

This paper was first presented at The Dialogue Institute of Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University and Institute of Medieval and Post-Medieval Studies, Dallas Texas on March 21, 2015.

Western Research and Studies on Rumi

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Introduction

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, even earlier, western scholars have delved into studying Rumi. Their efforts, hard work and dedication on exploring Rumi is phenomenal. There are many students of knowledge and literature who are not aware about the immense contribution on Rumi by western scholars. Contribution of western scholars on Maulana Jallaluddin Muhammad Balkhi known as Rumi, have achieved several magnificent points: First, these studies connected the East with the West intellectually and spiritually. This relationship based on scholarship is a solid prove that connection through knowledge and wisdom can be constructive to people because self-interest is not involved. Secondly, it established cooperation between scholars. This cooperation cemented an understanding between cultures and a true appreciation of each other. Third, Maulana, believing in monotheism and One Reality, opened the door for understanding Tauhid (unification), the Islamic philosophy of Oneness of God, humanity, knowledge and the universe to western cultures. Maulana , we can say, introduced the true nature of mysticism, “Love of the Absolute,” (Tasawuf) to the West. And last but not least, it was through Maulana that people of the world, those who seek peace found not only peace of the soul, but also peace of co-existence among nations of the world.

Western scholars and Maulana Jallaluddin Muhammad Balkhi known as Rumi

Western scholars were attracted to Rumi during the reign of the Turkish Empire.

An empire that lasts 600 years. Maulana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi known in the West as Rumi was born in Balkh, in today's northern Afghanistan and was buried in Konya, Turkey, where he was influenced and met for the first time the mystical dervish, Shams. It is noteworthy to mention that western scholars were exposed to Islamic mysticism long before Maulana, in the Middle Ages. In this study, we try to list those who worked tirelessly on Maulana Jallauddin Muhammad Balkhi, known as Rumi, to not only introduce him, but also expose the true unity of mankind through his two branches of Maulana's literary work, namely, the *Ghazals* and the *Mathnawi*.

Before we elaborate on western contribution, it is important to elaborate on two questions that is not mentioned by those who have previously studied Maulana. First, the role Maulana played in transforming western orientalist into humanist scholars. And secondly, what was the secret of Maulana that attracted so many people from all cultures and religious denominations while he was a committed Muslim?

Anthropology is a field of knowledge that mostly developed in colonial period. In other words, colonialism contributed to the field of anthropology particularly linguistic anthropology and cultural anthropology. Western scholars were rightfully accused or stigmatized as associates of colonial powers-This is true when we see anthropologists depict the native culture through their own understanding of civilization. However, what is interesting that Jalal Uddin Muhammad Balkhi had such an immense impact on these orientalist that he made them, very consciously in the service of mankind not colonial powers. Their translations and contributions reached the world of humanity for the sake of knowledge, peace and co-existence.

Secondly, as we ask, what was it that enabled Maulana to attract so many people? What was his mystery? Maulana become universal because he preached the only One Absolute Truth and nothing else. He realized the fact that law of nature and law of Allah (God) is one and the same. He realized the fact that all comes from Him and go back to Him. Unity to Maulana was and is that: God is One, knowledge is One, mankind is One and the universe is One and this is the Absolute Truth to him. Maulana taught humanity that this Oneness does not recognize anything else but Unity. In fact, today we know that the same DNA that we find in plants is similar to,- the DNA we find in humans. Those who consider themselves as Maulana's students or they call themselves experts on Maulana and still belong to an ethnicity, nationality, language, or any another thing that they take pride of, have not understood Maulana or his mission as a Master. Maulana crossed all borders, cultures and man-made association with the Unity.

He was attached to the Only Absolute Truth. If a professor of this field in academia teaches Maulana and does not practice Maulana's legacy then he missed the point as a professor. This means that Maulana *Shenaasi* is not only teaching or knowing the meaning of his literal work and message, but also to personally practice his legacy and accept him as his own Master in the path of morals and ethics.

Western scholars particularly the Germans, the British and the French played a major role in introducing Maulana to the West.

Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall was the one who studied Farsi, Turkish and Arabic texts and used his translations in his classical writing *chichte der schonen Redekunste Persiens* in 1818. According to Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003), the renowned German scholar of Islam and Sufism, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall part of translation of *Diwan*, influenced Friedrich Ruckert (1788-1866), German poet, translator and professor of oriental languages to the extent that he created *ghazals* based on Rumi's poem and style, "the first attempt to adapt the *ghazal* form to German poetry." This work of Ruckert, forcefully, undoubtedly introduced Rumi in German literary circles and intellectuals of German history. It was through Ruckert's work that the prominent German philosopher, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), learned about Rumi and he admired Maulana in his *Enzyklopadie Philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences)..

