

# “A Blessing on Our People”: Bibi Pak Daman, Sacred Geography, and the Construction of the Nationalized Sacred

**Noor Zaidi**

*University of Pennsylvania*

## Abstract

This article focuses on the hagiographies and debates related to Bibi Pak Daman, a small shrine in Lahore’s Old City. Said to house the graves of six women from the Prophet Muhammad’s household and subject to a range of theories regarding its origins, Bibi Pak Daman is critical space in validating Pakistan’s religious character and centrality in broader map of Islam. The most widely disseminated claim maintains that the main mausoleum in Bibi Pak Daman is that of Bibi Ruqayyah bint Ali, daughter of ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, the fourth of the “Rightly Guided” Caliphs and the first Shiite Imam. The implications of this presence allow devotees to link Bibi Pak Daman to seminal events in the formation of Islamic and Shiite history in particular, affirming that the lands that would become Pakistan were vital at Islam’s inception, rather than a much later, peripheral recipient of Muhammad’s message.

Yet like no other site in Pakistan, Bibi Pak Daman exemplifies the tensions that exist between state sanctioned religious rhetoric and local and folk traditions, with the unease with the government’s role as religious arbitrator, between nationalism and communal rivalry, and within a minority Shiite community often struggling to legitimate its beliefs in a nation with a rapidly-narrowing space for public religious plurality.

## Introduction

Pakistan’s landscape is dotted with hundreds of shrines, in massive complexes and small villages, scattered across a country where ties to Sufism and the shrines of various saints and Sufi *pīrs* run deep. Many are unknown to the vast majority of the public, serving as sites of worship for rural communities, while some take on critical national prominence. Each shrine possesses its own unique characteristics and circle of devotees, but perhaps none so captures the range of competing ideologies and tensions about the proper role of religion in society that have emerged in the process of nation-building in Pakistan than the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman, nestled amongst the crumbling colonial construction and bustling narrow streets of Lahore’s Old City.

Said to house the graves of six women of the Prophet Muhammad’s household and subject to a range of theories regarding its origins, Bibi Pak Daman has become a critical

space in debates over the nature of the nation’s religious character and place in a broader map of Islam. The identity of the six women buried at this small complex in Lahore remains a source of some controversy, unlike the more prominent Sufi saints of Pakistan. The most widely disseminated claim states that the main mausoleum in Bibi Pak Daman belongs to Bibi Ruqayyah bint Ali, daughter of ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, the fourth of the “Rightly Guided” Caliphs (*Rāshidūn*) and the first Shiite Imam.<sup>1</sup> For devotees, the implications of a daughter of ‘Ali buried in Pakistan are monumental: it allows them to link Bibi Pak Daman — and therefore Pakistan — to seminal events in the formation of Islam and Shiite history. It affirms that the lands that would become Pakistan were vital at Islam’s inception, rather than a much later, peripheral recipient of Muhammad’s message. Yet though believers seek to establish its place in Islamic and Shiite sacred geography, Bibi Pak Daman continues to occupy an ambiguous and contested space in both devotional and official discourse.

Shiite shrines have long been sites of accommodation and conflict, where personal and dynastic rivalries over religious authenticity and financial patronage have played out on sacred spaces. Scholars such as Juan Cole, Yitzhak Nakash, and Meir Litvak have analyzed the links between shrines, politics, and finances in their works on the older shrine cities of Iraq and Iran.<sup>2</sup> Cole, in particular, identifies the border shrine cities of Iraq as the true “frontier” between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as territorial control of these shrines became central governmental concerns. While Cole addresses physical borders, I argue that Bibi Pak Daman forms an *internal* frontier shrine: it is the physical space onto which competing ideologies about religion and the state are mapped and conflicts over meaning are played out. Few shrines under the government’s control were subject to such competing interpretations or charged valence, and as a result of the legal environment established after independence, devotees had to resort to government authority to police the differences between the sects and enforce the boundaries — both spatially and spiritually — between Sunnis and Shiites.

Certainly, the appeal of Bibi Pak Daman owes in part to the influence of Sufism in the subcontinent, chronicled so comprehensively by scholars ranging from Anne Marie Schimmel to Katherine Ewing.<sup>3</sup> Like other *pīrs* and saints, Ruqayyah’s life is held as an

<sup>1</sup> Bibi Pak Daman (or Damana, pl.) contains 6 grave markers. The center structure is for Bibi Ruqayyah. The five others are for her female relatives and companions, though explanations vary on whether they are her daughters or Muslim Ibn Aqeel’s sisters.

<sup>2</sup> See Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi’ite Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd, 2002); Meir Litvak. “The Finances of the ‘Ulama’ Communities of Najaf and Karbala, 1796–1904.” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 40, Issue 1 (March 2000), 41–66; Yitzhak Nakash, “The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi’i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 81 (1995), 153–164.

<sup>3</sup> See Katherine Pratt Ewing. *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); S. Jamal Malik. “Waqf in Pakistan: Change in Traditional Institutions.” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series. Bd. 30, Nr. ¼ (1990), 63–97.

exemplary tale of piety and a source of emulation. Her husband, Muslim ibn Aqeel, was an envoy for the third Shi'a Imam, Hussain; along with their two sons, he was murdered in the city of Kufa and together are considered the first martyrs of Karbala. Yet Bibi Pak Daman is distinct for multiple reasons, and it is these factors that have made it the embodiment of competing narratives that continue to characterize Islam in Pakistan. It is the shrine to a female figure, one whose history ties her firmly to central Shiite narratives. Because her arrival in the region predates the master Sufi *pīrs* by centuries and contestations over the recorded history remain, the shrine operates without the clear line of hereditary *sajjada nashīns*, descendants of a Sufi *pīr* who inherit the *pīr's* divine blessings. It is these unique characteristics that have also repeatedly led to outbreaks of conflict between Sunni and Shiite groups that contest the space of the shrine. With the federalization of *waqf* properties — inalienable religious endowments held in a charitable trust — in the 1960s and the creation of the Department of Auqaf to manage these properties, the debates over Bibi Pak Daman and religious practice at the shrine were exacerbated. Like no other shrine in Pakistan, Bibi Pak Daman exemplifies the tensions that exist between nationalism and communal ties, with the unease with the government's role as religious arbitrator, between state sanctioned religious rhetoric and tradition, and within a minority Shiite community often struggling to legitimate its beliefs in a nation with a rapidly-narrowing public space for religious discourse. Thus, this article will focus on the hagiographies and narratives, bureaucratic history, and contestations around Bibi Pak Daman and illustrate how the Shi'a minority in Pakistan manages a difficult balancing act between emphasizing the unique character of the site and resisting the "othering" of their community.

## Tales of an Extraordinary Life

How Ali's daughter would have ended up buried in a small sanctuary in Lahore is the subject of various competing narratives, all of which reveal the complex religious, financial, and jurisprudential interests at stake in this shrine. For Shiites, hagiographies reveal the dual impulse to link Lahore to Medina, Najaf, Karbala, Damascus — all the holiest sites of Shi'ism — while still grounding Ruqayyah in the local context and affirming their loyalty to the national idea. The most prominent narratives link Bibi Ruqayyah to the Battle of Karbala, the seminal formative moment in the Shi'a faith. For the Shi'as of Pakistan, the story begins on Ali's deathbed. It is said that as he lay dying of poison, 'Ali gathered his children around him to deliver his last will and instructions

---

Riaz Hassan. "Religion, Society and the State in Pakistan: Pirs and Politics." *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (May, 1987), 554; For more on the role of Sufism in the spread of Islam and the consolidation of political authority through British rule see Sarah Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and "Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement", *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no.3 (1979), 485–517; Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

(*wasiyat*). He instructed all his sons to pledge their allegiance to Hassan and Hussain, who would become the second and third Imams. Then, he called forward his eldest daughter, Zainab, and entrusted to her the mission to carry on the message of the Prophet. His sons protested that their sister had been given this weighty mission while they still lived:

It was at that time that ‘Ali revealed the coming events of Karbala, and stated, “This is what the Prophet has revealed, and so shall it be, as Allah has decided that the protection and greatness of our religion shall be affirmed through our blood.”

After this, one by one, ‘Ali gave his daughters instructions for the proselytizing of Islam and described the cultures and geographic locations of various lands to which they must go.

Today, where Islam is present and prevails, there was the presence of the daughters of ‘Ali; however, where the women of ‘Ali did not reach, Islam has not remained.

To Sayyeda Ruqayyah, he claimed, “Daughter, your husband and sons will be martyred in Karbala, but you will have to take your daughters and Fatima’s progeny to Sindh and Hind. There, you are responsible for the preaching of the religion of Mustafa [the Prophet Muhammad], for in that part of the world is the opportunity to spread Islam the greatest. I see that in Sindh and Hind the people will become Muslims by your hands, and then this will be the land that will be suitable for the people of Banu Fatima to live in, for there will be the greatest number of those who love the family of the Prophet.”<sup>4</sup>

The moment of ‘Ali’s will is a critical moment for Shi’ism; according to traditions, ‘Ali’s words created the first imagined map of Islam, constructing a sacred geography that would then come to fruition as his descendents spread to preach the faith. In keeping with this narrative, local hagiographies claimed that Ruqayyah was raised with the knowledge that she would survive the events of Karbala and was destined to preach in the subcontinent — elevating the status of Islam in the region.

