The King has arrived from the West: A Preliminary Study on the Historical Origin and Structural Evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam

Author:
Ali Jan S. Damani
Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi, Pakistan.

Email:
alijandamani@yahoo.com
a.jan.17237@khi.ibe.edu.pk
alijan.damani@utoronto.ca

Postal Address:
Flat 17, Evershine Society, Shivratan Street, Garden East, Karachi.

Whatsapp Number:
+92-321-2744563

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A Preliminary Study on the Historical Origin and Structural Evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam[1]

Ali Jan S. Damani[2]

Abstract:

This paper deals with the historical origin of a sacred space called Shāh Jā Qadam (literally, Lord's foot). It is located at Amīr Pīr, Sindh, Pakistan, and attracts thousands of Ismāʿīlīs throughout the year. Without even actually knowing the history of Shāh Jā Qadam, many Ismāʿīlīs still continue to visit this sacred space as a part of their family tradition. Owing to the paucity of reliable historical sources, hitherto not even a single systematic attempt has been made in the academia to study this site. Over time, the history of Shāh Jā Qadam has shrouded under a thick layer of myths and legends, creating a serious challenge for the scholars of Ismāʿīlī and Sindhi studies. Therefore, it is with the intention to fill this research gap that this paper has been developed. The research aspect of this paper is informed by both the field work and the examination of relevant archives undertaken by the author. The subject-matter and methodology used to inscribe this paper clearly indicates that in order to construct even a simple version of the history of the Satpanth (literally, true path) Ismāʿīlī tradition—let alone the question of understanding and appreciating its complexity—scholars will have to pay due attention to the local and regional oral Ismāʿīlī narratives, which are quite often ignored in the name of hagiography, mythology and legend. Hence, this paper sheds some light on the historical origin and structural evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam—a place which still holds immense historical, cultural, social, political and religious significance for many Ismāʿīlīs.

Keywords: Aga Khan I, Amīr Pīr,Ismāʿīlī, Satpanth, Shāh Jā Qadam

[1]This article is dedicated to the loving memories of Late Manjī Vallū Dāmjī and Late Pyarali Jiwa

[2] Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi

Introduction

The land of Sindh is the land of Sufis and Sindh is called Bāb-ul-Islam[3]

From the coastal regions in the south to the mountainous landscape in the north, the modern-day nation-state of Pakistan is dotted with countless Ṣūfī shrines.[4]Many of these Ṣūfī shrines in Pakistan hold bodily relics related to Muḥammad, the final prophet and messenger of Allah, and his family (*Ahl al-bayt*).[5] In fact, scholars have observed, and studies have shown that separate spaces have also been dedicated for the aforementioned category of relics.[6] One such popular space is called Qadamgāh Imām ʿAlī, where the footprints of ʿAlī, the first Shīʿī Imām, are preserved.[7] Known by names as diverse as Qadam Mubarak,Shāh Jā Qadam, Mowlā Jā Qadam, this space preserves and showcases ʿAlī's footprints for its visitors. The Satpanthī Khojā Ismāʿīlīs do have spaces which preserve different holy relics belonging to the family of the prophet (*Ahl al-bayt*)[8], however, there is no particular Qadamgāh of ʿAlī which can be labelled as the property of the current Aga Khan or the Indian Ismāʿīlī community. The Ismāʿīlīs of Sindh, nevertheless, visit a place called Amīr Pīr, where the footprints of their first Imām to

[3] Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, "Sindh is the land of the Sufis,"*Dawn*, August 12, 2020.

[4] It is difficult to determine the total number ofṢūfī shrines in Pakistan. There isno official record indicating the total count of these shrines. What can, however,be said with more confidence is that these shrines are over a thousand in number. Records about these shrines which are maintained byofficial departmentslike Auqaf (a department of Sindhgovernment) arenot reliable from a scholarly point of view. See, Giving at Shrines in Pakistan: An Untapped Resource for Social Development (Islamabad: Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy, 2016), 6-7. This arithmetical uncertainty surrounding the number of Ṣūfī shrines is not limitedto Pakistan only.It can also be extendedto what was once the pre-partition twin sister of Pakistan: the modern-day nation-state of India.

[5]Not all the Ṣūfī shrines in Pakistan possess such relics. However, the popular ones like that of LaʿlShahbāz Qalandar do.Studies in this regard are scare, however, seeMichel Boivin, Artefacts of Devotion: A Sufi Repertoire of the Qalandariyya in Sehwan Sharif, Sindh, Pakistan (Karachi: Oxford University Press,2011). Also refer to, Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, "Holiest of Relics," *The Friday Times*, April 5, 2019.

[6] I argue here that the relics with which we are concerned are held in two major spacesviz. public and private. Public spaces include, but are surely not limited to, Ṣūfī shrines,Mazārs, Dargāhs, Mosques (Masājids) etc;private spaces, on the other hand, involverooms in houses dedicated to prophet's hair, for example.The object of veneration (or the relic)varies from one school of thought to another. For example, in many localTwelver Shīʿī houses in Pakistan, one wouldfind the mud from the ground of Karbala (Maidān-e-Karbala).

