

Peoples' Perceptions about Visiting Sufi Shrine in Pakistan

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Abstract

Sufi shrines hold great importance in Pakistani society. Followers of the shrines consider it sacred place and they perform different rituals there. The role of Sufis has been considered as intermediary who lead towards the path of God and success. Present study deployed qualitative research technique whereby data was drawn from 19 in-depth interviews at the Hazrat Mian Mir's Shrine in Lahore. Findings of the study revealed that majority of the people have strong belief upon the blessings of Sufis and they visit shrine to fulfill their social, economic, physical, and spiritual needs. They believed that the late Sufis of shrine could listen, correspond and help them in multiple ways. However, some people thought otherwise. They believed the Sufi of shrine as pious ones but they did not believe upon the intermediary role of Sufis between human beings and Allah. Perceptions about myths and superstitions varied with regard to gender and level of education but majority of visitors did not believe in myths and superstitions.

Key Words: Sufi Shirens, Sufism, marginalized segment of society, superstitions.

Introduction

Sufism, which was developed by the twelfth century from a small movement of ascetics emphasized spiritual over the legal, and closeness to, rather than remoteness from Allah (Hatina, 2007). The *Sufi* traditions and shrines are closely associated (Bashir, 2011) and their relationship is backed into history (Sabra, 2013). In Pakistan *Sufi* shrines have traditionally been maintained by hereditary saints (*Pirs*), who often command a large number of people (Ewing, 1983). *Sufi* shrines in Pakistan are the common public places of religious rituals which

followers consider to be righteous by virtue of being pious (Platteau, 2011). Followers of *Sufis* exhibit deep emotional attachment to their shrines. (Manzo, 2003). With their emotional fellowship, *Sufi* shrines remain a significant aspect of religion and social structure in Pakistani society (Farooq & Kiyani, 2012).

Historically, *Sufism* has been described as a “pathway to God” whereby it helps eliminate all the barriers between man and God through changing patterns of life (Pirani, Papadopoulos, Foster & Leavey, 2008). Etymologies of the term “*Sufi*” are various but in practice the term “*Sufi*” was reserved for ideal usage and *Sufi* referred to themselves in other terms such as devotee, ascetic, impoverished, and spiritual traveler (Hassanali, 2010; Sabra, 2007). Most of the Pakistanis view *Sufi* saints as the embodiment of Islamic virtue and consider them true *Faqirs* (impoverished ones) characterized by a life of piety, self-sacrifice and public service (Rozehnal, 2006).

Sufi shrines work in multidimensional ways thus their political, social, cultural and economic implications have always been, and will continue to be, substantial (Kreiner, 2010; Malik, 1990; Platteau, 2011). Since time immemorial, the tradition of visiting sacred places to attain religious merit, washing off the sins and accomplishment of desires has been a common practice across the world (Frembgen, 2012). Visiting of sacred spots, places, and building has traditionally been regarded as noble and often equated with purification of body and mind, and achievement of merits (Brewster, 2011).

Over the time, *Sufi* shrines assimilated the aspiration of the local people and cultural traditions became the part of many religious rituals at *Sufi* shrines (Pirani et al. 2008). Followers of *Sufi* shrines engage themselves in different rituals and religious practices (Malik, 1990) which include prayer, attending mosque, Quranic study, *Langer* (feast), *Mannat* (divine intercession), *Qawwali*, *Sufiana Kalam*, *Drumming* and *Dhamal* (ritual trance dance) etc. (Wolf, 2006; Abbas, 2010). Moreover, other religious ritual performed by the people at *Sufi* shrines are *Bayat* or having oath in the *Pirs*, touching the tomb, tasting/licking the salt and other sacred items placed at shines, knotting the thread, offering prayers, blowing and taking round, taking *Ta'weez* (amulet) (Chaudhary, 2010). These rituals and religious practices provide a structure and meaning to life of the followers (Schrode, 2008).

People come to *Sufi* shrines to manage their social and psychological problems (Levin, 2008). In Pakistan, life stress and depression are highly correlated with the social problem, followed by the lesser social support and few years of education (Hussain et al. 2007). In this regard, followers seek healing through therapeutic rituals, meditation, and fulfillment of their wishes by using *Sufi* saints as intermediaries (Pirani et al, 2008; Pfleiderer, 1988; Glik, 1988). Satisfaction of spiritual need is central to the functioning of *Sufi* shrines (Brewster, 2011). Spirituality, however, cannot be precisely measured (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011); nonetheless, Flannelly and Inouye (2001) found that religion and spirituality may be positively linked with life satisfaction and quality of life.

