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SAINTHOOD IN RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN EGYPTIAN AND PAKISTANI SUFI MODELS[1]

الولاية في السياق الديني والاجتماعي والسياسي: دراسة مقارنة بين النموذجين الصوفيين المصري والباكستاني

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الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة المقارِنة مفهوم الولاية في الأعراف الصوفية المصرية والباكستانية منذ القرن العشرين وحتى الوقت الحاضر. ورغم التأثير العميق للتصوف في بلورة المشهدين الديني والثقافي في كل من مصر وباكستان، فإن مظاهر الولاية في السياقين تُظهر جوانب مشتركة وأخرى متمايزة. تُحلل الدراسة مختلف أبعاد الولاية، بما في ذلك المشاركة السياسية، والنشاط الاجتماعي، والقيادة الدينية، والروحانية، والزهد، ودور النساء في الولاية، وثقافة الأضرحة، والمعجزات، وتأثير الكاريزما. من خلال مقارنة منهجية، تُبرز الدراسة أوجه التشابه البارزة بين التقليدين، مثل بناء الأضرحة، وإقامة المهرجانات السنوية، والتركيز على قيم الزهد والتقوى، والإيمان بقدرة الأولياء على تقديم الإرشاد الروحي والبركات. في الوقت ذاته، تُسلط الضوء على الاختلافات الملحوظة، لا سيما في المصطلحات المستخدمة، والنطاق الجغرافي لتأثير الأولياء، والمواقف تجاه التقاليد الصوفية في الأديان الأخرى. وتؤكد الدراسة أن المنهج المقارن يُشكّل أداة فعالة لتعزيز الحوار والتفاهم المتبادل بين هذه المجتمعات الصوفية المختلفة. ومن خلال دراسة الروابط بين الأعراف الصوفية في جنوب آسيا والشرق الأوسط، تُسهم هذه الورقة البحثية في إثراء مجال الدراسات الثقافية المقارنة وتعميق الخطاب الأكاديمي حول التصوف ومفهوم الولاية عبر الثقافات.

Abstract

This comparative study explores the concept of sainthood within Egyptian and Pakistani Sufi traditions from the 20th century onward. While Sufism has significantly shaped the religious and cultural landscapes of both regions, the expression of sainthood in each context reveals both commonalities and unique distinctions. The study examines key dimensions of sainthood, including political engagement, social activism, religious authority, spirituality, ascetic practices, the role of female saints, shrine culture, miracles, and the influence of charisma. Through a systematic comparison, the paper uncovers notable similarities,

such as the establishment of shrines, the observance of annual festivals, the emphasis on asceticism and piety, and the belief in saints' spiritual guidance and blessings. At the same time, it identifies important differences, particularly in the terminology used, the geographical extent of saints' influence, and attitudes toward mystical traditions in other religions. The study argues that a comparative approach provides a valuable framework for fostering dialogue and mutual understanding between these distinct Sufi communities. By examining the interconnections between South Asian and Middle Eastern Sufi traditions, this research contributes to the broader field of comparative cultural studies and deepens scholarly discussions on Sufism and sainthood across diverse cultural contexts.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التصوف، الولاية، مصر، باكستان، دراسة مقارنة، الأضرحة، البير، الأولياء.

Keywords: English: Sufism, Sainthood, Egypt, Pakistan, Comparative Study, Mysticism, Shrines, Pirs, Awliya

Introduction:

The intellectual and spiritual legacy of Sufism has profoundly enriched Islamic mystical philosophy. Classical Sufis played a pivotal role in shaping their societies, a responsibility that modern Sufis continue to shoulder with notable influence. Sufism maintains a deep resonance, especially among the educated elite, the affluent, and individuals of high social status across various cultures. Assertions about the demise of Sufism in modern time needs to be revised.[2] Nile Green asserts that by 1100, Sufi activity had expanded across both the East and West. By 1500, the Sufis had achieved remarkable prominence, establishing a global network of institutions and exerting profound influence. Their ascent cemented their role as pivotal

[2] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, (Colombia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 367.

social and intellectual anchors within diverse communities.[3] The Sufi experience occupies a prominent position in scholarly discourse, with the phenomenon of sainthood emerging as a central subject of rigorous analysis and critique. As a cross-cultural and transnational phenomenon, sainthood functions as a cohesive framework through which individuals from disparate cultural and ethnic backgrounds converge, embodying shared attributes that transcend their inherent differences.

Sufi saints in the Pakistani and Egyptian models emerge from distinct cultural contexts, shaped by divergent ethnicities, traditions, customs, daily life concerns, lifestyles, and clothing. The South Asian cultural framework significantly contrasts with that of Egypt, which is rooted in the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, the linguistic divide further underscores their differences, as Arabic and Urdu, despite sharing relatively few words, often assign them different meanings. Geographical distance further separates these models, with Pakistan located in South Asia and Egypt situated at the crossroads of the Middle East and North Africa.

Given these profound differences, how can a comparative approach be both effective and meaningful in analyzing these two seemingly opposing paradigms? This paper seeks to address this question by arguing that comparison serves as a vital scientific method. It facilitates the "formation and application of categories," an inherently evaluative and hierarchical process that establishes a standard by which phenomena are assessed for inclusion or exclusion, and subsequently ranked within marked or unmarked classifications.[4]

In this study, I will compare these two Sufi models in terms of sainthood from the 20th century onwards, aiming to demonstrate how such a comparison can bridge diverse subjects, fostering integration and dialogue between these distinct traditions. The structure of this paper is as follows:

- The first two sections delve into the defining features of Sufi sainthood in Egypt and Pakistan, exploring dimensions such as political engagement, social

[3] Nile Green, *Sufism A global History*, (USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 71.

[4] Barbara Holdrege A., Politics of comparison, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 2010, 149.

activism, religious leadership, spirituality and asceticism, inclusivity, female sainthood, the establishment of shrines and their associated festivals, the extraordinary and supernatural acts ascribed to saints, and the role of charisma in shaping their impact. These elements are examined in comparative context, emphasizing their cultural expressions within each tradition without direct juxtaposition.

- The last part provides a comparative analysis of traits of sainthood in both models. It discusses the points of similarities as well as the points of differences. It also illustrates how comparing the two models contributes to the development of a unified framework for understanding Sufi sainthood.

In his seminal work The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), William James, the father of modern psychology, contends that most religious mystic figures share a range of common characteristics, such as asceticism, power of soul, purity, and charity. This suggests that human experience, particularly in its religious dimensions, is cross-cultural and capable of uniting diverse traditions. Inspired by James's study, this current research has undertaken a comparative analysis to explore the similarities and differences in the mystic experiences of saints from Asia (Pakistan) and the Middle East (Egypt).

