

**Research Paper****The Architect of Her Own Essence: Existentialism and individual liberty in Bhitai's  
Sure, Marui**

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\*Corresponding email: [naveed.sandeelo@usindh.edu.pk](mailto:naveed.sandeelo@usindh.edu.pk)**Abstract**

This study explores the existential dimensions in the poetical thought of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and examines how his ideas reflect concerns about human existence, freedom, and social transformation. A qualitative research methods was applied, using textual and thematic analysis of Bhitai's selected poetry to interpret existential themes within their philosophical and cultural context. The analysis focused on concepts such as individual freedom, responsibility, struggle, and the search for meaning in life. The findings reveal that Bhitai's poetry goes beyond literary expression and presents a profound philosophical outlook that challenges outdated social norms and encourages self-awareness and moral responsibility. His poetic narratives highlight the resilience of individuals and their quest for truth and identity in society. The study concludes that Bhitai can be understood not only as a poet but also as a thinker whose ideas resonate with existential philosophy. It recommends further interdisciplinary research on Bhitai's thought from philosophical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives to deepen understanding of his intellectual and cultural contributions.

**Keywords:** Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Existential Philosophy, Poetical Thought, Human Existence, Social Transformation, Sindhi Literature, Philosophical Poetry

## Introduction

### Existentialism

Existentialism is an important philosophical movement because it places human beings at the center of its inquiry. What makes this philosophy particularly significant is its strong concern with human existence, consciousness, and individual choice. Unlike other objects in nature, human beings are conscious and possess intellectual abilities that allow them to think, decide, and act according to their own will. Existentialist thought suggests that human life gains meaning through action, choice, and personal responsibility. What a person freely chooses, decides, and aspires to become contributes to the authenticity of his or her existence. In this way, individuals shape their identities through their actions. Human beings also possess the ability to distinguish between good and bad, which helps them guide their lives in meaningful ways. Another major aspect of existentialism is its focus on human thought and perception. In this context, Protagoras' famous statement, "Man is the measure of all things," closely reflects this philosophical perspective, as it emphasizes that human beings interpret and judge the world through their own understanding and experience. This concept means that existence is prior than essence. According to Barrett, man creates his own nature out of his freedom and the historical context in which he lives rather than being born with a set essence (Barrett, 2002). Among other Existentialism is modern philosophical movement which belongs to contemporary philosophy. It is believed that this was established and produced by the nineteenth century's philosophers (Mueller, 2016). He argued that, Existentialism is "a rejection of all purely abstract thinking, of a purely logical or scientific philosophy; in short, a rejection of the absoluteness (Sartre, 1948). Olson accepts the importance of existentialism in the present world which, by him, is the most enthusiastic movement everybody has thought about its

various themes from their own point of view (Copleston, 1948). This well defines that "there is no essential human nature given in advance. Men are stuck down in the world, and they become whatever they choose to become by doing and feeling what they choose to do and feel (Sartre, 1948). This simply denotes that when human beings come into existence, they create their essence through what they do in the course of their lives. In this sense Sartre means to say that the human being "is nothing other than what he makes of himself (Copleston, 1948). This lends some authority to German existentialist Martin Heidegger's statement of man being thrown into existence, which existentialists consider as prior to any other thoughts or ideas that humans have or definition of themselves that they create. It is widely accepted argument that existentialism is a philosophy of individual's personal experience. It is essentially nothing but it focuses on self-realization of every individual's existence, where is no pre-defined essence to humanity. But he or she makes for it. Sartre further adds, "Man first is – only afterwards is he this or that. Man must create for himself his own essence.

### Literature Reviews

#### EXISTENTIAL TRENDS IN BHITAI'S THOUGHT

The richness of Bhitai's message and the depth of his poetic vision establish him as one of the greatest thinkers of Sindh. Because of his diverse treatment of social realities and the conditions of human existence, his thought has often been compared to the existential ideas that later developed among European existentialist philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This anticipation of existential concerns at multiple levels reflects the completeness and intellectual depth of his philosophy, which consistently seeks to examine life and reality in a profound manner. Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai stands as the only major poet-philosopher produced by Sindh, and his masterpiece, *Shah Jo Risalo*, owing to its poetic authenticity and philosophical insight, remains

the most significant literary as well as philosophical work in the Sindhi language. The peculiar purpose of *Risalo* is, to convey message, too aware in man the quality of self-realization, the element of love (Kazi 1973: 49). It must clearly be understood that Latif is not a poet in the conventional sense of that terms: he never wrote poetry. His method of expression was more direct. All that one discovers in his *Risalo* was sung by him to the accompaniment of musical instruments (Brohi, 1975, p. 341). According to G.M. Syed, Bhitai revealed that man was the best creation in the universe and that he was the best reflection of the divine. to understand the essential unity between the component and the whole and the mystery of differences (Syed, 1996, p. 176). Human existence'. The soul-stirring verses in Bhitai's poetry reflect his views on different issues of human subjectivity. Shah's poetical genius was superb. There is no art and form of poetry in which Shah's poetry and intellectual had not made waves like a river. He is great from all angles (Gurbuxani, 2009, p. 70). Bhitai's poetical thought is rich in existential themes which are extended on the strong folk-characters of Sasui, Marui, Mumal, Sohni and Leela etcetera. Each character, according to Sheikh Ayaz, appears bloodied, worn out, and attempting to break open its own closed door with an axe in order to enter its own heaven. And they are making a consistent attempt to find the truth, without showing any signs of despair (Pirzado, 1998, p. 33).

