

Beyond Deconstruction: Rewriting Self, Being, and Meaning Through Sufi Ontology in Bulleh Shah's Kafi-A Digital Humanities and Computational Textual Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has increasingly drawn parallels between Sufi mystical tradition and post-structuralist philosophy to underpin their peripheral similarities and cross-cultural ties. However, these comparative studies have oversimplified their fundamental ontological and epistemological distinctions, leading to a westernized systematic dissection of Sufi spirituality. This paper argues that Sufi metaphysics and cosmology provides a distinctive yet densely rich understanding of self, divine and meaning though its philosophical investigation share similar anti-rationalist and anti-essentialist approach with Western deconstruction. Through close reading of Sufi kafi's of Bulleh Shah informed by Ibn Arabi's philosophical doctrine of *Wahdat-ul-Wujud*, this paper argues that paradoxical nature of *Khudi* and *Khuda* in Sufi text is not reflective of linguistic or cosmic indeterminacy but in-depth realization of divine infinity and experiential knowledge of the Real. By contesting the generic and structural interpretation of Sufi texts, this paper contributes to the development of a counter-argument to cross-cultural studies that posit overtly conceptual unities between Eastern Sufi thought and Western post-structuralist philosophy. The findings of this paper reveal that metaphysical complexity and spiritual density in Bulleh Shah's poetry ultimately shapes its understanding of existence and meaning, acting as a contrary to the linguistic *différance* which strictly bound itself with the interpretive understanding of reality. This paper further extends its analysis into the digital humanities domain by examining how computational text analysis tools and natural language processing methods, when applied to Bulleh Shah's kafi's, may expose the limits of algorithmic meaning-making when confronted with spiritually dense, experiential poetic discourse that resists reduction to lexical or semantic pattern.

Keywords: Bulleh Shah, Sufi Metaphysic, *Wahdat-Ul-Wujud*, Close Reading, Identity Deconstruction

1. Introduction

Though there is a lot of research on the kafi's of Bulleh Shah, the focus of the critical writing is either social-political or postmodern theoretical. Though it has been researched extensively the critical writing focuses either on the social-political or postmodern theoretical aspects of the kafi's of Bulleh Shah. These methods tend to overlook the ontological and metaphysical richness of his work, limiting the consideration of selfhood to a problem of the instability of identity and not responding to the teleological and cosmological underpinning of his work. This paper analyzes Bulleh Shah's kafi's, to argue that his equation of selfhood and ego transcends the mere hierarchical binaries, revealing that his epistemological and ontological framework is deeply embedded in Sufi metaphysic of Faana, Tawheed and Marifa that actually shapes his understanding of existence and being, thus exposes the limitations of reducing his poetry to linguistic or conceptual critique of fixed identity.

This research comes to a point in situating the discourse of self and existence of Sufi from the perspective of metaphysics, thereby decolonizing the metaphysics of the Eastern Sufi paradigm in theory and philosophy. This paper seeks to contain the poetry of Bulleh Shah within the epistemology of Sufism, particularly the stages of al-annihilation



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(fana') and al-living (baqa) in God, al-haqq, the ultimate source of meaning, as a function of Ibn al-Arabi's metaphysics of Wahdat al-Wujd. This paper is a critical intervention at the intersection of Sufi metaphysics and poststructuralist philosophy, where it is common to see surface level similarities while concealing profound ontological differences. It examines a Sufi concept of selfhood from a deconstructive perspective as it compares Jacques Derrida with Ibn Arabi and Bulleh Shah.

This is not only theoretically important but also epistemologically important as it restates that Sufi ontological impression of existence, and the concept of self, has weight in itself. Based on close reading of Bulleh Shah's kafi's and Sufi ideas of Tawheed, Fanaa and Marifa discussed in the philosophical doctrine Wahdat ul Wujud, this paper shows that khudi is not a linguistic or conceptual idea, rather it is a spiritual entity, a metaphysical idea, a cosmic and divine force. The being unburdens itself of superficial identities and binaries, through self-interrogation and realization. The studies just ends at this acceptance of non-fixed identities without foregrounding that this is not the end but the start of the understanding of existence. The awareness of the unity of being is called Marifa and through Fanaa, the self attains to this state. Hence, self in Sufi sayings of Bulleh Shah is not a void or negativity but only attains awareness of its existence through relinquishment of the worldly identities and surrender to the source of meaning and truth. Hence the superficial understanding of the Sufi knowledge of existence rooted in the idea of rejection of fixed identities and the lack of cosmic complexity and a foundation of metaphysics is challenged in this study.

