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Sufi Poetry of Bulleh Shah: A Dithyramb of Ecofeminism and Green Ecology

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ABSTRACT

This paper talks about ecocriticism in the general and spiritual insight of ecofeminists in Bulleh Shah's verses where he equates women with nature and has been rendered as someone who defies cultural boundaries, but always conforms to nature. Woman in his poetry has been portrayed as having the power to nurture humanity as well as human beings, her femininity has been appreciated and acknowledged. His poetry does not see ecology as a confined term but it includes human beings as well non-human organisms. The paper explores the times of the Shah when there was no theory of ecological feminism but ecology and woman's relationship has always been there. His poetry has spoken particularly for the vulnerable communities of gypsy, women, and non-human living phenomenon; the subaltern that needs representation. This research criticizes the ways culture takes over nature, supporting the canonical philosophy of the west that looks at nature from the perspective of anthropocentrism. Ecofeminist view of Bulleh Shah's poetry talks about the atrocities caused by a human being in the name of culture against other human beings and nature. Women have been portrayed particularly who don't disturb the order of nature and speak against green criminology. The havoc caused by man through plundering, massive killing, and sabotaging the weaker ones is disproportionate to Mother Nature and invites her wrath. Women conversely nurture and share the quality of nature of being benevolent and productive. The research undertakes how the woman has contributed to safeguarding nature and fighting a war both against man's violence on her and culture's imposition on nature in Bulleh Shah's poetry.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Ecology, Anthropocentricism, Green criminology, Bulleh Shah

Introduction:

Bulleh Shah (1680-1758) is one of the most-read poets of the subcontinent and he has also been able to seek international readership as well. He is not only famous for his Punjabi poetry and anecdotes but his portrayal of the times in which he has lived is parallel to none. He can be called a reformist in the sense that he has not only highlighted the evils and political and religious hypocrisies of his times but he also openly criticized them. This is very unfortunate that he could not be saved in writing as the exact verses during his lifetime. All hopes do not die as he is so famously sung poet that most of his *Kafis, Dohra, Athwart, si-herfi, and Bara-mah* have been preserved and forwarded through oral tradition.

Abdullah Shah, the real name of the poet, and his poetic signature have been derived from his real name where according to the translation of Christopher Shackle his "poetic signature" was taken from Abdullah where it is preferred not to pronounce the last 'h' alphabet. (*Bullhe Shah- Sufi Lyrics*). He was born in 1680, in Uch Gillanian, a small town in Bahawalpur later the family moved to Pandoke, in district Kasur. Lajwanti Krishna writes in her book *Punjabi Sufi Poets AD1460-1900* that the Sufi poet was born in Pandoke and not in Bahawalpur. (1)

So his place and date of birth remain a mystery and many critics and scholars of the Punjabi language are ambivalent about it. His father's name was Dervish Muhammad, Shah, and belonged to a Sayyad family. Bullha being a Sayyad and a son of imam masjid was prolific in his learning of Arabic and Persian languages. One of the teachers in Kasur was Hazarat Ghulam Murtaza and according to some of the scholars one of the fellow learners was Waris Shah but this is considered a farfetched fabrication. From his particular style and diction of verse, we can discover different references to Islamic ideas and spiritualist structure. As mentioned in *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: South Asia*, his pantheistic belief may be seen in Vedantic and Neopletonism. He never disrespected any other religion and his poetry also supports pluralism. (2)

Ai Gal Muk gaye ty raula ki?/ Ram Raheem ty Maula ki?

"Having understood, why heed the storm

Over such names as Allah and Ram. (3)

The Punjabi language was the language of folks so he contributed a great deal to make people aware of the irregularities of his times that brought him to produce poetry of the laymen and for the laymen. One thing should be kept in mind that he could not recommend someone to write a *Divan* (collection) of his verse and almost all the poetry that is ascribed to him came forward as the oral tradition. Some of them were preserved by the *Qavvals* (colloquial singers) and some by other public singings in indigenous settings. The Punjabi language has its particular appeal and its dialect is older than Hindi or Urdu.

Islamic mysticism suffered a great deal except with the consistency of the scholars like Bulleh Shah, Madho Lal Shah Hussain (d.1599), and Waris Shah (d.1798). With the penetration of intermediaries and intruders of various nationalities, Arabs, Turks, and Afghans, Sufism was conveyed to Sindh. Sufis like Bulleh Shah and Shah Abdul Latif (1689-1752), empathetically continued to spread the message of Allah to love humanity. Shah was never a conservative thinker he had always thought beyond the defining boundaries of culture. His acculturation and constant resistance gave him a new very vastly vivid identity that came up with lots of criticism from his family and friends but it all paid off when Bullah got his mentor Inayat Shah's consideration to guide him through his course of development of mystic ideology.

