

Sufi Shrines in South-East Panjab: A Socio-Cultural Study (c.1200-c.1800)

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Abstract: The sociopolitical relevance of Sufi shrines in South-East Panjab between c. 1200 and c. 1800 is investigated in this paper. It looks at how these shrines could promote regional spiritual, cultural, and commercial contacts. The studies clarify the influence of Sufi saints on regional authorities, the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, and their effect on the socio-religious mix of local people. The research follows the historical development of significant Sufi orders in the area using primary sources, field surveys, and hagiographical testimonies, thereby highlighting the transforming power of their shrines on community dynamics. The study also assesses the contemporary importance of these spiritual sites and examines how Sufi practices helped to produce syncretism, cultural absorption, and economic growth. This study uses a qualitative method to examine the historical and cultural functions Sufi shrines in South-East Panjab perform. Field studies of the shrines complement primary materials like archival records, folklore, and hagiographies. “The approach traces the relationship of Sufi saints with local communities and regional authorities using both historical study and ethnographic research. Along with looking at the financial effects of shrines in their areas, the research centers on the main Silsila's of Sufism and their socio-cultural effects. Analyzed are customs, rituals, and their meaning to help one to fully appreciate the part the shrines play in forming local culture.

Keywords: Sufi shrines, South-East Panjab, Islamic mysticism, Sufism

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to completely appreciate the development of Islam on the Indian subcontinent without recognizing the essential contribution of Sufi saints, whose spiritual impact pervaded areas long before official Muslim control was established. A fundamental component of Islamic life, Sufism—a mystical offshoot of the faith—blends theoretical profundity with a focus on personal, experienced prayer. From the 13th to the 18th century, Sufi shrines, or dargahs, were somewhat well-known sites of pilgrimage and religious authority in South-East

Panjab. These shrines became centers of social, cultural, even commercial activity in addition to representing the spiritual direction of their creators. Interactions supported by these spiritual institutes changed the socio-cultural fabric of the area as local people interacted with Sufi saints and their teachings. Although important Sufi groups like the Chishti and Suhrawardy helped to define the spiritual terrain, the regional history of Sufism in South-East Panjab is still quite understudied compared to other regions of the subcontinent. Most of the current studies usually concentrate on the notable dargahs of Ajmer and Delhi or the bigger Sufi centers in North-West Panjab. Nonetheless, the dargahs in South-East Panjab were as important in promoting religious syncretism, bridging indigenous customs with Islamic ideas, and thus altering the local cultural dynamics. Through the trade networks they maintained and the gifts collected from both kings and followers, these spiritual locations also helped to promote economic growth.

Focusing on their function as institutions that crossed religious barriers and promoted cultural integration, this paper attempts to explore the socio-cultural and financial effects of Sufi shrines in South-East Panjab. It will also look at the customs and ceremonies connected to these shrines, their management, and how their historical significance still permeates the present”. By means of a review of primary sources, field studies, and extant literature, this study aims to close the gaps in the historical account of Sufism in this area therefore providing a more complete knowledge of its relevance. Often seen as the core of Islamic spirituality, Sufism offered a distinctive method of religious practice by stressing personal experience and direct contact with the divine. Sufi teachings, unlike the more formalistic components of Islamic law and theology, concentrated on inner purity, humility, and love for all of creation, which resonated profoundly with individuals across many socioeconomic strata in medieval England. Sufi saints were especially important in South-East Panjab

in bridging cultural gaps as their lessons promoted inclusion and often included components of regional customs and belief systems. With its varied religious scene, this area regarded Sufism as a middle ground between many groups, including Muslims and Hindus, therefore fostering a tolerant and spiritual oneness.

Not just sites of religious importance, the Sufi shrines in South-East Panjab evolved into hubs for education, socializing, and business contacts. Establishing these shrines, the saints—also known as pirs—drew people from all walks of life—peasants, tradesmen, aristocrats, even kings—seeking spiritual direction and benefits. These shrines grew to be powerful establishments throughout time, essential in the political and social life of the area. Their purposes went beyond mere religious observance to include mediation in disputes, charitable donations, and promotion of area businesses by means of markets set around the shrines. “Although the larger background of Sufism in India has been much researched, the regional history of South-East Panjab—especially between the 13th and 18th centuries—has not gotten the same attention. This study seeks to investigate the evolution of Sufi groups in this area, the sociopolitical processes they impacted, and their financial benefits to nearby populations. Through concentrating on less well-known shrines and saints, the research aims to underline the significance of these spiritual sites in determining the course of South-East Panjab historically. By means of thorough field surveys and historical text research, this project will provide fresh perspectives on the legacy of Sufism and its contribution to the diverse, diversified culture that still shapes, the area today.

