

Journal of Religion & Society (JR&S)

Available Online:

<https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/index>

Print ISSN: 3006-1296 Online ISSN: 3006-130X

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

Rescue Stories in Sufis' Devotion: Shifting Human-Animal Boundaries in Pakistan (1947-2015)

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Abstract

Rescue of humans from dangerous animals and vice versa has been a yardstick of devotion to Sufis, in the history of Pakistan. This study deals with stories that substantiate suchlike yardstick of devotion. Therefore, this article investigates how, celebrated through hagiographical literature, the devotion of Sufis historically revolves around their control and power over animals in rescue and repression stories. This article also demonstrates how dominance over animals kept on benefiting not only to humans from animals but also to animals from animals. Then, it also concerns with the display of unusual behavioral performance of animals that portrays the power of Sufis as intact. This research paper tackles the question how boundaries were remained shifting between humans and animals in the hagiographical depiction of rescue and repression stories?

Keywords: *Animals, Sufis, Rescue, Repression, Devotion, Boundaries*

Introduction

In order to make thematic description and analysis, this article has been compartmentalized into five sub-parts. The first part of Sufi-animal interaction stories bracketed in this heading illustrate how people, mostly disciples of the concerned Sufis, are rescued from dangerous animals through Sufis' blessings, even in those Sufis' absence from the spots. The second part of article surrounds around those incidents and stories that pertain to animals' rescue from humans. This part illustrates how missing or lost animals are retrieved, rescued, and recovered, by the Sufis' blessings. In these stories various animals those went displaced, e.g. stolen livestock, from their place of residence, are recovered in a surprising way. On the contrary, the third part of Sufi-animal stories are the evidences of how animals are warded off or repelled by the Sufis' power of blessings from people, their assets, and houses. Then, the final part of this article demonstrates about the behavioral subversion of animals due to Sufis' miraculous blessings. These incidents reveal how Sufis cause the turning of usual behavior of an animal into compliance

out of resistance. Finally, the part number five contains a number of rescue stories that mark an obvious shifting in the tradition. However, at the core of all the discussed parts, there is an unintended narration about the changing nature of human-animal boundaries in the perspectives of their 'rescue' from some suffering by the Pakistani Sufi saints.

1- Rescue of Humans from Animals

Muhammad Umar Barailvi (d. 1967), a Sufi of Beerbal (Sialkot region), is penned down by his hagiographer as having power over animals, even without his presence on the spot where the incident occurred. In first story, Madad Shah, a person, is said to have rescued by Sufi Umar Barailvi. It is reported that Madad Shah dreamt a couple of wild pigs, running and chasing after him, to kill him. And, while in an escape race, at a point, he saw a saintly figure who rescued him from the deadly wild animals. After the dream, he became upset. His brother felt his distress and sought to get help of his Sufi saint. In fact, his brother was already the devotee of Umar Barailvi. He accompanied and took his disturb brother to his Peer. Madad Shah, the distress person, instantly recognized the saint and said he was the same who helped him rescuing from the wild animals, in his dream. He was so impressed by the spiritual charisma of the Sufi that he, like his brother, also became Sufi M. Umar's disciple.ⁱ Then, associated with the same Sufi the hagiographer pens down another event of rescue of some disciples with the help of the Sufi. He narrates that a couple of Sufi M. Umar's disciples were informed by the Sufi himself, in advance, to be aware of a potential snake attack. So, on one of the next days, the informed disciples were encountered by a snake, in their way. So, during the encountering incident, after some amount of struggle, they remained successful, to kill the venomous animal. But, the hagiographer focuses on the point, on meeting their saint, they were asked by the saint about the incident. They themselves didn't initiate the talk of the incident. It was the Sufi saint who asked them about the encounter. So, the disciples explained all the story of the encounter. And, upon listening their story, the Sufi saint said 'Alhamdulillah' (thanks to Allah Almighty).ⁱⁱ Then, another story of rescue, in his physical absence, is ascribed to Shah M. Ismail Naqashbandi (d. 1966) of Okara. A devotee of him named Haji Ismail, from Sahiwal, narrated that, in a dream at one night, he was rescued by the Sufi, from a violent wild bull who was pursuing him to hurt.ⁱⁱⁱ The experiences and stories about saints' role in the dreams or visions had been in not only near past but also in medieval times too.^{iv} However, hagiographers craft these sorts of incidents to meet their objectives and intentions that all to depict saints' miraculous power and control. In this motive and regard, he also narrates another story. Maulvi Noor M. of Sahiwal, a follower of Shah M. Ismail narrates it. Once, besides some other people, he was present in the company of the Sufi. Suddenly, unusual to his behavior, the Sufi spoke aloud a religious/spiritual slogan. One of the people present asked the saint about the slogan. The saint responded that he had sent some of his followers, to take groceries, and they were attacked by a pack of dogs so I made the dogs run away from

