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Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Pakistan is Noor, and Noor Knows No Decline”: The Shrine-Based Public Arena in the Punjab, 1940–1977****Muhammad Shafi**

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On the wall of the Lahore shrine of the twentieth-century Sufi Wasif Ali Wasif is written: Pakistan is Noor, and Noor knows no decline. This article asks through what history a modern state acquired a mystical biography. It argues that the Sufi shrines of the Punjab constituted a public arena in their own right, with their own calendar, media, and organization, and that this arena did two kinds of political work across two eras. Between 1940 and 1947 the pirs of Alipur Sayyedan, Golra Sharif, Sial Sharif, Jalalpur, and Manki Sharif converted spiritual allegiance into electoral force for the Muslim League, wielding the bay'ah against the Unionist order of the province. After 1947 the shrine world claimed the authority to say what the achieved Pakistan meant, pressing the state to enforce the Shariah and elaborating, through hagiography and prophecy, a sacral narrative of the state as a foretold and destined entity. The state answered by moving from courtship to control, bringing the shrines under the Auqaf administration after 1959. Drawing on pir-sponsored periodicals, Urdu district histories, and the hagiographic canon, the article extends the study of shrine politics across the frontier of 1947 and reads prophecy as evidence of popular political theology.

Keywords: Sufism; pirs; shrines; Punjab; Pakistan movement; public arenas; hagiography; Auqaf**Introduction**

On the wall of a Lahore shrine stands a sentence that no constitution ever dared: “Pakistan is Noor, and there is no demise to Noor.”¹ The shrine belongs to Wasif Ali Wasif, a twentieth-century Sufi of the city, and the inscription makes a claim of a kind political science has no category for. It does not say that Pakistan is legitimate, or viable, or even Islamic; it says that Pakistan is Noor, divine light, and that what is light cannot decline. A state founded by lawyers in 1947, argued over in assemblies, partitioned, amended, and twice placed under martial law in its first three decades, is here declared an emanation beyond the reach of history. The sentence is easy to pass by as devotional excess. This article proposes instead to take it seriously as evidence, and to ask the question it poses: through what history did a modern state acquire a mystical biography?

Answering the question requires a vocabulary, and the vocabulary belongs to the shrine. A pir is a living spiritual master, bound to his disciples, his mureeds, by the bay'ah, an oath of allegiance with roots in the earliest history of Islam; a sajjada nashin, literally the one who sits on the prayer carpet, is the hereditary custodian of a deceased saint's shrine, inheriting the founder's sanctity along with his lands and his following; a khanqah is the

¹Azhar Waheed, “Pakistan Noor hai, Noor ko Zawal Nahi,” *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore), January 13, 2013.

lodge attached to a shrine where the master teaches and the community gathers; and the urs, literally a wedding, is the annual festival of a saint's death-anniversary, celebrated as his union with the divine. The great shrines of the Punjab descend through orders, silsilas, above all the Chishti and Naqshbandi lineages, and their devotional world overlaps broadly with the Barelvi school of South Asian Islam, for which the intercession of saints is central rather than suspect.

The argument of this article is that the shrine was a public arena in its own right, and that it did two different kinds of political work on either side of 1947. In the first era, the pirs helped make Pakistan: they converted the bay'ah into an electoral instrument, threw the sanctity of their houses behind the Muslim League in the decisive campaigns of 1945 and 1946, and delivered rural publics no party organizer could reach. In the second era, they claimed the authority to say what the Pakistan they had helped make actually meant: pressing the new state to enforce the Shariah, and elaborating, through hagiography and prophecy, a sacral narrative in which the state figured as foretold, chosen, and guarded. The first half of this story is known in outline since David Gilmartin's pioneering study; the second half has scarcely been written, and it is the second half that explains the writing on Wasif Ali Wasif's wall.²

The sources for such a history lie mostly below the sightline of the English-language archive, and the article is built from them deliberately. The evidence includes the pir-sponsored press of the Punjab's districts, weekly and monthly periodicals issued from Jhelum and Chiniot in the League's cause; the Urdu district histories and biographical compendia in which the shrines' political interventions were recorded by their own publics; the hagiographic canon, from Sufi Barakat Ali's collected discourses to the mystical memoirs of Mumtaz Mufti and Qudratullah Shahab, in which the prophecies of Pakistan circulate; and the mainstream press, above all Nawa-i-Waqt, which relayed the appeals and fatwas of the pirs to the reading province. The League's own Islamic commitments, and the parallel campaign of the religious parties after 1947, are documented in companion studies and are cross-referenced rather than retold.³

The scholarship this article joins has examined the shrine and the state from above, and its gap is the arena in between. Katherine Ewing showed four decades ago how successive Pakistani regimes labored to redefine the saints, promoting the Sufi as social reformer against the Sufi as intercessor; Umber Bin Ibad has recently reconstructed the state's takeover of the shrines through the Auqaf administration; Gilmartin and Ian Talbot established the pirs' part in the making of Pakistan before 1947.⁴ What remains missing is the shrine's own voice in the postcolonial decades, the years in which the pirs and their publics debated, in their own idiom, the meaning of the state they had blessed into being. Between the mobilization Gilmartin recovered and the nationalization Ibad recorded lies

²David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988).

