



RESEARCH PAPER

Existentialism in Sufism: A Sociological Analysis of Bhitai's Thoughts

¹ Naveed Hussain Sandeelo*, ² Moula Bux Naich and ³ Rashid Ali Daudpota

1. Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Sindh Jamshoro Sindh, Pakistan
2. PhD. Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Sindh Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Sindh Jamshoro Sindh, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** naichm@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examined Bhitai's thoughts as a Sufi poet, despite the fact that little has been written about Existentialism in Sufism. It is mostly based on the supposition that his followers accumulated after his death. Even Literary scholars have yet to make tangible and analytical comments on his poems. Therefore, exploring the depths of Bhitai's Sufi thought and its existential foundations through his poetry would require someone who has not only been initiated into Sufism but also ventured quite far into the mysterious world of mysticism. To investigate the relevance of Sufi philosophy in the modern era while being conscious of his extremely limited knowledge in the field. To emphasize the theologians' antagonistic attitude toward the mystics and to recreate the historical circumstances in the subcontinent in the seventeenth century. The findings of this study proved valuable to individuals who have a direct or indirect connection to Bhitai's poetic ideas or existential themes. By analyzing Bhitai's poetic ideas, it becomes evident that the poet's main objective was to bring about significant transformation in an outdated society.

Keywords: Bhitai's Thought, Existentialism, Mysticism, Poetry, Sufism

Introduction

Existentialism is a philosophical and literary movement which emerged in the 19th century. It came into prominence in the aftermath of World War two. It mirrors the spiritual crisis of both man and society. "It is generally the philosophic stand point which gives priority to existence over essence" (Lavine, 1984). It was new project to give meaning to human life. "It is some kind of an attitude and outlook that emphasizes human existence" (Titus, 1964, p. 296). Existentialism starts its journey with this maxim that 'Existence precedes essence'. Existentialism is modern philosophy which deals with the problems the individual faces in life. One's feelings, emotions and with one's own outlook on life and experiences. Existentialism treats the human essentially as a subject, not object. Therefore, it should be taken with more assertion that the human is not an object to be known like other objects or things, but a subject, as a living being. Existentialism is a way of thinking which peculiarly focuses on human existence rather than the general aspects of nature or the material world. This is a new type of philosophy having ancient roots. Socrates is considered as the first truly existentialist who cultivated young minds of classical Greece and brought new changes in that society. "Because he set the ethical reference of thought against the scientific bias of the Ionian school which sought to understand 'nature' rather 'man'" (Ayer, 1973).

Existentialism is also considered as some kind of revolt against traditional type of philosophy and social modern trends. It is also a protest against the Greek rationalism of Plato and speculative world views of Hegel. In their systems the meaning of individual is lost in a supersensible world. In this regard "Existentialism is a protest in the support of individuality against the concepts of reason and nature that were so strongly emphasized during the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment" (Titus, 1964). Historically, existentialism has been crying out that the man in his concrete existence as a conscious being has been

neglected by different disciplines i.e., science, philosophy, religion, social as well as political organizations.

Lavine sees “In the contemporary world, the philosophic voice of existentialism is being raised in areas of civic life, art and learning. It is a voice which calls upon artists, scientists, philosophers, politicians, theologians, administrators, physical and mental health practitioners to be concerned with the prescription and feelings of the human subject, as against the standardized ways in which these fields analyze, predict, and program human beings as if they were no conscious things” (Lavine, 1984). In the light of above important features and factors existentialism may thus be seen as the champion and defender of the human spirit and value against the oppressive features of the philosophy, science, mass society, politics, and organized religion.

Existentialism focuses solely upon human existence. “Existentialism is contemporary renewal of one of the necessary phases of human experiences in a conflict of ideals which history has not yet resolved.” (Blakham, H. J 1961). The existential attitude begins with a disoriented individual facing with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept. This disorientation and confusion are one of the by-products of the Renaissance, the reformation, the growth of science, the decline of church authority, the French Revolution, and technocracy (Solomon, 1987).

