Identity Amidst Liminality

Performing Religion, Gender, and Spirit Possession at Thalla Kaiwal Ram

By

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Pakistan

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A thesis submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Studies

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2022

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"***Identity Amidst Liminality: Performing Religion, Gender and Spirit Possession at Thala Kaiwal Ram***"

Dedicated to my father Fida Hussain Gaadi who taught me critical thinking.

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Abstract

Thala Kaiwal Ram is typically a representative case of liminal religious identities of South Asia. As a historical sacred place located in the larger sacred complex of Bilote town, it defies the structuring role of rigid boundaries and borders in the construction of religious identities. As a result, it acts as a shared religious site, which is owned, visited, and revered by both Hindus and local Muslims. This liminal status of Thala Kaiwal Ram is practically produced and maintained through contestation over the religious identity of Kaiwal Ram- the chief Bhakti saint who had founded the place in the late medieval period.

Liminality id performed at Thala Kaiwal Ram and the town of Bilote in many other ways. First and foremost, it is invested into the building of sacred landscape which is dominated by the juxtaposition of different religious traditions. Besides its association with Hindu bhakti tradition, the sacred complex is full of Shia iconography as well as practical demonstration of folk religious traditions such as the worship of sacred trees, stones, and snakes. It is also the place known for the performance of Jatra- a healing/music ritual. Thousands of possessed persons visit the place during the spring season to play/ perform Jatra for healing purpose. Liminality is part and parcel of the experience of possession and tripartite structure of healing ritual. The present research work tries to keep this spatial and cultural character of liminality intact by making the choice of situating itself in-between the history of Thala Kaiwal Ram/ Eighth Gadi and doing ethnography.

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Glossary

Term	**Definition**
ashnan	bath
advaita	non-dual
ashtam	eighth
avesa	absorption; spirit possession
baithak	a sitting place
bhakti	devotion; a Hindu devotional tradition
bhakat	a devotee
bhedaabheda	hidden and unhidden; in bhakti it signifies unconscious identity and difference
bazar	traditional marketplace
bhava	emotion; aptitude; experience
bhug	pleasure
bhutta	ghosts or spirits which remain in the world after death
	brahman; a person belonging to the highest caste of Hindus.
chaitra	month or season of spring; first month of the year as per Hindu calendar
darshan	seeing/ school of philosophy in Sanskrit studies
dharma	right path/ religion
gopi	milkmaid/ a female consort of Krishna
gosvami	religious leader or priest
haveli	house; a temple in Pushtimarg tradition
jal	water
jatra	pilgrimage; a healing ritual for possessed person
jinn	Arabic term for ancestral/ concealed spirits
karma	action
kalyug	dark age in the larger Hindu cosmology of time

kirtan	singing/playing music; sports; story
mana	mind and associated feelings
murti	image; idol
nag puja	snake worship
nirguna	without attributes
pada	poetry; a genre of poetry
pattan	a crossing point of river
phalla	fruit
prem	love
potre	grandson
puja	worship
puran	something that is very old
pushtimarg	path of grace
ras	nectar; a realized sentiment in Sanskrit aesthetics
saguna	with good attributes/qualities
sakhi	friend; a female companion in Krishnaite bhakti
samparadaya	religious order/organization
seva	giving service
shakti	power/ potentiality

shringar	erotic; a primary emotion in Sanskrit aesthetics
shuddha	pure; something that is without corruption *svarupa* true form
taqyia	Arabic term for dissimulation to avoid persecution
tirtha	crossing river; religious pilgrimage
vedanta	end of Vedic period and its ethos
virha	separation in love
vanaparsta	worship of trees
vaisakhi	a festival starting at the first day of the Indian month

Note on Diacritics

I have not used diacritics to mark the terms of Sanskrit, Hindi and Siraiki language in the thesis. Most of the terms are already well-known in academic research in different disciplines. They are also explained in the list of glossaries. Moreover, the decision to avoid using diacritics is based on the intention to make the text readers friendly. Many of the terms are

Introduction

1. In the Beginning

It was the mid-1990s when I was first introduced to Thala Kaiwal Ram. My friend, poet Ashu Lal from Karor Lal Essan told me that he was going to visit Thala Kaiwal Ram to attend the traditional event of *Vaisakhi*.[1] Further discussion with him disclosed that Kaiwal Ram was a *bhakti* Hindu saint of the late medieval period who founded the sacred *Thala* (literally, raised platform)[2] which is now known by his own name. The place is also alternatively named as Thala Boharianwala.[3] It is located in Bilote Sharif, a town itself renowned as an important sacred complex in the upper Indus floodplains.[4]

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[1] *Vaisakhi* is traditional / religious celebration of New Year in Hinduism and Sikhism. As per Hindu calendar, the new year is either started in *Chaitra* or *Vaisakh*. They are marked as the change in season. *Chaitra* typically represents spring season when plants grow news buds. It is therefore considered the month of new birth and growth. The next month Vaisakh, on the other is more related to the start of the period of wheat harvesting. As a part of folk cultural tradition, both months are widely celebrated by rural Muslims as well through a variety of festivals. The celebrations of *Vaisakhi* start on either 13 or 14 April of every year.

[2] Though the literal meaning of *Thala* is 'raised platform' in Siraiki language but it was commonly used by Hindu community in the pre-partition period as community place for religious and festive congregation. Several places in Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan can still be found by the name such as '*Kirar Thala*', '*Ram Thala*', etc. They are reminiscent of diverse society, religion and culture of the region before the partition of the Sub-continent.

[3] *Bohar* is a local name for the sacred banyan tree. Like *pipal*, banyan is considered a sacred tree, especially in Buddhism and some bhakti Hindu traditions.

[4] The upper Indus floodplains constitute downstream areas of both Jinnah and Chashma Barrage. The town of Bilote is located tens of kilometers downward from Chashma Barrage. Owing to its location at

For the next many years, I kept hearing of Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote from different friends. They were always mentioned because of their several remarkable spatial, historical and cultural attributes. For example, I was told that there was an ancient archaeological site in the town of Bilote, popularly known as '*Kafir Kot*' (infidels' fort). The town is one of the main regional sacred complexes and a main pilgrimage site of the area. Thousands of devotees from far flung areas annually flock to the town to pay their homage to and seek the blessing of Shah Essa-the chief Sufi saint of the fourteenth century.[5]- and numerous other sacred personages and pilgrimage sites. The *mela* (festival) of Shah Essa is annually held on every Sunday during the month of *Chaitra*.

However, the intriguing aspect of the place, in which I later became very interested, was the performance of music/dance/trance ritual for the healing of possessed persons. The ritual is called Jatra.[6] Thala Kaiwal Ram, the shrine of Shah Essa and many other sacred sites in Bilote town are renowned for the performance of this healing ritual. It is held on the daily basis during the entire month of *Chaitra*. Every day, hundreds of

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the west bank of the Indus River, it was a busy river port in the region before the construction of Chashma Barrage. Indeed, the Indus River was diverted towards eastward to compel its flowing into the main channel which was/is necessary to make the barrage functional and successful. Some of the major towns in the upper Indus River Valley include Kalabagh, Essa Khel, Mianwali, Kundian, Piplaan, Thal (desert region) of Khushaab, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan.

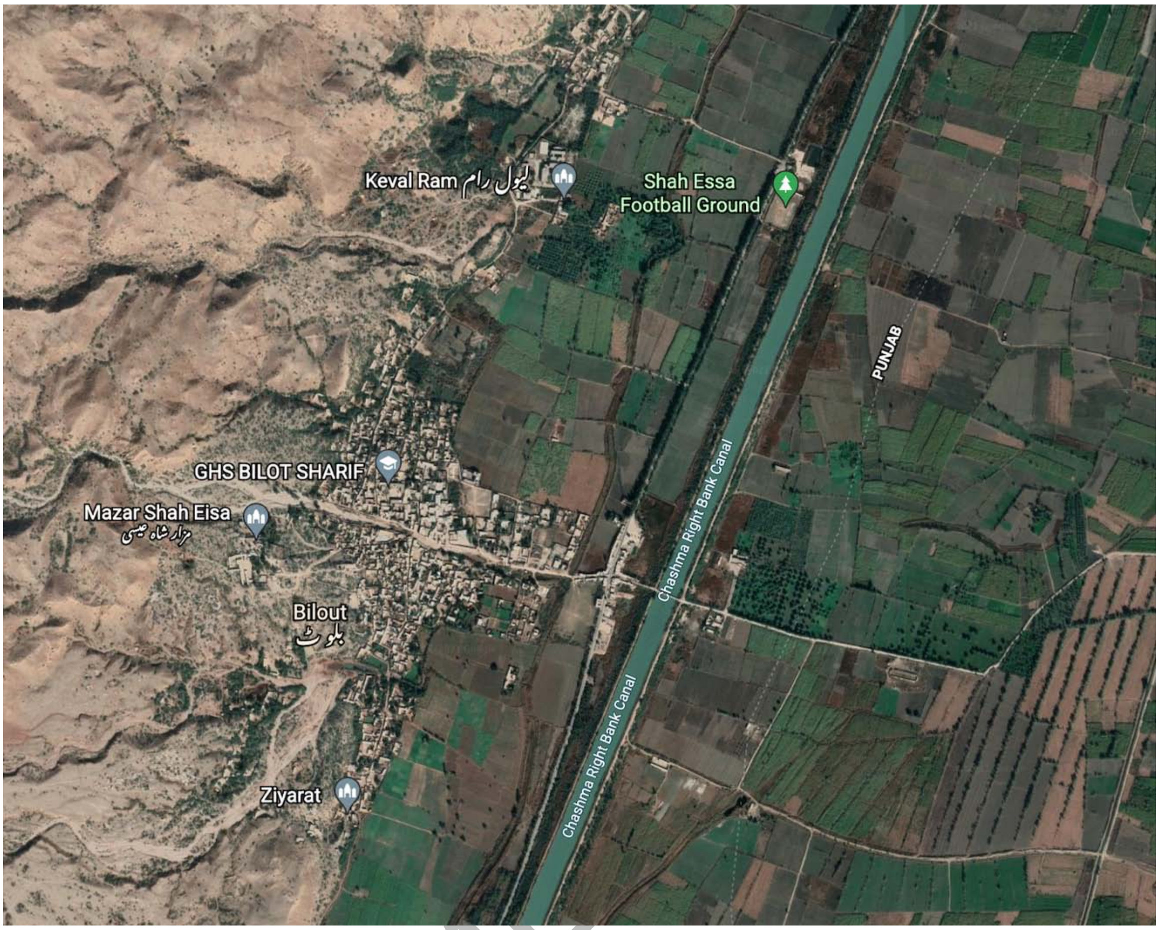
[5] Shah Essa was a Sufi saint associated with Shia Bukhari *silsasla* (order) of Uch Sharif in the fourteenth century. He was given large tracts of land by Lodhi dynasty and his descendents are now the custodian of his shrine and sway significant religious, economic and political influence due to their status as spiritual leader, big landlords and elected politicians.

[6] *Jatra* is the vernacular version of Sanskrit term Yatra. Its original meaning is 'going', setting off, journey, march, expedition'. However, it is mostly used in the religious sense of going to pilgrimage. For details, see https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/cgi-bin/tamil/recherche

persons especially women, who are believed to be possessed by different spirits, perform it for their healing.

Unsurprisingly, being an anthropologist, all this information was extremely interesting to me. Many times, I thought to visit Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote. However, I couldn’t be able to materialize this desire before the year 2006. It was spring season. I was then returning from my native town Taunsa to Islamabad. Bilote town was on the way back and I decided to make a brief stop over there.

Upon my arrival at Bilote bus station, some geographic, historical, and cultural aspects of very distinctive significance were easily noticeable. The town was nested into the foothills of the rugged but beautiful *Khaisore* Range which flanked it from the west and south side. The entire town and adjoining fields were full of date palm trees. Its eastern border was


Keval Ram کیول رام
Shah Essa
Football Ground
PUNJAB
GHS BILOT SHARIF
Mazar Shah Eisa
مزار شاہ عیسی
Chashma Right Bank Canal
Bilout
بلوٹ
Chashma Right Bank Canal
Ziyarat

Map 1. Google Map of Bilote Sharif and Kaiwal Ram

DRSML

marked by a newly constructed Chashma Right Bank Canal (CRBC) while the far eastern panorama gave the impression of a moribund river channel. On the south, the old decaying structures of temples and fort constructed over low-peaked hills were visible from road and bus station. They gave the impression of shattered fragments of an ancient past.

There was an atmosphere of celebration all around in the wake of shortly expected *mela* of Shah Essa. A variety of sweet shops, make-shift hotels, shops of children's toys and women's jewelry and make-up items had been newly established in the main street from the bus station to the shrine of Shah Essa. Both the bus station and the main *bazar* street were thronged by a variety of rural folks.

I quickly glanced over many features of the place. Most of the houses in the town had black flags and other iconic items of *Shiite* placed over the top of their roofs. It was an indicator that the main local inhabitants in the town are Shi'a by their faith. Moreover, the majority of people in the *bazar* belonged to the Siraiki speaking population which constitutes amajority in the district of Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwah Province. However, one could also see Pashtu speaking persons with visible signs of acculturation. Most of them belonged to neighboring Pashtun areas especially Tank, Laki Marwat, South Waziristan, Bannu, etc., and they appeared to be bi-lingual and their demeanor was much localized.

I was told by a shopkeeper that Thala Kaiwal Ram was located at the north-west edge of the town. It took us a few minutes' drive to arrive there. I was told that the side road leading to Thala Kaiwal Ram has been privately built by Hindu devotees mainly from Sindh and Balochistan who visited here every year to attend the festival of *Vaisakhi*.

The loud sounds of drums and singing could be listened from the distant place where I was then standing. When I arrived there, I discovered that the Thala Kaiwal Ram was actually a large gated compound having four walls, residential rooms, a lane of bathrooms and small temple structure. An overwhelming sign of the compound was a large *banyan* tree in the middle of the compound. The temple structure was actually located under its dark and cool shadow. Later on, I came to know that the Thala is also known as *Bohrianwala* (the place of banyan) due to the fact that the sacred tree was planted here by the saint Kaiwal Ram. However, it was cut down during the Hindu-

Muslim riots at the time of partition. The present tree was replanted by the descendents of the chief Muslim saint Shah Essa.

What were immediately noticeable were two security guards standing at the gate of Thala Kaiwal Ram. They were appointed by the provincial government for the purpose of thorough search and scrutiny. Local people told me that the security was provided by the provincial government due to terrorist threat to the historical sacred Hindu space. This security measure was discernible owing to the location of Bilote town, situated as it was near both frontier tribal and settled territories troubled by the Taliban terrorist insurgency and resultant counter-military operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwah.

Before my entry into the compound, I encountered an event that had not only deeply impressed my mind but, to some extent, directed my future research pursuit as well. A few yards away from the gate, two men were engaged in an intensive dialogue. By appearance, one man seemed to be a young religious cleric with long black beard and green turban. The second one was an illiterate peasant with rugged and torn clothes. The cleric was fiercely talking against the visit of Muslims to the place overtly associated with a Hindu saint. He was of the view that paying any reverence to Kaiwal Ram was an un-Islamic act and those who were doing it would have to face the wrath of almighty Allah. They were destined to go to hell. The response of the poor peasant was muffled and comprised of rambling sentences. Whatever I could gather from his low voice was the expression of his being helpless in this case:

“I have no choice. My wife is possessed by a Hindu J*in*. He dictates her to visit Kaiwal Ram. He gets appeased by it. If not followed, he punishes my wife. “

Being an anthropologist, his remarks sparked a number of ethnographic insights inside me. For example, I thought of how the world of spirits was being identified by social categories like the religious identities of Hindu and Muslim. Another thought that immediately followed was whether it was impossible to make history and past oblivious in complete sense? Despite the fact that history witnessed a large-scale exodus of both Hindus and Muslims from their ancestral places in the subcontinent as a consequence of the partition, their spirits were still presumably living in those places. I was also struck by the medical significance accorded to the sacred place with respect to the supposed attacks of malevolent spirits.

Meanwhile I proceeded to the large entrance gate of Thala Kaiwal Ram where two official guards were standing in an alert position. After getting their permission, I entered the courtyard area packed by pilgrims, a majority of whom were men. I was told that those men were the companions of possessed women who were playing Jatra (music/ dance/ healing ritual) in the small adjacent compound inside the temple building. The loud sounds of drums and singing were coming out of that compound. I felt electrified and overwhelmed by a very mysterious trance.

As soon as I entered into the compound, I was completely surprised and enchanted, by the scene of possession performance. Many dozens of the possessed persons sitting under the *banyan* tree were in enraptured state while swinging their heads along with the fast beats of drum and songs performed by local musicians/singers. It was my first encounter with the scene of possessed persons playing / performing the healing ritual of Jatra. A large majority of them were young women. A few men were, however, also amongst the performers. There was no strict physical gender segregation. The place of performance was shared, though some gap between men and women was left open to pay due respect to local gender norms and values. I was struck by the passionate facial expressions and fast body movements of the performers, particularly the way they were swinging their heads like a fast fan. I couldn't decide how to interpret the scene. Was I seeing psychopaths performing a kind of catharsis with the help of music? What was the relationship between music and possession trance? Why was it all performed in a ritualized form? What was the place of religion and beliefs and their relationship with the ritual of Jatra? Was it all a part of an indigenous tradition surviving against all historical odds, changes, and discontinuities? Such questions continued to appear in my mind while I had observed it all with the feelings of perplexity.

It was the moment when I decided to evolve my academic engagements with this seemingly uncanny (sacred) place as well as the phenomena of spirit possession and, ritual of healing and other performances. At that time, I was also pondering the specific field and subject of my doctoral research. Not surprisingly, the brief experience was persuasive enough to help me in taking the affirmative decision.[7]

1.2. Research Project as a Rite of Passage

The writing of this research work is the last stage of the journey that I decided to undertake after my brief but striking encounter with spirit possession, healing rituals, shared religious traditions and many other such atypical things at Thala Kaiwal Ram

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[7] Self-writing is now an acceptable practice in anthropology and other related academic fields. After the post-modern turn, the conventional objective writing without bringing the researcher into the text has not remained the rigid academic standard. Rather, self-writing is considered crucial to elucidate the context of field research and its everyday dynamics. I have partially done self-writing wherever it is necessary for the purpose of clarification and establishing connections. For more details, see Chapter 5.

and sacred complex of Bilote. Like other rites of passages, it was marred with challenges, ambiguities, transitions, and aggregation. Initially, it was started as a project of ethnography of Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote. However, in the middle of my work, I realized that the place and sacred personages of Bilote are shrouded in the deep mist of history. Without historical understanding, the research project would remain flawed. It led me towards an extensive historical survey and review of the traditional and historical archives available to me.

I was also troubled with the question of an appropriate theory-methodology conjunction. Without settling it, any research in social sciences and humanity cannot pass on through the standards followed as academic rites.

I was of the view that the notion of ‘syncretism’ was flawed and might not be helpful in finding satisfactory answers of the questions I was then seeking. From the very beginning, I sensed that something ‘unusual’ was involved in the subject I was interested in and wanted to study and interpret. This ‘uncanny’ character of my subject/interest was evident by religio-cultural performances like spirit possession, devotion, healing rituals as well as the maintenance of shared Hindu-Muslim religious traditions. The notion of syncretism was much limited and misplaced for my quest.

My struggle was partly resolved when I encountered the writings of anthropologist Victor Turner on the concept of liminality or the state of being ‘in-between and betwixt’ and particularly its application in the field of possession, pilgrimage, ritual and instances of identity transformation. The concept of liminality proved very helpful to me in weaving together otherwise discrete cultural subjects and performances into single unifying framework. Most importantly, its propensity to acknowledge certain level of ambiguity and anti-structural movements in the field of cultural studies partly relieved me from the imperative of rigid coherence and tidy rational schemas.[8]

The outcome of this craggy and scabrous journey is the final text of this work. The readers are the best judges of its starting point and end point. For me, it always remains 'in-between and betwixt' of an uncased process of knowing and learning.

2. Challenges of Early Rapport Building and Fieldwork

Rapport building is considered the most crucial stage in any kind of fieldwork. However, it has more special place in the anthropological method of participant observation and ethnographic works. Rapport building is especially of paramount importance in the context when ethnographer / fieldworker is foreign to local culture. Traditionally, ethnographers were given proper training to build trust-worthy and frank relationship with their local informants. In this regard, the initial contacts were thought of most crucial significance.

Rapport building involves a number of ethical, cultural and psychological aspects. First and foremost, the fieldworker/ethnographer need to get the fully informed consent of their informants. For this purpose, they are required to give the full explanation of the purpose, scope, use and process of their research.

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[8] The detailed discussion on the definition and relevance of the concept of 'liminality' is given later in a separate section. Its reference is here merely meant to elucidate the questions and difficulties of research process.

For me, the rapport building process was not very much problematic in terms of finding local acquaintances, settling in the town and other logistic issues.[9] Moreover, I was also well versed in local language and cultural norms, hence faced little problems in communication.[10] However, most of my problems were related to some other cultural and ethical challenges. On the top of them was the issue of restricted access to possessed women. The area is known for its strict gender segregation. Therefore, the main challenge for me was finding key women informants. Most of women pilgrims used to come along with their male relatives and were strictly guarded by them. In this regard, I adopted a two-pronged coping strategy. First, I made close relationships with men and confided to them the purpose of my research. It was however not an easy task. Majority of them were not literate and it was very hard for them to comprehend why I was interested to talk to their women. At the end, I succeeded in finding some men who were personally prepared to trust me. Secondly, I had to make choice of making distinction in my selection of women informants. After spending some time in the field, I realized that gender relations of pilgrims varied with respect to their belonging to

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[9] My main contact was one of my former students from Bilote Town. He belonged to local Syed family and therefore was very helpful in finding living place and introduction to the custodian of different shrines. Moreover, his linkages were helpful in getting permission to visit different sensitive places and events. The special problem was obtaining access to the performance of Jatra –ritual of healing music and dance because most of the participants of it were possessed women and hence very restrictive because of local gender segregation norms.

[10] I do belong to the same Trans-Indus region of Southwest Punjab. My native town is not far away from Bilote. It takes a few hours to reach there. It is although not my claim that this research is a project of native anthropology in its very specific sense, but my status as native anthropologist cannot be denied or ignored in this case.

different regions. I came to know that possessed women / pilgrims belonging to Thal desert and Indus riverine belt were relatively unrestricted in their interaction with men.

The gaining of the trust of the custodian of Thala Kaiwal Ram and musicians/ singers was also very crucial for my free entry and mobility within the temple compound. For that purpose, I found some common acquaintances and started to visit their home in the evening.[11]

3. Literature Survey

There is little literature available about Thala Kaiwal Ram and sacred complex of Bilote. Unlike Uchh and Sehwan Sharif, it has been completely ignored by academic scholars. The broad classification of these scant resources pertinent to Kaiwal Ram and Eighth Gaddi is given in the following:

Internal Archival Resources: Before the partition, dozens of manuscripts concerning Kaiwal Ram and Eighth Gaddi of Pushtimarg were housed in the temple liberary of Dera Ghazi Khan. They constituted biographies of prominent gosvamis, poetry and other kinds of literature. Most of it was written in Braj Bhasha. However, at the time of partition, the custodians of the temple library were able to carry over selected manuscripts which were later on donated to and archived by Vrindravan Research Institute (VRI)[12].

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[11] The custodian of Thala Kaiwal Ram is a Muslim named Ramzan. He inherited the custodianship from his father who started to look after the place after the migration of local Hindus. He is also well connected with local descendants of Shah Essa-the patron saint of of the town.

[12] The details of internal resources have been discussed in Chapter 2 in a separate section.

Colonial Archival Resources: There is a few colonial documents which provide scattered and incoherent information about the brief history of Eighth Gaadi, its *gosvamis* and devotees. Majority of them are district gazetteers which provide details about the influence of Eighth Gaddi and its influence over Hindu community of Southwest Punjab. The gazetteer of Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Multan, and Bahawalpur are especially relevant[13]. We do also find some references about Eighth Gaddi in H. Rose book titled "*A glossary of the tribes and castes of the Punjab and North-West frontier province*"[14].

External Academic Resources: Two external academic resources are most very much pertinent and worthy to be mentioned. The first is the book of Alan W. Entwistle titled "*The Rasa Mana Ke Pada of Kevalarama"* published in 20… Although it is mainly the compilation of the poetry of Kaiwal Ram but it provides historical background and review of Eighth Gaddi and its growth in the Indus Valley. The second book is authored by Girja Kumar titled "*The Indus People: Saraiki Saga and Sufi-Sant Renaissance"* published in 2013. It provides useful but very brief information about Shri Lalji, the founder of Eighth Gaddi, Kaiwal Ram and other Bhakti saints of the Indus Valley region[15].

DRSML (AJ)

3.1. Problems in Framing Theory/Methodology Conjunctions

Finding an appropriate theory-frame concomitant with relevant methodological choices was my greatest problem. At the surface level, it appeared to be a simple and straightforward matter. Being an anthropologist, what did I need was to ensure my participation in different significant events and activities, record and order them attentively and meticulously and then see what kinds of tentative theories and interpretations are possible.

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[13] The details given in these gazetters have been discussed in Chapter 2. For more details, see *Gazetteer of Dera Ghazi Khan District, 1883-84* (1898) (2nd edn) Lahore: Govt. Press; *Gazetteer of Dera Ismail Khan District 1883-84* (1884) Lahore: Govt. Press; *Gazetter of Multan Distrct, 1901-02* (1802) Lahore: Govt. Press; *Bawalpur State* (1908) Punjab State Gazetteers, volXXXXVI , Lahore: Govt. Press.

[14] A.H. Rose (1911-19) *A glossary of the tribes and castes of the Punjab and North-West frontier province*, 3 vol. Lahore: Superintendent, Govt. of Punjab

[15] Girja Kumar (2013) *The Indus People: Saraiki Saga and Sufi-Sant Renaissance,* New Delhi: Vitasta Publishers.

However, there were certain obvious and deeper limits of such process. A common and apparent issue encountered during ethnographic fieldwork was the problem of inaccessible experiential aspects of informants' activities and associated events. The renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz frames this problem in the following way:

> "*We cannot live other people's lives, and it is a piece of bad faith to try. We can but listen to what, in words [. . .] they say about their lives [. . ..] We gain [our sense of other people's lives] through their expressions [. . .] It's all a matter of scratching surfaces."*[16]

An experience is always more inner, private, and personal in nature, hence very different from the notion of behavior. In the case of the latter, there is always outside observer describing and interpreting someone else's actions. While, on the other hand, an experience is not only about outward actions but also feelings as well as an element of reflexivity. The distinctive feature of experience is that it tends to be self-referential and self-reflexive in terms of communication. Therefore, the problem with experience is that it is lived and embodied and no one can feel and realize it directly and unmediated way on the behalf of another person. As a result, it is almost an impossible task to know and access others' experiences in its entirety except whatsoever have been told and shared by them.

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[16] Clifford Geertz (1986) Making Experience, Authoring Selves, in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner (eds.) *The Anthropology of Experience.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 343-80.

How, then, can this limitation of private and personal experience be overcome during ethnographic and historical research? The emergent field of the anthropology of experience offers a number of insights as well as solutions to deal with this typical problem. First, notwithstanding the personal nature of experience, it is by and large located in the larger arena of culture and society. As Roger D. Abrahams says:

> *"Experiences, at one and the same time, illustrative of what individuals do and of the conventional patterns of culturally learned and interpreted behavior that makes them understandable to others*[17]*."*

In other words, no experience is original in its entirety and hence needs us to recognize that we are part of a generation, a network, and a community. Secondly, given the fact that we are social beings, we are motivated to express and share our feelings, passions, views and opinions with other members of our cultural group. Victor Turner asserts in this regard in the following:

> "*The hard-won meanings should be said, painted, danced, dramatized, put into circulation. Here the peacock's urge to display is indistinguishable from the ritualized need to communicate*".[18]

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Hence, the difficulty of accessing inner and private dimensions of experience can be partially overcome through observing and interpreting expressions. What is, therefore, ultimately available to anthropologists in their field work are both linguistic and non-linguistic expressions comprise various representations, performances, objectifications, and texts. They can at best interpret those expressions in the light of their experiences and specific practices/conventions of writings.

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[17] Roger D. Abrahams (1986) Ordinary and Extraordinary Experience, in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Burner (Eds), *Anthropology of Experience*, Urbana: University of Illoins Press, 29.

[18] Victor Turner (1986) "Dewey, Dilthey and Drama", in Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Burner (Eds), *Anthropology of Experience*, Urbana: University of Illoins Press, 37.

However, the problem remains unresolved in the light of the question of interpretative strategies. Traditionally, this problem was dealt through claiming certain authorial powers located into the scientific truth claims regarding the ethnographic method of participant observation.[19] Later on, in the wake of post-modern turn of scholarship, the so-called claims about scientific truths were no more unchallenged and authorial powers became much more fragmented. Ethnography and other disciplines of humanities and social sciences turned to be more attuned to a variety of authorial sources and strategies including experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic.

However, an additional and much deeper problem involved in my research focus on spirit possession was the very split of the subject into two selves, namely the possessing spirit and his/ her medium. From the tradition of positivistic methodological perspective, it is problematic in many ways. The question immediately arises in

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[19] For more details, see James Clifford (1983) "On Ethnographic Authority", *Representations*, vol. 2. According to him, the traditional authorial powers of fieldworker/ethnographer/anthropologist were embedded into six specific discursive practices. Briefly speaking, they include (i) the validation of the persona of fieldworker/ethnographer by professional and public domains; (ii) short term stay in the field (often not exceeding two years) with the tacit professional agreement about efficiently using vernacular of native societies without mastering it; (iii) privileging methodical observations of fieldworker and ethnographer over the interested interpretations of indigenous authorities; (iv) employing powerful theoretical abstractions to help academic ethnographer to "get to the heart" of a culture more rapidly than someone undertaking; (v) seeing culture a complex whole and hence strategically focusing on its particular social institutions for the purpose of efficiency; (vi) representing those "wholes" as synchronic representations.

studying spirit possession is the authenticity of voice and all other related expressions and narrated experiences. How much to consider the statements of a possessed person objective and real? How sound and unproblematic can their judgments be considered?? Do the experiences narrated by informants in such cases really belong to them? Particularly, this issue involves the question of normalcy and illness and their relative cultural construction.

At the core of this problem is the underpinning presumption of modern western thought that it is only the unaltered and unitary state of mind characterized by rational thinking that is capable to arrive at objectivity, consistency, and truth.[20]. However, Michael Lambek partially deals with this problem in his study of spirit possession by elaborating how different cultural traditions had historically evolved various strategies of making up multiple minds.[21] Hence, spirit possession shouldn't be considered irrational as the western modern thought tends us to think and believe as per its own epistemological assumptions.

Last but not least, I have to deal with the classical dilemma of research methodology concerning with the opposition between diachronic and synchronic research in anthropology and other social and cultural studies. The fact is that Thala Kaiwal Ram was established under the sway of then emergent Pushtimarg *Sampradaya* in the late medieval period. Not only did it continue to survive but witnessed many transformations over the next many centuries. For example, most Hindus left the region after partition. Not surprisingly, the place became deserved over the next many decades but was intriguingly reclaimed by Hindus in the late 1980s. In a short time, it became the main site of pilgrimage and celebration of annual festival of *Vaisakhi* attended by Hindus from Sindh, Balochistan and South Punjab. Moreover, ritual practice of dance and music by and large participated by Muslim community was also reinstituted with the consent of local custodian of Shah Essa shrine.

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[20] Michael Lambek (2010) "How to Make Up One's Mind: Reason, Passion and Ethics in Spirit Possession", *University of Toronto Quarterly,* No, 2, Volume, 79, 722

[21] Ibid.

How the past is yet relevant to the present? Should it be considered and in what manner while studying it in prevalent conditions?

The resolution of these methodological issues is partly contingent upon the selection of interpretation frames which I have discussed in more details in the following section.

3.2. Liminality as Unifying Framework of Interpretation

Since my first visit to the place, I have somehow fallen into the impression that I was encountered with something uncanny and hard to explain by using the dominant social theories that are common in practice. The most intriguing aspect of my experience with the place was the question of limit and boundary. It appeared to me that everything I observed and experienced was located on certain boundary/limit/margin. A Hindu bhakti saint revered by Muslims, persons possessed by alien spirits, mélange like landscape composed by outcropped low-peaked mountains, foothills, green orchards of palm trees, moribund river channel, black flags and other icons of Shiite, sacred graveyards and multiple shrines scattered all over the towns, historical time present in the form of material fragments.

How should I connect, arrange and then interpret all of these diverse manifestations through plausible theoretical framework? The question continued to occupy me in my early visits and brief stays at the place. Meanwhile, during this search, I chanced the reading of the paper of Victor Turner entitled “Between and Betwixt: Liminal Period in Rite the Passage”, mainly an English introduction and re-interpretation of the early work of French folklorist Arnold van Gennep. The more I read about liminality, more I became convinced that it is only this paradigmatic concept which could be of any help to me in understanding and explaining such seemingly bizarre phenomena. This view led me to study the history, transformations, and uses of the paradigmatic notion of liminality, which eventually became the larger theoretical framework of the present study.

Let me first trace the origin, transformation, and evolution of the concept of liminality and then explain how and to what extent I have employed it for this research. Liminality as a hermeneutic tool was the first time systematically used by French sociologist / ethnographer/ folklorist Arnold van Gennep in his analysis of the middle stage in ritual passages.[22] It was by no means a lesser theoretical discovery in the dominant context

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[22] Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) was a contemporary of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and many other early founders of modern sociology and anthropology in France and the European continent. However, unfortunately, he was not recognized and celebrated as a great thinker in his lifetime owing to many reasons. He published more than thirty research works on different topics, but he considered his book *Rite of Passage* (1909) the most significant achievement in the sociology of religion. According to his own words, “my *Rites de Passage* is like a part of my flesh and was the result of a kind of inner illumination that suddenly dispelled a sort of darkness….” (Review Article on Frazer’s, *The Golden Bough*, here as quoted and translated in Belmont 1979: 58) In fact, it was the concept of liminality that proved to be a kind of illumination for him and made him able to provide interpretations of ritual and religion different from Durkheimian functionalism. The book presents the analysis of ritual events concerning with the transition of time or social status in traditional societies. He identifies that any *rite of passage* consists of three sub-categories, namely, *rite of separation*, *rites of transition*

of Durkheimian sociology of religion. For Durkheim, religious beliefs and institutions were based on the stark dichotomy of sacred and profane. Arnold van Gennep had not directly questioned the Durkheimian classificatory schema but rather subverted it by highlighting the importance of real human experience concerning with stages of transition, movements forward, and period of relative inactivity. However, his insight couldn't get recognition during his life owing to the supremacy of Durkheimian sociology in the then university academic circles.

After the next several decades, it was Victor Turner, another anthropologist, who re-discovered the significance of the work of Arnold van Gennep, especially the importance of his concept of liminality and further used it in cultural studies in the late sixties.[23] While initially remaining within the larger bounds of ritual sphere, Turner made numerous theoretical contributions to escalate the term 'liminality' up to the

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and *rites of incorporation*. By calling transition rites as liminal in their character, he noted that this general tripartite ritual structure was many times reproduced in the middle stage or transition period itself. For more details, see Arnold van Gennep (1960) (1909) *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.

[23] Victor Turner (1920-1984) was initially trained in Marxist conflict theory and functionalist anthropology under the supervision of renowned British anthropologist Max Gluckman. He conducted his first doctoral fieldwork among Ndembu of Zambia in 1950. Not surprisingly, owing to his training background, his first research was revolved around the study of social mechanisms and institution for the resolution of a variety of conflicts. However, later, he turned his attention towards the predominance of rituals among Ndembu and deployed the notion of "social drama" for its interpretation. His fateful encounter with Arnold van Gennep's Rites of Passage occurred in 1963 when he was planning to shift from England to America. This encounter had led his radical departure from dominant structural-functional anthropology and became the basis of all his later works.

status of a master concept varyingly used in the studies of religion, gender, geography and landscape, performative arts and literature, politics and history[24].

