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# The Role Of Women In Sufism: Highlighting The Importance Of Women Sufis In Sindh, (Karachi and Thatta)

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## Abstract

This study aims to express the importance of Sufi shrines in a Sindhi society. The Sufi shrines dwell a central status in our social, cultural and religious setup regarding socio-spatial relationships, status of women in Sufism/Mysticism, rituals, beliefs, spiritual influence, customs and traditions and spiritual healing. Sufi shrines are not only the source of satisfaction for the devotees but also a place where Muslims and non-Muslims participate in all rituals and festivities together. Sindh is the land of Sufis and it holds great importance in Sindhi culture. Hence, the case studies and observational research methods are used to analyze the importance of women Sufis in the Sindhi culture, because both these research methods are explanatory, descriptive, in-depth, detailed and exploratory in nature. Case studies of six women Sufi shrines (three from Karachi and three from Thatta) are incorporated to access the first hand knowledge on the subject. The historical and current scenario about women Sufis and their role in Sindh regarding Sufism is studied through an unstructured interview schedule. Six shrines from Karachi and Thatta were selected as a universe of the study, and the respondents were purposively selected for conducting interviews in detail. The findings reveal that the people of Sindh have blind faith on Sufis (men and women Sufis both). People consider that if they visit the Sufi shrines, they will be blessed with their desires. And moreover people go to the shrines to satisfy their socio-economic, psychological and physical, moral wishes and spiritual needs.

**Keywords:** Shrines of Sufis, Social Relationships, Powerless Group of Society, Beliefs and Rituals, Sufi Saints, Music, Mystical Influence, Sindhi Culture and Society.

## تلخیص

اس مطالعے کا مقصد سندھی سماج میں صوفی مزاروں کی اہمیت اُجاگر کرنا ہے۔ صوفی مزار ہمارے معاشرے میں مرکزی حیثیت رکھتے ہیں اور اس کے علاوہ سماجی، ثقافتی، مذہبی، رسومات، عقائد، روحانی اثرات، شفایابی اور فیض حاصل کرنے کا ذریعہ ہیں۔ صوفی مزارات صرف اطمینان حاصل کرنے کا ذریعہ نہیں بلکہ یہاں مسلم اور غیر مسلم افراد مل کر تمام رسومات میں حصہ لیتے

ہیں۔ سندھ صوفیوں کی سرزمین کہلاتی ہے اور سندھی ثقافت میں تصوف بہت اہمیت رکھتا ہے۔ لہٰذا سوانحی مطالعے اور مشاہداتی تحقیقی طریقہ کار کا استعمال کرتے ہوئے سندھی ثقافت میں خواتین صوفیاء کی اہمیت کا تجزیہ کیا گیا ہے۔ یہ دونوں طریقہ کار تشریحی، مفصل، گہرائی طلب اور تفصیلی نوعیت کے ہیں۔ سوانحی مطالعے کے لئے تحقیق میں چھ صوفی خواتین کے مزارات (تین کراچی سے اور تین ٹھٹھہ سے) کا انتخاب کیا گیا۔ غیر منظم شدہ مصاحباتی شیڈول کے ذریعے صوفی خواتین کے کردار بالحاظ تصوف، تاریخی اور موجودہ صورتحال جاننے کی کوشش کی گئی ہے۔ چھ مزاروں کا بطور کائنات انتخاب کیا گیا اور جواب دہندگان کا انتخاب تحقیقی مقصدیت کی بنیاد پر کیا گیا۔ نتائج سے یہ پتہ چلتا ہے کہ سندھ کی عوام مرد اور خواتین صوفیاء دونوں پر اندھا اعتقاد رکھتے ہیں۔ ان لوگوں کا ماننا ہے کہ مزارات پر حاضری دینے سے برکتیں ملیں گی اور اس کے علاوہ سماجی، اقتصادی، جسمانی اور نفسیاتی فوائد حاصل ہوں گے اور اس کے علاوہ اخلاقی خواہشات اور روحانی ضروریات بھی پوری ہوں گی۔

**کلیدی الفاظ:** صوفی مزارات، سماجی تعلقات، معاشرے کا پسماندہ طبقہ، عقائد و روایات، صوفی بزرگ، موسیقی، روحانی اثر و رسوخ، سندھی ثقافت و معاشرہ۔

## Introduction

> *"And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification." (33:33)*

> *"Allah addresses men and women in the same breath: "O believing men and women, obedient, truthful, patient, humble, charitable and fasting men and women." ( 33:35)*

Sufism started developing, in the twelfth century as a result of small movements by ascetics, which gave emphasis to spirituality and closeness to Allah (Hatina, 2007). There is a very close relationship between shrines and Sufi traditions Bashir (2011), and this link can be viewed by looking deep into the history (Sabra, 2013). In Pakistan spiritual heir ship has been the traditions of Sufi shrines, and the Sufis have a huge number of disciples and followers under their command (Ewing, 1983). Common people in Pakistan hold great respect for these Sufi saints and these shrines are considered as sacred public places Platteau (2011), where followers perform their traditional rituals (righteous and pious) and show their deep and emotional attachment by considering these shrines as sacrosanct place (Manzo, 2003). In Pakistani society, people are connected emotionally

with Sufi shrines and these shrines have become a symbol of social structure and religious significance (Farooq & Kayani, 2012). According to the Sufis, Sufism is considered as a pathway to achieve closeness to Allah, and it is a state where all barriers between man and Allah are eliminated, thus changing the life pattern i.e. a man becomes purely ascetic (Pirani et al., 2008).

There are many etymological terms for "Sufi", for example, spiritual traveler, devotee, impoverished and ascetic person, but the term Sufi appeared to be the more common and accepted term referred by the Sufis themselves (Hassanali 2010; Sabra, 2013). Majority of Pakistani people consider Sufis as the quintessence and asset for Islam and consider them the pious one and the righteous one as an impoverished one (فقیر), who live their life just according to Islam and are involved in public service (Rozehnal, 2006). Sufis considering themselves as public servants engages themselves in a wide variety of work like, social, economic, political, moral, ethical issues and it has always been their significant feature (Malik 1990; Platteau, 2011). It is traced down from the history that visiting holy places has always been a sacred ritual and sins are washed off by visiting shrines, on the other hand, it is also a source of inner satisfaction and a way to fulfill desires by praying at shrines, all these are the common practices which are the practices not just in Pakistan, but throughout the world (Frembgen, 2012). According to Brewster, visiting sacred places has its traditional roots, which is linked with the purification of mind, body and soul, i.e. achieving Sanctification and purification of the soul (Brewster, 2011). With time, Sufi shrines have incorporated great influence on the common people and they have established certain rituals, which have now become a sacred tradition (Pirani et al. 2008). Ardent visitors of Sufi shrines have engaged themselves in a variety of spiritual activities Malik (1990) like, offering prayers in mosques, reciting Quran, divine intercession (منت), Sufi poetry, understanding divine revelations, Samaa:Qawwali and Dhamal (mystic and ritual, music and dance) and free food for poor and needy people coming to shrines (Langer, لنگر) and etc. (Abbas 2010; Wolf, 2006). Furthermore, some other rituals are also performed by the followers, for instance, having an oath (Bait, بیت) with their spiritual masters, tasting or eating different items at shrines, tying knots to threads or wrapping pieces of cloth around the trees, taking amulets (تعویز) etc. (Chaudhary, 2010). The followers believe that these rituals add new and spiritual meanings to their lives (Schrode, 2008). Usually people visit shrines to resolve their socio-economic and psychological issues (Levin, 2008). In Pakistan, most of the people have mental stress and depression problems, which are caused by their social issues, low social support, low literacy rate and undue social pressures (Husain et al., 2007). Normally the visitors seek for spiritual healing, meditation, and for the fulfillment of their desires, they consider Sufis as mediators (وسیلہ، ذریعہ) for the acceptance of their prayers by Allah (Gilk 1988; Pfleiderer 1988; Pirani et al., 2008).

