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## Sufism in the Digital Age: A study of Fareed's Poetry

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### Abstract

Sufi poetry is a very inspiring facet of Sufism that has deep penetration in lovers of God. Muslim saints, through their poetry, have spread the spiritual message very effectively that has formed immortal impacts on the followers. Their famous Sufi poetry is generally listened in religious gathering at the occasion of Sufi death anniversary called *Urs* or in Sufi folk festivals and gatherings since centuries. However, in this new millennium, the widespread use of mobile phone and ultra-fast internet connectivity has made social media the part and parcel of life for the means of communication. Social media users habitually share likeable content in the forms of text, photos and videos to engage the community. This paper calls attention to the Sufi poetry that is shared on the most popular platform, Facebook, through the content analysis of the most famous and influential Sufi poet of Saraiki language, Khawaja Ghulam Fareed, to find out the themes of the poetry and its penetration among the users. In summary, the findings of our study revealed the great mystical messages, divine knowledge, and depiction of natural beauty and romance in his poetry. Further, the results found a significant traffic as well on the particular page.

**Keywords:** Khawaja Ghulam Fareed, Sufi poetry, Sufism, Social media, Facebook.

### Introduction

Sufi poetry, an inspiring facet of Sufism, has greater penetration into the lovers of God. Muslim saints, through their poetry, have spread the spiritual message very effectively and formed immortal impacts on the followers. Their famous poetry was generally heard in religious gatherings at the occasion of Sufi death anniversary called *Urs* or in Sufi folk festivals and gatherings since centuries. However, in the recent times, the digital age has moved the world online, and we can see that the presentation of Sufism is also increasing on digital platforms day by day. We can find out Sufi books and treatises, original and translated, on different websites created by the educational, social and Sufi organizations. Some organizations are also providing content of Sufi poets in different languages and launching their mobile applications as well<sup>1</sup>.

A lot of video content is also available and is uploaded through specific or general platforms like YouTube, and a number of promotional pages have been created around the world on Facebook by Sufi followers and lovers to propagate Sufi message and ideology which is

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further going to make global public sphere. Even live Sufi congregations are aired through social media to involve devotees and disciples around the globe<sup>2,3</sup>. In this background, this study has attempted to investigate the message of the poetry and social media traffic on the selected Facebook page of Khawaja Ghulam Fareed (1845-1901); a great mystic, Sufi scholar and well known traveler in the history of Sufism of South Punjab<sup>4,5</sup>.

### Literature review

In recent times people around the globe depend on social media to fulfill their needs. Similarly, social networking penetration in Pakistan is increasing significantly since the last decade, 3% to 20.6% from 2011 to 2021<sup>6</sup> and part of Facebook user is very high, 88%<sup>7,8</sup>. It is evident that media has become an institution in the contemporary society. *"Mass media, interactive media and combinations hereof have become commonplace, natural components of everyday life such as education, politics, family life and religion"*. Further, smartphone technology has accelerated the pace of media activity and social interaction, and *Media have become integrated into the workings of almost all types of social institutions at the same time as they have become responsible for the general society's public as well as private communication. It is precisely through this social integration that media may exert their influence and be implicated in the transformation of social institutions, including religion*<sup>9</sup>.

Mystical poetry always influenced human beings and created a great impact on their lives, attitude and beliefs, and the *Qawwali*, a musical performance of Sufi poetry, is very famous since centuries that can be traced out by 13<sup>th</sup> century, credited to Amir Khusrau who was the court musician of the Turkish Sultan of Delhi, Alaaddin Khilji and the disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya. Sufis' poetry and music arouse mystical love and spirituality in listeners, and *Qawwali* is considered a path to attain *Wajd*, spiritual ecstasy. Sufi poetry throughout the Muslim world made Sufi saints immortal due to the deep penetration of their poetry among the masses<sup>10,11</sup>. Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), Saadi Shirazi (1210-1291) and Nuruddin Jami (1414-1492) were illustrious Sufi poets in the history of Sufism whose work inspired millions of the people<sup>12</sup>. Sufi poetry has become a great source of inspiration for the local and global communities where these Sufis poets revealed their stance and inner feelings about love, spiritual exposures, political instabilities and social problems<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly, Sufi poets of Punjab, Shah Hussain (1538-1599), Sultan Bahu (1630-1691), Bulhe Shah (1680-1757), Waris Shah (1722-1798) and Khawaja Ghulam Fareed (1845-1901), are revered not only among the people of sub-continent irrespective of religion but they are also very famous in historians, researchers and lovers of Sufi poetry in the entire world. Their poetry is still very popular even after passage of the centuries. Their poetry propagate devotional love, mystical ideas, and spiritual education. They believe that asceticism and divine love could be achieved under the guidance of a spiritual master. They were inspired to the philosophy of Ibn-e-Arabi, Wahdat-ul-Wujud (Unity of Being), and condemned the lovers of mundane life and described proximity to Allah as an aim of the life. They stressed that inner purification is the only way to achieve the reality of the life. Moreover, their poetry has social, political and religious metaphors of his particular time and place, and they have expressed his disappointment towards the orthodox Islamic scholars in his several verses<sup>14,15,16</sup>.

