

THE CONCEPT OF LOVE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAULANA RUMI AND SHAH ABDUL LATIF BHITTAI

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Abstract

In this comparative study, it is tried to explore some parallels of the concept of love between two great mystic poets, i.e. Maulana Rumi and Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. Instead of several differences in their perspectives like, homeland, language and bringing up in different social environment and backgrounds, there is clear manifestation of the similarities in their philosophies. Through this research it can be seen that Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai seems as a spiritual disciple of Maulana Rumi; consequently this vision has been the main focus of investigation.

Keywords: Concept of love, Maulana Rumi, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

Introduction

Maulana Rumi and Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai: Brief Introduction

The greatest Persian poet Jalau'din Rumi was born on 30th of September 1207 in Balkh, today's Afghanistan, and died on 17th December 1273 in Konya, present-day Turkey, where he spent years of his precious life. His body was laid to rest beside his father and a splendid shrine was erected there which attracts a large number of visitors, Muslims and non-Muslims, from all parts of the world every year.

The dance of Whirling Dervishes called 'Sama' is a part of the inspiration of Rumi which today is known as a part of the Turkish tradition and culture. The ritual was registered in the list of UNESCO's World Intangible Heritage few years ago. Sama represents a mystical journey of man's spiritual ascent through mind and love to a state of 'perfection'.

Rumi composed his poetry in Persian language and his works are widely read in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan where Persian is spoken widely. Rumi's poetry has been translated in all the major languages of the world. He lived most of his life under the Seljuk Empire.

Rumi started his career as a preacher and theologian but after meeting Shams-e-Tabrizi, he became a mystic or Sufi. Rumi composed the largest corpus of lyric poetry in the Persian language, amounting to 40,000 verses. Jalal-u-din Rumi was more than just a poet. He was a perfect master. His poems were more down to earth than the great master poet Hafiz, thus have been easier to translation; being more digested into English vocabulary. The popularity of his poetry has spread in the West because of its heart-felt themes of love-beloved mysticism, and its spiritual joy which seems to originate even from the most distorted versions in English.

Rumi has been hailed by the Western scholars as the greatest mystic poet of all times. The translation of his poems into English language became the best-seller book in the US in 1997. Ever since, the book of Rumi's poetry has always been among the best selling books in the United States. (www.chnpress.com/new).

Rumi's life was greatly influenced by two persons. One of them is the stimulator of Rumi's spiritual and poetic creation, Hazrat Shamas Tabriz. In him, Rumi found the perfect image of the Divine Beloved; he was seeking since long. He lived along with his beloved Shamas Tabriz at his house for a year or two but spiritually remained inseparable. Due to that illustrious personage Rumi composed his *Diwan-I-Shamas-Tabrizi* (lyrics of Shams of Tabriz) and dedicated to the memory of his alter ego (Nicholson, 1998). Another personage who influenced Rumi after Shams Tabriz was Husamu'l-Din ibn Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Akhi Turk, whose name he mystically associated with his greatest work, the celebrated *Mathnavi* (epic poem). He calls the *Mathnavi* "the book of Husam" (Ibid).

On the other hand, one of the greatest mystic poets, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai was born at Hala Haveli, a village in Hyderabad district, Sindh, Pakistan in 1649, A.D. His father Shah Habib was also renowned poet and his great grandfather, Shah Karim Bulri Waro was also eminent poet of Sindhi language and is called "the morning star of Sindhi poetry". Shah Latif inherited the religious traditions from his family as they observed the prayers and fasting regularly and he himself was embedded in these traditions. Shah Latif was contemplative one since his childhood. He spent most of his life in isolation and liked to stay at desert. After coming to maturity, he spent most of his time on the mound of sand thence he came to be called "*Bhittai*" (one who lives on the mounds of sand) and to this day he is famous as Bhittai.

He adopted all kinds of tracts in the search of truth and reality. He accompanied, like Siddhartha of Hermann Hesse, ascetics (yogis) for years and wandered all parts of the sub-continent. Not only with them but also with his disciples, he wandered to observe the nature and beauty of the creation. He visited different places and met several mystics, poets, and saints while traveling. Because of that close observation of the things, he became able to depict the scenes of nature in his poetry beautifully. It is believed fact that Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai always kept three books with him e.g. Holy Qur'an, Mathnavi of Maulana Rumi and Shah Karim jo Risalo. That is why, the influence of these books can be found anywhere in his poetry.

