

## **Reasoned Love in Maulana Jalalu'd-Din Rumi's Poetry: A Review Article**

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Maulana Jalalu'd-Din Rumi's contribution to the theme of mystical love for God is well known. In this review article, an attempt has been made to focus on this subject of perennial interest and abiding significance against the background a recent publication by the noted Urdu scholar and critic, Professor Shakil Rahman (*Maulana Rumi ki Jamaliyat*, 'Urfi Publications, Madhuban, Haryana, 2002). As he rightly points out that it is love underneath the Sufi's heart that is not only revelatory but also creative.

Rumi brings home to us the supernal importance of looking beyond the external of the event or experience. Unless the exoteric and esoteric do not enter into a harmonious relationship, the Ultimate Truth will not reveal itself. *Sama'* of the dancing darwishes is not therefore music in the ordinary sense of the word but a creative process that makes the lover realize the beauty of his Creator. Knowledge of the Creator and the created, thus gained, is a wealth of immeasurable proportions. A gnostic (*arif*) is, indeed, nearer to Allah by virtue of the fragrance of his meaningful and creative existence.

The merit of Shakilur-Rahman's work lies in his lucid analysis of the artistic skills of a great spiritual teacher like Rumi who seeks a happy blending of the exterior and inner life. Rumi stresses the superb importance of knowledge for understanding the realities of the material world in conjunction with the spiritual

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dimension of one's terrestrial existence. True knowledge broadens one's vision and is a prerequisite for intellectual and inner equilibrium; the key to gaining it lies in an inner quest for one's spiritual or real identity. The marked quality of Rumi's *Masnavi* is its author's unique style of expounding the spiritual realities by way of similitudes. It is this distinctiveness that lends creativity to Rumi's mystical thought. In this context, Shakilu'r-Rahman makes a valid observation that Rumi makes art a "creative mystery" rather than a dry philosophy. The spiritual teacher is not merely an artist but an art in himself in that both are gifted with the beauty of seeking creative ways to reach the Truth. What makes him the fountainhead of Light and spiritual energy is his vision. He does not have mere ability to view a problem imaginatively and creatively; indeed, he has also inner capacity, rather fragrance, to recognize the Truth in the deeper strivings and recesses of his mind, soul and heart in unison. While the spiritual mentor realizes the Truth, he makes its profundities intelligible to seekers after the Truth by choosing to live in the depths of *faqr*.

*Faqr* is not poverty in the ordinary sense. Being the pride of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ or, for that matter, the virtue of several prophets (AS) that preceded him, it was therefore highly valued by the Sufis for gaining spiritual excellence. At the back of a Sufi's spirituality is his profound knowledge of the concept of *faqr* in the context of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It is this knowledge together with his never ceasing spiritual yearnings that makes him aware of his human limitations. The role of a Sufi lies in removing the mist of ignorance. A seeker is, therefore, capable of understanding Reality only after recognizing the limits of his partial reason (*'aql-i juzwi*). And once he anchors it in the reason of Allah, he is sure to comprehend the inner meaning of the Qur'an in a state of union with His purpose. Truth thus reveals itself in the form of the light of the sun, the tide or the currents of the river. Realising that neither the sun nor the river is worthy of adoration, Rumi observes in bewilderment that Allah in His Essence is neither the sun nor the river but a great deal more than his own superstitions or suppositions. Taking a cue from the beautiful similitudes coined by Allah in the Holy Book, Rumi wonders that even in His effulgence He is hidden. It is this growing awareness of Immanent yet Transcendent Creator of the cosmos that invigorates his belief in

*Tawhid*. The emerging point is that the much deeper spiritual dimensions of *Tawhid* can only be fathomed in a state of *fana* or non-being.

*Fana* is not annihilation or death of the seeker in physical terms. It is the passing away of the self in His Eternity. Knowledge gained in search of the Eternal is not false but eternal. Whosoever tastes the fruit of the tree of eternal knowledge will not die. In the process of seeking true knowledge he will himself become an ocean, the sun or, for that matter, even a cloud that through rain makes the barren land fertile. Knowledge and love thus go together in making a seeker recognize the ocean in a mere drop of water as well as the sun in a ray.

