Piri-Muridi in the Twin Cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan

David Hansen

Centre for International and Strategic Analysis, Oslo

Abstract

Sufism, *piri-muridi*, in Pakistan is an overlooked aspect of Muslim religious experience. This article sheds light on how respondents of the Twin Cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Pakistan, relate to this overlooked aspect, and tries to situate changes to piri-muridi in a historical context. As this article finds, being orthodox does not necessarily hinder adherence to *piri-muridi*. Rather, people of all sects, and even non-Muslims, regularly attend *'urs*, keep a relationship with a pir, or visit the shrines on occasions – as ways of exhausting all possibilities to find comfort, seek spirituality, or solve practical problems in their lives. This aspect, then, breaks down the apparent divide between the orthodox and the traditional in the sense that many people pick bits and pieces and make those pieces into their own practiced form of Islam. Yet, *piri-muridi* in the Twin Cities is experiencing a purification process where its opponents try their best to discredit it as 'un-Islamic', and its adherents are often critical of certain practices and rituals but still obey it.

Exploring *piri-muridi* in the Twin Cities

In the midst of the contemporary debate and focus on Islam, often revivalist or orthodox versions and not least the extremist version(s) of it, there is a tendency to overlook the fact that many people still relate to ancient beliefs and practices commonly associated with Sufism. In Pakistan, these popular Sufi practices are often labeled *piri-muridi* – which refers to the relationship between a saint (*pir*)[1] and the disciple (*murid*). Instead, the focus is almost entirely on 'High Islam', the revivalist or orthodox version as propagated by Islamists, as Frembgen (2008: 4) notes:

> In the Western media, Islam is almost exclusively identified with its official, scriptural, normative manifestation – orthodox, legalistic Islam. The significance of folk Islam in local contexts as well as other facets, dimensions and sub-regimes of this world religion which exist in parallel, especially the popular face of the Sufi tradition and the closely related veneration of saints, is either underestimated or ignored.

The basis for this article is my PhD research – which combined aspects of Islam, Islamism (*shari'a*), radical Pakistan, and aspects of 'folk Islam' or Sufism.[2] I thus had the unique opportunity to treat 'the

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[1] In accordance with the teachings of Islam, there can be no more prophets; humankind (still) requires spiritual guides and guardians. Thus, for this purpose, God has chosen saints, *walis* (friends of God) in order to watch over the world. In Pakistan, these saints are commonly referred to as *pirs*. Sufism was initially brought to the subcontinent by individual *pirs*, and after the thirteenth century, larger congregations, orders or brotherhoods, *tariqas*, started arriving (Ewing 1983: 254–5; Frembgen 2008: 18). *Shaykh* is also a word used with similar meaning to that of *pir* (Rozehnal 2006: 30), mostly in Arabic-speaking countries. Frembgen (2008) notes that the ideal of all Sufi saints is to be able to trace their lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad. In Pakistan, many *pirs* cannot claim to do so (p. 17).

[2] PhD dissertation titled "Radical Rhetoric-Moderate Behavior: Perceptions of Islam, *Shari'a*, and the Radical Dimension among Inhabitants of Islamabad and Rawalpindi in the post-9/11 Pakistani Reality." The dissertation was submitted to the University 11 June 2010 and publicly defended 11 November 2010. The evaluation committee consisted of Dr. Stephen Cohen (Brookings Institute), Prof. Tor H. Aase (University of Bergen), and Prof. Pamela Price (University of Oslo). Data for the study were

popular face of the Sufi tradition' alongside normative (Islamist) manifestations of Islam. In this fusion, I found some surprising responses and conclusions – which questions Sufism as (only) the 'path of love'. I quite often found the path to be quite orthodox and even take on a radical rhetorical outlook. My focus is not on the intellectual aspects of *piri-muridi*, although I do take into account any such reflections from my interviewees. Rather, in this article I will shed light on popular practices associated with *piri-muridi* as I find it important to convey what is happening in the current religious climate in Pakistan – not least owing to the seemingly adverse developments in the recent decades, which has led to a focus on (only) radical and extremist interpretations of religion.

Perhaps because of the lack of focus on 'folk Islam', there has been created an impression that Sufism may serve as an opposing force to the increasingly revivalist, orthodox, and even radical and extremist tendencies found in Pakistan. This impression, which has been created by the media and certain scholarly works alike, stands almost unchallenged, and may not be true for Pakistani urban centers like Islamabad and Rawalpindi (hereafter the Twin Cities). As I have found, and will shed light on in this article, many people in Pakistan do relate to *piri-muridi* in many aspects of their lives and blend it with their knowledge of Islam – making it their practiced form of religion. Yet, urban Islam as I found it in the Twin Cities is experiencing a shift towards an orthodox or revivalist form of Islam, often wrapped in Deobandi or Wahhabi packages, which has more focus on *shari'a* and condemns many of the practices commonly found in *piri-muridi* in Pakistan, whilst adhering to others. This resembles part of Gellner's (1978) 'Pendulum Swing Theory of Islam', in the sense that there is an increasing transfer of loyalty from the traditional 'folk Islam' (Sufism) towards a purist and scripturalist version of Islam.[3] It should, however, be emphasized that the transfer of loyalty is not necessarily

gathered through approximately 18 months of sequential fieldwork, wherein I relied on passive and participant observations, formal and informal interviews, and conducted two surveys (N=475 * 2). I also relied on my study/research experiences in Pakistan the last decade. All tables and pictures in this article have been collected and processed by the author.

[3] Gellner (1978), also see Hassan (2004: 13–4, 78, 120) for elaborative accounts on Gellner's theory. I will not describe the shift as a 'pendulum swing', as I do not necessarily believe that the pendulum will turn back towards what may be seen as the traditional 'folk Islam' of the past.

absolute but rather selective. This, again, differs itself from the perception of Sufism as mystical, ecstatic, joyous, and perhaps more importantly; anti-*shari'a* version of Islam.

The majority of the people whom I interacted with in the Twin Cities mostly expressed ambivalence towards Sufism, often condemning some of its practices and rituals, while embracing and adhering to others. Recitations of poetry or other in-depth intellectual expressions on the issue were mostly absent. During my fieldwork, I became increasingly convinced that Sufism in Pakistan is just as related to culture as it is to religion – the South Asian spices blended into one big 'melting pot' – and the result of that is a specific South Asian approach to ritualistic behavior towards religion, which sometimes surpasses religious and sectarian demarcation lines. Moreover, this culture is so deeply rooted in many people's lives that it is hard to assess where religion ends and culture begins.

I now turn to a few paragraphs describing how the two main Muslim sects in Pakistan, the Barelvis and the Deobandis, relate to *piri-muridi* in general terms and on an overall level.

The sectarian divide and *piri-muridi*

The Deobandis take their name from the town in which the sect was founded in 1867, Deoband in India. The Deobandi movement's founders were Muhammad Qasim Nanantvi [1833–1877] and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi [1829–1905]. The Deobandi movement's aim was to sustain a reformed Sunni Islam separate from the colonial state of India. In 1867, the reformist movement opened up a school in Deoband, India, in order to educate and promote their aim through the curriculum of studies of the Qur'an, the Prophet's praxis (*Sunnah*, as found in collections of his narrations: *hadiths* collections) and Islamic law and science. Contemporary Deobandis are increasingly influenced by the Saudi Arabian Wahhabi doctrine, and as among the Wahhabis, there exists a general theoretical objection to the worshipping of Sufi *pirs*, although individual Deobandis do follow the tradition of various Sufi orders, and emphasize individual spiritual discipline through spiritual masters.[4] Concerning this aspect, Ewing (1983: 254) notes

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[4] Abbas (2005: 103, 112); Ahmad (2008: 67); Cohen (2005: 180); Mohammad (2002: 221–2); Rahman (2007: 124); Talbot (2005: 148); Ewing (1983: 254).

that early Deobandis sought to, "…combine the roles of *pir* and *'alim*, espousing a doctrine according to which individual was to look to a single *'alim* as his definitive guide to religious law." In this context, Rahman (2007: 124) adds that the Deobandis "…did not oppose mysticism altogether, but did argue that adherence to the Islamic law (*Sharia*) was the path to mystical exaltation." I will return to how I found the stance towards *piri-muridi* among Deobandis in the Twin Cities later in the article.

The Barelvi sect takes its name from the place of its origin, Bareilly in India, where it was founded by Ahmad Reza Khan [1856–1921] as an opposition movement against the reformists, such as the Deobandis, towards the end of the 19th century.[5] In contemporary Pakistan, Barelvis have the greatest number of followers among the Muslim sects.[6] The Barelvis adhere to a system of Sufi and syncretic folk traditions, and attach great importance to Sufi saints (*pirs*), whom they treat as intercessors before God. For Barelvis, the Prophet Muhammad is treated with the utmost veneration and is attributed an almost divine status, and celebration of the Prophet's birthday, *milad an-nabi*, has become a favored and popular event.[7] Another feature of Barelvis is their veneration of saints and their ancestors, which most clearly manifests itself through the celebration of late *pirs* through festivals on the days of their deaths; the so-called *'urs* celebrations which symbolizes the 'mystical nuptial', the marriage of a *pir* with God.[8] The Barelvis are often called the main rivals of the Deobandis because of their devotion to celebrating saints, the way the sect has maintained plural manifestations of ancient pre-Islamic religions and cultures, and the near divine status that they attribute to the Prophet Muhammad.[9]

The Barelvis, unlike a majority of the Deobandis, supported the calls for an independent Pakistan before partition. In fact, their role in mobilizing for the new state was of tremendous significance in

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[5] Ahmad (2008: 67); Ewing (1983: 254); Kazimi (2009: 78); Mohammad (2002: 222–3); Rahman (2007: 125); Rahman (1984: 41).

[6] Cohen (2005: 180).

[7] Ahmad (2008: 67); Ewing (1983: 254); Mohammad (2002: 223); Rahman (2007: 125); Rahman (1984: 41); Zaman (2004: 11).

[8] Ahmad (2008: 67); Frembgen (2008: 6); Gilmartin (1979: 486); Mohammad (2002: 223).

[9] Ahmad (2008: 67); Mohammad (2002: 223).

various parts of pre-partition India. Sufi *pirs* and *sajjada nashins* (tenders of shrines)[10] put their weight behind the Pakistan Movements by using their spiritual and, quite often, political influence. They represented a vital role in rallying for the Muslim League and the Pakistan Movement, through, for instance, rallies that were held during '*urs* at different shrines.[11] The Barelvi sphere of influence was traditionally strongest among rural areas of the Punjab and regions of Sindh. In later decades, however, their support base has been extended into the urban areas as well – especially among deprived and poor urban dwellers. Despite popular Western perceptions, the Barelvis, just as the Ahl-e-Hadiths and the Deobandis, view *shari'a* as an important and fundamental prerequisite for Pakistan.[12]

As will become apparent later in this article, these demarcation lines between the Barelvis and Deobandis, when relating to *piri-muridi*, are not absolute in practical terms. This is not only related to an increased orthodoxy among most sects, but also to the fact that people (still) have the tendency to be quite eclectic in how they view and practice religion.

I will now explain the historical origins, evolution, and organizational structure of *piri-muridi* in Pakistan. The purpose of this is to situate certain terms as well as to give an impression of how the institution of *piri-muridi* came into being in the form it takes in contemporary Pakistan.

The Sufi legacy and practical make-up of the *piri-muridi* institution in Pakistan

Sufism is the mystic, spiritual, or esoteric aspect or face of Islam, and in Sufism, religious experience is the essentially significant component. Sufism as such thus complements the *shari'a*, or external

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[10] *Sajjada nashin* or *gaddi nashin* are regular terms used for the hereditary *pirs*. The literal meaning of *sajjada nashin* is 'he who sits on the prayer rug' (Ewing 1983: 255).

[11] Aziz (2001: 43–52); Hassan (1987: 560); Mohammad (2002: 223); Talbot (1999: 30, 69-70); Talbot (2004: 76). See Gilmartin (1979) for detailed accounts on the role of *pirs* in the Pakistan Movement.

