



Spiritual Rituals at Sufi Shrines in Punjab: A Study of Khawaja Shams-Ud-Din Sialvi, Sial Sharif and Meher Ali Shah of Golra Sharif

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Abstract

This research narrates Sufi institution's influence on the religious, political and cultural system. The masses frequently visit Sufi shrines and perform different rituals. The shrines of Khawaja Shams-Ud-Din Sialvi of Sial Sharif and Meher Ali Shah of Golra Sharif have been taken as case study due to their religious importance. It is a common perception that people practice religion according to their cultural requirements and this paper deals rituals keeping in view cultural practices of the society. It has given new direction to the concept of "cultural dimensions of religious analysis" by Clifford Geertz who says "religion: as a cultural system" i.e. a system of symbols which synthesizes a people's ethos and explain their words. Eaton and Gilmarin have presented same historical analysis of the shrines of Baba Farid, Taunsa Sharif and Jalalpur Sharif. This research is descriptive and analytical. Primary and secondary sources have been consulted.

Key Words: Khanqah, Dargah, SajjadaNashin, Culture, Esoteric, Exoteric, Barakah,

Introduction

Sial Sharif is situated in Sargodha region (in the center of Sargodha- Jhang road). It is famous due to Khawaja Shams-Ud-Din Sialvi, a renowned Chishti Sufi. In 19th and 20th century, his Dargah promoted Chishti Sufi Order in the Punjab. Khawaja Suleiman Taunsi followed Shariah in his whole life and later his successors adhered to it. Sialvis laid the foundation of Dar-ul-Uloom Zia Shams ul Islam in which Shariah was strictly observed. The Sufis of Sial Sharif promoted the philosophy of love, humanity and respect among their followers. People often visit Sial Sharif and perform rituals. Chishti Sufi practices are observed at the Chishti Shrines in the whole Punjab. Langer is distributed to every visitor without any discrimination. Free accommodation is available for every visitor. The second important Shrine of Chishtiyya Order after Sial Sharif is shrine of Meher Ali Shah situated at Golra in Islamabad. The construction of Meher Ali Shah's mausoleum completed in twenty years and high quality marble was requisitioned from the famed Makrana mines in Jodhpur. In his interview with Moin ul Haq Shah, (personal communication, MAY 05-18) talks about its design conforms to the traditional Islamic style of architecture, with an imposing dome in the middle and arched verandahs on all sides. Selected verses of the Holy Quran and Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) can be seen at the shrine. Well selected Persian verses of eminent Sufi poets like Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Khwaja Hafiz Shirazi and Shaikh Saadi of Shiraz have been engraved with black stone in exquisite calligraphy.

Development

The shrines of Khawaja Shams-Ud-Din Sialvi and Meher Ali Shah of Golra Sharif have become the center of many rituals. Tehmina Iqbal has quoted the definition of Ritual from *Encyclopedia Britannica*

"Ritual is the presentation of traditional performances arranged by belief or by spiritual verdict. Ritual is a precise, visible way of behavior demonstrated by all recognized the social orders. It is therefore conceivable to sight ritual as a manner of describing human beings." (Iqbal & Farid, 2017)

