

The Modern State, the Politicization of Sufi Rituals, and the Local Religious Authority of Sufi Shrines: A Study of the Shrine of Bābā Farīd (Pakpattan-Punjab)



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Abstract

The modern state that developed in the Indian subcontinent after the arrival of colonial power in the region had profound effects on the internal religious-spiritual matters of Sufi shrines. The Chishtī Sufi shrine of Bābā Farīd, in Pakpattan, also heavily affected by the emergent state's policies in all respects. The state's intrusion into the ritualistic matters of the shrine has gradually reduced the traditional custodian of the shrine to a mere ceremonial head of the institution. The process of politicization of Sufi rituals started during the British Raj; the crucial interference in the ceremonies of the shrine came after the take-over of the management and the administration of the shrine of Bābā Farīd by the West Pakistan Auqāf authorities during the early 1960s. This study is intended to explore the emergence and development of the centuries-old ritualistic patterns of the shrine, the modern state's contrivances that affected them, and the resultant effects of the said evolution on the local religious authority of the traditional office bearers of the shrine.

Introduction

The accommodating approach of early Chishtī Sufi masters in the Indian subcontinent brought them into direct contact with local people, leading to a solid personal relationship with the local population. Followers of the other Indian religions gradually became part of the process, especially around several *khānqāhs* (convents or Sufi lodges) established by various Sufis and later their shrines. "For it was through its rituals that a shrine made Islam accessible to non lettered masses, providing them with vivid and concrete manifestations of the divine order, and integrating them into its ritualized drama both as participants and as sponsors". (Eaton, 1984)

The presence of the shrine of a renowned 13th century Chishtī Sufi saint, Shaikh Farīd al-Dīn Mas'ūd Ganj-i Shakar (d. 1265) in the city of Pakpattan has had varying effects on the political, economic, social, educational, cultural, and religious development of the city. An objective study of the shrine of Shaikh Farīd reveals a close relationship between the history of the area and that of the shrine. Besides, the cultural transformation of the area has been, and remains, influenced by the status and the role played by the shrine. (Muhammad Mubeen, 2015)

Due to his scholastic religious expertise as well as his recognition as a spiritual master, Shaikh Farīd (popularly known as Bābā Farīd) proved to be the source of the local religious authority of the institution he established, the *jamā'at-khāna* Farīdiyya in Ajūdhan (present Pakpattan). Different rituals and ceremonies were established at the institution during Bābā Farīd's times, like singing *qawālī* (spiritual and devotional singing of Sufi poetry) and running of the *langar-khāna* (charity kitchen). However, daily functioning of the *khānqāh* of Bābā Farīd, during the lifetime of Bābā Farīd, was more like of an educational institution where the *jamā'at-khāna* (space for the spiritual disciples of a Chishtī saint where they are provided with spiritual, religious, and moral education) was the most important part of the institution. (Nizami, 1955)

After the demise of Bābā Farīd in 1265, a different type of functioning developed in the shrine whose focal point was to venerate the buried saint and *ziyarat* (regular pilgrimage at the tomb) of Bābā Farīd became a regular practice in the later period. (Markovits, 2004) From his demise, his legacy continues in Pakpattan, mainly represented by his lineal descendants and the vast shrine complex based on his tomb, a mosque, a charity kitchen,

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and several related buildings. Different hagiographical sources like Amīr Khusrāu's *Rāḥat al-Muḥibbīn* ("pleasure of the Lovers [of God]") and 'Alī Asghar Chishtī's *Javāhir-i-Farīdī* (gems of Farīd) record how the major rituals have been instituted in the early days of the shrine career. ([Alī Asghar Chishtī, 1884](#))([Amīr Khusrāu, n.d.](#)) The major ceremonies that gradually became part of the daily, weekly, and annual routine of the shrine include the regular educational ventures of the *jamā'at-khāna*, regular running of the *langar-khāna*, daily evening singing of *qawālī*, distribution of *Shakar* (raw sugar), and lightening of *dīyās* (oil-lamps) by the visiting pilgrims, weekly ceremonies of Thursdays and Fridays' *samā'* (*qawālī* singing and *dhamāl*- an ecstatic dance with strong drumming), the annual 'urs festival in the month of Muḥarram, the annual opening of the Bahishtī Darvāza (lit. "Door to Paradise"), and the *dastār-bandī* (tying of a turban) – a ceremony denoting a formal placement of a lineal descendant of the saint in the office of the *sajjāda-nishīn* (custodian of the office). From the days of the establishment of the shrine onward, annual 'urs of the saint and its different ceremonies like the opening of shrine's Bahishtī Darvāza and the distribution of *Shakar* (sugar) enhanced the link between the shrine and the local population, boosting the socio-religious authority of the shrine of Bābā Farīd in the later centuries. ([Hashit Bahisht: Majmū'a-i-Malfūzāt Khwājgān-i-Chisht \(Urdu Tr.\), 1996](#)) And "Over centuries, the shrine of Bābā Farīd got precedence over *jamā'at khāna*, which became less significant as an institution" ([Anjum, 2009](#))

