

Rahmatullah Bukhari and the Contemporary Significance of His Ethical Views

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Abstract. The article provides a philosophical analysis of the life, scholarly and literary activity, and ethical views of Rahmatullah Bukhari (Vazeh), a prominent representative of the scholarly and literary environment of nineteenth-century Bukhara. Although the thinker did not compose a separate ethical treatise, the ideas advanced in his tazkira "Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob" and other works reveal a coherent and consistent moral worldview. The study examines the criteria upon which Vazeh relied in evaluating literary figures, disclosing his system of virtues, including knowledge and enlightenment, scholarly honesty and objectivity, friendship and loyalty, and human dignity. The author's distinctive approach, which harmonizes Sufi ethics with a practical philosophy of life, is also considered within the context of the Eastern philosophical tradition. The article substantiates the practical relevance of Vazeh's legacy for contemporary spiritual and educational processes, particularly for cultivating the unity of knowledge and moral maturity in young people, promoting academic integrity, and fostering national identity.

Keywords: Rakhmatullah Bukhari, Moral Philosophy, Nineteenth-Century Bukhara, Spiritual and Educational Heritage, National Identity.

1 Introduction

The scientifically grounded rediscovery of the national spiritual heritage and the objective study of the moral and philosophical views of past thinkers constitute one of the most relevant directions of contemporary philosophical inquiry. Throughout human history, moral philosophy has served as the principal criterion defining not only theoretical views but also the practical norms of everyday life. In Eastern philosophical thought, moral education is regarded as the highest pinnacle of culture and enlightenment. Qori Rahmatulloh Bukhari [1](Vazeh), a scholar and man of letters who worked under the complex socio-political conditions of the late nineteenth century, likewise connects the development of society in his works precisely with spiritual purification and the principles of morality. The present article comprehensively examines the thinker's ethical views and their philosophical roots. The study was conducted through a multi-stage analytical procedure combining historical, hermeneutic, and philosophical methods. First, the primary source, *Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob*, was selected as the principal text because it represents the most comprehensive source reflecting Vazeh's intellectual and ethical views. In addition, secondary sources, particularly Tursunboy Ne'matzoda's monograph *Vozeh* (1967), were consulted to clarify the historical, literary, and intellectual context of Vazeh's life and works. Second, passages containing explicit or implicit ethical judgments, evaluations of human character, descriptions of exemplary personalities, and discussions of moral virtues and vices were systematically identified and classified. Third, these passages were interpreted using a hermeneutic approach in order to understand their meaning within the social, cultural, and intellectual environment of nineteenth-century Bukhara. Fourth, the extracted ethical ideas were compared with the historical context and existing scholarly interpretations to distinguish recurring ethical concepts from isolated literary observations. Finally, the recurring ethical themes were synthesized through philosophical analysis to reconstruct the fundamental principles of Vazeh's ethical worldview rather than to attribute a formal ethical doctrine to the author.

Spiritual heritage is considered essential as a factor ensuring spiritual and cultural continuity between generations, serving the preservation of national identity and facilitating adaptation to modern life. The study of the place and significance of the historical and spiritual heritage in the upbringing of future generations is relevant not only from the standpoint of philosophy but also from that of such disciplines as pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies[2]. From this perspective, at a time of growing need to rely on a spiritual

foundation, turning to the legacy of figures formed within the intellectual milieu of nineteenth-century Bukhara is of both theoretical and practical significance.

In the existing scholarly literature, Qori Rahmatullah Vazeh has been studied primarily as a tazkira author, poet, and historian of literature. Major literary scholars, including Tursunboy Ne'matzoda[3] and Sanoat Ahmadovna Oqilova[4], have examined his literary heritage, historical writings, and contribution to nineteenth-century Bukharan literary culture. More recently, the young researcher Z. Yunuszada has investigated Vazeh's travelogue, further enriching the study of his literary legacy. Nevertheless, these studies have remained within the field of literary scholarship and have not treated Vazeh's ethical thought as an independent subject of philosophical inquiry. Consequently, no previous study has systematically reconstructed his moral worldview or analyzed the conceptual foundations of his ethical philosophy. This study therefore presents the first comprehensive philosophical and hermeneutic reconstruction of Vazeh's ethical thought based on *Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob*.