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There is no blinking fact that Sufi rituals have significant role in the lives of the masses of the sub-continent. The masses from whole of the Punjab and Pakistan come frequently at shrines and pay respect to the Sufis in their traditional ways. As far as Sial Sharif is concerned, during the Urs celebrations (24th Safar), people come in form of small groups. Urs ceremonies continue for three days 22th to 24th Safar. During these days, the devotees perform different rituals. The followers take sheets (chador) with them and place it at the grave of the Sufi. It is sign of respect which is given to the Sufi. These sheets are specially decorated with the verses of the Holy Quran or sacred poetry or Ahadith. The Sajada Nashin gives the *ghusal* (cleansing) to the Mazar with rose water. At that time, the followers recite Sura-e-Fathia inside and outside the Mazar. They also indulge in worship of God. Women are not allowed to enter into the Mazar. Darood Sharif (special remembrance of the Holy Prophet) is given due weightage among male and female sections equally. It is recited loudly and Naat is also read. In Bralvi school of thought, Darood Sharif has special importance. The concept of bait is common at most of the Chishti shrines. The Sajada Nashins provides opportunity to the visitors to take bait (oath taking performance) on his hand. In Sufism, the Bait is considered compulsory for spiritual elevation. There are three stages of spiritual elevation in mysticism and first stage of that elevation is Fana-Fi-Shaikh. Bait is the starting point of this stage. For the protection, for treatment of the diseases, for prosperity, the followers take Tawiz (amulet) from a person which is deputed by Sajjada Nashin for this special purpose. The followers give special attention to this tawiz in their lives that play role in fulfilling their desires. When the desires and wishes of the people are fulfilled, they perform Mannat. The credit of their achievement is given to tawiz. In return of it, they distribute food; they knot the thread, recite the Holy Quran, offer Nawwafil prayer, and offer the sheet at the grave. They also present salt at the shrine in a special pot. The followers take salt as a sacred for the treatment of their different diseases. Due to poverty and illiteracy, the shrines of Sufis have become centers of physical treatments. People also torch traditional oil lamps which is another shape of vote of thanks to the Sufi. The followers also pay nazzrana in the shape of cattle, money and gold as gift according to their capacity. The non-believers dislike this practice and criticize the family of the Sufi on accepting nazzrana. No doubt, these gifts are utilized for providing lunger and accommodation. For this purpose, special building is constructed for the purpose of lunger with the amount of nazzrana that is known as lunger khana. The maintenance of the shrine is also ensured with this amount. It is also spent on the welfare of the students in the religious institution (Choudhary, 2010).

The Urs ceremonies attract the business community due to great hustle and bustle of the followers. Stalls and shops of different items including food, salty and sweet rice, decoration pieces, toys, handicrafts, sheets and flowers are established. The books of the Sufis, speeches of the Sufis and Sajjada nashins, pamphlets, magazines and CDs are available for the visitors. For worship and recitation of Darood Sharif, they buy Tasbbees (prayers beads) and caps also for covering the heads. Packets of Makhana are also taken as Tabbarak for relatives and on these packets of Makhana, the Sajjada Nashin recites few verses of Holy Quran or Darood Sharif and hand it over to the devotees as Tabbarak. Makhana are also distributed among the visitors. Some people come with sweet dishes alike MethaChaval (Rice) and is distributed. All these acts are performed for the pleasure of Allah. Such food items are considered Tabbarak (blessed food). So it can be said that the shrine of Sial Sharif also provide the economic opportunity to the local people through selling different items (Shah, 2015).

The shrine of the Sufi is sacred place for the devotees as mosque is sacred for the Muslims. The followers of the mysticism cover their heads with caps or pag (traditional dress of the Punjab) as a sign of respect and honor. Women cover their heads with chaddar and enter into the vicinity of the shrine with bare feet. They do not indulge into any activity against the teachings of the Sufi. It is their established belief that saint is watching them. As a respect, they bow their heads before the shrine. During their presence, they remain silent or recite Darood Sharif. They are so much careful about the respect of the shrine and the Sufi that at the time of leaving the shrine, their back must not be facing the grave. Mujani (2019) expresses that this ritual is found at the shrine of Meher Ali Shah of Golra Sharif also who was the follower of Sial Sharif and stands among the prominent *Khulfas* of Sial Sharif.

According to Mujani (2019) two other important places at the shrine of Sial Sharif have also become very important for the devotees and many rituals are performed there as Baraka. These are called Hazzuri Masjid (Mosque) and Dada Bagh. Hazzuri Masjid is the Chilla Gah of Khawaja Shams-Din-Sialvi and Dada Bagh is Sialvi family's graveyard. These two places are situated at half an hour distance from the main shrine. In Dada Bagh,

berry tree attract the visitors due to its special importance. The devotees visit the Bagh with the intention to eat its leaves. They eat leaves as Baraka and for the treatment of their body diseases. The ritual is common among the female because they eat leaves for the birth of their child. The visitors of these two places also drink water of hand pumps as Baraka. It has developed thought among them that this water is the treatment of many diseases. The people fill it in bottles and take back to their homes for their relatives also. At most of the shrines, this ritual is common and water is used as Baraka. Two factor are very important behind this philosophy; the first one is the poverty and the poor people are unable to afford the expenses of their treatments in the hospitals so they seek remedy in the shape of water that is available at the shrine of Sial Sharif. Secondly, the spiritual attachment of the devotees with the Shrine and the Sufi make everything of the shrine Baraka. Therefore, it can be said that the shrines have become the centers of social, economic and religious activities for the masses.

