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Newspapers and Dynamics of Religious Communication: The Test Case of Sufi News

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Abstract

Religion and the print media are two powerful motivators and sources of meaning, information and culture, and their relationship has been there seen since 19th century with the advent of industrial revolution. This research aims to analyze the portrayal of Sufism in the print media by investigating features of Sufi news stories of Urdu newspapers. For this purpose, this study applied qualitative approach to investigate news writings of national newspapers published from the city of saints, Multan. To provide a comprehensive overview, this study has analyzed news stories printed on the occasions of death anniversaries of prolific Sufi saints in four leading newspapers, *Jang*, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, *Express* and *Khabrain*, to contribute to the contemporary studies of religion and the print media. Probing the dynamics of religious communication, the study found the holy sketch of Sufi saints that portrayed them as great Muslim and spiritual mentors, and a heart of love and religious harmony. Their path and ideologies were recognized as the sources of inspiration for eternal success. The newspaper writings stated that Sufis are the treasures of the divine grace, wisdom and spiritual knowledge whose teachings address the love of God and Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the concept of piety, humbleness, pardon, the uncertainty of the world, and optimism. In this background, this research, with its results, is an important addition for a better understanding of the association of religion and media.

Keywords: Sufi saints, Sufism, Islamic mysticism, Urdu newspapers, media and religion, Multan

Introduction

Sufism, the spiritual facet of Islam, is widely covered by the mainstream media of Pakistan, however, its coverage of the hub of Sufi saints, Multan,¹ that is renowned for its ancient shrines and Islamic mysticism all over the world, is remarkable. This part remained a center of revered Sufis from the tenth century hitherto where Suhrawardi, Chishti, Qadiri and Naqshbandi spiritual masters served the society with their mystical knowledge, noble

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¹Capital city of Southern part of the province of Punjab, Pakistan, which is known as “the city of saints.”

character, spiritual authority, and social values.² They made Multan a central city of Islamic excellence and “*Sajdah Gah-e-Malaik*”³ that is why *Muhadditheen*⁴ called Multan “*Medina-tul-Sagheer*.”⁵ The Sufis’ work generated remarkable religious, social and political impacts in the Southern part of the Punjab; and a huge number of *Khanqahs*,⁶ mosques and institutions of Sufism and Islamic teachings were established during these periods which disseminated the message of Islam and guided the society towards the path of God. They established *Khanqahs* for education, nutrition and shelter where humanity, love, inter and intra-religious harmony, spirituality and moral conduct were basic objectives of their education which created a new code of ethics in the masses and society.⁷ Even, the response of these spiritual masters towards other religions was admirable that created inter-religious harmony in the region,⁸ and attracted non-Muslims as well towards Islam in multitudes with their attitude and practices.⁹

In the current scenario, there are hundreds of thousands of followers and disciples of Sufi saints throughout the South Punjab who participate in Sufi circles as well as in the festivities of ancient Sufis to pay tribute to their endeavors. Sufism has become a prominent part of the society and people from every walk of life are the devotees of Sufi saints.¹⁰ That is why mainstream media of Pakistan pay attention to the Sufis’ activities, and propagate Sufism to great extent and this practice has been going on since centuries. In the history of sub-continent, The Muslim print media remained under the supervision of religious scholars and institutions due to their control and authority over education. In the 19th and 20th centuries, most of the editors of the mainstream newspapers and periodicals of the Muslims were educated from Islamic seminaries, who published Islamic teachings

²Masud Hassan Shahab, *Khittae Pak Uch* [Holy region of Uch] (Bahawalpur: Urdu Academy, 1993); Rubina Tareen, *Multan ki Adbi wa Tahzeebi Zindagi men Sufia Karam ka Hissa* [Share of Sufis in the Literary and Cultural Life of Multan] (Multan: Beacon Books, 1989).

³The place for the prostration of angels.

⁴Plural of *Muhaddith*; an Islamic scholar who profoundly knows and narrates a large number of sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

⁵Little Medina; Syed Sibtain Gilani, *Multaniyat: Janubi Punjab per Sufism ke Asrat* [Study of Multan: Impacts of Sufism on South Punjab] (Multan: Kitab Nagar, 2006), 34.

⁶Sufi lodges or convent.

