

Sufi Influence on Pakistani Politics and Culture

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Religious Underpinnings

The etymologies of the term Sufi are various. The obvious root is *suf* (wool), referring to the wool robes that the early mystics wore. The term has also been connected with *safa* (purity) or *safwa* (the chosen ones), emphasizing purifying of the heart and the role of divine grace in choosing the saintly. Another link is with *suffa* (bench), referring to a group of poor Muslims (contemporaries of the Prophet Mohammad) known as the People of the Bench, signifying a community of shared poverty.

In practice, the term “Sufi” was reserved for ideal usage, and Sufis referred to themselves in other terms such as *abid* (slave, devotee), *zahid* (ascetic), *dervish* or *faqir* (impoverished), *arif* (knower of spiritual truth), *salik* (spiritual traveler), or *ashiq* (lover). They also made differentiations between spiritual masters, called *sheikhs*, *pirs*, or *murshids* (guides), and their disciples, known as *murids* (seekers). A Sufi saint was known as *wali* or friend of God.

While acknowledging that the term “Sufi” was not current at the time of the Prophet, Sufi theorists maintained that this specialization in spirituality arose in parallel with other disciplines such as Islamic law and Koranic exegesis. Sufism was inspired by the Koran. A believer meditating on the meaning of the Koran would be filled with Allah’s overwhelming transcendence, realize his total dependence on Allah, and as a result would completely surrender to Allah’s will. While objects in nature submit to Allah’s will unconsciously, the Sufi does so consciously. He is like the birds and the flowers in his yielding to the Creator; like them, he reflects the Divine Intellect to his own degree. However, he reflects it actively, they passively. The Sufi thus strives to understand Divine Reality “from the inside.” Sufism also entails ethical and spiritual goals that function to open the possibilities of the soul.

Sufi theorists claim that the earliest Sufis include the Prophet Mohammad and his chief companions. The *bayah* (oath of allegiance) to the Prophet became the model for the master-disciple relationship in Sufism. The Prophet’s meditation

in a cave on Mount Hira (outside Mecca) was seen as the basis for Sufi practices of seclusion and retreat. Sufis regard the Prophet's experiences as the basis for their spiritual experience and entertain imitating his example as a way of attaining or strengthening their own divine qualities. Hence veneration of the Prophet Mohammad, both for his own qualities and in his role as intercessor for all humanity, found a place in Sufi piety as it diffused through Muslim society.

Aside from the obligatory and supererogatory prayers, the most important Sufi practices are *zikr* (remembrance) and *sama* (listening or audition). Through *zikr*, the Sufi recollected Allah by reciting the names of Allah. This recitation could be silent or spoken aloud and drew from the list of ninety-nine names ascribed to Allah. As with the supererogatory prayers, *zikr* aimed at internalizing the Koran and its contents, in order to obtain closeness to Allah. As meditations, these practices aimed to empty the heart of anything but Allah and to begin establishing qualities of the divine in the Sufi. *Zikr* is derived from the Koranic injunction that instructs believers to remember Allah. Among Sufis this duty evolved into an individual or a group exercise involving the repetition of a phrase (usually Koranic). The more sophisticated methods of *zikr* involve breath control, body movements, and other techniques to gain control over the five senses as well as the psyche and imagination.

While *zikr* recitation may originally have been restricted to adepts, as a kind of group chanting this practice could also be accessible to people on a broad popular scale. Simple chanting of phrases like "there is no deity but Allah" (*la ilaha illa allah*) not only expressed the fundamental negation and affirmation of Islamic theology, but also made it possible for a wider public to adopt the practices of Sufism. One of the advantages of *zikr* was that it could be practiced by anyone, regardless of age, sex, or ritual purity, at any time.

Sama involved listening to music, usually with a group. The music was often accompanied by Koranic chants or singing of mystical poetry and the recital intended to spark a mystical experience within the auditors. Those most affected by the *sama* rise up to dance in unison with the music. Depending on the Sufi group, the dance can be a marvel of aesthetic movement or the frenetic writhings of the seemingly possessed.

Other widely encountered forms of Sufi practice also include music and poetry, which take on different regional forms in accordance with local traditions. Although conservative Islamic legal tradition has been wary of musical instruments as innovations not present during the time of the Prophet, the rich and sophisticated musical traditions have furnished irresistible and highly developed forms for communicating Sufi teachings, particularly when combined with poetry. Sufis in fact speak mostly of "listening" (*sama*), emphasizing the spiritual role of the listener far

more than that of the musical performer, and the focus is upon the words of poems that may or may not be accompanied by musical instruments. Sufi poets produced literature in several genres ranging from the quatrain (*rubai*) to the lyric (*ghazal*) and the ode (*qasida*), along with the epic couplet (*masnavi*).

The complex and esoteric nature of Sufism placed it far beyond the reach of most Muslims. It was ritual exercises (specifically *zikr* and *sama*) that helped fill the gap and minister to the immediate needs of the faithful. Thus Sufism came to represent, for many, not abstruse theory but concrete practice that was accessible to all. The emphasis on *zikr* and *sama* helped blur the distinction between mystical experience that is attained after serious spiritual training and experience that is self-induced. Unsophisticated sessions of *zikr* and *sama* often consisted of self-hypnosis, hysteria, drug-induced states, and other violent emotions that pass for mystical experience.

Early Development

Two interrelated movements in the early Islamic period gave rise to (or at least tolerance of) mysticism. First was the movement of piety which required prayer, purity of intention, and renunciation of self-interest and worldly pleasure. Second was the movement of meditation on the meaning of the Koran (especially the esoteric meaning). The Sufi movement during the first centuries of Islam was characterized by informal association of like-minded individuals.

