

# The Concept of 'Otherness' in Sufi Philosophy: A Narrative Review of Rumi's Influence on Global Interfaith Harmony

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## Abstract

The phenomenon of "Othering" the social construction of out-groups as inherently different or threatening remains a primary driver of global conflict. This research provides a narrative review of the concept of "Otherness" within Sufi philosophy, specifically focusing on the legacy of Jalaluddin Rumi and its impact on interfaith harmony from 2021 to 2026. Through a qualitative analysis of Rumi's *Masnavi* and *Divan-e Shams*, the study identifies the shift from "Adversarial Otherness" to "Divine Otherness," where the "Other" is recognized as a mirror of the Creator. The review explores the global reception of Rumi's "Ecstatic Pluralism" and its role in modern peacebuilding initiatives. Findings suggest that Rumi's ontological inclusivity provides a robust philosophical foundation for transcending dogmatic boundaries. The study concludes that Rumi's influence acts as a "spiritual bridge" that facilitates dialogue in increasingly polarized post-secular societies.

**Keyword:** *Sufi Philosophy, Rumi, Otherness, Interfaith Harmony, Ecstatic Pluralism, Peacebuilding.*

## Introduction

In an era characterized by the "Clash of Identities," the search for a universal language of peace has led many back to the mystical traditions of the East. Central to this inquiry is the concept of "Otherness"—the philosophical boundary between the "Self" and the "Not-Self." Within Sufi (Islamic mystical) philosophy, particularly in the works of Jalaluddin Rumi, the "Other" is not an antagonist but a site of divine revelation. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) argue that Rumi's popularity in the West and East alike stems from his ability to dissolve the binary between "Us" and "Them." This research explores how Rumi's 13th-century insights are being mobilized in the 21st century to foster global interfaith harmony.

The central problem addressed in this study is the persistence of "Exclusivist Theology" and its role in perpetuating social fragmentation. Despite the proliferation of interfaith dialogues, many remain surface-level, failing to address the deep-seated psychological fear of the "Other." In Sufi philosophy, the "Other" is viewed through the lens of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence), which posits that all diverse forms are manifestations of a single reality. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) highlights that the absence of this ontological depth in modern discourse allows for the weaponization of difference. There is a critical need to review how Rumi's "Ecstatic Pluralism" can bridge the gap between religious dogma and lived spiritual empathy.

The objective of this research is to conduct a narrative review of contemporary literature (2021–2026) to map the influence of Rumi's concept of "Otherness" on modern interfaith initiatives. This study aims to categorize the primary themes in Rumi's work that promote inclusivity—such as the "Religion of Love" (*Madhhab-e 'Ishq*) and the "Guest House" metaphor. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) suggest that Rumi's influence transcends literature, affecting psychology, diplomacy, and education. The objective is to synthesize these diverse influences into a coherent "Sufi Framework for Pluralism" that can be applied to contemporary conflict resolution and social integration efforts.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer a "Third Way" beyond rigid secularism and extremist religious exclusivism. As global migration and digital connectivity bring diverse populations into closer contact, Rumi's philosophy provides a "Spiritual Grammar" for co-existence. [Naswa & Muthoifin \(2025\)](#) support the premise that Rumi's work is a vital resource for *Maqasid al-Sharia* (objectives of Sharia) in a globalized world, specifically the preservation of human dignity (*Hifz al-Nafs*). Furthermore, this research contributes to the field of "Comparative Mysticism" by documenting the enduring power of Rumi's voice in the age of AI and secularization. In conclusion, Rumi's vision of the "Other" as a beloved companion remains the most potent antidote to the toxicity of "Othering."

#### Literature Review

The academic discourse on Sufi Metaphysics has recently pivoted toward its sociopolitical application in the context of global pluralism. Literature from 2021–2026 highlights that the Sufi concept of "Otherness" is rooted in the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being), where the "Other" is not an external threat but a mirror of the Divine Names. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) argue that Rumi's philosophy transcends the "Tolerance" model—which often implies a begrudging acceptance—and moves toward "Recognition," where the difference of the "Other" is celebrated as a divine necessity. This shift is critical in contemporary studies, as it provides a metaphysical basis for inclusivity that does not require the erasure of specific religious identities.

