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The Position of "the Otherness" in Balkhi's Humanology

Abstract:

Despite being one of the most prominent mystical poets in our cultural realm, Jal Uddin Mohammad Balkhi Rumi also has significant insights in the field of humanities and is considered a great humanologist. Few in our mystical humanology have explored the concept of "Otherness" as thoroughly as Balkhi. On one hand, he has documented the dimensions and hidden aspects of the anxious human being the "eagerness and separation" in his works in the best possible way. On the other hand, he has spoken about the participation of "the Otherness" in the game of truth.

In Balkhi's humanology, the position of "the Other" has an ontological dimension in addition to an ethical aspect. His ontology suggests that the human soul, as a being, cannot be conceived without considering the existence of "the Other." Therefore, it can be argued that Balkhi's intersubjective approach can respond to the spiritual and epistemological crises of our time, a time that urgently needs the formation of a dialectical relationship between the "self" and the "Other" within the framework of "intersubjective" or "intercultural" concepts.

This situation is where discourse takes shape, and the paradigm beyond the subject finds a serious role. These epistemic and social advantages are something our time desperately needs, and Balkhi, in this regard, because he has given a special place to "the Other" in the realm of humanology, has valuable insights for contemporary humans and societies.

Keywords: Balkhi, Jalal Uddin Mohammad, mysticism, Humanology, egocentrism, Otherness, intersubjective, existential circle.

Introduction:

Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi² can be considered one of the prominent spokespersons for the cultural conscience of our civilizational domain. He is regarded as a renowned proponent of "humanity" in the realm of culture and human civilization.

The question that might arise is whether Balkhi's message is still effective in our time? Can utilizing his teachings keep the flames of hope for liberation burning in the complex modern era?

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². *Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi (1207 – 1273)*

This is a broad discussion that needs to be analyzed and examined from various angles. However, in this brief opportunity, while I do not consider the description of encountering Balkhi in a linear way, as a grand narrative or as a transhistorical phenomenon, I will refer to the position of "the Otherness" in his Humanology and discuss its applicability in the contemporary modern era. However, I deem it necessary to mention that, although Balkhi is considered one of the most prominent and beloved figures of our civilizational domain and even of human civilization, he cannot be introduced outside his historical horizon, beyond the criteria of critique, as a finished figure for all times and contexts. Therefore, considering the developments related to intellectual backgrounds, cultural experiences, social transformations, and his psychological states, we can speak of "which Balkhi?" Based on this, I am focusing on Balkhi after his encounter with Shams and will discuss his trans religious approach to "the Other." Balkhi, who viewed humanity and the world with a mystical perspective and presented his insights beyond the frameworks of jurisprudence, theology, and religious inclinations, and whose paradoxical and symbolic language regime should also be considered in this context, privileges that give us the opportunity to discuss his opinions and avoid the risk of uncriticism.

Balkhi's Ontological View of Human

Balkhi's thought is essentially a multifaceted prism in which diverse colors of knowledge and life are observed. Moreover, his musical skill in speech is also admirable, abilities that have been employed to promote "global citizenship" and, as the German Friedrich Rückert¹ put it, "global reconciliation." These are aspects that define his Humanological nature and highlight his view regarding "the Other." Therefore, it can be said that in Balkhi's Humanology, human identity is not only determined as a social construct, but he has an ontological view on this matter and he spoke and said about the relationship between the existence of "I" and "the other". He said:

By your kindness I became a soul, hidden even to myself.

Then, your existence became hidden in my hidden existence (Balkhi, 1375: 671).

For this reason, he considered humans to be among the wonders of creation:

"Thus, in form, you are the lesser world;

Thus, in meaning, you are the greater world" (Balkhi, 1336: 651).

Hence, it can be claimed that if the discussion of "the Other" among mystics had an ethical aspect, from Balkhi's perspective, it has an ontological dimension. His ontology indicates that the human soul as a being cannot be conceived without considering the existence of the Other. In his Masnavi, in the story of "The one who knocked at the door of a friend, said: 'It is I...'", he clearly demonstrated that as long as a person sees their "self" in the center, they cannot reach and connect with "the Other", The relationship that Mikhail Bakhtin² also mentioned in his anthropology in the new era as "seeing the other as me" or "I, becoming you" is what shows that modern self-centeredness has faced a challenge and an alternative discussion.

