

The Human Beloved and the Divine Beloved in the Poetry of Mawlānā Rūmī

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Throughout the *Diwān-i Kabīr* and the *Mathnawī* of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī – Rūmī – there are frequent references to both the human beloved and the divine Beloved. Due to the vast extent of his poetry, in this study we have limited ourselves to illustrative examples in choosing those mainly from Mawlānā's quatrains, which in themselves number close to two thousand.

SANĀ'Ī AND 'AṬṬĀR

In regard to the differentiation between the human and divine Beloved, Mawlānā was preceded by two Sufi poets whom he greatly admired: Ḥākīm Sanā'ī of Ghazna (d. 526/1131) and Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār of Nishāpūr (d. 618/1221 or 627/1229).

Sanā'ī's *Diwān* contains about 450 quatrains, most of which extol the human beloved, such as the following:

From seeing me at a distance, [the beloved] displayed smiling lips,
But hid, with jasmine [flowers], that moon-like face.
That soul of the world made an amorous gesture of the beautiful
ones.
[For] otherwise, one cannot hide the moon with a reed [plant].¹

In certain other quatrains, Sanā'ī also expresses adoration for the divine Beloved:

1 Ḥākīm Sanā'ī, *Diwān-i Ḥākīm Abū'l-Majd Majd al-Dīn Ādam Sanā'ī Ghaznawī*, ed. Mudarris Raḡavī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kitābkhāna-i Sanā'ī 1341/1962), quatrain 154, p. 1129. Translation by the author.

In Your path, I am free from [worldly] gain and loss.
 And from passion for You, I am free from this world and the next.
 I have given my [entire] self to You, [so] I am without those [other]
 worries.
 I [only] have concerns about You, [so] I am free of those [other
 concerns].²

ʿAṭṭār’s quatrains are found in his *Mukhtār-nāma*, where he, too, often praises the human beloved, as in the following example:

At times I am distressed by your black tresses,
 And at times I am worried about what is hidden under your hat,
 You said, ‘One night I will secretly come to meet you.’
 But I am afraid of the brightness of your moon-like face.³

ʿAṭṭār also describes his adoration of the divine Beloved in other quatrains:

In love for You, I will be [like] a flag in the world [honouring You],
 And from passion for You, I will be on [my] head like a [reed] pen
 [praising You].
 From love for You, I have entered existence joyously drunk,
 And from love for You, I will become joyously drunk with non-
 existence.⁴

Therefore, from these examples, we may conclude that the expression of praise and devotion toward both the human beloved and divine Beloved was an important feature of mystic poems prior to the poetry of Mawlānā.

THE HUMAN BELOVED IN THE QUATRAINS OF MAWLĀNĀ

Mawlānā generally refers to Shams-i Tabrīzī when he extols the human beloved. However, some poems praise other human beloveds,

2 Sanāʿī, *Dīwān*, quatrain 302, p. 1148.

3 Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Mukhtār-nāma: majmūʿa-yi rubāʿīyyāt athar-i Farīd al-Dīn-i ʿAṭṭār-i Nayshābūrī*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs A.Hsh./1358/1979), p. 175.

4 ʿAṭṭār, *Mukhtār-nāma*, p. 145.

such as Sayyid Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq Tirmidhī, Salāḥ al-Dīn Zarkūb and Chelebī Ḥusām al-Dīn ibn Akhī-Turk. In any case, there are certain key characteristics in respect to the human beloved, some examples of which follow.

Although the lips, curls, eyes, cheeks and eyebrows are often described, the human beloved in Mawlānā's poems is not an ordinary human being. Thus, he emphasizes:

An [ordinary] beloved of the household is not any use [to me],
 Since she displays flirtation and shows no faithfulness.
 The beloved must be one who [is] at the edge of the grave;
 She [is the one who] opens a thousand doors from the gardens
 of heaven.⁵

The true lover also is sometimes depicted as no ordinary human being:

[On] the [first] day, when the heavens' seals were stamped,
 The lovers' golden seals were stamped in a different way.
 You will never understand with [your] intellect how they were
 stamped.
 For these 'gold [coins]' were stamped outside the realm of the
 intellect.⁶

Likewise, Mawlānā compares the human beloved to a musician who shares the company of the spiritual nobility of Sufi adepts. The real musician of the 'mystical concert' (*samāʿ*) has to belong to the beloved's 'neighbourhood':

I want a musician who is a lover and a drunkard,
 [Who] is bound to the district of your tavern,
 [Who] is a 'king' whether he is [a king] or not.
 O Lord, grant [me] one who is of this category.⁷

5 Rūmī, quatrain F-836 (beloved: *ma'shūqā*); Rawan Farhadi and Ibrahim Gamard (trans), *The Quatrains of Rumi* (San Rafael, California: Sufi Dari Books 2008), with Persian text, p. 263. Many of these translations are followed by explanatory notes that may also contain technical information about Persian or Arabic terms, textual variants chosen, literal translations of idioms, and so on.