[12] Mohammad (2002: 223).

law (exoteric aspect).[13] From the eleventh century, Sufi saints played a critical and perhaps the most significant role in spreading Islam and converting people to Islam in the subcontinent. Some even maintain that the saints enabled the 'Orthodox' Sunni Islam of the Arabian deserts to merge with the indigenous culture(s), making it acceptable for the people of South Asia at the time when Islam started to spread to the subcontinent. Later, Sufi saints were instrumental in preaching and developing popular Islam, 'folk Islam', through their missionary activities.[14] Sufi centers, *khanqahs*,[15] became an important institution in the subcontinent. These *khanqahs* provided Muslims as well as non-Muslims with spiritual guidance, social welfare, and education. They were in addition instrumental in various cultural activities for the public. The *khanqahs* had a special appeal to the public, as they represented something very different from the rigid and stratified Hindu structures in society. Instead, they focused on the equality of humankind.[16]

Sufism, in practical terms represented (mainly) through *pirs* and shrines (*dargah*), is an integral part of the religious organization of Pakistan.[17] Those that become followers, *murids*, are often related to as Sufis (although they may refrain from using the term themselves) and in addition, there are the *dervishes*, also commonly known as *faqirs*. A *murid* or Sufi does not necessarily bear any visible signs of affinity to his *pir*. *Dervishes* and *faqirs* on the other hand, have a total dedication and commitment to the ideal of poverty in their spiritual journey to God; their lifestyle is for them a means to seek salvation and constitutes a kind of mystic exercise. Their lifestyle also places

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[13] Frembgen (2008: 4); Mohammad (2002: 229); Verkaaik (2004: 69). The term 'Sufi' is derived from the word *suf*, wool. This is related to the practice of the early ascetics of Islam who wore frocks of rough white wool, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahmed 2003: 91; Frembgen 2008: 4; Malik 2006: 30).

[14] Buehler (1997: 299); Frembgen (2008: 35); Gardner (1993: 213); Hassan (1987: 553, 557); Iqbal (2007: 62); Malik (2006: 11, 31); Talbot (1999: 29).

[15] *Dargah* and *mazar* are also used to describe shrines. I will use the terms *khanqah* and *dargah* (interchangeably) in this article. *Mazar* is mostly used to describe the tomb itself in or under the *pir* is buried. Frembgen (2008) refers to *khanqahs* as lodges, which later on developed into *dargah* institutions. These *dargah* institutions would also include facilities like a mosque, communal kitchen (*langar*), hospital, schools – in addition to the shrine(s) of deceased *pirs* (p. 53).

[16] Hassan (1987: 555); Rozehnal (2006: 30).

[17] Cohen (2005: 196); Ewing (1983: 251).

them on the periphery of mainstream society and distinguishes them from moderate Sufis, who are often close to an orthodox Islam.[18] Frembgen (2008: 15), refers to P.M. Currie and explains the difference between a *dervish* and a Sufi by saying that, "A Sufi is one who tends towards the mystic life as it has developed within the framework of Islam, whereas a darvish [sic] or faqir is one who is attached full-time to the religious life either as a dependant of a Sufi establishment or as an independent wandering mendicant." Some tend to confuse the *pir* and the *dervish*, thus a distinction between these two should also be made, which Frembgen (2008: 19) describes in the following:

> The *shaikh*, *pir*, *ishan*, etc. who usually lives permanently at a shrine is a spiritual authority who instructs disciples in mystical teachings, writes mystical treatises and poetry or propagates religious reforms. A dervish, in contrast, who tends towards renunciation, is a wanderer both on an internal spiritual path and in this exterior, earthly world. He expresses the Sufi tradition in his life by seeking proximity to God through ecstatic practices.

The hereditary successors of the *pirs*, the *sajjada nashins*, commonly referred to as (just) *pirs*, play the role of mediators or intercessors between their *murids* and God. This is made possible through the spiritual blessings (*baraka*) bestowed to the *pir* during his lifetime, and after that, transcended to the shrine itself. The shrine and its *sajjada nashins* thus become the (new) sources of blessings. The *murids* must then gain access to the original *pir* through the living (hereditary) *pirs*.[19] This ritual veneration of saints and the replacement of the concept of direct contact with God, as it existed in the mysticism of early Islam and still practiced among many Muslims, developed in the subcontinent some time during the thirteenth and

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[18] Frembgen (2008: 2, 11, 14). The literal meaning of *dervish* is (one who goes) from door-to-door, i.e. a beggar or poor. *Faqir* means poor. Some *dervishes* are even venerated as saints after their deaths as people ascribe more magical than charismatic qualities to them. Certain *dervishes* became successors to shamans for nomadic people in Central Asia (Frembgen 2008: 14, 17, 29).

[19] Aziz (2001: 6); Buehler (1997: 300); Ewing (1983: 255-6); Frembgen (2008: 31); Gardner (1993: 213); Gilmartin (1979: 486-7); Hassan (1987: 557); Mohammad (2002: 229); Qureshi (2002: 36); Rozehnal (2006: 30); Talbot (1999: 29); Verkaaik (2004: 82).

fifteenth centuries.[20] Hassan (1987: 557) offers his explanation of the system of *piri-muridi* as it developed during the passage of time in the following:

> With the passage of time the *khanqahs*, as a socioreligious organization, evolved and changed. The spirituality of the mystic and knowledge of mysticism shifted from a *learned* process to an *hereditary* one. The spiritual power of the founder of the *khanqah* came to be transmitted through his descendant who became the center of the devotion of followers of the Sufi saints who, after their death, were usually buried in the *khanqah*. This was an important change and eventually led to the development of the master-disciple, or what is known as the *pir-murid* [sic] paradigm in which *pir* (or master) is the director and *murid* (disciple) a faithful follower obliged to surrender himself/herself completely to the *pir*.

The system of *piri-muridi* is also a system of (hereditary) reciprocity. In this, the development of *piri-muridi* in Pakistan is often seen to have changed from a system where *murids* would spend longer periods with the *pir* to a system of blind devotion to the *pirs*. In this, there is a split from the traditional rigid system. Ewing (1983: 260) explains this aspect of reciprocity of the *piri-muridi* system in the following:

> Historically, the importance of the shrines derives directly from the Sufi tradition, because most *pirs* were originally respected as Sufi masters and teachers. As the tradition has developed in South Asia, however, and in somewhat different ways in other parts of the Muslim world as well, there has been a partial split between Sufism as a rigorous spiritual discipline transmitted from spiritual teacher to qualified disciple on the one hand, and "piri-muridi" as the term is usually used, rather pejoratively, in Pakistan today, to mean a blind devotion of the lay follower (*murid*) to a *pir*, whom he expects to act as a spiritual mediator for him. Such *pirs* are exemplified by the traditional *sajjada-nashins*.

This shift, the evolution of a hereditary system of saint allegiance and not least what Ewing terms 'blind devotion of the *murid* to a *pir*', albeit as ancient as it may be, is something I found many respondents to object to, as I will explain later in the article.

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[20] Frembgen (2008: 30).

Whereas some look into the deeper meanings and understanding of Sufism from an intellectual perspective, for most people in Pakistan (especially among the general public in Punjab and Sindh), the usual form of worship is the contact, submission, and relationships they have with their respective *pirs*.[21] The *murids* show their affection for the *pirs* by visiting their *dargahs*, sometimes offering food or other items, and in return, they receive the *pirs'* *baraka* and promises of a better life, a cure, or otherwise that their wishes may be granted. The ability to heal and bestow their *murids* with *baraka* is said to be derived from the *pirs'* proximity to God. In doing this, *pirs* rely on the tradition of curing diseases as believed to be inherited by Prophet Muhammad himself.[22]

Dargahs and *sajjada nashins* are often visited when people suffer from a mental or physical illness, when desiring wealth or success, and even in trying to eliminate a threat or a magic spell someone has put onto them. The hereditary *pirs* and the spirit of the deceased *pirs* are thus seen as intercessors before God, negotiating healing, prosperity, and good fortune on behalf of the *murids*.[23] Often,

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[21] Fieldwork notes. Also see Mohammad (2002: 229).

[22] Frembgen (2008: 17, 27–8, 31); Mohammad (2002: 229). As Mohammad (2002) notes, some of the ceremonies being conducted at *dargahs* all over Pakistan are reminiscent of popular Hinduism (and Sikhism) (p. 229). This is also true for the relationships that often foster between the *murid* and the *pir* – which in Hinduism is the relationship between the *guru* and the *chelal sheshya* (Frembgen 2008: 128; Mohammad 2002: 229). Gardner (1993) notes that in South Asia, *pirs'* efficiencies to grant requests, give blessings, are being assessed on the basis on how 'hot' a *pir* is; the 'hotter' the *pir*, the more power he is said to have (p. 215). Frembgen (2008) exemplify the extreme influence *pirs* have over *murids* when he notes that some even drink the water that the *pir* has cleaned himself with, swallow his saliva and sputum, and even rub dirt from his feet onto themselves (p. 31).

[23] Pirani (2009: 4, 35). Pirani (2009) specifically stresses that many use faith healers, saints, for curing mental illnesses and that people may even combine the use of these saints together with traditional medicine (p. 4). Pirani finds that some of the attendees she studied expressed that they experienced relief of symptoms of diseases accounted to the healing powers of the shrine and *pir*. It should also be noted that she found that few of the participants at the shrine were offered, or could afford, treatment for their illnesses at private facilities (p. 177, 222, 273). In analyzing the environment of the shrine, Pirani says, "What I witnessed at the Shrine was not necessarily 'religious activity' but a social play where the actor attempted to use the context of the Shrine and it's religious legitimacy, and the therapeutic milieu to create innovative solutions to their problems. For many of them, this solution extended to their home life and became instrumental in their identity." (p. 289).

illnesses (of various kinds) are seen as having been 'spelled onto people,' wherein the *pirs* are seen as one way of remedying the illness. Regarding this, Pirani (2009: 28), who has conducted research on understandings and explanations of ill health and help-seeking among attendees at a shrine in Sindh, says the following:

> Pakistani culture is a mixture of rituals, traditions, and folk beliefs. The belief system underlying causation of illness and healing regimes is complex and multilayered. Explanations of illness include possession by jinn [spirits], ghosts or fairies; evil spirits; black magic spells and healing approaches including exorcism, sorcery, faith and traditional healers including long dead Sufi saints. Often the rationale behind these beliefs is again believed to be rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith.[24]

In describing how some *murids* experienced their connection to the shrine and how the shrine provided comfort and relief for them, Pirani (2009: 191) notes that:

> The attendees described a very affectionate relationship with the dead Saint. They located the spirit of the Saint within the geographical boundaries of the Shrine. This extended the relationship with the Saint to include a relationship with the place (the Shrine). They felt listened to, taken care of, and hopeful for change in their circumstances. Many attendees described how they had found a true guide and powerful protector in the Saint and how their lives had changed completely since they had found the path to the Shrine. When they felt restless, agitated, or low, they just had to go and hold the *jaali* [calligraphic screens or walls surrounding the shrine] to be reminded that they were cared for.

When a *pir* dies, most often a son or another descendant of the family takes over the task of acting as *pir*. He is then given the title of *sajjada nashin*. The *sajjada nashin* then takes on the spiritual responsibilities that rested with the old *pir*, and is in addition seen as caretaker of the shrine and as 'inheritor' of their ancestor's *baraka*. This gives the *sajjada nashins* the authority to wield spiritual power over their

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[24] In this context, a poll conducted by Gallup Pakistan titled *Views on Evil Eye & Magic*, February 2010, finds that 78% of Pakistanis claim to believe in both 'evil eye' and magic. Another poll conducted by Gallup Pakistan dated 16 February 2007 titled *Views of Black Magic and Tawiz Ganda* finds that 52% respondents believed in black magic, *kala jadu*. Similarly, 49% of respondents believe that wearing an amulet (*tawiz*) can be used to heal ill effects of *kala jadu*.

murids – thus, on the other hand, if the *murid* fails to oblige the *sajjada nashin*, this is thought to have adverse consequences.[25] This hereditary system has led Sufism to become an 'institution' in Pakistan, wherein 'houses of *pirs'* have accumulated large fortunes based on the worshippers' non-taxable donations.[26] The *pirs* are involved in many social dealings, ranging from the abovementioned activities, giving blessings at weddings, to giving advice to politicians. *Pirs* are parts of large networks involving the political sphere and elite of Pakistan, thus making them a political force in their own right.[27]

I now turn to discuss how Sufism has been subject to (instrumental) change by various political leaders in post-independence Pakistan.

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[25] Ewing (1983: 255, 259); Mohammad (2002: 229); Talbot (1999: 29); Verkaaik (2004: 82). Abbas (2007) in his research finds that *pirs* even exert power over their *murids* by, for instance, suggesting names for children (p. 40), this is also mentioned by Frembgen (2008: 31).
[26] Mohammad (2002: 229). Ewing (1983) notes that *sajjada nashins* annually collects contributions from the tribe(s) associated with the particular shrine in a process called *nazar* (p. 255).
[27] Mohammad (2002: 229–30).

Figure 1. 'A hungry *dervish's* walk.'[28]

Figure 2. Traditional Sufi.

