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Sacred Words, Defiant Voices: Feminist Consciousness and Women's Empowerment in Punjabi Sufi Verse

Ms. Rabia Ikram
Ph.D Scholar (Gender Studies, University of the Punjab), M.Phil (Philosophy, GCU, Lahore). rabiaikram89@gmail.com

Ms. Satwant Kour
Lecturer of Punjabi, Kinnaird College for Women University. Ph.D Scholar (Punjabi, Lahore College for Women University). Satwant.kour@kinnaird.edu.pk

Ms. Maria Khalid
Lecturer Gender Studies department, University of the Punjab. Ph.D Scholar (Gender Studies, University of the Punjab). maria.dgs@pu.edu.pk

Abstract
This research examines the convergence of feminist consciousness, religious agency, and poetic voice within the Punjabi Sufi poetry tradition, with a special focus on Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, and Mian Muhammad Bakhsh. By means of a qualitative secondary data analysis of Sufi poetry, literary criticism, and feminist theological structures, the study examines how Punjabi Sufi literature presents subversive constructions of womanhood, resists patriarchal norms, and retrieves feminine voice in religious discourse. The research finds that Sufi poetry not only represents a space of mystical contemplation but also an subtle yet deep space of women's resistance, empowerment, and cultural continuity. Figures like Heer and Ranjha's beloved in Waris Shah's Heer are read anew with a feminist approach, placing emphasis on their spiritual resilience, independence, and metaphorical resistance against oppressive social structures. By placing this question within the framework of spiritual feminism, the research adds to a richer comprehension of how mystic poetry serves as a vehicle for gendered agency, reconceptualizing the sacred as an arena of feminist possibility within South Asian literary and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Punjabi Sufi Poetry, Feminism, Feminist Spirituality, Women's Empowerment, Gender and Mysticism, South Asian Literature

Introduction

South Asian, or rather Punjabi, Sufi poetry has been conventionally a rich medium of religious self-scrutiny, ethical resistance, and cultural expression. In the verses of such poems are etched metaphors of divine love, human suffering, and transformation that charge the oppositions of gender, flesh, and self. While Sufism is largely accessible in terms of its male saints and mystics, its poetic heritage contains equally vivid and intricate portraits of women—not just as religious icons, but as figures of resistance, knowledge, and transformation. For the last few decades, feminist scholars have begun to return to these worlds of literature in order to uncover the implied but subversive ways in which Punjabi Sufi poetry conveys feminist consciousness and female action. This research investigates intersections of gender, mysticism, and poetry in Punjabi Sufi poetry, and in particular the poetry of Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, and Mian Muhammad

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Bakhsh, and how it speaks of the spiritual lives of women, assumes feminine subjectivity, and overturns patriarchal models for identity.

Sufi poetry is always drawn from popular culture and popular society, and hence, it becomes profoundly available to men and women belonging to class and caste society. Heer in Heer Ranjha, Sahiban in Mirza Sahiban, and the Badi-Ul-Jamal in Saif-ul-Malook are not just romantic heroines but richly complex characters representing feminine agency, passion, and divine gnosis. These symbolic and real women negotiate with God and social hierarchy through their fantasies, refusals, and behaviors. Under the lens of spiritual feminism—a framework that validates women's religious and mystical lives as authentic means of knowledge and empowerment—the present research asks how Punjabi Sufi poetry subverts master religious and social narratives. Amina Wadud (1999), Carol Christ (1997), and Sa'diyya Shaikh (2012) are some of the scholars who have highlighted the potential of religious narratives to reclaim women's voices within religious traditions. Their scholarship provides a critical theoretical framework for this research.

This study employs qualitative research through secondary data analysis of already-existing Sufi literature, feminist literary theory, and ethnographic readings of mystical stories. It analyzes how Sufi poets embed resistance, spiritual agency, and feminist ideals into metaphorical language and mythic narratives. By placing the feminine in the center of Sufi poetry, the study attempts to reconfigure such poetic spaces as repositories of embodied resistance and sacred defiance. The question is important not merely for gender studies and religious scholarship but also for larger discussions on cultural identity, indigenous feminism, and literary resistance in postcolonial South Asia.

Research Questions

How is feminist consciousness articulated through metaphors, symbols, and narratives in Punjabi Sufi poetry?

In what ways do Punjabi Sufi verses challenge traditional gender norms and offer alternative representations of women's spiritual and social identities?

