AL-SHAJARAH

ISTAC Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization

AL-SHAJARAH

EDITORIAL BOARD

Al-Shajarah is a refereed international journal that publishes original scholarly articles in the area of Islamic thought, Islamic civilization, Islamic science, and Malay world issues. The journal is especially interested in studies that elaborate scientific and epistemological problems encountered by Muslims in the present age, scholarly works that provide fresh and insightful Islamic responses to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world. *Al-Shajarah* will also consider articles written on various religions, schools of thought, ideologies and subjects that can contribute towards the formulation of an Islamic philosophy of science. Critical studies of translation of major works of major writers of the past and present. Original works on the subjects of Islamic architecture and art are welcomed. Book reviews and notes are also accepted.

The journal is published twice a year, June-July and November-December. Manuscripts and all correspondence should be sent to the Editor-in-Chief, *Al-Shajarah*, F4 Building, Research and Publication Unit, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), No. 24, Persiaran Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Taman Duta, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. All enquiries on publications may also be e-mailed to alshajarah@iium.edu.my. For subscriptions, please address all queries to the postal or email address above.

Contributions: Submissions must be at least 5,500 words long. All submissions must be in English or Malay and be original work which has not been published elsewhere in any form (abridged or otherwise). In matters of style, *Al-Shajarah* uses the *University of Chicago Manual of Style* and follows the transliteration system shown on the inside back cover of the journal. The Editor-in-Chief reserves the right to return accepted manuscripts to the author for stylistic changes. Manuscripts must be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief in Microsoft Word. The font must be Times New Roman and its size 12. IIUM retains copyright to all published materials, but contributors may republish their articles elsewhere with due acknowledgement to *Al-Shajarah*.

TRANS-NATIONALISM AND CIVILISATIONAL IDENTITY

Rumi on Land, Language and Love

Amir H. Zekrgoo[1]

Abstract

In the twenty-first century, the eight-hundred-year-old teachings of a Muslim mystic-poet from West-Asia continues to inspire masses with the universal messages of liberty, love, and fraternity. Many of us can still read and enjoy Rumi's appealing poems in the original Persian language without difficulty – a very rare accident in the arena of world literature! The transcendental meaning of 'civilisational identity' has an evident presence in Rumi's poems, and his teachings are still relevant. This essay aims at presenting Rumi's borderless mentality and inclusive approach, which is, in many instances, in contrast with the modern tendencies of fragmentation and exclusivism. The discussions begin with a short 'Introduction', followed by four main headings. 'Civilisation, Imitation of Creation,' provides a brief overview of the transformation of the meaning of 'civilisation' from the classical period to the modern times. It also emphasises on the less visible yet essential role of art and literature in the formation of civilisational identity. 'Rise of Nationalism as Independent Identity' touches upon the establishment of nation-states, followed by an elaboration of the positive and negative aspects of 'Nationalism' as a recent development in human history. 'Trans-National Identity of Liberated Souls' offers a bird's-eye-view of Rumi's life across various lands. It introduces Persianate culture as medium of connection of many nations, and showcases Rumi, through his writings, as a borderless, nationless, profound, inclusive, translucent, and love-oriented intellectual. 'Language: Facilitator or

---

[1] Professor Zekrgoo is Honorary Fellow at the Faculty of Historical and Philosophical Studies, the University of Melbourne, Australia. He is currently residing in Malaysia. Email: ahzekrgoo@gmail.com.

Barrier' focuses on the idea of communication at two levels: speechless communication and communication via tongue, referring to the esoteric and exoteric aspects of expression. Under this heading we shall also see how a shared language of a few countries – that has been a uniting factor in the history – can become a dividing factor when different 'name-stickers' are adopted to accomplish political agendas under the banner of nationalism. And finally, under 'Conclusion,' a concise summary of the paper is provided. The essay is complemented by relevant couplets by Rumi and two contemporary poets from Iran and Afghanistan. Fresh English translations of the couplets are provided.

Keywords: Rumi, Mathnawi, Civilisational Identity, Nationalism, Trans-nationalism, Persianate, Persian, Najeeb Barwar, Zabihollah Behrouz, Dari, Farsi, Tajik.

Introduction

Ideas and teachings of Jalāl al-Dīn Mohammad Balkī (d.1207), better known as Rumi, have attracted a wide range of audiences from various cultural and religious backgrounds. In the past seventy years, frequent conferences have been organized, and many speculative thoughts and controversial heated debates were exchanged at individual, national, regional, and international levels – trying to 'define' Rumi's intellectual, cultural, and ideological dispositions. A theologian, philosopher, poet and mystic, his thought-provoking views and attractive tales are narrated mainly in his two poetic masterpieces, *Mathnawī-e Ma'nawī* and *Divān-e Shams-e Tabrīzī.* Hundreds of millions have been inspired by these two works throughout the world. His prose writings are also profound but less popular.[2]

  Rumi was a trans-national figure with the message of love and unity. Few factors contributed to his open mind, wide view, and tolerance towards others. The proper education he had under his

---

[2] Besides the two major poetic works that is the *Mathnawi-e Ma'nawi* and *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, Jalal al-Din left behind three prose books namely *Fīhī Mā Fīhī (In It is What's in It), Majāles-e Sab'ah (Seven Sessions),* and *Makātīb (Letters).*

learned father Bahā' al-Din Valad, and trainings he received from other grandmasters at the young age undoubtedly solidified his thought foundation. His life-changing encounter with Shams-e Tabrizi helped him break himself out of the cage of formal knowledge, social status, and academic positions. Travelling to other lands and encountering people of different languages and ways of life, was perhaps another experience that made him tolerant and flexible.

