

**RESEARCH PAPER****Religious and Cultural Tourism in Sindh: A case study of Sufi Saints of Rural Sindh****Zil-e-Huma**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores the role of the Sufi Shrines in the religious and cultural tourism in Sindh Pakistan. In the religious and cultural life of rituals, saints, traditional beliefs, noises, trance, dance, and music in ethnic healing and spiritual illness/disease, shrines play a crucial role. In addition to being a center of Sufi devotion and religion, it is also a location where Muslims and non-Muslims engage in joyful activities. The spiritual and religious systems of Muslim social organizations, as well as its aesthetic and economic facets, are reflected in the architecture and design of sufi shrines, both locally and internationally. The methodological approach of this article is anthropological and based on the field work. Since visitors from all over the world have been visiting Sufi shrines since the Middle Ages, religious tourism has long been the standard in Sindh. The primary Sufi shrines that are the subject of this study piece are Lal Shabaz Qalandar and mystic poets Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai, Sachal Sar Mast.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Religious, Saints, Sindh, Sufi, Tourism**Introduction**

Religious tourism is widely regarded as the earliest form of tourism, with roots reaching back thousands of years to pilgrimage. Journeys to ancient holy places (settlements, natural components - streams, mountains, trees) lacked modern logistical support but shared the same human motivation: faith. This sometimes-excessive faith served as the foundation for the establishment of religions (Rinschede, 1992). Human type, environmental conditions, culture, and society's advancement all contribute to their diversity and complexity. Millions of individuals travel around the world seeking spiritual advice and hallowed sites. The Sufi shrine is considered a living heritage because of its ongoing cultural significance in the South Asian environment. Due to the large number of sites that reflect many religious and cultural backgrounds, Pakistan is a growing yet mostly undiscovered destination for religious tourism (Cohen, 2006).

Sindh's prominence as a religious tourism destination stems from the Sufi Saints' dedication to people worldwide, especially those from South Asia. The political, cultural, historical, and geographic context of living heritage sites is closely related to them (Irfan & Ali, 2020). This study aims to provide a thorough explanation of the development of a living heritage site at a Sufi shrine. In the Rural Sindh, there is no district of Sindh where there is no big or a small shrine like Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai tomb in District Hyderabad, Makhdoom Fatehuddin Shah Jehanian, Makhdoom Nuh, Hala Town, Syed Abdul Wahab Shah Jilani, in Dadu District Mohammad Usman Marwandi (Lal Shahbaz Qalander), Shah Sadar Lakyari, Sikander Shah Bodlo, Sehwan Sharif, in Sukkur District Shah Khairuddin Jilani, Bharchondi Sharif, Ghotki and similar there are a number of other Sufi Siant Shines which are visited by the people on their Hurs and other important dates (Khan, 2011).

A circle of religious tourism has been established throughout Sindh as a result of these trips. While it is impossible to address the religious and cultural significance of every Sufi shrine in Sindh, a thorough discussion of some of the most significant shrines and their

significance for religious and cultural tourism takes place. Travel for religious or spiritual reasons, or pilgrimage, and the viewing of religious structures and artifacts, which is a subset of sightseeing, are the two main genres of religious tourism, also known as spiritual tourism, sacred tourism, or faith tourism. Some of the people have the attraction with the Sufis as they developed a culture to visit these shrines every year and to pass some time on the tomb of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar which shows the devotion of the people towards Shrines and the Sufis (Abbas, et al, 2020).

As the religious tourism includes the travel for the religious and spiritual bonds and to view the religious monuments artefacts which does not mean that those people to come to the Shrines to tour who have direct faith relation with the Sufi or the Sufism. Some of the tourists consider it as the historical site and visit these sites. In the same way every year a number of non-Muslims from all over the world visit these shrines. Sufi shrines are visited by people for a variety of reasons as a result of their traditions and devotion. The majority of the people who frequent Sufi shrines are either urban poor or members of marginalized social groups. The majority of the yearning guests at Sufi shrines on the eve of Urs, the Sufi saint's death anniversary, are drawn from underprivileged social groups, such as Khusraay (transvestites), Malangs (religious mendicants), prostitutes, singers, fortune tellers, traditional healers, etc. Another feature of the well-known religious practice of marginalized people, particularly in Sindh, is the Dhamal (Shah, 2023).

