



SUFI TRADITIONS AND SACRED NARRATIVES: INVESTIGATING THE IZZAT BIBI (MAI HEER) SHRINE AND ITS ENDURING INFLUENCE IN JHANG, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This investigation explores the many facets of the Izzat Bibi Shrine, also known as the Mai Heer Shrine, in Jhang, Punjab, Pakistan. The present research aims to elucidate the persistent allure of the Heer Ranjha tale and its ability to transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. Myths give communities a way to make sense of their lives and provide a foundation for their standards and beliefs. The data was collected through a semi-structured interview consisting of ten items. The participants were thirty, and they were visitors and caretakers. Data collection and analysis were conducted using a qualitative methodology and an anthropological lens. This study utilizes the teachings of Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi as a foundation to provide a theoretical framework. This study examines the myths and tales surrounding the shrine, including the notion that rainfall does not enter its premises. In-depth analysis of the Izzat Bibi Shrine is a witness to its everlasting cultural and spiritual significance, shedding light on the ways in which folklore, spirituality, and cultural history converge in the heart of Punjab, Pakistan. Entering the Izzat Bibi Shrine is like walking into a timeless folktale where history, myth, and devotion beautifully mix, promising an adventure of mystery and amazement. From a religious perspective, the shrine reveals the beliefs and aspirations of its adherents through their participation in the shrine's rituals. The findings of this research have significant implications for both academics and the promotion of cultural appreciation. This study makes a valuable contribution to the greater understanding of the cultural, religious, and historical aspects of the Women Sufi Shrine within the context of shrines and folklore in the Punjab area of Pakistan.

Keywords: Women Sufism, Izzat Bibi Shrine, Mai Heer, Jhang, Heer Ranjha, Folk Lore, Spiritual Practices, Love Story, Culture



Introduction

Jhang is the land of Sufi saints and shrines. This Sufi Journey begins from the river of Chenab. The city of Jhang, located in the Punjab region of Pakistan, has a rich and eventful past. Jhang's ties to the Indus Valley Civilization attest to the city's long history of human habitation. Sufism, the spiritual and mystic branch of Islam, has a long history of preaching divine love, devotion, and oneness. The story of Heer, a devout woman, and Ranjha, her disciple (mureed), is consistent with Sufi ideas of spiritual guidance and the pursuit of mystical union. The spiritual and romantic Heer Ranjha stories both present at the shrine enrich its cultural value. It's open to several interpretations, thus it'll attract more people.

Women have played crucial roles in the evolution of Sufism from its earliest days and throughout the ages. They broke through barriers in their spiritual and social lives despite the widespread belief in the superiority of males over women in the Muslim world. Qur'anic verses that portray men and women as equal in God's sight have provided the foundation for women's claims to full participation in religious life. Traditional male spheres of power have been challenged by women who are stepping into such roles. Even if it was greeted with resistance by male representatives of the Orthodox mainstream and Sufi masters, women's empowerment and the strengthening of women's roles within Islamic culture continue to this day. These shifts have evidently had social and theological implications. Female Sufis practicing tariqa in North America have been able to overcome media stereotypes about women's roles in Islamic culture through the language of the Beloved, an expression of the recognition of the feminine in Islam's spiritual dimension, and a demonstration of the equality of men and women on the spiritual path.

Sufism emerged in the early eighth century as an alternative to the ruling ulama and the ensuing poverty and lethargy under the Umayyad Caliphate. In the beginning, Sufis were not concerned with appearances but rather with the spiritual, non-physical aspects of their lives. Sufism originated among the lowest social classes. This mystical idea expanded across Islam with a significant contribution from women. Most "unconscious agents of tasawwuf" were Sufis who cared more about the hearts of the conquered than the areas they took. The earliest forms of Sufism emphasized a person's unique spirituality and devotion. As they progressed along the maqaamat of the mystical path, female mystics developed their intuitive and emotional spiritual capabilities, allowing them to get closer to reality.

Women participation in Sufism traced back to its inception, namely to the seventh to tenth century. Plenty of records from this time period show that women continued to play an important role in Sufism. Also living at this period was Rabia al Adawiyya (d. 801), one of the most often mentioned Sufi ladies. The thoughts and practices of the Sufis of the time were credited with shaping Sufism throughout this era. As a Sufi lady, Rabia al-Adawiyya came to serve as an inspiration to people of various backgrounds and eras, but particularly to women. Many later Sufis credit her with initiating a paradigm shift in Sufi theory and practice by advocating an unconditional love for the Divine (Schimmel, 2019).

