

Hedonistic Themes in Omar Khayyam's 'Quatrains'

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Abstract

This paper presents the hedonistic ideas raised in the worldwide famous poem 'Quatrains' written by the noted Persian poet, Omar Khayyam. As shown in the translation of the text at the hands of the renowned Victorian poet, Edward FitzGerald, the Persian writer attempted to express his tendency to express his persistent desire to seek pleasure and happiness all the time. Khayyam called for man's need to enjoy time as much as possible since death is the end of life. To him, human beings had to face their predestined predicament of living on the face of earth. Human life itself formed a puzzle for the poet. He saw that life was full of contradictions. The poem proved to be imbued with highly philosophical ideas.

Keywords: Omar Khayyam, quatrains, Persian, Edward FitzGerald, Hedonism, Epicurus, Cavalier poetry, dichotomy of life, and finality of death.

Omar Khayyam is one of the most outstanding Persian poets whose name keeps twinkling in the cultural history of the Middle East region. He belongs to the middle ages; a time when the culture of his both his country and the neighboring ones overshadowed that of Europe. Then, the Middle Eastern culture was brilliantly shining in the world. The noted figure was born in the city of Neyshapyr, Persia in 1048. He managed to fill his lifetime, which continued for 83 years, with great achievements in various fields especially that of science. His contributions in mathematics and astronomy were quite noticeable. However, nowadays he is recurrently remembered as a great poet. It is always more than sufficient to mention him in the circle of literature as the author of the 'Quatrains' written sometimes as 'Rubaiyat' which is the equivalent in Arabic. In other words, this literary work made him a world-wide prominent poet. It is noteworthy here to state the idea that his reputation in the scientific field outshines that as a poet. In his country, khayyam was well-known in the field of philosophy. This could be noticed quite clearly through the philosophical ideas touched upon in his 'Quatrains'.

It is true that Khayyam's great reputation in the domain of literature rests mainly on his 'Quatrains'. However, it is undeniable that he was one of "renowned philosophers and eminent scholars" in " the old Persia". (Khan and Nashibi, p. 691) Due to the great literary value of the 'Rubaiyat', "the poem ...[represented] a highly visible target" for translators. (Drury, p. 193) Drew adds that "the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*...[has] become one of the most famous translations of all time." (p. 93) The cause of his global reputation can be traced back to the translation of the outstanding literary work accomplished by the great British poet Edward FitzGerald who lived in the 19th century. Davis argues that:

Edward FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* was for a while the most famous verse translation ever made into English, and its extraordinary popular success – which lasted for perhaps a century, from about the 1860s to the 1960s – has ensured that it has been much picked over, carped at, imitated, admired and condescended to. (p.1)

As a matter of fact, the Victorian poet's translation has never failed to draw scholars' attention to these remarkable verses. De Blois emphasizes "that the immense popularity of FitzGerald's creation played a decisive role in instigating a large amount of scholarly interest in the *Rubáiyát*." (p. 306) Richardson adds "Edward FitzGerald's rendering of the...quatrains of Omar Khayyam brought the 11th-century Persian poet into Western consciousness and established FitzGerald as an important... Victorian poet." (p. 90) The famous Persian writer further managed successfully to present English readers a remarkable translation of the poem imbued with the deep feelings and philosophical ideas of the author. The number of the translated quatrains is 158. The English poet succeeded in conveying the important themes discussed through the poem. FitzGerald's translation triggered off the popularity of this salient work. Reason comments stating that " Edward FitzGerald's 1859 translation of Omar Khayyám's twelfth-century Persian verses offered Victorian readers an evocative exploration of the mysteries of life and death". (p. 119) What motivated the noted Victorian writer to translate the famous poem was that "FitzGerald clearly found so much in Khayyám's quatrains that he sympathized with ... and ... that he seems almost to meld his own personality with that of his author, so that they do *seem* to become, briefly, one person." (Davis, p. 5) It seems that the translator's interest in Khayyam's 'Quatrains' sprang from the tendency of most writers during the 19th century to reconsider and rather to embrace the Epicurean philosophy. Ansell-Pearson argues for this view by stating that "Some significant appropriations of Epicurus's philosophy ...

