

Re-thinking Folkloristic Subjectivity as Queer Spiritual Discourse in *Saif-ul-Malook*

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Abstract *The intersection of folk narratives with queer spirituality presents an ontological displacement of subjectivity triggered by an inquiry towards the nature of identity. Decentering of identity to the extent of modification of the self into a trans-human relationship mediated through love between a fairy and a man is a queer spiritual experience which creates anti-normative spaces hitherto celebrated in folklores. This paper explores societal oppressive apparatuses fore-grounded in assertive religious discourse forcing people to seek reliance against such faith-based norms in folkloristic tradition and to create spaces where their sexuality is celebrated rather than condemned. Saif-ul-Malook is the folk narrative in the regional literature of Punjab by Mian Muhammad Bukhsh (1830-1907). It describes the love tale of a Prince with a fairy. Positioning queer subjectivities amidst a metaphysical worldview is an attempt of resorting to inner conflict of self through gender and sexuality. By separating spirituality as sociological discourse from discursive religious practices, our paper investigates queer spirituality in different folkloristic forms on experiential standards than that of belief systems.*

Key Words:
Queer Spirituality, Folkloristic Subjectivity, Trans-human relationship, Metaphysical World View, Empirical Praxis

Introduction

Literary folk traditions often celebrate the silent spaces and non-vocalized experiences of less privileged sections of society, particularly those that transgress religious norms. In Punjabi Muslim communities, where the mixing of men and women is highly controlled, fairytales can help create space for documenting and imagining violations of these codes in a non-threatening way. This queering of gender identities and practices shown through analysis of Mian Muhammad Bukhsh's *Saif-ul-Malook* parallels much of the discourse of queer theory across the Global North. While on the surface this is distinct from Global North discussions of homosexuality and of transgender identities. Queer theory in Punjabi folklore becomes a tool for understanding and reimagining how men and women are defined, separated, and controlled in our community. The projection of a trans-human love relationship between a fairy and a prince by writers like Bukhsh creates a nexus between metaphysical and physical which queers not only gender identities but attempts to romanticize the self by discussing sexuality as a part of human experience which has usually been confined to culturally sanctioned silence. According to the conventional dogmatic belief system, sexuality is considered or discussed in opposition to spirituality of which the present paper presents a counter-narrative by exploring certain aspects of the trans-human love relationship of a prince with a fairy through queer spiritual discourse. Bukhsh tries to create spaces in the narrative of this tale under the veil of spirituality to celebrate curbed human passions of sexuality which societal and cultural barriers otherwise do not allow to be vocalized. The paper is an attempt to study queer spirituality in folkloristic literature with the deconstructive methodological approach of Michael Foucault on sexuality and queer theological perspective of Althaus-Reid (2000). As Carrette & Bernauer are of the opinion that Foucault critically and methodologically speaks for those sections of society which are categorized as silent. (Bernauer and Carrette 2004, 4). Similarly, Lynne Huffer writes about Foucault's claims about spirituality as given in *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, that Foucault asserts that primarily spirituality has an alliance with knowledge as a practice of knowing; the status and influence of the process of knowing contributes towards the transformation of the self of the subject (Huffer 2010, 258).

Saif-ul-Malook is an epic of Eastern folklore literary tradition written by Mian Muhammad Bukhsh (1830-1907). *Saif-ul-Malook* is the epic of folklore literature of eastern Punjab. Bukhsh wrote *Saif-ul-Malook* in 1279 and it was published in the year 1286. *Saif-ul-Malook* was reprinted with English translation after almost

one and half centuries by Prof Saeed Ahmad, the author of the Great Sufi Wisdom Series of books. I also translated some parts of this epic into English which was published in the form of an article in 2013 the link of which could be found in the bibliographical section of this paper as I mostly have used my own translated version of *Saif-ul-Malook* for this research. *Saif-ul-Malook* is rated as a classic in the oral tradition of folklore and folk singing in Punjab. As an epic, the work could be compared to Spenser's Faerie Queene on narrative grounds (my M.phil research is the comparative analysis of both these epics), to Rumi's poetic art thematically, and Homer's Iliad and Odyssey in lieu of cultural impact and epic structure. Farani claims that he has faith that if Buksh had written this tale in the Persian language, his stature as a Mystic poet would have not been less than Rumi's (Farani 2004, 11-12).

