Religious Inclusiveness and the Medieval Sindhi Sufi Poetry: Intangible Cultural Heritage of Sindh

¹* Tanvir Anjum

Abstract

Cultural heritage in a given society may take the form of both tangible and intangible manifestations. Concerning Sufism in Sindh, manifestations of tangible cultural heritage may include Sufi shrine complexes, sites of meditation and dwellings, Sufi relics, and artifacts of devotion. In contrast, intangible cultural heritage may include, inter alia, Sufi traditions, literary productions, music and dance, festivals, and Sufi ethos. The rich Sufi ethos of multi-ethnic and multi-religious medieval Sindhi society was informed by varied socio-historical traditions. The Sufis of Sindh composed vernacular poetry encompassing the theme of religious inclusiveness and pluralistic accommodation, squarely in line with the eclecticism of the region's religious landscape. It freely imbibed elements from varied local cultural traditions. Sufi poetry, together with centuries-old Sufi practices, allowed fluidity of religious affiliation and created a space where religious identities became inextricably intertwined. However, these identities were communalized and rigidified in colonial and post-colonial periods. Recent years have unfortunately witnessed the growing menace of religious radicalization, considerably undermining the Sufi ethos. The situation calls for devising a coherent strategy to cope with religious radicalization to reclaim and preserve the tolerant cultural heritage of the region.

Keywords: Medieval; Sufi Poetry; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Religious Inclusiveness; Radicalization; Sindh.

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage refers to the ideas, practices, customs, and traditions inherited from the past generations in any given society. It may take the form of both tangible and intangible manifestations. The importance of cultural heritage cannot be denied, as it links a society and its people with their past and traditions, inculcating a feeling of unity and a sense of belonging. Any reference to the cultural heritage of Sindh cannot be complete without acknowledging the impact of Sufism, or *taṣawwuff*, the mystical-spiritual dimension of Islam. In the cultural heritage of the region, one may discern both tangible and intangible features with reference to Sufism. Manifestation of its tangible

features range from Sufi shrine complexes, Sufi meditation sites, and dwellings to Sufi relics and artifacts of devotion, whereas intangible cultural heritage includes, but is not limited to, Sufi traditions, literary productions, music and dance, festivals, and the Sufi ideals and values, or the ethos. The Sufi ethos reflected religious inclusiveness, pluralistic accommodation, and tolerance, which was manifestly articulated in medieval Sindhi Sufi poetic compositions. The present study is an attempt to explore this Sufi ethos as expressed in vernacular Sufi poetry. While doing so, it traces its ideological roots in Sufi doctrines, which led to the development of religious inclusiveness and intertwined identities, which were later replaced by rigid Hindu-Muslim communal identities in the colonial era. The contemporary era, however, has unfortunately witnessed the growing menace of religious radicalization, considerably undermining the tolerant Sufi ethos, which needs to be reclaimed and preserved.

　　　　Considerable literature has appeared on the subject of vernacular Sufi poetry in Sindh. The studies by Parsram (1924), Schimmel (1974), Allana (1983), and Jotwani (1986) offer a thematic survey and analysis of Sufi poetry composed in Sindhi. However, recent studies such as Kothari (2004) and Boivin (2008 & 2020) have offered a more nuanced understanding of the hybridity of Hindu and Muslim/Sufi cultures, challenging the idea of their historical antagonism. These studies argue for religious inclusiveness in Sindhi society and culture. The present study interprets medieval Sindhi Sufi poetry in this framework while highlighting its contemporary relevance in the backdrop of growing radicalization and decreasing tolerance.

2. Setting the Context

To begin with the geographical interpretation of Sindh's history, geography has played a decisive role in its historical development. Historically, the great river valley civilization of Indus depended upon abundant water and fertile soil. Moreover, the region has been a borderland or a frontier zone between India and the Persian region of Khurasan in the Iranian Plateau, which historically included northeastern Iran, southern parts of Central Asia, and Afghanistan. Additionally, the region, which had intermittently been under the Indian and Persian empires (Markovits, 2000, p. 32), served as a passage or a corridor for coming in and leaving India. Its unique geographical position as a frontier zone and its peculiar physiography promising agricultural abundance prompted an influx of migration, making it a land of opportunities for immigrants. That is why Sindh presents an admixture of diverse ethnic groups. Besides indigenous groups such as Lohānas, Kohlīs/Kolhīs, Menghwārs, and Bhils (Boivin, 2021), many Arab and Middle Eastern migrants settled in the region in the wake of Arab rule in Sindh spanning over two centuries. During the Samma period in the fifteenth century till the eighteenth century, when the region came under the sway of the Mughals, considerable migration of Sufis, scholars, poets, soldiers, and notables of Central Asian, Persian, Turkic and Afghan descent took place. Following the invasions by Afghan kings, Nādir Shāh Afshār (r. 1736-47) and his successor Aḥmad Shāh Abdālī (r. 1747-72) in the eighteenth century, Baloch tribes settled in the region in order to counter local resistance. In addition to the migration from the West, settlers from the East, such as the Rajputs, also settled in the region (Cook, 2010, pp. 133-149). Moreover, the presence of a small minority of African descent called Sidīs or Sheedis can also be discerned in its coastal areas (Pankhurst, 2003, pp. 189-222). In order to appreciate the diverse cultural heritage of Sindh, it is pertinent to explore the region's religious diversity briefly.

