

## ***Religious Practices at Sufi Shrines in the Punjab***

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### **Abstract**

*This article is a cultural analysis of religious practices at the shrine of Bari Imam following Geertzian interpretative paradigm. It is based on the overall assumption that people practice religion according to their socio-cultural requirements. Sufism flourished in the Punjab as its beliefs and practices were nearer to the basic nature of the social relationships in the Punjabi society - both being hierarchical in nature. Besides that Sufism was flexible in its approach, therefore, people could practice it according to their social and professional life. These assumptions have been analyzed in the light of data from shrine of Bari Imam. The focus has been on the participants in the urs celebrations. The main groups of participants at the urs include khusree (transvestites), malangs, (religious mendicants) prostitutes, singers, fortune-tellers, traditional healers, etc. All these are rather the marginal groups of the Punjab and they relate their professional life with Bari Imam who was a saint of mainly the marginal groups. All these groups venerate the saint in their own way akin to their professional life.*

### **Introduction**

This article explores the relationship between religion and culture with a particular focus on Sufism in the Punjab for which the shrine of Bari Imam in Islamabad was chosen as a case study and most of data was collected during the years 2003-2007 mainly

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during *urs* (death anniversary of the saint) celebrations. The view is presented here that people practice religion according to their cultural requirements. In other words there is a close relationship between the Punjabi culture and the Sufi practices. There is certainly a vice versa relationship also between religion and culture i.e. that the religion affects the cultural practices but we want to focus on the first in this paper. This is in line with what Geertz has called “cultural dimension of religious analysis”<sup>1</sup> or “Religion: As a Cultural System” i.e. a system of symbols which synthesizes a people’s ‘ethos’ and explains their worlds.<sup>2</sup> Eaton and Gilmartin have attempted a similar historical analysis of the important shrines of the Punjab like Baba Farid, Taunsa Sharif, Jalalpur Sharif, etc. Gilmartin wrote that:

...a look at the origins of Islamic institutions in rural Punjab provides insight into the ways local, tribal identities and local forms of religious organization developed in close association. ... the shrines embodied diverse local cultural identities, whose variety reflected both the diversity of ecological, social and kinship organizations in Punjab and the diversity in the spiritual needs of the people.<sup>3</sup>

These authors were concerned with the past or the history of the development of these shrines. Their focus was the nexus between the state and the shrines and the relationships of the shrines with the people during the Sultanate, Mughal, Sikh and British periods. Gilmartin wrote that:

In Punjab, structures of political power and religious organization has developed in close relationship and remained so with the British imperial system. Understanding the place of Islam within the local structure of Punjabi society is thus central to understanding the development of imperial system and the emerging role of religion in twentieth-century politics .... The construction of *khanaqahs* (hospices), and later Sufi tombs, produced symbolic cultural outposts of power of Islam and of the Muslim state in the world where local tribal identities continued to be of vital importance. Imposing Sufi tombs, constructed by Muslim sultans, underscored the importance of Islamic shrines as sites of access to transcendent spiritual authority. Equally important, they drew the tribes

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1 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.89.

2 *Ibid.*, p.87.

3 David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: University of California Press, 1988), pp.40-41.

gradually, and perhaps insensibly, into the state's political-and religious-orbit.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this paper is very similar to the above mentioned studies with one difference that this paper concentrates on the current situation particularly the annual *urs* celebrations with the question; how these shrines are helping in catering the socio-religious needs of the people? We assume that the *urs* is a shorter but perhaps more dramatic version of the year long activities at the shrines. Further we are of the view that the *urs* is a microcosm of the larger Punjabi society. This paper is based on the following set of assumptions:

- i. Firstly, that the basic nature of the social relationships in the Punjabi is hierarchical and Sufi practices accepted rather promoted this hierarchical nature of the Punjabi social structure.
- ii. Secondly I want to propose that Sufism was flexible and tolerant to divergent views, therefore, its followers could practice religion according to their own cultural and environmental requirements.
- iii. Finally it is assumed that the shrines today represent and constitute an important part of the Punjabi Sufism.

Corresponding to these assumptions this paper is divided into three main parts. In part one the Punjabi culture has been discussed in the light of ethnographic literature available on the Punjabi society. The focus in the second part is on the present religious practices at the shrine of Bari Imam. The third part consists of discussion and findings before conclusion.

### **I. Punjab ethnography: Setting the scene**

Punjabi population is predominantly rural and agricultural in background. Broadly speaking the main characteristic of the southern districts of the Punjab is big landholdings and feudal social structures. The central districts are characterized by relatively smaller landholdings of peasant proprietors. In addition to this the central Punjab is also hosting a number of important urban industrial centres like Faisalabad, Lahore, Gujranwala and Gujrat. The northern part is mainly dependent on rain-fed

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4 *Ibid.*

agriculture a subsistence economy but is supported by employment in Pakistan army. If we look at the religious landscape of the Punjab, we find most of the prominent Sufis and their shrines located in southern districts like Multan, and Bahawalpur followed by the central Punjab and then the northern Punjab at the other end.

In spite of the several differences within the Punjabi sub-regions that have been mentioned above we know from the ethnographic literature on these sub-regions like Naveed-i-Rahat (1990), Anjum Alavi (2002) and S. Lyon (2004)<sup>5</sup> on the northern Punjab, Eglar (1960), Saghir Ahmad (1977), Chaudhary (1999)<sup>6</sup> on the category central Punjab and H. Alavi (1972), Kurin (1985)<sup>7</sup>, etc. in the southern Punjab that hierarchically organized *biradari* system is found everywhere in the rural Punjab. According to this system the population of the Punjab, especially in the rural areas, is divided into different *biradaris*. These *biradaris* literally defined as brotherhoods are groups of people who claim a common ancestor.<sup>8</sup> The first, most prominent and Punjab wide universal division is between the farmers and the menial groups.<sup>9</sup> The social distance between these two categories of *biradaris* to which the farmers belong to the upper social status category and menial group to the lower category is found all over Punjab. Similarly there are differences in social status within these two categories. There could be a difference of opinion among the local population

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5 For details see, Naveed-i-Rahat, *Male Out-migration and Matri-Weighted Households: A Case Study of a Punjabi Village in Pakistan* (Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1990); Anjum Alvi, *Bearers of Grief: Death, Women, Gifts, and Kinship in Muslim Punjab* (Ph. D. Diss., Free University of Berlin, 1999); Stephen M. Lyon, *An Anthropological Analysis of Local Politics and Patronage in a Pakistan Punjabi Village* (Lapeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

6 For details see, Zekiye Eglar, *A Punjabi village in Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); Saghir Ahmad, *Class and Power in a Punjabi Village* (Lahore: Punjabi Adbi Markaz, 1977); Muhammad A. Chaudhary, *Justice in Practice: Legal Ethnography of a Pakistani Punjabi Village* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

7 Hamza Alavi, "Kinship in West Punjab villages," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol.6 (1972), pp.1-27; Richard Kurin, "Patterns of Solidarity in a Punjabi Muslim Village," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol.19 (1985), pp.235-50.

8 Eglar, *A Punjabi Village in Pakistan*. Alavi, "Kinship in West Punjab Villages," pp.1-27. Also see, Chaudhary, *Justice in Practice*.

