

Does Rahman Baba's Poetry Cheer Monasticism?

Language & Literature

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Abstract

As the very foundation of spiritualism differs from religion to religion, particularly from Islamic spiritualism known as Sufism while spiritualism in other religions is called mysticism. Monasticism is one of the movements dated in pre-historic era, encouraged in all religions except Islam. Yet it had been inducted in Islam too. Literature, particularly poetry is the most powerful tool to incite masses or to propagate definite thoughts in a society. By the way, some poets gain universal fame. Similarly, Rahman Baba is such a poet who is accepted and respected throughout Pashtunkhwa. For the reason his poetry is immensely adored specifically in Pashtun community while in neighboring countries generally. The main theme of his poetry is Ishq, the very basic principle of Sufism but in a universal form which is equally accepted to each Pashtun scholar as well as a layman. Anyhow, some writers are of the view that many of his couplets encourage detachment of worldly life. In this connection, the writers of this paper strive to unpack assumption of the poet regarding worldly life and to unveil whether his poetry certainly proliferate monasticism or not?

Keywords: *Spiritualism, Sufism, mysticism, pashtun,*

Introduction

Monasticism The free encyclopaedia defines: "Monasticism (from Greek μοναχός, monachos, derived from μόνος, monos, "alone") or monkhood is a religious way of life that involves renouncing worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one's self to spiritual work."(Wikipedia, 2014) Encyclopaedia Britannica (2014) defines, "monasticism, an institutionalized religious practice or movement whose members attempt to live by a rule that requires works that go beyond those of either the laity or the ordinary spiritual leaders of their religions." If further describes "The word monasticism is derived from the Greek monachos ("living alone"), but this etymology highlights only one of the elements of monasticism and is somewhat misleading, because a large proportion of the world's monastics live in cenobitic (common life) communities. The term monasticism implies celibacy, or living alone in the sense of lacking a spouse, which became a socially and historically crucial feature of the monastic life."(Ibid, 2014) "The term comes from the Greek word monachos, which means a solitary person. Monks are of two types: eremitical, or solitary figures; and cenobitic, those who live in a family or community." (Christianity.about.com, 2014) Kamran Azam Sohdrui, in his account "Islamic Tasauif" says: "Rahab" means fear. (Sohdrui, P. 138) He further says in the context of a verse of Surat Ul Maeda "Ruhban means worshippers, (or) secluded people who secluded themselves due to fear of God but for a specific time. As Hazrat Musa (A.S) spent forty days on Thour valley, Hazrat Essa (A.S) spent forty days on Zaitoon valley, and our prophet (peace be upon him) spent in the Cave of Hira. Ashab-e-Suffa and Ashab-e-Khaf are also included in them." (Sohdrui, P. 138)

The term monasticism is Greek rooted and started in the former religions hence it could be defined in contexts of those religions but with comparison of the definitions of Muslim scholars as stated in previous lines too. So Monasticism is referred to an act of a person who offers in seclusion to seek the will of the Allah Almighty, adopt life of the desserts or jungle, or the one who fears God. It is known as eremitical monasticism while on the other hand, monks and nun also live together or in communities. This type of monasticism is known as cenobitic monasticism. Whereas, Islamic teachings totally negates such types of monasticism. In Suratul Hadid, verse 27, Allah says:

وَ رَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقَّ رِعَايَتِهَا

Translation: "And they innovated monasticism, We did not prescribe it to them— only to seek Allah's pleasure, but they did not observe it with its due observance." And a well known tradition states;

لَا رَهْبَانِيَّةَ فِي الْإِسْلَامِ

“There is no monasticism in Islam”.