[7]As is the case with the total number of Ṣūfī shrines in Pakistan,the total number of Qadamgāhs are also ambiguous. However, scholars have studied some of the prominent Qadamgāhs. See, Michel Boivin,"The Polyvalent Qadamgāh Imām ʿAlī In Hyderabad, Sindh: A Preliminary Study in Relics, Political Power, and Community Setup,"Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World I, (2020): 248-67. Refer also to the work of Kalhoro cited in the above note.

[8]I have used the words Ismāʿīlī, Satpanthī, Khojā and Indian Ismailis interchangeably in this article.The Ismāʿīlīs have long held the belongings of their Pīrs and Imāms very dear. Out of a long list of the relics that the Ismāʿīlīs have preserved in public and private spaces, I mention a few here: stamps and seals, carpets, wooden boxes, palaces, and even footprints (with which this paper is primarily concerned). It must also be noted that scholars have not yet compiled a list of such relics. Whether the Ismāʿīlīs, in doctrine, are allowed to venerate such relics or not falls beyond the scope of this essay.

arrive in India, Aga Khan I (d. 188), are preserved under the name of Shāh Jā Qadam.[9] Shāh Jā Qadamis now a property of Aga Khan IV, who is the present Imām (Hāzir Imām) of the global Ismāʿīlī community.

A true delight to the eyes of a common visitor, the site of Amīr Pīr is located in the Thatta district of modern-day province of Sindh, Pakistan. It is located approximately 142 km from Karachi and can be reached within three hours.[10] The Ismāʿīlīs of Sindh[11] have been visiting the site of Amīr Pīr since the first half of the 19th century. The site of Amīr Pīr has not been studied adequately. I argue here that not even a single systematic research has been dedicated in the academia to this complex site.[12] However, this paper is only concerned with a space located within the very site of Amīr Pir. This space is called Shāh Jā Qadam by the visitors of the site. According to Ismāʿīlī traditions, Shāh Jā Qadam is the actual space where their 46th Imām, Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh, made his appearance sometime in the fourth decade of the 19th century. It is in the memory of their Imām's visit, that the Ismāʿīlīs have preserved this particular space at Amīr Pīr since decades. Although the Ismāʿīlīs often visit the site of Amīr Pīr andpay due respect (Salām or Ḥādhrī) to Shāh Jā Qadam, however, we do not have an academic work dealing with the historical origin and evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam. Therefore, in what follows, the paper has made a systematic attempt to look at the temporal origin of Shāh Jā Qadamand trace the main stages in its structural evolution and development over the course of almost two centuries. It is worth stressing on this juncture that the study has positively ignored the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of this space. Through my ethnographic research at the site of Amīr

[9] Shāh Jā Qadam is no less a sacred space for the Ismāʿīlīs than the Qadamgāh of ʿAlī located in Hyderabad, for the light (Nūr) and blood (Khūn) in every Imām is that of ʿAlī. To discuss the significance of Shāh Jā Qadam falls beyond the scope of this paper.

[10] The distance and time quoted in this article are merely approximations, and thus should not be taken as strictarithmetical figures. For more on such approximates like its distance from Jhimpir, Sindh,see Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, "Amir Pir Mela in Sind & its Origin," 2007, p.1,http://ismaili.net/heritage/book/export/html/10789.

[11] By employing the terms "Ismāʿīlīs of Sindh" or "Sindhi Ismāʿīlīs", I do not intend to limit the diversity of the visitors (of both past and present) to this site.Rather, I simply mean that majority of the Ismāʿīlīs, who nowvisit the site of Amīr Pir, live in the province ofSindh, Pakistan. It must thus be kept in mind thatIsmāʿīlīs from all across the globe have been seen paying frequent visits to this site (both in the past and present). In fact, visitors from other religious backgrounds have also been visiting Amīr Pīr since almost the same time as the Ismāʿīlīs, or probably even before it. Boivin, for instance, suggests that the interest of the local Hindus in the site of Amīr Pīr is older than that of the Ismāʿīlīs. See, Michel Boivin, "Shivaite Cults and Sufi Centres: A Reappraisal of the Medieval Legacy in Sindh," in *Sindh Through History and Representations: French Contributions to Sindhi Studies*, ed. Michel Boivin (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39-40.

[12] The present author is already in the phase of completing his forthcoming publication on Amīr Pīr. The publication is expected to appear in a couple of years from now. See bibliography.

Pīr and necessary archival work, the study has tried to collect, document, critically analyze and evaluate, and use scattered oral and written sources on the subject so that our understanding about the theme of this article can be augmented. In other words, this essay therefore gives an outline of the historical origin and structural evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam from a scholarly point of view. It is therefore a convenient point of departure for the discussion that follows.

