

Bullhe Shah A Mystic Poet

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Sufism is generally an accepted term for Islamic mysticism. Annemarie Schimmel, an orientalist scholar on Islamic mysticism, says, mysticism means something mysterious not to be reached by ordinary means or by intellectual effort. It has been taken from the words mystic and mystery the Greek *myein*, "to close the eyes". Mysticism has been called the great spiritual current which goes through all religions of the world. In its widest sense it may be defined as the consciousness of the One Reality—be it called Wisdom, Light, Love or Nothing.¹ "Mysticism can be defined as Love of the Absolute—for the power that separates from mere asceticism is Love. Divine love makes the seeker capable of bearing, even of enjoying, all the pains and affliction that God showers upon him in order to test him and to purify his soul. This love can carry the mystic's heart to the divine presence, 'like the falcon which carries away the prey', separating him, thus from all that is created in time".²

Junayd Baghdadi, the undisputed leader of the Iraqi School of mysticism wrote, "Sufism is not (achieved) by much praying and fasting but it is the security of the heart and the generosity of the soul".³ Some of Junayd's contemporaries emphasized the ascetic side of sufism, a complete break with what is called "the world and egotism". "Sufism: to possess nothing and to be possessed by nothing". Sufism is freedom and generosity and absence of self constraint. The sufi should rather insist upon faithfulness with the contract and should be free, neither tired by searching nor disappointed by deprivation.⁴

The social and philosophical aspect of sufism is understood from definitions like those of Junayd and Nuri, according to whom "sufism is not composed of practices and sciences, but it is morals," and "who surpasses you in good moral qualities surpasses you in sufism." It means to act according to God's orders and laws, which are understood in their deepest spiritual sense without denying their outward forms. This way of life is possible only through loving devotion. Sufism in the hearts being pure from the pollution of discord—a sentence which Hujwiri explains as follows: "Love is concord, and the lover has but one duty in the world, namely to keep the commandment of the beloved, and if the object of desire is one, how can discord arise?"⁵

The sufis have spoken of the threefold meaning of *tasawwuf* according to the *Sharia*, the Muslim law, the *tariqa*, the mystical path and *haqiqa*, the truth. It is a purification on different levels, first from the lower qualities and the turpitude of the sound, then from the bondage of human qualities, and eventually a purification and election on the level of attributes.⁶

In brief, Islamic mysticism can be defined as an attempt to reach individual salvation through attaining the true *tauhid*.

The history of mysticism would be incomplete without mentioning the name of Husayn ibn Mansur ul-Hallaj, the martyr of mystical love, the tragedy of a man who deeply influenced the development of Islamic mysticism, therefore his name became in the course of time, a symbol for both suffering love and unitive experience. He was born in the province of Fars in 858 A.D., grew up in Wasit and Tustar. He went to Basra where he became disciple of Amr-al-Makki in Baghdad and also of Junayd Baghdadi. He became estranged from Amr when he married another mystic's daughter. After a short while, Hallaj's father-in-law began to regard him as a "cunning sorcerer and miserable infidel." Husayn stayed in Mecca for a year in connection with his first pilgrimage, undergoing terrible hardships in asceticism. After his return to Baghdad, Junayd foretold according to the legends of an evil end

for his former disciple. At this point the tradition contains the following anecdote: When he knocked at Junayd's door, the master asked: "who is there"? and he answered: ana'l Haqq, "I am the Absolute" "(o creative) truth (or the true Reality);" later this sentence became the most famous of all sufi claims. In the year 905 A.D., Hallaj took a boat to India. From Gujrat he wandered through Sind, the lower Indus valley which had been a part of the Muslim Empire since 711 A.H. The seeds he sowed on the soil of Sind grew in later centuries in the mystical poetry of this province. After his arrival in Baghdad he claimed miraculous powers which encouraged opposition on the part of both political and religious circles, therefore, he was considered dangerous. On 26 March, 922 A.D. he was put to death. Hallaj's hands and feet were cut off, and he was put on cross or more probable, on the gallows, then decapitated; his body was burned and the ashes thrown in the Tigris. This was the death for which his whole life had been a preparation. One of his most touching hymns begins with the words:

Uqtuluni thiqati - inna fi qatli hayati.