2. Literature Review

The modern interpretation of Kafi of Bulleh Shah is largely dependent on comparative methodology, which enables communication and dialogue between Eastern Sufi teachings and Western literary schools. But such literary trends can lead to a lack of philosophical and theological difference in Bulleh Shah's Sufi metaphysics, which is only to be expected to serve as a foundation for structural resemblance like deconstruction. Theoretical comparisons have been made between Bulleh Shah's transgressive questioning of self and Derrida's paradoxical interpretation of final meaning and finality, which have only been superficial because they are drawn by critics such as Azheer Ahmed and Perven.

Theoretical parallels have been made between Bulleh Shah's questioning of self and the transgressive nature of his poems and Derrida's ambiguity between final meaning and finality, and these parallels have been superficial, as they have been initiated by critics like Azheer Ahmed and Perven. The only architectural similarity provided by such approach is provided by deconstruction in both traditions, which remains a system of radical rejection of fixedness of essence and rationalism. This article looks at a "mystical deconstruction" (12) of orthodox religious identities in Bulleh Shah's Kafis as an alternative to nihilism in the West, thereby reducing Sufi tradition of self-annihilation and divine union to something simple. But in the article of Khurshid Alam & Munir Ahmed Zia Rao, one can find the argument convincing as stated "Bulleh Shah celebrates vagueness, emptiness and a centreless centrality" (18) It is an article, which treats Bulleh Shah as a modern existentialist thinker, who lives in a world of questions and no answers, but rather as a spiritual heretic, who goes beyond the rigid answers and infinite questions. This kind of interpretation makes it possible to understand how metaphysical ground and epistemological distinction emphasizes the functioning of deconstruction, and this article, in a way, suggests that Bulleh Shah is situated outside of Sufi spirituality and towards a secular existential dilemma which might lose its connection from the original metaphysical soil from which Bulleh Shah identity originated.

In addition to being critically evaluated in the light of primary texts, the philosophy and theory of Ibn Arabi has been methodologically analyzed by Western researchers. In *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative study of Derrida and Ibn Arabi*, by Ian Almond, research is placed in the foreground, even if Derrida and Ibn Arabi are drawn into philosophical and metaphysical difference, they have similar outcomes, including an infinite number of interpretations, an unfixed essence, and the interplay of absence/presence for Almond: "If both the infinitizing of the divine intent and the removal of it result in the same hermeneutical freedom, should one bother retaining the distinction at all?" (76) His argument is superficial and abstract in nature, omitting the fact that experimental knowledge in Sufi doctrine is meant not only to destabilise the static and abstract concept of knowledge (in his case, similarity) but also emphasise the inability of language and intellectual knowledge, which must be transcended to attain union with the Real.

Although there have been numerous investigations on Bulleh Shah's poetry and recent studies that incorporate Derridean theory, there has been little work critically exploring how the philosophical incompatibility of Sufi metaphysics and deconstructive linguistics are manifested in his poetry. Much current scholarship has been on structural parallels, including the issue of paradox, ambiguity, and the negative discourse of fixed identity, but not on the epistemological differences between these traditions. This paper therefore fills this void by taking a step into the

ontological and metaphysical instead of outside. Paradox, uncertainty and symbolic irony in the poetry of Bulleh Shah are shown to be leading to experiential knowledge of the divine which begins with philosophy and culminates in spiritual experience of ecstasy.