The main attribute and functioning of the Sufi shrines is the spiritual satisfaction (Brewster, 2011). Spirituality is such a vast religious medium, therefore, it is not possible to sum up under some specific attributes Astin et al. (2011); whereas, Flannelly and Inouye, there is a positive link between spirituality and religion, which leads to the satisfaction in life (Flannelly and Inouye, 2001). Similarly, Khan and Sajid, studied that generally people visit shrines for their spiritual satisfaction and healing, to resolve social and economic issues and for the management of their psychological problems Khan and Sajid (2011), which are due to social stress, poverty, poor living standard, health issues, social misbehaviour and violence (Pirani et al., 2008). The social issues, psychological stress and tensions lead to their poor physical and mental health (Gilk, 1988). The followers have firm believe in spiritual healing, therefore along with medical treatment they prefer to contact their spiritual healers also (Golomb, 1985). After visiting shrines, people feel much relaxed and relived (Levin 2008; Rhi, 2001). People normally visit shrines for divine intercession or to pray for resolving their socio-economic matters, even people having high status from upper class like businessmen and politicians visit shrines to gain and maintain their power (Veer, 1992). Besides all this, people visit shrines habitually, for recreation (visiting shrines with families) and to seek spiritual satisfaction, to demonstrate their dedication and visiting to serve the traditions (Farooq & Kayani, 2012). Usually people from deprived class (lower class) visits shrines, because they feel the Sufi saints can help to get rid of their problems Abbas (2010); Ewing (1983), usually these people belong to both urban and rural class (Frembgen, 2012). During the ritual based festivities at shrines (عرس), the majority of the visitors and followers belong to lower class, including: trans-genders, religious mendicants, women in abusive relationships, financially deprived people and etc. (Chaudhary, 2010).

Dhamal (a spiritual form of dance performed at shrines during Urs) is also a common practice at Sufi shrines, especially in Sindh and Punjab (Frembgen, 2012). Many philanthropists visit shrines to provide free food to the devotees and contribute financially (cash or kind). Mostly the people provide free food either for the devotees or to fulfill their divine intercession (منت), and free food is a main attraction for the devotees and the poor people who visit shrines. Besides devotees and frequent visitors, foreigners and tourists are also attracted by the ritual activities for recreation (Khan and Sajid, 2011). The colorful activities, delicious food, festivals, historical background and the graceful architecture of the shrines attract the tourists (Nolan and Nolan, 1992). The region, socio-economic status and literacy rate influence the superstitious and mythical beliefs of people. According to Farooq and Kayani, in most of the urban areas and at large in rural areas of Pakistan, people believe that the breaking of glass, seeing a black cat during travelling, blinking of an eye, itching in the palm and etc. are the signs of good omen and bad omen (Farooq & Kayani, 2012). It was also observed that there is no gender involvement regarding superstitions, because men and women both equally have mythical approach. But on the other hand, some studies show that women have a higher

tendency of believing in superstitions than men (Sreedhar, 2006). This is the distorted shape of faith and beliefs, whereas, early Sufis projected Sufism as the knowledge of truth and realities, which are part of the Islamic law and cannot be separated from Islamic beliefs (Hassanali, 2010). Some of the religious scholars believe that not all, but most of the rituals practiced at the shrines are a form of polytheism and idolatry (Shirk ،شرک) and innovation (Biddah ،بدعت) (Chaudhary, 2010). There are varied opinions about visiting shrines, according to few these ritualistic activities develops special relationship and closeness to Allah, whereas others think that these activities are based on profane and polytheism (Veer, 1992).

Regarding the historical Sufi perspective, Sindh (province of Pakistan) is known as gateway of Islam (Bab-ul-Islam ،باب الاسلام). The history of Sufism in Sindh dates back even before the arrival of Muslim conquerors. The invasion of Sindh by Muhammad Bin Qasim in 711 AD, started the Muslim conquest in South Asia Bunting (1980), and established the Umayyad dynasty, for about 200 years Sindh remained under the caliphates of Umayyad and abbasid (Baloch, 1975). All the provinces along with Sindh have been divided into several districts. The hypothetical statement is established on the basis of provinces and their districts that people follow and practice the religion based on the social, economic and cultural setup. In Sindhi culture Sufism and Sufi shrines are of great significance. Followers believe that shrines are sacred places and based on their set of beliefs they practice various rituals there, for example, Urs, Sufi music and dhamal, spiritual healing and etc. people believe that Sufi shrines have a transitional role towards gaining the realization of Allah (معرفت الہی). The present study (based on the Sufi shrines in Sindh) focuses on the links between cultural and religious practices, especially the inspiration involved between women Sufi shrines and Islam. This study is based on qualitative analysis, whereby the data is collected from interviewing the visitors and the care takers at the selected shrines of Karachi and Thatta, which include: three shrines from Karachi and three from Thatta

1. Sayyedina Maryam Bibi **(Karachi)**
2. Hazrat Amma Maryam **(Karachi)**
3. Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa **(Karachi)**
4. Hazrat Shah Peryun (Shah Pari) **(Thatta)**
5. Satyun Jo Aastano\Dairo **(Thatta)**
6. Mai Makli **(Thatta)**

## Theoretical Framework

Religion is a set of beliefs and faith, sometimes we draw some socio-religious practices from our culture also, through which link between humanity and spirituality and moral values and customs are viewed and narrated. Religion defines firm rules and regulations

and religious model is planned for religious studies courses, which was basically known as cultural values and cultural system by Greetz model (Geertz, 1993). Greetz's model faced criticism that religion falls into the anthropological category, because most of the religions have narrative versions, religious traditions, symbols and sacred historical background that are visualized to suggest and explain the life's origination, living style and the universe. Along with that it also explains the ethical values, morality, laws and customs based on human's thoughts and creation of human thoughts. According to the studies it is concluded that there are around 4200 religions in the entire world. Religion is not just a system of beliefs, but it constitutes of our opinions, holy places, sacred scriptures and social institutions as well, thus relating humanity to human survival (Geertz, 1993). All religions have their own set of faith system and set of beliefs, which makes them unique based on their divinity James (1902), sacred texts Durkheim (1915), and phenomenon, faith Tillich (1957), and a concept of supreme power (James and Peter 2010). According to James faith and cultural values are a source of religious beliefs (James, 2008). There are many religions worldwide (AFSMU, 2005).

Mystics are those people who seek for attaining highest station of mysticism to look for spiritual pleasures through personal experiences in association with Allah. Sufis seek association with Allah not only by divine law, but also from personal experiences, realization of Allah. Many Sufis have attained the position in Sufism like Mansoor Hallaj, by establishing a relationship with Allah spiritually, which results in self-catharsis. According to the understanding of Sufism the inner strata has multi structures. And each level corresponds to the personal experiences attained by spirituality. The path of spirituality, interior (inner-self) differs from Sufi to Sufi and so are the technical terms. It can be seen that a term used by one Sufi might not be the same with other Sufis based on their experiences. Some of these terms are drawn from the Quran and rest are depicted from various other sources **(**Suhrawardī, 1962**).** Few most popular terms used by the Sufis are as follows: secret of the secret (sirr al-sirr), reason ('aql), spirit (ruh, P. jan), self (nafs), secret (sirrmost hidden (akhfa), heart (qalb, P. dil), and hidden (khafi). Before going deep into exploring these terms, we must understand that these terms cannot be expressed in a general manner, because each Sufi has used these terms differently **(**Nihon, 1960**)**.

