



The Role of Muslim Sufi Shayyukh in Formation and Preservation of Religious Identity of Muslims in the United Kingdom

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The Role of Muslim *Sufi Shayyukh* in Formation and Preservation of Religious Identity of Muslims
in the United Kingdom

Sadaf Rauf Shier

A Thesis in the Field of Religion
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

This study explored the techniques used by three generations of Muslim *Sufi Shayyukh* [plural of a Muslim religious leader, *Shaykh* in Arabic], of Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, mainly between 1970's-2025, to help their British Muslim followers with formation, preservation and transfer of positive religious identity as law abiding citizens of the UK and transforming them into peace builders. Pakistanis from remote areas of Pakistan with low literacy and few professional skills were brought to the UK in the 1950s as cheap labor to keep older textile mills competitive after electrification. Low pay and the need to live near the mills led to Muslim-majority neighborhoods. Subsequent family reunions created a critical need for preserving positive religious identity in the presence of socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, and racial tensions with the host society. Most Pakistanis were unaware of the differences between British and Pakistani cultures before arriving, and they had little religious literacy. The new land contributed to their economic well-being, but they needed guidance to navigate the many differences. Labels of extremism and terrorism presented additional challenges for Muslims. The *Shayyukh* realized the challenges their followers were facing as early as the 1980s, when they started helping them integrate into British society, while still retaining their positive religious identity and helping them transfer those benefits to the next generation. This ethnographic study used interviews of the *Shayyukh*'s followers in the UK and Pakistan, observations, field notes, multi-modal data from social media, including photographs, screen shots of videos, and video recordings of publicly-delivered speeches. Discourse

analysis and multimodal discourse analysis of data revealed that the *Shayyukh* used traditional *Naqshbandi Sufi* Muslim concepts of *Sohbat* [companionship with the *Shaykh*] and *Rabta* [connection(s)] in creating the desired changes. Five specific methods used are given below. First, they developed in their followers a deeper understanding of Islam and its application in domestic, professional and public lives. The second method involved role modeling applied to religion in domestic and public lives. The third method was to offer hope, resilience and training to followers seeking positive alternatives, particularly in the face of adversity. Fourth, they helped their followers understand who they were in their new land, and how to become part of it in the following ways: by being good, caring neighbors even when harshly treated; by getting educated; by getting good employment; by doing charity; among other things; all of which should help dispel negative stereotypes. The fifth method was to engage youth in celebrating their religious identities by organizing and performing in formal religious gatherings. They made extensive use of relationship-building to help their followers. Most important was making the new land their arena by being flexible, without sacrificing Islam's core religious values, integrating instead of self-segregating, getting to know the local community and building successful relationships with it. To do this, the *Shayyukh* used the language of hope and positivity, visiting their followers' homes frequently, never judging them nor closing doors on them.

Frontispiece



The photo shows the exterior of the Roza Paak (the mausoleum) of the first three Sufi saints of Naqshbandiyya Muhammadiyya Mujaddadiyya Sufi Order at Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Source: IT and Communications Department, Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, June 07, 2017.

Author's Biographical Sketch

My higher education experiences of being a visibly Muslim (hijab wearing) student at US universities took place in the early twenty first century. These experiences reaffirmed my belief that divides will only cause harm, disrupt lives and damage communities. Since then, I have always felt a serious need to help this increasingly curious world understand Islam and Muslims without a prejudicial lens and help this world heal. Therefore, I started working with interfaith organizations in Minnesota, USA. I also started developing connections with transnational Muslim *Sufi* diaspora people in western countries. I became increasingly interested in learning about other young Muslims, their experiences in Western universities, their family bonds, and the role of religion in their academic, professional, and personal lives. Therefore, after finishing a Ph.D in Second Languages and Cultures Education, I started working as a Muslim Chaplain at a Roman Catholic university in St. Paul, MN, where I delivered lectures and designed programs to promote religious literacy about Islam, as well as interfaith collaboration among diverse religions at that university. The experience there re-awakened in me a long-held desire to teach Islam in a US university full time. The desire led me to undertake the ALM in Religion at Harvard Extension School that this thesis is part of. My strong faith in the positive role religion can play in our lives, my desire to explore ways to bridge divides in this world, and my passion to explore the ways *Naqshbandi* wisdom guides its followers, motivated me to undertake this research project.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the *Naqshbandi Sufi Shayyukh* for their unconditional love for humanity and their dauntless courage and innumerable contributions to maintaining world peace.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the generous support and freedom that the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif have provided to me during my field trips and data collection process. I would like to offer heartfelt gratitude to my study participants in the UK for their trust in me and their commitment to the mission of helping this world through their personal stories. I would like to also acknowledge the resident *Sufis* at the Eidgah Sharif shrine complex and many visiting followers [*sungees*] for providing me access to the information that I needed during my field trips.

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I couldn't have done this work without the stellar support and never-failing love of my beloved husband. I am deeply indebted to the support of my parents, particularly my mother, in helping me reach where I am today. I am grateful for the silent and innumerable contributions of my siblings during my prolonged educational journey.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This study explored the techniques used by three generations of Muslim *Sufi Shayyukh* [plural of a Muslim religious leader, *Shaykh* in Arabic], mainly between 1970's-2025, to help their British Muslim followers with formation and preservation of positive religious identity as law abiding citizens of the UK and transforming them into peace builders. Most Pakistani Muslims in the UK today are the descendants of Pakistani migrant laborers, particularly from Mirpur Azad Kashmir region (Peach, 2006), brought into the UK in the 1950s to work primarily in textile mills in the Midlands region. Electrification at the time had allowed the construction of more efficient textile mills, so that the only way older textile mills built for steam engine and belt-delivered power, then retrofitted with electrical power, could compete and not close, was to reduce overhead by operating around the clock, seven days a week. Local British labor was insufficient in numbers and unwilling to work nights at low paying jobs, so migrant laborers were brought into the UK as “guest workers” (Smith, 200, p.4), primarily from mountainous regions of Pakistan, where large numbers of people were being displaced by the construction of hydroelectric dams. Relationships between the non-Muslim white British public and Muslims were never simple, uni-directional, or uniform. Vertovec (2002, p. 33) calls this relationship a “circular procedure” and provides evidence for this. While there was recognition of Pakistani Muslim laborers and their descendants as hardworking and honest people in the UK, stigmatization started as early as 1960's. Derogatory, racial labels were used to associate Pakistani Muslim youth with crime and lawlessness. The

second generation of Pakistani British Muslims born and/ or schooled in the U.K. during late 1970's and 1980's were much more confident and aware of their rights. They understood the importance of, and worked towards, preserving their religious identity and at the same time achieving better social integration, better opportunities for upward social mobility and recognition at social, political, and legislative levels (Vertovec, 2002).

These efforts led towards enhanced recognition of Islam and Pakistani Muslims among the general British population. This recognition was welcomed by many non-Muslim white British but simultaneously perceived by some as a threat to their social and economic lives and the British Judeo-Christian cultures and identities. Consequently, stereotyping of Pakistani Muslims and Islamophobia became more rampant, and so did the advocacy for and by Muslims. Muslim youth were not only seen as an underclass, kind neighbors, loving classmates, honest co-workers, "law abiding citizens" and "hardworking" (Ghail & Haywood 2017, p. 7) immigrants (Acher, 2009), but they were now also seen as "a social problem for the state and more specifically an institutional problem for educational institutions" (Ghail & Haywood 2017, p. 7). As soon as the 21st century started, they were simultaneously seen as "potential jihadist and Islamophobic victim" (Ghail & Haywood 2017, p. 7), potential security threats (Acher, 2009), and the "enemy within" (Ghail & Haywood, 2017, p. 1). Their beloved religion, Islam, came under attack. As with other people, Pakistani British Muslims' religion was a bond between them and the rest of the Muslim diaspora in the world, a source of strength and peace, and something they were trying very hard for decades to preserve and pass along to their next generations as an identity and a treasure. However, this very Muslim identity became a source of danger. The struggle was many-dimensional and involved multiple

contested identities. This endangerment of Muslim identities has impacted and disturbed the entire social fabric of Muslims in the UK, and impacted the personal, academic, and professional life trajectories of Muslims. My research tries to capture the intricacies of this never-ending, decades long struggle to preserve the positive religious and social identities, and the role *Sufi Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, played in it.

Gaps in Research

The published literature on the Muslim immigrant experience in the UK has focused on the history of Muslim immigrants in the UK, particularly as aging textile mills closed, removing the original purpose for them being there, and extensively documenting the interactions and experiences of immigrants and traditional British citizens. There is also a substantial literature on the lived immigrant and Muslim experiences in the UK, usually by authors seeking a balanced perspective. However, discussion on the role of shrines in civil life in contemporary times is missing. Strothmann (2013) claims that disconnecting or dismissing the role of Islamic institutions, such as shrines, in civic life is likely to ignore a large part of public life. In the case of *Sufi* shrines, their role is not limited to the Muslim country that they exist in, but rather, they are transnational in their influence. Strothman (2013) also claims that “Faith Based Organisations can provide psychological stability in an unstable environment” (p. 50). My literature review reveals that an area of major impact that needs attention is the work of Muslim *Sufi* spiritual leaders in peacemaking and preserving and reclaiming Muslim identity during the last 5 decades and helping them see ways in which they can be positive, productive law-abiding valued citizens of the UK based on Islamic teachings. Diana Moore might call it Islam in

public life in a Western society. What is lacking are narratives of Muslim *Sufis* in Britain, and a description of the activities and methods used by *Sufi* Muslim religious leaders to help UK Muslims to reshape the dominant anti-Muslim narrative and achieve resilience, positive civic engagement, and social action. These narratives could help those around them turn the moments of identity crisis into “ever-greater opportunities to reflect upon their own Islamic identities” (Ghail & Haywood, 2017, p. 8). The methods of the *Naqshbandi Sufi* leaders include “*Sohba*” (also known as *Sohbat*, close companionship of a *murid* or follower with their *Sufi* master), which is characterized by consistent, rigorous, yet flexible, subtle, and informal ways of multi-generational one-on-one connections. The *Sufi murids* [followers] of this *Sufi* Order believe in their *Sufi* master as a living saint, the *Quranic* word for which is *Awlia Allah* (the friends of *Allah*), singular of which is *Wali Ullah* (a friend of *Allah*).

The following were my guiding research questions:

- What methods did three generations of Eidgah Sharif shrine superiors use with UK youth in the last five decades, in order to form, preserve and transfer their Muslim religious identity as positive law-abiding citizens, and create peacebuilders from the UK youth?
- What relationship-building strategies were used and what is the significance of relationship between the *Sufi* master and his followers in creating peacebuilders among UK youth?
- What language features did the shrine superiors use to achieve their goals?

In order to examine the role of transnational linkages of this *Sufi* Order (based in Pakistan) in preserving and transferring the *Sufi* Muslim identity of British Pakistani

Muslims, this research has conducted a multimodal critical discourse analysis of some pictures from the *Sufi* shrine located in Pakistan, open access photos of the *Shayyukh* with their followers obtained through their social media accounts, the gatherings they hold in the U.K., screen shots of the live broadcast of their programs through Facebook, audio-recorded interviews of Pakistani British *Sufi* Muslim followers of this particular *Sufi* Order, the publicly delivered speeches of the *Sufi Shayyukh* [plural of *Shaykh*] of this *Sufi* order, and some religious texts that they quote.

Significance of the Research

This multidisciplinary research matters to the field of religion and is applicable in the broader fields of peace and migration studies. This study helps enhance our understanding of the application of religion in domestic as well as public life, specifically in the secular sphere. This study also helps promote religious literacy about *Sufism*, which is broadly misunderstood in the Western world, which often uses the term for something completely different from the branch of Islam being considered in this study. *Sufi* contributions in promoting and preserving world peace and identity formation in the Western context is an understudied area. *Sufis* claim that they have always been working for world peace and formation of positive religious identities of people. It was necessary to closely examine contributions of silent, yet crucial, stakeholders (in this case *Sufi* Muslim religious leaders) in world peace, especially in Britain. This study has tried to fill that gap and examine how the Pakistani immigrants prove themselves as valued neighbors, humanitarians, bridge builders, and peacemakers. The study will also help the readers see *Sufi* Muslim youth as modern visionaries of this world, and as resilient citizens of the global world who can and do use their agency, creativity, and flexibility

towards peacebuilding and fighting extremism at grassroots levels. Understanding the ways these *Sufi* methods have worked or not worked in the UK may open a window to deepen our understanding of the validity and crucial role of traditional religious leadership in a contemporary state of affairs. The purpose of this research was multifold including the following:

1. To help the world see the traditional role of *Sufis* and *Tassawwuf* in the contemporary world, especially with regards to building bridges between perceived enemies, promoting world peace, and fostering interfaith harmony in diverse societies; and
2. To identify lessons that can be transferred, and the tools that may be used to address many of the problems facing today's broader Western society (including Europe, the US, and Canada). These tools may help to:
 - a. Preserve and re-claim stigmatized and threatened religious identity.
 - b. Build bridges between ancient religious traditions and the modern Western world.
 - c. Build bridges between generations.
 - d. Lead Muslim youth out of loneliness, depression, and anxiety.
 - e. Prevent extremism and the terrorism it can lead to.

Chapter II

Muslims in the UK

In the 2021 census, there were 3.9 million Muslims (6.5%) in the UK, with most in London, West Midlands, North West, and Yorkshire (Statistica, 2023; Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census, 2021). Their socioeconomic status is low, unemployment is high, academic achievement and skill levels are low (Statistica, 2023; Platt & Zoccotti, 2021), and they live in overcrowded households (Wilson, 2023, p. 17). Ghettoization in poor neighborhoods with racial discrimination and Islamophobia has trapped them in a downward spiral of unemployment, low-paid jobs and low socio-economic mobility (Ansari, 2018; Partington, 2023). They are viewed negatively by other British (National Centre for Social Research, 2019), caused in part by terrorist activities of September 2001 (Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats). Muslims in the UK have become the victims of 47% of religious hate crimes¹ (Home Office Report on Hate Crime: England and Wales, 2018 - 2019, p. 17). The immigration status of some Pakistani Muslims limits advancement and integration into the broader host society.

Historical Context of Muslims in the UK

Muslims have been in the UK least 300 years (Gilliat-Ray, 1969; Hellyer, 2007), with the first mosque established in 1889 (Runnymede Commission, 1997). In the 1920's

¹ Home Office Report on Hate Crime: England and Wales, 2018-2019.
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5da47329ed915d17b9646841/hate-crime-1819-hosb2419.pdf>

and 1930's, Muslim immigrants were mainly seamen. The main influx of Pakistanis into the UK came in the 1950s, when electrification of old textile mills created a need for labor willing to work undesirable night and weekend shifts to allow them to compete with modern mills. At the same time electrification in Pakistan was achieved by dam building in a remote, mountainous area. The UK obtained needed workers by passing the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 and admitting Pakistanis displaced by the dam, the majority of them with marginal to no education. Family reunification led to a rapid expansion of the Pakistani population in the UK from the 1960s to 1980s. Beginning in the 1960s, more than a thousand doctors, teachers, scientists and engineers were also brought in from Pakistan.

The chain immigration of women and families created a need to maintain the cultural and religious roots. Alison Shaw (1988) addressed many of the issues faced in this transition, but not race relations with British society. Bashir (1992) in *The New Scots: The Story of Asians in Scotland* provided an empathetic, in-depth, insider perspective of Pakistani life in Scotland, highlighting the positive contributions of Muslims to the region and describing how hard they were trying to integrate. The race relations issue was only addressed later with publication of *Islamophobia, A Challenge for Us All* (Runnymede Commission, 1997), and *British Muslims: Past, Present and Future* (Hellyer, 2007).

British Muslim Identity

It is reported in *Islamophobia, A Challenge for Us All* (Runnymede Commission, 1997) that initially most Pakistani migrants saw themselves as temporary visitors or workers in the UK, but after the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, when their

families arrived in the UK, they started envisioning for themselves identities of permanent residents and citizens of the UK. However, this did not come without identity-related challenges, e.g., how to “build a sense of corporate identity and strength in the situation of material disadvantage, and in an alien and largely hostile surrounding culture” (Runnymede Commission, 1997, p. 15). Hellyer (2007) reports that an important characteristic of most Muslims is that they would like to hold both Muslim and British identities without compromising one for the other. Muslims are “keen to be integrated into British society, but as Muslims” (Hellyer, 2007, p. 250). Hamayun Ansari in *The Infidel Within, Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (2018) tries to explore the answer to the question, “Has a British-Muslim identity developed?” Ansari claims that the press lumps Muslims and extremism together and describes how the perceived negative image of Muslims was amplified through world events such as the Iranian revolution, Iraqi invasion, and the Islamophobia developing after September 2001. He describes the concept of a virtual Umma with Muslims around the world coming together online for solidarity. He claims that despite the fact that an overwhelming majority uses technology to positively and peacefully form, preserve and negotiate their religious identity, the West only acknowledges Muslim engagement with the technology for extremist activities.

Factors Impacting Integration of Muslim Neighborhoods and Associated Public Schools

Education has provided a variety of additional examples of barriers to Muslim integration and educational attainment in the UK. An example are the attacks by Honeyford not just on multiculturalism in general, but also suggesting that integration of British history and culture in education would help make better British citizens out of

Asian Muslims, implying that British culture was superior to Asian (and by extension Muslim) culture and religion (Baxter, 2007). Another education-related barrier to Muslim integration in the UK was associated with campaigns by white parents to have the right to send their children to the schools of their choice, meaning white-only or white-majority schools (Loveland, 1993; Vincent, 1992). Bagley (1996), who examined “the extent to which 'race' is a factor in white parents’ choice of school”, reported that white parents who selected a school for their children with low Asian enrollment very rarely selected race as a reason for their choice in a questionnaire about reasons for their selection.

Islamophobia

The term “Islamophobia” was first used in 1997 in *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997). Professor Gordon Conway, vice-chancellor of the University of Sussex, chaired this study. Any study of British Muslims, Islam in Britain or Islamophobia in the West is incomplete without this foundational text. The report provides a history of Muslims in Britain, the factors that promote Islamophobia, describes eight features of Islamophobia they identified, and makes many recommendations to counter deeply embedded Islamophobia. In *The Fear of Islam; An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*, Green (2015) commented on each of the eight features of Islamophobia, providing more current examples. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) addressed the issue in 2003. Hellyer (2007) addressed the effect of the events in New York City in September 2001, which put Muslims under physical and emotional assault. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims published a report defining Islamophobia (APPG on

British Muslims, 2018) based on research by Moore et al. (2008), Lewis (2006) and many others. It also identified the costs of racial inequality in the UK.

There is a significant body of research demonstrating that practicing faithful Muslims can be loyal patriotic British citizens despite Islamophobia. There have been numerous reports confirming British Muslim belief in this statement (APPG, 2018; Kaur-Ballagan et al., 2018; Lugo et al., 2013; Smith, 2002), but others have found that many British citizens disagree (Field, 2011). Khan and Mythen (2021) identified ways in which Pakistani Muslim youth in Britain manage their complex identities and reported that Muslim youth use strategies to resist being ‘othered’ in the British society, including a strong sense of identity and a deeper understanding of Islam in response to intense questioning of their faith and culture by non-Muslims. Study participants confirmed this, sharing detailed accounts of how they are simultaneously British and Muslim in terms of language, dressing, food, and celebrations.

Chapter III

Tassawwuf, the *Sufi* Process of Self-Purification

Tassawwuf, commonly known as *Sufism* in the Western world, played a key role in the spread of Islam. The large majority (about 7/8) of Muslims today live where Islam was spread by *Sufi* saints (Figures 3 and 4). Islam was not spread by the sword. Even in the Arabian Peninsula, all the battles that were fought were defensive; unification was achieved by sequentially establishing defense agreements with each of the small isolated groups living at populated oases throughout the peninsula. The section below briefly explains how the charismatic characters, selfless love, silent sacrifices, wisdom, and the peaceful teachings of *Sunni Sufi* saints are an agent for transforming the hearts and minds of people (Salma & Qayyum, 2023).

The blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ² started preaching Islam in 610 CE in Makkah, where He established the first Muslim community in the city of Madina tul Munawwara, to which He started to migrate with only one blessed companion, Sayyadina Abu Bakar al Siddique. After each defensive battle or mutual defense agreement, additional people joined them, becoming Muslims. Traders and travelers to Madina tul Munawwara also brought back with them inspiring testimonies of the unprecedented

² ﷺ This calligraphic symbol is an abbreviation of Arabic salutation "صلى الله عليه وسلم" [*Sal Allah u Aleihei Wa Alehei Wassallam*] that Muslims offer whenever they mention the Blessed name of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. According to Muslim belief, this Arabic salutation does not only demonstrate respect and protocol for the remembrance of the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it also brings Muslims rewards.

sound character, compassion, wisdom, leadership skills, justice and mercy of the blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Tassawwuf, Sufiya [Sufis] and the Spread of Islam

The presentation on *Sufis* and *Sufism* [*Tassawwuf*] in this thesis draws mainly on translations of great classics in *Tassawwuf* written by great Muslim *Sufi* Masters dating back at least 1000 years. Unfortunately, the majority of the Western Scholars (Arberry, 1943; Goodarzi & Anoush, 2012; Sedgwick, M., 2018; Trimingham, J.S., 1971) writing on Islam and *Sufism* attempt to frame *Tassawwuf* from a mostly non-Muslim, non-*Sufi* perspective, or from a predominantly Shi'a perspective. There is a serious lack of scholarly work on *Tassawwuf* written in the English language from a *Sunni Sufi* perspective. Most importantly, most of the recent scholarly work published on *Tassawwuf* builds on or argues against the literature on *Sufism* that was written during the 1900s. Hardly any published work connects back to the classics, i.e., the original *Sufi* texts written by Muslim *Sufi* Scholars more than a thousand years ago. This focus on trivial recent writings has resulted in a serious gap in contemporary understanding of the original, true *Tassawwuf*. The result are many misunderstandings of the true *Sufism*/*Tassawwuf*, including but not limited to the following:

- (i) Incorrect belief that *Tassawwuf* (the *Sufi* path, *Tariqat*) is independent of *Sharia* (Islamic law established by the *Quran* and *Hadiths*);
- (ii) Writers incorrectly assuming that *Sufis* are not scholars of Islam;
- (iii) Writers incorrectly assuming that *Sufis* are divorced from the social issues of their times; and

(iv) Writers incorrectly assuming that *Tassawwuf* and *Tariqat* are afterthoughts or later innovations in Islam, when in fact *Tassawwuf* faithfully preserves the practice of the Prophet Muhammad and any other form of Islam is an innovation that came after.

Misunderstandings like these and more create a great need for a thorough, unbiased examination of *Tassawwuf* by a well-informed insider who can help the Western academic world see *Tassawwuf* through the eyes of contemporary as well as historical *Sunni Sufi* practitioners. This study aims to present the initial, fundamental and deeply scriptural roots of *Tassawwuf* and its manifestations in the lives of contemporary *Sufi* Muslims in today's United Kingdom. In an effort to dispel some of the misunderstanding about *Tassawwuf*, this literature review will try to rely directly on *Quran* and Hadiths of the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ,³ as well as on the great classic *Sufi* texts by legendary *Sufis* such as Imam Nouman bin Thabit Abu Hanifa (699–767CE); *Shaykh* Sayyad Ali bin Usman Hujwiri (14 August 1009 - 8 August 1072 CE), *Shaykh* Abu'l Qasim Al Qushayri (986- 1072 CE); Khwaja Baha ud Din Naqshband (1318-1389 CE); *Shaykh* Sayyad Ahmad Sirhandi (1564-1624); Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem (1848-1936); and *Shaykh* Muhammad Hisham Kabbani (1945-2024), and *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman.

Sufism is a Western term used for *Tassawwuf*. An influential Muslim *Sufi* Saint, Sayyad Ali bin Usman Al-Hujwiri (1009 CE-1072CE), a descendant of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was born only 400 years after the beginning of Islam (610 CE). In his book, *Kashf ul Mahjub*, compiled in the 11th century, Sayyad Ali bin Usman Al-Hujwiri

³ ﷺ This calligraphic symbol is an abbreviation of Arabic salutation "صلى الله عليه وسلم" [Sal Allah u Aleihei Wa Alehei Wassallam] that Muslims offer whenever they mention the Blessed name of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. According to Muslim belief, this Arabic salutation does not only demonstrate respect and protocol for the remembrance of the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it also brings Muslims rewards.

(2001) begins by lamenting on the decay of *Sufism* during the first four centuries after the origin of Islam, saying that people in his time had labelled *Sufism* as ‘the mystic path’ in “neglect of the Law of Prophet ﷺ” (Al-Hujwiri, 2001, p. 78). He then defines *Sufism* and explains the logistics of *Sufism* based on the sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, verses of *Quran*, and the practice of the Blessed Companions (people who personally knew the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ), and *Sufi* Masters from the first 400 years. He derived his definition of *Tassawwuf* from the characteristics of Sayyadina Abu Bakar as Siddique, which was:

Verily, purity is a characteristic of the Siddiq, if thou desires a true *Sufi* – because purity (*safa*) has a root and a branch: its root being severance of the heart from “others” (*aghyar*), and its branch that the heart should be empty of this deceitful world. Both these are characteristics of the Greatest Siddiq, (the Caliph) Abu Bakar ‘Abdallah b. Abi Quhafa, with whom may God be well-pleased! He is the leader (*imam*) of all the folk of this Path. (Al-Hujwiri, 2001, p. 102)⁴

In Epistles of Qushayri [*Al Risala al Qushayriyya*], Imam Qushayri lists all the often-quoted definitions of *Sufism* that are linked to the probable etymology of the word *Sufi* from words like *Suf* (wool), *Suffa*, or *Safa* (cleansing, purifying), *Saff* (front row) and the most probable one, *Suffa* referring to the Loft in the mosque of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that served as the dormitory for the Blessed Companions who wanted to learn directly from the blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and hence lived in that chamber or loft. They were called *As’hab us Sufa*. The loft was later named the loft of *As’hab us Suffa* and is still present in Masjid an Nabwi Sharif (the Mosque of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ). Some other definitions of *Tassawwuf* include:

⁴ www.nafseislam.com

“It means assuming every sublime moral character trait and giving up every lowly one.”

(Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 289)

“Turning yourself over to God Most High, so that He may do with you what He wants.”

(Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 290)

Shaykh Ma’ruf al-Karkhi said: “ ‘*Sufism* means grasping divine realities (*haqaiq*) and despairing (*ya’s*) of what the hands of men hold.’ ” (Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 290)

The ancestral grand *Shaykh* of Eidgah Sharif, Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem Sahab writes in his book *Faiz ul Kareem*:

There are various sayings regarding the origin of word *Tassawwuf*. Some state that this word is derived from the word “*Suf*” [wool-plain, rough garment] thus the person who wears *suf* is called *Sufi*. *Tassawwuf* is not just the name of wearing *suf* but also it is adorning the internal and external self with the mannerism and etiquettes of people of *Tassawwuf*. (Abdul Kareem, n.d., pp. 401-402)

The grand *Shaykh* also quoted a statement from Imam Ghazali, “It means, *Tassawwuf* is the name of isolating your heart for the sake of *Allah* and considering everything other than *Allah* as less worthy and inferior. And it is derived from *Safa* because it cleans hearts” (p. 404).

In one of his speeches,⁵ *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman explains *Tassawwuf*. He quotes *Quran* which states: “Indeed, successful is the one who purified his *nafs* [inner self]. And in deficit [loss] is the one who contaminated his [inner self]” (*The Quran*, n.d., 91:9-10). Here, *Allah Kareem* has determined two paths for *nafs*. One is of virtue and the other is of sin. The *Quran* names the cleansing and purification of the inner self as *Tazkiya*. The process that enables *Tazkiya* is called *Tassawwuf* by the *Sufis* and *Walis*. A

⁵ YouTube video: Topic Tasawwuf Full Speech *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman At Eidgah Sharif 06-09-2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKI5KU-Cya4>

seeker should not associate themselves with the *khanqah* (shrine) merely for the healing of physical ailments through *dua*, or to offer homage and donations at the shrine. A seeker should associate themselves with *Sufi* Masters and with *khanqah* so that the *Sufi* Master can cleanse and purify the inner self of the seeker, purge it from the desires of the lower self [*nafs*], wash off from it the love of *ghair* [other than *Allah*], remove pride from people's heart and instill in it the true love of *Allah* and His Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This process is called *Tassawwuf*. *Sufis* cleanse and purify people [do their *tazkiya*] through this process. *Tazkiya* is essential and not optional. *Allah* ranks *tazkiya* as the second of the four obligations of Prophethood that He has mentioned in *Quran*. He ranked the recitation of *Quran* as first, *tazkiya* as second, and the knowledge of the Book and Wisdom [*Kitab* and *Hikma*] are ranked third and fourth. *Sufis* believe that *Allah* mentioned *Tazkiya* even before teaching the Book and *Hikma*. This is because anyone can gain knowledge of Book and *Hikma*, but the light of the Book and *Hikma* will transpire in the heart of only those who are cleansed and purified. *Tazkiya* should take place first, the heart should be cleansed and only then the *Nur* [the light] should enter and consequently the *Nur* can become beneficial knowledge for the seeker. For example, *Sufis* believe that the knowledge that is gained when the heart is full of arrogance, will further enhance that arrogance and true learning will not take place. These are the obvious principles through which the Last Messenger of *Allah* cleansed the *Zahir* [appearance, the outer self] and the *batin* [the inner self], took them out of *kuffar* [disbelief] and *shirk* [polytheism] and transmitted into them the treasure of *Iman* [faith], *Iqan* [belief and trust], and *Ma'rifat e Ilahi* [the secret knowledge of *Allah* and the

closeness to *Allah* that cannot be attained through books alone.⁶ It can be attained through *Mushahida* [to witness, to observe] and is bestowed upon only those that *Allah* Wills to. An *Aa'rif* is, therefore, a person that understands these secrets. *Sufis* search for *Ma'arif* and once they attain it, they become *Aa'rif*].

Sufi Shayyukh and Their Authority

Here we consider the authority of the *Shayyukh* and the *Shaykh-murid* relationship as described and practiced by the *Sufi* Masters. They understand the *Shaykh-murid* relationship, because they have experienced it from both ends, having previously excelled at being faithful and committed *murids* of their own *Shaykh*.

From Western Academicians

According to Western Academicians, “*Sufi* theory organized the saints into a hierarchy, at the apex of which stood Muhammad ﷺ the pole of the universe, supervising the world” (Esposito, 2011, p. 133). Thus, a *Sufi Shaykh* must believe in Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as his Master and entrust himself to the authority of the Blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ without doubts or questions. *Sufis* believe that “no mystical experience can be realized if the binding injunctions of *Shari'a* are not faithfully followed first” (Schimmel, 1975, p. 98). *Shari'a* is the Islamic law that is based on what was revealed on the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and his practices (*Sunnah*) and his sayings (Hadiths).

⁶ I have done a comparative analysis of Islamic terms *Ma'rifa* (*Ma'arif*), and *Aa'rif* with the dominant English translation of these terms i.e. gnosis, gnostic (and also Gnosticism-the Christian sect). These translations do not match with the Islamic concept of *Ma'rifa*, *Ma'arif*, and *Aa'rif*. Therefore, I will refrain from using the terms gnosis, gnostic and Gnosticism for *Ma'rifa* (*Ma'arif*), and *Aa'rif* in the context of Islamic *Tassawwuf*.

Thus, as a guide, the *Sufi Shaykh*'s role is to first of all personally believe in and adhere to *Shariat-e-Muhammadi* ﷺ and then ensure that his *murids* adhere to it as well.

The *Shaykh*'s character is conceived as a “model to be emulated” (Esposito, 2011, p. 129). This model is a staunch believer, the faithful follower, obedient servants, and spiritual heir of the Blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. A *murid* is a *salik* (seeker), or a wayfarer (Schimmel, 1975, p. 98) on the path (*tariqa*) that would connect him with *Haqiqa* (the Real, the True). On this path to the *Haqiqa*, *Shaykh* is a guide who is well aware of the dangers along the path, whether Satanic or of the lower self [*nafs*], that might misguide a person. It is at this point that the *Shaykh* leads and controls his *murid* (Schimmel, 1975, p. 103) to ensure that the *murid* does not go wrong in this spiritual journey. Therefore, the *Sufi Shayyukh* have been given “almost unlimited authority” over their *murids* (Schimmel, 1975, p. 103). “Absolute obedience to the master is part and parcel of basic rules of *Sufi* life from earliest times on. The *Sufi* master assigns the *murid* a *dhikr* which is appropriate for his spiritual and mental state” (Schimmel, 1992, p. 112). The spiritual Master should be like a physician who diagnoses and heals the “illnesses and defects of the human soul” (Schimmel, 1975, p. 104). This is why, frequent visits to the Master is a “religious duty of the disciple. . . and to serve a master is the highest honor” (Schimmel, 1975, p. 104). *Sufi* Master works on *Murids*' ego and helps the *murid* tame and control the desires of his lower-self and remain sincere in his desire for *Allah*.

From *Sufi* Masters

When the *Naqshbandi Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif include someone in their *Naqshbandi* Order through *Bay'at* [oath of allegiance], they assume the responsibility to

lead the seeker on the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In his book, *Faiz ul Kareem*, the grand *Shaykh* Hafiz Abdul Kareem writes,

The following two principles are the foundation of the *Naqshbandi* path. First, one should be steadfast on *Sharia* to such an extent that he should not be willing to give up even minor aspects (procedures, requirements) of *Sharia*. Second, one should be so firm and steadfast in his love and sincerity with the *Shaykh* that he should not even imagine criticizing or raising objections about the *Shaykh*. The *murid* should admire and appreciate all the actions and decisions of his *Shaykh*. (Abdul Kareem, n.d., p. 482)

Sohbat [Companionship] and *Rabta* [Connection]

Hidayat ul Insan Ila Sabil il Irfan (Abdul Kareem, 1986, p. 102), a classic on *Naqshbandi* ways written by the grand *Shaykh* of Eidgah Sharif Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem, lists three ways to gain closeness to *Allah* (*Wasool il Allah*). First is Connection [*Rabta*], second is Remembrance [*Dhikr*], and third is Islamic Meditation [*Muraqba*]. Connection [*Rabta*] means having spiritual and internal connection. The essential condition for developing a connection is to faithfully follow the *Sunnah* [the actions] of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and the ways of the pious spiritual ancestors [*salf saleheen*]. The seeker should have only one aim and that is attaining a spiritual state in which he is always attentive towards *Allah*. The grand *Shaykh*, Khwaja Hafidh Abdul Kareem, states that such a connection [*Rabta*] that brings one closer to *Allah* is possible only by gaining companionship [*sohbat*] and closeness with a *Shaykh* who has reached the spiritual station of Observation [*Mushahida*]. These are the *Shayyukh* that when a person looks at them or acquires their company, he remembers *Allah*. Since such a *Shaykh* has already successfully travelled on this spiritual path, they are already aware of all satanic insinuations and traps of the lower self, they can help the *murid* avoid those insinuations and traps. The more a seeker is devoted to the *Shaykh*, the stronger the bond of trust is,

the easier the path is. This is because if the seeker has complete trust in his or her *Shaykh*, they will follow the advice with a stronger commitment and willingness. The attention of the *Shaykh* helps the seeker pass through the spiritual stations much faster and gain closeness to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and *Allah*.

A guiding principle of *Tassawwuf* is captured in the *Quranic* verse “O people who believe! Fear *Allah* and be with the truthful” (*The Quran*, n.d., 9:119). The grand *Naqshbandi Shaykh*, Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem (Abdul Kareem, 1986, p. 105) quotes another grand *Naqshbandi Shaykh*, Khwaja Ubaid Ullah Ahrar, who states two meanings for this verse. First, keeping company and loving truthful people instils similar attributes in the seeker. Second, a seeker should develop such love and admiration for their *Shaykh* that they gain a permanent relationship with the *Shaykh*, so that even when they are physically apart, the seeker gains the benefits of *Sohbat*. *Sohbat* means being emotionally, mentally and spiritually close to the *Shaykh* even when not physically present.

Sohbat-e-Shaykh, a hallmark of *Naqshbandi Sufi Shayyukh*, literally means companionship of the *Shaykh*. *Naqshbandi Shayyukh* try their best to nurture companionship with their followers. The purpose of *Sohbat* is to allow the followers an opportunity to spend time in *Shaykh*’s company and absorb spiritual blessing from the *Shayyukh* [*iktasab e faiz*]. It elevates the followers’ spiritual ranks and helps them successfully pass through spiritual stations. Often this learning and training through *Sohbat* have deeper and lasting impressions on a follower. The *Shaykh* is the one who has annihilated his will and desire in Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and he does not perform any act that does not match with the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ; therefore, he is a role

model for his followers. Due to *Sohbat* with the *Shaykh*, the followers benefit from the opportunity to closely observe and learn from their role model's (the *Shaykh*'s) dealings, behaviors, and everyday life routine firsthand. Hence, the *Shaykh* demonstrates to their followers how to follow Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in their contemporary lives. These followers will then emulate these learnings in their everyday life. In *Sohbat*, a seeker is close to the *Shaykh*, and hence develops a different level of devotion, trust and understanding of the *Shaykh* that an ordinary follower may not have. Such followers develop a deeper sense of awareness of and commitment to the mission. The expectation is that these followers will then apply the lessons learnt during this *Sohbat* on their lives and then emerge as role model citizens for their families and society and hence act as an ambassador for the mission. Thus, *Sohbat* has impressive implications for the betterment of the individual and by extension, society.

In the *Naqshbandi Sufi* order, both the *Shaykh* and the *murid* invest their time and effort in *Sohbat*. Historically, *Sufi murids* have traversed various continents, countries, and cities to find a *Shaykh* and benefit from their *Sohbat* for extended periods. This is why most *Sufi Khanqahs* (shrine complexes) have adjacent apartments and inns for visiting seekers. The great Muslim theologian and jurist, Imam Abu Hanifa, founder of Hanafi *maslak* (the first of four schools of religious law in *Islam: Hanafi, Shafa'i, Maliki, and Hambli*), spent decades learning all exoteric knowledges in *Islam* (such as *Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Tafseer, Nahav* etc.). After that, he sought spiritual benefits [*Iktasab e faiz*] from the *Sohbat* of the greatest leader in *Tassawwuf*, Imam Jafar al Sadique, an authority in all religious affairs in *Islam* and a descendant of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (the great grandson of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ). Imam Abu Hanifa says he would

have endured a great spiritual loss, if he had not acquired Imam Jafar al Sadique's *Sohbat* (Hariri, 2004, p.130). Another example is the *Sufi* Muslim poet, Rumi (Mawlana Jala ud Din Rumi), who was an accomplished Islamic scholar, jurist, theologian and expert in all fields of Islamic exoteric knowledge in his time. One day when Rumi sat by a river with his books, a great *Sufi*, *Shaykh* Shams Tabrez came. He pointed towards Rumi's books and asked what they were. Rumi responded, "This is what you are not aware of." The *Shaykh* threw all of Rumi's books into the river water. Because Rumi became very upset, *Shaykh* Shams Tabrez, pulled his books out of the river so dry that dust blew off them. In great surprise, Rumi asked, "What is this?" The *Shaykh* responded, "This is what you are not aware of." Rumi was so impressed and humbled that he acquired Shams Tabrez's *Sohbat*. Rumi so excelled in spirituality in Shams Tabrez's *Sohbat* that he became known as Mawla e Rum. He wrote the following verse: A cleric would never be able to become master for the entire Rûm, had he not accepted servitude⁷ of Shams Tabrez.