The story of *Saif-ul-Malook* is that the Prince Saif-ul-Malook, the single child of the king of Egypt Asim bin Sufwan, quite coincidentally sees two pictures emblazoned on two stamps of his royal heritage which his father presents to him as a gift. The prophet Suleiman/king Solomon who was the ruler of Jerusalem, Palestine during 970–931 BCE, and was mythically thought to be the king of fairies and jinni, had long ago presented those stamps to the forefathers of Prince Saif-ul-Malook as a token of friendship (again a mythical discourse). The prince, after looking at the pictures on the stamp astonishingly finds one of the pictures as his own and the other one is of a youthful and charming maiden with whom he falls in love at first sight and longs to find her anywhere on earth. His father, the king of Egypt in order to fulfil this desire, sends out many valiant and heroic soldiers of his army to find out the maiden but all come back unsuccessful sooner or later. After this the prince, one night happens to see the maiden in a dream. She introduces herself as queen of fairies and summons the prince to her fairyland simultaneously bewaring him of the awaiting hardships to arrive there. Prince Saif-ul-Malook goes out to find the fairy and in due course goes through many trials, facing numerous endeavours and performing many folkloric and mythically heroic actions, and reaches fairyland eventually to wed the Queen of Fairies. As for the historical background of the story of prophet Suleiman/King Solomon and its connection with the folk legend of *Saif-ul-Malook*, it is given in the Babylonian Talmud, the essential manuscript of Judaism and the fundamental book of Jewish theological law, Solomon, the king and prophet of God according to many myths was born in Israel. Solomon/prophet Suleiman is also reported to build the first Temple in Jerusalem. During his reign, Israel remained united and was at the height of majestic glory. The Bible gives many accounts of his wisdom. According to the biblical source which many take as myth, King [Solomon](#) was the third and last king in the ancient United Kingdom of [Israel](#). He was well known and reputed for his knowledge and insight, his creative writings, and the prestigious monuments built during his reign. King Solomon ruled almost 40 in Israel. King Solomon was also famous for his international exchange of royal gifts and marriages. One such most popularly reported example is Solomon's alliance with the [Queen of Sheba](#). According to Quran, the religious book of Muslims Suleiman was the son of Prophet Dawud/ David and, just like his father was greatly loved by Allah. Allah gifted Suleiman/Solomon with miracles that no other Prophet had: he had the miraculous power to communicate with all kinds of animals and birds, and he could command the wind. The jinn is unseen creatures of Allah, and Suleiman/Solomon was given the power to rule them too. Two points make this historical account of prophet Suleiman/King Solomon quite relevant to the narrative of the folk epic *Saif-ul-Malook*. Firstly, during the reign of Solomon Israel held a friendly international alliance with neighbouring kingdoms of which Egypt was one where the legendary/historical event of *Saif-ul-Malook* took place according to the narrative of the tale. Secondly, God had given prophet Suleiman/king Solomon miraculous power to command over jinn, demons and fairies.