³The League's public commitments of the 1940s are documented in Muhammad Shafi, "Debating the Idea of Pakistan as Modern Islamic State during 1940s," *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 34, no. 2 (2021): 45–60; the campaigns of the religious parties after 1947 are the subject of a companion article derived from the same dissertation.

⁴Katherine Ewing, "The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 2 (1983); Umber Bin Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State: The End of Religious Pluralism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019).

a generation of shrine-based argument about the idea of Pakistan, and this article is an attempt to give it its history.

The Pirs Make Pakistan, 1940–47

The Muslim League needed the pirs because its natural allies had failed it, and the need was mutual before it was sentimental. Jinnah and the League labored to enlist the reformist ulema of the Deobandi, Bareilvi, and Ahl-i-Hadith schools, and largely failed, the bulk of the learned classes remaining hostile or aloof, with only a fraction rallying under Shabbir Ahmad Usmani; yet the League, an apparently urban party of lawyers and landlords, could not carry the Punjab without the countryside, and the countryside listened to its shrines.⁵ The Sufis and sajjada nashins, commanding followings in the millions and standing outside the seminary quarrels that divided the ulema, filled the gap: they became, in the language of this study, hierarchies of mediation between the League and the rural masses, translating an abstract constitutional demand into the idiom of loyalty, blessing, and salvation. The alliance balanced the opposition of the religious stalwarts and lent the proposed state a religious shade no committee could have painted.

The adherence of the great Naqshbandi master of the age gave the alliance its most venerable face. Pir Jamaat Ali Shah of Alipur Sayyedan (1841–1951), by the 1940s the grand old man of Punjabi Sufism, held a profound conviction in the League's cause, corresponded with Jinnah directly, and instructed his vast following to throw itself into the election campaign of 1945–46; and because his spiritual authority ran beyond the Punjab, the effect travelled. In the North-West Frontier Province, where the League faced the entrenched strength of the Khudai Khidmatgars, the pro-Congress “red shirt” movement of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Sufis under Jamaat Ali Shah's influence, among them Syed Sayeed Banuri Kohati and Pir Abdul Latif of Zakori, carried the League's case into a province the party could hardly enter on its own.⁶ A single bay'ah network, in other words, was operating across provincial lines as a campaign apparatus.

The Chishti houses matched the Naqshbandi commitment, and none carried more prestige than Golra. The shrine of Golra Sharif, near Rawalpindi, had been raised to subcontinental fame by Pir Mehr Ali Shah (d. 1937), the great Chishti scholar-saint of the age, and the house that inherited his sanctity placed it behind the League's demand, its custodians writing to the Quaid-e-Azam and urging their followers into the campaign.⁷ The convergence mattered doctrinally as well as politically: the Naqshbandi and Chishti lineages, with their different disciplines and different histories, were arriving at the same public position, so that a Punjabi villager could hear the case for Pakistan from whichever spiritual house held his family's allegiance. The League's critics among the ulema could dispute Jinnah's credentials; they could not dispute the credentials of Golra, and the League's opponents in the countryside discovered that the argument had acquired guardians they dared not heckle.

Sial Sharif shows the alliance at its most institutional, because there the shrine did not merely bless the League but built it. Khwaja Qamar-ud-Din Sialvi, sajjada nashin of the great Chishti shrine of Sial Sharif, founded the Muslim League branch in Sargodha district

⁵Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*; Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849–1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988).

⁶Fayyaz Ahmed Shaheen, “Tehreek-e-Pakistan mein Sufiya-e-Karam ki Shamuliyat ke Muharrakat ka Tahqiqi Jaiza,” *Mirr-at-ul-Aarifeen International* (2018).

⁷Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.

in 1938, two years before the Lahore Resolution, and the leadership of the shrine was present at that resolution's adoption in 1940; the Jamia Mosque at Goal Chowk in Sargodha became the branch's working headquarters, where the sajjada nashin and his followers arranged the public gatherings, meetings, and conversations through which a wider audience was argued into the idea of Pakistan.⁸ Here the ordinary direction of political recruitment is reversed: the party did not capture the shrine, the shrine constituted the party. When historians count the League's district organizations in the Punjab, they are counting, in places like Sargodha, the political face of a khanqah.

The bay'ah was the campaign's decisive weapon, and Sialvi drew it without hesitation. The oath binding disciple to master is, in the shrine world, a matter touching salvation, and Khwaja Qamar-ud-Din Sialvi publicly denounced the bay'ah of all those who opposed Pakistan and supported the Unionist Party, drawing the line, in the account preserved of these events, between kufr, disbelief, and Islam.⁹ The severity of the instrument must be registered: a Punjabi Muslim of the shrine world who canvassed for the Unionists was being told that his bond with his spiritual master, and what hung upon it, stood forfeit. No party whip in the subcontinent commanded a comparable sanction. The historian need not admire the maneuver to recognize its meaning for this study: the shrine possessed, and in 1946 spent, a currency of allegiance that operated entirely outside the categories of interest and ideology through which the election is usually read.