my followers. Again, central to the story, when those follower humans returned back there, they did witness that the same incident happened with them.^v

Moreover, another story of rescue is pertinent here. It is attributed to Ameer Hizabullah Khawaja Syed M. Fazal Shah Jalalpuri (d. 1966). In the earlier years of 1980s, Syed Ghulam Mustafa Gillani narrates about a decades-old event of his life. He dreamt himself in the midst of wild beasts in a forest. The wild beasts were moving towards him to kill him. He felt extremely afraid of them and anxious. Suddenly, he came to a close encounter with a lion which made him still and suspended. Thinking about his end as approaching, he fearfully shut his eyes, initially, but sooner saw the lion licking his feet. Somehow, he picked the lion's ears and mounted on it. The lion begins a walk. They remained going through roads and streets of a village. Ultimately, the lion walked the rider to a Sufi shrine, located in a thickly populated town. There were also some people present at there who informed the rider that you had reached, at the shrine of Jalalpur Sharif. In the meanwhile, there appeared an illuminating face about whom, again, the people told him that the saintly figure was the guardian of the shrine. Then, the Sufi saint spoke and revealed that he had sent the lion, to bring, to him, the wandering helpless person who, originally, was looking for a spiritual master for himself. The saint also allowed the lion, who had proved quite dutiful by performing its part, to return back to its habitat. Then, the saint also instructed the man to move forward and made him a disciple of him. At the same moment, the story narrator said, he became awakened from his sleep/dream. He further said that in the next morning, he had talked, out of the quest, about the place (the shrine), to several people and found some of them already in devotion and discipleship to there. However, he visited the shrine of Jalalpur Sharif along with some people, about fifty in number. There, they met with Fazal Shah Jalalpuri the then sajjadanashin (in charge) of the shrine. He found the saint in the same dress and same sort of surrounding by the people. He formally became the disciple of the saint and also told about his dream to the saint. The saint instructed him to recite some sacred verses which the narrator acted upon throughout his life.^{vi} The story also connotes an allegorical meaning too. It means that without a Peer/murshad, one can be in a wilder like condition. And, any disciple may feel safe from dangers like threats from wild animals, only with the blessings of the Sufi Murshad. So, in the sense, the described story can be categorized in what Simona Cohen notes as man-beast metaphor.^{vii}

In addition, there is a story of rescue of humans from dangerous animals is associated to Mian Sher Muhammad Sharaqpur, a much celebrated Sufi saint of Pakistan. On one day, Hakeem M. Ishaq, a disciple of the Sufi master, during his travel, experienced a face-off with a wolf in the midst of the forest. According to the hagiographer Mian Jalil Ahmad, the suffered devotee did shut his eyes and recall his Sheikh to be rescued from the danger. Consequently, he did find the safety and disappearance of the wolf from the scene. However, the Sufi Sheikh remained informed

about this event despite of not being there physically.^{viii} Then, suchlike devotion was also recorded about the Sheikh Ali bin Haibati. The medieval Sufi is associated with stories of abstract control over Lions. It narrates that if someone had been attacked by any lion, the attacked person would have remained safe if he or she would speak the name of the Sheikh Ali bin Haibati, before the attacking lion.^{ix}

2- Rescue of Animals from Humans:

