**Economic Impact of Shrines**

The growth of faith in shrines and the frequent visits of people to the shrines gradually produced a climate in which the credulous masses of Kashmir became objects of exploitation by the mujavirs. The exploitation was mainly economic. No doubt, the people offered money to the mujavirs and other attendants of the shrines in the hope of receiving divine grace through the good offices of these religious brokers. Ignorant and superstitious as the masses were, they never even for a while suspected the intentions of the mujavirs and did not at all doubt their incapacities to obtain them any advantage whatever.

The enshrinement of relics of the saints and the construction of their tombs within the premises of the shrines further enhanced this awe and venerability of the shrines. Such a development widened the scope of exploitation of the common people by the mujavirs. The mujavirs and the attendants of the shrines exacted money from the people with remorseless ease. Apart from cash offers, the people were also encouraged to bring to the shrine grains, poultry, cloth and blankets. All these items or a large share thereof was grabbed by the mujavirs.

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2. See supra, p. 84
Not only the common people, but even the rich people brought cash and gifts to the shrine and offered these to the mujavirs for the same reason as prompted the poor masses to make the offerings voluntarily or by persuasion. Additionally perhaps the rich people thought that it was a sure means of earning a reputation and rising in the scale of public estimation.

This system of offerings to the mujavirs monetary and material inducements by the people in the hope of earning none too simple spiritual or religious merit represented only the fraction of the economic impact that these shrines made on the people and society. More importantly the shrines became the hubs around which came up habitations which eventually grew into a small towns with markets. People in large numbers visited the shrines on occasions of Urs and other days of festivity. Occasionally they spent night or two at the ziarat. On their return they considered it their sacred duty to make purchases of a few articles from the market which they looked upon as Tabruk. No wonder, therefore, that articles produced elsewhere were brought to these markets to be sold to the pilgrims. However, certain areas around the ziarat came to acquire special skill in

1. Such towns are to be met with at Aishmuqam, Baba Rishi, Chrar-i-Sharif and Hazratbal.
manufacturing one article or the other, depending of course on the availability of raw-material. The ornate kanger from Chrar has acquired certain amount of respectability with finding access to prestigious drawing rooms the world over.

Lately the flourishing willow-work industry has grown up round the shrine at Hazratbal. Beautiful brazier(kangers) baskets, boxes, screens and several articles of furniture are manufactured at Hazratbal. It was at the shrine of Hazratbal that the people of different areas particularly of pargana Pak used to purchase their goods and other provisions for a week. The fairs and festivals were attended by the women as well. This was most probably the occasion when only women used to came out of their homes. The presence of women lent a special charm to the occasion and they pressed their husbands or parents to go for more purchases for their own use. Thus such items as ornaments were brought from these markets by the pilgrims coming to the shrine from far and near. The fairs at the shrines lasted many

1. Chrar-i-Sharif was one such place where the people developed special skill in producing the most highly prized brazier (kanger) called Chrar-Kanger. A special variety of such kanger which was and still is given away to married daughters on special occasions. Pandits give a kanger to each of their married daughters on the occasion of Shivratri, every year. The Muslims use this kanger for burning wuda and Isband on occasions of marriage.

2. This information was given to me by Haji Ghulam Muhammad alias niama of village Zakura of Pargana Pak.

3. Armlets, bangles, ear-rings, finger-rings, necklaces were the ornaments purchased. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 289.
days so that the merchants and shopkeepers found an extending market for their goods for several days. The people of Mir Bahri\(^1\) (popularly known as Dal lake) who were mostly vegetable growers visited most of the shrines of Srinagar for selling vegetable. But they mostly brought their produce for sale at the market in Dargah almost daily but weekly transactions on Fridays and on the days of festivals were the largest.

The growth of villages and towns around or in close proximity to the shrines opened up opportunities of increased employment to the local people which resulted in their economic welfare.\(^2\)

The shrines wore a festive look on Fridays when people flocked there to offer Nimaz-i-Juma (congregational prayer). It is on Fridays and other festivals that the markets around the shrines were seen humming with activity. At Hazratbal and Jamia Mir means large Bahr means sea. Since it is a great lake of Kashmir, it was called Mir Bahri.

2. The shrines not only provided chances of earning money to the mujawir and pir but also to the local population of the villages too. Abdul Ahad Azad has rightly remarked that it was due to the blessings of the shrine at Chrar-i-Sharif that local population which constituted various sections of people, viz., businessmen, traders, intellectuals, Reshies, shopkeepers and others obtained Azuka (sustenance). See Qasida of Abdul Ahad Azad which is in the preservation of Master Ghulam Nabi of Chrar-i-Sharif.
Masjid\(^1\) one was never surprised to see several vendors from outside the state displaying and selling their articles including metal ware, drapery, toys, bangles and other articles.