The masters did not spare their own greatest disciples, and two scenes preserve the campaign's temperature. At a public gathering at Jhavarian in Sargodha district, near the Calara estate of the Punjab premier himself, the Pir of Sial openly instructed his own mureed, the Unionist candidate Nawab Allah Baksh Tiwana, to forget politics at that critical juncture and stand with the Muslim community and with Islam; and the Pir of Golra warned his mureed Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana, the Unionist premier of the province, that to isolate himself from the cause of Islam was to court the fires of hell.¹⁰ Meanwhile Hakim Atta Muhammad Shah, on the advice of his own master Sialvi, carried the Pakistan campaign into Calara itself, the premier's birthplace. The shrine world, in short, was conducting its offensive at the very hearth of the Unionist order, and conducting it in the register of damnation and salvation, before crowds, with names named.

The Pir of Manki Sharif extended the pattern to the Frontier and extracted its price in promises. The young pir of Manki, commanding one of the province's largest followings, threw his network behind the League in a province where the party was otherwise weak, and the alliance was sealed by assurances from Jinnah himself that in Pakistan the life of Muslims would be ordered in accordance with the Shariah, assurances the pir would remember, and publicly redeem, after 1947.¹¹ The transaction deserves emphasis because it shows the pirs as principals rather than instruments: they did not simply lend the League their sanctity, they negotiated the meaning of the state their sanctity was buying. The promise given to Manki Sharif in the 1940s is one of the threads that ties the two halves of

⁸Tahmina Iqbal and Mazhar Farid, "Political Role and Impact of Chishti Dargah of Sial Sharif in Pre and Post Partition Era of Punjab, Pakistan," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 57, no. 1 (2020).

⁹Ian Talbot, *Punjab Ghulami Say Azadi Tak, 1857–1947* [Punjab from Slavery to Freedom], trans. Tahir Kamran (Lahore: Takhliqat, 1999).

¹⁰Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.

¹¹Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

this article together, for the demand to enforce the Shariah in the new state came, after independence, from precisely the houses that held such promissory notes.

The scale of the achievement is measured by the order the pirs helped to bring down. The Unionist Party had governed the Punjab since the reforms of the 1920s on a cross-communal alliance of the landed interest, cemented by the colonial state's patronage and by exactly the rural hierarchies of tribe, caste, and biraderi, the patrilineal brotherhoods of the Punjabi village, that ordinarily decided elections; against this machine the League brought no comparable landed network of its own.¹² The pirs supplied the countervailing hierarchy. Standing above the biraderi quarrels, they could ask the village to vote its faith rather than its faction, as when Raja Ghazanfar Ali Khan, of the family of the Pir of Jalalpur, called publicly for the tensions of biraderis and tribes to be set aside for the community's cause and the honor of Islam. The election of 1946, which broke the Unionists and made Pakistan electorally undeniable, was won in the spaces where that appeal was credible, and it was credible where the shrines had made it so.

The roll of the committed houses shows how widely the commitment ran. Beyond Alipur Sayyedan, Golra, and Sial, the pirs of Jalalpur Sharif, of Rajoa, and of Shah Jiwana associated themselves with the League and its ideology across the years 1940 to 1945; Fazal Shah of Jalalpur placed his district network at the campaign's service; and the list could be extended through the shrine geography of the province.¹³ Two features of the roll deserve notice. First, its breadth across lineages and districts means the phenomenon cannot be dismissed as the idiosyncrasy of a few political pirs; the shrine world moved as a world. Second, and crucially for what follows, the pirs achieved this while ignoring the reformist ulema's standing critique of Jinnah's and the League's Islamic credentials: the houses that vouched for Pakistan were vouching, implicitly, for its founder, and they regarded their own sanctity as sufficient warrant. The idea of Pakistan entered the Punjabi countryside wearing the shrine's seal.

The Shrine as Arena: Calendar, Media, Organization

The shrine's political power rested on a calendar, and the calendar assembled publics no party could convene. The devotional year of the Punjab ran through the twelfth of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the Prophet's birthday; the twenty-seventh of Ramadan, the commemorated night of the Quran's descent; the two Eids; and the weekly Friday congregation; and across the province, in districts, tehsils, and villages, it ran above all through the urs, the annual festivals of the saints, each drawing its own concourse of devotees.¹⁴ These occasions were, by their nature, recurring mass assemblies with guaranteed attendance, held at fixed places, addressed by speakers whose authority the audience had come precisely to acknowledge. A political party must labor to gather a crowd; the shrine's crowd gathers itself, annually, forever. When the pirs chose to speak of Pakistan from these platforms, they were inserting the idea into the one assembly system of rural Punjab that predated, and outnumbered, every political meeting ever held there.

The urs deserves a moment's description, because its texture explains its force. A great urs is as fair as much as a rite: pilgrims arrive across days, the langar, the free kitchen, feeds thousands, qawwals sing the saint's praises through the nights, traders and storytellers

¹²Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*; Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.

