

November 2016

Songs of Ishq, Freedom and Rebellion: Selected Kafis of Bulleh Shah in Translation

Zainab Sattar
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2



Part of the [Music Performance Commons](#), [Other Classics Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Other Music Commons](#), [Performance Studies Commons](#), [Poetry Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), and the [Translation Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sattar, Zainab, "Songs of Ishq, Freedom and Rebellion: Selected Kafis of Bulleh Shah in Translation" (2016). *Masters Theses*. 444.
<https://doi.org/10.7275/8984355> https://scholarworks.umass.edu/masters_theses_2/444

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

SONGS OF *ISHQ*, FREEDOM AND REBELLION: SELECTED KAFIS OF BULLEH
SHAH IN TRANSLATION

A Thesis Presented

by

ZAINAB SATTAR

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 2016

Comparative Literature

SONGS OF *ISHQ*, FREEDOM AND REBELLION: SELECTED KAFIS OF BULLEH
SHAH IN TRANSLATION

A Thesis Presented

by

ZAINAB SATTAR

Approved as to style and content by:

Edwin Gentzler, Chair

Joseph Black, Member

Nigar Khan, Outside Member

Moira Inghilleri, Member

Edwin Gentzler, Director
Comparative Literature Program
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures

William Moebius, Chair
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Edwin Genzler, for his unwavering support and guidance. I am also grateful to Joseph Black for his patience and immensely helpful feedback over the course of the project. Thanks are also due to Nigar Khan and Moira Inghilleri for their invaluable contributions as members of the committee.

A very special thank you to my dear friend Akshaya Tucker for her collaboration on the interpretive piece of music that accompanies this project. Akshaya is the composer and pianist in the accompanying composition, Jacob Scharfman is the vocalist, whilst the lyrics are my translation of Bulleh Shah.

ABSTRACT

SONGS OF *ISHQ*, FREEDOM AND REBELLION: SELECTED KAFIS OF BULLEH

SHAH IN TRANSLATION

SEPTEMBER 2016

ZAINAB SATTAR

B.A LAHORE UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

M.A. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Edwin Gentzler

Abdullah Shah (1680-1757) was the birth name of the boy who would later become one of the most eminent Sufi poets of South Asia, and the master of Sufi lyrics in Punjabi—Bulleh Shah. Living during times of strife and major conflict between the Sikhs and the crumbling Mughal Empire, Bulleh Shah wrote poetry with an underlying humanist and tolerant philosophy that challenged the turmoil of his times. Blind to the bounds of religion and caste in an increasingly divided India, Bullah's spiritual philosophy and his message of equality found voice in his *kafis*—a genre of poetry indigenous to the Indian subcontinent that can be seen as a form of folk ballad.

This project offers translations of 15 *kafis* from his identifiable corpus, preceded by a substantial introduction. Each *kafi* is presented in three translations—literal, functional, and oral. The selected *kafis* draw on the three dominant themes in his work—*Ishq*, rebellion, and freedom. Scans of the original *kafis* in Shahmuki script Punjabi have been provided. Furthermore, the project is accompanied by an interpretive composition of

the translated *kafi* “What Times, What Strange Times,” which was a collaboration between the author of the thesis, Akshaya Tucker, and Jacob Scharfman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|----------------------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | iv |
| ABSTRACT..... | v |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2. BULLAH THE <i>ASHIQ</i> | 4 |
| 3. BULLAH THE BI-PARTISAN CRITIC: POLITICAL CONTECT OF HIS TIMES...8 | 8 |
| 4. PUNJABI: LANGUAGE, FOLK-TALES AND KAFIS..... | 10 |
| 5. SUFISM: A PRIMER AND GLOSSARY..... | 17 |
| 6. QAWWĀLĪ AND SUFIANA KALAM: ANOTHER EXPRESSION OF KAFIS..... | 21 |
| 7. NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS | 31 |
| 8. TRANSLATIONS | 40 |
| APPENDICES | |
| A. KAFI SCANS ORIGINALS..... | See Supplemental Content A |
| B. WHAT TIMES WHAT STRANGE TIMES..... | See Supplemental Content B |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 87 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rivaling the predominant literary traditions of Urdu and Hindi, the regional poetry of the Indo-Pak subcontinent is a force to be reckoned with. With numerous poets spanning geographical distances, and the languages associated across those distances, these poets populate the poetic tradition with various themes, genres and innovations. It would not be amiss to surmise that, perhaps, the regional poetic traditions hold more sway than the mainstream. This influence, however, if greater in magnitude, is certainly lesser in numbers. One such gem, an occupant of the treasure chest of regional and folk poetry, is Bulleh Shah (d.1757)—the Punjabi Sufi poet whose lyrics echo from beyond his era and language, who remains an unmatched influence for many revolutionary poets to follow, and whose creative prowess still holds as much poignancy and power as it did in stirring up his times.

This project is a literary translation of a selection of Bulleh Shah's *kafis*, with a long introduction and a short translator's note. I have chosen 15 *kafis* from his currently identified corpus, and provided two or three separate translations of each, with each version acting as an exercise in a different translation and creative approach. The project is divided into 8 chapters. As a writer, I wished to furnish as much context as I could for readers, before delving into the poetry itself. As such, I begin in the first chapter with a biographical context on Bulleh Shah. It is followed up with a chapter on the political background of his times to get a sense of his milieu. The third chapter is an explication on the language of Punjabi—along with an attempt to situate its roots, I have placed the

language on a geographical map and looked into its metaphoric and folk-tale traditions. Along with that, a detailed exposition on the genre of *kafi*, which is indigenous to the South-Asian poetic tradition, has been provided. With the fifth chapter, I cover the basic elements of Sufism (South-Asian Sufism in particular), and provide a glossary of basic terms essential in understanding the concepts and terms alluded to in Bulleh Shah's poetry. The sixth chapter focuses on the musical adaptation and representation of these *kafis* in the contemporary setting. The last chapter before the translations themselves is my note as a translator, in which I explain my methods and approach in undertaking this exercise, and what influences and theory shape the translations I have created.

The translations form the last chapter of the project. Original *kafis* have been provided in the Shahmukhi script. The decision to undertake three separate translation versions of each *kafi*, each aimed toward a different kind of audience, is explained in the translator's note. A conclusion, which summarizes my retrospective analysis of the exercise, wraps the project up.

This project was as much a creative exercise for me as an academic one. As a relayer of the poetic tradition of Bulleh Shah to an environment that is largely unfamiliar with him and his work, I also wished to delve into an interpretive aspect of the thesis which was performative in nature. Since *kafis* as a genre are song compositions that were sung and performed, I wished to preserve that part of the tradition in the thesis. For this purpose, I am grateful to Akshaya Tucker and her friends for lending their time, effort and talent to performances of selected *kafis*, live recordings of which have been provided with this thesis. (See supplemental material for mp3 recordings). It was an immensely

interesting and enriching experience for me to witness not just the movement of Bullah's words and message across time, land and language, but also across genres of music.

CHAPTER 2

BULLA THE *ASHIQ*: LIFE AND EDUCATION

Abdullah Shah (b. 1680) was the birth name of the boy who would later become one of the most eminent Sufi poets of South Asia, and the master of Sufi lyrics in Punjabi—Bulleh Shah. The hypocorism was a term of endearment that would later become his identity. Despite his popularity though, little is known for certain about his life. He was born to Shah Muhammad Dervesh in Uch Gilaniyan,¹ which is now a part of Pakistan's southwestern Punjab. At some point in his early childhood,² the family migrated to Malakwaal,³ where they stayed for a short while before moving out again, this time to Pandoke.⁴ As was mostly the custom of his time, Bulleh Shah was home schooled for his earlier education by his father, who was versed in Arabic and Persian too. For his formal education, he would later be sent to Kasur, where he was under Hafiz Ghulam Murtaza's tutelage. For his spiritual education though, he found his inspiration in a completely different source—Shah Inayat.

Shah Inayat was an *Arain* from the Qadri *silsila* based in Lahore.⁵ The *Arain* were known as meagre gardeners. On Bulleh Shah's first encounter with Shah Inayat, again, differing accounts exist. The most widely accepted one goes thus: Bulleh Shah was on his way somewhere when he passed by Shah Inayat's garden. In his desire to draw the

¹ Many details of his early life are debated (firm evidence is lacking for most of them) but the basic details are widely accepted, perhaps for the sake of ease.

² Estimates vary from him being 6 months to 6 years old. See Puri and Shangari 1995, p. 2.

³ A village in Sahiwal district, southwest Punjab.

⁴ A village about 14 miles southeast of the city of Kasur, in western Punjab. Kasur shares the Ganda Singh Wala border to its west with India.

⁵ *Silsila* = chain. The term is common to Sufis and denotes spiritual lineage. The Qadri *silsila* derives its spiritual lineage from Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), the Sufi master from Baghdad.

Sufi master's attention, Bulleh Shah directed his attention to the mango tree in the plot and began silently reciting *Bismillah*.⁶ The mangoes began falling from the tree. Noticing this, Shah Inayat turned around and knew immediately that the mischief was caused by the youth standing in front of him. As it goes, he addressed Bulleh Shah and asked "*Kyun bhai jawan? Yeh aam kyun toray hain?*"⁷ Having successfully caught his attention, Bulleh Shah countered "*Sain, na aap kay darakht per charha na pathar maara. Main nay aap ka phal kaisay torr liya?*"⁸ In response, Shah Inayat just looked at him, then said "*Aik to chori ooper say seena zorri.*"⁹ *Agar tu nay phal nahin torra to kis nay torra hai?*"¹⁰ As if having had the depths of his soul plumbed by the gaze, Bulleh Shah is said to have fallen at Shah Inayat's feet in prostration. Shah Inayat then asked Bulleh Shah his name and what he wanted. To which Bulleh Shah's response was "*Ji mera naam Bullah hai aur main Rubb ko pana chahta hoon.*"¹¹ And thus began Bulleh Shah's passionate devotion and dedication to his Sufi master, a spiritual and personal relationship to which a large part of his poetic corpus is testament.

For his allegiance to Shah Inayat, Bulleh Shah was the subject of ridicule and censure. Not only did he have to put up with the annoyance of his family, who were

⁶ Arabic for "In the name of God."

⁷ Urdu. Translation: "Why then lad? Why did you pluck these mangoes?" For more details on the encounter described, see Puri and Shangari 1995.

⁸ Urdu. Translation: "Sir, I have neither climbed your tree nor hurled a stone at it. How could I have plucked these mangoes?"

⁹ Urdu proverb. A close equivalent proverb in English would be "Show me a liar, and I'll show you a thief." Literal translation of the proverb could be "For one, it's to steal. To be proud/take pride on top is another."

¹⁰ Urdu. Translation: "If you haven't plucked this fruit then who has?"

¹¹ Urdu. Translation: "My name is Bullah and I want to find God."

disgruntled and thoroughly ashamed that a Sayyid¹² was in spiritual servitude to an *Arain*, but the scorn of others around him too. Bulleh Shah pushed against this hostility without trepidation or care. In one incident, when he witnessed a young woman braiding her hair whilst awaiting her husband's return home, he braided his own and marched off to Shah Inayat's residence. In yet another incident, as a response to the disdain levelled at him, Bulleh Shah purchased donkeys and went around parading them, just to have people mock him even more.¹³ The expectation was not met with disappointment, and Bulleh Shah became "the donkey man."¹⁴ He went further though, and took his donkeys and began singing and dancing in a street square with intersexes.¹⁵ A number of *kafis* in his corpus are a resounding roar to the derision he faced, reasserting just as strongly and stubbornly his loyalty to Shah Inayat.¹⁶

Yet another incident in Bulleh Shah's life that holds supreme importance in the impact it had on his poetry was when he fell out of favor of Shah Inayat. Yet again, two separate accounts are circulated of the reason behind this dispute. The first relays that Shah Inayat got cross at Bulleh Shah's very vocal criticism of Islamic jurisprudence and its propagators. But since, in an earlier part in his life, Shah Inayat himself had moved to Lahore from Kasur after his opposition with the local cleric there, this reason seems inconsistent and unlikely.¹⁷ The second widely accepted account is as follows: A member

¹² Bulleh Shah's caste. The Sayyids derive their descent directly from the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. As such, there is much pride and superiority attached to the caste.

¹³ A donkey is a symbol of lowliness, stupidity, and disgrace in south Asian culture.

¹⁴ "Khoteyaan aala" was what the people called him in Punjabi. It literally means "The one with the donkeys" or "donkey man."

¹⁵ A community that is, to this day, unfortunately severely marginalized and stigmatized in both India and Pakistan. Pakistan only began issuing National I.Ds to intersexes in December 2009.

¹⁶ "Bulleh nu Samjhaawan Aaiyaan" amongst this translation selection being one of them.

¹⁷ See Puri and Shangari 1995, p. 6.

of Bulleh Shah's family was getting married. As such, Bulleh Shah sent an invitation out to Shah Inayat to attend. Shah Inayat sent one of his pupils in place of himself. This man was of humble origins and arrived in modest clothes to attend the wedding. The hosts decided not to offer him hospitality, and Bulleh Shah himself failed to attend to his *khwajatash*.¹⁸ The man relayed his humiliation upon returning to Shah Inayat, who was infuriated and refused to speak to Bulleh Shah again. The agony of being separated from the one person he loved the most is said to have driven Bulleh Shah into delirium. A large number of his *kafis* were inspired from this severance from his beloved, all of them carrying poignant degrees of anguish, pleas for forgiveness, and descriptions of the misery of detachment. Driven to desperation, Bulleh Shah took to the tutorship of a courtesan to learn proper singing and dancing, since Shah Inayat is said to have been very fond of those performative media. It is undetermined just how long he remained out of favor with Shah Inayat and under this courtesan's tutelage. Finally, wearing a veil and anklets in his feet, one day Bulleh Shah danced and sang at a shrine¹⁹ in public in attendance of Shah Inayat. When Shah Inayat recognized him, he is said to have exclaimed "*Oye tu Bullah ain?*"²⁰ To which Bullah's response was to fling himself at his master's feet and cry out "*Ji main bhulla aan!*"²¹ The reconciliation with his master finally returned peace and ecstasy in Bulleh Shah's life.

¹⁸ Turkish: Khwaja is the honorific title granted to Sufi teachers and means master/lord. *Tash* means companion. The compound means "fellow-pupil." See Brown 1968, p. 162.

¹⁹ An alternative version cites the street of Shah Inayat's house as the site of the incident. There seems to be an agreement, though, that "*Tere Ishq Nachaya*" is one of the *kafis* Bullah sang at this point. See Pollock's Introduction to Shackle's translations of Bulleh Shah 2015, p. xxiv.

²⁰ Punjabi. Translation: "Oi are you Bullah?"

