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# “Transpersonal Pakistan”

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The essay is controversial. The argument that Sufi-inspired transpersonal experiences, practices and processes are widespread does not match the popular view of Pakistan as a major homeland of Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ and militancy. Neither does the argument match the views of all those Islamists who bind Sufism to the transcendent theism of tradition. In various ways and to varying degrees, the most illustrious of Sufi saints move away from tradition and the alterity of the Godhead. For this reason Sufi saints can serve as a powerful font of transpersonal humanism, a universal humanism of humanity which plays a critical role in holding the nation together. Exploration of ‘transpersonal Pakistan’ also serves to illustrate a way of working as a transpersonal sociologist, and what the approach has to offer.

**Keywords:** *Healing; Pakistan; sacred humanism; Sufism; transpersonal sociology*

Pakistan is widely known as the home of conservative, sometimes militant, Islam. This is the Islam of exclusive tradition. Exclusive tradition divides people into two camps: those who belong to the humanism of the tradition itself, and those who belong to erroneous ways of being “human.” Those who adhere to tradition are on the path to salvation. The future is far from promising for non-adherents.

Transpersonal sociology is the study of the *sacred humanism of humanity*.<sup>1</sup> Transpersonal sociology dwells with the universal of the sacred, lying beyond differences generated by the sociocultural. Sacred humanism of the universal is far removed from the sacred of the exclusive humanism of conservative tradition.

It might well be thought that the idea that Pakistan is transpersonal is, well, nonsense. Surely this is the land of powerful, “in the right,” religion. In fact, the transpersonal of sacred humanity is alive and well. Sufi *pirs* or saints are the great fountain-head or spring of transpersonal humanism. Of very considerable influence, they work for the end of “humanization”; for what they “know” to be the most worthwhile life of all. They cultivate the humanism of humanity. They help hold exclusive Islam in check. They contribute to the relative stability of the nation. In this sense, and as a generalization, it is more accurate to speak of transpersonal Pakistan than Pakistan as the land of the fundamentalist.

## **Transpersonal Sociology**

It would be good to move directly to the topic of Pakistan. However, transpersonal sociology is in its infancy. For this reason alone, it might be helpful to say something about the mode of inquiry adopted here. To pave the way to Pakistan, it might also be helpful to clarify the focus of inquiry, specifically why the focus lies with sacred humanism, beyond the transcendent theism of tradition. This discussion is as brief as possible.

### **Mode of inquiry**

Transpersonal sociology can be envisaged in two rather different ways. First, there is the “activist approach.” Transpersonal activists “know” that there is “something greater than the reality of the everyday world,” something which “transcends social experience to include a spiritual dimension” (Greenwood, 1990; Cohn & Markides, 1998; reprinted in this issue). People who “think that the visible world is all that exists” are “mistaken.” Informed by their faith and experience, activists work out of their spirit to contribute to the spirit of others. Activists work with other people to help them “realize,” or more fully appreciate, the spiritual dimension of life. Ego-attachments block the path to inner spirituality. The stranglehold of the ego has to be addressed. Awareness is critical. Those intent on delving within become critics of their own egos: of the extent to which their egos are malfunctioning; the extent to which their egos are the products of the ways in which they

have been socialized; the ways in which ego-malfunction owes a great deal to sociocultural-malfunction. A “critical sociology of the ego” is in evidence.

Second, there is the ethnographic approach, one that balances experiential participation with observation. Rather than working to help people to change, the primary aim is to engage as closely as possible with those who are *already* engaged with transpersonal practices. The approach is grounded in, and informed by, participants themselves. The task is to elucidate the indigenous. The job of the transpersonal sociologist is to explore what takes place when participants “know” that the spiritual dimension is present within their lives. The aim is to explore how participants set about making contact with the transpersonal dimension; what participants have faith in; what they have to say, or how they otherwise express their experiences; to convey the experiential-cum-existential source of spirituality as vividly as possible; to explore the consequences of the ‘flow’ of spirituality into the secular world. From this perspective, the issue of whether or not a spiritual dimension actually exists, independently of whatever people might happen to believe or experience, is beside the point. What matters is exploring Ryan Rominger’s “social dynamics of the movements of the spirit,” those shifts of consciousness, awareness, *believed* to be true by those engaged with transpersonal practices; exploring those social dynamics which *are* true when they demonstrably take place in the public world. By grounding transpersonal sociology in the expressions of participants, including spiritual *virtuosi* like great Sufi saints, who surely can be relied upon as “knowing” what they are doing, interminable debates about whether the spiritual dimension exists in its own right are bypassed. By grounding transpersonal sociology in ways which do not depend on ultimate truth claims made by the sociologist, that is, by relying on the truth claims of participants themselves, judgements of the “mistaken” variety can be studied in their own context: how, why, and when do Sufi saints judge people to be “mistaken,” for example; whether they use blunt, ontological judgements of the “mistaken” variety at all, even in connection with the Taliban.