Annemarie Schimmel (2011) explained how important the connection between the *Shaykh* and the *murid* is in the following words:

The strong relationship between sheikh and *murid* is exemplified in the technique of *tawajjuh*, concentration upon the sheikh, which later orders, mainly the Naqshbandiyya, considered necessary for the successful performance of the *dhikr*. One speaks in Turkish of *rabita kurmak*, "to establish a tie" between master and disciple. The sheikh, too, would practice *tawajjuh* and thus "enter the door of the disciple's heart" to watch him and to guard him every moment. (p. 237)

⁷ Accepted to be in obedience of. Here servitude does not mean literal slavery or bondage, but rather an extreme level of reverence, respect, loyalty, and obedience.

Shariah and Tariqa^{8 9}: Relationship of *Tassawwuf* to *Shariah*.

The path of *Tassawwuf* is not separate from *Shariah*. The following passage is a translation of *Shaykh* Hafiz Abdul Kareem in *Faiz ul Kareem* (Abdul Kareem, n.d., p. 413). He says:

Remember that the level of *Haqiqat* [The Truth, The Real] and *Ma'arifat* [the secret knowledge of *Allah*] which is the aim of *Tassawwuf* cannot be achieved without purging one's inner self [*nafs*]. And this cleansing of the lower self is impossible without faithfully following *Shariah*. A *Sufi* *Shaykh* writes that the *Sufi* path which is against *Sharia* is *kufir* [disbelief in *Allah*; denial of *Allah*]. And the *Haqiqat* [the Truth, the Real] that cannot be approved by the Book [*Quran*] and *Sunnah* [the actions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ], is deviance, heresy, and atheism [الحاد – *Ilhad* and زندقة – *zindiq*].¹⁰ Yes, understand it the following way. First of all, a sincere seeker should become aware of all what is permissible and forbidden in *Shariah* and be particular in piety and cleansing. Cleanliness [*taharat*] happens only as a result of *Shariah*. After these stations, one can reach *Allah* [*wasool il Allah*] and is able to witness [do *Mushahida*] the Divine light which is the *Haqiqat* [the Truth, the Real]. In fact, all these three ranks are a result of following *Shariah* par excellence. That means, after excelling in ritual and habitual pursuit of *Shariah*, one should attain the real cleanliness [of inner self] and piety in such a way that it brings pleasure in *Allah*'s remembrance [*dhikr*]. From this pleasure one gets [feelings of] being engrossed, absorbed and captivated.¹¹ It is also said in the following way: The cleansing of *Sharia* [*Taharat e Sharia*] can be attained through Muslim ritual washing of a few specific parts of the body [*wudu*]¹² and Muslim ritual bathing [*ghusl*].¹³ Cleansing of *Tariqat* [*Taharat e Tariqat*] can be attained through giving up all the desires of the inner self [*nafs*], and Cleansing of Truth [*Taharat e Haqeeqat*] can be attained through cleansing the heart from all other than *Allah*—removing the desire of all other than *Allah* from your heart.

⁸ This section has come from the speech of *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman, Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi. A YouTube link to the video speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKI5KU-Cya4>

⁹ The first paragraph is a translation of an extract from *Fai ul Kareem* (Abdul Kareem, n.d.)

¹⁰ In the *Al Qushayri's* Epistles on *Sufism*, Imam Al Qushayri quotes an example from *Shaykh* Abu Bakr al-Daqqaq, "As I was wandering in the desert of the Children of Israel, it occurred to me that the knowledge of the True Reality (*Ililm al-haqiqat*) is different from the Divine Law (*al-shari'at*). [Suddenly] I heard a voice from beneath a tree, saying: 'Each truth that does not conform to the Divine Law is but unbelief!'" (p. 371).

¹¹ Some self-proclaimed *Sufis*, as well as Christian Gnostics, use drugs or other substances and certain physical exercises to induce such feelings as mentioned above. All of these inducement techniques are *haram* [forbidden] in Islam.

¹² Also known as partial ablution

¹³ Also known as full ablution

Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman of Eidgah Sharif completely agrees with this when he explains the inescapable bond between *Shariah* and *Tariqat* in the following translation of a passage from one of his speeches on *Tassawwuf*:¹⁴

Some deviants claim that people who follow *shariat* [شریعت - *Shariah*], and those who follow *Tariqat* [طریقت - *Tariqa*] are on separate paths. The one who claims so is misled and is rebellious to both *Tariqat* and *Shariat*. They are the ones who say offering prayers is something only people of *Shariah* do, whereas people of *Tariqa* only give away amulets [تعویذ - *ta'wiz*]. NO! *Sufis* claim, *Tariqat* is the name of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ actions [افعال *af'al* i.e. *Sunnah*] and *Shariat* is the name of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ sayings [اقوال *Aqwal* i.e. *Hadith*]. *Shaykh* Imam Ibn e Abideen Hanafi Shami who is the author of *Fatawa Shami* states that the relationship between *Tariqat* and *Shariat* is the same as that of body and soul. Exactly as the body becomes useless when the soul departs it, *Tariqat* becomes useless when and if *Shariat* severs from it. *Shaykh* e Mujaddid (*Shaykh* Ahmad Sirhandi a.k.a. Mujaddid Alf Sani) says *Shariat* is the source [منبع - *Mam'ba*] and *Tariqat* is the river that originates from it. Exactly as the river dries out when and if it is disconnected from the source, similarly, if a *tariq* (*Sufi* order) loses its connection with *Shariah*, that *tariq* becomes devoid of spirituality [روحانیت - *ruhaniyat*] and spiritual emanation and spiritual blessing [فیض - *faiz*]. *Shaykh* Junaid Baghdadi beautifully said some people claim that prayer, fasting, and religious vigils (*wazaif*) are a means to reach [وصول - *wasool*]; but we have already reached [واصل - *wasil*] (hence we do not need to do any of these prayers and acts of worship). *Shaykh* Junaid Baghdadi says, they are truthful in saying that they have reached. However, they have not reached *Allah* [وصول الی اللہ - *wasool il- Allah*], they have reached the hell [وصول جہنم - *wasool e jahanam*] because a person cannot at all successfully find *Tariqat* without *Shariat*. *Shaykh* e Mujaddid also said that religious regalia and spiritual ancestry [شجرہ - *Sharjah*] carry a great significance, but you cannot depend upon them. What really matters is whether the *Sufi* is successfully following the teachings of his spiritual ancestors or not. Because when someone asked Prophet Muhammad ﷺ about the identification of *Sufis*, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that “seeing them will remind you of *Allah*, listening to them will enhance your virtues, their deeds will remind you of hereafter”. And *Allah* has also said so: “Pay heed! Indeed, upon the friends of *Allah* is neither any fear, nor any grief. Those who have accepted faith and practice piety” (*The Quran*, n.d., 10:62-63). These verses of *Quran*

¹⁴ This section is a translation of a speech of *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman, Eidgah Sharif. A YouTube link to the video speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKI5KU-Cya4>

Kareem explicitly mention the identification, they are the people of perfect faith [ایمان. *Iman*] and piety [تقوى *Taqwa*].

Opposition to *Tassawwuf* and the People of *Tassawwuf*

Shaykh Hafiz Abdul Kareem states in *Hidayat ul Insan* (Abdul Kareem, 1986, pp. 414-415) that exactly as ignorant folks couldn't understand the reality of Prophethood, and hence most of them rejected it, there have been people in each era who have been denying venerable *Sufis*. The reason is that these *Sufis* progress to the levels that are above the intellect of an ordinary person and thus are not moved by the opposition. The grand *Shaykh* also stated a summary response of Imam al-Shafi'i on this topic:

People who strive for *Shariah* and *Tariqa* are all righteous [راستباز -*rastbaz*] and upright and honest [عدل -*adool*] people whom *Allah*, because of His Mercy, chooses to serve His *Shariah*. Thus, anyone who pays a little attention will know that the knowledge of these *awliya* of *Allah* are not at all outside the realm of *Shariah*. How can they be outside *Shariah*? Because for them, *Shariah* is the way to reach *Allah* [*Wasool il Allah*]. Thus, they cannot be away from *Shariah* even for a breath [or a second]. (Abdul Kareem, 1986, pp. 414-415)

The grand *Shaykh* also quotes *Shaykh* Junayd Baghdadi who says, “Our *Tassawwuf* has been strengthened through the Book and *Sunnah*. Therefore, it is essential for every single *Sufi* to be a scholar in the Book [*Quran*] and *Sunnah* [the actions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ] and not the opposite of it. Thus, the reason for denial of *Tassawwuf* is nothing except for ignorance and pride” (Abdul Kareem, 1986, pp. 414-415).

Imam Qushayri (Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 44). Also quotes a similar set of sayings from *Shaykh* Al-Junayd, “This teaching of ours is bound by the foundations of the [Sacred] Book and the custom [of the Prophet].” Al-Junayd also said: “This knowledge of ours is reinforced by the reports of the Messenger of God”. Imam Qushayri, quoted from

Shaykh Sari Saqati, said, ““In his inner self he [a *Sufi*] does not speak of any knowledge contradicting the external meaning of the [Holy] Book or the Prophet’s custom. [His] miracles do not cause him to violate the sacredness of the divine prohibitions”” (Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 23).

Saintly Miracles [*Karamat*¹⁵] in *Tassawwuf*

Risala e Qushayriyya, also known as *Al Qushayri’s Epistles on Sufism*, states Imam Al Qushayri’s stance on *Karamat* [saintly miracles] as follows:

It is possible for God’s friends to display miracles. The proof of the [miracle’s] possibility is that it is something that can be conceived by the intellect and that its occurrence does not lead to the suspension of any basic principle. One must ascribe to God – praise be to Him – the ability to originate it, and, since it can be made possible by God – praise be to Him – then there is nothing that can negate the possibility of it taking place. (Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 357)

Imam Qushayri quotes from Imam Abu Bakar b. Faruk that *Walis* “must hide and conceal” their saintly miracles (Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 358). They should not do ostentatious demonstrations of their miracles. However, if and when they deem it critical, they could show those miracles. Imam Qushayri quotes examples of a vast number of saintly miracles from *Quran* including the following:

Among its proofs found in the *Quran* is the story of a companion of Solomon – peace be upon him – who said: “I will bring it [the throne] to thee, before even thy glance returns to thee.” Yet, he was not a prophet. There is also a sound report about the Commander of the Faithful Umar b. al-Khattab – may God be pleased with him – according to which he exclaimed, “O Sariya, [watch out for] the mountain!” during his Friday sermon and [according to which] the voice of ‘Umar reached Sariya,

¹⁵ This section is a translation of a speech of *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman, Eidgah Sharif. A YouTube link to the video speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKI5KU-Cya4>

putting him on guard against the ambush of the enemy on a mountain at that same time. (Al-Qushayri, 2024, p. 360)

Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman stated in one of his speeches¹⁶

Today, there is a misconception that those who do not have saintly miracles [كرامت. *Karamat*], cannot be friends of *Allah*, saints [ولی *wali*]. In fact, this is not so. To be a *Wali*, it is not essential to have *Karamat*, but rather it is essential to have *istaqamat* i.e. Steadfastness [استقامت *istaqamat*] on *Shariah*. While training his *murids*, the grand *Naqshbandi Shaykh*, *Shaykh* Baha ud Din Naqshband used to tell them, do not be desirous of becoming a *Wali* that can do saintly miracles. You will get the ability to perform them anyway. But if this desire comes into your heart, tell yourself that it is the desire of your inner self [*nafs*] to become a saint that can do miracles [صاحب کرامت-*sahib e Karamat*]; but it is the order of *Allah* to become a steadfast person [صاحب استقامت-*sahib e istaqamat*]. Each Blessed companion [صحابی-*Sahabi*] was a *Wali*. Put together the spiritual ranks of all the *Wali*'s, yet it will not mount to a fraction of the ranks of a single *Sahabi* (will be worth less than a *Sahabi*'s feet). Each Blessed companion [صحابی-*Sahabi*] was on a highest rank of sainthood [*wilayat*]. But not every *Sahabi* manifested *Karamat*. That absolutely does not mean that the *Sahabi* who did not show a *Karamat* were not on the station of *wilayat* [a chosen one]? This proves that for a *Wali*, instead of showing *Karamat*, it is essential to be steadfast on *Sharia*. This is why a person stayed with *Shaykh* Najm ud Kubra for about six months. While he was about to depart, the *Shaykh* asked, where are you going? He said, "I am leaving because I have not yet seen any *Karamat* [from you]. The *Shaykh* asked, have you ever seen any single of my actions that is against *Shariah*? The man said, NO! The *Shaykh* said, this is the biggest *Karamat*. Someone came to *Shaykh* Abu Sa'eed saying, "Sir, listen about so and so; he is a great *Wali*. The *Shaykh* asked, what does he do? The man responded, "he flies in the air." The *Shaykh* said, "a fly can also fly in the air. What else does he do?" The man said, "he walks on water." The *Shaykh* responded, "a duck can also walk on the water, what else does he do?" The man said, "within a moment he can go from one city to another city." The *Shaykh* said, "this is what Satan can also do." The man asked, Sir, then who is a *wali*? The *Shaykh* said, who lives among creation, but his heart (attention) is focused on *Allah*.

¹⁶ This section is a translation of a speech of *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman, Eidgah Sharif. A YouTube link to the video speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKI5KU-Cya4>

Variations in the Form of *Tassawwuf*

The ancestral grand *Shaykh* of Eidgah Sharif, Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem Sahab writes in his book *Faiz ul Kareem* (Abdul Kareem, n.d., p. 405), that there are several truths present in this world. However, the layers of innovations and modifications have made them hard to recognize. The same is the case of *Tassawwuf*. *Tassawwuf* was a path and tradition of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The explicit evidence of the reality of *Tassawwuf* can be found in the lives of early Muslims that is:

- The Blessed Companions, particularly *As'hab us Suffa* [the people of the loft] who learnt directly from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ;
- *Taba'een* [Muslims who did not meet with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but received the treasures of *Tassawwuf* from the Blessed Companions];
- *Taba Taba'een* [Muslims who did not meet with the Blessed Companions, but they learnt directly from *Taba'een*].

However, as Muslims moved away from the glorious era of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the number of *Sufis* increased, but only few remained steadfast to the authentic *Sufi* rigor. Many variations were introduced into *Tassawwuf*. Consequently, *Tassawwuf* became widely criticized by people with no religious authority as something reprehensible and inglorious. The reason for such variations in *Tassawwuf* is nothing except for lust for material gains and blind pursuit of the desires of *nafs* [lower self].

There were two reasons that caused objections to *Tassawwuf* and people of *Tassawwuf*. First, *Sufis* with insufficient knowledge of *Quran* and Hadiths and insufficient commitment to following the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ; second, *Sufis*

inspired by Greek philosophy to apply inappropriate meanings to *Quran* and Hadiths and the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Sufis with Insufficient Knowledge

These *Sufis* who knew little about *Quran* and *Sunnah* or were so minimally educated that they could not differentiate between excesses or deficiencies in religion. Hence, due to ignorance, they allowed wrong beliefs to become part of religion and guided their followers to believe in those wrong beliefs and practices. Because they themselves were ignorant of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, they could not become a source of inspiration for their followers to concentrate on *Quran* and *Sunnah*. Some people in the recent times have started saying and doing things in the name of religion that have no connection with *Allah's* Book (*Quran*) or the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. With the passage of time, such elements became so established that people started considering them to be part of the religion. Instead of pondering upon the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, the followers of such ignorant *Pirs* (*Sufi Shayyukh*) started considering the sayings and practices of their *Pirs* to be so important as to be revelations.

Philosopher Sufis

Some *Sufi* leaders mixed principles of Greek philosophy with the *Quran* and *Sunnah* and extracted incorrect meanings from the mix. They also used *Quran* and *Sunnah* to explain concepts of Philosophy and in the process added some of their philosophical concepts to the religion, including ones that contradicted *Shariah*. Some Muslim scholars started following this ill practice and lay people venerated their writings.

These practices undermined *Tassawwuf*, putting it on a downward spiral of deformation that took it even farther from its original form.

No Muslim can deny the reality of *Tassawwuf*. However, so many variations have been made to its original form that its current form has become very different from what it was in the times of the Saints in the early eras of Islam. If a person tries to compare current forms of *Tassawwuf* with its original version, he will find a little similarity. There are only a few people whose internal and external selves are like our righteous, pious Muslim ancestors [سلف صالحين- *salf saleheen*]. Therefore, it is necessary to present a reality of *Tassawwuf* to the audience that does not conflict with *Quran* and *Sunnah*. Such reality is the soul of Islamic teachings and without embracing it, no one can attain a perfect faith. (Abdul Kareem, n.d., pp. 405-407).

Shajrah: The Spiritual Lineage, The Golden Chain¹⁷

Shajrah, the “Golden Chain” is itself sacred. The *Shajrah* elaborates the spiritual lineage of *Sufi* Masters through the generations (Figures 5 and 6). The *Sufi murid* is connected through these generations of *Sufi* Masters to the ancestral root, the Blessed Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Many *Sufi murids* display a visual representation of the Golden Chain in their houses, because they believe that the names in the *Shajrah* are sacred and hence will bring them and their household blessings and healing. Some of the other reasons for displaying a visual image of *Shajrah* are mentioned below.

¹⁷ For the Golden Chain [*Shajrah*] of Eidgah Sharif, see Figures 3 and 4.

Sense of Identity

The concept and visual representation of *Shajrah* (the Golden Chain) encourages in a person the sense of identity, belonging, affiliation, linkage, and membership with a particular *Sufi Silsila* [lineage, chain]. The reminder of such a lofty affiliation motivates the *murids* to develop faithfulness and devotion for the Supreme Master. It is not uncommon for *murids* to research and explore the life and works of at least a few *Sufi* masters included in their *Shajrah* and try to emulate them or acquire at least a few attributes of them. When the *murids* get busy in the material world, the *Shajrah* reminds them of who they are, and hence establishes elements of religion in them because the *murid* should continuously reflect upon their actions and invest in them the identity of being a *Sufi murid* of a particular *Sufi* order. These elements of religiosity stimulate “‘powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations.’ This kind of religiosity cultivates a mind-set that keeps its participants invested” (Herling, 2016, p. 81). Because religion does not operate in vacuum, but rather influences individuals who live in a society, any change in individual human behaviors and motivation informs (and is informed by) the overall social and cultural fabric. This devotion then should shape the *murid*’s behavior and their treatment of the world around them.

Authenticity Certificate

Shajrah also serves as an authenticity certificate for the *Sufi Shayyukh*. “The authority of a *Sufi* teacher is based on that of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who is viewed as the source of all *Sufi* lineage” (Ernst, 1997, p. 120). While there are several *Sufi Silasil* [plural of *Silsila i.e.* chain], each chain is embodied by the linkage of master to disciple going all the way back to the Prophet ﷺ. According to Ernst (1997), “The experiential

origin of *Sufism* was the master-disciple relationship” (p. 123). *Shajrah* does not work like a social institution, it is a chain of spiritual transmission that bestows upon a *murid* the responsibility and the status of spiritual leadership, that is to become a *Shaykh* or a *Pir* (Ernst, 1997, p. 122). Thus, in order for someone to become a *Sufi Shaykh*, it is essential that they are initiated by another *Sufi Shaykh*, who in turn must have been initiated by another *Sufi* Master. In the chain of *Sufi* lineage transmission, there must never be a gap. Take the example of the *Shajrah* and the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif. *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman was initiated by *Shaykh* Naqib ur Rahman, who was initiated by his *Shaykh* Khwaja Habib ur Rahman, who was initiated by *Shaykh* Abdur Rahman, who was initiated by *Shaykh* Hafiz Abdul Kareem, who was initiated by Khwaja Noor Muhammad. The chain continues until it reaches back to Sayyadina Abu Bakar al Siddique and ultimately to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. In this entire Golden Chain, there can NOT be even one missing or uncertain connection. For example, no one can randomly enter their name into a Golden Chain, no one can self-identify as a *Shaykh*, and people cannot vote in a *Shaykh*, nor can an individual declare dissociation from any one of the *Shayyukh* in the chain. You must accept every single saint in the *Shajrah* as your Master. You cannot pick and choose between them—this is an all or none approach. The individual has to maintain association with a well-established, unbroken Golden Chain of transmission. For example, a *murid* rejected and outcasted by one *Shaykh* can never become a *Shaykh*; in principle he/she can never initiate their own *Sufi* order. In terms of the analogy of the tree, the branch that breaks off or disassociates from the tree can never blossom, initiate a subbranch, or bear fruit (that is, they remain void of spiritual blessings). Thus, in *Sufism* the *Shajrah* represents the authenticity and authority of a

Shaykh and also of a *murid*. The *Shayyukh* in the *Shajrah* are the “intermediary link” (Ernst, 1997, p. 124) between the *murid* and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. For a *murid* to rise in spiritual ranks, this “role of intermediaries . . . [has always been] of great importance” (Ernst, 1997, p. 123).

The Golden Chain as a Defense

The *shajrah* [Golden Chain] is a powerful document that works as a symbol and a shield against anti-*Sufi* extremists who are trying to destroy or significantly alter the Muslim identity or completely erase the *Sufi* path of Islam. The Golden Chain, *Shajrah*, presents the history of a particular *Sufi* Order. Through the ancestral *Shayyukh* in *Shajrah* the seeker traces his/ her commissions back to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It proves that *Tassawwuf* is not an innovation, and *Sufis* are not innovators in Islam, because they connect all the way back to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Throughout the entire time of the chain, every single personage involved (Blessed Companions¹⁸ and all the *Walis* who came after) made it their top priority to preserve the commands of *Quran* and the actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (that is, the entire *Deen* [religion]) in the way it was originally taught and practiced by their Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. That is, for a *Sufi* Master, the highest priority is preserving the *Deen*, which means closely following both the commands of *Quran* and the actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as they were originally given. When the religiously uninformed are incorrectly told that the innovations resurrected by extremists are the true Islam, it makes the original way of

¹⁸ For example, Eidgah Sharif’s Golden Chain [*Shajrah*] begins with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, followed by two of His Blessed Companions i.e., Sayyadina Abu Bakar as Siddique and Sayyadina Salman al Faris, one member of His Blessed Family Imam Jafar as Sadique, as well as a continuous chain of *Walis* and *Sufi* Masters).

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (i.e., the *Deen*), the *Sufi* way [*Tassawwuf*], appear to them to be an innovation, even though it is actually the original way of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Sufis closely follow and believe in *Quran* and Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ teachings about staying away from coercion in religion. *Allah* commands in *Quran*, "There is no coercion (compulsion) in religion" (*The Quran*, n.d., 2: 256). Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has also commanded, "Make it easy for people, do not be harsh with them; give them glad tidings and not to incite hatred" (*Sahih al Bukhari, Kitab ul Aadaab, Hadith: 6125*).

Therefore, *Sufi Shayyukh* claim that *Tassawwuf* strives to provide religion to people without aggressively forcing it on people. Rather, it helps them understand it deeply through love and kindness. *Sufis* have offered significant resistance to extremists and their message, with the result that extremists see *Sufis* as a threat. Extremists have taken anti-*Sufi* rhetoric to another level in the era after the events in New York City in September 2001. Some present distorted, manipulated, and often fabricated sacred texts (Hadiths and translations of *Quranic* verses) to religiously naïve Muslims to convince them that *Sufism* is an illegitimate branch of Islam and an innovation, and hence *Sufi* Masters and *murids* are innovators and infidels who will go to hell, and that *Sufi* teachings are un-Islamic. Extremist organizations have led an organized and well-established propagation of extremist religious ideologies in Pakistan, including anti-*Sufi* ideology as part of their recruiting efforts. It is in these circumstances that *Shajrah* reminds people of the history of the *Sufi* Order and their close connection with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. By doing so, *Shajrah* offers a shield against extremists' propaganda.

Shajrah as a Change Agent in Behaviors: A Connection between the Sacred, the *Murid*, and Society

Shajrah can motivate the *murid* to practice the message of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by making a permanent change in their behavior, because the *Shajrah* reminds them of their powerful connection with the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Geertz (1993) clearly ranks religiously affiliated signs as more than mere artistic representations; he sees in religious symbols the potential to influence human attitudes and an expression of human beliefs. Geertz's understanding of symbols serves as a bridge or a connection between the sacred, the *murid*, and society. My interpretation of the visual image and the metaphor of tree and garden used in the *Sufi* shrine of Eidgah Sharif confirms the above-mentioned elements of Geertz's theory. *Sufi Shayyukh* use symbolism and metaphors of chain, tree, and spiritual family to motivate multilateral changes in behavior that have several manifestations. For example, first, change directed towards the individual to transform the person's soul; second, the inner self and change directed towards the relationship between the individual and the sacred; and finally, the change directed toward the overall social and cultural fabric of a particular society. When the individual (i.e. *murid*) sees him or herself as a representative of a *Sufi* spiritual lineage, they try to align their actions with the message and the mission of that spiritual lineage. Because at the top of each *Sufi* chain is the Supreme Master Prophet ﷺ, each connection (i.e., each *Sufi* Master) will try their best to emulate the message of the Supreme Master, and the same is expected of the *murids*. This brings a uniformity in purpose and the mission. Therefore, in an ideal scenario, a *murid* will pause before each action to see whether his actions and behaviors match with that of his *Shaykh*, knowing that *Shaykh*'s actions should completely align

with the command of the Supreme Master ﷺ. Hence, in following the *Shaykh*, the *murid* is in fact following the Supreme Master ﷺ. If the *murid*'s actions do not align with the commands of the Supreme Master ﷺ, the *murid* will try to correct himself and in doing so, s/he will seek the *Shaykh*'s help.

The Supreme Master Prophet ﷺ has instructed His people to not abandon the world but rather live in and operate in this world an exemplary life according to the peaceful, and loving teachings of Islam. For example, if a devout *murid* of the grand Shaykh, Khwaja Abdur Rahman Sani Paak (the grandfather of *Shaykh* Naqib ur Rahman Sahab) mentioned to Sani Paak their intention to give up their employment, business, or profession in order to be able to go into seclusion and completely devote themselves to prayers and worship, the *Shaykh* would not permit them to do so, but rather tell them that the *murids* should use their position and work according to the blessed teachings of our Supreme Master ﷺ. Therefore, a *murid* remains fully engaged as a law-abiding citizen who understands his/her responsibility towards nation building, and the betterment of the world. The ideal *murid* should engage in a continuous and inescapable practice of self-retrospection, self-reflection, and self-correction so that s/he becomes a source of comfort and love for everyone else.

Sufi Orders

Sufi Orders are various different paths that carry the same message and strive for the same goal, the pleasure of Allah and the Blessed Prophet ﷺ. *Sufi Sunni* orders, or *tariqa*, are religious brotherhoods within Islam that have their own leadership structure, and saintly lineage traceable through their Golden Chain back to the first caliph

Sayyadina Abu-Bakr al-Siddique or the fourth caliph Imam Ali and through them to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Most *Sufi* Orders are named after their spiritual founders, and have shrines were built in their honor. Their deputies and followers spread the orders throughout their region and in some cases throughout the world. The following describes some major *Sufi* Orders.

Qadriyya

Qadriyya was based on the teachings of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani in Baghdad, Iraq, in the 12th century. They are particularly strong in Bangladesh and India. *Shaykh* Abdul Qadir al-Jilani was a 15th-generation descendant of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, highly revered for his intellect and piety, who was given the title *Ghaus e Azam*. *Ghaus e Azam* is an extremely important *Sufi Shaykh* and religious scholar, considered to be the leader of all the *wali*'s [Muslim saints, friends of *Allah*] and *Sufis* who came after him. For these reasons, he is highly revered among Muslims and his sayings carry great legitimacy.

Chishtiyya

Chishtiyya is a *Sunni Sufi* order named after the town of Chisht in Afghanistan, where it was initiated by *Shaykh* Abu Ishaq Shami in the 10th century. The order was brought to South Asia by *Shaykh* Mu'in al-Din Chishti in the 12th century. The *Chishti* Order is known for its emphasis on love, tolerance, and openness. It is said that *Shaykh* Mu'in al-Din Chishti inspired more than a 100,000 people to embrace Islam just because of his polite, positive demeanor and love for God's creation without any discrimination.

Shaykh Mu'in al-Din Chishti was given the title of *Ghareeb Nawaz*, meaning one who is kind to the poor.

Suhrawardiyya

Suhrawardiyya is a *Sufi* order that was founded by Abu 'l-Najīb Suhrawardī in Baghdad in the 12th century. It was known for its strict spiritual discipline and ritual prayers, known as *dhikr*, based on repeating the names of God thousands of times.

Naqshbandiyya

Naqshbandiyya is a *Sunni Sufi* order that traces its commissions back to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through Sayyadina Abu Bakar as Siddique. This is why, initially, the order was known as *Siddiqiyya*. From the 14th century onwards, it started becoming known as *Naqshbandiyya*, because of the great influence of the grand *Sufi Shaykh* Khwaja Baha ud Din Naqshband during the Timurid Empire period in what is Uzbekistan today. It became the dominant *Sufi* order in the Indian subcontinent by the end of the 16th century and subsequently spread west to the Middle East and east to Southeast Asia and China.

According to Renard (2005), *Naqshbandiyya* is one of the only two *Sufi* orders that have been influential over the widest expanse of territory including the Middle East, Central Asia, Caucasus, Southeast Asia, South Asia the Balkans, and Turkey. With significant contributions by recent *Naqshbandi Sufis* during this past century, the *Naqshbandi Sufi* order has spread in Europe, United Kingdom, United States, and Canada. There are also *Naqshbandi* followers in Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Latin America. The order currently has over 60 million followers worldwide.

Naqshbandi Sufi Shayyukh celebrate the fact that their *Shajrah* [the Golden Chain, or spiritual lineage] links them to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through two special connections:

- The closest Companion of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ Sayyadina Abu Bakar as Siddique.
- The Noble Household of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through Imam Jafar al Sadique, who is the great-grandson of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ grandson, Sayyadina Imam Husein.

Doctrine of the *Naqshbandi Sufi* Order. The grand *Shaykh*, Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem, states in *Faiz ul Kareem* that it is better to follow the *Naqshbandi Sufi* Order, because *Naqshbandi Shayyukh* closely adhere to the *Sunnah* [practices, actions] of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, avoid innovations in religion, and dislike pretensions in religious practice. This is why when the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif initiate someone into their *Sufi* Order, they take an Oath of allegiance not to their *Sufi* Order but to the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [*Tariq Muhammadi* ﷺ]. (See Oath of allegiance script).

The *Naqshbandi* Order has a central, unparalleled devotion to the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, which they inherited from the first Muslim Caliph and the head of the *Naqshbandiyya* chain, Abu Bakar as Siddiq. This is why devotional poems about the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, His Noble Family, and the Blessed Companions are central to the *Naqshbandi Sufi* order. These poems praising the Blessed Prophet ﷺ are called *Naats* or *Nasheeds*. *Naqshbandi Sufi* shrines frequently celebrate the *Mawlid* (birth) of the Beloved Prophet ﷺ.

The *Naqshbandiyya Sufi* order is considered a very sober order (dances and music are not allowed as part of their devotional practices, only *a cappella* reciting) and its

teachings, practices and rituals closely adhere to the teachings of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ and His *Shariah*. When King Akbar's *din-e-ilahi* promoted dance and music as significant parts of religion, and when he tried to introduce elements of other religions into Islam, the grand *Naqshbandi Sufi Shaykh* Mujaddid Alf Sani feared that allowing such syncretization would compromise the original form of Islam, so he stood up against the emperors of his time, served many jail times for his efforts, but did not give up his mission to preserve Islam and *Tassawwuf* from cross contamination. Due to the dauntless efforts of this *Naqshbandi Shaykh*, Islam and *Tassawwuf* have retained their original soul.

Although Schimmel (1975) says that the *Naqshbandiyya* order performs only silent *dhikr*, *Naqshbandi Sufi* texts such as *Hidayat-ul-Insaan Ila-Sabeel-il-Irfan* cite various forms of *dhikr*, including *Dhikr-al-Khafi* [silent *dhikr*] and *Dhikr-al-Jali* (audible *dhikr*). *Tajweed ur Rahman* by the grand Shaykh Khwaja Abdur Rahman Sani Paak is another foundational Sufi text that provides evidence on the permissibility of loud *dhikr*. There are principles for *dhikr* that encourage the follower to be mindful and intentional about this devotional practice of *dhikr*.

Naqshbandi Doctrine heavily emphasizes *Sohbat* (connection) and teaches *murids* to develop a serious *tawajjuh* (attention, focus) towards their *Shaykh*. The *Shaykh* and *murid* maintain a very high level of close spiritual connection, often despite geographical and physical distances. This attention of *Shaykh* and *Murid* to each other results in experiences of spiritual unity, faith healing, and many other phenomena. The spirit of the *Shaykh* is supposed to have spiritual powers and remains alive even after *Shaykh* veils from this world and remains actively engaged in the affairs of this world. Often *Shayyukh* appear in the dreams of their *murids* to guide them on the Path to God. *Naqshbandiyya*

order also teaches *murids* to focus on the spiritual reality of the Great *Shayyukh* of their chain to strengthen their spiritual pursuits.

Transregional and Transnational Linkages Between *Sufi* Shrines and their Followers

The people of *Tassawwuf* have always been transnational. Green's (2003) analysis of migrant *Sufis* and sacred places in South Asia provides evidence that *Sufis* operate transnationally and transregionally. It is wrong to label *Sufis* as nomads, hippies or wanderers, because *Sufi* migrations have a purpose and, in most cases, their destinations are pre-determined, then they always return to the shrine, their spiritual home. "The early *Sufi* manuals of both Suhrawardy and Hujwiri also explicitly describe the etiquette (*adab*) of *Sufi* travel" (Green, 2003, p. 493). The original version of *Kashful Mahjub* (and its Urdu translation) devotes an entire chapter to the mannerisms of travel. Although its English translation has omitted that chapter.

Transnationalism in the *Sufi* system happens in multiple ways. For example, the Masters travel to administer their mission, send their deputies to various parts of the world for the same reason, as well as the seekers engage in international travel to be in the *Sohbat* [company] of their Masters. Irrespective of geographical distance, a seeker must keep visiting their *Sufi* Masters and the shrines of the ancestral *Shayyukh*. For example, followers of Eidgah Sharif and their families travel from various parts of the world to meet with the *Shaykh*, to gain blessings from the tombs of the ancestral *Shayyukh* resting in Eidgah Sharif, and also to attend major annual events at the shrine, such as *Urs*. Many followers of Eidgah Sharif will also go to Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to gain blessings from the shrines of *Naqshbandi* ancestral *Shayyukh*. These followers then return to their countries of origin with messages and guidance to be delivered to

other *murids*. The analysis section of this thesis will explore the ways in which advancement in technology has supported these transnational connections.

At the heart of these transnational linkages is the commitment to Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ message of love and peace. *Sufi* Orders operate simultaneously in multiple countries of the world in order to effectively spread Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ message of love and peace. *Sufi Shayyukh* usually travel alone or with a handful of people. For example, Shaykh Sayyad Ali Hujwiri (commonly known as Data Sahib) came to Lahore in the 10th century with just one person. Khwaja Mu'in al-Din Chishti in the 12th century brought the Chishti *Sunni Sufi* order from Afghanistan, where it was initiated by Abu Ishaq Shami in the 10th century, to South Asia. He came to the region all alone and converted more than 9,000,000 people to Islam.

The *Naqshbandi Sufi* order that is practiced at Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, spread in steps from the sacred city of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Al Madina al Munawwara, to Iraq and from there to Iran and in the 12th century to present day Uzbekistan. From there it spread to Kabul, Afghanistan by the 14th century, and was brought to present day Delhi, India by *Shaykh* Baqi Billah in the 1600's. About two hundred years later, in 1803 CE, this *Sufi* Order was brought to Gundapur in KPK, Pakistan by Khwaja Sayyad Muhammad Eesa. The founding of Eidgah Sharif in the late 1800's was a continuation of this process. Today, the followers of Eidgah Sharif are present in almost every country of the world.

Chapter IV

Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi: A *Sufi Sunni* Shrine of Holy *Sufi* Order of *Naqshbandiyya*

Mujaddadiyya Muhammadiyya

The *Sufi Sunni* shrine, Eidgah Sharif, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, is a leading *Naqshbandi Sufi* shrine of the *Mujaddadiyya Muhammadiyya* sub-order (Figures 7 and 8). The shrine represents a major landmark on the twin cities of Islamabad (Pakistan's capital) and Rawalpindi. These twin cities have road signs that point towards prominent places such as the Presidential House, National Assembly of Pakistan, or the Parliament House of Pakistan, but there are also signs pointing towards Eidgah Sharif, because it too is an important historical and contemporary landmark. Here is a brief overview of the history and the saints of this shrine (Figures 8 and 9).

A Brief History of Eidgah Sharif

Eidgah Sharif is a *Sunni Sufi Naqshbandi* shrine in the northern Pakistani city of Rawalpindi, located in the southeastern foothills of the Hindu Kush. It is a region at the crossroads of civilizations, rich in history and in the *Sunni Sufi* religious tradition, with Eidgah Sharif becoming a significant part of that tradition in recent centuries. Islamic faith grew in the region against a backdrop of shifting empires. Alexander the Great and his army had spread his empire through the region in 326 BC. Timur brought the Timurid Empire to the region in 1398, when he and his army marched through on their way to capture Delhi. The first Mughal emperor, Babur, after capturing Kabul in 1504, spread the Mughal Empire eastward through the region and across the north of India to as far away as present-day Bangladesh. Islam was brought to the region by a series of *Sufi*

saints beginning in the 11th century with Data Sahib (Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Uthman [Usman] al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, c. 1009-1072/77), who brought Islam from Afghanistan to Lahore, now in Pakistan. Data Sahib was followed by another great *Sufi* saint from Afghanistan, Moin-ud-din Chishti (Hazrat Sheikh Khwaja Moin-ud-din Chishti Ajmeri, 1141-1236), who brought the Chishti *Sufi* Order to the region and by 1230 is said to have inspired a 100,000 Hindus to embrace Islam. In the 15th century *Shaykh* Baqi Billah (Khwaja Muhammad Baqi, 1564-1603) brought the *Naqshbandi* order of *Sufism* from Kabul to South Asia. *Shaykh* Baqi Billah is best known for confronting the liberalism of the third Mughal emperor, Akbar I, who tried in 1582 to bring religious unity to his empire by creating a syncretic creed derived mainly from Islam and Hinduism, but including elements of Zoroastrianism and Christianity. This struggle was made successful by *Shaykh* Baqi Billah's *murid*, *Shaykh* Mujaddid Alf-e-Sani (Shaykh Ahmad al-Fārūqī al-Sirhindī, 1564-1624). The work of the *Naqshbandi Sufi* Order continued and flourished in peace in the region for centuries. A notable event occurred when two wealthy traders from Kabul, Alah Daad Khan and his brother Husain Khan, stopped in Rawalpindi on their way to Delhi on business, and were so inspired by the famous *Sufi* Saint, Bari Imam Sarkar (Pir Syed Abdul Latif Qadiri, 1617-1705), that they chose to stay there for the rest of their lives supporting the religious works of his shrine. Eidgah Sharif was founded in 1888 by *Shaykh* Hafiz Abdul Kareem.

