

**JALAL AL-DIN RUMI'S PHILOSOPHY OF TASAWWUF OR  
SUFISM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO INTERRELIGIOUS  
DIALOGUE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research is an attempt to expose Jalal al-Din Rumi's Philosophy of Tasawwuf or Sufism and its relevance to interreligious dialogue. Tasawwuf or Sufism, in general, and Rumi's philosophy, in particular, are a moderate and tolerant feature of Islam and provide new possibilities and venues to approach the Islamic world. A Sufi and Rumi's approach centers on the concept of love in dealing with the problems of fundamentalism, terrorism and religious intolerance. This research emphasizes the possibilities of Rumi's philosophy for interreligious dialogue. The key to harmonious and peaceful coexistence is dialogue at all levels, especially at the interreligious level. Rumi's philosophy of Tasawwuf gives way to this healthy approach of dialogue. He bridges people of different creeds, colors, cultures, faiths and religious traditions under the umbrella of a religion of love (Divine and Mystical Love).

Rumi is among the best and most exemplary guide for humanity to carve a better future where people of different backgrounds come together, set aside their differences and work for a better and more peaceful coexistence. Rumi appeals to all people and faiths to get rid of their differences and to fear and fight evil in all its form. He is convinced that a better humanity will never come from hatred, violence and terrorism. For him love is a better option and a more real alternative through which we can achieve peace and harmony because love is the central teaching of all the cultures, civilizations and religions. He encourages all to come together and share the highest good (Divine and Mystical Love) and restore our lost human dignity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title Page	i
Approval Sheet	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Rationale	1
Review Related of Literature	5
THE PROBLEM	15
Statement of the Problem	15
Significance of the Study	16
Scope and Limitations	16
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	17
DEFINITION OF TERMS	17
ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY	19
CHAPTER II: TASAWWUF OR SUFISM IN ISLAM	20
2.1 Definition of Tasawwuf or Sufism and Some Historical Facts	20
2.2 Tenants of Tasawwuf or Sufism	32
2.2.1 <i>Tawhid</i> (The Doctrine of Unity)	32
2.2.2 <i>Wahdat al-Wujud</i> (Oneness of Being)	33
2.2.3 Five Pillars of Islam	33
2.2.4 Divine Love	34
2.2.5 Worship of God	34
2.2.6 Service to others	34



2.8. Conclusion	46
CHAPTER III: RUMI'S PHILOSOPHY OF TASAWWUF AND ITS RELEVANCE TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE	47
3.1 Life of Jalal al-Din Rumi	47
3.2 Works and Contribution to the Philosophy of Tasawwuf or Sufism	51
3.3 What is Interreligious Dialogue?	55
3.4 Aim of Interreligious Dialogue	56
3.5 Bases for Dialogue	58
3.5.1 Our common humanity	58
3.5.2 The good in other religions	59
3.5.3 God is infinite	59
infinite truth	59
3.5.4 The	59
3.5.5 Fundamentalism	59
3.5.6 Non-believers	59
	59
3.6 Levels of Interreligious Dialogue	60
3.6.1 Dialogue: Doctrine or Theology	60
3.6.2 Dialogue: Sharing of Religious Experiences	60
3.6.3 Dialogue: Common Actions	61
3.6.4 Dialogue: Life	61
3.7 Rumi and Interreligious Dialogue	62
CHAPTER IV: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	87
4.1 Summary	87
4.2 Conclusions	90
4.3 Recommendations	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	93

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Rationale**

The tragic event of 9/11 has changed the global scenario in multiple ways especially in the Middle East and in many of the Islamic countries, proof that developments have given way to fundamentalism, intolerance, and terrorism. This wave of extremism has struck many countries, especially Pakistan which has been badly affected by these crises; at the same time, there have been many positive and constructive efforts and initiatives by people of good will. The heart of these efforts is dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue.

The aim of this research is to explore the Sufi teachings, especially the Sufi teachings of Jalal al-Din Rumi, and to seek the possibility of their relevance to an interreligious dialogue between the Islamic world and other faiths. At present the world is facing multiple crises and problems, among which are the serious issues of religious intolerance and the clash of religions and civilizations. Different nations, countries and religions are nevertheless trying to develop a healthy relationship with each other, on account of which we need dialogue.

Through this research the researcher is keen on expanding his interest in Islamic Philosophy, especially Tasawwuf or Sufism, in particular the Sufi teachings of Rumi and its relevance to interreligious dialogue, notably in Pakistan. Since the researcher comes from Pakistan, he will not hesitate to write with its context in mind.

Pakistan is an Islamic country. Its religious composition of 97% Muslim population is divided mainly into two sects, namely, *Sunni* and *Shia*. The *Sunnis* are 80% and the *Shias* almost



20 % of the total Muslim population.<sup>1</sup> The religious minorities are composed of Christians 1.58%, Hindus 1.60%, *Ahmadis* 0.22%, Scheduled Castes 0.25% and others 0.7 %.<sup>2</sup> At present Pakistan is facing hard times and going through multiple crises and troubles like religious and social intolerance, terrorism, lack of economic opportunity, political corruption, militarization and peace and order.<sup>3</sup> Especially after 11 September 2001 Pakistan is facing two kinds of threat, namely, internal and external terrorism. However, the serious threat which Pakistan is facing now basically comes from within, which is what is here called internal terrorism.

After 9/11 USA launched a war on terror in Afghanistan, as a result of which the Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban sought refuge in the northern tribal areas of Pakistan. There they started to organize themselves for a counterattack on the US Armed Forces. They are heavily protected and supported by the banned religious political parties and some foreign elements. The Al-Qaeda and Taliban justified and continue to justify their activities under the umbrella of Islamic teachings. Some political and religious militant groups have their own sectarian agendas, especially against the *Shias* and other religious minorities like the Christians and even the Sufi orders.

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<sup>1</sup> Mehtab Ali Shah, "Sectarianism – A Threat to Human Security: A Case Study of Pakistan," in *The Round Table*, Oct. 2005, Vol.94, Issue 382, 613.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Apoorva Shah, "The Most Dangerous Place" in *World Affairs*, May/June 2011, Vol.174, Issue I, 80.

The internal form of terrorism also includes religious extremism and ethnic strife. Ethnicity is deeply rooted in the Pakistani culture and society and is in fact one of the causes of division, violence and terror in the country. Religious extremists are responsible for creating hatred, violence and divisions on religious grounds. This religious extremism and terrorism can be traced back to the Afghan Jihad in the 1980s when these extremists got the official patronage of Pakistan, USA and their allies which prepared them to fight against the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> At present these extremists have turned into a major form of terrorism. This wave has spread throughout the country and is a great threat to the integral peaceful co-existence of the area.

There is also the Islamic militancy which poses one of the important challenges that destroy the peaceful atmosphere of the country and destabilize it socially, economically, religiously and politically. It has caused intolerance both at religious and social levels in numerous ways, giving rise to religious and social intolerance, ethnic division and sectarianism. Destroying the spirit of religious pluralism, this growing phenomenon of Islamic radicalism has immensely contributed to the aggravation of religious intolerance in the country. The members of different Islamic sects, as well as non-Muslims such as the Christians, Hindus and *Ahmadies*, have all been victims of this religious intolerance which has given way to sectarian violence, hatred and discrimination.

At present Pakistan needs peace, stability, and law and order. The remedy lies in affirmative actions, one of which is dialogue at all levels of life - social, political and

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<sup>4</sup> Mehtab Ali Shah, "Sectarianism – A Threat to Human Security: A Case Study of Pakistan," 616-617.