In order to develop a realistic perception of Rumi's worldview and be able to appreciate his civilisational contributions, it is important to keep an open mind that is clear from biases – national as well as ideological! An overall view of his life's journey to various lands, as well as familiarising oneself with his works, will help in achieving a fair assessment of Rumi's teachings.

Civilisation, Imitation of Creation

The meaning of 'civilisation' has undergone fundamental changes in the course of time. The concept has been a subject of discussion among philosophers, politicians and social scientists since the classical period, and still a matter of debate and confusion. The earliest deliberations on civilisation have been essentially theoretical – mainly revolving around the qualities or attributes of an 'ideal civilisation' from a philosophical, or rather metaphysical perspective. Plato introduced the ideal form of city-state, the 'Utopia,' as a collective entity shaped after the cosmic model.

It was on the basis of such definitions that certain key indicators, such as the desirable type of governance, good citizens, proper social order and justice were discussed. Saint Augustine's *The City of God* is a remarkable example in which he presents the sons of Adam (Cain and Abel) as representative citizens of the two city types – the 'heavenly city' and the 'earthly city' – with an elaborate justification of the superiority of the former.[3]

---

[3] Cain type belongs to earthly domain i.e. "the city of men," while the Abel type belongs to "the city of God." Naturally, from a God-oriented perspective, Abel is a truer representative of God than Cain, hence people are encouraged to willingly accept the citizenship of the city of God. See Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), Book XV, 478-79; also Book XVI & XVII,

The idea of an ideal society that would reflect the cosmic equilibrium in its perfection fascinated philosophers in various lands and of different timespans. The idea stimulated artists' imaginations resulting in the production of symbolic works of art that presented the doctrines that inspired them. A good example of artworks that were produced to depict the cosmic equilibrium and the connection between heaven and earth is Yggdrasill, the cosmic tree in Norse mythology.[4] Yggdrasill represents the perfect universal equilibrium. Its roots are stretched into various wells, and its branches extended far into the heavens.[5]

Figure 1. Vision of Creation in Norse Mythology.
Yggdrasill, is the name of an immense mythological ash tree in Norse cosmology. It is a version of 'the tree of life' in Northern mythology. Yggdrasill is the axis of the universe around which all the nine worlds are arranged, and within which all creatures live. This illustration was published in 1895 by Henry G. Bohn.
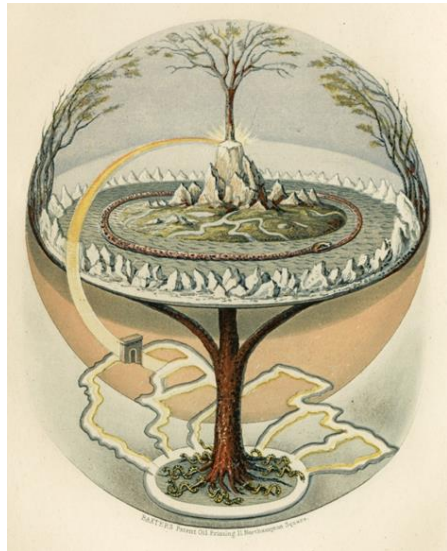
In Indian philosophy, the creation is an embodiment of the Cosmic Man - Puruṣa. The term '*puruṣa*' in Vedic and Upanishadic teachings, refers to a Cosmic Being, the abstract sense of the Self, the Indestructible Principle from whose body the universe was created. The idea found visual manifestation in geometric diagrams as well as

---

521-608.

[4] It is mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Poetic Edda,* from earlier traditional sources.

[5] Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology,* trans., Angela Hall (D. S. Brewer, 2008), 375.

anthropomorphic renderings.

Figure 2a. Geometric and anthropomorphic presentation of the Universe. According to Hindu cosmology, life begins when Purusha (the Cosmic Man) unites with Prakriti (the earth substance).
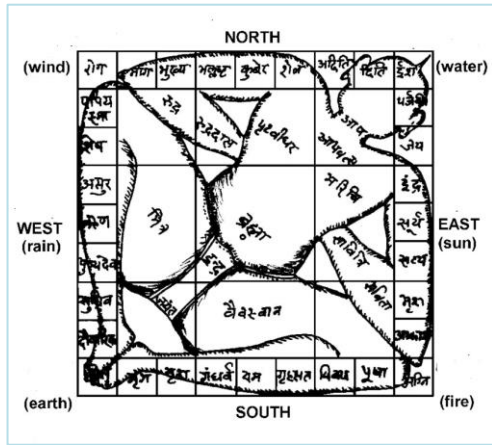

Figure 2b. Mandala is a 'cosmogram' – a map of the universe. Vastu Purusha Mandala is a 9 x 9 square grid. The 81 squares are allocated to different forces of the universe. Together they accommodate the body of the Cosmic Self. Vastu Purusha Mandala is used as the plan of a sacred place, a temple. It is meant to replicate the cosmic order on earth by incorporating heavenly bodies and supernatural forces within the four cardinal directions.