History of Bhitai Poetry

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai is variably known as Shah Bhitai has been considered the greatest poet-philosopher and thinker of remarkable qualities. The birth of this unique philosophical figure took place in the year of 1690 in the village of Bhainpur in Hala *taulqa*. Shah Abdul Latif was great-great grandson of Sayyid Shah Abdul Karim, another important classical age's thinker of multi-faceted poetic qualities.

Shah Abdul Karim was grandson of Sayyid Jamal Shah, grandson of Sayyid Abdul Quddus and son of Shah Habib. It is documented with some assurance that Shah Abdul Karim had migrated from Matiari to Bulri. Shah Latif's father Shah Habib was living in his *Haweli* (mansion) the actual birth place of our poet, Bhitai, which is told he had built in the village of Bhainpur in Hala. In Hala *taulqa* there was another village Kotri Mughal which was not far from the *Haweli*.

The Mughals there had constructed a small *Kot* (protective compound wall) around their mud houses. Hence their village was called Kotri Mughal of Sardar Shah Beg Mughal. After Shah Abdul Latif's birth his father Shah Habib shifted from his *Haweli* to Kotri. In present times both the villages exist in ruins and the simple mosque which was built by Lung *faqir* on the site of the house of Shah Abdul Latif's birth-place is a lone vestige of Hala *Haweli*. (Jotwani, 2006) Shah Abdul Latif is renowned as Bhitai because of Bhit (sand dune) where he lived with his *faqirs* during the last ten years of his life. The place of Bhit is four miles at distance from Kotri. Thousands of devotees and lovers of Latif visit Bhit to pay homage and respect to the poet. It is generally agreed by all Sindhi scholars that Shah Abdul Latif belonged to a notable Sayyid family which traces its lineal connection to Herat.

Bhitai's Education

Some conditions really play an essential role in the development of great minds, poets and philosophers. Latif's father Shah Habib developed such kind of atmosphere at home which cultivated intellectuality at par his illustrious son. Shah Habib kept up to the family traditions of piety, devotion to God and service of the fellow men. People from different distance areas would visit him to seek his blessings. For this act he was called as 'a Perfect Man of God'. Such aspiration and positivity enthused Bhitai for consummate

learning. Thus, Shah Abdul Latif, was descended from the parents who were spiritually high and socially privileged.

He was too much inspired by the teachings of Holy Quran, the *Risalo* of his great grand-father Shah Abdul Karim, and Mathnavi of Jalaluddin Rumi, to them all he treated as highly unique books. It is said that he always carried these books along with himself, which were source of his intellectual inspiration and poetic genius. At his tender youth Latif was humble, and used to spend days by himself beside buds, flowers, gardens, birds and butterflies in the *otaro* of his *Haweli*. He loved solitude and serenity, a trait he inherited from his father.

Existential Trends in Bhitai's Thought

Bhitai was the great Sindhi thinker, and he was the only poet and philosopher, and the greatest of his work *Shah-Jo-Risalo* is the only literary and philosophical masterpiece written in Sindhi. The peculiar purpose of *Risalo* is too aware in man the quality of self-realization, understand alienation, to live according to his choice and overcome one's anxieties, agonies, loneliness, and weirdness and separation etcetera. In the course of this, various images and pictures are poetically presented. Bhitai's poetic flight is so expertly and innovative that in spite of the apparent multiplicity of themes, there is an internal precious treasure of gems of philosophical and existential thoughts. This is the main reason which stands him unique among other poets. Bhitai unlike other poets has not focused on common themes but he has touched with enough profundity and philosophical approach. He had gone to express with some deeply and intensity, and thus has conveyed his message very clear. Love (*Ishque*) has peculiar place in poetry.

Bhitai's poetical thought is rich in existential themes which are extended on some strong folk-characters of *Sasui*, *Marvi*, *Mumal*, *Suhni* etcetra. These characters reflect the gist of poet's thinking whose utter desire was to bring change widely in the outmoded society. Through his revolutionary ideas he had his own existential philosophy to make aware individuals about the real meaning of their authentic existence. They were living unauthentic life of others. Shah did for his natives Sindh is what other thinkers have done for their land and people in their particular way. Kierkegaard for Danish, Heidegger for Germans, Sartre for French, Berdyaev for Russians and Wilson for Americans.

