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INTERPRETATION OF ZEBUNNISO BEGIM'S MYSTICAL VIEWS

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ABSTRACT

The works of creative women, capable of leaving valuable contributions through their remarkable perspectives and strong initiatives, not only enrich our cultural and spiritual heritage but also serve as practical examples in the education and upbringing of today's youth. The enlightened poetess Zebunniso Begim (1643–1721) is one such remarkable figure. This article attempts to analyze the life of the poetess and the meanings and essence of her poetry.

KEYWORDS

Zebunniso Begim, poetry, enlightenment, mysticism, philosophy, love.

INTRODUCTION

The spiritual life and enduring cultural legacy of Zebunniso Begim are rooted in her faith in Islam, her understanding of its essence, and her adherence to its values. A member of the Mughal dynasty, Zebunniso Begim's contributions to Persian literature and her influence on Eastern literary traditions, particularly in the region of ancient India, significantly shaped the development of literature in the region.

Known by the pen name "Makhfi", Zebunniso was born on the 10th day of Shawwal in the year 1048 Hijri (corresponding to 1638 AD) in India. As the eldest daughter of her family, she shared a close relationship with her father, who, being a devout, strict, and conservative man, ensured that she was educated by knowledgeable and pious teachers.



Zebunniso Begim grew up as an outstanding poetess, scholar, musician, and calligrapher. She mastered the morphology and syntax of Persian and Arabic languages. During her studies, she memorized the Qur'an and remained devoted to worship and charitable deeds, integrating spiritual practices with her scholarly pursuits.

Zebunniso Begim's father, Muhyiddin Muhammad, was born in 1208 Hijri and ascended to the throne in 1068 Hijri. He passed away in 1118 Hijri. He was known by various titles such as Aurangzeb, Alamgir, Shah Ghazi, and Khalid Makon.

Her mother, Dilras Banu Gulbadan Begim, was the daughter of Shah Nawaz Khan and Nuh Rustam Khan ibn Sultan Husayn Mirza ibn Bahram Mirza ibn Shah Ismail. She came from a lineage of Sufi mystics. At the age of 18, Muhammad Aurangzeb married this esteemed lady on Tuesday night, Zulhijja 23, 1046 Hijri.

Zebunniso devoted her life to poetry, music, and knowledge. For her, books and learning were the ultimate sources of joy, destiny, happiness, and the paradise longed for by humanity. Alongside her lyrical poems, she authored works on ethics and morality, including Zeb ut-Tafasir (Beautiful Commentaries), Zeb un-Nashat (Adornment of Joys), and Munis ul-Arwah (Faithful Friend of Souls), which delve into the philosophy of Sufism.

Her poetry gained widespread recognition across Central Asia, India, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and other Eastern countries. Unfortunately, not all of her poetic legacy has survived. Her remaining works include a divan of 8,000 couplets (ghazals), 7 qasidas, 5 tarjebands, and one mukhammas. Some sources suggest that she wrote under the pen name "Makhfi" (The Hidden). A collection of her works, titled Devani Makhfi, copied in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is attributed to her.

Manuscripts of Zebunniso Begim's works are preserved in numerous libraries worldwide, including the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan (inventory nos. 2590, 1269, 1936). She was laid to rest in the Zarzari Cemetery in Delhi, alongside Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, two prominent figures of the region.

In Zebunniso Begim's creative work, social, philosophical, and mystical ideas began to take deeper root. Typically, mystics and dervishes align themselves with a pir (spiritual guide) or murid (disciple) and associate themselves with a particular lineage or group of Sufis. However, according to Zebunniso, this approach is unacceptable, as sharing the path of divine love is considered sinful.

This perspective reflects one of the most nuanced and remarkable aspects of this learned woman's far-sighted and independent worldview. It highlights her



profound understanding of individuality in the spiritual journey, emphasizing the unique and personal nature of one's relationship with the divine.

ره عشق است ای مخفی مجرد بایدت رفتن

که گر عیسی بود همدم رفاقت را نمی شای

(Meaning: On the path of hidden love, one must walk alone; even the companionship of Isa (Jesus) is unwelcome.)

It should be noted that Zebunniso herself believed that a person cannot achieve anything without a mentor. However, she emphasized the distinction between having a teacher or mentor and the concept of complete submission to a spiritual guide (pirparastlik).

بی مربی هیچ کس در هیچ جا کاری نساخت

بی مددکاری ابری قطره ای دریا نشد

(Meaning: Without a mentor, no one has accomplished anything anywhere; without support, a cloud would not become a drop in the sea.)

She believed that seekers of enlightenment, along with Sufi groups and sects, require a broad foundation to achieve their goals. However, she also emphasized the distinction between a teacher (ustoz) and a guide (yo'l'boshchi), recognizing that their roles and purposes are not the same.

