

The Paradigm of Love in Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi

*Prof. Naseem Ahmad Shah**

The thirteenth century Persian poet-philosopher Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi is one of the foremost spiritual geniuses of human history. His perennial wisdom is yielding profound spiritual insights and his exceptional creativity is globally being acknowledged in our times and climes. Allama Iqbal has mentioned about him:

گفت ای دیوانه ارباب عشق	جرعه‌ئی گیر از شراب ناب عشق
خنده را سرمایہ صد سالہ ساز	اشک خونین را جگر پر کالہ ساز
تا کی چون غنچہ‌ئی باشی نموش	کبہت خود را چو گل ارزان فروش
آتش اتنی بزم عالم بر فروز	دیگران را ہم ز سوز خود بسوز

*He (Rumi) said: Oh, you, mad with Love
for those who achieved eminence in Love!
Take a draught of the pure wine of Love,
Turn your smile into a treasure to last you
a hundred years. Crush your liver and
shed tears of blood.*

*How long will you be silent like the rose
bud? Give away your scent freely as the
rose does.*

*You are a blazing fire: set aflame the
world: Put some of your fire into others
too!*

پیر روی مرشد روشن ضمیر	کاروان عشق و مستی را امیر
منزلش برتر ز ماہ و آفتاب	خیمہ را از کپکشماں ساز و طناب

*SH Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

*My Mentor, Rumi is a spiritual teacher of
illuminated conscience.
He is the leader of the caravan of Love
and ecstasy.
His dwelling is beyond the Moon and the Sun.
The rope of his tent is tightened in the
Milky Way².*

Maulana Rumi is almost consensually accepted to be the greatest sufi or mystical poet the world has ever seen. Being a spiritual humanist of the highest order, the contemporary relevance of his spiritual achievements and poetic accomplishments can never be overemphasized. The entire poetic corpus of Rumi is brimming with pantheistic proclivities and humanistic orientations. At his best Rumi surpasses perhaps all Persian poets in the width and breadth of his imagination, the forcible rhythm of his words, depth of emotions and tenderness of feelings.

تشنه کمان را کلامش سلسبیل	رومی آن عشق و محبت را دلیل
اصل او از گرمی اللہ حسوست	گفت آن شعری کہ آتش اندر دست
آن بواجز هم زند افلاک را	آن نوا گلشن کند خاشاک را
با فقیران پادشاهی می دهد	آن نواب حق گواهی می دهد

*Rumi is the manifestation of Love and
Compassion; His utterance are like the
water of the stream of paradise for the
thirsty souls.*

*He said such verse that contains flame –
the flame that emanates from the name of
Allah.*

*His cries reinstate the ashes into a bloom;
His cries disturb the galaxies.*

*His musings are a witness to the Truth;
His musings offer throne to the beggars³.*

Rumi has formulated one of the most universalist versions of religious thought¹¹. His catholicism transcends all social, political, ideological, theological, philosophical, cultural, historical and geographical determinations; his pluralism appropriates them all. He appropriates the entire quire and furniture of the universe and yet he transcends it all. His spiritual negations and affirmations are cosmic as well as transcosmic. His vision is universal, his mission spiritual⁴. His whole philosophy is enlightened with spiritual frenzy and creative ecstasy of Love inspiring the heart and elevating the mind.

سر من از ناله من دور نیست ایک چشم و گوش را آں نور نیست

تن رجان و جان ز تن مستور نیست لیک کس را دید جان دستور نیست

*My secret is not far from my plaint but ear
and eye lack the light (whereby it should
be apprehended). Body is not veiled from
soul, nor soul from body, yet none is
permitted to see the soul.⁵*

Rumi's spiritual and intellectual leadership of sufi culture as well as philosophy can be fathomed from his thematisation of Love as the ultimate source of knowledge as against the time-honoured and classically acknowledged sources such as sense-experience and Reason. His alternative epistemological account anchored on Love became a dominant theme of sufi poetry in centuries to come. The comparison between Love and Reason became a characterizing feature of post-Rumi sufi epistemology.

