

Abstract

Title: Sufi Heritage in Sindh: Discourse, Representation and Performance

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In the study of cultures, anthropologists engage with tangible and intangible cultural heritage forms as an indispensable, critical sites of analysis to understand how people, social groups, communities, minority group, nations and states in different cultures formulate cultural knowledge production and use it in relation to identity politics. Sufism or mysticism embodies as an idea, imagery, literary knowledge, critical heritage, discourse and practice in Muslim societies and Indian/South Asian cultural context. The idea and practice of Sufism or Sufi culture has multiple, contesting meanings, forms and interpretations in historical, socio-cultural, political contexts. Its contesting, dynamic and multiple meanings seem to explain Sufism as a shifting, transpositioning, ever-changing cultural construct and practice. The critical discourse heritage perspective of Sufism interprets it in terms of alternative literary discourse and practice integral to identity politics. In Indian cultural, historical context, the Sufi heritage knowledge production and music practice is recognized to have influenced from local, indigenous plural religious traditions and cultures i.e. Bhakti devotional movement, Guru Nanak's Sikh tradition, Buddhism and Hindu Santan Dharam. In this context, the cultural transfer, exchange, translation and transposition of ideas and practices seem to underpin the defining feature of Sufi cultural narrative and practice. This also helps to understand the dynamic, collaborating, connecting and transcultural conceptualisations of culture.

Grounded in the contesting conception of culture and identity, my interdisciplinary doctoral research study project aims to explore, analyse and document the Sufi literary and music heritage in terms of role and significance of critical discourse of heritage as cultural knowledge production and practice in the context of Sindh, Pakistan. The interdisciplinary research framework is grounded in the fields of anthropology, cultural studies, ethnomusicology, critical heritage and discourse studies and looks into the discourse, representation and performance of Sufi heritage practice in the formulation of transcultural and cosmopolitan conceptions of culture.

The contemporary cultural political context of the Sufi literary and music tradition in Sindh is being interpreted and actively used in public space as a progressive literary movement and critical discourse heritage practice to promote syncretism, tolerance, peace and pluralism against religious extremism and radicalisation. Given this critical engaging discourse of the Sufi heritage, it explores and analyses what and how the Sufi discourse, representation and performance has been/is being engaged with by different cultural actors, writers, artists and performers as an instrument of anti-radicalisation, peace promotion and social harmony. Critically, it aims to analyse and document the socially engaged, critical, activist role and public performance of Sufi heritage in a conflict ridden society in Pakistan.

Based on the conceptual notions of cultural politics of progressive literature, critical, alternative discourse, performance practices and social movement, my doctoral study project aims to explore and document the social, public engaging role of the literature, art, heritage and cultural forms of knowledge in the identity construction and for the promotion of the transcultural, multicultural and global values of tolerance, peace, pluralism and social justice.