3. Religious Landscape of Sindh

Far from being homogenous in religious terms, the medieval Sindhi society offers a diverse religious landscape, offering a mosaic of historically co-existing religious traditions. Long before the advent of

Islam, ancient Sindh housed a prominent Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu population. The Hindus controlled upper Sindh, while the Buddhists dominated lower Sindh, where Buddhist monasteries and important Buddhist centers like Debal and Hyderabad/Nirun existed. Buddhist stupas are found in Debal, Jhirk, Kahu-jo Daro (Mirpur Khas), and Thul Hairo Khan near Johi; in addition to Buddhist rock art at multiple sites, including Lahut Tar in Mol Valley, stupa images or engraving on rock at Chiti in Nali valley in Kirthar Valley and Shaho Kumb in Seta Valley (Kalhoro, 2018).

Though Buddhism started declining around the seventh century AD, Sindh remained a stronghold of Buddhism even after the Arab conquest. Nonetheless, by the end of the tenth century, Buddhism almost completely disappeared from the region (Avari, 2013, pp. 26-28). In addition, Jainism was another popular religion, with the Punjabi, Marwari, and Gujarati communities having considerable Jain following. Apart from Umerkot and Hyderabad, Nangarparkar in Tharparkar was an important Jain center with over a dozen Jain temple sites. These included Gori Jo Mandir, Nangarparkar Bazar Temple, Virwah Temple, and Bhodesar Temple, to name a few (Flügel and Ahmad, 2018, pp. 26-32). These sites remained pilgrimage centers till the nineteenth century. The ecological changes in coastal areas led to the migration of the Jain population to the nearby regions. Later, almost the entire Jain population migrated to India around the time of the partition, and their temples were completely abandoned (Hasan, 2008; Kalhoro, 2021). Nonetheless, the influence of Buddhism and Jainism survived in many religious groups and practices.

As for Hinduism, it must be remembered that the Vedic religion (Sanatan Dharama) is generally referred to as Hinduism in South Asia, and the usage of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' is contested, since these were coined by the British, (Thapar, 1989, pp. 209-231). However, these are being employed here for convenience, though with caution. Sindh still holds a sizable Hindu population despite large-scale migration to India around 1947. Hinduism cannot be understood as a homogenous or a monolithic set of beliefs and practices, especially in the context of Sindh. Historically, the heartland of Hinduism has been the Indo-Gangetic Valley plains, and Sindh was a peripheral region where its adherents practiced a loosely defined "non-textualised" form of Hinduism (Kothari, 2004, p. 3885; Parsram, 1979, pp. 74-77; & Boivin, 2010, p. 118), having multiple sects, cults and groups ranging from Krishnāism, Shivāism and Nāth Yoga to Bhaktī.

The southern part of Sindh was dominated by the Nāthpanthīs (a Shivāite cult founded by Gorakhnāth in the twelfth century AD). At the same time, the Bhaktis enjoyed considerable influence in the northern part of the region (Boivin in Boivin, 2008, pp. 22-41). In addition, the Daryāpanthīs (who worshipped the River Indus/Sindhu), Barmati Panthīs or Maheshwarī Panthīs, founded by Matang Dev in the twelfth century AD (Mallison in Boivin, 2008, pp. 67-71), and Nānakshāhīs or Nānakpanthīs (the followers of Baba Guru Nanak, pp. 1469-1539) among the Sikhs/Hindus also shared the religious landscape. Interestingly, the hallmark of the religious landscape of ancient Sindh has been its eclectic tendency, which allowed fluidity of religious affiliation, which continued even after the advent of Islam in the region.

