

REGIONAL FOLKLORES OF PAKISTAN IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUFI POETRY AND ITS ROLE FOR PEACE AND INTEGRITY

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Abstract

Regional folklores of Pakistan like other folklores around the globe encompass poetry, songs, sonnets, tales, legends, myths, traditions, customs and proverbs. Being limitless and denying boundaries they link regions to regions, provinces to provinces and countries to countries. They develop integrity and help making the people of Pakistan as one nation. Sufi practices all over the country shape a strong and significant indigenous force to unite.

Along with other factors religion is an influential factor construing the identity of Pakistanis as a nation. Fortunately, Sufism has a firm religious basis. Additionally, its indignity has global links spreading from the sacred centers of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia through Central Asia to the provinces of Pakistan and further spreading deep into the heart and outskirts of the subcontinent. From Baghdad in Iraq and Konia in Turkey to Lahore in Pakistan and Delhi in India and to the remote parts of South Asia with the purest religious spirit the great Muslim saints put interlinked efforts to preach religion, humanity and conscience. It is peculiar that their expositions whether in prose, poetry or speech made extensive use of folklores. As mentioned earlier poetry, songs, sonnets, tales, legends, myths, traditions, customs

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and proverbs all were the tools of their expositions. All great saints took poetry as a basic source of their expositions. From Rumi in Konia to Amir Khusru in Delhi poetry sparkles to expose sincerity of their devotion to Islam, Allah (God) and the last Prophet (SAW). Most of such poetry is uplifting and hope-giving rather than dejection and gloom.

Sufism has been a part of the fabric of life in the region comprising Pakistan for centuries. It is a symbol of peace in a country like Pakistan caught in deadly crossfire of controversial ideological and political controversies.

This study explores the use of folklores in the poetry of some of the Sufi poets and also of that part of the poetry of such poets that is now itself the folklore. Four Sufi poets one from each province of Pakistan and their mystic poetry is considered and analyzed for the purpose. The poets selected are Sachal Sarmast, Baba Buleh Shah, Rahman Baba and Mast Tawakali. The focus of the study is the literary legacy of these poets and mention of ritual practices and the folklore in their poetry. It is well known that the basic perception of their poetry is love. They themselves were many-faceted people indeed — humanists and preachers of peace, harmony and tranquility. The rhymes of these great Sufi poets are immersed in love, empathy and forbearance and are the reverse manifestation of the world view of the people of Pakistan.

It will be useful to view this broad pool of resources to be active for exposing Islamic thoughts through Sufi methods to invoke a positive wave to create integrity in the ocean of current conflicting cultural and political scenario of Pakistan.

Key Words: *Sufism, Islam, Politics, Folklore, Pakistan, Ideology.*

Introduction

There is a misconception that Sufis are an ethnic or religious group, but a mystical society that is established all over the Islamic world and that still has a deep authority and influence on the diverse populations of the Middle East. Sufism grew historically as a reaction against the unyielding legalism of the traditional

spiritual leadership and as a counterweight to the increasing worldliness of the growing Muslim territory. Major source of Sufism is to be found in the dual presentation of Allah in the Qur'an: on the one hand He is portrayed as the Almighty Creator, Lord and Arbitrator, and on the other hand he is seen as an enduring in the believer's heart and nearer to man than his own jugular vein.

Right from the beginning, Sufism taught the lesson of peace, resolution and compassion and worked for the comfort of humanity around the world. Sufis always stressed that peace can be achieved and spread in the world with love and brotherhood and to bring close all the people of the world to one another. So that, they can do away with their internal disputes, greediness and disagreements leading to conflict in the society.

The path of moderation was adopted by Sufis right from the beginning to invite man towards one's real self and let them know about their purpose of creation. This was their approach to fight against the feuds and to bring all human beings into the bond of peace, love and tolerance.

Take a glance over the behavior of the Sufis, they kept themselves distant from battles and educated others the lesson of love, peace and tolerance. Similarly they can play the same role even today to show the nonviolent aspect of Islam. They can demonstrate the world how the Sufis kept society together with their communication skills, and how the people having diverse views and following diverse religions were living in peace and unity side by side.

In Pakistan the most famous and influential Sufi saints includes Baba Bulleh Shah (Punjab), Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (Sindh), Abdullah Shah Ghazi (Sindh) Bari Imam (Islamabad), Baba Fareed (Punjab), Lal Shahbaz Qalander (the "Red Sufi of Sehwan") and Sachal Sarmast (Sindh). They were all moved beyond rituals; all are blessed humanists of the entire universe. To use terminology of the diversity favored by these saints, the sacred "dwells within the heart," "resides within the body. The Sufi poetry focused the issues encountered by the common man, and the greatness of these saints are evident that their poetry is still relevant, as people still identify and recognize with the matters taken up by these great poets.