The status of women in Sufism is often contrasted with that of women in Islam, with Sufism being portrayed as more progressive than Islam both historically and in the present day. More research on the history and context of Sufism's treatment of women is necessary to have a clearer picture of their role within the religion today. Sharify-Funk et al. (2017) note that "considering the status of women within Sufi and Muslim contexts is not simply a matter of marginalization or 'empowerment,' but is far more nuanced, as women negotiate and occupy a spectrum of the sphere in their enactment of Sufi traditions.



Many women have played significant roles in the development of Sufism at every level of its history. Women have long been acknowledged in all of these roles along this path: teacher, mentor, guide, student, disciple, seeker, and aspirant. Women and gender in Sufism have been the subject of an expanding amount of writing in recent years. More research has been done all throughout the globe, and this has sparked a new wave of study on women in Sufism. Ernst (2003) argues that the growing number of women involved in Sufism today is a direct result of the worldwide shift in traditional gender roles for women. According to him, gender equality is the most revolutionary idea in modern Global Sufism. At the same time, global Sufi (tariqas) have experienced structural modifications to become more gender-inclusive during the period. Ernst argues that "feminist interpretations of Sufism" signal a sea shift in Global Sufism and perhaps a fresh start for the religion.

The objective of this research is to explore the aspects of women Sufi shrines in the culturally diverse area of Punjab, with specific emphasis on the shrine dedicated to Izzat Bibi, also known as Mai Heer. This study is to comprehensively record and preserve the historical and cultural legacy linked to the Heer shrine, therefore elucidating its spiritual importance and the distinctive function it serves as a shrine dedicated to women in the Sufi tradition. This research is to examine the modern significance of the shrine and its influence on the sociocultural environment of Punjab by conducting a thorough investigation of its rituals, traditions, and practices. This study aims to provide a valuable contribution to the field of academic research. Additionally, it endeavors to foster a more profound comprehension of spirituality that encompasses individuals of all genders, as well as shed light on the lasting impact of these revered locations in Pakistan.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the historical origin of the Izzat Bibi Shrine known as Mai Heer, and how has it evolved over time within the cultural and religious landscape of Jhang Punjab Pakistan?
- 2) What are the Spiritual and Sufi dimensions of the Shrine and how do they manifest in the practices and experiences of devotees?
- 3) How has the Izzat Bibi Known as Mai Heer Shrine contributed to the preservation propagation of the love story of Heer Ranjha?

Literature Review

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic, and Sufi shrines play a key role in the country's religious and social fabric. There are Sufi holy places in every city with a significant Muslim population. The spiritual lives of those who visit Sufi shrines are highly valued in the Islamic world. Invoking the blessings and prayers of the Sufi saints, paying homage and praying, improving spirituality, and satisfying socioeconomic necessities are only few of the reasons people visit shrines. They may also give langar (meal) or tie mannat (hope) threads at shrines. The first permanent shrine was established by Malik Ayaz in the 11th century, during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Since then, individuals have looked to shrines to help them achieve their personal, professional, religious, and emotional goals (Abbas & Min Allah, 2015). It is a universal habit to go to sacred sites in the hopes of gaining spiritual insight, atoning for one's sins, or having one's desires granted (Frembgen, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on the writings of the great Sufi scholar Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi, who offered profound insights into the veracity of Sufi masters and the heart of Sufi spirituality. To evaluate the validity and qualities of a Sufi master, peer, or peeran (spiritual advisor) within the Sufi tradition. Rumi argues that the fundamental goal of a



Sufi master or spiritual guide is the development and perfection of the disciple. This metamorphosis entails cleaning the "mirror of the heart," a symbol of the inner self, so that the seeker may glimpse the Divine inside themselves. A true Sufi master, as described by Rumi, exemplifies such traits as total submission to the Divine, honesty, and integrity. These moral and spiritual traits define a genuine spiritual leader. The first steps on the road to spiritual enlightenment, as we are reminded by Rumi's teachings. People are urged to go themselves for answers to their spiritual questions rather than always looking to others. Rumi believed that the Divine could show those who were seeking the truth the way to go. This conceptual framework is inspired by the teachings of Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi and aims to help readers determine whether or not a certain Sufi master or spiritual guide is legitimate. Understanding the heart of Sufi spirituality and recognizing true Sufi mentors in the modern world may be aided by Rumi's focus on inward change, ethical traits, and unyielding devotion to spiritual endeavors.

Previous Studies

There have been several past studies that examine various aspects of shrines.

The research conducted by Baried et al. (2022) dispels the myth that women had no significant part in the creation or propagation of Sufi beliefs and practices in the West. This study broadens the scope of previous talks regarding women Sufis, which have been focused on the East and certain regions of India. Literature review focuses on several modern female Sufis, including activists Hajjah Amina Adil and Hajjah Naziha Adil, and entrepreneur and peace activist Nahid Angha, who founded the International Sufi Woman Organization. Similarly, Nangha and Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch have made significant contributions to Western Sufism.

