KANZ PHILOSOPHIA

Volume 6 Number 1 June, 2016 Page 1-16

SCIENCE OF THE SELF AS DEPICTED IN THE STORY OF THE SNAKE-CATCHER: RŪMĪ 'S *MATHNAWĪ* IN CONTEXT

Amir H. Zekrgoo
Professor of Islamic & Oriental Arts,
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
ahzekrgoo@gmail.com

Leyla H. Tajer
Researcher
University Islam Malaysia (UIM)
leilatajer@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The self is always become a central concept in the mysticism tradition, nonetheless for Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d.1207). Through *Mathnawī*, Rūmī uses metaphors to presents man's multi-layered self. He communicates through stories with great potential to be developed into various forms of visual and performing arts. Through his creative imagination, and using elements from Persian mystical literature Rūmī presents his messages in an attractive and tangible form. Adopting metaphors and symbols he pictures various faces of *nafs* (self) relating each face to an individual animal. "The Snake Catcher's tale" is an excellent artistic display of man's battle with his animal self. It offers a complex religious subject in an easy-to-digest manner that can be visualized and set into play.

Keywords: *Rūmī, 'Ilm al-Nafs (Science of the Self), Mathnawī, snake symbolism, artistic expression.*

ABSTRAK

Persoalan diri menjadi isu yang sangat sentral dalam tradisi mistisisme, tidak terkecuali bagi Jalaluddin Rūmī (d.1207). Melalui *Matsnawī*, Rūmī menggunakan metafora untuk menunjukkan lapisan diri manusia. Ia berkomunikasi melalui kisah-kisah dengan potensi besar untuk dikembangkan menjadi berbagai bentuk seni visual dan pertunjukan. Melalui imajinasi kreatifnya, dan menggunakan unsur-unsur dari literatur mistik Persia, Rūmī menyajikan pesan dalam bentuk yang menarik dan nyata yang dapat diamati dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, bahwa rangkaian simbol-simbol tersebut merepresentasikan diri manusia. Melalui metafora dan simbol, Ia menggambarkan berbagai wajah *nafs* (diri) dan menghubungkan setiap wajah dengan hewan. "Kisah Penangkap Ular" adalah tampilan artistik yang sangat baik mengenai pertempuran manusia dengan diri hewaninya. Metafora dan Simbol menawarkan subjek keagamaan yang kompleks yang mudah dicerna dengan cara yang dapat divisualisasikan dan dimainkan.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Rūmī, Ilmu Jiwa, Matsnawī, simbolisme ular, ekspresi artistik.*

How to Cite: Zekrgoo, Amir H., Leyla H. Tajer, Amir H. Zekrgoo, and Leyla H. Tajer. 2016. "Science of the Self as Depicted in the Story of the Snake-Catcher : Rumi's Mathnawī in Context." *Kanz Philosophia : A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 6 (1): 1–16. doi:10.20871/KPJIPM.V6I1.168.

doi: 10.20871/kpjipm.v6i1.168

Introduction

'Self-realization leads to God-realization' is an insightful statement from a famous *hadīth*, which highlights the importance of one's self-awareness and inner qualities. Such awareness allows one to identify one's strengths and weaknesses, and one's true station in life. It can open the inner eye with which the right path is identified, dangers detected, and friends and foes distinguished. The fierceness of the inner enemy, says the *Mathnawī* quoting the Prophet, is such that "would burst the gall-bladders even of courageous men." It drains the power of their body and heart to the extent that "they cannot even endure fasting and prayer" (Rūmī 2013, chap. II: 1901-1903).

To expose this hidden and dangerous enemy, and to bring it to the common understanding, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī resorts to his creative imagination, and develops an attractive story full of symbols and metaphors. He uses a frosted-yet-alive ferocious dragon to symbolize the enemy that resides within, and a poor and ambitious snake catcher who wishes to conquer such a powerful opponent without having the necessary knowledge, power or tools. The narrative speaks of man's struggles to confront his own inherent enemy, day by day throughout the life. Science of the self is supposed to equip man with necessary tools that would keep him safe in his life-time-struggle.

