

Revisiting Omar Khayyam and His Time

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Abstract:

Omar Khayyam¹, poet, thinker and philosopher was not made for the era he lived in. Khayyam moved ahead of his time and he was not quite discerned by anti-liberal era. His intellectual accesses was confined in the narrow fence of fear and panic of Seljuk dynasty's² fanatic era. As the result, he became an introverted and taciturn person. Relying on reason he sufficed to "I don't know" in answer to metaphysic phenomena. Political and social turmoil of the time incited him to raise against the dominant norms. He was indicted to

¹ Ghiyāth ad-Dīn Abu'l-Faṭḥ 'Umar ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khayyām Nishāpūrī (/'oomar kai'jɑ:m, -'jæm, 'oʊmər/; Persian: ه ت فلابو ا رمع م بهار ا ما یخ یروباشین; 18 May 1048 – 4 December 1131), commonly known as Omar Khayyām, was a Persian polymath, philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and poet. He also wrote treatises on mechanics, geography, mineralogy, music, and Islamic theology.

² The Seljuk dynasty (Persian: سلاجوقلس; Turkish: *Selçuklular*, Turkmen: *Seljuklar*) was a Turkish Sunni Muslim dynasty that gradually adopted Persian culture and contributed to the Turko-Persian tradition in the medieval West and Central Asia. The Seljuqs established both the Seljuq Empire and Sultanate of Rum, which at their total height stretched from Anatolia through Persia, and were targets of the First Crusade. In Persian history, the "Seljuq Period" denotes the period between the year 1037, when Toghrul (the founder of the Seljuq Dynasty) seized Nishāpūr (birthplace and burial place of Omar Khayyām) and was proclaimed sultan or *malik* at Marv (north west of Iran), and 1231, when the Mongols ransacked the country and took it over from the Seljuq Turks.

Infidelity, atheism and loss of faith which is nothing but the inherent flaw of parochial societies.

Key words: Seljuk Dynasty, Anti-liberal Era, Fanaticism, Political and Social Turmoil, Infidelity

The paper aims to illustrate Khayyam's thought and reflection being formed by his time. At his time, in name of the state and nation's expedient, the only alibi of dictatorial regime, Seljuk Dynasty and Nizam al-Mulk³, scholar and vizier of the Seljuk Empire, suppressed and quenched the free thinking as in the book "*Dami Ba Khayyam*" (*A moment with Khayyam*) by Ali Dashti translated as "*In Search of Omar Khayyam*" by L. P. Elwell-Sutton, he remarks: "This was a period when a fanatical pietism ruled over men's minds; there was even a kind of censorship of ideas, and in religious circle philosophy was regarded with suspicion." (*In Search of Omar Khayyam* 47), and demolished other ideologies and their followers especially Shia⁴ and Esmailiyan⁵. Throughout his lifetime, Nizam al-Mulk rejected and harassed all belief being disagreed with Sunni⁶ state of Seljuk regime. Nizam al-Mulk In his book, *Siyasatnama*⁷ (*The Book of Government*) page 227 to 287,

³ Abu Ali Hasan ibn Ali Tusi (April 10, 1018 – October 14, 1092), better known by his honorific title of Nizam al-Mulk (Persian: نظام‌الماظن, "Order of the Realm") was a Persian scholar and vizier of the Seljuq Empire. He held near absolute power for 20 years.

⁴ The Shia (Arabic: شيعية Shī'ah) represent the second largest denomination of Islam and adherents of Shia Islam.

⁵ Ismā'īlism (Arabic: إسماعيلية al-Ismā'īliyya; Persian: نزاریه یا یه‌سازان Esmā'īliyān) is a branch of Shia Islam whose adherents are also known as Seveners.

⁶ Sunni Islam (/ˈsuːni/ or /ˈsoni/) is the largest branch of Islam; its adherents are referred to in Arabic as *ahl as-sunnah wa l-jamā'ah* (Arabic: أهل السنة والجماعة), "people of the tradition of Muhammad and the consensus of the Ummah" or *ahl as-sunnah* (أهل السنة) for short. In English, its theological study or doctrine is called *Sunnism*, while adherents are known as Sunni Muslims, Sunnis, and Sunnites.

