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Unveiling the Self: A Mystical Journey in Bulleh Shah's 'Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun'

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Abstract

This study explores the mystical and philosophical depths of Bulleh Shah's celebrated kafi "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun", focusing on its central theme of self-realization and the quest for unity with the divine. Rooted in the Sufi tradition, the poem transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries through its symbolic imagery and existential inquiry. Employing the Mystical and Spiritual Framework, enriched by insights from cultural, historical, and stylistic perspectives, the study examines how Bulleh Shah articulates his spiritual journey through culturally bound metaphors, such as Musa (Moses) and Firaun (Pharaoh), while critiquing societal orthodoxy and promoting pluralistic values. The repetition of the titular phrase and the conversational tone enhance the accessibility and introspective nature of the poem, engaging readers in a universal quest for identity and divine unity. This interdisciplinary analysis positions "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" as a timeless work of Punjabi mystical literature, offering profound insights into the human condition and its relationship with the divine. The findings underscore the poem's enduring relevance in contemporary discussions on identity, spirituality, and interfaith harmony.

Keywords: Bulleh Shah, mystical poetry, Sufi philosophy, self-realization, Punjabi literature

1. Introduction

Bulleh Shah's poetry is a profound exploration of selfhood and spirituality, with his works deeply rooted in the mystical traditions of Sufism. His celebrated kafi, "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun," serves as a pivotal text for understanding the poet's philosophical inquiries into 328

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Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

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identity and the self. This poem is not merely an artistic composition but a profound spiritual journey that delves into the complexities of human existence and the search for unity with the divine. Central to Bulleh Shah's vision is the process of unveiling the self—transcending societal, religious, and cultural constructs to achieve a deeper connection with the divine essence. The poem's central question, "Who am I?", encapsulates this existential inquiry, resonating across cultures and eras with its universal themes.

While previous studies, such as Asghar's (2021) analysis of cultural metaphors and Shah's (n.d.) exploration of Sufi philosophy, have provided insights into specific aspects of Bulleh Shah's poetry, there remains a gap in understanding how the poet articulates the concept of selfhood as a continuous process of unveiling. This study aims to address this gap by examining "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates mystical philosophy, cultural metaphors, and literary techniques. Drawing on the Mystical and Spiritual Framework as its foundation, this study situates the poem within the broader Sufi tradition, emphasizing the stages of spiritual growth (Shariat, Tariqat, Haqiqat, Marifat) that guide the quest for self-realization.

Additionally, this study explores how Bulleh Shah employs culturally bound symbols, such as Musa (Moses) and Firaun (Pharaoh), to reflect on the dualities of existence and the dissolution of ego in the face of divine truth. The linguistic simplicity and repetition in the poem further enhance its accessibility and meditative quality, inviting readers into a shared experience of introspection and spiritual connection. By focusing on the unveiling of the self in "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun", this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Bulleh Shah's philosophy and its relevance to contemporary discourses on identity, spirituality, and universal human values.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The analysis of Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" requires evaluating multiple frameworks to determine the most suitable model for the study. The Cultural and Metaphorical Analysis Framework, as highlighted by Asghar (2021), emphasizes the importance of understanding metaphors within their cultural contexts, reflecting Punjabi traditions and spiritual nuances, but while crucial for exploring symbolic depth, it does not fully engage with the poem's existential themes. Similarly, the Historical and Socio-Political Framework, discussed by Hussain (2018), situates the poem within the socio-political milieu of the Mughal Empire, providing valuable insights into its critique of orthodoxy and pluralistic advocacy, yet it prioritizes external societal influences over the poem's core

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

spiritual journey. The Comparative Literary Framework broadens the analysis by situating the poem within the shared mystical traditions of Bhakti and Sufi movements, highlighting interfaith harmony and inclusivity; however, it does not delve deeply into the poem's metaphysical aspects. The Textual and Stylistic Analysis Framework captures the linguistic and stylistic elements that enhance the poem's mystical dimensions, such as repetition and conversational tone, yet it serves more as a supplementary approach than a primary model. The Mystical and Spiritual Framework, rooted in Sufi philosophy as discussed by Shah (n.d.), emerges as the most suitable framework for this study, aligning directly with the poem's exploration of self-realization, unity with the divine and existential inquiry. While the mystical framework will be central to the study, insights from cultural, historical, and stylistic frameworks will be integrated to provide a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of the poem.