[took] place in nineteenth century European thought.” (p. 237) Al-Ghalith adds that “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, focuses on some ... major humanistic issues.” (p. 57) Since the ideas tackled by Khayyam were saturated with humanistic concerns and preoccupations, it has inspired writers and artists, and won the hearts of admirers all over the world.

Through the present paper, the researcher tries to attract attention to the hedonistic themes handled in Khayyam’s ‘Quatrains’. ‘Hedonism’, that was central in ancient philosophy,” apparently originated from the Greek lexical item ‘hedone’ which means pleasure. (Crisp, p. 619) The term refers to a school of philosophy officially established by the great Greek philosopher Democritus who lived in the 5th and 4th centuries B. C. Moen argues that the term ‘hedonism’ refers to a way of life where one seeks to promote pleasure and avoid pain.” (p. 1) Philosophically speaking, there are two central motivating elements in human life. These are man’s need to get pleasure and that to avoid pain. The critical approach used in this paper is the eclectic one so the researcher uses tools taken from diverse approaches to analyze the target text.

Pleasure is actually connected with happiness. This is why human beings have been known since the beginning of time to seek pleasure and get rid of pain. Happiness has been believed to be closely connected with man’s indulgence in the pleasures of the body. Tannsjo calls the moment dominated by “pleasures” a “hedonic situation”. (p. 92) Traditionally, societies tended to frown on such an inclination and to encourage man to stick to virtue which advises people to sacrifice happiness for the sake of righteousness and chastity. Aristotle was one of the philosophers who argued against hedonism and dealt with it negatively. However, there were other philosophers who took the other side of the argument by speaking positively about humans’ continuous quest for pleasure. Many years later,

Epicurus felt the need to advocate hedonism. One of the best examples of the literary works which can reflect the basic ideas of the Epicurean philosophy is the ‘Quatrains’ written by the Persian poet Omar Khayyam.

Simidchieva asserts that:

the Persian poet is a ‘simple hedonist’, a sensualist who offers ‘an antidote to Victorian moralism’, a fatalist – or alternatively, a materialist – whose unconcern with the afterlife and ‘eat, drink and be merry’ philosophy is in tune with libertine, materialistic Western modernity. (p. 56)

Celikkol affirms that “discussing sensuality and materialism in the *Rubáiyát*, some Victorian reviewers drew attention to the poem’s secular orientation.” (p. 512) Secularism is definitely part of Epicurism. Whether the poet read about Epicurus’ views as a philosophical trend or not, what counts here is how much the ideas he calls for in the poem seem to be similar to a lot of the basic principles adopted by Epicurus. Gray adds that “Epicureanism, which FitzGerald also deliberately invokes, achieves profundity [in the ideas discussed] through simplicity.” (p. 9) During Khayyam’s time “Epicurism” in Persia spread as a “progressive and opposition movement” in the face of “Sufism.” (Jaberizadeh, p. 697) Epicurus was a great Greek philosopher whose views affected a lot of writers and thinkers.

Epicurus was born in Greece in 341 B. C. and died 70 years later. He was actually one of the most remarkable Greek philosophers. His philosophy rests on the principle that the essence of human life is happiness. Iannone sees that “Epicureanism stressed hedonism and the ethics that followed from it.” (p. 175) To him, the aim man has to spend his or her lifetime to realize is getting happiness and delight. Stressing this view Moen points out that “Hedonism is the theory that pleasure is the only intrinsic value.” (p. 267) When man asks how s/he could make life good, the philosopher’s reply is not only to stick to moralities and justice but also

to search for happiness and pleasure. Heathwood points out that “Hedonism identifies the good life with the pleasurable life.” (p.539) The philosopher called for two types of pleasure: the physical pleasure and the intellectual one. According to the prominent Greek thinker, human life is so short that mankind should not waste it. Once a minute passes away, it will never come back. So, human beings are advised to indulge in satisfying their desires and whims as well as to immerse themselves in fun and joy. Such philosophical ideas prevailed during Epicurus’ time and for many years after his death.