Kill me, o my trustworthy friends, for life is in my being killed.

During his imprisonment he wrote *Kitab at-Tawasin*; it contains eight chapters each of them called *tasin*. This little book deals with problems of divine unity and with prophetology. When Hallaj was in prison, he was asked "What is love?" He answered: "You will see it today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow". And that day they cut off his hands and feet, and the next day they put him on the gallows, and the third day they threw his ashes to the wind.⁷

Hallaj was willing to suffer for himself and for others. The mystery of his death is aptly described in Emile Dermenghem's words about the true Muslim saint:

"The saint is he who takes upon him the sins and the pain of the world; the unjust death is, for him, one of his means of accomplishments. He is the "great Help" and the consolation of the people. He is a living accusation for the world: his existence insults the tyrants, his death makes tremble his executioners, his canonisation is a victory of faith, of love, and of hope".⁸ This is

the spirit in which Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj went to the gallows. Since he was put to death by the establishment his influence became even stronger after his execution than it had been during his life time. According to Hallaj "Love is that you remain standing in front of your beloved, when you are deprived of your qualities and when the qualification comes from His qualification". This love is realized through suffering—man can be united with the divine will by accepting suffering and even longing for it. Suffering is He himself, whereas happiness comes from him. Hallaj does not advocate destruction for the sake of destruction. He emphasizes suffering as being positive value by means of which man might understand that "ishq", "Love", is the essence of God and the mystery of creation. The word "ishq" with its "connotation of passionate, overflowing love, "came to mean, for him dynamic divine love; but this term was considered dangerous, if not illicit, even by moderate sufis. In Hallaj's theory, the compensation for having offered God unconditional love was the beatific vision, without an intervening.⁹ Bullhe Shah belonged to this school of thought.

Undoubtedly, Bullhe Shah has been considered the greatest mystic poet of Panjab. He enjoys a unique reputation and celebrity among all the mystic poets of the Panjab. His kafis (rhymes) are equally popular among the common people of Sind and Panjab. Bullhe Shah was born in a Syed family at the village Uch Gilania located within the boundaries of the old Sind of seventeenth century (at present this village is located in province of the Panjab) in the year 1680 A.D. His father Sakhi Shah Mohammad Darvish named his son Abdullah. This was during the twenty-first year of Emperor Aurangzeb's reign. (1658-1707). When Bullhe attained the age of 6, his father migrated from Sind and went to settle down near Kasur in Panjab. According to Dr. Nazir Ahmed, he took his formal education from Ghulam Murtaza, a mosque man of Kasur.¹⁰ This opinion has also been supported by C.F. Osborne who says that the father of Bullhe Shah was a man of dervishic ideas. It may be concluded, therefore, that Bullhe Shah's father could not have been a man of theosophic disposition and what C.F. Osborne meant by dervishic ideas was that he was a religious man.¹¹ One can find frequently the references of Quran, Fiqah and Sharia in the poetry

of Bullhe Shah which is the direct result of religious education which he was imparted in his early life.

In his youth, Bullhe went to Lahore in search of a *Murshid* or spiritual master where he met Inayat Shah Qadri an Arain or Gardener by caste and requested him to be accepted (Bullhe) as disciple and may be taught the secret of God. Bullhe's request was granted and he was classed as disciple of Inayat Shah Qadri. The Qadris of the Punjab were well reputed and famous for their mystical ideas and scholarly achievements; it was their influence that had produced a unique mystic scholar of the sub-continent like Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), the eldest brother of Emperor Aurangzeb.¹² The relatives of Bullhe Shah being Saiyids were much enraged when Bullhe Shah became a Sufi and a disciple of the Arain Inayat Shah. Shah Inayat, it is said, always preached in Panjabi and used to quote some Panjabi verses of his own composition. Shah Inayat used to write in Persian language, being the language of ruling class in those days. Bullhe Shah came most directly under his influence and having learnt from him a deep inspiration wrote his remarkable poetry which knocked establishment as well as common and touched even unexplored horizons of mysticism. Bullhe's relatives exerted influence on him to give up his *Murshid* who came from the family of Arain being considered by them subcaste but Bullhe paid no heed to them and his commitment with his *hadi* or *Murshid* was unshakable and so firm that he remained his disciple for lifelong. Here is an example of the protest made by his family in the words of Bullhe Shah:

بلھے نوں سچھاوَن آئیاں بھیناں تے بھرچائیاں
 ”من لے بلھیا ساڈا کہنا۔ چل دے ہلا رائیاں
 آل نبی اولاد علی نوں توں کیوں لیکان لائیاں؟“

“To Bullhe sister and sister-in-law came to explain advice, why. O, Bullhe, have you blackened the family of Prophet (Peace be upon him) and descendant of Ali? Listen to our advice, Bullhe, and leave the skirt of Arain”.

