

MANNAT AND ASSOCIATED BELIEFS SYSTEM OF PEOPLE VISITING SHRINES

Attiya Batool¹, Dr. Abid Ghafoor Chaudhry², Hyder Bux Shar³, Adnan Nasir⁴, Haris Farooq⁵

¹Anthropologist, Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI), ²Incharge, Department of Anthropology PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, ³Sociologist, Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI), ⁴Anthropologist, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, ⁵Anthropologist, Department of International Development Studies Iqra University

Corresponding Author:

Attiya Batool

Development Alternatives Incorporated (DAI) Islamabad

AttiyaBatool005@gmail.com

Abstract: Shrines of Sufi Saints remain a significant aspect of the religious and social structure of Pakistan. They are fundamentally functional in creating social participation, provision of entertainment in the form of devotional music and songs (*qawali*), educating people, distribution of food, sweets, money etc. The purpose behind the present study was to explore the notion of *Mannat* and its existing types and practices in different religions and sects of the existing society. To uncover the associated belief systems of people visiting Shrines. Moreover, to understand the underlying casual factors compelling people to make *Mannat*. The study's sampling frame was Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam in village Noor Pur Shahan of Capital Territory Islamabad, from which a sample of 80 respondents was purposively selected. The study used a blend of both qualitative and quantitative tools. The results showed.

Key Words: Sufism, Shrine, *Mannat*, Belief, *Sufi* saint, Regular visitor, Sects, *Waseela* and *Wasta*.

INTRODUCTION

In Pothohar region there are various Shrines, where followers visit to deal with their social and psychological problems. The (Khan and Sajid 2011). Shrine of Bari Imam is built on top of Medieval sites, therefore it is at least 450 years old. The Shrines are deeply connected with the '*Sufi Salasul*' (spiritual orders) which was established and named after some of the leading *Aulia Allah* (Sufi friends of God) (Khan, et al. 2014). Shah Abdul Latif Qadri Qazmi Mashhaddi R.A (Bari Imam) is a well renowned Sufi Saint of the Pothohar region (Government of Pakistan 1999). He was considered to be righteous by the virtue of being pious (Platteau, 2011), true follower and preacher of Islam. He worshipped Allah (God) at a number of places (Batool, et al. 2014a). He was a *Wali Allah* and spiritual guide of '*Silsila-e-Qadria*', a '*Tariqa*' which claimed spiritual supremacy over all other Sufi orders (Loimeier, 2013), of Hazrat Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra).

The Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam was originally built on the order of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (Government of Pakistan 1999). It is under control and management of '*Auqaf*', institution of Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, since 1976. A total of 40 employees work at this Shrine, 17 are regular and rest are hired on daily wages by civil defense (Batool, et al. 2014a). The Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam contains a unique culture like other sacred

areas. Believers of Shah Abdul Latif perform a variety of religious rituals at Shrine to make connection with spiritual world especially the buried Saint. Famous practices of this Shrine are

- Lightning rituals (burning of candles, *charagh*, *much* and *agarbatti*)
- *Chadar* and flower spreading on and '*jharoo lagana*' on the Sufi graves
- '*Mannat uthana*' , '*Langar bantna*' (free distribution of food to the public), *Tabarruk* (distribution of food to specific people), distribution of sweets (*Elaichi dana/Makhane*)
- Story telling regarding Hazrat Ali ul Murtaza (A.S), Naat, Tilawat, *Dhammal*
- Slogans of Hazrat Ali ul Murtaza (A.S) and of Hazrat Bari Imam etc (Batool, et al. 2014b)
- Threads and lock tying to the mesh around the grave area of the shrine and taking circling the shrine, and visiting the shrine barefooted.

At Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam both the believers and non-believers visit and make *Mannat* (to ask or beg), because it is believed that Hazrat Bari Imam is relatively closer to Allah and can advocate their desires to Him. When the desires, or prayers are fulfilled believers present different things at Shrines depending upon their socio-economic condition, including animals, money, gold, sweets, *Daigs* (food), milk, ghee, pitchers (*gharolies*), *dalies*,

sehras etc for showing their love with buried Sufi and Allah(Batool, et al. 2014b).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research was conducted at the Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam in village Noor Pur Shahan, by selecting a sample of 80 devotees (regular visitors). To explore the types, ritual practices, and casual factors compelling people to make '*mannat*' and its associated belief system various qualitative and quantitative tools including participant observation, structured questionnaire, formal and informal interviews and case studies were used. The data was entered in SPSS for further analyzation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Percentile Table. People Perception Regarding Mannat

