READING PUNJABI SUFI POETRY AS PERFORMANCE: REVIEWING THE MUSICAL RENDITIONS OF THE KĀFI

Ayesha Latif[1]

Abstract

The work presents an analysis of the regional poetic and musical genre called the kāfi pioneered by Sufi poets in early modern Indian Punjab, including Shah Hussain in the sixteenth century and Bulleh Shah in the eighteenth century. The study starts from tracing the origins of the genre kāfi to highlight its quintessential folk characteristics. Taking cue from the designation of ragas in kāfi collections, this work specifically attempts to understand the significance and role played by these ragas in the performances of Sufi Punjabi poetry.

Moreover, the work examines the repetitive patterns in the musical renditions of the Sufi poetry that fetch the mundane and sacred meanings embedded within the Sufi-devotional paradigm. It includes views of contemporary performers on their conception of the kāfi as well as references to mediatized contemporary recorded performances. In conclusion, the study brings to focus how over a vast timespan these works have accrued popular prominence in South Asian music which attests to the resilience and dynamism of the Punjabi poetic genre of the kāfi.

Keywords

Sufi-devotional poetry, historiography, Pakistan, reading and singing, renditions

INTRODUCTION

The poetry in the kāfi associated with Punjabi Sufi poets is hardly acknowledged as a significant musical genre. The early modern Punjabi poets that include the sixteenth-century poet Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah from the eighteenth century created these "mystical songs" in Punjabi dialects (Claus, Diamond & Mills, 2003:317; Hannabuss, 2003). These short poems in the kāfi transmitted across epochs through verbal tradition not only enriched the Punjabi literary culture but continue to echo in the realms of poetry and music throughout South Asia.

The sixteenth-century Sufi poet Shah Hussain pioneered his poetry in the genre of the kāfi in a way that no study of the genre is complete without referring to its place in the musical realm. However, not much thought has been given to the function and association of music with the kāfi. It is no coincidence that from the earliest collected manuscript versions of Shah Hussain's collected works, we find every single poem in the kāfi is ascribed to be sung following a ragor raga.[2] These song types were set to ragas or ragas, which technically speaking are permutations and combinations of tones within a scale in Indian Classical music.

---

[1] Ayesha Latif is a lecturer in the Department of Humanities at Comsats University in Pakistan. In addition, she is currently working as a PhD research scholar on the regional poetry of the Sufi-saints from the early modern South Asian region of Punjab. She is interested in reviewing the history of Punjab embedded within the Sufi orature. Alongside, Ayesha Latif is working on the translation of scripts authored by a female Punjabi mystic- poet of the early nineteenth century Piro Preman. More information can be obtained via email ayesharamzan83@gmail.com.

[2] Significant textual renditions include Shah Hussain's works collected by Asif Mohammad Khan (2014) and by Muzaffar A. Ghaffar. 2006, , where each kāfi is assigned to a specific raga.

Latif, Ayesha. 2024. Reading Punjabi Sufi-Poetry as Performance: Reviewing the Musical Renditions of the Kāfi.
AEMR, 14: 51-64.
DOI: 10.30819/aemr.14-5

The word raga derives from the Sanskrit word reg, which means "to dye or to color" (Thompson Platts, (1884 [1974]: 583).

Underlying the concept of ragas is the Indian philosophical view of the interconnection between natural rhythms of time and music. The ragas follow the rotating patterns of the day and night, the cycle of seasonal change, and the successive set of life and death. It would not be completely misplaced to say that the meanings of the word 'reg' connote the transformative power of musical performance to morph the listeners' emotional state. Poems sung in ragas following an order through specific pacing of rhyme and rhythm are meant to draw listeners into different emotional states. The kāfi is sung in the raga patterns, but as practice shows, there has been no compulsion on the performers to follow a specific rhythmical pattern.

The Indian classical system of music based on the system of raga*s* confounded oriental historians and scholars. A case in point is the description found in Amaury de Reincourt, the French historian and ethnographer's earliest fourteenth-century writing. He recorded the encounter with the musical culture of the pre-colonized India in the following words:

"Unlike Western music, which frequently alters and contrasts its moods and sentiments, Indian music concentrates utterly on one particular mood with the help of a constantly repeated tonic sound…The musician delves into it, develops and cultivates it relentlessly until the hypnotic suggestion can no longer be resisted by the audience" (Reincourt, 1986: 124). Reincourt's overall tone betrays a western ethnographer's insufficient knowledge of the Indian musical system. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts on music, we come across "colonial denigration" of the Indian musical system in the works of later Orientalists such as Sir William Jones and Richard Johnson (Butler Schofield, 2010: 486). It is only much later that the Indian musical system of raga*s* and raginis was recognized as unique and exclusive; however, the theorizations that rendered the patterns as "classical" are not unproblematic. For more detailed discussion one can consult, Butler Schofield's discussion in the article 'Reviving the Golden Age Again: 'Classicization,' Hindustani Music and the Mughals' (Butler Schofield, 2010).