The first venture of Turner into the concept of liminality was his paper on "Between and Betwixt: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage", in the book on "*Forests of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967)". He said that we should not only consider liminality as a transition between states but also as a state. By focusing entirely on the middle state of *rites of passages*, he made a couple of observations which later on helped him to further evolve liminality into an analytical framework. For example, he notes that the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, invisible" (1967: 97). Given the dominance of structural-functionalist anthropology of that period, it was a bold theoretical deviation from mainstream theory-field in the direction of discovering new ethnographic possibilities. This anti-structuration thrust was more explicitly elaborated in his next book published after two years.[25] He begins by the claim:

> "*The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (threshold people) as necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locates states and positions in cultural space.*"[26]

To further make his point evident, he distinguished normative social structure from communitas which emerges recognizably in liminal period…as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even

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[24] Bjorn Thomassen (2009) "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality", *International Political Anthropology*, Vol. 2, No. 1.

[25] Victor Turner (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Ithica: Cornell University Press.

[26] Ibid, 95

communion of equal individuals.[27] Thus, communitas take place at the outside or margin of social structure and is most often marked by the character of liminality, marginality and inferiority. The examples of communitas in traditional societies include ritual groups, shamans, mendicants, diviners, mediums and those in monastic seclusion.[28] However, it was the analysis of pilgrimage that provided much clearer explanation of communitas. He argued that pilgrimage was a kind of liminal experience in which participants become equal while they temporarily distanced themselves from normal social structures and identities. As a result, pilgrimage creates a homogenization of status and unique sense of communitas.[29]

In his last days, Turner tried to tie up the works of Arnold van Gennep and Wilhelm Dilthey together by elucidating the relationship between liminality and experience.[30] Fascinated by Dilthey's concept of lived experience, Turner started exploring the etymology of the English word 'experience' and showed how it was linguistically and

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[27] Ibid, 96

[28] Victor Turner was however not stopped to restrict his analysis of liminal states and experiences to traditional societies but rather tried to apply it in modern, complex societies with some revised formulations. He suggested that liminal experiences in modern societies took place in the form of liminoid moments especially in the field of art and leisure activities. For further details, see Victor Turner (1974) "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual", *Comparative Symbology*, vol. 60, no. 3, 53-92

[29] Edith Turner and Victor Turner (1978) *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Columbia: Columbia University Press.

[30] Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was German philosopher known for his works on a variety of subjects including the distinction between natural and human sciences, historical understanding and role of hermeneutics, arts, descriptive psychology, psychic nexus and imagination metamorphosis, etc.

culturally related to passage, peril and associated meaning. As per his explanation, “the word experience derived from the Indo-European base “per-, “to attempt, venture, risk” mirrors culturally the "peril" etymologically implicated in "experience.” Similarly, “the Germanic cognates of per relate experience to “fare," “fear," and “ferry," Since p becomes f by Grimm's Law. The Greek perao relates experience to "I pass through," with implications of rites of passage. In Greek and Latin, experience is linked with peril, pirate, and ex-per-iment.[31]

After the death of Turner, cultural and humanity studies around liminal themes continued to evolve in different directions and fields. In this regard, the contribution of two present anthropologists is worth mentioning. The first one is Bjørn Thomassen who has undertaken a thorough survey of the uses and meanings of the term ‘liminality’ since its early discovery by Arnold van Gennep. His recently published book “Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between” is an excellent endeavor to install the concept of liminality in the heart of major social theories. He contends that, like the notion of structure, practice, agency and sign, liminality has universal status in social theory. Its significance mainly lies into its capacity to explain the situations of chaos, transition, and in-between states. He specifically asserts:

“The very distinction between structure and agency in liminality ceases to make meaning; and yet, in the hyper-reality of agency in liminality, structuration takes place.”[32]

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[31] Victor Turner (1986) *Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama*, 35

[32] Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was German philosopher known for his works on a variety of subjects including the distinction between natural and human sciences, historical understanding and role of hermeneutics, arts, descriptive psychology, psychic nexus and imagination metamorphosis, etc.

Apart from highlighting the place of liminality in social theory, Bjørn Thomassen also provides us in his book with the details of different categories of liminality in various spheres of life. Broadly speaking, types of liminality with respect to individuals, groups and societies can be organized in terms of its temporal and spatial dimensions. Temporal dimensions of liminality include the moment, period and epoch which are marked with the state of rupture, transition, in-between and change. For example, momentary dimension of liminality in the case of individuals might involve sudden events such as birth and death, divorce, or ritualized passage of adulthood, etc. Similar momentary instances of liminality can also be arranged in the case of groups and societies. The cases of spatial liminality are even more concrete and observable. Indeed, it was spatial dimension of liminality that originally caught the attention of Arnold van Gennep. The spatial aspects of liminality include specific places (doorways in home, separations line between holy and profane sites, openings of human body, etc.), areas and zones (frontier regions, prisons, seaports, etc.) and countries and larger continents.

Arpad Szakolczai is another important sociologist making a significant contribution to the subject by exploring certain cases wherein liminality takes on relatively permanent form[33]. He suggests that liminality turned into a kind of permanent temporal fixity when any of three stages in the rite of passage (separation, liminality, and re-integration) becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame.[34] He cites the cases of monasticism, court societies and prolonged states of anarchy and civil wars as some of the examples of permanent liminality.

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[33] Bjørn Thomassen indicates that the concept of permanent liminality is very much identical to what Max Weber terms as "routinization of charisma". Victor Turner identifies such condition with the term "institutionalization of liminality".

[34] Arpad Szakolczai (2000) *Permanent Liminality and Modernity: Analyzing the Sacrificial Carnival through Novels*: New York, Routledge, 220

The concept of liminality is presently used in varied disciplines and contexts. Indeed, there is a sharp surge of studies on liminality ranging from more traditional forms of rites of passages to subjects such as terminal illness, migration, religious tourism and pilgrimage, sexuality and gender identity, trickster practices, borderlands and political conflicts. However, many scholars question the utility and appropriateness of deviating from the original and specific use of liminality. They argue that extending and stretching the concept of liminality to a variety of situations and contexts results in the loss of its theoretical rigor and hence renders it less valuable. This argument carries some weight, but the genealogy of knowledge also demonstrates that it is also subject to a kind of rite of passage involving the course of separation, liminal state and then re-integration.

After this brief overview, it is now imperative to explain and clarify how I have employed the concept of liminality in my own research. From the outset, I propose to use it by the sense which is almost closest to its etymological source. A quick etymological search suggests that the concept of liminality derives from two Latin words '*limen*' and '*lime*' which have overlapping meanings. While the word *limen* refers to 'threshold', *lime* is particularly meant by 'boundary', 'frontier', and 'limit'. By adopting this original meaning of the word, I will be however applying it in some broader ways in order to highlight the construction of liminality in the field of religious identity, sacred landscape, pilgrimage and performances of spirit possession and healing rituals.

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3.3. In-between History and Anthropology

The present research work represents an endeavor to find the fine balance between history and anthropology while interpreting the subject matter with the aid of an overarching and unifying framework of liminality.

Both history and anthropology have a protracted, albeit problematic, relationship in the academic field. In the early colonial period, anthropologists distanced themselves from the discipline of history and alleged that it was merely a conjectural past. The participant observation of small and bounded communities in present time was privileged and termed as the most authentic method.

The gap between history and anthropology was further widened owing to "functionalist' turn in the British anthropology after the First World War. Under the influence of Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, the 'functionalist' trend flourished and matured till the Second World War and afterwards. It acquired a prestigious position within anthropology departments of different universities.

Talal Asad contends in his book titled "Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter" that this secured position of social anthropology and functionalist paradigm till 1960s was acquired owing to its unambiguous and reduced subject matter. The main task of the anthropologist was then defined by his/ her study of the so called 'primitive' communities, 'simpler' people and 'pre-literate' societies through prolonged stay in the field and employing the method of participant observation.[35] However, this prestigious

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[35] For more details, see Talal Asad (1975) *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter*, LondonL Ithaca Press, 1-14

position was soon challenged in the post-colonial setting because of many reasons. First, the knowledge of anthropology was increasingly criticized for its subservient use in colonial administrations. Secondly, post-colonial (developmental and modernization) dynamics deprived it from its stable and unified subject. The assumptions of anthropology about primitive and simple societies with their holistic social structures proved flawed. They were not only found to be conflict ridden but were also shaped by the forces of local and regional histories. Thirdly, the functionalist paradigm collapsed and increasingly challenged due to its superficial imposition of coherence and unification at the costs of ignoring other crucial cultural aspects.

The fragmentation of the subject of anthropology led it to nurture new cross-disciplinary relations including history, linguistics, politics, and economics. The past was given new significance in the study of societies and cultures. The field of regional and oral histories, myths and memory and study of religious traditions acquired more space within anthropology.

The present research work is revolved around the space in-between history and anthropology. Hence, it is divided into two parts. The first part is an immersion into the past to trace the origin of Krishnaite bhakti, the establishment of Pushtimarg *Samparadya* and rise and growth of the Eighth Gaddi in the Indus Valley. It is not only aimed to elucidate the intimate connections of the place of Thala Kaiwal Ram with these larger religious traditions but also engages with the question of continuity, change and survival of religious traditions in general and particularly the Eighth Gaddi in the Indus Valley region. The second part is more anthropological in nature. Not only does It study Thala Kaiwal Ram and the sacred complex of Bilote in its synchronic setting

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but also explores the prevalence of various co-existing religious traditions and popular practices and performances associated with them.

4. Organization of Chapters

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the larger historical background of the emergence and growth of Krishnaite bhakti and Pushtimarg Sampradya in northwestern India. The reason for this focus lies in the fact that Kaiwlaram and his Eighth Gaddi was primarily associated with Pushtimarg *Sampradya* and Krishnaite devotional culture. It is aimed at providing the detailed historical context of the medieval period in which the Eighth Gaddi and Thala Kaiwal Ram were established.

The second chapter is a sort of continuity of the previous chapter and specifically focuses upon the revival of Krishnaite devotional culture and religious tradition in the Indus Valley in the form of the rise and growth of the Eighth Gaddi and role of Kaiwal Ram in spreading and strengthening it. It also evaluates the political and economic situation which provided the enabling conditions for such change and transformation. More specifically, it discusses how political stability under the Mughal Empire, composite culture and burgeoning in-land trade of the Indus Valley with Afghanistan and Central Asia played an instrumental role in the rise of new Hindu merchant classes whose ethics and aesthetics was more compatible with the ideology and praxis of Pushtimarg *Sampradaya* and its branch Eighth Gaddi in the Indus Valley.

The third chapter is concerned with theoretical debate on what constitutes a religious tradition and how and in what ways it ensures its continuity and adopts historical changes and transformations taking place at the larger socio-cultural, economic, and political level. For this purpose, it engages with philosophical debates of Scottish thinker Alasdair Maclntyre on the pitfalls of liberal notions about tradition and commensurability. It also invokes Talal Asad and his interlocutors on this issue and shows how their insights can clarify the rise, growth, and fragmentation of the centuries old religious tradition of the Eighth Gaddi and cult of Lalji and Kaiwal Ram. More specifically, it examines the present status of Thala Kaiwal Ram as a fragment of a disintegrated tradition and the way liminality is helpful in its survival in the post-partition period. It also provides the narrative of peaceful but partial reclaiming of Thala Kaiwal Ram as a Hindu sacred place after its devastation in the wake of the event of partition and mass migration of local Hindu communities to India. The event is unprecedented because most Muslim and Hindu sacred places in both India and Pakistan respectively witnessed conflicts and destruction.

Chapter four describes the way both a natural and sacred landscape is built to invest into it an atmosphere of liminality in the sacred complex of Bilote. Apart from giving the details of the physical and historical landscape of Bilote but also describes the sacred environment dominated by a heterodox Shia tradition of the early medieval period which is more prone to accommodate Hindu bhakti tradition of the Eighth Gaddi. The chapter also discusses the surviving remnants of folk traditions such as snake and tree worship cults and their role in creating a shared space for the co-existence of different religious traditions in the sacred complex of Bilote.

The last and fifth chapter is concerned with the widespread phenomenon of spirit possession and concomitant practices and rituals of healing. Some of the main themes dealt in this chapter include the history and culture of spirit possession in South Asia, local classification and typologies of spirits and ways of possession, traditional practices of healing and role of Jatra. Moreover, it furnishes with ethnographic information about pilgrimage and construction of communitas to enable the devotees to experience liminality.

Chapter 1

Setting the Historical Stage:

Krishnaite Bakhti and Pushtimarg Kaiwal Ram

This chapter aims to describe the larger historical background of the Eighth Gaddi of the Pushtimarg *Sampradaya*, which was the primary religious association of Sati Kaiwal Ram. The emergence of Pushtimarg as a distinct in the medieval period marked a significant change in Krishnaite bhakti tradition, especially in western regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan in South Asia. In fact, it involved several theo-philosophical and performative shifts in Krishnaite tradition. Later, it was diffused into the middle Indus Valley, mainly represented by the establishment of the central seat of the Eighth Gaddi in Dera Ghazi Khan town.

For this purpose, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives a brief account of a diverse and changing Krishnaite bhakti tradition in South Asia. It mainly covers the emergence of the early Krishna cult, its reappearance in the sacred Hindu text of *Bhagvat Gita* (BhG) along with the portrayal of Krishna as an ascetic warrior preaching war for the sake of dharma. This image of Krishna was however again transformed in the first millennium through the text of *Bhagvat Puran* (BhP) which depicts him as a naughty child, lover and seducer, adulterous partner of Radha, etc. Though his image of omnipotent and transcendental god is kept intact but he seems to be involved in more earthly and mundane affairs of life.

The second section is specifically concerned with the facts of life, philosophy and praxis of Vallabha Acharya-the founder of Pushtimarg *Sampradaya*- and the role of his successors in consolidating and spreading the order in the north-western India, particularly Gujrat and Rajasthan. It also explicates the specific views of Vallabha Acharya about the intimate relationship between the experience of absorptive possession and bhakti. More specifically, the discussion on how his exegetical commentaries upon *Bhagvat Puran* and other classical Sanskrit texts entails the centrality of the aesthetics/experience of absorption (*avesa*) into that (Lord) as a necessary attitude (*bhava*) towards the realization of proper devotional state. To paraphrase it, he suggests that the salvific devotion is only possible when all thoughts and actions of devotees are directed towards Krishna, who is the supreme manifestation of Brahma.

The main point of the contention in this section is to elucidate how the introduction of certain new elements such as service (*seva*), possession and absorption (*avesa*) and love and separation (*prem* and *virha*) were well adjusted with the political ethos of the emergent rule of Mughal Empire. Moreover, it shows that the relative discursive and performative continuity of Krishnaite tradition was kept intact in spite of change and reformation.

The third section details the process of the diffusion of Pushtimarg in the middle Indus Valley where it had the competition with not only other prior Hindu traditions but also faced the challenge of interaction and adjustment with a variety of Islamic Sufi traditions dominant in the region.

1. Brief History of Krishnaite Bhakti Cult

The religious and social history of medieval India is marked by the rise of a variety of devotional communities in both Hinduism and Islam. The emergence of numerous

Sant-Sufi poets was symbiotically related to this emergent trend of devotional turn. Bhagat Kabir (1440-1518), Guru Nank (1469-1539) and Dadu Dayal (1544-1603), Shah Hussain (1538-1599), Meera Bai (1498-1546) are considered some of the most prominent sant-sufi-bhakti poets who rejected religious intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. They preached a religio-spiritual vision that transcended the authority of clerics and priests. They were against the rigid boundaries of caste, social status, and other hierarchies in society. Moreover, they asked their followers to realize the essence of the divine through repeated remembrance and recalling of its names. Both love and prangs of separation were considered a kind of embodied experiences necessary for the realization of both truth and beauty.

During this period, we also witness the emergence of more institutionalized Krishnaite bhakti movement within the confines of Hindu discursive and performative traditions. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya and Vallabha Acharya are two most distinguished figures in this regard. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya (1486-1534) was a Bengali spiritual reformer and leader who established Gaudiya Vishnavism.[1] His followers considered him a reincarnation of Krishna.

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[1] Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was the founder of Gaudiya community which practiced devotional practices revolved around the figure of Krishna-Radha. Chaitanya had not written anything systemic to describe his theo-philosphical doctrine. Rather, he advocated that the devotees should absorb themselves through ecstatic chanting of Krishna's name. However, his later followers systematized his theology which imagined Krishna as the supreme Lord and Radha being the source of his power (*Shakti*). The relationship between Krishna and Radha in Gaudiya community is conceived to be based on the principle of *Achintya BhedAbheda* (unconscious identity and difference). The metaphor and mood of erotic love is presented as the model of devotional spirituality and disposition. Bhakti is primarily of two types as espoused by Bengali Gaudiya tradition, namely *Vaidh*i *Bhakti* and *Raganuga Bhakti*. The

Vallabha Acharya was a Telgu speaking Brahmin settled in Varanasi in North India. He founded Pushtimarg *Sampradaya.*[2] Before we divulge upon the details of the rise and growth of Pushtimarg and Eighth Gaddi in the medieval period, it is imperative to give a brief historical account of the prolonged evolution of Krishnaite bhakti and its changing relationship with Vishnavism and Braj.

The history of Vishnavism and its association with Krishna bhakti is very lengthy, complex, and variable. The complexity is further added with the fact that Vedic references to Vishnu have been fused with numerous independent deities and tribal cults over a very long period. The first instance of such fusion is the identification of Vasudeva- a deity of Vrshni tribe in the North India- with Vishnu as back as the 4th century B.C.[3] It was later evolved into Krishna-Vasudeva cult very popular in the early centuries of the first millennium. The members of this cult were then called Bhagavatas. The later development in this process of fusion was the merger of Bhagavatas cult with

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first one is comprised of practices performed as per scriptures and prescribed rules. However, the second type is the most important one as it leads devotees to approach Krishna directly in the manners of intimate lover. For more details, see *Kenneth Russell Valpey (2006) Attending Krishna Image: Caitanya Vaishnva's Murti seva as Devotional Truth, Rutledge, London;* Esward C. Dimock (1966) *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaishnva-Sahajiya Cult of Bengal*, The University of Chicago Press, London.

[2] *Sampradaya* is a Sanskrit word which is generally used for 'cult'; 'tradition' or 'sect'.

[3] Gavin Flood says that Vasudeva is Krishna's patronymic which was perhaps the tribal hero of Vrshni. An intertwined identity of Vasudeva-Krishna might have been the later fusion of Vrshni and Yadva clan from Dwarka wherein Krishna-the son of Devaki- was considered the celebrated hero. For further details, see Gavin Flood (1996) *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 119.

the cult of cowherd tribe known as Ambars in the 5th century. The result was the growth of Krishna-Gopala cult in the North India.

Meanwhile, we find the reference of Krishna in the great classical Hindu epic of *Mahabharata* (400-300 B.C.) in which he has been portrayed as a determined and fierce warrior. The later incorporation of *Bhagvat Gita* (100 B.C) into *Mahabharata* introduced some further features of his personality. Not only did he appear to be a warrior but also an ascetic-yogic teacher disclosing the secrets of karma, dharma, bhakti, etc.[4] He is depicted in the text as the most supreme reincarnation of Vishnu whose main task is periodic appearance in the world to fight against the forces of wrong and eliminate evil in *Kalyug* (Dark Age)

However, the twist in the story of Krishna doesn't stop here. We find another text entitled '*Harivamsa*' (HV) which introduced his playful childhood and erotic-romantic youth at his birthplace Gokul (Braj-Mathura). The stories of his turning the heavy cart, stealing butter, teasing cowherd women, slaying of demons, taming the deadly snake *Kaliya* and many other miracles are narrated to exhibit his divinity from the very childhood.[5] At his youth, he teases and plays with milkmaids (*Gopis*) in the full moonlight of autumn. He makes them spellbound by the sweet sound of his flute and

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[4] Many researchers purports that the philosophico-theological treatise of *Bhagvat Gita* was later insertion into the epic of Mahabharata. Please see James L. Fitzgerald (2004) Mahabharata, in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (eds.) *The Hindu World*, New York: Routledge, 52-74.

[5] Vivienne Baumfield (2000) *Stories of Krishna*, Calgary: Bayeux Arts Inc.

hence compels both married and unmarried *Gopis* to rush to forests to make love with him. He is the master of playing *Ras Lila* at Vrindravan.[6]

This version of Krishna was however fully developed in South India, particularly Tamil and Telgu speaking lands. It took place under the tutelage of bhakti literature mainly composed between the periods of fifth to ninth century. It was mostly composed by Bhagavata and Alvar-saints belonging to Vishnavism in the South India. These poet-saints developed the devotional and philosophical literature providing alternative that provided an alternative to the school of non-dualism (*Advaita Vedanta*) preached and popularized by Adi Shankra (c. 788-820 C.E.).

One of the special themes of that devotional literature was *Viraha bhakti* which glorified the passions of love in separation. The scenes of *Ras Lila* were especially used to model the ideal of devotion in bhakti. Many aspects of that episode were highlighted in the literature. For instance, they depicted the obsessive desire and longing of *Gopis* to meet and make love with Krishna. Many of them were married and they were not

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[6] *Ras Lila* refers to a circle dance associated with Krishna. Both *rasa* and *lila* are Sanskrit words meaning 'juice, nectar or emotion' and 'play or act' respectively. *Ras Lila* constitutes one of the major themes of Hindu sacred scriptures especially *Bhagvat Puran* and *Gita Govinda*. According to the story, the cosmic dance of Krishna with thousands of *Gopis* and *Sakhis* took place in the full moonlight of autumn season. Krishna employed his magical powers and changed himself into multitude to dance with every *Gopi*. The dance with Krishna made *Gopis* and *Sakhis* proud and they started to feel themselves superior from others. Krishna made himself absent to lower their egoistic feelings and passions. The disappearance of Krishna created the pain of separation and longing among *Gopis* and *Sakhis* and they started to feel remorse about their sense of pride and superiority. Krishna made him again present after this realization by *Gopis*. This story is used by bhakti poet to exhibit passions of separation and union among lovers and realization of self.

even considerate of their worldly ties and duties to their husbands and families, and they left their homes in the state of possession / trance when they heard the sweet melodies of flute played by Krishna in the full moonlight in the middle of Govardhan forests. Another important aspect of the narrative was the deeper passions and feeling of joy that *Gopis* experienced when Krishna turned himself into multitude and hence created the magical illusion of dancing and love making with each of them.

The romantic and erotic aspects of love between Krishna and Radha was however the most conspicuous and revered theme of bhakti poetry at that time. The poetics of Krishna and Radha is full of the imagery of thick forests, longing of Radha and her intense jealousy to other *Gopis* and *Sakhis* of Krishna, erotic symbolism, and licentious behavior.[7] Some poets have even gone to portray their relations as adulterous as Radha was thought of a married woman.

We find varied interpretations of this depiction of playful and erotic Krishna. What was however claimed by bhakti-saint poets were the imperative of experiencing all these passions and feelings in the realization of divinity in personal terms. Going into its details would certainly bring us to the debate about *Saguna* and *Nirguna* aspects of

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[7] For more details about the passions of Radha and Krishna, see Sudhir Kakar (1985) “Erotic Fantasy: The Secret Passion of Radha and Krishna”, *Indian Contributions to Sociology*, vol. 19, Issue. 1.

divine in the context of theo-philosophical debates primarily woven around the proponents and opponents of *Advaita Vedanta.*[8]

This process of the symbolic transformation of the figure of Krishna continued in the next centuries. The ninth century's text *Bhagvat Puran* (BhP) was its final culmination point in which Krishna is presented as the supreme goal of attaining divinity and bhakti. He is portrayed as the great yogic teacher especially in Book 10 which is considered the core of *Bhagvat Puran*. Although it retains many former aspects of the narrative of Krishna but it reinterprets it in new ways by changing their emphasis as well as adding some other stories. Freda Matchett depicts this strategy of textual change in the following way:

> *"Of all the [BhP's] twelve of his fingertips, the lover whose attractions outweigh all ties of duty [. . ..] Although the [BhP's] story of Krishna is so like the versions in the [HV] and the [ViP], it is given a new significance in its retelling. This is done partly by the reinterpretation of the well-known story and partly by the introduction of new episodes, particularly in the narrative of Krishna's childhood."* books. Book 10 is undoubtedly the best-known and best-loved. It contains the most appealing and significant images of Krishna: the child who contains the universe within himself, the boy who can displace a mountain with a flick[9]

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[8] Both *Saguna* and *Nirguna* constitute cardinal concepts in the classical Sanskrit theo-philosophical debates on the nature of divine (*Brahman*) and devotion (B*hakti*). The primary word is "*guna*" which means 'attribute of something' while the function of prefix '*sa*' and '*nir*' is to make semantic addition. Hence, *Saguna* means 'with attributes' and *Nirguna* implies 'without attribute". Both terms are used varyingly in the debate whether Brahman is with attribute or without attribute? For more details, see Neeti M. Sadarangani (2004) *Bhakti Poetry in Medieval India: Its Inception, Cultural Encounter and Impact*, New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 55-90

[9] Freda Matchett (2003). The Puranas, in Gavin Flood (ed) *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 129-43.

This strategy of textual inflections, additions and transformations is broadly aimed at investing great divinity into Krishna. He is not depicted and described as celestial counterpart of Vishnu controlled by outside actions. The mundane story of Krishna's childhood is retained but his sanctity is more visibly elaborated and highlighted. For example, his actions of defeating the deadly *Kaliya* serpent and protecting local community of Braj from the wrath of Indra are retold to demonstrate his transcendental and immanent powers. Moreover, the announcement of the Vedic god Indra declaring himself as Krishna's bhakta further adds into his magnificence and splendor. He is rendered into a seamless image of cosmic child. Similarly, the earlier episodes of his role as a warrior and epic hero of Mahabharata are though kept intact but they have now overtones of spiritual teacher.

The case of his youthful erotic plays and performances with *Gopis* is not much different. He appears to be stealing *Gopis*' clothes, calling them to join him in the *rasa* dance in the jasmine-scented autumn nights and making adulterous love with them. However, at the same time, he lectures them to go back and perform their worldly women's duties (*Astridharma*). But they appeal to him to satisfy their aroused passions otherwise they would not be recovered from the afflictions. As a result of this dialogue, he agrees to quench their thirst of passions. The *Bhagvat Puran* describes the subsequent play of love in the following manners:

> *"Increasing the passion of the beautiful women of Braj by stretching his arms and embracing them, by touching their hands, hair, thighs, skirts and breasts, by playfully scratching them with his fingernails, by play as well as by glances and smiles, Krishna brought them delight."*[10]

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[10] Bhagavad Purana (1997). S*hrimad Bhagavad Purana*: Text and translation by C.L. Goswami. 2 vols. Gorakhpur: Gita Press.

Notwithstanding this illicit and adulterous love play; *Bhagvat Puran* gives the impression that Krishna performs all these acts out of compassion, without involving any lust. He is described as the perfect yogic master who does his karma in the state of complete detachment. His sexual exploits are not meant for the sake of pleasure. He is fully capable to enjoy in himself. Hence, his erotic performances are driven by his compassion. Moreover, they are meant to demonstrate real bhakti of *Gopis* which should be followed by everyone who seeks liberation from this mundane existence.

This desire-less and disinterested character of Krishna in the text of *Bhagvat Puran* is also evident by many other episodes. One of such examples is his relationship with his wife. According to an older version presented in *Harivamsa*, both Krishna and Rukmani were attracted to each other. The flame of desire was alighted when he first saw her. As a result, he abducted her to bring her into wed lock.[11] However, the episode in *Bhagvat Puran* is revised with some significant inflections. Here, Rukmani first expresses her passionate love and then pleads him to undertake the act of abduction.[12]

This ninth century's image of Krishna being playful and erotic, yogic and religious pedagogue, mainly presented and popularized by *Bhagvat Puran*, proved very much foundational in the renaissance of Krishna bhakti in the sixteenth and seventeenth century of Mughal India. This process of renaissance especially took place in north-west and east India. Vallabha Acharya and his descendants were mainly responsible for

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[11] Abduction of women for the purpose of marriage was a common practice among Vrshni tribe from Braj region-the place of ancient worship to Vasudeva-an avatar of Vishnu and Krishna. The references to Vrshni tribe and cult of Vasudeva can be found in old Greek accounts about the religion of North India.

[12] *Bhagvat Puran*, 10-29

the renewal of Krishnaite cult in the region of Braj, Gujrat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in the north-western India. Similarly, Chaitanya played the crucial role in the promotion of Krishnaite bhakti in Bengal, Bihar and other parts of east India, which, in turn, was partly built upon certain earlier elements of VishnvaSahajiya and Tantra.[13]

To summarize this historical background, it appears in this review that the identity/image of Krishna and associated performative rites have been changing and transforming over a very long period of Indian history. In BhG, Krishna is a heroic warrior and ascetic yogi who is charioteer of the principal *Pandava* fighter Arjuna in *Mahabharata*. Not only he teaches Arjuna the art of war but also held dialogue with him over the meaning of war, peace, rightful action and liberation of human soul. Moreover, he acts as an avatar/deity of Vedic god Vishnu. However, after many centuries, Krishna takes new identity by the recombination of Vasudeva cult with selective references from the sacred text of *Harivamsa* and *Vishnu Puran*. This religious change in Krishnaite tradition mainly happens in South India from sixth to ninth century. The new identity of Krishna is now simultaneously playful, erotic and yogic. Moreover, he is considered an avatar of Vishnu in his manifestation of Narayan. This process of change culminates in the third and final stage of Krishna's depiction in *Bhagvat Puran* at the end of ninth century which, in turn, brings him back into larger Brahmanic fold while retaining the popular folk elements of playfulness and eroticism. The renaissance of Krishnaite bhakti in north-western and south-eastern India during the late medieval period was founded upon this particular identity / image of Krishna.

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[13] For more details on the historical background of the emergence of Chaitanya led Bengali Krishnaite bhakti movement, see Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon,* 25-40

2. Braj Krishnaite Traditions and Establishment of Pushtimarg

The Krishnaite bhakti movement in north-western India emerged in the late fifteenth century mainly by the process of reclaiming Braj area as the birth place of Krishna.[14] Before it, Braj was not exclusively known as the sacred pilgrimage place for Krishna bhakti cult. Rather, there was an amalgamation of diverse religious cults revolving around the worship of snakes, trees, water and numerous other local deities including Krishna.[15]

Braj was started to be transformed into the central Krishnaite pilgrimage/worship site at the end of the fifteenth century in the midst of the political crisis and anarchy brought about by the collapse of the Delhi Sultanate. However, major Krishnaite activities in the area began in the early sixteenth century, mainly owing to the efforts of

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[14] The early history of Braj is closely intertwined with the sacred town of Mathura. The available archaeological evidence suggests that a small settlement was founded in the 7th century B.C.E in the vicinity of Mathura which was later on developed and fortified around 4th century B.C.E. This was the period when Mathura turned to be a very important religious and trade center in North India. It was not only a kind of corridor connecting the travelers to North, South and East India but it also flourished as the major pilgrimage center for Jain, Buddhist and Shivaite communities. Its importance decreased in the eleventh century A.D. when it plunged into anarchy due to feuding Hindu kingdoms and then its conquest by Muslim rulers. For more details, see Alan Entwistle (1987) *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage,* London: E. Forsten Publications, 110-111

[15] It was mainly Krishna-Vasudeva cult which was mainly popular in Braj area before its conversion into a major centre of activity by burgeoning Krishna bhakti movement. Govardhna hills were especially the main place which was worship site for local followers of Krishna-Vasudeva cult because it was believed to be lifted by his one hand by Krishna. The place also contained an image of black stone associated to Krishna.

GaudiyaVishnva community. Chaitanya Mahprabhu was the pioneer figure in re-imagining and re-discovering different sites of Krishna's pastime in the area as mentioned and described in *Bhagvat Puran*. [16]

Later on, many of Chaitanya's followers settled in the Braj area and continued the process of the meditative visualization and discovery of such sites associated with Krishna and his stories of childhood, amorous romances and miracles.[17] The activity of meditating upon Krishna's pastime and discovering the places of his childhood and youth was vehemently carried on by many other Vishnvaite communities as well. Hit Harivamsh, Svami Haridas and Harivyasdev were some of the leading figures in this endeavor.

Within a short period of time, Braj was transformed into a sacred landscape of par excellence. Many of the images of Krishna and Radha were installed in different locations. Maps and plans of pilgrimage to such sites were charted out with minute

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[16] The method of discovering the sites and places of Krishna's pastime in Braj was a kind of externalization strategy. Most of the places mainly cited in Bhagavat Purana were imagined / mediated upon by Chaitanya, Vallabha Acharya and many other gurus. Those places were then transformed into sacred pilgrimage landscape through investing into it with many worship icons/ items.

[17] Chaitanya visualized and discovered many sacred sites attributed to Krishna in Bhagavat Purana. Besides visiting the twelve forests, he discovered two ponds in the vicinity of Govardhna wherein Krishna and Radha were believed to bath together. Similarly, he discovered many sites along with the banks of Yamuna River and numerous groves where Krishna spent time with Radha and milkmaids. Some of his prominent disciples who settled in Braj and continued the rediscovery of sites include Rupa, Sanatana Gosvami and Narayan Bhat. The depiction by Narayan Bhat was later on used for instituting and fashioning the pilgrimage of 662 miles which traversed many Braj's town, hills, groves and forests.

details. Moreover, *Ban Yatra* and the celebration of numerous festivals including *Ras Lila* were started and popularized in the area. Indeed, it was the birth of very distinct tradition of Krishnaite bhakti of the medieval period with its own distinctive features.

2.1. Vallabha Acharya and Establishment of Pushtimarg

Vallabha Acharya (1479-1531 C.E) is considered one of the towering figures in promoting Krishna bhakti movement in the medieval period. He was successful in the establishment of his own separate *Sampradaya*, known as Pushtimarg, which later on flourished and transformed into the most popular and powerful Krishnaite tradition of north-western India, particularly the Rajasthan and Gujrat regions.

Much of the information about his life and works is mainly contained in sectarian texts and literature. A brief story of his life and achievements sketched out from diverse sectarian hagiographic literature is in the following:

"Vallabha is considered the sixth main *acharya* of the Vishnvaite bhakti tradition. He belonged to a Telgu speaking Brahman family living in Varanasi at the time of his birth. The family had to shift from the ancestral Andhra region due to mounting anarchy. Hagiographic sources recount that he was born at the time when his family fled to North India. During the travel, he fell ill and his parents thought he was dead as no signs of life were seen. However, it is believed, the lord Krishna came into the dream of his parents and told them that their son was his avatar. When they awoke, they found him perfectly alright and healthy."

Since his childhood, he was very much interested in classical Sanskrit literature and Vedanta philosophy. When he was a boy, he started the study of Vedas, Upanishads and Purana and, up to his youth, he travelled throughout India. During one of his early travels to South India, he was introduced to the court of Krishna Deva Raya, the king of Vijayanagar, [18] where he was invited to undertake a theo-philosophical disputation with some Shivaite Smarta Brahmins. The king was highly impressed by his vast learning and the sophisticated nature of his argumentation. Besides awarding him the title of *acharya*, he was also given very precious presents. The event brought him great fame among the followers of Vishnavite *Sampradaya* and a number of devotees became his disciples. He returned back to his home via Gujrat and Rajasthan where he continued preaching his philosophy / doctrine of *Shuddhadvaita.*[19]

Vallabha Acharya is also known for his authorship and significant number of commentaries on classical Sanskrit works[20]. His most crucial and renowned authorial work is his commentaries on *Bhagavat Purana*.[21] After living sometime in his birthplace Varanasi, where he continued his studies and writing, he again underwent pilgrimage of ancient pilgrimage places. For the next nine years, he wandered in Himalayan valleys and stayed in Hardwar and Badri-Kedar. At the end of this lengthy pilgrimage, he decided to live in one of the groves of Vrindravan- the eternal place of Krishna. He was accompanied by a few of his followers and disciples. Meanwhile, as per hagiographical accounts, the lord Krishna instructed him during his sleep to discover his image of Shri Nathji and thus meet him in Govardhan Hills where he was incarnated. The next day, Vallabha Acharya along with his close disciples went at the place and found the image. It is also believed he had there met with Shri Nathji who asked him to propagate His worship. After some period, he constructed a temple at that place wherein he installed the image of Shri Nathji. It was the moment of the foundation of Pushtimarg *Sampradaya*, which later on became very popular in Rajasthan and Gujrat region of the sub-continent.