This study integrates these frameworks to provide a holistic analysis of "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun." The mystical and spiritual framework serves as the foundation, enriched by cultural, historical, comparative, and stylistic perspectives. Together, these frameworks illuminate the poem's exploration of identity, spirituality, and unity; contextualize its cultural and historical significance; and highlight its universal appeal and literary artistry. By adopting this interdisciplinary approach, the study ensures a nuanced understanding of Bulleh Shah's masterpiece and its enduring relevance in literature and spirituality.

2.2 Empirical Framework

Past studies on Bulleh Shah's poetry have employed various research frameworks to analyze its cultural, mystical, and literary dimensions. These frameworks provide valuable insights into the depth and richness of his works, particularly his kafi "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun."

The cultural and metaphorical analysis framework highlights the importance of understanding metaphors within their cultural contexts. Sanna Asghar's (2021) research emphasizes how cultural metaphors in Bulleh Shah's poetry, such as the symbolic juxtaposition of Moses and Pharaoh, reflect the unique traditions of Punjabi mysticism. This framework also examines the challenges faced in translating such metaphors, which often lose their cultural and mystical essence when rendered into other languages. For this study, it underscores the necessity of preserving the poem's cultural depth to fully appreciate its mystical message.

The historical and socio-political framework situates Bulleh Shah's poetry within the socio-political dynamics of the Mughal Empire. Ashna Hussain (2018) explores how his works critique orthodoxy and caste hierarchies while serving as a bridge for pluralism. This

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

perspective is essential for understanding "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" in its historical context, where the poet's dissent against societal norms and religious rigidity becomes a voice for universal humanism. It also helps to connect the poem's themes with the sociopolitical tensions of its time.

The mystical and spiritual framework aligns with the core themes of Bulleh Shah's poetry, particularly the Sufi concepts of *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* (unity of being) and stages of spiritual growth (*Shariat, Tariqat, Haqiqat, Marifat*). Midhat Shah's work on Sufi philosophy provides a lens to interpret the poem as a spiritual inquiry into identity and divine love. This framework is crucial for analyzing how the poem transcends external rituals and progresses toward self-realization and unity with the divine, reflecting the mystical essence of Sufi thought.

The comparative literary framework draws parallels between Bhakti and Sufi traditions, as outlined by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (2018). This framework focuses on shared themes of rebellion against orthodoxy, spiritual devotion, and inclusivity. It positions Bulleh Shah's poetry within a broader South Asian literary tradition, demonstrating its universal appeal and its role in bridging diverse cultural and spiritual practices.

The translation studies framework evaluates the challenges of translating Bulleh Shah's poetry while retaining its cultural and mystical nuances. Taufiq Rafat's translations highlight the loss of cultural metaphors and the difficulty in conveying the essence of Punjabi mysticism to a global audience. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding the accessibility of "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" across linguistic boundaries and its impact on universal audiences.

The textual and stylistic analysis framework delves into the linguistic features and stylistic techniques of Bulleh Shah's poetry. Jonjua's (2019) work emphasizes the use of repetition, conversational tone, and simple diction in his kafi. This framework is instrumental in exploring how these stylistic choices enhance the mystical and philosophical dimensions of "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun," making it both profound and accessible.

Among these, the mystical and spiritual framework is the most suitable for this study, given its alignment with the poem's exploration of identity and unity. It allows for a deeper analysis of the philosophical and metaphysical aspects while situating the work within the broader Sufi tradition. By integrating elements from the cultural, historical, comparative, and stylistic frameworks, this research provides a holistic understanding of Bulleh Shah's masterpiece, highlighting its timeless appeal and mystical depth.