By including observational findings concerning relational, social and cultural phenomena as well as the experiential dimension, the ethnographic approach can explore the sociocultural consequences of transpersonal practice and experience. Attention is directed to exploring whether values are changed, empowered, transformed

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among those who go to Sufi Saints, for example, and if so to what effect. More generally, attention is paid to whether experiences, values, sentiments, outlooks, fuelled by practices, enter into intimate relationships, the familial, the collegial, relations within the workplace (including hospitals), the politics of emancipation, or the politics of combating hate-groups. Or attention is directed to ascertaining whether the socio-cultural significance of transpersonal practices is eroded, perhaps blocked, by those intent on undermining, even destroying, practices of this variety.

**Focus of ethnographic inquiry:**

**The transcendent or the immanent?**

Thinking of the two basic loci of the sacred, the *transcendent* (where the sacred ultimately lies with a theistic Godhead) and the *indwelling* (where the sacred ultimately lies with the inner “life” of the world), transpersonal experiences, processes and values do not have a natural home with the former. The reason for this is straightforward.

As Rominger and Friedman note in their essay (this issue), Ken Wilber’s “ideal” is “a process of ‘transcend and include.’” “Include” is not at home within theistic tradition. Traditions that emphasize the sheer difference between an all-powerful Godhead and the affairs of this world serve to exemplify the point. Duality is the order of the day. The theistic is hierarchical. The Godhead is over and above anything of this world or that of which this world is capable. Salvation lies with following the truth of the tradition in which one believes. The sacred of other traditions is not really sacred at all. The exclusive is the order of the day. Other traditions are believed to be inferior, perhaps delusional, mad, subhuman. It is true that the other major form of theistic tradition, often called “liberal,” is considerably less dualistic (teaching a much closer relationship between the Godhead and humanity) and less exclusivistic (teaching respect for other religions). However, there are limits to inclusion. Generally speaking, liberal religions insist on their autonomy. They do not countenance the idea that all traditions—especially those that are anti-liberal—are somehow the same, even in some ultimate sense.

No doubt some of the senses of the prefix “trans-” —“across”/“crossing over” (for instance, the sea), “go beyond” (for instance, transcending the personal), “through” (transcontinental), “on the other/opposite side” (transverse), “change” (transform)—apply to relationships between the transcendent of the theist and

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the believer. Relationships between the indwelling Holy Spirit and the “born again” believer can be considered in terms of the transpersonal. So can prayer, healing, and grace. Overall, though, “transcend and exclude,” rather than Wilber’s “transcend and include,” is amply in evidence within theistic quarters—and the hierarchical nature of the “trans-,” the exclusivity of the sacred, do not match what the transpersonal is taken to mean by eminent figures such as Wilber. Ethnographic inquiry is unlikely to dwell on the sacred of the transcendent.

Transpersonal processes flower when the sacred is indwelling: “known” to exist at the heart of the human writ large, the natural or cosmic order as a whole. Here, the sacred lies beyond the differentiations of tradition—tradition or ego-ego. To *be* beyond the ego *is* to include the heart of humankind. Equality *is* “the equal” of the sacred; the experience of *being* “at one” with the universal. This is a universal humankindness that can de-fuse differences of ego-generated inequalities. The inner-life spirituality of sacred humanism proclaims the transformation of the human, *of* and *for* humanity as a whole. This is not the flawed “true love” of the secular, differentiated ego. It is the experience of universal love *itself*.<sup>2</sup>

### **“Transpersonal Pakistan”: On “Balancing” a Nation**

**I**s sacred humanism widely abroad in Pakistan? How can this be the case in a country where transcendent theism is the norm? The argument is that appearances notwithstanding, processes resonant with transpersonal sacred humanism play a critical role in sustaining and cultivating the health of the nation: precisely because there is little, sometimes virtually no, dependency on theistic tradition. “Transpersonal Pakistan” is an exaggeration, to emphasize what has been rather neglected: the ways in which Sufi pirs/saints, in particular, bring life to the human/ism of humanity; help hold exclusive Islam in check; help generate more profound humanization; contribute to stability.<sup>3</sup>

#### **An Unlikely Setting**

A popular view, not uncommon within Pakistan itself, and more frequently encountered among those of other cultures, is of a nation of division and danger; one riven with strife; one that is on its last legs. The view is focused on the religious “right”: right as highly conservative, right by virtue of submitting to the will, “the Right,” of the transcendent God-head. The view is focused on militancy.

Aarish Khan (2012) has written, “Most of the banned militant terrorist outfits of Pakistan either subscribe to the Deobandi or the Wahabi-inspired Ahl-e-Hadith or Salafi school of thought” (p. 1). Influenced by the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Deobandi follow the teaching of *Wahadat ul Shahud*, literally meaning “evidence about the One” (Choudhary, 2010, p. 6). The Godhead is the One; a unity in and of the One. To threaten the unity of the transcendent is to commit the sin of *shirk*. Summarized by Elizabeth Sirriyeh (1990), *shirk* is the belief that “the association of other beings with God, is the greatest sin of all in Islam, violating the central doctrine of the faith, that of *tawhid*, the belief in Gods unity” (p. 139). To “associate” with God, in any way whatsoever, to any degree whatsoever, brings the imperfect to bear on the perfect itself: the sacred unity of the God-Head *as such*. The relationship between Allah and this world is neither egalitarian nor mutually reciprocal. Theistic Islam of the Deobandi right forbids association, partnership, friendship, with Allah. The gulf between the Godhead and this world is too great for anything transpersonal. God’s creation is not God *per se*. Immanence is downplayed. The Prophet is perfect: as a human. Pakistanis who believe that Sufi, *themselves*, are perfect, and—worst of all—“worship” them as autonomous beings beyond “the sovereign rule of Allah,” commit *shirk* (Schimmel, 2001, p. 32). Categorically, monotheism cannot be eroded by polytheism. Neither can the humanism of Deobandi tradition—and that tradition alone—be corrupted by the sacred humanism of humanity as a whole. Hence the right wing attacks on the shrines, mosques and leadership of universalistic, Sufi-associated Islam (Khan, 2012; Rehman, 2012).<sup>4</sup>

