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## **Nomos and Opacities: an Approach for Studying the Sufi-Artisan Relationship in pre-partition Punjab<sup>o</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Social historians widely acknowledge Sufis' influence on social life in pre-1947 subcontinent. However, they have produced a limited literature on Sufis' relationship with professional and marginalized communities (such as traders, artisans and unskilled labour). Part of the problem is the lack of primary source-material available on professional and marginalized communities and methodological tools for constructing such a social history. Currently, social history is facing challenges from other borderline disciplines and social historians are turning their attention towards other types of history. It is now even more important to devise a methodological approach to explore Sufis' social history which is already being overlooked by social historians. This methodological essay proposes an approach for studying the Sufi-artisan relationship in pre-partition Punjab by engaging Peter Berger's concept of **nomos** and Robert Darnton's idea of "opacities" in folktales. Both these concepts intend to grasp an insider's views and can help the social and cultural historians in making sense of a world which is separated by us because of its pre-modern life and **mentalité**.*

**Key Words:** *Nomos*, opacities, Sufis, artisans, Punjab, social history.

Prasannan Parthasarathi laments about the decline of social history in South Asia.<sup>1</sup>

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For him, changing priorities of academic publishers especially in North America, historians' interest in colonial discourses, nationalism and representation of colonial and postcolonial subjects, knowledge/power relationship, etc., have eclipsed the tradition of Thompsonian social history which studies economic transformations associated with industrialization.<sup>2</sup> Despite being profoundly influenced by Michel Foucault and Edward Said in the 1980s and 90s, South Asian historical scholarship could not fully appreciate the complexity of Foucauldian social history which attaches significance to material conditions along with the concepts such as normalization and micro-techniques of power. South Asian scholars seem to have given up the idea of practicing social history in favour of cultural history based on language, discourse and power. Parthasarathi suggests that since Thompsonian and Foucauldian social histories are a product of generations of historians who developed sophisticated theoretical and methodological tools, current scholarship engaged with South Asian social history is unlikely to match with them.

Parthasarathi's concern of the decline of social history is also shared by Christophe Charle with reference to French historiography.<sup>3</sup> Charlie questions whether the new direction of social history would be able to retain "social"? Contemporary historians are increasingly confusing the category of social history with other related disciplines such as historical sociology, biological history, social psychology, and social anthropology. The chronological method which social history borrowed from political and military histories is being radically changed. Following Roger Chartier, Charlie calls this new direction a "cultural history of the social", or sociocultural history.<sup>4</sup> Charlie suggests that comparisons in sociocultural history by using various macro-level contexts can be a hidden renewal of social history in France. Source-material for social historians is limited, "each society produces specific types of sources about social and cultural phenomena, reflecting administrative traditions and the respective roles of State and private groups. With a comparative view, it is possible to fill the gaps in one context with information borrowed from another one, or transfer questions from one context to the other".<sup>5</sup>

By using insights and considering the concerns of Parthasarathi and Charlie, in this article I propose a method for practicing social history of Sufis in pre-partition Punjab.<sup>6</sup> Instead of

relying on Thompsonian or Foucauldian methodologies, or employing the chronological method, I borrow the concepts of *nomos* from sociology and opacities of folktales from cultural history to explore the Sufi-artisan relationship. In one of his well-known works, *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger explains *nomos* (originated from a Greek word used for “custom, law”) as a belief system that inscribes meanings on to life.<sup>7</sup> I take the other concept, “opacities” in folktale, from Robert Darnton’s famous book, *The Great Cat Massacre*.<sup>8</sup> Opacity means idioms or incidents which are abnormal or weird. Darnton suggests that these opacities provide us with clues that can help in understanding pre-modern *mentalité*. Before proposing a method for studying the Sufi-Artisan relationship in pre-1947 Punjab, I will briefly review the contemporary literature which partially unravels the nature of the Sufi-artisan relationship. This overview shows how neglected this aspect of Sufis’ social history is.

In the 1960s, when several European scholars were interested in non-European “alternative cultures”, two French scholars, Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin, suggested that Sufi teachings strongly influenced artisans and their practices in the Middle East and Persia since the tenth century.<sup>9</sup> Massignon and Corbin are followed by other scholars of Sufi literature, who do not necessarily discuss the Sufi-artisan relationship; rather, they explain the significance of various arts and crafts (especially calligraphy) for Sufi ideas.<sup>10</sup> This literature provides theological insights about the correlation of Sufi ideas and craftsmanship. These works, however, are over-generalized, lack contextualization, and provide little insights into the processes which led to the development of the Sufi-artisan relationship.

