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P(ISSN) : 3007-0031

E(ISSN) : 3007-004X

<https://rc-archive.com/index.php/Journal/about>



POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUFI SHRINES IN PAKISTAN: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF JHANG DISTRICT

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Publisher : EDUCATION GENIUS SOLUTIONS

Review Type: Double Blind Peer Review

ABSTRACT

Natives of the Subcontinent are credulous by nature, which provided the spiritual elite a rich soil to grow tall. In Pakistan, the study examines the influence of spiritual elites, including Sajjada Nashins and Pirs, in politics, particularly during the 2018 general elections and the case of Jhang District. Examining past, present, and social aspects, the research explains how such custodians began as guides in spiritual life and now utilize their religious influence in elections to secure office. Because of the legacy left by colonialism, Pirs today influence rural areas, especially in Punjab and Sindh, due to the land, honorary titles, and judicial positions they were given. The paper explains, using cases of active shrine families such as Sultan Bahu, Shah Jewna, Sial Sharif, and Taunsa Sharif, that religious patronage helps maintain political monopolies and hurts the growth of democracy. According to the findings, shrines maintain and shape culture and beliefs; however, their use in politics today helps feudal traditions persist, weakens leadership based on skills and accomplishments, and makes it more difficult for rural people to support democracy. This paper aims to examine the influence of the spiritual elite on our politics, while also shedding light on the vast wealth amassed by the Pirs through spiritual exploitation.

Keyword: Sajjada Nashins, Electoral process, Shrines, Pirs

Introduction

Ever since the advent of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, Sajjada Nashins, the guardians of Shrines, have remained important figures. Be it the affairs of the state or the personal lives of people, Pirs have always been the key players, and the case is still the same. Scene didn't change even after the Inception of Pakistan as the Shrines of Sufis have remained the centre of gravity, especially during the elections, for the public has always been swayed by the pirs to cast their votes as per their (Pirs') directions. The Pakistani nation, in general, and Central and Southern Punjab, as well as Sindh, in particular, have consistently shown a tendency to be misled by the guardians of Shrines. This is a case study of the influence of Sajjada Nashins in the 2018 Elections in Pakistan, where the Sajjada Nashins of famous Shrines personally won several seats in the National and Provincial Assemblies. The paper would help in understanding the level of influence enjoyed by the Sajjada Nashins and their effects on democracy, which is, otherwise, the system of choosing rulers by the ruled on their initiative. (Malik, 2015)

Jhang, for instance, is the land of Sufis and that of the lovers. The people of Jhang, being lesser exposed to the modernism, are still simpletons and credulous. They have always remained the blind followers of the Sufi Saints and that of the clerics, which is/was why the people have almost always elected Pirs and Sajjada Nashins to the National and Provincial assemblies' seats. In the 2018 Elections, two seats of the NA were won by Sahebzada

Mahboob Sultan and Barrister Ameer Sultan, the Sajjada Nashins of the famous shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahu, while the third one was also won by Ghulam Bibi Bharwana, who was directly being supported by the Pirs of the leading Shrines of Sial Sharif and Alipur Syedan. (Bharwana, 2019) Keeping the influence of Pirs in mind, Shrines or Darbars can be categorised as minor, mediocre, and leading Shrines. The minor or local Shrines may render their guardians with a regional level of influence and medium tracts of land. Their catchment area may span from a few hundred to a few thousand followers. They usually fall into the category of Zamindars.

The medium-level Shrines have a relatively larger influence over their guardians, while the leading Shrines are no less influential than the Gold Mines. Their Sajjada Nashins have always remained as feudal lords and have been leading politicians ever since the introduction of representative forms of Government in the Subcontinent. The shrines above, having millions of dedicated followers, possess a considerable level of influence not only in their constituencies but also across the nation, in some cases. Pirs of Golra, Taunsa, Shah Rukn e Aalam, Pagaro, Sultan Bahu, Alipur Saidan, and Sial Sharif are a few among the aforementioned leading Gaddis that hold a massive number of dedicated followers across the nation. They can change the game with the wink of an eye in some areas, particularly in rural Sindh, and in Central and Southern Punjab. Even a towering personality like Mr. Jinnah had to seek their blessings while struggling for independence. While campaigning for the 1945 elections, Jinnah met the Sajjada Nashins of almost all the leading Shrines across the Subcontinent, which substantially helped the Muslim League win the Muslim Majority in the said elections. (Lieven, 2012) It wasn't only Jinnah who sought their (Pirs') blessings. Still, throughout the history of the Subcontinent, even Afghan invaders like Mahmood of Ghazna, Shahab ud Din Ghauri, and the leading Mughal emperor Akbar sought the blessings of Hazrat Ali Hajvery, Hazrat Moin ud Din Ajmeri, and Sheikh Saleem Chishti, respectively, for every venture. Akbar even named his favourite son (Shehzada Saleem alias Jahangir) after Sheikh Saleem Chishti, the famous Saint of Agra. (Jahangir, 1999)

