

Pictures of Love and Piety in Pakistan's Domestic Spaces

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Abstract

This paper is part of an ethnographic field research project conducted in Pakistan's Punjab to investigate the ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and aesthetic traits and patterns that are operative behind the way people of different social levels decorate their domestic spaces. Here specifically we study the popular religious icons, posters and pictures of Sufi saints -pictures of love and piety, which are displayed mostly in the houses of the poorer class and that bring peace, benediction and solace to these dwellings. Here we attempt to understand not only the different meanings that religious art has for various classes of people, but also delve into the important aspect of personal piety and religion in the daily domestic lives of people.

Keywords: *Ethnographic field research, Informal interviews conducted with an ethnic based sample of households of various social classes, Domestic space: An area in a dwelling place that may be a whole room or more or just a nook or wall which is a special domestic place for the household, Interlocutors: The interviews I had with people were informal and since primarily they were informing and telling me about their beliefs I refer to them as interlocutors and not interviewees*

Introduction

As it is understood across a range of academic disciplines, home is a concept denoting a distinct space that evokes a broad spectrum perception of a set of human relationships within a lived space and this perception is essentially similar for different and diverse societies, although these relationships are culturally and historically contingent on their own societies that may be very dissimilar even enemies of others in some cases. At one level, the home is a material place, a dwelling in which we live. It can be a house, a hut or even a tent. However, Elizabeth H. Jones, in her study of home and identity in twentieth-century French autobiography, emphasises "the importance of affective investment in one or more particular spaces of habitation" (Jones 58). Furthermore, she links the idea of a home with what she calls "cultural belongings" (59) suggesting that the material spaces we inhabit emotionally and physically play a role in helping us situate ourselves in a cultural and social space. Various scholars in their studies of household objects have commented on the way certain objects are crucial to the production of a domestic space; that is, to the transformation of a house into a 'home' (Csikszentmihalyi

and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Halle 1993; Riggins 1990) – and my research suggests that for certain ethnic, religious minded people of some persuasions, pictures of piety or Sufi saints are prime among these. These pictures are popular, colourful and naïve, mass-produced religious images of a specific genre that are kept and displayed in homes to create a secure domestic space.

Although the production of popular religious prints also prevails in India, Syria, Turkey, Egypt and some other Muslim countries but apart from Shiah's the Sufi pictures produced in Pakistan address the more specific Sunni Barelvi understanding of Islam and these posters are of a unique kind.

The posters follow an unsophisticated idiom that the common man can relate to and that evoke religious associations of the saints and their shrines. The genre probably originated from a pioneering fine art lithographic press founded in 1892 in Bombay (Mumbai, India) by a self-taught high art (as opposed to popular commercial art) Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma (1846-1906) that not only printed his European inspired, iconic Hindu devotional paintings, it also printed literature on Sufi teachings as well as Sufi posters and other works of art, which played an important role in the wide

dissemination of Sufism in colonial India. Prior to this, in mid-nineteenth century, cheap German chromolithographic prints flooded markets all over the world. Because of this precedent the inexpensive mass produced prints coming out from the Varma press in India were readily acceptable and soon became quite popular. Later distribution of such mass-produced prints became the most popular medium of visual communication of the socially and culturally fragmented Indian subcontinent populace. Thereafter, the development of new materials, new techniques of engraving including lithography, and photography had a great impact on production of prints, which circulated throughout the subcontinent.

In the first half of the 20th century, many publishers such as Hafiz Qamr ud Din & Sons, H. Ghulam Muhammad & Sons in Lahore produced posters or calendars with Islamic themes (Saeed 25). Most of the traditional handmade posters of the Sufi saints during the past three or four decades, were predominantly painted by Sarwar Khan and Saeed Khan of Malik Shafiq Art Press (Frembgen "The Friends of God" 131) as well as M. Ishaq, which posters were widely circulated. These may be considered the prototypes of the posters found in the market today. Now there are copies with additional elements that are still being produced extensively.

