

Saeed Bhutta Interview

My name is...Muhammad Saeed Khawr but my pen name is Saeed Bhutta. I was born in a village of Jhang, Pippal Bhutta. In our village, there is a '*dargah*' (or shrine to the memory of) of an elderly Sufi, Aafat Diwan Rehmat-Ullah. At this '*dargah*', every evening there used to be recitation of Punjabi Sufi poetry (Sufiana Shayri) people would recite Sufia-e-kalam of many poets; including Shah Hussain, Bulle Shah, Khwaja Sahib, or of Sultan Bhau. This poetry was recited at the dargah and that is how I was inspired by it I became deeply interested in our poetry, about our literary tradition and culture

I was educated at Government College, Jhang up to F.A., and then passed B. Ed. examination at Government College, Faisalabad. I passed M.A. examination from Punjabi University, Lahore from where I also obtained a PhD In 1991; I worked with Aasif Khan as a research scholar at the Pakistan Punjabi Adbi Board. In working with Khan Sahib, I benefited immensely; as far as I am concerned, Aasif Khan was such a clear-headed person, his every word was well-thought, , every action balanced properly Being so close to such a great scholar it was natural that over the daily interaction with a great scholar, I, too developed talent in learning, researching and developed skills. In January 1994, I joined Punjab University as a lecturer. It was during this time, I completed my PhD, in 2010, and I was promoted to a professor.

Aside from academic work, it my own hobby an interest in our oral tradition – spending as much time I could spare to it..... In 1991, as part of my interest, I heard some ballads from the famous storyteller, Min Kamaldeen, I was editing a book for the Punjabi Adbi Board at this time; there is the famous ballad of Muzaffar Khan. At that time, in those days I met Kamaldeen who stayed with me in my village. In the evening, elderly people told me Baba Kamaldeen recites nice stories, that he is a well-known story-teller. I asked Kamaldeen) to narrate a story to me. So he told me the story of Raja Poras. I was very excited and happy because no one in Punjab knew about Raja Poras. Whatever was written about Raja Poras, we got this through English translation from a Greek historian

Budda Parkash has written a book titled, History of Poras, which is Pakistani scholarship's contribution too, this all comes from the English translations. This is European point of view, research was done by them and we were told about our tradition of Raja Poras. I got the story off a street man in 1991 and published it in 1993 in magazine of Government College, Lahore, *Raavi*. , People appreciated this publication enormously. After this, I was working on tasks side-by-side – one was folk ballads, such ballads were not available in any published form. , these are part of our oral tradition –people tell them or share them from person-to-person. I collected them and published as the first volume under the title of "*Des diyan Waaran*" from Punjab Institute of Language, Arts and Culture. I am now working on the next two volumes of this series. The second task I am involved is Punjabi folk-

tales, these folktales are also known as legends, you can call them legends as these semi historical folktales, these folktales exhibit a unique viewpoint of Punjab.

I have published four books in this series by now – the first is “*Kamaal Kahani*”, a selection of stories by Mian Kamaldin. The second is “*Nabar Kahani*”, which contains stories against the European invaders, the third is “*Bar Kahani*”, this is followed by *Raj Kahani*. These are stories of rule, about characters of Punjab who are also characters of the rest of Hindustan; these are stories of the court, of the palaces of kings. These stories have themes of humble, good people, it contains such characters. There is a story of Sardul Khan a minister of Emperor Shah Jahan. And I think of these stories are read together there is a link in them; these four books sketch a parallel history. The Greeks have provided a point of view, another view point was provided by Persian-speaking rulers, then we have the British version; then we e got viewpoint of Urdu speaking people also. But in these stories, what you get is the viewpoint of the man in the street, common man’s view about his own land, about his own fellow-beings, about his language..... Another matter concerns the Lehnda term - as used by Grierson. This Lehnda land approximately is a large cultural unit, it starts from Bahawalnagar and extends to Mandi Bahudeen, where “Lehndi” was spoken. Its old name was Shahpuri, but Grierson used the term Lehnda and it became popular. Thus we have the landscape, characters, and so on. As we collected stories, I, too am based here, most of storytellers were from here, so we have accumulated a lot of literature concerning the lehnda region and its traditions. This is quite a big treasure accumulated here.

The question regarding Punjabi is directly linked to 1857, as the British took over our subcontinent. The atrocities they leashed upon us, the injustice they did to Punjab; it was that they denied the right to teach primary education in mother language. With the arrival of the British, Urdu was introduced in Punjab. So people who went to schools, colleges and universities did not appreciate their mother language. A second misconception was born, that Punjab's language was Urdu. During that time there was great controversy and differences between three different communities; the Hindus in Punjab said their language is Hindi. Punjab's Muslims said, following the lead given by Aligarh leaders, maintained that Punjab's language is Urdu. What I mean to say is how the intelligentsia of our communities acted and gave a lead. And Sikhs, out of necessity, it was them alone, as the Granth Sahib was in Punjabi, so for this reason they identified themselves with Punjabi at that time. And so we had an element of our people who went through colleges and universities who remained devoid of their mother tongue, they had no knowledge about their mother language.

