A Vernacular Historiography of the Punjabi Poetic Genre of the *Kāfī:* A Review of Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah and Piro Preman's Works

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ABSTRACT: *This paper critically examines the formation of the Punjabi poetic tradition known as the kafi in the works of Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah and Piro Preman, and presents an analysis of the genre as a vernacular medium. By situating the poems in the pre-modern Indian historical context, the article is an attempt to analyze the origin and the evolution of the poetic form known as the kafi. Drawing from scholars who propose a diverse and multifaceted outlook on the formation of Punjabi literary traditions, I review the genre from a framework known as a critical aesthetics of assimilation. In addition, this paper points out the structural and thematic changes introduced by the nineteenth-century poetess Piro Preman in the work called Āik Sau Sath Kāfīaṅ. I argue that the evolution of the kafi from Shah Hussain to Piro Preman's compositions attests to the resilience and dynamism of the Punjabi poetic form.*

Keywords: Punjabi poetry, *Kafi*, Vernacular, historiography

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The many debates on the origin of Punjabi literature hint at the richness and complex history of these literary traditions. Syed Najm Hosain, Punjabi poet and intellectual, views that the literary tradition of the early modern Punjab was pioneered by the Punjabi poets the twelfth-century poet Baba Farid (34). However, Saeed Bhutta argues that GorakNath from the Nath poetic tradition was the founding father of Punjabi literature (14). There is no doubt about the resplendence of Punjabi literature that includes a variety of literary genres as " doha, caupai, kafi, baramahsa, siharfi" (Asani 84). These forms have been ascribed as the literary products of the pre-modern and the early- modern era in India. Undoubtedly, the division of South Asian history into pre-modern and early-modern eras is open to many objections but it serves to identify certain specifications regarding the cultural and literary trends. In this paper, the early-modern period that falls between 1500- 1800 CE corresponds to the rise and fall of the Mughal Empire in India.

Following the above categorization of historical periods, we find that in the early-modern age, the kafi appeared as an exclusive form in the works composed by the sixteenth-century poet Shah Hussain. A typical Shah Hussain kafi appears like a short poem consisting of six or twelve lines with one line that is repeated after alternating couplets or stanzas. In the textual form, these poems are titled after the name of ragas, the melodic framework in Indian Classical music, which serves as a reminder that the kafis were meant to be sung or performed as musical renditions. Given that these poems belong to the oral tradition and were recorded in writing decades after, the textual versions have provoked suspicions. Scholars have doubts about the authenticity and originality of the sources and their associations with the poet. In this paper, we argue that implicated within these objections is academia's bias regarding oral cultures and traditions. In addition, the skeptical views on the authenticity of oral poetry bears upon the colonial attitudes towards non-western traditions which were often viewed as products of non- literate cultures. In the same way, since the kafi belongs to India's pre-modern oral milieu, it is synonymously linked with the culture of the non-literate peoples. This way the kafi is often dismissed as an insignificant poetic form, one that lacks structure and as a consequence is regarded as a non-canonical genre.

The question of visualizing the place of a language or a writing as a literary form intertwines with a generic understanding of the term "literary". In an analysis of South Asian literary history, Sheldon Pollock points out that in the context of South Asian history, the use of the term "literary" is both complicated and problematic, and thus Pollock asserts that the very use of the expression "literary" requires reassessment (123). Previously, A.K. Ramanujan in a seminal lecture dispelled the Western paradigm for understanding and interpreting non-Western traditions and cultures (4-16). In Ramanujan's view the western

framework based on a clear division between orality and literacy fails to offer any correct version of India's cultural history. This is because, from early-modern times the two forms orality and literary existed simultaneously, and not only were the traditional oral forms equally popular among the lettered and the unlettered but "written traditions" too were "carried over by oral means" (Ramanujan 6). Postcolonial scholars have only recently pointed out that the parameters of the term 'literary' need to expand.