6 Rūmī, quatrain F-660 (lovers: *āshiqān*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 440.

7 Rūmī, quatrain F-752 (a lover and a drunkard: *āshiq u mast*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 482.

The lover is very willing to die for the sake of the human beloved:

If I give [my] life for your sake, I will die happily.
 And if I am the slave of your slave, I will be a happy prince.
 I'm crazy from those two curls, [that are] like chains.
 [And] I'm dazzled by [those] two eyes with the magic of Kashmīr.⁸

In some of Mawlānā's poems, it is unclear whether the beloved is human with beautiful human attributes or divine with divine attributes, and thus whether metaphorical (*majāzī*) love or real (*ḥaqīqī*) love is intended, remains ambiguous.

THE DIVINE BELOVED IN THE QUATRAINS OF MAWLĀNĀ

The Almighty Himself has taught real love to His lovers. The following is a typical example of Mawlānā's intimate devotional prayers (*munājāt*) to God:

[My] heart is Your student, since it is learning Love;
 Like the night, it is the day's supplicant.
 Everywhere I go, the face of Love is before [me],
 Because the [lamp] oil is [always] behind the burner.⁹

At the beginning of the *Mathnawī* occur the famous couplets about the yearning of the reed (*ṇay*) for its lost home in the reed marsh (*ṇayistān*). This earliest state of the soul's blessed union with the Beloved is also referred to in the following quatrain:

You [are] the one who reminded me about last night,
 And [You] reminded me about that ecstasy full of agitation.
 I will never forget that blessing [again],
 Since You reminded me about [that] forgotten treasure.¹⁰

The first step in the journey towards God is repentance (*tawba*). For true lovers, who are also called the 'spiritual elite' (*khāṣṣ*), this turning and returning to God in repentance and renewed reliance derives

8 Rūmī, quatrain F-1204; *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 53.

9 Rūmī, quatrain F-237; *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 475.

10 Rūmī, quatrain F-1694 (blessing: *rahmat*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 336.

from a divine attribute, for He Himself is Ever-Relenting (*Tawwāb*) in forgiveness and the acceptance of repentance:

What use is repentance to me, when my repentance is Your shadow
[upon me]?
The beginning and end of repentance is entirely Your capital.
Repentance is the worst offense in Your presence.
Where is the repentance that is worthy of Your rank?¹¹

In another one of Mawlānā's intimate devotional prayers, he suggests that the subtlety and awe of the lover's love for God derives from another divine attribute: the Benevolent, the Most Subtle (*al-Laṭīf*):

Why is love for You such a wise one and a teacher?
[And] why is affection for You such a subtle foundation?
Why do I tremble [with fear] at love if it is not pleasant?
And if love is pleasant, why are there all these shouts [for help]?¹²

The lover, spirited by passion for the divine Beloved (a passion free of desire for this world), feels like a mote of dust 'dancing' in the sunlight, accompanied by the music of love-longing:

From the moment I heard the song of longing for You,
I have been dancing like the motes of longing for You.
From the radiance of desire for You, the mote [is] visible.
From beyond the atmosphere is the desire of [longing] sorrow for
You.¹³

'Longing sorrow' (*gham*) becomes joy in the love for the divine Beloved. Devotion to this love leads to a genuine freedom and glory that is loftier than the heavens. This is expressed in another one of Mawlānā's intimate devotional prayers:

11 Rūmī, quatrain F-176 (repentance: *tawba*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 484.

12 Rūmī, quatrain F-145 (affection: *mihr*; subtle foundation: *laṭīf bunyād*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 494.

13 Rūmī, quatrain F-1537 (longing: *gham* or *ghamm*; the desire of 'love's grieving passion', or 'longing-sorrow': *hawā-yi gham*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 322.

