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RUMI'S THOUGHTS ON HUMAN BEINGS AND SOCIETY IN HIS OWN TIME

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Abstract: This article explores the thoughts of Mevlânâ (Rumi) on humanity and society during his lifetime. By examining his philosophical and spiritual teachings, the article delves into his views on human nature, the relationship between individuals and society, and the concept of unity and love. Mevlânâ's works, particularly the Divan-i Kebir and Mathnawireflect a deep understanding of the challenges facing humanity in his era, while offering timeless wisdom on how to transcend individual and societal divisions. His emphasis on self-awareness, compassion, and spiritual connection provides valuable insights into the human condition and remains relevant in contemporary discussions on societal harmony and personal growth. This article delves into the profound ideas of Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi, particularly his teachings on human and societal relationships. The article highlights Mevlânâ's views on the inner journey of man, the process of self-discovery, and the pursuit of love. According to him, the highest goal of a person is to draw closer to God and achieve spiritual maturity. Mevlânâ also advocated for the principles of tolerance, love, and understanding in interpersonal relationships, seeing the development of society as possible through individual inner transformation. Furthermore, he emphasized that for societal harmony to be achieved, individuals must cleanse themselves of their egos and establish deeper spiritual In this context, the article shows that Mevlânâ 's teachings have a timeless universal relevance and continue to hold significance for contemporary society.

Keywords: Mevlânâ (Rumi), Human-Nature Relationship, Society and Humanity, Concept of Humanity

MEVLÂNÂ VE DÖNEMİNDE İNSAN VE TOPLUM ÜZERİNE DÜŞÜNCELERİ

Öz: Bu makale, Mevlânâ'nın (Rumi) yaşadığı dönemde insan ve toplum üzerine düşüncelerini incelemektedir. Onun felsefi ve tasavvufî öğretilerini ele alarak, insan doğasına, birey-toplum ilişkisine ve birlik ile sevgi kavramına dair görüşlerini irdelemektedir. Mevlânâ'nın özellikle Dîvân-ı Kebîr ve Mesnevî adlı eserleri, yaşadığı dönemde insanlığın karşı karşıya olduğu zorluklara derin bir anlayışla yaklaşırken, bireysel ve toplumsal ayrımlıkları aşmanın yollarına dair zamana meydan okuyan bir bilgelik sunar. Onun öz farkındalık, merhamet ve manevi bağa yaptığı vurgu, insanın varoluşuna dair önemli iç görüşler sağlamaktadır ve günümüzde de toplumsal uyum ve kişisel gelişim üzerine yapılan tartışmalarda geçerliliğini korumaktadır. Bu makale, Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi'nin özellikle insan ve toplum ilişkilerine dair derin fikirlerini ele almaktadır. Makalede Mevlânâ'nın insanın içsel yolculuğu, kendini keşfetme süreci ve sevgi arayışına dair öğretileri vurgulanmaktadır. Ona göre insanın en yüce amacı, Allah'a yakınlaşmak ve manevi olgunluğa erişmektir. Mevlânâ, insanlar arası ilişkilerde hoşgörü, sevgi ve anlayış ilkelerini savunmuş; toplumun gelişimini, bireyin içsel dönüşümünden geçtiğini belirtmiştir. Ayrıca toplumsal uyumun sağlanabilmesi için bireylerin benliklerinden arınmaları ve daha derin manevi bağlar kurmaları gerektiğini vurgulamıştır. Bu bağlamda makale, Mevlânâ'nın öğretilerinin evrensel ve zamansız bir değer taşıdığını ve modern toplum için hâlâ anlamlı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mevlânâ (Rumi), İnsan-Doğa İlişkisi, Toplum ve İnsanlık, İnsanlık Kavramı

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Introduction

Mewlânâ (Rumi), the XIIIth-century Persian poet philosopher, and mystic, is one of the most influential figures in the history of spiritual thought and literature. Living in a period of significant social, political, and cultural upheaval, particularly during the decline of the Seljuk Empire and the invasions of the Mongols Mewlânâ's teachings provided a beacon of hope and wisdom. His deep reflections on humanity and society have not only impacted the Islamic world but have resonated universally, making him one of the most celebrated figures of all time.

The 13th century, marked by wars, instability, and the constant shifting of political powers, was a turbulent era that shaped the lives of individuals and societies. For Rumi, this was a period where the human soul was in need of healing, and society was fractured by division, conflict, and misunderstanding. His response to this crisis was not one of violence or rebellion, but of love, unity, and spiritual awakening. His works, most notably the *Masnavi* and *Divan-e-Kabir*, reflect both his personal spiritual journey and his deep concern for the societal challenges of his time.