The first story is ascribed to Muhammad Umar Barailvi about whom a brief introduction is given in the above part of this article. This story is about the lost of nine buffaloes and retrieval of them, in a surprising manner. One of Sufi's devotees named Hayat Gondal of Gujra lost his nine buffaloes and remained along with many people to find them but to no veil. Emphasizing on the point, the hagiographer says that the owner's cousin taunted him that you often visit your saint at Beerbal, ask him to help you find your cattle. He felt challenged and stopped pursuing his lost livestock. He thought of about his saint. Meanwhile, his cousin resumed his talk and said I was speaking in lighter mode. But the devotee said now his saint will do this job. Suddenly, a horseman came and informed him about his animals so he hurriedly rushed, at the informed place, and found his animals.^x The second story in this regard is related to Peer Muhammad Sadiq (1914-1984) of Mughal Pura, Lahore. Once, a follower of him said that his buffaloes got missed and he along with people became tired as a result of long effort of search of the displaced animals but to no avail. Somehow, they saw the saint near the canal adjoining the locality. They requested him for help concerning the displaced animals. The saint said them, go to your home, you would find your animals there. So, it happened, according to the saint's word.^{xi} Notably, although element of surprise is present, in the retrieving of animals that were displaced or went missing yet the degree of surprise remains within the possibilities, in other ways. Moreover, the retrieval of the animals demonstrates their care and concern, for the non-human fellows that is a way of subjective consideration of them. Adding to it, having some different mode of story, Maulana Shah Fazal Rahman (d. 1313 hijri) enshrined at Muradabad, UP, has been recorded about an incident. One of his devotees got his horse struck in a stream 'daldal' (mud). He became helpless but he remembered his Sufi for help. The horse became able to get out of the wetland. When the devotee reached to his saint, he found the saint wearing a blanket around him. The saint showed him his back which had the marks of the horse's hooves and mud spots on it.^{xii} Another rescue of animal story is concerned, now, with a classic Sufi, Sheikh Samau Din. There was an old woman who got her cow lost and went on suffering from worrisome times. The saint helped her and found the lost cow to the lady.^{xiii} Additionally, loaded with amount of miraculous, a rescue of animal story is concerned with Syed Shahabuddin Nehra (d.1631) who was the son of Hazrat Mira'n M. Shah popularly known as Mauj Dariya Bukhari of Lahore. It is narrated that once he saw a lion trapped in a cage. He picked that caged lion from

its ear and set it free from the cage, instantly. The animal took its way to freedom.^{xiv}

3- Repression of Animals

In the stories categorized in the theme of repression of animals, the first belongs to Mufti Abdul Aziz (1927-2007), a Sufi of Kot Radha Kishan town of district Kasur. He was the disciple of Mian Ghulam Ullah of Sharaqpur (d. 1377 hijri) who was, in turn, disciple of Mian Shair Muhammad Sharaqpuri (d. 1347 hijri). So, Mufti Abdul Aziz belonged to silsila Naqashbandia.^{xv} A follower of him named Haji M. Lateef Faridi is reported to say that some wild animals (boars) used to come, from somewhere, and destroy his agricultural crops. He furthered that he attempted various sorts of ways to keep the animals away, from the crops, but to no avail. Since the damage to crops could cost him much in terms of his income from agricultural business, he remained much disturbed resultantly. At last, he appeared before Mufti Abdul Aziz and conveyed his problem to the Sufi. In response, the Sufi, Mufti Abdul Aziz, instructed him to recite some verses on water and to sprinkle it on the fields' boundary area. He said that on acting upon the formula he came to notice that none of the animals ever damaged the crops, consequently.^{xvi} Another story pertaining to both 'rescue' and 'repression' categories is ascribed to Peer Muhammad Sadiq who has been discussed in the previous part of this article. Lived as a 'majzoob' (blameworthy) in Lahore, he was originally from Abbottabad and moved to Lahore in 1928. His shrine is situated at near Railway lines, Mughalpura, Lahore. His hagiographer M. Din Kaleem describes that the Sufi M. Sadiq used to wear warm clothes in the summer and spend several hours in canal water, during winter cold. His close disciple named M. Younus of Shadbagh, Lahore, narrated about an event of rescue from the snakes in wake of the spiritual blessings of his Sufi master. He detailed about the story that once in the year of 1983, his daughter informed him about a snake at the roof of their house. The family became much terrified. They remained sleepless, due to the fear of snake, till mid-night. Sooner, they got to know that it was a pair of golden colored snakes with 'phan' (hoods or hooding). It is narrated that in the state of intense fearful moments, the family recalled in their thoughts about their Peer (Sufi) and his blessings. Soon after, they got the courage and eliminated the venomous reptiles which were four to five feet in length. They buried the dead bodies. Next day, when the disciple went to his Peer, the latter asked about the elimination of the snakes. Then the Peer Sahib became quiet for some time.^{xvii} In addition, there is another story in this regard. It is about Maulana Muhammad Zikriya, Sheikh ul Hadees (d. 1982). He has been reported for the repression and cure of scorpion bite with some religious verses. He also instructed religious verses to control and check the presence of snakes and scorpions in his disciples' houses.^{xviii}

