Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review
www.plhr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of Sufi Shrines in Local Politics: A Case Study of Mitthan Kot Rajanpur, Pakistan

[1]Sarfraz Ahmad, [2]Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, and [3]Fahd Zulfiqar

1. Assistant Manager/Lecturer, Institute of Business Management (IoBM) Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad, Pakistan

| *Corresponding Author | Sarfrazpide@gmail.com |

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Sufi shrines in the local community and local politics. This study follows a qualitative research strategy and employs in-depth interviews to collect data from different stakeholders, including shrine visitors, local politicians, and the *Sajjada Nasheen* (custodian of a shrine). The total number of respondents was 50. Thematic analysis has been used to analyze data. The findings of this study showed that the *Sajjada Nasheen* in Mitthan Kot uses the shrine for their own benefit, as they are only the caretakers of the Shrine. They are not functioning for the shrine's development or for spreading the teachings of Khwaja Ghulam Farid. Moreover, the results showed that after gaining power, *Sajjada Nasheen* and his family altered their behavior towards the local people and visitors to the shrine.. That is also quoted in the results as one of the reasons that the number of visitors to the shrine is decreasing. Sajjada Nasheen is involved in politics by using the shrine with the help of local politicians. Hence, the nexus between *Sajjada Nasheen* and local politicians defines the local political landscape in Mitthan Kor, Rajanpur.

| **KEYWORDS** | Local Politics, Mitthan Kot, Pakistan, Rajanpur, Sufi Shrines, Sajjada Nasheen |

Introduction

Sufism is related to the history of Islam in South Asia. It involves a specific group of beliefs and practices in Islam that focus on spiritual and personal elements of the religion. There are two main expressions of Sufism in South Asia: Sukr and Sobriety. The followers of Sukr are Sunni Barelvis, and the followers of Sobriety are Sunni Deobandis. The followers of Sufi shrines are mostly Sunni Barelvis (Muzaffar & Rafique, 2020; Epping, 2013).

Numerous studies have examined the role of Sufi shrines in the political landscape of Pakistan (Ali, Chaudhry, & Ahmed, 2014). These studies explore both the direct and indirect influence of Sufi shrines on politics, the process by which individuals become followers, and the benefits they derive from these shrines (Abbas, Qureshi, Safdar, & Zakar, 2020; M. Boivin, 2002).

Shrines play a significant role in Pakistani politics. Pirs, as religious mediators, hold power because their followers believe that the *Pir* is closest to God. Sufi shrines are prevalent throughout Pakistan, and a large portion of the population identifies with these shrines (Cheema & Nuri, 2005). Prominent political figures such as Ayub Khan (President of Pakistan from 1958 to 1969), Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (President from 1971 to 1973 and Prime Minister from 1973 to 1979), and General Zia-ul-Haq were known followers of Pirs. It is well documented that they attained the presidency with the support of Pirs and their close

association with these shrines (Zaidi & Weekly, 2002). The government of Pakistan has historically considered shrines to be the centre of political power, as during Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's era, when government officials participated in shrine rituals. In Pakistan, most politicians are from *Pirs* lineage such as Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, and Ex-foreign minister Syed Mahmood Qureshi, among others. In rural Punjab, many people follow Sufi shrines and they visit to saints of Pakistan. They offer both cash and kindness to the shrine, which helps the hereditary administrator/custodian (*Sajjada Nasheen*) to gain more power in society (Ahmed, 2008).

The topic for the current research is to explain the relationship between shrines and politics. The locale of our study is rural, in which most people are illiterate and obey their *Pir* orders. For the followers, *Pir* solves all their problems. Some people from this social group, who have well-rounded knowledge about religion and are literate, migrated to urban areas; they believe in *Pir,* but they do not behave like rural people who have firm faith in *Pir*.

It is estimated that 45% of the population of South Punjab is surviving below the poverty line, and district Rajanpur is the poorest and least developed district of South Punjab, with 50% of the population below the poverty line, which depicts that every second person is below the poverty line(Imran, 2018). Among the 36 districts of Punjab, Rajanpur ranks last in literacy indicators (Sultan, 2022).

Poor villagers visit the shrine for various life problems, such as marriage, jobs, and children.   They give *Nazrana* (Gifts a murid gives to his pir, such as Money, animals, or Gold) for the shrine in different forms, such as cash or animals. From revenues, the caretaker of the shrine (*Sajjada Nasheen*) gets the direct benefit and uses poor people for their benefit to gain power. He plays a role in politics due to the villagers' support. Followers have blind faith in *Sajjada Nasheen*. Through this research, the researcher also explained how the Sufi shrine influences the local community (not only the followers but also non-followers in the context of our research locale).

