



Vernacular Resistance in Mian Muhammad Bakhsh (1830-1907)'s Qissa Saif ul Malook: Language, Authority, and Social Criticism

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the work of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, Saif ul Malook, as a vernacular critique of the misuse of power, linking his spiritual themes with social and moral insights. In this composition, Saif ul Malook, written in simple Punjabi, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh criticizes the Dogra rulers at certain points. Through the use of metaphors in his poetry, he imparts lessons on moral values, empathy, and social justice to the people. By employing simple and common language in his work Saif ul Malook, he conveys an enduring message that encourages patience, coexistence, and standing against social evils.

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1. Introduction

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh was a prominent Sufi and poet of the Punjabi language, renowned for his masterpiece Saif ul Malook. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh presented his work as a Punjabi folk-tale. Through the poetry of Saif-ul-Malook, he not only conveyed spiritual messages but also criticized the social injustices of his time, highlighted societal evils, and critiqued the structures of oppressive power. He employed simple and easily understandable language to reach the common people with his message. He used his poetry as a means to stand against social evils and oppression. In Saif ul Malook, he critiques social structures, advocating for justice and equality in society, encouraging resistance against oppression, and also stresses work upon one's own self which will ultimately improve the society in the end. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh was a great Sufi poet of Punjabi literature who expressed cultural, religious, and philosophical themes in a simple and common language for common people so that they could understand them. Among his many works, the most famous is Safar-ul-Ishq, popularly known as the story of Saif ul Malook. He completed Saif al-Muluk in 1863 at the young age of 33, taking inspiration from the famous Persian tale *Alif Laila* (Thousand and One Nights). Many have narrated this story in their own languages and styles, but its main message has remained the same. According to Christopher Shackle, Saif-ul-Malook is the last great romantic epic of South Asia and an important Sufi poem. The story transcends borders and cultures and has remained popular over time. Its main character is an Egyptian prince who goes on a journey to find his beloved. The story is filled with love, adventure, and magical beings such as jinn's and fairies. This story has three main parts: the hero's early life in the court, his journey to South Asia and then Western Asia, and his meeting with his Badi ul Jamal. For the past 500 years, this story has been popular in Central and South Asia, where Persian culture has had a deep influence.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used simple and easy-to-understand language in *Saif-ul-Malook* so that common people could easily understand his message. Through this story, he gives advice and moral lessons based on different situations. His teachings were not limited to the people of his time but continue to guide and inspire even today. During Dogra rule in

Kashmir (1846–1947), policies like forced unpaid labor (*begar*) and heavy taxation created extreme hardships, especially for the working class (Lone, 2012). Through these policies, the Dogra rulers sought to tighten their control over both the people and the land of Kashmir, reducing farmers to a state of virtual slavery and subjecting them to severe exploitation. Those who resisted faced harsh punishments, breaking their spirit and spreading widespread anger and despair. In response to this social and moral decline, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used his poetry to uplift and guide people. In *Saif-ul-Malook*, his verses encouraged resilience, inspired hope, and taught the importance of supporting one another in difficult times. The British rulers sought to strengthen their control in the subcontinent by influencing local minds and targeting culture and traditions, which form the foundation of a nation's identity and heritage (Yaqoob, 2019). They knew that a nation could not be kept under control for long through force alone, so they created a sense of inferiority among the local people. As a result, many became so fascinated by British culture that they began to admire it while neglecting the positive and constructive aspects of their own traditions.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh became a voice of hope and resistance for people in this conspiratorial and oppressive environment through his poetry. He criticized the injustices of rulers in his verses and taught people to have faith in Allah, which gave courage to the oppressed and encouraged them to remain steadfast against hardships. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh drew his teachings from the Quran to improve the moral state of his society, especially Muslims. He based his guidance on the eternal source of guidance, the Quran, which has always been a beacon of light for those who are lost. Sufi saints considered it essential to use local and common languages to spread the teachings of Islam in non-Arab regions, including the Indian subcontinent. They harmonized Islamic teachings and concepts with local cultures and presented them in a manner that ordinary people could easily understand. Sufi elders wrote in regional languages, moving away from Arabic and Persian, which made it easier for the general public to grasp religious teachings and also promoted local identity (Anjum, 2017). Thus, knowledge of Islam was not limited to scholars but reached ordinary people as well. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used simple Punjabi in his work *Saif ul Malook* to criticize the misuse of power by the Dogra rulers and to raise awareness among the people regarding this issue. Through the story of Prince b Saif and Badi' al-Jamal, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh presented themes of divine justice, equality among people, humility, and living with love in his poetry to the public. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh addresses social injustices, challenges oppressive customs, and gives voice to marginalized groups in *Saif ul Malook* through the use of symbolic characters, analogies, and allegories from folk stories. Even people who couldn't read might learn from the poem because it was frequently recited at gatherings. *Saif ul Malook* promotes individual development and group opposition to injustice by fusing spiritual mysticism with aspects of the local culture. In addition to providing spiritual direction and a call to action for societal change, it cultivates a strong feeling of identity and justice.

