

The Effect of Teaching Mowlana's Thoughts on the Peaceful Coexistence of Foreign Students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

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Abstract

One of the main problems in the Middle East has been wars and conflicts over recent years that have happened for various reasons, including political, religious, historical, geographical, and so on. Science and awareness are among the features that have proven historically that it is possible to resolve issues between the parties involved through peaceful dialogue. Iran is one of the most important countries in the Middle East, with many ethnic and religious varieties. During recent years, many foreign students, especially from the Middle Eastern countries, have studied in Iranian universities. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad with admission of 1,700 foreign students has the highest number of foreign students. These students complete the six-month course of Persian language training and then begin their specialty. The main source of education for this centre is the book series *Modern Persian Language Learning* written by the author of these lines. One of the main concepts in these books is the use of Mowlana's thoughts in direct or indirect forms. In this article, we seek to answer two questions: the first is the quiddity and types of Mowlana's peaceful views and the second the study of the influence of these ideas on the development of peaceful attitudes of Persian students.

Keywords: Mowlana, peaceful coexistence, foreign students

1. Introduction

Mowlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Rumi, is one of the great poets of Persian literature whose poetic works *Mathnavi-e Ma'navi* and *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* has a worldwide reputation. Today the translation of his poetic works into several languages has expanded the readers of his works so that Mowlana has become one of the famous and popular poets of the world.

The question that arises is what are the reasons for this luck and the desire of people of different countries in his poems? Part of the answer to this question can be Mowlana's success in reaching

a definition of humanity that goes beyond ethnic, racial, color, and religious limits. He understood the common human essence and looked at human beings from this point of view and presented the result of this vision in the form of fictional or figurative and imaginative poems in a beautiful Persian language. Through his attitude to humankind on the basis of the common human essence, Mowlana places all human beings into an interconnected set, who are intrinsically equal and there is no difference between them considering their essence. The extrinsic differences between human beings are a factor in their better understanding of one another, because human can better understand two objects based on a comparison of the differences between them. Therefore, two important conclusions are obtained: first, humans do not inherently have any superiority to each other, and the essence of every human being is dear and respectable, and second, differences between human beings are not intrinsic and are only for the increase of their knowledge and perception. The root of this Mowlana's thought can be identified in verse 13 of the holy Quran's surah *Al-Hujurat* (‘O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.’)

This Mowlana’s thought can be an approach to the world today; a world involved in war, violation, murder and bloodshed based on the same extrinsic differences; Religious, intellectual, ethnic, and racial differences based on Mowlana's attitude could be an opportunity for human to understand human better, but because of ignorance, prejudice and dogma, it has become a threat to human life. It is clear that in order to eliminate this ignorance and fanaticism of human thought, they must be taught; part of this educational content can be the previously mentioned Mowlana's attitudes.

In this essay, I seek to identify the impact of Mowlana's peaceful thoughts on those who have extrinsic differences. So, I ask two fundamental questions. First, what are the types of Mowlana's peaceful thoughts? And second, what are the impacts of these thoughts in developing a peaceful attitude in students who are learning the Persian language? To answer these questions, first I classify and introduce some types of Mowlana's peaceful thoughts through his two poetry books, *Mathnawīye Ma'nawī* and *Diwan-e Shams*, and then I mention part of these thoughts introduced in my book series, titled *Modern Persian Language Learning*¹ for Non-Persian Students, and report the impact of these educational texts on changing the Persian language learners’ attitude.

My main purpose of writing this essay is to say that Mowlana's ideas for the world today, especially our region, can be an approach towards peaceful life.

2. Peaceful life in Mowlana’s view

¹ Ghabool, Ehsan (2015), *Modern Persian Language Learning* (vol. 1-5), Mashhad, Dr. Ehsan Ghabool Publ.

Mowlana calls for peace and friendship and peaceful life with other human beings in his works and mentions that the essence of all objects is one and the differences between them is a factor for order and style of the universe and not the emergence of wars.

هم آب و هم آتش برادر بدند ببین اصل هر دو به جز سنگ نیست
که بی این دو عالم ندارد نظام اگر روم خوب است بی‌زنگ نیست^۱

Mowlana symbolizes war as Divine wrath, and peace as His love:

ور به خشم و جنگ عکس قهر اوست ور به صلح و عذر، عکس مهر اوست^۲

In a story in *Mathnavi*, Mowlana describes, the source of many conflicts and wars among humans. He expresses that many of these kinds of wars is a cause of misunderstanding and not getting the point of each other's words and purposes, and believes that human beings who have reached a common human essence and language, and in other words, human beings looking beyond apparent differences, have the ability and merit of establishing peace and reconciliation between them.

