

Teachings of the Sufi Mystics; Poetry as a Source

Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali*

Introduction

Let me first introduce the Qur'ānic foundations of Islamic Mysticism. Different scholars present different references in this regard and the interpretation that appeals me the most is described in *Surah Fussilat* verse 30-31,

Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on the right course - the angels will descend upon them, [saying], 'Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised. We [angels] were your allies in worldly life and [are so] in the Hereafter. And you will have therein whatever your souls desire and you will have therein whatever you request [or wish]'

Qāḍī Abī As Sa'ūd ibn Muḥammad Al 'Imādī in commentary *Abī As Sa'ūd* while explaining angels' descend says, "they assist and support them in their worldly and spiritual affairs."

While commenting on "allies in worldly life and [are so] in the Hereafter," he says,

Therefore We are your friends in worldly matters. We pass on spiritual revelation to you what is truth and 'Haq' for you and we guide you towards in such affairs where is betterment for you.

Qāḍī Muḥammad Thanāullah 'Uthmānī Panipati in his famous commentary *Tafsīr Maḍḥharī* (volume 4, pp.423-424) describes a principle explaining the difference between the Prophetic revelation and Sufi revelation,

Such Divine revelation which is proof of Sharī'ah it is only specifically for Prophets. Such Divine revelation ended after Holy Prophet (SAWW).

But such spiritual revelation which is not proof of Sharī'ah, such spiritual revelation through intuition or through the words of angels,

* Chairman, MUSLIM Institute

as it occurred for Sayyeda Maryam, this form of revelation is not limited to Prophets. In fact it can be revealed upon friends (*Awliyyā*) of Allah.

He states that after the finality of Prophethood on Holy Prophet (SAWW), there cannot be any new prophet. However the revelation is directed upon the friends of Almighty, the Sufis. He describes the principle that there are two types of revelations, one is *tashrīṭ* and other is non-*Tashrīṭ*. *Tashrīṭ* is the one which can be the source of *sharī'ah* and this is specific for Prophets. However the revelation descended upon the friends of Allah, the Sufis is non-*tashrīṭ* and therefore cannot be source of *sharī'ah*. Shaykh 'Abd Al Qādir Al Jīlānī (RA) the spiritual master of all spiritual orders says that the person refuting the *tashrīṭ* revelation is the unbeliever and committing infidelity. Whereas one negating the non-*tashrīṭ* revelation is not committing infidelity and is only captured in adversities and is unable to have spiritual benefits. Therefore Qāḍī Muḥammad Thanāullah 'Uthmānī Panipati clarifies that the *tashrīṭ* revelation has stopped after finality of Prophethood whereas the non-*tashrīṭ* revelation is still descending and will continue to be descended.

The status of people receiving the non-*tashrīṭ* revelation is honour with Almighty's friendship in both the worlds. They are in Almighty's proximity and He saves them from all the evil desires and Satanic designs.

Spread of Islam across the regions has been largely attributed to Sufi Mystics. From Arabia to Persia, Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, Far East, China, every region echoes with the voice and poetry of mystics. Xavājah Ḥasan Baṣrī, Ḥaḍrat Sīrī Saqṭī, Ḥaḍrat Junayd Baghdādī, Shaykh 'Abd Al Qādir Al Jīlānī, Imām Al Ghazālī, Ḥaḍrat Ibn Al 'Arabī, Mevlana Rūmī, Bahā Ad Dīn Naqshband, Ḥāfīdh Shirazi, Xavājah Bedil, Sulṭān Al 'Ārifīn Sultan Bahoo and uncountable such personalities in every part of Muslim world pronounce this fact.

Dual duty performed by Sufi mystics is to be considered. On one hand preaching Islam to non-Muslims and on the other preaching Oneness and ardent love of Almighty to believers. The oneness

impacting people in their both individual and social aspects alike making it easier to reflect individual traits in social construct.

Practicality of their message was evident from their own lives leaving no room to call it something mere abstract. Even the people not present in their proximity, were influenced through poetry.

Individual as well as social constructs both remained under mystics focus. When individuals discover their spiritual destination, simultaneously, through its reflection, society finds its spiritual manifestation.

Brief Introduction of Sultan Bahoo

A just a brief introduction regarding a born saint who with gifts of God; developed and became ‘*Sultān Al ‘Ārifīn*’ to ‘*Sultān Al Faqr*’.

Sultān Al ‘Ārifīn Sultan Bahoo belongs to the fertile land of Shorkot district Jhang the present day Punjab, Pakistan. Born in 1629 to a spiritual family of Awan tribe (the non-Fatimid descendants of fourth Caliph ‘Alī Al Murtaḍa’ RA), spent his childhood under spiritual supervision of his mother. Based upon intuitional instructions of Shaykh ‘Abd Al Qādir Al Jīlānī, made the pledge at the hands of Sayyad Peyr Abd Ar Raḥmān Dehlvi (RA); a Qādirī Spiritual Mentor in Delhi.

The Divine qualities to which he imparted to his folks with on coming generations regarding purification of Heart; Soul.