### **Literature Review**

On religious and cultural tourism, a plethora of literature has been produced both by the indigenous and the foreign scholars. Some of the peer reviewed articles on the cultural and religious tourism in Sindh are reviewed to trace out the research gap for this research article. An article written by Aftikar Ahmed Charan et al (2018) with the title "Cultural and Religious Perspective on the Sufi Shrines" in which author has discussed overall the role of the Shrines in cultural and religious perspective in Pakistan. This article explains the significance of Sufi shrines in Pakistani society. Shrines have a significant role in cultural and religious practices, including rituals, Saints, traditional beliefs, music, dancing, ethnic healing, and spiritual illness/disease (Muzaffar. & Rafique, 2020). It is more than just a location of religion and devotion centered on Sufi shrines; it is also a place where Muslims and non-Muslims can enjoy happiness together. Sufi Shrines' design and construction have both local and global influences, representing the spiritual, religious systems, economic, and aesthetic components of Muslim social institutions. As a result, Muslims' relationship with Sufi shrines is significant from a traditional, political, social, and economic standpoint (Charan, Wang, & Yao, 2018). A similar approach is adopted by Masooma , (2018) that living heritage sites are intrinsically linked to their historical, geographical, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts. This study aims to provide a descriptive narrative of the evolution of a Sufi shrine's living heritage site. It examines the evolving link between geographical and socio-cultural factors across time. The bigger or macro regional context is inextricably linked to the micro architectural context. The tangible heritage is defined and inextricably linked to the intangible parts of the heritage. The research thesis investigates and analyzes the macro and micro aspects, as well as their interrelationships, particularly through space and architecture. In South Asian Pakistan, the Sufi shrine represents a greater precolonial tradition (Manzoor & Shah, 2018).

Verily, the religious tourism in Sindh is also discussed in the domain of socio-economic and cultural aspects. It has been discussed by Sarfaraz Ahmed that Sufi shrines abound in Pakistan, and they have enormous economic, cultural, and societal implications. Sajjada Nasheen has a significant influence on poor and uneducated people in Pakistan's rural areas (Hussain, 2021).The purpose of this research is to look into the socioeconomic and cultural effects of Sufi shrines in Mitthan Kot's rural communities. This study employs a qualitative research technique by conducting in-depth interviews with various stakeholders. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This investigation reveals a

connection between the local population and shrines based on dire facts. Shrine-related employment opportunities include clothing shops, food services, and transportation, contributing to both the local and national economies. Similarly, they appreciate cultural gatherings (Haq & Medhekar, 2018). Furthermore, this approach is adopted by the Mubhat Ali that it looks at how both communities are altering the joint Jhule Lal complex. Sindhi Hindus wield more power, as they dominate the entire management and decision-making process, whereas Sindhi Muslims lack power and authority, necessitating Hindu permission for unilateral decisions. The Jhule Lal complex, located next to the Balanbo Sahib region, has a principal shrine, a mosque, and the Jot's room/temple. Previously, Muslim followers frequented the Balanbo Sahib location for rituals, but this tradition was discontinued after its transition. Hindus constructed a Shiv shrine, an equestrian statue, and decorated the main gates with Hindu symbolism (Shakir, 2018).

### **Material and Methods**

A case study studying religious and cultural tourism focusing on rural Sindh's Sufi saints is based on the qualitative research techniques which include both the primary and the secondary documented sources along with the field work of the two three main Sufi Saints Shrines of Sindh. Primary data is collected in the form field work by observing these Shrines during the Urs period to know the perspective of the religious tourists. Academic journals, books, tourism reports, government publications, and reliable internet resources about Sufism, Sindh tourism, and religious tourism's economic impact. To establish a theoretical framework and context, review past research and identify gaps (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016).

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Religious Tourism in Rural Sindh**

Sindh is the province with the richest historical heritage out of the four. It has a roughly 4,000-year history. It is widely acknowledged that this area is home to some of the earliest civilizations in the world. The people who live in Sindh have traditions and rituals that are a reflection of the region's past, which has had a significant influence on prevailing social norms (Rehman, 2016). It is impossible for any visitor to not taking in the area's vitality and cultural spirit. It's interesting to note that locals still enjoy a very diverse range of customs, cultures, and culinary traditions. This may surprise visitors from other countries who typically anticipate a more homogeneous local culture. Many Sufi texts refer to Sindh as the home of the Sufis since the Suhrawardy Sufis established their formal capital in Sind and were the first to settle in India. Many believers were inspired and encouraged by the generosity, love, and devotion of the Suhrawardy Sufis. Sindh is now teeming with ancient cemeteries, saints' shrines, and spiritual leaders' shrines, all connected to the afterlife. These monuments, which are a part of Pakistan's legacy, are dispersed around the province. The most well-known Sufis of Sindh were Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and Shachal because of their lyrical poetry and philosophy, however there were many more Sufis as well, such as Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Abdullah Shah Ghazi Qalander Baba Auliya, and Pir Mangho (Abbas, et al, 2020)

