

**RESEARCH PAPER****Exploring Sufi Thought in Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai's Poetry through Khamisani's Translation****Rafia Syed***

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of Sufi thought in the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai by analyzing Khamisani's English translation. Bhitai, a prominent Sindhi Sufi writer, expresses themes of divine love, spiritual quest, unity of existence, and humanism in his poetic work. The research examines how these core Sufi concepts are conveyed, interpreted, and transformed in translation. Using a qualitative textual analysis approach, selected verses from Bhitai's poetry and their translated versions are critically analyzed to identify shifts in meaning, symbolism, and cultural context. The study highlights the challenges of translating Sufi metaphors, mystical expressions, and culturally embedded ideas into English while preserving their original essence. Findings suggest that although Khamisani's translation succeeds in making Bhitai's poetry accessible to a wider audience, certain spiritual nuances and symbolic depth are partially altered. The study contributes to understanding the intersection of Sufism, literature, and translation studies.

Keyword: *Sufi Thought, Bhitai's Poetry, Khamisani's Translation, Mysticism, Translation Studies, Sindhi Literature*

Introduction

Over the years, *Shah Jo Risalo*, the magnum opus of the great Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, has been translated into English by several scholars and translators, including Kazi (1965), Khamisani (1994), Salim (2006), Alasti (1986), and Allana (1980). Although these translations have contributed significantly to making Bhittai's spiritual and poetic vision accessible to a wider audience, there has been a noticeable lack of critical inquiry into their comparative value, accuracy, and interpretative depth. Despite multiple efforts to render Bhittai's poetry into English, no comprehensive study has yet been undertaken to examine and evaluate how far these translations retain the aesthetic beauty, cultural essence, and mystical spirit of the original Sindhi text. Recognizing this research gap, the present study aims to critically analyze Amina Khamisani's English translation of *Shah Jo Risalo*, the poetic masterpiece of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689-1752), which is a cornerstone of Sindhi literature and Sufi thought. It embodies themes of divine love, human struggle, spiritual quest, and moral beauty, expressed through rich symbolism and folk narratives. Mysticism is the central subject of his poetry, as Brohi (1965) proves: "Poetry of Latif is fundamentally allegorical in that he resorts to the vernacular of visible symbols in order to draw man's attention to the world of the invisible" (p. 12). Further, Soomro (2020), discussing Bhittai's poetry, explains, "Mysticism is a religious practice based on the belief that knowledge of God or real or spiritual truth can be found by prayer and meditation rather than through reason and the senses" (p. 33). Because of its profound philosophical depth and poetic grace, *Shah Jo Risalo* has attracted translators and scholars from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who have sought to make its message accessible to non-Sindhi readers. Shah Abdul Latif is the poet of truth. He tells the universal truth. Every object that is described by Bhittai tells the truth, from the spinning wheel to the woman performing household chores. His poetry orbits universal symbols and worldly metaphors, as Ansari (1983) exemplifies: "There are several symbols like journey symbol, hunting symbol, poison symbol, serpent symbol, boat symbol, camel symbol." Here is God's plenty and pageantry of all creatures, high and low. Bhittai's poetry also contains musical notes. Every night, after a prayer, a group of mystical singers assemble in the courtyard of Bhittai's shrine and sing Bhittai's poetry and perform spiritual dance on a musical instrument in the local language, which is called 'Tanbooro'. This musical device is also Bhittai's creation. Talking about form and unity in Latif's poetry, Kazi (1965) explains, "Two melodic themes run side by side to create mystery in mysticism, and double the depth that is already too deep." Translation of such a spiritually and culturally dense text presents significant challenges. The subtle metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and mystical connotations in Shah Latif's verses often resist direct transfer into another language—particularly English, which differs greatly in rhythm, tone, and cultural context. Therefore, English translations of *Shah Jo Risalo* vary in their approaches, reflecting translators' linguistic choices, interpretive style, and understanding of Sufi philosophy. Among the notable translators is Amina Khamisani (1994), whose work represents a distinct era and translation philosophies. Bhittai couched these verses in the 17th century, and Khamisani approached it in the 20th century. She translated the text with poetic sensitivity and deep admiration for Shah Latif's mystical message, producing a translation that emphasizes the literal meaning of each word while retaining the beauty and devotional tone.

