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Theme of Intolerance in the Poetry of Rumi, Hafiz and Bulleh Shah

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Abstract

This paper would attempt to discuss the age long intolerance and socio-political unrest which was prevalent even at the time of 13th, 14th and 17th century poet Rumi, Hafiz and Bulleh Shah respectively. The term Intolerance can be defined as lack of tolerance or refusal to respect, tolerate others' belief or view contrary to one's own. According to Merriam Webster's Learner's dictionary "Intolerance" means not willing to allow or accept something or someone to have equality, freedom and social rights. The word Intolerance has not created today as it was present in every age and in every time and space. Moses had to fight with the social injustice in the hand of Ramesses (pharaohs), Prophet Muhammad by non-followers of Islam, native Indian people in the hand of Colonial Rule and till now it is continuing in different form around us. We could see the revolutionary mind in the great freedom fighters of our country with pen and sword like Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Sing and Kazi Nazrul Islam, who was honoured the title of "Revolutionary poet".

Keywords- *Intolerance, Revolutionary, Socio-Political Unrest*

Introduction

The term Intolerance can be defined as lack of tolerance or refusal to respect and tolerate others' belief or view contrary to one's own. According to Merriam Webster's Learner's dictionary "Intolerance" means not willing to allow or accept something or someone to have equality, freedom and other social rights. The word Intolerance has not created today as it was present in the time of Moses when had to fight with the social injustice in the hand of Ramesses (pharaohs), it was there in the time of Jesus Christ, Muhammed and it was also there in the 13th, 14th and 17th centuries poet cum revolutionist Rumi, Hafiz and Bulleh Shah respectively. It was even there in the time of British rule in our country and even today it is

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continuing around us. We could see the revolutionary mind in the great freedom fighters of our country with pen and sword like Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Sing, and Kazi Nazrul Islam who was honoured the title of “Revolutionary poet”. And we could even see it in the works of the three Sufi poets Rumi, Hafiz and Bulleh Shah.

Intolerance was also prevalent in the time of Rumi, Hafiz and Bulleh Shah. Jalal-ud-din Rumi was a great Persian mystical poet of 13th century whose popularity doesn't confine to the Islamic world but to the whole world for the lyrical beauty of his outpourings of love for the divine. One can summarize Rumi's popularity in the word of Jawidmojaddedi, a scholar of early and medieval Sufism at Rutgers University and an award winning Rumi translator:

Rumi was an experimental innovator among the Persian poets and he was a Sufi Master, and the combination of mystical richness and bold adaptations of poetic forms, is the key to Rumi's popularity.... (In The Kashmir Monitor. Sunday, April,20,2014)

Rumi's yearning for ecstatic love is not only for God but also for his beloved friend and master Shams of Tabriz, who introduced him to the mystical path. Rumi was totally lost in the new found love that his master revealed, and all his great attainments were blossoming through that love. In fact after he met Shams everyday was a miracle and a new birth for Rumi's soul. As Rumi himself describes his condition through his poem “*I Died as a Mineral*”: “The outcome of my life is not more than these three lines; I was a raw material, I was cooked and became mature; I was burned in love.” (web, 8,no page)

But their friendship had to pay for the intolerance which was prevalent at that time. As Shams had to meet with a mysterious death. Though the mystical disappearance of Shams is believed to be the sacrifice of his head for his mystical friendship but in reality it was the intolerance of some so called religious fundamentalist groups who out of insecurity and jealousy had killed Shams. Here we can compare the mysterious killing of Shams with the killing of the teacher of Dhaka University Prof. Humayun Azad who survived the first attempt to murder in Bangladesh by the suspected Islamist militants but later was being killed mysteriously in Germany. Another example of intolerance in Rumi's time was that once in around 1243 BC Shams with his meeting some Sufi masters and some religious judges and when the judges were boasting on the glory and splendour of Bagdad city Shams- e- Tabriz proclaimed that a city and a country will look beautiful as long as its people are beautiful and destruction is must when the people would turn to a path of corruption and intolerance. So the prophecy became true for so many cities including Bagdad, Syria, Iraq and Rangoon, the former capital of Myanmar for its socio-religious intolerance. However it is proved that the person who raised their voice against the evils of society and authority has to meet their tragic end. And it has been going on since time immemorial as Shams- e- Tabriz, Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Sing and Mahatma Gandhi and many more had to meet their tragic end.