At the same time, Sufism developed into a legitimate esoteric science of religion (*ilm*) whose principal aim was to seek a direct experience from Allah, and a profounder (esoteric) understanding of the Koran and Allah. This was attained through *fana* where the Sufi “dies in one’s self” and is “absorbed” into Allah. *Baqa* is the Sufi’s existence after *fana*, when he or she lives in Allah. Alongside the mystical experience is the ethical responsibility to return to community life, fulfill the obligations of Muslim life and to display the impact of divine experience. When the mystical experience overwhelms the individual self to the point that human existence has no meaning, that Sufi is termed “intoxicated”, the “sober” mystic’s life, on the other hand, takes on heightened ethical values. Most Sufis drew nearer to Allah and gained esoteric knowledge through an arduous process of study, meditation, ascetic retreat, and spiritual exercises. The Sufi’s progress along this spiritual path was measured in states (*ahwal*) that were experienced and corresponded to stations (*maqamat*).

The growth of Sufism was partly a reaction against the worldly orientation taken by the Muslim community in the wake of the conquest of Middle Eastern lands in the seventh and eighth centuries, as well as against political violence and

official corruption. Sufis benefited from the mystical traditions of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and they subsequently played a significant role in the indigenization of Islam among the peoples living in lands governed by Muslim rulers. They carried Islam via trade routes into sub-Saharan Africa, India, Central Asia, southeastern Europe and the Caucasus, and Southeast Asia.

By the end of the eighth century, Sufis began to formulate a vocabulary of interior spiritual experience, based in large part on the Koran and the emerging Islamic religious sciences. Notable features of Sufi practices included intensive and protracted prayer (not only the five obligatory ritual prayers daily, but also the five supererogatory or “extra credit” prayers) and meditation on the meanings of the Koran. The stark asceticism of the very early Sufis, with its rejection of the corrupt world, was tempered by the quest to find God through love. Other Sufis contributed to the development of an extensive analysis of spiritual states, as a natural result of prolonged meditative retreats.

In the early centuries of Islam, the khanaqahs served as the meeting place of the Sufis, where they performed their various spiritual exercises (especially the invocation) and where those who were ready were able to receive initiation into the Divine Mysteries. Here, those who had not been satisfied with formal learning alone, but searched after the light of certainty and sought direct vision of the truth, left the discussion of the schools to discover ecstasies of contemplation (generally under the direction of a spiritual master). In this manner, the Sufi centers served as a center of learning, but a learning which was not to be found in books, and discovery of which it was not sufficient to train the mental faculties alone. They served as centers where the qualified could realize the highest form of knowledge (gnosis), the attainment of which required purification of the soul as well as of the mind.

Introduction of Sufism in Pakistan

The initial entry of Muslim armies into Pakistan came in the first century after the death of the Prophet Mohammad. The Umayyad caliph in Damascus sent an expedition to Baluchistan and Sind in 711 led by Muhammad bin Qasim (for whom Karachi’s second port is named). The expedition went as far north as Multan but was not able to retain that region and was not successful in expanding Islamic rule to other parts of the region. It was trade and missionary activity that had a more lasting influence on indigenous culture. Coastal trade and the presence of a Muslim community in Sind facilitated significant cultural exchanges and missionary activity which brought Sufism in its wake.

Details of the early Sufis are sketchy at best, while evidence of their activities and long-term influence remain areas of study. Some of the early pioneers

include Mohammed Alfi who arrived as early as bin Qasim's expedition in 711. It is believed that Alfi conducted his missionary work in Kashmir. Sheikh Ismail Bukhari came before Mahmud Ghaznavi's invasions. Sheikh Abdur Rahman did his missionary work in Ajmer and authored the first work on Islam in Hindi. "The Ismaili missionary Abdullah landed near Cambay in 1067 AD and worked in Gujrat when the country was governed by Sidhraj Jai Singh. He and his Jain teacher Huma Charya are said to have been converted to Islam when there was no recorded Muslim invasion" (Hollister). These and other Sufis introduced Islam by synthesizing it to some extent with local beliefs. Hence the Ismaili and Imam Shahis *ginans* (hymns), for example, make numerous references to Hinduism and local culture. They use the prevailing literary traditions for sacred literature to convey the Islamic message. Hence some of the *ginans* bear a striking similarity to Hindu *bajans* (hymns).

Sufi Social Organization

Mystical theory and expression characterized Sufism as much as its social dimension did. From the beginning, companionship (*suhbah*) was considered essential for progress in one's spiritual life. Fluid interaction among Sufis soon evolved into a more structured relationship of master and disciples adding a new level of social complexity. Not only would disciples visit their masters, but many also took up residence with their masters. Initially, the master and his disciples remained a cohesive unit until the master's death, and then the group disbanded. Later, many Sufi groups became self-perpetuating social organizations. No longer was the group's survival dependent on a living master; authority was passed from master to disciple, thus providing a stable structural basis for continued growth and development.

As Sufi communities gradually coalesced, Sufi masters were increasingly associated with residential hospices (*khanaqah* or *tekke*). These hospices were typically places dedicated to prayer, study of the Koran, meditation, and communal meals. As with later Sufi hospices, travelers and the needy were welcome and Sufi masters would impart instruction and advice to their students and visitors. Even during this early period, Sufi centers depended on patronage. Some depended entirely on the ruling establishment, but others drew support from a broader base encompassing not only the nobility, but also the artisans.

During the 10th and 11th centuries, Sufi adepts began to organize into groups of masters and their disciples that developed into mystical orders known as *tariqas* (paths), each with its own distinct doctrines, practices, and spiritual genealogy (*sil-sila*) which all members had to study and memorize. Sufis met in mosques, homes, and *madrasas*, but their chief centers were hospices and retreat centers (*khanaqahs*

or *tekkes*). These usually contained tombs of former sheikhs and members of the order, and often became popular shrines that would attract devotees seeking blessings (*baraka*) from the saint.

