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Understanding of Rituals and Practices at the Shrine of Baba Fareed, Pakpatan

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the ritual activity and the interfaith relations at one of the most important sacred places of Punjab; shrine of Hazrat Baba Farid Ganj Shakkar located in Pakpatan, Pakistan. The study explored these rituals as mediums of spiritual, cultural, communal, and religious coexistence in the region that is a product of centuries of plural religious practices. The work is based on the theory of Victor Turner (1969), in ritual and communitas, and the shrine rituals are seen as performative and transformational actions that bring about the collective emotional intensity and provisional social equality. In addition, the theory of religious pluralism and interfaith spatiality by Diana Eck (2001) used to interpret the shrine as a dialogic and inclusive sacred space. A site of encounter where Muslim and non-Muslim worlds of devotion intersect in terms of shared participation and embodied spirituality. Qualitative ethnographic case study was used. One year of immersive field work was carried out consisting of participant observation, field notes and semi-structured interviews with thirty gaddi nasheens (caretakers), devotees, and pilgrims of different religious backgrounds. The interview guide developed locally in the form of six thematic sections was piloted on linguistic and cultural relevance. Spatial order, affective moods, and ritual activities were recorded as field notes when the event was significant Urs celebrations, langar (communal meals) and Qawwali sessions. The data were coded using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), and identified the following central themes: the meaning of rituals, the sense of the sacred, communitas, and identity. The results emphasize that Qawwali, Langar and the joint prayer are performative enactments of egalitarianism and piety, which produce what Turner terms a communitas of the sacred. These are practices that are not limited by sectarian geographical borders and therefore the shrine becomes a living space of coexistence where Sufi ethics and social inclusiveness intersect. It has shown that the rituals of the shrines are not passive repetitions of inherited traditions, but dynamic and ethical and socially integrative practices that make the pluralistic sacred geographies of modern Pakistan. The study has a strong point in its long-term ethnographic immersion, dialogic interaction with the participants, and the combination of lived spirituality into the theoretical interpretation. The present study adds value to the anthropological study of religion, South Asian Sufi, and interfaith dialogue as a novel source of empirical and theoretical information.

Keywords: *Baba Farid, Sufi shrine, ritual practices, communitas, sacred space, interfaith coexistence, religious pluralism, Qawwali, Langar, Punjab, Pakistan.*

1. Introduction

This research attempts to explore the rituals and practices of the Baba Fareed's shrine and to help understand what they meant in the formation of individuals and collective identity. Baba

Fareed's shrine and go hand in hand with rich historical narratives and as strong spiritual interpretations of Sufi Islam. The fact is that geographical and cultural environment, as the heart of Punjab. For example, the poetry of Baba Fareed was preserved in Sikh Holy Scripture Guru Granth Sahib stories that tell a story of an historical, spiritual dialogue between the two communities. Each of these sites is important for Muslim and Sikh scholars alike, and for scholars interested in interfaith relations, ritual practices, and sacred geography, precisely because they were shared.

This study treats religious rituals carried out at these sacred spaces and approaches them from multiple scholarly perspectives to focus on their meanings and functions. In order to situate the local practices with theoretically broader framework, this study is based on classical theories like Durkheim's collective religious experience, Geertz's interpretation of symbol and meanings, and Erikson's concept of identity development as similarly contemporary studies on sociologies, anthropologies, and interfaith dialogue. It also cursorily addresses among other features, modern realities like politicization of religion, state influence, and changing patterns of religious authority in the perspective of postcolonial Pakistan as in a religious landscape.

The research is based on ethnographic and historical approach and drawn from available textual sources as well as field observation (where possible) and is framed conscious of region's colonial legacy, Partition trauma and ever present communal tensions. Yet rather than the usual account of all conflict, this study portrays spiritual sharing and cultural bonding that remain alive in the rituals, the narratives and daily service at these sacred sites.

The study first explores the broader meaning of sacred spaces in the South Asian context and second, proceeds to discuss the role of ritual in identity formation and community cohesion. The case of Baba Fareed's shrine introduced as religious institutions as well as interfaith spaces of memory, moral authority, and cultural resilience. The research seeks to contribute to that outcome by first understanding how this sacred place is lived, symbolically, and historiographical linked to the historical experience of colonial rule and postcolonial conditions.

1.1 Background of the Study

The culturally fertile land of Punjab has been a home to shrines and gurdwaras as sacred sites of worship along with sites of socio political memory for communal identity. Out of these the extremely sacred shrine of Hazrat Baba Fareed-ud-Din Masood Ganj-e-Shakar at Pakpatan represents the place which are visited by millions of devotees every year emanating from different but blending religious traditions of Islam, and Sufism respectively. Although founded in Islam's historical legacies are becoming places where memory sacred, communal and ritual come together in important ways. Their historical background, their ritualistic practices, their communal symbolism all say something very important about the general dynamics of religious life, of the relations between communities, of the changes at the socio political level in South Asia.

Traditional shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpatan is one of the oldest and effectually the most politically significant Chishti shrines of the Indian subcontinent; it traditionally had twin importance, spiritual and administrative. Richard Eaton (1982) in his landmark study, described how the local community conceived of the shrine as the 'Court of God' as well as the 'Court of Man' symbolizing its functions as a guide and source of religious guidance and temporal authority. In some centuries, the shrine evolved into a site where the Sajjada Nasheen mediated between the spiritual and worldly needs of the masses, as the latter's custodians of Baba Fareed's legacy (Eaton, 1984). The shrine was a site of both spiritual

pilgrimage and allegiance to a political cult as well as economic activity due to its inherent duality. Sama, Langar and Urs in Pakpattan are not merely devotional acts rather they are symbolic performance of collective memory and the moral order.

The present study is important within the rich historical, cultural and spiritual landscape from which this draws. This research, by means of investigating the rituals and practices at Baba Fareed's shrine attempts to rediscover the religious meanings of these acts, and how they facilitate the mediation of identity, memory and cross communal relationship. The following inquiry does not seek to overgeneralize or romanticize this sacred site. To achieve this goal, it does not pursue them as simple, chronic and depopulated, but rather tries to make sense of them as nodes in the relational flows of lived religiosity, cultural transmission, and claims to belonging. It considers seriously the call from scholars such as Paine (2003) and Bigelow (2012) to pay attention to the ways in which ambiguity, and negotiation and plurality are found in sacred geographies. Additionally, the study enriches the discussions on ritual pluralism and shared sacredness by arguing that although these spaces are founded on specific faiths, they typically span religiously through the historical, emotional and symbolic continuity.

