The Message of Social Reformation in the Poetry of Sheikh-Ul-Aalam r.A

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Abstract: At every crucial time many prophetic personalities arise for the upliftment of society, who can relieve the society from all damages and frustrations. Many Movements arise, like as Bhakti Movement of India, which produced devotional luminaries like Guru Nanak, Kabir, Meera Bai, Baba Bulleh Shah, Namdev etc. Similarly in Kashmir the Rishi Movement started for the betterment of society, Sheikh ul Alam laid its foundation, who first practiced himself then he preached. He made poetry as a means of propagation of his thought/preaching. His poetry belongs to classical Indian Literature and penetrated in our collective psyche and his verses have become proverbs of common folk. Rishi Movement in the traditional Kashmiri society that several of its unique social and religious characteristics were not regarded as an alien. The strength of its social authority not only lay in its denunciation of the Brahmanic notions of caste but, also, in the satisfaction that it gave to the spiritual instincts of the people in the Hindu-Buddhist environment of the valley. It is pertinent to say that Rishism had struck strong holds in Kashmir prior to the advent of Islam in the region. The anti-caste crusade was most forcefully articulated by the founder of the Muslim Rishi order, Shaikh Noor-ud-Din locally known as Alamdaar-i-Kashmir and Shaikh-ul-Aalam r.A

Keywords: Rishi; Kashmir; Shaikh-ul-Aalam; Movement.

Introduction: Shaikh Noor-Ud-Din r.A locally known by the name Shaikh-ul-Aalam r.A was a multidimensional personality as his verses do not simply share the common traits; but he was an environmentalist, botanist (for example, in one of his verses he said; “Food is subservient to forests”) as well as mystic. There is hardly a verse of Sheikh which has not a social, moral, cultural and more importantly topographical context. He was determined to mend the society from being worst to best. He toured too many places of Kashmir, even he prescribed the names to some unknown villages, and he became successful in his mission of spreading the teachings of Islam to common people through their mother tongue so that they could understand the religion of Islam properly. The thought content of his poetry may be divided into the following broad categories: (a) Devotional poetry (b) Naat (c) Morality (d) Monotheism (e) Life after death (f) Ethical Poetry (g) Religious (Islamic) Poetry (h) Love for the Humanity (i) Communal Harmony (j) Lyricism (k) Descriptive (l) Satire and Sarcasm and (m) Mysticism. Being a saint, most of his poetry revolves around them. Through his verses, he protests against the evils of society and played an important role of reconstructing the society. His verses concerning the end of human life should not be described as an emotional expression of the fear of death; rather they seem to have functioned as an effective medium of satire and social commentary on inequality, injustice and repression in the masterly use of metaphor and allegory.  

Against social inequality

From the view point of social history, Noor-ud-Din’s description of the social inequalities existing in the contemporary society is important. Apart from the caste system, his criticism of the rich people is also rooted in the social ethics of the Quran. He regarded hunger as the most degrading of diversities. The exploitation and sufferings of the weak at the hands of the strong is evidenced by his verses. The rich people busy themselves in the enjoyment and forget their responsibilities towards society, to help the poor and needy people and uplift the society. He says:

One amuses oneself by organizing in a musical concert,
Although aware, yet pretends innocence (about human sufferings),
(While) the other is being scourged,
(Has) God Himself willed it so? 2

Inculcation of values of modesty

1
The other evil which dominates the whole society and make it hollow and dark is its administration. How can nation develop when its administration is under the thumb of corruptive and ignorant politicians?

In one of his verses, he beautifully and sarcastically presents the realistic picture of ignorant and selfish politicians who enjoy the power and debunk the wise ones who are competent to organize the administration. He writes:

Hollow hoots while solids art mum and low.
Stammered be a parakeet while lyric the crow.
Aerial is a populous while shoots budded bow.
Phoenix is confined to woods while kite wilt runs the show. 

Against caste system

During the time of the poet Hindu society had already faced devastation due to caste discrimination. Some Ulemas who were fond of worldly pleasures and official privileges also felt the indirect influence of this local malaise and started an undercurrent division of Muslim society on such basis. The Sheikh came out vehemently against such social evils. He stressed his viewpoint by elucidation of Islamic conceptual environments:

The Aazar who carved idols all his life,
Gave birth the son Abraham.
He broke those idols into pieces,
And fought the Holy war against evil.
Built Ka’ba with his own hands.

At another place he says:

By displaying the caste in the world,
What will thou gain?
Into dust will turn the bones,
When the earth envelopes the body;
To utter disgrace will he come,
Who forgetting himself jeers at others.

Against Mullahs and Brahmans

Sheikh ul Alam’s main target was to reveal the real face of fake Mullahs. He advises to beware of those fake Mullahs who wear the mask of being pious, and take the advantage of their fake identity. He not only ridicules the Mullahs but Brahmin as well;

These talkative Mullahs,
With long dyed beared,
Deceitful is their sweet speech,
They are author-minded liars.

Denunciation of Materialism

The society should be built on such values which broadly respect the rights of fellow creatures. There are certain ills as the cause root for deterioration of the society and so greatly fatal for humanity. In this selected list the truth is considered the foundation of the edifice of morality and falsehood is dubbed as the destroyer of a value based society. The lust for worldly pleasures is declared a root cause of individual strife and national confrontations. Sheikh ul Alam stresses the condemnation of the greed, lust, anger and jealousy which destroy the society;

Without the aid of a sailor, I did sale my ship,
By suppression of greed, jealousy, arrogance,
Lust, pride and anger,
Then I realized what I am.
U crave to embrace lustily wives of others,
What madness!
U cannot purchase for any price.

Against Hypocrisy

The other cause of destruction of society is hypocrisy which has been condemned by all preachers, activists. Sheikh also condemns both hypocrite and the pretender. He says;

Though hast deceived none but yourself
Pretended as if a priest though hast opened,
A shop (for medication of souls),
Carrying rosary in thy hand,
Did hide knife under thy long sleeves to kill others.

Sheikh-ul-Alam on Education

He laid great emphasis on education and learning particularly the knowledge of theology without which no seeker of the ways of God could understand the commands of shariat, fiqh and tariqat. Side by side he insisted upon putting all in practice which has been learnt. He said:

Who has the courage and guts to lighten up a lamp against this wind storm?
And will fuel the lamp with his knowledge and faith,
Will abandon the false message and look after the true one,
All the knowledge is alif, laam and meem (Quran).

Sheikh ul Alam’s poetry is full of warnings, and advises us how to eradicate these evils from being particular to general. Now, it is up to us how much advantage we shall take from his valuable poetry as he proved himself to be our real guide to develop our personality. Although his poetry is written in seventeenth century but it is applicable to
our present society, if we follow the rules of Sheikh, which are completely based on Islamic teachings, our all problems will be solved without any toil but unfortunately we ignorantly abhor them. The teachings of Sheikh are based on love, equality, communal harmony and honesty which can eradicate all evils and will be replaced by love and peace.

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