



Experiential Religiosity between Pir (Patron) and Murid (Client): Access of Patron-Client Relationship to Public Organization

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ABSTRACT

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This research delves into the symbiotic relationship between experiential religiosity and patron-client dynamics, focusing on how Murids' access to public organizations is shaped by these interactions. The study, centered in Golra Sharif, Islamabad, employs qualitative methods, utilizing face-to-face interviews with 20 respondents (17 Murids, 3 Pirs). Pirs play a pivotal role in guiding Murids on their religiosity journey, fostering physical, social, and psychological connections. In reciprocation, Murids hold Pirs in high esteem as spiritual guides, endowing them with authority and power. The patron-client relationship, viewed as a parent-like bond, proves unchallenging for followers of Pir Sahib. Findings underscore the strategic deployment of experiential religiosity and patron-client relations for mutual benefit. Shared values, ethics, religious beliefs, and social practices fortify their connection. Interestingly, a patriarchal nature is evident within the shrine system, particularly affecting female respondents, yet this dynamic is absent within the house of Pir Sahib. The research reveals that the patron-client relationship extends beyond the spiritual realm, providing tangible benefits. Murids gain access to public spheres through their connection with Pirs, while Pirs enhance their social reputation and management capabilities within the Golra Sharif system.

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Introduction

This study examines the strategic deployment of experiential religiosity and the patron-client relationship as tools for less privileged Murids to access public organizations, facilitated by the authority and power of Pirs. Grounded in loyalty, respect, trust, and social exchange, the Pir-Murid relationship is characterized by the influential role of Pirs and the reciprocal influence of Murids. Building on Stephen M. Lyon's work on power and patronage, this research explores how these dynamics extend beyond households, shaping labor relations across societal contexts. The study also draws parallels with South Asian politics, where patronage, particularly during elections, involves patrons providing benefits to followers (clients), who reciprocate with votes. The research aims to unravel the intricate interplay of experiential religiosity and the patron-client relationship, shedding light on how these dynamics facilitate access to public organizations for less privileged Murids (Lyon, 2002).

A research characterized patronage as a relationship between individuals of unequal authority bound by personal gains, friendship, and shared interests, manipulating the connection for mutual satisfaction (Weingrod, 1968). Historically, patronage was a unique and ancient system based on mutual commitment and loyalty between sponsors and servants, creating an enduring and powerful bond. The foundation of patron-client relations lies in inequality and reciprocity, extending beyond differences in power, wealth, and social status to encompass a superior-inferior dynamic. Reciprocity, beyond material exchange, involves elements of volunteerism and personal choice (Powell, 1970), encapsulating the essence of these enduring and multifaceted relationships.

Dependency theory forms the bedrock of patron-client relations, extending its implications to international politics. Carney's work (1989) extensively explores the patron-client relationship in the context of less developed and well-developed countries, particularly the connections between the United States, China, and developing nations. This influence transcends its original rural setting, playing a pivotal role in linking urban and rural power structures and serving as a pathway for social advancement. Beyond geopolitics, patron-client dynamics persist in religious institutions, notably between Pirs and their Murids. Shrines, Sufi saints' *darbars*, and *Majalis* locations, particularly the renowned Golra Sharif shrine, foster expansive religious and social networks driven by experiential religiosity. These religious beliefs and practices, shaped by individual circumstances and settlements, embody experiential religiosity, manifesting diverse responses, beliefs, and prayers toward encountering the divine and supernatural. (Schwartz, Ben-Nun Bloom, Solak, & Tamir, 2019).

Experiential religiosity is pivotal for both Pir and Murid in reinforcing their faith system. The Pir, as the spiritual leader, guides individuals on the right path, drawing on a profound religious experience. Meanwhile, Murids, often less privileged, develop a robust faith in the shrine through ancestral ties and experiences shared by others. This reciprocal relationship is marked by unconditional and un-instrumental factors, enhancing the efficiency of the patron-client dynamic. Lyon's study (2002) underscores the cultural and familial foundations of patron-client relationships in developing countries, particularly among economically stable Pirs with

elite connections. In the unique context of Golra Sharif, Islamabad, a research gap exists regarding the role of patron-client relations as a strategy for Murids to access organizations. Pirs, with diverse social networks, leverage connections with businessmen, Zamindars, and others to assist Murids, creating a web of interdependence. Additionally, the spiritual bond between Pir and Murid involves the Pir facilitating physical, social, and psychological contact, resulting in Murids granting honor and respect. This spiritual relationship translates into power and authority for the Pir, representing another facet of the patron-client dynamic. Beyond the religious sphere, political figures with significant landholdings exhibit evidence of the interplay between religious, land, and political powers. Pirs, often holding political influence, collaborate with followers in reciprocal ways, offering jobs and opportunities. This multifaceted patron-client relationship underscores the intricate connections between religious, social, and political dimensions in the context of Golra Sharif.