The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif¹⁹

The great-grandfather of Pir Naqib ur Rahman Sahab, the grand *Shaykh* Hafiz Abdul Kareem (1848-1936), better known to his followers as Bawaji Sahab, had migrated from Ghazni, Afghanistan, and settled in Rawalpindi. He was a fifth-generation descendant of Alah Daad Khan, himself a tenth-generation descendant of Babur, the first Mughal Emperor. Bawaji Sahab was orphaned while very young and raised by his aunt and uncle. He displayed a remarkable affinity for religious material, memorizing Holy *Quran* by age of two and a half. He was exceptionally talented at recitation and interpretation of the Holy *Quran*. His recitations were said to have been so beautiful that birds were captivated by him and people came from all around to listen to him. The melodious tones had the power to touch people and create in them a reverence for the sacred texts. At age 25, Bawaji Sahab took *Bay'at* with Baba Fakeer Muhammad, son of Hazrat Khawaja Noor Muhammad of (1765-1869), also known as Baba Ji Churahi, who founded Chura Sharif in 1867 CE, and made it into a prominent center for spiritual training and learning for the *Naqshbandi Silsila*. Bawaji Sahab formed an intense bond with his *Shaykh*, holding him in the highest esteem, so that he gave all he possessed to Baba Fakeer Muhammad. According to *Majmoo'a Gulzar Hafiz Abdul Kareem*, a book about *Tassawwuf*, and the history of Eidgah Sharif's, Bawaji Sahab excelled among all other *murids* in *Tassawwuf* and deeply impressed his *Shaykh* by his intellect, wisdom, and unmatched devotion and love for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Deeply impressed and profoundly proud of his *murid*, Baba Fakeer Muhammad rewarded this *murid*, Bawaji Sahab, with the sacred *jubba* [a long Islamic coat for *Sufi* saints], the *Imamah Shareef*

¹⁹ Please see a montage of the *Shayyukh* in appendix 1

[the sacred headdress which is a symbol of religious nobility and authority]. While on pilgrimage in Madina tul Munawwara, Bawaji Sahab requested Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to keep him in Madina tul Munawwara. He did not want to go away, but rather stay forever in the city of the Beloved Prophet ﷺ. In response, Bawaji Sahab was told that there was work for him to do. He was assigned a mission²⁰, and the site of the sacred location of Eidgah Sharif was revealed to him. He was asked to go there and start working on the mission. In fulfillment of the orders given by His Master, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Bawaji Sahab returned and established the Holy Shrine of *Darbar e Aaliya Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya Muhammadiyyah*, although it has become more generally known by the name of the section of Rawalpindi in which it is located, Eidgah Sharif. He invited hundreds of thousands to the Path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, His deputies have become major *Sufi Shayyukh* in charge of great religious schools in Pakistan. The books that Bawaji Sahab wrote serve as foundational texts in *Tassawwuf*. In particular, his translation of *Maktoobat e Mujaddid alf Sani* (letters of *Shaykh* Mujaddid alf Sani) are considered the most authentic Urdu translation of these Persian letters.

Bawaji Sahab had five sons. Among them he chose *Shaykh* Muhammad Abdul Rahman (born on Monday, June 8, 1892) to assume responsibility for preserving and expanding Eidgah Sharif. Known to his loving followers as Sani Paak, he assumed responsibility for Eidgah Sharif on May 20, 1932. He expanded and modernized the religious and educational activities of Eidgah Sharif, serving with humility and dedication the spiritual needs of his followers and fostering a culture of unity and devotion to the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, until he veiled on January 2, 1961. A review of

²⁰ See the section Mission of Eidgah Sharif

video speeches recorded on the occasions of *Urs* Paak of January 02, reveal that religious scholars and prominent *Sufi Shayyukh*, even those, unaffiliated with Eidgah Sharif consider Sani Paak as an unmatched religious scholar and a devout *Sufi* of his time. Sani Paak was fluent in multiple languages including Arabic and Persian. He visited Baghdad, Iraq and during his encounters with religious scholars there, he impressed them so profoundly that they insisted he take over teaching positions there, teaching not only students, but also the most renowned scholars of his time. His book *Tajweed ur Rahman* is considered a great defense of *Sufi* practice of *dhikar bil Jahar* (loud, audible *dhikar*)

Sani Paak's son, His Eminence *Shaykh* Muhammad Habib-ur-Rahman (born December 9, 1930), known affectionately to his followers as Lasani Paak, wrote influential religious books and worked tirelessly to strengthen the faith. Lasani Paak particularly valued Mondays as the time for new clothes and new beginnings, and the 12th of the month to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ. He is famous for his exquisite *Sufi* demeanor, the training he gave to his followers, and his passion for authenticity in religion. His books *Fa Nabi Allahu Hayyun Yurzuq*, and *Tafseer e Habeebi* are strong defenses of *Sufi Sunni* belief about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Lasani Paak also started visiting the US and the UK in order to minister to his *murids* there.

Lasani Paak bestowed the fourth generation of leadership of Eidgah Sharif to his beloved son, His Eminence *Shaykh* Muhammad Naqib ur Rahman (born January 4, 1955), affectionately known to his followers as Pir Sahab or Hazrat Sahab. Under the leadership of Pir Sahab, the influence and outreach of Eidgah Sharif has expanded enormously, so that it now has more than four million followers in Pakistan and another 50,000 or more in UK, Dubai and elsewhere around the world. Pir Sahab organizes and

participates in a heavy schedule of *Mehfils* at Eidgah Sharif on the 12th of each month, *Urs Paak* on June 8, January 2 and September 6, as well as home visits (*Duas*) throughout Pakistan and abroad in countries around the world where followers live. Although Eidgah Sharif has been engaged in connections with international diplomats, and engaged in interfaith outreach and charitable work since beginning, under Pir Sahab's leadership, Eidgah Sharif made enormous progress in all three areas. Pir Sahab continued treasuring connections with domestic as well as expatriate *murids*. Therefore, for the last four decades, he has been doing annual visits to the UK, Europe, and frequent visits to the US as well as the Middle East.

The 5th generation of Eidgah Sharif's leadership, *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman Sahab, commonly known to his followers as Qibla Sahab, actively co-leads Eidgah Sharif with his father, *Shaykh* Naqib ur Rahman Sahab. Qibla Sahab is currently a member of the Islamic Ideology Council of Pakistan. This council is the highest-level institutional body that can counsel the government of Pakistan on religious affairs in Pakistan and hence is known as the religious face of the government. He particularly attracts youth, and generally all age groups of people. In Qibla Sahab's leadership, Eidgah Sharif's influence and outreach, both in person as well as through digital media, has seen a revolution. His Facebook pages have more than a million followers. He has been delivering lectures through ARY QTV for the last 11 years consecutively. Hence, he provides knowledge and guidance to millions of people who are not even *murids* of Eidgah Shaif. In addition to these daily and weekly lectures on electronic media, the live streaming of Eidgah Sharif programs through Facebook, YouTube and the local and international TV channels have benefitted not just *murids* but also an overwhelming

number of admirers and followers around the world. He has an enormous following in many countries and travels around the world to deliver lectures on Islam and meet with Muslim scholars.

Mission of Eidgah Sharif

The following is my understanding of a *Khanqah* based on my personal experiences, readings of *Quran*, Hadith, and *Sufi* texts, my observations of various *Sufi Khanqahs* in my life, and my parents' guidance. Eidgah Sharif belongs to a *Khanqahi* system. Eidgah Sharif has the same mission that people of *Khanqahi* system acquired and spread across the world, that is the Love of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The most prominent light (guidance) from this is what our Merciful *Allah* has said about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that We have sent You with the most exalted disposition (character and mannerism). We have not sent You but as a Mercy for all the Worlds. And we can see Prophet Muhammad ﷺ say, "When on the Day of Judgement your deeds will be weighted, the heaviest²¹ of all will be your mannerism (noble disposition)" (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Kitab Al-Adab, 4799). We also see Prophet Muhammad ﷺ say, "If you guarantee me what is between your two jaws, called your tongue, I will guarantee you Heaven" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Kitab ur Riqaq, 6474). What is that guarantee? What does it guarantee? That is, you will never tell lies with this tongue, not break someone's heart, not hurt someone's

²¹ This refers to the Islamic concept that on the Day of Judgement a scale for weighing deeds [*Meezan*] will be set and each individual's deeds will be weighed in a way that his/her good deeds will be placed in right side of this scale while the bad deeds will be placed in the left side of the scale/ balance. If the right side (i.e. good deeds) weighs heavier than the left side (i.e. bad deeds), the person will be sent to the Heaven. Otherwise, the person will be sent to the hell. Islamically, each deed has its weight. According to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the heaviest weight will be of good-polite-mannerism. This refers to the value of polite mannerism in order to earn a place in Heaven.

feelings, not do backbiting. In summary, you will use your tongue only for what is good. This refers to the same thing, that is noble disposition.

In a *Khanqahi* system, people are trained and positively groomed. This is because no human can become a good person unless education is accompanied with training and positive grooming. The prime task that is performed through a *khanqah* is positive grooming to transform someone into a good person. A person who helps others, invites people to do good, does not cause anyone distress, but instead provides them relief from distress, does not cause anyone any hardship or affliction, but instead eliminates their afflictions. No matter where in the world that person may be, his/her existence provides benefits to people and does not cause them any damage. Different kinds of people live in a society; this person becomes such an addition in society that s/he works towards the betterment of society²².

Khanqah practically provides peace to those who come here—peace of heart. Provides food to the hungry and connects them with *Allah* and His Prophet Muhammadﷺ. When a person loves *Allah*, automatically, s/he develops the love of *Allah*'s creation as well. Because Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the Mercy for all the worlds, therefore, His love also brings in His lovers the love of God's creation. The one who spends time in *Khanqah*, experiences feelings that s/he cannot explain, but through them their heart softens. What I have explained is just the basics. In addition, there are innumerable benefits that a person can feel and experience when they come and stay here.

²² <https://www.facebook.com/reel/627272513113527>

Major Rituals, Practices and Celebrations in Eidgah Sharif

Eidgah Sharif closely adheres to *sharia* law and hence must observe all Muslim practices, rituals, observances, and celebrations including the mandatory five daily prayers in congregations, *Salat ul Jumma* and *Salat ut Taraweeh*,²³ teaching and learning of Holy *Quran* and Hadith, *dhikr*, observance of *Ramadan*, celebration of major Islamic days such as *Eid Milad un Nabi*²⁴ ﷺ, *Eid ul Fitr*, *Eid ud Duha*, *Laila tul Qadr*²⁵, *Ashura*²⁶, *Miraj Sharif*²⁷, *Shab e Bara'at*²⁸, *khatam sharif*²⁹ and *Urs*³⁰. The shrine also commemorates the sacred personages in Islam. Due to time limitation, this chapter will provide only an introduction to *Bay'at*, *Dhikr*, *Urs*, and *Milad un Nabi* ﷺ. In addition to the above mentioned, the shrine is heavily focused on social welfare, education, and interfaith activities. These will be discussed further in the analysis section.

Initiation into the *Tariqa* through the Oath of Allegiance (*Bay'at*)

The process of initiating a seeker into a *Sufi* Order (making someone a *murid* of a particular *Sufi* order) involves pledging an oath to allegiance (*Bay'at*). The concept of *Bay'at* comes from many instances when Prophet Muhammad ﷺ asked the blessed

²³ Ramadan-specific night prayers.

²⁴ Celebration of the birth of *Rasool Allah* ﷺ [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ]. This is also known as *Mawlid un Nabi* ﷺ.

²⁵ The Night when the Holy Quran was sent down. It is one of the last ten odd-numbered nights of Ramadan.

²⁶ Martyrdom of Sayyadina Imam Hussein, the Grandson of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, along with 72 close family members.

²⁷ Also called *Isra wal Miraj*, it is the Night of Ascension when *Rasool Allah* ﷺ went to the Heavens to meet with *Allah*.

²⁸ Also called *Laila tul Bara'at*, it is the Night of Deliverance from Hell fire. This is the night when decisions for the upcoming year are made and handed over to the angels. This is the night when the supplications are accepted, and sins are forgiven.

²⁹ A congregational *dhikr* in which people recite a set of Quranic verses and sacred words and supplications in a particular order to benefit themselves and the others.

³⁰ Commemoration of the day when the saints of *Allah* veil (pass away)

companions to take an oath or make a pledge with Him. The *Quran* celebrates *Bay'at e Ridwan*, a pledge that the blessed companions took with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In the verse below, *Allah* addresses Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, “Those who swear allegiance to you do indeed in fact swear allegiance to *Allah*; *Allah*'s Hand* is above their hands; so whoever breaches his oath, has breached his own greater promise; and whoever fulfils the covenant he has with *Allah* – so very soon *Allah* will bestow upon him a great reward” (*The Quran*, n.d., 48:10).

Thus, it is proven through this verse of *Quran* that taking *Bay'at* is in fact a *Sunnah* [action] of the blessed companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The context and the content of the pledge varied depending upon the occasion. Fulfilling the pledge and remaining steadfast to it, is an act that *Allah* likes. “Indeed *Allah* was truly pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you beneath the tree – so He knew what was in their hearts – He therefore sent down peace upon them and rewarded them with an imminent victory” (*The Quran*, n.d., 48:18).

In his commentary on the above-mentioned verse 10 of chapter 48, Imam Ahmad Raza Khan Brelvi writes in *Kanzul Iman* (an authentic and well-accepted translation and brief commentary on *Quranic* verses), the act of taking *Bay'at* on the hands of a *wali* (whether it is a *Bay'at* of Islam, of piety, of repentance, or of good deeds etc.), is a *Sunnah* [act, tradition] of the Blessed companions and is a source of blessings. Hence, the act of taking *Bay'at* is validated from this very verse of *Quran*. Each *Sufi* order has their own script for its *Bay'at*. Following is the script of *Bay'at* from the *Sufi* order that is the topic of exploration in this thesis, i.e. The Noble *Sufi* Order *Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya Muhammadiyah, Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi*. The process of *Bay'at* is

such that seekers demonstrate their interest in and make a request to take *Bay'at* with the *Shaykh*. Following the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the *Shaykh* then takes the hand of a male seeker in his hands or if there are many people, the *Shaykh* asks them to hold one end of a large piece of clean fabric, while the *Shaykh* holds the other end of the fabric (Figure 10). In case of female *murids*, irrespective of the number, *Bay'at* happens through large pieces of fabrics. The *Shaykh* then reads the following words of the *Bay'at* in Punjabi, Urdu, or sometimes in English language and the seekers follow him.^{31 32 33} The following is an English translation of the script. For full text script, originally multilingually in Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic, along with its English translation, please see appendix 7.

Table 1 Oath of Allegiance [*Bay'at*] Script by the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif

Speaker/ commentator	Text of <i>Bay'at</i> [Oath of Allegiance]
<i>Shaykh</i>	Repeat after me
Researcher commentary	From here on, <i>seeker(s)</i> repeat(s) each utterance of the <i>Shaykh</i> either silently or out loud.
<i>Shaykh</i>	I seek refuge of <i>Allah</i> from the cursed Satan. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	In the name of <i>Allah</i> , the Most Magnificent, the Most Merciful.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	There is no God but <i>Allah</i> and Muhammad ﷺ is the Messenger of <i>Allah</i> . *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Glory be to <i>Allah</i> , and all praise be to <i>Allah</i> ; and there is no God but <i>Allah</i> , and <i>Allah</i> is the Greatest. There is no might or power except <i>Allah</i> , the Exalted, the Great One. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	I seek forgiveness of <i>Allah</i> who is my Lord, for all my sins and I repent. So, please forgive me [oh my <i>Allah</i>]. *

³¹Pir Sahab taking Oath of Allegiance from an individual whose shop is being visited during their UK tour <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OK5MpVJt2Mw>

³² The Grand *Shaykh* Lasani Paak taking Oath of Allegiance from a group of people at a follower's house during their visit to the UK in 1980's. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44gJQyiZXNA>

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igwoThNvdjU>

Speaker/ commentator	Text of <i>Bay'at</i> [Oath of Allegiance]
<i>Shaykh</i>	Oh <i>Allah</i> , I sincerely repent*
<i>Shaykh</i>	And promise:*
<i>Shaykh</i>	I will offer prayers;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	Do your <i>dhikr</i> ;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	Worship you;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	Will not steal;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	Will not lie; *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Will not commit adultery; *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Will not consume alcoholic beverages; *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Will not gamble; *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Will not keep bad company. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Oh <i>Allah</i> , I am your humble slave. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	I sincerely repent. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Please accept my repentance. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Forgive my sins. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Turn me into your slave. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Save me from sin. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	Oh <i>Allah</i> , I repent, I repent, I sincerely repent. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	You are permitted on the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [<i>Tariqa Rasooli</i>] to start your spiritual journey in the name of <i>Allah</i> [<i>IsmUllah</i>]. You are permitted to recite <i>Darood Sharif</i> , and <i>Khatam Sharif</i> . Do you accept?
Seeker	Yes, I accept. (needs to be said audibly)
<i>Shaykh</i>	Congratulations!
Researcher commentary	Now the <i>Shaykh</i> congratulates the seeker on being initiated and becoming the member of this holy spiritual family. The <i>Shaykh</i> also guides the seeker on how to do the <i>dhikr</i> of <i>Allah huu</i> using the following words.
<i>Shaykh</i>	Fold your hands like you do in prayers
<i>Shaykh</i>	This way
<i>Shaykh</i>	Touch your chin to the left side of your chest
<i>Shaykh</i>	When you inhale, your heart should say <i>Allah</i>
<i>Shaykh</i>	When you exhale, [it should say] <i>huu</i> .
<i>Shaykh</i>	And the <i>huu</i> should strike your heart.
<i>Shaykh</i>	<i>Allah Huu</i> *
The entire crowd	<i>Allah Huu</i> **
Researcher commentary	When <i>Dhikr</i> ends the <i>Shaykh</i> raises his hands and does <i>dua</i> . The crowd continues to say Ameen after each supplication that the <i>Shaykh</i> makes. After supplication, the <i>Shaykh</i> says:

Speaker/ commentator	Text of <i>Bay'at</i> [Oath of Allegiance]
<i>Shaykh</i>	Congratulations! When a person repents, <i>Allah</i> forgives all his past sins. From now onwards, be careful. After offering Fajr prayers, do this <i>wazifa</i>: Recite <i>Darood Paak</i> 100 times, <i>Ya Hayyu Ya Qayyum</i> [The One who is Alive; the One who has been forever and will be forever. He was when nothing was present, and He will Be when all else will cease existing] 300 times and again recite <i>Darood Paak</i> 100 times. The greatest <i>wazifa</i> is remembrance of <i>Allah</i>. Work with hands, speak with tongue, but in your heart and thoughts it should always be <i>Allah Hu</i>:
The entire crowd <i>Shaykh</i>	<i>Allah Hu, Allah Hu, Allah Hu</i>** Remember <i>Allah</i> with every single breath. No breath should neglect it. The foundation of our <i>Tariqa</i> [<i>Sufi</i> path] is to become one with the commands of the Master of both worlds [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ]; following His commands; and not going against any of His commands.

**This text is then repeated by the seeker either out loud or silently.*

***This text is repeated by the entire crowd out loud or silently*

****Researcher's comment added for clarity.*

The oath of Allegiance is administered multilingually (in Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic) by the Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif to seekers and here translated into English by Dr. Sadaf R. Shier. For translation purposes, the script of the Bay'at was first transcribed from pre-existing video recordings. Web addresses of these video tapes are provided in footnotes 30, 31, 32.

Once a seeker takes the oath of allegiance, the expectation is that they will accept the *Shaykh* as their mentor and guide in every matter of their life and follow the *Shaykh*'s guidance. The *murid* should revere the *Shayyukh*, trust them, follow their teachings sincerely, and make every effort to fulfil the promises they made during the *Bay'at*. The *murid* should invest effort and time to maintain a strong *Rabta* [connection] and maintain *Sohbat* [companionship] with their *Shaykh*, even when they are geographically apart.

Dhikr [Remembrance]

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ “Therefore, remember Me, I will remember you” (*The Quran*, n.d., 2:152). In *Hidayat ul Insan Ila Sabil il Irfan* (Abdul Kareem, 1986, p. 34), Khwaja Al Hafiz Abdul Kareem devotes an entire chapter in establishing the significance of *dhikr* and people who engage in *dhikr*. The following section is comprised of extracts from this chapter.

Shaykh Sabit Banani used to say, I know when *Allah* remembers me. Startled by this claim, people asked, how can you know this? He said, when I remember *Allah*, He remembers me. The Islamic exegesis of the *Quran* states multiple meanings of the *Quranic* verse, “Therefore, remember Me, I will remember you” (*The Quran*, n.d., 2:152). That is, *Allah* says in effect, if You remember Me through following My commands, I will remember you through forgiveness and rewards. Or if you remember Me through repentance, I will remember you through acceptance. If you remember Me through supplications, I will remember you through answering your supplications favorably. Or if you remember Me in your dwellings, I will remember you in your grave and keep you steadfast until your last breath. Or if you remember Me through trust, I will remember you by being adequate for you. Or if you remember Me through goodness, I will remember you through Mercy. In *Quran*, *Allah* says, يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا “O People who Believe! Remember *Allah* profusely” (*The Quran*, n.d., 33:41). *Quran* also says, وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ “and indeed the remembrance of *Allah* is the greatest worship” (*The Quran*, n.d., 29:45).

Sayyadina Abu Huraira narrates that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that “*Allah* says that I am with my servant while he continues to remember me [does my *dhikr*] and both

his lips move in my remembrance.” Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem states that this Hadith reveals that there are two kinds of *dhikr*, *dhikr e Qalbi* [silent *dhikr* or *dhikr* through heart] and *dhikr e Lisani* [audible *dhikr* or *dhikr* out loud].

Dhikr e Qalbi [Silent *Dhikr* or *Dhikr* in the Heart]. The silent *dhikr* or the *dhikr* in the heart is more powerful and more dignified. A Hadith states that *Dhikr e Qalbi* is seventy times more dignified than audible *dhikr*. When the *dhakir* [doer of *dhikr* is engaged in this kind of *dhikr* in his heart, other humans are unaware of this activity. Hence, such *dhikr* cannot be attributed to pretension or to impress people. In the *Quran* (*The Quran*, n.d., 7:205), *Allah* addresses Prophet Muhammad ﷺ , وَأَذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ “And remember (Oh Beloved ﷺ) your Lord in your heart.” This verse also emphasizes the importance of *Dhikr e Qalbi*.

Dhikr e Lisani [Audible *Dhikr* or *Dhikr* out Loud] ³⁴. On page 39 of *Hidayat ul Insan*, the grand Shaykh, Khwaja Al Hafiz states the rewards of audible *dhikr*, a *dhikr* that people around you may listen to. The grand *Shaykh* says that a *dhakir* [the doer of the *dhikr*] who is doing *Dhikr bil Lisan* [out loud] will always be watchful of his words and not engage in foul talk. This is because the tongue that he uses for the sacred *dhikr* of his Lord, *Allah*, should not be used for vulgar, indecent, and rude talk. He will deter from and be ashamed of backbiting or lying. Thus, *dhikr* protects people from exoteric and esoteric sins and earns people deliverance in the hereafter. The grand *Shaykh* says that fortunate is the person who is blessed by *Allah* with the ability to remember *Allah* all the

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/ShaykhHassanHaseeburRehman/videos/464427658533384>
An example of *dhikr* at Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi led by Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab.

time, whereas unfortunate is the person who spends his time in vulgar and useless talk and neither does *dhikr*, nor reflects upon *Allah*.

Sayyadina Abdullah bin Umar says that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used to say that “for everything, there is an instrument that cleanses it and the instrument that cleanses the heart is *dhikr*. Nothing can protect from *Allah*’s torment better than *dhikr*” (*Hidayat ul Insan*, p. 40). The blessed companions asked, not even Jihad for the sake of *Allah*? Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “No, even though you strike so much that you break your sword.”

Dhikr bil Jawareh. According to Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman³⁵, there are three stages of *dhikr*; the first stage is *dhikr* through the tongue [*dhikr bil lisan*]. When the tongue does *dhikr* with great sincerity and intensity, that person’s heart acquires this *dhikr*. The second stage is *dhikr* through the heart [*dhikr bil qalb*]. The heart should remain attentive towards *Allah* at all times; my *Allah* is watching, I should not steal; my *Allah* is watching, I should not hurt someone. The heart should not feel inclined towards sinning. The third and the greatest form of *dhikr* is when every part of the human body engages in *dhikr*; this is called *dhikr bil Jawareh*. For example, the *dhikr* of the eye is that it should never see anything indecent; the *dhikr* of the ears is listening only to the truth and staying away from lies and gossips; the *dhikr* of the tongue is not telling lies, uttering foul words or cursing someone; *dhikr* of hands is that it should not hurt anyone. *Dhikr* removes negligence of the heart.

From Speech to Action [from *Qaal* to *Haal*] The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif encourage their *murids* to engage in *dhikr* in such a way that s/he moves beyond words into a

³⁵ Qibla Sahab’s speech on *dhikr*
<https://www.facebook.com/ShaykhHassanHaseeburRahman/videos/1052317943496794/>

spiritual state that incite action. Qibla Sahab explains in one of his speeches³⁶ that *Qaal* is to call *Allah* as *Ya Kheir an Nasireen*, [Oh the best Helper], *Haal* is that the caller, the *dhakir* [doer of the *dhikr*] starts helping people. *Qaal* is to call *Allah*, *Ya Qadi al Haajat* [Oh the One who fulfills people's needs], *Haal* is that the *dhakir* starts fulfilling people's needs to her/his best capacity. If a *dhakir* calls *Allah*, *Ya Kareemo* [Oh the One who is extremely Merciful], the *dhakir* starts being merciful on all of *Allah*'s creations without discrimination. Qibla Sahab calls this transformation in a person's station as progressing from *Qaal* (speech) to *Haal* (action).

How Much *Dhikr* is Good Enough? The grand *Shaykh* quotes Sayyadina Abu Sa'eed Khadri narrating that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said to "remember *Allah* in such an abundance that people call you insane" (*Hidayat ul Insan*, p. 41). Sayyadina Ibn e Abbas said that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said to remember *Allah* in such a way (with such an intensity) that hypocrites call you pretentious" (*Hidayat ul Insan*, p. 41). The grand *Shaykh* comments on these hadiths saying that Muslim faithful people should continue to remember *Allah* continuously and with full sincerity despite the accusations of being insane or pretentious.

Practices of *Dhikr* in Eidgah Sharif. During *Bay'at*, when the *Shaykh* asks the seekers to pledge "I promise, I will offer prayers; do your *dhikr*; worship you" (see appendix 7), he is asking the seeker to pledge to all three kinds of *dhikr* i.e. *Dhikr e Qalbi*, *Dhikr e Lisani* and *Dhikr bil Jawareh*. The emphasis on *Dhikr e Qalbi* is evident when the *Shayyukh* say, "The greatest *wazifa* is remembrance of *Allah*. Work with hands, speak with tongue,

³⁶Qibla Sahab's speech on *dhikr*
<https://www.facebook.com/ShaykhHassanHaseeburRahman/videos/1052317943496794/>

but in your heart and thoughts it should always be *Allah Hu, Allah Hu, Allah Hu*³⁷". The training of *Dhikr e Lisani* starts with (and is not limited to) the brief *dhikr* tutorial that the *Shaykh* provides to the seeker during the *Bay'at* process. "Fold your hands like you do in prayers. Touch your chin to the left side of your chest. When you inhale, your heart should say *Allah*. When you exhale, [it should say] *huu*. And the *huu* should strike your heart. *Allah Huu*." In fact, in Eidgah Sharif, most activities such a distribution of meals among masses, hauling goods from one place to another etc. are all accompanied with the audible *dhikr* "*Allah huu*" in such a way that the hands are busy distributing and receiving meals, while the tongues are busy in chanting "*Allah huu*". The public address system clock at Eidgah Sharif plays a recording of *Darood Sharif* at every hour on the hour. Another example is at 10:00am every day, when a group of followers start reading aloud a set of *Quranic* verses and holy words, which everyone around repeats either audibly or silently. Hence, several kinds of *dhikr* are done around the clock at various locations in the shrine's vast compound. They create an inescapable aura of the remembrance of *Allah* and His Blessed Prophet ﷺ.

Implications of Dhikr. *Allah* says that He is aware of the hidden secrets in human hearts. If someone believes that *Allah* is aware of the secrets in their hearts, they should know that *Allah* is watching their intentions. Therefore, every act must be done with the intention to please *Allah* only, and not for the sake of self-projection— not for the sake of making yourself look pious to people. The Blessed Prophet ﷺ said that there is a thing in the human body that, if that thing is in the correct state, then everything else in the body is also correct. The Blessed Companions asked what is that thing? The Blessed Prophet

³⁷ Video of Oath to Allegiance with the Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif. The video also shows the practice of *dhikr* of *Allahu*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igwoThNvdjU>.

ﷺ said that that thing is the human heart. If the heart is okay, the tongue will be okay as well and as a result, it will say only what is true and kind. It will refrain from gossip and/or hurting people. If the heart is alright, the ears will avoid listening to lies or gossip; the hands will refrain from causing others any damage and the feet will not move forward in any destructive or harmful activity, heart will stop thinking ill of others and stay away from negativity. *Dhikr* provides peace of heart and solace. The Blessed Prophet ﷺ said that the way iron catches rust, the heart catches rust too. The Blessed Companions asked, how can the heart be cleansed of the rust? The Blessed Prophet ﷺ said, “Through *dhikr*.” Through *dhikr*, it will be cleared of hypocrisy, and harshness will exit from it. The person will become a doer of good deeds. His heart will have been softened with the *dhikr* of *Allah* and frustration will go away. When you remember *Allah*, you find pleasure and you feel like following His commands. *Allah* says in *Quran*, “Oh Prophet (ﷺ), tell them, if you wish to love *Allah*, follow Me [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ], *Allah* will love you (*The Quran*, n.d., 3:31)”. From the blessed life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, we see that when people were sent to seek medical treatment of physical ailments, they were also told to do *dhikr*. Following this prophetic tradition, when a sick person comes to Eidgah Sharif, the *Shayyukh* here treat them through *dhikr*, but also send them to a doctor. Similarly, medical doctors routinely refer their patients to Eidgah Sharif so that they may find solace in the *dhikr* of *Allah* and His Beloved Prophet ﷺ, and hence are able to overcome frustration, anxiety, depression, and various kinds of addictions. In summary, the content analysis of *Shayyukh*’s online speeches reveals their belief that *dhikr* provides relief in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

Urs, Mawlid, and Dhikr Gatherings at Eidgah Sharif

Mawlid un Nabi ﷺ (also known as *Eid Milad un Nabi* ﷺ or *Milad Paak*) is the celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on the 12th day of the third Islamic month, *Rabee ul Awwal*. *Mawlid un Nabi* ﷺ is celebrated following the *Quranic* command, “ Say, in the Bounty of *Allah* and His Blessing, they should rejoice. This is better than all what they accumulate” (*The Quran*, n.d., 10:58). Also, “And proclaim your Lord’s Blessing” (*The Quran*, n.d., 93:11). *Sunni Sufis* believe that according to *Quran*, *Allah*’s greatest blessing and Mercy is Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, “*Allah* has indeed bestowed a grand favor upon the Muslims, in that He sent to them a Noble Messenger (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) from among them, who recites to them His verses, and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom; and before it, they were definitely in open error” (*The Quran*, n.d., 3:164). Therefore, *Sufi Sunnis* believe that Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, His birth, and His character must be celebrated. Therefore, Eidgah Sharif holds a *Mawlid* on the 12th day of the third Islamic month, *Rabee ul Awwal*. Eidgah Sharif holds a *mawlid* the 12th of each Islamic month, called *Barhveen Paak* [the scared twelfth], as well as April 22nd, which is the day of Birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ according to the Gregorian calendar.

Urs (meaning *shadi*, *wisal*, a celebration, having reached, or returning) is usually held on the day a sacred person passed away to celebrate returning to *Allah* after successfully living a life in following His commands in every matter of life as *Quran* requires, "Oh you the satisfied soul, return to your Lord such that you are pleased with Him and He is pleased with You" (*The Quran*, n.d., 89:27-30). The purpose of celebrating *Urs* is to soften the hearts of attendees by reminding them of the life and

character of these *Sufis*, and the *Sufi* message to love *Allah* and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and its requisites i.e., to eliminate hatred and spread love without discrimination. The *Urs* gatherings also encourage people to do self-analysis, self-retrospection, and ultimately, correct themselves. *Allah* says in *Quran* that the purpose of human creation was to worship *Allah*. *Sufis* believe that serving God's creation is also worshipping *Allah*. Eidgah Sharif holds three *Urs Paaks* per year (June 7-9; January 2; September 6).

Urs and *Mawlid* are both forms of *dhikr* of *Allah* and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. At Eidgah Sharif, *Urs* are *also* done by holding *milad* gatherings with *Quranic* recitations, *naat* recitation [accolades of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ], sermons on religious beliefs as well as character-building, *dhikr* and supplications, but no music or dance. Several hundred thousand followers from around the world and national and international dignitaries attend (see Figures 11-14) and others watch them as a live broadcast on TV channels or livestreaming on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, and later on as recordings on social media (see Figures 25-29). These events are free, open to the public, no reservation is needed, and free meals are provided.

Eidgah Sharif is one of the most active *khanqah* [shrine complex] in Pakistan with gatherings for five daily congregational prayers, Friday prayers, Ramadan specific nightly prayers called at *Taraweeh*, Sunday *mehfils*, two daily *dhikr mehfils*, monthly *Barhveen Paak mehfils*, *Urs Paak*, *Eid Milad un Nabi* ﷺ, the Night of Ascension, the Night of Deliverance, *Leila tul Qadar*, and memorial services. Hundreds of *mehfils* attended by millions per year are held elsewhere in Pakistan organized by the followers of Eidgah Sharif, or the other *Sufi* shrines with Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab as featured presenters (see Figures 13-14). During their lectures, the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif offer

extensive evidence to prove that the way Eidgah Sharif practices religion, including celebrating *mawlid*s, is the actual tradition of the Blessed Companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and not an innovation in religion. More on social and personal implications of *mawlid*s can be found in the Transnational Linkages chapter.

Institutes of Higher Education in Religion Housed inside Eidgah Sharif

Eidgah Sharif houses three residential religious school. One for young boys. The other two religious schools, one for women and the other for men, are institutes of higher education in religion and spirituality (Figure 15). These institutes offer multiple programs, the most popular being a 7-year degree in religious education called *Dars e Nizami*. These institutes also train students in modern education such as bachelor's degree in arts or commerce depending upon students' area of interest. A combination of 7 years of *Dars e Nizami* and a bachelor's in arts, or Science will earn these students an equivalency of Master's degree from the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. In addition, these students are given training in computer skills and English language communication skills. Most importantly, these students remain under direct training of the great *Sufi* leaders of their time, reside in a *Sufi Khanqah*, understand and internalize the *Sufi* ways of living and being. Special training sessions are arranged for them not just on *Tassawwuf* and Islamic theology but also on social issues such as prevention of drug abuse, and prevention of crime and extremism among youth. The hope is that these future religious leaders will enter the world well equipped with all the tools and skills needed to help resolve challenges that are hindering world peace. Several of these students make their shrine very proud by winning various contests in both curricular and co-curricular

activities. It is a norm that students from these institutes housed in Eidgah Sharif win distinctions in annual exams when there is a competition with other religious schools.

The Rosary Bead Moved; Did your Heart Too?

Pir Sahab frequently quotes a poetic line by a Punjabi *Sufi Shaykh* of Qadri lineage, *Shaykh* Sultan Bahu (1630-1691), who is famous for his *Sufi* poetry. The literal translation of it is: “The rosary moved but your heart did not; what good is holding the rosary?” Pir Sahab quotes this poetic line as part of teaching his *murids* that the purpose of prayers, worship, nightly vigils, and rosary practice is to soften the human heart. Softening the heart helps the *murids* feel the pain of God’s creation and be ready to serve everyone without discrimination. Pir Sahab asks his *murids* to search their hearts to see if all the prayers, worship, nightly vigils and rosary practice have softened their hearts. If not, check your intentions, because when prayers are done with sincerity, without any pretense, the heart will be transformed, softened.³⁸ Qibla Sahab teaches this message using *Quranic* verses and the sayings of Prophet Muhammadﷺ, see the text below.

Imams Behaqi and Tibrani quote this saying of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ: Whosoever walks out of his house (place) with the intention to help a poor person, to fulfill someone's needs, 5,000 Angels (according to another narration, 75,000 Angels) ask *Allah Kareem* to forgive that person and to shower blessings upon him. Oh *Allah*, he has set off to help your creation for the sake of your pleasure, please help this person and also shower your blessings upon him. The Blessed Prophet ﷺ says, "If someone helps a poor person in the morning (even if it takes just one moment), angels keep praying for him until nighttime. And if someone helps a poor person at nighttime, angels keep praying for him until the morning". Just imagine, how long does it take to help a poor needy person? If you make it a routine to help any poor person once every morning and once every night according to your capacity, from whatever *Allah* has endowed you with, 75000 angels will keep praying for *Allah's* blessing and forgiveness upon you 24 hours a

³⁸ What benefits will we get if we help the needy? An segment of Qibla Sahab’s speech translated into English. <https://www.facebook.com/ShaykhHassanHaseeburRehman/videos/449316899392568>

day. The Blessed Companion, Umer Farooq (May *Allah* be pleased with him) narrates a saying of the Blessed Prophet ﷺ, "The Highest out of all deeds is that a person pleases a *momin* (a true believer)". *Allah* is the greatest of all! The best of all the actions is that a person pleases another person.

