

LOCATING BULLEH SHAH (d.1757) IN THE MYSTICAL TRADITION OF SOUTH ASIA

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In him the pantheism of Punjabi Sufism reached its apex. His works are characterized by a blending of Neo-Platonic and Vedantic pantheism. He did not claim superiority for any religion and was never involved in proselytism. He is often hailed as the Rumi of Punjab who attained spiritual summit. Much to the consternation of Islamic orthodoxy, the hallmark of his spiritualism is wifely devotion and identification of *murshid* with God. *Urs* is held in his tomb at Qasur in Lahore. He sees God in Krishna and Rama. Bulleh Shah adores Muhammad not as a messenger of God but as incarnation of God. It is like the Vaisnava adoration of Krishna. Both Dr. Mohan Singh and Dr.Lajwanti agree that the following six ideas betray influence of Hinduism.

[i] The adoration of Prophet Mohammad on the pattern, on which the Vaisnavas adore Lord Krishna

[ii] The identification of the spiritual guide with God

[iii] Wifely devotion

[iv] The practice of concentrating on the *Trikuti*, controlling of breath and hearing of *Anahat Shabd* (unstruck sound)

[v] Monism; and

[vi] Transmigration of soul.

No: four is from the system of the Nath Yogis. All the remaining ideas have been adopted from the system of Vaishnava Vedantic Bhakti.

In some of the verses, the Vaisnava colour is so dominant that one hesitates to admit them as the compositions of a Mohammedan. The vocabulary, the metaphors, the atmosphere and the thought all are Vaisnava. In the following verses speak the gopis of Krishna Bhaktas:

*When Lord Krishna sounded the flute and I heard its voice, sayeth Bulleh Shah, I cried in agony and since then I am wailing in pain of separation. Bulleh, the gopi, turned mad and ran towards Lord Krishna. The gopi asks where else she should go.*

Bulleh Shah sees God in Krishna who grazed cows in Brindaban and in Rama who invaded Lanka.

In the verses where the Islamic terminology occurs, the spirit therein is undoubtedly Vaisnava. Bulleh adores Muhammad, the Prophet, not as a messenger of God, but as an incarnation of God. In Islam, Muhammad is not assigned any divinity. He is only a servant of God. But Bulleh declares that God [Ahad] Himself disguised as *Ahmad* [Muhammad] and appeared on earth. Bulleh anthropomorphized the Immanent aspect of God in the Vaisnava style and identified it with the historical Muhammad. Nathism and ascetic sections of Vaisnavism identify guru with God. According to Nathism, when knowledge is gained from a personal guru then guru is god but when it is directly received from God then God is guru.

It is claimed that Bulleh believed in the law of karma. It should be mentioned that no religion denies the law of karma. Qadiris of Punjab are renowned for their interest in Hindu philosophy. Bulleh's guru discussed that in *Dastur-al-Amal*. Devotee Bullhe Shah needs an object for emotional identification. The notion of wifely devotion is a case in point.

*To attain Thee, I have controlled breath. (yogic impact)*

Hindus believe that fate is determined by past karmas. Muslims believe that fate is determined by God at His will. It appears that Bulleh used Hindu vocabulary and did not accept the law of karma as prevalent among the Hindus.

Qadiri mystic Prince Dara already prepared *Sirr-I Akbar* for the sufis. Bulleh had knowledge of both the Upanishad and the doctrine of Wahdat ul Wajud of Ibn Arabi and Jili. Out of likeness,