Statement of Research Problem

Mysticism is a universal element in many world religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, where it is known as Sufism. The study of Sufism, an essential part of Islamic culture and spirituality, is significant in understanding the historical development of Islam in India. While Islam's presence in India dates back to the arrival of Arab traders, the establishment of an Islamic state occurred much later. The spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent has been explained through various theories such as forced conversion, political patronage, and immigration. However, scholars like Richard M. Eaton emphasize the crucial role Sufi saints played in this process, particularly in

their interactions with local populations before the establishment of Muslim Sultanates in the 13th century. In Panjab, Sufi shrines and saints like Fariduddin Masud Ganjshakar and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar emerged as influential spiritual figures, shaping the socio-cultural landscape. Yet, despite considerable research on major Sufi centers like Ajmer and Delhi, the regional history of Sufism in South-East Panjab remains underexplored. This research problem stems from the lack of scholarly attention to the socio-cultural and economic roles played by Sufi shrines in South-East Panjab between the 13th and 18th centuries.” The study aims to address these gaps by focusing on the major Sufi orders (silsilahs) in this region, their rituals, and the socio-political and economic impact of their shrines, while also exploring their contemporary relevance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Mushtaq et al., 2019) studied “Spiritual Rituals at Sufi Shrines in Punjab: A Study of Khawaja Shams-Ud-Din Sialvi, Sial Sharif and Meher Ali Shah of Golra Sharif” The narrative of this study delves into the impact of Sufi institutions on the system of religion, politics, and culture. “Many people participate in various rites at Sufi shrines. Because of their religious significance, the shrines of Khawaja Shams-Ud-Din Sialvi of Sial Sharif and Meher Ali Shah of Golra Sharif have been chosen as case studies. This study discusses rituals with the society's cultural customs in mind, supporting the idea that individuals follow religion based on what is necessary for their culture. It has provided fresh insight into Clifford Geertz cultural dimensions of religious analysis” in which he defines "religion: as a cultural system—that is, a network of symbols that explains and synthesizes a people's speech and ethos. The historical analyses of Baba Farid, Taunsa Sharif, and Jalalpur Sharif shrines put forward by Eaton and Gilmartin are identical. Findings are both analytical and described in this study. We have checked both primary and secondary sources.

(Hasan et al., 2018) studied “reconstructing the sufi shrine as a living cultural heritage: case” In modern South Asian society, the Sufi shrine represents an ongoing cultural legacy. This assumption is the central tenet of the research hypothesis. “Historians Jalal (2001), Anderson (2006), Hasan (1979), and Gilmartin (2014) discuss how the postcolonial Pakistan nation state is formed within the setting of the sufi shrine. According to Ahmed (2015), it stands

as an emblem of a more extensive precolonial civilization. The cultural and political transformation of the area from its precolonial kingdoms to its colonial era (1799–1947) and finally to the establishment of the nation state in 1947 is mirrored in the development of the sufi shrine. Sufi shrines on the Indian subcontinent attest to historical continuity during times of transition when political power and administrative frameworks have undergone significant changes.

(Sudarta, 2022) studied Sufism, Sufi Leadership and 'Modernisation' in South Asia since c. 1800 How the Islamic spiritual tradition of sufism has dealt with modernization is an area that has received surprisingly little academic attention. Studying how Indian sufis responded to the rise of the colonial state—which brought new knowledge and order—and the rise of reform and revivalist Muslim movements—which viewed sufism as detrimental to Muslims' ability to maintain an Islamic society—has been an area of great interest to me. Never before has sufism been confronted with such an antagonistic environment. My strategy for tackling this issue is based on researching three active spiritual traditions in India from the 1800s and 1900s.

(Sarfray Ahmad, 2022) studied Socio-economic and Cultural Impact of Sufi Shrines: A Case Study of Mitthan Kot The abundance of Sufi shrines in Pakistan has had far-reaching effects on the country's economy, culture, and society. Sajjada Nasheen has a significant impact on Pakistan's rural poor and illiterate. The purpose of this research is to examine the cultural and social impacts of rural Sufi shrines in Mitthan Kot, Upper Indus Basin. This study utilizes in-depth interviews with many stakeholders as part of its qualitative research approach. The data has been analyzed using thematic analysis. According to the results, locals have ties to shrines that deal with sad truths. The local and national economies benefit from the abundance of people who work in the areas around shrines, whether it's in clothing stores, restaurants, or transportation. Culture festivals, such as Urs and Meela, provide people with spiritual delight and social enjoyment in a similar vein. Beyond this, literacy conventions and free eye camps are two more important medical facilities that help the impoverished. There must be immediate action to improve the efficiency of shrines and the rules governing their operations so that offerings may be better used. The abundance of Sufi shrines in Pakistan has had far-reaching effects on the country's

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Giving at Shrine

All of these quotations point to the fact that when people visit the shrine, they spend money that goes to the Sajjada Nasheen and the Waqf board. Many routes, both inside and outside the temple itself (such as stores selling religious goods, a box for visitors to contribute money, or Nazrana), allow the shrine to reap the benefits of its patrons.