Thus shrines contributed to the acceleration of the process of urbanisation in their own way. There was hardly a segment of society or an age-group or sex that was not drawn towards the shrines for one reason or the other. Apart from providing spiritual benefit and religious merit, the market around a shrine assured adequate opportunity to both the seller and the buyer. To the former, it gave the opportunity to dispose of his goods while it enabled the latter to purchase whatever articles he needed for his use. These markets influenced the tastes of the buyers and whenever there was an increase in the demand for an article there was a corresponding increase in production and supply of that particular item.

Realising the economic and social significance of the shrines people lost no time in making liberal grants to the shrines. The rich people including the several business houses displayed special fervour and enthusiasm in ear-marking a portion of their profits as donation to the shrines.\(^2\)

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1. Jamie Masjid which was a common meeting place on Fridays, Iddas and other festive occasions there came into existence a large and permanent market, Ghulam Nabi Khanyari, op.cit., p. 620.

2. The house of khanyeris, an important business house of Srinagar make lavish grants to the shrine of Makhdoom Sahib.
In rural areas the people usually had greater faith in the shrines. Inevitably, the rural community felt the economic impact on the shrines to a greater extent than their counterparts in the urban areas. The fear of a famine, flood, fire or epidemic and the hope of blessing and boon were uppermost in the minds of illiterate people, more particularly in the minds of the rural poor. They were convinced that a calamity or economic disaster could be averted only if they in all humility approached the shrine and the saint enshrined there and begged for a reprieve. Likewise because of their blind belief in the miraculous powers of the shrine and the saint, they sought the favour of a son or a daughter. Sometimes they implored forgiveness for a sin. They would often seek prosperity at the shrines by praying to the saint. But on such occasions they never went to the shrine empty-handed. They carried gifts and presents and offered them to the mullahs. Certain people could gladly donated a walnut tree or an almond tree to the shrine. The people of villages who were comparatively less resourceful donated paddy and other grains to the shrine. Very often people hungering for a son or marriage of their daughter or son or for

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1. See supra, pp. 84-85
2. Lawrence, p. 86
the achievement of any other object tied cords at the shrines which they untied only after the boon was granted. On such occasions the seekers came to the shrine with presents and gifts and sometimes threw a feast to the people present on the occasion. These people included their own relatives and friends and people from the neighbourhood.¹

The forties of 19th century witnessed the construction of roads² that linked some of the places of worship and shrines with the towns at a distance and at least some of these shrines were connected with the city proper. The development of means of communication led to increase economic activity which benefited particularly the mujavirs and mullahs as also the business class.

The ever increasing influence of the shrines led to increase in the population of Babas and Rishis who moved around the shrine.³ It were these people who moved out of their homes to collect cash and kind from people living in different parts of the Valley⁴, some of which were at long distance.

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1. At Baba Rishi's shrine at Bangil (Tangmarg) people performed the ceremony of first hair cut (zarkasai) of their children to the accompaniment of a feast, besides the offerings to the shrine and mullahs.

2. The people by and large went to shrines on foot. The custom of footing the distance from residence to the shrines was common among the more credulous and the poor masses. There were others who covered the distance by boats if they could afford to do so. There were of course water ways which linked the shrines with the certain parts of the city such as the shrine of Hazratbal on the Dal lake and Khangah-i-Mulla and Bulbul Shah on the right bank of river Jhelum.


4. See Appendix I.
Evidently the shrines encouraged the growth of the class of mujavirs and mullahs on the one hand and Rishis and Babas on the other. It is very important to point out here that these people were parasites who produced nothing and depended solely on the earnings of others. The conclusion here becomes irresistible that the shrines tended to create an economic divide between the parasite and the hard working mass of peasantry. On the one hand the parasite class of Pirzadas and Bezbadas escaped hard work and the much hated begar, on the other hand there were the illiterate superstitions ignorant mass of people who were subject to heavy exaction and begar. The shrines and its management became yet another instrument of economic exploitation of the poor people. The masses were thus further defrauded of what actually belonged to them. The superstitious and credulous Kashmiri could not afford to incur the displeasure of the saint and the mujavirs, as such he had to find means not only to pay the revenue and the rent but also a share of his produce to the shrine and the mujavir. In desperation, the poor peasant turned to the resourceful who could lend him ready money even at exorbitant rate of interest. It was in these circumstances the class of ruthless money lenders came into existence and in the emergence of this class the shrines played their own role.