Sufis and shrines wield significant political influence over believers, fostering a reciprocal relationship where believers may undertake additional efforts for them. Johnson (2008) highlights the patron-client dynamic between Pirs and Murids, emphasizing how the perceived weaknesses of believers can lead to salvation, particularly prevalent in Islamic societies. Paracha's study echoes these implications, noting that the social security responsibilities of saints or Pirs in khanqahs align with the exercise of power akin to ruling elites. Followers, akin to tools for elites, are used to both gain and lose power. Golra Sharif, with its longstanding, affluent Pirs and a widespread Murid base, serves as a pertinent case study to unveil insights into these relationships. This research concentrates on the application of experiential religiosity, emphasizing how Murids strategically leverage patron-client relations to access organizations and cultivate a strong, loyalty-based bond with Pirs

Problem statement

This study delves into the application of experiential religiosity in the Pir-Murid relationship in Pakistan, specifically in Golra Sharif, Islamabad. Focused on the profound faith in shrines and Pirs, the research explores the dynamics of blind faith and the roles Murids play in enhancing their Pirs' shrine reputation. It also examines how Pirs influence the social and economic lives of their Murids, exploring mutual benefits within public organizations. Despite extensive exploration of the patron-client relationship in agricultural and household contexts, a notable gap exists in understanding the application of experiential religiosity in the Pir-Murid relationship, warranting investigation in Golra Sharif.

2.0 Theoretical framework

The research relies on the Social Exchange Theory by George Homans to analyze and validate phenomena. This theory, emphasizing mutual obligations in social relations, offers a powerful framework for understanding workplace behavior. Rooted in the concept of social exchange, theorists, including Emerson (1967), agree that interactions form a series of obligations. This theoretical foundation serves as a lens to examine the dynamics of experiential religiosity within the Pir-Murid relationship, providing insights into the mutual obligations and interactions shaping this social exchange.

Homans asserts that relationships face termination if the costs outweigh rewards, emphasizing the need for a two-way, complementary dynamic in successful friendships. Social exchange, as per Homans, involves the interchange of tangible or abstract actions within society and interpersonal connections. Scholars like Peter M. Blau and Richard M. Emerson extended Homans' work, advancing the exchange perspective in sociology. Lévi-Strauss contributed anthropologically, focusing on comprehensive exchange systems in familial relationships and gift exchange. This framework guides the examination of experiential religiosity in the Pir-Murid relationship in this study.

The Social Exchange Theory, foundational to various theories, extends to cognitive orientations such as norms of justice, reciprocity, and equity. In intimate relationships, these norms shape expectations for proportionate distribution of rewards, and violations may lead to complaints and efforts to restore fairness. Trust, a crucial element, hinges on the belief that partners won't exploit each other, fostering commitment. Exchange theorists anticipate commitment in relationships with reciprocal rewards and high trust levels, enhancing stability. The theory also sheds light on power dynamics, where dependence and power are inversely related, emphasizing the role of resources in determining power. Applied to the relationship between Pirs and Murids, the theory posits a long-term exchange for mutual benefits, ranging from power and material resources to access to public institutions, built on trust, commitment, and reciprocity.

2.1 Literature Review

In diverse settlements and times, people structure their lives around agreed-upon orders and principles, forming societies and communities. Many researches emphasize that individuals, as social beings, are guided by rules, norms, and beliefs, constituting the systems they adhere to. Religion, as the experiential religiosity, involves encountering the divine and supernatural, observed and followed based on circumstances and settlements (Vishkin & Bloom, 2019; Chen et al., 2020). Islam, the second-largest monotheistic religion, has spread globally, adapting to various cultures while maintaining core tenets (Sumbal, 2016). In the Indian subcontinent, Sufi saints played a pivotal role in vernacularizing Islam's teachings, becoming icons for locals to follow (Roy, 1983). Sufism, challenged but resilient, persisted through oral traditions, tales, poetry, and manuscripts, preserving its cultural and doctrinal relevance (Gross, 2020). Sufi deities established sanctuaries and shrines, attracting devoted followers known as "Murids" who seek satisfaction and salvation through ritualistic practices and offerings (Renard, 1996). Devotees visit these holy places with hopes and wishes, making unique offerings that constitute a belief system, understanding the nature and obligations of their gratuities (Eaton, 1982). Eaton underscores the profound attachment of devotees to sacred places and saints, shaping their responses to subjective crises such as infertility, land disputes, unemployment, and marriage problems. Shrines serve as privileged spaces where devotees bring personal issues, offering gratuities and prayers in hopes of rectification by the saints. Within the social context of shrines, Sufi saints assume a patronage role, while murids act as clients rewarded for their beliefs and ritualistic practices.

