

## **Sufi poetry**

*Bulleh Shah*

What is largely known about Bulleh Shah comes through legends, and is subjective, to the point that historians cannot even agree on the precise date and place of his birth. Some “facts” about his life have been pieced together from his own writings, while others have been passed down through oral traditions.

Bulleh Shah’s real name was Syed Aliraza Shah Rizvi, he was a Punjabi Muslim Sufi poet, a humanist and philosopher from 1680-1757. He is believed to have been born in 1680, in the small village of Uch, Bahawalpur, Punjab, now in Pakistan, where his ancestors had migrated to from Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan.

When he was six months old, his parents relocated to Malakwal, where his father, Shah Muhammad Darwaish, was a preacher in the village mosque and a teacher. His father later got a job in Pandoke, about 50 miles southeast of Kasur. Bulleh Shah received his early schooling in Pandoke, and moved to Kasur for higher education. He also received education from Maulana Mohiyuddin. His spiritual teacher was the eminent Sufi saint, Shah Inayat Qadiri.

Bulleh Shah practiced the Sufi tradition of Punjabi poetry established by poets like Shah Hussain (1538–1599), Sultan Bahu (1629–1691), and Shah Sharaf (1640–1724). Bulleh Shah lived in the same period as the famous Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai (1689–1752). His lifespan also overlapped with the legendary Punjabi poet Waris Shah (1722–1798) of Heer Ranjha fame, and the famous Sindhi Sufi poet Abdul Wahad (1739 – 1829), better known by his pen-name, Sachal Sarmast (“truth seeking leader of the intoxicated ones”).

### ***Stay silent to survive***

People cannot stand to hear the truth.  
They are at your throat if you speak it.  
They keep away from those who speak it.  
But truth is sweet to its lovers!

Truth destroys shara [shariah: religion].  
Brings rapture to its lovers,  
And unexpected riches,  
Which shara obscures.  
Stay silent to survive.

Those lovers cannot remain silent  
Who have inhaled the fragrance of truth.  
Those who have plaited love into their lives,  
Leave this world of falsehood.  
Stay silent to survive.

Bulleh Shah speaks the truth.  
He uncovers the truth of shara [shariah].

He opens the path to the fourth level,  
Which shara [shariah] obscures.  
Stay silent to survive.

*Nor Hindu nor Muslim*

Neither Hindu nor Muslim,  
Sacrificing pride, let us sit together.  
Neither Sunni nor Shia,  
Let us walk the road of peace.  
We are neither hungry nor replete,  
Neither naked nor covered up.  
Neither weeping nor laughing,  
Neither ruined nor settled,  
We are not sinners or pure and virtuous,  
What is sin and what is virtue, this I do not know.  
Says Bulleh Shah, one who attaches his self with the lord,  
Gives up both Hindu and Muslim.

Bulleh is neither Rafzi nor Sunni, nor learned  
nor an intellectual nor a Jaini.  
I have learnt the lesson of love of God alone.  
People say: Bulleh is an Infidel (Kafir)  
and an idol-worshipper.  
But in the Lord's court, both the Momin [believer] and Kafir  
are treated alike.

*Translated by Kartar Singh Duggal*