

Mawlana Rumi and Mawlaiyyah Order

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Abstract:

The paper discusses the past and present of Mawlaiyya Order of Sufism which is named after Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the most famous Sufi masters and celebrated poet. Mawlana Rumi (born 1207) was not the head of an order during his lifetime but the Order was gradually organized by his immediate successors, especially his son, Sultan Walad and his friend and disciple Celebi Hussam-ud-Din. Based on Rumi's message of love as being the motive force of the universe, the Order soon spread throughout the Ottoman territory. Although Sufi Orders are legally banned in modern Turkey, Mawlaiyya is considered one of the largest Sufi Orders in the country. The paper also explores Rumi's message of love and brotherhood and discusses the tradition of Mawlai Sama (Whirling Dance) which has become popular in many Western countries. Each year, different groups from Turkey perform the Sama ceremony in some of the most famous cultural venues abroad. Rumi's family is still holding the seat of leadership of the Mawlaiyya Order. A number of individuals and groups seek direct guidance from the descendants of Mawlana. While discussing the current situation of Mawlaiyya Order, the paper also discusses the origin and ban on Sufism in Turkey.

Mawlana Rumi:

Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi Rumi, named “Mawlana” (Our Lord or teacher) is regarded as one of the greatest poets, thinker and mystics in the Islamic world. He was born in the city of Balkh (historical city near Mazar-i-Sharif) in the north of Afghanistan on September 30th 1207. Mawlana’s father Sultan-ul-Ulama Baha-ud-din Waled was a renowned scholar of his time who migrated with his family to Turkey from Balkh; apparently due to the Mongol threat over Balkh and the region. After staying in the Turkish town of Larende for few years where he established a Madrassa and attracted a wide circle of students, Baha-ud-Din Waled eventually settled in Konya, the Seljuk capital, and continued teaching. When Mawlana Rumi’s father died in 1231, his followers attached themselves to Rumi. Mawlana Rumi’s Madrassa became a center of learning and he became a leading authority. But he himself was not satisfied with the extent of his knowledge and understanding and began gradually to move towards a mystic approach.

The meeting of Mawlana Rumi with a wondering ecstatic dervish proved to be the beginning of an extraordinary relationship between the two of them. The dervish, Shams-ud-Din of Tabriz, became his teacher and they remained together for days, even weeks, deep in philosophical discussions and meditation. It is said that Shams set his heart alight with the rapture of Divine Love and Gnostic ecstasy. Both of them exchanged their views on a range of subjects and became inseparable as they were convinced they had found the level of mystical understanding of Almighty God.

Rumi expressed what he had experienced and learnt during his time with Shams in a truly remarkable literary outpouring in verse. His greatest

work is the six-volume long poem, known as Mathnawi, contains some of the most beautiful passages of mystical verse ever written. His poetry, which is in Persian, has been translated in a number of annotated and prose versions into several modern languages, including English.

Rumi is said to be the best-selling poet in the United States and a massive increase has been noted in the sale of copies of his translated poetry especially after the events of 9/11. He was named by Time Magazine as the Mystic of the 13th Century. (1)

In recognizing year 2007 as the 800th anniversary of Rumi's birth, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, called Rumi an "eminent philosopher and mystical poet of Islam" whose "work and thought remain universally relevant today." (2)

This true devotin of God and a follower of the Prophet of Islam died when he was 66 years old on December 17, 1273 in Konya, Turkey. According to him, death was a form of rebirth into the devotion and the ultimate reality. He described the night of his death as the night of union "shab-i-arus", as he regarded it as the instant when his physical entity attained union with the Universal Entity and thus with everlasting life. Members of all sects, inclinations and religions were present at his funeral and considered him as one of mankind's greatest leaders.

He saw life as a corridor to meet with God and defined death as being the meeting time as he described in this poem:

On the day of death, when my coffin is on the move

Do not suppose I have any pain at leaving this world.

When you see my hearse, say not

"Leaving! He is leaving!"

That time will be for me union and encounter.

