"A COGNITIVE SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF BULLEH SHAH'S POETRY TO EXPLORE HOW STRUCTURAL PATTERNS SHAPE MEANING, EMOTIONAL RESONANCE, AND THE READER'S INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCE."

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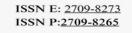
Abstract

This research explores the unique syntax of Bulleh Shah's poetry, focusing on how his use of language shapes the rhythm, emotion, and meaning of his work. A prominent figure in the Punjabi Sufi tradition of the 17th century, Bulleh Shah known for his deep spiritual insight and distinctive poetic voice. The study combines traditional syntactic analysis with modern linguistic approaches to identify and group the structural patterns found in his couplets. It pays special attention to techniques like repetition, parallelism, and intentional deviations from everyday language—features that give his poetry its expressive power and help convey themes of mysticism and inner struggle. The exploration also considers the broader social and artistic environment in which Bulleh Shah wrote, aiming more understand how his language reflects Sufi gospel and the practices of his time. His language reflects Sufi philosophy and the practices of his time. In doing so, the study not only adds to the field of literary syntax but also sheds new light on the poetic craft of one of South Asia's most influentiall spiritual voices.

Keywords: Bulleh Shah, Sufi poetry, Syntax analysis, Punjabi literature, Linguistic patterns, Repetition and parallelism, Deviation from colloquial syntax

- **Introduction**

Bulleh Shah, one of the most celebrated poets of the Punjabi Sufi tradition, holds a unique place in South Asian literary and spiritual heritage. Writing in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, his poetry captivates audiences through its philosophical depth, mystical tone, and unconventional use of language (Lari, 1990; Nizami, 2002). This study investigates the syntactic structures in Bulleh Shah's couplets, focusing on how devices such as repetition, parallelism, and deliberate departures from colloquial syntax shape the rhythm, emotional resonance, and spiritual meaning of his verse.

While existing scholarship has illuminated Bulleh Shah's thematic and cultural significance, the formal mechanics of his language remain underexplored. By combining traditional grammatical analysis with contemporary linguistic frameworks, this research identifies and classifies key syntactic patterns in his poetry—patterns that are integral to its expressive power (Lari, 1990; Nizami, 2002). Recent studies have begun to engage directly with these formal features: Mazhar, Iqbal, Naseer, and Shahid (2021) applied a multi-level stylistic analysis to the Punjabi original of "Bullah I Know Not Who I Am," revealing how foregrounding at the lexico-syntactic level intensifies thematic meaning. Similarly, Bashir, Aziz, and Sarah (2023) conducted an in-depth examination of "It's All in One Contained," highlighting the interplay between syntactic

deviation and semantic density. Furthermore, Ahmad, Farhat, and Abbas (2024) employed Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to uncover socio-religious discourses embedded within Bulleh Shah's structural choices.

In addition to formal analysis, this study situates Bulleh Shah's syntax within the sociocultural and religious landscape of his time, showing how his vernacular use of Punjabi both reflects and critiques contemporary norms of authority and ritual (Lari, 1990). By exploring these syntactic strategies, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how poetic form and mystical content coalesce in Bulleh Shah's work, enriching both literary and linguistic scholarship on South Asia's most influential Sufi voice.

Statement of Problem

The Punjabi Sufi literature of the 17th century finds one of its most powerful voices in the poetry of Bulleh Shah, whose work is renowned for its profound spiritual messages and emotional depth. While a substantial body of research has focused on the thematic, philosophical, and mystical dimensions of his poetry, there remains a noticeable gap in the exploration of the formal linguistic structures that underpin his poetic expression. Syntax plays a central role in shaping the distinctive rhythm, emotion, and mystical tone that characterize Bulleh Shah's work. Despite this, a comprehensive syntactic analysis of his poetry has yet to be conducted.

This lack of attention to syntactic elements—such as repetition, parallelism, and deviation from normative sentence structures—overlooks the ways in which Bulleh Shah evokes spiritual and emotional responses from his audience. These syntactic choices are not merely stylistic but are deeply embedded in the aesthetic and spiritual experience of his poetry. Without a detailed examination of these linguistic features, critical insights into the full complexity of his poetic expression remain limited.

Furthermore, Bulleh Shah's use of language cannot be fully understood without situating it within the socio-cultural and historical context of 17th-century Punjab. His syntactic choices reflect not only personal creativity but also broader cultural influences, including local linguistic traditions and Sufi philosophical thought. Understanding how these elements interact in his poetry is crucial to appreciating how Bulleh Shah both reflected and shaped his cultural moment.