Basically they are stereotyped themes; colourful, dense compositions in primary colours with formalized images that feature a prominent figure of the saint on one side in front of a full view of his shrine. The saint's image is easily recognizable because his features, beard, garb and turban are always depicted in the same formalized manner and also his shrine is easily identifiable' as can be observed in figure 2.

There are also posters of Makkah and the Prophet's, PBUH (Peace be upon Him), mosque in Madinah in the same bright, primary coloured genre. These two sites are considered to be the holiest places in the world by Muslims. Apart from these religious pictures, of course there are other secular ones. Now there are many other printers in the market that are turning out more religious popular art using digital and photographic techniques. Many technicians just use computer Photoshop methods and cut and paste the original images of these Sufi posters that were created by others, in order to vary and transform the design.

Any art aficionado or person with a degree of sophistication in taste will regard these mass produced, garish representations on cheap paper with aesthetic disdain and consider them to be 'kitsch'. But it has been argued that aesthetics are independent of art and in the wider sense aesthetics may be considered to be the way people in a society perceive certain deeper meanings. Also nowadays aesthetics is most commonly defined beyond the specialized areas of art and literature as questions of visual appearance and effect (Coote 245-274; Williams 28). Jeremy Coote cites philosopher Nick Zangwill who says: "One could do aesthetics without

mentioning works of art! Sometimes I think it would be safer to do so" (Coote 246). Thus different people have different perceptions of beauty and any crafted work with a degree of creativity that evokes emotion in the eyes of people of some society may be regarded as an art form. To deny this would be to deny all ethnic art. Indeed at a humanistic level these posters have a naive beauty of their own. To devotees these posters are a surrogate to the actual presence of these beloved and venerated saints and evoke as much emotion in them as the most beautiful religious masterpieces of the Renaissance can do to worshippers in that context.

Over the past couple of decades, the Pakistani Sufi religious prints have been examined by learned foreign as well as indigenous anthropologists and scholars of art (Frembgen 1998, 2003, 2006 and 2008; Yousuf Saeed 2012; Farida Batool 2004), however comprehensive research on the particular subject of the title of this paper is still a desideratum though much insight has been elucidated by the above writers. Therefore this paper attempts to investigate such religious prints and their relations with people and domestic spaces.

Sufi pictures and their dissemination

Ethnologist and Anthropologist, Jürgen Wasim Frembgen states that Pakistan is "a heartland of Islamic mysticism" ("Friends of God ix) within the Muslim world. There are strong Sufi movements of devotion prevailing in Pakistan and also in some parts of India where one finds similar expressions in Hindu mysticism. In both the Islamic and Hindu worlds of the Indo-Pak subcontinent a huge production of religious posters serves the great need for spirituality.

In Pakistan, the important centres of such devotional movements are mostly in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, whose "local cultures in particular are deeply permeated and shaped by Islamic mysticism" (1). These centres in Punjab are Lahore, Multan, Uch Sharif, Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakpattan, Kot Mithan, etc., where hundreds of people were converted into Islam by the Sufi saints (Gilmartin 40). These 'God intoxicated' holy men (Khwaja Ghulam Farid, Baba Fareed Ganjshakar, Bhulleh Shah, Huq Bahoo, Shah Hussain, Mehr Ali Shah), who addressed God as 'close friend' and 'beloved' had a deep rapport with the sons of the soil in their time, empathising with the hardships of the common folk and many of them wrote poetry in the local vernacular language, and their verses are considered to be the most beautiful Punjabi poetry, expressing human emotions with boundless mystical connotations, unimaginably deep and transcending all definable limits of formal religious thinking.

The adoration people bear these saints has created a legendary, quasi-cult image about them and these associations along with the related folk piety are characteristic components of rural religious sensibility,

which are evident particularly in the lowland rural areas of Punjab. Richard M. Eaton stated that the Sufi saints made Islam accessible to the non-lettered masses as well as to non-Muslims among whom they lived (Eaton 33) and even now many Sufi saints are also venerated by many Sikhs, Hindus and Christians.

