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FULL PAPER

A QUALITATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL SYNCRETISM IN PAKISTANI ISLAMIC PRACTICES

Abstract

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The study investigates how pre-Islamic cultural elements from Pakistan became integrated into Islamic practices through an analysis of secondary academic sources. The study examines how Islamic teachings combined with local customs to create religious practices, social traditions, artistic traditions, and regional distinctiveness. The research demonstrates that Pakistani Islam evolved through a process of cultural development which existing traditions merged with Islamic practices through subsequent periods of development. The main religious elements of the study consist of Sufi shrine worship, marriage rituals that combine Islamic rules with Hindu-based customs, and devotional music that fuses Islamic poetry with classical Indian musical traditions. The study demonstrates how present-day challenges emerge from orthodox reformist groups who reject syncretic practices, which they show through their attacks on Sufi shrines since 2005. The ongoing appeal of syncretic traditions among Pakistani people demonstrates their strong connection to Islam as it exists in their culture, which exists despite the ideological battles between traditionalist and reformist movements

Keywords: Cultural syncretism, Pakistani Islam, pre-Islamic traditions, religious accretion, Sufism

1. Introduction

Presently, Pakistan is recognized as an Islamic republic, where not only the state religion is Islam but also a major part of the overall national identity. Nevertheless, the Islamic culture that is found in Pakistan is strikingly dissimilar to Islamic practices found in Arabian countries or in other Islamic countries. The disparity is mainly due to the fact that the territories that make up Pakistan have a very long history, which dates back to thousands of years before the advent of Islam. The area that is now Pakistan was a birthplace of one of the most ancient civilizations of the world - the Indus Valley Civilization, which persisted from about 3300 BCE to about 1300 BCE (Kenoyer, 1998). Subsequently, the region witnessed the establishment of Hindu kingdoms, the rise of Buddhist monasteries, and the advent of various tribal cultures over the course of many centuries.

When Islam first came to the Indian subcontinent in the 8th century CE through Arab traders and later through Turkish and Persian rulers, it did not simply replace all the existing traditions and customs. Rather, it was a lengthy culture-mixing and adaptation. The Islamic principles and practices mixed with the local cultures to form a distinct type of Islamic culture, which is unique to Pakistan. This is what was referred to as syncretism or cultural synthesis by historians and implies that most of the pre-Islamic practices, traditions and social events still persisted but they took different shapes that could be reconciled with the Islamic teachings (Eaton, 1996).

The paper aims to address the following research question in this qualitative research study: How have the cultural traditions in place in pre-Islamic times been incorporated into Pakistani Islamic practices and what does the cultural synthesis look like in various regions and spheres of social life? The main argument of the text is that, the Islamic culture of Pakistan is not a direct import of Arabia or Persia, but it is an exceptional blend which embodies all the Islamic religious standards and the ancient cultural tradition of the region (Metcalf, 2009). This integration is seen in most aspects of Pakistani Muslim lives, including the worship in Sufi shrines, affections towards music and poetry, the conducting of marriages and festivals, and even in the pronunciation of various languages..

To understand this blending of cultures, the paper will begin with the historical context by giving the background of the pre-Islamic civilizations and the progressive Islamization of the area. Later, it will point out the determined areas where this cultural synthesis is most elucidated, e.g., religious practices, festivals, arts, and social customs. The paper shall take into account the variations in these traditions from region to region across Pakistan, namely, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In the end, the paper will address the current debates and dilemmas of the syncretic culture in Pakistan today, where the different groups have opposing views; some want to hold on to traditional practices while the others advocate a more orthodox Islam.

2. Historical Context

2.1 Pre-Islamic Civilizations

The regions of present-day Pakistan have witnessed human civilizations for millennia and have a very rich cultural heritage that goes back even before the arrival of Islam. Many of those cultural elements just continued in different forms and eventually got absorbed into the Islamic culture of the region.