Serving all of God's creation without discrimination is a tradition that Eidgah Sharif practices on daily basis. The charitable outreach programs of Eidgah Sharif have expanded greatly in recent decades. Eidgah Sharif currently provides several million^{39 40}
⁴¹ free hot meals per year (Figure 16) for people coming to the Shrine. Eidgah Sharif provides groceries for many more people and pays the medical bills of about 1000 families each month, as well as holding free medical camps for people in need of medical advice. Eidgah Sharif makes its facilities available freely for weddings by local people in need. In recent decades natural disaster outreach has been an important part of Eidgah Sharif's charitable outreach. During 2022's devastating floods, Qibla Sahab himself went to the remote areas of Punjab where no relief materials had yet arrived, and personally distributed relief materials among the victims of the flood (Figure 17).⁴² Disaster relief (for example, earthquake and floods) by Eidgah Sharif includes inspections and material support without religious affiliation, as befits a Muslim country, and it has inspired other organizations to do so as well. Eidgah Sharif has worked with other organizations to provide water wells equipped with solar-powered water pumps. Following are a few examples of the impact of Eidgah Sharif's teachings on its *murids*. Eidgah Sharif's followers worked at Rohingya relief camps, 2017 as volunteers with various UK-based

³⁹ <https://web.facebook.com/muhammad.farhan.awan.2025/videos/491536560040746>

⁴⁰ [Shaykh Muhammad Nageeb Ur Rehman | Iftari At Eidgah Shareef ❤️ #madinah #madinahalmunawwarah #madina #kareem #sufi #sufiesm #shaykhnaqeeburrehman... | Instagram](#)

⁴¹ [\(20+\) Facebook](#)

⁴² [Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman | Shaykh Muhammad Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman reached out to the flood affectees in the far most area of South Punjab. A relief camp was... | Instagram](#)

charity organizations that were not affiliated with or run by the *murids* of Eidgah Sharif. Shazad Yasin Foundation (SYF) is a UK-based charitable organization that was set up as a legacy of one of Eidgah Sharif's *murids*, Shazad Yasin, who spent his life in the service of all of God's creation. Shazad Yasin passed away in a road accident during his trip to Pakistan for charity projects. SYF takes its inspiration from the teachings of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, is run by Eidgah Sharif's *murids* but is not affiliated with Eidgah Sharif. SYF's website showcases their projects for clean water supply, UK homeless outreach, supporting National Health Service, UK workers during COVID-19, education in Africa, and food in Pakistan. Elsewhere on their Facebook page and website, they have published pictures of their several other charitable activities (Figure 18). SYF is only one of several similar organizations (for example, Mankind Welfare Trust, UK).

Chapter V

Methods

This is ethnographic research in which I have used Critical Discourse Analysis as a theory, analytical framework and methods of analysis. I have used observations, field notes compiled over a time period of 27+ weeks and interviewed 22 followers of Eidgah Sharif in the United Kingdom to collect data. In addition, I have collected data from websites, Facebook pages and from more than thousand (1000 +) publicly delivered sermons of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif during the last 3 decades. While presenting the interview data of my participants, I have weaved in the extracts of speeches from the publicly available sermons of the *Shayyukh*, and the religious content from sacred sources that the *Shayyukh* have given reference to, with the matching themes in the interview data of the followers. The analysis of data provided a list (not exhaustive) of the methods that the *Shayyukh* use to help their followers.

I have used Theo Van Leeuwen's (2014) framework of authorization and legitimacy and multimodal critical discourse analysis, and James Paul Gee's (2014) critical discourse analysis to analyze this data. The combination of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and multimodal discourse analysis helps see power dynamics and legitimation within a particular discourse. "CDA provides tools for addressing the complexity of movement across educational sites, practices and systems in a world where inequalities are global in scope" (Rogers, 2011, p. 1). Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provided sufficient tools to uncover the hierarchies, uncover power structures, explore power struggles, and negotiations of relations constructed in Britain. The identities of Muslims in the UK are shaped under the inescapable influence of several

elements, such as educational, economic, and national and international security policies. This study has used Van-Leeuwen's Discourse of Legitimation Framework (2008), which helps answer questions about social practices such as "Why should we do this?" or "Why should we do this in this way" (p. 105). Since a significant portion of this study deals with the followers who may have made decisions in their lives idealizing their religious leader, Van Leeuwen's moral evaluation, and role model authority can lend itself as a helpful lens for analyzing such data.

My primary source of evidence included English translations of the extracts of multilingual speeches by the *Sufi* masters, selected literature from *Quran* and Hadith, if quoted by any of the participants in their interviews or visual prompts, *Sufi* poetry, open access videos and photographs related to the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif and their followers, of the interfaith activities, and the social welfare and educational work of *Sufi* masters and their followers, including photographs or screen shots from the videos of *Sufi* gatherings. The reason for collecting this multimodal and multilingual data is to provide sufficient evidence in order to get a deeper insight into the works of this particular *Naqshbandi Sufi* order and their followers. Multimodal data helped understand and see the evidence from various angles in order to support an argument or to find contradictions.

Ethical Considerations

Some of the ethical considerations for this study are listed below.

Translation Work

I have personally done all the translations from Urdu and Punjabi to English language, because I am fluent in English and a native speaker of Urdu and Punjabi languages. Moreover, I have formally studied in English, Urdu and Punjabi languages. For translations of Arabic text to English language, I have consulted with a Muslim religious scholar who is fluent in Arabic and Urdu languages.

Photographs, Screen Shots, and Video Links

All the photos, except where indicated, used in this thesis were acquired from open-to-public-access social media platforms. In a few instances in which a photo was provided by a study participant, permissions for use in this thesis have been obtained. The screen shots of videos and video links were all secured from open access public forums such as YouTube.

Researcher Positionality

I am a Pakistani *Sufi* Muslim currently residing in the United States who has been aware of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif and their work for decades. I have been educated in and taught in both Pakistani and American Universities. I have visited the UK six times since 2010.

Disclaimer

In this thesis, I did not intentionally include any author or researcher due to their religious affiliation except when authentic, traditional *Sufis* were needed in two chapters, namely, *Tassawwuf, the Sufi Process of Self-Purification*, and *Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi*. The reason for choosing works of authentic, traditional *Sufis* such as Sayyad Ali bin Usman Al-Hujwiri (1009-1072), Imam Qushayri (986-1072), Khwaja Baha ud Din Naqshband (1318-1389 CE), *Shaykh* Sayyad Ahmad Sirhandi (1564-1624); Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem (1848-1936); and *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman (born 1993) is that they all are highly regarded as presenting the most authentic and consistent case of *Tassawwuf* across the history. A few non-Muslim authors were used as references in these two chapters due to the relevance of their work. No other author in this thesis was used for their religious or political beliefs or affiliations. As a researcher and the author of this thesis, I do not endorse any religious, political or ideological affiliations or claims made by the researchers or authors cited in this thesis. Wherever I have cited them, I cited them to support only the claim, data, facts, or statistics that they are referenced for.

Research Limitations

I was not born and raised in the UK so my understanding of the context of the study is based on my visits to the UK and Pakistan. But because I was raised as a *Sufi* Muslim, and lived in Lahore, Pakistan, walking distance from two major *Sufi* shrines and visited several other shrines around Pakistan, read and listened to *Sufi* texts and talks in Urdu, Punjabi, and English languages, I can claim to have an insider perspective of *Tassawwuf* and *Sufi Sunni Khanqahs*. For this thesis, I have invested more than 27 weeks

in frequently socializing with my study participants in Pakistan and the UK, as well visiting the shrine under study i.e. Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, in order to develop a report and gain a deeper insight into their lived experiences. Therefore, my journal entries, field notes, and observations are in depth, but not expansive in terms of duration. I have supplemented this limitation by focusing more on interview data and data collected from websites, social media platforms, or publicly delivered speeches. My study is also narrowly focused on the works of one particular *Sufi* order and their followers in the U.K. Some of the findings may be generalizable or transferrable. A comparative analysis of multiple *Sufi* orders was not possible due to time limitation.

Chapter VI

My Garden, My Trees, My Children and NOT Terrorists or Extremists

If we [Qibla Sahab and I] have an asset, that is you. For some, their asset may be their plaza building, for someone else, it may be their livestock, they [boast about it by saying] MY asset. For Qibla Sahab and I, Oh my children, for Qibla Sahab and I, ONLY you are our asset. And the way that person may be concerned for his/her plaza building, I am a billion times more concerned about my spiritual children⁴³.

—Shaykh Muhammad Naqib ur Rahman

This chapter delves into understanding the perceived impacts of choice of language by the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif on their followers. Therefore, Section 1 performs a close Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of three of the most frequently used phrases by *Shaykh* Naqib ur Rahman (Pir Sahab). Doing so will help the reader understand a contextualized meaning of these phrases within the context of: a) Islamic theology; and b) the broader context of a multifaith, multi-racial society. Section two presents selected extracts from interviews of Pir Sahab's followers in order to determine the understanding of Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab's messages (especially those in Section 1) by the followers within the context of their lives as immigrants in a multi-faith,

⁴³ Source: English translation of a speech extract delivered in Urdu by Shaykh Naqib ur Rahman, December 10, 2021, in Eidgah Sharif. Translation starts at 38:48.
https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=464427658533384

multicultural Western society. Section 3 will present multimodal data, mostly pictures, to examine the potential application and validity of the ancient message (1,450-year-old message of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) being delivered by the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif on the modern lives of their followers in a non-Muslim, non-Pakistani Western world. Overall, this chapter aims to find out if and how the language and the message of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif is helping their UK followers to preserve and promote a positive religious identity.

Use of Multimodal CDA provides tools that help unpack the underlying multiple interpretations of speech, not just within a sentence, but within the broader Discourse of religion, immigration, identity, belonging, and media rhetoric that may inform Muslim immigrants of ways of living and being. CDA helps analyze what is said, why it is said, but also what is not said and why. English translation of a speech extract delivered bilingually in Urdu and Punjabi by *Shaykh* Naqib ur Rahman to his followers at an in-person event.

Table 2 “Be Trees”— Transcript of a Speech of Pir Sahab

Line #	Transcript
1	“O’ my naive friend, if you get away from this [lust of material world] and engage yourself in the remembrance of <i>Allah</i> , He will enrich and empower your heart. He will satisfy you fully.
2	When you stop chasing this world like a dog, the world will start pursuing you—like she were your servant. But the condition is that you become fully sincere to the Beloved Rasool <i>Allah</i> ﷺ [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ]
3	You should be what is the glory of a Muslim. I wish we could ever become such good, real Muslims. . . .
4	My dear friends, if you want to stay out of all these traps of materialism, individualism, selfishness, depression, frustration and more depression, we have only one way to do that, which is to follow the path of our Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Line #	Transcript
5	Ghaus-e-Azam guides us towards the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the following way.
6	Once his <i>Khalifas</i> (deputies) were present in his company, he said: “O you the <i>Molvis</i> [clerics], O’ you the <i>Sufis</i> , O’ you the dried branches of trees, what good are you other than for burning? Make yourself beneficial. Be trees!”
7	A tree is nothing but beneficial to others until it dries out, turns into just wood.
8	Then, even its wood burns itself to benefit others.
9	Some heat up their water on it, others cook their food. Then its residue is used as a scrub to clean the pots. You clean the hearts of people.
10	Then after cleaning pots, the scrub is washed away into drains. It reaches fields and becomes fertilizer.
11	Ultimately, it springs up again as a tree.
12	My friends, let us have a look at ourselves, what is our spiritual plight? What is our state? Adopt the path to follow our Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ⁴⁴ .

Segment of a sermon given by Pir Sahab in Urdu and Punjabi audio recorded and translated into English by Dr. Sadaf R. Shier

Sufi Shayyukh strictly adhere to the following orders of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in their written or spoken speech, "Whoever believes in *Allah* and the Last Day, should not hurt his neighbor and whoever believes in *Allah* and the Last Day, should respect their guest and *whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should speak what is good or keep silent*" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*⁴⁵, Hadith Sharif: 6018, Kitab: On polite Mannerism). Therefore, in their everyday life, most *Sufi Shayyukh* will speak only when it is necessary and only as much as necessary. The *Shayyukh* claim that the sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (*Hadith Sharif*) are full of hope, compassion, positivity, and forgiveness, not just for those who

⁴⁴ English translation of an extract from a bilingual speech Shaykh Naqib ur Rahman delivered in-person in Urdu and Punjabi languages.

⁴⁵ Written by Imam Bukhari (d. 846 AD, 232 AH), *Sahi al Bukhari* (also called *Bukhari Sharif*) is comprised of seven volumes, and is one of the six most authentic compilations of *Hadith* [sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ].

believe in him, but also for His enemies. Since, a *Sufi* Master must follow their role model, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as closely as possible, the speech of a *Sufi* Master should also reflect kindness, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, positivity, and hope for all of God's creation without discrimination.

Similarly, *Tassawwuf* is based on the principle of *Tazkiya*; i.e. cleansing and purifying the outer as well as inner self of a person. Through prayers, worship, *dhikr*, and other practices, *Tassawwuf* cleanses the human heart of ills such as anger, hatred, jealousy, revenge, greed, selfishness, hypocrisy, deception, arrogance, discrimination, harshness, vulgarity, pretense, negativity, and hopelessness. Unity of speech and action can only happen when a cleansed, purified, tender and compassionate heart is mirrored through a similarly pristine, positive, and soft language. The tongue should be used to benefit others and not harm in any direct or indirect ways. A righteous, God-fearing *Sufi Shaykh* is very aware of their accountability in front of God for every single word they utter and every single thought they entertain in their mind (not just actions). The grand *Shaykh*, Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem (1986) writes in *Hidayat ul Insan*, Chapter *dhikr* [remembrance of *Allah*] that a *dhakir* [the person who does *dhikr*] is vigilant about his tongue, because it is not appropriate to use a tongue used for the sacred *dhikr* of *Allah* for anything foul or wrong. Therefore, *Sufi* Masters speak very little and are very careful in selecting their words, the connotation of these words, the environment that these words may create, and the impact these words may have on the listeners, especially the *murids* [disciples and followers] who try to emulate their *Shayyukh*. Their speech is distinct from ordinary people and hence requires in depth analysis.

This chapter analyses use of language in one segment of a speech delivered in Urdu and Punjabi languages by Eidgah Sharif's shrine superior, Pir Sahab. The segment was selected for two reasons. First, it contains several themes that are important for the present study, including hope in extremely desperate circumstances, positivity in midst of negativity, preserving and forming a positive identity, and building peace makers. Second, this segment contains two appellations ("My garden" and "My trees") that Pir Sahab frequently uses with followers. The chapter begins by outlining multiple instances of using the appellations "My garden" and "My trees." Then it proceeds into a detailed CDA of these phrases in one extract of Pir Sahab's speech. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of this particular speech segment, intertextual references are made to extracts from his other speeches.

Pir Sahab uses garden and trees appellations when he is referring to his followers. He refers to himself and Qibla Sahab as the gardeners tending this garden. For example, he would frequently say in his speeches: "تسی میرا باغ او" [You are my garden].

On the occasion of *Urs Paak* on January 2nd, 2023, while encouraging his followers to plant plants, in a very heart felt and emotional speech, he said,

"تسی میرے بوٹے او - بوٹے لاؤ" [You are my plants-plant the plants].

When he refers to this garden, he also talks about trees that are well established, and fully flourished [senior *murids*] and they are his asset. Even though he is spending a lot of his time tending his newly transplanted, delicate plants [junior *murids*], he shifts his entire attention to the issue when he feels there is even a little danger to his well-established trees.

There is a serious and essential focus on reminding the followers of the history of his garden (his spiritual children) and the gardeners. Pir Sahab indicates that he feels he has inherited his spiritual garden from his father, who toiled in the same garden before him.

تہیو تے پترو۔ اے باغ بڑی مہنتاں نال لگا اے۔ میرے شیخ۔ جب وہ دورہ کر کے تشریف لاتے تھے۔ مجھے یہ سعادۃ حاصل ہوئی۔ میں نے اپنے ہاتھوں سے انکے جوتے اتارے۔ اتنے بڑے بڑے چھالے۔

[Oh, my sons and my daughters, it took a lot of hard labor to plant and make this garden flourish. When My *Shaykh* (Pir Sahab's father, *Shaykh* Habib ur Rahman) would return from a [spiritual] tour, I would be privileged enough to have the honor of taking his shoes off with my own hands. I saw there big blisters on his feet [due to excessive and difficult walking, tending the garden].

Section 1: “Be Trees”!

The following is the CDA of Pir Sahab's speech segment presented at the beginning of this chapter. Pir Sahab once again invites his followers to “be trees” and also explicitly explains what it entails to “be trees.” If we examine the analogy of a tree for its structure and function, a tree has deep roots that help it embed itself firmly into the ground, where it stands and continues to flourish, branch out, and bear fruits and/or flowers. If the roots are strong, no matter how many times the top is cut off, the tree grows back again. If the roots are strong, the tree can continue to brave the strongest winds and storms. When a tree is uprooted, it dies, or when its roots weaken, the entire tree will weaken and wilt. Like a tree, a good, real Muslim embeds himself firmly and deeply into the teachings of Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and consequently grows and branches out to benefit all the creation of God without discrimination. Conversely, when a Muslim detaches from the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Muslim dies a moral and spiritual death, or when Muslims let their connection with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

weaken, they become weak humans, so that any opposition and challenge, be it spiritual or worldly, can destroy them.

The Path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Lines 4, 5, 6, 12)

In the extract above, Pir Sahab explains what the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is, and what is the criterion for becoming a real, good Muslim. Namely, being fully sincere to the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ requires that a person follows the Path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and consequently becomes a beneficial tree that selflessly serves all of God's creation without discrimination. James Paul Gee's *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* (Gee, 2010) requires that we also look at the opposite. The opposite in this case is intentionally and deliberately hurting God's creations and discriminating among them, which is equal to abandoning the path of the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The *Sufi Shayyukh* will call it being insincere to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and hence failing the most important criterion of being a real Muslim. The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif will say that such a person can be considered a self-proclaimed Muslim, a hardliner, a terrorist, or an extremist, but not a true sincere Muslim.

Offering Hope, and an Alternative

Let's look at the opening of the speech segment under analysis (Boxes 1-3 in the text box above). Pir Sahab assigns a lot of power (agency) to the listeners and views them as people who have ability to do better. In the first three sentences, Pir Sahab starts with offering hope and a reward, which is contentment (enrichment of heart) and satisfaction. He conditions this hope and reward on an explicit call to action to dissociate from lust for

material things, and instead engage in remembrance of *Allah* and becoming fully sincere to the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

In line 4, Pir Sahab provides an explicit prognosis of the problem and that is a potential entrapment into a downward spiral of self- and other-destruction characterized by materialism, individualism, selfishness, depression, frustration, and more depression. However, he immediately offers an invitation towards a broader solution and an escape from this **downward spiral** that according to him is, “to follow the path of our Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ” (line 4). In lines 6-11, Pir Sahab enters into a visual description and a detailed explanation of “the path” using the analogy of a tree. A closer view of this suggested “path” (line 6-11) reveals that this path itself is a life-giving and life-enhancing upward spiral of positivity, fertility, beneficence, resilience, resistance, optimism, and survival.

Be a Tree for Whom? Non-Discrimination

People of *Tassawwuf* heavily emphasize upon the importance of feeding the hungry and helping the needy⁴⁶ because *Quran* praises this act, “and they feed the needy, orphan, and prisoners for the sake of *Allah*’s love” (*The Quran*, n.d., 76:8) and according to Prophet Mahmmad ﷺ one the best deeds that can ensure *Allah*’s forgiveness is feeding the hungry (*Mustadrak, Kitab ut Tafseer, Tafseer Sura Al Balad*, Hadith number 3990). Eidgah Sharif itself practices this message of non-discriminatory beneficence day in and day out by welcoming everyone into the shrine irrespective of religion, feeding people

⁴⁶ An Urdu speech extract of Qibla Sahab, translated into French and English regarding helping the needy and feeding the hungry. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=449316899392568>

(Figure 16), providing resources for medical treatment, offering *duas* [prayers], and fulfilling other needs (Figure 16-18).

In line number 7 when Pir Sahab says, “A tree is nothing but beneficial to others until it dries out, turns into just wood”, the word “others” is not limited to families, friends or Muslims only. This is a frequent theme in most of Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab’s speeches. It is evident that they would like their *murids* to become a source of blessing for all of God’s creation without discrimination. A tree never restricts its benefits to an exclusive population, although some orchard owners may. Anyone and everyone can eat its fruits, enjoy its fragrance, sit under its shade, benefit from the clean air that it helps create, use its parts for medicinal purposes, and so on. Pir Sahab presents himself and Qibla Sahab as generous gardeners who would like their trees, that is their followers, to be beneficial for all of God’s creation without discrimination.

Pir Sahab’s explanation “A tree is nothing but beneficial to others” is a direct reflection of the *Sunnah* [sayings and actions] of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. For example, when Prophet Muhammad ﷺ made treaties with the non-Muslims in Al Madina tul Munawwara and when He sent His Companions to other regions, a message that they all brought to the non-Muslim tribes was, “*Allah* and His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are responsible for and protectors of the people of Najran and their allies, and their blood, their lives, religion, lands, property, monks and priests, personnel whether physically present or not, their livestock, caravans, and their places of worship. They will not be forcibly proselytized; and their rights and their places of worship will not be altered; neither a priest, nor a monk, neither any leader or any servant of their place of worship, irrespective of their status high or low, will be dismissed from their service; they will

have no fear” (Ibn Sa’ad, Al Tabqat al Kubra, 358, 288:1; Abu Yusuf, Kitab ul Khiraj, 78; Abu Ubaid Qasim, Kitab al Amwal, 244, 245, number 503; Ibn Zanjwiyya, Kitab ul Amwal: 449, 450, number 732; Bilazari, Fatuh ul Baldan: 90).

For How Long and For Whom Should a *Murid* be a “Tree”?

In line 7, Pir Sahab indicates following the path is a lifelong commitment with “A tree is nothing but beneficial to others until it dries out, turns into just wood.” Be beneficial to others even when you are dried out of all energy and the life in you. Here, Pir Sahab is offering his *murids* ‘no out’, and ‘no pause’ to their duty to serve all of God’s creation. In some other speeches, and routinely in their everyday conversations, Pir Sahab frequently uses an English word “duty” to refer to serving God’s creation. For example, “*beita duty karein*,” [My child, perform your duty]; “*Khush dili sei duty karein*,” [Perform your duty happily]. Can one consider the job done when one feels he or she is dried out of all their energy and life? The answer is in line 8, “Then, even its wood burns itself to benefit others.” Pir Sahab raises the bar even higher and calls towards an exceptionally and remarkably extreme level of humility, selflessness, courage, resilience, and commitment to the betterment of humanity. For those who are able to follow the call, their legacy lives on. An example is Shahzad Yaseen, a young British Muslim follower of Pir Sahab who devoted his life to serving humanity and doing charitable work (Figure 18). He passed away in a tragic road accident during a trip for charitable purposes in

Pakistan.^{47 48} Another *murid*, Hafiz Munir Ahmad,⁴⁹ shared the story of Babar and Iftikhar, two other *murids* who were fatally wounded in the same accident, where drinking water and emergency medical care were limited. Babar asked for water. When someone brought him water, Babar heard Iftikhar cry for water and requested that the water be given to Iftikhar first. Iftikhar heard Sa'adat Ullah cry for water and requested that Sa'adat Ullah should be given preference over him. When water was finally brought to Babar, he had already passed away, so they rushed to Iftikhar, but he had passed away too. They sacrificed their own need of water over others at a moment when they were fighting for their lives. This story poignantly demonstrates the lengths of Pir Sahab's call for beneficence, courage, compassion, and unconditional sacrifice for others in following the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the very end. Hafiz Munir recalled a similar story reported by a Blessed Companion of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Sayyadina Huzaifa Adwi *Radi Allah*, about three martyrs who preferred each other with their last drink of water at the Battle of Yermuk (Albadaya Wan Nahaya; Al asta'yaab)⁵⁰.

Under What Circumstances Should a *Murid* Respond to a Call for Undaunted Courage, Resilience, Selflessness, and Humility?

The lives of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif are excellent living examples of monumental determination and courage in the face of the most unfavorable circumstances. Recent examples include anti-extremism and anti-terrorism efforts by the

⁴⁷ SYF's website: <https://www.syf-relief.com/>

SYF's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Shazadyaseenfoundation/>

⁴⁸ SYF Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=syf%20shazad%20yaseen%20foundation>

⁴⁹ Hafiz Munir Ahmad is the real name of this participant. In fact, all the names in this particular story are real names as compared to the rest of the thesis where all the names of the participants are pseudonyms.

⁵⁰ Battle of Yermuk lasted for six days in August 636, near the Yarmuk River on the Syria-Jordan border.

Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif to preserve world peace. After the devastating events of September 2001, the Taliban and Al Qaida started violent extremism in Pakistan as well as around the world, including misleading religiously illiterate Muslims by ways like saying that killing non-Muslims or the Muslims of certain sects was a way to heaven. The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif developed an alliance with religious leaders in Pakistan who issued *fatwas* [religious declarations] that suicide bombing and killing of innocent human beings were ways to Hell and not to Heaven. The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif intensified their religious literacy campaign to continuously remind Muslims in Pakistan and around the world that terrorism and extremism was forbidden by Islam, so the extremists' message was in fact against Islam at many levels. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab condemned the extremists' calls for killing, hurting and causing pain to Muslims physically, as well as damaging their structures by suicide bombings. Moreover, the extremists' actions caused the world to create anti-Muslim stereotypes and believe in them. The stereotypes portrayed all Islam as a monolith of terrorists, extremists, and hardliners. It also damaged the reputation of Islam and presented it as a religion of terror. The real Islam respects and protects all of God's creation without discrimination. The real Islam says saving one human life is as if you saved the entire humanity, while killing one Muslim unfairly is as if you killed the entire humanity. The power of the *Shayyukhs*' anti-extremist message frightened and angered the extremists, and they started bombing shrines all over Pakistan. Data Sahib's shrine in Lahore (BBC, 2019)⁵¹, Bari Imam Sarkar's shrine in Islamabad

⁵¹ Pakistan Data Darbar: Bomber kills nine outside Sufi shrine in Lahore.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48197260>

(2005)⁵² that is located only thirty minutes from Eidgah Sharif, and Abdullah Shah Ghazi's shrine in Karachi⁵³ (Chughtai, 2017) were all bombed. Several close allies of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif were targeted for killing⁵⁴ (BBC news, June 12, 2009). It is common knowledge among *murids* in Eidgah Sharif that their *Shayyukh* receive death threats from extremists. Nevertheless, the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif personally went to every city in Pakistan, visited United Kingdom, Europe, United States and other countries where their followers were present, held public gatherings, frequently appeared on television, social media, and electronic media with the message that terrorism is not part of the true Islam.

In Pir Sahab's eyes, to "Be Trees" and being beneficial is not conditioned only on favorable circumstances with an abundance of resources, support system and youthful energy. The real test is to demonstrate selfless benevolence while living under hostile and unfavorable circumstances in a Muslim or non-Muslim country. In line number 10, the *Shaykh* is calling the *murid* towards an extreme level of humility, optimism, and commitment in the face of unfavorable circumstances, when *murids* may feel they are being abused, taken advantage of and wasted. They should not stop their efforts, no matter how humble and miniscule their efforts may be. No act of hatred, no attempt at character assassination or humiliation, no fear of failure, and no scarcity of resources can deter or change a true *Sufi*.

⁵² Wikipedia: 2005 Islamabad Bombing.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_Islamabad_bombing#:~:text=On%2027%20May%202005%2C%20a,city's%203rd%20and%204th%20avenues.

⁵³ Aljazeera infographic of attacks on shrines in Pakistan:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/2/19/attack-on-shrines-in-pakistan-since-2005>

⁵⁴ Attack on Jamia Naeemia that killed Mufti Naeemi.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8096776.stm

Belonging: “So what if They are Dried out, What Matters is, They Belong to “My Garden”

When people migrate from one country to another, integrating themselves into a new culture in a new society in a new country, it takes a huge toll on them psychologically, so they need a feeling of belonging, connection and rootedness. This section explains how *Sufi Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif help with that. Dry branches and dry wood is an important sub-theme in this extract. Although dry branches, dry wood may seem a burden and useless, *Sufi* Masters protect, preserve and cherish even their dry branches; i.e., *murids* running out of energy or motivation. This can be understood through a reference to another speech in which Pir Sahab is talking about a physical orchard of trees and plants that Pir Sahab’s forefathers planted in Eidgah Sharif. In order to explain how he and his ancestors value, protect, care for, and nurture their followers, Pir Sahab is using a true story about the ways Eidgah Sharif’s elder saints nurtured, preserved, and cared for that orchard. The following is an extract of a speech he publicly delivered in Birmingham, UK.

When my *Shaykh* [referring to *Shaykh* Habib ur Rahman] used to sit in Eidgah Sharif, there used to be a really beautiful garden, you may have seen it. It was a beautiful garden. If a gardener ever came, and my *Shaykh* never liked anyone breaking even a single branch [of a tree or a plant from his garden]. Even if there was a dried-out branch that the gardener was about to break apart [dissociate from the plant or tree], my *Shaykh* would ask him, “Stop, do not break it apart. This belongs to my garden.” I [Pir Sahab referring to himself] gave my hand to that *Shaykh* [I took oath of allegiance with that *Shaykh*].⁵⁵

⁵⁵Text given is 0-3:43seconds from a YouTube video of the lecture delivered on the day of Grand Shaykh Lasani Paak, (Pir Sahab’s father and his Shaykh as well). The occasion was held in Birmingham, U.K on 09/09/15/.

P6-06/09/15 Youm-e-Lasani Paak R.A. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eha-WTGq6o>

The emphasis is that even if a *murid* is exhausted, less motivated, running low on energy, and not physically close to the shrine, the gardener, the *Sufi* Master, will continue to nurture and look after them. Being still precious to the Master, because they belong to Master's spiritual garden, provides the *murid* with a sense of self-worth, belonging, and relief. My interviews with study participants reveal that they sincerely value this sense of belonging and try to maintain and strengthen this relationship with the *Shaykh*, even if it is transnational. Such a sense of belonging provides hope and protects a *murid* from depression and loneliness. Digital media and advances in communication technology have made the feeling of belonging easier, but Pir Sahab still recommends his followers around the world come to Eidgah Sharif to refresh and re-energize themselves and get rid of anxiety and depression.

Hope for the Future is to Become Fertilizer, Spring up Again as a Tree.

Line 10 and 11 provide an ultimate message of hope, fertility, and resistance. This is what psychologists will call a positive future self, and I consider to be an ideal imagined future. Under the very circumstances in which the wood feels crushed, wasted, and humiliated, it starts working as a fertilizer. The reward is that you are now making the entire area fertile, which is suitable for many more trees like you, and hence the garden expands, and the cycle of positivity, and selfless humanity continues. Pir Sahab provides this life-giving, life-enhancing *cycle of positivity, selflessness, determination, courage, optimism and realism*, which serves as an antidote to the downward spiral of “materialism, individualism, selfishness, depression, frustration and more depression” (line 4). One of my study participants called this, “They give you a hope and an option.”

Summary of “Be Trees.” Irrespective of the severity of resistance, and unfavourability of circumstances, Pir Sahab is calling his followers to not forget who they are. That is, they are a “real Muslim” (line 3) who is “nothing but beneficial to others” (line 7) and remains faithful to “*the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ*” (lines 4, 5, and 12).

Psychologists call this “self-concept clarity” in which “people perceive their personal attributes as clearly defined, coherent and stable across situations and time” (Szabo, 2021, p. 879). *Murids* do not just reclaim and preserve a “self-identity,” but also to transfer it to their coming generations to provide them with a sense of rootedness.

The appellation “You are my garden” and “Be trees” is also a positive imagined future, combining “future self-positivity” and current “self-concept clarity.” This positive imagined future becomes a source of hope and motivation in turbulent times.

Section 2: Not Terrorists or Extremists—My Trees, My Garden, My Children!

All of my Pakistani British Muslim participants celebrate their Muslim and British identities and report that they highly appreciate the ways in which British society, economy and academics have contributed to their success. They also highly appreciate overall religious freedom in British society. However, there were instances of struggles in their lives. This section focuses on the ways in which Muslim *Sufi Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif helped my participant, a British Muslim follower of Eidgah Sharif named Abdul Shakoor (a pseudonym) and many others, successfully navigate their struggles. Abdul Shakoor’s struggles should not be taken as representative of the entire Pakistani Muslim diaspora in Britain, nor should the treatment he received by some locals in the UK be taken as typical.

Abdul Shakoor's father came to the UK in the 1960's to work in mills in the Midlands 12 hours a day at low pay and live in neighborhoods "worse than ghettos" in a shared house where morning shift workers slept in the same beds as evening shift workers with 8-12 workers sharing one room. Later, Abdul Shakoor's father brought his wife to the UK, hoping for educational opportunities for their children. Abdul Shakoor was born in the UK and he considers himself more British than Pakistani. He went to a local school in the Midlands, where he reported that he was a very bright student, but because of being a person of color, he was beaten up countless times, and sometimes so badly that he would fall unconscious. As a way to defend himself, he bonded with another student of color in the school. One of their defense strategies was that on daily basis, they would return home using a different route. Teaming up to better protect themselves in school and neighborhoods was his introduction to gangs. He remembers a game between a local team and a German team in which the locals were defeated by the Germans and then they took out their anger on the immigrants by rioting in front of their houses, burning things and beating people. The windows of the house where he lived with his parents and sisters, were broken, along with other damage. He had to endure verbal abuse as well, including racial slurs. As a consequence of such hostile circumstances, he dropped out of school and his family moved him out of the Midlands. Abdul Shakoor recalls several dark decades in his life, particularly after September 2001, when the world introduced terms such as terrorists. It is when a larger number of non-Muslims also started reading about Islam, mostly the mis-portrayed version of Islam that was provided to them by ISIS and Al Qaida. In the whirlwind of everything around him, Abdul Shakoor's thirst for inner peace grew and he started listening to Muslim scholars,

including hardliners such as Zakir Naik, and his frustration grew. He then came across some *Sufis* and their teachings seemed appealing.

During these dark decades he became a father to several children, including daughters. He felt his surroundings were too racist, too un-Islamic, full of improprieties such as night clubs, strip clubs, alcohol, drugs, and gangs. It did not feel safe to raise his children, particularly daughters, there. Will my children have to face similar treatment and the same racial slurs and identity labels of terrorists and extremists? The other Muslim countries were not the places where he felt he belonged, because he found himself too British to stay in other Muslim countries. Who am I? Where do I belong? Where do my children belong? It was during the search for answers to those questions and for inner peace that he met with Pir Sahab at a *Sufi* religious gathering in the U.K. Pir Sahab had never met Abdul Shakoor before, and did not know his name. This is how Abdul Shakoor remembers the encounter:

The question I said in my heart. I was. Because I have daughters and growing up in this country is a nightmare sometimes, if you haven't got the guidance. And I was thinking of moving to Pakistan to take my daughters away from this country. I went to Pakistan where we lived. After about 2 months, I said I am not bringing my children here. No chance. So then I came back. And then...if I had pursued it, I could have gotten a teaching job in Saudi. I went there for two weeks to see if we could live there. Within one week I knew we couldn't live there. The Saudis are a lot of them have a different way of thinking. We couldn't live there. And then it was basically I was thinking of doing the *hijra* [migration]. In that meanwhile Hazrat Sahab was talking about something else and then they looked at me and goes, "*Abdul Shakoor Sahab, it doesn't matter where you live. It does not matter where you live. It's how you live.*" (Abdul Shakoor-pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

This massive gathering. And they said that to me. If that was not an answer to the question in my heart what else can it be? Does that make sense? Yeah? And it happened at the right time. All my daughters are [now] graduates, and my son is a graduate. They are all high-level professionals and lawyers etc. And all this is Hazrat Sahab's guidance. So, I believe not only have I benefited, but society has benefited as well. So, this is the effect that Hazrat

Sahab is having by bringing this caravan of love to this country. (Abdul Shakoor-pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

As a result of Pir Sahab's guidance, "It doesn't matter where you live. . . It's how you live," Abdul Shakoor decided not to leave the UK. Consequently, not only were his children able to receive higher education and enter into dignified professions, they stayed safe from extremist ideologies and learned how to simultaneously carry both British and Muslim identities. They were able to positively contribute to the socio-economic development, and stability of their homeland, the UK, as well as be practicing Muslims. Pir Sahab's guidance, "*It's how you live*," also transformed Abdul Shakoor's understanding of relationships, and the environment in the family. Now, like Pir Sahab, he also views his family as a garden, where a positive environment will help them and their relationships grow. In his words:

It boils down to the message of loving relationships that Hazrat Sahab teaches. And if you got a happy life. I mean mothers, wives, all of them. Everybody wants love. EVERYBODY wants love. And in the loving household, if you can create that environment, everything grows beautifully. That's what Hazrat Sahab is doing to people who come and listen to him, basically. Does that make sense? (Abdul Shakoor-pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

Abdul Shakoor believes that his otherwise very shaky and unstable relationship with his family and Muslims improved since he listened to Pir Sahab's advice. The following is how his relationship improved with his son and his parents. In his words:

I'll give you an example. To humble myself once, at a masjid there was thousand people there. So, I grabbed hold of Hazrat Sahab's shoes so he wouldn't have to look for them at the end and I waited for them to come out. My son was with me and he saw me place Hazrat Sahab's shoes in front of Hazrat Sahab when they come out. A few months later we went, me and my son went to another gathering for Jumma [*Friday prayers*]. Sorry. We went for *Eid* prayers, at the local *masjid*. And my son was outside the entrance waiting for me with my shoes. And when I saw that, you know, it

brought tears to my eyes. And my friends and my family members, cousins saw that, they saw that as well. When they were looking for shoes, I had mine on. Thanks to my son. And what do you call it now. It made me feel very proud of my son and it brought me closer to him because of that. But if I hadn't done that with my Pir Sahab, my son would never have seen it and I would never have experienced it. Right? Yes. Yes. Then, as a [spiritual] son, every time I saw Hazrat Sahab, Every time I saw Hazrat Sahab, as a form of respect and a *Sunnah* of the companions [the blessed companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ], I kiss Hazrat Sahab's hands when I see them. And that made it easy for me to kiss my father's hands. And to kiss my mother's hands. But now, I kiss my mother on her head. I have no shame. And if I hadn't seen that, I wouldn't have done it. Does, does that make sense? So, it's some people can learn things from a book, but some people need to see it in action. On a practical side, and we need more of it. (Abdul Shakoor-pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

Thus, he was able to earn for himself identities of a loving and caring father, a loving and respectful son, and a devoted and loving husband. Abdul Shakoor, reports that Pir Sahab guided him towards “The path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ” and as a result he escaped the downward spiral of selfishness, materialism, individualism, and more frustration. He started feeling inner peace and hope in giving, sharing and serving not just to people around him but also in distant continents. These positive life-enhancing actions helped him refute the negative identity labels ascribed to him and other Muslims and negotiate new identities of “a real Muslim,” a good neighbor, and a responsible citizen. Thus, once he found his roots in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he stood up tall, flourished and branched out like a tree. In his words:

I always give examples from myself. If Hazrat Sahab hadn't come into my life, I would've still be living a dark life. So, by me coming out of darkness into light, I became a good member of society. I believe it's led me to do volunteer work; led me to join associations for work; helped me to work with charities; given me the confidence of knowing I can express my feelings and get something done for the betterment of society. And before that it was just selfishness. I want a bigger car than you. I want a bigger house. But, the satisfaction you get from giving is better than receiving. It's not to prove the old cliché and it's such a true one. You, You, You feel peace. You look for . . . It's like as if you see an old person walking across

the road. Before then, you would let them walk across the road, but NOW, because of Hazrat Sahab's teachings, you HELP them across the road, because it's the right thing to do. And, you know, I do believe in my area where I live, [now] people respect me for the social work I do without wanting anything back in return. And that has helped me to talk to family members, other people, non-Muslims, and they've become better people because of it as well. Because it's not about you anymore. It's about pleasing God, and these are things that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught. Hazrat Sahab tells us what pleases *Allah* the most. Because everybody thought, for everybody else in Islam, most people emphasize the ritual side of it. Alhamdulillah, the ritual side is part of Islam, but only one part. The emphasis on Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ teachings work for you to become a better member of society. Not just Muslims, all society. To become a better member of your family, to become a great neighbor, where your neighbors are safe from bad intentions. So, from my childhood upbringing, from what I have experienced, there is a lot of negativity and violence. But then to come across Hazrat Sahab in this loving, teaching, living way, has totally transformed in me everything. (Abdul Shakoor-pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

Examples from Abdul Shakoor's story indicate that his traumatized childhood, lack of religious grounding, not enough guidance, and the globally circulating stereotypes about Muslims all worked together to create an identity crisis. Abdul Shakoor envisaged this crisis threatening the lives of his children as well. While all my study participants are deeply grateful to British society for their openness and support of Muslims, there are instances of struggle such as Abdul Shakoor mentioned. It is during these turbulent times that the continuous guidance of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif becomes of critical value.