Through his teachings, Rumi explored the essence of human nature, emphasizing that true fulfillment is found in transcending individual desires and connecting with the collective soul of humanity. He saw the human experience as a journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth, where love and compassion serve as bridges between individuals and society. Rumi believed that societal harmony could be achieved through mutual understanding, tolerance, and the recognition of a shared humanity, rather than through force or conflict.

This article delves into Rumi's thoughts on humanity and society, considering how his spiritual and philosophical views were shaped by the challenges of his era. We will explore how his messages of love, unity, and self-awareness not only addressed the societal concerns of the XIIIth century but continue to offer valuable lessons for modern society. In examining Rumi's reflections on human nature and the relationship between individuals and the broader community, we will gain insight into the relevance of his teachings in today's world, where many of the same issues persist.

1. The Historical and Cultural Setting of His Life

Rumi, as is well known, was born in the city of Balkh, a major center of culture and learning that had produced prominent Sufi figures since the 9th century and was one of the main centers of Malâmâti Sufism. He lived there until the age of five. "However, Rumi primarily developed his Sufi character and philosophy in Anatolia. Although he spent his childhood in Balkh, the education he received through his father cannot be considered separate from the dominant cultural atmosphere of Balkh, which was shaped by the synthesis of Turkish, Persian, and Arab cultural currents that emerged in the 6th and 8th centuries. In terms of his intellectual development, the existing sufi movements in Anatolia at the time must have had a significant influence on him. During this period, Sufi currents such as the teachings of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi and Afifeddin Tilmisânî from Andalusia and North Africa, as well as Suhrawardiyya, Vefa'iyya, Cavlaki (Kalenderî), and schools like Kubrawiyya, Yeseviyya, and Haydariyya, which were primarily based in Central Asia, Iran, and particularly Khorasan, had a widespread impact (Esin, 1973, 49; Ocak, 1996a, 52).

The environment in which he lived helped him become acquainted with various religious systems such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Sufism. He was influenced by legal frameworks such as *fiqh*, which aimed to resolve conflicts among urban intellectual groups. He observed the psychological exhaustion caused by the fear and insecurity induced by Mongol invasions and the Crusades, as well as the deterioration in the personalities of both Muslims and Christians. In 13th century Anatolia, the authority that the Seljuk State sought to establish was, in a sense, one of the reasons why various Sufi movements directed their attention to this region. Before the development of madrasa institutions in Anatolia to meet its own needs, the demand for scholars, judges, and religious experts was met by scholars from other Islamic countries, particularly Iran and Khorasan. A large number of Sufi sheikhs also came from these regions.

This situation had profound effects on the Muslim Turkish life in Anatolia, shaping it in significant ways (Günay & Güngör, 1997, 66; Akdağ, 1995, 87).

During this time, the activities of the Kalenderi, Haydari, and Vefa'iyya in the nomadic Turkoman tribes helped establish the foundations of a form of folk Sufism enriched with pre-Islamic belief motifs. On the other hand, the idea of Unity of Being (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*), which philosophically added depth to the mysticism rooted in city centers, quickly permeated everyday life. Ibn 'Arabi had already introduced the systematic symbolism of Unity of Being in the early 13th century, in a cultural geography that included cities such as Konya, Kayseri, Sivas, Erzurum, and Malatya. His successor, Sadr al-Dīn Qunawī, grounded this philosophical structure ontologically, within the limits of reason. Sadr al-Dīn Qunawī metaphysical symbolism developed parallel to Rumi's metaphorical world, which was based on love and spiritual ecstasy. This process left behind a rich symbolism of words, writing, and rituals in the Sufi culture that developed in Anatolia (Ocak, 1996a, 54-55; Uzluk, 1997, 49-54; Ülken, 1973, 61).

In this context, it is possible to say that, within Turkish Islam in Anatolia, the religious aristocracies, with their claims and passions, began to emerge as influential figures. On the surface, the Turkish religious life in Anatolia, which remained strictly tied to traditional beliefs and customs and was characterized by tolerance, gradually shifted to a form where Persian-influenced Islam became more dominant, especially in urban areas. Additionally, this led to the development of a third form, which was primarily based on theology, jurisprudence, and Sunni Sufism in the madrasa tradition. It should be noted that there is a general consensus that the Seljuk tradition in Anatolia fostered a wide tolerance rather than religious fanaticism and extremism. The early Turkish urban communities, formed in a heterogeneous environment, lived in relative harmony with other social and religious groups, thanks to this broad religious tolerance. Theologically charged discussions and meetings between Islamic scholars and Christian clergy were common in the cities of Anatolia, reflecting the dual cultural structure of these urban centers (Ülken, 1973, 59; Günay & Güngör, 1997, 63-66; Akdağ, 1995, 78).