In spite of protest made by Bullhe's family, he frankly and firmly replies:

جھڑا سانوں سید مدے دوزخ ملن سزائیاں
جو کوئی سانوں رائیں راکھے بہشتی پینگاں پائیاں
جے توں لوڑیں باغ بہاراں، چاکر ہو جا رائیاں

“He who calls me a Saiyid, shall receive punishment in hell, he who calls me an Arain shall in heaven have swing; O, Bullhe, if you want pleasures of the garden become a disciple of the Arain”.

Bullhe does not believe in caste, colour and creed but in the quality of man. His strong belief was in the equality of mankind; in his eyes no such person was superior than others who had an opportunity of social status, wealth, or any kind of formal education and all other materialistic achievements. Such a man did not gain superiority in real sense but in the eyes of Allah all human beings were equal and respectful. Bullhe sees creation of God on earth in different materialistic colours being found in our society but he considered them a false notion and says:

سب اکو رنگ کپاہیں دا!
چونسی، پینسی، کھدر دھوتر
ملل، خاصا اکا سوتر
ہونی وچوں باہر آوے
بھگوا بھیس کسائیں دا
سب اکو رنگ کپاہیں دا!

Finally, Bullhe Shah was left alone in his search of wisdom, truth and reality in the unexplored regions of mysticism. One can frequently find references of Shah Inayat in the verses of Bullhe Shah as token of honour and laurel for his *Murshid*. He lived as bachelor's life and mostly remained in Kasur (his home town) and died there in the year 1758 A.D. He did not write his poetry himself, neither he allowed others to write it, his poetry was

preserved through oral rendering from generation to generation by the common man, as the roots of this great poet were lying in the masses of Panjab and Sind. About one hundred and fifty verses and small epic poems belong to Bullhe Shah's pen, mostly written in the *Kafi* genre, and one in the *barahmah* (twelve months) genre. Prem Singh Kasuri, a Panjabi scholar collected poetry of Bullhe Shah and preserved it by writing in the year 1896 A.D., 138 years after the death of the poet. Before this, poetry of Bullhe Shah was published from Lahore by another scholar named Malik Hira in the year 1882 A.D., being the oldest manuscript but the same was incomplete and full of errors.¹³

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 A.D., Moghal Governors were so weak and their administration became so loose that they failed even to collect land revenue from the land lords. Lawlessness prevailed, dacoity and mass killing became order of the day, villages and towns were being looted frequently. Tyranny was perpetuated on peasantry and common masses. Between 1740-1750 Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali attacked Delhi which continued even after the death of Bullhe Shah. Panjab became target of bitter battles and tragic events and massacre. The heart of Bullhe Shah weeps and he mourns the killing of innocent people and the injustice that reigned throughout. Bullhe Shah saw with his own eyes his motherland burning with fire and blood; thus he cried in protest and his echo stretched on the land of five rivers.

در کھلا حشر عذاب دا
برا حال هويا پنجاب دا
وچ هاوے دوزخ ساڑیا
کدی آمل یار پیاریا

Bullhe Shah had seen last quarter of seventeenth century and first two quarters of eighteenth century. The latter two quarters were period which completely deteriorated the economy which also affected social life of the people of Panjab. This was the result of internal administration being weak and several attacks made by Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali in which they committed mass killing.