1.2 Problem Statement

As is well known, particularly to students of religion, the South Asian region, and more particularly Punjab, has been historically a region of great religious diversity and intercommunal interaction. From the time of Buda, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and others have all lived in close proximity to one another in this city of coexistent creeds; they lived not only in proximity but in fact shared commonly the space ground of the city and in fact the cultural values, the linguistic traditions and even perhaps sacred sites. Even though, the shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpattan provide excellent case study whereby shared spiritual n cultural traditions are not only remembered, but also practiced through public rituals and communal gatherings. However, concepts remain under researched largely within the academic literature with little research on it in Pakistan, a country where talks about interfaith harmony are extremely politicized or are not talked about at all. This research focuses on the shrine of Baba Fareed in order to trace the ways in which the lived rituals and devotions of religion both established and continue to shape inclusive spiritual identities and cultural relationships in the Punjab region of Pakistan.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are also as follows:

- To Understand how religious rituals help developing the religious evolutionary process of the personal faith, communal spirituality and the religious commitment of devotees at this sacred place.
- To critically locating the shrine of Baba Fareed in relation to the historical and cultural background of the South Asian religious sites
- To ascertain the role ritual practices play in defining the Muslims sufism in Pakistan today.
- To observe prayer, music, communal meals, storytelling elements at Sufi shrine and how these activities help us understand religious and cultural identity of each community in both individual and collective terms.

1.4 Research Question

1. What are the key rituals and practices observed at Baba Fareed's Sufi shrine in Pakpattan?

2. What roles do these rituals and practices play in promoting religious pluralism, syncretism and coexistence within the multicultural societies of India and contemporary Pakistan?
3. How do specific practices and rituals, such as prayers, music, and langar (community kitchen, free food), shape the religious identities and community engagement at Baba Fareed's Shrine?

1.5 Scope and Significance of the Study

The focus of this study is on the religious rituals and practices elaborated during rituals at Pakistan's most historic sacred site, Hazrat Baba Fareed shrine in Pakpattan. This research aims only at discussing the ritual expressions, the devotional practices, and the communal activities of this location in order to understand how these expressions and practices affect intra – faith and inter faith relationships in the region. In the study, there are rituals like collective prayer, devotional music (qawwali) and communal meals (langar) which are key to both the sites. As such, it reveals how these activities influence religious identity; reinforce spiritual memory; and promote the bonding of members of the community. Through this research, emphasis is placed on the experience of devotees in performing these practices and what the symbolic meanings are that they attach to them. Religious debates and institutional politics are not dealt into details; however, everyday religious expressions through ritual and shared tradition are under focus.

In consideration of how faith, culture, and memory intersect, the study presented here joins a field of interdisciplinary research which understands South Asian religiosity as multifaceted and multiple as well as often collaborative. As much as it is a source of inspiration for scholars of religious studies, anthropology and history and of peace building who have an interest in how sacred spaces can serve as places for dialogue and uniting diversity. The objective of this research is to achieve a deeper academic insight on ritual as a means of spiritual devotion and social harmony by focusing on religious practices at the shrine of Baba Fareed and how these continue to influence an individual's faith and a collective identity in contemporary Pakistan.

1.6 Theoretical Framework for Current Study

This study utilizes ritual theory as well as interfaith dialogue as its theoretical underpinnings in order to understand the religious practices that take place in the Sufi shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpattan. Rituals are used to develop spiritual devotion, social cohesion, community relationships, communal identity and interfaith relations. This research is mainly informed by the two theoretical approaches of Victor Turner's theory of ritual and *communitas*, and conceptual discourse on religious pluralism and interfaith spatiality as practiced by Diana Eck and other scholars.

1.6.1 Turner's Theory of Ritual and *Communitas*

The rituals at both sacred sites can be studied as an application of Victor Turner's theory, as explained in *The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). Rituals were, for Turner, something performative and transformative not simply a symbolic ceremony. Turner (1969) introduced the concept of liminality, a transitional phase of rituals and a feeling of *communitas*, by which is meant social equality and emotion sharing with other participants in a transitional condition (Turner, 1969). In particular, these are ideas that have direct applicability to the world of pilgrimage and pilgrimage to shrine, where people from highly diverse backgrounds congregate to partake in one spiritual community for a while.

The shrine of Baba Fareed, rituals, like qawwali (devotional music), langar (shared meal), and urs (annual commemorative festival) impart a very strong feeling of spiritual unity among the devotees. People from all caste, class, and sect participate; and many report a feeling of

oneness with the other participants and also the divine. The description of these practices shows Turner's example of *communitas* which negate the social divide and create a shared sacred experience. Both in the contexts of individual and collective identities, they renew and provide a space for moral reflection, healing and a space of belonging for rituals as rites of passage.

1.6.2 Rituals as Vehicles for Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Pluralism

The second theoretical component of this study develops from Turner and it also provides a good starting point for understanding the internal dynamics of ritual, however it expands upon the role of sacred spaces and rituals in shaping interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism. In borrowing especially from Diana Eck's (2001) and others' works on shared religious space, this study analyses shrines and gurdwaras as contact zones where people of various faith systems conduct overlapping practices and mutual respect. Historically Baba Fareed's shrine, have been visited by their own religious communities as well as those who follow other faiths. The Sikhs have respected Baba Fareed's poetry included in Guru Granth Sahib for long and local Muslims are often praise for Guru Nanak's teachings. From a historical and spiritual perspective, rituals at these sites become acts of religious diplomacy involving service, music, prayer, and food sharing, in which values such as equality, humility, hospitality, and devotion are reflected that are shared by both traditions (Ahmad, 2022). The spaces in which the repetition of inclusive rituals takes place play a function in reinforcing the group ties in such spaces and also provide the opportunity of intergroup empathy and symbolic reconciliation.