He has a spiritual association with humanity and nature can be seen in his poetry and his support for the weaker and the oppressed is evident through his poetry. He lived through times of turmoil in Punjab where the Mughal Empire was to face resistance at the hands of the armed Sikhs, pundits who were supported by the native nobler of that time. In one of his *kafis*, he says "*bhurian walay rajay keetay, Rajian bhaik mangaye*". Shah did not turn his eyes away from the unrest caused by the plundering of these locals and he seems to make a complaint about it as if the new age has lost all the element of respect and order in life. In one of his Kafi, he says:

Ultay ho zamany aye, tan main bheet sajan dy paye/ Kaan lagrhan nu marun lagy, chirhian jurray dhaye /Ghoray chugan Arurhian ty, Gaddon Khved pavaye

In the topsy-turvy world, I saw the truth unroll

Crows peck at scarecrows, pigeons fell the hawk,

and asses have assumed the horse's role. (4)

Shah also holds responsible for these political upheavals as the reason for the disturbance of the order of nature. His poetry and his persona masked as a woman always

support nature in its most intuitive form. The female in his poetry is portrayed as a gypsy, or a mad woman, mad because she does not perform conformity. His *Jhali* or *Kamli* may be related to the 4th world people. They are the one who generally does not participate in the mainstream of economy but they are the one who cultivates nature not destroy it, unlike the civilization and culture that deforms nature and its living beings. "*Main choorhi haan, sachay saab dy darbaron*/ *Pairon nangi, siron jindholi, sineha aya paaron*"

I am just a sweeper.

Hair uncombed, barefoot, I received a word...⁽⁵⁾

The Death of Nature (1980) by Mechant is one of the pioneering books of ecofeminism and was written when the idea was simply arising and women and nature were attributed to each other. Both turn out to be the victim of crimes committed against them mostly by the men and his proudly structured culture. It was the time when conferences were arranged to speak about the hazards as the result of world wars, population explosion, and already in progress scientific revolution. Ladies who, as ecofeminists, went to the protection of nature were solidifying their abuse in the very orders that distinguished men with culture furthermore, ladies with nature. (6)

The aspect of Shah's poetry that is relevant to this paper is the viewpoint he raised against the "cultivation of nature and woman". Shah usually transgresses the norms of his age which he considered quite disturbing. The woman in his poetry is mostly in a constructive phase, not disrupting the surrounding. She uses the tools to build things without harming the cosmos that surrounds her. She has also been portrayed as someone who longs for the love of her beloved with whom it is very hard to consummate. Her longing at times becomes the mouthpiece for Bulleh Shah as he longs for the love of God and personifies himself as a woman in many of his verses.

It was in 1974 when a French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne for the first time coined and used the term "ecological feminism" to emphasize women's ability to bring about an ecological revolution in her book *Feminism or Death (1974)*. Ross (1990) quotes in the article "Exploring Ecofeminism" that there are some ecofeminists who believe in the theory that "atomism, dualism, hierarchal, rigid autonomy, and abstract rationality are central problems in the ways we think and live, in particular, the hierarchal that is patriarchal and puts man at the center of things". In this way, the weaker communities are thrown away to the peripheries of society and the dominant one comes

in the middle. Nature cannot speak for itself; however, it has reciprocated human beings back whenever her wrath has been invited so are women and other marginalized communities. (7)

The main objective of this research is to highlight how nature and women can be equated in becoming the victims of marginalia; to study how women and other fourthworld members of the community have provided the least hazards to nature and other non-living beings; to explore the portrayal of women supporting ecology and order of nature in Bulleh Shah's poetry.

This is an inductive research approach and after having read the text ecofeminist and ecocriticism perspective of Bulleh Shah's selected verses shall be explored. It is a qualitative research design where the close reading method will be used to analyze the women-nature relationship. Through textual analysis of the text and many theorists of ecofeminism, the objectives of research and contention of research will be explored. The text of the poetry has reached the reader through rendition and recitation of people so the oral tradition and narratives and translations will be taken into consideration. The theme of the poetry in translations remains the same; however, there is not a single definite text available. Nevertheless, this oral tradition has not hurt the soul and purpose of Bulleh Shah's poetry much.

