



The Comparative Philosophy of Life of Jalal Al-Din Rumi and Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi: its roots and contemporary relevance

Celaledin Rumi ve Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi'nin Karşılaştırmalı Hayat Felsefesi: temel ve çağdaş önemi

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Abstract

This article compares the philosophy of life propounded by two outstanding Sufi thinkers: Jalal al-Din Rumi and Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. Both philosophers made significant contributions to the development of Sufism and left an indelible mark on the history of spiritual thought. Rumi, who lived in the 13th century, is renowned for his profound reflections on love, spirituality, and the path of self-discovery. His philosophy is permeated with the ideas of spiritual awakening and the realisation of the true nature of man, striving for unity with the Divine and overcoming the limitations of the Ego. Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, who lived in the 15th century, was a prominent scholar, philosopher and astrologer, whose works were dedicated to issues of ontology and ethics. His teachings emphasise the importance of purifying the heart and the compassionate soul as the path to liberation from worldly burdens and reunion with the Creator. The article provides a comparative analysis of their philosophical views, identifying similarities and differences, together with discussing their influence on the development of Sufi thought and spiritual practice. The research methods used include an analysis of literary sources, historical documents, and the oeuvres of the philosophers. The hypothesis of the research is that, despite the differences in epochs and cultural contexts, the philosophies of Rumi and Bakuvi share a common foundation in the pursuit of spiritual perfection and the search for truth.

Keywords: Jalal al-Din Rumi, Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, Khalwatiyya, Sufism, Islam, Tolerance, Philosophy.

Özet

Bu makalede, iki önemli Sufi düşünürünün yaşam felsefesi incelenmektedir: Celaleddin Rumi ve Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. Her iki filozof da tasavvufun gelişimine önemli katkılarda bulunmuş ve manevi düşünce tarihinde silinmez bir iz bırakmıştır. 13. yüzyılda yaşamış olan Rumi, sevgi, manevi düşünce ve kendini keşfetme yolu üzerine derin düşünceleriyle tanınır. Felsefesi, manevi uyanış ve insanın gerçek doğasını fark etme, İlahi ile bir olma ve egonun sınırlamalarını aşma fikriyle doludur. 15. yüzyılda yaşamış Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, ontoloji ve etik konularına adanmış çalışmalar yapan önemli bir bilim insanı, filozof ve astrologdur. Öğretileri, kalbin ve merhametli ruhun arındırılmasının, dünyevi yüklerden kurtulma ve Yaratıcı ile birleşme yolunun önemi üzerinde durmaktadır. Makale, her iki filozofun felsefi görüşlerinin karşılaştırmalı bir analizini yaparak, benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ortaya koymakta ve aynı zamanda onların tasavvuf düşüncesinin gelişimine ve manevi pratiğe olan etkilerini incelemektedir. Araştırma yöntemleri, edebi kaynakların, tarihi belgelerin ve filozofların kendi eserlerinin analizini içermektedir. Araştırmanın

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hipotezi, farklı çağlar ve kültürel bağlamlara rağmen, Rumi ve Bakuvi'nin felsefelerinin, manevi olgunluk ve gerçeği arayışta ortak bir temele sahip olduğudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Celaleddin Rumi, Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, Halvetiyye, Tasavvuf, Hoşgörü.

The only eternal beauty is the beauty of the heart."

Jalal al-Din Rumi

Introduction

In the Middle Ages, ideas of tolerance were markedly different from what we understand today. Tolerance was not a value in the modern sense; this period was marked by dominant religious and cultural structures, such as Christianity in Europe and Islam in the Eastern Muslim world, and many aspects of life were governed by religious norms and dogmas. Tolerance was perceived more as a reluctant acceptance of the 'other' to avoid conflict, rather than embracing equality or accepting differences. Today, philosophers view tolerance as a fundamental holistic element of a pluralistic society, where a diversity of perspectives and ways of life is the norm, not the exception. Modern tolerance implies respect for differences and the protection of minority rights. New forms of engagement in matters of tolerance and cultural understanding are evolving in the context of globalisation, digitalisation, and shifting social norms. However, historic Sufi teachings in the East place a special emphasis on loving one's neighbour, considering this as an integral part of a spiritual path and expression of love for God. This love is manifested through compassion, mercy, and the pursuit of unity with the Creator by serving humanity.