The current scene that we have is this: Punjab University, Lahore, there is M.A. level study offered in Punjabi, M. Phil degree is being offered, one can even do a PhD. Similarly, Lahore College for Women University is offering regular classes in M.A. and M. Phil level too. And in Faislabad University, regular classes are offered at M.A. level Punjabi. In Bahudeen Zakariya University, Multan, although there is no regular provision for Punjabi but anyone wishing to pursue M.A. in Punjabi as a private

candidate can avail the examination facility. In this way we now have an awareness of Punjabi at the university level, people are getting familiar with this scene; some are studying for higher level, doing PhDs. But in terms of a proper base, until Punjabi is introduced and taught at school level, its secure cannot be established.

If doing work pays for food, earns money, then it is clear that people's interest in that work will increase. They have a right, at least, in Punjab, they have a right. Thousands of teachers will adjust in schools, many professors t will adjust in colleges, children who are taught by them will develop an interest for their tradition, for the classic, for their language, for their literature and they will develop as with the quantity, the quality will improve , and great writers will be born. And for us, they've developed routes in a very technical way... until primary education is not provided in mother language in Punjab Still there are movements which are going on, the amount of efforts people have been putting it during past 60 years for our language, that is a big sacrifice. They publish journals themselves, they go out to sell them it is important to appreciate how people have accomplished a lot with their efforts in the last 60 years. Now the Punjab government has ultimately created a place, Punjab Institute of Language and Culture. They have enough staff to do work. It's a big organization of Pakistan, Pakistani Punjabi Adbi Board, Lahore. It exists where the best intellectuals are part of it; its present, secretary Mustaf Ali Sahib declared 21st February as mother tongue day and asked to celebrate it

I from 1947 there has been movement in the cities of Punjab- people know our language, our tradition, and we need to take responsibility for this tradition. Our second generation and third generation are making efforts that it is our right, we should claim our language. On the other hand political parties of Pakistan have never empathized with the question of Punjabi language. When we talk to them about this issue, sometimes they say this and other times say something else. Really we can only put pressure on political parties to include the question of Punjabi language in their agenda.

The first generation of East Punjab after 1947, did pretty good criticism and their research work is very commendable, too. But we too have writers too, I Scholars in East Punjab seem to be unaware of these writers, and he wants to write upon classical poetry he has memorized four – five popular names, they don't know non-famous writers, it is as if they've picked these names from a bibliography. Reading in a true sense means: take the story of Sohni Mehiwal or, Heer Ranjha; say, Heer Ranjha's manuscript is in Punjabi, it is in Persian the book has been published in Lahore, if the scholar may have seen it sometimes they have not seen it. Such manuscripts are not available easily here nor there, so what is the truth? The truth is that we need to be aware of the entire tradition of a legend. We need all versions of Heer Waris, all of Heer Ranjha's stories, familiar with all writers who wrote them, other scholarly works on it need to be analyzed. This is right. Now what they do is, they only know names. Sure, this is what our people do the same thing, they're also not educated on the entire tradition. The availability of books is one thing, making a

script is another thing, you should know the script. It is important for the Pakistani Punjabi scholar here to know the script, for Gurmukhi script, you need to know Gurmukhi. The east Punjabi scholar should definitely know the Persian script. Otherwise he will not be aware of the entire tradition.

The entire tradition consists of the Persian script for the last 1000 years, no doubt in its written form it contains a lot of richness. That richness, if it hasn't been read by the scholar, how will that scholar appreciate its richness? How will he get his direction? In this way, we too, have a problem that the people of Pakistani Punjab, who ordinarily study Urdu, our education system doesn't teach Punjabi. In this way, they use traditional Urdu to work with a loose version of Punjabi. One type of Punjabi is written by Nazam Sahib, it is neither Urdu nor Sanskrit – it is not Sanskrit loaded Punjabi or Urdu loaded Punjabi, it is just Punjabi....Aasif Khan Sahib wrote Punjabi – so on our side, the conscious writer has a question not only of Punjabi but how it should be written as Punjabi. Those who write *Urdu-ized* Punjabi, no doubt, we have many of them, on one side there are those who write for a special purpose or those who use Urdu as a way to work in Punjabi. On the other side by writing in Sanskrit-ized Punjabi, they're not able to contribute either. On our side, those writing in Urdu-ized Punjabi are also not going to be able to last for long.

