waves of human society and similarities between each valley and its corresponding wave is presented.

1. Tribal age: There is no unanimity between archaeologists on the longevity of tribal age. Some researchers believe that tribal age lasted about 80,000 to 70,000 years (e.g. [11]) while others estimate its longevity between 200,000 to 500,000 years (e.g. [12];[13]). In this age, people were mobile hunter-gatherers, who did not know how to produce food by domesticating plants and animals. Their tools were made of wood, stone and bone. Gradually, they found out how to light fire, melt metals and produce weapons and they began a trend toward increasing efficiency in technological evolution [14]. This age was the longest and hardest era for humankind [13].

Similarities between the Valley of Quest and tribal age: The valley of Quest is the first, longest and hardest valley to be passed. This is a critical phase for a wayfarer in his path toward perfection. In this valley, the wayfarer must endeavour to abandon everything in his previous life in order to feel the divine glory in his heart. He would be restless until he passes this stage to find his beloved.

Similarly, the tribal age is the first, longest and hardest period of human existence. People were vagabond mobile hunter-gatherers.

2. Agricultural age: Following the development of agriculture, hunter-gatherers were displaced by farming or pastoralist groups in most parts of the globe. Some researchers believe that the agricultural revolution began about 10000 years ago in the fertile crescent of the Middle East (e.g. [10]). Durant believed that the beginning of agricultural activities can be considered as the first social revolution and the dawn of civilization [15]. In early phases of this era, everyone made their own products for their own consumption and there was little or no trading between households. People transitioned from nomadic wandering

and hunting, to the clustering of villages and the development of social culture. The most important aspect of this era is the dependence of humankind on earth, meaning that the land was the basis of economy, politics and culture [16]. The emergence of Feudalism divulges the importance of land in the agricultural age.

Similarities between the Valley of Love and the agricultural age: In the valley of Love, the wayfarer only cares about his beloved and finds his perfection in attaining the beloved. Since love is the progeny of need, the lover needs to attain what he wants, or protect what he has. While others are content with another day's promise to wait, the lover thinks only about today and attaining his beloved. It is necessary to note that in Persian theosophy, love is divided into two categories, ranging from earthy love to divine love.

These characteristics are consistent with those of the agricultural age in a way that the most important aspect was the dependence of humankind on earth, so that the land was the basis of economy, politics, culture and so on. Farmers were mostly concerned about their farms and tried to keep or extend it. They had almost found their earthy love.

3. Industrial age: Commencing in the mid-18th century, the next wave described an industrial society, where machines expressed their muscles to begin the Industrial Revolution and urbanization around factories which changed the way of life of millions [16]. Many historians believe that the industrial age began in England, just after the invention of steam motor in 1765 [17]. This wave brought machines together under a single roof, called a factory, and attacked every feature of the agricultural era. Standardization, specialization, maximization and centralization are the most important changes which occurred during this period [16]. The growth of scientific knowledge was intense in the industrial age and man felt the thirst for more knowledge [18]. In spite of intense scientific growth in some countries, such as the USA and Western Europe, many other countries were still in their agricultural age.

Similarities between the valley of knowledge and the industrial age: After traversing the valleys of Quest and Love, in the valley of knowledge, the wayfarer tries to learn more about his beloved and gain more wisdom. However, because of the abundance of the paths, different wayfarers would experience different pathways and everybody would gain knowledge based on their own capacity.

Similarly, one of the main characteristics of the industrial age is the intense growth of scientific knowledge. Having experienced previous waves, man was enthusiastic to learn more about his environment and himself and many scientific trends commenced in this era. But different regions and countries experienced different pathways. In spite of intense scientific growth in some countries such as the USA and Western Europe, many other countries were still in their agricultural age.

4. Information age: Some researchers posit that this era commenced in the late 1970s by the invention of personal computers, and soared in the early 1990s by the development of the Internet [19]. Unlike the previous ages, the information age is based on mind rather than muscle, as its most powerful driver is information technology. The key property of this wave is flexibility. People can receive goods and services and do their work when they want, where they want and from whom they want [16]. In the information age, people become independent of everything but connecting to the network. In fact, citizens transform to citizens of the Net - or, Netizens [20]. The usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) helps the global village to be a dream come true [21].

Similarities between the valley of independence and the information age: As shown in its name, in the valley of independence, the wayfarer is independent of everything, but his beloved. The world and its components are very small compared to the endless magnificence of the beloved.

This is similar to one of the main characteristics of the information age in which people are independent of everything, but connecting to the network. They can work, communicate, trade, etc. by using the Internet whenever and wherever they want.

