Ishtiaq Ahmed

Studying Bulleh Shah's select poetry in the perspective of Sufism

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STUDYING BULLEH SHAH'S SELECT POETRY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUFISM

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Abstract: Sufism is a movement in Islam which came in existence in 8^{th} -9^{th} century. It is known by the name of *Tasawwuf in* Islamic doctrine, which means Islamic mysticism. It is a state of mind in which one feels ecstasy. In this state one thinks that there is nothing else but all is God. Sufism has its origin in the life of Prophet Mohammad, *Sal-allahu Alaihi Wasallam* (S.A.W.). This movement started from Arab and stretched throughout the world. It flourished during the period of Caliphs of Mohammad (S.A.W.). But it extended to the different parts of the world by their Sufi *Silsilas* or Sufi orders, in this system the disciples of Caliphs got their spiritual knowledge from their masters and transmit it to their disciples.

Bulleh Shah belonged to the Qadri Order, which is one of the Sufi Orders. He got his Spiritual knowledge by his spiritual master Anayat Shah Qadri. These Sufi people were very polite, kind hearted, master of spirituality and helpful to the poor and needy persons. Selflessness, meditation, reciting the name of God, etc. are characteristics of their life. Bulleh Shah was a poet who used to express his philosophy of humanitarian through poetry. I have a great interest in poetry, but his poetry really attracted me toward this project. Because I found he was a Sufi poet and Philosopher who has used his poetry only as a tool which spreads the message of love, unity, fraternity and respect to each other, which compels to everyone meditate on human emotions.

That is why I thought it will be beneficial for everyone to know about the Sufism that how Sufism deals with the problems of a society or a nation, where the discrimination occurs on the basis of race, caste, color, class, religion. My purpose is to explore the Sufi elements in the Bulleh Shah's selected poems which help us to learn the unity, fraternity, secularism, respect to each other, respect to each individual and each religion. These are the keys of succession, to become a developed nation, and to maintain peace and harmony in India, which is a secular and democratic country. It also helps us to create an environment for a peaceful global society.

Introduction: Sufism is a movement in Islam which came in existence in 8^{th}-9^{th} century. Sufism is known as *Tasawwuf* in Islam which means Islamic mysticism. It is not a sect of Islam but an aspect of Islam. The word '*Suf*'' is derived from an Arabic word '*Soof'* which literally means 'Wool'. The movement got its name Sufism because the course of wool garments they wore as mark of their rejection of worldly things.

Sufis have traditionally pledge of poverty and celibacy. They pursue the variety of ritual practices intended to help them understand union with God, such as writing and reciting poetry and hymns; distinct form of religious ceremony prayers which called z*ikr* including reciting the names of God, and *'*gyratory Dervishes*'*.

Sufism is an Islamic school of thought which is expressed by Quran as: belief in God and His Angels and His Books and Messengers. Sufis defined by Quran: "The true servants of God who walk on the earth politely and with courtesy; and when they address the ignorant people, give reply to their salaam." Sufis are those who mostly concerned with moral and spiritual revival.

Origin: Sufism has its origin in the teachings of and in the celebrity of prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). The first people to call themselves Sufis were a group of disciples of prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). It begun in a state of ecstasy; and that phase of mind always has remained the sublime mystery of all mysteries, which first appeared in the life of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). In such a state the Prophet is said to have asked his spouse Ayesha: *Man Anti* (Who are you?). She replied that *Ana Ayesha* (I am Ayesha). Again he asked *Man Ayesha* (Who is Ayesha?), she replied that *Ibinnathus Saddiq* (the daughter of Saddiq, the first Khalifa). Again the Prophet asked Who is Saddiq?. He received the reply that The father-in-law of Mohammad (S.A.W.*),* but when she was asked who Mohamed is, the wife of the Prophet remained silent, for now she knew that the Prophet was in another state: in that state, indeed, when the philosophy of *Hama-Oust* (All is He) is the scale of life: when the Mystery of all that exists through divine light, into whom all shall be absorbed. The Prophet Mohamed thus ranks as the first Sufi of Islam.

Sufis are known in Quran by terms *Muqarrabin* (friends of God), *Sabirin* (patient men), *Abrar* (virtuous men), and *Zuhhad* (pious men).

Selected Poems of Bulleh Shah: An Analysis

Bulleh Shah's real name was Abdullah Shah. From Abdullah Shah it changed to Bullah Shah or Bull Shah. Out of affection some call him Sain Bulleh Shah, Baba Bulleh Shah and some others mere Bullah. He was a greatest Sufi poet of Punjab of Qadiri Shastari order. Much of the

written material about this philosopher is from Hindu and Sikh authors. The popularity of Bulleh Shah reaches consistently across Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Bulleh Shah's verse form which he primarily used is called the *Kafi*. It is a style of Punjabi, Sindhi and Siraiki poetry. It was used not only by the Sufis of Sindh and Punjab, but also by Sikh gurus. At present, it is also using in Gujjari shayari. Bulleh Shah's philosophy and poetry strongly criticizes religious orthodoxy of his days. Here is analysis of Bulleh Shah's selected poems is made. Which are translated by PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive and published as "*Bulleh Shah -45 poems-"* in 2012.