Questions	Response	Percent	
		Yes	No
Do you ask for <i>Mannat</i> ?	Yes 54 No 01	98.1	1.9
Staunch belief that <i>Mannat</i> asked at shrines are fulfilled.	Yes 55 No 00	100	00
Does the lower class only believe and asks for <i>Mannat</i> at shrines?	Yes 52 No 03	94.5	5.5
People present something as (<i>Nazarana</i>) at shrines after fulfilment of their desires?	Yes 55 No 00	100	00
Presentation of <i>Nazarana</i> gives inner satisfaction to people?	Yes 54 No 01	98.1	1.9

The respondents and their families when inquired if they '*ask for Mannat at shrines*', 98.1 percent agreed that they did. Further they added that the tradition of considering these places as holy and visiting shrines has been passed on to them by their families and the practices have been amalgamating by their parents and grandparents. However 1.9 percent stated that they only visited the shrine in respect of the saint and for goodwill. Further the beliefs were investigated by asking if they had a '*Staunch belief that Mannat asked at shrines are fulfilled*' 100 percent agreed that they frequently asked for *Mannats* at Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam and that they were always fulfilled. The completion of *Mannat* strengthened their beliefs rigorously and made them regular visitors. Diverse believes and ways of request/pray were observed at Shrine.

- Some Believers asked directly from the Sufi Saint

- Some made him a *waseela* in front of God
- Some gave *wasta* of Sufi to God
- While some asked directly from God (Batool, et al. 2014a)

It was observed that all these practices, ways and '*waseelay*' are actually the same. A visit to the Shrine for *Mannat* shows the belief of pilgrims as he requests the fulfilment of his desires. Paying pilgrimage to the saint means that the Sufi Saint is being made into a '*waseela*' and '*wasta*' in front of God. Now no matter what path believers choose, i.e. should they ask directly from God or from Sufi Saint or make Sufi Saint as *waseela* and *wasta* they prayers come true because of the Saint. When inquired '*Does the lower class only believe and asks for Mannat at shrines*', it was found to be true that majorly only the lower class believe on shrine and visit it as 94.5 percent agreed and are usually from rural areas. While, 5.5 percent disagreed. The students in an Indian university have found during their study that urban people are more superstitious than those having rural background (George and Sreedhar, 2006).

When inquired why and which things compelled them to make *Mannat*, they referred to their Holy Scripture Quran. They reflect that Allah answers that a man calls his God or cries for help, and marches toward Him, when he was in trouble and complexity, and then He bestows His blessing to him. Needs and difficulties force people to ask and beg to God. They have been distressed from materialistic means so that they go towards God and find realistic means (*waseela* of *Auliya* Allah, friends of God) to please Allah.

At Shrines of Sufi Saints, believers not only come for social, economic, physical and psychological needs but also for spiritual healing, *Faiz* and *Nigah*. After completion of any desire, '*they satisfy their soul by presenting Nazrana*', as 100 percent respondents agreed that *nazarana* is a common practice after the completion of the '*Mannat*' while 98.1 percent unravelled that it provided them with inner satisfaction. The meaning of *Mannat* (vow) explored from the respondents has been found to be multidimensional. *Mannat* has been believed to be as an oath or a promise while some held it as a transaction between a person and a deity, to render some services or gift. It was observed that, *Mannat* is considered as a humble request (*Minnat*) or pray of a person at Shrine to get some material or non-material objects which he can't easily receive from God through his own name as they are sinners. The prayers thus when not answered directly, people march towards these sacred places and pious people (Saints/*Auliya*). The religious

ritual *Mannat* is practiced in a variety of world's religions, cultures and sects. In Christianity, a person free of marry by making religious *Mannat* (vow). It intended to help people and do well in life. The '*Barata*' (Bengali term for vow) stories provide models for ethics compassion, and caring for others, making virtuous daughters and wives (Raj and Harman 2006). In Buddhism, many different kinds of religious vows are taken by lay and monastic community in Mahayana and Vajrayana tradition. Muslim vows are characteristic of supernatural power and history is well-known to supplicants. Islam includes a number of sects including *Ahl-e Sunnat*, *Ahl-e-Tashayyo*, *Ahl-e-Wahab*, *Dayobundi*, *Naqshbundi* etc. Thus the religious practices vary according to this division. The concept of *Mannat* exists in almost all sects but practices vary accordingly. Similarly in Pakistan, majority of population is Muslim (Farooq and Kayani 2012) but the community belongs to different sects, and the most popular are *Ahl-e Sunna* and *Ahl-e-Tashayyo*. Followers of both these sects have belief on *Risalat*, *Nabuwat* and *Wilayat*. They take pilgrimage of sacred Shrines for various purposes and practice different Shrine rituals.

