

JALAL-UD-DIN RUMI: REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM AS A RELIGION OF “WAR” OR “PEACE”

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Abstract

In (Sufism: Heart of Islam 135) Prophet Muhammad asserted that People Should "Beware of Extremism because it destroyed the people before you." First and foremost, it was war on terror painting all Muslims as terrorists which generated anger among the community, which unfortunately enabled the radical Islamists to increase their reservoir. Islam, in the world, for years has been cloaked in the colours of Sufism, but the patronage to Wahabism by USA and its allies in Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union, that saw the rise of Al-Qaida and the Taliban, ultimately leading to the events of 9/11 which completely radicalised the image of Islam in the eyes of the world. Jalal ud-din Rumi , the great Sufi poet of Islamic era and his poetry without any doubt deals with the human condition and that is always relevant. Rumi is often seen as one of the foremost exponents of the Sufi path and; his intellect, spiritual depth and status in Islamic world is far greater than any other mystical poet. Paper focuses on the selected works of Rumi who has been discovered by many as the antidote to the ills from which both the Western and the Eastern worlds are suffering, and that is, they are impoverished of spirituality and suffocating in materialism.

Keywords: *Extremism, Terrorists, Jihad, Religion, Sufism, Islamic, Qur'an.*

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Muslims must remember that the Prophet Muhammad rank *al-jihād al-akbar* (the greater warfare) above (*al-jihād al-asghar*, (the lesser warfare) i.e. the war against infidels, and explain the greater warfare as *mujāhadat al-nafs* meaning (earnest striving with the carnal soul). In the present times, the image of jihad in the minds of people is gun-carrying militants called jihadis, which unfortunately is a term coined by corporate global media. When talking about the concept of jihad in Islam, Ed Hussainsays, “Jihad originated in chivalry on the battlefield, not cowardly suicide attacks on innocent people. The prophet’s teachings were not abstract. He reprimanded even his bravest fighters for killing unarmed soldiers”. (*Sufism: Heart of Islam* 140).

For centuries Islam has been the target of Western prejudice and the current phenomenon in the Western world is its biased translations of Islamic literature with which they are trying to propagate Islam as intolerant, medieval and barbaric. This is something not new to Islam as even at the time of Christian crusades, Islam came to be viewed as a militant religion devoid of any spiritual content. America with its own interest in the oil rich gulf wants to exercise its policies over it by continuously trying to interfere in the internal as well as external matters. There is no doubt that Islam at present is the target of western ideologies and propaganda, as West for its own personal benefits in possible way are directly targeting Islam through its media, literature, films for its own supremacy and Euro-centric policies. By propagating Islam as a violent religion and with continuous interference of west in the eastern policies especially in the Gulf is giving vent to the anger of Muslims. Not only America even, “Radicals from other religions . . . have often demanded that Muslims expunge verses dealing with jihad in *Qur’an*” (*Sufism: Heart of Islam* 150) in one way or the other trying to distort the peace loving image of Islam.

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From the very beginning the terrorist group like ISIS has created a spectacle of violence that they claimed is legitimised by religious texts, and there by inspiring tens of thousands of radicalised youth from around the world. Islam has always accepted *Qur'an* as a source of spiritual nourishment and not a political document and further it creates a space for non-Muslims, when *Qur'an* asks the Muslims to say, “And I will not Worship that which ye have been wont to worship, Nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your way, and to me mine” (*Qur'an* 109:4-6). During the interfaith dialogues this particular verse from *Qur'an* is often quoted, for it clearly establishes the principal of peaceful coexistence.

Taking this point into consideration, even in his day's Rumi's love and honour for all religious traditions was not always popular and often aggravated criticism from the more rigid. Even if kings were his followers, yet Rumi's critics could never understand why Rumi's greatest love and dedication went to what they called, “the tailors, the cloth seller-sellers, the goldsmiths and the petty shopkeepers- uncouth and uncultured ruffians”. When poetry began to pour forth from Rumi's pen and he sought to give verbal expression to the highest mystical states, it was only natural that he should draw on the well of religious and spiritual knowledge he had accumulated since childhood. As an Islamic scholar and writer Rumi's status in Islamic world always remain high. From his contemporaries to modern day scholars his teachings remained a source of enlightenment, not only for those who prefer mysticism but also to the ones who seeks to do well with their lives. Through all these centuries Rumi remained popular among all the religious sects.

