

## **Cultural Legacy Speaks Through Walls of Pandoke**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There is an affinity between history and identity. Pakistan stands on unique position in the contemporary world due to its multi-cultural nature. The literary contents of Punjabi language have a magnificent cultural expression which can be perceived in poetic verses of Bulleh Shāh on the walls of Pandoke. This paper deals with the sentiments of natives with ṣūfī poet Bulleh Shāh and his poetry. The essence of his poetry is enlightening the walls and generate a novel strengthen in the form of cultural legacy. The representation of classical poetry on walls is expressing the devotion of residents with ṣūfī poet Bulleh Shāh and his parents at small town Pandoke. The inscription on walls has socio-cultural values and manifestation from which it is born. This is an unalloyed interpretation of Bulleh Shāh's poetry which is written on the well, nearby a hub of garbage. When we compare these verses with its environment, this can be creating a sense of symbolical connotation. Along with representation of wall chalking, there is also dynamism of pictorial fabrication in the form of posters on the walls of Pandoke. The social culture of Punjab is known for its generousness and simplicity along with transcending virtuous suggestions.*

**Keywords:** Bulleh Shāh, Punjabi poetry, cultural identity, wall inscriptions

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION**

The world is full of such places which look completely different from the others just because of their unique culture. Interesting and unique cultural ties attract people towards the regions where it develops and constantly practices. The cities and towns that we know of today were developed centuries ago and mark the every smallest variation of cultural, religious, societal differences that people had cultivated to make themselves distinctive.

On the other hand there are many places around the worlds that are only one of its kind and still out of the attention of the people. Pandoke is a small village near district Kasur in the Punjab province of Pakistan. It is one of the most neglected or forgotten places in Pakistan where one can hardly find out the basic facilities of life and health but the people in this area developed a very surprising and remarkable practice to pay their heartiest tribute to one of the legendary ṣūfī poet Bulleh Shāh. They used to write the poetic verses of ṣūfī poet at every nook and corner of the village. In this way they pay tribute to the ṣūfīsm.

Culture of Punjab interpreted variously as a form of social and communal life, or manifestation of the cerebral life, whether material, moral or spiritual values. Thus culture, more precisely defined as a social order in all its totality. Another noteworthy feature of culture is that it is transmissible from one generation to another. This is an evolutionary process, and involves transformations and innovations within the frame

work of old cultural traditions. The literary subjects of Punjabi language have an opulent of cultural expression which can be seen in poetic verses of Bulleh Shah on the walls of Pandoke, is a small village in near Kasur, Lahore District, Punjab. The place is famous by the reference to the great *ṣūfī* poet Bulleh Shāh, after passing early decades in Pandoke then moved towards Kasur and his parents are buried in Pandoke. Traditionally Kasur is said to have been founded by Kusha, a son of Rama. The district has its fame far and wide because of being the last resting place of Bully Shah, one of legendary Sufi poet of Punjab. The era attributed to him is from 1680 to 1758. His ancestors belonged to the once flourishing town of *Uch*, living its part *Uch Gilaniyan*, now in Bahawalpur. His family migrated to Malakwal finally settled in Pandoke, some far away from Kasur.

This paper deals with the sentimentalities of people with Bulleh Shāh and the quintessence of his poetry is illuminating the walls and revealing a novel reinforcement in the form of cultural legacy. As Akbar Naqvi stated in our subcontinent we have two basic traditions of art: one imperial, which is dead; and the other folk including poetry which may not be as vital as of yore, but which is still living.<sup>1</sup> In the light of this definition the inscription on walls of Pandoke is the best representation of living trend of paying homage to art form. Bulleh Shah was considered as Classical mystic poet of subcontinent. The term mysticism has its source in Neo-Platonism and derived from the Greek word *mystikos* means to instigate. This means the instigation towards spiritual truth. Charles Chadwick divided the symbols used in literature into two broad classifications, Human symbols and transcendental symbols. Human symbols are confined to ideas or expressions which are used by poets in the order to convey the meaning whereas; the transcendental symbols are not from the general human world but from a vast ideal world of which the real world is just an imperfect representation.<sup>2</sup>