From this, Ruqayyah’s story takes two common variations. In the first, Bibi Ruqayyah set out from Medina at the instruction of the 4<sup>th</sup> Shi’a Imam, heading a caravan of 300 members of the Bani Hashim tribe, including many of ‘Ali’s grandsons, in 65 Hijri. Medina had become unbearable for the family of the Prophet, and “in an atmosphere of upheaval and tyranny, according to the will of her father, the daughter of Ali set off towards her preordained destination.”<sup>5</sup> For decades, Bibi Ruqayyah preached Islam in the regions of historic Khorāsān, Sindh, and Hind and “prepared the grounds for *jihād* against Banu Umayyah” [the tribe of the enemies at Karbala].<sup>6</sup> Upon hearing the

---

<sup>4</sup> Masood Hashmi. *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah Bint Ali: Bibi Pak Damana Lahore Mein*. (Lahore: Al-Fazi Publications, 2004, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 185–86.

<sup>5</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 17.

sorrow-filled sermons of Bibi Ruqayyah and hearing her preach the word of Islam, the “idol and fire worshippers of Khorāsān and Sindh” converted in large masses to her message, especially among the “lower Hindu castes that had been oppressed by their Brahmin rulers.”<sup>7</sup> These developments proved deeply troubling to both the rulers of the Umayyad dynasty and the local Raja. Spies were repeatedly sent by the Umayyad rulers to capture and kill her people, and they conspired with the Raja to stem her influence. The famed conqueror of Multan, Muhammad bin Qasim, was allegedly among those sent to wage war against Bibi Ruqayyah.<sup>8</sup> Ruqayyah’s army, lead by Abdullah Abu Hashim bin Muhammad Hanafiyya bin Ali, defeated Muhammad Bin Qasim’s army and captured him; when he was informed of the woes of the family of the Prophet and the cruelty of Banu Umayyah, he became a supporter of Bani Hashim and cursed his former rulers. He then proceeded to “raise the flag of Islam in all of Sindh” in the name of Imam Hussain, and when he returned to Damascus, he was condemned to death for his betrayal of Banu Umayyah — a startling assertion, and one that is largely absent more accepted histories of Muhammad bin Qasim’s exploits. This connection forged between two figures whose historic accounts almost never overlap reveals much about the distinct investment that local hagiographies display in crafting an expansive narrative for Ruqayyah’s place in Pakistan’s history.<sup>9</sup>

In these hagiographies, the pursuit of Ruqayyah did not end with Muhammad bin Qasim’s conversion, even as her caravan crossed the Sindh River and arrived in Lahore in 88 Hijri.<sup>10</sup> Representatives of the Umayyad dynasty increased efforts to have her captured, winning the support of the Raja of Jaislamer, who feared the threat to his rule that the conversions posed. The Raja’s son, Rai Chawli, was sent to bring Ruqayyah and her companions to the court and receive judgment for inciting rebellion against the patron idols of the people. Such was Ruqayyah’s presence, according to the narrative, that Rai Chawli’s heart was instead turned to Islam and his men set out to defend Ruqayyah against the Umayyad dynasty, as the Caliph Walīd Bin Abdul Malik had dispatched a large host towards Lahore in order to subdue the rebellions that threatened to break out in her name. When Ruqayyah received news of the impending force, the narrative tells us that she gathered the remaining women of Bani Hashim and, in their

<sup>7</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> In 712 AD, the fiercely pro-Umayyad Governor of Iraq, Hajjaj bin Yousef, dispatched his young nephew Muhammad bin Qasim to conquer Sindh in the name of the Umayyad dynasty.

<sup>9</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 141.

<sup>10</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 142. Note: the exact years of Bibi Ruqayyah’s movements vary across sources, and multiple reasons are given to address the inconsistencies. First, and most commonly, sources attribute the confusion to the strict veiling that the notable women of Bani Hashim observed, making verification of their exact movements and locales more difficult. These women often had multiple names, used in a variety of contexts. Finally, hagiographers note that her presence only appears in local documents once news of her activities spread — often many years after she had settled comfortably in a new locale. These factors remain a challenge to a historical study of high-ranking women of this era.

despair, prayed for divine deliverance from the threat of constant peril. In accordance with their wishes and because of their high standing in the eyes of God, the ground ruptured and their camp vanished underground.<sup>11</sup>

Her disappearance, then, is not death, as hagiographies claim that these women are “still alive, just out of our sight.”<sup>12</sup> As such, her ability to intercede on behalf of her devotees is influenced both by her lineage and her in-between state: neither living nor dead, she transcends both realms. The shrine is thus for Shiites a place of remembrance and commemoration, where a remnant piece of cloth of the tents was said to be visible after she disappeared, rather than housing the physical remains of Ruqayyah and her companions. Because the women had not died, the Raja’s son respected their veiling and built a boundary wall around the area so that no men could easily access the site where Ruqayyah and her companions had disappeared. With time, it was forgotten by the vast majority of devotees that these were not graves, though the pleas for intercession continued unabated. This attribute of transcending death is in direct contrast to the lives of the Sufi saints that have shaped Islam in South Asia; while believers certainly affirm the saints’ ability to intercede on their behalf, there are no claims about their immortality. In particular, with the government’s nationalization of *waqf* properties, the government’s official biographies of saints and *pīrs* simply characterize them as figures that embody exemplary Muslim behavior, not as those who can miracles. In Auqaf documents, the graves at Bibi Pak Daman were built to hold the physical remains of the six women, and references to their living status are excluded. Instead, it is the good deeds of Ruqayyah’s life and the importance of her presence in what would become Pakistan that is emphasized.

The claim that these women were simply taken away due to the threat on their lives most obviously mirrors one of the central tenets of the Shiite faith: the occultation (*ghaybat*) of the last Shiite Imam, who was hidden by God to ensure that the line of succession from Ali would continue till the Day of Judgment. As such, it is not surprising that the concept of the *ghaybat*, which remains a source of great tension between Sunni and Shiite theology, would not receive official sanction in government materials. Yet attributing such a sacred phenomenon to Ruqayyah is particularly striking; the 12<sup>th</sup> Shiite Imam, or the Mahdi, is the holiest of figures, one whose very existence is what defines and continues a distinct Shiite identity. The most revered figures in Shi’ism achieved martyrdom, sacrifices that were given willingly in the name of God at the Prophet’s family; yet the focus on Ruqayyah’s *ghaybat* is implicitly equated with the Mahdi and sends a different message — when surrounded by non-believers in a foreign land, pursued by the enemies of Ali and his family, she was saved to illustrate both God’s omnipotence and the exalted status of the Prophet’s family.

---

<sup>11</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 34.

The second variation of Bibi Ruqayyah's story is more prevalent, though certainly the two narratives share much in common, differing slightly in the names of the participants. Perhaps because this narrative warrants a brief mention in John Subhan's 1938 work *Sufism, its Saints and Shrines*, a popular work written by a Sufi convert to Christianity, it is the version that is quoted in the few Western sources that reference Bibi Pak Daman. This variation specifically names the five daughters of Muslim bin Aqeel buried along with Ruqayyah — Bibi Hūr, Bibi Nūr, Bibi Gawhar, Bibi Tāj, and Bibi Shahbaz. These names are Persian in origin, and for those who express doubt about Ruqayyah's presence, this fact undermines the claim that these women are members of Ali's family. Subhan argued, however, this fact "need not surprise us, because after the Muslim conquest of Persia most of the ladies belonging to the Persian royal family were given in marriage to 'Ali's sons and relatives."<sup>13</sup>

For Subhan and many of his local sources, Ruqayyah's journey began in Hussain's camp on the plains of Karbala. On the night before the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, Hussain asked Ruqayyah and her companions to leave the camp and proceed to the subcontinent, based on his father's will and instructions. After much wandering, Ruqayyah and her companions reached the land of Lahore, setting in motion the astonishing chain of events that is narrated in a local hagiography,

It is said that one day, all of a sudden, all of the statues and idols in the temples fell from their places, though they were made of stone and firmly attached to their pedestals. It was impossible for them to simply shatter as they did. At the same time, the fire that continuously burned in the temples went out, and its worshippers were astounded. The superstitious Hindu nation saw these as terrible signs, and commotion reigned. The Raja called all his ministers and told them to investigate. The court fortune-tellers were summoned and asked the cause. They learned that some foreigners had arrived and had camped in the middle of the forest, and their arrival had caused these events. The Raja gave the orders to capture the foreigners and bring them to the court.<sup>14</sup>

In order to bring these foreigners in, the Raja dispatched his son, Raj Kumar Bakr, to their camp. When he reached the hill, he announced the Raja's orders in a loud voice, thinking these foreigners would not be able to comprehend his words. To his shock, one woman, who appeared to be their leader, stepped forward and responded in his local tongue that they were the descendents of the Prophet of Islam, come to seek asylum after the trials of Karbala. Though Ruqayyah's words had a great impact upon him, the prince was forced by duty to bring them in, either willing or through force. His words caused Ruqayyah to give him a furious look, "the force of which he could not bear and fainted."<sup>15</sup> When Raj

<sup>13</sup> John Subhan. *Sufism, its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India*. (Lucknow: The Lucknow Publishing House, 1938) pg. 120.

<sup>14</sup> Masood Raza Khaki. *Bibian Pak Daman* (Lahore: Haidri Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman*, 8.

Kumar awoke, however, he renounced idol worshipping and converted to Islam, taking the name ‘Abdullah. As a result, for some time Ruqayyah and her family were able to live in peace and preach the message of Islam to her followers under the protection of the prince and the favor he commanded from the Raja.

However, continued harassment by the Hindus made their lives unbearable. Ruqayyah gathered the 704 Quranic scholars that had traveled under her command from Karbala and ordered them to disperse to continue her preaching.<sup>16</sup> Thus, she ensured that her teachings would continue around the region, in accordance with her father’s wishes, as these scholars would become venerated *pirs* amongst their own followers. Then, she gathered her family and “prayed that the earth might shield them from the sight of these unbelievers, and in answer to their prayer, the earth opened her mouth and mercifully swallowed them!”<sup>17</sup> Upon witnessing this wondrous sight, the prince vowed to protect this sacred ground, building seven tombs over the spot and becoming the first *mujawar* (caretaker) of the shrine. The present guardians of the shrine claim to be descendants of this prince, gaining stature and influence from appropriating the concept of hereditary succession that marks other Sufi shrines in Pakistan.