In the 17th century, Epicurean views were resurrected at the hands of the school of the Cavalier poets. Fitzgerald himself admired a number of the poets of that time. (Poole, p. xxvi) These writers were affected by the renowned English literary figure Ben Jonson. This famous group of poets like Robert Herrick and Richard Lovelace were originally soldiers serving King Charles I. They supported him in the face of the parliamentary rebels during the Civil War. Scodel emphasizes that the Cavalier poets tended to “take pleasure ...by manipulating the traditional moral restrictions associated with the mean to maximize pleasure.” (p. 240) They further drew “upon motifs in Roman erotic poetry.” (Scodel, p. 239) These writers adopted the Epicurean philosophy and propagated for its principles. They stressed that shortness of life and the need of man to enjoy it as much as possible. They called for self-indulgence in pleasures and joys. These men of letters bore in mind embraced hedonism which was the equivalent of “pleasure [or] gratification of desires.” (p. 3924, original article) They also tended to address such issues as the importance of following the virtuous road in life and the existence of beauty in the world of nature.

One of the best examples of Cavalier poetry is Robert Herrick’s ‘To Daffodils’. The writer was keen on expressing his ideas about “erotic

pleasure". (Scodel, p. 261) In his frequently anthologized poem, mentioned above, the author presents Epicurus' philosophy in a crystalized way. Herrick indicates that human life is very short so that man should not waste a single minute of it because once a moment passes it will never come again:

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
 You haste away so soon;
 As yet the early-rising sun
 Has not attain'd his noon. (Thompson[ed.], p. 65)

Therefore, he asks the bunch of the beautiful daffodils addressed in the lines above which blossom early in the morning to stay until the evening time. Then, they together with him can die. This idea stresses that beauty, pleasure and fun have a very short time to stay in life just like man himself.

During Khayyam's time, the Persians saw that the earthly world occupied a lower position than that of the heavenly one. Man has to live in the dark ditch called the world. S/he seems to receive no help from heaven:

Then to the rolling Heav'n itself I cried,
 Asking, "What Lamp had Destiny to guide
 Her little Children stumbling in the Dark?"
 And-"A blind understanding!" Heav'n replied. (RK, Q. 33)

Furthermore, mankind themselves were created from dust and water. This mixture is called 'clay'. Human beings were caught in the invincible grip of destiny. Al-Ghalith points out Fitzgerald, in his translation of the 'Quatrains, "only concerned himself with the skeptical and fatalistic aspects of Omar's poem." (p. 58) No one could ever avoid what had been predestined for him or her. After spending the previously determined span of time, death was to reap man's soul eventually. This doomed denouement has been considered as the unavoidable end of every human's life story.

The earthly world represents a puzzle to Khayyam. It is full of mystery which man usually strives hard to understand. All the attempts of human beings to grasp the significance of life tend to fail:

Up from Earth's Centre through the seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
And many Knots unravel'd by the Road;
But not the Knot of Human Death and Fate. (*RK*, Q. 31)

They find it difficult to perceive the reasons lurking behind the vicious circle of continual construction and destruction. Man is born, grows up and then dies. A new generation comes to life. After spending the allotted time predestined for them, they die giving way to another generation. Briggs comments indicating that "the poet has unravelled many knots, 'But *not* the *Knot* of Human Death and Fate.'" (p. 84) The most obvious riddle of life is the repeated process of birth and annihilation.

One of the persistent themes in the under-discussion poem is the predicament of mankind on earth. The writer believes that the earthly world is full of misery and suffering. The time of relief and comfort is very brief. People should make utmost use of this limited time:

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust Descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer and—sans End! (*RK*, Q. 24)

Man's lifetime is nothing but a long journey through which the moments of rest are almost rare. People are frequently tossed from one agony to another. They are like play things manipulated by a very clever juggler. To eliminate one's pain, s/he makes the utmost use of happiness whenever a chance is offered.