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[18] Vijayanagar was the capital city of Karnata Empire in the South India (14th to 17th Century). For more details, see Robert Sewell, Fernao Nunes, Domingos Paes (1980) *A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar): A Contribution to the History of India*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi.

[19] *Shuddhadvaita* is a Sanskrit term comprised of *shuddha* (pure) and *adviata* (non-duality). The doctrine is a form of monism and primarily attributed to Vallabha acharya who perceived and advocated no difference of essence between individual self (*Atma*) and God (*Brahma*). Brahman is immanent and hence in-dwelling the individual self. Another important feature of his philosophy is that it does not recognize *Maya* as something which is unreal. Rather, it is the force of *Ishvar* which is used to create the universe. In this regard, he gives an example from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* which describes how Brahman turned into multitude of individual selves and the universe owing to his own desire. The God cannot be understood unless He manifests Himself. However, the most important aspect of his philosophy and praxis relates to Krishna bhakti as a mean of acquiring salvation.

[20] Some of his main philosophical and devotional works written in classical Sanskrit include *Brhmasutraanubhashya* (a commentary on Brham Sutra), *Subodhini* (a commentary on Bhagavat Mahapuran) and *Shodash Granth* (a set of pedagogical verses).

Vallabha Acharya married a Brahman girl from Banaras who gave birth to two sons named Gopinathji and Vithal Nathji. The last days of his life were mostly spent in Varanasi wherein he concentrated on writing his philosophical treatises concerning Vishnavism and Krishna Bhakti.[22] He died at the age of fifty-two. According to

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[21] *Purana* is a very peculiar genre in Sanskrit literature. Its literal meaning is primordial or very old. There are approximately 18 texts of *Purans* which, like *Upanishads*, are considered with relation to *Vedas*. *Bhagavat Purana* or *Bhagavatam* is the text which advocates devotion to Krishna as an *avatar* of Vishnu. Moreover, it presents many stories and themes relating to cosmology and philosophy of *Yoga* and *Samkhya*.

[22] He promoted the worship of and devotion to the image of *balak* (child) Krishna. It was one of the main features of his philosophy and praxis which distinguished him from his Bengali contemporary

sectarian accounts, he went to one of the banks of Ganga River adjacent to Varanasi and entered into water and disappeared.

2.2. Main Tenets of Vallabha's Teachings

The teaching of Vallabha Acharya, which later on became the basis of Pushtimarg's beliefs and rites, are philosophically embedded into the classical Vedantic doctrine of pure-non-duality (*Shuddha Advaita Vedanta*) which teaches complete monism. It was deviated from Adi Shankarra's views of *Advaita Vedanta* in many respects. First, it denies any distinction between real and un-real. Rather, it conceives the active powers of *Maya* (un-real) as a part of Supreme Brahman. Secondly, the complete manifestation of the Supreme Brahman takes place in the form of Krishna who is *Purnapurushottam*. Moreover, *Jivat*, C*hit* and *Anand* (existence, consciousness, and bliss) are three divine attributes of the *Purnapurushottam*.

Vallabha Acharya argues that ordinary people most often forget this identity of Krishna and His relationship with all creation owing to their ignorance. However, this state of ignorance can be overcome through complete devotion to and absorption into Krishna and depending upon the receipt of His grace (*Pushti*).[23] Therefore, all of the novices in

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Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486 – 1534) who promoted the worship and devotion to Radha Krishna as a couple.

[23] The concept of grace is not only limited to Pushtimarg but has various kinds of presence in different religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, etc. In his recently published book on religion and grace, Arpad Szakolczai explains the relationship of grace and divine with the help of the concept of something "out of ordinary". According to him, religious idea of grace concerns with something that evades the conscious control of conduct. Similarly, it should be also differentiated from magic and sacrifice-two other domains of sacredness, simply because they start with some conscious and planned

Pushtimarg are required to be initiated through *Brahmasambandha Mantra* which binds them to Krishna.

There are two other main aspects of Vallabha Acharya which shaped Pushtimarg as a distinct tradition. First, the devotees are not required to practice renunciation which is one of the predominant yogic practices since the time immemorial. Rather, they can follow the pursuits of worldly / household life with the compliance of rules and regulations of society and caste system. Hence, material acquisition and enjoyment of (sensual) pleasures is not considered something undesirable and to be avoided. What is basically asked of devotees is their complete belief on the grace of Krishna and thus the dedication of all acquisitions and actions to him before personal uses.

This dedication and devotion towards Krishna resulting into complete absorption can be achieved through the praxis of *seva*. In Pushtimarg, *seva* is privileges over traditional forms of *puja* (worship) because of its selfless and interest-free character. While *puja* is always done with the expectation of some fruit-*phalla* (effect), *seva* is aimed at pleasing the loved one without any desire for reciprocity.

The rites of *seva* play very central position in the tradition of Pushtimarg. The larger goal of *seva* is the acquisition of a certain devotional state of mind called *bhava* and

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initiative. Lastly, it is also not compatible, albeit related, with the notion of fate and fortunes. Though they all involve some kind of the logic of gift but grace should be taken as a gift which should be taken care of and used for all. For more details, see Arpad Szakolczai (2007) *Sociology, Religion and Grace: A quest for the Renaissance*, New York: Routledge, 2-5 corresponding *rasa*.[24] In Pushtimarg, *seva* is generally directed towards the image of the child Krishna which promotes *vatsalya bhava* relating to the motherly affection modelled on the feelings and passions of Yasoda towards his baby son Krishna.

The rites of *seva* play a very central position in the tradition of Pushtimarg. The larger goal of *seva* is the acquisition of a certain devotional state of mind called *bhava* and corresponding *rasa*.[25] In Pushtimarg, *seva* is generally directed towards the image of

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[24] The classical Sanskrit theory of aesthetics is based on the mutual articulation of two cardinal concepts, namely *bhava* and *rasa*. Initially, they were defined and employed in the ancient Sanskrit treatise of art called Natya Shastra. They were mainly evolved to produce certain feelings in the spectators of theatre, dance and other fields of arts. In this context, *bhava* is something related to the feelings of characters/ actors while *rasa* is a corresponding sentiment evoked into spectators/ audience. In other words, *rasa* is an empathic version of corresponding *bhava*. According to this theory, any performance of art must be focused upon the cultivation of single *rasa* while attending ancillary set of *rasas*. Some of the main *rasa* include love, laughter, terror, heroism, compassion, peace, etc. *Rasa* theory of aesthetics/ art and diverse religious traditions under the rubric of Hinduism are historically articulated to each other in very close manners. This is especially the case of bhakti traditions which privilege art and aesthetic in attaining/ realizing devotional experiences. For more details on it, see Sheldon Pollock (2016) *A Rasa Read: Classical Indian Aesthetics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 5-24; Rachel Van. M. Baumer and James R. Brandon (1995) *Sanskrit Drama in Performance*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 214-226

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Vallabha Acharya was successful in attracting the attention of merchant classes and occupational groups in the western India who especially found his teaching practical as they allowed them to simultaneously follow both worldly and religious pursuits. One of the reasons behind the success of Vallabha Acharya and early Pushtimarg was the inclusion of all castes/classes including *shudra* in the fold of Krishna bhakti. Initially, many of his devotees belonged to low caste groups who considered their membership as the source of gaining prestige and hence social mobility.[26]

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rasa. Some of the main *rasa* include love, laughter, terror, heroism, compassion, peace, etc. *Rasa* theory of aesthetics/ art and diverse religious traditions under the rubric of Hinduism are historically articulated to each other in a very close manner. This is especially the case of bhakti traditions which privilege art and aesthetic in attaining/ realizing devotional experiences. For more details on it, see Sheldon Pollock (2016) *A Rasa Reader*, 5-24; Rachel Van. M. Baumer and James R. Brandon (1995) *Sanskrit Drama,* 214-226

[26] The details of the principal disciples of Vallabha Acharya shows the broad-based class support to the early phase of Pushtimarg. The historical / sectarian document *Chaurasi Vaishnava ki Varta* provides the accounts of eighty-four main disciples of Vallabha Acharya. In the list, thirty-nine were Brahman, thirty six belonged to warrior and business class, five were associated to mercantile group while six had shudra background. Interestingly, Krishnadas, who was appointed as the in-charge of the temple of Shrinathji temple, belonged to the last group. For more details, see S. Saha (2004) Creating *A Community of Grace: A History of the Pushti Marga in Northern and Western India (1493-1905)*, a PhD thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa, 113-115

3. Consolidation and Growth of Pushtimarg after Vallabha Acharya

After the death of Vallabha Acharya, the consolidation and growth of Pushtimarg took place in numerous distinct phases. The first phase is mainly attributed to the efforts and actions of Vithal Nath, the younger son of Vallabha Acharya (b.1515-d.1585 A.D), who had made Pushtimarg as one of the most formidable and well knitted communities in the north-western India. He assumed the *Gaddi* of Pushtimarg after the death of his elder brother Gopinath and his son in mysterious circumstances in 1533.[27] Under his leadership, Pushtimarg was not only consolidated in Govardhan and Gokul area of Braj region but it was further established in the western regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Like his father, his main strategy of propagation was undertaking extensive travels to different regions, making lengthy stay and interacting with local population and groups of notables in order to bring them into the fold of Pushtimarg. Some of his main visit places included Mathura, Gokul, Dwarka, Malwa, Mewar and Pandharpur. He was especially successful to create the large following among bankers, merchants and occupational castes of Rajasthan and Gujrat.[28] Moreover, he made Braj, especially

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[27] After the death of Vallabha Acharya, two significant conflicts occurred with respect to the succession and control of temple. The first conflict emerged between his two sons. The sectarian literature indirectly alludes to it. It was resolved after the death of Gopi Nath and his infant son Purushottam in a very short span. The second conflict broke between Bengali Vaishnava devotees and Vithal Nath. When Bengali devotees were driven out of the temple, the leadership of Vithal Nath turned to be uncontested.

[28] One of the reasons behind the following of rich groups was the favorable perspective and attitude of Vallabha Acharya and his successor towards worldly engagements. Not only renunciation was not preached as a practice of faith, but the household life was positively approved. Many elements of ancient "*gharast dharma*" were in fact incorporated into the ritual systems of Pushtimarg.

Govardhan and Gokul, as the major pilgrimage site of Pushtimarg *Sampradaya*. The foundation of the temple of Shri Nathji was laid down by his father Vallabha Acharya. He continued to further built and expand it. Moreover, he collected large sums of donations from his wealthy followers to build temples in other places as well.[29]

The fast growth of Pushtimarg under Vithal Nath is also attributed to allowing, albeit temporarily, his main disciples to initiate the people into its fold. The authority of initiation was strictly restricted to the person of Vallabha Acharya at the time of founding Pushtimarg. However, Vithal Nath considered it important to delegate the power to his principal disciples in order to ensure the growth of *Sampradaya*. However, later, the authority was again strictly restricted to the descendants of Vallabha Acharya in order to establish hereditary patterns of leadership.

The second phase (1585-1670 E.E.) is marked by the death of Vithal Nath and the transference of leadership to his seven sons. They were given separate *murtis* by their father to establish their own sphere of devotees broadly aligned with Pushtimarg. The principal *murti* of Shrinathji became the possession of the elder son. It was also the time when hereditary succession of leadership became a firmly established principle in Pushtimarg. During this period, the descendants of Vithal Nath acquired more imperial land grants in Gokul area and tax exemption. Moreover, they started to call themselves *maharaja* and tried to acquire the symbolic power related to both spiritual and temporal domain.[30]

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[29] The spread and strength of any Sampradaya in Hinduism was / is reflected by the activity of temple building. Temple has the greater symbolic and institutional significance in Hinduism as it is considered the reflection of religious ideals, practices, and ways of life. The architecture of temple was / is viewed as an epitome of numerous religious aspects including time and space, Moreover, they are considered the sacred spatial linkage between transcendental and worldly spheres. For more details, please see George Michell (1977) *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms*, London: The University of Chicago Press

The third phase starts with the decision of some descendants of Vithal Nath to shift the center of Pushtimarg from Braj to Rajasthan mainly owing to the weakening Mughal Empire in the wake of *Jat* rebellion in North India. Different *maharajas* sought shelter in the kingdoms of Jaipur, Bundi, Bikaner and Mewar. In 1672, the principal *murti* of Shrinathji was shifted to a newly constructed temple in the town renamed Nathdwara in Mewar. The Rajput ruler of Mewar *mararana* Raj Simha allowed the *Tilakyat* an exclusive fiefdom and government rights in the area.[31] This shift from Braj to Rajasthan had not only enabled the *maharaja*s of Pushtimarg to gain and enjoy the political patronage of Hindu Rajput rulers but brought them closer to wealthy *banaya* mercantile classes of Gujarat who were then main devotees as well as the major sources of financial contribution. The increased political patronage and access to vast financial

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[30] There is considerable evidence that suggests that Vithal Nath and, later on, his descendants, were gradually succeeded to acquire the patronage of Mughal imperial authority and different Hindu rulers. He was given numerous land grants along with tenurial rights in the main area of Pushtimarg activities in Braj. According to the official record, the first land grant was accorded to the family in the name of Emperor Akbar in 1577. It was not only exempted from taxation, but imperial protection was also ensured to the temple in Gokul area. Another imperial edict was issued in 1581 which allowed the cows of Pushtimarg to graze freely in Gokul and all adjacent lands belong to state or noblemen. Two other edicts issued in the name of Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu and Mughal official Bahadur Khan were issued in the same period which allowed tax exemption as well as free and unrestricted grazing of cows belonged to Pushtimarg. Later, the shift of Pushtimarg in Rajasthan ensured the similar kind of political patronage to *maharajas* of Pushtimarg by different Rajput kingdoms.

[31] *Tilakyat* and *Maharaja* are the honorific title assumed by the descendants of Vithal Nath family.

resources led *maharajas* to extend their influence through establishing subsidiary temples in different parts of the western region of South Asia.

However, it would not be correct to interpret the success of Pushtimarg mainly only because of political and economic patronage of Mughal imperial authority or, later on, Hindu Rajput rulers. No doubt, the rule of patronage was crucial. However, there were many other factors involved behind this success. Apart from the theo-philosophical foundation established by Vallabha Acharya, the later leadership accomplished the task of turning devotion into an aesthetic experience for devotees. In this regard, the introduction of the construction of *haveli* and ritual of daily *darshan* played the most crucial role. In Pushtimarg, the site of worship is called *haveli* which is generally built mansion-like, multi-storied structure. This preference of the word *haveli* over *mandir* is meant to invoke the image of the home of infant Krishna in Braj. In other word, *haveli* is the sacred place for devotees who can feel the presence of child Krishna and participate in his pastime in Braj.

A *haveli* is generally comprised of numerous balconies, large courtyards, and rooms for the storage of jewelry, clothes and preparation of foods for the *seva* of Shrinathji. The walls are decorated with the pictures of Krishna. Not only it houses the murti but the family of *Maharaja*-the custodian of it, also resides there. The devotees are required to build a special personal rapport with the metal image which is considered *svarupa* of Krishna.[32] The inner sanctum having the image of Krishna is generally kept separate from other areas so that the pilgrims should be able to experience the transition from mundane to sacred sphere.

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[32] *Svarupa* is classical concept of different school of Indian *Darshana* (philosophy) and religious traditions. It is a compound Sanskrit word comprised of *sva* (own) and *rupa* (form). It signifies the process of realizing one's own form or characteristics. In Pushtimarg tradition, the image of Krishna is considered his svarupa and hence the devotees are expected to feel and treat it as a sentient being.

Darshan or viewing of Krishna in his pastime is another important practice to provide the devotees with an aesthetic and devotional experience. For this purpose, eight viewings (*darshan*) are arranged on daily basis. The first is *mangla darshan* held at the time of sunrise in which *murti* / the image is offered breakfast, mainly comprised of milk and fruits. Almost after an hour, *shringar darshan* is performed. The priests bath and dress the image of Shrinathji and show it mirror. *Gval, rajbhoga, uthapan, bhog, sandhyaarti and shayanarti* are among other *darshan* which are regularly followed and performed at an appointed timing.

Similarly, the measures are taken to ensure the comfort of *svarupa* (image/ *murti*) in changing seasons. For example, during the summer season, the construction of fountains and ponds is undertaken in front of *svarupa* so that the child Krishna feels cool. Both dress and jewelry are selected according to the dictates of the seasons.

The tradition of playing of music (*kirtan*) and singing of *bhajan* at every occasion of *seva* was also standardized by Vithal Nath. It was meant to help the devotees create a certain devotional trance to experience the passion of love toward Krishna. For this purpose, the role of *Ashtachap* bhakti poets was very significant.[33] Four of these bhakti eight poets were the companion of Vallabha Acharya while the remaining four were appointed by Vithal Nath. Each poet of the group was responsible to sing and perform music during each occasion of *Asthma Seva*. The most prominent of the group was

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[33] The literal meaning of Ashtachap is eight seals. However, it refers to the eight poets in Pushtimarg tradition.

Surdas who is revered for his poetry because of the beautiful portrayal of the exploits and sports of infant Krishna and representation of daily life and its emotions. He was blind and his collection of poems is known as the *Sursagar*. Other members of the Ashtachap group are also known for their contribution in classical Braj poetry and music. [34]

Besides making *seva* an aesthetic experience, the establishment of social and cultural identity and building of distinct community around Pushtimarg were some other initiatives which were responsible for its consolidation and growth as popular *Sampradaya* in north-western India. The use of Braj Bhasha as the language of religious instruction and development of hagiographic / *varta* literature proved very helpful in building the distinct religious and community identity of Pushtimarg during seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Both Vallabha Acharya and Vithal Nath used classical Sanskrit for the compilation of their philosophical and devotional works. Perhaps, the use of Sanskrit was necessary to place Pushtimarg in larger Vedic / Brahmanic traditions to gain legitimacy and credibility. However, Sanskrit was not popular language. Therefore, Gokul Nath, the fourth son of Vithal Nath, made the shift and introduced Braj Bhasha as the main language of religious instruction, devotional poetry and *varta* form of hagiography. His early works include *Shri Mahaprabhu Nijvatvarta* and *Gharuvarta*. They are mainly the stories and anecdotes about Vallabha Acharya and his family in Varanasi. He is also

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[34] The development of renowned *Dhrupad Sangeet* is also considered an important contribution of poets and musician related to Pushtimarg. For more details on role of Ashtachap in the development of Dhrupad Sangeet, see Lalita Manhas (2015) *Contribution of shri harirayji in the growth of bhakti sangeet*, PhD thesis, University of Baroda, India.

the author of *Shri Gokulnath ke chaubis vacanamrta* which comprises his twenty-four oral instructions to devotees about religious and devotional matters. Particularly, it stresses upon the elective nature of the community of Pushtimarg and the selfless nature of seva with complete surrender and faith upon the grace of Krishna. Gokul Nath is also credited with collecting and compiling *Chaurasi Vaishnava ke Varta* and *Do Sau Bavan Vaishnava ke Varta*. The first is the collection of the stories about Vallabha Acharya and his faithful eighty-four disciples / devotees. The second is not much different except that it deals with the life stories of Vithal Nath and his two hundred and fifty-two disciples.

Hariray (d. 1715), the nephew of Gokul Nath, was the second most important contributor in the *varta* literature of Pushtimarg. He migrated to the Hindu princely state Kota in Rajasthan in 1660. He not only revised the aforementioned works but also expanded them in the milieu of Rajasthan by adding stories about the establishment of Nathdwara. Moreover, he introduced the genre of pedagogical commentaries which emphasized upon the theological significance of complete dependence upon the grace of Krishna and his incarnation Vallabha Acharya, performance of *seva* and imperative of keeping Pushtimarg as distinct community. After Hariray, the production of standard varta literature was followed by subsequent leadership of Pushtimarg. However, the main body of it formed between seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Chapter 2

Eighth Gaddi of Pushtimarg and Thala Kaiwal Ram

When Vithal Nath was close to his end, he decided to establish the principle of hereditary succession and leadership of Pushtimarg. For this purpose, he gave seven different *murtis*/ *svarupas*of Krishna to his seven sons. They were also allotted seven separate *havelis* in Vrindravan. Later on, they evolved into seven sets of independent, albeit connected, *Gaddis* and built their own circles of devotees and followers. The circumstances and process of their transference to Rajasthan and Gujarat region are already narrated in the previous chapter.

The eighth *murti* of Gopinathji was however given to Shri Lalji who was considered an adopted son of Vithal Nath[1]. He was given the *murti* of Gopinathiji and advised to go to Sindh region for the propagation of Pushtimarg *Sampradaya*. After the journey spanned over many months, he settled in the border town of Dera Ghazi Khan and laid there the foundation of the principal temple of Gopinathji[2]. Later on, he was successful in attracting a large Hindu following in the trans-Indus tract, princely state of Bahawalpur and Multan, and established his own *Ashtam Gaddi*. He was especially successful in bringing wealthy mercantile Hindu communities of Arora and Khatri caste

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[1] The varta literature of the Eighth Gaddi claims that the original name of Shri Lalji was Tulsidas and he belonged to the town of Sehwan Sharif in Sindh Province.

[2] Perhaps, at that time, the present ethno-linguistic identities of geographic regions were not as much rigidly defined as we see in the present day. Many of these regions were loosely defined and their boundaries were not strictly marked. Moreover, they had many parallel and diverse identities as well. Therefore, Ghazi Khan and other areas of trans-Indus tract in Punjab Province might not be strictly separated from the larger Sindh region.

into the fold of the Eighth Gaddi. While the historical record shows that the relationship of the Eighth Gaddi with the rest of the seven *maharajas* remained very irregular and nominal, the descendants of Shri Lalji continued to claim their allegiance to Vallabha Acharya and Pushtimarg for the purpose of legitimacy and credibility[3].

Kaiwal Ram was the grandson of Shri Lalji who migrated to Dera Ismail Khan in his young age. After spending some time there, he finally decided to settle in Bilote, a northern town located about sixty kilometers away from Dera Ismail Khan. He built *Bhajan Thala* in Bilote and turned the place into a renowned pilgrimage site for Hindus living in the upper parts of the Indus floodplains. He was also equally successful to create a considerable following in local Muslim population. After his death, the place continued to be known as the major center of *Eighth Gaddi* where many annual festivals were held and jointly celebrated by a vast number of Hindus and Muslims[4]. After the migration of Hindus in the wake of the partition of Sub-continent in 1947, almost all temples associated with Eighth Gaddi turned to be deserted sites. Later on, many of them were demolished or their land was occupied by the migrants from India. However, Thala Kaiwal Ram was perhaps the only pilgrimage site which was reclaimed by Hindus in the late 1980s. It was not only reconstructed but the annual festival of

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[3] For this purpose, it was necessary for the *Gosvamis* of the Eighth Gaddi to get initiated from any of the seven *maharajas* of Vallabha household. After the fulfillment of this condition, they were however independent in undertaking the initiation of their own followers and devotees to make them members of the Eighth Gaddi.

[4] Thala Kaiwal Ram remained under the ownership of the Gosvamis of Dera Ghazi Khan temple. They had not only kept their deputies to supervise the sacred site on their behalf but were also used to hold regular visits and participate in different festivals and ceremonies organized there.

Vaisakhi was again started to be held which is now regularly attended by Hindu communities mainly from Sindh, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwah.

This chapter is aimed at giving the description of the history of the Eighth Gaddi, its consolidation and growth. It also details the trajectory of life of Kaiwal Ram and his achievements in bhakti poetry and praxis. Moreover, it discusses how the Eighth Gaadi encountered the challenge of fragmentation in the wake of the partition in 1947 as well as the survival and revival of Thala Kaiwal Ram.

1. Literature of the Eighth Gaddi and External Resources

Before the partition of the Sub-continent in 1947 and the subsequent arrival of *Gosvamis* of Eighth Gaddi in Vrindravan, there was little knowledge of its sectarian literature in the academic field. In the state of sheer emergency, *Gosvamis* of Eighth Gaddi managed to bring some selected literature of the Eighth Gaddi to its hereditary temple in Vrindravan. Almost all of this literature was brought from the library of the Eighth Gaddi in Dera Ghazi Khan[5]. Later on, a large part of this literature was donated to Vrindravan Research Institute and hence made accessible to academic scholars.

Some of the early written references to the manuscripts of the Eighth Gaddi appeared in the form ofmagazine articles and papers of sectarian periodicals published from

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[5] A variety of manuscripts from the temple library of Dera Ghazi Khan were brought by three senior *Gosvamis* of Eighth Gaddi (namely Bankay Lal, his son Ratan Lal and his uncle Shyam Lal). According to them, they had to leave behind a large part of the temple library because of emergency situation. For details, see Allan W. Entwistle (1993) *The Rasa Man Ke Pada of Kevalrama: A Medieval Hindi Text of the Eighth Gaddī of the Vallabha Sect,* London, Egbert Forsten, 1-11.

Vrindravan[6].Fourarticles throwing light on the Eighth Gaddi, Shri Lalji and his descendants were published during the period of 1956-1960 C.E. Meanwhile, the first academic thesis entitled Shri *Kaiwal Ram krta 'Jinanadipaka' ka vaijrianaika pathanusamdhana* was submitted by Ramesha Chandra to the University of Agra in 1958.It is mainly based upon Kaiwal Ram'stext '*Jinanadipaka*', without referring to the work of any other author or manuscripts related to Eighth Gaddi or Pushtimarg. Its first part details about the life of Kaiwal Ram which were narrated by the *Gosvamis* of the Eighth Gaddi living in Vrindravan after the partition. The second thesis entitled *Shri Laladasa ke grantha ka vaijrianaika pathanusamdhana*_was authored by Ramesha Chandra Mehrotra in the same period. It is compilation of four edited books of Shri Lalji along with scant linguistic and literary appraisal. The third note-worthy work in this regard was authored by Prabhudayala Mital in his long article entitled Vallabha *sampradaya* ke athavigaddiuruskasahitya published in the periodical '*Braja Bharati*'in 1965. It provides with the general information about the Eighth Gaddi, introduction of *Gosvamis* and different writers / poets along with the sample of their verses.

Much of the above-mentioned works lack academic standard and methodological rigor. The information provided by them is rather scanty, incoherent and lacks references to other wider sources. The only exception in this regard was the Ph.D. thesis titled *Vallabha sampradaya ka asthma pithastha sahityakaro ka adhyayana* submitted to the University of Agra in 1971. It was authored by Surrendra Sharma who had not only enlisted all of the manuscripts brought from Dera Ghazi Khan's temple library but also compiled all necessary biographic details of *Gosvamis* and authors of the Eighth Gaddi. Moreover, he discussed social and cultural background in which the Eighth Gaddi was founded and grew in the south-west Punjab.

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[6] It seems that the migration of Gosvamis of the Eighth Gaddi enabled them to get connected with the larger religious and sectarian milieu of Pushtimarg in Vrindravan and other religious / sectarian traditions of India. These renewed connections and social rapport facilitated them to introduce the works and achievements of their Gaddi.

The latest work of Alan W. Entwistle is the most comprehensive academic research so far produced on this subject. His book entitled *The Rasa Mana Ke Pada of Kevalarama* catalogues all twenty-three manuscripts containing direct and indirect information about the Eighth Gaddi. It provides the genealogy of Shri Lalji's house and analyzes different social and cultural variables responsible for the success and growth of Eighth Gaddi. More specifically, it deals with the distinctive linguistic and musical aspects of the poetry of Kaiwal Ram. At the end, he gives the entire manuscript of 'Rasa *Mana Ke Pada*' along with its English translation[7].

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[7] According to Allan W. Entwistle, about seventy-five manuscripts were brought by Gosvamis of Dera Ghazi Khan's temple library. Only thirty-three manuscripts entail the details of the Eighth Gaddi. The accounts of ancestors (*stutis*) and genealogies (*varnshavalis*) constitutes a significant part of these manuscripts. Although the chronological details (especially the date of birth and death of Gosvamis since Shri Lalji) are not beyond any doubt and uncertainty but they can be however treated as the most informed approximates. Anthologies including the verses of different poets associated to the Eighteenth Gaddi constitute the major portion of these manuscripts. Many of them were compiled in the eighteenth century, the period when the Eighth Gaddi not only consolidated itself but also became the leading Sampradaya among various Hindu communities of south-west Punjab. It seems that *Gosvami* Ranachorarya (d. 1768) and Harideva 1793-1835) were particularly interested in the documentation of the record and literature of their Gaddi and they asked different scribes to copy the manuscripts for the purpose of building the library of Dera Ghazi Khan temple.

The works outside of the manuscripts of the Eighth Gaddi are not much extensive and exhaustive in details. Most of them comprise of colonial archives in the form of district gazetteers, administrators' reports and travelogues of the officials of the British East India Company. The account given by Mohan Lal Kashmir- a spy / agent of the British East India Company, is comparatively more comprehensive and provides with some useful information about Hindu religious communities and their role in regional commerce, banking and overland trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia[8]. In fact, his knowledge of Persian and local languages and acquaintance to Hinduism and Islam helped him form sharp observations of social, cultural, and political circumstances of the region.

There are also two unique books, written in the English language, which give valuable information about the Eighth Gaddi. The first book titled *Hamara Dera Ismail Khan*

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[8] Mohan Lal (1812-1877) belonged to a Kashmir Pandit family which migrated to Delhi. His forefathers established their contacts with the Mughal imperial authority and his great grandfather was titled 'raja' and had high post in Mughal court under the reign of Shah Alam II (1756-1806). The fortune of his family was significantly reduced owing to changing political circumstances. Mohan Lal was admitted into Delhi English College 1828. Three years later, he was employed by Alexander Burnes as a Persian interpreter during his journey to Central Asia. He travelled from Lahore to the Indus region in 1832 and compiled the accounts of his visit of Bahawalpur, Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Mithankot, Sjhikarpur, Kalabagh while going to Afghanistan and Central Asia. He had also performed the duty of assistant political agent during the first Ango-Afghan War and was made prisoner in Kabul. Later on, he was released and spent last part of his life in London. His accounts of journey to the Indus region constitute the main body of detailed information about the geography, commerce and politics of these areas. For more details, see Mohan Lal (1834) *Journal of a tour through the Pun jab, Afghanistan, Turkistan, Khorasan and part of Persia in company with Lt. Burnes, and Dr. Gerard*, Calcutta; Hari Ram Gupta (1943) *The Life and Work of Mohan Lal Kashmiri*, Lahore: Minerva Book Shop.

was originally written in Urdu by Jaswant Ram Ailwadi[9] who was a teacher in the city of Dera Ismail Khan and later migrated to India in the wake of partition. The book was published in 1952. Later on, it was translated into English by Ram Narain Bhatia, and it was published in 2005. Apart from dealing with the history and geography of Dera Ismail Khan, the book is very rich in giving details about religious, cultural, and social life of Hindu communities living in the town and adjacent areas. It also includes a separate part on the details of temples, brief biographic details of Shri Lalji and Kaiwal Ram and the vast influence of the Eighth Gaddi and its *Gosvamis* over Hindu communities in Dera Ismail Khan[10]. The second book, written by Girja Kumar is entitled *The Indus People: Saraiki Saga and Sufi-Sant Renaissance*is and was published in 2014[11].Although the larger aim of the author is establishing the unique historical identity of the Indus people beyond communal lines but it also contains helpful information about the revival of Vishnavism in the medieval period, the establishment of Eighth Gaddi by Shri Lalji and Kaiwal Ram and its influential position in the region.

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[9] Jaswant Ram Ailwadi was a teacher in Church Mission High School in Dera Ismail Khan at the time of partition. The importance of his book lies into the fact that most of the information on religious and socio-cultural life of Hindu communities living in the border town is based on personal experience and direct observations.

[10] Jaswant Ram Ailwadi (2005) *Hamara Dera Ismail Khan* (English Translation), New Delhi. n/p

[11] Girja Kumar was in his twenties when he had to migrate from Dera Ghazi Khan at the time of the partition in 1947. Later on, he worked as the chief librarian in Jawaharlal Lal Nehru University in New Delhi. He is the author of many books. His book on the Indus People is partly the re-interpretation of history since *Mahabharata* and partly a memoire detailing the life and circumstances of Hindu communities in Dera Ghazi Khan. However, it methodologically more rigorous and follows all necessary academic protocols and standards. For more details, see Girja Kumar (2013) *The Indus People: Saraiki Saga and Sufi-Sant Renaissance*, New Delhi: Vitasta Publishers.

2. Life of Shri Lalji-the Founder of Eighth Gaddi

The information about Shri Lalji in the literature of Pushtimarg only covers his family background and the period he spent in serving Govardhan temple. After his migration to the Indus region, references about his life and the Eighth Gaddi are almost missing. For the information about his later life and works, we have to depend on the varta literature produced and preserved by the Eighth Gaddi and its *Gosvamis*.

The hagiographic work entitled '*Do Sau Bowen Vaishnava ke Varta*' merely contains a brief reference to him. He has been mentioned by his original name Tulsidas. It narrates the story how his father was appointed by Vithal Nath as *jalghara sevak*. His main duty was fetching water for Govardhan temple from Yamuna River. However, he died shortly after his arrival in Braj and his son Tulsidas was adopted by Vithal Nath. Tulsidas started to live in the house of Vithal Nath as a member of family. Like his father, he was also given the duty of arranging water for the temple.[12].When Vithal Nath gave seven *murtis-svarupa* to his sons in 1583, Tulsidas was gravely disappointed by ignoring him. However, according to the story, Krishna realized his discontent and asked Vithal Nath to give the eighth *murti*of Gopinathji to him to initiate devotees and hence establish his own Eighth Gaddi in Sindh region[13].

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[12] In a commentary on *Do Sau Bowen Vaishnava ke Varta* written by Harideva, it is said that the father of Tulsidas migrated along with his wife and son from Delhi to Braj and asked Vithal Nath for help. He was then given the duty of fetching water. The story given by the sources of the Eighth Gaddi are however different.

The rest of the story of Shri Lalji is however not followed in the literature of Pushtimarg[14].For this purpose, we need to depend upon the manuscripts of the Eighth Gaddi which not only provide more details about the later events, but they are also comprehensive and consistent about the family background and other details about the life of Shri Lalji. Furthermore, they also differ in many aspects from the brief story narrated in the general literature of Pushtimarg. According to the sources of the Eight Gaddi, the father of Tulsidas / Shri Lalji was the resident of Sehwan Sharif in Sindh[15]. His family already belonged to Vaishnava community and used to occupy a *baithak* in Sehwan Sharif which was visited by devotees during annual festivals. His family derived from *Lalari* lineage of *Kausala gotra* of Sarasvat Brahmins.[16]

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[13] One of the explanations given by Gosvamis of the Eighth Gaddi referred in the works of Allan W. Entwistle is that the eighth murti might be given to him to confirm the significance of octads in Pushtimarg. The fact of eight syllables in the initiation mantra of Pushtimarg, eight times of *seva*, eight poets, eight darshan and eight *sakha* of Krishna highlight the role and significance of *Ashtam* (eight) in *Sampradaya*. See Allan W. Entwistle (1993) *The Rasa Mana Ke Pada,* 25

[14] Perhaps the long geographical distance and the fact that Tulsidas was not the direct descendent of Vallabha Acharya's household led towards the neglect of giving the later accounts of the consolidation and growth of the Eighth Gaddi and its *Gosvamis*.

[15] Although Sehwan Sharif is renowned for the tomb of Muslim saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, there are many sacred Hindu places / temples in the town. The father of Tulsidas was believed to be the custodian of one such sacred place.