What role does feminine mysticism play in shaping counter-narratives to patriarchal spirituality within Punjabi Sufi literary traditions?

How do depictions of female figures in Punjabi Sufi verse—both mythical and historical—reflect broader struggles for autonomy, voice, and spiritual agency?

Research Objectives

- To analyze the articulation of feminist consciousness in Punjabi Sufi poetry through the use of metaphors, symbols, and narrative structures.
- To examine how Punjabi Sufi verses subvert traditional gender norms and construct alternative representations of women's spiritual and social identities.
- To explore the role of feminine mysticism in creating counter-narratives that resist patriarchal interpretations of spirituality within the Sufi literary tradition.
- To investigate the portrayals of historical and mythical female figures in Punjabi Sufi poetry as reflections of broader struggles for women's autonomy, voice, and spiritual empowerment.

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Research Methodology

The research employs a qualitative secondary data analysis (SDA) in its study of how women's empowerment and feminist consciousness are constructed and expressed in Punjabi Sufi poetry. The research is drawn from an interpretivist and feminist theoretical perspective, seeking to identify the manner in which language, symbolism, and narrative used in Sufi poetry articulate and defy gender norms, spiritual authority, and social expectations of women. Through an analysis of available textual sources, this research explores how Punjabi Sufi poetry presents both veiled and direct criticisms of patriarchal spirituality and rejoices in feminine mysticism, resistance, and autonomy.

The evidence for this research is taken from a variety of pre-existing and publicly accessible secondary sources such as classical and modern Punjabi Sufi poetry (original and translated), academic analyses, historical commentaries, anthologies, and feminist literary critiques. Works by and on influential Sufi poets like Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Sultan Bahu, and oral traditions like Heer Ranjha are read, with specific reference to the representation of women and how feminine voices are created or retrieved. The study also includes interpretive readings of female Sufi icons (mythical or real) and feminist reinterpretations of Sufi texts available in scholarly papers, cultural essays, and pertinent archival sources.

The research adheres to thematic content analysis as the main line of inquiry, following Braun and Clarke's guidelines. This entails coding important metaphors, symbols, and gendered patterned language within chosen texts in order to extract emergent themes like spiritual resistance, divine femininity, symbolic subversion, and gendered metaphysics. The research centers on the way the texts represent women's agency in the religious and social spheres, and the way the poetry negotiates against or subverts prevailing discourses of gendered subordination. The interpretation is feminist in approach, highlighting how the Sufi poetry tradition provides room for other forms of womanhood, mysticism, and empowerment.

There are very few ethical issues because of the inherent nature of secondary data, but the researcher is always mindful of the cultural and religious sensitivity of the texts and contexts that they are studying. All sources are referenced with academic honesty, and interpretations are placed within their historical, literary, and spiritual contexts to prevent decontextualization or misrepresentation. The assistant also recognizes the limitations of secondary data, most notably the lack of direct voices or lived experience, and balances this by conducting a critical and reflexive analysis of a wide variety of textual sources.

Overall, this method enables us to have a rich, interpretive understanding of feminist subjects and enactments of women's empowerment in Punjabi Sufi poetry. Through the critical reading of available poetic and scholarly works in terms of feminist literary concerns, the study brings to the forefront the ways in which holy language can be used as a space of both spiritual ascendance and gendered resistance in South Asian literary and cultural history.

Theoretical Framework: Spiritual Feminism

This research is based on the theoretical construct of spiritual feminism, which provides a counter-discourse to interpret women's agency, identity, and empowerment through mystical and spiritual traditions. Spiritual feminism

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challenges the patriarchal institutions inherent in institutionalized religion while reclaiming the sacred as a legitimate space for female creativity, empowerment, and resistance. In contrast to secular feminist critiques that readily dismiss religion as essentially oppressive, spiritual feminism acknowledges that women can find voice, subjectivity, and freedom within—and even sometimes through—spiritual practice and discourse.

Punjabi Sufi poetry is a fertile ground for spiritual feminist criticism, since it infuses mysticism with metaphor, and frequently subverts strict gender dualisms and social hierarchies. Sufi poetry describes the Divine in profoundly intimate, gender-nonconforming, and transgressive language, often providing women—both as symbols and subjects—a domain of transcendence and power that is not perhaps available within formal religious communities. Through this perspective, the sacred is a site of reclamation, wherein the spiritual is not separable from the political but irretrievably bound up with the pursuit of autonomy, embodiment, and visibility.

