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**BETWEEN THE CHENAB AND THE THAMES: REREADING  
PUNJABI FOLKLORE THROUGH SHAKESPEAREAN  
TRAGEDY**

**Amna Anwaar Khan**

PhD Scholar PUCAD Research Center, In-Charge Fine Arts Department, Government College University, Lahore.

Email: [amna.anwaar@gcu.edu.pk](mailto:amna.anwaar@gcu.edu.pk), [amnaaanwaar01@gmail.com](mailto:amnaaanwaar01@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

**Aim of the Study:** This paper presents a comparative study of Ustad Allah Bux's paintings (1895–1978), a leading figure in Punjabi visual art, and William Shakespeare's tragedies. It argues that both artistic traditions engage in a deep deconstruction of themes like love, loyalty, and social sacrifice. Using Derridean deconstruction, Aristotelian concepts of hamartia and anagnorisis, and Roland Barthes' semiotics, the study analyzes three key Punjabi folktales: Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, and Mirza Sahiban, as depicted by Allah Bux.

**Methodology:** This paper conducted a qualitative inquiry on exploratory and descriptive research, utilizing intrinsic expressionism and secondary data, including interviews.

**Findings:** These are then compared to their Shakespearean counterparts: Romeo and Juliet, Othello, and King Lear. The findings suggest that Allah Bux's humanist realism and his use of landscape as a tragic character contribute a unique South Asian perspective to the global conversation on comparative tragedy.

**Conclusion:** Through detailed visual analysis focused on composition, color, and symbolic objects, such as the unbaked clay pot (kacha ghora), the turbulent Chenab River, and poses of devotion, the paper shows that Allah Bux's paintings go beyond simple illustration to become philosophical reflections on universal tragedy. Furthermore, it argues that Punjabi folklore is not just a regional cultural artifact but a vibrant visual language of human resilience that aligns with universal archetypes found in Shakespeare's plays.

**Keywords:** : *Ustad Allah Bux, Punjabi folklore, Shakespearean tragedy, visual semiotics, deconstruction, Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, Mirza Sahiban, comparative literature, hamartia*

**Introduction**

Folktales are vital representations of a society's traditions, cultural identity, moral principles, and social conduct; they frequently define its notions of moral and morality. From antiquity to the present, every civilization on the planet has created its unique folk customs. As part of a common cultural legacy, these stories were originally passed



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verbally from generation to generation. This article explores Punjabi culture using traditional folktales and Ustad Allah Bux's artwork as a visual representation of them.

Punjabi folklore is rich with tales of tragic romance, heroic resistance, and mystical devotion. Stories like *Heer Ranjha*, *Sohni Mahiwal*, and *Mirza Sahiban* have long been passed down through oral tradition. Allah Bux drew inspiration from these narratives, translating them into visual form with remarkable sensitivity.

Folktales have profound significance in Punjabi culture and emphasize the customs of kindness, relationships, and cultural values. Rather than illustrating folklore in a literal, storybook manner, Ustad Allah Bux infused his paintings with symbolic elements capturing the *essence* of these tales: longing, devotion, sacrifice, and the eternal connection between humans and nature.

Within Punjab's rich cultural landscape, oral traditions have served not just as entertainment but as the "moral and social DNA" of the society (Sekhon, 1996). Iconic tragic romances, *Heer Ranjha*, *Sohni Mahiwal*, *Mirza Sahiban*, and *Sassi Punnu*, weren't crafted by poets in courts but developed over generations among rural communities. These stories reflect collective fears, moral values, and spiritual hopes of a people influenced by the Indus River and Sufi beliefs. Sung as ballads (*kafis*) at shrines, fields, and weddings, they became integral to *Punjabi* society's identity. Truly, these stories embody the people's philosophy, an unwritten philosophy embodied by doomed lovers struggling against tribal honor, familial duties, and cosmic fate.

Punjabi folktales work on multiple levels simultaneously. On the surface, they are romantic stories, often ending with the death of the main characters. Beneath this, they serve as a critique of social systems, including the *biradari* (clan system), arranged marriages, and the concept of *izzat* (honor) that suppresses individual freedom to promote collective conformity (Malik, 2006). This layered nature makes Punjabi folklore particularly suitable for comparison with Shakespearean tragedies, which also appear as dramatic stories but explore the underlying forces that lead to the downfall of exceptional individuals.

