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Title The Depiction of Islamic Ethical Principles in the Poetry of Sufi Pashto Poet Rahman Baba

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The Depiction of Islamic Ethical Principles in the Poetry of Sufi Pashto Poet Rahman Baba

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Abstract:

The Holly Quran is one of the most read books in the world history, the discourse on what the holly Quran is and what is in it has long been resonated to actualize the position of this last scripture from the Almighty Allah. Scholars from different eras of history tend to agree on the point that the most prevalent and universal declaration of Quran is the ethical principles that will live for eternity. These principles that are stemmed in compassion, equality and equity, righteousness, truth, empathy, justice, peace and love for humanity are cross cutting. Classical poets of Pashto especially the Roshanites of 16th Century and iconic three pillars of 17th century including Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689), Rahman Baba (1632-1706) and Hameed Mashokhail (1660-1732) have echoed the Quranic principles in most of their poetics expressions. But the poetry of Rahman Baba is an exception when it comes to treatment of metaphors, phrases, allegories, allusions and insinuations with regards to convey the ethical and normative prospects of Islam. This paper tends to explain and analyze the compatibility of the poetry of Rahman Baba in the normative framework of Islamic teachings and Qur'anic ethical principles.

Key Words: Ethical Principles, Quran, Pashto Classical Poetry, Compassion, Truth

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Introduction:

Ethics and morality are the intertwined terms that are most of the time used as synonyms. The study of religious text and mythologies shows that almost all religions of the world have a strong concern for social justice, love and care for people, supporting needy and helpless, giving shelter and food to the homeless, orphans, and wayfarer, and emancipating those social groups that are supposed to remain in the bottom of the power paradigm. Islam, a monolithic religion has established its ethical and moral position that is depicted in almost all sources of Islamic tradition including the Holly Quran, Ahadith, Sunah, and legislative fraternities of the early period. The ethical principles and normative framework of Islam has been strongly translated into the subconscious of Muslim societies stemmed in tradition. Pashtun living at the continuum of extended arm of history have evolved a society which has phenomenal connection to Islamic tradition. Rahman Baba the seventeenth century poet is one of the most well-known literary figure in history and contemporary Pashtun society. His distinction is the expression of Islamic ethical and spiritual principles that he has uttered with acute simplicity and yet great artistic essence. This paper is an attempt to contextualize his poetry in the prism of normative Islam and ethical principles of the Holly Quran.

Ethics: Ours and Their

The evolution of The Eurocentric world views in the world has a vivid colonial basis that is developed on the continuum of the dominant occident and dependent orient. As Edward Said narrated “to define is to control” (1) and how the peculiar meanings and definitions are used as Michael Foucault states “tools for social control through social institutions” (2). The discourse on ethics, virtues, right and wrong has always been influenced by the said discourse that was originated by European colonial masters and who arbitrarily dominated the scholastic and academic circles till the demolition of the very literal and direct form of European colonialism. In contemporary academic there are different Eurocentric theories that revolve the discourser on ethics and ethical principles.

“These include relativism theory, utilitarianism theory, egoism theory, deontology theory, the divine command theory, and the virtue ethics theory. These theories are the current theoretical framework that is applied by recent research to explain an ethical phenomenon”.(3)

Analysis of the theories indicates that ethics have socio-cultural construction, which alters with space and time and can be mutually contradictory. Rachels, J. & Rachels in their account on the elements of moral Philosophy has summarized the said theories in the following five points:

“(1) different countries and societies may have different ethical codes; (2) there is no standard or principle that can be used to evaluate one societal code better than the other; (3) the ethical code of specific society has no special rank, which means it is simply one among many; (4) there is no universal truth in moral/ethical principles that can be held for all peoples at all times; and (5) the moral code of a specific country or society identifies what is right within that society; if the moral code of that country or society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right at least within that society”.(4)

Normative Islam and Quranic Ethical Principles:

The word “ethics” is derived from the Greek word “ethos”, which means “character, spirit and attitude of a group of people or culture” (5). In general, Ethics, as understood in western context, is a branch of Philosophy which studies morality in terms of the non-religious reasons given to justify moral claims. Religious ethics, on the other hand, looks at moral prescriptions and proscriptions as they are formulated within a religious context. That is, in religious ethics one looks at the kinds of actions that are prescribed or proscribes. Thus, the main difference between ethics and religious ethics is that in Religious Ethics one understands that moral experience is inextricably embedded in a religious worldview (6).