The target literary work addresses man's lack of certainty. Human life seems to exist in a world of virtual reality. The whole universe which is apparently concrete and so vast will finally turn to nothing. It is just like an image taken from a book and then burnt into dust. On the contrary, the

world after death which is seemingly part of imagination and no one alive has touched will prevail and stay forever. Sharples indicates that “Against the fear of death Epicurus’ and Lucretius’ basic argument is simple: since we do not exist after death, it is no concern to us: ‘Death is nothing to us; for what has been dissolved is without sensation, and what is without sensation is nothing to us.’ (p. 94) Since what is real is actually unreal and vice versa, skepticism bewilderment become in control of life as a whole. Then, to be sober or drunk does not make any difference. Gray argues that “Fitzgerald’s [translation of the] poem gives a new twist to a widespread mid-Victorian preoccupation, the problem of striking an appropriate balance between memory and oblivion.” (p. 765) Khayyam advises people to drink wine in a way hoping that drunkenness may help them to get dissolved or at least to forget all about their overwhelming dilemma.

The author of the ‘Quatrains’ believed that human life is very short. This concept seems to be drawn out of the Epicurean philosophy. Al-Ghalith comments by stating that “Fitzgerald singled out and condensed those quatrains that professed the...Epicurean point of view.” (p.58) Therefore, the poem keeps stressing this idea through many parts. Khayyam indicates that life fades away swiftly. Man’s lifetime passes quickly as if it were a cloud flying over a mountain, or a wind that comes across and leaves a desert fast. Further, time seems to be like a piece of snow which quickly melts when touching the surface of a desert:

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone. (*RK*, Q. 14)

When a comparison is held between man and the other things existing in the universe, the insignificance of that creature becomes quite apparent. S/he is nothing but a speck of sand in a desert or a drop of water in a wide sea. Whereas seas, oceans, and deserts can stay for thousands and

thousands of years, human life darts away as if it were a phantom. What people are required to do is to enjoy their time as much as they could before their time slips away.

When considering human life, man becomes aware of the idea that time actually poses his or her most merciless and harshest enemy. If only people who are yet to come to life knew the hardships troubles man goes through, they would refuse to allow their souls to come to this world. Children usually beg time to pass quickly so as to grow up and enjoy their lives even better. They do not know that by so doing they are shortening the span separating them from death:

Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly—and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing. (*RK*, Q. 7)

When a person starts walking in the road of life, every move to proceed ahead makes him closer to the end of the journey. Shojai affirms this view when commenting “Death, then, is conceived of, within the symbolic ‘scheme’ of the ‘poem,’ as being that which marks the end of the ‘linear’ progression of Life.” (p. 127) Time actually plays havoc in man’s life. It overloads his or her shoulders with unbearable burdens which gradually bend the body and fill the soft skin with wrinkles. Reaching the breaking point, the body collapses under the pressure of time. Then, the soul runs away from the body which is deteriorating and finally collapses. The soul can never stay in such a physical form which is about to fall apart. This is how death overcomes man.

Another recurrent theme in the ‘Quatrains’ is actually the ephemerality of the human life. Cole sees that the poem “maintains that life is meaningless and ephemeral.” (p. 170) The world of reality itself is definitely transient. All what it contains must fade away one day or another:

Ah, fill the Cup:—what boots it to repeat
 How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:
 Unborn *to-morrow* and dead *yesterday*,
 Why fret about them if *to-day* be sweet! (RK, Q. 53)

In man's life, days and nights pass one after the other quickly as if they were race horses. These horses are different only in colour and so are nights and days; while nights are dark, days are bright. No matter how time is, it fades away fast. "FitzGerald's version of the *Ruhaiyat* provides a fatalistic and pessimistic view of man and what he can do in his short life." (Al-Ghalith, pp. 68, 69) When death comes, it abolishes family relations, feelings, emotions, and hopes. All these aspects go with the wind as soon as the sword of death falls on the neck of a human.