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" with a focus on its thematic, cultural, and mystical dimensions. The data for this research consists of the script of the poem sourced from reputable online platforms in its original Urdu script and a Romanized version for accessibility and detailed linguistic analysis. By integrating textual and stylistic analysis with interpretive frameworks, this methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of the poem's core themes and its linguistic and symbolic depth.

3.1 Data Collection

The primary data comprises the full script of "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun":

- 1. **Urdu Script**: Obtained from an authenticated online source to ensure fidelity to the original text.
- 2. **Romanized Version**: Developed to facilitate analysis for readers unfamiliar with Urdu script, preserving the phonetic and rhythmic qualities of the poem.

Both versions of the text provide a basis for analyzing the poem's language, stylistic features, and cultural metaphors, ensuring an inclusive approach that bridges linguistic barriers.

3.2 Method of Analysis

This study adopts the Mystical and Spiritual Framework as the central lens, incorporating complementary insights from cultural, historical, and stylistic frameworks. The following analytical methods are employed:

- 1. **Thematic Analysis**: Focused on the poem's central themes of self-realization, divine unity, and existential inquiry. This involves interpreting how the question "Who am I?" evolves throughout the poem to represent the spiritual journey of unveiling the self.
- 2. **Cultural and Metaphorical Analysis**: Examines culturally embedded symbols such as Musa (Moses) and Firaun (Pharaoh), exploring their relevance to Punjabi traditions and their role in conveying universal spiritual truths.

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

3. **Textual and Stylistic Analysis**: Analyzes the linguistic features of the poem, including repetition, conversational tone, and rhythmic structure, to evaluate how these elements enhance the mystical and introspective qualities of the text.

3.3 Framework Integration

This study integrates:

- **Mystical and Spiritual Framework**: To explore the poem's alignment with Sufi concepts like *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* and stages of spiritual growth.
- **Cultural Framework**: To highlight the culturally bound metaphors and their universality.
- **Stylistic Framework**: To analyze the linguistic tools that engage the audience in a shared spiritual experience.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Since the data is publicly available and sourced from reputable online platforms, no ethical concerns arise regarding the use of the text. Proper attribution to the sources is ensured throughout the study.

3.5 Limitations

The analysis is limited to one kafi, "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun", and focuses primarily on its cultural and mystical dimensions. Broader generalizations about Bulleh Shah's oeuvre or Sufi poetry may require further comparative studies.

This methodology allows for a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun," bridging linguistic and cultural gaps while uncovering its enduring spiritual and philosophical significance.

4. Results and Discussion

Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" is a profound Sufi kafi that explores the themes of self-realization, divine unity, and existential inquiry. The poem's structure and content align closely with the research purposes and objectives by engaging with mystical philosophy, cultural metaphors, and stylistic elements. Below is the detailed analysis in light of the stated purpose and objectives:

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

The central theme of "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" is self-realization, encapsulated in the repeated line "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" (Bulleya, to me, who am I?). This refrain symbolizes the poet's existential inquiry, inviting readers to reflect on their own identity beyond societal and spiritual constructs. The negation of external identities is a recurring motif, as Bulleh Shah systematically rejects labels tied to religious orthodoxy: "نا میں وچ کفر دیاں ریتاں ,مسیتاں" (I am neither a believer in the mosque nor a follower of the rituals of disbelief). This line critiques the division between belief and disbelief, urging a transcendence of such binaries in favor of spiritual truth (Hussain, 2018).

The poem's concluding lines, "اول آخر آپ نوں جانا، نه کوئی دوجا ہبور پچھانا" (In the beginning and end, know yourself; there is no other to recognize), emphasize that self-awareness is the path to divine unity. This insight reflects the theme of spiritual growth, where the journey of unveiling the self involves dissolving the ego and recognizing one's inherent connection with the divine (Shah, n.d.).