The researchers, during their visit of the shrine, have also observed that the devotees touch and kiss the different places and things during different hours. They touch and kiss the tomb of the Sufi, its doors, its walls, its windows as Baraka. Some of them even clean the floor of the shrine with *Jharoo*. The strangers or the critics often criticize these rituals and declare them the result of illiteracy. But the devotees and the followers of the shrines say that they do so for receiving Baraka which protects them from all evils and it is also a way to get the pleasure of the Sufi. These practices are done as a part of worship. The Chaddar (sheet) of the shrine is also very sacred for the devotees. They touch it with great enthusiasm with their hands and eyes. They again consider it the source of Baraka that protects them from diseases. People take flowers from the grave as Baraka which they eat and save them as sacred thing.

There is no blinking fact that most of the rituals are performed as Baraka. The concept of Baraka is very important at the shrines among the followers and stands among the special features of the shrines. Even it has become a source of attraction for the people at the shrines of the Sufis in the whole of the Punjab. They want to get maximum at low price. They do not pay much for seeking Baraka but only respect and veneration for Sufi and the Shrine. They eat food free of cost, get accommodation for their stay free of cost, spiritual elevation with dedication without any financial cost, physical and mental healing with no special medicine except the water of the hand pump.

Ahmed (2018) argues that the shrine of Sial Sharif stands among those shrines where the focus of the visitors is the religious guidance and spirituality but the culture of Dhamaal, Malangs, fortunetellers, Khusras, worldly music or the availability of drugs like Bhang and Charas was not observed by the researchers during their visit. The family of the Sufi strictly lead their lives according to the teachings of the Sufi. They have not used donations for their personal comforts but used them for expansion and construction of the Dargah, Mosque, Madrassa, and Lunger Khana. Tomb of the Sufi is called Roza by the devotees. It is well managed with beautiful calligraphy, marble tile art and Persian poetry on the walls. The Roza consist of four doors but only south (Male) and north (for female only but they cannot enter into the Roza) doors are opened in the routine days. Another important thing of the shrine is a specific place which has been saved where Khawaja Shams Ud Din Dialvi used to mediate and pray to Allah. It is called Mussalla (prayer carpet). The devotees also give special importance to this place also.

The culture of the shrine of Meher Ali shah is similar to the culture of Sial Sharif. Same rituals are performed at the both shrines. The main rituals were observed by the researcher during Urs celebrations at the shrine of Meher Ali Shah. The important Urs observed at the shrine are as under:

Sr No	Urs Name	Date	Islamic Month
1	Ghous Pak	9-10-11	Rabi us sani
2	Hadrat Meher Ali Shah	28-29-30	Safar
3	Babujee Sarkar	1-2	Jamad us Sani

(Interview of a devotee AfzalKhaksar)

The participants come for spiritual guidance, not for cultural activities. Two or three places have been specified for Wazu (ablutions) and the visitors first do this and then enter into the shrine. All rituals are observed according to the Chishtiyya Order and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Malang culture, prostitution, fortune tellers, Khusras are strictly forbidden. Respect and veneration are observed during the performances of the rituals

and prayers. Most of the people come to the shrine in the form of groups from different parts of the country. These include babies, women, youngsters and old men. As soon as they reach Golra Dargah, people pay homage to the shrine and exercise the religious practices in the vicinity of the shrine or in adjacent mosque. They keep their luggage in the rooms of the Musafar Khanas (Accommodation places for the visitors). After religious exercises, they take food from shrine kitchen. After that, they perform several rituals at the shrine like recitation of the Holy Quran near the grave, touching the entrance walls and grave base, bowing to the grave and embracing it, touching the surface with eyes, laying chaddar (a beautifully embroidered cloth) and roses over the grave. The rituals at the shrine of Meher Ali Shah are little different from other shrines of the Sufis in the Punjab. Muhammad Azam Choudhary, an anthropologist, in his research article *“Religious Practices at Sufi Shrines in the Punjab”* has mentioned those practices, which are observed at the shrine of Bari Imam