Several social historians writing on pre-colonial societies and artisan guilds also mention the Sufi-artisan relationship. Bernard Lewis highlights, in some detail, the political and economic dimension of the Sufi-artisan relationship and suggests that tax collection and forceful conversions to the ruling sect of Islam were important factors which established this relationship.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars, working either on Muslim societies<sup>12</sup> or regional histories of Spain,<sup>13</sup> Iran and Central Asia,<sup>14</sup> the Middle East<sup>15</sup> and the Ottoman empire,<sup>16</sup> also mention this relationship without dilating it enough, because many of them are sceptical about the nature and extent of this association. Nevertheless, they do acknowledge the observance of Sufi rituals in many craft

guilds; associations of some guilds to various Sufi orders; Sufi as *Sheikh* (head) of artisan guild; and religious homogeneity of the guild members. However, others reject the idea of a mystical aspect to craft practices and highlight social and economic concerns behind the working of craft guilds.<sup>17</sup>

Historians of medieval India have hardly considered artisanal life and its relationship with Sufis worth pursuing and their main emphasis remains on agriculture, village communities, trade, urbanization, etc.<sup>18</sup> Scholars of Sufi history such as Thomas Dahnhardt and Athar Abbas Rizvi partially discuss the Sufi-artisan relationship in pre-colonial India.<sup>19</sup> Both mention multiple factors in the development of the relationship: political interests of the state to increase the number of its faithful Muslim subjects; the social and economic marginality of artisans; and religious zeal of Sufis for more conversions and to promote their own *silsila*. The pre- and post-partition literature in local languages (Punjabi, Siraiiki and Urdu), dealing with the cultural and social traditions, altogether ignores the Sufi-artisan relationship in the region.<sup>20</sup> Disregard of the Sufi-artisan relationship is understandable because artisans have never been the main concern of medieval historical and hagiographic literature.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Nomos***

Bergerian *nomos* is “a meaningful order imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals” but it does not include the experiences of all individuals. *Nomos* has the capacity to incorporate variegated experiences through social interaction of individuals.<sup>22</sup> Co-habitants in a *nomos* share knowledge based on language which imposes an order on the discrete experiences of individuals, thus, helps in strengthening the *nomos*. A complex process of socialization helps individuals to internalize the *nomos*. Such appropriation of *nomos* enables individuals to understand and explain their own experiences.

As the combination of social relations and the vision of society, *nomos* is necessary for the sustenance of a society and without it, society experiences alienation and anomie (the situation when a society’s values fail to define the meaning of life). Peter Berger uses anomie in the Durkheimian sense, that is, the anomic person is the one who may be economically stable but is deprived of happiness because

he or she does not find any meaning in his/her life. *Nomos*, if strongly established, can foster unity and sustain social groups regardless of social and economic differences. While explaining Sufis' relations with artisans, traders, shrine visitors and others, historians can use the concept of *nomos*, which helps to understand as how the shrine-based communities that had common individual and collective interests, attached similar purpose to life and possessed the same world-view. I am not deploying this idea of *nomos* to the Punjabi society as a whole. Instead, I propose that *nomos* is essential for sustaining Sufi communities. Punjabi society could exist without Sufi *nomos* but it was necessary for Shrine-based communities in pre-partition Punjab to maintain a particular kind of belief system to sustain themselves.

While engaging with the idea of *nomos* for understanding the social history of Sufis, historians must consider the concept of *barkat* or *baraka*, which means "blessing", "well-being" or "auspicious". *Baraka* was the belief largely shared among shrine-based communities in pre-partition Punjab. Clifford Geertz's definition of *baraka* in Morocco's context is also useful for making sense of socio-religious ethos of Punjab. For him, *baraka* "encloses a whole range of linked ideas: material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude...[suggesting] the proposition (against, of course, wholly tacit) that the sacred appears most directly in the world as an endowment—a talent and the capacity, a special ability of particular individuals".<sup>23</sup>

Social historians should view *baraka* in a wider sense, encompassing individual and collective interests such as the desire of kings to legitimise themselves, treatment of various diseases, collecting wealth or having a sense of self-fulfilment. In this way, *baraka* which is invoked through various rituals or *adab* (manners), is a source of the fulfilment to material and mystical needs of Sufi communities. In Sufism, *adab* means acts performed to profess respect and acknowledge the sanctity of Sufi masters and the Sufi ethos. Such "manners" involve touching the feet of a Sufi, behaving in a certain way in the presence of a Sufi-master, collecting dust from a Sufi's feet, and giving gifts (*futuh*) to Sufis, wearing certain type of dress, consuming simple food, observing etiquette while listening to music (*sama*). Court chroniclers and hagiographic sources repeatedly mention this aspect of medieval Indian life.<sup>24</sup> Analysis of the concept of *baraka* can provide the

historians with certain clues to understand the sustainability of Sufi *nomos*, and Sufis' relationships with artisans.

