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Exploring Sacred Traditions: Rituals and Customs at the Qadria Shrine through the Lens of *Dargha*Bahoo Sultan

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Abstract

This article delves into the traditional practices observed at the Qadria shrine, centering on the esteemed figure of Bahoo Sultan within the Qadria Order. Through a comprehensive examination of rituals, customs, and spiritual significance, it explores the rich tapestry of traditions that define the shrine's cultural landscape. By focusing on Bahoo Sultan's teachings and his integral role in the Qadri Sufi tradition, the article sheds light on the enduring spiritual practices that shape the identity of the Qadria shrine.

Key words: Sufism, Traditions, Shrines, Qadriya, Bahoo Sultan

Sufism, with its rich spiritual traditions and profound mystical teachings¹, has flourished throughout the centuries, leaving an unforgettable mark on the cultural and religious landscape of Punjab. The historical context of Sufism, Sufi Orders, and Qadria Shrines in Punjab offer a captivating perspective on the development and propagation of this mystical tradition within the region. Sufism often referred to as the heart of Islam, encompasses a deep inner journey of spiritual awakening and union with the Divine. It transcends the boundaries of orthodox religious practices, emphasizing the direct experience of God's presence and the realization of one's true self. Punjab, a land known for its vibrant traditions and spiritual inclination became a fertile breeding ground for the expansion and diffusion of Sufism. Within the domain of Sufism, various Sufi Orders emerged, each with its distinctive teachings, practices, and spiritual lineage. These orders served as channels for transmitting the esoteric wisdom and practices from one generation to another. The *Qadria* Order, one of the prominent Sufi Orders, established a profound presence in Punjab, nurturing spiritual seekers and fostering the development of numerous Qadria Shrines throughout the region.

The Qadria shrines hold immense spiritual significance for the followers of the *Qadri* order, a prominent Sufi order that emerged in the medieval period. Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam, has been deeply rooted in the spiritual fabric of Punjab, with numerous Sufi saints and their shrines scattered across the region. These shrines serve as centers of devotion, where followers seek solace, guidance, and spiritual elevation through various rituals and practices.

Sufis are the friends of Allah Almighty. The proclamation of Quran, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and angels' existence and practice served as underpinning for Sufism's tenet system. The Sufism is thought to be a combination of Islamic Law (*Shariat*), Way of Otherworldly Learning (*Tariqat*), and Realities (*Haqiqat*), which eventually leads to the profound gift of spirits to attain *Marfat* (gnosis of God).² In actuality, *Tasawwuf* (divinities)³, which involves the intense, profound longing of those who are rivals for reality, is the essence and soul of Islamic

¹Sultan Bahoo, *Heart Deeper than Ocean*, translated by Z. A. Awan, (Lahore: Al-Arifeen Publications, 2017), 95.

² Abdul Samad Saram, *Tareekh e Tasawwuf*, (Lahore: Naqoosh Press, 1969), 23.

³ Abdul Samad Saram, *Tareekh e Tasawwuf*, (Lahore: Naqoosh Press, 1969), 23.

Sufism. Sufism is also misunderstood as a path to cleansing the soul, enlightening the spirit, and purifying the inner being. Finally, Sufism brought the hope of achieving unification.⁴

Qadri Order, named after its leader Abdul Qadir Jilani, is one of the most prominent Sufi orders in the subcontinent. It holds a special distinction as being the first among the four principal orders to gain prominence in the region, alongside the Chishtia, Naqshbandia, and Soharwardia orders. What sets the Qadri Order apart is its direct establishment by Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani himself. Unlike other orders, which were founded by disciples who received spiritual teachings from Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani, the Qadri Order traces its origins directly to him. Central to the Qadri Order's teachings is the concept of Faqr or spiritual poverty, which emphasizes detachment from worldly possessions and complete devotion to the divine. Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani emphasized the importance of Faqr, teaching that its virtues are boundless and eternal. The Qadri Order has historically garnered support from prominent figures such as the Hanbalis and Hazrat Abdul Qadir Polyhistor, further solidifying its significance in the realm of Sufi traditions. Through its emphasis on spiritual humility and devotion, the Qadri Order continues to exert a profound influence on followers seeking a deeper connection with the divine. Hazrat Sultan Bahoo also known as Wultan-ularifeen was born in year 1630, Shorekot, Jhang during the reign of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.⁵ His genealogical tree traces back to Hazrat Ali (R.A.).⁶ His shrine remains a sacred place of pilgrim and performance of several spiritual rituals.⁷