## Sayyeda Ruqayyah Becomes “Bibi Pak Daman”

What emerges from these narratives of Bibi Ruqayyah’s life and from an analysis of the tropes are the multitude of ways in which discussions about Bibi Pak Daman navigate a dual purpose: they validate the importance of Islam in South Asia, linking this shrine to the perceived Arab “center” of the faith while simultaneously appropriating Ruqayyah into a national narrative. Thus, Bibi Pak Daman serves a clear nationalist function, both in official documents and local hagiographies written by Shiites and Sunnis alike. ‘Ali’s prophecy that it would be in Hind and Sindh where there would be the greatest numbers of Shi’as who revered him lends legitimacy to the nature of Islam and Shi’ism in the subcontinent, where Muslims are often criticized as practicing a syncretic, overly ritualized and emotional Islam, one that deviates from the origins of Islam both in space and kind. If ‘Ali, the Commander of the Faithful and the Lion of God for his Shiite followers, would send one of his beloved daughters to journey so far from her homeland, surely this land would one day be worthy of her presence. While the great centers of early Islam such as Medina, Mecca, Damascus, Najaf, and Karbala remain physically out of reach for the majority of the devotees at Bibi Pak Daman, the presence of Bibi Ruqayyah draws Pakistan into this Islamic sacred geography. No longer on the periphery of this map, Pakistan becomes integrally linked to the narrative of Karbala and the foundational events of Islam. Thus, she brings the far-away events of Karbala in closer proximity, mapping Pakistan’s place into the sacred geography described by ‘Ali and perpetuated by his followers.

---

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Latif Malik. *Aulia-e-Lahore*. (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publishers, 2005), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Subhan, *Sufism*, 122.



The understanding that shrines serve a vital social function and play a critical role in ordering devotees' conceptions of space and time first emerged from Victor Turner's influential concept of the pilgrimage site as the "center out there."<sup>18</sup> While anthropologists and historians of religion have since problematized Turner's claims, primarily regarding the anti-structure nature of pilgrimage and the *communitas* it engenders, the notion of the shrine occupying an important aspect of the lived and imagined identities of devotees remains salient. However, it is clear that for many faiths, and most certainly Shi'ism, there exist multiple centers of this sort, places that possess an emotional valence for believers and, linked together, construct a map of sacred geography. It is Ruqayyah's very association to key figures in Shi'ism that make her story relevant and her shrine a place of special stature. She is, of course, revered for her singular role in spreading Islam in the subcontinent, but it is the references to these other narratives that frame the contours of her story. Beginning with Ali's will, her story winds through her husband and sons' martyrdom in Kufa, Hussain's sacrifice in Karbala, and Zainab's sorrows and trials in Damascus. Her shrine, then, functions simultaneously as a place for devotees to gather to seek intercession from a living presence and as a local conduit to a wider religious space. Medina, Najaf, Karbala, Damascus — all the holiest sites and most emotive narratives are brought together in this small and unassuming complex in the crowded alleys of Lahore.

However, while the ambiguities of Ruqayyah's life allow Bibi Pak Daman to be linked with a broader sacred geography, her story and persona have become deeply imbued with tropes that resonate on a local and national level. The fact that Ruqayyah chose this region and then converted its people en masse affirms the case for the historic presence of Islam in the region — and, by extension, provides validation for the necessity for the creation of Pakistan. Indeed, the very justification for the establishment of this state rested on the notion Islam was not just a foreign influence imposed on the local population but was organically rooted in the subcontinent; Islam's inherent incompatibility with Hinduism was exacerbated by the colonial structure and necessitated a separate state. Thus, Islam's historic presence — embodied by Ruqayyah — affirms that a kind of religious distinctiveness has existed since the early age of Islam and not merely created vis-à-vis India in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as colonial enterprise wound down.

The blessing of Ruqayyah's presence in Pakistan is repeated throughout literature and conscious effort is made to prove that she did arrive — and indeed belongs — in the region. Unlike the majority of *pīrs* and *sajjada nashīns* buried across Pakistan who draw their influence from a clear line of hereditary descent, the ambiguities of Ruqayyah's story have led to some differing claims. Many Sunnis believe that Ruqayyah is one of the daughters of Syed Ahmad Tokhta Tirmizi, a Sufi *pīr* who lived in the Lahore area in the

<sup>18</sup> Victor Turner. "The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goals." *History of Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Feb., 1973), 191–230.

12<sup>th</sup> century. According to the official pamphlet published by the Auqaf Department, however, “There have been many questions raised over the decades about the shrine, but the most accepted explanation is that after Karbala, this Bibi was forced to leave her home for a foreign land.”<sup>19</sup> While the debate is certainly more complex, with deep-seated interests at stake, the official interpretation is that Ruqayyah is the daughter of Ali. Thus, both government works and hagiographies make varied attempts to disprove any other theories, an indication of a broad political and religious commitment to the notion that a daughter of Ali had made her way to Pakistan. One writer laments,

For us, the people of Pakistan, what a fortunate blessing that for our spiritual guidance, one of the children of Ali came as a guest to our land, but we have not recognized her as she deserved. If we had, today Bibi Pak Daman’s blessed shrine would have been built in a manner that suited her standing. . . . Many people do not agree upon how she came to Lahore, but the truth is that most people are not knowledgeable about the history of Islam. Her presence is found in the history of Hind and Sindh if one knows how to look.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the cause for controversy should not be in the identity of the graves in the shrine but in the way that Pakistanis have cared for this blessing that has been bestowed upon them — a critique of moral and physical decay and the inability to safeguard the nation that one sees mirrored in a variety of different discourses. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with proving Ruqayyah’s identity pervades much of the local literature, because the debate has significant implications for nationalist interpretations. Her presence is often referred to as a favor bestowed upon the nation that must continuously prove itself worthy of her presence — especially since she remains alive. A shrine for a figure of this stature is a validation of both Shi’ism in particular and Islam in general on the subcontinent, and it bolsters the nationalist mystique of Pakistan.

Thus, the second aspect of the duality between Bibi Pak Daman’s internationalized and nationalized milieus is the way that Ruqayyah’s arc has been imbued with references to known saints and seminal events in the constructed national narrative. The head of Ruqayyah’s army and the man who captured Muhammad bin Qasim was said to be Abdullah Abu Hashim bin Muhammad Hanafiyya, a grandson of Ali. Abu Hashim was later killed in the service of protecting Bani Hashim’s caravan “and to this day his grave is in the Clifton district of Karachi, known as Abdullah Shah Ghazi.”<sup>21</sup> The shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi is now a sprawling complex in Pakistan’s largest city, and the saint is regarded as the patron saint of Karachi. The link to Karachi is notable; though Bibi Pak Daman is located in Lahore, this narrative places the shrine within a national matrix, associating it with personalities who are deeply rooted in

<sup>19</sup> Ghaffir Shehzad. *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*. (Lahore: Department of Religious Affairs and Auqaf, Punjab, January 2005), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 142.

regional and national consciousness. While the vast majority of *pirs* and shrines in Pakistan resonate on a local level, in a nation where these provincial and ethnic divisions resonate deeply, Ruqayyah's life connects these sites in an overarching national narrative.

The most commonly known reference, however, is in the story of Ali Hujwari, Data Ganj Bakhsh, the patron saint of Lahore. Multiple sources recount that Hujwari was a devoted pilgrim to Bibi Pak Daman and would spend days in contemplation and prayer at the shrine. Such was Hujwari's regard for Ruqayyah's exalted status — and his own humility — that he was said to have crawled miles on hands and knees on his approach to Bibi Pak Daman. There, he would often spend weeks on end in solitary meditation.<sup>22</sup> While the Data Ganj Bakhsh shrine has grown into a massive complex, there remains a dedicated marble slab in Bibi Pak Daman that marks the spot where Ali Hujwari spent time in prayer to Bibi Ruqayyah. Thus, this narrative serves a dual purpose: it verifies the contested timeline of Ruqayyah's arrival in the subcontinent and ties her to a nationally revered figure. Hujwari lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, sources argue, and as such Ruqayyah must have arrived in the subcontinent earlier — too early for her to be a daughter of Ahmad Tokhta. In fact, as local sources note, because the vast majority of Sufi saints in the subcontinent trace their descent to Ali, they all sought to pay their respects to Ali's daughter. The great saints of the subcontinent, from Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and Syed Muinuddin Chishti to Khwaja Nazamuddin Auliya, all visited the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman in their travels.<sup>23</sup> These narratives reveal a clear effort to prove Ruqayyah's existence in Pakistan by tying her to famed individuals, appropriating her into the local context. The lives of these figures have all made an indelible mark on the subcontinent and occupy central roles in the cultural heritage of India and Pakistan. Nowhere is this clearer than in the association of Muhammad bin Qasim, the legendary Umayyad conqueror of Sindh and the Punjab, and Ruqayyah. Linking Ruqayyah to a prominent early nationalist and Islamic hero illuminates a fascinating desire to both authenticate her presence in the subcontinent and place her in an accessible local context, even as the shrine draws much of its spiritual authenticity and salience from the links to the broader Islamic map.