Sufis believe that true love for God is unattainable without love for His creations. They emphasise that loving one's neighbour reflects divine love and serves as a means of purifying the heart. For instance, a Sufi parable states: "The first step in the soul's ascent on the Path is love for all that exists in Allah's Creation... Every living creature of Allah becomes significant in the life of such a devotee – as a great miracle created by Allah for his own and our perfection!" [Karimov,1991]

Sufi masters teach their followers to show mercy and compassion to all people, regardless of their faith or social status. For example, Imam Malik narrates a story where a man expresses his love for another solely for the sake of Allah, leading to a profound spiritual connection. Sufis emphasise the idea of human unity and the equality of all before God. Inspired by Sufi and Bhakti traditions, the poet Kabir wrote: "Love and Truth are not in holy places – they are everywhere, Love and Truth; and foremost – in the everyday actions of man." He taught that true faith lies not in the formal observance of rituals but in "purifying the heart", expressing love for one's neighbour. Sufi poets and thinkers often depict this as a direct manifestation of love for God. For instance, a Sufi parable recounts the story of a man who, upon expressing his love for another, is reminded of the Prophet Muhammad's teaching that Allah's love is granted to those who love each other for His sake.

Thus, Sufi teachings focus on the practice of mercy, compassion, and the recognition of human unity, viewing these as pathways towards drawing closer to the Divine.

Academic motivation

In this article, we will attempt to explore the ideas of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi on tolerance and the spiritual interactions amongst people, ideas which share numerous points of convergence, despite the different times and cultural contexts in which they lived. Both thinkers belonged to the Sufi tradition, where the values of love, spiritual unity, and tolerance hold central importance. Today, representatives of the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – increasingly advocate for interfaith dialogue, mutual respect, and tolerance, especially in the context of globalisation, where people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds interact more closely. In these religions, the



approach to tolerance often rests on the recognition of shared roots, common humanity, similar spiritual values, and the importance of peaceful coexistence.

Jalal al-Din Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, mystic, and philosopher, is renowned for his profound insights into spirituality and human connection. Central to Rumi's teachings is the concept of tolerance, which he viewed not merely as a social virtue, but as an essential spiritual practice intertwined with love, compassion, and acceptance. He perceived the diversity among individuals as reflections of divine wisdom and the inherent grace of humanity, believing that every person, irrespective of their background or beliefs, follows a unique path leading towards the Divine.

Key Aspects of Rumi's Approach to Tolerance:

Love and Compassion for All: Central to Rumi's teaching is the concept that love is the foundation of the universe, enabling one to understand others. He famously commented: "Beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I'll meet you there." This expression of openness and tolerance means that, beyond prejudiced judgments and divisions, there exists a unified space where everyone can be accepted as they are. His philosophy extended beyond abstract concepts, offering practical guidance for cultivating tolerance. Rumi's own gatherings welcomed individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering an environment where people could share their unique spiritual experiences and learn from one another.

Emphasis on Inner Transformation: He taught that personal transformation through love and self-awareness leads towards the natural expression of tolerance. Rumi's poetry often incorporated elements from various cultural and religious traditions, reflecting his appreciation for the panoply of richness that diversity brings to the subjective human experience. For Rumi, love was also the path to spiritual enlightenment. He believed that, through love, individuals could attain a deeper understanding of themselves and the universe. This journey inward, guided by love, leads to a realisation that all beings are interconnected and the Divine Essence is present in everyone. Such an awakening fosters a profound sense of empathy and compassion, being essential components of true tolerance. Central to Rumi's teachings is the concept of love as a universal force that permeates every aspect of existence. He believed that love is the essence of life, a divine spark that resides within every human being. This perspective is encapsulated in his assertion:

"Every religion has Love, but Love has no religion."