Each region of the country has its own traditions that are consequences of its beliefs and religious proclivities. Such proclivities and practices are in turn affecting on the natives in particular way of livings, cultural arrays and psychological attitudes, and “society as a whole adheres to them like gospels.”<sup>3</sup> Asmina Ranjit wrote culture is like a “tattoo” which could not be separated from an individual: one may adopt a new culture but what one has had from birth will always be within, layering and intermingling.<sup>4</sup> The folklores and poetry of *ṣūfī* poets of Punjab has a rich perception of its diverting culture and portrays its people’s determinations. The soil of Punjab has spiritual significance in its existence throughout the centuries due to *ṣūfism*. Punjabi language is as glorious as culture of Punjab and however, still served the cause of *ṣūfīs*. With the passage of time the dynamism of Punjabi language is developed through Punjabi poets who are revealing cultural diversity through their poetry. Bulleh Shāh is one of those mystic poets who continue to lie in the idiom of eastern as well as western Punjab.<sup>5</sup>

The representation of classical poetry on walls is expressing the devotion of natives with *ṣūfī* poet Bulleh Shāh and his parents at Pandoke. The Punjabi culture is proliferates through Punjabi poetry. Such a kind of devotion seems to be beyond the limits as flowed out on every wall of streets in the village. By seeing these every corner of street, each seems to have literary contents and convey an ideology. The poetic verses are saying welcome to their visitors. The rough and worn out walls are embellished with poetic verses which are source of amusement for new comers.

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<sup>1</sup> Ghulam Ali Allama. *Art of Sindh* (Pakistan: lok Virsa), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Chadwick Charles, *Symbolism* (London: Meuthen, 1971), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ihsan H. Nadiem, *Punjab* (Lahore: Al-Faisal Nashran, 2005), 213.

<sup>4</sup> Sangeeta Thapa, *Nukta Art*, Vol, I (Karachi: Nukta Archives, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2006), 72.

<sup>5</sup> Geeti Sen. *Crossing Boundries* (New Dehli: Orient Longman, 1997), 126.

The poetic verses of Bulleh Shāh are basically interpretation of spiritual inspiration of Sufis. Inside the village every wall is personified by specific poetry and aesthetic philosophy of Bulleh Shāh's verses lies in its essential concepts rather than in details. As it seems such a kind of poetry plays a vital role and maintained harmony in social circle of village. These walls gratify as institutionalized visual collection and cultivate the wisdom of Bulleh Shāh in social environment of village. Such a kind of visual expression provides a psychological linkage to the village for its residents.

The artistic expression of these walls has a strong relation to its surrounding because a shrine of spiritually inclined intellectual Pir Shah Muhammad Dervish has been in this village and Bulleh Shāh's poetry leads new comers and visitors towards their parent's shrine. The inscription on walls has socio-cultural tenets and demonstration from which it is born. A street corner which leads towards shrine, inscribed with Bulleh Shāh's poetry. These verses showed his intuitive approach towards life (fig. 1,2).