Sainthood in Islam

Sainthood, or *Walayah* is a general term used in the Qur'anic terminology to refer to the divine authority, or ties of allegiance between the believers and it is mentioned in the Qur'an more than one hundred times referring to "patron", "protector", and "friend".[5] In Sufi terminology, the term refers to a specific spiritual state in which an individual reaches an elevated level of purity and transcendence. A saint (wali, plural awliya in Arabic, or Pir in Urdu) is characterized by an exceptional closeness to Allah, embodying qualities of profound spirituality and divine connection. Awliya are regarded as individuals uniquely chosen by God, endowed with

[5] Richard J.A McGregoer, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 6.

extraordinary gifts, including the ability to perform supernatural acts, reflecting their elevated spiritual status.[6]

In The Salience of Saintliness in Islam: A Sufi Perspective, Hegazy outlines several definitions of the term wali as follows:[7]

> "Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1073), an Arab Muslim scholar and theologian defines the term *wali* by two meanings; the first is the care of God for his friends, and the second is the strict adherence of the *wali* to God's way and avoidance of His disobedience.[8] Carl Ernst, professor of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina, holds that *wali* is a figure who could intercede with God, much as a feudal noble could intercede with the king.[9] It is worthy of mention that the term *Wilayah* was developed in the second half of the ninth century by al-hakim al-Tirmidhi (a Sunni jurist (*faqih*) and traditionist (*muhaddith*) of Khorasan, and one of the great early authors of Sufism, (d. 912) and later authors, such as Ibn Arabi who had to expand on al-Tirmidhi's ideas.[10] While these definitions of *wali* focus on the attributes possessed by an individual, Vincent Cornell, professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University notes, "*Walaya* and *wilaya* are used interchangeably by most Western scholars of Islam … the terms *wali allah* has a social as well as a metaphysical signification: the Muslim saint protects or intercedes for others as Allah's deputy or vicegerent."[11] In other words, sainthood has both a spiritual and a social significance. In the spiritual context, this refers to possessing specific characteristics and abilities that are cultivated through a deep connection with the divine. Socially, it pertains to the capacity to perform particular actions within society that stem from this state of divine closeness."[12]

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[6] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Radtke, B, "Saints", (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 520.

[7] Wael Hegazy, "The Salience of Saintliness in Islam: A Sufi Perspective," Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–19.

[8] Abdul-Fattah Barakah, *Al-hakīm al-Tirmidhī and His Theory in Wilayah* (Cairo: Majma al-Buhuth al-Islamiyah, 2001), 65.

[9] Carl Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, (USA: Shambhala Publication, 1997), 50.

[10] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Radtke, B, "Saints", 520.

[11] Vincent Cornell. *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998), 65.

[12] Wael Hegazy, "The Salience of Saintliness in Islam: A Sufi Perspective 1–19.

A *Wali* is a person whose soul is profoundly refined and heart unblemished, enabling divine perception, guidance, and unwavering reliance on God. Their existence mirrors serene trust, akin to a bird soaring in faith, detached from human dependencies. This elevated state grants an inner strength and a broader spiritual life beyond mundane concerns. As William James suggests, the saint accesses a vast realm of meaning and draws empowerment from an Ideal Power, rooted in unwavering faith and exclusive dependence on the Divine.[13] Such power arises from a deep, sincere belief and an unwavering dependence on God, reflecting complete trust and devotion to the Divine.

Scholars approach the concept of sainthood through various lenses: some emphasize baraka (spiritual blessing) as a defining power of the saint, others view sainthood as a social construct dependent on public recognition through specific actions, and yet others focus on ethical virtues, defining saints by their exceptional moral character (salih). [14] [15] Nevertheless, The concept of sainthood and the "Perfect Man" primarily emerged and gained prominence from the 13th century onward, subsequently becoming a shared legacy across Sufi orders worldwide. While diverse interpretations of sainthood exist, this study adopts a comparative framework to examine how the two comparands both converge and diverge, thereby shaping an integrated epistemological model. By situating comparison itself as a dynamic epistemological source and a powerful tool, the study underscores its utility in advancing knowledge across various domains.

I begin by examining the concept of Sufi sainthood within the Egyptian context:

The current official statistics record about 77 Sufi orders registered with the Supreme Council for Sufis Orders in Egypt, with total more than 6 million Sufi disciples.[16] Although it is widely argued that Sufism recently faded in Egypt because the

[13] Vincent Cornell. *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism*, 212.

[14] Wael Hegazy, "The Salience of Saintliness in Islam: A Sufi Perspective," 1-19.

[15] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, (University of North Carolina Press: USA, 1975),, *199*.

[16] Al Jazeera. "The Supreme Council for Sufi Orders in Egypt." Al Jazeera Encyclopedia. December 4, 2017. https://www.aljazeera.net

challenges of modernity, nationalism, proliferation of Salafism and other factors, Sufism is still alive and works in all walks of Egypt providing its followers with strength, spirituality and hope.[17] "Sufi institutions and orders are considered among the most significant foundations, on whose basis much of the religious tradition and establishments arose in Egypt."[18]

Egyptian Sufi Saints as Political activists

Egyptian Sufi saints are known not only for their spiritual connection with society but also for their active role in political reform. A key feature of their identity is their engagement with political life, refusing to withdraw from its realities. While their political involvement may be sporadic, it remains an important aspect of their presence and influence that cannot be ignored. Political participation of collective Sufi saints in Egypt can be traced back to 1173, with the reign of Salahuddin al-Ayyubi (d.1193), who used them as a power supporting him in his political campaign against the Fatimids.[19] Since the 1952 revolution, Sufi saints have wielded considerable influence within Egyptian society, a fact that has been keenly recognized by successive Egyptian regimes. These regimes have strategically leveraged the Sufi presence to garner support for governmental decisions. For instance, the Egyptian Sufi saints who are represented in their Sufi institutions expressed their "support of Abdel Nasser's decisions to withdraw international forces from Sinai during May 1967 as well as the master of the *al-'Azmiyya* Sufi Order gave allegiance to Mubarak for a period extending up to 2010.[20] Another example for the presence of Sufi saints in the political life in Egypt is appeared in the decision taken to appoint Abu *al-'Aza'im*, a contemporary Egyptian Sufi saint, as the coordinator between the Sufi leaders in Egypt and the government of the United States during the reign of Mubarak.[21]

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[17] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, x.

[18] Tarek Ladjal, Sufism and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: A Study of Sufi Political Engagement in the Pre and Post-revolutionary Reality of January 2011.

[19] Tarek Ladjal, Sufism and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: A Study of Sufi Political Engagement in the Pre and Post-revolutionary Reality of January 2011.

[20] Ibid.,

[21] Ibid.,

Egyptian Sufi saints were recognized for their active participation in political affairs, exemplified by the Tijaniyya order. Founded in Cairo by Sheikh Ahmad at-Tijani (d. 1815), this order was known for its role as a form of political opposition to the ruling authorities.[22] Egyptian Sufi saints strive to maintain a balance between their religious practices, active involvement in social work, and the preparation and mobilization of leaders for political participation. Among the most renowned Sufi figures of the 20th century is Sheikh Abu ul-Wafaa al-Sharqawi (d. 1961), who significantly influenced both the political and religious elites of his time.[23]

At times, Sufi saints may not be directly engaged in the political process, but their connections with influential political figures enable them to exert some influence on political decision-making. For example, the Sufi Sheikh Ahmad Radwan (d. 1967), is noted for his associations with political leaders such as former President Gamal Abdel Nasser (d. 1970). Nasser attended one of Radwan's sessions and even established a train station bearing Radwan's name to facilitate access for his followers. Nile Green also highlights that Sufis have historically been "major political players" who benefited from extensive landholdings and the support of numerous devoted followers.[24]

Sufi saints derive their political authority from the core principles of Sufi teachings, which emphasize disciplining followers in alignment with the saints' vision, often demanding complete submission. The recent involvement of some Sufi saints in politics reflects a revival of historical practices, where earlier saints participated in Jihad against colonialism and were often consulted or appointed to ministerial roles by governments. However, not all Egyptian Sufi saints embraced political engagement. Some distanced themselves from governmental matters and remained silent on political issues. For example, Sheikh Abu ul-Wafaa al-Sharqawi (d. 1899), despite his widespread popularity among Sufi followers and the general

[22] Kelly Pemberton, Women Pirs, Saintly Succession, and Spiritual Guidance in South Asian Sufism, *The Muslim World*,
Volume 96, Issue 1, Jan. 2006.