Islam is the state religion in Pakistan. There are several religious sects that practice different forms of Islam here; apart from the main Sunni and Shiah divide. These two sects are further divided into other sects; the main Sunni sects being the Barelvi, for whom music, worship of saints and homage at shrines is part of their creed, to the austere Deobandi and Ahl-i-hadith, who are influenced by Salafi and Wahhabi ideas and are strongly oriented to Arabic culture. They declaim music and reject saint worship. There is a general belief in Islam that all figural representation in painting, sculpture and even in engraved and other decorative forms is taboo. This dictum is specially observed by the Deobandi and their related sects. Nevertheless from the early days of Islamic history and with the flourishing of Islamic art, though the emphasis is on geometric design and floral motifs but images of figures and animals often occur in all mediums and most people accept them without reservation. In fact any proper reading of the Holy Koran and Hadith (sayings of the Holy Prophet, PBUH) shows there is no such proscription; in fact there are indications in the opposite direction. Art historian David Morgan writes in his book "Sacred Gaze":

In the case of Islam, for example, depending where and at what period one looks, images of various kinds are found in manuscripts, architecture, tapestries, homes, mosques, and personal devotional items. Same holds for Judaism. Those Protestants, Jews, and Muslims, for example, who express disdain for visual imagery in religious practice and seek to proscribe its use as "idolatrous" typically, put in its place alternative forms of material culture that provide a different form of iconicity (Morgan 117).

In fact among Barelvis and Shiahs religious icons and other images are looked on with great reverence. As mentioned earlier, posters of Sufi saints are very popular. The domestic spaces in low-land areas of Punjab province are often decorated with such popular, mass-produced devotional posters. People flock to visit the shrines of these saints and there is widespread participation in the activities and rituals of these shrines and their veneration forms its own somewhat ethnic mode of popular devotion. These practices provide an insight into the nature of contemporary Punjabi beliefs and religious sensibility. According to Frembgen:

The belief of devotees of the charismatic and miraculous qualities of saints and their closer relationship with God ultimately leads them to seek to have posters of these popular figures of piety, especially among the poorer and rural classes. These are taken home by the votaries to receive their spiritual gaze and have face-to-face contact with them and thereby find greater religious

response through their visual contemplation ("Rehmat ka Sayah" 11).

These mass produced 'Sufi pictures' can be seen displayed in domestic spaces as well as at shrines, in tea stalls and at other public festivals. They have become quite a ubiquitous modern manifestation of folk piety.

They are fond chiefly in retail shops and roadside stalls usually leading to Sufi shrines as can be seen in figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1 Sacred and secular popular posters are being sold on a handcart (rehri) near shrine of Data Ganj Bakhsh. Lahore, 2014



Figure 2 Sacred and secular popular posters are being sold by a roadside vendor on a holiday. Multan, 2014

The ordinary customer of Sufi posters purchases them at these sites usually on the eve of the *urs* festival (death anniversary of a Sufi saint). They are often displayed alongside other posters of national heroes, political leaders, film stars and decorative pictures of sweet babies (which are usually photo-real depictions), animals and landscapes, etc. These pictures are available on cheap prices ranging from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 (around 8 cents to 13 cents) depending on their sizes.

Several of the people from the middle and lower class that I interviewed informed me that they displayed Sufi

pictures because they believed that they protected their dwellings. Analysing the photographs taken of these domestic spaces reveals how actually the primary purpose of these popular, mass-produced pictures adorning the homes of people is not decoration but as a form of domestic devotion. They are mostly pasted on walls. One feature is almost universally common in the bedrooms of poor and lower middle class homes, which is that high on one wall there is a shelf on which glasses, plates, trays, vessels and other utensils are proudly displayed; usually it is in this domestic space where Sufi posters are pasted. To many devotees they may symbolize a direct link to the shrine of the saint. Most devotees subjectively believe that these shrines emanate unseen spiritual waves. This paper also examines this understanding of domestic space as not only centring on the home, but also extending outwards.