9 For details, Chaudhary, *Justice in Practice*.

with regards to the social ranking of these *biradaris*. There are no two views that these *biradaris* are hierarchically different. There are also regional differences within the Punjab for example a Raja is an honorific title in the northern Punjab (Rawalpindi, Murree) in the central Punjab (Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh etc. a barber is called Raja. In the similar manner Malik is a big title in northern Punjab, in the central Punjab Malik is the oil extracting *biradari* belonging to the menial groups. There are limitations on inter-*biradari* commensality especially between the farmer and the artisan groups.<sup>10</sup> There are similarly very limited *inter-biradari* marriages and still fewer examples of *vartan bhanji*, the famous Punjabi system of gift exchange, between the two.<sup>11</sup>

This system of *biradaris* provides the population of the Punjab with the basic orientation for all purposes of social, political, even religious life. The hierarchical character of these *biradaris* is inherited from Hinduism, the former faith of the most Punjabi castes or tribes. Cohen has provided us a very apt description of caste system in the Indian Punjab which fits well the Pakistani Punjab, only if we change the word caste with *biradari*.

... men are not born equal, and they have widely differing inherent worth. This theme or value is basic to the whole social structure and is expressed most clearly in the caste system . . . . The *Chamar* (cobbler) knows he is not equal to the *Thakar* (landlord). He may want to be equal but he knows he is not. The *Thakar* cannot be convinced in any way that the *Chamar* is his equal ...<sup>12</sup>

We intend to further the assumption that this *biradari*-based hierarchical social structure of the Punjabi society provided a fertile ground for the spreading of Sufism in the Punjab because Sufism itself promoted very similar structures. The interaction between Sufism and the Punjabi culture resulted in the particular form or practices of the Punjabi Sufism.

Punjabi Sufis: Embedding the shrine of Bari Imam: Sufism is also not a coherent category. At one level it could be divided into

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10 *Ibid.*

11 See Eglar, *A Punjabi Village in Pakistan*; Alavi, "Kinship in West Punjab Villages," p.192.

12 Bernhard Cohn, "Some Notes on Law and Change in North India", in Paul Bohannan ed., *Studies in the Anthropology of Conflict* (New York: Natural History Press, 1967), p.177.

different Sufi orders called *Silsilas* main being *Qadiri*, *Chishti*, *Suharwardi* and *Naqshbandi* (shrines belonging to all these orders are found in the Punjab). All these orders vary to the extent that it is difficult to say two Sufis are alike in their approach and methods. Interestingly, many Sufis were followers or attached to different orders simultaneously or one after the other.<sup>13</sup> The most significant differences are between the *Naqshbandis* and the other three orders with particular reference to the concept *Wahadatul Wajud* (Oneness of being). Most of the Sufis of India adhered to this ideology. The concept of *Wahdatul Wajud* was originally presented by Ibn al-Arabi that was explained as *hama oost* [Persian: Every thing is Him: in the sense of God is nothing else, other and more than everything in the universe and beyond].<sup>14</sup> In opposition to this Mujaddad Alf Sani a very important follower of *Naqshbandi* school presented the concept of *Wahadat ul Shahud* (evidence about the One)<sup>15</sup> instead of *hama oost* he said *hama az oost*: [Persian: Everything is from him or is an evidence of Him]. There were differences even between *Naqshbandis*, for example, Shah Wali Ullah and Mujaddad Alf Sani. The *Naqbandi* order claimed being nearest to the *Sharia*, the line followed by the *Deobandis*. As a matter of fact, *Deobandis* may even be called an off shoot of the *Naqshbandis*.

Going back to the commonalities, for example, in the literature written by some of the Punjabi Sufis (Bulle Shah, Baba Farid, Haq Bahoo and their contemporaries) the Sufis emphasize a total

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13 David Gilmartin writes about Pir Mehr Ali Shah of Golra Sharif, Islamabad that: "Saiyid Mehr Ali Shah was the son of the *Sajjada nishin* of a *Qadiri* shrine in Rawalpindi, a man who traced his ancestry to Saiyid Muhammad Ghaus Gilani of Uch. Like many Punjabis who sought an advanced religious education in British India, Mehr Ali Sahh travelled to the United Provinces, where he studied *hadis* and *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis) with leading 'ulama in the reformist tradition. Returning to Punjab with a concern for reform, he became the disciple of an important Khalif of Khwaja Suleman, Khawaja Shamsuddin of Sial Sharif, under his influence Mehr Ali Shah transformed Golra into a major Chishti centre." Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, pp.58-59.

14 S. A. A. Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India* Vol. II (New Delhi: Mushiram Manohar Lal Ltd., 1983), see Chapter 1 "An Outline of Ibn Arabi's Mystical Ideas," pp.36-54.

15 For details, Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *The Mujaddid's conception of Tawhid*, Maktabah Islamic Books, 2010) See also S.A.A Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India* Vol.II, Chapter 4, "The Naqshbandiyya Order," pp. 174-263.

renouncing of this world instead of just partial (*zakat*: alms) as practiced by the *ulama*. An all time praying instead of just five appointed times. Sufis, similarly, emphasize *Jihad* [Arabic: holy war] against their own ego - the ultimate goal of a Sufi is death, that is union with God -, instead of *Jihad* against the ‘infidels’, and love of God i.e. *Ishaq-i-Haqiqi* [Arabic: The True Love]<sup>16</sup> not fear of Him.<sup>17</sup> The anecdote of Rabia Basri a very prominent female Sufi illustrates this aptly. The story goes that one day she walked in the streets of Baghdad with fire in one hand and water in the other. People asked her as to why she was carrying these two items? She replied: “I want to extinguish the hell fire with this water as no one shall worship God out of fear of hell. Further I want to put the paradise on fire with this flame so that no one would worship God for the purpose of achieving paradise.” The main target of criticism by all Sufis is mullah, and the limited nature of his (worldly) knowledge, his worldly piety and extreme formalism.<sup>18</sup>

The main reason of the success and popularity of the Sufis could be their role as mediator in religious as well as mundane matters. In the worldly matters the Sufis mediated between the rulers and the folk, between the downtrodden, destitute, marginal etc. and rich/mainstream culture. In the religious affairs the Sufi offered intercession between God and the devotee, something totally unacceptable to the orthodox *ulama*. A prominent writing on the subject is of Richard M. Eaton: *The political and religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid*. Eaton has given in-detail account of how the institution of shrine developed around the

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16 Iqbal’s verse “*Bekhatar quod para atishe namrud mein ishq, aqal hai mehve tamasha libe baam abhee.*”

17 The verse of Quran “Had we brought down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have seen it humble itself and crack for fear of Allah”. *Al-Quran*, 59:21, Eng. Trans. Mauhammad Y. Zayid (Beirut: Dar Al-Choura, 1980).