#### **Method and Material**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the existential dimensions in the poetical thought of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai. The research is mainly based on textual and thematic analysis of Bhitai's selected poetry, particularly from *Shah Jo Risalo*. Primary data was collected from Bhitai's poetic verses, while secondary sources such as books, research articles, and scholarly interpretations related to existential philosophy and Sindhi literature were also consulted. The study analyzes Bhitai's poetry

through the theoretical framework of existential philosophy, focusing on themes such as human existence, freedom, responsibility, struggle, and the search for meaning in life. Through interpretative and descriptive analysis, the research examines how Bhitai's poetic expressions reflect philosophical ideas and social realities. This method helps to understand Bhitai not only as a literary figure but also as a poet-philosopher whose thought presents deep insights into human existence and social transformation. The qualitative approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical depth embedded in his poetry.

#### **Result and Discussion**

##### **Human Existence and Liberty: Marui of Malir**

Through the character of Marui, it has been evaluated and analyzed the importance of human existence and its liberty. While explaining the main motto of this sur it has been also widely evaluated that how liberty is more important than slavery. It is necessary to have the cognition of human existence and desire for freedom. Furthermore, this musical tune is replete with the spirit of patriotism, love of the people, maintaining old traditions, abstaining from tempting offers of strangers, and never to submit to the power and arrogance of strangers. It is said that to defend their existence, people have many challenges. In this way they have to struggle and it requires sacrifice. In spite of it, Marui as an important character in the *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai*, to defend her existence has many challenges, whether it is from herself or out of herself especially Umar, the king. It is commonly known that human being will never be satisfied with what he or she has already got. It can be seen that without feeling satisfied, human being always asks for something more. Not only this but he or she desires to live a life of liberty, without other's enforced. For this he or she will always attempt to make everything better than present state. He or she will struggle to make himself or herself liberate and to fit his or her imagination of what he or she should be. This condition shows human being superiority as it also means that

human existence is always being, not as a finished or static one. Marui was a poor ordinary rustic girl from the district Tharparkar. For her beauty and innocence, she was abducted and imprisoned by a nobleman, who fell in love with her. She is already betrothed to Maru. King Umar offered every kind of comfort what human hearts can crave or desire to win her love but utterly fails in. She rejects all and only wants to be free from his mansions.

**Table1: While Remaining Inside Palace Marui Cognizing Reality Of Her Existence Says:**

*When 'Be' was not yet said, nor was there flesh-bone scheme or plan. When Adam had not yet received his form was not yet. Then my relationship began, my recognition too.*  
(E.Kazi 1981: 179)

Bhitai tends to say that, during imprisonment in the fort of Umer she comes to self-cognition of her origin, and thus she links her existence to that time when there was no existence of universe or Adam was created, her kinship started there. That, she promised with her land and people. She still bears this recognition of her existence. Like Sartre, Bhitai also overemphasizes the priority of existence over essence. Moreover, being a mystic-existentialist Bhitai goes beyond than Sartrean accepted concept, and re-associates Marui's existence and promise with her people prior to coming into the world. She had cognition that she will never exchange her love of cottages to palaces. Here Bhitai provides Holy Quran's verse to strongly support his concept. When God was creating souls in the beginning He asked to them about Himself.

**Table 2: When She Heard The Sacred And Clear Words Of Him She Promised With Her Marus That Moment She Will Never Separate From Them Till Last.**

*The voice on the day of creation, as soon as I did hear, "Am I not your God?" "Yes you are" I*