The numerous local and Islamic tropes interwoven into Ruqayyah's arrival in the region and the construction of Bibi Pak Daman similarly construct a relatable milieu. Multiple sources detail events that clearly invoke the most prominent trope in the subcontinent — that of the destruction of idols and the power of Islam to uproot “false” religions. According to various hagiographies, the inhabitants of Lahore were devoted idol-worshippers, ruled by royal courts that patronized temples to false gods and placed their faith in duplicitous fortune-tellers. However it would be problematic for Ruqayyah's message to exist alongside these unbelievers, since the truth of Islam should

<sup>22</sup> Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 5.

be powerful enough to uproot *shirk*.<sup>24</sup> For many noted Islamic figures, legends of their ability to affect conversions and prove idols to be false were critical components in establishing their piety. This trope is echoed in Ruqayyah’s life. As she traveled from Medina, her sermons attracted masses that were disillusioned by the inequality of the Hindu caste system and political control of the Brahmins, converting in large quantities to Islam.

More dramatic, however, is the spontaneous destruction of idols. This story exists as proof of the power of Islam as the “true” religion, embodied by Ruqayyah, and the fragility of the false faiths that she came to expose. This occurrence, however, is not unique to the history of Bibi Pak Daman; one finds that the trope of idol destruction is particularly pervasive in the region, perhaps reflecting uneasiness at the coexistence of Islam and Hinduism. Indeed, the accounts related to the most popular Muslim figures often address their particular interactions with idol-worshipping, revealing concerted attempts to explain how these practices continued, even as Islam gained a larger foothold. Thus, in some way, these messengers must all have acted to undermine Hinduism, either by destroying the inanimate objects that its followers worship or by converting the local populations to Islam. Ruqayyah’s story embodies both of these components and fits into the larger matrix of South Asian Islam.

This trope harkens back to perhaps the most memorable and, ironically, iconic moments in the history of Islam in South Asia. In 1025, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, “the Afghan iconoclast of myth and legend” sacked the Shiva temple at Somnath, Gujrat, refusing to allow the ransom of the main temple idol by claiming, allegedly, that he was a breaker of idols, not a seller of them.<sup>25</sup> This legend, however, also references the actions of the prophet Abraham who destroyed the idols of his father, a maker and seller of idols. This preoccupation with undermining idolatry, either through destruction of the idols or the conversion of the idolaters, reveals a conscious anxiety in how to describe Islam’s existence alongside Hinduism without ever fully vanquishing or supplanting it. Interestingly, it was Mahmud Ghaznavi’s governor who commissioned the first concrete structure in Ghaznavi architectural style over the graves of Bibi Ruqayyah and her family.<sup>26</sup> As Mahmud Ghaznavi is commonly perceived as a virulent iconoclast, it is notable that the initial construction of the shrine is attributed to him, since the building of shrines and the rituals practiced in these places remains a source of heated debate. Similarly, the extension of Bibi Pak Daman and the creation of *waqf* around the site are attributed to the Mughal Emperor Akbar, another fascinating link across time and space

---

<sup>24</sup> *Shirk* is commonly translated as idol-worshipping, though a more literal translation would denote a meaning closer to “association.” In Islamic doctrine, *shirk* is a violation of the central tenet of *tawhīd*, or the oneness of God. For more, see G.R. Hawting. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Jamal J. Elias, “(Un)making Idolatry: From Mecca to Bamiyan.” *Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory and Criticism*. Vol. IV, No.2 (Winter 2007), 24–25.

<sup>26</sup> Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman*, 53–54.

to the famed names of local history.<sup>27</sup> The matrix of links and associations between popular saints, national heroes, and historical Islamic figures reinforces the dual nature of Bibi Pak Daman. These interwoven narratives serve to repeatedly emphasize Bibi Pak Daman's central place both in sacred Islamic and national geography.

## A Frontier Shrine in Urban Politics

These narratives, tropes, references and speculations are not simply stories that devotees construct, nor should they be read to uncover the “real” story of Bibi Pak Daman. They matter much beyond devotional practices. These narratives are critical because of the work they do, what they project, and how they directly affect the physical reality of the shrine. It is not merely control over the discourse surrounding Bibi Pak Daman that has been contested, and these debates were not confined simply to the realm of meaning-making. Who Ruqayyah is and what Bibi Pak Daman means had direct implications on government regulation, jurisprudential ramifications, and control of resources.

Indeed, physical control of the shrine also entailed the ability to define the shrine, to determine the narratives and interpretations that emerge from it and normalize ritual surrounding it. This was a particularly potent issue, especially in regards to a shrine whose history remains ambiguous. Though the government and devotees have had a vested interest in displaying the international importance and nationalist implications of Bibi Pak Daman, the shrine remains a deeply contentious space, and debates over the history of the shrine reveal deep divisions in Pakistani society; indeed, its very ambiguity has allowed it to take on multiple valences, serving as a site on which communal tensions, distrust of government authority in religious practice, land disputes, and rhetoric about “proper” religious rituals are mapped.

Though Ruqayyah was said to have arrived in Lahore near the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, according to the Auqaf Department's official pamphlet, the first verifiable written reference to the land control of Bibi Pak Daman was in 1856, when a local census record noted a combined ownership of a large tract of land on which the shrine was located.<sup>28</sup> In 1924–25, the British administration allowed a more detailed demarcation of land, and the individual plot for Bibi Pak Daman was defined. In the intermediate centuries, a network of self-proclaimed *sajjada nashins* and surrounding residents had controlled the shrine, forming a de facto administration that ruled the shrine as private property. Tracts of land were passed down through generations as *waqf* property, complicating questions of ownership with Islamic precedence and civil law.

On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1967, the government took control of the administration of Bibi Pak Daman and the surrounding land through the authority of the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance of 1961, registering it as a Sunni shrine and ending centuries of

<sup>27</sup> Subhan, *Sufism*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Shehzad. *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 12.

ambiguity over the control and ownership of the shrine.<sup>29</sup> The takeover notification was published in the West Pakistan Gazette and acknowledged that the Chief Administrator of Auqaf had “taken over and assumed the administration control, management, and maintenance of the Shrine”, including the attached mosque and graveyard.<sup>30</sup> Simultaneous with the publishing of notification 1(71)-Auqaf/63, Muhammad Asghar, the Assistant Manager Auqaf, Lahore Central District, went to take possession of Bibi Pak Daman. He provided for the Chief Administrator, Auqaf a full account of the scene at the official handover from the *sajjada* (or *gaddi*) *nashins* to government personnel,

At this darbar, there are 4 collection boxes, on which we put our own locks and sealed them and the list of present property was prepared.

There is no attendant or caretaker appointed at the shrine. There are 8 *mutawalli* families that take weekly turns taking responsibility for the shrine and in their own turns they keep taking their cut from the cash boxes. The cash boxes are in 4 different locations, for which is needed one caretaker and one guard for the evening. At present, a search is one for a suitable appointment.<sup>31</sup>

These observations clarified the self-policing nature of the *sajjada nashin* system at Bibi Pak Daman before the government takes control. Together, these families shared informal responsibilities and, most critically, all the donated funds collected from devotees. Though the Auqaf Department was seizing control of the physical resources and presenting itself as the authority at the site, hereto forward responsible for implementing new policies and bureaucracy and arbitrating all disputes, the manager then proceeded to make lengthy recommendations for how the government must manage the transition so as not to interrupt the ongoing rituals at the shrine.

The blessed *urs* [death anniversary] is going to be on the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> of *Jamadi-ul-Sani* [sic] and the distribution of the *langar* [charitable feast] must be arranged for the 7<sup>th</sup> evening and 8<sup>th</sup> morning. In addition, on the second Thursday of every lunar month, at 10:00 AM we must arrange for a *milad* [recitations praising religious figures], which continues till the Zohar prayer.

At the end of the *urs*, *dupattas* are distributed to the men and women who recite *milad*. On the 6<sup>th</sup> *Jamadi-ul-Sani* [sic] after Zohar namaz, the shrine is cleansed and bathed and distribute small pots of sweet rice on the 6<sup>th</sup> evening. On the 7<sup>th</sup> after Isha there is Quran reading and the distribution of *langar* and then *qauwali* is

---

<sup>29</sup> Shehzad. *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> Order Notification from M. Masood, C.S.P, Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan. *No.1(71)-Auqaf/63*, Sept. 9, 1967. Issued by Office of the Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan, Lahore. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager Auqaf, Central Zone Sector II, Lahore to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore [trans] Sept. 9, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

recited. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, from 11 AM to 12:30, *naat khani* continues, then reciting and finishing of Quran, *langar*.<sup>32</sup>

These observations reveal a clear desire not to interrupt routines and practices that had been accepted as the routine rituals of the shrine. However, in a follow-up letter sent a few days later, the manager described his subsequent trip on September 12<sup>th</sup> to the shrine to order necessary arrangements and account for all property now under the authority of the Auqaf Department. In this letter, he acknowledged that “because there has been a takeover and there are shops and homes in that area . . . Auqaf will decide what the rentals will be so that the government can start collecting [funds].”<sup>33</sup> Land control and rent was to be the immediate concern.

Despite the professed desire to ensure a smooth transition, the Auqaf officials quickly acted to formulate and disseminate new rules of conduct in an attempt to exert control and subvert any rival authorities. Because of the long history and complex narratives associated with the shrine and the lack of clear familial descent, over the course of centuries both informal and formal systems of patronage and authority had emerged. As such, the authorities quickly began to observe and respond to the situation on the ground in a series of instruction letters and official orders. In a letter from Abdul Majid, the Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, to the same Assistant Manager, concerns about practices that have continued at the shrine beyond the control of the Auqaf department are discussed.