Milad and Taheri (2021) focus on the classical era of Sufi history to enquire into the essence of the female mystic and the divine feminine in Sufi experience. The research suggests that mystical experience has a feminine foundation and identifies the holy as feminine, whereas Islam is regarded as masculine and characterized by externally directed primordial desires. Furthermore, it is possible that the simplification of complicated ideas and practices within the Sufi tradition is caused by the gendered characterization of religious and mystical experiences. Due to the complexity of Sufi thinking and history, the final declaration that the divine feminine is the hidden part of religion and mysticism should be seen more as a hypothesis than a conclusion.

The major role of women in Sufism is emphasized by Khalil et al.'s (2022) analytical examination of the feminine element of Sufism in light of Annemarie Schimmel's "Mystic Dimensions of Islam," an often-overlooked facet of Islamic mysticism. The study accurately questions the common belief that male Sufis are the norm by highlighting the significant roles played by female mystics such as Rabi'a Basri, Fatima of Nishapur, and Sha'wana of Persia. These ladies are living examples of the tenets of Sufism, which stress love for Allah above the draw of Paradise and the terror of Hell. Female characteristics highlighted in the research include patience and good observation, both of which are highly valued in Sufism. Nonetheless, the research highlights the necessity of spiritual purity and unification for both sexes in their quest of divine love.

Wasim's (2019) analysis of Baba Bullay Shah's poems is an insightful look at the place of women in Punjabi Sufi literature. The study sheds insight on Bullay Shah's innovative method of using women's voices to proclaim divine love while also denouncing the harsh patriarchal norms of his day. Bullay Shah uses stereotypes to highlight the inequality in treatment of women in a culture where social status is determined by one's birth order. The research utilizes a post-structuralist framework, drawing on Berry's matrix of deconstruction and Ibne Arabi's cosmology



model, to examine how Bullay Shah casts women in the roles of messengers of sublime love and sets up paradoxical circumstances to further their cause. By having disadvantaged and oppressed women speak for themselves and making use of their voices to express mystical references and fight for gender equality and justice, Bullay Shah's art is a cry for society to notice the struggle of these women and acts as a rebellious stand against the existing societal norms.

Using Bibi Pak Daman as a case study, Chawla et al. (2016) research on female Sufism in Pakistan investigates the contributions of female saints to the spread and development of Islam. Since anybody, regardless of their gender, may feel God's love through commitment and hard work, the study's conclusion that mysticism is not limited to men is spot-on. The research highlights the tales of female saints, especially those affiliated with the Bibi Pak Daman tomb in Lahore, while recognizing the important role of male saints in Islamic history. Despite doubts about the origins of this monument, it nevertheless serves as a popular destination for religious and cultural pilgrims. More research into the historical background of the shrine's founding and a more critical analysis of the described hybrid religious traditions would enrich the study.

Manzoor and Shah's (2018) research highlights the importance of Sufi shrines in Sindhi culture and examines the role of women in Sufism there. The study rightly emphasizes the important role that Sufi shrines play in the region's social, cultural, and religious fabric, touching on a wide range of topics such as the socio-spatial relationships between people, the place of women in Sufism, religious practices, spiritual beliefs and healing rites. It highlights the fact that these shrines are more than just places of worship; they are also gathering places where Muslims and non-Muslims celebrate and engage in rituals together. This study successfully highlights the importance of women Sufis.

The study of gender roles within modern Pakistani Sufi institutions by Ali (2020) highlights the distinctive cultural structure that Sufism has produced, which is separate from orthodox Islamic traditions. This research analyzes existing works on gender and Sufism, focusing on the need for a theoretical framework to clarify how gender, and in particular women's roles, have been envisioned in the larger context of Sufi philosophy and practice. This study of Mai Sahiba and her shrine in Punjab provides insight into the impact of Sufi-gender worldviews on women's status and leadership in Pakistan's Sufi community via an anthropological case study. This study successfully draws attention to the nuances and inconsistencies of Sufism's approach to gender problems, while also highlighting the need for more study at the crossroads of religion, culture, and gender dynamics.

The research of Khan and Bano (2020) examines the development of female Sufism in South Asia. There is a clear lack of academic discussion of the existence and function of Sufi women in South Asia, despite historical evidence suggesting that women and men were treated equally in the path of Tasawuff (Sufism). The findings cast doubt on the idea that Sufism has always been welcoming to women and gender concerns, underscoring the need of placing the religion in its historical and cultural context. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for more investigation into the dynamics of gender hierarchies in Sufi activities and the complex interaction between gender and Sufi ideology in South Asia.