In this socio-cultural environment of Anatolia, Rumi shaped his thoughts within an atmosphere where the formal and structural inclination of madrasa education was gaining strength on one side, and the Seljuk tradition of tolerance on the other. During his time, Rumi addressed the people of Anatolia, suffering greatly under the pressure of Mongol invasions, with a message that soothed the troubled hearts, providing a tranquility that the madrasa could not offer. In a way, he responded to the spiritual need for unity during this extraordinary period. The XIIIth century in Anatolia was a time when many great sheikhs, dervishes, and religious figures emerged, and it is evident that this development was connected not only to religious factors but also to the historical, political, and economic conditions of the period. The soothing guidance of Sufism and the *tariqas*, in contrast to the social pessimism, chaos, and political and economic collapse caused by the Mongol pressure, gave a distinct meaning to Rumi's role and thoughts in the religious life and history of Anatolia (Lewis, 1991, 66; Uzluk, 1997, 79; Taneri, 1987, 54).

In particular, in large cities, Sufism and the *tariqas* served as a kind of buffer mechanism, promoting ideals based on character, tolerance, and virtue to those who lacked higher education, in contrast to the formal education offered by the madrasas. In this context, institutions such as *zaviyes*, *khans*, *ribats*, and other structures played a role in facilitating social transitions, providing a way for powerless and unemployed segments of the population to integrate into the broader social process. Rumi's ideas contributed positively to the stability of the social structure in this way (Lewis, 1991, 91-93).

In Turkish religious history, while more orthodox *tariqas* like the Qadiri, Halveti, and Naqshbandi maintained strong relations with various folk groups and social classes, the Bektashis and particularly the Mevlevi were considered more flexible and tolerant, integrating older Turkish beliefs with Christian pagan practices. Both sects played significant roles in the Ottoman Empire. The Mevlevi were a more urban-centered order that developed in Anatolian cities, with important branches in regions such as Thessaloniki in Rumelia. In particular, the

people who felt disconnected from Sunni Islam found guidance and support in the tariqas and their dervish leaders (Taneri, 1987, 66).

Although Rumi's thoughts were influenced by the Sufi movements in different regions of the Islamic world, they cannot be separated from the dominant motifs specific to Anatolian Turkish culture. In his works, he frequently referred to Turkish customs and traditions. Under the influence of Central Asian and Iranian literature, Rumi primarily formed his understanding and approach on this foundational ground. On one hand, he was influenced by the Sufi understanding of figures like Necmüddin Kübra and his father Bahaeddin Veled, and on the other hand, by the mystical literature of poets like Feridüddin Attar and Hâkim Senai. Through his travels across different parts of the Islamic world over the course of twenty years, Rumi gathered a wide range of cultural knowledge, but it was in Anatolia that this knowledge manifested fully. Thus, Rumi, bridging two civilizations and two kinds of wisdom through Arabic, Persian, and Greek languages, became a bridge between Islamic and Greek civilizations (Ocak, 1996b, 58-60; Çelebi, 1957, 91).

It is impossible to fully understand Rumi's thoughts without considering the political, economic, and social upheavals in XIIIth century Anatolia, the struggles between the Seljuk state and the Mongols, and the reactions and struggles these generated in the inner worlds of people. Rumi personally experienced the difficulties of the period, from the Mongol rule in the 1240s until his death in 1273, observing the effects on both the administrative circles and daily life. These events deeply affected his inner world and enabled him to empathize with the joys and sorrows of the people he interacted with daily.

Rumi's life in a heterogeneous environment, where different religions and nations coexisted, created a meaningful interaction with the tolerant approach to religion he shaped. His understanding of religion, based on tolerance, made room for new and different interpretations among the urbanizing Turkish migrants in Anatolia. While the Turks had accepted Islam nearly a century before migrating to Anatolia, it is known that their understanding of Islam was largely influenced by their earlier religious beliefs, thus forming new forms and practices. Figures like Baba Ishak, Barak Baba, Sâri Saltuk, and other Turkoman leaders were perceived not merely as Muslim sheikhs but also as continuations of ancient Turkish shamanistic traditions. However, to try to explain Rumi solely through the social conditions of his time would underestimate his profound impact and fail to recognize the multifaceted approach required by scientific inquiry (Ocak, 1996b, 66; Turan, 1988, 104).