⁷ *Siyāsatnāma* (Persian: کتاب سیاست‌نامه, "Book of Government"), is the most famous work by Nizam al-Mulk, the founder of Nizamiyyah schools in medieval Persia and vizier to the Seljuq sultans Alp Arslan and Malik Shah.

introduced adverse belief and their instances like Mazdak⁸, Qarmatians (Esmailiyan), Shia and etc. In view of him all these ideologies were adversaries of Islam and state and they were deprived of all political and social rights.

“It was an age when a kind of fever had seized hold of people’s reasoning power, so that they looked at all problems from the standpoint of religious doctrine. It was a process that had begun with the domination of Turks, especially under Mahmud of Ghazne (998-1030), and reached its zenith during the Seljuk period in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.” (*In Search of Omar Khayyam* 49)

At such a time, those intellectual minds like Khayyam with Mathematical Mind and Rational and logical attitude were not able to compromise and conform themselves with unjust and biased situation. Ali Dashti researches: “It seems quite normal for him to be given such titles as Emam (religious leader), Counsellor, Proof of the Truth, Philosopher of the World, and Lord of the Wise Men of East and West” (*In Search of Omar Khayyam* 42). All humanitarians and clear-sightededs of Seljuk era were secluded, thereupon two new stream of thoughts, Hassan-i Sabbah⁹ an Islamic ideologist and Omar

⁸ Mazdak (Persian: مزدک) (died c. 524 or 528) was a Zoroastrian prophet, Iranian reformer and religious activist who gained influence under the reign of the Sassanid Shahanshah Kavadh I. He claimed to be a prophet of Ahura Mazda, and instituted communal possessions and social welfare programs. He has been seen as a proto-socialist. Mazdak was the chief representative of a religious and philosophical teaching called Mazdakism, which he viewed as a reformed and purified version of Zoroastrianism, although his teaching has been argued to display influences from Manichaeism as well. Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion of Sassanid Persia, and Mazdak himself was a Zoroastrian priest, or mobed, but most of the Zoroastrian clergy regarded his teaching as heresy. Information about it is scarce and details are sketchy, but some further details may be inferred from the later doctrine of Khurramism, which has been seen as a continuation of Mazdakism.

⁹ Hassan-i Sabbāh (Persian: حسن صباح; 1050s–1124) was a Nizārī Ismā‘īlī missionary who converted a community in the late 11th century in the heart of the Alborz Mountains of northern Persia. He later seized a mountain fortress called Alamut and used it as the headquarters for a decentralized Persian insurrection against the dominant Seljuk Turks. He founded a group

Khayyam Clear-sighted philosopher , were emerged in confront of Seljuk dynasty's biased power. Hassan-i Sabbah's message was a religious message, he used religion against religion. Hassan-i Sabbah, the founder and leader of a group of *fedayeen* (Devotees)¹⁰ whose members are sometimes referred to as *Hashshashin* or *Assassins*¹¹, established a crusade against the dominant Seljuk Turks and took the state's tranquility for years and eventually assassinated Nizam al-Mulk, the vizier of the Seljuk Empire.

Khayyam' message was a clear-sighted message against hostile and one-sided thought of Seljuk era. "There is probably no Persian poet so well known to-day as this so-called Eastern Voltaire"¹² (Flowers from Persian Poets 81). In his Rubaiyat (Quatrains), which seems Khayyam scrupulously kept them away from the eyes and ears of aliens, he indicated his averse thoughts to the dominant Religious belief of time and rejected the powerful assuming vizier of the Seljuk reign. Through words Khayyam refuted those all things being considered as

of fedayeen whose members are sometimes referred to as the *Hashshashin*, or "Assassins".