²¹ Punjabi. Translation: "Yes! I am the forgotten." *Bhulla* also means wayward, directionless. See Choudhry 2012, p. 50.

CHAPTER 3

BULLAH THE BI-PARTISAN CRITIC: POLITICAL CONTEXT OF HIS TIMES

Born at a time when the Mughal empire was crumbling under its last emperor Aurengzib (1618-1707), Bulleh Shah experienced great political strife and turmoil from his early childhood days. One of the major conflicts was between the Sikhs and the Mughals. The enmity started with Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution by Aurengzib on November 24, 1675. Guru Tegh Bahadur was the 9th Nanak.²² The execution caused a furor in the Sikh community, and before long, they were up in arms against the Muslims. Guru Tegh was succeeded by his son Guru Gobind Singh, while Aurengzib was succeeded by his son Bahadur Shah Zafar. Although Bahadur Shah tried making peace with the rising Sikh opposition, his reign only lasted four years till his death in 1712,²³ after which he was succeeded by his son Jalandar Shah.

Guru Gobind's trusted general was Banda Singh Bahadur. Their partnership hardly lasted though, because Banda Singh met and pledged his allegiance to Guru Gobind in 1708—later that same year, Guru Gobind was assassinated by two pathans. The anti-Muslim sentiment strengthened further in the Sikh community. Banda Singh embarked on a destructive rampage to avenge his guru's death, in which he destroyed entire Muslim villages. Blind to the bounds of religion and caste in an increasingly divided India, Bulleh Shah had already braved the ignominy and chagrin of the *Ulema*²⁴

²² Term for Sikh Guru. The chain of Nanaks all derive from a direct link from Guru Nanak.

²³ The exact period of his reign, from coronation to death, is 19 June 1707-27 February 1712.

²⁴ The body of Muslim scholars specializing in Islamic sacred law and theology.

of his time by declaring Tegh Bahadur a *Ghazi*²⁵—a term reserved as the highest honor for Muslim martyrs. Later, he hailed Guru Gobind Singh in the following words:

*Na kahoona ab ki
Na kahoona tab ki
Hote na Guru Gobind Singh
Sunnat hoti sab ki*²⁶

The eulogy asserts that had Guru Gobind Singh not been around, everyone perhaps would have been a Muslim. Perhaps it was his refusal to pick the Muslim camp for reasons of a common-religion only, or his attempts at pacifying both sides in equal measure, or his vocal repudiation of the *Ulema* of his time, Bulleh Shah was greatly respected by the Sikhs and their current warrior hero Banda Singh, and he used this influence several times to intervene and cool matters down.

His critique and lament of the sociopolitical atmosphere of his times appears numerous times in his *kafis*.²⁷ It is due, in part, to the power of his secular approach and humanist stance, coupled with his defiance of the authorities of his time, be they religious or political, that Bulleh Shah's voice has found such a strong resonance in today's times too. His commitment to authenticity, paired with "(repugnance) to ritualistic bigotry, social conformism and subservience to despotism"²⁸ is perhaps what is unceasingly engaging in an increasingly divided world.²⁹

²⁵ Bullah laments his death in the question "*Kithay Tegh Bahadur Ghazi aye?*" Translation: "Where is the martyr Tegh Bahadur?"

²⁶ Whether this couplet is from a longer kafi or not can no longer be determined. The couplet is, however, ubiquitous in the religious forums of the internet—interestingly, both Sikh and Muslim, like SikhNet and Sunniport.

²⁷ See "Ultay Horr Zamanay Aaye" in this selection, "Kapoori Ryorhi Kyunker Larray Pataasay Naal" is another kafi emblematic of the tumult of these times.

²⁸ Matringe, in "Disguising Political Resistance in the Sufi Idiom" (2006), p. 3.

²⁹ Pollock calls this an "attractive universality."

CHAPTER 4

PUNJABI: LANGUAGE, FOLK TALES, AND KAFIS

Punjabi, a biscriptural language of the Indo-Aryan family, is written in Gurmukhi (lit: from the Guru's mouth) and Shahmukhi (lit: from the king's mouth).³⁰ The Gurmukhi script is used in Indian Punjab and runs from left to right. The Shahmukhi script is a sub-script of the Persio-Arabic *Nasta-liq* script used in Urdu. The Shahmukhi runs from right to left and has an additional four alphabets to the Urdu alphabet.

Punjabi is divided into 6 dialects: Doabi, Malwai, Majhi,³¹ Seraiki,³² Pottohari and Dogri. It takes influence from Persian to its west and Braj to its east. Braj Bhasha is recognized as a dialect of western Indian Hindi, and is different from Awadhi and Khariboli, which are the modern forms of Hindi and Urdu respectively. The Braj influence on Punjabi takes heavily from the Sikhs, especially the *bhakti* tradition of Sikh gurus. Hymns of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) were collected together with earlier *bhakti* poets and assembled in the *Adi Granth* in 1604. The earliest known extant literary work in Punjabi, however, is credited to the Punjabi Sufi saint Baba Farid,³³ whose verses are also said to be included in the *Adi Granth*. The very first origins of Punjabi literature are traced back to Hattha Yog Panths under Gorakh Nat (940-1031).³⁴ Those writings, however, reached their current audience heavily modified after the advent of Islam after

³⁰ See Shackle 2015, p. ix.

³¹ The dialect spoken across central Pakistani Punjab, and the Amritsar-Lahore-Faisalabad belt in western Pakistan and eastern Indian Punjab.

³² In the National Consensus of Pakistan of 1981, Seraiki and Hindko were granted statuses of separate languages.

³³ Born Sheikh Farid-ud-din Mansur (1173-1266).

³⁴ See Puri 1997, p. 131.

Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sindh and southern Punjab in 712. The publication of Punjabi texts, however, did not take off before the turn of the 20th century, despite there being print technology available.³⁵

There are debates on the origin of Punjabi. Orientalist studies trace Prakritic origins, whilst contemporary Pakistani scholars affix Dravidian roots to the language. Punjabi is also identified as the only tonal language in the Indo-Aryan family, with four recognized tones: level-tone, high-fall, low-rise, and a combination of the high-fall and low-rise. This gives the language a rhythmic quality that readily lends itself to music. Mystic poets of the region have been recorded as employing words and expressions freely across all dialects. Bullah's primary dialect is Majhi, but his verses include Seraiki and Potohari in numerous instances. By his time, an organically evolved literary diction—*Maanjhi*—had formed, which offers itself to and induces metaphors heavily. He composed his *kafis* at a time when Punjabi had already moved into its contemporary form that persists to this day. So he was using language that was easily accessible to the people around him—a fact that comes hardly as a surprise given his fearlessness was coupled with a need to articulate his opinions through his poetry.

The genre of *Kafi* can be seen as a form of a folk ballad indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. They arose originally as a form of song compositions and can hence be seen as an orally transmitted form of poetry that is meant to be sung. Dennis Matringe observes the structure of a *kafi* as follows: “The typical 18th-century *kafi* consists of a series of quatrains punctuated by a two verses chorus. The meter has a fixed number of metrical instants; the first three verses of a quatrain rime together, while the last one

³⁵ For more, see Mir 2010, pp. 91-94.

rimes with the chorus.”³⁶ The refrain of the *kafi* is its central and defining feature. The refrain can be a single line or have two. Each stanza that forms the body of the *kafi* is thus preceded and followed by the refrain, and the refrain is in turn punctuated by these stanzas, which can be couplets, quatrains, tercest etc. Since the very purpose of the *kafi* is, in fact, the enterprise of rendering it musically, the trait of the aforementioned climatic line, indispensable to the genre in its repetitive and cyclic nature, already lends itself to the form of music. Much like the common structure of a lyric song would consist of an intro, verses, chorus and an outro, the *kafi* can be seen as a song which differs from other song structures but rests in the same genre. The transition of a *kafi* from its origins to the modern recording studio, then, is not a travel across a meta-genre but rather a move across the sub-classified types that populate a genre. The differences in the studio or live adaptations and performances of the *kafi* lie in the improvisations of the performers, the instrumental music accompanying the lyrics and the structure of the sub-type the *kafi* is sung in. The *kafi*’s refrain, though, had a somewhat unappreciated status before. British colonial officials did not warm up to it, finding it wasteful and irksome.³⁷ For perspective, for example, Mir thinks “the climatic line is an essential constituent but while composing a book, for convenience, it is not necessarily repeated after every line or stanza.”³⁸ Muhammad Asif Ali Khan adds to the consensus: “All the lines coming after every climatic line in a Kafi, all the lines that follow it have their own autonomous value. But each line gives its full meanings when read with the climatic lines.”³⁹

³⁶ Matringe 2006, p. 4.

³⁷ Hence the movement of Punjabi to publishing houses took its time. See Mir 2010, p. 94.

³⁸ Quoted in Bhutta, “Kafi” (n.d.), p. 2.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

The first printed edition of Bulleh Shah's work did not arrive until about a century after his death, appearing as lithographs first.⁴⁰ The earliest print edition came out in 1889, edited by Anvar Ali Ruhtaki, which was reprinted in Pakistan in 2006. This edition had 116 *kafis*. The next edition came out in 1896 and had 131 *kafis*, along with Bulleh Shah's works in other genres. Mohan Singh Ubirai came out with a critical edition in 1930. Faqir Muhammad Faqir's comprehensive assortment of Bulleh Shah's work, which came out in 1960, is considered a cornerstone that all contemporary compilations are based on. The latest versions are the 1976 edition by Nazir Ahmed and the 1991 edition by Muhammad Sharif Sabir.⁴¹ Regarding Bulleh Shah's corpus, individual *kafis* cannot be dated with certainty, because Bulleh Shah made public his poems by singing them. The poems themselves contain no dates or datable events. Consequently, they cannot be ordered in any sort of linear chronology. Most compilations either list the *kafis* in alphabetical order (like Nazir Ahmed) or group them thematically (like Puri-Shanagri). Lajwanti Ramakrishna took the liberty of ordering them according to stages he perceived in the development of Bulleh Shah's thought. The results have not won wide acceptance: since there *is* no chronological context available for the *kafis*, where does one derive these stages from? How does one ascertain the development and movement from one stage to the next when the chronology to bolster that narrative is absent to start with?

Studies of the etymology of the genre have sparked conflicting debates. For example, Makhdoom Muhammad Zaman Talib-ul-Maula comments, "The word is actually Qafi (rhyme scheme) related to Kafi, That is rhymed speech. It means the words

⁴⁰ See Shackle 2015, p. xxxi.

⁴¹ For complete publication information on Bulleh Shah, see Shackle 2015, pp. xxxi- xxxv.

or sentences which use rhyme.”⁴² Abdul Ghafoor Qureshi tells us, “Kafi is in fact a distortion of the word Qavafi in Arabic dictionaries. It has been mentioned as concise poetic composition. But there is no reference to this genre in Arabic literature.”⁴³ Sharif Kunjahi, however, differs and notes, “To read Kafi as rhyme scheme (Qafia) is not correct...the real word was Kav. It is called Kafi because in Sindhi and classical Punjabi, the last letter is not a consonant and usually it would have been pronounced with a declining accent.”⁴⁴ Scholars will, however, agree that the genre itself is a rhymed composition with the distinctive feature of a climactic line that is repeated throughout the poem at intervals. And while there is speculation surrounding the source of the term designated for the genre, there is a prevailing consensus on studies of the form and content of the genre itself, most pointing it out as indigenous and linguistically exclusive to Punjabi and Sindhi that is specific to the Muslim mystic philosophers and poets of the Indo-Pak region.

Punjab is also the land of folk-tales that have seeped into the cultural fabric and been absorbed into the language. The province is irrigated by five main rivers. From south to north these are: Sutlej, Ravi, Chenab, Jehlum and Indus. Each river has a folk tale affiliated with it. These folk tales are mostly romances tragic in nature. Whether one can call them romance-tragedies or tragic-romances is up for debate. The eponymous romance-tragedy of Punjab is Hir Ranjha, associated with the river Chenab. The folk tale was further popularized by Waris Shah (1722-1798), the Punjabi poet who wrote an epic poem based on the tale. Waris Shah was Bulleh Shah’s contemporary, and

⁴² Quoted in Bhutta, “Kafi,” p. 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Bullah's poetry has innumerable references to the Hir Ranjha saga. The story, in concise, is as follows: Dheedo Ranjha is the eighth and youngest son of a villager in Takht Hazara.⁴⁵ He is his father's favorite, a partisan love that his other seven brothers do not take kindly to. After his father's death, Ranjha is driven out of his home by his brothers' sour behavior. He leaves home and reaches Jhang, a city situated on the east bank of Chenab. Jhang happens to be the stronghold of the affluent Sials, whose leader is the chief of the city. His daughter is Hir. It is while reposing in a barge after having traversed across land and river that Ranjha first meets Hir. It is her barge he is resting in, and Hir scolds him for it. The encounter quickly devolves into love-at-first-sight though. Hir urges him to find employment under her father as a herdsman. The employment would afford them both proximity too. Ranjha complies and is hired. Their love affair becomes known though, and Hir is married off to a man in the powerful Khera clan by her enraged parents. Desperate not to be separated, Hir urges Ranjha to disguise himself as a yogi and follow her to her in-laws. Once they're there, Ranjha plots Hir's elopement with her sister-in-law—a development that comes completely unexpected given the in-law culture of the area. The lovers succeed in escaping and reach Jhang again, where Hir's family promise to wed them both. While Ranjha, having thus been assured, leaves for Takht Hazara to prepare for the wedding, Hir's family poison her in his absence. When news reaches Ranjha he dies in shock and grief.

While the tragic aspects of the romance would seem to jump out most, the text is also seen as a mystical allegory. Equally plausible is the categorization of it as a text in

⁴⁵ A town in Sargodha district, central Pakistani Punjab.

morality and conduct.⁴⁶ The text, though, can be seen as a combination of all these categories, and still elude a definitive form of classification. Hir, in her vivacity, strength and confidence is the active instigator and pursuer, while Ranjha, in his submission and subservience, is the passive of the two. Hir is consistently painted, across poetry and perception, as the more passionate lover of the two but Ranjha receives his due as the lover who is ready to go any lengths for his beloved. Hir's resistance to her forced marriage to the Khera clan has passed into the language as a metaphor for opposing socially constructed norms and truths, while Ranjha's dedication has become a metaphor for undying devotion. Seen together as a pair, Hir and Ranjha have become a metaphor for the struggles of spiritual advancement in order to attain union with an ultimate truth. Bulleh Shah's poetry is replete with references to this folk-tale, where time and again he refers to himself as Hir, or assumes the voice of Hir.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Hosein Syed 1968, p. 31 (henceforth cited as Syed 1968).