For Rumi, metaphorically speaking, Reason is represented by *Satan* and Love exemplified by *Adam*. Reason is the instrument of Greek philosophy and Love is the instrument of Sufism or spiritualism.⁶

گر نبودے بہر عشق پاک را کے وجودے دارے افلاک را

*If there had not been Love, how should there
have been existence?*

Rumi's ecstatic utterances about Love are mind-baffling. Love is essentially indefinable and unanalysable. It is a state of being, a state of feeling the ultimate splendour, a state of being in touch with the supreme transcendent and transcendental Beauty. Professor Khalifa Abdul Hakim while dwelling upon Rumi's account of Love says, "Love is indescribable and the attempt to define it is as baffling as to define life itself. Life as well as Love, not in spite of, but on account of their immediacy cannot be defined".⁸ Love, according to Rumi, is the greatest virtue. Perfect Love is perfect freedom, causing the union of human will with the Divine will⁹.

Rumi tells us that it is not logic but music¹⁰ that is a partial medium of its expression, and Love being paradoxical in its nature, music, that is its vehicle, becomes paradoxical too: "Poison and Antidote at the same time". "Our sweetest songs are those that tell us of saddest thoughts". Love is the greatest mystery of life and music is the garb in which it symbolizes itself in the phenomenal realm:

سر پہان است اندر ز یوم فاش گر گویم جہاں برہم زخم
 ہچ نے زہرے و تریاقے کہ دید ہچ نے دمساز و مشتاقے کہ دید

*There is a secret in the melody of the flute
 which if divulged would upset the scheme
 of things.*

*Whoever saw a poison and antidote like
 the reed? Whoever saw a sympathiser and
 a longing like the reed?*

In pre-Rumi era, the Sufis generally wallowed into negativistic and deterministic attitudes. The sufi intellectual climate fostered a mindset characterized by fatalism and total surrender. Rumi most forcefully brought out the role of human struggle in making and unmaking of the world. He famously said that "it is better to be pointlessly engaged than to be sitting idle and doing nothing". Iqbal reverberates the same by saying

that “an alert apostate in front of an idol is far superior to a Muslim who slumbers inside the *Ka'bah*”.

According to Rumi, man's struggle for higher ideals and values is perennial. It is a genuine and meaningful struggle. It does not mean that man has to strike his head against fate. However, it is the very destiny of man to struggle against his destiny.¹¹

Love is a principle of Unification and Assimilation. The force in every atom and one form of life losing itself in another form (Assimilation) and thereby resulting in Growth-all are manifestations of the form of Love:

گر نبودے عشق ہستی کے بدے	کے زرے ناں بر تو تو کے شدے
نان تو شد از چہ عشق و اشتہا	ور نہ ناں را کے بدے تا جاں رھے
عشق نان مردہ را جاں کند	جاں کہ فانی بود جاویداں کند

*If there would not have been Love, how
should there have been existence?
How should bread have attached itself to
you and become (assimilated to) you?
The bread became you: though what?
Through (your) love and appetite;
otherwise, how should the bread have had
any access to the (vital spirit)
Love makes the dead bread into spirit: it
makes the spirit that was perishable
everlasting¹²*

The universe, according to Rumi, is a realm of Love, In comparison with Love, Law and Reason are secondary phenomena. It is Love that creates to fulfil itself and reason steps in later to look at it retrospectively, discovering laws and uniformities to seek the threads of unity in the diversities of manifested life¹³.

Rumi says that there is no contradiction between Universal

Love and Universal Reason, but when the human intellect narrows itself, it begins to take a part for a whole, making the mistake of identifying a fragmentary phenomenon with the whole of reality. Human intellect, divorced from universal reason, remains at the biological and utilitarian level, and language which is the outward grab of the intellect possesses no vocabulary for the description of the intuition of cosmic Love. Human consciousness remains generally at the biological level and its perception, affections and connotations are governed directly or indirectly by biological needs. The biological instruments Rumi calls *khird* or Particular Reason (*aql-juzwi*) to distinguish it from Universal Reason, which is an ally of the intuition of life. The particular reason which exultingly calls itself scientific reason, capable of explaining all reality and solving the riddle of the universe, proves to be utterly useless when faced with the intuition of life and Love, and instead of gracefully accepting its inadequacy, begins foolishly to deny the reality that cannot comprehend¹⁴.

Rumi deplores the inadequacy of human speech to convey it and also points to the limitations of sense experience as well as inductive or deductive reasoning of what he calls the particular intellect which deals with reality in piecemeals¹⁵.

