

**TRANSNATIONAL DEVOTEES: REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF SUFI SHRINES IN THE MIGRATION PROCESS FROM GUJRAT, PAKISTAN**Sarfraz Khan<sup>1</sup>, Zulfiqar Ali<sup>2</sup>, Siraj Hussain<sup>3</sup>, Sobia Abid<sup>4</sup>**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose-**In rural communities across Pakistan an increased proclivity can be observed towards Sufi shrines visitation and ritual performance. People normally pay visits and give donations at shrines in a bid to accommodate their spiritual needs. The migrants (transnational devotees) having strong connections to the home communities were inclined towards the Sufi shrines in the same way as their relatives back homes.

**Design/methodology/approach-**The current research was conducted in district Gujrat which is famous for both the international migration and veneration of Sufi shrines. For this research, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted by using a) in-depth interviews, b) case studies, and c) focus group discussions from the community members having knowledge about migration and shrines. The selection of the respondents was made through the use of purposive sampling with a specific criterion as only international migrants, their left behind families' de facto heads and the custodians of the Sufi shrines were taken as respondents. The rationale behind their selection was very simple as they can better explain the bond between migrants, custodians and shrines even after the relocation from the origin to destination.

**Findings-**The findings showed that a strong affection can be seen among migrants, their families and the shrines. They were paying visits to the shrines, performing rituals and giving donations for the functioning of shrines.

**Originality/Value-** This paper has focused on one of the issues which normally had been missed by mainstream migrant researchers. So, keeping in view the dearth of existing knowledge base on this issue, the current paper aim to add on to the body of knowledge related to the role of spiritual guidance in the process of migrants.

**Keywords:** Gujrati Diaspora; International Migration; Migration Process; Pakistan; Remittances; Sufi Shrines; Transnational Devotees.

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## Introduction

The word 'transnationalism' has widely been used as a cross-cutting theme in social sciences. There are several definitions of it but for the current study the concept given by International Organization for Migration (2008:500) is used which defines transnationalism as "the process whereby people establish and maintain socio-cultural connections across geopolitical borders." Pakistani diaspora across world comes under this definition as they maintain strong connections across borders. Werbner (1999:24) identified these links in the case of Britain; she added that, "The British Pakistani community is an established transnational community, stratified by class, caste, education, occupation, religious affiliation, cultural interests, urban or rural background, and so forth." The current paper has looked into both economic and religious connections maintained by the Pakistani diaspora living abroad. Through this connection we have looked into the transnational devotees' affiliations with the Sufi shrines at origin and offerings made by these transnational devotees. Devotees are the labor migrants and their family members who have a strong belief in the shrines and they regular visit these religious spaces, perform rituals and give donations. The concept of 'devotees' has been used in the same way as it was used by the Werbner (1999:20) in her article about the 'GlobalPathways'.

Pakistani diaspora has flourished over the time and space. Pakistan stands at the fifth position in the world's top ten remittances recipient countries with reception of total \$22.3 billion remittances during 2017 (World Bank, 2017:3). The total size of overseas Pakistanis has climbed up to 10 million in 2017 and this is excluding of the irregular migrants (BE&OE, 2019). Overseas Pakistanis are spread over to the different parts of the world but their concentrations can be seen in the following regions; a) Middle-East, b) Europe, c) USA, Canada, and Australia, and d) Asian region. The question why people move abroad have been addressed by many researchers within migration studies, anthropology, sociology, international relations, history, geography, and alike. The main pushing factors which are surfaced as a result of these researches about the migration could be grouped as; a) poverty, b) environmental hazards, c) conflict etc. Additionally, one cannot set aside the other reasons such as; a) education, b) marriage, and business, which also are considered equally viable.

The veneration of Sufi shrine has no limits as it provides the spiritual guidance not only to the communities in Pakistan but at the same time it has also benefited to the Pakistani diaspora abroad. The overseas Pakistanis are equally devoted towards the Sufis and their shrines back in the country of origin. It is very common among the migrants to pay visits to the Sufi shrines when they return back to Pakistan. On their visits they not only perform certain rituals for their spiritual satisfaction but at the same time they also give donations to the shrines. This transnational connection is beneficial for both the parties, transnational devotees and shrines, as the former gets psychological satisfaction and spiritual guidance by performing rituals and giving donations and the latter provides the resources for better functioning and expansion of shrines' building complex.