⁴⁷ In this selection, see "Ranjha Ranjha" and "Ranjha has come as a Jogi."

CHAPTER 5

SUFISM: A PRIMER AND GLOSSARY

Sufism is the Islamic form of mysticism, and knowledge of some key concepts and terms of Sufism are indispensable to any study of its type of text. Considered essentially a Persian product, Sufism entered South-Asia through Persian influence. After the advent of Islam under Muhammad bin Qasim in 712, the region became accessible to Turkic-Mongol invaders, whose descendants—the Mughals—would later accord Persian language and culture an unprecedented importance in the region. They declared Persian as the official language and took a mixture of Persian-Turkish culture to new heights.⁴⁸ The confluence was chiefly Persian and the Mughals whole-heartedly extended patronage to Persian arts and poetry. As Iranian ideologies began their perpetuation in the region, Sufism glided in with just as much ease. Sufi shrines began spreading rapidly across the region, and Sufi masters gained immense popularity. To this day, a Sufi master is called *Pir* in the region, which is Farsi for “guide.” The “*Pir*” is synonymous with the desire for spiritual advancement, and hence becomes a “*murad*” for the seeker of truth. “*Murad*”, literally, means a desire, a wish. So the seeker becomes the “*Murid*,” i.e. the pursuer of that desire, that wish. So the pupil is known as *Murid*. *Murshid* is yet another term accorded to Sufi masters, which also means “teacher.”

In the quest for spiritual advancement, the *Murid* offers an unqualified and nonretractable allegiance to the *Pir*, called *bai'at*. The relationship between the two then

⁴⁸ See Bennett Islam, “Role in Stimulating South Asian Islam” (2012), p. 18.

becomes symbolic of the attainment of *ishq-e-haqiqi*.⁴⁹ Through various differing practices of music, dance and *Dhikr*,⁵⁰ the *Murid* then progresses along the quest for Divine Truth and Unity called *tassawuf*. The *Murid* becomes a *faqir* (servant) to the *Pir*, and is expected to contribute manually to tasks too. This practice is based in instilling humility amongst the pupils, whose *Pir* is just as actively involved in labor. During *dhikr* and practices of music and dance, the aim is to escape the corporal and transcend into the spiritual—the resultant state of blissful ecstasy, which is completely unaware of the material world, is called *wajd*. The *Murid's* symbol for the divine becomes the *Pir* on earth, and love for the material (called *ishq-e-majazi*) is slowly cleansed from the body.

The *Murid* goes through subsequent stages of annihilation and finally escapes the corporeal form we reach the earth in, and unites with the divine. This begins in *ishq*, which is both “an expression and an imagination”⁵¹ in Sufism. The imagination part of it comes as a form of contemplation and meditation where the student focuses on vividly imagining the *Pir*. This invokes the *Pir* and his spirituality in the *murid*, who then progresses onto annihilating the self for the will and approval of the Sufi master. This stage is then called *fana-fi'l-Sheikh* (annihilation in sheikh), which is a precursor to the next stage of *fana-fi'l-rasul* (annihilation in the Prophet), which then leads to the last stage—*fana fi'llah* (annihilation in Allah).⁵² The most renowned proclamation of *fana fi'llah* is ibn-e-Mansur Al-Hallaj's “*Ana al-Haqq*”—I am the Truth. The proclamation earned him a death sentence by the religious authorities of his time. *Wajd* is a means of

⁴⁹ Meaning: Divine Love.

⁵⁰ Meaning: Mention. *Dhikr* is the practice of repeating God's names.

⁵¹ Chaudhry 2012, p. 48.

⁵² See Valdocini 2012, p. 38.

inducing these states of *fana*. *Fana* then leads to what can be seen as a form of immortality—*baqa*, which means “everlasting subsistence in God.”

One of the most pertinent philosophers to Sufism would be Ibn-Arabi.⁵³ An active perpetuator of “inter-faith dialogue,” Ibn Arabi’s “mystical vision “Everything is He (*hama ust*)’ found expression in a perception of a world filled with dialogue and appreciation of the faiths of others.”⁵⁴ On his impact on the Sufism of the subcontinent, Shyhawk says,

While the ontological monism implied in ibn Arabi’s vision of the doctrine as “Everything is He” was (as is) rejected by a majority of the orthodox Sunni *ulema*, his influence on...Sufi thought is beyond estimation/ If only to explain, modify, or correct the apparent pantheism in the great Shaikh’s vision, by the first half of the fourteenth century every Sufi from al-Andalus to Hindustan had at least heard of, if not seriously studied [his] *Fusus al hikam* (“Bezels of Wisdom”) and *Futuh al-Makkiyah* (“The Meccan Revelations”). Though the first explicit references to [his] doctrines of the Oneness of Being (*wahdat ul wujud*) appear suddenly en masse in the writings of the Sufis of the Subcontinent in the latter half of the fourteenth century, there is evidence to suggest that even as early as Hazrat Mu’in ud-Din Chishti of Ajmer (d.1236), who was a contemporary of ibn Arabi, a doctrine very similar to ibn Arabi’s unity of being was the centerpiece of Chishti teachings in the Indian Subcontinent.⁵⁵

Ibn Arabi’s vision encompassed all differing religions by positing an absolute transcendental form of the divine. This theory was taken a step further by the Sufis of India by morphing the concept into *Wahdat ul-Shuhud* (Unity of Witnessing). The polarity is placed directly in man, by asserting that the Truth is witnessed in the heart of a believer, and is not an external manifestation of any sorts. This meant that God, from Ibn Arabi’s vision that Truth was singular and the ultimate Unity, and therefore accessible *for*

⁵³ Born Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-Arabi al-Hatimi in 1165 in Murcia.

⁵⁴ Shyhawk 2012, p. 236.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

all, was repositioned directly by the ensuing interpretation and development to that the Truth is present *in* all. This equality and legitimacy of all beliefs found a very strong voice in the Sufis of the Subcontinent, and it found a particularly potent expression in Bulleh Shah. Although there are numerous instances in his *kafis* where he vocalizes this idea, the most powerful perhaps is in the following lines:

Dha day mandir dha day masjid

Dha day jo kujj dhainda

Per kissay da dil na dhain

*Rab dilaan vich renda*⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Punjabi. Translation: Tear down the temple, destroy the mosque / Demolish whatever can be / But never break anyone's heart / For God lives in hearts.

CHAPTER 6

QAWWĀLĪ AND SUFIANA KALAM: ANOTHER EXPRESSION OF KAFIS

The *kafi*, in its original form, is devoid of a Hook (or a pre-chorus). Versions that have travelled across the sub-genres, into *Qawwālī* or *Sufiana Kalam* especially, have metamorphosed the original into completely different versions. Where the lyrics are retained, the melodic, rhythmic and beat restructuring in a *Qawwālī*, for example, would produce a completely different version of the same *kafi* than its adaptation in a *Sufiana Kalam*. To elaborate, *Qawwālī* is a male-exclusive genre that employs the hierarchy of a head-*Qawwal* leading his accompanying vocalists— *Humnavas*— through a sing-and-repeat form of presentation. The Head-*Qawwal* sings a phrase, that is then repeated by the *Humnavas* and the *Qawwālī* hence proceeds in a turn-taking format. Moreover, any *kafi* being sung in the *Qawwālī* format is never just sung in exclusivity of the poet's own lyrics. A *kafi* of Bulleh Shah, say, being sung in the *Qawwālī* format will not limit itself to his language (Punjabi) or his prose only. The genre features a mix of Arabic, Persian, Urdu/Hindi verses from other Sufi poets and, commonly, will open with verses from Amir Khusro as a means of paying homage to the creator of the genre of *Qawwālī*.⁵⁷

Abbas notes,

A typical performance of *qawwālī* ritual begins with a *qaul* or *hadith* in Arabic. Alternatively, it may begin in Persian, which is considered the language of higher intellectual thought. To establish the authenticity of their texts, the musician recite the initial verses in Arabic or Persian and then switch to the vernacular. This can be either Urdu, Hindi, Purbi, Brajbhasha, Sindhi, Siraiki, Panjabi, Hindko,

⁵⁷ See comparative model 1.5 in Burney Abbas 2002, p. 10 (henceforth Abbas). Also see Qureshi 1999, pp. 63-98 and Qureshi 1986.

Baluchi, or any other code depending on the audience and the speech communities involved in the event. The dialect of the performers themselves is significant as they switch codes and use many linguistic and musical improvisations to communicate with their listeners.”⁵⁸

These opening verses can be seen as a sort of setting for the *Qawwālī* that is subsequently performed. In borrowing from other Sufis, the performers not only establish the authenticity of the text, but also draw from a long and rich Sufi tradition where predecessors influenced and enriched the subsequent Sufis to come. Every live performance of a *kafi* in the *Qawwālī* format tends to differ from the other ones. This variation arises due to a number of factors. Firstly, the opening of a *Qawwālī*, as mentioned before, can be verses in Arabic, Persian or other vernaculars, mostly borrowed from other Sufi poets and not from the poet whose *kafi* comprises the major body of the *Qawwālī*. This means that if a performance of a *Qawwālī* opened with verses from Amir Khusro, then a second performance can borrow verses from, for example, Lal Hussain, Waris Shah, Khawaja Ghulam Fareed or any of the other Sufi poets and philosophers of the Persio-Arabic tradition or the Indo-Pak region. The second factor is the *alaap*—an indispensable part of the structure of classical form. Defining what exactly an *alaap* is and encompasses is tremendously difficult, if not near impossible, because of the fluid nature of this component of classical singing. *Alaap* can be described as an on-the-spot improvisation of either pure wordless singing (consisting of humming sounds like “aaaa,” “hoooo” etc) or a play with “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa”⁵⁹ in a way that the singer completely dispenses with traditional musical progression (called *Arohi*) or regression

⁵⁸ Abbas 2002, pp. 11-12

⁵⁹ Eastern equivalents of the Western solfege “Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do” in classical training. This is called a Sargam in Indo-Pak classical jargon. I draw this knowledge from my own brief classical training.

(called *Amrohi*),⁶⁰ and mixes the individual syllables in any way that is completely improvised and unplanned. An *alaap* can feature an improvisation of both wordless humming and individual syllables of the *Sargam*. To illustrate, take, for example, in a live recording of *Mera Piya Ghar Aaya* by Ustad Nusrat, the *Qawwālī* opens with a completely different wordless *alaap* than other versions. Yet in two other versions, Ustad Nusrat opens the *Qawwālī* with the opening couplet of another of Bulleh Shah's *kafīs*—*Aavo Ni Saiyyon Rull Deyo Ni Wadhai*.⁶¹ In yet another studio recording version, Ustad Nusrat dives straight into the lyrics without any *alaap* or introductory verses to set the *Qawwālī*.⁶²

Where *Qawwālī* is an elitist male-exclusive genre, the musical genre of *Sufiana Kalam*, on the other hand, is its folk cousin. *Sufiana Kalam* allows the vocalist the breadth of the stage all to themselves. It is practiced by both men and women, and the genre focuses on solo vocalists delivering the *kafī* in its unalloyed form in the vernacular.⁶³ This genre, interestingly it would seem, is not only inviting, but also nurturing to female practitioners in particular. If *Qawwālī* has juggernauts like Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Aziz Mian and Sabri Brothers, then *Sufiana Kalam* has its queens in Abida Parveen, Reshma, Dai Haleema and Taj Mastani. *Qawwālī* is still reeling and attempting to recuperate from the massive loss of Ustad Nusrat in 1997, the genre having gone relatively quiet compared to the prolific output it saw during Ustad Nusrat's life.

⁶⁰ Again, I know this through my brief classical training.

⁶¹ The couplet goes “*Aavi ni saiyyo rull deyo ni wadhai / Main vurr paaya Ranjha maahi*.” The performances are a 1993 live performance of India-Pakistan's Golden Jubilee Celebrations and a 1993 concert at University of Washington Meany Hall. Both performances are available on YouTube. The entire Meany Hall concert was also released as an album by the University of Washington's ethnomusicology department.

⁶² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEhEMHsbP5L>.

⁶³ See the aforementioned comparative model in Abbas.

His nephews Rizwan and Muazzam Ali Khan have taken the mantle after their uncle. *Sufiana Kalam*, on the other hand, seems to be a form that self-replenishes rather quickly due to its inclusive nature perhaps, and while some losses are irreparable—Reshma’s in particular, who passed away in 2013 but had stopped singing long before that due to a battle with cancer—the genre has seen notable new additions like Sanam Marvi, Mai Dhai and the Nooran sisters. This, arguably, could be because the genre relies on the shrine-culture of Sindh and Punjab to supply and replenish its trove of stalwarts—its source lies in the devotion of its devotees, who lend their voices and put melody to the words of the Sufi mystics whose shrines they occupy. More often than not, these devotees are females who furnish the *kalam* they sing at the *Urs* celebrations of these shrines with particular gusto and emotionality.⁶⁴ Abbas also notes that

...the Sufi khanqahs (monasteries) were centers of learning where the faithful were inducted into spiritual discipline ... Devotees created rituals from their teachings and poetry ... An entire ritualistic and spiritual world grew around these shrines where women and children went in large numbers to pray, to supplicate, to bring offerings, and to seek relief from emotional familial and financial concerns... Throughout the centuries the Sufi shrines have provided women with security and shelter.⁶⁵

Of the singers of *Sufiana Kalam*, Abida Parveen is arguably the most prolific and versatile in her output, having sung in Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi and Hindko. Bulleh Shah’s *kafis* have also found their melody most notable in her voice. *Bulleh Nu Samjhaawan Aaiyaan*, *Bullah ki Jana Main Kaun*, *Ik Nuqte Vich Gull Mukdi Aye*, *Tere Ishq Nachayan* are amongst some of her most popular renditions of Bulleh Shah. It is interesting to note here that, even though she is singing in the form of *Sufiana Kalam*, Abida Parveen borrows from the tradition of Qawwālī and opens her *kalam* with verses borrowed from

⁶⁴ For more, see Abbas 2002, pp. 15-32.

