



RELIGION AND SOCIETY: HUMANISM IN BULLEH SHAH'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The present study intends to investigate the relationship between religion and society with reference to Bulleh's At One Point all Talk Ends, Come My love and Going to Makkah is not the Ultimate. The study investigates why Bulleh Shah is against the religious practices and why he is in the favor of choosing a Murshid. It also explores the relationship between religious rituals and an individual in the society and what are the solutions purposed by Bulleh Shah against the sociological problems of the world? Moreover, it also explores the philanthropic aspects of his personality through his poetry. By using Deconstruction theory, the researcher finds out that the Mullahs/clerics are responsible for spreading religious hatred, intolerance and extremism in the society by distorting the teachings of Religion.

KEYWORDS: Asceticism, Perfect Fakir, Ego, Sufism, and Murshid.

INTRODUCTION

Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri (1680-1757) popularly known as Bulleh Shah, is a Punjabi Sufi poet. He was born in the village of Uch Shrif Bahawalpur (Then Subcontinent) in a noble Sayyed family, but left the life of nobility and led a humble life. He got his early education from his father and for higher education he went to Qasur, where he studied The Holy Quran, Sunnah, Islamic traditions and different languages like Arabic and Persian under the supervision of Hazarat Gulam Murtaza and Maulana Mohiyuddin. The study of Islamic Scriptures aroused his interest in Mysticism. Thus, he became a disciple of Shah Inayat Qadiri (Arian Caste) to attain religious enlightenment but he was criticized by the members of his family for choosing Shah Inayat Qadiri as his spiritual leader. The reason is that the subcontinent at that time was in the grip of caste system. Jamal Malik writes in this connection: "The concept of caste, or 'qaum' in Islamic literature, is mentioned by a few Islamic historians of medieval India, but these mentions relate to the fragmentation of the Muslim society in India (Jamal Malik, 15)." Bulleh Shah was against the

discrimination on the basis of caste, color, creed and religion and he resisted this cult of discrimination through his poetry [1].

In his poetry, Bulleh Shah followed the Sufi pattern of Punjabi Poetry set by his contemporary poets like Shah Hussain, Shah Sharaf, Waris Shah and Sultan Bahu. Bulleh Shah wrote 150 kafis, 1 Athwara, 1 Baramah, 3 Siharfa, 49 Oodh and 40 Gandhan. But his main focus was on Kafi. He in his Kafis deals with issues like religious intolerance, materialism, ego, and inequality. For example, in At This Point, All Talk Ends, he rejects the religious orthodoxy and favors love and Universal brotherhood. Similarly, in Come My Love and Neither Hindu nor Muslim he talks about the real purpose of religious prayers. He is of the view that if religious rituals don't remove greed, and ego present in the heart of Man then observance of these rituals is useless. In Love Springs Eternal, Bulleh Shah says that one can find Salvation by loving one's fellow Human beings. He is of the view that a Religion gives the lesson of Humanity and says the practice of Religion should be stopped if one does not learn the lesson of love and respect for Humanity [2].

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The present research study is significant as it furnishes a view regarding Mysticism/ Sufism in Pakistani Literature and also brings the marginalized Pakistani voices in the mainstream of the society. Besides, the world is in the terrible grip of religious fanaticism and in such atmosphere it is need of the time to spread Humanism that is present in Bulleh Shah's Poetry.

LIMITATIONS

Bulleh Shah a 17th century Punjabi poet wrote poetry in Punjabi. He, in his poetry gives the message of love, hope, tolerance and Humanism that is why his poetry is translated in many languages of the world like Urdu and English. The researcher will focus only on English version of At this one Point All Talk Ends, Come My love and Going To Makkah is not The Ultimate.

ANALYSIS

Hold fast to your murshid
Become a devotee of all the creature,
Intoxicated, carefree,
Without desire, indifferent to the world,
Let your heart be fully clean.

From the above quotation it can be argued that Bulleh Shah through his poetry preaches universal love and brotherhood. For Bulleh Shah Humanism is above board from all the other considerations like religion, caste, color and racism. Besides, he is of the view that all the religious rituals are for the benefits and betterment of the human beings and the society. That is why he criticizes the preachers

of the religion who only stress upon the strict observance of religious practices and ignore the real essence of prayers [3].

Bulleh Shah criticizes the fake idea of the Mullahs/Clergymen who preach the masses that one must offer prayers, must go to church and take bath in river Ganges in order to escape from the terrors of death and from the fire of the hell. He is of the view that the inherent purpose of all the religious rituals is to create harmony, love and brotherhood among the different segments of the society regardless of religious beliefs. It is futile to think that one can escape from the fears of grave and the torments of hell and can attain salvation by simply observing the religious rituals. He says in this context: "Going to Makkah is Not The Ultimate, Even if hundreds of prayers are offered, Going to Gaya is not the ultimate; Even if hundreds of worship are done." These lines clearly show that one cannot get the nearness and blessings of God by paying visit to religious places like Maakkah, Church or River Ganges [4].

In Islamic Mysticism there are seven different stages of the development of human soul and in the second phase of the development of human soul which is known as Nafas Lawama a man becomes aware of his good deeds. A man follows all the religious obligations such as prayers, observes fast, and pays alms but at the same time he wishes to be known as a pious man among the people. This wish for appreciation is the result of ego. The ego is considered as a source of all the evil in Islamic traditions. Holy Quran says that the reward of all the human actions depend on the thinking behind the actions. Thus, a man who does some pious deeds to get fame in the society will not be able to get the original reward of his good deeds in life after death [5].