Literature Review

To understand existential philosophy in Bhitai's ideas, one must read through all the literature on the subject, which analyzes and cites numerous significant primary and secondary sources. Gurbaxani argued that this is a key text for understanding the folk characters and their struggle to overcome existential crises. He believes that the themes explored in this text are universally relatable and provide valuable insights into the human condition. The text offers a profound exploration of the complexities of human existence and the inherent challenges individuals face in finding meaning and purpose. (Gurbaxani, 2012). Advani also emphasized the main text, which provides an important portion of Bhitai's poetical thought with an easy and accurate explanation. The main text is crucial in understanding Bhitai's poetical thought because it offers an accessible and precise explanation. It serves as a foundation for interpreting his poems and delving into their deeper meaning (Advani, 2006). Kazi recognized the significance of certain fundamental terms and the essential galaxy of poetic thought. He knew that understanding these concepts was crucial for his literary analysis to be comprehensive and insightful. Therefore, he dedicated diligent study and research to fully grasping their meanings and implications. Existential philosophy became a significant part of his exploration, as it offered deeper insights into the human condition and the meaning of life. It allowed him to develop a more profound understanding of existence and ultimately shaped his perspective on the world (Kazi, 1993). Sayed addressed the key issues intellectually. Bhitai discusses an existential-

sufistic philosophy while also emphasizing certain important points in his poetry. Bhitai's poetry reflects his deep understanding of the human condition and his ability to convey profound thoughts through his words. His poetry continues to inspire and resonate with readers today because it speaks to universal truths and the complexity of human emotions. It serves as a reminder that the human experience is timeless and can be felt across generations (Muzaffar & Rafique, 2020; Sayed, 1988). Sartre asserts that existentialism serves as a humanistic framework for comprehending the true nature of human life, emphasizing the importance of individual authenticity and the notion of freedom. Existentialism can ultimately lead individuals to live more meaningful and fulfilling lives. It encourages individuals to take responsibility for their choices and actions and to create their own purpose and values. Man is defined as an autonomous being who actively participates in a purposeful endeavor and has a subjective existence. Existentialism recognizes that individuals are responsible for creating meaning in their own lives and that the choices they make shape their own identity and determine their own (Sartre, & Jean-Paul 1973). According to Barrett, *A Study in Existential Philosophy* explains twentieth-century existentialism clearly and focuses on analyzing its forebears and key thinkers. It also explores the impact of existentialism on contemporary society. It also examines the existentialist movement's influence on various fields such as literature, psychology, and theology. The study of twentieth-century existentialism is crucial for understanding its profound influence on modern thought (Barrett, 1962).

Materials and Methods

The research problem has been tackled adequately since this is a study on content analysis. The inquiry is confined to an analysis and evaluation of Bhitai's existential topics. The folk characters and cantos with this theme are selected in this way. The personalities and poetical concepts have been analyzed and appraised in light of the qualitative research technique and the assessment of relevant literature.

The research includes almost all of Bhitai's poetry as well as a survey of relevant literature since the selection of material focuses on the existential themes in his thinking. But from his work (*Risalo*), a collection of poems and characters with existential themes have been chosen, including Suhni, Sassi, Marvi, Moomal, and Lila. To provide a particular focus on poetry, he has brought clarity to his existential trends, which has enabled the researcher to produce more significant findings. This research study has a limitation. To testify the assumption and draw the inferences the research has been limited to existential trends in Bitai's thought and only those folk characters of the poet have been focused that contain this theme through which it has been tried to get an objective conclusion.

Research Approach

The historical research technique is used in this study to acquire data for the research issue "The Existential Trends in Bhitai's Thought," which discusses the objective of qualitative research. The aim of a "qualitative" or "naturalistic" study differs depending on the research paradigm, technique, and assumptions, but it generally involves gaining in-depth understanding and insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals. The aim of a qualitative or naturalistic study is to uncover rich and nuanced data that can provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied. This approach allows researchers to explore the complexities and intricacies of human behavior and emotions, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the topic at hand.