The former corrections help in navigating the distant past and recovering historical junctures that shape the genre of the kafi. We argue that the genre reveals the history of South Asian literary traditions as products formed by constant interactions. The kafi is a literary product that was formed and shaped by the influence of many diverse literary traditions, and cultures that co-existed in the region of Punjab in pre-partition India. More importantly, the kafi shows the assimilation of "regional" and "trans-regional forms" that had a simultaneous presence in the Indian culture (Pollock 8). Apropos of the former statement, how should we construe the cultural milieu of early- modern India?

A purview of the Indian pre- modern literary and cultural arena from the earliest recorded studies provides a glimpse of the diverse traditions. To mark the huge repertoire of oral and written literary traditions in different languages spread across different parts of the larger Indian Sub-continent, the orientalist scholars applied categorizations such as the *marga* and the desi, the high and the little traditions. Although these categorizations based on Western empiricist and humanist presumptions are highly contestable, however, they obliquely illuminate the variety and diversity of literary languages and forms spread across in different parts of the larger India. These early European scholars categorized the local and regional literary forms under the rubric of mystical and devotional poetic forms. Richard Eaton found popular songs sung in medieval Dakani and Bijapur dialects, and called these forms as belonging to the "esoteric mystical traditions" (117). Later, Anne Marie Schimmel found various vernacular poetic forms that she simply described as "Mystical poetry in the regional languages-Sindhi, Pashto, Panjabi" (383). Schimmel compares these many varied Indic poems with the Persian Sufi and Turkish Sufi traditions. In a lot of ways, the dynamism and the complexity that shape the vernacular genres is overlooked. As a result, a perception that only highlights the poetic traditions as part of an exclusive "mystical" domain completely overlooks the sedimentation of vernacular historiography in these forms.

In the foreword to an anthology of essays titled Popular Literature and the Premodern Societies in South Asia Surinder Singha and Ishwar Dayal Gaur endorse the study of "popular" literature, an alternative expression for the literature in the vernacular languages. The term popular a western construct has

its ontology from the commercial English novels of 18th century and thus, popular literature is looked down upon as "a medium for propagation of ideologies" or else as "market driven works". Against the typical Anglo-oriented, contemporary definitions of "popular literature", the term popular denotes "one that is enjoyed and supported by people". Singha and Gaur insist that the popular literary traditions provide an active alternative source of history and thus, would pave the way for new historiographies (2). The former theorists foreground the significance of placing South Asian popular literature in its appropriate historical, and social context which means challenging the already present "hegemonic" assumptions and conceptual frameworks advocated by traditional historians and historiography. In order to review the kafi in a new light, we draw from the former perspectives to analyze the significance of the genre in popular history and culture.

Contrary to general assumptions associated with the term folk, Shah Hussain, the pioneer poet of the kafi form was born in the city of Lahore in Punjab. By the fifteenth century, Lahore had become the center of trade and commercial activity. Historians cite that with the influx of traders and migrants, the city of Lahore became a hub of literary, spiritual, and cultural activities (Talbot 12). Nath yogis, Bhakti poets, Sants, had already established themselves in all over Punjab. With the intrusion of Persians and Turks during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the social and cultural setup of the region was transformed further. Overall, owing to the critical geographical position, and the influx of foreign intrusions in the expanse of Punjab, the region displayed an ever-shifting political relationship with the state. Farina Mir, historian of Postcolonial and Colonial South Asia, remarks validate that "Punjab never had a stable region or a single culture" (12). To what extent do these multiple shifting cultural patterns bear on the formation of the poems in the kafi?

By the time Shah Hussain appeared as a poet, the works of two Punjabi poets, Sheikh Farid and Guru Nanak, had gained prominence. The two former poets used a markedly different Punjabi dialect in their compositions; the dominant idiom shows the use of literary Punjabi. Shah Hussain appears as the first Punjabi poet who composed poetry in the language of everyday use. His poetry shows the foremost as a text where the poet renders the common language for a literary purpose. The number of poems attributed to Shah Hussain approximately 160 are found in the earliest compilations by Mohan Singh Diwana (1942), Piyara Singh Padam (1967), and Mohammad Asaf Khan (1988). It is the metaphors, similes, and analogies from the everyday life of an ordinary person that form the warp and woof of Shah Hussain's compositions. Even within this small number of poems recorded in the kafi form, it is hard to pin down the subjects and the range of meanings in Shah Hussain's poetic praxis.