Bulleh Shah is against Ego and hypocrisy, as in Sufi traditions both are always considered evils which ultimately mislead a perfect fakir from path of Truism. When a person observes all the religious rituals like Prayers, pays alms and takes fast regularly then Satan tries to mislead him through hypocrisy. A Man without Murshid becomes the prey of Satan and he wishes to be known as a reformed person and finally under the influence of the devil he publicizes his piety, his good deeds, and expects appreciation from people. This makes his behavior hypocritical [6]. Sometimes he realizes this, and tries to changes. Bulleh shah writes in this context: "Many return from Mecca as Haajjis, Blue shawals across their shoulder, they profit from the merit earned by haj, who can admire such behavior? Can the truth ever remain hidden, At this one point, all talk ends". The quotation makes it clear that if someone takes a religious journey with a mind to be known as pious person among the people is reward less. For Bulleh Shah such deeds take roots from hypocrisy. Bulleh shah propagates to avoid from hypocrisy. The world is temporal and Man is Mortal. Thus all the things like people's opinion are also temporal and inconsistent. People's opinion changes from person to

person and place to place. Therefore one should opt for that which is permanent, eternal and everlasting. For a perfect fakir it is very essential to avoid from hypocrisy [6].

Bulleh Shah through his poetry preaches that Human beings must create a balance between Eternal and Mundane life. He is totally against Asceticism and rejects it in any form or in religion. Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary defines Asceticism as: "The belief that one can attain to a high intellectual or spiritual level through solitude, mortification of flesh and devotional contemplation (WCD 84)". Ascetics abandon sensual pleasures and lead an abstinent lifestyle, in the pursuit of redemption and salvation, spend time in isolation while fasting. Bulleh Shah views Asceticism that is practiced in all the major religions like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam is a futile and useless activity and it should be discouraged. In Abrahamic religions Asceticism is associated with fakir, monks, and nuns and in Hinduism and Buddhism it is related with yogis, and bhikkhus respectively. Mainstream Islam negates Asceticism, except for its minority Sufi sect. The Holy Quran says in this context: "We did not prescribe it to them—only seek Allah's pleasure, but they did not observe it with its due observance; so we gave to those of them who believe their reward, and most of them are transgressors [7].

For Bulleh Shah the real purpose of all these religious rituals is to teach Man equality, universal brotherhood, and tolerance. For example, in Islam while performing prayers all the rich and poor stand in a row without discrimination of caste, color and creed. Besides, the real motif behind prayers is to make a person a law abiding citizen of the society. The Holy Quran narrates in this connection: He (Allah) forbids indecency and evil and rebellion (An-nahal, 90)." Similarly, Hajj also teaches equality as on the day of Hajj in Mecca it is necessary for all the Muslims to wear same dress [8].

In his last sermon Prophet Muhammad said: "O people, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard the life and the property of every Muslim as a sacred trust" (Alhafeez.org). The quotation makes clear that Islam equates life dignity of a Muslim life and with Holy city of Makkah. The compassion and love for others is not only for the Muslims even the life and dignity of non-Muslim is equally valuable. Prophet Muhammad (PUBH) once said: "He, who kills an innocent person, he kills the entire humanity". The quotation shows Islam preaches love and humanism not only for the Muslims but also for the nonbelievers. The time in which Bulleh Shah was writing was a time of chaos and disorder. The Sub continent was under Mughal control in the second half of the eighteenth century and the social, economic and political condition of Sub continent crumbling day by day. During Aurang Zeb's Jats, Sikhs, and Marhats started arm struggle to overthrow the Mughal Empire. All these rebellions ultimately destroyed the social fabric of the society. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs who were living peacefully since Babar's time started fighting with each other [9].

Bulleh Shah was disturbed by all the chaos and he tried to create harmony in the society through his poetry. That is why he is against religious debater Muslims, Hindu, and Sikhs. He says in this context: “tear down the Mosque, or the temple; you may break everything, you can/but don’t break a person’s heart; it is there that God resides”. In At This One Point All Talk End he says: “For no reason you abrade your forehead on the ground, you display your reverence at the Mehrab, You recite Kalma to entertain a listener”.

Bulleh Shah’s poetry and philosophy is his bold and harsh satire on religious practice of his days. He was a keen supporter of humanity and at all fronts he opposed oppression and exploitation of public by Mullahs and religious scholars [10]. Safir Rammah in his article “Leading Light Of Punjab” writes; “Bulleh Shah outright rejection of any formal authority of religious institution in regulating the affairs of society, in particular the role of Mullahs and religious scholars, became the subject of many of his famous poem [11].” In eighteenth century, Mullehs were responsible for religious hatred, intolerance and spreading of extremism in our society that Bulleh did not like. Bulleh Shah criticizes the duality of Mullehs who consider themselves pure but inwardly they are corrupt. As Nathaniel Hawthorne in The Scarlet Letter unveiled a Puritan minister ‘hypocrisy “Dimmesdale continues to preach and delivers some of his most passionate sermons, on the topic of sin. He describes himself “as a pollution and a lie” to his parishioners yet he does not confess and they continue to view him favorably.” In the same way Bulleh Shah says in his poetry; “Mullah and the torch bearer, both from the same folk guiding others, themselves in the dark.” Bulleh Shah hates those who give the lesson of Islam but themselves are unaware of true meanings of Islam. They misuse their authority and tease suffering humanity [12].

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion one may conclude that Bulleh Shah preaches Humanism in his poetry as he believes that redemption and love for mankind are closely linked. Without loving and showing compassion to others it is futile to seek God’s closeness and salvation as the religious rituals like prayers, fasting and giving alms are meant to teach us the lesson of humanism. Moreover, Bulleh Shah preaches Humanism for everyone without any discrimination of religion, color, caste and creed.

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