1.6.3 Integration of Theories

This research uses Turner's theory of ritual in affiliation with the interfaith dialogue framework and spiritual space to develop a broad analytical model. It makes possible a critical reading of ritual as an activity of community building and also as a crane for catching interfaith understanding. In the Pakistani context where religious coexistence is a long history, political and sectarian tensions often drown any talk of it, this integrated framework is particularly timely. This is how the shrine of Baba Fareed revealed not just as pilgrimages to be visited but social cultural and ethical institutions whose values are imbedded into social life agencies for preserving the common heritage. Thus the theoretical framework enables the study to look at how the ritual activities, such as devotional music, communal meals, or collective prayers, influence the construction of religious identity, spiritual experience and respect intercommunal.

2. Review of Literature

The role of rituals and sacred spaces in religious life, distinct key theories must be carefully engaged with by religion, sociological and anthropological foundations. A number of scholars over the last century have variously provided frameworks explaining how rituals can and do work as acts of worship, but also as tools that play significant roles in forming society, identity, and perception of space. Key theoretical contributions from Émile Durkheim, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Mircea Eliade, as well as Jonathan Z. Smith are reviewed for their importance in analyzing rituals and practices connected with the shrine of Baba Fareed Pakpatan.

Mircea Eliade (1959) addressed the matter in *The Sacred and the Profane*, where his approach was to deal solely with the phenomenological dimensions of religion. He said religious people and non-religious people perceive space and time differently. Further discussion was added by Jonathan Z. Smith (1987) in his book *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, in which he expanded the role of place in religious life. He said that sacred spaces are not intrinsic to something's holiness, but are made holy. For Smith, the fact of sacredness does not change

depending on physical features, but rather repetitive acts that make physical features assume meaning.

Roy Rappaport (1999) takes a more inclusive evolutionary and ecological view of ritual in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. According to him, ritual is a basic part of human communication and social organization. For example, celebrations like that of urs at Baba Fareed's shrine or sacred days are occasions of collective reaffirmation of spiritual ideals and moral obligations through the congregation.

An important extension of this view is provided by Pickering (1984), where he has revisited the classical theories of Émile Durkheim. Pickering states in *Sociology of Religion* that Durkheim's idea is to emphasize collective effervescence, emotional energy, being part of a group and being enthusiastic with the rest of the group. Randall Collins (2004) further elaborates on the emotional and social power of rituals by developing theory of interaction ritual chains. Collins argues that this emotional energy motivates people to come back to similar situations in which successful rituals display the shared focus, emotional entrainment and physical presence. Even if Collins does not concentrate only on religion, his theory fits well to religious meetings. Both at Baba Fareed's shrine rituals reinforce personal commitment and social ties by generating emotional energy.

According to Ahmad and Akhter (2018), the shrine has significance in bringing peace among Muslims and Sikhs. According to their study, they also share devotional practices, including sharing a reverence for Baba Fareed's Punjabi poetry that was included in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Sikh Holy Scripture. The authors define the shrine as a vivid example of a sacred space which can become a dialogue and the place of coexistence, when rituals and the cultural practice go beyond the religious frame.

Just like that, Ahmad (2009, 2023) studies Baba Fareed as the founder of Punjabi Sufi poetry, especially how his vernacular style enabled him to make his message reach all over the linguistic, caste, and religious divides. His works became absorbed into the collective spiritual culture of Punjab, confusing whatever distinction existed between Islamic and Sikh traditions. Iqbal et al. (2022) illustrates specifically experiences around the reshaping of the spiritual and administrative structures in Baba Fareed's shrine under the influence of colonialism and affecting the Piri–Muridi (spiritual guide–disciple) relationship. Similar perspective is presented by Khan et al., (2020) in their study of the historical development of Pakpattan in 20th century and argue that even in the times of political and cultural changes, shrine continued to be Centre of community identity and social cohesion.

In even broader regional terms, Iqbal and Ibrahim (2017) discuss why Chishti Sufism was important in Punjab, by placing Baba Fareed within a long line of Sufi saints with their emphasis on love, service, and diversity helping to shape the religious flavor of the region. All of this body of literature provides a solid basis of how to understand the spiritual, cultural and communal roles of the Sufi shrines and their rituals. Similarly, Lajwan and Khoso (2021) explore the Sufi rituals in Pakistan and also spotlight the unnamed spiritual atmosphere of the shrine, Baba Fareed as some rituals such as tying the threads, sharing sweetenets, utterance of dhikr and offering votive money are practiced.

Mustafa and Bhutto (2024) also trace the historical development of Chishti Sufi rituals in India and how within the Chishti order there was a clear focus on the spiritual inclusivity of music, service to humanity and the spiritual companionship (suhbat). It is written from broader regional perspective, from Strothmann (2016) which discusses the political characteristics of Pakistan's largest Sufi shrines. He emphasizes how the rituals of shrine can function as agenda for attaching political legitimacy, patronage and negotiate with state authorities.

Philippon (2012) generates hypotheses on the sociological side of the urs of Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore that can serve as comparative factors for Pakpattan, by understanding the role of profane festivals as temporal religious spectacles (with media coverage, state backing, and popular participation). Mushtaq and Shabbir (2019) are also found this is not directly concerned with Pakpattan, their efforts are part of the effort to look at how rituals such as dhikr, manqabats, and langar are used across multiple shrines to reaffirm the same Chishti spiritual ethos of love, modesty, and the universal availability of divine grace. Taking this for granted, it follows that Baba Fareed's shrine serves as a prototype of Chishti spirituality in which rituals are not innovations but are preserved in old Chishti traditions.

Lastly, Kumar (2021) examines similar Sufi shrine practices in Kishtwar and argues that despite the varied histories of Sufism in the region, Sufi shrines all across the Indian subcontinent have ritual elements, symbolic meanings and spiritual tales in common. His work argues that rituals at Baba Fareed's shrine are part of a South Asian Sufi culture which is locally situated but connectively bound through shared values around devotion, inclusivity and remembrance. Finally, Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, another perspective on understanding space is found via his phenomenological approach. He describes the difference between the abstract and open "space" and the "place" that is space imbued with meaning by way of experience, memory, and attachment.

