

Thematic Foundations of the Quatrains of Mullah Habibullah Sharif Kashani

Azim Hamzeian

Associate Professor, Department of Religions and Mysticism, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Semnan, Semnan, Iran. (Corresponding Author)
ahamzeian@semnan.ac.ir

Ghasem Roohi

PhD Student of Islamic Sufism and Mysticism, Faculty of Humanities, Department
of Religions and Mysticism, University of Semnan, Iran.
ghasem.raufi@semnan.ac.ir

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Introduction

Mullah Habibullah Sharif Kashani, a prominent scholar and jurist, was born in Kashan in 1261 AH. He attained the rank of mujtahid at the age of 16 and dedicated his life to teaching, writing, and guiding people. He trained numerous students and produced valuable works in various fields of knowledge. His notable works included *Montaqed al-Manafe* about jurisprudence, *Lubab al-Alqab* on biographies of scholars, *Tashil al-Masaalikila al-Madarik fi Ru'us al-Qawa'id al-Fiqhiyyah*, and *Qawamis al-Durar*. In addition to his numerous works, Mullah Habibullah Sharif Kashani also authored a collection of Persian quatrains and an Arabic qasida in praise of the Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Imam of Shiite. This work demonstrated his deep devotion and love towards Imam Mahdi. Mullah Habibullah's quatrains, in line with the requirements of the time, belonged to the category of protest and social quatrains. These quatrains provide valuable information about the society, the conditions, the people, and their circumstances at that time.

Materials, Methods, and Results

The ruba'i, an ancient Persian poetic form of a-four-line structure and an "aaba" rhyme scheme, has a high capacity for expressing profound and effective notions due to its simplicity and conciseness. This form has had diverse applications throughout the history of Persian literature, encompassing themes ranging from love and mysticism to wisdom, praise, and satire. Nevertheless, the ruba'i, owing to its structural characteristics, is also considered a suitable medium for expressing social and political themes. Mulla Habibullah's ruba'is serve as a comprehensive mirror of

the social, economic, and political conditions of the Qajar era, particularly the epoch of the First World War and the famine of 1296 AH in Kashan. In addition to their literary values, these ruba'is are a valuable resource for understanding the living conditions of the people, their thoughts and critiques of a religious scholar in the face of social problems. Besides, they reveal a better comprehension of the political situation of that period. The content of Mulla Habibullah's ruba'is encompasses a wide range of themes. They include the description of God, the praise of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, and Imam Mahdi, the promotion of moral virtues, the lamentation of the time, the reflection of the poet's poverty, the famine of the era, a criticism of the city of Kashan, its people, women, various professions, and different social classes. Within his poems, he also criticizes the Sufis and their beliefs in the unity of existence. Considering jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, and Hadith the best sciences, he himself seems to believe in the unity of vision. A notable aspect of Mulla Habibullah's ruba'is is his political inclination, which opposed the Russian and English governments. He also has a sidelong glance at the constitutional situation. One of the main reasons for Mulla Habibullah's opposition to the colonial governments of Russia and England was his concern about the weakening and elimination of the Islamic religion. He refers to the severe social conditions prevailing in the society and speaks of the widespread evil and corruption, poisoned family relationships, the oppression of the rulers, and the closure of scientific and religious schools. He then alludes to his own unfavorable financial situation in the later years of his life and expresses his expectation for assistance and attention from Kashan's people. However, he faces indifference and, thus, resorts to sarcasm and disparagement of the city of Kashan, considering it a city full of sedition. The author, then, proceeds to criticize various professions and social classes. He expresses his disapproval of the religious class in a serious tone and advises people to distance themselves from them. He also makes remarks about the judges and directs the most extensive criticism towards the apparent scholars and clerics. According to the evidences found in his other poems, Mulla Habibullah refers to these people with titles such as "ignorant negligent ones" and "followers of falsehood," accusing them of plundering people's wealth and corrupting their beliefs.

In short, the poems by Mulla Habibullah present a bitter and stinging portrayal of the social and cultural crises resulting from the famine in Kashan. He expresses his candid and unvarnished criticisms towards all segments of society, from the rulers and religious scholars to common people, through a direct and uncompromising language. His poems serve as a valuable document for understanding the social and cultural conditions of Kashan during the famine period. They also helped recognize Mulla Habibullah's critical and reformist perspectives. Another theme in his ruba'is is his belief in Islam practiced by the Shia. He considers Imam Ali as the rightful successor of the Prophet and refers to this issue in numerous verses. In addition to the aforementioned themes, Mulla Habibullah's ruba'is also address topics such as women, the sanctity of not shaving one's beard, and moral advice. The poet's ethical recommendations are tailored to the requirements of the time and include calls for moderation, patience, and abstinence from seeking help from inferior and mean people.

Conclusion

Mulla Habibullah's ruba'iyats (quatrains) are valuable resources for understanding the social, economic, and political conditions of Kashan during the First World War and the great famine of 1296 AH. These ruba'iyats, beyond their literary aspects, present a bitter and stinging portrayal of the social and cultural crises of the era as well. In his poems, Mulla Habibullah expresses his direct criticisms of the colonial governments of Russia and England, Sufis and dervishes, the superficial scholars, and the people of Kashan. With a harsh and uncompromising language, he criticizes the prevailing corruption, injustice, poverty, and secularism in the society and calls for social reforms and the revival of religious values.

Mulla Habibullah's ruba'iyats also reflect the devastating impacts of the famine on the lives of the people. He speaks of hunger, death, the collapse of families, and the spread of corruption. His poems show that the famine had severely shaken the moral and social foundations of the society. Thus, Mulla Habibullah's ruba'iyat serve as a historical document for understanding the critical conditions of Kashan during the great famine as well as for recognizing the critical and reformist perspectives of a religious scholar in the face of social problems. His poems present a bitter and stinging portrayal of the social and cultural crises of that era and call for social reforms and the revival of religious values.

Keywords: Mulla Habibullah Sharif Kashani, Kashan famine, ruba'iyat, social conditions, Qajar era.