¹³Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.

¹⁴Talbot, *Punjab Ghulami Say Azadi Tak*.

work the margins, and at the center the sajjada nashin receives, blesses, and addresses the assembly. Politics conducted here does not feel like politics; it arrives wrapped in blessing, woven into the praise of the saint and the duties of the disciple, absorbed in an atmosphere of festivity and devotion rather than debate.¹⁵ Precisely for that reason the classical model of the public sphere cannot see it, and precisely for that reason it worked. An argument that reaches its audience as an obligation of love has passed beneath every defense that audiences raise against ordinary persuasion, and the campaigns of 1945–46, and the campaigns for the Shariah that followed, travelled by this route.

The khanqah joined the old assembly to the new machinery, and the joint is where the modern history begins. The lodge was the home ground for hearing the master's message, but by the 1940s the message was amplified: loudspeakers carried the address beyond the courtyard, and the shrine's public rituals, the gathered listening, the collective prayer, meshed with the tools of print and sound into a single circuit of connectivity.¹⁶ The detail matters against a persistent stereotype. The shrine world is imagined as the archaic other of modernity, awaiting disruption by print and party; in the Punjab of these years it behaved instead as an early adopter, grafting the microphone onto the mehfil and the press onto the pulpit. The arena this article describes was not a survival from the past resisting the modern public sphere; it was a parallel modernization of publicity, running on sanctity where the newspapers ran on subscription.

The shrine world published, and its periodicals are among the least examined sources of the Pakistan movement. Maulana Karim-ud-Din, a follower of the Pir of Sial, issued the weekly *Siraj-ul-Akhbar* from Jhelum, and Hafiz Khuda Bakhsh the monthly *Vad-i-Khuda* from Chiniot, journals that carried the case for the League and the idea of Pakistan to their district readerships and gave the shrines' position a printed, argued, continuing form.¹⁷ Above the district press, the appeals and fatwas of the pirs travelled through the province's mainstream newspapers, *Nawa-i-Waqt* conspicuous among them, so that a declaration made at an urs in Sargodha could be read within days in Lahore. The circuit ran in both directions and at every level: the great dailies relayed the shrines, the shrine journals localized the movement, and between them the devotional and the political press became, for the campaign's purposes, one system.

The shrines founded institutions, which is the conduct of actors who expect the argument to last. Maulana Ahmad-ud-Din Gangvi established a madrassah in Mianwali district to carry the cause into religious education; Pir Fazal Shah of Jalalpur founded Hisbullah, a local party in Jhelum, to give his following an organized political form; and Shah Maghfur-ul-Qadri founded the *Ahya-i-Islami* in Bahawalpur to popularize the proposed state in his own region.¹⁸ A sermon is an event; a madrassah, a party, and a society are standing capacities, and their foundation in these years shows the shrine world building infrastructure for a long campaign rather than lending charisma to a short one. The pattern also corrects the assumption that organization flowed downward from the League to its allies: in these districts the organizational initiative was the shrine's own, and the League was less the architect of the network than its beneficiary.

¹⁵Talbot, *Punjab Ghulami Say Azadi Tak*.

¹⁶Amjad Saqib, *Shahar Lab-i-Darya* (Lahore: Ilmi Publishers, 1993); Shahbaz, *Shakhsyat-i-Jhelum*.

¹⁷Shahbaz, *Shakhsyat-i-Jhelum*; Amjad Saqib, *Shahar Lab-i-Darya* (Lahore: Ilmi Publishers, 1993).

¹⁸Shahbaz, *Shakhsyat-i-Jhelum*; I. H. Qureshi, *Karwan-i-Shauq* (Lahore: Idara-e-Tahqiqat, 1988)

Taken together, calendar, media, and organization amount to a complete public arena in the theoretical sense, and naming it so is not a decoration. Students of colonial North India have taught us to find publics constituted through collective ritual, in processions, festivals, and performances, rather than only through rational conversation in print.¹⁹ The shrine world of the Punjab is that teaching's fullest case: assembly by the devotional calendar, amplification by loudspeaker and district weekly, organization by madrassah and local society, all of it conducted in Punjabi and Urdu, below the sightline of the English-language record from which the province's history has mostly been written. Histories that find no significant public debate over Pakistan in these years have, in general, not looked here; the arena was full, but it kept its minutes in languages, genres, and places the historiography had not learned to read.

After 1947: From Making Pakistan to Meaning It

Independence changed the shrine world's question rather than its habits, and the change is the hinge of this article. Before August 1947 the pirs had argued that Pakistan should exist; after it, they argued about what Pakistan, existing, must mean, and they argued in the same arenas, by the same calendar, through the same networks of bay'ah and print. The historiography, having followed them attentively to the boundary of partition, largely abandons them there, as though the shrines fell silent when the flag rose. They did not. The houses that had spent their sanctity on the state's creation regarded themselves, with some justice, as holders of its promissory notes, and the postcolonial decades opened with the shrine world presenting those notes for payment.