The earliest and the most important of all the ancient cultures in this part of the world was the Indus Valley Civilization, also referred to as the Harappan Civilization, which existed in 3rd millennium B.C. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.). It was one of the world's three great ancient civilizations, together with Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt (Wright, 2010). The Indus Valley Civilization was situated in two big cities; Mohenjo-daro of Sindh and Harappa of Punjab; both in present-day Pakistan. Fascinating urban planning can be noticed in remains of these ancient cities, including well-organized roadways, advanced drainage systems, public baths, and brick houses (Kenoyer, 1998; Wright, 2010). Excavations carried out at these places show that the inhabitants had elaborate religious practices, but the modern-day scholars are still unable to fully comprehend them since the Indus script has not yet been deciphered (Caspers, 1992). However, various items such as figurines, seals with animal motifs, and bathing facilities suggest that the aspect of religion and spirituality was quite significant in the daily lives of these ancient people.

What makes the understanding of subsequent Pakistani culture interesting is that even after Indus Valley Civilization was on the decline around 1300 BCE, many elements were there to continue logging the history. Kenoyer (1998) argues that there was significant cultural continuity between the Harappan civilization and later South Asian cultures. Amongst others, agricultural practices, some artistic motifs, and perhaps even certain religious ideas are mentioned as having been kept alive by the passing on from one generation to the next. The Bathing practice and ritual purity, the latter of which is seen in Mohenjo-daro's Great Bath (Vidale, 2010), can be paralleled with both Hinduism and later Islam's ablution

After the Indus Valley Civilization's decline, the area moved into what is termed as the Vedic period when Hindu kings and culture took over (Sen, 1999). This era witnessed the development of Indian texts, religious rituals, and the caste system. The religion of Hinduism spread widely, especially in Punjab and Sindh, where the temple and the associated practices became parts of the people's life. Some local communities were adhering to Hinduism, and thus their daily lives were strongly influenced by this religion as well as by the other surrounding cultures.

Buddhism was another important cultural force that spread from the 6th century BCE over the entire area. The Gandhara region, comprised of the areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the northern part of Punjab, was the main hub of Buddhist civilization (Samad, 2011). Not far from contemporary Islamabad, the city of Taxila held the position of the most significant Buddhist learning center in the ancient world. This place was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1980 and consists of more than 50 archaeological sites that represent different periods (*Taxila - UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, n.d.). The area was a center of monastic life, art, and trade for many centuries. Mixing of Greek and Buddhist elements in the Gandhara art style gave rise to some exquisite sculptures, and architectural works that are still appealing to people today (*The Gandhara Gallery*, n.d.).

These pre-Islamic cultures contributed considerably more to the world than just their archaeological sites. They set up the cultures that would last for thousands of years. The agricultural cycles following the seasons, the tales and legends, the arts, music, and dance, and the social habits are some of the things that were created during these pre-Islamic times. When Islam came to the region, it found a society with diverse cultural practices and beliefs that had developed and became ingrained over time. Instead of wiping out these traditions completely, Islam most times would adapt to them or accept them in their modified forms thus forming the syncretic culture that is characteristic of Islam in Pakistan today.

2.2 Islamic Arrival and Early Settlement

Islam was introduced to the areas which are now part of Pakistan as a result of Arab military actions during the early 8th century CE. The conquest of Sindh led by the Arab general Muhammad bin Qasim in 711-712 CE was a significant event and the first appropriate movement of Islamic power in the Indian subcontinent (Eaton, 2008). The conquest meant the establishment of the first Muslim dominance in the area but it was confined mainly to Sindh and did not immediately come to other places. The Muslim rulers in Sindh were quite liberal towards the local Hindu and Buddhist

communities, allowing them to adhere to their faith since Islam by that time recognized these religions as "People of the Book" capable of living under Islamic reign by paying a jizya tax.

