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Aspects of Shrine Devotion and its Entwined Communication with the Lived Sufi Culture in Karachi

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Abstract

This paper endeavors to gain insight into the phenomenon of sacred presence, as it is perceived, expressed, and defined by devotees of diverse Sufi orders in the context of a sampling of ritual practices, narratives, and beliefs connected to eight Sufi saints' tombs in Karachi. The paper explores how devotion, tradition, and faith through the saints are preserved within the physical and spiritual framework of shrines and play an indispensable role in the lives of the ordinary person. How a deep love and veneration are epitomized as a testimony to the Saints' selfless service to God's creation, and how these sacred spaces have stood the test of time in preserving tradition and the essence of the spiritual. This paper investigates rituals, and practices and how through the singular thread of devotion to the saints they connect various communities that make up the diverse populace of Karachi. This paper argues that despite the apparent disorderliness, disruption, and haphazardness, there is a unity of purpose behind different rituals/ways of remembrance and its integration into people's lives, centered around and nourished by the saints' spiritual presence, which is a lived experience for millions. It investigates the ways this culture becomes the common thread of connection, unity, and continuity for a vast populace that identifies with the connection (*nisbat*), of the saints (*auliya)* and their shrines (*dargahs).*

Keywords: *Sufism, Devotion, Veneration, Tradition, Sacred Presence, Islamic Mysticism*

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Introduction:

In the present times of uncertainty, when people struggle globally to sustain themselves, undergoing constant self-renovations in search of so-called better versions of themselves. In Pakistan's largest city Karachi, masses continuously try to find ways to upgrade their lives and survive in the name of progress and development in a fast-changing life brought about by capitalism. Stemming from our collective lack of identity, researcher struggle to fit in, trying to move further away from the everyday 'ordinariness.' The mesh of fast-paced growth that constantly entangles us also prevents us from self-reflection, making us experience feelings that we have not known before. As a result, without a second thought, researcher hastily filter out traditional values which are taken for granted and dismissed as redundant. Many labels previous generations' practices, methods, and beliefs as unpractical, absurd, and useless. With this newfound refinement, and in the buzz of the moment, a significant number of the populace remains largely ignorant of the virtues and balances these practices have brought to our culture for centuries, neglecting the gradual degeneration of the ground that has held our roots together. In the book, *Hayat-e-Qadir*, (Durrani, 1997) establishes the 'preference for haste' *(ujlat pasandi)*, which has been infused into our lives as one of the prevailing reasons for the emergent negativity of this time and age. With this exponential acceleration, people want immediate results in everything, not wanting to wait for anything. In the 21st century, this deep imprint of impatience has been further emphasized with the advent of an endless fast-paced technological overload. With our inability to define limits for various technologies and social media platforms that make 'the instant' a common expectation, we are constantly bombarded with stimuli making it difficult to keep up, leading us to anxiety and stress.

As a result, no one wants to wait for anything. Collectively, we have calculated how we feel and express ourselves, our relationships, and how we live. Year after year, the ineffable knot that ties together ways of living and a sense of contentment in light of beliefs and age-old wisdom continues to diminish. Vernacular knowledge, oral traditions, and cultural practices embodied as a lived culture, and for centuries providing us with perspective and sustainability, are now at risk of silently escaping our collective memories.

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Hussain, R. (2017). Understanding Shrine Devotion in Karachi: Unveiling Layers of Communication and Their Connection to the Lived Sufi Culture. Shrine devotion in Karachi reflects the rich tapestry of lived Sufi culture, intertwining spiritual practices with cultural expressions (Ali, 2018)

As a society, our shared detachment might be due to shifts in belief systems that have dramatically impacted our religious interpretations. In the predominantly *Sunni* population, sect-based religious beliefs based on reformist ideologies raise questions on cultural practices entwined with religion, leaving many doubting the spiritual side of faith. Many communities prefer to substantially minus or eliminate traditional practices from their newfound understanding of religion, primarily based on the reformist evolution with the *Wahabi* movement. This, combined with changes in behavioral patterns, inter-generational disinterest, and a growing disregard for experiential learning, all add to this disintegration.

In this writing, Researcher try to trace the roots of the common person's spiritual wisdom to its source, the Sufi saints. We delve into the background, origins, and theology of Islamic mysticism *(tassawwuf*), its link to rituals and beliefs that, despite its severe criticism from the orthodox-leaning Muslim population, still unites its followers, forming a sacred connection between the person and the divine through the shrine and the saint. Insightful research by Khan (2015) emphasizes the expressive aspects of shrine devotion in Karachi and the deep connection it has with the city's thriving Sufi culture. The author's work makes a substantial contribution to revealing all of this cultural phenomenon's complex layers.