The socio-religious prestige of the shrine and its successive custodians paved the way for the shrine's local political and economic authority in the region during the medieval period. Resultantly, Pakpattan remained, for centuries, under the politico-administrative authority of the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd that ultimately resulted in his control over the economic resources of the region. Therefore, the shrine of Bābā Farīd was enjoying a well-defined local authority in Pakpattan and its environs that reflected the local shrine culture, manifested through the prestigious status of its *sajjāda-nishīn* - a semi-independent ruler of Pakpattan when the British East India Company (BEIC) annexed Punjab in 1849. ([Muhammad Mubeen, 2015](#))

The shrine's local authority dynamics took a new turn with the change of central political authority in mid-19th century India. The establishment of the modern state, by its wide-ranging, centralized, and hierarchical executive, political, and economic arrangements, primarily aimed at setting an operational administration in the region and utilizing as much as possible the local resources, had far-reaching consequences for the local shrine culture. In a way, a process of redefining the local authority of the shrine took place through official institutions like the local executive, the Court of Wards, judicial courts, and the law itself. In Pakpattan shrine, the process of redefinition by the state resulted in the politicization of three major rituals at large; the *dastār-bandī*, the control of the annual 'urs festival, and the annual opening of the Bahishtī Darvāza. The following paragraphs will highlight the evolution of the process.

The Modern State and the Politicization of the Major Chishtī Sufi Rituals Associated with the Shrine of Bābā Farīd

With the advent of the modern state in the mid-19th century, the state took over the role of the most powerful socio-political actor in the region; the shrine of Bābā Farīd could not escape the socio-political developments going around even the internal religious-spiritual matters of the shrine could not escape from the modern state's encroachment. Gradually the modern state penetrated the management of the shrine's economic resources. This phenomenon ultimately culminated in the take-over of the shrine management and its financial resources by the post-colonial state of Pakistan in the early 1960s. All the aspects of the local authority of the shrine of Bābā Farīd, including the socio-religious authority, were affected by the modern state, which resulted in the evolution of the 'local shrine culture'.

During the colonial period, the rituals did not change significantly, and the state only intervened to regularize the annual 'urs festival. During the pre-colonial times, the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd used to manage the shrine and regularize its affairs during the annual 'urs. The *sajjāda-nishīn* had his staff deal with every matter. During the colonial period, the state machinery was partially involved in matters of special importance. The correspondence of 1871, related to an incident during the annual 'urs, clearly suggests that the local officials, namely a *taḥṣīl-dār* (tehsil revenue officer) and a sub-inspector, were involved in the administrative arrangements during the festival. However, they were working to help the regular staff of the *sajjāda-nishīn*. During the shrine

management under the 'Court of Wards' in the 1930s and 1940s, the matters were controlled by the Deputy Commissioner of Sahiwal, who was assigned as the Court of Ward for the minor *sajjāda-nishīn*.

After the Partition, until the take-over of the shrine of Bābā Farīd by the West Pakistan Auqāf Department in January 1961, the incumbent *sajjāda-nishīn* himself remained in the helm of affairs for the arrangements. ([Notification No. 3\(4\)-Auqāf/60, Dated January 17, 1961, n.d.](#)) However, the main interference by the state in the ceremonies of the shrine came in the late 1960s, a few years after the take-over of the management of the shrine of Bābā Farīd by the state authorities.

In the first place, the custodian family complains that the Auqāf has caused many destructions. For example, as is claimed by the family of the *sajjāda-nishīn*, a large number of the *tabarrukāt* (relics) of the shrine had been sold out or destroyed by the Auqāf officials. At the time of the take-over by the Auqāf Department, they were in abundance, but the unconcerned officials of the Auqāf Department have destroyed this legacy. Similarly, the custodian family members claim that the Auqāf managers have even sold the floor marble tiles of the interior of the tomb and the big *gharyāl* (clock tower) of the shrine, which was an invisible sign of the shrine for the locale up to a considerable distance around the city of Pakpattan. Thirdly, the Auqāf control over the food distribution of the *langar*, over the distribution of the cut-pieces of the *chādars* of Bābā Farīd's grave, and its control over the shrine cashboxes, despite the presence of the living representative of Bābā Farīd, has disturbed the shrine following in one way or the other. In the post-take-over period, the politicization of some main rituals has disturbed the traditional ritualistic patterns of the shrine, which are discussed below.