⁶⁵ See Abbas 2002, p. 132

other Sufi poets. The main difference lies in that her introductory borrowed verses are exclusively in the vernacular in which she sings the main body of the *kafi*. So, for example, numerous performances by her of Bulleh Shah's *kalam* open with verses from Mian Muhammad Bukhsh, who also wrote in Punjabi. And when she sings Amir Khusro, she opens his *kalam* with either verses from his own Persian corpus (if the main *kalam* is sung in Persian) or *Khariboli* if the main *kalam* is in *Khariboli*, as in *Chaap Tilak, Tori Surat kay Balhari, Mo Se Bole Na*.⁶⁶

While *Qawwālī* and *Sufiana Kalam* would both fall under the ambit of classical forms, many adaptations of Bulleh Shah's *kafis* have been contemporized, with plenty of renditions of Bulleh Shah's *kalam*. While this popularity furthers the dissemination of his work, it sometimes comes at the cost of warbling the semantics and muddling the depth of the poems for the sake of accessibility. Linguistically speaking, Bulleh Shah's Punjabi would escape the grasp of the educated elite of Pakistan, who receive their education predominantly in English. Paired with an unfortunately aimed disdain at the regional languages, this training only further alienates the people from their linguistic roots. And while a lay Punjabi speaker from Kasur, say, may understand the language itself, the meaning behind it might still be elusive unless one were familiar with the context. Consequently, it took a mainstream pop adaptation of one of Bulleh Shah's most famous *kafis*, *Bullah Ki Jaana Main Kaun*, by Rabbi Shergill in 2005 to push a rather unwitting version of the poem suddenly into the spotlight. The guitar centric and percussion-laced version was an instant hit. While the tune latched itself onto most listeners, the complexity and depth of the *kafi* slipped away silently. None of the blame lies with

⁶⁶ Performances and their variations are available on YouTube.

Shergill himself, whose adaptation of the *kafi* I find commendable. Najm Hosein Syed laments,

The popularity of this poem, as of several others of Bulleh Shah, has been largely responsible for blurring its virtues. Popular applause where it may indicate the aliveness of any poem also signifies that the poem has, in the course of its life accumulated a certain amount of dead matter. There is no surer signal for a poet to overhaul his wares than an undefined acclaim. The popular reading of this poem takes the refrain to be a suave abstention from commitment of any kind—who knows and who can know, so let us shelve the ungainly business of knowing altogether. The appeal lies in the satisfaction yielded by the escape supposedly implicit in the refrain, from an essential inner questioning about reality. The popular interpretation is the result of a conveniently indifferent way of reading the poem. For a better appreciation of the poem it is necessary to rediscover the subtleties of tone and gesture inherent in each phrase. Also there should be an awareness of the cultural background of the form used here by Bulleh Shah... Bulleh Shah's question embodies a moment containing past, present and future time. The moment contains the total individual and social experience of human history. The rejection of suggested identities and affiliations when it comes is complete and indiscriminate and implies a passion for being anew, for recreating the I. There is no preference or more exactly, all preferences have fallen in favor of the unknown positive.⁶⁷

Since Bulleh Shah's *kafis* have not been chronologically dated, it is difficult to put a date on this particular *kafi*. Like most of his corpus expounding his humanist philosophy, his *kafis* were also very closely tied in with the daily struggles and happenings of his life. As mentioned earlier, in taking spiritual studentship under Sheikh Inayat of the *Arain* caste, Bulleh Shah had to put up with a lot of opposition from his family who censured him severely for entering into the servitude of a lower caste. In his impassioned replies to these complaints, accusations and externally imposed structures, he takes a proverbial sledgehammer to them in his *kafis* by cursing such objectors to hell⁶⁸ and asserting the

⁶⁷ Syed 1968, pp. 70-72.

⁶⁸ “*Jerha sanu Sayyid sadday dozakh milay sazaiyaan*” from *Bulleh Nu Samjhaawan Aaiyaan*. The lines can be translated as “Those who call me Sayyid, may you burn in Hell.”

source of his spiritual plentitude and bounty in his *Pir, Shah Inayat*.⁶⁹ Read in conjunction with this context, the vehement negation of all identities in the *kafi* alludes ultimately to his humanist philosophy of a society that dispensed completely with all discriminatory systems, such as castes, that throttled individual spirituality through oppressive mediators between the person and God in the form of religious institutions and their proponents, most notoriously the *Ulema*. The *kafi* then means something completely different than the escapist compliant meaning pop culture propounds.

The riddle at the center of this *kafi*—*Bullah ki jaana main kaun?*—can be translated and read in multiple ways. The three that jump out most obviously are:

1. Bullah who knows who I am
2. Bullah how do I know who HE is
3. Bullah how do I know the *whoness*?⁷⁰

Ustad's Nusrat's rendition of the *kafi*, in employing claps and drums, melodically places stress on “*Ki*” (how) and “*Kaun*” (who) in one line and then shifts the stress to “*Main*” (me) whilst retaining the stress on “*Ki*,” in its next repetition following immediately.⁷¹

This opens the *kafi*, in interpretational terms, to its true multifaceted nature. The shift in stress brings forth the different nuances in the central riddle, establishing the polarity between the “whoness” and “non-whoness” at one point and the “howness” and the “meness” at the other. The move occurs from a seemingly unassuming dichotomy of negation/reinforcement to plunge suddenly into the depths of knowledge and existence.

Syed summarizes this tussle eloquently when he points out that,

⁶⁹ “Jay tu loorain bagh baharaan, chaaker ho ja Araiyaan” from *Bulleh nu Samjhaawan*. The lines can be translated as “If you seek the orchard of spring, then enter the servitude of the Arain.”

⁷⁰ See Syed 1968, p. 71.

⁷¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbRPnehCgmk>.

...in answer to this chimerical question the poet with an amazingly casual touch recreates the entire panorama of human experience in Time. For an ultimate fulfilment man took up the search for identity and affiliation. Each level of experience deceived him with an answer which took the shape of a dogma, an institution, a belief, a value, an attitude or a relationship. But in the elemental tussle of 'I' and 'who' the child dismisses all the answers provided by the experience of man, breaking one toy after another in his frenzied curiosity. The poem is a dance of negative phrases accompanied by the double interrogative of the refrain.⁷²

The *Qawwālī* also shifts between Urdu and Punjabi and, in doing so, features many additions that Ustad Nusrat seems to have added himself as further fodder to the conundrum. At many points, he sings the original stanzas in Urdu instead of Punjabi, and has hence, in a way, undertaken a translation. At other points, he retains some Punjabi stanzas in their original form. Coke Studio⁷³ came out with a version of this *kafī* by Riaz Ali Khan, under the production of Rohail Hyatt.⁷⁴ The Coke Studio version retains the original *kalam* but takes melodic and instrumental liberties with the composition. This *kafī* featured as the second Bulleh Shah *kafī* that season, and was a precursor to the emergent trend of rendering Sufi *kafīs* and folk songs into fusion versions—a trend that was to gain immense strength and popularity with each subsequent season. The first time Bulleh Shah featured was in Season 2, in Saeen Zahoor's rendition of *Aik Alif* with the band Noori.⁷⁵ Noori themselves had previously released a rock rendition of Bulleh Shah's *Kuttay*.⁷⁶ The lyrics were vastly different from the original *Kuttay kafī* though, Noori wrote the song themselves in Punjabi, and borrowed the title, along with some

⁷² See Syed 1968, pp. 71-72.

⁷³ A series of live music recording sessions broadcast over the television and the radio. Full seasons are available on Youtube.

⁷⁴ Season 2, episode 4.

⁷⁵ The *Kafī* is alternatively titled "*Ilmo Buss Kareen O Yaar*."

⁷⁶ In their album *Peeli Patti aur Raja Jani ki Goll Dunya* released in 2005.

lines, from the original Bulleh Shah *kafi*.⁷⁷ So Coke Studio became a platform to awaken the public to the literary, cultural and linguistic gems of its own treasure chest. The initial Sufi songs under the banner can be categorized as taking the form of *Sufiana Kalam*, with Rohail Hyatt enlisting singers like Sanam Marvi and Abida Parveen; the studio also ventured into the *Qawwālī* form and brought stalwarts like Rizwan and Muazzam to redo some of Ustad Nusrat's most popular compositions, and the duo Abu Muhammad and Fareed Ayaz to bring into limelight the Persio-Arabic tradition of Amir Khusro. In Episode 1 of Season 5, Qayaas and Atif Aslam sang Bulleh Shah's *Mera Aye Charkha Naulakha*. The production changed hands after Season 6, and Strings, one of the most popular folk/rock bands of Pakistan, assumed the reins from Hyatt. Under their creative vision, Javvad Bashir did yet another version of this *kafi* in Season 7, which differed from the moody and dark version of Season 5. Javvad Bashir, himself part of the Mekaal Hassan Band to which he is the lead singer, himself was no stranger to the *kalam* of Bulleh Shah. Mekaal Hassan Band had released a completely re-envisioned version of Bulleh Shah's *Chal Othay Challiye* as a vista of the seven deadly sins. Both the audio and video of this version of the *kafi* were a far cry from the original *kafi*, but formed a stellar whole in a version that was original in many different ways, most prominently regarding the creative interpretation.

Even though Bulleh Shah himself was not survived by any descendants, biological or spiritual, his legacy is as undying as the spirit of his message itself. As the secular and humanist outcast of his times, he left a message that resonates even today amongst his readers and listeners. Musicians sing adaptations of his *kafis* still today, and

⁷⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pr6xZNu0LQ>.

the popularity of these renditions are as much a reflection on the continued admiration of his message as they are to the efforts of these handful of musicians to keep his legacy alive. As I learnt from one of the plays that the Ajoka theater company staged on Bulleh Shah's life,⁷⁸ his was the spirit that, even when its physical embodiment was thrown out of the city walls and denied a traditional religious funeral at his burial, managed to pull the city outside of its boundaries and relocate itself as his shrine at its center—a heart that beat continuous devotion into its dwellers and granted itself immortality by way of the beauty of its occupant's philosophy.

⁷⁸ The play was titled *Bullah*, written by Shahid Nadeem, directed by Madiha Gohar and staged in the NCA auditorium Lahore in 2009. I personally attended the staging.

CHAPTER 7

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Of the 15 *kafis* selected for translation, I have provided 3 different versions of each *kafi*. The *kafis* selected are amongst the most famous in Bulleh Shah's corpus. *Kafis* like *Bullah Ki Jaana Main Kaun*, *Bulleh Nu Samjhaawan Aaiyaan*, *Gharyai Deyo Nikaal* and *Tere Ishq Nachaya* also happen to be amongst those that are consistently re-adapted in contemporary music. With these choices, I make accessible linguistically to an English audience the *kafis* that are most easily found in contemporary adaptations in a wide variety of musical performances available on the internet. A part of me wished to preserve the aspect of the oral tradition from whence these *kafis* arose. Even as I provide a movement into the written, I wished to supplement it with musical interpretations of the *kafis* in order to retain their original performative aspect.

As an amateur translator, I have focused first on rendering the *kafis* as literally as possible, and then building on those versions in subsequent attempts to incorporate additional elements. The first version of each *kafi* is a literal translation, without too much regard for grammar and structure. For the purposes of this translation, I have attempted to relay what is being *said* directly, instead of what is being *implied*. The manner is akin to that of communicating the spoken word between two end-entities, whereby I am the interlocutor who is merely passing, through the medium of a different language, the direct words at one end to another, without much heed for the message. In order to avoid rendering the communicated words entirely unintelligible, however, I have

preserved the grammar of the target language in this version of the translation, with the aim of not obscuring the utterance altogether behind alien syntax. For example, a translation that preserved the grammatical structure of the source language would read “Gong-beater with away” instead of “Away with the gong-beater” that I have chosen. Similarly, “Awake night, doing worship” is represented by “They stay awake at night, they worship.” I have, however, opted to replicate, as closely as possible, the same structure in the translation as in the original *kafi*, unbound by the conventions of Western poetry. This means that I have preserved the same number of verses in the target language that are in the source text. Because the *kafi* is a separate poetic genre, I believe that it should be accorded that same differentiation in the translation.

For the second version, I have moved from the literal to the functional. With this version, I build upon the first literal translation and start incorporating the implied elements in the *kafi*, with a greater focus on the *essence* of the message than the words themselves. With this version, I have also moved into a more academic/scholarly domain, with emphasis on the choice of words, the placement of these words, and how to convey the kernel of the bountiful fruit. Metaphors are unwrapped and then repacked in either equivalent metaphors (if I felt they fit and conveyed the message), or rendered in what (I hope) would be a poetically induced form of reference. As with a lot of Bullah’s *kafis*, what is said is completely different from what is meant and implied. And the implications themselves are numerous, at times, for any one utterance. I employ this second version in order to capture some of these multiple valences. So, example, “Ranjha the herdsman toils amongst the livestock” from version I becomes “You may be ordinary in the people’s eyes, contemptible in your wretched caste” in the next version. Where I felt that there

was still a predominant subtext deserving of conveyance, I introduced that in the third version. For instance, “This Jogi’s eyes are round like bowls/ They set traps like hawks” in version I becomes “What beguiling, deceiving innocent eyes/ That set traps and lure in defeated lovers” in version II, which further becomes “Your eyes, that hold that guileless tranquil/ With exquisite turmoil, they deliver blows” in version III.

The third version of each translation is a song-writing exercise. In an attempt to replicate and preserve the original genre, I have undertaken this last version with creative liberties. The focus in these versions is more on internal rhythms, with no forced end rhymes (except for where they seem to have arisen organically). The last version then is more an intuitive exercise, with me taking on the role of a lyricist dominantly over that of a translator. The mood and tone of the original *kafi* has been my focus in these versions. So, for example, the urgent yet ecstatic, annoyed yet allayed tone of “Away with the gong-beater” becomes “Curse the clocks damn this time” in the song-writing version. Although I have preserved the number of verses across this version too, the rule has not been applied across the entire selection. As mentioned earlier, since I wanted to undertake this project as much as a musical and performative exercise as a written one, the primary aim of the last versions of these translations arose out of a wish to attempt to fashion pieces that would lend themselves (more readily, hopefully) to music and composition than the first two ones. These song-writing versions are a lot less specific (I dispense with most nouns and pronouns of the source text for this version) and a lot more creative. References to Ranjha, for example, are removed and a direct form of address is adopted in place.

The translation theory of Robert Bly has been a major influence, admittedly retroactively, in this translation exercise. In building up different versions of each *kafi*, I found his eight stages to be of great help. With each version, I incorporate some (if not all) movements borrowed from his stages. So, for example, in the very first stage of translating a *kafi*, I start with a version that dispenses with grammar, tone, meaning and syntax, translating word for word the source text into the target language. No writing from this stage makes it into the final draft though, because the text simply does not make any sense at all in English. From there, I build the literal version, where I incorporate the grammar of the target language into the translation, so as to convey what the literal utterance is, still dispensing with meanings. For instance, the first word-for-word translation of “Upside down times have come” read “Upside down and/more times come.” “*Horr*” in Punjabi can mean both “and” and “more,” depending on the sentence-context in which the word is used. In Bullah’s case here, where the *kafi* carries a tone of both a lament and pessimistic amusement of sorts, the reading can go both ways—with an emphasis on “*And* upside down times have come” as if to say “here we go...”, or “*More* upside down times have come.” Idiomatically, though, that would read awkwardly in English. So, in the first literal version, I forgo both “and” and “more,” sticking instead to the literal translation of the word “*Ultay*,” which means “upside down” in Punjabi. The angst-ridden tone of amused pondering is conveyed instead in the song-writing version through repetition in “what times what strange times!”