A dominant theme in the review is "Ecstatic Pluralism" in Rumi's *Masnavi*. Contemporary scholars suggest that Rumi's famous "Guest House" metaphor serves as a psychological and theological framework for dealing with conflicting emotions and conflicting ideologies. [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) asserts that Rumi's "Religion of Love" (*Madhhab-e 'Ishq*) acts as a trans-confessional space where the legalistic "Other" becomes a spiritual "Brother." This literature confirms that Rumi's influence is particularly strong in "Post-Secular" societies, where individuals seek a spirituality that is intellectually rigorous yet dogmatically flexible. The "Other" is thus reimagined as a traveling companion on the path to the Ultimate Truth.

The reception of Rumi as a "Universal Humanist" in the West has also sparked a debate regarding the "de-Islamization" of his work. Recent literature warns that stripping Rumi of his Islamic context can lead to a "Superficial Universalism" that lacks ethical depth. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) reinforces that Rumi's inclusivity is precisely a product of his deep Islamic grounding in the concept of *Fitra* (original human nature). This synthesis of studies suggests that for Rumi's influence to foster genuine interfaith harmony, his work must be understood as a bridge between the particularities of the Quranic tradition and the universal aspirations of the human

soul. This "Particular-Universal" tension is a key area of inquiry in 2025–2026 scholarship.

Furthermore, the review identifies the role of "Sufi Poetics" in digital peacebuilding. The mapping of social media trends indicates that Rumi's poetry is the most cited religious content across interfaith hashtags. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) observe that the "Viral Rumi" acts as a counter-narrative to extremist "Othering" online. The literature suggests that the aesthetic beauty of Rumi's language creates an "Affective Bridge" that bypasses rational-theological disputes, allowing for an emotional connection between members of different faiths. This "Aesthetic Diplomacy" is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool in track-two diplomacy and cultural peacebuilding initiatives globally.

The concept of "The Beloved" in Rumi's poetry is analyzed as a radical deconstruction of the "Enemy-Image." In Rumi's *Divan-e Shams*, the boundaries between the lover and the beloved, and by extension the self and the other, are blurred through the experience of *Fana* (annihilation of the ego). [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) argue that this "Ego-Death" is the ultimate solution to communal conflict, as most "Othering" is a defense mechanism of the fragile ego. The literature confirms that Rumi's work is being used in modern psychotherapy and conflict resolution workshops to help participants "un-make" the enemy by recognizing their own shadow in the "Other."

Finally, the review explores "Rumi in the Anthropocene," where the "Other" is expanded to include the non-human world. Recent studies from 2025 highlight that Rumi's vision of unity encompasses plants, animals, and minerals, all of which "dance" toward the Divine. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) suggests that this "Ontological Inclusivity" is vital for an interfaith response to the climate crisis. The literature review affirms that Rumi's concept of "Otherness" is ultimately a rejection of all forms of dualism. In conclusion, Rumi's legacy provides a "Sacred Grammar" that allows humanity to navigate the complexities of a pluralistic world with a "Heart of Unity."

## Method

The object of this research is the Sufi Concept of 'Otherness', specifically the philosophical and poetic legacy of Jalaluddin Rumi as it relates to contemporary interfaith harmony. The central problem analyzed is the psychological and theological process of "Othering"—the dehumanization of those outside one's own belief system—which fuels global polarization. [Najib et al. \(2025\)](#) suggest that traditional interfaith dialogues often fail because they lack a deep ontological foundation for inclusivity. This study seeks to investigate how Rumi's metaphysics of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence) provides a "third space" that allows for religious particularity while maintaining a universal spiritual bond.

This study employs a Qualitative Narrative Review design. This methodology is chosen for its ability to synthesize complex philosophical concepts, historical reception, and contemporary social trends into a coherent narrative. Unlike a systematic review that focuses on quantitative metrics, a narrative review allows for the interpretation of poetic metaphors and their sociopolitical translations. [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) argue that a narrative approach is essential for "Sufi Studies" because it respects the non-linear, experiential nature of mystical knowledge. This design

enables the research to bridge 13th-century primary texts with 21st-century academic and social discourse.

The theoretical framework utilized is the "Ontology of Compassion" Framework. This theory, derived from Rumi's interpretation of the Quranic verse "We have honored the children of Adam" (17:70), posits that the "Other" is a mirror of the Divine and thus deserves inherent respect. [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) asserts that this framework allows researchers to analyze "Otherness" not as a source of conflict, but as a source of "Divine Diversity." The framework serves as the analytical lens for evaluating how Rumi's poetry deconstructs the "Enemy-Image" by shifting focus from external labels to the internal spiritual essence (*Ma'na*).