2 Method

The research is based on qualitative historical-philosophical methodology. It utilizes textual and hermeneutic analysis of Rahmatullah Bukhari (Vazeh)'s principal work, *Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob*, together with his other literary writings and relevant secondary literature. Historical and comparative methods are applied to examine the formation and distinctive features of Vazeh's ethical thought within the intellectual tradition of nineteenth-century Bukhara and the broader context of Eastern philosophy and Sufi ethics. The study further employs analytical, interpretive, and synthetic approaches to reconstruct the philosopher's system of moral values and evaluate its relevance to modern educational, cultural, and ethical development.

3 Result and Discussion

The present study does not argue that Vazeh directly addressed contemporary educational or social challenges. Rather, it identifies universal ethical principles embedded in his writings—such as honesty, justice, the pursuit of knowledge, responsibility, and truthfulness—and examines their potential relevance within contemporary moral and educational discourse. These principles are interpreted in light of present-day contexts while remaining grounded in the historical and intellectual environment of nineteenth-century Bukhara. Thus, the study seeks to demonstrate the enduring significance of Vazeh's ethical thought without imposing modern concepts on his original ideas.

Yet a careful reading of the thinker's legacy reveals that behind each of his evaluations and each of his choices stands a definite system of values—a moral measure. The purpose of the present article is to offer a moral-philosophical interpretation of Vazeh's work "*Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob*" ("A Gift to Friends and a Remembrance of Companions"), to identify the system of virtues that emerges from it, and to substantiate their contemporary spiritual and educational significance.

Rahmatulloh Vazeh's celebrated work "*Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob*" was written in 1871[5]; the tazkira contains accounts of 145 poets[6] together with selected poems from their pens. The author did not include all the poems of these poets in his work for the following reason: the tazkira would have become excessively voluminous, which would have created difficulties for readers in purchasing it. A further reason was that the verses of certain poets expressed, either openly or in subtext, discontent with the epoch, with rulers, and with the ruling circles in general. The poems Vazeh selected for his work are those that correspond to the poet's nature while at the same time not rejecting the laws and conventions of the time.

*Мо зи васли сӯҳбати ирониён дорем ор.
 Бигзарад гар филмасал фазлаш зи Моҳу Муштари [7]*

*Mo zi vasli suhbati eroniyon dorem or,
 Bigzarad gar filmasal fazlash zi Mohu Mushtari.*

"Even if their virtue and learning have surpassed, say, the Moon and Mushtari (Jupiter) that is, risen as high as the heavens we are ashamed to converse with the Iranians, to be close to them."

The expression "Mohu Mushtari" (the Moon and Jupiter) was regarded in the literature of that epoch as a symbol of the loftiest summit, of unattainable stars. A person may be so deeply mired in the swamp of arrogance and fanaticism that he refuses to acknowledge the man standing before him even if that man's learning is lofty enough to instruct the entire universe (in the couplet, higher than the Moon and Jupiter) merely on account of his ethnic origin or for some other reason. Through this passage, Qori Rahmatulloh Vazeh expressed his ethical view of the gravest vice of human morality: the conscious rejection of truth.

The next key word of the couplet is "to be ashamed": a person ought to be ashamed of ignorance, unlearnedness, and obscurantism. Yet the figures depicted in the poem are ashamed not of their own ignorance but of conversing with people of great learning. This testifies to a complete inversion of moral criteria that is, to a displacement of values in society. In this couplet the author is not displaying national pride; on the contrary, with bitter satire (irony) he exposes the unenlightenment of certain groups in the society of his time, the ignorance concealed behind the mask of religiosity or patriotism. What is depicted here is the tragedy of a person who, powerless before another's virtue, resorts to demeaning him. This attests to the fact that Vazeh analyzed the question of social protection not merely in economic terms but on the basis of the principles of humanity and equality.