This promising personality after gaining spiritual maturity attained also highest echelons which made him an authority to be ‘*murshid*’ (spiritual guide) for so many followers, that increased to such an extent that his personality influenced the Mughal King Aurengzeb Alamgir.

The Prevalent/Ecological Environment

He lived in the era when geographical demographic portrayed the lush green pastures with flowing majestic rivers; grazing cattle with farming as prime profession to produce basic provisions of life.

These were the fertile lands of Punjab, the land of five rivers with predominantly rural population. However majority was able to understand and communicate mostly in their local language.

There was an abundance of natural resources and basic needs of life. Such an environment made the folks to have an innocence and honest approach in societal norms.

The Folklore Domain

The beliefs, customs and traditions are passed on from generations onward. Many folklores consist of poetry, tales, legends with myths, superstitions, including religious celebrations carrying the societal norms and acquaintance.

They don't have written scripts, but they have folk songs which they imitate from their forefathers as a trust and treasure. People used to learn them from their childhood especially laps of their mothers.

Today scholars consider them group of people who share at least common linkage and building factor (a significant bondage) which gave them a better survival value for a long time.

Emergence of Saints/Spirituality

Sufi saints emerged who touched the heart and soul of folks to adopt Islamic norms of Qur'ān and Sunnah.

It is important to note that at that time Indo-Pak subcontinent had pluralistic society (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs etc.), making the targeted audience of Sufi mystics very diverse.

This was quite a challenge to bring those folks from ignorance to enlightenment (fragrance). Therefore, means and ways were adopted from Islamic values and principles.

They made efforts to import teachings as described in *Surah Ibrāhīm* (verse 4), "And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them,"

Sufi poetry carries a speciality that it embraced and used such means for diffusion of knowledge in societies which became reason to cherish their message. For example people used to listen folklores, melodies, music and got inspired towards folk-singers. On the occasion of annual funfairs or such gatherings, people were able to access singers singing the melodies. Sufis discovered that the music emerges from

poetry. Therefore, in the first step they adopted poetry and produced such poetry for which music could be composed easily. When one comes across their poetry, it is felt that it emerges from pen as well as from flute. Going through their poetry, it reveals that it is already moulded in music.

Sufis made their message part of folk's entertainment sources. They shaped a productive society which even found its entertainment engulfed with spiritual philosophy. Citing example of Indian subcontinent, I can confidently say that large chunk of its music owes its origin to Amīr Khusrow. People even unable to understand contents of lyrics of *Qawwali* feel influenced by its impact because of Niḏḥām Ad Dīn Awliyyā' and Muīnuddīn Chishti Ajmeri. Sufi poetry became part of folk traditions and practical lives. People can neither extricate themselves from this philosophy nor do they want to do so because it is source of their spiritual satisfaction.

The mystics (*ārif*s) promoted their message in folk languages. In Persian one finds Thanā'ī Ghaznavī, Farīd Ad Dīn 'Attār, Jalāl Ad Dīn Rūmī, Ḥāfiḏḥ Sherazi, Sa'dī Sherazi, Abd Ar Raḥmān Jāmī. In Hindi, one finds Amīr Khusrow, in Punjabi Sultan Bahoo, Waris Shah, Bhulhay Shah. Similarly Shāh Abd Al Laṭīf Bhittai in Sindhi, Raḥmān Bābā in Pashtu, Mast Tawwakālī in Balochi, Ali Ar Renari and Shaykh Ḥamzah Al Fansūrī in Indonesia, Yunus Emre in Turkish, Shah Muhammad Sagir in Bangla and many other such examples in different languages.

The principle goals of a mystic;

- Knowledge of spiritual reality that exists beyond everyday life
- Spiritual union with some higher power
- Freedom from selfish needs and worldly vain desires

These principles made their message to be accepted widely.

A Case Study: Sultan Bahoo

Sultan Bahoo remains one of the prominent Sufi mystics of Indo-Pak subcontinent whose impact is felt across the world.

Despite authoring around 140 Persian books he remains famous for Punjabi poetical work '*Abyāt Bahoo*'. One of the reasons being the local

language Punjabi the more attractive for the villagers. Such strong was the attraction that *Abyāt* became worldwide renown with Sultan Bahoo's name.

Every single line of *Abyāt* describes the deep philosophy and meaning which reveal itself upon the reader and listener. Popular among the folks, *Abyāt* became part and parcel of their lives leaving deep impact on culture and traditions.

There are different themes in *Abyāt*. Just to mention few:

- Connection to the Creator
- Love of Holy Prophet (SAWW)
- *Dhikr* (remembrance)
- *Ishq* (adherent love)
- Purification of heart
- Death before dying
- Immortality of soul
- "Hoo" as code of life
- Knowledge of reality
- Strong character and morality
- Forgiveness, patience and brotherhood

Concept of Hoo (هُو)

When we talk about Sultan Bahoo and his Punjabi poetry, the discussion revolves around 'Hoo'. 'Hoo' has always been considered by Sufis as the excellence of the status of '*Dhāt*', the Almighty. *Ism Dhāt*, the actual name of Allah Almighty is described in four stages by Sufis Allah (الله), Lillah (لله), Lahoo (له) and Hoo (هُو).