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Rumi through his poem tried to bring tolerance among the people. According to him love is the only reason that made the creator create this beautiful universe. And there is no separate religion and nation for the lover accept the beloved because for the lover nothing exists except the beloved. While speaking about Rumi in one of his interviews Coleman Barks says:

I feel there is a strong global movement, an impulse that wants to dissolve the boundaries that Religions have put up and end the sectarian violence. It is said that people of all religions came to Rumi's funeral in 1273. Because they said he deepens our faith wherever we are. This is a powerful element in his appeal now. (in *The Kashmir Monitor*. Sunday, April, 20, 2014)

Therefore in today's world of terrorism and religious violence, it is very important to have the liberal view about religion which Rumi possessed and which showed in his poetry. As Rumi asserts:

It is love that makes God to create this cosmos.
Love's nationality is separate from all other religions,
The lover's religion and nationality is the Beloved (God)
The lover's cause is separate from all other causes
Love is adorable of God's mysteries. (M. Naini, 2002: 12)

In a poem taken from his Anthology of poems called 'Divan', Rumi says that silence can make our heart speak better and it is the inner bond that draws one person to another, not the words. As there is a universal rule that whatever feeling a person possesses against another person that will be reciprocated. So instead of prejudice we should always possess a feeling of love for each other because it is love that turns even the bitter into sweet, copper into gold, drugs into wine and pain into medicine.

Khwaza Shams- ud-din Muhammad Hafiz of 12th century also discussed about the prevalent intolerance of his time in his poetry. In the Islamic tradition the name Hafiz is a honorary title given to a person who has memorized the entire holy Qur'an. His poetry deals mostly the intoxicating love of God. He often uses the wine as the symbol of love and its power of intoxication. Scholars of the world are in confusion of whether to consider Hafiz as a mystic or a libertine a good Muslim or a Skeptic or the combination of all these. But as a poet he was dearly beloved and has often been referred to as the "Tongue of the Invisible". Ralph Waldo Emerson in his book "Essay on Persian Poetry" published in 1858 called him as 'a poet for poets'. However he was not spared of being the victim of intolerance as he had to flee from Shiraz to Isfahan to save his life for his controversial writing and liberal view just like other modern and post- modern writers including Taslima Nasreen and Salman Rushdie. Eventually on public demand the Shah (king) pardoned him and allowed him to return the city. Hafiz was not only a Sufi poet but also a great outspoken person of his time who could not tolerate the hypocrisy in the society. So he remained misunderstood by the court authority

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and also by the people. Thus he remained a controversial figure, saint or libertine. Coleman Barks say about Ladinsky's translation of Hafiz's poems in his book "The Subject Tonight Is Love: 60 wild and sweet poems of Hafiz": There are universe inside Hafiz, a lineage of masters. Ladinsky follows the playfulness; the rascal moves well. (2003:1)

Hafiz urges us to view this world through his eyes to realize the presence of God in everything in this world and was against the hypocritical way of worshiping God which violets the inner spirit of law. All-HallajMansur (c858-922AD), the famous controversial figure in Sufism who was condemned to death for his liberal view, uttered the following lines when he was imprisoned by the authority, "may God veil you from the exterior of the religious law, and may he reveal to you the reality of infidelity." (Dehelvi, 2009:96)

So what Mansur really meant was to close our heart to the outward law and achieve 'manifest gnosis' which is possible only through the union with the divine God. Mansur spoke the above mentioned lines when he was going through a trial in Bagdad for proclaiming the word 'Analhaqq' which mean 'I am God'. By the word 'Analhaqq' what he really meant was that the beloved and the lover are one. As he uttered:

I am he who I love, and who I love is I
We are two spirit dwelling in one body
If though see me, though see us both
And if though see him, though see us both
In that glory is no I nor we or Though
I, we, Though, He are all one thing. (Dehelvi,2009:90)

Another Great Sufi Bayazid Bistami (D. 874AD) had a similar view asked his disciple to strike him if he made a similar claim that he was a God. However when they tried to strike him with the sword, the sword instead of killing Bayazid turned towards them and wounded them. Then he told them under his garment there is nothing but God. Bayazid and Mansur had same experience that is the perfect mystical state where love, lover and the beloved are the same. Keeping this in mind Bayazid said, 'O Lord' remove the veil of mine and thine that exist between thee and me, that/Have no existence separate from thy essence. (Dehelvi,2009:87)

Therefore this particular sentence itself tells that we human being are the part of same God, so there should not be you and me as according to these Sufi saints we all are one. Hence there should not be prejudice, fight, violence in the name of religion among us. Hafiz urges us to denounce all our negativity, intolerance and prejudice which will lead us no where.