Democracy is a form of government that enables people to elect their leaders. In other words, in a democracy, the ruled elect their rulers. Western States, considered pioneers of modern democracy, have given their citizens a free choice in electing their representatives. In the west, virtually, there's no proper influence of any such personality on the people that makes them vote against their free will. The situation is entirely different in the subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan.

Democracy didn't evolve here, but it was imported or imposed by the colonial rulers so that we couldn't develop a taste for it. Moreover, the British made the feudals and the Pirs more

potent to rein the masses through them. These feudal lords (Lieven, 2012) and Pirs became the surrogates of the British, helping them to rule the public more efficiently. This system continued even after independence. After the Gora Raaj, we had to be subservient to the Brown Raaj. We couldn't develop a responsibly democratic culture because we were never given the requisite space to broaden our thinking. As mentioned above, people of Sindh and South and Central Punjab are particularly credulous, thus falling prey to the influence of the Pirs. Jhang is considered one of the backward districts in Punjab, virtually having no established University, Medical College, Industry, or proper Infrastructure. Every conscious one considers the Pirs responsible for this sorry state of affairs. The intent behind this study is to identify the factors that still compel our people to blindly follow the Pirs, so that the public can be enlightened about elections and the power of the vote. (Naqvi, 2019)

Historical Background

The philosophical foundations of colonialism are still intact in our social fabric, even 70-plus years after independence. The concept of power implemented by colonialists to consolidate their colonies remains in the post-colonial era. In order to consolidate their rule after 1857, British imperialists created a new sociopolitical gentry that was naturally their ally, as it was bestowed with honorary titles, properties, and positions in the viceroy's office by the Raj. These blessings of the Raj offered this new class a much higher place in society than the rest of the people/classes. The largest part of the newly invented elite were the guardians of shrines, usually referred to as Pirs or Sajjada Nashins. The people of the Subcontinent, being congenitally credulous, were already subservient to these Pirs. These Pirs were originally ascetic in their lifestyle, but now that they had become highly opulent, their level of command over the common people grew beyond imagination. They proved highly helpful to the Raj in exercising its outsized powers. By the end of the 19th century, when the demand for self-rule grew globally and the British were forced, unwillingly, to offer a controlled democracy in the subcontinent, these Sajjada Nashins proved highly effective in creating a crippled democracy, with all powers resting with the British. When Sir Charles Napier occupied Sindh, he declared the Sindhi feudals (most of whom were Saiyyid Sajjada Nashins of various shrines) to be the national elite. These Pirs were honoured with special seats in the offices of the deputy commissioners, commissioners and that of the governor. This chair/seat was usually allotted to them in keeping with their socioeconomic position, number of devout followers and level of their loyalty to the Raj. Moreover, these Pirs were awarded with the appreciation shields, the special robe of honour, and a sword or a gun, to ennoble them and help them stand tall among the public. The Encumbered States Act was introduced in 1876 in order to invigorate these Pirs. (Cohen, 2007) Later in 1905, the Court of