However, the significant movements of Islam in the area were by Turkish and Persian rulers a few centuries later. Starting from the 11th century, the Muslim Turkish dynasties were active in northern India, where they began their conquests. The most notable of these was the Delhi Sultanate, which asserted its dominance between 1206 and 1526 CE. The Delhi Sultanate not only rendered political control but also brought with it the Islamic religion, Persian language, and new administrative systems in the area (Eaton, 1996). The Delhi Sultanate rulers were of Turkic and Afghan origin, and they, in turn, shaped the characteristics of the region through close interaction with the Persians and Central Asians. The construction of mosques, madrasas (Islamic schools) and Persian as a language of administration and high culture set the tone for this period in Indian history.

The process of Islam spreading across this area progressed through multiple centuries as a continuous process instead of a sudden violent overthrow. For a long time, many historians believed in what Eaton calls the "religion of the sword" theory, which claimed that Islam spread in India mainly through military conquest and forced conversion (Eaton, 1996). Modern historical research has shown that this theory does not explain how Islam actually spread in the region. Eaton (1996) points out that if forced conversion was the main method, we would expect to see the highest Muslim populations in areas that were under Muslim political control for the longest time. The observed outcomes contradict this expectation.

The spread of Islam through these territories happened through various methods of construction according to Eaton (1996). The process of Islam expansion in Bengal and Punjab started through "accretion" which described his method of local populations developing Islamic identity through multiple generations of adopting Islamic practices while keeping their original cultural customs. The development of this process depended on the social and economic transformations that were taking place in those areas. The people who settled in Bengal as farmers took Islam as their new identity after they cleared forests and cultivated new agricultural lands (Eaton, 1996). The Sufi saints' shrine centers in Punjab functioned as major Islamic conversion sites because they attracted local people to Islam according to the upcoming section.

The Hindu caste system which existed in Punjab and Bengal before Islam arrived created challenges which made conversion to Islam more difficult for local people. The communities found it easier to

adopt Islam because they maintained their core religious identity according to Eaton (2009). Additionally, Islam came to the region not just as a religion but as a complete civilization with Persian literature, new forms of music and poetry, architectural styles, and administrative practices. The cultural package which included multiple elements appealed to various people who wanted to advance socially or explore different cultural (Metcalf, 2009).

Also worthy of mention is that the patterns of Islamic expansion were somewhat different in the various regions of Pakistan as they extended through their territories. The initial Islam spread in Sindh, where Arab conquest first occurred, happened through urban centers and the trade networks which connected their cities. In Punjab, the Sufi saints and their complex of shrine were the primary point of attraction of those residents who wished to convert to Islam. The tribal groups in the northwestern frontier areas (which are now under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region) adopted Islam while keeping their traditional tribal practices and laws. The development of Islam in Balochistan resulted from both local tribal customs and Persian cultural elements (Eaton, 2008). Finally, the northern mountainous areas of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir received Islam as a result of Sufi missionaries from Persia and Central Asia who arrived in the 14th century, with *Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani* serving as the main missionary who converted local Buddhist and Hindu people through his peaceful preaching methods instead of using military force (Abbas & Ahmad, 2021). Furthermore, the Mughal Empire period which lasted from 1526 to 1857 saw Islam become a major religion in the area because local customs had altered its original Arabian and Persian forms. The Islamic culture which emerged in these areas combined Islamic religious beliefs with native languages and local cultural practices and community systems and artistic heritage. The syncretic Islamic tradition which emerged during this period developed into the main religious practice among Pakistanis throughout contemporary times.

2.3 The Role of Sufi Saints

The spread of Islam throughout Pakistan depended on various factors, but Sufi saints and their spiritual orders achieved the most significant impact. The Sufi mystics of Islam developed spiritual practices which allowed local people to understand the religion better than the strict religious laws which orthodox Islamic scholars maintained. The Chishti Qadiri Suhrawardi and Naqshbandi orders developed into the main Sufi organizations which established their presence throughout the area. The different spiritual practices which each group presented showed their unique methods, but they all shared a common belief in love and devotion, which led to personal encounters with the divine

(Metcalf, 2009). Dargahs functioned as Sufi shrines, which were holy places for worship while uniting various cultural groups. The shrines established a connection between Islamic religious teachings and local cultural traditions which visitors could use to practice different types of worship through musical performances, poetic recitations and festive events (Eaton, 2000).