DISCUSSION

To continue with the discussion on the kāfi and its relation to the rāgas, scholars have proposed that the very word kāfi denotes a specific form of Indian rāga called kāfi. However, the scholar Nazir Ahmed disagreed and viewed that the notion of limiting the complete repertoire of poems in the kāfi to only one rāga is absurd (Bhutta, 2008: 224). In a recent work titled "Ishqnama Shah Hussain", Farrukh Yaar associates 11 melodic ragas with Shah Hussain's poems.[3] For each raga, he specified a set of poems in the kāfi: tilang, rāam kāli, dhna siri, basānt, budhans, tikhāri, asāwari, snādhra, bilāwal, kidāra, and kalyān (Yaar, 2022: 127). On one hand, this designation of the kāfi with a raga can be understood as a reminder to the contemporary readers that these poems were meant to be sung. For the performers, it suggests that the songs were meant to be sung for specific times and seasons; however, in practice, the ambience has never been a bondage. On the other hand, the poems in the kāfi as set to raga forms had deeper implications.

The use of specific vocabulary and expressions provide further hints that the poetry was meant to be publicly sung. The Punjabi literary critic Hosain Syed viewed that "the kāfi …are designed as musical compositions to be interpreted by the singing voice" (Hosain

[3] Yaar documents Shah Hussain's poetry comparing the earliest textual renditions compiled by various collectors such as Mohan Singh Diwana (1942), Abdul Hameed Bhatti (1961), and Muhammad Asif Khan (1988).

Syed, 2006:10). Whether the pioneering poet of the kāfi was trained in the musical knowledge is a key question; however, apart from a few speculations about the poet's musical training, not much is known about his biography. Nevertheless, there is much more that can be inferred about the environment in which the form of the kāfi originated.

Shah Hussain is a vernacular poet; concomitantly, the genre of the kāfi belongs to the South Asian regional tradition. In simple words, Shah Hussain is a Sufi-mystic poet of the common people of the Punjab. The regional poetic tradition of the kāfi grew outside of the sphere of the court. The Mughal court patronized the Persian literary traditions; thus, it was in the late sixteenth century and seventeenth century within the Mughal court that works on "outlining music theory, the chapter on sangīt in Ain I Akbari (1593)" appeared in Persian script (Butler Schofield, 2010: 499). To put into a clearer perspective, since the kāfi belongs to the desi tradition of poetry, the use and association of ragas with this poetic tradition should be conceptually and theoretically seen as distinct from the Indo-Persian court tradition. In choosing to compose verses in the regional language, the Sufi poets of Punjab created poetry accessible to the widest range of listeners and combined aesthetic, musical, and emotional effects in ways that resonated with the common populace across ritual, gender, and ethnic divides. Scholars have grappled with the question of the varied influences on the Punjabi Sufi poets. It seems to be well established that the Sufi poets appropriated precolonial local cultural traditions which foremost include music and singing.

A preliminary historical view of Indian society's precolonial cultural ethos reveals that perhaps more than in any other region, ritual behaviour and music had been intricately connected. An important observation shows that ritual music was produced in Indian Hindu temples for the recital of sacred hymns called 'tevaram'. However, one of the defining aspects of the ritual poetry consecrated in the temples was that it was strictly codified. Sambamoorthy wrote that "When the music of the hymn was known, nobody would dare change it" (Sambamoorthy 1967: 76). Conversely, outside the temple in the realm of the rather vernacular, another category of poetry, the folk songs in varied regional languages, asserted influence.

The South Asian Medieval Era

Scholarship on the South Asian medieval era fetches a large reservoir of folklore that includes songs in different regional languages. One of the earliest anthropologists of medieval India, Richard M. Eaton, in the work titled "Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam" mentions songs in the regional language called 'Dakani' that were especially popular among the women; these little songs were chanted as the women of the house executed the routine, household chores, which included spinning and weaving cloth (1974:119)[4]. Eaton, In the context of Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah's poetry, terminologies similar to the Dakani poetry can be identified in the kāfi. Novetzke (2016) surveyed the pervasiveness of oral songs in varied regional dialects in the precolonial Indian subcontinent. In a similar way, historians recorded that the Bhakti as oral poets who preceded the Sufi saints had a widespread presence among the local communities already, a phenomenon, discussed in length by Hawley (2018) in his work titled 'Sūrdās: Poet, Singer, Saint' Hawley displayed that the fame and eminence accorded to the fifteenth-century saint from Banaras, Kabir, and the sixteenth-century poetess from Rajasthan, Mira Bai,

[4] The most popular songs were named Chakki-Nama the grindstone], and Charkha-Nama [the spinning wheel]. The grinding tool and the spinning wheel were part of common households. Interesting here is to notice that both these activities, grinding grains, and spinning yarn, entail repeated turning movements of a wheel, which in a way symbolizes the repetitive patterns of human life. Eaton, 1974:119.

not only validate the strong impact of Bhakti orature in various communities across the Indian regions, but it also shows how it derived its survival value from being passed orally among the common populace (Novetzke, 2007). Bhakti collections categorized on the basis of raga*s* further suggest the Sufi poets' partaking of its aesthetic and performative aspects.

It is amidst the dynamic precolonial ethos that the Sufi poets created works in the kāfi genre. In what other significant ways can we conjecture the origin of the songs called the kāfi*?*

The eminent researcher of South Asian Sufi-mystic poetry, Anne Marie Schimmel, cited that the earliest reference to the kāfi, "often chanted like songs" (Schimmel 1971: 75, is found in the works of Western oriental ethnographers, Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) and Ernst T. Trumpp (1828-1885). South Asian scholars estimated that the etymology of the word kāfi derives from the Sanskrit-Hindi expression, kāviya or kāvita, which simply means a song. Bhutta (2008) discussed various scholarly attempts to trace the origins of the word kāfi. According to Bhutta (2008: 224), "The etymology of the term kāfi is unclear; some scholars trace it to the Arabic term *qāfiya*, which denotes an end-rhyming scheme, and some others tie it to the Sanskrit term *kāvya* which means a poem". Bhutta rejects the sundry views on the origin of the kāfi that connect it with the Arabic or Sanskrit tradition, claiming instead that the kāfi is rooted in the "indigenous song-like poems" that had diffused throughout the premodern Indian subcontinent.

