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Metrical Patterning in Khawaja Ghulam Farid's Saraiki Kafi "Musāg Malendī Dā Gujar Gayā Denh Sārā": An Autosegmental-Metrical Phonology Analysis

Beenish Siraj
BS English Applied Linguistics, University Of the Punjab
Email: beenishsiraj1993@gmail.com

Abstract
Saraiki, an Indo-Aryan language spoken across all four provinces of Pakistan, remains comparatively understudied at the level of metrical phonology despite a substantial body of devotional Sufi poetry, or Kafi, composed in the language. This study examines the metrical organization of a single Kafi, "Musāg Malendī Dā Gujar Gayā Denh Sārā," composed by the Saraiki Sufi poet Khawaja Ghulam Farid (1845–1901). Using a qualitative descriptive case-study design grounded in Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology (Goldsmith, 1990), the nine couplets of the poem were analyzed along four parameters: foot-headedness, directionality of foot construction, quantity sensitivity, and boundedness. Findings indicate that eight of the nine couplets exhibit a predominantly right-headed, quantity-sensitive, and unbounded metrical structure consistent with the classical Perso-Arabic Bahr Mutaqarib and Bahr Mutadarak meters, while one couplet departs from this pattern and displays free-verse characteristics. The poem's reliance on vowel length rather than strict syllable count to organize rhythm parallels, in general terms, the role of quantity sensitivity documented in some English metrical traditions, although the two systems differ substantially in directionality and foot type. The study contributes a documented case of metrical regularity in Saraiki Sufi poetry and outlines directions for corpus-based and cross-linguistic extensions of this analysis.
Keywords: *Saraiki, metrical phonology, Khawaja Ghulam Farid, Kafi, autosegmental phonology, quantity sensitivity*

Introduction

Saraiki is one of the major Indo-Aryan languages of Pakistan, spoken by millions of people primarily in southern Punjab but also across parts of Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Malghani, 2023). Although it is sometimes treated as a dialect of Punjabi or Sindhi rather than as a language in its own right, Saraiki has a distinct phonological and grammatical profile that has been documented in recent descriptive work (Atta et al., 2022; Bashir & Conners, 2019). Despite this growing body of phonetic and phonological description, the metrical structure of Saraiki poetry, and particularly of the devotional Kafi genre, has received little formal attention within generative metrical phonology.

Kafi is a Sufi poetic genre native to the Punjab and Sindh regions, composed in regional languages such as Punjabi, Saraiki, and Sindhi, and traditionally performed with musical accompaniment in devotional gatherings (Bhutta, 2008). Khawaja Ghulam Farid (1845–1901), a Sufi mystic associated with Chachran and Kot Mithan in the former princely state of Bahawalpur, is regarded as the foremost Saraiki Kafi poet; his collected verse forms the Diwan-e-Farid. His Kafis are noted for their use of desert symbolism and intense expressions of divine longing, qualities that have made his Diwan a touchstone for discussions of Saraiki poetic craftsmanship (Bhutta, 2008).

This study addresses a descriptive question that bears on language status more broadly: Does Saraiki poetry exhibit a systematic, rule-governed metrical structure of the kind that metrical phonology predicts for languages with established prosodic systems, or is its rhythmic patterning irregular at the line level? To investigate this question, the study analyzes one widely cited Kafi using the parameters of Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology (Goldsmith, 1990).

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Research Objectives

The study pursued two objectives:

1. To identify the metrical patterns, present in the selected Kafi using the parameters of metrical phonology
2. To situate the resulting metrical profile of Saraiki in relation to general properties of metrical organization documented in English poetry.

Research Questions

Two questions guided the analysis:

1. What metrical patterns characterize the Kafi when analyzed using the parameters of foot-headedness, directionality, quantity sensitivity, and boundedness?
2. In what respects, if any, do these patterns resemble or diverge from metrical organization documented in English poetry?

