

SUFISM AS REFLECTED IN VAIKKAM MUHAMMED BAHEER'S LITERARY WORKS

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India is known to the world as a birth as well as meeting place of various religious creeds and faith. Apart from the oldest ancient Hinduism India has give birth to other religions. After them, came Islam in the beginning of medieval age in India. Sufism is the name given to the mysticism in Islam. The Sufi movement was a Socio-religious movement in Bagdad in Amavi period in 661-750AD¹. But the movement come in force with good effect is fourteenth to sixteenth century. The exponents of this movement were unorthodox Muslim saints who had a deep knowledge in Vedantic and other philosophies in India. They could see the Indian religious thoughts from very near and realized its inner values: They differed from orthodox Muslims. The union of the human soul with God through love and devotion was the essence of the teaching of Sufi saints. The method of their realizing God was the renunciation of the world and worldly pleasures. They lived in a secluded life.

The term Sufi is derived from Suf which means 'wool' as these mystics wore woolen garments as their budge of poverty.² The Sufis consider love to be the only means of reaching God. According to the Historian Tara Chand "Sufism indeed was its passion; poetry, song and dance. Its worship and passing away in God it's Ideal."³

The Sufis didnot attach importance to namaz half and celibacy. That is why they regarded singing and dancing as the method of inducing a state of ecstasy which brought one nearer to realization of God. There were some leading Sufi saints like khwfa muinuddin shistic fariaddin ganf-i-shankar. Nizam-addin- auliya contribute their life for sufi way of life.

Sufism in Kerala

The region of Kerala had been fortunate enough from ancient times to have nurtured and maintained a strong bond and relation with a great number of foreign nations, in terms of trade, and cultural and intellectual exchanges. The Arabs who travelled out and far for merchandise became a settler group wherever they stepped for trade, and merged in to the new social community through the institution of marriage, thereby forming a mixed novel society, which exactly how the Muslim communities we find in the coastal regions of Southern part of India were formed. The philosophers and historians are divided in their opinion on the arrival of Sufism into the Malabar Coast. One assumption is that the philosophy of the Sufi was spread through the Sufis who came to the land with the Arab merchants. Another assumption is that the Arab sailors who set sail for trade would carry along the Sufis who were adept adventurers, and might have reached our land also. Either way, they arrived and were pivotal in spreading the Sufi philosophy in the land of Malayalam⁴. The migration of Ba-Alavis, who are related to the Sufis, to Malabar influenced the formation of Muslim community in Kerala, and in Malabar especially.

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer holds prominence among the writers, whose literary works imbibe the Sufi philosophy in Kerala. He was a multi talented person who, besides being an Apollo in the literary realm influenced his readers also with his deep interest for Sufi philosophy, and as a social reformer, traveller, environmentalist, freedom fighter and teacher. His life and his works are examples of internal changes Sufism brings to the followers of the doctrine, along with the external ones. One who has lived a Sufi alone can pen the philosophy so elegantly yet profusely, so much, so that a drift from the reality of being 'You and Me' to a state of 'You exist within Me' is what one conceptually find in the Basheer's magic as literature and reality of life merges his works and unfolds to reflect the same on his audience⁵. His works such as *Anarghanimisham*, *Immini Belya Onnu*, *Mathilukal*, *Vrikshangal Cheviyorkkuka*, *Antimakahalam* and so on let off the dual concept of creation and creator, and relentlessly flows to reach a state of non-dualism in it.

