

Role of Muslim Dargas in West Bengal: Some Sociological Observations

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Abstract: This sort of research is qualitative in nature and followed all qualitative research methods for the collection of data. The research has been done mainly based on two questions. One is what type of functions played by the religious institution i.e Darga? And another is how Dargas has managed human resource development (HRD) from ethical perspectives? Unlike other sacred places or institution, Dargas of West Bengal are also referred as sacred religious institution, it is not only played religious role but also along with completed other functions, which are completely linked with social development. The Pir Baba has prodigious Islamic knowledge and he made himself as pure man from spiritual point of view and he has played inside and outside role from social, ethical and spiritual perspectives.

Keywords: Darga, Ethics, Islamic theology, Silsila or Chain, Role of Darga, Human Resource Development,

Introduction

India is a land of sacred places. These places includes shrines numerous lakes and groves. People regularly visit such places with or without religious predisposition. Many sacred places are considered religious spot historically for example; Roman Church, Catholic Church, Luthrian Church, Ayodhya and Mecca etc. are the places where people regularly visit in order to get/enjoy salvation through their performing rituals over there and thereby purchase and as *Cultural Capital*. Mecca is a worship prophet Mohhammed Saheb as a “matter of symbolic surrender of man to God”. Like other religious institution, Darga is also very famous religious intuition to the concerned fellow followers.

There are plentiful books written by Indian foreign authors clear about how sufi practices are relevant to Muslim shrines, the mode the sufis walked through, the rituals and ceremonies performed in the dargahs, the socio-religious changes brought by peers or pir's in India. The literary works support the peer/sufi way of existing by emphasizing that the Dargah visitors should follow the footsteps of the saintly persons.

The Dargah is to make different presentation on the development of Communal harmony and relevance of syncretic tradition in India. Since a dargah is a place for religious gathering especially by the Muslims. The Muslims of West Bengal have been living for centuries and today, how they live together with other communities a framework of a free, pluralistic and secular India.

Historical Account of Indian Darga System or Pirism

The term Dargah came into practice sometime during the 9th century and has its roots in persia. “Dar” means a lodging place or house and “Gah” means time. Hence, the word Dargah means “house of time”. It is an area or room where the sufi saints who passed away many centuries ago have tombs built for them. There is numerous numbers of Dargahs in India and millions of Muslim followers come here to pay their respects to the departed souls. These Sufi saints are given so much importance because right since 11th or 12th century, these saints were the only connecting link between the Indian Muslims and the teachings of Allah.

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No Idol Worship

Dargahs are the places of worship or paying respects by the Muslims. The way Muslims worship is far-off dissimilar other religions because unlike Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism or Buddhism, Islam does not broadcast idol worship. None of the mosques or dargahs will have idols of Allah. Most of these holy places are just tombs of some of great Islam saints and scholars, where people visit to pay their respects. These saints are known as Sufi Saints and Dargahs are usually magical structures built over the graves of these saints. Most of the Dargahs in India are expansive structures and have a very good architectural style. These saints were believed to be the most loyal messengers and devotees of Allah, which is why Muslims visit these Dargahs to pay their respects.

Darga and Mosque

Though many people interchange these two terms, in pragmatism, these two do not mean the parallel. There are certain distinguishing factors between the two. The first and foremost difference is that while a dargah allows all people to enter into it, a mosque allows only Male members inside its premise. A mosque is where Muslims worship by prostrating on the floor to Allah. A dargah, on the other hand, is place where Muslims pay their respects to the saints who have reached divine domicile. The religion of Islam strictly prohibits bowing in a dargah, as prostration should be done only for Allah and nobody else.

Famous Dargas in India

Though there are many Dargahs in India, a few of them deserve special mention due to their historical importance and value. There are the Ajmer Sheriff, Haji-Ali Dargah in Mumbai, Hazrat Nizamuddin Dargah in Delhi, Nagore Dargah in Tamilnadu etc. These places are turning out to be huge attractions for International and Indian tourists.

Peer/pir (sufism)

Peer or pir (persian:lit. 'elder') is a title for a sufi spiritual guide. They are also referred to as a Hazrat and Sheikh or Shaykh, which is literally Arabic equivalent. The title often translated into English as "saint" and could be interpreted as "Elder". In autism a Pir's role is to guide and instruct his disciples on the Sufi path. Other words that refer to a Pir include Murshid (Arabic:lit. 'guide,mentor') and sarkar (persian:lit. 'Master,lord'). In Alevism, pirs are considered a direct descendant of Ali. The title Peer Baba (from persian:lit. 'father') is common in the Indian subcontinent used as a salutation to Sufi masters or similarly honored persons. After their death, people visit their tombs or mausoleum, referred to as Dargah or maqbara. The path of Sufism starts when a student takes an oath of allegiance with a teacher called Bai'at or Bay'ah (Arabic word meaning "transaction") where he swears allegiance at the hands of his pir and repents of all his previous sins. After that, the student is called a Murid (Arabic word meaning 'committed one'). From here, his batin (esoteric) journey starts. A Pir usually has authorizations to be a teacher for one (or more) tariqahs. A tariqah may have more than one pir at a time. A Pir is accorded that status by his Sheikh by way of khilafah (Arabic word meaning: "succession"), a process in which the Pir identifies one of his disciples as his successor, which may be more than one.

