



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF RUMI WITH REGARD TO THE DOCTRINES OF PANTHEISM AND PANENTHEISM

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: October 17th 2023 Accepted: November 14th 2023 Published: December 20th 2023</p>	<p>Reading Rumi's oeuvre, one could see many trends the gist of which could be absolutely perplexing. Many have argued that his work shows a doctrine which considers God and all his creation as a whole intricate entity, namely they could be formed into one whole which is named the doctrine of pantheism by most scholars of Rumi. His works have been analyzed as the work of someone who considers universe and the surrounding world as totally in and of itself. This paper tries to further analyze this view and argues that this issue can be studied in some different terms, meaning the doctrine of panentheism. This doctrine, on one hand points out that all universe and its beings have been created by God, and on the other hand they all form one entity. Therefore, universe is part of God and at the same time apart from it. Lastly, through this viewpoint, one could thrive to reach the grace of God and pass over this mundane world by setting some steps to reach at the everlasting reality.</p>

Keywords: Pantheism, Panentheism, God, Universe, Doctrine

INTRODUCTION

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, or to put it more simply Rumi, has been and is one of the most controversial poets in the history of Persian literature and in a broader sense the literature of the world, since his books, even after the passage of hundreds of years are still of much significance and subject to debate nowadays. He is generally known as the leading Sufi-poet of his time and the exemplar poet around whose works the model of true Sufism and connection with God has been evolving. But the doctrine of Sufism is not the only state of belief that Rumi has been associated with. There has been much discussion about Rumi's system of thought and its relatedness to the doctrine of Pantheism and most interestingly Panentheism. Ever since the works of Rumi got into the center of the attention of translators and critics and became one of the groundworks of Persian and Islamic mysticism, his poetry was interpreted and untangled from different points of view. It was even to the point that some called him non-Muslim, some indeterminate, and some claimed that he is the lover and follower of all religions. Nonetheless, there are many points that could be made about different trends that Rumi's thought originated from and lead to. This paper will then try to clarify these claims and look at them from a critical standpoint to further elucidate what the gist of Rumi's sayings is.

Discussion

Jalal ad-Din Rumi has long been the subject of much discussion and confabulation up to the 21st century. His books are even in the row of the bestsellers nowadays and they have maintained the unique material that they have been offering readers for hundreds of years. Considering the fact that Rumi has influenced many western philosophers and thinkers, most notably Hegel, it should not be a far cry claim that many of Rumi's translators and interpreters have tried to redefine the foundations of his thoughts on the basis of a new – or to put it more precisely, a western origin. Keeping this in mind, we could understand that why so much dispute rose among different Rumi scholars regarding this matter. But a close reading of Rumi's works and philosophy would inevitably lead to no other place than Islamic thought as William C. Chittick has elaborated on it in his book *The Sufi Doctrine of Rumi*:

"Orientalists commonly speak of the derivation of Sufism from non-Islamic sources is commonly spoken ... But to conclude from this in the manner of many scholars that Sufism gradually came into being under the influence of a foreign tradition or from a hodgepodge of borrowed doctrine is to completely misunderstand its nature, i.e., that in essence it is a metaphysics and means of spiritual realization derived of necessity from the Islamic revelation itself". (15-16)

It should be noted that many of these doubts about the true nature of Rumi's thought rose as a result of one of his poetry. One in which he talks about a change that came into his life. He (Rumi) "admits that he was a pious theologian-ascetic, but something happened to his piety and common sense (mard-e moja 'hid budam, 'a 'qil o

za`hid budam) so that that man "flew away like a bird" (D: 2244)" and it should not be left out that Rumi "refers to Sufis in his poetry in a positive way—as he does other groups, including Christians, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Jews, and even pagans—as part of his universalist philosophy" (Vaziri 21).

Perchance, a suitable topic to discuss at this moment would be to clarify, though briefly, the nature of Sufism that is related to Rumi in its utmost form. One particularly confusing thing about God and the origin of Goodness is that it connotes a place about which one can only be sure by means of deep belief that comes from the heart; "In Persianate Sufism this "place" transcends physical dimensions and is designated by paradoxical terms like *lā-makān*, "no-place," and *nā-kujā-ābād*, the "land of no-where" (Tourage 63). To describe this place, Rumi has actually used "the term *dhāt*, meaning "essence," instead of the term "nafs, meaning "self," (Tourage 135). And it is precisely at this point that the role of heart and the meaning attached to it comes into light:

"One particularly important symbol of Sufism, repeated three times in the tale of the prankster, and linked to the term "essence," is the "heart" (V:3335, 36, 37). Being touched in the heart, as in the case of Pharaoh's magicians (V:3337), is associated with an intimation of the essence". (136)