[23] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 255.

[24] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 3.

public in Egypt, chose to avoid political involvement and maintained cordial relations with the ruling regime.[25]

Women Sufi saints in Egypt

Women's participation in Sufism holds equal value and significance as political involvement. For Egyptian women, Sufism offers a valuable opportunity to engage actively in spiritual activities, particularly given the traditional and social constraints that often limit their involvement. Historically, gender-based distinctions were absent in the original Sufi tradition, which supported female participation in Sufi life. Notably, early Sufi women enjoyed greater freedoms compared to their contemporary counterparts. For instance, Ibn Arabi, the great Sufi saint, considers the femininity as a symbol of divine love in addition to his thinking that human existence is superior to the distinction based on gender.[26] He also accounts various miracles of women saints including his teacher who was a female saint and he served her until her death.[27]

Surprisingly, in the late 20th century, the Egyptian Supreme Council of Sufi Orders officially banned the membership of females in Sufi orders claiming that this step comes to comply with the Islamic law which prohibit the mixing between the two sexes.[28] This does not mean that this decision prevented women from participation in Sufi activities, but they have actively participated and became members of the saints' disciples and even they became saints themselves.[29] In modern Egypt, it seems to be rare for a woman to become *shaykha* (saint) although it was accepted in the pre-modern times. For instance, Zaynab Fatima bint al-Abbas (d. 1394) was the saint of the women retreat house (ribat) in Cairo belonging to Baghdadiyah Order.[30] Hajja Zakkiya Abdu l-Mutalib Badawi (d. 1983) is among the renowned female Egyptian saints, celebrated for her dedication to charity, hospitality, and her profound spirituality. She attracted a large following of disciples, both men and

[25] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 285.

[26] Nuzha Barrada, *Femininity in Ibn Arabi's Thought*, (Beiruit: Dar al-Saqi, 2008), 10.

[27] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 229.

[28] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 226.

[29] Ibid.,

[30] Ibid., 232.

women, who regarded her as a spiritual guide. Inspired by figures like her, some modern female Sufi disciples are advocating for their rights to emulate the pre-modern female Sufi saints who played active roles in their communities and conducted spiritual gatherings.

Egyptian saint is a spiritual father/mother

Focusing on the spiritual dimensions of Sufism, it is evident that Egyptian Sufi saints often adopt a paternal or maternal approach in their relationships with disciples, treating them as spiritual children. For instance, Sheikh Abu al-Azaym, a prominent contemporary Sufi leader and head of the International Union for Sufism, has disciples who refer to themselves as his "sons." Similarly, Sheikh Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim (d. 1998), head of the Muhammadiyya Shadhiliyya order and founder of the al-'Ashira 'l-Muhammadiyya association, referred to women in the association as his "daughters."[31] It comes out from the idea of spiritual relationship is more valuable than the biological one. Therefore, it is not surprising to hear, in the Sufi context, expressions such as this is my father, mother, son or daughter, as they refer to spiritual not blood relations.

In the same vein, Egyptian female Sufi saints acted as "mother" for their disciples. For instance, Hagga Zakkiya Abdu l-Mutalib Badawi had spiritual children who were found everywhere in Egypt because of her piety and accepted prayers.[32] Sheikh Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, in his writings, always talks to his disciples as my sons and daughters. It is uncommon to find a Sufi saint whose writings do not include terms such as "my sons" and "my daughters." Sufi saints foster spiritual bonds with their disciples by extending the concept of fatherhood and motherhood. Additionally, they cultivate a sense of brotherhood, which is a profound relationship that binds and disseminates love among the disciples.

Sincere Spiritual Life of Egyptian Saints

The predominant characteristic among Egyptian Sufi saints is their indifference to reputation, leadership within Sufi orders,

[31] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 226.

[32] Ibid, 226.

and the pursuit of disciples.[33] This indicates that sainthood in Egyptian Sufism transcends the formal leadership of Sufi orders. These saints embody the idea that God's care is a deeply personal secret shared solely between themselves and the Almighty, one that must remain undisclosed to others. They believe that discussing their miracles or unique qualities diminishes their status as God's friends and risks disrupting that sacred connection. Furthermore, they place no importance on outward appearances, aligning with the original Sufi principle of wearing woolen garments as a symbol of humility. Instead, their focus is deeply rooted in the cultivation of inner morals and values. Thus, Sufism as an idea can also be practiced outside the Sufi orders as it is a mystic and spiritual experience applicable to anyone who fulfills its ways and methods.[34]

Sincerity is the most common quality among the Sufi saints and it explains their insistence to invite the youth to attend their orders and engage in their sessions to the extent that one of Sufi saints passed away in one of his spiritual journey during *dhikr* session.[35] Egyptian Sufi saints are sincerely helping society's members as they used to open their homes for their Sufi disciples to stay and attend the spiritual sessions without charging them the cost of their living. For example, Hagga Zakkiya is said to be a good example of the most pious Sufi woman who devoted all of her time to *dhikr*, recitation of Qur'an and doing a litany of prayers about the Prophet. [36]

Nobility of Egyptian Sufi Saints

While spirituality forms the essence of Sufism, genealogical lineage significantly influences the perception of sainthood within the tradition. A defining feature of many Egyptian Sufi saints, and potentially those in other regions, is their noble ancestry, frequently traced to the Prophet Muhammad. Sheikh Ahmad Radwan, a prominent contemporary Sufi figure, is reputed to descend from the Prophet through his grandson al-

[33] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 256.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 278.

[36] Ibid, 293.

Hasan, exemplifying this revered genealogical connection.[37] Further, Wafaayiah *tariqa* is an Egyptian Sufi order and is considered a branch of Shadhiliyah order. Wafaayiah order has been founded by the prominent Sufi saint Muhammad Wafaa (d. 1301) who descended from a noble *silsilah* (initiation). It is said that his ancestors go back to the son of Ali, the son of the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.[38] Sheikh Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim, who is a son of an Egyptian Sufi saint, Sheikh Ibrahim Zaki Ibn Ali, is also said to be descended from the offspring of the Prophet Muhammad.

It is customary among the disciples of Sufi orders, particularly those engaged in documenting the biographies of their saints, to emphasize the importance of both biological lineage (*Nasab*) and spiritual initiation (silsilah). Through these connections, they trace the ancestry of Sufi saints and even prominent members of the order back to the Prophet Muhammad.[39] It looks like drawing this lineage adds to the credibility of Sufi saints as transmitters of spiritual traditions from the early ages of Islam and to be considered as a source of knowledge and blessing.

To formalize and preserve the bloodline of Sufi saints and others, the Office of the Descendants of the Prophet (Niqabat al-Ashraf) was established in 10th-century Egypt, exclusively for the lineage of Prophet Muhammad. The "lineage" or "chain" model of Sufi saints, originating in the medieval period, emphasizes the inheritance of power, blessings, and knowledge from predecessors. This model parallels the concept of dynasties among sultans, which emerged and spread across various Islamic countries from the medieval era onward.[40]

[37] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 257.