According to Islamic tradition (Sources of Knowledge) the concept of ethics is coupled with several terms which includes *Khair* (Peace), *ma'ruf* (accepted), *haq* (truth), *adl* (equity and equality), *Insaf* (justice), *Ra'hm* (Compassion) *Taq'wa* (Chastity), *Huriat* (freedom), *Salihat* (Goodness) etc. These terms have been translated into social and educational paradigms of Islamic tradition. In most of the cases the term “*Ikhlaq*” is used as synonym to the righteous attitudinal and behavioral manifestation of individuals and groups. The most simplest and concrete description of ethics revolves around the extremes of good and bad, right and wrong, fair and corrupt. Most of the traditional societies imbedded in the religious norms possess these ethical principles. Pashtun society with diverse cultural and sub-cultural zones inhabits these norms as core determinants of social organization. The code of *Pashtunwali* which ranges from collective to individual has a pragmatic connotation. The poetry of Rahman Baba contains both the values of *Pashtunwali* and the ethical principles that are stemmed in the mystic tradition of Islamic societies.

Rahman Baba: The Nightingale of Peshawar

Rahman Baba (1632-1706) is one of the most famous and well known Sufi Poets amongst Pashtuns. He was contemporary of the great Pashtun Warrior poet Khushal Khan Khattak, and Hameed Mohmand, but details of his early life, family and marital life has not been documented. Although we have some glimpses from the works of Orientalists of 19th century. Henry. G. Raverty in his accounts on Pashto poetry pin points his origin as following:

“Rahman belonged to the Ghoriah Khel clan or sub-division of the Mohmand tribe of the Afghans, and dwelt in the village of Hazar-Khani, in the Tapah or district of Mohmand, one of the five divisions of province of Peshawar”.(7)

The study of his poetry shows that he belonged to a poor family and mostly lived a life with contention, poverty and patience. He lived all his life in his village as saint (Darwaish) and seldom affirmed to get indulged into temporal matters. The pain of helplessness and discard and his love for God and his creatures are the core contents that shaped his mystic-poetics. His reflexivity transcended the time and space, and he wrote his spiritual experience in the form of Pashto poetry with the most simplistic diction. According to Raverty he was belonged to the Chushti-sect of Islamic Sufi tradition. In his mentioned account further elaborates.

“He is said to have been passionately fond of hearing religious songs, accompanied by some musical instrument, which the Chasthi sect of Muhammadans appears to have a great partiality for. ... Indeed, he is said to have been in the habit of weeping so much, as in course of time to have produced wounds on both of his cheeks”.(8)

The position of Rahman Baba in Pashto classical poetry has been narrated as equivalent to S'adi of Persian classical poetry. The Dutch orientalist Gen Envoldson has posited him in the Pashtu classical poetry as follows.

“Rahman Baba was the king of love, the guide to the contemplation and virtue, the walking stick of the blind, the leader of the poets, the saint of Pathans, and master of simple world”.(9)

It is certainly not exaggeration to state that Rahman Baba is the only poet who has widespread acquaintances in the Pashtuns living across the borders of Paksitan and Afghanistan. His poetry collection has found space in almost all corners of Pashtuns plains, highlands and hinterlands. This widespread acceptance to his poetry is due to his very simple diction and the themes of morality and mysticism. His book has always been second to the holly Quran in the most of the mosques and homes of the ordinary people. Dr. Hanifullah Khan in his Ph.D Dissertation on Mysticism of Rahman Baba and its Educational Implications states that, “The consensus among Pukhtuns is that Rahman Baba’s Diwan is more than just poetry. They hold that it is a book written in the shadow of the Holy Quran”.(10)

Rahman Baba’s Poetics and Qura’nic Ethical Principles:

The study of Rahman’s poetry in the context of Normative Principle of Quran has discursive contours. In order to make a comprehensive analysis, it is important to cast a cursory glance over various ethical and spiritual principles that tend to educate and nurture civility, spirituality and scholarship as interknitted values that give meaning to one’s life.

The Alchemy of Love: Swapping evil with goodness

Like Moulana Rom’s assertions, the concept of Rahman’s love is also fulfilling, love is not something that can belittle, infect or make someone mentally ill. Love is the only source that give meaning to life and all the colors of life becomes faded without love.

Islamic tradition in almost all its sources binds the men to take responsibility to spreading goodness, showing love, care and respect to all the fellow Muslims and other social entities.