Research Statement

This research investigates devotees' perceptions and expressions of sacred presence across diverse Sufi orders and communities, focusing on ritual practices, narratives, and beliefs associated with this lived devotional culture of Karachi.

Research Objectives

1. Investigate Karachi's diverse communities' integration into Sufi culture, focusing on their engagement with specific Sufi orders' *khanqahs* and *astanans.*

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2. Understand the continuity of Sufi traditions among Karachi's diverse communities, examining how symbols, rituals, and beliefs connected to these traditions shape their daily lives and contribute to a cohesive culture.

Research Question

1. How do individuals from diverse communities in Karachi engage with and contribute to the Sufi culture, particularly within the context of specific Sufi orders?

2. What are the key factors that contribute to the continuity and connection of Sufi traditions among followers from various communities in Karachi, and how do these traditions influence their daily practices and lived experiences?

Literature Review

Most writing available on Islamic mysticism and the Sufism tradition focuses on the major saints, their shrines, and their contribution to the Sufi culture. Little focus and attention are given to the archiving and knowing of the lesser-known shrines, which are in no way less integral to their related communities serving as a locus of devotion and spiritual connection. Homage to these small, localized shrines and their rituals 'anchor' ordinary people and their communities to a sacred space, deepening their sense of belonging and connection to their locale, their community, and with the saint as the spiritual patron. Four of the books mentioned here describe how the presence of even the lesser-known saints and their shrines are equally responsible for cultivating the larger spiritual landscape of a place.Hayat-e-Qadir by Ubaidullah Durrani is this thesis's primary source of inspiration. The book is a portrait of 20th-century Sufi Saint Baba Qadir Auliya in Vizianagaram, South India, whose teachings emphasized the importance of devotion to God and service to humanity. With limited understanding and aptitude for the Urdu language, the vocabulary used in most books on mysticism remained unrelatable, given their extensive use of Urdu terminologies. In contrast (Durrani, 1997) used a simple and conversational style of Urdu language, rendering the writing both involving and inclusive. Its balance between relatable vocabulary and visual descriptions of places and events tied together by verses of Urdu poetry left a lasting impression on this research.

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The chapter 'Hujra Mubarak' (Blessed Chamber) is especially central to this research as it illustrates how sacred spaces for God's friends come into existence. The chapter depicts how, through divine arrangements, a place (that will become a future center of Sufi Centre) is identified and formed without adequate planning or provision. In his biographical audio recording, Durrani shares an intriguing story about how he came to write this book. He describes feeling curious and confused regarding the human understanding of divine truth (Haq). This was when he came across a pundit who advised him that if he wanted to understand God (Bhagavan), he must try and understand the bhagat.

The Mystical Dimensions of Islam serves as a foundation that identifies timelines, sources, and happenings exploring Islamic Mysticism's aspects. She emphasizes the importance of the mystical experience in Islam while debating a highly relevant theme in this time and age: Sufism is not a separate or distinct entity from Islam but rather an integral part rooted in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). (Schimmel ,2013) describes it as a path to direct communion with God while examining different forms of Sufism throughout Islamic history, ranging from congregations of early ascetics to the more systematized Sufi orders. She also discusses the role of Sufism in Islamic art, literature, and poetry, highlighting how it has influenced and enriched the culture of the Muslim world. (Burckhardt, 2003) *The Essential Titus Burckhardt: Reflections on Sacred Art, Faiths, and Civilizations* by Titus Burkhardt features a highly visual writing style exhibiting the author's flair for painting a living portrait of the place and its people These narratives were absorbing and left a deep imprint. He writes about modest living informed by spiritual traditions, by recording the spirituality in everyday lives, simplicity of words, expression, the sanctity behind handiwork, and the importance of intention. Burkhardt describes elements of traditional Moroccan life,