For a more technical view of the kāfi, we refer back to Anne Marie Schimmel's definition of the kāfi as "a mono-rhymed poem, which is interrupted by a refrain" (Schimmel, 1962: 175) The South Asian scholar and collector Muhammad Asif Khan in the definition of the kāfi validates that it is 'rahao' which means a refrain, the key feature distinguishing the kāfi from other songs (Khan, 2014: 48). Similarly, Carla Petievich writes that "The kāfi*'s* binding force is the refrain which is repeated after every line or stanza" (Petievich, 2007: 16). Hosain Syed defined the kāfi as " […] a small poem in stanzas followed by a refrain […] kāfi is a traditional song with traditional associations with music" (Hosain Syed, 2006:22).It is at this juncture where we find that the former delineations on the structural makeup of the kāfi coincide with discussions on folklore from other parts of the world.

For instance, we find parallel structural forms in Eastern European folk poetry which like the kāfi consists of "few intervals, a small range, and short repeated lines or stanzas" (Nettl, 2010: 479). Bruno Nettl said that "a short line or stanza repeated and varied lightly" is found in "African tribal music to south Slavic epics to modern urban minimalist music" (Nettl, 2010:479). Atkinson referred to the English folk songs that are characterized by "verbal and structural repetitions, parallelism, and patterning" (Atkinson, 2004: 469). Foley found the repetitive verbal structures, " […]density of formulaic phraseology", as a persistent feature of folk poetry (Foley, 1992: 280). Foley further elaborated that the lexical iterations function as mnemonic devices for local bards and consequently create the possibility of indiscreet circulation of poetry among the folk majority. Across cultures, we come across an age-old understanding of the sundry functions of oral poetic performances. Huizinga remarked that "antique poetry" in the oral cultures served beyond aesthetics in a way that it had a more important "social and liturgical function"; it was "entertainment, ritual, artistry, riddle-making…" all at the same time (Huizinga, 1944:13). Despite the cross-cultural similarities, the kāfi must be placed in the specific South Asian tradition of the devotional regime of knowledge, a term used by Michel Boivin to refer to the Sufi poetic texts and performances (Boivin, 2020).

This is the loci, the category of 'devotional' poetry, where the performance of the kāfi yields other functions in music and singing. Michel Boivin ascribed Sufi orature as part of "devotional regimes of knowledge". Boivin adduces that in contrast to the ritual texts, as the Quran or the Bhagavat Gita, the Sufi poetic texts constitute the "devotional regimes of knowledge" that feature the "use of vernacular language" and the import of "musical performances" regularly (Boivin, 2020:19). What specific role did mystical or devotional poetry play in the sphere of performance?

Michel Boivin remarked that "devotional poetry" is sung to reach a spiritual state (Boivin, 2020:310). This is validated by Shemeem Abbas in her ethnographic work that highlights the Sufiana Kalaām sung at the public performances in the Sufi shrines. Abbas observed that during these performances, the musicians and performers concentrate on delivering an "ecstatic devotional aspect" to the listeners (Abbas, 2002: 58). Regula Burkhardt Qureshi captured both the details and the dynamics of the Sufi ritual performances. Qureshi analyzed that during the live musical concert known as sama, performers often utilize the polyphonic effect of music through various modes to reach the desired goal which is to invoke spiritual ecstasy ((Qureshi, 1986: ii). Direct observations of shrine performances show common people initiated into the ecstatic spiritual state, also known as Haal.

In the context of precolonial Indian Punjabi society, a conglomeration of various communities comprising different rituals, castes, and ethnic traditions, what value did these devotional practices of Sufi poetry hold?

Historical Analyses

Historical analyses fetch pictures of a socio-ritual culture in precolonial India as dominated by the Hindu pundits. For years, the Brahman Hindu pundits exercised control over the ritual sphere of the temple. The tyrannical presence of the Hindu pundits made it especially crippling for the common folk to access the spiritual realm. After the ingress of Islam in India, Muslim ritual teachers, mullahs and qāzis, exhibited similar oppressive tendencies. In contrast, the Sufi saints showed a different approach. According to Ali. S. Asani, the Sufis introduced a 'folk' version of Islam which they shaped distinctly from the orthodox prescriptive Islamic ritual approach (Anjum, 2017; Anjum & Pervaiz 2019). Not surprisingly, the condemnation of tyrannical authority exercised by ritual orthodoxy is a huge part of Sufi Punjabi poetry, an aspect that resonated with the common folk; conversely, this opened a path for the ordinary people to equally partake in the sacred and the spiritual sphere. Asani viewed that unlike the orthodox Islamic approach, the Sufi saints blended Islamic messages with local culture and traditions. They conveyed the messages through poetry in vernacular dialects to reach out to the common folk. In Novetzke's view, the Sufi poets did not aim to propagate exclusive forms of knowledge for a single specified community; in other words, their aspirations were far from proselytization. It makes sense since unlike the orthodox traditional version of Islam that strongly prohibits music as part of the Islamic way of life the Sufi poets embraced musical and poetic impacts.