The popular view appears to be supported. The notion of “transpersonal Pakistan” appears to be nonsensical. The otherness, transcendence, utter uniqueness, incomparability of the Godhead of the Deobandi, combined with the exclusiveness of Deobandi tradition, entail that this territory is far too inhospitable, too stony, for transpersonal practice and experience. However, the popular view ignores the zones of the religious landscape of Pakistan where the ground is far more fertile.

#### **Moderate Pakistan**

It is true that the religious or spiritual sensibilities of the great majority of Pakistanis are informed by the ultimate value, ideal, of living up to the perfect of the sacred via the path of theistic tradition. It is true that the mosque of tradition is firmly in place across the

nation. (Gallup Pakistan [2012, May 18] has reported that all but a small number of males “often” go to a local mosque for Friday prayers [n.p.] It is also true that *zahir* (sustained by religious experts of the ulama, mullahs, sacred texts, public, outward forms of religion), together with the hold of local customs, serve to counter tendencies towards the sacred humanism of humanity: most strikingly, perhaps, in connection with gender characteristics and relationships.

However, the theistic orientation of Pakistan has to be qualified. The moderate Islam of the nation emphasizes the immanence of the sacred. As Roger Ballard (2006) put it in connection with the Punjab, “An awareness of the *presence* of Allah pervades the lives of rural Punjabi Muslims” (p. 160; emphasis added). The Prophet, too, is immanent: not just as a human; far more significantly as the divine light of Allah, present in the world at many places at the same time. In effect, the Prophet is “in” the world, albeit not “of” it. Whereas a great deal of the Deobandi movement of Pakistan is underpinned by Naqshbandi Sufism, Chishti Sufism underpins the major school of moderate Islam, the Bareilvi. Marking the influence of Ibn al-Arabi, the concept of *Wahdatul Wajud*—unity of existence—is influential (Choudhary, 2010, p. 6). Rather than unity belonging to the Godhead, over-and-above this world, everything belongs to the unity of the “all.” Human life is bound up with the sacred.

Accordingly, non-violence is valued. Bareilvi do not attack Deobandi mosques. So is the value of including, accepting, even encouraging other religions. An arresting finding of Gallup Pakistan (2010, January 8) is that “more than two thirds of all Pakistanis (69 per cent) believe that Christians in Muslim countries like Pakistan should be allowed to construct churches for worship” (n.p.). The moderate outlook of the Bareilvi movement is attested by the fact that most adherents attend Sufi shrines, not just their mosques; attend the shrines of Sufi saints, the saints of sacred humanism.<sup>5</sup>

Approximately three quarters of the population are of moderate religious persuasion. The themes of unity, immanence, and humanism are pervasive. The popular view of a nation ruled by “fundamentalists” is patently a misleading, alarmist, counter-productive stereotype.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sufism**

So to Sufism, the land where sacred humanism flowers most vividly of all. For Jurgen Fremgben (2006), Pakistan is “a heartland of Islamic mysticism,” a country

where the “path of love” is “especially alive in its popular manifestations” (p. ix). Whether dead or alive, pirs or saints lie at the heart of the matter. The sacred humanism of humanity writ large is “known” by all those pirs/saints who have moved beyond the differentiations of the exclusive truths of belief or sacred text to “know” the inclusive of the “all,” the spirituality that flows through life. Movement is from the exterior realm of *zahir*, or tradition, to the interior realm of *batin*: experience of immersion in unity; realization of *Wahdatul Wajud*. In the parlance of Western transpersonal studies, sacred humanism is in evidence when pirs/saints have shifted from what they have acquired from the socio-cultural, accumulated as the ego, to what is experienced as boundless; to that which is unalloyed by division, including the divisions of tradition.

The most popular, influential saints of Pakistan include Bulleh Shah (Punjab), Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (Sindh), Bari Imam (Islamabad), Baba Fareed (Punjab), Lal Shahbaz Qalander (the “Red Sufi of Sehwan”) and Sachal Sarmast (Sindh). All have moved beyond tradition; all are sacred humanists of the universal. To use expressions of the variety favored by these saints, the sacred “dwells within the heart,” “resides within the body” (and see below). Sometimes, the language of the “indwelling” serves to emphasize the immanence, closeness, “presence” of the sacred. The indwelling ultimately depends on God on High. Here, the turn within diminishes the attention paid to God beyond. Here, Sufi are *inclined* towards the inner-life. Sometimes, though, the language of “indwelling” serves to emphasize the sacred of human/natural life itself. The move within is more radical. In this connection, the sacred is “known” to encapsulate, or express depths that *belong* to the world. Whether ultimately grounded in the theistic of the transcendent, in the inherent of the sacred of human life itself, or both, Sufi of inner-life persuasion are somewhat removed from the Godhead of right wing believers, the teaching of *Wahadat ul Shahud*, the belief that Allah rules life from beyond the human, the belief that humanism belongs to a particular tradition.