The practice of Sufi masters lending their name to specific spiritual methods (*tariqas*) commenced in the twelfth century. It was common to characterize each method (or way) as a “chain” (*silsila*), with the masters and disciplines constituting links. These chains were traced backwards to end (actually begin) with the Prophet Mohammad. Nearly all of these chains reach the Prophet through his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abu Talib.

The *silsila* is more precisely a genealogy tracing the names of one master to his master and so on back to the Prophet Mohammad. The centrality of *silsila* in Sufism has an analogous tradition in the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammad) literature. The literary structure of a *hadith* has two parts: the chain of transmitters (*isnad*) and the body of the text (*matn*). According to Muslim tradition, the authenticity of the *hadith* is guaranteed by the reliability of the *isnad*. Just as the words of the Prophet have been preserved through the *isnad*, so too have the teachings of a particular Sufi *tariqa* remained alive through *silsila*. Just as for Muslims the *isnads* solidly ground the *hadiths* in the period of original revelation; the *silsilas* for Sufis provides them with religious legitimacy. Even though Sufi *tariqas* may vary considerably in their teachings and attitudes toward mystical experience, they each can claim, through their spiritual genealogies, to be solidly based on the foundations of Sufism.

The institutional spread of Sufism offered the community the prospect of a spiritual community organized around a charismatic teacher whose authority was derived from a lineage going back to the Prophet himself. While dedicated membership in Sufi orders remained confined to an elite, mass participation in the reverence for saints at their tombs has been (and continues to be) a typical feature of Sufi organizations.

While it is convenient to refer to these organizations as “orders” (with an implicit analogy to monastic orders), the analogy is inexact. Sufi orders are less centrally organized and have a more fluid hierarchical structure, which is formulated in terms of different types of initiations. Complicating this situation is the phenomenon of multiple initiation through which individual Sufis could receive instruction in the methods of various orders while maintaining a primary allegiance to one. Sufi orders are not inherently driven by competing and exclusive ideologies, although competition in the sociopolitical arena is certainly not unknown. The majority of Sufi orders have a Sunni orientation, although Shia orders do exist as well. While it has been suggested that the Sufi orders played an important role in

spreading Islam on a popular level, there is little historical evidence to suggest that premodern Sufi leaders took any interest in seeking the conversion of non-Muslims.

The major social impact of Sufi orders in terms of religion was to popularize the spiritual practices of the Sufis on a mass scale. The interior orientation of the informal movement of early Sufism became available to a much wider public through participation in shrine rituals, the circulation of hagiographies, and the dispensing of various degrees of instruction in *zikr*. Elaborate initiation rituals developed, in which the master's presentation of articles such as a dervish cloak, hat, or staff would signify the disciple's entrance into the order. A frequent feature of initiation was the requirement that the disciple copy by hand the genealogical "tree" of the order, which would link the disciple to the entire chain of masters going all the way back to the Prophet.

The institutionalization of *tariqas* and emphasis on *silsila* enhanced substantially the religious and political position of the *sheikh*. Whereas in the past, the *sheikh* functioned primarily as an expert and confidant, he now became a repository of spiritual power as well. A *sheikh's* lineage did not provide simply a list of teachers; it implied that the spiritual power of each of these great Sufis had been transmitted to this last member of the line. *Sheikhs* of great Sufi orders, therefore, took on superhuman qualities. They became known as *awliya* (sing. *wali*) which means intimates or friends of Allah. Their spiritual perfection raised them far above the level of their disciples and the masses of Muslims. The term *wali* is often translated as saint, which is misleading as there is no religious hierarchy in Islam empowered to canonize individuals as saints. Rather the status of *wali* is attained through public acclamation. Sufis believe that the *awliya* have the ability to confer *baraka* (blessing) to disciples or devotees, and that the *baraka* has the potential to transform an individual's spirituality as well as provide concrete material blessings. *Baraka* is often transmitted through touch (similar to the laying of hands or application of relics).

The *awliya* became objects of veneration both during their lifetime and after their deaths. It was believed that some of these *awliya* possessed the power of miracles (*karamat*). The extraordinary powers of the *awliya* were not diminished after their death; rather their intercession often appeared more efficacious. Their tombs (usually erected near their homes) became vibrant pilgrimage centers – especially commemorating the *wali's* death anniversary.

Full members committed themselves to the *sheikh*, who initiated them into the *tariqa*. Initiation rites varied, and most included a pledge of allegiance (*bayah*). The *sheikh* bestowed the initiate a patched frock (*khirqah*) as a sign of entry into the Sufi *tariqa*. Members were encouraged to subject themselves completely to the *sheikh's* will ("to be like dead bodies in the hands of body-washers"). Depending

on the *tariqa*, members remained celibate while others married; some lived in poverty while others lived comfortably.

There was great diversity within various Sufi practices. Particular orders were known for distinctive practices such as the loud *zikr* recitation (as practiced by Rifaiyya) in contrast to the silent *zikr* favored by the Naqshbandiyya. Some (such as the Chishtiyya) integrated music and even dance in their practices while other resolutely shunned these activities. Some (such as the early Chishti orders) kept politics at arm's length, refused offers of land grants and refused to entertain rulers who visited them, while others had a history of close association with the ruling elite (such as the Suhrawardiyya and the Naqshbandiyya).

In Pakistan, the ownership and maintenance of Sufi tombs fell to the family members. The devotion of many pilgrims created a class of hereditary custodians who were in charge of the finances and operations of the tomb-shrines. These were sometimes combined with hospices where teachings of that *tariqa* took place. Increasingly, the *wali's* tomb came to be an independent institution, in some cases functioning as the center of massive pilgrimage during festivals. Two common festivals were *mawlid* (the *wali's* birthday), and *urs* (literally "wedding") which symbolized the death anniversary as the "wedding" of the *wali's* soul with Allah. On a social level, these tombs were commonly connected to lodges or hospices that maintained open kitchens where all visitors were welcome, thus enhancing the public development of Sufism.