The pirs who had campaigned for Pakistan now campaigned publicly for the Shariah within it, and the roll of the active houses is again long. The Pir of Manki Sharif and Pir Jamaat Ali Shah were among those who publicly insisted on the enforcement of the Shariah in the new state, redeeming in the 1940s' own coin the assurances the campaign had minted; and around them a wider circle remained active and energized after the creation, Pir Ghulam Mujaddid Sirhindi, Mian Ghulam Ullah Sharqपुरi, Sultan Muhammad Abdulaziz, and others, pressing the state apparatus to Islamize the country's laws on the strength of promises all parties remembered.²⁰ The demand was the same in substance as the religious parties' campaign examined in a companion study, but its register was distinct: where the Jamaat argued from ideology and the ulema from jurisprudence, the pirs argued from covenant, as creditors of the state's founding bargain, and they argued it to the devotional millions the parties could not reach.

The shrine's idiom gave the Islamic-state demand a constituency the ideologues alone could never have assembled. The devotional world of the Punjab, broadly aligned with the Barelvi orientation for which the saints' intercession is central to religion itself, had little natural sympathy for the Jamaat-e-Islami's scripturalist vanguard or the Deobandi ulema's reformist severity, both of which regarded shrine piety with suspicion; a campaign for the Islamic state conducted only in their registers would have bypassed the countryside. The pirs translated. In their preaching the Islamic state was not a constitutional mechanism but the completion of a sacred trust, the form in which the community would honor the bargain its saints had blessed, and in that translation the demand acquired, in the villages

¹⁹Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²⁰Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*; Shaheen, "Tehreek-e-Pakistan mein Sufiya-e-Karam."

and at the festivals, the mass resonance the drafting committees in Karachi eventually learned to fear.

Beneath the demand for the Shariah, a deeper claim was forming, and it is the claim this article exists to document. In the shrine world's telling, Pakistan was not merely a state to be Islamized; it was already, in its essence, a blessed entity, brought into being under providence, foretold by the saints, and guarded from the unseen. The demand and the narrative reinforced each other, for a state that heaven had ordained could hardly be permitted laws that heaven had forbidden, but they are analytically distinct, and the narrative was the more original production. Political demands are the common coin of public arenas everywhere; the elaboration, within a generation of the state's founding, of a full sacral biography for it, with prophecies, assigned guardians, and an ontology of light, is rarer, and its documentation is the task of the next section.

Why the sacral narrative flowered precisely after partition is a question contemporaries' interpreters have begun to answer, and the answers frame what follows. Ayesha Siddiqa, writing from a secular vantage, argues that the Sufis were accorded a share in the new country's power structure and employed their mystical knowledge to furnish the state an ideological basis, in a postcolonial discourse that, in her phrase, "had little patience for a pre-modern form of religion" unharnessed to the Islamic state's development; David Gilmartin's account of the shrines' political incorporation points the same way.²¹ On this reading the prophecies are the shrine world's bid for relevance in a state that might otherwise have left it behind. The reading has force, and the article returns to it; but it must be tested against the texts themselves, which is where any history of belief has to live.

The Prophetic Canon: Pakistan Foretold

There exists in Urdu a substantial literature in which the creation of Pakistan is foretold, and this article proposes to read it as an archive rather than an embarrassment. The literature spans genres, from the collected discourses of living masters to the mystical memoirs of celebrated writers to predictions attributed to medieval saints and circulated in the press; its common substance is the conviction that Pakistan was known to the friends of God before it was demanded by any league, and that its career unfolds under their continuing guardianship. Historians have generally averted their eyes, since the texts fail every test of reportage. But the historian of ideas asks a different question of a document: not whether its claims are true, but what its circulation proves about the convictions of its public, and by that test the prophetic canon is among the richest sources the idea of Pakistan possesses.

Sufi Barakat Ali of Dar-ul-Ihsan, Faisalabad, supplies the canon's most sustained modern voice. In his revered *Maqalat-e-Hikmat*, the collected papers set down across his long teaching, he returns again and again to Pakistan: the country's creation, he taught, had been foretold, the great saint Abdul Qadir Jilani himself having presaged it and assigned the duty of its service; he declared himself a muhib, a devoted lover, of Pakistan, guiding his people toward its care; and in his last years he proclaimed that Pakistan would revive the true culture of Islam and lead the Muslim world.²² The teaching should be weighed for what it does. It binds the state into the silsila itself, making Pakistan an item of spiritual

²¹Ayesha Siddiqa, "Sinners and Saints, Soldiers of God: Has Sufism Failed to Counter Radicalism?," *Friday Times* (Lahore), February 16, 2018; Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*.

²²Sufi Barakat Ali, *Maqalat-e-Hikmat* (Faisalabad: Dar-ul-Ihsan, n.d.); Muhammad Asghar Chishti, "Sufi Barakat Ali," *Daily Pakistan* (Lahore), July 26, 2013.

inheritance passed from the eleventh-century saint to the twentieth-century master to the disciple in the courtyard, and it converts patriotism into a devotional obligation. A state so held cannot be merely criticized; opposition becomes something close to sacrilege.