The paper is an attempt to draw a picture of the inside and outside role of the Dargas in West Bengal and an attempt was made to point out the function of the Darga to help build an Islamic human resource (HR) environment in the society from spiritual and ethical point of view. The present study has been done of three broad Dargas situated in West Bengal based on secondary and primary sources and data has been collected during urs (religious festival) time through the method of observer participant.

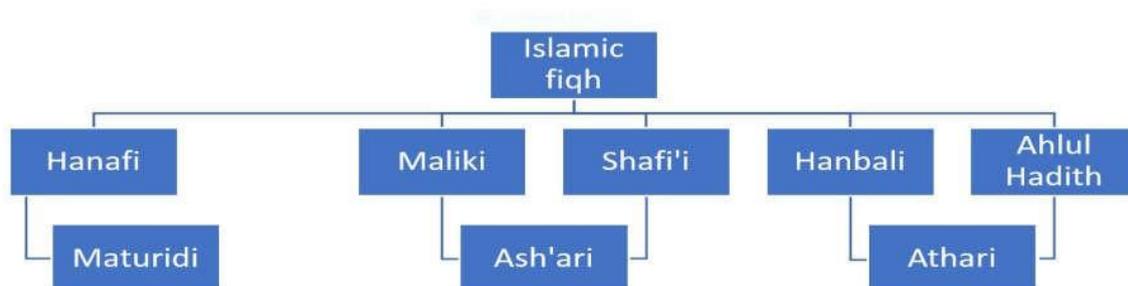
West Bengal and Muslims

West Bengal is one of the 28th medium-sized states and it is situated in the eastern part of India. It has a total area of 88,752 sq. km with 80.18 million populations out of which Muslim constitute 20.24 million i.e. 25.2 per cent of the total state population. In terms of population, West Bengal stands fourth position among the states of India. It is surrounded by three countries, Bhutan and Nepal in north and Bangladesh in the East. On its north-east lies green valley of Assam. Bihar and Jharkhand states lie on the western side, while to the south-west lies Orissa state and the deep blue Bay of Bengal lies on its South. West Bengal has been divided into three sub-divisions which consist of 19 districts.

Indian state of West Bengal is home to an estimated **23-24 million Bengali Muslims as per 2021 estimation, rest 6-7 million Muslims are Urdu and Surjapuri speaking Muslims**. Two districts in West Bengal – Murshidabad and Maldah have a Muslim majority and North Dinajpur has a plurality. According to the (2021) estimation, the West Bengal state has over 31,144,763 Muslims, who form **28.9%** of the state's population.

Theological Schools of Islam

In Islam there are mainly four theological schools have been found and it has been narrated through the following figure.



Sunnī schools of theology

Most Sunnis have adopted the Ash'ariyya school of theology, but the similar Mātūrīd'iyyah school also has Sunni adherents. Sunni Muslims are the largest denomination of Islam and are known as '**Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'h**' or simply as '**Ahl as-Sunnah**'. The word **Sunni** comes from the word **Sunnah**, which means the teachings and actions or examples of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Therefore, the term "Sunni" refers to those who follow or maintain the **Sunnah** of Muhammad.

The Sunnis believe that Muhammad did not appoint a successor to lead the Muslim *ummah* (community) before his death, and after an initial period of confusion, a group of his most prominent companions gathered and elected Abu Bakr, Muhammad's close friend and a father-in-law, as the first 'Caliph' of Islam. Sunni Muslims regard the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattāb, Uthman Ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abu Talib) as "al-Khulafā'ur-Rāshidūn" or "The Rightly Guided Caliphs". After the Rashidun, the position turned into a hereditary right and the caliph's role was limited to being a political symbol of Muslim strength and unity.

It is believed that most of Bengali Muslims are followers of Hanafi school of thought and they are called as Sunnis.