The modern perception of civilisation is far from what has been discussed above, and the divergence is more evident when the discussion involves Islamic civilisation. [6] While the classical

---

[6] For a brief overview of characteristics of Islamic Civilisation see Osman Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays* (Brunei Darussalam:

perception is a 'duty-oriented' process towards what is believed to be philosophically and universally 'right', the contemporary literature tends to define it as a 'rights-based' process. It is explained as a political membership by means of which one is entitled to certain civic, social, and political rights. And in exchange for enjoying such rights, the citizens will offer their membership duties. Such efforts have helped develop legal boundaries and rules of conduct that would set a legal framework for the relation between citizens and their nation-states on the one hand, and the engagement of countries with one another, on the other hand. This mere pragmatic approach, however, could not fully address issues that are ontological in nature, and has had its negative consequences. Schweitzer saw "very clearly that the modern civilised world, so self-styled, is not really a civilised world, but a world of 'Epigoni' inhibitors, rather than creators of any positive goods."[7]

Fortunately, contemporary academic publications are beginning to address the issues of the 'challenges confronting the theory and practice of citizenship in a globalised, socially fragmented, and multicultural world.' Muslims, having become the subject of various social and political discussions, are now being studied as minority communities within western societies – a promising initiation.[8]

Let us leave the theoretical aspects behind and use common sense as a platform for a tangible understanding of what constituted a 'civilisation.' When we speak of civilisation, we usually imagine a vast land with an advanced stage of social and cultural organisation that has enriched human lives for a rather long stretch of time. Civilisations have engraved their unfading marks on human history through leaving behind rich and profound 'art', in the civilisational sense of the word. Greatness of civilisations are marked by their advanced artistic productions that reflect their high ideals. A society

---

UBD Press, 2014), 11-32.

[7] See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *What is Civilization, and Other Essays* (Lindesfarne Press, 1989), 1-12.

[8] See "Liberal Citizenship and the Search for an Overlapping Consensus: The Case of Muslim Minorities," in David Thunder, ed., *The Ethics of Citizenship in the 21st Century* (Springer, 2017), 145-178.

that lacks high art – regardless of how advanced and mighty it may be technologically, militarily, and economically – cannot be called a civilisation.

By 'Art' we mean a wide variety of creative activities, from visual and performing, to poetry and music, to architecture and traditional crafts. Arts have close affinity with the cultural identity of the people who created them and display their aesthetic and emotional sensitivities. Superior artistic productions exhibit perfect harmony between form and content: The aesthetic taste of peoples that share a civilisational identity is shaped by the artistic production that have developed deep and wide in time and space. Art is therefore the most remarkable civilisational feature. Kandinsky begins his famous book with the following remark.

> Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own which can never be repeated.[9]

While art and architecture create a shared pattern of aesthetic taste that connect societies visually, literature connects them internally like an invisible yet strong web. It encompasses sophisticated and creative writings of philosophical and scientific nature in poetry and prose. Together they shape people's thoughts and create an intellectual tradition. To understand a civilisation, one must familiarise oneself with language, land, and aesthetic sensitivities of the family of cultures that give meaning to it.

Rise of Nationalism as Independent Identity

'Nation-state' is a relatively new social and territorial structure in human history. The concept is essentially based on European developments of political economy and political geography. The term 'nation-state' is used when an "ethnic and cultural population inhabits the boundaries of a state, and the boundaries of that state are

---

[9] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* translated to English by M. T. H. Sadler (Dover Publications, 1977), 1.

coextensive with the boundaries of that ethnic and cultural population."[10]

The association of a people who live within the territorial boundaries of a nation-state gradually gave way to formation of a new collective identity. This identity gradually developed into what was later branded as 'Nationalism' – a modern phenomenon that originated in Europe in the 18th century. Nationalism, in its early stages, manifested as movements aimed at upholding freedom, justice, and revival of cultural values   emphasising on taking pride in patriotism and national identity – one nation, one person. Heads of states often promote national pride with the intention of maintaining national unity on the one hand, and as a tool to solidify their position in power. In many cases the noble idea was hijacked by powerful global and/or local players to fulfil their capitalistic agendas.[11]

Nationalism, within some nation-states, underwent potentially dangerous changes. It turned into a form of idealization of a nation that gave way to the rise of extremism, both at theoretical and active levels. Tendencies such as assumption of a nation's superiority, failure to consider critical views, and resistance to new ideas gave nationalism an ego-centric edge of 'uncritical acceptance and belief in superiority of a group by descent, race or culture.' Nationalism in its extreme manifestations can lead to fascism, and can be an obstacle to the world peace.[12] Nazi Germany is a remarkable example of how nationalism can go off track, causing catastrophic harms to the world.[13]

While shared heritage can promote love and brotherhood in a cross-cultural panorama, nationalism could bring about opposite

---

[10] Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 86.

[11] "'Made by Capitalism' is on its label", see Tom Narim and Paul James, *Global Matrix: Nationalism, Globalism and Terrorism* (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2005), 6.

[12] Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Reflections on Indo-Iranian Relations" in Anwar Alam, ed., *India and Iran – An Assessment of Contemporary Relations* (New Delhi: New Century Publications, 2011), 308-322; for an elaboration see Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

[13] See John Cai Benjamin Weaver's "Adolf Hitler's account of 'Nation' and 'Nationalism'," https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/8736, retrieved 27 July 2022.

results. Cultures, metaphorically speaking, resemble pyramids – the wider the base of a pyramid the stronger and taller the structure! When cultures are fragmented into smaller units, they lose both their beauty and strength. Dividing cultures that share a civilisational identity under the banner of nationalism can bring about animosity. An overall glance towards nationalistic movements in the past century reveals that the exclusive attitude toward one's nation, has sometimes acted as an anti-civilisational force – undermining cultural and civilisational identities that are often trans-national. Divisions between politically shaped territorial spaces did not become a common practice until late eighteenth century.

