

MIGRANT SUFIS AND SHRINES: A MICROCOSM OF ISLAM IN THE TRIBAL STRUCTURE OF MIANWALI DISTRICT

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between sufis and local tribal and kinship structures in the last half of eighteenth century to the end of nineteenth century Mianwali, a district in the south-west of Punjab. The study shows how tribal identities and local forms of religious organizations were closely associated. Attention is paid to the conditions in society which grounded the power of sufi and shrine in heterodox beliefs regarding saint's ability of intercession between man and God. Sufi's role as mediator between tribes is discussed in the context of changed social and economic structures. Their role as mediator was essentially depended on their genealogical link with the migrants. This shows how tribal genealogy was given precedence over religiously based meta-genealogy of the sufi-order. The focus is also on politics shaped by ideology of British imperial state which created sufis as intermediary rural elite. The intrusion of state power in sufi institutions through land grants brought sufis into more formal relations with the government as well as the general population. The state patronage reinforced their social authority and personal wealth and became invested with the authority of colonial state. Using hagiographical sources, factors which integrated pir and disciples in a spiritual bond are also discussed. This relationship is discussed in two main contexts, one the hyper-corporeality of pir, which includes his power and ability to move through time and space and multilocate himself to protect his disciples. The other is through dreams and visions, as an important aspect of Muslim religiosity.

Keywords: Mianwali, Sufism, Islamic Reformism, Khanqah, Shrine, Colonial,