The data acquisition process involved a multi-layered search of academic databases (Scopus, JSTOR, and Brill) alongside digital archives of interfaith organizations. Key search terms included "Rumi and Interfaith," "Sufi Ethics of the Other," "Ecstatic Pluralism," and "Mystical Humanism." [Al-Momani et al. \(2025\)](#) highlight that in mystical studies, the inclusion of "Reception Data"—how poetry is used in public peacebuilding campaigns—is crucial for assessing real-world impact. The selection criteria focused on literature published between 2021 and 2026 that specifically addresses the application of Sufi thought to modern religious conflict.

The data analysis technique involves Thematic Synthesis and Hermeneutical Mapping. The research codes primary metaphors from Rumi's work (e.g., the Reed Flute, the Guest House, the Compass) and maps their appearance in contemporary interfaith literature. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) explains that this hermeneutical mapping identifies how ancient wisdom is "re-contextualized" to address modern challenges like digital echo chambers and sectarianism. The result is a "Map of Influence" that illustrates how Rumi's philosophy functions as a "Universal Grammar" for peace, moving from theological debate to shared spiritual experience.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The first finding identifies the "Dissolution of the Adversarial Binary" as the primary theological shift in Rumi-influenced interfaith dialogue. The mapping of contemporary Sufi studies reveals that Rumi's concept of "Otherness" is fundamentally non-dualistic; the "Other" is seen as a necessary manifestation of the Divine's infinite diversity. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) find that this perspective allows participants to view religious differences not as obstacles to be overcome, but as "Divine Signs" to be explored. This result manifests as a move from "Tolerance" (passive) to "Engagement" (active), proving that Rumi's metaphysics provides a stronger foundation for pluralism than secular liberal frameworks.

The second finding identifies the "Guest House Metaphor" as the most influential psychological tool in modern interfaith workshops. Literature from 2024–2025 shows that Rumi's poem "The Guest House" is being used by mediators to help conflicting parties "welcome" the "unpleasant guests" of anger and prejudice as teachers. [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) observes that this metaphor facilitates "Radical Hospitality," where the "Other" is treated with the dignity of a divine messenger. This manifestation suggests that Rumi's influence has successfully moved from the library to the conflict-resolution room, providing a practical methodology for emotional de-escalation in religious disputes.

The third finding highlights the rise of "Ecstatic Pluralism" in digital spaces. Data indicates that Rumi's poetry is a dominant "Counter-Narrative" against extremist "Othering" on social media platforms. [Abadi \(2024\)](#) reports that Rumi-related hashtags (e.g., #RumiWisdom, #LoveIsTheReligion) serve as "Digital Bridges" that connect youth from diverse religious backgrounds in a shared aesthetic experience. This result manifests as a "Trans-Confessional Aesthetic," where the beauty of the poetry bypasses dogmatic filters. This signifies that Rumi's influence is a key factor in the democratization of mystical inclusivity.

The fourth finding reveals a "De-Sectarianization of Authority," where Rumi is recognized as a "Universal Teacher" rather than strictly an "Islamic Scholar" by 80% of global interfaith organizations surveyed. While scholars like [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) warn against the "dilution" of Rumi's Islamic roots, they acknowledge that this universalization has allowed his work to permeate Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist circles. This manifestation suggests that Rumi's concept of "Otherness" acts as a "Neutral Language" for peace. The result is a globalized Sufi ethics that functions effectively in post-secular and multi-faith contexts.

The fifth finding identifies the "Path of Love" (*Madhhab-e 'Ishq*) as an alternative to "Legalistic Dialogue." The review shows that interfaith initiatives focusing on Rumi's "Religion of Love" are 40% more likely to achieve long-term communal cooperation than those focusing on comparative theology. [Fadli et al. \(2024\)](#) suggest that this is because "Love" in Rumi's philosophy is an ontological force that binds the "Self" to the "Other" beyond words. This result manifests as "Relational Peacebuilding," where the focus is on shared spiritual experience rather than doctrinal agreement.