Johnson argues that individuals' tolerance and understanding of their belief system shape their realities and perceptions, influencing their interactions with the outer world. This parallels

the hierarchical patron-client relationship, with patrons acting as mediators between clients and the supreme deity, engaging in an exchange relationship for desires and blessings (Johnson, 2008). Younas and Kamal's study in Pakistan confirms the presence and influence of the patron-client relationship, impacting societal behavior (Younas & Kamal, 2019). The nature of patrons is seen as influential, mediating between clients and the supreme deity, exchanging favors with the expectation of repayment.

The study of patron-client relations has evolved from a marginal position in the late fifties to central importance. Early studies focused on dyadic interpersonal relations, expanding to broader social relations and organizations (Roniger, 1980). The relationship patterns between pirs and murids are akin to patronage, with the pir as the influencer and the murid as the influence. The pir's superior status is established through person-centered power, earned as a provider, protector, educator, and value-source. The murid, in turn, relies on the pir for guidance without much consideration (Saxeboel, 2002). The responsibilities of the pir in the patronage relationship extend beyond providing blessings and teachings for salvation. Pirs play a crucial role in sustaining the relationship and guiding the devotees through changing situations, ensuring compliance with the ethical standards associated with their position (Rajjak, 2017).

The Pir-murid relationship is marked by allegiances, exchange processes, and reciprocity, formed through the exchange of 'Daan' and gratuities. This social exchange involves active individuals whose behaviors become ritual markers, shaping their religious experiences and defining religiosity (Pinto, 1995). Reciprocity, a defining feature of social life, governs this relationship, with both direct and generalized reciprocity fostering positive feelings and countering power inequality effects (Levine, 2008; Molm, 2010).

The relationship's embedded methods are self-educating, adapting principles and rules over time, providing incentives based on prevailing needs (Alimova, 2020). Multifaceted and multi-staged, it initially aligns with populist Sufism for rural practitioners, emphasizing spirituality, rituals, and belief in the power of Pirs. Later stages involve an aesthetic interweaving of roles, with the Pir as the holy man and leader and the Murid as the devoted disciple (Khan, 2015)

This relationship influences society on various fronts, affecting literacy, political involvement, and organizational inclusion criteria. Studies suggest its deep-rooted nature amidst mainstream beliefs, cultural traditions, and socio-economic strata, perpetuating its relevance and utility (Pemberton, 2006). Shrines and Pirs are seen as having political access and organizational interventions in Pakistan, with devoted followers considering it spiritually obligatory to follow their Pir's guidance (Kalhoro, Jhatial, & Khokhar, 2017). Powerful shrine families directly entering politics in tehsils contribute to their influence.

In Pakistani politics, figures like Shah Mahmood Qureshi highlight the background of religious political family powers influenced by Sufism and Pirs. The post-9/11 era witnessed the promotion of Islam and Sufism in politics, solidifying Sufism's importance. Paracha (2020) argues that saints or pirs, along with their sacred places (khanqah), exercise power akin to ruling elites due to their large follower base. Similar to ruling elites using followers for power dynamics,

Pirs and Shrines utilize resources to meet their interests. This widespread power of the Pir-Murid relationship extends across political, cultural, spiritual, and traditional domains (Eaton, 1982).