[16] Sarasvat Brahmin claims to derive their descent from a group of Brahmins who used to live along the banks of sacred / mythical Sarasvati River. They are though dispersed throughout India but the

Before we venture into the story of Shri Lalji and his Eighth Gaddi, it is imperative to give a brief history of Vaishnava community in Multan and south-west Punjab (middle Indus Valley). Historically, the region had remained the vibrant center of Vaishnavaism since antiquity. The most primordial reference to it relates to the story of Vishnu devotee Parhlad and his demonic father Hiranyakashipu[17]. Since ancient times, the city

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majority of them are concentrated in Sindh, Gujarat, south-west Punjab, Kashmir and Rajasthan. Later on, many of them migrated to Goa, the Konkan and Uttar and Dakshin Kannad districts. They migrated to these area traversing Maharashtra wherein we again find a significant number of Sarasvat Brahmin. They are especially concentrated in and around Poona. Sarasvat Brahmins in Sindh, Gujarat and south-west Punjab are the main *purohits* of Khatri, Arora and Bhatia communities. Moreover, they do also perform religious rituals for all kinds of low caste groups in these regions. In Gujrat, they are also known as Hussaini Brahmins because they receive learning (*dakshina*) from Shia communities. There is also an evidence of the presence of Hussain Brahmins in Multan who migrated India due to the partition of the Indian sub-continent. There is also a myth that they supported Imam Hussain at the time of Karbala battle. Also, their clients include Memon and Khoja communities who belong to *Lohana* community derived from Sindh and south-west Punjab. It is also believed that Khatri caste emerged after the cross-breeding of Sarasvat Brahmins and Kshatriya in the wake of the mythical decimation of the latter group by Parasuram-the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. For more details, see Girja Kumar (2013) *The Indus Peoples*, 224-240

[17] According to the story narrated in *Bhagavat Purana* and other ancient Hindu scriptural resources, Parhlad was born to Hiranyakashipu who was a king with some extraordinary powers. He was given a boon by gods that had made his death almost an impossible occurrence. As per the boon, he couldn’t be killed of anything born by living womb, neither be killed by a man nor an animal, neither during the day nor at night, neither indoors nor outdoors, neither on land, nor in the air nor in water and of no man-made weapon. These extraordinary powers led him to become brutal and demonic towards his subjects. However, the case of Parhlad was very much different. He was used to hearing the chants of the great sage Narada Muni while he was still in his mother’s womb. Since his childhood, he turned to be a staunch devotee of Vishnu. As a result of his spiritual devotion, his father decided to kill him. For

of Multan remained the center of Parhlad worship. The historical record shows that Parhladpura was once the name of Multan[18]. Similarly, one of the ancient name of Multan was Sambhapura which was identified with the son of Mahabharata's Krishna. It is said that he was given the lordship of the city after the defeat of Kaurava confederacy[19].

When Shri Lalji arrived in Dera Ghazi Khan and built Gopinathji temple there, the region was already witnessing the resurgence and revival of Vaishnava / Krishna cult among local Hindu communities. The most noteworthy Vaishnava figures propagating Krishnaite bhakti in the region included Shyamji and KrishnadasaGunjamali.Shyamji or Shyamdasa was born in Kshatriya family of Dipalpur district. In his very youthful age, he went to Vrindravan and associated himself withGuadiya Vaishnava community created by Mahaprbhu Chaitanya. After spending many years in Vrindravan, he

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this purpose, he adopted many methods to inflict harm upon Parhlad. He was given poison; trampled with elephants and put into a room with highly poisonous snakes. However, each time, he was saved by Vishnu. At last, his father Hiranyakashipu decided to put him into the lap of his aunty Holika as she sat on a pyre. Holika was blessed by gods that she couldn't be burnt by fire. Again, Holika was killed while Parhlad remained completely safe due to his prayers to Vishnu. Hiranyakashipu was finally killed by Narasimha- an avatar of Vishnu- by taking the form of a part man, part lion. The festival of *Holi* is celebrated in the memory of this victory of Narasimha over Hiranyakashipu. For more details, see Manohar Laxman Varadpande (2015) *Mythology of Vishnu and His Incarnations*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishers, 67-76

[18] The temple of Parhlad was once the most revered sacred place in Multan. It was however seriously damaged as a reaction to the destruction of Babri Mosque in India. Its crumbling structure can be still found adjacent to the renowned tomb of Muslim Sufi Sheikh Bahauaddin Zakarya Multani located in the main fort area.

[19] For more details, see Girja Kumar (2013) *The Indus People*, 88-89

returned back to Dera Ghazi Khan in 1543 and built his own temple and started the initiation of devotees. Later on, his *Sampradaya*, maintained by hereditary *gurus*, extended its influence throughout the region. It was considered the most influential *Sampradaya* especially in urban areas and towns. Similarly, Krishnadas was born in a family of Sarasvat Brahmin living in Lahore. He went to Vrindravan and got initiated there by Nityananda who, in turn, was the disciple of Chaitanya. After he returned, he created his own following and built a network of temples in Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur and Muzzafargarh. However, the chief Gaddi was in Tulamba in Jhang district. Besides these gurus / *Gosvamis*, the influence of Guru Nanak had also limited presence in south-west Punjab and Sindh region. For example, there was a group known to be SanwalShahis who were devotees of a local disciple of Guru Nanak. Similarly, a group of Nanak Shahis were reported in the upper Sindh region. However, both groups had liminal religious identity because of their observation of Hindu rites and use of Brahmins in ritual performances.

The environment of political stability, burgeoning overland trade and the works of earlier Vaishnava gurus made it easier for Shri Lalji to carve out his own particular niche of following and entrenchment of his Gaddi in far flung areas of Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Multan, Bahawalpur, Sindh and certain parts of Baluchistan and Afghanistan. He was successful to form a group of disciples who further propagated the teaching of bhakti. Like the varta literature of Pushtimarg, there is a manuscript of the Eighth Gaddi written in Braj Bhasha prose which details the stories and accounts of his twelve devoted disciples[20]. They highlight the great spiritual power and grace of

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[20] The manuscript titled Shri Lalabhaktvaradvadasakatha provides the accounts and stories of twelve devotees of Shri Lalji.

Shri Lalji and selfless devotion of his disciples. Dwarkadasa Khatri was one of the main disciples who was later on appointed as the custodian (*adhikari*) of Dera Ghazi Khan temple. According to the story, he was the worshipper of a goddess which advised him to make Shri Lalji his guru for attaining *mukti*. UchhiramaKalara, Jagadisha, Paramananda, Kalyanadasa, BhagavatadasPambu, ViruValecha were amongst other chief disciples whom stories of conversion, devotion and *seva* are narrated with more details. Dandirama was also considered the main disciple of Shri Lalji who had succeeded to establish his own separate line of following as well[21]. His account is however of special significance to us because it narrates how he was involved in the healing of possessed persons and rites of exorcism. It indicates that the gurus of the Eighth Gaddi were involved in folk ritual practices relating to spirit possession and healing. Indeed, the current performance of such rituals in Thala Kaiwal Ram can be considered a kind of the remnants of those old practices.

A number of works are attributed to Shri Lalji. Many of them are translation of Sanskrit texts and some are pedagogical books which describes and explains bhakti especially the advantages of *bhajana*, *namasmarana* and *seva* of *gurus* and Krishna[22].

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[21] According to traditional sources, he belonged to a Bhil tribe in Dwarka region. He was involved in the robbery of pilgrims but, later on, became a staunch devotee of Shri Lalji. He established his *asthan* in the hills of Muri in Rajanpur district which happened to be a route of caravan trade to Khurasan. He had considerable influence on Hindus living in Kandhar and other parts of Afghanistan. A temple associated to him was also built in Leiha district. For more details, see Allan W. Entwistle (1993) *The Rasa Mana Ke Pada,* 37.

[22] Main works of Shri Lalji include *Saptagranthi*, *Namaratna, LaghuPracisi, Krishnastotra, Saptashaloki, Gurustuti, Bhagavatstuti and Ghar ke paddhati, Ekadasacatushpadi.* A few other works are adopted versions of some parts / books of *Bhagvat Puran*.

These works contain little reference to the literature of Pushtimarg or seven Gaddis established by the sons of Vithal Nath. There is only one manuscript entitled *Ghar ke paddhati* which has brief reference to Vallabha Acharya and the relationship of the Eighth Gaddi to Pushtimarg. As has already been mentioned that the Eighth Gaddi had not remained in active contact with the main seven houses of Pushtimarg. Not only was its location remote and distant but Shri Lalji was also not the direct descendent of Vallabha Acharya and hence given not much importance by other houses located in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Gokul region. It was perhaps because of this loose contact that allowed the *Gosvamis* of the Eighth Gaddi to establish their own sources of religious legitimacy. For example, Shri Lalji is portrayed in the Eighth Gaddi literature as the *avatar* of Krishna who was responsible for the salvation of souls in the Dark Age (*Kalyug*).

Within a year of his arrival at Dera Ghazi Khan, Shri Lalji married a daughter of a local Brahmin living in Dera Ghazi Khan. He had four sons, of whom two died earlier without having children. Mathura Nath and Giridhara were two surviving sons who, later on, played an important role in the consolidation and growth of the Eighth Gaddi. The elder son Mathura Nath became the custodian of the central temple of Dera Ghazi Khan while the younger son Girdharji was given the *murti-svarupa* of Nagaraji who took it to Dera Ismail Khan and built there a separate temple[23].

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[23] Both Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan town were built in the fifteenth century during the reign of Langah Sultanate in Multan. They were built under the policy of Hussain Langah of settling Baloch tribes in the trans-Indus tract of south-west Punjab for the purpose of cementing the defense of his kingdom. Both towns were not only important for defense purposes but they were situated on major trade routes leading to Baluchistan and Afghanistan. Dera Ismail Khan was situated near Gomal and

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There is a fair account of the death of Shri Lalji narrated in the manuscripts of the Eighth Gaddi. According to these sources, Shri Lalji died in/ around 1618 at the age of sixty-seven. Before his death, he instructed his followers that his elder son Mathura Nath would head the Gaadi after him and perform the *seva* in the chief temple of Dera Ghazi Khan. He decided to go to Vrindravan to spend his last days in the sacred place. During this period, he continued to perform daily *ashnan* (bath) in Yamuna and recitation of *Bhagvat Puran*. As per Hindu mythology, he is believed to be disappeared after making his last prostration before *Bhagavat Purana*. After his death, his large *Samadhi* was constructed beneath a banyan tree at the bank of Yamuna River.The place is now considered one of the sacred places of the Eighth Gaddi.

3. Consolidation and Growth of the Eighth Gaddi

Mathura Nath, the elder son of Shri Lalji, became the next head of the Gaddi. At the same time, his younger brother Girdharaconstructed a temple in Dera Ismail Khan and placed the *murti-svarupa* ofNagaraji. It was not only the most popular place of worship but also considered the second in significance after the temple of Dera Ghazi Khan. Later on, his elder son Bhagavan inherited it after the death of Girdhara. His younger son, named Kamalanayana, migrated to Bahawalpur State and constructed the temple of Girdhariji which was accounted as the third most important temple of the Eighth Gaddi in south-west Punjab. Majority of the *Gosvamis* of Bahawalpur State were comprised of Sarasvat Brahmins who were popularly known as ‘*Lalji Potre*’or the

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Dara Zinda Pass which were traditionally used for overland caravan trade. Similarly, Dera Ghazi Khan was also the gate for various mountainous passes further connecting to Bolan Pass. They were also major river crossing points because of their location on the bank of the Indus River.

grandsons of Lalji'. Majority of the following of the Bahawalpur Gaddi of Shri Lalji derived from the town of Lodhran and Karor Pakka[24].

The result of this expansion was the growth of three branches of the Eighth Gaddi established in three important commercial and political centers of south-west Punjab. Although the temple of Dera Ghazi Khan continued to occupy the central position in the Eighth Gaddi, two other branches were equally important because of their independent following and resources. Dera Ismail Khan constituted the most north-western center of the Eighth Gaddi while the temple of Bahawalpur State was located on the south-eastern fringes. The temple in Dera Ghazi Khan was almost situated in the middle of these two important sites of the Gaddi.

The temple in Dera Ismail Khan town catered to the large Hindu following dispersed in Paharpur, Tank, Banu, Kohat, Peshawar and South Waziristan. Most members of Hindu community living in these frontier regions were involved in rural commerce, overland regional trade and moneylending and hence the main source of donation to the temple. Similarly, the branch of Bahawalpur State was also situated at important trade route and connected to Sindh and Bikaner State. Later on, the emergence of Shikarpur as the leading regional financial capital in the middle of the eighteenth century would have certainly given the advantage to the temple of both Bahawalpur State and Dera Ghazi Khan to extend their influence among Hindu communities of the town, mainly owing to their geographic proximity to it.

3.1. Kaiwal Ram and the Eighth Gaddi

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[24] (1908) Punjab State Gazetteers, vol. XXXVI A, *Bahawalpur State 1904*, Lahore: Government Press, 156

After the death of Mathura Nath, his elder son Gokul Nath was made the head of the temple of Dera Ghazi Khan temple. However, it was his younger brother Kaiwal Ram who was destined to become the most crucial figure of the Eighth Gaddi.Both Gokul Nath and Kaiwal Ram were born in 1610 and 1617 respectively. Kaiwal Ramwas considered the reincarnation of Shri Lalji and therefore the second most revered figureinthe Eighth Gaddi. After the death of Gokul Nath, Kaiwal Ram was asked by his devotees to head the Dera Ghazi Khan's branch, but he said he would like to stay away from the worldly affairs. Rather, he proposed to make the son of Gokul Nath as the new head of the Gaddi. However, his nephew also died soon, and he was once again asked to take the responsibility of the Gaddi which he refused. As a result, his son Madan Mohan was made the new head while he opted to migrate to Dera Ismail Khan.

For a brief period, he stayed in the town of Dera Ismail Khan where he was used to stay in a baithak that stood opposite to Nagaraji temple[25]. Later, he shifted to Daraban town which was located near Dara Zinda Pass of Suleiman Range. Perhaps, the decision of settling there was influenced due to the strategic location of the town and its central role in burgeoning caravan regional trade to Baluchistan, Afghanistan, and other regions[26].

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[25] The old city of Dera Ismail Khan was destroyed due to the bank erosion of the Indus River in 1823. As a result, the new city was reconstructed to the further west of the river wherein a new temple of Nagaraji and the *baithak* of Kaiwal Ram were also built. For more details, see Jaswant Ram Ailwadi (2005) *Hamara Dera Ismail Khan, 25-30*

[26] The importance of Daraban town in terms of caravan trade was mainly lied into its access to multiple regions. The caravans arriving there from Afghanistan and Central Asia had the choice to go to Bahawalpur State via KotMithan and then further proceed to Jaisalmir or Bikaner in order to have

However, subsequently, he was permanently shifted to Bilote town in the north of Dera Ismail Khan. He constructed his Bhajan Thala which was transformed into the most important sacred site of the Eighth Gaddi in the region. What were the reasons behind the decision to settle in Bilote? The certain answer of this question is although difficult but certain advantages of shifting there can be deduced on the basis of some apparent advantages. For example, like Daraban, the town of Bilote was located near trade routes connected to both Gomal and Kurram Pass of Suleiman Range. Moreover, it was also situated on the bank of the Indus River and hence used as the regular crossing point. However, apart from geographic factors, there might be some additional reasons behind this decision. For example, Bilote was already the most important sacred complex of the region and regional site of pilgrimage. The town was renowned for the shrine of Shah Essa and other Muslim Sufis buried in its historical graveyard. The desire might have been to reclaim the linkage of the place with a splendid Hindu past. The town was established by the name of Raja Bilote under Hindu Shahi period. The remains of the strategic fort and temple in the town are still conspicuously visible as they are located on the southern hill side and hence dominates the entire panorama of the town.

Whatever the reasons behind the selection of Bilote Sharif as the permanent abode of the most revered figure of the Eighth Gaddi, its effects upon Hindu community living in various towns of the upper Indus floodplains were immense. The Hindu community in the region constituted a very thin layer of the population. The construction of Bhajan

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access to different routes connecting to various regions of India. It was also easier to go to Multan and then Delhi and other parts of India by crossing the Indus River near Dera Ismail Khan and then traversing Thar Desert. Similarly, it was also used as a route to go to further north especially Lahore. For further details, see Alexander Burnes (1835) *Travels into Bokhara and Narrative of Voyage on the Indus*, London: Philadelphia.

Thala on the bank of the Indus River in Bilote and holding of different festivals and celebrations made it possible to cement the mutual ties of otherwise isolated and scattered Hindu community in the region. The revival of Vaishnava bhakti tradition in the region helped the *Gosvamis* of the Eighth Gaddi to build a closely knitted community of devotees and followers. A pilgrimage to Bilote and Bhajan Thala and participation in festivals increased the mutual interaction of Hindu community living in the north-western towns such as Mianwali, Kalabagh, Mari, Makhad, Hund, Piplan, Kalore Kot, Tank, Laki Marwat, Bannu and Kohat. It would have been certainly beneficial to the *Gosvamis* of the Eighth Gaddi to extend their sphere of religious influence and collect more donations for their temples.

Notwithstanding his permanent settlement in Bilote, Kaiwal Ram spent a dynamic life and continued his routine of travels and pilgrimagesin most of life. Since his youth, he used to accompany his father during his visits to Baluchistan, Afghanistan, Sindh, and north India. For example, the foundation of a temple known as Shri Lalji Dwarain the city of Kandhar in Afghanistan is attributed to him[27]. He is also credited with the construction of the temple of the Eighth Gaddi known as Gore Dauji in Vrindravan. According to the legend, he went to Vrindravan along with Sukhan Mai who was the fiancée of his young deceased son Jagan Nath. It is believed that she refused to marry anyone else after the death of her fiancée and, like Miran Bai, decided to spend her life as being the Gopi of Krishna in Vrindravan. For this purpose, Sukhan Mata and Kaiwal Ram travelled to Vrindravan. As per sectarian legend, Sukhan Mata struck her head to a stone while dipping her head during her early morning Ashnan in Yamuna. She was instructed by Balarama in her dream that she should go back to the place to meet him.

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[27] Allan W. Entwistle (1993) R*asa Mana Ke Pada*, 46

Both Kaiwal Ram and Sukhan Mata had the darshan of Balarama there and, later on, carved a *murti* of Gore Dauji and placed it in a newly constructed temple of the Eighth Gaddi in Vrindravan[28].

In the later part of his life, Kaiwal Ram seemed to turn into an ascetic and *Udasi*.[29]He spent much of his last days in practicing asceticism his hermitage in Bilote. Although there is enough information available about his life and achievements in the literature of Pushtimarg, but it doesn't mention any specific date of his death. The Thala of Kaiwal Ram had soon become the main pilgrimage site and center of various festivals and fairs of Hind community in the region after his death. Some of the most popular festivals held at Thala Kaiwal Ram include Krishna's Janamashtami, *Chaitra Shudi* (the birthday of Kaiwal Ram) and *Vaisakhi*[30].

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[28] Ibid, 45. The maintenance of the temple and *seva* of Gore Dauji remained in the hands of *pujaris* who were appointed by the Gosvamis of Dera Ghazi Khan. It was used as the residential place by them whenever they visited Vrindravan for pilgrimage purpose. After the partition, they permanently resided there and made the svarupa of Gopinathji as the main deity of the temple. Allan W. Entwistle discussed the possible reasons of preferring Vrindravan as the site of the temple of the Eighth Gaddi over Mathura, Govardhan and Gokul. According to him, there might have been many reasons behind the decision. It was already the site of the Samaadhi of Shri Lalji. Moreover, it was the area dominated by Gaudiya Vishnavism to which Kaiwal Ram was possibly more attracted. This is at least confirmed by his poetry which eulogizes both Radha-Krishna and their erotic stories and *rasa*. Similarly, the selection of Vrindravan could also be influenced by the desire of Kewalaram of not being overshadowed by other seven houses of Pushtimarg.

[29] The term '*Udasi*' has been intriguingly used by Allan W. Entwistle in his analysis of historical and biographical data about Kaiwal Ram in his book on '*Rasa Mana Ke Pada*'. However, he doesn't qualify the term '*Udasi*' which is in fact loaded with thick historical background. The term *Udasi* is used to signify either the travels (of Guru Nank) or the sect which was established by his elder son Shri Chand. Contrary to the principle of Guru Nank in favor of participation in worldly affairs, Shri Chand adopted an ascetic life and preached *samnyas*. Moreover, he opposed the nomination of non-hereditary Sikh Gurus after the death of Guru Nank and hence established his own sect out of this early schism. It was the major sect of Sikhism till the nineteenth century. In Sindh and south-west Punjab, we find a sizeable following of *Udasi panthis* besides Nankpanthi and Sanwalpanthi. Given this historical background, it is not clear whether Allan W. Entwistle uses this term casually and in loose or he wants to refers the relationship of Kaiwal Ram to this sect in his later part of life. For more details on *Udasi* sect of Sikhism, see Kiranjeet Sandhu (2011) *Udasis in the Colonial Punjab, 1849 AD-1947 AD,* Ph.D.

Kaiwal Ram was also a renowned poet and writer. His works would have certain contributed in the building of the distinct identity of the Eight Gaddi. A large authorship mostly written in literary Braj diction is attributed to him[31]. It is mainly contained in the seventeen manuscripts brought from Dera Ghazi Khan's temple library by the *Gosvamis* of the Eighth Gaddi which are now archived in Vrindravan Institute of Research.

Kaiwal Ram was a prolific poet as it is evident by a total of 553 poems attributed tp him in the seventeen manuscripts of the Eighth Gaddi. There are three large poems

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[30] Allan A. Entwistle (1993) *The Rasa Mana Ke Pada*, 51.

[31] Allan L. Entwistle makes a detailed analysis of the identity of Kaiwal Ram of the Eighth Gaddi and his works because there are different Kaiwal Ram whom poetry has been mentioned and incorporated in the literature of Krishna bhakti especially Nabhadasa's *Bhakatamala* and Malukadasa's *Jnanabodha*. This is actually a typical of the Indian literary tradition in which the same epithet is often used by different poets and writers. Therefore, Allan L. Entwistle considers the manuscripts of the Eighth Gaddi containing the works of Kaiwal Ram as the most authentic references.

entitled *Ratnasagara,Rasa Mana Ke Pada* and Jnanadipaka. Many other poems are scattered in the anthologies of the Eighth Gaddi. The first two of long poems mostly deal with Krishna's *lila* and the subject of *vinaya* (prayer). Jinanadipaka, the third longer poem, is however much different from the other two as it is mainly concerned with didactic teaching written in the style of Sant tradition. The manuscripts of both longer and shorter poems often refer to relevant *ragas* and *raganis* as well.

The foundational role of Kaiwal Ram in the entrenchment and consolidation of the Eighth Gaddiis visible by the fact of his considerable following in the Muslim population of the region. Similar to many other renowned figures of Sant Bhakti tradition, his communal identity is blurred, and he is owned by both Hindu and Muslim devotees. A set of myths and legends revolved around the contestation and reconciliation between Kaiwal Ram and different local Muslim *pirs* help to build the bridge connecting Kaiwal Ram to both his Hindu and Muslim devotees. These legends and myths are commonly narrated during festivals and *melas* as well as everyday conversation in the town of Bilote. A comprehensive description and analysis of these legends and myths and their role in maintaining the identity and place of Kaiwal Ram Thala, in spite of the fragmentation of the Eighth Gaddi after the partition, is the major subject matter of the next chapter.

3.2. Later History of the Eighth Gaddi

The process of consolidation and growth of the Eighth Gaddi in south-west Punjab and upper Sindh continued after the death of Kaiwal Ram. Madanmohan (b. 1644- d.1695), the son of Kaiwal Ram, was appointed the head custodian of Dera Ghazi Khan temple. Like his father, he contributed to the distinct literary tradition of the Eighth Gaddi. He is credited to write about two hunderds and fifty pada as well as the translation of the tenth book of *Bhagvat Puran* into Braj Bhasha. Moreover, a compilation of a festival calendar is attributed to him which provide details about the proper performance of rites of *seva* and appropriate *kirtan*. His elder son Pradyumna (b. 1672) succeeded him. He was also the author of many *padas* and *kavitas*. As both sons of Madanmohan were childless, the custody of the Gaddi was shifted to their uncle Brajabhusana (b. 1676-d. 1744). He was succeeded by Bake Bihari (d. 1790), Ranachoraraya (b. 1765) and Harideva (b. 1793-1835) respectively. They played very significant role in establishing the temple library as most of the manuscripts available were copied in their period. Harideva is especially considered another important literary figure of the Eighth Gaddi[32]. A long work entitled Virhabhedavivarana is attributed to him. It contains two hundred and twenty-five *padas* which are arranged by *ragas* and *raganis*. Baladeva (b. 1815-d. 1882) succeeded Harideva. His period coincided with the colonization of the region by the East India Company. After his death, the property of the temple was divided into his two sons, namely Kunjalala (b. 1883-d. 1928) and Jivanlala. As per previous tradition, the *seva* and ownership of temple property was invested into the head custodian of the deity. As result of the division, a confusion arose, albeit temporarily, about the performance of the *seva* of *svarupa* and other rites. An important event during the period of the temple custodianship of Kunjalala was destruction of the town of Dera Ghazi Khan due to devastating Indus floods and hence reconstruction in safer place. As a result, the deity of Gopinathiji was also shifted to a newly constructed temple. Sundarlala (b. 1878) was the last *Gosvami* of the temple of Dera Ghazi Khan who subsequently migrated to India after the partition[33].

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[32] He happened to head the Gaddi at the time when Muslim rule in Multan and trans-Indus tract was being weakened and later replaced by Dewan Sanwan Mal after the conquest of the region by the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As a result, the Gaddi would have first time enjoyed direct political patronage by Hindu rulers.

The British Indian colonial archival literature indicatesthat the Eighth Gaddi was the most significant *Sampradaya* and commanded substantial following in Hindu community of the region. For example, the colonial ethnographer notes in his glossary of tribes and castes of the region compiled in the early twentieth century:

"The only object of reverence, which can be said in any way to rival Krishna and his apostles, is the river, and the people have gone so far as to confuse the two, and at times it is the Indus, at times Lalji, who is addressed and worshipped as Amar Lal, the immortal one."[34]

The above note is significant not only because it testifies the popularity and influence of the Eighth Gaddi and its *Gosvamis,* but it also implicitly indicates towards an integrative strategy adopted to make the new religious tradition discernible and acceptable in terms and categories of the old dominant tradition of the region[35]. Similar process of translation and creating loose categorical equivalences can be seen in the

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[33] For details see Allan W. Entwistle (1993) *The Rasa Man Ke Pada of Kevalrama*, 20-24.

[34] H. A. Rose (1911) *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, Vol. 1, Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 389

[35] This strategy of intertwining an emergent tradition with old existing traditions is very typical phenomena of religious change and maintenance in South Asia. For example, in this specific case, we observe that Shri Lalji was made equivalent to Amar Lal, a deity associated to the Indus River, while, equally, Amar Lal is the equivalent of Uderolal, Jhulelal and Lal Shahbaz Qalndars (in Muslim context). In terms of Hindu mythology, Uderolal / Amarlal were also the reincarnation of Vedic god Varuna. This aspect of creating linguistic and cultural equivalence between different religious traditions and hence managing change and continuity is the subject matter of the next chapter.

case of the legends about the relationship between Kaiwal Ram and rival Muslim pirs in the region.

4. The Nexus of the Eighth Gaddi and Mercantile Hindu Castes/Class

The main point of this section is that the patronage of wealthy Hindu merchants and moneylenders in the south-west Punjab was very crucial for the consolidation and growth of Pushtimarg in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. However, the achievement of it hadn’t proved much difficult, mainly because of the dire need of Hindu merchants and moneylenders to adopt a new form of religiosity and ritual culture which should be helpful in the exhibition and enhancement of their social status

The trajectory of the consolidation and growth of the Eighth Gaddi in the Indus Valley has certain similarities and differences compared to the case of Pushtimarg and its seven houses in Rajasthan and Gujarat region in India. Both Rajasthan and Gujarat were predominantly Hindu majority areas. There was more favorable religious, political and cultural milieu available to Pushtimarg in the western regions of India. We find abundant evidence in Puranic literature and archaeological studies about how Krishna was intertwined with the folklore, culture and history of Gujarat. The coastal city of Dwarka in Gujarat is amongst main four pilgrimage centers of Hinduism. The epic of Mahabharata narrates how Krishna shifted from Mathura to Dwarkaafter defeating his uncle Kansa. According to the legend, he built the city by forcing the sea to recede in order to make an empty space for Dwarka city. The city is dotted with temples and sacred sites attributed to Krishna. The migration of the ancient Yadavas tribe from Mathura to Gujarat region is another mythical connection of Krishna to the region. The legend says that Krishna was born in the Yadavas tribe, and he was also the main deity of their worship[36].It would not be an exaggeration to say that Krishna was already a popular folk hero anddeity in the religious culture of Gujarat. The situation was not much different in Rajasthan. The poetry and songs of Mirabai (1498-1546) had already made Krishna worship cult an intimate part of religious and cultural imagination of local communities of Rajasthan. Moreover, Rajput rulers were very keen to patronize Pushtimarg's *maharajas* to drive legitimacy as well as the wealth of rich *Bania* devotees from Gujarat to the pilgrimage centers in their kingdoms.

However, the conditions for the establishment and growth of the Eighth Gaddi in the south-west Punjab were very much different. First, the region had already undergone large scale religious identity transformation as majority of the population was Muslim at the end of the sixteenth century when Shri Lalji had settled in Dera Ghazi Khan[37].

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[36] Yadavas are the ancient people who trace their ancestry from the mythical king Yadu. The community was comprised of four tribal clans, namely Andhaka, Abhira, Satvatas and Vrishni. The worship of Krishna was the main unifying characteristic of these four clans. Many of later kingdoms claimed their descent from Yadu and Yadavas. For more details, see S.D.S Yadva (2006) *Followers of Krishna: Yadavas of India*, New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1-16. On the fusion of the tribal and Vedic images of Krishna, see the Richa Pauranik Clements (2010) *Social Lives of Religious Symbols: An Evolutionary Approach to Explaining Religious Change,* Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, 113-124

[37] I have avoided the term 'conversion to Islam' as it has been recently problematized by recent academic research. For example, Richard Eaton argues that the term 'conversion' resonates the ethos of the nineteenth century Christian missionaries and hence is not adequate to capture the religious transformation in the medieval India. Secondly, the change in religious identities in the case of Bengal and West Punjab was a slow and gradual process carried out in unselfconscious manners. Third, it was situated in larger economic and political environment dominated by agricultural expansion, settlement and migration of pastoral-tribal groups. For more details, see Richard Eaton (2009) "Shrines, Cultivators and Muslim Conversion in Bengal and Punjab, 1300-1700", *The Medieval History Journal*,

The religious scene was dominated by different Sufi *silsilas* which were established and flourished during the Sultanate and early Mughal period. In the early medieval Islamic era, the contestation between Muslim Sufi and Shakta / Nath Yogis was a part of the folklore ad legends of the area. In most of these stories, Muslim Sufis, such as Jalal al-din Surkh Posh, Din Panah, etc., often defeated the magical and tantric powers of Shakta / Nath Yogis by their unwavering devotion and surrender to God.[38]

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no. 12, vol. 2. To some extent, Sara Ansari makes the observations similar to Richard Eaton while focusing upon Sindh Province. For more details, see Sara Ansari (1992) *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sindh: 1843-1947*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 17-19

[38] In his recent doctoral research, Patton E. Burchettdiscusses how Bhakta (devotional) tradition progressively succeeded over the competing order of Shakta/ Nath yogis in the early modern period (circa 1500-1750) through its adoption of Sufi inflected conception of monotheistic spirituality especially its emphasis upon complete surrender to God. He notes that early modern / late medieval period witnesses the significant "tension between the *bhakti* approach of self-surrendering, loving devotion to God and the self-asserting, power-seeking perspective of tantric religiosity". According to him, the role of Sufism in the development of Bhakta tradition is though not much recognized but a closer scrutiny confirms its formative influences over Bhakta's religiosity and practices. More specifically, he describes how the common rejection of human agency in the work of miracles and magic by both Sufis and Bhakta gurus led towards a new kind of devotional imagination and culture. Also, he discusses the role of emergent Mughal-Rajput alliance in patronizing resurgent Bhakta tradition and communities. For more details, see Patton E. Burchett (2012) *Bhakti Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India: Kacchvāhās, Rāmānandīs, and Nāths, circa 1500-1750* , Unpublished Thesis, Columbia University, USA; William R. Pinch (1999) "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta", in Daud Ali (ed.) *invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. Nile Green makes similar observations with respect to his analysis of oral contestation stories between Muslim Sufis and followers of Tantric Shakta religion. See Nile Green

Secondly, unlike Pushtimarg's seven houses, political patronage available to the Eighth Gaddi was not much extensive especially in its formative period of sixteenth century. An exception in this regard was the short period of the rule by Sanwal Mal and his son Mulraj who ruled Multan after the Sikh conquest of Multan in 1818. Sanwal Mal was himself a Khatri from Gujranwala District of Punjab and hence was sympathetic to Hindu communities living in the south-west region[39]. Moreover, being an efficient administrator, he encouraged Hindu merchants and moneylenders to invest into rural credit and overland regional trade.

The success of the Eighth Gaddi was by and large dependent upon the rising mercantile Hindu caste / class living in the frontier region. They were not only the main managers of trade, commerce and finance of the region but also involved in overland trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia, Iran and Russia.The recent surge of academic research on the economic and trade history of India in seventeenth and eighteenth century confirm the dominance of Hindu Khatri and Arora castes in overland trade with

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(2004) "Oral Competition Narratives of Muslim and Hindu Saints in the Deccan", *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 63, no. 2.

[39] James Royal Roseberry writes that the rule of dhoti-wearing *Kirars* (a local name for Hindus) was quite unprecedented in the region. First time, they had enjoyed religious freedom and held public celebrations like *Holi*. For more details, see James Royal Roseberry (1987) *Imperial Rule in Punjab: The Conquest and Administration of Multan, 1818-1881*, New Delhi: Manohar, 75-78. Similarly, during his travel of the region in the early 1830s, Charles Masson observes that "the Hindus, always the principal inhabitants, felt themselves in the liberty under the Sikh sway to display their wealth, whereas under Mohammedan masters they were studious to conceal it." Charles Masson (1842) *Narratives of various journeys in Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab, including residence in those countries from 1826-1838*, London: Richard Bentley.

neighboring Iran, Afghanistan and Russia. Majority of them were identified Multani and belonged to the region of South-west Punjab.

Before we discuss the relationship of the Eighth Gaddi with Hindu mercantile castes as well as the extent of overland trade, which was mainly conducted from this region, it is necessary to describe Hindu communities living in upper Sindh and South-west Punjab. The historical accounts indicate that, before partition, three Hindu castes dominated the region, namely Khatris, Aroras, and Brahmins[40]. Majority of Hindus were however comprised of Aroras who claim their origin from the ancient town of Aror town in the upper Sindh. They consider themselves as a part of Khatri caste and relate their mytho-geneological descent to Kshatriya Varna. Indeed, at mythological level, they are intimately related to each other. They legend of Parashurama and his drive to completely decimate Kshatriya has mytho-foundational status in this regard. According to the legend, Parashurama was a Brahmin and the sixth incarnation of axe-wielding Vishnu who fought terminal battles withKshatriya to avenge their excesses and wrongs. He was so furious and merciless in his revenge that he had not even spared infants to-be- born in the wombs of Kshatriya women. A version of the classical myth,which is very popular among Aroras, tells us that Kshatriya forefathers of Aroras started to call themselves '*Aur*-other', in order to camouflage and avoid their massacre. Later on, they fled to the upper Sindh region and established there a town known as Arorkot or simply

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[40] This account is mainly based on Girja Kumar's description of pre-partition Hindu castes living in the upper Sindh and Southwest Punjab. He uses external historical resources as well as personal knowledge and information he commands due to the fact of being a member of Hindu migrant community from Dera Ghazi Khan living in New Delhi. For more information, see Girja Kumar (2013) *The Indus People*, 224-240. There is also a few other works which, however, provide scant information about Hindu caste organization of the region in pre-partition era.