This great mystic poet of Sindh died in 1752 and is buried at the Bhit, near Hyderabad Sindh. Every year his "Urs" is celebrated that attracts thousands of people from all over the country. Every night the "Mehfil e Sama" (the function of music) is held at his shrine in Bhit Shah. Interestingly, since the death of the great mystic poet no single night went without the *sama* up to this day.

Love Concepts of Maulana Rumi and Shah Latif:

The concept of love is central to almost all the Sufi, mystic poets. Love is the instinct or basic expression of one's inner self. Through this expression of love humanity came to live in coherence and accepted each other in the system of co-existence because for Sufis there is no distinction of creed, caste; they believe only in love. Rumi expresses these feelings in the following lines:

*Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, idolater, worshipper of fire,
Come, and come yet again,
Ours is not a caravan of despair.*

(Cited in Abdul Hakim, 1977).

Inviting towards the love, Shah Latif expresses the same view:

هلو هلو ڪاڪ تڙين، جتي نينهن اچل،
نڪا جهل نه پل، سيڪو پسي پرين ڪي.
Halo, Halo, Kak Taren, Jity Neenh Uchhal,
Na Ka Jhal, Na Pal, Sabhko Pase Preen Khe.

(Come, Come on towards Kaak place, where there is pull of love; and there is no prohibition (discrimination on any basis) all may have opportunity to love, to hope).

Above principle of unrestricted love is very common with both the mystic poets. It looks like a religion in their peculiar treatment of the love. Both are paradoxically embedded in the religion of love. Apart from the love there is no religion, no creed and no attachment for them. If somebody has 'love' that is all he/she needs. Rumi says:

He whom destiny places among the group of lovers becomes free mosque and temple. He whose mode of life is annihilation and Faqr (detachment from the world) has neither relation nor belief nor gnosis nor religion.

(Cited in Abdul Hakim, 1977).

Same ideas are expressed by Shah Latif in the following words:

روزا ۽ نمازون، ايءَ پڻ چڱو ڪم،
 او ڪو ٻيو فهم، جنهن سان پسجي پرين ڪي.
 Roza ain nimazoon aee pun chago kam
 Ao ko byo fahm, jenh san pasjy preen khe.

(Fasting and offering prayers (religious obligations) are good works, but those are not the ultimate paths of seeking lover, that is another way, which is love).

In the above-quoted examples, Rumi and Latif stand in almost complete agreement. One says that 'group of lovers becomes free from mosques and temple' and the other says that 'religious and other rituals are not the ultimate ways for the lover, thus lover can be had without religion or creed'. At this point Latif seems admitting the influence of Rumi in that concept and at many places Latif admits it too.

Love as a Cause of Creation

Sufis/mystics are of the opinion that this universe is created because of love, which stimulated the Creator to create this universe. They refer it to the love of God with His beloved Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h). Maulana Rumi describes it in a form of God's discourse with love as:

God said to love, "If not thy duty, how should I pay attention to the mirror of an existence".

Here God directly addresses the love saying that without you I had not created anything. Here Rumi is expressing it directly, while, Shah Latif describes it in a somewhat different way:

“الست بربكم” جڏهن ڪن ٻيو،
 “قالوبلي” قلب سين، تڏهن تن چيو،
 تنهن وير ڪيوم، وچن وير هيچن سين.
 Alast be rabakum, jadenhen kan payom
 Kalobala kalab sen tadhen tit chayom
 Tenh weer kayom, wachan wehichan seen.

(‘Am I not your Creator?’ When I heard by my ears at the time of birth, “yes you are” said my heart and at that moment I promised to love my fellow being).

In the above lines Shah attaches the cause of creation with the love of humans which, in his view, is the true love to God. Furthermore, Rumi calls 'love' as mirror in the following words:

The world is like a mirror, displaying love's perfection. O friend who has ever seen a part greater than its whole.

Love is never separate from its beloved and both are integral part of each other. And God has created this love to see Himself, His own reflection in mirror. Shah Latif affirms this statement as:

Panhe passé pan khe, panhe mehboob
 Oanhe khalaqe khoob, panhe talib tin jo.
 پاڻهي پسي پاڻ ڪي، پاڻهي محبوب،
 پاڻهي لقي خوب پاڻهي طالب تن جو.

(He sees Himself, He Himself is Beloved. He created the love and beauty and Himself is Lover of that).

At another place Shah Latif says that the Creator and the creation are actually same as in the above lines Maulana Rumi says, following verse of Shah Latif seem as reflection of Rumi's saying. Shah says:

پڙاڻو ۽ سڌ، ور وائي جي لهين،
هئا اڳي گڏ، بتڻ ۾ به ٿيا.