The Dastār-Bandī (Turban tying)

The *dastār-bandī* (tying of a turban) symbolizes the succession of the commonly revered saint and the continuation of the moral authority of the shrine. The *dastār-bandī* ceremony meant to place the lineal descendant formally in the office of the *sajjāda-nishīn* is a key ceremony of the institution Bābā Farīd established at Ajūdhan. Having a turban tied at the shrine as *dastār-bandī* means inheriting Bābā Farīd's spiritual authority, which represents the continuation of his *baraka* (blessing conferred by God upon humankind and transmitted through saints) through a living representative from his blood lineage. Eaton remarks, "this act decisively served ritually to link the new successor with Bābā Farīd himself and rested in the popular belief that Bābā Farīd had used his own turban as a symbol of spiritual authority." He continues, "Indeed, it is in the turban's rich symbolic repertoire that we see its capacity to express and sustain values so central to the shrine. Accordingly, in different contexts, the turban could even express values that might otherwise appear mutually antagonistic, i.e., the hierarchy of religious status and commonality of cultural inheritance" and "... the turban, used in the proper ritual context, was uniquely empowered to endow the wearer with Bābā Farīd's own spiritual authority." ([Eaton, 1982](#))

According to the analysis of Richard Eaton, in the history of Pakpattan, this ceremony played a key role in establishing the local authority of the shrine of Bābā Farīd and its custodian in the region. In his opinion, "...the shrine Bābā Farīd assimilated people religiously as well as politically and socially, the tying of the turban (*dastār bandī*) possessed a great symbolic repertoire; it defined relations of kinship between the shrine and the subordinate clans, it symbolically conferred legitimacy on actual rulers in Delhi, and it conferred spiritual discipleship at the shrine itself." ([Eaton, 1984](#))

In the shrine's tradition, the ceremony was always performed by a *Chishtī* master or by a *sajjāda-nishīn* of some prominent *Chishtī* shrine, as showed in the table here below.

Table 1. The *dastār-bandī* of different *sajjāda-nishīns* carried out by *Chishtī* Personages (rest of the *sajjāda-nishīns* put the *dastār* (turban) themselves on their head)

S. No	The Sajjāda-Nishīn	Dastār-bandī carried out by
1 st	Badr al-Dīn Sulaimān (d. 1281)	Shaikh Kh ^w āja Nizām al- Dīn Auliya (d. 1325)
2 nd	'Alā' al-Dīn Mauj Daryā (d. 1334)	Shaikh Kh ^w āja Nizām al- Dīn Auliya

3 rd	Mu'iz al-Dīn (d. 1348, performed in 1323, before his father's death)	Shaikh Kh ^w āja Nizām al-Dīn Auliya
4 th	Mu'azzam Afzal al-Dīn Fuṣṭal (d. 1355)	Shaikh Kh ^w āja Naṣīr al-Dīn Chirāgh of Delhi (d. 1356)
5 th	Muḥammad Munawwar (d. 1403)	Shaikh Kh ^w āja Naṣīr al-Dīn Chirāgh of Delhi
12 th	Ibrāhīm (Farīd Sānī) (d. 1552)	Shaikh Kh ^w āja Ḥasan (Chishtī Nizāmī master)
13 th	Tāj al-Dīn Maḥmūd (d. 1610)	Shaikh Abū Sa'īd Gangohī (Chishtī Šābrī master) (d. 1630)
21 st	Glulam Rasūl (d. 1809)	Muḥammad Ḥayāt (<i>sajjāda-nishīn</i> Mīrām Sayyid Bhekh)
22 nd	Muḥammad Yār (d. 1828)	Muḥammad Ḥayāt (<i>sajjāda-nishīn</i> Mīrām Sayyid Bhekh)
25 th	Said Muḥammad (d. 1934)	Kh ^w āja Pīr Muḥammad Ḥasan Shāh Farīdī (Chishtī master)

Source: *Asrār-i- 'Itrat-i-Farīdī* (Private lives of Farīd's descendants) (Urdu tr.) (1891): 273-95.

However, the only *dastār-bandī* ceremony for the formal succession to the office of the 27th *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd, in the post-take-over period, that took place in 1986 was performed by the Governor of Punjab, instead of any Chishtī master.

The Annual Opening of the Bahishtī Darvāza

The presence of the Bahishtī Darvāza in the shrine of Bābā Farīd is one of the most important privileges of the town of Pakpattan since many centuries. Eaton, while analyzing the importance of the annual 'urs of the shrine of Bābā Farīd during the colonial and pre-colonial period, writes: "In the Bahishtī *melā* the theme of salvation through loving devotion was made far more explicit than in most other Indo-Muslim shrines since all participants literally acted it out," and "... the Bahishtī ceremony served ritually to act out and confirm the sense of spiritual hierarchy that pervades the whole ethos of the shrine." (Eaton, 1982) Therefore, for centuries, the ceremony of crossing the Bahishtī Darvāza during the annual 'urs at the shrine of Bābā Farīd remained the source of spiritual solace for the pilgrims.