*When you commit me the grave,
Say not "Farewell! Farewell!"*

For the grave is a veil over the reunion of paradise. (3)

As he embraced everyone regardless of religious belief and social status, Rumi's teachings have been playing a great role in the harmony of Turkish society. Konya is still a centre of pilgrimage for those in search of mystic truths as it was in the life of Mawlana Rumi. Every year thousands of people from every corner of the world came to Konya and pay their respects to this universal poet. An international Mawlana congress is also held tri-annually in Konya where academics from all over the world gather and discuss the works of 'great Mawlana.'

At the entrance of his historical and unique mausoleum, is an inscription bearing his Persian couplet with Turkish and English translation.

"Come; come whoever you are.....

Wanderer, idolater or worshipper of fire...

Come even though you have broken your vows a thousand times,

Come and come yet again

Ours is not a caravan of despair..." (4)

Sufism and Sufi Ways (Orders):

Sufism or Islamic mysticism seeks to avoid conflicts and confrontations, calls for love and peace and serving humanity. It seeks a brotherhood among human beings. In the middle of this confusion of civilizations, Sufism, the most accessible, tolerant and pluralistic incarnation of Islam, and a uniquely valuable bridge between east and west at this moment of crisis finds itself suppressed by the Islamic world's two most pro-western governments: the Saudi Wahhabis, who see it as a heretical threat to their own harsh and literal interpretation of the Qur'an; and secular Turkey,

which regards it as a token of their embarrassing, corrupt and superstitious Ottoman past. (5)

The Sufi spirit softens the message of the Qur'an by emphasizing the sense of love, and the passionate relationship between the believer and the beloved, God, of course being the ultimate beloved. So in the eyes of Rumi and the Sufis, God becomes not the angry God of punishment, nor the God of revenge, but the God of love.

The number of different Sufi Orders or Sufi Brotherhoods is thought to have reached to more than two hundred now. While commenting on the nature and the need for the different Sufi Brotherhoods, the following verse of Mawlana Rumi is mostly quoted.

“Though the many ways (diverse religions) are various, the goal is one. Do you not see there are many roads to the Kaaba?” (6)

Origin of Mawlawiyya Order:

Mawlawiyya Sufi order is named after Mawlana Rumi who was not the head of an Order during his lifetime. Ibn-i- Batoota says in his '*Safar Nama*' that followers of Mawlawiyya Order are known as Jalalia as Mawlana's nickname was Jalaluddin but this Order is known as Mawlawiyya in Minor Asia, Syria, Egypt and Constantinople. (7)

The foundation of Mawlawiyya Order was laid in 1273 by Rumi's followers after his death. His first successor in the rectorship of an Order was Rumi's close friend and disciple, Hassamuddin Chelebi. After Hassamuddin's death in 1284, Rumi's younger and only surviving son Sultan Walad (died 1312) became the master of the Order. (8)

Risale-i-Sipehsalaar, one of the most reliable historical accounts of Rumi's life, tells us that Rumi followed the teachings and character of his father, Sultan-ul-Ulama Baha-ud-din Walad (died 1231). From this

account it is understood that Rumi's first spiritual guide or sheikh was his father. After the death of his father, Syed Burhan-ud-Din Muhaqiq Al-Tirmizi, one of Sultan-ul-Ulama's deputies -- became Rumi's spiritual guide and sheikh. Both Sultan-ul-Ulama and Burhan-ud-din Tirmizi were members of the Kubrawiyyah Sufi Order. Hamdullah Musevifide writes that Rumi's father was one of the deputies of Najam-ud-Din Al-kubra, who was the founder of Kubrawiyyah Order. (9)The Mevlawiyya became a well-established Sufi order in the Ottoman Empire by realizing a blood relationship with the Ottoman sultans when Devlet Khatun, a descendant of Sultan Waled, married the Sultan Bayezid I. Their son Mehmed I Celebi became the next Sultan, endowing the order, as did his successors, with many gifts. (10)Many of the members of the order served in various official positions of the Ottomon Caliphate. The centre for the Mawlawiyya order was in Konya where their 13th century guiding spirit, Mawlana Jalauddin Rumi is buried. But Mawlawi Houses (called Mawlawi Khana, pronounced as Hane in Turkish) were established in many parts of the Ottoman Empire. Even today, there is also a Mawlawi monastery or *dergah* in Istanbul, near the Galata Tower, where the *sama* (whirling ceremony) is performed and is accessible to the public. During the Ottoman period, the Mawlawi Order spread into the Balkans as well as in Syria and Egypt. It is still practiced in these countries. The Bosnian writer, Meša Selimović wrote the book "The Dervish and Death" about a Mawlawi *dergah* in Sarajevo. (11)