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Such examples of transnational Sufi devotion are very common in which migrants had spent a part of remittances for the religious and other activities can be found in the case of Nigeria (Adebayo, 2010). The devotional affiliation exist in each society but the nature and foci of it varies from one to another society. The affiliations to the Sufi shrines are very common in rural Pakistan. Most of the people believe that these are the main mediating forces between public and the ultimate authority, God. Hence, these spaces are considered as source of solution to everyday issues faced by the people even the migrants are the most common visitors to such shrines to seek spiritual protection for their aspired journeys abroad (Khan and Kalhor, 2016).

In many cases the migrants make vows (*manat*) for the issuance of visa and even in the case of irregular migration. On accommodating their objectives, they pay visits to the shrines and donate money and perform other specific spiritually-charged acts on the shrines. In most of the cases it becomes a common habit for the migrants to allocate a part of their remittance for the shrines which is used not only for the public feast (*langar*) but in some case it is also used for the expansion of such shrines. The expansion of religious shrines in the Potohar (upper Punjab) region is on the rise. People believe that the bigger shrines could attract more visitors and thus could generate more money through the donations made by these visitors.

### ***Sufi Shrines in Gujrat***

There are number of shrines in the district but for the current research four shrines having a greater significance were selected. In the case of Gujrat, the shrines of Barrilla Sharif which is about 36 km in north of Gujrat city is one of the most famous visiting places for the migrants. The seventy-two-yard-long, apparently an ancient, grave of Hazrat Qanbeet is the first shrine in Barrilla Sharif which attracts a majority of devotees from the district and beyond. In this complex, at a distance of few hundred yards there is another shrine of Molvi Muhammad Hafizullah (Khan and Sajid, 2011: 68). This complex is very famous for the provision of continued *langar* to the visitors. The arrangements for *langar* in both the shrines are very impressive as it is distributed equally thrice a day for the whole week. The number of visitors varies from some hundreds to thousands depending on the days. In most of the cases the first 'Lunar Thursday' is celebrated by the devotees.

In addition to the shrines at Barrilla Sharif there are two most visiting shrines in Gujrat city center as well. The first of these belongs to Hazrat Shah Kabir-ud-Din (b.1581) alias Shah Daula Daryai and the second is of Hazrat Karam Elahi (b.13 April, 1838) alias Kanwanwali Sarkar (literally translated as crow-feeding saint). The shrine of Hazrat Shah Kabir-ud-Din is in the south of the city center and it is one of the most visiting shrines in the regions. As per the records of the custodians of the shrine about three thousand to four thousand people visit this shrine on daily basis. The construction of the shrine of Hazrat Shah Kabir-ud-Din was commissioned by Qazi Sultan Mehmood with the Mughal influence of the construction. The donations made by the visitors, especially the left behind families to this shrine ranges between three-to-four hundred thousand per month.

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The visitors come from the various parts of Pakistan including Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Sindh and some devotees also come from Afghanistan. During their visits, it was very common among the devotees to spread a green colored floral sheet on the tomb of Hazrat Shah Kabir-ud-Din. The visitors also distribute sweets like candies at the shrines. “Rat-people” commonly known as ‘*Shah Daulah kay Choohay*’ is one of the peculiarities of the shrine. These individuals suffer from microcephaly—an uncommon disease but people had their own explanations about them. During their growth the head size remains smaller as compared to the body growth. There are some speculations about such children as people think that these are children donated to the shrine by their parents as part of their vows they actually made on their visit to the shrine when they were not having kids. So, it is commonly known that such devotees donate the first child to the shrine as part of their appreciation to the saint. But these speculations have been out rightly rejected by some local writers such as Zaman (2006:187) who has written an Urdu versioned book on shrines in Gujrat. He mentioned in this book that these are not the donated children as people actually think about them but these are children who suffered of a disease, microcephaly, which is prevalent in the world. Since, the saint was very generous and had housed such kids whose families left them because of this disease. Later on, the tradition remained intact and now these children have been used as beggars by some people.

An online blog on health by MedicineNet (2018) explains that this as “microcephaly is a condition where the head (circumference) is smaller than normal.” Since people in this region were not aware of such type of disease so they associated such kids having this disease to the shrine of Hazrat Shah Kabir-ud-Din. One can find so many kids known as *Shah Daula kay Choohay*- the rat-children of Hazrat Shah Daula bagging in the streets of Gujrat and even some neighboring regions as well. There are some human traders who purchase them or sometimes take on rent for bagging (Zaman, 2006:187; Kirmani, 2006:125).