Khan and Sajid (2011) concluded in a study that people visit *Sufi* shrines for their spiritual healing and satisfaction, social cohesion, and stress management.

Many attendees described their living situation as stressful due to poverty, violent and abusive family relationships, feeling of being dependent upon their children, ongoing health problems which remained untreated, lack of inner peace and satisfaction and so forth (Pirani et al. 2008). These worries were perceived to provoke deterioration in their physical and mental health (Glik, 1988). In these given conditions quite often medical treatment is sought primarily but along with it, followers contact to their *Sufis* for spiritual healing (Golomb, 1985). It is more likely that people feel respired themselves after visiting shrine (Rhi, 2001; Levin, 2008). People visit *Sufi* shrines to offer *Mannat*. Furthermore, they use the *Sufi* shrines as to gain economic power, political patronage and social control and prestige (Veer, 2002). Moreover, Shrines are used for spiritual, habitual, and recreational pursuits (Nelson, 1996).

People visit *Sufi* shrines for various purposes out of their dedication and cultural traditions (Farooq & Kiyani, 2012). By and large, the regular visitors of *Sufi* shrine belong to marginalized segments of society (Ewing, 1983; Abbas, 2010) and usually they are rural people or urban poor (Frembgen, 2012). At the eve of *Urs* (the death anniversary of the *Sufi* saint), the permanently attached visitors at *Sufi* shrines are from marginalized segments of society which by majority include *Khusraay* (transvestites), *Malangs*, (religious mendicants), prostitutes, singers, fortune-tellers, traditional healers, etc. (Chaudhary 2010). The *Dhamal* is also a characteristic of famous devotional practice of marginalized people especially in Sindh and the Punjab (Frembgen, 2012). In contrast to the marginalized people, some followers of *Sufi* shrines visit these places and perform certain rituals which include giving donations in the form of cash or kind. Most of the time they provide *Langer* to the people present at shrines and it attracts devotees and people from the surrounding (Khan & Sajid, 2011). Besides emphasizing the involvement of followers in religious devotions, *Sufi* shrines also attract the secular tourists and others for the sake of enjoying social gathering and recreation (Khan & Sajid, 2011). Various combinations of historic, artistic, and scenic site characteristics and colorful religious festivals are the principal attractions for non-followers and the secular tourists (Nolan and Nolan, 1992).

Belief in myths and superstitions may vary with respect to region, socio-economic status, and level of education. However, Farooq and Kiyani (2012) found that in Pakistani villages, slightly less than half of the respondents had belief in various superstitions including breaking of mirror, seeing black cat, lucky and unlucky day, blinking of eyes, itching of palm, sacred object and so forth. Furthermore, they found that gender disaggregation has no significant difference in their beliefs towards superstitions. Whereas, George and Sreedhar (2006) found that sex differences have much effect on the superstitions variable with females having more irrational beliefs than males.

Hassanali (2010) found that early *Sufi* writers considered *Sufism* as the “knowledge of realities” which could not be separated from the knowledge of

Islamic law and scriptures. However, conservative *Ulmās* (religious scholars) criticize such practices and think these rituals as a form of *Shirk* and *Bida'* (idolatry) – a best corrupt innovation in Islam (Chaudhary, 2010). In view of former, their celebrations and other special activities have special relationship with God. However, these celebrations are contrasted with more orthodox form of Islamic observances – whereby other Muslims criticize these *Sufi* celebrations as improper, profane, and polytheistic (Veer, 1992). So both *Sufism* and *Ulma* criticizing the *Sufism* stand at opposite ends.

Materials and methods

The present study deployed qualitative research design to capture the in-depth opinion of visitors of *Sufi* shrines. Reason behind choosing this strategy was that most of the perceptions particularly, religious one are intrinsic in nature which can be best explored through rigorous opinions and detailed description/discussion. Thus, researchers adopted interpretive stance which most of time is inductive in nature aligned with the philosophical foundations of qualitative research. However, this study cannot be proclaimed a “purely inductive study” because apart from the identification of themes during data collection, certain themes were deduced before data collection with the help of available literature and stock of common sense knowledge. Data was collected from the shrine of Hazrat Mian Mir which is situated nearby the Cantonment area of Lahore city. This shrine is associated with the name of Main Mir (c. 1550 - August 11, 1635), a *Sufi* saint of the *Qadiri* order of *Sufism*. He is famous for being a spiritual instructor of Prince *Dara Shikoh*, the eldest son and heir-apparent to Shah Jahan (Asian Historical Architecture, 2013). Shrine of Hazrat Mian Mir holds the communal loci of followers whereby it attracts thousands of people from Lahore city and rest of the places of Pakistan.