Spiritual feminism, as understood by scholars like Christ (1997) and Mahmood (2005), allows for the coexistence of religion and feminist action, especially beyond Western cultures. More specifically, Sufi orders dissolve the borders between religious and secular, feminine and masculine, divine and human, thus offering sites through which feminist interpretations may achieve entry. For example, female characters like Heer in Waris Shah's poetic epic or symbolically represented women in Bulleh Shah's poetry subvert submission, embody desire, subvert authority, and avow agency through spiritual longing. Through interpretation in the context of Sufi feminist spirituality, these texts demonstrate how mystical discourse is used as cultural resistance and empowerment.

Besides, spiritual feminism highlights a special concern for embodiment, intuition, and ritual that are again deeply embedded in Sufi poetic forms. Punjabi Sufi poetry's metaphorical use of embodiment, longing, voice, and dance generates not only theological understanding but also cultural space for women to redefine themselves as spiritual as well as social agents. Spiritual feminism does not perceive women simply as passive recipients in patriarchal religious systems but rather reads them as active agents, seekers of the spiritual, and even as figures of the divine.

This model of theory is especially relevant to South Asian contexts, where the spiritual/feminist binary proves unproductive. In this research, spiritual feminism is applied in a way that does not impose secular Western feminist ideals on Punjabi Sufi poetry but instead uncovers local articulations of feminist consciousness within spiritual and poetic traditions. It enables a critical examination of patriarchal hegemony and sensitivity to the liberating potential of the sacred, especially the poetic and mystical modes.

Literature Review

The confluence of Sufism and feminism has become a subject of growing academic interest as scholars attempt to determine how mystical traditions are simultaneously reflective of and complicit in patriarchal norms. In the South Asian context, Punjabi Sufi poetry provides a rich site upon which these tensions may be explored, particularly in relation to women's spiritual agency and feminist expression. Whereas Sufism can be seen as a more inclusive and

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egalitarian tradition of Islamic spirituality, scholars suggest that its literary genres—most notably poetry—contain richly layered metaphors and symbolic structures which hold out feminist potential for interpretation (Shaikh, 2012).

A lot of this ground-breaking work on Sufi literature in Punjab revolves around poets such as Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, and Waris Shah. Such poets utilize symbols of spiritual love, yearning, insurrection, and spiritual conjunction that often subvert conventional binaries of power and gender (Alam, 2011). Such as Bulleh Shah's application of feminine personae like Heer to go beyond literal interpretation and read into gender fluidity and subversion (Malik, 2019). Scholars have noted that such poetry can be a space of feminist awareness in which feminine metaphor connotes not passivity but deep spiritual authority (Schimmel, 1975).

Sufi poetry abounds with metaphors subverting gender norms. The beloved—coded feminine—is the spiritual ideal and the seeker who is may have both masculine and feminine qualities in their quest for union with the divine. Feminist theorists like Sa'diyya Shaikh (2012) have highlighted how Sufi mystical language of surrender and intimacy, when analyzed through gendered prisms, offers a subversive ethic of embodied spirituality that has the power to give expression to marginalized voices. This is particularly relevant in Punjabi Sufi poetry, where the poetic voice tends to be based in a position of emotional interiority, yearning, and breakdown—experiences very closely linked to feminine mysticism (Chittick, 1983).

In addition, Punjabi women's oral traditions, songs, and sacred narratives also provide insight into the lived feminist aspects of Sufism. Literary works such as Heer Ranjha by Waris Shah depict Heer not just as a love heroine but as an image of resistance, decision, and existential self-awareness. More recent feminist interpretations (e.g., Shackle & Snell, 1990) suggest that Heer's nonconformity, intellectual power, and religious symbolism resonate with larger themes of women's resistance to social and family patriarchy.

The use of female characters in Punjabi Sufi literature—mythical, historical, or symbolic—transcends narrative purpose to represent more underlying social conflict. The life of Rabia Basri, a female mystic who is worshiped within Islamic tradition, becomes a model of ascetic resistance and divine love. These types of women are commonly eulogized in poetic verses that make it difficult to separate sanctity from rebellion, so that the spirituality of women can be seen as strongly critiquing hegemonic structures (Ahmed, 1992; Murata, 1992). In certain interpretations, the veiled or occulted woman is not an indication of oppression, but an emblem of the secrecy of the divine and feminine strength (Christ, 1997).