¹. Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866)

². Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895 - 1975)

Balkhi's intercultural Message

Critics of the one-sidedness of modernity believe that the Kantian system has marginalized the concern of the "Other" due to its lack of attention to the very important place of intersubjectivity. This challenge has prompted thinkers to analyze the limitations of Kantian modernity and provide solutions to overcome it. Among those, we can mention the Emmanuel Levinas¹, who according to him, in Kant's project, the subject of "Other" was neglected and went so far as to leave no place for "other" in the most basic area of life (ethics). Therefore, he has tried to compensate the gap caused by the primacy of "I" with the humanism of relying on "the Other".

Levinas emphasized that only an ethics that does not prioritize self-interest over the reciprocity with "the Other" and is based on "responsibility for the Other" (Levinas, 1998: 160) can challenge the self-centeredness of the "self." He advocated welcoming the presence of "the Other" and considering them equal, if not superior. In addition to Levinas, other thinkers such as Martin Buber², Gabriel Marcel³, Martin Heidegger⁴, Mikhail Bakhtin⁵, and postmodern philosophers claim that the modernity project has failed. This situation indicates the need to present a message different from the self-centered modernity. They seek ways to overcome the ethical and worldview crises of modernity: escaping the one-dimensionality of human existence. Therefore, messages like Balkhi's are appealing to them, and it can be argued that many find their ideals in Balkhi's thoughts.

Scholars such as Hammer Purgstall⁶, Friedrich Rückert⁷, Arthur John Arberry⁸, Professor William Chittick⁹, Edmund Helminski¹, and Professor Annemarie Schimmel¹, who have studied Balkhi's thoughts, find his Humanology responsive to the needs of modern humans. Hans Meinke¹, the German poet, described Balkhi as "the only hope for the dark times we are living in" (Nadvi, 2021: 98).

Nicholson¹ has described Balkhi as "greatest mystical poet of any age" (Chittick, 2005: 4). Coleman Barks¹ has noted that "Rumi Conquers America" (Holat, 2005: 5), and Phyllis Tickle¹, the editor of Publishers Weekly, stated that Balkhi's popularity in the United States is "is a matter of our enormous spiritual hunger" (Ibid).

Hence, the question "Is Rumi's message still relevant today?" receives a positive response, meaning that the place of the "Other" in his anthropology holds a prominent position and can address the spiritual and epistemological crises of our times. These are times that desperately need

¹. Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995)

². Martin Buber (1878 -1965)

³. Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973)

⁴. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)

⁵. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975)

⁶. Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856)

⁷. Johann Michael Friedrich Rückert (1788 -1866)

⁸. Arthur John Arberry (1905 - 1905)

⁹. William Clark Chittick (1943)

¹. Kabir Edmund Helminski (1947)

¹. Annemarie Schimmel (1922 - 2003)

¹. Hanns Meinke (1884 - 1974)

¹. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868 - 1945)

¹. Coleman Barks (1937)

¹. Phyllis Tickle (1934-2015)

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the formation of a dialectical relationship between the "Self" and the "Other" within the framework of "inter-subjective" or "inter-cultural" concepts. In such a situation, discourse comes alive, and a paradigm beyond the subject gains serious importance. Ananda Coomaraswamy¹ has thus called Rumi and Meister Eckhart " Rūmī and Meister Eckhart "the two piers of bridge of understanding that will finally span Western and Eastern civilization"(Lewis, 2000: 529). In this context, the "Other" is sought and recognized in an order different from modern subject-centrism, a process of "in-betweenness" that highlights the openness of the "Self" towards the "Other" as an ethical condition of dialectical dialogue. This situation aligns with Rumi's humanology and compels us to think more deeply and theorize in this regard.

Rejection of Truth Monopoly

From the above observations, it can be inferred that the world today, despite the temporal distance from Balkhi's era, still needs to promote his Humanology. Especially considering the current turmoil, it seems that Thomas Hobbes² assertion that "man is a wolf to man"(Rossello, 2012: 225) has become relevant.