Data was drawn from 19 semi-structured in-depth interviews during the month of June and July, 2013. A set of open ended questions was made in the interview guide and these open ended questions were supported by the topical and motivational probes. Topical probes were not used as separate open or close ended questions instead these were used as sub-themes to further elaborate the major theme. Main themes of the interview guide included performance of rituals and needs gratification, belief system, spiritual healing, myths and superstitions and orthodoxy or heterodoxy of believers of *Sufi* shrines. The interview guide was prepared in English as well as Urdu. For data collection, interview guide prepared in Urdu was used for convenience and better understanding of the participants. In case of some participants, questions were asked in *Punjabi* (local language of the province of the Punjab). Interviews conducted in local languages (Urdu and Punjabi) helped capture the intended context of participants’ expression and verbatim. Two in-depth interviews, each with a male and female respondent were conducted as pilot testing. Based on the feedback of pilot testing, questions in the

theme of “need gratification” were amended and categorized into different sub themes including economic, physical and psychological need gratification. Thus, pilot testing not only resulted in improvement in the interview guide but also helped researchers to understand the ambiance and normative structure of the shrine. In the present study, saturation point was achieved after conducting 19 in-depth interviews. Participants for the present study were purposively selected from the *Sufi* shrine of Hazrat Mian Mir. It was noticed that almost similar number of males and females visited *Sufi* shrine therefore it was attempted to maintain gender balance during sample selection. Access to the participation of the present study was achieved with the help of Manager *Auqaf* (a designated officer of government of the Punjab, Auqaf and Religious Affair Department) who served as gate keeper in the present study. Purpose and scope of the study was negotiated with Manager *Auqaf*, thus, he allowed researchers to collect data and extended his full cooperation to complete data collection.

As per the gender sensitive normative and moral structure requirements of the shrine, male and female participants were interviewed by male and female researchers respectively. Place of interview was mutually decided by the participants and the respective researcher. In this regard, on one hand, it was ensured that interview process should not create disturbance for the other followers in performing their rituals. On the other hand, it was also tried that interview should be conducted in such a place or setting where other peoples could not interfere or interrupt the discussion. After explaining the objectives of the research, verbal consent was taken from the participants before start of the discussion and it was made them believe that during the course of interview, if they feel annoyed or discomforted, they can quit the interview. In this regard, four participants terminated the interview because they were accompanied by their family members and they had to leave for home.

Researchers could not fix follow up meeting with those participants because of their non-surety in terms of availability for interview again. Researchers wasted the incomplete collected data of those respondents and searched for other participants for in-depth interviews. A vast majority of interviews (16 of 19) were audio recorded after seeking consent from the participants, whereas, a few interviews (3 of 19) could not be tap recorded because participants did not allow audio recording of their discussion. However, their note taking was done in all cases with due permission of the participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done in steps. At first step, first two authors transcribed verbatim of the interviews and recorded discussion into Urdu for capturing the intended context of participants’ expressions. At the second step, they translated Urdu transcripts into English. The first and third authors analyzed the data manually by initiating the coding and category assignments. They also went

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through the data identifying discrepancies. All the highlighted discrepancies were discussed and consensus was reached after referring the tapes and note taking. At third step, all of authors derived themes by analyzing the collected data. It enabled the researchers to capture the context specific perceptions of the participants. Finally, the salient findings of the study were discussed in the light of the themes inferred from the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

Methodology of the present study was duly approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of the Punjab, Lahore Pakistan. In order to ensure ethical consideration in the field, Manager *Auqaf* was approached whereby he performed the role of gate keeper in the present study. Moreover, verbal consent was taken from the participants before the start of interview, for note taking and audio recording of the interviews. All information was kept confidential, with names excluded from the recorded materials to avoid giving away the identity of the participants.

Limitations of the study

Since, all the shrines in Pakistan are known for their distinguished characteristics and different status in the view of followers, findings of the study can only be discussed with reference to the shrine of Hazart Mian Mir and not to the other shrine(s). The present study was conducted in an unbiased manner because the underlying purpose of the present study was not to challenge or criticize any sect or religious belief system in Pakistan.