Poems:

Going to Makkah is not the ultimate

In this poem Bulleh Shah says to Muslims that going to Mecca is not enough to become pure and perfect human, to reach the ultimate truth, even you offer hundreds of prayers. And he says to Hindus that going to river Ganges is not enough to become pure and perfect human, even you take hundreds of baptisms in River Ganges. He also says to Buddhists that to going Gaya is not enough to reach the ultimate even hundreds of warships are done. But the ultimate to become pure and perfect human is that when they will remove their ego, their selfishness and pride from their hearts. In this poem Bulleh Shah suggests to purify heart and points out the misconception of orthodox religious people who think that only by going to religious places is enough to become a pure and perfect human. It can be said that, this poem points out the Sufi element by suggesting the human beings to pure the inner core of heart, about which Quran has defined Sufis in Surat-al-Furqan.

2. If the divine is found through ablutions

In this Bulleh Shah says if the divine is found through ablutions, then frogs and fish would get him first because they are already in water. If divine is hidden in jungles and is found by roaming in jungles, then cattle would have discovered him because they are also roaming in jungles. Therefore, he says, that if you (people) want to get divine, they should not think that they will find to divine through only taking bath or roaming in jungles. It is their orthodoxy. If

they want to get divine or divine power then they have to make their hearts pure and true. Here by this point sufi element is obviously seen in this poem of Bulleh Shah.

3. Look into Yourself

In this poem, in the first verse Bulleh Shah criticizes to religious scholars. He said that they have red thousands of books and learnt so much knowledge. But you did not read yourself. He criticizes to priests of mosque and temple. He says to them that they have gone to mosque and temple. But they did not visit their soul. He says that they have reached to the skies but they have failed to reach what is in their hearts.

Therefore, in this poem he says to religious persons and scholars that they need to read themselves, they need to visit their souls they need to fight against their ill intentions to be a perfect human and religious person. They have directly reached to skies for their purification and perfection. But they have failed to reach what is in their hearts. So firstly, they have to reach and know what ill intentions are in their hearts. First they need to make pure and perfect their hearts. If their hearts will be pure and perfect then they need not to go on the skies for perfection and to find divine. As Sir-Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal has said in his one poem, that:

Baat sajdhoon ki nhi,
Khaloos-e-Niyat ki hoti hai.
Aksar loog khali haath loot aate hein,
Har namaz ke baad.

Translation:

The talk is not of prostrations, but purity of intention.
Often people come back with empty hand, after every prayer.

4. Neither Hindu nor Muslim

This poem is divided into three parts. In the first part of this poem Bulleh Shah urges for unity and peace. He says that we should neither be a Hindu and nor be a Muslim. It means we should not be divided into Hindu and Muslim. Let us sit together by sacrificing our pride, our ego. He also urges to Muslims, neither be a Sunni and nor be Shia. Here he means don't divide into sections. He says let us on the road of peace. He says to the people of India that they are neither hungry nor replete, and neither naked nor covered up. They are in middle position. They

are neither weeping nor laughing, neither ruined and nor settled. So they should not be divided on the basis of religious and intra-religious sections.

So, he says that he does not know they are sinners or pure and virtuous, even he does not know what sin is and what virtue is. But he knows only one thing that he attaches himself with God. He gives up both Hindu and Muslim; he becomes only 'Human'. He does not fall in religious conflict. In the second part of the poem Bulleh Shah makes aware to the people about his philosophy and imparts the knowledge of love.

Here he says that he is neither Rafzi, and nor Sunni, nor a Jaini. He is not a learned person and not an intellectual but he has learnt only the lesson of love of God alone. Without it he nothing know anything else, he said. He also describes that people say to him an Infidel (*Kafar*) and an idol worshiper. He makes aware the people to avoiding their orthodoxy that in the Lord's court, both the *Momin* and *Kafar* are treated alike, means God provides everything equally in the world to *Momin* and *Kafar*. In the third part of the poem Bulleh Shah says that all the old and orthodoxy conflicts which were on the basis of religions, give up now. He says that whatever an ancient quarrel between a Hindu like Ramdas and a Muslim like Fateh Muhammad now that has been vanished. And something new has emerged now. So, he says that leave all the ancient orthodoxy quarrels. That is why he says to people that come and let us sit together. Let us walk on the road of peace. It means he invites the people toward peace love, and avoids the people to fight and fall in ill intentions.