Trans-national Identity of Liberated Souls

Rumi (d.1207) lived some 800 hundred years ago; that is some six centuries before the idea of nation-state was invented, and much earlier than many of the countries that now claim him appeared on the world map! It is worth mentioning here, that the development of mapping technology has had a game changing effect on defining borders of nation-states, and giving legitimacy to some political establishments, while others were harmed by the maps![14]

> Authority structures not depicted on maps were ignored or actively renounced in favor of those that were, leading to the implementation of linear boundaries between states and centralized territorial rule within them.[15]

Having said that, to avoid being trapped into the ever-changing socio-political maps that constantly shake our minds, it is

---

[14] This trend is still in practice. New maps are being forged to serve political agendas. The case of 'Persian Gulf' is worth mentioning. In the last three decades we have been witnessing systematic mobilization of forces – in the political and academic arena – to undermine the historically documented name 'Persian Gulf', and impose a fabricated one (Arabian Gulf) in its stead. The agenda is being complemented by producing modern maps that distort historical facts.

[15] Jordan Nathaniel Branch, *Mapping the Sovereign State: Cartographic Technology, Political Authority, and Systematic Change.* PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkley, 2011, "Abstract", see https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2tt0p94m, retrieved 15 July 2022

important to remind ourselves of Rumi's civilisational and historical heritage. Historically speaking, Rumi does not belong to any of the political territories that are presently identified as independent states. Instead, he was an amazing product of a rich intellectual tradition that is shared by many nations, races, and ethnic groups.

A few countries have 'claimed' Rumi, based on certain historical and geographical evidences. Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan (arrange in alphabetical order) are among them. Place of birth, place of demise, and duration of residence have been presented as reasons for such claims. To give the credit based on the '*country of origin*' (a modern phrase used in most application forms for traveling to other countries) then Afghanistan and Tajikistan will have to find an undisputable historical proof to win the case. If duration of residence is accepted as the criterion, then Turkey will have an unchallengeable victory, with an additional bonus of having Rumi's tomb in its soil.[16] Iranians consider Rumi one of their own due to historical and linguistic ties with the iconic poet from the one hand,[17] and for keeping alive the intellectual tradition through producing valuable scholarly works by contemporary figures. [18]

There is a larger and perhaps more essential context in which Rumi can be studied – the 'Persianate identity.' Persian – in the broad meaning of the term –   has connected people of a vast area that stretched from China to Balkans, and from Siberia to the Indian subcontinent; it was the literary and official language of a large region in Asia and Europe.[19] Persian also refers to a language (also known as Dari, Farsi, and Tajik) and to the people that speak in it, or to an ethnic group. 'Persianate,' on the other hand, refers to a

---

[16] In 1228 Rumi's father, Baha al-Din Valad, moved with his family to Anatolia and settled in Konia. Rumi spent most of his productive life in Konya, in the modern state of Turley.

[17] Most Iranians can read Rumi's work in the original language without difficulty, and have kept Rumi's teaching alive as an oral culture.

[18] Franklin Lewis believes that most important Rumi scholars today are Iranian. For an elaboration see his *Rumi, Past, Present, East and West* (Oneworld Publication, 2000).

[19] See Nile Green, *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (University of California Press, 2019), 1.

trans-national cultural identity. The term includes many societies that weren't necessarily Persian ethnically, but were connected through linguistic ties, aesthetic values, as well as cultural and artistic traditions. A historical study of the cultural transformation of societies in west-Asian and south-Asian regions reveals the remarkable influence of Persian culture on the societies under the rule of several dynasties.   a general view of Persianate societies on a geographical map is provided in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Civilisational map of Persianate societies. Unlike the maps that exhibit divisions of lands according to political establishments of nation-states, map of a civilisation is closer to a map of nature, it looks less rigid, more relaxed, with a sense of inclusiveness.[20]

The limitations of this study do not allow touching upon all dynasties and lands that are part of the Persianate culture but mentioning a few of them would paint a clearer picture for the reader.

Seljuqs (1037-1194), whose empire encompassed parts of Anatolia and the Levant in the west, to Central Asia in the north, and to Hindu Kush and the Persian Gulf in the east and south respectively, were Turkic-speaking rulers. Under the Seljuqs 'the court culture was largely Persianized; the process of Persianization accelerated in the thirteenth century'.[21]

---

[20] This map is a modified version of a map available at https://www.bibleodyssey. org/en/tools/map-gallery/p/persian-empire

[21] C. E. Bosworth, "Turkish Expansion Towards the West," in *UNESCO History of Humanity, Volume IV: From the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century*, UNESCO Publishing, (Routledge, 2000), 391.

The Timurids (1307-1507) – also known as Gurkaniyan – were of Turco-Mongol origin. "Persian literature, especially poetry, occupied a central role in the process of assimilation of Timurid elite to the Perso-Islamicate courtly culture."[22] The area under the rule of this dynasty included lands from the modern-day Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, as well as some other areas in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. "In almost all the territories which Temür incorporated into his realm, Persian was the primary language of administration and literary culture."[23]

In the Indian subcontinent Persian has been the *lingua franca* for some eight hundred years. Under the Ghaznavids (977-1186) Lahore (in the modern Pakistan) became Persianized, and later several Muslim dynasties ruled over large parts of northern, central and southern India; the dynasties are generally referred to as Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526). During this period, outstanding writers and poets produced brilliant Persian works that are still appreciated and loved. Amir Khosrow (1253-1325) is among my favorite Persian musician-poets. He is also known as 'the father of Urdu literature' and 'the father of Qawwali' – a kind of Sufi devotional song that is performed with musical instruments. But the most prominent glow of Persian language, art and culture was during the Mughal empire (1526-1857).[24] Persian language continued its administerial function for a long period during the British empire's rule over India in the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. British officials often used Persian seals inscribed in Nastaʿliq style – a Persian style of calligraphy – as their official signature.[25]

---

[22] David J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album 1400-1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (Yale University Press, 2005), 130.