Bullhe Shah used his poetry as weapon against injustice and brutality in the form of protest and strong hatred against tyranny and tyrant; and he says :

ظالمو ظلموں ناہیں ڈر دے
اپنی عملیں آئیے مردے
مونہوں تو بہا دلوں نہ کر دے
ایتھے اوتھے ہوں مہوار

The interesting aspect of Bullhe Shah's poetry is his keen interest in Panjabi society and the events which took place at that time which highlight the social side of Bullhe's message. Though he witnessed a peaceful period of Aurangzeb but he was not happy with clergy and professional Mullas, their highhandedness, hypocrisy, greed for power and wealth. After the death of crown prince Dara Shikoh, mullah declared Sarmad (Mohammad Saeed), a high class mystic, as infidel or kafir and he was beheaded near the grand mosque of Delhi in 1070 A.H.¹⁴ Bullhe Shah refers to this tragic incident in one of his poems; he says:

تنہا چک چک منڈی جاویں، دھیلا لے کے چھری چلاویں
کھانا شک شبھے دا کھاویں، دسین ہورتے ہور کھاویں
علموں بس کریں او یار!
علموں بس کریں او یار!

During this time those so-called educated mullas were dominating illiterate peasantry and other masses. Bullhe Shah was not happy with this kind of education and he condemns such education being the rootcause of suffering of the people of Panjab. He considered peasantry, artisan, and toiling masses, no doubt illiterate and ignorant, but being hard working, honest and peace loving as better than so-called educated mullas.¹⁵

پڑھ پڑھ شیخ مشائخ کھاویں
لٹے مسئلے گھروں بناویں

یہ علماں نوں لٹ لٹ کھاویں
 جھوٹے سچے کریں اقرار
 علموں بس کریں او یار؟

Here reader shares equally the deep sorrow of the poet's unrequited love.

آون کہہ گئے پھیر نہ آئے
 آون دے سب قول بھلائے
 میں بھلی، بھل نین لگائے
 کہے ملے سن ٹھگ بیوپاری
 کہم بیدرداں دے سنگ یاری
 روون اکھیاں زارو زاری

Like other traditional sufis, Bullhe Shah is also longing to have reunion with his beloved, pangs of separation ring in these lines :

میں تیرے قربان
 ویہڑے اوڑ میرے
 تیرے جیسا ہور نہ کوئی
 ڈھونڈاں جنگل، بیلا، روہی
 ڈھونڈاں تان سارا جہان
 میں تیرے قربان، ویہڑے اوڑ میرے

"Love without gnosis or marifa is impossible—one can only love what one knows",¹⁶ wrote Imam Ghazali. The higher understanding of divine mystery can be achieved through love and annihilation. Bullhe Shah has merged himself with the divine unity of God and he says :

اک لازم شرط ادب دی اے
 سانوں بات معلومی سب دی اے

ہرہر وچ صورت رب دی اے
 کتے ظاہر کتے پھیندی اے
 منہ آئی بات نہ رھندی اے

Here is an example of mutual understanding between man and God. Perhaps Bullhe Shah has attained Divine Union which he expresses in the following manner :

رانجھا رانجھا کردی ہن میں آپے رانجھا ہوئی
 سدو مینوں دھیدو رانجھا، ہیر نہ آکھو کوئی
 جو کچھ ساڈے اندر وسے ذات اماڈی سوئی
 جس دے نال میں نیونہ لگایا اوہو جیسی ہوئی

Beyond the horizon of metaphorical love *ishq-i-majazi*, the mystic is being enchanted by the Divine beauty where lover ascends to the ladder of the highest beauty and seeks the love of God. Here people do not understand the mystical dimension of love and they declare lover as heretic or kafir and Bullhe Shah firmly replies them:

بلہیا عاشق ہوویں رب دا، ملامت ہوئی لاکھ لاکھ
 لوک کافر کافر آکھدے تون آدو آہو آکھ

In search of Divine love, one has to go through difficult stages; Bullhe's spiritual master or *murshid* is angry with his disciple, if reconciliation is possible then Bullhe is dancing to please his *murshid* and he says:

تیرے عشق نچائیاں کرکے تھیا تھیا!
 پھپ گیا وے سورج، باہر رہ گئی آ لالی
 وے میں صدقے ہوواں، دیویں مڑھے دکھالی
 پیرا میں بھل گئیاں تیرے نال نہ گئیا
 تیرے عشق نچائیاں کرکے تھیا تھیا!