Science of the Self

The term "*nafs*" or human soul has three characteristics in the Qur'anic terminology: *ammārah bi-al-su*' (commanding to evil), *lawwāmah* (upbraid), and *mutmảinnah* (tranquil). 'Izz al-Dīn Kāshānī (d.1334/1335) provides a hierarchical structure of the three with the *nafs al- ammārah*, being the rawest and uncultured form of human self, located at the bottom (Kashānī 2002, 84). The Qur'an indicates that this 'self' commands to evil unless the Almighty guides the person with His Compassion (QS. Yusuf [12]:53). The pyramidal structure rises to the second level where the

upbraid/criticizing self (*nafs al-lawwāmah*) is stationed. Allah takes an oath to this self from whose position man is blamed (QS. al-Qiyāmah [75]:2-3). The upbraid self is a power by which man is held back from moving towards sins. It draws its light from various sources, namely the divine guiding light that is installed in man's heart, and the blessing of the presence of *ṣulaḥā* (righteous) and *awlīyā*' (friends of God) (Dekhoda 1959). And the highest status of the self, the tranquil self, is the one that is called by its Lord to return and meet Him in joy and satisfaction, and join His servants in Paradise (QS.al-Fajr [89]: 28-30). In order to attain to the height of this sublime self (*nafs al-mutmåinnah*), which is the state of supreme purity, one has to discipline his self severely and continuously. He must adorn himself with the good manners, intentions, and actions (Musahab 1993).[1] The Qur'an further explains that the people who are rebellions to Allah are the ones who prefer the mundane desires of this life over the life of the Hereafter. They are destined to reside in the hell. Whilst those who fear their Lord and forbid their *nafs* from such desires will be given residence in paradise (al-Nazi'at [79]: 37-41).

Animal symbolism has often been adopted in Persian art and poetry to express ideas that would reflect inner qualities/attributes in the man. The gist of such symbols is meant to take man on the path of self-realization. The entire concept is directed towards explaining how man's lower multi-faced self, acts as an obstacle to realizing his higher Self. The lower self is the enemy to be put down; only then the true Self in us will shine.

In the process of the "knowledge of the self" (*'ilm al-nafs*), the seeker needs to equip himself with tools and means that help him elevate his state of being. The aim, according to the Qur'an, is to assist the spiritual wayfarer to liberate himself from his vicious 'evil commanding self' (*nafs al-ammārah*) by passing the stage of the 'upbraid self' (*nafs lawwāmah*) and taking him to the ultimate goal of self-assertion and self-realization that is the 'tranquil self' (*al-nafs al- mutmåinnah*). At this juncture, the spiritual traveller's self is in complete peace. A person with a "self at-peace" is the one in a state of selflessness. "By realizing the transient nature of the individual self (ego), the seer will realize that the rays of the true Self will not shine unless the distracting sparkles of the lower-self are extinguished. In other words, "selflessness" leads to "Self-realization"" (Zekrgoo 2008, 202–5).

Sufis believe that "what is not in a man he cannot know. Therefore, he could not know God and all the mysteries of the universe unless he found

[1] Under "*nafs al- mutmåinnah*"

them in himself" (Nicholson 1914, 85). This expression draws its validity from a famous Prophetic *ḥādīth* that states: 'Whoever knows himself, he knows his Lord'.[2] Rūmī (1207-1273) reiterates the same *ḥādīth* in his *Mathnawī* in a poetic form (Rūmī 2013, chap. V: 2114), and argues that man is a microcosm only in appearance, but a macrocosm essence (Rūmī 1925, chap. IV: 521).[3] In Sufi terminology nafs is identified with lowest of the three categories presented in the Qur'an, and therefore regard it as a blame-worthy attitude – a disease or a personality disorder (Qushayri 1995, 226). Among Persian scholars and commentators, Zamani, in valuable work *Minagar-i Ishq*, devotes an independent section to the *Mathnawī's* verses that refer to *nafs al-ammārah* (Zamani 2003, 502–10). Foruzanfar describes *nafs* as a power that promotes tendency towards earthly desires, hence a source of evil conducts (Forunzafar 1988, 484). Qushayrī also provides two opposite interpretations of *nafs*: the soul and the self. He regards the soul as source of praise-worthy qualities while the sensual self as breathing place of undesirable manners and attitudes (Qushayri 1995, 132). The Islamic concept of the self/soul has been discussed in Islamic theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafah*) and mysticism (*'Irfān*). 'Alī ibn Abī Thālib (599-661) was perhaps the first Muslim who used snake in a metaphoric manner to explain world and its illusionary existence. He compares the deceptive nature of the world to a snake, whose skin is smooth and desirable to touch, while it carries a deadly venom inside (*Nahj al-Balaghah* 1368, 381; Bagherpoor 2011, 101). Rumī follows the same line and compares worldly desires to a snake that awaits its prey hidden and disguised as a tree branch (Rūmī 2013, chap. VI: 4079-4081). This expression is in line with the earlier literal works of Sufi masters and Quranic commentaries expressed in the works of Sana'ī (1080-1131), 'Attār (1145-1220), Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240), Suhrawardī (1154-1191) and many others.