[23] Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 109.

[24] See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Traces of Persian Art in the Domain of Indian Culture" (Persian) (رد پای هنر ایران در عرصه فرهنگ هند، 1 & 2), in *Nameh Farhang, Quarterly Journal on Cultural and Social Studies,* No. 18 (1995), 138-143; and *Nameh Farhang*, No. 19 (1995), 144-151.

[25] 'See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "An Introduction to Persian Seals: Special Reference to Devotional Seals from an Eighteenth-Century Manuscript" in *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought & Civilization (ISTAC)*, Volume 27, Number 1 (2022), 153-170.

In Anatolia, under Ottomans (1299-1922), Persian language had a remarkable function as the carrier of civilisation, because it was a medium of historiography. Its poetic richness was deep rooted to the extent that 'even Sultan Salim I, a bitter enemy of Iran,' wrote poetry in Persian.[26]

A study of Rumi's writings, especially his two great poetic masterpieces – the *Mathnawi* and *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* – portrays him as a borderless, nationless, profound, inclusive, translucent, and love-oriented soul. He metaphorically introduces his master, Shams-e Tabrizi, as a person who is in a state of spiritual intoxication, liberated from all conventional boundaries and attachments.

I walked out of my house, a drunk man approached me,
With hundred rose-gardens and canopies, hidden in his glances of mystery…

"To where do you belong?" I asked; he responded mockingly:
"Half from Turkistan, half from Fergana," – O dear, can't you see!"

"One half from heart and soul, other half from water and clay,
"One half of untainted pearl, other half at the shore of a bay."

Beggingly I said: "be my friend, as we are related,"
"I don't discriminate strangers from friends," he said!

"I have no hearty attachments, nor I wear a ranking turban,
My chest is bursting with words; must I relieve this burden!"[27]

'Drunkenness,' in the above couplets, refers to a state of liberation from all imposed conventions. 'Wine' represents the 'beloved' whose charm and beauty intoxicates the 'lover' and liberates him from mundane realities that govern mediocre people's lives.[28] A liberated

---

[26] *Persian Historiography and Geography: Bertold Spuler on Major Works Produced in Iran, The Caucasus, Central Asia, India, and Early Ottoman Empire,* Translated from German by M. Ismail Marcinkowski (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional Pte Ltd, 2003), 68.

[27] Rumi, *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, Ghazal No. 2309, online edition. Translation to English by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 1.

[28] 'Wine' and 'drunkenness' are two important metaphoric terms in Persian mystical literature. They are part and parcel of the process of experiencing love – central

man's soul is purified by love. His transcendental vision does not discriminate between strangers and relatives. He is detached, unconcerned about outfits and ranks; yet his chest is a treasure of wisdom, ready to be explored. This sublime spiritual experience is referred to as a state of 'selflessness' (*bī-khudī* = بیخودی) – another familiar theme in Sufi tradition.[29]

'Self' and 'selflessness' are key terms associated with the journey of self-realization. The higher Self is associated with the Divine spirit (الروح) that God blew into man's physical shell at the time of creation (Qur'an 15:29). The lower self, on the other hand, is associated with the ego – that destructive force within us that stands on the way of spiritual growth and liberation. The Qur'an refers to it as 'The self that commands to evil' (15:29). The seer, in the journey of spiritual growth, "will realise that the rays of the true Self will not shine unless the distracting sparkles of the ego are extinguished. In other words, 'selflessness' would lead to 'Self-realisation'".[30]

Strive for selflessness, find your 'Self' (in the Source),
*   Proceed fast, for God only knows of the right course.*[31]

'Self-interest' is a popular expression in global communication among nations. Countries often justify their unjust acts and legitimise their oppressive attitudes under the deceiving expression of 'national interest' –   trends that are too often but greed and ego inflated to a national level! Rumi promotes 'selflessness' in order to attain self-realisation – which, according to a famous *hadith*, is the path to

---

element of Sufi teachings. For an elaboration see N. Pourjavady's "Love and the Metaphor of Wine and Drunkenness in Persian Sufi Poetry," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed., Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012)*,* 125-136.

[29] Mohammad Iqbal Lahori (1877-1938) composed two celebrated books of poetry in Mathnawi style, after Rumi's lead, elaborating on the concepts of Self and Selflessness. The books are called رموز بیخودی (Secrets of the Self) and اسرار خودی (Hints of Selflessness).

[30] Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Sufi Sama and the Cosmology of Mandala," in *Al-Shajarah*: *Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought & Civilization (ISTAC)*, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Volume 13, Number 2 (2008), 203-204.

[31] Rumi, *The Mathnawi* 4: 3218, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 2.

God-realisation.[32]

Humanity has paid a big price for the 'interest-oriented relations.' The global increase of animosity and violence are but symptoms of the disease of selfishness at a collective level! Rumi regards selfishness as demonic, a manifestation of Satan that works in opposition to angelic forces and intellect.

Ego and Satan are a single entity,
Displaying themselves with double identity.

Angel and intellect are also essentially same,
For the wisdom of functions, they use a different name. [33]

The advice is to stay wise by taking the side of the angel of goodness and purify oneself from 'The self that commands to evil' (Qur'an, 15:29).