he created likeness. In *Ahad (Nurullah)*, he inserted MIM (i.e., produced *Ahmad* or *Nur Muhammad*) and then made the universe. So Bulleh was also influenced by Islamic cosmogony and not merely by Vedantic pantheism. He was apparently influenced by Dara who discovered monotheism in Vedas and Upanishads. Ijadist sufis see God's beauty, wisdom, awe etc manifested in the phenomenal world. In the phenomenal world Ibn al Arabi admits the reality of both good and evil. Ibn al Arabi's Neo Platonic Pantheism is crippled as it implies that evil has been assigned to man and good to God which distinguishes God from man. But Bullhe under the impact of Vedanta sees God even in the opposites. He realizes the One in his friends and foes in lovers and Beloved in the guide as well as in the disciples. Bullhe sees God both in a Hindu and in a Muslim. Someone who has gone astray is also God. This reminds us of Tulsidas, who received food served by an outcaste Brahmin at Kashi. Bullhe's unitive experience reaches new heights when he says that it is God who suffers and weeps as a woeful person. It is indicative of his nearness to Vedanta than to Neo Platonism. Ramakrishna also said that hate the sin not the sinner. According to Ijadic Sufism God's grace is limited. First man has to win over *nafs* and observe *farz*. But Vaisnava Vedantic pantheist's notion of God's Grace is much wider. They say that God's Grace is showered on the sinful too. Bullhe shared this position. According to this position the grace of God is higher than His Justice. If God does Justice Bullhe would be thrown into Hell. But God's Grace meant communion with Him.

Islamic view of the purpose of creation is available in *Hadis-i Qudsi*- "I (i.e., Allah) was a hidden treasure; I desired to become known and I brought creation into being that I might be known." But the view that the world is Lila or sport or *Tamasha* of God is Vaishnava and has been adopted by Bulleh, who says- "God Himself has appeared in the guise of the individuals to play the sport." Thus in respect of both the thought and style, Bullhe was influenced more by Vaishnava Vedantic cult than by Neo-Platonic Pantheism of Ibn al- Arabi and Jili. Bullhe was denounced as a heretic by the ulama. Sufis like Bullhe used the terminology of the orthodoxy to offer their own interpretation and also to attack the mullahs. Orthodox teachings deal with Heaven, Hell and worldly life, but the sufis know no lesson other than that of love of God in this life and the life after. Only the sufi path is true sharia claims Bullhe. To him *tariqat*= mother and sharia= midwife. Like the bauls Bullhe is also not interested in the historical Muhammad. They see him as a cosmic man. Bullhe crosses the sectarian boundaries of sharia and saw no difference

between Hindus and Muslims, Kafir and Momin, Mecca and Gaya, mandir and masjid, Mullah and Pundit. He also put emphasis on kamil murshid. He argued that it is useless to visit the masjid unless the prayer is said with love. Bullhe says that he realized God in the heart and the people are ignorantly wandering here and there. Bullhe's place of pilgrimage is Takhat Hazara, the village of Ranjha which is his heart. His namaz is not the recitation of the Quran but his meditation in the name of God. He adopted the path of love and abandoned formal practices (sharia). His utterances explaining communion with God discern a great intimacy. Bullhe's mystic experiences of states like Qurb (nearness), Uns (intimacy) Qabz and *Bast*. (contraction and expansion). I have both the Mecca and the beloved in my heart. In my heart dwell all the Hajis and the Gajis and the thief (*naf*) The metaphorization of self (Heer) and God (Ranjha) as wife and husband was traditional which Bullhe adopted. The veil of ignorance has been described as Ghungat (veil) which a newly married girl uses. By removing veil a wife sees the face of her husband. The seeker removing the veil of ignorance (duality) achieves communion with God by realizing oneness of Existence. Bullhe lost his 'I' ness and sees God all around. After killing the idea of 'I' ness Bullhe qualifies himself to be a lover. Kabir said that God dwells in every heart. Thou should not speak harsh to anybody.

The month of *Bhadron* brought me good fortunes, and I saw my beloved. He is dwelling in every body. Shah Enayet, my guide, helped me to see him. Indeed! Sufis such as Bullhe, could identify themselves with the good fortunes of the masses caused by a good harvest etc. On the other hand, emphasis on the guru implied emphasis on local religious symbols. In its turn, the local blessed man is crucial for the local community's self-confidence through the sanctification of local space. This process was important, because due to economic or other factors many people were deprived of the luxury of a pilgrimage to a distant place. For such people, pilgrimage to the local shrine acquired a new meaning during their quest for identity. Through the martyrdom of Mansur, God has hanged his own self. After traversing the valley of *fana* (annihilation), Bullhe reached the stage of *baqa* (subsistence)= he is one with God. Not only the poet who is suffering from separation. The whole universe is longing for reunion with God. Pantheist Bullhe would express the griefs and glooms of each and every particle of the Universe. Bullhe in the state of communion, realized God not only internally in the heart but externally

also in the Mullah and Pundit, in the guide and disciple and in the saint and the astray. But Junaid and Suhrawardi are restricted to the internal union only.