Furthermore, the theme of self-negation is intricately woven into the poem's structure. For example, in "نا وچ بهنگان نه شرابان" (I am neither in intoxication nor sobriety, neither among the reckless and the wasted), Bulleh Shah transcends the dichotomy of extremes, whether they be states of mind or moral judgment. This negation aligns with the Sufi tradition of rejecting external rituals and states in favor of internal realization (Jonjua, 2019).

The question "Who am I?" evolves throughout the poem, transforming from a personal inquiry to a universal truth that highlights the interconnectedness of all existence. Bulleh Shah's invocation of Wahdat-ul-Wujud (unity of being) reinforces this transformation, as the speaker moves from the fragmentation of identity toward the wholeness of divine unity. The introspective tone and repetitive questioning engage the reader in a shared spiritual journey, making the poem a timeless exploration of selfhood, spirituality, and enlightenment.

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

Through its thematic richness, the poem not only addresses individual self-realization but also advocates for a collective human experience that transcends divisions and unites all in the divine essence (Hussain, 2018; Asghar, 2021; Shah, n.d.).

4.2 Cultural and Metaphorical Analysis

Bulleh Shah employs a rich tapestry of culturally bound symbols in "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" to communicate universal spiritual truths. The line "نه ميں موسیٰ نه فرعون" (Neither am I Moses nor Pharaoh) exemplifies the transcendence of dualities, such as good versus evil and believer versus non-believer. By referencing figures from Abrahamic traditions—Musa (Moses) as a symbol of righteousness and Firaun (Pharaoh) as a symbol of tyranny—Bulleh Shah negates binary distinctions, urging a shift from judgmental constructs to an inclusive, holistic understanding of the divine and the self. This metaphor resonates with the Sufi ideal of Wahdat-ul-Wujud (unity of being), where all apparent dualities dissolve into a unified existence (Asghar, 2021).

تا میں عربی نه لهوری" (I am neither Arabic nor Lahori, neither Hindi nor from Nagaur), underscores Bulleh Shah's critique of parochialism. By naming specific places that evoke cultural pride or exclusivity, the poet deconstructs the idea of identity tied to geography or ethnicity. This line reflects a universalist ethos that aligns with the Sufi vision of unity, emphasizing that spiritual truth transcends all physical and societal boundaries. It further critiques the human tendency to define identity through external affiliations, advocating instead for inner spiritual realization (Hussain, 2018).

Moreover, the line "نا میں وچ کفر دیاں ریتاں ,نا میں مومن وچ مسیتاں" (I am neither a believer in the mosque nor a follower of rituals of disbelief) negates religious orthodoxy and ritualism, inviting readers to consider spirituality beyond the confines of institutionalized religion. This metaphor critiques rigid dogmas and challenges the reader to seek the divine within, reflecting the Sufi practice of tariqat—the path of inner realization.

The poem also addresses the elemental aspects of existence in lines like "نا میں خاک" (I am neither water nor earth, neither fire nor air). These metaphors draw on the classical elements to express the speaker's detachment from the physical and material world. By rejecting identification with these elemental forces, Bulleh Shah situates the self in the realm of the eternal and the divine, transcending the temporal and corporeal.

This cultural and metaphorical richness bridges the local and the universal, allowing the poem to resonate across different spiritual and philosophical contexts. It reflects the

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

interplay between the particularities of Punjabi culture and the universal truths of human existence, making Bulleh Shah's work timeless and globally relevant. By breaking down barriers of caste, creed, and regionalism, the poem aligns with the Sufi vision of unity and fosters an inclusive perspective on identity and spirituality.

4.3 Textual and Stylistic Analysis

The stylistic and linguistic features of Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" contribute significantly to its mystical and introspective qualities. The linguistic simplicity and repetition of the titular phrase "بَان مِين كُون" (Bulleya, to me, who am I?) create a meditative rhythm that invites readers into a shared spiritual journey. This repetition serves as a mantra-like invocation, grounding the audience in the existential and spiritual core of the poem. By repeatedly posing the question of identity, Bulleh Shah emphasizes the universality of the spiritual quest, making the poem both introspective and accessible (Jonjua, 2019).