18 Werbner while describing Sufism writes that: “In Sufism, knowledge is gained through practice rather than intellectual learning, through experience rather than rationality alone. Divine knowledge is arrived at via the heart. The central ritual practice on this journey is the *zikir*, the remembrance of God. By continuously practicing the *zikir* a person’s *nafs* and his very body is transformed”. Pnina Werbner, “The Making of Muslim Dissent: Hybridized Discourses, Lay Preachers, and Radical Rhetoric among British Pakistanis,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol.23, No.1 (Feb 1996), pp. 102-122.

grave of Baba Farid and particularly the details of relationships that emerged between the rulers and his descendents i.e. *Diwan* also called *gaddi nishins*. Eaton writes:

Although Baba Farid himself assiduously avoided contact with the mundane world of the court and its ministers(...), the whole picture changed with the advent of the Tughluq period (1321-98) (...) Sultan Ghiyath ad Din Tughluq, became one of the many local notables attracted to the spiritual powers and piety of Diwan (...). On one such occasion, (...) the governor brought along his son and nephew, the future sultans (...), all three were given a turban (...) and told by him each was destined to rule Hindustan. (...) Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq had bestowed the city of Ajudhan on the shrine. (...) Sultan Muhammad commissioned two engineers to construct what proved to be one of the finest examples of Tughluq architecture in the Subcontinent. (...) Diwan Muizz ad-Din, was even called to Delhi by Muhammad ibn Tughluq, placed in government service, and sent to Gujarat as deputy governor. The diwan's brother, meanwhile, was appointed to the office of Shaikh al-Islam of India.<sup>19</sup>

The relationship between the shrines/*gaddi nishins* and rulers continued during the Sikh and later on during the British rule. Gilmartin writes that:

When Makhdum Shah Mahmud died in 1869, for example, the deputy commissioner intervened at the shrine to perform the *dastarbandi* (turban-tying) ceremony signifying official recognition of the heir, a ceremony that local British officers performed for leading local families and "tribal" chiefs within their administration.<sup>20</sup>

And that: "Indeed, the British selected many *sajjada nishins* to serve as local representatives in the local administration (...)"<sup>21</sup> He also quotes several examples of succession disputes where the contestants brought their cases to the British courts. The relationship between the shrine and the rulers was in no way one sided. Eaton wrote that:

The shrine thus gave clan leaders and their followers not only access to Islam, but the honour of participating in the reflected splendour of the Sultanate or Mughal courts without actually being directly subservient to the authorities in Delhi.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Richard M. Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid" in Barbara Metcalf ed. *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (California: University of California Press 1984), pp. 338-39.

20 Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, p.48.

21 *Ibid.*, p.50.

22 Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid", p.347.



Werbner also explained the multiplex nature of these relationships in a recent publication as follows:

For low-caste peasants or urban workers membership in the cult is a source of status. They derive their personal standing vis-à-vis others from their connection with an illustrious, important, and famous saint (...) In this sense the respect accorded to *Zindapir* by high-level politicians, civil servants, or army officers is not only for pragmatic purposes, but, perhaps even more significantly, it confirms, the saint's elevated status in the eyes of the many villagers who form the main body of his disciples, and bring together the high and the low in a single "family" of "disciple-brotherhood". The vicarious status derived from membership in an important order of this type is seen by these disciples as conferring a meaningful and dignified gloss on their lives.<sup>23</sup>

The most important role of the Sufi saints, in my view, is his religious role as mediator between humans and God. The general perception about God is of His being Supreme, the Greatest and far away from man. Further people think that like important officials (policemen, judges, etc.) God is a: "a busy person" whose "hall of audience is of limited capacity".<sup>24</sup> Another often cited comparison is of climbing a high building. People say: "You cannot climb a roof top without a ladder. How could you reach God whose abode is high up in paradise without a support?" Sufi is known as *Wali* Allah i.e. friend of God. After their death these friends of God according to the popular belief have secured a place close to God and were thus in a position to intercede for others.<sup>25</sup> The major role then falls on the descendents select of these Sufis known as *gaddi nishin* (literally those who sits on the sitting cushion) who then are supposed to have a better approach to the spirit of the original saint. Some of these *gaddi nishins* themselves become saints of very high quality.

Thus Sufism is very hierarchical in its nature. The designation Sufi/saint is both ascribed and achieved. Ascription is almost a precondition i.e. being born in a Sayed family in the best case a descendent of or even *gaddi nashin* of a famous Sufi like Baba Farid. This ascribed status (*Syed*) could be enhanced through

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23 Pnina Werbner, "The Making of Muslim Dissent: Hybridized Discourses, Lay Preachers, and Radical Rhetoric among British Pakistanis," p.105.

24 Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, p.42.

25 *Ibid.*

joining if not inherited important Sufi orders or Sufi master and meditation in seclusion at far away and difficult places like in deserts, forests, caves, rivers, etc. The success of the Sufis may be measured by the miracles they become known to have performed of which each prominent Sufi might have performed several. God in the Sufi belief system as practiced is no more directly accessible except for the selected few. Every person needs a *murshad* (spiritual guide) who himself had a *murshad* of a higher order in the chain that continues through the top leader of the Order (for example Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani in case of *Qadiriya* Order) to God through Muhammad (PBUH) and Ali the son-in-law of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

This creates and strengthens the hierarchical order of relations. The mere fact that it is very difficult to become a Sufi if not impossible for those who are not born as *syeds* place the Sufis at the top of social hierarchy in their immediate context with different other stages. Werbener named it a tripartite leadership structure:

they are composed of, first, saints and vicegerents, (the latter usually aspiring world renouncers); second, ulama trained in religious seminaries espousing Sufi cultic practices and traditions; and their, lay activists, who raise funds and provide liaison with the wider community. The lay members are themselves preachers who take active role in speech making – of *Khutabs* at Friday prayers, but especially during festivals celebrating the Prophet's birthday (*Eid-milad-un-nabi*) and other commemorative ceremonials.<sup>26</sup>

Marxist inclined social scientists like Saghir Ahmad wrote about the Pakistani Punjab that: “the class relations of South Asian villagers are more fundamental for most of their life experiences – including religious belief and practice – than is their membership in *quoms* or caste like status groups”.<sup>27</sup> Hamza Alavi (1972) and Huma Haq (2000) seem to agree with Ahmad about the importance of class system in the Punjab. There may be a lot of problems in accepting<sup>28</sup> this classification system for the Punjab as a whole. If accepted we find interesting differences in these classes with

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26 Werbner, “The Making of Muslim Dissent”, p.106.

27 Ahmad, *Class and Power in a Punjabi Village*, p.9.

28 See Alavi, “Kinship in West Punjab Villages”; Huma Haq, “Feminist Islam and Sexist Muslims: A Case Study of Rural Punjab,” *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.23 (1997).

particularly reference to the relationship to Sufism. We find that the lower classes and the upper class tend to be more affiliated with Sufism than the middle class. Werbner noted the same:

... sufism remains attractive to apparently Westernized high-ranking civil servants, army officers, politicians, businessmen, and professionals as well as to large numbers of relatively uneducated villagers ... Zindapir had ... a large army following, including many brigadiers and generals. Among his disciples and supplicants were also politicians and high-ranking civil servants. Sufism ... thus appeared to appeal to the relatively educated and powerful, as well as to the vast mass of low-ranking followers.<sup>29</sup>

In an answer to the self raised question – Why Sufism remains attractive to the Westernized rich elite and the low-ranks/village poor alike Werbner writes that:

... worldly achievements are divine rewards for obeying the edicts and instructions of the saint ... . The saint's own vast accumulation of wealth is similarly regarded. Discipleship thus constitutes a legitimation of worldly success. ... For low-caste peasants or urban workers membership in the cult is a source of status. They derive their personal standing vis-à-vis others from their connection with an illustrious, important, and famous saint and regard themselves otherwise as social nonentities ...<sup>30</sup>

The vast majority of the Sufi followers come from the villages who are peasant i.e. small farmers and the workers of the farmers, the so called group of artisans. Included among the followers of the Sufi for example Bari Imam are many marginal groups like *Khusree*, prostitutes, singers and beggars most of them living in the cities rather slums areas or shanty towns. Many of the farming *biradaris* and other groups claim to have converted to Islam by some of the important Sufis of the Punjab.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore these Sufis served as a link between the rulers and the masses. The poor groups that have been mentioned above and the rich including the elite attend the shrines for same and different reasons. The poor may be indulged in professions not seen as appropriate like prostitution, transvestites, homosexuals, beggar, etc. The poor furthermore may find no time or simply fail to offer regular prayers due to different reasons. They may not have the money to

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29 Werbner, "The Making of Muslim Dissent", p.105.