At a time when "respect for the Other" and valuing "difference" face serious challenges from prejudice and fanaticism, Balkhi's inclusive message undoubtedly resonates with those yearning for liberation and creates hope. Therefore, among many great thinkers and mystics, it can be argued that Balkhi's message is highly valuable and essential for today's world.

Balkhi's mysticism is a spiritual horizon open to all, and respect for "the Other" is one of its main characteristics. His knowledge transcends borders, and his vision goes beyond sects and paths. He embraces others and considers the differences between believers, infidels, and Jews to stem from their prejudices. Therefore, refining these prejudices is of fundamental importance to him, and he calls everyone to the "**religion of love**":

*We follow the religion of the playful eyes,
And we worship the faith of the idol's tresses.
Although the beloved's rejection breaks our hearts,
We too possess hearts and souls for such heartbreak.*

In Balkhi's time, human dignity was also trampled, and division and conflict had reached their peak. Therefore, he considered respect for "the Other" as a missing element that should be at the forefront of human life. He honored humans as they are, without any distinction or superiority among individuals. This underscores the primacy of "intersubjectivity" over "subjectivity," which is essential for the development of dialogue between "Self" and "the Other." As Gadamer³ puts it, this helps "the event of understanding to occur as a game" (Gadamer, 2004: 102).

For Balkhi, dialogue, in addition to its ethical dimension, also has the capacity for meaning-making and knowledge-giving. This is because through the presence of "the Other," the "self" becomes

¹. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947)

². Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

³. Hans Georg Gadamer (1900 - 2002)

meaningful. Human awareness is formed through the experience of blending the conceptual horizons of the "Self" and "the Other," thus refining human knowledge.

Balkhi, with his doctrine "The paths to reach God are as numerous as the souls of humankind" invited followers of different religions and sects to mutual understanding. He viewed baseless conflicts among them as resulting from vain imaginations, unnecessary prejudices, and "ignorance and negligence" (Zamani, 2006: 112). He expressed his disdain for these conflicts:

*"Outwardly I am free of disbelief and Islam,
I am fleeing from the cloak and the zunnar (Christian belt)" (Balkhi, 1374: 1017).*
or:

*"What should I do, O Muslims, as I do not recognize myself,
I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Zoroastrian, nor Muslim" (Balkhi, 1381: 1868).*

Balkhi did not present the concept of "the Other" merely as a slogan but as one of the foundations of his Humanology. In his view, giving place to "the Other" indicates an acknowledgment of the limitations of the "self's" positions, recognizing "the Other" as an independent bearer of perspective. Thus, "the Other" is not something to be merely measured by the standards of the "self" and then diminished. For this reason, Balkhi condemned and criticized the notion of the "self's" perfection:

*"Whoever saw and recognized their own image,
Rode swiftly towards their own perfection.
They do not fly towards the Divine Majesty,
For they mistakenly think themselves perfect.
No disease is worse than the illusion of one's own perfection,
O you who are full of charm" (Balkhi, 1336: 159).*

When he talks about "the secret of lovers in the hadith of others" (Balkhi, 1336: 7), he introduces "the other" as more knowledgeable than himself: "I don't know anything, I know that you know." (Balkhi, 1375: 957) which shows that it is completely consistent with the words of Shams: "Words are for others, and if they are not for others, what is the purpose of speech?" (Tabrizi, 1377: 172). In relation to epistemological pluralism, Balkhi follows the view of Abu Suleiman Sajestani, which Abuhian Tawhidi reported in al-Maqabsat, and that is the story of touching the elephant.

Sajestani said: People are neither right in all directions nor wrong in all directions, but everyone reaches the truth in a way (Al-Tawhidi, 1359: 220). This is something that Balkhi also had an opinion on, as he said in the story of touching an elephant:

If each had a candle and they went in together the differences would disappear (Balkhi, 1336: 445).

This teaching warns humans against claiming the monopoly on truth for oneself and advocates recognizing that "the Other" is not entirely mistaken. It suggests that everyone is entitled to partake in the truth, thus minimizing misunderstandings and distortions in mutual relationships.

