

Spiritualism in Sindh: A Case Study

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Abstract

Sindh is the land of spiritualism. The culture of Sindh is of unique features. The values norms, cognitions, laws, architecture embodies the spiritual aspects. The main theme of the research is to highlight the elements that directly and indirectly influence the culture of Sindh. Sufism has great impact on culture of Sindh. The saints like Shah Adul latif Bhitati, Lal Shebaz Qalaundar are the actors which enrich the culture of Sindh. These great persons impart spiritual values throughout the culture of the Sindh. The study focuses on the role behaviors. The approach is analytical descriptive. The original and secondary sources are used.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Spiritualism in Sindh, Sufism, Contribution of Sufis.

Introduction

Spiritualism's main focus is to promote an individual's personal experience with God. Spiritualism is a religion that is not based on a relationship with a particular savior. It recognizes all prophets that have come to humankind throughout the ages, not setting one above the other. Rather, it is based upon the idea that we are all to form our own relationship with God, and to obtain guidance and accept responsibility for our actions based on our interaction with that personal guidance. We are able to have that instant and personal communication directly with God through no intermediary; hence the reason that we do not give anyone a fixed idea of God, only that there is a God. Any attempt to personalize the idea of God only limits the totality of that intelligence, which is the reason that Spiritualists sometimes refer to that idea of God as "infinite Intelligence" or "infinite Spirit". (Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp p.1)

Another significant difference is the belief of survival of the personality after death, meaning that we still think of ourselves the same after death as during our physical life. This is proven by Mediumship, the bringing back of loved ones in evidential form who have gone through the change called death. Belief in the survival of the personality also removes grieving when it is realized that our loved ones are still care about us, and can be communicated with. Mediumship, when done in the true sense, will produce a real understanding of this existence and level of interaction to add from the spirit realm.

Another major difference is that we believe that the nature of humankind is to be good, not evil. We do not believe in sin and repentance, only spiritual progression by natural law. The basic philosophy of Spiritualism does not say it is the only way, but feels that all religions can produce enlightenment and believes that Jesus, as well as all other saviors and prophets, was a real person. Our feeling is that your purpose here is to evolve spiritually and then use that to be of service to others as you continue to evolve.

- Spiritualism is a science because it investigates, analyzes, and classifies facts and manifestations of Spirit;
- A philosophy because it studies the laws of nature both on the seen unseen side of life and bases its conclusions upon present, observed facts;
- A religion because it strives to understand and complies with the physical, mental, and spiritual laws of nature, which are the laws of God.

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The philosophy and movement of Spiritualism, when put into practice in your life, will truly change it and produce true freedom and confidence in you. Through your example, you can lead others to seek what you have. (Cassadga Spiritualist Camp. 2-3)

Modern Spiritualism

Modern spiritualists point out to the ancient accounts of spirit contact in the Bible: the visit of Saul, the king of Israel, to the so-called witch of Endore, in the course of which the late prophet Samuel appeared (1 Samuel 28), and the story of the Transfiguration, in which Moses and Elijah appeared to three of Jesus' Apostles (Matthew 17, Mark 9). Some phenomena associated with mediums were found among those regarded in the Middle Ages as possessed by devils-e.g., levitation and speaking in languages unknown to the speaker. Similar phenomena were reported in the witch trials of the early modern period, particularly the appearance of spirits in quasi-material form and the obtaining of knowledge through spirits. (John Gordon Melton, p.1)

The practice of having sittings for communication with spirits spread rapidly from the 1860s. It was popular in England and France. Kate Fox and one of her sisters, Maggie Fox, devoted much of their later lives to acting as mediums in the United States and England. Many other mediums gave similar sittings, and the attempt to communicate with spiritualists by table turning (in which participants place their hands on a table and wait for it to vibrate or rotate) became a popular pastime in Victorian drawing rooms. Some churches regarded the practices of the spiritualists as part of the forbidden activity of necromancy (communication with the dead in order to learn the future). A decree of the Holy Office of the Roman Catholic Church in 1898 condemned spiritualistic practices, though it approved of legitimate scientific investigation of related phenomena. Both Protestant and Catholic bodies released a steady stream of anti-spiritualist literature.

Spiritualism also inspired the rise of the discipline of psychic research to examine the claims made by mediums and their supporters. A variety of techniques were developed to study not only basic psychic experiences (telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition) but the more complex phenomenon of spirit contact. By the end of the 18th century, significant efforts were being made to verify the phenomena of mediumship, especially the occasional materialization of spirit entities. Among the most prominent supporters of spiritualist claims was the chemist Sir William Crookes (1832-1910), a president of the Society for Psychical Research, who investigated the materialization phenomena produced by medium Florence Cook. Spiritualism had its greatest success in France and Brazil, where it was known as spiritism and incorporated the idea of reincarnation. So successful has the movement been in Brazil that the French founder of spiritism, Allan Kardec, has been pictured on Brazilian stamps (Spiritualism: Religion, 2015).