¹⁰ Fedayeen فیدائین *fidā'iyīn* Arabic, فدائیان فارسی "redeemers" or "those who sacrifice"; are a type of voluntary militant group found in Persian culture extending to countries which (historically speaking) were, or are, Persian influenced. Fedayeen are not normally connected to an organized government or military and often operate in areas with little or no government control. Hassan-i-Sabbah, an Iranian from Qom, formed the first band of Fedayeen, holding the main headquarters in Alamut (modern day Qazvin). He coined the name *fidā'iyīn* as the Arabic plural of *fidā'ī*, which means "sacrifice." A literal translation of *fidā'iyīn* might be "martyrs." It is widely understood in the Arab world to mean those willing to sacrifice themselves for God. The group carried out an armed struggle against any form of enslavement with actions based on resistance.

¹¹ The Assassins (from Arabic: نیشااح *Hashshāshīn*) were an order of Nizari Ismailis, particularly those of Persia and Syria, that formed in the late 11th century. In time, the order began to pose a strong military threat to Sunni Seljuq authority within the Persian territories by capturing and inhabiting many mountain fortresses under the leadership of Hassan-iSabbah.

¹² François-Marie Arouet (French: [fʁɑ̃.swa ma.ʁi aʁ.we]; 21 November 1694 – 30 May 1778), known by his *nom de plume* Voltaire (pronounced: [vɔl.tɛːʁ]), was a French Enlightenment writer, historian and philosopher famous for his wit, his attacks on the established Catholic Church, and his advocacy of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and separation of church and state.

norms in his time. In point of fact he endeavored and ventured to rescind and terminate misbelief, spurious ideas from their stump and disproved their Authenticity and integrity. It was a Grimace and rebellion to a stream of religious sociality which was a means for Seljuk dynasty by which to achieve their illegitimate goals.

Omar Khayyam was a Philosopher, he was acquainted with Avicenna's thoughts and Greece philosophy. "Khayyam was both an original thinker in the scientific domain and an important transmitter and interpreter of Greek mathematical writings to the Islamic world."(The Wine of Wisdom 3) Philosophical skepticism was part of his mind and incertitude toward everything was his mathematical mind's legacy. "Omar's scepticism was real enough; it belonged to the age of religious darkness in which he lived." (Flowers from Persian Poets 81) Khayyam and his poems have been studied perfunctorily and have been judged unfairly over time and among nations. Mehdi Aminrazavi in his book, *The Wine of Wisdom*, mentions that Omar Khayyam is "a stranger both in his homeland and in the West, a figure misunderstood by many people, loved by the free spirited and hated by many among the orthodox." (The Wine of Wisdom 1) And also as Khayyam himself asserted everyone grasps him and interprets his poetry through her or his speculation and cognition.

Have I been drunk with Maghaneh Wine, I've been,
Have I been Infidels and idol-worship, I've been,
Every one suspects me somehow!
I owned myself, what I've been, I've been (trans, Iman Emam Dadi)

Philosophers and thinkers of history believe that man is born out of affliction, lives in suffering and dies through pain. Howbeit, from mystical perspectives, pain forms and completes man, but from a thoughtful sapient perspective, it is a cruelty to man. Through times with specific historical circumstances and tyranny, this pain grows. This tribulation exceeds chiefly

for visionaries, those who are more sensitive and easily get affected by what goes on in society. Khayyam's pain is a philosopher bewilderment, a great philosopher who sees man's weakness and incapability in perceiving truth and being astonished by irrational and absurd demeanors of iced minds who are much far from moderation and sobriety and have become blind and heedless through Religious fanaticism. With all malpractice and negligence of thinking, they act as if they have touched the ultimate truth and it only exist in their heart. Eminent men and women through the enigmatic and mysterious pathway of history desire and idealize a better world with sublime belief and faith in humanity. A world to embrace all human being regardless of religion, race, region and etc. In the face of suffering, each thinker has opted different means to deal with their time. Heraclitus¹³, "Weeping Philosopher", had a sensitive soul. He lived in a constant sorrow, wept for human misery, eluded people and died in seclusion. Democritus¹⁴ was exactly opposite of Heraclitus, a pessimistic wise man who laughed at people reprobate and blameworthy deeds. Epicurus¹⁵, another pessimistic sage of Greece, prescribed pleasure primarily artistic and spiritual delight. Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi¹⁶, an Iranian