1.2. Theory of Vernacular

Vernacularization is the process of transferring ideas, texts, or traditions from other languages into a simple and comprehensible manner for local people in their own language, making it easier for them to understand. Through this process, literature from other languages is made accessible to the common people. When Islam began to spread in non-Arab regions, Sufi saints travelled to these areas and conveyed Islamic teachings in local languages in a simple manner to make them easier to understand. Expressing Islamic teachings in local languages using simple words demonstrates that when Islam spread to non-Arab regions after conquests, Sufi saints presented the teachings of Islam in a simplified manner according to local cultures and languages to facilitate understanding. In the Indian subcontinent, Sufi saints also played a significant role in conveying Islamic teachings to the common people through local languages, making them comprehensible. By articulating the teachings of Islam in Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, and other local languages, it became easier for people to understand and practice Islam.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, known for his poetry in the Punjabi language, is referred to as the "*Rumi of Kashmir*." He presented the teachings of Islam in a highly effective manner in the local language for the common people to understand easily. His simple and easily comprehensible poetry resonates in the hearts of ordinary people because it contains a beautiful blend of spiritual depth and cultural harmony. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh wrote his

poetry in Punjabi, but his work also reflects influences of Persian and Arabic. He used his poetry as an effective means to combine spiritual wisdom and social critique. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh severely criticized the atrocities and injustices of the Dogra rulers through his poetry to raise awareness among people about the oppressions they faced and to give a voice to the oppressed. He also wrote against social injustices and evils in his poetry to attempt to improve the moral decline of society through his verses. According to the theory of Vernacularization, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry stands out from other Sufi poets because he tries to connect spiritual themes with local culture and language. His poetry uniquely blends Punjabi and Persian influences. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh not only criticizes social attitudes and societal evils in his poetry but also speaks against the oppression of the rulers of his time. Following the principles of Sufism, he conveys a message of social justice and moral reform. Using the local language and customs, he makes his poetry simple and understandable for common people so that every section of society can grasp and follow his message.

1.3. Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

- To learn how Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used Saif-ul-Malook as a way to teach people and encourage social change by sharing moral lessons and motivating others to act ethically.
- To understand Saif-ul-Malook as a critique of oppressive power structures, especially during the Dogra regime, that encourages resistance to tyranny and raises awareness among the masses.
- to understand how Bakhsh's poetry and other regional literary works can be used to support justice and fairness, and to resist oppression. This will help us see the role that common, everyday poetry plays in changing society.

1.4. Method

This study will closely examine Qissa Saif-ul-Malook to understand how Sufi poetry challenges oppressive power and encourages social change through moral teachings. By analysing its themes, allegories, and historical background, the study will show how Mian Muhammad Bakhsh inspired and educated marginalized communities. The focus will be on his use of simple, local language to promote moral values, stand against injustice, and empower the weak through a qualitative approach. This examination will show how his writings skilfully combined a call for social change with spiritual insight.

