



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page#. 2787-2796

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)



Analysis of Translation Techniques in the English Version of Bulleh Shah's Poem “Bullah Ki Jana Mn Kon” Translated by Parvez Iqbal Anjum

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Abstract

The research article examines the challenges and opportunities involved in translating Punjabi Sufi poetry, with a particular focus on the works of Bulleh Shah. It investigates how themes such as self-awareness, spiritual exploration, and cultural identity are addressed in translated poetry. The study analyzes various translation strategies, including borrowing, amplification, and modulation, to navigate the complexities of translating texts rich in cultural and linguistic heritage while preserving their original essence. By translating Bulleh Shah's poetry into English, the paper explores the methods used to convey the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of the original text. Through qualitative analysis, the research sheds light on how these techniques capture the nuanced meanings and cultural contexts of the Punjabi text. The findings aim to improve the understanding of the translation process within literary studies and assess the effectiveness of these techniques in conveying the intended meanings to an English-speaking audience.

Keywords: Sufi poetry, Self-awareness, Spiritual exploration, Nuanced meanings, Punjabi text, Intended meanings

Introduction

Translation plays a crucial role in language learning by enabling learners to effectively convert text from a source language to a target language. Mastering this skill is essential for improving language competence and performance. Language learning activities are designed to provide learners with the necessary skills and attributes for various contexts (Suprayitno et al., 2019). Translation helps students grasp and communicate in both their native language and the new language they are acquiring. By translating words, phrases, and sentences, learners can enhance their language skills and gain proficiency in the new language.

Translation involves transferring the meaning of a language unit from one language to another, emphasizing the conveyance of meaning rather than achieving exact equivalence, identity, similarity, or correspondence between languages (Newmark, 1991). It is not merely about finding direct translations but ensuring that the overall message is preserved. The core idea of the text remains intact.

The process of translation is complex, requiring consideration of linguistic, semantic, and cultural aspects of both the source and target texts. Newmark (1988) categorizes translation into four types: (1) "communicative translation," (2) "free translation," (3) "literary translation," and (4) "semantic translation" (pp. 46-47). Translators must account for the meaning of the text and the cultural context in which it was written. By considering these types, translators can select the most effective approach to convey the original text's meaning in a way that is meaningful in the target language.

Punjabi mystic poetry, deeply rooted in the Punjabi mystic tradition, deserves global recognition. Shafiq (2019) notes that Punjabi Sufi literature holds unparalleled appeal for native speakers, and Punjabi was ranked the 10th most spoken language in the world in 2015. This rich tradition, originating from Punjab in South Asia, should be shared internationally. Punjabi mystic poetry is highly valued and needs to be presented to a global audience. Bulleh Shah, a revered Punjabi Sufi poet, is known for his profound works exploring divine love, mysticism, and human existence. Translating his poetry into English involves more than just converting words; it requires a deep understanding of the cultural, philosophical, and spiritual elements of the original text. The challenge is to preserve the poetic essence and profound meanings while making the poetry accessible to a diverse global audience.

Bulleh Shah, a distinguished Punjabi poet, is celebrated for his reflections on the culture of Pakistani society. Associated with the Qadriya school of thought and a descendant of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he received spiritual guidance from Shah Inayat Qadri, focusing on self-knowledge and unity with God. Bulleh Shah's poetry centers on the theme of divine reunion, asserting the inseparable bond between humanity and the Creator. He advocates that serving humanity is akin to serving God, promoting love, humanity, and tolerance through his works. His poetry is esteemed as a high point of Sufi literature in Punjab (Alina Mazhar).

Bulleh Shah stands out as one of the greatest Punjabi Sufi poets, addressing Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus alike through his poetry. Due to his virtuous life and profound spiritual achievements, he is admired across communities in both India and Pakistan (Danish, 2014). His poetry underscores the importance of goodness and helping others as a form of serving God. Bulleh Shah's belief in the deep connection between humans and God is a recurring theme in his work. Renowned for his focus on love, humanity, and tolerance, his poems speak to a diverse audience, bridging religious and cultural divides. His profound spiritual insights and commitment to a life of virtue have earned him widespread affection and respect, resonating with people across different faiths and communities in both India and Pakistan.