'Redefining the saints'

Ewing (1983: 251–2) finds that *pirs,* through the organizational structure of the shrines, have been seen as an obstacle to (governmental) political and social organization of Pakistan. Until Ayub Khan's modernist but at the same time military rule, few changes to the shrines' structure were noted.[29] Ayub, and later Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, viewed the *ulama* as a hindrance to modernist development of Pakistan, as the *ulama* desired a literal return to a system based on Islamic law (*shari'a*). On the other hand, the tradition of the shrines, wherein the *sajjada nashins* were seen as feudal

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[28] Frembgen (2008: 2, 135) notes that itinerant *dervishes* usually carry a begging bowl (*kashkul*) around their necks, for collecting alms. It is said that when the bowl is carried on the back the *dervish* is not hungry or the bowl is full, and when carried on the stomach, the *dervish* is hungry. Frembgen also notes that the *kashkul* probably dates back to similar practices followed by itinerant Buddhist monks and Hindu ascetics (p. 135).

[29] Talbot (1999) notes that Ayub Khan even utilized the 'Sufi-vote' when he was able to mobilize support form the congregation of *pirs*, Jami'at ul-Mushaikh, in the 1965 elections (p. 30). Aziz (2001) notes that Ayub Khan is said to have been a *murid* of the *pir* of Dewal Sharif (p. 55).

aristocrats hindering political control, was not compatible with their aims. Both leaders desired to identify and legitimize their rule with Islam, and thus, as an attempt to balance out the orthodoxy represented by the *ulama*, and perhaps as a choice between what they perceived as 'two evils', they both co-opted the shrines.[30]

Ayub brought along some few changes to the way shrines and the *pirs* attached to them were to function. He concentrated his efforts on utilizing the shrines as a vehicle in his modernization process. Instead of suppressing the shrines, as in the examples of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Ayub co-opted them through a formal institutionalizing process of religious endowments, *awqaf,* with the 'West Pakistan *Waqf* Properties Ordinance of 1959.' This was further increased during Bhutto's era, and under Zia, was transformed into the Department of *Awqaf*.[31] In addition to the promotion of Sufism in the amended forms that the government wanted, Ayub Khan also started building infrastructure adjacent to the shrines in order to distract attention away from the traditional power of the *sajjada nashins*. This infrastructure included schools, hospitals and other institutions meant for the common social welfare of the needy. Already at that time, it was apparent that this kind of infrastructure was in opposition to the *sajjada nashins'* powers, as they represented alternative (and traditional) remedies and cures through their ways of giving blessings thought by the public to fix their problems, which often come in the form of amulets (*tawiz*), spiritual guidance, and conversations.[32] In this lies an important aspect in the sense that some things commonly

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[30] Buehler (1997: 311); Ewing (1983: 253).

[31] Aziz (2001: 55); Buehler (1997: 310); Ewing (1983: 251-2, 258, 262); Rozehnal (2006: 35). Ewing (1983) notes that Ayub Khan initiated the process leading up to the 'West Pakistan *Waqf* Properties Ordinance of 1959' – which gave the central government the power to directly control and manage shrines, mosques, and other properties dedicated for religious purposes (*awqaf*). The 1950 ordinance was superseded by another similar ordinance in 1961, and during Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto the *Auqaf* Act of 1976 came into being. All ordinances and the Act were promulgated in efforts to lessen the traditional political power of both the *sajjada nashins* as well as the *ulama*. Another goal of these ordinances was to persuade the public that the government was better equipped to maintain the shrines as well as that of trying to convince them of the inability of the *sajjada nashins* to grant blessing over their *murids* (p. 258–9).

[32] Buehler (1997: 310-11); Ewing (1983: 261); Frembgen (2008: 32); Hassan (1987: 562). Ewing (1983) notes that the policy of supporting institutions for social welfare continued during Zia's rule (p. 264).

associated with modernity, such as amenities and state organization, social welfare such as education and medical assistance, are assessed as countering the interest of the traditional institution of *piri-muridi*. Bhutto's emphasis on the shrines can hardly be overestimated; he utilized the shrines to convey and carry out his policies, and thus encouraged government participation in the Sufi rituals, such as the celebration of the anniversary of the death of a *pir* (*'urs*) at the shrines.[33] Whereas, as Ewing (1983: 263) notes, during Ayub Khan's rule, "…participation in the *'urs* by government officials was generally limited to the literary and social-welfare activities scheduled to occur in conjunction with the *'urs*." During Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's rule it became common practice that higher government official conducted some of the ritual ceremonies, such as the laying down of the cloth covering the tomb (*chadar*) at the beginning of an *'urs*.[34] Bhutto often went to rural shrines and interacted with the *pirs* as well as the *murids*, sometimes referring to himself as a *faqir*.[35] Talbot (1999: 216) notes that Bhutto himself even came to be seen a martyred *pir* after his death, with thousands of people coming to his tomb every year. In modern day Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto has also been elevated to a similar status, something like a female *pir*, *sheikha*, where people regularly go to her gravesite in Larkana, Sindh, as well as the place where she was killed, Liaqat Bagh, Rawalpindi, where a makeshift memorial has been raised.

In trying to weaken the aristocratic outlook and the traditional roles as political leaders of the *pirs*, both Ayub and Bhutto emphasized the 'true nature' of the Sufi tradition, wherein political leadership (in theory) is separated from spiritual authority – thus, as Ewing (1983: 253) terms it, they were trying to 'redefine the saints.' This redefining was concentrated on an emphasis on the return to the roots of Sufi teachings, in order to link themselves to religious authority and legitimacy as rulers of the Muslim nation of Pakistan.

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[33] Aziz (2001: 56); Buehler (1997: 311); Ewing (1983: 252, 263); Hassan (1987: 562); Talbot (1999: 37). Qadeer (2007) notes that during Bhutto's rule, *qawwali*, the musical genre made up of Sufi poetry, gained the status of national music, often being featured in films. The *qawwali* was embraced by large segments of the society (p. 246). Ahmad (2008) notes that listening to *qawwali* aims at getting the listeners into an ecstatic trance (p. 67).
[34] Ewing (1983: 263).
[35] Verkaaik (2004: 83).

However, the reforms put in place by Ayub Khan might have worked against the desired aims of weakening their powers, instead strengthening the influence of the *pirs* and the *sajjada nashins* by recognizing their practices and by formal appointment of staff to oversee the *nazar*.[36]

With General Zia ul-Haq's *coup d'état* in 1977 came a (slight) shift in the government's role in co-opting the shrines. Zia was less concerned with the promotion of shrine activities, such as the yearly *'urs* celebrations.[37] For Zia, the religious authority sanctioned by the shrines was not particularly important, as he instead focused more on legitimizing his rule and formulating new policies with the assistance of the *ulama*. The *ulama*, the Deobandi *ulama* in particular, resisted the idea of *pirs* and shrines and the traditional relationship between the *pir* and the *murid*, and saw no difference between the exoteric and esoteric aspects of religion, thus arguing that there was no ambiguity between *shari'a* and Sufism.[38] Zia nevertheless co-opted *pirs* and congregations of *pirs* (*mushaikhs*) as he saw fit in order to bring them into conformity with his Islamization project. Zia's re-orientation thus led to attempts to fuse Sufism with (the *ulama's*) orthodoxy by claiming that the original Sufis themselves were mostly from *ulama* adhering to *shari'a* whilst at the same time, or perhaps because of this, trying to lessen the role of the hereditary *pirs*.[39] Zia did however acknowledge the authority of the *pirs*, and sometimes included them in important conferences, such as the first convention of *mushaikhs* in August 1980,[40] and even promoted Sufi culture – something the following extract from a brochure published by Pakistan Tourism Development in 1985 suggests:

> Muslim shrines and tombs of Sufi Saints represent Muslim culture [and] traditions. … These Sufi Saints still rule over the hearts of Pakistanis and Muslims of other countries. With the passage of time

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[36] Talbot (1999: 166).

[37] Rozehnal (2006) notes that the *'urs* is often seen as a marriage with God – in the sense that it is with the death of a *pir* when he, or she, enters into the eternal union with God (p. 36).

[38] Aziz (2001: 56–7); Ewing (1983: 253–4, 263–4); Hassan (1987: 563).

[39] Ewing (1983: 254, 264); Qadeer (2007: 69). Ewing (1983) notes that in Zia's time, there was a concentrated effort to shift the focus from the *pir* being a holy man in his own right, to that of the *pir* being an *alim*; a (religious) scholar meant to educate and guide the followers in Islamic law (p. 267).

[40] Buehler (1997: 311).

the number of devotees has increased. The visit to shrines by millions of people every year is an abiding testimony of their absolute and undisputed sway over their followers and of their divine blessings emanating from their hallowed graves.[41]

It is nevertheless reasonable to argue that Zia's moves were attempts at replacing the traditional system of *piri-muridi* with the orthodoxy represented through, at that time, Deobandi scholars and scriptural (Islamist) doctrine; which represented the backbone of Zia's Islamization process itself. Zia's Islamization did have an impact on how the institution of *piri-muridi* in Pakistan has changed. One major change was that religious movements, including that of the Sufis, became highly politicized, and in turn started preaching a more conservative version of Islam. During Zia's rule, mosques were increasingly designated and divided among sectarian lines, and subsequently connected to larger networks. This gave the *ulama* greater political and religious influence over them and in turn empowered local *mullahs* to challenge the institution of *piri-muridi*.[42] The orthodox seeds sown during Zia's rule have thus taken root and continue to influence popular opinion in favor of the orthodox at the cost of the traditional 'folk Islam' in Pakistan.

I now turn to discuss how orthodox Islam is challenging and influencing 'folk Islam' in urban centers, like the Twin Cities, in contemporary Pakistan.

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[41] Cited from Buehler (1997: 299). Talbot notes that Zia did try to implement some policies that were seen as negative by the *pirs*. For instance, Zia challenged some of the *sajjada nashins* by implementing a ban on kite and pigeon flying, a practice associated with many Sufi saints, under the validation that they constituted a breach of sanctity and privacy for women. The authorities eventually had to withdraw the implementation of the ban (Talbot 1999: 251; Talbot 2004: 72). In contemporary Pakistan, kite flying is still a controversial theme, which is often banned by provincial governments.

[42] Abbas (2007: 16, 18).
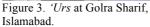
Figure 3. *'Urs* at Golra Sharif,
Islamabad.

Figure 4. Golra Sharif, Islamabad.

Orthodox Islam challenging traditional 'folk Islam' in the urban centers

Contemporary urban Pakistan is witnessing a shift from the traditional system of *piri-muridi*, wherein the followers, the *murids*, would take the *pir's*, or the *mullah's* words for that sake, as 'the (only) truth'. People tend to be hesitant to reveal information regarding their affiliation with Sufism and seem hell-bent on trying to distance themselves from it – instead, rhetorically, portraying themselves as orthodox Muslims, who disregard anything seen as un-Islamic.[43] In this context, Malik (2006: 31) notes that, "…a growing middle class of Muslim purists consider dance and music to be latter-day influences from non-Islamic sources, which have to be shunned." I am not limiting such a shift only to the 'middle class', rather, I find the phenomenon to be valid on a broader scale, including that of lower segments in the urban milieu as well. In this lies the fact that more

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[43] Zaman (2004) argues that this shift from Sufi and shrine-based religiosity towards orthodoxy is attributed to the rise of sectarian organizations, and in turn, the Deobandi *ulama's* use of the sectarian environment (p. 136).

people are turning to modern technology as well as utilizing traditional religious sources (Qur'an and *Sunnah*), which they access through a higher degree of availability to such sources amplified by increased education levels in general. This is something that Hassan (1987: 563), more than two decades ago, shared in his farsighted analysis, in which he argued that education and urbanization challenges the old 'folk Islam', weakening it and instead strengthening orthodox Islam. In his analysis, he argues that:

> …the social change which Pakistan has undergone in the past three decades has created socioeconomic circumstances conducive to mass mobilization in support of a *ulema*-led purist Islamic tradition which I have elsewhere called Islamization. Urbanization, increasing literacy, and industrialization have created an urban environment which is sufficiently differentiated to provide the *ulema* and the purist Islamic tradition with an important and strategically located constituency. …education and urbanization appear to be related to an increase in a universalistic religiosity and a decline in folk or popular Islamic practices.