This application of Sufi poetry as a feminist counter-narrative is bolstered by the scholarly works of researchers investigating indigenous feminism. Postcolonial feminist scholars such as Leela Gandhi (1998) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) encourage academics to pay heed to locally situated epistemologies, claiming that spirituality, commonly undervalued in Western feminist thought, can be a powerful site of resistance and self-actualization. Punjabi Sufi poetry in this context provides an earthenly grounded, culturally resonant vehicle through which women's voices—whether textual, symbolic, or historical—questioning common discourses of silence, invisibility, and conformity.

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Where Sufi poetry has traditionally been read through masculinized frames, this research is premised on newer feminist and spiritual-feminist scholarship that retrieves the sacred as a space of women's empowerment. To read Sufi poetry through such a lens is not so much interpretive as political—it creates room for inquiry into how spiritual vocabulary has been taken up or erased in patriarchal contexts and how it might be retrieved as a voice of freedom and feminist awareness.

Perhaps the most influential of Punjabi Sufi poets, Baba Bulleh Shah (1680–1757), is notable not only for his mystical perception but for his revolutionary dismantling of social and religious hierarchies, such as those of gender. His poetry frequently takes on the voice of a female speaker, a literary conceit that subverts strict gender polarities and bestows sacred agency on the feminine. In such poems as "Bullah ki jaana main kaun" ("Bullah, who knows who I am"), Bulleh Shah erases markers of identity—creed, caste, gender—asserting an inner self that outlives social constraints. Scholars like Malik (2019) read Bulleh Shah's employment of the feminine voice not simply as a literary device but as subversive practice to recover feminine subjectivity within both mysticism and the socio-cultural structure of Punjabi society.

A specific instance of female spiritual agency in Bulleh Shah's work is his calling upon Heer, the legendary female character of Waris Shah's epic. Bulleh Shah says, "Mainu Heer na aakho koi, main taan Ranjha hoi" ("Do not call me Heer, I am Ranjha now"). Here, he assumes Heer's makeover, proposing a gender-flexible mysticism where lover and beloved converge in violation of patriarchal love stories. This role inversion erases boundaries between masculine and feminine, taking the female voice out of the realm of passive love object and onto the plane of spiritual seeker and actor of divine desire (Schimmel, 1975). Feminist theorists see this borrowing as symbolic reduction of spiritual power—Bulleh Shah brings his poetic authority to female figures, elevating their desires and spiritual aspirations into equivalents, equal in terms of sacredness and revolutionary potential.

In addition, Bulleh Shah's poetic challenge of clerical orthodoxy and gendered moral norms frequently manifests in the forms of dance, music, and body-suffused devotion—practices historically closed to women in public religious settings. His own suspected entanglement with the dancing girl "Mai Jani" is a folkloric embodiment of rebellion, suggesting his accommodation of feminine religious power despite social opprobrium (Qureshi, 1995). By such transactions, Bulleh Shah redefines spiritual authority: the transcendent is approached not by masculine domination and doctrinal rigueur, but by love, humility, and surrender—qualities normally feminized and marginalized. His poetry therefore becomes a discursive space where women's mysticism, affectivity, and fleshly experience are commodified and expressed instead of being repressed, so that his poetry will be at the center of any feminist interpretation of Punjabi Sufi poetry.

The character of Heer in Waris Shah's Heer Waris Shah (1766) holds a singular position at the juncture of Sufi mysticism, poetic convention, and feminist resistance. Waris Shah recasts Heer as a voice of rebellion, wisdom, and spiritual longing, frequently situating her actions within the trajectory of the mystic lover in Sufi tradition. Early on, Heer establishes agency by defying family and societal expectations to marry Ranjha, a choice that makes her a symbol of

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resistance against patriarchal dominance. She refuses to be molded according to the dictates of arranged marriage and is willing to suffer social ostracism for it, a refusal that represents the Sufi virtue of non-conformity (malamat)—renouncing the worldly for the Beloved. Scholars like Shackle (1976) and Schimmel (1975) point out that Waris Shah overlays the romantic story with Sufi allegory, in which Heer is now a seeker struggling through the rugged landscape of spiritual union, resonating with the persecutions of classical female mystic Rabia al-Basri. Heer's verbal battles with religious officials—particularly her mockery of the village mullah—depict a vitriolic denunciation of patriarchal religious orthodoxy.