Popular Sufi Pictures in Domestic Spaces

According to my survey of various homes of different classes, one definite conclusion was that these Sufi posters are posted only in the homes of poor class, lower middle class as well as in the middle class people to some extent but seldom if ever in those of the educated elite class. Mind you, it is not only the more credulous poorer folk who believe religious relics can bring benediction upon a house or protect it from harm; even many rich middle, upper middle and elite class people have religious calligraphy adorning the entrance or outside of their houses (often the calligraphy says 'Ma sha Allah', which is a protective benediction meaning 'by the blessings of Allah'); or they have images and pictures of Makkah and Madina and they too believe these will bring benediction on the house. In my research I asked many elite class interlocutors about their opinion of images of saints on posters, etc. Most said that regarding such visual representations, it did not make sense to venerate the saints in this manner. They claimed that it is more important to read their books and follow their teaching. On the other hand when I asked the opinion of the poorer, uneducated or less educated interlocutors most of them believed that such pictures of Sufi saints bring happiness and comfort to homes and protect the family from misfortune. These two statements indicate that the books and teachings of the Sufi saints are for the higher class, which is certainly a more "educated" view, and the images and superstitious beliefs are left for the "uneducated". However, the fact is very few people actually read these holy works, though the poetry of Ghulam Fareed and Bulleh Shah is popular and most important certainly the teachings of these Sufi saints is more humanistic, compassionate and understanding than sectarian doctrines. Thus, a high minded, "educated" attitude towards the veneration of these saints is highly creditable in its own right, but the simple incredulity of the poorer class is more reflective of the love and folk piety that was what the teachings of these Sufi saints was really all about.

Sayyid Ali ibn Uthman al-Hujwiri (d.1072) popularly known as Data Ganj Bakhsh (meaning 'the giver of bounties') and also called Data Sahib especially by the lower strata is probably the best loved saint in the Punjab. He was born in a section called Hujwir in the city of Ghazna, the capital of the Ghaznayid dynasty, which is now in Afghanistan. This saint came to the subcontinent much earlier than the others. His writings and teachings gave a deeper insight into Sufism and his message of love and kindness reverberates to this day. Along with his clear vision of mysticism he considered it important to follow the formal rituals of Islam. This especially revered Sufi saint's mausoleum is the central shrine of Lahore, the capital of Punjab and a point of convergence for devotees of many backgrounds.

This figure 3 shows a lower class female devotee's bedroom (shown in picture) where there is a poster of Data Sahib and another well-loved Sufi saint, Shahbaz Qalandar that is displayed between two larger posters of Makkah and Madina. On one hand the large posters of Makkah and Madina show the reverence the devotee has for these two holy places; while on the other hand, displaying the poster of the two saint's in the middle of these evinces her affection for them.



Figure 3 Posters of Data sahib and Shahbaz Qalandar pasted in between those of Makkah and Madina shrines in the bedroom of a lower middle class. Muzaffargarh, 2014

Another well-loved popular saint is Sayyid Ghaus ul-Azam Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), called by various *laqabs* (titles) however the most popular *laqab* is Ghaus Pak (the saint of "pure help"). He was born in the village of Niff (now in Iran), he got his religious education in Baghdad and died there and his mausoleum is in Baghdad. He is specially venerated and has an elevated status because he is the founder of the Qadiriyya school of Sufism, which is one of the main schools of Sufism. Actually he is not directly connected to the subcontinent but because of his elevated status he is deeply loved and revered here.