According to Ariene Gregorius (1999), “There are thousands of pirs across Pakistan, with millions of followers” (p. 1). The number surges when all those pirs/saints who are physically dead (albeit spiritually alive and powerful) are taken into account, perhaps to 10,000, perhaps many more. The number increases when the *murid* (disciple, novice) is included. As a guess-

estimate, the number of Sufi—dedicated to the quest of union with the sacred—is less than 100,000, probably considerably less. However, vastly greater numbers visit Sufi shrines. Muhammad Choudhary (2010) referred to the “rough estimate” that approximately one million visit the Islamabad shrine of Bari Imam annually, with 60,000 attending the annual Urs (p. 14). The annual Urs of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar attracts some half a million “pilgrims” from around Pakistan (Ghani, 2012); the Urs of Waris Shah some 300,000 (Rehman, 2009, p. 154). In the Punjab, almost everyone turns to pirs on occasion. Roger Ballard (2006) wrote, “In my experience very few Punjabis—no matter how “orthodox” their religious commitment might be, and no matter whether they are Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims—fail to explore . . . remedies [provided by pirs] when faced with irresolvable personal difficulties” (p. 166). Ascertaining popularity from national polls, two findings of Gallup Pakistan are worthy of note. First, “37% [of] Pakistanis favour taking *bayt* (oath) from a *pir* (saint)” (2011, April 6). Second, “32 % of men and 15 % of Pakistani women claim they participated in an annual congregation / festival (Urs) at a Sufi shrine during the last one year” (Gallup Pakistan, 2012, May 21); a finding from 1987, for males, is identical (Gallup Pakistan, 1987, August 1).

In the eyes of Huma Imtiaz and Charlotte Buchen (2011), “Sufism [is] Pakistan’s most popular brand of Islam” (p. 11). On the basis of data provided in this essay, it appears that between 30 and 40 per cent of the Muslims of Pakistan have faith *in* Sufi pirs/saints *themselves*, with most seeking first hand contact with the sacred *of* the saint/pir as and when required. Although there are no determinate percentages, it is certainly safe to say that Sufism is popular enough to serve as a significant force of the land. In fact, the most popular, the most influential, of pirs/saints are inward-orientated sacred humanists; “masters” of the universal.<sup>7</sup>

### **To and Out of the Sacred:**

#### **The Transpersonal of Pirs/Saints**

In the words of that expert on Sufism in Pakistan, Jurgen Frembgen (2006), “Friends of God,” namely saints, seek to “refine the divine qualities hidden in the human soul”; seek to realize “the unity underlying the whole of creation” (p. 5). Striving for union with the sacred, ultimately to dissolve into the unitary, pirs/saints endeavor to liberate themselves from the attachments of the ego; from being tied to anything imperfect. It is easy to see this as the path of world-rejection: working

to move beyond the imperfect as much as absolutely possible, working to remain with the perfect as much as absolutely possible, working to disappear as an inevitably imperfect human being of the realm of the secular. However, virtually all inner-orientated pirs/saints “know” that the path to the sacred *requires* ethical agency within this world (Hassanali, 2010, p. 25). The dynamic of connection has two aspects: connecting with the sacred by moving beyond the secular world of the imperfect, and connecting with people to contribute to their liberation from their flawed lives. World-rejection goes together with world-activism. World-rejection, alone, is the exception rather than the rule.

Movement towards the sacred entails following the path of “humanization”; the path of becoming ever more truly human by aligning with the universal humanity of the sacred. Pirs/saints seek to liberate themselves from the imperfections, the anti-humanism, of the ego-level of being; seek to transcend or transform the lower, “animalistic,” *nafs* of the ego. Pirs/saints practice humanism, for themselves-cum-others. Pirs/saints cultivate sentiments of compassion, consideration, mercy; cultivate awareness of humankindness, the sheer value of life, the values of equality or mutuality. Liberation, salvation is *via* and for spiritual humanism, most especially when “love” is “known” to flow through life. The humanism of humanity is critical as a means to the end of uniting humankind, and as a means to the end of pir/saint union with the sacred. Uniting with the unity of the sacred involves seeking to unify humans. The greater the extent to which pirs/saints source the sacred, the greater the extent to which they can serve as a re/source for “others.” To help ‘others’ to engage with the cause of universal humanism is to move towards, into the sacred. For a great many Pakistanis, pirs/saints are the experts of the transvaluation of human life, their own and the lives of the more ego-dominated.

#### **Saints Themselves**

The best way of grasping the transpersonal dynamics and qualities of saints is, perhaps, by letting them speak for themselves. Several illustrations are provided, drawn from the works of the most illustrious saints of Pakistan. The theme of liberation from the imperfect is clearly in evidence, with the imperfect taken to include the mosque, the “codes” of religious tradition, or being “a Hindu” or “a Muslim.” Love for all is of utmost significance: beyond the identities, or identifications, of the secular.