As the rituals at Pakpattan have been studied through hagiography, anthropology and sociology and, to a certain extent, history, they reveal themselves as multiple phenomena, which help to make identity and community as well as sacred space. Yet, studies on the shrine already available offer a firm base, but many of them look at the shrine in isolation and via a singular lens. These scholars create a picture of sacred spaces as constructed, ritualized, ritualized, ritualized, and ritualized through performance, semantics of place, memory, domestication, cultural imagination and beyond. Sacredness provides orientation to life, which in ritual a place becomes holy, the transformation of pilgrimage, religious categories in space and the emotional and symbolic aspects of place making are all explained by Eliade, Smith, Morinis, Parkin, and Tuan. These perspectives are necessary to contemplate in examining shrine of Baba Fareed as this place is not only inherently sacred but also constantly reconstituted as sacred via the actions of the community and its commitment to history as well as devotion.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study was executed through a qualitative case study at sacred site in Punjab, Pakistan: the Shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpattan. Qualitative case study is particularly fit for the present research in that it permits an in depth exploration of interrelated spiritual, social and cultural phenomena as they are lived and experienced in certain contexts (Yin, 2018).

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection took 6 months and used qualitative methods: ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, and filed surveys. Participant observation was the primary mode of data collection and this was carried out at the Baba Fareed's dargah. The role of the researcher as an observer as participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Every day, detailed field notes were taken with regard to all ritual events, social dynamics, spatial arrangements, body language and spontaneous interactions observed in the context of religious activities. Particular attention was paid to ritual practices including Qawwali at Dargah and Langar (community meals) and acts of devotion; such as offerings, prayers and sacred music.

Thirty individuals were additionally interviewed semi-structured interview from the site. Religious caretakers (Gaddi Nasheen), local residents, frequent visitors, and workers in the shrine were all interviewed for the field work. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, with diversity in gender, age and as much as possible religious background taking place.

3.3 Instrument

A semi structured interview guide is designed carefully for this study to effectively explore the lived experiences of the religious rituals, spiritual practices and interfaith interactions at the shrine of Baba Fareed in Pakpatan. Specifically to meet this research's cultural, and religious focus as well as Punjab's unique sacred space context, the instrument was developed. The intended goal of this locally constructed tool is to be inclusive and context sensitive, and to help the resource be applicable to the Islamic Sufi shrines with their unique theological traditions, ritual performances and community dynamics. The language of the guide was chosen carefully to reflect linguistic and cultural diversity of participants so that the guide is usable in Urdu, Punjabi or English as preference may be of participants.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data as it is suitable for identifying recurring patterns and construction of meaningful categories from textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was analyzed in three phases.

1. Interview transcript coding and field note coding on themes that include ritual meaning, community formation, interfaith expressions, spiritual emotion, and symbol of sacred space.
2. To identifying the religious practices, meanings and interactions in which the site.
3. Interpretation through theoretical lenses specifically, Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* and ritual process, and the framework of interfaith dialogue and shared sacred space.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

The credibility and trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through the use of data triangulation which included the utilization of various methods (Participant Observation, Interviews, and Field surveys), and different sources (Religious Leaders, Visitors, and Workers). Triangulation of the triangulation ensured emerging themes were consistent and researcher bias is reduced (Patton, 2015).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Approval of the study was granted by the institutional review board of the university. Written and verbal information was given to participants before data collection about the purpose of the study and informed consent was sought.

Methodology for studying the ritual practices and interfaith dynamics at Baba Fareed's shrine. This approach is based in ethnographic fieldwork, semi structured interviews and thematic analysis. Moreover, it offers new views on lived religion in present-day Pakistan, and helps complete the gaps in literature to form an intensive comprehension of how sacred spaces still act as shrines of dedication, personality and interfaith communication.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Most especially as experienced in South Asia, Sufi Islam is steeped in experiential devotion and mystical relationship to the Divine. Sufism is unlike purely legalistic approaches which do not only emphasize the inward journey of the soul but also through rituals that amalgamate personal piety with communal spirituality. Not only these are expressions to the belief but also it is a means to create such bonds of emotions, morals and societies among communities (Iqbal & Ibrahim, 2017). This of course being in the Chishti Sufi tradition to which Baba Fareed

belonged, rituals are considered to be sacred actions and these actions are rather not just to connect the devotee with the god but also with the living memory of the saint. Overall, the Sufi ritual practices which are related to the Chisti order, and especially those celebrating in the shrine of Baba Fareed are multi-faceted. These are music, food, prayer, pilgrimage, and remembrance, all attempts, through sensate means, to create a very directly and effectively affective connection with the Divine. In addition, these rituals have a dynamic and adaptive nature, change over time and keep their spirituality. Still, they maintain their role as vehicles of divine love and direction, and powerful instruments of bonding communities, fostering interfaith harmony and healing for South Asia's interfaith society.

4.1 Rituals at Baba Fareed's Shrine

This Shrine in Pakpattan is a living center of Sufi devotion, where ritual practices of Pirs and rituals of the community over centuries have been growing through their participation, oral transmission, and spiritual reverence. They are rooted in the Chishti Sufi tradition, are not expressions of religious commitment alone, but are also shared values of love (ishq), remembrance (zikr), service (khidmat), and intercession (tawassul). Participant observation and interviews with 20 caretakers, pilgrims, and locals' deduce remained very relevant in the personal, social, and spiritual life of the people in 2024 as the field work showed.

Urs is one of the most spiritually charged events taken place from 25th Zil Hajj to 10th Muharram, it marks the event when the saint joined (visal) with the Divine. As most of the visitors and the Diwan (hereditary successor) testify, the Urs is also the period of communal and spiritual revival. This period is deeply structured, symbolic, emotionally immersive, and the rituals undertaken by it are deeply structured, symbolic, and emotionally immersive. The ritual of tying the thread of the evening of 24th Zil-Qad marks the spiritual commencement of the festival and followed by distribution of makkhana, a sweet thought to have barakah (blessings) from the saint (Field notes July 2024 and July 2025).

The major ritual cycle at the shrine includes the annual Urs (commemorating death anniversary of the saint as his union with the Divine (visal)). The Urs commences from 25th Zilhaj with the thousands of devotees arriving from all over Pakistan and abroad. Sacred performances, material offerings, physical gesture of veneration, and communal participation are done in the course of rituals that constitute a tapestry of devotion, memory, and presence.