The hagiographical sources like *Tahqīqāt-i Chishtī* (1867) and *Asrār-i- 'Itrat-i-Farīdī* (1891) as well as the official correspondence carried out in 1871, referred above, which all describe the 'urs ceremonies at the shrine of Bābā Farīd, suggest that in the shrine's history, the Bahishtī Darvāza was previously not open for more than two nights during the 'urs, on the 6th and the 7th of the first month of the Islamic calendar, Muḥarram. They also state that the incumbent *sajjāda-nishīn* always carried out the opening ceremony.

In the post-take-over period, symbolically the most important change that shattered not only the religious authority but also the social prestige of the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd: he was deprived of his privilege of being the only person qualified to open the revered Bahishtī Darvāza during the annual 'urs. Moreover, since 1968-69, the Bahishtī Darvāza has been opened for three more nights by state authorities. Let us see how and why this change occurred.

In 1968, the annual 'urs started on March 25. Three weeks before the commencement, the Chief Administrator Auqāf (CAA) issued an order to keep open the Bahishtī Darvāza for seven nights from 1st of Muḥarram to the 7th of Muḥarram during the annual 'urs, from 7 pm to 7 am. (Letter Dated March 2, 1968, by the Administrator Auqāf, Lahore, n.d.)

On the March 25, the order was challenged by Pīr Muḥammad 'Arīf Chishtī, a close relative of the then *sajjāda-nishīn*, under article 98 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the High Court of West Pakistan Lahore. In the petition, it was claimed, with reference to the *Javāhir-i Farīdī* (gems of Farīd) (1623), that the ritual of the opening of the Bahishtī Darvāza was established by Kh^wāja Nizām al-Dīn Auliya who envisioned the Prophet of Islam at the spot. Nizām al-Dīn Auliya performed the ritual, which has been repeated ever since. Therefore, the ritual should not be left with the personal will of the CAA, who, according to the Waqf Ordinance of 1959, was authorized only to take over the management and the property of the shrine and was not authorized to issue any order regarding the matters connected with the ceremonies at the shrine. The petitioners argued that the CAA had no authority to alter the wishes of the dedicator, which through continuous usage had become a binding custom regulating the ceremonies at the shrine. (Writ Petition No. 437 of 1968, dated March 25, 1968, in the High Court of West Pakistan., n.d.) At the 1968 'urs, the ordered pattern was followed that

changed, according to the claimants, the entire complexion of the 'urs and disturbed the settled traditions laid down by Kh^vāja Nizām al- Dīn Auliā and followed since then. Therefore, it caused resentment in the following.

In his response, the CAA blamed the *sajjāda-nishīn* for misusing the discretionary authority of opening of the Bahishtī Darvāza. The CAA accused the *sajjāda-nishīn* of getting financial benefits by granting the right of passing through the door. The person who could pay more *nazrāna* (offerings) to the *sajjāda-nishīn* could have easy and repeated access to the door. He furthered that such harassment and the monetary extortion in the shrine for the sake of getting entry to the Bahishtī Darvāza caused disappointment in the pilgrims. He also accused the *sajjāda-nishīn* of different patronizing malpractices in the shrine premises. The CAA denied any type of public resentment after the order was issued and argued that the decision was taken for the benefit of the pilgrims. He contended that the door was built long after the demise of Bābā Farīd, and the ceremony attached of passing through it was a very recent development. He further argued no document existed which could show any religious ordinance either by Bābā Farīd himself or by Kh^vāja Nizām al- Dīn Auliā to keep the door open only for two nights. He further pushed that if passing through the gate was a venerated norm, it should be opened for additional nights to let more pilgrims pass through it. To prevent the crowd, enormously growing over the years, from causing such problems as stampede (due to the small size of the door) or from threatening law and order in the town during the annual fair, he ordered to open the door for seven nights. He endorsed his argument by telling the High Court that he even let the door open for ten nights during the annual fair of 1969 to ease the flow of pilgrims, which numbered an estimated three lakh. ([Respondent answer to the petition of 1968 dated April 15, 1969, n.d.](#))

However, the Auqāf record shows that the case remained pending for the next few years. The Bahishtī Darvāza was opened for five nights in the years 1970 and onward, as CAA undertook to open the Bahishtī Darvāza on the 5th of Muḥarram and to continue to open till the 9th of Muḥarram. ([Report by the Chief Administrator Auqaf, 1995](#))

In July 1990, the CAA, Punjab, issued a Notification, in which it was notified that for the first two nights (5th and 6th Muḥarram), the *sajjāda-nishīn* would open the Bahishtī Darvāza. The rest of the nights, this privilege would go over to different state officials: for the third night (7th Muḥarram), to the Minister Auqāf/ Secretary and CAA, Punjab, for the fourth night (8th Muḥarram), to the Divisional/District Administration, and for the fifth night (9th Muḥarram), to the Zonal Administrator Auqāf (ZAA) Multan, or to their respective representative. ([Order No. SOP-2 5\(17\) | Dated July 07, 1990, by the Chief Administrator Auqaf, Lahore, n.d.](#)) This schedule remained applicable for seventeen consecutive years until reshuffled in January 2008, when a tussle was going on between the local administrators for the fourth-day opening ceremony because the Local Government under the Zila' Nāzīm (District administrator) was also functioning at the district level.