¹³ Heraclitus of Ephesus (/ˌhɛrəˈklaɪtəs/; Greek: Ἡράκλειτος ὁ Ἐφέσιος, *Hērákleitōs ho Ephésios*; c. 535 – c. 475 BCE) was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, a native of the Greek city Ephesus, Ionia, on the coast of Asia Minor. He was of distinguished parentage. Little is known about his early life and education, but he regarded himself as self-taught and a pioneer of wisdom. From the lonely life he led, and still more from the riddling and paradoxical nature of his philosophy and his stress upon the needless unconsciousness of humankind, he was called "The Obscure" and the "Weeping Philosopher".

¹⁴ Democritus (/diˈmɒkrɪtəs/; Greek: Δημόκριτος *Dēmókritos*, meaning "chosen of the people"; c. 460 – c. 370 BC) was an influential Ancient Greek pre-Socratic philosopher primarily remembered today for his formulation of an atomic theory of the universe.

¹⁵ Epicurus (/ˌɛpɪˈkjʊərəs/ or /ˌɛpɪˈkjuːrəs/; Greek: Ἐπίκουρος, *Epíkouros*, "ally, comrade"; 341–270 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher as well as the founder of the school of philosophy called Epicureanism.

¹⁶ Muhammad ibn Zakariyā Rāzī (Persian: محمد بن یزید زکریا *Mohammad-e Zakariā-ye Rāzī*, also known by his Latinized name Rhazes or Rasis) (854 CE – 925 CE), was a Persian polymath, physician, alchemist and chemist,

scientist, saw more evil and ugliness than goodness and beauty in the world. He believed amenity and convenience of life are nothing compared with its toil and tribulation, hence he saw man essence as nothing but evil and corruption. Al-Ma'arri¹⁷ knew no way to escape the irremediable pain of life, but death. Buddha¹⁸, great Indian philosopher, suggested an ethical and logical program in order to put an end to man misery.

Omar Khayyam, like his great ancestors, believes in happiness as Ahura Mazda's¹⁹ gift for man. He ceases the time and reminds others that time is short and they should avail Possibilities and opportunities of life.

One Moment in Annihilation's Waste,
One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste-
The Stars are setting, and the Caravan
Draws to the Dawn of Nothing-Oh make haste! (Rubaiyat of
Omar Khayyam 94)

Khayyam's attitude towards being is a wise stance which is not congruous with the dark age of dogmatism. Rubaiyat are outcomes of scientific and rational mind that lives in the prison

philosopher and important figure in the history of medicine. He is well known as the discoverer of alcohol and vitriol (sulfuric acid).

¹⁷ Abul 'Ala Al-Ma'arri (Arabic أبو علاء المرعشي البغدادي *Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī*, full name *Abū al-'Alā' Ahmad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sulaimān al-Tanūhī al-Ma'arrī*; 973–1058) was a blind Arabian philosopher, poet, and writer.

¹⁸ Gautama Buddha, also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, Shakyamuni, or simply the Buddha, was a sag on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. Born in the Shakya republic in the Himalayan foothills, he is believed to have lived and taught mostly in eastern India sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE.