Some other terms were also introduced by the Sufis to link humans with spirituality but for that one has to understand its origin. Sufis have elaborated nafs (self) starting from the lowest level, i.e. : 'the soul inciting to evil' (al-nafs al-ammarah) (12:53), 'the censorious soul' (al-nafs al-lawwamah**) (75:2),** and 'the tranquil soul' (al-nafs al-mutma'innah) (89:27), as well as others such as 'the seducing soul' (al-nafs al-musawwilah) and 'the satisfied soul' (al-nafs almardiyah)**.**

## Review Literature

Since the start of cognizance, both female and male (human beings) have strolled the way of reuniting with the sense of their existence as an individual. In spite of the fact that in this universe of duality we may end up in various structures and forms, but eventually no concept of male or female exists, except for just being. According to the Sufi customs and traditions, the acceptance of this fact has empowered the spiritual maturity of women in a way that has not generally been conceivable in the West (Yamin, 2009). Men and women both have served Islam and have shown great love for Allah, this light has been carried out by them throughout the centuries. Due to many factors women remained invisible as compared to men, but they carried out their services and showed great devotion as active participants. Some Sufi circles allowed women to participate in religious gatherings and ceremonies with men, whereas, in some Sufi orders women worship and participate in religious ceremonies of remembrance (zikr) separately in a segregated environment. Few Muslim women were strong enough to devote themselves in an ascetical sense, by parting from the society, for example, Rabi'a Basri; whereas, other women desired to play the role of benefactors to promote the worship circles. These benefactresses became very familiar teachers, students and religious friends and influenced the life of others. And in their household domain as mothers and wives, they continue to support their family members and continued to follow the path to attain the unification with the beloved (Allah) (Helminski, 2003).

There are various scholarly opinions about the origin and adoption of the term "*Sufi*", its origin can be encompassed by the following Arabic words, for example *Saffa,* which means the purity of man's heart and soul, and *Ahle Suffa* refers to (Zahids and Abids) certain abstinent, who devoted their lives for absolute devotion and utter submission to Allah during the life time of the Holy Prophet. Another Arabic word *Suff,* means row, i.e. the Muslims who used to offer their prayers five times a day in the first row. *Soofa,* was the Arab tribe, who devoted themselves to the services of Kaaba. And most importantly the terms *Soof and Cuf*, which means wool and the Sufism followers used to cover themselves with wool, i.e. covering their purity with wool by leaving the worldly pleasures and suppressing their desires. Many derivations have been proposed so far, but now it is certain that the term *Sufi* has been depicted from the word *Suf*, i.e. *wool* (Browne, 1997).

## Sufi Philosophy

Sufism is considered as the religious philosophy of Islam, which is depicted and explained in terms of the oldest existing definition as 'the depiction of divine veracities', and the mystics of Mohammad (SAWW) used to call themselves proudly as 'Ahl-al-Haqq' (the devotees and followers of the divine Reality). Among the modern eastern and

western scholars, the mystical and Gnostic view of Sufism is very popular; they represent Muslim / Islamic mysticism as Sufism and believe that the term Sufism is an attempt for people to develop true Islamic beliefs in order to find out the mysteries of the world and life. Many western scholars have interpreted Sufism according to their understanding. Reynold Nicholson, one of the most exceptional scholar of Sufism has discussed Sufism by depicting the words of Ma'ruf 'l- kharki, which he relates as 'divine truths and realities can be best understood by Sufism' (Nicholson, 1963). Similarly, Ansari quoted that another well-known scholar Titus Burckhardt, further elaborates that Sufism is not only the apprehension of divine realities, but it is a decisive factor to understand real Sufism and it also lays the foundation of the *Sufi Tariqah* (pathway of Sufism) (Ansari, 2004).

**Mysticism/ Sufism/ Tasawwuf**

The Sufism and its importance, the main Sufi orders, their distinctive elements and the philosophy and ideology of Sufism can be understood through the historical study of *Tasawwuf* and its expansion via particular references all over the subcontinent (Indian subcontinent) (Engineer, 1991). Basically Sufism (*Tasawwuf*) intends to brief the process of attaining the realization of Allah, which creates all possible types of spiritual attributes. Though the term *Tasawwuf* became common in the late 2nd century A.H, but still it was an integral part of the believers, right from the beginning. In other words, we can say that *Tasawwuf* is another referral name for the realization of Allah through the Islamic concepts and beliefs (Khan, 2004).

In the beginning the role and presence of women within Sufism was not recognized and their contributions were undermined. But a change in people's mindset and women's recognition in Sufism dominion started with some phenomenal, thought provoking and influential work by Rkia Cornell. In her book "Early Sufi Women", which she translated from a very exceptional text of as-Sulami's Dhikr a Nisswa al-Muta 'abbidat as-Sufiyyat. Rather than a discovery her work was considered as a new beginning and a pioneering endeavour and it became a landmark for many other similar efforts globally. With the beginning of realization through such efforts Sufis, scholars and intellectuals started to look up the gender issues and other issues like sexuality, language, caste, ethnicity which exists within Sufism. The literature, which was produced by these Sufis and scholars became the source of great knowledge and is continuously growing through researches regarding this specific topic (Cornell, 1999). Cornell's work provoked many scholars to investigate critically that how Sufism looks into and represents global perspective towards gender issues. Similarly, few other scholars explored, to create theoretical understanding. Even after all these efforts a very basic, elementary, clear-cut, interesting, but most challenging, intriguing and provocative question can be raised and that is how many Sufi women, we can recall by their names by looking back into the history or even

in present times? And the answer is that one should critically think about the concepts of women Sufis. Only this way we can imagine and analyze what elements are responsible for making women invisible even if it is about religion.

Unlike the past, currently and in the past few decades, massive scholarly work has been done on national and international level and is known as Sufi-o-graphy. And lately the question about gender and Sufism has been discussed quite more commonly than ever. This subject is very diverse and needs to be debated with full potential in order to find out the real standing of Sufi women in the past and present to change the perceptions overall, about women and their status. And this should range from concepts of gender within Sufi practices to women's contribution in Sufi shrines and also from exposing or revealing mystical fundamentals to establishing again the gender dimensions from a feminist point of view. Over the past few years, these efforts have produced the following themes from a feminist perspective as well. It has been observed that over the period of a few years, women and Sufism is the most debatable subject within Sufism than any other feature of it. Various concepts and thoughts regarding women and Sufism have established pretty more clear perceptions, but still there is a need to converse the idea about gender and Sufism to uncover and explore the hidden elements to be more specific about the role of women in this domain. And this analysis is based on dialogues and debates on the very subject and it must not be generalized, otherwise we would not be able to picturize the true spirit of Sufism.

As mentioned above, the topic of Sufi women can be linked to three issues. Firstly, it is very important to discuss the concepts of gender within Sufism and mystical practices. Jawad (2006), floated this idea and concept in "Sufi gender paradigm" as her analysis. Secondly, she has emphasized that the status of women in Sufism along with their authority and role should be discussed under the Sufi gender paradigm. On the other hand, Dakake has observed that it is not necessary that by exploring the role of women within Sufism can lead to the active role of common women. And finally, these arguments will be furnished on the basis of theoretical foundations. We can identify these three stages as, first one stems out of history, the second from anthropology and the third one from philosophy (Dakake, 2002).

**Gender Ideas within Sufi Practices and Interaction**

Reproducing the concept of "Sufi gender paradigm", one should analyze the components of gender perspective, the contributors and its impact on an individual. It is also noticeable that "Sufi gender paradigm" gives the chance to see the world through the gender lens, i.e., it represents and informs about the social status of individuals. Social relations can be well understood by using gender as an analytical tool, because it is not just social construction. Areas of gender neutrality can be explored and examined through

the mannerism of gender formulation and its impact on men and women both. Along with that it can be used as a mirror to reflect the real image or to make visible, various aspects of gender e:g, living standards, values and norms and access to resources and etc. (Radden, 2004).

The foundation of this paradigm is based on the detailed explanation of the Sufi symbolism, i.e. this symbolism constitutes of femininity and masculinity, which then views collectively, completes them as one being. Sachiko, advocated this thought critically and in one of his influential work "The Tao of Islam", presented the feminine aspects in Islamic mysticism (Murata, 1992). similarly, Dakake, has analyzed that this symbolism has established more clearly the status and role of women Sufis (Dakake, 2002). Whereas, Annmarie mentioned that Ibn Arabi has explained the importance of women within Sufism, Arabi considers that women are an essential part of the divine reality (Schimmel, 1997).