These Sufi poets contributed a lot for the mystical love and divine blessings and they are also considered as stimulating agent against social cruelties and norms<sup>17</sup>. Panjabi Sufi poets in

their work with "the Unity of Being" expressed problems of the oppressed community as well and created harmony among different religions too. They criticized political cruelties and economic injustice of the rulers that is why communities of all major religions of that time Hindu, Muslim and Sikh paid tributes to them and they became the voice of the region.

### Research on Fareed

Fareed appeared as a great mystic, Sufi poet and intellectual to researchers and at present, Khawaja Ghulam Fareed has become a very popular topic among the scholars of mysticism and Sufism in South Punjab. His poetry in Saraiki language is considered the best source to probe local historical cultural values. His Saraiki poetry is regarded as the prototype of Saraiki language due to its fundamental vocabulary, accent, signs, and terminologies. He wrote poetry in Urdu, Persian, Hindi, Sindhi, Arabic and Purbi language, thus, he was truly called polyglot. His Urdu poetry *Diwan* is also available whose several poems need authentication, however, Saraiki poetry is his identity and critics expressed caliber of his Saraiki poetry equivalent to the well-known poets of the world.

Several prominent social scientists of South Punjab and Sindh like Sheikh Saeed, Dr. Anwar Ahmad, Dr. G. A. Alana, Dr. Shahid Hasan, Dr. Qazi Abid, Dr. Aslam Ansari, Khursheed Alam, Mujahid Jatoi, Dr. Abdul Jabbar Junejo etc. are working on his poetry and personality to describe different dimensions of his great work. Khursheed Alam in his article expressed that until 2000 almost hundred books were published about Khawaja Ghulam Fareed and his poetry in Pakistan and India<sup>18</sup>. Nowadays, several new books are also available which express the significance of this illustrious Sufi poet. Moreover, he is also considered internationally and recent research of Shackle in a book chapter, *Punjabi Sufi Poetry from Fareed to Fareed*, published in an edited book, *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice*, of Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir in 2012 investigated his poetry.

Fareed has focused two main features, divine love, and natural beauty. He was influenced by Sufi wisdom of Ibn-e-Arabi, particular to the doctrine of *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* and he has recognized Ibn-e-Arabi's philosophy as his spiritual guide. He expressed the love of God and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as well as uncertainty and fragility of the world that stimulate the listeners towards real love (Love of God), spiritual emotions and purification of inner-self. Fareed interpreted the world as illusion and presented the concept of an ideal man called '*Mard-e-Qalandar*'<sup>19</sup>. He also addresses piety, humbleness and pardon which takes a man into the circle of humanity irrespective of religion, sect, color, race and society<sup>20</sup>. Fareed's poetry eliminates religious narrow-mindedness and raises voice for women rights and as well as against tyranny<sup>21</sup>.

It is evident that Sufi is the most sensitive man of the universe whose poetry interprets the privileged mood, feelings, emotions and values, and we can find optimism and as well as sadness in his poetry. But he called worries temporary and addressed to struggle for happiness. He illustrated obstacles of love but said to never give up due to difficulties<sup>22</sup>. But, the first and utmost quality of his poetry is optimism. His message of hope and struggle to overcome temporary worries is appreciated. He exemplified life as a journey; and said that man tackles all difficulties in a journey due to longing of destination, and difficulties are inferior as compared to his goal. He used folk stories to explain sincerity and faithfulness in love. Several lines of his celebrated poems have become idioms in everyday life and *Yar*

Fareed is a sign of beloved of his poetry like other folklore characters of *Sanwal*, *Dhola* and *Mahi*. He also utilized feminine accent and *Sassi* was his favorite character.

