

The Phenomenological Understanding of *Piri-Muridi* in Pakistan

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This qualitative study was aimed to explore the belief and opinions of various religious and university scholars regarding the phenomena of *Piri-Muridi* in Pakistan. Seven religious scholars and seven university scholars from social sciences departments of Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan were interviewed through a structured interview schedule. Thematic analysis of responses by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model was adhered to identify potential themes. Thematic analysis resulted in the identification of 8 themes and 10 subthemes. The main themes evolved are historical roots, *Piri-Muridi* a multi-sect view, the criterion for a *Pir*, motives to become *Murid*, categories of *Murid*, personality factors, the role of education, and *Piri-Muridi* as an institution. The major findings revealed that *Piri-Muridi* has historical roots in our society; besides cultural traditions, religion and personality factors are the major contributing factors in strengthening these practices. Implications of the study have been discussed.

Keywords. *Piri-Muridi*, religious and university scholars, thematic analysis, nonbelievers, *Murid*.

Piri-Muridi [Master-Disciple] practices are common in Pakistan, but very little attention has been directed by researchers in the past. These practices have been prevalent in Pakistan for centuries, extending throughout the subcontinent and are primarily based on mutual passion and devotion, regardless of *Murids* social, cultural, or political backgrounds. Among various cultural traditions, visiting various *Pirs* and their shrines are one of the very important traditions, with deep-seated roots in our society established over a long period of time. It is observed that many people from all over the country visit these *Pirs* for a myriad of reasons, paying reverence to these 'holy

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men'. Though not explicitly stated by religious teachings and guidelines about *Piri-Muridi* as a religious act, the followers consider it an act of piety and religious obligation, practicing it in this same spirit.

Pakistan, as a third world country, has majority of its populace living a substandard life, falling below the poverty line. The growing uncertainties in the region, joblessness, lack of health opportunities, family conflicts, and other psychosocial stressors are important contributory factors and a potent source of distress and anxiety for the people. Whereas the people lack adequate resources to cope up with these catastrophic conditions, they are consistently entangling in the well of sorrows, worries, fears, insecurities, and despairs.

Finding a medical doctor, a counselor, or a clinical psychologist to help them in their distress is difficult with a shortage of economic resources. Moreover, the lack of education and awareness lessens the probability of stepping forward towards these professionals. The only easy and cheap way out is taking refuge in religion or visiting the *Pirs* 'holy men' for the remedies of their sufferings. The *Pirs*, being easily available to the common people and claiming the ability to treat any sort of ailment, attract many people towards them. This situation strengthens this institution to a considerable extent.

People with lack of directed awareness and education may be more inclined to visit shrines and *Pirs*. They may visit to satisfy unfulfilled wishes and desires. Due to neither being economically sound nor aware of various counselors and psychologist who can play roles in addressing psychological ailments (Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 2011), they may consider it easy to visit a *Pir* and prefer spiritual healing like *taveez* [amulets], and *damdarood* [spiritual recitation] to visiting a psychologist for counseling or psychotherapy. As a final resort or as a short cut to the efforts needed to obtain legitimate treatment, majority of people cling to these *Pirs* and the shrines of saints, seeking their intercession. Resultantly, this institution of *Piri-Muridi* continues to be strengthened and presently, it has deeply entangled roots in Pakistani society.

A *Pir* is considered a 'holy man' who is believed to have the capability to perform minor miracles and may help the sufferings of *Murids* through his spiritual powers. He is also a guide on the way of Shariah [Islamic Principles], piety and the success in this world and the world hereafter. The persons who follow the *Pir* are known as *Murid* [Disciple]. A person becomes the *Murid* of a *Pir* by a formal process of *Bayat* [Taking Oath to *Pir*]. Moreover, there are no

questions to be asked in front of the *Pir* and whatever he says is to be listened to and obeyed blindly (Aziz, 2001).

The term *Pir*, *Murshid*, *Sufi*, *Wali* are mostly used synonymously for a 'holy man' in literature and generally, there is no agreed-upon definition available. Pinto (1995) gave various definitions of *Pirs*. According to him, "The *Pir* is a guide, helper, and a teacher who takes one to God" (p.125). "The *Pir* is the guide who brings the *Murid* on the way of Quran in such a way that the *Murid* begins to live according to its injunctions" (p.126). He defined *Murid* as, "The *Murid* is one who seeks to die to himself. He is one who obeys the *Pir*. The *Pir* may order the *Murid* to do anything. The *Murid* has no right to say that he will not obey" (p. 206).

Ajmal (1984) has thrown some light on the *Piri-Muridi* relationship. He says that *Piri-Muridi* is practiced within a context that includes a worldview that preaches the reliance on understanding the true nature of things, most especially man's dependence on God. This is a religious doctrine and a method that gives this doctrine an almost existential character, suggesting that *murid* can begin to consciously live out and realize his dependence on God through the practice. Khan (1991) explored the phenomenon from an anthropological perspective and among the major findings, it was reported that belief system and learning transmitted through family are important elements in transforming the attitude of people towards *Piri-Muridi*. Moreover, it was added to the findings that this sort of belief in supernatural beings is more related to emotions rather than rationality.

Batool (2002) studied the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* and reported that among the major reasons for joining this institution included seeking the cure of medical problems by the *Pirs* through faith healing, including uses of *Taveez* and *damdarood*. It is interesting to note that these practices, common in Pakistan, can also be seen emerging in the modernized, Western world. Good luck charms, crystals, tapping, and chanting is practiced counselors in many societies have adopted in some form. Studying the phenomenon, thus, becomes especially relevant now in Pakistani society.