This research therefore seeks to address the existing gap by conducting a systematic and detailed syntactic analysis of Bulleh Shah's poetry. By examining the linguistic techniques, he employed to construct a unique aesthetic and spiritual voice, the study aims to offer fresh insights into his poetic craft. Ultimately, this work will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and mysticism in South Asian literary traditions, and enrich the fields of both literary criticism and linguistic analysis.

Research objectives

- To identify and categorize the syntactic patterns in Bulleh Shah's poetry, focusing on features like repetition, parallelism, and syntactic deviation that enhance its rhythm and expressiveness.
- To analyze how these syntactic choices reinforce the thematic and mystical dimensions of his work, linking form with meaning.

- To contextualize Bulleh Shah's syntactic style within the socio-cultural and historical setting of 17th-century Punjab, highlighting its connection to Sufi philosophy and vernacular traditions.

Research Questions

- What are the key syntactic patterns and structures in Bulleh Shah's poetry?
- How do these syntactic features enhance the thematic and philosophical depth of his work?
- □How do Bulleh Shah's syntactic choices reflect the socio-artistic and literal environment of 17th- century Punjab?

Background of the Study:

Although Bulleh Shah (Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri) was a 17th-century Sufi poet rooted in the Punjabi cultural and spiritual landscape, his words continue to resonate deeply, transporting readers into the spiritual and cultural world of South Asia. Composed primarily in Punjabi, his poetry is celebrated for its profound spiritual insights and its ability to express complex philosophical ideas with striking simplicity and emotional intensity. His verses explore themes such as divine love, human suffering, and the seeker's spiritual journey, securing his position as one of the most influential figures in the Sufi poetic tradition (Shackle, 1977).

While the thematic richness of Bulleh Shah's poetry has received considerable scholarly attention, the structural and syntactic dimensions of his work remain largely underexplored. Syntax—the study of how words and phrases are arranged to convey meaning—is central to understanding how poets like Bulleh Shah evoke powerful emotional and spiritual responses. His use of repetition, parallelism, and deliberate deviation from standard syntactic forms contributes significantly to the rhythm, depth, and expressive force of his verse (Chomsky, 1965; Mir, 2010).

Despite widespread recognition of Bulleh Shah's lyrical brilliance, literary scholarship has tended to overlook the role of syntax in shaping his poetic expression. Prior research has focused predominantly on thematic and philosophical interpretations, often neglecting the formal structures that contribute equally to the aesthetic and emotive qualities of his work (Schimmel, 1993). This research seeks to address that gap by offering a systematic syntactic analysis of Bulleh Shah's poetry, revealing how his unique use of language contributes to its overall spiritual and emotional impact.

Moreover, any analysis of Bulleh Shah's poetic language must be situated within the broader socio-cultural and historical context of 17th-century Punjab. This period witnessed significant religious and cultural transformations, with Sufism playing a central role in shaping the spiritual and intellectual climate. The convergence of mystical philosophy and vernacular linguistic traditions deeply influenced poetic expression during this era (Ahmad, 2009). By examining the morphosyntactic features of Bulleh Shah's couplets within this context, the study aims to uncover how his linguistic choices amplify his spiritual message and reflect his cultural milieu.

The goal of this research is to enhance existing scholarship on Bulleh Shah by conducting one of the most comprehensive syntactic analyses of his poetry to date. In doing so, it will offer new insights into the linguistic aesthetics of one of South Asia's most revered poetic voices and contribute meaningfully to the fields of linguistics, literary studies, and cultural history.

- **Literature Review**

The poetry of the 17th-century Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah has long attracted scholarly attention for its thematic and philosophical depth. His verses, rich in spiritual symbolism and mystical reflection, have been widely studied in terms of their religious and cultural significance. However, a significant gap remains in the syntactic analysis of his poetry—an area that offers unique insights into how linguistic form supports spiritual meaning.
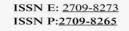
Most existing studies have focused on the **thematic dimensions** of Bulleh Shah's work. Schimmel (1993), in her foundational exploration of Sufi mysticism, highlighted how Bulleh Shah's poetry embodies the spiritual ideals of the Sufi path, emphasizing his role in communicating mystical knowledge through accessible language. Similarly, Ahmad (2009) explored the core themes of divine love, physical suffering, and spiritual awakening in Bulleh Shah's verses, reinforcing his alignment with the broader Sufi philosophical tradition. These studies, while valuable, primarily address the *content* of his poetry rather than its *form*.