Bulleh Shah is regarded as an enlightened soul, a perfect saint, and a true devotee of God and humanity (Puri & Shangari, 2010). His extraordinary spiritual connection and genuine concern for humanity set him apart as a beacon of hope and inspiration. His legacy of love and

understanding continues to inspire people from all backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of compassion, empathy, and spiritual enlightenment in our interactions with one another.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the various translation techniques employed in conveying the essence of Bulleh Shah's poetry in a translated work.
2. To elucidate the complexities and nuances encountered in translating culturally significant poetic texts.

Research Questions

1. What are the different translation techniques utilized in conveying the essence of Bulleh Shah's poetry in a translated work?
2. How do translators navigate the complexities and nuances encountered in translating culturally significant poetic texts like those of Bulleh Shah?

Literature Review

The poem "Bullah Ki Janna Mn Kon" by Baba Bulleh Shah addresses themes of freedom from oppression and rejects distinctions based on culture, caste, and religion. Bulleh Shah argued for the right of everyone to live peacefully and opposed the notion of superiority based on caste or religion. He believed that religion is not central to self-identity and that all religions are equal in the pursuit of God. For Bulleh Shah, sincerity of the inner self is crucial, and true self-discovery comes from a deep connection with God (Alina Mazhar). He emphasized that serving humanity is equivalent to serving God, and all religions play a similar role in the search for the divine.

Vahid (2004) asserts that poetry is inherently "untranslatable" and that translation often results in a loss of poetic elements. However, other critics argue that skilled translators can preserve, convey, and even enhance the original poetic qualities. A translator's expertise in both the source and target languages enables them to maintain the form and content of the original poem. Newmark (1988, p.5) describes translation as a subjective process where a translator interprets the source text according to their own perspective. This process involves transferring meaning through equivalent texts. Similarly, Hatim and Munday (2004) view translation as both a process and a product (p. 3). Holmes (2004) further divides translation into 'Pure' and 'Applied' methods, with Pure translation being categorized into descriptive and theoretical branches. Descriptive research, in turn, includes product, process, and function studies (p. 185). This study, focused on analyzing existing texts and translations, is oriented towards examining the product, which may involve describing a single target text or comparing multiple translations of the same source text. Bulleh Shah was critical of the distinctions made by religious authorities between Muslims and non-Muslims. His poetry often employs juxtaposition to highlight contrasts, such as the comparison of Moses and Pharaoh in "Bullah Ki Janna Mn Kon." Moses represents righteousness and the path of God, while Pharaoh symbolizes the dark, evil side of human nature. This juxtaposition, along with other contrasting images like pure versus impure and faithful versus non-believers, serves to illustrate various aspects of human nature and Islamic teachings (Alina Mazhar). Bulleh Shah's use of these contrasting images emphasizes different facets of human nature and spiritual concepts.

Translation involves conveying meaning from a source language to a target language. The choice of translation technique is crucial for accurately transferring messages and is essential for translators to understand (Davis, 2004). Translation techniques, which can be applied at the level of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences, include a variety of methods depending on the contextual factors of both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Molina and Albir (2002:509-511) identify 18 translation techniques: 1. Adaptation; 2. Amplification (Addition); 3. Borrowing; 4. Calque; 5. Compensation; 6. Description; 7. Discursive Creation; 8. Established Equivalence; 9. Generalization; 10. Linguistic Amplification; 11. Linguistic Compression; 12. Literal Translation; 13. Modulation; 14. Particularization; 15. Reduction; 16. Substitution; 17. Transposition; and 18. Variation. This study will analyze the translation of Bulleh Shah's poem from Punjabi to English using these techniques to assess how effectively the translation conveys the original text's meaning and cultural context.

Methodology

This research conducts a qualitative analysis of the English translation of Bulleh Shah's poem, comparing the original Punjabi text with its English rendition. It examines the techniques used to convey meaning and cultural context, aiming to understand how these methods enhance the translation's effectiveness, particularly with poetry rich in cultural and spiritual elements. The study focuses on how these translation strategies address linguistic and cultural gaps, making the text more accessible and impactful for English-speaking readers.