The advent of Islam in Sindh dates back to the seventh century (Mubārakpurī, 1965), though the region came under the political sway of the Arab Muslims in the early eighth century. Historically, the practice of Islam in the region was closely linked with Ismailism and Sufism, as the two groups were not always mutually exclusive. Many Ismaili preachers (dāī's) were mystically inclined and succumbing to the doctrine of taqīyya or concealment, overtly pronouncing a Sufi or Hindu identity to cloak their Ismaili-identity in order to avoid political persecution in Sunni-dominated areas. The same is true for many Ismaili groups (sometimes referred to as Satpanth Ismailis) spread across South Asia (Virani, 2011, pp. 99-139). The region remained a stronghold of

Ismailism even after the military campaigns of Sulṭān Maḥmūd (r. 998-1030) of Ghazna to suppress it in the early eleventh century (Virani, 2007, p. 100).

Historically, the presence of Sufism in medieval Sindh can be discerned as early as the eighth century. From the eighth to twelfth centuries, many wandering Sufis visited Sindh, and some even settled there. Later, the region became home to many Sufi silsilahs. In the thirteenth century, the Suhrawardīs started consolidating themselves in the region. During the fifteenth century, the Naqshbandī Silsilah was introduced in Sindh, but in the early sixteenth century, Shāh Beg Arghun (r. 1521-24) welcomed many Qādrī and Naqshbandī Sufis in his kingdom. Consequently, the Naqshbandī Silsilah began to be popularized and gradually emerged as the most influential Sufi silsilah of the region, soon replacing the Suhrawardīs in the seventeenth century (Boivin, 2008, pp. 29-31; & Ansari, 1992, p. 22). Many cities and towns such as Sehwan in District Jamshoro, Bhit Shah and Hala in District Matiari, Daraza (near Ranipur) and Pir Jo Goth in District Khairpur, Luari in District Badin, Makli and Thatha city in District Thatha, among others, emerged as powerful Sufi centers, to which vibrant Sufi communities were affiliated (Kalhoro, 2022).

4. The Sufi Literary Landscape of Sindh

Sindh has a rich Sufi literary landscape. In addition to the mystical poetry of Ismaili pīrs (spiritual masters) in multiple languages, including Gujarati, Marwari, and Sindhi, the early Sufi poets such as L'al Shahbāz Qalandar (b. 573/1177-d. 672/1274) of Sehwan composed poetry in Persian. Apart from Persian, many Sufis composed poetry in Sindhi and its native dialects. The most notable among them include Qāḍī Qāḍan (d. 958/1551), Shāh 'Abd al-Karīm of Bulṛī (b. 944/1538-d. 1032/1623), Makhdūm Nūḥ (b. 911/1506-997/1589) Suhrawardī Awaysī of Hāla, Shāh Luṭf-Allah Qādrī (b. 911/1611-1090/1679), Shāh 'Abd al-Laṭīf Bhitā'ī (b. 1101/1689-d. 1165/1752), Miyūn Shāh 'Ināyat Riḍvī, or Shāh 'Ināt (d. 1112/1701), Khwāja Muḥammad Zamān of Lūārī (d.1125/1713-d.1188/1775), Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥīm Grohṛī (b.1152/1739-d.1192/1778), Roḥal Faqīr (d. 1198/1783), Murād Faqīr (d. 1214/1800), 'Abd al-Wahhāb Sachal Sarmast (b. 1152/1739-d. 1242/1829), Miṣrī Shāh Imām Riḍvī (1840-1905) and many others. Composing vernacular poetry widened the audience range of their Sufi message and challenged the cultural hegemony of the elite literati writing in Arabic and Persian. The popular reception of Sufi poetry greatly contributed to disseminating Sufi ethos, characterized by religious inclusiveness.

5. Ideological Roots of Religiously Inclusive Sufi Ethos in Medieval Sindh

Ethos is understood as a set of beliefs defining a person, community, or institution and as guiding principles for regulating social behavior. The Sufi ethos, or the characteristic spirit of the Sufi communities that flourished in medieval Sindh, was represented by religious inclusivity and pluralistic accommodation in everyday life. Before elaborating on this sufi ethos, it seems pertinent to trace its ideological roots. This worldview is rooted in the Sufi doctrines of the oneness of God (tawḥīd) and the unity of God (waḥdat). According to the Sufis, Allah is not only the sole Supreme Being; a fundamental unity exists between the Creator and all the creation, though not in essence.