*said clear, with a bond I did adhere, that moment love to my compatriots.*

*(Adwani 2006: 341)*

For Heidegger human existence "Dasien" is always in three modes: "Thrownness", "historicity" and "facticity". Same is happening with Marui. After kidnapped by Umar she finds her presence in "thrownness" situation inside the congested walls of king's palace, she encounters facticity of the world and thus links her existence with its historicity where in actuality she belongs to. She realizes her own-self with different angle as compare to her prior position. Here Bhitai divides Marui's existence in two situations: one with her people – Maru, when she lived a smooth and common life. But later on there comes a second phase in her life when she finds herself in confinement of Umar king. She is forcibly seized and taken away by king from her people to his palace. Thence, it begins to realize herself; from there she starts to fill the essence of liberation and emancipation in order to re-associate with her origin. For Sartre the essence of man precedes his historically primitive existence in nature. A being whose existence comes before its essence is man, and in Heidegger's words, the human reality. Moreover, Sartre states that, existence is prior than essence. It means that existence has priority over essence. Man first exists, comes into existence then he fills his essence through his struggle. He materializes in the world, encounters himself and later on defines himself (Sartre 2007: 22-23). Sartre aims to stimulate in man the sense of his or her existence that how human beings becoming self-aware fill their essence. For Sartre, human existence has more meaning and priority over essence. Man's definition comes after taking birth. As Mirza Ghalib rightly says that "Admi Ko Bhi Muyasar Naheen Insan Honan" (It's not predestined to man to be human). There is nothing pre-given to male or female. But by their act all human beings shape themselves in the

world. Here Bhitai conveys this message through Marui that while existing in the world every person has to be conscious of one's thrownness situation, facticity and historicity. How to encounter everydayness like Marui that is a symbol and representing character in Risalo of Bhitai, and she has been created as a role model for every girl's liberty and existence. In the case of Marui Bhitai reveals a broader perspective and condition of human existence. The life of comforts and luxuries which create hurdles before genuine and free life are worthless. Human existence is the source of essence, that essence one lives according to one's own choice as a subjective being. After coming into king's mansion Marui becomes fully aware about her own existence and its authenticity. Coming up its reality she determines to free herself at any cost. The iron chains of slavery become the cause of her self-cognition and emancipation. She praises those days when she was in pains and torturous life.

**Table 3: It Seemed Rains And Storms Roared Above Her Threateningly.**

*Good were the days I passed in prison, Thunder storms and rains on palatial, My cries for help went undone; How tortuous was that prison? But lo: my love by chains of iron, Was chastened and purified.*

(Adwani 2006: 370)

Bhitai in the mouth of Marui tells that, those painful days proved to be good for me. While in prison all the deadly panic creating storms and my cries for help were meaningless. Those iron chains purified and renewed my love. Bhitai states that, pains and chains played an essential role to Marui's life which made her revolutionary and prepared to fight for her liberation. Here Bhitai being an existentialist aims to bring out other dimensions of human life. That, it is not only name of comforts but in actual sense life is full of pains and tortures, every human being encounters during its journey. Being captivated inside the mansion walls Marui not only becomes aware about the reality of her existence but same

time she knows the importance of pains and sufferings. She is fully determined to destroy and set on fire all these evil doers, hurdles and confining houses and slavery bound palaces, where not only Marui herself is confined but other females are also imprisoned. She seeks to liberate herself from the shackles of misery, unhappiness and injured condition. Ingersoll argues that men do not prefer unhappiness to joy. It can hardly be said that man intends permanently to injure himself, and that he does what he does in order that he may live a life of misery. On the other hand, we must take it for granted that man endeavors to better his own condition, and seeks, although by mistaken ways, his own well-being.... Every human being prefers liberty to imprisonment (Ingersoll 1941: 80). Marui's longing and craving is for liberate Malir. She wants to emancipate her individuality and same time she aspires other females for freedom till her breath was lost. In this struggle there are risks one takes on own self to fill the essence.

**Conclusion**

This sur is based on the kidnapping story of Marui. Marui is a name of poor humble village girl belonging to Thar District. The legend on which it is based is that Marui is kidnapped and is imprisoned by Umer the king, who fell in love for her elegance and beauty. In his palace Umer tried to persuade Marui to marry him and become queen. Marui rejected every kind of offer, including gold, comforts, costly things, fine clothes, delicious foods, all what human heart can crave or desire. But he fails to win her heart. She hated the palace life, rejects every offer and wants to be free from his mansions and is determined to back and rejoin her people, Maru. If see Marui in an existential-political perspective she is the symbol of patriotic elements, Umar as a tyrannical ruler, Umer Kot as the life of enslavement, and Malir as the world of freedom. Shah Latif takes Maru as the people of Sindh and Malir as Sindh. When the sky is overcast in Malir it stands as a symbol of promise

of prosperity. He feels greatly proud of the nomadic life of the Sindhis. He counsels Sindhis not to sacrifice their freedom and self-respect over the palaces, comfortable beds, rich garments, the large variety of dishes and the smell of the perfumes of the aliens, and consider their humble dwellings, the sunny fields, indigenous flora and fauna, shrubs, thorns, and the rough blankets and sheets woven from the hair of camels and food derived from wild plants, a thousand times better blessing. Poverty is pride rather than shame. The most significant theme of this sur is living in absolute freedom with people, not to let the honor be besmirched, not to yield to tyranny and oppression, not to accept slavery. Bhitai has presented the virtue of patriotism in this sur in comprehensive manner, that to keep a deep sentimental attachment with their region land and people.

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