Subtle, yet consistent, exposure to micro- and macro-aggressions rooted in racism and xenophobia can cause anxiety, stress disorder and trauma among immigrants (El-Bialy & Mulay, 2020). Recent studies in the field of Trauma Research have shown that religion and spirituality can be useful resources in overcoming mental health crises and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It also serves as a shield to reduce damage when a faithful or spiritually grounded person is exposed to racism and xenophobia (Samari, 2016). Abu-Ras and E. Saurez (2009) claim that "reactions to micro- or macro-

aggressions may be expressed through trauma symptoms” that “may be debilitating (avoidance, intrusion, and arousal) or life-enhancing (spiritual, proactive, resilient)” (p. 49). The intensity of psychological and physical responses to a race-based aggression depends upon multiple factors including “character, beliefs, spirituality” (Abu-Ras & E. Saurez, 2009, p. 49). My study participants report that their spiritual grounding helps them survive and respond positively to stressful events and come together for unity, and constructive efforts.

Self-concept clarity, “the extent to which people perceive their personal attributes as clearly defined, coherent and stable across situations and time” (Szabo, 2021, p. 879) and future self-positivity, “imagining one’s future self as likeable, desirable and positive,” are “beneficial for achieving adaptive outcomes” for immigrants (Szabo, 2021, p. 878). However, if some immigrants face negative stereotypes or destructive labels, their self-perception of being hardworking, loyal, positive, peaceful citizens is challenged and their religious identities are threatened, it can be difficult for them to maintain strong motivation to strive for a successful, prosperous future and maintain a positive self-image. Research shows that “expecting the future self to be unpleasant, negative or undesirable can give rise to experiences of self-confusion, leading to poorer subjective wellbeing” (Szabo, 2021, p. 879). Moreover, “Feeling responsible for and anticipating a positive self in the host society allows recent migrants to maintain a clear and coherent sense of who they are during a challenging and turbulent time.” “Self-concept clarity plays a foundational role in achieving positive wellbeing outcomes.” (Szabo, 2021, pp. 884-885).

In challenging circumstances, if people are struggling with an endangered sense of identity and self, and lack of hope for a positive future, religious leadership like that of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif becomes integral to people's wellbeing, and their success and usefulness in the host society. The frequent use of appellations such as plants, trees, garden, and children by the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif carry connotations of life, hope, fertility, growth, beneficence and usefulness. The study participants, who are Muslim *Sufi* followers of Eidgah Sharif, find these appellations appealing, empowering, authentic and legitimate because of the deep religious roots of these appellations. They find the appellations help them travel the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Data analysis indicates that the availability and support of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif have enabled them to gain self-concept clarity, stay on the path to successful integration into British society, achieve financial, professional, academic and social stability, while maintaining a Muslim identity for themselves and their families.

Chapter VII

Promoting Islamic Women's Rights

*Seeking education is mandatory upon every Muslim.*⁵⁶

—Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Sanun Ibn e Ma'ja, Hadith: 224

A Blessed Companion asked, "Oh Prophet of Allah who has the most right on me?" Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Your mother." "After that?" "Your mother." "And after that?" "Your mother."

—Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Sahih al Muslim, Kitab al Bar, Hadith: 6501

The one who raised up and positively groomed two daughters until they reached adulthood, will come on the Day of Judgement so that he and I will be [close to each other] like these two fingers. Saying this, He ﷺ brought His two fingers together.

—Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Sahih al Muslim, Kitab al Bar, Hadith: 6695

The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif believe in the powerful role of women in the family as well as in society. Pir Sahab said in front of an audience of about 100,000 people in Eidgah Sharif that a mother's lap is the first educational institution for a child. The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif also stress that the Holy *Quran* and the Hadiths afford many rights and protections to women. For example, the *Shayyukh* preach that Islam does

⁵⁶ Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has declared it mandatory for every Muslim, male as well as female, to seek education. It is therefore clear that people who say that Islam does not allow women education or Muslim women should not seek education are wrong.

not allow forced marriages,⁵⁷ the Holy *Quran* declares that all Muslim daughters and wives must receive a share of the inheritance from their husband and their father that is pre-determined by *Quran*.⁵⁸ Pir Sahab frequently said that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared that heaven lies under the feet of your mother and hence keep serving her (Sanan an Nisa'e, Kitab al Jihad, Hadith 3106). Respect both your parents and not only your father. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ guarantees that any Muslim who is blessed with daughters, and raises them well, and gives them the best education will enjoy closeness with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on the day of judgement. Closeness to their Prophet ﷺ is the highest reward a Muslim can imagine.

The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif work hard to develop a deeper understanding of religion among Muslims, because Muslims who learn religion by word of mouth without consulting the authentic sources (*Quran* and the Blessed Hadith and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) remain unaware of the rights and protections provided to women by true Islam. Consequently, they make false assumptions in the name of religion that lead to incorrect decisions in their domestic and social lives.

This chapter will share three case studies that illustrate how the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif promote rights and protections of women in Islam. In order to understand the first two case studies, it is essential to understand the contextual and historical factors that led to problems of forced marriages, and lack of education and professional development of some Pakistani Muslim women in UK before Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab intervened. For example, Pakistani Muslims in Britain from some areas of Pakistan used

⁵⁷ See the third case study in this chapter named, Against Forced Marriages.

⁵⁸ There is share for men from what their parents and relatives have left after them [as inheritance]; and for women, there is share in inheritance from what the parents and the relatives have left behind, whether the inheritance is less or more. Allah has designated these shares (*The Quran*, n.d., 4: 07).

to not send their daughters for higher education in the UK. Even though there were some very educated female *murids* of Eidgah Sharif in the UK at that time, they were not seen as a source of inspiration for other women's education. It was only when Pir Sahab sent his own daughter all the way from Pakistan to the UK for higher education, that set a precedent for his followers. The same people who were once not supportive of women's education, now send their daughters to British universities and support their academic as well as professional accomplishments.

This chapter explains the ways in which the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif fight against the stereotype of Islam promoting mistreatment and oppression of Muslim women. Critical Discourse Analysis of interviews with followers reveals that the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif use *Sohbat* [companionship] and *Rabta* [connection] with empathy and compassion, which allows the *murids* an opportunity to closely observe their *Shayyukh*'s demeanor, and their interactions with everyone, including their family members. Doing so provides their followers with a role model that they can emulate with confidence.

Context: The Nexus of Religious Illiteracy, Fear, and Mistrust

Although this study does not use the technique of Nexus Analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), the overarching idea behind Nexus Analysis helps us understand the how and the why of a social action at a micro as well at a macro level.

Discourse analysis as a field of study might either be the micro-analysis of unfolding moments of social interaction or a much broader socio-political-cultural analysis of the relationships among social groups and power interests in the society. A nexus analysis is a way to strategize unifying these two different levels of analysis. We believe that the broader social issues are ultimately grounded in the micro-actions of social interaction

and, conversely, the most mundane of micro-actions are nexus through which the largest cycles of social organization and activity circulate (p. 9).

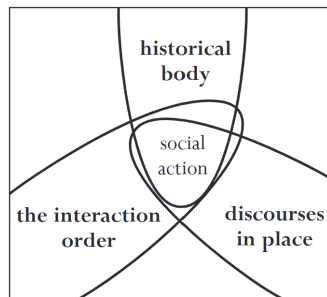


Figure 1 Nexus Analysis

Source: Nexus Analysis, emergence of a social action. Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 154.⁵⁹

According to the above diagram of Scollon & Scollon (2004), social actions take place under the confluence of social interactions, circulating discourses and histories. Similarly, we need to look at the historical factors, and the circulating discourses as well as interactions at the micro and macro level that helped shape some unfavorable circumstances for Pakistani Muslim women in the UK. These circumstances included early marriages, lower educational attainment, low paid employment, and hence severely limited upward socio-economic mobility for some (please note, not all) Pakistani Muslim women in the UK. The following is an explanation.

Many Pakistani Muslims came to the UK from the 1950's to 1970's to fill a need for cheap labor in textile mills, and because they were displaced by dam construction in a remote mountainous area in northern Pakistan. Now, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are being raised in the UK. Religious and secular education was

⁵⁹ Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon. 2004. *Nexus Analysis: Discourse and the Emerging Internet*. New York: Routledge.
[https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=nlebk&AN=115040&site=ehost-live.+](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=nlebk&AN=115040&site=ehost-live.)

severely limited or non-existent in most who came, so cultural and tribal values were confused with religious values. While people in most remote parts of Pakistan made serious advances in both religious and modern education, the religious education of many in the Pakistani Muslim diaspora of the UK halted with their departure from Pakistan. The Muslim religious clerics in the UK were mostly concerned with helping the recent Pakistani Muslim immigrants stay in the fold, engage in the ritual side of Islam, and not go astray with night clubs, strip clubs, alcohol, and drugs; in-depth understanding of religion was not a focus. These immigrants later transplanted their families into low-income British neighborhoods near mills that became ghettos with the help of white flight and race related, anti-immigrant sentiments among locals. Many British schools were not ready for non-English speaking, non-Christian immigrants of color resulting in issues like the Honeyford Affair.⁶⁰ Many Pakistani Muslim boys and men were beaten up in schools and in the public sphere on a daily basis, and race riots were a common feature in mill towns. As a result, Pakistani Muslim families did not want their daughters, the future family makers, to be physically, sexually or emotionally abused or lured into what they considered “the improprieties” of bars and night clubs. They came to the UK for a better life and greater educational opportunities, but they were not ready to deal with these culture differences. Overwhelmed, many of them became overprotective, and made undesirable, difficult, unpopular, and in many cases harmful decisions for themselves and their families. Study participant, Abdul Shakoor described it this way:

NO! My. My way of thinking was very old-fashioned. Daughters as soon as they hit 16-18, get them married. That’s it. Because. I was. That’s. that’s. that was something in our culture. And because I saw. And. And. The reason for that is, We dint want the women, the girls to run away. We dint got the soft side. You have to remember. Its not a loving world. People will say, I

⁶⁰ Burnet, 2014, <https://irr.org.uk/article/the-rehabilitation-of-a-race-martyr/>

love you, but they don't really 'I love you', and they use you and abuse you.
(Abdul Shakoor—pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

According to Theo Van Leeuwen (2007), who provided a framework of legitimation for social practices, people use various criteria to legitimize or de-legitimize their or other people's actions. Moral evaluation, one of the criteria of legitimation, did not legitimize the moral values of the host culture. It was a fight to protect *my good* from what was perceived as *your bad*. Their lives caught between the two competing cultures were not easy. The decisions many Pakistani Muslim families made were not sustainable. While many of their children and family members accepted or half-heartedly supported these decisions, many revolted, causing family-harming situations. While the fear was legitimate, there was a problem with the ways they were trying to protect their values. It was during these turbulent times that the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif came to help them navigate integration issues.

Case Study 1: The *Shayyukh* Role Modeling of Love, Trust, and Women's Empowerment

Like their *Naqshbandi Sufi* spiritual ancestors, the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif have always been very keen about closely watching over, maintaining connections [*Rabta*] and companionship [*Sohbat*] with their followers around the world. If *murids* are the *Shayyukh*'s spiritual garden, the purpose of all the transnational and transregional visits is to tend to their plants and water them. During late 80's and early 90's the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif recognized that the tensions of integrating into British society were impacting the family lives and wellbeing of their *murids* and their children, as well as other Pakistani Muslims. This was a tall order. The *Shayyukh* needed to address the

lack of religious literacy of Pakistani Muslims in Britain, and they needed to use something more than traditional lectures or reading session. In Abdul Shakoor's words, there was a need to provide a practical demonstration of appropriate treatment of women in this new environment. He also said, "And I read in the books you have to be kind and loving to your daughters and your loved ones. But when you actually see it. Some people need to see it. . . . So, its, its, its. Some people can learn things from a book. But some people need to see it in action. On a practical side."

For Theo Van Leeuwen (2007), legitimation provides people with an answer to the questions, "'Why' – 'Why should we do this?' and 'Why should we do this in this way?'" (p. 93). He lists "Authorization" (p. 92) as one of the four major categories of legitimation. "Authorization is legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested" (p. 92). Reading in books and listening to sermons about traditions and laws in Islam on how to treat their wife and daughters was not enough. They needed what Van Leeuwen (2007) called a "role model authority" they could witness with their own eyes. The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif became that for them. Now, they had an answer for the family and societal pressure to the question, "Why should we put so much trust in our women in this British society?" The answer was, "Because Pir Sahab does so too. If the *Shayyukh* are doing it, it must be right because the *Shayyukh* understand Islamic values more than we do." Here is how Abdul Shakoor shares his story of transition after witnessing the role models:

Table 3 Transcript: Abdul Shakoor's Story of Being Inspired by Pir Sahab

Line #	Speaker	Transcript
1	AS	And Hazrat Sahab came to my house with his family. Stayed a night. And then the next morning they had the <i>duaz</i> ⁶¹ to do. Like they do.
2		And Hazrat Sahab's eldest daughter was coming down the stairs. She needed to see her father.
3		And the father said, I haven't forgotten about you. When I get back, it's a busy day, we will sit down.
4		And then they went. But it was such a busy day we didn't come back until about midnight.
5		Hazrat Sahab's same daughter is coming downstairs.
6		Hazrat Sahab walked really fast towards her. Give her a hug. And started kissing her head. As fathers do.
7		But the way they did it and what they said. "I apologize for being late."
8		That is. That is a practical way of showing someone a part of the love that you have for your daughters.
9		It doesn't matter how old they are, where they are, they'll be your daughters.
10		You can hold them. You can kiss them.
11		And you <i>shouldn't be ashamed of her</i> . In fact you should be proud of her.
12		And as you know. <i>Look at Hazrat Sahab's daughters</i> . They are full of confidence. <i>Confidence</i> in their home life. <i>Confidence</i> outside their home life. <i>Great members</i> of society...
13		AND in some cultures where you don't let the daughters express themselves, <i>they become like zombies</i>
14		AND we don't want that. We don't want that
15	SRS	How did that change you?
16	AS	How that changed me?
17		I couldn't wait for Hazrat Sahab to go so I could <i>grab hold of my daughters and kiss them because we stop doing things like that</i> . Don't we?
18		We stop doing things like that when they still are babies and Hazrat Sahab revived that passion of love for my daughters in me for them without saying a word.
19		It was a, it was a, it was a beautiful moment
20		Yeah, it was a great moment. I remember it very, very clearly. One of the most beautiful memories.
21		One of the most beautiful memories.

⁶¹ See Chapter Transnational Activities of Eidgah Sharif, section House Visits [*Dua*-blessing the houses and businesses].

Line #	Speaker	Transcript
22	AS	And because Hazrat Sahab had stayed in my house.
23		We've seen, observed them, how they're with their wife, how they are with their son. How they are with other people.
24		And its just on a different level.
25		And if we bring them teachings into our practical lives. I've tried and the benefits are enormous.
26		
27	SRS	How did the transition in yourself for example loving your daughters... helped you or the family life?
28	AS	It helped the family life that I sat with the daughters down.
29		They knew that they got a loving father. They knew. I was able to communicate better because of it.
30		If they had a problem, come see me. I am not going to punish you haha. I am going to help you. I am there for you.
31		NOW I want you to go to university.
32		If you want to go to university, I will help you to go to university.
33		Before it was "why? What are you going to do?"
34		Now. "You go to the university and do what you need to do. And I will help you instead of being an obstacle."
35		NO! My. My way of thinking was very old-fashioned. Daughters as soon as they hit 16-18, get them married. That's it. Because. I was. That's. That's. That was something in our culture.
36		And because I saw. And. And. The reason for that is. We dint want the women, the girls to run away.
37		We dint got the soft side.
38		You have to remember. Its not a loving world. People will say, I love you. But they don't really 'I love you.' And And they use you and abuse you.
39		And the only way around that is for the daughters to be confident and educated.
40		So nobody can pull the wool over their eyes. No matter what kind of environment they are in.
41		And Alhmadulillah. You know, I was able to get that through to them and they you know
42		and we made a deal that you go through. You do what I will help you to achieve what you want to achieve
43		And you help me to help you by not letting anybody point a finger at you. Does that, does that make sense?
44	SRS	Yeah. Yeah.
45	AS	You can understand it because we come from a similar culture.
47	AS	And Alhmadulillah. I have no worries. They are all working. They are working in offices. They, they travel. They go on holidays by themselves.

Line #	Speaker	Transcript
48		I have got no, what do you call it now, no bad. Negativity for them. They can go anywhere they want. Because I trust them and they trust me.
49		It boils down to the message of loving relationships that Hazrat Sahab teaches.
50		And if you got a happy life. I mean mothers, wives. All. They. Everybody wants love. EVERYBODY wants love.
51		And. And. And. In the loving household if you can create that environment. Everything grows beautifully.
52		And that's what Hazrat Sahab is doing to people who come and listen to him, basically. Does that make sense?
53		Some people to this date believe in forced marriage but that has nothing to do with Islam and has nothing to do with the teachings of Hazrat Sahab.

Story recounted by a study participant in English language (Abdul Shakoor-pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024).

Abdul Shakoor dropped out of school because of racism and xenophobia. He was severely beaten countless times in his life and the ghettos where he was born and raised never felt safe to him. Now, when he was blessed with several daughters and sons, nothing felt a “safe home” for his daughters. He had observed women being lured and sexually exploited by men who wanted to take revenge on the immigrants. He tried migrating to Muslim countries, but he didn’t feel he belonged there either. In search of peace of heart and mind, and to come out of the vicious cycle where darkness multiplies, negativity grows, and frustration engulfs people, he reached out to Pir Sahab with questions like Who am I? Where do I belong? Where should I migrate to? And what is safe for my daughters? Pir Sahab gave him a one sentence answer, “It doesn’t matter where you live. It does not matter where you live. It’s how you live.” He decided to not migrate and started exploring the answer to “how you live.” For him, the answer to this question was in his role model, Pir Sahab, who often repeated in sermons that loving your

children is an act of worship of God. In one of his sermons in Birmingham, Pir Sahab said,

People often say, feed your child with a golden spoon, but look at them with a lion's eye. I tell them NO. Look at them with an eye of love, love and more love. . . parents should bring their children so close to them and have such a bond of trust that the things they cannot even share with their friends or roommates, they should be comfortable coming and sharing them with you. ⁶² (*Shaykh* Naqib ur Rahman, Birmingham, UK)

When Abdul Shakoor witnessed the *Shaykh*, his role model, and the *Shaykh's* daughter, interacting with each other, he was able to witness firsthand at least the following:

- The kindness and humanity of the *Shaykh* with *Shaykh's* own immediate family.
Abdul Shakoor had heard the Hadith many times, “the best amongst you is the one who is good to his family,”⁶³ but now he was seeing it acted out there in front of his own eyes, right here in the UK.
- The physical embodiment of the sacred gesture of parental love between a father and a daughter. (Instead of scolding or ignoring his daughter who perhaps had an unrealistic expectation from the father who was exhausted from his religious and professional duties, the *Shaykh* did not undermine the human need of his daughter for attention, love, and affection from her father).
- The act of making an explicit apology, humbling himself, in front of his followers.

⁶² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eha-WTGq6o>

⁶³ Sayyadina Abu Huraira relates that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, the better amongst you is the one who is good for his family” (*Masnad as Shahab*, Hadith:1243).

Undoing the Nexus of Fear and Mistrust through Love, Trust and Positive Communication

Before Pir Sahab came to the UK, Abdul Shakoor was trapped in the nexus of traumatizing histories, and a context where Muslim-friendly and anti-Muslim discourses were circulating simultaneously. The interaction order was also complex, so that various interactions at multiple levels were taking place. However, interactions featured with fear, mistrust and lack of communication had become dominant. When Abdul Shakoor interacted with Pir Sahab, and became a member of Eidgah Sharif's spiritual family, his orientation towards himself and relationships changed, which altered his role in the interaction order and consequently, the interaction order changed. The following is an analysis of it.

Abdul Shakoor couldn't undo the histories of his parents and fellow villagers who left Pakistan unprepared for the UK, and the traumatic experiences of Abdul Shakoor's childhood, and the struggles of integration into British society. So, the historical bodies remained the same. There were people in British society who spoke fairly and positively about Islam; however, the racist and anti-Muslim sentiments had not completely ended in the UK. The fear was still there in Abdul Shakoor that someone could lure and abuse his daughters in the name of love (line 38). Hence, the circulating discourse of fear, and mistrust of the perceived other had not changed. Circumstances had become even more difficult immediately after September 2001. What changed after meeting with Pir Sahab was the interaction order. In line 12, Abdul Shakoor attributes the confidence of *Shaykh's* own daughters and their confident family and social lives directly to the explicit and unapologetic expression of parental love and care they receive from their father. In line

18, Abdul Shakoor states that in his family tradition they stop any explicit expression of love for their daughters when they are still young, but his religious role model, “Hazrat Sahab revived that passion of love for my daughters in me for them without saying a word” (line 18). Here the silent action of the *Shaykh* did for Abdul Shakoor what the sermons were not able to do. As he happily mentions, “And if we bring them teachings into our practical lives. I’ve tried and the benefits are enormous” (line 25). In line 50, Abdul Shakoor claims “love” is the key. He was ready to try with his own family the life-enhancing upward spiral of love, confidence, and trust he witnessed between the *Shaykh* and his daughters.

Towards a Sacred Pact: Changing Interaction Order Alters the Social Action

A second interaction that can be subjected to nexus analysis, involves Pir Sahab as parental role model with his daughters changing Abdul Shakoor and his interaction with his daughters. Despite the histories and the circulating discourses, Abdul Shakoor and his children were ready to alter their negative impacts on their family life. There was now a joint alliance between Abdul Shakoor and his son and daughters, a sacred pact that they now entered: “and and we made a deal that you go through. You do what [you want and] I will help you to achieve what you want to achieve. And. . . you. . . help me to help you by not letting anybody point a finger at you. Does that, does that make sense?” (lines 42-43).

The explicit expression of love opened doors of communication that brought in mutual trust and a greater sense of protection for daughters as well as for the family’s religious and cultural identity. You “help me to help you by not letting anybody point a

finger at you” (line 43) i.e., they entered into this pact without compromising shared religious and cultural values and identities. The role model authority, the *Shayyukh*, revealed to their followers through demonstration that the ancient sacred values are not decadent or out of date, but rather still valid, current, alive, vibrant, flexible, and bright in the 21st century irrespective of the location, East or West. As Pir Sahab said, “It’s how you live.”

Abdul Shakoor’s earlier resistance to change disappeared with guidance from observing Pir Sahab, and he with his family collectively imagined and claimed new identities, becoming educated and professional British Muslim world travelers, independent earners, confident and brave daughters, proud father, loving siblings, and happy united family. They moved ahead and became “Trees” in Pir Sahab’s garden and gained a sense of rootedness and belonging; working with charitable organizations, they were paying back and paying forward to Islam, and British society. As Abdul Shakoor says, “It boils down to the message of loving relationships that Hazrat Sahab teaches” (line 49). Pir Sahab has extracted this message of “loving relationship” from the saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, “The best among you is the one who is best for his family.” (Masnad al Shahab, Hadith number 1243). Diane Moore (2014) might call it “religious literacy,” but Abdul Shakoor called it a “*Karamat*” [a miracle a saint can perform]. The way Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab’s followers in the UK and elsewhere in the world apply Islamic teachings to their everyday academic, professional, and social lives, is what Diane Moore might call “Religion in the public sphere”. I view it as a powerful technique the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif use to resist and alter the negative circulating discourses against Muslims—the many positive interactions and the resulting social actions of

strong, confident, well educated, and law-abiding Pakistani Muslim British men and women are doing miracles - the narrative is changing!

Case Study 2: Women's Education

My study participant, Hamid's wife, a long-time *murid* of Eidgah Sharif, and a lawyer with an extensive career in the UK government was one of several very well educated female *murids* in the UK. However, they were not taken as inspiration. Some *murids* in Britain would simply not send their daughters for higher education in the UK, either because of lack of in depth understanding of religion or because they did not have a strong argument to the question "Why should we do it?". Things dramatically changed when the *Shaykh*'s daughter came all the way from Pakistan to the UK for higher education; it set a precedent for his followers. As a result, the people who were once not supportive of women's education, began to send their daughters to British universities and support their academic as well as professional accomplishments. This is just one example of how the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif have been promoting religious literacy about women's rights and responsibilities.

Eidgah Sharif houses a very active women's education enterprise at the shrine complex in Pakistan, providing free room and board and education for young women at every education level up to postgraduate degrees. The female students from this residential school participate in provincial and national level competitions for educational achievements as well as extracurricular activities for which they win prizes. Pir Sahab's sister supervise and guide the direction of these schools and frequently hold skill enhancement workshops and seminars for these young women. Thousands of young women have graduated from this institute and are now serving around the globe.

The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif believe in the powerful role of women in the family as well as in society based on the saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, “A mother’s lap is the first educational institution for a child.” The following is another example the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif acting as role models in support of early education as a critical step in the process of achieving excellence in women’s education. The example also illustrates how the *Shayyukh* personally encourage their young followers, particularly girls, to achieve excellence in their education.

The following scene occurred in *Baramda Sharif*, the veranda area of the shrine complex where the *Shayyukh* meet with their followers several times a day. I observed there one of the most endearing scenes, when waves of young children accompanied by their parents came straight from various local schools outside Eidgah Sharif to share their end of term results with Pir Sahab. Some were decorated with medals [literally wearing their medals] and /or carrying trophies while others were carrying their report cards. It was emotionally and intellectually overwhelming to see how a person of enormous prestige and influence, a religious leader of several millions, would wear his glasses and thoroughly read each individual student’s report card and diplomas and listen from them regarding their academic journey and make them feel valued. The expressions of children and their parents’ faces were priceless. It seemed obvious that both parents and children knew their *Shaykh* would cherish their success or become concerned about their academic struggles and provide guidance. One family arrived with three children all carrying their diplomas, certificates of appreciation, transcripts and trophies to show them to Pir Sahab, as shown in the accompanying photo.⁶⁴ Pir Sahab holds the transcript and the “Rising

⁶⁴ The photo is shared here with the permission of the parents and children.

Star” certificate of appreciation of the older sister and the younger sister looks on patiently for her turn, while both sisters hold their trophies.



Figure 2 Pir Sahab Celebrating his Spiritual Daughters’ Academic Success

Note: Pir Sahab cherishes reading the transcripts and certificates of achievements of two daughters of one of his followers. The two daughters confidently stand with their trophies. The proud father stands next to Pir Sahab. Other men seem to share the joy.

James Paul Gee encourages us to note who else is in the picture, and what else is happening. Six other men can be seen standing behind the joyous proud father, all attentive towards Pir Sahab. The ones towards the end are literally leaning in to observe

and all are clearly sharing the joy. Several other people are behind Pir Sahab, but their faces are not visible. Two of these six men are strangers, and their dressing indicates a humble socio-economic background. They are standing on a sacred place of religious significance i.e. their *Sufi* shrine, witnessing their religious leader, who they perceive as their role model and an authority in religion who perfectly emulates Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They witness their *Shaykh* cherishing the success of his spiritual daughters, appreciating them and their father for their success. Like Abdul Shakoor, these men now have an answer to the question, “Why support women’s education?”. Because Pir Sahab does. Hence, by publicly celebrating his spiritual daughters’ bright successes in education, Pir Sahab has given these men a powerful message that religiously, women’s education is not just legitimate, it is something appreciable and worth celebrating. For these spiritual daughters and countless others, his message is that you are fulfilling a religious obligation and making your *Shaykh* proud by getting education. I am on your side. When I asked the older girl why she shared her academic success with Pir Sahab? Her answer was, “Because it will make him happy.”

Case Study 3: Against Forced Marriages

What does Islam say about Forced Marriages? Following is the English translation of an extract of a speech *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman delivered in Urdu Language in Chesham, UK.

The young parents who live in the UK and have sons or daughters, remember that *Allah* Kareem and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ have declared it mandatory for us to love our daughters and children. . . .⁶⁵ There are places where children are treated with cruelty, they are not listened to.

⁶⁵ It is quoted in Hadith Sharif number 3671, *Sanan Ibn Ma'aja*, Our Prophet ﷺ has said, “Respect your children and teach them best demeanor.”

Like, there are many examples of it even in minor issues [apparently insignificant issues]. About forced marriage as well, getting someone married through coercion, and not asking children what their will is, this is not our religion. In our religion, there is [the process of] proposal and acceptance. First the daughter should be asked and then the groom should be asked [whether they accept this bond of marriage or not]. This process tells us, Islam says that when you are getting them married, do not do it through coercion, do it through their consent, do it after asking them. Our Prophet ﷺ has taught us to respect children in every matter, to take care of them in every matter, and to respect children in every matter. I am telling you what a magnificent Mercy has our Prophet ﷺ come to us as.⁶⁶

Quran has established a principle for every Muslim until the Day of Judgement:

“لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ” Translation: There is no compulsion (coercion) in religion (*The Quran*, n.d., 2:156).

It is related with Sayyadina Abdullah Ibn e Abbas *Radi Allah Anhuma* that a virgin came to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and reported that her father had forcibly married her to someone even though she disliked him. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ granted her the authority. (She could continue the marriage if she wanted to or end it if she wished so). This Hadith is stated at multiple places including Ahmad bin Humble, al Masnad, 273:1, number 2469; Abu Dau'd Al Sinan, Kitab un Nikah, 132:2, number 2096; Ibn e Ma'ja, al Sinan, Kitab un Nikah, 6031 number 1875. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has said, A widow should not be married without her consent, nor should a virgin (Sahih al Bukhari, Kitab un Nikah, 1974: 5 number; 4843).

Quran and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ neither allow forced marriages nor forced conversion of any human to Islam. In fact, *Quran* and *Sunnah* have established rights and

⁶⁶ Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman delivered in Urdu Language in Chesham, UK — What does Islam say about forced marriages:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dx4k23ROcfo>

protections of Muslim women including their right to marriage. Pakistani Muslims in the UK come from diverse backgrounds. Some that have minimal religious literacy, confuse their family traditions or regional culture with religion and enforce their family tradition of marrying their children with their cousins, distant relatives, or people of the same cast. Peach (2006) attributes such attitudes of families to the desire of cultural and ethnic encapsulation. According to him, at least 55% Pakistani-British couples are first marriages. He quotes from Ballard (1990) that most Pakistani Muslim marriages are with the people from the same village. Some other Pakistani Muslims may succumb to the trap of marrying their children for immigration. Such arranged marriages often do not follow the Islamic pre-requisite of proposal and acceptance [*ijab o qabool*]. According to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, forced marriage is not a legitimate marriage. The most important thing in *aqd*, or *nikah* [Islamic way of marriage] is proposal and acceptance, and the right of proposal and acceptance is with the bride and groom only, parents or siblings or anyone else cannot take that decision for them or enforce that decision on them. In order for *aqd*, or *nikah* [marriage according to Islamic law, the Islamic bond of marriage between a man and woman] to establish, a sincere proposal must be made to bride and the groom; first, the bride accepts that proposal without any fear, coercion, or manipulation. Only after the bride says yes to the proposal three times, the groom is asked for his willingness. If the bride or groom do not accept this proposal with free will, but rather due to pressure, coercion, or fear etc., the *aqd*, *nikah* [Islamic marriage] does not establish and hence religiously they are not husband and wife. Therefore, forced marriages violate the Islamic principle of proposal and acceptance and they are not considered a marriage in Islam. Imposing forced marriages on children is a sin.

I was told by my participants that many Muslim families consult the *Shayyukh* regarding issues around marriage, especially young men and women who may feel that they are being coerced by their families into a marriage that they are not happy about. The following is one such example.

Razia—a Pakistani Muslim in Britain, a mother, and a resident of the Midlands—is married in a family in which marriages are done within family and strictly arranged by elders. Like Abdul Shakoor’s family, this family confused culture with religion until the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif intervened. One day Razia’s daughter came to her saying that she wanted to marry somebody in her university. The prospective husband wanted his parents to meet with her parents with the marriage proposal. This was a massive shock for Razia. Although she trusted her daughter fully and knew that her daughter had not violated any religious boundaries, she did not know how to convince the family. Razia feared that if anyone in the family learnt about it, “This will cause a big *raula* [contention] in the family. She was worried that this will violate family’s generations old cultural traditions. They will ask me why she can’t marry her *mamon ka larka* or *Chacho ka larka* [maternal uncle’s son or paternal uncle’s son]. We don’t do love marriages. I was so scared. I couldn’t talk to anyone in the family.” Razia did not want her daughter to run away, nor did she want her daughter to live a life of, what Abdul Shakoor calls as, a zombie. She was a mother, but she was also a wife and a daughter-in-law. She did not want the rest of the family to be upset and break apart. She thought for a few days and then decided to reach out to Pir Sahab’s daughter-in-law — Qibla Sahab’s wife. Extremely perplexed, Razi made a phone call to Qibla Sahab’s wife in Pakistan and shared the entire situation. The response was extraordinary and unbelievable. Qibla

Sahab's wife said that the daughter had done nothing wrong, religion allows space to marry the person of your choice. In fact, religion is against forced marriages. Razia reports that Qibla Sahab's wife guided her on every step of this process and boosted her confidence by saying, *aap uski ma hein. Aap khud confident hon gi to kuch ho ga na. Pehlei aap khud positive hon.* [You are her mother. Nothing can happen unless you are confident. First of all, you need to be positive]. Qibla Sahab's wife guided Razia on every single step of the process in such a way that Razia was able to speak with her entire family with confidence and convince them that this was all religiously acceptable. It was their daughter's right to marry a person of her choice. Because the daughter had brought the proposal to the family, and the prospective husband is offering to arrange the marriage through family, that shows they both respect the family and its values. When the family learnt that their *Shayyukh* believed this was religiously acceptable and they are in support of the daughter, they all happily agreed to support this marriage and hence the potentially family harming situation turned into something that everyone happily approved of and welcomed. When I asked Razia how her daughter was, she said, "*wo to apni shadi ki sab tayyarian khud hi kar rahi hei. Mujhei bas bata deti hei mama mei nei dress ye order kar diya, yei makeup artist final kar diya. Kyunkei wo khush hei na*" ["She is making all her wedding arrangements by herself. She only reports to me, 'Mom I have ordered this dress and finalized this make-up artist'[Razia says it is] because she [her daughter] is happy"].

Chapter VIII

Sohbat [Companionship] & *Rabta* [Connection, Rootedness]

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ .

O you who Believe! Fear Allah and be with the truthful

—*The Quran*, n.d., 9:119

Sohbat and *Rabta* are hallmarks of *Naqshbandi Sufi Shayyukh*. *Sohbat* means companionship or the company one keeps. *Rabta* is an Urdu word for connection. *Sohbat* and *Rabta* are two ancient Islamic traditions and critical concepts for those who aspire to excel in *Tassawwuf* especially in *Naqshbandi Sufi* Orders. Sincere *Sohbat* with a *Shaykh* helps strengthen the *Rabta* [connection] between the seeker [*murid*] and the *Shaykh* (Figures 19-24). The stronger the connection and the bond of trust, the easier it is for the seeker to follow the *Shaykh* and excel in spirituality. This chapter explains some of the ways Eidgah Sharif maintains and actively practices the centuries-old traditions of *Sohbat e Shaykh* and *Rabta* in the 21st century based on interviews, field notes and digital and social media analysis.

The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif are heavily invested in *Sohbat* and *Rabta*, so they are always found surrounded by their *murids*. The *Shayyukh* also travel extensively at local, provincial, national, and international levels to invite and include people into their circle and to maintain connections with their followers. Once a person has taken *Bay'at* [oath of allegiance] with them, the *Shayyukh* and the seeker [*murid*] both try to maintain an uninterrupted connection with each other. The *Shayyukh* encourage and support the

seekers in acquiring and maintaining *Sohbat*. However, all of this takes place within strong boundaries of respect, ethics, morality and discipline that *Shariah* has prescribed for all Muslims. The environment at Eidgah Sharif is a living example of trust, love, respect, and care between Pir Sahab, Qibla Sahab and all the *murids*.

Like the ancient *Sufi khanqahs* [*Sufi Shrine complexes*], Eidgah Sharif also welcomes *Sufi murid*s who have travelled from cities, countries, and continents to find, and maintain *Rabta* and *Sohbat* with the *Shayyukh*. Like the ancient *Sufi khanqahs*, Eidgah Sharif also houses a large number of resident *murids*. In the perception of these *murids*, *Sohbat* allows them to absorb spiritual blessings [*iktasab e faiz*] from the *Shayyukh*. During *Sohbat*, the followers should closely observe and learn from the dealings, behaviors, and everyday life routine of the *Shayyukh* whom, the followers believe, perfectly live their lives according to the Blessed *Sunnah* (Figures 19-24). Therefore, due to *Sohbat e Shaykh*, the followers learn the ways to apply the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in their own lives. They also witness firsthand that the wisdom in *Sunnah* and in the blessed *Shariah* is not just valid, current, and applicable to today's world, but it can also help people succeed and flourish. A *murid* is also expected to apply the lessons learnt during this *Sohbat* to their own lives, and as a result emerge as model members of their families and Muslims around the world.