The Islamic history of Pakistan has seen numerous Sufi saints who played a major role throughout its development. Baba Farid (1188-1266) served as an essential Sufi saint who established his shrine in Pakpattan which lies within Punjab territory. He attained the status of major Punjabi language poet because he belonged to the Chishti order. His shrine had served as an important component that had changed local Jat communities into Muslims over several centuries, and his poetry became a holy book of the Sikh texts as it was included in Guru Granth Sahib that proved how popular his teachings were (Eaton, 2000). A grave of Data Ganj Baksh Ali Hajveri (990-1077) in Lahore is one of the most visited graves in Pakistan. The shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar attracted millions of tourists every year because of his ecstatic devotional performances which he displayed at his Sehwan shrine in Sindh (Metcalf, 2009).

What made Sufi saints so effective in the expansion of Islam relied on their method to what Eaton (1996) calls to accretion, incorporating Islamic practices into the local practice without substituting wholesome local practices. Sufi saints did not insist that new converts should at once change all their past cultural practices. This allowed the gradual Islamicization of people as they still upheld their customary local practices and festivals and social systems. This conversion brought about less uproar to the local communities since they were able to come up with a form of Islam that was similar to their current beliefs.

3. Method

The paper adopts the qualitative historical research approach to understand the process of adopting the pre-Islamic traditions into the Pakistani Islamic cultural practices. This approach allows the researcher to learn how religious syncretism emerges as a result of interplay of various cultural aspects that change with time. Moreover, it aids in following the evolution of the cultural practice throughout centuries and comprehending the mechanisms of Islamic and pre-Islamic traditions intertwining within the Pakistani context.

The research uses systematic literature review which analyzes secondary scholarly sources as its main method to collect data. The study will entail the assessment of peer-reviewed scholarly books and journal articles along with historical documents that were written by South Asian history scholars and Islamic studies scholars and anthropology scholars. The study mainly relies on the works of Richard Eaton concerning the issue of conversion and cultural integration of Islam (Eaton, 1996, 2000, 2008, 2009) and a whole work of Barbara Metcalf who studied the issue of South Asian Islam (Metcalf, 2009). These studies are also used by the research in investigating the Sufi traditions and shrine culture, and various Islamic practices that can be found in the different regions of Pakistan.

The analytical approach to this paper is based on the theory of accretion introduced by Eaton, who demonstrated that South Asian religion conversion to Islam developed new Islamic actions that added up to local traditions (Eaton, 1996). The model explains the existence of traditional Islamic features along with unique regional characteristics of Pakistani Islamic culture. It explores the continuity of cultures through the different facets comprising of religious practices, social practices, artistic expressions and patterns of language. The study also uses a comparative discourse to analyse how Islam has been incorporated in local practices in various parts of Pakistan that comprise Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and north parts of Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir.

There are certain limitations in the research that should be noted. The research employs secondary sources only that eliminates the possibility of researcher relying on primary sources and fieldwork to substantiate the research since their findings rely on the interpretations of the researcher. The limited capability of the researcher to use the sources, which are not in English language, including Persian, Arabic and Urdu texts leads to the incomplete interpretation of the historical data. The large geographic and time scale of the study does not allow it to record all of the local variations and other aspects of the study area.

4. Findings

The findings of the research, which are the primary outcomes of the investigation, indicate how pre-Islamic traditions have been absorbed into the Pakistani Islamic culture through their use in religious activities, social traditions, artistic expression and various regional traditions.

4.1 Religious Practices and Shrine Culture

The most visible manifestation of cultural synthesis in Pakistani Islam is the widespread practice of shrine veneration and Sufi spirituality. According to available data, 60% of Pakistani Muslims identify themselves as Sufi followers who engage in shrine-based devotional practices(*SUFIS IN PAKISTAN | Facts and Details*, n.d.). The dargahs function as religious sites which operate as social gathering places, cultural expression areas and spiritual healing centers that combine Islamic devotion with pre-Islamic traditions of sacred site veneration (Hakim et al., 2024).