Aror.[41]Similarly, the legend of Khatri is by and large related to *Parashurama* myth which purports that some surviving women of Kshatriya were given refuge by Sarasvat Brahmins who later on married to them and hence giving rise to present-day Khatri caste. Another version of legend claims that the pseudonym of Khatri was adopted by Kshatriya in the period of their hiding when they were being massacred by Parashurama'ma[42].Although Khatris claim to be a part of Rajput castein order to enhance their social status, but it is generally refuted by Rajputs themselves. A similar case is between Aroras and Khatris. While Aroras claim the common descent with Khatri which they refuse to acknowledge. However, despite all such contrary claims, both Khatris and Aroras share the commonality of having Sarasvat Brahmins as their joint ritual / official*prohit*. Indeed, the shared but varying relationship of Sarasvat

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[41] Aror was an ancient town located at the left bank of the Indus River in Sindh Province. It was the capital of Raja Dahar at the time of Arab conquest of Sindh in the eighth century. However, in the mid of the tenth century, the town was ruined due to the change in the course of the Indus River. The settlement was subsequently shifted to the right bank at present day Rohri. Rohri is also an important archaeological site of pre-historical and historical remains which is progressively destroyed due to seer neglect. For more details, see Paolo Biagi (2006) *The Archaeological Sites of the Rohri Hills (Sindh, Pakistan): The Way they are Being Destroyed* (online publication). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261196811_TheArchaeological_Sites_of_the_Rohri_Hills_Sindh_Pakistan_the_Way_they_are_Being_Destroyed

[42] In his recently published works, Jürgen Schaflechner describes different mytho-historic narratives about the origin of Khatri and Brahma Kshatriya and the way they are related to the renowned Hindu Goddess Hinglaj whose principal abode is located in Lasbela District of Baluchistan Province. Hinglaj is considered one of the most significant Shakti Pitha of Shiva-Shakti traditions. For more details, see Jürgen Schaflechner (2018) *Hinglaj Devi: Identity, Change and Solidification at a Hindu Temple in Pakistan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 48-61.

Brahmins with these two important Hindu castes of upper Sindh and South-west Punjab is very intricate and complex which, in turn, make them symbiotically dependent upon each other. We cannot certainly settle these mutually related but varying mytho-historical claims originating from the history of Vedic and post-Vedic period[43].

Whether Khatris and Aroras are related to each other or not but they do share excellent entrepreneurial skills. Both are renowned for their business acumen since centuries. This is evident by the recent works on economic history, regional trade and formation of historical Indian diaspora throughout the world. The case more pertinent to this work is the role of Aroras and Khatris in the economy of the South-west Punjab. The available historical documents indicate the predominant position of Multani traders and money-lenders (the majority of whom belonged to Arora and Khatri caste) in the affairs of early era of Delhi Sultanate[44]. For example, Zia-al-Din Barani, a Muslim Indian historian of the fourteenth century, states that Multani merchants and money lenders occupied the most significant position in the commerce and trade and given much importance by Delhi Sultanate. He mentions a *farman* of Sultan Ala' al-Din Khalji which made it mandatory for Multani merchants to sell their textile products at the fixed rate. Moreover, his treasury paid two million tanga (then the currency of Delhi

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[43] We also witness similar kind of obscurity and overlapping in the case of the Lohana caste identity of Sindhi Hindus. For example, Thakur writes that Lohanas, Khatris and Aroras share many significant features and they all hire Sarasvat Brahmins for ritual performances.

[44] Although we do find many references to Muslim traders and merchants from Multan but the evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of them were constituted by Hindu Arora and Khatri castes. Nomadic Afghan groups generally called Paiwanda was another important category of traders and merchants who were extensively involved in caravan trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Sultanate) to Multani merchants in order to stabilize and promote their textile commerce and trade[45].

We have much more documentary information about the prosperity and success of Multani and Shikarpuri traders during sixteenth and nineteenth century. They played the instrumental role of monetizing rural economy as well as sponsoring regional overland trade to Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia. In fact, the significance of trade and commerce started to increase in the sixteenth century due to relatively improved governance, stability and peaceful environment under the Mughal Empire. The trend of growth in economy and trade was further enhanced in the late Mughal period when regional princely states emerged and established their independent rule in the eighteenth century. In the Indus Valley, the establishment of Bahawalpur, Kalat, Kalhora and Multan state brought rulers and merchants / money-lenders closer to each other and their mutual reliance was immensely increased[46].

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[45] Scott Levi (2007) "Multanis and Shikarpuris: Indian Diasporas in Historical Perspective", in Gijsbert Oonk (ed.) *Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 36.

[46] Muzaffar Alam challenges the established view of conventional historiography about the decline and decay of the late Mughal period in the eighteenth century and suggests how new political orders mainly revolving around the dynamics of regional polity had successfully emerged and established themselves. By using the case material of Punjab and Oudh, he demonstrates that regional polities and states were more efficient to mobilize productive agricultural resources and trade networks for the maximization of state revenue in the struggle of survival. We do also witness the surge of similar academic works in recent period. For more details on diverse debates and case studies on the history of the eighteenth century India, see Muzaffar Alam (1992) *Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-48*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press,; Seema Alavi (2002) *The Eighteenth Century in*

Hindu traders and moneylenders had not only lent necessary credit to local land owners and cultivators to improve agricultural produce but also provided loans to regional rulers of Multan, Bahawalpur and Sindh to undertake extensive network of inundation canals in order to increase irrigated lands[47]. Similarly, the role of Hindu merchants, moneylenders and bankers in upper Sindh and South-west Punjab was no less important in burgeoning regional overland trade in the above mentioned period. The centrality of Multan (mainly Hindu merchants and bankers) is evident by the fact that almost all Indian traders operating in Turan, Khurasan and Russia were identified as Multanis[48].

India, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Rajat Datta (2000) *Society, Economy and the Market: Commercialization in Rural Bengal, c. 1760–1800,* New Delhi: Manohar; Prasannan Parthasarathi (2001) *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720–1800, London:* Cambridge University Press.

[47] One of the significant economic achievements of regional states of Bahawalpur, Sindh and Multan was the construction of an intricate but extensive network of flood (inundation) canals in the eighteenth century. The geography and topography of these regions was much convenient to divert river flood flows to inundation canals in the monsoon season. Hundreds of thousands of acres were brought under irrigation owing to these newly constructed flood canals. Besides the ability of local rulers to mobilize seasonal labor for the construction and silt clearing of canals, the role of credit, mainly provided by Hindu traders and moneylenders, was also very crucial to undertake these regular operations. For more details, see David Gilmartin (2015) *Blood and Water: The Indus River Basin in Modern History*, California: University of California Press, 27-40; Richard B. Barne (2007) "Ripping Yearns and Rippling Dunes: State Building in Early Modern Cholistan", in Saeed Shafqat (ed), *New Perspectives Pakistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 10-25

[48] Irfan Habib (as cited by Scott Levi, 2007, p. 36) suggests that the eighteenth-century lexicon *Bahar-i-Ajam* defines Multani as a general name for a Hindu in Central Asia and Persia because the Indian who lived in those regions originated in Multan. Similarly, Stephen Frederic Dale observes that merchants from Mughal India in the seventeenth century who conducted trade in Turan, Khurasan and Russia often identified specifically Multanis, the fact which indicate the significance of Multan (and southwest

Thousands of merchants from Multan and south-west Punjab used to live in the major regional towns such as Qandhar, Asfhan, Samarqand, Bukhara and Astrakhan[49]. One of the comparative advantages of Multani and other merchants from south-west Punjab was their proximity and familiarity to the mountain passes and routes then used for caravan trade. Bolan, Sanghar and Gomal Pass were critical for the operations of overland trade[50].

It shouldn't be difficult to imagine how these wealthy Hindu merchants and tradersplayed a crucial role in the consolidation and growth of the Eighth Gaddi in seventeenth and eighteenth century. The building of temples in Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Bahawalpur, Leiha, Karor, Kot Addu, Jampur, Essa Khail, Kalabagh, Pilplan and many other important towns of South-west Punjab couldn't be undertaken without the support of Hindu merchants and traders who controlled economy and

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Punjab region) as an important commercial center. For more details, see Stephen Fredric Dale (1994) *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*, London: Cambridge University Press, 55

[49] While quoting the German physician EngelbertKaempfer, who visited Asfhan in 1684-85, Stephen Dale writes that 10,000 Multanis were residing in the city. The scattered information about Multanis living in other important commercial centers of Central Asia, Persia and Russia is also available which indicate towards the burgeoning trade and active role of Hindu merchants in it from Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan and Shikarpur. For details, see Stephen Fredric Dale (1994) *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*, 57-58

[50] Gomal Pass is located on the northwest side of Dera Ismail Khan. In the medieval period, it was not only used to arrive Ghazni but traveling to Qandhar and Kabul as well. Sanghar Pass was considered the shortest route from Multan to Qandhar. It was located between Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan. It was blended to Sakhi Sarwar Pass in the southwest of Dera Ghazi Khan. Bolan was not only linked to Sanghar but it was also the main pass linking Shikarpur (north Sindh) to Qandhar.

commerce of the region. The rising Hindu merchant and business class should had been keen to enhance their social prestige through generous donations to the Eighth Gaddi.

There were many reasons behind the preference of Hindu merchants and moneylenders to associate themselves with the Eighth Gaddi. First, the version of religiosity promoted by Pushtimarg and Eighth Gaddi was very convenient to them. As has already been mentioned that Vallabha Acharya and *Gosvamis* of Pushtimarg and Eighth Gaddi allowed the pursuits of worldly affairs along with the condition of complete surrender to Krishna through dhan, man, tan (wealth, mind and body). This worldview of and attitude towards worldly pursuits and their display was briefly summarized by colonial ethnographer H. H. Wilson in his article published in the Asiatic Researches. He says that "Vallabha introduced ... that it was the duty of the teachers and his disciples to worship their deity, not in nudity and hunger, but in costly apparel and choice food, not in solitude and mortification, but in the pleasures of society, and the enjoyment of the world."[51]

Pushtimarg and the Eighth Gaddi had not considered renunciation as the most appropriate model of religiosity and *moksha* (liberation). Rather, the devotees were required to exhibit their devotion towards Gopinathji and other *svarupas* through the proper cultivation of *seva bhava* which, in turn, was meant to obtain the joy (rasa) of giving. This practice of giving, popularized and institutionalized by the *Gosvamis* of

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[51] Although the above quote reflects the general lavishness of the *seva* of *svarupa* in Pushtimarg tradition, but we should also be cautious to the fact that such comments of colonial administrators were also be used to portray it as an Indian parallel of Epicurean philosophy of the ancient Greece. It was especially criticized by them from the dominant puritan Evangelicalism which was then much in vogue among the colonial administrators.

Pushtimarg, was also synchronized to the desire of Hindu merchants and bankers to heighten their social status. In her recent historical and ethnographic work, Shital Sharma shows how the practices of *seva* and donation to the *Gosvamis* of Pushtimarg and *havelis* functioned as a symbolic capital among Gujarati *baniya* which was/ is meant to signify social prestige and class[52].

Secondly, the bhakti tradition of Pushtimarg prompted household (*gharast*) as an important religious site. The architecture of *haveli* and simulation of the scenes of infant Krishna living in his home of Vrindravan portrayed the centrality of household and, by implication, worldly affairs. The image of Gopinathji and other *svarupas* used to be installed in the household of Pushtimarg followers which led to the incorporation of women into *Sampradaya* and its ritual culture.

Not surprisingly, Shri Lalji and the Eighth Gaddi was one of the leading *Sampradaya* when the region was incorporated into the British colonial administration in the mid nineteenth century. H. A. Rose notes this influence of Krishnite Vaishnavism and bhakti gurus of Shri Gunjamali, Shri Shyamji and Shri Lalji in the following:

> *"The influence of these men in favour of the Hindu religion has been enormous and they have in all probability reclaimed the whole of the trading communities of the south-west from a virtual conversion to Sikhism and Mohomedanism. To be a Hindu by religion in those parts almost synonymous with a follower of these Gosains. The Khatris and Aroras of the south-west are divided into Sikhs and Sewaks-the followers of Nanak and the disciples of the Gosains; and it is due to the exertions of Shamji and Lalji that the later are as numerous as they are."*[53]

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[52] Shital Sharma (2018) "Consuming Krishna: Women, Class and Ritual Economies in Pushtimarg Vaishnavism", in Brian K. Pennington & Amy L. Allocco, *Ritual Innovation: Strategic Interventions in South Asian Religion*, New York: State University of New York, 140-158-164

[53] H. A. Rose (1911) *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes*, .389

However, this large following had to encounter the experience of dislocation and migration when India was partitioned into two independent states in 1947. The subsequent questions emerging from this experience of dislocation and migration are thus mainly concerned with the challenge of the fragmentation of the Eighth Gaddi and its partial survival in the mainland of origin and following. The next chapter is meant to deal with these questions' concomitant with the theoretical debates in history and anthropology on change and maintenance of religious-cultural traditions.

Chapter 3

Thala Kaiwal Ram:

Fragmentary Survival and Revival of the Eighth Gaddi Tradition

Thala Kaiwal Ram is just a small remnant of the well-established Hindu tradition of the past. Its survival and, later on, partial revival, is exceptional and a deviation from the common trend of a disintegrating tradition. Why and how did it survived and what were and are specific reasons behind it? These questions need through discussion. However, it would be better to first give the general description of the situation immediately after the partition.

The migration of Savmais and their Hindu devotees led to the abrupt disintegration of the tradition of the Eighth Gaadi. There was no one to take care of the sacred places, temples and ritual cultures associated with the tradition. Most of the temples and sacred places were occupied by either the Department of Evacuee Properties or new migrants from India. Even those temples and other sacred Hindu places, which are not yet demolished and exist in dilapidated conditions, have no elaborate presence in public memory. They are just a vague reference to the Hindu past of the region.

On the other hand, Hindus associated with the Eighth Gaddi and now settled in different parts of northwest India are also not able to continue it in effective terms. Although they tried to build the temples of their traditions in new places, they are faced with the consequences of assimilation into more powerful Krishnaite bhakti traditions of those region. Moreover, their social organization has been greatly weakened and they are not able to mobilize resources to maintain the tradition.

Thala Kaiwal Ram is perhaps the only place which has survived and was, later, partly retrieved and revived by the custodians of the tradition. What are the specific reasons behind its survival and revival? How has it been revived and what are its present challenges? Can we term it as a kind of the continuity of the Eighth Gaddi tradition or does it stand on its own? There are many questions which need to be answered to properly understand the context of the survival and revival of Thala Kaiwal Ram in Bilote town which is located in the northwestern most corner of the Indus Valley region, bordering to Pakhtun tribal areas adversely affected by militant radical Islam and counter-insurgency operations,

However, before we go into the details of Thala Kaiwal Ram, there are several hermeneutical issues that I have so far avoided which need to be discussed in the light of theoretical debates on religious traditions and challenges of their continuity and change.

The strategy behind writing the first two preliminary chapters was implicitly led by a couple of preferences. First, it was aimed at keeping the historical account relatively straight and lucid. Moreover, the major interest was presenting as much information as available from different traditional and non-traditional sources. Secondly, both chapters have been weaved in a way so as to reflect the different trajectories of changes in various religio-cultural traditions under the larger rubric of the Krishnaite bhakti movement. More specifically, the first case study charts out mytho-historical origin of the Krishnaite bhakti tradition and its seamless transformation into Pushtimarg and GaudiyaVishnavism in the medieval period. The said change is primarily marked by the alterations in the narrative of Krishna encapsulated into two classical Hindu texts, namely *Bhagvat Gita* and BhagvatPuran. While the second case study is built upon the historical narrative of the establishment and consolidation of the Eighth Gaddi of Pushtimarg and its later partial survival in the form of Thala Kaiwal Ram in the face of fragmentation and disintegration.

The main focus of this chapter is hermeneutical because it endeavors to interpret some observable patterns of change and continuity inreligio-cultural traditions in general and particularly Krishnaite bhakti in the Indus Valley. Therefore, this section is designed to engage with theoretical debates regarding the general question of what does constitute tradition and how it is continued, changed, and survived with the specific focus on Krishnaite bhakti cult in the Indus Valley.

1. Tradition, Modernity and Change: Theoretical Contentions

The subject of both continuity and change in religio-cultural traditions has recently emerged as the central concern of religion studies, anthropology, history and folklore. Some of the primary questions involved in these studies include what constitutes the notion of tradition? What is the status of tradition in modernity and modern world? In other words, how much the original elements of tradition can be preserved in modern conditions and how much it is reconstituted under the sway of all-sweeping modernity? What has been the relationship between tradition and colonial hegemony? What is the language of change in tradition? Whether the change in tradition necessarily involves syncretic products or are there other patterns of adoption of new elements within a tradition?

The debate on tradition, change and modernity is generally divided into two extreme poles. Both tradition and modern have been generally posed as binary opposition. As a result, there is a group of academic scholars who contend that the notion of tradition constituted by certain invariable core carried over time and space is not tenable and hence of little use in understanding contemporary debates and discourses. Moreover, they argue that past and its traditions have been substantially reconstituted by the experience of modernity. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger are considered pioneering scholastic figures in fashioning this approach. Their book entitled "The Invention of Tradition" argues that "traditions which appear or claim to be old are quite often recent in origin or sometimes invented[1]". It was rather the imperative of driving the legitimacy from an imagined authentic past and deployment of an image of eternal / invariable existence in the middle of the influx of change and innovation in the conditions of modernity which did lead to the invention of such traditions.

This notion of "invented tradition" was however contested by numerous scholars across disciplinary boundaries[2]. Alasdair Maclntyre, the Scottish philosopher, is one of the leading opponents of the omnipotence of modernity. His critique directly hits the notion of rationality and reason as articulated within liberalism which, in turn, is the main philosophical and ethical basis of modernity. Moreover, he provides us with more subtle understanding of tradition and its imperatives.

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[1] Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1

[2] In the studies of religion, William Graham was one of the most conspicuous defenders of the notion of "tradition and traditionalism" within the confines of the discipline of Islamic history. Not only he rejected the notion of traditionalism attributed to regressive or reactionary forces working against the process of change and innovation but rather defined it as constituted by the belief in personally guaranteed connection with a model past and especially with model persons which, in turn, provided the plausible basis for the constitution of society and its reform process in the wake of change and transformation. In fact, this aspect of personally guaranteed link to a model past and persons is very crucial in establishing the authority to negotiate with change in any age. For more details, see William A. Graham (1993) "Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History,* vol. 23, no. 3. P. 522

He says that "tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come tobe expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted."[3]According to him, tradition may encounter new challenges or questions owing to changes over time but it keeps intact certain arguments revolving around the basic doctrine expressed through shared language and performances.

Maclntyre is of the view that position of liberalism that the reason embedded into positivist rationality can be the sound basis for the evaluation of any tradition is not maintainable simply because traditions are incommensurable in relation to each other[4]. Indeed, the discursive strategy of liberalism is hegemonic in the sense that it enables a process of translating intellectual / cultural positions belonging to other traditions through decontextualizing and deconstructing them. In this strategy, those elements

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[3] Alasdair MacIntyre (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 12

[4]Maclntyre is of the view that the intellectual basis of modernity is Enlightenment / Liberalism. Without understanding this relationship, it is not possible to form any position on the debate on tradition and modernity. According to him, rationality shouldn't be meant as taking neutral and context-independent reasoning as it claimed by liberalism. Rather, there are different forms of rationality or reasoning in different traditions. The most distinctive aspect of any tradition lies into its idea of what is counted as a good reason and how effectively it can argue and compete with other traditions. All kinds of adoption to change and reforms take place from that particular idea of good and bad. He elucidates this point by giving the example of the adoption of Aristotle's ideas of justice and practical reasoning in medieval Christianity by the followers of Augustine and Aquinas.

which are incompatible and odd with liberalism are rendered ineffective and inoperative.

Talal Asad is considered another crucial figure in this wide-ranging academic debate on tradition and modernity (liberalism). Drawing upon the works of both Maclntyre and Foucault, he defines tradition in terms of both discourse and power. In other words, traditions are primarily constituted by discursive formations which are co-constituted with power/ knowledge. He delineates his idea of "discursive tradition" in his seminal work on "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" published in 1986. In this paper, he dismisses not only the modernist views of Islam as a blueprint of social totality including diverse beliefs, practices and customs but he is equally critical of various post-modernist perspectives of Islam which privilege diversity over any recognizable essence[5]. According to him, Islam must be viewed as a tradition which "consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history."[6]

Hence, the main purpose and function of a tradition is founding the idea of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in prevailing social and political circumstances. In the view of Talal Asad, traditional discourses are not a kind of fossilized entities. Rather, they are linked

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[5] In the case of modernist representations of Islam, Talal Asad mainly reviews the works of the authors like Ernest Gellner (1981) *Muslim Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University; Clifford Geertz (1971) *Islam Observed,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. The authors with post-modernist tilt discussed by Talal Asad mainly include Abdul Hamid el-Zein (1977) "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6, 227 – 54; M. Gilsenan (1982) *Recognizing Islam*, London: Croom Helm; D. F. Eickelman (1976) *Moroccan Islam,* Austin, University of Texas Press .

[6] Talal Asad (1986) *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Occasional Papers, Washington: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 14.

to a past (when the authentic practice was established) to a future (ensuring the correct performance of practice and its consequences in future) through a present (the way it is related to other practices and prevailing socio-political conditions).

Talal Asad views the co-constitution of orthodoxy and power as the most defining aspect of tradition, particularly from the perspective of Islam. In his own words, "orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship — a relationship of power."[7] He specifically emphasizes upon the existence of a certain translocal criteria of orthodoxy in Islam which is not only determined by prevailing conditions but acts as determining factor for the agency of its followers as well[8].

As the case material of both Maclntyre and Asad heavily draw upon the studies of Semitic religious tradition (Christianity and Islam), one can raise the question how much their theoretical insightscan be useful in understanding and interpreting diverse religious traditions of South Asia. For the purpose of making evaluation of their broader theoretical conclusion in the light of South Asia, we need to go into more specific details related to myriad Hindu and Islamic traditions in South Asia.

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1.1. Invented or Authentic Traditions: The Case of Hinduism

The debate on tradition, change and modernity is not less contentious in the context of South Asia. This is especially the case with Hinduism. In this regard, the scholarship is again divided in the similar banal fashion. On the one hand, there is constructionist group of scholars who purport the claim that Hinduism was in fact invented and imagined by the British colonial rulers in the nineteenth century. Some prominent scholars of this group include Vasuda Dalmia, Harjot Oberoi, Christopher Fuller, and Brian K. Pennington among many other.

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[7] Ibid, 15-16

[8] For more details on Talal Asad and his interlocutors, see Talal Asad (1993) *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; Charlse Hirschkind (2001) "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: an Islamic Counter-public", *Cultural Anthropology*, volume 16, issue 1

The notion of the invented nature of Hinduism under the auspice of colonial rule and modernity was first time forcefully espoused by W.C. Smith in his pioneering works entitled "The Meaning and End of Religion", published in 1962. He writes:

"*Hinduism refers not to an entity. It is the name that the West has given to a prodigiously variegated series of facts. It is a notion in men's mind….and a notion that cannot be but be inadequate. To use this term at all is inescapably a gross simplification.*"[9]

The views of Harjot Oberoi are rather more specific and concrete. In his works on the construction of Sikh identity, he asserts that the name of Hindu was never explicitly mentioned and used in most of the sacred scriptures associated to them, such as *Vedas*, *Bhagvat Gita* or *Ramayana*. Rather, it was the name employed by Persian rulers of northwest region under Achaemenid Empire in the late ancient period. They did it in connection with the original word of Sindhu with ethno-geographical features. The term was though later on given religious connotation by Muslim rulers, but it was concretized and standardized under the colonial British rule in the nineteenth century. The identities of diverse and discrete historical communities like Shivaites and

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[9] W.C. Smith (1962) *Meaning and End of Religion*, New York: Macmillan, 144-145

Vishnavites were brought under the single rubric of Hinduism through reductionist classificatory regimes[10].

In his recent book, Brian K. Pennington offers us colonial genealogy of the term 'Hindu' in more detailed manners. According to him, the term was founded, instituted, and popularized mainly by British Protestant Evangelical and Utilitarian groupsin India during the short period spanning between 1789 and 1832. It was this period when the modern Hinduism was conceived as a unified world religion comparable to other major faiths such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam[11].

Indeed, the list of scholars who pursue this constructionist argument in their studies on the modern history and identity of Hinduism is very long. However, on the other hand, there is no dearth of scholars who disagree with this deconstructive interpretation. Some prominent figures in this group include David N. Lorenzen, Wendy Doniger, Gabriella EichingerFerroluzi, and Peter van der Veer. Although they don't dismiss the effects of colonial/ modern governmentality in the partial reconstruction of diverse Hindu traditions but, at the same time, they insist upon the connection of such changes and reforms with the past models and practices which are fairly traceable.

The fact is that the contentious debate on Hinduism, that whether it is a colonial construction, or an authentic ancient tradition adapted to extensively dispersed time and

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[10] For more details, see Harjot Oberoi (1994) *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in Sikh Tradition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 16-18

[11] Brian K. Pennington (2005) *Was Hinduism Invented: Britons, Indians and Colonial Construction of Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1-2

space, cannot be adequately resolved. Like the notion of tradition itself, the debate on it is also interminable.

Whether religious traditions are historical or recently constructed but the general trends is their identification in terms of binary opposition. A certain reification of religious identities is presumed to define a distinct religious tradition. But, on the ground, we don't have the dearth of empirical data which point to the existence of numerous shared religious traditions. They defy the rigid standards of what Talal Asad terms orthodoxy and orthoproxy. Rather, they exhibit the certain quality of crossing and contesting boundaries in the process of the construction of religious identities.

It is perhaps pertinent here to discuss popular shared religious traditions in the context of this hermeneutical debate.

1.2. Shared Popular Religious Traditions of the Indus Valley: Syncretistic, Equivalent, Liminal or Something Else?

The question of the diffusion of Islamic traditions in culturally and linguistically diverse regions of India and elsewhere has been conventionally posed in the discipline of history and anthropology as being an issue of "syncretism"[12]. To paraphrase it, the general problem encountered by the scholars of different disciplines, especially history, anthropology, religion, and cultural studies, is how they should interpret the diffusion and expansions of diverse Islamic traditions in South Asia? To what extent are these traditions syncretistic? If the term is not adequate and has a derogatory nature to it, what other language tools are the available to us to describe and interpret the mutual borrowing, sharing and accommodations of various religious traditions in South Asia? Was the success of Islam in different regions such as Bengal, Indus Valley, etc. can be attributed to syncretistic strategies or were there some other kinds of processes involved in it? These and similar other questions have been intensively explored, debated and contested in the context of the diffusion and growth of Islamic traditions in South Asia.

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[12] The term syncretism and its meanings and uses continued to change and vary over long period. Etymologically speaking, the word derives from Greek prefix 'sync, 'with' and krasis, 'mixture'. It denotes combining or mixing two different things together. Its textual use goes back to Plutarch (A.D. 45-125) who used it with reference to the combination or mixing of Cretans with each other against their opponents. Its scholarly use appeared in the Renaissance period in the backdrop of the celebratory claims for the continuity of especially certain ritualistic and religious traits of pagan cultures in the wake of the conversion to Christianity. This positive attitude towards syncretistic nature of Catholicism

Unsurprisingly, this debate again appears interminable. Although we witness the shifting preference, but the adequate resolution is yet awaited. Moreover, there is also the addition of many other terms which are contestant to the term syncretism. They include creolization, hybridization, synthetization, etc. Whatever the term or heuristic categories we use, the challenge of interpretations of the popular folk religious

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was however again looked down by Protestant theologians in the seventeenth century. The term of syncretism had again acquired currency in the field of comparative religion and history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Much of the focus did however remain upon Roman and Hellenistic era and its imperialist exploits in other regions and cultures. Later on, the term was also positively employed in burgeoning anthological literature on the study of culture, religion and rituals. However, very recently, the concept has been again challenged because of its value loaded connotations, especially the sense of impurity and un-originality implied in it. For more details on the discursive uses of the term, see Irina A. Levinskaya (1993) “Syncretism—The Term and Phenomenon”, *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 44. No. Pp. 117-128 ; Charles Stewart & Rosalind Shaw (1994) *Syncretism / Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, London: Routledge, 1-24, traditions and their propensity to defy strict religious boundaries will continue to haunt future researchers.

This challenge is indeed daunting in the face of numerous cases of shared religious identities and composite traditions at the level of popular folk culture in the Indus Valley. One such curious example is the shrine of Sakhi Sarwar located in the trans-Indus areas of Dera Ghazi Khan. The historical and oral literature confirm that the saint was equally revered by Hindus, Muslim and Sikh devotees in the pre-partition period. There were many shrines of Sakhi Sarwar in Lahore, Gujranwala, Firozpur, Amratsar and many other parts. Although he is known as a Muslim saint but, as per popular narratives, his messenger was Bhairun who is a dreadful avatar of Shiva[13]. Before partition, there was a special room allocated for Bhairun where Shiva's ling was also placed[14].

Sakhi Sarwar is a classic case of syncretistic folk religious traditions of the Indus Valley. He is a Sayyed whose descent is related to Imam Zain-ul-Abdin. Undoubtedly, he is the most revered figure for the local Shia population. He is also considered to be associated with all major Sufi silsila of the Indus Valley including Suhrawardiyya, Qadriyyia and Chishtiyya. At the same time, his shrine was host to a number of Hindu icons including Shiva's ling and drawings of Shri Krishna[15]. He was also the popular

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[13] Bhairun is the vernacular name for Bhairva who is the most popular avatar of Shiva and considered the custodian of the most Hindu sacred complex of Varanasi.

[14] For more details, see R.C. Temple (1881) "A Song about Sakhi Sarwar", *Calcutta Review*, vol. 73, no. 146, 255

[15] According to certain historical records, the present shrine structure was built by one Issa of Delhi during the reign of Aurangzeb. However, it was improved and further built in the mid of nineteenth

pir of Sikh community especially because of a miracle of resurrecting the dead son of Dani Jati attributed to him[16].

However, Sakhi Sarwar is not an isolated and alone case. We find many such examples of shared shrines and sacred personages in the Indus Valley and other parts of South Asia. For example, Dominique-Sila Khan in her recent research work analyzes the complex legacy of the medieval period's saint known both as a Sufi (Hajji Ratan) and Nath Yogi (Ratannath). Sacred placed identified by his name are scattered throughout South Asia. As per Nath Yogi tradition, he was a disciple of legendary Gorakhnath-the founder of Nath Yogi and Kan Phata tradition. There is Caughera NathYogı monastery in Nepal which is identified by his name and he is believed to be its builder. There are a number of legends and narratives which point that his later part of life was spent in

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century by Dewan Lakhpat and Jaspat Roy-two renowned Hindu nobles of Lahore. A local Muslim scholar Muhammad Ali Ahmdani alleges that most Hindu iconography was incorporated in the reconstruction process. He even goes further and says that Muslims have nothing to do with the sacred place as it was an ancient Hindu sacred pilgrimage center. Its original name was Saskhi Sarovar which is believed to be the abode of Shiva. However, later on, the name was changed to give the place a Muslim identity. Interestingly, the book was banned by the government due to its contentious nature. For more details, see Muhmmad Ali Ahmadani (1983) *Tarikh-e-Sakhi Sarwar*, Naya Maktaba, Dera Ghazi Khan, 11-20

[16] Harjot Oberoi gives us the details of his popularity in the nineteenth century among Sikh devotees and subsequent campaign by Sikh Singh Sabha against their annual pilgrimage to his shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan. One of the major reasons for this opposition was predominantly Muslim identity of Sakhi Sarwar and corruption of Sikh beliefs and practices because of it. According to him, the shrine of Sakhi Sarwar was largely associated with popular notions and beliefs about illness, spirit possession and folk culture of healings. For more details, see Harjot Singh Oberoi (1987) "The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarwar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in Punjab", *Studies in History*, vol. 3, no. 29, 29-55

northwest India under Muslim political rule. Not only they tell his popularity among local Muslims because of the miracles he did perform in Jalalabad, Kabul and Peshawar but he is given credit to give his blessing to Mahmud Ghorid against Prithvi Raj Chuahan in the Battle of Bhatinda in Punjab-the town where the darga¯h of Hajji Ratan Baba is located as well. Muslim narratives and legends especially popular in Bhatinda region locate him in different identities, places and period. As per Muslim tradition, Baba Rattan was supposed to be the companion of the Prophet Muhammad as well as the disciple of Gorakhnath and guru of epic hero Gogga Chuahan. He was believed to be settled in Nepal, Makkah, Bhatinda and Peshawar, during the seveneth, the eleventh and the thirteenth century. His multiple identities are further evidenced by his temple in Peshawar[17].

The tradition of Imam Shahi and Satpanthi in Indian Gujarat is another example of the accommodation and incorporation of multiple religious identities and practices especially from Isma'ili and Vishnavite devotional traditions[18]. The popular folk cult

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[17] The syncretistic character of Ratan Baba has been thoroughly discussed by V. Bouillier, D.-S. Khan in their paper. Apart from presenting the summary of colonial accounts about him, they do also give the details of his presence in multiple locations in South Asia. In the conclusion, again, they emphasize that he is one of the glaring cases of blurred religious identities, less rigidly defined borders and strong local roots and influences. For more details, see Ve´ronique Bouillier & Dominique-Sila Khan (2009) "Hajji Ratan or Baba Ratan's Multiple Identities", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 37. 559-595

[18] There is a lot of academic literature available on the history and transformations of this composite / syncretistic religious tradition since its beginning in the medieval period. The tradition came under immense pressure to refashion and, to some extent, reinvent itself under the British colonial rule when it was legally scrutinized by Bombay High Court in 1866. The final court verdict favorably supported the claims of the Agha Khan against local leaders of Khoja community over the matter of religious authority and material control. He was then newly settled from Afghanistan/ Iran to the British India.

of Jhulay Lal and contested religious identities of Hindu Sindhis represent the classical case of the phenomena of borrowing, accommodating, blending, and contesting different religious identities and practices[19].

Indeed, there is dearth of cases and examples of such inter-religious and inter-communal exchanges and borrowings in religious tradition. The problem is however hermeneutical in the sense what kinds of theoretical frames are adequate to properly interpret the wider prevalence of such phenomena at the level of popular folk culture? The theory of syncretism is certainly the traditional contender in this field. It is however challenged on the basis of its failure to go beyond the simple recognition of the occurrence of these phenomena. Notwithstanding the effort of C. Stewart and other scholars to rescue the notion, especially by the addition of syncretism and anti-

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Presently, it is again facing immense pressure from the emergent onslaught of Hindutva in India. For more details, see Teena Purohit (2012) *The Agha Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Zawahir Moir & Dominique-Sila Khan (2010) "New Light on the Satpanthi Imamshahis of Pirana", *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol.XXXIII, no.2. 210-234.

[19] The construction of blurred boundaries of religious traditions among Hindu Sindhis is vastly reported fact. Steven W. Ramey tells us Hindus Sindhi Diaspora in India, after the partition, blended many new elements in their already blurred religious traditions. He especially gives the example of Hari Om Mandir where the emphasis on Hindi music, the *Bhagvat Gita* and Hunuman have been incorporated in the temple ritual practices while maintaining the conventional centrality upon Jhulay Lal, the Guru Granth Sahib and Ardas. For more details, see Steven W. Ramey (2008) *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested Practices and Identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond*, New York: Palgrave, 1-11; Steven Ramey (2013) "Liminal Hindus: Disputed Boundaries and their Impacts on Sindhi Hindus", in Eliza F. Kent and Tazim R. Kassam, *Lines in Water: Religious Boundaries in South Asia*, New York: New York Syracuse University Press, 157-183

syncretism dynamics, the mounting trend is find other hermeneutical tools for appropriate interpretation.

The latest works of Tony K. Stewart are not only a good analysis of the pitfalls and flaws of syncretistic perspectives but also provide an alternative framework / model of translation and create equivalence of meanings for the interaction / encounter of different religious traditions. His analysis of the emergence of Satya Pir as the most popular religious figures for both Hindu and Muslim communities of medieval Bengal throws light on how the practical strategies of translation and creation of equivalence of meaning were employed to create the most revered and shared saintly personage[20].

The third contender in these hermeneutical options is the theory of liminality. The concept of lime as border or threshold is particularly relevant to determine the separating and overlapping areas of different religious traditions which do generally maintain their separate and distinct identities. Liminality in the sense of border, edge or threshold performs the function of both connecting and separating different religious traditions. It is a peculiar state or status which does not clarify but also preserves certain amount of ambiguity to give border of anything its special character. It operates as an anti-structure force in the midst of structural schema.

The case of the survival and the recent revival of Thala Kaiwal Ram provide some good material to further look at the phenomena of religious traditions with less rigidly marked boundaries in South.