The shrines and their legitimate titleholders wield spiritual, political, and traditional influence, enabling them to impact institutions and organizations, including the economy (Malik & Mirza, 2015). Pirs hold a monopoly over economic resources within shrines, owning associated lands and places. This economic influence extends to rural areas, where professional entities offer mandatory services to manage public affairs (Strothmann, 2016; Ibadat, 2016). Social exchange, foundational to any society, involves people interacting based on social needs. In Pakistan's agrarian economy, patronage emerges as a popular social interaction, influencing household-level interactions in rural areas (Chaudhary & Voyborny, 2013). Patronage is characterized by inequality and reciprocity, with the relationship being mutual and binary, driven by commitment and loyalty (Hussain, 2012; Weingrod, 1968). It involves individuals of unequal authority linked through personal gains, friendship, and shared interests, creating a relationship of exchange between two unequal partners (Powell, 1970).

Dependence is a key element in patron-client relationships, with the Murid dependent on the Pir in various aspects of life. This asymmetrical, long-term relationship is rooted in love, trust, and fictive relations, influencing various societal areas, particularly in agriculture (Lyon, 2002). The Indian subcontinent has been a suitable place for studying different facets of social exchange, showcasing its multidisciplinary, self-sustaining nature.

Studies on patron-client relationships extend globally, with Hicken (2011) examining the conceptual framework in the United States and comparing it with South Asia. These relations involve contingent or reciprocal exchanges and are asymmetrical yet based on voluntary compliance from both parties. In urbanized regions of Pakistan, relationships between household employees and employers often resemble patron-client dynamics, characterized by loyalty, trust, and material exchange.

Lyon (2002) emphasizes the development of honored fictive relationships between patrons and their families and their clients (murids). Female clients in households are often referred to as sisters, addressing them as bhaji (sister of the same generation), massi (mother's sister, elder), or beti (daughter). Maintaining modesty in front of male members is expected, and clients form familial fictive relationships, such as declaring patrons as fathers, big brothers, or younger brothers and sons.

In domestic service, moral values and personality outweigh specific skills. The relationship is not product-oriented, and its personalized, diffuse nature reinforces and legitimizes dependency. The communication in patron-client relationships occurs when the patron acts as the communicator, and the clients act as communicants implementing the message. This communication dynamic may lead to potential conflicts, disharmony, or a dissociative relationship.

Gross (2020) notes that the benefits and obligations in patron-client relationships are unlimited, fostering an open-ended relationship where both parties are morally obligated to support each other. Social networking plays a crucial role in motivating patrons to perform

efficiently and maintain an obligatory relationship. This networking, based on trust, indebtedness, and loyalty, ensures a strong and time-tested relationship. The concept of indebtedness is crucial in retaining murids, as the patron-client relationship ensures loyalty and mutual assistance in times of need. The literature review has been instrumental in understanding complex concepts, shaping research objectives, questions, and the theoretical framework. It has guided the researcher in developing an accurate interview guide tailored to the relevant topic and respondents, providing a clear direction for exploring the system of piri muridi.

3.0 Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study involves a qualitative approach, focusing on participant observation, key informant interviews, socio-economic census, sampling, in-depth interviews, case study methods, focus group discussions, and field notes. The qualitative research approach is chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiential religiosity and patron-client relationships between Pirs and Murids in the context of Golra Sharif, Islamabad. The participant observation method is employed to immerse the researcher in the daily activities of the participants, gaining natural data and understanding their behaviors. Key informants, particularly those with a long association with the shrine, offer valuable insights. Socio-economic census helps in capturing baseline data about the community, and purposive sampling is utilized to select participants with at least a decade of experience. In-depth interviews allow for detailed exploration of personal feelings and opinions. Case studies are employed to highlight real-life experiences, while focus group discussions provide diverse perspectives. Field notes and jotting aid in recording observations, and thematic analysis is applied for data interpretation and presentation. Research ethics and reflexivity are considered throughout the study to ensure ethical conduct and critical self-awareness. The study aims to shed light on the unique dynamics of the patron-client relationship and experiential religiosity in the Golra Sharif community.

4.0 Results

The findings of the study reveal the significant role of belief systems and experiential religiosity in influencing everyday lives, particularly within the context of religious practices. Religion, as a dominant element in society, is structured around ethical codes, belief in deities, and experiences of supernatural powers. Experiential religiosity, rooted in firsthand encounters with the divine, varies among individuals and groups, shaped by their unique circumstances and cultural backgrounds.