صاحب سرّی عزیزی صدزبان گریدی آن‌جا بدادی صلح‌شان^۳
هم سلیمان هست اندر دور ما کو دهد صلح و نماند جور ما^۴

Mowlana considers the root of the wars to be the whims of the people; therefore, he believes that one of the factors of peace is to confront and impair the profiteer essence of human beings.

بکن مجاهده با نفس و جنگ ریشاریش که صلح را ز چنین جنگ‌ها مدد باشد^۵

Mowlana's ideology is total peace and if anyone pushes him toward war, he will not enter the war, but will leave him and believes the earth of God to be wide for emigration.

اگر مر تو را صلح آهنگ نیست مرا با تو ای جان! سر جنگ نیست
تو در جنگ آیی، روم من به صلح خدای جهان را جهان تنگ نیست
جهانی است جنگ و جهانی است صلح جهان معانی به فرسنگ نیست^۶

Mowlana is a pragmatic and optimistic man; he believes that if the whole world is in war and the world is a militant movement, this will not be a reason for other human beings to participate in this

¹ Mowlana, 1387: 323.

² Mowlana, 1378: 81. (And if (we come) to wrath and war/ 'tis the reflection of His Might;/ and if to peace and forgiveness, 'tis the reflection of His Love.)

³ Mowlana, 1378: 393. (If a master of the esoteric had been there, / a revered and many-languaged man, / he would have pacified them/ (Yet) even in our epoch /there is a Solomon who would give (us) / peace and not suffer our injustice to continue.)

⁴ Mowlana, 1387: 1227.

⁵ Mowlana, 1387: 323.

process. Even if a single person is against warfare, he must confront this movement and keep the light of his peace on, so that the brightness of this peace affects others as well:

تو مگو همه به جنگند و ز صلح من چه آید تو یکی نه ای؛ هزاری! تو چراغ خود برافروز
که یکی چراغ روشن ز هزار مرده بهتر که به است یک قد خوش ز هزار قامت کوز^۱

In *Mathnavi*, Mowlana calls the entire universe the form of the whole intellect and as the father of men; therefore, men are called to peace with the father i.e. the world and the universe, and this peace transforms the attitude of man to the universe and his aesthetic sense. He believes war with this world and its inhabitants is the cause of misery and curse.

صلح کن با این پدر عاقی بهل تا که فرش زر نماید آب و گل
من که صلح دایماً با این پدر این جهان چون جنتستم در نظر^۲

In Mowlana's view, tough and bad-tempered people are warriors and subtle and nice ones are peace-seekers:

جمله گل‌ها صلح جو و خار بدخو جنگجو خیز ای وامق تو باری عهد عذرا تازه کن^۳

In his view, those with peaceful manners are successful and victorious in this world; and on the other hand he introduces the warlords as the losers:

آنها که اهل صلحند، بردند زندگی را وین ناکسان بمانند در جنگ زندگانی^۴

He calls people to appreciate the value of each other before death and to avoid war and bloodshed:

بیا تا قدر یکدیگر بدانیم که تا ناگه ز یکدیگر نمائیم^۵

Mowlana is a man who adheres to Islamic teachings; he introduces peace as the best way and method with Islam; therefore, according to a Hadith, he calls men to abandon conflict and struggle:

چو فرموده است حق کالصلح خیر^۶ رها کن ماجرا را ای یگانه^۶

¹ Mowlana, 1371: 451.

² Mowlana, 1378: 787. (*Make peace with this Father, / abandon disobedience, that the water and clay (the world) may appear (to thee as) a carpet of gold. / Since I am ever at peace with this Father, / this world is like Paradise in my sight.*)

³ Mowlana, 1387: 996

⁴ Mowlana, 1371: 1113.

⁵ Mowlana, 1371: 572.

⁶ Mowlana, 1371: 879.

Through the words of Mowlana, we can reach a utopia which is his ideal world. One of the main features of this utopian city is that it is all about peace and friendship, and there is no sign of war in it.