Criticism to Sufism

Religious criticism of Sufi practices and doctrines started to occur in the late ninth century. Sufism emerged from this crisis by insisting on strict adherence to the norms and disciplines of Islamic religious scholarship, while at the same time it cultivated an esoteric language and style appropriate to the discussion of subtle interior experiences. Early Sufi writers emphasized Sufism as the "knowledge of realities," inseparable from yet far beyond the knowledge of Islamic law and scripture.

Conservative *ulama* would intermittently attack Sufis for such practices, considering saint veneration in particular to be a form of idolatry (*shirk*) or at best a corrupt innovation (*bidaa*). They also condemned the Sufi *zikr*, as well as the *sama*. Sufis for their part criticized jurists for being too concerned with their reputations and the letter of the law (rather than adhering to the spirit of the law). Nevertheless, a degree of consensus was reached between the *ulama* and mystics.

Sufi Social Organization in Medieval Muslim India

Though little is known in detail of early Sufi activity in Pakistan, the spread of Islam is usually credited to the work of Sufi mystics who first established their *khanaqahs* in western Punjab. While there was Sufi presence before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, missionary activity intensified in the years following the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Most of this activity occurred in western Punjab and was carried out primarily by the Chishti and Suhrawardy Sufi orders. By the fourteenth century these orders were well established with an extensive network of *khanaqahs*. These served as local out-posts of Islam which linked the diffuse, tribally organized population of the Punjab to the larger Muslim community. Subsequently it was these local centers which provided the focus for Islamic organization in most of western Punjab, and it was to these centers that the population looked for religious leadership. The establishment and evolution of the *khanaqahs* not only generally corresponds to the establishment of Islamic political rule in medieval India, but also to the spread of Islam in medieval India.

Success of a *khanaqah* depended largely on the resident Sufi's ability to understand and empathize with the social and cultural climate of the surrounding areas. The principal support for the upkeep of *khanaqahs* in the early stages came from three sources: *futuh* (unsolicited charity), *jagirs* (land grants), and *waqfs* (religious trusts). Subsequently, the *khanaqahs* became an important institution of Muslim and non-Muslim community life in medieval India. Their importance arose from the spiritual, social welfare, educational, and cultural functions they performed for the local population. The congenial, unstructured social environment and the unassuming ways of the mystics contrasted with the stratified social structure of Medieval Indian society. During the early period, *khanaqah* social organization was characterized by Islamic ideals of equality and fraternity notwithstanding the discriminatory practices of the Muslim ruling classes.

Spirituality was sometimes gauged by the manifestation of supernatural gifts (called *karamat*). Those who attained the highest mystical states were called saints, or more precisely, the "Friends of God" (*awliya Allah*). The *karamat* of these persons were truly extraordinary, ranging from visions and apparitions of God or the prophets to clairvoyance and the power to intercede with God. Such thaumaturgic powers were considered a divine dispensation, a sign of divine favor, which emanated from God.

With the passage of time the *khanaqahs*, as a socio-religious organization, evolved and changed. The spirituality of the mystic and knowledge of mysticism shifted from a learned process to a hereditary one. The spiritual power of the Sufi master came to be transmitted through his descendents who became the center of

devotion of the followers. Deceased masters were usually buried in the *khanaqah*, and veneration of Sufi graves began to take hold as a custom. This was an important change and eventually led to the development of the *piri-muridi* (master-disciple) paradigm in which the *pir* (master) was the director and the *murid* (disciple) a faithful follower was obliged to surrender completely to the *pir*. The *pir*'s charisma was institutionalized as the head of the cult association, and the criteria of succession shifted from a merit based one to one based on heredity. This in turn gave rise to a whole new class of people who by virtue of descent from a Sufi saint could claim spiritual status. They are also known as *sajjada-nishins* (literally "he who sits on the prayer carpet").

The hereditary religious authority of the *sajjada-nashin* was largely based on the transmission of *baraka*, or religious charisma, from the original saint to his descendants and to his tomb. Because of this *baraka*, which linked the *sajjada-nashin* to the original saint, he was recognized as a religious intermediary who could intercede on behalf of the devotee and channel God's favor to the devotee. The effect of such hereditary leadership gave stability to the Sufi shrines. The exercise of this religious authority was associated with certain religious practices at the shrine. The links of the *sajjada-nashin* to the original saint and the links of the original saint to God were dramatized every year in a ceremony marking the death anniversary of the saint (*urs*). The *urs* ceremonies themselves provided symbolic justification for the position of the *sajjada-nashin*, who normally had to perform prescribed ceremonial duties which underscored his special links to the original saint as the inheritor of *baraka*, and thus defined his effectiveness as religious intermediary. The *pir*'s role as religious intermediary was formalized by the *pir* providing *baraka* and the *murid* making payments or offerings. This did not bind the *murid* to follow any rigid spiritual discipline; rather, it bound the *murid* to accept the religious leadership of the *pir*.

The prime spiritual responsibility of a *pir* to his followers was to act as a mediator between them and God. The original saint brought his followers closer to God by means of his spiritual blessing. He was the channel through which communication with God flowed. At his death his tomb became a source of blessing, but the blessing can only be obtained through his living representative (the *sajjada-nashin*) – hence the need for the *pirs*. Access to God for *murids* was through a chain of authority: from the *sajjada-nashin*, to the original saint, to the founder of the Sufi Order to which the saint belonged, to the Prophet, who had direct access to God. This spiritual chain of authority was reinforced by heredity. Others can come into contact with this blessing and benefit from it, but they cannot transmit it, because blessing cannot flow through their impure or underdeveloped souls. Since the members of a tribe cannot themselves transmit blessing to others, they needed

to maintain contact with the source through which blessing flowed to them. The source of blessing was the saint with whom they were spiritually connected through *bayat*.