Wards System was introduced, which was in fact, the continuation of the Encumbered Act. These Pirs were awarded with the honorary post of magistrate by the Raj. When the Khilafat Movement started in India against the British policy of creation of new states in the Middle East after World War I, the Pirs of Sindh issued an edict directing their followers to sequester themselves from the said movement. While suppressing this movement, the pirs who supported the British were rewarded with lofty titles and hundreds of hectares of land along with Sukkur Barrage. It was actually the British-Pirs alliance extended also to Punjab in order to consolidate British rule in the region. On 29 March 1849, British had an accession of the Punjab after an agreement with the juvenile Sikh ruler and patronized local Pirs or Sajjada Nashins to govern the province peacefully. At the first place, British successfully segregated urban politics from the rural one consolidated the position of Pirs in rural areas by bestowing them with agricultural lands, robes of honour and special chairs in the offices of the governor and that of the bureaucrats so that the public may remain awestruck with the position of feudal cum Pirs. Secondly, these Pirs were given full-fledged representation in the imperial legislative Council. Moreover, the relatives of the Pirs were bestowed with titles or positions like Khan Bahadur, Sardarzada, or Lambardar, Zaildar, etc. They were also given honorary ranks of noncommissioned officers. In 1900, the Transfer of Land Act was passed to consolidate the position of the Pirs further. As the non-agrarian class was barred from purchasing agricultural lands, it was typically the Pirs who were granted the right to own large tracts of land, thereby becoming feudal lords and spiritual leaders. Major clans of Syeds and Qureshis were made landlords this way.

These Pirs paid the Raj back by directing their followers to enlist in the conscription during World War I and World War II. Among the 27 rural members of the Imperial Legislative Council of 1920, 5 hailed from famous Pir families in Punjab. According to an employee of the Auqaf Department, out of 598 registered Shrines in Punjab, the Sajjada Nashins of 64 Shrines are directly involved in provincial or National politics. The Sajjada Nashins from Sargodha, Jhang, Pakpattan, Sahiwal, Wihari, Mandi Bahauddin, Okara, Multan, Chishtian and Khairpur Tamaywali are a few among those who are directly involved in politics. The ancestors of these Sajjada Nashins aided the East India Company during the 1857 War of Independence in its efforts to suppress the freedom fighters. Those Pirs even issued edicts that declared the war against the British as "mutiny". As a result, they were granted large tracts of land. Here is a short list of the Pirs who were granted lands under the Court of Wards System and in 1930: Ghulam Muhammad Shah and Riaz Shah of Shahpur were granted 6423 acres, 25185 acres to Sardar Sher Muhammad of Attock, 9564 acres to Shahjewna Family of Jhang, 11917 acres to Syed Aamir Hyder Shah, Ghulam Akbar Shah and Makhdoom Pir Shah of Multan, 7165 acres to Gardezi Syeds family

of Multan, 34144 acres to Syed Ghulam Abbas and Syed Ghaus of Jalalpur Pirwala, 11467 acres to the Gillani family of Multan, and Makhdoom Sheikh Muhammad Hassan of Sattpur receiving 23500 acres are to name only a few who benefitted from the British after ratting on their compatriots. (Malik, 2015)

Today, the progeny of these Pirs is the champion of democracy and civilian supremacy in our national and provincial assemblies. These political Pir clans have been ruling the roost since 1937 and will continue to do so for heaven knows how long. After the partition, these Pirs kept on supporting every sovereign regardless of whether his being a dictator or a democrat. The monopoly and patronage of these spiritual leaders are still intact in the post-colonial era. The national political system has granted these Shrines spiritual and political powers to keep the people devoid of reasoning and rationale, thereby maintaining the colonial system and ensuring the perpetuation of the monopolistic elite's triangle. (Abbassi, 2019)

Political Economy of the Shrines

Having lived the power in its literal sense, better than anyone else, Pirs are experts in the art of knowing how to remain relevant. As we mentioned above, Pirs have been appropriate for a thousand years (like Hazrat Ali bin Usman Hajveri) and they still are. The natives of the Subcontinent are gullible by nature and they always seek someone's hand for their eternal salvation, thus giving the Pirs a pivotal place in their lives. Pirs have been enjoying all sorts of luxuries: spiritual, political, monetary and the like (Ansari D. S., 1992).

