

# William Blake and Bulleh Shah : A Comparative Study of Their Mystical Poetry

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## Abstract

In English poetry William Blake emerged as a famous mystic poet having didactic nature while in Punjabi poetry Bulle Shah broke the conventional chains of religious poetry. This article will explore how these two poets penned down their personal views for the readers and to what extent they share similarities and dissimilarities. The research objectives of this study will be to highlight the deviation of mystic poetry from the conventional orthodoxy with special reference to William Blake and Bulle Shah. The study will comprise the selected poems of both the poets and it will aim at to give the comparison and contrast of a few features of both poets. The term 'mysticism,' comes from the Greek  $\mu\upsilon\omega$ , meaning "to conceal." In the Hellenistic world, 'mystical' referred to "secret" religious rituals. In early Christianity the term came to refer to "hidden" allegorical interpretations of Scriptures and to hidden presences, such as that of Jesus at the Eucharist. While on the other hand mysticism in Islam started from Arab in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This flourished in various Muslim countries and got a specific colour in the sub continent. Both the poets are called the mystic poets. Besides they share many other qualities in body and substance of their poetical works. These elements are the subjects of this research study and will be discussed in details.

**Keywords:** Mystic Poets , Didactic , Conventional Chains , Similarities , Dissimilarities , Deviation , Rituals , Substance

## 1. Introduction

Abdullah Shah alias Bulle shah was born in 1680 in Uch Gilanian, the city of saints in Bahawalpur, in the family of a pious syed. His father moved to a village of Kasur, a district of Lahore division today, where the six-year-old Abdullah received a strictly orthodox religious training. No one knows how the boy made his inner journey from received knowledge to an intensely felt heterodox devotional religion but hagiographic 'tazkiras' narrate that his teacher Khawaja Hafiz Ghulam Murtaza Kasuri trained two rebellious personalities; the other was Waris Shah, the author of Punjabi romance in verse, 'Heer'. There is no doubt that the earliest heterodox tradition he imbibed was that of the Persian mystic poet Romi (1207-1273). His most rebellious kafi, and the most popular, 'Ki jana mein kaun' (what do I know who I am) is almost a literal translation of a ghazal from Diwan-i-Shams Tabriz.

While William Blake was born in 1757 in London, England; William Blake began writing at an early age and claimed to have had his first vision, of a tree full of angels, at age 10. He studied engraving and grew to love Gothic art, which he incorporated into his own unique works. A misunderstood poet, artist and visionary throughout much of his life, Blake found admirers late in life and has been vastly influential since his death in 1827. Blake briefly attended school, being chiefly educated at home by his mother. The Bible had an early, profound influence on Blake, and it would remain a lifetime source of inspiration, coloring his life and works with intense spirituality. At an early age, Blake began experiencing visions, and his friend and journalist Henry Crabb Robinson wrote that Blake saw God's head appear in a window when Blake was 4 years old. He also allegedly saw the prophet Ezekiel under a tree and had a vision of "a tree filled with angels." Blake's visions would have a lasting effect on the art and writings that he produced.

## 2. Poets of Different Culture And Age Sharing Same Ideas

The selected poems of two above mentioned poets describe the inner and outer world of man with special reference to his link with the world of physicality as well as the spiritual world. Man having entered into this world has to lead his life according to some dogmas prescribed for him in that particular society in which he is born. In a way he becomes the slave of those conventions prevailing over that society. It becomes hard for any man to be rebel to those set traditions. But only poetry has the power to change man's inner and outer state. Poetry broadens the vision of man and provides him with a path on which he can tread on. The article gives a detailed view of poetic qualities which are considered to be universal and know no boundaries and limits. Men of pen have always inspired common people against the cruel social norms. These ideas are strong and may be found among many different poets of overseas. The study is a mirror to same ideals presented by Punjabi poet Bulleh Shah and English poet William Blake.

## 3. Literature Review :

Poetry the voice of soul has its universal appeal to everyone whether in East or West. The poets were called the

“Makers” by the great Greek philosophers because it is poet who creates the world though imaginary which cannot be confined to a specific area or people. Rather these thoughts of the poets cross the boundaries of geography and language and become universal. Fundamentally all the great poets represent human passions and thoughts and make a line of action for the followers of poetry irrespective of their age, culture, language and religion even some time two poets of different cultures seem having same ideas. Mind is the wonderful manufacturing source which creates , models and moulds the raw material available to it and forges ideas , views and thoughts that get immortality through the pens of the poets. On the basis of this unique role , the poets of different languages or cultures sharing same qualities , are on the same page when analyzed in comparative studies. As Baba Bulleh Shah says :

سب اگو رنگ کہاں دا  
تانی ، تانا ، پینا ، ٹلیاں  
پیڑے، خواتے جتھاں پھلیاں  
آپو اپنے نام جتاون  
دکھو و کھنسی جاہیں دا  
سب اگو رنگ کہاں دا

There is only one thread of all cotton  
The warp, the woof , the quill of the weaver’s shuttle  
The shuttle, the texture of cloths, the cotton shoes and hanks of yarn  
All are known by their respective names  
They all belong to their respective places  
There is only one thread of yarn.