The primary source contains Bhitai's original poetical composition, "Shah-jo-Risalo." Those poems were studied and chosen for content analysis because they contained existential trends that were tested for validity in comparison to philosophical studies through a review of the related literature, and thus a theoretical framework was created to

demonstrate the validity of the research study. Existential tendencies are covered in primary materials, which differ in both form and substance from discipline to discipline.

The philosophical research method's secondary source is not a direct or original source. It offers printed or electronic source material, such as history books, encyclopedia articles, popular magazines, newspapers, movie reviews, and academic publications that evaluate the original research of other experts. The researcher resorted to critical works in both printed and electronic form in the secondary sources, which touched on existential tendencies in thinking. This source is frequently mistaken for the main source; for example, a work of fiction from one era that is essentially the primary source becomes a secondary source in another era when it is used for historical proof. A book that may also be used to acquire insight into parts of the French Revolution. As a result, distinguishing between the two sources might be difficult at times.

Results and Discussion

The information gathered for the study on the existential themes in Bhitai's ideas led to the following conclusions: the influence of Sufism and mysticism on Bhitai's work; the exploration of love and spirituality in his poetry; and the significance of his writings in promoting unity and peace among diverse communities. Through meticulous examination, assessment, and analysis of the chosen Sur and folk figures from the poet-philosopher Risalo, the researcher was able to draw conclusions on existential themes.

Upon doing a comprehensive examination and assessment of Bhitai's ideas, it is evident that he is personally engaged in existential philosophy, indicating his belief in the existence of humans and their difficulties. This belief is reflected in his works, particularly in his emphasis on the human condition and the challenges faced by individuals. Furthermore, Bhitai's exploration of human emotions and the search for meaning in his poetry further demonstrates his deep connection to existentialist themes. An essential topic in his thinking is human existence, which is closely related to human freedom and faces a number of existential issues, such as pain, dread, anxiety, meaninglessness, fear, love, death, estrangement, and guilt. These themes are explored in depth in his literary works and philosophical writings, revealing the complexities of the human condition and challenging traditional beliefs. They serve as a reflection of the universal human experience and provoke introspection.

The true meaning of life may be comprehended via existential freedom, which rejects any imposed dread, uncertainty, or worry. It allows individuals to embrace their autonomy and create their own purpose. This enables individuals to live a fulfilling and meaningful existence. It allows individuals to live a fulfilling and meaningful existence, ultimately leading to a sense of contentment and satisfaction. It may endure difficulties and afflictions that are not little but are inextricably linked with life; without sorrows, pleasures are meaningless. The awareness of one's own existence teaches a person how to overcome despair, alienation, and guilt and emerge from existential crises. Ultimately, the journey towards self-discovery and finding meaning in life leads to a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. In the end, it is through this journey that one can truly find happiness and inner peace. Bhitai's existential perspective is expanded on a large scale. Through his lyrical concept, which includes sur and folk figures, he depicts many human concerns. Furthermore, he appeals to emotions and fundamental human concerns such as human existence, self-realization, and freedom of choice, anxiety, despair, strangeness, pain, love, guilt, estrangement, and grief. In his work, he explores the complexities of the human condition and delves into the depths of our shared experiences. His exploration of these emotions and concerns allows for a deeper understanding of ourselves and others.

The only way to solve all of these difficulties is to establish new ideals and teach people the fundamental principle of "knowing thyself." Because human life, and all

problems associated with it, begin with him. The extensive discourse analysis demonstrates that Bhitai has existential tendencies and philosophical depth. He seems to have had a significant effect on these existential ideas, making him a poet, philosopher, and forerunner of existentialism in South Asia in the 18th century. His contributions to literature and philosophy continue to influence thinkers and scholars even today. His work is still widely studied and appreciated for its profound insights.

Semi-Historical Folk Characters in Shah-Jo-Risalo

Marui

This narrative is based on Marui's abduction story. Marui is the name of a poor, lowly Thar District rural girl. According to mythology, Umer the king kidnaps and imprisons Marui because he fell in love with her grace and beauty. Umer attempted to convince Marui to marry him and become queen of his castle. Marui turned down every offer, including riches, comforts, expensive items, gorgeous clothing, delectable cuisines, and everything else the human heart may covet or desire. But he is unable to win her heart. She despised the royal life, turned down every offer, wanted to be free of his palaces, and was resolved to return to her people, Maru. From an existential-political standpoint, Marui represents patriotic elements: Umar as a tyrant, Umer Kot as the life of servitude, and Malir as the world of freedom. Shah Latif portrays the Sindhi people as Maru and Sindh as Malir. When the sky in Malir is clouded, it represents the promise of wealth. He is quite proud of the Sindhis' nomadic lifestyle.

