

PUBLIC, PIRS AND POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF PIRI-MURIDI IN DISTRICT LAKKI MARWAT

Hikmat Ullah ^{*1}, Dr. Fakhar Bilal ²

^{*1} MS, Quaid-I-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan; ² Assistant Professor, Department of History, Quaid-I-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan

^{*1} hikmatmarwat1993@gmail.com, ² fakhar@qau.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *

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ABSTRACT

Guardians of the shrines, typically familiar as Pirs, are considered a crucial part of Pakistani politics. They benefit from the huge assistance of their attendants both in the countryside and from urban areas of the country manifesting them as power players in electoral politics. However, some Pirs in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa do not possess the above qualities. For instance, the Pirs of district Lakki Marwat are not very popular among the residents. They do not have an enormous number of lands and jagirs to live lavish lives like the Pirs of Punjab and Sindh do. Additionally, there is no custom of celebrating Urs of demised Pir or other rituals of the shrine in the district Lakki Marwat. Their public interaction is very less and therefore, their political influence over the common masses of district Lakki Marwat is minor. This study aims to investigate the influence of local Pirs on the politics of Lakki Marwat. This article analyzes the nexus of Pirs and Politicians in the politics of district Lakki Marwat. A qualitative research method was used. To collect the data from respondents, semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted while, for data analysis thematic approach was adopted.

Keywords: Public, Pirs, Politics, Piri-Muridi, Lakki Marwat

INTRODUCTION

No doubt that the shrines are an essential part of this validated structure of power. Perhaps when the shrine guardian decides to put the power or starts to support any individual for power acquisition the entire shrine community stands in their support. Concerning the already demonstrated custom *Adab* (respect) is an intrinsic element of the religious environment of the shrines (Metcalf, 1984). The core outcome of the issue of power depends upon the understanding, the inception, establishment, and regulation of free will obedience. Getting a plenary understanding regarding power relations is dependent upon the knowledge of the field, where the power demonstrator urges obedience and the profound perception in which the obedient person

assumes it is essential and mandatory to obey (Gerth, 1953). The *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* are not mere spiritual mentors of the people but also landed elites in their respective areas. The persistent enhancements in their wealth come from the considerable vows and donations that the common visitors and disciples devote to them, and the shrines of their forebears. The day and night enlargement in wealth made them influential political actors at the time of elections. The political and social control comes from the belief system of common people in Pakistan that the *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* are friends of God on earth (Darling, 1955).

It enhances his esteem and political influence over the public. The illustration of authority over the

political behavior of the common public is precisely a minor demonstration of *Pir's* power. Casting the vote in favor of *Pir* or *Pir's* friend is comparatively a small contribution of devotees to *Pir*. It is a demonstration of the helplessness of devotees when they cast their vote in *Pir's* interest. In electoral constituencies, the helplessness of disciples is consolidated by the shrines that have some kind of political hold. In this case, helplessness is generally cemented accompanied by the free will of obedience of the admirers. The admirers wish for the assimilation of their beloved spiritual mentors in everyday matters. For instance, property-related strife, acquisition of jobs, marriage, curing of their diseases, and Mediation role in their disputes. From this perspective, voting in favor of *Pir* is not a big deal or a matter of discussion for disciples (Malik, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr in his book *Islam and the Making of State Power* very magnificently summarizes the ulterior intentions of the state to take over the administration of shrines. He writes that governments mostly wish to control the shrines for two reasons. One to give a relative interpretation of Sufism that may support his development policies and number two to ensure the presence of the state without the support of any individual in the rural areas of the country (Nasr, 2001). Field Marshall General Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto embraced the theory of Nasr. Both the leaders under the guise of political influence manifested themselves the admirers of *Sufi* Saint and their teachings. Their surreptitious intentions were not more than merely a fact to take over the Shrines and overshadow the *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins*. Unfortunately, both the leaders failed because of their own vested political imply (Kalhor, 2016). However, General Zia-ul-Haq cuddled an alternate policy. Rather than taking the help of *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins*, Zia integrated orthodox *Mullas* into the government. Pious Islam replaced popular Islam or *Sufi* Islam. The shrine rituals did not enjoy government support during the Zia-ul-Haq regime (Ewing, 1983).

Unfortunately, the tragedy of 9/11 happened and Pakistan came under acute pressure for its orthodox religious beliefs. Many U.S.A. social scientists were