**Can Woman be a Sufi?**

In spite of the fact that there is a long history of women's contribution in numerous aspects of Sufism, but in the conventional Islamic spirituality we do not find any proper documentation regarding their services towards Islam and mysticism. The researchers have conducted ethnographic studies to observe the participation capacity of men and women both in religious rituals at Sufi shrines, but out of these only few studies have been published and even these studies have focused the participation of men and neglecting women's presence. Few popular western scholars, Annemarie Schimmel and Margaret Smith have researched about Rabiá al-'Adawiyya and some other famous Muslim women mystics, but the nature of their work was based on historical investigation, theoretical and literary work. None of these scholars have focused the true and devotional dimension of women Sufis. The role of women has been poorly documented and there is no clear understanding about their role and services towards mysticism and Islam, it has been ignored even at a scholarly level. The presence and contribution of women Sufis have been very vibrant in countries like Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey, Morocco, Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. In the Muslim world women can perform their religious prayers in Mosques but with some restrictions and limitations, and these restrictions are based on socio-religious perspective. On the other hand, women can freely and openly participate in the religious rituals performed at Sufi shrines. Women are usually referred as members of Sufi orders and family members of Sufi saints as mothers, sisters and daughters. The following areas have been identified for women participation regarding Sufism and its rituals.

- Women's role in Sufi practices as mystics.
- Women's role in Sufi poetry as creators.

- Women as source of inspiration and influence for male Sufis in their reproductive roles as mentors, nurses, daughters, sisters and mothers.
- Women as patrons and ethnographers of male Sufis, for example the Mughal princess (Jahan Ara), the daughter of Mughal king Shah Jahan.
- Women's role in Sufi songs and poetry.

Women's role as guardians and conservers of Sufi lore and discourse, for example a maid servant (Mai Naimat) of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, conserved all his memories in the form of "*Shah Jo Risalo*" (Abbas, 2002). Throughout the Islamic world, there are numerous names of women Sufis who have great contributions towards Islam and Sufism, but we hardly see any research regarding women Sufis not even in the sub-continent (Kloppenborg & Hanegraaff, 1995).

## Can Men Become Sufi without the Contribution of Women?

In the development of Sufism, women have contributed a lot and played a vital role being a member of human society and as male's life partner. They made a tremendous impact on the history of Sufism and their role is quite prominent in terms of their spiritual attitude. Though society has established roles for men and women, which limits women, but women knew that Sufism can create a very noticeable history. Therefore, even with their reproductive role they managed to participate in spiritual activities and proved that they can be equally ascetic like men and contributed in mysticism in many ways, for example by being part of spiritual sessions lead by great Sufis and documented their extraordinary deeds based on miraculous acts. On the other hand, many women appeared as very highly esteemed Women Sufis and gained recognition in a male dominated society where women achieve denial only (Bhaduri & Mukherje, 2016).

## Mothers, Wives, Sisters and Daughters of Sufis

Women have a great capacity of adopting many roles simultaneously and they perform in all these domains with excellence. In all of the social relationship women excel and help men as well. Women have had great influence as sisters on Sufis and their lives. Many Sufis were very close to their sisters and used to share their feelings and views with them, even sometimes they would seek their advice. For instance, Ali Roodbari, at the time of his death shared his experience of death. He told his sister "Fatemah", heaven doors are opening and the heaven is decorated, and the angels are telling me that all these bounties are for me. But I just want one look at me by Allah; it will be the best reward for me. Fatemah, later narrated the death experience of her brother with pride. This narration shows that Abu Ali's sister was an ardent listener and he trusted that his sister will understand his mystic mood (Meibodi, 1960). Similarly, in another story shows the close bonding of Boshr Hafi with his sister. One night he told his sister that he will stay on the

roof and the next morning when his sister inquired the reason, he answered that I wanted to be alone to think deeply that Allah has created human beings, some are Christian and some are Jews or belong to other religions, but why they have not accepted Allah as the supreme authority of the entire universe and I am so blessed that being a Muslim I am fortunate to have a firm belief in Allah. Sisters of the Sufis have shown that they had been a support, companionship and ardent listeners of their brothers. For example, Boshr Hafi, considered Mozqe (his sister) a true companion and a person with whom he could share things with ease. He was so much attached to his sister that after her death he stated that if someone fails to worship Allah properly, then he may lose his/her companion, and he was afraid of the fact that he might have failed to fulfil his duty as a worshipper, therefore, his sister parted from him by death (E'temad-al-Saltane, 1926). Women are sacrificing by nature and for their loved ones they are always ready to give away anything, especially for their fathers, brothers, husbands and children. Farid ud-Din Attar of Nishapur once narrated that when a well known Sufi Fazil 'Ayyaz adopted Sufism and wanted to leave for Mecca, leaving his wife behind by giving her choice to live her life according to her choice. At that moment his wife took a bold step to be with her husband, she told him that she will follow him wherever he goes and will never leave him alone. Unlike many other wives Fazil 'Ayyaz's wife acted differently and sacrificed by leaving all her relatives and family behind to accompany her husband in his quest to Mecca (Bhaduri & Mukherje, 2016).

Miracles (*Karamat*) are a very important part of mysticism. It is a well established belief that only devout and pious people can attain the station of Sufism, where they can perform miracles. Women in the life of Sufis play a vital role by being devoted towards them in whatever the relation they have with them, i.e. as a mother, wife, daughter or sister and they share very important mystical status in Sufism. A pious and devout woman bears a pious child and trains him into a cultured and mystic person. Thus mothers and also the wives, sisters and daughters hold a very special position in the spiritual life of Sufis. History highlights that mothers of few Sufis were also able to perform miracles and used to guide their sons towards the spiritual path. Bibi Zulekha, mother of Hazrat Nizam-ud-Din Awliya was his spiritual teacher and guide. After her death, whenever he wants guidance in any dilemma, he used to visit her tomb to seek her guidance (Helminski, 2003). Same way, Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-shakar, considered his mother as his mentor and guide. He was so much influenced by his mother and daughter that he wanted to announce his widowed daughter as his successor, but he could not, because women were not acknowledged as *Khalifa*. His mother also had attained a mystic status and could perform several miracles. Many of the Sufis have admitted that their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters can perform miracles and are at a very high status of mysticism. The wife of Al-Hakim was also a mystical person and played a very significant role as a Sufi. Similarly the wife of Hazrat Khizar (Khidr) used to get instructions and guidance from her husband in her dreams, which is a very sacred form of

guidance in Islam. Once he appeared in her dream and asked her to maintain cleanliness, later he explained that by cleanliness he meant clean speech (Helminski, 2003).

**Role of Male and Female Sufis**

Islam is a very harmonious religion, close to nature. The Islamic faith is based on the oneness of Allah Almighty, or in other words, it can be said that pictures, carvings and idols are not allowed. The global debate raises a question that, can we see Allah? And the answer is given through many Ahadith, in one of the Hadith the Holy Prophet said: 'In Paradise the faithful will see Allah with the clarity with which you see the moon on the fourteenth night (the full moon)'. Sufis have also argued on the subject and they believe that even in this world we can see Allah, but with the eyes of the heart, just as Sufi martyr al-Hallaj in his poem said:, "ra'aytu rabbi bi-'ayni qalbi' (I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart)". Sufism has no distinction regarding gender, because men and women are equal before Allah. Women have played a very important role in the development of Sufism right from the beginning, which is said to have begun with the Holy Prophet (SAWW). Prophet Muhammad taught lessons of life and the amalgamation of matter and spirit and the recognition of male and female is based on everyday life. The cultural expressions have over shadowed the essence of purity, objectivity and purpose, but the Qur'an has clearly identified that men and women are equal. Islam has balanced the human relations by maintaining the honour and respect of women. Hazrat Kahdija (beloved wife of the Holy Prophet) and Hazrat Fatima (beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet) played a vital role and appeared as very strong women, showing the strength that women are equal to men in all walks of life. Hazrat Kahdija stood by the side of Muhammad through thick and thin. And Hazrat Fatima had a very deep understanding of mysticism and is considered as the first mystic Muslim woman.