On January 11, 2008, the CAA, Punjab, issued a new Notification, in which it was notified that for the first two nights (5th and 6th Muḥarram), the *sajjāda-nishīn* would open the Bahishtī Darvāza. The rest of the nights, this honor would over to different state authorities: for the third night (7th Muḥarram), to the CAA/ Director Religious Affairs Auqāf, Punjab Lahore, for the fourth night (8th Muḥarram), to the District Coordination Officer (DCO) Pakpattan, and for the fifth night (9th of Muḥarram), to the ZAA Pakpattan, or their respective representative. (Order No. SOP 5(17)I, Dated January 11, 2008, by the Chief Administrator Auqaf, Lahore, n.d.) However, the Local Government was still ignored in the Notification. On the request of the Zila' Nāzīm, four days later, on 15th, a new notification was issued with backdating (of January 11) and with the signatures of January 15, in which it was notified that for the first two nights (5th and 6th Muḥarram), the *sajjāda-nishīn* would open the Bahishtī Darvāza. The rest of the nights, this privilege would go to a different state and local authorities: for the third night (7th Muḥarram), to the CAA/ Director Religious Affairs Auqāf, Punjab Lahore, for the fourth night (8th Muḥarram), to the Zila' Nāzīm Pakpattan instead of the DCO, and for the fifth night (9th Muḥarram), to the DCO Pakpattan instead of the ZAA Pakpattan, or their respective representative.

A week later, the ZAA Pakpattan contested this order in his letter to the CAA. He argued that the newly issued schedule could attract other local official authorities like police, judiciary, or Tehsil administration to fight for the opportunity of opening the Bahishtī Darvāza. Therefore, he demanded that the schedule of 1990 be reinstated and the ZAA and the Manager of the shrine of Bābā Farīd, who administer the shrine the whole year, have the privileged opportunity mutually. ([Letter No. ZAP/A-II/Auqaf 2008/3642, Dated January 21, 2008, from](#)

[the Zonal Administrator Auqāf, Pakpattan Zone to Chief Administrator Auqāf Punjab, Lahore, n.d.](#)) Within a week after this letter, a new Order was issued, in which it was notified that for the first two nights (5th and 6th Muḥarram), the *sajjāda-nishīn* would open the Bahishtī Darvāza. The rest of the nights, different state authorities would open the door: for the third night (7th Muḥarram), the Secretary/CAA Punjab/ Director Religious Affairs Auqāf Punjab Lahore, for the fourth night (8th Muḥarram), the Divisional/District Administration, and for the fifth night (9th of Muḥarram), the ZAA Pakpattan, or their respective representative, were reinstated to open the Bahishtī Darvāza. ([Order No. SOP 5\(17\)I, Dated April 30, 2008, Office of the Chief Administrator Auqāf Punjab, Lahore, n.d.](#)) This pattern is still followed currently.

The Annual ‘Urs

The annual fairs held at the Sufi shrines in Punjab, generally on the death anniversaries of the buried saints, are popularly termed as ‘urs – literally final ‘marriage’ with God. Various rituals, customs, and ceremonies observed on these auspicious occasions are the media to demonstrate faith, devotion, and deep and can be looked upon as ways of seeking and receiving the heavenly blessings. The more exalted and the accomplished the saints are, and the deeper and the more unflinching faith in them, the vaster and the more lasting divine responses will be hoped to make the life here and hereafter blissful and comfortable – the fulfilment of the Divine purpose of Creation.

The ‘urs of Bābā Farīd is observed every year for centuries; it has developed its character and culture. It acts as a meeting place for his followers from diverse origins who attend the shrine to pay homage to the saint. The ritual of circumambulation performed around the tomb of Bābā Farīd during the annual ‘urs demonstrates the unity of the followers of Bābā Farīd, being similar to the circumambulation performed by *ḥajj* pilgrims around the Ka‘ba, meant to affirm the unity of the believers in the worship of the One God.