Findings of the study

People from different walks of life which included businessmen, government servants, students, daily wagers, factory workers, housewives, and shopkeepers visited *Sufi* shrine. By and large, views, opinions and arguments of the both genders were similar except views on myths and superstitions. Moreover, a huge difference was found in the opinion of highly educated and illiterate persons with regard to their perceptions about *Sufi* shrines and different rituals. Overall, peoples visit *Sufi* shrine of Hazart Mian Mir due to multiple reasons including needs gratification, spiritual healing, and devotion with the *Sufi* of shrine.

Participants' characteristics

Participants recruited for the present study were aged 16-50 years whereas, the median age of the visitors was 27 years. Visitors of the *Sufi* shrine had varying degree of education. However, it was found that majority of the people were illiterate, followed by the primary schooling. There was a little number of respondents having higher education. Majority of the respondents belonged to urban background whereas there were few participants who came to visit *Sufis* shrine outside the Lahore city and they belonged to rural settings (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 19)

Characteristics	n (%)
Age of participants (years)	
Range	16-51
Mean	27
Gender	
Male	10 (52.63)
Female	9 (47.37)
Education	
No schooling	7 (36.84)
≤ five years of schooling	4 (21.05)
6 to 10 years of schooling	3 (15.79)
> ten years of schooling	5 (26.32)
Area of residence	
Urban	11 (57.89)
Rural	8 (42.11)
Marital status	
Married	10 (52.63)
Unmarried	9 (47.37)
Occupation	
Housewife	5 (26.32)
Housemaid	2 (10.53)
Teachers	2 (10.53)
Worker/daily wager	4 (21.05)
Student	3 (15.79)
Businessman	2 (10.53)
Driver	1 (5.26)
Monthly income ^a	
No income	8 (42.11)
≤ 10000	7 (36.84)
10001 to 15000	2 (10.53)
>15000	2 (10.53)
Religion	
Muslim	19 (100.0)

a. In Pakistani Rupees

Needs gratification

Needs gratification with regard to social, economic, physical and spiritual dimensions was explored.

Social needs gratification

The major reasons for visiting *Sufi* shrine included praying for the daughters' marriage, passing exams, to mitigate the family disputes, resolve family conflicts, praying for marriage with the beloved and praying for better future of children, and for birth of child. Data was collected during the month of June and July 2013. At that time annual exams of secondary and higher secondary level were going on. A sizeable number of respondents (4 of 19) visited *Sufi* shrine for praying the passing of exams for their children. People believed that praying for children will help them pass and secure good marks in exams. They believed that when so ever they prayed with serenity, their wishes have come true. One such woman who was in her late 30s, and she had completed 10 years of education said,

I have been visiting this *Darbar* (shrine) for last 10 years. When so ever I had some problem (referring to family issues or financial encumbrances), I just come here and pray for that. I have now come to this *Darbar* for my elder son who is taking intermediate exams. I will pray for his success and good marks.

It was an oft reported response (7 of 19) that when so ever they had some problem or issue, they come at that shrine and pray for the same. One participant who was 33 years old, belonged to urban area and had completed intermediate said,

I had four daughters and my family members used to curse me for not producing male child. Even my husband and mother in law considered it my fault. I was disturbed and did not know what to do? A lady in my neighborhood advised me to pray and give *Sadqa* (alms) at this *Darbar* (referring to Hazrat Mian Mir's shrine). I gave there a *Daig* (cauldron of rice) and prayed with full thrust for a male child. Allah granted me a male child after four daughters and I am very happy in this regard. Since then, I have been regularly visiting and giving donation at this *Darbar*.

It was found that few respondents (2 of 19) (unmarried girls) have come with their families but they visited shrine for praying for their love marriage – they wanted to marry by their own choice. During the course of interview, they reported that their parents have been visiting this *Darbar* and they have seen fulfilling their wishes. They also hoped to get married at the place of their own choice. On further probe, they explained that they consider this shrine as sacred place where the chances of acceptance of their prayers are higher. They consider the role of *Sufi* of shrine more like as an intermediary source for praying to Allah. One of these participants who was 22 years old belonged to urban area said,

My mother and grandparents have been visiting this shrine. I have come to this shrine with my mother. We are three sisters and two brothers. I am the eldest one. My parents have taught us that the *Sufis* are the beloved people of Allah and they work as *Waseela* (source) for common peoples. Now a days some

people are coming to our home for asking my *Rishta* (proposal for engagement) but i love my cousin. I have come to this shrine for praying that may Allah bless me with my love marriage.