The research offers a detailed qualitative analysis of Bulleh Shah's poem by comparing the original Punjabi version with its English translation. It investigates various techniques used to capture the poem's essence and cultural context. The primary goal is to evaluate how these techniques contribute to the translation's overall effectiveness, especially when translating poetry with deep cultural and spiritual significance from Punjabi to English. By employing specific methods, the study aims to bridge linguistic and cultural divides, making the text more accessible and resonant for English-speaking audiences. The analysis highlights the importance of preserving the original work's essence and authenticity while ensuring its relevance and impact in a new linguistic and cultural context.

Data Analysis

These techniques are essential for effectively conveying the original poem's philosophical and spiritual depth in a way that is comprehensible and resonates with an English-speaking audience. Here's a closer look at how these techniques are applied in the translation:

Stanza 1

Text from poem	Translation
بلہا کیہ جاناں میں کون نہ میں مومن وچ مسیتاں نہ میں وچ کفر دی ریت آں نہ میں پاکاں وچ پلپیت آں نہ میں موسیٰ نہ فرعون آ	Bulleha least I know who am I? Neither am I a believer in mosque Neither have I trodden the infidels path Neither am I pious in sinful Nor I Moses in Pharaohs

Borrowing:

The term "Bulleha" is retained from the original text to preserve the cultural and poetic essence of Bulleh Shah's work. This term carries significant cultural and contextual weight in Punjabi Sufi poetry, where Bulleh Shah is a revered figure.

Literal Translation:

Anjum's translation mirrors the original text's structure and wording closely, preserving Bulleh Shah's language. However, this approach might result in a translation that seems somewhat stilted or redundant in English, as it does not fully capture the poetic rhythm and quality of the original Punjabi.

Adaptation:

In the adapted translation, "Bulleh does not know who he is; explore the depths of your own heart," the text is made more readable and fluent in English. This version avoids the repetitiveness of the original, making the message more engaging. However, adaptation modifies the repeated structure and might slightly alter the poem's rhythmic and emphatic style.

Cultural Substitution:

The translation retains "Bullah" and the concept of searching the heart without substituting specific cultural references. By keeping these elements, it maintains the cultural and spiritual essence of Bulleh Shah's message. Readers unfamiliar with Bulleh Shah or Punjabi Sufism might need additional context to fully appreciate the significance.

Cultural Explication:

Adding an explanatory note, such as "Bulleh Shah is a revered Sufi poet who explores themes of self-identity and spiritual introspection," helps provide necessary context for understanding the poem's cultural and spiritual significance. While this addition aids comprehension, it can also complicate the translation and disrupt the poem's immediate impact.

Stanza 2

Text from poem	Translation
بلہا کیہ جاناں میں کون نہ میں وچ پلیتی پاکی نہ وچ شادی نہ غمناکی نہ میں آبی نہ خاکی نہ میں آتش نہ وچ پون	Bulleha least I know who am I ? Nothing I have to do with piety or putrescence Nor am I in pleasure or grief Neither am I of water nor of earth Neither am I of fire nor of air

Literal Translation:

Literal translation aims for a word-for-word rendering that stays as close as possible to the original text. Anjum's translation largely adheres to this approach. For example, "Bulleh, least I know who am I?" is a direct translation of "بلہے کی جانے میں کون". Similarly, "Neither am I of water nor of earth" reflects a literal rendering of "نہ پانی دانہ مٹی دا". This method preserves the original structure and vocabulary, making it easier to trace back to the source text. However, it can sometimes result in awkward phrasing or the loss of certain nuances.

Free Translation:

Free translation focuses on conveying the overall meaning rather than adhering strictly to the original wording. Phrases like "Nothing I have to do with piety or putrescence" exemplifies this approach. The terms "piety" and "putrescence" are interpretive choices used to express the concept of detachment from material and spiritual concerns, rather than providing a direct translation. This method helps convey the poem's essence and broader meaning, making it more accessible and understandable to readers unfamiliar with the original cultural or linguistic context.

Transliteration:

Transliteration involves converting text phonetically from one script to another, usually for proper nouns and terms without direct translation. In this case, there is no use of transliteration. Instead, the translator opts to translate concepts rather than retaining the original terms in their native script.