The primary motivation for visiting Sufi *Dargahs* is the fulfillment of various social⁸, financial, physical, and mystical desires. Visitors seek blessings for matters such as marriages, success in exams, resolving disputes, and securing a better future for their families. Some come for social enjoyment, viewing the *Dargahs* as holiday destinations. Others, including marginalized individuals, find refuge and survival in these sacred sites. Additionally, some of them seeks

⁴ David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab the making of Pakistan* (London: University of California Press, 1988).

⁵ Qaiser, *Beyond the Manifest*, 217-221.

⁶ Amjad Parvez, "Metaphysics of Sultan Bahoo Dedicated to those with Clear Concepts of Philosophy," *Daily Times* (Lahore), October 30, 2019

⁷ Qaiser, *Beyond the Manifest*, 217-221.

⁸ Khan and Sajid, *The Essence of Shrines in Rural Punjab*, 68.

financial prosperity through prayers and attribute success stories to *Dargahs* visits. Medical reasons also prompt visits⁹, with believers trusting in the healing properties of items such as holy salt and sugar. Mental peace and spiritual fulfillment are sought through practices like meditation and seeking forgiveness. *Dargahs* serve as platforms for addressing societal issues and providing relief from life's pressures, with visitors attributing happiness and quality of life to spiritual fulfillment.¹⁰ *Mannat*, prayers with conditions, are made for various reasons, and *Dargahs* also serve as sources of financial gain, political support, and social prestige.¹¹

Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's *Urs* is celebrated in *Jamadi us Sani* and people also gathered there for this celebration. *Langer* distribution, Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's *Abyat* (Punjabi poetry), *Zikar*, recitation of Quran, *Hazri* at grave and praying, fund collection are activities during *Urs*. The Sufi whirling is also seemed at shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo during *Abyat* Singing. New *Chaddar* (green cloth used to cover the grave) is also provided and grave is also cleaned and washed at the start of the *Urs* celebration. The *Urs* celebration is a common activity on all the Sufi shrines in Punjab and all Sufi orders supported the concept of *Urs* celebration. The activities done there may be differing with one another but there are some common activities too. *Chaddar*; Grave washing; *Langer*; *Zikar*; recitation of Quran; *Hazri* at grave and Fund collection are some common rituals in most of shrines in Punjab including the *Dargah* of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. Every year, the hallowed grounds of the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo come alive with a vibrant display of devotion and reverence during the *Urs* celebrations. This sacred event, steeped in centuries old tradition, encapsulates the essence of spiritual enlightenment and draws countless pilgrims from far and wide. The sacred rituals performed during the *Urs* at the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo are not merely ceremonies, but transformative experiences that ignite the spirit and nurture the divine connection within every seeker. It is a celebration where the boundaries of time and space fade away, and devotees are embraced by the eternal grace that permeates the shrine, continuing the legacy of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo for generations to come. Among the main rituals performed at this revered event are:

⁹Levin, *Esoteric Healing traditions*, 101-110.

¹⁰ R. M. Eaton, *Sufi folk literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam*, in *Essay on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: OUP, 2000), 117-27.

Peter Gottschalk, ed. *Indian Muslim Tradition in Religions of South Asia: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), 201-45.

¹¹Shemeem Burney Abbas, *The Female Voice*. University of Texas Press, 2002.