The Impact of Sufi Philosophy in Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's Life:

It is indeed necessary to analyse one's life while discussing or examining his or her works, literary or other. Basheer was a writer who had lived the life of a Sufi, which paved way for his experimentation with the ideology and concept of the philosophy in his own life as well as in his literary works, which enabled him to experience being a judge and witness alike in various situations of life within the literary framework. The different characters he crafted show different faces and depth of 'self'. A person who immerse himself down to his own self burns away his ego and arrogance and finds in the depth of his heart the way to one's true nature, which incidentally is not self denial, rather a means to achieve equivalence with the subject, or with one and all, so that one may be able to see, as was in Basheer's case, the entire universe and its diverse creatures in the depth of one's own soul⁶

Basheer started his life at the time of amorality which existed among the Muslim communities. He openly opined through his literary works the changes the society should immediately adhere to. His was a time when education in English language was prohibited for men, yet he received the same education because of the resilience of his father to send him to an English school, which Basheer remembers later with gratitude. It might be secular friendships he managed to amass with Hindus and Christians as well, that inspired him to walk the path of a universal fraternity. He started his socio-political life by taking part in the Vaikom Satyagraha and became prominent because of his life style.

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer learned the Holy Quran by the age of eight completely⁷. The fables in the speeches delivered by the Musaliyars, the war lore in the Islamic history with descriptions of fought battles, the songs about Sufi saints, the strong religious faith exhibited by his parents, his Grandfather's relation, who spoke in Arabic, with Arabia and so on were the light and shades of Basheer's faith, and awareness of his religion. The minimal knowledge he received were not enough

to quench his thirst, and he started looking outside traditional frameworks for answers, which nurtured in him the love to travel, the respect and tolerance for other religions and beliefs, and kindness and benevolence to each and every bit of life around him.

The fact that all religions reach the same spot, as professed in Sufism, attracted him and he reflected the indifference and love one finds in the Sufi philosophy, in his literary works. His concept of religion meant to surpass any and all ritual practices and doctrines with the never ending wave of everlasting universal love.

The problems or troubles in the physical affairs of all life forms, including that of women and men, becomes one's spiritual troubles, which is an exalted state. Basheer is of the opinion that the entire life is a prayer in itself, and an endless continuity⁸. The Sufi concept in him is that each and every action he commits is a prayer. Thus, he does not want anything of this world or the ether world, but lived with the awareness of the existence of the Divine, like a Sufi.

Music, impartiality and humour were innate elements of his life. The Sufi tradition believes music to be the subsistence for soul. Basheer had once told that music is the art that stands much near to silence. It can therefore be assumed that the philosophy of Sufism had left an unmistakable mark of influence on the life and thoughts of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer.

Philosophy of Sufism in his literature

Sufism is the yogic tradition, which is the state of supreme most form of spirituality in every religion, in the Islam. As one reaches this state, the outer shells of a religion becomes irrelevant as the person attains oneness with the fundamental truth which also is the Supreme Divine¹⁰. The mystics reach the same goal, even though they walk separate paths.

The concept of the singularity of the Divine does not only mean the existence of one God, rather it stresses on the belief that there can be only one God in reality, and nothing other than that shall exist is also what the Sufism states.

The qualities of a Sufi is commonly found attributed characters in most of Basheer's writings which are untarnished goodness, secular nature, equal respect towards all religion, kindness towards all life forms, cleanliness and so on. Basheer had once said that he was breastfed by women from all casts during his early childhood. The concept of humanity was deep rooted in him beyond religious doctrines. The phrase 'roma-matungal' (which means 'hair like religions') from his work *Mantrika Poocha* echoes the concept that the differences between religions are only on the outer level, like a shock of hair, though all are alike inside¹¹.

Intense compassion to all fellow life forms was inherent a trait displayed by Basheer's decorated personality. In *Pathummayude Adu*, he describes an incident during the time of a flood, when his parents attempted saving a black scorpion which somehow had reached their home. The character Kunjipathumma, who is kind towards the leech that bit her in *Ente Uppuppakkoranendarnu* is similarly compassionate. The Sufis are of the view that kindness is the greatest quality of Allah. Basheer had tried to accumulate the same to reflect it through the characters in his literary works to the world, and though his life.

Sufism is also a method of love. One who does not love cannot become a Sufi. Basheer had experienced both physical and spiritual love. The novel *Balyakalasaki* portrays his love during his early youth. The love within the walls of a prison later became *Matilukal*. *Anuragatinte Dinangal* are memoirs of the intense love he had while he had been staying in Thrissur. All of his physical affairs had ended in mishap. Yet, there was another love that continued within him all the time, the divine love towards universal substance or entity, which eventually led him to the Sufis and sages. He had remarked in his work that he was always at the presence of God.