#### **Religious Tourism and cultural Patterns**

Religious tourism involves physical travel to seek answers to crucial concerns, such as the meaning of life or the purpose of one's life. Many notable sufi adepts lived in the area and are still honored today (Shah, 2023). The Sehwan Sharif shrine, dedicated to the 12th-century sufi master Syed Muhammad Usman Marwandi, also known as Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, draws both Muslims and Hindu worshippers. People from all over the world use to visit Lal Shabaz Qalandar's tomb, and during Urs's time, people traveled from far and wide to pay tribute to the Sufi saint. In essence, it offers a source for religious tourism as well as

a means of promoting rural Sindhi culture and providing a means of cultural tourism. The little Pakistani city of Sehwan is home to the shrine of Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (Fatima, Naeem & Rasool, 2016). At the annual Urs celebration, which takes place over three days to honor the saint's death anniversary, thousands of devotees travel to Sehwan. At the urs, men, women, and transgender individuals participate in a variety of rites, the most notable of which is the devotional dancing known as dhamaal. The shrine area offers followers—the majority of whom are impoverished—a communal non-verbal expression in the form of dhamaal both during and outside of urs. Dhamaal allows the body to express itself in a society that would not often support it in public. According to this idea, the Sufi discourse in Sehwan transforms a devotee's body into an expressive one (Kalhoro, 2018).

This shows that annually thousands of people visit the tomb of the Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is a part of the religious tourism which promotes the basic tenants of culture of Sindh and amalgamate a number of culture patterns with the people who visit the Shrines of Sindh. As a whole it has developed a cultural chain of religious culture among the people (Qamber, 2008). With in the local people, it has developed a spiritual devotion towards the Shirins. The tourists from Sindh and other parts of Pakistan believe that these Pirs or the Saints have something unique which has taught the world to come and live together in their Shrines like other religious holy places (Ali, 2023).

Along with this, the tomb of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and other Sufis has become a source of economy for both the government and the local people who during the Urs do a number of businesses in the form of food industry, religious outfits and articles, residence and a number of other sources of economic generation has been developed with religious and cultural tourism of Sindh. This is considered as another positive aspect of religious and cultural tourism which has been ignored by the researcher and the authorities. Thess Shrines are not only a source of religious tourism but also economically benefitting the region where the particular Shine is built and its has become a source of identity for Sindh and the Sindhi culture (Raza, 2017).

Sindh has the most extensive historical history of any of the four provinces. It has a history of almost 4,000 years. The region is often regarded as one of the world's oldest cradles of civilization. Sindhi traditions and customs represent the region's history, which has influenced modern cultural norms. Any tourist who visits the area cannot not but feel its cultural energy and vibrancy. Interestingly, there is still a lot of diversity in the customs, culture, and food loved by the people, which may surprise international tourists who expect more homogeneity in a region's culture. Sachal Sar Mast is a leading Sufi in Sindh whose Shrine is also visited by a large number of tourists on daily basis (Boivin, 2020). Abdul Wahab Sachal Sar Mast (1739-1826) is a lasting symbol of Pakistan's cultural unity among diversity. His artistic genius was expressed in a variety of folk languages spoken throughout modern-day Pakistan. He has composed poetry in both the elite languages of Persian and Urdu, as well as folk idioms from the regions. The Shrine of Schal is equally visited by the literature tourist because of his philosophical poems and his understanding through his sayings and other teachings while it is a common notion that the people who prefer the religious tourism are the backward people but the truth is contrary to this in rural Sindh. People are more diverted towards Schal not only because of his religious services only but his poetry has also remained a source for people attraction towards him. The rural as well as the Urban Sindh has considered these Sufi Shrines as light for the people who are source of guidance for all the people and especially for the people of Sindh (Ibad, 2018).

Another Sufi poet shrine that has attracted a huge number of tourists throughout the years is the Shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai. Bhitshah is a small town in Taluka Hala District Matiari, located in the lower Indus Valley (Sindh, Pakistan). It is a twin city of Hala, situated 202 kilometers from Karachi and 250 kilometers from Sukkur, and is home to the Lansdowne Bridge and Lloyd Barrage. Bhitshah is a culturally significant sacred site that many tourists and researchers visit. It is the major means of connecting human souls all

across the world. The tomb of Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai is located on the mound of a sandy dune known as "Bhit," which Shah established as the center of spiritual rites between 1668 and 1752 A.D. People of various faiths and religions are involved throughout the year (Khan, 2015).