Cultural Substitution:

Cultural substitution replaces specific cultural references with those more familiar to the target audience. Anjum's translation does not heavily employ this technique. It remains relatively true to the cultural context of Bulleh Shah's poetry, aiming for a faithful representation rather than altering cultural references to suit the target audience.

Modulation:

Modulation involves changing the perspective or form of the message to better suit the target language. For instance, "Nor am I in pleasure or grief" can be seen as a modulation that fits the English linguistic and cultural context. This phrase captures the essence of detachment from emotions, which is central to the poem. Modulation helps convey the intended meaning while adapting to the nuances of the target language.

Stanza 3

Text from poem	Translation
بلھا کیہ جاناں میں کون نہ میں بھیبت مذہب داپایا نہ میں آدم خواجایا نہ کچھ اپنا نام دھرایا نہ وچ بھیمین نہ وچ بھون	Bulleha least I know who am I ? Neither I found the secret of religion Nor was I born of Adam or Eve Neither I gave me any name Neither am I of those who squat Nor I have to do with dwelling.

Literal Translation:

Literal translation involves translating text as directly as possible from the source language to the target language, maintaining the original structure and word choice. Anjum's translation employs this approach in several instances:

- "Bulleha least I know who am I?" is a direct translation of "بلھے کی جانے میں کون".
- "Neither I found the secret of religion" translates "نہ میں مذہب دے راز لھے" with minimal alteration.
- "Nor was I born of Adam or Eve" mirrors "نہ میں آدم خواں دی نسل توں" closely.

- "Neither I gave me any name" follows "نہ میں خود نوں کوئی نام دتا" directly.

This approach stays close to the original text, facilitating the traceability of meaning. However, it may lead to somewhat awkward phrasing or a lack of natural flow in the target language.

Free Translation:

Free translation focuses on conveying the overall meaning and essence of the original text, rather than adhering closely to the exact wording. Anjum's translation incorporates this strategy in some parts:

- "Neither I gave me any name" adapts "نہ میں خود نوں کوئی نام دتا" to fit the target language, though it could be more fluid.
- "Neither am I of those who squat" interprets "نہ میں اوہناں وچوں جنہاں بٹھن", aiming to capture the essence of detachment from worldly practices.

This strategy ensures that the core message is conveyed effectively, making the text more accessible and comprehensible to the target audience, even if the exact wording differs.

Cultural Substitution:

Cultural substitution involves replacing cultural references with those more familiar to the target audience. Anjum's translation does not heavily utilize this technique. It remains faithful to the original cultural context and terminology, reflecting the Sufi themes without altering them for a Western audience.

Modulation:

Modulation involves adjusting the perspective or form of the expression to better suit the target language's norms:

- "Neither am I of those who squat" reflects a modulation from "نہ میں اوہناں وچوں جنہاں بٹھن". This phrase is adapted to be more understandable in English, though the original term refers to a specific cultural practice of sitting or meditating.

Modulation helps adapt the translation to the idiomatic expressions of the target language, making the content more relatable while preserving the intended meaning.

Adaptation:

Adaptation involves modifying the text to better align with the target culture's norms and expectations. Anjum's translation shows minimal adaptation. The terms and references are translated in a way that maintains their original meaning and cultural relevance, without significant alteration to fit the target culture's context.

Stanza 4

Text from poem	Translation
بلھا کیہ جاناں میں کون اول آخر آپ نوں جاناں نہ کوئی دو جاہور پہچاناں میتھوں ہو نہ کوئی سیانا بلھا شوہ کھڑا ہے کون؟	Bulleha least I know who am I? From the beginning to the end I know nothing but me Nobody else I recognize and found Nobody else more sage than thee Bulleha who Spouse is around

Literal Translation:

This strategy involves translating the text word-for-word, aiming to stay as close as possible to the original text's structure and wording. Anjum's translation employs this approach in several instances:

- *"Bulleha least I know who am I?" is a literal translation of "بُلّھے کی جانے میں کون", aiming to preserve the original structure.*
- *"From the beginning to the end" translates "آغاز توں لے کے انت تک" directly, maintaining the time span's meaning.*
- *"I know nothing but me" mirrors "میں نوں کچھ نہیں پتا، بس خودی", providing a direct translation of self-knowledge.*

This approach preserves the original meaning and form, making it easier to trace the text back to its source. However, it can occasionally result in awkward phrasing or unnatural English.