Hassan and Kamal (2010a) found dominant motives for which people seek the services of *Pirs* include the cure of their psychological sufferings and treating physical ailments. Furthermore, an assessment scale was also developed by Hassan and Kamal (2010b) for measuring beliefs and attitudes of people towards *Piri-Muridi*. Summarizing the work of researchers, it can be concluded that growing uncertainty and worldly tensions are rendering people to move towards spiritual healers and *Pirs* in a higher frequency. However, at the same time a

question arises as to why, among Muslims, some people hold strong beliefs towards this institution whereas others do not. Is this concept of *Piri-Muridi* part of the religion or does it have an older, deeper cultural origin? Although, the studies on the subject give an overall picture of the *Piri-Muridi* practices, causal factors behind them, rituals and modes of treatment adopted by *Pirs*, however, no understanding of the origin of the practice is evident. There is still much to be known about this institution.

The initial understanding gained from literature gives birth to many questions. Do only worldly problems compel people to visit these spiritual healers or it is the belief system which plays a role, regardless of external circumstances? If the belief system plays a primary role, then why do people from the same belief system behave differently toward this *Piri-Muridi* institution? It again brings attention to the personality attributes that may be playing a role in shaping this attitude of people. Perhaps a dimension of individual differences related to human personality structure transcends religion and culture, making it more likely that some individuals, regardless of their religion, denomination, culture or location, tend to rely on this mode of coping with difficulties of surrendering individual will to another person.

These are some of the questions not answered by research literature. The concept apparently owes its origin in religion, yet to understand psychosocial perspectives related to personality factors, there is first a need to gather the viewpoints of various social scientists along with religious scholars. Describing and defining the phenomenon operationally is the first step, and even that has not yet been done, despite the widespread use of the practice in healing, both informally and formally. This research will help in building a preliminary theoretical understanding of *Piri-Muridi* practices.

The present study is an endeavor to explore in depth the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* from multidimensional points of view of various religious scholars and university teachers. Following were the main objectives of the study:

1. To explore and understand the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* in Pakistani context as perceived by religious and university scholars and the development of various theoretical propositions.
2. To explore personality attributes of *Murids* and dispositional factors in building their belief system.

Method

Participants

The participants for the present research consisted of 14 religious and university scholars. The religious scholars ranged from 37 to 70 years of age ($M = 45.28$, $SD = 11.22$) whereas university scholars ranged from 30 to 57 years ($M = 42.29$, $SD = 10.79$). The 7 male religious scholars belonging to different religious sects. 2 belong to *Sunni Brelwi*, 2 from *Sunni Deoband*, 2 from *Shia* and 1 from *Ahlayhadith*. Seven university scholars (4 men & 3 women) of different sects were selected from Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad from different disciplines of social sciences. Two scholars were selected from psychology, 2 from history, 1 from anthropology, 1 from Pakistan studies and 1 from history and cultural studies.

The inclusion criterion for research participants was different for the two broader categories of scholars; hence, a purposive convenience sampling technique was used. For religious scholars, only *Muftis* or *Allama* in case of *Shia* sect were included in the sample. University scholars having a minimum qualification of MPhil. and 5 years of teaching experience were included in the sample. These scholars had teaching or research experience in the field of religion, spirituality or *Sufism*.

Data Collection Tool

SemiStructured Interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted as a data and information-gathering tool to explore in depth the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi*, identifying beliefs and opinions of various scholars about the concept. The interviews were based on a few broad domains derived from an extensive review of the literature on the concept. These domains were followed to conduct semi-structured interviews of scholars in an open and informal discussion mode and any additional information obtained during initial interviews was later incorporated in the subsequent interviews. The broader guiding categories for interviews include historical antecedents of *Piri-Muridi*; the concept of spirituality; *Bayat* and its significance; underplaying motives behind *Urs*; the personality of *Murids*; the role of gender in *Piri-Muridi* relationship; reasons for becoming *Murids*; illiteracy and *Piri-Muridi*.

The literature gave a picture of all these categories but lacked comprehensiveness, and especially, it did not incorporate all the belief systems of Islam regarding how the people from different sects practice this phenomenon.

Procedure

The researcher started from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970) as the construct of the study, that is *Piri-Muridi* lacked an extensive literature background. Hence, to explore this phenomenon extensively, semistructured interviews of respondents with different belief systems, educational backgrounds, and life experiences were selected with the intent to build an understanding on the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* from an expert point of view. An initial interview guideline was prepared. All interviews were conducted accordingly with the participant's informed consent, according to ethical guidelines of psychological research. Extensive observational notes were taken, and interviews were recorded after seeking permission by the participants. Recorded interviews were later transcribed from audio recordings. Authors reconstructed and transcribed verbatim from careful notes.

Thematic Analysis of Transcriptions

The material that was analyzed consisted of the verbal transcriptions from the interviews based on recordings and notes taken during and shortly after the interview. After the initial reading, the researcher checked the transcriptions against the tape-recorded material, and changes were incorporated where deemed necessary. All the interviews were transcribed the day after the interview took place so as to ensure that the contents to be reproduced according to the context in which the statements were made, to ultimately enhance the credibility of the gathered data.