This work argues that the kāfi embodies this historical moment when the Sufi poetic sensibility, keenly perceptive of the outward forms, and expressions tapped into the folk oral traditional culture. Mohinder Pal Kohli's assertion that the advent of Islam had "philosophical, literary, and linguistic consequences" finds expression primarily in Sufi poetry (Quoted by Puri, Rakshat & Bulleh Shah, 1997: n.p.). The Sufi shrines, where these discourses circulate, provide an instance of this embracive spirit. In contrast to the Muslim mosques or Hindu temples, Sufi shrines are open and inclusive sites for people across

ritual, ethnic, class, and gender segregation. It is within these spaces primarily that ritual performances of the kāfi take place. If religion is defined as "an act or series of acts regularly repeated in a set precise manner" that yield wider cultural significance, we find the shrines as sites which allow devotees to practice religion in creative ways using ritual acts. These spaces are a fascinating ground for the intermingling of various cultural and ritual traditions which include the meshing of music, prayer, and intermittent ecstatic dances on the beat of drums. Brian Bond (2020a and 2020b) in his ethnographic essays argued that Sufi poetry in musical performances becomes affective practices that function beyond aesthetics. To illustrate, he referred to the Muslim singers of Sufi poetry in the region of Kachchh, who continue to foster "inter-ritual" interaction between Hindu and Muslim communities through musical public concerts held regularly.[5]

The Sufi poetry recorded long after the death of the poets continued to derive its power from its execution in music and singing.[6] The role of local minstrels and bards has left an indelible mark in carrying forth this tradition through oral performances. Unlike poetry coded in the form of writing, oral poetry allowed performers to sing in an effortless and spontaneous manner, an exercise that is visible in the contemporary live musical performances of Sufi poetry. The Sufi musical performances illustrate how agency is inscribed to both the musical performers and the listeners. Michel Boivin's study corroborated that the Sufi devotional practice does not lend itself to a linear connection between the performers as active soloists and the listeners as passive participants (Boivin, 2020:282). A similar point is mentioned by Christian Novetzke who wrote that the performance of vernacular oral poetry converts the dichotomy between the poet and the listener in a way that the relationship between the poet, the performer, and the audience is changed into a trichotomy (Novetzke, 2008: 256). Often, in a single musical performance, the singers blend different pieces of works from different Sufi poets; the singers insert quotations, lines, and verses from diverse sources.[7] Shemeem Burney Abbas employed the term "call- and -response" to denote how the singers chant, sing, and enact these live performances (Abbas, 2002). Regula Qureshi (986: xiii) noted that the solo and group performances of mystical poetry are "characterized by repetition and improvisation". The listeners or audience equally participate in the live performances, which often extend over three consecutive dusks, compelling performers to continuously extemporize the orature. Qureshi added that in between these Sufi musical performances, the audience and performers practice zikr, repetition of God's name, as a ritual. In Anne Marie Schimmel's view, who uses alternate spellings for the practice of zikr as dhikr, "the dhikr [zikr] can be compared to the act of spinning", and it cultivates feelings of renewal of faith in the devoted practitioners (Schimmel, 1975 :386). Shemeem Abbas specifically mentioned the doyen singer of the kafi, Abida Parveen, who is recorded to repeatedly chant "devotional Kalimats (Zikr)" to induce "ecstasy" (Abbas, 2002:23).

[5] It is important to mention that Brian E. Bond's essay is a study of the kāfi performance, based in Kachchh in the province of Sindh, which is separate from the Punjabi genre and its musical renditions. The Sindhi Kachchh tradition evolved on its own and was popularized by the performers in the second half of the twentieth century. See, article "Teaching Islam in Song: Storytelling and Islamic Meaning in Sindhi Sufi Poetry Performance".

[6] Reportedly Bulleh Shah's most famous Kafi *Bulleh noo Samjhawan aaiyan* [The women came to admonish Bulleh] was discovered and recuperated directly from the oral singers writes Khalid Ahmad in the Introduction to *Bulleh Shah. A Selection*. (2015: 27).

THE CLASSICS

Let us return to the question of the associative function of the raga with the *kafi* performance. In a discussion of the Indian raga system, Powers established that in contrast to the Christian church musical mode, which is "liturgical text dependent", the most essential feature of the Indian musical system is its freedom from any "textual bonds" (Powers, 1958: 449).

The raga system allows performers and musicians to "improvise" freely which in turn generates a "self-renewing spontaneous creativity" (Powers, 1958:452). Powers referred to the extemporaneous transmission of the various kinds of "non-liturgical" Indian musical traditions.