5. Technological convergence age: The world is undergoing a global technology revolution, namely technological convergence at an accelerating pace [22]. Different fields of science are unifying based on unity in nature and we would experience a new renaissance in science and technology [23]. The phrase 'Convergent Technologies' (CTs) refers to previously distinct technologies which move toward stronger synergistic combination, integration and unification in order to achieve similar goals [24]. Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology and Cognitive science (NBIC), are the most popular converging technologies which lead to revolutionary scientific discoveries, such as the extension of human sensory abilities, expanding brain functions through technical aids and the retardation of aging [25]. The convergence of these technologies may result in such outcomes which surpass the sum of their parts in performance [26]. The conjunction of NBIC with advances in mathematics, system approach and computation lays the ground for the first time to comprehend the natural world, human society and scientific research as closely coupled complex hierarchical systems. Expanding human cognition and communication, improving human health and physical capabilities, enhancing group and societal outcomes and reaching sustainable development using NBIC tools can be considered as some of the potential outcomes of technological convergence [23].

Similarities between the valley of unity and the technological convergence age: In the valley of unity, as mentioned above, everything comes into one and everything is a phenomenon of the beloved.

This is consistent with the main aspect of technological convergence that different technologies come into one to achieve similar goals.

6. Intelligence age: Perhaps the idea of inventing a machine that can far exceed all the intellectual activities of any man was articulated by Good [27]. He called that machine an "ultraintelligent" machine and argued that:

"Since the design of machines is one of these intellectual activities, an ultraintelligent machine could

design even better machines; there would then unquestionably be an 'intelligence explosion' and the intelligence of man would be left far behind. Thus the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make...".

Bostrom believes that there are some prerequisites for developing an ultraintelligent machine and 'uploading' is the most important one. Uploading refers to the technology utilization for transferring a human mind to a computer [10]. Uploading a human mind to a computer mainly depends on scanning and simulation technology and a degree of neuroscience insight. Whenever uploading becomes technologically feasible, it would provide an enabler for an intelligence explosion and exponential growth in science and technology. Some researchers have called this rapid bewildering event a "Singularity" ([28]; [29]). According to Kurzweil (2005), singularity refers to a future period in which rapid technological change will affect society so deeply that many aspects of human life would be irreversibly transformed. He argues that in the future, there will be no distinction between human and machine in terms of intelligence, as machine intelligence will emulate human intelligence and machines will progress to be like humans and beyond [29].

It is important to note that the first steps toward developing brain-inspired machines have been taken and IBM has produced cognitive computers which can learn through experiences, find correlations, create hypotheses, and remember - and learn from - the outcomes [30].

Similarities between the valley of bewilderment and intelligence age: In the valley of bewilderment, the wayfarer imagines that he is in a new world. After experiencing previous valleys and gaining divine wisdom, he discovers that so far, he did not know anything.

In the intelligence age, man would face a period in which rapid technological change will change human life radically. By experiencing these changes, the whole world would be similar to a new world to the bewildered humankind and he would discover that he did not know anything theretofore.

7. Post-humanity age: Zarathustra, an ancient Persian prophet, argued that the destiny of humankind would be something beyond man, namely "Superman". In his book, Nietzsche tried to describe the Superman according to Zarathustra's arguments [31]:

"I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man? All beings hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide, and would rather go back to the beast than surpass man? The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman SHALL BE the meaning of the earth!"

Anderson (2003) provides three different scenarios for the future of humanity, namely Augmentation, Symbiosis and Transcendence. In the Transcendence scenario, he claims that the world would experience an "Omega point", a time in which everybody will be a part of a larger entity, called a "global brain". He asserts that countless connected individuals would work together in order to advance our evolution and build upon what has been learned around the world in an incredible, efficient and productive manner [32].

Bostrom has enumerated some characteristics of post-human conditions [10]. He believes that post-humanity refers to the condition in which population is greater than one trillion persons, life expectancy is greater than 500 years and human psychological suffering is becoming a rare occurrence.

In the post-humanity age, because of the previous developments in science and technology -especially cognitive science-, man would experience the highest cognition capacity ever. Moreover, by implanting invisible super-thin chips under the skin, everybody would be connected to a global network. The existence and identity would be defined within the network and everyone outside would not be formally considered alive.

It is important to note that scientists have invented electronic chips called 'epidermal electronics'. These chips that stick to the skin like a tattoo, have the mechanical properties of the human skin and are being used for medical monitoring [33].

Similarities between the valley of deprivation and post-human age: In the valley of Deprivation and Doom, the wayfarer will be gifted to see by revelation. He loses his previous identity and becomes one part of a whole. This is where thirty (Si) birds (Murgh), become Simurgh.

Likewise, in the post-human age, man loses his previous identity to become one part of the global society. In this era, by previous developments in science and technology-especially cognitive science-man would experience the highest cognition capacity thitherto.

Discussion and Conclusion

Iran's history is full of great philosophers, mystics and poets whose works are hidden under the dust of time and oblivion. It is time to start learning from our history and utilize the heritage of our ancestors to build a proper future for our next generations. We need to think about our future and answer the questions about our long-term destination. These answers might help to make intelligent policies which make sense to be pursued.