30 *Ibid.*

31 For details Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*; Eaton, "The political and religious authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid".

perform other religious duties like *Haj*, *Zakat* or even observe fasting due to the nature of their works. These people may find themselves on the wrong side of the divide if the Sufis would not promise their salvation. The mediation of a Sufi may also be a rather convenient option for the rich/elite as a substitute for the rigorous *Sharia*. The rich may not be regular in prayers, do not pay *Zakat*, may similarly be involved in drinking, fornication, prostitution, drug addiction, etc. Therefore in my view “A key role of the saint is believed to be his ability to act as mediator for his disciples with God on the day-of-judgment, asking forgiveness for them and thus assuring that they go to paradise (*janat*)”.<sup>32</sup> The rich and the poor also need the mediation of the Sufi to get what they do not possess themselves. The poor might need the Sufi for an access to the domains of power like access to the police, courts, etc. the rich/elite need Sufi’s help in securing votes if the Sufis themselves are not the candidates. The poor similarly might need access to worldly resources like free food and shelter which many shrines provide for which the rich contribute.

The urban educated middle class Punjabis may present as the major exception to this above detail. This group mainly includes the office workers, the Muslim clergy, and particularly the businessman like traders, shopkeepers, etc. This may also some times include the rural educated middle class but rather as exception. The main emphasis of this group is the claim to equality and the access to text particularly religious text. They can afford prayers, alms, Hajj, etc. They differentiate themselves from the lower class and their activities like prostitution, transvestites, beggars even artisan professions including sometimes their adherence to the shrines. They also condemn the rich elite for their life style. That was perhaps why the *Deobandi* movement found its support in the towns and cities in the Punjab.<sup>33</sup> The group that belongs to the *Deobandi* style of Islam in the Punjab is not only relatively small but is also different from the Pushtoon version. Compared to the Pushtoon variety they are tolerant of the Sufis and shrines. At times even the mullahs trained in *Deobandi madaris* in

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32 Werbner, “The Making of Muslim Dissent, p.105.

33 For details Metcalf, *Moral Conduct and Authority*.

the Punjab, particularly in rural context adopt practices typical of the *Brailvi* at least to save their jobs. They call themselves as *Ahle-Sunat* which in the Punjabi villages stands for *brailvis* where *Deobandi* are perceived as *Ahle-Hadith*. The division between the *Deo-bandi* Pushtoon axis and the Sufi Punjabi axis is not always so neat and clean. Some *Deobandi* influence is also found in rural Punjab. There is the non-Pushtoon population among the Pushtoons, some Pushtoons also adhere to the Sufi particularly the *Deobandi* Sufi.

Having discussed Sufism and the Punjabi culture in general terms now we want to discuss Bari Imam as an example of shrine as cultural system. As has already been mentioned we are of the view that the political history, ecology and local socio-economic circumstances have affected the religious practices at the shrine of Bari Imam. In other words religious practices at the shrines could be understood and explained in the local cultural contexts i.e. the shrines are relatively flexible in their religious practices and people practice it according to their socio-economic needs. Further we are of the opinion that Sufism did not only accept such structures, it flourished in such areas and even promoted circumstances that strengthened such hierarchical structures. One may also argue that Sufism itself was a very strong factor in creating the present hierarchy in the Punjab because most of the families belonging to these Sufis i.e. their present day *gaddi nishins* stand both socially as well as economically at the top of social hierarchy. These families have got their lands and other properties because of the influence of the founder Sufis and later their shrines. This may seem to be a contradiction to the original idea of Sufism i.e. Sufi saint as world renouncer.

## II. Shrine of Bari Imam: The microcosm *urs* celebrations

The word *urs* is used for marriage and in connection with the shrine it is used for the death anniversary of the saint buried in it. This may sound strange that the death of a saint is celebrated as his marriage. Frembgen explains this as follows:

For the *wali* (friend of God) physical death marks the entry into the 'real' life embodied in the mystical union (*maqam al-wisal*) with Allah, a

moment of unification which is ritually celebrated as a 'holy marriage', an 'urs, with God.<sup>34</sup>

All the prominent Sufi poets of the Punjab (Bulle Shah, Shah Hussain, Baba Farid) used female expressions and symbols like spinning-wheel, water pots, bangles or feminine forms etc. in their poetry to express their selves relation with God. The Sufis equate themselves to the bride who leaves her parent house to join her husband after marriage who traditionally prepared at least part of their dowry themselves. In this mundane life the Sufis consider themselves betrothed to the God. This is most clearly the case in the two poems of Bulleh Shah: '*kar katan wal dhehan kure*': "Lass, Look to your spinning" and '*Kat Kuree na wat kure*': "Stop the spinning-wheel, Girl".<sup>35</sup> We have already explained the concept of Wahadatul Wajud according to which the Sufis try to kill their ego to reach the ultimate Creator. The famous goal of Sufis so often quoted to us during fieldwork is: '*finah fill sheikh*' (merging with the Sheikh), '*finah fill Rasool*' (merging with the holy prophet mpbuh) and '*finah fillah*' (merging with the God). This will explain the painstaking *Chillas* (worship in seclusion) of the saints in water, hill and caves and under other extremely difficult circumstances.

The *urs* of Bari Imam is celebrated according to the Indian lunar calendar also called *desi* calendar in *Jaith* i.e. the month of May in English calendar and the dates are set in such a way that it falls from Sunday to Thursday. The Punjab Gazetteer (1893) mentions that during the life time of Bari Imam a fair was held here in the month of December which now takes place in *Jaith*/May-June. According to rough estimates approximately one million people visit the shrine annually and more than 60 thousand pay their homage during the annual *urs*. On the opening day of Sunday at about 5 o'clock the shrine is given a ritual bath in the presence of high officials (in 2004 it was the Prime Minister) with rose water brought on foot from Peshawar by a Syed family that

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34 Juergen Fremngen, "The Majzub Mama Ji Sarkar: A friend of God moves from one house to another," in Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, eds., *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.140.

35 For further details see, Taufiq Rafat, *Bulleh Shah: A Selection*, Eng. Trans. (Lahore: Vanguard Publication, 1982).

has committed itself to this job since death of the saint. Similarly beautifully decorated *Chaddars* (grab spreads) are brought by the devotees to cover the shrine, a ritual common to most shrines in the sub-continent.

Though people from all walks of life participate in the *Urs* celebrations prominent among them are *khusre* (eunuchs), *malang* (mendicants), dancers, prostitutes, fortune teller, traditional healers almost all belonging to the marginal and pariah groups. We want to propose here that all these groups venerate the Sufi saint in their own special way almost according to the requirements of their professions. In the following we want to give a brief description of these different groups and their relationship to the shrine. We call this *urs* microcosm of the Pakistani society in the sense that people from all regions and walks of life come here and practice Islam in a variety of ways. We are of the view that this *urs* is an occasion to observe this at one place and in a very short time. The following section is an attempt to describe *urs* visitors, their socio-economic conditions and the religious practices they observe during this occasion.