Figure 4 A specially decorated wall of a lower middle class bedroom adorned with a popular poster (middle) of Ghaus Pak featuring his popular miracle; alongside are the popular posters of Makkah and Madina shrines; the whole display is garlanded by coloured fairy lights and 'I love you' prominently written in front. Muzaffargarh, 2014

Figure 4 shows a lower middle class bedroom with a beautiful decorative display of posters. Ghaus Pak's poster is in the middle of those of Makkah and Madina, shrines like in the previous figure, but this time both shrines are smaller and the saint's poster is notably bigger, which shows the importance the devotee gives to the saint and the reverence he has for him. These two posters highlight the relationship of posters of Makkah and Madina with those of revered Sufi saints. The former are considered the holiest places anywhere by Muslims. However, devotees also deeply venerate their saints and probably feel a personal attachment to them. Still these saints, though some are very unorthodox, fall in the ambit of Islam and Makkah and Madina are the acknowledged holiest places; the first being the epicentre of Islam towards which all Muslims pray and where they go to perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage) and the second is the first mosque, built by the Holy Prophet and where Islam originated from.

Thus there is an unwritten code regarding the placing of religious icons and images. The first principle in middle class houses is that the height at which the picture is displayed denotes respect; the second is that they are never placed where people's feet may point, like facing the foot of a bed and the third is that, especially in poorer class houses, the wall where these images are displayed is a special domestic space.

However, the previous figure 4 is also significant in another important aspect. Among all the decorated spaces in poorer class homes that I came across in my survey this one was the most lovingly and ornately embellished. A poor person has no impressive *objects d'art* to highlight his interior designs so all he can do is express his love with what he has on hand and his means

can afford. Here the interlocutor has arranged all his metal utensils in as impressive a manner as possible, outlined the set up and posters with fairy lights and written 'I love' prominently on a sheet in front. This is his utmost, creative expression of beauty to depict his love for the Sufi saint and the religious holy places. He has not done this to impress visitors or be 'one up on the Jones'; to the devotees their *pir* (spiritual guide) is very much alive and he is propitiating him in his domestic space.

Hazrat Sakhi Sarwar is a Sufi Saint whose shrine is in the desert foothills of D.G. Khan near Muzaffargarh and Multan. Hence he has a great following there. He was born in Baghdad in the twelfth century and was a *mureed* of Ghaus-e-Azam (founder of the Qadiriyyah sect), Shaikh Shahab-u-Din Suhrawardi (founder of the Suhrawardi sect) and Khwaja Maudud Chishti (founder of the Chishti sect) and they are said to have blessed him with the power of prophecy. He migrated to the subcontinent to Jhang, where he married Ayesha the daughter of a noble chief Pira. His in-law's family got jealous of him and sought to murder him, so he ran away to D.G. Khan where he gained a big following because of his spiritual powers.

He was said to be very humane and loved animals. Eventually his enemies followed him and murdered him. Now votaries flock to his tomb in the barren hills.

In figure 5 we can see how the interlocutor has exercised genuine aesthetic taste by arranging his posters in a neat line on top, even utilizing a disjointed front of a glass shelf on the left side to add to the set up and the articulated rising line in the centre of the utensils is all in harmony to make a definite composition. By the way the object covered with a counterpane and cushions in front is not an extraordinary high settee, but actually a big trunk in which the family keep all their quilts and bed linen. So here we see an unlettered villager with a degree of aestheticism, utilizing all he's got and functional household items to create a fitting, devotional arrangement for the posters of the saints he venerates.



Figure 5 A lower middle class bedroom decorated with a ubiquitous poster of Hazrat Sakhi Sarwar (right), while the left poster depicts pictures of several other Sufi saints including Sakhi Sarwar. On the couch is the owner of the house. Muzaffargarh, 2014.