In this way Bulleh Shah gives the message of love, unity, fraternity, peace and secularism in this poem, which is a great and common intention of all Sufis in which they hate to fight and make discrimination in between. They have full faith in love, peace and respect to all religion.

5. Remove duality and do away with all disputes

In this poem also he talks of secularism, unity, respect of every religion and avoidness of religious disputes. Here Bulleh Shah says that remove the duality about religions and do away with all disputes. It means he says to the people that do not think that he is Muslim and he is Hindu but think about oneness that we all are one and belong to one nation. He says that the Hindus and Muslims are not other than He (God). It means that both the Hindus and Muslims are the creatures of God. Both the Hindus and Muslims don't have their existence without God. So both are equal in the eyes of God. Here he says that if we fight with each other on the basis of

religion its mean we are fighting with the God. Therefore he says to the people that imagine everyone is virtuous in the world, there are no thieves, because all are the creatures of one God, all are equal in His eyes in the world. Thus, Bulleh Shah says that within everybody He (God) Himself resides. It means God lives in the heart of every human being; there is no superior and no inferior in this world. At the end of the poem he says with wonder, how the Trickster has put on a mask! it means how the Trickster has divided to us in religious conflict. Here he tries to make understand us about the unity, secularism and to learn the respect of every religion and also to avoid all the religious disputes. This is a part of Sufism's kindness toward human beings.

As Sir-Dr.Allama Muhammad Iqbal has also written that:

Teri iss duniya mein ye manzar qiun hai.

Kahin zakhum aur kahin khanjar qiun hai.

Sunna hai k Thou har zare mein rehta hai.

Phir zamein par kahin Masjid, kahin Mandir qiun hai.

Sub rehane wale iss duniya k hein tere bandhe.

To phir koi kissi ka dossat kissi ka dushman qiun hai.

Thou hi likhta hai sub loogoon k maqadar ya Rab.

To phir koi badhnaseeb , koi maqadar ka sakandir qiun hai.

Translation:

Why this scene is in your world?

Why somewhere is hurt, and somewhere is arrow?

It is heard, you lives in every particle.

Then, why somewhere is mosque and somewhere is temple on the earth?

All persons, living in the world are your creatures.

Then, why someone is friend of someone and someone's enemy?

You write the dooms of everyone O God!

Then, why someone has bad doom and someone is the great of doom?

There are three more poems, which I don't found in translation form in that very book, which is my primary source. I have translated them too from Punjabi to English. Here I have mentioned these poems with their analysis. They are as under:

6. Parah parah kathabaan ilam diyaan

Parah parah kathabaan ilam diyaan,

Naam rakh liya Qazi.

Hath wich pahrah ke talwar,

Naam rakh liya Ghazi.

Makkey, Madiney gahoom aya,

Naam rakh liya Haji.

O, Bulleya! hasal ke kitha?

Je Rab na kitha razi.

Translation:

By reading the books of knowledge,

You have labeled your name a jurist.

By taking the sword in your hand,

You have labeled your name a religious warrior.

Came back after roaming Mecca and Medina,

You have labeled your name a pilgrim.

O, Bulleya! What have you got?

If you did not make happy to God.

In this poem Bulleh Shah criticizes to orthodox Muslim scholars. He says to them that by reading the books of knowledge they have labeled their name as a jurist. And they feel proud that they are jurist and a perfect man to judge and direct the others, but they are not. He says to religious warriors that they have labeled their name as a *Ghazi* by taking sword in their hands, and they think that they are on right path, but they are not. He says to religious pilgrims that they have come back after roaming Mecca and Medina, and labeled their name as a pilgrim. They understand to themselves pious men but they are not.

Bulleh Shah says that if they did not make happy to God, they have failed. So, if they want to be a pious person or virtuous then they have to make God happy and God will happy through the happiness of His creatures (all human beings). Hence it can be said that in this poem Bulleh Shah laid stress on to make God happy with the happiness of His creatures, which is always remained Sufis' intention.

7. Rab Rab karde budhe ho gaye,

Rab Rab karde budhe ho gaye,

Mulla Pandat saray.

Rab da khooj khurra na labha,

Sajde kar kar haare.

Rab te tere andar wasda,

Wich Quran ashaare.

Bulleh Shah! Rab onho milsi,

Jera apne nafs nu mare.

Translation:

Doing worships all Mullas, Pandits have grown up old.

By doing worship they have tired,

But could not found Lord.

Lord lives your inside,

In Quran, it is allude.

Bulleh Shah! Lord will meet to those,

Who will kill his pride.

In this poem Bulleh Shah describes that by doing worships all Mullahs and Pandits have grown up old. They could not fond to Lord. And he asks to them that why they are trying to find to God by doing worships in different religious places. He asks to them that are they don't have any knowledge about it that God resides in their hearts which is alluded in Quran. Bulleh Shah said that God will meet to those who will kill their ego, who will sacrifice their pride.