It has been brought to my notice that the caretaker Mastana sits at the Gaddi of H. Bibian Pakdaman and handles money from the devotees for putting in the cash-boxes. This practice is very much objectionable and should not be allowed to continue any longer. It was also reported that he collects the *burgas* offered at the shrine by the lady visitors and sells them in the market. All the offerings received of whatever kind it may be belongs to Auqaf Department and it should be disposed of by the Asst. Manager concerned, after inviting tenders or holding public auctions . . .<sup>34</sup>

The informal business arrangements at the shrine have clearly been identified in this exchange. In the absence of formal structures, patronage agreements, mutually beneficial financial exchanges, and links between caretakers and bazaar shopkeepers flourished. Because of the Ruqayyah’s veiling and her prayer to deliver her from the eyes of nonbelievers, devotees at Bibi Pak Daman often donated *chadors* or *dupattas*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager Auqaf, Central Zone Sector II, Lahore to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone. Sept. 9, 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager Auqaf, Central Zone Sector II, Lahore, to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone. Memo No. 204-HMLW-1/T.O/67. [trans.] Sept. 14, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Capt. Abdul Majid, PCS Administrator of Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore, to S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager, Sector II, Lahore. Memo No. ACZ-9-2(1)-104/67/5874. Nov. 25, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

in exchange for the granting of intercession. These were often collected by the attendants at the shrine, many who subsisted on the donations and extra funds procured at the shrine, and resold in the bazaar. The Auqaf Department’s demands to eliminate these practices would thus be transferred to the attendants now in their employ. The attendant who served in the ladies section of Bibi Pak Daman was issued strict instructions to list all donated *chadors*, cash, or expensive item by date and could no longer be passed on to other pilgrims at the discretion of attendants. Cash could not be accepted by hand and must go directly into locked cash boxes, no male attendants or pilgrims were to be allowed to sit near the shrine, and “the above instructions must be followed strictly, and if there are any complaints from our pilgrims you will be fired from the job.”<sup>35</sup>

These stricter regulations did not simply apply to streamlining rituals and donations at the shrine. The Auqaf takeover removed large swaths of land from private ownership into government-controlled *waqf* property, the boundaries of which encompassed historic Bibi Pak Daman, despite decades of urban sprawl and encroachment. The government was quick to develop a rent schedule and allocate proceeds from rent collected towards the shrine’s expenses, drafting a budget for June 1968 immediately. Notably, an official recommended, “Those who were not paying rent to the *mutawalli* should be investigated” and noted that “some current construction is illegal and must be demolished immediately.”<sup>36</sup>

Yet for all the apparent speed in implementation in rent collection and land consolidation, this was a negotiated process, carried out incrementally as the government faced resistance from local residents and shrine leaders. In response to the takeover notification on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1967, surrounding landowners immediately sent land claims to the Auqaf Department and petitioned the courts, contesting in particular the government’s right to control the surrounding graveyards. Indeed, the nature of Bibi Pak Daman made these land disputes even more complex. Though the shrine itself was ostensibly all *waqf* property established by Akbar, over the centuries families had moved into the surrounding environs of Qila Gujjar Singh, passing land deeds on through generations and giving in *waqf* certain portions of their holdings. Complicating the matter further, the mix of Shi’a and Sunni *waqf* properties and stipulations created an additional layer to civil proceedings over registered land deeds. Because Bibi Pak Daman was taken over and registered by the Auqaf Department as a Sunni shrine, despite the more widely held belief that Ruqayyah bin Ali was buried there, Auqaf control and regulations violated the terms of many Shi’a *waqf* properties, and local

---

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Office of Manager of Auqaf to Ghulam Fatima, Ladies Attendant, Darbar Bibi Pak Daman. Memo No. 301/AMLW-II/67. [trans.] Dec. 4, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from S. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Manager, Auqaf, Central Zone, Section II to Office of Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Dec. 12, 1967. Query No. 5283. [trans.] General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.



residents petitioned to exempt their lands. Many of these sales were conducted pre-independence, and with new laws dictating land rights the government was forced to adopt creative solutions to these disputes. On a broader level, those who had held those properties as private family holdings were now forced to pay an additional layer of government taxes, and the takeover of land was met with resistance.

Rather than tacitly accept the Auqaf takeover, many local residents immediately mobilized to gather relevant documents and undertake action to get their lands released from Auqaf control. In these interactions between residents and government and judicial officials, one discovers the responsive nature of the state in the early years of the federalization project. Just days after the Auqaf Department secured the land around Bibi Pak Daman, a letter and supporting documents was sent from a Mahmud Akhtar, on behalf of his widowed sisters, requesting a specific plot be released.

My respectful request is as follows —

Since January 1933–34, this lot has been in the name of our father Muhammad Din son of Maula Bakhsh. . . This right was confirmed in 1939 in the court of lower judge Abdul Wahid . . .

But on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1967, this lot number 4536 was taken into the control of the Auqaf Department.

Dear Sir, any notice or order issued on this lot should be issued in my name. This graveyard is my ancestral property and there is no connection to Bibi Pak Daman and I still have control over this property.<sup>37</sup>

This is a common theme in these land requests. Petitioners did not contest the Auqaf Department's federalization notification, nor did they debate the right to the shrine itself. Instead, they argued that their specific plots were not associated with the religious purposes of Bibi Pak Daman, demonstrating an increasingly sophisticated framework for negotiating with the government.

Many of these petitions were then filed in Lahore's lower courts. The resulting judgment was that apart from the main shrine and portions of the attached graveyard, the surrounding land could not be judged *waqf* under government ordinances. On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1967, the excluded land was released back into private ownership — a process that mirrored legal challenges to the Auqaf ordinances that took place across Pakistan after the nationalization decrees were issued.<sup>38</sup>

## Sectarianism Emerges

Despite the permissive nature of the appeals process, the uneasy relationship between private and government influence over Bibi Pak Daman continued, framing

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Mahmud Akhtar son of Muhammad Din, et al to Administrator, Auqaf Board, Lahore. [trans.] Sept. 17, 1967. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>38</sup> "Waqf Ordinances: High Court Allows Government Appeals." *Dawn Newspaper*. October 19, 1961.

much of the debate over the shrine. The most significant conflict that emerged over land rights was in regards to the control of the *masjid* attached to Bibi Pak Daman and religious ornamentation of the shrine itself. These disputes were directly influenced by the competing Sunni and Shiite interpretations of Bibi Pak Daman and the ramifications of what those different narratives entailed. The site was place of worship for a broad swath of the population, including Sunnis, though their investment in the identity of the women differed. While many Sunnis questioned Bibi Ruqayyah’s history, some continued to pray at the shrine with little engagement in the controversies over their identities. Those that accept the story about Ruqayyah did so in a more localized context, rarely linking her presence to the longer Shiite narrative trajectory. Shiite hagiographies, however, revealed more at stake in their commitment to the story of Ruqayyah’s arrival in Pakistan, as Bibi Pak Daman became enmeshed in their validation and self-identity as a besieged community. Indeed, the denial of Ruqayyah’s presence was interpreted as yet another slight in their history, as those who claim that this was not Bibi Ruqayyah do so to limit the tragedies of the family of the Prophet, since their persecution gives evidence to their righteousness.<sup>39</sup>

These conflicting views created rival impulses and pressures regarding the government’s role in administrating the shrine and mediating practice. The very takeover of the shrine, according to the official Auqaf information, reignited these sectarian cleavages, forcing the government to become a reluctant arbitrator in this volatile situation. With tensions over regulated prayer timings often leading to confrontation between members of both sects and local officials, in 1969 the Auqaf Department further separated the *waqf* properties of Bibi Pak Daman and gave up rights over the shrine’s attached lands, including the attached *masjid*, and renounced control over the site and payment of salary to the Imam.<sup>40</sup> This de-notification clearly revealed the government’s initial reluctance to become deeply involved in a site that had become such a sectarian flashpoint. Its initial focus at Bibi Pak Daman was similar to the stated goals at Sufi shrines across Pakistan — to regularize ritual practices, ensure that donations were funding shrine maintenance and not the network of caretakers and attendants that profit off the shrine, and create a government bureaucracy capable of managing religious affairs.

Bibi Pak Daman proved to be an entirely different case, however, as few other shrines in Pakistan produce the same investment on a devotional, sectarian, and governmental level. Despite the Auqaf Department’s desire to remain outside of sectarian conflict by returning the *masjid* to private ownership, just months later they were compelled to reassume “the administration, control, management, and

---

<sup>39</sup> Khaki, *Bibian Pak Daman*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Memo from Assistant Manager for Waqf Properties, Sector V to Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Memo No. AMLW-V-660/69. [trans.] Dec. 22, 1969. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman.

maintenance of Masjid Hanfia” to restore order to a chaotic situation.<sup>41</sup> The consequence of this decision, however, was that the *masjid* was designated in the same manner as the shrine — officially a Sunni religious site, albeit one where the rights of the minority communities could not be prejudiced.