Likewise, some participants (4 of 19) reported that they have come to pray for the better and righteous marital proposal for their children especially for daughters. Among these participants, a majority was comprised of females who were worried about finding suitor for their children, especially for their daughters. On further probe, they explained that now days it is difficult to find a good proposal. One of these participants who was 48 years old, belonged to urban area and she was a housewife stated,

I am worried about my daughter who has done masters and she is 28 years old. She is my eldest daughter and we could not find a good proposal for her so far. Some proposals came for her but they were not good suitor for my daughter – either they were uneducated or unemployed. I have come to this *Darbar* for praying of good suitor for my daughter.

Contrary to above response, few participants (2 of 19) reported that they came to enjoy the social gathering and celebrate their holiday. They enjoyed the colorful setting of *Darbar* and interesting rituals of believers at that *Darbar*. Kids of such visitors also accompanied their parents. In response to the question that whether they perform any ritual or attach any belief with the ritual they viewed that they neither believe nor disbelieve any ritual or belief system. They used to visit the shrine to enjoy social gathering. One of these participants who was 30 years old, middle pass and belonged to poor socio-economic status said,

Me and my children are found of going to historical places. In my view, *Darbars* are wonderful historic places. Their history is backed into hundreds of years. Moreover, I like the colourful, ascetic as well as religious rituals performed at *Sufi* shrines. Four to five years ago, *Qwali* was sung at this *Darbar* but now due to security threats and law and order situation, they (Auqaf Department) have banned this event. Now we enjoy here the event of *Urs* in particular and *Dhamal* in general. I have not religiously strong background to comment the legitimization or illegitimization of rituals over shrine. we just enjoy social gathering her.

During the course of discussion, it was also revealed that among female visitors majority of the females (6 of 9) visited to get resolved family disputes which included in-laws conflict, husband wife disputes, and intra family tussles. For that reason, they performed different rituals which include praying on the grave of *Sufi*, putting oil in earthen lamps placed at *Sufi's* shrine, *Chaddar Charhana* (placing piece of cloth at grave) etc. and taking *Taweez* (amulet). However, no participants reported to visit that shrine to exercise *Kala Jado* (black

magic) or for other negative gains – which directly harm other people. One of these participants, a woman of mid 40s, who was uneducated and belonged to rural area said,

My daughter in law has not good relations with my daughters. They are always at quarreling ends and the atmosphere of home is worsened. My son has become mental patient. He says he can neither leave us nor his wife and children. Most of the time, he tries to spend time out of home. I am worried about this situation. One of my relative has advised me to come here and place a piece of cloth (*Chaddar Charhana*) at the grave of *Sufi* of this shrine. Moreover, I will take *Taweez* for my son. In doing so, I think so my son will be at ease and the atmosphere of our home will become peaceful.

During the course of data collection, it was observed that some addicts and *Malang* and other such marginalized people were also present at shrine. Upon asking from the participants about these people, a vast majority of the respondents (15 of 19) reported that they have no *Thekana* (place of residence) nor they can afford food or other cost to be incurred on daily living, therefore, they have permanently occupied that place. Out of sympathy, people give them *Khairaat* (little money) and don't mind their presence in the shrine. One of these participants who was in his early 30s and he was a vender said,

I think so these are the ascetic people and they are nothing to do with the worldly affairs. They do mystical dance (*Dhamal*), sweep and mop the floor of *Darbar*. I think so their presence is not harmful to anyone.

By contrast, some respondents (4 of 19) had strict view point about these people. They consider such people as criminals or drug dealers who have disguised themselves and personified them as *Malang*.

Economic needs gratification

A vast majority of participants (13 of 19) did not visit *Sufi* shrine for economic gains. Whereas rest of the respondents (6 of 19) reported by and large similar economic reasons to visit *Sufi* shrines. The most oft reported reasons in this regard were to get job, promotion in job, vastness in the business, and avoidance of financial problems. These people had strong belief that visiting of *Sufi* shrine and praying will bring good fortune to them. One of these participants, aged 28, a shopkeeper said,

I was jobless. I had done graduation and I was much upset because where so ever I applied I could not be selected for job. I was almost hopeless. Though I was a regular visitor of this shrine but I never prayed nor

give any donation in form of cash or kind at this shrine. one of my friend told me to pray and *Mannat Mana*. I did the same. I was surprised I got the job at electronics shop. This is how I believe, visiting of shrine proved helpful for me achieving job.

Moreover, some participants (3 of 6) shared their success stories of praying for economic gains. They elaborated that with the help of *Sufi* of shrine, their business flourished and their economic status was improved. Likewise, few participants associated their all of their success in life with that shrine. They believed that blessing of the *Sufi* of shrine have helped them economic prosperity, social prestige, and mental peace. Among these participants, one female aspiring visitor who was 45 years old, uneducated and she belonged to rural area associated all her success to shrine and said,

I have been a regular visitor of this shrine for last 25 years. Whether it is the construction of my house, job of my son, or peaceful family relations, this all is because of the blessing of *Sufi* of this shrine.