Anatol Lieven says, "It is not wealth alone, but wealth plus either kinship or spiritual prestige, or both, that gives political power. A shrine, in this regard, provides an ideal platform. Medium-sized shrine makes him a small landowner and a local squire. The big shrine gives him an entrée into the zamindar club and makes a magnate of him. A leading shrine is a gold mine, which catapults him into the aristocratic category and brings him riches large enough to...enter politics directly at the highest level." (Lieven, 2012)

Apropos of the above quoted statement, general elections 2018, is a witness to the involvement cum exploitation of Sajjada Nashins and Pirs in Pakistani politics. Politics being the absolute goldmine in Pakistan, and Pirs being the congenital gold diggers, have either contested the elections themselves or backed politicians in almost every rural constituency, especially in Punjab and Sindh (Hussain Bux Mallah, 2024). All three major political parties PTI, PPP, and PML-N have not only awarded tickets to the Sajjada Nashins but have also sought their blessings. According to a study conducted by the famous newspaper 'Pakistan Today', five leading Shrines in Punjab have directly or indirectly participated in the elections in almost fifty percent of the rural constituencies. Among the five Shrines Mentioned, three, namely Taunsa Sharif,

Sial Sharif, and Golra Sharif, are intertwined, as the Sialvis and Golrvis are disciples of the Taunsa Shrine. (Naqvi, 2019)

Shrines as Economic Institutions

Thousands of followers visit each year to some of Pakistan's leading shrines, which generate significant revenue from donations, offerings, land rentals, and the operation of affiliated local businesses. The Auqaf Department is responsible for managing places of worship, such as shrines in Multan, Pakpattan, and Sehwan. However, shrines supervised by private hereditary custodians own and operate the vast agricultural lands acquired during the colonial era (ibad, 2018). Previously, in British-ruled India, many Shrines were granted land, and officials were appointed to roles that contributed to their wealth, such as honorary positions as magistrates. Economic incentives were offered for political loyalty, facilitating the operation of colonialism through indirect rule in many parts of the world. Postcolonial Pakistan witnessed shrine families gaining political power due to their economic gains (Toor, 2014).

Sialvis

Sialvi is the leading pir clan that holds sway across central, northern and southern parts of the Punjab, and their Murids/followers win elections due to their open support & canvassing in their favour. Sial Sharif is a town in district Sargodha where the mazaar of Hazrat Khwaja Shamsuddin Sialvi is the centre of attraction and pilgrimage for the disciples of the Barailvi sect since the 19th century. Sialvis enjoy huge following in Sargodha, Khushab, Faisalabad, Chiniot and Jhang districts. (Alazhari, 2011) Khwaja Hameeduddin Sialvi is the incumbent Sajjadah Nashin of Sial Sharif who spearheaded the religious movement against the Nawaz government over Khatam-e-Nabuwat (PBUH) controversy. (Khan, 2018)

Sialvis remained actively involved in practical politics in the 1970s when Khwaja Qamruddin Sialvi, the then Jamiat Ulama-i-Pakistan (JUP) chief, led Swadaa-e-Azam (the Sunni alliance) in 1970s. (Talbot, 1998)

"Sialvis supported Nadeem Afzal Gondal for NA-88 Sargodha-I, Usama Ahmed Mela for NA-89 Sargodha-II, Nadia Aziz for NA-90 Sargodha-III, Aamir Sultan Cheema for NA-91 Sargodha-IV, Sahibzada Naeemuddin Sialvi for NA-92 Sargodha-V, Umar Aslam Khan for NA-93 Khushab-I, Malik Ihsanullah Tiwana for NA-94 Khushab-II, Ghulam Muhammad Lali for NA-99 Chiniot-I, Zulfiqar Ali Shah for NA-100 Chiniot-II, Dr Nisar Jutt for NA-106, Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan for NA-114 Jhang-I, Ghulam Bibi Bharwana for NA-115 Jhang-II, and Sahibzada Ameer Sultan for NA-116 Jhang-III". (Abrar, 2018)

Around two dozen politicians for the provincial assembly also enjoy the support of Sialvis in the districts above. To woo the Pir of Sial Sharif, PTI awarded a party ticket to Sahibzada Naeemuddin Sialvi for NA-92 Sargodha, a member of the Sialvi clan.

Jhang is also famous for the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahu, whose caretaker, Sahibzada Mehbub Sultan, contested and won the election from NA-114 Jhang-I. At the same time, his cousin, Sahibzada Ameir Sultan, vied for and won NA-116 Jhang-III.