Figure 6 is similar to figure 5 inasmuch that it evinces the natural aesthetic taste of the poor, rural interlocutor. With his limited means he has tried to indulge his religious feelings in assembling a beautifully decorated domestic space. There is a poster of Hazrat Sakhi Sarwar in the corner and other saints as well. All the figures are selectively chosen religious icons and have been displayed keeping an appropriate distance between them. Though the hot dry weather of the village has caused one picture to become unstuck but still one can note that the small and large posters are hung symmetrically like in a gallery, even keeping the line of the tops of the niches in sync. Furthermore, it is interesting to observe that he has not hung the posters of Makkah and Madina above the others; not giving them any special pride of place. Maybe he was not aware of these conventions, but one fact is apparent, that is that he has tried to exercise his own aesthetic taste to create a beautiful domestic space that shows how much he reveres these saints. Though the room was dustier than that of the previous arrangement, but this decoration certainly elevated his poor home. This display reflects what Pierre Bourdieu calls "Aesthetic distancing" (Bourdieu 53 -54).



Figure 6 A poster of Sakhi Sarwar (right in the corner) with other sacred and devotional icons adorned poor class bedroom. Muzaffargarh, 2014.

Baba Farid Ganjshakar was born in a village near Multan in 1179 and died in Pakpattan near Sahiwal. He was one of the founders of the Chishti sect of Sufism. According to Ibn Battuta Baba Farid was the spiritual guide to the Sultan of India Nasirudin Mahmud Firuz Shah of the Slave Dynasty. He gave the city of Ajodhan to the saint and later this city came to be known as Pakpattan. He is purported to have performed many miracles. He is one of the first people to start writing poetry in Punjabi, previously poetry was only in Urdu or Farsi (Persian).

Figure 7 shows a poor class bedroom adorned with a typical poster of Baba Farid. Here again the saint's poster is much bigger than the pictures of Makkah and Madina on the right side. Stephen Harold Riggins in his essay about the role of domestic objects notes that the meanings of objects are affected by their sizes and convey a different meaning and status. He used the term

"highlighting" meaning to attract the attention of the viewer to individual objects (Riggins 353-355). Here the poster of Baba Farid attracts the direct attention of the viewer, which probably shows the high status the person of the house gives to this poster and his strong belief in the saint and also that he wants to make the other members of the family share his belief. The interlocutor of this household had only been educated in a *madrasah* (religious school) in childhood; therefore probably he was not aware of the conventions of which religious pictures were to be given greater priority. One can appreciate the pure belief of the interlocutor that is not bothered about details and which motivated him to buy and display religious art.



Figure 7 A poster of Baba Farid in a poor class bedroom Multan, 2014

The patron saint of Sehwan Sharif in the south province of Sindh, Mir Sayyid Uthman popularly known as Shahbaz Qalandar (1177-1267) was a philosopher-poet of the Suhrawardi sect who belonged to the Qalandariyya school. He was born to a *dervash* Syed Ibrahim Kabirudin in Marwand, Afghanistan. His family came from Baghdad. His father was the caretaker of the tomb of Imam Hussain in Baghdad. He did not have any children till very late in life. It is said that when he was 75 Imam Hussain gave him a revelation that he would have a son like a falcon. Hence he is called Shahbaz Qalandar. He arrived in Sehwan in 1251 where his hallowed shrine is. He was a companion to Bahaudin Zakariya, the Suhrawardi saint of Multan, Baba Farid (Chishtia) and Jalaludin Bukhari. He is one of the most popular saints of Pakistan, widely venerated also by the Hindu and Christian community and he is also very popular in the Punjab, especially among the lower middle class and poor strata.

The saint's posters adorn domestic spaces all over the country. Figures 8 and 9 are one example. Seeing these posters every day enables the family who live in the house to find peace and comfort and cope with anxiety. Both these posters are in the bedroom so that the interlocutor will view them before he goes to sleep and the first thing he'll see when he wakes up. These posters symbolize divine grace for the household and make them feel a deeper attachment for their home.



Figure 8 A popular poster of Shahbaz Qalandar showing him flying as a falcon and with his disciple Bodla Sikandar displayed in a lower middle class bedroom in Muzafargarh, 2014.