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and deduction is made through close analysis of primary text which includes Bulleh Shah's kafi's and Ibn Arabi doctrine of Wahdat-ul-Wujud. A few secondary texts (some comparative research papers, articles from known journal in Jstor, Academia, Research Gate) have also been explored to support the counter argument. Furthermore, this paper considers recent research in digital humanities and explores the knowledge gained and lost from using computational text analysis techniques with Sufi poetry. Research using NLP on mystical and devotional texts (Karsdorp et al., 2021; Underwood, 2019) has shown that algorithmic methods can be used to recognize surface-level structural and lexical patterns, but systematically fail to capture the experiential and transformative aspect of Sufi poetic discourse. This methodological observation further strengthens the paper's core claim, that Bulleh Shah's kafi's embody an epistemological mode of "lived gnosis", or *ma'rifa*, which is not necessarily subject to deconstructive breakdown or computational extraction: Rather, its meaning is enacted not only through linguistic structure, but through the sonic, performative, and experiential aspects of Sufi poetry.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Bulleh Shah was one of the most prominent poets of the Punjabi language during the eighteenth century in the tense socio-political climate of eighteenth-century Punjab, where religious matters were at stake. He was a period when there was political unrest with the rise of the Sikh Empire and the decline of the Mughal Empire. His writings show a strong desire to experience the mystical and skepticism toward dogma. Bulleh Shah's poetry was notable for its strong condemnation of the caste system and religious dogma. He lived in a time when there was great controversy in the region over the nature of the region's spirituality and culture. Most of his works in Punjabi have been interpreted and have had a great impact on Sufi literature. He collected his poetic oeuvre, the majority of which consisted of Punjabi kafi's, and raised the vernacular language to the level of a vehicle for metaphysical exploration, ethical questioning and mystical emotion. Dissolution of binaries, negation and self-interrogation are all aspects and categories of Bulleh Shah's poetry, which places the search for the truth in experiential knowledge, in divine love and in cosmic unity. Jacques Derrida's deconstructive approach, with his concept of *différance*, has been used to analyze and map out Bulleh Shah's works, as well as the Sufi concept of self on to postmodernist deconstruction, especially in the kafi "Bullah ki janan ma kon". This, however, will inevitably lead to what Derrida calls 'epistemic violence' (Violence and Metaphysics 78), a kind of violence that takes place when one discourse violently pushes another out of its own conceptual system. Many current scholars regard Sufi poetry and texts as philosophical thought; a form of philosophical speculation, but not in the strict sense. This attempt to philosophise Sufism neglects to understand the concepts underlying it, which are based on Islamic thought. In his *Mathnawi* Maulana Rumi refers to philosophers as follows:

"Whoever hath doubt and perplexity in his heart, he in this world is a secret philosopher.
He is professing firm belief, but sometime or other that philosophical vein will blacken his face. Take care,
O ye Faithful! For that (vein) is in you! In you is many an infinite world
For fear of this, anyone who has the fortune of this Faith (Islam) is trembling like a leaf.
The Abdal have certain terms of which the doctrines of reason are ignorant."
(Rumi, 306 trans. Nicholson)

Sufi ideas of ontological ambiguity have been likened by such writers as Ian Almond to Derrida's notion of *différance* which defers meaning endlessly so that no matter how much you know you cannot ever fully capture 'presence'. The repeated negation of the markers of identity – religious, social, existential etc. – has been interpreted deconstructively in poems like "Bullah ki jana ma kon". For Derrideans, the self/other, inner/outer, sacred/profane binary sets are all one and the same, as they erode the metaphysical consistency of identity, making the self a product of *différance*, or perpetual deferral – between the structure of language. This reading, however, is not able to capture the experiential character of Sufism, the idea of a spiritual praxis and omits the ontological nature of Islamic spirituality.