Bulleh Shah (1680-1752 CE), “considered the greatest of Panjabi mystical poets” (Schimmel, 2011, p. 388), frequently composed from beyond the orthodoxy of theistic Islamic tradition. One of his best known poems, “Destroy the Mosque and Temple!” illustrates just how radically transgressive—and blunt—he could be in the cause of God within.

Destroy the mosque!  
Destroy the temple!  
Destroy whatever you please.  
Do not break the human heart,  
For God  
Dwells therein.  
(Jamal, 2009, p. 311)

Although Bulleh Shah’s poetry is sometimes more theistic in pulse, poems such as “Destroy the Mosque and Temple!” patently are not—he was a man who was not bothered by shirk.<sup>8</sup> Another poem includes the lines, “When my Beloved entered my abode/I abandoned religion’s code” (Jamal, 2009, p. 307). His own “code”—very much of experience—lies with expressing, serving, the universal. Bulleh Shah’s humanism of humanity, with everyone sacred at heart, is vividly conveyed by another of his poems:

Remove duality and do away with all disputes;  
The Hindus and Muslims are not other than He.  
Deem everyone virtuous, there are no thieves.  
For, within every body He himself resides.  
How the Trickster has put on a mask!  
(Puri & Shangari, 1986, p. 21)

In the words of one of his translators, “Performing good deeds or favouring and serving humanity cannot be separated” from how Bulleh Shah worked for the ultimate of his life, union with the sacred (Ahmad, 2003, p. 5).

Jalaluddin Rumi, whose poetry is deeply felt among the pirs/saints of Pakistan, wrote:

Fools laud and magnify the mosque,  
While they strive to oppress holy men of heart.  
But the former is mere form, the latter spirit and truth.  
The only true mosque is that in the hearts of the saints.  
The mosque that is built in the hearts of saints  
Is the place of worship for all,  
For God dwells there.  
(Whinfield, 2011, Book 5, Story 3)

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Then there is the Sindh Sufi poet Sachal Sarmast (1739-1829 CE), with the terse lines,

Tis not in religion I believe,  
Tis love I live in.

For this poet, “He is everywhere and in each and every phenomenon” (Abbasi, 1989). Or think of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (1177-1274 CE): honored as saint/ruler of Sindh; a man whose sacrality was “reflected” in those who came to him; who is regarded as “the lord who gives us life,” with placards studied by Frembgen (2008) containing the lines “The threshold to the Qalandar is a help for the poor, every sorrow will come to an end if we call upon him” (pp. 4-5). Or consider Mionuddin Chishti (1141-1230 CE; buried in Rajasthan), the Sufi who developed the Chishti order, now the largest of South Asia: “peace to all,” the importance of developing “river-like generosity, sun-like affection and earth-like hospitality.” Then there is Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689-1752 CE), of the Sindh, with the verse,

From One, many to being came;  
“Many” but Oneness is;  
Don’t get confounded, Reality  
is “One,” this truth don’t miss—  
Commotions vast display—all this,  
I vow, of Loved-one is.  
(Jamal, 2009, p. 313)

## The Transpersonal:

### From Pirs/Saints to the Public

Sufism in action is primarily by way of the sacred flowing from pirs/saints into the world; primarily to heal.

**The transpersonal of healing illness.** According to the World Health Organization (2001), 70% of Pakistanis use TM (traditional medicine) or CAM (complementary and alternative medicine; WHO, p. 79). Based on a survey of cancer patients in Lahore, Philip Tovey and colleagues (2007) found that 84 % use TM and/or CAM (p. 120). By far the largest number report that they have been to a pir for healing (p. 120). (Recall Ballard on the numerical significance of visits to pirs.)

Muhammed Hassanali (2010) noted the belief that *baraka*, the spiritual power of the saint/pir, “has the potential to transform an individual’s spirituality as well as provide concrete material blessings” (p. 29).

The impact of spiritual agency owes a great deal to the authority of the saint/pir. Those who go to shrines encounter the ultimate of the “pure;” the perfect of the power of the sacred. Their attention is focused on the sacred of the saint/pir. Essays in an excellent volume edited by Helene Basu and Pnina Werber, *Embodying Charisma: Modernity and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (1998), serve to demonstrate the sheer vitality of what takes place at shrines, tombs; for some, Sufi abodes, lodges, “hospices.” Typically, encounters with the sacred are highly charged. Typically, they are of a transpersonal nature, the direct “crossing over” from the saint/pir to those who come to be healed, the healing force of the pir/saint flowing out to enter the patient. Altered states of consciousness are frequent.

Pirs do more than transmit the “raw” power of the sacred. Most obviously during one-to-one encounters, pirs serve as spiritual guides. Attendees are directed to examine, reflect upon, confront, those bad habits of the ego that have generated their illness. Pirs might attribute chest pains to a *jinn* (spirit), the *jinn* of violent tendencies; state that the violence of the *jinn* is wrong, that healing requires doing something about those malfunctioning relationships that generate the hatred. Bearing in mind that the path to union of the saint/pir is intimately bound up with humanism, shrines have “moral authority” (Frembgen, 2006, p. 1). Uzma Rehman (2009) referred to “moral lessons,” attendees learning about respect, humility, brotherhood, friendship, the value of “good deeds” from their “spiritual guides” (p. 142). Pnina Werbner (2003) wrote along much the same lines. By “energising this mundane world of the here and now in which pilgrims live their daily lives,” the spiritual baraka transmitted by pirs/saints serves “moral renewal” (p. 127).