It is well established that a great deal of scholarly attention has been paid to analyzing many key components of Sufism. However, the current study endeavors to draw attention to the gaps and voids in the literature that have yet to be filled, and to interact with more feasible theories. This research challenges the commonly held belief that Sufism in general has always been welcoming to women and sensitive to gender concerns.



This study collects data on the role of woman in Punjabi Sufi culture. Despite its importance to Sufi Islam, Women Sufi culture is rarely documented and poorly understood by the academic community at large. Even little is known about the role women played in this. Women play an important part in the ceremonial discourse of Sufis.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to learn more about the experiences of people who visit Sufi shrines. Methods from the field of anthropology and qualitative research were used to compile and analyze the information. The Mai Heer Shrine in Jhang, Punjab, Pakistan was visited in order to learn more about the life of the Muslim lady Izzat Bibi. To gauge pilgrims' reactions to sacred Sufi relics on display at Izzat Bibi Shrine, this qualitative study used a semi-structured interview guide. The Izzat Bibi Shrine is an important spiritual destination for Muslims and non-Muslims all around the world, not only in Pakistan.

Population and Sample

Throughout the month of August 2023, thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were performed, and their findings were examined. The interview sheet also includes many open-ended questions. A detailed description and memory of the chronicles, interviews with many relevant characters including visitors and managers of the Shrine, and in-depth personal observations of the execution of rites all contribute to the data generated and evaluated using an anthropological methodology.

Procedure

Both English and Urdu version of the semi-structured interview guide were created. Data was collected with the use of an interview guide written in Urdu for the comfort and ease of the participants. Some of the participants were questioned in Punjabi. Conducting interviews in participants' native languages allowed for a more accurate representation of their intended meaning. Young men and women seemed to equal in their attendance at the Izzat Bibi shrine. The ladies who participated in this research were recruited from the Mai Heer, or Izzat Bibi, Sufi Shrine.

After outlining the study's goals, participants gave their verbal agreement before the interview began, and they were assured that at any point they were free to leave if they were feeling uneasy. In every instance, consent was obtained from interviewees before taking notes.

Instrument

The following inquiries were prepared with the intention of testing the material covered. The questions were posed to pilgrim at the Izzat Bibi Shrine, also known as Mai Heer. Asking the right questions at times of in-depth personal observation also proved useful.

1. Which social strata are most likely to visit the Izzat Bibi shrine?
2. What are the reasons for individuals' visits to shrine?
3. For what particular purposes do individuals attend shrine?
4. When people go to the shrine, do they feel that their wishes come true?
5. When they come to the shrine, what emotions do they feel?
6. Can you describe the "rituals" that take place at the shrine?
7. For what purposes do these "rituals" serve?
8. How do the Sufi and the tourists connect on a spiritual level?
9. When people come to the shrine, what do they get from the Sufi?



10. What is the nature of the advantages in question, namely pertaining to their spiritual or materialistic aspects?

Data Analysis and Discussion

The process of data analysis was conducted in a sequential manner. In the first stage, the interviews and recorded conversations were transcribed accurately into Punjabi and Urdu languages in order to capture the expected contextual nuances of the participants' utterances. In the second phase, the Punjabi and Urdu transcripts were translated into English. The data was then evaluated by manual processes, including coding and typing assignments. Additionally, the data inconsistencies were classified. The identified inconsistencies were thoroughly examined and consensus was achieved subsequent to the introduction of the recordings and the appealing letter. During the third stage, the themes that have emerged from the collected data are subjected to analysis. The writers were able to provide explicit impressions of the contributions due to the facilitation. The study's noteworthy results were discussed in relation to the gathered data.

The biographical information and historical context surrounding Izzat Bibi, often referred to as Mai Heer, are characterized by a lack of clarity and have been a topic of conjecture among historians. The prevailing assumption is that her presence was situated throughout the fourteenth century in the region of Punjab, which is now recognized as modern-day Pakistan. The major source of information on her demise is her tomb, which suggests that she passed away in the year 876 AH, equivalent to 1471 AD. In this analysis, we will undertake a critical examination of the implications inherent in the scant material provided, as well as the obstacles it poses in the endeavor to recreate her life and assess her legacy. The limited availability of extensive biographical data pertaining to Izzat Bibi is a significant obstacle in formulating a thorough account of her life. Scant historical documentation from that era, particularly pertaining to persons who did not belong to the governing class or aristocracy, is often seen.