Purify yourself from the impure attributes of the self
For only then you'll see the clear essence of your "Self"[34]

Kill your ego and resurrect the World (of Spirit),
The ego has killed its master, make a slave of it[35]

Trans-nationalism, as a civilisational mindset, has connected peoples of Persianate culture beyond the national borders for a very long time. It has created a sense of intimacy and kinship that is still felt. This kinship is even reflected in the names and surnames. Many people carry the name of a certain city – that is presently part of another country – as their surnames. I have Iranian friends with the surnames such as Herati or Kabuli (attributed to the cities Herat and Kabul, Afghanistan), Dehlavi (attributed to Delhi, India) Kashmiri (attributed to Kashmir, a disputed territory between Pakistan and

---

[32] A hadith narrated from the Prophet reads: من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه. "Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord."

[33] Rumi, *The Mathnawi* III: *4053-4054*, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 3.

[34] Ibid, I: *3457* English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 4.

[35] Ibid, III: *2504*, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 5.

India), Marvi (attributer to Marv/Merv, Turkmanistan), Qobadiani (attributed to Qubodiyon, Tajikistan), or Nakhjavani (attributed Nakhichevan, in the modern state of Azerbaijan). Similarly, I know people in India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia with the surnames such as Bukhari (attributed to Bukhara, Uzbekistan), or Shirazi and Isfahani (attributed to Shiraz and Isfahan, Iran.) The list goes on. This is among the subtle strings that preserves kinship cross borders.

The following poem, composed in by Zabihollah Behrouz (1890-1971) articulates this point charmingly.[36]

Tajikistan and Khorasan; They're both yours – O Brother!
Your body is in one land; your soul is in the other!

In Bukhara and Samarqand, Tashkent, Chach, Wakhsh and Khujand,
The bright culture of your ancestors is rooted in the land.

Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Ganja, Marv, and Hisar,
Like Shiraz and Isfahan – part of your Iran, they are!

Assemble we all must, the soil particles that are spread,
And the pure drops of water –   the tears that you've shed.

We need another Rostam, to protect our glorious name,
Or else the brand of betrayal, will bring us endless shame.[37]

In the above couplets, names of ten cities and countries associated with the Persianate culture are listed. The last couplet emphasizes on the need for restoration of unity; hoping for the rise of a new Rostam[38] – a contemporary trans-national hero figure who would restore the spirit of kinship and brotherhood among the family of cultures that were once limbs of a single body.

Najeeb Barwar, a contemporary poet from Afghanistan, has echoed Zabihollah Behrouz's trans-nationalism in a poem entitled

---

[36] The poem has been posted online, http://afghanpaper.com/nbody.php?id=80178 retrieved 29 July 2022

[37] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo; For couplets in original language see Appendix 6.

[38] Rostam/Rustam is a legendary hero of unsurpassed power in Persian mythology. His life and heroism have been highlighted in the *Shahnameh* epic by 10th century Iranian poet Ferdowsi.

'Bridge' (پُل). The poem was composed into a song that received wide audience.[39]

Where they draw a border, you build a bridge of connection,
Speak of Tehran, Samarkand, and 'Sar Pol'[40] in every location.

When they talk about war, you respond with a wide smile,
Show them a window facing the landscape of toleration.

Say 'NO' to idolization of politicians -- no, no!
Put flowers on all the graves of separation.

With the mixed soil from Bukhara and of Nishapur,
Rebuild the ruins of Kabul, and end its devastation.

For the hair of girls caged in our beloved Pamir[41] –
With flowers from Khorasan, make hair-decoration.

Bring over a cup from Balkh and wine from Shiraz,
Compose lyrics in a two-world state of intoxication. [42]

In his 'Bridge,' Barwar names ten cities that belong to a single family – now divided with artificial borders. The poet encourages his audience to build 'bridges' across the borders to restore the relation between kinfolks. The ten cities of Tehran, Samarkand, Sar-Pol, Bukhara, Neyshabour, Kabul, Pamir, Khorasan, Balkh, Shiraz – in the same order mentioned in the poem – are located in Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Language: Facilitator or Barrier

Rumi spoke of communication at various levels. His attitude towards expression and communication may be categorised under two general

---

[39] Najeeb Barwar's poems are popular in social media, among the Persianate societies. Shafaq Siahpoosh, a singer originally from Afghanistan and very popular in Tajikistan, sang Najeeb Barwar's 'Bridge.'

[40] Reference to Sar Pol-e Zahāb (سر پل ذهاب) a Kurdish county in Kermanshah province of Iran near the Iran-Iraq border.

[41] Pamir is a vast plateau that is spread across Tajikistan, Afghanistan, China and Kyrgyzstan.

[42] English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 7.

themes: Speechless Communication and Communication via Tongue. I have briefly touched upon the two modes of expression in a few of my writings as 'Language of Presence' (لسان الحال) and 'Language of Tongue' (لسان القال).[43] "The inner guiding light speaks to man in the "language of presence" through signs and inspirations, and connects him to a universal reality that is timeless and primordial."[44] The language of tongue, on the other hand, "puts forward realities that are attributes of the time-bound world."[45]

The *Mathnawi* narrates an interesting story that revolves around the proper use of verbal and non-verbal modes of communication while expressing love. The story is about two lovers who have been separated for a long time. In his lonely moments, the lover would compose poems and write letters – expressing his deep affection for his beloved and complaining from the pain of separation. As there were no efficient postal services in those days, not all such letters were delivered; but the very opportunity of expressing his feelings via writing brought the man a certain degree of relief. The days of separation eventually came to an end, and the lovers found a rare opportunity of enjoying each other's company in a pleasant environment without outside disturbance. In that exiting moment, the lover pulled out one of his highly poetic writings and began reciting the lines to impress his beloved.