Literature Review

Religion is very important to human beings, and without religion, life is not complete. This argument is advanced by B.R. Ambedkar, who claims that religion is an institution that helps society on the verge of collapse; to ignore religion is to ignore its connection to life (Haynes, 2012). Religion was the key ideology that inspired political war among social groups during the eighteenth century. In Western Europe and the rest of the world, the development of centralized states in 1948 decreased the political significance of religion. In the early 20th century, religion again gained momentum, as seen in the Iranian revolution in 1978 and in Turkey, where the Sunni Muslim majority and a secular development model coexisted. In the 1970s, religious involvement in politics increased across various countries. Much focus was on Islamic fundamentalism, which differentiates religion and politics among Jews and Muslims. The relationship between religion and the state explains the different traditions and ethical principles that arose from these two spheres. Modernization theory is based on evolutionary assumptions that suggest a relationship among economic, social, and political development in the differentiation of modern societies. In this regard, a study by Casanova (2012) is important, as it presents five phases of religious advancement: archaic, historic, primitive, and early modern, all grounded in belief, practice, and association.

The majority of the wars in history have been fought for the sake of religion. Religious extremists claim that they are on the path of righteousness and acting as per the

divine authority. The connection between religion and the world, change has been raised for both social science and the humanities. The social sciences support the role of religion in tradition, existing social structures, and security (Schwartz & Huismans, 2009). As per Al-Qaeda, the triumph will not finish with Afghanistan, and Jihad will proceed until all the land of Muslims comes back to them.

After the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the incident of September 11, 2001, political Islam has been discussed all around the world. Increasing the Global War on Terror and targeting jihadis and terrorists, who use the name of Islam for their benefit and to gain power in the Muslim world, was meant to end them. Malaysia, with its developing economy and political stability, supports Muslim politics. Malaysian leaders said that religious deviancy from the state explains the norms of different Islamic practices. Compared with other countries, Malaysia has a low rate of religious conflict (Dawson, 2014).

The articulation of religion and politics is also evident in the context of the 1992 Babri Masjid incident in India. The uproar was from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to develop its politics in the name of religion. Now, different religious actors are associated with political issues. Religious actors avoid politics and global relations, and government experts agree that everything has changed in various ways. Most investigations of politics and religion focus on social, cultural, and economic problems. In the past, different interfaith religious groups focused on social development issues, like the World Faiths Development Dialog (WFDD), made with the help of the World Bank for religious faith development (Roccas, 2005). Different religions may create clashes between groups, classes, and nations by altering social relations in family, law, politics, and education. In some cases, religion becomes an important factor in politics and global relations. Some religions play an instrumental role in shaping international conflict, whereas others consistently discourage it, as asserted by Ellis & Ter Haar.

The relationship between religion and the state explains the different traditions and ethical principles that arose from these two spheres. Modernization theory is based on evolutionary assumptions, which suggested the relationship between economics, social, and political development for the differentiation of modern societies. In this regard, a study by Casanova (2012) is important, as it presents five phases of religious advancement: archaic, historic, primitive, and early modern, all based on belief, practice, and association.

Political development is associated with disputed modernization. The existing focus of studies of political development was on European and North American nation-states. In modern societies, important functions in controlling political development were the care of institutions and the representation of interest groups, parties, and the mass media. There were normative thoughts on a stable, legitimate political system to prevent the recurrence of dictatorship and on the representative of that system. In the late fifties and early sixties, Western studies and ideas were applied to the non-Western World. Universal political functions disturb social mobilization, economic development, and social welfare in the non-Western World. In the development of modern politics in Europe and North America, historians found reasons that were not appropriate in these countries. Karl Marx's study of political development also identified the same problems. In Southern and Eastern Europe and Latin America during the eighties and nineties, normative studies of political development found a new way of life in the origins of rules. Previous studies show that normative studies of political institutions improve the importance of society, well-being, and good governance (Dawson, 2014; Gramsci & Wishar, 1971; Jessop & philosophy, 2005; Mulloy & Moore, 1957). The study of political modernizations and the Third World shows that the main problems of development were due to short-sighted political experts.