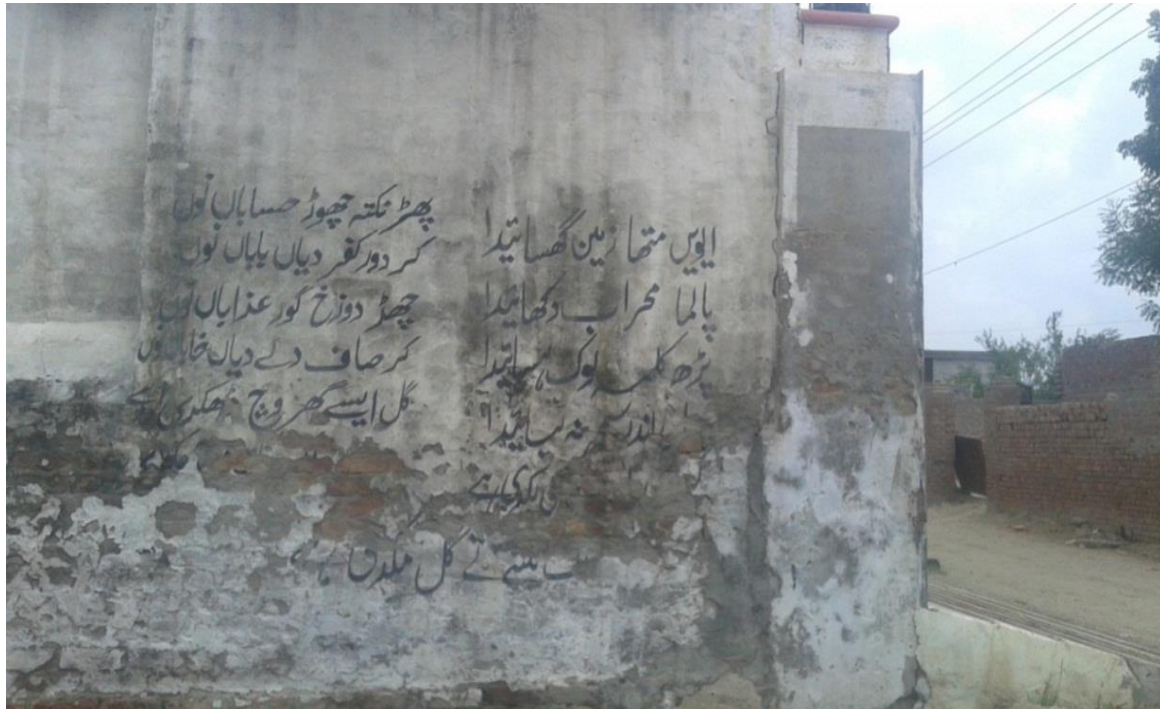


Figure 1. (گل اک نقطے وچ مکدی ائے) Photography by author.

Bulleh Shāh's poetry is cultured with the aesthetic philosophy and its essence is reintegrated with God. The verses on walls are interpreting of social and moral image of society. Society is abode where people live and perform according to the customs, norms and culture set by natives. In other words man needs society for his survival.

ایویں متھا زمین گھسائی دا

پا لما مہراب وکھائی دا

پڑھ کلمہ لوک ہسائی دا

دل اند سمجھ نہ لئی دا

کدی سچی بات وی لکدی ائے

گل اک نقطے وچ مکدی ائے

His behavior towards society reflected through social intents. The social intentions are based on traditions which develop through a long chain of generations. Human civilizations in fact are cultivated by its culture and cultural norms. The relationship of human beings and their existence in social milieu cannot be alienated from humanism and humanity.

The selection of Bulleh Shah's poetry written on the exterior walls of each house, shop or any corner of the street in Pandoke village mostly represent Bulleh Shah's philosophy which raised questions on epistemology of learning (theory of knowledge). He negated all the previous ideas of knowledge for religious or any other worldly concern. He proposed through his philosophical poetry that *eko Alif tereay darker, Ilmoo bas karin o yaar* (only one Alif is your need, stop seeking for more), and *Ek nuqtay which gal mukdi ay* (every talk ends on one point). *Alif* is the first alphabet of Urdu language and *Ek nuqta* is one dot or a point, both can be understood as an abstract of symbolic personification of a Whole or one single being. In simple words need of the time is that one should get awareness of one's own single being that would suffice to understand each and everything. Bulleh Shāh pointed out a single point which is the essence of all the sources of knowledge where all discourses end and that is; the creature is not different from his creator.



Figure 2 (اک نقطے وچ گل مکدی ائے). Photography by author.

To understand the link between inscriptions and ethical social attitude of the people, it is necessary to have a look over the reality of individual identity in cultural sphere. Cultural identity is somehow united with religious identity. According to these verses Bulleh Shāh says that all things are immersed on the fact of reality, which is beyond this physical world. One can approach that world through truth, for this one must have to leave his worldly desires. This inscription unwraps the reality of humans. These verses are basically interpreting of mysticism which Bulleh Shah experienced throughout his life. The sense of poetic verses is revealing his Divine experience which he explored through symbols in his poetry. As it seems that a devotee



has written these verses unconsciously and does not feel inconvenience about surroundings or environment because sewage is running below these verses. The verses on this wall are personification of an image and metaphor. These verses not only have contemplative tone but also replete with the convincingly vocabulary due to this reason the Punjabi language had developed and being used for folk songs throughout the history (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Poetry merges into folk songs. Photography by author.

The aesthetics of Punjabi language is hidden in its tonal character and this character merges into the lyrical and rhythmic form of verses. The repetition of his own name at the end of every stanza shows his humanistic approach and realization of his own self, which is also making possible for other to understand the reality of this physical world. A representation of wall chalking with the verses of *Bullah ki jaana 'n mae 'n kaun*, showed firmly tribute to Bulleh Shāh (fig. 4). T.S Eliot's stated that "the poetry takes its life from the people's speech and in return gives life to it." Eliot also observed that no poetry, of course, is ever exactly the same speech that the poet talks and hears; but it has to be in such a relation to the speech of his time that the listener or reader can say, 'that is how I should talk if I could talk poetry.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Geeti Sen. *Crossing Boundries* .New Dehli: Orient Longman, 1997, 135.



Figure 4. ( بلہا کی جاذباں میں کون ) Photography by author.