The old style Punjabi had not been wiped out –there are still present. Someone who wants to listen to Hussein, there are those who find out that Waris Shah has been

published, those Punjabi generations are still present in large numbers. They used to read Bulle Shah, Waris Shah. Any publisher who needs to invest, he invests only because his goods are sold. So the general population is connected to their heritage. The first, second and third generation, or three generations together, without learning Punjabi as it is not taught in main stream schools and universities, ended up siding with Urdu. Still, a large population had a deep love for their mother language, their heritage, their classic *shayari*. But after 1947 the Punjab that had some printing presses, its publishers intellectuals, and writers, helped to revive it again. The Punjabi character is internally connected to his heritage. In 1857, they started Urdu in schools but how many people went to school? Even now, in Punjab, how many people go to school? How many people in big cities like Lahore and Multan go to get their education? In small cities, in small villages, even now, our medium of instruction is Punjabi – math, chemistry, physics, are all taught unofficially in Punjabi. A teacher's role is to make sure children know math but in big cities, because of the influence of the media and the influence of Urdu, there is more harm done to Punjabi that destruction is not applied in small villages yet. So, at that time, people wanted to study and so there were many means to study. In every part of Punjab, there are shops. Something that is very interesting to me, as I came across while working on Neeli's story tellers, I collected folk tales from there, from Sahiwal and Pakpatan. In these areas, Punjabi *shayars* Bhutta Gujarati, Hidayatullah, are well quoted. Other story tellers used to quote Waris Shah, Bulle Shah, Kadir Hazir but in Ukara, Sahiwal and Pakpatan, where I collected if they quote shayars, they quote Bhutta Gujarati and Hidayatullah. The reason for this is

that these areas used to have Punjabi books, those books reached people. One *shayar* is from Gujarat and one is from Lahore but the biggest influence, in this area, is through those books that used to be transported to these areas and read by the village people. So, that influence was heavy but when our generations came around, the situation became more complex, as our language became associated with social class.

And Urdu was introduced in schools. In schools, it reached the fifth and sixth generation gradually, so a foundation of Urdu was established. It came really fast after 1947, then even common man in the street started discouraging Punjabi and it brought the domination of Urdu. To this day, they're still trying.

Because there is no friendship between the two countries, our scholars cannot benefit from exchange about their common heritage and it's an obstacle our talent was divided. In Pakistani Punjab's talent fell into the treasure chest of Urdu, which was started back in the British rule. Iqbal, Faiz, , Rashid, Meera Ji, Rajender Singh – they were all Punjabi. All of them lived in Punjab, their talent fell into the treasure chest of Urdu, that is they wrote in Urdu. In this way, East Punjab's talent fell into the treasure chest of Hindi as some of them started writing in Hindi. We need to focus on these points. We should find out truth, we should evaluate it. The availability of Punjabi books is an issue. We don't give the Indian researcher a chance to come and sit at the Secretariat and read letters and documents or to see other revenue documents. The same way they would not allow us to go to Amritsar

and Patiala to have a network connection and benefit from that exchange. So the full picture cannot be created. I don't want to use any harsh terms, if we do not use our language, in the particular field we are working in, whether short story or novel, criticism, if a scholar doesn't know his own language, its long tradition, what kind of a scholar is he? So, for all these issues both the government is responsible, as also the scholar himself is responsible. By writing in Urdu as our mother language, we are really destroying Punjabi, we are ruining our language, diverting its income by using Sanskrit-ized Punjabi but there people who exist in Punjab, on both sides.

Kishan Singh did not write Sanskritised Punjabi. The older generation knew the fury, like Duggal Sahib, everyone, those who were Persian speaking knew the Persian script, knew Urdu, were married in these areas, with their languages – Mohan Singh, Amrita Pritam and so on. . You should also know of course people of one area, when they write poetry, the language is different from others; prose is different; as they write research and criticism, then the language is different, in terms of the official language. That artificial activity is not present in short story. Prem Prakash is widely read on our side also, and in East Punjab, Duggal Sahib's pieces are read, Amrita's 'Kagaz te Canvas', is a very popular book in Pakistani Punjab and no one finds it difficult to read it. According to Amrita Pritam, Mohan Singh's 'Saave Pattar' is the second most read book after 'Hir Waris', even now is regularly published by commercial people, there is no problem related to language. But when we look at the modern scholar in east Punjab, its language flies over our heads, that is to say it is incomprehensible