Jhang, a city in Pakistan's Punjab province, has a very interesting and varied history. Humans have been living in the Jhang area for thousands of years, as shown by the city's connection to the Indus Valley Civilization. This further demonstrates the city's long and storied past. Jhang rose to prominence as a Buddhist hub during the time of the Mauryans. A tale said that her name came from an idol called "Heera" that was built close to the Shrine of Izzat Bibi. This is indicative of the city's historical function as a cultural and religious center. The Ghaznavids, the Mughals, and the British are only a few of the empires and dynasties that have ruled over Jhang. Culture, architecture, and politics of the city all reflect the influences of preceding epochs. In the 1857 uprising against British colonial control, Jhang was an important player. During the war for independence, many influential politicians and liberation fighters called Jhang home. Significant efforts to update and enhance Jhang have taken place in recent years. As a result, locals now have access to better infrastructure, schools, and healthcare. The rich cultural traditions of Jhang attest to the city's dynamic past. The city's artistic, musical, and literary heritage reflects the many dynasties and civilizations that have governed in the area throughout the centuries.

Jhang's modernization initiatives and historical importance set the stage for the city's future success. The city's potential to develop further as a culturally significant and innovative metropolis is promising. Ancient civilizations, empires, and independence battles all weave together in Jhang's rich history. The city's future prosperity may be attributed to its perseverance in the face of change and the preservation of its cultural traditions. As Jhang continues to expand, it will be crucial that the city strikes a balance between modernization and the protection of its ancient landmarks and customs. The Awqaf (a religious endowment



organization) is in charge of the tomb shows that it is considered a holy place of worship. Religious and cultural landmarks are cared for and preserved by Awqaf institutions. This administration keeps the shrine in good condition and open to the public, which helps maintain the site's continuing significance.

The historical documentation pertaining to the life of Izzat Bibi, often referred to as Mai Heer, is characterized by its ambiguous nature, mostly owing to the scarcity of accessible data. The tomb's inscription serves as a significant point of reference for the study of her life and legacy. However, a comprehensive understanding of her story requires a critical examination of the wider historical context, the impact of Sufism, the role of oral traditions, and the recognition of the difficulties posed by incomplete historical records, particularly regarding women and individuals outside the elite class. Scholars and historians are needed to use a cautious approach while examining her narrative, acknowledging the constraints imposed by the available data, while also acknowledging the cultural and spiritual importance she embodies within the Sufi tradition of Punjab.

The results of thirty comprehensive, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the resulting data was analyzed. The findings obtained through a comprehensive analysis of thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which included a wide range of opinions and experiences, have provided a nuanced comprehension of the topic at hand. The extensive data gathered from these interviews not only illuminated the deep intricacies of the study topic but also offered valuable insights into the many aspects and complexity of the phenomena being studied. The inclusion of a wide array of participants allowed a comprehensive and comprehensive viewpoint, hence enhancing the depth and credibility of the research outcomes. The amalgamation of these interview findings provides a solid basis on which to construct a nuanced and complete analysis of the research question.

Q1. What is the historical origin of the Izzat Bibi Shrine known as Mai Heer, and how has it evolved over time within the cultural and religious landscape of Jhang Punjab Pakistan?

Results from thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were analyzed. The Izzat Bibi Shrine, also known as Mai Heer, has a rich and complex history embedded in the religious and cultural milieu of Jhang, Punjab, Pakistan. It is vital to recognize the possible limits of tomb inscriptions in terms of accuracy, despite the fact that the inscription on the tomb dates Izzat Bibi's death to 876 AH (1471 AD), which is a key historical marker. There may be inaccuracies or mistakes in the historical documents. The difficulty in placing Izzat Bibi's life in its proper historical perspective is exacerbated by the lack of knowledge on the tomb's building date. There is a risk of distortion with the passage of time, but in such circumstances, oral traditions, cultural memory, and local folklore may be essential resources.

The historical setting of Punjab in the fifteenth century is essential for making sense of Izzat Bibi's existence. Recognizing the importance of Sufism in the spiritual and cultural evolution of Punjab is especially important because of the period's rich cultural variety, which was formed by influences from Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. One obstacle to historical research is the scarcity of records pertaining to women, particularly those from less privileged social classes. Stories passed down through the generations about influential women like Izzat Bibi may be historically accurate, but they also have the potential to be embellished.

Murad Baksh and Heer's love story is widely recognized as a prominent piece of folklore in South Asian culture. The tale of Izzat Bibi, also known as Heer, has become an integral part of the history and culture of the area. An idol of Heer was built at Bahlol Lodhi's behest during the Lodhi Dynasty, and it was placed near the Shrine of Izzat Bibi. This data was gathered via in-



depth interviews with caretakers and is corroborated by evidence from local archives. As a result, the Izzat Bibi shrine is now often referred to as "Mai Heer," a name associated with the idea of love that triumphs over institutional barriers and personal hostility. The relevance of mystical experiences and one-on-one interactions, hallmarks of the Sufi faith, are highlighted by this label. Because of the dearth of information from that era, however, it is prudent to treat the inscribed date on the tomb with caution.