Dr. Nurbakhsh has mentioned in the prologue of his book "*Sufi Women*", that there is no difference among men and women in terms of faith. He claims that women who have set their foot on the path of Sufism and reality have attained the equal and the same status as of men Sufis. Dr. Nurbakhsh praises the fact that there is no concept of "I" or "You" in the ocean of divine unity, which is the highest point, because what else could be the best possible meaning men and women can hold. His book provides the enlightenment regarding the respect of women Sufis over the period of time, from the early days to date, through the biographies and subjective stories and narrations of highly reputed and respected women Sufis. These stories highlight the role of women Sufis, especially the Rabe'ah Basri and she was the most popular and highly esteemed Sufi woman of her time. She had a very tough life full of pain and misery, but out of that she explored truth. There are many great Sufi women, but their stories were set down and they remained anonymous. The current study, therefore seeks to find out why these Sufi women were left unrecognized. Rabe'ah Basri is one among the Sufi women, who has attained the

*Ma'arifah* (the mystical knowledge of Allah) and have gone beyond many male Sufis. Inevitably, she is one among the great Sufis of her time and from early days to date she has the excellence, piety and piousness and (*Zohd)* self-restraint, which anyone can wish to have. She has an unparalleled position in Sufism path and she is known as the *Taj al-Rejal* (crown of men). Fariduddin Attar had praised her with these sentiments in the "Conference of the Birds echoes":

"No, she wasn't a single woman
But a hundred men over:
Robed in the quintessence of pain
From foot to face, immersed in the Truth,
Effaced in the radiance of God,
And liberated from all superfluous excess" (Nurbaksh, 2004).

**Sufism in Sindh**

The new ideas of Sufism have given new dimension to it and it is a never ending struggle for seeking the love and blessings of Allah. Self-control, simplicity and praying at night raise the awareness level and open new horizons for an average person who seeks the love of Allah to attain the status of his beloved (Schimmel, 1975). If we study the Islamic history in detail, we can depict the clear picture of the rise and fall of Muslim Empires and the formulation and compilation of Islam through Sufism (*Tasawwuf*). Sufis have used Islamic teachings, jurisprudence (the theory and philosophy of Islamic law), love, peace, humanity, tolerance, true expressions and open heartedness rather than war disasters and aggression to change the hearts of people. Before the occurrence of any change (socially or religiously), first, the internal impact is crafted than it creates external impact in the form of revolution (Schimmel, 1992). Similarly Hazrat Sheikh Al Hajveri in his book "*Kashf ul Mehjoob*" mentions that the attainment of *Irfaan-e-Zaat* (identification of self) is the extreme station of reality (Hajveri, 1978).

The culture and soil of Sindh is enriched with the history of Sufism. Many highly respected Sufis have filled the soil of Sindh with their knowledge and wisdom. Almost all the Sufis of sub-continent have focused Sindh due to its prime importance relating to the history of this region. Though entire Sindh is the source and Sufism and righteousness, but few historic cities are of central attraction like Deebal, Mansoora, Thatta, Makli and Rorhi. Sufism teaches us to have self-control, and selflessness, and these Sufi traits help in bringing the social revolution. The Sufi saints are considered as rain in a desert. The Sufi shrines are a source of tranquillity for the followers. Sindh has a rich Islamic history due to the Sufi saints, in other words, we can say that Sindh is the land of Sufis, Saints and highly esteemed religious figures. Though the culture of Sindh is so rich regarding Sufism, but still we do not find much literature regarding the subject (Sultanova, 2011).

The role of women Sufis is deliberately ignored and certain misconception have been established in order to malign the religious status of women (Mernissi, 2011). According to Burton, in Pakistan, many women from Sindh province adopted the path of Sufism and became *Fakirani* (follower of religious order either *murid* or *Sufi*) Burton (1973), few among them attained the status of *murshid* (spiritual teacher) (Denny, 1988). Some Sufi orders allowed them to participate in all of the rituals like men Schimmel (1982), for instance, Qadiriyya and Rahmaniyya orders let the women enter as Sufis (Smith, 2010).

## Methodology

This study examines the role of women in Sufism, and it also attempts to capture in-depth understanding regarding the people's perspective about Sufism and women Sufis. Thus, the researcher focused on detailed study on the subject through qualitative research method and descriptive survey by interviewing visitors of Sufi shrines and the care takers to gain firsthand knowledge regarding the topic, so that authentic information can be collected for further analysis. For this purpose case study method has been chosen to analyze every possible detail to cover all the aspects of the research problem, because due to the qualitative nature of case study the researcher can attain detailed information based on an explanatory, exploratory and descriptive research. The core aim of this study is based on ethnography, which is to demonstrate the activities performed at Sufi shrines and people's perception regarding the women Sufis. Case studies of six women Sufi shrines (three from Karachi and three from Thatta) are incorporated to access the firsthand knowledge on the subject and for this purpose, and the names of the shrines are as follows: 1) Sayyedina Maryam Bibi (Karachi), 2) Hazrat Amma Maryam (Karachi), 3) Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa (Karachi), 4) Hazrat Shah Peryun (Shah Pari) (Thatta), 5) Satyun Jo Aastano\Dairo (Thatta) and 6) Mai Makli (Thatta). Care takers and the visitors were interviewed by using unstructured interview schedule. Karachi city and Thatta were selected as universe of the study and the interviews were conducted by selecting respondents purposively. In qualitative analysis, descriptive method is used to acquire exact and factual based details about the religious status and importance of women Sufis and the turnout of people visiting their shrines based on their beliefs and mystical influence of these women Sufis. Since there is not much of a research work done on the subject; therefore, it is needed to explore all the hidden aspects of Sufism linked with Sufi women and their role in the propagation of Islam, especially in Sindh. By interviewing the respondents at the shrines, served the purpose of the research and it was quite a fruitful research, which opened many new dimensions to be explored to portray the clear picture of women in Sufism, which is definitely a missing link of Sufism.

## Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in segments systematically. First the interview schedule (in Urdu language) was used to record the response of the respondents. Secondly the responses were translated from Urdu to English. Later it was presented in forms of case studies to have in-depth information on the subject.

## Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the present study is to have qualitative analysis regarding the role of women in Sufism and to highlight their importance within Sufism and in the society, along with that observing the rituals and religious activities performed at the women Sufi shrines is also a motive of this research. Exploring the exclusive dimensions of women Sufis which are not yet explored, because there is no sufficient research work done regarding women in Sufism.

## Descriptive Research

It is a research method which is used to have a detailed description about the characteristics of the selected population under study. These characteristics are based on certain categorical and definite format also called as descriptive categories. It does not deal with the "how/when/why" questions; rather it deals with "what" question, i.e., what are the distinctive qualities of the chosen population (Shields and Rangarjan, 2013).

## Exploratory Research

Exploratory research, as the name suggests that it helps to explore something or to conduct a research on an issue which has not been explored closely or clearly. It is used to establish research priorities, improving and finalizing research design and developing operational definitions. Since exploratory research has an exclusive nature, therefore, it is needed to choose the research methods and drawing conclusions with ultimate care (Shields & Rangarjan, 2013).

## Observation

The systematic approach of data collection is called observation. It is a way of recording the views of people by examining them in natural conditions or any naturally occurring event or circumstances. It involves the researcher's engagement for prolonged periods till the required results are obtained. Observational research actually records the current behaviours without influencing the people, things are recorded in the order of their occurrence (McBurney & White ,2009).

## Case Studies

Case studies based study establishes a clear picture and understanding about the issues of the research problem. It is a way to achieve accurate information and it also strengthen the experience and knowledge gained from the previous conducted researches. Case studies also provide in-depth analysis about a single person, a group, community, organization, city, country or even a region. Researcher usually uses qualitative research techniques to reveal the social issues to develop a clear understanding about it. In case study methods various tools for data collection are used, such as interview method, a survey, questionnaire, data analysis tools, observation and review of documents (Yin, 2012).