⁷Abdul Majeed Sindhi, *Pakistan mein Sufiyana Tehrikeen* [Sufi Movements in Pakistan] (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publication, 2000); Shahab, “*Khittae Pak Uch*.”; Tareen, “*Multan ki Adbi wa Tahzeebi Zindagi men Sufia Karam ka Hissa*.”

⁸Shaik Abdul Azeez Saheb, “A ‘Festival of Flags’: Hindu-Muslim Devotion and the Sacralising of Localism at the Shrine of Nagore-e-Sharif at Tamil Nadu,” in *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, ed., Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu (London: Routledge 1998), 55-76.

⁹Humaira Faiz Dasti, *Multan: a Province of the Mughal Empire, 1525-1751* (Karachi: Royal Publishing Company, 1998); Zahid Ali Wasti, *Tareekh Ser Zameen e Multan* [History of Multan] (Multan: Beacon Books, 2009).

¹⁰Tahir-ul-Qadiri, *Haqiqat-e-Tasawuf* [Reality of Islamic Mysticism] (Lahore: Minhaj-ul-Qur’ān, 2000).

regularly along with political news and articles¹¹ and this practice is still going on in the Urdu newspapers of Pakistan.

The coverage of religion in mainstream media of Pakistan is very considerable in recent days too as compared to the world because demographics and practices of people of Pakistan demand religious content and coverage, and the rich religious culture compels publishers to print religious informative content that corresponds to the readers' interest and practices. Urdu newspapers cover the issues of Sufism by publishing news stories, photos of Sufi festivities, and articles having Sufi hagiographies, teachings, and sayings. This research is set to discover the role of Sufist news regarding promotional beliefs, culture, and practices by focusing Urdu press of the South Punjab, Pakistan. These publications have social, cultural and spiritual dynamics which are communicated through words, symbols and images. This study attempted to analyze these sacred objects, philosophy and tradition, presented in the news stories within the context of the wider societal practices and ideological framework.

2. Conceptual Framework

Research work on "Media and Religion" to describe the impact of both the domains on the contemporary life has become significant among social scientists since last three decades. Analysts covered the relationship between media and religion in different dimensions like culture, politics, faith, etc. to comprehend the liaison of these disciplines. Sufism, which is one of the most prominent features of Islam, was also investigated by the eastern and the western historians and anthropologists to evaluate the impact and role of Sufi saints and shrines in the society, and to identify penetration of Sufism among the folks. Thus, owing to the bipolarity of this study and to draw it more comprehensively, we analyzed literature published on Sufism in Pakistan and as well as the literature on the relationship of media and religion to present clear picture of this work.

2.1. Sufism in Pakistan

The scientific research on Sufism has two main dimensions: analysis of Sufis' hagiographies consists of their religious, social and political practices, and analysis of Sufis' manuscripts and poetry. In this context the book of Pnina Werbner titled *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*, is a valuable source for researchers and analysts to understand Sufi life and his work. In her prolific field research, she dealt with a Naqshbandi Sufi, known as Zindapir, who belonged to Kohat, the city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. In thirteen chapter long book, she examined all aspects of a Sufi and his cult and lodge. She interviewed Sufi saints, their descendants and disciples to evaluate Sufi's practices, rituals, mystical teachings, faith, and social work, expansion of cult and veneration of a saint among the people of all walks of life. In several sections

¹¹Saleem-ur-Rehman Khan Nadvi, *Bar-e-Sagheer mein Islami Sahafat ki Tarikh aur Irtiqah* [History and Evolution of Islamic Journalism in Sub-continent] (Karachi: Islamic Research Academy, 2013).

of her book, Werbner focuses on the faith economy. She portrayed *Zindapir* as a great spiritual master and ascetic whose intermediary role constructed a distinguished social network among his devotees and disciples that encouraged people to participate in religious practices and social work; participation in free food service (*Langar*) with money and commodities and helping unemployed persons for the job. Werbner also provided an insight into the Sufi revelations, spiritual level, divine powers and charismas. These practices of mystical teachings, social work and revelation of divine powers establish spiritual autonomy over the mundane world that produces faith economy among their devotees and disciples.¹²