2. Literature Review

Folk poetry is the foundation of language and literature, cherished for generations. Using simple, everyday language, it reflects local traditions, culture, and the shared emotions of communities through rhythmic storytelling. Emerging in times of limited written records, it was passed down orally, preserving history and values as a living cultural archive. Scholars like Richard Bauman and A. B. Lord emphasize its role in preserving culture and connecting universal human experiences (Bauman, 1986; Lord, Mitchell, & Nagy, 2000). Rooted in rural life, folk poetry portrays the joys, struggles, and essence of countryside living, shaped by diverse languages, religions, and traditions. According to Farina Mir's book *The Social Space of Languages: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, Punjabi literature and language were essential to maintaining cultural identity and opposing linguistic and colonial domination throughout British rule (Mir, 2010). She highlights the important role Sufi poetry played in preserving the social and cultural resilience of the area. This viewpoint is supported by Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's *Saif ul Malook*, which uses the Punjabi language to criticize societal injustices, increase spiritual awareness, and promote moral change. His poetry demonstrates how effective vernacular language are in reaching the general public and resolving their issues. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh emphasizes the value of local languages as a means of communicating with and considering the people's concerns via his work.

In their article *The Vernacular Literary Resistance in Colonial Punjab and Colonial Balochistan 1880-1925*, Naveed, Rabia, and Razaq highlighted how regional literary movements in Punjab and Balochistan struggled against colonial rule (Razaq, Islam, & Razaq, 2023). They attempted to clarify how the aspirations and feelings of cultural identity of local populations are reflected in the preservation of languages such as Punjabi, Balochi, and Brahui, which became symbols of resistance against the growing dominance of Urdu and English. A

similar form of resistance can also be seen in Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poem *Saif ul Malook*, as his poetry significantly promoted the Punjabi language. He critiques social injustices in his poetry while advocating for marginalized and backward classes, expressing moral and spiritual principles in Punjabi. His poetry demonstrates the crucial role that local language poetry played in defending cultural identity, promoting social change, and struggling against colonial culture. In his book *Sufism and Vernacular Knowledge in Sindh*, Michel Boivin sheds light on how Sufi saints and their written works positively influenced the literature and culture of Sindh (Boivin, 2020). He explains how Sufi poets integrated social and spiritual elements, promoting local traditions and customs. Sufi saints wrote in the local Sindhi language, which not only made it easier for them to convey their message but also contributed to the promotion of the Sindhi language. A similar pattern is observed in the tale of *Saif ul Malook* by Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, where he presents moral and spiritual teachings in the Punjabi language. Both works touch upon the importance of language to spiritual and social change, and the capacity for local poetry to be an effective medium for social commentary and cultural preservation.

In their article *Masnavi Safar ul Ishq*, Ghazal Yaqoob and Ghulam Farida highlight themes of self-confidence and spiritual understanding in Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's *Saif ul Malook* (Yaqoob, 2019). In their article, they discuss various virtues of Bakhsh's work, particularly the stages of divine love (*Ishq-e-Haqiqi*) and teachings on avoiding social evils, which can lead to societal improvement. The article connects moral lessons with Sufi teachings, providing a foundation for social change. This demonstrates how Mian Muhammad Bakhsh emphasized the importance of moral and spiritual transformation in the Punjabi language to bring about improvement in a declining society. In *Cultural Identities in South Asia: The Way Forward*, Rajkumar Singh highlights the historical and cultural ties among South Asian countries, rooted in shared religious and cultural traditions from ancient and medieval times (Singh, 2021). He notes similarities in administrative, political, and economic systems across the region. Hinduism has shaped the subcontinent's culture and politics, while Islam has left a profound impact on its art, architecture, and heritage, with South Asia being home to over 400 million Muslims. Though diverse religions are practiced in the region, common traditions, artwork, food, values, among other things have emerged over time as people of different creeds and faiths have coexisted for centuries.