It was interesting to note that during the course of data collection, not a single respondent reported to visit *Sufi* shrine for winning lottery or prize bond.

Physical

Findings of the study revealed that a majority of participants (16 of 19) visited *Sufi* shrine for getting rid of illness/disease. They believed that coming to this *Sufi* shrine, praying here, and eating the sacred food stuff (*Tabaruk*) including *Langer*, sugar and salt will help them treat diseases. These participants highlighted that by virtue of that *Sufi* shrine, people get rid of chronic diseases like Hepatitis, Tuberculosis, and Typhoid etc. On probe, it was revealed that the sacred eatable items like salt, sugar and *Dam Wala Pani* (holy verses read on water) have been considered to treat many diseases including chronic ones. One of these participants who was 16 years old girl, a matric student stated,

I am suffering from hepatitis c, initial stage. My aunt who lives here in Lahore asked me to come here and pray to the *Sufi* of this shrine and *Mannat* for recovering from this disease and good health.

It was also observed during the field visit that visitors were applying oil on their heads and other body parts as something sacred. On probe, it was revealed that they believed that applying oil on head will keep their hair black and enhance their memory whereas applying it on joints will reduced joint pain. People used to bring water in bottles and placed it near the grave of *Sufi* so that the people visiting that place may blow verses on water (*Dam wala pani*) and drank that water to avoid all types of diseases. A female participant of mid 40s, belonging to rural area said,

I used to come here every Thursday and place a water bottle where, all people who use to recite Qur'an, they used to blow on that water. I used to mix that water to

all water bottles in my home which protects all my family members from diseases.

By contrast, few participants (3 of 19) certain items placed at sufi shrine are not sacred ones and they have nothing to do with physical wellbeing and treatment of diseases. Placement of such items is the exhibition of normative and cultural structure of sufi shrines.

Spiritual needs gratification

Almost all of the visitors (16 of 19) reported that they visit *Sufi* shrine to get mental satisfaction and tranquility. In case of tension, trouble, or disturbance in their lives, they visit *Sufi* shrine and get peace of mind which serves as meditation. Moreover, they get hope for success and get confidence about their wishes to be fulfilled. Few respondents reported (3 of 19) that they find a chance of catharsis at *Sufi* shrine. They come here and talk to Allah. They said that they bow to Allah, request pardon from Allah to forgive their *Gunah* (sins), and show them right path. They said they cry and it helps them to do *Tazkia Nafes* (self realization). When they leave the shrine, they feel themselves very relaxed and enlightened. A participant who was 33 years old, venter by profession, belonged to urban area said,

I used to come whenever I become tense due my life problems, I used to sit in one corner to this *Darbar* silently and I feel peace of mind then I offer *Nawafilis* (prayer) here. This activity reduces all my mental disturbance and tension.

Belief system

A majority of the participants (14 of 19) had strong belief about the blessings of *Sufi* of shrine and considered them alive. In their view, he could listen to the followers and work as intermediary between them and Allah. By and large they believed that *Sufi* of shrine know their problems. On further probe they highlighted that they come on *Darbar* and pray to get rid of their worries. *Sufi* knows their worries and communicates it to Allah for blessing. They recognized the legitimacy of the *Sufi* as mediator because he is in a better position to pass on and advocate prayers of followers to Allah. In case a man or woman directly pray/wish to Allah, there are little chances of acceptance/fulfillment of that pray/wish. A participant of mid 30s, belonging to rural area said,

Sufis are the noble, pious and ascetic people. Their status to Allah is very much higher as compared to the common people like us. If we pray to Allah, it would not be as much listened as if a *Sufi* prays for us to Allah. They are a *Waseela* (source) for the followers.

It was observed that followers of the *Sufi* shrine performed certain rituals which included reciting verses over water (*Dam Karna*), lightening the candles and earthen lamps, to cook meal in cauldron (*Daig pakwana*) and rhythmic movements (*Dhamal Dalna*) on religious rhymes. They believed that visiting, praying and performing certain rituals can help them in multiple ways. These include; achieve better socio-economic status, a good moral character, good health and peace of mind. A participant who was a house wife, aged 38 years said,

The *Sufi* of shrine is alive but we are not aware of that. He (*Sufi*) not only listens to our prayers but he knows our intentions also. If someone with malicious intention visits him, he does not fulfill his/her *Muraadein* (wishes).