Spiritualist belief developed during the early decades of the movement. A core belief of spiritualism is that individuals survive the death of their bodies by ascending into a spirit existence. A person's condition after death is directly related to the moral quality of his human existence. Communication with the spiritual world is both possible and desirable. Healing is the natural result of such communication. The spiritualists understand God as infinite intelligence.

Also basic to spiritualist practice is "spirit healing." Among the precursors of spiritualism was the Magnetism movement, which had grown out of the magnetic healing theories of Franz Anton Mesmer. Although spiritualist practices have been motivated by mere curiosity and fascination with the supernatural, they have also been driven by more serious concerns about the fate of the human soul. For those who have lost their faith in traditional Christianity, spiritualists have offered a new religion based not on an ancient tradition but on facts that apparently can be observed.

Sufi Pearls

The word Sufi is driven from the term Sahfa. In the times of Holy prophet Hazrat Mohammed (PBUH), the message of Islam was spreading far and wide by missionaries and conquests. The Sahafa was one band of men who were totally devoted to prayer and meditation. Worship and search for spiritual perfection was their only aim. Over the centuries the sahfa became those holy men who are now called Sufis. (Sufism in Sindh, 2015)

The great mystic Husain Ibn Mansur al Hallaj who is credited with utterance, "Anal Haq" (I am the Creative Truth) reached Sindh in 905, proceeding from Gujarat. He wandered along the river until he reached the northern areas of present Pakistan. The strong spiritual wine which was powered out by Mansur in the Sandy Plains of Sindh has since then inspired many poets and musicians even more than was the case with other parts of Muslim world. "If you want to know what love is? Ask it from those who are like Mansur."

Sachal Sarmast, the intoxicated ecstatic was one of the greatest admirers of Mansur al Hallaj whose name occurs on almost every page of enthusiastic poetry (Wikipedia). Sufism in Sindh covers the incidence of Sufism in Sindh, the lower Indus valley in Pakistan, which is reputed to be an area of mystics. It is famous for enormous number of saints and mystics who are supposed to have lived here. According to popular legend, 125,000 of them are buried on Makli Hill near Thatta. The life of greatest of them, the poet Shah Latif Abdul Latif Bhittai, has been studied in Europe by Dr. H.T. Sorley.

Suharwardiyya tradition represented by Bahauddin Zakariya Multani took its roots in northern part of the province. Later in the 15th century; Qadiriyya achieved a firm position in upper Sindh and expanded considerably during the following centuries. Last not least, the Naqshbandiyya reaction against too much emotionalism set in shortly after Ahmed Sirhindi's death (1624).

Famous Naqshbandi Sufis of Sindh includes Makhdum Muhammad Zaman of Luwari, Khuwaja Abdul Maskeen and Makhdum Abdul Qasim. Scholars like Makhdum Muhammad Hashim and his. After, Shah Latif Bhittai there comes Sachal Sarmast who was most vocal exponent of "hama ust" (Every thing is He.) And can rightly be called "Mansoor of Sindh". By his love songs, which unveil the secret of love and union, separation and sufferings, Sachal immediately capture the heart of his listener. (Annemarie Schimmel)

Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (R.A.)

Sindh is the land of mystics and saints who not only preached the message of Islam but also the people to live with love, peace, affection and brotherhood and there is the need to spread over the guidance of these mystics and saints in every nook and corner of the country. The Governor said that these are the blessings of the saints that Pakistan particularly Sindh always come out from the crisis, however, there is need to promote the message of these mystics and saints. By following it, the country could move towards rapid progress and prosperity. (Dr. Ishratul-Ibad, Governor of Sindh, 2009)

Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (R.A.) (1177-1274) was a great Persian Sufi Saint, philosopher, poet and Qalandar. He belonged to the Surarwardiyya order of Sufis and was close contemporary to Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya Multani (R.A.) Hazrat Fareeduddin Ganjshakar (R.A.) Hazrat Syed Jalaluddin Bukhari Surkh-posh (R.A.) of Uchch and Hazrat Shah Shams tabrizi (r.A.). Some also add the name of Hazrat Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi Rumi. (R.A.)

Hazrat Lal Shehbaz Qalandar (r.A.) was born in Marwad to a dervish Syed Ibrahim Kabiruddin whose ancestors migrated from Baghdad and settled down in Mashhad, a center of learning and civilization. His mysticism attracted people from all religions. He was titled Lal (Red) for his usual red attire, Shahbaz due to his notable and divine spirit, and Qalandar for his Sufism and saintly attitude. Lal Shehbaz (r.A.) lived a celibate life and, did not

marry. Hazrat Lal Shehbaz Qalandar (R>A) traveled around the Muslim world and had settled in Sehwan (Sindh, Pakistan) and was buried there. He preached religious tolerance. His dedication to the knowledge of various religious disciplines enabled him to eventually become a profound scholar. During his lifetime, he witnessed the Ghazanvid and Ghurids rulers in South Asia. He became fluent in many languages including Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Sindhi and Sanskrit.