Jhang is also the birthplace of the famous Saint Hazrat Shah Jiwna, whose descendant, Makhdum Faysal Sauleh Hyaat, contested the election on the PPP ticket from NA-114. At the same time, his younger brother, Asad Hayat, vied for NA-99 Chiniot. (Board, 2018)

Shrine of Pir Choora Shrief from Pindighaib is the gravitational point for faithful and has a massive following across central Punjab. Pir Saiyyid Jamaat Aly Shah of Ali Pur Syedan is also a venerated Saint among the Bareilvis who follow the political directions of Pir Khursheed Shah, the Sajjada Nashin of the shrine, who holds sway in Sialkot, Lahore, Kasur, Jhang, Narowal, and Gujranwala. Being a disciple of Pir Chura Sharief, Hazrat Jamaat Ali Shah also represents the Pir of Chura Sharief for followers. (Alazhari, 2011)

Taunsavis

Taunsa Sharief, a subdivision in Dera Ghazi Khan, situated on the Indus Highway, is a pivotal point for followers due to the mazaar of the revered saint, Hazrat Mohammed Suleiman Taunsavi (also known as Pir Pathaan). Khawaja Ataullah Taunsavi, a descendant of the said Saint, is the custodian of the shrine above, where faithful from across the country, especially Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, gravitate. Taunsavis hold a significant following in Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismaeel Khan Districts. Khawaja Ataullah contested the election as an independent, though he had been awarded a party ticket from PPP chief Asif Zardari. (Abrar, 2018)

Pakpattan

Shrine of Baba Fareed Ganj-i-Shakar is center of attraction for faithful galore who pay allegiance to Maneka tribe of Pakpattan. Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf Chairman Imran Khan was involved in a controversy when a video footage went viral on social media showing the chairman, now the Prime Minister of Pakistan, kissing the pathway of the gate of Baba Fareed's shrine. Iran's wife, Bushra Bibi, also belongs with the powerful Maneka clan and was being referred to as the one who forced Mr. Khan to pay allegiance to Baba Fareed's descendants. (Masood, 2018)

Golra Sharief

Golra Sharief is the seat of Pir Mehar Aly Shah - the Sufi saint who rose to fame because of his poetry that expresses his reverence with the Holy Prophet (PBUH). His descendants, whose mureeds/disciples are ubiquitous across Pakistan and even abroad - are actively involved in politics and have influence in the capital, Rawalpindi, Jhang, Chiniot, Khanewal and many more. (Ahmad, 1997)

Bahauddin Zakariya

Shrine of Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya is a place of reverence for the

followers from across Pakistan and the influence of his descendants is overwhelming in the districts of southern Punjab and interior Sindh. (Azeemi, 2017)

PTI's Vice Chairman and the incumbent Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shah Mahmood Qureshi is the Sajjada Nasheen of two venerated shrines in Multan - Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya and Hazrat Shah Rukan e Alam. He leads Ghausiya Jamaat whose followers walk barefooted in burning summers from interior Sind to Multan. (Gray, n.d.)

Qureshi is contested from two NA constituencies - NA-220 Umar Kot & NA-221 Tharparkar, interior Sindh. He also contested in the NA-156 Multan constituency while his son Zayn Qureishi contested the NA-157 Multan seat. (Board, 2018)

Pir of Pagaaro

Pir Sibghat ullah Shah Raashdi is the current Pir of Pagaro in Khairpur, Sindh. He leads Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F) and also leads an election alliance of like-minded called Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) to confront the monolithic Pakistan People's Party.

Being most influential shrine in Sindh, Pir of Pagaaro leads an informal force known as "Hur Fauj" who threw strong resistance to the Indian army in wars of 1965 and 1971. Pir Pagara, Ali Mardan Shah, himself remained a prominent parliamentarian and a power broker in Pakistan all his life and now his son sways the influence. (Ayaz, 2018)

Pir of Hala

Makhdum Jamil uzz Zamaan is the incumbent Pir of Sarwari Jamat aka Makhdum of Hala, Sindh. The center of influence of Sarwari Jamat lies across Sindh, especially in Hala, the rural Hyderabad.

Makhdum Jamil uzz Zamaan was the PPP's candidate from NA-223 (Matiari) while his relatives had been accommodated on two provincial assembly seats. Makhdum Mahboob uzz Zamaan was awarded ticket for PS-58 (Matiari-I) while Doctor Makhdum Rafeeq uzz Zamaan contested from PS-59 (Matiari-II). (Board, 2018)

The above cited Pirs are just to name a few among scores of Pirs and Sajjada Nashins who either themselves participate in the elections and hold coveted portfolios in almost all the regimes, or, support the potential candidates from across the nation from whom they encash their support later if they're elected. This vicious circle is going on in Pakistan ever since it came into being and will hopefully go on unless the common people attain a requisite level of consciousness.