consistently advising Pakistan to implement the *Sufis* version of Islam. Stephen Philip Cohen was the most imminent among them. For Stephen Philip Cohen, Sufism had influenced the culture, music, and art of Pakistan and therefore was considered the only tool in the hands of the Pakistani government through which they could vanquish terrorism and restore their lost image in the world community (Cohen, 2003). Withal Sufism was the only tool in the hands of General Musharraf's government to restore the optimism of the public, attract foreign investment, and bolster the crippling economy of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf's government eventually decided to present the *Sufi* interpretation of Islam on the world forums as state narrative. General Pervez Musharraf addressed the public gatherings in Punjab and Sindh on different occasions and urged the *Pirs* to assist him in popularizing the soft face of Islam. This proclamation provided a new chance for *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* to enter into government institutions and influence policies. *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* were invited by mainstream media to present their views about Islam and Sufism. Similarly, the National *Sufi* Council was established for government assistance. The *Urs* of *Sufis* were celebrated on a national level with government backing. The politicians were ordered to ensure their presence at the shrine ceremonies. For instance, Chaudhary Shujaat Hussain one of the members of parliament and very close to General Pervez Musharraf, tied a *Sufi* turban around his head and projected himself as a *Sufi*. Contrary, to the protocol that *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* received from the Musharraf government, had invited huge criticism from orthodoxies. Many of the rigid religious people called it Washington-based Sufism. Similarly, many thought that General Musharraf was trying to consolidate and legitimize his coup under the carpet of Sufism (Roger D. Long, 2018).

On the other hand, General Musharraf's policy towards *Sufi* Shrines invited a huge wrath of pitiless terrorists as retaliation. Shrines became the easiest and most accessible targets of terrorists in Pakistan. For instance, a bomb blast on the Shrine of Bari Imam in which fifty-three innocent people lost their lives (Drage, 2015). Similarly, another bomb was blasted at the Pakpattan Shrine of *Baba Farid* in which forty people had lost their lives. Custodians of the shrine declared all the departed souls as martyrs.

The deaths of people were celebrated as shrine rituals and it has been proclaimed that it is better to sacrifice life at the feet of *Baba Farid* instead of somewhere else because it guarantees salvation in life hereafter (Rozeenal, 2006).

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) adopted General Pervez Musharraf's policy to vanquish terrorism when it came to power in 2008. It was the pledge of the Pakistan People's Party in her election manifesto that it would eliminate and terminate terrorism from Pakistan using the *Sufis* doctrine. Pakistan People's Party government promoted the National Sufi Council into the *Sufi* Advisory Council and announced the names of some prominent *Sajjada Nashins* for high-profile political power offices. For instance, the Party announced the name of Yusuf Raza Gillani, who is the *Sajjada Nashin* of Moosa Pak Shaheed Shrine (Multan) as Prime Minister of Pakistan. The name of Shah Mehmood Qureshi (the custodian of Rukn-ud-din Abul Fath d.1335) was announced as Foreign Minister of Pakistan. Likewise, Hamid Saeed Kazmi (the descendant of Saeed Kazmi Shrine) was appointed the Minister of Religious Affairs (Shahid, 2016). On his visit to the United States of America in March 2010, Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani urged the White House authorities to support and back Pakistan's current government policy to implement the *Sufis* version of Islam. According to the Pakistani Prime Minister, this was the only option they had left with to fight and defeat the menace of terrorism. Even Washington and many other European states were eagerly waiting for such kind of statement from Pakistan's Prime Minister (Siddiq, 2011). In the same month March 2010, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gillani participated in the *Urs* (death anniversary) of Karmanwali *Sarkar* (Okara). Addressing the public gathering at the Shrine, the Prime Minister, claimed that the *Khanqhai* doctrine is more suitable and viable to wipe out terrorism and extremism from the state of Pakistan. Similarly, addressing the *Urs* of *Suhrawardi* Order Shah Rukn Aalam (Multan), Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi proclaimed that Pakistan would not surrender to the Taliban. The Islam that we Pakistanis are following is entirely contrary to the Islam that the troublemakers want to implement by force. The people in power politics manipulated and exploited the Sufism and Shrines to enhance and maximize

their powers, and therefore corrupted the entire *Sufi* School of thought (Shahid, 2016). General elections were held in 2013. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Party (PML-N) won the elections and formed governments in the center as well as in the province of Punjab. In the 2013 General Elections, 43 *Sajjada Nashins* from different provinces of Pakistan secured their seats in the National Assembly, which is equal to 16% of the total seats in the National Assembly. The election result depicts that the sun of political, social, and religious power of these *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* never set in the territory of Pakistan (Mirza, 2015). Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) formed a government after winning the majority of seats in the National Assembly. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) government endeavored to amend the blasphemy law, which enraged the common public against the PML-N government. Meanwhile, many *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* condemned the government policy towards blasphemy law and were dismayed by the government. A large number of *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* withdrew their support from the sitting government. The outrageous *Pir* and *Sajjada Nashins* proclaimed to support Pakistan Tehreek Insaf Party (PTI) in the 2018 General Elections, because of her considerable inclination towards the culture of *Sufis* and Shrines. The *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* extended their plenary support to the Pakistan Tehreek Insaf Party (PTI) and assisted them in winning the General Elections of 2018 (Sareen, 2018).