In Pakistan, mostly popular Urdu literature on Sufi saints consists of narratives of Sufis without any scientific approach, although, in academia several scholars made efforts to scrutinize stories of saints' lives with historical references. In the context of this research, Javed's book *Punjab ky Sufi Danishwar* (Sufi intellectuals of the Punjab) is worth mentioning, in which he critically analyzed life stories, Sufi literary work, teachings and the poetry of prolific Sufis of the Punjab, from the tenth century to the twentieth century. Javed has discussed differences between popular tales and teachings of saints and as well as mentioned Sufi ideological variations among their literary work and poetry.¹³ Another research work in this direction is the doctoral thesis of Rubina Taren, "Multan ki Adbi wa Tehzeebi Zindagi mein Sufiya Karam ka Hisa" (Sufis' share in the literary and cultural life of Multan). After a brief history of the advent of Islam in Multan, the center of the Southern Punjab, the thesis analyzed the arrival of Sufi saints and expansion of Sufism in the region. The researcher investigates Sufi hagiographies to explore the religious, educational, cultural and linguistic impacts of Sufism in the region.¹⁴

Similarly, in the category of studies for ancient Sufis, Michel Boivin evaluated one of the most famous Sufis of Pakistan, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. He, in his book, *Le Soufisme antinomien dans le sous-continent Indien: Lal Shahbaz Qalandar et son Héritage XIIIe-XXe Siècle*, discussed authenticity and credibility of literature and illustrated how and when this literature came into being. He not only investigates historical literature to verify narrative stories and personality sketch of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar but also analyzed the poetry of others to find out his persona and imagination of the poets as well to find out the religious, mystical and social behaviour of pioneers.¹⁵

¹²Pnina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003).

¹³Qazi Javed, *Punjab ke Sufi Danishwar* [Sufis' Share in the Literary and Cultural Life of Multan] (Lahore: Fiction House, 2010).

¹⁴Taren, "Multan ki Adbi wa Tahzeebi Zindagi mein Sufiya Karam ka Hisa."

¹⁵Michel Boivin, *Le soufisme antinomien dans le sous-continent indien: La'l Shahbâz Qalandar et son héritage, XIIIe-XXe siècle* [Antinomian Sufism in the Indian Subcontinent: Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and his 13th-20th Century Heritage] (Éditions du Cerf, 2012).

Furthermore, many studies have been published to explore the impacts of Sufism on culture and politics. The worth mentioning research on the political relationship between Sufis and the rulers of the sub-continent has been conducted by Khaliq Ahmad Nizami. This author, in his book *Salateen-e-Delhi ky Mazhabi Rujhanat* (Religious tendencies of the rulers of Delhi), has analyzed religiosity of the Muslim rulers evaluated relationships between the illustrious Sufis and the Muslims kings of Delhi from Sultan Qutb-ud-din Aibak (d; 1210) to Sultan Ibrahim Lodi (d; 1526). This book has illustrated that in this relationship great Sufis influenced rulers and confirmed spiritual authority over the worldly rule. The rulers paid respect to them and they never bowed their heads to kings; however, this relationship destroyed the holy atmosphere of Sufi lodges after pioneer saints because their descendants were more interested in portfolios of royal courts rather than spiritual autonomy. Furthermore, the renowned spiritual descendants made their own lodges that continued spiritual authority over years. The author expressed that sometimes, this relationship became very critical when Sufis criticized kings' policies and cruelties. The kings killed a few saints or their descendants due to contradictory attitudes but on several occasions the rulers ignored Sufis' sarcastic remarks and conduct due to their fame and spiritual authority.¹⁶

Another significant part of Sufi literature is Sufi poetry, and the Sufi poets of the Punjab, Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, Sultan Bahu, Shah Hussain, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, Khwaja Ghulam Farid, etc., are well known among the lovers of Sufism throughout the world. These Sufi poets contributed a lot to mystical love and divine blessings and they are also considered as a stimulating agent against social cruelties and norms. Shackle in a book chapter, *Punjabi Sufi Poetry from Farid to Farid*, published in an edited book, *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice* of Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir, investigated several verses of many Sufi poets to sketch the Sufist work based on immense love and self-denial.¹⁷ Similarly, Rinehart in his article, "The Portable Bullhe Shah: Biography, Categorization, and Authorship in the Study of Punjabi Sufi Poetry" evaluated veneration of Bulleh Shah among in major religions, the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs of the region. He analyzed his life and work to interpret his religious identity and personality.¹⁸ While Deol in his work, "Sex, Social Critique and the Female Figure in Premodern Punjabi Poetry: Varis Shah's Hīr," provided Sufist challenging approach towards social norms. The author discussing the famous character of the Punjabi folklore, *Hīr Ranjha*, in the poetry of Waris Shah examined female character, *Hīr*, struggling for her

¹⁶Khaleeq Ahmad Nizami, *Salateen e Delhi ke Mazhabi Rujhanāt* [Religious Trends of Kings of Delhi] (Lahore: Nigarishat, 1990).

