

Khulna University Studies 2(1): 1-5

**RUBAIYAT-E-OMAR KHAYYAM: A NEW APPROACH  
TO HIS PHILOSOPHY**

**Gazi Abdulla-hel-Baqi\***

*Office of the Registrar, Khulna University, Khulna 9208, Bangladesh*

Manuscript received: July 07, 200; Accepted: September 25, 2000

---

**Abstract:** Omar Khayyam of Persia wrote a large number of four line stanza poems which are called Rubaiyat. Through his poems, besides a host of other ideas, he expounded a new philosophy that every thing on this mutable world is for the best who can evaluate things properly and understand their actual worth. Also, he cancels hypocrisy and tries to discover the truth which lies at the bottom of human mind. Khayyam, the astronomer poet, was a spiritualist who shows that man is the victim of the quixotic tendencies of his own mind.

**Key words:** Rubaiyat; saki; wine; religion; mysticism; wisdom, love

---

### **Introduction**

Omar Khayyam, the great astronomer poet of Persia, was born in 1050 and in 1123 he breathed his last. He was buried at Naishapur in Iran. Omar wrote some eight hundred odd quatrains which are the fruits of his life experience. His fame as a scientist, mathematician, existentialist and a spiritual mediator has been eclipsed by his immortal verses which are known as Rubaiyat to the civilized living.

In his Rubaiyat, Omar made use of symbols and metaphors, and by a subtle use of these, he aimed to bring together an amount of wisdom of life and world. He was primarily concerned with spiritual values and highly metaphysical thought. His genuine but doubtful and difficult verse thus appears:

‘The Ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,  
But Here and there as strikes the Player goes;  
And He that toss’d you down into the Field,  
He knows about it all-HE-knows!’ (Fitzgerald)

---

\* Corresponding address: Tel.: 88-041-720663, 720171-3; Fax: 88-041-731244; E-mail: <ku@bdonline.com>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53808/KUS.2000.2.1.1-5-ah>

### **The Themes of Omar’s Rubaiyat**

The central themes of Omar’s Rubaiyat are concerned with the enigmas of the total creation. In Rubaiyat ‘he shows himself the chief and foremost of that group of free-thinkers who satirized the narrowness of dogma and taught the futility of piety and virtue’-Levy. Besides, Omar, the unequalled genius, perceived the meaning of living reality- the reality of truth, honesty, justice, death and equality. Some of his Rubaiyat evince that man is the victim of the quixotic tendencies of his own mind. Through his Rubaiyat, he preached a doctrine that discovered the essential torments and conflicts of human mind and spiritual problems. His Rubaiyat “expresses his revolt against the hypocrisy and fanaticism of the dogmatic priesthood” - Najibullah. Thus if we find out the most individual and universal aspects of his four line stanza poems, we will see that he as a poet is unquestionably equal in rank with the greatest poets of the world. Omar sought the cause of the total creation in the following Rubai. Again, an idea of optimism is followed by a thought of pessimism, that expresses an ultimate nihilistic approach to life.

The object of entire creation we are  
In the eye of reason, the power of vision are we  
The circle of universe is like a ring  
Undoubtedly the engravings upon its stone are we. (Rosen)

### **Traditional Views about Omar’s Philosophy and a New Approach**

Omar was a great philosopher and his philosophy is connected with the idea of existentialism that distinguishes between the essence and its existence. But we cannot grasp our existence, because all men must die; life is very short and limited in eternity. All these views with his individual attitude to Allah have been enshrined in his Rubaiyat. From his Rubaiyat Omar emerges as a spiritual meditator and the subject of his meditation is lofty and universal. No doubt, a materialist was also Omar, but his idea of pure materialism has intruded into a hedonistic creed which is ultimately the profession of a sufi. His interest in esotericism never languishes, too.

‘It is not to be wondered that Umar’s philosophy was not always to the taste of pious Muslims and that he was subjected to much persecution’ - Levy. So the mockeries of Omar are at times directed to the false sufis and Mollahs who actually distort the import of religion and debase its sanctity . Omar was not regardless of religion. A staunch believer in religion, he comprehends the gist, the quintessence of what religion is. Being excited with the emotion of religionism, he was able to attain the ecstasy, not to sit in debate on religion. Omar says:

In Mosque, Temple, Church, Synagogue and Madrasa,  
Day and night are discussed fear in hell and pleasure in heaven.  
Who actually comprehend and know of Allah  
Are not at all disturbed by mere gossip and lullaby. (the author)

Omar always had an impossible reality, a sincere understanding of human life, its constant oneness with supreme Being. So in this mundane world, his improved soul was blind to the sense of mortality, though he was consciously aware of the transitoriness of human life.

Omar was an idealist, but his ideal world is replete with inevitable sufferings as the grape-juice is coated with a slight taste of bitterness. How fine they bear resemblance ! - and this idea is expressed in one of his beautiful Rubaiyat.

Sometimes it is found that “Omar Khayyam’s mystical poem has been erroneously accepted throughout the west as a drunkard’s profession of a hedonistic creed: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”- Graves. I think Robert Graves, a famous modern English poet, has rightly evaluated Omar here. The word-wine and beautiful woman as Saki or houri occur in his Rubaiyat repeatedly and are made at times into objective realities. They are the elements and moods of Omar’s sensibility, the range of which is wider.