“.....In addition, many pilgrims tie threads or small padlocks to the screen round the grave, tie threads in the Banyan tree, light candles, take oil from the burning oil lamps to apply that to their bodies especially with disease and take a taste of the ash called khakeshifa from fire that is permanently burning.....” (AzamChoudhary at., 2019)

It is also a recognized fact that people visit shrine for different purposes. Some have their multifarious problems and visit for Dua like asking for a child – preferably a male child. Some want cure from diseases, some want liberation from poverty, obtaining job, mental peace, higher crop yield, support in court cases, success in the examination, marriage with beloved one, and political victory in the elections. No doubt, it covers socio-economic, religious and political motives of the society of Pakistan. During the election days, the candidates are frequent visitors of the shrine for seeking support of the devotees of the shrine for their better electoral returns in elections (Snehi,2019).

Three kinds of devotees are found at the shrine: one are of those who stand at upper age limit and have observed the period of Babujee. They are very loyal to the teachings of Sufi and the shrine. Second are those who stand between fifty to sixty years of age. They have been attached with the shrine during the period of Ghulam Moin ud Din and Shah Abdul Haq. They also try to follow the teachings and directions of the Sufi. Third kind of devotees was created by Syed Naseer ud Din (son of Ghulam Moinud Din) and they are not strict to the teachings of Meher Ali shah. Naseer ud Din Shah tried to produce a new group of followers (HaqNasir....YaNasir).

The details of the practices at the Sufi shrines will not be complete without mentioning the system of Lunger (shrine kitchen). The participants or the visitors are distributed food at three times a day at almost three places known as Musafar Khana (specific accommodation places for the residence of the visitors). In breakfast, tea and cake is delivered, in lunch the Daal or meat along with bread is distributed to the visitors and in dinner same food is given. Bulks of people sit on the ground in lines and amuse themselves with delicious food. This is distributed all the year around but at the time of the Urs, there is more strength of people as compare to routine days. Lunger is one of the attractions of the shrine during and after Urs. Lunger is partly sponsored by the people and partly by the administration of the shrine. The devotees or Muredains bring food annually at the shrine.

According to Fadil Khan et al. (2019), it is concept that Allah gives them more with the prayers of the Sufis if they present one part of their agriculture product like wheat, rice, sugar in the shrine kitchen. The property owners devotees like Watto, Khawaja, Tiwana, Malik etc contribute through their agriculture product while the middle class through giving Rupees in the form of cash. The renowned families like Amir Habib Ullah Khan (Ruler of Afghanistan), Nawab Sahib of Bahawlpur state, Nawab Waliuddawlah of Hyderabad, Nawab Sir Umer Hayat Khan of Kalra state and his son Khizr Hayat Khan, Nawab Muhammad Hayat Qureshi, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Khan Bahadur, MianMushtaq Ahmed Gurmani, Nawab Abdullah Khan of Khan Garh, Mian Imam Baksh of Multan, Mian Abdul Rashid of Peshawar are the devotees of the Dargah. Now the question arises why the people take Lunger with special devotion? The visitors take food as an element of shifa (treatment) against the diseases. They even take pieces of the bread as a Tabarak (sacred Thing). The persons who provide services in kitchen are devotees of the shrine and they do so without any financial benefit. They think that it is the part of worship which is done for the pleasure of the Sufi and God. It is good sign that unlike the other mostly shrines situated Punjab, the drugs like Bhang (traditional summer drink of many males in Punjab) is not served to the visitors or devotees. Bhang is important attraction for the malangs at the shrines. It is said to have cold effects. It includes cannabis, poppy seeds, almonds, milk and sugar. All these ingredients are grounded together and milk or water is added. It has intoxicating effect.