In this way he makes clear the point, that there is only single way to find God. That way is, to kill our own ill intentions, our own ego, our own pride. Then we will success to find the God. In this poem, Bulleh Shah points out that god will meet to those, who will remove their ego from their hearts. But not to those who do more worships. This poem of Bulleh Shah talks about that concept of Sufism which says to do work as told in Quran that God lives in hearts of human beings.

8. Masjid daha de, Mandir daha de,

Masjid daha de, Mandir daha de,

Daindha jo kuj, daha de.

Ek bandhe da dill na dahavien,

Rab dillaan wich rehandaha.

Translation:

Demolish mosque, demolish temple,

Demolish everything, which you can.

But don't break man's heart.

Lord lives in hearts.

In this poem Bulleh shah gives the direction to the people, very beautifully to stop their religious fight. He says to people that demolish mosque and temple, and destroy everything which they can destroy. But don't break man's heart because God lives in the heart of men. It means if the people will break mosque and temple, they will not break only mosque and temple. It means they have broken the hearts of men. Therefore, they did not break human's heart only they have broken God's home. Because God resides in the human's heart. In this poem he says philosophically to maintain humanity, secularism and do the respect of each other. As Sir-Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal has written in his one poem that:

Dard-e-dill ke vaste paidha kiya hai insaan ko

Warna athaat ke liye kuch kam na the krobiyaan.

Translation:

Humans were created to feel the heart's pain of other,

But there were not less the angels to do worship of God.

In this way we can see in Bulleh Shah's poetry gives the message of love, unification, secularism, fraternity and respect of each other. It can be mentioned here that Bulleh Shah was not a poet, but he was a Sufi Philosopher. As a group of people inquired to Sir-Dr.Allama Muhammad Iqbal that is he a poet or a philosopher? He asked in reply to them that what they think about him. They replied that they think he is a Philosopher. Then he explained that yes, he is a philosopher, not a poet, but poetry is his way of expression to Philosophy. By the same way, I have observed that Bulleh Shah was not a poet. He was a Sufi Philosopher but poetry was his way of expressing his philosophy. Sufism's elements are definitely obvious everywhere in these selected poems of Bulleh Shah, which talks about the purity of heart, kindness toward human beings, respect of every religion and individual, to maintain peace and harmony, realization of God in every particle and to avoid disturbing the nature.

Conclusion: As I found through my study that is, in a very common way Sufis trace their origin of *Tasawwuf* to the *Hadith* and the practices which were done by Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). Sufis also do the same practices as Prophet had done, e.g. the Prophet used to spend days and nights in solitary meditation in the cave of Hira near Mecca, before receiving the Revelation. In short we can say, the Sufis throughout the world have the same goal, e.g. 'eternal love' 'to reach the truth' and 'purification of soul' by meditation but the way of their celebrating and reaching to the goal is a little bit different from each other.

Sufism believes all human beings are equal, in the God's eyes. He provides equally air, water, sunlight, moonlight, fire, each and every universal thing to all human beings. Either they are White or Black, either they are Hindus or Muslims, either they are Christian or Janis, either they are Buddhist or from any other religion in the world treated by God equally.

Sufism has full faith in God and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). Sufis give the message of love, fraternity, liberalism, union with God, respect to each other with the respect of each religion, without discrimination, because all human beings are the creatures of one God.

Thus Sufism also believes in all caste, creed and religion, are originally from God the Grand. Sufism is the route of spirituality that exists in Islam. Its meaning is:

1, Seeking the pleasures of God.

2, Love and peace with one's self.

3, Harmony with all creations (mankind, animals, and nature).

4, To be dressed with beautiful qualities of Prophets (S.A.W.) and saints.

So Sufism is the way to purify the heart from bad and evil manners and characteristics. Therefore, I can say Sufism says that there is no superior and no inferior in this world, all are equal in the eyes of God. Because we do not know who is superior and who is inferior, we all are creatures of God. To whom we say inferior, may be God like him/her. Thus here is mentioned that Sufism is a that concept of Islam which is not in favor of disturbing the nature and also longing the real love of God and to reach the eternal truth.

Where about I found in Bulleh Shah's poetry, he was a Sufi philosopher but his poetry mere the way of expressing his philosophy. He was a humanist and a beacon of peace. His whole philosophy in the form of poetry gives the message of love, unification, secularism, fraternity and respect to each other with the respect of every religion and to maintain peace and humanity. In present days which are most important needs of a country like India to develop.

At last I would like to suggest the readers that Buleh Shah's poetry should not read only in the perspective of Sufism. But it must be read to develop the global harmony, peace, fraternity, liberalism, unification and humanity, which helps us to create a peaceful global society.

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