This is also a reminder that the kāfi categorized as belonging to the sacred sphere presents a contrast from the institutional devotional tradition and constructs spirituality where the blurring of the sacred and the secular can occur. The recurring line *Ghoom charakhra* in the *kafi* by Shah Hussain has been interpreted in both secular and spiritual ways. For instance, Richard M. Eaton viewed the circular movement of the "spinning wheel" and "the grindstone" as the poets' way of urging the listeners to repeatedly practice the "Islamic precepts" (Eaton, 1974:123). Michel Boivin (2020:132) found that "the wheel of a spinner" is "a gesture of daily labor"; this pervasive metaphor has been taken from everyday lives of the common people since the spinning wheel was a central part of every household in early modern India Michel Boivin's study focuses on Sindhi Sufi Folk literature. Interestingly, the works of the Sindhi Sufi poets show stark similarities with the Punjabi Sufi poets in their use of allegories, parables, and motifs that are essentially derived from everyday life of the common people..In one of the musical renditions of Shah Hussain's kāfi sung by the eminent Pakistani Sufi singer Abida Parveen and the rock singer Ali Azmat, the line *Ghoom charakhra* [Spin, O spinning wheel… Spin, O Spinning wheel] is repeatedly chanted (Hussain Shah, 2018: 3m 04ss). To a common listener, the musical performance of the elegant and simple lines of the kāfi unfolds multiple layers of meanings; the repetition of the refrain reassures the connection between the varied interpretations. This polyvalent feature of the lyrics allows both secular and sacred meanings to materialize in the musical performance; inarguably, the Sufi poetry has found a permanent space in a variety of musical arenas. Shah Hussain's poetry is popular as part of musical renditions in the category of Sufiana Kalaam sung at the shrines, and in commercially produced qawwali performances.

Equally popular is Bulleh Shah, the lyrical genius who followed Shah Hussain's poetic tradition of the kāfi and complemented it further with the spontaneity of expression and emotion. According to Najm Hussain, Bulleh Shah's kāfi appear as "a dramatic song with traditional associations with music" (Hosain Syed, 2006: 22). Scant biographical references of the eighteenth-century poet hint that he was trained by musicians at some point though not much is credible. Nevertheless, Bulleh Shah's verses were acquired by the local musicians and bards and appear to have blended so well in the oral milieu of pre-colonial India; reportedly, one of his famous works in the kāfi *"Bulleh noo Samjhawan aaiyan"* was recuperated directly from the folk singers. It is important to remind readers that the term folk singers usually associated with the rural class represents a much wider category in the Indian context; demographic analysis shows that the people who sang these songs were by no means restricted to one class or community. The vernacular rituals and musical performances studied and observed at the annual fairs at Sufi shrines attest to the presence of the diverse community of singers. Contrary to public opinion, historically, the spread of songs in local vernaculars was so expansive and deeply embedded

within Indian subcultures that it is misleading to strictly associate the folk songs with rural communities or classes alone. Butler Schofield remarked with certainty that the vernacular song lyrics were known at the Mughal court since the Indic and Persianate traditions often show stark similarities in the ways "emotions" were cultivated through music and artistic performances.

While it is almost impossible to describe the musical experience in words to some degree in a typical Bulleh Shah's kāfi, the emotional intensity is mirrored in the textual renditions as the following lines illustrate:

> "Come embrace me, my Beloved,
> Why embroil us in this fight?
> The distracted never attain their goal,
> I've seen that it is only through vigilance." (Petievich, 2007:51).

What other features in the kāfi performance play a key role in the execution of the emotional effect? Contrived for oral recitals, Bulleh Shah's poems in the kāfi medium allow performers to artfully vary the repetitive verses where musical affect reaches a heightened state.

Carla Petievich noted that in the musical renditions, the "repetition of the rahāo (the refrain)" plays a key role to "reinforce the central mood and the message of the kāfi" (Petievich, 2007: 17). Michel Boivin also found that the structure of the kāfi sanctions musical performers for "rhythmic free improvisations" (Boivin, 2020:311). In the article titled "Performing realization: The Sufi music videos of the Taalibe Baye of Dakar", Ogunnaike specifically pointed out the role of repetition of successive lines in Sufi musical performances. In his view, it is primarily the repetitive feature that creates a symbiotic relationship between the performers and the listeners. Ogunnaike further argued that in Sufi performances "each new invocation or repetition represents an invitation to a new and fresh approach to—a new revelation of—the same reality in a new context" (Ogunnaike, 2018:29). In a study on the function of sestina or the refrain in a poetic text, Michael Frishkopf's remark resonates with the former observation. According to Frishkopf, the performance of the refraining line embodies an "incantatory affect"; thus, "the repetition allows for interpretations in both sacral and secular ways" (Frishkop,f 2003:88). As adduced later, we get to know that the performers of the kāfi are aware of the emotional effect on the audience and can tell that the deliberate reiteration of lines induces the oftenmentioned "incantatory" or "hypnotic" experiences. Thus, we find the refrain repeated in varying styles in different versions of the song.[8]

What Evokes Emotional Depth

To ensemble what else evokes the emotional depth of a typical poem in the kafi genre, this study incorporates the views of contemporary singers and performers of the genre. This includes a conversation on the kāfi with Noor Zehra Kazmi, one of the most revered veena players and performers in South Asia. Noor Zehra Kazim is a Sagar Veena (a stringed instrument) player based in Pakistan. She is a veteran in the art of South Asian classical music and has been practicing and teaching music for over four decades. Kazmi remarked that the kāfi cannot be understood in entirety through an academic perspective. In her view, the study of the kāfi necessitates an analysis of the musical structures that are part of the basic Indic epistemology on music. During a conversation at *Sanjan Nagar*,

[8] This can be compared to another musical version of Shah Hussain's poem, [Spin, O Spinning Wheel, spin], by a younger artist. The refrains occur at the interval of 7 m: 18 ss.

the classical center for music studies in Lahore, Kazmi said that the inherent expressive quality of Indian music creates a deep emotional resonance which does not necessitate expressions or gestures used in writing, but it arouses emotion, a power secondary in writing. She mentioned the great kāfi singers, Pathanay Khan, Abida Parveen, and Hammid Ali Bela, whose renditions transfer the emotional intensity to the audiences. In her opinion among nonclassical forms of music, the kāfi is the only exception that allows the words and music to flow as a single entity (for lack of a better word). Kazmi viewed that the kāfi cannot be sung without the performer's feeling being aligned with the lyrics. The performer's voice transfers the emotions to the listeners. The language and the music meld, becoming one inseparable entity. This overpowering visceral quality of the kāfi spreads outward. In her view, the sufis were no less than philosophers, who had felt deep grief and pain and were able to manifest emotions in the Sufi lyrics.