Rumi is fundamentally an evolutionary thinker who conceived of existence not in static but dynamic terms. The unconscious urge to rise to higher levels is implicit in all existence; the inorganic is always ready for being assimilated by the organic; in every entity there is an upward surge from within and a pull from above:¹⁶

آں یکے زان سوئے و صرف است و حال جز دوئی ناید بمیدان مقال

*That Unity is beyond description and
condition: nothing comes into the arena
(domain) of speech except duality¹⁷*

Rumi re-establishes the reality of the world and dignity

of all life, particularly of human life which has become 'self-conscious and conscious of its divine origin and goal. All movement is from God unto God. Rumi performs the admirable task of ridding mysticism of quietism and irrationalism. He established with all the force of his genius the reality of free will which is vouchsafed to man to identify itself freely with the cosmic will. He has brought out the essence of universal religion as creative Love. He preaches the infinite potentialities of life because all egos have their origin in the Infinite Self and are restless and nostalgic in order to realize their infinity¹⁸. Rumi declares life at all grades to be an Eternal Reality; it is not life but death which is an illusion. The purpose of life is more life, higher and better¹⁹.

Rumi represents a life-embracing creed. Although one of the greatest mystics of all time, he was not a body torturing and self annihilating mystic. In a verse he talks of great souls as great hunters of life trying to capture and assimilate the spirituality of angels, saints, and Prophets, finally aiming at capturing the cosmic spirit itself for perpetual and eternal enrichment of the self, actualizing its infinite potentialities. He wants you not to gather your garments to prevent them from getting wet but to plunge a thousand times in the sea of life. Fight for spiritual conquest, and not flight from life's challenges, is the way of life that he preaches and practises²⁰.

بے تعلق نیست مخلوقے بدو آن تعلق هست بے چوں اے عمو
زاں کہ فصل دوصل ہو در رواں غیر فصل دوصل نیند رشتہ گماں

*No created being is unconnected with Him:
that connection, O uncle, is indescribable
Because in the spirit there is no separating
and uniting, while (our) thought cannot
think except of separating and uniting²¹*

Rumi is talking here of the ideal man or the ideal of humanity. He is hidden in the nature of every man. The purpose

of life is to reach this perfection. In another verse he has repeated the story of Diogenes moving about in the market-place of Athens with a lamp in his hand in broad daylight seeking Man in a crowd of men who according to him were only counterfeiting humanity when he is told that no such being could be found, he replies:

أَفْتِشُ عَنْ إِنْسَانٍ

I am carving of find him (Man) who is not found²².

It is a characteristic feature of Rumi's world of thought that his central conception is not Truth or knowledge of God but Life. It is the organism and its function of Growth and Assimilation that presents to him a picture which explains life more than any system of intellectualistic metaphysics. Love is a paradox in the sense that in it by giving we take and by dying we live. This process of dying to live is represented by organic life. Inorganic matter becomes organic by dying to itself and living a higher life in the plant and so can the plant be exalted into still higher life by dying unto itself and living in the animal. The whole course of evolution is an illustration of the principle of dying to live²³. As a divine madness Love is opposed to the calculated Reason:

عقل راہ نامیدی کے رود عشق باشد کاں طرف بر سر رود
لا الہالی عشق باشد نے خرد عقل آں جوید کز اں سودے برد

*How should Reason wend the way of
despair? It is Love that runs on its head in
that direction.*

*Love is reckless, not Reason: Reason seeks
that from which it may get some profit.²⁴*

Rumi finds the principle of growth and development through the organic power of assimilation as the highest power of explanation. Mechanism may try to explain phenomena by

the principle of identity of cause and effect, but Mechanism is an extremely partial abstraction from the Real. Reality presents to us nothing but qualitative transformation. Fuel turning into the fire and bread turning into life and consciousness point to the incommensurability of the cause and the effect²⁵.

That is the conclusion to which Rumi's interpretation of Assimilation as a process of love leads him. So here we find a tremendous difference between the Eros of Plato and the 'Ishq of Rumi; the former leading to the gazing of impersonal intellectual beauty and the latter leading us to be partakers of infinite life by becoming living organs in the Life of Life²⁶.

پس چه باشد عشق در یائے عدم در شکستہ عقل را آنجا قدم

*Then what is Love? The sea of Not-being:
then the foot of the intellect is shattered²⁷*

کاشکے هستی زبانی داشتے تازہستاں پر وہ ہا بر داشتے
ہرچہ گوئی اے دم هستی از ایں پر وہ دیگر بروستی بدیں
آفت ادراک آں قال است و حال خون بخون شستن مجال است و مجال

*Would that Being had a tongue, that it
might remove the veils from existent
beings.*

*O breath of (phenomenal) existence,
whatsoever words thou mayest utter, know
that thereby thou hast bound another veil
upon it (the mystery).*

*That utterance and (that) state (of
existence) are the bane of spiritual
perception; to wash away blood with blood
is absurd, absurd.²⁸*

Philosophy attempts to find a thread of unity running through the multiplicity of phenomena. This attempt can succeed only partially, because Reason can never overcome the dualism

of the subject and the object. In the words of Rumi, “there is a squint in the eye of the intellect”. It sees double that which in reality is one. It is intellectual analysis that splits reality into two which it does not know afterwards how to bind again. As a principle of unification, Love stands higher than Reason. Reason differentiates and separates, while Love binds and assimilates the heterogeneous and makes it homogenous with itself²⁹.