In another instance, when the cleric challenges her morals, Heer lashes back in biting irony, laying bare the performative religiosity and double standards of religious authority. The scene is not merely dramatic but ideologically loaded, positioning a Punjabi village woman in open defiance of institutional Islam and its authority over the bodies and desires of women. As Mir (2006) and Saeed (2018) contend, Heer's voice is a proto-feminist expression of women's autonomy, conveyed through a poetic form that permits meanings to be layered—a romance, a spirituality, and a politics. Her narrative is transformed into a women's cultural myth of resistance, recited in women's circles and mehfil-e-sama as a testament to feminine strength and resilience. In addition, Waris Shah's employment of Punjabi colloquial and rural idioms in her narrative makes her rebellion localized and makes her a folk icon of emancipated womanhood transcending generations (Grewal, 1994; Kaur, 2021).

Heer's emotional and spiritual suffering is not passive experiencing but intensely gendered divine yearning (ishq-e-haqiqi). As with the Sufi lover destroyed in quest of the Beloved, Heer suffers social ostracism, betrayal, and spiritual exclusion, turning her suffering into an ascetic, even saintly, way of being. Waris Shah insistently identifies her ordeal as a process of purification, situating her within the Sufi template of the majzoob—one so engulfed by love that they lose all connection to the ways of the world. As per Qureshi (1995) and Malik (2019), this feminization of mystical love retrieves women's emotional and bodily lives as sites of spiritual understanding instead of shame or vulnerability. The text's repeated invocation of mythic female lovers—Sassi, Sohni, and Laila—places Heer within a canon of sacred femininity, women who, while romanticized, are avatars of resistance, passion, and existential courage. Thus, Waris Shah not merely sanctifies Heer's love but raises her voice and body as vessels of mystical wisdom, building a feminist poetics which resonates within scholarly and popular receptions of Punjabi Sufi poetry.

In Saif-ul-Malook, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh skillfully weaves a mystic allegory of love, desire, and divine pursuit through poetic tales which subtly place feminine resilience and spiritual agency at center stage. While the core narrative is about Prince Saif's quest to reunite with the fairy Badi-ul-Jamal, the narrative process is not simply a masculine journey but one of collective pursuit of transcendence, where the female is not passive but an active agent of spiritual growth. Badi-ul-Jamal, who is traditionally seen as the "beloved," is in a sacred position closer to the Divine Feminine, embodying not just beauty but wisdom, power, and mystery. By her otherworldly yet forceful presence, she emerges as a symbol of feminine mysticism, leading the aspirant towards divine destruction (fana) and realization (baqa)—ideas at the heart of Sufi epistemology (Malik,

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2020; Schimmel, 1975). The text, taken on a feminist Sufi framework, repositions the female not as an object of erotic contemplation but as a spirituality archetype. Additionally, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh often uses symbolic language to exalt the woman's body and voice as sacred spaces of experience and change. In some poems, female protagonists are presented as representations of God's love, where their outer beauty represents their inner purity and closeness to God. A poignant illustration is where Bakhsh describes the ferocity of divine love engulfing the soul like a fire that incinerates ego—a feeling that resonates with women mystics' emotional strength (Qureshi, 2011). His vocabulary in describing yearning (ishq) and suffering (dard) is in concordance with emotions conventionally scripted as feminine—vulnerability, patience, and devotion—thus redeploying these qualities as sites of sacred power instead of fragility. As Kaur (2019) points out, the pain and alienation in Saif-ul-Malook reflect women's social exclusions in patriarchal worlds, yet these moments of spiritual disconnection are also the routes to divine reunion.

Significantly, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry is marked by an inclusive worldview that subverts strict gender dichotomies by creating spiritual spaces where women's voices sound, if metaphorically. The lover's position in the poem is not that of possession but of activation of the seeker's soul—a motif already recuperated by feminist scholars as an allegory of female autonomy through mystical subjectivity (Ahmed, 2020). The woman's "absence" in certain sections of the poem is thus not a silencing but an omnipresence, symbolic in nature, as her being fills the seeker's mind and transforms his spiritual self. In addition, oral performances of Saif-ul-Malook in Punjabi villages—particularly in devotional sessions conducted by women—demonstrate how the work is reappropriated by women as a space of common memory and sacred narrative (Saeed, 2017). These oral traditions enable women to reinterpret and rethink the female subject in Bakhsh's poetry as both spiritually powerful and emotionally perceptive, reasserting the function of Punjabi Sufi poetry in expressing feminist awareness before the institutionalization of feminist thought in South Asia.