[38] Richard J.A McGregoer, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt*, 51.

[39] Julian Johnsen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*, 49.

[40] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 127.

Saints' Shrines and Festivals Around Them

In modern Egypt, the creation of shrines for Sufi saints and the frequent celebration of festivals around them are both prevalent and culturally accepted. These festivals are called *mawalid* and are supported as well as protected by the governments over the ages. The Arabic word *mawlid* refers to the birthdate of a saint in which it is annually held by the disciples and followers of this saint or his order.[41] There are about 2500 famous shrines in Egypt in which each shrine has its exclusive visit and festival but not all of these shrines have a salient festival like the most prominent shrines such as al-Hussain Birth festival in Cairo (grandson of Prophet Muhammad, d. 680) and al-Badawy (d. 1276) in Tanta, Abu al-Abbas in Alexandria (d. 1287), and others. It is also said that there are some unknown shrines spread within Egypt which are estimated at 6000 shrines in total with about 300 shrines only in Cairo.[42]

These shrines serve not only as memorials for deceased Sufi saints but also as sacred spaces where Sufi followers seek blessings, remedies for illnesses, and assistance. Their significance stems from the belief that saints can continue to benefit others even after their passing. "The situation of several shrines of Sufi masters in Egypt, however, also played a significant role in settling the Sufi practice into the fabric of social acceptance, with the credence of historical continuity, and a sentimental claim to the land."[43]

Charismatic Personality of Egyptian Sufi saints

Nile Green emphasizes the role of charisma and brotherhood as pivotal factors in the process of saint-making. These elements act as powerful agents in shaping the saint's personality and

[41] Julian Johnsen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*, (Oxford, Clearndon press, 1996), 70.

[42] Wael Hegazy, *Excessive Expenditure in Islamic Context, Two Models: Sufism and Shiism*, unpublished article, fall 2018.

[43] Tarek Ladjal, Sufism and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: A Study of Sufi Political Engagement in the Pre and Post-revolutionary Reality of January 2011.

character.[44] A charismatic personality is often prevalent among Egyptian Sufi saints, playing a crucial role in drawing disciples. Sheikh Ahmad Radwan, in particular, is noted for his compelling charisma, which captivated his followers and inspired them to trust and follow him unconditionally.[45] It is said that none can sit with him except he/she is influenced by his magic charismatic personality. The same attribute was found in the Sheikh Ahmad abul Hasan (d. 1994) who was a disciple of Sheikh Ahmad Radwan, in which he was characterized by impressive and charismatic personality.[46] Sheikh Mahmoud Abu Ilyan Adhazili (d. 1908) was a Sufi saint renowned for his strength and authority. His charisma and prestige were so impactful that it is said many people, including his own disciples, were afraid to pass by his house.[47]

Charisma, though present in individuals across various spiritual and ideological backgrounds, is especially prominent among Sufi saints. In Sufi thought, this charisma is regarded as a divine gift granted to saints who have fully devoted themselves to God. It is perceived as a reflection of God's power, emanating from their deep dedication to the Divine.

Egyptian Sufi Saints as Social Workers and Problem Solvers

In Egyptian Sufism, social engagement is as significant as spiritual participation. Unlike some saints in other traditions who often spend their lives in solitary worship, Egyptian Sufi saints view themselves as integral members of society and do not distance themselves from others. They devote considerable time to teaching their disciples, assisting those in need, and addressing societal issues, while also engaging in personal worship and devotion. For instance, Hagga Zakkiya, as recounted by her spiritual followers, began her journey of compassion and service upon relocating from her village to

[44] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 93.

[45] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 264.

[46] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 267.

[47] Julian Johnsen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*, 44.

Cairo, where she extended her kindness, offered hospitality, and addressed the needs of those who sought her assistance.[48]
It is worth noting that the powerful influence of Sufi saints is predominantly felt in rural areas. This is largely due to the active network of Sufi orders, with many masters and saints residing in villages and rural communities.[49] It does not mean that urban areas have not witnessed social services by the Sufi saints. One of most prominent Sufi institution is *al-'Ashira 'l-Muhammadiyya* which was established by Sufi saint Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim in 1930 and one of its functions is to socially serve the Egyptian society. It provides medical, educational and social services in some of Cairo's regions whose people suffered from poverty and lack of necessary living needs.[50]

One of the interesting social services provided by the Egyptian Sufi saints was the *Saha*, which is a group of buildings built by Hagga Zakkiya and dedicated to provide social services for the Bedouins of the region of Sidi Shadhili (a region in Upper Egypt) whose rights the government neglected for years after the 1967 war.[51] This *Saha* model has been established in many places in Egypt for mainly serving society's members and providing education and necessary needs for them.

Sufi institutions are considered as a major component of Egyptian society, particularly with regard to its widespread reach, and its role in shaping the religious and traditional character of Egyptians.[52] Although the importance that Egyptian Sufi saints gives to the solitary sessions and the effectiveness of solitary contemplation, they never feel isolated from the society and are deeply involved in social life. The nature of the Egyptian society necessitates that people shall set aside their differences and society members shall communicate and interact with each

[48] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 295.

[49] Tarek Ladjal, Sufism and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: A Study of Sufi Political Engagement in the Pre and Post-revolutionary Reality of January 2011.

[50] Julian Johnsen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*, 67.

[51] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 297, and 298.

[52] Tarek Ladjal, Sufism and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: A Study of Sufi Political Engagement in the Pre and Post-revolutionary Reality of January 2011.

other whatever their ideologies or orientations.[53] The Egyptian Sufi saints fully understand the nature of the Egyptian society and know how to socially integrate in ordinary people's lives.

Egyptian Saints as Healers of Disease

In Sufi circles, it is widely believed that Egyptian Sufi saints have the ability to heal mental illnesses and spiritual afflictions, with some followers extending this belief to physical ailments as well. For example, Hagga Zakkiya is renowned for her success in treating individuals with various mental health challenges. This healing ability is attributed to her baraka (blessing) or hidden karama (miracles). Hagga Zakkiya is also celebrated for numerous miracles, including acts of healing, profound wisdom, and transcending spatial limitations.[54] Many accounts are narrated about cases that have been cured from various diseases by the Sufi saints. Most of Sufi saints' hagiographies are full of their stories with these cases.

Further, the shrines of deceased Sufi saints are also sought by Sufi followers and some ordinary people as a means of seeking remedy from troubles, cures from illness, and hope in desperation.[55] During *mawlid*, tens of men and women carry their children while they are going to the shrine seeking the remedy from the deceased Sufi saint as he/she represents the intercessor to God. They usually donate for decorating the shrine and providing services for the shrine in order to show the loyalty to the shrine's saint seeking their intercession with God.

Modernity in Egyptian Sufi sainthood

In the context of modernity, Egyptian Sufi saints remain largely unconcerned with material pursuits, dedicating themselves instead to their spiritual path, which guides their actions and serves as the central focus of their lives. While their deep engagement in spiritual life may lead them to be less concerned with modern technology, they are generally open to utilizing

[53] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 297, and 366.

[54] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 297.