The annual Urs celebrations, which commemorate the death anniversaries of Sufi saints, represent a significant example of religious syncretism. The Data Darbar shrine in Lahore attracts over one million devotees during its three-day Urs festival, while the Urs of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan Sharif draws similar numbers (Metcalf, 2009). The festivals maintain their current practices because of their cultural value which exists outside standard Islamic practices. At the Baba Farid shrine in Pakpattan devotees enter through the Bahishti Darwaza (Gate of Paradise) once per year during Urs because they believe that this act will remove their sins and bring them blessings. The five-day celebration attracts more than devotees who take part in this ritual (Qarni, 2014).

Pre-Islamic influences exist in multiple practices which form part the shrine culture. Devotees tie colorful threads to grilles surrounding the tombs while making wishes which resembles the pre-Islamic practice of making votive offerings at sacred sites. The distribution of free meals (langar) to all visitors regardless of their background mirrors pre-Islamic traditions of communal feasting at sacred locations. Dhamal represents a devotional dance which involves dancers whirling their bodies while drummers create rhythm, and this dance shares links with ecstatic ways of worship found in various pre-Islamic spiritual traditions of the region. The shrines attract visitors from both Muslim and Hindu and Sikh faiths which shows their ability to appeal to different religions while upholding the area's custom of shared religious sites (Eaton, 2000).

4.2 Festivals and Social Customs

Pakistani Muslims celebrate several festivals and observe numerous social customs that combine Islamic principles with pre-Islamic cultural practices. Islamic festivals such as Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha start their observance according to Islamic requirements but also include various local cultural traditions. The Mela Chiraghan Festival of Lights at Shah Hussain shrine in Lahore operates through

the illumination of thousands of candles and lamps together with the performance of devotional poetry singing and traditional music which mimic pre-Islamic spring and light festivals (Ahmed, 2017).

Pakistani wedding ceremonies show cultural synthesis through their various social customs which people observe during their celebrations. Pakistani weddings start with Islamic Nikah marriage contracts and proceed through multiple pre-wedding and post-wedding events which lack any Islamic foundation (Fatima et al., 2022). The Mehndi ceremony functions through Hindu practices which define its application of henna designs on the bride's hands and feet. The Mayoun ceremony requires the bride and groom to receive turmeric paste for their purification and beauty, which directly resembles the Hindu Haldi ceremony. Families come together during Dholki nights to perform traditional wedding songs with drum beats, which serve as a link to pre-Islamic musical and social customs.

About pre-Islamic North Indian traditions, the Baraat procession shows pre-Islamic roots because the groom arrives on a decorated horse while his family performs dance movements with drum beats. The practice of the Joota Chupai when the bride sisters steal the groom shoes and keep them as a ransom to give them back has no Islamic roots, yet it is a favorite tradition (Fatima et al., 2022). Islamic piety of the sacred book plus pre-Islamic rites of blessing and protection of passage into a new life (Rukhsati) of the bride are united with holding the Quran over the bride.

4.3 Arts, Music, and Language

There are several areas where the pre-Islamic artistic and linguistic cultures were integrated into the Pakistani Islamic culture. Qawwali, the most identifiable form of devotional music that is intertwined with Sufi shrines, is the fusion of Islamic spiritual texts and classical Indian musical style, instruments and performance methods (Qureshi, 2001). The lyrics are frequently a mixture of Persian, Urdu and local languages, and the musical forms are based on the pre-Islamic classical music of the subcontinent. Well-known Sufi poets such as Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain and Waris Shah did not use Arabic or Persian, but Punjabi, and this allowed Islamic spirituality to reach local languages (Metcalf, 2009).