This can be applied on the poets of international fame. These poets belong to no age, no race, no nation and no religion. This study is based on two such universal poets sharing same ideas. William Blake and Bulleh Shah belong to different cultures and languages and they have not even have a glimpse of each other’s literatures . Bulleh Shah had made an exit of his life feet when Blake came into this world. They were of the opposite communities the former a Muslim and the latter a Christian . They had their respective different societies and cultures. But they were very kin to each other’s personal thoughts. There are many similarities and dissimilarities between works of both of the poets . For example Bulleh Shah and William Blake both deviated from the orthodoxy and criticized staunchly on the set traditions of the people and hegemony of so called religious leaders. They advocated the pre-eminence of truth , love and compassion over religious scholarship, external formalities and bind faith. Their outright rejection of any formal authority of religious institutions in regulating the affairs of society in particular the rule of clergy , the priests , the mullahs and religious scholars became the subject of many of their famous poems. They sharply criticized the rigid beliefs and intolerance of clergy and so called preachers who were in fact doing jobs for their personal uplift and not for the welfare of humanity. As is crystal clear from the following verse of Bulleh Shah :

ملاں تے مشالچی ، ڈونہاں اگو چت  
لوکاں کر دے چاننا، آپ انھیرے وچ

The mullah and the torch-bearer , hail from the same stock  
They give light to others and themselves are in dark.

William Blake criticizes organized religion for misleading and repressing young minds. He supports finding God and religion through the natural divinity of all living things. The harsh reaction of organized religion to this idea is illustrated in the latter, "A Little Boy Lost," in which the youth is actually burned for his rebellious thinking. The first set of poems tells of the boy's lack of success in a religious system that did not seem to truly care about the boy, and left him struggling. It then describes his introduction to God in the forest, who brought him back to his mother, the earth, which showed him proper worship of God through nature, not regimented ceremonial instruction. The second poem captures organized religion's harsh reaction to this untraditional and rebellious thinking, and destroys the boy for trying to reach outside of the accepted normal teachings. Together, the poems show an evolution from Blake's dissatisfaction with organized religion to an outright denunciation of its practices. Another good example of Blake's critique of organized religion, is in "The Chimney Sweeper," in

Songs of Experience. The boy in the poem does not expect a merciful angel to save him, but rather, he blames God, the church, and the King, for the misery, William Blake's Religion Essay William Blake's Religion Essay 4 which he is forced to endure. At one point, he makes it clear that because he was happy that his parents sold him into misery, and because he smiled and sang, "they think they have done me no injury." The boy does not even seem to believe in heaven, or at least he doesn't have the sweet, innocent, view that is portrayed in "The Chimney Sweeper" from Songs of Innocence. In fact, he even says that it is God, the church, and the king, which includes his parents and the rest of society, who "make up a heaven of our misery."

#### 4. Both Poets Digress The Set Traditions of Religion

Both Bulleh Shah and Blake absorbed the essence of uniformity so well that to them differences of religion, country, and sect were immaterial. They abhorred regulations and the dry dogmas of all religions. They displayed best the essence of pantheistic Sufism (Mysticism). They ignored conversion, and were chiefly responsible for establishing unity between the faithful of various religions. They observed the world keenly and had criticized on the social level and the purpose of both poets was didactic. They wanted to reform the world through their specific point of views and both were not accepted at their times to be reformers but later on were esteemed greatly. Both fell a victim to the criticism of clergy because of their norms against the social conventions. William Blake in his poem "London" includes social and political criticism, which seems to have been stemmed from both Blake's free imagination and critical eye. Besides, Blake's lifetime saw the advent of the commercial society. Due to this fact, he can be regarded as one of the intellectuals who approached industrialism, technology and scientific development with anxiety, because of their inevitable outcome: materialism. Blake's poetry is always referred to as 'prophetic' in the sense that it has signs warning of dangers, horrors and injustices. "London" is no exception; it alerts the reader to the prevailing social ills which, then for Blake, would possibly accumulate in the future. Blake is a poet who was "conscious of the effects on the individual of a rapidly developing industrial and commercial world. He saw the potential dangers of a mass society in which individuals were increasingly controlled by systems of organization" (Carter and McRae 226). In this sense, Blake can be considered to be an intellectual having both suspicions of the workings of the social system and auguries about the running of the world in the future, at least the future condition of English society. "London" indicates the exploitation of the common people by the privileged commerce classes, the monarchy and the Church resulting with people's abject poverty and miseries. Owing to the critical aspect of the poem and its analytic approach to social facts, it can be considered to be a poem which, at the same time, both reflects the history and resists its facts.

The human species finds its place within the organic world of nature, but it is the most important species: "Where man is not, nature is barren." Humanity is unique in that it is made in God's image, the "Divine Image". Like the Christian anarchist Tolstoy, Blake believes that the kingdom of God is within us: 'M deities reside in the human breast.' There is no distinction between the creator and the created: "God is Man and exists in us and we in him." Man is thus primarily a spiritual thing and is not bound by his physical body: "Spirits are organized men." Blake calls this spiritual human essence the "Imagination" or "Poetic Genius" and insists that the "Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius." At the same time, Blake does not fall back on traditional dualism, separating the mind from the body, praising the one to the detriment of the other. He remains a thorough going monist idealist. Body and mind are two aspects of a common spirit.

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