عقل جزوی عشق را منکر بود گر چه شما بید که صاحب سر بود
زیرک دو اناست اما نیست نیست تا فرشته لا تشدا هر یمنی است
او بقول و فعل یار ما بود چون بحکم حال آئی لا بود

Partial (discursive) reason is a denier of Love, though it may give out that it is a confidant.

It is clever and knowing, but it is naught, (devoid of self-existence); until the angel has become naught, he is an Ahriman (Devil).

It (partial reason) is our friend in word and deed, (but) when you come to the case of inward feeling (ecstasy), it is naught (of no account)³⁰

The contrast of Love and Reason is a popular topic in the Sufi literature. The demands of these two potent factors in the personality of man are pressed as the conflict of Law and Love and at other times as a contradiction between the Law and Reality and the general tendency in the Sufi doctrine is to assert the Primacy of Love and Reason. Sometimes the contradiction is maintained in all its sharpness by the bold assertion that Love is lawless and Law is loveless. Love is identified with ecstasy that absorbs all distinctions: fidelity and infidelity, good and bad, right and wrong — in short, all values are drowned in it³¹.

What the Sufis really meant to assert was the primacy and

immediacy of the one as compared with the other. What they maintained was that the essence of religion is neither identical with law nor with morals, nor with theoretical reason, nor with the outward form of any positive religion. Their view point was exactly that of Schleiermacher that the essence of religion is neither morals nor theology but a cosmical feeling, an intuition of oneness with the spirit of the Universe:

آں طرف کہ عشق مے افروز درد بوحنیفہ و شافعی در سے نکر د

*In that quarter where Love was increasing
(my) pain, but Hanifa and Shafi'i gave no
instruction.*³²

In this respect religion is not immoral or irrational but amoral and non-rational. It does not contradict morals and reason; it is categorically different from them. This indescribable cosmical feeling is exactly the same as the *'Ishq* of Rumi. The following quotations from the Mathnavi will verify this statement³³.

1. This cosmical feeling has not any particular form as its object:

آنچه معشوق است صورت زیت آں خواه عشق این جہاں خواه آں جہاں

*That which is the object of love is
not the form, whether the love for
(the things of) this world or yonder
world*³⁴

2. *'Ishq* cannot be identified with the psychophysical feeling of pleasure and pain; it is categorically different from them.

دل کہ او بستہ غم و خندیدن است تو مگو کہ لائق آن دیدن است

*Do not say that the heart that is bound
(conditioned) by (such bodily attributes
as) sadness and laughter is worthy of
seeing Thee (as Thou really art).*³⁵

مذہب عشق از ہمہ دین ہا جداست

*The religion of love is different from
all other religions*

خود طواف آنگہ او شہ بین بود فوق قہر و لفظ و کفر و دین بود

*Verily, the circumambulation
performed by him who beholds the
king is above wrath and grace and
infidelity and religion.³⁶*

عاشقی زیں ہر دو حالت برتر است بے بہار و بے خزاں بجز و تر است

*Love is higher than these two states,
of feeling: without spring and
without autumn it is (ever) green and
fresh³⁷*

از غم و شادی نباشد جوش ما با خیال و وہم نبود ہوش ما

*Our emotion is not caused by grief and
joy, our consciousness is not related to
fancy and imagination*

حالت دیگر بود کاں نادرست تو مشو منکر کہ حق بس قادرست

*There is another state (of
consciousness), which is rare: do not
thou disbelieve, for God is very might³⁸*

3. This cosmical feeling is the very essence of religion.

ہر چه گوید مرد عاشق بوئے عشق از دہانش مے جہد در کوئے عشق

*Whatsoever the man in love (God)
speaks, the scent of love is springing
from his mouth into the abode of
Love³⁹*

در بگوید کفر آید بوئے دین آید از گفت شکش بوئے یقین

*And if he speaks infidelity, it has the
scent of (the true) religion, and if he*

*speaks doubtfully, his doubt turns to
certainty*⁴⁰

در بگوید کز نماید راستی اے کثی کہ راست را آ راستی

*If he speaks falsehood, it seems
(like) the truth. O (fine) falsehood
that would adorn (even) the truth!*⁴¹

Theoretical reason cannot lead to this feeling;
one must turn away from logic in order to realise
this feeling.