In *Punjabi Sufi Poets A.D. 1460-1900*, Lajwanti Rama Karishna explains that early Punjabi Sufi poets, like their Indian counterparts, initially wrote in Persian, incorporating its words, phrases, and stylistic techniques (Krishna, 1977). Later, they shifted to Urdu, blending Persian and Indian elements. However, this often-overlooked local culture and the thoughts and emotions of Punjab's people. In the mid-15th century, Shaikh Ibrahim Farid, a descendant of Faridu'ddin Ganj-i-Shakar (1173-1265) of Pakpattan, pioneered writing poetry in Punjabi, the language of ordinary people. His efforts inspired other notable poets like Madhu Lal Husain (1538-1599), Sultan Bahu (1630-1691), Rahman Baba (1632-1706), Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689-1752), and Bulleh Shah (1680-1757) who enriched Punjabi literature with their contributions. This research draws on key scholarly works to build its foundation. Ali S. Asani emphasizes how vernacular languages in Sufi poetry bridge the spiritual and the everyday, echoing Bakhsh's use of Punjabi (Asani, 1988). Tanvir Anjum highlights how localized expressions of Islam foster cultural and spiritual connections (Anjum, 2017). Sobia Ilyas's *Sufism for the Common Man* illustrates how esoteric teachings were simplified for the masses, a central idea in Bakhsh's philosophy (Ilyas, 2016). Sobia Aslam and Muhammad Riaz's work on Punjabi Sufi poets underscores how figures like Bakhsh promoted harmony and tolerance (Aslam & Riaz, 2022). Using this framework, the study analyses *Saif-ul-Malook* to show how Bakhsh employed vernacular poetry not only for spiritual enlightenment but also to challenge power structures and advocate justice. By examining the intersection of mysticism, morality, and social critique in Bakhsh's work, the study highlights the enduring relevance of vernacular poetry in addressing both timeless and modern issues.

3. Simplicity of Punjabi Language

The major cities of Punjab have often been victims of invasions, and a significant reason for this is that the majority of Punjab's population resides in rural areas, where the Punjabi language has continued to thrive. Although Persian and Urdu were spoken and understood in Punjab, Punjabi became a medium for many Sufi saints to convey their messages due to its simplicity and widespread use among the people. These Sufi saints communicated the message

of Islam, the fundamental purpose of Sufism—which is for all people to rise above religious divisions—and criticism of social evils through poetry in a common and straightforward style, which greatly impacted the local population. By using the language of the people, namely Punjabi, these Sufi saints became immensely popular among rural communities, and their poetry was recited and shared at various fairs and gatherings. Singers would perform these verses at gatherings, receiving tremendous appreciation. Scholars often referenced this poetry in mosques and public sermons. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, while considering these elements in his work *Saif-ul-Malook*, conveyed his message to the common people through his poetry in the Punjabi language. In *Saif-ul-Malook*, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, according to the story, highlighted social evils and the message of Islam through mythological characters, metaphors, and allegories wherever necessary. Through his poetry, he became the voice of the deprived classes against oppressive taxation and instilled hope for a better future among his people. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's *Saif-ul-Malook* is immensely popular among the public, and he often recites it at rural gatherings. By combining spiritual mysticism and local cultural elements, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh became a movement against individual improvement and collective injustice through *Saif-ul-Malook*.

4. Vernacular Themes in *Saif-ul-Malook* Promoting Social Reform

While narrating the story of *Saif-ul-Malook*, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh has written many verses on appropriate occasions to address social issues for the betterment of society. Through these verses, he teaches the general public various ways to solve social problems based on the Quran, Hadith, and many Islamic teachings. In his poetry, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh mentions several points for the betterment of society, one of which is consistent struggle and action. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh carefully studied the conditions of his time and reflected on social evils like an expert analyst. He then expressed these problems and their solutions through his poetry.

4.1. Overcoming Despair Through Steadfastness

One of the problems was that people frustrated by their circumstances would lose hope. In response, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used his poetry to encourage those who became discouraged and disheartened by failure. He urged them to keep trying and never give up. In the story of *Saif ul-Malook*, he writes that:

جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل جَہل
بار بار نہ ہاریں، بہت بک دن پھر سی پاسا
بُھکھا مَنگن چڑھے محمد، اوڑک بھر دا کاسا
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.25)

Translation

Do not lose heart after repeated failures; success will come one day
Just as the beggar's bowl is filled when he is hungry, so too will you succeed

مردا بہت بار نہ مولے مت کوئی کہے نمردا
بہت نال لگے جس لوڑے پائے باجھ نہ مردا
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.25)

Translation

Never lose courage, no matter what anyone says
Keep working hard with determination—you will surely succeed

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh highlights the importance of facing difficulties in various aspects of life in these verses of his *Saif ul Malook*. He points out that people often encounter challenges and sometimes face failure. Because of this, a lot of people end up feeling hopeless. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh writes for these individuals, urging them to remain steadfast instead of being disheartened by repeated failures, and to continue striving, as one day Allah will surely reward their efforts. Through these verses, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh teaches people not to give up in the face of despair and difficulties. He emphasizes the significance of perseverance and continuous effort, stating that success is always a result of steadfastness. His message is all about staying committed to your goals and building a society that values hard work and determination.