Thematic analysis was considered most appropriate for the present study as it uses inductive methodology. A data-driven approach was adhered, and no preconceived notions were followed, as mandated by the process of phenomenological study. As the objective of the study was gaining a phenomenological understanding of the *Piri-Muridi* construct, thematic analysis best suited this objective. Phenomenology's hypothesis-free stance ultimately yielded themes which provided a better understanding of the concept and offered a foundation for subsequent empirical studies. In carrying out the thematic analysis, the researcher adhered the guidelines described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis took a semantic approach, that is, the themes were identified from the explicit or surface meanings of the words, comparing analyses at the latent level where the researcher moved beyond what was said by the respondents in order to identify underlying themes or ideas that signified what people said.

The process of thematic analysis utilized following stages: (a) Familiarization with the transcribed data through reading and re-reading of the texts and extraction of initial ideas; (b) generation of initial codes, and associating data that was clearly signifying for each code to make broader coding categories; (c) synthesis of coding categories into preliminary themes; (d) revision of themes through their association with the generated codes and broader coding categories, and (e) analysis of the whole data set. Subsequently, the researcher worked on the final refinement of the themes by generating and arranging sub-themes. These steps and guidelines were followed thoroughly as the researcher moved towards data reduction.

Initially, there were 256 coding categories for similar concepts. The same process of data review and reduction was continued and these 256 coding categories were evaluated and re-evaluated with the help of two judges from the field of psychology. These categories were again coded for the similarity of the text in context. This drill ultimately provided 26 major categories. These 26 broader coding categories were further discussed with the same experts to identify themes and sub-themes. This ended in the generation of final themes and subthemes which were finally arranged in the form of a thematic map. Findings were then discussed and elaborated.

For the present study, reliability and validity issue was addressed in two steps: 1) At the time of data collection, and 2) at the time of data analysis. During the first step, the researchers after each interview session ended had a debriefing session with the scholars so as to get any feedback if the information gathered by the researcher had a different connotation as compared to what was being actually said by the scholars. This practice resulted in establishing idiosyncrasies between what was said and what was perceived and thereby enhanced the credibility and validity of the qualitative data. During the second step after thematic analysis, 26 coding categories were discussed with the two independent judges who were Ph.D. scholars in psychology. The independent discussion with the two judges finally resulted in the generation of 8 main themes and 10 subthemes. The issue of reliability using the intercoder reliability technique was addressed to some extent in this way.

Results

The 8 main themes and 10 subthemes are shown in the Figure 1 that follows.