In contemporary Pakistan, there is an increased emphasis on 'Islamic identity'; this is especially valid for the (educated) urban middle class. In the Twin Cities, this emphasis has led to a turn towards orthodox Islam at the cost of traditional 'folk Islam'. For example, the Wahhabi-oriented al-Huda movement is among the most popular movements for the urban middle class. In this, a new way of locating followers has developed. In previous times, the Tablighi Jama'at was the main organization known for going door-to-door in locating and recruiting supporters. In the last few years, other organizations, including al-Huda, Hizb ut-Tehrir, Jama'at ud-Da'wa, and Deobandi movements have begun to follow the same pattern as the Tablighi Jama'at, locating people in the affluent living areas of Islamabad, in shopping centers, as well as visiting people at mosques or in their homes.[44]

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[44] In this context, in an interview with the author, Amir Rana of Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) argues that the main reason for the middle class' attraction to sectarian identity is their awareness of local and international issues related to the post-9/11 situation. Rana adds that even the Hizb ut-Tehrir is popular among the middle classes in urban areas of Pakistan. Al-Huda does not portray themselves as a sectarian movement but still is related to a puritanical Wahhabi Islam – which more often than not condemns Barelvis in the way they pay homage to *pirs* etc. Al-Huda

Deobandis, as seen earlier in this article, are often referred to as being orthodox and anti-Sufi. Still, many Deobandis have deep connections to Sufism but instead of entering into a 'blind relationship' with a *pir*, there seems to be a higher degree of intellectual reflection as well as a more personal and secretive approach in their Sufism. As I found in the study, quite often Deobandis would not reveal their adherence to it in public, nor alone when other people were present, but sometimes told me about their adherence to it in private. It is in this context I cite Roy (2002: 9), who notes that, "…the Deobandi do not oppose literature or poetry, nor even Sufism as such, although they condemn the "cult of the saints", i.e. addressing prayers to others than Allah." Indeed, it was among Deobandis that I was met with the most critical voices against saint worshipping, i.e. "cult of the saints", yet a certain few Deobandis also surprised me with their extensive knowledge of Sufism. Most often, these Deobandis would relate their responses to the intellectual aspect of Sufism, rather than practices and rituals commonly found at shrines (which they would most often object to). Still, I emphasize that these Deobandis were in a minority, as I agree with Rozehnal (2006: 44–5) who describes how the Deobandis in general have changed their attitude towards Sufism from having an intellectual closeness to it, towards rejection of it.

The orthodox movements' success in gaining supporters is starting to have an adverse effect on the traditional Barelvi organizations. The main reason for this is that the orthodox movements, such as al-Huda and Hizb ut-Tehrir, offer an alternative to the mystical, often secretive and difficult to understand Sufism as preached by the Barelvis.[45] Furthermore, as Ayesha Siddiqa argues, "There has also been an exhaustion of the old, the traditional institution of *piri-muridi*". By this Siddiqa meant that they have stopped giving anything back to their followers. Thus, the missionary activities, the *da'wa,* of the orthodox movements seem to have a greater appeal to the (mainly educated) middle classes of urban centers as Islamabad. Concerning this, the director of Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) Amir Rana, says the following:

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often preaches about universality of Islam and use words like 'equality', *ummah*, the brotherhood of Muslims, etc. in their rhetoric.

[45] Also see Qadeer (2007: 147, 153).

> I think right now the Barelvis are not paying attention – which
> comparatively with other sects here in Pakistan is [sic] more moderate
> in their religious ideology. They are losing ground, but they are also
> themselves responsible for losing this ground as they have very few
> religious practices in common which educated persons can believe in,
> e.g. what is going on in the shrine etc. This is also a response to the
> practices being done by the Barelvis, the *pirs*, and the scholars. Thus,
> people are inclined to go towards people who are more educated, they
> are appealing, they [the orthodox movements] can speak English, they
> are very well mannered; so in reaction they move to these movements.

The shift from the old 'folk Islam' may, as indicated earlier, be also
probably related to increased access to newer technology such as
Islamic TV broadcasts and the Internet. This is especially the case in
Islamabad, where many of the residents are former emigrants to
western as well as Arab states. In exploring this issue, I was initially
very surprised to experience that former immigrants to countries of
Europe and the USA – who, in the majority, had emigrated from
traditional Barelvi areas such as Kharian, Gujarat, Lala Musa, Mirpur,
etc. – were now applying Wahhabi rhetoric.[46] Going deeper into this, I
discovered that there had been a concentrated 'reinvention' of religion
among many of these 're-emigrants'. In their re-discoveries, they had
turned to technologies such as the Internet in locating 'the religion'. In
many cases, their point of departure was said to be at a minimum:
thus, when they started 'Googling' information on Islam, they mostly
ended up finding orthodox Islamic websites.

    These 're-emigrants' are often very engaged in supporting their
local mosques, which often have their own religious seminaries
(*madrassas*) attached to them, and donate large sums of money to
these private institutions – something serving as one factor for the
increase in orthodox, Wahhabi-based mosques in the capital in recent
years. In practical and palpable terms, there exist multiple changes
among this group. This is especially valid relating to marriage patterns
(e.g. less focus on pre-Islamic rituals, instead turning to the 'pure'
traditions in Islam), lifestyle (e.g. dressing more like Arabs; women's
turn to the *abaya* and *niqab*, and men's wearing of Arab headscarves
(*rumal*); leaving aside western dress codes), and discourse and

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[46] Qadeer (2007) also finds that Pakistani workers in the Gulf and Arab states have
brought back Islamic conservatism in their old settings (p. 269).

rhetoric – which seem to be highly influenced by Wahhabism.[47] This dimension to urban Islam has also been noticed by local academics, such as Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, who told me in an interview that:

> In a sense, this is natural because technology brings homogenization: you may now sit on the Internet and access Islamic web-sites globally. What does one see over there? The Qur'an and its translations, *hadiths* [collections of the Prophet's praxis, the *Sunnah*], *fatwas*, political commentary, etc. Those searching for Islam almost always arrive at a purer, more orthodox, view of the religion. This view is not tempered by culture, tradition, or historical experience. Instead, it is directly taken from the written word which is generally harsher than tradition, particularly that of Sufi Islam. Tradition had ameliorated some of the harshness that is inherent in the religion. In Pakistan, pristine Wahhabism is growing while the Sufi and Barelvi tradition is on the retreat. Slowly but surely one sees the *pirs* and 'folk Islam' become less important with time.

A factor in the increased shift towards orthodoxy at the cost of traditional 'folk Islam' is thus seen as being caused by increased levels in literacy and education in general. The argument is that when people have the opportunity to explore for themselves, they tend to read religious literature, including the authentic text of the Qur'an and the collections of *hadiths*. This is also the case for educational institutions outside the religious sphere, such as universities and colleges. Commenting on this, Hoodbhoy says:

> Paradoxically, as literacy levels went up in Pakistan, the degree of orthodoxy also increased. Why? Because when people are able to read they read that which is available. Because religious books are all around and available at highly subsidized rates, people read largely about religious matters. A lot of literature comes from hard-line Islamic organizations, and this preaches a version of Islam that is pretty harsh.

On the other hand, shrines and *pirs* are most likely influenced by a growing orthodoxy in society as well. Not only are they reported to be preaching a more conservative version of Islam. This has in turn led certain shrines to implement a stronger discipline, like for instance an increased emphasis on reading of the Qur'an, as well as the banning of

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[47] Qadeer (2007: 16) has similar findings in his work.

women and discouraging of music in the shrine areas.[48] Some, such as Abbas (2007: 16, 72), even point to the possibility that some *pirs* have ventured into the *jihad* game by sending the students of their *madrassas* as well as their *murids* to join the *jihad* against allied forces in Afghanistan.[49]

I now turn to look at how the people of the Twin Cities view the institution of *piri-muridi* and how they perceive certain practices and rituals commonly associated with it.

Perceptions of *piri-muridi*

In exploring issues related to *piri-muridi* in the Twin Cities, I had anticipated (and hoped for) many intellectual and/or spiritual reflections on what Sufism constitutes for the respondents. Alas, from the huge majority of people I interviewed, observed, and had conversations with, only fragments of such were found when they were describing their relations to Sufism. For some, it is a system of reciprocity, wherein one pays homage to the saint (*pir*) or descendent of a *pir*, being the good follower or disciple (*murid*) that one is supposed to be. For others, Sufism is something they have not fully thought through but still adhere to as they see that it can have some practical and religious benefits for them later. Indeed, as Pirani (2009: 36) argues, most *murids,* instead of 'investing in the spiritual training,' simply surrender to acts of obedience towards the *pir*. It is in this context that Robert Rozehnal (2006: 46), a contemporary scholar on Sufism in Pakistan, says that, "…questioning Pakistanis about their views on Sufism may elicit any number of responses—from reverent, extemporaneous recitations of the poetry of a local saint to harsh

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[48] See also Gardner (1993) for a study of a Sufi-cult in northeast Bangladesh that has turned towards orthodoxy – banning singing and dancing, focusing more on recitation of the Qur'an and formal prayers (*namaz*), as well as limiting women's attendance at the shrine. Gardner attributes some of this change to the fact that many devotees are migrants (UK, Arab states) who have undergone orthodox transformations.

[49] Abbas (2007) introduces his readers to a 60-year-old respondent, who used to frequent shrines and had a formal relationship with a *pir*, having sworn his allegiance (*bait/bay'a*) to him, and later in his life emigrated to Saudi Arabia – where he became convinced that his previous practice of attending the shrines was *shirk*. The respondent later became involved in *jihad* in Afghanistan (p. 103).

invectives against the moral depravity of the uneducated masses who flock to the shrines."

Very few people I met during the fieldwork explained *piri-muridi* in an intellectual context or by drawing on Sufi poetry or other spiritual explanations. I did, however, have the pleasure of being acquainted with a man who did offer such explanations: a local neighborhood 'living *pir*' (*zinda pir*) in his late seventies, originally hailing from Indian-administered Kashmir. The following is his explanation on how he entered into the world of *piri-muridi*:

> It happened like this [how I became a *pir*]. Let's see, I sought my master [teacher, *murshid*] in my youth, and then I accepted his discipleship. At that time, I already had two small children. I went to Jalalpur to visit the *murshid*. Will he provide food for us or not (I wondered)? When I went to his shrine, my children had fallen asleep. I said to myself, "If he is a true *pir*, then he will provide us food; otherwise, I will not believe him." This is my own experience. This *murshid* of whom I became a disciple is now dead, now his son is his successor [*mahant*;[50] the head of the shrine]. First time I visited the shrine, at one o'clock in the night, a number of people were sitting inside there. Then an order came from the inside, "Look for a person who has two children with him. First, food will be given to them and then distributed amongst others." People were looking for us in the mosque, here and there, but we were in the shrine. People were worried because they could not locate the person who they were told to feed. The *mahant* held a lantern and came inside shrine. I closed my eyes, when I saw him. He asked me to go with him to have some food. We were walking in front of him, and he was behind us with the lantern in his hands. He ordered someone to bring food and said that, "First your children will eat the food, then you will be served, and after that, other people will be served." I sought forgiveness and said that, "I wanted to test you; you have passed my test." That is the thing; at that time, truthfulness existed but nowadays it is gone. They [Sufis] were not liars. They worshipped Allah in the real sense.

Although the *pir* had stopped administering *tawiz'*, and otherwise told people he was no longer 'in the business,' I regularly met people who said that they had received his help in various matters recently. He himself argued that he had stopped functioning as a *pir* as there were

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[50] Note that the *pir* uses the word *mahant*, which is seldom used in contemporary Pakistan, as it is a Hindu word derived from Sanskrit and used to describe the head of a Hindu or Sikh temple.

too many imposters, acting as *pirs* or *faqirs*, in addition to what he perceived to be an abuse of people's trust and money by most *sajjada nashins*. He also said that he believed he had become more 'scripturalist' (orthodox) during the last couple of decades, as he wanted to distinguish himself from what he called 'un-Muslim' (*ghair Muslim*) practices in contemporary *piri-muridi*. Perhaps because of this, I would regularly run into him in the local Deobandi mosque during prayers.

Before turning to what other respondents had to say about *piri-muridi*, another extract from the same interview with the *pir* follows, in which he explains one of his many strange encounters with Sufis of the past. In this story, the *pir* tells about an encounter he had with a man he believed was an imposter, selling *tawiz'* for money, only to be surprised that the man was not so and allegedly had special skills:

> Once I saw a man who was clean-shaven, who smoked, and administered *tawiz'* to people for money. I told myself, "I will see what kind of a man he really is [whether he is an imposter]. I will check him out at night when he doesn't offer prayers." I made a hole in the wall and was surprised to see him. He was scattered in pieces! His legs, head, arms, and other parts of his body were scattered! And the voice '*Allah hu*' [Allah is] came out from each part. I thought he was dead but the next morning I was amazed to see that he was still alive. I approached him and asked what had happened. He told me, "What you thought about me [imposter] was not right. There is a difference between my inner and outer self." Then he asked me not to disclose his secret during his life. Otherwise, I would have to bear damage.