"Tying of the Thread" a ritual performed on 24th Zilhaj, is one of the earliest ritual in the Urs (cycle). At the place of the saint's grave, the Sajjada Nashin (Diwan) ties a thread to a window and distributes Makkhana, a sweet symbolizing blessing (tabarruk), to people. The act represented in this is a spiritual teaching (Urs or Shemeem Abbas, 2002). In addition, there are daily rituals of distributing blessed sugar, listening to Qawwali from the Noori Darwaza courtyard, and changing of the grave's covering (Iqbal & Farid, 2017).

The most powerful moments of communal religious ecstasy involve the Qawwali gatherings, which are called Mehfil-e-Sama'. The poetic verses are rich metaphors of divine love (ishq-e-ḥaqīqī), suffering, and longing and sung with great emotional resonance. These performances are central to these performances (though always only in part), because Baba Fareed's own kalām has been preserved in Punjabi and Siraiki. Listeners tend to get involved in mystical reflection or cathartic expression (Iqbal et al., 2022). In the Chishti tradition it is not mere amusement but a means of remembering (zikr) which is practiced musically (Renard, 2008; Frembgen, 2004).

The opening of the Bahishti Darwaza (The Gate of heaven) from 5th to 9th of Muharram is the second major ritual. This door, as deep symbolic of spiritual salvation, is ceremoniously

opened by Diwan after Maghrib prayers in turban tying ritual Paicha. The practice has become both sacred and institutionalized, and the door is opened each day by different officials of the Auqaf Department. Assuming one's mouth lit with sincerity, wishing for and passing through the Bahishti Darwaza, one is promised spiritual reward (Chaghatai, 2006).

Through symbolism of devotional gifts, the distribution of Kodi (sea shells) and Shakar (brown sugar) by the Diwan represents continuity as well as innovation. It is believed that Kodi brings blessings over a long period and Shakar is mystique to Baba Fareed himself as sometimes known as 'Ganj-e-Shakar' (Treasure of Sugar). The devotee such as these objects are not mere tokens, and the saints are objects tangible conduits of barakah (blessing), linking the devotee physically and spiritually to the saint (Abbas, 2002; Ahmad, 2023).

The Chishti commitment in the Dargah's Langar system mirrors khidmat. All visitors are offered free food and it exists in line with the ethos of equality and spiritual hospitality. It serves as this ritual for reinforcing this shrine's communal identity as well as providing material sustenance, alongside spiritual nourishment (Iqbal & Ibrahim, 2017; Anjum, 2009).

Physical expressions of humility, longing, being the ritual actions which include sweeping the Dargah floor, licking salt, lighting oil lamps (diya), offering charods and 'kissing' the tomb (mazār). These acts are not like the duty only, because Pilgrims do those only to feel the saint's presence, to ask intercession or to thanks granted prayers (Abbas et al., 2020; Frembgen, 2004). Ritual of mannat (making of the vow), especially by women, is tied of the Dargah's jali (grille) and coming with offerings when the wish is fulfilled; yet the belief in a saint's agency (hayāt al-awliyā') keeps running.

However, the practice of the ritual is also socio-economically important. During Urs, the Dargah Bazar becomes a hub of commerce selling items that are sacred, Sufi literature and devotional objects. This may be interpreted as commercialization, but it also means the shrine was implicated in the local economic structures (Ghafoor, 2001; Malik, 1991). Yet Baba Fareed is truly seen as a savior of many devotees and local shopkeepers who believe that because they are blessed (barakah) by him they are able to sustain themselves, thereby linking spirituality and economics in day to day life.

The built environment of the shrine has also been subject to change over time. The spiritual aesthetics of the shrine (Shahzad, 2009) have undergone a change due to the extensions by the Auqaf Department, replacement of the historical Tughlaq mosque with a modern structure and infrastructural expansions. There are however some of the devotees who are bothered by these changes and feel that emotional and mystical aura has gone with the changes (Ghafoor, 2001). However, the ritual performance sustains devotion.

To sum up, the rituals at Baba Fareed's shrine are complex rituals for devotion that are beyond the theologies. Through their interplay between sacred and worldly, individual and collective, seen and unseen, they make a dynamic interaction, one in which any kind of activity becomes a revealing and sometimes developing interaction with the world. This study's fieldwork demonstrates, however, that these practices are deeply felt, read, and performed by devotees in ways that multiply the saint's living body, grounding spiritual life in emotion, performing a moral community, and communicating tradition.

4.1.1 Qawwali: Musical Devotion and Emotional Transcendence

In Chishti Sufi ritual life, Qawwali is not just a performance but is a deep spiritual practice found at the core. Qawwali at this shrine is rooted in century's old tradition, and to the medium for invocation of divine remembrance (zikr), the expression of love for the saint and the creation of a medium for communal transcendence. This study concurs that the Qawwali, though described as 'indescribable', constitute the most intensely emotional and spiritually

transformative experience among the visitors to the shrine. This is especially true about the kalam of Baba Fareed, its metaphors of dust, of humility, of hunger, and of divine longing, which present a seductive image of itself. During interview, one elderly devotee from Pakpattan said:

“Sab Nam ki soch jaate hain jab Farid ka kalam sun'te hain, lagta hai jaise khud se mulaqat ho rahi hai” (“If it is speaking of Nam, I think that when I hear Farid’s verses I am meeting my own self”).

4.1.2 Collective Prayers and Zikr Gatherings at Baba Fareed’s Shrine

At the Dargah of Baba Fareed, collective prayer and zikr (remembrance of God) are crucial to both the devotional life and the ritualized communal life of the shrine community which serves as both emotional and moral quotients of the shrine community. Observations for the Urs of 2024 indicated that individual supplication (du‘ā) continues to be practiced throughout the year with collective observances of specific days reaching a climax for piety comprising large gatherings at specific timed hours such as after Maghrib and Isha. The sessions take place under canopies in the shrine compound as well as in open courtyards. Although men and women generally pray in different parts of the building, both sects show similar emotions of devotion—many with eyes swimming with tears, heads bowed, hands raised in reverent gestures. “We pray not just for ourselves, but for Baba’s blessing upon everybody who stepped here, be it Muslim, be it Sikh, rich, be it poor, we don’t care,” a caretaker interviewed 10 years ago, after 2025 Urs, reveals. It is also in line with the Chishti Sufi principle of openness and mercy (rahmat), in which a saint acts as a spiritual intercessor for all (Iqbal & Ibrahim, 2017).