With the take-over of the shrine management in 1961, the whole management of the shrine went under the control of the Auqāf Department, which collaborated with other local administrative departments to deal with the special arrangements of the annual festival inside and outside the shrine premises. The *Auqāf Department* gave the *sajjāda-nishīn* a certain annual amount for the performance of rituals at the shrine during the annual ‘urs time. According to the official record of the Zonal Administrator Auqāf, Pakpattan, in 1998, the Department authorities accepted *sajjāda-nishīn*’s long-lasting demand of stipend for the upkeep of his family. As he was not satisfied with the amount, and to get his stipend increased, the incumbent *sajjāda-nishīn* resorted to a dangerous means to pressure by refusing to open the Bahishtī Darvāza despite repeated requests from the administration, during the annual ‘urs in March 2001. The result was a stampede at the shrine on the first night of the opening of Bahishtī Darvāza, which caused the death of dozens of devotees in the shrine premises. ([Rozeḥnal, 2006](#)) After the incident, the annual stipend for the *sajjāda-nishīn* has been gradually increasing.

At present, during the annual ‘urs, the Auqāf authorities, in collaboration with the local administration, carry out extensive arrangements. The Auqāf authorities provide adequate facilities to the local administration to establish a control set-up in the shrine premises. Before the commencement of the ‘urs, several meetings are held to finalize the arrangements in which responsibilities and costs are appropriately allocated to the concerned departments. The Deputy Commissioner and the Senior Superintendent Police set their camps in the shrine complex and collaborated to control the situation. Security cameras and walk-through gates are installed at different points to ensure security measures. Many police personnel under senior police officers are appointed inside the shrine premises to control day and night routines. A Police Guard (comprising hundreds of police officers) from the adjoining districts is brought to Pakpattan town under provincial government orders to help regularize affairs. ([Office File “‘Urs Hazrat Bābā Farīd Al-Dīn Mas‘ūd Ganj-i Shakar – 2008-09”, District Cordination Officer, Pakpattan, n.d.](#))

The Shrine, The Rituals, The Local Shrine Culture, and the Impact of the Politicization of Sufi Rituals in Pakpattan

Bābā Farīd once told a visitor who had presented a pair of scissors to him: “Do not give me scissors, give me a needle. I sew. I do not cut.” ([Nizami, 1955](#)) This is what his shrine does in many ways. For centuries, the spirit of the rituals established at the shrine of Bābā Farīd and the annual ‘urs is about bringing people together.

In the Punjabi Muslim society, Sufi shrines are traditionally considered analogues of Heaven. Gellener describes Sufi saint's *baraka* as a "socially legitimated Charisma" in the way it is dealt with by the respective characters involved. (Gellner, 1969) The *baraka* of a saint is a believed transcendent spiritual entity that satisfies its recipients' desires helps them control their lower soul (*nafs*) and gives them peace and tranquillity. (Ewing, 1983) The *baraka* is commonly considered imbued within material objects or human beings in the form of *tabarruk*. For the followers of the Sufi discourse, actions such as taking petals from the graves as blessed stuff, done with a pure heart, make them the recipients of the blessings or *baraka* of the saint. The pilgrims usually bring some offerings (*nazrāna*) which may serve as a vehicle for visitors to partake of the saint's *baraka*.

The popular belief of the intermediary status of a Sufi saint and his shrine in the Punjabi Muslim society explains Sufi shrines' importance and spheres of influence. Ballard explains beautifully the procedure through which the seekers access shrines and put their ultimate questions and demands in front of the Almighty. In the first place, they offer prayers at the shrine to seek the help of the deceased saint as an intercessor of a higher spiritual calibre who has already accessed to union with the Divine after he departed from this world. This search for intercessional assistance is coupled with vows and offerings at the shrine. (Ballard, 2006) These offerings are redistributed to the pilgrims of the shrine through *langar* or other means, and this circulation enhances and encourages social participation. (Jeffery, 1981)

Similarly, the *baraka* of Bābā Farīd, considered a contagious entity that may be absorbed by close contact with the grave and other things associated with him, has caused the local and trans-local folk's continuous frequency at his grave. Richard Maxwell Eaton remarks in his analysis, that "... the shrine of Bābā Farīd in Pakpattan provides a striking example of how Islam, the religion par excellence "of the Book," has been in one instance mediated among common villagers most of whom were illiterate. For them it was the shrine, and so the Book, which manifested the juncture "where the contrasted poles of Heaven and Earth met." Through its elaborate rituals and grand processions, the shrine displayed a sense of divine magnificence and divine mercy. It displayed, in short, the Court of God." The shared motivation behind visiting the shrine of Bābā Farīd was to beseech him to fulfil a need and to thank him for his *baraka*. The shrine of Bābā Farīd was perceived as an analogue of the saint himself. While explaining certain of the shrine's followers during a legal proceeding, Eaton remarks, "Indeed, many *murīds* referred to the saint and his shrine in the same term, sometimes defining themselves as *murīds* of the *gaddī*, or shrine. By conceptually fusing the saint and his shrine, *murīds* were able to understand the shrine as linking not only Heaven and Earth but also past and present. The shrine was Bābā Farīd." (Eaton, 1982)