Often, Shah Hussain in the poetic voice and persona of a woman draws the readers into the domestic sphere, atan, or trinjan, defined as a place where the women spin and weave, participate in conversations, and engage every day. The visual and auditory images of weaving and spinning recur in many poems such as "Charkha maera rangra, rang laal" (Coloured is my spinning wheel, red dyed) , "Maenun ambr jo aakhdi katt ni, maenun bholi jo aakhdi katt ni" (Spin the simple one asks me to spin), "Atan main kyun aaee saan, maeri tand na pae a kaae" (Why did I come to the spinning ground) (Ghaffar 32, 301, 354). Lajwanti Ramakrishna in her research work, Panjabi Sufi Poets, enlisted words and expressions that belong to the cotton production activity (22). It is not unusual for scholars to read the act of spinning, and weaving as symbols of mystical import. The mystical often connotes "inscrutable and unrelated to ordinary individual" (Hosain 25). However, from a vernacular historiographical perspective what is lost in these interpretations is a view of the vernacular culture, the daily labor, that was a part of an ordinary woman's life. In this way, Shah Hussain's poems allow us to see the art of spinning, and weaving both as significant economic and social activities. This furthers our understanding of the contribution of women, and their economic role in the precolonial era.

Biographical details from the only available text Haqiqat-ul-Fuqura (1686 A.D) provide information that Shah Hussain belonged to a family that was associated with weavers. It is not surprising to find that Shah Hussain names different textile materials as causi and painsi in his poems. While this allows us to read the images and imagery taken from everyday material objects, Shah Hussain brings a whole range of emotions in his poetry. In many kafis, the Punjabi folk character of Heer cohesively appears as the central character. In the voice of Heer, the poet conjures up affective states as longing and intense desire for the beloved. In one of the poems, Heer longs to be with her lover Ranjha and says "Maendi dil Raanjhan Raaval mangae, jungle baelae phiraan dhudaendi," Ranjhn Raaval asks for my heart, I wander searching jungles, moors, (Ghaffar 890) in another instance, Heer utters a plaintive cry Maen bhi jhok Ranjhan di jaana, naal maerae koee callae (Ghaffar 535) "Travelers I too have to go, I have to go to the solitary hut of Ranjha" (Hosain 15). One can speculate the influence of the Sanskrit Indian Classical poetic tradition of the kavya in the way Shah Hussain incorporates everyday sights, and images as those of a kite, dark night, the jungle, thicket, and the river-crossing, in the kafi. The kavya tradition contained short-rhymed love poems in the poetic pieces. Leinhard summates that the kavis, the poets of kavya incorporated "images from nature, the seasons, the flora, and include the themes of love in union, and love in separation" that had always been the basic stuff of poetry from the kavya tradition of Indian poetry. (Leinhard 162). Not only are these images and themes reiterated in Shah Hussain's poems but the origin of the word kafi is connected with the Sanskrit word kavya which means poetry. Many

indigenous Punjabi scholars have pointed to the genre's connection with Indic folklore known as lok git.

Borrowing, appropriating, and assimilating the available materials to compose new ideas was not an unusual practice for medieval and early modern Indian poets. For instance, to describe the works by the fifteenth century Bhakti poet Kabir, Linda Hess employs the expression "reshuffling the deck of cards" as an apt metaphor for the poet's use of traditional forms and expressions (16). The origin of the kafi, though much debated, exhibits confluences and intersections of precedent pre-modern literary and cultural traditions. Saeed Bhutta finds the genre's connection with the earliest Punjabi lyric poetry composed by Nath Jogis and Ismaili Pirs. Tracing this influence, Bhutta observes that the Nath Jogis who introduced the short poetic forms of "doha", "shabd" bears similarities with later Sufi Punjabi poetry. Gorakh Nath, the much-revered Nath yogi poet, ascribed the rags for some of his poetic compositions, a feature that provides another possible connection with the kafi. Bhutta asserts that although the Punjabi poets borrowed from the previous literary traditions, the kafi developed into a distinct form (22). Amidst these muddled influences, how can one decipher the history of the making of a genre?