His poetry, for instance, emphasizes the importance of love to transcend attachments to the world, and dismisses concerns for worldly reputation, literal-mindedness and intellectualism. From dry scholarship and popular piety, Rumi turned his attention to mystical poetry, and he became known for his propensity to fall into an ecstatic trance and spin around in public. Looking at his greatest work “*Masnavi*”, without a doubt it holds an exalted status in the rich canon of Persian Sufi literature as the greatest mystical poem ever written. Rumi's disciple Hosamuddin Chalabi inspired him to write his *Masnavi*, that mystical didactic poem that Jami called ‘the *Qur'an* in *Pahlavi*,’ in the Persian tongue. The *Masnavi* of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi is one of the most highly acclaimed poetical works of the past ages, by the savants and sages. Prof E. G. Browne, considered Rumi as, “the most eminent sufi poet and the *Masnavi* as a great poem of all times” (qtd. in Irfani 1).

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It is an exceptional work, not only in length but also in style and content, for it blends traditional tales, parables, anecdotes and legends about the Sufi saints with stories about the prophets, and commentaries on the Prophetic Traditions and passages from the *Qur'an*. According to Rumi, the greatest virtue is love, by which spiritual sentiment is purified and the vision of the Supreme object of love attained. Religious rituals and prayers are good, but the dwelling of the beloved is not in the mosque, temple or church; it's in a pure heart. Religion for Rumi was mostly a personal experience and not limited to logical arguments or perceptions of the senses and along with it, the dignity of life, in particular human life (which is conscious of its divine origin and goal), was important for him. In book II of "*Masnavi*" Rumi says,

The religion of love is different from all religions,
for lovers, religion and denomination is God alone. (M2:36)

Swamped by the stark naked materialism in the 21st century, West is thirsting for the seven hundred years old, the soul-stirring wine of love. Rumi's popularity in West at presents shows that, the conscience of the West hopes to find solace and satisfaction in the message of peace and love preached by Rumi in his *Masnavi*. Rumi is discovered by many as the antidote to the ills from which both the Western and the Eastern world are suffering, and that is, they are impoverished of spirituality and suffocating in materialism. The purpose of his life and teachings was to deliver the real message of peace, love and humanity, which in itself is the message of Islam. Rumi in his *Masnavi*, through one or the other story often warns his readers to keep themselves away from the material goods which human soul is often gets tempted to. He also warns his readers to be aware of the hypocrites and fake religious preachers. *Qur'an* says, "Know that the life of this world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the husbandman, but afterward it drieth up thou seest it turning yellow, then it becomes straw. . . . the life of the world is but matter of illusion".(57:20)

Rumi assures his readers to look for the true mystics, as they can even be found today, they are before us constantly singing the songs of the beloved (God). All we need is power to see, them, which comes only from God. As per Rumi, it is very hard to protect ourselves from hypocrites and religious thugs. Outwardly they are so sweet and pious that people are willing to surrender their hearts and souls to them. They would go to any extent to satisfy them and they can even harm others for the sake of these hypocrites. They start initiating and behaving like them and are like magicians who with their magic spell keeps the people spell bound

during their performance, they can't see the reality and start believing that which is false and deceptive. Until and unless one is not able to make out the difference between right and wrong, pure and impure, Godly and un-Godly one can't attain the fragrance of the Divine union. Rumi warns his disciples about the powers of God, when he says,

Read out from the Koran that verse we know
 Where God says, *when you threw you did not throw!*
 . . . Before His power where's your humility,
 Admit that you're a slave to His decree!
 . . . When you don't see His power, don't claim you do!
 Or prove it if you really have a clue!
 . . . Prophets in this world follow God's command
 While infidels receive in hell what's planned: (M1-619-41)

Rumi through his stories warns everyone not to act like the hypocrites and stop playing the crooked games in the name of religion. Those who practices hypocrisy, Rumi advised the true believers not to sit with them as they will corrupt their heart as well as soul. He says,

Observe them from a distance and then run!
 They are not fit to swallow down, my son.
 Don't let talk from the insincere tempt you,
 For it's an old, weak bridge which looks like new: (M2-2852-53).

Rumi's verses sketches out the whole panorama of life, from human sorrow and devotion, to the universal breadth of God's hidden plan and as the time passes his poetry seems fathomless and endless.

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