**The participants:** Most of the people come in the form of groups called *dali* representing different regions and groups who pitch their tents in the compound of the shrine. These groups are called *dalis* actually the name for the miniature models of the Bari's shrine made from wood and beautifully decorated. Some groups carry more than one such model of shrines for example one of Bari Imam's shrine and the other of the shrines of the places these groups come from. These shrines are carried on shoulders like palanquin that were used in olden days to carry brides from the house of parent to her in-laws. The groups as soon as they reach here pay homage to the shrine. Some times *dalis* pay homage together therefore wait till all have arrived. The places where the *dalis* settle down are called *deras*. *Dalis* are placed at the entrance to the *dera* and is respected like an Alter. Most of these *dalis* groups bring food stuff with them including animals for slaughtering. The food is cooked and served at these *deras* and offered to the visitors. Many of the *dalis* bring their own music. These miniature shrines are carried back home to have an easy access to them during the rest of the year. A comparable

description about memorial shrines of Baba Farid is provided by Eaton: “small memorial shrines to Baba Farid began appearing, scattered throughout the countryside of the central Punjab, and that the Baraka or spiritual power and authority of Baba Farid became physically established ...”<sup>36</sup> In the following we want to give a brief description of some groups and their religious practices at the shrine.

**Khusre** are usually translated as eunuchs or transvestites but I would agree with Pfeffer (1995) that the term cannot and should not be translated. *Khusre* call themselves *faqir* (commonly misunderstood as ‘beggars’ but ascetics) who have given up this world in favour of the one in the hereafter. *Khusre* call people other than themselves as *dunyadar* (people of the mundane world).<sup>37</sup> *Khusre* are despised and feared at the same time. They are despised for their roles like homosexuals, beggars, dancers etc. considered impure and disrespectful by the society and also for not belonging to male/female sex. They are feared for their *badduaah* (curse) and their social license to be abusive or for exposing their non-existent genitals. Pfeffer describes *khusra* in the following words:

It relates to a Punjabi who does not accept the male role and behave very differently, when compared to a female, even though a *khusra* mostly adopts a female dress and the female language forms of reference. In a rite of passage, practiced sometime but not always, her male genitals are totally removed, and she is not a member of an ordinary Punjabi household or caste. She is in fact permanently associated with other *Khusre*, but such a household is a very regular feature of an ordinary urban ward, in the sense that it very much belongs to the area and neighbours recognize it as such. Similarly a *Khusra dera* or camp is a normal feature in the rural areas. In a ritual context, *khsura* may also stand for a caste like *nai* (barber) or *chuhra* (sweeper). Like these, a *khsra* is essential for life cycle ceremonies.<sup>38</sup>

They call themselves males with female spirit which I consider a very close description. *Khure* claim to have given up their sexuality for saving the regeneration (sex) of humanity. In

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36 Eaton, “The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid”, p.340.

37 Haniya Rais, *The Socio-Economic Organisation of the Khusra Community of Rawalpindi* (M.Sc. Diss., Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, 1993).

38 George Pfeffer, “Manliness in the Punjab: Male Sexuality and the Khusra”, *Sociologus* Vol.I (1995), p.31.



this way they seem to have acquired an ability to make a gift of or at least affect the sex of others particularly when they do not get their ritual dues. The *khusre* perform commonly at the time of the marriage or birth particularly of the sons. They make music by beating drums and by clapping, they sing, dance and want *vadhai* as their ritual payments and in return guarantee the sex of the child and through that the continuity of the lineage. At the marriage occasions they very often give special performances for the young males by titillating songs and dances and get special *vadhai*. In case of refusal of payments or under payments they may turn to expressions that are unbecoming of the occasions including in worst cases exposing their own (lack of) genitals. People mostly want them gone as soon as possible. While analyzing the place and role of *khusre* in the Punjabi society Pfeffer writes further that:

In ritual practice sterile, emasculated dancers without sex or gender guarantee virility of Punjabi men and fertility of women and lineages. In celebrating the advent of male offspring and by taking ritual dues, they enhance the idea of manliness. ... *Khusre* existence should be understood as sacrifice. They have given their sex on the world and are auspicious as sex-givers, or as representatives of regeneration, even though they are otherwise impure and mutilated. ... This value-idea is so strong on the sub-continent that it has survived side by side with the more specific obligations of the various religious communities and is recognized by all.<sup>39</sup>

The *khusre* are originally males — there was no female *khusre* reported including in literature — and many of them get themselves castrated. There are also so called *zanans* i.e. those who are fully males but wear woman's clothes and walk and behave like woman. The other important aspect is that almost all of them belong to the families of low caste (*biradaris*). They say good bye or in most cases are forced to say good bye to their natal families for fear of losing respect in the neighbourhood. Their families fear becoming something like outclass due to their unspecified sex, their 'impure' jobs and existence. Some *khusre* visit their families occasionally mainly disguised and during midnight. In short, we can conclude that the *khusre* are a community in the Punjab whose status is of a marginal group.

*Khusre* have a special relationship to Bari Imam and his shrine. They carry the saint's *mehndi* (henna paste) in big plates

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39 *Ibid.*, pp.34-35.

decorated with colourful papers and lights in a procession to his shrine during the *urs* days. There is a lot of singing, dancing and merry making. They sing songs like “*dekho dekho Bari Imam ki sawari aa gai*”[Urdu: behold Bari Imam has come riding]. They told that every year during the *urs* there is a small windstorm - we could confirm it from our own experience during the fieldwork on several *urs* occasions. This is a sign and evidence that Bari Imam has come to take part in his *urs*. This is almost purely a *khusre* celebration. We have already written in the beginning of this section that *urs* means marriage. We have also written above that in the Punjabi society the *khusre* perform (sing and dance) on marriage occasions. Their performance at the shrine is comparable to the performance at these marriages. The only difference is that at the time of *urs* they claim the role of guests therefore accept no money. The *khusre* claim that this role was assigned to them by the saint during his life time and ever since they celebrate this ceremony. They have a room reserved for them, where outsiders or non-*khusras* are not allowed. It seems that by performing their traditional role at the shrine the *khusre* actually have made it a part of their religion as practice. Bari Imam has assigned them this role and through that Bari Imam has sanctioned this role for them in the society. Bari Imam as a *wali* (friend or even bride) of God would help them in getting forgiveness before God. This is also why they say they come to the service of Bari Imam and as long as they participate in the *urs* they do not go for their traditional jobs from which they earn money. They claimed in their interviews that they are come here to spend and not earn. We could find out that at least some of them were earning money by selling their sex and also otherwise but this was not the version *khusre* liked when confronted. Such practices also lead to interpretations like if there was no storm that they will say that Bari was angry with them.

**Malangs** translated in English as mendicants are another very prominent group of participants in the *urs* celebrations at the shrine of Bari Imam. They are known for wearing colorful clothes, smoking hashish (*charas*), drinking bhang (green hash) and not caring much for the world. *Malangs* carry and wear a lot of different articles and ornaments that have symbolic meanings and help identifying them to different groups. Some of the prominent

things include: wearing very few cloths a *langoti* (loincloth), using *choga* (long loose shirt covering down to the ankles) made of colors uncommon among men in this part of the world like sharp green, red, yellow, black. Some wear *godri* i.e. a shirt made of variegated cloth, grow long hairs, shave heads completely or grow a long *bodi* (lock of hairs) and shave rest of the head, wear heavy iron arm rings called *gulaba*, carry long animal horns called sword of Ali, have a begging bowl known as 'kasa' or 'zambil' in their hand and wear ear rings. Similarly some keep a club called 'mubair' found in different shapes and decorations, wear heavy chains around their body from neck to the ankles, hang bells made

of brass around themselves, have a lot of finger rings, some carry *trisula* rod or portrays or even pictures of different saints. Carrying chains indicate the major accident of history in Karbala, colors of clothes indicate their attachment to a particular group of *malangs* or Sufis like Lal Shahbaz Kalandar or the famous Khwaja Khizer, etc.

