THE ROLE OF URBANIZATION IN SHAPING FOLKLORE, MYSTICISM AND PEACEBUILDING IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Cultural practices reflect evolving notions of social cohesion and transcend regional, provincial and national boundaries. Folklore preserves identities and traditions while embodying aspirations and critiques of the status quo. In Pakistan, a post-colonial society shaped by diverse cultural influences, folklore is expressed through songs, poetry, customs and proverbs, serving as a medium for reformation, reconstruction and cultural integration. These traditions play a crucial role in fostering national identity and unity, bridging divides among various ethnic, linguistic and regional groups. Folklore is not merely a reflection of the past but a living force that continues to shape contemporary societal values, providing a framework for collective memory and community resilience. Mysticism, deeply embedded in Pakistan's cultural fabric, offers spiritual guidance and symbolizes peace and hope, rooted in the teachings of Muslim saints. Sufism, with its emphasis on love, tolerance and empathy, has been integral to Pakistan's cultural identity, fostering peaceful coexistence. However, urbanization has disrupted these traditions by amplifying ideological tensions and eroding cultural heritage. The urban shift has marginalized folk practices, as modern settings often prioritize progress over tradition, leading to the erosion of oral traditions and communal rituals. This research explores the relationship between regional folklore, mysticism, national identity, and social cohesion, with a focus on Sufism and poetry as key repositories of folklore that promote empathy, love, and tolerance. It analyzes the impact of urbanization on these traditions, highlighting the loss of cultural heritage and the ways urbanization and globalization reshape national identity. The paper also examines efforts to preserve folklore in Pakistan, including initiatives in education, media, and grassroots organizations, which aim to maintain cultural continuity amidst rapid urban growth. Ultimately, the paper underscores the importance of folklore in fostering social cohesion and national unity in a modernizing society.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Cultural practices are indicators of changing notions of social cohesion and traditions intertwined with boundaries limitlessly with regions, provinces and countries. Identities and traditions are preserved through folklore and represent interests and aspirations that lead to a critique challenge to status quo. Pakistan as a post-colony, its history and culture are borrowed, remodelled and emerged from various cultures and regions. Songs, poetry, traditions, customs and proverbs are the regional folklores of Pakistan like, other traditions around the globe. Folklore can be utilised as a symbol of national processes of reformation, renovation, reconstruction and retransformation of study and dynamics of cultural practices and help in building integrity in order to developed as one nation. Pakistan shapes a strong and significant united force through practices of mysticism that are directly associated with religion preached by great Muslim saints for religion, humanity and conscience. Mysticism has been a part of the fabric of life in Pakistan for centuries, which uplifts and is a mark of hope-giving element which pictogram peace but urbanization has a direct correlation with the loss of Sufism, specifically in Pakistan, pointing out ideological controversies. This chapter delves into the interconnection between regional folklore and mysticism, as well as their impact on national identity, social unity, norms and values. It also examines how Sufi poets incorporate folklore into their poetry, thereby creating new folklore that symbolises love, empathy, patience and challenges the prevalent negative perceptions about the people of Pakistan. Additionally, the paper sheds light on the consequences of urbanization, which has resulted in the loss of valuable heritage and offers a perspective on the perception of past folklores. Pakistan, a sovereign nation-state situated at the crossroads of South Asia and Central Asia, is endowed with a rich cultural tapestry, steeped in a millennia-old legacy of conquests, migrations and assimilation of diverse ethnicities and religious sects. This complex historical backdrop has contributed to the country's remarkable heterogeneity, with its regions and provinces possessing distinct identities, languages, customs, and traditions. However, this multifaceted diversity also poses significant challenges in establishing a uniform and cohesive set of behavioral norms, beliefs and values, due to the inherent variations in cultural standards and practices across the country (Qadeer, 2006). The country is currently best defined as a cultural mosaic, with conservative and traditional values coexisting with secularism and liberalism. Folklore is defined as the transmission of stories, proverbs, and occasionally jokes from one generation to the next. These are frequently derived from traditions that are widespread in culture, subculture, or community. Oral storytelling is common in folklore. To arouse curiosity and generate enthusiasm, the story is presented in different meetings. It indulged into a difficult situation. It's a long-lasting phenomenon that dates back a long time. Each culture has its own set of values. It has its own mythology to tell and is distinctive in its own right (Ammar *et al.,*