درویشی و تنهایی شرط است به هم بودن

سلطان اقالیمی گر هم نفسی داری

(Meaning: Dervishhood and solitude must go hand in hand, even if you are the sultan of the realms, if you have desires, it means nothing.)

In her discourse, "Makhfi" refers to Sufi terminology, presenting herself as a person who steps onto the mystical path with caution and clear vision. This reflects her thoughtful and deliberate approach to Sufism, emphasizing mindfulness and self-awareness in her spiritual journey.

دختر شاهم و لکن رو به فقر آورده ام

زیب و زینت بس همینم نام من زیب النسا است

(Meaning: Even though I am the daughter of a king, I have turned to humility. What need do I have for wealth and gold when my name, Zebunniso, suffices.)

In earlier times, it was common for Sufis and certain representatives of mysticism to have portraits made to establish their identities. In this context, Makhfi references well-known figures such as Majnun, Kuhkan, and Mansur in her poetry, drawing unique characteristics from each. From Majnun, she adopts the idea of wandering in the desert; from Mansur, the imagery of being hanged for truth; and from Kuhkan, the despair of solitude and the inability to fully grasp the ultimate truth.

Through these symbolic allusions, Makhfi intricately weaves her identity as a seeker on the mystical path, blending humility and a profound quest for enlightenment .

گاه فرهادم به کوه و گاه مجنونم به دشت

بیخودم مخفی چنین، آن چشم جادو کرده است

(Meaning: Sometimes I am like Farhad in the mountains, sometimes like Majnun in the desert. Makhfi, enchanted by those magical eyes, has transcended the self.)

This verse reflects Makhfi's profound mystical journey, where she aligns herself with the symbolic figures of Farhad and Majnun, representing relentless effort and all-consuming love. By transcending her ego, she conveys the transformative power of divine love, a central theme in her poetry. Through these allegories, she expresses the depth of her spiritual longing and devotion.

می زنم لاف انا الحق بر سر بازار عشق

تازه منصوری دگر، بر دار خواهم کرد و رفت

(Meaning: At the forefront of the market of love, I boldly proclaim "I am the Truth." Now I would hang another Mansur on the gallows.)

In this verse, Makhfi alludes to the famous Sufi mystic Mansur al-Hallaj, who declared "Ana al-Haqq" (I am the Truth) and faced execution for his statement. By

referencing this, Makhfi places herself in the space of bold spiritual expression, acknowledging the paradoxes and dangers of proclaiming divine truths. The line also reflects her introspection and critique of the self, suggesting a continuous struggle with ego and the ultimate realization of truth on the path of love and mysticism.

ما گرم روان ره عشقیم چو منصور

از دار نترسیم و ز احباب نگردیم

تا قبله ما طاق دو ابروی تو باشد

نزدیک به بتخانه محراب نگردیم

(Meaning: We are the loyal servants of love's smooth path, like Mansur. We do not fear the gallows nor turn back from the Beloved. As long as our qibla is the arch of your brows, we shall not approach the niche of an idol temple.)

In these verses, Zebunniso presents herself as an embodiment and reflection of the mystical spirit of her era, drawing parallels with figures like Mansur and Majnun. While she identifies with Layli, acknowledging her feminine nature, her spiritual virtues and steadfastness align with qualities traditionally attributed to men in mystical literature. Her state of mind and devotion place her in a Majnun-like position, signifying the transcendence of gender in the pursuit of divine love and truth. This interplay between her feminine identity and masculine spiritual attributes



highlights her unique place in the literary and mystical traditions of her time.

گرچه من لیلی اسام دل چو مجنون در هواست

Meaning: Even though I am like Layli in essence, my heart is restless like Majnun. I wish to throw my head into the desert, but the chains of modesty bind my feet.)

Historians and biographers unanimously note that Zebunniso never married. Some have written that this great woman found no one worthy of being her life partner. Zebunniso could not find a man who matched her stature and left this mortal world without marrying. However, like other women, she too desired to marry. She expressed this sentiment in the following words:

صد بهار آخر شد و هر گل به فرقی جا گرفت

غنچه باغ دل ما زیب دستاری نشد

کار ما آخر شد و آخر ز ما کاری نشد

مشک خاک ما غبار کوچه یاری نشد

(Meaning: A hundred springs have passed, and every flower has found its place,

But our heart's bud did not become the adornment of a turban.

Our journey has reached its end, but in the end, it was of no use to us.

Our soil became musk, yet the dust of the beloved's street did not touch it.)

Undoubtedly, the number of people who thought like her, served her, or visited her was immense. It would not be an exaggeration to say that all virtuous individuals of that era sought her presence. Such prominence and depth in her poetry and life demand a more detailed exploration and specialized research dedicated to this remarkable poetess.

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