Punjabi Sufi poetry, with its strong foundation of spiritual defiance and divine affection, frequently expresses subversive testimonies that attest to feminine strength and agency. Shah Hussain, the first Punjabi Sufi poet, offers a revolutionary refiguring of feminine self via the figure of Ranjha, who is taken up as his spiritual love. Reversing patriarchal gender ideals, Hussain takes on the persona of Heer, thereby incarnating fluid, receptive yet tough femininity. Spiritual androgyny thus becomes a feminist modality of expression, highlighting submission rather than submission as holy empowerment (Shackle & Hussain, 2000). Hussain's poetry tends to overturn patriarchal dualities by emphasizing the ishq (holy love) felt via a feminine perspective—one that overcomes physical limitations and upholds spiritual agency.

Sultan Bahu's verse, though abundant in masculine mysticism, holds many pieces where he calls upon the female and maternal aspects of holy knowledge, representing women as vessels of spiritual awareness. His deployment of metaphors like the guddi (doll) and chadar (veil) serve not just as indicators of modesty but also as indicators of inner fortitude and divine enigma. Bahu states, "He who knows the secret of the veil, knows the secret of the soul," subtly placing women's everyday experience at the heart of mystical knowledge (Bahu, trans. 1998). Herein symbolic schema, female is not a passive believer but

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an active participant in the disclosure of divine truth. This figure subverts patriarchal constructions of spiritual hierarchy and raised female mystic to the status of knower and teller of truth.

Peero Preman, 19th-century Sufi poet and courtesan, offers a strong feminist intervention into Punjabi religious literature. Her autobiographical poems, particularly in "Mahabati Peero", severely criticize the hypocrisy of male saints and women's exclusion from religious forums. Professing herself a lover of God and a woman of wisdom, Peero resists the sexual exploitation, objectification, and silencing of women in both religious and secular forums. Her poetry asserts her right to speak, to love, and to desire union with the Divine on her own terms without mediation from male clerics. This raw expression of spiritual agency and resistance to patriarchal expectations gives Peero's work a central feminist voice in South Asian Sufi literature (Niazi, 2017). Her invitation to the Divine is not passive, but revolutionary—transforming the Sufi path into a space of gendered recovery and spiritual resistance.

Findings and Discussion

Punjabi Sufi poetry, as it unravels through interpretation, is not just a religious dialogue but a fertile bed for articulation of feminist awareness and religious dissent. With the poets such as Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Waris Shah, and Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's symbolic, metaphorical, and emotive lexicon, lives of women in love, yearning, social defiance, and religious autonomy are passionately articulated. One of the most fundamental findings is that the feminine is not a minor, silenced or subordinated figure but rather as the central mystical subject who resists societal convention and seeks instant union with the Divine. Heer in Waris Shah's poetry, for instance, is not a tragic heroine in the conventional sense but an empowering symbol of resistance to feudal power and gendered oppression. Her refusal to accept social norms and her unrelenting pursuit of love highlight the redemptive potential of feminine desire and religious agency.

Bulleh Shah's poetry particularly demonstrates a radical feminist spirit. In appropriating the voice of Heer and upending traditional gender roles, Bulleh Shah overturns hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal gatekeeping of spirituality. His poetry is more about inner light than ritualized devotion, and he calls for a kind of spiritual liberation that is feminist in its impulse. The woman's voice throughout his work, symbolic or real, is a truth-speaker — someone able to speak truth to religious duplicity, hold accountable social oppression, and voice a deeply personal love affair with the Divine. Similarly, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry in Saif-ul-Malook also celebrates the sense and endurance of women characters, making them moral and religious pillars rather than passive players who are waiting to be saved by men. These women are narrative agents — charting directions of spiritual journeys rather than simply accompanying them.