Figure 9 A different view of the same bedroom showing another poster of Shahbaz Qalandar of the same composition except without his disciple, Muzafargarh, 2014

As we have seen, usually the posters of Sufi saints follow a few stereotype basic compositions; however, in regard to posters of this venerated saint, it seems there are a greater variety of compositions as compared to those of other saints. Figure 9 is one of the commonest compositions of his Sufi posters. However Figure 10 showing him seated and praying is also popular. Other images show him flying as a falcon or dancing, wearing a Sindhi *ajrak* (shawl) and cap and carrying a musical instrument. These are also depicted in smaller insets in the above posters. This dancing image is also shown in many other forms such as small placards or huge hoardings announcing his *urs* celebrations. The reason for this diversity in his posters is the deep love his devotees bear him that has deified the many legendary aspects of his saint-hood; his dancing, his many miracles, his flying like a falcon and his intense love for his disciples, thus these give more subjects to depict on the posters.



Figure 10 Posters of Bulleh Shah with his contemporary poet Waris Shah is hung in a drawing room of a middle class home. There is also a large political poster of a politician the owner of the house idealizes, Lahore, 2013

Bulleh Shah (1668-1774), Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri, exemplifies the poet-saint. He was born to a poor but Sayeed family in Uch. His father was a Pesh Imam Syed Shah Mohammad Darvaish and in search of livelihood they moved to Kasur in Bulleh Shah's childhood. In adolescence he sought to be the *mureed* of a *pir* Shah Inayat who belonged to the Arain caste. His family

considered this *pir* below their Syed status and objected to his caste. They ostracized Bulleh for his choice. Also the *pir* sent him away because he thought he was too ardent. It is said that Bulleh Shah danced in front of him in female clothes and thus ended his estrangement from his *pir*. He is considered one of the greatest Punjabi poets and his beautiful poetry reflects a very unorthodox, mystical and humanistic attitude. Minstrels have sung his verses down the centuries and today many famous singers, even in India sing his poems. Local pop singers have also sung his *kafis* (four line verses). Many of his verses are part of the Sikh Holy Book.

Figure 10 is significant because the poster includes Waris Shah, who is considered the other great Punjabi poet in history. Thus it seems this interlocutor reveres this saint not only as a Sufi but also as a poet. On the other hand Figure 11 the interlocutor has hung the posters where the saints can watch over his family while they sleep. Clearly he loves his family very much and he looks upon these saints to bless and protect them.



Figure 11 The bedroom of a poor class house where the whole family sleeps is adorned with a poster of Bulleh Shah and another of Hazrat Sakhi Sarwar. For some reason, maybe mistakenly the owner of the house has pasted the posters at a slant. The two children of the owner are also seen in the photograph, Muzaffargarh, 2014

On the other hand in Khwaja Farid's (1846 – 1901) time photography had been invented and thus his posters are usually different from those of earlier Sufi saints. They can have a photographic image while the others had to rely on an imaginary, formalized image based on folk lore descriptions of the saint. Khwaja Ghulam Farid belonged to the Chishti-Nizami Sufi school. He was born in Chachran near Bahawalpur and his shrine is in Mithankot. He is most famous for his beautiful poetry.

Figure 12 presents a view of a middle class bedroom with a beautifully framed portrait photograph of Khwaja Farid hung directly above the bed; in the same manner as we have seen many other posters hung in the previous figures. But as far as photographs are concerned normally those that are placed in this fashion are only of the head of the family, a deceased member or a big family photograph according to what I have observed in many

households of elite class. However it is important to note that this photo is adorned with a veil of artificial flowers, what is called a *sehra* (garland), that is traditionally put on grooms on their weddings to honour and beautify them. Saint's cenotaph and photographs are often adorned with a *sehra* symbolizing a crown of love that he has attained. Here, for the devotees of the household, the adorned portrait of Khwaja Farid is a permanent part of the domestic piety of the household and it is accorded a high status hung like the portrait of the head of the house.