### Opacities

Medieval sources — histories,<sup>25</sup> travelogues<sup>26</sup> and autobiographies<sup>27</sup> — provide little information about artisans' life in Punjab. This paucity seriously hampers the efforts of economic and social historians to reflect upon medieval artisans.<sup>28</sup> Scholars, influenced by the epistemic trends enshrined in the *Subaltern Studies* or in the works of Edward Said and Michel Foucault, examine quite incisively the characteristics of Indian society and economy, and internal structures (such as caste system, villages), but ignore the dynamics of artisan's social lives.<sup>29</sup> Social historians can overcome these problems of sources and theoretical limitations by using folktales and Darnton's concept of opacities.

Folktales, an important genre of popular culture in pre-colonial and colonial Punjab, express the artisans' *mentalité* in relation to their historical experiences. This is not to suggest that the meanings attached to folktales remained the same throughout the medieval period; in fact, the locals understood these stories according to their own contexts and in narrating and re-narrating these stories changed their meanings. As the social conditions of narrator and listener changed over time, our reading should not necessarily typify artisanal or Sufi culture in pre-colonial Punjab. The representation of Sufis and artisans in folktales only provides clues which can be related to the social history to give insight into the Sufi-artisan relationship based on *baraka*. Before proposing a method of studying the Sufi-artisan relationship through folktales, I will provide an overview of two contemporary approaches to the study of Punjabi folktales — i.e., which are Sufist and socio-cultural — to differentiate my proposed approach.

Inspired by Marxist and nationalist formulations, some scholars interpret folktales to understand social conditions and anxiety among the lower strata of society towards elite classes and foreign invaders. In such interpretations, verbal imagery such as river and desert, are interpreted metaphorically as social and cultural barriers, so crossing signifies rebellion against the power structure. Najm Hosain Syed suggests that it is misleading to interpret Punjabi folktales by

using Sufi ideas; these are simple messages of protest against contemporary injustices.<sup>30</sup> Other scholars, without discounting the Sufi influence, underscore resistance in Punjabi culture through folktales as a way to reinforce Punjabi identity.<sup>31</sup>

None of the above approaches highlights the aspects of artisanal life or their interaction with Sufis. One of the possible ways of studying the Sufi-artisan relationship is to take cues from the methodology of Robert Darnton and Carlo Ginzburg. To explain the world and worldview of medieval Punjabi artisan, social historians can consider Punjabi folktales through Darnton's notion of "anthropological symbols" which he employs in *The Great Cat Massacre*. Different clues in Punjabi folktales provide entry point into the medieval world which should be analysed in relation to social and economic factors. To reconstruct the social narrative of medieval artisanal life, Ginzburg's method of conjectures and speculations is extremely useful. This "conjectural model" according to him "help[s] us to go beyond the sterile contrasting of rationalism and irrationalism".<sup>32</sup> This methodology makes historical reconstruction similar to the interpretation of signs, or to the "abductive model of testimony which treats judgement of testimony as an instance of inference of hidden causes from manifest vestiges and signs".<sup>33</sup> Keeping in view the subjectivity of historical documents, we should read the medieval historical record as signs which can provide us with clues about the Sufi-artisan relationship.

Robert Darnton borrows tools from cultural anthropology, which can answer many questions concerning our past societies and cultures as both anthropologists and historians aim to understand socially shared meanings. For Darnton, it is important to know "what the event meant to the people who participated in it".<sup>34</sup> He explains the story of the great cat massacre by first formulating a tentative perspective and then explaining it with reference to other sources (autobiographies, social and cultural histories, folktales, proverbs, etc).<sup>35</sup> On the basis of the Old Regime's archival sources, he finds that French people were troubled by issues such as toothaches, horrifying stories, etc. Their proverbs and idioms are opaque to us. Darnton believes that this "opacity", rupture or abnormality can provide us with an entry point in that alien terrain because such opacity is part of the texts written and embedded in a particular social and cultural context.<sup>36</sup>

We can use these opacities to make sense of different and distant cultures.

How to analyse opacity in a text? Symbols are complex, polysemic and fluid, denoting multiple meanings for various groups of people. Anthropologists such as Michael Herzfeld,<sup>37</sup> James W. Fernandez<sup>38</sup> and Keith Basso,<sup>39</sup> who have studied Greek peasants, rattle and harp among the Fang of Gabon, carrion beetles and butterflies among the Apache of Arizona, respectively, contend that a community's insiders have their own way of constructing and interpreting symbols which outsiders find hard to understand. Like Darnton, we can read symbols broadly, "in connection with any act that conveys a meaning, whether by sound, image or gesture".<sup>40</sup> Darnton uses this notion of symbolism without engaging semiotics and linguistics, because for him what appears more opaque can provide clues and insights about a culture. Punjabi folktales, too, present such opacity, which provides clues about medieval artisan's world. For instance artisans act of requesting Sufis for their *baraka* by acquiring cloth or stick, artisans' fear to align themselves with the hero are a few examples of opacities which provide clues to the medieval artisans' *mentalités*. These opacities are, in fact, clues which social historians can explain with the help of other medieval sources to understand the Sufi-artisan relationship.