Fareed immortalized *Rohi* to use the metaphor of desert for expressing diverse themes particularly colors of the life and the monsoon weather that evoked feelings and thoughts of natural beauty. He describes preview of the desert, desolated ruins, forests, camel caravans, field of sand and aesthetic beauty of '*Rohi*'<sup>23</sup>. His poetry prompts love to the motherland but the depiction of grieve in his poetry is the universal truth which came from sorrows and problems of the residents. He spent 18 years of his life in the desert of Cholistan, locally known as *Rohi* that was most significant part of his life, and expressed the spirit of living with one another in peace. Fareed preferred *Kafi* style and used an attractive combination of *Kafiya* and *Radeef* (rhyme and refrain). The genre of '*Kafi*' of Saraiki, Sindhi and Balochi poetry has a great impression of '*Tasawuf*'<sup>24</sup>.

### Methodology

This is an exploratory research, the methodology opted for this research is mixed methodology. The mixed methodology refers that structure which opted both quantitative and qualitative method for data collection and analysis in one study. This study has attempted to investigate the Facebook page created for poetry of Khawaja Ghulam Fareed named as "*Kalam-e- Fareed*", and evaluated the posts in terms of views, likings and shares for quantitative purpose and implemented the method of thematic analysis for qualitative purpose. The universe of the current research is the content uploaded on the page "*Kalam-e-Fareed*" during the era from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020.

### Data Analysis

This section encompasses the results and interpretation of the investigation conducted in terms of textual and visual elements of the Facebook page of "*Kalam-e-Fareed*". This study has analyzed the poetry of Khawaja Ghulam Fareed (1845-1901). His poetry is also listened and relished in social and religious gatherings for pleasure and to attain full attention to their beloved, God. *Qawwali* performers present famous poetry in Arabic, Persian and Urdu language of Sufis of entire Muslim world and focus their theme of "the Unity of Being"; however, folk festivals performances concentrate local esteemed Sufi poets, Sultan Bahu and Khawaja Ghulam Fareed, whose poetry has become a great source of inspiration for the local communities. Singers revealed Sufi stance and inner feelings about devotional love, mystical ideas, spiritual exposures, political instabilities and social problems. Even, Sufi circles and devotees sang their poetry in religious assemblies and Sufi gatherings for spiritual exercises. Their poetry has a message of asceticism and divine love and describes proximity to God as an aim of the life. It stresses that inner purification is the only way to achieve the reality of the life. Their poetry is inspired to the Sufi wisdom of Ibn-e-Arabi, particularly to the doctrine of *Wahdat-ul-Wujud* (Unity of Being); even, Fareed recognized Ibn-e-Arabi's philosophy as his spiritual guide.

With the passage of the time due to the advancement of technology and hectic schedule time is becoming the barrier to attend such sort of events, so many aspects of our daily routine matter is depending on social media and it became a digital sphere. Like other activities existing on social media to cater different facet of life same as many pages regarding Sufism

are existing in the digital media to entertain the people who have a passion in this realm. So in this research, the researcher do the analysis and the interpretation of text and visual elements of one the page occurred on Facebook of Khawaja Ghulam Fareed named as "*Kalam-e-Fareed*".

### Quantitative Findings

The poetry of Ghulam Fareed which were uploaded on the Facebook page named "*Kalam -e-Fareed*" during the era of 1s January 2020 to 31 December 2020 were analyzed on the basis of number of likings, sharing & viewership of posts for quantitative purpose.