تا قهر را بر هم زند، آن لطف اندر لطف تو تا صلح گیرد هر طرف تا محو گردد جنگ‌ها^۱

And the king of this ideal town is the one who, with his presence, brings peace between all opposites and enemies.

یک صفت از لطف شه آن‌جا که پرده برگرفت آب و آتش صلح کرد و گرگ دایه میش بود^۲

On the basis of these poems, it can be said that peace and peaceful life is derived from the natural flow of the system of existence, and wherever a war is being conducted, it is due to the opposite movement. He portrays the whole universe as the manifestation of God's attributes; then expresses the war as the manifestation of divine anger and wrath and the peace as the manifestation of His love and forgiveness.

He considers two important factors for the emergence of wars: one is superficiality and misunderstanding of language, and the other surrendering to the misleading desires of the soul; and to avoid the war, he introduces several approaches: to respond affectionate toward a bad deed, to leave the warrior man, to invite other people to peace and friendship, even though the peacekeeper is in a pure minority, to mediate between the parties of the conflict by those who have reached the common human language, to return to Islamic commands, to think about the world system, to appreciate the magnitude and value of other human beings.

Mowlana believes that seeking peace results in delight in life, prosperity and salvation at the end. Peaceful living among humans is one of the main characteristics of his utopia; a utopia whose governor is an agent to develop peaceful life between opposites and enemies.

3- The Impact of Mowlana's Peaceful Thoughts on Developing a Peaceful Attitude in Persian Students

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad is the third oldest university in Iran (founded in 1949) and, during the recent years, it has been the top university of Iran in the field of international co-operations. An important part of the international cooperation activities of the university is the attraction of foreign students. Currently 1700 foreign students from 32 countries study at this university. At this university, the largest international center for teaching the Persian language to non-Persian speakers in the international arena has been working since 50 years ago. The foreign students must first pass a 6-month Persian training course before starting their academic studies. After passing the Persian language test entitled Ferdowsi Test they can attend their field of study.

¹ Mowlana, 1387: 163.

² Mowlana, 1387: 1033.

The main source of education for this center is the book series Modern Persian Language Learning written by the author of this essay. I wrote these books when I was teaching Persian language from 2009 to 2012 at St. Joseph, Holy Spirit and Lebanese universities and the Iranian cultural consulate in Beirut. One of the main concepts in these books is the use of direct and indirect forms of Mowlana's thoughts. In this section I mention some examples of the peaceful thoughts used in these books and some of my observations from the classes of the center for teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, which resulted in developing the attitude of peaceful life of foreign students.

Prior to expressing this, I emphasize this principle that I used literary texts to teach the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing Persian, as well as teaching cultural communication. Today, in modern methods of teaching foreign languages, the use of literature has a privileged position, and experts in this field emphasize the influence of literature on the development of lingual, intellectual, emotional, and pragmatic skills of foreign students¹.

One of the texts I selected from *Mathnavi* is a story I mentioned in the third volume of the Modern Persian Language Learning entitled "The conflict between four guys on grape which each of them otherly deemed to know," which appears in the second book of *Mathnavi*. I rewrote this story by introducing Mowlana and his worldview under the title "Mowlana, the poet who brings two hearts together" (pp. 73-75). The summary of this story is that four people from four Iranian, Arab, Turkish, and Roman nationalities were in company. They did not understand each other's language well. During the journey they are given a coin and everyone agrees to buy and eat fruit with it. Iranian says that I want "angur", the Arab says I want "enab", the Turk says "ozum", and the Greek says that he wants to buy "staphyl". The four people in the market are busy fighting and fighting, and they insist on their will, until a person who knew the language of each of the four peoples is aware of their dispute. He takes the coin from them and buys grapes for them. Those four were embarrassed after they realized that they all wanted one thing and that their conflict was due to different lingual forms of grape. Mowlana points out that many of the wars between humans are of this nature; they all demand the same truth, but because they are calling it in different languages, misunderstandings, conflicts, and war starts.

In one of my classes in CTPL of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad learners from 7 different countries including Lebanon and China participated. At the first session, the Lebanese student who was adhering to Islamic laws, avoided contact with the Chinese student and did not even take the wet glass of water brought by him for the whole class, and the Chinese student, made a gesture in his face which was offending. At the end of the session the Lebanese student came to me and said that according to Islamic law, the unbelievers are impure and because the Chinese are Buddhists

¹ Ref. (Carter & McRae, 1996), Lazer (1993), Parkinson & others (2004)

and disbelievers, it is hard for me to be present in this class. I talked with him and convinced him to continue the class. But the question for me was how I can save the classroom from this situation.