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[20] For more details, see Tony K. Stewart (2001) “In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory”, *History of Religion*, vol. 40, no. 3, 260-287

2. Liminality in Practice: Survival and Revival of Thala Kaiwal Ram

Thala Kaiwal Ram is perhaps the only Hindu sacred place which has not only survived after the partition but also revived in many ways. More importantly, it has occurred in the frontier region which is presently suffering the problem of militant radical Islam and counter-insurgency operations of security forces in the region.

Local oral accounts inform us that Thala Kaiwal Ram was attacked and destroyed at the time of partition. The sacred banyan tree, which was planted by Kaiwaram at the time when he opted the place his permanent abode, was burnt down and much of the land was occupied by local inhabitants[21]. However, very soon, an initiative for the restoration of the place was started. A new pipal tree was planted by one of the Mukhdoms of Bilote. Moreover, a Muslim devotee of Kaiwal Ram started to take care of the place[22]. Notwithstanding the less care and maintenance, local Muslim devotees and pilgrims continue to visit the place especially in the month of *Chaitra*.

Meanwhile, the migrant Hindus devotees remained out of contact with Thala Kaiwal Ram. Besides other difficulties, the visa policy for the pilgrimage of sacred places was

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[21] Local accounts inform that these attacks were orchestrated and undertaken by the armed tribesmen from Laki Marwar area. This Pashtu speaking tribe lives across the *Khaisore* range in the southwest region. Apart from religious and communal hatred, the main motivation of tribesmen behind attacks was the acquisition of wealth. The horrible story of the rape and murder of a Hindu girl at nearby *Kafir Kot* is repeatedly narrated in local accounts.

[22] Lighting the lamp, arranging music and performance of healing rituals were the main functions revived by him. His son Muhmmad Ramzan is now presently the practical custodian of Thala Kaiwal Ram. He has constructed a house attached to Thala Kaiwal Ram and he stays there permanently with his family members.

not liberal. Hindus devotees from India were able to visit the place at a couple of occasions.[23] It was otherwise not possible for Svamis-the legal custodian of the place- and Hindu devotees and followers to maintain any regular contact with Thala Kaiwal Ram.

It was the late 1990s when Hindus petitioned the Department of Evacuee Properties to restore the control of Thala Kaiwal Ram to them. The initiative took place in the wake of the peace accord between India and Pakistan signed during the second reign of Prime Minister Nwaz Sharif (1997-1999). The petition was favorably dealt and about eight kanals of the land was restored as the sacred Hindu property in 1998.[24].

The restoration and revival of the place started slowly and at different fronts. First, it was undertaken at the level of physical building of the place. Besides the construction of walled compound, many residential rooms along with veranda were built to facilitate Hindu pilgrims to make their stay comfortable. A new separate house of local Muslim custodian- Muhmmad Ramzan- was also built for the permanent look after of the place. A link road from main highway to Thala Kaiwal Ram was constructed to make an easy access to it. The installation of water pump, electrification and provision of ceiling fans and toilets were critical facilities which made the place comfortably livable. Most of this physical/ infrastructure building were done on the basis of self-help. The generous

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[23] Ram Ailwadi (2005) *Hamara Dera Ismail Khan*, 48

[24] Given the hesitation to divulge the exact details of internal negotiations and other processes in the restoration, we have not enough information how it had happened. The brief information has been given by Jay Prakash-the leading Hindu leader of the community from Usta Muhammad in Balochistan through a personal interview. According to him, Shayam Sundar-the *Svami* of Dera Ghazi Khan temple- motivated them to pursue the process. For this purpose, he visited Pakistan many times.

donations of wealthy Hindu merchants from Sindh and Balochistan made it possible to build the place.

However, it was the revival of peculiar ritual culture which played the main role in reclaiming Thala Kaiwal Ram as the sacred Hindu placed. In this regard, the traditional festival of *vaisakhi*, which was started by Kaiwal Ram in his lifetime, was revived. For this purpose, Hindus living in PakhtunKhwah, Sindh and Balochistan province were largely mobilized to attend the festival. The most significant step was however the installation of the *murti* (effigy) of Kaiwal Ram in the early 2000s. For this purpose, a separate inner sanctum was constructed within the temple compound. At the end of vaisakhi festival, *chadarposhi* is performed. The pilgrims perform '*dandi* dance' before the ritual of *chadarposhi*. Moreover, local sweet '*shangarinisari*' is distributed among pilgrims as '*parsad*[25]'. The performance of music in the form of '*kirtan*' is regularly done during the two-days of *vaisakhi* festival. In songs and bhajans, both Kaiwal Ram and Lalji are lavishly praised and their love and blessing is sought. Communal food is prepared and distributed among Hindu pilgrims. After *chadarposhi*, the devotees seek the *drashan* of Kaiwal Ram. There is a hole at the trunk of pipal tree. The pilgrim believes that Kaiwal Ram gives his *darshan* in the form of a snake coming out of the

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[25] Parsad has highly sacred status in the ritual culture of Krishnaite bhakti. Eating of the leftover food of guru is considered the most sacred and blessed act. In Hindu bhakti culture, self, food and guru are an integral part of larger system. They are considered companions of each other. For more details, see R.S. Khare (1992) Food with Saints: An Aspect of Hindu Gastrosemantics, in R.S. Khare (ed.) *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experience of Hindus and Buddhists*, New York: State University of New York Press, 27-52

hole. The Bhgvad Gita written in Gurumukhi script is regularly recited by a Brahman priest[26].

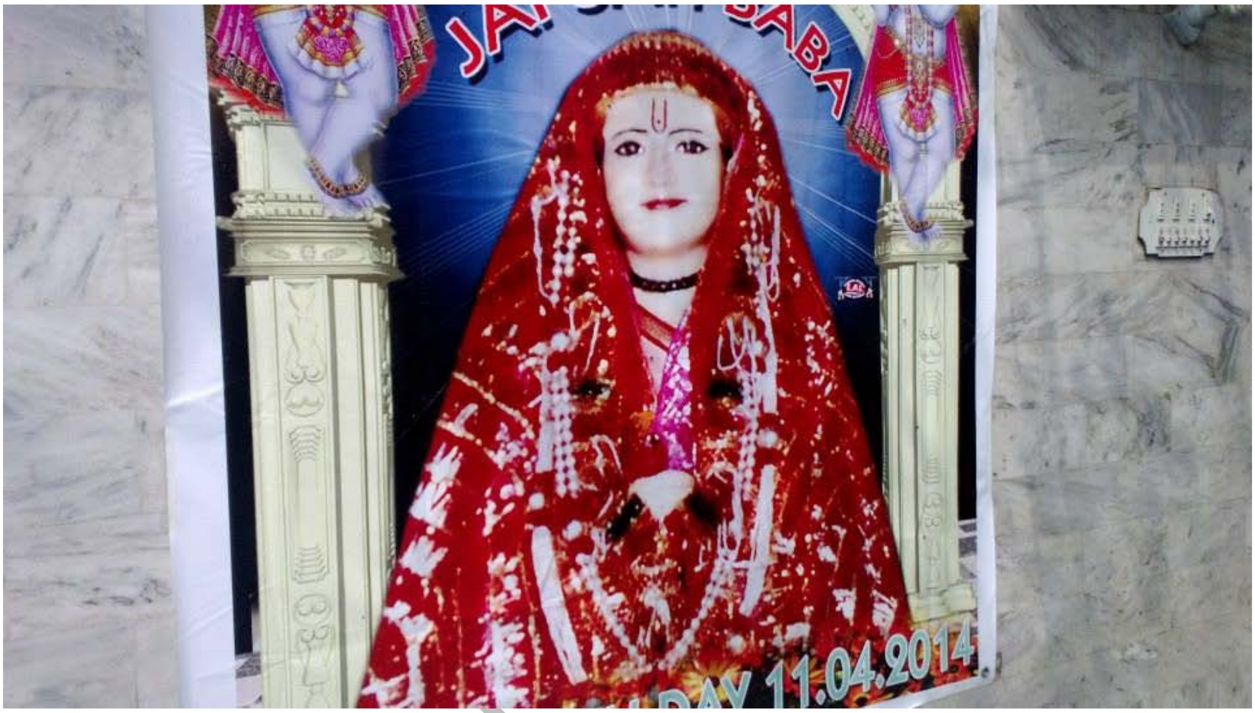

Fig. 1. A *Murti* of Kaiwal Ram

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[26] Gurumukhi script is identified with Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religious tradition. He is equally revered by Hindus in the Indus Valley as one of their great gurus. The Adi Guru Granth is generally placed in most of Hindu temples in Sindh and Balochistan.

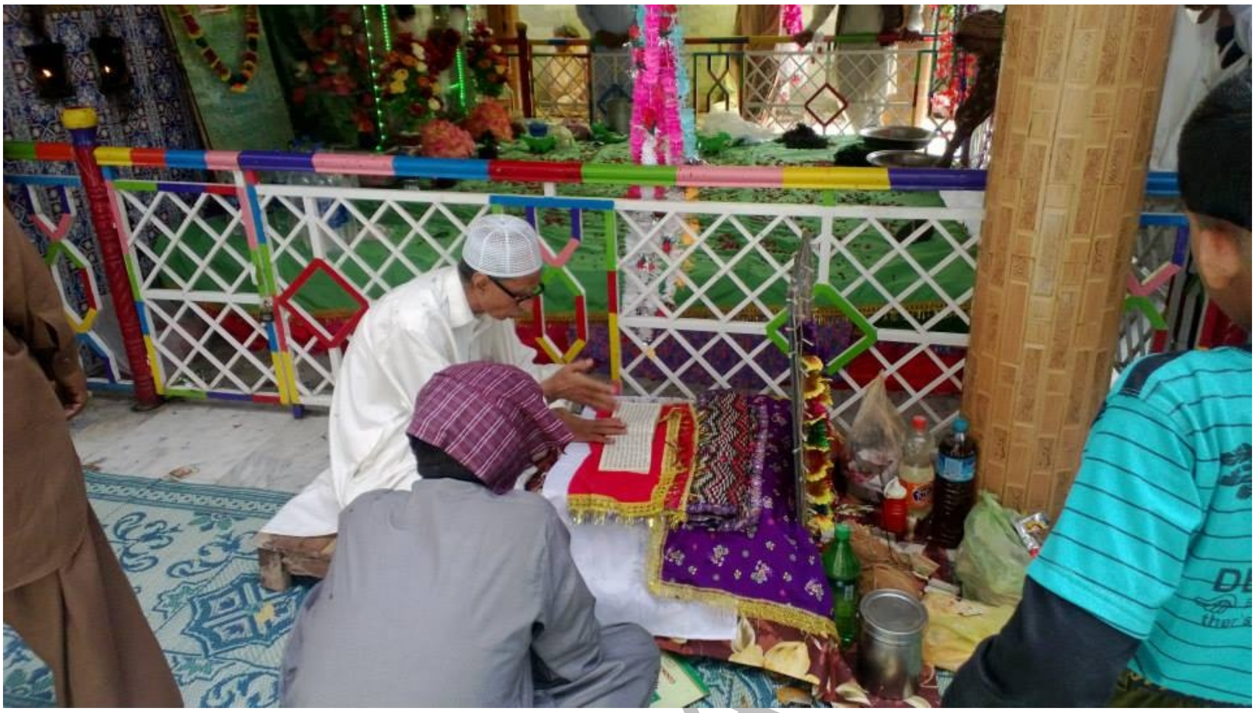

Fig. 2. A Brahman reciting *Bhagvat Gita* at Thala Kaiwal Ram

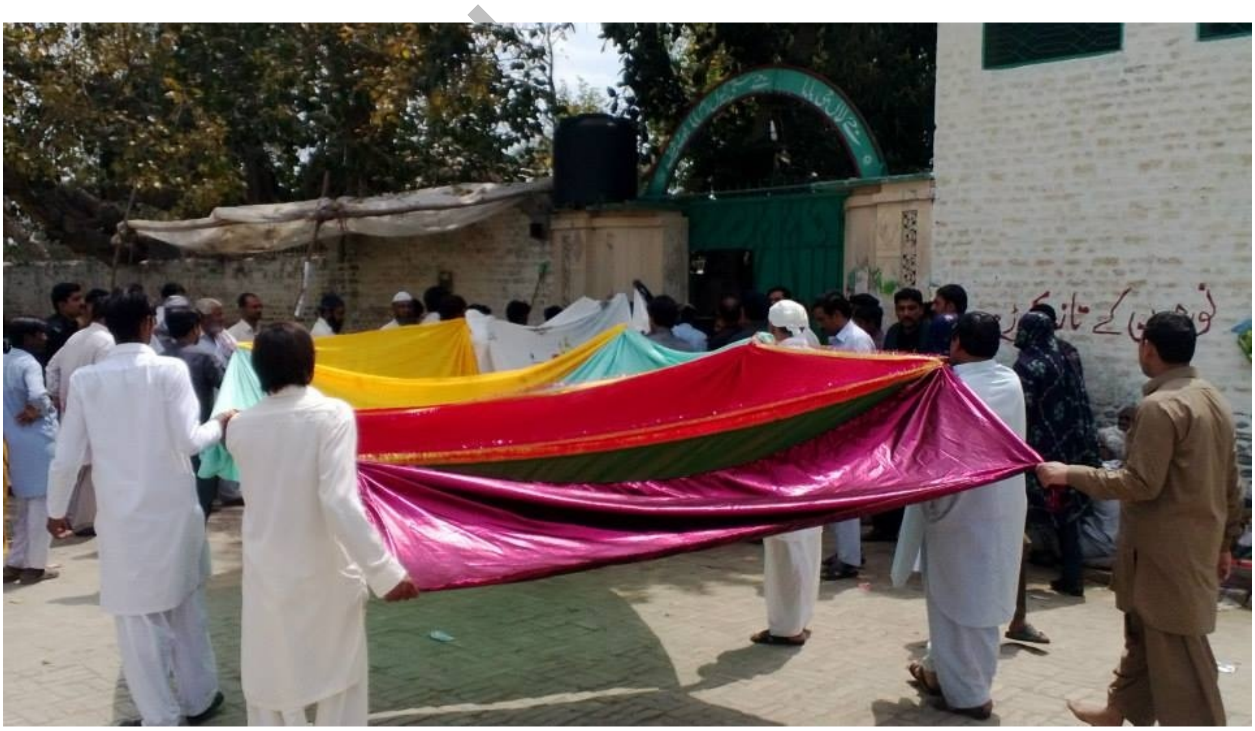

Fig.3. ChadharPoshi ritual at Thala Kaiwal Ram

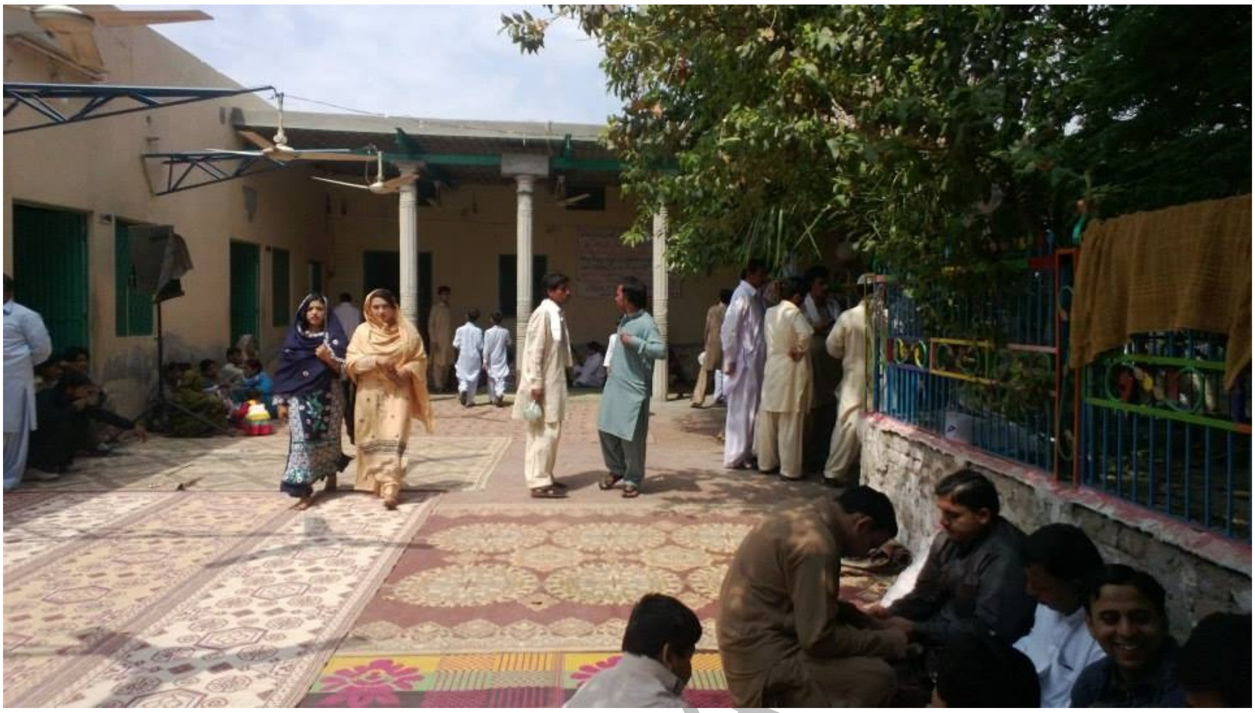

Fig.4. Hindu pilgrims getting rest in the compound of Thala Kaiwal Ram

The building of physical infrastructure and civic facilities along with proper arrangements for the performance of Jatra during the entire month of *Chaitra* helped in strengthening the relationship of Muslim devotees with the place as well. For this purpose, the presence of special singers and musicians on the permanent basis was / is arranged. Not surprisingly, the place is thronged by the majority of Muslim devotees to perform Jatra and other healing rituals. In the end of *Chaitra*, *Vaisakhi* is the next festival, which is attended by Hindu pilgrims from Khyber PakhtunKhwah, Balochistan and Sindh. The festival is celebrated for the two days and Hindus perform their different religious practices and rituals during that time. Hence, in many instances, Thala Kaiwal Ram presents us an interesting example of shared religious traditions and performances.

How should we interpret it? Is it the typical case of syncretism? Perhaps, the answer is not yes. Both Hindus and Muslim devotees and pilgrims are well aware of their religious boundaries. These boundaries are relatively more marked after the rebuilding and revival of Thala Kaiwal Ram by Hindu community and its leaders in the Indus Valley. The installation of '*murti*' of Kaiwal Ram and revival of *Vaisakhi* festival proved indeed crucial steps in reasserting the Hindu identity of the saint and place. However, this identity is subtly disputed by local Muslim devotees and pilgrims. They narrate many legends and myths which point to the contestation between Kaiwal Ram and the patron Muslim saint Shah Essa, resulting into the victory of the later along with mutual reconciliation at the end. Hindus do also narrate the same stories and legends of spiritual contestation between the two saints. The only difference is that they describe Kaiwal Ram as being the victorious one in the said contestation. The final outcome of mutual reconciliation is however similar and there is not much dispute about it[27]. Both Kaiwal Ram and Shah Essa lived in different period with significant gap but folk narratives and legends consider them contemporary for the sake of creating this frame of contestation and reconciliation at the level of popular religious tradition.

The classical theory of syncretism doesn't recognize explicit conflict and marked difference in the construction of religious boundaries. Its major emphasis is upon certain borrowing and mixing up of different elements of various traditions.

Unlike syncretism, the equivalence theory purported by C. Stewart recognizes the distinct religious boundaries and identities, but it doesn't give much acknowledgment

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[27] The narratives of contestation between Sufi pirs and Hindu saints especially Nath / Shakta yogis was very common rhetorical / theatrical strategy evolved in the early medieval era, the period of initial but extensive contact between Islam and local Hinduisms in the Indus Valley and other regions of South Asia. Interestingly, most of the details concerning the events of contestation remain similar but they are transposed to different characters, places and times. For the details of such contestation between Kaiwal Ram and Shah Essa, see

to the fact of conflict and contestation. The emphasis upon relative equivalences among different religious traditions ultimately results in lessening the significance of difference and contestation.

A state of dispute or contestation involves liminality in many ways. It creates ambiguity in the status of anything which is being contested or challenged. Secondly, it is dynamic and full of potentiality because of this ambiguous status. Thirdly, it is anti-structural and creates a middle zone for contestation and negotiation for shared space and practices.

Thala Kaiwal Ram is presently such a liminal sacred space which not only provides the opportunity for the display and contestation of distinct Hindu and Muslim identities but, also, is the space for negotiating and sharing boundaries on the everyday basis.

Chapter 4

Sacred Landscape, Juxtaposed Religious Traditions and Liminoid Pilgrimage in Bilote

“Representations of landscape have the potential to both obscure and articulate lived experience. In other words, landscape as image has both ideological and ontological implications for the way in which we think about the world.”

Christopher Tilley[1]

The moment we enter into Bilote town, it becomes evident to us what could have motivated Kaiwal Ram to make the place his permanent abode after his decision to leave his ancestral temple in Dera Ghazi Khan. Bilote place is remarkable in many respects. Its physical landscape is exceptionally varied and picturesque. It qualifies to be liminal in many respects. One set of landscape transforms into another by forming brief boundaries.

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[1] Christopher Tilley (1994) *A Phenomenology of Landscape Places, Paths and Monuments*, BERG, Oxford. P. 25

Fig.5. Panoramic View of Bilote from Western Side

The town is located in foothills. Low mountain crops are scattered all around on the western, southern and northern boundaries of the town.

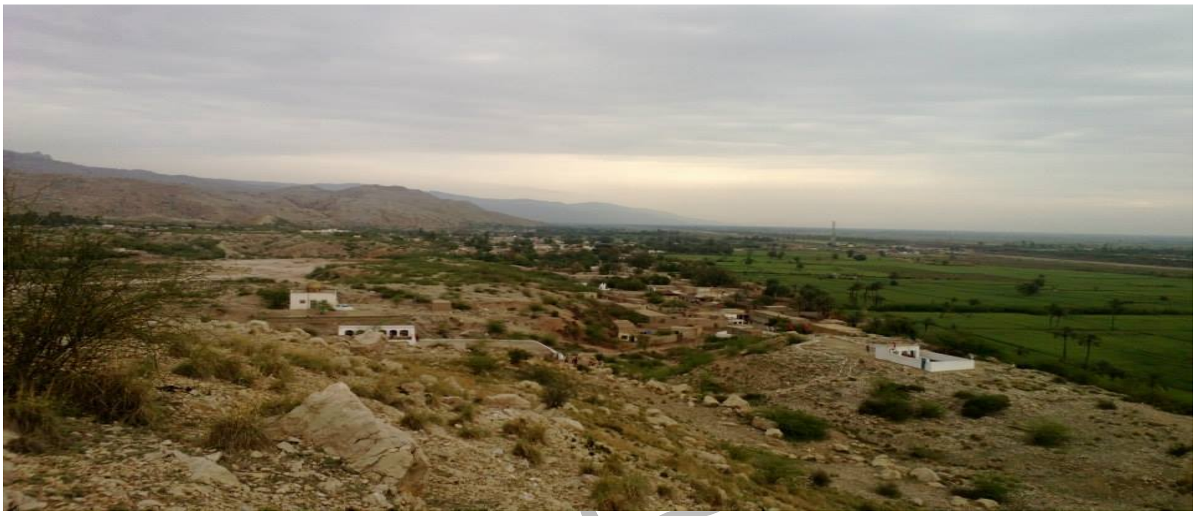

Fig.6. Panoramic view of Bilote from Southern hill side

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On the west, it borders the rugged Khaisore range which optically dominates the view. Barren but colorful, the Khiasore mountain range is the most distinctive and defining physical feature of Bilote's landscape. On the eastern border of the town, one can still find the visible marks of a moribund channel of the mighty Indus River. A few decades ago, this channel was not yet abandoned, and it was used to carry over regular flood flows especially in monsoon season. This part of the town contains the lush green agricultural farms of the area. Its soil is fertile and productive due to ancient silt deposits of the Indus River and hill-torrents of Khaisore mountain range.

In the past, before the change in river course and construction of Chashma Barrage Bridge in late 1970s, the town served as the main river crossing point in the region. Boats were always available to take people and goods across the river. The signs of a defunct *pattan* are still present on the south-east side of the town. Its significance was aided by the fact that it was located at the mouth of mountain pass linking it further to Gomal pass and other main trade routes in Suleiman mountain range.

Not surprisingly, given the strategic and trade significance of the place, a fort was constructed over the adjacent south-western hills. The fort was part of the integrated defense system of Hindu Shahi rulers in the salt range, primarily constructed against Turk-Afghan invaders[2]. The fort is an archaeologically significant site and has been declared a protected place by the provincial government. Besides other remains of the fort, there are a number of crumbling temples structures and other buildings which are considered very unique in terms of its building material and architectural design. They were mainly built in the seventh century[3]. The architecture style represents earliest form of *Nagara* style of temple building which remained very popular in northern India.

The town is also covered with the groves of date palm trees on its northern and southern border. However, the scattered palm trees can be also seen in the entire village.

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[2] The fort in local area is named Kafirkot, the name which signifies its historical association with the early medieval period when Hindu Shahi rulers and Turkic Islamic forces were engaged in protracted armed conflict over the control of Ghazzni, Kabul and Gandhara kingdom areas. Given this background, most of the defense system along with a series of Indus temples in the salt range was constructed during Hindu Shahi period (879-1026).

[3] The fort buildings are part of the chain of Indus temples constructed in the Salt range from fifth to eleven century A.D. For more details, see Michael W. Meister (1996) Indus Temples, *Expedition*, vol. 18, no. 3. Pp.41-54

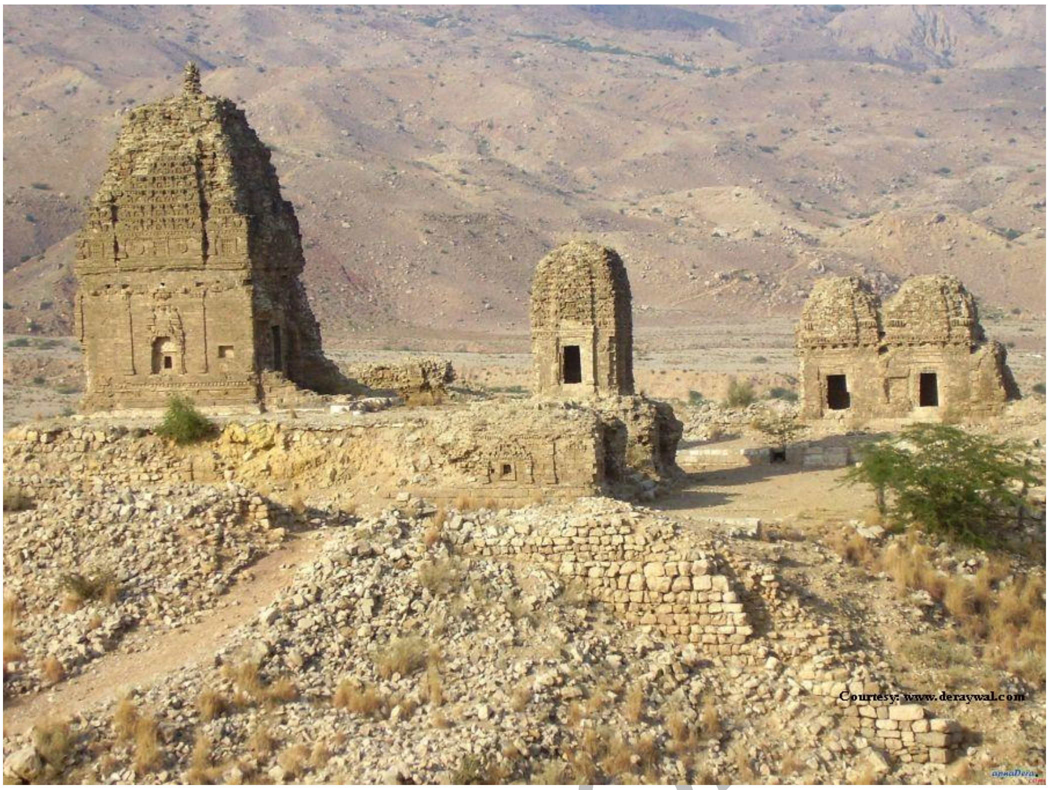

Fig.7. Kafirkot temple complex located on the south-western hills of Bilote town

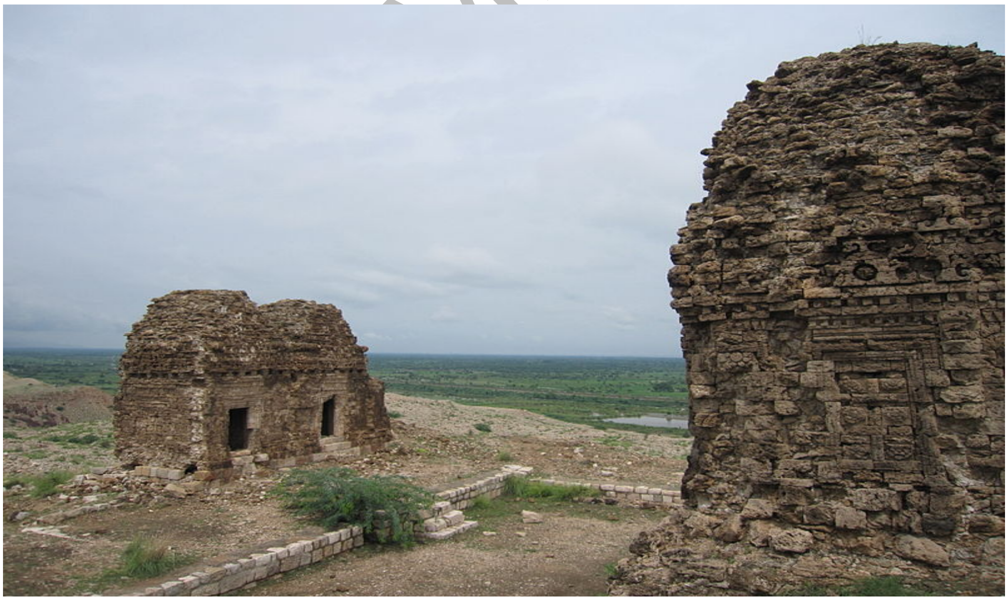

Fig.8. A view of the Indus floodplains from Kafir Kot temples

A unique and varied physical/ natural landscape, such as we find in Bilote, has always been the ideal selection for the built sacred landscape. It helps to shift our sensory inputs and induces a certain trance which is an important precondition for gaining any religious experience in the process of pilgrimage. It transmits us an immediate and subconscious sense of self-alteration and change.

1. Sacred Landscape of Bilote: Juxtaposition of Religious Traditions

A religious experience is primarily a passage from profane/mundane condition to sacred world. An entry into a varied and unique physical landscape constitutes a kind of threshold/ border to another world which is filled with divine presence and manifestations[4]. Both nature and physical landscape have generally double significance in most of world religious pilgrimage systems. First, certain parts of nature such as mountains, caves, rivers, islands, forests, etc. are viewed as the symbol of a divine act of creation. Not surprisingly, we find the use of such unique physical aspects of nature in the building of sacred sites throughout the world. Secondly, these unique and varied physical features of natural environment are further invested into religious symbols and meanings. Myths, stories and narratives associated with them prove helpful in enhancing the religious significance of natural phenomena.

In a cursory look, Bilote appears as an extraordinary sacred complex because of its unique combination of physical landscape and built sacred environment. L. P. Vdyarthi was the first Indian anthropologist coined the term ‘sacred complex’ in the context of his studies on sacred pilgrimage city of Gaya. Borrowing from American anthropologist Robert Redfield, he contends that a sacred complex is as an embodiment of both

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[4] This very imagination / concept of threshold or border between profane and sacred world accords religious experience a characteristic of liminality which Van Gennep, Victor Turner and other anthropologists highlight in their studies.

continuity and conciliation between great and little traditions. For him, Gaya was one of such examples in which great Hindu tradition was in compromise with little / folk tradition of tribal people[5]. According to him, sacred complex is mainly comprised of three characteristics, namely pilgrimage, performances and specialists. By illustrating with the example of Gaya, he shows how the sacred city represents continuity, compromise and combination of great and little traditions of the region.[6]

However, in the context of Bilote, there are many problems in the application of this definition of sacred complex. The sacred complex of Bilote is not only continuity and conciliation between great and little traditions but also hosts two different, and often opponent, sacred traditions of both Islam and Hinduism in South Asia. Their contestation is much evident by the stories and narratives of competition between Shah Essa and Kaiwal Ram. These stories of their conflict and partial accommodations are well known in common folklore of Bilote and widely circulated in the town at the time of pilgrimage and congregation.

What further makes Bilote an interesting case is the presence of relatively peripheral (and to some extent) heterodox religious traditions within Islam and Hinduism. The majority of local Muslim population in Bilote is Shi'a . The black flag and other iconic symbols of Shiite can be seen placed on rooftops of the most of the houses in the town.

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[5] This distinction between great and little tradition has been challenged by later anthropologists who consider it primarily a normative difference which lead towards belittling of various traditions labeled by this identity. The binary opposition between great / little tradition not only simplify the complex historical and cultural systems but it acts as a negative normative judgment against numerous traditions.

[6] For more details, see Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi (1961) *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya*, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi, Pp. xxvii-

In fact, the town is the major Shia religious center in the region. The congregation of mourning at the time of Āshūrā’ in the town has no parallel in the adjoining areas in terms of participation, singing, chest beating and other ritual performances.

The descendants of Shah Essa or Mukhdums of Bilote are Shi’a . They are however equally revered and respected by local Sunni population in the region. Both Shi’a and Sunni pay pilgrimage to the shrine of Shah Essa during the month of *Chaitra* when a local festival is held on every Sunday.

We will again have to go back to the past to study this shared Sunni-Shi’a religious tradition associated with the patron saint Shah Essa[7].

The scant and scattered historical record shows that Shah Essa lived during the reign of an Afghan of India, Bahlul Lodhi (1451-1489). His descendents trace their genealogy to Jalal al-din Surkhposh of Uch Sharif, a town that was the most significant Sufi center

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[7] I have refrained from giving the full historical account of the origin and spread of Shiaism in the Indus Valley. Briefly speaking, the tenth century is considered the most crucial period in terms of the origin and growth of Shiaism in the region. It was the period when Isma’ili/ Qaramati influence was at its peak. Multan and the adjoining territories were controlled by them. They had also made alliances with Hindu Shahi rulers against the common threat posed by Ghaznavids of Afghanistan. This influence was decreased by repeated attacks from Ghaznavid and Ghurid dynasties However, the region still remained the center of popular Shiaism. The revival of active Isma’ili da’wa was again started under Shah Shams Sabzwari’s tutelage in the fourteenth century when he openly preached his faith and ideas in Multan and facilitated sectarian reorganization in the region. It was the period of general anarchy due to Mongols’ invasions and conflict between Qabacha and Delhi Sultanate. Another period of revival and religious freedom for Shia community in the religion was started in the eighteenth century when regional princely states emerged in Sindh, Multan and Bahawalpur.

of the Indus Valley in the early medieval period[8]. Jalal al-din Surkhposh and his descendents were although institutionally linked with Suhrawardi Sufi *Silsila* established by Baha al-din Zakariyya Multani ( )but they also had a very close connection with Shiite in the region. Many scholars believe that Jalal al-din Surkhposh was himself Shi'a and he exercised dissimulation or *taqyia,* a typical medieval period's method to avoid mounting religious persecution under Sunni political rule.