Role of Darga

In west Bengal there are numerous Dargas have situated in different corner of the region. There are no proper documentary sources in regard to the actual statistical figure of Muslim dargas in West Bengal but some significant Dargas are known to all because not only their religious role but also their socio-political role in special. These are Furfura Sharif of Hoogly, Basubati Mejo Huzur Darbar, Hijli Sharif of Paschim Medinipur, Pratapur Darbar Sharif of Purba Medinipur and Haldia Bari of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. All the followers, they are known as Muridans of all Dargras or mentioning Dargas of West Bengal are called Sunni Muslims and as per respondents view declared that all the famous, big and small Dargas are religiously follows the Hanafi School of Islamic theology. According to this school of thought, it is professed Imam Hanifa is the most sacred man and we follow and obey His (Hanifa) rules and regulation and these rules and regulations as he governed according the direction of almighty Allah for improvement of humanity and for brotherhood. There is no proper literary source about the history of these Dargas. Some sentences of historical account of Dargas which has gathered through orally are as follows. Dargas are basically follows four silsila or chain of Islam; these are Suhrawardiya, Chistiyya, Quadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya. Most of the Dargas of West Bengal are following the path of Chgistiyya and Quadiriyya model of Islam.

Historical Account

Furfura Sharif (also known as **Furfura**, and **Furfura Darbar Sharif**) is a village in Jangipara community development block of Srirampore subdivision in Hooghly District in the state of West Bengal, India. It is a holy place for some Bengali Muslims. Before the afternoon prayers, people queue up at the mazar (shrine) of Mohammad Abu Bakr Siddique (1846–1939), a prominent *pir* (holy person) of the

town. People say it is the second most prominent *mazar* in the country after Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan

The masjid built by Muqlish Khan in 1375 is a site for Muslim pilgrimage, especially during the pir's mela (fair)- It attracts a large number of pilgrims during Urs festival Oral tradition holds that the Bagdi (Barga Kshatriya) king who ruled here was defeated by Shah Kabir Halibi and Karamuddin, both of whom were killed in the battle. Their tombs are revered to this day by both Hindus and Muslims.¹ Veracity of the account and other details are unstudied.

Furfura Sharif contains the *mazar* of one Pir Mohammad Abu Bakr Siddique and his five sons, popularly known as the *Panch Huzur Qeblah*. He was a social and religious reformer, who founded charitable institutes, orphanages, madrasas, schools and learning centers. He encouraged female education by establishing a School for girls in Furfura Sharif named Siddiqua High School. He was the founder of the "Order Of Furfura Sharif" or "Silsila-e-Furfura Sharif" and a religious congregation observed on the 21st 22nd and 23rd of Falgun Bengali month.

Basu Bati Mejo Huzur is type of Darga which is located at Hoogly distric of West Bengal. As per the version of the present member of this Darga is that during the period of Samrat Akbar a religious beggar or fakir namely Syed Shah Jalala Bokhari came to Shilet presently in Bangaldesh for the extent of Islam and after that his descendent namely Moulana Syed Shah Mohammed Ayyaz entered into Basubati of Hoogly and then he established a permanent house here for the spread of Islam. They follow of both silsila or Islamic tradion of Chistiyya and Quaderia.

Hijli Sharif mazar or darga is presently situated at Paschim Medinipur district of Bengal. They also follow Chistiyya silisila or Islamic chain and people of distant places of West Bengal are compelled to visit and pray particularly those are purchasing a new vehicle.

Pratapur Darbar Sharif is another Darga, located at Purba Medinipur district of Bengal. This darga is also following the Quaderia and frfura e silisila or tradition. The present peer baba is known as Abbajan to the followers or muridans and the son of existing Abbajan is known as Bhajjan and he is the founder of AIMA (All India Minority Association) and it is non-political association.

Haldia bari Mazar Sharif is kind of Darga that is placed in Cooch Behar distric of west Bengal. Thois os also following the Chistiyya silisila. The peer of this mazar sharif came from Rangpur and visited different parts of north Bengal and then establish a darga at haldi bari for the spread of sufi kind work.

Functions of Darga

Alike as other religious institution, Darga or Mazar is another key institution to the concerned fellow believers of Muslim community hereafter that are observed in various corners of the world. Hence, it is an institution, which provides not only the place of worshipping things 'sacred' (a. la Durkheim) but also provides maintain the principles of solidarity and also disseminated the human resource to accelerate their ethics and morality. In this perspectives Darga has accomplishes many functions, which are divided into two categories- inside and outside functions or role.

Inside Role of Darga

Actually all Dargas of West Bengal are performing related styles of inside activities. Inside functions are generally referred to those functions which have been observed within the boundary of particular Darga.

Here, the Pir Baba is the dominant point of the institution and he has performed all inner activities as sacred specialist.

Five time prayer (salat),Friday Prayer (Salat -ul Jumma) Milad –un- Nabi and Annual Urs (religious seminar) and oral practice (Jharfuk) etc. are considered as inside role of the Dargas of West Bengal.