The one whom You elevate will never become lowly,
 [And] the soul whom You sadden will be joyful.
 The exalted sky will bestow a hundred kisses
 Every day upon the feet of the one whom You enchain.¹⁴

The holy Qur'ān teaches that everything in the heavens and on earth praises and prostrates to God in its own way. Those whose eyes and ears are spiritually receptive may hear the praise of the Beloved coming from the viol (*rubāb*) during the mystical concert (*samā'*), while they weep tears of burning love:

O Lord, by the right of the viol's praise,
 There are a hundreds of questions and answers in its praise.
 O Lord, with roasted hearts and eyes full of tears,
 We are more turbulent than wine in the jar.¹⁵

There is great risk if the lover relies upon his own self (*nafs*) instead of upon God alone, as is stated in a *Ḥadīth* attributed to Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him): 'O God, do not let me rely upon my own self for even the duration of a blink of an eye.' Mawlānā expresses this in the following way:

O Lord, don't give me over to [my] captivating self;
 Don't give me harmony with anything except [what] is from You.
 I always flee to You from the disturbance of [my] 'self'.
 [Since] I belong to You, don't give me back to 'me'!¹⁶

In his love for the divine Beloved, the mystic lover cannot remain silent and inexpressive, or else his very soul will be set ablaze. Yet, if he cries out his passion, both this world and the hereafter will also be consumed:

14 Rūmī, quatrain F-1898; *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 499.

15 Rūmī, quatrain F-74 (line one: *yā rabb, yā rabb, bi-ḥaqq-i tasbīḥ-i rubāb*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 473.

16 Rūmī, quatrain F-1606 (captivating self: *nafs-i ṭannāz*; the disturbance of my 'self': *fitna-yi khwīsh*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 498.

If I practice patience [as a lover], [my] clothes and [my] life will burn
 [with me];
 [Not only] my life, but the lives of all beings will burn.
 And if I raise a cry, [my] mouth will burn;
 Not only [my] mouth, [but] this world and the next will burn [with
 me]!¹⁷

The cries of such a lover of God will resound in this world, the hereafter, and the place of assembly on the Day of Resurrection.

CONCLUSION: LOVE, LOVER, AND BELOVED IN THE *MATHNAWĪ*

Although there are, as we have seen, numerous themes of the 'lover' and the 'beloved' broached in Mawlānā's quatrains, his loftiest views on the subject are more often found in his *Mathnawī*. To form a proper understanding of his views on this matter, some brief reference to this grand work is demanded.

For example, in one verse Mawlānā mentions how the human beloved may be so extraordinary as to become a 'ray of God':

That one is a ray of God, not [an ordinary] beloved.
 That one is a creator; you may say not created.¹⁸

In regard to the relationship between human or 'metaphorical love' (*ishq-i majāzī*) and 'real' or divine love (*ishq-i ḥaqīqī*), Mawlānā said:

That which is the [real] beloved is not a form,
 Whether [it is] love for this world or that [next] world.¹⁹

Lastly, the following verse from the Qur'ān has been interpreted as affirming that God's Love for humanity is primary and the origin of humanity's love for God: '... a people whom He loves and who love Him' (V: 54). In regard to this idea, Mawlānā said:

17 Rūmī, quatrain F-554 (patience: *ṣabr*); *The Quatrains of Rumi*, p. 422.

18 Rūmī, *Mathnawī-yi ma' nawī*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1357 A.Hsh./1978), I: 2437 (a ray of God: *partaw-i ḥaqq*; a creator: *khāliq*).

19 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 703 (the real beloved: *ma'shūq*; form: *ṣūrat*).

Whether being in love is from this or that origin,
Finally, it is our guide to that [divine] Origin.²⁰

The true faith of the lover is love of God alone:

The creed of Love [of God] is distinct from all religions;
The creed and doctrine of the lovers is [only] God.²¹

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²⁰ Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I: 111 (being a lover: ʿāshiq; origin: sar).

²¹ Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, II: 1770 (creed of love [or, instead of 'creed', one might say, 'religious community', the Qur'ānic meaning of the term]: *millat-i ʿishq*; doctrine: *madhhab*).

As a proposal for further exploration, I believe that the above-mentioned distinction between the human beloved and the divine Beloved can lead to a new and fruitful approach in the study of Mawlānā's *Dīwān-i Kabīr*. Each *ghazal* and *tarjīʿ-band* poem has its own ambiance. The differentiation between the human beloved and the divine Beloved provides a hermeneutical key for rearranging the *Dīwān*, thus liberating it from the alphabetical shackle of the traditional, formal arrangement of its poems on the basis of the final letters of their individual verses. Such a rearrangement has already been accomplished with the complete English translation (with matching Persian text) of Mawlānā's quatrains, with very fruitful results (Farhadi and Gamard, tr., *The Quatrains of Rumi*, 2008). We would invite scholars of Mawlānā's poetry to contribute to such an endeavour.

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