4.1.3 Food Distribution as Sacred Duty (Langar-like Practice)

Food distribution at the shrine of Baba Fareed Ganj Shakar in Pakpattan is more of an act of charity than charity itself that is deeply rooted in the Sufi understanding of khidmat (service to humanity) and true to the Chishti philosophy about egalitarian hospitality. Even though the word “Langar” is not used in the Sikh tradition, the practice is similar but with spirit and function. Visitors or devotees get cooked meals (daily) such as sweet rice (zarda), lentils, sometimes meat, irrespective of their social or religious background. The volume of this ritual indeed increases many times during the Urs, which are celebrated closely in 2024. Volunteers, families, shrine workers prepare hundreds of large cauldrons of food as mannāt (a vow fulfilled after a wish comes true). The reasons people offered food to Baba Fareed the participants gave were that it is an act of gratitude for healing, family blessings, or protection. Sahiwal woman said, “I asked Baba’s waseela when I couldn’t have children and I brought cooked rice and makhana. I gave it out, I tried to educate all the girls. I am saying when my dua was accepted, I came with food in his name.” Such personal testimonies of feeding at the dargah, are a reflection of a widespread belief that giving to others at the dargah is a spiritual transaction (Rehman, 2017).

4.1.4 Ziyarat and Prostration at the Tomb

The practice of ziyarat pilgrimage to the tomb of a saint is central to the devotional life at Baba Fareed’s Dargah in Pakpattan. Above all else, it is not simply a physical journey, but a spiritual act of going towards (qurb) the saint’s enduring barakah (spiritual grace). In 2024 during fieldwork, it was seen time and time again that devotees approach the tomb with a balance of awe, reverence, and emotional vulnerability. The Dargah’s threshold was waked by many visitors, head bare, come barefoot to the hujra (inner sanctum), where the tomb of Baba Fareed is. One of the ways prostrating or touching the tomb in addition to kissing the

threshold was observed to show humility and seek intercession of the saint (tawassul) (Jaffer, 2015; Ahmad and Akhter, 2018).

Prostration is not directed to the physical grave of Baba Fareed but to the spiritual presence (roohaniyat) of Baba Fareed which the devotees consider a wasīla (intermediary) to divine mercy. In 2025 while at Urs, in an interview by a shrine worker, he said: "Yahan sajde Farid sirf raasta hai Allah ke liye hota hai" (The prostration here is only the way to God Baba Farid is). Such explanations are the result of an internal theological negotiation between orthodox Islamic teachings and folk devotional practices.

4.1.5 Pilgrimage to Baba Fareed's Grave as a Central Act of Devotion

Pakpatan Baba Fareed's shrine is not a usual pilgrimage place, it is rooted deeply in devotion, it connects the pilgrim not just to a sacred place, but to a sacred geography as well as a spiritual lineage. This has made it one of the most visited Sufi shrines in South Asia with devotees from all around Pakistan and beyond taking pilgrimages to the Dargah on annual and seasonal basis (Eaton 1982; Ahmad & Akhter 2018). The flow of the pilgrims toward the shrine also increases noticeably during the 25th of Zilhaj until the 10th of Muharram and in those days the rituals are intensified and the emotional atmosphere in the shrine complex is palpably 'charged'.

Most of the interview participants from Lahore, Bahawalpur and interior Sindh mentioned that they have been visiting the Dargah regularly for more than a decade, occasionally along with family members and the visit has become a generational tradition of traveling to the sacred. During the 2025 fieldwork one elderly woman remarks, "We don't come here as tourists, we come to see Baba, to shed our tears and to show gratitude."

4.1.6 Offering of Chadar, Flowers, Sweetmeats, and Personal Vows (Mannat)

One of the most visibly proved and emotionally charged act of devotion performed at Baba Fareed's shrine comprises of offering of chadar (decorative sheets), flower, sweetmeats like makkhanas and performing of personal vows, or mannat. And these are not mere efforts at a ritual gesture but are rather deeply personal appeals to the saint's spiritual intercession. During field visits in 2024, I observed devotees from various socio economic and regional backgrounds coming to the field carrying elaborately embroidered chadar (decoration) with Quranic verses that are inscribed or Sikh spiritual slogan of Ya Fareed which highlights the honor and gratitude towards the sadaat. Women are not left out when it comes to exerting their devotion to the saint; both women and men tie threads on the window grille or are preparing symbolic items outside the inner sanctum.

The other key ritual embedded in devotional culture of the shrine is that of act of mannat (a vow or spiritual request to a saint). Mannats are performed by women usually while they light oil lamps (dia jalana), tying a knot on the shrine's lattice window (jaali) or compelling to perform a future charity or langar distribution if the lady's wish is complied. During interviews, on several occasions, the participants told emotional testimonies about the 'grant' of their mannats (his illness, infertility or economic case), through the waseela (intercession) of the saint. According to narrative from one of the devotees of Sahiwal, who said she had not been conceived for years and later conceived after a mannat and returned for thanking the shrine offering new chadar.

4.1.7 The Urs Festival as Ritual Renewal

Celebrated as an annual Urs ('urs, meaning a 'wedding') on a respective date, Hazrat Baba Fareed's death anniversary at Pakpatan is not only a commemorative event but also a ritual renewal of our communal memory, spiritual devotion and local identity. Beginning 25th Zil-Haj and ending 10th Muharram, Urs attracts thousands of Muslim and occasionally Sikh and

Hindu pilgrims to gather together in this shared sacredity that reasserts the eternity (barakah) of Baba Faareed and century Sufi tradition (Ahmad & Akhter, 2018; Eaton, 1984). Fieldwork conducted in 2024 discovered that devotees from different socioeconomic background converged in Dargah compound neither just for rituals but also reimmerge themselves in a space of affective belonging and spiritual kinship. For those, the Urs is a time of inviting the spirit of the saint to dwell by making; chadar offerings, attending qawwali, collective du'a and mannat (vows). What I've termed Urs of Baba Fareed, however, is a multi-dimensional range of renewedness both spiritually, socially and economically.