¹⁷Christopher Shackle, "Punjabi Sufi Poetry from Farid to Farid," in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice*, eds. Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22-26.

¹⁸Robin Rinehart, "The Portable Bullhe Shah: Biography, Categorization, and Authorship in the Study of Punjabi Sufi Poetry," *Numen* 46, no. 1 (1999).

love against social and religious authorities. This study also highlighted Sufi ideological contradiction and disassociation to corrupt religious law officers, *Qazi*.¹⁹

These historical scholarships of Sufist philosophy, which have attributes of religious awareness, mystical knowledge and development of spiritual beliefs, portrayed Sufis as the friends of God and their teachings a source of inspiration for a successful life. They were the perfect guides and theoreticians for their disciples and devotees due to their high position in the collective consciousness of their ages,²⁰ and the literature of Sufi poets has overwhelmingly enhanced its contribution particularly with the projection of mystical love, divine blessings and self-denial philosophy and beliefs.²¹ The Sufi poetry, further, disseminated the Sufist challenging approach towards social cruelties and marked their identity as the savior of society.²²

2.2. Media and Religion

The initiation of religious media research is indebted to the historians, Christian professors and communicators who, for the sake of religious preaching and educational improvement, investigated the church communication process and its effects on the receivers.²³ In 1951, the National Council of Churches of the United States conducted a research, headed by Everett Parker, to measure the effects of religious television in society that confirmed the effectiveness of media among the religious audience.²⁴ The major emphasis was on early “Religion and Media” studies to know the effectiveness of religious media. In the United States of America, until 1980, several types of research had been conducted for religious institutions, although, since the 1990s the field of research on academic perspective in media and religion has increased all over the world, and over time, particularly during last three decades, a number of disciplines like anthropology, cultural studies, mass communication and journalism have entered in “Media and Religious Studies” having several objectives with new research models, and interrelated topics have become prominent in the explanation of media and religion relationship.²⁵ According to

¹⁹Jeevan Deol, “Sex, Social Critique and the Female Figure in Premodern Punjabi Poetry: Vāris Shāh's ‘Hīr’,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002).

²⁰Arin Salamah-Qudsi, “Remarks on Al-Niffarī's Neglect in Early Sufi Literature,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 4 (2014).

²¹Shackle, “Punjabi Sufi Poetry from Farid to Farid.”

²²Deol, “Sex, Social Critique and the Female Figure in Premodern Punjabi Poetry: Vāris Shāh's ‘Hīr’.”

²³David Morgan, ed., *Key words in Religion, Media and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁴Robert A. White, “The Media, Culture, and Religion Perspective: Discovering a Theory and Methodology for Studying Media and Religion,” *Communication Research Trends* 26, no. 1 (2007).

²⁵Stewart M. Hoover, and Knut Lundby, *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (London: Sage, 1997); Morgan, “*Key words in Religion, Media and Culture.*”

Angela Zito “We must understand cultural analysis itself through several phases: culture as meaning, culture beyond meaning as practice, and culture in terms of mediation.”²⁶

The presentation and coverage of religious cultural events in print and electronic media has made “Religion, Media and Culture” an impressive topic of research among social scientists, and scientific studies in this area of research and have been developed rapidly over the last three decades. Several books and theories for the illustration of relationships between these three factors have emerged since 1990s. The significant contributions of Stewart Hoover, Jolyon Mitchell, Lynn Schofield Clark and Peter Horsfield in this interesting area express current approaches for newcomers. Hoover and Clark conducted several studies like Religion in the News, Media and Popular Culture, Mediated Rituals, Religious Television, and Internet and Religion, etc., in the domain of Media and Religion.²⁷ The advancement of the research in this specific field has focused on political, cultural, ritual and spiritual features of media and religion investigating media practices, patterns and beliefs, and individual’s feelings about mediated symbols, images and ideas.