Obviously, Bulleh Shah's negation does not mean he is stating that he has no definite meaning; and the dissolution of identity categories is a pre-text, not a post-text. It clears the epistemological ground for a deeper truth and unifying with the Divine. In this way the poem is a step towards the attainment of *ma'rifa* (gnosis): the self does not rest on the contingent, but turns instead to the Divine as its last referent. In the sufi thinking of Ibn al Arabi, God/

Al Haqq is the source of meaning and reality. When the self is destroyed it's not emptiness but is a dissolving into this absolute reference point. In Sufi metaphysics what seems to be instability in a deconstructive paradigm is a step towards certainty. Bulleh Shah shows a gradual process of self-annihilation that reflects the Sufi metaphysics of Ibn al-Arabi reflecting the inner journey of the self through Sufi stages like nafs, qalb, and rūḥ, in a very natural and experiential way. Initially the poem is about the nafs (ego-self) in which man is bound with the identities of religion, purity and status. It hides the subject from seeing the Divine as a wall and means of spiritual change. Bulleh Shah rejects all of these egotistic binaries: 'Neither I am a believer (who stays) in a mosque/ Nor do I indulge in actions of disbelief' (Shah 150, trans Rafat) The nafs acts as an illusion, and serves a important purpose of disciplining before the qalb (heart) can be awakened. In *Fuṣūṣ al Ḥikam*, Ibn al Arabi says: 'The servant does not exist in himself, but he is a point of Divine manifestation.

Then the poem enters the depth of the qalb (heart) and a deeper realization begins, and all opposition starts to fall apart. 'Nor am I in the (argument of) Purity and Impurity' (150) This is because the person begins to understand that these differences are not real at all; these differences exist in the mind and not in reality, and in the mind, they have to do with viewpoints, or as Ibn Al Arabi would say 'wahdat al-Wujud' – everything is one. Lastly, when Bulleh Shah speaks, 'From beginning to end, I tried to understand myself 'Na koi dooja hor pacchana/ I did not come to know of anyone else' (150), it means the stage of the rūḥ (spirit) and sirr (inner self) had reached its highest degree, and the ego had disappeared altogether as Fanaa (total annihilation). The deconstruction of the binaries gives a potent critique of the language; however, it is possible for the deconstruction to be a reduction that complicates the telos and experiential basis of Sufi selfhood.

The issue is not whether parallels can be drawn between the two school of thoughts, it is whether they seem to be ethically valid or methodologically obtrusive. Dissolving binaries is an integral component of sufi thought, where ma'rifa, the knowledge that is not discursive nor representational but illuminative and experiential, plays a major part. The knowledge that is known here is not infinite, but it reaches to the state of yaqīn, which is based on unveiling (kashf). To read Bulleh Shah's negation of identity is to miss the spiritual fulfillment, within this framework, to be an instance of perpetual undecidability. So, even though each verse represents self as an unstable subject and the absence of any lasting significance, which can be echoed in the existential crisis expressed by philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre, the denial of self always ends up in the unity of God. The deconstruction of identities, in Sufi epistemology is a disciplined passage towards unveiling. Self-negation is not the goal but a way to clear epistemic doubts, necessary in order the self to transcend. Similarly, Bulleh Shah's "Meri Buccal De Vich Chor" runs the risk of being reduced to an epistemic instability by a deconstructive reading. The "chor" (thief) hidden within the self is seen through a Derridean perspective as the trace of différance, an internal alterity that breaks the illusion of a single subject.

This however is a reading that fails to account for the Sufi metaphysics of interiority in which the "thief" is a paradoxical signifier of the Divine in the self, not a known signifier. Bulleh Shah's line, 'In my own shawl resides the thief; I searched everywhere but within' (Shah 56) is not simply pointing at something else but is also redirecting the gaze towards the internal transformation (kashf). It is the inability to know the "thief", not the continual delay of presence, the nafs] concealing the Divine actuality that is already there. The self is not an empty place of linguistic slippage but rather a location of tajalli (divine self-disclosure) in Sufi epistemology, especially as expressed by Ibn Arabi. Thus, however, the poem does not claim to have an infinite regress of meaning, but rather it is teleological and oriented towards ma'rifa (gnosis). Moreover, the Sufi dialectic of annihilation (fana) and annihilation (baqa) that guides the experiential trajectory of the kafi is not considered by the deconstructive focus on the disintegration of subjectivity.