2. Rumi's Understanding of Human Nature and Society

In the intellectual universe of Rumi, the central position of human beings and love for humanity forms the basis of his understanding of religion, establishing a foundation of tolerance that leaves no room for comparison with others in his era. Starting from the unique and privileged position of human beings among creatures, Rumi does not emphasize the differences in thought and understanding of religion among people. According to him, the differences in views and understandings between people stem from our inability to perceive the whole (Mevlâna, III, 1990, 96; Uzluk, 1997, 78). "Divisions are in the way of travel, not in the truth of the path" (Mevlâna, I, 1990, 104). "Every prophet has a path; every saint has a method. But since they all lead people to God, they are one" (Mevlâna, I, 1990, 61). Therefore, in his understanding of religion, Rumi reflects a universality that is not confined to the beliefs and dogmas of a particular community. Even during a time of great suffering under the Crusades and Mongol pressures, when the rhetoric of "othering" increased hatred and violence, Rumi's teachings promoted the equality of all humans regardless of their religion, language, or race. In this sense, he advocated tolerance towards other faiths and communities. The unifying identity recognized by different segments of society is evident in the visits and interest from leaders and followers of various religions. Rumi's approach to living together with the "other" marks a level that remains difficult to reach even much later. This uniqueness in his approach is also why he presented his

thoughts within a discourse that did not ignore historical and social differences and realities (Eflaki, I, 1989, 66; Mevlâna, II, 1990, 52; Mevlâna, III, 1990, 61).

On the other hand, Rumi's interpretation of the division of labour as a result of divine will — “*God assigns everyone their task*” — signifies the community's power and determinism, but this is also a shared concept among classical Islamic thinkers. Just as in the individual-society relationship, where there is a tendency to elevate the community, there is also the influence of binding judgments that view “*community as mercy, division as torment.*” In his works, Rumi comments on the concepts of human beings and society in a way that connects them with the divine, in line with his general approach and understanding. Despite being physically equal to other creatures, humans are considered to be in the same category as angels in terms of thought and spirit. Since God created humans in His image, some of our characteristics reflect His divine attributes. Rumi believes that humans, seen as a copy of the universe, do not originate from the sensory world; they have passed through various stages to reach this life and possess boundless potentials here. In the subconscious, humans have the potential for all types of existence. A human being, initially created weak, can reach tremendous power and superiority when they receive the proper education and upbringing suited to their nature. He believes that every person is created as a great being with all potentials written inside them, but personal veils such as desires and various preoccupations hinder them from discovering this potential. He views thinking (meditation/zikr/contemplation) and the resulting transcendental state of mind as the source of human behaviour (Nicholson, 1978, 69; Mevlâna, I, 1990, 42; Çelebi, 2001, 67-68; Mevlâna, II, 1990, 59; Mevlâna, IV, 1990, 38; Eflaki, II, 1989, 71).

Rumi sought to realize this level of existence with a group of followers in Konya. Thus, he emphasized societal interaction and sincerity as a way to gain the experience of behavioural purity. Rather than focusing on the behaviour itself, he concentrated on the motivations behind it. He stressed eliminating undesirable thoughts from consciousness and controlling desires arising from the self. Despite the classical Sunni approach's negative stance, Rumi did not oppose music, poetry, and the *sema*, and even had his portrait created by Rum artists as gifts for his friends. His inclusion of music and *sema* in rituals reflects a fusion of the deep-rooted music tradition in Anatolia with the legacy of ancient Turkish culture. Rumi's opposition to a dry and formalistic understanding of worship reflects an intellectual orientation that criticizes worship without spirit. However, this attitude did not affect his appeal to the people, as he was embraced by both scholars and statesmen, as well as craftsmen, artisans, and rural people, creating a broad circle of followers (Aresteh, 2000, 71, s. 74; Eflaki, III, 1989, 66; Baykara, 1998, 48-53).