Also included are lesser-known perspectives like that of Peero Preman providing first-person feminist critique of patriarchal religious authority. The poetry of Peero unearths how women have been excluded from space in the spiritual, yet how women have adapted and reinterpreted such space in oral poetry, spiritual songs (kafis), and shrine pilgrimages. Another intersectional site of critique here is that of gendered agency and devotional practice in the perpetuation of Sufism in Punjab. Through performance and poetry, women

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have rendered as sacred genres of expression, performing negotiations of spiritual fulfillment as well as social resistance. These remarks collectively indicate that Punjabi Sufi poetry is not only a site for mystical thinking but also a site of literature to recast gender roles, construct female subjectivity, and disrupt patriarchal construct. The poetry thus serves as a developing storehouse of feminist consciousness drawing its sustenance from religious tradition.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted the deeply entrenched feminist consciousness of Punjabi Sufi poetry and demonstrated how women's spiritual subjectivity, resistance, and agency are articulated through metaphors, narratives, and sacred symbolism. Far from passive or marginal, the feminine voice in Sufi poetry presents as powerful, autonomous, and often defiant. From close readings of Bulleh Shah's poetic works, the works of Waris Shah, and the works of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh—and other Sufi-poetic voices—the present study has shown that Punjabi Sufi poetry is a revolutionary cultural archive where feminine power is recovered and gender oppression is dismantled.

The poetry indicates that women are not merely central to Sufi thematic composition but also the metaphors of divine love, pursuers of truth, and bearers of spiritual wisdom. Figures such as Heer, Badi-ul-Jamal, or the anonymous female mystics in kafis and hekayas destabilize entrenched opposites of spiritual and social inferiority. They instead represent a profound, rich tradition of feminine strength, mystical aspiration, and moral accountability. Finally, the study confirms that Punjabi Sufi literature is a site of urgent importance for remaking spirituality in a feminist mode, putting women not just as passive receivers of God's love, but as translators, critics, and collaborators in religious knowledge.

Recommendations

1. **Encourage Feminist Literary Analysis in Indigenous Contexts**

Future research ought to proceed to use feminist and decolonial approaches to South Asian literary cultures, and especially vernacular works such as Punjabi Sufi poetry. These provide rich terrain for subverting Eurocentric models of feminism by foregrounding culturally grounded discourses of empowerment.

2. **Preserve and Translate Vernacular Sufi Texts**

Most of the strong feminist statements of Punjabi Sufi poetry are underresearched because of language barriers. Increased translation efforts need to be made on these texts, particularly by feminists, to provide easier access as well as interpretative coherence.

3. **Center Women's Oral and Performance Traditions**

Women's religious expressions in Punjab—via shrine visits, qawwalis, and devotional sessions—are a continuation of the poetic tradition. Ethnographic research on these practices can support textual analysis, bringing to the fore the lived aspects of feminist spirituality in Sufism.

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4. **Incorporate Sufi Poetry into Feminist Pedagogy and Curriculum**
Punjab Sufi verse needs to be incorporated in gender studies and literature studies at Pakistani and international academic institutions. It can broaden feminist theory discourses to encompass mystical epistemologies and South Asian contexts.

5. **Develop Archival Projects of Women-Centered Sufi Literature**
Creating virtual and physical archives of women's roles in Sufi traditions—poetry, oral narratives, songs, and visual arts—would safeguard fading cultural knowledge and affirm women's intellectual and spiritual contributions.

6. **Foster Interdisciplinary Research**
Mixing literary criticism, anthropology, religious studies, and gender theory can produce richer understanding of the rich complexities of Sufi poetic traditions and their feminist aspects.

Ethical Considerations

This secondary data analysis-based study has interacted with published books, literary translations, and available scholarly interpretations of Punjabi Sufi poetry. Although it does not entail face-to-face interaction with human subjects, ethical accountability is at the heart of the research process. To begin with, due diligence has been taken to provide proper acknowledgement of all poetic sources, academic works, and interpretive analyses through precise citation as per APA 7 standards.

Respecting the cultural and spiritual sensitivities that invest Sufi traditions has been a working assumption. Interpretation of religious and mystical texts has been conducted with respect, shying away from reductive or instrumental readings that would threaten their sacred worth. In addition, the feminist perspective used in the current research is contextually embedded and works to multiply women's spiritual and social agency while not imposing Western theoretical categories inappropriately on indigenous structures. This decolonial awareness guarantees that the voices, metaphors, and representations discussed in the poetry are deciphered with a critical appreciation of their cultural, historical, and religious significance.

Lastly, gender representation in religious texts is problematic, including for religious dialogue. For this reason, the research eschews generalization and essentialism by highlighting the diversity of women's lives and accepting the interpretative constraints of secondary analysis. Where academic disagreement is present, it has been pointed out to maintain academic openness. The larger aim is to assist in an ethical, respectful, and inclusive conversation that respects both the poetic heritage of Punjabi Sufi saints and the time-tested voices of feminine empowerment present within.

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