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. including architecture, the markets *(souks)*, the crafts, and the religious rituals. He emphasizes the connection between the material and the spiritual worlds in Moroccan culture, exploring themes of spiritual blessing *(baraka)*, believed to be present in certain places and objects in Fez. The chapter 'Evocations of Traditional Moroccan Life' focuses on how traditional Islamic culture and spirituality are embodied in people's daily life in Fez, Morocco. On the first interaction with a local craftsperson from the Baluch community, I drew many parallels from the section 'The Blind Comb-maker.' Another chapter, 'The Spiritual Life,' is a nuanced and insightful exploration of the spiritual dimensions of Islamic life in Fez. The Quran's importance and role in the daily lives of Muslims in Fez are explained. The author discusses the concept of *Bismillah*, the invocation 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,' recited before every action, and how it shapes the spiritual outlook of Muslims. The chapter concludes by discussing the various forms of Islamic spirituality, including the Sufi orders, and how they integrate spiritual practices into daily life. In *The Sacred and the Profane,* (Eliade, 1987) studies how cultures express and communicate the experience of 'The Sacred' through rituals, symbols, and myths. He introduces the concept of 'hierophany,' which he describes as a moment when man realizes the manifestation of 'Sacred Reality' with the breaking of the divine into the mundane world. He portrays this concept of manifestation by speaking about a tree, stone, or threshold that might appear to be ordinary and mundane but has become sacred to the one it has been revealed to. For research, this idea tied into the concept of ritual offerings at the shrine. In Sufism: A Global History, Nile Green thoroughly examines Sufism and its history across various regions of the Islamic world. He discusses the Sufi shrine globally as an elemental manifestation of the Sufi culture. This book helped the study regarding the formation of a shrine as a place for traditional activity and togetherness of communities as he discusses the prevalence of shrines throughout the Islamic world, not only as spiritual hubs but also serving as centers of social engagement and cultural activity for the devotees

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. Green also highlights the diversity of Sufi shrines, noting that their architecture, rituals, and practices vary widely. Some shrines are simple and modest, while others are grand and ornate. Similarly, the rituals and practices observed at these spiritual hubs may differ, depending on the local Sufi traditions and customs. (Green, 2012)

Kashf al-Mahjub, or *The Revelation of the Veiled,* is considered one of the earliest and most influential treatises on Islamic mysticism, written in the 11th century by the Sufi master Ali al-Hujwiri and translated by Nicholson A. Reynold in 2014. Reynold draws on the author's personal experiences and the stories of Sufi masters to illustrate its teachings, focusing mainly on explaining the spiritual path of Islamic mysticism. (Hujwīrī, 2014) The book is one of the earliest known guides for followers who seek a deeper understanding and practice of *tassawwuf*. The literature covers a wide range of topics, from the nature of God, the relationship between the human being and the divine, spiritual practices of devotion, the different stages of spiritual development, and various symbolic representations of the mystical path. As parallels have been drawn between the archetype of the malang's patched garments, the tiled floor, and the various diverse mixtures in this research, Researcher was recommended to read Chapter 4. 'On The Wearing of Patched Frocks.' This chapter provides a chronological insight into the history of the garment, tracing its tradition to the Prophet (PBUH) and His companions, for whom this was a symbolic representation of poverty.

Research Methodology:

In this paper, the research philosophy employed is interpretive research. Interpretive research is founded on the idea that social reality is shaped by the individual experiences of human beings and the contexts of those experiences (ontology) rather than it being singular or objective. As a result,

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it is best explored within its socio-historical context. to (Bhattacherjee, 2012). According to Eileen M. Trauth, in this particular research philosophy, a phenomenon is studied according to the definition provided to it by the members of any given society as well as within the boundaries of its cultural context. Interpretive research methodology makes use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. (Trauth, 2009) and (Merriam, 2009)

This study attempted to interpret observations of the participants through their social context. I have two levels of interpretation: the participants' perceptions and the significance of their experiences in order to give a comprehensive or rich account of the phenomenon in question and to give reasons as to why the participants acted the way they did. Direct observation and participant observation are examples of observational methods utilized in this particular research method. In the context of evaluation and monitoring, the term "observation" typically refers to instances in which the researcher monitors the situation that typically surrounds the research objective. (Peters, 2023) Participant observation requires the researcher to participate in the situation, so through that, participant observation provides the researcher with a unique and comprehensive understanding of the research or project community. (Bernard, 2011)

Analysis & Interpretation

Despite severe criticism by religious reformists, the generality of the lived Sufi culture still thrives in many parts of South Asia. Islam is understood through interpretations of the Sufi saints and their teachings. These saints are referred to as the *Sufiya-e-Karaam* (The Exalted Sufis), the *Auliya* (Friends of God), the *Buzurgan-e-Deen* (The Elders of the Faith), and the *Fuqara* (The Poor in God). Devotion, tradition, and faith have collectively managed to stay preserved within the physical and spiritual framework of the *dargahs*, the *astana*, , and the *khanqah*. These sacred places spell out a connection to the divine and testify to the selfless service of the saints to all of God's creation. Through a constant connection *(nisbat)*, this is where people like Muhammad Jan and many others feed their inspiration, convey their prayers, and fuel their drive for life.