The shrine's langar system incorporates several contributors. The proprietor of Ashraf Sugar Mill, who is also a devoted disciple of Khawaja Sahab, is the primary benefactor. In addition to providing regular money for langar, he has provided Sajjada Nasheen a residence". As a result, appealing to people's emotions is an important part of the supply and demand for individuals associated with the shrine.

"When our wishes are fulfilled, we come here and give money or animal to Sajjada Nasheen or distributing rice according to our financial power".

"Yes, we contribute into langar according to our financial power, through money, animal or wheat".

"We do not give too much to Sajjada Nasheen but when we come, we give some money to contribute into langar. Today we gave a goat to Sajjada Nasheen to offer Mannat".

“We are poor people we just support in the season of wheat according to our power. All the things that we are having are due to Khawaja Sahab, we are nothing without him”.

“We do not know about family support, but when we visit shrine, we put some money in the box or give money in the form of amulet”.

Employment

Detailed information on the market forces at work is provided by the quotations made by respondents to the poll. Since the shrine offers several economic options for individuals to make a living, there is activity on both the supply and demand sides. “We get many benefits from the Benazir Bridge, but those in positions of authority, like Sajjada Nasheen, the politicians, and the waqf, also stand to gain financially. Residents in District Rajanapur will be able to find gainful employment as a result, and their agricultural goods will have easier access to markets. Since the number of tourists increases owing to this bridge, Waqf board and Sajjada Nasheen also benefit from it. Additionally, this is great for store owners since customers spend a lot of money there.

Our earnings are directly proportional to the number of followers. With loyal customers, our stores thrive. Actually, we have ties not just to the temple but also to the manufacturers that provide us with goods, which we then sell both within and outside the shrine grounds.

There is a religious significance to every item sold there. Many worshippers purchase sweets (cardamom and dates) as a token of their devotion to the faith. Our product sales are boosted by the quantity of followers. Due to the exorbitant rent demanded by Waqf, we used to charge guests a premium and they could only come in the winter. However, we now have year-round tourists and our costs are affordable. Similar to Nazrana, Waqf and Sajjada Nasheen also profit from an increase in tourists.

Benefits attributed to Sajjada Nasheen

Even though the Sajjada Nasheen have access to funds that come from Waqf, guests, followers, as well as governmental and non-governmental sources, the sums are seldom distributed to their rightful owners. Power over resources has seldom been used to suit the strategic or practical goals of the community.

Being the head of the worldwide ulama e mashaikh puts Sajjada Nasheen in a position of authority right now. The residents of Mitthan Kot feel utterly let down by Sajjada Nasheen's family; all they do is revere the shrine. The majority of a Pir's authority comes from local communities that adhere to the teachings of Khawaja Sahab.

The respondents shed light on the fact that the Sajjada Nasheen have not fulfilled their promises, despite their economic power. They express disappointment with their lackluster performance and emphasize that they respect the shrine for its religious history and emotional connection to the saint.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that Sajjada Nasheen made money off the Sufi Shrine. This is the result of the Auqaf (Waqf) department's ineffective policies and checks and balances. The information also provided light on the shrine festivities. The Auqaf department organizes many modest events at the shrine, such as the Friday Qawali festivals. Unfortunately, a dispute between Sajjada Nasheen and the Auqaf administration has put a halt to Urs, the major shrine celebration. Every year on the 6th, 7th, and 8th of Rabe us Sani, the shrine would host the Urs ritual. Shrine is bustling with tourists all day long, but especially on Mondays and Fridays. People travel from far and wide to attend the Friday prayers and the annual Qawali celebration at the shrine, making Friday the busiest day of the week. According to one response, the government used to host a three-day Mila at the temple, during which many devotees would come to pay their respects. On just three days, merchants may make enough money to last almost six months. However, the mela festival cannot be organized by Auqaf anymore because of the Khwajgan (discussed in the part that follows). \At a shrine, one observes a distinct set of religious rites. For example, one person recounted spending nine nights at the shrine in the hopes of receiving a healing. They migrated for a variety of reasons, including marriage, having a family, and escaping poverty. There is a belief that the water from the shrine's pool may alleviate illness. Amulets, or taveez, may serve a variety of functions for people. When people are in need of a solution to a problem, they go to the temple. All of the surrounding area revolves around the Khawaja Sahab shrine. When people are in need of spiritual guidance, they often visit shrines. Many more people are visiting the

shrine now that Benazir Bridge is finished.” Through this temple, many individuals are involved in various occupations. Not only do Muslims worship at the shrine of Khawaja Sahab, but so do non-Muslims. Thanks to Khawaja Sahab, this shrine is well-known all over the world, not only in Pakistan. One person said that the Mitthan Kot Shrine is the district of Rajanpur's and the city of Mitthan Kot's identity.

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