The projection of this trans-human love relationship of a man with a fairy is an attempt on the part of the writer of this folk tale to create space under the thick layer of spirituality to celebrate the otherwise non-vocalized experience of sexuality considered 'queer' if situated amidst the theologically anti-normative discourse. By combining the study of such tales with queer spirituality and further with the Foucauldian approach, this research deals primarily with the deconstruction of the narrative construction of discourse that supports the cultural constructs to the question of how the study of religion/spirituality might be 'queered'? Through deconstructing the structural constructs of folk narratives, the tension between the normative silence and the vocalization of the culturally non-vocalized can be resolved as such mechanisms of queering recurrently involve an interruption of frequently build discourse of spiritual and sexual, metaphysical and physical initiating a process of re-signification of certain meanings. This is the only possible way of romanticizing the radical on the part of such writers as Bukhsh, who writes in a certain cultural and socio-theological discourse to generate a narrative of self-solace in order to celebrate their sexual experiences under the legitimate title of spirituality. Bukhsh, writing about the burning fire of human love for a maiden personifies the maiden with a fairy and gives it the signification of spirituality in order to get it legitimate and less controversial in a certain cultural tradition where the mixing of men and women is prohibited. He states in *Saif-ul-Malook*, the English translation of which is thus, "Without Divine love, your prayers are vile. If there is no burning fire of love in your heart and soul, you can never embrace the beloved Reality" (Syeda 2013, 752). In these lines, the writer gives ascendancy to love over piety and prayers but constructs the cocoon of Divinity and spirituality in order to make love and sexual attraction between opposite genders legitimate and uncontroversial. Such subjectivity of Bukhsh regarding the agency of human desires in *Saif-ul-Malook* invokes a queer spiritual discourse about the projection of a trans-human love relationship of a man with a fairy to reinforce a metaphysical worldview on empirical praxis. It is an attempt to create space for the vocalization of the silence; to give voice to such human passions which otherwise societal and theological oppressive apparatuses deem to consider controversial and anti-normative. In this sense, Foucault is applicable to Muslim spaces because Foucault's theoretical philosophy on sexuality is the philosophy of "silence" in order to break the silence of the oppressed and to vocalize their curbed passions of which folk narratives with

eastern cultural backgrounds can serve as case studies. Through folkloric queer constructs, such subjects have easily been presented as less 'queer' and more spiritual to the extent of celebration of self. Folklore literature creates space for outbursts of suffocating cultural oppression and provides justification of self-projection to the extent of romanticizing all that is otherwise considered 'queer' to the limits of objectionable within certain cultural boundaries. This paper investigates these folkloric constructs and narratives of signification in *Saif-ul-Malook* which indicates the connection between queer spirituality and sexuality to the extent of romanticizing the radical.

Literature Review

Re-thinking/re-imagining the intersection of folklore with queer spirituality tends to deconstruct the projection of self, sexuality and gender out of narrative discourse which otherwise cannot be clearly comprehended in the way it should be. The intersection of folk narratives with queer spirituality has its roots somewhere in the narrative theory dealing with the psychopathic solution of self and narration. Damasio (2010) speaks of the neuro-scientific justification of the construction of self as a story through the narrative. According to Victor Marsh, Narrative theory has been and is being applied in various disciplines, such as psychiatry, social and behavioural sciences and specifically art and literature because it claims that the self is a story, so it can be told differently within numerous variants of it (Marsh 2007, 100). This paper aims to deconstruct the narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* to tell the story of the self "differently" to bring the sexual self out of the spiritual self hidden under a queer discourse of folk narratives of the East. The study as diverse in thematic boundaries involves a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches such as poststructuralist deconstruction, queer theory with spirituality discourse and theoretical perspectives of construction and deconstruction of self-narrative. All these theoretical approaches somewhere cross the borders to intersect with one another. This paper is an attempt to expand the theoretical boundaries of queer to include the oriental definition of gender and sexuality through investigating the Eastern folk narratives which apparently have much to deal with all that is considered spiritual. This kind of application of queer theoretical perspectives to understand folk narratives has given a new scope of investigation by broadening its horizon to investigate folk literature other than European and as a result to include new subjects of critical inquiry to it such as defining the role of gender supremacy in colonial discourse and the connection between spiritual and sexual.