Recognition of "The Other"

In Balkhi's discourse, recognizing "the Other" is crucial because it fosters dialogue, prevents hatred, challenges violent methods, and promotes tolerance as mutual respect. According to Balkhi, our perspectives are limited and cannot reflect the whole truth, thus necessitating "intertextuality" and highlighting its importance.

The necessity of "the Other" in a philosophical sense is also significant for intercultural communication, as it emphasizes the need for exchanges in the realms of thought and opinion, preserving and recreating the principle of plurality within the context of dialogue. As Hegel stated: "In dialogue, the important issue is the courage to listen to the other, the courage to accept one's own limitations, and consequently, the acceptance of the other's right" (Ahmadi, 2012: 541), attributes that Balkhi embodied admirably. The features that Balkhi was admirably adorned with. Obviously, when:

Sirajuddin Qonavi was told that Balkhi said: "I am one with seventy-three religious sects" because he was selfish, so he wanted to humiliate Balkhi and make him angry. He sent one of his relatives, who was a great scientist, to ask Balkhi in front of the crowd, why did you say that? If he confesses, curse him. That person came and asked Balkhi, did you say that I belong to seventy-three sects? He said: I said. That person opened his tongue and cursed, Balkhi laughed and said: I agree with what you said. That person was ashamed and turned back (Jami, 1370: 461).

Balkhi's open view of different trends is also admirable at that time, as it has been reported, in addition to Christians and Armenians, unbelievers also appeared in his assembly and benefited from the spiritual atmosphere of the assembly:

One day I was speaking in the midst of a crowd, among whom were a group of unbelievers. They were crying in the middle of the speech and they were having spiritual pleasure. Someone asked what do they understand and know about this type of speech? I said: They don't need to understand the appearance of this speech, they understand the essence of this speech (Balkhi, 1387: 115).

Maulana has said:

If the paths are different but the destination is the same, don't you see that the path to Kaaba is long? Some are from Rome, some from Syria, some from Ajam, some from China, and some from India and Yemen by sea. So if you look at the roads, the difference is huge. But if you look at the meaning, everyone is united and one and all are connected to the Kaaba inside, their love becomes one inside the Kaaba and contradictions become meaningless (Balkhi, 1387: 115).

The influence of Balkhi on the cultural fields of the West

It is worth remembering that although in Western civilization, the discussion of paying attention to the "other" can be found and admired in the teachings of Protagoras¹, Socrates² questioning, Plato's³ dialogue writing, and Aristotle's⁴ method of *aporia*, but in the medieval period of the Inquisition, there was no place to recognize "He did not leave another." After that, during the Enlightenment era, the concept of "other" was subordinated to the transcendental and self-sufficient subject of Cartesian, and the project of grand narratives has created a great barrier against the flourishing of pluralism. A powerful process that has been accompanied by criticisms and questions.

With this definition, it would be unfair to ignore the contribution and role of other civilizations and cultures, especially the undeniable influence of the rich culture of Eastern mysticism, in valuing the "Other" and tolerating opposing opinions and peaceful coexistence with ethnic groups and religions.

It should not be forgotten that at the same time as the absolute rule of dark thinking, dogmatism and violence over Europe in the Middle Ages, many philosophers, thinkers and speakers of our civilization openly or implicitly respected the opinions and opinions of others in their statements. The writings of the vast majority of our Sufis and mystics, especially Balkhi, are the most eloquent and honest proof of this claim.

In addition to believing that man cannot know absolute truth, Balkhi also opened our eyes to the fact that man's knowledge and understanding of truth is not beyond his "existential circle" (Balkhi, 2013: 97). Therefore, a non-deterministic understanding of truth brings tolerance, respect and epistemology along with humility. This epistemological humility can be seen even five centuries after Balkhi in Lessing's⁵ message during the Enlightenment in Germany, his famous drama "Nathan the Wise"⁶.

If God holds all the truth in his right hand and in his left hand only the ever-dynamic instinct to seek the truth, with the assumption that I will always and forever walk the wrong path and tell me "Choose!", I will I humbly fall on his left hand and say: Father, give me this, because the pure truth is only yours (Yasukata, 2002: 24).

In addition to influencing our civilization, Balkhi has been an inspiration since the 18th century in the West and especially in the 19th century in the West when the Transcendental School grew and emerged under the influence of Hafez, Saadi, Khayyam and Balkhi.