From my previous informal conversations with people in Pakistan about *piri-muridi*, I had anticipated and hoped for more stories like the one in the extract above. Alas, most respondents kept their expressions of *piri-muridi* to practical and ritualistic aspects of it.

'Sufism is an integral part of Islam, but some practices are un-Islamic'

As seen from the table below, most respondents (82.53%)[51] perceive Sufism to be an integral part of Islam but among these, some 20%

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[51] When response options 'a' and 'b' are combined.

added that the Sufism practiced in Pakistan has incorporated many Hindu and other pre-Islamic practices. These practices are not necessarily seen as legitimate (*jaiz*) practices *per se*, but rather as innovations (*bid'at*) derived from Hinduism or other pre-Islamic cultures and religions.[52] For most people with whom I interacted in the Twin Cities, Sufism was neither intellectual nor seen as prescribed norms for how to live one's life. Rather, it was centered on the yearly functions of *'urs*, keeping some sort of relationship with a *pir*, or occasional visits to *pirs* when in need of remedies and blessings. Those that argued that Sufism is the same as it was during early Islam mostly had no additional comments or information. When asked directly about specific issues, certain practices, or rituals, they would often say that they had no knowledge about the particular issue but feared it is inherited from the Hindus. Very often, respondents would ask how they were supposed to be knowledgeable about Sufism when they did not even have basic knowledge of Islam other than the rituals which have been passed on to them by their ancestors.

Table 1. Sufism as an integral part of Islam (Survey II).

Do you consider Sufism (*piri-muridi*) as a part of Islam?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes, everything about it is Islamic – as it was in the early period of Islam.*	297	62.53%
b) *Yes, but some practices are derived from Hinduism and other pre-Islamic cultures.*	95	20%
c) *No, it is not part of Islam.*	66	13.89%
d) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	17	3.58%
	475	**100%**

Some respondents did explicitly express that Islam and Sufism in Pakistan consist of other cultural or so-called un-Islamic religiously inherited practices. For many of these, there were often expressions that these 'un-Islamic' practices should be gradually removed from

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[52] Verkaaik (2007) notes that the ruling elite post-independence were instrumental in labeling Sufi practices, 'folk Islam', as impure (*napak*). This was especially valid for the relationship of the *pir* and disciple – *piri-muridi* (p. 90). Many non-Islamic, including Hindu customs and cultures were adopted by the early Sufis of the subcontinent (Aziz 2001: 7; Malik 2006: 30–1). Verkaaik (2005) also finds that some of the traditions relating to Sufism are commonly referred to as *bid'at*, innovations, by reform movements. At the same time, he still finds defense of the values found in the traditions in Sufism among his respondents (p. 48).

the religion through enlightenment: religious (orthodox) education. Very few saw these culturally inherited practices and rituals as beneficial either for Islam nor for the people of Pakistan as such. Some few exceptions were found, however, such as the respondent quoted below, a 45-year-old retired Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) employee. His take on Sufism and Islam in general was quite atypical in the sense that he felt proud of having a religion that had assimilated different pre-Islamic values, rituals, and practices, which he did not see as 'un-Islamic', but rather as a proof of there being only one God. This is a short extract from this interview:

> Sufism is a huge part of most people's lives in Pakistan, in fact in all of South Asia. In fact, Sufism probably has a greater role in people's lives than the real authentic [orthodox] Islam. This is a part of our legacy and culture; partially derived from Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions.

The respondent furthermore pointed to another issue in the same interview: the place people hold for religion, in the sense that most people adhere to the 'easy way out', which for many is a form of Sufism, as opposed to the more intellectual and scriptural orthodox Islam (which the respondent refers to as authentic Islam). This aspect means that certain *murids* let their *pirs* perform their religious responsibilities on their behalf, for which of course, the *pir* is compensated. Although some will point to rituals and practices in *piri-muridi* as being 'un-Islamic', and thus argue that they should be removed or stopped, while going to the *'urs* they very often seem to engage in and enjoy these 'un-Islamic' practices. Among the practices objected to I regularly found respondents condemning the tradition of getting into an ecstatic trance, a state of mind in order to achieve closeness to or even unity with God, often related to as *dhammal*.[53]

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[53] This *dhammal* is meant to achieve a state of ecstasy referred to as *hal* (conversations and interviews with Hugh van Skyhawk in 2007; Rozehnal 2006: 42). The *hal* is considered a state of ecstasy as a gift of mercy from God. In this state, humans are 'communicating with the ultimate reality.' Although the term *dhammal* is used to describe someone dancing, whirling, or other type of bodily movement in order to get into a trance with the objective of reaching unity with God, the actual meaning is the rhythmic sequence of drums, which is considered essential for inducing *hal*. It is also common for Sufis to turn to drugs, such as hashish and opium, and alcohol in order to reach *hal*. (Frembgen 2008: 167, 176, 183–8).

Other things that are objected to are the practices of ritual offerings of salt (and other commodities), burning candles, gravesite rituals, and of course, the practice of some people at Sufi shrines of taking drugs or drinking alcohol. The following extract from an interview with a respondent, a 26-year-old part-time student, also uncovers another aspect to this dimension. The respondent highlights the fact that most entrances to shrines are relatively low in height, hence one has to bend down, to bow before the *pir* (which is common when meeting them in person), which he perceives as being un-Islamic:

> Yes, it is [part of Islam] but we have to think and reassess some of the things going on. The *sajjada nashins* should tell the *murids* about the original Sufis, about their life routine, their prayers, and their living style and should ask them to do the same. It should not be like going to the graves once in a year [for the *'urs*], putting a piece of cloth on the grave [*chadar*] and acting '*dhammals*' together with women and that's it. These things should be avoided because these are un-Islamic. …a lot of things [are derived from Hinduism], for example, the door of a mosque is usually high but in shrines they are short in height and people have to go through them by bending down. The same is the case of the temples. Then you see people offering salt, burning candles, etc., which also is in Hinduism. I think it is not a part of our religion. Burning fire and after that acting '*dhammal*' and dancing. …all these things that they do are not in our religion.

Yet, despite these so-called un-Islamic practices in *piri-muridi*, as practiced at shrines, many people do go there. However, as I will explain in the following, even more people might indeed go to functions at shrines or otherwise visit *pirs*, but as they are embarrassed to reveal their affection for it, they often decline to admit it.

Figure 5. *Murid* after *dhammal*.

Figure 6. 'Sampling the products.'

'Of course I go there, but it has changed its character'

As seen from the table below, I found the number of respondents saying that they go to Sufi shrines or visit the yearly *'urs* of *pirs* (31.37%) much less than the number of respondents who said that they perceived Sufism to fully be part of Islam or with some pre-Islamic rituals integrated in it (which totaled 82.53%).[54] This figure is probably higher in practical terms, as I have found that many people do not even tell their relatives that they visit shrines or otherwise seek help from *pirs*. Thus, I would instead see the figure presented as those 'admitting to going to shrines or visiting the yearly *'urs* of *pirs*'. The main argument for this is that many respondents seem to be embarrassed at disclosing their relationships with the shrines.

[54] A Gallup Pakistan survey, titled *Views on Visiting the Graves of Famous Saints*, January 2010, finds that 52% of Pakistanis admit to having visited shrines of *pirs*, 47% said they had not. I see the discrepancy between Gallup Pakistan's findings and my own to be caused by two factors. Firstly, Gallup Pakistan asked whether respondents had visited shrines, whereas I asked if respondents visit shrines. Secondly, and perhaps most important, Gallup Pakistan's survey includes rural and urban respondents alike; rural respondents are more likely to having visited shrines than their urban counterparts.

Respondents sometimes express that they feel that although it provides comfort to them, *piri-muridi* is argued by 'most people' to be something ancient and an institution that only 'eats out of the poor man's pockets,' taking advantage of them – a point that I will return to below.

Table 2. Visiting of shrines and attendance at *'urs* of *pirs* (Survey I).

Do you ever go to Sufi shrines or visit the yearly *'urs* of *pirs*?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes.*	149	31.37%
b) *No.*	308	64.84%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	18	3.79%
	475	**100%**

For those who admit to going to the shrines, this admission is very often followed up by clarifications in the sense that they only go there to pay their respect to one particular *pir* or simply to offer funeral prayers (*fateha*).[55] I often found the tendency among respondents to emphasize their disapproval of some of the practices and rituals taking place at the *'urs*. This was most evident when respondents described people who consume drugs and alcohol, dance, or engage in other so-called 'un-Islamic' activities at the shrines. Respondents would often add that the *'urs* had suffered due to cynical people trying to gain material wealth for themselves, for instance by selling artifacts, prayer books, and other 'glossy items' such as decoration pieces for homes and cars etc., which are common in the marketplaces (*melas*) set up adjacent to most larger shrines. Another important issue, echoed by most respondents was a negativity towards going to the shrines in order to beg for something for themselves, either from the *sajjada nashins* or through the shrine itself. Instead, most respondents would argue that *they* were only paying their respects to the deceased *pirs* by offering *fateha* prayers. Some, like the following cited respondents, a 35-year-old man working as a shopkeeper and a 27-year-old owner of a Public Call Office (PCO), would express that people have lost the

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[55] A Gallup Pakistan survey, titled *Views on Visiting the Graves of Famous Saints*, January 2010, finds that 64% of Pakistanis admitting to having visited shrines of *pirs* said they went there to show respect, 34% said they visited to get their prayers fulfilled or wishes come true, 11% said that they went there to receive spiritual healing, 4% said they visited shrines to receive free food or gave no response.

'true meaning' of going to the *'urs*. The main argument was often that in the past people would go there to learn about the old Sufis' ways and then try to follow their examples in their own lives. The respondents say the following:

> *Shopkeeper*: Of course I go there! They [*pirs*] are the beloved people of God. They used to spread Islam. Now look at us, what we are doing today. We go there and abuse their shrines; people go there and become intoxicated; drink, use drugs, and people are beating the drums and dance over there. That is a total abuse of the dignity of the shrines. I don't say that people should refrain going there but they should (go there to) recite the holy Qur'an, offer *fateha* prayers, and beg from God. A special prayer from God in order to make us like these people [the original saints, *pirs*], and make us like the people who followed [*murids*] these saints [in the past]: these things are correct.

> *PCO owner*: They [*pirs*] are on the right path. They sacrifice their lives, families, and properties just to earn Allah's favor. Whatever they begged for, they achieved from Allah. Certainly, we must go their shrines but not beg something from these graves, and not burn candles etc. These practices are prohibited in Islam. I have been visiting Bari Imam [shrine in Islamabad] and many other renowned places. All these evils ['un-Islamic practices'] have been adopted because of some of the people going there.

Also, consider the following from another respondent, a 27-year-old businessman commuting between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, arguing that although on the one hand it is acceptable to visit shrines, on the other it is heresy to maintain gravesites for longer periods of time. He said that he was basing his perceptions on his long stays in Saudi Arabia, where his experience with gravesite practices was obviously different.[56] On this issue, the respondent says:

> I usually go to *'urs* at different shrines, but I don't have that much interest. We only go to give grace to and worship some special *pirs*. Some of the practices in Sufism are actually Hindu, and I don't like that. For instance, when we bury people, people make a huge fuss about it: burning candles, decorating, setting up stones etc. That is not in accordance with Islam. In Saudi Arabia, people are buried, and

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[56] Abbas (2007) has similar findings in his work. He attributes the 'sinfulness' of going to graves to Wahhabi influence brought home by emigrants to the Middle East (p. 60).

after ten years or so, the graves are cleared, in order to create space for new ones. We should not be making large graves, putting up stones etc. Again, this is the work of the religious leaders; they want to be remembered, so they make it happen. In addition, many people are exploiting the situation, taking drugs and alcohol, saying they want to experience 'the oneness' [*tawhid*] of Allah, while in fact they are only bad people [*haramis*]. But we [can also be understood as I, from ham] still go there; it is our habit [*'adat*].

As seen in the extract above, the respondent claims that the main problem with the shrines is that religious leaders themselves encourage the system as a way of being remembered and worshipped after their deaths, thus also sustaining the family heritage and securing income for generations to come. Still, as he himself admits, he goes to the shrines and attends *'urs*, saying that it is related to his (family's) customs and traditions.