As mentioned above, man's life is transient while the life of other things in the universe seems to be eternal. Khayyam states that man may live for a number of years but ultimately s/he lies in the grave. Skau states that "the poem captures the sad delights ... of earthly pleasures ... [and] the melancholy of short-lived beauty". (p. 490) When still alive, one can enjoy the light of the moon and that of the sun that keep illuminating the world before moving to the darkness of the grave.

Then to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn
 My Lip the secret Well of Life to learn:
 And Lip to Lip it murmur'd—"While you live,
 Drink!—for once dead you never shall return." (RK, Q. 35)

However, human beings pass away quickly whereas the moon and the sun continue to shine. Since such is the case, people are advised to enjoy the light of the moon before it comes to shine over their graves. In this way, men are like guests in life while things like the moon, the sun, seas and deserts are like hosts or the owners of the world.

The dichotomy of life has been stressed through the quatrains. The world is clearly double-sided for joy lives side by side with sadness, beauty is surely mixed up with ugliness, and life is mingled with death. Human life

looks like a chess board in which the two contradictory colours are juxtaposed with each other, neither of them can work alone. People in this world are like the pawns on the chess board:

The Ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes;
And He that toss'd Thee down into the Field,
He knows about it all—HE knows—HE knows! (*RK*, Q. 50)

They are controlled and manipulated by the Divine Power. In the face of that mighty authority, humans are helpless. To concretize the concept of the duality in life the poet presents the image of the violet flower. This flower is a symbol of the mixture of beauty and sadness. Whereas the fragrance and the beauty of the flower provide joy and pleasure, its blue colour indicates sadness. The stem itself is bent to show the helplessness of the flower when facing melancholy. The violet is the best representative of human life with all its grief and happiness. Man can never guarantee that his or her life could be full of fun and joy all the time. People cannot change their fate. They have to accept life with all its conditions. Thus, when a person is offered a moment of happiness, s/he must make good use of it before it vanishes for joy is necessarily followed by grief one day or another.

To clarify the tight predicament of man, Khayyam returns to the idea of the “wheel of fortune” which was recurrently handled in the poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries in England. This can be seen quite clearly in Shakespearian drama. This wheel has been meant to refer to fate. Human fate is like a wheel to which people have been stuck. So, the wheel may take man up and then it may take him or her down. One day a person may go to the top of the world but the other day s/he could go down to the bottom of life. This is how fate works with humans. At one time a person could be happy, lucky or rich while at another time the same man or woman may be sad, unlucky or poor. The wheel of fortune deals with man

as if s/he were nothing but a piece of wood juggled by a circus player. One minute this wood goes up and the other minute it goes down. The same viewpoint was adopted by Khayyam. In his 'Quatrains', he sees that human beings have been caught in the grip of fate:

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays. (RK, Q. 69)

No one can escape from what has been predestined for him or her. Therefore, when a person is endowed with a minute of happiness or joy, s/he should take full advantage of it before it slips away. Man can consider this situation by looking at what happens to a position of authority. The question that may arise is: can a person hold this position for ever or even until the end of his or her lifetime? The answer is simply "no" for the possibility of doing this has never happened throughout the whole history of mankind. The position is like a seat passing from one person to another. Nothing stays the same forever.

Khayyam's submission to the idea of fatalism has been touched upon through the 'Quatrains'. The belief that all happenings were predestined by God even before the beginning of life is known as fatalism. To Sharples, predestination means "a certain natural connected ordering of all things, one group of things following on and involved with another from eternity, such a weaving-together allowing no avoidance." (p.49) This idea comes in opposition to that of man's free will. Hence, to the poet, man seems to be obliged behave and take decision the way s/he does. There is no possibility to change fate. Humanity's free will is limited. Simidchieva argues that the poet "consoles himself by ... the intellectual game of weighing the options of 'Fate and Free Will, Existence and Annihilation' against one another." (p. 59) Accordingly, human beings' plight gets tightened and their helplessness is apparently emphasized. Even to get mercy from heaven is

apparently hard to expect. Pushed by despair the speaker in the poem turns to escape from the realities of life as he sees by drinking wine, listening to music and staying near his beloved. Weijers states that “eating, drinking, listening to music” and the intimate relations between a man and his wife are the best examples of the practices which can provide pleasure. (p. 34) It is not surprising, hence, to find the speaker in the ‘Quatrains’ pursuing these types of pleasures.