Saki and wine constantly brought for him a revelation of new life; this two acted as the sole instruments by which his soul was redeemed and its expansion was guaranteed. His inverted cup is the symbol of the whole concave sky and the wine it contains is the symbol-image of wisdom of the whole world as this idea is expressed in one of his Rubaiyat.

Omar casts his searching glance at woman and wine like a punctual devotee. He responded to his whole truth-love and liquid. Some observe that he is a rank drunkard and if he is really so, his enjoyment is so excessive that it transcends the normal limits of human pleasure. Thus he emerges as a perfect incarnation of sensual enjoyment and his exhilarated soul reaches the ecstasy with the aid of it. So wine and woman-the sublime aspects of divine wisdom and immortal love- though forbidden for the fools are for the persons who are the best and can properly perceive them. Here he was rules-blind and rebel and his soul, completing the function of self-destruction, wished to have a perfect ever-bliss in his pure, solitary and autonomous world of woman and wine. He with the quality of healing power of these two things, cleansed his heart of mortal sins. Besides, at times it is true that an evil occasion is for the higher good. Without evil, no idea of good can be calculated. Hence, I think, according to Omar, everything is for the best and perfect who, unlike others, can discover the total meaning of the whole universe, its source and existence. He does not find himself confined to the narrow compass of any biased knowledge or wisdom; the sense of limitations does not at all accompany his contemplation.

### **Is There Any Sufism in Rubaiyat?**

A number of Rubaiyat expresses that Omar was a divine mystic. “Khayyam treats wine in a sufi fashion as a metaphor of the ecstasy excited by divine love : a simple concept not

readily grasped by Westerns.....” Graves. Thus it is clear that Khayyam’s relation with Saki and wine is a kind of divine-marriage.

Without joy which is central to a Sufi’s life, no ‘ecstasy’ is for a man. Khayyam’s source of eternal joy was the taste of love and wisdom. He was direct and straight-forward to apply his own theory in attaining perfection. His transparent honesty and the deep penetration of his self into the causes of beauty and wine made him perceive the Truth of the world. He drank deep in the taste of love and ruby-the nectar of mysticism for him. Omar’s free soul thought, contemplated and lived under the spell of immortality with love and wisdom. What he wrote was dictated by his time-ridden mind and love-sick heart fresh with disinfectant cup of divine wisdom.

### **A Look into Rubaiyat from a Different Angle**

The being of Omar is supremely animated by two supreme spiritual foods-love and taste of blood of the grapes. That wisdom and love are the only elements are the only unseen link between the orders of the whole world within one concept.

Out of his wine and woman, an eternal concept is born and this belongs to the source of the existence of whole life and universe. His path is merged with the endless one running to the Supreme order. So, Omar’s faith was so profound in love and taste of the grape juice that he flew to the infinite, spreading his ecstatic wings just like a bird that flies at large in nameless ways. Omar wanted to change the dead-colouring of the visions of common man. Omar was also the worshipper of beauty. The principle of beauty awakens in him a consciousness that finds peace in harmony of the cosmos. His heart and soul required always constant ecstatic expansion through wine - the symbol of wisdom and woman- the symbol of love and beauty, only forbidden for the dullards and blockheads, for these types of persons will surely abuse those things, failing completely to evaluate their actual worth.

‘My drinking is not for the purpose of enjoyment,  
Nor for frivolity nor from indifference to religion and morality.  
I want for a while to be free from myself,  
That is the reason for my drinking and my intoxication. (Rosen)

Omar’s vitriolic remark to the false pious in the following Rubai is very remarkable and pertinent:

O Mufti of the town ! your path is led astray,  
You are more intoxicated than I am.  
You drink the blood of the people and I taste grape-juice,  
Who is the greater blood-sucker you tell ? (The author)

According to Omar, the person who is not ripe in wisdom can never drink wine. Wine is nectar for the wise but it is poison for fools. Again, if a wise man offers anybody a cup of poison, he should drink it; on the other hand if a dullard provides anybody with a cup of

nectar, he should reject it. Omar also advises that wine should not be drunk in the company of base, mean and ill-tempered persons. All these are embedded in some of his representative Rubaiyat. Omar himself indicates who can actually drink wine.

Though forbidden you go on drinking wine,  
Remembering three things-who are you drinking with?  
Are you capable of drinking wine and what sort of wine is it ?  
Don't touch a single drop until your wisdom is ripe. (The author)

## Conclusion

However, when intoxicated with wine, Khayyam as though turns into a bubbling spirit, forgetting all the dark memories that are associated with the transient elements of the mutable world. And when his free soul plunges into the ocean of love, Omar is discovered in the blissful state of peace and harmony where he is illuminated by the Light of Allah. An insatiable quest of divine wisdom and love made the self of Omar to be divided into two identities-one is possible impossibility and another impossible possibility. Sometimes, there takes place the curious mixture of the two, but each deserves the same value. So the love of Omar originated in his beloved becomes perfect with the love of Allah. And in search of wisdom he travelled through the path of knowledge of Allah, starting from his very self. So Omar was reality-bound and at the same time soared high up in the infinite universe at times making him invisible to the common eye.

## References

- Fitzgerald, E., 1967. *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Golden Treasury Series, Macmillan and Company Limited, London.
- Graves, R. and Ali, S.O., 1972. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Penguin Books, Cox & Wyman Limited, London.
- Levy, Reuben, 1955. *Persian Literature: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Cambridge.
- Najibullah, 1963. *Islamic Literature*. Washigton Square Press Inc., New York.