The folklore of the Pakistan includes the folk songs, myths, folktales, fables, traditions, proverbs and customs of the four provinces and several tribal areas that forms the nation of Pakistan. The folklore of the Pakistan offers precious and

historical evidence of ethnic and religious migrations and influences of the cultures depicted largely in the poetry of the great Saints of this land.

Rahman Baba

Abdul Rahman is usually considered a saint among Pashtun poets. He was called “Baba”, a word that means father, a title of respect for age or wisdom. Historically no other Pashtun poet has attained Rahman Baba’s universal fame: he was a mystic, a source of inspiration for other poets and writers, and endless subject of study for researchers and critics of Pashto language. Rahman Baba knew the culture, the folklore and both positive and negative aspects of the Pashtuns’ society. He was not a detached and lonely mystic, unaware and blind in front of everyday problems of the people around him. He was a true representative of the spirit of his age: his poetry is a mirror of the virtues and the ills of his time, so much that many of his verses have become proverbial in Pashto language and are often cited in public speeches or sermons. Arguably the most popular poet of the region, Rahman Baba wrote verses that found their voice in the daily lives of Pukhtuns and are recited enthusiastically at all public events. Over time, he has become a central icon of Pukhtun culture and is known as a ‘poet of the common man’.

Throughout his life Rahman Baba fought against human materialism, which is depicted in most of his poems

“Better to meet a demon or devil; than to come across an evil man”

“The company of dragon would be better; than companionship with a fool”.

“Regard others as you do yourself; For everyone is like you”

“Judges should deal justly; and not to be Swayed by greed and lust”

It is not an exaggeration that Rahman Baba’s poetry has been listened and read by all Pashtun or is familiar with. It is famous that his poetry addresses every single member of the society so much so that each one finds a relevant message for himself in it. The simple and heart-touching poetry has brought Rahman Baba close to all Pashtuns. His message of Spiritualism and unconditional love free of materialism touched many hearts and some Pashto poets gave him the title of “poet of humanity” as the message carried by him was not specifically for some tribe, nation or society but he addresses all human beings. His poetry has been

translated into various languages, including English and Urdu. One of the famous poems of Rahman Baba translated into English that has an inspiring message for humanity is as follows:

"Sow flowers so your surroundings become a garden,
Don't sow thorns; for they will pick your feet,
If you shoot arrows at others,
Know that the same arrow will come back to hit you.
Don't dig a well in another's path,
In case you come to the wells edge,
You look at everyone with hungry eyes,
But you will be first to become mere dirt.
Humans are all one body,
Whoever tortures another, wounds himself."

Bulleh Shah

Baba Bulleh Shah is a Cultural Icon in the Heritage of Pakistani society. Bulleh Shah lived after the Pashto Sufi poet Rahman Baba (1653-1711). He lived in the same period as Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689–1752). Among his counterpart are Waris Shah, Punjabi poet, of Heer Ranjha fame, and the Abdul Wahab, Sindhi Sufi poet, famous by his pen name Sachal Sarmast. The verse form Bulleh Shah primarily employed is called the Kafi, a style of Punjabi, Sindhi and Saraiki poetry.

At the time of Bulleh Shah's there was a communal strife between Muslims and Sikhs. During that age Baba Bulleh Shah emerged as a beacon of hope and peace for the people of Punjab. Bulleh Shah upholds that violence is not the answer to violence. Bulleh Shah's writings symbolize him as a humanist, one providing remedy to the sociological problems of the society and people around him, describing the turmoil his homeland of Punjab is passing through, while in tandem searching for Allah.

Few translations of his work,

Neither Hindu nor Muslim,
 Give up pride, let us sit together.
 Neither Sunni nor Shia,
 Let us march the road of harmony
 We are neither starving nor stuffed,
 Neither bare nor covered up.
 Neither crying nor amused,
 Neither broken nor established,
 We are not sinners or clean and righteous,
 What is sin and what is virtue, this I do not know.
 Says Bulhe Shah, one who connects his self with the divine.
 Gives up both Hindu and Muslim.

I am liberated, my mind is liberated,
 I am neither a sick person nor a physician
 Neither a believer nor an infidel
 Nor a Mullah or Syed
 In the fourteen spheres I walk in liberty
 I can be incarcerated nowhere.