Families visit shrines due to their dedication and traditional orientation towards *Sufism*. Tradition of *Sufism* reflects that spiritual resources provide coping strategy for various issues of the contemporary world (Voll 1992). At Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam, vast population of pilgrims belonged to *Ahl-e Sunna* and *Ahl-e-Tashayyo*. Majority of the people came to make *Minnat* or to present *Nazrana* after fulfilment or were regular visitors. Pilgrims regularly perform certain activities and sometimes make *Minnat* (Khan and Sajid 2011). People come with their needs and request for the fulfilment and decide *Nazrana* on their own. There is no compulsion for *Nazrana* like to present a '*Daig*' or gold etc or time period. The decision is made according to the affordability. Believers state that *Auliya* Allah (Saint) does not need all these things. They are friends of God and just bestow things to people without discrimination. It's only the belief of people and a way of satisfaction, which is one of the major characteristic of Shrine (Khan and Sajid 2011).

Case Study

Bakht Bibi was a regular visitor of Shrine Hazrat Bari Imam. She lived in an area adjacent to the Shrine. She claimed that she met with Hazrat Baba Lal Shah Qalandar of Surasi Syeddan when she was living in Murree. She left her native area Murree for providing better educational opportunities to her son. She came to Islamabad city and chose this area for living. Bakht Bibi told that from that time she used to visit Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam regularly.

When the son of Bakht Bibi completed his education, he got a good job of government sector in Islamabad.

In the beginning, they didn't have their own home but after job her son bought his own. Bakht Bibi went to Shrine everyday and shared all her worries and joys to the buried Saint and asked vows for different things. Her son's job was excellent and her family was living happily. One day her son lost his job due to a conspiracy. He struggled a lot but did not succeed in proving himself as innocent. The conditions worsened day by day. However, everyday Bakht Bibi went to the Shrine and asked the holy saint for her son's job. She made a *Mannat* that if Hazrat Bari Imam will return the job of her son; she will give a '*Daig*' as a *Nazrana* at Shrine. Then one day his son decided to go back to his native area because since he could not cope with the stress anymore. Bakht Bibi however, disagreed and felt worried. She didn't want to leave Hazrat Bari Imam. Every day she went to the Shrine and cried her heart out. Before the day of departure Bakht Bibi came to the shrine for last pilgrimage and '*Salam*'. She was pained and returned back saying "today is my last visit to you. I do not know if I will come back or not". Now when she returned back home home, her son hugged her happily and told her that his boss called him in office and gave him the news that the conspirer had been arrested; and they need not leave now. Bakht Bibi was overwhelmed and returned to the Shrine. She paid her gratitude to the buried Saint. After some days she gave *Nazrana* (*Daag*) at Shrine.

Bakht Bibi added that she had great belief on Shrines and *Auliya* Allah. Her belief was strengthened after this incidence. Hazrat Bari Imam loves their pilgrims and bestows *Faiz* and what they ask.' A unique culture is observed in various holy places of the world including Mosques, Hindu Temples (*Mandir*), Churches and in Shrines. Muslim saints and Shrines, known as *dargahs* attract diverse range of pilgrims religiously (Batool, et al. 2014b). Beliefs and attitudes are socially learned (Bord and Faulkner 1975). People adapt their actions and behaviours according to their observations and awareness (Kottak 2002). Some religious beliefs have more resilience and are retained or culturally transmitted by humans (Scupin and DeCorse 2009). Pakistani community allocate great importance to the Shrine of dead saints (Daniel and Pugh 1984) and have great faith upon them.

CONCLUSION

Sufi Shrines hold immense importance in society of Pakistan. Believers of the shrines perform different rituals there (Abbas, et al. 2013). The role of Sufis has been considered as intermediary bridge that lead to God and success. Pakistani people 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 (Rozeenal 2006). The tradition of visiting sacred places to attain religious merit, washing off the sins and completion of desires and prayers (*Mannat*) are common practice across the world (Frembgen 2012). The Shrine of Bari Imam is one of the most popular Shrine of South Asia. Followers and believers of Hazrat Bari Imam are belonged to various areas of Pakistan as well as to other countries of world. Diverse ranges of rituals are practiced here every day. A distinctive ritual *Mannat* is also practiced here like other sacred places and Shrines. People make different types of *Mannats* and after completion of desire/pray, they present *Nazrana* for self-satisfaction. The Shrine of Hazrat Bari Imam is under construction since many years. During this time period, number of disputes arose. Shrine is under control of Auqaf (governmental institution) but the role of Auqaf is zero percent at shrine. The message of Islam and *Faqar* is not conveying by this institution. Believers of pilgrims are mortifying so that it is required; Auqaf will follow the path of buried Saint Hazrat Bari Imam and spread the message of Islam and *Faqar* through this religious institution.

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