*Ustad Allah Bux* (1895–1978) stands as the singular artistic genius who elevated these folk narratives from the realm of oral performance and popular illustration into the domain of high visual philosophy. Born in Lahore, trained in the traditions of the Mughal miniature and influenced by the European Romantic Realism he encountered through colonial-era art education, *Allah Bux* developed a style that his admirers have described as "Humanist Realism" a mode of painting that honors the physical particularity of the Punjabi landscape while investing every rock, river, and human gesture with an almost unbearable weight of symbolic meaning (Malik, 2006).



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Crucially, *Allah Bux* made a conscious artistic choice that distinguishes his work from that of his contemporaries: he chose to paint not the "event" of the folktale, not the moment of action or climax, but rather the "essence" of his subjects' interior emotional and metaphysical state. His *Sohni* does not splash dramatically in the water; she is caught in a moment of transcendent longing, the river both devouring her body and paradoxically elevating her spirit. His *Heer* does not writhe in the agony of poison; she embodies the quiet, sacred surrender of a soul that has chosen love over survival. This commitment to essence over event represents a fundamentally philosophical approach to artistic narration, one that finds its closest parallel not in narrative painting but in the tragic drama of the Elizabethan stage.

This essay argues that Allah Bux's paintings constitute a visual deconstruction of Punjabi tragedy, reflecting global motifs in Shakespearean theater, particularly the self-destruction brought about by love, envy, and social sacrifice. This study shows that Punjabi folklore is not a local curiosity but rather a parallel and equally sophisticated tradition of tragic humanism, whose visual articulation by *Allah Bux* contributes uniquely to the global conversation about the nature of tragic experience. It does this by analyzing *Allah Bux's* paintings through the dual lenses of Derridean deconstruction and Shakespearean tragic theory.

## II. Literature Review:

Punjabi folklore's journey from oral tradition to written classicism is a complicated and contentious one. Before classical poets codified the major tragic romances, they existed for centuries as fluid, polyphonic oral traditions, according to scholars like Sekhon (1996). The most important of these codifications is *Waris Shah's* eighteenth-century version of *Heer Ranjha* (written in 1766), which turned a well-known song into an intricate Sufi allegory where *Ranjha's* love for *Heer* serves as a metaphor for the soul's yearning for the holy. *Heer* by *Waris Shah* is notable for its intricate storyline, its satirical societal commentary (the poet is particularly harsh on the hypocrisy of Muslim clerics), and its profoundly humanist depiction of female agency and desire.

Similarly, different regional traditions have given varied poetic interpretations to the legends of *Sohni Mahiwal* and *Mirza Sahiban*. For the sake of this study, it is important to note that the shift from oral fluidity to written classicism consolidated the



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inherent tensions and ambiguities of these stories, leaving the tragic structures open to further artistic interpretation. When *Allah Bux* came upon these tales, he was dealing with a tradition that had already undergone centuries of artistic development rather than unprocessed folk material (Aijazuddin, 1991).

### ***Ustad Allah Bux's Aesthetic***

Unfortunately, there is not as much critical writing about *Allah Bux* as his artistic significance merits. The main scholarly work on Malik's visual philosophy is still his monograph from 2006. According to Malik, the main conflict in *Allah Bux's* work is between his Sufi-influenced metaphysical worldview, which saw all physical reality as a veil (*parda*) hiding a deeper spiritual truth, and his training in European academic realism, which placed a strong emphasis on accurate anatomical representation, perspectival depth, and the play of natural light. Instead of being a contradiction, this tension serves as the inspiration for his paintings. In *Allah Bux's* paintings, the physical world is shown with remarkable sensory accuracy, but it also gestures beyond itself toward a world of unadulterated emotion and spiritual yearning.

In order to comprehend *Allah Bux's* artistic milieu within the larger context of Lahore's art scene in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aijazuddin (1991) offers crucial contextual grounding. Even though *Allah Bux* works in a much larger format and with a far more overtly romantic emotional register, the Mughal miniature tradition's hierarchical use of scale, flattening of perspective in favor of symbolic arrangement, and intricate detail can be seen in his compositional strategies. Understanding this dual legacy is crucial to understanding how Allah Bux could be both a symbolist, employing the same rivers, forests, and human bodies as vehicles for philosophical meditation, and a realist, loyal to Punjab's rivers, forests, and persons.