More than hundred years ago, in 1903, Ruckert's *Ghazals* were translated by a Scottish theologian and educator named William Hastie (1842-1903). As a matter of fact, his English translation of *Ghazals* was just produced before his death in 1903. In the middle of twentieth century, one of the most prominent German scholar of literature was Helmut Ritter who not only produced a marvelous work on Sheikh Farid Uddin Attar, but also on Mathnawi of Maulana under the title of "Das Proomium des mathnawi." He also wrote the essay on the dance of the dervishes under the title of "*Maulana Galaladdin Rumi und sein Keris.*" 1942. Another prominent scholar was Dr Annemarie Schimmel who served as Professor of literature at Harvard university in the United States from 1967 to 1992, and produced superb studies of Sufism and Islam. Her book on Maulana, "The Triumphant Sun," (1993), is about life, thought, poetry and influence of Rumi. Another major Dr Schimmel's work was her book, "Mystical Dimensions of Islam" (1975) that had a huge impact on Western intellectuals as well as those who were interested in spirituality in the West.

The British orientalist exceptional study of Rumi by Edward Henry Whinfield (1836-1922), who was a scholar of Farsi language produced a magnificent work on Hafez as well as of Rumi translation, 1857). As a matter of fact, Whinfield was

the first to compose the first translation of Hafez and Rumi as well as 500 quatrains of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. James William Redhouse (1811-1892), was a “KCMG,” (The Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George), authored the original and authoritative Ottoman-English dictionary, translated Rumi, (London, 1881), they both “culminated in the magnificent edition by Reynold A. Nicholson [1868-1945], of Rumi's *Mathnawi*, together with a translation and documentary (1925-1940).” Nicholson was an eminent scholar of Islamic literature and Islamic Mysticism, and he is considered without question the greatest Rumi scholar. Nicholson work on Rumi has been compiled in eight volumes. Nicholson was the first European who translated and edited of the “forty-eight ghazals.” The selected poems from “*Diwan-i Shams-i Tabriz*” (1898), was reprinted in 1961. Two other major works by Nicholson were “*Tales of Mystic Meaning*” (London, 1931) and “*Rumi: Poet and Mystic,*” (London. 1950). It is noteworthy to also mention the two Nicholson influential books namely, “*Literary History of The Arabs,*”(1907) and “*Mystic of Islam,*”(1914).

Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969), a student of Nicholson, was a British orientalist and prolific scholar of Arabic, Farsi and Islamic Studies. His translation of the Qur'an, “*Koran interpreted*” is one of the most prominent work written by a non-Muslim scholar. His contribution in Rumi studies is another marvelous addition to Rumi studies which includes, *The Rubaiyat of Jalaluddin Rumi* (London, 1959), “*Tales from the Mathnawi*” (London, 1961), “*More tales from the Mathnawi*” (London, 1963) and *Mystical poem of Rumi* (Chicago, 1968). Arberry's biography tells us that he worked tirelessly, and the publication of Chicago was produced one year before his death. Arberry's book, “*Tasawuf*”(Mysticism) has been translated by Gvoillard into French language, 1952.

Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch (1909-1999), a French Islamologist produced a major work on Maulana called “*Rumi et le Soufisme*” (Rumi and Sufism), in 1977. This book has been translated by Simone Fattal in English (1988). Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch with collaboration of Mr. Jamshid Murtazavi translated the full text of *Mathnawi* which published in 1990. She tirelessly worked on more than seven translations into French.

Rumi is universal. There are many authors and translators who published about Rumi from a variety of cultures and people men and women. For Rumi there is no border or gender. For Rumi is the Love of the Absolute and the relation to the Only One Reality.

Rumi was introduced to Americans by author and humorist, Mark Twain. “Twain had already traveled himself to the Middle East in 1867, the experience of which he details in *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress*(1869), and

from the 1870s was much captivated by a different Persian poet “*Omar Khayam*,” whose *Rubaiyat* Twain described as “the only poem I have ever carried about with me.” That Twain could thus find humor in the Western fascination with the “whiling dervishes,” and take the occasion to poke a bit of fun at religious intolerance, perhaps illustrates just how far back the iconic image of Rumi and the *Mevlevis* began to take shape in the West.” A contemporary scholar of Rumi is Professor Franklin D. Lewis, by all means is a prominent scholar of Rumi. His book, “*Rumi: Past and Present East and West: The Life Teachings, and poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi*” is an excellent work done by an American scholar of Rumi. This book has been translated by Hassan Lahouti in Farsi.

To know and comprehend this fact of life through mysticism of Rumi, the Love of the Absolute, we end this piece by introducing Coleman Barks, an American poet who become a renowned translator of Rumi and had many publications on Rumi. The mysterious point about this scholar is that according to his biography, “he neither speaks nor read Persians,[Farsi] he is nonetheless renowned as an interpreter of Rumi and other mystic poets of Persia[Khurasan].” This is reality of the Only One that one can know Him without a language because the Only One speaks all languages. Coleman symbolizes the true unification of mankind with the Only Reality.

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