The shrine of Hazrat Karam Elahi is situated in a north of the city. Few years back this part was considered as outskirts of the city but in the recent past city has been expanded to this shrine. The saint is very famous for the number of miracles. The shrine is frequented by people invoking the saint for the multiple problems including the fertility issues, release from prison, for business boost, desire for son, getting rid of disease, seeking job, warding off evil eye and exorcism success in examination, success in migration process (including irregular journeys), and so forth. During his adolescent time Hazrat Karam Elahi became the disciple of Pir Syed Imam Shah Sarkar of Chandala Sharif and he used to visit the said shrine on regular basis for about 12 years. After some time, the saint was directed by the *pir* to visit Delhi where he spent about four years and used to visit the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya on regular basis (Wazirabadi, nd:69-70; Zaman, 2006:206-208). At the age of 51, the saint returned to the Gujrat and remained here for the rest of his life. The saint died at the age of 90 and was buried here in the same place where the current shrines is constructed. The number of devotees is increasing day-by-day. The devotees pay visits from within district and also beyond

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normally on Thursdays and Fridays. On their visit to the shrines they perform number of rituals in a bid to get their wishes fulfilled.

### ***Migration, Remittances and Religious Activities***

For centuries people from the Pakistani region have been moving abroad for number of reasons. One of the example of trade links between the Indus region and the middle East have been discussed by Ballard (1987:31) in the following way, “Contacts between the Middle East and what is now Pakistan are of long standing. The earliest trading links between the Indus delta and Mesopotamia were established at least 4,000 years ago, and to this day many of the leading trading houses in the Gulf are run by families of sub-continental origin. Similarly, there have long been links between the Makran coast and Oman, where a majority of the Sultan's troops are Baluchis.” Although, there are such other examples too about the migratory and trade links between Indus valley and other ancient valleys across the globe. But the main focus in this section will remain to the recent trends of international labor migration from Pakistan.

Dahya (1974:84) has mentioned about the migratory links between Mirpur region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Great Britain during 1930s as the industrial zones in England were short of labor and thus they started recruiting Mirpuri people into manual industrial labor. Some of these workers were already there in England as they were performing the jobs as peddlers on the boats and as stokers on coal-fired ships. This phase of migration was considered a new direction in the migration process for the Kashmiri peasants. They not only settled in England as manual laborers but also called upon their close-kins to capitalize on such opportunities which resulted into the concentration of Kashmiri diaspora in England.

Migration from the Gujrat region was also started during the same period as they started following the foot prints of their neighbored regions like Mirpur. The first wave of migration of *Gujrati* people was to Europe, especially to England, Norway, Germany, and Spain and then to the Middle-East (Khan, 2017:42-50). Hasan and Raza (2011:27) mentioned about the migration process from Mirpur and Jhelum regions to England. These people started moving to England even before the creation of Pakistan as a separate state. They started working in the industrials zones in Bradford and Birmingham. During 1950s and 1960s the number grew from hundreds to few thousands. During 1960s people from Gujrat and adjacent regions (such as Jhelum and Sialkot) started moving to Middle-East as well in addition to the destinations in European region. By that time some *Gujrati* people were already settled as laborers in Spain (especially working in mines near Barcelona), Germany, and Norway in addition to Great Britain. Addleton (1984), Ballard (1987), and Shah (1995) mentioned about the size and reasons behind migration from Pakistan to oil booming region of Middle-East. The six countries were in that time holding world's largest oil and gas reserves and they started pumping these reserves to boost their economies. For such purposes they needed labor and thus recruited laborers from India and Pakistan. During 1998, 28 per cent of the total population of Saudi Arabia

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was of nonnative while this number was as high as 75 per cent in the United Arab Emirates (Shah, 2001:5).

Migratory links between Gujrat and Norway have extensively been studied by number of researchers including, Laenen (2005) and Brunborg, Østby and Henriksen (2006). They found it clear that at time when Norway converged from emigrant state to immigrant state people from Gujrat were the first immigrants who entered this region in a search for labor work. These workers not only found jobs but they also settled permanently. This number grew to thirty thousand during the last decade and considerably will cross the fifty thousand in coming years as the diaspora was using the options of family reunification and marriages back to the origin. Kharian (a tehsil of Gujrat) is known to be the sole origin from where a large number of people are settled in the suburbs of Oslo (Laenen, 2005:1). In addition to Norway, Gujrati people are settled almost in all parts of the world as these are having a rich emulation factor (Leghari, 2009:5).