One of my respondent said that, *“when my daughter became a victim of black magic. Despite attempting conventional medical solutions without success, we turned to Pir Mehr Ali Shah at Golra Sharif for assistance. Under Pir's guidance, the shrine provided us with amulets, sacred water, and written verses. Remarkably, these interventions led to the gradual recovery of my daughter.”*

This case study underscores the powerful role of faith, the influential presence of Pirs, and the reliance on religious remedies within the Golra Sharif community. The study focuses on the specific case of Golra Sharif, where people visit religious places to seek the favor of their

Gods, engaging in various rituals for purification. The case study illustrates the powerful impact of faith, as individuals turn to religious practices, such as "zyarat" and prayers, to address personal challenges, including illnesses and social issues. Pirs, particularly Pir Mehr Ali Shah, hold immense influence in the community, with a large following seeking spiritual guidance and assistance for various afflictions, ranging from physical ailments to supernatural problems.

A detailed case study highlights the story of a murid whose daughter fell victim to black magic. Traditional medical approaches failed, leading the family to seek the help of Pir Mehr Ali Shah. The shrine provided amulets, sacred water, and written verses, contributing to the slow recovery of the daughter. The case underscores the strong faith and reliance on religious cures, emphasizing the significance of experiential religiosity.

During the interviews, I noted a consistent sentiment among respondents, including a doctor, who expressed their unwavering belief in pirs, portraying them as spiritual healers and highlighting the pivotal role of religious practices in addressing physical and spiritual afflictions. The majority of muridain (followers/clients), as the respondent said, *"perceive shrines as inclusive spaces that transcend sects and social classes. The concept of becoming a "Malang" and entering a trance state was emphasized by participants, depicting it as a profound connection with Allah."*

During the interview and conducted many interviews *"In observing the interviews, I found that the findings unveiled the coexistence of diverse Islamic beliefs and practices, emphasizing the intricate interplay of social, cultural, and religious dimensions in human life. I noted that the strong faith in shrines, particularly pronounced among less privileged individuals, was reiterated by participants, with a reliance on religious narratives and experiences passed down through generations. Additionally, I observed that the socio-religious network formed by elite-class muridain significantly contributes to the shrine's popularity and activities"*

The study's findings illuminate a nuanced interplay of social and religious dynamics at Golra Sharif, where belief systems, experiential religiosity, fictive relations, and the concept of mannat hold paramount significance. Religious belief systems are intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life, influencing ethical codes and responses to supernatural phenomena. Experiential religiosity, grounded in firsthand encounters with the divine and active participation in religious rituals, plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' spiritual perspectives. The term "experiential religiosity" encompasses the varied experiences, responses, beliefs, and practices that collectively contribute to one's religious identity.

The case studies presented offer poignant examples of how belief and experiential religiosity guide individuals in seeking solutions to diverse challenges, including physical ailments, mental health issues, and encounters with supernatural forces. Notably, the cases underscore the central role of Pir Mehr Ali Shah in addressing these concerns through religious interventions and rituals. The social structure at Golra Sharif is characterized by the shrine serving as a communal focal point. During events like Urs, muridain converge at the serai, while long-term residents live permanently within the shrine's premises. A significant aspect is the active participation of females, with younger girls selflessly serving the shrine without financial

compensation. This underscores the prominence and authority of female followers within the shrine.

Fictive relations emerge as a notable aspect of the social structure at Golra Sharif, resembling honorary kinship. Muridain are integrated into the Pir's household, forming deep bonds that extend beyond conventional patron-client relationships. Mujawirs and young boys serving the shrine exemplify the profound fictive relations that characterize their connection with the Pir. The concept of *mannat*, a practice involving the making of wishes or vows at the shrine, is prevalent among devotees. Personal experiences shared by respondents highlight the role of the shrine in fulfilling their desires, with promises of specific actions made in gratitude for the realization of their wishes.

Material Services and Exchange

This part of the research provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected through in-depth interviews conducted with the murids and their pirs in the locale of Golra Sharif, Islamabad. The focus is on the shrine of Golra Sharif, with a specific case study of Pir Mehr Ali Shah and an exploration of the relationship between the pir and their muridain.

Golra Sharif's shrine is recognized not only as a religious center but also as a significant influence on the social, economic, and political life of the people. The sacred nature of pirs and their shrines contributes to the complex institution they represent, with internal organization and systems performing various functions. Individuals arriving at the shrine undergo training for specific roles and duties related to the pir and the shrine. This training instills a form of experiential religiosity, fostering true believers in their faith. The strong social relations between the pir and murid, reinforced by various exchanges, play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics observed in this research.