2021). Dress, theatre, music, poetry, qisa, architecture, celebration of festivals, cuisine and telling of jokes are all manifestations of unique identities and traditions in post-colonial Pakistan and all of these contribute to social, cultural, political and historical narratives. Folklore not only preserves identities and customs but also serves as a representation of interests and goals, challenging and criticising the current quo. Folklore is quite essential in every society because many stories have been lost in translation and many stories stay in their native language owing to linguistic constraints, Pakistan's folklore traditions have been quite varied (Hussain & Asif., 2021).There is also a shortage of translators who are fluent in a variety of regional and local languages and could quickly translate them. Folk literature is more than just a collection of stories. It has long been used to instill and educate younger generations on social and cultural values. It now acts as a cultural portal for visitors from all around the world. Some folklore genres, such as ghost tales in mountainous locations, provide intriguing stories that appeal to both local and international tourists. They are used to heighten the thrill and adrenaline rush associated with a mountaineering expedition (Salman & Mazhar., 2021).Culture and folklore are essential reference points for identity building and individual, communal, and national narratives, in addition to solid economic, social, and political frameworks (Naz, 2014). Heritage, a sense of belonging, and the quest for roots have become important points of

contention in many intellectual and public discussions in an increasingly fluid world but which cultural activities are essential to the formation of national and personal identities? What criteria are used to decide which cultural practices, objects and tales should be kept, rehabilitated, reformed, recreated, or even abandoned? What methods are used to legitimise cultural practices? What are the variables and players that influence cultural practices? Folklore, on the other hand, is an essential aspect of intangible cultural heritage. Everyone can be recognised by his/her history as it is transferred from generation to generation.(Saeed *et al.,* 2021). Dissociation and a loss of identity are two highly hazardous phenomena in today's society, when mistrust and hatred are on the rise. Customs and traditions must be uplift, preserved and valued by the creators and its community, as no one carry forward community's legacy other than the makers. The period of relative impermeability is long gone as lack of identification might represent an existential danger to communities in an increasingly globalizing society. Aside from the value of folk tradition, what it means to a country as varied as Pakistan, which is home to over sixty languages and a diverse ethnic population. It is an important component of our identity as well as a means of fostering inter-ethnic peace (Dinakhel & Islam., 2019). Although most nationalities have very diverse cultures, the basic principles of sin, hospitality, loyalty, and honor as well as the values, the individuals hold, are very dear to

one's heart which lead to specific customs, and are very crucial component of how we all are same, irrespective of huge diversity. (Salman & Mazhar., 2021). Changes in conceptions of what society is or should be may be seen in architectural styles and urban planning. For example, the garden city movement, which influenced Islamabad's development, advocated for cities to be divided into sectors, each serving a particular purpose. An individual's perceptions of society and social cohesiveness can be influenced by such geographical division. Important historical events, such as wars or terrorist attacks moreover discoveries and scientific development should be considered in dialogue regarding cultural legacy as it reflects and impact on people interaction with one another and effects public at large (Haque, 2021).