They do not know how to make fruitful use of available resources. Politics studies the overall process of development. The empirical focus is not fruitful all the time. Social Sciences focus on important factors of life, sociologists and anthropologists study norms and social movements. Economics focuses on the production and distribution of goods, while a political expert focuses on the management of society and struggles for development. The politics-development debate is solved by studying politics as an interdisciplinary field of development. The political economy was of great significance in Japan's postwar reconstruction. The study of political modernizations and the Third World shows that the main problems of development were due to short-sighted political experts. They do not know how to make fruitful use of available resources. Politics studies the overall process of development. The empirical focus is not fruitful all the time. Social Sciences focus on important factors of life, sociologists and anthropologists study norms and social movements. Economics focuses on the production and distribution of goods, while a political expert focuses on the management of society and struggles for development. The politics-development debate is solved by studying politics as an interdisciplinary field of development. The political economy was of great significance in Japan's postwar reconstruction (Overbeek, 2022).

Politics has been found in the state, civil society, international organizations, and business companies. Three forms of politics, institutions, structures, and organizations are found on various levels. Politics includes institutions as forms of organization. The political actors cooperate and contest one another as they defend their plans. Their actions affect the scope, forms, and content of politics. Political experts in Third World countries conduct observational experiments without following the methods of European or North American studies. A few years ago, international agencies and the European Union introduced the above techniques to underdeveloped countries. Academic and political development paved the way for political science inquiries in the Third World countries and regions. Both types lack knowledge and face important problems as well. The fundamental issue with Northern and Southern institutions is that they base their study of the Third World on external funding and interests in political economy, thereby making creative and concerned engagement difficult (Jalalzai & Krook, 2010).

There is a strong relationship between religion and politics in the Subcontinent. When Mahatma Gandhi became the leader, he said, Unity is necessary between people from different societies. He wanted to foster coordination among all religions in India. The other political parties have communal goals, and they mobilize their supporters around them. There is a different meaning of secularism in India and the West. Jawaharlal Nehru said that secularism means freedom for all religions. Officially, India is a secular state, and the state does not perceive any religion; instead, it does not separate itself from religion. Communication of political issues in the 1980s was shaped by various political groups and divisions along religious lines. In the 1980s, Congress presented a bill to amend the structure of Aligarh University. The reservation expressed by Muslims prompted the government to confirm Muslim individuality (Darby, 2007).

The Muslims are constantly utilized as a vote bank. After gaining political independence, Muslim politicians addressed their concerns and established the Majlis-e-Mushawarat. The association presented its requests to the administration, including the Muslim law, the status of the Urdu change of book, and so on. In the 1977 election, Muslims supported the Janata coalition, and they won two seats for the Muslim Majlis. In Uttar Pradesh, they apportioned 10 seats out of 425 to Muslims. Be that as it may, after the race, they cannot take care of Muslim issues. When Congress won the vote bank of Muslims, their leader apologized for the benefit of all the parties, not to save the Babri Masjid. These writers examine the social hypothesis to understand world political issues (Doty, 1996).

Religion is essential in the political history of Pakistan. It played a major role in Pakistan's movement and constitutional advancement of Pakistan. The significance of religion in administration issues of Pakistan has major significance. Beginning with Pakistan's ideology, religion has remained a regulatory power in the administration. The individuals who are in the garb of religious sectarianism are responsible for social division. In formulating policies on population welfare, well-being, and social improvement, religious guidance plays a major role (Hassan & Kamal, 2010).

Sufism played a critical role in Pakistani governmental issues. In one phase, they stayed away from the political stage, and in another, they included political issues to gain control. Over the past ten years, Barelvis have been included in governmental issues to secure their religious traditions. In 2002, there were more than 7000 Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan, and from 1778 to 1988, the number increased tremendously. In 1990, Saleem Qadri and Barelvi youth established Sunni Tehreek (ST). The principal reason for Sunni Tehreek is to ensure Ahle Sunnat's beliefs, rights, mosques, and shrines. To understand religious and governmental issues in Pakistan, the West drew closer to the religious and political issues of Pakistan on academic fronts. The sympathy for Sufism has been engendered by America that the West ought to interface with the belief system against Islamic militancy, and that Sufis are followers of the West. Starting Sufism as an answer to Islamic violence faces numerous issues and it failed to understand the challenges of Sufism in Pakistan (Epping, 2013). More than two decades after Pakistan gained independence, to divert Pir politics (Politics of caretaker of Sufi shrine), Ayub Khan established the Department of Auqaf to change traditional principles into modern, secular ones. He tried to reduce the power of *the Sajjada Nasheen, but in* vain. He utilized the local power of *the Sajjada Nasheen and benefited from his political interests as a* follower of Pir Dewal Sharif (Boivin, 2020). Things continued as before under the government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and the government's commitment to the shrine remained the same (Ewing, 1983; U. Rehman, 2017).

