Brief Glimpses of Raskhan and his Visions of Lord Krishna in Sujaan

Vivek Chauhan¹, Kabir Debnath²

¹Department of English, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Bengaluru, India
²B. Com, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Bengaluru, India

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Abstract—The present study is about Raskhan, the Hindi poet Saint who flourished in the 16th century and composed his verses in Braj Bhasha, the dialect of Western Uttar Pradesh. The first part of the study confines itself to the brief but catchy and informative descriptions of Raskhan as they appear in traditional stories passed on from generation to generation and the subsequent paper will deal with select verses of Sujaan composed by Raskhan. The study will focus mainly on the author’s own translations and interpretations of such verses that deal with the visions that Raskhan had of his Beloved Lord Krishna.

Keywords—Raskhan, Sujaan, Visions, Krishna, Lord, Vrindavan, Mathura.

INTRODUCTION

The name of Raskhan is well known among the students, teachers, connoisseurs and critics of Hindi poetry. That Raskhan, though a Muslim, was devoted heart and soul to the worship of Lord Krishna is evident from most of his work that consists of spontaneous utterances in verse that appear to be revelations or visions that the pure heart of Raskhan was a witness to. Raskhan, having given up all worldly aspirations, took to the austere path of spirituality without prior thought or calculation.

RASKHAN THE PROPHET OF UNITY AMONG RELIGIONS

Saint Raskhan’s remarkable journey transcended the boundaries of religion as he embraced the divine with an open heart. Born into a varied cultural background, he sought to understand the nature of spirituality beyond the confines of his religion. Reading through the teachings of various religions, he recognized the common thread of love and compassion that connected all paths to the divine. With unwavering commitment, Saint Raskhan has focused on promoting unity and tolerance, fostering interfaith dialogue and promoting harmonious coexistence among believers of different faiths. His deep belief in the goodness of humanity and the omnipresence of God inspired countless souls to follow a similar path of transcendence, showing that the purest form of devotion is that which unites religions and embraces the divine universal nature.

LOVING THE LORD IS PARAMOUNT

Raskhan was a true lover of the Lord. He wanted humanity to rise above age old ritualistic practices to realize Divinity. He believed that the vision of the Lord was possible only through true love of the Lord. This is what he says in Sujaan about his love for Lord Krishna:

एक सुतीरथ डोलत है इक बार हजार पुरान बके हैं।
एक लगे जप में तप में इक ससद्ध समाधन में अटके हैं।
चेत जु देखत ही स्कान मु नयू मह झिम भटके हैं।
साशांच सह वे जन आतुर्मय यह स्तम्भ गुपाल ने जारी राखे हैं।(Sujaan, p.6, verse 23)

One goes around performing pilgrimages, another one is engrossed in the recital of a thousand puranas, yet another person is engaged in telling of the beads and performing austerities. You observe yet another one lost in meditation. O Raskhan, all of these people have actually gone astray. Only those people are the truthful ones who have lost their minds in the constant love for Krishna.
RASKHAN - A PART AND PARCEL OF INDIAN CULTURE AND SPIRITUALLY

This is what Saba Naqvi says in her book In Good Faith supporting the idea that many prominent muslims who rose to eminence in India in their own field never appeared as exclusive foreign entities from other muslim nations. That through years of toil in this country they became a part and parcel of it inasmuch as it is impossible to separate them from this intricate fabric of Hindu culture and civilization. This is particularly true of Raskhan and this is what is nicely put across to readers in the book by Saba Naqvi:

For instance, take the sixteenth-century poet Raskhan who became a Krishna devotee and is considered one of the masters of Braj Bhasha, which has had a rich literary tradition before Hindi. The pen name ‘rasa’, is described by one scholar as a Braj Bhasha pun, meaning ‘mine of rasa’. Born Saiyad Ibrahim, the son of a minor jagirdar, he moved to Vrindavan after becoming a Krishna bhakt. He composed a rich body of devotional poems describing the beauty of Krishna and his love for Radha. His leelas or devotional songs on Krishna are still popular and anyone who follows the evolution of Braj and Hindi, is familiar with his works, still available most commonly as Raskhan Rachnavali. His grave at Mahavan in Mathura, is a popular pilgrimage spot. (Naqvi 145-146)

THE STORY OF RASKHAN

A popular story goes thus - One fine day, Raskhan Pathan, a young man in teens and the heir to a rich merchant in Delhi, was observed standing before a Paan Shop in Old Delhi. He had ordered for the preparation of the betel leaves and was thus waiting at the shop. In the meanwhile his gaze wandered to a picture that was displayed just behind the Paan shop owner. The picture showed the infant Krishna, all smiles, standing naked and barefoot. Unknowingly, Raskhan felt drawn to the smile of the blue infant Krishna and ventured to ask the Paanwala, “Brother! Who is this sweet child? Why is he naked and barefoot in such inclement weather? Is there nobody to take pity on him?” To which innocent query the Paanwala replied, “Babuji! Don’t you know? He is the infant Krishna whom we hindus worship as Kanha.” Raskhan’s curiosity was not at rest and so he further asked the shopkeeper, “Where is he to be found? I am going to buy him clothes and slippers.” The Paanwala replied that if Raskhan was serious in finding out the whereabouts of Krishna and giving him clothes and footwear he should surely go to Vrindavan and enquire of the people there.