This idea was articulated by many Sufi poets of Sindh including Qāḍī Qāḍan, Shāh 'Abd al-Karīm of Bulṛī, Shāh 'Abd al-Laṭīf Bhitā'ī, Khwāja Muḥammad Zamān and Sachal Sarmast. Many of them employed the river metaphor for the divine unity, in which all big and small streams of water fall, lose their individual identity, and become one, or the ocean in which waves appear to have their separate identity but are part of the indivisible ocean of unity. Bhitā'ī, the foremost champion of religious pluralism and accommodation in Sindh, believes that God is neither the Lover nor the Beloved, neither the Creator nor the Creation. Furthermore, he reminds us that "plurality is unity,

unity is all plurality. Truth is one…" (Saleem, 2015, pp. 39-40). Sachal, another great champion of religious inclusivity in Sindh, also reminds us that God is not merely the Observer but also the scenery Himself. He is the One; sometimes He appears as a Slave, and sometimes as Alexander and Darius. Sachal asks the readers to shun duality and embrace unity (Sarmast, 2010, pp. 26-129). This idea has led the Sufis to propagate the notion that all humanity enjoys a fundamental unity as it stems from a single source. 'Abd al-Raḥīm Grohṛī declares: "When we dived deep into the river of heart, there was neither Adam nor any man nor us; it became obvious that all were one" (Bhatti, 2012, p. 79).

In line with this idea, a vast majority of the Sufis in Sindh articulated the Sufi state of spiritual union or the unitive experience and self-annihilation or self-effacement (fanā). The renowned tenth-century Sufi martyr, Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922), who visited Sindh, is presented as a symbol of the mystical quest for union in Sindhi Sufi poetry. He is known for his ecstatic, yet blasphemous, saying, ana'l Ḥaqq (literally meaning I am the Divine Truth), and he was mounted to the gallows for it (Schimmel, 1986, pp. 96-149). Early seventeenth-century Sindhi Sufi poet Shāh 'Abd al-Karīm stresses that a seeker must self-efface himself to reach the Divine. One must search for Him inside" (Najm-al-Islam, 1987, p. 40). Shāh 'Ināyat Riḍvī contends that since he is unified with the Beloved, and his breath has identified with Him, why shall he call Him, Who is not far from him" (Allana, 1983, p. 18). The same idea is echoed in the verses of Bhitā'ī (Saleem, 2015, pp. 547-550) and Sachal (Sarmast, 2010, pp. 74-131).

The Sufi doctrine of fanā is often theorized as waḥdat al-wujūd (Unity of Being, or the transcendent unity of God). The thirteenth-century Spanish Sufi-philosopher Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) articulated and elaborated the philosophy, though he did not coin the term waḥdat al-wujūd. It is considered a humanistic philosophy, as it views all creation, including human beings, as the mirror of God (Hakim, 2004, p. 37). Through this philosophy, on the one hand, the Sufis tried to bridge the gulf between God and humanity, and on the other hand, they sought to bring the fellow human beings close to each other, subverting the class, caste, creed, and color based distinctions. Thus, the Sufis who professed the wujūdī philosophy are considered to be more humane and tolerant of the religious other, as opposed to those who espoused its counter-philosophy of waḥdat al-shahūd (the unity of vision, or monotheism of witness), disseminated in South Asia by the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Naqshbandī Sufi reformer, Shaykh Aḥmad Fārūqī (d. 1034/1624) of Sirhind. It must be remembered that the Sufis of Naqshbandī Silsilah are generally pro-shahūdī philosophy and have generally been more puritanical and orthodox in their approach. In contrast, in the South Asian context, the Sufis of Chishtī, Qādrī, and Suhrawardī Silsilahs generally profess wujūdī philosophy and are considered more open-minded and tolerant.

Now, coming to Sindh, a vast majority of the Sufis belonging to Suhrawardī, Qādrī, and Chishtī Silsilahs believed in the wujūdī philosophy. It propagated it through their literary compositions, including poetry, thereby contributing to the region's historical legacy of pluralistic worldview, manifested in the coexistence of its inhabitants having diverse beliefs and values. However, almost all Naqshbandī Sufis conformed to the shahūdī position, except Khwāja Muḥammad Zamān of Luārī or Lowārī (1713-1775), who distanced from the shahūdī position (Ansari, 1992, p. 22) and candidly expressed his favorable views regarding the wujūdī philosophy in his poetry (Anjum, in press).

6. Intertwined Religious Inclusiveness in the Sufi Ethos

As for the eclectic tendency in religious beliefs and practices in Sindh, the region's religious landscape offers a spectrum of religious formations instead of neatly divided religious communities. Recent studies on Hindu-Muslim relationships in South Asia, including Sindh, call for a more nuanced understanding of the assumed divide between the two (Lawrence & Gilmartin, 2000; Dalmia & Faruqui, 2014). The 'non-textualised' and non-rigid religious practices of Hinduism created a space where religious identities became inextricably intertwined. Religious boundaries were quite porous since the osmosis occurred among various sects and groups, whereby ideas and knowledge were gradually and often unconsciously assimilated. The fluidity of religious categories resulted in the formation of intertwined identities. In the words of Levesque, Cook and Boivin (2017, p. 3), these identities

> "… socio-culturally subverted clear-cut communal distinctions by failing to foreground differences between Hindus and Muslims as politically relevant. In other words, religious distinctions were not particularly important political categories of identification for people in Sindh as they did not translate into radically segregated faith experiences."