This is an unalloyed depiction of Bulleh Shāh's poetry which is written on the well, nearby a hub of garbage. When we compare these verses with its environment, this can be creating a sense of symbolical representation. Such verses generate a deep perceptiveness for those who are showing their unawareness from the reality of life. They showed their rigidities and impulsive behavior towards life and spend their times as an ignorant (fig 5,6).



Figure 5. Poetic Verses are written on a well near Garbage. Photography by author.

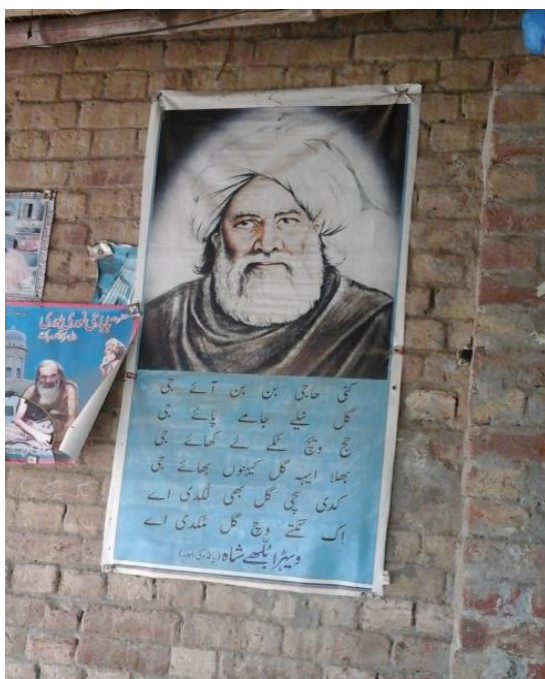


Figure 6. Iconography of Bulleh Shāh. Photography by author.

The figurative image of Bulleh Shāh has taken an exclusive element which shows the simplicity with local cultural charisma (fig 7). Beyond the expression of devotion these posters become a part of culture and “it is obvious that popular iconography reflects the way by which groups or communities utter a discourse on them, and while doing this way they convey their status inside the local society.”<sup>7</sup>



Figure 7. A tribute to Sufi poet Bulleh Shāh. Photography by author.

The village, Pandoke is considered a remarkable and significant phenomenon of artistic practice of *ṣūfī* poetry. These walls are not only visualized the pragmatic aspect of poetry, but also manifestation of an encouraging attitude and response from natives.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Boivin, *Nukta Art*, Vol, I (Karachi: Nukta Archives, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2006), 52.





Figure 8. Tribute to Bulleg Shāh (Bulleh Shāh School in Pandoke). Photography by author.

On the street, we have come to across with terms of visual representations which appear to have a tremendous impact of *ṣūfī* Bulleh Shāh on the lives of inhabitants. They have erected their institutional edifices as well as business shops, on the name of Bulleh Shāh (fig. 8). These executions are basically the demonstration of dedication of natives which becomes the cultural identity of their village, Pandoke. Historian Anindita Ghosh suggests that channel of statement in printed texts appealed to an audience making the transition to literacy and reading culture.

## CONCLUSION

Bulleh Shāh's poetry is a reflection of his wisdom and his theology merge with cultural values of Punjab. His Punjabi poetic verses on the walls are basically portraying the cultural reality. According to natives there is an annual centennial is organized, which means of recreation and resuscitate the cultural as well as religious values of society. By organizing fairs and centenaries, people are able to get rid of their strains and anxieties of life. "The saints in a way acted as a psychiatrist and provided effective cure of physical maladies as well psychological disorders. Nevertheless, the people of the Pandoke, partake in these commemorations, which shows the sincerity of their attitudes towards ethnic traditions. These walls are boundless enthusiasm to its natives which can act as mental therapy in social milieu.

The people, as a part of living in the village of Pandoke, used to speak these inscriptions in a free poetic way. They consider that such a kind of wall chalking enhanced the exquisiteness of their village. This attitude creates astonishment for new comers that these people who are kept away from schools or institutions but they have fully grasped on these verses. In rainy season these inscriptions on walls wipe out easily but the passion of locals' dose not fade with rain drops, they chalk again these walls with more strength and strong passion. The poetic verses of Bulleh Shāh on walls near hub of garbage or swage have symbolical connection that the sacred flower lotus grows in the mud and a powerful significance in many cultures. So, these verses of Bulleh Shāh have a spiritual approach whether written on muddy walls or near garbage or swage.

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