Role of Shrines in the Politics of Jhang District

Jhang, as we already know, is the land of the Sufis and that of the lovers. The people of Jhang, being lesser exposed to the modernism, are still simpletons and credulous. They have always remained the blind followers of the Sufi Saints and that of the clerics that is why Pirs have always remained the dominant players in the political arena of this district. Keeping the influence of pirs in mind, Shrines

or Darbars can be categorised as minor, mediocre and leading Shrines. The minor or local Shrines may render their guardians with local level of influence and medium tracts of lands. Their catchment area may span from few hundred to few thousand followers. They usually fall into the category of Zamindars. The medium level Shrines provide relatively larger influence to their guardians while the leading Shrines are no lesser than the Gold Mines. Their Sajjada Nashins have always remained as feudal lords and have been leading politicians ever since the introduction of representative forms of Government in the Subcontinent. (Talbot, 1998) The said Shrines, having usually the dedicated followers in millions, possess huge level of influence not only in their own constituencies but also across the nation; in some cases, Pirs of Golra, Taunsa, Shah Rukn e Aalam, Pagaro, Sultan Bahu, Alipur Saidan and Sial Sharif are a few among the aforementioned leading Gaddis that hold huge number of dedicated followers across the nation and they can literally change the game with the wink of an eye in some areas, particularly in rural Sindh, and in Central and Southern Punjab. Even the towering personality like Mr. Jinnah had to seek their blessings while struggling for the independence. While campaigning for the 1945-46 elections, Jinnah met the Sajjada Nashins of almost all the leading Shrines across the Subcontinent, which substantially helped the Muslim League win the Muslim Majority in the said elections. It wasn't only Jinnah who sought their (pirs') blessings. Still, throughout the history of the Subcontinent, even Afghan invaders like Mahmood of Ghazna, Shahab ud Din Ghauri, and the leading Mughal emperor Akbar sought the blessings of Hazrat Ali Hajvery, Hazrat Moin ud Din Ajmeri, and Sheikh Saleem Chishti, respectively, for every venture. Akbar even named his favourite son (Shehzada Saleem alias Jahangir) after Sheikh Saleem Chishti, the famous Saint of Agra. (Ansari S. , 1992) (Board, 2018)

Jhang, the land of two rivers, is famous for love and dedication to the Sufis. Though a backward district, it has always kept an iconic position in National Politics, having a lion's share in the cabinet of almost any government, military or civil, and most of the time these ministers have been the Pirs or Sultan Bahu or that of Shah Jewna. Sheiks and the clerics of Sipah-e-Sahaba (now Ahl e Sunnat Wa Aljamaat) have tried their utmost to give the Pirs an intense competition, but more often than not, Pirs have maintained their dominance. This influence, in the eyes of the politically conscious, had kept Jhang at the bottom of the development ladder. Democracy is a form of government that allows the people to choose their rulers. In other words, in a democracy, the ruled elect their rulers. Western States, considered pioneers of modern democracy, have given their citizens a free choice in electing their representatives. In the west, virtually, there's no proper influence of any such personality on the people that makes them vote against their free will. The situation is entirely different in the

subcontinent, particularly in Pakistan. Democracy didn't evolve here, but it was imported or imposed by the colonial rulers so that we couldn't develop a taste for it. Moreover, the British made the feudals and the Pirs more potent to rein in the masses through them. These feudals and Pirs became the surrogates of the British and helped them rule the public more efficiently. This system continued even after independence. After the Gora Raaj, we had to be subservient to the Brown Raaj. We couldn't develop a responsibly democratic culture because we were never given the requisite space to broaden our thinking. As mentioned above, people of Sindh and South and Central Punjab are particularly credulous thus falling prey to the influence of the Pirs. Jhang is considered one of the backward districts in Punjab, with virtually no established University, Medical College, Industry, or proper Infrastructure. Every conscious one considers the Pirs responsible for this sorry state of affairs. The intent behind this study is to dig out the factors that still force our people to blindly follow the Pirs so that the public can be enlightened regarding the elections and the power of the vote. (Hussain, 2015)