I Rahman relish the pain of love

So much that I don’t care for its remedy. (12) (Sampson & Khan, 2005;259)

Rahman Baba has sensed the core of normative Islam, when he discards the feelings of “Ri’ya” (display) in prayers Almighty Allah.

Whether you one does as habit or ritual

I condemn the pretense of saint

His poetry contains “Love” is one of the core determinants of humanism. As he challenges the pretense in love with God, similarly he instructs to show respect to the feelings of others and take care of the “hearts” which is the place where God lives.

He compares the position of holly Ka’ba and heart of man.

This Ka’ba is bigger than Abraham’s

If one rebuilds the destroyed home of the heart (13) (Kamil & Qalandar, 1984; 23)

The values of normative Islam revolves around human potential to rebuild a world where one can live with humility, peace, love and coexistence. For this it is important to promote and reclaim omens and symbols of love and altruism. Rahman Baba weighs the two Mughal monarchs with “Mansoor” as carder in the following verse.

The nobles like Aurangzaib and Shahjahan

Shall be inferior to a poor carder, “Mansoor” (Benawa; 1947; 64)

Life on earth is mortal:

The holly Quran on various instances instructs the human kind to notice and ponder over the question of men mortality. In Sura Al-Imran Allmighty Allah states; “Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection. So he who is drawn away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise has attained [his desire]. And what is the life of this world except the enjoyment of delusion”. (*Al-Quran 3:185*)

This very fear and concern of death has overwhelmed the imagination of Rahman Baba. He strongly emphasizes on valuing the moments of life that are particularly counted and already written.

Each breath and every step is counted

Do not take even a single step outward the straight path (Benawa, 1947; 92)

To believe in the eternity of this world is like;

Taking a tour of river in a boat made of paper. (Kamil & Mohmand,1983;27)

Every single moment is the death of human body;

How can one be in peace with such gradual migration. (Kamil & Mohmand,1983;31)

If someone wants to count the length of life on earth;

Just take a notice of the life span of a bubble. (Kamil and Mohmand, 1983;27)

There is no return for thee, a second time, unto this world!

To-day is the opportunity, whether thou follows evil or good! (Raverty, 1978;3)

The very initial verses of Rahman Baba contains the message that human race has been created with a limitation of temporary and specific interval of time on the earth. During this shorter span of time s/he has to write his/her destiny for an eternal life in the hereafter. This is up to an individual that how he or she uses this specific interval between the birth and after the death. The inconsistency of life has been one of the prominent themes, and Rahman Baba echoes in most of his verses to find a purpose that can regulate your life. Living a purposeful life mean to identify something that the contents of Goodness, Peace, Patience, Contentment, Humility and Righteousness. The lens he uses is to get prepare for a life that has no end and has not been revealed. His emphasis of ethical teachings and steadfastness is aimed to educate ordinary Pashtuns so that to follow and practice the essence of normative Islam which is stemmed in prevailing goodness, righteousness, contentment, sacrifice, empathy, truth, humility, justice, peace, equality and equity. He coins newer and altogether alternative meaning that constructs a spiritual consciousness and wisdom that really takes a man (a’dmi) to become human (Ins’an), He most often shows mirror to the ones whose consciousness is immersed. He echoes that, as water extinguishes the fire with humility, so why positive behavior cannot overcome the bad conducts.

Depiction of a value system:

Rahman Baba has been known as the most influential Sufi poet of all times. The ethical and normative value system that encompasses his poetry has been vivid and exalting for pious and meaningful life on earth. The values of norms of righteousness, humility, compassion, love for humanity and sacrifice are overwhelmingly part and parcel of the poetics of Rahman Baba. Dr. Barkat Shah Kakar translates some of the verses from the collection of Rahman Baba compiled by Academician Allama A Rauf Benawa.