No	Titles	Views	Likes	Shares
	Ki haal sunawan dil da	8 K	164	226
1.	Peeloun Pakyyan	5.2K	110	125
2.	Sanwal Mor Mahran	5 K	145	147
3.	Ishq anokhri peer	3.1K	144	96
4.	Jeevan dheen udhai vad yar	2.7K	124	43
5.	Nainna Layyun Karran	2.2K	71	63
6.	Jeevan day adhai	2.2K	103	36
7.	Nainah layun karan	2.2K	71	63
8.	Sassi a kr hoon	1.5K	77	40
9.	Sohnriyan koo hain	1.5K	76	43

Based on the documentation that has been done, obtained from the Facebook page "*Kalam-e- Fareed*", the most record gaining post of Fareed on this page during this era is "Ki Haal sunawaan dil da" which posted on 5 July 2020 gain 8k views, 164 likes and 226 shares. The second most utmost post of Fraeed on this page is "Peeloun Pakyyan" which posted on 8 May 2020 which got 5.2k views, 110 likes and 125 shares. Same as after this the reward gaining post is "Sanwal Mor Mahran" posted on 2 May 2020 which got 5k views, 145 likes and 147 shares.

Among these posts the post "Nainna Layyun Karran" and "Jeevan day adhai" also gain remarkable views and likes. These figures depicted that Fareed has become a very popular topic among the scholars of mysticism and Sufism in South Punjab.

### Qualitative Findings

Qualitative content analysis is the method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. Researcher has also implemented the qualitative analysis method and do the interpretation of text through devising the thematic analysis. The developed themes are as under:

1. Divine Love
2. Natural Beauty
3. Romance

No	Themes	Title	Illustration
1	Divine Love	<p>"Har soorat wich away yaar nazar"</p> <p>"Kya haal sunawan dil da"</p>	<p>Illustrated about the feelings of love when you fall in real love only thing you see is the face of your beloved.</p> <p>Narrated his mystic experiences of oneness with Allah through a description of lover's anguished wails when separated from partner.</p>
2	Natural Beauty	<p>"a choonoun ral yaar peeloun pakyyan ni vay"</p> <p>"Roohi vathri, toobah taar vay"</p>	<p>Illustrated about the beauty of land associated with the season of a fruit named Peeloun and that how that land turned into heaven with ripen of this fruit.</p> <p>Depicting about beauty of spring season of Rohi Desert, when ponds fill with water and plants bloom, and hustle bustle of birds fill the life with happiness.</p>
3	Romance	<p>"Shah Ranjha albaila"</p> <p>"a choonoun ral yaar peeloun pakyyan ni we"</p>	<p>Illustrated about the feeling of Love by nominating Ranjha as Prince who desperately wants to win his beloved "Heer" despite having all super-natural powers.</p> <p>Depicting the feeling of romance with the association of gathering of beautiful women over the fields for picking of fruit.</p>

### Divine Love

The school of thought regarding divine love varies across the different spheres of the world but this concept of divine love with the perspective of relationship of World with God implemented across the world. Divine love refers such sort of love which has enormous power of attraction and which has the ability to bring peace inside and outside the world. In most of his poetry, Fareed mainly focused on the feature of divine love. He narrates his mystic experience of oneness with Allah through a description of a lover's anguished wails. Like in his poetry "*Ki haal sunawan dil da*" he illustrated that lovers' wailed when he separated from his partner, in this he refers partner to God. He also described that if I will not be able to find you in my heart then to whom should I tell the condition of my heart, no one except you can give me the sooths.

In other poem named "*Hr soorat wich away yaar nazar*" he again demonstrated about the feelings of divine blessings by depicting the love in form of preacher. He tried to narrate that if you fell in love in real terms than your love means God will be your spiritual guide and you can see his blessings in every little entity and if you fail to do so you can't get the real destination.

### Natural Beauty

Natural beauty usually refers to such sort of scenes and aesthetic beauty which lies in environment and in our surroundings which gives a pleasant and an alluring feeling to the viewers. It also depends upon the viewers that which sort of environment appeals him, as

Fareed immortalized Rohi to use the metaphor of desert for expressing its life and weather that arouse love and affection of natural beauty.

He expresses his love for natural beauty in most of his poetry like "*Peeloun Pakyyan*" where he described the natural beauty with the help of ripen of fruit named peeloun also illustrated that when this fruit get ripen and the farm gets full of the fruit it gives a very magnetism scene and people came around to pick this fruit and a sort of get together occurred in the farms and people do contact each other it is also a part of our culture which arose a beauty and gives immense pleasure.

In another one of his famous poetry entitled "*Roohi vathri, toobah taar vay*" in which poet builds an association of splendor by depicting the beauty of spring season where fullness of ponds with water and plants and chirpings of birds presenting a charming feeling to the viewers.