During Ottoman times, the Mawlawiyya Order produced a number of notable poets and musicians such as Sheikh Ghalib, Ismail Rushuhi Dede of Ankara, Esrar Dede, Halet Efendi, and Gavsi Dede, most of whom are buried at the Galata Mawlawi Hana in Istanbul. (12)

The Mawlawi Order has some similarities to other Sufi orders, such as the Qadiri (founded in 1165), the Rifaa'i (founded in 1182), and the Qalandari.

Ban on Sufism in Turkey:

With the foundation of the modern secular Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, the first president of the country, removed religion from the sphere of public policy and restricted it exclusively to that of personal morals, behaviour and faith. On December 13, 1925, a law was passed closing all the tekkes and zawiyas (Sufi lodges) as well as the centers of veneration to which pilgrimages were made. Istanbul alone had more than 250 tekkes and other small Sufi centers for gatherings of various Sufi fraternities. Before the First World War, there are said to be almost 100,000 disciples of the Mawlawi order throughout the Ottoman Empire. But, as part of his desire to create a modern, western-orientated, secular state, Kamal Atatürk banned all the Sufi Orders. Charitable Waqfs were suspended and their endowments expropriated; Sufi hospices were closed and their contents seized. In addition, all religious titles were abolished and darvish clothes outlawed. Turkish intellectuals were encouraged to study western classics, while Rumi's writings, along with those of all his Sufi peers, were treated as an intellectual irrelevance. Two years later, in 1927, the Mausoleum of Mawlana Rumi in Konya was allowed to reopen as a museum. In 1937, Atatürk went even further, prohibiting by law any form of traditional music, especially the playing of the ney, the Sufis' reed flute. (13)

Sufis were suppressed in modern Turkey for decades. Today, one can see that discreet expressions of Sufism are tolerated and pictures of Whirling Dervishes are prominently used in Turkish government tourist brochures. But the open practice of the Sufi mysticism that Rumi represented can still technically result in prison sentence of several months.

Spread of Mawlawiyya Order:

In 1950s, the Turkish government legalized the Mawlawi Order as an association and began allowing the Whirling Dervishes to perform the ceremony. These darweshes are chosen among the members of Mawlawi sect, to perform annually in Konya on December 17, the *Urs or* anniversary of Rumi's death. The followers of Rumi have also performed in the capitals of several Western countries. In 1971, they performed in London with Kani Karaca as lead singer. In 1972, they toured North America for the first time with Kani Karaca, Ulvi Erguner, and Akagündüz Kutbay among the musicians. They performed in France, for Pope Paul VI, and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and other venues in the United States and Canada, under the direction of the late Mawlawi Shaikh Suleyman Hayati Dede. In April of 2007 the Order initiated another tour of the US, where they performed to sold-out crowds, in places such as Denver and San Francisco. (14)

As far as the Turkish State is concerned, the Mawlawis are little more than a museum culture to be exploited as a tourist attraction. This process apparently began in mid-60s when the wife of a senior US army officer came to Konya and asked her government escorts about the dervishes. The officials were thrown into a panic. The local mayor eventually found

an old dervish and forced him to teach the local basketball team how to turn; soon a “folkloric” festival began to be mounted in the Konya sports hall every year to attract foreign tourists. For a while, there was even a brief attempt made to replace the Sufi musicians who accompanied the dancers with the town’s brass band, which was judged to be more modern. For over seven centuries, Rumi’s teachings have traveled from Afghanistan to Andalusia, from Egypt to the Balkans. The fame of Mawlawi Order had reached to all parts of the Eastern World. The Order is still active and exploring the new frontiers in the Western world. Rumi’s teachings are now spreading in Europe and America.