### ***Aristotle, Shakespeare, and the Logic of the Fatal Flaw (The Anatomy of Tragedy)***

Aristotle's *Poetics*, the primary Western text for comprehending tragic form, must be the starting point for any comparative study of tragedy. For this study, Aristotle's two most important ideas are *hamartia*, which is commonly translated as "tragic flaw" or, more precisely, "error of judgment," and *anagnorisis*, which is the critical realization or moment when the tragic hero realizes the nature of the error that has destroyed them (Eagleton, 2003). According to Aristotle, the ideal tragic protagonist is a person of mixed moral character whose demise is caused by some recognizable error in judgment rather than by pure evil or pure misfortune.



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Shakespeare adopts this Aristotelian structure, but he complicates it significantly. The hamartia in *Romeo and Juliet* is arguably the result of the societal structure itself, the long-standing rivalry that prevents personal love, rather than any particular character. The General's fatal weakness in *Othello* is his disastrous susceptibility to manipulation, which paradoxically stems from his greatest strength: his unwavering, soldierly dedication to devotion and honor. The King's incapacity to distinguish between manufactured flattery and true affection is known as the hamartia in *King Lear*. This lack of discernment leads to a disastrous redistribution of power. Shakespearean tragedy's enduring impact, according to Critchley (2019), is precisely this combination of contingency and inevitability: we simultaneously sense that the disaster was predetermined and that it could have been prevented. This interpretation is expanded upon by Eagleton (2003), who contends that tragedy is essentially ideological since it highlights the most stressful moments in a particular social structure and the points at which the intrinsic contradictions of the system become intolerable.

### III. Theoretical Framework

#### The Tragedy of Deconstruction

Although it necessitates careful adaptation from its original literary context, Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction offers a potent analytical tool for analyzing *Allah Bux's* paintings. According to Derrida's framework, deconstruction entails recognizing the hierarchical binary oppositions that form a text, such as presence/absence, speech/writing, nature/culture, and hero/victim, and proving that these oppositions are constructed and thus reversible rather than stable and natural (Eagleton, 2003). When applied to visual art, deconstruction encourages us to consider how a picture both supports and contradicts its seeming ideological convictions.



**Plate 01: Heer and Ranjha by Ustad Allah Bux oil on canvas**

Dated: 1960, (32 15/16 x 59 5/8in)

Source: Internet; Accessed by Author May, 2026

Deconstruction functions along multiple axes in *Allah Bux's* depictions of the tragic romances of Punjab. Above all, his work dismantles the dichotomy between "heroic" and "vulnerable." The protagonists' agency *Ranjha's* unwavering commitment, *Sohni's* bravery at night, and *Mirza's* fighting skills is highlighted in the traditional retelling of these folktales. However, *Allah Bux's* visual interpretations always center on the exposure moment, the instant when the hero's might is made apparent while also being the source of their weakness. His *Sohni* is both powerful and devastated by her own passion. His love both unmakes and elevates his *Ranjha*. One of the most conceptually complex features of *Allah Bux's* artistic accomplishment is this visual dissection of heroism, which exposes the frailty within the heroic.

The comparative framework of this study rests on the identification of structural homologies between the Punjabi folktales and their Shakespearean counterparts not superficial narrative similarities, but deep-structural parallels in the logic of tragic destruction. Table 1 summarizes these structural links.

**Table 1: Structural Homologies Between Punjabi Folktales and Shakespearean Tragedies**

Punjabi Folktale (Allah Bux)	Shakespearean Reference	Theme of Deconstruction	Structural Homology
Heer Ranjha	Romeo & Juliet	The Deconstruction of Tribalism	Both works strip away the family name to reveal the



<b>Punjabi Folktale (Allah Bux)</b>	<b>Shakespearean Reference</b>	<b>Theme of Deconstruction</b>	<b>Structural Homology</b>
			raw, doomed autonomy of the individual. Allah Bux's focus on Heer's longing mirrors Juliet's defiance against the Veronese structures.
Sohni Mahiwal	Othello	The Tragedy of the Elements and Betrayal	As Othello is undone by a trifle (the handkerchief) and manipulation, Sohni is undone by a baked/unbaked pot. Allah Bux depicts the river as a semiotic devouring force, similar to the psychological sea of Othello's jealousy.
Mirza Sahiban	King Lear	The Betrayal of Kinship	Mirza's trust in Sahiban's brothers mirrors Lear's misplaced trust in his daughters. Allah Bux paints Mirza in a moment of rest before the fall, capturing the tragic blindness of the hero.