Additionally, in Rumi's symbolic language, certain negative traits like “disloyalty” were associated with rural people. As a settlement unit, “*The village is the grave of reason. Staying in the village is like sitting in a grave for the wise.*” Rumi, by drawing parallels between the style of settlement and the development of thought, expresses a negative approach to rural life. Later, the reputation of the Mevlevi Order among urban elite circles reflects the connection between his approach and these thoughts. On the other hand, Rumi, although he admired the world-renouncing attitude of Shams-i Tabrizi, stemming from the philosophy of *melâmat* (blame), did not approve of the distorted, coarse version of this attitude seen in popular Kalenderism. It can be said that he distanced himself from the Turkmen sheikhs belonging to the Babai movement, not only because of their oppositional stance to the central government, with whom he had good relations, but also due to their lifestyle and understanding of Sufism. He also looked coldly upon the Rifai dervishes, who had fled to Anatolia from the Mongol invasion. Growing up in a family that embraced the book-based understanding of religion and had close ties with the ruling elite, Rumi naturally found it difficult to align himself with the style of these dervishes who exhibited their spirituality in public through extreme displays of piercing their bodies with needles and playing with scorpions and snakes (Eflaki, I, 1989, 69; Günay-Güngör, 1997, 48; Ülken, 1973, 66; Mevlâna, III, 1990, 37).

At least in his own practice, he stood against the attitude of “*abandoning social life and disconnecting from society,*” a kind of alienation that some Sufis of his time exhibited. His

understanding of religion, shaped by poetry, music, and sema, naturally attracted the attention of urban people. Despite his enthusiastic and emotional states, Rumi attached great importance to a life shaped by art. Thus, he became a representative of a religious interpretation that influenced urban circles, in contrast to the unrestrained popular Sufism widespread in rural Anatolia. Indeed, the Mevlevi lodges, which later concretized this understanding, attracted attention for their potential to cater to the aesthetic inclinations of the urban elite, such as musicians, poets, and calligraphers (Mevlâna, III, 1990, 41; Schimmel, 1999, 9; Ocak, 1996a, 66).

Although one of the greatest figures in Sufi history, Rumi's dynamic and positive outlook, differing from the passive and negative stance of Sufi understandings that caused suffering in the purification of the self, has had lasting effects not only in his own time but also in later periods. In this sense, he distanced himself from Sufism that encouraged negative tendencies like apathy, passivity, and fatalism, and rejected the traditional theological understanding that promotes such tendencies. He argued that the monotheistic concept of God should not prevent human development but serve as a measure for directing one's behaviour. By placing humanity at the centre, he elevated religious and spiritual experience above the formalism of religious authorities. Rumi's interpretation of Sufism thus reflects a universal path to shaping human beings rather than merely making them social entities. His Sufism emphasizes liberation from instinctual behaviours, the use of reason for practical purposes, and the benefit of pursuing one's true self as a transcendental human (Çelebi, 1957, 62, Schimmel, 1999, 12, Ocak, 1996a, 66, Aresteh, 2000, 87).

3. Conclusion

Rumi's understanding of humanity, society, and religion offers a profound and enduring perspective that transcends time and geography. His worldview, centred on the primacy of love for humanity and the inherent value of each individual, laid the foundation for an inclusive and tolerant approach to religion, one that defied the limitations of dogma and sectarianism. This universal perspective, which sees human beings as inherently equal regardless of religion, race, or background, was particularly striking in an era marred by the violence of the Crusades and the Mongol invasions. Rumi's emphasis on human potential, transcendent spiritual development, and the interconnectedness of all beings formed the core of his teachings, fostering an environment of mutual respect and tolerance that was ahead of his time.

His unique interpretation of social relations—*viewing the community not as a mere collection of individuals but as a collective entity bound by divine will*—illustrates a dynamic model of society. Rumi's resistance to the disjointedness and superficiality of formal religious practices, his rejection of isolationist tendencies within Sufism, and his championing of a balanced, engaged approach to life set him apart as an intellectual and spiritual figure. His works, deeply rooted in the socio-political realities of 13th-century Anatolia, were, however, not solely a reflection of his immediate historical context, they presented a vision that transcended the particularities of his time, resonating with both urban and rural populations, intellectuals, and spiritual seekers alike.

Rumi's influence on the spiritual and intellectual landscape of Anatolia is undeniable, and his ability to address the spiritual and social needs of diverse communities—*whether the urban elite or rural folk*—reveals the universal appeal of his thought. His view of the human being as a reflection of the universe, capable of limitless potential, and his insistence on inner purification through practices like meditation, music, and *sema*, provided a holistic framework for both individual transformation and societal cohesion.

In conclusion, Rumi's thoughts on human beings and society remain a testament to the relevance of his teachings in fostering unity, understanding, and tolerance in a world often divided by difference. His approach, rooted in love, spiritual awareness, and human dignity, provides valuable insights for contemporary discourse on social harmony, the role of religion in public life, and the potential for human beings to transcend their limitations. Rumi's enduring legacy lies in his capacity to inspire individuals and communities to embrace the deeper truths of

existence, inviting them to live harmoniously in a world that, despite its differences, remains fundamentally united in the pursuit of love and truth.

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