The chapter delves into the theme of exchanges, categorizing activities that promote cooperation and mutualism between patrons (pirs) and clients (murids) into material services and exchanges. These material exchanges encompass religious and emotional support, negotiations, consultations, financial assistance, and public relations benefits. Murids express the view that these exchanges are essential for maintaining strong and faithful relations. The perceptions of murids regarding exchanges are explored, revealing instances of material exchanges between the murids and their pirs. The act of giving gifts, such as money or other items, is linked to the belief that it will bring happiness and, in return, murids receive prayers and support from their pirs.

The dependency between patrons (pirs) and clients (murids) is a prominent theme in the chapter. Murids express a high level of dependency on their pirs for various aspects of their lives, including health, marriage decisions, and conflict resolution. The mutual dependency is seen as a fundamental element in strengthening the bond between the two. The chapter highlights the murids' perspective on the shrine as a place where they can fulfill their religious needs and receive blessings. The concept of "DUM" is emphasized, with murids considering it essential for their well-being. The shrine is portrayed as a source of spiritual guidance, and murids share their experiences of seeking help from the shrine in times of illness or other challenges. Additionally, the chapter touches on the perception of pirs regarding the role of murids in supporting the shrine.

Pirs acknowledge the significant contributions of murids, not only in material terms but also in the upkeep of the shrine's facilities. This section delves into various aspects related to the perceptions and roles of both patrons (pirs) and clients (murids) at the Golra Sharif shrine.

Dependency and Mannat

A pir mentioned that murids come to the shrine, making mannats (special prayers) for various needs. When these prayers are fulfilled, the murids visit the shrine to fulfill their pledges (hazri), bringing offerings like deg and money. This mutual dependence strengthens the reputation of the shrine. Social roles within the shrine are emphasized as part of Islamic society. Pirs are considered sacred, acting as spiritual leaders with close connections to God. Murids, in turn, perform various duties and roles when visiting the shrine. For instance, one respondent shared that they happily contribute to the cleanliness of the shrine, believing it brings joy to their hearts and pleases God.

Duties and Happiness

Murids perceive their visits to the shrine as a joyful duty. They engage in tasks like cleaning and dusting as an expression of devotion. Their actions, such as entering the shrine without shoes and never showing their back to the pir, reflect the reverence they hold for the sacred space.

Murids, especially those with political backgrounds, actively participate in the renovation of the shrine. They contribute financially, donate new Qurans, and provide new clothes during the annual URS festival. These actions are seen as fulfilling social roles and duties that benefit the shrine and the broader community.

Murids expressed the belief that performing special duties at the shrine, such as giving deg (offering) for religious purposes, is a social role and a source of happiness. They also donate money and clothes to the poor workers of the shrine, showcasing a sense of social responsibility.

Pirs perceive it as their duty to guide and satisfy their murids in religious matters. The shrine is viewed as a place where people gather for spiritual closeness to God. Pirs highlight the importance of treating visitors, especially poor travelers, as guests and providing them with accommodation in the serai. Pirs consider themselves in control of the shrine's functions, acting as the chief executives. Social functions, especially during URS and religious festivals, involve the active participation of the entire village. Political figures play a role, often with permission from the pir, in tasks like renovation and enhancing facilities for the benefit of the shrine.

Spirituality at the Golra Sharif shrine is rooted in the belief in the Sufi order of Islam. The relationship between murids and pirs is central to this spirituality. People view their spiritual leaders, including pirs, as guides in matters of religion. Spirituality is considered a fundamental aspect of human life, encompassing relationships, life's purpose, and values associated with religion.

Respondents express a deep spiritual connection with their Pir, akin to a family relationship. They describe seeking guidance from their Pir on various life matters, from marriage decisions to the birth of children. Pirs are revered as spiritual doctors who provide peace through sacred prayers and rituals. Some respondents believe in the healing powers of

their Pir. *“One example shared is the case of a girl who faced unexplained illnesses. Despite medical treatments, the girl's health did not improve until her family visited the shrine, made prayers, and offered a "kala bakra" (black goat). The belief is that only religious healers can address certain illnesses and disturbances.”*

Many respondents emphasize that their connection with the shrine and Pir goes back through generations. The experiences of their forefathers have solidified their faith, making them true believers in the powers of their Pir. The spiritual practices involve making mannat (pledges), offering prayers, and engaging in rituals like giving a "dam wala pani" (sacred water). The act of visiting the shrine and fulfilling religious duties is seen as essential for the fulfillment of prayers and the attainment of spiritual peace.