Significance of the Study

A documented account of metrical regularity in Saraiki poetry contributes empirical support to claims regarding Saraiki's status as an independent linguistic system with its own prosodic conventions. The analysis also adds a case organized through the Perso-Arabic Bahr system, rather than through the Sanskritic chanda tradition more familiar in South Asian metrics research, to the comparative literature on quantity-sensitive metrical systems.

Literature Review

Khawaja Ghulam Farid and the Kafi Genre

Khawaja Ghulam Farid was a Saraiki Sufi poet and Sajjada Nashin associated with the Bahawalpur region of southern Punjab. He was educated by his elder brother and became proficient in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, Braj Bhasha, and Saraiki, composing devotional poetry primarily in Saraiki. His Saraiki Diwan is built largely around the Kafi form (Bhutta, 2008). Kafi as a genre is rooted in Sufi devotional practice and uses symbols of longing, separation, and the soul's journey toward the divine; key exponents include Baba Farid, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, and Sachal Sarmast (Bhutta, 2008). Within the Perso-Arabic prosodic tradition that informs Kafi composition, individual Kafis are classified according to Bahr (meter), with Farid's poetry drawing especially on Bahr Mutaqarib and its variants (Patafi, 2008).

Saraiki Phonological Background

Saraiki has a comparatively large consonant inventory organized around five places of articulation and a laryngeal contrast that includes implosives alongside the more familiar voiced, voiceless, and aspirated series (Bashir & Conners, 2019). Its vowel and syllable inventory, along with its status as a distinct Indo-Aryan language within the broader Indo-Iranian family, has been documented in recent descriptive phonology (Atta et al., 2022; Malghani, 2023). This descriptive foundation makes it possible to identify syllable weight, the property most relevant to a quantity-sensitive metrical analysis.

Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology (Goldsmith, 1990), which models stress assignment through the construction of metrical feet over syllables. Four parameters from this framework served as the analytic backbone of the present study.

Foot-headedness refers to whether a foot is left-headed (trochaic), with prominence on the initial syllable, or right-headed (iambic), with prominence on the final syllable (Goldsmith, 1990). Directionality concerns whether feet are constructed rightward from the beginning of a domain or leftward from its end (Goldsmith, 1990; Pandey, 2018). Note that directionality of foot-building is distinct from the direction of the script: in the present analysis, directionality refers to the direction of foot construction within the

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prosodic domain, not to the right-to-left orientation of the Perso-Arabic script. Quantity sensitivity describes systems in which syllable weight constrains which syllables may occupy the strong position of a foot; quantity-insensitive systems disregard this distinction (Ghani & Ali, 2014; Goldsmith, 1990). Boundedness distinguishes bounded feet, restricted to a maximum of two syllables, from unbounded feet, which allow prominence to be separated by an indefinite number of syllables (Goldsmith, 1990; Pandey, 2018). Together, these four parameters provide a systematic basis for comparing metrical organization across languages.

English Metrical Organization for Comparison

English verse is conventionally described in terms of recurring foot patterns such as the iamb and the trochee, with meters named for the number of feet per line (e.g., iambic pentameter); quantity effects in English are reflected less in vowel length at the line level than in stress-conditioned patterns of word-level stress assignment (Arndt-Lappe et al., 2022; Trevian, 2007). Because English and Saraiki differ in script direction, foot type, and the phonological basis of syllable weight, any comparison between the two systems is necessarily general rather than a claim of structural equivalence.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design suited to an in-depth, line-by-line account of a single literary text. Rather than testing a statistical hypothesis, the design aimed to document the presence or absence of systematic metrical structure in the target poem.

Data Source

The primary data consisted of the nine couplets of the Kafi "Musāg Malendī Dā Gujar Gayā Denh Sārā," attributed to Khawaja Ghulam Farid (1993). The Saraiki text, its Roman transliteration, and an English translation were drawn from the published Diwan-e-Farid (Farid, 1993), supplemented by publicly available transcriptions for cross-verification (Kafi 18 [with English translation], n.d.; Read full kaafi by Khwaja Ghulam Farid, n.d.).