So we can deduce this point from this reasoning that we could associate the connotations of Sufism with the heart. What is interesting about this is that, traditionally thinking, Sufism was mostly associated with our thoughts and we held to be true on the basis of our reflections; but in this way, we could actually find some connections with our emotions just as

in the tale of the Sufi who, in contemplative posture in a garden, is reproached by an ignorant man for being asleep instead of looking at the signs of God (IV:1359–1373). The Sufi answers: "The signs of God are (within) the heart, . . . only the signs of the signs are that which is without". (78)

Hence, we could get to the idea that we should look for the signs of God within ourselves. Of course, this could be asked that what is the origin of this signs? Is there a direct relationship between these sign and God himself? Or is there something in between?

In the doctrine of the Sufis, the creation of the universe and consequential sign are actually represented as some indicators/signs of the characteristics or attributes of God himself as "expressed by the famous hadith qudsī9: "I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the world." (Chittick 31). Rumi, as Chittick has pointed out refers to this hadith quite often, i.e. in the Diwan:

David said: "O Lord, since thou hast no need of us,
Say, then, what wisdom was there in creating the two worlds?"
God said to him: "O temporal man, I was a hidden treasure;
I sought that that treasure of lovingkindness and bounty should be revealed
..." (Diwan, p. 15). (Chittick 32)

Some scholars have even expanded this discussion further and have tried to make a connection between Sufism and the doctrine of Neoplatonism. In fact, these two doctrines share some similar traits that could be of some use for the discussion. "Many Sufis have conceived the universe in Neoplatonic fashion as a series of emanations from God, the One Real Being" (Iqbal 195). Therefore, God could be considered as the center from which divine signs and elements flow into the world. This point should be also mentioned that "The Neo-Platonists believed in the Supreme Good as the Source of all things. Self-existent, it generated from itself. Creation was the reflection of its own Being. Nature, therefore, was permeated with God" (Davis 12). Hence, it can be understood that we – including all the elements of the universe whether animate or not – are in fact the result of the image of the Being of God Himself and that these attributes of God could be found in everything by deep contemplation; a contemplation that Rumi searched most notoriously in the heart.

Up to now, some different perspectives from which Sufism could be inspected has been discussed. There are actually some other trends that has been taken to study Rumi that could be interesting. One of the most attention-getting of these trends and points of view is the doctrine of Pantheism. The term Pantheism has been defined by Britannica as "the doctrine that the universe conceived of as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe" (Britannica) and Chambers Dictionary has described it as "The doctrine that nature and the physical universe are constituents of the essence of God" (Chambers Dictionary). Based on this definitions, from the viewpoint of Pantheism, it could be said that God is the constituent of every single element that could be found in the universe; but the problem is that it doesn't hold any place for anything that could be outside this sum of elements – it doesn't consider God as an entity apart from these elements. Resulting from this kind of standpoints could be the argument that the flowing of God into the universe actually stops at the chain of universe itself and this is precisely where it becomes problematic:

One example of a common misrepresentation is to call certain Sufi s "pantheists," Ibn `Arabi being a prime target in this respect. It is true that both Sufism and pantheism say that the world is God, but Sufism adds immediately that God is absolutely other than the world, while classical pantheists say that the world is God with the implication that God is nothing but the sum total of the elements of the universe. (Chittick 29)

Thereupon, considering Rumi's poetry in terms of pure pantheism would do unfairness to him and it would not be that admissible. Of course using Pantheism in its original form would surely convey some other sense that will not be fit for interpreting such Eastern mystic as Rumi just as Mostafa Vaziri has verified it in his book *Rumi and Shams' Silent Rebellion* by saying "It is true that both pantheism and monism have more of a European application and are not appropriate for describing Rumi" (Vaziri 101) and he goes further on by noting "Bausani believed that Rumi's lyrical Persian metaphors are responsible for the monist and pantheist misinterpretations" (Vaziri 102). Thence, one of the reasons that Rumi's poetry has raised much of these discussions is because of their complexity and the intricacy of their structure. Of course, the augmentation of many of these discussions originate from Ibn al- 'Arabi, a well-known Sufi of the 12th and 13th century. Iqbal confirms this by noting that "Most interpreters have sought to expound the Mathnawi in terms of the pantheistic system associated with Ibn al-'Arabi, but this is doing grave injustice to Rumi. He is essentially a poet and a mystic, not a philosopher and logician" (195). Arising from this matter, is the various trends and methods of inquiry whose very inconclusiveness would result in different interpretations that we now see of Rumi.