Attar Neyshaburi is one of the great Persian poets and mystics whose works can be inspiring for building our world. Attar has left behind many works, among which '*The Conference of the Birds*' can be recognized as his masterpiece. In this study, we tried to use seven valleys of love as a metaphor to grope the next waves of human society.

In order to confirm our hypotheses, a combination of hermeneutics and critical rationalism was used. Having interviewed some experts in this field, we found a consensus among them, that the seven valleys of love—which provide an individual theme- can be generalized to a public theme to provide a fruitful source of vision to predict the evolution of human society. Therefore, by presenting the similarities between each valley and its corresponding wave, we

stated that the next waves of human society might be 'Technological convergence', 'Intelligence' and 'Post-humanity'.

Convergent Technologies (CTs) refers to previously distinct technologies which are moving toward stronger synergistic combination, integration and unification in order to achieve similar goals. Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology and Cognitive technology are the main elements of CTs. CTs could help humankind to build a convergent human society.

The intelligence age refers to a future period in which rapid changes in machine intelligence will affect society so deeply that many aspects of human society would be transformed. Uploading a human mind to a computer and creating machines which are as intelligent as a human would be the first step of this era.

Post-humanity might be an era in which the previous developments would enable humankind to surpass the man. In this era, everybody will be a part of a larger entity, namely a 'global society'. Countless connected individuals -with higher cognitive capabilities- would work together in order to advance human evolution and build upon what has been learned around the world in an incredible, efficient and productive manner.

It is important to note that every forecasting effort deals with some degree of uncertainty and different features of the future could be predicted by a degree of reliability and precision. Thus, the future waves that are proposed in this study are not necessarily the waves that human society will experience. However, we are trying to make an integrative 'big picture' by thinking about trends and visions of the probable, possible and preferable future.

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ს. ღაზინური*, მ. აფშარი-მოფრადი*, ლ. ალი მონთაზარი**,
მ. რაშიდირადი§

* თარბაით მოღარესის უნივერსიტეტი, ინფორმაციული ტექნოლოგიების მენეჯმენტის დეპარტამენტი, თეირანი, ირანი

** თარბაით მოღარესის უნივერსიტეტი, საინჟინრო ფაკულტეტი, თეირანი, ირანი

§ კენტის ბიზნესის სკოლა, კენტის უნივერსიტეტი, კენტერბერი, კენტი, ინგლისი

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის თ. გამყრელიძის მიერ)

ათარ ნიშაბური ერთ-ერთი დიდი სპარსელი პოეტი და მისტიკოსია, რომელიც დაახლოებით 800 წლის წინ ცხოვრობდა. მისი შრომების მთავარი დამახასიათებელი თვისება არის მის მიერ ხმარებული ენის სიმარტივე და შთამბეჭდაობა. იგი ცდილობდა თავისი დიდი მისტიკური ცნებები გამოეხატა მარტივი სიმბოლური ამბების გამოყენებით, რომელიც ყველასთვის გასაგები უნდა ყოფილიყო. მან დაგვიტოვა ისეთი პოეტური ნაშრომი, როგორცაა მასნაჲისი, ასრანამე და ელაჰინამე, მაგრამ ბევრი მეცნიერი ფიქრობს, რომ მისი შედევრი არის „ფრინველების საუბარი“, რომელშიც ათარი მოგვითხრობს ათასობით ფრინველის მოგზაურობის შესახებ უძლეველ სიმურგთან - მოგზაურობა, რომელშიც ფრინველები გადაუფრენენ სიყვარულის შვიდ ველს და მათი უმეტესობა ვერ გადარჩება. ავტორის თვალსაზრისით, ამ ნაშრომის სიმბოლური ენა შესაძლებელს ხდის, რომ თითოეულმა მკითხველმა გაიგოს ათარის აზრების ერთი ასპექტი. წინამდებარე კვლევაში ჩვენ გამოვიყენეთ სიყვარულის შვიდი ველი, როგორც მეტაფორა ადამიანთა საზოგადოების შვიდი ტალღის მიმართ, რათა წარმოვადგინოთ მომავლის ახალი პერსპექტივა. გამოყენებულ იქნა ჰერმენევტიკული მეთოდი, რათა გავიგოთ ათარის ტექსტების მნიშვნელობა. კვლევის შედეგები გვიჩვენებს, რომ ზემოთქმულ მეტაფორას შეეძლო მოეცა ადამიანთა საზოგადოების ევოლუციის უკეთესი გაგებისათვის ხედვის ნაყოფიერი წყარო. შედეგები აგრეთვე გულისხმობს, რომ ჩვენ შეგვიძლია გამოვიყენოთ ჩვენს მდიდარ ლიტერატურაში დამალული გამოცდილებები და ცნებები, რათა ვისწავლოთ და ავაშენოთ უკეთესი ცხოვრება ყველასთვის.

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