The girl gave her lover a seat by her side,
*   The man pulled out a letter and began to recite.*

With melodious couplets he adored the girl,
*   With lamenting passages, he shed tears like pearl.[46]*

The girl's reaction, however, was not what the poor man had imagined! She seemed unpleased with his lover's action – or rather

---

[43] See Amir H. Zekrgoo, "Metaphors of Music & Dance in Rumi's Mathnawi," *in KATHA: Official Journal of The Centre for Civilizational Dialogue*, Universiti Malaya, Volume 8, 2012 (late publication 2014), 1-14; also, my "Sufi Sama and the Cosmology of Mandala," in *International Mevlana Symposium Papers*, Volume 3, (Istanbul: Motto Publication, 2007), 1559-1583. Actual Printing 2010.

[44] Zekrgoo, "Metaphors of Music & Dance in Rumi's Mathnawi,", p. 6.

[45] Ibid, pp. 6-7.

[46] Ibid, 3: 1406-1407, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 8.

his absence of action! Criticising the shaken lover, she appealed that the way he had acted in that rare opportunity was not indicative of true love:

The beloved said: "If these are meant for me, –
    At the time of union, it's waste of life – a fallacy!"

"I'm with you, and you're busy with recitation!"
    "This is no sign of a lover's genuine affection!"[47]

Speech can actually act as a barrier when it comes to expressing the most profound and intimate feelings, love! [48] The morale of the story is that 'mere words' are not sufficient for genuine expressions of love! This matter has been emphasised time and again in various passages of the *Mathnawi*; one of them is quoted below:

On the nature of love, I spoke in elaboration,
    In the presence of love, I got ashamed in every occasion.

The commentary of tongue is indeed appealing,
    Yet a tongue-less love is far more revealing[49]

While the above discussions seem to support the effectiveness of 'speechless communication', Rumi's position with respect to the 'language of tongue' is equally profound. The poet tends to separate the 'form' of communication – i.e., the spoken or written forms of language – from its 'spirit' of communication. He claims that speaking in the same language does not necessarily establish communication; that in order to establish sincere connection via tongue, the elements of 'empathy' and 'intimacy' must be present. If such qualities are absent in a conversation, then one can feel estranged and lonely even among his closest friends!

---

[47] Ibid, 3: 1408-1409, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 9.
[48] Love, in Rumi's words 'has a hundred different tongues'. See *The Mathnawi* 3: 3842.
[49] Ibid, 1: 112-113, English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 10.

To share a tongue shows kinship and connection,
*   A man among strangers is like a prisoner in chain.*

Indians and Turks may connect through a shared tongue,
*   While two Turks may be strangers in vain.*

Therefore, the language of intimacy is of a different nature,
*   To be one in heart is indeed better than to be one in tongue*[50]

To make his case even more tangible, Jalal al-Din Balkhi's creative mind produces an ingenious tale about four co-travellers that couldn't communicate, as each one spoke in a tongue that the others did not understand – Farsi, Arabic, Turkic, and Greek.[51] Suffering from exhaustion and hunger, they came to possess a single dirham donated to them, which they had to share and spend it in agreement. Each individual struggled to get his own desired item from the menu! Unable to understand the other ones' tongue, each one announced the name of his favourite fruit in his own language. The Persian guy tried to encourage others to spend the coin on *angūr* (انگور), while the Arab disagreed, insisting on *inab* (عنب) instead. The Turk, fearing to lose his chance of getting a tasty bite, got engaged in the discussion and voted against '*inab*, as he fancied *üzüm* (اوزوم). Now it was the Roman guy's turn to announce what he desired. Sternly, he asked everyone to leave aside the useless argument, and settle instead for '*stafýli*' (استافیلی). The argument got heated and turned into a fistfight. Their fight, Rumi declares, had a single cause – ignorance; for all four men had actually been longing for grape, pronounced differently!

The story of ignorance is universal and timeless. Today we witness how one language (Persian) – that has been a remarkable factor of friendship and affection among millions of people in the region – is being used as a divider, using different 'name-stickers' (Dari, Farsi, and Tajik) to accomplish political agendas under the banner of nationalism. Najeeb Barwar, a contemporary Afghan poet, articulates the same idea beautifully.

---

[50] Ibid, 1: 1205-1207, English by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 11.

[51] The tale is narrated in the *Mathnawi* II: 3681-3692.

Borders no longer distance us, O brother!
      You know well our origin is one.

Call it Tajiki, Farsi, or Dari – if you so desire,
      In whatever name, Persian language is one! [52]

Conclusion

Jalal al-Din Rumi's inspiring works introduce him as a person with a fluid mind that transcends geographical borders. Thus, any attempt to put a stamp of 'national' ownership on him, would immediately display a clear contradiction to his character and teachings. Moreover, many nation-states that claim such ownership were shaped centuries after his lifetime!

Perhaps the most attractive aspects of Rumi's personality, was his amazing ability to come up with creative interpretations of familiar themes and tales that appeal to people of various ages, classes, and of different cultural backgrounds. His stories are crosscultural and his messages are universal. Persian, the language of his writings connects people that live apart in different national borders but share a 'Persianate identity.' In his writings he discussed language at the levels of 'form' and 'spirt' – the language of tongue, and the language of presence. He also referred to love – a profound abstract feeling that can be expressed 'in a hundred different tongues' – as a vital component of global communication. His 'love-oriented communication' is in clear contrast with the 'interest-oriented relations' that are causing animosity and violence today.