The aim of this description is not to write a detailed ethnography of the *malangs* but to show that *malangs* are a marginal group in Pakistan. For most Pakistanis *malangs* are dirty, illiterate even irreligious, drug addicts, at least a social outcaste<sup>40</sup> at best an exotic folk that lives on the margins of the society. As Ewing notes:

One activity that most Pakistanis consider to be in violation of the *Shariah*, and which is regularly engaged in by *malangs*, is the smoking of hashish (*charas*) and drinking of *bhanga*. Fragrant use of *charas* marks the *malang* as being outside respectable society and also clearly sets him apart from the *ba shar pirs*.<sup>41</sup>

Ibbetson suggests that *malangs* are:

... a non-descript sect said to be the followers of one *Jaman Jatti*, who in turn was a follower of Zinda Shah Madar, ... But the term is generally applied in a more general way to any unattached religious beggar, who drinks *bhanga* or smokes *charas* in excess, wears nothing but loin cloth, and keeps fire always near him.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Hafeez ur Rahman Chaudhry, "Annual Urs Celebrations at the Shrine of Bari Imam," *Journal of Central Asia*, Vol.28 (1995), p.2.

41 Kathrine Ewing, "The Malangs of the Punjab: Intoxication or Adab as the Path to God?" in Metcalf ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority*, p.363.

42 *Ibid.*, p.358.

Most of them come from poor backgrounds. Some told to have been thrown out of the families by relatives. A *malang* with mutilated arms told that he was adopted by his group after he lost his arms in a factory accident and was left un-helped by relatives and society. Another claimed he inherited this from his father. Yet another *malang* said:

I have come here to fulfill the promise with Imam Bari. He came in my dream just a few days before *urs*, he ordered me to make my presence at the occasion of *urs*. I have to remain highly attentive and look after the fire, so that it is not extinguished at least for three days. People think that our activities are against the *sunnah* and *sharia*, but we are actually on the right path, and our activities are according to *sharia*. I have been coming here for 23 years for the service of imam.<sup>43</sup>

*Malangs* follow their own version of Islam which they claim is the same as that of the Sufis they are followers of. The *malangs*, for example, explain their use of bhang and hash differently than the way people perceive:

The *malangs* I spoke with made no effort to hide their use of hashish and marijuana, but spoke with contempt of the ordinary man's use of alcohol. ... Once in a hashish-induced state of intoxication (*nasha*), the *malang* enters into communion with God and receives His commands.<sup>44</sup>

We can say that *malangs* follow Islam that is according to their life style or one can turn it round and claim that their belief system controls their way of life. The *malangs* at the shrine of Bari Imam regard themselves as the servants (*naukar*) of the saint. Their main focus is Bari Imam from whom they claim to get orders (*hokum*) often in their dreams. This notion of experience of dream is claimed by almost by all Malang groups. Most of the *malangs* seem to worship Bari Imam. This was most clearly demonstrated at the time of their arrival and approach to the shrine – they bowed down to the ground with their foreheads touching the ground with shrine at the front that according to the orthodox Muslim belief is only permissible for God and is done during the five time prayers in the mosque. This according to the ideology of the *Wahadatul Wajud* that the *malangs* seem to follow will be that they (*malangs*) prostrated not to Bari but to God because Bari was God at least since his death. *Malangs* were very clear in their

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43 Source: Field data.

44 Ewing, "The Malangs of the Punjab", p.363.

views that Bhang and *dhamal* (dance) are the source of communication with their *murshid* but not alcohol that is forbidden and bad. When *malang* takes excessive amount of hash and bhang he goes into trance and start dancing. Sometimes, he continues dancing until he becomes exhausted and falls down on the ground. Concluding we can say that like *khusre*, *malangs* form the marginal group of the Punjabi society and shrine of Bari Imam offers freedom to practice Islam as they deem fit.

**Prostitutes, Singers, Homosexuals** and some other marginal groups participate in the *urs* at the shrine of Bari Imam. There were other not so prominent groups like fortune-teller, traditional healer, musicians, women decorating hands with liquid *hina* stamps, food and entertainment groups. All these groups, individuals or families who came to *urs* practiced their own version of the religion conforming to their socio-economic status and needs. The prostitutes, the singing and dancing girls, their accompanying musicians are generally considered dirty, irreligious and depraved. Because of the lack of space and requirement we do not want to go into the full ethnographic lengths about these groups but cannot avoid narrating some interesting experiences relating to their religious practices at the shrine. The most astonishing for us was the beginning of a mid-night *mujra* (singing and dance performance) with recitation from the holy Quran. We were enlightened by the presiding *pir* with a return question - what was exotic in it? He explained: "That what you call the songs in the praise of a female or even male are actually praise of God who has created them".

The other striking revelation for us was the conversion of the prostitutes/singers to *Shia* sect and/or attachment to the shrine. Some people said the prostitutes become *Shias* because of *mutah* marriage of fixed time. The most interesting answer was of a *Shia* who told they commit big sins and need strong intercession. This seems to function in the manners that greater the sins stronger the mediation required. The Sufis/shrines like Bari Imam seem to be almost the only religious sources that offer an access to God for the prostitutes, transvestites, singers. They offer them solace and also food if required. When questioned a *pir* presiding the *mujra* where a young singer girls came and before performance bowed down to

touch his feet with hands and face, said, for her it is Baraka for me a test to remain steadfast in spite of temptation. Bari Imam is famous for being protective of marginal groups like prostitutes.

We similarly met a traditional healer known as *hakeem*, the practitioner of traditional non-allopathic medicines in Pakistan. They use herbs and local plants for the treatment of their patients. This knowledge is transferred from one generation to the other. They speak and understand the language of their patient. Most of the people in Pakistan still believe that a good *hakeem* or doctor must be able to tell the disease of the patient just by feeling the pulse. The octogenarian *hakeem* Ramazan belongs to Sahiwal and has been practicing *hikmat* for the last 50 years. The most surprising thing was the nature of relationship between *hakeem* Ramzan and Bari Imam. He admitted proudly that: “what he is today is all because of Bari sarkar”. He revealed that once he was caught in a false murder case and was awarded death punishment. In the prison, he prayed to Bari to save his life. A miracle happened and Hakeem Ramzan was freed from the prison. Since that time he always comes to pay salaam at the Shrine as his relation with Bari is that of life. He had almost 50 different plastic bottles and a large variety of herbs. He informed about the effects called “*taseer*”, recipes and ingredients of various indigenous medicines. The medicine cost depends upon the nature of ingredients and these medicines, claimed the *hakeem*, can cure diseases raging from simple cold to chronic cancer.