4.2. Transforming Society Through Moral Growth

He writes with great skill in the story of *Saif-ul-Malook*:

آپو جنگا کوئی ہووے ہر نون بہلا نکیندا
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.28)

Translation

O those who possess wisdom, listen to what this humble man says
When someone is good themselves, they will see goodness in others

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh while writing against social evils, addresses his audience and urging them to adopt a positive mindset. He encourages people to keep kind hearted for others, as taught by the teachings of Islam. He highlights that when a person's heart is pure and their intentions are good, they will think positively about others as well. In this way, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh has beautifully articulated social issues and their solutions, inviting people to self-reflection and thoughtful consideration. The encouragement of positive thinking and goodness is a solution to societal problems and can help create a better society. His poetry provides guidance to the common people on how we can be good ourselves and think well of others, so that we can build a better community.

4.3. The Crow Metaphor: A Lesson on Selfishness

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh writes about people who cause problems in society. He writes about people who make small problems seem like a big problem. Thus, in the story of *Saif-ul-Malook*, he writes that:

فسادی لوک دکھی دشمن دوتی ڈاڈی دنیا
زیادی کجہ ہتھوں بناون کاں چا دا چچی
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.222)

Translation

This world is full of those who spread chaos and enemies of peace. They make a fuss over small matters, just like crows do.

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh in this verse of Saif ul Malook describes selfish people who create problems in the society. Such people exaggerate small problems to make them bigger and spread hatred to turn people against each other for their own benefit. He compares them to crows and says that they make noise and spread chaos just like crows do. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh uses this metaphor to give a message of social reform. He encourages people to recognize the influence of such troublemakers and stay away from them. Just as crows create noise with their constant cawing, these selfish and disruptive people spread chaos in society through their actions.

4.4. The Shared Bond of Grief

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh expresses human emotions and social issues through his poetry and beautifully describing the improvements that can be made in these areas. He often writes about the hypocrisy found in society and highlights that only a person who has experienced pain can truly understand it.

According to this, in *Saif-ul-Malook*, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh includes these verses:

دکھیے دی دکھیے گل دکھیے سنڈا، دکھیے قیمت قدر بچھانے
کے دکھیے جو دکھیے اگے، دسے دسے نہیں و بانے

جیوں دکھیے نون دکھیے مل کے، بنجوں بہر بہر روندا
سکھیے تائیں تک کے سکھیے، ایسا خوش نہ ہوندا
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.140)

Translation

Only the one who is in pain truly listens and understands the pain of others.
One who is suffering does not need to explain their pain to another.

Just as one who is sad feels the pain of another, The happy ones rarely share in the joy of others. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh describes human feelings very well in his poetry. He talks about how people who have faced hard times develop a strong sense of care and love. This helps them understand the pain of others. On the other hand, those who have always lived in

comfort cannot truly feel the struggles of others. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh shows how strong connections between people in society help them share each other's sorrows. This creates harmony in the community. Through his poetry he encourages people to look after one another and help those in need. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh uses these verses to emphasize that people who face difficulties and hardships can deeply understand the pain of others. Through this he highlights the importance of empathy love and mutual support in society so everyone can live together in harmony. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh gives the message that society should have harmony and people should share in each other's joys and sorrows. Such positive actions lead to social improvement and progress.