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Romeo and Juliet and *Heer Ranjha* both have a basic tragic framework that revolves around the arbitrary cruelty of inherited societal division destroying love. Shakespeare portrays the Montague-Capulet conflict as being so archaic and ridiculous that there is no longer any logical explanation for it; it is merely institutional inertia, a system that endures by habit and reputation. The same reasoning underlies the Punjabi caste and clan system that divides Heer (of the Sial tribe) from Ranjha (of the Ranjha tribe): these tribal divisions have social force rather than rational content, and that social force is enough to bring about the demise of anyone who violates it (Sekhon, 1996).

The more intricate similarity between Othello and Sohni Mahiwal is based on the shared topic of elemental destruction as well as the semiotics of the objects, the clay pot and the handkerchief. In both stories, a seemingly little household item becomes the tragic turning point. Iago describes Shakespeare's handkerchief as a "trifle light as air," but it bears the full weight of Othello's confidence and its demise. Sohni's clay pot is equally insignificant as a tangible item and equally disastrous in its failure: Sohni's nightly act of devotion is turned into a death sentence when a jealous sister-in-law engineers the change from a baked to an unbaked pot. The visual depiction of this story by Allah Bux centers on the exact moment when the solid turns liquid, that is, when the seemingly dependable vessel of devotion dissolves into the consuming river (Malik, 2006).

The common subject of misplaced confidence and betrayal by those who should be faithful is the structural connection between King Lear and Mirza Sahiban. Lear's hamartia is his incapacity to discern between real and fake love; he distrusts Cordelia, who loves him with sincere but unspoken devotion, while trusting Goneril and Regan, who flatter him. An analogous lack of insight may be seen in Mirza's faith in Sahiban, particularly in his readiness to sleep carelessly in front of her brothers. Like Cordelia, Sahiban's reasons are essentially loving: she breaks Mirza's arrows out of a frantic attempt to stop the carnage that would unavoidably ensue if her brothers and her boyfriend faced off. However, Mirza's death results from this seemingly protective deed; this is a structural echo of Lear's last scene, when the father's initial lack of judgment ultimately leads to the death of the loving daughter.

### IV. Visual Analysis

#### Symbolism in Allah Bux's Work

##### *The Landscape of Longing: Nature as Tragic Protagonist*

Allah Bux's portrayal of the setting is arguably the most intellectually unique aspect of his approach to the Punjabi tragic romances. The landscape serves as setting in the traditional pictorial tradition of romantic illustration, whether in the court



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miniatures of Mughal India or the popular market art of Lahore. It offers context, atmosphere, and aesthetic enjoyment but does not take part in the story. In contrast, the landscape in Allah Bux's paintings is an active protagonist that shapes, mirrors, and eventually decides the fate of the human beings inside it, rather than just serving as the stage on which the human drama is performed (Malik, 2006).

Deep currents in the Sufi and European Romantic traditions that shaped Allah Bux's development are connected to this philosophical notion of environment as participant rather than backdrop. According to Sufi philosophy, the natural world is a manifestation of the divine; every river, forest, and storm is a form of divine communication, and the human condition's tragedy is precisely the disconnect between the soul's ability to hear this communication and the social structures that keep it from reacting. In the tale of Sohni Mahiwal, the Chenab River represents all the societal, family, and cosmic elements that stand in the way of an individual's desire and its realization; it is more than just a physical barrier separating two lovers (Aijazuddin, 1991).

### ***The Object as Tragic Pivot***

The *kacha ghara*, or unbaked clay pot, is the focal point of Allah Bux's visual story of Sohni Mahiwal. It serves with remarkable density and accuracy in the painting's semiotic economy. Clay pottery holds a deep symbolic load in Punjabi visual and material culture. It is connected to the feminine, domesticity, the frailty of human undertakings, and the ground, from where all life originates and returns. One of the most powerful symbols in Punjabi folk philosophy is the potter's wheel, or *charkha*, which represents the cycles of creation and destruction controlled by the divine potter (Sekhon, 1996).

With remarkable sensory accuracy, Allah Bux depicts the clay's texture: the pot is a unique object with its own weight, porosity, and water vulnerability rather than a generic symbol. The painting's main compositional tension is produced by the juxtaposition between the unbaked clay's earthy hardness and the Chenab's unrelenting flow. Through a substitute that was never intended to cause harm, the pot that should provide flotation, that should be the vessel of the lover's passage becomes the weapon of drowning. Allah Bux depicts this reversal of function, the life-giving vessel turning into the death-instrument, with an accuracy that transcends representation and attains the degree of philosophical declaration.