4- Behavioral Subversion of Animals

Khawaja Syed M. Shah Bukhari is described with the attribution of charismatic performance, even without his presence, with regard to

animals' behavioral subversion. It is said that despite of the saint's absence from the field, the bulls which brought to plough, continued to be obedient and followed his instructions, that he said earlier, to sit and stand.^{xix} There is another suchlike story that corresponds to Haji Rahmat Ali, a Sufi of Gujrat region. Someone said that he had seen, in his dream, the obedience, discipline, and service of the animals (the cattle) to the saint (Haji Rahmat Ali) though they displayed their disobedience to their worldly owner.^{xx} Then, in a case from the medieval era, there is a much celebrated story about the behavioral subversion of a small sparrow. It is narrated that once Hazrat Sheikh Najamuddin Kubraa saw an eagle attacking the sparrow. The classic Sufi is said to subvert the game. He miraculously turned the hunted sparrow to a hunter one over the eagle.^{xxi} Moreover, Haji Ahmad Bakhsh is also recorded for an event of animals' subversion of their behavior as an aspect of Sufi's spirituality. Once, in his village, as it is a cultural practice in regional societies particularly in Punjab, there was festival of bull-race. A follower of Saint Ahmad came to him with the request to have written verses (Taweez) so that his bull may be able to win the festival of race. The saint said, I have prayed for your animal's success but the applicant remained insisted to have the written verses of blessings. On that, however, the saint did write on a paper piece "bhagta ja, bhagta aa" which translates into English "go running, return running." The man knotted the paper of blessings to the bull's neck. So, in the festival, his animal won the race. He talked with everyone, in the village, and explained that his animal won the race on account of the paper of blessings he had gained, from the Sufi saint, Haji Ahmad Bakhsh. Thus, the bull's winning the race, along with the Sufi's blessings, remained the talk of the town, for many days to come.^{xxii} There is another story about behavioral change performed by Syed Talib Hussain Gillani (d. 2004) enshrined in Pattoki region and the story is narrated by his companion devotee and visitor to his shrine. Story runs as that some people requested to the Syed Talib Hussain, for his blessings, for their uncontrolled and always disturbing 'khachar' (an ass) that was a source of their livelihood. So, the saint prayed for the animal and consequently the behavior of the animal changed so subverted that even the kids began to play underneath him (ass).^{xxiii} Hence, there are other aspects of the stories penned down in hagiographies of Sufis. It depicts peoples' perception of Sufis' spiritual strength with regard to their day-to-day jobs and lives, even in entertainment. Then, each miraculous story has its importance as a vehicle and product of the cultural memory. However, suchlike stories correspond to socio-cultural values and contexts, and represent various forms of Sufi-animal interaction and animal-centric narration of Sufi traditions. All the mentioned stories in this part of the article align to a great extent with the perspective of Nathan Hofer that he offers in his chapter, "Dogs in Medieval Egyptian Sufi Literature." He says that Sufi of medieval Egypt at times subverted normal social values, with respect to their treatment with dogs, for pursuing their spiritual path."^{xxiv} And, as far as animals' actions are concerned, this volition of

animals can be aligned with their willful experience. What Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger refer to as “postulating animal agency is not a new idea. Darwin’s writings, though famous for seeming to undermine even human agency by presenting evolution on a large scale, systematically foster the witnessing of subjectivity in animal life by representing action as performed by, rather than happening to, animals.”^{xxv}

