

PAHLAVON MAHMUD AS A RUBAIY WRITER

M. Rajabova

professor Asia International University

Abstract. This article analyzes the rubai (quatrains) of Pahlavon Mahmud, a major 13th-century poet of this genre. It provides an extensive examination of the symbols and images used in the poet's rubai, the philosophical reflections, and the ethical-spiritual ideas expressed in artistic form. The article also evaluates the poet's skill in depicting themes such as divine love, self-purification, futuwwat, and chivalry in his quatrains.

Keywords: Pahlavon Mahmud, rubai, Sufism, divine love, symbol, nafs, philosophical poetry.

Pahlavon Mahmud was born in the mid-13th century (approximately in 1247–1248). In the history of our spirituality, he is remembered as an invincible wrestler, a sensitive poet, and a renowned saint. Very few biographical sources about Pahlavon Mahmud have survived.

The literary scholar To'xtasin Jalolov, who studied Pahlavon Mahmud's works, wrote: "In both poetry and philosophy, Pahlavon Mahmud is an insightful successor of Khayyam. After Khayyam, there was not a single poet in Persian literature who wrote only rubai. This phenomenon is also not found in the literature of Turkic peoples."

Pahlavon Mahmud is a poet specializing in the rubai genre. He expressed his philosophical views artistically by employing the unique features of the rubai form. His quatrains frequently utilize the symbols and concepts characteristic of Sufi poetry. In his works, the poet promotes themes such as love for God, renunciation of worldly pleasures, the search for truth, and divine unity. His mystical worldview is connected with the Kubrawiyya order.

T. Jalolov wrote: "Anyone who reads Pahlavon Mahmud's rubai feels spiritually purified, refreshed, and elevated, because such a spirit is embedded in the quatrains... This pure spirit represents the ideals of a movement known in history as futuwwat or javonmardlik."

To tear apart three hundred Mountains of Qaf,
To dye the sky with the blood of the heart...

Or to lie in prison for a century–
All are better than the company of the ignorant.

In this rubai, the poet uses vivid symbolic imagery to express complex psychological states. The image of "three hundred Mountains of Qaf" that the lyrical hero wishes to break symbolizes his desire to overcome the limitations of the material world and reach higher spiritual states. "Dyeing the sky with the blood of the heart" expresses inner anguish and the hero's devotion in the search for truth. In the closing lines, the poet conveys his ethical position: he prefers "a hundred years in prison" to associating with the ignorant.

Walking in the desert of love is difficult,
Refraining from stepping into it is also difficult,
But the hardest of all is this: everywhere
Your Beloved is present, yet seeing Him is difficult.

Lover– whether divine or earthly– is a major theme in Sufi literature; reaching it requires struggle. In this rubai, the poet describes the inner conflict faced by the seeker on the path of love. The "desert of love" is a metaphor for this arduous spiritual journey filled with trials. The second couplet contains the meaning of a Qur'anic concept: God is present everywhere, yet He is unseen. Thus, the poet implies that understanding and perceiving the Divine requires passing

through certain spiritual stages. According to him, union with the Beloved demands courage, patience, and devotion.

I saw many lying on the bed of earth,
Many sunk into the black embrace of soil.
When I cast my gaze into the realm of nothingness,
I saw many who had gone, and few who had come.

This rubai reflects on the meaning of human life. Sufi poetry often uses the contrast between life and death to express such reflections. Both religious sources and Sufi teachings emphasize that humans originate from soil and ultimately return to it. The first couplet presents philosophical contemplations on human frailty and the inevitability of returning to “the bed of earth” and “the black soil.”

Pahlavon Mahmud created artistically mature rubai. He skillfully used symbols and images to express Sufi ideas. In the following rubai, he employs the symbols of the sun, moon, Venus, and dawn to create a vivid image:

The sun reddened the horizon with its tears of blood,
The moon scratched its face, Venus tore her hair,
At dawn’s mourning the night put on black,
And ripped its collar, unable to endure.