Performing ablution, or *Wudu*, before entering the shrine or engaging in any other ritual act is a customary practice observed by devotees visiting Sufi *Dargahs* like that of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. This act symbolizes purification, both physically and spiritually, preparing individuals for their spiritual encounter within the sacred space. It serves as a ritualistic cleansing, aligning devotees with a state of spiritual readiness to connect with the divine presence believed to inhabit the shrine.

Particularly among women, there is a tradition of entering the *Dargahs* barefooted and with covered heads as a mark of respect and humility in the presence of the revered Sufi *or Sahib E Mizar*. This outward gesture of reverence reflects the inner devotion and veneration that devotees hold for the spiritual figure entombed within the shrine.

Another significant spiritual practice at Sufi *Dargahs* is the offering of flowers and incense, which holds deep symbolic meaning. Devotees believe that by presenting these items, they are expressing their love, devotion, and respect to the saint, and seeking blessings from him. The act of offering flowers is seen as a symbolic gesture of adoration and reverence. Devotees often bring flowers such as roses or marigolds, arranging them in colorful displays in front of the tomb or other sacred objects within the shrine. The aroma of these flowers is believed to create a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere, conducive to spiritual reflection and communion. Similarly, the offering of incense carries profound spiritual significance. Incense, when burned as an offering, is believed to symbolize the ascent of prayers and intentions to the divine realm. The smoke from the incense is thought to carry the devotees supplications and aspirations to the heavens, fostering a connection between the earthly and the divine. Additionally, the sweet fragrance of the incense is believed to purify the atmosphere within the shrine, dispelling negative energies and invoking spiritual blessings.

Reciting *Sora-e-Fathia* at Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's shrine is one of the most important rites. After offering the hallowed verses of the Holy Quran, devotees pray (*Dua*) for themselves. Males execute this activity in the *Hujjra*, while ladies perform it in their own region. Devotees give the reward to Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, then to the souls of those who are entombed in his *Dargah*, their deceased loved ones, and all departed Muslims in general.

The practice of *zikr*, or remembrance of God, is a central spiritual practice in Sufi tradition. At the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, *zikr* sessions are held regularly in which devotees recite the names of God and engage in other spiritual practices designed to deepen their connection with the divine. This involves fasting or performing other acts of self-discipline as a way of purifying oneself and demonstrating devotion.

On the 9th of Muharram, after *Fajar* prayer, the *Gaddi Nasheen* (Peer Najeeb Sultan) himself participates in the *Dargah's Ghusal* ritual with rose water presented in pictures (*Matkas*), *Matkas*, wrapped in *Ghalaf* (Embroided Cloth). *Gadi Nasheen* distributes *Ghusal* rose water as a *Tabarkto* the followers.

One such practice is the tying of threads, which holds symbolic significance in Sufi tradition. Devotees often tie threads at specific locations within the shrine, such as near the tomb or sacred objects, as a form of supplication or wish fulfillment. The act of tying a thread symbolizes a devotee's prayer or vow, with the belief that the saint will intercede on their behalf to grant their desires or protect them from harm.

Feeding pigeons is another common practice observed at Sufi *Dargahs*. Devotees often bring grains or food items to scatter near the shrine, attracting pigeons to partake in the nourishment. This act is viewed as a gesture of compassion and goodwill, reflecting the teachings of love and kindness espoused by Sufi saints like Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. By feeding the pigeons, devotees seek to express gratitude for blessings received and to seek the saint's blessings for their continued well-being.

Because women are not permitted to enter Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's *Hujjra*, only men are permitted to execute this rite. They bring expensive sheets (some of which are stitched with gold and silver thread) to lie over the grave or cover it. This is a way to pay respect to Hazrat Sultan Bahoo by wearing a *chador*, which is a mark of respect in Muslim culture. The sheets are usually artistically embellished with Holy Quran passages or the phrase given above. Many devotees from around Pakistan, particularly from Punjab; bring large and expensive sheets to lie on Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's tomb, demonstrating their tremendous affection and adoration for the Hazrat Sultan Bahoo.

