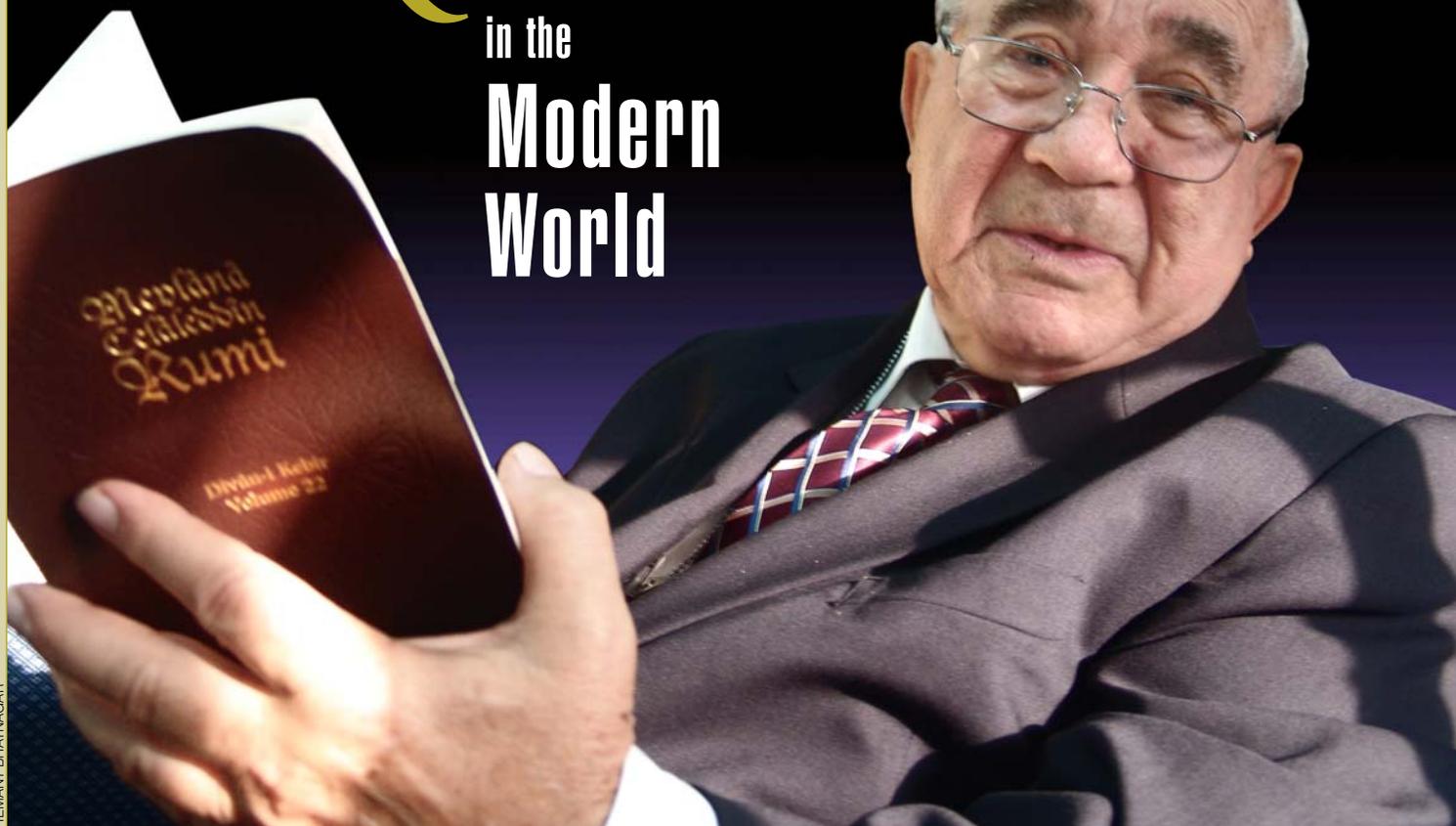


Relevance of Rumi in the Modern World



HEMANT BHATNAGAR

An interview with DR. NEVIT ERGIN by ANJUM NAIM

San Mateo, California-based, Turkish American surgeon and translator of Jalaluddin Rumi's narrative poetry, Dr. Nevit Ergin visited India in connection with the 800th anniversary of the birth of the Persian poet. Though Ergin is a surgeon by profession, he has dedicated himself to the study of Rumi and his works for the past 50 years. He has also translated and published Rumi's complete poetic works into English in 22 volumes under the title *Bayaz-e-Kabeer* (A Comprehensive Anthology). In New Delhi, he spoke with Urdu SPAN Editor Anjum Naim.