The Arabic term *'nafs'* is broadly adopted in Persian literature. In the area of linguistics and theology, the word refers to two primary entities, namely one's self and one's soul. In most lexicons and literary works, this term is explained as referring to one's true self (Zanjani 1999, 17). Nafs is believed to be from the same root as '*nafas*' (breath) and is therefore associated with life (Zanjani 1999, 14). It is the essence of life that resembles

[2] من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه

[3] We have used Nicholson's edition of the *Mathnawī* (1925-1940) to identify the verse numbers in this paper. For the English translation too, in many cases Nicholson's translation was used. We have also benefited from Jawad Mujaddedi's and Amir Zekrgoo's English translations as indicated in the text.

a fine steam that brings to the body the feelings and the power of voluntary movements and actions; this is also known as the 'animal soul'. This steam-like substance leaves the body at the time of death, but it distances itself while remaining connected to the body during sleeping. The term *nafs*, from a linguistic perspective, is masculine. However, in the Qur'an it is presented in two different gendered forms: In almost all examples *nafs* refers to one's self (as a person), the term appears in as masculine (e.g. Ali 'Imrān [3]:185). In one instance, however, the term refers to the pre-eternal soul from which all human beings were created, the term becomes feminine (Al-Nisā'[4]:1) (Ṭurīhī 1996, 114). Ibn Sinā was perhaps the first Muslim scholar who elaborated on *'Ilm al-Nafs* as an ontological and philosophical discourse in his *Shifā* (Dibaji 2006, 60). The science of the self is a vast area with many branches such as the nature of the self, its origins, powers of the self, the relation of the self to the body. Suhrawardī in the same intention treated *nafs* both as a philosophical dialogue and a practical subject for self-purification, using metaphoric expressions (Dibaji 2009, 59–78).

The Notion of Self in Rūmī's *Mathnawī*

Rūmī refers to the 'self' in his works using Persian terms *khud*, *khish*, *man*, as well as the Arabic *nafs*. The *Mathnawī*, based on minute observation of man's reaction to various situations, formulates a science of the self. It elaborates the stages of man's ego and the sources of their inspirations. The "self" in the *Mathnawī* mostly corresponds to "the self that commands to evil" as is expressed in the Qur'an (Yusuf [12]: 53). The poet invites his reader to be aware and vigilant of the hazards and downfall of the self.

جمله قرآن شرح خبث نفس هاست
بنگر اندر مصحف، آن چشمت کجاست

"The entire Qur'an is a description of the viciousness of sensual souls:
Look into the Holy Book! Where is thine eye?" (Rūmī 2013, chap. V: 4862)

The carnal self is explained using negative terms such as 'spring of black water', (Rūmī 2013, chap. I: 775), 'black flood' (Rūmī 2013, chap. I: 776), 'wisdom removing magic' (Rūmī 2013, chap. II: 2278), 'possessor of thousand tongues with each tongue equipped with the hundred languages (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 2551), 'predatory wolf' (Rūmī 2013, chap. VI: 4856), 'treaty breaker'(Rūmī 2013, chap. II: 2279), just to name a few. It is also named the bad self, the blind

self, the cursed self, the self with hellish attitude, the sick self, the selfish self, the greedy self, the evil self, and so on (Ketabi 2006, 19).