Materials and Methods

This study has employed a qualitative research strategy and a descriptive research design.

Units of data collection

The units of data collection for the current research included shrine visitors, residents of the locale, *Sajjada Nasheen*, Auqaf department, and local politicians. There were 50 total respondents, and data from 46 respondents was used for the analysis of the current study.

Sampling

Probability and non-probability sampling techniques (purposive and simple random) were used to sample respondents. Purposive sampling techniques were used for the *Sajjada Nasheen* and local politicians, which is a type of non-probability sampling because the sample size is small, while simple random sampling was used for the Shrine visitors and the local population, which is a type of probability sampling because the sample size is large.

Data Collection

Data were collected using qualitative research methods, including semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Data was collected through audio recordings, memo writing,

and photography. Rapport building and participant observation were also used as data collection techniques because I am a native of the locale.

Data Analysis

Thematic approach and framework analysis were used as data analysis tools (Becker, Bryman, & Ferguson, 2012).

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee of the host institute. There will be no language barrier to data collection. The data were collected from the respondents after obtaining their consent. All interviewees were briefed on the research purpose and assured of their confidentiality, privacy protection, and that the information provided by them would be used only for academic purposes. Local relations were also used for data collection and as a privacy guarantor to the respondents.

Locale

Mitthan Kot is situated near District Rajanpur (Punjab). It is situated on the right bank of the Indus River. The city is famous due to the Shrine of Khawaja Ghulam Farid. The shrine is the 6th-most-visited Sufi Shrine in Pakistan. It is located in the National Assembly constituencies NA-195 and PP-296 of the Provincial Assembly. The population of the area is 36748 (Pasha & Hafiz, 2017). The total number of voters is 13108 in Mitthan Kot (Elections, 2018). The main reason for choosing this locale is that the people of Mitthan Kot and other related areas are very poor and illiterate. They work day and night just to fulfil their basic needs. Despite these existential problems, they always help *the Sajjada Nasheen with* cash and animals. They give votes to *Sajjada Nasheen* without any benefit, even though they do not have access to the necessities of life. People are followers of the Shrine because their belief system is shaped in a way that conditions them to think about religion through the Shrine, and for them, the *Sajjada Nasheen* is everything.
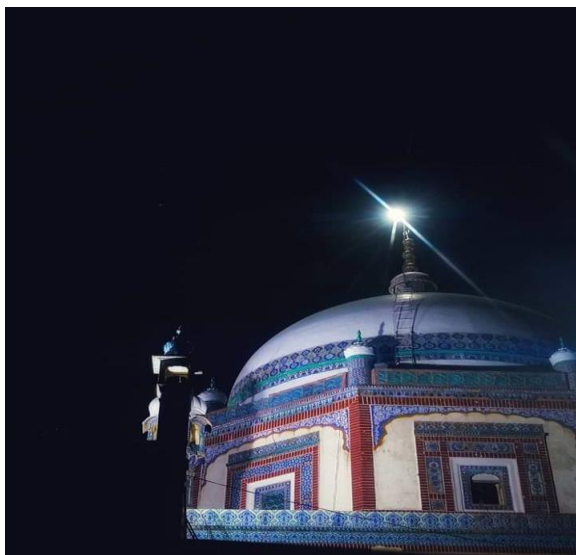

Figure 1: *Shrine of Mithan Kot*   Figure 2: *Visitors outside Shrine of Mithan Kot*

Figures 1 and 2 provide clear views of the shrine. This tomb was constructed by Nawab Sadiq Khan Abbasi of Bahawalpur. Furthermore, the shrine was renovated by different politicians, feudal lords, and followers.

Results and Discussion

The researcher approached 50 potential participants, and semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted. Group interviews were conducted with shrine visitors and the local community, as visitors often visited shrines with family. In-person interviews were conducted with the local politicians and *Sajjada Nasheen*.

Table 1
Response from the participants

Respondents Frequency (Percentage)	Shrine development due to the Sajjada Nasheen and Auqaf Department	Community Development due to the Shrine	Role of Shrine in Politics	Politics of *Sajjada Nasheen* for community benefits	Role of local Politicians and Feudal in community development	The voting decision is self. family or forcefully
Agree	10	5	95	3	85	5% self
Disagree	90	95	3	97	10	90% family
Don't Know			2		5	5% forcefully
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100%

Political Prospective of the Local Community

Under the following quoted different variant views on politics have been explained by respondents. A respondent, *Sajjada Nasheen*, a lawyer and landlord, equated politics with worship. To another who is *Sajjada Nasheen*, politics is nothing without a politician who helps the needy people and works for the welfare of society at large, because of his/her selection by the people.