Urdu language is a system of language, which incorporates Arabic and Persian wording with its own language foundation (Rahman, 2016). Assimilation between various languages produced a new language system that provided the speakers to communicate Islamic ideas without compromising their

cultural and language heritage. The architectural designs of the Pakistani Islamic sites indicate a distinct tendency of the architectural design blend. The Islamic architecture of mosques and shrines includes domes and minarets along with the design elements of the pre-Islamic art tradition that influences the choice of colors and design of the layout. Mirrors and color tiles are used to decorate the shrines along with certain geometrical designs to echo the Mughal and pre-Mughal art forms rather than the true Arabian or Persian Islamic design philosophies.

4.4 Regional Variations

The different regions of Pakistan show distinct patterns of adopting pre-Islamic traditions because each area maintains its own unique pre-Islamic cultural heritage. The shrine culture reaches its highest development and greatest impact in the Punjab region. The shrines of Data Ganj Baksh in Lahore, Baba Farid in Pakpattan, and various saints in Multan receive annual visits from millions of pilgrims. Punjabi Islamic traditions show strong connections to both Hindu and Sikh customs, which especially influence their wedding practices and musical traditions and their festival observances. The shared veneration of certain saints by Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs - for example, Baba Farid's poetry appears in the Sikh holy book Guru Granth Sahib - demonstrates the syncretic nature of Punjabi religious culture (Snehi, 2024).

Islamic culture in Sindh shows cultural elements which Hindu and Buddhist traditions from the region brought to the area. The shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan Sharif and Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai in Bhit Shah are visited by both Muslims and Hindus who continue the ancient practice of shared sacred spaces. Sindhi Sufi artists make their poetry and music based on the local folk traditions and linguistic patterns. The Urs festivals in Sindh are the most elaborate in a yearly basis since they feature devotional dance and music that was practiced before the Islamic religion.

Balochistan has evolved its Islamic culture by blending its tribal culture with the Persian culture. The community still retains their Islamic legal system that coexists with their traditional dispute resolution approaches and their social order. The Islamic cultures of the area are Persian Sufi influenced and maintain their own tribal cultural aspects. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a region where the Pashtun people are seen to continue their traditional Pashtunwali culture and Islamic law. The tribal code encompasses notions of honor, hospitality, and revenge which are pre-Islamic, but have been preserved even amid Islamic teachings which at times contradict these traditions.

The introduction of Islam in Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir was done through Sufi missionaries, who reached the area in the 14th century. Only by trying to combine Sunni and Shia beliefs with the local customs did the Noorbakshia Sufi order create a certain Islamic tradition in the region. Persian New Year celebrations, Nowruz, are still celebrated in certain areas, reflecting how the Persian culture combined with local mountain traditions affected the culture (Abbas and Ahmad, 2021).

Regional diversities in the Pakistani Islamic culture demonstrate that there exists no single Islamic tradition but a variety of Islamic traditions that emerged due to local cultural background of a region. The different regions show that Islamic principles and practices combine with local customs to create unique Islamic cultural expressions which maintain their authentic Islamic and Pakistani identity.

5. Discussion

The findings of the research indicate that the Pakistani Islamic culture is a blend of Islamic religious beliefs and pre-Islamic practices that prevailed before the advent of Islam. It has led to a process of synthesis that has created disagreements that still prevail within the borders of contemporary Pakistan. The evidence demonstrates that the process of cultural integration occurred due to what Eaton termed as accretion since the practices of Islam were incorporated into the existing practices without completely abolishing the original traditions. The system enabled the various regions to show their own cultural practices as people converted to Islam.

The greatest modern controversy of this synthesis of cultural is the war of ideologies between the traditional Sufi-influenced Islam and the orthodox reformist movements. The period since 2005 has seen multiple suicide attacks which specifically targeted Sufi shrines throughout Pakistan, resulting in the deaths of hundreds Sufi worshippers (Chughtai, 2017). The attacks have been executed mainly by militant organizations which follow Deobandi and Wahhabi teachings including the Taliban and its affiliated groups who consider shrine veneration and other syncretic practices as un-Islamic innovations. The 2017 Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine bombing in Sehwan resulted in the death of 88 people and the Data Darbar bombing in Lahore in 2010 left 42 devotees dead (Chughtai, 2017). These acts of violence can be seen as efforts to enforce a puritanical understanding of Islam that denies the cultural synthesis that this paper records.