### Romance

It refers to such sort of feelings and action of the people who are usually in a relationship with each other, especially such sort of relationship in which both do have a feeling of love and association for each other but without the relationship of marriage. With regards, Fareed's poetry mostly highlighted the feelings of alienation and belongings in his poetry. Although his poetry associated with romance among the partners. With reference to one of his Kafi entitled "*Shah Ranjha albaila*" in which Ranjha connote as a hero with majestically powers, and despite all of his extra-ordinary powers he wanted to use these supremacy qualities to win his beloved Heer. The Kafi depicted that though an individual has a supernatural powers seem to be useless if he will not be able to win his love.

In another Kafi named with "*A choonoun ral yaar peeloun pakyyan ni we*" in which the poet again depicting the association of gathering of beautiful women over the fields with the romance. The poet characterize the feature of beautiful women as honed weaponry that is related with struck the heart.

### Discussion

Impact of Sufism on South Punjab is very visible and deep rooted. Muslim saints and their work not only impressed the religious aspect of the society but they also influenced philosophy and norms of the region. Sufi lodges and festivities are the inspiring part of religious, social and political life of the folks since centuries; where *Sama*, an assembly of Sufi poetry, is a very popular part of the propagation of Sufi ideology. Sufi poetry is considered a source of divine love and blessing, and peace of mind and the poets of South Punjab are the source of aspiration for the local community.

One of them is Khawaja Ghulam Fareed who have introduced this region in the world with the message of self-recognition and God-recognition. His poetry addresses love of God and Prophet (PBUH), pure Sufi concept of love, piety, humbleness, pardon, uncertainty of world and optimism. Fareed's poetry is an agent of stimulation towards real love (Love of God), spiritual emotions and purification of inner-self. A famous scholar, Mujahid Jatoti, elaborating his poetry expressed Sufi poet the most sensitive man of the universe because his poetry interprets the privileged mood, feelings, emotions and values. He added that Fareed's poetry leads towards spiritual growth and takes man into the circle of humanity rather than religion,

sect, color, race and society.

Moreover, the theme of nature in his poetry made him unique among the Sufi poets. Khawaja Fareed immortalized ancient belongings of *Rohi* and its weather, plants, insects, animal, birds, culture and mood of life. His camping and traveling in the desert of Cholistan, *Rohi*, evoked feelings and thoughts of natural beauty. Expressing nature, he used metaphor of desert for diverse themes, particularly, regarding its colorful life. He used names of unknown herbs which make them well-known<sup>25</sup> that left wide-ranging effects on the local language.

Furthermore, romance is another famous features of his poetry. He used folk stories to explain sincerity and faithfulness in love<sup>26</sup>, and 'Sassi', female character of the famous folklore 'Sassi Punhun' of Sindh, was his favorite character. His poetry illustrated obstacles of love but never gave up due to difficulties. We can find sadness, sorrows, separation, and as well as optimism in his poetry; he called worries temporary and addressed to struggle for happiness (Rizvi, 2004). It is obvious that depiction of grief in his poetry is universal truth which came from sorrows of the region<sup>27</sup>. Scholars stated that his natural thinking and its fascinating effectiveness reflect the mood of the South Punjab. His poetry eliminates narrow-mindedness and raises voice for women.

### Conclusion

Ghulam Fareed is a mystical poet which receives a huge amount of recognition in Sufism among other scholars. Khawaja Fareed expresses Sufi poetry in the form of love of God in two main features divine love and natural beauty. Sufi poetry is the great inspiration for expressing feeling regarding religious and spiritual exercise that purifies the reality of life. Social platforms are now allowing people to express their feelings in the way of communication. In the modern era where other activities took place on social platform, social media also have greater interpretation of life which showed in the ways of poetry. In this study, "*Kalam e Fareed*" (Poetry of Fareed), a Facebook page was analyzed which took a huge amount of attention among people because people still believe on traditional cosmology where people think that God is reachable through spiritual moderator and they see God as their real preacher which is to believe that getting his blessings can make them succeed in life as human society still require guardians and spiritual lead for the hope to thrive. According to thematic analysis, people appreciate poetry by interpreting it in three different meanings such as divine love which is taken as love of God, love for the land and for the loved ones.

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