
Martyrdom As Mystical Grammar: Re-Reading Karbala In The Poetry Attributed To Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

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Abstract

Scholarship on Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689–1752) recognises him as a vernacular Sufi poet of eighteenth-century Sindh, while studies of Karbala have examined its enduring ethical, ritual, political, and mystical significance. However, the relationship between Karbala and Latif’s poetic tradition remains comparatively underexplored. Existing studies often discuss Sur Kedaro as a lament for Karbala, place it within the Sindhi marsiya tradition, or interpret it as an expression of Latif’s Islamic and mystical thought. Less attention has been given to how Karbala is transformed from a historical narrative into a vernacular Sufi framework for ethical action. This study examines the Karbala material associated with Shah Jo Risalo, particularly Sur Kedaro, with attention to themes of suffering, love, loyalty, sacrifice, and spiritual closeness to God. It employs historical contextualisation, close textual analysis, and comparative interpretation, while treating the disputed attribution of Sur Kedaro as an important methodological consideration. The study argues that Karbala’s significance within the Latifian tradition does not depend entirely on determining whether every verse of Sur Kedaro was composed by Latif. Rather, its importance lies in the development and reception of a vernacular devotional discourse in which martyrdom represents exemplary love, suffering becomes a means of spiritual insight, and loyalty to the beloved provides a basis for critiquing worldly power. Karbala therefore functions not merely as a subject but as a poetic framework connecting historical tragedy with mystical selfhood and ethical transformation. The study contributes to scholarship on South Asian Sufism, vernacular Islam, and the cultural memory of Karbala.

Keywords: Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai; Karbala; Sur Kedaro; Sufism; Vernacular Islam

1. Introduction

Karbala occupies an unusual position in Islamic intellectual and cultural history. The killing of al-Husayn ibn Ali at Karbala in 680 CE is simultaneously a historical event, a sacred memory,

a narrative of moral conflict, a ritual repertoire, and a symbol whose meanings have been repeatedly reconstructed across time and place. Recent scholarship has emphasised that the Karbala narrative acquired meanings far beyond the immediate historical episode: it became a language through which communities could think about fidelity, betrayal, suffering, sacrifice, authority, and the moral legitimacy of resistance. Torsten Hylén's recent study, for example, demonstrates how early representations of Karbala contributed to the formation of Shi'i identity, while later literary traditions expanded the event into wider ethical and devotional registers. (Hylén, 2025)

In South Asia, Karbala entered a particularly rich vernacular environment. Persianate courts, Sufi networks, devotional communities, and regional literary cultures enabled the story of al-Husayn to circulate beyond sectarian boundaries and to acquire new linguistic and symbolic forms. Sindh provides an especially important case because the region developed an extensive tradition of Sufi poetry in which Islamic narratives, Persian-Arabic vocabulary, local folklore, musical forms, and vernacular ethics intersected. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai stands at the centre of this tradition. His *Shah Jo Risalo*, compiled and transmitted after his death, became one of the foundational texts of Sindhi literary culture. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* characterises the *Risalo* as a corpus organised around the Sufi doctrine of an innate hunger for the divine and notes its fusion of lyric, narrative, musical, and vernacular forms. (Baqir, 1982; Schimmel, 1976)

Within this corpus, *Sur Kedaro* is conventionally associated with Karbala. Its presence, however, raises a methodological difficulty that has too often been suppressed by devotional or nationalist readings. The textual history of the *Risalo* is not uniform, and the authenticity of *Sur Kedaro* has been debated. H. T. Sorley associated the composition of *Kedaro* with the final period of Latif's life, while later scholarship and textual criticism have questioned whether all of the verses conventionally transmitted under the title can be attributed to Latif. The problem is not merely bibliographical. It changes the question that scholarship should ask. Instead of treating the text as an uncontested window into the poet's mind, the researcher must examine how a Karbala discourse became attached to the Latifian corpus, how it resonates with securely established features of Latif's poetics, and how subsequent communities have interpreted that association. (Agha, 2016; Baqir, 1982; Sorley, 1940)

The central argument of this article is therefore deliberately narrower and more historically cautious than a simple claim that "Latif wrote about Karbala." It argues that Karbala operates in the Latifian textual tradition as a form of mystical grammar. By grammar, the article means a recurrent system of relations through which historical suffering is rendered intelligible as an ethical and spiritual experience. In this grammar, the martyr is not only a victim of political violence; martyrdom becomes an exemplary enactment of fidelity. Pain is not simply an emotional response; it becomes a mode of knowing and transforming the self. Love is not confined to romantic metaphor; it becomes a principle that explains why voluntary sacrifice can possess greater moral significance than worldly survival. The tyrant, correspondingly, is

not merely an individual historical actor but the figure of power detached from ethical legitimacy.