Around 400-500 individuals/tourists attend for spiritual fulfillment during major occasions such as the Annual Urs, where a large number of devotees gather (300,000 to 400,000 people). Adjacent to the temple, there are hallowed sites called as "Hujra and Wadi-Otaque" where tourists and visitors can connect spiritually. Poor and rich, illiterate and literate, research scientists from all over the world, as well as individuals of all faiths and religions, come to "Hujra" to seek the cause of humanity (Cohen, 2006). The shrine structure is expansive, with two main entrances on the south and north sides. It is a place that plays Sufi music 24 hours a day. It is a voice that brings people's hearts together across borders. If we listen to Shah-Jo-Raag, we shall become citizens of a global village that values peace because Shah teaches us how to love others. The echo of a lovely voice is a form of communication that conveys messages of peace and tolerance. It naturally connects people's hearts and aims to bring them together. The spiritual music is a beautiful blend of voices with a true echo, allowing listeners to link people's hearts all over the world and become peaceful members of the global village (Haq & Medhekar, 2018).

Collectively, a high level of tourism in the form of religious and cultural tourism in Sindh, as there are a number of other small and big Shines which are part of this tourism. This religious tourism in Sindh has brought the people closer with each other while meeting at these shrines and sites monthly or annually. On the other hand, on these sites some people have created their permanent abodes and are living and earning on these Shrines and welcome the tourist all the time and some of the Malangs who consider themselves as the Mureed or the followers of the Sufis also live permanently on these Shrines. The Sufi Shrines has become a part of the Muslim society in Sindh as a whole which can never be separated after the cultural domain of Sindh after the establishment of a number of modern modes and understanding (Irfan & Ali, 2020).

Another important Sufi Shrine in Sindh is essential in the context of religious tourism is the Shrine of Shah Abdul Karim, was born in Matiari, a spiritualist and Islamic teaching center in southern Sindh, in the year 944 A.H. He was descended from the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) and came from a Sayyid family that was well recognized for its piety and scholarship, but he could only recite two passages from the Holy Quran in the dialect known as Thenazerah. Instead, he found himself pulled to the sama's sessions and the gatherings of Sufis. The Tomb of Shah Abdul Kareem is playing a great role in religious tourism as it is seen that the tourists are equal to other Sufi Saints Shrines on yearly bases (Mahbub-ul-Alam, Khan & Islam, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Sufi saints in rural Sindh are not only religious luminaries, but cultural icons who have made substantial contributions to the region's social and cultural fabric. Their teachings, which promote peace, tolerance, and universal brotherhood, have a tremendous impact on both the local population and visitors. This study emphasizes how these ideals are passed down through music, poetry, and rituals performed at their shrines. Religious and cultural tourism involving Sufi saints has a significant economic influence in rural Sindh. The flood of pilgrims and tourists during the yearly Urs celebrations generates significant money and employment opportunities for nearby communities. These economic benefits, however, must be balanced against the need for long-term measures that protect and preserve the sacred places' cultural heritage and environment. Managing the growing number of tourists and the infrastructure needs they impose on rural regions poses substantial issues. There is a need for improved facilities, transportation, and services that meet the needs of both local and international visitors while maintaining the sanctity and

traditional nature of the shrines and their surrounds. The report suggests numerous ways to improve the management of religious and cultural tourism in rural Sindh. These include improving visitor experiences by providing better educational resources about Sufi culture, improving infrastructure, supporting environmentally friendly practices, and encouraging community involvement in tourism development to ensure that economic gains are delivered equitably.

There is an urgent need for coordinated efforts to protect the physical and intangible cultural treasures associated with Sufi saints. This involves preserving ancient structures, supporting traditional arts and crafts, and protecting the spiritual practices and festivals that are central to the Sufi way of life. The government and non-governmental organizations play an important role in promoting and regulating tourism in rural Sindh. Effective regulations encouraging ethical tourism, protecting heritage monuments, and promoting local culture are critical for the sector's long-term success. Religious and cultural tourism centered on rural Sindh's Sufi saints provides a unique chance to highlight the region's rich legacy while also promoting economic development. Stakeholders must prioritize sustainable practices, cultural heritage protection, and tourist experience enhancement in order to achieve long-term growth. This study reveals that by using a comprehensive and integrated strategy, Sindh can strike a healthy balance between cultural preservation and economic development, ensuring that this distinct component of its character continues to thrive and attract people from all over the world.

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