**Fortune-tellers** are another important group in the *urs*. This is a very old profession and includes people like palmists and future telling through parrots. The palmists read the lines on hands and make forecast about the future. Prof. Imtiaz Rahi was Master in Urdu and claims 20 years of experience in palmistry. A client asked him to assess his lines and reveal their language. Mr. Imtiaz Rahi told him about lines of life, career, fortune etc. He used the notion of poor men's hand and riche's hand. He also suggests Allah's name for his clients to get rid of life's troubles and worries. His charged Rs.50 per person, but it also varied with the client's status and out look he said. Another type of fortune telling common in Pakistan is with the help of parrot which select one envelop from a pile. M. Kazmi told that this has been transferred

from generation to the next since 14 lines. His ancestors had learned it from India and on partition shifted to Pakistan. He told that it takes six months to train the parrot. And it needs a lot of concentration. Once a parrot is angry, he refuses to pick card from the pile. One of the clients asked him for a *faal* or drawing of the card by the parrot. Mr.Kazmi asked him his name and asked his parrot to draw the fortune card from pile. The parrot walked on the pile cards and finally drew a card for him that read: “though you are passing through tough times nowadays but, these will be over soon. And don’t share your secrets with anybody and so on”. He charged ten rupees but people at times give him extra as “*bakshish*” when their cards predict happy future. He takes pride in being called as Bari’s devotee and claims to find the peace of mind and soul at his tomb.

**A middle aged woman** was dancing with the beat of drum. We asked her as to why she was doing that in a society where women are not expected to do such things in the public. She told that she did not beget any children and had done everything that was possible for her. Then she made a promise to the saint that she will participate in his *urs* every year barefooted and would also dance all the days of the *urs*. She got her desire fulfilled and since then she is regularly participating in the *urs*. She explained further that her son too was blessed with children following her prayers to the legendry Sufi. Now her son has three children two sons and a daughter. I am very happy and have full belief in Bari Imam she concluded.

**The arrival of Dali** from Peshawar marks the beginning of the *urs* of Bari imam. This is a distance of about 190 km which participants cover on foot, most of them even bare footed. It is note-worthy that May is very hot month in Pakistan when the temperature exceeds 40c but “much hotter are the spirit of the believers of Bari than the Sun those days” wrote one of the Daily newspapers.<sup>45</sup> The *chaddars* are spread out and held in such a way that people can throw money into them. The daly is accompanied by the drumbeater and dancers carrying out *dhamals*. The participants of Peshawar *dali* claim that their ancestors were

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45 *The News* (Islamabad), 6 June 2004, p.27.

instructed by the saint to carry the *gharoli* (clay pot) to the *urs*. There are several versions<sup>46</sup> of the story as to why this Peshawar *dali* comes and comes first. One of them as reported by Frembgen is: “Chan Agha Badshah a saint from Peshawar once insulted Barri Imam, not recognizing his saintliness. The moment he realized his mistake, Chan Agha’s regret was such that he vowed to journey every year by foot to the saint’s *dargah*.”<sup>47</sup> This *dali* begins with the participation of the *pirs* of Peshawar to Bari Imam’s *urs*. Starting as a relatively small group it grows with every town on the way and swells many times before reaching the shrine. The *urs* begins with the arrival of this procession from Peshawar as it opens the doors of the shrine with the keys from the Aukaf official and places *mehndi*, *halwa*, and *gharoli* inside the shrine which are taken out after five days to mark the end of the *urs*.

The ethnographic details of the shrine will not be complete unless the *lunger*, the shrine kitchen, is mentioned. *Lunger* is partly sponsored by the Aukaf and partly by the people. This consists of mostly sweet or saltish rice, bread with meat or vegetable and other items to eat. This is distributed all the year around but at the time of the *urs* special arrangements are made for the big gathering. *Lungar* is also one of the attractions of this shrine during and after the *urs*. Another important attraction here is bhang, the traditional summer drink of many males in Punjab. It is said to have cold effects against the scorching heat of the Punjabi Summer. It includes cannabis, poppy seeds, almonds, milk and sugar. All these ingredients are grounded together in a clay pot for a long time before milk or water is added to it. It has intoxicating effects. It is a favourite drink of the *malangs* but other people also drink it. The cannabis is also used in the *pakor*s (a dish) that

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46 For another version see, Doris Buddenberg, “Schreine im Islamischen Kulturraum: Sociale Funktionen fuer Hoch-und Volksreligion”? “Stephanie Zingel-Ave’ Lallemand and Wolfgang-Peter Zingel (eds.), *Contemporary German Contributions to the History and Culture of Pakistan* (Bonn: Deutsch-Pakistanisches Forum e. V., 1993).

Another very interesting aspect we learned about the family of a *saiyyid* who also accompany the Peshawar *dali* are their names for which they use the same words as different Punjabi names of sexual organs like Laure Shah (Phallus Shah), Kusee Shah (vagina shah), etc. We were told these names are a continuous repentance of the descendents for the insult to the Bari.

47 Frembgen, “The Majzub Mama Ji Sarkar,” p.142.



produce intoxicating effects. *Sardai* is another favourite drink in this heat common at the *urs*. This includes similar ingredients as bhang except for green hash. This is sold on commercial basis where-as bhang is mostly for personal consumption and sold secretly. There are other different types of entertainment facilities for the visitors like circus, dances, *maut ka kuan* (death well) and swings for the children. During the *urs* days, the colourful bazaars outside Bari's shrine become even more attractive. These colourful shops sell a large variety of bangles, necklaces, finger rings, garlands, and beautiful printed/embroidered grave spreads.

### **III. Discussion**

As a general observation it can be said that the dominant majority of the people who come to attend the shrine and participate in the *urs* belong to the lower economic strata of the urban area, as well as from the rural areas and many of them are members of the marginal groups. Most people visit Bari's shrines for the resolution of their multifarious problems. Some come asking for a child — preferably a male child — some want cure from a disease (this includes particularly people who cannot afford the doctor or their diseases have been declared incurable), others want liberation from poverty - they get at least free food from the shrine kitchen - , obtaining a job, mental peace, higher crop yield, support in court cases, thanks giving, visa for employment overseas, success in the examination, marriage with beloved one, in short it covers all fields of life from social to economic, religious, political, entertainment and enjoyment.

There are several rituals performed by shrine pilgrims 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* (grave spread) and rose garlands over the grave. Some people rub their bodies with stones that rest on the grave. 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 *khake shifa* (ashes for curing ashes) from fire that is permanently burning. Afterwards these visitors usually make a cash donation to the ministry run-charity boxes outside the tomb.

The total income from the shrine, according to the Aukaf administration is 11.4 million Rupees per annum with only 1.8 million Rupees as expenditures. Some time pilgrims make contributions of animals to the shrine e.g. of pigeons, lambs, goat and cows.

Pilgrimage to Bari's shrine especially at the time of *urs* is a liberating experience - people dance (*dhamal*) on the beats of drums, some experience *haal* or a state of trance also called *wajad*, other raise many different slogans like crying Bari, Bari, Bari others add Ali Haider, Qalandar, etc. and give vent to their emotional sometimes suppressed feelings. All these elements of folk spirituality may take even a non-interested, non-believer into a deep thought.

At the margins of the shrine is a mosque which is said to be founded by the saint during his life time. Saint's hagiographers write that he used to give Quran lessons at least during that time of his life before he became a *majzub*. In the compound of the shrine there is a place where holy Qurans are placed and could be used for recitation at the shrine. The prayer carpets are spread for saying regular prayers as well as *nawafil*s (special prayers) for the saint. In the same compound we find a place with permanent fire a reminder of the Gorakhnathi past. The banyan tree is also present in the compound under which the saint had worshiped that hints at the Buddhist past of this holy place as was identified by Anne Marry Schiemel and Fussman.<sup>48</sup> If we look at the religious practices in and around the room in which the shrine is found we find a mix of different types. Some people when they enter the shrine bow down to kiss and touch the shrine with their foreheads. Many people stand around the shrine praying with raised hands. There are others who sit down near the shrine and recite from the Quran. Most of the people move in this tiny room in a way that they do not show their back to the grave, a well known sign of respect in the Punjabi society for the venerated souls and scripts. There are also people who do not go to the grave but acknowledge the services of such saints for the religion and society.