The sentence 'I went to the mosque, I went to the temple, the thief was never found' (56) does not signify a lack of core, but a lack of externalization of religion, because the thief is not found. In Bulleh Shah's ontology, the "thief" finally comes back in the end to Al-Haqq, the Absolute Reality which is the ground of all multiplicity, but the dispersal would further reinforce Derrida's absence of a transcendental signified. The ego does not become split up but it merges with the whole. Ibn Arabi's statement, 'He who knows himself knows his Lord,' points to the fact that the 'theft' taking place in the heart is the appropriation of the ego-self by God. So, a Sufi reading re-imagines this instability as a condition for ontological unity which is not always deferred, but completed within the awareness of divine immanence, while deconstruction reads the poetry as a process of identity destruction. In another kafi, called Whatever You Touch, the notions of Wahdat-al-Wujud (cosmic unity), cosmic participation and divine manifestation are now more explicit. The lines 'Whatever you touch takes your hue / Your eyes have caused a stir, unveil yourself' (Shah 90) depict the changed person as radiating divine presence, coloring, whatever it touches. This is part of the Sufi view of human beings being microcosms of the macrocosm, the relating of which is a major statement of Wahdat al-Wujūd, that the individual is nothing in itself, and the presence of God in the individual (Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya).

The image of the moon breaking through the clouds 'Like a cloud-swept moon when it breaks through the night' (90) is used to remind the reader that the heart (qalb) perceives and discerns the light after the veil of the ego is

cast away, meaning that all perception is a reflection of the unity. The kafi also shows 'Too many obstacles! Now take my hand and help me over them as I flew. /Dance, Bulleh, dance, your love has come to you'. The line represents the culmination of the self in *baqā'* which means subsistence in God. In this phase the destroyed self is free to roam in Divine love, without restrictions. It is completely united with the order of the cosmos. The phrase 'whatever you touch takes your hue,' (90) expresses that the self is not an autonomous identity but rather the expression of the cosmic unity of all things when it is in service of God.

Whereas Derrida's deconstruction of identity keeps it forever shifting and indeterminate, Bulleh Shah's move from *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh*, *fana* and *baqa* is a teleological deconstruction of self that is not the end itself, but a way to ontological and a larger cosmic realization. This reading of Bulleh Shah's kafi's position them as a living enactment of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, where self-annihilation results in revelation of divine and divine unity, and the human being is both the site and instrument of the cosmos reflecting God's presence. For Ibn Arabi, as an objective for the accurate understanding of one's existence, our path is not to seek God but to seek God's vision of Himself as us, as is evident from Bulleh Shah's kafi, *Rabb da Banda*, where he writes, 'Learn about yourself first, then return to temples or mosques' or in Bulleh Shah 'Bulleh Shah you long for the divine above, yet you have not discovered the inherent power within yourself, quietly residing within the sanctuary of your own being, emphasizing the necessity of self-discovery before delving into spiritual practices. In the Sufi kafi of Bulleh Shah, the question of existence, identity and reality is not limited to the breaking of binaries and finding oneself beyond the rigid structure, but it is the realisation of the deeper meaning that is within the appearance. Through a paradoxical inquiry, Alphabetical signs and Spiritual symbols, Bulleh Shah reveals that the word "self" is not constructive but unfolding of divine essence. In this well-known kafi "A For Allah" Bulleh Shah states "A for Allah who has my heart, /I have no knowledge of B" (1-2).