In analyzing Vazeh's ethical views, one methodological truth must first be acknowledged: he expressed his moral ideas not in a separate theoretical treatise but within the framework of the *tazkira* genre, through the portrayal of the lives and works of specific individuals. In this sense, his ethics is not an abstract doctrine but a "practical ethics" a morality demonstrated through the virtues of people who actually lived. This circumstance defines the distinctive character of Vazeh's legacy.

Among the 145 poets mentioned in the *tazkira* "Tuhfat ul-ahbob," Vazeh dwelt in particular on the moral virtues of those contemporaries whom he had met in person and whose conversation and works he had enjoyed. He characterizes them with such epithets as "learned," "virtuous," "open-hearted," "sweet-spoken," "hospitable," "quick-witted," and "understanding." In describing the character of other poets, the author relied on what had been said about them by others, and Vazeh noted this in his work as well. For instance, concerning the poet Shavqiy of Kattakurgan, renowned for his verses in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic, the poet's virtue is conveyed in the following form: "I myself have not seen Shavqiy, but those who have seen him describe him as 'sweet-spoken' and 'a pleasant conversationalist. [8]"

The present study does not interpret individual poetic expressions as direct statements of philosophical doctrine. Instead, ethical conclusions are drawn only from recurring moral themes, consistent value judgments, and ethical concepts that appear across Vazeh's literary works, biographical narratives, and evaluations of historical figures. Thus, the reconstruction of his ethical worldview is based on the consistency of ethical ideas throughout his writings rather than on isolated poetic metaphors or symbolic expressions.

*Фафлатоҳанги наводи хайру шарр,
 Беҳабар аз имтиёзи нафъу зар.
 Пойбанди доми нафси бадсигол,
 Фарқои баҳри иқоби Зулҷалол.
 Нафси шайтон розиву хушнуд аз ӯ,
 Халқу Холиқ ҷумла хашмолуд аз ӯ [8]*

*Ghaflat-ohangi navodi khayru sharr,
 Bekhabar az imtiyozi naf'u zar.
 Poybandi domi nafs'i badsighol,
 Gharqai bahri iqobi Zuljalol.
 Nafsi shayton roziyu khushnud az u,
 Khalqu Kholiq jumla khashmolud az u.*

The translation of the couplets is as follows:

That man is deaf to the call of good and evil,
 sunk in the slumber of heedlessness;
 he cannot tell profit from loss.
 Ensnared in the trap of the ill-natured nafs,
 he has drowned in the sea of the chastisement of Zuljalol (Almighty God).
 His nafs is content and pleased with Satan
 hence both mankind and the Creator are wrathful toward him.

Although several works are attributed to Vazeh, *Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob* was selected as the principal source because it contains the richest and most systematic presentation of his intellectual, literary, and moral evaluations. Other works, including his poetry and travelogue, were consulted where relevant to support particular interpretations; however, they do not present ethical reflections with the same consistency and comprehensiveness as *Tuhfat ul-ahbob*. Future research may expand the analysis by examining Vazeh's complete literary corpus in greater detail. The couplets cited above are of great importance for the study of the poet's worldview, for here we are dealing not with someone else but with Vazeh's own direct convictions and inner experiences.

Turning to the content of the poem, we find united within it several important ideas characteristic of classical Sufi literature. The poet condemns the state of heedlessness (ghaflat) in the human heart that is, deafness to the voice of good and evil and the inability to distinguish benefit from harm. This serves as proof that a person must not remain oblivious to the meaning of his own life.