Allah the exalted, says in the holy Quran in many places to contemplate about the universe and creator of the universe which is considered as better than offering but farz. Kamaran Azam Sohdruvi says; “Quran uses the word “Saihoon” for seclusion. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was ordered “Tabuttal” which means seclusion too, So as to offer Allah with zeal and attention. It is different from Ruhbaniat. Ruhbaniat means renouncing the world and living virgin life.” (Sohdruvi, p. 138-139)

But actually, the word “Saihoon” is derived from “Al-Sahah” which means open space or visitor (سائح). Although it does not give clear sense regarding secluded offering yet it is referred to the one who keeps fasts as well. “Sufian bin Aainah narrated that the one who keeps fasts is therefore, called سائح that he circumvents eating, drinking, and sexual relations, as a passenger does. (Qurtbi, 1995 P. 249)

Similarly, “Tabuttal” does not mean to cut off from society, family and social responsibilities so as to seek Allah's will but to adopt the way of the prophet (PBUH) in day to day affairs. It actually means that there should be Allah in your heart all the times.

During the consecrated period of the prophet (PBUH), some of the companions of the prophet left social activities and absorbed in offerings as much as they could do. They avoided interaction with their families. When the prophet (PBUH) came to know, he strictly noticed it: Abu Qulabah narrated "Some of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) decided to relinquish the world, forsake their wives, and become like monks. The Prophet (PBUH) told them with asperity, People before you perished because of their asceticism; they made excessive demands on themselves until Allah brought hardships on them: you can still see a few of them remaining in monasteries and temples. Then worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him, perform the Hajj and the ‘Umrah, be righteous, and all affairs will be set right for you.” (Reported by ‘Abdur Razzaq, Ibn Jarir, and Ibn al-Mundhir). (itsislam.net, 2014)

The poetry of Rahman Baba and monasticism

The very first book which displays the monastic portrait of Rehman Baba is Pata Khazana. It states; “Abdul Rehman Baba born in 1042 AD. And pursued his studies of Jurisprudence and Tasauf in the guidance of Mullah Muhammad Yousaf. After that he had been to Kohat where he had acquired higher studies and became a prominent scholar. He relinquished worldly life in his juvenile period and would go on mountains.” (Dawood, 1339, P. 94) In this paragraph, the sketch of Rahman Baba resemble to the sketch of Imam

Al-Ghazali who had also renounced worldly life after thoroughly studying Islamic jurisprudence and initiated ascetic life.

While Robert Sampson & Momin Khan wrongly quoted the statement of the eminent researcher Dost Muhammad Khan Kamil in their compilation, the poetry of Rahman Baba. They quoted; “Kamil suggests that

رحمان بابا ترك ملنگي او دروېشي تر دې حده رسېدلې وه چې هغه ځان له ديني او دنياوي فرائضو او علايقو [علايقو] ويستلې وو.

(Rahman Baba reached such a profound abandonment that he also abandoned all religious and worldly duties. Whereas the actual paragraph is,

دا به هم مبالغه وي که چيري د پورتنيو اشعارو په بنا دا ووايو چې د رحمان بابا ترك، ملنگي او دروېشي تر دې حده رسېدلې وه، چې هغه ځان له ديني او دينوي فرائضو او علايقو نه ويستلې ؤ او له خپله ځانه او خوا و شانه بي خبره ؤ، د هغه په كلام كي ځای په ځای د ديني فرائضو د ادا کولو تلقين او سره د دنيا د غندنې د يو لوی عنصره تر ډېره حده د دنيا ستاينه هم په کي شته او دنيا او تعلقاتو نه يې د مطلقي چشم پوشی او کناره کشی تر غيب پکي هيڅکله نشته.” (Momand, 2006: P. 70)

It would be an exaggeration if in the light of the above couplet we say that Rahman Baba reached to such limit of the renunciation of world, Malangi*, Darwaishi† that he abandoned himself from religious and worldly duties and affiliations and was unaware of himself as well as of society. His poetry witnesses advise of religious duties besides denunciation of materialistic life to a huge extent but do not negate it totally and never entices the complete rejection and renunciation of the world.

Professor Fahim Dil Rahi in his comprehensive work on Rehman Baba viz. “Aarif Rahman” says that;

ده خپل ځان د خپلو خپلوانو نه بيل کړی وو. او خپله دنيا يې ځانله بېله ودانه کړې وه. ولي دا بيلتون يې د څه حسد يا بغض له وجي نه ؤ ، دا صرف د هغه الله پاک سره ريښتني مينه او د دنيا د ”تتوبو نه هغه کرکه وه چې دی يې لکه د مجنون در په در خاوري په سر کړی ؤ.