After the literal version, the matter shifts to revisiting the *kafi*, this time re-reading it keeping in mind any historically-furnished context, and the deeper meaning conveyed in the text. This stage requires a parallel visit to the thesaurus, in order to furnish words

that convey the implied meanings better than the words chosen in the literal version. I read the *kafis* as Sufi texts for this stage, as the verbalizations of Bullah's humanist Sufi philosophy. What the *kafi means* takes center-stage then. For instance, for "Whether you know it or not," after the literal version has been furnished, I delve into a critical analysis and exegesis of the *kafi*. Quite possibly composed during Bullah's separation from his *murshid*, the *kafi* carries a plea from Bullah to Shah Inayat to grant him an audience. So "step into my veranda" actually carries the plea to "grace me with your presence," which is what the second version carries. The metaphors are then unwrapped at this stage. For example, Ranjha's drudgery amongst the livestock, which is symbolic of Shah Inayat's low-standing caste, is unpacked and the allusion is referenced directly—"You may be ordinary in the people's eyes, contemptible in your wretched caste/ You are my pride and faith in your humility, O grace me with your presence." The unpacking of metaphors is not uniform though. In places I have searched for equivalents in the English language, but often I retain the metaphor's operative words from the source language into the target language, having either explained the metaphor in the introductory chapters, or provided an explanation in a footnote. The folk-tale of Hir and Ranjha, the metaphor most employed in the poetry, is narrated beforehand before delving into the translations, with the metaphorical value of Takht Hazara, Sials and Khera explained in specific footnotes. Lawrence Venuti's foreignization plays a major influence in this decision to retain some metaphors in the target language as they appear in the source language. Stemming from my own personal belief regarding languages as conceptual windows, I have opted to explain the breadth and depth of the concepts of those metaphorically and ideologically loaded terms in some version of each *kafi*, before moving to Eugene Nida's

domestication in subsequent versions. For instance, terms like “*ishq*,” “*alif*” and “*ahad*” have been left untranslated in some versions, with explanations provided in footnotes, to fully grasp the concept before delving into a linguistic adaptation of that concept in the English language in subsequent translation versions of the *kafi*. So “*ishq*” becomes “passionate love” in the second version of “*Mennu Ishq Hullare Dainda Aye*,” whilst “*alif*” and “*ahad*,” which are retained in the first version of “*Ranjha Jogeera Bun Aaya*” with explanations provided in footnotes, become “merged all variations into a unity” in the subsequent version. In the last version, the expression becomes “Through the murk of diversions, you found me my focus” to convey that sense of gratitude, love and gratefulness to a contemporary audience in easily understandable words. Similarly, the metaphor of holding onto a shirt’s hem signifies dependency and an unwillingness to let go in Urdu and Punjabi. I retained that metaphor in the literal version of “*Bulleh nu Samjhawan Aaiyaan*,” then moved onto “Let go of that Arain” in the second version of the *kafi*, to signify the meaning behind the urging of Bullah’s family. In the song-writing version, I domesticate the image to convey the tone of self-confident defiance of a lover, who opens the door, to the horror and outrage of the awaiting family, in their beloved’s shirt. The shirt becomes symbolic of a bold rebellion that brooks no intervention between the two lovers and their bond—a symbol that reaffirms the attachment between them. The translation hence becomes “They’re still standing at our door, in their anger and disconcert/ The irony? Well darling, I’m still wearing your shirt.”

Reciting the *kafi* numerous times was the stage that preceded the songwriting version. Capturing the cadence, internal rhythms and mood of the *kafi* was central to that version. Sound patterns became more and more evident through repeated recitations—the

undulations of register and rhymes that even a non-native speaker of Punjabi would catch if the originals were to be recited aloud. Every *kafi* has an inherent beat that is conveyed through vocalic or consonantal alliteration (whether intentional or not is beyond the investigative intentions of this project). This only further amplified and reaffirmed the performative nature of the originals. When I felt I had a fair understanding of the inherent cadence of the *kafi*, moving that rhythm, with some semblance, into the target language became the aim of the final stage. Capturing both the mood and the undulations of register was perhaps the toughest part of the project. As intuitive as the last versions are, the part of playing a lyricist at the cross-roads between two completely different linguistic and social milieus was a daunting challenge. Conveying both in an approachable and current form of English that foregrounded rhythm and mood was a step even more challenging. The alliance between imagination and intuition, however, aided this exercise. With greater artistic liberty came greater freedom of expression and more fertile ground to play around with words and expressions. So, for example, “*Tere Ishq Nachaya ker kay thaiyya thaiyya*” has an almost frantic energy in its cadence that lends itself readily to the medium of dance. The original chorus containing “*thaiyya thaiyya*” borrows from the language of classical South-Asian music and dance. With an aim to convey that paradoxical mania of agony and bliss, I transitioned from retaining “*thaiyya thaiyya*” in the first version to “aye aye aye aye” in the song-writing version, as I felt that the sound transferred not just the repetition, but also the same quality of melodic inclination and readiness towards adaptation in music as the original. The retention of “*thaiyya thaiyya*” is also yet another incident of adopting Venuti’s foreignization strategy, whereas the movement towards “aye aye aye aye” signals the attempt at

domestication. I found myself, particularly at this stage, subconsciously engaging in an exercise of translating every piece of music I heard whilst working on this project. It didn't matter what kind of song I was listening to, because if it were in English, I found myself translating it into Punjabi or Urdu in my head. And if it were in Urdu, Punjabi, Seraiki or another language I understood, my brain plunged into a translative exercise automatically. A lot of times I found myself debating internally over the poetics of the lyrics and composition; whether I'd rendered my translation more poetic than it was in the original version, whether I was missing something profound that needed to be conveyed, what rhythms in the written words could possibly convey a sense of the melodies in the original. This subconscious exercise was also a major aid and drill in translating Bulleh Shah's pieces here.

With each version of the translation, I aim at a different target audience. With the first, I hope to convey, and hopefully incite, interest and intrigue in the person of Bulleh Shah and his poetry to anyone completely unfamiliar with him. The purpose is to have a passing reader stop and wish for more on him and his compositions. With the more academic and functional version, I target the scholarly milieu of western academia who might be interested in hearing voices of the margins, with attempts to convey that voice in as close a poetically true version as the source, conveying the intrinsic meaning and philosophy of the elocution too. With the song-writing version, I hope to reach out to the students and performers of the arts and relay to them the voice of an artistic genius who commands immense respect and admiration in his region even today. Essentially, with this project, I hope that in some way I will be reaching out to anyone and everyone who may chance upon these translations, who might connect in different ways to the poetry

and be curious and intrigued enough to want to find out more about Bulleh Shah and the power of his philosophy—a message that was decades ahead of his time.

CHAPTER 8
TRANSLATIONS

Ik Nuqte Vich Gull Mukdi Aye

It All Comes Down to a Single Point

Version I

It all comes down to a single point

Clutch the point, forget calculations

Set aside all doubt-filled ledgers

Shed all vexations of death and the grave

Purify your heart of whims

The Truth comes home from this

It all comes down to a single point

To no avail you rub your forehead on the soil

And flaunt your bruise of piety⁷⁹

Your recitation of the *Kalma* is a farce

For you understand nothing of its essence⁸⁰

Can that which is the Truth ever be kept hidden?

It all comes down to a single point

Many return from the Pilgrimage,

⁷⁹ Regular practitioners of prayers often feature bruises on their foreheads from repeated prostrations. Bullah is basically telling off the “religious show offs.”

⁸⁰ i.e., You rattle out words without grasping their meaning.

Donning their blue robes to mark their success
You eat the earnings from selling your Hajj
Bullah how can anyone find this acceptable?
Can that which is True ever be concealed?
It all comes down to a single point
They traverse jungles and oceans
They insist on surviving on a few grains daily
Out of stupidity they emaciate their bodies
And thus they return home sickened
For nothing they starve through austerities
It all comes down to a single point
Hold tight the Master then⁸¹
In intoxication is freedom from care
Sans whims and sans burdens
Your heart is rid of pollution
Bulleh when has the Truth ever been stopped?
It all comes down to a single point

Version II

This⁸² is what it's all about
Forget everything else just hold on to this
Cast your doubts away

⁸¹ That is, the true service of God, Bulleh Shah says here.

⁸² "This" being the point, i.e., either the "black spot" mentioned above, or the inner truth. Depends on how the reader wishes to take it. He leaves the "point" unexplained so I leave "this" unexplained likewise in the translation.

To hell with hell and the grave!
Just keep a clean heart
This is how truth arrives
This is what it's all about
All those prostrations for nothing
Those lovemarks?⁸³ For nothing!
Fooling people with your sweet nothings
When you carry an empty heart with you
Has what's true ever remained hidden?
This is what it's all about
Come bring your farce of a piety
Wearing your masks of deception
Sell your love for a nibble of indulgence
How could I be fine with this?
Go on. Try stopping the truth then
This is what it's all about
Sitting in self-imposed exile
You refuse to eat more than a morsel
Idiot! Wasting yourself for nothing!
Come home then, with your fatigue
What wasted vigils, what wasted bodies
This is what it's all about

⁸³ I imagine here an erotic reinterpretation of the image from the first translation. Much like a lover would flaunt or exhibit lovemarks/bitemarks/bruises, so the analogy is transferred to these so called "lovers" of religion and God showing off their bruises of love.

Hold on lover hold on
In this carefree intoxication
I am free from the burden of wishes
Just a pure heart
What's true doesn't falter
This is what it's all about

Version III

Here's the deal, here's my version
Forget what you've been taught
Let go of what you've been told
Break free of polarities and biases
Just bask in this liberation
In this feeling of being afloat
Here's the deal, here's my version
Drop the act, come clean come forward
You pose as a savior, I know you as a robber
What use to plague your mind as such
Descend into madness, everything too much
Scrub clean that slate, every friction every touch
That created chaos, the noise behind your erosion
Here's the deal, here's my version

Ultay Horr Zamanay Aaye

Upside Down Times Have Arrived

This *kafi* refers to the Sikh rebellions against the Mughals, especially Banda Singh and Guru Gobind Singh's revenge of the assassination of Guru Gobind Singh by Aurangzeb in 1670. Historical accounts affirm Baba Bulleh Shah's ties with both Guru Tegh Bahadur and Banda Singh, and his attempts at dissuading both from violence. Bulleh Shah, much to the chagrin of the Mullahs of his time, famously called Tegh Bahadur a *Ghazi*—a term reserved for martyrs particular to Islam.

Version I

Upside down times have arrived
Hence I figured the secrets of the beloved
The crows hunt the hawks
Sparrows conquer kites
Horses peck on grains
While donkeys graze in lush fields
There is no loyalty among the kin
Be they elder or peers
No harmony exists between fathers and sons
Nor amongst mothers and daughters
The honest are pushed around
Whilst the liars are kept close
The front-seated sit impoverished
While the back benchers lie on carpets

The paupers are exalted to royalty
Whilst the princes go about begging
Bullah! The Lord has sent His command
Who can challenge His will?
Upside down times have arrived
Hence I figured the secrets of the beloved

Version II

Inverted times have come
Hence I found the secrets of the beloved
Crows hunt the falcons
While sparrows conquer kites
Horses peck on grout
While donkeys get lush greens
There is no loyalty amongst the kin
Whether old or young uncles
No agreement between fathers and sons
Nor between daughters and mothers
The honest are pushed around
While the treacherous sit close by
The front seated are without matting
While a carpet is spread for those at the back
The mad are bequeathed kingship
While the kings are begging

Bullah! The Lord has sent His command!

Who can quench this thirst?

Inverted times have come

Hence I found the secrets of the beloved

Version III

What times what strange times!

I unraveled your secret in these strange times⁸⁴

The crow hunts the falcon

Kites befallen to sparrows

What times what strange times!

I found your secret in these strange times

Horses left to chew on dust

And asses⁸⁵ feast on plenty

What times what strange times!

I unraveled your secret in these strange times

Away with you front seaters!

It's the back bencher's time to shine

What times what strange times!

I unraveled your secret in these strange times

The beggars are the new princes

While the princes beg on the streets

What times what strange times!

⁸⁴ Alternatively "I found my true friends in these strange times." I prefer this version.

⁸⁵ I use this noun for donkeys here to convey the true tone of derision Bullah has in this line of the poem.

I unraveled your secret in these strange times

The Lord has spoken! Come

Quench this thirst

What times what strange times!

I found your secret in these strange times

Bulleh Nu Samjhaawan Aaiyaan

Bullah's sisters and sisters-in-law came to caution him

This *kafi* is amongst those that was Bullah's response to his family's displeasure at assuming tutelage under Shah Inayat.

Version I

Bullah's sisters and sisters-in-law came to caution him

Heed our warning Bullah!

Let go the hem of the Arain's shirt

Why have you brought shame to the Prophet's progeny and Ali's children?

Go to hell those who call me Sayyid!

Swing on the swings of heaven those who call me Arain

That Arain Lord pervades all

The Lord doesn't care

He spurns the beautiful and embraces the ugly

If you seek the orchard of Spring

Become a servant to the Arain⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *Chakker = Nokar. A servant*

Why do you inquire after the caste of Bullah?

Be content in His Will

Version II

Bullah your family came to warn you

Heed our words, they said

Let go of that Arain

You're a shame upon us!

I say Go to hell all!

All you who call me Sayyid

I'm in paradise with my beloved Arain

He is my Lord⁸⁷

He doesn't care

My God wraps the ugly in his arms too

Where lies my everlasting Orchard?

In the slavery of my beloved

You ask about my caste then?

Know that I don't care one bit

Version III

O look they're here, my family's here

To tell me to steer clear of you

What shame! What horror! What infamy I bring

⁸⁷ The Sufi dynamic of Pir/Murid (Teacher/Student) is based on a notion of complete supplication and servitude to the spiritual teacher and guide, which culminates in an apotheosis where the teacher is collated with God, and through the teacher the student reaches God. Sufi poetry is replete with metaphors of Master/Slave, Divine/Created, Bride/Groom, etc.

To them who don't care for giving me hell
To hell with that, to hell with hell
You take my mark and I'll take yours
They're still standing at our door, in their anger and disconcert
The irony? Well darling, I'm still wearing your shirt.

Bullah Ki Jaana Main Kaun

Bullah! Who knows who I am?

The *kafi* remains in a state of suspension—employing a “neither-nor” structure. Bulleh Shah steers clear of affirming any state at all. Rather, the focus is on a negation of all states that culminates in a state of doubt where the identity of the self is no longer clear. This *kafi* is also among the most musically represented from Bulleh Shah's corpus.