"I belong to the caretaker (Sajjada Nasheen) family of Pir Naru Wali Sain Shrine in Haji Pur, Rajanpur. To me, politics is a prayer, a prayer in which you help the poor, the needy people [which is] the actual meaning of your creation. People elect us and give us a vote; in a real sense, this is the respect from God. Today, politics is a business just to get benefits from poor people. I am very thankful to Allah; I have everything, and [I am] also a landlord in Haji Pur, so I focus on poor people that is the reason they elect me in every election."

"According to me, the meaning of politics is to give equal rights to all. We want in Pakistan, the federal system should give equal rights to all the provinces, and provinces [should] give these rights to local politicians and then local politicians to people. Our flag has two colours: green and white, unfortunately, we always talk about green color but we never talk about white color; we don't talk about minorities. If we want to stop violence in our country, we must give equal rights to minorities. We want Pakistan, where everyone has equal rights [to practice their] religion."

The respondents also discussed modern Pakistani politics, in which politicians use votes to gain power and benefit themselves. They are talking about the violations in Pakistan suffered by minorities.

Feudalism, Family, and Politics of Mitthan Kot

The following quotes from families, school teachers, and local politicians highlighted the political dynamics in relation to Pir and feudalism.

"We give votes to a feudal lord through force, because he once sent eleven members of my family into jail at the behest of another person without any reason, and he also helped us with judicial

bail on the demand of election support. If somebody does not give a vote to him, he may steal animals or send them to jail through illegal allegations. No one decides to vote, and the vote is for feudal."

"The feudal system is dominant and the vote is for a feudal lord. No third person contests in the election without the permission of a feudal lord. Some educated people or residents of Mitthan Kot vote for a candidate who is doing development work. People in the city of Mitthan Kot voted for Malik Kamal in the local body election, who has done extensive development work for the city. Now, after his demise, they support their son Hamza Kamal. If someone does not support feudal then they pick their animals, motorbikes, charge them with illegal allegations and create other problems for them."

As can be seen from the above quotes, the Mitthan Kot feudal lords are dominant; without their help or permission, no one can contest the election or even cast a vote against their discretion.

"In our region, feudal politics is more dominant. Nobody wins the election without the support of the feudal lord. Now, feudal politics is like hereditary politics, and feudal lords have dominated generation to generation in this region. Feudal lords have a strong political base in this region, where many factors are at play, including factories, poor people working there, and a lack of education. Feudal lords think that if poor people become educated then they can lose their power, and the best example [for this] is the International Islamic University, which got approved in Rajanpur and still has landed there, but due to feudal lord's university shifted in Islamabad. If someone is educated in our region, he/she is shifted to the developed city… [A] After the completion of the Benazir Bridge, the situation of district Rajanpur has changed slightly. People connect with Rahim Yar Khan and Sadiq Abad, and political competition has increased because people from Rahim Yar Khan and Sadiq Abad also contest elections in District Rajanpur. This bridge is a hope for development in Rajanpur and also a hope to free locals from feudal lords."

The above quotes are reflective of the development of the region being entirely contingent on the interests of the political elite. Due to political competition, some politicians are working to develop the area.

"My father decides on voting, and we give our vote to Nasrullah Dareshak. He is the landowner and always helped us in difficult situations."

"My father decides to vote, and we give the vote to Sajjada Nasheen because he is our neighbour, or to give the vote to that person to whom Sajjada Nasheen supports."

The above quotes state that the household's male head decides whom to vote for, and his decision, in turn, has been contingent on the Sajjada Nasheen's support in elections.

Pir Politics of Mitthan Kot

The following respondents, visitors to the shrine and the local community, claim that politics has now become merely a business. Pir is receiving his benefits after the association of Politics with the shrine, but according to the Pir of Mitthan Kot, politics is worship, and the shrine's role is very important in politics for the well-being of the local community.

"The Sajjada Nasheen of the Shrine does not do any politics; they only do business through this shrine and politics. According to my information, Pirs only get their benefit from poor people; they do not help the poor or needy people."

"I cast my vote for PTI for change. Sajjada Nasheen is my neighbour, and if he contests the election, I will vote for him. But he cannot win the election because people disagree with him; people think he is a Pir and his job is Piri muridi, not politics."

