

Classic Poetry Series

Rahman Baba
- poems -

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Rahman Baba(1650 – 1715)

Abdul Rahman Baba (Pashto: ?????????? ?????; popularly Rahman Baba, Pashto: ????? ?????), was a Pashtun poet from Peshawar in the Mughal Empire (modern-day Pakistan). He remains the most popular poet among the Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan. His poetry expresses a peaceful mystical side of local culture which is becoming increasingly threatened by less tolerant interpretations of Islam.

Rahman's Lineage

Rahman was a member of the Khalil Mohmand (Bahader Kalay) sub-tribe of the Pashtuns, a group which originally migrated from Kandahar to the Peshawar valley, from the 13th to the 16th century. He grew up in a small pocket of Mohmand settlers on the outskirts of Peshawar. Rahman apparently lived peacefully in the area, and never mentions his involvement in the fierce inter-tribal conflicts of his day.

Opinion is divided about Rahman's family background. Several commentators are convinced that his family were village Maliks (chieftains). However, Rahman Baba was more likely to have been a simple, though learned man. As he himself claimed: "Though the wealthy drink water from a golden cup, I prefer this clay bowl of mine."

Abdur Rahman Baba died in 1715 CE, and his tomb is housed in a large domed shrine, or mazar, on the southern outskirts of Peshawar (Ring Road Hazar Khwani). The site of his grave is a popular place for poets and mystics to collect to recite his popular poetry. In April each year, there is a larger gathering to celebrate his anniversary.

Religious Background

Rahman Baba was an ascetic but various unfounded theories have been made about who Rahman's guide may have been, and to which order he was attached. Sabir suggests that Rahman had a Naqshbandi Sufi tariqa initiation in Kohat, as well as training from the sons of Pir Baba. Schimmel and Saad Ahmed Baksh casually assign Rahman to the Chishti order. Aqab, himself of the Qadiriyyah order, claims Rahman was a Qadiri.

Published Work

A collection of Rahman's poetry, called the Diwan (Anthology) of Rahman Baba, contains 343 poems, most of which are written in his native Pashto. The Diwan of Rahman Baba was in wide circulation by 1728. There are over 25 original handwritten manuscripts of the Diwan scattered in various libraries worldwide, including ten in the Pashto Academy in Peshawar, four in the British Library, three in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, as well as copies in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the University Library Aligath. The first printed version was collected by the Anglican Missionary T.P. Hughes and printed in Lahore in 1877. It is this version which remains the most commonly used to this day.

Selected Verses from Rahman Baba's Diwan translated into English Rhyme

About 111 verses were translated into English Rhyme and published by Arbab Hidayatullah, himself a Ghoriakhel Mohmand, in 2009. The original Pashto version has been transliterated into the Roman alphabet in order to make it easier to read for those who can not read the Pashto alphabet. This translation, with a tilt to the romantic side of Rahman Baba's poetry, has been very well received.

Agony Of Love

You ask, my love, about my tears
But don't you recognize the fears
That agonize my heart?
Were not your infidelity
Torturing me so cruelly
My sorrows would depart

How can your lovers joyful be
If practicing idolatry
Is just like loving you?
If this your real nature is
What wounded heart can find release?
What medicine will do?

I sense, that you have turned aside
I suffer from my rivals' pride
I'm killed in either way,
If one makes love to Plato's tune
To me he'll always be Manjun
Tomorrow as today

No dog is subject to such pain
I'm like a watchdog in your lane
And yet I suffer still,
A dog wants naught, RAHMAN wants you
This single goal I must pursue
Whatever be your will

(Translated by Jens Enevoldsen, from the book *The Nightingale of Peshawar: Selected Poems of Rehman Baba*)

Rahman Baba

All Authority Is Subject To My Lord

What a marvelous creator is my Lord:
All authority is subject to my Lord

All the holy ones of old you may recall,
Unsurpassed in excellence is still my Lord

?? ?? ??? ????? ?? ?? ????? ????? ??
?? ? ????? ??? ??? ?? ?? ???

Nothing does He need or want from anyone,
Seeking favours none should reckon with my Lord

Out of nothing He created everything,
He sustains and nourishes it all, my Lord

Like an artist He perfectly formed all things,
Yet he harks to all the man would speak, My Lord

Of the unimagined in this time and space
Very essence, very fragrance is my Lord

Of all structures in this world and in the next
Peerless architect and builder is my Lord

All the pages not yet written, He has read,
Perfect knowledge of all secrets has my Lord

Be it hidden, manifest or half obscured,
Cognizant of any matter is my Lord

No one is a partner in His government,
As an absolute dictator reigns my Lord

List his oneness be considered poverty:
In His unity abundant is my Lord

Fellowship with anyone they do not need,
Who have found a lasting friendship with my Lord

Why should I go anywhere in search of Him?
Right beside me in my cottage is my Lord

He is never liable to change, RAHMAN,
In eternity remains unchanged my Lord

Rahman Baba

On Knowledge

Lights in the world are those, who know,
Guides of mankind are those, who know
When looking for the road to God
And prophet, ask from those, who know
The alchemist in his research
Finds sympathy with those, who know
A desert stone will turn to gold
In company with those, who know
An ignorant is like a corpse,
Like Jesus Christ are those, who know
For by His breath the dead arose,
The saintly breath of those, who know
Those are not humans, only shells,
The empty ones, who do not know
No matter to which low degree,
REHMAN will serve the ones, who know

Rahman Baba

Poem

Live not with thy head showing in the clouds,
Thou art by birth the offspring of this earth,
The stream that passed the sluice cannot again flow back,
Nor can again return the misspent time that sped,
Consider well the deeds of the good and bad,
Whether in this thy profit lieth or in that

Rahman Baba