The Life Sketch of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

Renowned Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689- 1752 A.D.), corresponding to (1102-1165), hails from the Sindh region of modern-day Pakistan and is well known for his profound and spiritually rich poetry. The family tree of Bhittai traces back to the holy Prophet (PBUH). —The ancestors of Shah Sheb lived at Heraat. The family was held in high esteem, both because of their noble descent, as well as because it was a wealthy

family" (Allana, 1980, p.12). He is recognized as Bhittai throughout Sindh and beyond its borders. His life is the symbol of simplicity. Having been born into the privileged class, he showed no interest in power and glory. He did not make a contradiction between his words and deeds. — At Bhit are still preserved several relics of him ; the long stick he used to use when walking, his turban, a piece of cloth he wore, and the beggar's bowl of coconut husk from which he ate and drank frugally|| (Sorley, 1940,p.172). It is a concern that there is not sufficient information about his life and education. All of the records found are based on the words of his contemporary, Mir Ali Sher Qani, Thattawi, which is not sufficient according to modern standards of scientific research. Much research has been done, and much more remains to be done. Even H.T. Sorely, who devoted much time of his life to this cause, could not give an accurate account of Bhittai's life. —There is no really satisfactory account of Shah Abdul Latif's life, nor will there be (Sorely, 1940, p.170)

Literature Review

It examined their historical significance, the core ideas underlying each translation, the methodologies employed by translators and researchers, and their overall contribution to the expanding field of Latifian scholarship. Over the decades, Shah Jo Risalo has attracted the attention of scholars, linguists, and translators from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds who have sought to interpret Bhittai's poetic message for both local and global audiences. Earnest Trump (1866) from 1828 to 1885 was a Christian missionary and a German professor. He was sent to propagate Christianity among the populace of British India's Subcontinent. He gained great fame and respect in Sindh province as the first compiler of Shah Jo Risalo in book form. "He learned Sindhi during his temporary stay at Hyderabad and undertook this compilation with the help of two Sindhi scholars. People of Sindh are indebted to Trump" (Khamisani, 2012, p.21). The devotion of the people of Sindh is the same for him as his devotion to Bhittai. As already mentioned, there were a few copies of the Risalo scripts. It was not very accessible to the public. ||Ernest Trump was the first European scholar who returned Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai to Sindh by publishing about him for the first time in history|| (Mallah, 2023, p.8). He carried his compiled Risalo to Germany, and it was first published in 1866 in Leipzig, after which he entrusted it to the people of Sindh. His work paved the way for others. Trump's compiled Risalo comprised 26 Surs. Some of the Surs were not added due to a budget shortfall. Later, Trump regretted not including Sur Marui in his compilation. —He did as much valuable service to Shah as Fitzgerald did to Omar Khayam and Hali did to Ghalib. His edition is known as Trump's edition (Agha, 1985). No doubt, as a foreigner, his services are highly commendable and will be remembered forever. Great literature of history has been brought to the notice of other people, such as Hali serving for Ghalib, Edward Fitzgerald for Omar Khayam, and it was only W.B. Yeats who brought Tagore to notice. Otherwise, Tagore's own translation of Gi-tangili might have taken a longer time to reach the mainstream of literature. In 1985, Risalo's first edition was published in Sindh by the Bhit Shah Cultural Committee, Hyderabad. Second and third editions were published in 2008 by the Sindh Cultural and Tourism Department.|| In actual fact, the first scholarly attempt to put the poems into. Permanent form for the use of future generations was made by a foreign missionary named Ernest|| (Sorely, 1940, p.224). Ibrahim, M.Q. (1867) A Sindhi scholar produced his edition of the Risalo, which was published by the Government of Bombay. To date, it is known as the Bombay edition. It contained many alien verses, as Khamisani (2012) confirms; unfortunately, it also contained many extraneous verses. In its second edition (1877), these alien verses were removed (p. 21). In 1900, the Government of Sindh decisively initiated the publication of an authorized edition of the Risalo, overseen by Mr. Tarachand. Despite this effort, the public justifiably criticized the edition for its random nature and pointed out the inclusion of numerous extraneous verses. Sorley (1940) clearly articulates these concerns and presents a strong argument regarding them:

"Other useful editions have been brought out by Liaran Watanmal and Arachand Showkiram, but their scholarship is not to be compared with that of Mirza Kalich Beg and H.M. Gurbuxani" (p. 225). Beg (1913) compiled his Risalo, which was published in Shikarpur, Sindh, but unfortunately, this edition did not gain popularity due to printing errors. Sorley (1940) admits, —The most competent student of Shah Abdul Latif's life is Mirza Kalich Beg (p.170). He was an accomplished man of letters, but due to a lack of resources, his compiled Risalo did not gain recognition in scholarly circles. Dr. Gurbuxani's (1923) Shah-jo Risalo had a masterly introduction, notes, and commentary, composed in three volumes. The first volume was published in 1923, whereas the second and third ones were published in 1925 and 1927, respectively. But he discovered Bhattai from the lens of religion according to his religious belief, while in the case of Bhattai it is not so, as Kazi (1965) writes that —In judging Bhattai therefore, we are not going to use the criteria that our own hearts suggest|| (p. 207). According to Umrani (2010) this is the modern research on Shah Jo Risalo. Further, he stated that in this research work, Dr. Umar Bin Muhammed Daudpoto was subordinate to Dr. Gurbuxani. —It was a matter of immense regret that such a great work could not be completed, most probably due to the reason that Gurbuxani was scathingly criticized (Umrani, 2010, p.14).

Method and Material

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine the representation of Sufi thought in Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai's poetry, as conveyed in Khamisani's English translation. A textual analysis approach is employed, focusing on selected poems that reflect key Sufi themes, including divine love, the unity of existence, the spiritual journey, and humanism. The original Sindhi verses are compared with their translated counterparts to identify variations in meaning, symbolism, and cultural references. The study also applies a comparative and interpretive framework to evaluate how mystical expressions and metaphors are rendered in English. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books on Sufism and translation studies, support the analysis. This method enables a critical understanding of translation shifts and their impact on the conveyance of Sufi philosophy.

Results and Discussion

Textual Analysis: Another research tool used in this study, in accordance with its nature, was textual analysis (McKee, 2001). —When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text|| (McKee 2001, p. 3). As a central methodology of Cultural Studies, there is no comprehensive written guide to what it actually is, how it works, why it is done, what kind of information it produces, and how it can be applied in research. —The closest account is perhaps that of John Hartley, who describes a forensic approach to textual analysis in *The Politics of Pictures*, but even this does not go systematically through these questions|| (McKee, 2001, p. 02). The most straightforward guide to textual analysis is *A Beginner's Guide* (McKee, 2001), which he describes as an informative method. According to Sinha 2018 the most crucial method for conducting literature research is textual analysis. We can show how the various elements of a literary text relate to one another through textual analysis. —Textual analysis encompasses various approaches, including close reading, formalism, structuralism, post-structuralism, and reader-response theory|| (Khokhar, n-d., p. 63). Textual analysis is a powerful methodology employed in academic research that enables researchers to gather and critically analyze information. Various academic disciplines, especially in the physical and social sciences, prioritize their methodologies, having established robust and approved approaches for effective data collection and processing. This commitment to rigorous methodologies ensures the integrity and reliability of research outcomes. —Textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help||, Belsey [2013,

p.55]. Khamisani (2012) has used different translation techniques; these will be explored through textual analysis.

Primary Data Source: The primary data source for this study is the selected English translations of Shah Jo Risalo by Khamisani (2012). Secondary Data Source used critical books, research papers, reviews, comments, numerous biographies of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai as well as life accounts of both translators. All information was obtained from public libraries as well as the private libraries of scholars.

First Sur Kalyan [Peace]

أولاً لله عليم، اعلي، عالم جودتي؛ قادري بنهنجيدرتسين، قائماً هقديم؛ والي، واحد، وحده، رازق، رب رجيم؛ سوساراهسجودتي، چيخمه حكيم؛ كريپا تكريم، جورونجور جهانجي.

Khamisani: Foremost, omniscient and supreme is the world's Lord, of His own might in existence since eons old, Mighty creator, merciful, sustainer, one and only, His praises sing His planned and perfected the universe.

Kazi:

The One Creator, the all-greats; Lord of the universe. The living, the original; Ruler with power innate; the giver, the sustainer, the unique, compassionate; this master praise, to Himalone Thyself in praise prostrate. The generous, who creates the universe in pairs. (p.31) The word اول has been translated by both of the ladies from their perspective, and much suitable as Agha (1985) writes, "I have interpreted the word اول as 'to be given with', (Being the first word of the Risalo) "Allah is the very first" Bhittai says, عَلِيمًا لِلْهَآوِلِ. to this wording Kazi has given this wording, "The One Creator, the all-great, lord of the universe" and Khamisani has given this wording to it "Foremost, omniscient and supreme is the world's Lord" as the given description. Agha Khamisani has used equivalent wording, which shows a connection to the original text.

