

Towering spiritual and literary figure

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Article

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I am neither of the East nor of the West: no boundaries exist in my breast. "In this so-called borderless and globalised world, such words sounded more like a cliché, coming from any one of the G8 leaders or at least from the champions of globalisation.

Only that this one is somewhat more poetic than rhetoric; more appealing to a palette of cultures, beliefs and religions, as compared to the usual empty lip service.

The reason perhaps is the person who uttered them is one of the greatest spiritual and literary figures of all time.

He is the renowned Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi, better known as Rumi, the widely acclaimed poet-cum-scholar.



Rumi was born on Sept 30, 1207, in Balkh in Central Asia, now part of Afghanistan.

His father, Baha' al-Din Walad (Bahauddin), a religious scholar and a Sufi (Islamic mystic), had tremendous impact on him.

And Rumi, who later became a force in jurisprudence and religious matters, like his father, was made a university professor.

Some even said it was Rumi who transformed the history of Persian literature.

Despite the fact that 800 years have since passed, Rumi's legacy remains tuneless and is still relevant to today's world.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) saw it fit to designate this year as the International Year of Rumi with the underlying message of global peace.

Indeed, some of the themes in Rumi's work focus on tolerance and the love and the remembrance of the divine as a way to achieve peace.

When writing about Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, he transcends the barriers between the East and West.

He constructed a religious-cultural bridge of deep understanding where "no boundaries exist in my breast".

For Rumi, there is no room for the small-minded "clash of civilisations" as advocated by some; neither is there a "them versus us" as narrowly interpreted by others.

In contrast, he has been quoted as saying: "While beliefs vary from place to place, faith is essentially the same."

In parts, this has to do with the many years he spent exploring the frontiers of knowledge, travelling to places and meeting scholars as a keen learner of new cultures and meaning of life.

His broad exposure connected him to other dimensions of not only the Judeo-Christian faith, but also Buddhism, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism.

Not surprising then that his poems and stories do not fail to enchant and capture the minds and hearts of his audience. At the same time, they act as bridges in linking up this shrinking world of ours. Rumi clearly put forward the messages of humility, peace and love based on the quest for Truth.

After all, not unlike today, his world, too, was plagued by war and violence, particularly as the Mongols led Genghis Khan were ravaging throughout the larger part of Asia.

When he was young, Rumi was forced to flee Balkh because of the invading Mongol forces.

Together with his family, he left for Konya, in present-day Turkey, where they eventually settled down, after making a pilgrimage to Mecca.

It was in Konya that he eventually made a name for himself as a famous jurisprudent and teacher, especially after the death of his father in 1231.

By then he had become known as an accomplished Sufi, devoting much of his time seeking Truth, by means of love and humility.

Reportedly, Rumi referred to himself as: "Dust on the path of Muhammad. Dust can be nothing but dust; it signifies humility, and submission. Even the tiniest insect may move the lightness of dust"

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