More commonly, help in the material needs remained the dominant motive behind the attendance. The pilgrims bring different offerings for the tomb; *chāḍars* (cloth sheet), flowers, garlands, and even oil for oil-lamps (*dīyā*). Devotees' prayers could be understood as a form of bargaining for divine help, inspired by the saint's intercession, in return for offerings at the shrine. The pilgrims visiting the shrine of Bābā Farīd and taking petals, oils, salt, *shakar*, and other *tabrukāt* from the shrine believe these articles to be a source of *baraka* of Bābā Farīd. It is commonly believed that the saint's *baraka* imbues the places and things close to him. Therefore, the visitors during their few minutes inside the tomb Bābā Farīd, generally touch kiss, caress the grave and the *chāḍar*, offer prayers (*fātiḥa* and *du'ā*) and take some of the already scattered flower petals on the grave. These petals are meant to be eaten as an intercessional objects. The visitors also take them to their homes for their family members as blessed stuff or *tabarruk* for *shafā'* (intercession). Pilgrims also eat the food, which has been cooked at the *langar-khāna* (community kitchen) of the shrine. The relics of Bābā Farīd preserved at the shrine are considered as sources of radiation of his *baraka*. Similarly, the old cloth sheets (ornate *chāḍars*) are preserved in the shrine storeroom for distribution to the pilgrims, in cut-pieces, as articles of *baraka*.

In the local history of Pakpattan, the shrine of Bābā Farīd has played a significant role in defining the face of local popular Islam. Over the centuries, Bābā Farīd has remained an immensely popular saint among the millions of villagers who inhabit southwestern Punjab. The shrine of Bābā Farīd is highly revered by many local clans who claim to have been converted to Islam collectively through 'the agency of the shrine.' The phenomenon led to the immense socio-religious power and influence of the shrine and its custodian family in the region over its huge following and created a social hierarchy from the *dīvān* to the *Chishtī* clan and the clans of the *murīds* and the

supporters of the custodians. Even the "...economic, political, and kinship ties between the shrine and its neighboring clans, the latter gradually became integrated into the shrine's ritual functioning..." (Eaton, 1984)

This was not limited only to the clans converted to Islam but extended to the Sikhs and Hindus of the region. In a broader societal context, the shrine of Bābā Farīd became a regional centre of moral authority, exercising legitimacy over inter-ethnic and intra-societal relationships. It proved to be a source of harmony amongst different religious communities of Pakpattan, and before Partition, non-Muslim used to take part in the shrine's rituals regularly. For example, a Brahman of the town held the key of the Bahishtī Darvāza and the *ṭall-bardār* (ball-carrier) during the ritual of *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) used to be a Hindu. Similarly, Hindu elders of the Hāndā clan of the Khatrīs used to join hands with the Divān for the opening ceremony of the Bahishtī Darvāza. (Irving, 1911)

Although the local religious authority of the shrine of Bābā Farīd has regressed a lot in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the religious and spiritual linkage between the shrine itself and the locale is intact to a considerable extent. The shrine is a core sacred space in the town, and the local spiritual culture is representative of its long-lasting presence in the locale. The *dargāh*, of Bābā Farīd, is functioning as an intermediary institution for the circulation and redistribution of wealth, as did centuries back the saint's *khānqāh*. For this purpose, various charity functions have been going on its premises since the earliest days. A proper *langar-khāna* has been functioning since the early days of the shrine of Bābā Farīd. Similarly, at the time of the 'urs, food is served from the *langar* to thousands of visitors, and the pilgrims also contribute toward the 'urs celebrations at Bābā Ṣāhib, according to their capabilities - distributing offerings. Qavvālī plays an important role in upholding the status of the shrine of Bābā Farīd. The ritual attracts large audiences, and renowned *qawāls* of national and international fame come to Pakpattan. The annual 'urs of Bābā Farīd attracts devotees in large numbers preordaining a colossal activity in the city - a *melā* or a huge festive fair is held outside the shrine. The town's population increases many folds during the 'urs days, especially during the days of the opening of Bahishtī Darvāza. Even at present, the popular belief is intact that one who passes through this gate is blessed by God and gets his place in Heaven. Followers believe that by crossing the Bahishtī Darvāza, all of one's sins are pardoned. Therefore, thousands of people struggle to pass through the Bahishtī Darvāza, hoping they will obtain Paradise. Prominent personalities, including politicians, *mashāikh* (spiritual masters), *sajjāda-nishīns*, and bureaucrats cross the Bahishtī Darvāza on the very first night, being given privilege over the ordinary devotees queued up barefooted outside the *dargāh* and across the city. This brings the saint, the city, and the *melā* into the limelight in local and national media. In sum, the rituals followed regularly have happy consequences on the social life in the city.