Literature Review:

This section talks about the main content used for this research. It will explore the research works already done in this area of study; both for the novel and the theory and lead toward the need for the study or the research gap which initiated this study. Bulleh Shah's various selected verses have been used to highlight the point of discussion for the same purpose several Punjabi and English renditions have been employed to have a better understanding of the poet because the poet reached the people through the mode of oral tradition. A translation with the title *Bullhe Shah* (2015) by Christopher Shackle and a rendering of Taufiq Rafat, *Bulleh Shah: A Selection* (2014) have been incorporated to make this research reachable to the international audience.

Various theorists who speak for ecology and women will be cited to study the ecofeminist view of Shah's poetry. According to Ross (1990), many ecologists and feminists became ecofeminists when they find similarities in the depressive and oppressive states of women and nature. Clearing the forests and less inhabited land for

agriculture and mega construction projects cannot be sent out of this inclusion of terrorizing nature. (8)

Aldo Leopold (1949) produced a script on land ethics that was published as part of A Sand Country Almanac with the title "Land Ethics". The purpose was to develop and redefine the meaning of community and to teach human beings how he/she can enlarge their community by adding soil, water, plants, and other living organisms to their community. He also advised humanity to cooperate with these elements rather than fighting them back and creating competition about it. $^{(9)}$

Many other Eco-critics and ecofeminists of the subcontinent talk about how indigenous women of the land have contributed to the preservation of land and not the otherwise. Many even suggest that women should be made part of all the policy-making that is pro-environmental and can help in the preservation of nature and reduction of loss (Haq et al. 2020). In *Sexual and Gender Diversity in the Muslim World: History, Law and Vernacular Knowledge (2016)* gendered subjectivity has been brought under discussion. How the vulnerable communities are more powerful in defying boundaries while the stagnated prototype gendered construction does not support women and other she-males in a patriarchal society (Hamzić). In "Environment, Islam, and Women: A Study of Eco-Feminist Environmental Activism in Pakistan" the writer justifies the position of women in the indigenous subcontinent and the ways it has started gaining ground in Pakistan.

Analysis:

Phagan phooly Khait Jion Ban Tan Phool Singhaar
Her Daali Phul Battian, Gul Phullunn Kay Haar
In Spring the fields bloom, and every branch is laden
with leaves and flowers like a garlanded woman. (10)

Bulleh Shah's perspective of ecology and women has been portrayed in the above verses. He resembles nature's ripeness with a female that is laden with colors and flowers. Environmental activism is a twentieth-century phenomenon that has made human beings realize that they are losing the world and they do not have any other option so far. In the age when Bulleh Shah was producing his poetry, the image of earth was polite and nurturing, the one who feeds humanity through the events of the scientific revolution has started gaining roots that created an opposite image of the earth like the

one that needs to be harnessed by the man. Nature was getting destructive through famines, earthquakes, pandemics, sterility of land, and her wrath was invited by the scientifically equipped man. He was least interested to study the havoc that he was causing to Mother Nature and earth through the process of colonization, clearing the patches to feed the growing population, his hunger for more ivory had turned human beings into rapists of the land.

In *Bulleh Shah* (1992) Surinder Sing Kohli writes that Bulleh Shah was born when it has been six years that the 9th guru of the Sikhs died. Aurangzeb Emperor was ruling the subcontinent of India and he was a pure *Sunni* and a disciple of Ahmad Sarhandi. He had no place for pluralistic beliefs so he wanted all the Sikhs and Hindus should embrace Islam and was ready to cause any harm to the one who would negate his intentions. (11)

Bulleh Shah was also not happy with Aurangzeb and his ancestors' policies, Nadir Shah Irani's plundering harmed the land unequivocally and the armed Sikhs had crossed all the limits of causing the deeds that disassociate them from being humans. In such circumstances, a mystic poet like Shah could not keep quiet as he writes, *Bhoorian waly Rajay keetay; Rajay Bheek Mangayee*. (12)

It means that the one who deserves to be served is serving now, so the world has turned upside down.