As mentioned by Noor Zehra Kazmi, Pathanay Khan (1926–2000) is a singer whose name is synonymous with the singing of the kāfi. His kāfi renditions comprise verses penned by Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah, and Khwaja Ghulam Farid. He found a wide audience among both the common folk and the gentry. Not only has he influenced and inspired many contemporary artists and vocalists, his voice brings the profound felt experiences of pain and passion through the quality of his voice which is both sweetly splintered and lovable, coarse rustic.[9]

Modern Ideas in Pakistan

Similarly, the modern Pakistani singer known for his Sufi poetry renditions Arieb Azhar commented that the *kafi* can be viewed as "the blues of our part of the world, though these musical renditions are without lively beats".[10] Azhar mentioned that the kāfi is sung preferably in a single drone-like tone and does not necessarily require the support of a variety of musical instruments. Azhar added that the repetition of the lines or phrases in the performance enhances the aesthetic quality in the singing of poems in the kāfi. He referred to his personal preference for improvisations and mentioned that often, in live performances, he combines varying verses from different sufi oratures. Arieb Azhar's comments directed attention to the primary intertextual quality of folk orature that facilitates the singers to move beyond "text-centric" renditions (Bond, 2020a: 45). Azhar concluded the conversation by pointing to the quintessential female centric themes in the kāfi.

Inarguably, many poems by Shah Hussain are about female social spaces, places where women gather to spin and weave cotton or to grind flour on the grindstone. Simply, the recurring images spinning, weaving, and dying portray the everyday life of the Punjabi folk, and amidst these images, essential human experiences of love, pain, joy, and separation ricochets. Interestingly, it is through the use of feminine voice that the male poets evoke the emotive aspect. The male poets, Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah, repeatedly employ Heer as a symbol and persona in the kāfi. Schimmel (1975: 388) writes "The story of the tragic lovers, Heer-Ranjha, has been retold by nearly a hundred poets in Panjabi, Urdu, Sindhi and has been translated several times into English language ". Thematically, the love-story is comparable to the Shakespearean tragic-romance "Romeo and Juliet". The archetypal tragic love heroine from Punjab, Heer, is the central character in the legendary love story called Heer-Ranjha, symbolizing the passion and intoxication of

[9] Pathany Khan performances on you tube: https://youtu.be/a3uWDBxUFE0?si=DoMf--NzvCPMrOgb.

[10] Arieb Azhar is a Pakistani musician known for his renderings of traditional Sufi poetry and folk songs.his first album, *Waajj*, released in 2006 consists of eight tracks in which he vocalizes the classic Sufi lyrics of the poets that include Punjabi poets as Ghulam Farid, and Bulleh Shah. I interviewed him at a local Café in Islamabad, his hometown, on January 1, 2023.

love. For instance, in Bulleh Shah's poem, *Main aapay ranjha hoi*, [I have transformed myself into my beloved, I am one with him], the poetic voice repeatedly chants Heer's longing for her lover Ranjha. In the voice and persona of Heer, the words "main aapay Ranjha hoi" convey Heer's sweeping affection for her lover. In Shah Hussain's kāfi, Heer appears as a defiant character who repeatedly proclaims her love for her beloved, Ranjha, against the wishes of her family. In the refrain, she repetitively tells her mother "I belong to Ranjha and he belongs to me" (Syed, 2006:12).

Much has been written about the use of female voice and persona by the male poets. However, it is the magic of the performance that wields a "gamut of emotions", an expression borrowed from Heidi Pauwels, through the performer's persona as a female lover (Pauwels 2021:147). The singers of the kāfi are cognizant of the use of feminine voice in poetry. Shemeem Abbas in her research study questioned both male and female singers, the qawwals, on the use of feminine voice in Sufi performances. The responses to this question show that not only are the musicians aware of the "aesthetics of female voice", which adds a formidable emotional feature to the performance, but it also allows them to "play with the syntactic and semantic structures of the languages to speak as though they were females" (Abbas, 2002). Abbas remarks that within the musicians' gesture of imitating the female heroines and their voice manifests a "challenge" to the patriarchal norms; this is a very fascinating aspect, Abbas argued that unlike the "elitist" qawwali, the kāfi is a grassroot oral tradition that essentially encapsulates the female domain (Abbas, 2002:19). That the performers tap into its feminine and folk features is made explicit in the varied forms and diverse ways of performance. In a musical rendition of the kāfi by Shah Hussain, the late maestro Nusrat Fateh Ali's voice would send the audience in dollops of joy and delirium when chanting lines that celebrate the arrival of the lover, *O laalni mera piya ghar aaya* [My beloved is home at last]. Popularized by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and performed by dozens of other musicians, the refrain in Bulleh Shah announces the long-awaited arrival of the beloved: [come my friends, its time to celebrate. See how lucky I am to have found a beautiful beloved].