(Rahi, 1986: P. 75)

He secluded himself from relatives, lived detached life, not on the basis of hatred but for a high cause of true affection with Allah and detestation from world due to which he suffered as was Majnoon.

Similarly, some other scholars also opine regarding the monastic approach of Rehman Baba but none of them give valid argument or the argument in the light of Rehman Baba poetry. Actually, the understanding of monasticism differs, particularly, monasticism in christinity which must not be mingled with Islamic practices adopted for contemplation, which have

* Living a simple life

† Living life with priestly qualities.

been discussed. Moreover, monasticism is a bidaat (innovation).whereas; the huge portion of Rahman Baba's poetry is according to Quran and Sunnah. As he claims:

دا چي زه و تاته و ايم که خدای کا _____ په ايت او په حديث کښي به څرگند وي

What I say to you is with the authority, found in the Quran and Hadis. (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p.820-821). Although some of his couplets could be objected, particularly, the couplets in which he expresses his love with male or female beloved which does not resemble with remaining poetry. Rahman Baba seems to be a religious of high caliber, hence one could not expect such poetry from him. In this connection, the writers are of the view that this would be either poetry of his juvenile period or included by the then compilers.

Anyhow, the basic elements of monasticism are seclusion / renunciation materialistic world and repudiation of marriage. But poetic collection of Rahman Baba witnesses his deep understanding and observation of the society.

He severely criticizes the role of nominal religious scholars and exposes his notorious deeds in form of a scholar. Rahman Baba says;

”په شپه ويني د مظلوم خوري --- سبا کښيني په منبر
په زره تور لکه تبي وي--- په مخ سپين لکه قمر
د دنيا په طلب گرځي--- خپل ځان بولي قلندر

At nights, he drinks the blood of the oppressed, by the day he takes the pulpit. His heart is as black as a pot, His face as white as the moon. He chases in search of the world, but calls himself, Qalandar.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p. 194 to 197) In the same ghazzal and harshly sketches the true face of Mughal emperor Aurangzaib Alamgeer's life. He states;

”اورنگ زيب هم يو فقير ؤ--- چي توپي بي وه په سر
و توپي وته ئي شا کړه--- چي قادر شه په افسر
خوی بي هومره فقيري وه--- چي څه نه وو ميسر
چي فلک ياري وکړه--- نور بي ملک کړ مسخر
گوره څه چاري ئي وکړي--- په عيال د خپل پير
وار په وار تر تيغ بي تير کړو--- د خورم تمام تير
يو تير د خورم څه ؤ --- ډېر عالم ئي کړو ډېر...
اوس نوبت د شاه عالم دی--- دور طور شه دگر
خدای زده څه بازي شي پيښه --- عاشوره شي که اختر

Aurangzaib was also a faqeer (poor man), with cap on his head. But he turned his back on the cap, when he got command of the kingdom. He was only that much of a fakir, when nothing was available. When fortune befriended him, he kept conquering the land. See what injustice he did, to the

children of his father. One by one he killed them with the sword, the whole family of Khoram. It was not the family of Khoram alone, he destroyed many others besides....Now is the turn of Shah Alam, a different time and style. God knows what will happen, whether [it would be] Ashura or Eid.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p. 196 to 204)

Rahman Baba is given title of “Poet of Humanity” by the intellectuals and scholars of this century. He is the messenger of love, peace and religious harmony. History is full of religious and sectarian clashes. Due to which huge loss had been observed in Europe, Asia and other continents. Islam also bans sectarian differences between the Muslims. Similarly Rahman Baba also stresses unity and says;

دا څلور مذهبه واره سره يو دي--- ما او تا په کښي پيدا کړو اختلاف”

“The four sects are one; you and I made discord between them.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p. 254)

Some more couplets from his poetry are as under, so that to make more clear. He says:

”مذمت د دنيا مه کړه --- واوره پند کړه دا دنيا”

Do not condemn the world, listen and absorb this advice.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p.84-85) In another couplet he repeats that;

په دنيا کښي بدي نشته--- که بدي نه وي له تا

“ There is no evil in the world, If no evil comes from you.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p.88-89)