Ali Asani and Richard Eaton have stressed on viewing the Indian literary culture as a wide complex where "reconciliations" "mergence" and "adaptations" between traditions were continuous phenomena (Asani 83; Eaton 124). Keeping in view the coordinated system of exchanges in the pre- modern Indian milieu, Kumkum Sangari proposes a critical aesthetics of "assimilation and co-constitution" to analyze the literary and artistic formations of these times (9). Kumkum Sangari's framework, aesthetics of circulation, allows us to track the kafi as part of a cultural artifact that "assimilated, and appropriated" human experiences in a continually changing temporal and spatial frame (26). It helps us to position the kafi as part and parcel of the South Asian vernacular literary tradition and mobilizes new readings of the genre that defy monolithic, fossilized, and constricted definitions. We argue that this vantage point is crucial to the understanding of the Punjabi kafi since the genre partakes from varied yet connected forms and develops into a distinct medium of poetry.

Additionally, this perspective incorporates the possibility of interactions between "cosmopolitan" and "vernacular" poetic traditions, which is referred to as "vernacularization". Sheldon Pollock theorized "vernacularization" as a process of change by which the local forms replaced the cosmopolitan literary mediums (41). A comparison of the early Sufi literature, premakhyans, gives an insight into this phenomenon. The Sufi romance narratives, premakhayans, are poetic compositions produced during the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. Unlike vernacular genres, the premakhyans remained confined to the precincts of the

court. Ujwala Rao analyses that these are highly allegorical texts, and thus were meant for an "elite" and educated audience. Given their courtly themes and elite patronage, Rao has questioned their labelling as Sufi literature (28). The former evaluation of premakhyan as part of court literature contrasts with the mass appeal that the kafi garnered. What is so distinctive about the genre's form and character which appears simply as short and simple poems?

The recent developments in genre studies propose to evaluate genre as a contingent category which is regularly revised and modulated. New insights into genre enable us to determine the significance of the choice of literary language and genre over others. To see this, we find that Shah Hussain did not concede to the Persian literary traditions espoused by the Mughal emperor Akbar, and chose the dialect of common Punjabi known as Lahnda for literary purpose. It should not be taken for granted that against the largely accepted literary languages, Persian and Sanskrit, the poet chose a vernacular that was generally were perceived as a rustic and coarse medium. Concomitantly, the choice of Punjabi as poetic diction reflects the poet's preference for an audience that comprised of the common people instead of the courtly elite.

Shah Hussain chose to be a poet of the common folk can be further validated. While Shah Hussain's direct contact with his contemporary, poet and warrior Dullah Bhatti, is not known, Shafqat Tanvir Mirza finds a striking similarity between Dullah Bhatti and Shah Hussain. In Mirza's view, both poets waged resistance against the court of Emperor Akbar, and his oppressive administrative policy of introducing the agrarian taxation system on the poor peasant class, however the only difference is that Dullah was an actual warrior who took up arms against the king, while Shah Hussain conducted an intellectual resistance (18-19). Thus, unsurprisingly, in many poems, Shah Hussain mocks the emperors, kings and monarchs for their luxurious lives filled with shallowness and wastefulness.

Shah Hussain refers to himself as a "fakir" or one from the debased class; in many poems he calls himself "nimana fakir", the weak one or "jolaha", one from the class of weaver. Torstan Tschacher investigates how literary vernaculars are invested with certain aesthetic attributes, which includes "deliberate counter-aesthetics" which is the rejection of the "learnedness" or the contesting "caste categories" (79). In empowering the local Punjabi dialect with aesthetic and literary features, Shah Hussain contests hegemony of the elite literary traditions and culture of his time. By the time, Bulleh Shah reproduced and emulated the kafi as a poetic form, Punjabi had gained prominence as a powerful literary empowered idiom.