In 1980, Sheikh Jalaluddin Loras began Mawlawi training in Northern California. He was sent to America by his father Hazrat Murshid Suleiman Hayati Dede, a Mawlawi Sheikh of Konya. Besides the traditional Mawlawi teachings and practices (i.e. “Sama”, the turning ritual, circles for “Zikr-Allah” (divine remembrance), and “Sohbat” (sacred discourse), Sheikh Jalaluddin has instituted new expressions of the traditional dervish teachings appropriate to North America. (15)

Besides regular classes, seminars, and public zikr ceremonies, the Mawlawi Order of America produces public celebrations for “Shab-i-Arus”, the anniversary of Mawlana’s passing, each year. The ‘samazens’ (whirling dervishes) prepare throughout the year to “receive from God and give to people”, the sacred responsibility of those who embrace this practice. The “Shab-i-Arus”, ceremony is offered annually in various American cities, usually on the West Coast. As many as 60 -70 samazens turn, accompanied by a score of Mawlawi musicians. Also participating

in the ceremony are Sheikhs from different Sufi and dervish lineages, as well as senior representatives of other spiritual traditions.

Classes in Sama, the “Turning” are currently held at locations throughout the United States. The practice of “Zikr Allah”, the Divine Remembrance, is conducted by several circles that also meet regularly. Everybody, regardless of his/her religious or spiritual background, is welcomed to participate in these practices and classes.

For more than seven centuries, the Mawlawi Tradition has held the light of the religion of love, offering spiritual refuge and enlightenment for those who wished to develop their human-ness to the highest level. In Ottoman times, the Mawlawis cultivated not only spiritual attainment but cultural and artistic excellence as well. Mawlawis have always been progressive and liberal in spirit while at the same time conserving the best of tradition. Today, the Mawlawi Tradition is reviving in the West to offer spirituality adequate modern times.

In 1990, Kabir Helminski was honored with the title and responsibility of Mawlawi Sheikh by the late Dr. Jalaluddin Celebi of Istanbul, head of the Mawlawi Tariqa (Order) and direct descendant of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. In May of 1996 at an international conference on “Rumi and Goethe,” Kabir Helminski was awarded an honorary doctorate in literature from Selcuk University in Konya for his writings on Mawlana. In 1999, Camille and Kabir Helminski moved from Putney, Vermont to Aptos, California. Under Camille’s and Kabir’s direction, “The Threshold Society” is working to apply traditional Mawlawi principles to the requirements of contemporary life. In addition to their continuing

work as spiritual teachers, they are now involved in several creative projects in writing, recording, and educational consulting. Kabir introduced the Mawlawi Dervishes of Turkey to more than 100,000 people during their four tours of North America. (16)

Current Status of Mawlawiyya Order:

Mawlana's family is still holding the seat of leadership of the Mawlawi Order. A number of individuals (both among ordinary dervishes and sheikhs) and certain groups seek direct guidance from the descendants of Mawlana. The 22nd generation descendant of Mawlana Rumi, Farooq Hemdem Celebi, practically represents Mawlan Rumi and issues recommendation and permission letters to those whom he thinks are suitable and capable enough to be a Sheikh of Mawlawi Order. Farooq Celebi and his sister Esin Celebi live in Istanbul and both are active in promoting Sufism and the teachings of their great-grand father, Mawlana Rumi. The descendants of Mawlana are called by the honorific title Celebi (Pronounced as Chelebi), meaning "worthy man of God." (17)

There are several other groups and individuals in Turkey trying to promote the Rumi's message of love and harmony. Mawlana Education and Culture Association in Istanbul is run by Mr. Abdul Hamit Cakmut and his wife, both in charge of male and female wings respectively. The group works for the promotion of Mawlana's teachings and trains their male and female members in sama, the ritual dance. They also have sama ceremony once in every two weeks in the famous Mawlawi Sama Khana

of Galata, Istanbul, and have separate groups of male and female 'sama zan' (whirling dervishes).