Queer theory has been developed for probably almost two decades and has contributed to various fields of study and academic disciplines. Initially developed in the early 1990s, the theorists of this discipline aim to understand the formation of some important and normative categories of sexuality to the extent of understanding the diversity of this subject hitherto unvoiced due to its anti-normative positioning of it in strict theological discourse. Much of the work in the first decade of its critical agency was done to explain how norms have been questioned and debated to draw upon certain challenges in generating and maintaining "heteronormativity". In the study of spirituality and sexuality with the queer theoretical perspectives, liberationist approaches work as a kind of border crossing towards all that deems to be spiritual. Such approaches intersecting with queer theory and aiming to draw upon the liberation of self had figured outstandingly by not only demolishing the line of demarcation between spiritual and sexual but by expanding the boundaries of queer theory to include the importance of the agency of the self under various cultural constraints. Claudia Schippert pointed out that the Queer theory discusses a challengingly diverse perspective of gender roles and investigates disorienting the existing theoretical perspectives to discover new ones (Schippert 2011, 68). The revolutionary dimensions of queer theory debate the study of religion as an investigation to understand and expand queer theory's thematic inclusion. The scholars of religion in most recent years have discussed the queer challenges to theology and religion itself by investigating the intersections of sexual and religious identities. Marcella Althaus-Reid's work is excellent in this context. In *Indecent Theology (2001)* she discusses that theology in total cannot be ascribed without sexual dimensions. In her following work, *The Queer God (2003)*, she challenges the dominant power of orthodox heterosexual convention. The implications of heterosexual identities and queer spirituality for theology and the study of religion have recently become an important theme due to the intersection of queer theoretical approaches with a diverse range of academic and critical inquiry. This paper attempts to broaden the scope of queer spirituality for the study of religion even further through its implication on the folk narratives written particularly in oriental tradition with theology/spirituality as a leading subject of such tales. The intersection of queer theory with spirituality and sexuality may not be as unexplored as it has been considered but its implication to folk narratives of the East is somewhat a new field of inquiry in which our study falls. Claudia Schippert suggests investigating the new dimensions of queer theory by taking into account the investigation of different disciplines such as history, social theory, and also within theology and the study of religion (Schippert 2005, 90).

By annexing the queer theoretical debate about gender and sexuality with a spiritual discourse of Eastern folk narratives such as the one under study, it can be asserted how marginalized identities might be liberated from sacrilegious theological discourse by 'border crossing'; seeking out methodologies of reliance from other cultural traditions to access divergently established patterns of self and identity. For this purpose, this paper attempts to investigate twofold meanings of queering the self and the spiritual. Firstly, our study tends to explore queer sexuality in spiritual discourse specifically positioned within the cultural boundaries of Eastern folk narratives and secondly, it ventures to separate the dimensions of 'spiritual' from the term 'religious' by expanding the scope of investigation of the former to incorporate a socio-normative cultural rendition of it. Quoting Hans Mol, Marsh, suggests that religion provides the 'mechanism by means of which on the level of symbol systems certain patterns acquire identity (Marsh 2007, 98). Anna King, for example, is a theologian who suggests that "the term 'spirituality' is often used nowadays to avoid the use of the term 'religion', which is

increasingly associated with more traditional (and oppressive) ideas” (King 1996, 343). This paper intends to approach queer spirituality in *Saif-ul-Malook* rendered by sexual identity of self and gender considering the term 'spirituality' as divergent from the term 'religion' with more diversity of scope. Exploring and analyzing the spiritual discourse in Eastern folklore and its intersection with queer sexual/spiritual subjectivity is the main purpose of this paper. Our approach and analysis have not been explored within the Eastern cultural bounds so far.