The eighteenth-century poet Bulleh Shah revitalized the genre of the kafi by adding a forceful quality to its structure and content. The vigor instilled in the form perhaps owes to the overall political and cultural dynamism of the time. Asani remarks that from the seventeenth to eighteenth century the vernacular-folk poetry thrived from Punjab to Bengal in various forms and varieties (83). Interestingly, this coincides with the fact that the three renowned Punjabi poets, Bulleh Shah, the poet of the kafi, Waris Shah, the poet of the most famous rendition of Hir-Ranjha, and Najabat, the author of Nadir di Vaar, were contemporaries .

Interestingly, in his poetry Bulleh Shah exhibits a shifting sensibility that can be seen in his inclusion of trans-local influences. Unlike Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah incorporates Persian and Arabic words, and sometimes borrows metaphors from these cosmopolitan traditions. Chronologically speaking, Farina Mir has pointed out that to this era as early- modern times when the region of Punjab was distinctly, “multilingual”, an arena where various languages such as Persian, Sanskrit, Braj, Arabic and Punjabi “overlapped” (35). Following Mir’s suggestion, one imagines a thrust in circulation of varied literary traditions in these times. Borrowing from the Persian language the terms, “mast”, and “Hal", Bulleh Shah refers to the state of intoxication, a condition that mystics aspire to attain. In Taufiq Rafat’s view Bulleh Shah’s kafi Bulleya ki janan nain kaun “Who am I? Does anyone know?”, is a complete literal translation of the Persian Poet Shams Tabriz’s Diwan (2).

Bulleh Shah does not preclude the local cultural influences which Denis Martringe refers as “Hindu traditions”. Martringe analyses that Bulleh Shah draws the poetic symbols as the flute, and the yogi and yogini from the “Krshnaite” devotional cult (191). Invariably though the presence of these symbols has caused disputes among scholars regarding the characteristic identity of the poet Bulleh Shah as a mystic. Lajwanti Ramakrishna connects Bulleh Shah with Vedanta, the monistic thought in Hinduism. The Punjabi scholar Mohammad Asif Khan aligns the poet’s mystic strains with the Islamic mystical theory called "existential monoism" or Wahdat -al Wajood (190). Nevertheless, amidst these debates we find that Bulleh Shah’s “eclectic” merging of the local and trans-local influences anchored the kafi in "new temporal and spatial imaginaries" (Sangari 28).

Bulleh Shah is revered as a popular poet in South Asia. The term popular though riddled with contradictions, denotes a long-held connection with the people. Wilson Trajano Filho views the popular culture is “a site of creative appropriations” that often brings to view the contentious and unofficial dimensions of social life (337). Examined through the perspective of popular culture, the popular poets and writers represent creative groups that operate out

of the domain of official or institutional endorsements, or state control. Similarly, Ishawar Gaur and Surinder Singh view that the popular poets who "deliberately" composed works for the common people included "radical" and "anti-hegemonic" features (8). Replete in the works of Bulleh Shah is a condemnation of the oppressive administrative role of the feudal lord, and the religious elite as the qazi, ulema and the pundit. In addition, in many poetic verses his outright rejection of discrimination based on caste and religion are instances of his "rebellious" streak (Rafat 20). In the context of pre-modern South Asian history, the word popular refers to something widely accessible to the common people, and indicates a high level of acceptance across social strata.

Extolling the instinctive and the sensual, his poems resonate with people across religious, cultural and gender divides. In the riddle-like structure of one of the most expressive works in the kafi, "Bulleya Ki Janan Main Kaun" (Who am I? Does anyone know?) (Khan 101) Bulleh Shah questions the significations of class, creed, and religion. The kafi has been popularized in singing by different contemporary musicians belonging to India and Pakistan which attests to its resonance with people across time and space.