This statement highlights Rumi's belief that, whilst various religious traditions embody love, the essence of love itself transcends any singular religious framework. By positioning love above doctrinal confines, Rumi promotes a holistic vision of unity that embraces all of humanity.

1. **Acceptance of Other Paths and Beliefs:** Rumi believed that all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, are seeking truth and striving toward God, each in their own way. He emphasised that the external differences in religions and customs are of marginal importance as the ultimate goal is the same for all. His poetry often features imagery where he addresses all religions and peoples, stressing that unity is only possible via the renunciation of egoism and prejudice.

2. **Rejection of Judgment and Criticism:** Rumi urged his followers not to judge others for their faults or imperfections. He wrote: "Do not look at my sins, look at my heart." This concept highlights the importance of accepting all people, despite their weaknesses and mistakes, for no-one is perfect. Through this approach, Rumi demonstrated tolerance towards human imperfection.

Empathy and Understanding: Rumi viewed empathy as the path to acceptance and love. His verses often focus on the idea that a person must strive to understand the pain and joy of others. He believed that each person, having endured pain and suffering, becomes more sensitive to others and increasingly capable of understanding those who experience similar challenges. [Руми, 2013]

Thus, for Rumi, tolerance is not merely about accepting differences, but developing a deeper capacity for understanding and love. His teachings on tolerance have inspired and continue to be a model for many people in their search for an inner peace.

Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, a 15th-century Azerbaijani philosopher, Sufi, and prominent thinker, is one of the leading representatives of Sufism in the Caucasus. He left a significant mark on Sufi philosophy and esoteric Islam. Bakuvi lived and taught in Baku, where he was the Sheikh and leader of a religious centre for the Khalwati Sufi order, which he helped propagate in the region. Like most Sufi teachers, he placed great emphasis on the values of tolerance, spiritual unity, and mutual respect. His polymathic oeuvre, penned in Arabic, Persian, and Azerbaijani, encompasses such topics such as ontology, ethics, astronomy, and mathematics. Notable amongst his writings are the poems ‘Bayān al-‘Ilm’, ‘Atwār al-Qalb’, and ‘Manāzil al-Āṣiqīn’. His philosophical treatises, such ‘Asrār at-Tālibīn’, are imbued with religious-mystical concepts and serve as invaluable resources for studying the philosophy and science of his era. [Cleyer,1994]

Key Aspects of Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi's Approach to Tolerance

1. **Unity of All Believers and Transcendent Truth:** Bakuvi believed that all true knowledge and spiritual paths lead to God and, despite the coexistence of different religious traditions and rituals, the truth is always one and the same. In Sufi tradition, it was often emphasised that the external forms of worship or cultural differences are merely different paths to attaining one transcendent reality. Like many Sufis, Bakuvi adhered to the conceit that internal sincerity and depth of faith matters, with external elements being ignored. This enabled him to develop openness to other beliefs and commitment to interreligious understanding. [Aliyeva, 2023]
2. **Teaching of Spiritual Love and Brotherhood:** Bakuvi believed that spiritual love was the foundation for all people seeking God and that, via love for the Creator, one could achieve love and respect for others. This idea of spiritual fraternity encouraged him and his followers to view every person with respect and understanding, being an undeniable characteristic of the Sufi Islamic tradition. The order to which he belonged extolled unity and brotherhood, regardless of ethnic or religious differences.
3. **Preaching Tolerance and Rejecting Fanaticism:** Under the influence of Sufism, Bakuvi opposed fanaticism and religious dogmatism, which he recognised often led to divisions and conflicts. His philosophy was a call to follow a deeper spiritual trajectory, free from prejudice and narrow interpretations. He believed that the true path to God was possible only through the purification of the heart, detachment from hatred, and the search for inner peace, which also formed the basis for tolerance towards those of divergent views. [Aliyeva, 2023]
4. **Mutual Understanding and Respect for Other Cultures:** Bakuvi lived and preached in a multinational and multireligious environment, which itself created fertile conditions for the evolution of tolerance as a necessity. His respect for cultural and religious diversity is evident from his works and the manner in which he led his religious community. His approach to teaching was inclusive and open to all who sought knowledge and spiritual enlightenment.