- i. The voice on the day of creation, as soon as I did hear, "Am I not your God?" "Yes you are" I said clear, With a bond I did adhere, That moment love to my compatriots
- ii. Good were the days I passed in prison, Thunder storms and rains on palatial, My cries for help went undone; How tortuous was that prison? But lo: my love by chains of iron, Was chastened and purified.
- iii. I hope immensely, after all, my sigh from deep of my heart, Will destroy very soon slavery wall, which torture and exploit me.
- iv. In the condition that I came could I return in same -? What glory, like a seasonal rain? What joy would I reclaim?

SOHNI

The story of Sohni is well-known around the country, even to oriental and occidental scholars. This romantic folk tale is based on two lovers Sohni and Mehar. It is told that a rich potter of the town Gujrat whose name was Talha had a very beautiful daughter by name Sohni who falls in love with Izat Beg (later on came to known as Mehar and Sahar), a handsome young man of about 16. He was son of a rich man, living in Bukhara, who was a Mughal of Jighatai family. In the time of emperor of Dehli Shah Jehan when he came to a place called young Gujrat, he liked the scenery of the place and halted there for two or three days. It was here that Tulha lived with his family. When Izat Beg heard the admiration of young Sohni's beauty by his servant, being a young man, felt himself moved to go and see her. He decided to visit Tulha's house and accompanied the servant to Tulha's house, on the excuse of purchasing more pottery.

- I. The damsel does not entertain any thought, except that of her beloved Mehar, Her mind is thinking only beloved dear, and she remembers him every moment of life.

- II. Without Mehar's union Sohni is imperfect and unholy while sitting in his company only, she can be cleansed and purified
- III. There are new flows in the river but the flowing is fast ahead while sitting in home o friends, there, you praise thy husbands' promises, if you had seen the face of Sahar, you wouldn't have prohibited me ever, and had taken jars in your own hands.
- IV. When the people are in deep slumber, and silence hover over the dwellings, at that time of my friends! I only am thinking of Mehar, I regard it as my great honor, Even they accuse me with taunting.

Conclusion

Bhitai's existential tendencies have been identified and assessed. Surs and folk characters were sought-after for these features. They were seen as embodiments of Bhitai's teachings and philosophy, serving as inspiration for individuals seeking wisdom and spiritual enlightenment, thereby solidifying their significance. A closer analysis of the settings and characters showed that they both dealt with existential issues, and Bhitai seemed to be an early adopter of both movements. This suggests that Bhitai's works were ahead of their time, making him a pioneering figure in philosophy and serving as inspiration for individuals seeking wisdom and enlightenment in their own lives. Bhitai's impact on philosophy and enlightenment remains influential to this day. His contributions continue to shape the way we think and seek wisdom. This research study provides valuable insights into the depth and complexity of human experience. In his poetry, which is composed of existential thinking, he has tackled existential themes. His songs and folk poetry have existential overtones. This research study further highlights the significance of existentialism in the artistic expressions of this individual. It demonstrates how existentialism adds depth and richness to his artistic creations. The tone and attraction of the narratives looked to be global. A survey of the associated literature on this assumption was reviewed, contrasted, and analyzed to get such findings. The qualitative research approach was used, and the Chicago citation format was used. The hypothesis, when matched with the results of the research work, provides the affirmative response to the research questions in light of current research methods, literature study, and sur-by-sur analysis and appraisal of the poet's original work. This study is an outstanding contribution to the area of philosophy in general and existential evaluation in particular. It is also a substantial intellectual effort on Bhitai's work, giving the possibility for academics and researchers to perform a similar research study on the poet or on the works of other poets in order to uncover comparable tendencies based on their own thoughts or ideas.

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