The "*Dam Karna*" ritual is a way for devotees to express their devotion and seek the blessings of the divine. It is a practice that is deeply rooted in the spiritual and cultural traditions of the region and is seen as an important part of the pilgrimage experience at many shrines. It is observed at *Dargahs* involves the placement of water bottles near the Sufi graves. The purpose of this practice is to enable those offering *Fateha* (prayers) to recite verses over the water, thereby transforming it into what is known as *Dam wala pani* or blessed water. This blessed water is considered to possess special healing properties and is believed to hold the power to cure a wide range of diseases. Visitors to the *Dargah* who are seeking relief from various ailments may partake in this custom by drinking the holy water. It is believed that the spiritual energy and blessings associated with the Sufi saints intermingle with the water during this process, imparting it with healing qualities. This practice reflects the deep faith and reverence that many individuals have for the Sufi saints and their ability to provide solace and remedies for physical and spiritual afflictions.

On the start of *URS* ceremonies, the official successor or *Gaddi Nasheen* ties a thread to the window that is situated near the headstone of the grave of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. After this ritual is performed sweet food called *Makkhana* is distributed as *Tabbarak* among the devotees. Most of devotees including men, women and children also ties the thread on the same place for the fulfillment of their inner desire. This is a common ritual among the visitors and followers who came to the shrine and this ritual performing from a long time.

The *Langar* sharing as public offerings is another important practice in the *Dargah*. This ritual at the *Darbar* is part of a century's old custom. The *Dargah* provides free food not just to those who work there, but also to those who come. The whole night of the 9th *Muharram*, a room designated for *langar* was packed, and the food was distributed on the 10th of *Muharram*.

There is a primitive *Bairitree* on the *Dargah* grounds, under which Hazrat Sultan Bahoo is claimed to have sat and meditated, and whose fruit Hazrat Sultan Bahoo is said to have eaten. *Bairi* trees may survive for hundreds of years. Because it has a connection to their Sufi, pilgrims consume its leaves as *Tabbarak*. As a result, believers pluck the leaves of this tree and eat them as a blessing. Eating leaves, they believe, will protect them from many physical and mental ailments. They also carry a lot of the tree's leaves home with them for their relatives and

friends/family. This practice fulfils their expectations. It is mainly prevalent among women, who think that consuming these leaves and fruits would result in the delivery of a blessed baby. The majority of women sat under the *Bairi* tree, believing that if the leaves or fruits fell involuntarily on their garments, it was a symbol of Sufi favour. When asked, the majority of them said they had been sitting under the *Bairi* tree for many days, waiting for the tree's leaves or fruits to fall. And some of them have promised that they would not leave until they get it.

It is said that spending a few days as a *Dargah* servant makes a person a recipient of heavenly beauty. That is why women, especially, are seen sweeping the floors inside the *Dargah* of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. Another mystical goal of this ritual is to achieve the degree of humility by destroying the inner ego. Sweeping in front of others represents a subservient mentality that goes against inner pride or ego.

As part of their ritual, devotees light traditional oil clay lamps (*Dia*) at the *Dargah*. They normally undertake this ceremony when their goals and desires have been fulfilled. Females are more involved in this ceremony than guys. Some devotees use the residual oil to protect their skin and hair against sickness. After completing his *Manat*, some devotees lighted the customary oil lamp, while some lighted it for blessings and others for traditional ceremonies.

This is generally done on the feminine side of the *Dargah*. They recite the *Naat Sharif* and *Darood-e-Pak* aloud near Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's *Hujjra*. They are paying honour to the Sufi for being a real devotee (*Aashiq-e-Rasool*) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his whole pious life by doing so.

The Narration of *Manqabat* refers to the practice of expressing gratitude and reverence towards Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, through the recitation of *Manqabat*. *Manqabat* is a form of devotional poetry or hymn that is commonly used in Sufi traditions to praise and honor spiritual leaders, saints, and revered figures. In this context, the act of narrating *Manqabat* as a form of thanking Hazrat Sultan Bahoo involves reciting poetic verses that highlight his spiritual significance, teachings and contributions. These verses often describe his virtues, his connection to the divine, and the positive impact he had on the lives of his followers.