[55] Julian Johnsen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*, 40.

these advancements. This perspective is noted by Valarie Hoffman, who observes that Egyptian Sufi saints exhibit a positive attitude towards the use of modern technologies.[56] However, this situation has drastically changed in recent times, as evidenced by the current practice of conducting Sufi sessions and rituals online. This shift reflects an adaptation to contemporary technological advancements while maintaining their spiritual commitments.

Sheikh Muhammad Zaki Ibrahim is reported to have been open to some aspects of and was modernity as evidenced in his published writings. He also published a monthly magazine within his Sufi institution as he founded *Al-Muslim* magazine in 1984.[57] The value of this monthly magazine lies in its concern with the social issues of the Egyptian society in addition to its main focus on religious and spiritual ones.

With a particular emphasis on openness to other cultures—an essential aspect of modernity—Egyptian Sufis openly acknowledge and respect saints from all ethnicities, colors, and races. This acceptance likely stems from the diverse fabric of Egyptian society, which includes both Muslims and Christians. The ingrained culture of mutual respect and acceptance across religious, ideological, and cultural boundaries contributes to this inclusive attitude among Egyptian Sufis. The Egyptian society is also characterized by the openness to other cultures and ethnicities in Sufi experience. This is why one can find the most influential Sufi saint in Egypt was Moroccan; Abul-Hassan al-Shadhili, (d. 1258) and consequently his order became one of the most influential orders in modern Egypt. Al-Shadhiliya has a large following in Egypt despite the fact that its founder is from Morrocco.

Unique and Miraculous Abilities of Egyptian Sufi Saints

It is important to distinguish between two types of miraculous acts in Islamic thought. The first is a miracle (mu'jiza), which is exclusively granted by God to His Prophets as a form of divine

[56] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 363.

[57] Julian Johnsen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt*, 32.

support and a challenge to their opponents. The second is "Karama," a miracle that can be granted to any righteous worshipper who has a pure and sincere intention and has devoted their life to God. This type of miracle is typically attributed to Sufi saints.

These supernatural acts may sometimes be visible to disciples but remain hidden from others, except for a select few close to the saint. Sufi saints are believed to possess the ability to communicate with other saints, whether living or deceased, and to discern events occurring in distant locations.[58] Seeing the deceased people in dreams or in reality is a common quality of the Egyptian saints who claim to see the Prophet Muhammad himself. To see the Prophet Muhammad or the righteous people in dreams is normal by most Muslims and is not an exclusive trait of the Sufi saints or disciples but seeing Him or the deceased righteous people in reality is what Sufi saints claim to be distinguished by. Sheikh Ahmad abul Hasan (d. 1994) who was one of Sufi saints in Upper Egypt narrated his story with Sufism. He said that the first vision he saw after his Sufi teacher Sheikh Ahmad Radwan passed away was for one of the great Sufi saints accompanying the Prophet Muhammad.[59] A vision often signifies a pivotal moment in the life of a Sufi saint, serving as a source of inspiration and guidance that they follow closely. In another account, an Egyptian Sufi saint described undergoing a surgical operation in a dream, which was a cure for a severe illness he had previously suffered from. This experience was instrumental in his commitment to the Sufi path.[60]

These stories are often accepted by the disciples of Sufi saints, though they may seem surprising to others. One such figure is Sheikh Abul-Azam (d. 1983), who was reputed to possess extraordinary supernatural abilities. His wife claimed that their marriage ended due to these mysterious acts. She recounted instances where he would suddenly vanish while they

[58] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 264.

[59] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 268.

[60] Ibid., 273.

were together and described his ability to appear simultaneously in distant locations. [61]

Further, these Sufi miracles are seen as fuel of trust enriched in the Sufi disciples. Nile Green observes, "miracle stories fueled by the wider mechanisms by which Sufism was able to perpetuate itself through time, since such stories of past serve no purpose if no living inheritors of their power."[62] Sufi saints' biographies and books are full of stories about their unique abilities and *karamas.* Thus, it is widely accepted in the Sufi circles that every Sufi saint is characterized by exclusive hidden or clear miracles. These miracles are gifts of God to saints as a reward for their sincerity and commitment to worship.

As observed, the themes discussed above highlight key aspects of Egyptian Sufi sainthood. While some of these characteristics are shared by Sufi saints worldwide, others are specific to the Egyptian context. We now shift our focus to explore the distinctive features of Sufi sainthood as it is manifested in Pakistan.

Pakistani Sufi Saint (*Pir*)

Sufism has had a profound influence and a rich history in Pakistan and South Asia as a whole. The country is home to thousands of Sufi shrines scattered across its regions, attracting followers from all strata of society. The history of Sufism in this region predates the independence of Pakistan in 1947. The roots of Sufism in India trace back to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526), particularly through the Chishti and Suhrawardi orders.[63] By the 14th century, Sufi Tariqas (orders) had become well-established across many areas, with a significant number of khanqahs (buildings for spiritual gatherings, retreats, and character development). It is recorded that around 2,000 khanqahs existed in Delhi and its surrounding regions during this period.[64]

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[61] Ibid., 286.

[62] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 98.

[63] Riaz Hassan, Religion, Society, and the State in Pakistan: Pirs and Politics, *Asian Survey*, University of California Press, Vol. 27, No. 5 May, 1987.

[64] Ibid.,

Sainthood holds great significance for Sufi followers in Pakistan, where it is customary for everyone to have a Pir or Murshid. In the Pakistani context, both terms are used to refer to a Sufi saint. Sometimes the healer is referred to as *Pir* and the guide as *Murshid,* but in most cases both of these function are performed by one person and the two terms are used synonymously and a follower of both *Pir* and *Murshid* is called *murid* (disciple).[65] More specifically, because a Sufi saint is supposed to have an ability to cure the sick, it is said that *Pir* is concerned with physical remedies and *Murshid* with spiritual remedies.[66] Thus, it appears that a Murshid is distinguished by specific spiritual attributes, while the term Pir can be more general and may be applied to any Sufi saint. Additionally, the Bay'ah (pledge of allegiance), which every Sufi disciple is required to give to their saint, must be made to the Murshid rather than just any Pir. This is because a Pir may change, but a Murshid is a more permanent spiritual guide. [67] Bay'ah is a pact given by the disciples to the Sufi saint. It represents the treaty of obedience to Sufi saints' commands and directions. It is really rooted in the Islamic legacy, but it used to be given to the Prophet Muhammad.

Sufi *Pir* is an interpreter of dreams

The first role played by Pakistani Sufi saints is the interpretation of dreams. In Islamic thought, dreams hold considerable significance and continue to play an important role in the daily lives of many Muslims. Within Pakistani society, dreams are viewed as socially significant and serve as a cultural template. Given their importance, dreams and visions in Pakistan, a society that has endured years of colonialism, are seen by some scholars

[65] Adrian C. Mayer, Pir and Murshid: an Aspect of Religious Leadership in West Pakistan, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Jan., 1967, 3.
[66] Ibid., 3.
[67] Ibid., 6.

as one of many strategies for resisting colonial-dominated traditions that conflict with traditional Islamic principles.[68]

Pakistani Sufis consider dreams a substantial part of their life, and even a basis for decision-making. "Pakistani dream theory and techniques of interpretation are provided in printed manuals which are readily available in book bazaars."[69] Once having a dream, many Pakistanis prefer to consult with an expert, such as a Sufi *pir*, to get a proper interpretation as well as to be optimistic or cautious towards a certain matter. Through interpreting the dream, Pir builds a social relationship with the dreamer and even overwhelms him. The dreamer, then, becomes one of the Pir's disciples. By expressing the idea that "he has been waiting for his disciple to come to him, sending him messages through dreams, waiting for the time when his disciple will be receptive to that message", the dreamer becomes under the Pir's control and "a devoted disciple of his Pir." [70]

Furthermore, the life of a Pakistani Sufi saint is closely connected to accounts of visions and dreams, which play a vital role in gaining the trust and devotion of their disciples. Notably, the profound influence of Persian Sufi literature on Pakistani Sufism is particularly apparent in its emphasis on dreams.