Whereas contemporary mainstream Pakistan is highly sectarian, the shrines bring together a myriad of sects, sub-sects, and religions. Not only are the shrines popular places of worship for Sunnis: Shias, Hindus, and even Christians alike visit them regularly, especially for the *'urs* ceremonies.[57] What I initially found odd was that many Christians would say they that would regularly visit shrines of *pirs* and go to *'urs*. While talking with them, most said they go there because they have faith (*iman*) and that the chain (*silsila*) of *pirs* has been part of their upbringing.[58] In this context, they often downplayed the differences between themselves as Christians and the majority Muslims in society, often arguing that there was very little separating them in practical terms and social transactions in society as a whole. Returning to the practice of going to the shrines, some of the Christians maintained that the major reason for going there is related to an old practice of the pilgrimage to the Shrine of Mariyam, which is specifically known to be a place where childless women go to get

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[57] Fieldwork notes; Mohammad (2002: 229). Qadeer (2007) in his findings also report that sectarian differences matter little at shrines (p. 74, 256). Van der Veer (1992) in his research on Sufism in (Indian) Gujarat, found that Hindus were present and even participated in some rituals at some shrines (p. 555, 562). Frembgen (2008) also notes that Hindus venerate Muslim saints, although as he notes, "The latter [Hindus] see the saint, who is considered to be alive (*zinda*), as an incarnation of god Lakhsmana, in myths the son of Vishnu and the brother of Rama." (p. 26, 35).
[58] *Silsila* in this context is the chain of connection between the *pir* and the *murid*; an order (See for instance Kazimi 2009: 35 for further details on this concept).

blessings in order to become pregnant. In this context, most Christians would mention that even Muslims go to this particular shrine to get blessings.

As seen from the table below, those respondents who said that they did not visit shrines expressed that they did not care or believe in the institution as such. When talking to them in greater detail, however, the common explanation was that they would like to go but seldom found the time to do so. Thus, arguably, more people would visit the shrines if they found the time.

Table 3. Reason given for not visiting shrines/attending *'urs* (Survey I).

If you do not go to Sufi shrines or *'urs*, why not?	Total	Percentage
Of total respondents		
a) *I don't think it is permissible in Islam.*	50	10.53%
b) *I don't care/believe in such things.*	199	41.89%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	59	12.42%
	308	**64.84%**

'They have lost their way'

I found most respondents to adhere to the idea of *pirs* having some kind of power to intercede on their behalf in earthly matters. These earthly matters would range from (blessings for) having children, receiving cures for medical or psychological illnesses, being promoted or getting married, to resolving economic misfortunes. My observation regarding this is that people in the Twin Cities will visit their (hereditary) *pir*, usually after a *qawwali* session, after the *'urs*, or whenever the *pir* is available for the public, and then offer their 'silent wishes'. Then, the *pir* 'intercedes' with God on their behalf. Mostly, this intercession is conducted through advice which is often given to the *murids* in philosophical and/or complex language, or, as is very common, the *pir* prescribes a practical cure. The practical cure is achieved either by blessing an item or (holy) water (*ab-e-zam zam*) brought by the *murid*, advising the *murid* to say special prayers (*du'a*), and/or giving the *murid* an amulet or a pendant (*tawiz*) said to give relief or comfort.

Figure 7. 'Locked-prayers'.   Figure 8. 'Prayers in a tree'.

The *tawiz* usually consist of either a simple (mostly black) thread or a combination of a thread and a small piece of paper with certain verses or extracts of Qur'anic verses written on them. In addition, there is often written a series of three-digit letters – which the *pir* claims have some specific meaning, although this is not revealed to the *murid* – to help them gain their wishes. The *tawiz* will normally be put in a locket or sewn inside a leather cover and worn around the neck or on one of the arms. There also exist other types of *tawiz'*. For instance, some are hung in trees (these are usually pieces of cloth that are hung in trees adjacent to the shrine) or put on (the exhaust pipes of) automobiles, and some even are made to be rapidly thrown and dissolved into water or fire, which again is said to rapidly trigger the desired effect. It is sometimes maintained that once the *murid's* wish has been granted, the *tawiz* will automatically disperse, although I have often witnessed people coming back to the shrines in order to remove their (hanging) *tawiz* after their wishes have been granted.

The wearing of *tawiz* is contested among some. It is often perceived as an act of idolatry or polytheism (*shirk*), although I found most respondents, including Deobandis, to permit the wearing of *tawiz*

for one's safety: so-called *hifazati tawiz*.[59] For such an example, see the following extract from an interview with a 36-year-old (Deobandi) respondent currently working as a taxi driver:

> It [*tawiz*] is according to Islam. It is also useful for bad sight. [In addition to the *pirs*] it is also administered by the *ulama* but they do not play with people as some false *pirs* do. My child has one around his neck because he is frightened at night and starts sleepwalking in the house. Angels are also with my daughter, who studies [at Lal Masjid] in Islamabad, she also wears it around her neck. *Tawiz* is legal in Islam.

As pointed out by the respondent, even some among the *ulama* administer *tawiz'*. I only came across a few people who had had been administered *tawiz'* from the *ulama*, and based on these few, it seems that the *tawiz'* given by members of the *ulama* are not particularly mystical or difficult to understand, but instead consist of special Qur'anic verses believed to relieve people of discomfort or illness. I also found certain Deobandis who had been advised by religious leaders to wear (silver) rings or pendants with semi-precious stones such as turquoise (*firoza*) or carnelian (*haqiq*) attached to them, as these stones are said to have healing or comforting powers. The wearing of such rings is also very common among Barelvis. Usually the *pir* will receive money or another type of gift (*futuh*) in return for his services. After an interceding session with the *pir*, which usually involves the *murid* bending down before the *pir*, most often the *murid* donates an amount of money to the *pir* – which is given as a gift to the shrine. In this process, the *murid* declares or reassures his allegiance

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[59] Pirani (2009) notes that faith healers prescribe a variety of treatment including amulets, holy water, special prayers (*du'a*), and slaughtering of animals in dealing with health conditions (p. 66). I found it common to believe that *pirs* had to power to intercede, or to call upon people to become *murids* for instance, through dreams. Very little substance came out of the conversations I had with people on the issue, most saying they were too embarrassed to disclose any information at all, albeit they strongly believed that *pirs* regularly visited people in their sleep (fieldwork notes; also see Ewing (1990) for more on *pirs* interceding with people through dreams). Abbas (2007) mentions one example of a young Barelvi whose mother, after he changed his daily religious rituals towards Wahhabi practices, brought him to a *pir* in order for him to see the mistake he had committed. The *pir* gave the man a *tawiz* to be put under his bed in order for him to be 'put on the right track' (p. 41). Frembgen (2008) also provides some accounts on the *pirs'* practice of writing and administering *tawiz* to *murids* (p. 32).

to the *pir* by kissing his hand (or ring on his finger). This process of swearing allegiance to the *pir* is often related to as *bait/bay'a*.

Table 4. Whether visits to shrines will enhance one's life (Survey II).

Do you think that going to *pirs, 'urs*, or other Sufi gatherings will enhance your life?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes, these people have real powers.*	356	74.95%
b) *No, they are just frauds/imposters.*	97	20.42%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	22	4.63%
	475	**100%**

Some respondents believe that *pirs* have 'lost their way' in the sense that they are taking advantage of the 'common man' without putting anything back into the system (i.e. providing for the people). On this issue, there are ambivalent views: on the one hand people believe *pirs* have the power to intercede before God, and on the other, do not feel that it is appropriate to beg for anything from anyone else than God – although by having the *pirs* intercede on their behalf, they do so in practical terms. This point is also related to the next issue, in which there also lies some ambivalence. Most respondents will say that *pirs* are taking advantage of 'the common man' by defrauding them of what little wealth they do possess. As seen from the table below, this figure is relatively high, almost 70%. In addition, the respondents answering *'Don't know'* often said that they suspected that *pirs* were taking advantage of them but had no way to confirm it and did not want to challenge the *pirs* in as they saw a potential future danger in upsetting them.

Table 5. *Pirs* taking advantage of 'the common man' (Survey I).

Do you believe Sufi *pirs* are taking advantage of 'the common man'?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes.*	331	69.68%
b) *No.*	76	16%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	68	14.32%
	475	**100%**

The ambivalence with which the *murids* offer their respect, and often money or other items, to the *pir* on the one hand, and at the same time say that they are probably being taken advantage of, seems illogical

on the surface. This system is probably partly linked to old notions of reciprocity. This system of reciprocity between the *pir* and the *murid* – hence the name *piri-muridi* – is a system wherein the *murid* is supposed to keep the chain (*silsila*) of his or her ancestors intact. In this, the *murid* is expected to keep up the tradition of obeying his or her specific (hereditary) *pir,* although the *murid* might have started to question the validity of the institution of *piri-muridi* as such. One respondent, the same 45-year-old retired PIA-employee referred to earlier, after saying that he regularly visits shrines and attends '*urs*, as well as having an active relationship with a *pir*, said the following about the practice of certain *pirs* of taking advantage of people:

> Certain people are taking huge advantages of this [*piri-murid*]; selling prayers, *tawiz'*, and other blessings etc. They are professionals, thieves, just taking advantage of the [unfortunate] people; the followers (*murids*). The *pirs* still dominate society; they keep large support bases, which they even mobilize in elections etc.

The respondent also pointed to another important factor; namely that of the *pirs'* involvement in politics. This aspect will be discussed later in this article.

In addition to the aspect of *pirs* taking advantage of people's faith by 'stealing their wealth,' there also exist reports of physical and mental abuse going on at some shrines.[60] In the general context of *pirs* taking advantage of people, there is a common perception that the 'real *pirs*, *faqirs*, *dervishes*, and Sufis,' representing the true and authentic powers, have gone into hiding, or rather into a state of occultation. The 'visible *pirs'* and the shrines they maintain, in the function of being *sajjada nashins*, are thus seen as not possessing the real powers that the 'hidden *pirs'* possess. The reason why the 'real *pirs'* have gone into hiding is regularly explained as being a consequence of society's downfall, which has opened the path for bad people, allowing some of the *sajjada nashins*, to turn the old shrines and the institution of the shrines, into 'money-making' factories for themselves without giving anything back to the people. See the following excerpt from an interview with a respondent, a 28-year-old shopkeeper, who feels this way:

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[60] See for instance Pirani (2009: 73). Pirani found that a small group of people was being held at a shrine against their will. In those cases, parents or other elders had made the decision to keep them there (p. 272).

> All these people, the *pirs*, they are just number twos [*do number pir*; imposters]. In the past, there used to be good *pirs* as well, they are now all gone; they have gone into hiding. Just look at the people in Golra [Sharif] they are only interested in politics and money, and in Pakistan if you are involved in politics, you get the money. They are only giving back a little, you can go and eat at their *langars* [*langar khana*], and stay there for some days, but it is nothing like it used to be. I don't have the exact knowledge [of how it used to be in the past], but people say it was very different before. The *pirs* used to have powers, help people etc. They have lost their way. They are the ones that should help the people, but now the people are the ones providing support for them, and they [*pirs*] enjoy it very much. Look at their big buildings, dazzling cars – it is not right.

The following respondent, a 25-year-old currently unemployed man who volunteered at a local (Deobandi) *madrassa*, also expressed a similar view. He emphasized the important role of *pirs* and individual Sufis in previous times, and argued that this role is now filled by movements such as the Tablighi Jama'at, as the 'true *pirs'* have gone into 'hiding':

> After the Prophet and his companions, pious people [*pirs* and Sufis] became the cause of spreading of Islam: people such as Ali Hajweri in Lahore. Now this work is being done by Tablighi Jama'at, especially in Raiwand [Tablighi Jama'at headquarters in Pakistan], where thousands of people are always involved in preaching/missionary work (*da'wa*) and teaching. Groups are being sent to the whole world for preaching. Non-Muslims are rapidly converting to Islam. I think it is the righteous way as they spend their own money, lives and precious time… Nowadays, true *pirs*, in its true sense, are very few. Because of these no-good *pirs* they [the true *pirs*] are now hidden.

The respondent points to an important factor when he mentions the Tablighi Jama'at; as mentioned earlier in this article, orthodox movements, such as Tablighi Jama'at are challenging the traditional 'folk Islam'. Not only are they 'giving something back' to the people through their charity work, they also treat people with respect, for instance by relating to them as brothers (*bhai*) and otherwise addressing and conversing with them in a respectful manner. This behavior is quite opposite to the practice commonly found at shrines, where it is the norm that one bows before the *pir* and treats him like a monarch.