### **Colonial Collection of Punjabi Folktales**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, British scholars compiled folktales to gather "authentic" information about Punjab. Mainly triggered by German philology, which through Maximilian Müller was introduced in Britain and popularized by anthropologist E.B. Taylor,<sup>41</sup> colonial folklorists in Punjab –William Croke,<sup>42</sup> R.C. Temple<sup>43</sup> and Flora Annie Steel<sup>44</sup>—understood Punjabi folktales as a primitive Aryan oral tradition. Several scholars criticize such compilations because the colonial folklorists not only de-contextualized the tales but also ignored the possibilities of social change in Punjabi society.<sup>45</sup> Apart from preconceived European notions of caste-system, Aryan race, primitive or pre-literate mind, the British viewed folktales as the "popular, non-Brahminical superstitions of the lower orders".<sup>46</sup> This process of collecting folktales involved interaction of the British with the locals, which was marked by suspicion and resistance. Thus,



the inclusion and exclusion of tales were “connected explicitly with the surveillance and disciplining of the Indian population”.<sup>47</sup>

However, there are tensions within “colonialism-generated folk narratives” as Sadhana Naithani notes.<sup>48</sup> Characters remain the same but they reflect a contemporary reality. For instance, two stories, *Momiaai wala sahib* and *Dinapur wala sahib*, from William Crooke’s collection, which he typifies as “belief in ghosts and spirits”, can also be read as stories showing local perceptions of the colonial rule as both characters, *Momiaai wala sahib* and *Dinapur wala sahib*, are English and are involved in the kidnapping and murdering of Indians. Sometimes, real characters become part of the narrative without any symbolic or old identity.<sup>49</sup> Such tensions within the colonial folktales compilations suggest that these texts can be read in both ways: to see the reflection of colonial understanding about the locals; and to explain the perceptions of the locals about the British.

In nineteenth-century colonial Punjab, compilation of folktales was the result of a complicated process as R.C. Temple, an officer in the British Indian army, admits in the introduction to his collection.<sup>50</sup> The method was problematic. There was a strong possibility that local narrators were afraid of the British officers, whom they considered powerful and in many cases brutal. When Temple invited them to his residence or office, they must have been overwhelmed by the environment. Temple, too, hints to it, when he says that *marasis* could forget when he asked them to repeat their poetry, so he normally avoided this. According to Temple, many of these *marasis* were drug addicts, so he provided them with opium some food and rupees in exchange for narrating their tales. While some “literate” wanted money along with a letter of appreciation, some others could be happy with a blank paper which they took as a good luck charm. Temple’s description gives an idea of what he thought about his narrators. He believed them to be “illiterate”, “ignorant” and “superstitious”. It also explains why he did not expect any interpretation of folktales from them. It is here Temple deploys his own understanding of Punjabi folktales, that is, the Aryan literature is necessary to understand the religious and superstitious Punjabi society, as well as its local history and culture. The method of Flora Annie Steel, an English writer and wife of a colonial officer, was no different from Temple’s. She requested local *munshees* to record tales from *marasis*.

By keeping in view of these problems and biases in the colonial texts, historians can consider a few other texts which either in Punjabi or translated from Persian in Urdu. Punjabi folktales have many versions, but if we ignore minor variations, they more or less provide the same narrative. Like Darnton, my proposed method focuses on the opacity rather than differences between various versions of the same tale. These “opacities” will provide clues about the Sufi-artisan relationship.

### **Artisans’ Oral Traditions**

Robert Darnton’s method of studying folktales can be more useful for writing social history of pre-partition Punjab, if we tap into the oral traditions of artisan families, who claim to have close links with Sufis. For writing a social history of nineteenth-century Sufis, accounts of the third generation of artisans provide a source-material for making sense of opacities in the Punjabi folktales. It is not necessary that artisans’ oral accounts would match with nineteenth-century folktales or would have exact explanation of opacities; rather historians should treat these oral accounts for conjecturing in relations with other contemporary sources on Punjab. This method is in line with Charlie’s suggestion of borrowing information from other contexts, and Ginzburg’s method of reconstructing history from various clues in the archival documents.