Another Sufi Shah Waliullah of Delhi (d. 1762) invented an apt symbol for the spiritual purification, using the traditional image of the fire of love: man like a piece of ice will be put in a kettle on the flames; thus he will melt, become warm, boil and eventually, evaporating as steam, be as close as possible to the quality of heat inherent in divine love.¹⁷ Bullhe Shah has experienced such kind of fire to attain divine love and he says:

مینوں لگڑا عشق اولڑا
 اول دا ازل دا
 وچ کڑاھی تل تل پاوے
 تلیاں نوں چاتلدا
 مویاں نوں ایہ ول ول مارے
 دلیاں نوں چادلدا
 مینوں لگڑا عشق اولڑا
 اول دا ازل دا

Poet is longing for the vision of murshid (Shah Inayat). He is eagerly waiting to receive his beloved with warmth and fervour and expresses in one of his kafis in the following manner:

تانگھ ماہی دی جلی آن
 پار چنھاؤں جنگل بیلے، اوتھے خونی شیر بگھیلے
 جھب رب مینوں ماہی میلے، ایس فکر وچ گلی آن
 بلھا! شوہ میرے گھر آوے، ہمار سنگھار میرے من بھاوے
 مند مکٹ، متھے تک لگاوے: جے دیکھے تاں بھلی آن
 تانگھ ماہی دی جلی آن

Bullhe Shah seems completely intoxicated with divine love. The eternal joyous moments of love be always rare and poet is dancing and singing in the following manner:

جس تن لگیا عشق کمال
 ناچے بے سرتے بے تال
 جس نے ویس عشق دا کیتا
 دھر درباروں فتوائے لیتا
 جدوں حضوروں پیالہ پیتا
 کچھ نہ رہیا جواب سوال

The Panjab and the Indus Valley have a common tradition of mystical folk literature, thus it shows close similarities in the types of mystical literature which flourished with the images and shadows generally taken from the daily life of villagers which include peasants, weavers, blacksmith, carpenter, pottery maker and other village workers. In early seventeenth century the people of Sind and Panjab faced great upheavals and chaos which shook the foundations of the peaceful pattern of village life. In such turmoils society needed much protection, sympathy and solace which only humanitarians could provide. The prevailing conditions provided a fertile ground for the sufis to soothe the tormented souls. The greatest poets of all times who came out with love for humanity from Sind and Panjab prominent amount them was one from Sind Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit (1689-1752) whose poetry is based on the folk tales and folk literature of Sind which he used as symbol in his mystical work centred around the endless yearning of soul, burning love, longing for pain, being the blessings of God. The popular folk tales of Sind are the theme of *Risalo* (poetical work) of Shah Abdul Latif. This whole work is dominated with the idea of love for humanity, having deep sympathy and affection for his country, for his people. Here is poet's consolation as he pulls out the people from frustration and despondency and he says:

My beloved helps those who have nothing to fall back upon
 He runs to them like a monsoon shower and dispels all the agony
 from their minds in a moment.

Shah Abdul Latif went into wilderness in search of truth and beauty, along with faqirs and yogis. He visited place to place and

roamed about from region to region to know Sind, its people and its surroundings. In the Panjab Waris Shah (1735-1784) who was also contemporary of Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit wrote "Heer Waris Shah", a popular folk tale being common in Sind and Panjab. The theme of Heer Ranjha was also used by Bullhe Shah, Shah Abdul Latif and Sachal Sarmast and many others as vehicle for the expression of mystical experiences. It was the aesthetical sense and art of Waris Shah who immortalized popular folk tale into the poetical form. The tragic end of the story of Heer and Ranjha is the result of the death of two lovers. This death is, however, a triumph of powerful human love over obsolete tradition, over intrigue, over all the circumstances that hinder the way to progress. Poet vindicates the right of the individual in the face of caste, tradition and religious dogma. He says:

My friend asked me
write a new story of Heer's love
The whole story of love
should be told in beautiful words
Through beautiful and good poetry
Ranjha and Heer should be brought together
sitting together with friends in company
we should enjoy again the story of Heer's love.

This is humanitarian approach of Waris Shah who sympathizes with the lovers and seems to be with them throughout the story of their love.