This action marked the reengagement of the government in these divisive matters, as the brewing sectarian schism remained at the forefront of Auqaf and Punjab Secretariat records. Close attention was paid to the activities of the devotees and detailed reports were exchanged over all matters as tensions at Ruqayyah’s shrine began to escalate. In July 1970, an Auqaf official at Bibi Pak Daman alerted the central office of a crisis that was emerging over ornamentation at the shrine and religious rituals at the *masjid*. He describes the situation,

As you are aware, for the past two years, Sheikh Abdul Majid, member RPC Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, has been commissioning work and construction on the shrine from his own pocket. The construction of the shrine’s dome has now been completed. Inside the dome, Sheikh Abdul Majid is having the names of the *Ayima Karam (Ahl al-Bayt)* inscribed in glass-etch work. On this issue, the ahl-Sunnat and their followers are raising objections that along with the names of *Ahl al-Bayt*, the names of the Prophet’s Companions should be inscribed.<sup>42</sup>

This dispute was now firmly an Auqaf Department matter, both as a result of their position as the main form of authority onsite at Bibi Pak Daman and their appropriation of the *masjid* explicitly to mediate sectarian strife. Officials immediately began discussing action that would neutralize the tension; because members of the shrine’s official Religious Purpose Committee were involved, the government ultimately was forced to step in and act as an arbitrator between rival groups. In reference to the above memo, the Chief Administrator, Auqaf ordered local officials “to take immediate measures to avoid the sectarian clash, by stopping the construction immediately. Further construction should not be started until a gentleman [sic] agreement is reached between the two parties.”<sup>43</sup> This message was then passed on in a handwritten note to Sheikh Abdul Majid, requesting him to “stop further construction immediately to avoid sectarian clash at the shrine.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Order Notification from Raja Hamid Mukhtar, Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan. No. 1(71)-Auqaf/63: Amendment Schedule, March 31, 1970. Issued by Office of the Chief Administrator of Auqaf, West Pakistan, Lahore. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Assistant Manager for Waqf Properties, Sector V to Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Memo No. AMLW-V-170, [trans.] July 1, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>43</sup> Memo from Muhammad Hafizullah, Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore to Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties, Sector V, Lahore. Memo No. ACZ-4(1)-I03/RC/1720. July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties Sector V to Abdul Majid, Member RPC Hazrat Bibi Pak Damana, Lahore. July 11, 1970. General Records of Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

In this particular instance, however, there were financial considerations at play alongside sectarian concerns. Sheikh Abdul Majid had undertaken a much-needed renovation and aesthetic upgrade of the shrine, financed completely through private funds and donations. The government was ever resistant to increasing their financial commitment to any one shrine, especially one as contentious as Bibi Pak Daman. As a result, they sought to mediate a solution that would not impede on the construction and renovation entirely. The Chief Administrator of Auqaf would send these new instructions to officials onsite, those who had had numerous dealings with the involved parties.

You were directed to stop the construction personally [sic] immediately vide [sic] this office . . . Now it is desired that you should try to settle the dispute between the two sects at your personal level, say by calling a meeting of the two sects and persuade them in a reasonable manner and tacts [sic].<sup>45</sup>

In this instance, the Auqaf's financial interest clearly aligned with the Shi'a devotees and the government proclaimed its inability to interfere with minority rights by preventing the renovation.

In 1971, there was once again danger of “serious conflict” breaking out between Sunni and Shiite devotees at the shrine.<sup>46</sup> The struggle began on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1971, when Sunnis commissioned the engraving of the four *Rashidun* caliphs on one of the internal structures in the shrine. This belief in the *Rashidun* is an anathema to Shiites, who believe that the three earlier caliphs had usurped Ali's legitimate claim as Muhammad's successors. The conflict over ornamentation revealed how deeply aesthetics and devotion were linked at this place of worship and the import that the choice of textual references might have on devotees. As a result of the brewing conflict, on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1971, the Committee of Religious Affairs and the Chief Administrator, Auqaf called Shi'a and Sunni representatives to again discuss a way to compromise on the use of Bibi Pak Daman, to neutralize the warring division of space that had evolved. A joint ruling sought to pacify both parties. Men were barred from the inner sanctum of the shrine, a concession to longstanding Shiite demands that respect for the piety and veiling of Ruqayyah and her family must continue even in their physical absence, as one of the most important tropes in Shiite history are related to the forcible de-veiling of its women. To pacify Sunni devotees, it was decided that no *majālis* (sermons that commemorate the martyrdoms of the various Shiite figures) would be held inside the space of the shrine. Most importantly, the *masjid* located inside Bibi Pak Daman — the one the government was forced to reacquire — would no longer issue the *azān*, or call to prayer, of either sect, so as to neutralize it. Thus, all people could pray inside, but it would no

---

<sup>45</sup> Memo from Chief Administrator Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore to Assistant Manager, Waqf Properties, Sector V, Lahore. Memo No. ACZ -4(1) — I03/RC/1788. July 23, 1970. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>46</sup> Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 16.

longer function as mosque where devotees could congregate for collective prayers.<sup>47</sup> In essence, it would become emptied of formal spiritual resonance in order to avoid conflict.

The Chief Administrator and the officials of the Religious Affairs Committee believed that these negotiations would settle the arguments amongst Sunni and Shiite pilgrims. However, though officials agreed on the new terms, the prohibition on men entering the inner spaces shrine caused great unrest amongst devotees, leading to a letter of protest to Governor of Punjab. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1972 a new notification was issued in response to these agitations. The new guidelines stated that there would be no limit on the recitation of the Quran in the inner shrine by any pilgrim, the names of the *Rāshidūn* were allowed to remain, and *majālis* were not to be allowed inside the inner courtyard of the shrine, “so that no person of one faith will commit an act that will wound the other side.”<sup>48</sup> Equally critically, however, the notification reiterated that the shrine was acquired as a Sunni shrine and would continue as such, but the Sunnis who formed the majority of the local population may not obstruct the Shi’a faithful from any ritual practices.

This amended compromise revealed the unease with attempts to categorize the shrine and the difficult balance the government sought to keep as a perceived neutral party. It is striking that both Sunnis and Shi’as appealed to officials to negotiate their spiritual and ritual differences and segment the physical interior of the shrine, illustrating the ways that devotees utilized the government’s takeover of the shrine as a positive development, creating an official channel through which grievances could be aired. Regardless, the Auqaf Ordinances that federalized shrines through the 1960s and ‘70s created a framework in which the use of contested ritual space would be regulated and mandated, a development that affected the ways in which different communities related to Bibi Pak Daman.

The trust in government intervention, however, remained tenuous, as mistrust existed on all sides. For national purposes, the Auqaf Department had clearly displayed an investment in affirming that the graves at Bibi Pak Daman belong to Bibi Ruqayyah and her companions, yet the majority of the members of the Religious Affairs Committee and the government authorities of the Auqaf Department were Sunnis. As such, official interference was never greeted with complete welcome, and indeed the extent to which the government was able to exert control on day-to-day practice certainly varied. The distance between official judgments and daily ritual was revealed early on, as on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1972 a petition to the Chief Administrator, Auqaf, led him to issue another amendment permitting *majālis* to be held a few times a year in Bibi Pak Daman, with advance notice.<sup>49</sup> Despite the small amount of official gatherings allowed, however,

<sup>47</sup> Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Shehzad, *Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman*, 17.

Bibi Pak Daman remained a hub of activity throughout the year, with *majālis* held daily throughout the month of Muharram and on most important dates in the Shiite calendar, making the clear the distance between law and practices and the ways that Bibi Pak Daman provided a space in which these opposing frameworks were negotiated. Auqaf officials recognized the potential for conflict that free expression of rituals would ignite at site such as Bibi Pak Daman. Their solution was to regulate and restrict activities so as to have minimum impact on the opposing sect. Rather than allow devotees to fill the space with meaning through narrative, prayer, and ritual, the government sought to empty the shrine of all contention.

These attempts to neutralize the space were, of course, continuously negotiated, managed, and often disregarded by the different involved parties. A letter written in late 1973 from the Manager of Waqf Properties to the Head of Auqaf, Central Zone detailed multiple escalating events within the shrine that had challenged the neutrality of the site. He reiterated the Auqaf rules that “other than fixed occasions of dates and hours, members of Shi’a and Sunni communities are not allowed to congregate for religious rituals.” Pilgrims to the site regularly disregarded these schedules, conducting rituals and reciting prayers at all times of day. Yet in periods where tensions were heightened, as they were in the early 1970s, those rules become the default and Auqaf officials re-committed to a strict division of space.

For some time, in the inner verandas attached to the courtyard, a Shi’a devotee by the name of Asma Kaneez has been chanting *noba* [recitations about Karbala] . . . While listening to her the Shi’a ladies begin *matam* [beating of chests in lamentation], which is a violation of the restrictions and cause of tension. While watching the Shi’a ladies do *matam* inside the shrine makes the Sunni ladies angry, it can also lead them to retaliate as they have threatened. This matter can be prolonged and become a cause of conflict.

If this is agreeable then the following notification should be publicly posted inside:

‘Inside the shrine’s inner grounds, after offering basic salutations and prayers, kindly restrict yourself to reciting the Quran; other than that, *majlis*, *milād* and *naat khāni* can only be practiced in the allotted space and time.’<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, the official did admit that these rituals are viewed as necessary religious expressions that “refresh” faith; yet when they carry such emotional resonance as to move listeners to action they become a threat at a site like Bibi Pak Daman. The takeover of Bibi Pak Daman did not give the government license to dictate what religious expressions are practiced, but they were able to enforce negotiated schedules under the threat of sectarian violence.

---

<sup>50</sup> Memo from Manager Waqf Properties, Central Zone, Lahore to Chief Administrator, Auqaf, Central Zone, Lahore. Memo No. AMLW-III-1933/73 [trans.]. Nov. 11, 1973. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

He went on to relay another brewing conflict, one that revolved around the inscription of a particular Quranic verse that Shi'a Muslims believe refers to the Prophet's family. In Surah Al-Shūra, verse 23, Allah instructs Muhammad — "Say: no reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin." For Shi'as, this is a clear reference to 'Ali, Fatima, and their children; Sunnis contest this claim. The Manager of Waqf Properties relates the following narrative about the conflict:

Syed Ahmad Hussain Shah, a member of RPC [Religious Purpose Committee], has installed a black stone plaque inscribed with this ayat for which he received permission on Oct. 25. Two other members [of RPC] . . . confirmed that no one had any objections to the installation of this stone. However, upon further inquiry, it was found that the installation was delayed for some time because the *āyat* was engraved with the Urdu translation. Many Sunni devotees had objections to the translation. It was decided through negotiations that if this *āyat* was installed without translation, there would be no objections. As a result, on this plaque, only the Quranic *āyat* is written, without any translation.<sup>51</sup>

The calculation made here is striking — there was no justifiable reason to remove a verse of the Quran from a sacred site, even one as polarizing as Bibi Pak Daman. In this case, negotiations between Sunni and Shi'a members of the RPC had reached a settlement, yet it was outcry from pilgrims that prompted a change in the agreement. A translation into the vernacular would allow pilgrims to understand the meaning of the verse. For a site like Bibi Pak Daman, translations, narratives, and understanding threatened the balance of what can be allowed and managed. It could only remain in Arabic.