Version I

Bullah! Who knows who I am?
I am neither the fastidious believer in the mosque
Nor am I intimate with the ways of unbelief
I am neither amongst the pure or the impure
Nor am I Moses nor Pharaoh
Bullah! Who knows know who I am?
I am neither to be found in the Vedas or the Holy Books
Nor am I amongst the addicts and the drinkers
I am neither amongst the ecstatic nor the intoxicated
Nor am I among the awake nor the asleep

Bullah! Who knows who I am?

Neither am I amongst the elated or the sorrowful

Nor am I of the virtuous or vile

I am neither borne of water nor of soil

Nor of fire nor air

Bullah! Who do I know who I am?

I am neither Arab nor Lahori

Nor Indian nor from the city of Nagore

Neither Hindu nor a Peshawari Turk

Nor do I reside in the city of Nadaun

Bullah! Who knows who I am?

I have not achieved the illumination of religion

And I am not of the kin of Adam and Eve

Nor have I repeated my name

Neither amongst the settled or the wandering

Bullah! Who knows who I am?

I know myself as the beginning and the end

And I recognize no one else

There is no one wiser than I

O Bullah! But who stands there?

Bullah! Who knows who I am?

Version II

Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?

I'm not in the belief of the mosque

Nor in the freedom of non-belief

That blemish in the unmarked?

I'm not Moses or Ramses

Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?

I'm not in the litany to the divine

Nor in the ways of the addicted and drunk

That hooligan amongst the hedonists?

Neither amongst the awake or asleep

Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?

I'm not amid the delirious or dismal

Nor blameless or abysmal

Borne neither of water nor dust

Nor fire or gust

Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?

I'm not an Arab or from Lahore

Or a Hindu from Nagore⁸⁸

Nor of Peshawar or a Turk

Neither am I a dweller of Nadone⁸⁹

⁸⁸ An area near Marwaar, India.

⁸⁹ A city that was the stronghold of the Rajputs for years. It is about 20 miles south of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India.

Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?
Still without the secret to sin's reprieve
Begotten of neither Adam and Eve
I didn't even get to choose my name
Rest and repose is not my aim
Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?
I am my own beginning and end
Knowing none, without a friend
Is there one more clever than me?
Come my beloved! Reveal thee!
Who am I then Bullah? Who knows?

Version III

What makes me? Who is this?
Neither here nor there
Nor thence and whence
Am I forlorn? Or is this bliss?
What makes me? Who is this?
Break free break free!
From shackles of choice
I inhabit the void. I *am* the abyss
What makes me? Who is this?
The tranquil waters?
Not enough bend to give

The air? Too empty of substance, too full of will

Meager is the height of the sparks that hiss

What makes me? Who is this?

Raati Jaagein Karain Ibaadat

They Stay Awake At Night, They Worship

Version I

They stay awake at night, they worship

Awake at night the dogs

Are above you⁹⁰

Not ceasing in their purpose of barking

Sleeping on heaps of rubbish (the dogs)

They are above you

They don't desert the door of their master

Even if they get beaten with shoes (the dogs)

They are above you

Bullah Shah buy some goods

Otherwise they're winning (the dogs)

They are above you

⁹⁰ The word Bullah uses translates directly to "you." But the *kafi* carries a tone of addressing a collective, including himself. So it could just as easily be "Better than us." Because while Bullah is most definitely critiquing the pseudo-religious self-righteous trumpeters, he is certainly not presenting himself as a repository of virtue as a counter-example. The *kafi*, to me, reads more as an Ode to loyalty, with the dogs being the ultimate example of this quality.

Version II

You stay awake at night, you worship

The dogs stay awake at night

Better than you

There's no stopping them in fulfilling their purpose of barking

Sleeping on rubbish heaps

Better than you

Never deserting their master's door

Even if they get beaten with shoes

Better than you

Bullah Shah acquire some resources

Elsewise they're winning the game

Better than you

Version III

So you stay up all night in prayer?

Well so do dogs for their masters

They're better than you

They bark to warn

Sleep on your remains of scorn

They're better than you

To their owners they stay true

Even when pelted by shoes

They're better than you

Bullah prepare some defences!
Because the dogs have won at this
They're better than you

Tere Ishq Nachaiya

Your Love Made Me Dance

This *kafi* is amongst those that Bulleh Shah wrote during the period his *murshid* Shah Inayat was cross with him and had ceased all communication with him. Grief-stricken, Baba Bulleh Shah went to take dancing lessons from a courtesan of the city, knowing that Shah Inayat was fond of music and dancing. Finally, one day, he won Shah Inayat over with his lyrics and dance. The song that he sang was this *kafi*. This *kafi* is also one of the most musically represented of Bulleh Shah's *kafis*. From *Qawwalis* by Ustad Nusrat and *Sufiana Kalam* by Abida Parveen, to modern renditions by mainstream singers, this *kafi* has become musically indispensable to festivals like *Mela Chiraghaan*. The “*thaiyyan thaiyya*” in the refrain offers a particularly hard to navigate translational impasse: a term stemming from the classical music traditions of India and Pakistan, it is used more as a metronomic gauge for beats in singing and dancing than as a semantically imbued word itself. Similar examples are “*Ta*,” “*Tai*,” “*Tak*,” “*Thai*” and their various conjugates like “*Takthai*,” “*Thaitak*” “*Tathai*” “*Taitak*” etc. After grappling somewhat with the problem, I decided to recognize it for what it was—an untranslatable term, and left it as such in the translation.

Version I

Your love made me dance *thaiyya thaiyya*

Your love has made a home inside me

I filled and drank the cup of poison myself

Come quickly O helpful doctor⁹¹

Or else I shall die

Your love made me dance *thaiyya thaiyya*

The sun is hidden, the red glow remains outside

O I sacrifice myself for a glimpse of your visage again

Master! I forgot, did not go with you

Your love made me dance *thaiyya thaiyya*

Don't stop me, Mother, from this love

Who can turn the boat from going to its dock?

I lost my sanity and went with the rower

Your love made dance *thaiyya thaiyya*

The peacock sings in the copse of this love

I see my beautiful beloved in the Qibla and Ka'aba

After injuring us you never inquired after

Your love made me dance *thaiyya thaiyya*

Bullah Shah you're brought to Inayat's door

Who gave me red and green clothes to wear⁹²

⁹¹ "*tabiba*" = physician. I use this alternately in the next version.

Wherever I stomp my heel, I find my beloved there⁹³

Your love made me dance *thaiyya thaiyya*

Version II

Your love makes me dance and swing like so

Your love lives within me, has made a home of my heart

A cupful I happily drank of this poison myself

You're my only medicine so come quick physician!

Your love makes me dance and swing like so

The sun is down, the sky bleeds red

O to have but a glimpse of your face again

Why did I not go along with you?

Your love makes me dance and swing like so

What news of you or your affections?

You crash into me with the force of a hammer

And all I recall in my battered state is you

Your love makes me dance and swing like so

Don't stop me mother! From this love

No one can turn a boat sailing in this tide

I have lost my senses I'm besotted with the rower

Your love makes me dance and swing like so

Listen to the peacock calling from his love nest

⁹² Red is the traditional color of a bride's dress in most South Asian cultures, especially Pakistan. Green is the color associated with spirituality and purity in Sufism. It is interesting how white replaces both colors for both purposes in Christianity.

⁹³ This line is from the Puri and Shangari version of the Kafi.

I see god in my beloved
You wound me then walk away
Your love makes me dance and swing like so
Here I am, at your doorstep lover!
Doused in the bliss of your reds and greens
Where I imagined a favor, I met with loss instead
Your love makes me dance and swing like so

Version III

Aye aye aye aye
I'll dance this dance of love-fraught joy
My loves my poison my loves my cure
My loves my ailment and my antidote
Quick quick! Come quick precious!
I'm burning up in this passion so pure
Watch my anguish unfold
As the wings of a butterfly
Aye aye aye aye
I'll dance this dance of love-fraught joy
The crimson horizon swallows the sun
Do you not remember I am your one?
Take me with you! Take me away
Watch me unfurl, watch me come undone
Aye aye aye aye

I'll dance this dance of love-fraught joy
The waves attempt to match my passion
They rise but crash
Step away step away from my hearts furore!
Your embers glow
But ablaze is my ash
I twist my head and slap my thigh
Aye aye aye aye
I'll dance this dance of love-fraught joy
The rower, the peacock, the soldier, the saint
Hear them call out, call out their lover's name
The blue, the green, the red. For shame!
I'll paint these streets with my song and cry
Aye aye aye aye
I'll dance this dance of love-fraught joy

Buss Ker Ji Hunn Buss Ker Ji

Stop Please...Stop Now:

Version I

Stop please just stop now
Talk a bit pleasant to me
You live in my heart
Why then do you run like so from me?

With magic you pull in my heart
Where will you run off to now?
Stop please just stop now
Talk a bit pleasant to me
You don't cease killing those who are already dead
Carrying on hitting them like a bat strikes a ball
Suffocating those who speak mid-utterance
Now pull your arrow taut
Stop please just stop now
Talk a bit pleasant to me
You hide and I catch
You're tied up in my ringlets⁹⁴
Yet, you still have energy to hide
There is no escape from entrapment
Stop please just stop now
Talk a bit pleasant to me
Bullah Shah! I'm your slave girl⁹⁵
I'm dying to see your face
Always⁹⁶ pleading a hundred hundred times
Sit snug in this body⁹⁷

⁹⁴ The image here is of the hair as ropes, and ensnaring the lover in them.

⁹⁵ *Bardi* = female slave.

⁹⁶ *Nit* = forever, always. There is an element of redundancy and futility in the repetitive pleas.

⁹⁷ *Pinjar* = being. Also body.

Stop please just stop now

Talk a bit pleasant to me

Version II

Enough please, stop now please

Say something and laugh once with me

You dwell in my heart

Why ever do you run away from me?

You cast a spell and pull me in simultaneously

Wherefore will you run to?

Enough please, stop now please

Say something and laugh once with me

You never killed me with your silence

Like a bat takes to a ball

Strangling my throat mid-sentence

Draw your arrow in tight now

Enough please, stop now please

Say something and laugh once with me

You can hide but I will catch you

You're pinioned in the grasp of my passion

You've yet to master hiding

You won't find freedom once you've been ensnared

Enough please, stop now please

Beloved! Bullah is your slave

I crave for a glimpse of your face
Again and again, I plead to you
Come inhabit my inner depths now
Enough please, stop now please

Version III

Won't you stop now? Have you not had enough?
Come laugh with me, even if just once
My heart is your habitation
Why is it that you run away from me?
I'm enchanted by you, to top it all
Which way is your escape headed to
Won't you stop now? Have you not had enough?
Why do you insist on killing the dead?
Why abuse the victims of your strike?
You smother articulations of my thoughts
Go on then, take aim and fire
Won't you stop now? Have you not had enough?
Turn away from me, but I will win you back
Admit it or not, you're caught in my affections
I'll make up for what your novice skills lack
You can no longer sever this connection
Won't you stop now? Have you not had enough?
Come take me darling, I'm your fool

What I wouldn't do for a glimpse of you
My entreaties are beyond counting, what else is new?
Won't you fill up all the crevices of my being?
Won't you stop now? Have you not had enough?

Bhaanvain Jaan Na Jaan

Whether you know it or not...

Version I

Whether you know it or not know it, step into my veranda
I sacrifice myself to you, step into my veranda
No one is like you are to me
Searched jungles, across forests by the sea, and deserts⁹⁸
Searched the whole world, step into my veranda
I sacrifice myself to you, step into my veranda
People think he merely minds the cows
Ranjha the herdsman toils amongst the livestock⁹⁹
He's my faith and religion, step into my veranda
I sacrifice myself to you, step into my veranda
Leaving my mother father, I'm with you now
My master Shah Inayat

⁹⁸ The poem mentions 3 separate nouns where the lover has been searching for the beloved: 1) *Jungle* = Jungle (the noun is the same across Urdu and Punjabi); 2) *Baila* = a jungle by a riverside/seaside; 3) *Rohi* = Desert.

⁹⁹ My reading here is also Bullah deeming himself an unworthy recipient of his murshid's attention and care.

Honor the respect of your loyals¹⁰⁰, step into my veranda

I sacrifice myself to you step into my veranda

Version II

Whether you care or not, O grace me with your presence

My life is yours, O grace me with your presence

You are irreplaceable to me, Even as I have ploughed through plentitude, abundance and desolation

I scoured the entire earth, O grace me with your presence

My life is yours, O grace me with your presence

You may be ordinary in the people's eyes, contemptible in your wretched caste

You are my pride and faith in your humility, O grace me with your presence

My life is yours, O grace me with your presence

I have renounced all my ties, my allegiance is to you

You're my savior lord, Shah Inayat

Protect my honor, O grace me with your presence

My life is yours, O grace me with your presence

Version III

Even if you don't know me anymore

Step through that threshold and come home

What can I offer but myself in whole?

Step through that threshold and come home

You are unrivaled in what you mean to me

¹⁰⁰ *Laiyaan* = your lovers, your loyals. Two different senses combine in this Punjabi word. From "*lagana*," literally *lagana* = to put, as in those who have put their love and trust in you. *Lajpaal* = *Izzat rakhna*, *laj* = *izzat*. *Paal* = literally is "to keep."

I have plumbed depths of the oceans and trekked acres of land

The world was not enough for an answer

Step through that threshold and come home

What can I offer but myself in whole?

Step through that threshold and come home

If you are unworthy in the eyes of this town

I will make you my pride, I will flaunt you as my crown

Step through that threshold and come home

What can I offer but myself in whole?

Step through that threshold and come home

I don't care for anyone else anymore

I'm by your side from now on, my darling my dear

Let no one tear us apart, please keep me near

Step through that threshold and come home

What can I offer but myself in whole?

Step through and threshold and come home

Haji Loge Makkay Nu Jaanda

Pilgrims go to Mecca

Version I

Hajjis¹⁰¹ go to Mecca

My love Ranjha is my Mecca¹⁰²

I'm betrothed to Ranjha

My father pushes me away

Hajjis go to Mecca

My Mecca is the home of my beloved

Within, a pilgrim, within, a martyr

Within, a conniving thief

Hajjis go to Mecca

I'm off to Takht Hazara¹⁰³

Where my love is, is the direction of Ka'aba

Even if you pour through the 4 books¹⁰⁴

Aye I'm delirious!