In the context of '*pirs* having lost their way,' Ayesha Siddiqa Agha, herself having filled the role of a *pir*, acting as a female *pir* (*sheikha*) after her father died when she was in her early teens, draws on her own experiences and elaborates on this issue. Siddiqa explains that the practice of certain *pirs* and the institution as a whole to just 'take' from the *murids* without giving anything back, might also be related to the higher popularity of the orthodox movements. In the past, this type of reciprocity functioned in the sense that the *pirs* would help their *murids* and give them time and attention. In contemporary Pakistan, attention increasingly comes from the orthodox movements, which also tend to treat their subjects as equals, thus breaking old patterns of higher and lesser status between the religious/spiritual leaders and their *murids*. Siddiqa says the following about the lack of giving anything back to the people (*murids*) and hints at the consequence this might have in the future:

> These people [*pirs*] are accessible, but again, putting very little into the system, e.g. there are at least 14-15 members of my family – I don't do it – who constantly go on *safar* [travels, collection of *nazar*], visits to the *murids*, and the *murids* are spread from Sindh to Baluchistan. They go there, visit them, bless them, get money – so every time they run out of money they go on a *safar*. Any young boy in the family who is pathetic, can't do anything with his life and has no independent source of income, goes for *safar*. That's the method of sustenance: that is what I call spiritual predation. The problem with predation is, as the word explains, that it does not give anything, it just takes, it exploits. On the other hand you have, it is not an issue of challenging their philosophy, Akora Khattak [Haqqania Madrassa] and others, but they are at least giving the sense to the people that at some point they can be equal.

It has to be emphasized that although some *sajjada nashins* might deliberately take advantage of their *murids*, people do go there (mostly) on a voluntary basis, in that sense that they are 'letting themselves be taken advantage of.' In this, I regularly found attendees at shrines to have traveled long distances, even from abroad, to attend an *'urs* or otherwise to meet the *pir*. When asked about whether they thought they were being exploited, many quickly replied that they were not so, and that they gave away money on a voluntary basis because the *pir* had played a role in their ancestors' prosperity or the curing of disease, or just that they felt that they were being cared for

by the *pir*. Most shrines also offer their *murids* food through their *langar khanas*, medical services, as well as other practical assistance and advice, which I often found to be cherished by the attendees.
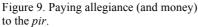

Figure 9. Paying allegiance (and money) to the *pir*.

Figure 10. *Dervish* in the outskirts of Lahore.

'It is OK to go there to offer *fateha*, but not to ask for something for one's self'

The visiting of graves is considered desirable or commendable in (most schools of thought in) Pakistan's Islam, as it is thought to serve the function of reminding men that death is certain and that men are mortal. It is also a way of seeking forgiveness from God for one's own sins. By Qur'anic tradition, visiting gravesites is said to be for men only. Thus, the practice of the many female *murids* going to shrines is considered *haram* by Deobandis and Wahhabis. In most cases, respondents will say that they go to the shrines primarily to offer prayers for the deceased, the so-called *fateha* prayers, where the *sura-e-fateha* from the Qur'an is recited.[61]

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[61] There are also those that resist the idea of going inside a graveyard altogether. Abbas (2007) finds an example of this in his work (p. 60).

Table 6. Permissibility in going to the shrines for *fateha* (Survey II)*.*

Is it OK to go to a Sufi shrine for *fateha*?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes.*	451	94.95%
b) *No.*	13	2.74%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	11	2.32%
	475	**100%**

At the shrines, many *murids* offer personal prayers (*du'a*) meant for God alone, although many respondents address their *du'as* to the shrine (or its deceased *pir*). This practice is seen by many respondents as an act of *shirk,* as prayers should only be offered to the one God. At shrines, it is also considered common practice to for instance burn incense (*agar batti*), heat special oils (*charagh*), decorate the graves, lay down rose-petals, and pour rose-scented water over the shrines. These practices are seen by many, especially among Deobandis and Wahhabis, as idolizing the dead and conducting these practices on graves or shrines, with the exception of the holy Ka'aba in Mecca*,* are often explained to be *shirk,* as it is seen as ways of challenging the concept of worshipping the only (one) God. As this respondent, the same 27-year-old owner of a PCO referred to earlier, argues:

> We should go to pray [*fateha*] for those who are buried. We must not, however, beg anything from them because it is forbidden in Islam to bow before anyone other than Allah. If it were so, wives would bow before their husbands. Thus, one should not bow before *pirs* or go to them for one's own needs. Still, you can observe that these things happen if you visit shrines.

Peter van der Veer (1992: 557) finds similar tendencies in his research in a Sufi environment in Indian Gujarat. Concerning the practice of going to the shrines, he refers to Deobandis of the Tablighi Jama'at, who are regularly seen as orthodox and opponents of 'folk Islam', and writes that:

> Muslims in Surat and its twin city Rander who call themselves Tablighi do not participate in or observe a saint's day ['*urs*]. The Tablighi Jamat is sometimes called an anti-Sufi movement, but according to the Tablighis I interviewed this is a misrepresentation. They do not oppose Muslims visiting Sufi shrines (*dargah*), but are against prayers to dead saints to intercede with Allah on behalf of the supplicant. The Tablighis cite the standard reformist argument that to

worship a saint in addition to Allah amounts to polytheism (*shirk*). In their view, a good Muslim should demand nothing from the buried saint or from his living descendant, but they do not object to visits to the shrine to pray for the benefit for the dead. The Tablighis present, then, an inversion of the usual Sufi practice in which the believer prays for his own benefit to the dead saint.

Van der Veer's (1992) findings concerning certain practices of 'folk Islam' being assessed as acts of *shirk*, as seen from the paragraphs above, are very similar to my own findings.

The tradition of asking something for one's own needs is common practice when visiting shrines of *pirs*, although this is not necessarily admitted by respondents, as seen from the table below.

Table 7. Permissibility of going to the shrines for one's own needs (Survey II).

Is it OK to go to a Sufi shrine in order to beg for something for one's self?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes, pirs have been given power by God in order to help people on the earth.*	14	2.95%
b) *No, one should only beg to God.*	451	94.95%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	10	2.11%
	475	**100%**

Many people offer their prayers (*du'as*) directly to the *pir* or shrine, try to 'gain from the *baraka*' of the shrine, or receive healing at the shrine. Many people will place small padlocks or threads on the bars of the windows or the metal grills located inside the shrine, hang pieces of cloth with their *du'as* wrapped inside on the trees adjacent to the shrine, or otherwise bring something to be kept at the shrine or its surroundings, to be removed when their wishes are fulfilled.[62] As part of the ritual when entering the shrine, one will experience people bending down over the tomb, touching it, and then fanning their hands to their faces repeatedly to get some of this *baraka,* in order to obtain

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[62] Pirani (2009) notes that some of the respondents in her research tied threads or chains around the doors of the shrine or around trees in the surrounding. She was told that these items served as witnesses to the requests that were made to the saint and served as some kind of protection for the *murids*. She also discovered that the *murids* believed that in their absence, the items would remind the saint of their request – so that it would be granted and that, when it became granted, it would 'fall off' (p. 197–8).

blessings or cures for illnesses. Some even bring items, such as clothing or (holy) water inside the shrine, as if to bless them.[63]

On certain occasions, I would also witness people carrying large chains around their bodies; they would always reply that, "They were in God's custody." When asking more about this – whether it was a punishment of some sorts, for instance – the usual reply was that it was a commandment of Allah, and not by the order of any *pir*. These people referred themselves as *faqirs*, although they were not the only ones calling themselves that.[64]

Using common rhetoric on the issue of the illegitimacy of 'begging for one's self', a respondent, the same 36-year-old uneducated taxi driver referred to earlier, expressed his view on this in the following:

> They [dead *pirs*] have no powers. They are dependent upon us because they are dead and we are alive. We buried them in graves and put lots of soil on top of that. They are our dependents because they are dependent on our *fateha* and [*du'a-e-*] *darud*. When you enter a graveyard, you do not know what is going on inside the grave. When you go there and pay your greetings [*salaam*], they reply but we never know. I have never gone inside a tomb [*mazar*] but I have prayed for them from the outside. Some people who regularly go there and say that they have prayed for me. Their prayers have been successful; I became rich, I had a child. Allah does not like those people who seek help from others. Allah listens to all prayers and replies, but some

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[63] Pirani (2009) finds some of the same behavior in her research. In addition, she notes that some would bring home the leftover, diluted oil from lanterns standing around the shrine to be used as massage-oil. This oil could also be bought at stores surrounding the shrine – in this lies, she argues, that the devotees could bring a piece of the shrine of with them as a reminder of the shrine and the saint (p. 191–2). I have also noticed oils, and other things found in the shrines being sold at the local *melas* (especially for Golra Sharif and Bari Imam where *melas* make up a huge part of the shrines' surroundings. What I however found, was that the *murids* would take these items to the hereditary *pir* in order to have them blessed and then taken home or sacrificed. In this, I also found *murids* bringing salt from home, which they would place into large bowls of offering inside the shrines – this is more noticeable at certain smaller shrines, and could be limited to Shia practices.

[64] Pirani (2009) in her research finds that some people wore chains around their bodies but in those cases, it was under the influence of the *pir* (p. 197). Frembgen (2008) also notes that other *faqirs* have expressed that they have worn the chains as a testimony to them being a 'slave of God'. Frembgen also notes that the wearing of such is related to a perception that it is supposedly protective of evil spirits, in addition to that of being a testimony to a specific bond to God or a *pir* (p. 135–6).

people think that their prayers were accepted and rewarded by these *pirs* and thus become loyal to them.

As seen from the extract, the respondent says that he himself has never gone inside a tomb but has gone to shrines to offer *fateha* prayers. What is interesting about the respondent's reply is that although he himself objects to the idea of asking something for one's self, he believes that he has been prosperous because of other people going to the shrines to pray for him.

Figure 11. *Faqirs* in chains.   Figure 12. *Faqir* in chains.

The ambivalence described above is common. Indeed, although some of the practices described in the paragraphs above are considered unacceptable, illegitimate (*najaiz*), and commonly described as 'un-Islamic' by the majority of Deobandis and Wahhabis, I have witnessed for myself that one may find people – either identifying themselves or otherwise revealing their sectarian affiliation as Deobandis or Wahhabis through dressing or other sectarian identification markers – doing so anyway. This is probably linked to the fact that although people may adhere to a particular sect, in practical terms, sectarian thinking or the 'absoluteness' of orthodoxy and 'folk Islam' is not as rigid and absolute as sometimes presented in popular or academic writings. Another important factor is that people

in dire needs, as I have found, will resort to most available solutions in easing their situations.

I now turn to look at how respondents perceive the popularity of Sufism. The questions relating to the popularity of *piri-muridi* were meant to trigger responses regarding the (continued) role of *pirs* in politics and to assess the degree to which respondents had awareness of this.

Historically, the ancient *khanqahs* not only had success with the public. Rather, from an early age, the subcontinent's Muslim rulers recognized the political importance of the *pirs,* which was largely connected to the popular understanding that *pirs* had the power to intercede with God on people's behalf. The *pirs* were thus seen to have enormous influence over their subjects, which again could be used for political purposes. The Muslim rulers thus began following a policy of supporting them, for instance by allotting properties and financing the building of shrines, which helped to ensure political legitimacy for their government's reign. This system of supporting the *pirs* continued during British rule in India, which meant that in return, the *pirs* had their positions as influential people asserted. In contemporary Pakistan, this system of state patronage of the *pirs* still exists and it has even been a common practice that local politicians have used their connections to the shrines as 'references' in running for seats in elections. *Pirs* are still deeply intertwined in the political scene of contemporary Pakistan.[65] As Ewing (1983: 257) explains:

> …once Pakistan was created, they [the ulama] hoped to control the direction of the new country themselves, thus adding an additional element to the political scene, but the landowners and *pirs* continue to be major political forces with which any politician who wants to remain in power must still contend.

Talbot (1999: 37) for instance, notes that when Benazir Bhutto made her first visit to Lahore as Prime Minister on 25 December 1988, she went directly to the shrine of Data Ganj Baksh (p. 37). When Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan in 2007, the first thing she planned to do

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[65] Aziz (2001: 7, 20); Buehler (1997: 306–7); Ewing (2004: 173, 190); Ewing (1983: 256–8); Frembgen (2008: 33, 59); Gardner (1993: 213); Gilmartin (1979: 494, 516); Hassan (1987: 558–9); Malik (2006: 31); Qadeer (2007: 204); Rozehnal (2006: 34, 45).

was to visit a famous Sufi shrine in Karachi. The ruling government's security set-up for her return did not however permit her doing so.[66]

In Pakistan, *pirs* are identified with the particular geographical areas in which their shrines are located, and often the *pir* believed to have converted a tribe to Islam is the one *pir* that the tribe relates to and grants their allegiance.[67] Elaborating on traditions of conversion and allegiance in pre-Islamic Pakistan, Ewing (1983: 255) says that:

> The original conversion did not usually occur as a mass movement, but rather in the form of a political move, in which the tribal leader went to the *khanqah* (Sufi Center) of the saint and accepted conversion in the name of the saint… Even today [1983] allegiance to these traditional saints is not a matter of individual choice. A man is the follower of a certain saint because this is the saint of his tribe. The tie is political as well as spiritual.[68]

It is obvious, then, that *pirs* may exert power over their murids in many facets of life, including that of politics, as the tie bound between the two has more than one controlling factor. Indeed, the *pir* not only controls the *murid* in this life, he also has influence over the next phase. This influence and power is not least exploitable when the spiritual and the political fuses, as is common in Pakistani politics where many prominent political leaders hail from the spiritual powerhouses.