2.Destruction, Construction, Reconstruction

2.1 The Role of Heritage on Regional Folklore

The intricate interplay between heritage preservation and cultural values reveals that the notion of taste, authenticity, originality and cultural representation heavily influences the decision-making process regarding the construction, deconstruction, or reconstruction of architectural structures and monuments. Such heritage sites are not merely physical structures but instead serve as symbolic representations of a nation's history and cultural identity. Thus, policies and actions concerning heritage sites

reflect the official and national narratives regarding a region, city, or country's values, history, and culture (Shafqat *et al.,* 2022). The decision to preserve, reconstruct or destroy such sites is, therefore, inherently linked to the complex socio-political, emotional and ambitious aspects of a nation's past and present. Therefore, it is essential to examine the contextual settings, motivations, intentions, and the criteria employed to make judgements concerning the preservation or destruction of cultural heritage traditions (Haider, 2006). The commodification of cultural items and folklore has become increasingly prevalent in modern times. While some expressed grief over dying out traditional customs and folklore due to a lack of time for specific rituals or the displacement of local handicrafts by cheaper, mass-produced alternatives, as folklore has been transformed into a consumer commodity on the national and global markets, in the form of ethnic fashion, handcrafts, food, and fusion music. In the tourism industry, culture is a significant marketing factor for destinations (Ammar *et al.,* 2021). It is crucial to recognise that Pakistan, as a post-colonial nation, has borrowed, reworked and appropriated cultural expressions from various civilisations and locations. The fourth generation of Pakistanis faces the challenge of determining their position in this intricate historical and cultural framework, choosing which elements to embrace or adopt and which to discard. Art and folklore are two examples of

how this can be accomplished (Dinakhel & Islam., 2019).

2.2 Role of Mysticism in Peace Building and Integrity

In Islam, 'peace' refers to more than the absence of war, oppression, or tyranny; it also refers to the concept of 'positive peace,' which is a process of achieving harmony between all living beings and nature through just social, economic and political structures that allow everyone to reach their full potential (Burton, 1992). As a result, tyranny, prejudice, and oppression, which perpetuate injustice, considered as amongst the biggest risks to peace and harmony in Muslim society. The Qur'an explicitly celebrates religious and ethnic plurality as well as cultural variety, declaring that mankind as a whole is one family and solidarity, collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims is anticipate in the quest of peace. Differences amongst people are part of Allah's purpose for humanity according to the Qur'an. While many Muslims recognise that conflict is an unavoidable part of life and on the other hand recognised that peace is the ultimate aim and all problems should be resolved in order to restore harmony. Allah (swt) said in Surah No. 49 Verse 9 of Al-Quran:

"And if two groups of believers fight each other, then make peace between them. But if one of them transgresses against the other, then fight against the transgressing group until they ˹are willing to˺ submit to the rule of Allah. If they do so, then make peace between both ˹groups˺ in all fairness and act justly. Surely Allah loves those who uphold justice." The Qur'an spread message of tolerance, forgiveness, conciliation, inclusivity and peace. There are also a number of ideals, ideas and practices established in the Qur'an and practical in Sunnah by the Last Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) which shapes an Islamic perspective on peace and nonviolence. Peacebuilding is not only subjected to the Shariah but also enriched in Sufism. Sufism promotes human brotherhood, peace, social justice, economic prosperity, equality, happiness and tolerance (Swain & Ojendal., 2022). This idea is not just about spiritual pleasure but it also encompasses other elements of life. It is a notion that transforms civilisations in a tangible sense and its ramifications of reformation had be seen for generations. A comparison of different communities where mystic beliefs predominated and still predominates reveal a diverse picture of events (Sandano *et al.,* 20196). This school of thought advocates for the abolition of injustice, social inequality, fanaticism, hostility, and allureness among the general population. Sufism and Pakistan are inextricably linked, intertwined, and inseparable. Although the subcontinent is rich in Sufism, Pakistan was founded in areas where Sufism had fundamental foundations (Orakzai, 2019). The Sufi movement's spirit is so strong that it does not even require government assistance. Before delving into the exterior and internal components of religion, it is important to mention that there's a wide range of possible viewpoints on a religion's or spiritual tradition's teachings, including how those teachings connect