Few studies have approached Bulleh Shah's poetry from a **linguistic or stylistic perspective**. Mir (2010) offers one such example, analyzing how Bulleh Shah's use of Punjabi idiom and local vernacular forms helped him connect with common people. She argues that his accessible style played a crucial role in making complex spiritual messages intelligible to a non-elite audience. However, Mir's work is more concerned with cultural accessibility than with detailed syntactic patterns.

Shackle (1977) provides one of the earliest attempts to explore the **linguistic artistry** of Bulleh Shah. His study draws attention to the poet's use of rhythm, modal language, and alliteration, showing how these techniques enhance the symbolic and emotional force of the poetry. Nevertheless, his work falls short of offering a systematic syntactic analysis. Likewise, Ernst (1997) contributes a broader perspective on Sufi poetic styles across traditions, noting the frequent use of repetition and rhythmic structure to induce meditative or trance-like states. While this framework is useful, it does not delve into the specific syntactic idiosyncrasies that set Bulleh Shah apart from his contemporaries.

The theoretical foundation for syntactic analysis in poetry can traced back to **Chomsky's transformational grammar** (1965), which introduced the idea that sentence structure has a deep role in shaping meaning. Although originally applied to prose, the principles of Chomskyan syntax have extended to literary texts. Cureton (1992), for example, applied syntactic theory to poetry, arguing that deviations from normative structures—such as inversion, ellipsis, and repetition—serve as powerful tools for emotional and symbolic expression.

In recent studies, linguistic approaches to literature have gained traction. **Jeffries (2010)**, in her work on critical stylistics, emphasizes how linguistic choices—especially at the syntactic level—can reflect ideological and emotional positioning in texts. Meanwhile, **Burton and Mills (2022)** have explored how syntactic structures in poetry be mapped to highlight shifts in tone, intensity, and voice. These newer methodologies provide a promising framework for the kind of syntactic exploration this study proposes.

Despite these developments, a detailed syntactic analysis of Bulleh Shah's poetry remains absent from current scholarship. Existing research has largely concentrated on cultural, philosophical, and thematic dimensions, often neglecting the **formal linguistic strategies** that underpin the poetry's expressive power. Given Bulleh Shah's distinct use of repetition, parallelism, and syntactic deviation, a syntactic study is essential fully appreciate the technical brilliance of his verse and the way it conveys complex spiritual truths.

Therefore, this literature review highlights the need for a **holistic syntactic investigation** into Bulleh Shah's poetry—one that bridges literary, linguistic, and cultural perspectives. Such an approach will not only fill a critical gap in existing scholarship but also provide deeper insight into how language structure contributes to spiritual and emotional resonance in Sufi poetry.
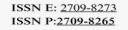
Poetry of Bullah Shah Bulleh Shah's poetry is widely celebrated for its simplicity, spiritual depth, and profound emotional resonance—qualities often conveyed through his masterful use of the Punjabi vernacular. Beneath the apparent simplicity lies a complex syntactic structure that amplifies the mystical and emotive power of his verse. His poetry frequently employs key syntactic devices such as repetition, parallelism, and deliberate deviation from conventional grammar, all of which play a crucial role in expressing spiritual themes and enhancing poetic intensity.

Repetition is one of the most distinctive features in Bulleh Shah's poetry. It functions not only as a rhythmic device but also as a tool for emphasizing core spiritual ideas. For instance, in the iconic poem *"Bullah Ki Jaana Main Kaun"*, the recurring phrase "Bullah Ki Jaana" serves as a refrain that reinforces the theme of self-inquiry and existential uncertainty. This repetition mirrors the meditative cycles of Sufi practices, inviting the reader into a state of reflection and contemplation (Schimmel, 1993).

Parallelism is another syntactic technique that Bulleh Shah employs with great effect. This involves using lines or couplets with similar grammatical structures to underscore a unified theme or draw meaningful contrasts. Through parallel syntactic structures, he enhances both the musicality and philosophical clarity of his poems. As Ahmad (2009) notes, these patterns are particularly effective in highlighting the dualities of human experience—love and pain, self and divine, presence and absence—that are central to Sufi thought.

Bulleh Shah also makes deliberate departures from standard syntax, bending grammatical morals to focus crucial spiritual dispatches. These syntactic deviations create moments of rupture within the linguistic flow, drawing the reader's attention to particular emotions or ideas. Such disruptions often serve to convey urgency or to challenge conventional ways of understanding, aligning with the Sufi tradition of subverting established norms to provoke deeper insight (Mir, 2010).