Version II

Pilgrims are Mecca-bound

My Mecca is my dear Ranjha

¹⁰¹ The religious pilgrimage of the Islamic faith is to Mecca, which is considered the emblem of the abode of the Divine on earth in Islam. The pilgrimage itself is of two types: the shorter one, "Umra," which can be taken at any time during the year, and the longer (considered more sacred) annual pilgrimage called Hajj. Bullah uses the term "Hajji," which is a term accorded those who undertake the annual pilgrimage.

¹⁰² Sultan Bahu, in a similar vein, has said "Murshad da deedar vay Bahu! Mainnu lakh kroraan Hajjan hu." Translated: A glimpse of my Murshid is worth a million Hajjs to me.

¹⁰³ Ranjha's town.

¹⁰⁴ As in Quran, Bible/Gospels of Jesus, Torah and Zabur/Psalms of David.

My betrothal is to Ranjha
My father shoves me elsewhere cruelly
Pilgrims are Mecca-bound
My Mecca is when my bridegroom is home
The believer is within, the crusader within
Yet within is the pilfering crook
Pilgrims are Mecca-bound
My way is Takht Hazara
My faith lies in the direction of my beloved
Your scriptures won't yield answers
Hear me I'm delirious!

Version III

Yes I'm wild! Yes I'm unhinged!
Let their faith guide them to where it will
My love will dictate my direction
My affections are forever my beloved's
Even as they push me elsewhere
Yes I'm wild! Yes I'm unhinged!
Let their faith guide them to where it will
My home is with my beloved
My belief lies within, my warrior within
Within me the miscreant and swindler
Yes I'm wild! Yes I'm unhinged!

Let their faith guide them to where it will
I'm homebound towards my darling
Wherever my dear, therein my peace
Go search through all the truths if you want
Your search will never cease
Yes I'm wild! Yes I'm unhinged!

Main Kyunker Jaavan Kaabay Nu

Why Should I go to the Ka'aba

Version I

Why should I go towards the Ka'aba
My heart searches for Takht Hazara
People prostrate to the Ka'aba¹⁰⁵
My prostration is my to my dearly beloved
Don't see the sins, forget those Sir Ranjha
Remember this that has passed¹⁰⁶
I, who doesn't know how to swim, don't know how to swim¹⁰⁷
I am a shame for you

¹⁰⁵ Islamic faith dictates that all prayers by Muslims be offered in the direction of the Ka'aba. The reference here is of the ritualistic prayers (*namaz*) that are performed over a mat and follow certain rules, prescribed five times a day as an obligation (but can be recited over and above as desired by a believer). A non-ritualistic prayer (*dua*) would mean the kind that is offered at any time and place during the day and is more a format of a conversation with the Divine in which the supplicant wishes, complaints, inquires, etc.

¹⁰⁶ This task/happening/occurrence? This moment of plea for forgiveness? This moment of crafting the *kafi* that signals that? Perhaps all.

¹⁰⁷ Muntaaroo = one who does not know how to swim. Also, a novice/amateur. Bullah uses this noun then follows it up with "tarrun na jaana" which also means "don't know how to swim." The repetition would be redundant in English, hence I differentiate with "doesn't" and "don't."

I could not find your equal
I searched the whole world
Bullah! Beloved's love is unique
He saves those replete with sins
Why should I go towards the Ka'aba
My heart searches for Takht Hazara

Version II

I won't go to the Ka'aba
My heart yearns for Takht Hazara
Let people submit their faith to the Ka'aba
I cast myself at my cherished beloved's feet
Do not be deceived by my demerits, Sir Ranjha
Focus on remembering my oath to you
Yet to learn to stay afloat in this mysticism
My failings would bring shame to you¹⁰⁸
No one I met could compare to you
I have left no corner of the globe uncombed
Bullah! God's love is so strange
He even saves repeat offenders
I won't go to the Ka'aba
My heart yearns for Takht Hazara

¹⁰⁸ The image here is of a novice Sufi student still learning the art and skills for keeping themselves from drowning in the material world. Like a bumbling apprentice would be a shame to a skilled master. Yet another meaning is that, since, I do not know how to swim, it is your responsibility to save me from drowning.

Version III

I have no reason to heed the compass
My Truth lies elsewhere, way away
Let people follow who they please
My sweet love holds me in his sway
I have no reason to heed the compass
My Truth lies elsewhere, way away
Won't you darling forget my faults?
But do not forget my pledge to you
I have no reason to heed the compass
My Truth lies elsewhere, way away
I have closed my eyes, I have taken the leap
It's up to you to save me ...
I have no reason to heed the compass
My Truth lies elsewhere, way away
You stay peerless, you remain unmatched
All my searches have ended in dismay
I have no reason to heed the compass
My Truth lies elsewhere, way away
What peculiar workings of the divine!
He guards even those who stride astray
I have no reason to heed the compass
My Truth lies elsewhere, way away

Ranjha Ranjha Kerdi Ni Main Aapay Ranjha Hoi

“Ranjha Ranjha!” I Repeated Until I Became Ranjha Myself

Version I

“Ranjha Ranjha!” I went until I became Ranjha myself

Call me Dheedo Ranjha¹⁰⁹, Don’t call me Hir

Ranjha is within me, I am within Ranjha, there is no other thought

It’s not me it’s him, Him who adores himself¹¹⁰

Whoever lives within me, My caste is theirs’

Who I have pledged my heart to, I have become like them

Remove and throw the white shawl girl! Wear the beggar’s stole¹¹¹

The white shawl will stain, The beggar’s stole won’t

Take Bullah to Takht Hazaray, Can’t find home in the Siyaals¹¹²

“Ranjha Ranjha!” I went, until I became Ranjha myself

Version II

By repeating “Ranjha Ranjha” I became Ranjha myself

Call me “Dheedo Ranjha,” No one call me Hir

Ranjha lives in me, I live in Ranjha, This consumes the entirety of my thoughts

This isn’t me, It’s him, and it is he who tends after himself

Whoever has a habitation within us determines who we are

Whoever I pledge my love to, I become just like them

¹⁰⁹ Ranjha’s birthname was Dheedo.

¹¹⁰ Diljoyee = please, satisfy, keep happy. Also, to cherish/adore.

¹¹¹ A wool stole, to be exact.

¹¹² The caste of Hir.

Throw the white shawl off your shoulders girl, Wear the mendicant's rags
That white shawl will gather stains, but the tatters won't
Take Bullah to Takht Hazara, I find no sanctuary with the Sials
By repeating "Ranjha Ranjha" I became Ranjha myself

Version III

I called out to you so many times
I no longer know who I am
I go by your name now
People no longer know who I am
You live in me, I am within you
There's space for nothing else
I am no longer, it is you
Will you not look after yourself?
My identity is of that which lives within me
I have become like the one who I have surrendered my heart to
Do you not see? How I have flung my marks of vanity
I have wrapped myself in humility now
My vanity would gather vices
But I am humble in my supplication now
Take me with you my love, my refuge lies with you
I called out to you so many times
I no longer know who I am

Mennu Ishq Hullaare Dainda Aye

Ishq Swings Me

Version I

Ishq swings me, it cries out “lover!” when it reaches the top

Why do you ask of my caste and character?

It’s the same as that of Adam

My habitat is in the jugular¹¹³

God spins in my head

Somewhere Shia somewhere Sunni¹¹⁴

Somewhere a Sadhu¹¹⁵ somewhere a Muni¹¹⁶

My earthenware is free from all this

My dear accepts whatever I say

Bullah trekked from afar

His visage invited me

He showed me the Pure Truth

He is not suddenly forgotten

Ishq swings me, it cries out “lover!” when it reaches the top

¹¹³ From “We are nearer [to him that his jugular vein]” (Quran 50.16). Islamic faith’s conception of the divine is panentheist—that he is both transcendental and immanent.

¹¹⁴ The dominant castes of the Islamic faith.

¹¹⁵ Sadhus are a type of Hindu sage who are also regarded as men of religion. “*Jattadhaar*” literally means “he who has a bun of dreadlocks.” It is a hairstyle typical of Sadhus. Sadhus typically renounce the world.

¹¹⁶ A type of Hindu sage who are a subcategory of Rishis. Muni is derived from *Manan*, which means “to think.” So Munis are experts in introspection and are those who have conquered the mind over the body. As such, they too are identified mostly as renouncers of society (especially the material) and ascetics, who are occupied in furthering their own quest rather than imparting knowledge onto others. Munis typically go by shaved heads. See <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-Rishi-and-Muni>.

Version II

My passionate love moves me fiercely
He's calling out to me, my beloved
Who I cannot stop talking about
Why do you inquire after my essence and attributes?
I share that very same essence of Adam's,
I lie nearer than the jugular vein in ambush
My head lurches with the secret of god
Somewhere there's Shias, Somewhere there's Sunnis
Somewhere there's the sage with dreadlocks,
Somewhere there's those with a shaved head
My being is free from all these categories
Whatever I say, my darling grants me
Bullah has come from afar
His face having allured me
It's him who has shown me true beauty
He never misguides me
My passionate love moves me fiercely
He's calling out to me, my beloved,
Who I cannot stop talking about

Version III

How passion swings me in its violent paroxysms!
I do not tire of talking of my beloved, Hear that he's calling!

What use is my surface and depth to you?
I'm born of the same composition as Adam
He prowls your depths, who goes by god
He seizes your thoughts, then unites with you
You can choose whatever manifestation for your belief
Our souls are free from all such divisions
I broke free to find him out, And when I did
He listened to my every word
What a temptation to give in to! What a persuasion to accede!
What an entity for my heart to concede
How passion swings me in its violent paroxysms!
I do not tire of talking of my beloved, Hear that he's calling!

Main Bay Qayd Main Bay Qayd

I am Without Confines I am Without Confines

Version I

I am without confines I am without confines
Neither patient nor physician
I am neither a believer I am neither an infidel
Neither the huntsman nor prey
My wandering lies in the fourteen heavens¹¹⁷
Not to be imprisoned anywhere

¹¹⁷ The fourteen spheres of Islamic cosmology comprise seven heavens above this world, and seven below.

My living lies in the liquor houses

Neither virtue nor vice

Why do you ask after the caste of Bullah's beloved?

Neither begotten nor born¹¹⁸

Version II

I am without constrains I am without fetters

Neither afflicted with an ailment, nor its doctor

Neither am I a believer, nor a heathen

Neither the predator nor the prey

I drift through the fourteen spheres of this universe

I cannot be held captive anywhere

My existence is spent in the taverns

Neither in purity nor sin

Bullah! Why do ask after the beloved's identity?

He is neither born nor created

Version III

I am free I am free¹¹⁹

I am neither the sickness nor its cure

Not a lamb¹²⁰ or a rogue

I am nor the shot or its aim

I traverse the realms of this cosmos

¹¹⁸ i.e., God.

¹¹⁹ I turn the negation into a positive affirmation in this version.

¹²⁰ As in a faultless person. I borrow from Christian analogy here to Christ.

I am impossible to contain
I while my time away in pubs
I claim no merit, nor surrender to depravity
Chaste I am not, but neither have I fallen
I claim no allegiance to the upright, neither to those who falter
Why ask after my beloved's identity?
To my Love, nothing holds claim
My Love was neither conceived nor became

Ranjha Jogeera Bun Aaya

Ranjha Has Come as a Jogi

Version I

Ranjha has come as a Jogi¹²¹
Bravo actor what a play!
This Jogi's eyes are round like bowls
They set traps like hawks
See that face and all sorrows shed
His eyes showed me love
Ranjha has come as a Jogi
The mark of this Jogi
Hoops in ears and necklaces around the neck
His face is unparalleled

¹²¹ i.e., a Yogi.

He turned *Alif* into *Ahad*¹²²
Ranjha has come as a Jogi
Ranjha is Jogi I am Jogini
For his sake I will fill water¹²³
For nothing I spent my former life
Now he has pulled me in
Ranjha has come as a Jogi
Bullah's beloved has such a way
He regenerated an old love
How will this stay hidden?
Has come from Takht Hazara
Ranjha has come as a Jogi
Bravo actor what a play
Ranjha has come as a Jogi

Version II

Ranjha has come disguised a yogi
What a show! What an act!
What beguiling, deceiving innocent eyes
That set traps and lure in defeated lovers
A face to behold that melts worries and woes
This yogi's distinguishing identity

¹²² Ahad = Numerical 1 in Arabic. Alif = 1st alphabet in Arabic. Both have the same written form. Bullah uses both to symbolize Divine Unity.

¹²³ This line in particular does not seem to fit into the kafi. Rather, it comes across as awkward and an abrupt attempt to keep the rhyme intact. Shackle has made a similar observation.

Are the trinkets that adorn his vanity
He remains matchless in his visage
He merged all variations into a unity
Ranjha has come disguised as a yogi
Ranjha is my master, I am his devotee
I'll quench his thirst as he quenches mine
My life was purposeless before I met him
I am mesmerized beyond remedy
Ranjha has come disguised as a yogi
Bullah's beloved found a stirring manner
To rekindle an old flame anew
This love cannot remain hidden anymore
With speed, he travelled from Takht Hazara
Ranjha has come disguised as a yogi
What an act! What a show!
Ranjha has come disguised as a yogi

Version III

My darling, you're here at last
Shrouded in a mad lover's mask
You hide behind your trappings dear
You fool the world but I see clear
Your eyes, that hold that guileless tranquil
With exquisite turmoil, they deliver blows

One look is all it takes for my despair to shed
I'm seeing everything anew
My darling, you're here at last
How do I count what sets you apart?
Your ornaments and jewels, to your beauty are wed
Your unmatched countenance, a miracle¹²⁴ to view
Through the murk of diversions, you found me my focus
My darling, you're here at last
You are my truth and I your perpetrator
I will wade through troubles for you with a laugh
My present, in disdain, now mocks my past
You've reeled me in, I don't wish for escape
My darling, you're here at last
How intriguing you are in your methods
You've unearthed a long-buried affair
Let this truth go forth, magnificent and bare
You traversed land for me and I am now aflame
Get ready now for this blaze and blast
My darling, you're here at last

¹²⁴ Yusuf's (the prophet Joseph) miracle was his beauty. Previous kafis also mention an unmatched visage, which the cultural milieu of Punjab could easily equate with the metaphor of Yusuf, the original unmatched visage.

Gharyaali Deyo Nikaal

Away With the Gong-Beater

Version I

Away with the gong-beater

Today my beloved has come home dear

Every 24 minutes¹²⁵ he strikes the gong

He shortens our night of union dear

Were he to know what's in my heart

He would throw the gong from his hands

Away with the gong-beater

Today my beloved has come home dear

The limitless trumpet¹²⁶ blows blissfully

The learned musician plays the rhythm and tune¹²⁷

I have forgotten fast, prayers and two prostration prayers¹²⁸

¹²⁵ The day and night were divided into four parts (called *pehar*) of three hours each. Each *pehar* was further divided into eight parts of 24 minutes each. Each unit of 24 minutes was called a “*ghari*.” The gong-beaters were responsible for signaling the passage of time.