Some of the recent studies claim that Jalal al-din Surkhposh and his descendants were Isma'ili *dā'īs*. This argument has been discussed with much detail by Hasan Ali Khan in book entitled "Constructing Islam on the Indus". According to him, many of Isma'ili *dā'īs* went underground after the collapse of Isma'ili state after the invasions of Ghaznavid and Ghorid rulers in Afghanistan. However, this trend was briefly reversed in the period when Shah Shams Sabzwari openly preached Ismaili faith in Multan and Sindh. It was done by hidden collaboration between Suhrawardi and Ismaili masters and was further solidified by Jalal al-din Surkhposh and his descendents in Uch Sharif. The establishment of the organization of Jalali *dervishes* by Jahaniyan Jahangasht and Sadr al-din Rajjan Qattal proved decisive with regard to the propagation of Shi'a and Isma'ili beliefs and practices in secretive ways[9]. These Jalali dervishes were not only known for their extreme asceticism but many of their practices were influenced by

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[8] As per traditional genealogical accounts, Makhdums of Bilote trace their descent from Sayyed Qutub Sher who is claimed to be the grandson of Jalal al-din Surkhposh. According to these claims, Shah Essa was the great grandson of Sayyed Qutub Sher and grand son of Syed Abdul Wahab. For more details, see Alama Safdar Raza Qadri (2016) *Tazkra Sadaat-e-Bukharia*, Kharian: Fatmia Islamic Center, 37367-371

[9] For more details, see Hasan Ali Khan (2016) *Constructing Islam on the Indus*, London: Cambridge University Press, 113-120

Hindu Shkata and Shivaite yogis. The limited studies available about Jalali dervishes portray them as a part of very heterodox mystic Muslim tradition. For example, G. A. Herklotsin his early nineteenth century's study describe their distinctive traits with some details. According to him, they don't follow Sharia in strict terms, shave their heads, leaving a scalp lock on one side, smoke hashish in large quantity, eat snake and scorpion, don't live settled life, continue to wander from one place to another and they exercise black magic.[10]

Regardless of whether Jalal al-din Surkhposh and his descendents were Shi'a or Isma'ili *dā'īs* in the period of early medieval history or not but, later on, they explicitly associated themselves with regional Shi'a cult. Rizvi claims that the descendants of Jahangasht had started to proclaim their adherence to Twelver Shi'ism and Jalali dervishes openly in the early eighteenth century. He infers from this fact that the real religious identity was kept secret for the long period and it was made public in more open political situation when Mughal (Sunni) imperial power structure started to crumble and new regional states emerged in the early eighteenth century[11].

Because of this association with an old Shi'ism of the Indus Valley, the sacred landscape of Bilote is full of its iconographic and material objects. There are many sacred sites which are associated with Shi'aism. For example, there is place where an

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[10] Most of these practices are also associated with Shakta and tantaric yogis. The practice of especially eating snake and scorpion is believed to enhance sexual energy and enhance spiritual powers helpful in controlling a variety of spirits.

[11] For more details, see Athar Abbas Rizvi (1986b) *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Ithna 'Asharis in India*, 2 volumes, Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House.

image of Hazrat Ali’s hand is imprinted which is paid visit by almost every pilgrim. Similarly, there is a tomb of Bibi Zainab and a site of the imprint of Hazrat Ali’s foot.

The town hosts numerous Imam Bargahs where the observance of Āshūrā’ is performed in grand fashion. Makhdums of Bilote are custodians ofmost of the Imam Bargahs. They also patronize the groups of local singers who are expert in the singing of Multani marthiyya[12].

Mukhdoms of Bilote have their own Kafi in Sehwan Sharif which proves their larger connection with popular Islam.

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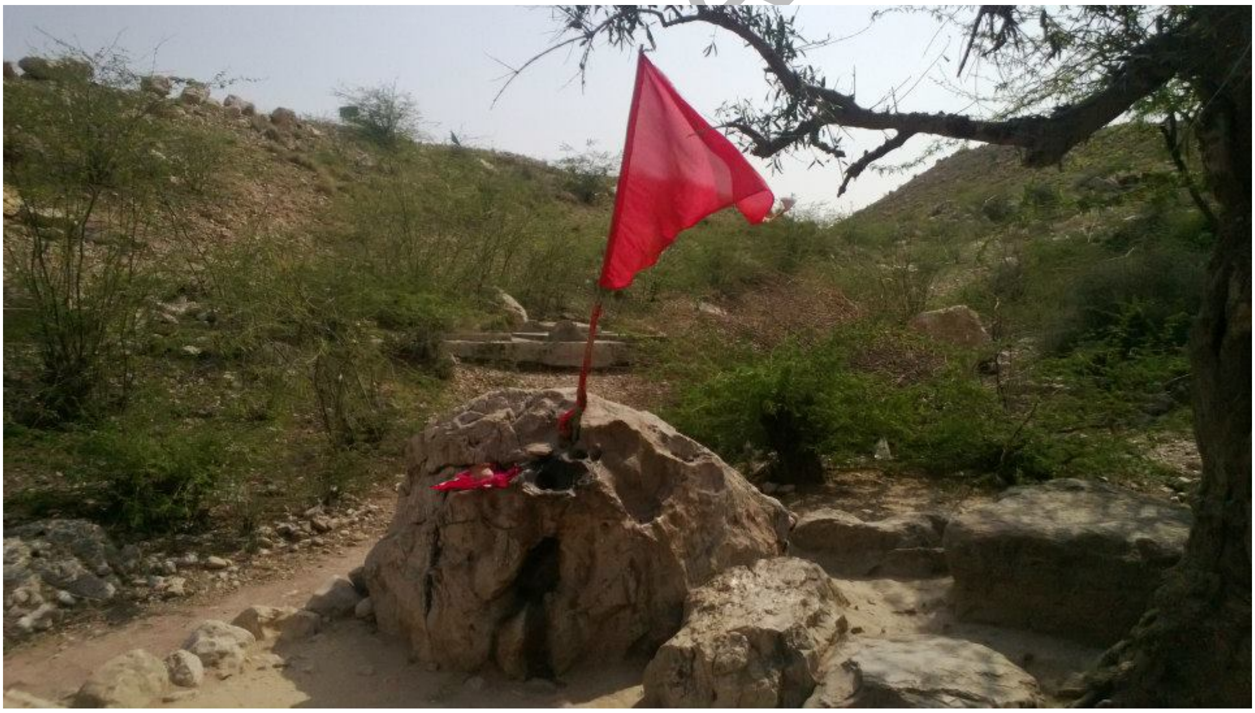

Fig. 9. Imprint of Hazrat Ali’s claw

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[12] For more details on Multani Marsya and other genres of Shia literature, see Christopher Shackles (1978) *Islam*, vol. 55, 281-311

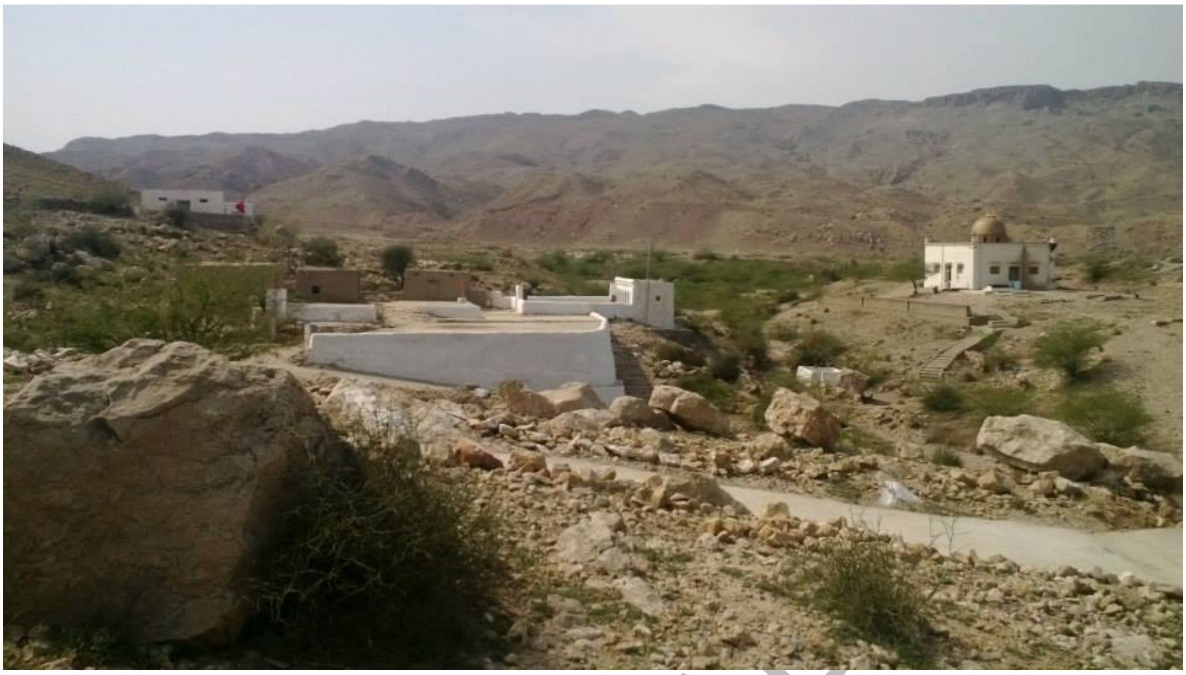

Fig.10. Tomb of Zainab Bibi

The sacred landscape of Bilote entails a number of sites which are more related to the phenomena of ancient folk cults. For example, there is the shrine of Ajmal Darya which is mostly visited by indigenous low caste groups living in the riverine belt and associated with fishing, boating and other related livelihoods[13]. Numerous miracles involving challenges of river voyages are attributed to him. There is a large stone placed in front of his shrine which is said to be used as a boat by him.

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[13] Darya means river in local vernacular. The very title of the saint "Ajmal Darya" signifies his close association with indigenous ancient river cults which remained very popular in the region before the dawn of colonial modernity. Its one popular manifestation were /are Jhulay Lal, Zinda Pir, Khawja Khizar and Sheikh Tahir.

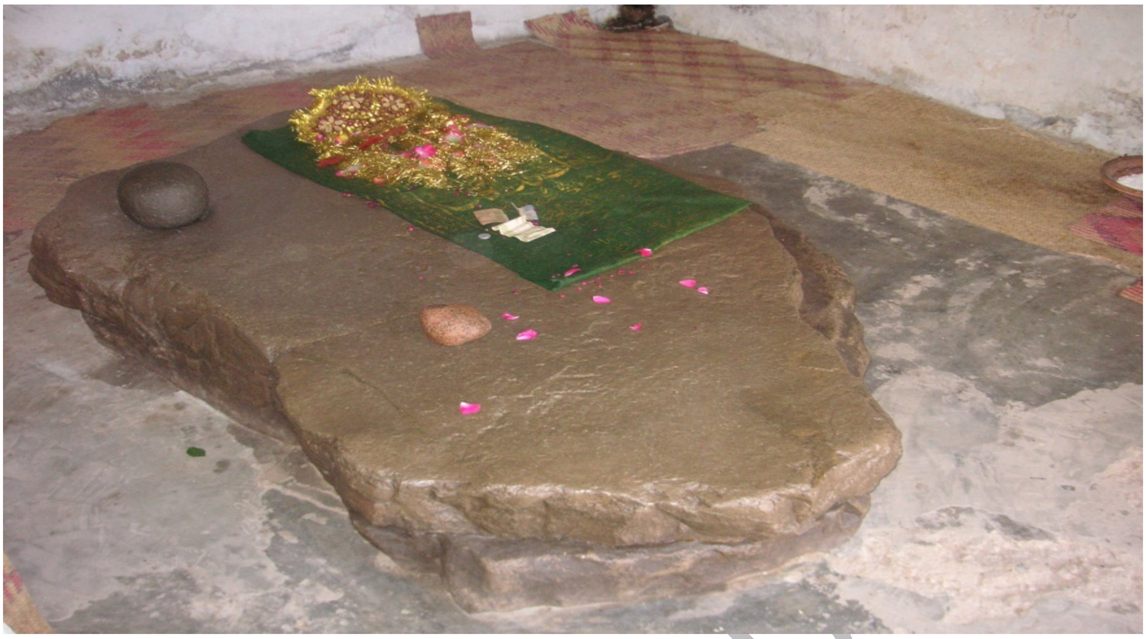

Fig.11. A stone which is believed to be used as a boat by Pir Ajmal Darya

Interestingly, one can observe symbolic associations of Jalali dervishes with snakes and scorpions incorporated through religious iconography in Bilote. For example, there are many stones laid down upon the graves of numerous saints which entail the image of snakes and scorpions. Such kinds of sacred stones having the image of snake are present on the grave of both Shah Essa and Naag Sultan. The later saint is especially revered for his association with snake-worship cult in the town. Apart from his title, many miracles of his mastery over snakes are time and again narrated at his shrine. His shrine is the center of *Jalali* dervishes who prefer to stay here at the time of *mela*. The snake also has a strong association with the cult of Kaiwal Ram. Hindu devotees believe that Kaiwal Ram gives his *darshan* in the form of a snake at the end of *Vaisakhi*. This strong presence of the symbol and stories related to snake shows that the region was once dominated by snake worship cult and its remnants can be still found in popular folk religious traditions[14].

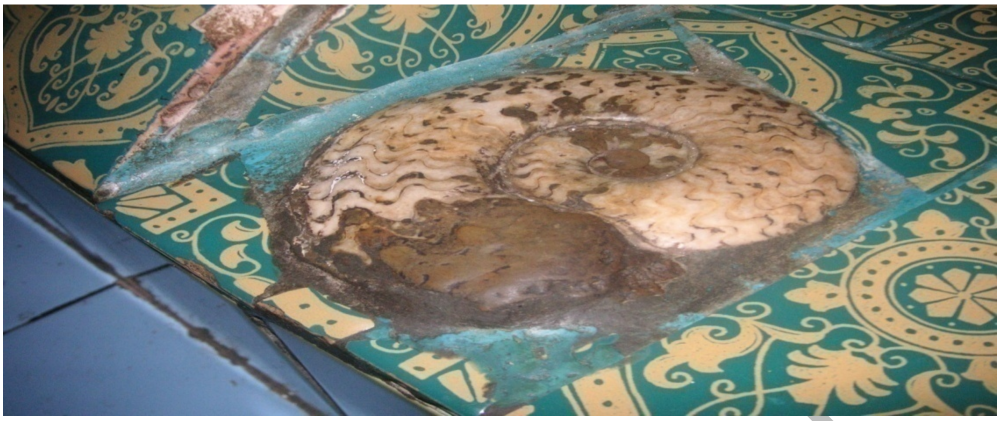

Fig.12. An image of snake itched upon the stone laid down upon the grave of Naag Sultan

Similarly, the worship of sacred trees is an old folk religious tradition which is incorporated into every major religion of South Asia. The Indus Valley is dotted with the presence of sacred trees. They can be found everywhere, inside villages, graveyards and wild places. However, they are abundant in the built sacred landscape. Some of the sacred trees in the Indus Valley are Jaal, Kareeta, Bair, Pipal and BohaR. The first three trees are generally revered by common Muslim folks and can be extensively found in graveyard areas. However, both pipal and bohar (banyan) are the most sacred trees and they are considered divine by both Muslims and Hindus[15].

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[14] Symbolism of snakes in the Indus Valley Civilization goes back to mature Harappa period. The depiction of snakes is found on a number of seals and pottery items discovered from Harappa and Mohen-jo-Daro sites. Later on, it continued to occupy central place in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. For more details, see G. Ravindran Nair (2017) *Snake Worship in India*, New Delhi: Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, New Delhi. 1-4

These trees are worshiped because of their double power. They contain both beneficial powers in terms of healing, fertility and protection. However, on the other hand, they are also believed to house threatening spirits, ghosts, and many other transcendental creatures. They are especially avoided during the night-time when spirits and ghosts are free to possess human beings[16].

The sacred landscape of Bilote town is full of such sacred trees. Thala Kaiwal Ram is generally known because of *bohar* tree planted by Kaiwal Ram himself. The place is also popularly called Thala Boharianwala. A pipal tree was planted by Mukhdoms of Bilote when bohar was burnt down. Now, the place house both pipal and bohar tree. There is also a number of other sacred places associated with pipal and bohar trees. The

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[15] The ancient sacredness of *pipal* is evident by its presence on the seals of Mohen-jo-Daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley. It is also considered the most sacred tree in Hinduism. On the other hand, the sanctity of *bohaR* (banyan) tree was much promoted under the influence of Buddhism. However, this preference is arbitrary and, in practice, they are generally considered divine and commonly worshiped.

[16] For the long period, the phenomena of tree worship continued to puzzle anthropologists, cultural analysts and scholars of religious studies. In the early colonial period, tree worship was considered an expression of childish animism of primitive people. It was thought of the product of illogical mind of savage people living outside the Civilization. However, this perspective was challenged in the post-colonial period due to its normative cadence. The recent studies in the context of animism, worldview and ecology have further brought positive light on it. For more details, see David L. Haberman (2013) Peoples Trees: Worship of Trees in Northern India, London: Oxford University Press. London, 1-15

shrine of Shah Essa and historical graveyard is covered with a number of jaal and kareeta trees.

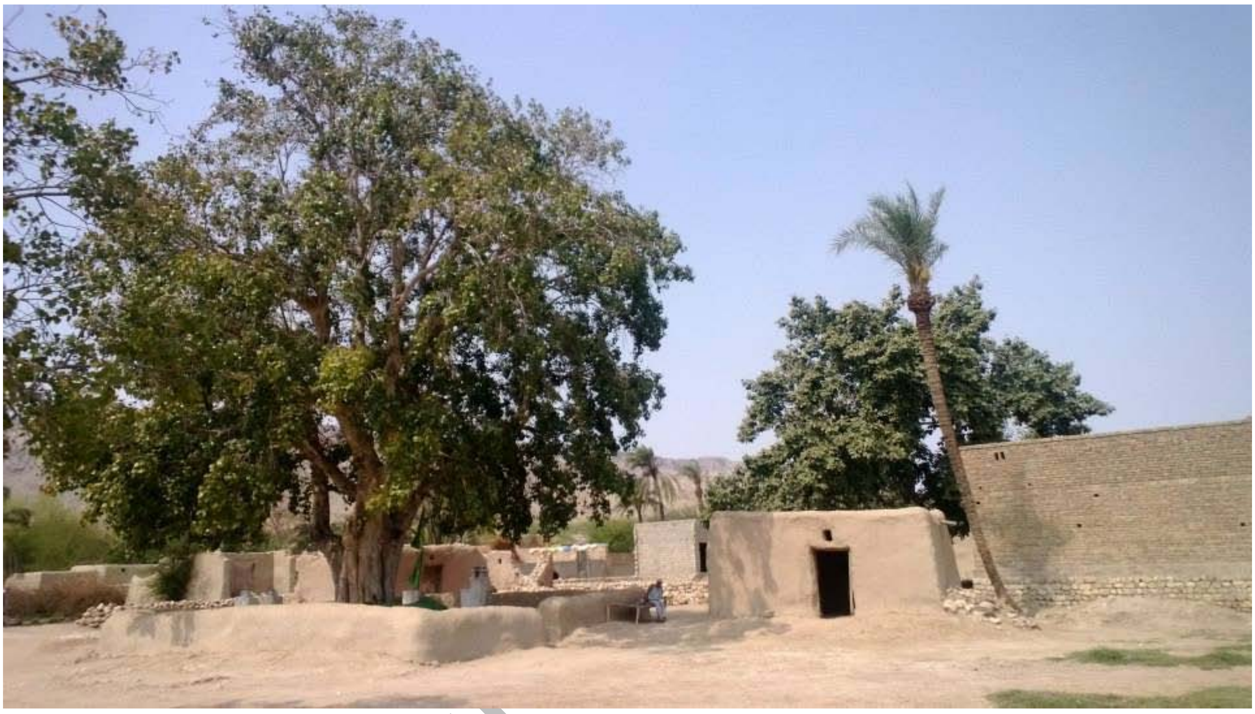

Fig.13. Sacred bohar tree regularly visited by pilgrims in Bilote

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2. Pilgrimage Practices and Liminoid Experiences

“If mysticism is an interior pilgrimage, pilgrimage is an exteriorized mysticism.”
Victor Turner and Edith Turner

Sacred landscapes are built for the purpose of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage places are believed to be the sites of miracles, their mysterious coming from the belief that the occurrence of miracles happening there in the past means they can potentially occur again at any other time.

Although the origin of pilgrimage is ancient, it is now part and parcel of all major religions. The region of Indus Valley is no exception in this regard. Being the place of an ancient civilization, it is dotted with numerous sites of pilgrimage in all of its areas. Many of these pilgrimage sites exist since early historical period and various religious traditions have been inscribed on them in different periods of history[17].

Before we describe the details of pilgrimage in Bilote and Thala Kaiwal Ram, it is however pertinent to clarify what is meant by this very term pilgrimage in academic literature. Richard Scriven, the renowned social and cultural geographer, says that a pilgrimage is defined by the combination of four characteristics, namely movement, place, belief and transformation. The first characteristic involves a variety of journeys

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[17] Most of the popular pilgrimage sites in the Indus Valley are shared by Hindus and Muslims. This fact not only point to the primordial character of these places but being the historical sites of interaction, contestation and negotiations of different religious traditions. For example, the most popular pilgrimage site of Sehwan Sharif in Sindh was also the sacred place of regional Shivaite traditions. It was a part of the larger *tirtha* (a Sanskrit word for pilgrimage) terminating at the site of Hinglaj Devi in Lasbela district of Balochistan. For more details, see Michel Boivin (2007) *Sindh through History and Representations: French Contributions to Sindhi Studies*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pp. 38-40. Similar pattern of pilgrimage can be observed in the case of Sakhi Sarwar in Dera Ghazi Khan. Before the partition, the groups of Hindu and Sikh devotees, popularly known as sanghs of Sakhi Sarwar, used to undertake the long and hard journey from distant places of the eastern and central Punjab to arrive there during the month of *Chaitra* and *Vaisakh*. Harjot Oberoi describes the route of pilgrimage in the following way: "A company of pilgrims was called a saig, and their halting-points, chaiki. In the Doaba the regional sangs had two well-established ancient routes. One commenced in the north and the other in the south. The major points for participating pilgrims along the first route were Adampur, Jullundur, Kapurthala, and Wairowal. The second itinerary touched numerous villages: Hansron, Mukandpur, Barapind, Boparae, Rurka Kalan, Bandala, Jandiala, Khanpur, and from there to the town of Sultanpur." For more details, see Harjot Oberoi (1992) "Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century", *History of Religion*, vol. 31, no. 4. 270-371.

and travels to distant and, most often, inaccessible places. No pilgrimage can practically happen without journeying or travelling to sacred sites[18]. Similarly, place, the second characteristic, is not less significant. A pilgrimage necessarily involves certain spatial qualities invested with divinity or sacred metaphors. The spatial character of a pilgrimage is more specifically defined by routes, departure/ arrival points, destination, etc. A belief, the third characteristic, is the driving force behind any pilgrimage. However, in this regard, the belief is not something abstract. It is concretely associated with the notion of the power of saints, likelihood of blessing and miracles, performance

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[18] In Hinduism, the Sanskrit word '*tirtha*', used for pilgrimage, directly signifies the meaning of a 'crossing place' or a 'ford'. It is also meant to signify crossing over to the far shore of a river. The symbol of river has crucial importance in the metaphoric uses of tirtha employed in various contexts. For example, tirtha in some Vedic and post-Vedic texts is meant as limens or threshold which established the connection of this world to the other. For more details on the semantic variations of the term 'tirtha' in Hinduism, see Diana L. Eck (1981) "India's 'Tīrthas'" Crossings in Sacred Geography", *History of Religions*, vol. 20, no. 4. 323-344

of rituals and seeking penance, etc[19]. Last but not least, a pilgrimage involves the possibility of transformations.

It is, however, this last characteristic, i.e., transformation, which is the main focus of Victor Turner's studies on pilgrimage as liminoid phenomena. For him, a pilgrimage is anti-structural and hence liminal in many respects. First, pilgrims make a clear break from their daily routine life to seek something new and unusual. Secondly, the journey involves traversing many places and crossing of various physical, social, and cultural borders. Thirdly, pilgrimage sites are highly undifferentiated and egalitarian in their nature. The general identity of pilgrims becomes a binding force while the hierarchy of status is put aside at pilgrimage sites. It gives rise to a specific, albeit temporary,

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[19] The role of belief in pilgrimage has been varyingly assessed by different scholars. There is a group of anthropologists and specialists in cultural studies who highlight the role of 'tourism' in pilgrimage especially in the prevalent modern period. The study of 'religious tourism' has become a sub-discipline and we witness the growing number of publications under the rubric. However, the composite term 'religious tourism' is also considered problematic because of the combination of two anti-thetical categories. Naming of a 'pilgrim' as being a tourist is not much publicly appreciated idea.The mixing of religion into tourism studies and tourism into religion studies is disdained as something impure. The impurity and / or ambiguity is highlighted by fact that religion is concerned with the sacred while tourism is a secular act by all means. However, the point which is generally missed is that the rubric of 'religious tourism' points to the changing nature of pilgrimage in the conditions of post-modernity. For more details, see Michael Stausberg (2011) *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations and Encounters*, New York: Routledge, New York. 15-28; Vitor Ambrosio (2017) "Sacred Pilgrimage and Tourism as Secular Pilgrimage", in Raza Raj & Nigel D. Morpeth (eds.) *Religious Turism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective*, Cambridge: CABI, 78-88

communitas devoid of hierarchies and the inequalities of social structure[20]. These anti-structural attributes of pilgrimage create the potential state of transition and change which is the main characteristics of any liminoid phenomena.

Whatever way we qualify pilgrimage, it is however an extraordinary experience. Therefore, the phenomena of pilgrimage are found in all societies, cultures and religions. They provide alternative occasions of experiencing landscape, journey, divinity and self-transformation.

The sacred complex of Bilote town and Thala Kaiwal Ram are most important sites of pilgrimage in the region of upper Indus floodplains. A variety of pilgrims with diverse background come here from distant places. It attracts pilgrims from not only the region of the middle Indus Valley but also devotees from Sindh, Balochistan and adjacent tribal areas. Many of them stay here more than one night and spend their time by visiting different sacred sites.

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[20] For more details on liminality and construction of communitas at pilgrimage sites, see Victor Turner (1973) “The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal: *History of Religions*, vol. 12, no. 3. 191-230; Victor Turner & Edith Turner (1978) *Image and Pilgrimage,* 2-4. However, his notion of pilgrimage as liminoid phenomena has been recently challenged by a number of studies which termed his approach as ‘apolitical’, ignoring the dynamics of conflict and contestation during pilgrimage. For example, Graham St. John suggests that the term heterotopias, coined and defined by Michael Foucault, should be rather used to characterize both consensual and conflictual elements of pilgrimage empirically observed in many cases. For more details, see Graham St. John (2001) “Alternative Cultural Heterotopia and the Liminoid Body: Beyond Turner at ConFest”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 12, no. 1. 47-66

Pilgrimage is however combined with festivity. It is held in the month *Chaitra* which is the time of season change and budding and sprouting of plants. The celebration of seasonal change helps in acquiring a new mood and temperament and gives better hopes of future. Simialrly, in many sacred sites, the celebration of *Vaisakhi* is also intertwined with pilgrimage season.

In the case of Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote town, the festivity and season celebrations are further linked with possession cults and performance of healing rituals. The season of spring is considered the period when spirits are free to possess. They do want their participation in festivity and majority of people undertake pilgrimage to Bilote and Thala Kaiwal Ram to have the blessing of sainst and appease the spirits for their well-being.

The period of pilgrimage and seasonal festivity creates substantial economic opportunity for local residents and shopkeepers of Bilote town. New bazaars are built on make-shift basis where shops of sweets, artificial jewelry, food items, toys and other goods are made available for pilgrims. Most of the pilgrims who come in the form of groups stay at different vacant places. Besides visiting different sacred sites, they do participate in dancing and singing. Local musicians and singers join pilgrims and they perform for them in return to voluntary and nominal payments.

Chapter 5

Liminality, Spirit Possession, Gender Boundaries and Ritual of Jatra

Thala Kaiwal Ram is a place known for its association with spirit possession and performance of Jatra. It is perhaps the main reason behind the post-partition survival of this Hindu sacred place. The existence of widespread beliefs and practices of spirit possession in the folk culture of local Muslim population is the main source of creating and maintaining the relationship and support of local Muslim devotees to it.

The popularity of these beliefs and practices in the folk culture of the region can even be gauged by my own childhood memory-traces of spirit possession as a social and cultural phenomenon[1]. Perhaps, these memoriesare partly responsible for making me interested in the subject as well.

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[1] The issue, which continued to intrigue me throughout my research, is why I was initially fascinated by the subject of spirit possession and hence selected Thala Kaiwal Ram as one of its main sites of manifestation and performances? Perhaps, after much reflection, the possible answer is that the subject is not only challenging because of its aporic character but it also provides me with an opportunity to comprehensively engage with it as being one of the fact of my own culture and society. In the first visit to Thala Kaiwal Ram during my quest to select the precise research topic as well as the site of my fieldwork, I was deeply struck by the scenes of possessed women and men collectively performing Jatra. They invoked many of my personal childhood's memories of possession and its diverse cultural manifestations. The event proved decisive in selecting Thala Kaiwal Ram as the site of my fieldwork.

I consider it significant to briefly describe my flagrant childhood memories of spirit possession for two specific purposes. One, the description of them can be an interesting and effective way of introducing an otherwise bizarre and uncanny subject such as spirit possession. Two, it would not only help me highlight its wider prevalence as a folk cultural and religious tradition but also emphasize the underlying point of the crucial role of mimesis in the reproduction of culture in historical communities. Both memory and culture are intimately related in the reproduction of religious traditions. They are co-incidental and co-constitutive at multiple levels.

In anthropology, personal is always partly collective and hence useful in reflecting and explicating the culture and traditions of certain areas[2]. While doing so, I will also be

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[2] This partial use of my own personal experiences of childhood and their memories in writing this text is by and large related to an old problem of objectivity and representation of truth in anthropological and ethnographic accounts. Contrary to early anthropologists, who strictly believed in anthropology and its methods as scientific and rational, the field has opened itself to the depiction of self and use of literature in the text. The posthumous publication of Bronislaw Malinowsky's field diary in 1967, covering many of his frustrating experiences and disgust of natives and fieldwork, raised numerous critical questions and helped to shape the question of the role of self, emotions and cultural prejudices in writing culture and society. These revelations and subsequent debates led Leach to assert: "When Malinowski writes about Trobriand Islanders, he is writing about himself; when Evan-Pritchard writes about Nuer, he is writing about himself. Any other sort of the description turns the characters of ethnographic monographs into clockwork dummies. In 1990s, we witness another decisive call for the use of self-narratives and literature in ethnography as well as increased consciousness of anthropologist both as fieldworker and as writers. As a result, it is now acceptable norm and practice in anthropology to allow the reflections of self and use of personal experiences as a part of standard text.

describing varying ways by which I have been trying to grapple, rationalize and interpret spirit possession in different stages of my life.

1. Personal as Collective: My Encounters with Spirit Possession

I was introduced to the ideas of transcendental creatures, spirit worlds and phenomena of possession in my early childhood in a variety of ways. First of all, it was the medium of stories which exposed me to them. I was then living with our extended household in the remote village of Dera Ghazi Khan district. My grandfather was considered one of the best story tellers of the village. Each night the children of our household gathered around him and asked to narrate a story for them. Listening to stories was then the best amusement available to children.

Apart from the tales of different animals and kings and queens, the characters of his stories involved *dehs* (monsters), *churails* (quadruples), *jinns* (Arabic word for spirits), *bhut prêt (ghosts), mums, paris* (fairies), etc., who happened to possess humans in different dramatic situations. Those stories and tales of spirit world and its interaction with humans had not only interjected fear inside me but also opened the door of imagination of transcendental creatures having concealed presence among us.

I was also exposed to the idea of *jinn* and *bhuta* through gradual enculturation process since very early age. For example, as a boy, I was asked not to sit under the shade of trees during night time. It was widely believed that trees are the common abode of spirits, and they could easily possess humans in darkness. Similarly, the graveyard was considered the main place populated by a variety of unfriendly and hostile spirits. There were also some abandoned homes, ravines, isolated groves and deserted places which were believed to be inhabited by *jinns*, *bhutas* and other similar creatures. I was told they didn't like disturbance in their habitat and react in hostile manners if someone entered it.

What is however more memorable was the presence of numerous persons in my village who were considered to be possessed by *jinns* and *bhutas*. An event related to one of the possessed persons is still very conspicuous in my childhood memory. It was the slaughtering of a camel which was being held by the demand of the possessing spirit. The event was held in the village assembly before a large crowd of villagers. It was promised by the possessing spirit that he would permanently leave the body of the ill person in return to the sacrifice of a camel. The camel was then very useful animal and hence considered very precious. What was however interesting was the complete healing of the possessed person after the ritual sacrifice. The spirit believed to be possessing him upheld the promise and left his body[3]. He remained normal and didn't

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[3] I was reminded of this event, especially the upholding of the promise to leave the body of the possessed person in return to the fulfillment of spirit's wish, when I chanced to reading the paper of Michael Lambek titled " How to Make Up One's Mind: Reason, Passion and Ethics in Spirit Possession". His main argument is that the presumption that unified state of mind exemplified by reason is not necessarily the only basis for sound ethical judgment and actions. Besides dealing with epistemological and philosophical aspects of the discussion on this subject, he also cites many ethnographic examples from his fieldwork to substantiate his claim that supposedly possessed person, having two minds and divided consciousness, can also perform sound ethical judgment and actions. For more details, see Michael Lambek (2010) How to Make Up One's Mind: Reason, Passion and Ethics in Spirit Possession, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, volume 79, number 2, 720-741

experience any possession in his later life. Indeed, the villagers were fond of this memory and they time and again narrated the event to emphasize upon the reality of spirit world and possession.

The second memorable event occurred at the time when my family shifted from our village to the nearby town of Taunsa Sharif. One day, an old lady relative from our village arrived at our home to spend a night. She was ill and travelled to the town for her medical check-up. Her presence was intriguing. My oldest brother told me that she was possessed by a *jinn* and had occasional fits of possession. However, very soon, my intrigue was transformed into fear when I was asked to sleep with her during the night. There was dearth of beds at our home and, being the youngest child, I was expected to share my bed with her. The thought of sleeping with an old lady possessed by *Jinn* was frightening. I was afraid that her *jinn* could possess me due to physical touch. My body then experienced a certain strange sensation which still exists in my mind as a retrievable memory-trace. However, after some time, I fell into sleep. When I awoke in the next early morning, I felt relieved that I was normal and saved from any kind of possession.

There are many other countless memory-traces related to the widespread phenomena of spirit possession culture in the society I was brought up and grew. What I still remember is the impression of something uncanny and weird generated inside me whenever I was encountered to it.

It would be pertinent at this point to narrate my own changing views and opinions about the phenomena of spirit possession and associated cults which I continued to encounter at different stages of my life. The description is not only helpful to understand my own personal journey of understanding it but, to some extent, it can throw light on the competing folk and scholarly perspectives generally held about spirit possession.

In my youth, due to my introduction to and appreciation of Enlightenment and the truth of scientific knowledgeacquired through my exposure to Marxist ideology, I started to consider the beliefs and practices of spirit possession as an expression of superstitions of our traditional society. The majority of rural folk and their beliefs in spirit worlds, holiness of saints and their yearning to undertake pilgrimage to different shrines appeared to me as the sign of the lack of reasoning power. Like colonial ethnographers and administrators, I consider them the manifestation of child-like mentality of illiterate rural folks. I thought it would change over the time after the victorious course of modernism and social evolution[4]. Another relatively nuanced explanation I created for

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[4] In my early youth, I got influenced and inspired by the liberal ideas of enlightenment, science, significance of empiricism and experiments and other related notions through my father who was a school teacher as well as a keen learner and local scholar of Marxism and dialectical materialism. However, he was not an orthodox Marxist and, as a true adherent of his ideology, he had always encouraged raising questions about orthodox modes of thinking and conventional truths. He was also a great admirer of Socrates, especially his method of dialogue and posing brief dialectical questions during conversation. Notwithstanding his open and critical thinking, being a staunch materialist, he was of the opinion that there was no real existence of metaphysical and transcendent creatures such as *jinn*, *bhuta*, etc. Many times, during my childhood, our family conversation turned towards the topic of spirits. The response/ reasoning of my father was always aimed at proving that it was just a matter of traditional belief most often strengthened by our fears of unknown. I still remember how, during one of such family debates, my older sister adamantly refused to accept the assertion of my father that belief in spirits was related to our primal fears. The discussion took place at night time followed by sleep. In the mid night, I was awakened due to sudden hue and cry. It was revealed that my older sister, who insisted on the existence of spirits, got up from her bed in a state of sleep trance and slapped at the face

myself was that possessed persons were actually victims of different mental illnesses which were conveniently labeled and believed by rural folk as the effects of spirit possession.