This study aims to undertake a **systematic syntactic analysis** of Bulleh Shah's poetry; categorizing and interpreting these linguistic features had better understand how they contribute to the expressive and thematic richness of his work. Using a combination of traditional descriptive syntax and modern linguistic theory, including Chomsky's (1965) transformational grammar, the research will identify recurring patterns—especially the strategic use of repetition, parallelism, and syntactic deviation—and analyze their function in constructing meaning and emotional depth.

In addition to examining form, the study will consider the **cultural and historical context** of 17th-century Punjab. Bulleh Shah's use of colloquial Punjabi and private expressions embedded his poetry in the verbal reality of his time, making complex mystical ideas accessible to broad followership.complex mystical ideas accessible to a broad audience. As Shackle (1977) points out, this connection to local language not only grounds his work culturally but also enhances its spiritual relatability and resonance.

Ultimately, this research will demonstrate that Bulleh Shah's linguistic artistry is not merely ornamental but foundational to his poetic and spiritual expression. By uncovering how syntactic structures shape the delivery of meaning, this study will enrich our understanding of his contribution to Sufi literature and offer a deeper appreciation of the ways in which language itself becomes a vessel for mystical experience.

- **Research methodology:**

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, integrating traditional syntactic analysis with insights from modern linguistic theories to examine the syntactic structure of Bulleh Shah's poetry. The research will begin with the careful selection of a diverse range of Bulleh Shah's poems, drawn from respected anthologies and critical editions to ensure both accuracy and representativeness.

The core method of analysis will be **descriptive syntactic analysis**, which involves systematically identifying and classifying key syntactic features in the poetry—such as sentence structures, repetition, parallelism, and deviations from standard syntax. This method allows for a detailed understanding of how linguistic choices contribute to the rhythm, expression, and emotional power of Bulleh Shah's work.

To place the poetry in its proper context, the study will also incorporate **historical and socio-cultural analysis**. Secondary sources on 17th-century Punjab, especially those focusing on linguistic practices and the influence of Sufis consulted. This contextual layer will help explain how Bulleh Shah's syntactic choices reflect broader spiritual and cultural currents of his time.

In addition, a **comparative approach** be employed, examining how Bulleh Shah's syntactic style compares with that of other Sufi poets of the same era. This will help highlight the distinctive features of his linguistic expression and poetic innovation.

The analysis will include both **manual coding** of syntactic elements and the use of **specialized linguistic software** to support accuracy and depth. Use visual tools such as syntactic trees and flowcharts to illustrate structural patterns and make the findings more accessible.

Throughout the research process, the study will remain iterative and reflective, adjusting the analytical framework as new insights emerge and incorporating feedback from peer review. This combined methodological approach aims not only to uncover the linguistic techniques that shape the spiritual and emotive power of Bulleh Shah's poetry but also to situate those techniques meaningfully within the rich cultural and mystical traditions of 17th-century Punjab.

- **Discussion**

The findings of this study confirm that the syntactic structures within Bulleh Shah's poetry are integral to the communication of its spiritual, emotional, and philosophical confines. Far from being incidental, his linguistic choices—particularly his use of repetition, parallelism, and

syntactic deviation—serve as essential tools for expressing the Sufi worldview and engaging readers in a contemplative process.

A central insight of this research is the pivotal role of **repetition** in reinforcing spiritual themes. As seen in poems like *"Bullah Ki Jaana Main Kaun"*, repetition functions as both a poetic and meditative device, reflecting the rhythmic chanting found in Sufi practices (Schimmel, 1993). These repeated structures anchor the reader's attention, creating a hypnotic effect that mirrors spiritual introspection. This stylistic feature underscores the poet's deep alignment with the oral traditions and mystical methods of his time.

Similarly, the analysis highlights **parallelism** as a syntactic strategy that enhances structural balance and thematic unity. Bulleh Shah frequently employs parallel grammatical structures across successive lines to mirror dualities—such as divine and human, physical and spiritual— that are foundational in Sufi philosophy. This not only contributes to the formal harmony of his verses but also aids in clarifying complex metaphysical ideas through accessible language (Ahmad, 2009).

Perhaps most striking is Bulleh Shah's **intentional deviation from standard syntax**, which disrupts conventional linguistic expectations to emphasize emotional or spiritual urgency. These syntactic shifts are not grammatical flaws but deliberate literary choices aimed at drawing focus to particular expressions or truths. In alignment with Sufi traditions, such deviations act as textual ruptures that compel the reader to pause and reflect, mirroring the Sufi quest to transcend worldly logic and enter spiritual consciousness (Mir, 2010). These strategies also reflect the poet's defiance of orthodoxy, both linguistically and theologically.
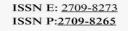
Beyond syntax alone, the study also demonstrates the deep **interconnection between language and the socio-cultural context** of 17th-century Punjab. Bulleh Shah's deliberate use of the Punjabi vernacular, infused with idiomatic expressions, allows his messages to resonate with the common people while still conveying profound mystical insights. As Shackle (1977) emphasizes, this linguistic accessibility is one of the key reasons for the poet's lasting popularity and cultural relevance.