### ***The Chenab as Active Antagonist***



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In his Sohni Mahiwal paintings, Ustad Allah Bux depicts the Chenab using a technique known to art critics as dynamic impasto: thick, swirling brushstrokes that give the water a tangible presence on the canvas, a literal dimensionality that makes the river seem to reach out toward the viewer (Malik, 2006). The warm earth tones and traditional reds of Sohni's clothing serve as a moving contrast to the visual field of overpowering energy created by the color scheme of deep indigos, murky greys, and sporadic bursts of stormy white.



**Plate 02: Sohni Mahiwal by Ustad Allah Bux** Dated: 1923

Medium: watercolor/paper (some catalogues also mention mixed media studies)

Source: Internet; Accessed by Author May, 2026

One of Allah Bux's most potent visual points is the contrast between the warm, demanding color of Sohni's clothes and the chilling, devouring darkness of the river. The river's color symbolizes not just water but the full apparatus of social opposition: the icy reality of tribal honor (izzat), the physical world's indifference to human desire, and the unstoppable logic of a universe where life is not assured by devotion. In contrast, Sohni's warm hues stand for the intensity of personal passion, the irreducible uniqueness of a desire that knows what it wants and chooses it fully aware of the price.

***Posture of Devotion and Sacrifice***



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What could be referred to as an ethics of vulnerability distinguishes Allah Bux's portrayal of the human body in his paintings of the Punjabi tragic romances. His forms are neither genuinely commonplace nor heroically glorified; they are neither the smooth, geometrically flawless bodies of academic classicism. They occupy a space in between the ideal and the real, one that is perfectly calibrated to imply the existence of an amazing spiritual ability within a normal human body (Malik, 2006).

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### ***Color and Light***

The light that comes from the characters themselves is a recurrent aspect of Allah Bux's portrayal of his tragic subjects. This is not the naturalistic light of plein-air realism, which comes from an outside source and uses the principles of optics to produce highlights and shadows. Instead, it is a light that seems to originate in the figure's body, or more accurately, in the figure's soul, and radiates outward through the skin, producing an unearthly radiance that contrasts sharply with the chaotic, black environment around it.

This method establishes a direct connection between Allah Bux and the mystical traditions of Punjab, particularly with the Sufi notion of the *nur* (divine light) that animates the devotee's soul. In Sufi poetry, the lover's inner light is both a sign of their spiritual elevation and their closeness to the divine beloved. and the reason they are vulnerable in this world, because it makes them visible to powers that would put them out. Allah Bux skillfully converts this literary idea into a simple visual tactic. His Sohni, Heer, and Mirza are all enlightened from within; they shine with a commitment that the outside world is working to undermine.

### **V. Discussion:**

#### **Linking the Tragedies**

##### ***The Chenab and the Storm: Nature as Mirror of Internal Chaos***

The utilization of elemental natural forces, such as storm, sea, and river, as objective correlatives for the emotional disorder of the tragic protagonist is the most obvious structural link between Allah Bux's visual cosmos and the Shakespearean tragic tradition. Shakespeare's most extensive use of this tactic is in *King Lear*, where the well-known storm on the heath in Act III serves as both a meteorological backdrop and an



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externalization of Lear's psychological collapse: as Lear becomes insane, the outside world becomes chaotic. The storm is both a mirror and a punishment, a cause and an effect. Shakespeare's most daring formal invention, according to Critchley (2019), is the transformation of the natural world into a type of psychological weather.

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### ***The Deconstruction of Marriage as Social Contract***

Romeo and Juliet's tragedy and Heer Ranjha's tragedy both revolve around the poisoning of marriage, which should be the story's socially acceptable conclusion. The lovers' covert marriage in Act II of Shakespeare's play should end the tragedy because it fulfills their love and, in theory, might put an end to the conflict between their families. Rather, it turns into a tool for their demise because Veronese society's social norms forbid the marriage, and its concealment exacerbates the issues that culminate in the disastrous last act. The bridal chamber that was never allowed to exist in the daytime world is horrifyingly transformed into Juliet's grave.

There is a structurally accurate parallel with Heer Ranjha. Several versions of the story claim that Heer and Ranjha are joined in a spiritual marriage that is acknowledged by the Sufi saint who oversees their romance. However, the tribal social order does not accept this connection, and the lovers are split up when Heer's family arranges her marriage to another man—the traditional social contract. The moment of reunion turns into the moment of death when Ranjha finally arrives to recover Heer, and a socially accepted marriage appears to be about to restore what was always due to the lovers: Heer is poisoned, and Ranjha dies with her. The interior essence of Heer's devotion is frequently highlighted in Allah Bux's paintings of Heer rather than the dramatic moment of poisoning. The expression on her face suggests she has always known that devotion of this intensity cannot coexist with the social world (Malik, 2006).