Rehman Baba is not a mere spectator but a practical man fulfilling his duties as well. He is fully involved in it and is well aware of its customs. He believes in the hard work rather meager fate. He says;

که د وني په څير گل او ميوه غواړي --- ځان په لمر کړه سايه بان د هر خاکسار شه

, if you desire flowers and fruit like a tree, stand in front of the sun and give shade to the lowly.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p.556-557)

Considering these couplet, it is very much clear that he repudiates monastic approach. But it must be kept in view that he supports it as it is supported in the holy Quran and holy Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH). He expressed very true, heart touching and decisive argument in a couplet that:

”له هر چا به پيغمبر سره وه ډېره _____ که څه قرب وي يا وقار د دې دنيا“

The prophet would have had more wealth than any; if [wealth of] the world were of any value.” (Sampson & Khan, 2010: p.76-77)

Well known scholar Dr. Muhammad Zubair Hasrat who carried out extensive work on the art and personality of Rahman Baba, is of the view that:

”چي هر کله مور د انسانيت شاعر او د اخلاقي معيارونو په بنياد د نوي معاشري او سماجياتو د راجورولو او قائمولو شاعر وايو نو له هغوی ځنی [څخه] بيا د اخلاقي پستی توقع څومره، څنگه او په کوم لحاظ لرلی شو؟“

(Hasrat, 2013: P. 52)

Translation: When we pay tribute to him with the titles of “the poet of humanity” and the poet who constructs society on the basis of ethical standards, then how could he be expected of the unethical enactment? He further says:

”نو د يو داسي ژوندي شاعر او د ژوند نه دك انسان په هكله به څوك څنگه دا ووايي چي هغه مجذوب يا مجنون وه او د ځان او د جهان له حاله بي خبره وه. د خپلي ټولني نه بي خبره وه او چي يې وئيلي دي نو د جذب او سكر په حالت كښي وئيلي دي.“

(Hasrat, 2013: P.68)

Translation: How one could blame such an active poet, a Majzoob, Majnoon or unaware of self and others. Term his sayings to the state of intoxication.

In the light of his poetry, one cannot justify monasticism and active participation in social life. In his poetry, historical, cultural, literary, traditional, religious, national, folkloric, Sufic and romantic thoughts have been discussed. Then how could he be termed as monk? Or his poetry a propagation of monasticism?

As for as, his marriage is concerned, no valid proof is available neither from his poetry nor from other external sources. Yet, Habib Ullah, Rafi, a well-known researcher says; “Maj. Roverty is of the view, that descendants from the Rahman Baba's daughter are still living in killi Bahadur, Peshawar while the descendants from his only son discontinued since long. He further says that orientalist Darmesteter, believes poet Hameed Gul one of his nephews.”(Rafi, 2010: P. 57-58)

Anyhow, in one of his couplets Rahman Baba mentions his son which makes marriage of him confirm. After reading this couplet we cannot urge his non-engagement/ Nikah. He says: “

که مي ورور که مي عزيز که مي فرزند دی.....واړه غواړي خپله خپله مدعا

Whether it is my brother, relative or son; each nurtures his own objective.”(Sampson & Khan, 2010: p. 122-123)

Conclusion

This study concludes that in the poetry of Rehman Baba seclusion known as “Tabuttal” is observed which is closed to “Itikaf” but very much different to monasticism. A Muslim could observe, Tabuttal according to the teachings of Quran. As for as the propagation of monasticism in the poetry of Rehman Baba is concerned, in the light of the given facts the writers are of the view that poetry of Rehman Baba includes versatile subject matter like

culture, tradition, civilization, politics, religion, nationalism, and mysticism. This could be expected from a person living in a society and having keen observation of the society. Because monasticism teaches detachment from worldly life, consequently the relation of a monk/nun to society weakens. He makes himself limited to a specific place for a specific cause. By the way he abandons Haqooq Ul Ibad as well. While Rehman baba is such a poet whose poetry nourishes pushtuns and all his reader not to adore worldly or materialistic life rather pay attention to perpetual life as Quran and Hadiths directs us.

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