Political & Economic Influence in Medieval Muslim India

The shrine's spiritual relationship was reinforced by an economic one: the *sajjada-nishin* annually made a circuit of the tribes and villages traditionally tied to the shrine to collect *nazar* (contributions). The circuit further reinforced the association of a shrine with a particular territory over which it had direct influence.

Religious and political structures, however, had never been merely separate-but-parallel ones. Saints, since they controlled access to God, had an enormous influence over their followers and could use their influence for political purposes. This attracted the attention of the ruling class which, for spiritual as well as for political reasons, sought cooperation from the *khanaqahs* in maintaining political stability in the country. The Muslim rulers, realizing the political importance of the saints, tried to bring the *pirs* under their control by granting them large properties and contributing to the building of shrines. Government support of the shrines was one way of ensuring the legitimacy of the ruler among the population.

Besides the critical and elemental roles they played in the spread of Islam and the growth of Islamic culture, the *khanaqahs* also influenced the evolution of the social structure of Muslim society. The substantial *jagirs* granted by the state not only obtained the *khanaqahs* cooperation in maintaining political and social stability, but also used their influence and power over their disciples to provide military recruits for the state at short notice. These land grants (*Madad-e-Mash*), were given first by the sultans of Delhi and then by the Mughal emperors and later by the British. In fact, under Mughal rule the Sufis and their descendents were known as *Laskar-e-Dua* (literally "army of prayers") and were considered as important as the regular army during periods of political upheavals and warfare in the country.

Ownership and proprietorship of large estates as well as their political alliance with the state made the spiritual leaders of popular Islam an important economic and political force in the society. Given the extended kinship and *biradari* (brotherhood) system that characterizes Muslim social organization, their kin became beneficiaries of economic and political status. This extended the *pirs*' influence in the economic and political spheres, which coincided with the interests of the other Muslim landed classes (*zamindars*), and evolved into a *pir-zamindar* alliance. Through intermarriage and social alliances with other Muslim *zamindars* (landholders) the *pir-zamindar* elite came to constitute the core of Muslim society, occupying a dominant position in the country's social structure. This structural

position made the *pirs* a formidable force wielding enormous political, economic, and spiritual influence over large numbers of their disciples who resided primarily in villages.

The relations of the *sajjada-nashins* with the Muslim state followed much the same pattern as the relations of these local chiefs with the state. As the links between the shrines and the Mughal state were snapped with the collapse of central Muslim political authority, many of the old *sajjada-nashins* who had wielded local political authority under the Mughals were transformed into local chieftains, who were increasingly isolated from the larger Islamic community.

The Advent of Colonial Rule

After the British annexed Punjab, they soon discovered that in developing their own rural administration they could not ignore the political influence in the rural areas that many of these *pirs* had acquired. Many *pirs* were accordingly honored by the British and given positions of local administrative authority. In the nineteenth century the British attempted to consolidate a system of rural administration which relied, particularly in west Punjab, on the local political influence of landed, often tribally based, intermediaries. In this regard the British were not departing from the established traditions of political control in western Punjab. At the same time the British sought to bolster the position of these rural leaders by isolating the rural areas from the growing economic and political influences emanating from the cities which might have tended to undermine the position of these leaders. This policy found its fullest expression in the Alienation of Land Act of 1900 which recognized the *pirs* as “landed gentry” and in general terms barred the non-agricultural population from acquiring land in the rural areas. In the twentieth century, as the British attempted to give political cohesion to a class of landed rural intermediaries who could be counted on to support their government, they recognized the leading *pirs* as an important part of this class.

During the colonial era, when much of the Muslim world fell under European domination, Sufi institutions played various roles. The overthrow of local elites by foreign invaders removed traditional sources of patronage for Sufism. Hereditary custodians of Sufi shrines became integrated into the landholding classes and became further entrenched as political leaders. Sufi responses to colonialism ranged from accommodation to confrontation. The cooperation of these Sufi leaders became essential in later independence movements directed against colonial control. With the overthrow of traditional elites by European conquest, Sufi institutions in some regions remained the only surviving Islamic social structures, and became the de facto custodians of cultural and religious knowledge. As they

were the only centers of resistance against European aggression, they furnished the principle leadership for anti-colonial struggles and later participated in shaping the vision of their nation-states. The colonial and postcolonial eras made it necessary for Sufism to come to terms with new roles dictated by the technological and ideological transformations of modernity.

Postcolonial Developments

In the postcolonial period, Sufi institutions in Muslim countries had an ambiguous political position, which was determined by the Sufi institutions' relation to the nation-state. Governments in many Muslim countries inherited centralized bureaucratic organizations of their colonial predecessors, some of which went back to pre-colonial bureaucracies. Some countries made efforts to bring Sufi institutions under governmental control. In some of these cases, officials appeared at Sufi festivals to direct popular reverence for saints into legitimizing their regimes, and governments also attempted to control the large amount of donations attracted to the shrines. State sponsorship of Sufi festivals also aimed to enroll support against fundamentalist groups critical of the government, and to redirect reverence for saints towards nationalist goals. Nonetheless, many of the largest and liveliest Sufi organizations flourish without official recognition.

The Muslim poet-philosopher Sir Muhammad Iqbal first proposed the idea of a Muslim state in the subcontinent during his address to the Muslim League at Allahabad in 1930. His proposal referred to the four provinces of Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and the North-West Frontier Province – essentially what would become post-1971 Pakistan. Iqbal's idea gave concrete form to the "Two Nations Theory" of two distinct nations in the subcontinent based on religion (Islam and Hinduism) and with different historical backgrounds, social customs, cultures, and social mores. Pakistan's independence in 1947 marked a watershed event in the religious and political lives of Indian Muslims. Today, it is difficult to imagine the emergence of Pakistan without a case made on the basis of religion, and without religious support for Pakistan.