In these sorts of interactions, even deadly animals act against their nature, demonstrating their reverence for the pious saints. Hagiographers depict and portray the effectiveness of the spiritual height of the Sufi saints even in their absence from the scenes. They (hagiographers) also often seem to stress the point that the Sufi Sheikhs even remained informed about the events despite of not being there physically. These writings also surround on the assertion of disciples’ beliefs. It has been a widespread representational mode of miraculous elements. In some cases, there is also present a socio-cultural harmony of the story. Julie Van Pelt in “The Hagiographer as Holy Fool? Fictionality in Saints’ Lives” argues that “hagiographer’s narrative crafting creates and reflects onto his saintly subject (saint) a certain authority while at the same time the saintly subject reflects religious authority onto the hagiographer. Moreover, it is this narrative crafting which establishes this complex but profound link between the hagiographer and the saint.” For Julie Van, “A hagiographer practices humility and fictionalization at once”.^{xxvi} So, all the stories discussed reflect that the spiritual power of the Sufis miraculously did reverse the normal natural phenomenon. The hagiographers demonstrate that the Sufis have their miraculous power over the animals as well as their hierarchies. Christian saints, of Medieval Europe, had also been celebrated and analyzed in ‘rescue’ stories. Dominic Alexander puts these stories, in his analysis, under the heading of ‘hermit and the hunter’ theme. It connotes stories where a saint rescues and protects a hunted animal from the hunter human or even another animal.^{xxvii}

5- Rescue and Subjectivity

However, there is an important perspective that surrounds around the subjective consideration of animals out of the rescue stories. Numerous Sufi saints have been remembered and celebrated on account of their close interaction with their companion animals. In these Sufis’ narration, their close human companions, devotees, and followers celebrate them without any miraculous or supernatural element rather they (devotees) narrate their Sufis due to their rescue to animals within the social and cultural contexts and values. Sufis Syed Talib Hussain (d. 2004), Baba Zafar (d. 2008), and Saen Faryad all experienced rescuing to their companion dogs, in particular, during decades’ long relationship with them.^{xxviii} Then, Sakhi Abbas (d. 1968) had a very close companionship with the dogs. The origin of their long companionship relates to a canine family’s rescue, in the heavy rain, by the Sufi himself. The story goes as that the saint saw a female dog and her puppies drenched in the rain, he had feelings for them and covered them with his own shawl while

himself remaining in the rain. The dog family followed him to his place and became his companions forever. Generations of that family remained committed in the companionship to the Sufi saint who went on caring, protecting, feeding, and accompanying them forever.^{xxix} Besides, in Pakistani Sufi traditions, there are several Sufi-animal interactional stories that entail the element of rescue although these stories are covered under the thematic analysis of 'healing of animals.' Importantly, these stories highlight the subjectivity of animals through the ethical and subjective treatment of Sufis involved.^{xxx} Additionally, since a huge number of animals live at a range of Sufi shrines in Pakistan yet they have to face some suffering or issues during staying there. Here, there plays a significant part by some social individuals or a group. An example of 'Sheedi' community looks quite pertinent in this aspect. Their historical role in the protection and conservation of crocodiles at Mangho Pir shrine in Karachi can be a relevant case study to be considered.^{xxxi}

Conclusion:

Hagiographic narration may contain element of miraculous to any extent. The amount of this element can be a way to determine about the nature of human-animal boundaries. Depicted incidents indicate that in almost every case, before 1947, the traditional boundaries, between humans and animals were maintained. Lot of case studies shows that not just the humans were rescued from wild and dangerous animal attacks but the animals were also rescued from human capture. However, in each and every case, the protagonist position remained of the Sufis who had been narrated and devoted for their unquestionable dominance over animals, in the hagiographical traditions. Furthermore, in many of the rescue stories, the celebrated Sufis remained aware of the incidents although they were not informed, apparently, by anyone or the affected people. Importantly, these hagiographic stories entail the advocacy of Sufi saints' spiritual and miraculous prestige and height. These stories also show how disciples enjoy beliefs upon the miraculous power of their Sufis over even dangerous animals. And, these beliefs and narrations do feature the elements of recognition, respect, and reverence by the animals about the Sufis. It is important fact to be noted in these sorts of stories that although largely the stories imply the maintaining of boundaries between humans and animals yet these limits seem, sometimes, as essential for a healthy and normal co-existence for the humans as well as animals. However, the study also finds that it is a remarkable characteristic of Pakistani Sufi traditions that in 'rescue' stories several Sufis, particularly of late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, have showed subjective attitudes and attributes towards animals. And, this shift in 'rescue' stories, marked by animals' individualistic personalities, ultimately, leads to the blurring of boundaries in human-animal interaction producing healthy social relations.

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