In the 1990s, the major research works of Stewart Hoover and Martin Barbero presented different models of media effects on the relationship of “Media, Religion and Culture.” Hoover’s study of televangelism explored the theory of “religious consciousness” while Barbero determined religious festivities as a communication tool.²⁸ Moreover, the research of Philip Lutgendorf on Indian television’s religious narrative programs found mesmerizing power of television.²⁹ The investigation of media in the perspective of religious cultural promotion has become a dominant part in media and religious academic studies that focus the relationship of media, religion and popular culture to examine the circulation and reception of religious message among the readers and the viewers through print and electronic journalism. These studies explored that media performs as a tool of religious communion and practices by sharing information and experiences that shape beliefs. Exploring the new features of media and religion, Stewart Hoover examined the beliefs and the behavior of media audience in the cultural and the spiritual perspectives. He discussed the development and alteration of media and religious

²⁶Angela Zito, “Culture,” in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 70.

²⁷Stewart M. Hoover, and Lynn Schofield Clark, *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²⁸Jesus-Martin Barbero, “Latin America: Cultures in the Communication Media,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 2 (1993); Stewart M. Hoover, “Televangelism Reconsidered,” *Media Information Australia* 60, no. 1 (1991).

²⁹Philip Lutgendorf, “All in the (Raghu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context,” in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 217-253.

behavior of institutions and people. Hoover's analysis explains that the self-consciousness of the message receivers has a meaningful impact in consuming the theme of the content.³⁰

Moreover, analysis of media message by intellectuals and people's response to the communicators and content create new themes in this area of study. In recent European media studies, the researchers are examining the concept of media and religion in different aspects like media text and meaning, media ideology, media as a cultural agent, etc., to determine how the religious content is knocking at the minds of the populace through technologies and how religion and media are interrelated. What is the role of communicators and producers of religious content and symbols? Nevertheless, awareness poses a question mark on the media message and its neutral stance; media still is powerful source particularly for fresh and less educated brains.³¹

The growth in the analytical work of media and religious studies has explored new dimensions in research, and the social scientists considering the immense penetration of media among the folks shifted research rapidly towards the uses and gratification of media from the effects of the media approach. Gyadu is one of them who focused Christian religious community and the importance of media for identification and propagation. He draws attention to the influence of media and its utilization by religious organizations and authorities. He noted that considering the importance of media, the religious authorities launched their community media for religious services. In the last lines, he concluded that "The media have not only universalized religious belief and practice but have democratized access to the sacred, making it possible for the use of media to deepen, advertise, and even hype the formation of communities."³²

3. Methodology

This study has used a qualitative method of content analysis as a discovery tool to explore the Sufi news stories of Urdu national newspapers printed from Multan. The researchers analyzed four leading newspapers, *Jang*, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, *Express* and *Khabrain*, for studying the content and presentation of Sufism in print media, and for this purpose, we selected four years, January 2016 to December 2019. We opted purposive sampling focusing on the death anniversaries of prominent Sufis; Bahauddin Zakariya, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Khawaja Ghulam Farid, Ahmad Saeed Kazmi and Maulana Hamid Ali Khan. The news stories of ancient Sufis, Bahauddin Zakariya and Shah Rukn-e-Alam, were published on three consecutive days while the news stories of great poet Khawaja Ghulam Farid were printed two days. Moreover, the news stories of Ahmad Saeed Kazmi and Maulana Hamid

³⁰Stewart M. Hoover, "Audience," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 31-43; Morgan, "Key words in Religion, Media and Culture."

³¹Peter Horsfield, "Media," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 111-122.

³²J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Community," in *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 68.

Ali Khan were published once during the death anniversary celebrations. The content was investigated thoroughly and each sentence of the news stories was considered a unit of analysis for better results and findings.

4. Data Analysis

The Sufi news stories are generally published on the eve of Sufi's death anniversaries, and they portray the Sufi's personality and perception by covering festivities and sermons of religious scholars and descendants. News stories of all newspapers covered mostly revered Sufis of the south Punjab; Bahauddin Zakariya, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Khwaja Ghulam Fareed, Ahmad Saeed Kazmi and Maulana Hamid Ali Khan. The publications presented Sufi saints as great religious and spiritual masters, leaders, propagators and philanthropists. These journalistic writings portray them as a source of love, divine blessing, salvation and inspiration. Moreover, the names of Sufis were written with impressive titles to demonstrate their spiritual authority and the idea behind such kind of writings seems to project Sufism. Most of the content of these news stories consists of the sermons of the religious scholars and descendants delivered during Sufi festivities of the death anniversary celebrations, and used praise worthy language to draw in detail sketch about the spiritual, religious and social personality of Sufi saints. The next lines will discuss the news content in detail.