This is a well known *Urs* rite that is generally performed on the male side of the shrine. Thousands of devotees from over Punjab go to the *Hujjra* of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo to pay their respects (*Salam*) to Hazrat Sultan Bahoo in a well-organized manner, shouting the chant "*Haqbahoo Such Bahoo Karam di Ik Nazar Tak Bahoo, Nara e Sultania, Haq Bahoo, and Jeeway Jeeway Murshad Jeeway.*"

Reciting poetry: Hazrat Sultan Bahoo was a renowned poet and many devotees recite his poetry as a form of spiritual practice and expression. Reciting Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's poetry is a common practice at his shrine and other Sufi shrines. Devotees recite his poetry individually or in groups. Reciting the poetry is not only a way of expressing one's devotion to the saint, but it is also believed to have spiritual benefits, such as bringing peace to the mind and deepening one's connection with the divine. Some of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's most well-known books of poems include *Abyat-e-Bahoo*, *Noor-ul-Huda*, and *Kaleed-ul-Tauheed*. These poems are often recited during *zikr* sessions, spiritual gatherings where devotees come together to remember God and seek blessings from the saint. In addition to reciting Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's poetry, some devotees also study and contemplate his teachings as a way of deepening their spiritual understanding. His teachings emphasize the importance of inner purification and the attainment of divine knowledge through spiritual practices such as *zikr*, meditation, and contemplation.

At the *Dargah* Premises: This is one of those rituals that followers do only for the sake of themselves. They touch and kiss the different portions of the tomb, notably the doors, windows, and the floor of the *Hujjra* where Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's body is laying repose in the grave, as a sign of their love and respect for him. The purpose of this rite is to obtain *Baraka*, which, according to their beliefs, protects them from all kinds of difficulties in the future.

Devotees take great care to ensure that when they leave the *Hujjra*, their backs are not facing the grave. They do so out of profound reverence for Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's mystical role in their life. They avoid dismissing the Sufi in any way.

This is a highly popular rite among the believers. They contribute according to their financial means. Some people donate millions of rupees. A handful of wealthy women occasionally donate their gold or silver jewelry. All of the *Nazzrana* are placed in the *Dargah's* money boxes,

which are located throughout the *Dargah*. It is necessary to give Hazrat Sultan Bahoo a gift because of this custom. During the *Urs* days, the *GaddiNasheens* receives millions of rupees on daily basis. Various social-welfare activities, including as the continuing of *LangarKhana* consumption on the *Dargah* building, providing housing for tourists, and other *Dargah* services, are all made possible due of this practice.

Normally, guests execute this ceremony at the *Dargah*. They mostly provide sweet (*Zarda*) and white rice, and *Makkhana* distribution is a prevalent practice there. Devotees undertake this rite in the name of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, with the main goal of serving meals to all visitors as if they were Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's guests. Furthermore, they think that their actions will satisfy Allah, and that HE will reward them. The destitute, hungry, crippled, beggars, and homeless people all wait frantically and impatiently for this ceremony to be performed. It gives them with nutritious nourishment at no expense. The *Dargah* attendees race to obtain *Langar*, especially the children for the White Sweets. All of this food is termed *Tabbarak* because it has something to do with the holy Sufi Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, whom they adore and revere.

Many devotees come to *Dargah* because the *Bait* binds them spiritually. They must communicate with their *Pir*. And the *Urs* of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo allows them to renew their commitment after a year. This tradition entailed swearing an oath in front of a *Pir*, usually a *SajjadaNashin* from Hazrat Sultan Bahoo's *Dargah*.

This is another rite that may be seen, it is generally performed in the presence of the *Pir* near the *Dargah*. Devotees also go to their *Pir* to obtain amulets. They think that by purchasing amulets, they may protect themselves from a variety of threats. They dip them in water or eat them, and some tie them around their arms and wear them around their neck as a remedy to their difficulties.