My experience suggests that a large number of artisan families view Sufis’ ideas as a way to interpret their craft practices and social relationships.<sup>51</sup> For instance, one such family is the Ansari, who claims to have an Arab origin and come to India in the eighth century along with the Arab army. Since then, they have been practicing tile-making and tile decoration (*kashigari*) in shrine and palace. Abdul Wajid, a member of this family, claims that in the nineteenth century, his family was involved in many shrine projects under the supervision of the Sufis or their successors.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the Rajput family, who practice wall painting (*naqqashi*) and claim their origin from a local Hindu tribe, argue that they converted to Islam on the preaching of a thirteenth-century prominent Sufi in Multan, Sheikh Bahauddin Zakariya. Like the Ansari family, the Rajputs also trace their connection to prominent Sufis, including a nineteenth-century Sufi, Suleman Taunsvi.<sup>53</sup> Abdul Rehman, a member of this family, claims that the meanings associated

to their crafts were mainly defined by the Sufi teachings. Another such family is the Pathan, who are carpenters by profession. Baksh Ilahi, a member of this family, claims that his in-laws practiced this craft in the nineteenth century. Baksh, whose masters learnt the craft from nineteenth-century carpenters in Chiniot, also suggests a close link of carpentry and Sufis' ideas.<sup>54</sup>

Above mentioned artisans' oral accounts explain the social relationships between Sufis and artisans in pre-partition Punjab. Central to these relationships was the concept of *baraka*. Artisans believed that their spiritual well being, honing of skills, new business opportunities, were ensured because of paying respect to Sufis. Sufis protected artisans from enemies and fought against those who threatened peace, economy and social life in the region. Oral accounts mentioned Chishti Sufis' disliking for British culture. Sufis explained the meanings of various decorative motifs to artisans on the basis of *Quran* and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings. For instance, floral patterns on shrines and cloths symbolized the beauty of paradise, and God's names represented attributes of *insan-e-kamil* (perfect human being and viceroy of God). Inscribing these names would positively change the social relationships of artisans with others (artisans would earn respect and have protection against their enemies). Chishti Sufis taught artisans etiquettes (*adab*) for practicing craft, for instance, business should be started with *wudu* (partial ablution), every design should be associated with God, and anything (knowledge, State, or law) challenging the religion (Islam) should be resisted.

Are these oral accounts of artisans trustworthy? While collecting oral traditions, one cannot ignore the contemporary situation in which artisans recorded their accounts. During my field survey between 2006 and 2010, the Taliban attacked many Sufi shrines in Pakistan, the relations between India and Pakistan were severely strained as a result of the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, the Pakistani media and the government perceived warnings and threats from India and the US as a precursor of war, and the US continued to carry out drone attacks in the tribal areas of the country. In fact, south Punjab was regarded as a recruiting ground for the Taliban fighters, and the locals anticipated aerial strikes in this region. These artisan families were strongly influenced by this situation. In this context of conflict, the artisan families narrated their linkages to Sufis and showed their

aversion to British colonialism. So, many current factors could have influenced the interviewees: the post 9/11 situation, the artisans' practising in a "Muslim" state which in a popular and constitutional sense asserts its "Islamic identity" and the artisans' association to contemporary Sufis.

In other words, if an artisan suggests that his forefathers supported the Chishti Sufis in resisting the British, he in a way, shows his disliking for the US influence on Pakistan presumably challenging the Islamic practices in the country. If an artisan claims that the Sikhs destroyed artisans' business in the nineteenth century, he in a way, reflects his aversion to the India-Pakistan military standoff which could possibly lead to a war. If an artisan blames a nineteenth-century sect for criticizing different rituals performed at a Sufi shrine, he could possibly be influenced by the attacks of the Taliban on Sufi shrines in the 2000s. So artisan families could be re-imagining past in the light of their contemporary experiences. To minimize the influence of contemporary situation on oral accounts, we should cite only that information, which we could make sense of in relation to nineteenth-century Sufi texts, political, social and cultural histories.

### **Conclusion**

A number of historians view social history in crisis, partly because of social historians' increasing interest in cultural history, and partly due to the availability of limited source-material and methodologies on which social historians insist while practicing history. The situation is more alarming among South Asian social historians as they failed to fully appreciate the complexities of Thompsonian and Foucauldian social histories sophisticatedly developed by generations of European historians. Social historians such as Christophe Charle and Roger Chartier make a case for exploring new methodologies for writing social history by using information and methodologies from borderline disciplines such as historical sociology, social anthropology and biological history.

New methodologies for constructing social history of South Asian Sufis also need to be devised as challenges faced by social history as a whole have kept this area under researched. We find little mention of Sufis' relationship with professional and marginalized communities in the

medieval period in contemporary history writings. It is also due to the limited source-material, either written by court chroniclers or followers of various religious persuasions. Administrative documents (such as court record) are also of little use. In such situation, Charle's argument of using alternate sources, methodologies and ideas for writing social history seems to be more pertinent.