Furthermore, the research reveals that Bulleh Shah's syntactic strategies are not isolated stylistic choices but are deeply embedded within **the larger Sufi poetic tradition**, though they also show distinct innovation. Compared with other Sufi poets, Bulleh Shah's syntax displays a subtle interplay between standard and non-standard forms, allowing him to craft a voice that is both grounded in the vernacular and spiritually elevated. These techniques distinguish him not only as a poet but as a linguistic innovator within the Sufi canon.

In sum, this syntactic study offers a fresh perspective on Bulleh Shah's poetic genius. While previous studies have focused primarily on the thematic and philosophical aspects of his work, this research demonstrates that his **linguistic structures are equally vital** in shaping the emotional, rhythmic, and spiritual impact of his poetry. His language is not merely a vehicle for mystical thought—it is a mystical practice in itself.

- **Conclusion**

This research proposal aims to bridge a significant scholarly gap in the study of Bullah Shah's poetry by focusing on its syntactic elements—those subtle, often overlooked linguistic structures that play a vital role in shaping the poetic and spiritual power of his work. While the thematic

and philosophical aspects of Bullah Shah's poetry have received substantial attention within Sufi literature and South Asian literary scholarship, the syntactic features that frame and animate these ideas have yet thoroughly explore. This study, therefore, proposes a detailed syntactic analysis of Bullah Shah's poetic compositions, emphasizing key features such as repetition, parallelism, and deviations from normative grammatical structures.

The proposal rests on the understanding that poetry is not merely about what is said, but how it is said. Syntax—the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences—is a fundamental mechanism through which Bullah Shah constructs the rhythm, emotional depth, and spiritual resonance of his verses. His frequent use of repetition, for instance, serves not only a stylistic purpose but also echoes the meditative practices of Sufi chanting (zikr), reinforcing spiritual themes through linguistic rhythm and emphasis. Similarly, parallelism in his lines underscores dualities and harmonies central to Sufi thought, while syntactic deviations, such as unexpected word order or intentional grammatical irregularities, act as deliberate disruptions that heighten emotional intensity and draw attention to spiritual paradoxes.
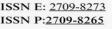
Methodologically, the study will combine traditional grammatical analysis with modern linguistic theories, including insights from transformational-generative grammar and poetic stylistics, to produce a comprehensive and nuanced reading of Bullah Shah's work. Tools such as syntactic tree diagrams and pattern mapping will be used to visualize the structural organization of his verses. Moreover, digital linguistic tools and software may assist in coding and identifying recurring syntactic features across his corpus, ensuring analytical precision and consistency.

Crucially, the research will contextualize Bullah Shah's syntactic choices within the socio-cultural and historical framework of 17th-century Punjab. This was a period marked by dynamic religious and linguistic interplay, in which Sufism emerged as a major spiritual and cultural force. Bullah Shah's decision to write in the Punjabi vernacular rather than Persian—the elite literary language of the time—was both a linguistic and philosophical choice. It allowed him to communicate profound mystical insights in a language accessible to the common people, thus democratizing spiritual knowledge. Analyzing his syntax in light of this historical and cultural positioning will reveal how his linguistic style reinforced his spiritual mission.

Ultimately, the expected outcomes of this research include a deeper appreciation of Bullah Shah's linguistic artistry and a clearer understanding of the syntactic devices that contribute to the emotional and mystical impact of his poetry. The study will not only enrich the fields of linguistics, literary studies, and cultural history but also provide a valuable model for analyzing other Sufi and vernacular poetic traditions. By highlighting the structural intricacies that make Bullah Shah's poetry so enduringly powerful, this research will reaffirm his status as both a spiritual visionary and a linguistic innovator in the rich tapestry of South Asian literature.

Further studies

- Future studies on Bullah Shah's poetry should incorporate syntactic analysis to uncover the structural depth behind his spiritual expression.
- Comparative research with other Sufi poets can highlight the uniqueness of Bullah Shah's linguistic style and its cultural resonance.
- Integrating historical and socio-cultural context into syntactic studies can enhance understanding of how language shapes spiritual meaning in Sufi literature.

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