Rumi must also be studied as an outstanding contribution of the Islamic civilisation to global fraternity. He lived outside the mental boxes of individuals and groups. His ever-fresh liberating mind produced ideas that flow like life-bestowing water in many lands. He was highly intellectual, had a broad unbiased mind, possessed a vision beyond his time, lived life as a liberated soul, saw humanity as a whole and left behind a body of genuine works that are multi-layered, profound, spiritual, philosophical, creative, artistic,

---

[52] Persian poem by Najeeb Barwar. English translation by Amir H. Zekrgoo. For couplets in original language see Appendix 12.

musical, stimulating, entertaining, engaging, and most importantly – timeless and borderless. Let us cherish this treasure and maintain its wholeness.

Appendix 1.

از خانه برون رفتم، مستیم به پیش آمد   در هر نظرش مضمر صد گلشن و کاشانه...

گفتم: ز کجایی تو؟ تسخر زد و گفت: ای جان نیمیم ز ترکستان، نیمیم ز فرغانه

نیمیم ز آب و گِل، نیمیم ز جان و دل   نیمیم لبِ دریا، نیمی همه دردانه

گفتم که: رفیقی کن با من که منم خویشت   گفتا که: بنشناسم من خویش ز بیگانه

من بی‌دل و دستارم در خانهٔ خمّارم   یک سینه سخن دارم هین شرح دهم یا نه؟

Appendix 2.

جهد کن در بی خودی، خود را بیاب   زودتر – والله اعلم بالصواب

Appendix 3.

نفس و شیطان هر دو یک تن بوده ا ند   در دو صورت خویش را بنموده اند

چون فرشته و عقل که ایشان یک بدند   بهر حکمت هاش یک صورت شدند

Appendix 4.

خویش را صافی کن از اوصاف خود   تا ببینی ذات پاک صاف خود

Appendix 5.

نفس خود را کش، جهان را زنده کن   خواجه را کشته ست، او را بنده کن

Appendix 6.

ای برادر تاجیکستان هم خراسان تو است   گر خراسان تن بود این پاره ی جان تو است

در بخارا و سمرقند و خجند و وخش و چاچ   ریشه فرهنگ اجداد درخشان تو است

کابل و بلخ و هرات و گنجه و مرو و حصار   همچو شیراز و سپاهان است، ایران تو است

ذره ذره خاک او را جمع می باید نمود   قطره قطره آب پاکش اشک چشمان تو است

رستمی باید که باشد حافظ ناموس و ننگ   ورنه داغ بی وفایی نقش دامان تو است .

Appendix 7.

حرف تهران و سمرقند و«سرِ پُل» بزنید   هر کجا مرز کشیدند شما پل بزنید

حرف از پنجره ی رو به تحمل بزنید   هر که از جنگ سخن گفت بخندید بر او

روی گور همه ی تفرقه ها گل بزنید   «نه» بگویید به بت های سیاسی – نه! نه!

با هم آرید و به مخروبه ی کابل بزنید   مشتی از خاک بخارا و گِل از نیشابور

گلی از باغِ خراســان به دو کاکل بزنید   دختران قفس افتاده ی پامیر عزیز

مستی هر دو جهان را به تغزل بزنید   جامی از بلخ بیارید و شراب از شیراز

Appendix 8.

نامه بیرون کرد و پیش یار خواند   آن یکی را یار پیش خود نشاند

زاری و مسکینی و بس لابه‌ها   بیت ها در نامه و مدح و ثنا

Appendix 9.

گاهِ وصل این عمر ضایع کردنست   گفت معشوق این اگر بهر منست

نیست این باری نشان عاشقان   من به پیشت حاضر و تو نامه خوان

Appendix 10.

چون به عشق آیم خجل باشم ا ز آن   هر چه گویم عشق را شرح و بیان

لیک عشق بی زبان روشنتر است   گر چه تفسیر زبان روشنگر است

Appendix 11.

مرد با نا محرمان چون بندی است   همزبانی خویشی و پیوندی است

ای بسا دو ترک چون بیگانگان   ای بسا هندو و ترک همزبان

همدلی از همزبانی بهتر است   پس زبان محرمی خود دیگر است

Appendix 12.

ای برادر اصل ما را خوب میدانی یکی است.   مرزها دیگر اساس دوری ما نیستند

این زبان پارسی را هرچه میخوانی یکی است.   تاجکی یا فارسی، یا خویش پنداری دری

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

	Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR		Ar	Pr	OT	UR
ء	'	'	'	'	ز	z	z	z	z	گ	–	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	b	ڑ	–	–	–	ṛ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	–	p	p	p	ژ	–	zh	j	zh	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ٹ	–	–	–	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	sh	ه	h	h	h¹	h¹
ث	th	th	th	th	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	j	ض	ḍ	ẓ	ż	ż	ى	y	y	y	y
چ	–	ch	çh	ch	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah			-a²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al³			
خ	kh	kh	kh	kh	ع	'	'	'	'					
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğ	gh					
ڈ	–	–	–	d	ف	f	f	f	f					
ذ	dh	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	q					
ر	r	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	k					

¹ – when not final
² – at in construct state
³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

		Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī	ī
Doubled	يّ	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	iyy (final form ī)
	وّ	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uv	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	au	ev
	ى	ai or ay	ay	ey
Short	َ	a	a	a or e
	ُ	u	u	u or ü o or ö
	ِ	i	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ <u>jh</u>   گھ <u>gh</u>

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

Contents

ARTICLES

MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

REVIEW ESSAY

BOOK REVIEWS   187