Spiritual affiliations once again played a very dominant and decisive role in the 2018 General Elections, particularly in the province of Punjab, which is home to many small and big shrines of exalted *Sufi* Saints. The *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* in the Punjab used the Shrines of their forebears for political ends. Political Parties preferred to accord party tickets to those candidates who were the custodians of small or big shrines. For instance, PTI nominated former Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi (the custodian of Hazrat Baha ud-din Zakariyya shrine) as her candidate in the Multan constituency. Additionally, in the district Jhang constituency Sahibzada Mehboob Sultan, the *Sajjada Nashin* of (Hazrat Sultan Bahu Shrine) was a PTI candidate for the Provincial Assembly (ECP, Notification, 2018). Similarly, the Pakistan People's

Party (PPP) announced the name of Makhdoom Faisal Saleh Hayat (the successor of Hazrat Shah Jeewna Shrine) as her candidate in Jhang constituency. The decedents of *Pir Mehr Ali Shah Shrine of Golra* used it for their political gains in the territory of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The interesting thing is that the *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* are not dependent on political parties in Pakistan. The political parties are dependent on them. In case the political parties do not issue the party ticket to the *Sajjada Nashins*, they then contest the election as independent candidates and join the political party that comes into power after victory in the elections (Bashir, 2019). A large quantity of literature focuses on the political influence of eminent *Pirs* and Shrines of Pakistan and ignores the role of less popular native *Pirs* on national and provincial politics. This research aims to fill this gap and explore the influence of local *Pirs* of Lakki Marwat and their influence on the common public and politics of district Lakki Marwat.

METHODOLOGY

This research has been conducted in the district Lakki Marwat. Qualitative research method was adopted along with semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Twenty respondents were interviewed of which eight were *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* while twelve were common devotees. All the interviews were conducted in the native language Pashto that was translated into English. Interviews were conducted in ten villages of district Lakki Marwat. Fieldwork was completed in twenty seven days. Research ethics were properly considered.

Denee Betak (religious gathering)

Denee Betak is a sort of gathering that the *Pir Sahib* arranges every morning at his *Khanqah*. Three types of people participate in *Denee Betak*. Firstly, those who arrive in the *Khanqah* of *Pir Sahib* merely to obtain his *du'a* (blessings). Second, those who are regular seekers or disciples. Thirdly, those who come to *Khanqah* for *Du'm* (exorcise). The people of the first category were usually the inhabitants of the *Pir Sahib's* villages. They often visit the *Khanqah* of *Pir Sahib* regularly in the Moring. They come into *Khanqah* time after time and sit around the *Pir Sahib* with homage and lowering their heads. To maintain the simplicity and protocol of Sufism, everyone including the *Pir Sahib* used to sit on the ground over a common mat. *Pir Sahib* accepts and answers the

Salam of every individual. The *Pir Sahib* in awfulness attitude looks towards everyone to demarcate the natives, seekers, and guests from adjoining villages. He remains silent for a moment to pursue a topic in his mind for discussion. The *Pir Sahib* always opts for a topic that will be more relevant and revolve around Sufism. Ultimately, *Pir Sahib* starts the discussion by telling the story of a particular *Pir* which he had read last night in a book. He tells about the entire chapter of the book and then begins a speech about his own forebear's penetration into Sufism. The story fascinates those who come and meet the *Pir Sahib* for the first time. All the participants hear the story consciously and carefully. The *Pir Sahib* said that his forebears had received the spiritual education from this or that *Pir* in ecstasy. His forebears then transferred all their knowledge to his father and his father transmitted it towards him. The public who were sitting around were shaking their heads without dissent. After twenty to thirty minutes of speech, the *Pir Sahib* finally deliberated about those guests who had come from far-flung areas for *Du'm*. Consequently, he concluded his speech and raised his hands for *du'a*. Everybody joined him in *Du'a*.

Respondent said that:

“The natives of this village come to see the *Pir Sahib*. They participate in religious gatherings and learn something from here. We always waste our time on worldly affairs like jobs, business, and games. We get true internal satisfaction here in this gathering”.

The natives, who visited the *Khanqah* merely to get the *Du'a* of *Pir Sahib*, relinquished the *Khanqah* one by one. Some of them left the *Khanqah* without saying goodbye to the *Pir Sahib*. However, some of them went close, kissed the hand of *Pir Sahib*, kept some money in his hand, and urged for exceptional *Du'a*. *Du'a* is a common and established custom. It gives a sense of satisfaction to the common devotees. They always feel safe under the umbrella of *Pir Sahib Du'a*. The general perception is that nothing could harm them as long as their *Pir Sahib* remembers them in *Du'a*. Therefore, in district Lakki Marwat when someone comes out safely from any danger, or challenges without any wound, tension, or depression the people call him in their local Pashto language *Pir day zorawar da* (your *Pir Du'a* is very powerful).

The participants in *Denee Betak* were silently listening to the *Pir Sahib* and believed with full conviction that what the *Pir Sahib* narrated was utterly veracious and without any doubt. After all, they had no choice, except to concede. The participants in this gathering either have very little education or have no knowledge regarding Sufism. They had never experienced any spiritual journey in their life; therefore, they absorbed the information, which the *Pir Sahib* was revealing before them. It was influencing the common people exorbitantly. It enhanced the love of *Murids* for their *Pir* and they gave him distinguished titles like *Hazrat Sahib*, *Shaikh Sahib*, *Pir Sahib*, and so on. Usually, male members participate in such kinds of gatherings.