"Sajjada Nasheen is doing politics as a business, but one of them, named Khawaja Ghulam Farid, the chairman of Sariki Qaomi Ithad (SQI), always helps the poor people, [and] talks about the rights of poor people. The younger brother of Sajjada Nasheen Khwaja Kaleem ud Din Koreja contested the election on the Pakistan People's Party ticket. The other is Amir Farid Koreja, who lives in Lahore; he won twice in local bodies' elections and became a chairman. Right after becoming a chairman, he changed his attitude, refrained from meeting poor people, helping them, and doing positive things for the local community. People supported him due to the Shrine, and he belongs to the Koreja family, but after this attitude, people cannot support him [anymore]."

"According to me, politics is the job of a fake person. It is not a good job for Pir, because Pir's job is based on the teachings of Islam and love. That is the reason people dislike the Koreja family. In every election, Pir supports the feudals just to maintain power and personal benefit. Now, for the Koreja family, this shrine is politics, and politics is this shrine. Sajjada Nasheen benefits from poor people, enjoying money based on Nazrana…feudal, Auqaf, and Sajjada Nasheen all are enjoying shrine income."

"Shrine's role in politics is very important. Punjab Shrine has a significant influence on politics; for example, Shah Mehmood Qureshi Sahab and Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani Sahab both play positive roles in Pakistani politics. Shrine politics is about patriotism. Shrine politicians should not be accused because they are linked to their voters and are working for their development. That is why people cast votes for them and select them. Another thing that is different between general politics and shrine politics is this: shrine politicians cannot buy a single vote because people are attached to them emotionally, and we are also attached to them; other politicians spend billions on buying votes. I was selected on the party ticket; people voted for my party, and I contested in every election through it. My work for community welfare and the shrine are additional factors in my politics; the main factor is my party. The politics of this shrine is like that… to give equal rights to everyone, spread peace and love, and provide education to poor villagers. My influence in politics is due to the shrine; people give their votes in respect of the shrine, and my work and personality are additional factors."

The above quotes illustrate the dichotomous role of the Sajjada Nasheen in a political context. One Politician is supportive of the rights of the poor people of Mitthan Kot. While the rest, though over-claiming to the public before the election, under-delivered after winning the election. Sajjada Nasheen did not bother to fulfil their responsibility of meeting the needs of locals. But the people have now decided not to support them in the name of the shrine or the lineage.

Politics and the Role of the Auqaf Department

The following respondents, visitors to the shrine and local shopkeepers, provide a different view on the role of the Sajjada Nasheen and the Auqaf department in the context of the shrine. Sajjada Nasheen and the Manager of the Auqaf and Religious Affairs department are enjoying the donations at the shrine. There are no rules or regulations for devotees' donations, nor for the development of the Sufi shrine by the Government or the *Sajjada Nasheen.*

One respondent visitor to the Shrine shared that, as followers of Khawaja Ghulam Farid, the Sajjada Nasheen gains many benefits. There is no development of the Shrine from the Auqaf department or Sajjada Nasheen. "Sajjada Nasheen is respectable for us, but why is Pir involved in politics? He must help needy people and spread the teachings of Khawaja Sahab and the caretaking of the Shrine. There is no development in the Shrine, not even a water cooler for the shrine, and not

a single fan for summer. Managers of the departments of Auqaf and Sajjada Nasheen get benefits from the Shrine. Every Friday, the Sajjada Nasheen comes to the Shrine for Qawali, after which the Qawali performers give him money (Nazrana). In the past, this Nazrana was for Qawal, but now this is taken by Pir Sahab. Today, when I was putting my Nazrana in the box, a man standing near the box, who was associated with Pir and Aukaf, instructed me, "Give this Nazrana in my hand." I replied, "No, I will put it in the box." The managers of Auqaf and Pir Sahab are both receiving financial benefits from the Shrine. None of them works for the development of Shrine."

Figure 1: *Pir Sahab's visit to the Shrine*   Figure 2: *Nazrana Collection Method*

Figure 3 was taken on Friday when Pir Sahab came for *Qawali* and to collect *nazrana* from visitors. Sajjada Nasheen is sitting near the fan. The picture is not very clear due to the ban on mobile phones on the Shrine's premises on Fridays. Figure 4 shows an old man with a young boy collecting nazrana from followers of the shrine in his hand, not from the box from the Auqaf department. This happens on Fridays in the shrine's hall during the *Qawali* session.