Thus, it is not tenable to view the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, and Sikh populations in medieval and early modern Sindh divided into neat religious categories. A spectrum of religious formations allowed a heterogeneous and eclectic tendency among the Sufi communities. The flexibility and inclusivity of the Sufi paradigm in Sindh permitted the incorporation of regional religio-cultural elements in Sufism. The Sufi ethos developed within the region's historical and socio-cultural matrix and freely imbibed elements from vernacular/local culture and the region's religio-spiritual traditions. Krishnāism, Shivāism, Nāth Yoga, and Bhakti movement greatly influenced the belief systems of the people, and one may discern a close connection between Shivāism and Sufism in medieval Sindh. For instance, there have been marked similarities between the Pashupata (a Shivāite sect of Hindus) path and the Qalandariyya Silsilah, as indicated by Boivin (2008, pp. 24-25).

These elements are incorporated from many centuries-old Sufi traditions and practices. The identification of Jhulelāl--the River Deity, one of the most revered deities of Sindhi Hindus (Parwani in Boivin and Cook, 2010, pp. 1-27) with L'al Shahbāz Qalandar of Sehwan, and the sacred site of Uderolāl darbār (District Matiari) houses a Muslim shrine, a Hindu temple and the adjoining spaces, co-managed by Hindus and Muslims can be cited as glaring examples in point. The multi-religious figure of Khwāja Khiḍar (Khizar/Khizr) is another example in point, greatly revered by the Hindus and Muslims alike. For the former, he is associated with the River Deity, while the latter regard him as a prophet or a Sufi controlling the river (Kumbher in Boivin & Pénicaud, 2024, pp. 104-119). The presence of 'Hindu Sufis' among Indian Sindhis, creating a 'trans-religious culture,' is another interesting phenomenon (Boivin, 2019). These traditions created space for religious inclusivity and pluralistic accommodation in the people's everyday lives.

7. Reflection of Religious Inclusiveness in Medieval Sindhi Sufi Poetry

Apart from Sufi rituals and practices, the incorporation of elements from the cosmological stock of other religions is also evident in Sufi literary productions. Long before the institutionalization of Sufi silsilahs in Sindh, the early Isma'ilī poets incorporated complex themes from Vedantic philosophy and Bhakti thought in their ginān (devotional hymn-like poems dedicated to God, the Prophet and the shi'ī Imāms) compositions, freely evoking characters such as Krishnā/Shām, Rādhā, gopīs and yogi (Shackle & Moir, 2000; Asani, 2002; Esmail, 2002; Kassam & Mallison, 2010). The medieval Sufi

literary conventions in Sindh often transcended the multiple layers of identities, including the Hindu and Muslim identities. This boundary crossing gives Sufi poetry its power to shape a distinctive language of identity. The worldly identities of religion, ethnicity, occupation, or class are transgressed by human love, which is symbolic of Divine love (Shackle, in Gilmartin and Lawrence, 2000: 58). Bhitā'ī, Khwāja Zamān, and Sachal evoke the metaphors of masjid (mosque) and mandir (a Hindu temple) or shiwāla (a temple or shrine associated with Lord Shiv in Hinduism) for alluding to rigid religious identities, while encouraging the readers to transcend them. They often went to the extent of denouncing the religious boundaries of Islam and Hinduism while candidly professing that there is no difference between Rām and Raḥīm. In a heart-touching poem, Sachal decries all such parochial identities and transcends the established religious boundaries of Islam and Hinduism in the Sufi path of love. He sees God everywhere and rejects the Rām-Raḥīm dichotomy (Sarmast, 2010, pp. 72-87). In Sindh, Roḥal Faqīr and Murād Faqīr freely incorporated elements from Hindu cosmology and Bhakti tradition in their poetry.

One aspect of this inclusiveness was the outright rejection of all intra-Muslim sectarian denominations. Sufi poets openly denounced rigid ideological and theological positions of both sunnī and shi'ī Islam. Bhitā'ī stresses that a Sufi has no sect, and no one knows his creed (Saleem, 2015, p. 135). At the same time, Sachal too candidly denounces the sectarian divide, urges the people to rise above such divisions, and embraces unity (Sarmast, 2010, pp. 76-77).