Among many other benefits of *Sohbat* is the opportunity to develop deeper awareness and commitment to the mission. The length of time each companion spends with *Shayyukh* varies from decades to a week or two, with re-visits later, or for followers who live in Rawalpindi, on a daily basis for a few hours. Some followers routinely join the *Shayyukh* during their local, national, and/ or international visits, so the *Shayyukh* of

Eidgah Sharif never travel alone. A *murid* takes *ijazat* [permission to depart] after their tenure of *Sohbat* is over, but wherever in the world they may relocate to, it is the responsibility of and a privilege for the *murid* to maintain a steady, deep, strong and continuing connection with the *Shayyukh*. They continue to revisit Eidgah Sharif, which they call their actual home, and invite the *Shayyukh* to visit their homes and regions as well. Hence, the separation after departure is only geographical and not spiritual and emotional. The focus of attention, loyalty, and heart are still at the shrine with the *Shayyukh* and fellow *murids*.

Intergenerational, Transnational, Family, and Individual Level Connections

The magnitude and depth of these connections [*Rabta*] are exceptional. I asked many people I met with how long they have been connected with the *Shayyukh*? How did you meet with them? An overwhelming majority of UK followers responded that their parents, grandparents (and in many cases, great grandfather) took oath of allegiance with Qibla Sahab's grandfather or Qibla Sahab's great grandfather. Now, their children love Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab passionately. A large number of them said that their uncles and aunts and cousins and nieces and nephews are also connected with the *Shayyukh*.

One woman participant reported that she married into a UK-based family that followed Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab. When her brother had a severe mental health crisis, she called Pir Sahab in Eidgah Sharif. It was not easy for her to make that call and tell a Muslim religious leader of an extremely prestigious level that her brother was saying things a Muslim should never say, but Pir Sahab listened to her with sincerity, empathy, kindness

and without judgment.⁶⁷ Pir Sahab asked her to wait for his call. Before long, Pir Sahab called her back and explained to her that her brother was showing symptoms of schizophrenia, and she should get him that help. Her brother is improving, but she continuously updates Pir Sahab and seeks his guidance on this issue. Her trust in the *Shayyukh* strengthened and her understanding of the role a *Shaykh* plays in his *murids*' lives also deepened. In her words, the *Shayyukh* are not "just take this amulet, it's more than just a *Mehfil*, ...you can actually talk to them." Talking to them opened doors for her and her immediate family, and the connection deepened.

The extent of the *Rabta* connection transcends formal teaching. In Pir Sahab's words, "We are one spiritual family." "You all are my children." "I am your father. When you are in pain, it hurts me." "Eidgah Sharif is your home." The *Shayyukh* follow the diaspora wherever they go. They never lose touch with them whether they are in the US, UK, or in a most remote village on the Kashmir border, or a small village in Sindh, Pakistan. Followers cluster around the beloved *Khanqah* on a daily basis, often coming to celebrate their birthdays (Figure 21), anniversaries and other successes with their *Shayyukh* in a sacred bond that is precious for both the *Shayyukh* and the *murids*.

Methods of Maintaining *Rabta* and *Sohbat*

There are several ways of maintaining *Rabta* and *Sohbat* including in person meetings, *duaz*, *mawlid* and *dhikr* gatherings, and digital connection, etc. These methods also include such as accompanying the *Shaykh* while walking to the mosque (19), going

⁶⁷ Many of my participants have reported that this is the typical behavior of Pir Sahab. He treats everyone with dignity, respect, empathy, kindness and without judgement. My participants believe that this behavior attracts people, especially youngsters, towards Pir Sahab.

for a hike, etc. (Figure 22). *Duaz* and *Mawlid* will be discussed in the Transnational Linkages chapter.

In person Meetings

I stayed at Eidgah Sharif shrine complex for data collection purposes. During this stay, one of the many places where I used to sit and observe the *Shayyukh* interacting with the *murids* and general public was *Baramda Sharif* [veranda of the shrine complex] where Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab sit several times a day to meet with people who come without an appointment. I witnessed that the *Shayyukh* demonstrated an extraordinary level of compassion for their followers and the general public of all ages, gender and socio-economic status who come to meet with them. The *Shayyukh* welcomed and embraced a day wage earner, and a street hawker dressed up in sweaty, shabby clothes in the same way as they embraced someone dressed in an expensive imported suit. During these observations at Eidgah Sharif and during spiritual trips with them to the US and the UK, I have never witnessed Pir Sahab or Qibla Sahab ask anyone what their religious affiliation or sect was. I have seen them meet with non-Muslims with the same compassion as they would to a Muslim. I have witnessed them console very disturbed and devastated persons like a mother would her child. I have also seen them cherish the smallest accomplishment of their littlest *murid*. More than a thousand people come to visit the *Shayyukh* on daily basis in an open house style and many enjoy a hot meal, called *langar sharif* [sacred blessed meal] (Figure 23). Many come for healing and blessings, counseling and guidance, as well as opportunities for deepening connections. Many young people come to the *Shayyukh* for one-on-one guidance on issues such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, choosing a career path, getting rid of drug addiction, or

ways to deal with increasing extremist influence in the world. Many youngsters come to seek guidance on how to make the world a better place. Others come to report and celebrate their success stories with the *Shayyukh*. For each visitor, the *Shayyukh* greet them with a smile, ask them how they are doing, how their family is doing and fulfil their request. No matter what the request may be, these few minutes of individual attention strengthen the bond between the *Shaykh* and the follower.⁶⁸ I have witnessed *murids* showing extreme satisfaction and gratitude for these encounters. Some will make video recordings of their encounters and post them on their social media accounts. Once a connection has developed, the invitation to love Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and acquire His path, works more effectively (Figure 24).

Traditional and Digital Connections and Outreach

Naqshbandi Sufis have always tried to meet with the followers where they are emotionally, intellectually, and physically located in order to guide them towards the path of love of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Eidgah Sharif witnessed a revolution in its connections and outreach when Qibla Sahab started supporting his father, Pir Sahab, in spreading Eidgah Sharif's mission⁶⁹ using digital technologies, especially social media for communications, connection and outreach. The challenge at present is that the young generation mostly uses the internet, some to the level of addiction. Therefore, internet is used as a platform of recruitment of young minds by extremists (Lakhani, 2023), criminals, sex traffickers, and drug dealers. In these circumstances it became inevitable

⁶⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjNDAwbpWI8>

⁶⁹ Please read Eidgah Sharif's Mission in Chapter V: *Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi: A Sufi Sunni Shrine of Holy Sufi Order of Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya Muhammadiyya*, section Mission of Eidgah Sharif.

for Muslim *Sufi Shayyukh* to also be present on the same platform and save the young generation from falling into the traps of these negative forces, warn them against the dangers of these negativities explicitly, and provide them a positive, healthy, and safe alternative. My participants have reported that their children who would otherwise spend hours and hours on the internet and sometimes watch what they were not supposed to, have now found a pristine alternative in the form of the speeches of Qibla Sahab and accolades of Prophet ﷺ sung *a Capella*. A large number of them have now turned towards being law abiding citizens and now work towards protecting other people from negativity. During the time I stayed at Eidgah Sharif shrine for observations, field notes and interviews, I met several families whose children had brought their parents to the shrine, because they had watched videos of Qibla Sahab. They felt convinced by the message and decided to change their lives towards positivity. Now, these children wanted the rest of their families to be connected to the same shrine. These families included not just people from Pakistan, but also from US, Europe and UK. Many of my participants report that they or their friends have left hardliners and hate preachers due to the teachings of Qibla Sahab on social media. In the eyes of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, the use of internet is not about increasing their followership, it is about advancing the centuries-old, scared mission, but on a new platform.

Live Broadcasts. Most of Eidgah Sharif's religious events, such as *mawlid*s, *Urs Paaks*, *dhikr* and *Khatam e Khwajgan*, are broadcasted live through ARY QTV (see Appendix 3; Figure 27), Facebook and/ or YouTube nationally and internationally for those that cannot be present. Many of these events receive several hundred thousand views (Figures 23-27). Study participants reported that these events provided them with a sense of a

global community, religious and spiritual connections and a source of support to overcome loneliness, depression, anxiety and other mental health related issues, particularly during the COVID pandemic when most places of worship were closed. A significant number of followers further share these live broadcasts through their personal Zoom, Facebook, or YouTube channels. Many in the UK will congregate in one house and watch these live broadcasts together. During these live broadcasts, the digital audience uses a live chat box option to send their messages to the *Shayyukh*, interact with each other and share their feelings, and responses about the event and the *Shayyukh*.⁷⁰

Presence at Local, National and International TV Channels. Qibla Sahab, frequently appears on local, national and international TV channels and newspapers. A Pakistan-based religious TV channel, ARY QTV that broadcasts in about 144 countries, has been running Qibla Sahab's religious education programs for more than 11 years. Other national⁷¹ and international level television channels^{72 73 74} such as Pakistan Television (PTV), Geo TV, KTV, *itv news*,⁷⁵ WNTV,^{76 77} ARY Network, cover Eidgah Sharif related news and invite the *Shayyukh* in their programs for featured appearances (Figures 25-29).

Recorded Lectures, Reels and YouTube Shorts The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif deliver at least a thousand in-person lectures every year, many of which are simultaneously

⁷⁰ *Khatam e Khwajgan* is a supplication formula that is comprised of a variety of sacred words and phrases to be said in a particular number and order. This formula was set by the saints of Naqshbandi order centuries ago and is believed to be very powerful in terms of bringing blessings, healings, and peace.

⁷¹ [Shaykh Muhammad Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman interview on SAMAA TV.](#)

⁷² [Geo News Report: The counter terrorism and interfaith event was organised in Oldham.UK](#)

⁷³ [Religious scholar Sahibzada Hassan Haseeb-ur-Rehman speaks at an event in London | Geo News](#)

⁷⁴ [GEO NEWS REPORT: interfaith And peace conferences In London](#)

⁷⁵ [Uk and Europe's Mainstream Media News Chanel ITV Special Message of Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman.](#)

⁷⁶ <https://wntv.co.uk/interview-pir-hassan-haseeb-u-rehman-in-uk/>

⁷⁷ [A report on Shaykh Muhammad Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman's spiritual &.....](#)

recorded and uploaded for unrestricted and open access to the general public by Qibla Sahab's social media volunteer team. There are Facebook pages, Instagram, TikTok accounts, YouTube channels, WhatsApp channels, and group chats that serve to archive as well as disseminate these recorded lectures. In addition to the social media outlets that Qibla Sahab's team supervises, there are countless social media outlets run by followers who, in their independent and individual capacity, disseminate Eidgah Sharif related online materials in their circles. Reels and YouTube Shorts of Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab's speeches and accolades of Prophet ﷺ are the most popular among their social media uploads. There are YouTube shorts and Facebook reels that have received as many as 700,000-1 million or more views (Figures 27, 29).

Social Media Statistics. Qibla Sahab's official Facebook page has 1.3 million followers, 1,089,192 likes, 13,022 people talking about this page on Facebook. Eidgah Sharif's use of YouTube as a platform to broadcast their videos can be traced back to the first decade of the 21st century. However, Qibla Sahab's official YouTube channel was started only in 2016. YouTube Official Channel has 157,000 subscribers, 1,397 videos, and 13,018,836 views. Eidgah Sharif is relatively new on Instagram and yet the official page shows that it has 251,000 followers, and 2,523 posts. Similarly, TikTok is a recent and less used platform for Eidgah Sharif. Despite that, the number of followers, likes and views on TikTok are impressive. It has 51,600 followers, 1.1 million likes, and the highest views on videos exceed 1 million (Appendix 3; Figure 29).

Chapter IX

Transnational Activities of Eidgah Sharif

Eidgah Sharif has a centuries old history of a transnational outreach. Given the fact that Eidgah Sharif has several million followers around the world, and not everyone can stay at Eidgah Sharif for an extended period of *Sohbat*, the *Shayyukh* frequently try to expand their outreach and connect with their followers locally, nationally, and internationally. The current Shrine Superiors, Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab, typically travel to the UK and Europe twice per year to minister to their more than 100,000 followers. In addition to the two visits per year to the UK, the Eidgah Sharif Shrine Superiors usually travel to the Middle East and Europe. They travel to the US about every other year. The followers from all over the world also travel to Eidgah Sharif, and stay at the shrine at no cost, sometimes for months.

Religious Formation and Outreach Tours [*Daura*] of the UK and Europe

The *Shayyukh* see their mission as being like gardeners tending their garden not only in Eidgah Sharif, but around the world. Their *murids* are like plants in their garden, and they tend to those in their garden at home and those who have been transplanted to distant parts of their garden as far away as in the UK or the US. To the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif the distant *murids* are just as important as the ones at home. In Pir Sahab's words, they "travel around to water their plants so they remain fresh and do not develop any weakness or disease. They need to stay strong and healthy so they can propagate the message of love, peace, and kindness and work for the betterment of all of God's creation for the sake of *Allah*'s pleasure only" (quote taken from field notes).

Eidgah Sharif's transnational mission to the UK can be traced back at least as far as the 1950's and 1960's when some of their followers moved to the UK. Pir Sahab's father the grand *Shaykh* Khwaja Habeeb ur Rahman started visiting UK in the 1980's.⁷⁸

The current Shrine Superiors have continued the legacy of Lasani Paak and hence they typically visit the UK twice a year. During these tours they stay two to three weeks on one trip and seven to eight weeks on the other trip. They normally stay in the homes of their followers and rarely in a hotel. Some followers from around the UK, the US and Europe in particular, join the *Shayyukh* for their entire religious preaching tours in the UK. Local followers take pride in hosting the visiting followers at their homes. This act in itself brings people closer to each other and provides them with a sense of being a transnational spiritual family. The followers continue their communications and friendship after the visit as well. The following two sections will explore the scope of the *Shayyukh*'s house visits and *mawlid* gatherings and their implications for religious and social wellbeing of their followers. Interfaith activities will be discussed in a separate chapter. *Mawlid* gatherings will be discussed as a new section and not as a subsection.

House Visits [*Dua* - Blessing the Houses or Businesses]

Dua is an Arabic word that literally means supplication. In the current context, *Dua* is one of the methods used by the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif. They visit their follower's houses and businesses to do supplications and hence, bless both the people and the place. There are cities that have many thousands of followers and there are neighborhoods where almost every house is affiliated with the *Shayyukh*. Sometimes they

⁷⁸<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155958901112333&set=pb.746572332.-2207520000&type=3>

visit as many as a hundred or more houses in one day. By doing that, they get to meet with the followers' families and their neighbors and co-workers and friends. Usually, this is a very quick stop at the follower's house (in some cases businesses as well), typically 10-12 minutes long. Each family gets one-on-one time with the *Shayyukh*. In most cases, the entire family is connected with the *Shayyukh*, but if not, they at least get to meet and know the *Shayyukh*. They can seek the *Shayyukh*'s blessings as well. When the extended family, friends and neighbors learn that the *Shayyukh* are visiting a particular house, they all try to attend and seek blessings for themselves as well.

It is during these visits that the *Shayyukh* assess how well their followers are doing as neighbors and citizens. For example, in one of his addresses, Qibla Sahab pointed out one particular neighborhood with a heavy Muslim concentration that had cleanliness issues. The *Shaykh* reprimanded his followers about the lack of cleanliness and instructed them to actively watch their own behavior, help others improve their treatment of the neighborhood, and also actively work on cleaning up the neighborhood. In one of his lectures, Qibla Sahab explicitly mentioned that this country (UK) provides the followers with better quality of life and freedom of religion and freedom of expression. The followers should not abuse this country just as an opportunity for earning livelihood, but rather they should consider it their homeland and work for its betterment. Several of my participants have reported that Pir Sahab has instructed them to inform the neighbors about Pir Sahab's arrival so that the neighbors are not surprised by a lot of activity happening in the neighborhood. My participants also shared that due to Pir Sahab's guidance, they share food and flowers with the neighbors routinely, and are becoming more watchful about how they handle the parking situation in a way that it

does not cause problems to neighbors. This act of intentional outreach to neighbors, being good to them routinely, and keeping them informed about Pir Sahab's arrival brings good results. In my participants' words, the neighbors keep asking, "When is the holy man coming?"

During the house visits, some people will draw closer to the *Shayyukh* and share issues with them, for which the *Shayyukh* do supplications. Others will present their issues in writing. The *Shayyukh* read the hand delivered notes and raise their hands for collective supplication. Irrespective of whether the entire family are followers of the *Shayyukh* or not, the *Shayyukh* try to care for their wellbeing. This is a chance for the families to share with the *Shayyukh* their personal issues ranging from domestic, educational, and financial struggles to the problem of drug abuse and the crime rate they may have witnessed in their neighborhoods. Since the *Shayyukh* have been visiting the UK for the last 5 decades, they understand the dynamics and nuances involved. They help their followers find a solution that is socially acceptable and rooted in religion. Several of my participants have reported that they have witnessed people moving away from drugs and becoming law abiding citizens as a result of the *Shayyukh*'s mentorship. Some shared with me their deeply personal stories in this regard.

While the family is meeting with the *Shayyukh*, the other companions (*murids*) wait either outside or in another room of the house they are visiting. This is how companions also get to know and meet with each other's families while respecting the host family's privacy. In summary, these house visits are an extraordinary way to connect followers with each other, as well as connect the entire family and the neighborhood with the *Shayyukh*.

Mawlid Gatherings in the UK and their Personal and Social Implications for *Murids*

The *Shayyukh* address large *Mawlid un Nabi* ﷺ gatherings in local mosques as well as in large event venues in the UK, such as Bingley Hall, Birmingham, with thousands in attendance. In addition to the religious benefits of *mawlid* gatherings mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, these *mawlid* gatherings have numerous personal and social benefits including, but not limited to the following. My participants report that these *mawlid* gatherings provide the youth with alternatives to unhealthy lifestyles.

Opportunities for Connections to Prevent Depression and Loneliness

Mawlid participation helps them to network, so they know that they are not alone in dealing with problems in schools and workplaces. Those who used to be in unhealthy company now have the children of fellow followers to be with. Many among the youth who used to shut themselves in their bedrooms, in front of their gaming stations or TV, or were entrapped in depression because they thought they were all alone dealing with bullying and harassment in schools, now find children of the *murids* to share their feelings with and devise positive coping mechanisms for themselves.

Opportunity to Perform and Celebrate Religious Identities to Prevent Frustration, Anger and Crime

The intentional focus on engaging young people in planning, promoting, marketing, and executing *Mawlid* gatherings (Figure 30) provides them with a positive outlet to positively express themselves and divert their energies towards. Doing so also provides them with a platform to perform and celebrate their religious identities and develop leadership skills. When people are given an opportunity to positively express

themselves and perform their positive religious identities⁷⁹ that many think are precious to them, they feel represented, respected, and valued. This prevents them from feeling excluded and marginalized. This may save them from frustration and anger and hence they may be less prone to being engaged in hate crimes or drug abuse. The overall idea is that religion improves quality of life. It takes people away from negativity and inculcates in them positivity in a way that this light spreads out of the person and spreads around without any discrimination, and hence improves not just the follower's life but also of everyone else around him/her.

Training Future Leadership

A group of young adult men in Dundee came together about 6 years ago, calling themselves the "Youth Team." This youth team works together to plan not just next year's spiritual tour and next year's *mawlid* but also fun things such as football matches or tea parties while the *Shayyukh* are preaching elsewhere in the world. My participant's son was the founder of this youth group. According to her, members of this youth group also provide each other with emotional support and counseling. Dundee has a similar group for young women as well. According to my participant, within the 6-8 years of its establishment, these youth groups have almost taken over the bulk of planning and execution of the spiritual tours including publicity, marketing, securing the venue, lining up the other guest speakers in consultation with the senior *murids* and the *Shayyukh*. This joint effort helps reduce the generation gap, develop a sense of respect, trust and

⁷⁹ Getting ready for Grand *Milad Paak*-
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155800785202333&set=pb.746572332.-2207520000&type=3>

cooperation. According to my participant, all of this trains the youth to become better citizens of this world and positive leaders.

Unity, Hope, and Positive Social Action

It is through these *mawlid* gatherings that the *murids*, especially in the UK, make connections in order to engage in social service and charity work. For example, a follower in London shared that his daughters and other *murid* daughters organized a bake sale for flood relief in Pakistan. My participant from Dundee reported that in Scotland, there is a tradition of holding events for collecting charitable donations from people. Young male and female *murids* of Eidgah Sharif also participate in these events and raise donations, for example through car wash, face painting, henna, bake sale, etc. She reported that although the inspiration comes from the *Shayyukh*, the charitable activities are unaffiliated with Eidgah Sharif. A group of female *murids* from Slough holds a monthly soup kitchen for the needy in which the women get together to cook, serve and clean later. A follower in Birmingham runs a religious education institute that positively engages young Muslims. This is what the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif call the essence of religion — unity, positivity, hope, and the resulting positive social action.

The New Land is the Arena

The Pakistani immigrant experience in integrating into UK society has had substantial similarity to the experiences of some other *Sufi* Muslim colonial peoples migrating to colonizer countries, such as described by Kane (2011) in his book *The Homeland Is the Arena* describing the immigrant experience of people from Senegal, a former French colony, in the United States. The title of the book implies that for *Sufi*

Muslim colonial peoples integrating into a colonizer country, their greatest concern is how successful they appear back home. For example, an Uber driver in New York is more concerned with generously supporting his extended family back home and acquiring real estate there, rather than meeting the standards of success in the new country, where he is viewed as one of the “other” people based on race and religion. Kane also uses the term “transnationalism” to describe the practice of travelling back and forth to maintain a life in both countries. Pakistanis were brought to the UK by the government to fill an economic need in discreet regions of the UK primarily associated with textile mills, particularly before passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 enabled family reunification. While this meant full employment for men, it did create issues associated with family reunification and the education of their children, given that it created Pakistani-majority neighborhoods in proximity to the mills. These Pakistani-majority neighborhoods led to accusations by indigenous British citizens of self-segregation. More importantly they resulted in Pakistani-majority schools that became associated with a range of issues related to race, religion and increasingly after September 2001, to a sense of security. The Pakistani cultural experience in the UK has been characterized by a high level of what Kane calls “transnationalism”. They not only shuttle back and forth between Pakistan and the UK to maintain links to family and religion, their *Shayyukh* do as well. Describing the process, the interactions, and the results of this “transnationalism” is a central feature of this thesis. Moreover, for the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, the new land is very much the arena, at least as much as the homeland. The *Shayyukh* of *Eidgah Sharif* want their followers to pay forward to the British society for all the good that it has contributed to their lives. For the *Shayyukh* of

Eidgah Sharif paying forward positively entails integrating into British society as peaceful law-abiding citizens, avoiding drugs, participating in nation-building, supporting the local economy and being good neighbors, all of which is part of being real Muslims who can help dispel negative stereotypes about Islam through their noble demeanor and positive life-enhancing actions. The *mawlid* gatherings are a perfect avenue for such training and positive grooming. The following is an example from a speech that Qibla Sahab delivered in English language in a *mawlid* gathering in a mosque in the UK, “This country has given you freedom of religion. This country has given you respect. In return, you should respect the law of the land.” According to Qibla Sahab’s speech delivered in the UK in English language.

Islam is a religion of peace and especially you people you live in this country, last word, I will say you should be the ambassador of Islam if you will especially youngsters don't go towards drugs. We hear news that there are problems because of drugs. Do not go to drugs any Muslim youngsters, here most of the people are youngsters sitting over here. Don't go towards drugs. Don't go towards crime, Don't go towards street crime because when you will be involved in negative activities, people will relate this with your religion and think bad about Islam, and if you will be engaged in positive activities always, so people will relate this with your religion and talk good about Islam, and this is you leaving the impression of Muhammad Rasool *Allah* ﷺ and of the Islam over here, so you should always be a civic citizen, respect the law of the land some people over here, they say oh, we are outsider over here, here our country is Pakistan, this is not our country. Don't say this. Pakistan is also your country, and this is also your country. You live here, you are citizen of the United Kingdom, this country is providing you all needs of good life, so in return you should also respect the law of the land. Respect the law of the land and be a civic citizen over here. Respect the law of the land. This is also your country keep this also think this country also like your country because this country is providing you all needs of good life, so you should be thankful and respect the law of the land and leave the good impression of Islam and Muhammad Rasool *Allah* ﷺ.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ A sermon of Shaykh Haseeb ur Rahman in Birmingham, UK
<https://www.facebook.com/rizwan1224/videos/1830061304417988/?fs=e&mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=l3roGzQ86ti6dgak>

Chapter X

Real Islam⁸¹

Oh the Messenger of Allah! “Who is the true Muslim?”

*Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “From whose hands and tongue, others
are safe.”*

—*Masnad Ahmad*, vol. 2, p. 654, *Hadith*: 6942

The text box below contains a segment of a speech *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman (Qibla Sahab) delivered August 07, 2018, in Luton Central Mosque in the UK to his followers and general public. He based his message on a *Hadith* (saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) to accomplish several objectives of critical importance for Muslims, Islam, and world peace, specifically defining Islam, delegitimizing extremism, alienating extremists, providing Muslims a checklist for self-analysis against extremism, and issuing a call to action for Muslims (Figure 31). He strategically and systematically performs these actions one after the other so that they lead up to a powerful call to action. The following is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of these actions:

Table 4 Transcript: Qibla Sahab’s Denunciation of Terrorism in the Name of Islam

Line #	Transcript
1	One person asks Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that Oh Prophet ﷺ of <i>Allah</i> ! Who is the true Muslim? Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: Who don’t harm others from his tongue and his hands.

⁸¹ Please see appendix 5 for one of Qibla Sahab’s social media posters explaining what Islam is.

Line #	Transcript
2	Harming others from your hand, that's very far [from OK]; it's evil to harm someone from your tongue, [to] say a bad word to someone, and [to] hurt someone. So Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says that's not a true Muslim.
3	A true Muslim doesn't harm any human whether he is from any faith. A true Muslim never harms any human being from his hand or his tongue.
4	Killing someone is not the concept of Islam. Islam doesn't allow to kill any anybody.
5	There is a hadith in Bukhari. Our Prophet ﷺ says: One woman goes to Jannah [Paradise] because she saved the life of a dog and one woman goes to Jahannam [Hell] because she killed a cat.
6	Now a dog is not from any religion.
7	Islam says that even if you will save a life of a dog you will go to Jannah and even if you will kill a cat you will not go to heaven.
8	Islam gives the message to save lives, not to kill human beings.
9	We condemn killing in the name of religion, we condemn that anyone takes the law in his hand whether he wants to kill anyone.
10	This is not the way of Islam.
11	Islam doesn't give permission to kill someone.
12	Islam gives the message to save the humanity, to serve humanity by promoting peace, by promoting love, by promoting harmony, and promoting integration.
13	Go and meet every human being, every people, all people wherever they live, from any religion, any faith, go give respect to them and prove with your character.
14	Alhamdulillah Islam is the religion of peace and Islam gives love to every human being. ⁸²

Segment of a sermon given by Qibla Sahab in the English language, which was transcribed from a YouTube video recording
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOlkAu1y3zU>.

Definition of a “True Muslim”

Qibla Sahab quotes a definition of a “true Muslim” verbatim from an authentic and undisputable source in Islam (i.e. the sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ). A true Muslim is the one “Who doesn't harm others from his tongue and his hands” (line 1).

⁸² A Youtube link to a segment of a speech that Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman (Qibla Sahab) delivered August 07, 2018, in Luton Central Mosque in the UK to his followers and general public
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOlkAu1y3zU>

Qibla Sahab also provides commentary on this saying in order to help followers understand its applications and implications for the larger multifaith society. He does so by explaining what constitutes the “other” in this Hadith. Does the word “others” refer to only the family members, friends, neighbors, or other Muslims only? Or does the word “other” refer to all humans including non-Muslims (lines 2 and 3)? As it is obvious from line number 3, “A true Muslim doesn’t harm any human whether he is from any faith.” Here, “others” is all-encompassing inclusive of all humans irrespective of their race, religion, nationality, gender, social class, and geographical location. In line 5,6, and 7 Qibla Sahab quotes the example of a woman who went to hell because she brutalized an animal. Hence, the word “other” also encompasses non-human beings such as animals.

Delegitimizing Extremist Rhetoric Through Islamic Perspective on Protecting Life

Today, when many in the world seem ill-informed or confused about Islam, it is essential to find these answers from the perspective of contemporary *Sufi* leadership with transnational influence. *Sufi* Masters of Eidgah Sharif claim that hypocrites and deviants within Islam have been trying to spread suspicions and doubts about the true form of Islam ever since Prophet Muhammad ﷺ announced His Prophethood and the formal preaching of Islam. The Blessed Companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and His blessed household became the safekeepers to preserve Islam in its true form. *Sufi* Masters claim that people of *Tassawwuf* (*Ehl e Tassawwuf*) aim to closely follow and to continue that mission⁸³. For this thesis, I have examined more than a thousand speeches that Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab have delivered during the last three decades in three different continents

⁸³ Please read Eidgah Sharif’s Mission in Chapter V: *Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi: A Sufi Sunni Shrine of Holy Sufi Order of Naqshbandiyya Mujaddadiyya Muhammadiyyah*, section Mission of Eidgah Sharif.

(Asia, the Americas, and Europe) through social and electronic media and in-person communications. All of those speeches contain an explicit message to help people identify what “real Islam” *is* and *is not*. My data analysis (including observations and field notes) reveals that this is the core of the mission of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif. They are extraordinarily particular, very vocal, and dauntlessly committed to it in both their practices and preaching. All my study participants brought up this theme of “real Islam”, and “good Muslims” in their interviews, indicating that this message is being successfully transmitted.

Violent extremist organizations such as Taliban and Al Qaida propagate a false ideology that killing non-Muslims will earn Muslims a place in heaven and deliverance from hellfire. This propaganda has led a few astray and they have committed acts of violence, which provided fuel for the cycle of stereotyping, fear, anti-Muslim sentiments, and discrimination to continue turning. Simultaneously, there has been a pervasive fear among Muslims that their religion and religious identity are in danger. Muslim parents’ worry is many folds. First of all, they want to protect their children from being trapped by the violent extremism that is sold in the name of Islam. Second, they are worried about their children feeling ashamed of their Muslim identity because of the false identity labels such as extremists and terrorists etc. They do not want cycles of stereotyping, fear, hatred, discrimination, and segregation in broader society to keep them from integrating with the British and supporting nation building and world peace. Hence, there is a need for Muslim religious scholars and leaders fearlessly, explicitly, and consistently presenting a counter narrative to violent extremism. Both Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab consistently speak in front of hundreds of thousands of people to prove extremists and

extremism illegitimate in Islam. In lines 5-8, Qibla Sahab proves that the rhetoric of extremists is illegitimate according to *Quran* and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Qibla Sahab does so by quoting a saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that a woman who killed a cat will go to the hell (Sahih al Bukhari, Hadith number 3482, Kitab: Narration about God's Prophets) and a person who saved the life of a dog will go to the heaven (Sahih al Bukhari, Hadith number 2363, Kitab: Al Shurb wal Musaqat). Here he proves that according to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, killing a living being is a way to Hell and saving someone's life is a way to earn Heaven. By providing this understanding regarding the sanctity of all lives, he not only proves that extremists' violence is evil, but he also proves that they are anti-Islamic — exactly opposite to what Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has preached.

Alienating Extremists, Training Youth

Line 9 presents Qibla Sahab's personal position on violent extremism committed in the name of religion. It is essential for all the religious leaders to publicly, explicitly, and consistently announce their personal stance on the issue of religious extremism, particularly in Pakistan where extremism and extremist ideology have a strong presence. The literacy level in Pakistan is only 62.3%. Hence, there are a significant number of people whose religious sentiments can easily be manipulated by extremist propaganda wrongfully presented in the true Islam, and they make it very dangerous to speak out against extremism. Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab fight extremism in at least four ways.

First, their example motivates religious leaders at less prominent, yet critical, positions at provincial, city, and local levels to also publicly and consistently denounce

extremism during their daily *Quran* teaching sessions and weekly Friday prayer sermons, reinforcing the message and creating a sense of unity. Second, explicit and public denouncement of extremism at all levels discourages acts by uncommitted, marginally extremists people won over by the misrepresentation of Islam. Third, but very important, when all the stakeholders in religion at all levels using all possible modalities (electronic and social media speakers, public forums such as *dhikr*, and *Mawlid* gatherings, sermons in the mosque and educational institutions, *Quran* tutors at home), consistently and forcefully repeat the same message, the younger generation will take it as the default position. Then it becomes almost a second nature for all Muslim children to not only understand what extremism is, but also assume the civic responsibility to identify and report any extremist tendency in their surroundings to the law enforcement agencies in order to protect themselves and others. All this makes recruiting harder for extremists. Qibla Sahab said the following in the UK.

Fourth, the non-Muslim world will witness an unignorable and overwhelming counter narrative to violent extremism from within Islam, so they question stereotypes about Islam as a religion of terror and about all Muslims being terrorists or extremists.

A Check List for Self-Analysis

Qibla Sahab' presentations give his followers a checklist for their self-analysis to use to see if they need to work on themselves. It is, in fact, a tall order and a lifelong commitment to engage in a continuous act of self-retrospection, self-analysis, and self-improvement in a way that individuals never allow themselves to give into any trappings of extremism, revenge, or countering hate with hate. Thus, it can be deduced that in the eyes of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, being a true Muslim is a continuous journey, a

never-ending process, and a sacred pact with God, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the *Shayyukh*, society, their families, and themselves. Being Muslim is to be always engaged in guarding one's own self. If each individual engages in guarding him or herself against the evils that reside in themselves at all times, we will be able to defeat injustice, cruelty, and social instability.

A Call to Action

In line 13 and 14 Qibla Sahab extends a call to fellow Muslims for several actions such as kindness and respect without discrimination. These sentences are constructed like assertions that make his call an obligation, not a mere option. Earn for yourself and for Islam a positive identity through your actions and not just your words. His call to action is simple and can be acted upon by individual acts of kindness in everyday life, providing an alternative to helplessness, frustration, and anger that some may feel in the face of negative stereotypes, Islamophobia, hatred and discrimination they endure routinely. The hope is that this alternative will help the youth channel their energies towards positivity and have positive self-clarity of themselves and a better future self-image. This call to action will provide them with a sense of being useful and helpful during these critical times. Abdul Shakoor, in his interview said about the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, “they give you an option.” Study participants saw the message as a game changer — turning negative perceptions into positive bonds of friendship, trust, and love through sincere, life-giving, positive actions in everyday dealings.

The Power, Authenticity and Legitimacy of the Message

The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif routinely publicly prove that their belief about Islam and Islamic values are based on *Quran* and *Sunnah* by extensively quoting verses and passages from *Quran* and *Sunnah*, often verbatim. They also frequently quote examples from the preachings and practices of earlier religious leaders. A contemporary Discourse analyst, Theo Van Leeuwen (2007), would call this technique “Authorization”, “that is, legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested” (p. 92). Moreover, the message the *Shayyukh* convey matches human nature [*fitrat*] (i.e., seeking peace and positivity in everything), because it propagates the moral values of justice, fairness, peace, positivity, desegregation, peaceful co-existence, inclusion, and integration. In Theo Van Leeuwen’s (2007) words, the message carries “moral evaluation”, that is, legitimation with “reference to value systems” (p. 92). The audience can easily understand it and it resonates with their situation, providing answers for their greatest struggles not just as an individual, but also as a family and as a diaspora.

Effect of this Message on Followers

This message of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif has a profound effect on the followers. According to several study participants, the greatest problem they face as parents is that when they send their children to universities and colleges, their children may get trapped in secularism and break away from their religious identity or they may fall into the hands of extremist organizations. Study participant, Abdul Shakoor, believes that Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab are doing a real *Karamat* [*a miracle that a Saint can do*].

So, I have got. I have got no choice not to believe. Haha. like we have a saying in gambling over here. **You have to be in it to win it.** If I wasn't in this place, I wouldn't have seen. For me these are *karamats* [miracles performed by *Walis*]. . . It feels like I have got a lot of spiritual help in the background. I have seen things that I can't put down to coincidence. I see the spiritual help and I can only point to the benefits from Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab. But, the biggest *Karamat* I have seen is the effect that I saw on my children and household, and not only that, on other people's households. Those are the people who are genuinely into it at the grassroots level, because you have to take into the context that we live in a world where the children are groomed away from religion. And the way Hazrat Sahab's teachings are having an affect on them and giving them the answers is a beautiful thing to witness. And the greatness of Hazrat Sahab, and when I say Hazrat Sahab, I mean the teachings of Eidgah Sharif, is how they connect everything to the love for Prophet of *Allah* ﷺ [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ]. Every issue, every problem, they will connect to the love of Prophet Muhammad Sal^l*Allahu* Aleihei Wa Alehei Wassallam. And I believe in this day and age that's what is needed. And they speak a language that everyone understands. . . . Hazrat Sahab's teachings get through to them, and they need it and Hazrat Sahab's then showing them the way to live according to Islam in the 21st century. . . And I don't know what it's like in America. Over in Britain we parents worry when we send our children to the universities, outside into the world. Are they going to come in contact with people of extremist thoughts? And Hazrat Sahab's teachings keep you safe from that environment. They give you an answer and an option which helps the kids to form an identity and a defense against people whose intentions may not be right. So that effect that I have seen that Hazrat Sahab has at the grassroots level as I call it. I have not seen anyone have that effect. (Abdul Shakoor—pseudonym, personal communication, September 14, 2024)

Against Forced Conversions to Islam

Qibla Sahab said in one of his speeches in the UK.⁸⁴

One companion came in the court of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and said that Oh Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, my sons are not Muslim, and they are not ready to be Muslim. Please permit me to bring them towards you or convert them to Islam forcefully. Verse of *Quran* came [revealed] “*laa ikraaha fid deen*”⁸⁵ You can't enforce someone to accept Islam. You can't force someone to accept Islam “*laa ikraaha fid deen*”. *Deen ma sakhti*

⁸⁴ A sermon of Shaykh Haseeb ur Rahman in Birmingham, UK
<https://www.facebook.com/rizwan1224/videos/1830061304417988/?fs=e&mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=l3roGzQ86ti6dgak>

⁸⁵ Translation: There is no coercion in religion. (*The Quran*, n.d., 2 256)

nahi ha. You can't force someone towards Islam. Islam is against extremism. Some people, they try to impose their extremist ideology on youngsters. Youngsters should be aware that if anyone is trying to take you to extreme, provoke you to take someone's life, report them to local official authorities.