The religious prominence of the shrine as Bābā Farīd's house and being the principal sacred space in the region has remained intact amongst the faithful; however, its custodians' prestige has shattered seriously, especially after the state's intrusion into the internal matters; the traditional custodian of the shrine is gradually reduced to a mere ceremonial head of the institution. The absolute authority of the saint or the office bearer was thus replaced by the more or less omnipotent but nevertheless anonymous governmental position of the Auqāf administrators, at least partially. The difference, of course, was that the power of the new administrators was not theologically or religiously legitimized but only secularly and ideologically. Though the colonial state avoided such tendencies to disturb ritualistic matters, the post-Partition state systematically preferred to intrude into the centuries-old system of religious-cum-traditional rituals established at the shrine of Bābā Farīd.

The Auqāf Department has affected in many ways the shrine ritual set-up. Through various orders, the Department took over the shrine management along with attached properties, reducing the *sajjāda-nishīn* to the level of dependency for survival. Even further, the Department, on the one hand, changed the established norms themselves in their nature, and on the other hand, deprived the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the prerogative of the only individual authorized to perform those ceremonies. The Bahishtī Darvāza, which is a significant peculiarity of the shrine of Bābā Farīd, and that used to be opened for two nights (every year) since centuries only by the hereditary descendant of Bābā Farīd, is currently opened for five nights - and three of those by the state authorities. Thus, the temporal state authorities have reduced the authority of the shrine's traditional custodian even inside the institution he headed uncontested for centuries. The state officials now manage the affairs of the shrine. On the one hand, the *sajjāda-nishīn* is reduced to be economically dependent on the stipend from the state for his and

his family's survival; on the other hand, he is also made dependent on the state approval for the performance of his reduced symbolic religious-spiritual role as the representative of the buried saint in the shrine.

Therefore, this state involvement has had a heavy impact on the local religious authority of the traditional custodian of the shrine of Bābā Farīd; a mere symbolic head of the shrine performing some rituals during the annual 'urs days, under official control. Moreover, this resulted in a gradual deterioration in the link between the shrine and the local population, thereby remodelling the shrine's local authority. Now the tomb, the Bahishtī Darvāza and the other components of the shrine are there, mediating followers with the Divine, but the most important constituent of the institution, the *sajjāda-nishīn*, the visible representative of the saint, is invisible for his devotees except during some 'urs days.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be gathered that the spiritual domain established by Bābā Farīd and furthered by his spiritual and lineal descendants gradually enhanced the prestige of his shrine, which in turn played a significant role in the religious and spiritual development of the local population of Punjab. During the pre-colonial centuries, the local system of authority around Pakpattan developed in such a way that the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd developed himself at the centre of the cultural life of the region through the rituals and ceremonies he managed and regulated at the shrine. Since its beginning, the rituals followed at the shrine regularly have had blissful results on the social life in the city. For example, the running of the welfare kitchen of the shrine has been feeding thousands of poor daily and has favored the development of a spirit of charity and care for the poor, and the annual 'urs has been an important source of cultural activities as well as of revenue for the city. However, after the mid-19th century, the shrine's local and regional religious-spiritual authority developed in the pre-colonial period was dramatically altered by the encounter with the modern state; the state policies became more critical for the *sajjāda-nishīn*, and this made him gradually more and more dependent upon official settings. As far as the spiritual penetration of the shrine is concerned, its role degraded to a ceremonial institution over time. The role of *jamā'at-khāna* was meant to provide religious and spiritual education to the disciples gradually vanished. The colonizers intentionally refrained from disturbing the ritualistic traditions of the Sufi institutions, at large, except to a level of facilitation of affairs. However, the post-colonial state ultimately challenged the local authority of the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine of Bābā Farīd by interfering more fiercely into financial, managerial, and ritualistic matters of the shrine through the state institution of Auqāf. The ritualistic system followed at the shrine of Bābā Farīd is a source of the attraction of the mass of the local population to the shrine, enhancing its local attendance and following; the politicization of some main rituals has disturbed the traditional centuries-old ritualistic patterns of the shrine. Presently, the shrine itself is financially controlled and run by state officials, and the *sajjāda-nishīn* has become dependent on the state for his and his family's survival and the performance of ceremonial functions of the shrine. Therefore, it can be concluded that the shrine's religious prestige as Bābā Farīd's house remained intact amongst the following. However, the modern state has profoundly affected the shrine's internal religious-spiritual matters and authority in Pakpattan during the recent decades, especially of the *sajjāda-nishīn* of the shrine. The religious role that the shrine holders performed in the earlier centuries is no more visible.

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