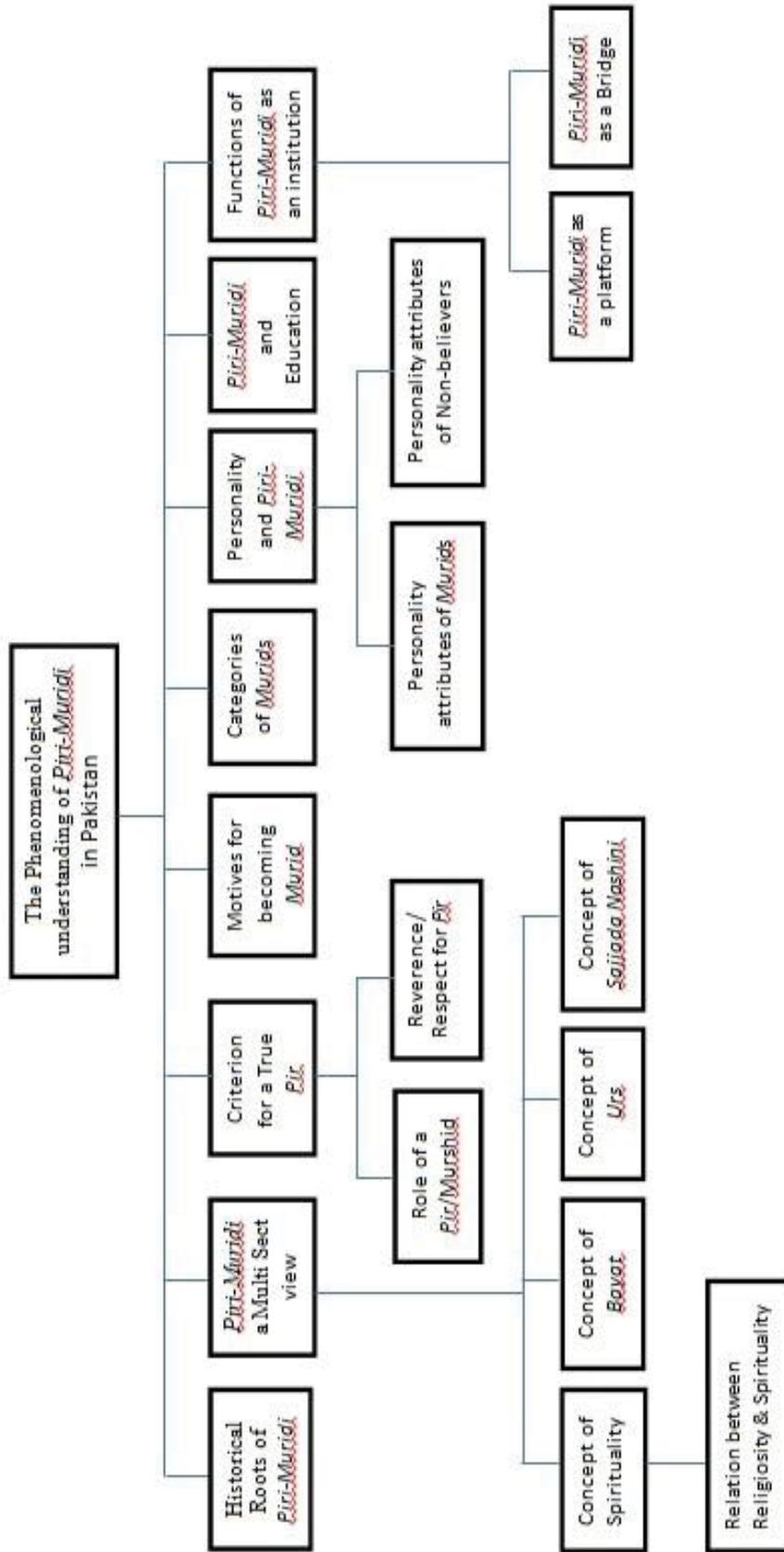


Figure 1. The phenomenological understanding of Piri-Muridi in Pakistan

Piri-Muridi, as noted in the Figure 1, is viewed by various religious and university scholars as attributed to various historical roots. Personality factors and cultural origin are also perceived to impact according to their understanding of the concept. The identified themes and sub themes are discussed in subsequent paras.

1. Historical Roots of *Piri-Muridi*. The word *Piri-Muridi* has its origin in Persian and Urdu languages. In Arabic, the synonym of *Bayat* is used. According to the majority of participants, the concept of *Bayat* is *Sunnah* of all Prophets, and particularly, the last prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to take *Bayat* from *Sahabas* (friends of Holy Prophet). Holy prophet used to take pledges from them to be virtuous in their deeds, and to refrain from bad acts and evils of the society. After the *Wisal* [death] of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), as there was no formal prophet to come to take these pledges, thereby, this role was taken by *Wali Ullah's* [holy men] *who* used to take such pledges in the form of *Bayat*. These *Wali Ullah's* have different connotations in the different regions of the world. The words Sufi, *Wali*, *Murshid* are by and large conceptually similar in the framework. Especially, in the Indo-Pak region, the term *Pir* is used for these 'holy men'.

Although, the majority of religious and university scholars have a consensus about the concept of *Piri-Muridi*, there were very few disagreements pertaining to particular sectarian beliefs. However, there is a mutual consensus for the existence of a *Wali* 'holy men' in all belief systems of Islam. Those scholars who believe this man to be followed by taking a formal oath of *Bayat* are in adherence with the concept of *Piri-Muridi* institution. They consider it a sacred task being performed by Prophets, which a contemporary *Pir* performs. Thereby, by the teachings of these scholars, resultantly this formal institution of *Piri-Muridi* emerged and people started giving reverence to these 'holy men', to their shrines after their death and to their successors holding *Pirs* position in the form of *Gaddi*, currently known as *Sajjada-Nashin* [Successor of Pir].

2. *Piri-Muridi* a Multi Sect View. The results of thematic analysis suggested that the concept of *Piri-Muridi* is perceived differently by scholars of different sects. The difference in understanding and beliefs of various scholars are discussed next, under sub-themes.

Concept of spirituality. The concept of spirituality has different connotations for different scholars. Generally, it is believed by a few scholars that spirituality is synonymous with inner satisfaction, a feeling of subjective mental peace, or as a growth of our spirit. As human beings are made up of two components that is, soul

and body, for our physical body daily worships, prayers, etc. play a role, but for our spirits, spirituality or a spiritual path is there to address this gap.

Spirituality is perceived as a very subjective feeling and is not formally defined by any religious scholar. However, few university scholars who had a pro-Sufi school of thought considered spirituality as a secret doctrine transferred by Holy Prophet (PBUH) to Hazrat Ali (RA). According to them, an aorta of this secret doctrine was shifted to Hazrat Salman Farsi (RA) and Hazrat Abu Hurraira (RA). The same spiritual path is being followed by *Walis* and *Pirs* and this path also makes a connection to form various Sufi Orders, generally called *Silsalahs* like *Naqshbandi*, *Qadri*, *Suharwardi*, *Chisti*, etc. The current *Pir* also follow one of these *Silsalahs* to move onwards on a spiritual path. Hence, once a *Murid* takes *Bayat* of some *Pir*, he becomes part of the spiritual path which a *Pir* follows and this spiritual path ultimately establishes one's connection with the Holy Prophet.

Relationship between religiosity and spirituality. According to religious scholars, albeit religion and spirituality are the relatively interdependent and overlapping phenomenon and are inseparable. Particularly, in Islam, spirituality is considered a part of the broader spectrum of religion, and there is no existence of spirituality without Islamic *Sharia*. A few university scholars contradict this belief. They consider spirituality as entirely independent of religion. According to them, spirituality exists in every religion, and each religion has its definition of spirituality. Thus, confining spirituality to Islam is not rational. However, majority of the scholars have a consensus that spirituality is not separate from religion.