In this gathering, the *Pir Sahib* also discusses the political affairs of the country and the local areas with the participants. He analyzed the political situation according to his political acumen. There was an open conversation on politics. The *Pir Sahib* provided a conducive environment for every participant to express their opinions regarding politics without any hesitation. He was helping those attendants who were scrutinizing the political circumstances in a traditional and sentimental posture. *Pir Sahib* persistently helped them to understand national politics in a broader global paradigm. After all, he was a well-educated person while the people sitting around him were either metric pass or fail. The people sitting in front of him had very little knowledge about history and economy and therefore, were not able to connect contemporary political issues with economy and history. On the other hand, due to his good educational background, *Pir Sahib* connected every political matter with the economy and history.

Respondent said that:

“Our *Pir Sahib* has completed his graduation in political science and economics. He understands politics very well but does not participate in it. He supports those political parties who have a good manifesto and pledge that they will work for the welfare of our area once they are elected. The *Pir Sahib* never compels us to vote for this or that party”.

These study circles prove very fruitful in enhancing the numbers of disciples and retaining the hold of *Pirs* over the masses. The study circles work like an *Urs*. In *Urs*, the custodians of shrine accompanied by the disciples celebrate the death

anniversary of their beloved *Pir* once in a year. They acclaim their *Pir*, renew their oath of allegiance, and memorize his teachings (Raza, 2017). Whereas, in Lakki Marwat, *Pirs* do not arrange *Urs* over the shrines of their forebear because they consider it an irreligious custom. Their ulterior motive behind arranging study circles is to keep their forebears alive in the memories of common people. The common difference between *Urs* and study circles is that *Urs* lasts for three days once a year. Contrary, study circles start every day throughout the year. Further, the arrangement of *Urs* needs a lot of time and money that the disciples of Lakki Marwat could not provide. This does not mean that every *Pir Sahib* arranges such kind of *Denee Betak* to educate the people socially, religiously, and politically. Neither every *Pir Sahib* in Lakki Marwat is well educated nor do they like to discuss political matters with people. Some *Pirs* keep themselves aloof from politics and worldly matters. Therefore, those spiritual leaders who have retained their reclusiveness from politics and worldly affairs are comparatively more respectable and popular among the common people. People often visit them to get their blessings. They meet the people; listen to their problems and try to solve them. The isolation of these *Pirs* from politics means complete isolation. They do not participate in political rallies. They do not deliver political speeches. They believe that a voter will have an equal share in the sin that a candidate commits after assuming power. Thus, they do not cast votes during the time of elections. They do not tell the people that who is a “good” politician and who is a “bad” politician. They keep their political affiliation limited to themselves instead of imposing them on others.

Respondent said that:

“When a *Pir* joins the politics it means that he no longer wants to live his life in the spiritual world. When the *Pir* joins the politics it means he preferred the material world to the spiritual one. By politics here I mean when the *Pir* contest the election as a candidate. It does not mean that the *Pir* could not cast his vote. Of course, a *Pir* is a member of this society. He could deliberate about its development. He could cast the vote. Our *Pir Sahib* does not participate in political rallies. He does not discuss the political issues with his disciples, but he does cast his vote during the time of the elections”.

Though they do not discuss political issues with common people, still they influence and mold the political ideologies of public. For instance, the *Pir Sahib* raises the flag of the political party in his house to which he belongs. This is a simple indication of *Pir Sahib* to those devotees who want to know about his political affiliation, but could not vividly ask or discuss it with him. From this flowing flag, the disciple's guess the political loyalty of their *Pir*. Therefore, they decide that they would vote for a party whose flag is flowing on *Pir Sahib's* house. The rationale is that the *Pir Sahib* is a virtuous man and he could not support or vote for a corrupt politician. The flowing flag depicts and adumbrates that the party, which *Pir Sahib* is supporting, would probably comprise pious and faithful leaders. The devotees, therefore, join *Pir Sahib* in his mission to give loyal, faithful, and pious leadership to the country by voting for the candidate of that political party whose flag they had seen on *Pir Sahib's* house. In this matter of politics, both *Pir* and devotees are on the same page, but they do not express their political feelings with one another. The devotees assume that they are sitting in front of the awing person who is apolitical. However, *Pir* too does not reveal his political affiliation before admirers. He believes that it would damage his reputation among the common public. In this circumstance, the flag guides the people politically.

***Pirs* and Politics in District Lakki Marwat**

The influence of native *Pirs* on the politics of district Lakki Marwat is very less. Those villages in the district Lakki Marwat where *Barelvi* people are in majority are the disciples of *Pir's* of Taunsa *Sharif* or Ghari *Sharif*. Similarly, in those areas where the population of *Sunni Deobandi* is in majority are the followers of *Pir Zulfiqar Ahmed Naqshbandi* or *Pir Zakori*. The native *Khulfas* (vicegerent) of the *Pirs* guide the people religiously, socially, and politically when necessary.