Devotees and visitors bring currency notes or coins as a symbolic gesture of devotion and gratitude. They approach the water pool near the tomb, which is usually adorned with decorative elements like flowers and candles. The process begins by holding the money in one's hand, reciting prayers or silently conveying their wishes and intentions. With reverence, the person then gently places the money into the water pool. The currency sinks and settles at the bottom of

the pool, becoming a part of the offering made to Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. This act of offering money at the water pool is seen as a way to seek blessings, express gratitude, and seek the intercession of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo. It is believed that by making this offering, one's prayers and desires may be fulfilled or that the act may serve as a means of seeking spiritual assistance or protection. The money offered in this ritual is typically used for charitable purposes and the upkeep of the shrine, supporting the ongoing work and services provided to the visitors and devotees. The ritual of placing money in the water pool as a *Nazrana* signifies trust, surrender, and a desire for spiritual blessings. It is a way for individuals to demonstrate their faith and commitment while seeking the blessings and guidance of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo.

Massive economic activities may be seen around the *Dargah* during the *Urs* days. Food products (mostly brown sugar, *Makkhanas*, etc.), clay pots, decorative pieces and toys, traditional handicrafts, Islamic/Mystical literature, jewelery, *Chadors* and flowers for placing on the *Mazar*, and many other goods are sold in particular stores and booths. During the *Urs* days, numerous folk singers with their teams and instruments can be found all around the *Dargah* site singing the *Kalam* of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo and other *Sufiana Kalam*. All of them travel to *Darbar* specifically to Hazrat Sultan Bahoo on his *Urs* and profit handsomely from the millions of people that attend. They look forward to the *Urs* festival (*Maila*) celebrations all year. So they go there with a financial goal in mind. At the rear of the *Dargah*, there is a historic old traditional *Bazar* (Market) called as *Dargah Bazar*. It is a large, long, and bustling *Bazar* in town that sells a variety of goods, including spiritual items. It is nearly overrun with guests from all across the region during the *Urs* days. Religious/Mystical books, prayer mats, *Tasbhees* (prayer beads), prayer caps, perfumes, CDs covering material about Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, his *Dargah*, and rituals performed there, CDs of *khatab*, packets of *Makkhanas*, and jewelry items for their family and friends/colleagues as a *Tabbarak* are among the items they enjoy purchasing from the *Bazar*. Around the *Dargah*, selling *Chadors* and flowers is a lucrative industry. The *Bazar's* shop keepers and salespeople have deep spiritual ties to Hazrat Bahoo Sultan and a profound belief in the Sufi's spiritual benediction (*Baraka*), which helps them remain affluent monetarily. As a result, they have been rooted in the *Bazar* for years and refuse to leave. They believe that the *Baraka* of Hazrat Bahoo Sultan is passed down from generation to generation, and that they are content with whatever they earn by being in the vicinity of the hallowed *Dargah*. Many

individuals in this Bazar make money from their businesses. As a result, the *Dargah* of Hazrat Sultan Bahoo also helps economically to the region¹².

In a nut shell, the traditional practices observed at the Qadria Shrine, with Hazrat Sultan Bahoo as a case study, illuminate the profound connection between spirituality, culture, and community. These rituals serve as more than mere ceremonies; they embody the collective memory, beliefs, and values of a people deeply rooted in their faith. Through the lens of Bahoo Sultan's life and teachings, we glimpse the timeless wisdom and spiritual depth embedded within these traditions. Moreover, these practices foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among devotees, transcending boundaries of time and space. As we reflect on the significance of these age-old customs, it becomes evident that they continue to shape the identity and ethos of communities, offering pathways to profound spiritual experiences and inner transformation. Thus, the study of traditional practices at the *Qadria* Shrine not only enriches our understanding of religious heritage but also inspires deeper reflections on the human quest for meaning and transcendence.

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¹²All thesedata is observed and collected by the author at the time of visiting Dargah Hazrat Bahoo Sultan during annual *Urs*

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