Salat

Salat is a Arabian origin, which means prayer and it is not only developed the religious mind setup of the fellow people but also strengthen the moral and ethical mind of the people, which is very imperative to concrete the humanity and also accelerated to human resources. So, salat has encouraged punctuality, self- discipline, self-control and cleanliness. It is also careful as the column of patience and honesty and also makes tolerance, unity, equality and cooperation from ethical point of view.

Salat- Ul- Jumma

It is kind of payer, which is held on Friday in a week, so it is called as Friday of weekly prayer. In this particular day the followers are coming to the Darga and participated of sacred activities. Through this prayer the devotees have enlightened in regard to not only for religious knowledge but sometimes they are also informed about the current socio-economic and socio-political situations of the society.

Miald un Nabi and Urs

So far field note is concern, it is clear to all that all Dargas setup in different parts of Bengal, they have organized an Urs primarily different dates of the month of January and February or Falgun, bengali month in every year. Urs is nothing but is kind of Islamic conference where Islamic scholars are assembled to propagate their Islamic knowledge among the muridans or fellow people as well. There are in numbers of pilgrims are participated, who are coming from different distant places of Bengal for the purpose of purify their soul and strengthen to moral characters.

Jharfuk

The Pir Baba has also playing the of oral practice (Jharfuk). The pilgrims have visited the concerned Dargas based on diverse purposes. The fact has come out from pilgrim's answers that there are 70% devotees are belonging to female sex and they have their own colourful purpose like to escape from dispute domestic matters, to erase the health issues, to study of the children, and many more . The Pir Baba has given them some oral suggestions and give some oral treatment like tabiz etc.

Outside Role of Darga

The Pir Baba and his team not only concentrated religious and inside activities but also goes out from his Gaddi i.e. Darga and inject some works among the devotes as well as general mass irrespective of caste creed and religion, which is also known to us as human resource development (HRD), is called outside activities of the Darga. The outside roles of the concerned Dargas are listed as follows.

Personal Development

Personal development is key point of human development from ethical and humanitarian point of view and it has close link with spiritual knowledge. Due to rapid development of technology, there are many

more inhuman activities have noticed in the present world and its bad effect have found in our families and cultures. In this perspective the Darga has played a pertinent role for the safe of humanity. The Pir Baba has reached devotees home and teaches them about the purity of Islam (Taqwa), inner thought and good attitude (Akhlaq) and good effort (Itqan) etc.

Political Development

In Islam political development means equal participation in decision making process and for this some Dargas made a sura committee, this committee has try to solve the political and social problems of the muslims. In this connection some of the Dargas have formed an organization, which performs social activities. Keeping in mind of this thinking, Pratappur Darbar Sharif of Purba Medinipur has already been formed an organization namely AIMA. This is a nonpolitical association where any can take membership irrespective of religion and they are doing very good job in the whole year. At present some rural parts of Purba Medinipu District of West Bengal are devastating by flood and in this unhealthy situation the members of AIMA have reached different rural area of Purba Medinipur district for the help of flood affected people.

Social Development

Sometimes the authority of Darga of Bengal has knocked the door of the poor needy people for their better social development; it is called as Izzat in Islam. Some Dargas like Basubati, Furfura and Pratapur Sarbar Sharif head has travelled the area of their devotees or muridans and find out the social evils like drug addicted people and Darga administration gives some suggestion that how they come out from those social problems, which they are facing day by day.

Economic Development

It is another pertinent issue of human resource development in Islam, the Darga has their own financial fund (MAAL) , which is collected through donation from the rich devotees. During the time of natural calamities like flood, earthquake and storm etc. people are badly affected by them. Not only that sometimes the poor people faced many economic problems like daughters marriage, in this critical situation the Darga authority has extended their helping hand to the affected people and safe humanity.

Moreover the Pir of Darga has been invited by the devotees to participate funeral ceremony (Janaja), birthday ceremony (Aqika) and the selection of bride and grooms for marital purpose etc. are also known as outside functions of the Dargas of West Bengal. The devotees are always ready to obey the Pir's decision in regard to selection of bride and groom for marriage and some followers have taken advises from Pir Baba when they are entered in the new building also.

Conclusion

Besides inside and outside role of the Dargas, which has been neutrally executed by the religious leader i.e. Pir Baba, he has also take parts about the democratic matter. Considering the present or current socio economic and socio-political issues, sometimes the Pir Baba of the concerned Darga has conveyed his message to the devotees or muridans that whom should cast their vote and the followers have accepted his suggestion without asking any hesitation, as they trusted him that he is the direct representative of almighty Allah or God and representative of god has never wish to bad thing for them i.e muridans. From this perception, it is to say that the Dargas of West Bengal played an important role not only in religious matters but also in political sphere. And this is why the Dargas are getting position to the political party hereafter.

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