4.1.8 Rituals Performed During the Urs of Baba Farid: Continuity, Symbolism, and Community Engagement

The Zilhijj Festival is a long festival of several days beginning from the 25th of Zilhaj to the 10th of Muharram, during which a great succession of ritual acts take place. The Urs ceremonies are ethnographically fieldwork-based and interviews held in 2024. The rituals represent theological framework of Chishti Sufism and occur in accordance to historical continuity and the changing institutional management (Eaton, 1984; Mubeen 2023).

Rasm e Dor Bandhna (tying of the sacred thread) is one of the earliest ritual, which is conducted in the evening of 24th Zilqad by the Diwan, hereditary successor of the spiritual of Baba Farid. The lattice window (jaali) near the saint's grave is tied to a thread, symbolic of opening a thread of communication between the saint and the devotees through the opening of Urs.

Throughout the Diwan the day from the 25th of Zilhaj until the 5th of Muharram, a daily ritual takes place consisting of du'a (prayer) over powdered sugar, which is given along with sweet drinks and Jillah (sweets). This also reaffirms the Diwan as an intercessor, a practice which alludes also to the saint's title, Ganj-e-Shakar (Jaffer, 2015), which signifies mysticism and the symbolism of spiritual sweetness in Chishti mysticism (Ahmad & Akhter, 2018).

One of the most noted ritual observed by people is the passing on of Kodiyan (sea shells) and Shakkar (brown sugar) from 1st of Muharram to 5th of Muharram. Diwan sits near Darbar Mauj darya, listens to the qawwali and slightly scatters the sea shells over the gathered devotees during afternoon Asr prayers. The brown sugar is then perfumed with prayers, and then distributed. It is a ritual wherein the original originator of it was Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, the celebrated murid and khalifa of Baba Farid, monarch of barakah (divine blessing) in households where food items perish and shells are kept to protect from the fleeting breeze, that is, were the food items coming to perish, but shells had value for spiritual protection (Snehi, 2022; Quraeshi, 2010).

The most iconic and biggest anticipated event in the calendar until then, is the ceremonial opening of Bahishti Darwaza aka (Gate of Heaven) from 5th to 9th of Muharram. The Diwan dastarbandi (tying of the turban) is a ritual in the process of giving the Diwan (inwrapper) a turban signifying his formal authority and spiritual lineage. Every evening after Maghrib prayers, it was opened and every dawn was closed, and the gate is believed to give divine intercession to those who pass through it.

In short, Baba Fareed Urs represents a one of a kind mingling of performative piety, symbolic heritage, and lived religiosity. Continuing to connect devotees to the spiritual presence of Baba Farid and the wider Chishti tradition, these observed rituals (tied thread, tabbarak, the sea shell and sugar on the brown plate, opening Bahishti Darwaza, and paicha) continue.

Typically, Baba Farid's Dargah devotees, especially women, light traditional oil lamps (diyā jalānā) in the form of one of the most visually evocative and spiritually symbolic rituals. This is a practice commonly observed only after a mannat (a sacred vow) has been fulfilled when

devotees place small clay lamps near the saint's tomb, creating a luminous atmosphere of supplication and gratitude.

4.1.9 Sacred Offerings, Veneration, and Devotional Reciprocity at the Dargah

Among the most important rituals at the Dargah of Baba Farid is *chādar charhānā*, the putting on of ornate cloth sheets on the saint's grave. Rich in visual symbolism and cultural veneration, this practice is performed almost exclusively by men because women are not allowed into the saint's *hujra* (interior tomb chamber). The devotees bring several sheets covered with Quranic verses or Sufi slogans from all across Pakistan and India, some of them gilt with gold or silver thread. Ceremonial as this offering may be, it is also a very embodied act of devotion that signified surrender, reverence and hope for *barakah* (spiritual blessing) (Eaton 1982; Ahmad & Akhter 2018). Field visits in 2024–2025 witnessed *chādar* laid while the devotees followed well behind, tears, silent prayers, and with grave emotional gravity signifying the act of laying *chādar*, as it is often performed.

4.1.10 Built Milieu of Baba Farid's Dargah

Apart from being a sacred tomb, Hazrat Baba Farid's Dargah in Pakpattan is also a monumental complex with a long history of spiritual, architectural and political transformations. In 13th century, the respected Chishti saint who brought the order to Punjab, Baba Farid got buried at Pakpattan. And over centuries, it caught the attention of pilgrims from all that was subcontinental. Field visits and interviews conducted in 2024–2025 show that since 1982, when the shrine turned physical space into the layered form of devotional memory, familial legacy, and fluctuating institutional authority found on the ground (Eaton 1982; Mubeen 2015)?

Today the Dargah comprises of a number of tombs, courtyards, prayer spaces and ceremonial structures, all of which narrate a specific point in the history and spirituality of the shrine. However, some of its notable features include an original Tughlaq-era mosque (now replaced by a modern structure), the central tomb of Baba Farid, the *Musalla-e-Nizami*, which is a spot reserved in remembrance of the most renowned disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.

4.1.11 Urs as both Spiritual and Cultural Performance

The annual commemorative religious gathering of the Urs of Baba Farid Ganj Shakar at Pakpattan does not just happen – it is a performance of sacred devotion and cultural expression. Urs at its core represents the saint's union with the Divine, and is thus a theological apex of Chishti Sufi tradition. At the same time, however, the event is also a socio cultural festival and gathers ritual, economy, heritage and public life into a complex construct of the sacred and the secular.

The Urs from a spiritual angle involves night long *Qawwali*, public *du'ā*, reciting Quranic verses, *zikr*, *ziyarat*, *mannat*, and symbolic passage through the *Bahishti Darwaza*, and, in some forms, the Dargah previously mentioned. Such practices are based on Chishti teachings effectuating divine love (*ishq-e-haqīqī*), humility, servitude, and remembrance, which invariably affectively gear the believer to include the personal and collective faith (Iqbal & Farid, 2017; Ahmad & Akhter, 2018). Field observations and interviews during the 2024–2025 visits as documented repeatedly by pilgrims describe the Urs as a time of “spiritual cleansing,” “deep emotional union,” and “return to the self through the saint.”