However, these convenient modes of rationalization of spirit possession were once again challenged and problematized after my admission in the department of social anthropology in university. On many accounts, the study of anthropology especially its different theories and interpretations of culture (hermeneutics) intellectually proved unsettling for me. My gradual academic exposure with notions, such as culture as a symbolic system with multiple layers of performances and meanings, thick descriptions, native anthropology, post-modernist turn of anthropology and cultural studies, all combined together brought an end to my rigid conviction about scientific episteme, objectivity and truth. Similarly, the works of Edward Said, Michael Foucault and other similar scholars made me realized how (disciplinary) knowledge production was inevitably and intricately linked with the imperatives of power and governmentality[5]. The hard lesson learnt was that powerful outsiders/colonizers could easily superimpose the categories of their own preference during the study of the culture

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of my father while subconsciously asking the question time and again: " Tell me whether spirits do exist or not?" It was though an unfortunate event, but I am always intrigued by the question how I should interpret it?

[5] For more details, see Ferial J Gbazoul (2010) *Edward Saeed and Critical Decolonization*, New York: The American University in Cairo Press; Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, Cameron McCarthy (2013) *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, New York: State University of New York Press,

of “others”. Anthropological debates on the difference between etic and emic studies of cultural performances and rituals further enabled me to evolve more nuanced sense.

Notwithstanding these new learning and subsequent transformation in perspectives, I had never thought to engage seriously with the subject of spirit possession and myriad performances attached to it before my visit to Thala Kaiwal Ram. In fact, it was the event of my visit to Thala Kaiwal Ram that had not only forcefully brought the above-described memory-traces of my childhood into the new light of awareness but also drew me to select the weird field of spirit possession as one of the significant aspects of my research.

Before further venturing into it, I must acknowledge here my failure to come up with any definite and verifiable conclusions in this regard. The very choice of the notion of ‘liminality’ as the main hermeneutical tool of this study is itself partly a proof of this failure. However, the declaration of the failure doesn’t mean that the present research is not relevant or carries little significance. Rather, I am of the view that the notion of liminality is very helpful in terms of interpreting spirit possession and many other similar cultural phenomena which evade any effort to be put into convenient categories of disciplinary structural analysis.

2. Folk Beliefs and Practices of Spirit Possession Cult

During the entire month of *Chaitra*, the courtyard of Thala Kaiwal Ram, the shrine of Shah Essa and other Muslim saints in Bilote remain packed with possessed women and men. They come from different areas and belong to various social backgrounds. Some of them stay for one or two nights while others visit in daytime and then return back to their home. Most often, possessed women accompany their husbands, fathers or close male kin/s. Although they are of different classes and statuses, the overwhelming majority of them constitute young lower-class rural women.

Most of them appear suffering from some kind of illness. They believe their illness is caused by certain possessing spirits. Therefore, they are here for pilgrimage, seeking the blessing of Kaiwal Ram, Shah Essa and other saints as well as to perform Jatra to heal their illness.

Many of them say that they will suffer the rest of the year if they don't come and play Jatra. More intriguingly, as it is told by them, they are not here for their own sake. Rather, their spirits want them to come and enjoy Jatra. However, there are also a significant number of women and a few men who visit the place in the month of *Chaitra* to perform/play Jatra not for the reason that they are possessed but because they want to experience seasonal change, celebrations, music and dance. They are interested in an aesthetic experience which they derive from the performance of Jatra.

During the spirit season, Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote are also visited by traditional medicine men called *Bhopa*. They consider it necessary to visit the place to gain the blessing of the saints and hence acquire extraordinary powers helpful to perform the services of the healing of illness and exorcizing spirits in rural society. The details of the methods adopted by them for the purpose of ensuring the dispossession of spirits will be properly divulged upon in the section of Jatra and other healing methods.

There is a widespread belief among local people that spirits are generally controlled by saints and their descendants. Many of the spirits are even imprisoned by them through employing their spiritual powers. However, in the beginning of spring season, they are freed by saints so that they should do whatever they want to do. This act of freeing spirits is performed through a proper ritual of goat sacrifice. The ritual symbolizes that spirits are free for the entire month and they can enjoy Jatra and other activities.

At this stage, it is necessary to describe some main beliefs and folk notions about spirits, spirit world and possession in order to appreciate the proper context of ritualistic activities undertaken at Kaiwal Ram Thala and Bilote[6].

There are two main categories of spirits generally employed by local people, namely *jinn* and *bhuta*[7]. *Jinn* is an Arabic term which was imported to the Indus Valley after the arrival of Islam and conversion of the majority of the people in the Indus Valley.

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[6] This description is largely based on the interviews with informants as well as summary of relevant literature review focusing upon the Indus Valley region. The early literature in this regard goes back to colonial study of religious belief about spirits. The first such study was compiled by W. Crooke in his book titled “Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore **of** Northern India”. It was published in 1894 from Allahabad. H, A, Rose was the second colonial ethnographer who gives main description of folk beliefs about spirit world and possession in his in larger study titled “A Glossary **of** the Tribes and Castes ofthe Punjab and North West Frontier Province, published in 1916. The third book which I have found very helpful is authored by U.T. Thakur on “Sindhi Culture” published in 1959. It was originally written as a Ph.D thesis submitted to the University of Bombay and later on published in a book form. T.C. Thakur was a Sindhi Hindu migrant settled in Bombay after the partition in 1947. Most of his material derives from his own memory as well as interviews from fellow Sindhi Hindu migrants in India. One of the chapters of his book is exclusively devoted to myriad beliefs about spirit world prevalent in rural Sindhi culture.

[7] *Bhuta* is employed as a generic category which entails many local vernacular sub-categories.

The idea of *jinn* existed in Arabia before the dawn of Islam. The Bedouin society in Pre-Islamic era believed in guardian and ancestor spirits. It was believed that those spirits were responsible to protect community and tribe. Similarly, the good work of poetry was also attributed to *jinn*. The literal meaning of *jinn* in Arabic language is ‘invisible or concealed’. The idea of Jinn is also a part of Islamic beliefs. According to Qur’an, *jins* were created before humankind. They were made up of fire of scorching wind and smokeless fire. There are both righteous and immoral *jinns*[8]. Like human beings, they received many messengers for divine guidance, and they will be made responsible for their good and bad deeds on the Day of Judgment. Iblis or Satan is also considered a particular *Jinn* who was expelled from heaven because of his disobedience of God’s command to bow down to Adam and Eve. He was responsible for exodus of both Adam and Eve by luring them to approach the forbidden tree.

There are many accounts in the holy book of Qur’an concerning *Jinn*. For example, chapter 72 of Qur’an narrates how a group of *Jinn* heard the recitation of the holy book and hence guided to right path. Similarly, there are also stories of *jinns* under the command of Hazrat Suleiman who employed them for the building of palaces and performing numerous other duties[9].

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[8] For more details, see F. Islam and R. A. Campbell (2014) “Satan Has Afflicted Me! Jinn-Possession and Mental Illness in the Qur’an”, *Journal of Religion and Health*, No. 52, 231-233;

[9] We witness diverse and changing theological perspectives about the existence of *jinns* and their actions in Muslim histories. Although there is little disagreement over the existence of *jinns* as it is authenticated by scriptural references but we witness differences of opinions with respect to their agency, influence and actions. These differences have been turned into controversy after the emergence of modern puritan and reformist Islam that vehemently denies any role and agency of *jinns* concerning

After the arrival of Arabs and gradual conversion of majority of local people in this fast expanding and growing frontier region, those Arabic-Islamic beliefs concerning the existence of *Jinn* and their actions of possession underwent the process of translation and adoption in the Indus Valley region where similar beliefs and practices had deeper presence since the ancient period[10]. Under this strategy of translation and making equivalences, both the notions of *jinn* and *bhuta* acquired the status of equivalently exchangeable entities/categories which made the continuity of ancient cult and practices of spirit possession and healing rituals practically possible in shared manners.

The precise point is that the strategy of translation and making equivalences was not only helpful in the aversion of any enduring conflict and controversy between two great traditions of Islam and Hinduism but also ensured the continuity of beliefs and practices of spirit possession prevalent in pre-Islamic era. As a result, the world of spirits and their diverse actions and interactions with human world remained identical with past beliefs and practices. The similar kind of continuity in fragmentary fashion is still present and observable at the level of folk religion practiced in the rural society of the Indus Valley region. The performance of healing ritual Jatra at Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote is the most conspicuous evidence of that continuity.

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human world. The reformist Islamic groups attribute such beliefs to ignorance and result of traditional, albeit un-Islamic, beliefs in rural peasantry. For more details on the competiting traditional and reformist perspectives as well as forms and processes of mutual accommodation, see Terje Østebø (2014) “The revenge of the *jinns*: spirits, Salafi reform, and the continuity in change in contemporary Ethiopia”, *Contemporary Islam*, no. 1, vol.8.

[10] In the Chapter 3, the theory of cultural translation and creating equivalences between different religious traditions in South Asia has already been discussed in details.

So, what are these beliefs and practices? Most of these beliefs and practices derive from the conception of folk religious traditions of South Asia about life after death. It is believed that a spirit doesn't die along with the terminal end of material body. After the death, the spirit is bound to travel to another world which is its permanent abode. However, this passage to other world is not easy and fraught with numerous hardships. In many instances, the spirits of deceased persons couldn't leave this world and continue to hover and reside in human world.

The underlying principle is that those spirits which are unable to leave the world turn into *bhuta*[11]. Etymologically, the term "*bhuta*" conveys the opposite meanings of both presence-absences. Therefore, *bhuta* is something- spirit which needs to be absent in the wake of death event but it is actually present owing to its inability to leave human world due to a variety of reasons. Most of the spirits which acquires the status of *bhuta* are of those persons who encounter tragic events in life or traumatic death. For examples, the spirits of babies immediately died after birth, widows with insatiate sexual drives or people killed in horrible accidents or murdered by intrigues are believed to continue to present in human world. Most often, they act as malevolent and revengeful spirits and possess their victims. However, folk religious traditions also make nuanced difference between these spirits from good spirits of saints and deities

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[11] *Bhuta*-a Sanskrit term, has complex and varying meanings. In the ancient classical Sanskrit literature, it primarily denotes something which is born, produced, obtained, existed, gone, past or becoming. For more etymological details, please see https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/cgi-bin/tamil/recherche. However, the term has also been extensively used in *Rig Veda* and other classical works in the sense of a spirit or ghost. The term is equally popular in different local religious traditions of South Asia including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Indian popular Islam.

which are supposed to deliver blessing to their devotees even in their physical absence[12].

It is pertinent here to clarify that the term ‘ *bhuta*’ is composite in nature and entails a varying classification from area to area. According to Rose, there are five main categories of *bhuta* or spirits among Muslims in the Indus Valley[13]. They include *Jinn*, *Iblis*, *Pari*, *Marid* and *Ifrit*. However, these main five classes are not exhaustive and there is an extensive variation as per folk religious traditions in different areas. For example, U. T. Thakur tells us that the types of spirits in traditional Sindhi culture were classified as per caste rules. Some of the most distinctive spirits included Gosain, Sanyasi, Mochi, Sochi and Dedh, etc.[14]. While the first two spirits are friendly and they are not considered helpful, the later are hostile and unfriendly. They cause serious illness and harm their victims[15]. Dedh are considered the most revengeful and stubborn spirits. The traditional exorcism specialist (Bhopa) encounters great difficulty to drive

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[12] Similar to the division of and friendly spirits, most anthropological literature differentiates between two types / forms of spirit possession. The first type, called executive possession is generally marked with the change in identity and assumption of certain personhood by possessing spirit in the process of mediumistic dialogues or exorcism. The second type is labeled as pathogenic possession which is believed to be related to illness and bad luck. This differentiation is important to understand the positive affect of possession in the case of mystic experiences in opposition to illness generating possession by spirits. Such kind of possession is most often related to pollution as well. For more details on these two forms / types of possession, see Emma Cohen (2008) “What is Spirit Possession? Defining, Comparing and Explaining Two Forms of Possession”, *Ethnos*, vol. 73, no. 1.

[13] H. A. Rose (1978) A *Glossary **of** the Tribes and Castes,* 561

[14]Gosain is the sacred personage in Hinduism and almost an equivalent to Muslim Pir or Sayyed in status.

[15] T.T. Thakur (1959) *Sindhi Culture*, Bombay: University of Bombay, 146

them out from the body of possessed person. For this purpose, they do apply very oppressive and, sometimes, torturous means to perform exorcizing functions in their case[16]. In Kaiwal Ram Thala and Bilote, Fateh Khan and Noor Jamalare two main types of *bhuta* which are often identified as the spirit which most often possess women.

The precise point is that the classification of *bhuta* in different vernacular cultures of South Asia varies from region to region. Sometimes, the classification is based on different nature of harms performed by various types of *bhuta*. For examples, Wayne Mcclintock accounts about 29 different types of spirits in his attempt to chart out the comprehensive nomenclature of *bhuta* in north India in general and particularly Punjab. In the details, he tells us what functions/ actions are attributed to different spirits. For example, *Dakan Shakan* spirit, which is most popular in Bahawalpur area, is considered the cause of most of brain and womb diseases. *Dag*is the spirits which is responsible for losses in crop yield. *Jal jogan* is specifically dangerous for women and children and they reside in springs and wells. The study of these details gives a precise idea regarding how different spirits, identified by different names, are responsible for different diseases and illnesses. Their places of abode are separately designated in folk

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[16] Like Dedh in Sindhi culture, the term "Chohra" is employed to designate the case of such extreme hostile and stubborn spirits in Thala Kaiwal Ram and areas of the middle Indus Valley. Chohra is the lowest caste in these areas. The traditional occupation of the members of this low caste is the collection of garbage which acts as both material and ideological basis of the central caste concept of pollution. Louis Dumont was the first anthropologist who theoretically linked the structuring of caste system in terms of the binary opposition between the pure and impure. What is noteworthy in this regard is the way the ideological principles of caste hierarchies in South Asian societies are applied in the world of spirits as well. For more details, see Louis Dumont (1980) *Homo Hierachicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

culture as well[17]. Similarly, the religion is another classificatory principle by which spirits are identified and dealt with. The most popular division in this regard is Hindu and Muslim spirits. The possession by the spirit of other religion is although not desirable but mutual perceptions and beliefs are not exactly identical. Rather, they involved nuanced differences / variations which need interpretive qualification. For example, Muslim spirits among Hindus are considered the most stubborn and dangerous. Like the identification of spirit world, the structuring principle of the pure and impure is also involved in this case. For Hindus, Muslim spirits represent high level of pollution and hence thoroughly contagious. They show thorough resistance against the effort of traditional exorcists to control and tame them. However, the beliefs and perceptions of Hindu *jinn* among Muslims are not as much dangerous. They are not sought-after spirits but the level of danger is not viewed as higher. Unlike Hindus, Muslims don't view Hindu spirits as being primarily constituted by pollutants. The principle of purity and impurity acquires some flexible character among Muslim communities. For them, Hindu spirits are most often agreeable and can be controlled and tamed in a variety of ways.

It wouldn't be perhaps incorrect to attribute the identification of spirit world in terms of both caste and religion to the structuring principle of binary opposition between the pure and impure. The rule of Impurity or pollution is however larger than identification. As a structuring principle, it can be observed in numerous possession processes. For example, women are viewed as highly susceptible to be possessed during their menstrual cycles. The individualswho don't observe ritual purity arealso believed to be more prone to being possessed by malevolent spirits[18]. Apart from this nexus between possession and pollution, the circumstances of possession are by and large defined and elaborated with respect to transgression and lack of following cultural and religious prohibitions and taboos.

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[17] For more details on the classification and nomenclature of *bhuta* in the folklore of Punjab, see Wayne Mcclintock (1990) "Demons and Ghosts in Indian Folklore", *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. XVIII, no. 1.

However, the most popular cause of possession is attributed to the sexual drive of spirits. For this purpose, the opposite gender is generally possessed. Female spirits transform themselves into beautiful girl and then seduce the desirable person. In this process, they demonstrate all kinds of human passions including jealousy with the wife of possessed person. In the case of the dissatisfaction of spirit, the medium is made sick and insane. Similarly, male spirits possess beautiful girls and make them ill if they are defied in the gratification of their sexual desires.

We can continue with these details in great length, but the main point is that spirit sphere is believed to be existing simultaneously with human world and it is by and large imagined and conceived on the basis of cultural model of a particular society.

3. Healing Ritual of Jatra and Bhakti: Connections of Classical-Folk Religious Traditions

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[18] Mary Douglas and many other anthropologists describe and demonstrate that the cultural notions of pollution are intimately connected with danger in majority of primitive and not only different cultural construction about demonstrate how the notion of pollution was related to danger in majority of primitive societies.

The main discussion in this section revolves around the multiple, albeit implicit, connections between classical Indic traditions of (Krishna) Bhakti with folk religion in the Indus Valley. The primary argument is that the use of music and dance (that involves very peculiar body movements) is not contingent in nature. Rather, it is intimately linked with classical Indic traditions. While Jatra is fundamentally a performative ritualistic model, many of its underlying philosophical / ideational / theological assumptions can be found in the classical traditions of Bhakti and Yoga.

However, before we start unearthing these connections, it is necessary to briefly give the description of Jatra and the conditions of its performance in Thala Kaiwal Ram and elsewhere in the middle Indus Valley region.

The season of Jatra starts in *Chaitra* and continues throughout the month. It formally ends with two-day celebrations of *Vaisakhi* festival held at Thala Kaiwal Ram. Jatra is not something unusual and unprecedented ritual. The examples of similar ritualistic performances are widely available in different possession cults throughout the world. Very typically, like other healing rituals, Jatra not only involves devotional drum music and peculiar dance moments, but the majority of its participants is generally women from lower rural classes[19]. The dance is most often collectively performed. While sitting on the ground, the performers move their upper part of body, especially the head

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[19] Traditionally, Jatra was performed with the help of Naghara which as a traditional musical instrument is related to the general class of drum music. However, in most of Jatra performance places in Bilote, Naghara has been abandoned and replaced by conventional drum instrument along with harmonium. Naghara is still being used in a number of Sufi shrines during the performance of Jatra. They include the shrine of Rajan Shah in Karor Lal Essan, Khawja Ghulam Farid in Kot Mithan and Daera Deen Panah in Taunsa Sharif.

initially in the shape of horizontal eight and then it assumes circular shape with high speed and rhythm. It is not only different from traditional whirling dance, which is performed in the standing position but its embodied effects at the end do also vary. Most often, it gets terminated by the act of vomiting which has both embodied and symbolic consequences. The vomiting not only empties the stomach but, symbolically, it is considered the relief, albeit temporarily, of body and mind from possession. An oracle keeps his / her presence during such performances and his main job is helping newcomers to indulge into trance and start dance by moving head. Those who refuse to move head and perform initial movements are declared by oracle as not possessed.

Another duty of the oracle is holding dialogue with possessing spirits at the end of music and dance session. They ask certain questions from spirits such as what was the precise cause of possession? When did it possess and under what condition? What does it want? At the end, the oracle sprinkles water over the face of possessed person and knots her / his hair. Knotting of hair is considered a kind of promise from spirit that it wouldn't disturb the possessed person till the next *Chaitra*.

However, it would be pertinent to mention that a significant number of participants of Jatra are not generally suffering from the belief that they are possessed. Rather, they are motivated to undergo Jatra as an aesthetic experience. It is not the practical reason of possession which compels them to perform Jatra but they do it to experience possession trance / transcendence. In other words, Jatra not only functions as a healing ritual for possessed persons but it is also used for inducing a certain trance for aesthetic purposes[20].

Although the performance of Jatra is apparently a ritual associated with folk possession cults, its linkages with classical Bhakti *Darshana* can be easily established. First, Bhakti purports complete devotion to/ absorption into the desirable deity, a state of mind very identical to possession. Initially, it was *Bhagvat Gita* which asks for complete devotion to Krishna for the sake of liberation[21]. The particular term which is used for absorption in *Bhagvat Gita* is '*avesa*' which is also used for possession in

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[20] Many anthropologists see little difference between possession and trance. According to them, possession is a certain form of trance which practically involves an invocation to gods, deities and spirits. On the other hand, a group of anthropologists and scholars from cultural studies emphasize upon the peculiarity of spirit possession and consider it different from trance or altered states of consciousness. Even many of them argue that trance has progressively replaced spirit possession in modern societies which do not have rigid beliefs about spirits and role deities in normal social life. In my opinion, both possession and trance inducement are though related phenomena, their separation can be helpful to explain the difference in various situations in which they are employed and performed. For more details, see Deniss R Wier (2006) *Trance: From Magic to Technology*, London: Trance Research Foundation; Bettina E. Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson (2010) *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, New York: Continuum.

[21] In *Bhagvat Gita*, Krishna says that those whose minds and thoughts are absorbed into me are the saved from Samsara (the cycle of death and rebirth). Moreover, he declares that the best among yoginis are those whom mind and thoughts are absorbed into me. mayyāveśyamanan (BhG: 12:2).

classical Sanskrit literature[22]. Later on, the equation between devotion/ absorption and possession was further established by another ancient classical text, the *Bhagvat Puran*.

Building upon these earlier notions of both *Bhagvat Gita* and *Bhagvat Puran*, theologians of medieval Bhakti movement, particularly Vallabha Acharya, had not only evolved more elaborate philosophical / exegetical foundations but also performative modes and manners of devotions/ possession[23]. In different works of Vallabha Acharya, the word '*avesa*' has been extensively used in the related sense of possession[24]. He purports that Bhakti is the relationship of mutual possession. A devotee gets absorbed into the attributes of Lord by single mindedly focusing upon his/ her thoughts upon the sports (*lila*) of the Lord. Similarly, the Lord pervades into the

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[22] The literal meaning of āveśas is "an entrance into" something. There is however a number of derivative words which are used to show and highlight varying semantic properties. For example, samāveśa, praveśa and praveśana are all related words signifying the difference in the states of possession. For more details, see Fredrick M. Smith (2006) *The Self Possessed: Diety and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*, New York, Columbia University Press, 14

[23] The fact that Thala Kaiwal Ram is the most renowned place of playing / performing Jatra cannot be treated as an isolated phenomenon. Kaiwal Ram was the major figure of the Eighth Gaddi of Krishnaite movement in the middle Indus Valley which, in turn, was closely associated with Pushtimarg of Vallabha Acharya. He was not only qualified poet in Braj Bhasha but was well acquainted with Indian classical aesthetic theories especially the role of *Bhava, Rasa* and *Dhavani*. The record tells that his Thala was used to perform *bhajana* sessions as well.

[24] The significance of the state of possession in Bhakti is evident by the use of this term in a variety of ways in the works of Vallabha Acharya. Some of those terms include līlāveśa (possession by remembering the plays of Krishna), cittāveśan (possession by thoughts), bhagavadāveśa (possession by Lord) and samsārāveśa (possession by the cycle of death and rebirth), aksarāveśa (possession by absolute).

person/ body of a devotee who, in turn, acquires His attributes. In this way, ultimately, the experience of Bhakti results into the nirodha (annihilation) of the personhood of a devotee into the Lord.

There are two other related terms which can also be helpful in further elucidating the relationship between Bhakti, possession and experiential aesthetic. The first term is *bhava* which, like *bhuta*, derives from Sanskrit morphemic source '*bhu*' and denotes the meaning of existing in general and particularly emotions or moods. The term was originally employed in the ancient text of Natya Shastra authored by Bhart Mani. It was meant to cultivate certain emotions among the audience of drama in order to experience certain feelings and sentiments. Later on, the term was used in a variety of contexts in the debates on poetry, philosophy and theology. In Bhakti, there are primarily five *bhava*s which are given utmost importance. They include Shanti, Preeti, Sakhya, Vatsalya and Priyata or Madhura. However, the topmost significant *bhava* in Bhakti is *Gopi bhava* which represents the yearning and longing of *gopis* to meet and unite with Krishna. Apart from other aesthetic performances, these *bhavas* are cultivated through music and dance which are also essential components of Jatra.

While highlighting both the similarity and difference between *avesa* and *bhava*, Fredrick M. Smith says that *avesa* is an open kind of absorption or possession in which the identity of experiencer can shift in contrast to *bhava* which doesn't necessarily involves the change in terms of identity[25]. Notwithstanding this difference, they share many characteristics in terms of emotive moods and feelings at the level of experience.

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[25] Fredrick M. Smith (2006) *Self Possessed*, 355

Rasa is the second concomitant term of Sanskrit aesthetic theory which has been imported into Bhakti philosophy and praxis in order to describe the peculiarity of devotional experience[26]. *Rasalila* or the divine dance / sports performed by Krishna along with *gopis* in the forest of Varindravan.

To sum up the above discussion, Jatra is not only a ritual for the healing of possessed persons but it also involves a certain aesthetic experience concerning with Krishnaite Bhakti. The use of music and dance further elucidates this relationship. The role of music and dance in the studies of possession and trance is well recorded and analyzed. Andrew Neher was the first ethnomusicologist who tried to establish an empirical relationship between music and possession trance. According to him, the repetitive rhythmic stimuli could generate a certain pulsation which, in turn, is helpful in creating possession trance[27]. This trend of investigating the relationship between the music and possession trance from different perspectives continued. Many anthropologists attributed the possession trance in healing rituals to sensory overload caused by repetitive drumming. In this regard, two studies are especially worth mentioning. The first study entitled "Dancing prophets: Musical experience in Tumbuka healing" was undertaken by Steven Friedson in 1996. By adopting a phenomenological approach, he says that multistable 3:2 polymetre of Tumbuka drumming results in perceptual ambiguities and causes the collapse of boundaries between object and subject. One of the determining effects of such shaken boundaries it the trance state bordering to liminality[28]. The second significant work in this regard is the book of Judith Becker entitled "Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing" published in 2004. What makes her study remarkable is the combination of both scientific evidence and experiential subjectivity. According to her, deep listening of music in certain cultures leads to an emotional response coupled with certain biochemical changes (release of hormones and monoamines) which not only inculcates possession trance into the audience but also gives them the impression of being in the company of spirits[29].

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[26] Both term *bhava* and *rasa* are intimately related to each other. While *bhava* denotes state of mind colored by certain emotion, *rasa* is an aesthetic enjoyment of it. Rupa Goswami, the medieval Bhakti philosopher and practitioner, is given the credit to systemize the relationship of Sanskrit aesthetics and devotional practices. In this regard, his book titled "*Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu*, is considered the most influential Bhakti works.

[27] Andrew Neher (1961) Auditory driving observed with scalp electrodes in normal subjects, *Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology* 13, 449-51.

Both music and dance have central importance in both Jatra ritual and Bhaki at practices. They are supposed to create certain *bhavas* (emotions) which help the performers and devotees to acquire certain possession trance. To paraphrase the central argument, Jatra and Bhakti performances are primarily corporeal and involve embodied experiences which cannot be merely explained through discursive forms of knowledge.

4. Liminality of Gender Boundaries, Spirit Possession and Jatra

It is an established ethnographic fact that women are the major subject of spirit possession. The cross-cultural research in anthropology, ethnomusicology, cultural studies and folklore provide ample evidence in support of this statement. The case of Thala Kaiwal Ram and Bilote is not much different. During the month of *Chaitra*, the place is thronged by women coming from far flung areas. Most of them are suffering from the illness of the perceived possession of malevolent spirits. They are also main participants in the performance of Jatra.

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[28] For more details, see Steven M. Friedson (1996) *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing*, London: University of Chicago Press.

[29] For more details, see Judith Becker (2004) *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press. There is a number of researchers who also emphasize upon the role of beliefs in spirit possession as a necessary condition to acquire the trance with the help of music. For them, the absence of such beliefs precludes the possibility of trancing.

Why are spirit possession cults dominated by women? This question has been extensively discussed from a variety of perspectives. Numerous studies purport different causes and factors behind women's preponderance in possession cults. These perspectives can be even classified into different sets of theories. For example, there is a group of theories which present a variety of explanations concerning psycho-social disturbances of women. The researchers following psychoanalytical tradition tend to find out shared psycho-physiological characteristics between spirit possession, trance and hysteria. As we know, hysteria has also been extensively associated with women[30]. The term hysteria is although now abandoned, many researchers still continue to refer its relationship with possession trance in terms of common theatrical and dramatic performances[31].

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[30] Even from etymological perspective, hysteria appears to be historically associated with woman's illness. The original meaning of hysteria is Greek and Latin language is "wandering womb" or "suffering of uterus" which signify it primarily a women's illness. For more details on the history of hysteria, see

[31] Natalia Theodoriidou argues in her paper that both hysteria and possession dance-trance are although socially and culturally constructed through deploying performative means but their difference lies into various functions. Hysteria in the conditions of western modernity reifies the physical affliction of hysteric while trance possession reifies the general spiritual environment and community gods. For

There is a group of anthropologists who analyze and interpret the predominance of women in spirit possession cults in term of their embodied resistance against oppressed patriarchic orders in most of traditional societies. I. M. Lewis was the first anthropologist who interpreted women's preponderance to possession as a strategy to gain power. He builds this argument upon the analytic distinction between the categories of central and peripheral possession cults. According to him, central possession cults are mainly practiced by men who are linked with power and dominant forms of religious morality and spirits are considered supportive to possessed persons. On the other hand, peripheral possession cults are characterized by the overwhelming presence of women and other marginal and deprived groups. The character of spirits in peripheral possession cults is dangerous and malevolent.

M.I. Lewis is of the view that peripheral possession cults dominated by women represent a kind of sex war in traditional society. Women who are generally located outside of power and high status try to gain advantage and improve their social standing by their participation in peripheral possession cults[32].

The views of Lewis and others pursuing her line of arguments were however challenged by critical feminist researchers on the basis of ignoring the role of women's active agency in possession cults. In this regard, the critique of Susan Starr Sered played pioneering role. She rejects the arguments that the preponderance of women in

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more details, see Natalia Theodoriidou (2009) "Hysteria and Trance: Performative Synergies", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 19, no. 2

[32] M. I. Lewis (2003) *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, London: Routledge, 26-27

possession cults is related to their low social standing, and frustration. By labeling these interpretations as “deprivation theories, she criticizes them for their misrepresentation of possessed women as religious subjects finding solace and satisfaction in traditional beliefs and practices under the conditions of oppression[33].

Mary Keller, an anthropologist and historian of religion, further develops this critique on ‘deprivation theories’ and portrayal of possessed women as oppressed subjects. To elucidate the role of possessed bodies of women and the ways they negotiate the multiple axes of power, she evolves the paradigmatic concept of instrumental agency. Her main concern is avoiding the trend of western scholarship to translate possession into academic language. Rather, she advocates accommodating the claims of indigenous religious traditions in the scholarship about the possession of women/ men bodies by deities, ancestors and spirits. She thinks that the idea of possessed bodies perceived to be instrumentally working for possessing spirits can bridge this gap and open up the space for taking into account both perspectives[34].

The fact is that possession cults and overwhelming participation of women is an enigmatic subject. It poses numerous theoretical and methodological challenges which can be easily surmounted. Not surprisingly, we witness a variety of interpretations offered by different scholars from numerous academic disciplines. I don’t think this problem is going to be ever resolved in convincing way. An uncanny and weird

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[33] Susan Starr Sered (1994) *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister*, London: Oxford University Press, 183

[34] Mary Keller (2002) *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power and Spirit Possession*, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 74-75

character of spirit possession and its different manifestations in various cultures will continue to haunt researchers.

One of the reasons behind this failure to arrive at the broader consensus on how to study and interpret spirit possession in general and its gendered aspects particularly is the liminal makeup of the subject itself. Given the ambiguity and potential of transformation attached to it, deploying the theory of liminality can itself be an answer to this dilemma.

Let us try it in brief. Liminality is something difficult to locate because it happens in the state of being in-between and betwixt. It is primarily associated with the state of transition. Therefore, it has no durable and stable features which can be used for its definition. By these criteria, spirit possession is liminal in par excellence. A possessed person is not only of him/herself but incorporates someone else as well. He/she performs the play of presence and absence[35]. The very corporeal absence of another persona (*bhuta*) testifies the presence through somatic symptoms of possessed persons.

Similar is the case of the construction of gender boundaries which are often transcended as the majority of the possessed persons are taken over by the spirits of opposite gender[36]. Numerous cross-cultural surveys on spirit possession testify this tendency of possession by the spirits of opposite gender[37]. Last but not least, the ritual of Jatra entails the tripartite structure defined by van Gennep as the basis of liminality. A possessed person is already in the state of exclusion from society. He/ she is not part of the society because of the fact of possession by spirits which do belong to otherly world. The performance of Jatra facilitates them in entering into a liminal state which exhibits that the subject is neither herself/himself nor other. The change of identity, sound and other manners testifies this state of liminality. The last stage-aggregation-reintegration-is symbolized by many acts. A dialogue with the oracle, sprinkling water over the face of possessed person, knotting hair and vomiting are all meant to show that the possessed person has acquired certain reintegration of self.

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[35] This play of presence and absence is evident by the very etymology of the Sanskrit term '*bhuta*' which we have already discussed in the beginning of this section.

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[36] The interpretations of possessed persons as suffering from hysteria can be explained by the framework of liminality from the perspective of new psychoanalytical research which consider hysteria as the result of the indecision of the subjects in terms of their gender. The work of psychoanalyst Nitza Yarom titled "Matrix of Hysteria" is especially relevant in this comparison between hysteria and liminality. She defines hysteria as the conflict between sexes (both external and internalized) is enacted within the body on the intrapsychic and intersubjective levels. She proposes three-axis levels which determine the matrix of hysteria. The first level is constituted by the fundamental question of whether I am a woman or man? The second level is practical manifestation of this fundamental gender question in the form of splitting, disassociation and fantasy work. The last and third level does take an embodied form. Through the process of displacement, the symptoms are displaced and transferred to body which conveys the narrative of gender conflict by evolving somatic manifestation. For more details, see Yarom, Nitza (2005) *Matrix of Hysteria: Psychoanalysis of the Struggle Between the Sexes Enacted*, New York: Routledge.

[37] In the case of Northern Areas of Pakistan, the general trend is the possession of majority of men (and some women) by fairies (*Paris* in local vernacular expression). Those spiritual persons who are traditionally associated with the work of healing in the case of fairies' possession are called *Pari Khan*. The analysis of the predominance of fairies' possession in Northern High Mountain Areas can provide interesting insights about gendered patterns in myriad possession cults of Pakistan. For more details, see Magnus Marsden (2011) "Possession in an Islamist Valley: Spirits, Islamists and Love in Chitral, Northern Pakistan", in Fabrizio Ferrari (ed.) *Health and Religious Rituals in South Asia: Disease, Possession and Healing*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Conclusion

A conclusion of text implies a certain act of closure. However, like many other acts, the closure of a text is nearly impossible. When the movement is closed by the writer, it acquires the possibility of re-opening through the act of reading.

Not surprisingly, we witness amounting trend in humanities and social research of leaving out the conclusion because of its elusive and arbitrary character. The fact is that no research can achieve the status of definite closure because of ever-changing theories, methodologies and sources of knowledge. The conclusion of research on the subject such as identity and liminality has additional difficulty owing to the problem in terms of establishing explicit objective criteria and goal.

Notwithstanding these observations, I consider it necessary to make certain tentative concluding remarks. The main aim set out for this research in the very beginning was the study of the way different identities i.e. self, gender, religion, etc., are revealed and performed in liminoid fashion. For this purpose, I have not only described the history of the establishment and growth of the Eighth Gaddi in the Indus Valley region in the late medieval period but also demonstrated how the identity of Kaiwal Ram as shared Hindu and Muslim saint had helped in the survival of Thala Kaiwal Ram after the migration of Hindu community in the wake of the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947. The theme of liminality was further explored in the construction of sacred landscape of Bilote as well as the simultaneous, albeit ambiguous, existence of different religious traditions through the means of iconography, beliefs and legends and ritualistic performances. Last but not least, the study explores liminal construction of ‘self’ and ‘personhood’ through the acts of spirit possession and healing rituals at Thala Kaiwal Ram and other sacred sites of Bilote.

Ultimately, a liminoid identity always implies a certain degree of ‘no identity’. Without it, no identity can qualify for liminoid status.

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