This is a poetic expression of Ibn Arabi's ontological understanding of self and creation by decoding cosmic language. In his iconic book *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya* (The Meccan Revelations) he assumes that the cosmos is the material substance of "Breath of the Merciful" (145) and that Arabic alphabets, besides being signs, are building blocks of the universe, each one of them referring to a divine mystery and miracle. The alphabet "Alif" is not only the first letter of God's name, "Allah", but rather the first letter that is the source of all existence and the original one. Just as every other Arabic letter is an extension or bending of the Alif, so too are all creatures born from the one Real, as Ibn Arabi writes: "It is a silent support for all other (variation)" In Sufi metaphoric language, its vertical form reflects the pure, silent and unequal Divine presence that supports and provide meaning to all creation. Its shape is also similar to the numerical "1", as the first digit of every number, making the expanse of Sufi cosmological understanding of creation and self to be connected to the other basic domains of understanding that explain the existence of things. Bulleh Shah in his kafi is positioning the self in a Divine grammatology in which each different creation is a word made up of letters articulated by God. While Derridean deconstructionist study of language does not have a "Transcendental Signified" (67), Bulleh Shah takes us beyond the humanly established linguistic order and into the primordial cosmic dictionary where self is just as a part of the divine reality that influences its meaning and existence. Furthermore, Bulleh Shah's resignation to delve into intellectual or interpretive debate "I can't tell between O and Q/ it makes me dither and delve" (5-6) is not a critique of failure of language or rationality to provide truth or meaning but a conscious choice charged with spiritual awareness about the relational nature of existence "A savour sweets to me" (4). The kafi concludes with poet's words "Bulleh, look after the first, /the rest will take care of itself." (7-8): This is an ontological prioritization where self can understand and solve its own ambiguities only if God is the one who is at the center, not people, society, or only intellect.

The existential quest of Bulleh Shah is not social sign or interpretive meaning, but of the actual source of existence itself – God – which enables him to understand his purpose, whereas Derrida's is based on these signs and roles which he perceives as the only source for the creation of meaning, but is broken and unstable. This marks a significant difference between Derridean and Bulleh Shah's deconstruction often overlook by scholars who simplify both traditions by underpinning rejection of fixed roles and meaning as the ultimate outcome of both philosophies. In another kafi "One is Enough" Bulleh Shah's existential questioning is presented in the essence of *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* which is *Tawheed* heed, *Fana* and *Marifat*. His poem's spiritual search for self and meaning starts after questioning all the comfortable and settled social and religious precepts: "belief and unbelief are just names" (4) Derridean rejection of binaries and fixed categories, but at the same time, but also at the same time. Bulleh Shah is not only challenging the binaries, but also insists that belief or disbelief is nothing more than a perception, which has no a priori moral or ethical duties. In the same way Bulleh Shah is against the "morality" as he says "In prayer why abrade your forehead? /Away. With it, tear down the facade/of morality." (7-9) Similarly, in the book *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, Ibn Arabi has said "True Human being was created according to the forms of All-Merciful" (336), meaning that moral and ethical responsibilities are not religious but are a part of the soul of a believer. Unlike the isolation of the search, Bulleh Shah's philosophy of the self is very humanistic, with morality arising from the soul that represents the divine attributes of mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

Unlike Derrida, Bulleh Shah's deconstruction emerges from this need to transcend the superficial understanding of self and divine in order to connect with original source through purification of heart and soul "forget hell's terrors and its flames,/purify your dreams and desires" (3-4) This links with the ideology of another ancient Sufi Saint Rabiya Basri, whose spiritual call also rejects the orthodox religious beliefs as she says "I want to put out the fire of hell and burn down the rewards of heaven. They block my way to Allah" (12) This connection reveals that existence and self in Eastern Sufi literature are conceived within a dynamic and living relationship with the Divine, in contrast to the more passive or systematized frameworks of the Western Enlightenment or the absent or adversarial conception of God in Western existentialism Bulleh Shah's claim that "One is Enough"(1) reveals that there is center in Bulleh Shah's poetic and spiritual realm where meaning and self can only be found by removing the veils of superficial meaning and identity. Thus, his deconstruction is not just against the rigidity of religious, social and linguistic structure, but also an attempt to orient oneself towards the real existence.