to global peace. The first is religion as a socially acquired practice, i.e., as part of culture known as "organised religion." Religious ideas, practices and foundations are learnt and passed down from generation to generation while religious institutions are an important element of the social structure and culture (Hussain, 2018). It is fascinating to note that mystics of all religions can typically interact with one another and recognise the spiritual or God energy at work inside one another, regardless of the religious tradition from which the other mystics originate. As evidenced in ecumenical efforts across the world, organised religion is frequently accepting of other religious traditions, although there may be misunderstanding amongst religions due to differing beliefs and practices (Waseem, 2021). On the other hand, role of destruction, construction and reconstruction mysticism/Sufism plays an important role. Sufis are not an ethnic/religious group but rather a mystical community that has spread throughout the Islamic world and continues to have profound authority and influence over the Middle East's various communities. Sufism developed historically as a reaction to the previous spiritual leadership's rigid legalism, as well as a counterweight to the rising worldliness of the expanding Muslim area (Seethi, 2021). The Quran depicts Allah in two different ways, is a significant source of Sufism. On the one hand, Allah is presented as the all-powerful Creator, Lord, and Arbitrator while on the other hand, Allah is depicted as residing within the believer's

heart and being closer to them than their own jugular vein. The teachings of Sufism includes peace and its promotion, determination and compassion, as well as working towards improving the lives of people across the globe. Sufis have long emphasized on love, brotherhood and peace throughout the world bringing people from all walks of life closer together (Manzoor & Manzoor., 2019). So that they can put an end to internal conflicts, greed and disagreements that lead to societal strife. Sufis have followed the road of moderation since the beginning in order to allow people to discover their true selves and the reason for which human beings are created. This was their strategy for overcoming feuds and uniting all people in the bonds of peace, love and tolerance (Nimer, 2001). Some of the most significant Sufi saints in Pakistan include Baba Bulleh Shah from Punjab, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai from Sindh, Abdullah Shah Ghazi from Sindh, Bari Imam from Islamabad, Baba Fareed from Punjab, Lal Shahbaz Qalander known as the "Red Sufi of Sehwan" and Sachal Sarmast from Sindh. They all transcended mere rituals and were bestowed with a universal humanist perspective (Rhman & Sami., 2015). The Sufi saints of Pakistan espoused a belief that the divine was not to be sought in some remote, transcendent realm, but rather that it was an imminent presence dwelling within each individual's heart and body. Their poetic expressions were characterised by a deep focus on struggles and challenges a common person faced, which rendered their works timeless and

resonant even today. These celebrated saints are testament to the enduring power of their words, which continue to be relevant and identifiable to modern readers grappling with the same existential concerns and spiritual aspirations as their forebears. Rehman Baba, one of the most famous poets of Peshawar depicts peace and integrity through his poetry such as:

"Better to meet a demon or devil, than to come across to an evil man" (Rehman & Sami., 2015). Another inspiring message for humanity depicts in his poetry which was later on translated into English is as:

"Sow flowers so your surroundings become a garden, do not sow thorns; for they will prick your feet, if you shoot arrows at others, know that the same arrow will come back to hit you. Do not dig a well in another's path, in case you come to the wells edge, you look at everyone with hungry eyes but you will be first to become mere dirt. Humans are all one body, whoever tortures another, wounds himself." (Rehman & Sami., 2015). Baba Bulleh Shah holds a significant place in the history of Pakistani society as a cultural icon. He was regarded as a beacon of hope and harmony for the Punjabi people. According to Bulleh Shah, responding to retaliation with retaliation is not the answer though spreading love and peace. His literary works portray him as a humanist who seeks to provide solutions to the sociological issues faced by society. At the same time, his writings also reflect the turmoil that his birthplace of Punjab is

going through and his quest to find Allah one of his famous saying (translated into English) as:

"Neither Hindu nor Muslim, give up pride, let us sit together. Neither Sunni nor Shia, let us march the road of harmony. We are neither starving nor stuffed neither bare nor covered up. Neither crying nor amused, neither broken nor established, we are not sinners or clean and righteous, what is sin and what is virtue, this I do not know" (Rehman & Sami., 2015). Sachal Sarmast, a prominent Sindhi Sufi poet, gained popularity during the Kalhora period. His literary works revolve around the themes of philosophy and Sufism, making him a renowned figure in the field of poetry. Sachal Sarmast is widely recognized as a prominent Sindhi mystic. He was a poet who defied convention and spoke out against religious oppression and dogma, making him a rebel in his own right. Sachal believed that religious bondage had reduced man to a mere bond slave (Asir) and stripped him of his status as "Amir". According to him, a person's identity is defined by their faith and if they become fanatical or bigoted, they lose sight of their humanity and good qualities. It also depicts from his poetry as:

"Break the bonds of all customs and ceremonies; banish from your mind all thoughts of slavery; be a hero and wear a royal turban of splendor" (Rehman & Sami., 2015). Sufi's persuasion strength and aptitude for a free catharsis are due to his extensive local knowledge. Sufi, on the other hand, lacks scientific expertise. However, extensive understanding of human nature, the

world, and the link between the two allows Sufi's to better identify and cure psychological issues (Budhwani & Mclean., 2019). A Sufi is a social reformer who helps humanity to realize Allah's love. Self-purification and self-actualization are his main goals. Sufi removes the conflict within him and approaches the Nafs-e-Mutmainna, which is the highest level of soul (Asghar, 2021). Love, as the central principle of life, played a vital role in shaping Pakistan's composite culture. The love of God and love for humanity served as the means of the mystic vision and helped to unite people. This principle is closely tied to the central concepts of Islam, including unity and justice as a guiding principle of social ethics, charity for the poor, rejection of priesthood and monotheism. Sufi saints emphasized the attributes of God, such as Rehman (the beneficent) and Rahim (the Merciful), which have implications of mercy and beneficence towards human beings, fulfilling their obligations to humanity (Haquq-al-Ibad). These teachings emerges from the bedrock of Sufi saints' philosophy and the main paradigm of regional folklore which expresses love, affection and peace for the society but many factors like terrorism, atmosphere of uncertainty and other reasons like urbanizations lead to the suppression of regional folklore in Pakistan (Manzoor & Shah., 2018).

2.3 Urbanization and Regional Folklore in Pakistan

Pakistan is endowed with a diverse population. This entails a diverse range of languages and civilisations, each with its own set of tales to tell. Traditional folklore themes include love, war heroes, and the occult. It is only logical that people who live in the Thar Desert have a different code of conduct than those who live in the Chitral highlands. Although their underlying values may differ, most Pakistani groups share the values of respect and morality. In pursuit of work, a large number of Pakistanis are moving from rural to urban regions. Water shortages have severely damaged the livelihoods of farmers, fisher men, other factors such as droughts, desertification, bad effects of climate change are predicted to make the situation worse in the future. In addition, many families in rural Sindh have relocated to cities after their houses were destroyed by water. The belief that metropolitan areas provide superior healthcare, education and other necessities attracts others to cities. However, natural population expansion is one of the main factors contributing to Pakistan's fast urban population growth besides migration from rural to urban areas (Kugelman, 2013). Our lives are influenced by storytelling, folklore and history. In today's society, when technology advances at a rapid pace, one can see how television and other technical instruments have saturated the art of folklore and history (Lowry, 1990). The once-cherished custom of our elders discussing the exploits of characters who had a meaningful moral at the conclusion of the story is slowly fading away. Since the 2000s, as the number of nuclear households has increased, the storytelling tradition that the grandparents and

elders of the family took leadership, has been slowly fading. As technology progresses, parents will find it easier, to teach their children through modern technology i.e., gadgets and displays on various devices that is readily available at home or easy accessible. In result of advancement in society, the customs and tradition has been disrupted and storylines of these tales have altered entirely, the relevance of stories that have travelled through families and taught so much in culture, history, and language is becoming almost invisible (Haque, 2015).