تابہ بینم قلزمے در قطرہ  
آفتابے درج اندر ذرہ

So that I can see the ocean in the drop of (water),  
And the sun amidst the ray.

Sufi's consciousness is neither the result of any sensational experience nor hallucination. It is a matter of felt experience or response to the yearnings of his soul. Such is his burning love for seeking the Truth that he does not see anything save Light everywhere. It is the Light within and outside his soul that lends beauty and charm to the world a Sufi lives in. He does not live in the world of ordinary wants; he inhabits the world that is always in the process of making, thanks to his abundant love and strivings to know the all-encompassing beauty that embodies the Knower. The Sufi path can therefore be treaded in the depths of solitude and hope, not despair. And one who secludes oneself finds the Way. A Sufi's inner self awakens in solitude. Conscious of the petty affairs of the mundane world, a Sufi struggles to raise himself above the petty concerns of the fleeting world. Seen from this perspective, silence is comparable with an ocean rather than a flowing stream. It is the serene silence of the ocean that distinguishes it from the roaring stream. Swimming against the tide is a trait that makes a Sufi poles apart from an average intellect feeling delight in swimming with the stream. The very silence of the ocean is therefore self-explanatory because the ocean itself longs to know the Truth. The



great lesson imparted by the great teacher to those in search of truth is to come out of the veil of imitation (*taqlid*). Once a seeker overcomes blind adherence, he is able to see all that exists in the world with the light of Allah. Consequently, every moment of a Sufi's existence on this planet is marked by infinite graces bestowed on him from the celestial world.

As I have elsewhere (See *Experiencing Islam*, Oxford University Press, Karachi; Sterling, New Delhi, 1997) shown that the stumbling block in understanding the Reality is not intellect but man's partial reason. What impairs one's intellect is the human failing to see beyond one's limited or narrow reason. While describing the narrow confines of partial reason by way of examples, Rumi stresses the significance of seeing with the eye of a heart of an ecstatic. Reason cannot see beyond the foam of the river but the intellect anchored in ecstatic love sees the river flowing in different directions from its source to its absorption in the ocean. Against the perspective of the unity of river, it is not difficult to understand why Rumi's spiritual experiences revolve around the unity of existence (*wahdatu'l-wujud*). This phenomenon should not be understood as pantheism because all that exists is not He but what emanates from Him alone. Central to this Unity is the concept of His Oneness both in His Essence (*dhat*) and Attributes (*Siffat*). An *'arif* who realizes this eternal truth about his tiny existence is like a scented flower in the garden of various hues.

Not unlike many Sufis, the Qur'an is a great source of Maulana Rumi's spiritual experiences and thought. His most outstanding and creative contribution, however, as a result of his reflections on the Qur'an, lies in promoting a deeper understanding of its several esoteric dimensions by way of telling moral stories for the edification of travellers (*saliks*) in the spiritual journey. Shakiu'r-Rahman brings home this fact with remarkable clarity with reference to many Qur'anic verses against the background of Rumi's mystical compositions. His explanations particularly in respect of the beginning verses of the Surah Nur are thought-provoking. Likewise Shakiu'r-Rahman rightly focuses his scholarly attention on the supernal personality of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as the second source of Rumi's thought. Here several aspects of the Prophet's life versified by Rumi are explained to show the moral excellence of his attitudes towards both friends and

foes. The ascension (*mi'raj*) of the Prophet, highly valued by Rumi and other Sufis because of the theme of love characterising the heavenly journey is, however, described perfunctorily.