5. Saif-ul-Malook as the Voice of the Voiceless

Subaltern historiography is a school of thought that emerged in the 1980s. Its concept is derived from Antonio Gramsci's idea of "subaltern". In this method of historiography history writes from the perspective of those who have historically been overlooked in traditional historiography, specifically the marginalized classes of society, including labourers, peasants, low-caste communities, indigenous populations, women in patriarchal societies, migrant workers, marginalized ethnic minorities, rural laborers, among other oppressed groups. This idea was first developed by historians like Ranajit Guha, who argued that society is divided into two parts: the elite and the subaltern. These scholars analysed the relationship between the two groups while keeping their identities separate. From this perspective historians criticized Indian nationalist history writing because it focused only on the elite's point of view and ignored the marginalized and oppressed classes. Thinkers like Jules Michelet inspired those working on Subaltern Studies because they gave importance to the common people's perspective in history writing. This school of thought tried to focus on the experiences and voices of marginalized communities in India so their point of view could be included in history.

In the context of South Asia, the Subaltern perspective is very important for understanding Sufi poetry because many Sufi saints composed poetry in their local languages to convey their messages to the common people. Figures like Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, and Bulleh Shah used their poetry to speak against rising materialism, corruption, and social injustice. The purpose of addressing these issues in Sufi poetry was not only to impart spiritual teachings but also to bring about change by eliminating social evils. Their verses provided courage and hope to the oppressed and taught them to unite against social inequalities. They not only raised their voice in resistance but also showed the path of self-awareness to the marginalized classes. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh was a famous Sufi poet of the Punjabi language who highlighted social and societal issues through his poetry. During his time Kashmir was under the rule of Dogra rulers and people faced severe exploitation. After the British government sold it for seventy-five lakh Nanak Shahi coins in 1846 the Kashmiri people had to endure heavy taxes and forced labour. Those who raised their voices against this were given harsh punishments. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used his poetry to criticize the rulers' behaviours and express the people's struggles. In his poetry he also pointed out the moral weaknesses of his own community.

5.1. The Snake Metaphor: A Symbol of Oppression

In Saif-ul-Malook, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh includes a part where he talks about the cruelty and unfairness of his time. He skillfully portrayed the challenges faced by the people in the following lines:

ماشک بائشک ناگ آسمان اسان پر غضبيون کنڈل مارے
آدميان نوں ڈنگن کارن چھجلی نيت کھلارے

(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.459)

Translation

Like a large snake, it is coiling in anger in the sky,
Spreading its fangs to bite the people

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh effectively expressed the oppression, hardships and suffering of the common people under the Dogra regime through his poetry. In *Saif ul Malook*, he compares the Dogra's to a venomous snake coiled in the sky, ready to strike and inflict further cruelty due to their tyrannical taxes and forced labour. During that time, the Kashmiri people were suffering greatly from injustice and oppression. Through his poetry Mian Muhammad Bakhsh not only condemned the oppression and cruelty of the Dogra rulers but also became a symbol of hope and resistance for the oppressed people suffering under injustice and tyranny.

His poetry not only criticizes oppression but also inspires the oppressed to raise their voices against injustice. This poetry delivers a timeless message of patience courage and resistance providing strength and guidance to those fighting against oppression even today.

5.2. Moral Obligations of Rulers: A Divine Accountability

In the story of *Saif-ul-Malook*, he writes that:

بادشاہاں؁ نوں پُچھے ہووے؁ گی؁؁ مظلوماں دے حالوں کھسی رب وڈیا تینوں؁ دے عزت اقبالوں
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.352)

Translation

Seeing the condition of the oppressed, the rulers will be questioned
Allah will ask, 'He who gave you honour and raised you to this high position...

Through his poetry Mian Muhammad Bakhsh reminds rulers of their responsibilities and makes them aware that they will be accountable for the welfare of their people. In *Saif ul Malook* he emphasizes that those in power will have to answer to Allah about how they treated the oppressed and how they used the authority given to them. Through his poetry he conveys the message that true leadership means ensuring justice for all and protecting the oppressed from oppressors. In reality the behaviour of the Dogra rulers was completely opposite to this. His words highlight the importance of justice and fairness in true leadership. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh through his poetry not only reminds rulers of their moral and spiritual responsibilities but also highlights the struggles of the oppressed to promote social justice. In his poetry he urges rulers to act with compassion honesty and responsibility. By emphasizing themes of justice accountability and moral leadership Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry inspires rulers and societies to work towards social reform and equality. His words encourage fairness and remind everyone of the importance of standing up for what is right.

