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Role of Sufi Shrines in Local Politics – Ruralisation of Urban Areas: A Case Study of Pakpattan District Punjab- Muhammad Saleem (2014-2016)

This qualitative research explains the key consequences of the role of sajjada nashins (Sufi descendants) in local politics with Pakpattan District as the research locus. Owing to large rural followings, the sajjada nashins possess strong social, cultural, religious and political positions in a Punjabi society. They earn these multifaceted positions by the value of religious role of Sufi shrines as Sufi shrines are believed to intermediate between man and God. There are many ways for a layman to avail of this intermediation of shrines; the most popular way is to become murid (disciple) of the sajjada nashins of the buried saint. In this regard, the sajjada nashins are venerated like princes because they are the direct representatives having blood relations with the sacred chain of inherited spirituality of respective shrines. Sajjada nashins are believed to be deserved a great allegiance and veneration whatever the worldly position they possess. In this context, they manipulate this inherited spiritual constituency to organise political power in local political arenas.

Key findings

1. Apart from socio-religious scope, some electoral constituencies of Punjab are dominated by the traditional political leadership of *sajjada nashins*. Despite the modern socio-political structure – changing voting behaviour, political awareness and education, some urban areas of Punjab are still continued to be dominated by traditional political leadership of *sajjada nashins*. The *sajjada nashins* dominate local politics by virtue of rural driven political support. In this result, some urban centres seem to be ruralised having very slow process of socio-political development – good health, education, goods and services and democratic, political, competition.
2. Besides the spiritual constituency, the Sufi descendants get political constituency in legacy from their forefathers. Government avails of their local oriented spiritual and political positions. This symbiotic relationship between party leadership and Sufi descendants gives way to dynastic politics in the political landscape of Punjab. Moreover, dynastic politics creates hegemony of Sufi descendants in local political arenas obstructing the way to democratic political process.
3. Historically, Sufi descendants and state have been enjoying symbiotic relationship since long in the subcontinent. Sufi descendants give support to the state in exchange of different privileges from the state. In Pakistan, symbiotic relationship has become impregnable. In this regard, a full-hearted paradigm shift in political system of Pakistan is needed to halt the authoritative control, over local masses, of Sufi descendants.

Policy Recommendations

1. Education plays a fundamental role in changing minds against social, religious, political, economic and psychological enslavement. Pakistan is lagging behind in providing standard education to its population. In local areas of both rural and urban, schools and colleges are not efficient to propagate good education. In this regard, full-hearted reforms regarding the educators should be led by the state. In other words, high qualified educators should be hired especially at Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary levels.
2. The demarcation of electoral constituencies should be done anew up to the location of urban areas to protect them from being ruralised.