The conflict contains a significant sectarian aspect which needs special attention. Estimates indicate that almost 50 % Pakistani Sunni Muslims practice or follow the Barelvi movement which permits Sufi

traditions and shrine worship (Kazemi, 2022). Approximately 15 to 25 percent of the population identifies with the Deobandi movement which originated in colonial India as a British reform movement and later developed into conventional religious practices. The government during General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime (1977-1988) provided extensive backing to the Deobandi movement by implementing an Islamization initiative which included financial support for Deobandi religious institutions (Shah, 2012). The government-supported Wahhabi ideology funding from Saudi Arabia and Gulf states created a powerful force which helped reformist groups that opposed traditional syncretic systems.

The ideological conflict between two opposing beliefs systems leads to two main outcomes which affect both religious observance and the fundamental nature of Pakistani cultural identity. The study documents three syncretic traditions which include shrine veneration and Hindu-based wedding customs and Sufi music and poetry but their rejection as un-Islamic results in the elimination of Pakistani Islamic cultural heritage. The reformist position maintains that genuine Islamic practice must follow the seventh-century Arabian traditions while denying the validity of all cultural changes and regional differences that developed throughout Islamic history. The current position endangers specific cultural elements because it undermines the fundamental framework which has established South Asian Islamic traditions for more than one thousand years.

The ongoing existence of shrine festivals together with their wedding traditions and their people who practice Sufi traditions demonstrate how Pakistani people maintain their cultural Islamic practices even though they face militant threats. The 2009 establishment of the Sunni Ittehad Council which united 60 Bareilvi groups to combat extremist groups demonstrates the increasing opposition against fundamentalist religious beliefs. The current challenge for Pakistan involves determining whether its existing traditional belief system can endure through a period that treats Arabian Islamic practices as superior to local Islamic practices.

6. Conclusion

The research investigates how pre-Islamic traditions became part of Pakistani Islamic practices across various fields which show that Pakistani Islam exists as a combination of Islamic beliefs and local cultural traditions instead of a complete takeover of existing native practices. The findings demonstrate that cultural integration occurred through a process which involved the gradual introduction of Islamic

practices that combined with preexisting local traditions to create new religious practices while maintaining existing cultural elements.

The research findings document extensive cultural synthesis in four key areas. First, religious practices centered on Sufi shrines show clear continuities with pre-Islamic traditions of sacred site veneration, pilgrimage, and communal spiritual practices. Second, social customs especially wedding ceremonies combine Islamic legal requirements with pre-Islamic rituals that have Hindu and regional origins. Third, artistic expressions which include music and poetry and language show the combination of Islamic spiritual content with native cultural traditions. Fourth, the different regional patterns show how various pre-Islamic cultures spread throughout Pakistan's current boundaries.

The current cultural integration process encounters its main obstacle from conservative reformist groups who oppose syncretic practices because they consider them un-Islamic innovations. The recorded assaults against Sufi religious sites that began in 2005 together with the ideological battle between traditional Muslim beliefs and modern reformist interpretations of Islam demonstrate the persistent conflict which determines Pakistani cultural and religious identities. The ongoing popularity of syncretic practices among most Pakistanis demonstrates their strong ties to Islamic traditions that combine with their local cultural practices.

This study investigates how religious traditions adapt through their relationship with local communities and their approach to creating new religious practices through cultural hybridization. The Pakistani case demonstrates that Islamization does not necessarily require complete abandonment of pre-existing cultural traditions. The process requires people to change their existing traditions through a complex process of negotiation and adaptation. Future research should investigate how globalization and transnational religious movements transform syncretic practices in Pakistan during the twenty-first century.

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