Among all of these interpretations and readings, there actually seems to be missing one particularly noteworthy doctrine that has evaded the critical stance of most of the interpreters and commentators of Rumi which is Panentheism. Britannica defines Panentheism as the doctrine that "asserts that God includes the universe as a part though not the whole of his being" (Britannica) and Chambers Dictionary explains it as "The doctrine that the world is a part, though not the whole, of God's being" (Chambers Dictionary). According to this definitions, we could get to a very sharp difference between the doctrines of Pantheism and Panentheism and it is that the former does not account God to be anything other than the sum of all the elements of the universe but the latter actually hold a place for God as that which includes the universe but – as it makes it completely clear – it is itself apart from this world.

Paul Harrison, in his book *Elements of Pantheism*, categorizes Pantheism and Panentheism together and he doesn't seem to differentiate between them. "Within Islam, Pantheism and strong Panentheism have been expressed most frequently in Sufism, the current of thought that stresses the possibility of mystical union with Allah" (Harrison 24). He goes further on his elaboration on the subject by bringing on an example from Quran:

Even in the Koran it is possible to find texts that support a form of Pantheism or strong Panentheism:

To Allah belongs the East and the West, and wheresoever you turn there is the face of Allah (Sura 2:115)

We created man, we know the very whisperings within him and we are closer to him than his jugular vein. (Sura 50:16) (Harrison 24).

This argument of Harrison could be criticized on some levels. First, as was mentioned above, he doesn't differentiate between the doctrines of Pantheism and Panentheism which despite many similarities are in a sharp difference in that the latter holds a place for God other than this universe, though it is commonly considered as a cognate of the former. Second, in the examples that have brought of the Quran, we actually see Allah who is the owner of the East and the West. Hence Allah should naturally be something apart from this world to be able to own it in the first place. And third, the second verse is talking about the act of creation; There should be some subjectivity first – here Allah – to presume the beginning of some action. Keeping this in mind, it could be argued that these verses alongside Rumi's own poetry support the case of Panentheism in his works.

But let us take a look at one of Rumi's best known poems, namely *Our Death is Our Wedding*:

Our death is our wedding with eternity.
What is the secret? "God is One."
It is in the vision of the physical eyes
That no invisible or secret thing exists.
But when the eye is turned toward the Light of God
What thing could remain hidden under such a Light?
Although all lights emanate from the Divine Light
Don't call all these lights "the Light of God";
It is the eternal light which is the Light of God,
The ephemeral light is an attribute of the body and the flesh.
...Oh God who gives the grace of vision!
The bird of vision is flying towards you with the wings of desire.

At the beginning of the poem, he starts by relating our death – transition from this world – to eternity and what does he count as the reason is actually the fact that God is the One; in fact, God is the entity towards which we all strive to return. Therefore, Rumi makes a difference between this universe and God who is the ultimate reality. In the following lines, Rumi warns us against seeing with our physical eyes and he contends that for seeing the grace of God we have to stick to the Light of God. And this is precisely where we can see traces of Panentheism. He declares that even though all lights emanate from the Divine Light, we should not get so fussy as to call them the Light of God. Not all products resemble their origins. The ephemeral light is a this-worldly attribute and its origin is in somewhere else, and we can fly towards it – towards God and whatever it may hold – with the wings of desire; that desire that originates from our hearts. As Davis puts it "Matter was essentially non-existent, a temporary and ever-moving shadow for the embodiment of the Divine. The Neo-Platonists believed that by ecstasy and contemplation of the All-

Good, man would rise to that Source from whence he came. These points bear directly upon the Sufi teaching" (Davis 12). Hence, we can actually perceive this world and God as apart and initiator of it and this is the point which rejects the claim of Pantheism and is in accordance with Panentheism.

CONCLUSION

All in all, Rumi's work, because of its complexity has drawn a wide array of interpretations that will need a deep deliberation in order to assent or reject. Clearly, studying Rumi's thought would be no ordinary or simple thing and the whole set a book that have speculated upon his intentions and their consequential effects is a proof of it.

There have been many endeavors to try to analyze Rumi in terms of different doctrines and Pantheism is one of them. To put it simply, Pantheism asserts that God is the total sum of the elements of the world. But this kind of thinking would surely raise a big problem and it is its not considering a place for God other than this universe. A cognate doctrine of Pantheism, which most of the critics and scholars of Rumi have ignored, solves many of its gaps regarding the matter of Sufism, namely Panentheism which states that all elements of the world are a part of God and it essentially holds a place for God other than this universe. It is all up to ourselves and the endeavor that we put into work whether we reach that ultimate reality or not.

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