The shrine around his tomb, built in 1356 gives a dazzling look with its Sindhi kashi tiles, mirror work and two gold-plated doors—one donated by the late Shah of Iran, the other by the late Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. His annual Urs is held on the 18 Shabaan—the eighth month of the Muslim lunar calendar. Thousands of devotees flock to the tomb while every Thursday their number stands multiplied especially at the Urs being a carnival as well a religious festival and celebrated every year.

Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai

Sindh has always been one of the favorite places for the Sufi and pious people. It is famous for its culture. Sufi poetry and the truth and sincerity the Sindh people have got inside their hearts and this sincerity originates from the poetry and teachings of Sufi people like Hazrat Lal Shehbaz Qalandar and Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai.

He was born in 1689 at a village called Hala Havelli near Hyderabad. Sindh Shah Abdul Latif was the direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad through Imam Zain-ul-Abideen, son of Imam Hussain. Shah's father, Syed Habib Shah had migrated from Matyaru, Afghanistan to Sindh.

When he was young, he fell in love with the daughter of the village's landlord. The landlord however, turned against him and tried his best to harass his family. After that Shah Latif, left his home became a spiritual wanderer. In the quest of eternal love, he traveled in many parts of Sindh and adjoining lands where he met Sufis and yogis. He spent three years in the company of these Sadhus.

Finally, when he arrived in Thatta, he met a Sufi saint Makhdoom Muhammad Moin. He understood the inner condition of Shah Latif, and held him there for a few days. He then told him, "The truth, for which you are wandering around, is inside of you self. A man is a mirror for a man. You have seen God's manifestation in the hand of that girl."

After a few days living with that Sufi saint, Shah Latif felt inner satisfaction and then he left for Hala. By the time he returned to Hala, the landlord had already died he married the love of his life Bibi Sajdha Begum who died within a few years of their marriage and he never married again. After her death, he would often seek solitude and spend most of his time in contemplation and Muraqba (Sufi meditation) and writing poetry. He lived a very simple life. His food was simple as well as his dress, which was often of saffron color, the color of the dress of Sufis or Yogis, stitched with a black thread. For the last eight years of his life, he lived at Bhitshah, a small village built by him. A few days before his death, he retired to his underground room and spent all his time in prayers and fasting, eating very little. The great Sufi poet died in 1752 was buried at the same place where a shrine now stands. In 1866, 114 years after the poet's death, a German scholar Earnest Trump compiled *Risalo*, a complete collection of Shah Abdul Latif poetry. (Muhammad Behzad, 2011 Pp.1-2)

Conclusion

Spiritualism is a religion that embodies the main ideas of all religions, that there is life after death, immortality and the existence of a God. The aim of Spiritualism is to affect an at-one-ment and unison of Humanity with God until every action and thought of Humanity is in perfect harmony with the Divine Will (Lyceum Manual, 2011).

Spiritualism is a universal religion, one focus of which is embodied in our 5th Principle, ‘Personal Responsibility’ It is what an individual chooses to do with that responsibility. Sindh is known as the land of 124,000 saints and dervishes, both Muslim and Hindu. It is because of the Sufis that Sindh is called the cradle of love and peace. The Sufi saints have large following among Muslims and Hindus of every stratum. A number of Hindus come from India and other parts of the world to pay homage to different shrines.

The spiritualism offers a world without sectarian, ethnic and communal difference. It is due to this hold of mysticism on Sindh culture, there is hardly any religious or sectarian frenzy in the interior of Sindh as compared to other parts of Pakistan. Sufism has no room for fundamentalism or fanaticism. In Sufism any form of intoxication is strictly forbidden. Also basic to spiritualist practice is “Spirit healing”.

Although modern spiritualist practices have been motivated by mere curiosity and fascination with the supernatural, they have also been driven by more serious concerns about the fate of the human soul. For those who have lost their faith in traditional Christianity, spiritualists have offered new religion based not on an ancient tradition but on facts that apparently can be observed by anyone. Those for whom materialistic ways of thinking have precluded belief in a life after death have been given a new hope of immortality. Those suffering from grief after the death of loved ones have been offered the possibility of communicating with them.

In short, Different school of thoughts interpreted and practiced in different way but the main objective and theme of spiritualism is ultimate perfection of human body and human soul. The contribution of spiritualists from any side and particularly the Sufis is unforgettable. The philosophy and movement of spiritualism, when put into practice in our life, will truly change it and produce true freedom and confidence in us and through our example. We can lead others to seek what we have.

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