This balancing act was tenuous at best. The extent to which the government was able to exert control on day-to-day practice certainly varied. The Auqaf takeover in the 1960s was not without opposition, nor did these ordinances create uniform standards to apply to all properties under their position. Indeed, those rules continued to be negotiated, as devotees repeatedly appealed against government rulings in their attempts to assert autonomy over their religious practice. In these instances, devotees displayed a remarkable degree of sophistication, playing various branches of the government against each other to receive the desired ruling and utilizing the language of constitutional rights to continue their devotional routines. The role of government, then, remained in flux, as did attitudes regarding the proper boundaries between public restrictions and private practice.

Yet was is also true that the entrance of the government into the shrine in fact helped construct an "official" sectarianism, reinforced by laws and practice alike.<sup>52</sup> Whether for financial, nationalist, or religious purposes, the Auqaf department had endorsed the

<sup>51</sup> Memo AMLW-III-1933/73 [trans.], Nov. 11, 1973.

<sup>52</sup> Extensive literature has emerged about the process in which sectarianism is made and constructed. See Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard

view that Ruqayyah bint ‘Ali is buried at the shrine and discredited Sunni claims that she is the daughter of Syed Ahmad Tokhta. Nevertheless, because of the years of encroachment and the network of *sajjada nashins* that claimed authority over the shrine, the government acquired the site as a Sunni religious site. This duality has created a framework for instability, one that Auqaf officials continually navigated. The bureaucratization of religious representation and the segmentation of rules and rituals constructed a formal sectarianism at the shrine, one perpetuated by government attempts to neutralize the space from conflict.

## Old Authority Meets the New State

Despite the Auqaf Department’s presence at Bibi Pak Daman and their role as arbitrator between Sunnis and Shi’as, there remained other influential presences complicating the space. The dynamic between the *mujawwars* and the government illustrated the other continuing tension that played out at Bibi Pak Daman — the older forms of familial authority and inheritance against the “new” order of government bureaucracy. According to most estimates, the Auqaf Department received most of its income from cash-box income in the Lahore region, with 13.6 million rupees received from donation boxes at Bibi Pak Daman in 2010.<sup>53</sup> The question of who received this income was particularly fraught at Bibi Pak Daman, since the caretakers are not direct descendants of the saint buried at the shrine — as at most other locations under the Auqaf Department’s control — and claims of ancestry are more difficult to legitimate. Nevertheless, the struggle for control and mistrust of financial dealings pervaded their interactions, with the three locks that guard the donation boxes opened simultaneously on Fridays in the presence of representatives from all groups — neither the Auqaf officials nor the *mujawwars* can complete the ritual without the presence of the other, nor do they trust other representatives with the proceeds. The tenuous nature of the alliance between older and newer forms of authority at Bibi Pak Daman was a microcosm of the similar interplay that existed across Pakistan since the Auqaf Ordinances were first issued, but it took on an added dimension at Bibi Pak Daman, where the government alternated between the honest broker in sectarian debates and the political force undermining traditional rituals and practices with their interference and bureaucracy. Bibi Pak Daman was a critical space, both in religious imaginings and charitable donations, and the stakes were extremely high.

The *sajjada nashins* at Bibi Pak Daman maintained a balancing act, seeking to negotiate with the government to maintain some of their influence and mounting legal challenges when they felt their hereditary rights were being impeded. These *sajjada nashins* were previously the sole beneficiaries of donations and funding to

---

University Press, 2010). Harjot Oberoi. *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mian Muhammad Syed, Manager of Auqaf, Bibi Pak Daman, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011.



the shrine, free to spend at their discretion. Many had some of their own personal lands taken into government possession in 1967, and it is over those lands that the legal challenges emerged. In these situations, however, the Auqaf Department retaliated by painting themselves as protectors of the pilgrims and their interests. In a discussion with a legal advisor, the Auqaf Manager at Bibi Pak Daman related an ongoing conflict with Abdul Karim, one of the *sajjada nashīns* present at the handover of the shrine in 1967.

Yesterday the undersigned received a notice from Additional Session Judge Sardar Fareed Khan . . . why construction was started during the ongoing dispute over control of Bibi Pak Daman compound.

The dispute was between the present and past *gaddi nashin* regarding ownership of that land . . . and have filed petition against Auqaf Department that while there is an ongoing court case against Auqaf by Abdul Karim, Auqaf should be stopped from continuing with the construction with immediate effect. But [there] are large numbers of pilgrims and devotees visiting the shrine who desire to stay overnight but at present there are only 2 rooms available for guests that are totally insufficient. The guests are extremely inconvenienced and have no shelter from heat or rain.

This matter has become so serious that Auqaf requested Punjab Governor Lieutenant Ghulam Jilani to request permission to build. Thereafter Chief Administrator Auqaf, Punjab, on great public demand and pressure, gave permission for construction of guest rooms on second floor.

This construction has been undertaken due to great public demand for convenience of devotees and pilgrims visiting the shrine and has no connection with the past *mutawalli* or matters concerning them.<sup>54</sup>

This letter was also published as a circular at the shrine, as part of the Auqaf's strategy to appeal to the pilgrims at the shrine and circumvent both the *sajjada nashīns* and the legal process. Their actions, of course, were not selfless: the funds to be earned by expanding rental properties onsite would add significantly to the shrine's revenues, income that would be completely inaccessible to Abdul Karim.

Yet Auqaf officials were not always able to present themselves in an altruistic fashion in disputes with the *sajjada nashins*. These families had long been influential residents in the Bibi Pak Daman area. Over the decades, they expanded their support through marriage and kinship ties, by awarding patronage and access at the shrine, and forging alliances with merchants and bazaar shopkeepers. These older networks of authority commonly emerge in shrine regions, and Bibi Pak Daman was no exception. By virtue of their standing in their community, they were often able to gain backing from

<sup>54</sup> Memo from Manager Auqaf, Sector V (Bibi Pak Daman) to Legal Advisor, Office of Chief Administrator, Auqaf, Lahore. Memo No. MLW81-3-Auqaf/444 [trans.] Sept. 17, 1981. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

residents and pilgrims against government intervention. In 1985, Muhammad Abdul Jaleel, son of Nizam ul-Din Sabiq, *gaddi nashin*, entered into a series of disputes with local police and Auqaf officials over a graveyard he claimed was private property. He had been burying members of his family in this particular graveyard since 1972 and claimed he had possession of written documents from the Chief Administrator Auqaf de-notifying that piece of land. Muhammad Abdul Jaleel also cited a circular dated August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1960 that states Department of Auqaf has no control over private graveyards in the area.<sup>55</sup> Because of the rise in pilgrims to the shrine and rapid encroachment, this *gaddi nashin* sought to build a fence around “his” plot of land to protect his family’s graves. The government resisted, claiming that the *sajjada nashins* at Bibi Pak Daman had simply usurped the land and claimed it as their own. Living on or using land did not invalidate the initial *waqf* arrangement for Bibi Pak Daman, nor did it invalidate the legal right the Auqaf Department now had to those lands. Abdul Jaleel retaliated,

Through this period, petitioner has daily been settling fights and argument between Shi’a and Sunni ladies. To protect petitioner’s own legal rights, he has locked the graves around Mai Tanveeri and has put a notice that entry cannot be gained without permission. Petitioner thinks all disputes should be settled with respect . . . He is saddened that despite his loyalty, they have not reached an agreement with him, nor has petitioner been contracted by a senior official from Auqaf.

If the Auqaf department can prove [my] claims to be false, [I] would forgo them . . . Does the Auqaf Department deny me the religious right to my family’s graves?<sup>56</sup>

This argument cleverly emphasized the petitioner’s good deeds and standing in the community, referencing his role in Sunni-Shi’a affairs, one the Auqaf officials could not replicate. This dispute continued for a period of years, becoming increasingly strident, but the lack of a respect for the social standing of a *sajjada nashin* continued to be one of the main points of contention. In a letter to the local police station to file complaint about trespassing on “his” land, he argued,

The petitioner is a *gaddi nashin* from Bibi Pak Daman, Chairman of the Shi’a Sunni Peace Committee and every year has received recognition for Shi’a Sunni unity efforts, which judiciary and administration is witness to . . . The *dargah* of Bibi Pak Daman is in control of Department of Auqaf, even though it is not a *waqf* property. Petitioner had three private graveyards, to which the Auqaf Department has no

---

<sup>55</sup> Memo from Chief Administrator Auqaf, Lahore to All Deputy Commissioners in West Pakistan. Wide Circular Letter, No. 1-(14) Aukaf 60.D. Aug. 26, 1960. Circulars Office, Records, Punjab Secretariat.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Muhammad Abdul Jaleel, *Gaddi Nashin*, Darbar Bibi Pak Daman to Manager Waqf Properties, Central Zone, Lahore. No. 1 (M.A.J)(P.G.Y) [trans.]. March 25, 1985. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

connections or rights to . . . where many of his ancestors and close relatives are buried.<sup>57</sup>

He then pointed out that he is a vital member of the shrine community, opening a small private canteen near his property for pilgrims and providing negotiating services at the shrine to mediate sectarian disputes. His influence in the community was not one the Auqaf officials could challenge.