The predictions attributed to Naimatullah Shah Wali carried the canon into mass circulation, and their very contestation proves their reach. The verses ascribed to this saint, said to have lived some eight centuries ago, foretelling the rise, trials, and destiny of a Muslim power in the subcontinent, have circulated in Pakistan through pamphlets, journals, newspapers, and latterly social media, and the debate over their authenticity, are the prophecies genuine or fabricated, has itself become a standing genre of the popular press.²³ For the social historian the authenticity question, endlessly argued by the participants, is beside the point; what matters is that generations of readers have found it worth arguing. A public that debates whether its state was foretold by a medieval saint is a public for which the state's sacral status is a live question, and the durability of the debate, decade after decade, measures how deeply the prophetic frame had settled into the common understanding of what Pakistan is.

The literary carriers of the canon gave it its most respectable vehicles, and Mumtaz Mufti's *Alakh Nagri* stands first among them. Mufti, one of the most read Urdu prose writers of his generation, narrated in that famous book the mystical biography of the state, recording among much else the forecast of Imam Bari Sarkar, the seventeenth-century saint of the Margalla hills, that a country would arise in the name of Islam; the book's enormous readership took its prophecies not from a pamphlet but from a celebrated man of letters.²⁴ *Alakh Nagri* matters to this history for its position as much as its content: it sits at the junction where the shrine's oral world enters middle-class print culture, carrying the khanqah's convictions into drawing rooms that would never attend an urs. The prophetic canon, that is, did not remain rural or subaltern; through literature it colonized the very readership on which the secular press relied.

Qudratullah Shahab embodies the canon's strangest conquest, the mystical bureaucrat, and his memoir made the conquest public. Shahab served at the summit of the civil service, secretary to heads of state across the very decades this article covers, and his posthumously celebrated *Shahab Nama* interlaces the memoir of administration with an autobiography of the unseen, visions, spiritual assignments, and the guardianship of Pakistan among them; around him gathered the literary circle, Mumtaz Mufti, Ashfaq Ahmad, and, in the following generation, Bano Qudsia, through whose enormously popular works the sensibility spread further.²⁵ The significance for this study is institutional: the sacral narrative of the state was being carried not against the state apparatus but within it, by one of its most senior servants, and the reading public learned that the files of the republic and the duties of the unseen could rest on the same desk. No account of Pakistan's official ideology is complete that ignores this devotional current running through officialdom itself.

Wasif Ali Wasif, on whose wall this article began, gave the canon its aphoristic form and its urban home. A teacher and essayist of Lahore rather than a hereditary *sajjada nashin*, Wasif drew the educated middle class of the city to gatherings built on the aphorism, the

²³Syed Iqbal Hussain Rizvi, "Shah Naimatullah Wali ki Paishgoiyan," *Humsab* (Lahore), May 1, 2019.

²⁴Mumtaz Mufti, *Alakh Nagri* (Lahore: Al-Faisal, 2006).

²⁵Qudratullah Shahab, *Shahab Nama* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, n.d.).

compressed mystical sentence, and Pakistan recurred among his themes, the state figured as a gift held in trust and, in the inscription his shrine preserves, as Noor itself, light without decline.²⁶ His case completes the canon's social geography. The prophetic frame had begun in the countryside's khanqahs, entered district print, ascended through literature into the middle-class home, and now acquired a metropolitan shrine of its own, visited by the very urban publics whose tea-house counterparts were arguing secularism a few miles away. By the end of the period the sacral idea of Pakistan possessed addresses in every stratum of Punjabi society, which is precisely what the word arena, in this series of studies, is meant to claim.

The canon's living transmission can still be observed, and one testimony from within the literary world may stand for it. Najeeba Arif, the Urdu scholar and literary historian, has recorded in her autobiographical *Ragni ki Khoj Mein* the tradition of spiritual duties assigned for the protection of Pakistan, among them the charge laid by the pir Baba Qadir Auliya upon one Durrani Sahib to guard the country, and she has affirmed in conversation that the identity of Pakistan is intertwined with such Sufi ideas.²⁷ The testimony is valuable precisely because it is unembarrassed: a senior scholar of literature treating the tradition of the state's unseen guardians as a living element of Pakistan's identity rather than a curiosity. The historian's protocol remains what it has been throughout, that such accounts are evidence of belief, not of events; but belief held at this level of the culture, and transmitted this matter-of-factly, is a historical force, and the protocol exists so that the force can be studied rather than dismissed.

The political work of the prophetic canon must be stated precisely, because it was considerable and it was double-edged. Positively, the canon armored the state's legitimacy at its deepest level: a Pakistan foretold by Jilani, forecast by Bari Sarkar, guarded by assigned saints, and inscribed as Noor stood beyond the reach of the left's class analysis and the liberals' constitutional criticism alike, its existence removed from the plane on which such arguments operate; the prophecies answered the country's recurring crises of survival, 1947, 1965, 1971, with an assurance no white paper could match.²⁸ Negatively, and by the same stroke, the canon raised the stakes of every dissent, for criticism of a sacral state shades into impiety, and the shrine world's gift to Pakistan's legitimacy was thus also a constriction of its arena. Both effects belong to the ledger, and the second explains why the secular publics of the period, whose own history is told elsewhere in this series, found the devotional narrative not quaint but formidable.