Procedure

Each of the nine couplets was segmented into syllables and transcribed for vowel length. Each line was then coded for the four Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology parameters described above: foot-headedness, directionality of foot-building, quantity sensitivity, and boundedness. Where applicable, the resulting metrical profile of each couplet was cross-referenced against the classical Perso-Arabic Bahr categories historically used to classify Khawaja Farid's verse (Patafi, 2008).

Notation Key

The following symbols are used throughout the analysis:

Symbol	Meaning
σ	Syllable
F	Foot (metrical constituent dominating syllables)
S / s	Strong position (head of foot — bears prominence)
W / w	Weak position (non-head of foot)
H	Heavy syllable (branching rhyme or long vowel; two morae: μμ)
L	Light syllable (non-branching rhyme or short vowel; one mora: μ)

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μ	Mora (unit of syllable weight)
Wd	Prosodic word
[...]	Foot boundary brackets

Interlinear Glossing of Representative Couplets

To make the morphological basis of the metrical scansion transparent, representative couplet lines are presented as three-line interlinear glosses following the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Lehmann, 2004). Each example gives: (i) the Saraiki line segmented into morphemes (romanized, in bold), (ii) a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss in small capitals, and (iii) a free translation. Abbreviations: PTCP = participle; F = feminine; M = masculine; GEN = genitive; PFV = perfective; NEG = negation; OBL = oblique; LOC = locative; 1SG = first person singular; VOC = vocative.

Couplet 1 — Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Maqbuẓ

(1a)

Musāg	**malend-ī**	**dā**	**gujar**	**gay-ā**	**deñh**	**sār-ā**
/mʊsāg/	*/mæleːndi/*	*/ḍə/*	*/gʊzār/*	*/gəjaː/*	*/ḍɪn/*	*/saːra/*
tooth.twig	rub-PTCP.F	GEN	pass.by	go-PFV.M	day	whole-M

'The day passed entirely in rubbing the tooth-twig [i.e., in tooth-cleaning].'

The genitive postposition *dā* and the compound perfective *gujar gay-ā* recur unchanged in the parallel second line of the couplet, a syntactic parallelism that reinforces the prosodic parallelism captured by the repeated *fāʾūlun* foot documented in the Results section.

Couplet 7 — No Identifiable Bahr (Free-Verse Characteristics)

(7a)

paḍh	**bismillāh**	**ghol-i-am**	**sar-kūñ**	**chāt-am**	**ishq**	**ijār-ā**
/paḍh/	*/bIsmɪlaːh/*	*/gholɪam/*	*/sərkuːɲ/*	*/ʧaːtam/*	*/ɪʃq/*	*/ɪdʒārā/*
Recite	in. God’s.name	uncover-PFV-1SG	head-OBL.LOC	pick.up-PFV-1SG	love	burden-M

'Having recited [the formula] in God’s name, I uncovered my head; I took on the burden of love.'

Morphologically, this line is more heterogeneous than Couplet 1: it combines a native converb (*paḍh*), a frozen Arabic formula that resists morphological segmentation (*bismillāh*), and two Arabic/Persian loans (*ishq, ijārā*) alongside native verbal morphology. The suffix *-kūñ* in *sar-kūñ* is the oblique-locative postposition, glossed OBL.LOC. Because the borrowed formula *bismillāh* behaves as a prosodically opaque unit rather than as a sequence of native light and heavy syllables, it does not enter into the long-short alternation that the regular couplets rely on to construct successive *fāʾūlun* feet. This morphological irregularity offers a plausible lexical correlate of the metrical irregularity reported for Couplet 7 in the Results section.