1. The institution of money lenders had a far-reaching effect on country's economy. While the money-lender continued advancing money to the illiterate and the suspecting peasant in dire need, he went on mortgaging the land of the peasant till such time as the peasant was reduced to the status of a poor labourer.
The fairs and festivals were attended by many folk artists who through the blessing of the shrine gained too much fame. The musicians, magicians, jugglers, bhaggats and bands\(^1\) flocked to the shrines and displayed their art to the people. The festive occasion helped to their fame far and wide. Their services were in great demand and they made good living by giving demonstrations and displays at various shrines and other places.

These artists came to have over the years implicit faith in and devotion to the shrines. Before setting out to demonstrate their skill at different places they would in the first instance give a performance at the a shrine nearby their residence. On that occasion they invoked the saint and sought his blessings\(^2\) for successful conclusion of their tour. It is a common site to see Sufiana Kalam being sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments particularly during days at different shrines spread over the length and breadth of the Valley. Many singers have saints for their pirs and quite a number of them are initiated into singing of Natia Kalam by the saints and pirs. Therefore, after singing the praise of Allah and the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) they

1. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 312

2. The Bhaggats and Bands carried the emblem of different saints particularly that of Shaikh-ul-Aalam.
also sing in praise of saints and aula. At the shrines a large gathering of people did not only appreciate the singers and musicians but showered money on them lavishly. The money thus earned enabled these skilled musicians to live in comfort. The other artists like jugglers and bands also earned money by displaying their feats to entertain people and thereby ensured a reasonably good earning to themselves.

The beggars made the shrines the centres for their begging. There was hardly any important shrine which was devoid of beggars particularly on festive occasions and Fridays. From this it follows that the shrines provided a fertile ground for beggars to flourish. In course of time begging became an established institution and the shrines tended to give to this institution covertly or overtly religious sanction. The beggars would turn up in large numbers and beg for alms from the pilgrims. In this manner they avoided physical labour and since they produced nothing themselves, they became parasites. Their indifference towards honourable profession and labour affected

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1. The Kashmiris, essentially a sympathetic people. They were always favourably disposed towards the beggars whom they offered alms even without being asked to do so. The Kashmiris paid the beggars either in cash or in kind particularly when they visited the shrines. They considered the occasion appropriate and fit for helping the needy people.
very adversely the economic prospects of the Valley. The pilgrims also encouraged begging to some extent. The shrines were visited by the pilgrims who were motivated by the teachings of the great saints, who always stood for giving away in charity to the needy and the deserving. The saints themselves had all their lives neither asked for nor received a farthing, to say nothing of collecting or hoarding the money. The pilgrims would be happy to spend the last penny at the shrine and give to the beggars alms liberally and then they were delighted to return home empty handed because such was their philosophy and was their culture.

A special feature of the festivals was the public auctioning of the cattle. A large number of those who had to sell and those who wanted to buy cattle came to the shrine with the usual niyaz and nazr. The items of offerings (nazr-u-niyas) included live cattle, blankets and other articles, which were auctioned. The sale proceeds thereof were deposited with the chest of the shrine.

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1. Anybody visiting Hazratbal, Makhdoom Sahib or any other shrine in the city or a town would come across a sizeable section of beggars sitting in a row and imploring the people to give them something and thus earn in the bargain their gratitude and the blessings of the saints and Allah.

2. This custom is seen to prevail even today.
The fairs and festivals, which initially aimed at religious upliftment gave birth to many other socio-economic problems. During the innumerable festivals of Kashmiri Muslims they used to arrange feasts and did not hesitate to borrow for the purpose, although borrowing in those days was too difficult task as they had to repay it with heavy interest. Obviously, the fairs and festivals had great impact on socio-economic life of Kashmiri Muslims. Generally after a saints demise, he became an object of worship and this evidently gave rise to a number of problems.¹

In following the practice of saint-worship Muslims of Kashmir deviated and departed from the right spirit of Islam and limitized its objectives to suit their pleasure which ultimately gave birth to such customs as created many socio-economic problems for the public particularly the poor.²

¹ G. H. Khan, op. cit., p. 147.