'It used to be more popular in the past'

During the latter half of 2007, I noticed that many politicians became actively engaged in trying to link themselves to some of the *pirs*: this

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[66] Hassan (1987) adds an interesting and not much discussed aspect of the rulers' additional agenda in supporting the shrines; some *sajjada nashins* were granted large estates and in return they provided the rulers with military recruits for the state to use in case of political upheaval or war in the country. During Mughal rule, such military units were named *lashkar-e-du'a* (army of prayers) and were considered as important as regular army units were. For this system of military recruitment, the *sajjada nashins* were given substantial support in the form of land grants given either as *waqf* to the shrines, or as *jagirs* to individual *pirs* and *sajjada nashins* (p. 558).

[67] Ewing (1983: 254–5).

[68] In the Twin Cities, I often found people to choose a *pir* on their own initiative. Ewing (1983) also found the tendency among worshippers to locate *pirs* for themselves in another urban setting: Lahore (p. 255, footnote 4).

was also the case of Benazir Bhutto.[69] Part of the reason for including the question of whether Sufism was more popular now was thus a desire to see whether there existed any reflections on a potential role for the spiritual powerhouses in the election that was scheduled for autumn 2007, which was eventually held in the spring of 2008.[70]

Table 8. Popularity of Sufism now versus the past (Survey I).

Is Sufism more popular now than before?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes.*	129	27.16%
b) *No.*	281	59.16%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	65	13.68%
	475	**100%**

When asking about the perception of popularity of going to the shrines, keeping relations with the *pirs*, and going to *'urs* (aspects of *piri-muridi*), respondents tended to say that it was more popular in the past, as seen from the table above. Usually, respondents compared popularity of the institution of *piri-muridi* with the times of independence, in 1947, which of course, few people have direct knowledge of. Thus, respondents would say that they had heard so from their parents etc. There was however one respondent who was old enough to recollect the time of independence: the same living *pir* (*zinda pir*) as quoted earlier. In the following, he recollects the *pirs* as role models for the people, their instrumentality in preaching and converting people to Islam, as well as their role in the Pakistan Movement's push for Pakistan:

> When we turn the pages of history, we find these *pirs* as role models for others. By their character, they changed the lives of people and converted them to Islam. In our region, these *pirs* played a vital role in preaching Islam. They spent their entire lives on it. And a majority of people in the subcontinent believed in them, when this movement of

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[69] Accompanied by Dr. Stig Toft Madsen and Prof. Dr. Hugh van Skyhawk (QeU), I was attending a meeting with two hereditary *pirs* at Golra Sharif when we suddenly were told to leave because of the visit of a VVIP (Very Very Important Person) – who the next day was identified as Benazir Bhutto.

[70] In describing the relationship of *pirs* in politics, Qureshi (2002) notes that there is, "…a triangle of *zamindars*, industrialists, and *pirs* who are also landowners… They provide patronage to their followers and develop the basis of patron-client relationship. The tenants and the rural masses serve as "vote bank" for the landowning elites" (p. 17).

independence started. These *pirs* pushed their *murids* in this movement. In older days, people were ignorant [*jahil*]. There are so many examples. People used to bury their daughters alive.

As seen from the table below, the ones arguing that Sufism had achieved greater popularity in recent times saw this neither in connection with elections nor in the political context in general. Most of the respondents who argued that Sufism had gained popularity argued that the reason behind this was that in contemporary Pakistan, more people than in the past are living under terrible conditions and thus need comfort from the *pirs*.

Table 9. Why is Sufism more popular now than in the past? (Survey I).

If you believe Sufism is more popular now than before, why is it so?	Total	Percentage
Of total respondents		
a) *Elections are coming up – Sufi orders play an important role in the electoral process...*	10	2.11%
b) *People are more scared and need comfort from religious/spiritual persons.*	25	5.26%
c) *People often go there to get help (e.g. to get cured from diseases etc.).*	80	16.84%
d) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	14	2.95%
	129	**27.16%**

'People do not want to destroy their own destinies'

> The politician's power comes from the ballot, the General's from the gun, the *pir's* from the grave. The first speaks in the name of the people, the second in the name of the Army, the third in the name of the dead. (Aziz 2001: 62)

For a long time the *pirs* of Pakistan have taken advantage of the powers inherited through their ancestors. As Aziz notes in the quote above, their powers are also manifested through an eternal bond to the dead (original) *pirs,* which they often take advantage of. Often, as Weinbaum (1996: 650) argues, the political influence of the *pirs* is so strong that, "Election to the National Assembly is virtually assured for those considered a living saint by their constituents." Most respondents, however, see no role for the *pirs* in politics. However,

when confronted with different politicians' names and their affiliations with shrines and *tariqas*, respondents tend to recognize the link between politics and *pirs*. Then the respondents would mostly argue that the spiritual institution should not be mixed with politics. Regarding this, it is likely that the influence of *pirs* in politics is much less in urban areas such as the Twin Cities than in rural areas, where the *pirs* have traditionally played a key role in politics.

Table 10. Sufi networks' role in electoral process (Survey I).

Are Sufi networks important for the electoral process of Pakistan?	Total	Percentage
a) *Yes.*	62	13.05%
b) *No.*	316	66.53%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	97	20.42%
	475	**100%**

A small number of respondents did however have clear visions of how *pirs* are active in politics; these are mostly respondents who have rural backgrounds and have witnessed for themselves how the *pirs* manipulate local politics and take advantage of their so-called vote-banks. One such respondent, the same 45-year-old former PIA employee referred to earlier, emphasized the spiritual power the *pirs* have over their subjects, extending it into politics. This is what the respondent said about *pirs* and politics:

> Well, I think it is called voter banks. They [the *pirs*] are paid to support someone [politician], some *pirs* keep huge voter banks, selling them to the largest bidder. Still, the people love them, whether they do something good or not. The thing is that people do not want to destroy their own destinies (*qudrat*). This is important.

As it is widely believed that *pirs* have the ability and power to control peoples' destinies, *qudrat*, it thus seem reasonable that the same people will do almost anything the *pirs* will tell them, including voting for their favored political party. To this, there is very little consciousness among respondents. As seen from the table below, only slightly more than 5% linked this type of power with the Sufi networks in Pakistan:

Table 11. How Sufi networks have a role in the electoral process (Survey I).

How are Sufi networks important for the electoral process of Pakistan?	Total	Percentage
Of total respondents		
a *They (pirs) have power over the people giving advice/blessings, it would be unwise to go against their advice – if they advise you to vote for someone.*	25	5.26%
b) *They are often in political positions themselves.*	30	6.32%
c) *Don't know/Refused to answer.*	7	1.47%
	62	**13.05%**

These numbers then, are different than what would be expected. In explaining the fear of challenging the power of the *pirs*, Frembgen (2008: 31) argues that, "The saint's power is often experienced as ambivalent: As long as his devotees are obedient and venerate him in the proper way, the holy man is benevolent and rewarding, but fear and punishment are certain for those who do not follow his commands."

Conclusion

The system of *piri-muridi* is still thriving, representing an important aspect of Muslim religious experience in the Twin Cities. In the Twin Cities, there are numerous *pirs* at shrines, as well as independent *dervishes* and *faqirs*, with whom many people have a reciprocal relationship. Although some question the authority and authentic credentials of the institution of *piri-muridi*, many regard Sufism as an integral part of Islam and relate to it in their lives. Firstly, this is related to perceptions that the alternative assistance provided by the *pirs*, through their ability to perform miracles (*karamat*) and extend their blessing (*baraka*) to their subjects, is the solution to many of their problems and that they indeed can be cured of illnesses or otherwise experience fewer problems in their lives. Secondly, respondents describe the notion of keeping up a relationship with a *pir* as a substitute to compensate for their lack of knowledge of Islam: thus, in a sense the *pir* becomes the guarantee of the *murid's* religious obligations. Thirdly, it is fair to assume that the system of reciprocity between the *pir* and the *murid* is still kept intact, as it is perceived to be in line with the families' expectations and part of the belief system

as inherited and propagated through the lineages and (they) thus do not want to upset their family's destiny (*qudrat*). Finally, there is the aspect of the cultural and religious fusions that have come to influence Islam in Pakistan, which are sometimes difficult to allocate to one specific sect or school of law, which incorporate some practices, including Sufism, while rejecting others.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness and focus among respondents that some practices associated with Sufism are un-Islamic and should be rooted out. Practices such as *dhammal* and consuming drugs or alcohol at shrines are widely held in contempt. On the other hand, there is a dualism in that while respondents condemn certain practices and rituals as 'un-Islamic', they still actively seek the shrines and the *pirs* and try to reap the possible benefits that the institutions can provide. The issue is further complicated by a notion of privacy, or even embarrassment, in the sense that most respondents perceive their relationships with the shrines as a personal matter, not even telling family members of their devotion to them, and are thus hesitant to reveal information on the subject.

While it is likely that (some) *pirs* and shrines have become more conservative and orthodox themselves, there is an increased *rhetorical* emphasis on 'Islamic identity', or the 'true Islam' – free of pre-Islamic ideas, practices, and values. This, I will argue, leads people into projecting a more orthodox Islam at the cost of traditional 'folk Islam', although many people might still adhere to practices associated with Sufism through the shrines and believe in the miracles (*karamat*) and ability to give blessings (*baraka*) of *pirs* as well as independent *dervishes* and *faqirs*. The orthodox alternative is promoted and filled mainly by Deobandi and Wahhabi organizations, which have started to be more outward in their preaching and missionary activities, thus reaching out to more people. Faith-based organizations of different affiliations, including the Jama'at ud-Dawaa, are also active in the Twin Cities, primarily as providers of welfare, which they often use as a pretext for gathering people to their congregations or otherwise use to promote their line of thinking.

The orthodox movements offer an alternative to the mystical, secretive, and difficult to understand Sufism as propagated by the Barelvis. It is a common perception that the old *pirs*, the institution of *piri-muridi*, has changed in the sense that the system of reciprocity has

turned into a one-way street, where only the *murids* commit themselves and their resources, and the *pirs* have stopped giving anything back while still behaving as 'feudal lords'. Nonetheless, many devotees express that they do indeed get something back. The orthodox movements, on the other hand, present themselves as equals, playing the 'international brotherhood of Muslims, card, using words as such brother (*bhai*) and approaching people with utmost respect, which clearly has an emotional effect on the many deprived, as well as the middle and higher classes, of the Twin Cities. The trend towards orthodoxy may also be related to increased access to technology, especially among the many 're-emigrants' of Islamabad, as discussed earlier. Literacy rates and education in general are also factors that can help explain a shift towards orthodoxy, because as people become more literate, they explore religious literature for themselves, turning to the Qur'an and *hadiths* because they are tired of having *mullahs* and *pirs* telling them what their religion consists of.

Finally, the increased levels of orthodoxy may also be seen as a response to western modernization, in which there is a transfer of loyalty from the traditional 'folk Islam' towards a purist and scripturalist version of Islam. In relating to this, reaching out towards a more purist (orthodox) form of Islam is also seen as an aspect of indigenous modernization in itself, for instance by seeking out and eliminating practices which are not found in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. According to J. B. Tamney, modernization is associated with religious purification. Tamney argues that modern people differentiate themselves from the traditional ('folk Islam') in the sense that they practice a purer form of religion after having gone through a (purification) process where they deliberately seek out and eliminate elements and practices, the inconsistencies, which cannot be found in scriptures: the original sources (Qur'an and the *Sunnah*). In this sense, Tamney's argument can thus be seen as that of religious purification, as found among Islamists, as one aspect of modernization in itself.[71] This in turn may help explain why *piri-muridi* of the Twin Cities may have become more orthodox – as a way of 'fitting the traditional with the modern.'

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[71] J.B. Tamney's arguments found in Hassan (2004: 14). Hassan finds some support for this theory in his own empirical work (Hassan 2004: 15).

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