Islam was thus the basis for creation and unification of a separate state, but Islam was not expected to serve as the model of government. Mohammad Ali Jinnah made his commitment to secularism in Pakistan clear in his inaugural address when he said, "You will find that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as Citizens of the State." This vision of a Muslim majority state in which religious minorities would share equally in its development was questioned shortly after independence.

The debate continues today amid questions of the rights of Ahmadiyyas, issuance of identity cards denoting religious affiliation, government intervention in the personal practice of Islam, and other issues.

For most of Muslim history, politics and religion have been intertwined both conceptually and practically in Muslim lands. The Medina Constitution and subsequent governance during the time of the Prophet served as precedents of governance and taxation. During the time of Muslim empires, from the Umayyads (661–750) and the Abbasids (750–1258) to the Mughals (1526–1858) and the Ottomans (1300–1923), religion and statehood were treated as one. Classical Muslim thought propounded the notion that the purpose of the state is to provide an environment where Muslims can properly practice their religion. If a leader failed in this, the people have a right to depose him.

The concept of Pakistan as envisioned by the rural population (specifically the *pirs*) was in traditional terms as the establishment of a religious state, ruled by the traditional leaders of society but firmly based on the Sharia. The crucial role of the *pirs* in the Muslim League's election victory in 1945 was also an important pointer to the nature of the Pakistan state which was to emerge. The victory for Pakistan represented only a call for a new religious definition of the old order, not for a new alignment of political power such as the reformist *ulama* had called for. The further definition of this system, however, remained to be developed in the new Muslim state.

Leaders of Pakistan found that the organizational structure of the shrines, traditionally maintained by hereditary *pirs*, was a force that hampered their efforts to control the political and social organization of the country. Leaders of other Muslim countries (such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia) also decided that the conceptual and organizational structures of Sufism and the shrines were incompatible with their political and religious goals. In postcolonial Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the solution was to suppress the shrines. In Pakistan, Ayub Khan's government established a different policy toward the shrines, which his successors continued with minor modifications. Their policies towards the shrines were carried out through the Department of Auqaf (formed shortly after independence). The essential goal was to enhance the shrines and the Sufi origins of these shrines for the glorification of Islam and Pakistan. At the same time the intent was to strip the hereditary *pirs* of their traditional functions.

Pakistan, despite its nominal Islamic affiliation, was also a modern national state. It originated in an Islam that had been defined in nationalist political terms but excluded the personal and moral dimensions of Muslim religiosity. The leaders of the movement to establish an independent Pakistan were entirely secularized in their education and lifestyles. They viewed religion as confined to the personal

sphere and envisioned their state as essentially secular. Hence they had no commitment to establishing a traditional Islamic state based on Classical Muslim thought. Their rhetoric was Muslim in form, but the content was nationalistic.

Pakistan's Transition into a Nation State

As Sufi tradition developed, there was a partial split between Sufism as rigorous spiritual discipline transmitted from spiritual teacher to qualified disciple on the one hand, and *piri-muridi* relationship which pejoratively meant blind devotion of the *murid* to a *pir*, whom the follower expected to act as a spiritual mediator. Such *pirs* were exemplified by the traditional *sajjada-nishins*. As part of an assault on the traditional meaning of *pir*, which gave him almost magical power, the Auqaf Department stressed the aspect of Sufism that Iqbal had drawn on and himself embodied: the original Sufi as poet and social reformer.

If these saints were pantheists, believing that God is immanent in all things, then there is no need, according to their own doctrine, for any mediator between God and man. It can be inferred that the role and responsibility of the individual in such a system is analogous to the role that citizen is expected to play in a Muslim democracy as an informed, voting citizen participating directly in the government: the government is "immanent" in its citizens. Literature distributed by the Auqaf Department also discussed conversion, but its significance was shifted away from emphasis on the conversion of some tribes by a particular saint toward the idea of the saints as a collective body who worked together to convert Pakistan as a nation to Islam.

Land reform acts were efforts to remove the landlord from his position as economic mediator and thus to remove him as a political mediator as well. The idea was that by divesting the landlords of economic power, they would also lose control of their votes. The hope was also that dividing up the land would be politically popular. To that end, the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance of 1959 gave the government the power to take direct control of and to manage shrines, mosques, and other properties dedicated to religious purposes. The act was superseded by the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance of 1961 and later by the Auqaf (Federal Control) Act of 1976, each of which further extended the authority of the Auqaf Department.

The power of the *pir* as a political mediator was difficult to eliminate as long as he retained the role of religious mediator. Only by changing the religious significance of the *pir* and the world view of his followers could any real political reorganization be effective. Thus the removal of *waqf* land from the control of the *sajjada-nishins* was equivalent to the breaking up of the lands of major landlords,

but one more step was required: the religious hold of the *sajjada-nishin* also needed to be broken.

In addition to developing the shrine areas as centers of social welfare, the Auqaf Department also made improvements on the shrines themselves, thus demonstrating that the government can satisfactorily fulfill the caretaking functions of the *sajjada-nishins*. The emphasis on educating missionaries suggested that the early Sufi saints were being compared to the *ulama* being trained to serve as *imams* in local villages. The emphasis seemed to be on minimizing the distinction between the saints and the *ulama*, and between Sufism and Sharia.

Instead of the traditional Sufi concern with the course of spiritual development of the individual, which included esoteric understanding for the spiritually advanced, the stress shifted to conformity of the Sharia, which in turn expected to lead to spiritual growth within the community. Thus, the Sufi was to be seen primarily as an *alim*, whose main function was to educate and guide his followers in the proper application and understanding of Islamic law.