5.3. Moral Cowardice of Exploitative Rulers

In the story of *Saif-ul-Malook*, he writes that:

ظالم دا تدھ زور نہ بھنیا دس سزا قہر دی لیسے دا اُپر الا چھٹیوئی کر کے عجب نامردی
(Saif-ul-Malook, 2015, p.352)

Translation

You did not crush the power of a wicked person by awarding him befitting punishment
You showed unmanliness by failing to patronize the weak

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh skilfully describes the condition of the oppressed in his poetry and strongly condemns rulers who exploit the poor and weak. He warns such rulers of Allah's punishment for those who oppress people. No matter how powerful a tyrant may be their time will eventually come to an end. The poor and weak always trust in Allah and the cruelty of rulers who oppress them cannot stand for long against God's wrath. His poetry reminds us that justice will prevail and no oppression lasts forever. He calls those rulers cowards who deprive the poor of their rights and oppress them. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry serves as a powerful voice for those who suffer from the oppression and injustice of cruel rulers. His poetry encourages people to stand up against tyranny and fight for justice. In this way, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh used poetry to fight injustice. In his *Qissa Saif ul Malook* Mian Muhammad Bakhsh criticizes the rule of the Dogra rulers and raises his voice in support of the oppressed. Through his poetry he highlights the struggles of marginalized communities especially the heavy taxes and forced labor imposed by the Dogra rulers on the Kashmiri people. These actions caused great suffering for the people and led to the moral decline of society. His poetry expresses the pain of the oppressed and stands as a powerful critique against injustice. On one hand Mian Muhammad Bakhsh gives hope and courage to the oppressed and on the other hand he strongly criticizes social evils like greed, exploitation and corruption. His verses become a source of strength for people and encourage the oppressed and marginalized to eliminate social evils from within themselves. He also criticizes the rulers for their wrongdoings. To eliminate social evils, he uses sharp criticism and employs *Saif ul Malook* as an effective tool for reform.

6. Conclusion

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's *Qissa Saif ul Malook* is an example of how Sufi saints and poets can use their poetry as an effective tool for moral guidance and social criticism in a

morally declining society. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh skilfully uses various metaphors in his poetry to provide religious spiritual and moral lessons while also highlighting the social and political injustices of his time especially the oppression of the Dogra rulers in Kashmir. Themes of patience empathy and justice are frequently seen in his poetry. He criticizes the rulers for exploiting socially backward classes by burdening them with heavy taxes. In his verses Mian Muhammad Bakhsh tries to draw the attention of rulers to their moral responsibilities while also criticizing the misuse of power. In *Saif ul Malook* he reminds rulers of their accountability against oppression creating a masterpiece that becomes a symbol of resistance against tyranny and serves as moral guidance for individuals and a collective voice against social and political injustices. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's perspective on social reform in his poetry is filled with deep empathy and moral insight. He urges readers to improve their character and ethics. He highlights major social evils and injustices that were causing the decline of society. In this tale of love and adventure Mian Muhammad Bakhsh offers solutions in his poetry to improve a declining society. He makes *Saif ul Malook* a tool to make people aware of their rights and responsibilities. Through simple yet effective language in poetry, he conveyed his message to the common people. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh encourages readers through his poetry to strive for self-improvement rather than remain silent about social evils. He raises his voice against the oppression faced by the marginalized and seeks to inspire people to actively participate in the struggle for justice. *Saif u Malook* is not only a literary masterpiece but also a continuous critical review of power, a demand for social change, and a beacon of hope for those suppressed within dominant power structures. The poetry of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh holds historical and cultural importance and also shows that poetry written in common language can point out social evils and encourage people to improve their social behaviour. He proved that Sufi poets can bring positive changes to the lives of common people through their poetry. Poetry in common language can challenge oppressors by combining religious and spiritual teachings with social criticism. For this reason, *Saif ul Malook* remains popular today due to these very characteristics. Mian Muhammad Bakhsh highlighted the importance of the on-going struggle for equality and social justice in society through his poetry. Observing his work can aid in further research on the role of poetry, helping to understand how poetry in common language can mobilize people, encourage collective action, and promote equality against organized oppression.

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