Sufi Pir as a Healer and Social Worker

Sufi saints in Pakistani society fulfill multiple roles, with one of the most influential being their role as healers. Pakistani Sufi saints are renowned for their ability to heal the sick and cure physical or mental illnesses. "Many Pakistanis seek a *pir*, once they have been afflicted by or are experiencing some sort of distress. The distress may be as specific as an illness or loss of a job, and the solution sought may be as practical as a cure or a

[68] Ewing, Katherine P. The Dream of Spiritual Initiation and the Organization of Self Representations among Pakistani Sufis. American Anthropological Association. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Feb. 1990), pp. 56-74.

[69] Ibid.,

[70] Ibid.,

new job." [71] Seeking a *pir* exceeds the limits of Sufi camp to the ordinary people who do not follow the Sufi way of life but still believe in the powers of the Sufi *pir*. There are no limits to the types of requests that people bring to saints. These demands range widely, encompassing spiritual guidance as well as specific assistance for issues like barrenness, illness, marital troubles, and other misfortunes.

Saints play a substantial role in the Pakistani society not only in the religious life of people but also in their personal life. This is obviously apparent in the *pir-murid* (master-disciple) paradigm in which we can find that the *pir* (or master) is the director not only supervisor but even the *murid* (disciple) seems to be a faithful follower who is obliged voluntarily to surrender himself/herself absolutely to the *pir*. [72] This *pir-murid* contributes to generate a new class of cult associations called *ta'ifa* (group) and the headship of this group goes to the *saint* by heredity and his blood descendants who later became *sajjada-nishins, gaddinashins,* or *walis*.[73]

Due to the status given to *pir*, he/she becomes one of most powerful components of every Sufi order. No Sufi order can be imagined without having *pir*, whether dead or alive. Therefore, both saints and shrines of saints give power to the descendant of the saint, the disciples, and the custodian of the shrine. "The shrines of important saints have great spiritual influence, and the custodianship confers a power and high status on the incumbents which many have maintained even when the shrine's secular organization has been placed under governmental control."[74]

[71] Ewing, Katherine P. The Dream of Spiritual Initiation and the Organization of Self Representations among Pakistani Sufis, 60.

[72] Riaz Hassan, Religion, Society, and the State in Pakistan: Pirs and Politics, 557.

[73] Ibid.,

[74] Adrian C. Mayer, Pir and Murshid: an Aspect of Religious Leadership in West Pakistan, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Jan., 1967, 160.

Sufi *Pir* is a Political Leader

As being part of the society, Pakistani Sufis actively participate in the Pakistani political life. Pakistani Sufism in general, and saints, in particular have been welcomed in the late the 20th century by the regimes whether secular ones such as Ayub Khan (1958-1969) and Ali Bhutto (1973-1977) who even defined themselves as Sufi, or the Islamist regimes such as Zia ul-Haq (1978-1988) who "has pursued a policy of "Islamization," contrasting his regime with what he has called the secularism and corruption of previous administrations."[75] Zia government asserted the role of *ulema* in the political life as well as he considered the Sufi saints themselves *ulema* who committed to follow the Islamic law.[76] This practice provided saints with greater opportunities to play a significant role in their societies, especially since they were often well-educated and held positions of authority within governmental institutions.

In the political realm, the original saints were regarded by Pakistanis not only as representatives of God but also as proxies for distant Muslim rulers. They symbolically revived the absent Islamic caliphate for the Muslim population of Pakistan, embodying the qualities expected of a Muslim ruler, such as knowledge, righteousness, and fairness. Thus, "Government support of the shrines was one way of ensuring the legitimacy of the ruler among the population." [77]

In opposing colonialism, *pirs* made a respectable contribution. For instance, "Pir Sabghatullah Shah was the Pir Pagaro during the second rebellion. The British saw him as a threat to their administration and executed him in 1943." [78] Recognizing him as a threat to their authority, the British deemed it necessary to eliminate him, carrying out his execution in 1943. The opposition of colonialism led by Sufi saints can be traced back to 19th century when a notable resistance movement was led by Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786-1831) who received his

[75] Katherine Ewing, The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan, 3.
[76] Ibid., 5.
[77] Katherine Ewing, The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan, 3.
[78] Ibid., 3.

Sufi education from Naqshbandi Sufi saint Shah Abdel-Aziz (1823).[79]

Recognizing their political influence and contributions, Sufi saints of the Khanqahs and their descendants, known as sajjada-nishins, who serve as spiritual leaders within their regions and among their followers, were granted political power to ensure social stability and provide military recruits for the state.[80] This position may be interpreted as allying the regimes, however their presence in the political space of the state added a value to their influence in the political life. Moreover, significant historical influence was exerted by itinerant Sufi elites, whose scholarly expertise, esteemed genealogies, reputed miraculous abilities, and, in some cases, ethnic heritage enabled them to mobilize resources. These capabilities allowed them to establish states or secure prominent roles within existing political systems.[81]

Sufi *Pirs* are Preachers of Islam

The Pakistani Sufi experience extends to its significant role in spreading Islam across the Indian subcontinent. Over the past eighty years or so, historical evidence highlights the missionary work carried out by Muslim Sufi saints in India. These saints exemplified a peaceful approach to winning hearts and inspiring conversions to Islam. This approach played a crucial and arguably the most important role in the Islamization of the subcontinent.[82] As a result, many converts to Islam also embraced Sufism simultaneously. Their acceptance of Islam often coincided with their initiation into Sufi practices. Moreover, Muslim mystics were the bearers of Muslim popular culture in the subcontinent.[83] With the coming of great Sufi

[79] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 192.

[80] Riaz Hassan, Religion, Society, and the State in Pakistan: Pirs and Politics.

[81] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 174.

[82] Riaz Hassan, Religion, Society, and the State in Pakistan: Pirs and Politics.

[83] R. M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1 700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

saints in the subcontinent, such as Abdul Qadir Jilani and Hazrat Shahabuddin Suharawardy, they have contributed to establishing the Islamic society.

From the 14th century onwards, the establishment of khanqahs—buildings dedicated to Sufi meetings and spiritual gatherings—played a significant role in spreading Islam throughout the Indian subcontinent. These original Sufi institutions, known as khanqahs, have historically served as centers for Islamic knowledge, aid for the poor, and social services, continuing to provide a genuine representation of Islam and its teachings.

Women Sufi Saints (*Pirs*) in Pakistan

Moving to female Sufi experience, it evidently appears that Sufi orders are mostly characterized by male domination everywhere, however the presence of the female saints is relatively noticeable in the classical times as well as in the pre-modern times. The oldest literature is "*Dhikr al-Niswah al-*Muta'bidat *al-Sufiyat"* (Accounts on Female Sufi mystics) that is dedicated for women and goes back to the 7th century to Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 693 or 694) who enumerated a number of early female mystics in Islam. One of the famous female mystics was Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 718), who is the most influential female mystic in the history of Sufism.