While there are countless references to the evil-commanding self (*nafs al-ammārah*) in the *Mathnawī* only a single reference is found about each of the other two categories, namely *nafs al-lawwāmah* and *nafs al-mutmåinnah*. The term *nafs-i lawwāmah* appears in the following couplet:

چون ز بند دام، باد او شکست
نفس لوامه بر او یابید دست

"When his wind (idle self-conceit) is broken by imprisonment in the trap, the rebuking soul gets the upper hand over him." (Rūmī 2013, chap. V: 2062)

The *mutmåinnah* self is also found only in a single verse:

روی نفس مطمئنه در جسد
زخم ناخن های فکرت می کشد

"The face of the tranquil soul in the body,
Suffers wounds inflicted by the nails of thought". (Rūmī 2013, chap. V: 557)

Two distinct enemies have been said to threaten man's life journey: the Satan and the 'self'. The two, Rūmī claims are but manifestations of a fundamental evil source. Satan is the external enemy while the bodily self is the internal one.

نفس وشیطان هردویک تن بوده اند
دردو صورت خویش را بنموده اند
چون فرشته وعقل کایشان یک بُدند
بهرحکمت هاش دو صورت شدند
دشمنی داری چنین در سر خویش
مانع عقلست و خصم جان و کیش

"The Self and Satan are one body; they
Make themselves look like two in their own way

And angel and true knowledge are united,
Although for wisdom's sake they seem divided.
You have a foe in your most hidden part,
Which fight with your own faith, your brain and heart". (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 4056-4058)

The hidden enemy inside is also a vessel for the outer one. This bigger foe is a source of all evils, sins and wrongdoings, and has hence become the main focus of discussion of self.

این چنین ساحر درون تست و سر
ان فی الوسواس سحرا مستتر

"A sorcerer who does that is in you:
Temptation's mystery's hidden from your view" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 4077).[4]

Both enemies are to be subdued as they are highest obstacles in the journey of salvation. Like the two edges of a scissors they cut the threads of man's spiritual life. The *Mathnawī* attempts to provide hints of self-realizations and guidelines on how to confront it. The 'hidden enemy' is not one but many (Rūmī 2013, chap. I: 1034)and the battle with it is the fiercest of all battles – the *Jihād al-Akbār* (Rūmī 2013, chap. II: 2379). Intelligence and reasoning are unfit for such battle (Rūmī 2013, chap. I: 1374). It requires the guidance of a Shaykh (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 2545, 2547) and blessings from God and his messenger to overcome this powerful enemy (Rūmī 2013, chap. I: 782).

Snake Symbolism in Persian Classical Literature

Snake (Persian = *mār*) in classical Persian literature is almost always associated with evil forces and therefore loaded with negativity. These creatures have strange looks and a somewhat unique behavior. They are mysterious, beautiful and dangerous. Their patterned and colorful scales attract the viewers while touching them could be fatal. They live both underground and on the surface, hence connected to the two realms: the realm of the living and the underworld metaphorically associated with the two domains of light and darkness. As serpents commute between the two worlds they are sometimes seen as messengers of death. On the other

[4] Translation by Jawad Mujaddedi.

hand, snakes shedding skin is regarded as a symbol of rejuvenation and, in this sense, a symbol of life. Snakes often attack from blind points and catch their prey off-guard, and so they symbolize the hidden enemy. The 11th century Persian royal poet, Abu Najm Ahmad ibn Qaus Manuchehri (d. 1040) compares killing of an enemy to killing of a snake; it cannot be achieved if it is in the hide (Dekhoda 1959).[5] Naser Khosrow (1004-1088), a Persian poet and philosopher, compares the transient world to a sleeping snake that shall not be awakened because it remains harmless as long as it is asleep (Dekhoda 1959). He further associates a bad friend to a sleeping serpent hidden in the *miḥrāb* (prayer niche) and forbids following him in prayer (Dekhoda 1959). Double faced people (hypocrites) are sometimes referred to as split-tongue snakes (Dekhoda 1959). Moreover, snakes were used in classical literary works to symbolize ignorance, greed, harmfulness, lust, unbelievers, and material possessions (Rahim 2014, 164). In rare occasions the hair-chain or curl of the beloved are compared to snakes; the lovers must know that the domain of love is a dangerous one and shall prepare himself for the risks involved (Rahim 2014, 164).