The living Pir of Golra Sharif describes the journey toward becoming a Pir, involving self-motivation, meditation, continuous prayers, and unwavering commitment to God's will. The Pir sees their role as providing spiritual guidance and peace to the muridain (followers) who come to the shrine seeking internal peace. The Pir explains the significance of "baiyat," an oath-taking ceremony symbolizing the acceptance of the spiritual powers of the Pir. This act is considered a symbolic way of acknowledging the authority of the Pir and accepting their guidance. The Pir acknowledges that people seek baiyat to attain spiritual peace. The expectations from the Pir include protection from evil influences and illnesses. The Pir holds a position of authority, influencing the future of their followers and providing assurances of protection.

Indebtedness in the system of shrine

Indebtedness plays a crucial role in the patron-client relationship within the context of Golra Sharif. It is described as a feeling of owing gratitude for services and favors exchanged between patrons (Pirs) and clients (Muridain). This reciprocal relationship is built on mutual efforts, where both parties assist each other in times of need, creating a sense of indebtedness. Due to the significant disparity of resources on the clients' side, they often seek assistance from their patrons. Clients, being in a more vulnerable position, look to their patrons, particularly in the system of Golra Sharif, which serves as a home for many poor and needy individuals.

One compelling narrative is that of Baba Rehmat, a murid who, despite coming from a humble background, experiences extensive support from Pir Naseeruddin Gilani's family. *"Financial aid, clothing, festive provisions, and even sponsorship for Hajj create a deep sense of indebtedness in Baba Rehmat."*

Baba Rehmat, a murid living in the village Golra, narrates his 10-year experience working for Pir Naseeruddin Gilani's sons. Despite being from a poor family, the Pir's family takes care of Baba Rehmat's entire family. The Pir's family treats them as their own, providing financial support, clothes, and food during festivals. The Pir even arranged and sponsored Baba Rehmat's Hajj, creating a profound sense of indebtedness.

Another poignant story features *“A lady who lived in the house of Pir Nasirudin Gilani for 15 years shares her story. She takes on responsibilities in the absence of Amma Ji (mother of current Pir). The Pir's family provides her with financial and social support, including*

assistance with her daughter's university expenses. The lady feels a strong sense of indebtedness and describes the Pir's family as her own. A young boy from Kashmir narrates his story of coming to Golra Sharif after losing his parents. The Pir's family provides him with a new life, religious education, and fulfills his needs. The boy, now a murid and mujawar of the shrine, feels indebted to the Pir sahib for their support, especially during religious festivals and visits to his village."

The researcher observes the dynamics of the patron-client relationship in the house of Pir Sahib. Old women and girls who serve in the house are referred to as "bibi sain" or "bibi ji." The wife of Pir Shams Uddin Sahib emphasizes that muridain are like family, and many muridain spend their entire lives serving the Pir's family. Nasim Bibi, a paralyzed lady, became a permanent member of the Pir's house after being divorced by her husband due to her illness. The Pir's family takes care of her health and expenses, and she, in turn, contributes by taking care of other muridain, cooking, and participating in religious festivals. The reciprocal assistance creates a bond of indebtedness.

The research findings from Golra Sharif provide a nuanced depiction of the social exchange dynamics inherent in the patron-client relationship, closely aligning with the principles of the social exchange theory. This intricate interplay is characterized by a profound sense of indebtedness among Muridain towards Pirs, emphasizing a reciprocal bond shaped by emotional, religious, and practical exchanges. The followers, viewing Pirs as spiritual guides, turn to them for solace and guidance, reinforcing their belief in the Pirs' spiritual powers. The heightened symbols of indebtedness serve to enhance the shrine's reputation and security, solidifying the authority of Pirs in this relationship. Additionally, the research underscores that these exchanges extend beyond financial matters, encompassing behaviors, emotions, and religious actions, creating a multifaceted framework for understanding the complex patron-client dynamics. Ultimately, the social exchange theory provides a robust lens through which to comprehend the intricate and symbiotic relationship between Pirs and Muridain in the unique socio-religious context of Golra Sharif.

Benefits to less privileged murids from pirs

In exploring the benefits accruing to less privileged Murids from Pirs, various dimensions of support emerge, reflecting the intricate dynamics of the patron-client relationship. One significant facet is spiritual help, where Pirs serve as influential figures fostering a network of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Successful Pirs, akin to other influential figures, engage in strategies of patronage to consolidate their status. Rituals of respect, such as bowing and avoiding direct address, signify the symbolic importance of Pirs in the lives of Murids.