One of the *Pir Sahib* in the district Lakki Marwat who belongs to a very well-off family and is very popular among the common people in the entire village not because of his blessings, but because of his friendly behavior participated pragmatically in the general elections of 2018. The *Pir Sahib* did not contest the elections himself, but he supported other political candidate. In his speech, *Pir Sahib* emphasized that every person in the village ensured

to vote for his party candidate during the time of elections. Further, *Pir Sahib* initiated a door-to-door campaign in the village to maximize and enhance the vote bank of his candidate. The people considered themselves lucky when *Pir Sahib* personally arrived at their house and requested a vote. At the personal request of the *Pir Sahib*, the people voted for his candidate. Not stop here, to express their loyalty many of the villagers gave their National Identity Card (CNIC) in the *Pir Sahib's* possession. The most common justification for this practice was that the *Pir Sahib* himself had come to their homes. They took back their CNICs before the polling day to cast their votes. Allegiance to the spiritual mentor is so much embedded in the Marwat society that an enormous number of voters stamped their votes outside of the polling booth before the eyes of *Pir Sahib*.

Respondent added that:

“*Pir Sahib* had personally come to my home and requested me to vote for his candidate.

How could I deny his request? Indeed, he is not dependent on us nor we are dependent on him but the thing is that he is a very respectable person in the village. Refusing his request was not possible for me”.

Similarly, people assume that at any point in their lives, they would need the help of *Pir Sahib*. Thus, if they will not help the *Pir Sahib* today then why would the *Pir Sahib* help them in time of need? It means that the bond between *Pir Sahib* and the common people is based on mutual interest. Both the parties (*Pir* and people) look for their material interests in one another. The relationship between *Pir Sahib* and the people is based on materialism instead of spiritualism. The public does not help the *Pir Sahib* due to his spirituality or his friendship with God. Perhaps they vote for the *Pir* candidate, considering that the *Pir Sahib* will help them in getting a job. The *Pir Sahib* of this particular village is the custodian of enormous numbers of land and owns a business of oil transportation. He has several oil transporting vehicles and therefore has recruited many of the poor villagers in his own business. For instance, some of the villagers drive his transport vehicles, while some work in his fields.

The *Pir Sahib* on the spot gave money as a reward to those voters who cast their vote in favor of his candidate and pledges a job to those voters who have

some education. The *Pir Sahib* promises them that once his candidate wins and his party comes to power he will provide them with a “permanent job” (government job). By chance, if the candidate of *Pir Sahib* loses and his party does not come to power, the *Pir Sahib* then accommodates the voters in his own business.

Respondent is of the view that:

“My brother works in the fields of *Shaikh Sahib*. He gives him a smart salary. *Shaikh Sahib* gave him fifteen thousand rupees a month. Besides, the *Shaikh Sahib* bought shoes and clothes for him during the time of *Eids*”.

Lakki Marwat is an economically very backward area in every aspect. The people are mostly poor and migrate towards far-flung areas like Karachi, Lahore, and in some cases towards the Arab Emirates to get a job. They work as a labor in different chemical plants, factories, and industries to ensure their survival and to change their living standard. Vote for this class of society is not more than mere an object of earning. They sell their vote to get some money. The number of such kind of people is overwhelming in the district Lakki Marwat. Sometimes they sell their votes before the day of polling and sometimes sell them on the date of the elections. They negotiate the price of their vote. Instead of voting for the *Pir Sahib* or the fraternity candidate, they vote for money. The only language which they understand and which they want to talk and listen is the language of money. These voters bargain and look for better customers who can buy their votes at their assigned price. The voter sells the vote of the National Assembly (NA) between the ranges of three thousand to five thousand rupees. Contrary, for the Provincial Assembly vote, they charge between the ranges of two thousand to three thousand rupees. Thus, it is not only *Pirs*, who Influence the voting behavior of the people, but the financial circumstances of the people of Lakki Marwat also play a dominant role in influencing their voting behavior.

Respondent said that:

“No one knows about the *Pir Sahib* during elections. They only look for money during the time of elections. We all know that all the politicians raise mere slogans hollow slogans. The disciples of many *Pirs* sell their votes (laugh). We all know the politicians. They only make us fools”.

The religious scholars admonish the voters who sell their votes. They try to convince them and halt them from selling votes under the argument that selling votes is like selling your faith or presenting it for auction. They advise them that the vote is not a commodity or an object of earning. The *Pirs* even advise the people that casting a vote is their fundamental obligation. This vote will bring change to their village. Contrary, there are *Pirs* in the district Lakki Marwat who buy votes for their candidates. These *Pirs* give money as a reward to those voters who cast their votes in favor of their candidate. Similarly, the candidates of *Pir Sahib* facilitate all those voters who go to other villages to cast their votes. For instance, the people of Barki Wanda cast their votes in Tatter-Khel village. The *Pir Sahib* Candidates provide vehicles to these voters for casting their votes. They provide them with food and sweet water or cold drinks to win their favor. They also gave them money to buy their votes and then sent them back to their villages. It depicts that money has replaced the spiritual power of *Pir Sahib* in the district Lakki Marwat.