Parado ain sad, war waye ji lahin,
Hua aggai gadd, buddhan me ba thiya.

(Sound and echo, if you recognize well, are same, Lover and Beloved were same but in obvious make out became two, separate, but actually not.)

They find much harmony in views to establish the eternal concept of love in different tones and temperaments of discourse, but their basic objective seems to support each other, though unintentional and natural. In this way, we can find many similarities in the views of the both mystic poets regarding the creation of this universe and the phenomenon of love with God, the Creator.

Ishq-e-Haqiqi (Love of God / Infinitive Love)

In the realm of love, in the mystic traditions, it is a well-accepted fact that every kind of love ultimately leads and should lead to the love of God that is said to be the infinitive love, which in the Eastern tradition is known as *Ishq-e-Haqiqi*. This kind of philosophy is found with both the mystic poets. In this context, for Rumi the love of God is a fire that facilitates him, he says:

His (God's) love is a fire that consumes difficulties: the daylight sweeps away every phantom.

Shah Latif also calls the love of God as fire;

آري عشق جي اندر آڳ ٻري.
Aari ji ishq ji andar aag bari

(In God's love there is fire inside me).

Moulana Rumi, in his treatment of God's love, does not take one side of human love to God but the love is equal from both sides. In other words, if a man is in love with the God, the God also seeks out him. This phenomenon is exquisitely described in Mathnavi 111, as Universal Love:

*When love of God waxes in thy heart,
Beyond any doubt God hath love for thee.*

This is the classical mystic treatment of the love, in which the love is not one-sided but from both the sides. This affirmation is also confirmed by Shah Latif as:

تو تئين جي تات، تن پڻ آهي تنهنجي،
هٿ کاتي ڳڙ وات، پچڻ پر پرين جي.

To tineen ji taat, tin pun aahi tuhnji,
Hath kati gurr waat, puchhan par preen ji.

(For whom you have desire/love, he has same thing for you; having knife in hand and sweet in mouth is the way to ask for love.)

It is maintained that if someone has desire/love for someone else who shares the same degree of desire, it means that there is not a one way desire on this path. Furthermore, Moulana Rumi propounds that the Ishq-e-Haqiqi or the Real Love is salvation from all kinds of difficulties and similarly, for Latif, it is a burning of self and then there is no pain, means self annihilation. But, in the following lines, Shah Latif expresses the same feelings as that of Rumi:

پسي پهر پنھون جي، نهن سين نيٺ ٺريام،
گوندر وسريام، سکن شاخون مڪيون.

Passi pehr punhoon jo, nuhn sen nenn tharyam,
Goondar wisryam, sukhan shakhhoon mukkyun.

(Having beloved's (God's) kindness, I came in comfort completely from nails of hands to eyes, all the difficulties went away and pleasure grew like plants).

So, for both the great poets, the love of God is the symbol of comfort, happiness, eternal pleasure and solution of all the difficulties. Furthermore, Rumi, the mystic, expresses his 'ishaq-e-haqiqi' as sacrificing his soul and abandoning himself:

*His un-sweetness is sweet to my soul: may my soul be
Sacrificed to the Beloved who grieves my heart!
I am in love with grief and pain for the sake of pleasing
My peerless king*

The concept of self sacrifice is unique with the mystical philosophy of the sub-continent, where, the sufis see their own image in sacrifices and it is the test of the lover for them. Not only this, but, also in the above lines, Rumi describes 'un-sweetness as sweet' and the same thing is described by Latif:

عاشق معشوقن جو، وٺي ويهه دڪان،
پئيج پيش پريان جي، پٽي وجهي پاڻ،
ته تون تنين ساڻ، سدا رهم سرخرو.
Aashiq! Mashoqan jo, wathhi weh dukhan,
Paij pesh piryan ji, patti wijhee paan,
Ta toon taneen saan, sada raham surkharu.

Here, for Shah Latif, only becoming a lover is not sufficient but it is the first step towards the success in becoming one with the beloved, but, when the lover sacrifices himself without any delay he attains eternal success. In another sense, Rumi's 'un-sweetness is sweet' is exactly the same with Shah Latif and seems as if Latif has expressed it in his own words:

محبوبن جي ملڪ جي، ڪانهي ڪڙائي،
اهي مٺائي، چڪين جي چيٽ ڪري.
Mehboob je mulk ji, kanhe karrai,
Aahe mithhai, chakhen je chet kare.