In this extract Qibla Sahab explains a religious principle that Islam does not give permission to forcibly convert someone to Islam. Converting to a religion is a matter of accepting it from the core of your heart, which does not come through coercion. Therefore, *Sufi* Muslims oppose the idea of forced conversions to Islam. In order to substantiate his belief, Qibla Sahab brings references from Hadith Sharif [saying of Prophet ﷺ]. Although, for a Muslim, Hadith Sharif is legitimate and carries huge significance. This Hadith Sharif refers to an issue so valuable that when *Allah* witnessed His Prophet ﷺ and His companion discussing this matter, *Allah* sent a revelation in the form of a *Quranic* verse which means “There is no coercion in religion” (*The Quran*, n.d., 2 256). Hence, *Allah* through *Quran* and His Blessed Prophet directly made this a rule until the Day of Judgement so that no Muslim, irrespective of their power or status, or influence can forcibly convert anyone to Islam. Now, today, any Muslim who tries to forcibly convert people to Islam or trick people into Islam, is sinning and violating the *Quranic* injunctions and the command of Prophet ﷺ. This verse becomes a magnificent defense of non-Muslims in Muslim dominant areas.

Chapter

XI Interfaith

This chapter presents a selected sample of decades-long expansive efforts of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif in promoting interfaith peace and harmony.

Protecting Rights of Non-Muslims, A Religious Obligation on Every Muslim

My data analysis reveals that for the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif, interfaith is not limited to a few meetings and press conferences, but rather this is a way of life in which people from various religious backgrounds can co-exist without fear or humiliation. A living testimony to this is Eidgah Sharif's veranda, and the courtyard where Muslims and non-Muslims are served alike on daily basis. Analysis of Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab's speeches reveals that in almost every lecture they devote a significant effort to promote awareness among Muslims regarding the rights of fellow human beings, and protections and rights of non-Muslims and peaceful coexistence. By doing so they invalidate the extremist rhetoric that promote hostility towards fellow human beings including non-Muslims. The following are a few examples of Qibla Sahab's publicly delivered lectures and sermons.

When a Christian pastor was killed in Peshawar, the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif went to the Cathedral of St. John on Feb 01, 2022, and held a press conference there. In his message, Qibla Sahab condemned the killing of the Christian pastor, dissociated the killers from Islam and called the killers criminals. He reminded his audience that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has declared the value of a non-Muslim the same as that of a

Muslim, and the constitution of Pakistan upholds it as such. He also established that the non-Muslims living in Pakistan are patriotic citizens and are making valuable contributions to this nation. He also quoted an often underreported saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ according to which on the Day of Judgement, the Blessed Prophet ﷺ will fight for the case of a non-Muslim, because he was wrongfully killed by a Muslim. The following is the text:

English Translation of Media Talk of *Shaykh* Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman at the Incident of Murder of a Pastor in Peshawar, Pakistan.

In the name of *Allah*, the Most Magnificent, the Most Merciful.

Today, under the leadership of our immaculate (righteous) *Shaykh*, Pir Naqib ur Rahman, we have come here in this Cathedral in Peshawar, Pakistan to meet with and offer our condolences to Bishop Humphrey for the inhuman, inhuman act that took place here the day before yesterday. We cannot condemn it in strong enough terms. A leader, a Bishop of our Pakistani Christians was attacked; it cannot be condemned in strong enough terms. Every human life is precious, and all religions protect human life. And Islam, in particular, preaches to protect all human lives, but this person [the pastor who was killed] was their religious leader. If we study the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and see his life events, whenever my Prophet ﷺ sent a delegation or troops somewhere, He always gave them one piece of advice that when you go there, take good care of the places of worship and the religious leaders of non-Muslims. Now, we all are deeply ashamed because of this incident [the killing of a Christian priest] that happened in an Islamic country [Pakistan]. I pray to *Allah* that such incidents never happen again because, remember, Islam does not at all allow such incidents. In fact, no religion allows such incidents that involve taking someone's life. Therefore, those involved in such incidents should not be considered a member or a representative of any religion; [they] should not be considered representative of Islam or any other religion. Instead, they should be segregated and seen as criminals in their individual capacity. Remember, Islam provides protection to all human lives. Now, all those Christians who are here, or Pakistani people of any other non-Muslim religion, they are patriotic Pakistanis like we are. Whether it is the Pakistani army or other institutions, wherever you see them, our Pakistani Christians have made innumerable contributions. They have similar sentiments about sacrificing their lives for this homeland as we do. And remember, according to Islam and the constitution of Pakistan, the life of a non-Muslim living in Pakistan has the same value as that of a Muslim. Prophet ﷺ Muhammad has declared the same restitution of murder [*diyyat*; bloodwit, compensation paid to the

bereaved family by the offender] of a non-Muslim as that of a Muslim. Similarly, as I said earlier, people of all non-Muslim religions living in Pakistan, whether Christians or any other non-Muslim religion, are as patriotic as we are. The constitution of Pakistan also values them enormously and values their life as precious as that of a Muslim. So, people involved in such incidents [of killing non-Muslims] are not representatives of any religion. They are not representatives of Islam. Instead, they should be seen as criminals, in separation from any religious affiliation. They are the enemies of Islam and also of humanity. I would like to share with you only two *Hadiths* [sayings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ] Particularly, those who are listening to us here, and all of our Pakistanis, they should know this: that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that if any Muslim unjustly killed a non-Muslim in any Muslim state, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that on the Day of Judgement, I will be the attorney supporting that non-Muslim. . . Remember, human life has a great value. It is mandatory upon us to protect human lives. In this country, in Pakistan, a non-Muslim has similar rights as a Muslim has. And they [the non-Muslims] SHOULD HAVE THOSE RIGHTS. I would like to say to all you who are [and will] listen to my talk, this final point, Islam does not at all allow spreading hatred in the name of religion. Certainly, work is being done for interfaith harmony in Pakistan and there is need to do more in this regard.

Sir Bishop, on behalf of my *Sufi* shrine [khanqah], my immaculate *Shaykh*, myself, the respected chairman of the Islamic Ideology Council, Sir Qibla Ayyaz, who is here with us, and the delegation of Muslim religious scholars, and the entire nation, I offer my heartfelt condolences. May *Allah* have mercy, and we never witness such incidents in Pakistan again. Certainly, our government, our army, and our law enforcement agencies are all actively working day and night to stop such incidents from happening again.”⁸⁶

In another sermon delivered in the UK⁸⁷ in 2023, Qibla Sahab condemned the incident of attack on a church in Jaranwala, Pakistan. He did so not only in his capacity as the shrine superior of one of the largest shrines in Pakistan, but also as a member of Islamic Ideology of Pakistan. He explicitly prohibited people from jeopardizing law and

⁸⁶ Media Talk of Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman at the Incident of Murder of a Pastor in Peshawar, Pakistan
https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=4903362539727488&id=100050480649914&rdid=IFrVwe9KfY2fB4ZE

⁸⁷ Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman condemns attack on non-Muslim places of worship, particularly the attack on a church in Jaranwala, Pakistan. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtDVR3npns>

order even when they may think that their deeply held sensitivities were hurt and they needed to take direct action. Instead, they should consult with the law enforcement agencies. In 2017, when extremists attacked a church in Quetta, Pakistan, Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab publicly condemned this attack, demanded the government provide all possible protections to non-Muslims in Pakistan, preached to their audience at Eidgah Sharif's central Masjid regarding protecting non-Muslims and their rights, and circulated their public condemnation of this incident through their social media accounts as well (Figures 33).⁸⁸ The extract of his speech (given in the appendix 8) explicitly shows that any Muslim who willfully violates the rights of non-Muslims, will be confronted by their own Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ, on the day of Judgement. Muslims believe in the mediation of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They believe, they will not be permitted entry into heaven, if Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is unhappy with them. Now, knowing that if they violate the rights of a non-Muslim, they will earn the anger of their Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and hence lose their chance to enter heaven. This concept itself nullifies the extremists' false claims that killing non-Muslims could earn someone heaven.

It is of critical importance to remember that Muslim religious leaders in Pakistan who dared to publicly issue statements to stop people from taking law in their hands and violating rights of non-Muslims, were subjected to open criticism, harassment, and character assassination on social media. It is a well-documented fact that the religious leaders who stood up against these extremists were subjected to suicide bombing, shot

⁸⁸ A social media post that circulated on Facebook, WhatsApp and the other social media accounts of Shaykh Hassan Hasseb ur Rahman. A large number of followers further shared and forwarded this post. Many study participants report that they made it their WhatsApp status. Posts like this help spread a message and re-affirm a climate of protection that negates fear, hatred, confusion, and extremism. Please also see appendix 6 for a social media post condemning the London Bridge attack.

dead, or their mosques or shrines were blasted (BBC news, June 12, 2009; BBC news, May 08, 2019; Chughtai, 2017; Wikipedia, 2005). Keeping all of this in mind, issuing such explicit statements was an extra ordinary act of courage, commitment to the dignity of all human lives, and commitment to what the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif believe as “real Islam” and the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Interfaith Outreach

The following are examples of the interfaith outreach activities of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif:

Lectures, Symposium and Meetings

The following are some examples of their lectures, symposiums, and meetings held internationally. In 2014, the *Shayyukh* were featured in a “*Sufi* Symposium” at Luther Seminary, Minnesota, USA. The audience included students, faculty, and administration in the seminary as well as interfaith practitioners from Minnesota (Figure 35). They were also featured presenters at the “Mysticism and Modernity” event organized and hosted by the Religious Studies Department at Hamline University, MN, USA (Figure 36). Their presentations in these lectures and question and answer sessions with the audience questioned stereotypes about Islam and presented a case against Islamophobia in the West through their positive interactions with academicians, students, and the interfaith practitioners.

Anti-extremism, Anti-terrorism, Peace Conferences

Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab were invited to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby in July 2015, as well as in 2016 (Figure 37). Qibla Sahab also visited a church in Wakefield at the invitation of Bishop Rev. Tony Robinson, Bishop of Wakefield, July 28, 2018 (Figure 38). They also participated in the United Against Terrorism Conference organized by local Muslims on July 12, 2018, in Manchester, UK (Figure 39). Other participants included the Assistant Chief Constable of Greater Manchester and the head of the NW Counter Terrorism Unit, the Bishop of Salford and Leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop John Arnold, and the family members of victims of the Manchester Arena terrorist attack. In all of these meetings, the *Shayyukh* highlighted the importance of working together and developing mutual trust in order to defeat extremism and terrorism for a peaceful world.

Meetings with Non-Muslim Religious Leaders

The shrine superiors of Eidgah Sharif welcome non-Muslim religious leaders for various meetings and religious events at Eidgah Sharif. For example, on January 02, 2021, Catholic Bishop Revd. Humphrey Sarfaraz Peters, and many other religious leaders of several other faith traditions were present on Eidgah Sharif's stage (Figure 40), along with several other shrine superiors and other Muslim religious leaders. This act itself demonstrated to the tens of thousands of followers present in Eidgah Sharif grounds, as well as and hundreds of thousands watching online, that non-Muslims in Pakistan should not live in fear or hide their religious identity.

Similarly, the *Shayyukh* hosted H.E. Niel Johnston (Advisor to Archbishop of Canterbury & Project Director, FoRB Leadership Network) and H.E. Dr. Charles Reed (Advisor to Archbishop of Canterbury & Deputy Project Director) along with several Pakistani Christian religious leaders in Eidgah Sharif (Figure 41). The meeting took place in the same veranda [*Baramda Sharif*] where Pir Sahab meets with his *murids* several times a day. This public expression of respect and hospitality for non-Muslims is in line with the tradition of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who hosted the Christians of Najran in His mosque. When they asked for a place to pray, He ﷺ responded by saying that they could pray according to their religious tradition in His ﷺ mosque without any fear. Qibla Sahab also attended a special event for Christmas, 2022, that was held at “The President’s House”, Islamabad, presided over by the President of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi (Figure 42). These are some examples of how the *Shayyukh* role model for their followers the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The act also demonstrated that the 1450-year-old teachings of respect and peace are valid, current, and applicable in this contentious world. This also demonstrated to their followers how to make intentional efforts to build bridges to prevent misunderstanding, fear and hatred.

Meetings with International Diplomats

The study participants claim that the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif have a long history of meeting with international diplomats and other non-Muslims, but Pir Sahab started paying special attention to it in the last three decades. The history of international diplomats’ visiting Eidgah Sharif for decades, makes it easy for the incoming diplomats to foster connections their predecessors have made with Eidgah Sharif. Coming to Eidgah Sharif provides them a chance to meet with general public, and witness an average

Pakistani, and particularly, Muslim religious leadership firsthand. They have an opportunity to see the ways Muslims and non-Muslims are all welcome in a shrine, and the way free meals and charities are distributed without discrimination. They have an opportunity to feel the awe, the grandeur with humility, compassion, generosity, hospitality and serenity of a *Sufi* shrine with unmatched influence in Pakistan. Doing so may help reduce misunderstandings and perceived fear of Muslims, Islam, and Pakistan. Better understanding of each side should help develop world peace in the long run. American, British, Australian, Palestinian, Bosnian, Egyptian, Saudi, Turkish, European Union, and Uzbek diplomats are frequent visitors to Eidgah Sharif (Figures 43-51). The *Shayyukh* also return some of these visits.

Chapter XII

Conclusion

The following is a summary based on field notes, observations during more than 26 weeks, a review of a very large number of video recordings and in-person speeches, review of many social media accounts, and interviews of study participants. The *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif employed traditional *Naqshbandi* methods such as *Sohbat* [companionship] and *Rabta* [connection] for training and positively grooming their *murids* with compassion, empathy, and humility. The *Shayyukh* provide their *murids* opportunities to maintain *Sohbat* and *Rabta*. While present in the *Shayyukh*'s companionship [*Sohbat*], *murids* learn religion not just from the *Shayyukh*'s sermons and talks, but also they watch their *Shayyukh*'s everyday dealings and their interactions with their family, friends, *murids*, critics, and non-Muslims. This offers *murids* a practical demonstration or role model of how to perform (or apply) religion in domestic as well as public life, especially in non-Muslim countries. Some study participants report that witnessing the *Shayyukh* practice religion helped them apply it in their own lives. In Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab, they also saw role model authority; i.e., if someone asked them, why they do so, they would answer, "Because the *Shaykh* does so." If the *Shaykh* does so, it must be right, because they closely follow the *Quran* and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This role model authority helped *murids* most when they needed to stand up to family or societal pressure to make wrong decisions in the name of religion, such as not sending their daughters for higher education. The *Shayyukh* take *murids* away from shallow understanding of Islam towards an in-depth understanding and its application in their domestic, professional, and public lives. The *Shayyukh* helped *murids* distinguish

between their family traditions, village cultures, and Islamic principles and values. Consequently, their *murids* felt more resourceful, confident, and ready to find lawful and civic, yet creative, ways to protect and celebrate their religious identities, pass them to their future generations, and also support the British economy and nation building.

The *Shayyukh* encourage youth in particular, to engage in religious activities such as planning, promoting, and executing *mawlid*s; leading prayers; holding *dhikr* gatherings; and carrying out charitable and social welfare tasks. The study participants report that this provides them with opportunities to perform and celebrate their positive religious identities and earn for themselves positive social identities. Consequently, they feel connected, valued, welcomed, engaged, and appreciated, and they stay away from feeling lonely, depressed, marginalized and excluded or repressed. This ultimately prevents possible entrapments in things like extremism, drugs and crimes.

Analysis of collected data also reveals that the language used by the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif plays important roles with their *murids*. Examples include strengthening their relationship with their *murids*, successful transmission of the message, and formation and preservation of a positive religious identity of their *murids*. The *Shayyukh* treat everyone with dignity, irrespective of the person's socio-economic status, employment, age, religion, nationality or education. They address everyone using respectful, appropriate titles such as *Janab* [sir or madam], *Sahab* [sir] or *Sahiba* [Madam], or *beita* [my child]. *Murids* also follow the same practice with the *Shayyukh* and each other, which creates a climate of respect. The *Shayyukh* choose vocabulary and frame their sentences in ways that project hope, and positivity, and foster in their *murids* a positive sense of self now and in the future. In times when the world is assigning

negative identity labels to Muslims, the *Shayyukh* are calling them, my children, my garden, and my trees. These appellations foster in them a positive self-image of a person who (i) stands tall and stays firm with their roots deeply embedded in their religion; (ii) is useful to all of God's creation without discrimination; and (iii) responds to negativity with positivity like a tree that does not withhold its fruit, fragrance and shade from those who come to destroy it, but continues to benefit others until the end. This positive sense of self-concept helps them become confident of their positive religious identity in ways that they can preserve it and pass it on to their future generations. This gives them strength to stay on track towards their goals, and it prevents unfavorable circumstances from redirecting their course of action towards anger, negativity, frustration, depression, extremism, crimes or drugs. They become in charge of their own actions in ways that match their positive self-concept, their positive religious identity, and their connection with the sacred. A *murid* continuously reminds himself or herself, I am a lover of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who is the Mercy for all the worlds. Will my (re)action or inaction cause me to deviate from my Prophet's ﷺ path? Do my actions reflect that I follow the Prophet of Mercy ﷺ?

When I asked young male and female followers of the *Shayyukh* "Why do you stay around Pir Sahab all the time when he is much older than you? Why do you stick with Qibla Sahab at the cost of your precious time?" Their answer was love, kindness and sincerity. They also mentioned that the *Shayyukh* made every effort to come to their level and sincerely understand what their struggles and achievements meant for them. The *Shayyukh* cherish their success and help them navigate their problems. The trust is such that even when a follower has made a mistake, the first person they would reach out to is

their *Shaykh*. When I asked them the reason for doing so, they stated that it is because the *Shayyukh* will not use hurtful, disrespectful language; will not judge them; and will not reveal their secrets to others, but they will correct them. The *Shayyukh* will understand the human nature of making mistakes and hold their hands to help them out of this darkness and negativity.

It is apparent that the *Shayyukh* believe that the *murids* should see their new land (UK) as their homeland and pay forward to the British community for all the good that the country has offered to them. The *Shayyukh* taught their followers to do well in school, secure good employment, do charity work and dispel negative stereotypes in order to form positive identities as law-abiding citizens, and caring neighbors.

As part of the data analysis for this thesis, I have personally listened to and watched more than a thousand speeches (video and in-person speeches) by Eidgah Sharif's leadership (Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab) delivered during the last three decades. I have also made a thorough search of all of Eidgah Sharif's social media accounts that have open access to the public. Every speech that I listened to contains at least one distinct segment that focuses on preaching about respecting the law of the land, and promoting peace, peaceful co-existence, rights of non-Muslims in Pakistan, constitutional rights of non-Muslims in Pakistan, human rights, women's rights, and denouncing extremism, forced marriages, drugs, crimes and abuse of law. Their roles as moral, ethical, and religious leaders may require them to be present at places where natural, political or terroristic events have occurred in order to calm the public and give the message of the Prophet ﷺ. The few negative press reports I have seen are completely inconsistent with everything I have seen and heard about the *Shayyukh*. My

understanding is that the negative press they have received is because the media has hastened to publish a one-sided, intriguing story without doing the due diligence of fact checking and researching the *Shayyukh* and the history of this shrine, without interviewing the *Shayyukh* or any of their associates, and without listening to the *Shayyukh*'s narrative. Lack of due diligence by the media is not new, and it is particularly problematic when there has been no urgency to publish under time pressure. Many world leaders and religious leaders of prestige and their many followers have been caught in the fallout from such careless, yellow journalism. Media has the ability to create public perceptions, and in the past, media used this ability responsibly to play vital roles in society. My request to media now would be as Islam says, "O you who believe! When a *fasiq* [known transgressor] brings news to you, verify it, lest you should offend a people unknowingly, then you become regretful for what you have done" (*The Quran*, n.d., 49:6). By following this direction, we can spread positivity. No one else can spread positivity more effectively than the media can. Due diligence to this duty will provide a significant service to humanity and world peace in times to come.

Glossary of Foreign Terms

The following are foreign language terms used frequently in the text along with their meanings and a brief description of their context within the thesis document.

Allah – God

Al Madina tul Munawwara – The Prophet’s City, in Saudi Arabia. It is one of the two holiest cities in Islam.

As’hab us Sufa — The Blessed Companions who wanted to learn directly from the blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They devoted their lives for this purpose, while living in the blessed Prophet’s ﷺ mosque in a loft called a *sufa*. They were called the people of the loft, which is still present in *Masjid an Nabwi Sharif* in the Prophet’s City, *Al Madina tul Munnawara*. *As’hab us Sufa* are considered the first-generation people of *Tassawwuf*.

Awlia Allah – The plural of *wali* or *Wali Ullah*. It refers to Muslim saints living or resting in their graves. This is a Quranic phrase that translates literally as Friend(s) of Allah. For example, “*Ala inna awlia Allahi la khawfun AAalayhim wala hum yahzanoon*” [Pay heed! indeed upon the Friends of Allah is neither fear nor any grief.] (*The Quran*, n.d., 10:62).

Barhveen Paak – An Urdu phrase that literally means the Blessed Twelve. The Blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came to this world on the 12th day of *Rabee ul Awwal* (the third month of Islamic lunar calendar). Most devout Muslims celebrate the 12th of each month in Islamic lunar calendar. *Eidgah Sharif* shrine holds a *Mawlid* gathering on the 12th day of each month in the Islamic calendar, and that gathering is also called *Barhveen Paak*.

Baramda – Veranda. In this thesis *Baramda Sharif* [the sacred veranda] is a place in the *Eidgah Sharif* complex where the *Shayyukh* meet with people several times a day without an appointment in an open house style. Religious services, including congregational prayers, are led in the Western end of the veranda *Sharif*. Free food [*langar sharif*] is served several times a day.

Batin — The interior, the inner self. In *Tassawwuf*, the focus is on adorning the inner self of a person as compared to the outer appearance.

Bay'at - Oath of allegiance. In order to formally join a Sufi order, to be initiated in it, the seeker takes *Bay'at* with the *Shaykh* of a particular order. Quranic evidence for the validity of *Bay'at* and an English Translation of the script of *Bay'at* at the *Eidgah Sharif* is included in Chapter 4.

Chishtiyya - A Sufi religious order named after the Muslim Sufi saint Shaykh Mo'in ud din Chishti (also known as Khwaja Ghareeb Nawaz) in Ajmer, India.

Darood Sharif or *Darood Paak* – A salutation to Blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Daura – Literally means tour. In this thesis, it refers to a spiritual tour of the *Shayyukh* of *Eidgah Sharif* to meet with their *murids* [followers].

Dhikr – means remembrance of *Allah* and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. *Dhikr* can be done silently (*Dhikr e Qalbi* or *Dhikr* in the heart), or it can be done out loud (*Dhikr Lisani* or *Dhikr bil Jahr*). However the most preferred level of *dhikr* is that when a person is attentive towards *Allah* at all the time in such a way that his body parts refuse to disobey *Allah* (*Dhikr bil Jawareh*).

Dhakir - The person who does *dhikr*.

Dua – Supplication. In this thesis it also refers to a practice of the *Shayyukh* of *Eidgah Sharif* in which they visit the houses of the followers to supplicate for them and to bless them.

Deen or *Din* – Religion

Eidgah Sharif – A section of the city of Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and the colloquial name used for the shrine complex of *Naqshbandiyya Muhammadiyah Mujaddadiyya Sufi* Order.

Hadith – A saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Hazrat – An honorific used to refer to someone who is entitled to great respect. The English word “Sir” does not fully encompass meanings of *Hazrat*.

Hikma – A Quranic word meaning wisdom (*The Quran*, n.d., 2:129).

Imam – Muslim religious leader. It is also used for a Muslim person who leads congregational prayers.

Ism Ullah - A name of *Allah*. There are at least 99 names of *Allah*. Each of these names refers to an attribute or characteristic of *Allah*.

Karamat - Miracles performed by a Saint, whereas *Maujaza* is a miracle performed by *Allah* or His Prophet.

Kareem – Merciful. This is an attribute of *Allah*, that is one of His 99 names. This is also an attribute of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. *Allah Kareem* [Merciful *Allah*]; *Rasool e Kareem* ﷺ [The Merciful Prophet ﷺ]. *Quran* is also referred to as *Quran Kareem*.

Kitab – Literally means a book. *Quran* refers to itself as “*Kitab*,” In this thesis, *Kitab* refers to the *Quran* (*The Quran*, n.d., 2:129).

Khanqah – A place where a Sufi *Shaykh* resides. This is a place of *tarbia'* [education, training and positive grooming], spiritual purification and character development. The seekers are transformed so that they become better human beings who respect the rights of *Allah* and all of His creation.

Khanqahi – Associated with a *khanqah*

Kuffar – Disbelief

Langar sharif - A sacred blessed meal

Ma'rifat e Ilahi (also *Ma'rifa*, *Ma'arifat* and *Aa'rif*) - The secret knowledge of *Allah* and the closeness to *Allah* that cannot be attained through books alone. It can be attained through *Mushahida* [to witness, to observe] and is bestowed upon only those that *Allah* wills it to. An *Aa'rif* is, therefore, a person that understands these secrets. Sufis search for *Ma'arifat* and once they attain it, they become *Aa'rif*. I have observed that the Islamic terms *Ma'rifa* (*Ma'arifat*), and *Aa'rif* are most frequently translated into English as gnosis, gnostic, or Gnosticism. These translations do not match with the Islamic concept of *Ma'rifa*, *Ma'arifat*, and *Aa'rif*, and therefore this thesis does not use the terms gnosis, gnostic and Gnosticism for *Ma'rifa* (*Ma'arifat*), and *Aa'rif* in the context of Islamic *Tassawwuf*.

Makkah, also spelled *Mecca* – one of the two holiest cities for Muslims. Makkah is important because Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born there; later He ﷺ migrated to the sacred city of Madina. Makkah has the Holy Ka'aba and the Plains of Arafat, where Muslims perform pilgrimage. The famous Zamzam spring is also in this city in the vicinity of Holy Ka'aba.

Mawlid – also known as *Milad or Eid Milad un Nabi* ﷺ or *Mawlid an Nabi* ﷺ, refers to the birth of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Muslims celebrate it in various ways, mostly through hosting religious gatherings in which Holy *Quran* and the accolades of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are recited and lectures are delivered.

Mehfil – literally means, gathering. Here it refers to religious gatherings most often called *Mawlid* or *Dhikr Mehfil*.

Milad – See *Mawlid*.

Murid – Follower of a Sufi *Shaykh*

Masjid – Mosque

Naat – Accolade of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ traditionally recited *a capella*.

Nafs – The self; a major part of *Tassawwuf* is knowing and purifying one's own self.

Naqshbandi – Associated with *Naqshband*

Naqshbandiyya - A Sufi religious order. Its real name is *Siddiqiyya*, because the order connects with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through Sayyadina Abu Bakar as Siddique, the first Muslim caliph.

Naqshbandiyya Muhammadiyya Mujaddadiyya – The official name of the Sufi order and the chain of *Eidgah Sharif*, the shrine studied in the research for this thesis.

Nikah - Marriage according to Islamic law

Nur – Light, one of the attributes of God in Islam

Nasheed – Originally *nasheed* meant only the accolade of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Arabic language. Most recently, the scope of *nasheed* has expanded to any Muslim religious poetry recital, in Arabic, English or many other languages in the world.

Paak – Pristine, pure, sacred

Pir – The guide. A Sufi *Shaykh*, or Sufi religious leader is called a *Pir*.

Qaal and *Haal* – In *Tassawwuf* these terms often co-occur. *Qaal* is an Arabic word that means speech. *Haal* is a spiritual state that motivates a seeker to take action.

Qadriyya – A Sufi religious order initiated by the grand Shaykh Abdul Qadir Al Jilani.

Qibla – This word has several meanings. It may mean orientation. In particular, it refers to the direction that Muslims face to offer prayers, which is the direction of *Kaaba* in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. *Qibla* is also used as an honorific to address a very respected person.

Quran – The Holy book of Islam revealed by *Allah* to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Rabta - Connection(s) or rootedness. In *Tassawwuf*, especially in the *Naqshbandiyya* Sufi order, *Rabta* refers to the connection with the *Shaykh*, the shrine and other members of the shrine community. The stronger the connection with the *Shaykh*, the better is the connection with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and ultimately with Allah.

Roza Paak or *Rawda* - Mausoleum of a sacred person in Islam. In this thesis, it refers to the mausoleum holding the first three generations of the *Shayyukh* of Eidgah Sharif.

Salik – A seeker, a wayfarer

Sahabi - A Blessed Companion. They are the people who saw and met with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. They are considered to be the first generation of Muslims.

Safa — To cleanse or purify

Sahab – Used to refer to someone who is respected.

Sayyadina – An Arabic word that literally means “my master”. This is used to refer to a sacred personage in Islam, such as the Blessed Companions, and to the Blessed lineage of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Sharia, also known as *Sharia Muttahara* [the pristine *Sharia*]; *Shariat e Muhammadi* [the *Sharia* of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ] - Islamic law established by the Holy *Quran* and Hadiths.

Shajrah – A spiritual ancestry, or spiritual lineage (also known as the Golden Chain) of Sufi saints linking a follower to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Sharif – Holy

Shaykh – A Muslim religious leader.

Shayyukh – Plural of *Shaykh*

Suhrawardiyya - A Sufi religious order

Sohbat - Companionship with the *Shaykh*. These are the characteristics of *Naqshbandi Sufi* orders. The purpose of being in the *Shaykh*'s *Sohbat* is for *murids* to not only get blessings from the *Shaykh*, but also to listen to and closely observe the *Shaykh*. For *Naqshbandi* Sufis, the *Shaykh* is the role model to be followed, because the *Shaykh* closely follows and emulates Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Sufi – A person who seeks to purify his or her inner self in such a way to become a better human being in all walks of life and be attentive to one's duties towards *Allah* and all of His creation.

Sufiya - *Sufis*, plural of *Sufi*

Sunnah – Actions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Taba Taba'een - literally means the follower of the *Taba'een*. They are the Muslims who neither met with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ nor with His Blessed Companions, but they met with one or more of the *Taba'een*.

Taba'een - Literally the one who follows. The title refers to the second generation of Muslims who did not see Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, but they met with one or more *Sahabi(s)* [Blessed Companion(s)].

Tariq – Literally a path.

Tariq e Muhammadi ﷺ - The path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Tariqa Rasooli - The path of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Tariqa or *Tariqat* - The Sufi path.

Tassawwuf - The Sufi process of *Tazkiya*, or purification of the self. For the Quranic evidence of meaning and purpose of *Tassawwuf* please see Chapter 3.

Tazkiya – Cleansing and purifying the inner self. The root word comes from the Quranic phrase *yuzzakihim* [He cleanses them] (*The Quran*, n.d., 2:129).

Taraweeh - Ramadan-specific night prayers

Tawajjuh - Attention. In *Tassawwuf*, this means the *Shaykh* paying attention to the *murid*, and also that the *murid* should be attentive to their *Shaykh* at all the times.

Urs or *shadi*, or *wisal* - A celebration of having reached, or revisiting. It is usually held on the day a sacred person passed away to celebrate returning to *Allah* after successfully living a life of following His commands in every matter of life as Quran requires, "Oh

you the satisfied soul, return to your Lord such that you are pleased with Him and He is pleased with You” (*The Quran*, n.d., 89:27-28).

Wali Ullah – Literally a friend of *Allah*, or a living saint.

Zahir - The exterior, the appearance. Attention only to appearance is discouraged in *Tassawwuf*.

Appendix 1: *Tassawwuf*

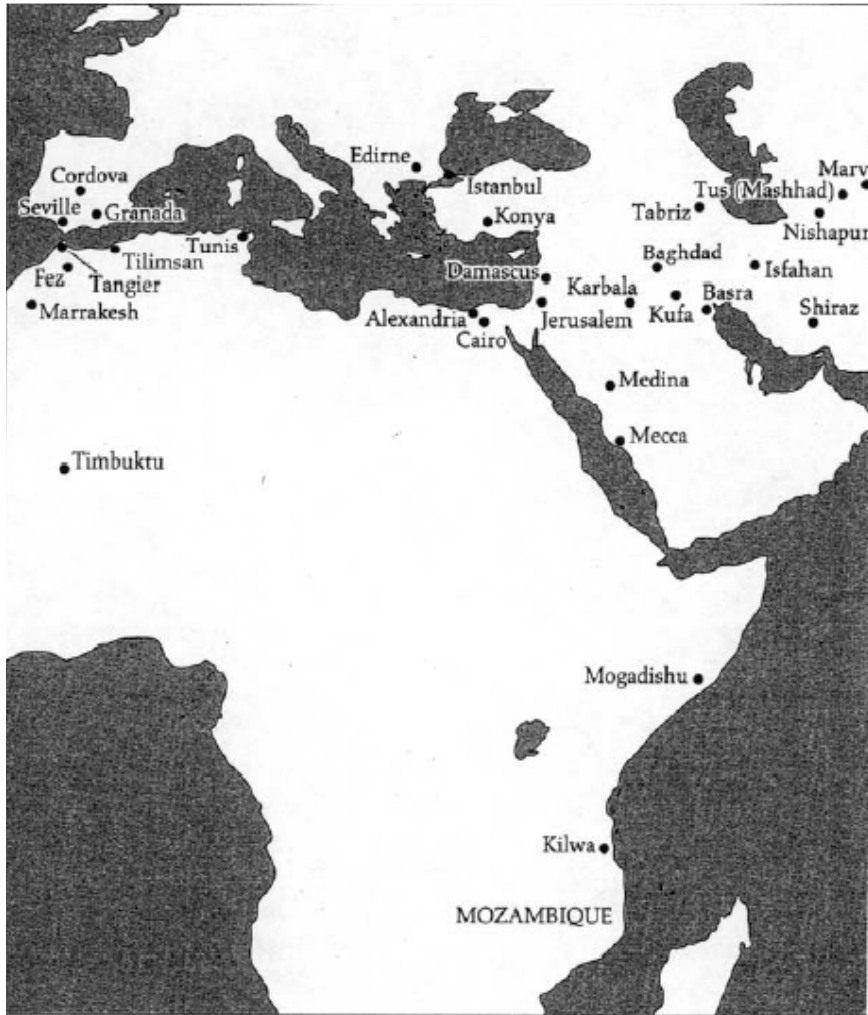


Figure 3 *Sufi Shrine Sites: Western Region*

Note. This map presents a visual description of the locations of Sufi shrines in the central, western and southern areas of expansion. In some cases, the shrines are still in existence and in other cases the shrines have been destroyed, including some in the sacred cities of Medina tul Munawwara and Mecca. Source: Historical Dictionary of Sufism (Renards, 2005).

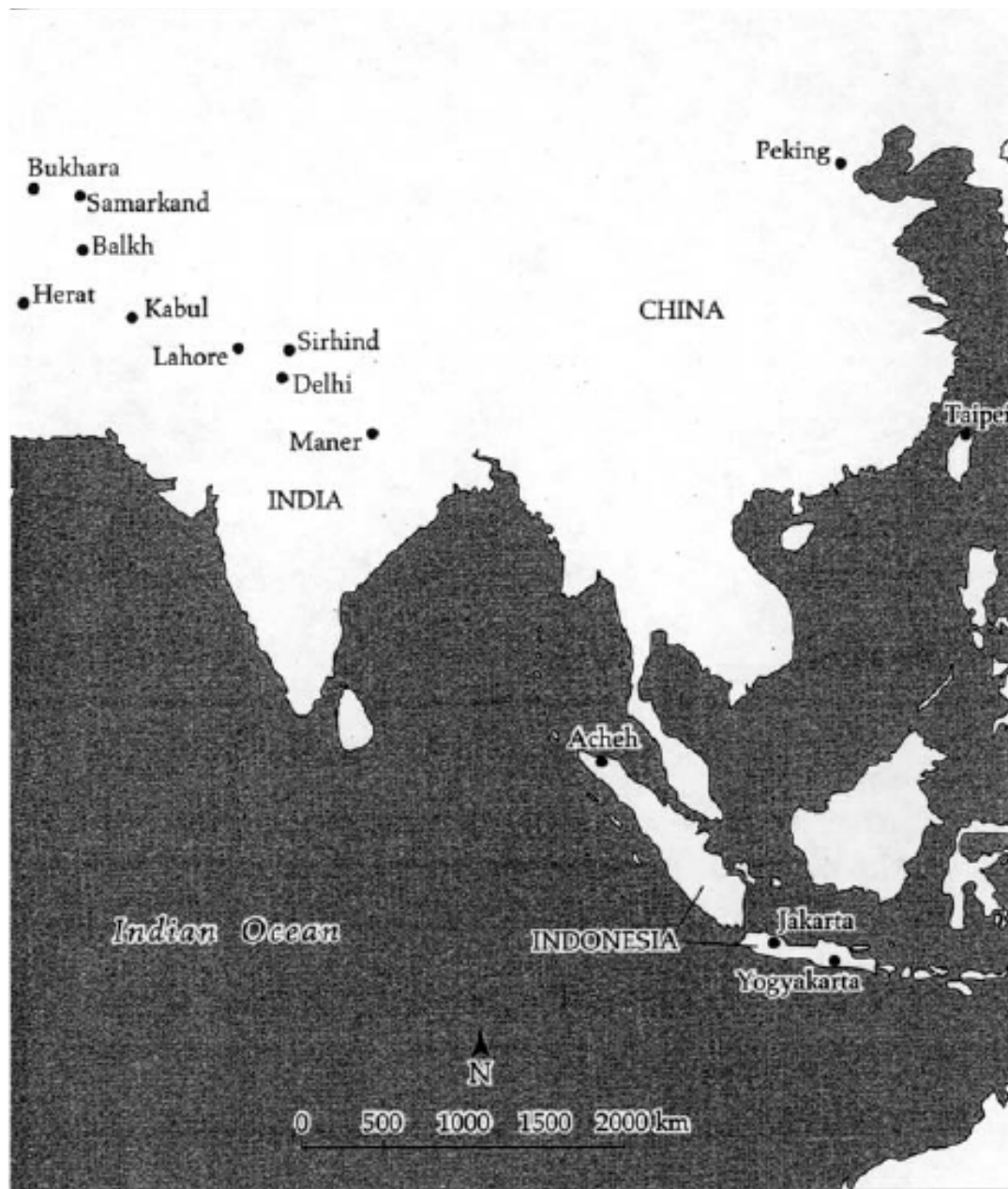


Figure 4 *Sufi Shrine Sites: Asia*

Note. This map presents a visual description of the locations of Sufi shrines in Asian areas of expansion. In some cases, the shrines are still in existence and in other cases the shrines have been destroyed. The early spread of Islam to many sites in Asia, such as Borneo, Philippines and coastal China, is poorly understood. Source: Historical Dictionary of Sufism (Renards, 2005).



Appendix 2: Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi: A *Sufi Sunni* Shrine



Figure 7 Exterior View of *Roza Paak* at Eidgah Sharif

Note. The photo shows the exterior of the Roza Paak (the mausoleum) of the first three Sufi saints of Eidgah Sharif. Source: IT and Communications Department, Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, June 07, 2017.



Figure 8 Interior View of Roza Paak at Eidgah Sharif

Note. A photograph of an interior view of Roza Paak showing the resting places of three ancestral Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif. The first one on the right side is Shaykh Abdur Rahman (Sani Paak), second from the right is the grand Shaykh Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem (Bawaji Sahab), and the left most is Khwaja Habeeb ur Rahman (Lasani Paak).