Bullhe describes the wailings and separation like those of the *gopis* of *saguna* Krishna *bhakti*. Like Krishna his God plays hide and seek game with her. Like most sufis Bullhe started his journey like a conformist. But soon he left sharia as a spiritual path behind. In the *tariqat* stage a *kamil murshid* or perfect guide is vital for the *salik* or seeker. Being a local symbol of Islam, *murshid* plays a vital role in intercessory Sufism for the illiterate masses. In the third stage or *Haqiqat*, Sufism revolves round the notion of *Hama Ust* or 'Everything is He'. In this stage the sufi hears the call of a *muezzin* (one who gives the prayer call) in the flute of an idol worshipper and the demarcating line between the Muslim and non-Muslim is blurred. The fourth or final stage of the spiritual evolution of a sufi is called *marfat*. It is the merging into divine reality called *fana*. The *murshid* helps the seeker to reach this stage, but it is the God's Grace which makes possible the ultimate union. The *Atma* (soul) and *Paramatma* (God) become one. When Bullhe attained this stage the entire world appeared to him as a reflection of the Divine Reality. Bullhe had merged in God. The moment this happens, caste and creed cease to have any meaning. It is not surprising that many farsighted rulers in medieval India could realize its potentiality as a sustainer of India's composite culture. Bullhe sings "Remebering Ranjha day and night I've become Ranjha

Myself. Call me Dhido Ranjha, no more I be addressed as

Heer. Ranjha and Heer are a single soul, No one could set them apart.

Unlike many contemporaries, Bullhe does not prescribe torturing the body into submission. Like the *sants* of the *bhakti* tradition, he believes in love and devotion and suffered the pangs of separation (of the devotee from guru and seeker from God). Though a rebel, Bullhe often follows the Islamic calendar. Bullhe used a language popular in Central Punjab, but he used *Lehndi* to describe emotional moments which was popular in South Eastern Punjab. Obviously, this flexibility enhanced his popularity in a larger geo-cultural region of Punjab. Punjab was known for various sufi traditions. Bullhe belonged to the Sant tradition of sufis. Perhaps his eclectic tradition was not unique in the context of Punjab. It is the land of Nanak. Even Guru Govind

Singh had many Muslim followers. Like Lalan Shah of Bengal, Bullhe's assertion of the soul against sharia is noticeable. In Bullhe's compositions we find the eternal yearning of the human soul to have direct experience of Divine Reality. When duality disappears, Bullhe moves from sharia to *tariqa* and became liberated. Bullhe asserts that spiritual attainment is not to be found by the recitation of the holy scriptures like Vedas and Quran. His understanding of spiritualism is the reconciliation of faith derived from orthodoxy and love, the essence of true devotion. God is conceived as a hidden treasure. Mansur Hallaj saw the Lord with the eye of the Heart. Bullhe says that God is beautiful and His reflection makes the worldly things beautiful. It is useful to note that this-worldly shift and optimism is also reflected in the baul songs of Bengal who flourished mainly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most important feature of Bullhe's poetry is music. He sings and dances on the street with the poetic frenzy of his inner passion which represented a symbolic challenge to hegemonic orthodoxy. *Murshid* is the ladder or boat through which it is possible to attain God's grace. Therefore Bullhe cannot tolerate the separation from his *Murshid*. Bullhe came to Punjab while he was very young and so in spite of his foreign origin he composed in perfect Punjabi. He represented rural Punjab like the Bauls who represented rural Bengal. Bullhe indirectly challenged *Ashraf* (aristocratic Muslims who claim foreign origin) arrogance. We notice a similar tendency in the *Jari* songs of nineteenth century Bengal. Bullhe expressed his deep and sustained feelings in rhythmical language to aid oral transmission which proved to be an effective method among the illiterate or semi literate masses. Outward meaning is apparent and inward is real (natural) in Bullhe's poetry. Bullhe acts as a bridge between Islamic mysticism and Hindu religion. An uncommon degree of imagination characterizes this poetic genius. Words are the only true reality in his hands. With his poetry, sufi philosophy in Punjab touches its climax.