The advice-laden tone spreads through several parts of the ‘Quatrains’. Hence, the author sometimes shows sympathy towards human beings’ misery. The poem serves actually as a murmur of grumbling against the wretchedness of man:

What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke
A conscious Something to resent the yoke
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke! (*RK*, Q. 78)

These creatures suffer from helplessness and deep sadness which usually stem from their inescapable destiny, their insignificant position in life, the brevity of their lifetimes as well as the irrevocability of death. The author “In the quatrains ... gives the notion of people as helpless results of an unexplainable creation wherein they play no part in their own formation.” (Al-Ghalith, p. 58) To make things easier for man, the poet sees that human beings have to accept these matters fixed facts or unchangeable conditions. This can provide the human heart with a feeling of reassurance and relief.

As long as humans prove to be unable to realize the significance of the puzzle of life, they may find comfort in stopping their fruitless quest. In order to get the mental quintessence, people can devote their whole time to seeking pleasure and fun:

Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
To-day of past Regrets and future Fears:
To-morrow—Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday’s Sev’n thousand Years. (*RK*, Q. 21)

Indulgence in pleasures is the backbone of the Epicurean philosophy. Ansell-Pearson clarifies that “Epicurus regards *voluptas* as the highest good, in which we can take delight in all that nature has provided to stimulate pleasure.” (p. 256) Therefore, man is advised to cease digging deep in the analysis of life with its riddles. S/he is required to embark on another query. The aim of the new quest should be enjoying time with the help of wine and music. Iannone indicates that “the principle of hedonism states that we should aim at maximizing pleasure in whatever we decide to do.” (p. 384) This is the advice of Khayyam in his ‘Quatrains’.

Then, Khayyam gives more reasons why man needs to get fun whenever it is possible. Wise men keep telling people to avoid getting delight at the expense of values and moralities. Human beings usually tend to shun from joys and pleasures when they think about both the reward and the punishment waiting for them after death. The Persian poet comes to stress the idea that mankind are deluded. They live in utter illusion. He believes that since no one came back from death to tell people whether there is really another life then or not, people should not stick to the point about the existence of another world after the termination of human life. Cole comments that “The quatrains only offer an afterlife playfully and irreverently.” (p. 147) To the Persian writer, even the belief in Paradise and Hell is a groundless one:

Of threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain—This Life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies. (*RK*, Q. 63)

Shojai comments on this point by stating that “Khayyam has rejected the orthodox Mohammedan conception of paradise.” (p. 114) People themselves are seen as insignificant creatures. When they ask for mercy, heaven shows no care. They waste their lives in illusions. He also indicates that whatever happens to man was predestined long ago even before his or

her birth. Khayyam, hence, “advocates that humans make the most of their lives by partaking in all that it has to offer: wine, music, companionship, and all kinds of pleasures.” (al-Ghalith, p. 57, 58) Humans are consequently supposed to enjoy themselves and pay no attention to what is going to occur to them since they are going to change nothing in their destiny.

Indulgence in drinking wine is considered by the speaker in the poem ‘The Quatrains’ as the solution for all his problems. Wilmer clarifies that the remarkable literary work “advocates the pursuit of pleasure – represented by the pursuit of drinking wine – as the only consolation a meaningless life can offer.” (p. 53) Skau adds that the poet recurrently mentions “the blessed gift of alcohol, specifically wine, as an escape from desperation.” (p. 490) Since death is final, human beings lack certainty about the world either before death or after it, man is helpless in the face of fate, and all what happens in life has been predestined, the poet sees that there is no difference in being drunk or not. Hence, he decides to dissolve in liquor. Wine is described by Khayyam as a red jewel that has been changed into liquid. The cup itself is presented as a mine that contains such valuable gems. Further, when the cup represents the human body, liquor stands for the soul:

So when that Angel of the darker Drink
At last shall find you by the river-brink,
And, offering his Cup, invite your Soul
Forth to your Lips to quaff- you shall not shrink.(RK, Q. 48)

The poet often asks his beloved to bring him wine and enjoy their time before it is too late. The time at which the speaker enjoys drinking wine makes him feel even better than a king. The importance of drinking lies in the idea that it can purge the heart of its grief and anxiety. Wine should be shared only with the beloved or the wise friends. The cup he intends to use when drinking wine has been made of clay. The substance mentioned has

actually come out of dust which is the origin of man. The speaker wants to drink wine in a cup made of clay before he himself becomes another cup. Wilmer refers to the idea that “the wine-bowl [is] understood as the source of consolation and the mortal clay of which both bowl and human being are made.” (p. 52) The situation is simply a would-be cup drinks wine in a cup. A person could resort to liquor when s/he wants to contemplate life. This habit could be seen as a source of limitless pleasure and fun.

Flowers occupy a very significant position in Khayyam’s “Quatrains”. They obviously play an important role in conveying some of the author’s ideas. Flowers are used to refer to the processes of creation and decay in man’s world. The time of spring in which flowers come to life stands for the stage of youth. They also represent the shortness of human life. The poet is consequently “just relaxing, enjoying the rose before it fades and the moon before it wanes.” (Purves, p. 25) Roses appear and fill the world with beauty and happiness for a limited time, and then, just like man, they die and turn into dust.

The red rose has a special position in the “Quatrains”. It is used to symbolize beauty, love, passion and happiness. The rose is also connected with wine which is employed by the poet as a way of immersing oneself in the mighty ocean of oblivion:

While the Rose blows along the River Brink,
With old Khayyam the Ruby Vintage drink:
And when the Angel with his darker Draught
Draws up to thee—take that, and do not shrink. (*RK*, Q. 48)

These inclinations do reflect the poet’s desire to indulge in fun and joy all the time. “Narcissism” and “self-centeredness” are two distinctive aspects of hedonism. (Jonasonet. Al., p. 102) In the above extract, the woman whom the poet loves is presented in the form of a red rose. The writer himself in his lyric is given like a nightingale. The bird is tempted by the red flower to approach it and enjoy its charm. Similarly, the speaker is

invited to come closer to his lover and get fun before the moment of perdition.

Man can spend time in fun in a garden drinking wine awaiting death. Humans' life is like a journey which must come to an end one day or another. People are traditionally seen as travelers who have to continue proceeding in their lives until they are stricken by the termination of their journey. As long as death is the doomed end of man's life, s/he should not care whether the body is going to be gnawed away by worms or devoured by a wild animal. The author is keen on emphasizing the irrevocability of death. As a matter of fact, death is final for when someone departs to the valley of death, s/he never comes back. Compared to metals, man is actually a base one:

The Vine had struck a Fibre; which about
It clings my Being—let the Sufi flout;
Of my Base Metal may be filed a Key,
That shall unlock the Door he howls without. (*RK*, Q. 55)

Humanity's lack of value can be seen in what happens after death. While people are always keen on scouring the land searching for gold, the human body is never looked for after burial. What is man advised to do is to take advantage of life as much as s/he could before it fades away.

The destiny awaiting man after death is the change into dust. Man has been created from dust and into dust will s/he turn. "In the Rubaiyat, one is going to die and be turned to dust no matter what hopes one has for this life." (*Al-Ghalith*, p. 65) As long as the case of humanity is as such, no one should despise dust. The heap of dust humans may see in front of them may have been a beautiful face of a young woman in the past:

And this delightful Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River's Lip on which we lean—
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen! (*RK*, Q. 19)

The ground man may step on may have been a face of a great ruler whose authority was unchallenged in a given time. Lovely flowers could come out of the soft cheeks of a girl. People must bear these facts in mind, and always remember that this is what is going to happen to them eventually.