The Contemporary Lovers of Mawlana Society' is another Mawlawi group in Istanbul, formed in 1989 under the guidance of its spiritual leader Hassan Cikar. Most of the members of this group are young, both male and female, who whirl and play music together without any distinction of sex. The group has taken few steps towards changing some of the traditional practices in order to make it more contemporary. They have brought men and women together in the sama ceremony and also introduced colorful ceremonial dress. These things have made the group somehow controversial in the eyes of other Sufis and Mawlawis in Turkey who argue that such changes are against the spirit of the Mawlawi Order. These critics say that Mawlana's teachings and the principles of Mawlawi Order, most of which are symbolic, are well preserved in writing. They say that the symbolic meaning might be affected with a slight change either in costumes or practice. But the head of this group, Hassan Cikar defends his revolutionary steps and stresses that all this is according to the spirit of Malwawi teachings. This group also presents a sama ceremony twice a month in Galata Mawlawi Temple in Istanbul which has become a tourist attraction where one has to buy an entry ticket before attending the ceremony. (18)

Sama (Whirling):

The Mawlawis, or "Whirling Dervishes", believe in performing their dhikr (Zikr) in the form of a "dance" accompanied by music ceremony. This ceremony is called 'sama'. 'Sama' means listening to music, and entering into ecstasy and excitement induced by the music. The Sama represents a mystical journey of man's spiritual ascent through mind and

love to the "Perfect." Turning towards the truth, the follower grows through love, deserts his ego, finds the truth and arrives at the "Perfect." He then returns from this spiritual journey as a man who has reached maturity and a greater perfection, so as to love and to be of service to the whole of creation.

Sipeh Salar writes that one day when Rumi was walking in front of Salah-ud-Din goldsmith's shop and by hearing the regular and harmonic hammer strokes, he suddenly became ecstatic and began whirling there. When Salah-ud-Din saw this, he kept on hitting the gold without thinking that the gold under the hammer would be wasted. Aflaki has given more details in this regards and says, "When Salah-ud-Din saw Rumi coming to his shop, he left the work to his apprentices and came out of the shop. When Rumi saw him, he embraced and kissed him and they started whirling together. But the old goldsmith, Salah-ud-Din, who was weakened by asceticism noticed that he couldn't whirl with Rumi. He excused himself and Rumi did not insist. Upon returning to his shop, Salah-ud-Din ordered his helpers to hit the gold not thinking of what is going to happen with the gold. This way Rumi whirled from noon until evening, and while whirling, he recited an ode beginning with the following couplet:

A treasure of meaning appeared to me in this goldsmith shop. What a luminous motive, what a pleasant meaning, what beauty, what beauty!(19)

It is believed that Rumi heard the word Allah (God) in this rhythmic sound, and this had inspired him; this inspiration put him into a state of ecstasy, which resulted in his whirling.

Sama was not performed in an orderly format during Rumi's lifetime. It started with Rumi's son, Sultan Walad, and Ulu Arif Celebi, and evolved slowly until the time of Pir Adil Çelebi. It was at that point when the form started to be taught and learned. It took on its final form in the 15th century, with the Naat Sharif (eulogies that praise the Prophet of Islam) being added to the Sama in the 17th century. The Sama symbolizes the creation of the universe, the creation of the human being and our birth into this world, the progress of the human being after the realization of servanthood, which is supported with a love for God, and our ascendance toward the ranks of *Insan al-Kamil* (Perfected Human). (20) The Sama starts with the Naat, accompanied by music composed by Bahurizade Mustafa Efendi, which is known as the Itri. This Naat is sung by the Naat khawn without any musical instruments in a standing position.

Naat Sharif is followed by a drumbeat (on the kudum) symbolizing the Divine command: “Kun!” (Be).

The Naat is followed by an improvisation on the ney (reed flute). This expresses the Divine breath, which gives life to everything, and perfects them.

During the Sama, other traditional instruments like the tambur, the ud, the kemençe, the kanun, and the bendir are also used along with the kudum and the ney.