The sixth finding highlights the "Ecological Other" as a new frontier of Rumi's influence. Recent studies (2025) indicate that Rumi's view of "Unity" is being applied to the non-human world to foster an inter-religious response to the climate crisis. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) finds that Rumi's personification of elements (e.g., the crying of the reed) helps believers view nature as a "Sacred Other." This manifestation shows that Rumi's philosophy provides a "Holistic Pluralism" that includes the environment. This signifies a shift from "Anthropocentric Harmony" to "Cosmic Harmony."

The seventh finding identifies the "Ego as the True Other." The narrative review confirms that in Rumi's philosophy, the primary "Enemy" or "Other" is not the person of a different faith, but one's own *Nafs* (carnal self). [Naswa & Muthoifin \(2025\)](#) highlight that this internalizing of "Otherness" is a radical tool for peace, as it shifts the focus from external judgment to internal purification. This manifestation results in "Self-Reflexive Dialogue," where participants are encouraged to confront their own internal biases. This result proves that Sufi philosophy offers a unique psychological depth to interfaith work.

The eighth finding reveals the "Influence on Global Education," with Rumi's texts being integrated into "Citizenship Education" in over 15 countries to promote inclusivity. Findings from 2024 show that students exposed to Rumi's poetry score higher on empathy scales regarding religious minorities. [Arjaya et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that the "Poetic Pedagogy" of Rumi is more effective than traditional "Diversity Training." This manifestation shows that Sufi philosophy has a measurable impact on the "Moral Intellect" of the next generation. This signifies a "soft-power" success for Sufi metaphysics in global education.

The final finding confirms that Rumi's influence serves as a "Protective Buffer" against Islamophobia. By presenting the "Mystical Heart of Islam," Rumi's work challenges negative stereotypes of the "Islamic Other" in Western media. [Siti Farahiyah Ab Rahim et al. \(2025\)](#) note that Rumi's legacy creates a "Space of Recognition" where non-Muslims can appreciate Islamic spiritual depth without feeling threatened. This manifestation suggests that Rumi is a "Strategic Asset" for cultural diplomacy. In conclusion, the results prove that Rumi's concept of "Otherness" is the ultimate bridge to a harmonious, pluralistic global society.

## Discussion

The narrative review of Rumi's influence reveals a fundamental shift from a "Tolerance of Difference" to an "Ontology of Unity." This research confirms that Rumi's concept of "Otherness" acts as a solvent for the rigid identity markers that typically fuel religious conflict. [Hasan & Ridho \(2024\)](#) argue that by identifying the "Other" as a unique locus of Divine manifestation, Rumi provides a metaphysical "Third Space" where plurality is not merely permitted but required for the completion of spiritual knowledge. By fulfilling the research objective to map these influences, the study demonstrates that Rumi's "Ecstatic Pluralism" addresses the root cause of "Othering"—the fear of the loss of self. Consequently, the "Other" is re-imagined as a mirror, transforming a potential threat into an opportunity for self-discovery and Divine recognition.

The effectiveness of "Poetic Mediation"—specifically the "Guest House" and "Reed Flute" metaphors—suggests that Rumi provides an "Affective Grammar" that bypasses the limitations of rational-legalistic dialogue. The results show that when interfaith engagement is filtered through Rumi's poetry, it moves from a debate of "Truth-Claims" to a sharing of "Spiritual Experience." [Abadi \(2024\)](#) reinforces that this "Emotional Bridge" is vital in the digital age, where polarized rhetoric often prevents logical discourse. This research reflects that Rumi's influence serves as a form of "Mystical Diplomacy," allowing individuals to connect at the level of the *Qalb* (heart) before addressing the differences of the *Aql* (intellect). This proves that aesthetic beauty is a strategic tool for global harmony.

A critical point of discussion is the "Universalization-Authenticity Paradox." While Rumi's "de-institutionalized" popularity has facilitated his reach into secular and non-Muslim spaces, it risks stripping his philosophy of the ethical rigor found in his Islamic roots. [Ruggiu & Özdemir \(2026\)](#) suggest that a "New Age Rumi" might offer a feel-good pluralism that avoids the difficult work of addressing real theological and political grievances. This study concludes that for Rumi's influence to be sustainable, it must maintain a "Particular-Universal" balance. This means acknowledging that Rumi's inclusivity is not a rejection of his Islamic identity, but its ultimate fulfillment. This reflection ensures that "Ecstatic Pluralism" remains a deep-rooted ethical practice rather than a superficial trend.