(There is no bitterness (un-sweetness) at the beloved's side, all is sweet if you taste from your affectionate desire)

Thus, first condition for both the poets is love. Then, all the difficulties, all the sorrows and all the unsweetnesses are nothing but just steps towards the real destination, the love of God. In that destination, someone is lost, there is no "I" nor "we" but "Beloved". Rumi says:

*O Thou Whose soul is free from "we" and "I", O thou
Who art the essence of the spirit in men and women,
When men and women one, Thou art One.*

(Ibid)

As it is well accepted in Eastern mysticism that self-annihilation is the attainment of beloved or love similar evidences are teeming at both the mystic poets. Thus at them there is no ego, no self praise for meeting the real beloved; one needs to go beyond the ego and the self; that is the message of the mystics. Latif also shares the same views:

سٽي ويهه ڪنن سين، ورائيج مه وري،
هادي جي هدايت جي، اهي ايءُ ڳري،
تن سڳي ساه سري، جنم، ماريا نفس ماڻ سين.
Sunni wenn kannan seen, warij ma wary,
Hadi ji hidayat ji, aahi aea garri,
Tan sagi saah sari, jin maryi nafas math seen.

(Whatever you listen, don't reply ever, this is Beloved's (God's instruction), so important, along with the whole body and soul, kill your ownness, "I" and "me").

In these lines, there is the concept of negation, no-"self" before the love of Beloved (God) and everything is sacrificed and then there comes the real love or "Ishq-e-Haqiqi".

At most places, it is observed that Shah Latif seems to be Moulana Rumi's spiritual disciple. He follows Moulana Rumi's philosophy ardently and proudly.

Mijazi Ishaq (Worldly Love)

On the perspective of manifestation of worldly love or "*Mijazi Ishaq*", both the mystic poets, again, seem to belong to the same school of thought. When one praises his beloved ardently and ambitiously, the other justifies it from a different angle. One lays basis of that love, the other keeps building over it magnificently. Rumi says in his worldly love or '*Mijazi Ishaq*':

They are in each other along.

When there is mention of love story, the lover listens very carefully that every detail may be understood and after finding that thing the lover starts to search the beloved. It is not known by the lover that love is blind, it cannot see, and the beloved is his part, in his own existence not elsewhere. So, minutely the observation is ascribed, so sensitively is touched the concept of love. By the same way Shah Latif affirms that statement as:

اندر آئينو ڪري، پرين سو پسيج،
گنهي راه رميج، ته مشاهو ماڻين.

Andar aaino kare, preen so paseej,
Inhee rah rameej, ta mushahido manen.

(Make your existence mirror and watch your beloved; in this way you can observe him because 'apart/out of you there is nothing').

According to Shah Latif, it is one's own observation and out of that observation they do not exist. It is love that makes their meetings possible and that is the only way. In this context, Rumi's views are not different from Shah:

*We are mirror as well as face in it
We are tasting the taste this minute
Of eternity. We are pain
And what cures pain, both. We are
The sweet cold water and the jar that pours.
I want to hold you close like a lute,
So we can cry out with loving.
You would rather throw stones at a mirror?*

I am your mirror, and here are the stones.

In the context of above lines, it seems that the lover and beloved are eternal part of each other, they are not detached. One is the image of another and the both can see each other in the mirror. And that perception is the treatment/cure of the pain of love. The pain as defined by Budhha as "Surrom Dukhum Dukhum" (everything is a pain), the same pain is loving but perception of that image/mirror is essential. Shah Latif defines it as:

ڪشي ڪان ڪمان ما، ميان مار م مون،
مون ۾ آهين تون، متان تنهنجو ئي تو کي لڳي.

Kashi kan Kaman man, mian mar ma moon
Moon me aahin toon, matan tuhnjo e to khe lagy.

(Don't withdraw your sword and don't point to murder me, my dear, you resides in me, so you may hit yourself)

Rumi gives it the name of mirror to his/her lover towards which the stone is thrown, the result would be the break down of both as both are made of same substance, while Latif calls it existence towards one points arrow and warns if you throw that arrow to him it will destroy arrower's own existence/being as Rumi says if you can throw the stone at the mirror that would break himself; because it is his own image that is reflected in the mirror. And the image of the love is spotless for both the mystic poets. Rumi says;

The sun is love. The lover,

A speck circling the sun.

Rumi calls the sun as love and lover, yet there are spots around that; thus how can it be like the lover. Shah Latif by the same way addresses the moon instead of the sun as:

چنڊ چوان سج، جي مٺي مور نه پائين،
ڪڏهن اڀرين ٿوڙو، ڪڏهن اڀرين ڳچ،
جو منهن ۾ بري مچ، سو پدم پرين جي نه پڙين

Chand chawan sach, ji mathi moor na bhain,
Kadhen ubhren thoriro, kadhen ubhren gach,
Jo muh me barri mach, so padam pryan ji na paren.