Inarguably, in Bulleh Shah's poetry oneness of human beings is the central proposition. In the kafi, "Sab Iko Rung Kapahein da" (All Cotton Balls are White) he mentions the different kinds of cloth carded from cotton (Rafat 108; Khan 209). caunsi, painsi, khaddar, dhotar, malmal, and ḳhasa—are made of the same yarn, says Bulleh Shah. In the endnotes to a new translations of Bulleh Shah's poems, Sufi Lyrics, Christopher Shackle mentions the impossibility of translating the types of cloth listed by the poet (139). The poem opens the way for reading vernacular history as it shines through the catalog of textile material, caunsi, painsi, khaddar, dhotar, malmal and khasa, provided here. Even more significantly, in the context of Punjab, in Punjabi society where weaving and spinning of cloth served more than utilitarian need, since the type of cloth worn was associated with the status, class, and caste. As the poet mentions that all the different kinds of cloth—the underlying message is his insistence on the essential likeness and equality of all human beings.

One can argue that Bulleh Shah through "the images/language/ text" both continues and ruptures the script laid out by Shah Hussain (Sangari 22). Corresponding to the use of female persona and voice by Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah too "masquerades" as a woman (Patievich 20). The echoes of the voice of Heer reappears in Bulleh Shah's kafi, "Ranjha Ranjha I cried till only Ranjha is there" (Rafat 103). However, Bulleh Shah equips the lover's voice with jouissance. In the voice of a playful lover, Bulleh Shah says, "Aa Sajan Gal lag Asaday" (Embrace me, love) (Rafat 54; Khan 91). In a similar way, a girl

celebrates the arrival of the beloved in the kafi, Mera Piya Ghar Aaya “My Love has Come to Call” (Rafat 144 Khan 289).

Finally, and most significantly, Bulleh Shah hosts a polemical tone in the kafi genre. He voices strong condemnation of the heteronormative political, religious, and social constructs that is displayed in his vehement rejection of all religious denominations in the kafi “Hindu Na Nahin Musalman” (I am Neither a Hindu nor a Musalman) (Khan 398) . Taufiq Rafat comments that a “consistent iconoclastic strain” in Bulleh Shah “distinguishes him from other poets in the Punjabi tradition” (15). Sadly, since no biographical history is available or written to give us a clearer understanding of the poet’s own life or the very question of what factors shaped his revolutionary ideas. Bulleh Shah’s radicalism is catalyzed in the work of the nineteenth-century female poetess, Piro Preman.

Piro Preman transforms the kafi from a short poem to a long narrative poem that is arranged in the form of consecutive stanzas. Piro’s composition known as Aik Sau Sath Kafian is a single poem composed of 960 verses. It is a blend of the Punjabi genres of the kafi and the qissa. Anshu Malhotra comments that “her narrative can be seen to be a hybrid innovation of the non-narrative kafi of the Sufis, and the qissa that narrated a tale” (81). Piro is enterprising in changing the functions of both genres.

Modern genre theory postulates that genres should be no longer considered as static categories, merely a set of devices and conventions, but they are dynamic “forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world” (Duff 12). Rejecting the fixed nature of genres, Paul Battle argues that genres can be read as literary forms that are in constant and continuous “flux” (6). Modern genre theory opens possibilities to view these “modulations or generic mixtures” in new ways (Fowler 242). For instance, Battle observes that mixing genres becomes a way of meeting history by consolidation and they provide us opportunities to explore forms of "concealments" and "exposures" (15). What does the evolution of the kafi reveal in the context of vernacular history? What other concealments and exposures do the changes in the form express?

Anshu Malhotra in the seminal work, Piro and the Gulabdasis, remarks that Piro draws on the “earlier episteme” by putting together the “inheritance of Indic and Islamicate sources” (80).