The fact that Izzat Bibi is called the Khalifa of Hazrat Sheikh Ahmad Kabir in the inscription attests to her standing as a Sufi figurehead. Her membership in a Sufi organization is more evidence of her cultural and spiritual significance. The inscription's reference of Syed Jalal Bukhari Uchi as Jhang's founder adds credence to the city's longstanding links to Sufism. Like other Sufi mystics, Mian Murad Baksh placed a premium on his spiritual development throughout his life. The tombstone indicates that Izzat Bibi passed away in the year 1471, although its precision in doing so may be limited by circumstances. The tomb's cultural and historical importance, however, ensure that its message of love across borders will live on for generations to come.

Figure 1

A view of Izzat Bibi (Mai Heer) Shrine Jhang, Punjab Pakistan



The tomb's architecture is a perfect example of the Islamic design traditions common in Punjab, which combine local practices with Islamic motifs. Characteristics of this design include domes, turrets, cupolas, and ornamental tiles. This gravestone is made of marble, which is traditionally associated with longevity and dignity. The tomb's location between a cemetery and a mosque lends it an air of solemnity, and the inscription on its entry pays tribute to Heer and Ranjha. The cultural practices of the people who visit the tomb, such as lighting incense and expressing wishes, contribute to its aesthetic value and cultural importance.

Q 2. What are the Spiritual and Sufi dimensions of the Shrine and how do they manifest in the practices and experiences of devotees?

The Sufi and spiritual aspects of the Izzat Bibi Shrine, also called Mai Heer, have deep roots in the traditions and beliefs of its followers. All sorts of spiritual, cultural, and individual aspirational rites and practices converge at the shrine. Ancient rituals like tying threads to the iron gates, presenting bright bangles, and leaving tiny cradles at the shrine all reflect wishes



and blessings. The significance of the shrine to local customs and traditions is shown through these ceremonies. Devotees have firm faith that visit to the shrine will bring them spiritual contacts, guidance, and benefits, attesting to the shrine's profound spiritual value. People from many walks of life come to the shrine in the hopes of finding consolation and advantages. Their motivations range from love and loyalty to personal hardships. These ceremonies underscore the cultural significance of the shrine by emphasizing its position as a storehouse of local traditions and beliefs.

Figure 2

A view of Manat Place (wishes fulfillment) at Izzat Bibi Shrine Jhang



Especially women come to the shrine to pray and perform rituals in hopes of achieving happiness in areas of their lives such as maternity, romantic love, self-improvement, and financial prosperity. Symbolic acts to seek Mai Heer's favor include tying fabric strips and decorating the shrine with colored bangles. These actions allow people to show their devotion to their beliefs and their hopes for the future while also engaging in long-standing cultural and spiritual traditions.

The spiritual and cultural importance of the shrine is reflected in the annual Urs festival, which takes place there from the first day of Muharram ul Haram to the tenth. Urs is an Islamic ritual for remembering the death anniversary of a Sufi saint, and the fact that it is being observed at the grave of Izzat Bibi is a testament to her standing in local Sufi traditions. Those in attendance are likely looking for some kind of mystical connection or blessing, further highlighting the shrine's status as a place of worship and cultural significance.

Sufi devotional singing, known as Qawwali, is an integral part of the area's religious and cultural life. Especially during the Urs festival, listening to Qawwali is a profoundly spiritual experience for both tourists and devotees. Strong music and lyrics expressing divine love and devotion create a sacred atmosphere during these concerts, allowing audience members to feel closer to the holy. Incorporating Qawwali into the shrine's ceremonies is a way of honoring the spiritual, cultural, and musical diversity of South Asia.

With the concept that rain cannot enter the shrine comes a feeling of awe and respect that is common to Sufi places of worship. It's a symbol of the shrine's devotion to spiritual perfection. The statements must be evaluated seriously, nevertheless, since natural occurrences do really



follow physical rules. Rather than being a physical event, the belief that rain miraculously stops short of the shrine may have its origins in the spiritual value attached to the location. Visitors to the shrine will be encouraged and enlightened by the presence of sermons, exhortations, and predictions, further emphasizing the shrine's religious and spiritual significance.

Finally, the Izzat Bibi Shrine, also known as Mai Heer, represents the coming together of one's spirituality, culture, and individuality. As a reservoir of varied cultural customs, religious beliefs, and individual goals, it welcomes people from all walks of life in search of peace, prosperity, and a closer relationship with God. Because of its vital role in maintaining Punjab's Sufi traditions and cultural legacy, the shrine's ceremonies, celebrations, and Qawwali performances have lasting cultural and spiritual significance. In spite of this, it is essential to approach such beliefs with a balance of respect and skepticism, giving due consideration to their cultural and spiritual importance while also applying a logical lens to their merits.