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> *"Most Sufi places of worship are known as dargahs and are centered on the tombs of the Sheikhs [Sufi Masters]. These shrines became sanctums for those who sought the presence of God. In time they became places of prayer where worshipers gathered in search of benediction and to ask for their wishes to be fulfilled. Faith in the sanctity and blessed bar of the shrine continues and attracts thousands of devotees from all walks of life."*

Several theologists and Sufi writers, including Maulana Rumi, Farid al-din Attar, , and Ibn-e-Arabi, have written about the spirit of inclusivity and acceptance practiced as part of the Sufi culture in their books. In Karachi today, most rituals practiced as part of the Sufi culture are based on knowledge transmitted from generation to generation through narratives, poetry, and reminiscences. These sacred practices have been integral parts of the tradition and heritage of this part of the world. They have become cultural expressions that have helped preserve and sustain this spiritual culture for centuries by inculcating a deep-rooted intimate sense of belonging *(apnaiyat)* between the people and the Saints.

Could the feeling of a person affect the energy of his surroundings? In *The Sacred and the Profane* (Eliade, 1987) talks of the Shepard yurt and the tent of a nomadic hunter, reiterating that even the humblest of human dwellings possess the potential to connect with the Divine.

> *"We have seen that the symbolism of the centre is the formative principle not only of countries, cities, temples, and palaces but also of the humblest human dwelling, be it the tent of a nomad hunter, the shepherd's yurt, or the house of the sedentary cultivator. This is as much as to say that every religious man places himself at the Center of the World and, by the same token, at the very source of absolute reality, as close as possible to the opening that ensures him communication with the gods."*

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The tranquil all-embracing presence within the shrines' atmosphere is something much more unified than words could express. Each object present, every portion of the structure, painted wall, scent, sound, and even conversations and words became part of this feeling of unity. Decorative items, religious iconography, and crafts from local artisans that make up the shared visuality of these places carried stories with cultural references, inherited tradition, passion, identity, and memory. These inexpensive souvenirs of homage are not always confined within the walls of the shrines; they are carried to homes and places of business as tokens of affinity to the saints. A garland of roses collected at a shrine can often be seen hanging in the corner of the place of work. Close to it, possibly a poster image of the *Auliya Allah* of *Pak-o-Hind*, a few stickers or cut-outs of Quranic verses, and the *durud sharif*[1] in brightly colored computer-replicated calligraphy. Often a folded *chadar,* signifying a token of consecration, will be put up at a high place in a shop so that symbolically the person conducting business there is constantly under its blessed presence.

In working with diverse communities and archiving folk practices as part of Karachi's multicultural fabric, it was impossible to ignore people's inherent sense of spiritual affinity. Every Sufi shrine has its presence and feeling, but visiting shrines around Karachi that are not commonly known, I always experienced a special wholehearted simplicity welcoming me. An inviting tenderness in the atmosphere and in the people's gestures. Even upon their first visits to these places, many others witnessed a warm familiarity, even though the atmosphere, fragrance, and visual iconography were new to them. What is this sincerity and familiarity that greets people from all walks of life with open hearts? If it defined something sacred, then why had I not witnessed the same in most other religious sites or places of worship? Could this experiential feeling be best explained as a particular state of soul or *kaifiyat* in Urdu? And was it something instilled within these structures and part of these fragrances or more? Was it an amplified aftereffect of being overwhelmed at a given moment? Were the people inhabiting the place affected by it, or was it the place being affected by the people? Was it a third possibility of something realized by the fusion of both these conditions? In a chapter on Islamic spiritual life, Titus Burkhardt highlights the connection of spirituality in the culture of the Maghrebi, which is not just limited to doctrines but transcends to poetry and symbols of daily life.

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"The spiritual high points of Maghrebi culture are to be found in the realm of Islamic mysticism, which in Arabic is known as Tassawwuf. Possessing as it does the dual aspects of wisdom and the love of God, it finds expression not only in metaphysical doctrines, but also in poetry and the visual arts and, as its essence is communicated most directly in symbols and parables, it can speak without hindrance not only to learned believers but also to the simple man of the people: the craftsman and the Bedouin; in fact, it may often be more readily accessible to the unlearned than to the learned."