Some respondents had view that *Sufi* corresponds to the visitors according to their level of devotion. A participant who was a sales man and he was 30 years old stated,

When so ever I plan to visit shrine, I straight forward come to shrine and don't engage myself in any other task on my way to shrine. I repeat the same thing while going back to home. I do all this to show my complete devotion – which is appreciated by the *Sufi* of shrine through fulfillment of my wishes.

Few participants viewed that *Sufi* of shrine directs their followers to act in a particular way. In this regard, an uneducated female participant who was in her mid 40s, shared her life experience with regard to this *Sufi* shrine and said,

Fifteen years ago, my husband was seriously sick and he was bed ridden. My *Jethani* (wife of husband's elder brother) had done *Taweez & Jado* (amulet and magic) on my husband to make him sick and feeble. *Sufi* of this shrine came into my dream and directed me to remove a piece of tied cloth from a branch of tree in our house. As soon I removed that piece of cloth, I found some *Taweez* into that. I wasted those *Taweez* and my husband started gaining health again. This is how *Sufi* of shrine can help his followers and direct them for their wellbeing.

Whereas, in contrast, some people (5 of 19) believed that the *Sufi* of shrine were the pious people and they worked very hard for the spread of Islam in this region, but they are dead now. They cannot listen and convey the wishes of people to Allah. They believed that people should directly pray to Allah for anything.

It was questioned to the visitors that what comes to those who do not visit *Sufi* shrines? A majority of the visitors (16 of 19) replied that it is their personal belief system. On further probe they said that non visitors are ignorant of the blessings of *Sufi* because they don't believe shrines and accordingly they don't visit these places. The same question was put in another way that what the non-visitors of shrines think about the visitors. Visitors of *Sufi* shrines carried different responses.

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Some said (10 of 19) that they believe us doing *Shirk*, whereas others (9 of 19) said they think it's our own belief system and carried neutral response.

Myths/superstitions

Different myths and superstitions which widely prevail in Pakistani society were discussed with the participants. These include considering the crossing of black cat as bad sign, existence of black magic, *ta'weez* and their influence, itching of palm bringing money, blinking of eyes giving some indication, crow sitting on the wall of house indicating arrival of guests etc. By and large (14 of 19), people did not believe in these myths/superstitions and they said these are just stories which pass on generation to generation. A female teacher of early 30s with masters education said,

I think so there is no reality is myths or superstitions. These things have been assimilated into our society from Hindu's culture. These all things are based on whims and have no scientific proof.

However, some participants (most of which were uneducated and females) believed that majority of the myths are true and they have experienced them. A participant who was housewife and she had completed her primary education said,

Myths or superstitions have a relevancy with the physical world. These are the sayings of our forefathers based on their life time experiences. I myself have experienced it. Once my left eye was blinking and my gold ring was stolen.

However, it was a contrasting response that a vast majority of participants (17 of 19) believed in the existence of black magic and *ta'weez*. They said black magic work but at the same time they said it to be against the *Sharia* (Islamic laws), whereas, majority of the respondents said that *ta'weez* works and helps them in multiple ways. On further probe, it was highlighted by the respondents that *ta'weez* has healing effect in case of any diseases and it help avoid *Nazre-Bud* (bad sight).

Discussion

Findings of the qualitative data carried mixed response about the perception of people who visit *Sufi* shrine of Hazart Mian Mir. People visit *Sufi* shrine in order to fulfill their social, economic, psychological and spiritual needs. Levin (2008) found that people visit *Sufi* shrines to manage their social and psychological problems. However, the gender disaggregation of male and female towards needs gratification was by and large similar except in case of economic and social needs. Men were more inclined towards praying and performing different rituals for

getting job, promotion in job and increase in the business whereas women visited *Sufi* shrine for other purposes. These included domestic issues including children education, marriage proposals, domestic disputes and family conflicts. In this regard, Kiyani and Farooq (2012) also found that more females go to shrines for *Mannats* for various purposes including marriages, cure of illness, having child, dissolution of disputes, passing exams etc. Similarly, Pirani et al (2008) found that many attendees at *Sufi* shrines describe their life conditions as stressful and stretched family relations.