Table 1. Sufi Concept

Sufi Concept	Practical Meaning in Vazeh
Nafs	Self-control
Ghaflah	Intellectual awareness
Sidq	Honesty in scholarship
Amanah	Social responsibility

The author dwells in particular on the question of the nafs. He stresses the danger of a person being captured in the "trap of the ill-natured nafs," that is, of becoming a prisoner of his own base desires and cravings. Through this image, Vazeh artistically depicts the resistance of a person's inner reason and will against the nafs. The allusion to the "chastisement of Zuljalol" (that is, punishment associated with God's attribute of majesty) reveals the poet's conscious attitude toward the hereafter and divine justice. This is one of the central concepts of classical Eastern moral philosophy. Another aspect deserving special attention is that the poet, pointing to the affinity between the nafs and Satan, emphasizes that as a consequence a person incurs the wrath of both the people and the Creator. In this way, Vazeh does not separate religious morality from social morality: in his view, a person is accountable not only before God but also before society and the people around him. Such a view demonstrates that the poet's conception of morality is not merely an abstract religious doctrine but a practical principle directly bound up with everyday life and interpersonal relations.

Seen from this perspective, this passage shows that Vazeh is not confined to the image of a tazkira author that is, a literary scholar and biographer, a man of learning who recorded the lives and works of other poets. Here we see another of his facets: the image of an independent didactic poet-moralist who, through his works, calls the reader to spiritual purification, to the curbing of the nafs, and to awakening from heedlessness.

In the moral philosophy of Qori Rahmatulloh Vazeh, a person's spiritual elevation is measured by his capacity to sacrifice his own nafs and by his steadfastness on the path of lofty ideals. The following lines of the thinker express in a distinctive way the process of moral self-sacrifice and spiritual purification:

*«Боядам дар оташи савдо саропо сӯхтан,
Чун сипанд аз ҳасрати он холи болочасти ту». [7]*

*«Boyadam dar otashi savdo saropo sukhtan,
Chun sipand az hasrati on kholi bolochasti tu».*

(Meaning: It is my lot to burn from head to foot in the fire of love just as a grain of sipand crackles and burns in the flame out of longing for the beauty mark upon your graceful, tall figure.)

Vazeh's philosophical reflections based on the image of sipand (wild rue, isiriq) reveal the principles of self-sacrifice and spiritual purification in his ethical views. In the thinker's understanding, the attainment of moral perfection is directly linked to a person's "burning" of his material being on the path of spiritual values (curbing his nafs). Through the flame of the wild rue, Vazeh depicts the spiritual transformation of the human being: he shows how, through pain and trials, goodness and virtue may emanate from the human soul. These views of his exemplify the harmonious fusion of Sufi ethics with a realistic philosophy of life.

The central question of this article is which criteria Vazeh relied on in evaluating literary figures and what system of moral values these criteria disclose. The analysis shows that several leading virtues stand behind the author's judgments. Vazeh characterizes people first and foremost according to their knowledge and scholarly capacity. He distinguishes literary figures as "masters of their craft" and "amateurs," noting which sciences they had mastered and what level they had attained. Of the amateur poet Afsah, for example, he writes: "Having completed his formal education, he took an interest in composing verse and thereby became renowned.[8]" Such classification in itself elevates knowledge and mastery to the rank of a moral-intellectual value: knowledge is interpreted as the principal virtue leading a person to perfection.

The strongest moral feature of Vazeh's views is his responsible attitude toward information. The author speaks only briefly of literary figures whom he did not know personally or about whom he lacked sufficient information; he does not present the unknown as known, and openly acknowledges the absence of information regarding the true name, pen name, or date of death of certain poets. Moreover, before offering an assessment, he read the authors' works directly. From a philosophical standpoint, this is a manifestation of the virtues of sidq (truthfulness) and amonat (safeguarding knowledge as a sacred trust). Here an epistemological principle is transformed directly into an ethical one: fidelity to truth is united as a demand of both knowledge and conscience. While Vazeh shares

several universal ethical values with earlier Islamic thinkers, including honesty, justice, knowledge, and moral self-discipline, his ethical reflections differ in both form and emphasis. Unlike al-Ghazali and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, who developed systematic ethical treatises, Vazeh expressed his ethical philosophy through literary criticism, biographical narratives, and evaluations of exemplary personalities. His ethical thought therefore represents a practical moral discourse embedded within literary writing rather than a formal philosophical system.