8. Rigidification of Religious Identities in Colonial Sindh
The colonial period witnessed a growing communalization of religious identities through conscious or unconscious 'othering' in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is argued that the British colonial policies created the Hindu-Muslim binary, which was not inherent or pre-existing in South Asia. The intersection of communalism and nationalism created and sharpened communal identities, which were later articulated and mobilized for political and electoral gains (Pandey, 1990). In Sindh, during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during the decades of 1920s and 1930s, "the immunity that intertwined identities provided against communal politics weakened," as the death of non-communal political leaders such as Ghulam Mohammad Bhurgri (1878-1924) and Seth Harchandrai Vishindas (1862-1928), and the communal riots of Larkana (1927) and Sukkur (1930) widened the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims (Levesque et al., 2017, pp. 3-4).

In the wake of the partition of united India in 1947, which took place amid communal hatred and violence, more than two million Sindhi Hindus migrated to India. Initially, the flow of migration was slow, but after the January 1948 riots in Karachi, the Hindus from Sindh left Pakistan and migrated to India en masse (Kumar & Kothari, 2016, pp. 773-789; Bhavnani, 2014). According to the 2017 census, 1.6% of the total population of Pakistan followed Hinduism as its religion, while Sindh housed 6.51% of the Hindu population, primarily residing in rural areas (Census of 2017, Population by Religion). The figure is believed to have dropped owing to migration to India and conversion to Islam. The post-partition era has further witnessed a growing rigidification of religious identities on both sides of the border (Kothari, 2004, pp. 3885-3888).

9. Contemporary Challenges and the Way Forward
The rise of Salafi Islam as a global reform movement in the twentieth century was marked by a call to revert to the pristine purity of Islamic tradition. Claiming to represent authentic Islam, its proponents rejected all expressions of Sufi Islam as heretical and irreconcilable with Islam. Recent decades have witnessed a strong link between the notion of jihad or holy war and Salafism, resulting in the use of

force and violence to promote and enforce this ideology. (Ridgeon, 2015; Bano, 2023). It has often been expressed in shrine attacks across the Muslim world.

In Pakistan, Sufi Islam, symbolized by the Sufi shrines, has witnessed a contentious historical relationship with the state (Ibad, 2019). In the decade of 1980s, the Zia regime witnessed the menace of religious extremism in the country, which has been increasing ever since (Abbas, 2015). Later, in the wake of 9/11, in its war on terror, the West tried to combat radical Islam through Sufi Islam as its alternative (Philippon in Ewing & Corbett, 2019). The West hailed Sufi Islam as 'good Islam' as opposed to the 'bad Islam' of the ultra-orthodox radical and militant religious groups. Appropriation of Sufi Islam as the soft side and the 'right' kind of Islam, being allegedly quietist and non-political, was promoted.

During the military regime of Musharraf in Pakistan in the 1990s, the representatives of Salafi Islam unleashed widespread religious extremism and radicalization, often expressed in shrine attacks in the country, including Sindh (Tunio & Ali, 2017). The regime tried to harness the potential of Sufi Islam to counter religious extremism and terrorism (Drage, 2015). Nonetheless, many of the state policies proved counter-productive, as the potential threat of militancy and extremism among the followers of Sufism, represented by parties and groups (such as TLP enjoying massive street power) representing Brelvi Islam (Zahid, 2018; Ceglia, 2018; Khan, 2011; & Ahmad, 2021) grew. Recent years have witnessed increasing attacks on religious minorities, including Hindus and Christians, and their places of worship.

10. Conclusion

Sufism needs to be brought to the forefront, as communal values of harmony and tolerance were an integral part of the once-lived culture of Sindh. Reclaiming the past by purposely bringing back at least some of the lost or forgotten values of the past can help minimize extremist viewpoints. The situation calls for devising a coherent strategy to cope with it. Not only does a counter-narrative need to be developed by the state but communities must also be encouraged to engage with this narrative. On the one hand, at the policy level, changes such as introducing communal values of harmony and tolerance in curricula can help de-radicalize the youth and disengage the communities at large from espousing radical views.

Moreover, it is high time for those at the helm of affairs and the policymakers to seriously rethink the priorities and political choices regarding the adoption of religious groups in Pakistan by any regime. On the other hand, at the social level, there is a need to dissociate the followers of Sufism from Sufi practices and traditions that seek to perpetuate oppression and injustice in society. These may include practices and traditions associated with the institution of *sajjadah-nashini* or the hereditary custodianship of Sufi shrines, marking the entire region's sacred geography.

Author
[1]* Tenured Professor & Former Chairperson, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Email: tanjum@qau.edu.pk

References

Abbas, H. (2015). *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*. London & New York: Routledge.