Sufism, particularly Bakuvi's teachings, significantly influenced the development of Azerbaijani culture, literature, and philosophy. The principles of tolerance, respect for diverse cultures, and interreligious dialogue advocated by Bakuvi have contributed to the formation of a multicultural society in Azerbaijan. Contemporary declarations of respect and tolerance emphasise the importance of embracing cultural diversity, aligning with Bakuvi's teachings.

Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi undeniably embodied tolerance as part of his spiritual path, supporting the ideals of love, unity, and brotherhood that surmounted religious differences and contributed towards the development of harmonious and respectful relationships between people of different cultures and beliefs.

Commonalities between the Teachings of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi regarding Tolerance and Spiritual Interaction

Despite living in different times and cultural conditions, the ideas of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi in relation to tolerance and spiritual interaction share many points of intersection. Both thinkers belonged to the Sufi tradition, where the values of love, spiritual unity and tolerance hold central importance. Here are the key aspects where their views align:

1. **Unity of All Paths Leading to God:** Both Rumi and Bakuvi believed that the truth is one, and all people, regardless of their religious rites and cultural differences, are striving toward this. Rumi emphasised that true connection with God comes through the heart, usurping religious dogma and boundaries, and commented that all people are 'rays of light', emanating from one source. Bakuvi also believed that the form of religion mattered less than its essence – being internal sincerity, purification of the heart, and the pursuit of spiritual truth. Their shared belief in the unity of the divine and striving for God through personal experience fostered tolerance towards different religious paths.
2. **Love as the Foundation of All Relationships:** Both philosophers asserted that spiritual love is the most important force uniting people. Rumi preached love as a way of knowing God, saying that only through love can a person attain true wisdom and unity. Bakuvi also saw love for God as the foundation for acceptance and mutual respect between humanity, believing that, through sincere love, a person comes to understand the unity of all existence. Both thinkers emphasised that spiritual love transcends divisions and helps human beings recognise the divine light in each other.
3. **Rejection of Fanaticism and Dogmatism:** Rumi and Bakuvi both condemned fanaticism and the narrowness of religious dogmas, which, in their view, only distance a person from the truth. Rumi explained: "Give up ideas of what is right and wrong, and walk into the garden". Bakuvi, in turn, emphasised that external manifestations of faith are of marginal importance, when compared to internal purification. Both believed that true spirituality requires freedom from bias, and this facilitates tolerant attitudes toward differing views.
4. **Spiritual Brotherhood and Respect for Diversity:** Both thinkers understood that cultural and traditional diversity is a natural part of the world order and must be respected. Rumi often spoke of the spiritual brotherhood of all people, regardless of their faith or culture, whilst Bakuvi maintained the principle of respect for cultural and religious diversity within his community. Their Sufi philosophy stresses the idea of universal brotherhood, whereby all persons, regardless of religion, deserve respect as a bearer of the Divine Spirit.

5. **The Search for Inner Peace and Purification of the Heart:** Both Rumi and Bakuvi placed great importance on the purification of the heart and search for inner peace as key tenets of the spiritual journey of humanity. This enabled them to transcend differences and embrace others with love and compassion, contributing to their tolerance and harmonious worldview.

Thus, the ideas of Rumi and Bakuvi inextricably intertwine in their approach to tolerance: both viewed this as the path to spiritual unity, based on love, the rejection of dogma, and respect for different traditions. These concepts remain relevant today, emphasising the values of spiritual and cultural dialogue for contemporary society.