What is the relevance and significance of Rumi in our era?

Rumi has always been a symbol of the unifying force in a civilization and its social and economic system. His poetry gives solace to heavy hearts and worried brains. Don't forget, the more the world becomes horrible, the more human lives become valueless, the more relevant and significant Rumi's poetry will be. Don't you observe the human potential and his self-framed religious behaviors are becoming entirely negatively surcharged? In this situation, will he be able to survive without a spiritual oasis in the desert of negative paradigms?

Anyway, he is in sheer need of a life code, as an alternative to his particular faith, which may prevent him becoming alien to his own society, to his own community. And Rumi provides a better guidance than any other in this regard. He was certainly much larger than life. But at the same time, he was very close to mankind, without any religious or racial boundary. [Rumi] is like an infinitely large umbrella covering all we have and beyond.

He introduces himself, saying:

*"I am neither Christian nor Jew,
Neither Persian nor Muslim.
I am neither the East nor West,
Neither from land nor from water."*

He refutes the allegation that he can be confined to any particular faith or shackles of time and space.

*"I am concealed, secret, sometimes,
Sometimes I appear, and become obvious.
Sometimes I am Muslim,
Sometimes I am in the faith of Moses,
Sometimes I am Christian."*



*In order to be a model to everyone,
I manifest differently in every time."*

How has Rumi become such a popular poet in the United States?

How well a person said: "Rumi's popularity in the United States is a matter of our enormous spiritual hunger."

It is a well known fact that Americans, usually and relatively, read more. Apart from that, more books are published [there]. Common people hardly get opportunities to go through books and deliberate where political or social conditions are not normal or where the life is burdensome. Since Americans ponder over different issues and try to find solutions, that is why Rumi attracted their attention and his thoughts impressed them so much. Moreover, Rumi opens a new gate in a multi-dimensional society that faces a dilemma between faith and reason. [American] society is full of the luxuries of life; but a well-to-do and prosperous person may not necessarily have a happy life, too. Here, [Rumi] bestows that sought-after happiness—happiness of body and soul, happiness of brain and heart. This is what makes him popular.

The entire credit of Rumi's popularity in the U.S. goes to professor Coleman Barks, who not only introduced Rumi to literary circles in the United States, but also translated [his] anthology beautifully. The earlier English versions were like giving solitary confinement to the skylark of the poet's imagination. Barks opened the cage, and the bird, once again, started singing the melodious songs with their totality and substance.

How difficult was it to translate Rumi's poetry?

The translation of a literary work is a difficult and challenging task. It becomes somewhat more difficult when one has to translate metaphysical poetry like Rumi's.

There is an inherent danger in Rumi's poems. They dazzle the eyes with their poetic beauty, so one cannot see their prophetic meaning.

You cannot perceive and understand Rumi unless and until you peep into [his] window to find the real perspective. I am a doctor by profession, but when I felt interested in Rumi's poetry, I dedicated myself completely to understand his themes and thoughts for 15 years. Rumi demands, if you are desirous to enter his world of thoughts, that you will have to abandon all your earlier assumptions and ideologies. It is rather a precondition to enter the arena of his musings. If you want to go through his works along with your preoccupations, then understanding Rumi will be an extremely uphill task. I have taken a lot of care in this regard.

What role does the Sufism religious view of Rumi's poetry play in a multi-dimensional society?

Sufism liberates you from the clutches of compulsions of self-adorned faith. It leads man to be in touch with God, directly. Different self-imposed faiths in a multi-dimensional society create problems for man to turn to God. Sufism relieves man from such shackles. That is why it plays an important role in such a society in comparison to uni-dimensional societies. India has always been a land of people wandering in search of God. Sufism is, therefore, deep-rooted here. I think these similarities will play an extremely important role in bringing both India and America closer to each other.