Much writing on Shah Latif has oscillated between hagiography and cultural nationalism. One mode treats him primarily as a saint whose poetry confirms inherited devotional truths; another transforms him into an abstract symbol of Sindhi identity, secular humanism, or social emancipation. Recent critical scholarship has productively challenged these appropriations by historicising the construction of “Latif” as a modern cultural figure. The present study does not reject the religious or cultural significance of Latif. Rather, it places that significance under historical and textual scrutiny. It asks how Karbala functions inside a vernacular Islamic poetics without assuming that its meaning is exhausted either by Shi‘i ritual memory or by modern nationalist interpretations. (Hussain, 2021)

The article proceeds through four questions: (1) How does the Latifian textual tradition transform Karbala from a historical catastrophe into an ethical and mystical narrative? (2) Which poetic concepts—love, suffering, fidelity, sacrifice, and divine proximity—organise this transformation? (3) How does the disputed textual status of Sur Kedaro affect the historical interpretation of Karbala in Latif’s poetry? and (4) What does this case reveal about the vernacularisation of Islamic sacred memory in eighteenth-century Sindh?

2. Historiography and Research Gap

Three overlapping bodies of scholarship frame the problem. The first concerns Shah Abdul Latif himself. Early colonial and postcolonial studies concentrated on the poet’s life, the social and economic conditions of eighteenth-century Sindh, and the literary and musical structure of the Risalo. Sorley’s *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit* remains important because it introduced a substantial body of Latifian material to English-speaking scholarship and placed the poet within the historical environment of Sindh. Schimmel subsequently provided a more explicitly Islamic and mystical interpretation, devoting separate sections of *Pain and Grace* to Latif’s life and teaching, his relationship with Sufis and yogis, and the Islamic background of his poetry. These works established the centrality of mystical experience, Islamic vocabulary, vernacular symbolism, and musical form to the study of Latif. (Schimmel, 1976; Sorley, 1940)

The second body of scholarship examines the textual history of the Risalo. The corpus has passed through multiple editions, manuscripts, editorial interventions, and translation projects. This matters because “Shah Abdul Latif’s poetry” is not a simple fixed archive. Editorial choices have affected which surs and verses are treated as authentic, and the history of Sur Kedaro illustrates the problem particularly sharply. A recent digital edition of Muhammad Yaqoob Agha’s work explicitly records that Kedaro was omitted from one earlier edition and later retained because the editor considered it integral to the Risalo. The existence of such disagreement means that attribution itself must be treated as evidence requiring analysis. (Agha, 2016)

The third body of scholarship concerns Karbala and its South Asian afterlives. Karbala scholarship has demonstrated the narrative's movement from early historical accounts into Shi'i identity formation, devotional ritual, Persian literary culture, Urdu marsiya, and regional vernacular traditions. In Sindh, recent ethnographic work shows that the Karbala narrative became embedded in local Sufi traditions and that Shah Latif expressed Husayn's martyrdom through a Sufi lexicon. This observation is highly significant but remains underdeveloped at the level of literary mechanism: what precisely happens when martyrdom is expressed through Sufi categories? How are historical violence and mystical love made semantically compatible? What kind of ethical subject is produced by this transformation? (Hylén, 2025; Ortis, 2023)

The research gap is therefore located at the intersection of textual criticism, Sufi literary studies, and the cultural history of Karbala. Existing scholarship establishes that Sur Kedaro concerns Karbala and that Latif's wider poetry is deeply Islamic and mystical. It also establishes that Karbala became embedded in Sindhi Sufi culture. What remains insufficiently examined is the conceptual process through which the Karbala event is translated into a vernacular mystical grammar of ethical subject formation, particularly when the textual authenticity of the relevant corpus is itself disputed. This article fills that gap by treating attribution, reception, poetics, and historical context as interconnected rather than separate problems.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The article uses a combined framework of cultural memory, reception history, and Sufi poetics. Cultural-memory theory is useful because Karbala is not treated here as a static historical object. It is approached as a remembered past whose meanings are reorganised in new social and linguistic environments. The distinction between historical event and cultural memory permits the researcher to examine how a seventh-century event could become an eighteenth-century vernacular resource without reducing the later representation to either factual history or sectarian ritual. (Hylén, 2025)