Ayub sought to impose a nationally oriented bureaucratic administration that would overcome existing regional ties and disruptive political parties. This strong central government would be reinforced by the bond of Islam and by rapid economic growth. Part of his strategy was to educate the rural population in the democratic process, so that they could intelligently elect their representatives. Some of Ayub's strategies were common to other modernizing countries, such as those concerning education and the provision of services through a national government. Unique to Pakistan was his effort to change the significance of the shrines and of the saints attached to them. He also used the shrines directly as a vehicle for modernization.

Ayub adopted Javid Iqbal's suggestion, which was to develop a new ideology with respect to the saints and shrines. On the one hand, the Auqaf Department had to demonstrate that it could maintain the shrines as well as, if not better than, the *sajjada-nishins*. But this task alone was not adequate, because to most people the *sajjada-nishins* were not mere caretakers of the shrines. They were also seen as possessors and dispensers of blessing and hence wielded spiritual power. From the perspective of their followers, failure to follow the wishes of the *sajjada-nishin* in any sphere of activity was thought to have serious consequences. The government therefore had to demonstrate simultaneously that the *sajjada-nishin* was superfluous in both his religious and his caretaking functions.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's strategy was to eliminate the middlemen who were the backbone of Ayub's economic and political organization. He nationalized many industries and appealed directly to the ordinary citizen. As the head of the People's party and successor to Ayub's fallen regime, he was acutely aware of the power of

mass protest. He tried to be a charismatic leader, whom everyone would look up to as the supreme benefactor. He too used the shrines to carry out his policy. Instead of using the shrine festivals to teach villagers modern agricultural techniques, for instance, he emphasized governmental participation in the rituals themselves, thus linking religiosity with nationalistic goals.

Road to Islamization

Pakistan's "Islamic Identity" consistently generated tensions within its political system as the need for state religious expression and pluralistic governance placed competing demands on political ideology and hence the political process. At the socio-cultural level, Islam remained an important factor in everyday life. However, there was considerable variation in the ways ordinary Pakistanis articulated, interpreted, and practiced their faith, and worked out its implications in their individual and collective lives. Even today, Pakistan continues to wrestle with what kind of Islamic state it should be. While most agree that Pakistan's constitution and government should reflect Islamic ideology, the issue was how to relate Islam to the needs of a modern state.

The first serious steps to Islamization were taken by General Zia-ul-Haq's government which emphasized the idea that the original saints were themselves *ulama*, trained religious scholars who followed the Sharia. His government, took an essentially reformist position, and stressed the synthesis of Sufi and *alim* in its definition of the saint, while at the same time denying the legitimacy of the hereditary *pir*. Zia emphasized the saints as models of the pious Muslim, as devout men who observed all the laws of Islam (specifically strict adherence to the Sharia).

Zia pursued an Islamization program within a complex ideological framework. His stance was in contrast to the popular culture (i.e. most people were "personally" very religious but not "publicly" religious). The introduction of *zakat* and *ushr* collection as well as the enforcement of Sharia law exasperated the fault lines of doctrinal and jurist differences among the various interpretations of Islam. The question as to which interpretation of the Sharia should form the basis of public policy became the major source of conflict. These controversies caused sectarian riots and assassination of several prominent *ulama* since the late 1980s.

An unexpected outcome was that by relying on policy grounded in Islam, the state fomented factionalism: by legislating what is Islamic and what is not, Islam itself could no longer provide unity because it was then being defined to exclude previously included groups. This resulted in unrest and sectarian violence. Sufi practices were branded as being "un-Islamic" and those who indulged in such practices were straying from the "true" Islamic path by participating in *shirk* (idola-

try) or *bidaa* (corrupt innovation of religious practices). More profoundly, in a move that reached into every home, the state had attempted to dictate a specific ideal image of women in Islamic society, an ideal that was largely antithetical to that existing in popular sentiment and in everyday life.

In August 1988 Zia and some of his senior military commanders died in a plane crash. This development led to the installation of a civilian government. Unfortunately, the civilian government's powers were restricted by the military in the political process. Post-Zia civilian regimes were largely unsuccessful in reconciling the demands of the *ulama* for imposing Islamic law with the reformist demands for a pluralistic multiethnic society and attempts at further Islamization continued.

The proliferation of *madrasas* and support for *jihad* in Afghanistan and Kashmir in the 1990s lead to the formation of several Islamist groups (some of them armed). The Taliban's genesis can be associated with the rise of *madrasas* in Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s. Taliban controlled Afghanistan (from the mid-1990s to early 2000) also facilitated the growth of several Islamist groups in Pakistan that shared the Taliban's vision of Islam. This vision advocated the eradication of "non-Islamic" cultural norms and symbols to revert to Divine favor, and hence called for the eradication of practically all forms of Sufi practices – especially saint veneration.

In October 1999 General Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency and effectively took control of the government. He portrayed his regime as reformist and emphasized a moderate form of Islam, which he articulated as "enlightened moderation." Initially he took measures to curb Islamic militants. However in 2000 he withdrew his proposal to reform the procedural aspects of the Blasphemy Law (which seeks the death penalty for any one accused of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammad). Moreover the government continued to support the Taliban in Afghanistan until September 11, 2001.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and Pakistan's subsequent alliance with the United States on the "War on Terror" compelled Pakistan to curtail the support it had provided to Islamist groups. Increased foreign pressure caused Musharraf to take wide-ranging measures against various Islamist groups in Pakistan. In January 2002 he pledged to cease Pakistani support for Islamic insurgents in Kashmir and Afghanistan and declared Pakistan a "frontline state against terrorism."