When I read the above-said story of Mowlana's poetry for the learners, and they realized that the four of them had fights for a common purpose, and the problem was not understanding each other's language a funny smile was on their lips. I defined the topic of the discussion for the next session to highlight the common characteristics of the human being and talk about it, on the basis of which they could communicate with each human being. The next session the Lebanese student began his speech with this prophetic hadith: "every creation is born with a common essence" and his emphasis was on the fact that humans have the same nature and essence, and that it is possible to communicate with human beings based on this essence. The Chinese student introduced ethics as a public category and stated that good ethical features such as truth, righteousness, goodness and sacrifice are positive in every thought, religion and culture, and negative moral features, such as lies, envy and betrayal, are rejected. I achieved the first theoretical and intellectual result I sought after in the class, and both have theoretically expressed and confirmed the common essence and ethic between them.

Next session, I put these two language learners in a group and I asked them to talk about the proverb "One Thousand friends are few and one enemy is too many," which I used earlier in the second volume (basic 2) in the literature section (p. 109) and which is one of the basic thoughts of Mowlana. With no objection they accepted this grouping. So they were implicitly accepted to practice together at least for an hour outside the classroom. In the next session, a friendly atmosphere was established between them. In that discussion, one was rolling an angry person who was in conflict with everyone and the other was a person who had a good manner with others. These two students talked about the correctness of their manners and finally the good tempered person was the one who proved his life manner is correct because first of all he himself enjoyed calmness in his life while the angry person first disturbs himself and then other and must always be worried about other's revenge. A kind of emotional relation was seen within their conversations.

At the end of their conversation, I described some verses of Mowlana in the class, which is also in the fourth volume of the books:

ما بقي خود استخوان و ریشه‌ای

ای بردار تو همان اندیشه‌ای

ور بود خاری تو هیمة گلخنی¹

گر گل است اندیشه‌ی تو گلشنی

¹ Mowlana, 1378: 227. (O brother, you are that same thought (of yours); as for the rest (of you), you are (only) bone and fibre./ If your thought is a rose, you are a rose-garden; and if it is a thorn, you are fuel for the bath-stove.)

The main theme in these two verses is that the true existence of man is nothing but his thought; therefore, the apparent and physical elements do not have a genuine existence; therefore, the thought in this world is authentic, and not the apparent and superficial differences between humans and Mowlana calls people into good and attractive thoughts that all human beings, regardless of color and religion, race and wealth, will enjoy it and be attracted to it, and he calls them to avoid repulsive thoughts that cause the mankind be apart.

For the next session, I asked the students to express their compatible and opposing views on this Mowlana's attitude. Everyone agreed to Mowlana's view, including the Lebanese and Chinese students, and tried to develop this outlook.

The interesting event was that, when the Chinese student's pen did not write at the last session, the first person who gave him an extra pen was the Lebanese student. In other words, the practical and positive relationship between the language learners was created positively, which in some way this relationship is one of the important goals of any type of education.

Of course, there were other variables and other factors contributing to this expansion of the peaceful attitude among the students, and I do not want to limit this positive conclusion to my attitude but it is definitely one of the important factors of this approach to teaching Persian language based on the literary statements including Mowlana's peaceful attitudes.

4. Conclusion

Today's world of science, research, and technology has astonishingly developed over the past few centuries: but contrary to these apparent improvements, major disputes and problems are seen worldwide. Religious, tribal and beneficial wars have created a dark and unpleasant future for us and for next generations. I believe that by training, a large part of these conflicts can be eliminated. Part of this training can be through the teaching of foreign languages. Texts that are provided for foreign language learning should be directly and indirectly at the service of developing the attitude of peaceful life of language learners.

I used this approach in the book series Modern Persian language Learning and my teaching method in Persian language teaching and for that, I especially benefited from the works of Mowlana Jalal al-Din Mowlana in the books of *Mathnavi-e-Ma'navi* and *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*. I repeatedly observed a lot of its theoretical, emotional, and behavioral results. The use of Mowlana's works in the educational method can, on the one hand, expand the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing of the Persian-language learners, and on the other, they will get acquainted with a flexible attitude which looks at human beings based on their human and divine essence and nature rather than their color and race, ethnic, religion and wealth.

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