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Aesthetics in Sufi poetry An Analytical approach

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Abstract

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy which deals with the study of beauty and taste. It is related to the philosophy of art. Aesthetics is a tool used to describe the beauty in an art and it contains a broader scope than philosophy of art as it also deals with the reciprocations to the natural

materials that perceive articulation in the language of the beautiful and ugly.

Sufism is viewed as the center that promotes the aesthetic values of Music, art, writing and other creative pursuits over their practical values.

Sufism has always had its own perspective on anything and everything which distinguishes it from the other perspectives of the world. Aesthetics in Sufism has had its bond for a long time and it is believed that aesthetics is also encompassed in the tenets of Islamic mysticism. To throw light on The Sufi literatures (prose and poetry), Sufis have had their journeys towards the divine love and aesthetics had played a major role in drafting their travelogue.

Many Sufis have claimed that Love is the path of their journey towards Allah and all of them use the language of aesthetics to describe the unique experiences of their travel, it is believed to be real that a Human being's aesthetic sense is so dynamic that if once a group of people are reading a poem or given an art the interpretations constantly change from one person to another respective to their level of understanding about aesthetics, they have in them. Same way the Sufis are people who seek for the divine love of Allah and once they start their journey their travelogue weighs according to the level of aesthetics, they have in them to interpret their own experience of their travel.

Sufi poetry has a great rank among the literature and the Sufis have already proved their proficiency in aesthetics with their immense contribution in prose and poetry in their field. The Contributions of Sufis such as Moulana Rumi, Muhaiyaddeen Ibn Arabi, Hussain Ibn Mansoor Al- Hallaj are widely discussed by the Scholars who delve in this Ocean.

This paper intends to throw light on the invention of love as a path to the journey towards annihilation in Allah and huge contributions of the Sufi poets to the literature with their unique style in Sufi poetry in expressing the experience of the journey through the path of love towards the light of God. The research on this topic is carried through an analytical approach where the unique style of aesthetics found in notable Sufi poetries are analyzed.

Keywords

Sufi Poetry, Aestheticism, travelogue, Sufi literature

Introduction

Sufism and Aesthetics goes hand in hand in the majority of the literary works of the Sufi Scholars. This notable style of the Sufis' marked a unique place, as Sufi literature. The culmination for the birth of Sufi literature is the unique style of dissolving the essence of Aesthetics in the Ocean of Islamic mysticism which are twined branches of philosophy, it is known that the Sufis are people who do not converse in accordance to the intellect of common people, rather they are people who converse with signs and symbols in their language. As Sufis are people who do not indulge in phenomenological issues while the common people do.

"Sufis have always maintained secrecy in their domain by sharing matters among themselves as it is believed that they claim that people would not be able to understand their interpretations and descriptions of their divine experience and they fear that they may be misled as a result of misunderstandings and difference of opinions which will arise if they try to open this chamber of secrets that ultimately leads to the criticism which may be laid on Sufis for their perspective even on the fundamental tenet of Islam, Tawheed. So, they do not enjoin every fellow being with them as they believe that either their experience cannot be expressed for a large audience, for not all may be eligible to understand their way of expression or they believe that their subject will not be understood properly by the people and they may not taste the same for everyone, as the tool like intellect for communication they use will not help them in interpreting the Sufis' thoughts and their descriptions, and the subjects which they communicate through their unique language of symbolization using metaphors are believed to be the inner knowledge that they receive as an inheritance from the Prophet, which cannot be understood using logical reasoning and cannot be expressed in any other language.

These reasons are hopefully sufficient to explain the difficulties that obstruct the researcher in understanding the meanings and goals of Sufism."

Therefore, it is required to be cautious while examining their statements, when analyzing them, interpreting them, or judging them. For, researchers have strayed by the ways of the Sufis many a times and they have interpreted them for wrong meanings, or they have given meanings for their sayings and thoughts which were not intended by the Sufis. This issue was noticed by the early learned scholars of this subject, and they warned against falling into it by advising the people who sought to reveal this path, seeking safety and to preserve the originality of Sufism. Apart from all these critical analytics around the subject, Sufism holds its significance in its ideology of receiving the divine love through experiencing ecstasy and distributing it among the

creation, so the core of Sufism lays on spreading love, Sufi literature has turned to become a deep ocean where we can see many notable pearls of prose and poetry.

Aesthetics in Sufi-Literature

Aesthetics is defined as a subject that deals with the study of beauty present in the arts of the world, it is classified with respect to the art it pertains to, aesthetics differs from art when it comes to literature like prose and poetry, and it has its classification respective to the poem or prose it applies to. Art in a broader scope covers literature but not all art is a literature likewise not all literature is an art.

Love is centralized in almost all the Sufi literature both prose and poetry, to express this emotional aspect the Sufi masters who have contributed greatly in literature have used metaphoric expressions or otherwise called as the love language in their works especially in poetry for example we see Maulana Jalaludin Rumi in his Masnavi a masterpiece of his works, he starts it by metaphorically comparing the separation of the Ney from its osier bed to the separation of his soul from the divine and the longing of the ney which laments its sorrow when it is played by the men and women.

"Hearken to the reed- flute, how it complains,

Lamenting its banishment from its home:

Ever since they tore me from my osier bed,

My plaintive notes have moved men and women to tears.

I burst my breast, striving to give vent to sighs,

And to express the pangs of my yearning for my home."