His resolution "One point settles it all" (10) is not epistemological completion, but ontological submission by Tawheed heed. Like Ibn Arabi, Bulleh Shah believes that true origin is God and self is nothing but a manifestation. In this context, "One Point" means Divine origin that is present in every human and non-human being and returning to the Divine essence is what according to Bulleh Shah, "settles it at". Bulleh Shah's ontological and metaphysical foray into existence is packed with paradoxes and ambiguities. It is not easy to comprehend how "being (Khudi)" and "not-being (Khuda)" "existence" and "non-existence" "veil (tajali)" and "unveil (Kashf)" can exist together in his kafi's. Because his poetry is full of paradoxes, ironies, spiritual symbol and existential questioning. In this poem "One is Enough" initially he claims the one small point (Nukta) is enough to encapsulates all divisions and distinctions but at the end the poet asserts that "Truth stands too tall" (14). His paradoxical language, unlike Derrida is not reflective of instability of signs rather his deep understanding of the very nature of human existence and Divine. Just as Ibn Arabi in his doctrine Wahdat-ul-Wujud posits that "Affirm diversity in immutability (thubūt), but keep it away from existence (wujūd). Affirm unity in existence (al-wahda fi al-wujūd), but keep it away from immutability" (235).

This implies that man and God cannot be separated but the human form(veil) is an obstacle to God and also a lens that can be used to see God. Similarly, Bulleh Shah from "I know not who I am" to "One point settles it all" undergoes this dynamic process where paradoxes and uncertainty are both questioned as well as act as evidence to God's incomprehensibility and profundity. The Sufi epistemology of Bulleh Shah, like his ontology is experiential, experimental and transformative rather than abstract or intellectual search of meaning and self. In his poem "Enough of Learning Friend" "he condemns the way people go so much into knowing so much that they forget that life is a reality that can only be experienced and discovered, not abstractly or logically decipher "You study night and day/while life is ticking away (3-4). In Sufi epistemology, institutional knowledge and education only sets the base for spiritual growth, it cannot lead you to divine experience. In his profound book *Fusus al Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom) Ibn Arabi has differentiated between Ilam and Marifa. According to him, Ilam is gained through logical reasoning and deduction and only makes you aware of God and it creation. But Marifa is experimental and experiential knowledge gained is only through journey to self-knowledge. While Ilam is objective and distanced information, Marifa is subjective, deeply gained in intuitions, feelings and experiences which he why he claims that "He who knows himself, Knows his Lord" (321).

The Sufi epistemology is reiterated by "Enough of Learning friend" (5) repeated by Bulleh Shah. Through rational, abstract and bookish knowledge, it is impossible for man to conceive divine reflection tajali because learning when divorced from lived reality and experiences becomes a source of distraction or attachment to ego as he says "The books you read and write/reach up to such a height/ they've quite shut off the light" (5-7). This criticism Bulleh Shah performed is also reflective of this fact that knowledge that is learned and not practice in reality yields nothing but darkness as he says "You nab the just, and the thief/you fail to apprehend." The epistemological containment which conceals spiritual wisdom and pure moments of existence is the other area that Bulleh Shah attacked, similar to ontological blindness resulting from ritual practice without an understanding of its profundity. Knowledge for Bulleh Shah is internal transformation brought about through a spiritual encounter with Divine. Such a knowledge can only be felt, perceived, experienced and lived by "When the bait of Love I cast, /slippery Truth was hooked at last," (18-19) This suggest that self-realization can only be achieve through experiential and experiential knowledge. When love, instead of reasoning drive your spiritual flight then "the griefs which held me fast/ God's mercy made an end." (18-19). Ibn Arabi, in his book calls this knowledge Dhawq or tasting. It refers to this idea that firsthand experience of God can only be achieve direct, intimating and intuition knowledge about God "The tajalli is the unveiling of a spiritual reality in the realm of vision. It is a direct-seeing into the nature of existence, a showing forth of the secrets of the One in the celestial and terrestrial realms" this shows that knowledge of self and Divine cannot be conceptualized but unveiled, arising from experiential witnessing through heart rather mind. In Sufi epistemology, and ontological direct, the course of spiritual enlightenment and self-knowledge is directed by the heart. In both cases, Ibn Arabi and Bulleh Shah, they made it clear that the soul is the manifestations of divine tajali and the heart is the door to the soul.

Love in Sufi poetry of Bulleh Shah is not just an emotion but an epistemic mode through his self comes to know about itself and Beloved.