For understanding the Sufi-artisan relationship in pre-partition Punjab, I propose to make use of two concepts, *nomos* and opacities in folktales. *Nomos* is a concept used by Peter Berger to study sociology of religion, while opacities in French folktales are analyzed by a cultural historian, Robert Darnton. Sufi *nomos* in pre-partition Punjab was established and strengthened on the basis of common language and knowledge system shared by the individual participants of shrine-based communities. Commonly shared meanings and belief system inscribed meanings on to Sufis' and artisans' lives. But these meanings are most likely to be accessible by studying opacities in folktales. These opacities or opaque idioms/events, if read along with other contemporary source-material, provide us with an entry point into pre-partition artisans' *mentalité*. Artisans' act of believing in Sufis' blessing powers has deeper meanings associated with their social and economic problems, and Sufis' close relationships with emperors which helped Sufis to protect artisans.

Punjabi folktales have multiple problems, which social and cultural historians cannot ignore. These folktales were compiled by the British who selected and narrated tales on the basis of preconceived European notions of Aryan race, caste-based Indian society, primitive or pre-literate mind, etc. Process of compilation was complicated due to the *munshees* and *marasis*. *Munshees* altered text of tales according to their own understanding, and *marasis*, who reluctantly narrated selective tales to presumably superior *gora sahib* (white master). To retrieve a complete sense of opacities, social historians should also consider artisans' oral accounts. Although one has to be very conscious about the influence of contemporary situation on artisans' accounts, yet these are very useful in explaining the opacities we find in Punjabi folktales. The method suggested in this article can be helpful in analysing Sufis' relations with artisans and other marginalized communities which are still less discussed in the writings of South Asian social historians.

## Notes and References

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- \* I highly acknowledge the valuable feedback of Maurizio Peleggi, Tan Tai Yong, Tania Roy and two anonymous referees on various drafts of this article. For the application of method proposed here, readers can see my book, *Artisans, Sufis, Shrines: Colonial Architecture in nineteenth-century Punjab* (London: IB Tauris, 2015).
- <sup>1</sup> Prasanna Parthasarathi, "The State of Indian Social History", *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37(1), Special Issue (Autumn, 2003), pp. 47-54.
- <sup>2</sup> E.P. Thompson (1924-93) a renowned British social historian, whose writings, particularly *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), set new trends of focusing on class consciousness in historical process and cultural dimension of political struggle in the post II World War historiography.
- <sup>3</sup> Christophe Charle, "Contemporary French Social History: Crisis or Hidden Renewal?", *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37(1), Special Issue (Autumn, 2003), pp. 57-68.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.
- <sup>6</sup> Carl Ernst refers Sufism "to a wide range of phenomena, including scriptural interpretation, meditative practices, master-disciple relationships, corporate institutions, aesthetic and ritual gestures, doctrines, and literary texts. As a generic descriptive term, however, Sufism is deceptive. There is no Sufism in general. All that we describe as Sufism is firmly rooted in particular local contexts, often anchored to the very tangible tombs of deceased saints, and it is deployed in relation to lineages and personalities with a distinctively local sacrality. Individual Sufi groups or traditions in one place may be completely oblivious of what Sufis do or say in other regions". Carl W. Ernst, "Situating Sufism and Yoga", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2005), p. 22. *Tasawwuf* is the Arabic equivalent of Sufism, which means "an act of becoming Sufi". One of the meanings of Sufi is pure or pious person. The term "Sufi" is variously used for Hindu, Muslim and Sikh mystics.
- <sup>7</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of the Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).
- <sup>9</sup> Louis Massignon, *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, [1982]); Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn-e-Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. N. Pearson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993).
- <sup>10</sup> Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi: His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971 [1961]); Martin Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976); Martin Lings, *What is Sufism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994); Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York

- University Press, 1984); Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- <sup>11</sup>Bernard Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds", *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Nov., 1937), pp. 20-37.
- <sup>12</sup>Ira Marvin Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, second edition), pp. 209, 349-50; Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of 'Ayyaran and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1995), p. 306.
- <sup>13</sup>L.P. Harvey, *Muslims in Spain, 1500-1614* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 150.
- <sup>14</sup>Mehdi Keyvani, *Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid Period: Contributions to the Social-Economic History of Persia* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1982); Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 92-165.
- <sup>15</sup>Gabriel Baer, "Guilds in Middle Eastern History", in M.A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in Economic History of Middle East, From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 16-7, 20; John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Craft and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914* (Albany: State University of New York, 2005), p. 22; Jeol Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 17; Pascale Ghazaleh, "Masters of the Trade: Crafts and Craftspeople in Cairo, 1750-1850", *Cairo Papers in Social Sciences*, Vol.22 (3), (Cairo: American University Cairo, 1999).
- <sup>16</sup>Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "The Economic Organization of Cities in Ottoman Syria" in Peter Sluglett (ed.), *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750-1950* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), pp. 104-40; for another perspective, see Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 62, 72-81.
- <sup>17</sup>See how secular, Marxian and religious persuasions explain the medieval Ottoman craft guilds, Siraiya Faroghi, "Understanding Ottoman Guilds", in Siraiya Faroghi & Randi Deguilhem (eds.), *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East: Fashioning the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 3-40; Siraiya Faroghi, *Artisans of the Empire: Crafts and Craftspeople Under the Ottomans* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011). For craft guilds in a global perspective, see Jan Lucassen, Tine De Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden (eds.), *The Return of the Guilds* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2009).
- <sup>18</sup>Romila Thapar, *Early India, From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India, c.1200-c.1750*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- <sup>19</sup>Thomas Dahnhardt, *Change and Continuity in Indian Sufism: A Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Branch in the Hindu Environment* (New Delhi: PK Printwood, 2002); Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India: Early Sufism and its History in India to AD 1600*, Vol. I (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004); Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India: From Sixteenth Century to Modern Century*, Vol. II (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2004). Several others give a passing reference of this relationship. Anna Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 169; Jamal Malik, "Encounter and Appropriation in the Context of Modern South Asian History", in Jamal Malik (ed.), *Perspectives of*