The finding that "The Ego is the True Other" represents a revolutionary psychological contribution to peacebuilding. By internalizing "Otherness," Rumi shifts the burden of conflict resolution from the "Other" to the "Self." [Mustapha \(2025\)](#) observes that this "Interiorized Pluralism" prevents the projection of shadow-traits onto minority groups, which is the psychological basis of Islamophobia and sectarianism. This implies that the future of interfaith harmony lies in "Contemplative Peacebuilding," where inner-work is recognized as a prerequisite for outer-peace. The

strategic implication is for interfaith organizations to pivot toward "Sufi-inspired Psychology" to address the deep-seated "Identity-Anxiety" that plagues modern multi-cultural societies.

Furthermore, the expansion of Rumi's influence into "Cosmic Pluralism"—including the non-human "Other"—offers a vital spiritual response to the Anthropocene. The results show that Rumi's "Universal Dance of Being" provides a framework for an inter-religious ecological ethics that values the sanctity of all life forms. [Alamsyah \(2025\)](#) finds that this "Bio-Pluralism" is essential for mobilizing a unified faith-based response to environmental degradation. This insight proves that the "Concept of Otherness" in Sufi philosophy is expansive enough to solve both social and ecological fragmentation. This confirms that Rumi's legacy is a "Living Philosophy" that continues to evolve to meet the crises of the 21st century.

The immediate action required is the development of "Rumi-Based Pluralism Curricula" for both religious and secular educational institutions. This strategy should move beyond mere poetic recitation toward a "Hermeneutic of Compassion" that trains students to deconstruct "Enemy-Images" in real-time. [Naswa & Muthoifin \(2025\)](#) suggest that these digital-age "Sufi Hubs" can serve as "Sanctuaries of Moderation" in the face of rising extremism. Subsequent research should investigate the quantitative impact of "Sufi Poetics" on the "Empathy-Quotient" of policy-makers and diplomats. Without these proactive educational integrations, Rumi's influence will remain a beautiful but underutilized "spiritual resource" in the fight for global interfaith harmony.

## Conclusion

The narrative review of Rumi's influence on the concept of "Otherness" confirms that his Sufi philosophy provides a profound ontological antidote to the modern crisis of polarization. This research proves that Rumi's "Ecstatic Pluralism"—rooted in the Unity of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujud*)—effectively shifts the perception of the "Other" from a source of threat to a mirror of the Divine. It is significant to conclude that Rumi's "Religion of Love" serves as a trans-confessional grammar that allows for deep inter-religious engagement without the erasure of specific theological identities. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Rumi's legacy has evolved from medieval mysticism to a contemporary "Strategic Compass" for peacebuilding, providing both the psychological tools and the metaphysical framework necessary to deconstruct "Enemy-Images" in an increasingly fragmented world.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in the identification of the "Poetic-Ontological Bridge" as a superior alternative to purely secular models of tolerance. Practically, this research offers a "Sufi Framework for Pluralism" that can be integrated into conflict resolution, psychotherapy, and global education to foster "Radical Hospitality." The added value of this work is its documentation of how Rumi's "Ecstatic Pluralism" is being successfully re-contextualized within digital peacebuilding and ecological activism. Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on Comparative Mysticism and Peace Studies by proving that "Otherness" in the Sufi tradition is not a boundary to be defended, but a sanctuary to be explored. This contribution serves as a vital resource for scholars and practitioners seeking to ground interfaith harmony in a deeper, more resilient spiritual reality.

While this review provides a comprehensive narrative of Rumi's influence, it is limited by the "Westernization" of Rumi's texts in popular discourse, which often masks the ethical rigors of his Islamic context. These limitations serve as a strategic invitation for future researchers to conduct "Contextualized Hermeneutic" studies that reconnect Rumi's pluralism with his Quranic and Prophetic foundations. Future research opportunities should also explore the impact of "Virtual Rumi"—the use of VR and AI to simulate contemplative Sufi spaces—on the "Empathy-Development" of radicalized individuals. Additionally, studying the reception of Rumi in the Global South provides a fertile ground for understanding "Non-Western" pathways to inter-religious harmony. In closing, Rumi's vision reminds us that "the wound is the place where the Light enters you"; likewise, our differences are the very spaces where the Light of Divine Unity becomes visible.

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