4.1. Sufi persona

These stories stated that paying tribute to the Sufis, pundits of Islam drew a holy picture of the Sufis and presented them as ideal Muslims. They said that Sufis were great spiritual leaders and Islamic scholars who followed '*Sharī'ah* and *Sunnah*'³³ and guided people towards the teachings of Islam and spent their whole lives in preaching. They established Islamic schools where they taught the Holy Qur'ān, Hadīth and '*Tasawuf*' which always played a vital role in the society for the propagation of Islamic values and beliefs. The Sufis articulated that the '*Tasawuf*' is based on '*Sharī'ah*', and we have to spend lives according to Islam, and any action which is contradictory to the '*Sharī'ah*' is ignorance. They were a treasure of unique knowledge and source of inner purification, and they proved '*Tasawuf*' the best way of life with their absolute belief in God and noble character. It is obvious that the Sufi teachings help people to understand the meaning of '*Tasawuf*'.

They were model of Islamic knowledge and practices, who spread, revived and strengthened Islam, even, in miserable conditions and critical situations. As a result, thousands of people got the divine blessing from them and millions of people embraced Islam due to their amiable personality and hard work. Their efforts against polytheism and atheism shifted the societies to the path of God. These Sufi saints worked a lot to eradicate the wrongdoings of the Muslim society as well. Many Sufis endured imprisonment and tyranny for the dissemination of Islamic values. They struggled against infidelity, hypocrisy, sectarianism and prejudices, and guided the populace to the right path. Their

³³*Sunnah* is teachings and practice of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

intellectual vision and endless efforts motivated the deprived people for their rights. The news content stated that propagation of Islam in sub-continent is indebted to their consistent efforts and their spiritual kingdom will remain effective until the doomsday due to their immortal religious and spiritual role.

4.2. Sufis, a Source of Love and Blessing

Islam is a religion of love and peace, and the saints propagated this philosophy in the community. Addressing pilgrims during festivities, Islamic scholars and Sufi descendants said that Sufis were ambassadors of divine love who served human beings without having any longing for return and spread beacon of spiritualism and humanism throughout the world. The Sufis conquered the hearts of people and illuminated the sub-continent with great Islamic values and teachings. Their personalities are the source of God's mercy and grace, and the society will enjoy their mystical blessing forever. Their services keep them alive in the hearts of people and their shrines have become a source of solidarity and blessing. Sacred Sufi lodges and Sufi shrines are centers of God's love, divine blessing, spiritual guidance, and national solidarity. These are the hubs where people fulfill their desires and receive divine grace and peace of mind, as '*Tasawuf*' promoted love by cleansing impurity of hearts and by disseminating the message of brotherhood and harmony. Their philosophy bestows grace upon soul and calmness to hearts, and every year hundreds of thousands of pilgrims gain blessing from the shrines. Similarly, their poetry, an impressive genre of Sufism, is also a source of spiritualism, love to God and human beings, and motivation for the whole humanity irrespective of religion.

4.3. Guidance; What we Have to Do

The other important element of these news stories was the guidance for society, particularly for the young generation. The news writers continuously expressed that the purpose of Sufi celebrations is to introduce the new generation to their teachings, services and achievements, and it is the need of the hour. The content articulated that Islam means peace and the youngsters should be educated to the true spirit of Islam which is based on Sufi ideologies. The Sufi saints eliminated roots of infidelity and innovation by moral conduct, and we have to understand their mission, behaviour, and philosophy. Today, we desperately need purification of inner-self to eliminate disruption, wicked ways, terrorism and bigotry from the society, and '*Tasawuf*' is the best source to finish the chaos of the society. The Sufis established a hate-free society, and by following Sufi doctrine, we can eradicate sectarianism and social evils, and we can also overwhelm the differences among religions and nations.