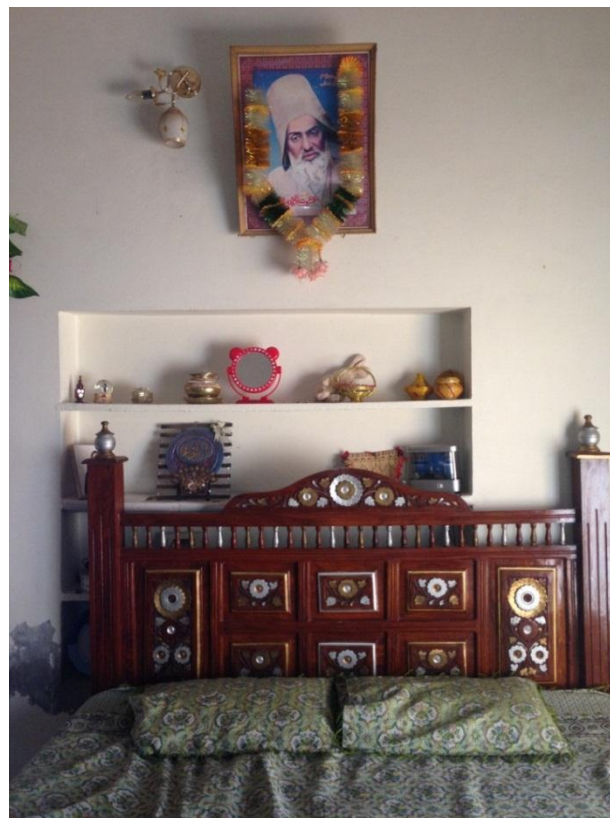


Figure 12 A modern portrait of Khwaja Ghulam Farid, watching over the bedroom of a middle class house, Muzaffargarh, 2014

Conclusions

This paper has shown considerable diversity in visual mass-produced art and devotional practices pertaining to both Indo-Muslim Sufis and Shia Imams. These revered personages are meaningfully present both in Sunni (Barelvi) and in Shia homes, from the middle class to lower strata, especially in their bedrooms displayed in prominent places. The whole families of these households seek peace and solace from these posters and like to see them when they go to sleep and when they awake. Looking upon them keeps their reverence of the personages alive.

Regarding the beliefs of these poorer classes and their relationship to these figures of piety two facts must be borne in mind:

The first is that these devotees believe these saints are not dead but are present and benevolent in a spiritual sense. Thus because of the sacred themes of these posters they affect a relationship between the saint and the beholders as well as they serve to symbolize and reinforce their belief. They become the focal point of a powerful and very real emotional attachment. Collectively they satisfy a taste for local piety which these devotees can relate to. Also they satisfy a need for someone to care and look after them and give them a sense of security.

Secondly, for more primitive oriented minds it is difficult to understand or respond to more abstract concepts. Altruistically God is actually a very abstract and transcendent concept (which in fact is outlined as such in the holy Koran); so most people worship God as some sort of father or kingly figure on high. Thus they respond more readily and personally to the figure of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and also to these saints. Their prayers are often seeking the saints' intercession with God to help them in their spiritual, mental and material problems. These posters enable people establish contact with God through these holy personages and thereby bring a deeper meaning in their lives.

By putting all these facets of belief together we gain an insight into both the subjective and cognizant role that these icons of saints play in the lives of believers. Through the centuries they have continued to be an important part in the domestic lives of people. Their veneration through ingeniously contrived modern means of production makes a significant contribution to an understanding of how such imagery promotes a powerful belief in Sufi saints, which ultimately gives indications of how popular Islam is practiced and understood at its gross roots level; especially among the lower classes, and more important how such figures of piety, love and devotion become --- to quote Frembgen:

Powerful iconic symbols embedded in the emotional and practiced forms of popular Islam ("Friends of God" 14).

Thus popular Sufi posters continue to be a growing religious trend because of the diversified range of meanings expressed in their symbolic visual imagery.

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