² The people considered it imperative to spend lavishly on these occasions in order to live up to their social status. Spending beyond one's means often created economic problems for the community as a whole. The poor who could not afford a meal had to arrange the feast in imitation of his more fortunate neighbour. He had therefore, to borrow irrespective of his capacity to repay the debt. Moreover, the people vied with one another in making offerings at the shrines and in placating the mujavirs with cash or kind. A baneful socio-physchological effect of the festivals was increase in superstition. 
Of the many festivals that Muslims celebrated in the Valley, four were very important. On these occasions families entered into matrimonial alliances and exchanged lavish gifts.\(^2\)

**Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis of the facts connected with the shrines of Kashmir has been attempted with a view to putting in proper perspective the economic impact of the shrines. There was hardly a class or a segment of the Muslim community in Kashmir which was not attached to the shrine. All these sections of society had an economic interest, though on most of the occasions, the economic interest had the religious cloak. The pirs and the mujavirs, the tradesmen and commercialists, the performing artists and the artisans, all of these people had a stake in the shrines and the festivities celebrated there. Their main interest was pecuniary. As appears from the above analysis, these people earned a living at the shrine in one capacity or the other, viz., as mujavirs, salesmen or showmen.

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1. Idd-i-Ramzan, Idd-i-Qurban, Miraj-i-Sharif and Urs-i-Nabi Lawrence, op. cit., p. 268.

2. The rich parents of a boy sent expensive gifts to the daughters parents who reciprocated this gesture with offer of costlier presents. Ibid.,
Even the beggars depended on the shrines for making a living.
The shrines promoted, to a good extent, institutions of money-
lending and begging. Obviously, the economic impact of the
shrines was as important as that on society and polity of the
Valley.
CONCLUSION

Kashmir has, since time immemorial abounded in temples, mosques and shrines. There is hardly a locality without a temple, a mosque or a shrine. Being the home of saints and seers, mystics and derveshes, the Valley has been known as Reshiwar.

The tradition of saint-hood and Reshiism did not cease to exert its influence even after Islam was introduced into Kashmir, rather there was a progressive growth in the belief of people in saints, relics and shrines. It was partly due to the conversion of Hindus of the Valley to Islam. The process of conversion in Kashmir was unique in the sense that it did not prevent the neo-Muslims to retain some of their traditional practices like faith in saints and shrines and other objects of worship, which pristine Islam does not allow. In fact, Kashmir passed through the course of integration of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim—most of the Hindus and Buddhists having embraced Islam—streams of religion and culture, in a manner, the like of which was not to be witnessed anywhere on the sub-continent. If the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal evolved the worship of satyagraha, the two communities in Kashmir nurtured the worship of Nund Rishi and his relics and the shrines, which today are widely dispersed. Along with Nund Rishi, Lal Ded or Lal Moi, as she is generally called, was and is still looked upon as a self-realized saint commanding respect of both the communities. The sayings (respectively the shruks and vakyas) of these two are at the tip of every
Kashmiris tongue. Then there is a host of Saiyids and Rishis, viz., Saiyid Ali Hamadani, Bam-ud-Din, Batmaloo Sahib, Reemol Sahib, and Baba Reshi and last yet not least Makhdoom Sahib and Pir-i-Dastgir (Kahnov) who are looked upon as guardian saints and saviours by the people of Kashmir. On occasions of pleasure and pain, rejoicing and suffering in prosperity and calamity, they throng at the shrines of these saints, make obeisance and offerings. They pray for blessing and averterion of a catastrophe.

The people of Kashmir are of the firm opinion that their solidarity, economic welfare and political stability depend on the pleasure of these saints. Therefore, they do nothing to incur the wrath of these saints. During the week-long annual Urs of Reemol Sahib, the entire population of the Anantnag town up to Bijbehare on the highway abstain from taking meat. This is a custom nowhere to be met with among the Muslims.

With the saints and shrines are associated the mujavirs and Babes, a class of people who draw their sustenance from the offerings of the people. Only a few of them now live up to the teachings and noble ideals of the saints. By and large, these custodians of the shrines exploit the ignorant and superstitious masses to feather their own nests. Very few of them are well versed in Fiqh, Shariat and other branches of religion, impart right type of education and the training to the laity. Some of these mujavirs are seen to beg and sometimes extract money from the pilgrims which gives rise to corruption.
In the present work an attempt has been made to examine all these problems but there is scope for further research and indepth study on the role of mujavir and Babzadas associated with the shrines. An effort has also been made to highlight the contribution of the shrines towards education. There is need to streamline and coordinate the educational activities of these shrines and this could easily constitute a viable subject of an indepth study. The present work has sought to put the socio-cultural, political and economic impact of the shrines in perspective.

The emergence of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement has been posing a challenge to the religio-legal validity of the shrines. It deserves closer study which would hopefully yield good results. In fact, the question of the relevance of the shrines and relics to modern man is likely to become a debatable subject in near or distant future. But before that a research project on this theme could be undertaken to some advantage.