The healing power of the pir/saint is value-laden. The power of values, themselves, help change negative ego evaluations in favor of the humanistic. Sentiments—as power-laden values – are at work; “feelings” of what it is to be/come truly human. Power charges the good of the world. Healing agency is taken to entail the transformation of values and associated ways of being: from what the ego holds dear, like possessive love and all the jealousy that goes with it, towards or into the life of “true” love. People do not go to pirs/saints to become good humanists. They go to be healed. However, many of those who engage with their pir/saint healer are immersed in the virtuous of the power of

healing; have to confront those states of affairs which counter the way of of “healthy humanism.” The power-cum-values, sentiments, dispositions, perspectives of the healer: respected, learnt from, absorbed—to some degree or another.<sup>9</sup>

**The transpersonal of the cultivation of humankindness.** The sacred universal humanism of pirs/saints contributes to humankindness in numerous ways. On a broader compass than the alleviation of illness, saints/pirs express “political” outlooks; make judgements. Recalling Bulleh Shah’s lines, “Remove duality and do away with all disputes/The Hindus and Muslims are not other than He,” attention is directed to the disquiet, distress fuelled by the differentiations of the socio-cultural realm. Pirs/saints point to what has to be done to alleviate suffering generated by society, culture, religious tradition: namely seeking life in harmony with the way of the sacred. Given the extraordinarily high esteem accorded to saints like Bulleh Shah among swathes of the population, with their poetry resonating with impact, people are encouraged to question the reality of the divisions of the socio-cultural; are incited to re-evaluate, perhaps “trans-evaluate,” human life as such.

A Lahore-based leftist Muslim human rights activist has proclaimed “the revolutionary potential of popular Sufi discourses” (anonymous, personal communication, 2007). The argument is that the unitary humanism of many a pir/saint can be drawn upon to help ground human rights. Sacred humanism can serve to fertilize the cultivation of rights, legitimate them, vitalize them. To all intents and purposes, the foundations of the rights of the United Nations have long existed within sacred humanism: the ultimate value of human life; the fundamental equality of life; the freedom to live in accord with the truly worthwhile; a universal basis for justice. The sacred, as “the right” of rights, can be drawn upon to help counter the tendency to treat human rights as alien, western forms of imposition. Pirs/saints can readily defend “the right” of rights by pointing to the consequences of deviation. Deviation, itself, is the punishment. Deviation means encountering illness, distress, misfortune, the grosser imperfections of the secular. Localized cultural politics, or higher level governmental policy, can be informed by the “law” of the life of the sacred. Sufi-informed philanthropy and banking activity, too, can be infused by the transpersonal of the sacred unity of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

“Sacred rights,” the values of unbounded humanity, the humanism of universal life, address gender inequality. Expressing love, openness, tolerance, compassion with the force of the sacral, pirs/saints, their shrines, tombs, their gatherings and events, and their abodes, are the only “public” places where it is possible for women to engage with the sacral on an equal footing with males. Whereas women tend to be few and far between in the mosque, or simply absent, the situation is very different at the shrine. Typically, the number of females and males is much the same. Although activities ultimately revolve around pirs/saints who are normally—although not exclusively—male, the ritual process frequently revolves around women. The humanism of equality, freedom, the inclusive, the unitary, is vividly attested. Altered states of consciousness—transcending gender differences—are commonplace. Sacred equality is in action. Transpersonal life-values, beyond the ego-discriminations of ego-genders, are authorized, positively encouraged, by the sacred universalism of the shrine. Thinking of gender relationships beyond the shrine, it is most unlikely that people simply forget their experiences when they return to the everyday world. So long as “shrine” experiences remain effective, Sufi humanism ameliorates the position of women. (See Abbas, 2002; Shaikh, 2009; more generally, Nussbaum, 1995).

**The transpersonal of the cultural.** To serve as a significant presence, to serve as an effective source of critique and activism, pirs/saints have to be popular. They have to have acquired a reputation for being able to make a difference. They have to inspire people to have faith in them. They have to heal in ways that are nothing less than miraculous; write poetry that could not be more inspirational, truthful.

Not least because the great majority of the most influential of pirs/saints have “died,” cultural transmission serves the transpersonal spirit of the pir/saint through time (as well as across space). Popular culture expresses, carries, the transformational agency or message of pirs/saints; goes beyond them to cross over to others. Poetry “moves” the sacral, expressive experiences of the pir/saint to those who recite, sing, listen. It is “poetry in motion,” if a Western song may be referenced (Anthony & Kaufman, 1960). For those who are receptive, Bulleh Shah’s lines, “Do not break the human heart/For God/Dwells therein,” continue to resound through the ages.

**“Transpersonal Pakistan”**

The effectiveness of cultural transmission is highlighted by the fact that in the Punjab and Sindh, in particular, the most popular gatherings, of sacred intent, are at the shrines of saints. The popularity of shrines demonstrates the extent to which saints-as-gods are deeply embedded in the culture; as is the Wahdatul Wajud teaching. (See Ballard, 2006, on the cultural significance of Bulleh Shah.) If the culture were to speak differently—for example stressing the dangers of the shirk of the “polytheism” of worshipping saints—shrines would not appeal (Ballard, 2006, p. 166).