Concept of Bayat. *Bayat* is an agreement between the *Murid* and *Pir* in which the *Murid* takes the oath to *Pir* to give up all bad deeds and to follow his path according to *Sharia* (Islamic principles). The process of *Bayat* includes holding the hand of *Pir* by *Murid* and verbally reciting verbatim that which the *Pir* recites. The women also adhere to the process of *Bayat* except they hold one corner of the cloth whose other end is in *Pir*'s hand. The rest of the process of verbal agreement for both genders is the same. However, there is also consensus among scholars that the holding of the hand is not mandatory for *Bayat*; verbal commitment is sufficient. When coming towards the justification of *Bayat* in the current era, according to most of the participants, the *Bayat* is proven to have a value from the *Quran* and *Hadith* and is purely a religious act. According to them, *Bayat* is *Mustahib* [Matter of Virtue] and *Masnoon* [Proven from Holy Prophet] but not an obligation. It means that doing *Bayat* is better than not doing it, but not doing it is not a sinful or questionable act.

Doing *Bayat* to someone in the current time period is not a point of consensus among all scholars interviewed, although, a majority of the scholars are of the view that *Bayat* was applicable as a concept in the Holy prophet's era, so it has the same functional value in the modern world. Now, contemporary *Pirs* are capable enough for this sacred task. The scholars of *Shia* sect and *Ahlayhadith* sect are not agreed upon this concept, however, according to *Ahlayhadith* scholars, as the *Bayat* is on hand of Prophet only, and as there is no prophet to come, therefore, *Bayat* to anyone's hand other than the prophet is against *Sharia*. Similarly, they are not convinced by the existence of a *Pir* or holy men, especially, in the current era. They simply negate the institution of *Piri-Muridi*, declare *Bayat* to be a non-Islamic act and consider any act associated with it to be included in the circle of *Shirk* (Negation Allah's oneness).

The *Shia* scholars, on the other hand, are convinced of the continuing existence of a *Pir*, *Wali*, or a *Murshid*. They consider them virtuous and respectable. One may follow any *Murshid* for spiritual attainment, growth, and success; but to follow them through the formal process of *Bayat* is not permissible in *Shia* sect, as *Bayat* after Prophet (PBUH) is a privilege of Imam (Holy Prophet's Grandson) only. Moreover, as the 12th imam in the chain of Holy Prophet's family, that is, *imam Mehdi* (AS) is alive and present in *Almay Ghaib* (not visible), hence *Shias*, being their followers, come directly under imam's *Bayat*. Therefore, in the presence of imam in the world, *Shias* are not bound and liable to do *Bayat* to someone, either a *Pir* or a *Murshid*. According to them, *Sharia* alone is enough for success but if someone wants to attain higher place in the world hereafter, he or she has to follow a spiritual path. To follow that spiritual path, a spiritual leader, *Pir* or *Murshid* may be followed to attain success in the path but to follow him blindly, disposing yourself to him through *Bayat*, is not advisable.

The *Bayat* has been categorized differently by different scholars and given different names but seems to have the same underlying meanings. Broadly they may be categorized into two main categories, that is, *Bayat-e Eiman* [Faith] and *Bayat-e-Aamal* [character]. *Bayat-e-Eiman* is on Prophet's (PBUH) hand whereas *Bayat-e-Aamal*, also called *Bayat-e-Tobbah* by a few scholars, can be done with someone who is a true follower of *Sharia* and whom we may call a *Pir*. *Bayat-e-Aamal* is basically saying pardon from previously committed sins and taking a pledge to refrain from them in the future.

Concept of Gaddi/Sajjada nashini. *Gaddi/Sajjada nashini* is a concept in which the *Pir* who is holding the spiritual power of a particular area can transfer that power to his successors, so that the

process of spreading spirituality remains in continuity. Sometimes, the *Pir* in his life nominates his son, grandson, or nephew to hold the *Pir's* position after his death. However, mostly in practice is the automatic transfer of *Gaddi* based on blood relation with the *Pir* which is considered authentic and appropriate. Sometimes, the *Murid* who is not blood relation of the *Pir* gives equal reverence to the successor of the *Pir* and follows him in the same spirit. This transfer of *Gaddi Nashini* passes from generations to generations and one *Sajjada Nashin* after the other holds the formal position of the *Gaddi*. The same concept of transfer of *Gaddi* as viewed by scholars is considered contrary to Islamic principles. According to almost all the scholars, although, the generation of *Pir* is honorable, yet, the son of a *Pir* may not be a *Pir* like a son of a prophet is not always a prophet. Hence, the transfer of *Gaddi* on the basis of relation is not justifiable within Islamic parameters. The scholars of *Deoband*, *Shia*, and *Ahlayhadith* sect were even against the existence of a *Gaddi Nashini* concept. This concept is mostly liked and honored in *Brelwi* sect. However, the *Brelwi* scholars believe that it is the duty of the *Pir* to transfer his *Gaddi* to a reliable person who is the true follower of Quran and *Sharia* so that the spiritual path of *Pir* can be continued with the same zeal and spirit. However, the process of present *Gaddi Nashini* and its transfer is unanimously declared inappropriate by all the scholars.

Concept of Urs. The reverence to *Pir* even after his death is a central concept in *Piri-Muridi* relationship. The visit to holy shrines is considered equally spiritual as visiting an alive *Pir*. The *Murids* give a formal reverence to holy men in the form of an annual gathering on *Pir's* death. The day is celebrated in different ways and it varies from *Gaddi* to *Gaddi* and from *Silsalah* (Order) to *Silsalah* that a *Pir* follows. The common activities at Urs among different shrines include *Qawali* [spiritual recitation] reciting *Naat*, *Darood Sharif*, Holy Quran and *Dhamal* [spiritual dance]. The stalls of various eatables and religious belongings are also arranged. The underlying motive of celebrating Urs is to give reverence to *Pir* on his *Wisal*. The term *Wisal* is used for *Pir's* death which means meeting with God. So the death of *Pir* is not actually dead. Rather, it is believed to be *Wisal* (meeting) with God so it is considered a matter of joy and happiness. The day of his death is annually celebrated, which is given the name of *Urs*.