However, there are many villages in the district Lakki Marwat where people are living miserable lives. The residents do not have access to basic facilities like health care centers, clean drinking water, roads, and a sanitation system. The inhabitants in these villages are so impoverished that in the current 21st century they are living in mud houses. A small amount of rain demolishes their houses and breaks their connections with other big villages, particularly with those who are near the main roadsides. Large numbers of voters live in these villages. They do not sell their votes. In fact, they use their votes like a barter system to change their fates. Many of the electoral candidates particularly those from wealthy economic backgrounds bring electric towers, electric transformers, solar panels, water pumps, dinner sets, and many more things to the district, and distribute them among the needy people of these villages to win their favor.

Respondent said that:

“These politicians promise that they will do this and that for this village once they win the elections. Contrary, when they win, they disappear, forget their promises and never look back. In the 2013 general elections, it was their slogans, but this time the people were conscious. I took the water pump as the

price of my vote. Many people in this village have done the same thing”.

This is not only the money that has replaced the politics of *Piri-Muridi* in the district Lakki Marwat. The spreading of modern education in the district is also playing a crucial role in the political understanding of the new generation. Different governments have opened different educational institutions. There are a number of government and private schools, colleges, and universities in the district Lakki Marwat. The parents invest their earnings in the education of their children. Similarly, the vast majority of the new generation of districts migrate towards other provinces and cities like Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore to acquire higher education in the prestigious universities of the country. The educated generation of Lakki Marwat has a huge influence on the politics of the district. During the time of elections, they went back to their villages to cast their votes. They campaign and vote for educated candidates, no matter whether he/she is contesting independently or from the platform of any political party. They do not care about *Pirs* and fraternity.

Some *Pirs* families pragmatically participate in the elections of district Lakki Marwat. All these *Pir* families are from the *Barelvi* sect. They participate in the elections to retain their hold and to curtail the popularity of other *Barelvi Pirs* in their respective areas. Therefore, some *Barelvi Pirs* of the district contested in the general elections of 2018 as independent candidates for the Provincial Assembly. The inside political tussles among the *Barelvi Pirs* weakened them politically and they lost all their seats. Tehreek Labbaik Party (TLP) lost its seats and PTI who had the support of *Pir* of Taunsa *Sharif* and Ghari *Sharif* performed very poorly in the elections. Similarly, another *Pir* family had nominated their family member as a candidate for the seat of Provincial Assembly. Because they were outraged against the candidate that the *Pir Sahib* family had supported in the 2013 general elections. The candidate had won the elections with the assistance of this *Pir*, but after winning the elections, he never visited the village of *Pir Sahib*. The winning candidate had betrayed the *Pir Sahib* and broken all his promises. He did not start any developmental work in the village of *Pir Sahib* like roads, streets, and schools. He did not give employment to the

devotees of *Pir Sahib*. Perhaps, he humiliated the *Pir Sahib* in the eyes of those disciples who had voted them on the plea of their *Pir Sahib*. Therefore, the 2018 general elections were a suitable moment for the *Pir Sahib* to teach a lesson to this ungrateful contestant. The *Pir Sahib* had known that his opponent candidate was economically very well off and that he would not be able to defeat him in the elections. Still, the *Pir Sahib* had decided to contest elections against him. The reason was not to win the elections but to create a threat to his opponent's victory.

The *Pir Sahib*, therefore, had framed his election manifesto and propagated it among the people of his village. The *Pir Sahib* also visited all those villages where his disciples were living and urged them to vote for him. The candidate was the brother-in-law of *Pir Sahib*. The opponent candidate came to know that *Pir Sahib* was going to bring his candidate. He promptly came to the village of *Pir Sahib* and met him. The opponent candidate requested that *Pir Sahib* withdraw the name of your candidate. He offered a huge amount of money to the *Pir Sahib* but was futile. The *Pir Sahib* also came to know that his opponent was very scared of his growing popularity and little more hard work could turn the election result. The *Pir Sahib* had assumed that the victory of his brother-in-law in the elections was very bright. Respondent added that:

“One of my opponents offered me a huge amount of money during the 2018 elections because I had nominated my brother-in-law as our election candidate against him. I refused to take the money. The only reason was to teach a lesson to my opponent. Though we did not secure victory in the election against him, our candidate got 7000 votes against him, which was a great achievement for us”. The assertion of *Pir Sahib* that his candidate had taken 7000 votes in the general elections of 2018 was baseless. After looking at the result of the elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan documents that the total number of registered voters for NA-36 and PK-99 Lakki Marwat was 421,224 during the 2018 general elections in which the numbers of male voters were 236,162 whereas, female voters 185,062. Similarly, the total candidates for the seat of the National Assembly (NA) were 18 of which 12 were contesting the elections independently. Additionally, the total number of candidates for the Provincial

Assembly PK-92 was 20 out of which 14 candidates were contesting independently (ECP, 2018). Many of the voters as discussed above sell their votes. Similarly, many of the voters did not cast their votes in which the numbers of female voters were huge, because of the patriarchal structure and cultural barriers of society. The election result revealed that all the independent candidates lost with a very high margin of votes. None of the independent candidates had taken more than 1000 votes. How could the *Pir* claim that his candidate had taken 7000 votes?