2.4 Repercussion of Urbanization & Literacy in Pakistan

Urbanisation is also interconnected with the literacy rate. When Pakistan was founded in 1947, 85 percent of the population was illiterate, with the rural sections faring significantly worse. According to the 2012 consensus, the country's literacy rate was 56 percent, which is extremely low and means that almost half of the population was illiterate. When looking at the country's regional literacy rate, interestingly, there are certain exceptions, such as in places like Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad literacy rate is quite high. According to the same source, the rate in major cities can reach up to 75%, which is far higher than the percentage in tribal regions. However, the comprehension, medium of instruction and language such as English in which narratives are translated in cities having high literacy rates, are easily understandable and converse effectively with the stories with the teachings of old traditions. (Mustafa & Sawas.,

2013). People who live in tribal or rural regions, on the other hand, are at a severe disadvantage since they are illiterate and unable to express their stories in writing to the public, lack modern technologies like printing facilities and others to preserve the traditions and folklore. In both rural and urban areas, physical effects of migration are obvious. Within and on the perimeter of metropolitan centers, as well as along the corridors that depart cities and towns, the result has been the formation of un-serviced or under-serviced informal communities along with diminishes of folklore particularly to the region (Kugelman, 2013). Families with migratory relatives have renovated or built new homes in urban designs in rural locations, which badly effect the memorization and codification of regional folklore. Folklore, on the other hand, is so much more in today's world. In modern age, grandmothers may not be telling youngsters stories due to lack of time and less interest of the today's generation. On the other hand, it is the need of the time that the virtues of bravery, respect, honor and loyalty should be preserved. Even if not narrated, possibly in schoolbooks or in cartoonish renditions, the teachings would be beneficial for today's generation. Furthermore, folk tales, when translated and published in English for a global audience, provide a glimpse into distinct indigenous cultures. They are an intangible cultural treasure of a country that must not be lost. Not only it enhances tourism in the country but also serves a much more critical purpose i.e., documentation of forgotten

traditions and folklore. Half of our lives are now becoming virtual due to modern technologies. Anyone may make us believe anything about our history if we forget who we were. Only by keeping the intangible portions of our origins near to our hearts can we combat the intangible menace of information onslaughts (Schimmel, 1975).

3. Conclusion

The intersection of Sufism, regional folklore and urbanization in Pakistan offers a unique lens, which comprehends the transformation of cultural practices, and the preservation of spiritual and societal values. Sufism, with its emphasis on love, peace and social harmony, has shaped the cultural and religious landscape of Pakistan, offering everlasting wisdom that transcends ethnic and religious boundaries. The works of iconic Sufi poets such as Rehman Baba, Baba Bulleh Shah, and Sachal Sarmast continue to inspire and promote a message of unity and tolerance, fostering a sense of interconnectedness among Pakistan's diverse communities. However, urbanization, with its rapid pace of development and technological advancements, has posed significant challenges to the preservation of regional folklore. Traditional storytelling, which once served as a vital medium for passing down cultural values, historical narratives and ethical teachings, is gradually disappearing in urban spaces. This decline is exacerbated by the growing literacy gap between urban and rural populations, where modern education and media have supplanted indigenous knowledge systems. The displacement of rural populations to urban areas has further contributed to the erosion of regional identities and cultural practices. As families adopt urban lifestyles and technologies, the once-vibrant oral traditions are at risk of being lost to future generations. However, there is a pressing need to preserve these intangible cultural assets, not only for their intrinsic value but also for their potential to foster national unity and contribute to the country's cultural tourism and international reputation. In an era dominated by virtual realities and digital distractions, it is essential to reclaim and honor the folklore and teachings that have shaped Pakistan's rich cultural heritage. By documenting, translating and sharing these narratives, Pakistan can safeguard its cultural identity while offering a deeper understanding of its history and values to a global audience. The challenge lies in finding ways to balance modernity with tradition, ensuring that the wisdom of the past continues to resonate with future generations, guiding them toward a more compassionate, inclusive and harmonious society.

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