The religious scholars have mixed view about the concept of *Urs*. The scholars of *Deoband* and *Ahlayhadith* sect considered it totally against Islamic *Sharia* (Principles) and declared it as a great *Shirk* (associating someone with God). They believed that all the activities held at shrines on the eve of *Urs* are against Islamic teachings;

besides, an opportunity for the mixed gathering of both genders thereby enhances the probability of sins to be committed. The *Shia* scholars are not against *Urs*, but they have mixed opinions too. They consider it appropriate but difficult to perform for every personality, as history is full of such holy men. Therefore, celebrating *Urs* of a particular *Pir* and neglecting many is not considered desirable by *Shia* scholars. However, overall, they were partially supportive of the concept of *Urs*.

The concept of *Urs* was strongly supported by the *Brelwi* scholars in both categories of religion and university. The religious scholars claim it to be a religious activity, being proven from the Holy Prophet's life. Moreover, they consider religious gatherings of any sort as sacred, as in gatherings of people, there are always some personalities which are close to God and by virtue of them all the people in gatherings may get the desired benefit. In this context, *Urs* being a big gathering is always a matter of blessings [*Baraka*]. Similarly, university scholars who are pro-*Sufi* school of thought also consider *Urs* as a desirable religious activity. They believe that *Urs* serve multiple functions including religious (in the form of reciting Quran), economic (including food stalls, religious belongings stalls), social (including shelter to various *malangs* [Insane] and the needy, etc. Overall, the scholars of *Brelwi* sect had a very positive evaluation of this cultural tradition or *Urs*, *Shia* scholars have a mixed view, while the rest of the scholars declare it a completely non-Islamic act.

3. Criterion of a True *Pir*. The selection of a true *Pir* is a very important step in spiritual attainment and growth. Majority of the scholars interviewed were favoring the concept of *Piri-Muridi* and by and large, they mention the same criterion for a true *Pir* which deserves to be followed. It includes

- a. A true *Pir* should have a vast knowledge of Islamic *Sharia*.
- b. A true *Pir* should be a practicing Muslim, his appearance, his behavior, social relations, and his character should be in accordance with Islamic principles and should not contradict *the Quran* and *Sunnah*.

Though, believers in *Piri-Muridi*, primarily scholars of *Brelwi* and *Deoband* Sect have consensus on this criterion for a true *Pir*. However, *Deoband* scholars believe that a *Pir* can be anyone who is fulfilling the above-mentioned criterion, whereas the *Brelwi* scholars have a slight disagreement here. They consider *Pir* as a *Wali* or as a supernatural human being to whom spirituality is bestowed upon by God as a special blessing. Hence, they provide an additional criterion for a true *Pir* besides the previously mentioned two. This includes:

- c. A true *Pir* should have continuity in maintaining *Silsalah* that resultantly leads to the holy prophet (PBUH) via Hazrat Abu-Bakr or Hazrat Ali.

Brelwi scholars believe that a *Pir* is given spiritual power by Allah and in actual happenings, he has a spiritual link to Holy Prophet (PBUH) by connecting a series of intermittent holy figures. So, if a *Pir* is not following some spiritual path or *Silsalah*, he is not a true *Pir*.

The role of a *Pir* and reverence to him are discussed as a subtheme in the subsequent Para

Role of a *Pir*/Murshid. According to scholars, a *Pir* can play multiple roles. A *Pir* can act as a teacher, or as a leader. He is an elderly figure who may guide you on the right track. He directs you according to the teachings of Islam and takes an oath from you to refrain from bad. He has the role to inculcate good values in you and to take away bad ones. However, the primary goal of a *Pir* is to guide you to follow the teachings of Islam in true spirit. Few scholars considered *Pir* as a psychoanalyst who helps you in your sorrows and sufferings, listens to your problems, counsels you where required and prays for you. They also consider *Pir* to be an important figure who acts as a teacher or guide on the path of spiritual growth. According to them, although *Sharia* (Islamic Principles) alone is sufficient for the success of human beings but for attaining the success of higher level, spirituality it is inevitable and to move on the spiritual path a teacher (*Pir*) is required. The contemporary *Pir* acts as a teacher on the way to spirituality which ultimately becomes a reason for one's success in attaining higher levels in the world hereafter.

According to *Brelwi* and *Shia* scholars, a *Wali* or *Pir* may act as an acquaintance in front of God. As in the worldly day to day matters, we get our work done through influential and key personalities giving their reference. Similarly, being lower in rank in front of God, by reference or acquaintance of *Pirs*, we can get our wishes fulfilled which otherwise might have not been written by Allah for us. So, a *Wali* or *Pir* acts as a *Wasilla* [acquaintance] in front of God.

Reverence/respect for *Pir*. According to scholars, as the *Pir* is a respectable personality and according to few, being a holy man, he deserves due respect and honor. The followers and *Murids* are required to give proper reverence to his personality. While, sitting in his company needs extra attentiveness, no one should talk when he is talking, and *Pir* should be a centre of attention in gatherings. Your voice should be lowered in front of *Pir*, in a way, submissive and respectful behavior is desirable.