The setting sun stains the horizon red. Seeing this, the Moon and Venus begin to lament – scratching faces, pulling hair. In “the mourning of dawn,” night dons black and tears its collar. Each line presents a beautiful example of personification. The poet turns an ordinary natural phenomenon into an artistic expression of profound philosophical meaning: the transience of human life and the preciousness of time.

Pahlavon Mahmud often uses the imagery of wine, jugs, cups, and the beloved to express mystical and spiritual concepts. This is evident in the following rubai:

The roaring flame – my heart’s companion,
The storming river – the tears of my eyes.
Every jug the potters craft

Is the dust of ancient friends – their hands or heads.

The flame burning in the lover’s chest represents inner passion or anguish. Tears flow like the waves of a stormy river. Through this exaggerated imagery, the poet depicts the most profound emotional suffering of the lyrical hero. In the second couplet, he uses the symbol of potter and jug to reinforce his idea: the potters craft jugs from the dust of long-gone companions.

These lines are filled with the deep mystical symbolism characteristic of Pahlavon Mahmud’s poetry. Fire, tears, and jugs all bear Sufi meanings, symbolizing the body’s return to dust and the soul’s union with the Divine.

One of the central themes of Sufi literature is the temptation – **nafs**. Pahlavon Mahmud frequently addresses this in his quatrains:

Be a master over your own temptation (nafs) — then you are brave;
Do not oppress others – then you are brave.
To step over the fallen is not bravery;
To lend a hand to the weak – that is bravery.

Here, the poet answers the question: “Who is truly brave?” One who overcomes his nafs, who does no harm to others, who helps the fallen. True strength lies in compassion and kindness toward the weak. Human beings possess both physical and spiritual power, and harmony between them is necessary. This harmony appears most clearly in compassion toward others.

Another distinctive feature of Pahlavon Mahmud's rubai is his frequent use of the question-and-answer form. This device keeps the reader alert and presents the central idea clearly and concisely:

I asked: "What is the meaning of this life, my dear?"

"A candle," she said, "a cloud, or a moth."

I asked again: "Who sets their heart on this world?"

"A fool," she said, "a drunk, or a moth."

These beautiful lines contain wise and expressive statements aligned with Pahlavon Mahmud's philosophy. The answers are short but profound: candle, cloud, moth. All three metaphorically emphasize the brevity and transience of life. And who attaches their heart to worldly possessions? Those who cannot grasp the true essence of life – the fool, the drunk, and the moth.

These concise answers are filled with the symbolic and philosophical tones characteristic of the poet. The metaphors of candle, cloud, and moth emphasize human life's ephemerality, while the fool, drunk, and moth represent people who lose sight of the true nature of existence and fall into worldly temptations. Such paradoxical imagery encourages readers to contemplate life, its secrets, and its hidden truths.

In conclusion, through his rubai, Pahlavon Mahmud actively promotes the fundamental principles of Sufism – striving for spiritual purification, renouncing worldly pleasures, and seeking divine unity. His poetry pays special attention to human morality, compassion, and justice – values central to the formation of ethical character.

References

1. Jalolov, T. Songs of Bravery and Humanity (Foreword to the third edition). In: Pahlavon Mahmud. Ruboiylar. Tashkent: G'. G'ulom Literature and Art Publishing House, 1979.
2. Ibotova, M. "Divine–Mystical and Philosophical Views on Soul and Spirit and Their Reflection in Artistic Creativity." Ayniy Vorislari, International Electronic Journal, 2024, No.1 (4), pp. 54–63.
3. Ibotova, M. "The Artistic Interpretation of the Soul's Journey in Alisher Navoi's Poetry." Proceedings of the International Conference "Alisher Navoi and the 21st Century", February 8, 2024. Tashkent–Bursa, 2024, pp. 654–257.
4. Ibotova, M. "The Metaphor of the Heart in the Lyrics of Rumi and Navoi." International Theoretical Conference "Problems of Eastern Classical Poetics: Navoi and Rumi." Tashkent, April 22, 2025, pp. 226–230.