Discussion

This study examines how Sajjada Nasheens use the Sufi Shrine to their benefit. According to the results, Pir is not doing anything to develop the local community and the Shrine; they are just enjoying money and political power. Pir contested the elections with the help of Feudal lords and by the name of Buried Sufi. The study also shows that the manager of the Auqaf and religious affairs department and feudal lords are enjoying financial and political benefits from the Sufi Shrine with the help of Pir.

Interpreting Findings with the Existing Literature

Ahmad's research data shows that *Sajjada Nasheen* is the spiritual authority and caretaker of the Sufi Shrine. He educates on religious and spiritual teachings. The current study's findings are the opposite: Sajjada Nasheen is the caretaker of the Sufi Shrine, but he benefits from it alone. Sajjada Nasheen is enjoying political power and financial benefits from the Shrine. When we talk about religious and spiritual education, *Sajjada Nasheen* curtails the education process in the Shrine. Due to the *Sajjada Nasheen*, the number of visitors to the Shrine decreases day by day, as they also accrue benefits from visitors. These *Sajjada Nasheens* are connected with social groups to get power. Social groups perform different activities in the Shrine.

The data from U. Rehman's (2009) research on spiritual practices performed by social groups show that followers engage in spiritual practices to manage their daily lives

in accordance with religion and society. People also engage in spiritual practices to address problems such as health, poverty, and marriage, to name a few. This study's findings show that people engage in spiritual practices for different purposes, depending on their religion and society. Some people spend 9 nights at the shrine for illness, some drink water from the pool to get rid of various diseases, and some get the Amulet from Pir Sahab for multiple purposes, among many other practices. However, the main problem in my locale is that *the Sajjada Nasheen engages with people through these practices to benefit from their* followers. In this regard, the study findings are opposite to the findings of the research.

Data from Kalhoro & Saleem (2016) indicate that feudal lords are dominant in rural areas, and people support them in elections because they help them with judicial matters. People never demand development from politicians. Researchers' findings are the same, but also against this study. According to our findings, people living in rural areas are mostly uneducated and vote for feudal lords or Pir Sahab because they want to help them with problems like court cases, but they never demand area development. While some educated people living in the city of Mitthan Kot cast their vote based on the area's and its people's perspective on development. They never want any other help, they want development. This concept is new in Mitthan Kot to cast the vote based on development which is the reason feudal lords still have power in the area.

Implications of Findings for Practice, Policy, and Research

The involvement of *Sajjada Nasheens in local politics is a significant factor in* their socio-political influence. There is a need for a regulatory framework to *limit Sajjada Nasheen*'s involvement in the administrative control of the Sufi Shrine and also in political activities. So, their focus remains on spiritual activities and religious education. The government should enhance educational programs in local communities to reduce their dependence on the Sajjada Nasheen. In this way, local communities will be empowered in their decision-making, including in matters of spiritual and political guidance. The government should establish a robust system of checks and balances for the Auqaf department to ensure that the resources and revenue generated from the Sufi Shrine are used for the shrine and community development rather than for political or personal benefit. The government should strengthen the rural police system to reduce the power of influential bodies such as feudal lords. Another benefit is that people can support the elections they choose, thereby reducing the political power of feudal lords.

Conclusion

Sufi Shrines are considered sacred places in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, attracting thousands of devotees each year. Devotees visit them almost daily, but they are highly crowded during *Urs.*. The reason for visiting it varies from person to person, often driven by personal struggles. The Shrine of Khawaja Ghulam Farid is also popular among Muslims and non-Muslims. It is the identity of the city of Mitthan Kot and the Rajanpur district. The Sajjada Nasheen's major source of income is generated by the Sufi Shrine through events such as Urs, Qawali, and Langer. Devotees donate large amounts, sometimes beyond their capacity.

This study focuses on the rural area of Rajanpur, which is highly influenced and controlled by feudal lords who dominate local politics. It reveals how political figures exploit Sajjada Nasheens and Sufi Shrines, including the Auqaf department's management's involvement in securing power in the region. The politicians, with Pir's help, manipulate the locals to gain political power in Rajanpur. The important finding of this

study is the deep-rooted nexus between religious authority and local politics, where Shrines are used as tools for benefits.

The study reveals that *Sajjada Nasheen*, the custodians of shrines, are leveraging these shrines to gain political power and financial benefits, often with the help of feudal lords and the Auqaf and Religious Affairs Department. They play a significant role in the country's electoral process. Power politics have attracted the *Sajjada Nasheen* of Sufi shrines, who either participate directly in politics or indirectly support candidates of their preference in both local and national elections. The study also indicates a lack of voting freedom in rural areas, where impoverished individuals feel compelled to vote for *Sajjada Nasheen* or feudal lords.