4. Motives for Becoming *Murid*. According to scholars, people join the institution of *Piri-Muridi* for numerous reasons. Mostly, people join this institution for satisfying their spiritual Quest. They attain spiritual knowledge and strive for their spiritual growth by associating themselves with some *Pir*. They declare themselves to be lucky after becoming *Murid* as they are part of the same chain which ultimately leads to the Holy Prophet. Therefore, they undertake *Bayat* from a *Pir* which is a key to success in this world and the world hereafter. There is another group of people who feel entangled in the catastrophes of the world. They want immediate remedies for their sufferings and are in a desire of their wish fulfilments. These people consider *Pirs* to be the right persons for a solution to their problems and hence, become *Murid*. Therefore, people become *Murid* for multiple reasons, but once they take the oath of *Bayat*, they are considered the part of a chain that a *Pir* follows and ultimately they are believed to have spiritual growth, success in worldly matters, remedies for their sorrows, and ultimate success in the world hereafter.

5. Categories of *Murids*. The *Murids*, despite the fact they have some common underplaying motives, can be classified more comprehensively as per the understanding of scholars. Different scholars name various categories of *Murids* differently, yet they may be placed under four major categories.

- a. Devotees
- b. Ordinary Decipals
- c. Select Decipals
- d. *Khalifas*

Devotees are the *Murids* who are aware of *Pirs* supernatural power, gives him reverence, and are respectful in their conduct but maybe having a less interaction with the *Pir*. Ordinary followers, who have a higher frequency of interaction with the *Pir* and sought his *Baraka*, are highly respectful in their conduct and thus may be placed a step higher as compared to devotees. Moving in the same hierarchy of respect and frequency of interaction comes select followers of *Pir* more respectful than the previous two categories and more inclined towards their spiritual enhancement and growth rather than preferring worldly gains. While very few reach a stage where *Pir* consider them competent enough to work on *Pir*'s behalf, these are declared as *Khalifas* ((secretary). A *Khalifa* is the supreme degree of *Murid* who after passing the maximum time of his life with the *Pir* is now

delegated as an authority to take *Bayat* from new *Murids* on his hand. The people even after taking the *Bayat* from *Khalifa* would be considered as *Murid* of that *Pir* as he is working on *Pir*'s behalf.

Though, the *Murids* are being categorized, generally for a *Pir*, all *Murids* are equal unless they strive to attain a particular position and for that, they have to put forth their dedicated efforts and follow the teaching of Islam as per the advice of the *Pir*.

6. Personality and *Piri-Muridi*. The scholars have mixed views about personalities of *Murids* and non-believers in the institution of *Piri-Muridi*. According to some university scholars, personality does not play a role in making you predisposed towards *Piri-Muridi* relationship. Others believe that personality does play such a role, but they reserved their comments as they think such discussions may evoke sectarianism. Some of them believe that it is a matter of belief and has less to do with personality traits. Some believe there is an impact of culture in shaping this belief. Psychologist scholars shared that personality alone does not play a role in shaping attitude towards *Piri-Muridi*; rather various moderating and mediating factors interact with the personality in shaping this belief system. Gender, age, sect, economic status, and education are a few worth-mentioning here. However, most of the scholars were of the view that *Murids* and non-believers would definitely have different types of personality. The personality attributes of these two categories are discussed under the next two sub themes.

Personality attributes of *Murids*. The scholars had mixed views about the personality of *Murids*, yet there is a general agreement that *Murids* do have personality traits which make them inclined towards *Piri-Muridi* relationship. Moreover, after joining this formal institution, if a *Murid* consistently interacts with the *Pir sahib* and follows his teachings, then majority of *Murids* would develop somewhat similar personality attributes.

Scholars believe that current worldly problems have rendered an environment of anxiety and depression among people. Our social scenario, economic instability, growing terrorism, and uncertainty has a great impact on the psychological health of individuals. To display courage and resilience when confronting such odds and despair is not easy for everyone. Resultantly, a high percentage of people adopt shortcuts for solutions to their problems. Taking refuge in religion and associated institutions like *Piri-Muridi* provides them a great forum to share their sorrows and psychological ailments. Hence, it is generally believed that people with neurotic symptoms like anxiety and mild depression are more likely to become *Murid*.

The scholars believed that the second characteristic *Murids* would have humbleness and submissiveness. As they surrender their self in front of *Pir*, hence, in other life domains and relations to they may continue exhibiting this same submissive behavior. However, exceptions are always there. Some *Murids* even become arrogant after affiliating themselves with a known and sacred figure. However, their frequency is believed to be less.

Similarly, *Murids* are believed to be social, humane, and cooperative. They interact with other *Murids*, prolong social relations and extend helping hands for each other. Overall, they are perceived as more humanitarian, gentle, and soft; but also more tense, fearful, and depressed.

Personality attributes of non-believers. Majority of the scholars views signify that the non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* institution are hardliners, clear in their views, and have a more directional, linear approach towards their life. At the same time, they are perceived as self-complacent and inflexible people who adopt rigid personality stances in religion as well as in general life. Overall, they are believed to be egotistical and self-centered in nature and move in a limited social sphere. They are unable to come out of their self-imposed shells, yet they are focused and clear in their vision and general life approach. However, the scholars who are strong believes of *Piri-Muridi* consider them deprived people who never get benefits from *Baraka* (blessing) of a *Pir* or a *Murshid*.