Piro uses a variety of characters and figures from the Muslim, and Hindu mythology. Taking from the Sufi tradition she employs the "bridal imagery" at the beginning of the poem (Malhotra 59). Later, she uses the Hindu mythological story of Ram and Sita as an allegory imagining herself as Sita waiting to be rescued from her prosecutors. Other allusions such as "Heer", and "Mansur

Hallaj", both confound and enrich the poetic landscape. The former instances are reminders of that the early-modern period in India when assimilation and co-constitution played a primary role in the formation of Punjabi vernacular traditions. As we place, Aik Sau Sath Kafian, in its historical context, following new revelations are found.

The corpus of poetic compositions by Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah, some of them retrieved directly from the Qawwals, was founded in the oral tradition. However, Piro's longer poem, Aik Sau Sath Kafian, was discovered in a written form, in Gurumukhi script. Interestingly, the manuscript was found in a section of GuruNanak University library approximately a hundred years after the nineteenth-century poet, Piro Preman's death (Singh 154). This reveals a lot about the changes in the mode of discourse and communication. Piro Preman lived to experience immense changes in an era that was on the brink of modernity. During this time when Ranjit Singh ruled in Punjab while the British colonized the rest of India, within Punjab a strong sense of language identity was already taking shape. The Gurmukhi script, literally meaning from the mouth of Guru, developed by the Sikhs took a formal shape in writing. The script was an identity marker that functioned to distinguish it from the Arabic- Persian script used by the Muslims and the Hindi script associated with the Hindu writings. On one hand, the discovery of Aik Sau Sath Kafian as a written script gives an idea of how literacy or writing had started to create space in the previously predominantly oral cultural landscape. Moreover, Piro's work helps us analyze how the writing tradition filtered among the common people in Punjab. In a section of the story in Aik Sau Sath Kafian Piro requests her friends to call for an amanuensis, a munshi, to write a letter for her addressed to her Guru Gulabdas. Besides the reference to a scribe in Aik Sau Sath Kafian mirrors how even the common people of not much social standing had begun to use the written medium in everyday life.

Piro Preman "crafted a story" from her own life and provides details of her experience as a religious renunciate (Malhotra 56). In Aik Sau Sath Kafian, Piro positions herself as the main character, narrating her own story. She recounts that, after encountering Gulabdas, the spiritual leader of the Gulabdasi community, she decided to become his devotee. However, she is punished for revoking ties with the Muslim religious community. She is kidnapped and persecuted, and after a lot of struggles, she is eventually rescued from her prosecutors and brought back to Gulabdas's abode. As she scripts the tale of her suffering, she refers to the prosecutors as "Turks", in a way similar to Bulleh Shah. She says "These Turaks trouble you, what do these unripe say?" (Malhotra 19). In Christopher Shackle's view "Turk was a standard term in Medieval

India" to refer to Muslims as opposed to Hindus (133). How far is this interpretation viable?

Anjum Tanvir points out that historiography has ignored the thirteenth-century Turkish invasions in India which continued over two hundred years. Thus, we forget that the denotation "Turk" is a reminder of the foreign incursions that brought immense "political and linguistic" transformations in the Indian local milieu (230). Richard Eaton furthers that the use of the term "Turk" registers the native resistance against invaders who belonged to a different culture and often provoked the locals by "the use of power to destroy social order" (11). It will not be wrong to assume that the native people of Punjab bore resentment against the foreign incursions, a notion that is equally applicable to Bulleh Shah's time and his reference to Turks. Thus, Piro Preman's voice resounds the native Punjabi's antagonism towards those who belonged to a foreign cultural and linguistic background and had imposed themselves on the local people.

Nevertheless, in Aik Sau Sath Kafian Piro Preman's "uncompromising female voice" is the strongest constituent that supports the practice of storytelling (Malhotra 84). In the text, Piro Preman shows herself engaged in vehement counter-argument with her oppressors. In a powerful scene, she accuses the Turks for treating their daughters as chattels for exchange, Dhi ke Lauray, literally meaning those who trade their daughters, and at another point, in the text she charges them for committing infanticide (Malhotra 89). Given the lack of veracity of historical facts, Piro's incrimination of the Turks requires elucidation. Only a few historians have hinted on instances of female infanticide as Harjot Oberoi traces from the colonial record "Montgomery's Minutes on Infanticide in the Punjab" that the practice of female infanticide was not uncommon in Punjab. However, it is important to notice Oberoi's remarks that this practice existed across the main communities that included the Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims (229). Thus, one can securely say that Piro's allusion to such instances reflects her awareness of the existing social realities of her times, also, this reference in the context of her story particularly accentuates her own subjective experience of being persecuted.