Reception history provides a second corrective. The meaning of a text is not exhausted by the intentions of an original author; it is also produced through copying, editing, performance, translation, commentary, ritual use, and subsequent interpretation. This is especially relevant to Shah Jo Risalo, whose textual history involves competing editions and whose verses have circulated through musical performance as well as print. The article therefore treats the "Latifian tradition" as a historical formation rather than a transparent synonym for the personal authorship of Latif. (Agha, 2016; Huang, 2020)

The third component is Sufi poetics. Sufi poetry frequently employs the vocabulary of love, longing, annihilation, suffering, journey, and union to articulate the movement of the self toward the divine. In Latif's poetry these concepts are expressed through both Islamic narratives and vernacular stories. The present study argues that Karbala enters this poetic system by providing an unusually concentrated narrative of fidelity under conditions of extreme suffering. The martyr is consequently legible through the same ethical structure that

governs the ideal lover: remaining faithful when union appears impossible, preferring truth to worldly security, and accepting suffering as the price of fidelity. (Schimmel, 1976)

4. Methodology and Sources

The study employs qualitative close reading combined with historical-contextual and comparative methods. The primary textual corpus consists of Sur Kedaro as transmitted in editions of Shah Jo Risalo, read alongside selected passages from Latif's wider poetic corpus where comparable concepts of love, separation, sacrifice, divine longing, and ethical fidelity occur. Because translations can obscure semantic and cultural nuance, the study does not treat a single English translation as an uncontested substitute for the Sindhi text. Where the argument concerns broad thematic structure, English translations are used for accessibility; where textual authenticity or semantic precision is decisive, the study relies on the edition history and scholarly discussion surrounding the relevant verses. (Agha, 2016; Sorley, 1940)

Secondary sources include Sorley's historical-literary study, Schimmel's analysis of Latif's Islamic and mystical background, Encyclopaedia Iranica's bibliographical and contextual account, recent scholarship on the politics of Latif's modern reception, and recent research on Muharram and Karbala in Sindh. The study deliberately places older scholarship in dialogue with newer critical work. This prevents two opposite errors: projecting contemporary categories backwards onto an eighteenth-century poet, and assuming that earlier Orientalist or hagiographical representations are historically neutral. (Baqir, 1982; Hussain, 2021; Ortis, 2023; Schimmel, 1976)

A major methodological principle is source criticism. Sur Kedaro is not treated as unquestionably authentic merely because it appears in some editions of the Risalo, nor is the entire cycle dismissed solely because its attribution has been questioned. Throughout the article, references to the cycle are therefore described as material transmitted within the Latifian textual tradition unless a secure attribution is independently established. Instead, the article distinguishes three analytical levels: the historical event of Karbala; the literary representation of Karbala in the Sindhi tradition; and the later attribution of that representation to Shah Abdul Latif. This distinction permits a historically defensible argument even where the textual record is unstable. (Agha, 2016; Sorley, 1940)

5. From Historical Catastrophe to Mystical Grammar

5.1 Karbala as an Ethical Event

At the level of historical narrative, Karbala is a confrontation involving political authority, kinship, loyalty, violence, and death. At the level of poetic memory, however, the event is condensed into a moral opposition between fidelity and betrayal. This condensation is fundamental to the Latifian treatment. The poetic interest is not simply in reconstructing the

battlefield. It lies in making the reader or listener experience the moral weight of a choice: whether to remain faithful when worldly calculation makes survival appear preferable.

Such a transformation is consistent with the wider structure of Latif's poetry. His celebrated narratives repeatedly place protagonists in situations where social conventions, physical hardship, separation, and danger test the authenticity of love. The figures of Sassi, Marui, Sohni, and others are not merely romantic characters; their stories become vehicles for reflecting on perseverance and the cost of fidelity. Karbala intensifies this structure because the beloved is no longer represented through an allegorical lover alone. The narrative places sacred kinship and moral commitment within a concrete historical catastrophe.