I know not who I am
 I am neither a believer going to the mosque
 Nor given to non-believing ways
 Neither pure, nor impure
 Neither Moses nor Pharaoh
 I know not who I am
 I am neither among sinners nor among saints
 Neither pleased, nor sorrowful
 I belong neither to water nor to earth
 I am neither fire, nor air
 I know not who I am

Sachal Sarmast

Sachal Sarmast (1739-1829) was a renowned Sindhi Sufi poet during the Kalhora era. His real name was Abdul Wahab and he used in his own poetry the name

“Sachal”. In Sindhi the meaning of Sachu is truth and Sachalu means truthful. While in Urdu and Sindhi the Sarmast means mystic. Literally Suchal Sarmast means ‘truthful mystic’. Sachal Sarmast was a passionate follower of Wahdat-ul-Wujood, an Islamic Philosophy synonymous with Hamah Oost.

Sachal Sarmast, one of the great and popular Sindhi mystic, is the leading Sufi poet whose poetry is composed on the verses related to philosophy and Sufism.

Sachal Sarmast remarkably raised the standard and level of Kafi, Ghazal and Marsia in Sindhi poetry; hence the Sindhi poetry of Sachal Sarmast encompasses the wide range of subjects. Unlike his counterpart Shah Latif Bhitai whose verses were composed on local and folk themes, Sachal has touched all great Sufi saints, alongside the most famous folklore of the Indus Valley.

Sachal Sarmast was given a prominent place in Sindhi Literature due to his employment of images, metaphors and similes in his work.

Sachal was a rebel poet in the sense that he was the first poet in Sindh, who raised his voice against the tyranny of religion and religionists. It is on account of religious shackles, says Sachal that man has become a bond slave (Asir) and forfeited his status as "Amir". Man is what his religion makes him and if he becomes a bigot of a fanatic, he becomes blind to human virtues and noble instincts. Sachal therefore warns us this:

Din (religion) and kufr (irreligion) are a snare for the heart,.

Brown them all into the wave of Divinity;

Then, O Sachal! Will your sway be everywhere?

Sachal's poetry furnishes positive evidence that he was an advocate of a new society, free from class shackles and unfettered by orthodox customs and set ceremonies. He was a fearless critic of all dogmas and dreamt of a New Age, free from; class and sectarian distinctions. 'Be a slave of none, he says, 'realise thy dignity.'

Break the bonds of all customs and ceremonies;

Banish from your mind all thoughts of slavery;

Be a hero and wear a royal turban of splendour.

Sachal had hinted at grave and gruesome consequences for the people of Sindh because of their disunity and discord.

Mast Taukali

Taukali was born in 1825 in Mandek Band area near Kahan. He belonged to Loharani (Shirani) branch of Mari tribe. His father's name was Lal Han (Lal Khan). Taukali's mother died in his infancy, his father passed away when he was just 13/14 years old. He had a brother named Peeruk. The original name of Taukali was Sohrab Khan, which was changed to Taukali due to namesake with a family member of the tribal chief. After his father's death, Taukali came to Maawand where he was fostered by a man named Balochaan.

Mast Taukali is the greatest Sufi poet of Baluchi language and his poetry is closely attached to the sufferings of common men in the subcontinent.

The distinction of Mast Taukali is that he was not only the harbinger of optimism in his time in Balochistan but his work for the promotion of positive value and his inspiration is considered to be very effective and soothing even today, the aesthetical element is too innately ingrained in Mast Taukali's poetry to be overlooked.

There is a notable distinctive quality in his poetry that he showed the path of remedy to the oppressed and helpless women of his society. This aspect endows Mast Taukali a higher status than other poets.

Conclusion

Violent extremists are found in each culture and in each tradition. We find Christian extremists in the West, particularly in the US. There are Jewish extremists in Israel and other places. Similarly there are Hindu Extremists seen in India. Islamic extremists are not exceptional and have captured to be top of the bill in recent years. Fanaticism or in other words extremism is not an issue or a matter of a particular religion and region; it is a disorder in the human consciousness in common.

Generally there is no such thing as religious extremism as it has very little to do with religion, if one ponders over. To some extent it's a spontaneous reaction to the strongly fragmenting nature of the today's world and also partly a retort against the inescapable, disturbing conflicts with diverse people and diverse

cultures and beliefs in our increasingly incorporated and multifaceted world. But commonly it is an act of extreme anxiety when the true teachings of the religion perceived by the heart are lost. When man lost the sense of what they really point to, they become obsessed with rules and traditions violently.

Fundamentalism and extremism are an admission of the spiritual uncertainty.

The real long lasting resolution to the issue of violent religious extremism in today's era is to stir up that lovable, clandestine, sacred bliss within ourselves, and spread it by generously sharing it with others, to generate atmosphere conducive to that enduring quest of the time.

The Sufi poets are indeed envoys of peace and love whose underlying objective was to prevent the people from acquiring extremist tendencies. The present environment requires most importantly carrying such messages and spread widely so that the earth becomes a better place for the generations to come to co-exist peacefully.

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