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158105024712333&set=pb.746572332.-2207520000&type=3>.



Figure 9 The Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif

Note. Five generations of leadership of Eidgah Sharif and the next generation in training. From right to left: Grand Shaykh Khwaja Hafiz Abdul Kareem (Bawaji Sahab), Shaykh Abdur Rahman (Sani Paak), Shaykh Khwaja Habeeb ur Rahman (Lasani Paak), Shaykh Muhammad Naqib ur Rahman (Pir Sahab), Muhammad Sobaan Naqib ur Rahman (Prince Sobaan, son of Qibla Sahab) and Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman (Qibla Sahab). Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkjJotRRx/?hl=en>.



Figure 10 Initiation into the *Tariqa* through the Oath of Allegiance (*Bay'at*)

Note. Pir Sahab is taking Bay'at from people, i.e. initiating them into his Sufi Order. The Shaykh holds one end of a clean sheet of fabric while the followers hold the other end. While holding this sheet, Pir Sahab reads the script of Bay'at from his memory while the seekers repeat it after him. Often the number of people wanting to do Bay'at is much larger than can easily hold the fabric. In that case, the Shayyukh ask the people in front to hold the fabric, and the people behind to put their hand on shoulder of the man in front of them in a chain. Women do it separately in the same way. Nowadays, when there are very large gatherings, the Shayyukh ask people doing Bay'at to just stand and repeat the script that the Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif read on the public address system. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BP95MbdhOMT/>.



Figure 11 *Mawlid* Gathering at Eidgah Sharif

Note. An audience in Eidgah Sharif grounds is raising hands in response to an accolade of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in prose or poetry. The photograph shows a moment of unity between the Shayyukh and the crowd where everyone seems to be in a state of spiritual ecstasy raising their hands together in an expression of love and close connection with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkidOXNRC4/>.



Figure 12 Ecstatic Audience Response at a *Mawlid* at Eidgah Sharif.

Note. Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab are leading a mawlid before a crowd of tens of thousands of people. The photograph shows a moment of unity between the Shayyukh and the crowd where everyone seems to be in a state of spiritual ecstasy raising their hands together in an expression of love and close connection with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkiauuTGPY/>.



Figure 13 Qibla Sahab Delivering a Keynote Speech at Ghamkol Sharif Shrine

Note. Qibla Sahab addressing a Milad Paak gathering as the keynote speaker at Ghamkol Sharif, Pakistan. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkiWx9t990/>.



Figure 14 Qibla Sahab Speaking at New Bingley Hall, Birmingham, UK

Note. Qibla Sahab is addressing their followers and the general public in New Bingley Hall, Birmingham, UK. Source: Photo shared by Muhammad Sufian, with permission.



Figure 15 Institutes of Higher Education in Religion Housed at Eidgah Sharif

Qibla Sahab is addressing both male and female students of Eidgah Sharif religious education institutes. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy7zUCoqgsb/?img_index=1.



Figure 16 Charity at Eidgah Sharif

Note. The photo shows some of the several million hot meals distributed in Eidgah Sharif each year. Hundreds of people come every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner in the huge courtyard in front of Baramda Sharif [the sacred veranda]. No signup is required, and no one asks for an ID card or religious affiliation. Many people come just to receive food and leave as soon as they receive food. Source: Screenshot from <https://www.instagram.com/p/C9cOrXBtwzy/>.



Figure 17 Qibla Sahab Distributing Flood Relief in 2022

Note. Qibla Sahab distributing flood relief materials among victims of devastating flooding in Pakistan in 2022. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkiSz2NAhh/>.

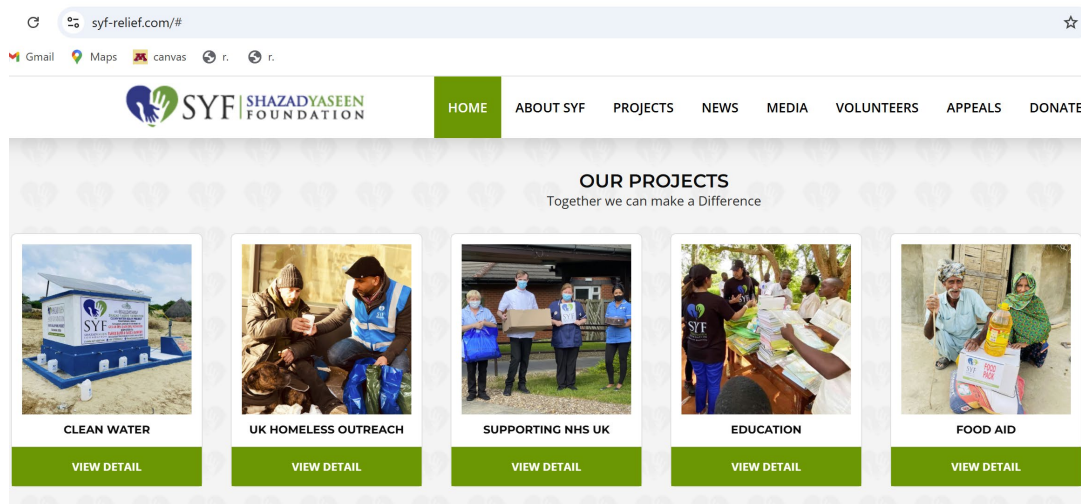


Figure 18 Eidgah Sharif Followers Do Charitable Work Around the World

Note. The Shazad Yaseen Foundation is one of several charitable organizations that are inspired by, but unaffiliated with Eidgah Sharif. Source: A screenshot of the Shazad Yaseen Foundation web page at <https://www.syf-relief.com/#>.

Appendix 3: *Sohbat* [Companionship] and *Rabta* [Connection].



Figure 19 Followers in *Sohbat* [Companionship] with Qibla Sahab

Note. Qibla Sahab is meeting with the late Mufti Salman Rizvi Esquire outside Eidgah Sharif Masjid. In the background are several young followers of Eidgah Sharif and Qibla Ayyaz Sahab, the Chairperson of the Islamic Ideology Council, Pakistan. Qibla Sahab is often found surrounded by young murids who would like to stay in his Sohbat. All the young men in the background are very attentive towards Qibla Sahab and Mufti Sahab. This is exactly how the phenomenon of Sohbat works. The murids stay in the company of the Shayyukh, who they believe are their role models, watch them closely and try to imitate them and finally acquire the Shayyukh's demeanor. Source: www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1129165778776100&set=a.279822170377136&_rdc=1&_rdr#.



Figure 20 *Rabta* [Connection] Between Pir Sahab and a *Murid* [Follower]

Note. Pir Sahab is with the late Captain Sahab, one of his senior deputies (Khulafa, plural of khalifa) at Eidgah Sharif. Once the Shaykh holds a murid's hand, both try their best to maintain and strengthen this connection. The older and the stronger the connection, the more precious it becomes. Source:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CcPjlG1qLRK/>.



Figure 21 *Rabta* [Connection] Between Pir Sahab and a UK Follower

Note. This murid has travelled all the way from the UK to Eidgah Sharif to celebrate his birthday with the Shaykh. This is a common scene at Eidgah Sharif; followers from around the world come to celebrate their happinesses, achievements, as well as challenges and grief with the Shayyukh. Followers travel to Eidgah Sharif to build Sohbat [companionship], deepen Rabta [connection], iktasab e faiz [seek blessings], and get tawajjuh [attention of the Shaykh]. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158101500612333&set=pb.746572332.-2207520000&type=3>.



Figure 22 Youth in *Sohbat* with Qibla Sahab while Hiking in the UK

Note. Young murids in the UK are hiking in the mountains of Scotland in the Sohbat of their Shaykh, Qibla Sahab. The concept of Naqshbandi Sohbat transcends formal lecture sessions and sit-down religious service, although both are extremely valuable as well. Meeting with the murids where they are intellectually, physically and emotionally and engaging them in non-traditional settings strengthens Rabta [bond, connection]. Study participants have reported that it is during such non-traditional Sohbat sessions that they learn the most about the application of religion in everyday life. Such sessions allow more space and time for the murids to ask deeper questions that they think are the most relevant for their lives. Source: Screenshot from <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGqW2GpqRPa/>.



Figure 23 Pir Sahab Breaking Fast [*Iftar*] with Followers [*Murids*]

Note. The photograph shows an example of relationship and connection building between Pir Sahab and some of his murids. At the end of a Barhveen Paak mawlid (Eidgah Sharif holds one on the 12th day of each lunar month), Pir Sahab is breaking fast (doing Iftar) with murids at Eidgah Sharif because this one occurred during the month of Ramadan.

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153747502932333&set=pb.746572332.-2207520000&type=3>.



Figure 24 Followers with Qibla Sahab in the City of the Prophet ﷺ

Note. The murids are enjoying the spiritual inspiration and blessings with Qibla Sahab by gazing at the blessed Green Dome at the Mosque of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the sacred city of Al Madinah tul Munawara, Saudi Arabia. For Sufi Shayyukh, gazing at the blessed Green Dome is a source of spiritual joy and blessings. The purpose of establishing Sohbat and deepening connections is to prepare and train the seekers to follow the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with commitment. I was told that many young murids from around the world join Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab whenever they visit the city of the Beloved Prophet ﷺ or the sacred city of Makkah. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Ccze5WPKwrS/?img_index=1



Figure 25 Connections on Social Media: Conference at Eidgah Sharif

Note. This is a screenshot of a formal mawlid gathering held at Eidgah Sharif and aired live on national and international television channels (in Pakistan as ARY QTV; in the UK as QTV on Sky Channel 761; in the US as DISH Network Channel 689), as well as being recorded and archived on the Facebook and YouTube channels of Eidgah Sharif, where it was then made available to the public. In this case there were 389,700 views in the first year. Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/100050480649914/videos/884504243366422>.



LIVE from Governor House Sindh

2 years ago · 166.6K views

Figure 26 Live Broadcast of *Mawlid* from Governor House Sindh

Note. Qibla Sahab is shown addressing the audience in a screenshot from a live broadcast of a mawlid gathering held at the official residence of the Governor of Sindh Province, Pakistan. Source:

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=957849095215598.



Shaykh Muhammad Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman's Video

8 weeks ago · 664.2K views

 36K

Figure 27 Connections on Social Media: Lecture on ARY QTV

Note. Qibla Sahab is shown in a screenshot from a recorded lecture, which was part of a series produced for airing on the Muslim religious channel in Pakistan, ARY QTV (QTV on Sky Channel 761 in the UK; DISH Network Channel 689 in the US). The recording was also archived on the Facebook and YouTube channels of Eidgah Sharif, where it was made available for public viewing. In this case there were 664,200 views in the first eight weeks. Several young murids have reported that they first listened to the Shayyukh's sermons online and then came to meet with and maintain Sohbat with the Shaykh at Eidgah Sharif. Some reported that they felt so convinced listening to the lectures that their lives were transformed and they also connected their parents with the Shayyukh. Source: Screenshot from <https://www.facebook.com/reel/2304770046562736>.



Uk and Europe's Mainstream Media News Chanel ITV Special Message of Shaykh Hassan Haseeb ur Rahman.

Figure 28 Connections on Social Media: *itv* News Spot

Note. Source: Qibla Sahab is shown giving expert commentary on efforts against terrorism on itv News (ITV Broadcasting Television Network, London, UK, Channel 3). The Shayyukh frequently make featured appearances or receive news coverage in international media. UK Source: Screenshot from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE93TFabb1Y>.

The following are more examples of their featured appearances or news coverage in international media:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84mvKn1zVPo;>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g47p5NOWREw;>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9m76KUigBU;>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5bB78gCcJM;>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE93TFabb1Y>; [https://wntv.co.uk/interview-pir-](https://wntv.co.uk/interview-pir-hassan-haseeb-u-rehman-in-uk/)

[hassan-haseeb-u-rehman-in-uk/](https://wntv.co.uk/interview-pir-hassan-haseeb-u-rehman-in-uk/); and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKR8p6EkHg>

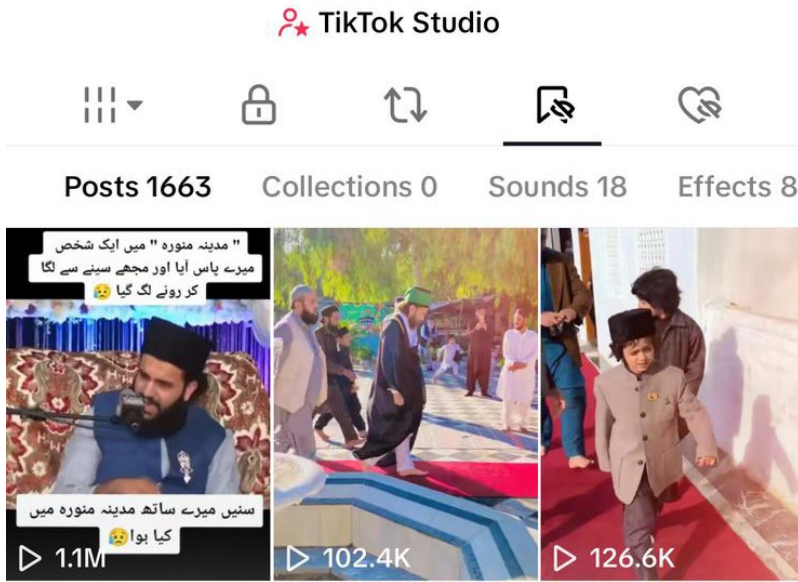
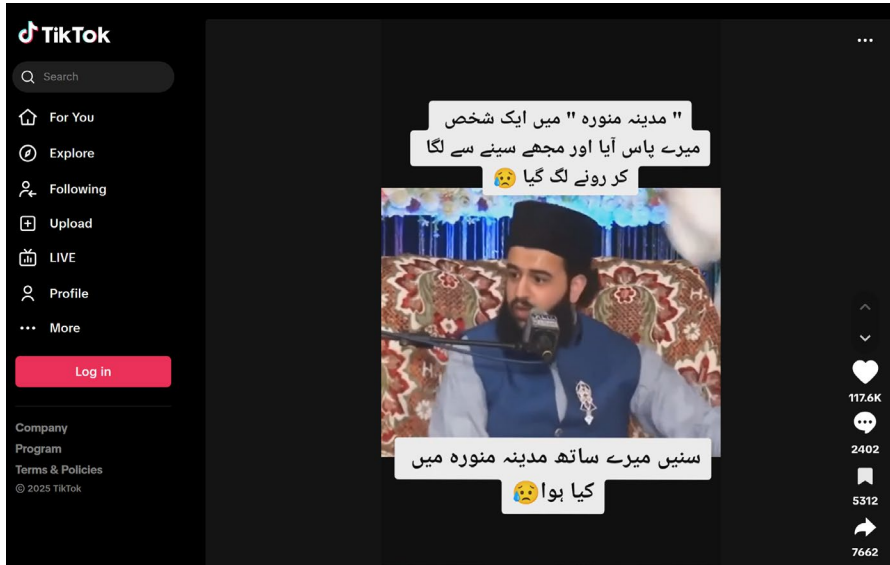


Figure 29 Connections on Social Media: TikTok Presence

Note. Recordings of live events are made available as reels, YouTube shorts, and TikTok videos such as the one shown in this screenshot from a video on TikTok. Several have received more than a million views. Source:

https://www.tiktok.com/@osamamuhammadiofficial/video/7182850211641937179?_r=1&t=ZN-8xEE7dcHdW2.

Appendix 4: Transnational Activities of Eidgah Sharif.



Figure 30 Religious Expression by Youth in the UK

Note. Murids are shown working together to build a stage for a mawlid gathering on the occasion of a memorial to be held for Lasani Paak (Pir Sahab's father) in UK in 2018. Such tasks allow murids a positive opportunity to perform and celebrate their religious identities, feel included and not marginalized. Murids reported that they feel privileged to participate in such activities, and they celebrate them on social media. Source:

https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155800771447333&set=a.10150257771647333&type=3&rdid=bgYr8jJJbkxyy20a&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2F1CKT4K31nt%2F#



Figure 31 “Islam Means Peace” Poster

Note. A poster promoting a presentation by Qibla Sahab explains that peace is not just one of the meanings of Islam, it is also an obligation on all Muslims that they harm no one. This poster was circulated on Facebook, several participants made it their WhatsApp status as well. Such explicit messages from the Shayyukh of mass influence help save minds of young people from being trapped into extremist propaganda. Source: https://www.facebook.com/ShaykhHassanHaseeburRehman/photos/a.573044389419443/3355491027841418/?type=3&mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=CVKMYNR68fxzavPv&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2F1HZ2C2yfnD%2F%3Fmibextid%3DwwXIfr.

Appendix 6: Interfaith Activities of Eidgah Sharif



Figure 32 Poster Condemning the London Bridge Attack

Note. A poster placed on and disseminated from Qibla Sahab's Facebook page contains a statement denouncing the London Bridge attack in June 2017. Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkiPrgrtr-b/>.



Figure 33 Poster Condemning the Quetta Church Attack

Note. Statement posted on and disseminated from Qibla Sahab's Facebook page in December, 2017, condemning a terrorist attack on a church in Quetta, Pakistan. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc5qC_agUkA/.



Figure 34 Press Conference Condemning the Murder of a Priest in Peshawar

Note. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab led a delegation to St. John's Cathedral in Peshawar, Pakistan, to meet with the Bishop and condemn the brutal killing of a priest in January 2022. In his address Qibla Sahab proved that killing or hurting innocents including non-Muslims cause anger of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and are a way to hell. Source: Screenshot from https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=4903362539727488.



Figure 35 Interfaith: Pir Sahab Lecturing at a US University

Note. Pir Sahab is shown addressing the audience at a Symposium, while Qibla Sahab is sitting in front of the audience at Luther Seminary on December 10, 2014. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=758489530907600&set=pb.100002396810934.-2207520000>.



Figure 36 Pir Sahab Speaking at an Interfaith Conference in a US University

Note. Pir Sahab is shown addressing a “Mysticism and Modernity” event organized and hosted by the Religious Studies Department at Hamline University, MN, USA. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=758909994198887&set=pb.100002396810934.-2207520000>.



Figure 37 Interfaith: Meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury

Note. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab met with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, in July, 2015. Source:
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=967512933305918&set=pcb.967513253305886>



Figure 38 Interfaith Meeting with Church Members in Wakefield, UK

Note. Qibla Sahab visited a church in Wakefield at the invitation of the Bishop of Wakefield, Rev. Tony Robinson, in July, 2018. Source:
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1945039665553235&set=pcb.1945040262219842>.



Figure 39 United Against Terrorism Conference in Manchester, UK

Note. Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab attended the United Against Terrorism Conference in Manchester, UK, on July 12, 2018, where they meet with the Assistant Chief Constable of Greater Manchester and two Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. Source: <http://www.ramadhanfoundation.co.uk/conference-2018.php>.

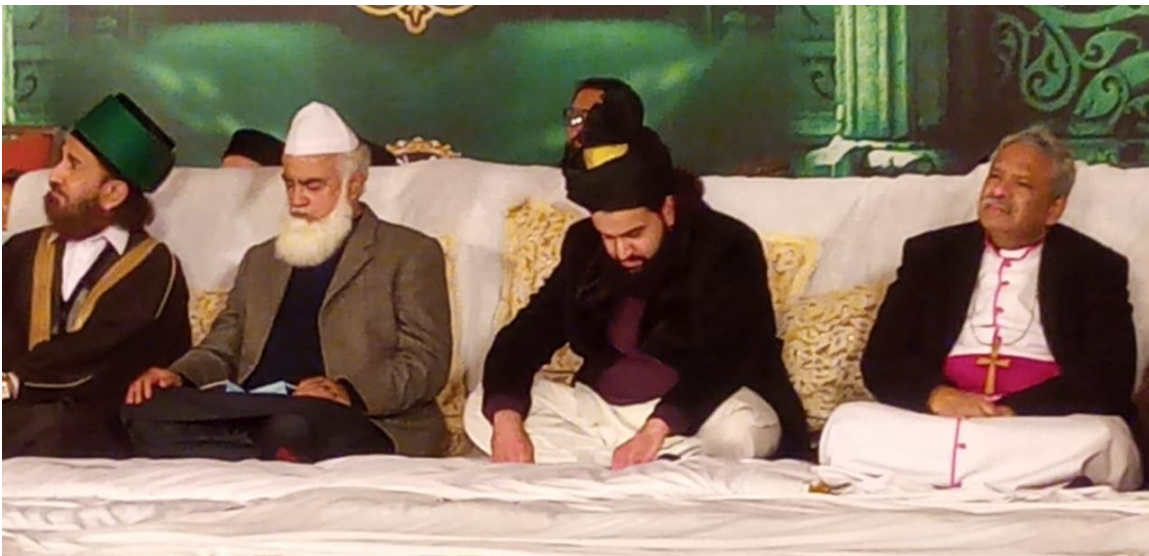


Figure 40 Interfaith in Practice at Eidgah Sharif

Note. The Rt. Revd. Humphrey Sarfaraz Peters in his Christian regalia joined Pir Sahab, Qibla Sahab and other dignitaries sitting on the stage at Eidgah Sharif during Urs Paak on Jan 02, 2021. Also on the stage were Hindu, Jain and other Christian religious

leaders. Source: Screenshot from Facebook video of Urs Paak January 02, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=396266481648304.



Figure 41 Interfaith Meeting on Baranda Sharif in Eidgah Sharif

Note. Pir Sahab sat on Baranda Sharif next to H.E Bishop Humphrey Peters (Primate in the Church of Pakistan & Bishop of Peshawar) while Qibla Sahab addressed the audience. Also present were H.E Niell Johnston (Advisor to Archbishop of Canterbury & Project Director ForB Leadership Network) and H.E. Dr. Charles Reed (Advisor to Archbishop of Canterbury & Deputy Project Director), who visited Eidgah Sharif on February 23, 2020. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2941332069257318&set=pcb.2941333509257174>.



Figure 42 Interfaith Christmas Gathering at the President's House, Islamabad

Note. A Pakistan Television Network news screenshot shows Qibla Sahab sitting next to Rev. Bishop Humphrey Sarfaraz at an interfaith Christmas 2022 gathering held at "The President's House", Islamabad, presided over by the President of Pakistan, H.E.

Honorable Janab Dr. Arif Alvi Sahib. Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3785405188183331&set=pcb.3785405338183316>.



Figure 43 Meeting with Diplomats at Eidgah Sharif: British High Commissioner

Note. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab met with the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, His Excellency, Christian Turner, on April 22, 2022. Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2859296720882203&set=pcb.285929677421553>

1



Figure 44 Meeting with Diplomats: The Australian High Commissioner

Note. His Excellency Mr. Neil Hawkins (Australian High Commissioner) visited Eidgah Sharif and participated in Iftar Dinner distribution on April 18, 2023. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=647150730770303&set=a.166812225470825&type=3&mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=3ssKK3GC95kmAt0Z&share_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fshare%2F1AHqqMBpi8%2F%3Fmibextid%3DwwXIfr.



Figure 45 Meeting with Diplomats at Eidgah Sharif: The Turkish Ambassador

Note. His Excellency Dr. Mehmet Pacaci (Ambassador from Türkiye) visited Eidgah Sharif and participated in Iftar meal distribution. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cq_l6oIN7Hu/.



Figure 46 Meeting with Diplomats at the Saudi Embassy, Islamabad

Note. Qibla Sahab and Pir Sahab met with the Ambassador from Saudi Arabia. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Ccfd7OnqeVx/?img_index=1.



Figure 47 Meeting with Diplomats: The European Union Ambassador

Note. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab meeting with H.E. Ms. Androulla Kaminara, the European Union Ambassador to Pakistan. Source:

https://www.instagram.com/p/CZKbQU0MFUc/?img_index=1.



Figure 48 Meeting with Diplomats at Eidgah Sharif: The Uzbek Ambassador

Note. Uzbek Ambassador to Pakistan H.E., Saadullah Tashmatov presenting to Qibla Sahab the letter of appointment as an honorary ambassador of Ziyarah tourism for Uzbekistan on behalf of their Deputy Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. A. Abdukhakimov. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/DLkiI_LN2ui/.



Figure 49 Meeting with Diplomats at Eidgah Sharif

Note. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab met with H.E. Dr. Mehmet Pacaci, (Ambassador of Türkiye in Pakistan), H.E. Mr. Ahmed Jawad A.A. Rabei (Ambassador of Palestine), H.E. Mr. Mohamed Karmoune (Ambassador of Morocco), H.E. Mr. Mohammed Azhar Mazlan (High Commissioner of Malaysia), Faisal Kareem Kundi Sahib and Malik Javid Iqbal Wains Sahib (Additional Attorney General for Pakistan) at Eidgah on March 16, 2024.

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C4lQa8mKWOE/?img_index=1.



Figure 50 Meeting with Diplomats: The American Ambassador

Note. His Excellency American Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Paul W. Jones visited Eidgah Sharif on April 3, 2019. Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10157266973990555&set=pcb.10157266985685555>.



Figure 51 Meeting with Diplomats: The Canadian High Commissioner

Note. Pir Sahab and Qibla Sahab met with the Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan. Source: <https://x.com/CanHCPakistan/status/746221388906672128/photo/1>.

Appendix 7: Oath of Allegiance [*Bay'at*] Script

Table 5 Script of Oath of Allegiance [*Bay'at*] used at Eidgah Sharif ⁸⁹⁹⁰

Speaker/ commentator	Multilingual text of <i>Bay'at</i> (in Urdu, Arabic and Punjabi languages)	English translation of the text.
<i>Shaykh</i>	پڑھو	Repeat after me.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم	I seek refuge of <i>Allah</i> from the cursed Satan.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ	In the name of <i>Allah</i> , the Most Magnificent, the Most Merciful.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ	There is no God but <i>Allah</i> and Muhammad ﷺ is the Messenger of <i>Allah</i> . *
<i>Shaykh</i>	سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ	Glory be to <i>Allah</i> , and all praise be to <i>Allah</i> ; and there is no God but <i>Allah</i> , and <i>Allah</i> is the Greatest. There is no might or power except <i>Allah</i> , the Exalted, the Great One. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ رَبِّي مِنْ كُلِّ ذَنْبٍ وَأَتُوبُ عَلَيْكَ فَغْفِرْ لِي	I seek forgiveness of <i>Allah</i> who is my Lord, for all my sins and I repent. So, please forgive me [oh my <i>Allah</i>]. *
<i>Shaykh</i>	یا اللہ میں سچے دل نال توبہ کردا ہوں	Oh <i>Allah</i> , I sincerely repent*
<i>Shaykh</i>	اور وعدہ کردا ہوں	And promise [to do the following]:*
<i>Shaykh</i>	نماز پڑھاں گا	I will offer prayers;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	ذکر کراں گا	Do your <i>dhikr</i> ;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	تیری عبادت کراں گا	Worship you;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	چوری نہ کراں گا	Will not steal;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	چوٹھ نہ بولاں گا	Will not lie;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	زنا نہ کراں گا	Will not commit adultery;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	شراب نہ پیناں گا	Will not consume alcoholic beverages;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	جوا نہ کھیڈاں گا	Will not gamble;*
<i>Shaykh</i>	بری مجلس وچ نہ بیٹھاں گا	Will not keep bad company. *

⁸⁹ The Grand Shaykh Lasani Paak taking Oath of Allegiance from a group of people at a follower's house during their visit to the UK in 1980's. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44gJQyiZXNA>

⁹⁰ A Turkish man taking oath of allegiance with Pir Sahab
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igwoThNvdjU>

Speaker/ commentator	Multilingual text of <i>Bay'at</i> (in Urdu, Arabic and Punjabi languages)	English translation of the text.
<i>Shaykh</i>	یا اللہ میں تیرا عاجز بندہ ہاں	Oh <i>Allah</i> , I am your humble slave.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	سچے دل نال توبہ کرداں ہاں	I sincerely repent.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	میری توبہ قبول کر	Please accept my repentance.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	میرے گناہ معاف کر	Forgive my sins.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	میںوں اپنا بندہ بنا لے	Turn me into your slave.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	اور گناہ کی بچا لے	Save me from sin.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	یا اللہ میری توبہ ، توبہ ، سچی توبہ۔	Oh <i>Allah</i> , I repent, I repent, I sincerely repent.*
<i>Shaykh</i>	طریقہ رسولی ، اسم اللہ ، درود شریف دا ، ختم شریف دا اذن دیتا تساں قبول کیتا ؟	You are permitted on the path of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ [<i>Tariqa Rasooli</i>] to start your spiritual journey in the name of <i>Allah</i> [<i>Ism Ullah</i>]. You are permitted to recite <i>Darood Sharif</i> , and <i>Khatam Sharif</i> ⁹¹ . Do you accept?
Researcher commentary	(the seeker should respond by saying “Yes” audibly)	
Seeker	قبول اے	Yes, I accept
<i>Shaykh</i>	(مبارک اے)	Congratulations!
Researcher commentary	After the <i>Shaykh</i> has congratulated the seeker on being initiated and becoming the member of this holy spiritual family. The <i>Shaykh</i> guides the seeker on how to do the <i>dhikr</i> of <i>Allah huu</i> using the following words.	
<i>Shaykh</i>	ہتھ بنھو جس طرح نماز لئی بنھد دے نیں ایس طریقے نال کھبی طرف تھوڈی سینے نال لاؤ ساء اندر جائے دل بولے اللہ ساء باہر آئے تے ہو اور ہو دی ضرب دل تے جا کے لگے۔	Fold your hands like you do in prayers This way Touch your chin to the left side of your chest When you inhale, your heart should say <i>Allah</i> When you exhale, [it should say] <i>huu</i> . And the <i>huu</i> should strike your heart.

⁹¹ *Khatam Sharif* is a compilation of Quranic verses, and sacred phrases in a particular order and number. In contrast to *wazifa*, which is a repetitive practice, *khatam sharif* may be done as a one-time practice. Here, *Khatam Sharif* refers to *Khatam e Khwajgan*. *Khatam e Khwajgan* is a supplication formula that is comprised of a variety of sacred words and phrase to be said in a particular number and order. This formula was set by the saints of *Naqshbandi* order centuries ago and is believed to be very powerful in terms of bringing blessings, healings, and peace.

Speaker/ commentator	Multilingual text of <i>Bay'at</i> (in Urdu, Arabic and Punjabi languages)	English translation of the text.
	اللہ ہو	<i>Allah Huu.</i>
The entire crowd	اللہ ہو	<i>Allah huu</i>
Researcher commentary	The crowd, including the new seeker, follows the <i>Shaykh</i> in the <i>dhikr</i> of <i>Allah Huu</i> .	
Researcher commentary	When <i>dhikr</i> ends the <i>Shaykh</i> raises his hands and does <i>dua</i> . The crowd continues to say Ameen after each supplication that the <i>Shaykh</i> makes. After supplication, the <i>Shaykh</i> says:	
<i>Shaykh</i>	مبارک اے	Congratulations
<i>Shaykh</i>	جس وقت انسان توبہ کر دے ، اللہ تعالیٰ اس دے سارے گناہ معاف فرما دیندا اے آنندہ احتیاط رکھنا صبح دی نماز پڑھ کر ۱۰۰ مرتبہ درود شریف - ۳۰۰ مرتبہ یا حی یا قَیُّوْمُ - پھر ۱۰۰ مرتبہ درود شریف دا وظیفہ رکھو وڈا وظیفہ اللہ دا ذکر اے	When a person repents, <i>Allah</i> forgives all his past sins. From now onwards, be careful. After offering Fajr prayers, ⁹² Do this <i>wazifa</i> ⁹³ : Recite <i>Darood Paak</i> 100 times, <i>Ya Hayyu Ya Qayyum</i> ⁹⁴ [The One who is Alive; the One who has been forever and will be forever. He was when nothing was present, and He will Be

⁹² Fajr prayer is the first of five daily mandatory prayers in Islam. This prayer is done before sunrise. Muslims above age seven must perform all five daily prayers. The second prayer, Zohar, is done when the sun is slightly past its zenith. The third prayer, Asr, is done when the shadow becomes equal the size of object, Maghreb prayer is done after sunset and the last and fifth mandatory prayer of the day, Isha, is done at dusk i.e. pitch dark.

⁹³ A *wazifa* is a regular litany practiced by Muslims which can be comprised of Quranic verses, holy names, sacred words and/ or various supplication. These *wazifas* are done for various purposes including material gains such as healing from sickness or securing employment, or protection in times of danger. People also do *wazifas* for spiritual gains such as seeking forgiveness, gaining softening of their heart, having a vision of sacred personage etc. People can do *wazifa* for their own or someone else's benefit. However, *Naqshbandi Sufi* Masters do not allow their followers to do *wazifa* to harm anyone. Through *wazifa*, a Muslim asks Allah for help. How can someone ask Allah's help in causing hurt or damage to His own creation?

⁹⁴ Here, I am intentionally avoiding "Savior" as a translation for *Qayyum* for two reasons. First, Savior is not a close enough translation. Second, Savior is a term frequently used in Christianity with a much different connotation than in Islam. Using Savior may cause unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding. The phrase *Ya Hayyu Ya Qayyum* [The One who is Alive; the One who has been forever and will be forever. He was when nothing was present, and He will Be when all else will cease existing]

Speaker/ commentator	Multilingual text of <i>Bay'at</i> (in Urdu, Arabic and Punjabi languages)	English translation of the text.
	بہتاں نال گم، زبان نال گلاں لیکن دل، خیال دے نال اللہ ہو۔ اللہ ہو۔ اللہ ہو ہر سانس وچ اللہ رہے، کوئی سانس غفلت وچ نہ جائے ساڈی طریقت دی بنیاد ایہی اے کہ مالک دو عالم دے احکام نوں اپنانا آپ دے حکماں تے چلنا آپ دے کسی حکم دی خلاف ورزی نہ کرنا	when all else will cease existing] 300 times and again recite <i>Darood Paak</i> 100 times. The greatest <i>wazifa</i> is remembrance of <i>Allah</i>. Work with hands, speak with tongue, but in your heart and thoughts it should always be <i>Allah Hu, Allah Hu, Allah Hu</i>⁹⁵. Remember <i>Allah</i> with every single breath. No breath should neglect it. The foundation of our <i>Tariqa</i> [<i>Sufi</i> path] is to become one <i>with</i> the commands of the Master of both worlds [Prophet Muhammad ﷺ]; following His commands; and not going against any of His commands.
Researcher commentary	The <i>Shaykh</i> now asks the newly initiated <i>murids</i> their names and whereabouts and asks them to collect a copy of the sacred Golden Chain [<i>shajrah sharif</i>] and <i>Darood Sharif</i> .	

**This text is then repeated by the seeker either out loud or silently.*

***This text is then repeated by the entire crowd out loud or silently*

The oath of Allegiance is administered multilingually (in Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic) by the Shayyukh of Eidgah Sharif to seekers and here translated into English by Dr. Sadaf R. Shier. For translation purposes, the script of the Bay'at was first transcribed from pre-existing video recordings. Web addresses of these video tapes are provided in footnotes 30, 31, 32.

⁹⁵ This means being conscious of God in all your dealings and affairs whether you are in a company of people or alone. Islam does not encourage people to go in permanent and complete seclusion from the world, but rather it encourages people to live in the world and do worldly business, but in such a way that the heart remains attentive towards Allah all the time. When the heart is attentive towards Allah all the time, the communication and the dealings will automatically embody consciousness of God. This will lead to a much deeper and meaningful transformation of the self.

Appendix 8: Sermon Condemning Attack on a Church in Quetta

The speech was delivered in Eidgah Sharif Central Mosque, Rawalpindi, Pakistan in Urdu language; the YouTube video was made available with English subtitles. The following extract is a compilation of the English subtitles available in this video.

I strongly condemn the attack on a church in Quetta where many of our fellow Pakistani people, our Christian citizens were killed, were killed. Remember, this thing has nothing to do with Islam. This has nothing to do with Islam. These people [Christians] were our fellow citizens. If somebody kills a non-Muslim and says, I am doing this for Islam, remember that person has nothing to do with Islam. That person has nothing to do with Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and my Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says in a Hadith that if a Muslim in a Muslim country, if any Muslim will kill a non-Muslim, *Jannat* [Heaven] will be haram on him. He will not be able to go to *Jannat*, if he kills a non-Muslim in a Muslim state. So, these terrorists, they say themselves, they are Muslims [they call themselves Muslims], they are not Muslims. They are not Muslim because my Prophet ﷺ said, if a Muslim kills a non-Muslim in a Muslim state, *Jannat* will be *haram* [forbidden] on him. He will never be able to go to *Jannat*. He will never be able to go to *Jannat*. And it is necessary for every Muslim living in an Islamic state that he should know that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says, “If a Muslim kills a non-Muslim in a Muslim state, I will be a lawyer against that Muslim on the Day of Judgement.”

Remember my Prophet ﷺ told the Christians of Najran, “We will take care of your lives, we will take care of your children, . . . we will take care of your places of worship and we will never force you to accept Islam. We will never force you to accept Islam”. Now, we as a Muslim, we have to uphold this promise of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. We cannot attack any places of worship of other religions in a Muslim state. We should respect everyone as a citizen. We should respect everyone as a citizen.

I want to say this to the Government of Pakistan that you should provide every possible security to them. Like on 25th of December, their religious event is coming, you should provide them with security, because we don’t want to see these kinds of attacks again in Pakistan. . . . Because we are Muslims, we are the Ummah [the nation] of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Somebody asked Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, “Ya Rasool *Allah* ﷺ [Oh the Prophet of God], who is a true Muslim? And who is a Mo’min [believer]?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “The ‘Mu’min and the Muslim is the one who takes care of others’ lives. He takes care of others’ children. HE

takes care of others' respect. HE takes care of others' property and everything. So, remember, you say, a Muslim can kill a human being? No, a Muslim cannot even disrespect a human being.

The last thing I would like to mention is that, *Allah* Kareem says in the *Quran*, that even if you kill one human being, even if you kill one human being, it's like you have killed the whole of the humanity, it's like you have killed the whole of the humanity. *Allah* [declared] it haram [forbidden] in the *Quran* for a Muslim to kill another human being. Killing a human being, *Allah* [has declared it] haram in *Quran*. So, if someone says. . . go and kill someone, you will go to Jannah [Heaven], they are then saying it is halal [declaring it permissible] to something that *Allah* has said is haram [declared forbidden]. And in the law of *Shariah*, if you say halal to that thing which *Allah* has said [declared] haram, then you go out of Islam [you get expelled out of the fold of Islam]. So these people are out of Islam. Terrorism has no religion.

May *Allah* Kareem [*Allah*, the Merciful] keep us, May *Allah* Kareem [*Allah*, the Merciful] keep us, *Allah* Kareem bless us all with loyalty to the Prophet ﷺ. Keep us loyal to the Prophet ﷺ and bless us with the ability to follow the footsteps of Prophet ﷺ in its true essence⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlj6Ty9q6N8>

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