His love towards nature, his faith in doing good to others, the immortality of righteousness and so on, which are his doctrinal belief, distinctively expressed in his story *Thenmavu* are in fact the theories or concepts in Sufi philosophy.

The literary world Basheer created is in a way the songs of kindness, which one finds in the formation of most of his characters, such as the pick pocket who is kind to his prey in *Oru Manushyan*, the Velya Ikkakka in *Pathummayude Adu* who despite realising being exploited by others continue to be what he always was, Kesavan Nair in *Oru Premalekhanam* who immensely loves Saramma and is kind to her, Yusuf Sidique in *Thenmavu* who, though is a dying person, drinks water only after watering a wilted Mango tree, the Akka in *Pazham* who helps a child at the verge of suicide due to poverty, the political prisoner in *Policinte Makan* who commiserates at the accused for robbery who was subjected to cruel man-handling and so on imbibes the crux of Sufi philosophy and which they reflect becomes examples also of Basheer's intellectual Sufi exhortation

Dhikr is what make the Sufis different from other practicing Muslims. Dhikr is defined as the practice of constant repetition of Allah's name or titles so as to maintain remembrance of God forever¹². Basheer, who never followed any traditional Islamic practices, had but observed Dhikr, which can be understood from his continuous mention of God in his works. In *Bhoomiyude Avakashikal*, he mentions God thirty eight times which include apology, prayer, glorification to God, as well as thanks giving prayer for all his blessings¹³.

Basheer imbibed the concept that all life forms irrespective of its species or classification are entitled for equal rights in the nature for life and survival as all were made by one God, from Sufism. The Sufi idea of spiritual dearth might have influenced or driven the thoughts and actions of his protagonist throughout the work. Basheeran philosophy is rooted strong in Sufism which has God as its criterion, and his God centred awareness of the universe led him further with *Bhoomiyude Avakashikal* which marks the entry of a Sufi Basheer into literature.

Loneliness and recess were inherent factors of ancient Sufism. Later, even when Sufism attained a form, loneliness was considered important a factor. Basheer always was a seeker, admirer and practitioner of solitude, a trait most evident in many of his works, to an extent that he even included in one of his works a chapter titled 'Great Shore of a Desolate'.

Simplicity and temperance are the hallmarks of the Sufi way of life. These qualities also are evident in the life and literature of Basheer. He maintained simplicity in his language and style. Most of his characters observe simplicity of life in their respective fictional roles. The lives of beggars he portrayed in *Shabdangal* talked for the first time in Malayalam literature about the minority or the subaltern, who were till then an untouchable a topic. All the characters in his fictional sequels led normal, simple life, a simplicity we find in Basheer himself.

Among the renaissance writers of Kerala, Basheer was the one who displayed awareness of death more in literature. He had even penned a novelette titled *Maranathinte Nizhalil* (In the Shadow of Death). Though he was conscious of death, it did not make him pessimistic or cynical. The Sufis see death as the start point of an immortal life, wherefore they do not fear death. Basheer was afraid of death, yet his awareness of the same was consciously transformed into more positive in nature.

Basheer valued the freedom of soul more than anything, and considered righteousness as his principle. He never had indulged in any movement or organization that would have jeopardized his concept. His belief in Islam was rock solid. He changed the traditional approach to prayer through his belief that any righteous action is prayer, and reflection of the practice is found in his works like *Thenmavu* and *Pazham*.

His innate humour helped craft his literary works with tint of positivity even when sorrow and loneliness remained a weight within him. The continuous mention of God's name in his works attributes a Sufi nature to his writings. It is thus clear from the study that the philosophy of Sufism had played a powerful impact on the life and works of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, and that any attempt to understand the various levels of literary genius he calibrated on the basis of Sufism would definitely contribute more to comprehend Basheer in depth.

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