Remittances are the major outcomes of the migration process which are highly desired by the left behind families at origin. In the case of Pakistan, annually about \$22.3 billion are received under foreign remittance head which is one of the major chunks of country's economy (World Bank, 2017:3). According the Government of Punjab's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2008) about 24.3 per cent families in the sampled communities in Gujrat were depending on the foreign remittances. Although this data has been changes during last decade but still it gives a true picture of the remittance dependency in the district. Remittances are considered as major sources of income in Gujrat. The allocation of remittances varies from one family to the other but there are some common avenues on which they are spending it. Household utilities and family welfare is considered as a common allocation purpose for most of the families in Gujrat. In addition to this people also spend remittance on access to luxuries of life which were not in access to them in the pre-migration situations. They usually spend on many things ranging from building big houses, purchasing of residential plots, on agriculture land, and for starting business etc. But it is also very common among the majority of the families to spend remittances on clothing, jewelry and electronic gadgets.

Allocation of foreign remittances is very common among the left behind families in almost all regions across globe. Religious affiliations are very common for the migrants and their dependents. In a bid to accommodate their spiritual deeds, they affiliate themselves to the religious shrines. They not only visit these shrines but also give donations and perform rituals. Khan and Sajid (2011:69) mentioned that the migrants on their visits back to the country pay regular visits to the shrines and give donations. Faeamani (1995:145) added about the practice of donations made by the migrants to the religious projects in Tongan communities. The migrants from Tongan villages were regularly sending remittances for the church administration, expansion and *misinale*- the annual cash offerings. Fuka (1985) also presented the case of Tongan villages as most of them perceived that one can be blessed by giving money in the God's work. Kurien (2008:1) stated about the allocation of remittances for religious activities by the Nappila

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(Keralite Muslims). Even the Sikh diaspora is very famous for the donations when they visit selective shrines in Pakistan. According to Government of Pakistan (2006:48-49) about \$6 million were donated by the Sikh pilgrims from India, the UK and the USA during 2006 for the expansion and administration of selected Sikh shrines in Pakistan. Adebayo (2010:73) stated that “in normal times, migrants donate funds to good causes, such as churches or mosques, construction/renovation, rural schools, cemetery improvements, health facilities, rest homes for the elderly, and orphanages.”

### Research Objectives

1. To study the profiles of the migrants and their left behind families in Gujrat, Pakistan.
2. To examine the transnational Sufi connections with migrants at origin and destinations.
3. To discuss the offerings made by the transnational devotees to the selective Sufi shrines in Gujrat.

### Methodology and the Context

The present research study is based on a multi-site ethnographic fieldwork using mix-method approach. It was conducted (from May to August 2017) in district Gujrat, Pakistan because this region is very famous for having a huge number migrants and reverence of Sufi shrines at larger scale. This city has a long history, as per the district gazetteer records it was the Emperor Akbar who established it during 1580 A.D. with the supporting role of Gujar inhabitants of this region (Government of Punjab, 1921:1). The present day Gujrat district hosts population around 2,756,110 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2018). There are number of Sufi shrines in this district which attracts huge followings across Pakistan. For the current research four Sufi shrines having the wider scope in the context of followings and performance of rituals were included after social mapping the personal visits. The first site is of the shrine complex at Barrilla Sharif village (which hosts two distinguished shrines: a) Hazrat Qanbeet, and b) Molvi Muhammad Hafizulla). This shrine site is situated at an approximate distance of 36 kilometers in the north of the city center while the rest of the shrines (shrine of Hazrat Shah Daula Daryai and shrine of Hazrat Karam Elahi) are situated in separate locations in the city center.

Sufi shrines were equally important for not only the inhabitants of the Gujrat but at the same time for those who migrated abroad for economic and other reasons from this region. *Gujrati* diaspora was equally associated to the Sufi shrines in Gujrat. Gujrat having the diverse socio-economic and ethnic composition remained very attractive to Sufis throughout the history and one can find dozens of shrines in this region. The inhabitants were also very affectionate towards these Sufis of Gujrat as they regularly visit the shrines for their spiritual needs. This bond between the devotees and the Sufis remained intact even in the case of migration to the other parts of the world. As cited above the *Gujratis* remained very proactive in migration process for number of reasons

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such as; a) there were fewer opportunities to earn, b) the barren nature of land restricts agricultural activities, c) family feuds also triggered migration, d) educational aspirants are now migrating abroad, and e) in few cases, marriages also lead to migration.