Women in Sufi culture, in rare cases, are acknowledged as *shaikhs, pirs, or sajjada nishin* in Pakistan. [84] This limited acceptance of South Asian female saints can be explained by "their formal designation, while in practice, women may carry out many of the tasks, duties, and ritual observances that are associated with the role of *pir*."[85]

This phenomenon may also be attributed to the nature of the relationship between men and women in Islam, where interactions are generally restricted except in specific

[84] Kelly Pemberton, Women Pirs, Saintly Succession, and Spiritual Guidance in South Asian Sufism, *The Muslim World,*
Volume 96, Issue 1, Jan. 2006.
[85] Ibid.,

circumstances, such as during the performance of Hajj (pilgrimage). Another reason that may be significantly recognized is "local perceptions in fashioning the boundaries that restrict or permit women to be acknowledged as powerful spiritual authorities in their own right." [86] Generally, cultural traditions are partially responsible for dictating the Sufi behaviors worldwide. This may be explained by some scholars like Valerie J. Hoffman as a constant image of manliness in the minds of religious authorities. For instance, the Indian saint Farīd al-Dīn Masʿūd Ganj-i-Shakar (d. 1266) "refers to a pious woman as man sent in the form of woman." [87]

However, Pakistani Sufi women had practiced the roles and tasks of *pir* but only with women. Thus, when a woman attains a reputation for saintliness, including a high level of spirituality and knowledge, or miracles, she is mostly sought out by others to practice different tasks of saints." [88] Although women have performed the roles and tasks associated with a pir, they have not officially assumed leadership of Sufi orders. Instead, they have led Sufi centers, organized prayers, Qur'anic recitations, and communal assemblies (such as zikr, the ritualized repetition of the names of God), and have provided instruction and preaching to residents of Sufi hospices (khanqah, ribat, zawiya)."[89]

As observed, the aforementioned qualities represent the key characteristics of Pakistani Sufi sainthood. While some of these traits are shared with Sufi saints more broadly, others are unique to the Pakistani Sufi experience. To explore how a comparative approach can yield a comprehensive understanding, let us proceed to the following comparative section.

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[86] Kelly Pemberton, Women Pirs, Saintly Succession, and Spiritual Guidance in South Asian Sufism.

[87] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 230.

[88] Kelly Pemberton, Women Pirs, Saintly Succession, and Spiritual Guidance in South Asian Sufism.

[89] Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa"d to Who's Who* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 106.

Comparison process:

Based on these case studies of Egyptian and Pakistani Sufi saints, we can explore how the comparative process functions as an integrated approach to epistemology. By examining both models, we aim to develop balanced, cross-cultural themes of sainthood in these distinct contexts. Following Barbara's method of comparative analysis, which serves as "a heuristic tool through which we construct and apply our scholarly categories and models," we will systematically analyze and synthesize the similarities and differences between these Sufi traditions to gain a deeper understanding of sainthood across cultures."[90]

Being a saint is not simply a matter of luck or inheritance; it is the result of a rigorous and challenging journey in a mystic life, marked by strict practices and ascetic disciplines. As William James asserts, saints demonstrate their devotion to a higher power through asceticism and sacrifices, ultimately expressing their profound loyalty and commitment.[91] According to the saints, the selection of sainthood originates primarily from God and is subsequently influenced by a sincere and pure intention to pursue only the path of God. *Shadhilia* order differentiates between two levels of *wilaya* in which the first one is the "true saint of God" (*wali Allah haqan*) whom God has chosen him/her. The second one is the one who has exerted spiritual efforts to reach this rank as al-Shadhili's statement, "if you want to have a share of what the saint of God has, then you must abandon all people except for him who guides you to God, by true signs and solid acts-which are not opposed by the Book or Sunnah".[92] Annemarie Schimmel (d. 2003) was an influential German Orientalist and scholar who wrote extensively on Islam and Sufism, and refers to what makes the suffering and pains acceptable for Sufis by arguing that love of God makes the saint

[90] Barbara Holderge, Politics of comparison, 148.

[91] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 214.

[92] Richard J. A McGregoer, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt*, 37.

strong enough to endure pains and even enjoy them along with his conviction that these pains are just tests from God.[93]
There are various aspects of similarity that can bring the two models together as follows:

- Establishing the shrines of saints and holding festivals around them in the saint's birthdate is a shared theme between both models of Sufism. Although each model has its own design of shrines and names, both of them are the same in having thousands of shrines for their deceased Sufi saints and they committed to hold festivals annually. This resemblance can be interpreted as the Sufi teachings, in terms of shrines, in both cultures are emanated from the same source and also "because most *pirs* were originally respected as Sufi masters and teachers, in which this tradition has developed in South Asia, as well as in other parts of the Muslim world as well." [94] In fact, the presence of such shrines serves as a sign of permanent existence of Sufi saints in their communities in which they provide the ordinary people whether Sufis or non-Sufis a means through which they express their devotion to God and seek favors from His friends.[95] Presence of shrines and reverence of them by Sufi disciples and even by the ordinary people also refer to the sacred status that Sufi saints always receive in their communities, whether in their lives or after their death.
- Asceticism is a common practice among Sufi saints, whether in Egypt or Pakistan. While it may be present among some Sufi practitioners, it is primarily associated with Sufi saints. These saints use asceticism to inspire their disciples to forgo the fulfillment of physical desires in favor of meeting their spiritual needs. For instance, Sheikh Ahmad Radwan warned his followers from attachment to the worldly things and even, he is said to have happily kept away and having nothing for days

[93] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, 4.

[94] Katherine Ewing, The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan, 3.

[95] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 103.

except some watermelon rinds.[96] The same thing is in Pakistani Sufi saints who committed to wear woolen cloth and abandoned the luxurious life so as to give a practical paradigm for their disciples on how to draw closeness to God. The outer appearance is seen by Sufi saints as less significant than the inner purity. This principle can be made clear by the statement of the classical cross-cultural Sufi scholar, Al-Qushayri who maintains, "Renunciation of this world means cutting short one's hopes rather than eating coarse food or wearing a woolen cloak." [97] What Al-Qushayri emphasizes here is that asceticism cannot be restricted only in overt acts of poverty (e.g., wearing woolen cloak), but also the adjustment of one's own hopes and desires, i.e., internal states. The withdrawal from worldly life is the saintly means to achieving a moral purity that can be tarnished by extensive participation in 'the outer world.' In fact, asceticism broadly combines comparands in various faiths and ideologies. William James also finds that spirituality can widely bring together different mystics from various faiths including the Hindu fakirs, Buddhist monks, and Mohammedan dervishes.[98]

- Fear of God and piety are foundational characteristics of Sufi saints, to such an extent that it is inconceivable to imagine a saint without these essential virtues. While these traits are not exclusive to both Pakistani and Egyptian Sufi models alone, they represent a universal characteristic shared by Sufi saints worldwide. Spirituality serves as a crucial unifying factor among various Sufi models, and it can bridge different faith traditions. Valarie J. Hoffman, for example, identified this commonality between Egyptian Sufi saints and

[96] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 257.

[97] Al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, 135.