Here in this study, case study method is used purposively to record every possible detail about the role of women in Sufism and the perception and social understanding about their contributions and sacrifices, which they make to support their families and accompany men through their mystical journey in different relationships as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. Since this dimension of Sufism is not yet explored on larger scale; therefore, the researcher aimed to gain firsthand knowledge from different shrines in Karachi and Thatta by visiting personally and used the above mentioned data collection tools to have a clear qualitative analysis of the research problem.

## Karachi: Case Studies of Women Sufi Shrines

### Case Study 1: Sayyedina Maryam Bibi

Syeda Hazrat Maryam Bibi's shrine is located in Kharadar at Nishtar road adjacent to Timber market. There are many other shrines in the same street, therefore, it is known as the street of shrines. Bibi Maryam's shrine is within the premises of a house in that street and the residents of that house administrate all the shrine's affairs. The care taker of this shrine is commonly known as Baji and she works there as a spiritual healer also. Bibi's Urs is celebrated every year on 27-29$^{th}$ of the Islamic month of Rajab. The people of that area does not know much about the history and details of the shrine and about her miraculous powers, but according to the care taker of Mai Lanji's shrine Bibi Maryam is the sister of Mai Lanji and this shrine is also 200 – 250 years old. People usually visit shrines for the fulfillment of their desires and they do not like to talk to anyone during their visit, therefore, it was not easy to interview. But somehow, the researcher, convinced one of the visitor Fatima, who was 40 years old and Gujrati speaking. Initially, it seemed impossible to interview her due to language barrier, but somehow the researcher managed to interview and collected the required information. Fatima was not literate, but since she lives in Karachi therefore, she understands things and manages all his household expenses within limited income oh her husband. She offers prayers daily

with regularity and believes in cleanliness, personal hygiene, purity and piousness. She understands the difference between polytheism and innovative acts very well and according to her visiting shrines in not Biddah at all. She respects the Sufis and hold high esteem for them. She knows that Sufis are considered as friends of Allah due to their piety and piousness. Therefore, Allah blesses them with miraculous powers and high status and they help people by using the gifts of Allah. Fatima said that music and dhamal are not non-Islamic practices, because in Qawwali Allah's praise is expressed, and already all praises are for Allah only. People regularly visit Bibi's shrine, but during Urs the festivities and celebrations enhance the Islamic spirit.

## Observations

Bibi Maryam's shrine is located in a densely populated area in a residential area, therefore it is not easy to identify it as a shrine, and it is recognized as a shrine only by the appearance of its entrance door. Her followers, visits her daily, but majority comes on Thursday and on 27$^{th}$ of Rajab, supplications are also offered. During URs festivities Qawali and dhamal is arranged and Biryani (Rice dish: very popular in Sindh) is given to the visitors as a token of blessing. People believe that their prayers will be heard by visiting the shrines, this is the point when a person starts doing idolatry, there is a very thin line regarding our beliefs, which one should decipher. A very interesting fact is observed that among visitors women are in the majority, because usually women seek alternate ways for their problems and fulfillment of desires. Women sometimes fall for such things, because they do not have enough knowledge about Islam due to lack of education and have no social exposure to make out between real and fake. Women normally think that the more time they spent at shrines more they will be blessed.

## Case Study 2: Hazrat Amma Maryam

The shrine of Hazrat Amma Maryam is located near Karachi Port Trust Office in the adjacent street of Hazrat Sayyedina Qibla Peer Haji Ghaib Shah Ghazi Bukhari. Almost 50 years ago Amma Maryam migrated to Karachi and started living in the same area. There was no one to take care of her, because she was all alone, therefore, in the name of Allah the shopkeepers of that area started to take care of her and use to provide her basic necessities. According to people her mother tongue was Urdu and twenty five years ago when she died, the residents of that area buried her and due to her piety, her grave gradually gained the status of a shrine. Only women can visit her shrine, mostly they visit on Thursdays and Fridays between 4-5 pm. Her followers are not only Muslims, but Christians also visit her shrine. Every year in the month of January her Urs is organized by the local residents. While interviewing a Christian woman Alina, the researcher asked many questions about her and Amma Maryam. She was a very old woman around 80 years of age. As she did not receive any help from her community and religion; therefore

she started living in Sufi shrines. She was in the profession of nursing and was alone, because she is unmarried and have no family. After retirement, she had no place to live and even church did not support her. She feels safe here at the shrine rather than seeking help from a church. She stays all day at Amma Maryam's shrine and at night sleeps at Peer Ghaib Shah's shrine. She proclaims that religion is not the property of any specific group or community. Therefore, she finds peace at shrines. Though she is a Christian, but she prays at the graves of Sufis for her needs.

**Observations**

The shrine of Bibi Amma Maryam is a single room space, which is located at the corner of PTK office adjacent to the market area. Like many other shrines, this shrine is also not registered and therefore, no maintenance is provided by the Department of Auqaaf and religious affairs. Shop keepers and visitors maintain the shrine and manage all the care and expenses. The appearance of the shrine looks like a small mosque. There were many small baby cots, which symbolizes that childless couples place these cots as a symbol of their divine intercession to have a baby as a blessing of the shrine.

**Case Study 3: Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa**

The shrine of Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa is located on Shah Abdullah Bhiati road near the Culry Jonah Mosque and Haidri Football Club. Amma Maa was a resident of the Ratan Talao Burns road and belonged to Dhal caste of Kach-chi community. Like Hazrat Amma Maryam's shrine, this shrine is also open for women only, men are not allowed to enter inside the shrine. Her Urs is organized every year on 2nd Moharram-ul Haram. Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa shifted to Lyari from Ratan Talao in 1961 and after her death in 1971; her shrine was constructed to honour her piousness as a Sufi. This shrine is also not a registered one; therefore, it does not get any cover from the Department of Auqaaf and religious affairs. One of her follower's Dhal family is looking after the shrine and manages all affairs. Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa had some miraculous powers, among which blessing a childless couple with a child was her most prominent miracle (karamat کرامت،). In the premises of shrine there is a well, which is known for its spiritual value, anyone who drinks water from this well recovers from any kind of illness. People donate money for the maintenance of the shrine and yearly 10,000 – 12,000 PKR are collected, which are later used for Urs festivities and maintenance of the shrine. Like many other shrines, people wrap coloured threads, pieces of cloth, and locks as divine intercession (منت). One of the local residents, Zulaikha Bibi provided some details about the shrine to the researcher; she is a wife of care taker Muhammad Haji Dhal and helps her husband in all rituals at the shrine. According to them Bibi Amma Maa belonged to Kach-chi community, she was not Syed, but people called her by the name Sayyeda Bibi Amma Maa in respect. Women are very ardent follower of Amma Maa and visit her shrine

regularly on Thursdays. Zulaikha claimed that the well within the premises of the shrine has never dried since it is constructed. Zulaikha also told that her husband's paternal aunt and grandmother were also the care taker of this shrine and this chain has never been broken. The researcher asked Zulaikha to explain the existence of well within the shrine and she said that once they had water crisis due to less rain, then Amma Maa prayed and well came into existence as a result of her prayers. Usually women come here to pray to conceive a child or they come to drink and take away the miraculous water from the well.

**Observations**

The premises of the shrine were very clean and tidy. The shrine has entrance and exit doors, so that visitors can easily perform their rituals and can leave without any problem. But the rear door is opened only on crowded days like on every Thursday, Friday and during the Urs. Near the head side of Amma Maa's grave, threads and locks of divine intercession (منت) are kept. Visitors give bestowment in honour of Amma Maa in cash and kind form.