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48 Buddenberg, "Schreine im Islamischen Kulturraum", p.184.

The main message at this shrine in my view is the religious flexibility and tolerance. The evidence of this is the presence of such a large number of people including those belonging to different religious groups and orientations crammed in such a narrow space under the burning sun for several days without giving rise to any unpleasant situation. (In all those years we attended the shrine there was never any conflict of serious nature and the same was confirmed by the police on duty). A visit to shrine or attendance at the *urs* means different things to different people. There were many different interpretation of religion found here for which I say people interpret it according to their requirements and circumstances making it what we have called here a cultural system in the sense it is a product of the local socio-economic, historical, political circumstances - unity in diversity. The other important message of the shrine is its recognition of the marginal groups it rather gives them central place in the ceremonies relating to the *urs* — the roles of *khusre*, *malang*, prostitutes, etc we have already discussed. This shrine seems to serve as a guarantee for their forgiveness before God. One could even say this shrine is a place for the marginal, while the others have a rather periphery roles. This is also evident from the place of mosque which is at the margins of the shrine instead of the central place as is the case in many other shrines. It is not only that the marginal groups have been assigned special roles by the saint in my view this shrine makes them the main-stream i.e. the periphery is made the centre. In this way this shrine is connecting the marginal groups of the society with the main-stream society – by assigning these roles and duties that are typical of their profession in recognizing these roles for the larger society.

### **Conclusion**

This paper discussed the relationship between religion and culture in Pakistan with a particular focus on the shrine of Bari Imam in Islamabad. The main idea was that Sufism, in general, and the *Qadiriyya/Qalandiriya silsila* of Bari imam in particular, was flexible in its approach to the religion. The people who attend the shrine tend to practice Islam according to their requirements and cultural perceptions. We have argued as proposed by Eaton that this shrine played the double role of connecting the local culture or

local version of Islam to the broader culture of Islam and at the same time kept its local character. The shrine of Bari Imam did not only integrate the marginal groups into the larger society by sanctioning their activities it also offered a possibility for the marginal groups to practice religion according to their requirements. On the broader level we argued that religion and culture are closely related therefore, *Deobandi* Islam found more favourable ground in the NWFP and Sufism in the Punjab. We have further proposed that this is going to stay as such in future because the *Deobandi* Islam has been Pukhtonised in NWFP to suit the cultural requirements of the Pushtoons and that the Punjabi Sufism is a product of the local culture and has been serving the local Punjabi cultural requirements.

With these conclusions we feel drawn into a debate rather controversy started between Imtiaz Ahmad, a professor of sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi and Francis Robinson, Royal Holloway College University of London. The position of Ahmad is that: “the co-existence of high Islamic and custom-centred religious traditions developed in the past, is established in the present, and is the distinctive, unique, pattern of Indian Islam which will probably persist into the future”.<sup>49</sup> The opposite position which is favoured by Robison is of Aziz Ahmad who considered that: “the folk and syncretic elements in Indian Islam, the worshipping saints, the barely disguised presence of Hindu godlings, the hint of pollution and the traces of caste, as mere temporary anomalies which would eventually be eliminated by the actions of Muslim reformers”.<sup>50</sup> Clifford Geertz views about Indonesian Islam are also presented for support in which he assumed that the process of Islamisation meant a victory of an orthodox, orthoprax great tradition over the heterodox, heteroprax little tradition. But this process of Islamisation is painfully gradual.<sup>51</sup> Robinson criticized I. Ahmad because in his views I. Ahmad: “is able to make his assertion, one sense, because the case studies he has brought together embrace too short a period of time,

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49 Francis Robinson, “Islam and Muslim society in South Asia”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol.17, No.2 (1983), p.187.

50 Robinson, “Islam and Muslim society in South Asia,” p.186.

51 *Ibid.*

because, perhaps, the sociological understanding of religion, and religious change, is not as 'comprehensive' as he would like to think. The historian's extended view suggests that there is continual, if sometimes slow and barely perceptible, movement between visions of perfect Muslim life and those which ordinary Muslims lead."<sup>52</sup>

In this debate our data supports I. Ahmad's broader assumption that the so called orthodox is not eating up the so-called heterodoxy. The continuity with the so-called 'heterodoxy' is not, at least in Pakistan, due to fear that the total displacement of indigenous mores and traditions could only be achieved at the cost of Islam's own rejection.<sup>53</sup> The heterodox religious practices including shrines/Sufism are, in my view, a product of a long process of interaction between the local culture and Islam as was also shown by Gilmartin a historian like Robinson: "a look at the origins of Islamic institutions in rural Punjab provides insight into the ways local, tribal identities and local forms of religious organization developed in close association... the shrines embodied diverse local cultural identities, whose variety reflected both the diversity of ecological, social and kinship organizations in Punjab and the diversity in the spiritual needs of the people"<sup>54</sup> Why would such a co-production of culture and religion be replaced by orthodox religious practices? The so called reforms and revival movements are quoted as a reason for this change.<sup>55</sup> Gilmartin has quoted several such revivalist and reformist movements from history of religion in the Punjab. My own view is that most of these revival movements merged into the larger culture based system after sometimes particularly when the founder of such reform movements was dead. Gilmartin, for instance, wrote about Khwaja Suleman a reformer of the Taunsa Sharif Shrine that K. Suleman:

... criticized the blind faith in pirs common among the people, he himself nevertheless became a pir of considerable standing and numbered

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

<sup>54</sup> Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, pp.40-41.

<sup>55</sup> For details see *Ibid.*

important local leaders among his murids. Khwaja Suleman's Khanaqah in fact received the protection of tribal leaders as a local spiritual centre. After Khawaja Suleman's death this mediatory centre became a shrine; construction of an imposing tomb over the saint's grave was financed largely by the Nawab of Bahawalpur".<sup>56</sup>

Another such Sufi reformer was Pir Mehr Ali Shah (1856-1937) of Golra Sharif whose grave is located in Islamabad. Since his death the shrine has become an almost traditional Punjabi shrine following the *piri-muridi* system. Therefore the view that there is a tendency of orthodox (Taliban) eating up the heterodox versions of Islam cannot be indorsed. The practices at the shrine of Bari Imam, its clear identity with the marginal groups and also its popularity among the masses represents historical continuity. There are also claim that participation at Bari Imam's shrine has increased. This should not be misunderstood in the sense that there is no change taking place. We fully support the view that there is nothing constant except the change including in culture. There are changes between those times and the circumstances today and the Sufism/shrines of today reflect the present times. Likewise shrines of today are Sufism of today in Pakistan. Bari Imam's shrine has been affected by the larger historical and political developments around it whether during his life time, the Mughal rulers or later on by Pakistan particularly by the construction of Islamabad, then the Islamization in Pakistan during Zia ul Haq or the so called 'enlightened moderation' of Musharaf era. In spite of all these changes this shrine remains a place for the minority and marginalised groups. This was very helpful for the flourishing of Islam because this way even those apparently expelled by the main-stream religion found a way to stay and found solace and peace. Furthermore we are of the view that it is not simply a black or white or the clear opposition between the orthodox and the heterodox. There is continuity between the two and difference is not only Sufi/shrine versus mullah/mosque. There are differences within shrines/Sufis and similarly there are differences with respect to orthodoxy or heterodoxy within mullah/mosques (*Brailvis* against *Ahl-e-Hadith*).

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56 Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, p.58.