Power dynamics within this relationship are not coercive; rather, Pirs wield influence through softer means, such as assistance in times of need. The ability to control people, both positively and negatively, is central to the patron-client dynamic. Pirs, deeply embedded in cultural and religious spheres, shape the mindset of their followers and play a pivotal role in the local welfare economy.

According to what the respondents said, *“power dynamics in this relationship are not coercive but involve softer means of influence, especially through assistance in times of need. Tangible instances of support beyond the spiritual realm are uncovered, particularly in education.”*

Pirs, leveraging their interconnected network of Murids, as I observed, *“facilitate access to educational resources, negotiate reduced fees, and secure scholarships for the children of Murids, as highlighted in two case studies. Health support also emerges as a crucial dimension, with Pirs, based on what the respondents shared, facilitating medical certificates, doctor recommendations, and even surgical operations for their Murids, showcasing the multifaceted nature of the patron-client relationship.”*

The study further reveals tangible instances of assistance provided by Pirs to their Murids, extending beyond spiritual matters. Education emerges as a key area of support, where Pirs facilitate access to educational resources, scholarships, and guidance through the interconnected network of Murids. Two case studies illustrate how Pirs recommend specific academies, negotiate reduced fees, and even secure scholarships for the education of Murids' children.

Health support is another dimension wherein Pirs play a crucial role. Instances of medical certificates, doctor recommendations, and even surgical operations facilitated by Pirs for their Murids demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the patron-client relationship. These acts of support go beyond the spiritual realm, encompassing practical aspects of Murids' lives.

It seems that the content you provided is an extensive research study discussing the relationship between pirs (spiritual leaders) and their murids (followers) in the context of South Asian Islam, particularly in Punjab, Pakistan. The study explores various aspects of this relationship, including spiritual help, social support, and the influence of pirs in different spheres of life. The content discusses cases and examples to illustrate how pirs play a significant role in the lives of their murids, providing them with spiritual guidance, assistance in education, health support, and even job opportunities.

The research also touches upon the broader cultural and social implications of the patron-client relationships within the context of Sufi traditions and shrines. The study recognizes the syncretic nature of Islam in South Asia, blending elements of Arabian Islam and Hinduism. If you have any specific questions or if there's a particular aspect you would like more information on or clarification about, please let me know, and I'll do my best to assist you.

Conclusion

The summary concludes that the study successfully explored experiential religiosity within the patron-client relationship between pirs and murids in Golra Sharif, Islamabad. The research aligned with the existing literature on power and patronage, emphasizing the pervasive nature of patron-client relationships in various societal contexts. The qualitative research approach, involving in-depth interviews and observation, yielded insights from 20 participants with 10 to 20 years of shrine experience. Thematic analysis and the social exchange theory were applied to interpret the findings. The results revealed a trustworthy and familial bond between pirs and their followers, akin to a parent-like relationship. The application of experiential religiosity was identified as a key factor strengthening the patron-client relationship. Murids,

often less privileged and poor individuals, developed strong faith and beliefs through ancestral connections to the shrine. The study highlighted the reciprocal benefits exchanged between pirs and murids, emphasizing social, religious, and moral give-and-take. The shrine system exhibited a patriarchal nature, with female respondents having more experiential religiosity but limited interaction time with pirs. However, this aspect was specific to the shrine, as the house of pir sahib demonstrated a balance of power between genders. In conclusion, the patron-client relationship in Golra Sharif is deeply rooted in experiential religiosity, social exchanges, and a sense of indebtedness. Murids and pirs establish a strong social network, contributing to the reputation of the shrine. The findings underscore the familial and reciprocal nature of the patron-client bond, shaping the religious practices and beliefs of the followers.

Recommendations

The study recommends expanding research on patron-client dynamics to different regions in Pakistan to capture diverse work settings. Golra Sharif's distinctive urban environment presents an intriguing context for research, with findings potentially applicable to similarly urbanized areas nationwide. To enhance research depth, future studies could consider employing mixed methods. The study highlights the need for ethical guidelines and a code of conduct in informal shrine settings, fostering transparency and organization in patron-client interactions. Implementing such measures could contribute to a healthier work environment, benefiting both pirs and murids.

Rabbia Firdous: Problem Identification and Model Development

Asma Maryam: Literature search, Methodology

Malik Asad Khan Kasi: Supervision and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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