¹⁹ Ahura Mazda (*/əˌhʊrəˌmæzdə/*), (also known as Ohrmazd, Ahuramazda, Hourmazd, Hormazd, and Hurmuz, *Lord* or simply as *spirit*) is the Avestan name for a higher divine spirit of the old Iranian religion (predating islam) who was proclaimed as the uncreated spirit by Zoroaster, the founder of Zoroastrianism. Ahura Mazda is described as the highest spirit of worship in Zoroastrianism, along with being the first and most frequently invoked spirit in the *Yasna*. The literal meaning of the word *Ahura* is *light* and *Mazda* is *wisdom*. Zoroastrianism revolves around three basic tenets - Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds.

of fanaticism and ethnocentrism of thought. In Khayyam's Rubaiyat, wine is wisdom, he Extols and lift wine as the symbol of altruism and becoming selfless rather than ethnocentrism and egoism. Through his poetry, Khayyam leads free minds to self-restraint and humility.

Drinking Wine, while not getting drunk,
Encroaching nothing, but goblet of Wine,
I praise Wine, you know why!?
Not to adore myself as you've done (trans, Iman Emam Dadi)

When Buddha experienced aging, sickness and others' death, he sensed the fact that he would face the same end. From that time aristocratic life became unpleasant and undesirable to him. From the exact time, when Khayyam contemplated about truth of life, its instability and fluctuation, discerned nullity and invalidity of life, experienced man's predetermination and being under duress and tested verity of death, he transmitted his doubt about the whole things and recommended taking chance, oblivion and ignorance. It seems that death aroused him and stimulated him to take step on a path terminating to Infinite Ocean of sobriety and temperance.

As he says, Khayyam was assaulted by his time and everyone realized him out of his own surmise. As Rūmi²⁰ says:

Everybody became my friend out of his own surmise,
None sought to discover the secrets in my heart,
My secret indeed is not remote from my lament,
But Eye and Ear lack the light to perceive it.

²⁰ Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī (Persian: *ذیلال لاج دمحم د خلب*), also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (*ذیلال لاج دمحم د مور*), Mevlana or Mawlānā (*ان لوم*, meaning *Our Master*), Mevlevi or Mawlawī (*دی ولوم*, meaning *My Master*), and more popularly in the English-speaking world simply as Rumi (30 September 1207 – 17 December 1273), was a 13th-century Persian poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic. Rumi's importance is considered to transcend national and ethnic borders. Iranians, Turks, Afghans, Tajiks, and other Central Asian Muslims as well as the Muslims of South Asia have greatly appreciated his spiritual legacy in the past seven centuries. His poems have been widely translated into many of the world's languages and transposed into various formats. He has been described as the "most popular poet in America" and the "best selling poet in the US".

(Rûmi, “the Song of the Reed”,tr. A. J. Arberry, Tales from the *Masnavi*, 21)

When viewed properly, it is found that Khayyam had a multidimensional persona. He is like a mirror in which everyone sees himself and has become the subconscious’ reflection. Everyone sees himself in Rubaiyat’s mirror and inadvertently without heeding the suffocating presence of Seljuk Dynasty and the pressure on his sensitive soul, shortsightedly calls him mystic, Ismaili, atheist, infidel and idolater. The depth and greatness of his philanthropic soul and Intellectual and moral greatness granted him a sublime position that raises the envy of jealous people and encourages wise people to humility. He is an erudite, Philosopher, mathematician, astronomer and poet who talked to himself in moments of pessimism and despair and bewilderment and uncertainty. Through his poetry he has depicted a world whose members are aware of their inability and lack of free will before the relative universe, which awes them to be sober and moderate. Khayyam has offered these members to degust the evanescent moments of life and live a happy life devoid of Heaven and Hell, future’s concern, egoism, greed and Pride and arrogance.

“The pain and sorrow of the past and worries for the future, however, prevent us from experiencing the here and now; hence Khayyam’s repeated reminder of the temporality of life. Seeing life as a river that is in a constant state of flux, Khayyam tells us, is a remedy to being continuously pounded by the merciless forces of life.” (The Wine of Wisdom 5)

He created a parallel world alongside the visible ephemeral world in which there would be neither regret nor remorse of fame and power as the noble soul like him will surely attain desirable spiritual liberation.

Have I got my hands on universe as God,
I would wipe it out,
Making such an universe,

To fulfill his desired palate of life, the freeman (trans, Iman Emam Dadi)

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