The State Reaches for the Shrine

The final proof that the shrine arena mattered is that the state moved to own it, and the movement has a date. In the first postcolonial decade the relationship remained substantially what the campaign had made it, courtship between a needy state and sovereign houses, and before 1959, as Umber Bin Ibad has established, not all Sufi shrines were patronized by the state, the great establishments retaining their properties, their custodians, and their independence of voice.²⁹ The Ayub regime ended the arrangement. Through the waqf legislation of 1959 and the administration built upon it, the Auqaf

²⁶Waheed, "Pakistan Noor hai."

²⁷Najeeba Arif, *Ragni ki Khoj Mein* (Lahore: Al-Faisal Nashran, 2018).

²⁸Rizvi, "Shah Naimatullah Wali ki Paishgoiyan"; Chishti, "Sufi Barakat Ali."

²⁹Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State*.

apparatus, the state assumed the management of the major shrines, their endowments, and increasingly their festivals, converting the sovereign houses of the campaign era into administered sites of an official religion. A government does not nationalize what it considers negligible; the takeover is the state's own assessment, entered in law, of the arena this article has described.

With ownership came redefinition, and Katherine Ewing's classic analysis showed how deliberate the project was. The regimes that managed the shrines also labored to re-narrate the saints, promoting the Sufi as social reformer, educator, and pioneer of development, an ally of the modernizing state, against the Sufi as intercessor and dispenser of blessing on whom the pirs' living authority rested; departmental ceremonies, official urs addresses, and sponsored publications carried the revised saint to the public.³⁰ The project concedes, in the act of revision, everything this article has argued: the state understood that the shrines were not merely properties but narrators, holders of the popular account of what Pakistan meant, and it sought to capture the narration along with the rents. That the capture was never complete, the prophetic canon continuing to flourish alongside the official saint, only confirms the arena's depth; publics that had absorbed the sacral Pakistan from their masters did not surrender it to a department.

The rulers came to the shrines in person, and the traffic of visits maps the exchange of legitimacies. Ayub Khan paid his visits to the great establishments even as his administration absorbed them, and the pattern he set, the head of a modernizing, and in his case avowedly anti-clerical, state bowing at the tombs his government managed, was followed by his successors down the decades; Ayesha Siddiqi reads in this traffic the terms of the settlement, a share in the power structure conceded to the shrine world in exchange for ideological service to the state.³¹ The scene condenses the period's paradox. The same state that fought the ulema over family law and dropped the Islamic name from its constitution knelt, photographed, before the saints, because the two gestures addressed different arenas: the modernists could be confronted in the press and the assembly, but the devotional millions assembled by the calendar of the shrines could only be joined. Even at its most confident, the state paid the arena the tribute of attendance.

The shrine landscape the state was absorbing can be glimpsed in the cities that carry it, and Multan may stand as the type. The old capital of the southern Punjab, styled for centuries the city of saints, lives amid the monumental shrines of its Suhrawardi masters, their domes commanding the skyline, their festivals structuring the year, their custodian families woven through the region's politics and landholding; the recent city literature, such as Ikram Ullah's *Multan-e-Mah*, records a place whose civic identity and devotional identity are not separable.³² Multiply Multan across the province, through Pakpattan, Sial Sharif, Golra, Jalalpur, and the district shrines beyond counting, and the scale of what the Auqaf administration undertook becomes visible: not the management of properties but the attempted incorporation of a parallel geography of authority, older than the state, better attended than its institutions, and in possession of its own account of the state's meaning.

³⁰Ewing, "The Politics of Sufism"; Ibad, *Sufi Shrines and the Pakistani State*.

³¹Siddiqi, "Sinners and Saints, Soldiers of God."

³²Ikram Ullah, *Multan-e-Mah* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2021).

The interpretive quarrel over this history divides those who look down from the state and those who look up from the village, and both deserve their say. From above, Aamer Sarfaraz observes that the Sufi institutions emerged from partition as “the only surviving Islamic social structures,” whose hereditary custodians, sustained by feudal landholding and low literacy, engaged ceaselessly in politics while never fostering local democracy, a portrait of co-optation and complacency echoed in Siddiqi’s account; from below, the tradition of Gilmartin and Talbot presents the shrines as genuine mediating hierarchies, through which rural society entered mass politics on terms it could understand, while Saad Ali Khan reminds both camps that Sufi engagement with power has been the historical norm rather than a Pakistani aberration.³³ The quarrel is real, but it is conducted, on both sides, over the same conceded premise: that the shrines possessed public power worth acquiring, worth wielding, and worth arguing about.