Recent ethnographic scholarship on Muharram in Sindh situates the local commemoration of Karbala within a vernacular religious environment in which Sufi traditions and Sindhi cultural forms are especially significant. This is more than a stylistic observation. It means that the historical figure of Husayn is repositioned within a pre-existing ethical system in which the highest form of love requires the abandonment of ordinary calculations of safety and possession. Karbala therefore becomes intelligible as a radicalised version of the lover's journey: the test is no longer merely separation from the beloved but the willingness to sacrifice the self without surrendering the truth to coercive power. (Ortis, 2023)

5.2 Suffering as Knowledge

One of the most distinctive features of the Latifian imagination is the conversion of suffering into knowledge. The traveller, lover, faqir, and seeker does not acquire truth by avoiding pain; knowledge is produced through the endurance of separation and trial. Karbala provides an especially powerful historical analogue for this structure. The suffering of Husayn and his companions can be represented not simply as misfortune but as testimony. The body becomes a site on which fidelity is inscribed.

This interpretation must not be confused with a celebration of suffering for its own sake. The point is relational. Pain acquires meaning because it is attached to an object of love and to a moral commitment. In Sufi terminology, suffering can disclose the inadequacy of the ego and expose the difference between attachment to worldly existence and orientation toward the divine. The Karbala narrative provides a historical image in which that distinction becomes visible through action.

Schimmel's treatment of Latif's Islamic background is important here because it situates the poet's mystical language within an Islamic conceptual universe rather than treating Sufism as a generic philosophy of love. The Karbala motif can consequently be understood as a vernacular Islamic articulation of sacrifice: the historical martyr becomes an ethical exemplar whose suffering communicates a truth about the relation between human fidelity and divine reality. (Schimmel, 1976)

5.3 Love, Martyrdom, and the Transformation of the Self

The central conceptual bridge between Karbala and Sufi poetics is love. In conventional devotional discourse, love may be expressed through praise, mourning, remembrance, or imitation. In Latifian poetics, however, love is tested by deprivation. A love that costs nothing is aesthetically attractive but ethically unproven. Karbala supplies the extreme case: fidelity is demonstrated through the willingness to lose everything.

Here martyrdom becomes a grammar rather than merely a theme. A grammar establishes relations among signs. In the Karbala grammar, the martyr signifies fidelity, the battlefield signifies the testing ground of truth, suffering signifies the cost of commitment, and remembrance signifies the survival of moral meaning after physical death. This semiotic structure helps explain why Karbala could be integrated into a Sufi poetic corpus without requiring the poet to reproduce the event as a chronological historical account.

The transformation also changes the meaning of death. In a purely political narrative, death may represent defeat. In the mystical-ethical register, death can signify the victory of fidelity over coercion. This does not erase the historical violence of Karbala. Instead, it explains why the memory of the defeated can become more culturally powerful than the authority of the victors. The poetic reconfiguration of martyrdom thus reverses the logic of political power: the ruler possesses coercive force, but the martyr possesses moral permanence.

5.4 The Tyrant and the Limits of Worldly Power

The figure of Yazid, whether represented directly or through the broader logic of opposition between worldly authority and sacred fidelity, performs an important conceptual function. The tyrant is not simply the villain of a historical story. He represents the possibility that political authority can become detached from moral legitimacy. This distinction is crucial in a Sufi framework because worldly power is temporary while divine truth is permanent.

Such a reading does not require the imposition of a modern democratic vocabulary onto the eighteenth-century text. It is better understood through the older Islamic distinction between legitimate authority and moral injustice. The significance of Karbala lies precisely in the fact that the apparent political winner becomes ethically discredited, while the defeated martyr becomes the enduring focus of remembrance. The poetic imagination therefore produces a counter-history in which moral legitimacy survives political defeat.

This dimension also helps explain the continuing cultural adaptability of Karbala in Sindh. Recent ethnographic research demonstrates that Karbala is embedded in local Sufi traditions and that its performance is connected with vernacular religious practice. The event remains powerful because it provides a portable ethical vocabulary. Different communities can emphasise mourning, sacrifice, justice, spiritual love, resistance, or communal identity while retaining the same historical centre. (Ortis, 2023)

5.5 Vernacularisation Rather Than Sectarian Isolation

An important implication of the Latifian case is that vernacularisation should not be equated with secularisation. The movement of Karbala from Arabic and Persian textual environments into Sindhi does not necessarily diminish its religious content. Instead, it can intensify religious meaning by placing sacred memory within the emotional and musical resources of a local language.