### **On Sufism as a Force in the Land**

First, Sufism, in tandem with moderate Islam, serves as a *joint force*, one that is central within contemporary Pakistan. As “spiritual adepts who are wholeheartedly committed to intense levels of spiritual practice” (Ballard, 2006, p. 168), the number of Sufis is too small to serve, alone, as a force in the land. Influence on a national scale owes a great deal to the far larger number of people who are “Sufi” on a part-time basis. Numerical potency lies with the Sufi-moderate Islam joint force. Primarily of Bareilvi persuasion, millions move from home-base, the mosque, to Sufi shrine/tomb/abode, then back. Extrapolating from evidence provided earlier, it is likely that well over half the 73.5 million population of the Punjab alone belong to the joint force. Continuities between Sufism and Bareilvi culture ensure that Bareilvi are at ease when they move from mosque to shrine. At the same time, Sufism is different enough from the sphere of the mosque-mullah to make a difference in some areas such as gender relations. Complementary interplay is in evidence. Each sphere is beneficial. The mosque is primarily for salvation, the shrine primarily for healing, for example. Each sphere contributes to, assists, the other. If this were not the case, people would not bother to move between the two. (Ballard’s [2006] account of Sufi-Bareilvi interplay is highly illuminating.) Working in tandem, the joint force constitutes the core of the nation. It can be added that it is highly unlikely that the heartland is threatened by the “reassertion of a radical Sunni Bareilvi subculture” which—it is claimed—is currently taking place (White, 2012, p. 179). The joint force is too embedded.

Second, Sufism (with more seriously engaged moderate Muslims) serves as a *third force*: third in that it is patently *not* secular, *nor* theistic in the sense of being limited to absolute belief in God’s unity (tawhid) in and of the transcendent (Wahadat ul Shahud ). As

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a third force, Sufi are positioned to address, critique, counter, all that is taken to be harmful of the secular and *all* that is judged imperfect of institutionalized, especially conservative, theism. In general terms, the secular is judged to be far from perfect. Shami Chishti's proclamation, "The worldly people are impure while the dervishes are pure in their souls" (Lawrence, 1991, p. 18), is typical. Pirs/saints are acutely aware of the perils, the corrupting temptations of the secular. In the words of the twelfth century Saint, Chishti Baba Fareed of the Punjab, "Fareed, when there is greed, what can there be?/ When there is greed, love is false" (Singh, 2008, p. 8.). Regarding institutionalized, especially right wing theism, Sufis attack religion (recall Bulleh Shah). A great deal of religious tradition is judged to have been corrupted by the secular; in effect to be the secular in religious guise or disguise.

Third, there is the matter of ascertaining whether Sufism—as a third force, as a partner of the joint force—is effective. Does Sufism make a substantive difference to everyday life (personal, social) within the secular? Is Sufi-engendered flow experienced and implemented at governmental levels? It is safe to say that a great tranche of the population is Sufi-inclined, sympathetic, or receptive. It is safe to say that considerable numbers are stirred, "moved," by direct contact with pir-power. It is safe to say that the sacred humanism of Sufism plays a major role in "balancing" the nation. Sufism helps to ensure that the heartland of the nation—the Punjab and much of the Sindh—serves as a humanistic, peaceful, "heavy-weight" force, more than capable of countering the alleged spread of right wing Islam.

Pakistan remains in equilibrium. The country is not collapsing into power struggles, let alone civil war. Without Sufi humanism, though, conservative Islam would surely grow, greater conflict would ensue, the nation would really fall out of balance, perhaps to fall to the hands of the religious right. Divisions, such as that between women and men, would become more pronounced. From the humanism of baraka to the humanism of poetry: by cultivating a sense of humankindness, by vitalizing the ethicality of humanism, by charging healing with the power of sacred humanism, it is beyond reasonable doubt that Sufi activism plays a critical role in sustaining the humanistic heartland of the nation. Sufi humanism faces up to de-humanizing forces, forces that de-humanize by de-valuing, sometimes attacking, those advocating the humanism of humanity

in the name of their own exclusive beliefs about what it is to be human. To sustain, strengthen, the transpersonal of "life as a whole" defuses the forces of de-humanization: not by physically attacking those who destroy Sufi shrines (for example) but by way of "value-attack" in the name of universal humankindness. The heartland holds. "Islamic extremists have never won more than 12 per cent of the vote in a general election" (Mallet & Bokhari, 2012, p. 5).<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion

To explore inner-orientated Sufism in action *is* to show what it can *do*. Exploration provides facts. The facts are armed with ethical-political significance. They can provide a powerful basis for arguing that more *should* be done to support the Sufi quest to change the world around them. When transpersonal sociology engages with the experiences, expressions and activities of indigenous participants, and explores personal and sociocultural consequences, the contribution to "making a difference" lies precisely with what engagement has to say. The ethnographer provides the information required for well-informed judgement. Obviously, the information will not always help the Sufi cause. Conservative theistic Muslims, for instance, might become yet more aware of the threat of universal humanism. On the other hand, ethnographic information can contribute to shifting evaluation: from being unsure about the nature of Sufism and what it has to offer, to appreciating its value; or to evaluating Sufism yet more positively. Here lies an activism generated by the fact that the "truly" transpersonal, of the indigenous, is replete with *valuable* values. Assuming that one is a humanist of humanity, that is.