As water punishes fire with humility;

My righteousness has made me indifferent to the ways of my foes (Benawa, 1947; 139)
Every tree laden with fruits gets stones.
Thee ought to remain upright to the wrongs of others (Benawa, 1947; 139)
You have the pen of destiny in your hand;
You can write either good or bad with it. (Benawa, 1947; 79)
I am Upright, Like the Alphabet “Alif”
I am not a row that is straight to brawl (Benawa, 1947; 73)
Grow flowers that will turn your land into garden
Don’t grow thrones that may pinch your feet (Benawa, 1947; 139)
Come, do not be the source of trouble unto any one;
For this short life of thine will soon be lost, O faithless one! (Raverty, 1978; 11)
As the holly Quran prohibits all the believers not to be overwhelmed by the feelings of lust, greed, overconsumption and competition. The poetry of Rahman Baba caters to all these themes, and he asserts that taking care of human being is the high level of human dignity and it is above all kinds of prayers.
Contentment has been one of the most prominent themes in his poetry. As the great Hadrat Ali (R.A) once stated that, “There is no treasure richer than contentment” (MH, H.16850). Rahman Baba also find contentment as a state that enriches one spirituality and takes one beyond the temporal or material standards set by people.
Thee not be worried about my helplessness;
God has conserved me Like treasure in the wilderness, (Benawa, 1947; 75)
Taking fewer intakes (food) closes one to Angels; Any person with excessive intake will become prey to frequent miseries, (Benawa, 1947; 140)
Contentment is the satin cloth under my latched cloak;
I appear to a beggar, but secretly am king of the whole world, (Benawa, 1947; 4)
Like a tree becomes fruitful after trimming;
The wiser people know the secrets of gain in the loss, (Benawa, 1947; 140)
Don’t be overwhelmed by lust and ego;
Behold your Lord is sufficient for all *Arabs* and *Ajam* (Non-Arabs) (Benawa, 1947; 79)
Rahman Baba affirms to remain consistent in the way of goodness and be counted on the right side of the history. He has always questioned the sentiments of competition and has supported cooperation as a natural trait to human nature.
If friends comprehend aught, to-day is their time;
That one friend may show self-devotion to another.
May God protect us from such a state of existence!
Where thou mayst speak ill of others, and others of thee (Raverty, 1978; 13)
Standing firm to the fellows and speaking truth to power has been demonstrated in his poetry. As the holly Quran instructs human being to remain strict to truth, stated in the following verse.
“O you who have believed Allah and be with those who are true” (Al-Quran 9:19)
Rahman Baba also instructs the readers to remain committed to the cause of truth.
It is incumbent on judges to administer justice
But not to give their ears unto venal things (Raverty, 1978; 13)

Human Race: A Single Body:
A careful study of his poetry shows that Rahman Baba’s call for the unity of human race. One can easily unearth the themes of empathy towards all human beings irrespective of their locale, color, gender and religion. As the holly Quran reveals on

several occasions that Almighty Allah created all human beings as one *Ummah* and it is humans that disturbed the oneness and created divisions within themselves. (Quran 10:19). Similarly the book of God frequently asserts that all human kind is from the same parents Adam (A.S) and Eve. Following are some of the glimpses of his poetry.

Humanity is like a single body;

If one gives pain to others, so will meet the same fate. (Benawa, 1947; 139)

As an idol made of gold cannot be called man

Humanity does not stand on wealth (Benawa; 1947; 105)

Complete submission to the will of God is one of the consistent assertions of the Holly Quran and other sources of knowledge and guidance. The Holly Quran asserts God's rights over His creatures to be remembered and fulfilled.

"I have only created sprites (Jin) and men so that they worship me" – (51:56)

Rahman Baba finds eternal peace only in complete submission to the will of God. In his Diwan he has repeatedly expressed this notion;

Since Rahman submitted to the will of his Lord;

So is bestowed with an essence of humanity (Benawa, 1947; 13)

There is no other blessing in this world like

Praying and complete submission to the will of God (Benawa, 1947; 13)

Love for God and Love for Human

The Holly Quran does not distinguish the love for God from the love of people. As social beings, the Holly Quran helps the human being to understand the innate human need for companionship – Love, affection, and sacrifices for the loved ones are the consistent themes found in Islamic teachings. Within the folds of Islam, the Quran encourages us to find a companion and spouse, who can in turn help us understand the importance and joy in sharing affection and mercy between two people.

"And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought" (Al-Quran 30:21).

Rahman Baba was in search of finding the eternal truth. His voyage of exploring the God's shadow on earth has been depicted in various verses. The essence of his thoughts is stemmed in love with God and in order to come closer to the Almighty Allah, he prescribes to treat the creature of Allah with acute respect, affection and love. Dr Khan in his Ph.D thesis elaborates this aspect of his poetry.

"Some of the major themes that Rahman Baba touches are contentment, self-examination, sincerity, patience, self-respect, honor and dignity, poverty and wealth, cruelty, learning, power, hypocrisy, mercy, unity, justice and respect for the rights of others etc. Rahman Baba's thoughts have many dimensions but love and eternal beauty are at its extreme".