According to a study by Dr Adeel Malik, a professor of developmental economics at Oxford University, there are approximately 64 shrines in the province of Punjab with direct political investment. In about forty-two tehsils of the province, at least one Pir family is politically dominant, with a member of the national or provincial assembly every time. Multan is at the apex with the highest number of Pir families in politics, followed by Jhang, Khanewal, Rahim Yar Khan, Taunsa Shareef, Chishtian, and Okara. (Malik, 2015) This research states that nineteen per cent of the total rural Muslim constituencies in the 1920 and 1946 provincial assembly elections were occupied by the Pir clans. The ratio is still the same. Around 16 % of the total NA members hailed from shrine families in the Nawaz Government that completed its 5-year term in May 2018.

Several shrine families have been dominant in Jhang's politics since before partition and continue to rule the police arena. The Shah Jewana and Sultan Bahu families are the leading ones in this regard. For instance, Syed Hussain Shah from Shah Jewana was elected to the provincial assembly seat in 1924, while his son Syed Abid Hussain became the MLA in the 1946 elections. Abid Hussain's cousin, Honorary Major Mubarik Ali Shah, won the seats in 1946 and 1951, while his son, Zulfikar Shah Bukhari, remained a member of the legislative assembly in 1962 and 1977. Syed Abid Hussain's daughter, Syeda Abida Hussain, was elected to the National Assembly in 1972, 1985 and 1997 and remained the federal minister in all her stints. The incumbent Sajjada Nashin of Hazrat Shah Jewana, Makhdoom Faysal Saleh Hayat, served as an MNA and federal minister five times from 1970 to 2013. Syeda Abida Hussain's husband, Syed Fakhr-e-Imam, served as an MNA four times. At the same time, her daughter, Syeda Sughra Imam, was

elected to the assembly in 2002 and subsequently served as a minister and District Chairperson. (Hussain, 2015)

Coming to the Sultan Bahu family, Sahibzada Sultan Hameed remained District Nazim of Jhang twice during the Musharraf regime. In contrast, Sahibzada Nazir Sultan and Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan have remained perpetual MNAs for multiple terms. Two of Jhang's three NA seats are currently grabbed by the Sajjada Nashins of Hazrat Sultan Bahu (Barrister Ameer Sultan and Sahibzada Mahboob Sultan), while the third seat has been consecutively won by Ghulam Bibi Bharwana, who Pir Hameed ud Din Sialvi and Pir Khursheed Hussain Jamaati openly supported. Ghulam Bibi tendered her resignation from the National Assembly on the directions of Pir Hameed ud Din Sialvi in 2018. Apart from this, Chiniot, the erstwhile tehsil of the district, has also witnessed the dominance of Syed families. The Rajoa Saadat family dominated the political arena for so long. Sardarzada Zafar Abbas Syed, Muhammad Ali Shah, and Syed Tahir Shah remained members of the legislative assembly multiple times. In contrast, Syed Ameer Hussain Shah remained an MNA in the People's Party Government. Muhammadi Di Sharif, the seat of Maulana Muhammad Zakir and his son Maulana Rahmat Ullah, is a famous place in Jhang/Chiniot. Maulana Zakir, an eminent Saint of his time, served as an MPA, while his son, Maulana Rahmat Ullah, held the positions of MNA and MPA multiple times. (Pakistan, 2018)

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, Holy Shrines in our state are no less than goldmines that offer boundless wealth, influence and following to their caretakers. Even Jinnah couldn't turn a blind eye towards them while canvassing and campaigning for the 1945-46 elections. He sought the blessings of almost all the leading Pirs and Sajjada Nashins of the region, as the Pirs had a considerable number of followers who blindly voted for candidates on the All India Muslim League panel, which subsequently led the party to win the Muslim Majority vote in an unprecedented manner. Well, seeking the blessings of the Pirs was no doubt a pragmatic political move of the Qaid. Still, these holy men or their progeny kept on swaying and exerting influence, especially in the rural areas, throughout 77 years of our independence. It is tough to shake off their role in politics, but we can educate our public to develop a critical and analytical approach, so that they may question things on logical grounds.

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