1. **Love as a Unifying Force:** "Love is not something we find. Love is something that finds us" – Rumi. This stresses that love is a force that does not choose, divide, or limit. It unites everyone, regardless of their origin, religion, or culture. According to Rumi, love can surmount any barriers and unite humanity. [Руми, 2009]

2. **Tolerance Through Acceptance of Differences:** "I do not distinguish between you and me. I love you. You may not look like me, but inside you are me" – Rumi. He taught that behind external differences lies a common essence, and therefore tolerance and acceptance of others are indisputable aspects of true love. [Руми, 1987]

3. **Revelation About Love and Spiritual Unity:** "Love does not look with eyes, it sees with the soul. It is not interested in form, but reveals the hidden essence" – Rumi. Here, Rumi emphasises that true love is not based on appearance or form, but inner unity. This ideal should form the foundation of tolerance, whereby we begin to understand and appreciate each other not through outward traits, but through essence and soul.

4. **A Bridge Between Differences:** "Do not ask who your brother or sister is. Love will stand between you to weave your souls into one" – Rumi. This verse illustrates the idea that love transcends divisions. In the context of tolerance, it reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, and it does not matter from where we come, as we share a common human bond.

5. **Acceptance of All Forms of Love:** "My religion is love. I follow love wherever it leads me" – Rumi. Here, he declares that his only religion is love. He rejects rigid boundaries, acknowledging that love is a universal feeling that exists beyond any particular religion or tradition. This is an important message for all those seeking to achieve true spiritual unity through mutual respect and tolerance.

These verses by Rumi highlight his deep commitment to the ideas of love, acceptance, and unity, regardless of difference. They inspire everyone to achieve mutual understanding and respect.

Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi, like Rumi, left us many profound and inspiring verses that touch upon themes of love, tolerance, and spiritual unity. Here are a few examples that can reveal his approach to these topics:

1. **Unity of Humanity:** "You and I are one. I see you in myself, and me in you. We are not two, we are one whole" – Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. This verse expresses Bakuvi's main philosophy regarding the unity of all humanity; that there are no real differences between people because, deep inside, we are all one. The principle that all people, despite their outer appearance or differences, constitute a single spiritual entity, lies at the heart of tolerance and respect. [Aliyeva, 2023]



2. **Love as a Universal Force:** "Love knows no boundaries, it forgives everything. Whoever loves does not divide people into theirs and others" – Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. This verse highlights the importance of love as a force that does not erect barriers or look for differences. Love, according to Bakuvi, unites, forgives, and accepts all people as they are, without dividing them into 'ours' and 'others'. [Aliyeva. 2019]
3. **Acceptance and Understanding:** "Oh, if people saw how one soul lives in the body of everyone! Then they could not look at each other as strangers" – Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. He touches on the concept of the inner connection between all people. This verse reminds us that, in reality, we are all connected by one common soul and should not perceive each other as strangers, but rather as an inseparable part of a holistic entity.
4. **The Principle of Spiritual Freedom:** "It does not matter who you were yesterday, what matters is who you become today. The true person is free from all labels and limitations" – Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. In this verse, Bakuvi asserts that true freedom and spiritual enlightenment lies in freeing oneself from all external categories and labels that divide people. This includes liberation from dogmas and prejudices, which is also the foundation of tolerance and respect for others. [Aliyeva, 2013]
5. **All Religions Lead to One Source:** "Religions may be different, but the essence is one – the striving for the One. Whoever finds love, finds the truth" – Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. This verse reveals an important point regarding the understanding of tolerance: whilst religious traditions may differ, they all strive toward one source, and that source is love. Bakuvi focuses on the importance of the inner search, not focusing on external forms of religious difference.
6. **On Love and Serving Humanity:** "He who serves others with love knows neither strangers nor his own. He serves everyone as himself" – Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi. In this verse, Bakuvi expounds the concept that true love makes no distinctions between people. Service and help for others should be motivated by sincere love and care, rather than by division into 'ours' and the 'others'. [Aliyeva, 2013]

These verses by Bakuvi, like those of Rumi, emphasise the importance of love, acceptance, and unity amongst all people, regardless of their superficial differences. They provide a deeper understanding of how tolerance and love can become the foundations of spiritual practice and interpersonal relationships.