Rahman Baba's love for God has been one of the most consistent themes: Major Ravorty translates following of his verses in English.

There will be no such another lover in it as myself,

Nor will ever such a beloved one be created like thee.

Indeed, from all eternity, I am devoted unto thee

It is not that today only, I have a beginning made.

When the sword of thee love it shall be served

Then will the neck of Rahman have its duty performed. (Raverty, 1978;9-10)

Therefore his logic of interpreting the motto of life is far more different from the

other poets of his time. In order to find eternal peace one has to diminish the demands of N'afs and ego. Therefore he sets the bench mark of alternative reality of seeking spiritual goal through losing all what is temporal. The Dutch orientalist Gen Envoldson explains one of his verses.

Rahman on medicine makes no design

For he enjoys the pang and pain of love (Envoldson, 1993;81)

I am lover, and the only task I know is Love

Therefore I am neither Khalil, Nor Dawuodzai or Mohmand (Benawa, 1947; 39)

I don't need any panacea

As I, Rahman have remedy through the pain of love (Benawa, 1947; 39)

Righteousness leads to successes:

Quran in most of the verses direct men to remain steadfast and righteous. The distinction of human being as vicegerent (Khalifa) of God on the earth is because men possess the capability to feel and imagine the pain of other fellow human. Quran unpacks righteousness in the following manner:

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakah (obligatory charity); [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and ailment and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous." (Quran 2:177)

While contextualizing the message of Rahman Baba, it is not difficult to find this theme as one of the most prominent.

Due to my righteousness, the God bestow me long life;

For my righteousness, I remain evergreen like pine tree. (Benawa, 1947;4)

Good people day and night want to be good;

They don't need fixed hours to behave. (Envoldson, 1993; 93)

Look for lewdness for lewd, Hermits hide to seek a cure;

Never look for widowhood, In a maiden pure. (Envoldson, 1993; 99)

Seeking Knowledge:

Learning, education and seeking knowledge to transform the life situations for the benefits of human race has been one of the core messages of the Holy Quran and other sources of Islamic tradition. The very first revelation received by Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was Surah Al-'Alaq, the 96th Chapter of the Holy Quran address Muhammad (P.B.U.H) to read.

"Read! for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, who has taught [man] the use of the pen" Al-Quran 96:3-4

This Surah "Al-'Alaq" specifies the blessings of Allah Almighty upon the humanity to know, learn, acquire, preserve and apply knowledge with the help of a pen. It also indicates that a man has the capability not only to read and understand things but can also write them for future use. Quran frequently unveils that human innately possess the capacity to acquire knowledge and reshape the nature/world in accordance to their needs for livelihood and knowledge that can take man as the true Khalifa (Deputed Guardian) by Allah on the earth. In chapter 39:9 the Allah distinguishes the people who know and those who do not know.

Say: "Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?" *Al-Quran* 39:9
According to Qur'anic perspective, knowledge is a prerequisite for the creation of a just world in which authentic peace can prevail. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of the pursuit of learning even at the time, and in the midst, of war. *Al-Quran* (9:122)

While analyzing the poetry of Rahman Baba one can easily identify frequent commentary on the essence and value of knowledge. Jens Enevoldsen, translated following verses of Rahman Baba.

A desert stone will turn to gold;

In company with those, who know. (Enevoldsen, 1993;43)

No matter to which low degree;

;Rahman will serve the ones, who know. (Enevoldsen, 1993;43).

Than to bear the society of a fool, it is more preferable;

That a fiery dragon should become one bosom friend. (Raverty, 1978; 13)

Conclusion:

The poetry of Rahman Baba consists of various layers of spiritual consciousness and ethical principles that is hermeneutically a reflection of the core ethical message of normative Islam. The diction of his poetry is highly concrete and contextually relevant; certainly this is the reason that most of people perceive his poetry phenomenal and correlational to Quran, Ahadith and other sources of the Islamic tradition. The metaphors, allegories, similes and symbols he used to craft images are so concrete and full of attraction that gripe the imagination of readers and henceforth takes them a rigorous experience of spiritual purification and high moral character. His versification contains themes that construct the core of ethical and normative Islam and in many respects show a structural assimilation of *Pashtunwali* the tradition of Pashtuns and the religion of Islam.

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