The main reasons behind the selection of four shrines were purely depending on the number of visitors and being famous among local and transnational devotees. People usually make vows on these shrines for the success in the migration process and even after reaching abroad they continue their devotion to these shrines for spiritual guidance and protection. The current research was aimed at understanding the linkage between the migration and the Sufi shrines- as these shrines were playing very pivotal role in accommodating the spiritual needs of migrants and their dependents. For the comprehensive understanding of the issue, three key informant interviews (KIIs), ten in-depth interviews (IDIs), and three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the different locations across the district. In the first phase of the research with the help of the caretakers of the shrines, three key informants were selected by using purposive sampling (the same sampling technique was used for the rest of the phases) but with an inclusion criterion (that was subsequently used for all research activities) a) at least have one active migrant-member, b) allocating a part of remittances for the donations (cash and in-kind items), c) paying visits to the shrines, d) making vows at shrines and e) performing rituals at shrines. One of the informants was taken from the Barrilla Sharif while rest were taken from both shrines in the city.

In the second phase of the research ten IDIs (detail about each respondent is given in Table I) were conducted from the heads of the left behind families who were having specific prerequisites for inclusion mentioned above. Four out of ten interviews were conducted in the village Barrilla Sharif (two at the shrine complex and two in the village setting) while the rest six interviews (three at each shrine) were conducted at shrines in the city. The researchers used semi-structured interview guide for the interviews with having some sections like: a) migration trends, b) inflow and allocation of remittances, c) shrines visitation culture, d) migrants and left behind families visits to the shrines, e) rituals, beliefs and functioning of shrines, and f) role of shrines in migration process (both legal and irregular channels).

Additionally, three FGDs were also conducted to get more information about the phenomenon and for the crosschecking of the data collected through the KIIs and IDIs. The participants of this activity were selected based on their knowledge about the process of migration and the functioning of Sufi shrines. Their inclusion was made through purposive sampling but based on the inclusion criterion mentioned about in the case of KIIs. The data collected through three methods was analysed separately but focus remained in getting specific information related to the selective categories of practices (i.e. migration process, allocation of remittances, visitation, donation, and rituals' performance). Inferences were drawn using the thematic analysis and thick description (Geertz, 1973) model. The selection of the respondents was made through the use of purposive sampling with a specific criterion as only international migrants, their left



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behind families' heads and the custodians of the Sufi shrines were taken as respondents. They could better explain the bond between migrants, custodians and shrines even after the relocation from the origin to destination.

Respondent	Age	Average Monthly Remittances Reception (Rupees/US\$) <i>1US\$= 105 Rs.</i>	Number of Visits per Month to the Shrine(s)	Donations made to Shrines per Month (Cash/In-Kind) Total Value (Rupees/US\$) <i>1US\$= 105 Rs.</i>	Occupation/Education/ Destination (Migrant)
Shoaib	40	100,000 (952.38)	2	3500 (33.33)	Shoaib: Private job/university degree Brother: settled in <b>Belgium</b>
Mudassar	45	120,000 (1142.85)	3	5500 (52.38)	Mudassar: No job/school degree Brother: living in <b>Greece</b>
Farhan	42	95,000 (904.76)	4	4000 (38.09)	Farhan: Self-business/university degree Father: settled in <b>UAE</b>
Asghar	43	115,000 (1095.23)	2	5500 (52.38)	Asghar: No job/university degree Brother: lives in <b>England</b>
Zahid	47	105,000 (1000.00)	1	3500 (33.33)	Zahid: Self business /no education Son: settled in <b>Saudi Arabia</b>
Anees	40	115,000 (1095.23)	3	5000 (47.61)	Anees: No job/College degree Brother: lives in <b>Germany</b>
Karim	38	125,000 (1190.47)	4	6000 (57.14)	Karim: Self-business/school degree Brother: Settled in <b>Spain</b>
Ayyub	46	165,000 (1571.42)	3	7000 (66.66)	Ayyub: Self business/College degree Brother: lives in <b>Italy</b>
Sagheer	55	110,000 (1047.61)	4	4000 (38.09)	Sagheer: Private job/University degree Brother: <b>Greece</b>
Usman	58	135,000 (1285.71)	2	4500 (42.85)	Usman: Farmer/ School degree Brother: settled in <b>France</b>

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Source: Own research May to August-2017.