Raskhan therefore, made up his mind to find out the whereabouts of Krishna. Procuring expensive garments and dainty footwear for the infant Krishna the enthusiastic Pathan set out on horseback towards Vrindavan. The idea is beautifully stated in the Book 252 Vaishnavan Ki Varta. "Raskhan ne jo ging le liyi or maa maa maan kii saapna kahii se andhi kahii se apna bawal do. Thapthi pachi sashe par keh to ek main maan jawat aaye. " (Ramdas 433)

Even though a muslim, Raskhan’s first love was hindi poetry and his composition ‘Sujaan’ is of surpassing beauty, both as poetry and as a spiritual offering of his to Lord Krishna whom he worshipped and envisioned till his last breath.

RASKHAN'S INTENSE LONGING FOR KRISHNA AND BRAJBHUMI

The very first verse of Sujaan is proof of the intense devotion that Raskhan had for his beloved Lord Krishna:

महातुम हौं तो वहीं रसखानं कहीं ब्रज गोकुल गांव के स्वरूप
जो पसु हौं हो तो कहा प्रसून बेंग सती नंद की पेतु मेहाना।
Paan hoi toh toh bati ke jo dhiri ka chal purush patna.
Jo ksha ho bate toh bati kailasini kutil kaidi ka shaan||

The translation of the foregoing verses goes as follows:

If Raskhan were to be born as a human again, he would prefer to be born among the cowherds of Gokul in Braj. On the other hand, if he was destined to take birth as a cow, he would prefer to graze among the cows of Nand. If a stone, he would prefer to be a stone on the mountain that Gopal held as an umbrella to protect the people of Vrindavan from the wrath of Indra. If by chance he was born a bird, he would like to make his nest in the kadamba tree on the banks of Kalindi (Yamuna).

RASKHAN’S DEPICTION OF LORD KRISHNA AS THE STEALER OF HEARTS

Francesca Orsini has beautifully translated one of the verses from Sujaan in a beautiful and insightful manner. The verse goes as follows:

प्रेम बाबत मौसम गांव में गहन गांव में गदी गरी भंसी आई
बातीः 1 कासालि में उदी में गोरे नाम सुसवलिनी के सिंस टू सरासूरा 11 ए सनी गुनी सागर के बालिन नंद के आग के उपास न आई। चैती की रसखान नहीं हित कृपेन ही निकासू कृपया।174||

Playing his flute and singing a herding song
He comes with his cowherds amidst the cows.
Through his flute he sounded my own name on
a pretext of calling the cowherd boys. O friend, hearing it,
for fear of my mother-in-law, even
with my sister-in-law nearby I could not catch my
breath;How should I act Raskhan, I who have no well-being, No peace have I, for the stealer of hearts has stolen it. (Orsini 173)

RASKHAN’S DEPICTION OF LORD KRISHNA’S CHILDHOOD

The very first verse of Sujaan is proof of the intense devotion that Raskhan had for his beloved Lord Krishna:

The verse goes as follows:

बेनु बजावत बैठके उनी सुग्वासन अन्न आयौ।
कैसी करौं सबूत बसू सुझी की कालिंदी कूल कोढी किंडी डारा।
जो देखना ने कसाम बसू किला कालिंदी कुल कांत भं त्राना।
बेनु बजावत बैठके उनी सुग्वासन अन्न आयौ।
कैसी करौं सबूत बसू सुझी की कालिंदी कूल कोढी किंडी डारा।
बेनु बजावत बैठके उनी सुग्वासन अन्न आयौ।
कैसी करौं सबूत बसू सुझी की कालिंदी कूल कोढी किंडी डारा।

Some Gopi describing the beauty of Lord Krishna to her companion says that the young Lord Krishna looks beautiful with his dust-besmeared body. His hair gathered together in a knot looked absolutely beautiful. He was wandering in front of his house playing and eating butter and roti. As Krishna walked the anklets tied to his feet sounded sweet.

He was wearing a yellow lower garment. Seeing his beauty even cupid felt ashamed and started to admire him. O Companion! That crow was lucky who took away the butter and roti from the hands of Krishna and flew away.

**CONCLUSION**

Raskhan’s unparalleled composition “Sujaan” is doubtlessly a treasure trove of the mystical visions and close encounters that Raskhan had with his Sweet Lord Krishna. To delve deep into this magical composition is to try to fathom the intellect of Raskhan that was ever diffused with the Ambrosia of the Devotion to the Supreme Lord Krishna who ever dwells in the hearts of men who sing his glory night and day.

**REFERENCES**