It was not an atrocity that was caused against land only but against other non-human beings as well. Bullah speaking for the less privileged and subaltern people like animals, gypsies, the *Khwaja Sara* community, etc. Bullah at times has taken the female voice or a female persona to explain his love and association with Allah's love and the love of his mentor Inayat Shah. It is important to note that whenever he uses a female mouthpiece the narrator is even more humble and conforms to the natural order. Bulleh Shah's poetry takes an ancient view of ecofeminism that supports that a woman's womb is like the womb of the earth, so she does the entire job that the earth does to produce, reproduce and nurture human and non-human beings. One of Bulleh's *Kafi* shows how indifferent the woman of his poetry is as she doesn't even want to be a part of mainstream economics, she just wants consumption. The word consummation that has been used here implies more than one inference; it is the consummation with Allah, with death: the ultimate truth, the consummation with Inayat Shah, and more specifically consummation with earth.

Laa makaan ki patri ooper/ Beh k naad vajavan gi

Laye Savan main Shah Gal apnay/ tadd main naar kahavan gi

I shall roam like a gypsy

And sing my plaint aloud

Till the sap of my passion

Runs madly through each clod.

In one of his *Kafi*, he declared dogs far better than human beings as they are famous for their loyalty conversely human beings are hypocrites and selfish and cannot be loyal to anyone nor to their master (God) who has given them sufficient. This master can be interpreted as mother earth that feeds human beings while industries and unequal distribution of sources between the masses have enraged earth to avenge human beings. Also in this verse, he conforms to Leopold's "Land Ethics" where animals and other organisms have made part of the community where he lives. Bullah says:

Kuttay Tethon Utay

Bhonkan tu band mol na hundey/ Ja roorhi ty sutty: Tethon Uttay

Khasam apnay da dar na chad'day/ Bhaven vajjan juttay: Tethon Uttay Dogs are better than you.

To bark and bark, and then to sleep/ On the first trash-heap you view; They are better than you.

They will not leave their master's house/ though beaten black and blue, They are better than you. (13)

There are divisions in this movement of ecofeminism as some of the critics believe that this gendered perspective that nature is being culturized and woman is also patronized according to male domination raga fears some other group of critics. They believe that this may exploit nature and women resultantly they are further suppressed. According to Haq et al. (2020), a woman is instinctively close to nature as she "naturally protects her environment and participates in economic growth like cattle farming, fishing, producing, and marketing of natural food and herbs. She executes her domestic responsibilities like cooking, gathering fuel, transporting pure water, and nurturing children, and elders".

In Shah's verses, the imagery of spinning, cotton, yarn, and the spinning wheel has been employed to show that human life is short-lived. If we see it from the perspective of the theory under discussion Bullah wants to remind us that one must contribute something to improving the condition of the earth before anything fades away as a consequence of human deeds. The following verse also describes how the matter of harmonized order of nature and society has been laid heavily onto the shoulders of a female character.

Kar Kattan Val dhean Kurray/ Aj ghar vich nave kapah kurrey

Tu jhab jhub veilna dah kurrey/Ronn vail, panjavan ja kurrey,

Fer kal na tera jaan kurray

Lass look at your spinning

The new cotton crop is in.

Take it for scouring, and then

Sit down to spin and spin

Or spinning time will be gone.

Indigeneity cannot be related to the age of Bulleh Shah, the term essentially is the product of colonialism; however, internationally this may be related to modern states and countries as mentioned in "Fourth World Theory and Methods of Inquiry" (14) This is what the universality of a poet means, the world is passing through an existential crisis and how the underdeveloped countries are responding to this pandemic is worth a thought. This revenge is less savage towards the countries that have caused less harm to it.

The truth is that Nature has come to avenge human beings, it has made human beings realize how it feels when human beings are caged instead of animals. Nature has pushed away the boundaries of a human being's so-called civilization, so talking about the environment while sitting in air-conditioned offices and holding international conferences cannot fool her. The avarice of humanity has no boundaries so for trivial benefit human beings can go beyond the boundaries of civility. A *Kafi* that Shah must have produced to highlight the greediness of his times' nobility can be related to the gluttony of today where lectures are deliberately given to make people aware of the atrocities that are caused by the one sitting on the top hierarchy in the very lecture room.

Hovay hiras dinon di taazi, Tenu keta hiras khavaaar/ Ilmon bus Karen O yaar. (15)

This *Kafi* emerges to criticize the deadly sin of gluttony and the time of Bulleh Shah and even after his lifetime, the situation remained the same or probably worse than before. The process of colonization and the treatment towards Asia and Africa has unveiled the graciousness of the west in particular. In the late 19th c. a man named Cody, the buffalo killer started killing them for sports with some other New Yorkers. The animal that was once in millions in the wilderness was reduced to a few hundred by the end of the 19th c. This buffalo massacre was politically supported by the President of the US who at that time also considered killing a buffalo may solve the 'Indian problem. ⁽¹⁶⁾ This was the hypocrisy that the West has always carried with it to plunder and deprive the countries that have naturally sufficiently available sources, if Africa and India only had stopped producing free labor and products for the West, the latter would have withered away due to intense starvation and poverty.