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- Mutual Encounters in South Asian History, 1760-1860* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 325-6.
- <sup>20</sup> Ganesh Das, *chaar baagh-i-Panjab*, trans. Amarvant Singh & Mohanjeet Singh, transcribe, Khalid Amin, *mudhli uneehveen sadi da Panjab* (Lahore : Suchet Kitab Ghar, 2005 [1849]); Ahmad Hussain Ahmad Qureishi Qiladaari, *zila Gujrat: tarikh, sukafat, adab* (Lahore : Pakistan Punjabi Adbi board, 1995); Dilshad Kalanchwi, *zila Bahawalpur: tarikh, sukafat, adab* (Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, 1997); Sajjad Haider Parvez, *zila Muzaffargarh: tarikh, sukafat te adab* (Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, 1989); Sajjad Haider Parvez, *Multan: Multan ki tarikh, tehzib-o-sukafat* (Islamabad: Lok Virsa, 2007); Harkeerat Singh, *yaadaan gunji baardiyan* (Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, 2007); Ahmad Ghazali, *cholistaan* (Lahore: Al- Faisal Nashran, 2007); Naveed Shahzad, *zila Multan: tarikh, sukafat, adab* (Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adab Board, 2001); Kaleem Shahzad, *zila Vehari: tarikh, sukafat, adab* (Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adab Board, 1994). Most of these scholars followed the colonial histories and gazetteers, thus, are thematically similar to colonial sources.
- <sup>21</sup> Abul Fazl (1601), *The Akbarnama*, trans. H. Beveridge, 3 Vols. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1897-1939); Abdul Qadir Badaoni (1595), *muntakhabut tawarikh*, trans. George S.A. Ranking, Wolseley Haig & W.H. Lowe, Vols. I-III (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1884-1925); Khafi Khan, *muntakhabul lubab*, trans. & eds. H.M. Elliot & John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol. VII (London: Trubner Company, 1877 ), pp. 207-533.
- <sup>22</sup> Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, pp. 20-1.
- <sup>23</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 33.
- <sup>24</sup> See one of the earliest medieval Sufi work on *adab*, Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, *daleel-ul-arifeen, mulfuzat-e-khwaja ajmeri*, trans. Mutee-ur-Rahman Qureshi Naqshbandi (Lahore: Zia-ul-Quran Publications, 1999).
- <sup>25</sup> Shams Siraj Afif (1400), *tarikh-i-firozshahi*, trans. & eds. H.M. Elliot & John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol. III (London: Trubner Company, 1871), pp. 269-373; Minhaju-s Siraj (1259), *tabakat-i-nasiri*, trans. & eds. H.M. Elliot & John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol. II (London: Trubner Company, 1869), pp. 259-383; Ziauddin Barani (1357), *tarikh-i-firozshahi*, trans. & eds. H.M. Elliot & John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol. III (London: Trubner Company, 1871), pp. 93-268; Abul Fazl, *The Ain-i-Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann & H.S. Jarrett, 3 Vols. (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Baptist Mission Press, 1873-1907).
- <sup>26</sup> Ibn Batuta, *The Travels of Ibn Batuta*, trans. & ed. Samuel Lee (London: Oriental Translation Committee, 1829); Thomas Rao, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619*, W. Foster (ed.), 2 Vols. (Hakluyt Society, 1889); Francois Berneir, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656-68*, trans. Irving Brock, revised & annotated, A. Constable, (London: 1891, reprinted Delhi: 1968).
- <sup>27</sup> Zaheeruddin Baber (1483-1531), *Tuzk-e-baberi*, trans & ed. F.G. Talbot, *Memoirs of Baber, Emperor of India, first of the Great Moguls* (London: A.L. Humphreys, 1909); Jahangir (1569-1627), *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri; or, Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Alexander Rogers, & Henry Beveridge (ed.) (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909-1914).
- <sup>28</sup> Raychaudhuri and Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I. Also see Irfan Habib, *Economic History of Medieval India 1200-1500* (New Delhi: Centre