In his poem “Up Your Veil My Love” Bulleh Shah insisted the Beloved on unveiling which Ibn Arabi calls Kashf “Up with your veil, love/ and Look at me” (1-2). Veil is all the material (form, desire, attachment) as well conceptual (rationality, logic, reasoning) boundaries that conceal true self from man which Ibn Arabi calls “manifestations of Divine” (322). The emotional push “the harder they jeer/ the louder my ecstasy.” brings about awareness of being with Bulleh Shah where the self-experiences divine light in the heart, and investigates the heart's true position in cosmic architecture. Ibn Arabi put it as “Guidance is that man is guided to bewilderment (hayra). He knows that the business is bewilderment. Bewilderment is being unsettled and movement. Movement is life.” (225). Veil is then lifted by Fana, active dissolution of self into whole Being, where one is made whole. It illustrates that in the kafi's of Bulleh Shah there is not only an ontological paradox, but also an epistemological one. To achieve yourself you have to lose yourself, you gain true wisdom you have to unlearn, to obtain Bak you have to first Fana.

This is the experience of nurturing the Divine Manifestations which culminates in Bulleh Shah's kafi “Hanja Hanja kar de”, “Ranjha is in me, / I am in Ranjha, / There is no other other thought.” (4-6) Here Fanaa has become Marifa – the state of knowledge in its pure state, direct and experiential form. The poetic form used by Bulleh Shah is “Kafi”. Kafi's are not supposed to be spoken instead they are sung; hence they create a sonic effect with some words repeated such as “Ranjha Ranjha kar de”. This creates an experimental and sensorial experience of spirituality in the Kafi's. The poetry of ‘Bulleh Shah' is not just a mystical journey towards one's self but a total transformation in his content, language, and form, as well as in his quest for identification and meaning, from ‘Does Anyone Know Me' to ‘Ranjha Ranjha Kar de' from existential to cosmic and spiritual. He does not question the strictness of religion and social roles, the fixity of essence and conceptual interpretation as a result of their emptiness and void as in Derridean deconstruction.

Rather, he shows them as distraction from spiritual and cosmic oneness with Divine who is the ultimate source and creator of existence and meaning. In Bulleh Shah speaking of the self while referring to God is a paradox where meaning arises from the loss of self, the unlearning of norms and for opening up to dynamic change. Therefore, analysing his poetry only to find deconstruction of traditional hierarchies in both philosophies risk simplify his spiritual and cosmic complexity which reflect both in his form as Kafi's and paradoxical inquiry of Self and Being.

5. Conclusion

In spite of that, deconstructive reading of the kafi's of Bulleh Shah renders the metaphysics of presence precariously unstable by presenting the instability of meaning in différance, application of this in on Sufi thought is not without its limitations. The Sufi sense of self is not just emptied of signifiers but transformed and annihilated (fanā) into subsistence (baqā) in the Divine. Therefore, the ERRERRE of “identity without a point of reference”, seen from a Derridean perspective, is a movement towards “the unity of the ontological” in Sufi epistemology. To sum up, this study brings into the academic discussion on comparative philosophy, literary theory, and postcolonial studies the weaknesses of Western theoretical ideas. It highlights not only the potential of productive engagement between different intellectual traditions but also deconstructs reductive readings of Sufi texts that place them under postmodern frameworks.

The study gives back to Bulleh Shah the intellectual density of his poetry and brings new avenues of interdisciplinary research into the nature of selfhood, meaning and transcendence by refocusing Sufi metaphysics as an organized and independent way of thinking. In addition, the interaction with digital humanities perspectives in this study points to an epistemological problem with computational analysis of sacred and devotional literature: what is missing from the NLP tools is not just a technical issue but an epistemological one as well. Algorithmic text analysis uncovers patterns, frequencies and structures, but cannot gain access to the experiential transformation, the telos of the Sufi discourse. There is thus a need for future studies to explore the hermeneutics of digital humanities and Islamic poetics, creating a computational approach that recognizes the indescribable experiential component of Sufi textuality (Underwood, 2019; Jockers and Witten, 2023).

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