[98] William James, *Varieties of religious experience*, 248.

Coptic Christian saints, demonstrating how spirituality can connect diverse spiritual paths.[99]

- Relative political participation is also an evident theme of Sufi saints in both models. Further, quietness is the proper description of their political activism over the ages. Recently this quietness moved to be alliance of governments of different affiliations. Some may see this alliance or quietness as passiveness and others consider them the proper position of this spiritual ideology in any society. However, they have been distinguished by a history of opposing the colonialism whether in Egyptian or in Pakistani models. In this regard, Nile Green maintains that "no narrowly "mysticism" phenomenon, this Sufi Islam had in institutional and ideological terms come to underpin the imperial, agri-cultural, mercantile, and bureaucratic spheres no less than the religious."[100] Anyway, their presence in any society cannot be ignored or diminished but rather it has been used, given sometimes that "governmental authorities used Sufis and Sufis institutions to secure political positions and interests, particularly in their struggle against political rivals and opponents."[101]
- Another shared feature is that Sufi saints are believed to possess spiritual qualities that provide profound insight into reality, consistently anchoring their thoughts and actions in divine presence and love. Basira or Kashf (intuitive knowledge) is a prominent and common trait among Sufi saints, enabling them to uncover what remains hidden from ordinary individuals. Both Egyptian and Pakistani Sufi saints are said to possess such personal intuitive knowledge. For instance, Egyptian saint Sheikh Ahmad Radwan claimed to have this ability, a claim corroborated by his disciples, allowing him to discern

[99] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 330.

[100] Nile Green, *Sufism A global History*, 188.

[101] Tarek Ladjal, Sufism and Politics in Contemporary Egypt: A Study of Sufi Political Engagement in the Pre and Post-revolutionary Reality of January 2011.

details about people before being introduced to them.[102] This knowledge absolutely generates authority for saints. While the classical sainthood strictly explains the limits of saints in terms of authority by differentiating between Prophet's authority and saints' authority [103] , later sainthood is not of the same strictness to differentiate their authority than the Prophets' one in terms of being binding over the believing individuals at least in the disciple's circle. The possibility of having this knowledge is available for the saints' disciples too. It is the so-called *Ilm Laduni* (hidden divine knowledge). According to Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish Muslim scholar, "such foresight means having an eye of the heart open, deep perception, an ability to see consequences at the beginning of an act, or foresight," just as it is "a power of conscience,"[104] is a trait acquired by seeking the path of mysticism.[105] This kind of knowledge is not transmitted to Sufi disciples through books, but rather through a permanent attentive discipleship to the saint.[106]

- Sanctity is a quality ascribed principally for *Wali* (saint) in the Quran (41: 62). However, it is worthy to mention that that *Wali* in Qur'an is not literally the Sufi saints but rather he/she may be any righteous person. However, sanctity becomes mainly ascribed to Sufi saints and this is also how Sufi disciples and even some ordinary people receive the saints.[107] They add such sanctity in their treatment with saints out of reverence, dignifying, and

[102] Valarie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, 264.

[103] Richard J.A McGregoer, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt*, 11.

[104] M. Fethullah Gulen, *Basira and Firasa*. *Fountain Magazine*, *Issue 91*, 1 January 2013.

[105] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, 193.

[106] El-Sayed El-Aswad, *Spiritual Genealogy: Sufism and Saintly Places in the Nile Delta*, International Journal of Middle East Studies, Oxford University Press, Vol. 38, No. 4, Nov., 2006, 508.

[107] Richard J.A McGregoer, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 6.

seeking the blessing. Both models of Sufi saints are enjoyed with this quality and have always been received by sanctity even from the governmental figures in their countries. However, their sanctity within their Sufi circle is based on their *Barakah* (blessing), which is a unique quality that they are given by God to cure the sick and psychopathic individuals. All Sufi saints are sought to receive spiritual fuel and medication from physical or psychological illnesses. Over the ages, Sufi saints have been sought to provide their visitors as well as their disciples with blessings.

Now, we can examine the points of divergence. While Islam as a religion plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between these two distinct examples, language and culture introduce differences between the Egyptian and Pakistani Sufi models. The influence of these factors is evident in the following areas:

- Both models employ different terms to denote sainthood. In the Pakistani Sufi context, terms such as pir and murshid are commonly used, while the Egyptian Sufi context is more influenced by the term wali. Nevertheless, both traditions use the term sheikh for leaders within Sufi institutions. This discrepancy is notable because Islamic terms are generally used consistently across various Muslim communities, regardless of ethnicity, language, or race. For example, the term imam is widely recognized in all Muslim cultures as a leader in prayer or mosque. In Egypt, terms like Qutb (axis) and Ghawth (helper) are frequently used to describe Sufi saints, with many Egyptian saints identified as Ghawth and Abdal (substitutes). In contrast, the term pir is predominant in the Pakistani context.
- Another distinguishing factor between the two models is the localized nature of sainthood in the Pakistani context, in contrast to the global scope of Egyptian sainthood. While Sufi saints are recognized as friends of God, holding a revered status just below that of the prophets, they also occupy a significant role in the world as Qutb

(the axis), responsible for overseeing worldly affairs under God's dominion. This *Qutb* is of an overwhelming authority, however Pakistani Sufi saints "in contrast, are identified with the areas in which their shrines are situated and many tribes are associated traditionally with a particular saint." [108] On the contrary, we can find universal saints whose control exceeds the national borders such as Ahmad ibn ʿAlī Ar-Rifāʿī (d. 1181), who is an Iraqi Sufi saint and his tomb and shrine is located in southern Iraq while he has a mosque in Egypt. His order is one of the main four Sufi orders and the largest one in Egypt. Ahmad al-Badawi (1199) is a Moroccan Sufi saint and founder of the second largest Sufi order in Egypt. Abul-Hassan al-Shadhili, (d. 1258) is a Moroccan Sufi saint and father of the third largest Sufi order in Egypt.

- The final point of difference between the two Sufi models lies in the Egyptian Sufi experience's broader acceptance of mysticism from other faiths, in contrast to Pakistani Sufism. Egyptian Sufi saints are notably open to recognizing sanctity and blessings from saints of other religious traditions. This acceptance aligns with a fundamental aspect of Sufism, which, as Nile Green observes, is characterized by a collective and public nature rather than being individualistic and private, unlike Western notions of mysticism.[109] It may also be ascribed, by some scholars, to the demographic diversity advantage of the Egyptian society, but the Indian (Pakistani as well) context is more diverse than the Egyptian society. It led Valerie J Hoffman to do a comparative study (Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt, 1995) between Sufism and Coptic Christianity in Egypt through which she drew various aspects of similarities between both forms of mysticism.

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that comparative analysis can facilitate dialogue and cooperation between the

[108] Katherine Ewing, The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan, 11.

[109] Nile Green, *Sufism A global history*, 3.

diverse Egyptian and Pakistani Sufi communities through the lens of sainthood. The comparison process transcends cultural and ethnic differences, enabling cross-cultural encounters between these two distinct Sufi traditions. This study contributes to the broader field of comparative cultural studies by examining the interconnections between South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. It enriches scholarly discourse in the human sciences by generating new categories and models grounded in the unique idioms of cultures with intricately woven histories.[110]

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[110] Barbra Holdrge, *Politics of comparison*, International Journal of Hindu Studies, 2010, 160.

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