

Sufi Heritage in Sindh

Discourse, Representation and Performance

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Introduction and Context

The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research framework has introduced new analytical models in the study of culture. The singular and discrete concept of cultures used in early anthropology has been transformed into multicultural, transcultural and transnational conceptions of culture.

In the transcultural and transnational study of culture, the heterogeneous, fluid, borderless and ever-changing conceptualizations of culture have replaced the traditional concept of singular, discrete and homogenous culture.

Drawing on the heterogenous, heterodox, de-territorialised and non-essentialist transcultural theorisation of culture, my research project focuses on heterodox Sufi cultural heritage and knowledge production in Sindh, Pakistan. It investigates the vernacular cultural context of Islam through progressive Sufi discourse and performance in Sindh.

As counter-cultural identity narrative in post-independence, newly created Muslim nation-state of Pakistan. I analyse the intersection of subversive Sindhi cultural identity and pluralistic Sufi discourse to contest the singular, monolithic literal Islamist religious ideology of Pakistan.

Sindhi Sufi Culture and Identity Construction

The pluralist and peaceful Sufi culture is interpreted and appropriated to construct Sindhi identity; it projects the authentic Sindhi identity as 'the land of Sufis and peaceful co-existence'. It promotes syncretic, inclusive, tolerant, peaceful and pluralistic values against religious extremism and radicalisation.

The progressive, plural Sufi cultural narrative challenges the singular, essentialist and reductionist orthodox clerical Islamist interpretation. Specifically, in the post-independence Pakistan, the Sindhi writers, intellectuals, academics, artists, performers, civil society and political activists use the socially engaged discourse and cultural production of Sindhi Sufi Heritage as an instrument to counter the dominant state religious identity and ideology.

In recent years, the progressive and pluralistic Sufi discourse and performance is actively used in public space in the form of cultural festivals against religious extremism and radicalism.



Methodology- sources of data

- Ethnography – fieldwork method- participation in and observation of Sufi Shrines
- Interviews – Key informants, Indepth and Informal interviewing
- Discourse Analysis – written and speech texts
- Social Media analysis – visuals, images and content
- Content Analysis of Sufi literature produced by cultural institutions

Objects of Study

To explore and analyse;

- Institutionalization of the cultural production of Sufi heritage
- Socially engaged activist use of Sufi heritage discourse and performance
- Sufism and progressive Sindhi identity construction
- Discursive formations of Sufi tradition
- Circulation and dissemination of Sufi discourse against religious radicalism



SUFISM BEYOND BORDERS A SOULFUL JOURNEY

with
ZULFIQAR ALI & MAZHAR HUSSAIN

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