¹²⁶ From Anhad Nad, a Hindi term of Sanskrit origin, denoting the “soundless sound” or the “uncreated sound,” signifying the sound of the cosmos and cosmic consciousness in humans. The sound signifies spiritual progress through meditation. Yogis are said to hear the Anhad Nad when they have reached the stage of Kundalini Awakening. In Muslims, the sound goes by various other names too, including *Kalam-e-Ilahi* (the Voice of God) and *Kalam-e-Haqq* (the Voice of Truth) and indicates an inner connection with God. In both faiths, this primordial sound goes through various stages before reaching its culmination. In Muslim faith, that culmination is said to be the sound of “*Hu*,” which is seen as the culmination of all of God’s names in one and is hence regarded as the most sacred sound in being a signifier of the Ultimate Source. For more on “*Hu*,” see John. G. Bennett’s talk given to Beshara Center at Swyre Farm in 1972, available in full at <http://www.beshara.org/principles/talks-and-articles/lectures-and-talks/the-meaning-of-hu.html>.

¹²⁷ Taan = a vocal technique in Indian classical music which has a rhythmic progression of “*bol*” (a mnemonic syllable, e.g., Dha, Dhin, Ta, Na etc.), usually vowels, in a rapid tempo. Strictly speaking, rhythm would be “*tal*” in Indian classical terms. Tarana = a composition of rapid tempo employing meaningless syllables. Founded by Amir Khusro, this vocal technique moves away from song-texts instead to where the vocalist emulates the tunes of an instrument.

When the devastatingly beautiful cupbearer gives me the cup of wine

Away with the gong-beater

Today my beloved has come home dear

What a wonderful sight when I look at his face

Pains of my heart all lifted up

Extend the night's vastness somehow

O put a wall up against the day

Away with the gong-beater

Today my beloved has come home dear

I have no awareness of myself

I have no idea who I got married to

How will this news remain hidden

Now exceeding generosity has occurred

Away with the gong-beater

Today my beloved has come home dear

I cast many spells and charms

Great magicians came

Now my darling is home

May he stay a hundred thousand more years with me

Away with the gong-beater

Today my beloved has come home dear

Bullah, the dear has a unique bed

¹²⁸ Dogana = a prayer that has two rak'at. The shortest kind of prayer in Islam. This prayer is separate from the prescribed five daily prayers.

O I have reached you who was standing across
How, how my turn has now come
Separation has become arduous
Away with the gong-beater
Today my beloved has come home dear

Version II

Out with the gong-beater
My darling has come home today
Every few minutes he strikes the gong
Darling, he shortens our night of union
If he were to plumb the desires of my heart
He would hurl the gong from his hands too
Out with the gong-beater
My darling has come home today
The unstruck sound plays so melodiously
The proficient musician plays the rhythm and melody
I have forgotten all about prayers and fasting
When the captivating wine-bearer brings the chalice
Out with the gong beater
My darling has come home today
What wondrous sights when I behold his face
My heart is purged of its aches
Somehow expand this night's immense extent

O put a wall against the dawning day
Out with the gong-beater
My darling has come home today
I am oblivious of myself
I don't know to whom I have been wedded
How will this mystery stay a secret?
I have been bestowed a remarkable benevolence now
Out with the gong-beater
My darling has come home today
Several charms and incantations I performed
Remarkable magicians came
Now my dear is finally home
Stay by me for countless years more
Out with the gong-beater
My darling has come home today
Bullah, beloved is singular in his repose
I have been set free by the deliverer
After such waiting, finally my turn has arrived
Parting from you is unbearable¹²⁹ now
Out with the gong-beater
My darling has come home today

¹²⁹ As in "I won't put up with it. It's impossible now."

Version III

Curse the clocks damn this time¹³⁰

My love is finally here

Every strike that chimes

Shortens this, our time

Were time to know my heart

It would cease before its start

Curse the clocks damn this time

My love is finally here

Listen to this ceaseless joyous silence

The melody of the musician's artistic violence¹³¹

Every part of faith I from here give up

My bliss lies in the intoxication of my attendant's cup

Curse the clocks damn this time

My love is finally here

You, my darling, are such a vision

One look...and my pain vanishes as if an apparition

Somehow stretch the boundaries of this night

Because the day offers me no respite

Curse the clocks damn this time

My love is finally here

¹³⁰ Carrying forward with the tone of annoyance and vexation that the kafi has towards the passage of time.

¹³¹ The tone the original kafi carries is that of both a wondrous, upbeat joy and jubilation along with an element of wild excitement and near delirium. I use this word here to convey the sense of a frantic, frenzied state of bliss the original kafi has.

I have no news of myself anymore
Nothing matters, it's only you I adore
Would you keep us a secret too?
Together, our miracle is that limitless blue¹³²
Curse the clocks damn this time
My love is finally here
I put such spells on you
The magicians weren't enough for what I wished to do
You, my darling, at long last are within my arms
Just stay beside me, till time returns
Curse the clocks damn this time
My love is finally here
How strange, this bed of yours my dear!
You bring me from the murk into the clear
Such a while it took, now it's my turn
Now it's my turn, though it came so slow
Joy! That a goodbye is no longer my concern
I swear upon you I refuse to let you go
Curse the clocks damn this time
My love is finally here

¹³² i.e., the sky.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbas, Shemeem Burney. *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India*. Austin, TX: U of Texas, 2002.
- Anjum, Tanvir. *Chishtī Sufis in the Sultanate of Delhi, 1190-1400: from Restrained Indifference to Calculated Defiance*. Karachi; New York: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Aquil, Raziuddin, ed. *Sufism and Society in Medieval India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Bāhū, Sulṭān, and Jamal J. Elias. *Death before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.
- Bashir, Shahzad. *Sufi bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011.
- Batish, Shiv Dayal. *Chalan Notations*. Ed. Ashwin Batish. Santa Cruz, CA: Batish Publications, 1993.
- Bennett, Clinton and Charles M. Ramsey, eds. *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*. London: Continuum, 2012.
- Biguenet, John, and Rainer Schulte. *The Craft of Translation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.
- Bhutta, Saeed. "Kafi: A Genre of Punjabi Poetry." Lahore: University of the Punjab, n.d.
- Bly, Robert. "The Eight Stages of Translation." *The Kenyon Review* 4.2 (1982): 68-89.
- Bor, Joep, ed. *The Raga Guide: a Survey of 74 Hindustani Ragas*. Hong Kong: Naxos Digital Services/Nimbus, 2010.
- Burckhardt, Titus. *Introduction to Sufi doctrine*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008.
- Chittick, William C. *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2013.
- Cintrao, Heloisa Pezza. "Translating 'Under the Sign of Invention': Gilberto Gil's Song Lyric Translation." *Meta: Translator's Journal* 54 (Dec. 2009): 813-32.

- Claus, Peter J., Sarah Diamond, and Margaret Ann Mills. *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Ernst, Carl W. *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1997.
- . *Teachings of Sufism*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1999.
- Ernst, Carl W., and Bruce B. Lawrence. *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Farid, Khawaja Ghulam. *Aakheya Khawaja Farid Nay*. Ed. Muhammad Asif Khan. Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, 2008.
- Faye, Maryam Kabeer. *Journey through Ten Thousand Veils: the Alchemy of Transformation on the Sufi Path*. Somerset, NJ: Tughra Books, 2009.
- France, Peter. "Poetry, Culture and Translation." *Translation and Literature* 6.1 (1997): 4-7.
- Frembgen, Jürgen Wasim. *At the Shrine of the Red Sufi: Five Days and Nights on Pilgrimage in Pakistan*. Trans. Jane Ripken. Karachi; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- . *The Friends of God: Sufi Saints in Islam: Popular Poster Art from Pakistan*. Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2006.
- Garfield, Jay L., and William Edelglass. *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Geoffroy, Eric. *Introduction to Sufism: the Inner Path of Islam*. Trans. Roger Gaetani. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010.
- Gorman, Max. *Stairway to the Stars: Sufism, Gurdjieff, and the Inner Tradition of Mankind*. London: Aeon, 2010.
- Green, Nile. *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books, and Empires in the Muslim Deccan*. London; New York: Routledge, 2006.
- . *Sufism: a Global History*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

- Hammerle, Arife Ellen E. *The Sacred Journey: Unfolding Self Essence: Sufi Psychology*. San Rafael, CA: International Association of Sufism, 2000.
- Heim, Micheal Henry. "To Foreignize or Not to Foreignize." *In Translation: Honouring Sheila Fischman*. Ed. Sherry Simon. Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2013. 83-91.
- Holmes, James S. *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988.
- Hussain, Fatima. *The War that Wasn't: the Sufi and the Sultan*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2009.
- Hussain, Shah. *Maaye Ni Main Kinnu Aakhan Kalaam Shah Hussain*. Comp. Saleem Akhtar. Lahore: Book Home, 2010.
- Islam, Riazul. *Sufism in South Asia: Impact on Fourteenth Century Muslim Society*. Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim* [videorecording]. Vlaamse Audiovisuele Regie. New York, NY: Films Media Group, 2006.
- Inner Journey: Path of Mysticism* [videorecording]. The Applegate Group. New York, NY: Films Media Group, 2006.
- Janaki, Bakhle. *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Khan, Shafqat Ali. *Sufi songs*. West Sussex: ARC Music, 2003.
- Knysh, Alexander D. *Islamic Mysticism: a Short History*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000.
- Kugle, Scott Alan. *Sufis & Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2007.
- Laude, Patrick. *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guenon, and Schuon*. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 2010.
- . *Singing the Way: Insights in Poetry and Spiritual Transformation*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005.

- Lefevere, Andre. "Literary Theory and Translated Literature." *Dispositio* 7.19/20 (1982): 3-22.
- Low, Peter. "When Songs Cross Language Borders." *The Translator* 19.2 (2013): 229-44.
- Manuel, Peter. "North Indian Sufi Popular Music in the Age of Hindu and Muslim Fundamentalism." *Ethnomusicology* 52.3 (2008): 378-400.
- Matringe, Dennis. "Disguising Political Resistance in the Sufi Idiom: The Kafian of Najm Husain Sayyid of Pakistan." *The Islamic Path: Sufism, Politics and Society in India*. Ed. Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri and Helmut Reifeld. New Delhi: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Rainbow Publishers, 2006. 110-30.
- Michon, Jean-Louis, and Roger Gaetani. *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Sufi Essays*. Chicago: KAZI Publications, 1999.
- . *The Garden of Truth: the Vision and Practice of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.
- Oliver, Paul. *Mysticism: a Guide for the Perplexed*. London; New York: Continuum, 2009.
- Pemberton, Kelly. *Women Mystics and Sufi Shrines in India*. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 2010.
- Pollock, Sheldon I.. *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2003.
- Puri, Rakshat. "Bulleh Shah in Punjabi Poetic Tradition." *India International Centre Quarterly* 24 (1997): 125-38.
- Qureshi, Regula Burkhardt. *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context, and Meaning in Qawwali*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- . "His Master's Voice? Exploring Qawwali and Gramophone Culture in South Asia." *Popular Music* 18.1 (1999): 63-98.

- Qureshi, Samina. *Sacred Spaces: a Journey with the Sufis of the Indus*. With contributions by Ali S. Asani, Carl W. Ernst, and Kamil Khan Mumtaz. Cambridge, MA; Ahmedabad: Peabody Museum Press and Mapin Pub., 2009.
- Raffel, Burton. *The Art of Translating Poetry*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988.
- Renard, John. *Historical dictionary of Sufism*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005.
- Ridgeon, Lloyd V. J., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2015.
- . *Jawanmardi: a Sufi Code of Honour*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011.
- Saeed, Yousaf. "Fled Is That Music." *India International Center Quarterly* 35 (2008): 238-49.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- . *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1975.
- Schuon, Frithjof. *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence: a New Translation with Selected Letters*. Ed. James S. Cutsinger. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006.
- Schwartz, Stephen. *The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony*. New York: Doubleday, 2008.
- Sedgwick, Mark J. *Sufism: the Essentials*. Cairo; New York: American U in Cairo P, 2003.
- Selver, Paul. *The Art of Translating Poetry*. London: Millerbook, 1966.
- Shāh, Bulleh. *Bulleh Shah Chuvniyaan Kaafiyan*. Lahore: Shirkat, 2010.
- . *Kulyaat E Bulleh Shah*. Comp. Faqir Muhammad Faqir. Lahore: Al-Faisal Nashiraan O Tajiraan E Kutb, 2006.
- . *Saain Bulleh Shah*. Ed. J. R. Puri and T. R. Shangari. Lahore: Fiction House, 1995.
- . *Sufi Lyrics*. Ed. and trans. C. Shackle. Ed. Sheldon Pollock. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2015.

- . *Tere Ishq Nachaya: Intikhaab Kalaam Bulleh Shah*. Comp. Saleem Akhtar. Lahore: Book Home, 2010.
- Shāh, Bulleh, J. R. Puri, and Tilaka Rāja Shaṅgārī. *Bulleh Shah: The Love-intoxicated Iconoclast*. Amritsar, Punjab, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1986.
- Shaikh, Sa'diyya. *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2012.
- Siddiqui, Moid. *Leading from the Heart: Sufi Principles at Work*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014.
- Stoddart, William. *Outline of Sufism: the Essentials of Islamic Spirituality*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2012.
- Sufi soul: Echos du paradis*. Frankfurt: Network, 1997.
- Sullivan, Lawrence Eugene. *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*. Cambridge, MA: Distributed by Harvard UP for the Harvard U Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997.
- Sulamī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn. *A Collection of Sufi Rules of Conduct: Jawāmi 'Ādāb al-Ṣūfiyya*. Trans. Elena Biagi. Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 2010.
- Sultanova, Razia. *From Shamanism to Sufism: Women, Islam and Culture in Central Asia*. London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011.
- Syed, Najm Hosein. *Recurrent Patterns in Punjabi Poetry*. Lahore: Majlis Shah Hussain, 1968.
- Tate, Allen. *The Translation of Poetry*. Washington: Published for the Library of Congress by The Gertrude Clark Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund, 1972.
- Todd, Richard. *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi's Metaphysical Anthropology*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Upton, Charles. *Reflections of Tasawwuf: Essays, Poems, and Narratives on Sufi Themes*. San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008.

Venuti, Lawrence. *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Wolf, Richard K. "Poetics of Sufi Practice: Drumming, Dancing and Complex Agency at Madho Lal Husain (and Beyond)." *American Ethnologist* 33.2 (2006): 246-68.

Yang, Wenfen. "Brief Study on Domestication and Foreignization in Translation." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 1.1 (2010): 77-80.