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- for Studies in Civilizations, 2011); Thapar, *Early India*; Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Money and the Market in India, 1100-1700* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- <sup>29</sup>For instance, Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990).
- <sup>30</sup>Najm Hosain Syed, *Recurrent Patterns in Punjabi Poetry* (Lahore: Just in Group Printers, 2006).
- <sup>31</sup>Shafqat Tanvir Mirza, *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1992); Saeed Bhutta, *kamal kahani* (Lahore: Sanjh Publications, 2006); Saeed Bhutta, *des diyan vaaran* (Lahore: Punjab Institute of Language, Art and Culture, 2007).
- <sup>32</sup>C. Ginzburg, "Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Homes", *History Workshop*, No. 9 (Spring 1980), p. 6.
- <sup>33</sup>Nick Jardine, "Explanatory Genealogies and Historical Testimony", *Episteme* (2008), p. 165.
- <sup>34</sup>Robert Darnton, "The Symbolic Element in History", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 58 (1), (March 1986), p. 228.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup>Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, pp. 77-8.
- <sup>37</sup>Michael Herzfeld, "An Indigenous Theory of Meaning and its Elicitation in Performative Context", *Semiotica*, Vol. 34 (1981), pp. 135-9.
- <sup>38</sup>James W Fernandez, "Symbolic Consensus in a Fang Reformatory Cult", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 67 (1965), pp. 902-29.
- <sup>39</sup>Keith Basso, "'Wise Words' of the Western Apache, Metaphor and Semantic Theory", in Keith Basso and Henry Selby (eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology* (Albuquerque: NM, 1976), pp. 93-122.
- <sup>40</sup>Darnton, "The Symbolic Element in History", p. 223.
- <sup>41</sup>Edward B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, Vol., I (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1883, reprinted); Edward B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, Vol., II (London: John Murray, 1873).
- <sup>42</sup>Crooke edited *Punjab Notes and Queries* (renamed *North Indian Notes and Queries* in 1890).
- <sup>43</sup>Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Panjab*, 3 Vols. (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1884-1885?).
- <sup>44</sup>Flora Annie Steel, *Tales of the Punjab: Told by the People* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894).
- <sup>45</sup>Gloria Goodwin Raheja, "Caste, Colonialism, and the Speech of the Colonized: Entextualization and Disciplinary Control in India", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 23 (3), (August 1996), pp. 494-513; Kirin Narayan, "Bana Republics and VI Degrees: Rethinking Indian Folklore in a Postcolonial World", *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 52 (1), (1993), pp. 177-204.
- <sup>46</sup>Mary Frere, *Old Deccan Days, or Hindoo fairy legends current in southern India*, (London: John Murray, 1898, second edition), p. xiii.
- <sup>47</sup>Raheja, "Caste, Colonialism, and the Speech of the Colonized", p. 498.
- <sup>48</sup>Sadhana Naithani, "An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India", *Folklore*, Vol. 112 (2), (October 2001), pp. 183-8.
- <sup>49</sup>The rumours about G.A. Grierson's survey are part of the colonial documents: "Grierson Sahib is counting boats and cattle in order to take them away for the Government's war in Egypt. He is counting the wells because he is aware of an

impending famine when these would be reserved for the British families. Children are being counted to be buried in the foundation of the bridge that the government is constructing over the Gandak river. Adults are being counted for use in war". Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.186. Similarly, Henry Lawrence and Richard Temple are also living characters of nineteenth-century Punjabi folktales in which Sufis force them to take care of locals.

<sup>50</sup> Temple's local subordinates assisted him in recording folktales. After a speaker completed his narration, Temple used to enquire about some details, which in most of the cases, the speaker was often unable to elucidate. Temple opined that these narrators were ignorant and thought it better to interpret rather than just recording the narrator's tale. Temple's *munshi* (assistant) was usually reluctant to record the precise words of illiterate and ignorant and so corrected or altered the narration. After realizing the problems in this method of recording folktales, Temple asked the *munshi* to retell the story to the narrator and get it corrected. Then he himself wrote it in English before narrating it to the *munshi* who had first listened to it. Temple's preference was to ask the narrator to visit his home or office for narrating the tales. Narrators, who usually belonged to the lower strata (*marasis*), narrated these folktales on special occasions such as death anniversaries, birth, marriages, Sufi festivals, etc. See for discussion on his method of recording, Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Panjab*, Vol. I (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1884?), pp. vii-xii.

<sup>51</sup> I have used these interviews in my book, *Artisans, Sufis, Shrines*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Abdul Wajid (May-June, 2010, Multan).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Abdul Rehman, member of the Rajput family (May-June 2010, Multan).

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Baksh Illahi (June-July 2010, Chiniot).