### ***Mirza and the Logic of Tragic Blindness***



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The comparison between Mirza Sahiban and King Lear offers the most nuanced presentation of the Aristotelian idea of the "fall of the great man", the demise of an exceptional person through the very traits that make him special. In every version of the folktale, Mirza is portrayed as a guy of tremendous physical courage, a passionate lover, and an amazing horseman. However, his hamartia is a type of trust that could also be referred to as a lack of social intelligence a refusal to recognize that the love he and Sahiban share does not exist in a social vacuum and that Sahiban's brothers are obligated by the code of honor to use violence in response to their sister's elopement, regardless of their feelings toward her.

A specific compositional moment—the hero at rest, the shattered arrows, the horse grazing nearby—is frequently favored in Allah Bux's paintings of Mirza. This moment of rest, or heroic vulnerability, is the visual counterpart of what Critchley (2019) refers to as the "tragic pause," the instant before the disaster in which the audience sees, with terrible clarity, what the hero cannot see: that safety is an illusion, that rest is impossible, and that the very beauty of this moment of peace makes the violence that is about to shatter it all the more devastating. The similar scene occurs in Act IV of King Lear, when Lear awakens in the French camp to discover Cordelia by his side. This is a moment of such radiant tenderness that the tragedy of ActV becomes almost unbearable by contrast.

According to Eagleton (2003), tragedy's ideology is always, in a way, conservative since it upholds the authority of social structures by illustrating what happens to those who oppose them. However, he also contends that the best tragic art simultaneously transcends this conservative role, proclaiming a value that the social system cannot contain through the hero's immense humanity. Similar to Shakespeare's Lear, Allah Bux's Mirza perishes due to a structural defect in the social structure, which is revealed by the hero's extraordinary humanity. Through the character of the hero's inner light, the picture stresses that the annihilation of such a figure is an indictment of the culture that destroys him, rather than just documenting this death.

### **VI. Conclusion**

This essay has argued that the paintings of the great Punjabi tragic romances, Heer Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, and Mirza Sahiban, by Ustad Allah Bux represent a sophisticated visual practice of tragic deconstruction that has its closest artistic analog in the Shakespearean dramatic tradition. The study has shown that Allah Bux's paintings are philosophical reflections on the universal architecture of tragedy, the destruction of exceptional individuals by the convergence of personal hamartia and structural social violence—rather than just depictions of folktales through careful examination of



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compositional structure, symbolic object, color and light, and the treatment of landscape as active protagonist.

The structural similarities between the Shakespearean and Punjabi tragic traditions have been shown by the comparative framework developed in this research. These similarities are the consequence of parallel reactions to the same basic human dilemma rather than direct impact. Both traditions struggle with what Eagleton (2003) refers to as the "sweet violence" of tragedy: the contradiction in which the loss of what is most valuable confirms the worth of what has been lost. Whether Heer or Juliet, Sohni or Desdemona, Mirza or Lear, both traditions use the figure of the doomed lover as a means of examining the most basic issues of human existence: the conflict between personal desire and societal duty, between the physics of the social world and the metaphysics of devotion.

Allah Bux's artistic accomplishments have an influence on comparative cultural studies as well as art history. Allah Bux has accomplished what may be considered an act of cultural translation without reduction by translating the Punjabi tragic tradition into a visual language that is understandable to audiences around the world while staying true to its native philosophical and spiritual foundations. The "essence" of the folktales, their intellectual and emotional heart, is preserved in his paintings without being compromised by the need for universality. In this way, his work exemplifies a cross-cultural artistic engagement approach that is still very important today.

This paper concludes with the idea that folklore is a living visual language of human tragedy and resilience that transcends boundaries and speaks directly to the condition of any human being who has loved, lost, and been destroyed by the collision of private desire with public obligation. Folklore is not a relic of the past, a charming survival from a pre-modern world. Ustad Allah Bux's paintings, with their dazzling, stormy, tragic beauty, continue to make this insight accessible to everyone who comes into contact with them. Bux understood this to the fullest extent of his artistic brilliance. By analyzing his Punjabi lovers from a Shakespearean perspective, we find that human potential for tragic commitment is universal rather than diminishing either tradition. It's a universal language, one that artists across cultures and centuries have independently discovered how to speak.



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