Discussion

For most lower-income communities in Karachi who ardently follow the *traditional Sunni* belief system, the association with shrines and saints also involved rituals, congregations, and festivities that brought them together several times annually. The tradition of venerating the saints and associating with them has become an essential aspect of the way of life for these communities, occupying a space between homage, pleasure, and faith. Most family picnics and get-togethers are centered around shrine visits *(hazri)*. Businesses and household chores are run around religious holidays and routines of sacred events such as 12th *(Bara) Rabi-ul-Awal, Ashura, Shab-e-Barat, Koonday, Shab-e-Mairaj, Gyarwin Shareef, Chhati Shareef,* and every month's *Nauchandi*. Lunar dates of blessed days from the *Shia* and *Sunni* sects form this unwritten sacred calendar, are observed exuberantly, and involvement is not limited by age or gender.

"Aik community Iss Continent Mae Aqaaed Pae Jeeti Hai Aur Jeeti Chali Ja Rahi Hai Sadiyon Sae"

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"A specific community in this continent (region) lives on these beliefs
And has continued to live this way for centuries."

During the research, the researcher met and conversed with people from the Urdu-speaking, Bengali, Pashtun, Sindhi, Punjabi, Hazara, and Baloch communities. Most of these people's relationship with the saints is forged around love and passion for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and His Blessed Household (*Ehl al-Bayt)*. In the month of Muharram, on the dates of the 9th and 10th (*Ashura)*, when the *Shia* community mourns the tragedy of *Karbala* the world over, large numbers of people from these traditional *Sunni* communities come together to honor the valour and heroic fearlessness of Iman Hussain and his companions. Large congregations in the form of a parade *(juloos)* celebrated the victory of Truth *(Haq)* over Falsehood *(baatil)*. Participation in these ritual practices passed down from generation to generation is said to awaken valor and confidence among the youth.

All over Karachi, these rituals of devotion varied from community to community. In parts and adjoining areas of Orangi town, Landhi, Malir, Khokrapaar, and Korangi, men, women, and children from these Urdu-speaking communities come together in processions with beautifully decorated *Tazias* each year, bringing to life this centuries-old tradition. In the old Drigh Colony, residents beat hand-made drums in a choreographed manner. The throbbing rhythms signify the remembrance of the war drums (*tabal-e-jung)* at Karbala's war grounds. The drummers passionately build these drums by recycling various scrap materials like oil drums, dried animal skins, plastic, and ropes as a yearlong preparation. The thrashing of these rhythms dominates the afternoon atmosphere with emotions of fervor and triumph. The drummers' facial expressions translate to how emotionally immersed they become in the performance. Troupe after troupe displays their pulsating passion for crowds who stand in a trance-like state with ears ringing from slap back echoes off congested concrete structures.

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On the evening of the 9th of Muharram, Bengali-speaking youths, settlers of Landhi 4, Murtaza Chowrangi area, pay their unique homage to Imam Hussain and his companions. Emulating the messengers and couriers *(qaasid)*) at Karbala, the participants tie brass bells and ropes around their bodies, where they take blessings at the *tazia* and enter a marked boundary measuring a few meters, running back and forth, forward and reverse within this space—verses of homage to the brave and mighty that became eternal in the battle of Karbala are recited loudly. The constant running motion, supplemented with the heavy dangling of bells and accentuated by this continuous recital, evokes a trance between the participants and the onlookers. Children, adults, men, and women from neighboring localities arrive to witness this spectacle of tradition. Sweets and savory items are offered as *niaz* and distributed to the participants and the audiences, and this ritual is simultaneously practiced with the same passion in several other localities.

The offering of *niaz* and *fateha* are standard practices in most traditional *Sunni* households. People believe that in Karachi, until thirty years ago, every other household observed the ritual of *niaz.* However, with most *khanqahs* and *astanas,* it remains standard practice. *niaz*, *fateha*, and *dua* are offered at the end of a *milad sharif and a qawwali* ceremony often follows.

The *urs* of Gaaji Baba is celebrated by residents of Landhi belonging to the *Purabi* community, who engage in three-day-long ceremonies. Muhammad Arif, a devotee to the saint, speaks about the unique preparation style of the free food *(langar)*. As part of their homage and devotion, everyone attending the *urs* ceremonies contributes by donating to the *langar*. Some people bring chickens and roosters; others bring a goat, sheep, or buffalo to offer homage. Sacks of rice are also donated, while someone takes care of the *ghee* and vegetables. As the gravy for the biryani is prepared, the meat is cooked all together; the mutton, chicken, and beef are all prepared simultaneously in the same cauldron – no raw food items or meats are separated from the other; all come together to make up a single dish that will feed the hungry.