Snake can also be positive symbol. In Persian folktales, snakes are often associated with the underground treasures that they guard and protect. The protective attribute of snake has been emphasized upon in many Eastern cultures and faiths, especially in Hindu and Buddhist Iconography (Zekrgoo 2012, 42–50). Sana'ī (1080-1135) parallels a good wife to a treasure snake while associates a bad woman with an evil serpent (Dekhoda 1959).[6] According to ʿAṭṭār (1145-1220) in his *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* (Conference of the Birds), a man carries within him a hell full of snakes (ʿAṭṭār 2005, 405). To become worthy of the secrets of existence, and qualified to enter the promised paradise, one needs to slay the ugly snake of the self (ʿAṭṭār 2005, 261).

The Story of the Snake Catcher

Rūmī has also, in various places, compared snake to a bad friend but emphasized that the latter is far more fatal than the former (Rūmī 2013, chap. V: 2635). The primary figurative use of snake in the *Mathnawī*, however, is concerning the human's lustful self, which is designated as "the mother of all idols." Worldly attractions are paralleled to snakes, while the corporal soul is regarded as a fierce dragon that is a mother to them all:

[5] *Lughat-nāmeh, under "mār."*
[6] *Lughat-nāmeh, under "mār."*

مادر بت ها بت نفس شماست
ز آن که آن بت مار و این بت اژدهاست

"The mother of all idols is the idol of your ego,
Outer idols are mere snakes while your inner idol is a dragon" (Rūmī 2013, chap. I: 772).

Perhaps the best and most comprehensive representation of snake symbolism appears in the Book III of the *Mathnawī* in "The Story of the Snake Catcher". High in the mountains; frozen peaks, a snake catcher discovers what seemed to be the biggest achievement of his lifetime career: a gigantic dragon frozen there in the wilderness! With lots of effort, the man manages to load the big catch on the back of his carriage, fastening tight the coils of the serpent with thick cords. Full of ambition and in the dream of making a fortune of this incredible opportunity, he transports the dragon to the city of Baghdad.

The news spreads fast. Words move from mouth to mouth. "Hey! A snake catcher has brought a dragon!" … "What a rare and astonishing hunt …" It is Baghdad and at the heart of summer; the heat under the blazing sun is unbearable. In such condition and normal circumstances, people tend to stay indoors, and come out only to perform their daily duties to earn a living, or to attend to an emergency. This time, the subject matter was neither one! In a short while, Baghdad's city centre gets packed with people gathered from all corners as well as the shores of the Tigris River. The city centre was now more crowded than ever. No one had remembered such a big crowd at the blazing mid-day of the hot season. It was entertainment of the highest order. A dragon, which people had only heard of in stories, was placed right there in front of their overwhelmed gazes.

At the focal point stood a carriage loaded with the tightly fastened large scaled body of the serpent. The body was still cold, and the remains of the mountain snow and ice were still visible in some areas that have been kept under the shadow of the nasty pieces of rag that were distastefully attached to form a temporary roof. The dripping wet clothes on the body of the serpent were getting dry fast, while the ground under and around the carriage was still wet as a result of the fast-melting ice. Both the fierce look of the dragon and the chilled ambiance produced by its frostiness attracted the people to assemble nearer.

The snake catcher came forward, standing proudly in front of the crowd, ready to exhibits his best catch ever. With a sense of heroic confidence, he cried out loud:

کاژدهای مرده‌ای آورده‌ام
در شکارش من جگرها خورده‌ام

"I brought for you a dead dragon with me
I hunted it with much suffering; come n see" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1005)[7]

In reality, however, the dragon was very much alive; it was merely frozen and appeared lifeless (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1005-6). The frost gradually disappeared and the penetrating heat brought signals of life back to the beast's body. The coils that were tightened with ropes and rags began to move slowly.

People's hearts that were full of excitement for being witness to a most excellent entertaining show just a few moments ago turned shrunk with a life threatening fear. While cries and screams of the frightened audience echoed in the nearby streets and alleys, the adrenalin flow drew them closer to the beast.

Suddenly a chaotic movement pattern of distress agitated the mass as the dragon broke out of the ropes with a roaring sound.