Shah Hussain's deftly crafted lines impart a rich resonance in music executions; his poems in the kāfi have been sung by various musicians and singers in diverse styles. The late classical singer Hamid Ali Bela sang Hussain's *kafi* in the most melancholic tone, and the more contemporary rendition is an electrifying dance number released in Bollywood.[11]

In a similar way, Bulleh Shah's works occupy a significant position in the contemporary musical landscape of both India and Pakistan; his poetry has found traction with young musicians and vocalists. *Ki Janan main kaun* [Bulleh Can I know who I am?] is one of the most favorite tracks among young vocalists and musicians. Najm Hosain Syed described this poem as "a dance of negative phrases accompanied by the double interrogative of the refrain", which pours forth a series of questions that essentially touch the ontological precepts (Hosain Syed 2006: 115).

"Bulleh Can I know who I am? […] I am neither the Pharoah nor Moses […] I am neither a Hindu nor a Turk […] I am neither scared nor profane […] Bulleh Shah Can I know who I am? […]"

[11] Shah Hussain: Neu La laya Bayparwa dai naal. <https://youtu.be/QtlYH87eMtM> The Orchard Music (on behalf of Oriental Star Agencies Ltd); Polaris Hub AB, and 1 Music Rights Societies. Also, see the thrilling dance number from Bollywood, https://youtu.be/V_0nZVqHAO8 . SME (on behalf of Sony Music Entertainment India Pvt. Ltd.); SOLAR Music Rights Management, UNIAO BRASILEIRA DE EDITORAS DE MUSICA - UBEM, ASCAP, SMEIndia_Pub, BMI - Broadcast Music Inc.

This kāfi has been sung by Pakistani vocalists such as Salman Ahmad and Ali Azmat of the Junoon band, and in India, by the Indian singer, Rabbi Shergill. Correspondingly, the meaning of a kafi as a single entity is animated by the repetition of the line: *Ki Janan Main kaun*. As Bulleh Shah's poetry continues to enjoy popularity across time and space, one can find a stark similarity to the way in which Hawley refers to "the transtemporal" quality of Kabir's poetry. Unsurprisingly, many poetic expressions and verses from Sufi orature have been variously appropriated in the modern and commercialized ventures, which validates its prominence among the younger, and more contemporary audiences. For instance, in 2020, the Sufi vernacular poetry resonated in the citadels of commercial studios in Pakistan, that too with unparalleled vigor.[12] The semantic range of the lyrics in many of these modern performances betray acquaintances with Sufi indigenous poetry. The appropriation of Sufi lyrics by modern singers is one of the debatable features criticized by the traditionalists. Similarly, the subsumption of the kāfi as Sufiana Kalaam, categorized by Shemeem Abbas Burney, is not entirely problematic, given that the genre is popular across different spheres and domains of performance, and thus is not limited to the shrine enactments only.

The genre remains an unmarked musical tradition, and its historical specificity has been ignored equally; however, it seems to have carved a lifecycle of its own. It is within the genre of the kāfi that the intricate and resilient connections between the oral folk early modern Indian culture and the Punjabi Sufi poetic tradition are repeatedly echoed. Accepted and revered both inside and outside of the Sufi traditional musical practices, the kāfi as a genre continues to reverberate in the contemporary South Asian musical culture in both Pakistan and India.

REFERENCES

Abbas, Shemeem Burney. 2002. *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Anjum, Tanvir. 2017. Vernacularization of Islam and Sufism in South Asia: A study of the production of Sufi literature in local languages. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan 54*(1): 190-207.

Anjum, Tanvir and Naila Pervaiz. 2019. Ghum Charkhaṛyā/Spin, O Spinning-wheel: Cotton-spinning and Weaving Symbolism in Shah Husayn's Poetry. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan 56*(1): 49-60.

Asani, Ali S. 1988. Sufi Poetry in the Folk Tradition of Indo-Pakistan. *Religion & Literature, 20*(1): 81–94.

Atkinson, David. 2004. Folk Songs in Print: Text and Tradition. *Folk Music Journal*, *8*(4): 456-483.

Bhutta, Saeed. 2008. Kafi: A Genre of Punjabi Poetry. *South Asian Studies 23*(2): 223-229.

Boivin, Michel. 2020. Oral Knowledge and the Sufi Paradigm. *The Sufi Paradigm and the Makings of a Vernacular Knowledge in Colonial India: The Case of Sindh (1851–1929).* Edited by Michel Boivin. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 269-285.

[12] The coke studio season 2020 performances, in particular, bring back the Punjabi folk devotional music. *Ishq da Kukkar* [The bird of love], < https://youtu.be/RomqjGzBXKE > *Na Tuttaya Vay* [My heart suffers greatly] <https://youtu.be/kezdQcNcDCs.>

Bond, Brian E. 2020a. Performing Pain: Sindhi Sufi Music, Affect, and Hindu-Muslim Relations in Western India. *Culture, Theory and Critique 61* (2-3): 112-132.

Bond, Brian E. 2020b. The Sufi Paradigm and the Makings of a Vernacular Knowledge in Colonial India. New Delhi: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Butler Schofield, Katherine. 2010. Reviving the Golden Age Again:"Classicization," Hindustani Music, and the Mughals*, Ethnomusicology, 54*(3) : 484-517.

Claus, Peter J., Sarah Diamond, and Margaret Ann Mills 2003. Kafi. *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Eaton, Richard M. 1974. Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam. *History of Religions*, 14(2), 117–27.

Foley, John Miles. 1992. "Word-Power, Performance, and Tradition." *The Journal of American Folklore*, 105 (417): 275–301. DOI: 10.2307/541757. Last accessed 8th May, 2023.