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Sajida Nisar, a Hazare Waal who moved to Karachi from her hometown in Abbottabad twenty-five years ago, prepares *kheer* every Thursday afternoon. The hot dessert is served in a glass bowl, and after *Maghrib*, she recites *fateha* over it for Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. She believes that everything she and her family have today is with the blessings of the Saint. She urges her sons, nieces, and nephews to contribute eleven rupees to this *niaz* or donate to a charity of this amount in the name of the saint.

Every year a *sandal* ceremony commemorating the *urs* of Khawaja Mahbub Mirza Chishti, an Indian Hyderabadi saint, is organized by devotees of his order in Khokrapaar Karachi. A tray with sandalwood, rose water, sweets, various attars, and a *chadar* are prepared, and verses from the Quran are recited. The ceremony starts precisely at the hour of the evening prayer, and a *qawwali* is performed following the prayer. A brass band stands ready to perform as the tray holding the *sandal* and *chadar* is reverently brought down the stairs of a second-floor apartment. A traditional *Naat* is performed over trumpets, a tuba, and marching drums. The rhythm of the music stays unbroken as the traditional *dhol* player, and *Shehnai Nawaz* begin their performance from the very note the brass band leaves it at. Following this, a group of *qawwals* takes over with the recital of devotional poetry. One of the participants says that the note (*sur)* shouldn't break; in this continuous performance that includes styles from three different musical styles. In the *Chishtiya* belief, *sandal* signifies the ground of the saints whatever is grown in the soil where sandal trees grow will carry its fragrance.

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Every community's link to saints and shrines can be traced with every practice. Participating in these rituals brings satisfaction and assurance to the people; the ones involved carry on with their ways, not forcing others to become a part of these acts, and with a collective objective of coming together in veneration. Something indescribable within their inner self rejoices with this accomplishment and satisfaction. *'It is a humbly sustained effort that can be seen taking place the following year and the year after*,' commented, an observer of these shared cultures. The ones crafting the *tazia*, the ones beating the drums, the ones running with bells tied to their bodies, the ones celebrating the *urs*, the ones offering *niaz* and *fateha*, and the ones cooking cauldrons of *langar* all continue to do so without thinking of physical gains they are getting in return.

Conclusion:

In a time where religion is greatly commodified and used for personal gain. When industrialists announce building gigantic mosques and inaugurating their latest housing schemes to profit from validation, televangelists, businesses, brands, institutes, and politicians misuse religion for personal gain. There remains a segment of society that doesn't feel the need to flaunt their religious beliefs when everyone wants to adorn themselves with badges of piety and appear holier than the rest. Their objective is not to try to fit in but to hold on to their beliefs; they didn't adhere to social pressures of appearing a certain way, men were not compelled to grow beards, and women didn't essentially veil themselves from head to toe. Those devoted and connected to the saints didn't need to display their faith outwardly. This connection can be seen in everyday life, reflected by virtues such as simplicity, piety, and contentment.

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For many, the *nisbat* of the saints is a self-assurance that spells out Divine presence, an absolute support system as they trudge through everyday challenges. Their shrines are the lighthouses on dark stormy nights that would otherwise leave them distressed. When all else fails, the presence of these saints becomes the key support (*sahaara)* that navigates them through challenging times. In the process of continuity, they hold on to their beliefs and keep strengthening their bond with the saints by expressing their love through rituals of devotion. A sacred bond of unity becomes a tangible experience at the shrine with the saint's intercession linking them to God and The Prophet (PBUH). Rituals rooted in hundreds of years of Islamic traditions instill a deep sense of identity and awaken a subtle value system among devotees. The unifying temperament of *tassawwuf* is exemplified at the shrine and in everything associated with it. Just like the floor tiles, imperfect in arrangement yet coming together in purpose, a singular shared objective unites the several elements of this culture. There is a realization where the overlapping of brash vocals sung on tiny suburban rooftops mixing with recitations, the beating of drums, the repurposing of rejected materials, the sharp-smelling burning incense, the transcendent fragrance of rose petals, the diverse congregations, the incoherence of inexpensive decorative objects, and the cauldron where different types of food sacrifice their identity to unify, all become a singular bond uniting everything and everyone in oneness. This haphazardness, apparent disorderliness, love, and passion all amalgamate to form Karachi’s lived Sufi culture.

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