In the succeeding sections we have discussed how this Sufi and migrant transnational connection is intact and what benefits are there for both the shrines (or for custodians of shrines) and transnational devotees. Followed by the role of religion (such as shrines) in the process of migration as this aspect is mostly neglected by the mainstream migration researchers including the world famous article by Massey et al. (1993) *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*. In the last section we have presented a list of offerings made by the transnational devotees and their relatives in Gujrat to the selective Sufi shrines.

### **Findings and Discussion: Transnational Sufi Reverence**

Visitations to the Sufi shrines was a very common practice among the inhabitants of Gujrat (Khan and Sajid, 2011; Khan and Kalhoro, 2016; Khan, 2017). They had a strong belief that these spiritual spaces and their custodians can make a big difference in their lives. The essence of shrines was propagated by the families and the new members were made to perform the same as it is done by their families. When *Gujrati* men move abroad they maintain the same devotions for shrines in their minds. At time of their journeys abroad they relate the success of their aspired journeys towards these shrines and make vows for the successful vogues. On reaching abroad the bond between shrines at origin remains the same as it was before their journeys.

Transnational Sufi connections could be seen in this case where not only the transnational devotees were paying visits and sending donations but at the same time the custodians of these shrines were also paying visits abroad to their devotees. On their visits abroad they not only greet their devotees but also collect donations for shrines. Karim (38 years old respondent) mentioned that my brother narrated a story about the recent visit of the custodian of a shrine to Spain in the following words:

“Whenever our spiritual leader (*pir*) paid us a visit we took it as the best time of life. We spent time with him, listened to his spiritual addresses with full devotion, made specific vows, some new devotees did *bayat* (took oath). On his return we gave him donations and gifts for the shrine’s functioning. Such spiritual gatherings are not common in the country of settlement; it could only happen with the visits of *pirs*.”

The migrants were closely associated to the four Sufi shrines for number of reasons including spiritual guidance and protection. Khan (2017) mentioned about such transnational visits by the custodian of Challey Sharif to the multiple settings in Europe including; a) Greece, b) Germany, c) Italy, d) Spain, and e) England. The custodian, Syed Intasar-ul-Hassan Shah, himself narrated during an in-depth interview that he has maintained a close contact with the transnational devotees and they are the constant

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contributors to the shrine not only for the construction/expansion but also for the welfare activities like the religious seminary, food, and clothing for the students.

Werbner (1996) studied the veneration of Hazrat Shah commonly known as *Zindapir* (the “Living Saint”) and his first *Khalifa* (deputy, vicegerent), Sufi Abdullah during 1989 in Birmingham, UK. In this study Werbner mentioned about the role of Sufi shrine which is based in Ghamkol Sharif in Kohat, Pakistan in promoting devotion among the Pakistani diaspora in UK. Such affiliations among Pakistani diaspora remained very common in Europe and beyond. Some of the *Khalifas* of Sufis too visit the Pakistani diaspora in Europe and beyond on regular basis to accommodate their spiritual needs. The visitation to the Sufi shrines was very common among the transnational devotees belonging to Gujrat. They visit shrines and sprinkle rose petals and spread floral sheets on the tomb. In addition to this they also donate money, distribute food to the visitors and perform rituals. Shoaib (40 years old) respondent mentioned that:

“My brother is settled in Belgium since many years. He normally visits us after two-to-three years. During his visit he usually pay visit to the shrine of *pir* Karam Elahi considering it an obligation. He donates money, distributes food and performs some rituals such as spreading of sheet on tomb, sprinkling of rose petals and torching for perfumed sticks.”

In this context, Leghari (2009:11) conducted a research in Athens, Greece to explore the religious activities such as building of mosques, rituals’ performance, processions, and meetings with the Sufis from Pakistan. He termed this process as the transnational Sufi religious social formation (Werbner, 1999) and transnational missionary network of *Tablighi Jamā‘at* (Kepel, 1991; Masud, 2000; Metcalf, 1996, 2002). Leghari (2009:13) further mentioned that, “Athens based branch of the transnational Qadiriyya Sufi order (Pir Sahibzada Pirzada Sultan Fiaz-ul-Hassan, custodian of the shrine of Hazart Sultan Bahu in district Jhang) is also very active among Pakistani immigrants.”