To Khayyam, death is certainly a very intricate secret which has never been unfolded by man. Shojai illustrates the idea that in the 'Quatrains', the author believes that "Each "Step" becomes, in a sense, a withdrawal from life." (p. 79) Karlin adds that the Persian writer stresses "the speed with which life rushes to death," and "tells us to hasten to enjoy our only taste of existence." (p. 21) Death as people's doomed destiny is like sharp scissors which cuts the sacred thin threads of human life suddenly. This is the fact on which all agree:

Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the Wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies. (*RK*, Q. 26)

Death does not give a human a chance to get ready for it for it usually hits him or her abruptly. It never has mercy on the souls of people. It is even similar to a vulture devouring the helpless bird-like souls. Since such is the case, a person should not bother himself or herself much about it. S/he can enjoy time as much as possible.

All humans whether rich or poor, ruled or ruling, dominated or dominating, high-ranked or low ranked will become dust. Man's lack of value is often stresses through the 'Quatrains'. It is therefore evident that "Having just asserted that life ends in nothing, the speaker reasons ... that one is nothing in life as in death." (p. 519) Regardless of the position of any person, his or her destiny is to change into dust:

And those who husbanded the Golden Grain,
And those who flung it to the Winds like Rain,
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd
As, buried once, Men want dug up again. (*RK*, Q. 15)

Since the case is as such, man is advised to be modest. Humility is required for the essence of mankind is very humble. Consequently, man should never show haughtiness while walking for the ground on which s/he is stepping is nothing but the bodies of the ancestors. The walker himself or herself will be trodden down by other people after death. The poet shows that, before this moment of humiliation comes, humans can get joy and fun as much as they could. Only naïve people do not know that the land they are walking on was made from the faces of other humans.

Sometimes Khayyam describes sleep as a sort of death. He does not want to waste his lifetime in sleeping too much. He thinks that there is no difference between sleep and death. The time spent while man is sleeping shortens the already short life of man. The speaker therefore attempts to awake the woman whom he loves and encourages her to enjoy life before it is lost forever:

Ah! my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
TO-DAY of past Regrets and future Fears-
To-morrow?—Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years. (*RK*, Q. 20)

Purves comments that:

Fitzgerald -- and through him, old Omar the Persian -- weave a silky thread of wry secular Epicureanism, a peaceful, humorous acceptance that life is short and must be lived, death accepted as inevitable, and simple pleasures gently taken; disputatiousness and fretting are best blurred with wine and song and the scent of roses. (p. 23)

It is common knowledge that when a day passes, it will never come back. Then, the beloved is asked to get him wine and they can play music while drinking.

To conclude, Khayyam's 'Quatrains' is apparently imbued with hedonistic ideas. Hedonism was formally established at the hands of the Greek philosopher Democritus who lived 4 centuries before the Christ. This school of philosophy called for man's need to get the utmost amount

of happiness and avoid pain. A few years later came Epicurus who embraced Democritus' philosophy. In this way, Epicurus emphasized that human beings should exert all effort to live in happiness. Self-immersion in fun and joy became the main goal humans should aim at. In the eleventh century A. D. the noted Persian poet, Omar Khayyam followed the same route. He wrote his worldwide famous poem 'Quatrains' stressing the same principles adopted by the above mentioned Greek philosophers. The global reputation and esteem given to this literary work are indeed indebted to the brilliant translation given by the renowned Victorian writer, Fitzgerlad. In this work of art, the writer shows how human life and all what happens in it were predestined before the creation of man. He sheds doubt over the idea that there is another life after death. Human beings are not sure about the existence of Paradise and Hell. Since death is irrevocable and life is short, man is advised not to waste a single minute in it. The speaker continues to propagate for the necessity of getting fun and enjoyment before humans reach the darkness of their graves. The same ideas appeared once more through the works written by the writers who belonged to the school of Cavalier Poetry which flourished in England during 17th century.

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