Frishkopf, Michael. 2003. Authorship in Sufi Poetry. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, (23), 78.* DOI: 10.2307/1350077.

Hannabuss, Stuart. 2003. South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, *Reference Reviews*, *17*(8): 23-24.

Hawley, John Stratton. 1988. Author and Authority in the Bhakti Poetry of North India. *Journal of Asian Studies, 47*(2): 269-290.

Hawley*,* John Stratton. 2018. *Sūrdās: Poet, Singer, Saint,* Revised edition*.* Delhi: Primus Books.

Ḥosain Syed, Najm. 2006. *Recurrent Patterns in Punjabi Poetry*. Lahore: Justin Group Printers.

Hussain, Shah. 2021. Nadiyon Par < https://youtu.be/DKj5m9cSMZs>. CMRRA, Abramus Digital, LatinAutor, LatinAutorPerf, PEDL, and 10 Music Rights Societies. Audio: Sony Music Entertainment India Pvt. Ltd(C).

Hussain, Shah. 2018. Ghoom Charakhra. < https://www.youtube.com> Coke Studio Season 11. Abida Parveen and Ali Azmat". Last accessed 16th May, 2023.

Hussain, Shah. 2016. Neu Lal laya. < https://youtu.be/QtlYH87eMtM>. The Orchard Music (on behalf of Oriental Star Agencies Ltd); Polaris Hub AB, and 1 Music Rights Societies.

Huizinga, Johann. 1944*. Homo Ludens: A Study of the Paly-Element in Culture (English translation)*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Khan, Asif Mohammad. 2014. *Kafian Shah Hussain*. Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Board.

Nettl, Bruno. 2010. *The Study of Ethnomusicology. Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*. Bloomington: University of Illinois Press.

Novetzke, Christian Lee. 2007. Bakhti and its Public. *International Journal of Hindu Studies, 11*(3): 255-272; DOI: 10.1007/s11407-008-9049-9

Novetzke, Christian Lee 2016. *The Quotidian Revolution: Vernacularization, Religion, and the Premodern Public Sphere in India*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Novetzke, Christian Lee. 2008. *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India*. New York: Columbia University Press. https://public.ebookcentral. proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4551269. Last accessed 14th May, 2023.

Muzaffar A. Ghaffar. 2006. *Within Reach. Book Series on Sufi Poetry*. Lahore: Ferozsons.

Ogunnaike, Oludamini. 2018. Performing Realization: The Sufi Music Videos of the Taalibe Baye of Dakar. *African Arts; 51*(3): 26–39. DOI: 10.1162/afar_a_00414. (Last accessed 04/05/23)

Pauwels, Heidi. 2021. Cultivating emotion and the rise of the vernacular: the role of affect in Early Hindi-Urdu'songs. *South Asian History and Culture 12*(2-3): 146-165.

Petievich, Carla, ed. 2007. *When Men Speak as Women: Vocal Masquerade in Indo-Muslim Poetry.* Delhi: OUP India.

Powers, Harold S. 1958. Mode and Raga. *The Musical Quarterly 44*(4): 448–460.

Puri, Rakshat and Bulleh Shah. 1997. Bulleh Shah in Punjabi Poetic Tradition. *India International Centre Quarterly*, *24* (2/3):125–138.

Qureshi, Regula Burckhardt. 1986. *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*. Vol. 1. New Delhi: CUP Archive.

Rafat, Taufiq, ed. 2014. *Bulleh Shah: A Selection*. London: Oxford University Press.

Rahman, Tariq. 1999. *The Teaching of Punjabi: A Study in Power and Prejudice*. Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.

de Reincourt, Amaury. 1986. *The Soul of India*. (1960). New Delhi: Honeyglen Publishing.

Rinehart, Robin, 1999. The Portable Bulleh Shah: Biography, Categorization, and Authorship in the Study of Punjabi Sufi Poetry." *Numen*, *46*(1): 53–87.

Sambamoorthy, P. 1960. *History of Indian Music*. New Delhi: Indian Music Publishing House.

Shah, Bulleh. 2004. Ki Janan Main Kaun. < https://youtu.be/gbpdE8n_QWo> Phonographic Digital Limited, FUGA (on behalf of Odd One Out Records); The Royalty Network (Publishing), CMRRA, and 5 Music Rights Societies.

Shah, Bulleh. 2015. Bulleh Shah: A Selection: Rendered into English Verse / by Taufiq Rafat; With an Introduction by Khaled Ahmad. Karachchi: OUP Pakistan.

Shah, Bulleh. 1999. Ki Janan Main Kaun. < https://youtu.be/IBxd5ilAnJQ> TheAdministrationMusicRights (on behalf of Sadaf Digital); Sony Music Publishing, LatinAutor - SonyATV, UNIAO BRASILEIRA DE EDITORAS DE MUSICA - UBEM, ASCAP, Polaris Hub AB, CMRRA, and 6 Music Rights Societies

Schimmel, Annemarie. 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Schimmel, Annemarie. 1962. The Martyr-Mystic Ḥallāj in Sindhi Folk-Poetry: Notes on a Mystical Symbol. *Numen, 9*(3): 161–200.

Schimmel, Annemarie. 1971. Sindhi Literature. *Mahfil*, *7*(1/2): 71–80.

Thompson Platts, John. 1974 [1884]. *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English*. London: Oxford University Press.