Werbner (1999) argued that, “similarly, the Muslim religious diaspora is itself stratified and divided according to religious tendency. Sufism, one such tendency, creates its own global landscapes peopled by saints and *pir-bhai*, ‘saint-brothers’; like global families the Sufi transnational regional cults have been created by international labor migration in which working-class cosmopolitans move along the prescribed pathways.” What makes the migrants to have faith in the Sufi shrines is a most common question which comes to the minds of the many researchers. When it was asked from the migrant respondents and their close-kins in Gujrat they presented somewhat the same answer as it was found by the Werbner (1999). In their perspective since they fully depend on the Sufis- who are actually the mediator between the God and the public so having strong faith in them could possibly lead them to have good in their lives and in the afterlife as well. One of the respondents, Farhan (42 years old) said that:

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“Since we are the sinners, it is the veneration of these Sufi shrines which makes our lives much easier for us. We are living such a prosperous life because of having strong faith in Sufi shrines.”

### ***The Role of Sufi Shrines in the Process of Migration***

The migrants from the Gujrat district are always depending on the Sufi shrines and spiritual leaders (*Pirs*) for the spiritual counselling and protection for the successful journeys abroad. Most of the migrants, even before the start of their journeys starting paying visits to the respective *Pirs* and shrines for the spiritual guidance and protection. During said visits they normally give certain donations at the shrines and sometimes to their spiritual guides with a purpose to have a safe journey. In addition to the spiritual guidance and donations they also perform specific rituals as well in a bid to compete their safe journeys abroad. The performance of rituals varies from one shrine to the other (for a complete list of rituals see, Khan and Sajid, 2011). Although, the issues under discussion has never been explored previously in the case of Pakistan but it has a very importance in the process of migration. Anees, (40 years old) from Gujjar family told that,

“When they were making arrangements for his younger brother’s Spanish visa they visited the shrine of Sain Karam Elahi (Alias *KanwanwaliSarkar*) and prayed for the success in visa process. When he got visa we visited the same shrine again and donated money, spread sheet on the tomb of the saint and distributed cooked rice at the shrine.”

It was very common among the migrants and their families to visit the shrines of Barrilla Sharif in rural Gujrat for the spiritual guidance and prosperous stays abroad Khan and Sajid (2011:69). In the case of Maya community of Guatemala’s migration to Houston, United States, Hagan and Ebaugh (2003:1145) presented a detailed chart of the role of religion in the process of migration. They have identified some stages of the migration process in which religion plays a pivotal role; a) the decisions to migrate, b) preparations for the migration, c) the journeys, d) the arrivals, e) the role of ethnic church in immigrant’s settlements, and f) the development of transnational linkages. They also mentioned the case of Mexican *retablos*- small votive paintings expressing thanks that are left by migrants and their families at religious shrines. An analysis of a sample of *retablos* produced by the US bound Mexican migrants showed that migrants often prayed and gave thanks to the saints of the Catholic church for a successful journey (Durand and Massey, 1995 cited in Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003:1146).

Hagan (2002:89) asserted about the role of religious shrines, churches and related institutions in the case of migration process of Maya transnational community. She stressed on the negligence on the part of the researchers who have undermined the cultural context of migration and specifically the role of religion. She asserted that, “More specially, within this context they have not addressed the role of religion in migration process, especially the spiritual resources it provides for some immigrant population in the decision to migrate, and psychological effects of this on migrants’

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commitment to see it through, to endure the hardships of migration.” Even in the case of illegal migration the aspired migrants’ reliance on religious spaces for the successful journeys also increased. One of the respondents, Asghar (43 years old) from a Kashmiri Butt Family, told that:

“When his elder son took the journey (through irregular/illegal process of migration) to Greece, they visited the shrine of Shah Daula and prayed for the success of his journey. When he successfully reached in Greece we again visited the same shrine and donated money, spread sheet on tomb and distributed some food.”

There were many cases of such nature in which migrants by themselves and their families prayed at the selective shrines in Gujrat for the successful journeys abroad. It has been observed that in the case of undocumented/irregular migration the chances of fatal incidents increased over the time. So, the reliance of such migrants and their families was increased on the spiritual spaces and leaders. Hagan and Ebaugh (2003:1146-47) also mentioned such reliance on the church for spiritual counsel and protection in the case of migration of Maya community of Guatemala to Houston, USA.