Turab et al.(2018), argue that such intoxicating things are strictly forbidden in shrine kitchen. Samma is organized at the shrine on daily basis with musical instruments. The poetry of the Sufis is sung with special lyrics. One of his family members preside over the session of Samma which is commonly called “Majlis”. The participants sit there with Wazu. It is common perception that Meher Ali Shah spiritually participate in the Majlis and the participants keep the element of respect and sanctity supreme. No hue and cry is allowed in the program of Samma. No devotee is allowed to throw rupees at the Qawals (singers) as a reward. Only one rupee is given to the Qawals. It is also tradition when the close relative of Sufi gives reward to the Qawals on their performance, then the participants try to follow and give one rupee to the Qawals. The shrine has its own regular Qawals who sing only at the shrine and no other places. Bakht Jamal was the first Qawal who devoted his life and spent most of his time in the company of the Saint. After his death, Mehboob was the second Qawal of this shrine and after his death Mushtaq replaced him. Mehboob was expert in playing Harmonium and well versed with Persian, Punjabi and Urdu poetry.

Mushtaq and Sohil (2019) cite evidence in support of an idea, Kamran and Shahid(year?) also describe in their research article “*Shari’a, Shi’as and Chishtiya revivalism: Contextualizing the Growth of Sectarianism in the Tradition of the Sialvi Saints of the Punjab*” that Chishti Sufis adopt practices such as Zikr and Samma as a spiritual signature of their Sufi order which also help it in terms of assimilating with indigenous culture. Ernst and Lawrence (2005) also discuss such Sufi practices in their book “*Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti order in South Asia and Beyond*”. According to them

“.....It is the experience of remembering God so intensely that the soul is destroyed and resurrected. It is also the memory of those who remembered God, those who were devoted to discipline and prayer, but above all, to remembrance, whether they recited the divine name (Zikr) or evoked his presence through song (Sama). While the Chishti experience of remembering God is possible, it has rarely been attained only a few, have been able to focus their whole being on God, remembering his name and evoking his presence in pursuit of the path of love, the Sufi ideal. These were the great once, in Sufi idiom, the Sufi saints the Shaikhs, the Pirs, The Masters, and captains of spiritual destiny who drew countless others to God through their exemplary lives and pure passion” (Ernst & Lawrence, 2005).

Emphasis is laid on Zikr and Samma among the followers. At the time of Bait, the direction is passed to the devotee to:

- a. Say prayers five times a day.
- b. Recite Kalma Sharif and Darood Sharif for ten times after every prayer

It is an effort to establish relationship between God and man and the Sufi plays role as an agent between God and the Masses. They try to purify the soul of the devotees and try to bring Islam to the masses and bring the masses towards Islam. The Chishtiya Order traces its spiritual genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and Hazrat Ali is considered to be the spiritual forebears. During the Urs celebrations, three slogans are raised:

- a. Narra-i-Takbeer (the participants answer this slogan with the loud voice of Allah O Akbar)
- b. Narra-i-Risalat (the answer is given Ya Rasool Allah)
- c. Narra-i-Haideri (the devotees says Ya Ali)

Conclusion

The study of Sufi Shrines, Sufi Dargahs and Sufi Urs are part of social history and anthropological studies. The cultural vernacular expressions at the Shrines are an integral part of the cultural landscape of Pakistan. The shrines of Sial Sharif and Meher Ali Shah play role as cultural, political, social and religious authorities. They stand among the list of revivalist/reformist Sufis who tried to purify the teachings of Islam and Shariah in true sense because many vernacular Indian cultural practices were perceived by them to be aberrations from pre-cinct principle of Shariah of Islam. Owing to this reformist tendency, the Fiqa and Ahadith gained more importance in madaris of these revivalist Sufis. It is notable that these shrines are being run according to true spirit of Islam where the Shariah is being fully observed. Zikar is used for bringing the followers into the domain of religion and religion is used for the welfare of the community. The allegedly illegal and immoral activities that have taken the shape of culture have failed to gain grounds in these both shrines.

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