Participation in the electoral process demands time, energy, and money. Some *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* in the district Lakki Marwat do not participate in electoral politics due to their poor economic conditions. Similarly, many *Pirs* are either uneducated or possess very less education and could not qualify for the eligibility criteria as a member of parliament. The state of their illiteracy is that they even do not know about their own *Silsilah* (Sufi school of thought). The natives call them by their nicknames like *Piraan*, *Shaykhan*, *Sahiban*, and *Shahjayan*. These *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* do not know in which century their ancestor had arrived in this district. What were the dates of their birth and their death? The only thing that they know is that they are from *Pir* families and therefore, should be given high status in society. To conceal and escape from such kind of questions from the general public these *Pirs* and *Sajjada Nashins* have hired educated persons for the shrines of their forebears.

These educated people work as tourist guides. They care for the shrines and collect information about them. They guide the tourists regarding the shrine. Similarly, they also collect the *Nazranajat* (vows) which the people present to the shrine. From these *Nazranajat* they take their salaries and give the rest of the amount to the shrine custodians. These shrines are not more than merely a source of earnings for their descendants in the contemporary era. The unpopularity of these shrines has mitigated its role in politics. The *Sajjada Nashins* are not very influential politically, but still, they play their politics. Instead of playing and bargaining with the politicians for the welfare of their devotees and common people, they negotiate for their own welfare. For instance, they put forward small problems before the political leaders like the approbation of electricity transformers for their houses and the drilling of clean

drinking water pumps or tube wells. One of the devotees who has been living on one particular shrine for the last ten years and guiding the people about the contributions of the *Pir* to society said,

Respondent said that:

“During the 2013 general elections, a candidate for the Provincial Assembly arrived at this shrine and inquired about the history of the shrine. I told him about the history of *Faqir Sahib*. The guardians of the *Faqir Sahib* met him and put forward their electricity problem before him. Similarly, during the 2018 election, another local politician visited the shrine and offered five thousand rupees to the shrine. We discussed with him the issues of clean drinking water. He wrote down our problems in a notebook and pledged that he would dispel all our issues. He did not come back after the elections. The *Sajjada Nashins* of this shrine are uneducated. They do not know how to interact and bargain with the people in power”.

In the villages where people live miserably and bring clean drinking water from the adjoining villages, the *Pir Sahib* in the same village lives a luxurious life. The *Pir Sahib* has his tube well at home. The *Pir Sahib* lives in a well-furnished house mostly made up of concrete. The *Pir Sahib* has also a well-maintained guesthouse. The walking of beautiful and precious birds enhances the beauty of *Pir Sahib's* guesthouse. The dancing of peacocks inside the walls of the guesthouse attracts the attention of visitors. The gardener takes care of the garden in the guesthouse, while the watcher takes care of the birds. The vacillating flag of one particular political party on the walls of the guesthouse demonstrates the inclination of *Pir Sahib's* political affiliation. The *Pir Sahib* meets the people who visit his guesthouse. He discusses and preaches the political manifesto of his party with the visitors. The *Pir Sahib* is not an MNA or MPA but is optimistic that shortly he will be. The *Pir Sahib* addresses the common worker about the decisions of the high command in his respective area and convinces them to participate in all protests against the government.

Respondent said that:

“I do participate in political activities. I am a leading leader of..... political party in this area. I had worked very hard to mobilize the masses against the government during the 2019 *Darna*. However, when the central leadership of the party decided to quit the

Darna against the government, this raged me over the party's decision”.

This is not the case for every *Pir Sahib* in the district Lakki Marwat. They do not share the same privileged economic background. There are many families of the *Pirs*, who are very poor and live, a very simple life. The *Pirs* of Lakki Marwat do not keep themselves aloof from the common people because of their distinguished status. Perhaps, they live among the common people of the village and meet them daily. They care for their devotee. They listen to their problems and endeavor to solve them if possible. They participate in politics, but evidence does not show the victory of local *Pirs* in National or Provincial elections. The reason is that the number of their disciples is very low in the district. The voters of district Lakki Marwat promise every electoral candidate, but they vote according to their understanding. For instance, many people are staunch followers of *Pir* of Taunsa *Sharif*, but they do not cast their votes in favor of the Saif Ullah brothers. Similarly, the *Sunni Deobandi* natives of district Lakki Marwat are the followers of *Pir* Zulfiqar Ahmed *Naqshbandi*, but they do not vote for the candidate of JUI-F.