Sachal Sarmast (1739-1826) another contemporary of Bullhe Shah was a versatile mystic who led a solitary life. He wrote in Sindhi, Siraiki, Persian and Urdu. He also relied upon folk tales and made Sassi, Sohni and Heer his heroines. His Sindhi poetry (being mother tongue) overpowers Siraiki and Persian poetry. In Sindhi poetry, Sachal Sarmast holds his name second only to Shah Abdul Latif. His pen-name was Sachal, a diminutive of *Sach*, "truth" as found in Hallaj's sentence *anal-Haqq*; and the name was Sarmast that he was an "intoxicated" sufi—and intoxicated he was indeed.¹⁸ He has described unity of being and secret of divine union in daring words exactly like Bullhe Shah. Undoubtedly Sachal Sarmast

has been called "Attar of Sind", and in fact the influence of Attar's imagery is clearly visible in his poetry.

Sachal Sarmast has given the martyrology in one of his poems tracing back the history of Islamic mysticism. Here are the names of martyrs who had to suffer for their love of God.

Welcome, welcome Thou art-to which place wilt
Thou bring me? Then wilt again cut off a head
Giving a kick to Sarmad Thou has killed him;
Thou has brought Mansur on the gallows,
Cut off Shaikh Attar's head.

Now Thou art asking the way here! Thou hast split Zakariya with a saw, thrown Joseph into a well. Thou hast made Shams to be killed at the hand of the mullas, Though usest to afflict the lover. Thou hast made Sanan bind the brahmin's thread. Thou hast made to be slaughtered Bullhe Shah, Jaffer to be drowned in the sea. In misfortune hast Thou pressed Bilawal, hast killed Inayat in the fighting arena, hast sentenced Karmal.

This poem gives a good idea of the historical information in which all these sufis belonging to the Muslim world who were attacked, persecuted or even killed by theologians and the "establishment".

During this time the people of the subcontinent were under the strong influence of mysticism, therefore the Pathan also produced mystical literature. In many ways their poetry resembles with that of the poets in Sind and Panjab. Rehman Baba (d. 1709), a Pashto mystic poet another contemporary of Bullhe Shah, a mystic of the Chisti order who lived during Aurangzeb's reign is usually regarded as the best mystical poet in Pushto language.

Likewise his contemporaries, Rehman Baba also seems to be intoxicated with divine love whose message is love for humanity as God created this world out of love. He says:

God created the universe
Out of love alone.
Love is the father of all creation
I am also and a lover alone

I am neither Khalil nor Daud Zai,
 Nor even a Mohammad (peace be upon him)
 Like the red roses,
 Thousands of bleeding hearts
 Roll in every bend of your long tresses.

Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit, Sachal Sarmast, Bullhe Shah, Waris Shah and Rehman Baba all these poets were contemporaries. They were more mystic of high order than poets, they gave message of peace, love and universal brotherhood through their poetry. Their verses move the heart of masses, whether they belong to the educated class or are completely devoid of any kind of education. Their verses are based on social, economical and spiritual awareness, interwoven with local romances and in simple rural vocabulary which is being understood by the people of every starta in Sind, Panjab and N.W.F. Province of this country.

Their poetry contains immense love for motherland, encourages peace, progress and prosperity. It condemns tyranny and tyrant in all its forms, all kinds of exploitation of man by man, it gives protection to individual freedom and honour. It increases morale and warns to be vigilant and to fight against enemy whenever freedom is endangered in one's homeland. They believed Islam to be a true creed, to them differences of religion, country and sect were unimportant. They represented the pantheistic sufism and were mainly responsible for establishing mutual love, unity and cohesion among the people belonging to the different faiths at grassroot level. Bullhe Shah like his contemporaries has captivated the heart of Sindhis and Panjabis equally and had the support of masses. For the people, Bullhe Shah is still alive being with them in the fierce struggle against poverty, social injustice, tyranny and other excesses being the materialistic problems of today's world. Bullhe Shah along with his contemporaries is still fighting for the better future of mankind which will ultimately pave the way towards spiritual attainment.

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15. Nazir Ahmed, Dr., op. cit. p. 'B'.
16. Annemarie Schimmel, op. cit., p. 130.
17. Ibid, p. 134.
18. Ibid, p. 393.

Note:— The poems and kafis of Bullhe Shah quoted in this article have been taken from "*Kalaam-e-Bullhe Shah*", Packages Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan, 1976, pp. 1-92.