Western cultural leaders tried to introduce them. It was during this acquaintance that William Jones⁷, a prominent English linguist, said about Balkhi: Perhaps a book as valuable as *Masnavi* has never been written by human hands. (Lewis, 2013: 694).

¹. Protagoras (fl. 5th c. B.C.E.)

². Socrates (470 BC – 399 BC)

³. Plato (428-348 BC)

⁴. Aristotle (384 - 322 BC)

⁵. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781)

⁶. *Nathan the Wise* (Ger: *Nathan der Weise*) [1779]

⁷. William Jones (1746 – 1794)

John Hick¹, an American theologian, in his book "An Interpretation of Religion Human Responses to the Transcendent"², began a chapter with a quote from Balkhi: "The lamps are different but the Light is the same" (Hick, 2008: 233), has also used the story of elephant from Masnavi to justify his theory of religious pluralism.

Balkhi has condemned "self-centeredness" with various interpretations. According to him, knowing the true and authentic "self" of a human being is possible only through "negation of the self", a state in which all distinctions between the subject and the object are lost and a kind of entanglement is created between them.

James Russell Lowell³, an American romantic poet, remembers one of Masnavi's stories in this context in an admirable way and recounts the story as follows:

Someone knocked on his lover's door. A voice from inside asked: Who is it? And he replied that I am. The voice replied: The door of this house is not open for someone who has you and me. The door does not open, so the lover goes to the desert and returns after a year and knocks on the door again. The voice asks again who are you? And he says "you"; And the door turns to him (Lowell, 1904, XII, 123).

*"One went to the door of the Beloved and knocked.
A voice asked, "Who is there?"
He answered, "It is I."
The voice said, "There is no room for Me and Thee."
The door was shut.
After a year of solitude and deprivation he returned and knocked.
A voice from within asked, "Who is there?"
The man said, "It is Thee."
"Now", said the friend, "since you are I, come in, O myself.
"There is no room in the house for two I's (egos)."*

Conclusion:

The Centrality of the Human in Balkhi's Thought Balkhi, in the vast expanse of his social thought, ascribes a central place to the "human," ensuring that, as Paul Ricoeur⁴ puts it, "Oneself as Another" is experienced, giving meaning to dialogue. As an Humanologist, Balkhi believed that humans have the capability to discover the spiritual realm of the universe. If the centrality of humans in creation is ignored, nothing meaningful remains to be said.

He goes beyond the philosophical definition of humans as "homo sapiens /rational animals" and refers to humans as "the astrolabe of the divine" (Balkhi, 1387: 23), a being that is both "sees" and "seen". He articulates this beautifully:

Balkhi says:

¹. John Hick (1922 – 2012)

². *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (1989)

³. James Russell Lowell (1819 - 1891)

⁴. Paul Ricœur (1913-2005)

Man (essentially) is eye: the rest (of him) is (mere) flesh and skin: whatsoever his eye has beheld, he is that thing (Balkhi, 1336: 1083)

Balkhi's assertion that "man is vision" and that "the world is based on his sight" means that humanity and its perceptions are central. Outside the human perspective, whatever exists is, in a way, outside the realm of truth and textual space. As we move away from these perceptions, we stray from the essence and truth, venturing into the margins.

Balkhi's acknowledgment of "vision" encompasses not only his own view but also recognizes the perspective of the "Other". This situation fosters "intersubjectivity," emphasizing the importance of breathing and flourishing in a multicultural space. The cognitive and social benefits of such an environment are immense, fostering mutual understanding, respect, and a richer, more harmonious coexistence.

It is important to note that Balkhi is not just a person; rather, his texts are interpretable, and each reader can engage with them through their own unique perspectives. However, it is certain that when the reader establishes a deeper connection with Balkhi's poems and thoughts, they discover new horizons in his opinions and theories. The dynamism and fluidity of Balkhi's thoughts are fundamental characteristics of his mystical and hermeneutical thinking. Therefore, the discussion of "**need for Balkhi**" becomes significant for researchers. I wish Rumi's birthday is celebrated as the world day of "**Respect for Otherness**".

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