Every living language in the world has dialects, Punjabi too has dialects but I think that Lehndi, specifically has a lot of richness. The basic reason for this is that our Punjab's classic literature is written in Lehndi. Baba Farid, lived outside in Pakpatan, Baba Guru Nanak lived outside, was born in Sandal Bar, the area near *Jhanaab* and *Raavi* is the area where Baba Guru Nanak lived. Waris Shah lived in Sandal Bar, Sultan Bhau is also from the same area. Yes. Now there is Shah Hussein, Bulle Shah, they, too wrote the basic unit of their language with the structure of Lehndi. It's not that you shouldn't know words from other dialects, you should but the classic Punjabi literature language that was used, was Lehndi. Now I would like to make a request. We have Baba Farid, what is his Sufism? What is Muslim Sufism? It is fundamentalism and self-criticism. One type of Muslim religious scholars is misinterpreting what the Sufi is saying about what Khuda is – Khuda is not what you say he is . So the result of self-criticism is that there is generation of a lot of terminology, a lot of vocabulary which Farid uses in his language. Farid didn't select his words, he had a deep feeling for them. If we look at Baba Guru Nanak, the word he uses for criticism, for saying his thoughts, are they big thoughts? About humanity, about the universe...about the landscape, society – language is developing in a way, terminology is developing.

Now we have modern Punjabi literature, who created it? on one side we have Farid who knew Arabic and Persian French, he was a big scholar. Despite knowing Arabic and Persian, Farid opted to write in Punjabi. The foundation of modern Punjabi Literature was laid much later by such college going students who became aware of

other languages, like Hindi speakers, Bangali people and seeing them, they started using English in their Punjabi. And after that, how many people would be conscious, how many people would know their language? On the other hand, the scholars of classic literature knew the mainstream languages of that time, but even then adopted Lehndi. A second thing is, modern Punjabi has been written in areas like Majhi, Lahore, Amritsar. In those times, only the affluent could afford to study, only they could afford colleges, obtain degrees coming to Lahore. People far away could not study. They couldn't afford the expenses of education. So, those who became the foundation of modern Punjabi literature, in that respect, no doubt, it was Sikhs who had an important role to play.

One is exploiter, then another one someone who is the exploited. We are the exploited. We have been exploited in this; our language was taken from us in 1857. Now, six generations later, the picture that is painted in our schools, colleges, in our newspapers, in the state news –that it is the British who decided. And we were exploited. Along with this, the question was confused, it's extremism they said, using these words is also a way of exploitation. See what happened to us - here in Pakistan, Urdu, Islam and Pakistan are the three pillars of progression. Sindhi, Baloch, Pathan Punjabi, who are part of the formation of Pakistan, when they talk about their language, it is called extremism. To be able to talk about our own mother language is a man's fundamental right, that every child should get their primary education in their mother language, the entire world agrees. When this question is raised in Pakistani Punjab, we are told Urdu is the language of progression. Urdu

should not be impacted in any way. Other questions, other languages in Pakistan are taking it in a direction of hate because we have been exploited whenever we tried to speak our own language

Because Punjab is troubled. Baba Farid's means Punjab is into Muslims....if we look at it from the other side of Islam, then, look at Baba Farid, Shah Hussein. Do they know better Islam than Bulle Shah, Sultan Bhau, Bulle Shah, Waris Shah, Mian Shah? They are Sufis...they have many followers, aside from intellectuals. Do these intellectuals know better Islam? If someone says, our progression is only attached to Urdu, that is also not right. Because the question has been exploited a lot, it has been written that Punjabi is the language of Sikhs. to emphasize Punjabi means the breaking of Pakistan. That has been put in the brains of the past six generations in such a way that whenever someone brings up Punjabi, they say he is an extremist.

Here, within a few miles, there is a small market where Urdu books are published. In small shops, some Punjabi books are also available, Punjabi books are also being read, but that is looked at badly. Each one of these are ways to exploit. Is this something to say, "no, you are against Islam." When someone wants to speak, no one listens to them because they say "No, friend, you are against Pakistan, you are this, you are that" - this is how we are exploited. Speaking Punjabi is not being an extremist, that is a basic human right, so we have the right to be educated in our mother language. For ages now, no political party has raised the question in Punjab, but in other places, the right to mother language is allowed without question. In Punjab, this is considered extremism, it is not extremism. In reality progression,

Islam, Pakistan, those questions are confused. In India, there are dozens of languages; the state owned them, right? They are all considered official languages of India. In the same way, there are Arab nations, there's more than 20 nations, who's language is Arabic. Is having one language necessary for one nation? Then how are these other nations. If there cannot be more than one language in a state, then look at the example of India. The reality of the situation is, Punjabi intellectual was never allowed to have his point of view. Because he was never allowed, his point of view never came forward. He was never made a part of mainstream media, how will he become? What newspaper will publish, who will run the T.V. channel, who will run the radios? How will the voice reach people? The most critical part, until political parties don't include this question in their agenda, it will remain confused. I believe that in Punjab, Urdu is living on the blood of Punjabi, and whenever a Punjabi talks about his rights, such things are said to blame him.