Critical and Methodological Approaches to the Queer

Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952–2009), the feminist queer theorist and theologian wrote about what it really meant to be open to theological issues and debates and to be able to bring about all that is in the dark annals of the hidden chronology of theology, spirituality and sexuality. She recorded her voice of what it meant to be an “indecent theologian” and claimed that “sexual stories from the margins of society can help transform theological issues” (Althaus-Reid 2001, 29). Her theoretical assumptions on all that seems and sounds queer to conservative theologians and what really is queer in theology itself when tested on empirical praxis questions the temporality of spiritual elements in theological writings with the implication of poststructuralist and deconstructive notions. Althaus-Reid's two major works, *Indecent Theology* (2001) and *The Queer God* (2003) reshaped the ages-old perspective of theology and spirituality by expanding the boundaries of queer theoretical perspectives not only to encapsulate religious psychology rather to associate it with such dimensions of 'queer' in theology/spirituality which was previously held sacrilegious to debate. Althaus-Reid's philosophy presents an ongoing contest of illusions and disillusion of constructs in writing that curtain the complexity of fictional characters. When taken together, both these works of Althaus-Reid provide a logically structured view of the writer's intricate involvement with queer theoretical and theological traditions in the context of her indulgence towards the philosophy of theological sexuality which blur the boundaries of self and becoming of queer identity cloaked in totalitarian theology. Love and sexuality in a queer spiritual discourse disregard boundaries of theology, ethical philosophy, cultural normative normality and patriarchal/colonial worldview of decency. Althaus-Reid questions the orthodoxy of religion and all those who take it as a big stick to wield against suffering humanity in the clutches of normative oppression. Talking about Mary as a symbol of decency and morality in religion, Reid points out the remoteness of her image from the empirical praxis of flesh and blood. “Nobody has taken the trouble to lift up her skirts to see what is under it” (Althaus-Reid 2001, 29). Althaus-Reid presents her critical agency to remove the “decent skirts” that “theology tailors for Mary”. These skirts veil the natural desires of her flesh and a long history associated with the rejection of these desires, along with all those who take refuge under the cloak of Mary's decency. These skirts legitimate the illusions of sexuality cloaked in queer spirituality. “Mary becomes the symbol of grace for women, who are called ontologically and materially to cover themselves up and metaphysically speaking to take a cold shower to inhibit lust” (Althaus-Reid 2001, 110). In this discourse spirituality and theology seem extravagantly divergent from each other in approach. Here comes the annexure between Althaus-Reid's theoretical grounds and our discussion in this paper; Bukhsh in *Saif-ul-Malook* has tried to safeguard erotic love between opposite genders by cloaking it in the queer spiritual discourse of trans-human love relationship between a fairy and a man. This paper is an attempt to “lift up her[fairy's] skirts to see what is under it”. The significance of our paper lies in the point that in spite of the subject being a non-vulnerably accepted debate in the present century's theoretical ventures, it has not adequately been explored within the narrative of eastern folklores like the one under study. There is a need to uncloak the normatively constructed fabric of queer spirituality to explore the dark and hidden annals of sexuality and anti-normative (within certain cultural discourse) love in order to romanticize the radical and redefine gender identities.

Analysis

The main question we proposed here regarding the text of *Saif-ul-Malook* on Althaus-Reid's “Indecent Theology” should be how writers of love and romance like Bukhsh with a queer approach write about religion? They keep on wandering from place to place, peep through hidden spaces of desires with the transgression of instinctive behaviour, keep on changing their position and reposition eventually, by participating in this process of change and behaviour they enable themselves to formulate new/partial conceptualizations of love and God (Althaus-Reid 2003, 50). The major task of this study is to question the identity of the writers like Bukhsh as lovers and theologians simultaneously as collected from the folk narratives written by them. In Althaus-Reid's words, the intention of such writers is to understand the extent they can get de-familiarized with the normative conception of God (Althaus-Reid 2003, 59). The narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* when deconstructed and told differently; the re-thinking of the tale, reveals several spaces of romanticizing the radical where Bukhsh does “digress at points of desire” tailors a cloak of theology/spirituality for his own sexual desires to “position and reposition themselves amongst themselves and amongst others” and creates a legitimate covering for his ideas to get public among the controversial audience in order to get their consent about the legitimacy of the newly formulated conceptualizations of love and God. For instance, apparently, the narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* beguiles the readers to tell them the tale of spirituality with the air of supernatural and trans-human queer love between a prince and a fairy which should not have any place to be positioned with ritualistic human passions commonly found on earth. It readjusts the transition from physical to metaphysical to remove the charge of hidden hetero-normative love and sexuality between opposite genders. The fairy perhaps gets the justification to be loved and relished sexual desires about instead of a woman just on account of the metaphysical character of the fairy itself in a cultural setting with certain religious discourse where mixing of men and women were not only highly controlled rather think and talk about their love relationship on