Through ethnographic observations in the field of the Dargah over the course of 2024, it becomes clear that ritual life is very dynamic at the Dargah. It rather represents a dynamic and evolving Sufi tradition adapted to the historical and political changes as well as to theological debates. The shrine stays vibrant as a place of spiritual dialogue between past and

present; whether through the resilience of a women's devotional presence, reformulated roles of the Sajjada Nashin, or adaptive responses to spatial and structural intrusions.

Above all, Baba Fareed's Dargah persists in articulating the possibility of a pluralistic and compromising spirituality. It attracts pilgrims come from different places and from different social backgrounds but also across religious lines women, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus others who all found meaning in this shared sacredness. The devotion of Baba Fareed's poetry in the Guru Granth Sahib, the participation of interreligious persons at Urs, and the drawing of people who come to the shrine for healing, offering and refuge all attest to the shrine's continued service as a beacon of intercommunal harmony. This is how Baba Fareed Shrine continues to be a living example of Sufi ideals of unity, love, closeness to the divine in the heart of the Punjab's spiritual and cultural space.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of the study indicate that Baba Fareed's Sufi shrine is a spiritual institution with shared ritual functions. Vehicles for spiritual transformation through devotional music, communal fueling with meals, and the collective prayer itself. Music is a central feature at shrine (qawwali) in evoking emotional engagement, theological reflection and participatory communal experience. The langar at Baba Fareed's shrine and niyaz or communal food distributed to the shrine establish the common values of humility, inclusiveness and service (khidmat), identifying and reinforcing communality of the people. Prayer as a shared emotional and spiritual experience phenomenon in creating *communitas*, are in conformity with Victor Turner's theory of *communitas*. Rituals at Baba Fareed's Sufi shrine are of central importance in the creation and maintenance of interfaith relations in today's complex religious landscape of Pakistan. This study demonstrates via fieldwork evidence and previous scholarship how these place related rituals at these sacred sites are not solely about the faith, but also as performatives of coexistence, and these sacred places are bodies of shared practices (of coexistence) where the boundaries between the religious communities are softened. Rituals like qawwali and langar accompanied by collective prayer, help diverse religious identities of Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and others come together and experience mutual reverence and ethical communion. These rituals are representative of the inclusive nature of these rituals, particularly those that are related to music and food, which align with Diana Eck's theory of interfaith spatiality, because sacred sites become contact zones of pluralism and spiritual diplomacy. While during urs celebrations and qawwali session one sees Sikh, Hindu and even Christian visitors to perform their devotional acts at Baba Fareed's shrine it indicates that devotional acts help negotiating doctrinal divides and contributing to a common cultural memory operating on vernacular spirituality.

The research finds that the shrine of Hazrat Baba Farid Ganj Shakkar in Pakpattan remains to represent the alive tradition of Sufi inclusiveness, social integration and harmony between believers in modern Punjab. The research was conducted on ritual practices, Qawwali, Langar, collective prayer, and pilgrimage, as transformational acts of devotion and community building, using a qualitative ethnographic case study supported by participant observation, field notes, and thirty semi-structured interviews. The study also followed Victor Turner (1969) theory of ritual and *communitas* and Diana Eck (2001) theory of religious pluralism and interfaith spatiality where the demarcations between religions become unclear due to the shared spirituality. Findings of thematic analysis with Braun and Clarke (2006) showed that rituals bring about a sense of renewal of morals, equality, and social solidarity that go beyond the level of religious affiliation to the participants. The results confirm the view that these practices serve as ethical and affective systems that perpetuate the pluralistic spiritual

environment of Punjab and recalls the concept of Durkheim that ritual was a source of collective identity and the concept of Eliade that sacred continuity. The research by combining theoretical understanding and field-based evidence shows that shrine practices are dynamic meaning-making processes that negotiate faith, culture, and coexistence in the changing Pakistani religious culture, which has considerable implications to interreligious dialogue, heritage conservation, and anthropology of lived religion.

Field observations and interviews confirm that these rituals reinforce collective memory by linking current generations to a shared past. For instance, the recitation of Baba Fareed's Punjabi poetry and its continued inclusion in Sufi gatherings and scriptures symbolizes a deep intertextual and interreligious cultural bond. Similarly, the architecture, oral narratives, and devotional routines reconstruct the life and teachings of Baba Fareed's in ways that preserve Muslim cultural identity even within a non-majority context.

Rituals at Baba Fareed's shrine, such as urs, qawwali, and du'a, are social dramas where for some time tensions of sectarian exclusion, gender roles, state control, and disempowerment are suspended. The shrine is a liminal space of liminality, where devotees (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, among others, including seculars) synchronously relinquish social categories to indulge in shared spiritual emotion and community. For example, during urs, the interaction between pilgrims from different social backgrounds, to an extent, emotional expressions and ritual gestures, represent Turner's liminal phase, which is characterized by the absence or modification of normal social processes that allow *communitas*, which is interpreted as empathic experience rooted in moral equality and sense of mutuality.

The research illustrates that rituals like qawwali and langar, create contact zone (Eck 2001) in case of sacred spaces in Punjab in which boundaries between the religious traditions are tempered and new forms of cultural solidarity are negotiated through the acts of bodies as contrasted from theological agreement. The study records many instances of Muslim and Hindu, Sikh and Christian visitors to the the Baba Fareed's shrine where the visitors both engage in rituals and articulate deep emotional and spiritual relationship with the subjects and teachings that they are at. These findings further and extend the findings of these previous research (Eaton, 1982; Ahmad & Akhter, 2018; Abbasi, 2018) through contemporary, field based evidence of the continuation of functions of sacred rituals as interfaith bridges in the post Partition landscape.

This study, in turn, contributes to the field by asserting that interfaith engagement in South Asia is not only a theoretical ideal that ought to be realized, but a ritual reality forming and resourced through the local actors, spiritual traditions and shared practice of devotion. It ultimately posits that sacred rituals for blending the pluralistic history of Pakpattan is essential instruments in the offer of intercommunal empathy, symbolic reconciliation and the perpetuation of the inclusive spirit of Punjab.

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