The conversational tone of the poem strengthens the connection between the speaker and the audience, creating an intimate dialogue that transcends time and culture. Lines like "وقائع " (I am neither in joy nor in sorrow) exemplify the personal nature of this exploration, encouraging readers to reflect on their own emotional and spiritual states. This simplicity is not a lack of depth but a deliberate stylistic choice to engage a wide audience, from the unlettered to the scholarly, in contemplating the universal questions of existence (Asghar, 2021).

The rhythmic structure of the poem mirrors the cadence of traditional Sufi poetry, which is often performed with musical accompaniment in qawwali gatherings. The line "نا وچ بهنگان نه" (I am neither in intoxication nor sobriety, neither among the reckless and the wasted) exhibits a lyrical quality that makes the poem suitable for both recitation and reflection. This rhythm enhances its appeal as both a spiritual and lyrical composition, aligning with the Sufi tradition of blending music and poetry to elevate the soul.

Bulleh Shah's use of negation throughout the poem, such as in "نه میں مومن، نه میں کافر" (I am neither a believer nor an infidel), reinforces the theme of transcending societal and religious labels. This stylistic technique dismantles binaries and directs the focus inward, urging readers to seek the divine within themselves rather than through external affiliations. By rejecting all classifications—religious, ethnic, or elemental—the poet dissolves the boundaries of identity, leading to a greater spiritual realization (Hussain, 2018; Shah, n.d.).

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

Additionally, the poem's consistent use of balanced structures, as seen in "نا میں آبی نه میں خاک" (I am neither water nor earth, neither fire nor air), creates a symmetrical rhythm that mirrors the harmony sought in Sufi spirituality. This stylistic balance reflects the unity inherent in *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* (unity of being), reinforcing the mystical themes of interconnectedness and self-realization (Shah, n.d.).

Overall, the stylistic simplicity, rhythmic cadence, and conversational tone of "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" enhance its meditative and introspective impact, making it a timeless work of mystical literature. These stylistic choices invite readers into a reflective space where they can engage with the poem's universal spiritual themes, fulfilling the dual purpose of enlightenment and emotional resonance.

4.4 Framework Integration

- **Mystical and Spiritual Framework**: The poem exemplifies Sufi concepts such as *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* and the progression through stages of spiritual growth (*Shariat, Tariqat, Haqiqat, Marifat*). The repeated questioning of identity embodies the journey toward self-realization and divine unity (Shah, n.d.).
- **Cultural Framework**: The culturally embedded symbols and metaphors root the poem in Punjabi traditions while conveying universal truths, demonstrating the interplay between local and global perspectives (Asghar, 2021).
- **Stylistic Framework**: The repetition, conversational tone, and rhythmic structure enhance the mystical and introspective qualities of the poem, making it an engaging and meditative experience for readers (Jonjua, 2019).

Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" offers a compelling exploration of selfhood, spirituality, and divine unity, aligning seamlessly with the research objectives. Through thematic depth, cultural symbolism, and stylistic simplicity, the poem transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries to communicate a universal message of identity and spiritual awakening. This analysis demonstrates how the poem serves as a timeless work of Punjabi mystical literature, inviting readers to embark on their own journey of unveiling the self.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore Bulleh Shah's "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" through a Mystical and Spiritual Framework, supplemented by cultural, historical, and stylistic perspectives. The primary objectives were to analyze the poem's themes of self-realization, divine unity, and existential inquiry; to examine culturally bound metaphors; and to evaluate linguistic 337

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

and stylistic elements that enhance its mystical and introspective qualities. The analysis demonstrates that these research purposes have been successfully achieved, providing a nuanced understanding of the poem's philosophical depth and universal appeal.

The thematic analysis reveals that "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun" effectively articulates the spiritual journey of unveiling the self. Through the recurring question of "Who am I?", Bulleh Shah negates societal and religious constructs, aligning with the Sufi concepts of fana (self-annihilation) and Wahdat-ul-Wujud (unity of being). The poem's progression from negation to divine unity captures the essence of Sufi spiritual growth, fulfilling the study's goal of exploring the mystical dimensions of the text.