BullehShah (1680-1758) is another Sufi saint of south Asia who is known for his unorthodox and radical attitudes towards religion. He was born in Panjab but his pure life and high spiritual attainments has made him famous among all nations. Scholars from the world such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Inayat Khan called him "The Shiek of both the world",

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“The man of God”, “The knower of spiritual Grace”. In spite of the saintly qualities Bulleh Shah was not allowed a buried in the community graveyard and his sister had to remain a spinster for their liberal mind which proves the presence of obvious intolerance in that time. No doubt Bulleh Shah was the follower of Shariat but later in life became radical because of the intolerance and harsh policies of some Mughal rulers towards the non-muslims. Another epitome of tolerance could be seen in Akbar the great who himself married a hindu girl to break the barrier of religion. He even stopped cow slaughter in Utter Pradesh in order to show respect to the Hindu majority provinces. Prophet Muhammad is another example of tolerance who punished those Muslims who tried to create problems to the non-muslims (ehudis) and also proclaimed that whoever will bring destruction to the minorities, at the day of judgement he himself will be the witness against that person (al hadith).

In Bulleh Shah’s poetry one can see the strong rejection of the orthodox hold of the Mullahs and Brahmins as he wanted a straight bond between the man and his creator. By discarding the rituals and ceremonials prescribed by all religions he proclaimed that good deeds were the only way to unite with the divine. As Bulleh Shah explained in his poetry:

Burn the prayer mat, break the water pot;
Quit the rosary, throw away the staff.
Lovers say at the top of their voice,
Leave the kosher and eat the shot.
Love is ever new and fresh. (Duggal, 2010: 73)

Even though Bulleh Shah was quite critical of religion neither he denounce it completely nor he questioned the Islamic religious orthodoxy but sometimes he used metaphors to express his frustration towards the rigidity of some Muslim rulers and orthodox Brahmins of that time. Through his poetry he spread the message of universal brotherhood. This was because according to Sufism the prime duty of every human being on earth is to regard and treat all equally.

Remove the duality and do away with all disputes,
The Hindus and Muslims are not other than He.
Deem everyone virtues, there are no thieves.
For within everybody He himself resides.
How the trickster has put on his mask! (Puri, 1986: 8)

Therefore Bulleh Shah through his poem showed a strong rejection of the prevalent intolerance, orthodox hold of all religious clerics, the nexus between them and the rulers which had created a huge gap between human being to human being and human being to God. Despite having different views all these three poets tried to bring peace and unity among the people of all religion. In order to bring peace and unity among the people of all religion Rumi happened to say in an unpublished manuscript “The Quatrain of Rumi” translated by Ibrahim Gamard and Ravan Farhadi, that he was neither Muslim nor a

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Christian neither he belongs to East nor West. Similar words were uttered by Bulleh Shah after decades through his poem “Neither Hindu nor Muslim”. In bringing oneness and tolerance among people Hafiz was also not lagging behind. As he tried to bring it through his poem “My heart is going wild”:

There is happiness even in heaven and earth,
If only two creeds are following:
Be just to your friend
Make peace with your foe. (Nisarg, 8)

So, from the above discussion of the three Sufi poets, we can accept that love is the main instrument to bring peace and harmony in the society, nation, as well as in the world. As according to *Qur'an*, *Bible* and *Gita*, we are blood related to each other as we are the descendent of same parents. Secondly, we can say that we all possess a different consciousness level at a same time, so we are not here to judge any one of us by any means. Thirdly, it is very difficult to clean up the same place where we exist as it has to go through several criticism and even life threatening. However, despite all these barrier we must proceed to bring change in the society and nation and hence must speak about all the evils of society in order to show the mirror of truth to the people of the nation.

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