بندها بگسست و بیرون شد ز زیر
اژدهایی زشت غران همچو شیر

"Once it broke free, it then slid on the floor,
And, louder than a lion, began to roar" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1047)[8]

The story of the snake catcher met a tragic ending as it did not take long before the dragon released itself from the bonds. It attacked the crowd, smashing bodies and tearing apart limbs. Lives were lost within a glimpse. The snake-catcher was among the first victims! (Rūmī 2013, chap.III:1048)

Metaphoric Expressions

In between the story, at a few junctures, the poet leaves the flow of the narrative to elaborate on the message behind. He provides a profound insight of the nature of the outside world and man's mundane desires. The elements of the story – from the main human characters to the dragon, to the location (Baghdad) and even the sun, the temperature and other bits and

[7] Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.
[8] Translation by Jawad Mujaddedi.

pieces – are charged with symbolic meanings and metaphoric references. A concise account of these is provided below.

Heat and Frost:

Heat represents life, and the entire world according to Rūmī is alive. State of coldness, on the other hand, does not necessarily represent death! Coldness is reminiscence of winter, and frost is a suppressing force that holds the living in a state of icy solidness that only appears to be inanimate. In other words, coldness creates an illusion of death.

عالم افسردست ونام او جماد
جامدا فسرده بود ای اوستاد

"The world is only frozen; they call it inanimate (*jamād*)
Any solid substance (jāmid) is frozen, O master" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1008).[9]

The poet goes yet another layer deeper when he introduces man's evil self as an untamed destructive force that is hidden within one's subconscious. The beast is often quiet; hence forgotten and deemed non-existent. However, in reality, it is a hibernating fierce monster. This dangerous inner dragon, Rūmī claims, can remain harmless only if kept frozen by the power of discipline and away from the wild flames of desires. Desires are means that can awaken the deadly beast.

نفست اژدرها ست اوکی مرده است
از غم وبی آلتی افسرده است

"The dragon is your carnal soul; how is it dead?
In the grief and lack of means it's frozen in bed" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1053)[10]

Sun and Bat:

Sun and bat represent yet another pair of opposite forces. Like heat and cold, the presence of one marks the absence of the other. It is the source

[9] Translation by Jawad Mujaddedi.
[10] Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

of heat and light. It has almost been used continuously as a positive symbol throughout Persian history, from Pre-Islamic to classical to contemporary literature. In the context of the story of the snake catcher, the heat produced by the sun triggers the rise of a destructive force – lust! Love and lust, on the other hand, in the Persian mystical poetry, have been regarded as negative and positive respectively. The Sufi poets of the past have consistently admired love as a noble quality of selfless nature, while they frowned upon lust for its selfish character. The following couplet regards the warm rays of the sun as dangerous means of awakening the power of lust. Here bat, which shies away from the sunshine in accordance with its nature, acts as a preventive agent. It keeps the destructive force of lust caged in the dark recesses of caves.

کان تف خورشید شهوت بر زند
آن خفاش مردریگت پر زند

"When the blazing sun of lust shines through the way
The hiding bats that rest within rush to fly away" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1060)[11]

Penetration of the rays of the sun in the dark ambiance of bats' nest is likened to the penetration of Baghdad's blazing summer heat into the frozen coil of the dragon.

اژدها را دار در برف فراق
هین مکش او را به خورشید عراق

"In the snow of separation keep the dragon of desires
Do not drag the frozen beast into the sun of Iraq" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1057)[12]

Worm and Dragon; Mosquito and Falcon:

Through the story of the snake catcher, the poet alerts his audience about the dangers of the hibernating beast that resides in each of us. The dragon is itself a metaphor for the self. To delve deeper into a detailed assessment of the behaviour of this creature, i.e. from a frozen dead-like being to a deadly monster, the poet resorts to other metaphors. He pairs a tiny worm with a mighty dragon at the first hemistich of the following

[11] Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.
[12] Translation by Amir Zekrgoo.

couplet, while in the second hemistich a mosquito and a falcon are paired. The message is concerning the availability of means, which can transform a small creature to a predator.