Hoo is the excellence as the *āyat al kursī* describes

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

The last part of Surah Al Hashr reads

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ

'Hoo' manifests the notion that there is only one 'He' everything else is deemed to annihilation. Sufi doesn't see anything but 'Hoo'. The meaning of 'Ba-Hoo' is analogous that such a personality who is always

with 'Hoo' and there is nothing else meaningful and existent in front of 'Him'. In continuity the Sufis have described 'Hoo' as the ultimate and final destination.

Imām Fakhr Ad Dīn Ar Rāzī explains

Ya-Hoo is the ultimate status of Oneness. It is away from duality and is the greatest stage of Oneness.

The author, Imām Rāzī says that I have described many secrets with kind blessings of Almighty, tremendous delicacies, intuitions and many secrets and mysteries of Almighty but my heart never received such observations and blessings which Almighty blessed on remembrance of *Ya-Hoo*.

I find this writing very minute in front of what I have experienced, what is revealed upon me by remembering Hoo, I didn't have anything in its comparison and even don't have the words for its description.

It made me feel that this name provided me with very strange effects, the inexpressible.

In famous *Majmū'ah Fatāwá* (volume 10) Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah describes in the continuity of a quote by Shaykh Shibli

Some Sufis say that the *dhikr* the remembrance of لا إله إلا الله is initial stage specific for the believers. The *dhikr* of 'arīfīn is الله and the *dhikr* of هو is for the perfect ones.

Hujjah Al Islam Abī Ḥamid Imām Al Ghazālī writes in *Mishkāt Al Anwār*,

لا إله إلا الله is the Oneness of common person. There is no one but 'Hoo' only that *Dhāt* 'Hoo' is the oneness of select comprising of most generalized, most realistic and most sophisticated.

The emphasis laid by Sultān Al 'Ārifīn Sultan Bahoo on 'Hoo' reveals height of his discussion, the excellence of spirituality and *faqr* (spiritual excellence). Listener of his poetry first considers 'Hoo' in poetical rhyme but is well taken to the similar condition that he feels its impact.

Hoo is also self-teaching very much connected to respiration through ‘just heart’ rather than normal anti-palimony breathing. Now you control the breath rather than material world controls you. The desire of exploration to very closer relation to nature brings you closer to the concept of controlling your breath and desires. The practice of this phenomenon will give a person complete mastery over evil design and satanic schemes.

These efforts further develop a medium to mediate with Him forever. The fraternity friendship with Allah Almighty will endow protection and refuge from strong irresistible forces, whereas satanic evil domain will pursue you with better fortune hope of a promising attractive material world.

The propagation of superb ‘*Sultāic Faqr*’ is the spiritual symbolism of Sultan Bahoo which is very much in signification which is very much manifested as (*Allah-Hoo*) or (*Ba-Hoo*) ‘Always with Hoo’ an association of soul, spiritual (monolithic) actions of complete submission just for ‘His pleasure’.

In his *Abyāt*, Sultan Bahoo describes:

Hoo is inner and Hoo is in outer, from where Hoo could be accessed
Hoo

The potential composition of ‘*Abyāt*’ specifies meditational-mediation of (*dhikr*) Remembrance. Reflection is an integral part of repeated reminders with resonance of Allah ‘*Dhāt*’ or essence with attributes of reverence-enhancement of spiritual system.

Hoo is in inner and Hoo in outer it scalds with every breath Hoo

The rhythm and rhyme of Hoo made his poetry part of folklores and music which further enhanced its impact and recognition. The translator of ‘Death before Dying’ describes this reality when he acknowledges his mother for introducing him with Punjabi lyrics and Ustad Pathana Khan with Sultan Bahoo. The deep-rooted philosophies penetrated the societies in conscious as well as subconscious level.

We do request our audience to peruse the poetical philosophy (including singing improvisations) which profusely illustrates the

fathomless concepts with a unique, unparallel influence of Qur'ān and Sunnah. This derivation of poetic literature imparts the listener a message of Islam in his own language with comprehensive connotation of code of conduct.

The 'flute' resonance gives him a fascinating 'melodious harmony' which further enhances the concept of 'fragrance' the flower garden of spiritualism.

When poetic philosophy progresses a man towards higher stages of spiritual philosophy the achievements turn into accomplishment of success, progress, prosperity in both the worlds.

Conclusion: The Choice, Freedom for Personal Welfare in Both the Worlds

I would conclude with verses 8-9 of *Surah Ash Shams*, "And its enlightenment, As to its wrong And its right, Truly he succeeds That purifies it."

Allah (swt) sublime creation as token of His Providences. Then the soul of man with internal order and proportion in its capacities and faculties as made by Allah Almighty is appealed to be endowed with power of selection (as a choice) – right and wrong.

Purification of heart and controlling desires is what we deduce from Sufi Mystic's poetry. The control over social evils becoming easier and paving the way for peace loving societies.

Self-accountability to the accountability of universe lessons from mystical poetry.

Then the conclusion is stated that man's success, failure, prosperity, bankruptcy would depend upon his keeping that soul pure or his corrupting it.