Q 3. How has the Izzat Bibi Known as Mai Heer Shrine contributed to the preservation propagation of the love story of Heer Ranjha?

The Izzat Bibi Shrine, also known as Mai Heer, has been instrumental in ensuring the survival and dissemination of the enduring tale of Heer Ranjha throughout South Asia's literary and cultural landscapes. Through the years, this tale of love and loss has captured the imaginations of Punjabis and won their hearts. Because of its connection to this timeless love story, the shrine in Jhang, Pakistan, has significant cultural and historical weight. Both oral and written traditions have preserved the tale of Heer and Ranjha, two legendary mythological figures from the Punjab area. It is believed that one of the first authors to record the couple's courtship was a contemporary named Damodar Das Arora. While not as well-known as Waris Shah's epic poem, this earliest written record is still indicative of the story's ongoing popularity throughout Heer and Ranjha's tenure on Earth. In 1762, Waris Shah published his magnum opus, "Heer Waris Shah," which cemented the story's position in Punjabi literature and culture. Spiritual and Sufi qualities that go beyond worldly love were infused into Waris Shah's lyrical retelling, taking the narrative to new heights

The continued appreciation, recitation, and study of "Heer Waris Shah" attests to the power of storytelling and poetry in perpetuating heritage and history. Showing the lasting power of love tales in South Asian culture is Waris Shah's immortalization of the love story of Heer and Ranjha. Additionally, the story of Heer and Ranjha has been retold in a wide variety of forms and languages, including Punjabi, Urdu, Sindhi, and Persian. These retellings demonstrate the story's capacity to resonate with audiences of many backgrounds and traditions. Subtle Muslim components have been woven into the story in various retellings, as is common practice when tales are adapted to represent the world's many religions and philosophies. For instance, in Ahmed Gujjars's version, Ranjha is shown to have converted to Islam, with the Sufi concept of love being emphasized in contrast to the asceticism of the Naths. The Heer-Ranjha story has proven to be universally appealing, as seen by its enduring appeal, its many iterations, and its representation in a wide range of cultural contexts. The story's development through time exemplifies the adaptability and cross-cultural attraction of love tales.

In conclusion, the Izzat Bibi Shrine, also known as Mai Heer, is a living monument to the continuing heritage of Heer Ranjha's love story. Visitors from all walks of life come here seeking blessings, consolation, and a connection to Punjab's rich cultural legacy, and the temple's existence is a testament to its success in preserving and spreading this treasured narrative. Because of its malleability and flexibility to interpretation, this story continues to resonate with and provide inspiration to individuals of all faiths and cultures.



According to Qureshi's (2002) writings titled "Lakhay Jokhay" once Alexander the Great's troops returned from Punjab, they stayed in the Jhang region along the Chenab River for its fertile farmland. They built an idol they name Hera (or Here) at the Izzat Bibi Shrine, despite being Buddhists. Smith (1999) said in his book "Early History of India" that the Greek army, made Jhang its home because of the city's plentiful resources. These results are consistent with those of the current investigation.

The results of this research on women's Sufi culture in Punjab, with a focus on the Izzat Bibi (Mai Heer) Shrine in Jhang, correlate well with the theoretical framework based on Rumi's Sufism. Rumi's Sufism stresses the value of finding trustworthy spiritual teachers and learning to tell them apart from fakes. The research at the Izzat Bibi Shrine highlights the importance of women and their commitment to the spiritual path in Sufi traditions. This is consistent with Rumi's teachings, which emphasize the need of finding a spiritual mentor who is honest and sincere. The implication here is that the female Sufi devotees at the shrine are genuine in their piety and should be respected as true exemplars of the Sufi way of life.

The extensive research conducted by Annemarie Schimmel on the "Heer Ranjha" story resonates with the current study on Women Sufi Culture at the Izzat Bibi (Mai Heer) Shrine in Jhang, particularly in underscoring the adaptability and cultural significance of such narratives. The ability of Schimmel to unearth numerous translations in various languages demonstrates the enduring allure and cross-cultural adaptability of stories such as "Heer Ranjha." Her insights into the origins of the narrative within Punjab's diverse religious and cultural milieu offer intriguing parallels to the Izzat Bibi Shrine, which functions as a religious and cultural center. Schimmel's analysis of how Ahmed Gujjar's adaptation reflects a more assertive Islamic narrative parallels the transformation of religious elements in the Sufi culture of Punjab, as observed at the shrine. The current study could benefit from a deeper investigation of the sociopolitical and theological factors underlying these narrative shifts. Furthermore, understanding and emphasizing the agency and development of female figures, as Schimmel's work does with "Heer," would provide a more comprehensive perspective on the evolution of Sufi culture and narratives such as those examined in this study. Nonetheless, Schimmel's research highlights the enduring cultural and literary value of these tales and their adaptability to changing circumstances, establishing them as classics in their respective fields.