The increase of the educated class in the district Lakki also influenced its politics. The educated class seriously takes into consideration the pre-poll survey of different organizations. The educated generation before polling their votes study and analyze the policies of former electoral winners and their contribution to the development of the district. It is because the people of Lakki Marwat want development in their area. They want schools, colleges, hospitals, universities, and job opportunities in their area. No matter who brings this development, liberals, conservatives, or *Pirs*?

Respondent added that:

“Every person is free to choose his or her representative. The only thing that matters the most during the time of the election is the developmental plan for this area. The candidate who comes with a well-framed and attractive plan of progress for the area always wins the seat during the elections. On the other hand, those candidates who play their politics on emotional affiliation always lose their seats”.

The *Pirs* in some villages halts their disciples and follower from polling their votes or participating in political activities in any form. These *Pirs* have

portrayed politics as a very bad thing among its disciples. Politics for such kinds of *Pirs* is not more than merely a source of accumulating wealth. The accumulation of wealth results in aloofness from religion and from spiritual satisfaction, which eventually devastates social peace. These *Pirs* take the prior pledge from the new seeker before giving them *ba'yat* or assimilating them into their *Tariqah* so that they will not participate in political activities. They even do not bear the flag of any political party on the disciple house. Therefore, the disciples of these *Pirs* do not cast their votes in elections. On the contrary, some *Pirs* work on these disciples and convince them to integrate them into political activities. These *Pirs* convince the disciples that participating in political activities is their fundamental right. These *Pirs* urge them that their votes will bring change in their village and the entire country.

Respondent said that:

It is not the *Pir Sahib* who tells the people to cast their vote in favor of this or that candidate; in fact, the people are free in their decision to cast their vote. The *Pir Sahib* only tells the people not to waste their vote, because it is necessary to change the fate of the village.

The devotees have their reservations against their *Pirs*. Some disciples had left their *Pirs*, due to their participation in politics. The devotees are of the view that their *Pirs* are now more interested in the material world instead of the spiritual world. The *Pirs* have left to guide and meditate with their devotees because of their political activities. The seekers deliberate that it is not the job of a spiritual leader to penetrate a political field. Similarly, the educated class of the district Lakki Marwat analyzes the penetration of *Pirs* in politics critically. They consider it the politics of *Piri-Muridi* or the use of religion by *Pirs* for political gains. The disciples and the educated class are true in their accusations against such *Pirs*. *Pirs* in some circumstances justify their politics and reject the policies and political ideologies of other candidates. *Pirs* use the derogatory word “foreign agents” for those candidates who contest elections from the platform of liberal political parties. Some of the *Pirs* in the district Lakki Marwat are prayer leaders in the mosques. They use the mosque chairs for political purposes. They urge the common people who come to mosques for prayers, to vow money for

the protests so that they could topple the government of “foreign agents”.

To retain control over the disciples every *Pir* in the district Lakki Marwat has his mosque accompanied by *Khanqah*. In the mosque, the *Pir* leads the prayer congregation and addresses the questions of disciples related to *Fiqa* (religious jurisprudence) while in *Khanqah* he meditates with disciples and supervises them on the spiritual path. The initiative of *Pir* to construct a mosque near *Khanqah* helped him to keep the disciples away from the influence of orthodox religious scholars. The disciples too prefer to offer prayer in the mosque of his *Pir* instead of offering it in the mosque of orthodox religious scholars.

The District Gazetteer of Bannu had documented that the *Pirs* of Gorakka (Gorakka is a small village in Lakki district) are very well off. The Gazetteer further writes that the *Pirs* of Gorakka are very influential in their area and have a huge number of lands, which the British government had given them as grants for their services (Bannu District Gazetteer 1870-1874). During the fieldwork, the researcher had visited this particular village. The researcher found the economic circumstances of the Gorakka *Pirs* entirely contrary to the Gazetteer’s claim. The *Pirs* of Gorakka village are very poor and live a simple life. They do not have a huge number of lands, but nominal numbers of lands like every person has in the village. They work on their lands, which are the only source of their livelihood. Some of the Gorakka *Pirs* are government servants in different departments. Similarly, they do not have a huge number of devotees nor have political influence. Perhaps, the number of their disciples is equal to none.

CONCLUSION

Despite, the influence of the *Pirs* of district Lakki Marwat over the common masses is not huge. Still, they play politics and influence the voting behavior of natives. By arranging *Denee Betak*, the *Pirs* not only keep their ancestors alive in the memories of people but also educate them politically. They praise the manifestoes of peculiar political parties in their *Denee Betak* and prepare the common masses psychologically for its support. Similarly, during the time of elections, the *Pirs* campaign door to door for political parties and endeavor to ensure their victory. However, many *Pirs* in the same district do not

participate in politics and political activities. They took prior allegiance from their disciples before giving him *ba’yat* that they would not participate in political activities in any form.

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