physical grounds was considered anti-normative. The writer fore-grounded the conceptualization of the personification of the fairy as a queer ideology sacred on account of belonging to some different time zone and the inhabitant of a world other than the human one where love and infatuation bear no brunt. Certain lines of this folk narrative, however, break the hard covering of theology/spirituality to expose the silenced space the writer creates for himself to celebrate sexuality. The following lines blurred out the physical status of the fairy by introducing her as a creature positioned by Bukhsh as an inhabitant of the earth instead of her projection as the supernatural persona of some alien land. The prince thanked the Almighty when he got to know that the fairy lives somewhere on the very earth, so it would not be impossible to locate her (Syeda 2013, 755).

Soon, however, in the very subsequent lines the physical status of the fairy has been shrouded in the metaphysical veil of spirituality and the entire narrative has been repositioned in theology.

RooH shehzada, nadi param di, baira jan badan nu

Jani nal milain tad jani, karain shakista tan nu. (Bukhsh 1984, 80)

(The stream in the tale wherein the prince has to sail in order to find out the fairy symbolizes the sea of Divine love and the broken vessel symbolically stands for the breakdown of the corporal frame of man. Only then one can get united with the Divine Beloved when he is able to relinquish the physical ties with this world) (Syeda 2013, 756).

The narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* holds the infinite variations of language which are positioned and repositioned frequently but do not reconcile when the boundaries of human and trans-human, woman and fairy, physical and metaphysical, sexuality and spirituality, erotic dissidence and romantic pleasure blur. Sexuality and spirituality keep on wrestling throughout the pages of *Saif-ul-Malook* with queer folkloristic subjectivity of the writer himself ever in conflict with socially sanctioned conventions and norms. Legitimized authority of metaphysical ranks the marginalized sexuality somewhat higher than its derogatory status by this kind of construction Bukhsh has developed between the lines. Womenfolk, a marginalized section of society with the oriental hierarchy of patriarchal and colonial oppressive apparatuses could never have been given the agency of vocalization specifically about love and the lure of infatuation, and Bukhsh, knowing this adequately, ventures to invest his creativity to make it less controversial and more acceptable by annexing the 'queer' signification with this kind of advocacy thus quite unknowingly expanding the spectrum of the theoretical bounds of "Queer" to the extent of defining the gender role in the East. Fairy in *Saif-ul-Malook* expresses the feelings of love and romance for the prince with such an openness that the author might have relished in some dark spaces of his own self just on account of the rendering of fairy with queer spirituality which could be chewed and digested easily. "In the dream, the fairy spoke thus: "O, prince! I myself am infatuated by you and my love is more powerful than yours, so, I came in your dream to invite you and tell you the way to reach me" (Syeda 2013, 756).

Folk tradition in literature specifically with oriental normative construction tries quite knowingly to put forward a queer investigative impetus to connote, encode rather to decode to a reasonably justified extent culturally specified values of resistance laired under certain spiritual discourse and narratives of theology against a set of religious codes and conventions which human psyche sees as intrinsically conservative and exploitive. Folk oral tradition is designed to exhibit traits of gypsies immune to bounds and climes promoting thus in a highly self-reflexive mode, a cultural homogeneity which within the boundaries of theologically orthodox social constructs, does not exist as different cultures present us with different constructions of religious autonomy which is strictly a subjective contouring of the self; a self which is practically the outcome of ideology instead of identity. Here is the point where 'queering' the study of theology and its scholarly inquiries get involved within the deconstructionist portfolio of re-narrating *Saif-ul-Malook* on the basis of a paradigm shift from theosophy to sexuality focusing on the initiative that *Indecent Theology* is an attempt to search for the sexual foundation of theology. The deconstructed narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* caters for the need to reject and resist, the ideological orientation of theology that holds back the possibilities of bodies in love. Writers like Bukhsh should have a sound and licit certification of transforming through under the discursive spirituality, the very tormenting working of theology itself. In an orthodox world where human desires find no legitimate space and suffer, it is God's rejection (propounded by normative constructs only) to put up with the corruptions of human desires to the extent of prohibition that brings theologians to praxis all that risks indecency and is permeated into with a destructive ethos. This study is an attempt to make theology travel within the silenced spaces of 'illicit embraces' whether these are colonial, political, economic, socio-psychic or sexual.

The narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* questions the construction of the so-called authority of decency of womanhood in more than one way. The fairy's love and romantic lure for the prince is not the only instance to question such authority, there are various others which put conceptualization of the marginalization of women in a postcolonial patriarchal society through the constructed authority of decency vested upon them into a searching mode of inquiry to the extent of telling the story differently. Bukhsh tries to describe the sexuality of women with colonial/patriarchal agency to posit it negatively as lust and sexual inclination. It is a queer homophobic construct which instead of exposing the lust and corruption of this marginalized gender as intended by the writer by alluding to homosexual desires among women, focuses on uncloaking the sexual desires of the writer himself through the homophobic projection of certain events in the tale. The love for the fairy with metaphysical personification juxtaposes it with the rejection of the physical/ normal by the prince (described as an illicit lure) allowing him to entertain homophobia on the contrary. The discourse is carried further with an air of colonial/imperial supremacy on the part of the writer decoding the hidden patterns of marginalization of women as the gender with socio-psychic and sexual constraints in societies like ours. The queer projection of the 'City of Ladies' in the

narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook*, a quaint city where there is no man but women only exposes the hidden patterns of homosexuality, psychic disruption as an outcome of rejected, dejected and curbed sexuality of marginalized womenfolk in a patriarchal society. The city was ruled by the most beautiful woman in the world who offered herself as mistress to the prince whom the prince rejected just on account that Bukhsh preferred the advocacy of 'the queer' instead of describing 'the real'; he seems to know that the love and romance of a man with a fairy is more acceptable in a patriarchal society than the love between a man and a woman. The sermonizing strategy of the author in some of the lines is due to certain social normative pressure which forces the author to tailor a cloak of theology/spirituality to hide sexual desires between opposite genders. Bukhsh contrived to project the women of 'City of Ladies' as corrupt and indecent because he could not have an alternative choice of exposing the 'indecent theology' which puts constraints on the natural sexual desires of womenfolk in such cultural traditions forcing them to create queer spaces for themselves where their sexuality is celebrated rather than condemned by their male counterparts like the one who is the author of this tale. Bukhsh could not resist the relish of sexuality of those women through the narrative of the story though presented with a queer pattern. The author presented these female characters as perverted and lusty because this was the only acceptable choice for depicting their sexuality in a patriarchal society. It is the point where the intersection of Eastern folk narratives with queer theory broadens the theoretical dimension of the queer to include the definition of gender in colonial societies with discourses of marginalization. He describes the bathing of these ladies together in a stream/pond in which they not only enjoyed the complete physical relish of sexual intercourse rather every one of them used to get pregnant after every such bath giving birth to a baby daughter as a result after a due course of time; begetting another woman to relish and celebrate her sexuality in a queer setting. Here is the point where the words of Althaus-Reid are most relevant. These women when positioned and repositioned in a spiritual discourse project themselves as queer.

Foregrounding Foucault's theoretical re-configuration of sexuality as an outcome of discourse, the narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* views sexuality not as a natural instinct of a person, but rather as a set of assimilations that brings about a disjointed and confused construction of a modern self; a self-triggered to get confined instead of being defined in the process of 'queering'. Bukhsh's 'queering' of love and sexuality is an attempt of liberating the oppressed and marginalized gender in a patriarchal society with an inherent libido of that gender. This discourse places thus greater significance on the critical examination of sexual identity with variant categories of meaning. By the end of the tale, the prince, the protagonist of this tale who rejected the love and sexual attraction of the most attractive woman on the earth during his episodic stay in the 'City of Ladies' with the implication of promoting spirituality, is seen not only getting married to the fairy rather Bukhsh categorically states that a son was born as a result of the union of the prince and the fairy; another queer construct of spiritual narrative annexing sexuality and spirituality together. By the end of the tale, Bukhsh unfolds the physical and sexual connotation of the fairy itself which is exactly what Giffney sees as emblematic of queer theory as a practical approach to discourse analysis (Giffney 2009, 7).