Schimmel's work and subsequent scholarship on Sindhi Sufism show that Latif operated within a complex Persianate and Islamic environment while also transforming inherited materials through local idioms. Karbala therefore becomes part of a multilingual cultural economy in which Arabic sacred history, Persian literary conventions, Islamic theological concepts, Sindhi musical forms, and local narrative structures interact. (Schimmel, 1976; Baqir, 1982)

The importance of this process is methodological as well as historical. A narrow sectarian classification risks missing the mechanisms through which sacred memory travels. The Latifian treatment does not have to be reduced to either "Shi'i poetry" or "Sunni Sufi poetry." Those categories may describe aspects of reception, but they do not adequately explain the poetic transformation itself. The more productive question is how a sacred narrative becomes available for mystical reflection within a vernacular Islamic literary culture.

5.6 The Problem of Sur Kedaro and Textual Authenticity

The authenticity question is indispensable. Sorley's account records a tradition that Latif had wished to undertake a pilgrimage to Karbala and that, after being dissuaded, he composed Sur Kedaro. This is valuable evidence for the historical reception of the poem, but it is not sufficient proof of authorship. Later editorial histories demonstrate disagreement about the inclusion and textual status of Kedaro. Some scholars have regarded it as an external addition, while other editors have retained it as integral to the Risalo. (Sorley, 1940; Agha, 2016)

Rather than treating this controversy as an obstacle that invalidates interpretation, it can be used to sharpen the research question. Textual instability tells us something about the cultural authority of Karbala within the Latifian tradition. If a Karbala cycle was transmitted, contested, edited, retained, omitted, and eventually reattached to the canonical corpus, the process itself indicates that communities perceived a meaningful relationship between Shah's spiritual vocabulary and Karbala memory. (Agha, 2016)

This distinction between authorial attribution and cultural association is central to the article's contribution. A historian should not claim that a disputed verse is securely Latifian. At the same time, a historian should not assume that disputed authorship makes the text historically irrelevant. Sur Kedaro can be studied as a layer in the formation of the Latifian canon and as evidence of how Karbala was understood within Sindhi Sufi literary culture. This approach converts a problem of authenticity into an object of reception history. (Agha, 2016; Sorley, 1940)

The issue also demonstrates why translation requires caution. English translations can make the poem appear more semantically stable than the Sindhi textual tradition actually is. The scholarly task is therefore not to create a falsely definitive English text but to preserve the distinction between the historical corpus, editorial construction, translation, and interpretation. (Agha, 2016; Huang, 2020)

5.7 Karbala and the Wider Latifian Poetics

Reading Sur Kedaro in isolation would risk making Karbala appear exceptional in a way that separates it from the rest of Latif's poetry. A more productive approach is to locate the Karbala material within recurring Latifian structures: journey, separation, longing, fidelity, trial, and transformation. The distinctive feature of Karbala is that these structures become historically embodied in a collective catastrophe. (Schimmel, 1976; Baqir, 1982)

The result is a movement from allegory toward history and then back toward spiritual meaning. In the romantic narratives, historical and folkloric figures can be interpreted as seekers. In Karbala, the historical event is already sacred, but poetic language reinterprets it through the emotional categories of the seeker. This double movement explains the unusual power of the motif. Karbala provides history with an inward dimension, while Sufi poetics gives inwardness a historical body.

This also helps explain why the Karbala narrative could remain intelligible across changing political contexts. A poetic grammar can travel because it does not depend on one political programme. Its central relations—fidelity against betrayal, sacrifice against self-preservation, moral authority against coercion—can be activated in different historical circumstances. The enduring cultural life of Karbala in Sindh is therefore not evidence of a static tradition; it is evidence of a tradition capable of semantic renewal.

6. Comparative Discussion: Karbala, Persianate Sufism, and Sindhi Vernacularity

The Latifian treatment of Karbala becomes clearer when placed within the wider Persianate Sufi world. Karbala had long been available to Persian poets as a language of martyrdom and spiritual exemplarity. The South Asian vernacularisation of this tradition did not begin with Latif and did not end with him. Sindhi poets subsequently developed marsiya and related forms, while mystical poets such as Sachal Sarmast continued to integrate Karbala with Sufi idioms. Recent research on Muharram in Sindh confirms the continuity of this synthesis and identifies Latif as an important early point in the process. (Hylén, 2025; Schimmel, 1976)