Musharraf's alteration of the 1973 Constitution and introduction of the Legal Framework Order in 2002 essentially transformed Pakistan's political system from a parliamentary one to a presidential one. Amendments to the constitution entrenched the military's role by creating a military-controlled National Security Council. Musharraf's authoritarian rule eroded Pakistan's civil institutions, gover-

nance based on rule of law and on parliamentary supremacy, which in turn alienated the secular voices from Pakistan's political process. This benefitted the Islamist organizations. Post 9/11 developments in Afghanistan and Musharraf's attempt to curb Islamist extremism in Pakistan created resentment and a sense of alienation among some Islamist groups that previously received state patronage.

Despite Musharraf's secular orientation, *madrasas* continued to flourish. The government issued a Madrasa Registration Ordinance in June 2002 to control foreign funding, improve curricula (including teaching of "secular" subjects), and prohibit training in the use of arms. However, most religious groups rejected these tentative governmental reforms. Social and economic factors and Musharraf's failure to enact widespread reform contributed to the popularity of the *madrasa* system of education. Islamization continued at the provincial level as well. One such instance was the imposition of Sharia law in the North West Frontier Province. This later led to unrest and riots which caused a large portion of the population in the Swat Valley to seek refuge in other parts of the country. Despite Musharraf's policy of "enlightened moderation," Islamic laws enacted by Zia's government remained largely intact.

Elections held in October 2007 angered opposition parties as they considered it unconstitutional. Domestic unrest and widespread international protest caused Musharraf to declare a state of emergency (and de facto martial law). The proclamation of emergency rule gave Musharraf almost dictatorial powers, which led to further unrest and protests.

Benazir Bhutto's assassination in November 2007 and Musharraf's protracted withdrawal from Pakistani political life left a power vacuum which led to further violence and chaos. It is still too early to tell how permanent the Islamist reforms in Pakistan will be. However, the Islamist perspective has made more and deeper inroads in Pakistan's political sphere since its independence in 1947. In its wake it has muted other interpretations of Islam and disinherited some of Islam's rich legacy.

Backlash to Sufism

Modernist secular thinkers had been critical of Sufism, and described it as one of the sources of fatalism, passivity, and civilizational decline; its ideas and practices were criticized for making Muslim states vulnerable to foreign domination. Some Sufi groups internalized the modernist critique and were themselves critical of some traditional Sufi practices such as listening to music and visiting the tombs of saints. Other Sufi theorists rejected life in the hospice and insisted on living in the world. Yet other Sufi advocates responded to the reformist critiques with polemics

and apologetics of their own. They defended Sufi practices as authentic and even necessary according to Islamic principles. Sufi theorists asserted that science ultimately seeks what Sufism alone can offer, and in the process adopted the language of psychology and modern technology in their defense.

The rise of Wahhabism and kindred Salafi movement brought contemporary fundamentalism in its wake. The fundamentalists have attacked Sufism with a virulence sometimes even more intense than that which was reserved for anti-Western diatribes. The *ulama* perceived “popular” Islam based on the *piri-muridi* paradigm as misleading, superstitious, and vulgar, and they believed it needed to be replaced by a “purer” or true Islam based on the Koran and Sharia, and for which they were the principal spokesmen. They frequently denounced pilgrimage to Sufi tombs as idolatry, and rejected the notion that saints are able to intercede with Allah on behalf of believers. However popular Islam was the dominant religious tradition and as such it permeated Pakistani cultural life. The evolution of the state in Pakistan was profoundly affected by the predominance of popular Islam. While criticizing Sufism, it is remarkable that some fundamentalist movements adapted certain organizational techniques and leadership styles from Sufism. The main difference was that these movements substituted political ideology for Sufi spirituality, to become mass parties in the modern political arena.

Contemporary Sufism

Sufi Islam in Pakistan is represented at two levels. The first is a populist Sufism of the rural masses, associated with religious rituals and practices that include belief in the intercessory powers of saints, pilgrimage and veneration at their shrines, and a binding spiritual relationship between the *pir* and *murid*. Muslims in some rural areas of Pakistan identify themselves with some *pir*, living or dead, and seek his intercession for the solution of their problems (worldly or spiritual), and for salvation. There is belief in the powers of both the person (i.e. *pirs*) and legends about their miracles (*karamah*). Many of these *pirs* are either themselves landlords or are associated with the traditional landowning interests. Although most of the major shrines were taken over by the government in 1959 and 1961 as a part of Ayub’s modernization program, the actual management of these shrines, the organization of their religious activities, and the dispensation of spiritual favors continue under the guidance of the original *sajjadah nishins*. It is not unheard of for some of these *pir* families to use their spiritual influence to gain election to the national and provincial legislatures.

The other strain is that of scholastic or intellectual Sufism, a more recent phenomenon predominantly in urban areas and becoming increasingly popular

among the more educated population. Influenced by the writings of earlier (medieval) Sufis, and by the spiritual experiences of the masters of the Suhrawardi and Naqshbandi orders, these modern Sufis are rearticulating Islamic metaphysics as an answer to Western materialism. For them, Sufism is the heart of Islam, and Islamic revival begins with the spiritual reawakening of individual Muslims.

Despite the vicissitudes of foreign invasion, the collapse of traditional social structures, the imposition of European education and culture, the rise of the secular nation-state, and an ideological shift towards fundamentalism in the Muslim world, Sufism in many different local forms persists and survives across the entire population spectrum from the illiterate to the elite. In Pakistan Sufism has now become a position to be defended or criticized in terms of ideological constructions of Islam. Whether defended in traditional languages as part of classical Muslim culture or attacked as non-Muslim heresy, Sufism still forms part of the symbolic capital of not only Pakistan but also of the majority of Muslim countries. As a form of religious practice, Sufism is seen both as an eclectic form of New Age spirituality and as the mystical essence of Islam.

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