Shakilu'r-Rahman deservedly pays glowing tributes to Rumi for his genius to versify moral stories embedded in the Qur'an. Such stories relate to several prophets. In his treatment of Moses or Joseph (AS), it is the concept of divine love that inspires the muse of the poet. The extraordinary creativity of the great Sufi poet lies in his imagery that makes the mountain of Sinai (Koh-i Tur) dance not so much at the mere sight of Divine Light as at the inner illumination experienced by Moses. Rumi metaphorically describes the tremor experienced by the mountain as the dance of the intoxicated Sufi. The mountain of Sinai personifies a true Sufi as it is, according to Rumi, characterized by abundant mystic love:

کوه طور از موسی شد رقص

The mount Tur came to dance due to the light of Moses.

Although Yousuf (AS) occupies an important place in Rumi's reconstruction of mystical thought around love, he finally brings home the thrust of his theme about the beauty of Allah.

اصل صد یوسف جمال ذوالجلال

The essence of a hundred Josephs is the Beauty of the Almighty.

Or

ملت عشق از همه ملت جداست

عاشقان را ندهب و ملت خداست

The community of love is distinct from all other communities  
The religion and way of lovers is God Himself.

Unlike several scholars of Urdu literature, Shakilu'r-Rahman is conscious of the fact that Sufism is not a philosophy. Nor can Sufism be described in mere words. On the contrary, Sufism is what he eloquently calls, in the context of Rumi's



poetry, the song of religion. In other words, it is a tuneful expression of the religion in silence and wonder. An understanding of Sufism therefore demands a vision that will find an ocean in each drop and the sun in every ray.

Significantly, then, Rumi's conception of time is in consonance with the Qur'an, notwithstanding Shakilu'r-Rahman's initial attempts at studying this important issue in the comparative perspectives of Buddhism and Jainism. True, the author of the book under review does make a clear distinction between the Divine Time and the historical time. But what must be borne in mind is that while Rumi is deeply conscious of the integral relationship of the past, present and future, he urges a seeker after the Truth to live in every moment of his existence rather than in the thoughts of past or future. Since past has gone into oblivion and that future is unknown, it is therefore necessary to recognize every present moment of one's existence as a creative force. Realising deeply that man is superbly capable of becoming part of the creative process of the Divine in present alone, Rumi, like other Sufis, attaches great significance to the importance of living in the present. However, living in the present moment does not mean living routinely in the mundane world for meeting its ordinary requirements. On the contrary, it means living deeply and reflecting in a state of purposeful existence—true to the spirit of the Divine Time. As compared to the historical time, described in the Qur'an as 'fleeting', the Divine Time is Infinite. Although the Qur'an nowhere claims that Allah is Time Himself, nevertheless, His concept of Himself as *Samad* brings us close to an understanding of Him as Time Himself. This is not blasphemy considering the Prophet described Allah as Time. It is obvious that a seeker's life will pass into eternity by the gradual melting away of his tiny personality only by giving meaning to his historical existence in recognition of living in accordance with His Creator's purpose. This absorption of the human self in Divine self should not be understood in pantheistic terms. Seen from the deeper perspective of Sufism, annihilation of the self for consecrating it to the eternal purpose of Allah is nothing but its rebirth after death in the currents and cross-currents of time. The reflective consciousness of living in every eternal moment of one's existence elevates man to greater heights. Man does not become eternal truth himself, but in his incessant search for Truth he himself becomes the living testimony of the Ultimate Reality. This is why Mansur al- Hallaj exclaimed: "I am

the creative Truth." His expression of *anal-Haqq* was, by no stretch of the imagination, an assertion of divine identity by a human being. It was a felt experience of being united with His Creator's purpose i.e. to recognize Truth in one's own self. Isn't man, according to the Qur'an, cast in the best of moulds? Doesn't the Qur'an enjoin him to reflect on the Signs of Allah in his own self? Sufi's life-long strivings in search of his real self cannot therefore be described as a deviation from the Shari'ah. His yearning to be one with the eternal purpose of Allah is a creative process of infinite proportions. In such a process, he does not merely harmonize his inner self but also sends ripples to the world as an embodiment of spiritual and social stability.

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