The basic elements of Sufi poetry is known to be the divine love and the mystical union between man and God, many Sufi masters have shed light on this concept which is found to be the concrete phenomenon of Sufism one such Sufi saint and master is Muhiyudeen ibn Arabi who has delved deeply into the context exploring only to establish a unique concept of Sufi metaphysics called The Unity of Existence familiarized as Wahdatul-Wujood. It is his own way of interpretation in drafting the travelogue of the divine journey, as he was the most influential figures of his time and so this concept has gained a pile of followers, the divine love and mystical union is notable in his texts in a wide range as the relation between Haq and Khalq i.e. the relation between God and Creation, it is vivid that this concept is a side of a coin with aesthetics and he has spilled ink on it in his works and one such notable works is The interpreter of desires also known in Arabic as Tarjuman-al-ashwaq he expresses about the secrets present in a Gnostic's heart which are the divine ideas as the Muhammadan heart seeks it and the divine ideas seek them and he metaphorically explains the status and stages of the Gnostic's heart attains and passes through to the

mountain-pass which indicates that there are stages in the divine journey towards the destiny and he speaks about the central aspect of Sufism i.e. love where he says that the lover is in dilemma when he is separated from his beloved.

"Would that I were aware whether they knew what heart they possessed!"

And would that my heart knew what mountain-pass they threaded!

Dost, thou deem them safe or dost thou deem them dead?

Lovers lose their way in love and become entangled"

Another such prominent and most controversial Sufi figure is Mansoor -al-Hallaj who is said to be martyred for disclosing the divine secrets and there are many contradictory views where some claim that he was martyred for some political reason, in his poems he discusses about the similar concept of Ibn Arabi except that he did not name it or establish it to be the unity of existence instead, he brings into light the theme of love and longing and union with the divine in a metaphorically sound manner contemplating on the earnest spiritual encounters with his valuable views on it moreover aesthetic way of expression is entangled in his works too.

*"Arise, oh Cup-bearer, rise! And bring
To lips that are thirsting the bowl they praise,
For it seemed that love was an easy thing,
But my feet have fallen on difficult ways."*

In the above stanza from his poem, we see that he has used the love language as a tool to express his longing for the bowl of love and he speaks about the difficulties which can be interpreted as the stages he faced, and he attained while travelling in the path of divine love to attain his destiny.

Sufi literature has paved way for the Sufi masters and mystics to influence the Muslims in their spiritual and moral aspects as their contribution to the literature of many world languages are celebrated by men and woman of all ages as an inspiration, and aesthetics has become an added feather to the hat of Sufi poetry where it stimulates the emotional quotient of a human being, making one to delve deeper into the thoughts of the divine which indirectly promotes the moralistic etiquettes of humanity.

Every Sufi's poem rotates in its own axis and revolves around love, as it is the centre of mystical thoughts. aesthetics plays its role in differentiating one poem from another and holds the balance of poems from changing the axes and clashing one another, as every Sufi poet has his or her own style of bringing aesthetics in their poems and the usage of aesthetic tenets differ from one poet to another but it is clear that all these poems convey the common ideology of love irrespective of the differences found in their ways of expressions.

Aesthetics is the rainbow which has several colors in reflecting the light of one Sun every Sufi Poetry holds its own way of using aesthetics to convey the experience of single and central idea of love, longing and the union with the divine. As Ibn Arabi says

أدين بدين الحب أنى توجهت * ركائبه، فالحب ديني وإيماني

**I embrace the religion of love wherever I face,
for love is my religion and belief.**

We find that many of the Sufi poems were ornamented with the pearls and rubies of aesthetics and thus manifesting its throne and crown in Sufi poetry.

The entwinement of aesthetics with Sufi poetry has influenced and inspired many and left some to criticize after pondering on it, which is considered as a redundant act when it comes to art, as it does not communicate in the language of the people who prefer and prioritize logical thinking and rationality over emotional quotient. It all depends on the perspective and the understanding of the person and on his or her interest and intention in interpreting such Sufi poetries.

Conclusion

Thus, we see the diversity among the Sufi poets in expressing their experience in the path of love towards the divine light of truth, each one has had his own way of aesthetic blend in his own poem, but they all converge at travelling through the path of love, seeking the divine love.

Foot Note

1. Fusus-Al- Hikam / Muhyiddin ibn Arabi / Abul ala Afifi/
2. Masnavi i Man'navi (Teachings of Rumi) English/ Maulana Jalaludin Rumi/ E.H. WhinfieldM.A./ pg-1
3. Tarjuman-al-ashwaq \ Muhiyudeen ibn arab\ Reynold.A. Nicholson\ pg-48
4. Poems from the Divan of Hafiz\ Gertrude Lowthian Bell\ pg-61

References

- ♦ Fusus-Al- Hikam, Muhyiddin ibn Arabi, Abul ala Afifi
- ♦ Masnavi i Man'navi (Teachings of Rumi) English, Maulana Jalaludin Rumi, E.H. WhinfieldM.A
- ♦ Tarjuman-al-Ashwaq, Muhiyudeen ibn Arabi, Reynold. A. Nicholson
- ♦ Poems from the Divan of Hafiz, Gertrude Lowthian Bell
- ♦ The essence of Rumi, Coleman Barks
- ♦ The Conference of the Birds, Fareedudin Attar