7. Piri-Muridi and Education. Psychologists, as well as religious and university scholars, generally had a consensus that people from all socioeconomic and educational backgrounds become part of *Piri-Muridi* institution. Education seems to have no direct relationship with *Piri-Muridi*. However, it is believed that educated people, being clearer in vision and having broader horizons, have more questions when things are not in accordance with their expectations. They do not passively absorb things as less educated people do. Especially, they become de-motivated when they encounter current pseudo-*Pirs*. But considering this general trend, people from all educational backgrounds have spiritual needs, so they become *Murid* and seek *Baraka* of these 'holy men'. According to a few scholars, the current *Pirs* themselves are now getting a formal education, and thereby educated people are also having a trend to become their followers and *Murid*.

8. Functions of Piri-Muridi as an Institution. *Piri-Muridi* with the passage of time has evolved as an institution and has a key place in society. The concept of *Gaddi-Nashini* has further strengthened this

institution, and now the *Pirs* are occupying a significant place in the society, and the political/religious forums. According to scholars, this institution can play potent and multiple roles in our society. Next, the significant perceived roles are discussed as sub themes

Piri-Muridi as a platform. *Piri-Muridi* is considered as a platform where *Murids* and the general public can come up to share their sorrows, worldly problems, psychological ailments, and unfulfilled wishes and desires. Pakistan is a developing country and economic factors do not allow its people to spend money on psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors. They have easy access to these *Pirs* where they easily come and communicate their sufferings and get spiritual healings and temporary relief from their sorrows.

Piri-Muridi as a bridge. According to some scholars, *Pirs* being important personalities also act as a bridge between common men and political figures. The politicians do maintain relations with these *Pirs* and *Gaddi Nashin* for the sake of their own interests. As a result, *Murids* can have access to these political figures via these *Gaddi Nashin*. Current *Pirs* may act as a bridge between the two categories. In this context, it is perceived as a very important institution that provides a platform for common people to come and discuss their sufferings and to convey them to political figures where it is deemed necessary.

Discussion

The present phenomenological study is the first of its kind to explore the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* (Master-Disciple relationship) by incorporating views of various religious and university scholars. Previous studies focused on the phenomenon by emphasizing on a few areas only. Hassan and Kamal (2010a), besides developing an indigenous tool to measure this construct, also unveiled a few important domains of *Piri-Muridi* through interviews of various *Sajjada Nashins* at Pothohar region. Again, this study portrayed one side of the picture, as *Sajjada Nashins* are the real propagators of this institution. Thereby the element of subjectivity cannot be ruled out. To cater shortcoming of this and all other phenomenological studies on the subject, the present research was carried out, including interviews of scholars from almost all the major belief systems of Islam. This study gives a more multidimensional view of the subject. Moreover, the inclusion of university scholars who were expert in the field of Sufism further strengthens the credibility of the present research. The current study, besides all other themes discussed, brings in the knowledge that *Piri-Muridi* is practiced in some form in almost all

belief systems with some variations except *Ahlayhadith* sect practitioners who totally negate this institution and declare it contrary to Islamic principles.

This little variation in beliefs is the actual essence which is not addressed in the literature. Furthermore, the study also clarified that the true *Piri-Muridi* practice has nothing to do with the current pseudo and fake *Pirs*. As almost every scholar relates it to religion, hence, it is a religious matter, and a *Pir* is like a spiritual guide who helps one to succeed in this journey of spiritual growth. This claim further provides us the basis to equate the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* with religion and spirituality, thereby giving a justification and grounds to predict the same from personality traits as most of the western researches suggest the same.

The study negates a general prevailing notion that only less educated people join *Piri-Muridi*. Almost all scholars believe that people from every segment and educational caliber become part of this institution and most of the current *Pirs* are themselves well educated. Among other important findings, one finding is regarding personality correlates and *Piri-Muridi*. Scholars generally believe that growing uncertainty and worldly tensions are the prime sources which are compelling people to join this institution, besides religious beliefs. Secondly, *Murids* are believed to be more social, sympathetic and humane; but are likely to be submissive and humble in nature, whereas the non believers are perceived as rigid, inflexible, more egoistic and self-centered in nature. If we try to relate these general terms about the personality of *Murids* and non-believers with some technical or psychological terms, the Five Factor model by Costa and McCrae (1992) may be useful herein describing the intended claims. The present study, have contributed in developing a phenomenological understanding of the *Piri-Muridi* construct, for cross-cultural comparisons of the specific belief-related phenomenon.

Implications and Suggestions

The present study is the first of its nature which explored in depth the concept of *Piri-Muridi* as viewed by various religious and university scholars. The study has attempted to incorporate views of scholars from multiple sects and educational disciplines, thus enabling and unfolding of multidimensional aspects of the *Piri-Muridi* institution.

The present study added valuable information through these 14 semi-structured interviews. To test and expand the complexity and

diversity of the concept, far more interviews should be conducted. Interviews of various *Murids* could also be included so as their personal views, beliefs, and opinions could be incorporated and analyzed. This could further strengthen the findings pertaining to the personality aspects of *Murids* through in-depth interviews. Further studies may be carried out which may use a multi-method approach, including personality testing, to further explore this phenomenon.

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