Modern Understanding of Tolerance in Philosophy

Today, philosophers view tolerance as the fundamental element of a pluralistic society where diversity of opinions and lifestyles is the norm, not the exception. Modern tolerance implies respect for differences and the protection of minority rights. John Rawls explored the concept of tolerance in depth in his major works, particularly 'A Theory of Justice' (1971) and 'Political Liberalism' (1993).

1. 'A Theory of Justice'. In this work, Rawls introduces his concept of 'justice as fairness', outlining principles that he believes contribute to a 'just' society. Central to this idea is the original position and social contract concept, where people with diverse beliefs agree on shared principles of justice. Tolerance, according to Rawls, is integral to this type of society, as it recognises and respects diversity, thereby fostering overall justice and stability. [Rawls, 1971]
2. 'Political Liberalism'. In this book, Rawls further develops his ideas, seeking to develop a pluralistic society where people may hold different, sometimes conflicting, worldviews. Here, he

emphasises that tolerance is necessary for peaceful coexistence in a politically liberal society. He introduces the concept of the ‘overlapping consensus’ – a situation whereby citizens with varying moral and religious views agree to adhere to the same political principles of justice. Rawls argued that tolerance is fundamental, as it helps maintain social harmony and stability.

The influence of such perspectives around tolerance on contemporary discourse suggests a continuous thread between ancient wisdom and modern thought, inspiring new approaches to multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence.

New Forms of Tolerance and Approaches to Diversity

In recent times, concepts like ‘inclusivity’ and ‘intersectionality’ have emerged. Inclusivity is based around the tenet that true tolerance arises from actively involving people from diverse cultures, orientations, and abilities in social processes. Intersectionality helps to understand how different identities (such as gender, race and social status) intersect, deepening an understanding of inherent tolerance and justice.

Modern approaches often emphasise the need to not only recognise others’ rights, but to actively combat inequality. This is particularly evident in contemporary movements advocating for the rights of women, LGBTQI+ communities, and ethnic minorities.

New forms of interaction on issues of tolerance and cultural understanding are evolving in the context of globalisation, digitalisation, and changing social norms. Conveying the concepts of Rumi and Bakuvi on love, tolerance, and unity to youth is an important and inspiring task. It is essential to adapt these ideas to contemporary perceptions and the needs of technologically adept young people, using accessible and engaging methods. Here are a few approaches that can help:

1. **Music and Art:** Integrating Rumi and Bakuvi's thoughts into music, poetry, or art can resonate with young people who are passionate about creative expression. Music videos, dance routines, or visual art, inspired by their teachings, can present their philosophies in a modern, engaging way. Music artists or poets can reinterpret these ideas, making them more relevant to youth culture. It is notable that quotes from Rumi are frequently used on social media.
2. **Interactive Workshops or Youth Events:** Organising events, such as workshops or discussion groups, wherein young people can explore Rumi and Bakuvi's ideas in the context of their own lives, is a powerful method of making these concepts more tangible. These sessions can include debates, group discussions, or role-playing activities, where youths can engage with the ideas of tolerance, unity, and love from a personal and contemporary perspective.
3. **Incorporation into Education:** Integrating the teachings of Rumi and Bakuvi into school curriculums or extracurricular programmes focused on ethics, philosophy, or social studies can help young people directly engage with these concepts. Educational videos, debates, and projects centered on the themes of love and tolerance could be part of the curriculum, helping shape a generation that values unity and respect for others.

Conclusion:

The philosophy of life expounded by Jalal al-Din Rumi and Seyyid Yahya Bakuvi is rooted in deep spiritual exploration, love for God, and self-knowledge. Rumi promoted Sufi ideas, emphasising the unity of all existence and the necessity of inner purification via love and devotion. Meanwhile, Bakuvi



developed Sufism within the Azerbaijani tradition of tolerance, focusing on asceticism and spiritual perfection. Both thinkers significantly influenced the development of Islamic philosophy and spiritual culture, leaving a legacy that continues to inspire and resonate through current and future generations.

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