References

Abbas, S., Qureshi, D. S., Safdar, R., & Zakar, D. R. (2020). People's perceptions about visiting Sufi shrines in Pakistan. *South Asian Studies, 28*(2), 372.

Ahmad, S. (2022). Socio-economic and Cultural Impact of Sufi Shrines: A Case Study of Mitthan Kot. *Sukkur IBA Journal of Educational Sciences & Technologies - SJEST, 2*(1), 35-47.

Ahmed, M. (2008). Voting Behavior in rural and urban areas of Punjab. *J J. Pol. Stud., 14*, 48.

Ali, S. Z., Chaudhry, A., & Ahmed, A. (2014). Role of Elite Class in Political Groupings and Orientation of Local People: A Study in Taunsa, Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan. *European Academic Research, 2*(6), 7157.

Becker, S., Bryman, A., & Ferguson, T. H. (2012). *Understanding research for social policy and social work: themes, methods and approaches*: policy press.

Boivin, M. (2002). Religion, Land and Politics in Pakistan. A Study of Piri-Muridi. *Critical Bulletin of the Islamological Annals, 18*(1), 54-55.

Boivin, M. (2020). Sufism and vernacular knowledge in Sindh. In *Routledge Handbook on Sufism* (pp. 461-473): Routledge.

Casanova, J. (2012). 8 Religion, the Axial Age, and Secular Modernity in Bellah's Theory of Religious Evolution. In *The axial age and its consequences* (pp. 191-221): Harvard University Press.

Cheema, P. I., & Nuri, M. H. (2005). *The Kashmir Imbroglio: Looking Towards the Future*: Islamabad Policy Research Institute.

Darby, P. (2007). *Fiction of Imperialism*: A&C Black.

Dawson, C. (2014). *Dynamics of world history*: Open Road Media.

Doty, R. L. (1996). *Imperial encounters: the politics of representation in North-South relations* (Vol. 5): U of Minnesota Press.

Elections, G. (2018). Election Commission of Pakistan.

Ellis, S., & Ter Haar, G. (2004). *Worlds of Power: Religious thought and political practice in Africa* (Vol. 1): Oxford University Press on Demand.

Epping, E. (2013). Politics and Pirs: The Nature of Sufi Political Engagement in 20th and 21st Century Pakistan. *5*(3).

Ewing. (1983). The politics of Sufism: Redefining the saints of Pakistan. *42*(2), 251-268.

Gramsci & Wishar. (1971). Selections from the Prison Notebooks, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith.

Hassan, B., & Kamal. (2010). Development and validation of the Piri-Muridi scale. 79-97.

Haynes, J. (2012). *Peacebuilding in the Field. Religious Approaches, Best Practice and Constraints.* Paper presented at the Religions and World Peace.

Imran, K., Devadason, Evelyn S Cheong, Kee-Cheok. (2018). Do migrant remittances reduce poverty? Micro-level evidence from Punjab, Pakistan. *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies, 55*(1), 19-47.

Kalhoro, Z.A., and Saleem, M. 2016. Religion and Society – Redefining the Role of Sufi Shrines in Politics: A Study in NA-165, Pakpattan District, Pakistan. *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, 39(2), 167-202

Muzaffar, M. & Rafique, S. (2020). Sufi Thoughts and Practices of Imam Aliulhaq (Hazrat Imam Sahib) in Punjab, *Al-Ehsan* 13, 13-25

Overbeek, H. (2022). *Global capitalism and national decline: The Thatcher decade in perspective*: Routledge.

Rehman, U. (2009). Sacred spaces, rituals and practices: the Mazars of Saiyid Pir Waris Shah and Sha ʿAbduʾl Latif Bhitai.137-157.

Rehman, U. (2017). Religion, politics and holy shrines in Pakistan. *Nordic Journal of Religion Society, 19*(2), 17-28.

Roccas, S. (2005). Religion and value systems. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(4), 747-759.

Schwartz & Huismans. (2009). Value priorities and religiosity in four Western religions. 88-107.

Sultan, M. H., Mujahid Khan, Jawad Nemat, Farhan (2022). Effects of Literacy on Healthcare Cost in District Rajanpur, Pakistan. *International Journal of Formal Education, 1*(6), 70-102.