The arena framework of this series dissolves the dichotomy rather than adjudicating it, and the resolution is the section’s conclusion. Co-optation and mediation are not rival descriptions but the two faces of a single fact: the shrine world commanded assembled publics and a narrative of the state, and every party to the period’s politics, the League seeking votes, the pirs seeking the Shariah and their own standing, the regimes seeking legitimacy, traded in that command. States do not buy powerless arenas, and arenas that sell are not therefore powerless; the price the state paid, in patronage, attendance, and eventually administration, is the measure of what the shrine had built. That later governments would market the country abroad under the very sign of its shrines, branding Pakistan a Sufi nation, is the exchange’s long epilogue, lying beyond this article’s period but not beyond its logic.³⁴

The Shrine and the Historiography

The shrine arena unsettles the materialist account of Pakistan at the point where that account is proudest, its realism. The class school explains the Pakistan movement through the interests of the salariat and the calculations of the landed, and for the Unionist Punjab it explains a great deal; what it cannot explain is the campaign this article has reconstructed, in which the decisive interventions were made in the currency of bay’ah, salvation, and sanctity, cutting across the biraderi and patronage networks in which interest was actually organized, and frequently against the material stakes of the very disciples being instructed.³⁵ A Unionist candidate ordered by his master to abandon his own candidacy is not maximizing; he is obeying, in a system of obligation the class analysis has no ledger for. The shrine arena does not refute the materialist school so much as mark its boundary: beyond this line, the history runs on sanctity, and the historian must learn its bookkeeping.

The ambiguity school fares no better at the shrine gate, for the prophetic canon is many things but it is not vague. The school’s central claim, that Pakistan was insufficiently imagined, a negative space defined only against India, collapses before an archive in which

³³Aamer Sarfaraz, “Sufi Politics in Pakistan,” *Daily Times*, May 7, 2019; Saad Ali Khan, “Sufi Islamism in Contemporary Pakistan: Emergence of a New Ideology or Resurgence of an Old Trend?,” *Pakistan Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 2, no. 2 (2017).

³⁴Salman Yousaf and Li Huaibin, “Branding Pakistan as a ‘Sufi’ Country: The Role of Religion in Developing a Nation’s Brand,” *Journal of Place Management and Development* (2014).

³⁵Hamza Alavi, “Class and State in Pakistan,” in *Pakistan: The Unstable State*, ed. Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1983).

the state is imagined with extravagant specificity: foretold by named saints, assigned to named guardians, charged with the revival of Islam's true culture and the leadership of the Muslim world, and defined ontologically as light. One may find these imaginings unwelcome, or politically consequential in ways to be regretted; one cannot find them insufficient. The shrine world's Pakistan was over-imagined if anything, saturated with meaning, and the historiographical lesson generalizes: the diagnosis of vagueness has always depended on which publics the diagnostician consented to read, and the devotional public, the largest in the province, was never read at all.

Conclusion

The writing on Wasif Ali Wasif's wall can now be read as history, the residue of a process this article has traced across four decades. The pirs of the Punjab campaigned a state into being between 1940 and 1947, spending the bay'ah and the sanctity of their houses against the Unionist order and delivering the countryside the League could not otherwise reach; after independence they presented the promissory notes of that campaign, demanding the Shariah in the register of covenant, while around them the shrine world elaborated a sacral biography of the state, prophecies, guardians, and light, that travelled from the khanqah through district print and literature into the middle-class heart of the culture; and the state, measuring their arena exactly, moved from courtship to attendance to ownership, taking the shrines under Auqaf and contending for the saints' own story. The inscription is what such a history leaves on a wall.

The ledger of the shrine arena should be entered whole, because each of its columns is substantial. To the making of Pakistan the pirs contributed the rural majority of the decisive province, the balancing of the hostile ulema, and the religious shade under which the demand travelled; to the meaning of Pakistan they contributed the most popular of all its narratives, the sacral state beyond decline, together with the pressure of covenant behind the Islamic-state demand; and from the exchange they took patronage, standing, and eventually administration, a bargain whose costs to their own independence the nationalization of the shrines made permanent. What remains unstudied is nearly everything beneath this outline: the district shrine presses barely opened, the urs addresses unrecorded or uncollected, the hagiographies unread as sources, the whole devotional archive of the state's first generation awaiting its historians.

The largest claim of this article is finally about where the idea of Pakistan lived, and the shrine's answer enlarges the map. The idea lived in assemblies and drafting committees, as institutional history has always known; it lived in tea houses, editorials, and party presses, as the companion studies of this series show; and it lived, for the largest public of all, in the courtyards of the saints, argued in the grammar of blessing, kept in the genres of prophecy, and renewed by a calendar older than the state itself. The shrine kept its own minutes of the great argument over Pakistan, written in a hand the historiography is only learning to read, and until they are read the history of the idea remains a history of its smallest publics. Pakistan is Noor, says the wall, and Noor knows no decline; the historian's task is not to judge the sentence but to explain how a state came to be the kind of thing such sentences are written about.

Note: This article is extracted from Muhammad Shafi, "Debating the Idea of Pakistan in Public Arenas: A Case Study of the Punjab (1947–1977)" (PhD diss., Department of History, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, Government College University, Lahore), completed under the supervision of Hussain Ahmad Khan.