This phrase سيقدري بنهنجيدرتسين Khamisani has translated in these words, "lord, of His own might," while Kazi has used these words, "The living, the original," as compared to original, Khamisani's words are closer and more suitable than Kazi's. This قديم آهقائم wording Khamisani has translated with these words, "existence since aeon old." She has used very pertinent words that convey the same message, whereas Kazi has not addressed this wording. This wording جي جهانجور جورون Khamisani has translated with these words, "He planned and perfected the universe," and Kazi has given this wording to it, "The generous, who does create the universe in pairs." Both translators have used such wording, which conveys the meaning that shows some connection to the original.

Khamisani:

وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، جن اتوسين ايمان؛ تن مچيو محمد كاري، قَلْبَ سَانِ لِسَانِ؛ اَوْ فَايِقَ مَقَرْمَانِ، اَوْتَرِ كَنهنهاوليا.

Those who in Lord's peer lessone ness believe,
Accept Muhammed's [PBUH] guidance, with heart and speech. Theirs is an abode of bliss, for they abide by God's decree.

Never are they misled onto dubious paths. (p.36)

Kazi:

None shares His glory, "He was, shall be" who this doth say Accepts Mohammad as 'guide' with heart and love's true sway;

None from amongst those lost their way Or ever went astray. (p.31)

This is the testimony *لَهُ مِثْرِكَا وَحْدَهُ* and first pillar of Islam and Kazi's tone is testimonial when she says, "None shares His glory" on the other hand, Khamisani skipped this line and translated second part *تَاوَسِينَجَن* of the line, skipping the first

part, but Kazi has translated both clauses when she says, "who this doth say". This line *كَأَرِئِي مُحَمَّدٌ مَجِيوتَن* Khamisani translated with slightly different from Kazi. As Kazi says, "Accepts Mohammed as 'guide' and Khamisani says, "Accepts Muhammad (PBUH) as 'guidance'. There is word *فَرْمَان* Khamisani very beautifully translated it with 'decree' that is the exact wording for it in English, while Kazi omitting it used the word 'sway' that is not delivering the same sense.

پڙاڏو سو سڏ، وَر وائيءَ جو جي لَهين؛ هُئا اڳهين گڏ، ٻڌڻ ۾ به ٿيا.

Kazi:

The Echo and the call are same, if your sound's secret knew
They both were one, but two became. Only when 'hearing' came (p.32)

Khamisani:

Echo and sound one and the same, Language's twist and turn understand,
Both were one, hearing has much difference made (p.38)

The word *پڙاڏو* was replaced with 'echo' by both translators which is exact meaning of Sindhi text. There is another word *سڏ* its literal meaning is 'call'. Kazi was on the right direction for rendering its English, while Khamisani disguised it with the word 'sound' that was totally different from the Sindhi version. The word *ٻڌڻ* means: listen or hear. Khamisa gave it the accurate wording 'hearing', but it was missing from Kazi's text.

Conclusion

Shah Abdul Latif was a 17th-century Sufi poet. He is commonly known as Bhattai or *Bhit Jo Shah*. His *Risalo* is highly admired in Sindh and around the world. It has been translated into many languages. The researcher has chosen two English translations of the *Risalo* Kazi (1965) and Khamisani (2012). In addition to the biography of Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai, the translators' biographies have also been discussed in this chapter. The *Risalo* has also been discussed in terms of its themes and Sur-wise analysis. The allegories and philosophies of each Sur have been analyzed separately. The aims and objectives indicate that both translations will be critically analyzed. Over time, Shah Jo *Risalo* has been translated into several languages to make Bhattai's wisdom accessible to a wider audience. Among the English translations, those by Elsa Kazi (1965) and Amena Khamisani (1994) are particularly significant. Both translators endeavored to capture the depth, spirit, and rhythm of Bhattai's poetry while rendering it into English for global readers. However, translating Sufi poetry presents challenges such as cultural nuances, metaphorical density, and spiritual symbolism, which often require interpretative clarity and linguistic sensitivity.

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