Tree-Structure Representation of Metrical Feet

Within Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology, a line is represented as a hierarchical tree in which a Line node dominates Foot (F) nodes, each of which branches into a Strong (S) and a Weak (W) constituent

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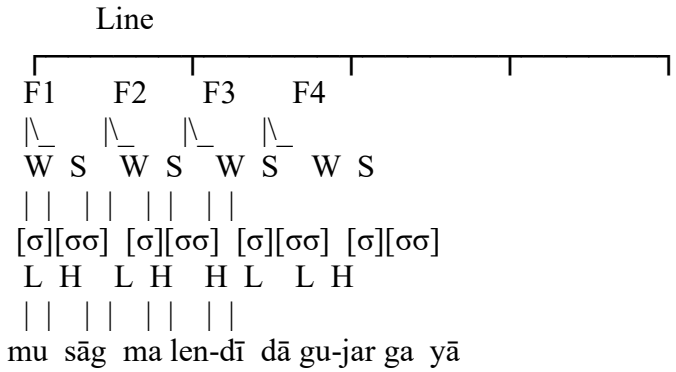
dominating syllables (σ) marked for weight, heavy (H) or light (L) (Goldsmith, 1990). Figure 1 represents Couplet 1, Line 1 as four right-headed
fāʾūlun feet. Figure 2 represents Couplet 7, Line 1, in which no binary foot structure can be imposed and syllables remain unparsed (stray) beneath a flat Line node.

Figure 1

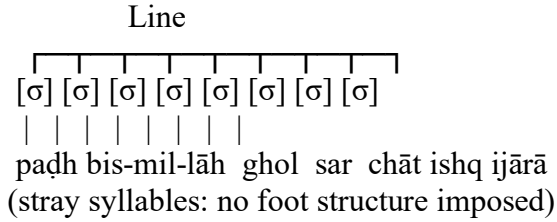
Metrical Tree for Couplet 1, Line 1 (Well-Formed Bahr Mutaqarib Structure)



Note. F = foot; S = strong (head) position; W = weak position; σ = syllable; H = heavy syllable (μμ); L = light syllable (μ). Each foot realizes the *fāʾūlun* template (light syllable + heavy constituent), with prominence on the rightmost, heaviest position, consistent with the right-headed, quantity-sensitive profile reported in Table 1.

Figure 2

Metrical Tree for Couplet 7, Line 1 (Degenerate, Unparsed Structure)



Note. "Stray" syllables are not incorporated into any binary foot in the sense of Goldsmith (1990). The absence of consistent S/W alternation beneath the Line node is the structural reflex of the "no clear headedness" finding for this couplet in the Results section.

Bracketing Notation

As a complement to the tree diagrams above, the following linear bracketing notation represents foot structure for Couplet 1, Line 1:

[W mu] [S sāg] F1 [W ma] [S lendī] F2 [W dā] [S gujar] F3 [W ga] [S yā] F4
L H L H H L L H

Each bracketed pair represents one foot. The head (S position) bears the long vowel or heavy syllable; the non-head (W position) bears the short vowel or light syllable. Couplet 7 cannot be bracketed in this way: all syllables remain stray (unfooted).

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Results

Table 1 summarizes the metrical profile of each of the nine couplets across the four Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology parameters (foot-headedness, directionality of foot-building, quantity sensitivity, and boundedness), alongside the traditional Bahr classification associated with each couplet.

Table 1

Metrical Profile of the Nine Couplets of "Musāg Malendī Dā Gujar Gayā Denh Sārā"

Couplet	Headedness	Directionality (foot-building)	Quantity Sensitivity	Boundedness	Traditional Bahr Classification
1	Mixed; predominantly right-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Maqbuẓ
2	Mixed; predominantly left-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive (moderate)	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Muzāʾif
3	Right-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Muzāʾif Muzāʾif
4	Predominantly right-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Muzāʾif Muzāʾif
5	Right-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Muzāʾif Muzāʾif
6	Predominantly right-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Athlam
7	No consistent headedness	N/A (no foot structure)	Not sensitive	Unbounded (no metrical basis)	No identifiable meter; free-verse characteristics
8	Predominantly left-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Athlam
9	Predominantly right-headed	Left-to-right	Sensitive	Unbounded	Bahr Mutadarak

Note. Directionality refers to the direction of foot-building within the prosodic domain, not to the direction of the Perso-Arabic script (which is right-to-left for all couplets). N/A = not applicable.