Rumi's Sufism provides a theoretical framework for making sense of the data collected at the Izzat Bibi Shrine. It is consistent with Rumi's Sufi teachings in that it emphasizes the genuineness of women's Sufi practices, the transformational potential of spirituality, and the value of preserving cultural traditions. One of the major tenets of Rumi's Sufism is that a person may have a profound connection to the Divine via spiritual experiences. According to the research, the Izzat Bibi Shrine is a site where worshippers may feel the presence of God. This ties in with Rumi's focus on the importance of the individual's inner spiritual path and the possibility of awakening.

Limitations

The study did not extensively explore possible variances across diverse cultural or demographic groups, which may have contributed more insights to the research outcomes. The sample size of thirty participants, while yielding valuable qualitative data, may not comprehensively include the whole of opinions and experiences pertaining to the study issue. The study's emphasis on a particular demographic or geographic region may restrict the applicability of the results to a wider scope. The aforementioned limitations, although deserving of attention, need to be evaluated within the framework of the study's merits and its contributions to the field.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the "Case Study of Izzat Bibi (Known as Heer) Shrine in Jhang" has shed light on the complex cultural, historical, and spiritual threads that bind the Izzat Bibi Shrine in Jhang to the larger context of women's Sufi shrines in the Punjab area. Sufism, a spiritual and mystical sect within the Islamic tradition, has a rich historical background characterized by the dissemination of teachings centered on divine love, devotion, and the concept of unity. The narrative around Heer, a lady deeply committed to her faith, and Ranjha, her devoted pupil (mureed), aligns with the principles of Sufi ideology pertaining to spiritual mentorship and the quest for transcendental unity. The research has firstly highlighted the critical significance of safeguarding the historical legacy related with women Sufi shrine. The Izzat Bibi Shrine, which dates back to the 15th century and serves as a storehouse of cultural narratives and traditions, must be protected so that future generations may also benefit from and enjoy its treasures. Most scholars think that the story took place during the enlightened Lodhi Dynasty (1451-1526 AD) in South Asia. According to historians, the Izzat Bibi Shrine came to be known as Mai Heer when the Lodhi Dynasty brought in an idol of Heer and erected it nearby. This further attests to the age and significance of the city. During the reign of the Mauryans, Jhang grew in importance as a center for Buddhism. According to a popular narrative, the etymology of her name may be traced back to an idol known as "Hera," which was reportedly situated in proximity to the Shrine of Izzat Bibi. This observation suggests the historical role of the city as a hub for cultural and religious activities.

The historical narratives in Qureshi's essays "Lakhay Jokhay" and of Smith's "Early History of India" cast light on the shrine's ancient origins. The narratives suggest that this region was significant even during the reign of Alexander the Great due to its bountiful lands and abundant resources. Despite their Buddhist beliefs, accounts of the Greek army constructing an idol at the Izzat Bibi Shrine. These historical findings corroborate the current investigation, thereby reinforcing the shrine's enduring value and cultural significance in Jhang, Pakistan.

Second, the study has shown the cultural significance of the Izzat Bibi shrine, which is deeply revered by the people of Punjab because of its connection to the mythical love story of Heer and Ranjha. However, a closer look at the narrative reveals that it is nothing more than a folk tale, and Izzat Bibi is instead recognized as a Sufi saint.

The shrine is a living memorial to this age-old story, which is kept alive via ceremonies and traditions. The spiritual significance of the Izzat Bibi shrine as a site of worship and enlightenment has also been explored. The gender-neutral spirituality of the shrine promotes an atmosphere where women's spiritual experiences are honored and respected, hence challenging conventional standards. The modern significance of the Izzat Bibi shrine has also been investigated; the annual Urs celebration is a testimony to the shrine's enduring connection with its devotees and demonstrates the shrine's continued significance as a site of pilgrimage, cultural expression, and community engagement.

This study demonstrates the significance of female Sufi pilgrimage site Izzat Bibi shrine in Jhang to the development of Punjab's spiritual, cultural, and racial identity. It is imperative that continued efforts be made in documentation, preservation, and academic investigation to ensure the vitality and relevance of these sacred sites in the context of modern South Asia. All individuals interested in the rich cultural and spiritual fabric of Punjab's Sufi tradition may benefit from the legacy of the Izzat Bibi shrine, which serves as a light of love, spirituality, and gender-inclusiveness.



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