### Notes

1. The term "sociology" is used as a shorthand to include overlapping approaches, most especially social/cultural anthropology.
2. See Heelas (2012a, 2013a) on the terms sacred and secular. The argument is that the former is "the perfect," the latter "the imperfect." Couched in the language of "the pure" and "the impure," for example, the distinction is certainly operative within Islam/Sufism.
3. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, in 2011 the population of the nation amounted to 177 million. The Punjab and Sindh, of greatest concern in what follows, are estimated at 73.5 million and

30.5 million. According to the 1998 census, 96.28 per cent of the population is Muslim.

4. A relatively small number of Deobandi adherents of the Punjab are tolerant of Sufi saints (Choudhary, 2010, p. 12).
5. In connection with the “construction of churches for worship” finding, Gallup Pakistan has rather pointedly noted that the poll took place “in the wake of the news that a majority of the Swiss voters had supported to ban the building of mosques with minarets in its neighbourhoods” (Gallup Pakistan, 2010, January 8. n.p.). Joshua White (2012) provided a helpful analysis of what it means to speak of “moderate” in the context of Pakistan.
6. Aarish Khan (2012) estimated the Deobandi amount to between 15 and 35 per cent of the national population (p. 1). Taking other statistics into account, including data reported by Jeremy Page and Zahid Hussain (2009), it is likely that the Deobandi amount to around a quarter of the nation. Drawing on data from the USA-based Pew Research Centre, Khan provided the estimate that the Barevli wing of the Sunni falls between 50 to 70 per cent (p. 1). With the Barevli at, say, 60 per cent, and the largely moderate Shia at 15 per cent (Khan, p. 1), the total of those committed to moderate Islam is around 75 per cent; this is three times the number of Pakistanis of conservative, Deobandi commitment. The “ruled by ‘fundamentalists’” scenario is also undermined by the Gallup Pakistan (2012, June 13) statistic that just 21 per cent claim to be “very conventional,” that is adhere to strong tradition (n.p.). Neither is right wing Islam especially powerful in the political arena. The national (and local) elections of 2008 “trounced” the religious parties of right wing Muslims of Deobandi persuasion (Abbas, 2009, p. 8; see also “The Calculus of Electoral Politics in Pakistan (1970-2008)” published by the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency in 2008). The relatively marginal position of right wing Islam is also indicated by Gallup Pakistan finding that 56 per cent of the population think that the influence of religion in society is either decreasing (35 per cent) or has remained much the same (21 per cent) (Gallup, May 11, 2011).
7. Not all pirs/saints are inner-orientated. Conservative pirs, emphasizing doctrine, sacred texts, shari’a, work with the embedded humanism of exclusive tradition. A few, including Pir Tayyab and Sufi Muhammad, have worked with militant organizations (Imtiaz and Buchen, 2011, p. 12).
8. Bulleh Shah’s master, Inyat Shah, wrote of “attaching” the mind “to God within” (Gibbons & Pritchard-Jones, 2008, p. 32).
9. Ethnographic accounts of what takes place at shrines include: Rehman (2009, 2011), Helene Basu and Pnina Werbner (Eds., 1998) and Choudhary (2010), the last drawing attention to the extent to which gatherings are inclusive, and providing a useful summary of why people go to shrines (p. 25). YouTube provides vivid illustrative material. A considerable amount of evidence, which cannot be entered into here, supports the contention that a great many people regard pirs/saints as sacred. See Heelas (2008, pp. 222-35), and (2012b; 2013b) for further discussion of healing.
10. On Sufi sacred humanism and the cultivation of human rights, see, for example, Heelas (2008, pp. 222-32), more generally Shaikh (2009), more generally still, Turner (1993, 2006). Tahir-ul-Adri, founder of an influential Sufi-based organization promoting rights, is the author of *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings* (2011). See Heelas (1992) on a world-ranking bank, ideally run according to the transpersonal flows of the sacred of Sufi humanism.
11. On the topic of “pir-politics,” an article in *The Economist* (Delhi & Sharif, 2008) provided the estimate that “pir politicians command 10% of the popular vote” (p. 25); and noted that pirs are active at the highest levels of provincial and national government (a Prime Minister and a Foreign Secretary have been pirs, for example). Pirs run organizations of considerable political importance, for example Pir Pagara’s the Hurs of the Sindh. Large Barevli organizations—such as Jamaat Ahle Sunnat and Sunni Tehreek—are pir-influenced. Pir-politics does not only rely on organized parties. By contributing to humanistic values—in particular to the ethos, the habits of the heart of the Barevli—through activity at the more local level (including the “politics of healing”), the humanistic translates into votes; the power of (relatively) moderate parties in government; their democratic endorsement to counter (allegedly)

better-organized conservative parties. The literature is extensive. See, for example, Terri Drage (2011), Katherine Ewing (1983), Muhammed Hassanali (2010), Alix Philippon (2012) and Joshua White (2012).

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## About the Journal

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