**Thatta: Case Studies of Women Sufi Shrines**

**Case Study 4: Hazrat Shah Peryun (Shah Pari)**

The shrine of Shah Pari is located in a very old graveyard of Makli and this shrine is almost 300 years old. The lineage of Shah paryun is linked with Hazrat Salman Farsi. There are three graves inside this shrine, first one is of Hazrat Shah Murad, and the other two graves are of Shah Paryun, who were disciples of Shah Murad. The 50 years old care taker of this shrine Salim Sahab told the researcher that their family has been taking care of this shrine and it is the 7$^{th}$ generation taking care of all matters here. Every year, the festival is organized on the first Thursday of Rajab (Islamic month) and the Urs is celebrated in the Islamic month of Safar, which starts on 19$^{th}$ Safar after dusk (maghrib) and ends at dusk (maghrib) on 20$^{th}$ Safar. During the festivities of Urs free food is arranged for the visitors, and even Qawwali and dhamal is arranged. Many people visit the shrine other than the festival and Urs on every Thursday. Many people who come to visit shrine from the distant areas to stays at night and leave after the end of the festivities next morning. 42 years old Bushra Khatoon came to visit Shah Pari's shrine from Karachi to attend the Rajab festival with her husband. She had received elementary education only, but had religious knowledge and is also very religious. She believes in the miraculous powers of Sufis and came here to pray for her daughter's health. Her entire family loves to visit shrines to pray for their issues. She clearly knows the difference between polytheism and Biddah and asks people not to perform non-Islamic practices at shrines. She thinks that we can pray to Allah only for everything, but these

Sufi saints can be a source due to their piousness. According to her there is no harm in visiting shrines, but one must know the limits; else we will cross that thin line.

**Observations**

Like other shrines of Makli and Thatta, the shrine of Shah Pari was very untidy. Within the premises of shrine, one could see litter everywhere and even around the graves. Maybe it is because people visit this shrine twice only in a year; therefore, the caretakers do not give much attention in this regard. Besides that the visitors here usually belong to the lower class and they do not have the sense to keep the shrine's premises clean. During festivals and Urs days food and handicraft stalls are arranged, so that people who come from distant areas can buy food to eat and can purchase handicrafts as souvenirs. All these things reflect the tradition of that area. The prominent miracles of the Shah Pari shrine includes: conceiving a child, economic issues and spiritual healing. On the head side of the graves there is a cavity where different types of stones and clay is kept for the visitors, they rub it on their bodies for healing. This miraculous clay and coloured threads are sold for 20 Rs. couples who are blessed with a child; bring their child on his first birthday to seek blessings. It is strictly restricted that impure women cannot enter the shrine.

**Case Study 5: Satyun Jo Aastano\Dairo**

The key importance of Satyun Jo Aastano is that 7 real sisters are buried here. Satyun Jo Aastano, means shrine of seven sisters. This is almost 800 years old shrine and the popular story about it is that all these sisters died at a very young age and all of them were unmarried. While they were crossing river bank with their brother Shah Jhanda in a boat. They prayed to Allah to save their life and as a result of their prayers an Island came into existence and later on their shrine was constructed on the same Island. The care taker told that all these sisters were mystical in nature from the beginning and people used to get benefits from them due to their spirituality. Their Urs is celebrated on 19$^{th}$ and 20$^{th}$ of Safar every year and food or sweets are given to the visitors as a token of blessing. Adjacent to Satyun Jo Aastano is the shrine of their brother, but women are not allowed to visit there, whereas, men can enter into Satyun Jo Aastano's shrine. A very interesting fact was revealed by the visitors that Shah Paryun and seven sisters of Satyun Jo Aastano are real sisters, i.e. in total they are nine sisters. Two sisters got the name of Shah Paryun, because there is a myth that they had wings and that is why they were buried separately. Women visit this shrine in a huge number, thus researcher got a chance to interview a few women there, among whom a woman named Bushra came to visit with her four sons and she came to pray for one of his sons. She lives in Thatta and has been visiting shrines for last 25 years. Like every other person, she also thinks that Sufi shrines are the source of fulfillment of their desires and their issues will be resolved, because these Sufi saints

are pious and their blessings are with the followers always. According to her, if a person asks for anything from these saints or bow down before their grave, then it is not idolatrous act, in fact it is a way to show their love and respect for them. Bushra does not have any elementary education and she does not know how to recite Quran or to offer prayers and even she has no concept of fasting, because they do not have a family of religious trends. At a question regarding gender differences, Bushra looked at the researcher strangely and said Allah has created men superior to women, therefore, women are inferior and men are their owners and they can control our lives. This reply definitely shows that lack of education and religious knowledge leads to ignorance. Women are not even aware of their rights and consider that men can treat them in any way they want.

**Observations**

Unlike Karachi, almost all the shrines in Makli and Thatta were not well maintained and people there have no sense of cleanliness. There could be many reasons like, the visitors do not care and spread the litter wherever they sit and due to a huge number of visitors the administration is also unable to maintain cleanliness throughout the day. Like all other shrines the Urs is not celebrated in Satyun Jo Aastano. People give bestowments on the fulfillment of their wishes and desires in cash and kind form according to their status. They purchase souvenirs (oil, flowers, and clay) at the shrine. Men and women both can visit here equally.

**Case Study 6: Mai Makli**

The shrine of Mai Makli is known by her name. The history of this shrine dates back at least 1000 years or maybe more than that. The care taker while giving the details of shrine said that the construction of this shrine was the best example of architecture and the walls were decorated with gold, but with time its beauty is lost. Some people say that once there was a temple of Mai Kali, whose name was changed from Maa Kali-Di to Mai Makli. From historical evidence it is known that Mai Makli used to live here, therefore, the temple was transformed into a shrine and was named after her. This shrine is under the administration of the Department of Auqaaf and religious affairs. The care taker added that Mai was a very miraculous person; she used to go to Arab countries, spiritually to sell milk and returns by the evening. Mai once saw in her dream that someone called her name and told her that this shrine is your Makkah ( ہذا مکہ علی، یہی تمہارا مکہ ہے) therefore, she started to live here. Later this area and the graveyard became famous by her name. Mai Makli was known for his miracles, one of which was that, if anyone picks up the heavy clay pots of milk, gets his/her wishes fulfilled, but now these pots are broken, in fact the entire shrine is destroyed; only the rear wall is left. Her Urs is celebrated every year on 15-17 Shabaan. People bestow money, meat, animals and

edibles. People take souvenirs (miraculous salt, coloured threads and oil) from there like all other shrines. The researcher interviewed 43 years old Umme Habiba at the shrine of Mai Makli. Her entire family pays visit to all the shrines in Thatta every year. Habiba said the visitors are not just Muslims, even non-Muslims pay visit to the Sufi shrines. There are some shrines which allow the visitors to stay a night, but few of them are closed for visitors after the sunsets. She said that polytheistic acts are practiced on all shrines, which should be controlled by the government and department of Auqaaf and religious affairs. Few people are involved in illegal acts and criminal activities also, which spoils the sanctity of these sacred places.

## Observations

The importance of Mai Makli can be understood by the fact that she is known as the leader of all Women Sufis of her time. Once this shrine was a perfect example of classic architecture, but now it is completely destroyed. Only rear wall and grave are left with a name of Mai Makli written on it, other than that, nothing indicates that it is a Mai Makli's shrine. This shrine is on the mountain's peak and the atmosphere here is very pleasant and peaceful. This shows that Mai Makli was really a pious Sufi saint and she was equally competent like men Sufis. A person feels complete serenity by standing there. According to the beliefs of people she was also blessed with spirituality; therefore, they get blessings by performing rituals there. The children born as a result of divine intercession are brought here and they become liable to serve at the shrine throughout their life. These shrines are a source of spiritual satisfaction for people. In the shrines at Karachi usually the care takers are known as (Mutawalli/ Majaver متولی/مجاور،), similarly in Makli and Thatta usually these administrators are called (Khalifa / khismatgaar خدمت گار/ خلیفہ،).