#### ***Migrants’ Offerings at the Sufi Shrines in Gujrat***

The elevated social status of the families in Gujrat due to the migration and inflow of foreign remittances could lead to the increase in the contribution towards the religious activities. In the above cited cases and the selected literature cited, across different regions and religions, it can be found that the contributions made by the migrants were evidently increasing in almost all the localities, such as Kerala in India, Gujrat in Pakistan, Tongan villages in islands, Mata community of Guatemala. In the current scenario, one can see the positive association between the migration and contribution towards the Sufi shrines. Khan and Sajid (2011) in the case of two shrines at Barrilla Sharif in rural Gujrat have already identified the economic contributions made by migrants for not only the management of the Sufi shrines but also for the construction, expansion, distribution of *langar* and other petty expenses. In some cases, the migrants also donated in-kind items such as electric fans, hand pumps, and other facilities to the custodians of the shrines and their credit of such contributions was inscribed at wall of these shrines. One of the respondents, Usman (38 years old) during in-depth interviews mentioned that:

“It is considered as an obligatory act to offer donations at the Sufi shrines whenever the migrants or their families pay visits. They normally perform such acts because of having strong faith that alike religious spaces can accommodate their spiritual needs and additional could also be helpful in achieving the aspired migratory goals.”

Khan (2017:108) mentioned about the contributions made by migrants and their left behind families to the shrine of Challey Sharif in Karrianwala village in rural Gujrat. He

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further added that migrants and their families were regularly sending money, clothes, and food items to the shrine's custodian and administrator of religious seminary annexed with the shrine of Challey Sharif in the village. In the case of undocumented/irregular migration the reliance of aspirants also increases as there are some risks involved in the said process. Most of the young aspirants from Gujrat move to Europe to counter poverty or due to some other reasons. They are pretty aware that such journeys to move abroad by adopting irregular migration are full of danger and incorrigible incidents had happened to the ones who initiated. In some case the aspirants before the start of journeys pay visits to the Sufi shrines and offer donations (both in cash and in-kind) and perform rituals for the success. One of the respondents Mudassar (45 years old) mentioned about the visitation to the shrine of Hazrat Karam Elahi, in the following words:

“When he was planning to migrate abroad (through irregular ways) he visited the shrine of Kanwanwali Sarkar for the spiritual guidance and protection. He distributed cooked rice and donated some money at the shrine. He further added, that due to some issues with the travel agent we could not started this journey but it is most common practice among the aspiring migrants to visit such Sufi shrines for spiritual blessings to have protective journeys.”

The construction and expansion of shrines is an ongoing process in Gujrat. The custodians of the shrines usually expand the shrine for number of reasons such as pride associated with the big structure of shrines complex. For said purposes, they need money and they normally fix expectations on migrants or their families for such support. Khan (2017:108) mentioned about the allocation of foreign remittances for the number of religious purposes including donations made to the shrines.

### **Conclusion**

The district Gujrat having very distinctive international migration pattern was the home for the spiritual leaders and Sufi shrines as well. The transnational devotees were associated to the custodians of the shrines and they were consulting for spiritual counsel and protection. These migrants were very punctual in paying visits to these shrines when coming back homes. They were also contributing donations to the shrines for management, construction, expansion, *langar* and other petty needs. The role of these shrines in the process of migration was very pivotal as the migrants pay visits and give donations before the start of their journeys. The linkage between religion and migration process has been studied by number of researchers such as Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) who explored this connection in the case of Guatemala highland Maya community migration to the Houston, USA. There is still a vacuum in the migration theories to look forward to the cultural aspects of migration and especially the role of religion across regions and religions. Massey et al. (1993) in their comprehensive article on the migration theories have somehow missed this perspective which the current study and the study of Hagan and Ebaugh (2003) have tried to fill the gap. Werbner (1996) and Leghari

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(2009) have rightly identified the transnational Sufis' effects in the case of UK and Greece respectively. The transnational connections between the migrants and Sufi shrines of Gujrat were evidently in contact to fulfill the spiritual needs of the devotees across border. At the time of initiation of migratory journeys, the aspirants- irrespective of legal and irregular were paying visits to the shrines in a bid for safer journeys abroad. The transnational devotees were also directing their families to maintain a strong bond with the shrines and custodians.

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