Despite their influence in the community, however, there remained great public mistrust of the self-serving interests of the *sajjada nashīns*. Devotees of Bibi Ruqayyah, both Sunni and Shi'a, believed that for decades these men had supported the alternate view that the shrines hold the graves of the daughters of Syed Ahmad Tokhta; as *sajjada nashīns* to this Sufi *pīr*, it would be their right to be involved in shrine affairs. In a book endorsed by the Auqaf Department as the preeminent hagiography and history of the shrine, this rival story was rejected as phony scheme: "All these lies were written to support Sunni sectarian views and *mujawwar* claims, so that if the Auqaf Department ever releases the shrine, their descendants will get a share."<sup>58</sup>

These conflicts have emerged as a result of debates over narratives and history, new bureaucracies and familial authority, and sectarian interests and continue to resonate. In recent years, there has been a significant organized effort to expand and upgrade the shrine. The Bibi Pak Daman Trust and some members of the shrine's Religious Purpose Committee have begun an ambitious campaign, securing federal resolutions and promises of funding from the national and Punjab governments. According to their estimates, 70 out of the 72 *kanals* of *waqf* property officially designated as part of Bibi Pak Daman are illegally occupied. The majority of these lands have been leased and rented illegally by the shrine's *mujawwars*.

The process of securing these lands for the expansion is arduous, one that has been met with stiff resistance and legal challenges by local leaders and residents. As a result, the Bibi Pak Daman Trust has accumulated extensive land and legal documentation, attempting to reconstruct the complex transactions — many unofficial — that had led the majority of land to remain outside the Auqaf Department's control. Once particular case is instructive. In 1956, a woman named Sayyeda Muhammad Fatima, a widow and local resident, registered her property as *waqf* lands. The *waqf-nama* described clearly her intent for the land her husband had purchased and why she was now forsaking all legal claims,

Because of my decision to remain in *parda* [veiled], on 17 July 1955 Jaffer Ali Muhammad Ali Wald Ibrahim, resident of Bibi Pak Daman, was given the authority

<sup>57</sup> Petition from Muhammad Abdul Jaleel, *Gaddi Nashin*, Darbar Bibi Pak Daman to Deputy Superintendent Police, Area Qila Gujjar Singh. Sections 452/506 [trans.] Nov. 11, 1988. General Records of Darbar Hazrat Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore.

<sup>58</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 10.

to collect contributions and build a structure [on this land] for the purpose of *majlis-e-Husayn, Sayyid-e-Shubada* [lord/leader of the martyrs], beloved brother of Ruqayyah bint Ali.

This land was bought specifically for the purpose of constructing the above mentioned center and the above mentioned Jaffer Ali has till the present been unable to do so; therefore, of my own accord, within my full senses and in sane mind, through this writing (document) I donate this land to Madrasa Jamiat al-Muntazir, Lahore so that its committee will assume construction of the center.

. . . Jamiat Muntazir will have the full authority to construct the center and it will be mandatory to have 10 *majalis* during the first 10 days of Muharram, and throughout the year all Shi'a community will have the right to hold *majalis* at any time other than school hours. If ever this organization is shut down, this property that I have given as *waqf* will remain used in the name of Imam Hussain and the Shi'a community will have the right to use it as a religious center and *imambargah*.<sup>59</sup>

The terms of this *waqf* were exceptional clear –Sayyeda Muhammad Fatima intended for her land near the shrine of Bibi Ruqayyah to be devoted completely to learning, remembrance of Hussain and Karbala, and to used by Shi'a pilgrims in perpetuity. Even if the lands were removed from the control of Jamiat al-Muntazir, they would remain open to the Shi'a faithful to use in the service of Ruqayyah and Hussain.

Over a decade later, however, the trustees of Jamiat al-Muntazir were still attempting to fulfill the terms of the bequest. As a result, the principle of the school, Maulana Sayyid Safdar Hussain, delegated the collection of funds and rents, expansion of the construction, and conduct of legal proceedings to the president of a local Shi'a organization.<sup>60</sup> Yet the difficulties remained. The residents surrounding Bibi Pak Daman were by and large Sunni, and Shi'a organizations were often at a disadvantage in collecting donations and mounting legal challenges. As a result, Jamiat al-Muntazir was soon forced to pass the *waqf* on to another Sunni organization, though reiterating Sayyeda Muhammad Fatima's original demands.

Sayyeda Muhamad Fatima gave this land [to Jamiat al-Muntazir] as *waqf* to Imam Hussain. We appointed the *mutawalli* for the land and gave him the authority to construct a suitable building and make arrangements throughout the year for the religious education of students and during Muharram conduct *majlis* . . .

Now, because Madrasa Jamiat al-Muntazir has till now been unable to deliver and will not be able to do so in the foreseeable future, I Seht Nawazish Ali, managing

---

<sup>59</sup> Waqf-nama of Sayyeda Muhammad Fatima Zawj Khan Bahadur Niaz Qutb. Document 549 file 3114 pg 58/62. Witnessed Jan. 30, 1956. Registered Feb. 13, 1956. Office of the Sub-Registrar. General Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, and Member of National Assembly.

<sup>60</sup> Public Letter of Authority from Maulana Sayyid Safdar Hussain, Chair, Jamiata al-Muntazir to Muhammad Bakhsh Sahib Qureshi, President, Anjuman-e-Jaffariya, Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore. April 30, 1970. General Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, and Member of National Assembly.

trustee, by the authority invested in me by Jamiat al-Muntazir Resolution #4, dated 24<sup>th</sup> April/71, transfer all the rights to Majlis-e-Tanzim ul-Islam, registered Lahore, and forsake all rights so that Majlis-e-Tanzim ul-Islam can construct and fulfill her wishes.<sup>61</sup>

Though Majlis-e-Tanzim ul-Islam was in fact an offshoot of the Deobandi school, at the time they accepted the terms of the *waqf-nama*. Because of the demographics of the area, however, over time the building was converted into a mix of private property and a Hanafi influenced-madrassa.

Through multiple examples like Sayyed Muhammad Fatima's *waqf*, much of the land designated explicitly for pilgrims at Bibi Pak Daman or given as *waqf* directly to Ruqayyah (as is common amongst Shi'as) had fallen out of public use. Attempts to reclaim the land have been met with resistance from bazaar owners, residents, and *mujawwars*, the vast majority of whom are Sunni. According to officials from the Trust, reclaiming the historic boundaries of Bibi Pak Daman is a national and religious mandate — to have Ali's daughter in Pakistan is a blessing, one that must be honored with a shrine benefitting Ruqayyah's stature. In turn, both internal and international religious prominence would increase revenues at the shrine and revitalize the surrounding areas. The *mujawwars* and bazaar merchants would be excluded from benefits on the lands they appropriated, however, and continue to fight legal proceedings to re-notify the land.

## A Shrine Under Attack

Yet for all the recriminations thrown against the *mujawwars* or the government's role in religious life, there existed equal criticism for the pilgrims to Bibi Pak Daman itself and the practices associated with them. For critics, the stories that describe Bibi Ruqayyah's life read more like myths than factual history; unlike the majority of shrines in Pakistan, its ambiguity has been hugely problematic for detractors, as it is one of the few shrines for which historical record or proof of lineage and descent of the caretakers is sparse. This uncertainty opens the shrine and its pilgrims to attack: if there can be no satisfactory proof given for the story of Bibi Pak Daman and Bibi Ruqayyah's existence, then devotees are simply engaged in un-Islamic rituals and superstitions — a charge that carries extra weight in Pakistan, where sensitivity to long-standing Hindu influences in local religious practices abounds.

The Auqaf ordinances issued through the 1960s and 70s was in part an attempt to normalize these practices and bring rhetoric about shrines and mystics in line with Islamic beliefs. The charge that pilgrims are engaged in un-Islamic behavior is a common one. That Ruqayyah's narrative is associated with Shi'ism makes Bibi Pak Daman a more

<sup>61</sup> Document of Transfer of Rights, Seht Nawazish Ali, Managing Director, Jamiat al-Muntazir, Witnessed by Professor Muhammad Sadiq Qureshi. Registry Amendment 549, file 3114, pg. 58–62 [*trans.*] April 24, 1971. General Records of Bibi Pak Daman Trust via Asma Mamdot, Chairman, and Member of National Assembly.

prominent target for these critiques, as Shiites are frequently accused of un-Islamic behavior by elevating the twelve Imams to the status of the Prophet. Indeed, from the mid-1980s, the national framework in which Bibi Pak Daman operates shifted and the shrine became subject to the changing nature of the state. Under the regime of Zia ul-Haq, shrine celebrations continued with some government support, though a Presidential Ordinance divested control of Auqaf properties and stated that “the administration, control, management, and maintenance of all Waqf property situated in a Province . . . shall instead be transferred to the Government of that Province.”<sup>62</sup> The increase in provincial control, along with the concurrent Islamization programs undertaken by the regime, allowed regional, sectarian, and political rivalries to gain traction at Bibi Pak Daman. A new round of disputes over the use of the space emerged, heightened by these increasing tensions.

Ultimately, by virtue of its particular history and the link to a controversial Shiite narrative, Bibi Pak Daman occupies a complicated and ambiguous space in both the local and boarder Islamic sacred geography. The dissatisfaction with government control, the tensions amongst sects and their respective interpretations and practices, and questions of gender are brought forward at Bibi Pak Daman. Yet even as the contradictions and debates that surround Ruqayyah’s grave remain, millions continue to navigate their ways through the narrow alleys and the security checkpoints to find solace in the presence of these holy women. For believers, as long as this basic reverence exists, “Bibi Ruqayyah will never forget Pakistan in her blessings. It was her mission to bring her message to us, and her mercy is greater than our doubts and injustice.”<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> “Auqaf Provincial Subject from today,” *The Pakistan Times*, April 14, 1976.

<sup>63</sup> Hashmi, *Makhdooma Bibi Ruqayyah*, 79.

Copyright of Muslim World is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.