Free Translation:

This strategy focuses on conveying the overall meaning and intent of the text rather than adhering closely to the original wording. Examples from Anjum's translation include:

- *"Nobody else I recognize and found" adapts "کوئی ہو میں نہ جاناں، نہ لہیا" into a more fluid English expression, though it may deviate from the original phrasing.*
- *"Nobody else more sage than thee" translates "کوئی ہو بُلّھے توں وڈھا نہیں" by capturing the idea that no one is wiser than the speaker, while altering the literal phrasing.*

Free translation helps to communicate the text's essence and meaning more naturally in English, making it more accessible and fluid.

Cultural Substitution:

This involves replacing cultural references with terms or concepts that are more familiar to the target audience. In Anjum's translation:

- There is minimal cultural substitution. The translation maintains the original terms and concepts, such as those related to religious and philosophical ideas, preserving the cultural context.

The minimal use of cultural substitution helps retain the original cultural and philosophical nuances of Bulleh Shah's poetry, which is crucial for maintaining the text's authentic meaning.

Modulation:

Modulation entails changing the perspective or form of expression to better fit the target language. For instance:

- *"Bulleha who Spouse is around" translates "بُلّھے، کہہ سڑاں کون؟" and represents a modulation that attempts to convey the original question about Bulleh Shah's understanding of his existential relationship. The term "Spouse" is used to make an abstract concept more tangible in English.*

Modulation is used to adapt the concept to a more understandable form for English speakers, even if it slightly deviates from the original term's connotation.

Adaptation:

Adaptation involves modifying the translation to align with the target culture's norms and expectations. In Anjum's translation:

- There is minimal adaptation. The translation retains the original spiritual and philosophical context, making only slight adjustments to ensure clarity.

Subtle adaptation helps make the translation more relatable without altering the poem's core message, preserving its original meaning and cultural depth. Anjum's translation demonstrates a balanced approach, combining literal and free translation strategies to maintain the meaning and cultural significance of Bulleh Shah's poetry while making it accessible to English readers.

Suggestions:

The use of different techniques in translating Bulleh Shah's poem underscores the importance of adaptation in poetry translation. Each technique plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between languages and cultures. This analysis suggests that careful consideration of these techniques can enhance translation quality, ensuring that the essence of the original text is preserved while making it accessible to a broader audience. Future research could explore additional translation techniques and their impact on other culturally rich texts. Comparative studies of different translations could further illuminate the effectiveness of various strategies in preserving the original text's essence.

Conclusion

The analysis of the translation techniques employed in Parvez Iqbal Anjum's English version of Bulleh Shah's poem "Bullah Ki Jana Mn Kon" reveals the intricate challenges and creative strategies involved in translating Punjabi Sufi poetry. This study emphasizes that translation is not just a linguistic task but a complex cultural and philosophical process aimed at preserving the original's essence while making it accessible to a wider audience.

Anjum's approach reflects a thoughtful balance of various techniques, including borrowing, literal translation, adaptation, and modulation. Each of these methods helps bridge linguistic and cultural divides, allowing the poem's profound themes of self-identity, spiritual exploration, and universal love to resonate with English-speaking readers. Maintaining the cultural nuances and philosophical depth of Bulleh Shah's work is crucial for conveying the intended meanings and fostering a deeper understanding of Sufi traditions.

The findings highlight that while some subtleties may be lost in translation, adept translators can successfully communicate the core messages and cultural significance of such rich texts. This research contributes to the broader field of literary studies, emphasizing the role of translation as a vital means of cultural exchange and showcasing the enduring relevance of Bulleh Shah's messages in promoting love, tolerance, and humanity across diverse cultural contexts. Ultimately, the study calls for ongoing efforts to introduce Punjabi Sufi poetry to global audiences, recognizing its universal themes and profound spiritual insights.

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