آزمودم عقل دور اندیش را بعد ازاں دیوانہ سازم خویش را

*I have tried far-thinking
(Providence) intellect; henceforth I
will make myself mad.*⁴²

4. This feeling consumes away all doubts and difficulties raised by man's theoretical and practical interests; it is a source of enlightenment not accessible to reason:

ہست عشقش آتش اشکال سوز ہر خیالے را بر و بد نور روز

*His (God's) love is a fire that consumes
difficulties: the daylight sweeps away
every phantom*⁴³

It is the Infinite in man, which dissatisfied with the Finite, doubts it and puts questions to it. Seek the answer there where the question emerges, i.e., in this finite cosmical feeling.

ہم ازاں سو جو جواب اے مرتضیٰ کایں سوال آد ازاں سو مرترا

*O thou with whom He is pleased, seek the
answer from the same quarter from
which this question came to the*⁴⁴

تو ازیں سو ازاں سو چوں گدا اے کی معنی چہ ہے جوی صدا

Why on this side and on that, like a

*beggar, O mountain of Belief, art thou
seeking the echo?*⁴⁵

پوز بند و سوسہ عشق است و بس ورنہ کے دسواں رابستہ است کس

*The only muzzle for evil suggestions
(of doubt) is Love; else, when has
anyone (ever) stopped (such)
temptation?*⁴⁶

The identification of 'Ishq with this immediate cosmical intuition reveals the real meaning of a number of utterances in the Sufi literature which otherwise appear to be irresponsible and extravagant. For instance, the following verses attributed to Abul Khair must be interpreted in this spirit:

آں را کہ قضا خیل عشاق نوشت آزاد مسجد است و فارغ ز کشت
آں را کہ فنا شیوہ و فقر آئین است نہ کشف و یقین نہ معرفت نہ دین است

*He whom destiny places among the
group of lovers becomes free from
the mosque and the temple. He whose
mode of life is annihilation and Faqr
(detachment from the world) has,
neither relation nor belief nor gnosis
nor religion*⁴⁷

References

1. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrar-i-Khudi*, Aligarh, 1987, p. 153.
2. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *Javeed Nama*, Lucknow, 1957, p.10.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
4. M. M. Sharief (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1993, p. 834.
5. *Mathnavi*, Vol. I, Verse 7-8.
6. Paul Edwards (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1967, Vol. IV, pp. 212-213.
7. *Math*, Verse 2739.
8. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*, The Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1959, p. 138.
9. Asloob Ahmad Ansari (ed), *Iqbal: Essays and Studies*, Ghalib Academy, New Delhi, 1978, p.38.
10. *Idem.*
11. Sharief, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
12. *Math*, Verse 2014-16.
13. Khalifa Abdul Hakim, *The Metaphysics of Rumi*, Revised Edition, New Delhi, 2006, p. 44.
14. Sharief, *op. cit.*, p. 835.
15. *Idem*
16. *Idem*
17. *Math*, Verse 2034.
18. Sharief, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
19. *Idem*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 836.
21. *Math*, Verse 3695-3696.
22. Sharief, *op. cit.*, p. 837.
23. Khalifa, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.
24. *Math*, Verse 1966-67.
25. Khalifa, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
27. *Math*, Verse 4723.
28. *Math*, Verse 4725-4727.
29. Khalifa, *op. cit.*, pp. 48.
30. *Math*, Verse 1982-1984.
31. Khalifa, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
32. *Math*, Verse 3832.
33. Khalifa, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

34. *Math*, Verse 703.
35. *Math*, Verse 1791.
36. *Math*, Verse 2697.
37. *Math*, Verse 1704.
38. *Math*, Verse 1803-1804.
39. *Math*, Verse 2882.
40. *Math*, Verse 2882.
41. *Math*, Verse 2886.
42. *Math*, Verse 2332.
43. *Math*, Verse 1136.
44. *Math*, Verse 1137.
45. *Math*, Verse 1139.
46. *Math*, Verse 3230.
47. Khalifa, *op. cit.*, p. 51.