Ahmad, M. (2021). *Rise of Barelvi Extremism: Policy Options for Pakistan (Policy Brief).* Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute.

Allana, G. (1983). *Four Classical Poets of Sind. Minyoon Shah Inat, Shah Abdul Latif, Sachal Sarmast, Sami.* Jamshoro: Institute of Sindhology, University of Jamshoro.

Anjum, T. (in press). Articulation of Sufi Path and Doctrines in the Poetry of Khwāja Muḥammad Zamān Naqshbandī of Luārī. *Journal of Sindhi Studies*.

Ansari, S. F. D. (1992). *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843-1947.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Asani, A. S. (2002). *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia.* London: I B Tauris.

Avari, B. (2013). *Islamic Civilization in South Asia: History of Muslim Power and Presence in the Indian Subcontinent.* London & New York: Routledge.

Bano, M. (2023). (Ed.) *Salafi Social and Political Movements: National and Transnational Contexts.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bhatti, R. (2012). *Sufism and Classical Sindhi Poetry.* Eng. tr. S. Noorhusain. Karachi: Culture Department, Govt. of Sindh.

Bhavnani, N. (2014). *The Making of Exile: Sindhi Hindus and the Partition of India.* New Delhi: Westland Tranquebar.

Boivin, M. (2008). Shivaite Cults and Sufi Centres: A Reappraisal of the Medieval Legacy in Sindh. In M. Boivin (Ed.), *Sindh through History and Representations: French Contributions to Sindhi Studies.* (pp. 22–41). Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Boivin, M. (2010). Sufism, Hinduism, and Social Organization in Sindh: The Forgotten Tradition of Pithoro Pir. In M. Boivin & M. A. Cook. (Eds.), *Interpreting the Sindhi World: Essays on Society and History.* (pp. 117–132). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boivin, M. (2019). *The Hindu Sufis of South Asia: Partition, Shrine Culture and the Sindhis in India.* London: I B Tauris.

Boivin, M. (2020). *The Sufi Paradigm and the Makings of a Vernacular Knowledge in Colonial India: The Case of Sindh (1851–1929)*. Basel: Springer International Publishing.

Boivin, M. (2021). Indigenous People of Sindh. In *Brill's Encyclopedia of the Religions of the Indigenous People of South Asia Online*, (Editor-in-Chief) Marine Carrin. Accessed on 11 January 2024 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2665-9093_BERO_COM_033382

Ceglia, C. (2018, November 29). Good Sufi, Bad Salafi: Is Pakistan's Romance with Sufism Backfiring?, *Jamhoor.* Retrieved from https://www.jamhoor.org/read/2018/11/14/good-sufi-bad-salafi-pakistans-romance-with-sufism-backfiring

Census of 2017 (Population by Religion), Pakistan Bureau of Statistics Website. Accessed March 5, 2024. https://www.pbs.gov.pk/node/96

Cook, M. A. (2010). Getting Ahead or Keeping Your Head? The Sindhi Migration in Eighteenth-Century India. In M. Boivin & M. A. Cook. (Eds.), *Interpreting the Sindhi World: Essays on Society and History.* (pp. 133-149). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dalmia, V. & M. D. Faruqui. (2014). (Eds.) *Religious Interactions in Mughal India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Drage, T. A. (2015). The National Sufi Council: Redefining the Islamic Republic of Pakistan through a Discourse on Sufism after 9/11. Unpublished PhD diss. Religion and Society Research Centre, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

Esmail, A. (2002). *A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics (Ginans).* Surrey: Curzon.

Flügel, P. and M. Ahmad, (2018). An Exploratory Survey of the Jaina Heritage in Pakistan. *CoJS Newsletter. 13*, 26-32.

Hakim, S. (2004). Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabî—A Humanist Perspective. Eng. tr. from the French by J. Lees. *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society. 36*, pp. 15–37.

Hasan, S. K. (2008). *Pakistan: Its Ancient Hindu Temples and Shrines.* Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research.

Ibad, U. B. (2019). *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State: The End of Religious Pluralism*. London: I B Tauris.

Jotwani, M. (1986) Sufis of Sindh. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.

Kalhoro, Z. A. (2021). *Glimpses of Sindhi Heritage.* Islamabad: Silk Road Centre.

Kalhoro, Z. A. (2018). *Symbols in Stone: The Rock Art of Sindh.* Karachi: Endowment Fund Trust for Preservation of the Heritage of Sindh.

Kalhoro, Z. A. (2022). *Saints, Sufis and Shrines: The Mystical Landscape of Sindh.* Karachi: Endowment Fund Trust for Preservation of the Heritage of Sindh.