Across the nine couplets, eight exhibit a broadly consistent metrical profile: feet are predominantly right-headed (Couplets 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9), with two couplets (2 and 8) showing a left-headed tendency; all eight are quantity-sensitive, alternating long and short vowels to build feet; foot construction proceeds

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left-to-right within the prosodic domain; and all are unbounded. These eight couplets correspond to variants of Bahr Mutaqarib and Bahr Mutadarak. Couplet 1, for example, transliterated as "Musag malyndi da guzar gaya dinh sara," was classified as Bahr Mutaqarib Musamman Maqbuẓ, with alternating long and short vowels producing the feet

fāʾūlun fāʾūlun fāʾūlun fāʾūlun.

The seventh couplet departs from this pattern: it shows no consistent alternation of long and short syllables, no identifiable Bahr, no clear headedness, and no basis for foot-directional assignment, and is more accurately described as exhibiting free-verse characteristics rather than a fixed metrical pattern.

Discussion

Metrical Regularity in the Kafi

The predominance of a single rhythmic organization across eight of the nine couplets indicates that the Kafi is not metrically arbitrary. Its structure aligns with the Bahr Mutaqarib tradition associated with the majority of Khawaja Farid's Diwan (Patafi, 2008), and the four Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology parameters converge on a coherent description: a quantity-sensitive, unbounded system with left-to-right foot-construction that maps onto the Perso-Arabic prosodic tradition. This is consistent with the broader claim that Saraiki, like other quantity-sensitive languages in the region, encodes rhythm through vowel-length distinctions rather than through syllable count alone (Ghani & Ali, 2014).

The Exceptional Couplet

The seventh couplet's departure from this pattern is noteworthy. Rather than treating it as a flaw in the poem's construction, it may reflect deliberate or convention-permitted variation within the Kafi form, which is traditionally described as flexible enough to accommodate a range of spiritual themes and registers (Bhutta, 2008). A single exception within a nine-couplet sample is not sufficient to determine whether such variation recurs systematically elsewhere in Farid's Diwan, a question that would require analysis of a larger corpus.

Comparison With English Metrical Organization

Both Saraiki (as analyzed here) and English organize verse rhythm through alternation, and quantity sensitivity plays some role in both systems, although the phonological basis differs: Saraiki vowel length operates within an unbounded, left-to-right foot structure, whereas English meter is typically described in terms of bounded binary feet such as the iamb counted across a line, with quantity effects emerging primarily at the level of word stress (Arndt-Lappe et al., 2022; Trevian, 2007). The comparison offered here therefore identifies shared abstract properties; both systems are sensitive to syllable weight and rely on directional foot construction, rather than claiming structural equivalence.

Limitations

This study is limited in three respects. First, the analysis is restricted to a single Kafi and therefore cannot establish how representative the observed metrical pattern is of Khawaja Farid's broader Diwan or of Saraiki Sufi poetry generally. Second, the data reflect only the Southern Saraiki variety; other regional varieties may differ in relevant phonological respects. Third, the comparison with English meter is qualitative and illustrative rather than based on a parallel corpus of English verse analyzed under the same procedure.

Future Research

Future work could extend this analysis to a larger sample of Kafis from Khawaja Farid's Diwan, or to Kafis by other poets within the genre, to determine whether the metrical profile identified here generalizes across the tradition. A cross-linguistic study applying the same four Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology parameters to a matched corpus of English verse would allow the comparison

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proposed in this study to be tested empirically. Applying Optimality Theory to the same data could further clarify how competing prosodic constraints interact to produce the patterns documented here.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the metrical organization of Khawaja Ghulam Farid's Kafi "Musāg Malendī Dā Gujar Gayā Denh Sārā" using the four parameters of Autosegmental and Metrical Phonology (Goldsmith, 1990). Eight of the poem's nine couplets exhibit a consistent right- or left-headed, quantity-sensitive, unbounded metrical pattern corresponding to the classical Bahr Mutaqarib and Bahr Mutadarak traditions, while one couplet diverges and shows free-verse characteristics. These findings support the broader claim that Saraiki poetry, like other established literary traditions, is organized by systematic metrical principles rather than unconstrained rhythm, and they provide a basis for further corpus-based and cross-linguistic research on Saraiki prosody.

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