At last, the prince reached the fairyland [ultimate destination] and got united with the queen of fairies [Divine Reality]. It is true that if the pursuit is persistent, one does reach the goal at last (Syeda 2013, 761)

The question with which the debate in the analysis section of this paper has been initiated that how queer lovers like Bukhsh (who secretly relish sexuality but apparently pose themselves theologians writing about theology/spirituality) write theology, can be resolved by stating that queer lovers like Bukhsh either fail to write theology in the rigid projection of religious discourse which aims to prohibit love and sexuality as a part of human experience and or if write theology such writers try to promote God not as a healer of human sufferings due to certain emotional constraints but as an outrageous antagonist against natural biological desires of man. The writers like Bukhsh if try to write theology have the only choice to adopt methods of queering theology/spirituality to get it fit with the sexuality they relish secretly but apparently project God as a big fear to hide natural human desires. Althaus-Reid argues that "God had to be liberated from the closet of theologians" (Althaus-Reid 2001, 107). The present study justifies the claims of Althaus Reid with the reinforcement that let the God of theology come closer to the suffering humanity under the socio-psychic trauma and there remains no reason to queer either spirituality or sexuality. Only a theology that dares to be radical can show us the presence of God in our times. Using Queer Theory to describe theology/spirituality, the narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* exposes the sexual roots that underlie all theology and takes the search for God to new depths of social and sexual inclusion.

Conclusion

Apparently encapsulating the insignificance of sex and gender with disparaging labels for sexual deviance and dissidence, the narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* initiates leading agency of discourse in the postmodern era aimed at the legitimization and toleration of marginality of gender and sex queer theoretical perspectives initiate. Further investigation into the narrative of this folk epic renders it to expand the theoretical boundaries of queer theory with the inclusion of the oriental concept of gender and sexuality under certain cultural constraints within which the relationship of the opposite gender is defined and redefined by all that is queer. Queer is thus not strictly defined associated with an identity, but establishes itself as antagonistic to the accepted and standard meanings of sexuality and gender. As a category of defiant discourse, Michael Warner calls queer theory an attempt to resist categories of all that is normal (Warner 1993, 26) whereas Lisa Duggan is of the opinion that the actual historical projection of queer theory is open with a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation (Duggan 2001, 167). Taking into consideration Duggan's 'negotiation and renegotiation' strategy, folkloric subjectivity in *Saif-ul-Malook* can be renegotiated as the queer tendency of repositioning of indecent theology to explore

the sexual dimensions of theology/spirituality which anchors upon the marginalization of gender and sexuality with the multi-dimensional conceptualization of the phrase. This sort of reconsideration can justify a reversal of meaning in Shiekh's statement about *Saif-ul-Malook* and Mian Muhammad Buksh, "Through the thin veil of romantic love in Saiful Muluk Mian Sahib has presented intricacies of True and Divine Love" (Sheikh 2008, 363). With a quick and pervasive disclaimer, spirituality can be renegotiated by deconstructing the narrative of *Saif-ul-Malook* as a cloak tailored for sexuality to make it less controversial and more acceptable in a social order in which the marginalization of gender was more legitimate than the advocacy of natural human desires. Alan Watts describes a link between the religious/spiritual and the social which is necessary to identify the moral and logical order of conventional codes of society (Watts 1957, 11). He criticizes the way in which orthodox behaviour deals with the social order with excessive authority (Watts 1957, 11). If Watts' analysis is correct, his approach is particularly deemed for people marginalized by this kind of construction which folkloric literature bears and can be attempted likewise to deconstruct by the intersection of folklore with queer theory of which this study seems to serve the purpose to a certain extent.

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