The purpose of this paper is not only to highlight the ecofeminism perspective in Bulleh Shah's poetry but also to relate it with the current situation and development of the movement. It is also to discuss how his poetry has social, cultural, and spatial variations as it does not belong to one tome, culture, and society. It is valid today because of its element of universality and the pregnancy of themes and thoughts that the poet has spoken about. He is a Sufi poet that longs for his love of Allah and his consideration for Inayat Shah but the poetry's pragmatism runs through generations and questions the authorities of any age. His untouchables and marginal community have more wisdom than the leaders of the world today. The transitory factor of life and respect to the order of nature has been far better understood by these people than the most civilized communities of today that organize summits and conferences to prove that they support women and nature and in every set up both of them have to validate their importance yet again.

Ki Kujh parti, Laag Chohri da, Ghundi Oor Sarhana

Jo Kuj Ditta Ap saen Ny, So Ghar Ly K Jana

What is my pay after a hard day's grid?

A hard pillow, and what you have behind.

United Nations' Earth Summit' which has been organized every year since 1972 is an attempt to highlight the increasing danger to land, but the one who is powerful counties that are part of the summit are the ones who have caused major damage to the world. The purpose of this summit is to make countries sensitized about the environment and some strategic planning for its enhancement. The adoption of 'agenda $21^{(17)}$ ', by all member states of the United Nations is also a part of the sustainable program on the human environment ("Conferences: Environment and Sustainable Development."). New York ironically has hosted most of this summit and the International Sustainability Conference 2021 which is going to be hosted again by the United Nations this year will reiterate that the world needs some land ethics to be followed.

This paper deals with the theory presented in *The Death of Nature (1980)* which was the start of this movement. It not only creates a sense of similarity between women and nature but also claims that they share the attribute of each other as well. However, there is an involvement of other ecological feminists' perspectives that talks about the ethics of involving many other organisms. The perspective of ecofeminism however has been broadened with time, and the current movements and inclusion of non-human organisms in nature have been taken into consideration. (18)

Where humanity has a very cheap price and hence can be found in the company of *dervish* and the people on the margins because they are not part of that rat race. Rafat renders in one of Bulleh Shah's *Kafi* "Being untouchable, none comes near/ me, but I am on the way, I do not care" (166). Shah speaks for them as they need representation. Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak? (1988)" argued that there are communities who still need representation because they do not have a say in the houses of parliaments and in the world occupied by chauvinism of course women of today can stand and speak for herself but non-human beings and the untouchables and Dalits still needs to be spoken for.

CONCLUSION

Bulleh Shah is still one of the most sung poets of the Sub-continent. This research not only has highlighted how his poetry is relevant to today's issues like ecology and feminist exploitation. Nature must be preserved so whatever may be done to enhance the human environment. History has witnessed an incident in India in 1974 known as 'the Chipkoo movement' where a small number of women as low as only twenty-seven of them safeguarded several hundred kilometers of land, they hugged the tree whenever there comes someone to cut it down, It was such a revolution that proves that it is mostly

the indigenous women who are closest to nature. ⁽¹⁹⁾ This revolution also challenged the ropocentricism⁽²⁰⁾ approach towards nature and women.

Green criminology and ecological violence that human beings have initiated caused irrevocable harm to the environment and we have invited the wrath of nature in the forms of various modern-day challenges like Covid-19, smog, increase in temperature, etc. This is also important to point out that just speaking at the summits and conferences to save nature will neither preserve nature nor its conventional role of being gracious, kind, and benevolent towards the human being. Many feminists have even objected to this relationship of a woman with nature because they believe that essentially it is causing more oppression than doing any good to her. However, this research takes up the ecofeminist perspective that equates women with nature for procreation and is most benevolent. Bullah's female not only protects her environment but also tries to be one of the organisms to respect sacred nature. Leopold's idea of community has been used to have a better understanding of community and be one with it rather than creating any difference and differentiating from it. Shah's poetic relevance can never be faded away, let's hope that his gypsy women teach something to the world leaders before the sound of the *Koel* dies away.

"Rain on time brings joy to all/ is what the Koels call" (21)

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