Vocal and instrumental music, especially the ney (flute), plays an important role in the Mewlawi ceremony and famous composers, such as Dede Efendi, wrote music for the *ayin* (cycle of Mawlawi ceremonial

music). The ayin text is normally a selection from the poetry of Mawlana Rumi. (21)

The Sultan Walad Walk, which is accompanied by the peshrev music, is a circular procession that consists of three turns around the middle space. The greetings of the semazens during the procession represent the salutation of soul to soul concealed by shapes and bodies.

A virtual line that stretches between the entrance point and the red fleece divides the Sema platform into two. This sacred line is called 'Khatt al-Istiwa' and it is never stepped on.

During this circular procession, the samazens greet each other three times. This visual greeting symbolizes the salutation of the spirits. The samazens come from the right side of the platform up to the red fleece, without stepping on the khatt-al-Istiwa and without turning their backs to the red fleece, then step to the other side, and face the samazen behind them. The two samazens face each other, bow and greet each other at the same time; this is called Muqabala. At the end of the third procession, after the Sheikh sits down on the red fleece, the Sultan Walad Walk, which symbolizes reaching the Truth (God), finishes.

Standing and leaning into one another, the samazens, after a short ney improvisation, straighten their sikke (long woolen hats that resemble an Ottoman tomb stone in shape), and take off the black coats. They then become separated from this world, symbolized by their pure white gowns, and become spiritual, opening their eyes to the truth. By holding their left shoulder with their right hand and their right shoulder with the

left hand they symbolize the number one, which reflects and witnesses the unity of God.

After kissing the Sheikh's hand and attaining permission to proceed, the samazens start the Sama. In this kind of whirling, the lover of God escapes his imaginary existence, his ego, and he is annihilated in God. The annihilation of the particle in the whole is like the shivering and whirling elevation of an atom to the sun.

Every detail of Mawlawi Sema possesses a symbolic meaning. For example, the bow which each dervish accords to his fellow, both before and at the end of whirling, symbolizes the respect which they feel all men should have each other.

The upturned palm of the raised right hand is open to the sky during the whirling and symbolizes the dwelling place of God. The down turned palm of the left hand is directed towards the earth, the dwelling place of man. The dervish thus himself can be viewed as a conduit of grace from above which he channels to the world below.

“From God we receive, to men we give”

The Sema consists of four greetings:

“Being conscious of one's servant hood,”

“Being awed before the greatness and power of the Lord,”

“The transformation of this awe into love,”

“Return to the highest rank possible for the human which is servant hood.”

These are symbolized by the first, second, third and fourth greetings, respectively.

When the recitation from the Qur'an starts the samazens finish the Sama and they take their places and sit. The Sema ritual finishes with the greetings of the Sheikh, the samazens and the musicians toward the red fleece.

Many people have explained the whirling. Many nice things have been said about the whirling. But the one who best explained, felt, and made others feel the whirling has been Rumi himself, as in the following ode:

Do you know what the whirling is? it is hearing the voices of the spirit saying "yes " to God's question "Am I not your Lord?" it is deliverance from ego and reunion with the Lord.

Do you know what the whirling is? It is seeing the Friend's states, states of God from across the curtains of the unseen.

Do you know what the whirling is? It is escaping one's existence. Continuously tasting the everlasting existence in the absolute non-existence.

Do you know what this is? It is making one's head a ball in front of the Friend's kicks of live and running to the Friend with out head and feet.

Do you know what the whirling is? It is knowing Jacob's sorrow and remedy; it is smelling the smell of the reunion with Joseph from Joseph's shirt.

Do you know what the whirling is? It is swallowing Pharaoh's spells just like Moses's staff every moment.

Do you know what the whirling is? It is a secret from the Prophetic Tradition: "There is a moment for me with God where no angel or no prophet can come in between God and me."

It is reaching that place without any means where no angel can fit.

Do you now what the whirling is? It is, like Shams-i-Tabrizi, opening the eyes of the heart and seeing the sacred lights. (22)

Notes

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