To return to the key question is to ask in what ways can we surmise the kafi as a composite of varied influences, especially when it appears to have combined several styles and genres, drawn heavily from the indigenous culture and traditions? Multiple conceptual frameworks have been applied by scholars to discern these cultural accommodations, influences, and borrowings, across, between, and among precolonial regional languages and literary traditions. Scholars have referred to syncretism as one of the recurrent features of these texts. In Eaton's view, the term "syncretism" as one of the most overused expressions is problematic since it presupposes static essences of religion and

cultures (Eaton 19). In comparison, the term "hybridity" has offered a way out of its concrete origins. Taken from biology, the meaning of the word hybrid expands in the cultural context. Brian Stross analyzes the aptness of the metaphorical extension of the meanings of the word hybridity from biology to a cultural domain while reminding the readers that hybridity as a conceptual tool is helpful only if the "context or the environment" of its origin is taken into account (266).

Correspondingly, the text gives an idea of the linguistic transformations in the Punjabi language. From Shah Hussain to Bulleh Shah and later to Piro Preman, the linguistic form of the text Aik Sau Sath Kafian shows significant changes in the Punjabi dialect. We find the linguistic zone expands in Aik Sau Sath Kafian, which reminds us of Kumkum Sangari remarks that regional language cannot be circumscribed in monolithic terms (9). As mentioned above, Bulleh Shah intersperses Arabic, and Persian words and expressions; Piro Preman shows an intermixing of Persian with the dialect called Braj. The use of Braj signals to a new literary dialect, that was formed during the late medieval and early modern periods. Allison Busch in an important work on Braj literary productions and their influence in the Mughal court writes that this language was also known as a variety of Hindi and qualifies as a "hybrid vernacular" (290). Thus, Braj as a local dialect unlike "the sanctified Sanskrit language" allowed the mixing of Persian and Arabic vocabulary. This is pictured in Aik Sau Sath Kafian, where the use of Braj allows Piro to add "aesthetic touches" to her verse. In addition, Piro also uses words that are now part of the Urdu language, such as Nari (a woman), Pukar (to call), Akal (intellect) . From a vernacular historiographical perspective, Piro' use of words from Braj points to the drastically changed political and cultural circumstances. That Braj had trickled into the popular realm is visible in the linguistic and literary productions of the time as validated by Aik Sau Sath Kafian.

Inarguably though, as a poet of the genre of the kafi, Piro Preman amplifies the scope, and range of the genre. The work, Aik Sau Sath Kafian, is one of the most sophisticated pieces of poetry that combines perception and emotion, abstract thinking and self-reflective awareness, devotion, and defiance. Its hybridity allows Piro to tap simultaneously into the lyricality of the kafi and the narrative power of the qissa. Unlike Shah Hussain and Bulleh Shah's poetry, Piro Preman's poetic legacy is yet to find recognition in mainstream literary history. While the reasons for Piro's lack of recognition and remembrance in literary history is an interesting topic for debate, discussing these reasons falls outside the scope of this paper.

Finally, since Oriental interpretations have had a penetrating impact on the analysis of Punjabi, often the works under consideration are documented as folk poems. Thus, works published on folk history of Punjab often display a "single", and "essentialized" region conforming to the colonial tradition of the study of folklore (Michelle 364). These attempts to record the folk literature reveal that the process of documentation is never innocent. The pseudo-stereotyping of the Punjabi poetry as folk literature both undercuts its vernacular essence and tends to undermine its quintessential diverse poetic landscape. This study is an attempt to show that perspectives grounded in the vernacular can help retrieve the unexplored aspects of vernacular history from the Punjabi literary forms.

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