## Conclusions

Through this article the researcher has attempted to demonstrate that in past few years debates regarding role of women in Sufism have emphasized that women hold equal importance in Sufism and can be equally ascetic. These debates have contributed their part in establishing possibilities for gender equality and developing social awareness about the role of Sufi women in all aspects of life directly or indirectly based on their thoughts and practices. Within Sufism the multiplicity of global views, patterns and various perceptions regarding women are absorbed and create impact not only on the status of women but also on their activities. These global views, patterns and various perceptions lay down the foundation for theoretical explanation, illustrate and envisage presence of women in Sufism. It is seen that the concept and practice of gender equality within the human societies emphasize on and encourages participation of women in Sufism. This mindset has created space for women in Sufism equal to men in terms of

status, role and responsibilities. On the other hand, we observe that gender biased societies have negative perception regarding women entering into Sufism. Thus, we can say that both perspectives can be viewed across the world and somehow women remain invisible even in religious matters.

In ancient times the Sufis received salutation by individuals because of their devotion, honesty, piousness and piety. The Sufis have even taught people to live peacefully with harmony and to spread amicability without the involvement of religion. Sufism has deep roots in Islam and has a very rich history, but the history has not recorded the role of women Sufis. History remains silent regarding the role of women Sufis and their participation as practicing Sufis. Yet there are so many authentic names of Sufi women, who had a very overwhelming and inspirational role in mysticism. It is debated that in Sufism, one has to shun the materialistic life, which is not possible for women to seclude worldly aspects from their life. This is the common perception of social groups and it has definitely damaged the image of women Sufis. Whereas, Islam teaches us to maintain equality between men and women in all aspects of life and religion, and anyone can become the "Friend of Allah" by adopting righteous path. This Islamic perception justifies that women are equally capable to perform anything, which is witnessed due to the productive participation of pious Muslim women and their contribution towards Sufism. In South Asia, it has been observed that due to mix cultural social setup the true essence of Sufism has declined due to the mingling of customary and traditional aspects of other religions. This blending of cultures in South Asia has changed the face of Sufism somehow and the practices at tombs and shrines demonstrate that Sufism concepts are not regarding the teachings of Islam anymore.

The role of women in Sufism is far more graceful and appreciable than just being an ascetic person. They not only believe in or bound themselves to practice a solitude life, but they assist men in different relationships as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters and their interpretations of life and behaviour leaved a commendable impact on them. Such as women being wives help their husbands in bringing up their children and fulfill their domestic responsibilities as well. Along with all these reproductive responsibilities they devote themselves for worshipping Allah and practicing asceticism. Their actions in their respective domain clearly show that women have sacrificing nature, whereas, Sufi men usually leave their families behind for their religious events, without caring for their families. Similarly, women as sisters have played a vital role in the life of their Sufi brothers. They were known for being ardent listeners and best companions, by providing them their support and assistance whenever needed. Women have shown great respect for Sufis in their own ways, for example, giving gifts to them, helping them financially, documenting their religious work and writing poetry, narrating their miraculous actions and trusting them whole heartedly and etc. Sufi women and common women both have a deep impact on women, they enter into Sufism willingly and not just by trusting men

Sufis blindly. This attitude shows that women act wisely and makes right decisions. Men and women Sufis both have created impact on each other, for example Hazrat Rabia Basri impacted many of her contemporary men Sufis.

Women should be given fear chance of doing things and making decisions on their own regarding their life, for this purpose society should play a vital role. Sindhi society and culture should revise and readdress its mannerism to sustain peace for the upcoming generations, because without giving women their freedom, liberty and equality society on the whole cannot prosper. Government being a driving force should play its role in maintaining tolerant and peaceful society, because Sindh is known as land of Sufis and these are the true traits of Sufis. Political leaders and media being an important institution should raise awareness among common people about the equitable society and to establish public opinion about status of women having the objective of betterment of common people. The people of rural areas have low access to education, which hinders them from getting a chance to understand their religion and responsibilities as being a man or woman. Customs and traditions or social practices, which bounds women and damages their status, should be abolished. Tolerance, peace, harmony and social justice should be revitalized in Sindh and incorporating it with economic strength, because people migrate to Karachi city from interior Sindh for economic activities. Thus, economic based equitable society can prosper and people can learn to respect each other rights. And all this enlightenment should be done in the light of Sufism spirit in Sindh.

The devotees from all over Sindh come to visit Sufi shrines of men and women Sufis both, common people have great respect for both men and women mystics. They come to shrines with a belief that their desires and needs will be fulfilled by praying over the grave of a Sufi saint. People perform various forms of rituals at shrines and these rituals are a way of showing their gratitude to the Sufis. Most of the people visit shrines by their own will and many others are influenced by their friends, relatives and religious leaders to visit shrines and to be the part of festivities at shrines. These visitors usually belong to middle class or lower class families having different socio-economic status. People who usually practice Biddah (بدعت) and believe in the myths and superstitions are mostly women and illiterate poor people.

As per findings of this research people have various perceptions of their own. These perceptions regarding myths and superstitions are based on gender, literacy, social and economic status. Overall it was observed that even those who perform acts of Biddah were convinced to certain extent that all these practices are not permissible in Islam, but they still practice it. Major aim of this study was to find out why people actually visit shrines and travel long distances to come to the shrines. It was concluded that most of the respondents were convinced that they will be blessed from the shrines only due to the blessings of Sufi saints. As far as visitors were concerned they had no doubt in mind

regarding gender of the Sufi saint, they seemed to believe in both male and female Sufis, but in our present social setup, women are still unrecognized in all walks of life. Though Sufi women also have many followers, but still they are not given the same status like men Sufis. Many Sufi women are known for their piety and piousness and many of them bear the power of miracles as well, even then they remained unnoticed in the history. Only few Sufi women got fame in a mystical world. In the present Muslim societies, the Biddah practices are commonly observed. People who visit shrines and tombs of Sufis perform false religious practices in the name of Islam. In Islam worshipping graves is strictly prohibited, but people follow such practices due to illiteracy and lack of religious knowledge.

## Limitation and Delimitations

Since the aim of this study was to find out the overall scenario regarding the role of women in Sufism in Sindh (Karachi and Thatta), therefore it was quite a challenge to interview respondents who visit shrines frequently and the care takers. Since interviewing people on any religious topic can offend them, because due to different belief system, researcher had to ask questions with care and keeping in mind that the questions should not be provocative. Religion becomes a personal matter, when a person faces different opinion other than his/her faith. Thus interviewing people is not an easy task. But first taking the care takers in confidence it became a bit easy to interview them. The respondents gave interview after getting assurance that their personal details will not be used anywhere neither directly nor indirectly. Taking pictures at the shrines was the biggest challenge, even the care takers resisted that, but with a little conversation they finally permitted the researcher to take few snaps only.

## Recommendations

To examine the status and role of Sufi women some serious researches are required and there is a need to change the social attitude towards women. In this study few recommendations are incorporated and they are as following:

1. Society should be gender sensitized to recognize the value of humans on gender basis. We shall held ourselves as honest, truthful, and a promising human being to accept responsibility to bring positive change in the society, to cultivate awareness within the existing culture, society and this should start from ourselves.
2. Sufism is a path of respect, nobility and servility; therefore, we should consider our actions above our personality, our personal gains and ambitions and should inspire others through our actions.
3. All men and women have equal status in Islam regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and age. Thus, there is no distinction among men

and women; anyone can educate themselves to the highest level and to seek highest station of spirituality.

4. All men and women have the equal right to express their emotions and feelings based on their spiritual ideas to acquire recognition through their abilities.
5. We should respect the opinion and ideas of others, the same way we honour our right of expression, our values and attitudes in order to establish a well balanced gender sensitized society, which holds women highly esteemed.
6. Women and men should be given equal opportunity to participate in public discussions for dialogues and productive arguments on all forums like spirituality, education, health, family life, marriage and divorce rights and other social issues.
7. Women should be encouraged to enter into Sufism without the gender discrimination and they should be given equal status like men Sufis.
8. Muslim societies should be moderate and balanced and should give equal chances to all its elements to survive and sustain their individuality.
9. There is a need to change social perception regarding the status of women, which Islam has given them and uplifted their role and status in all aspects of life including worldly life, religion and spirituality.
10. Tombs and shrines should be used as institutes where people can learn about Islam instead of practicing Biddah at the graves of Sufi saints.

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