It was also found, that majority of the respondents who visited *Sufi* shrine had poor socio-economic background and lower level of education. Chaudhary (2010) and Frembgen (2012) found that among permanently attached visitors of *Sufi* shrines, a majority of these consist of disadvantaged and marginalized people which include, *Khusray*, *Malang*, prostitutes, fortune tellers etc. – who are considered as anti-social agents which can potentially harm the social fabric of society. The presence of such people at *Sufi* shrines is very common in the Punjab, Pakistan. However, in the present study, a majority of participants did not consider their presence alarming or anti-social and they considered them ascetic and harmless people. Furthermore, participants carried sympathetic views about these peoples. Whereas, other than the disadvantaged peoples, followers of *Sufi* shrines had strong belief in the blessings of the *Sufi* of shrine and they viewed that their life is directed in a particular way by the *Sufi* saint. Out of their full devotion with the *Sufi* of shrine, they used to visit that shrine regularly. Furthermore, it was found that visitors of the *Sufi* shrine engaged themselves into different rituals. These rituals included offering of prayer, recitation of Holy Quran, giving *Langar*, *Dhamal*, *Chaddar Charhana*, taking *Taweez*, tasting the salt, eating sweets placed there. The performance of different rituals has also been discussed in other studies as well (Malik, 1990; Pirani et al, 2008; Abbas, 2010). It was interesting to note that perceptions of people were different about the performance of certain rituals and blessings associated with those acts. Items placed at the *Darbar* including salt, sugar, water, oil etc. were considered sacred by the followers of *Sufi* of shrine. Some respondents believed that oil placed at the *Darbar* in the lamps will not let their hair become gray or white, whereas, other respondents did not reckon so. They reported that this oil is useful for joint pains. Applying this oil on knees and ankle will reduce joint pain. In this regard, Schrode (2008) found that these rituals provide structure and meaning to the life of followers. Nonetheless, there is need to explore further the varied perceptions of visitors about the effect of sacred items placed at *Sufi* shrines.

It was found that some people visit shrines and other such places to enjoy social gathering and colourful events there. It is pertinent to mention that such participants did not support or condemn any sect or religious groups. They had a neutral view point about different religious sects and practices. Some studies have found that common public and cultural tourists from abroad visit such places due to their interest in the art and culture (Frembgen 2012; Nolan and Nolan, 1992).

Findings of the present study revealed that participants who were unemployed and belonged to poor socio-economic background visited *Sufi* shrine for economic gains for getting employment or work to meet their minimal subsistence. Therefore, the over trend was not inclined towards visiting shrine for economic gains. It was interesting to know that people who even did not had intention to visit *Sufi* shrine for economic gain, majority of those associated their economic position, social status and financial stability with the blessings of *Sufi* shrine. In this regard, Nolan and Nolan (1992) found that shrines functions as devotional centers for the followers where they seek blessings and good fortune. The present study also found that followers of the *Sufi* shrines had strong belief in the blessings of *Sufi* and considered them alive. Their role is considered as intermediary between Allah and a common person. Similarly, many studies have shown that followers believe in the blessings of *Sufis* – who work as intermediary between the persons and Allah (Pirani et al, 2008; Hassanali, 2010; Sabra, 2007).

The findings of the present study revealed that a majority of visitors did not believe in the widely prevailing myths/superstitions in the society. They consider them just “stories” which have been passing from generation to generation. It was found that people from lower socio-economic background, lower level of education or no schooling, and particularly a majority of women belied in myths/superstitions. However, Kiyani and Farooq (2012) found that sizable proportion of people believe in various superstitions. Moreover, George and Sreedhar (2006) while studying Indian community concluded that women have more superstitious beliefs than men.

A vast majority of people strongly believed that *Sufis* are the pious and saint people who had spent their lives for religious preaching and for service of the human kind. They viewed that those who do not believe in the blessings of *Sufis* and do not visit shrine are mistaken. Hassanali (2010) concluded that *Sufi* writers consider that *Sufism* cannot be separated from Islam. In contrast, finding of the present study revealed that visitors considered that non-visitors view their rituals at shrines as *Shirk and Bida*. The similar findings have also been highlighted in other studies which debate about the heterodox and paradox standpoints of *Ulmās* (Chaudhary 2010; Veer, 1992).

Conclusion

Peoples perform different rituals as a part of their religious affiliation. These rituals are by and large associated with one or the other form of social, economic, physical and spiritual needs gratification. Peoples were found to be persuaded by different people including parents, relatives, religious leaders, and friends to visit *Sufi* Shrines. They performed different rituals and considered those acts as righteous and blissful. People from almost all walks of life visited shrines but among all visitors the vast majority of people belonged to middle or lower socio-economic status. Furthermore, it was found that majority of the visitors did not

believe in myths or superstitions. However, among those who believed in superstitions majority were women and uneducated and poor people.

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