(Moon! If you don't mind I speak truth; sometimes you rise little sometimes much, whatever your full light is that is not equal to the foot of my beloved's shining).

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai clearly defines his beloved's beauty, addressing the moon, because moon is always symbol of beauty in poetry but Shah Latif has found the specks like Rumi found in the sun. In this way, for both the mystic poets, there is nothing as beautiful as their beloved or the loved one.

And while in complete assimilation with loved one there is no need for any exhortation or suggestion from any one because loving the beloved is not only to not return but also to go forward. Rumi describes this feeling very beautifully:

In that quarter where love is increasing (my) pain, Bu Hanifa and Shafi gave no instruction.

At the moment of love, everything is forgotten and all the rules, instructions and suggestions are of no use. They can help no more because the pain of love reaches at the peak. Absolutely that same thing is expressed by Shah Latif:

Mirron khanyanm maas, tab he had halandum hot de

مرون ڪانيم ماس، ته به هڏ هلندم هوت ڏي.

(Even wild beasts may eat my flesh, yet I shall go to my beloved with only bones).

This is very extreme of the concept of love for both the poets. One refuses the suggestions directly whereas, the other declines the fears of the wild creatures and rejects those fears and suggestions indirectly. Both are keen in their search and move towards the love and beloved at any condition.

Love of Humanity

Not only there is ample manifestation of 'Haqiqi Ishaq' and 'Mijazi Ishq', but, several other aspects of love are also there. Both the poets treat them justly and uniquely. Yet, there is a love of mankind apart from other concepts. Rumi treats mankind without any gender discrimination as in the poem "The Love of Woman":

If you rule your wife outwardly, yet inwardly you are ruled by her whom you desire;

This is characteristic of Man: in other animals love is

Lacking, and that shows their inferiority.

On the other hand, Shah Latif like Rumi has given importance to woman without any gender bias. Rumi inculcates the importance of woman quoting tradition from Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h) so that he may make woman equal in love because love is the characteristic of mankind not the animals. And that love is incomplete without woman. And in this direction, Shah Latif prays to God for the whole humanity:

سائينم! سدائين، ڪرين مٿي سنڌ سڪار،

دوست مٿا دلدار، عالم سڀ آباد ڪرين!

Sainm sadain, Karin mathe Sindh sukar,

Dost mitha dildar, aalam sabh abad Karin.

(O God, may you on Sindh

Bestow abundance rare;

Beloved! Let All the world share,

Thy Grace, and fruitful be)

(*Sur Sarang: Monsoon*)

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above discussion regarding the concept of love of the great mystic poet Moulana Rumi and Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, that there are several similarities regarding the concept of love and their philosophy of love. First of all, it is clear that Moulana Rumi was predecessor to Shah Latif who was his successor. Though, there is a difference of centuries yet there is almost the same philosophy and realization of love. Despite these similarities, there are some differences in their narrations too. First of all, Rumi in his treatment of the subjects, takes complete or comprehensive stories of the narrations, whereas, Shah Latif takes some important and most significant events from a story and does not narrate the whole story. Secondly, Rumi's narration is direct and to the point/straightforward dealing with the concepts and stories, whereas, in Shah's poetry, there is an indirect and artistic narration. Rumi describes all the things by himself like a story teller, whereas, Latif takes his characters to describe his feelings and to convey his message. While considering the sources of both the great poets, one can observe that Rumi uses metaphysical sources more than Shah Latif, who takes every example from his native land and folk stories with indigenous symbols. In this context, there is overwhelming religious and scholarly manifestation in Rumi's poetry whereas, Shah Latif has simple and common things for expression. Latif uses two sources very often, firstly Holy Quran and secondly the teachings of Rumi. Rumi too uses Holy Quran as a main source of his philosophy but he also takes advantage of Shariah, like using schools of Hanafi and Shafi, something rare with Shah Latif. Last but not the least, Shah Latif depicts the love of his land that is absent with Rumi and such belongingness with the native land is not quoted. This statement is based on the workshop on Rumi held at the Department of English Language, IIUI, Islamabad. In the seminar, Dr Jawad, while responding to a question said that Rumi did not pay attention on the conditions of fall of Baghdad and the attacks of Mongol on Persia. On the other hand, Shah Latif condemned foreign invasions on Sindh and suggested the locales to fight against them.

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