Kassam, T. R., and F. Mallison. (2010) *Gināns: Texts and Contexts: Essays on Ismaili Hymns from South Asia in Honour of Zawahir Moir*. Delhi: Primus Books.

Khan, M. I. (2011). The Assertion of Barelvi Extremism. The Hudson Institute. https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/the-assertion-of-barelvi-extremism

Kothari, R. (2004). Sindhis: Hardening of Identities after Partition. *Economic and Political Weekly. 39*(35), 3885–3888.

Kumar, P. and Kothari, R. (2016). Sindh, 1947 and Beyond. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies. 39*(4), 773–789.

Kumbher, K. (2024). Khwaja Khizr in the Sindhi Devotional Literature: A Preliminary Survey. In M. Boivin & M. Pénicaud. (Eds.), *Inter-religious Practices and Saint Veneration in the Muslim World: Khidr/Khizr from the Middle East to South Asia.* (pp. 104–119). London & New York: Taylor & Francis/Routledge.

Lawrence, B. B. and D. Gilmartin. (2000). (Eds.) *Beyond Hindu and Turk: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Levesque, J., M. A. Cook & M. Boivin. (2017) (Eds.) *Discovering Sindh's Past: Selections from the Journal of the Sindh Historical Society, 1934-1948.* Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Mallison, F. (2008). Barmati Panth: A Messianic Sect established in Sindh, Kutch, and Saurashtra. In M. Boivin (Ed.), *Sindh through History and Representations: French Contributions to Sindhi Studies*. (pp. 67–71). Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Markovits, C. (2000). *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1710-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mubārakpurī, Q. A. (1965) *'Arab wa Hind 'ahd-i Risālat Meiṇ*. Delhi: Nadwat al-Muṣannifīn.

Najm al-Islam. (1987) *Abiyāt-i Shāh Karīm.* Sindhi text with Urdu tr. in prose & verse. Jamshoro: Institute of Sindhology, University of Jamshoro.

Pandey, G. (1990). *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Pankhurst, R. (2003). The Ethiopian Diaspora to India: The Role of Habshis and Sidis from Medieval Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century. In S. D. S. Jayasuriya & R. Pankhurst. (Eds.), *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*. (pp. 189–222). Trenton; NJ: Africa World Press.

Parsram, J. G. (1979) *Sindh and its Sufis.* Lahore: Sang-e-Meel reprint; first pub. 1924.

Parwani, L. (2010). Myths of Jhuley Lal: Deconstructing a Sindhi Cultural Icon. In M. Boivin & M. A. Cook. (Eds.), *Interpreting the Sindhi World: Essays on Society and History*. (pp. 1–27). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Philippon, A. (2019). Sufi Politics and the War on Terror in Pakistan: Looking for an Alternative to Radical Islamism? In K. P. Ewing & R. R. Corbett. (Eds.), *Modern Sufis and the State*: *The Politics of Islam in South Asia and Beyond*. (pp. 140-160). New York: Columbia University Press.

Ridgeon, L. (2015). (Ed.) *Sufis and Salafists in the Contemporary Age.* London: Bloomsbury.

Saleem, A. (2015). *Melodies of Shah Abdul Lateef Bhittai.* Sindhi Text with English & Versified Urdu tr. V. 1. Karachi: Sindhi Adabi Board.

Sarmast, S. (2010) *Sachal sach haē sārā*. [Sachal is All Truth] Ed. & Urdu tr. A. Saleem. Karachi: Culture Department, Govt. of Sindh.

Schimmel, A. (1986). *Pearls from the Indus: Studies in Sindhi Culture*. Jamshoro: Sindhi Adabi Board.

Schimmel, A. (1974) *Sindhi Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Shackle, C. (2000). Beyond Hindu and Turk: Crossing the Boundaries in Indo-Muslim Romance. In B. B. Lawrence & D. Gilmartin. (Eds.), *Beyond Hindu and Turk: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia.* (pp. 55–73). Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Shackle, C., and Z. Moir. (2000). *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans.* Richmond: Curzon.

Thapar, R. (1989). Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity. *Modern Asian Studies*. *23*(2), 209–231.

Tunio, H. & Z. Ali. (2017). Bloodbath at Sehwan Shrine. *The Express Tribune.* February 17.

Virani, S. N. (2011). *Taqiyya* and Identity in a South Asian Community. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. *70*(1), 99-139.

Virani, S. N. (2007). *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, A Search for Salvation.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Zahid, F. (2018). The Potential for a New Strand of Islamist Extremism in Pakistan. *Terrorism Monitor*. The Jamestown Foundation.