کرمکست آن اژدها ازدست فقر
پشه‌ای گردد زجاه ومال صقر

"That dragon, under stress of poverty, is a little worm,
(but) a gnat is made a falcon by power and riches" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1056)

تافسرده می‌بود آن اژدهات
لقمه ی اویی چواو یابد نجات

"So long as that dragon of thine remains frozen, (well and good);
Thou art a mouthful for it, when it gains release (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1058)."

مات کن او را وآمن شو ز مات
رحم کم کن نیست او زاهل صلات

"Mortify it and become safe from (spiritual) death,
Have no mercy; it is not one of them that deserve favors (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1059)".

Assembly of Idle Babblers:

A large number of people had assembled in the Baghdad's city center to view the hunted dragon, many of whom lost their lives in their effort to get entertained. The tone that the poet adopts to address them is not a mild one. He is, in fact, critical of their thoughtless life pattern that is merely oriented around their thirst for entertainment, calling them 'an assembly of idle babblers,' or 'a crowd of idiots.'

جمع آمد صدهزاران ژاژ خا
حلقه کرده پشت پا برپشت پا

"A hundred thousand idiots gathered there,

Forming a circle with no room to spare" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1036)[13]

خلق را ازجنبش آن مرده مار
گشت شان آن یک تحیر صد هزار

"The serpent's sudden movement caused much more
Amazement in the audience than before" (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1044)

با تحیرنعره‌ها انگیختند
جملگان ازجنبشش بگریختند

"They started screaming in perplexity,
And then en masse the crowd began to flee (Rūmī 2013, chap. III: 1045)."

References here are to the crucial role of public opinion in encouraging or discouraging a trend. Had it not been for fulfilling the desire of the masses, which was the source of livelihood for the snake catcher, the catastrophe would not happen. The people who lost their lives in the incident appear to be innocent victims of snake catcher's ambition, but there can be another viewpoint from which the active and passive elements of the story change places. One may ask: 'wasn't the snake catcher the actual victim of people's idle wishes?' To give the story a tangible and contemporary context we can give the example of elephant hunters in the business of ivory and the existing market for ivory products. Who are the real culprits; the consumers or the hunters? Is the demand for ivory products the cause for hunting elephants, or is it the other way around? It is clear that all parties involved in the process have their share of responsibility and blame. In the snake catcher's tale Rūmī does not elaborate on the matter further; he only touches very briefly upon the role of audience by calling them 'an assembly of idiots.'

Conclusion

The science of the self in the Islamic tradition is most fundamental. Man requires this knowledge to be able to free himself from the outside enemy (Satan and the traps of the illusionary world), as well as his inner enemy (animal desires that are run by the evil-commanding self – *nafs al-ammārah*). This concept repeatedly appears in Persian mystical literature,

[13] Translation by Jawad Mujaddedi.

both directly and in the form of allegoric expressions. Among all such symbols, snake occupies a prominent position. Rūmī, continuing the tradition of his predecessors, brought snake symbolism to a higher level. The *Mathnawī's* story of the snake catcher is an anecdote full of symbols and metaphors, aimed at showing man's struggle with his animal self. The poet at times acts as a story teller and on other occasions becomes a commentator. He puts a snake as an animal associated with evil in Persian classical poetry, at the center stage. Then he develops an engaging story about entertaining idle desires, and how submitting to such desires can have a fatal ending. It is about the importance of 'knowledge of the self,' which includes self-realization, self-control or, in this case, the lack of them! Using multiple metaphoric expressions, he provides an insight of the nature of the outside world and man's lower self. Each element and character is a representative of a genre; they expose the hidden layers of man's self. Hence, in the dragon, the icy mountain caps where its frozen body was discovered, the blazing sun of Baghdad that melted the ice and brought back the dragon to life, one can find a deeper meaning. Also, the masses who had assembled to be entertained, are carriers of messages on self-control and priorities in life. While narrating the story, the poet resorts to some pair-metaphors such as 'sun and bat,' 'worm and dragon' and 'mosquito and falcon' to make his message clearer.

REFERENCES

Bagherpoor, Saeed. 2011. "Barrisī va Namād-Shenāsī-I Mār Dar Tamaddun-Hāy-I Bāstanī (A Study of Snake and Its Symbolism in the Ancient Civilizations)." *Kitāb-I Māh-I Hunar* 167. n.p.: 100–108.