The cultural and metaphorical analysis highlights the relevance of symbols like Musa (Moses) and Firaun (Pharaoh), which transcend local traditions to convey universal spiritual truths. This aligns with the objective of understanding how culturally bound metaphors enrich the poem's philosophical and mystical themes. Furthermore, the critique of caste, regional identities, and orthodoxy underscores the poem's advocacy for pluralistic values, addressing the socio-cultural dimensions outlined in the research purposes.

The textual and stylistic analysis affirms that the poem's linguistic simplicity, repetition, and conversational tone foster introspection and accessibility. These elements enhance the meditative quality of the poem, allowing it to engage audiences across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This aligns with the research objective of evaluating how stylistic features contribute to the poem's mystical and introspective impact.

In conclusion, the study achieves its aim of unveiling the self as depicted in "Bulleya Ki Jaana Main Kaun." By integrating mystical, cultural, and stylistic frameworks, it demonstrates how Bulleh Shah's kafi transcends its historical and cultural origins to address universal human concerns. The findings underscore the enduring relevance of the poem in contemporary discussions on identity, spirituality, and unity, cementing its place as a timeless work of Punjabi mystical literature. Future research may build upon these insights by exploring comparative studies with other Sufi and mystical traditions, further enriching the discourse on spiritual and philosophical literature.

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ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

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Appendix

نا میں مومن وچ مسیتاں نا میں وچ کفر دیاں ریتاں نا میں پاکاں وچ پلیٹاں نا میں موسیٰ نه فرعون

بلّے! کی جاناں میں کون

نا میں اندر وید کتاباں نا وچ بھنگاں نه شراباں نا وچ رنداں مسَت خراباں نا وچ جاگن نه وچ سون

بلّے! کی جاناں میں کون

نا وچ شادی نه غمناکی نا میں وچ پلِیٹی پاکی

Remittances Review

March 2024,

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN 2059-6596(Online)

نا میں آبی نه میں خاکی

نا میں آتش نه میں پاؤں

بلّے! کی جاناں میں کون

نا میں عربی نه لهوری نا میں ہندی شہر نگوری نا ہندو نه ترک پشاور مے نا میں رہندا وچ ناداں

بلّے! کی جاناں میں کون

نا میں بھیٹھ مذہبب دا پایا نه میں آدم حوا جا آیا نا میں اپنا نام دھرا آیا نا وچ بیٹھن نه وچ بھاؤن

بلّے! کی جاناں میں کون

اول آخر آپ نوں جانا نه کوئی دوجا ہور پہچانا میں تھوں ہور نه کوئی سیاں بلّا! اوہ کھڑا ہے کون

بلّے! کی جاناں میں کون

Roman Version

Bulleya ki jaana main kaun Na main momin vich maseetan Na main vich kufar diyan reetan Na main paakan vich paleetan Na main Musa na Firaun Bulleya ki jaana main kaun

Na main andar bed kitaaban Na vich bhaangan na sharaaban Na vich rindaan masat kharaaban Na main shaadi na ghamnauun Bulleya ki jaana main kaun

Volume: 9, No: S 1,pp.328-341

ISSN: 2059-6588(Print) | ISSN: 2059-6596(Online)

Na main aabi na main khaki Na main aatish na main paaki Na main aatish na main pauni Na main rehnda vich Nadaun Bulleya ki jaana main kaun

Na main arabi na lahori
Na main hindi shehar Nagauri
Na hindu na turk pashauri
Na main rehnda vich Nadaun
Bulleya ki jaana main kaun
Na main bheth mazhab da paaya
Na main aadam Havva jaaya
Na main apna naam dharaaya
Na vich baithan na vich bhaun
Bulleya ki jaana main kaun

Avval aakhar aap nu jaana Na koi dooja hor pehchaana Mai ton na koi hor siyaana Bulle shah kharha hai kaun Bulleya ki jaana main kaun