The social foundation of the *tazkira*-writing tradition likewise reinforces this conviction. As the sources note, hand-copied books were expensive and beyond the reach of the common people, and for this reason scholars compiled selections from famous works, creating the first anthologies. In continuing this tradition, Vazeh regarded the delivery of knowledge to the broad readership the dissemination of enlightenment as a spiritual duty. This reveals his ethics of enlightenment, that is, his view of knowledge as a universal human good.

The present study understands national identity and universal ethics as complementary rather than contradictory concepts. Vazeh expressed universal moral values—including honesty, justice, friendship, responsibility, and human dignity—within the cultural and historical context of nineteenth-century Bukhara. While these ethical principles emerged from a particular intellectual tradition, their moral significance extends beyond national boundaries because they address fundamental aspects of human conduct shared across cultures. Considering Vazeh's ethical views within the framework of the Eastern philosophical tradition brings out their distinctiveness more vividly. Whereas in Farabi virtue is theoretically substantiated as the foundation leading man to happiness and to the virtuous society, in Alisher Navoi the idea of moral perfection is raised to artistic-philosophical heights. Vazeh inherits the central idea of this tradition: that the unity of knowledge and morality leads man to perfection.

Yet Vazeh's originality lies in the fact that he expresses this idea not in the language of abstract concepts but through the destinies and virtues of real people in a biographical-practical form. In this sense his *tazkira* resembles a "textbook of practical ethics": virtues such as knowledge, honesty, industriousness, and friendship are presented to the reader through the way they were manifested in the lives of concrete individuals. Vazeh thus enriches the tradition not in a theoretical but in a practical-educational direction.

The values advanced by Vazeh bear direct relevance to contemporary spiritual and educational processes. His model of valuing knowledge and morality together as a single integral virtue recalls an important task facing modern education: cultivating moral maturity in young people alongside knowledge. Raising not an educated but unscrupulous individual, but a person in whom learning is in harmony with morality this is one of the principal lessons of Vazeh's legacy. Vazeh's principle of scholarly honesty and objectivity resonates directly with the contemporary issue of academic integrity. A responsible attitude toward information, refraining from claiming what one does not know, and respecting the labor of others these norms, demonstrated by a nineteenth-century thinker, can serve as a model for today's scholarly and educational environment as well. The findings of this study may be applied in several practical educational contexts. First, Vazeh's ethical principles may be incorporated into university courses on philosophy, ethics, literature, and the history of Central Asian thought. Second, his emphasis on honesty, responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge may contribute to character education and academic integrity programs. Third, selected passages from *Tuhfat ul-ahbob* may be used as teaching materials to promote critical thinking, moral reflection, and civic responsibility among students. Such applications would enable Vazeh's ethical heritage to contribute meaningfully to contemporary education while preserving its historical authenticity.

4 Conclusion

Although Vazeh did not compose an independent ethical treatise, his ethical worldview is consistently reflected in his literary evaluations, descriptions of exemplary personalities, moral judgments, and poetic works throughout *Tuhfat ul-ahbob fi tazkirat ul-as'hob*. These recurring ethical evaluations permit a philosophical reconstruction of his moral framework rather than the attribution of a formal ethical system. Furthermore, in literary and historical studies, the analysis of an author's literary works, including poetry, has long been recognized as an important means of identifying the author's intellectual, philosophical, and ethical views. Accordingly, the present study reconstructs Vazeh's ethical principles from recurring themes, value judgments, and moral evaluations found throughout his writings rather than attributing ideas that are not supported by the text. Therefore, unlike previous studies, the present research reconstructs Vazeh's ethical philosophy as a coherent moral system through philosophical and hermeneutic analysis.

Vazeh's ethics rests upon the idea of the Eastern philosophical tradition that "the unity of knowledge and morality leads man to perfection," yet it is distinctive in interpreting this idea practically, through the example of real people, rather than theoretically. These views hold practical significance for contemporary spiritual and educational processes, in particular for academic integrity and the cultivation of national identity.

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