Content elaborated that Sufi saints always advised for self-accountability and urged to serve human beings that is why we have to pursue their ideology to establish peaceful and welfare Islamic society. We should overcome our deficiencies for the betterment of Islam and Sufism, and achieve success in the eternal and worldly life only to follow Sufi teachings. The Sufis devoted life for Islam and their lifestyle is a source of inspiration for us, although, we are ignoring their path. The writers urged that we have to educate our

children with the spirit of Sufis and Sufism; we have to propagate Sufi ideology for mundane and eternal success. We should follow their teachings to stop prejudices and their followers should face problems with patience and courage. The Sufis performed great services for the propagation of Islam in the sub-continent and we should revive Sufi values for a peaceful and prosperous society with solid beliefs and confidence.

4.4. The Portrayal of Sufi Rituals

Our primary resources enormously communicated to the readers about the rituals of Sufi celebrations. *Urs*³⁴ festival of a spiritual master is a major function for Sufi ritual performances where several religious and traditional rites are held in which *Ghusal-e-Mazar*, *Chadar Poshi*, *Langar*, *Zikr*,³⁵ *Mehfil-e-Sama*³⁶ and *Mehfil-e-Na'at*³⁷ are common celebrations. It is printed that mostly death anniversary celebrations were inaugurated with *Ghusal-e-Mazar*, and at famous shrines of the South Punjab, generally spiritual successors or *Sajjada Nasheens*³⁸ amid high-profile government officials performed bath of the grave with rose water. Later, the ritual of *Chadar Poshi*, was held by laying shawls to the grave, then floral wreaths were laid and special prayers were offered for peace, solidarity and prosperity of the Muslims.

4.5. Rulers' Pilgrimage to the Shrines

Veneration of saints by rulers and authorities and their pilgrimage to the shrines were reported largely in the newspapers. The Chief Minister, Provisional Ministers, political leaders and Secretary for *Awqāf*³⁹ occasionally paid visits, particularly to the shrines of Bahauddin Zakariya and Shah Rukn-e-Alam for divine blessing. Moreover, the visits of high profile local administration for the arrangement of celebrations were also covered by the newspapers which demonstrate Sufi veneration and authority in the society.

4.6. Congregational Supplications

Final lines of the news stories were ended by stating the last activity of *Dua*, congregational supplications. It stated that the caretakers of the shrine led congregational supplications at the end of the concluding ceremony of celebrations. They offered prayers for peace, harmony, prosperity, and solidarity of the country and the Muslim nation, and as well as for the stability of mankind and particularly for the independence of Kashmir and Palestine.

³⁴It is death anniversary celebrations of a Sufi saint.

³⁵ Bath of grave, shawl lying ceremony, free food, and remembrance of God.

³⁶A gathering Sufis and devotees in which they listen mystical poetry with or without music.

³⁷“Mehfil-e-Na'at” is a gathering for chanting praise songs of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

³⁸*Sajjada Nasheen* is a hereditary successor and custodian of shrine.

³⁹A provisional authority which controls the administration of ancient shrines.

5. Conclusion

The relationship between Media and Religion is as old as the advent of public press, and to comprehend the role of religious media, scientific studies of this domain were also commenced at the mid of 20th century. Social scientists, for exploring the religious significance of media, have examined practices and philosophy of the media, and beliefs and culture of the folks. This study, within the context of societal practices and ideological framework, also has attempted to analyze the sacred objects of Sufism, philosophy and tradition, presented in the news stories. Sufi news stories of the Urdu newspapers have propagated Sufi ideology of spiritualism, humanity, simplicity and harmony. The study found that the message and wording of the news stories have an optimistic approach regarding Sufis and Sufism, and these news stories have tried to establish the supremacy of the saints. The newspaper writers used praiseworthy language to draw a detailed sketch about the spiritual, religious and social personality of Sufis. They propagated them as perfect human beings and portrayed their path a way of successful life here and hereafter. They mentioned saints as a friend of God and an inspirational source of divine blessing, love and peace by highlighting their mystical and social achievements; news stories presented saints a real model of Islam. The narrative of the text is expressing that Sufism is the most successful way of life due to its spiritual and humanitarian attainments. This study of news stories provides an idea about the constructive relationship between Sufism and news press, and these news stories are portraying Sufis as great spiritual masters, humanitarians and source of inspiration. These “news reports despite being ‘factual’ through various devices help to reinforce, reproduce and transform the social, moral, religious, and political structure.”⁴⁰ The previous research has confirmed the role of media to promote the ideology, and such kind of language can influence people, particularly children and they may turn towards Sufism focusing on the religious, spiritual and social success of Sufi saints.

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