What distinguishes Latifian poetics is not simply the presence of Karbala but the way it is placed within the same musical and narrative ecology as other forms of longing. Sur is simultaneously a literary division and a musical category. This matters because the meaning of a text performed through melody is not identical to the meaning of a text encountered silently on the printed page. The lament is embodied in voice, rhythm, repetition, and communal listening. Contemporary ethnomusicological research on Shah Jo Raag demonstrates that

performance remains central to the living tradition surrounding Latif’s poetry. (Huang, 2020; Schimmel, 1976)

The comparative implication is that Karbala should be studied not only as a textual motif but as a cultural technology of remembrance. The story is reproduced through language, music, ritual, and performance. Its meaning is therefore distributed across textual and embodied forms. The Latifian corpus is an especially productive site for studying this process because the poem is inseparable from its musical environment. (Huang, 2020; Ortis, 2023)

At the same time, the comparison reveals why the category “Sufi” should not be used as a homogenising label. Sufi traditions have historically contained multiple theological, social, and political orientations. Latif’s poetry must be situated within eighteenth-century Sindh, where Islamic learning, vernacular literary traditions, local political authority, Persianate cultural influence, and popular religious practices interacted. The Karbala motif is meaningful precisely because it emerges from this layered environment. (Schimmel, 1976; Baqir, 1982)

7. Principal Findings

First, Karbala in the Latifian tradition is best understood as an ethical structure rather than merely a historical subject. Its central function is to dramatise fidelity under extreme conditions.

Second, martyrdom is transformed into a mystical category through the language of love, sacrifice, suffering, and divine proximity. The martyr becomes an exemplary lover whose truth is demonstrated through action.

Third, the Karbala narrative provides a counter-logic to worldly political power. Political victory is temporary; moral memory can reverse the apparent hierarchy between victor and defeated.

Fourth, vernacularisation does not imply secularisation. The translation of Karbala into Sindhi expands the social and emotional reach of Islamic sacred memory while preserving its religious significance.

Fifth, the disputed textual status of Sur Kedaro should be treated as a source-critical problem and an object of reception history. It is methodologically unsound either to assume complete authenticity or to dismiss the entire Karbala tradition associated with Latif.

Finally, the broader significance of the case lies in the relationship between historical memory and mystical subject formation. Karbala supplies the historical catastrophe; Sufi poetics supplies the interpretive grammar; vernacular performance supplies the medium through which the memory becomes socially durable.

8. Conclusion

This study has argued that the significance of Karbala in the Latifian textual tradition cannot be adequately explained by describing Sur Kedaro as a simple elegy or by identifying it only with sectarian remembrance. Karbala becomes powerful within the poetry attributed to Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai because it can be incorporated into an existing mystical structure of love, longing, trial, fidelity, suffering, and transformation. The historical martyr becomes an ethical exemplar; suffering becomes testimony; and political defeat is reinterpreted as moral victory. Through this process, Karbala is converted into a vernacular mystical grammar.

The argument also demonstrates why textual criticism is essential to the study of devotional literature. The uncertain attribution of Sur Kedaro should not be hidden in order to preserve a simplified image of Latif. On the contrary, the controversy makes the subject more historically interesting. The history of inclusion, omission, editing, translation, performance, and attribution reveals how the cultural authority of Karbala became intertwined with the authority of the Latifian canon. The question is therefore not merely whether every verse is authentically Latif's. The more historically productive question is how Karbala came to be understood through the Latifian tradition and why communities found that association compelling.

Seen in this way, the case contributes to a broader study of South Asian Islam. Sacred memory does not remain unchanged when it moves between languages, regions, genres, and communities. Nor does vernacularisation necessarily strip sacred narratives of theological meaning. Instead, it can generate new interpretive forms. Sindhi provides a particularly revealing example of this process because its Sufi literary culture brings together Islamic sacred history, Persianate literary inheritance, local narrative traditions, music, and communal performance.

The article therefore proposes a broader research agenda: the study of Karbala in South Asia should move beyond genre-based descriptions of marsiya and examine the mechanisms by which martyrdom becomes a language of ethical subjectivity. Likewise, scholarship on Shah Abdul Latif should place textual criticism, Sufi poetics, and reception history into a single analytical frame. Such an approach avoids both hagiographical certainty and reductionist secularisation. It recognises Latif's poetry as a historically situated Islamic vernacular tradition whose enduring power lies partly in its capacity to transform inherited sacred narratives into forms of ethical and spiritual reflection.

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