Dekhoda, Ali Akbar. 1959. *Lughat-Nāmeh*. Tehran: n.p.

Dibaji, Seyyed Mohammad Ali. 2006. "'Nou Āvarīhāy-E Ibn Sīnā Dar "Ilm Al-Nafs (Ibn Sina"s Innovative Contributions to the Area of the Science of the Self).'" *Pazhūhishhāy-I Falsafī Kalāmī* 29: 59–90.

———. 2009. "'Tajarrud-I Nafs Az Dīdgāh-I Suhrawardī.'" *Andīshih-Yi Dīnī* 31: 59–78.

Forunzafar, Badi' al-Zaman. 1988. *Sharh-I Mathnavwi-I Sharif*. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zavvar.

Kashānī, 'Izziddin Mahmūd. 2002. *Misbāḥ Al-Hidāyah Wa Miftāḥ Al-Kifāyah (Lamp of Guidance and Key of Contentment).* Edited by Jalal al-Din Humāī. Tehran: Nashr-i Humā.

Ketabi, Aḥmad. 2006. "'Mafāhīm-I Nafs-I Ammārah, Nafs-I Lawwāmah Nafs-I Mutma'innah, Dar Andīshihā-Yi Mowlavi (Concepts of Nafs-I Ammārah, Nafs-I Lawwāmah Nafs-I Mutma'innah, in the Thoughts of Rūmī).'" *Aʾīneh-Yi Mirāth* 38: 15–37.

Musahab, Golam Hossein. 1993. *Da'irat Al-Ma'ārif Farsi Muṣāhab (Musahab Persian Encyclopedia).* Tehran: Franklin Publishing.

Nicholson, Reynold A. 1914. *The Mystics of Islam*. London: Routledge.

Qushayri, ʿAbd al-Karim ibn Hawazin. 1995. *Tarjumih-Yi Risalih Qushayriyyah*. Edited by Badiʿal-Zaman Foruzanfar. Tehran: Intisharat-i 'Ilmi Farhanggi.

Rahim, Amin. 2014. "'Namadhaye Janevari-E Nafs Dar Mutun-E "irfani Ba Tekiyyeh Bar Athar-E Sana"I, Attar va Mawlawi (Animal Symbolism of Nafs in the Mystical Literature, with Special Reference to the Writings of Sana'i, Attar and Rūmī)'" *Matn Pazhuhi-Ye Adabi* 18 (62): 147–74.

Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn. 1925. *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*. Edited by Reynold A. Nicholson. London: Luzac & Co.

———. 2013. *The Masnavi*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Jawaḍi al-Mujaddedi. New York: Oxford University Press.

Shahidi, Seyyed Jaʿafar. 1368. *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Tehran: Sherkat-i Intesharat-i 'Ilmi va Farhanggi.

Ṭurīhī, Shaykh Fakhruddin. 1996. *Lughat Nāmeh Majmaʿal-Bahriyn*. Tehran: Mortazavi.

Zamani, Karim. 2003. *Mināgar-I ʿIshq: Sharḥ-I Muwżūʿī –i Mathnawī Maʿnawī-I Māwlanā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī (Enamel-Maker of Love: A Thematic Commentary of the Mathnawi of Jalal al-Din Balkhi).* Tehran: Nashr-i Ney.

Zanjani, Hossein Haqqani. 1999. "'Ravānshināsī Islāmī, Nigāhī Bi Maʿanī-I Nafs Az Dīdgāh-I Luqat va Akhbār va Ḥadīth (Islamic Psychology: An Overview of the Meanings of Self from the Linguistic, Akhbār, and Ḥadīth).'" *Darshāyī Az Maktab-I Islam (Lessons from the School of Islam)* 39: 13–24.

Zekrgoo, Amir H. 2008. "'Sufi Samā' and the Cosmology of Mandala.'" *Al-Shajarah* 13 (2): 179–209.

———. 2012. *Symbolism in Oriental Arts, Snake in Buddhist and Hindu Iconography*. Tehran: Matn.

ʿAṭṭār, Fariduddin Mohammad. 2005. *Manṭiq Al-Ṭayr*. Edited by Mohammad Reza Shafiei Kadkani. Tehran: Intirshārāt-i Sukhan.