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Oral Heritage of Mankind in Pakistan

Patrimoine oral de l'humanité au Pakistan

by / par

Ms Kishwar NAHEED
Director-General, Pakistan National Council for the Arts
Ministry of Culture
Islamabad - Pakistan

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ORAL HERITAGE OF MANKIND IN PAKISTAN

(Kishwar Naheed)

Major number of cultural events in Pakistan encircle around shrines of mystics & regional language poets. Annual "Urs" (local name for anniversary) is held of each poet, mystic or religious leader as per lunar calendar. No invitations are issued, no posters, press release or media publicity is done. It is customary for people to remember dates of Urs as per sighting of moon.

The Urs or Festival is of two or three days. In Lahore, last day is reserved for ladies at Shah Hussain's shrine. All other Festival are open, men & women without any restrictions & reservation, equally participate.

On major number of shrines like Shah Lateef in Sindh & Data Sahib at Lahore, Separate entry & courtyard for prayers for women are built. On other shrines, no separate portions for women exist.

Festivals of the following major mystics regional language poets are held as per lunar calendar.

Punjab

Mystic & Regional Language Poets:- Shah Hussain/Waris Shah/Bulleh Shah/
Khawaja Fareed/Baba Fareed/Sultan Bahu.

Mystics

Data Sahib/Shah Jamal/Hazrat Ghore Shah/Bari Imam/Baha-ud-Din Zikria/Shah Ruku-
e-Alam/Chanan Peer/Bibi Pak Daman.

Sindh

Mystic & Regional Language Poet:- Hazrat Shah Lateef.

N.W.F.P.

Mystic & Regional Language Poet:- Khushal Khattak.

Baluchistan

Mystic & Regional Language Poet:- Jam Duruk.

Only a few of the major ones, I have referred above. If I am not wrong, every day in any part of Pakistan, some festival is held & people from urban & rural areas participate, some where women are more in number.

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Main features of the festivals.

People come with flowers, place on shrine & pray for the unfulfilled desires, business projects & for the male children to be born.

Better off people bring very previous shawl covers for the shrine, some have gold embroidery.

Some offer gold for the minarets, gates & tombs of the mystics, all gold gates & tombs of Shah Lateef, Data Sahib, are the voluntary contributions by the believers.

Cash contribution is dropped in a locked depository box, which is opened by the administrator of the shrine.

Ethnic craft & ceramic exhibitions are simultaneous feature of each festival

In 1974, Department of auqaf was created & control of shrines was taken over by the State. Earlier the affairs of the shrine were mainly looked after by "Mutawallies", followers & sometimes descendants of the same family.

The Govt. control was designed to stop mal-practices in the surroundings of the shrines. Mal-practices included bargain & abduction of women, misuse of the collected funds & all believable & unbelievable stories of use & business of drugs, also to control un-Islamic rituals practiced by the people.

After 25 years of Govt. Control, analysis show that on the one side Govt. has been flexible in matters of people's belief & practices. The hold of "mutawallies" has shrunken down, but it is still around.

Prominent Rituals

Each of the shrine carry different story of rituals. I mention a few for information.

- At the shrine of Shah Hussain, it is a permanent ritual to carry candles & light candles. Millions of candles are brought & lighted by the devotees.
- At the shrine of Ghore Shah, devotees bring new toy horses made of mud, the horses are beautifully coloured & sold on each Thursday by women outside the shrine. The story runs around that the mystic was a juvenile person, always sitting on a wooden horse & giving good wishes to the devotees. Now the devotees present horses at his shrine to get their wishes accomplished.
- At the Shrine of Khawaja Fareed, it is believed the first thousand who pass through the gate on the opening day of festival, will straight go to the heaven. In pursuance to

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such belief, many of the devotees sit on the roof top to get in & be counted in the first thousand to go to heaven. Some get their legs & bones broken in the process, but rush & devotion continues with the same zeal & madness.

- It is presumed that best of the folk singers could grow, if they are accepted and popularized at shrines. Most of the Sindhi folk singers and gypsy singer Reshman are the products of festival of Shah Lateef.
- Most of the Qawwals offer to sing at shrines without any charge, they also believe of the blessings of shrines.
- Most of the poetry rendered by Qawwals and folk singers at shrines other than the mystic poets, is the one written in praise of other mystics like Hazrat Nizm-ud-Deen Aulia, Data Sahib & Bahud-Deen Zikria.

Women Sufis.

Mysticism has also stayed as men's specialized dominion. Very few women like Bibi Pak Daman are listed high. She is said to have prayed to God to hide herself in earth, when some one tried to see her. On her prayer, the earth shook, she was taken inside, only a portion of her veil was out on earth to prove that she is now with the God.

Dr. Arne Marrie Schimmel has written a book on women sufis, where she has described hundreds of Sufis in muslim world. There are some other shrines of women mystic where festivals are held, particularly at the shrine of Heer (romantic character like Juleat) a significant name to mention.

Main vanishing rituals of festivals.

- Specialized reading and musical rendering of poetry of each mystic poet was the main feature of the festival. No efforts are being made to continue or revive it.
- Special folk dancers and instrumentalist used to grow through such festivals. Media imperialism has destroyed the tradition, no intensive efforts or display of artists is observed at shrines and festivals, except if arranged by the state, cuqaf or culture departments.
- Cultural backdrop of festival has been minimized after the state takeover of the shrines. Festivals almost reduced to the religious rituals.
- Readings of mystic pottery at village level was a permanent feature of evenings, where cultivators used to get together, talk, sing and listen to the word of wisdom. Neo-industrialization has neither brought the substitute nor left the basics. There is no cultural activity with in the framework of a village. Women and children don't have any avenue recreation. Cultural festivals at villages level have to be re-activated.

- *There is no public place at village level. In the towns and district levels, public place are parks, where people take children for modern electric merry-go-round picnic.*
- *Oral heritage of reciting folk poetry, folk tales, encouraging folk crafts and preserving monumental culture is getting over-powered by television, now people get to-gather around T.V. to view drams and film music, not old folks.*
- *Oral literature has been taken over by the press and news papers, no precedense exist now of oral story telling.*
- *Folk tradition of theatre used to have all character played by male artists. Women characters too, through used to do all women make-up and women dressing was performed by male artists. It still exist in some parts of Punjab, no support to such groups is provided by the state, so the groups are vanishing*
- *Folk and legendary tricks, games and performers also vanishing as market is taken over by computer games and electronic media.*
- *Inspite of big loss, still exists the traditions, desire and potential for the revivalism of "Living Cultural Assets". However, because of financial constraints, the performers and artists are resolving to choose some other profession for operative life and material needs.*
- *Spaces like shrines may be strengthened for rejuvenation and transmitting of oral and living culture of Pakistan.*