Tracing the Roots: On the physical Origin and Structural Evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam

In this section, the paper tries to discuss how the physical foundation of the very space of Shāh Jā Qadam took place. Of course, different possible reasons can be spelt out behind the establishment of this space; however, the paper is intentionally restricted up to the physical origin. It is argued that this restriction is instrumental in determining the cause of the physical origin. It implies that attaining plausible answers for the prime question with which this section deals is a precondition to understand the convoluted causes behind the origin of the physical space of Shāh Jā Qadam. To put it simply, it will be useful to determine 'who' built it before jumping on to the question of 'why' it was built. The paper also discusses here how the structure of this space has transformed over the years since the time of its inception. In doing so, the study takes into account different written and oral narratives to reach a conclusion about the historical origin and structural development of Shāh Jā Qadam.

The 46th hereditary Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Imām, Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1881), known as The Aga Khan I, left Iran due to political tensions and reached India in the Autumn of 1842.[13]It is related that he

[13] Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 470. Community scholars, often (if not always) relying on oral traditions, cite exact historical dates. See, Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *Ismailis Through History* (Karachi: Islamic Book Publisher, 1997), 414-15. Also see, Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *Brief History of Shia Ismaili Imams* (Karachi: Islamic Book Publisher, 2008), 184. Various other scholars have pronounced the same time period: Naoroji M. Dumasia, *The Aga Khan and his Ancestors: A Biographical and Historical Sketch* (New Delhi: Read Worthy Publications (P) Ltd, 2008), 38; Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 21; Hamid Algar, "The Revolt of Āghā Khān Maḥallātī and the Transference of the Ismāʿīlī Imamate to India," *Studia Islamica*, no. 29 (1969): 55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1595087. Almost every source cited in this notemake a brief mention of the political tensions that caused Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh to migrate from Iran to India. Perhaps,the pioneering work in this regard is that of Zawahir Noorally (now Moir), who mentions a large number of primary sources on the subject. See, Zawahir Noorally, "*The First Aga Khan and the British, 1838-1868, A Study in British Indian Diplomacy and Legal History*" (M.A. Thesis., University of London, 1964), 67.Interestingly, the dates put forth by Tajddin—though he does not provide any reference—are identical to the ones provided by Noorally.The khojkī manuscripts produced in Sindh during the 19th century might also contain a great deal of information about Aga Khan I (and especially about his life afterhis arrival to India), however, most of these manuscripts still remain inaccessible under the special collections unit of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), London. Nevertheless, the present author has examined and

paid the first visit—the purposeand the number of his visitsremain ambiguous—to the site of Amīr Pīr sometime between the winter of 1842 and the summer of 1844.[14]Talking about the date and purpose of Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh's visit to the site of Amīr Pīr, Tajddin notes:

> Soon after the tragic event [which occurred on March 23rd, 1843] of Jerruk (Jhirk), the Baluchis (Balochīs) attacked the Shiāite (Shīʿī)soldiers of the Imam (Imām), who were patrolling on the route between Jhimpir [Jhimpīr] and Kotri [Koṭrī]. Some of them were killed and buried at the location of Amir Pir (Amīr Pīr). When Imam Hasan Ali Shah arrived in Jerruk from Hyderabad after recovery, he visited the location with his few followers. He crossed the shallow water of the Soneri [Sunerī] Lake and reached the hilltop of Amir Pir Amīr Pīrlocation on horse. He dismounted and offered fatiha [Fāṭiḥa] on the graves of his Shiāite soldiers.[15]

Although Tajddin fails to mention the sourceof his information, however, his viewpoint is quite similar to that of Qāsū,one of the key informants during my ethnographic fieldwork at the site of Amīr Pīr. Coiffeur (or in vernacular, Nā'ī or Hajām) by a profession, Qāsū considers it his duty to be present at the site of Amīr Pīr on daily basis so that he could shave the hair of the newly born babies, if any, brought by their parents.[16] He sets up his stuff an hour or two before the noon,and wraps it up by the evening (6:00 pm). Upon being asked about the origin of Shāh Jā Qadam, Qāsū made the following remarks:

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extracted information from all the accessible primary sources in Khojkī and Gujarati in other institutional and private collections.

[14]Since there is no inscription at the site bearing the date of any of his visit, therefore we are not in a position to determine exact dates of his visits. The scholarship has also remained silent on this matter.At the time of writing this article, the author did not have access to two of the latest and important IIS publications viz. "The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History" and "The First Aga Khan: Memoirs of the 46th Ismaili Imam". Thus, the author was unable to determine whether these two publications contain any reference to the dates with which we are concerned here.As per author's knowledge, only Tajddin has mentioned about this visit in hisarticle on Amīr Pīr. The date of the visit given by Tajddin is 1843 (April onwards?). See, Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, "Amir Pir Mela in Sind & its Origin," 2007, http://ismaili.net/heritage/book/export/html/10789.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Many Ismāʿīlīs follow a tradition of getting their newly born babies shaved for the very first time at the site of Amīr Pīr. The present author has deliberately not discussed this ritual in detail for it falls beyond the scope of this essay. Interested readers may contact the author for further details about this ritual.

> "These footprints are of Ṣāḥib. These are here since the time of my ancestors. My grandfather, whose name was Moṭīo, informed us during our teenage that Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh Ṣāḥib came to this place almost at the time when the British [Angrez] started capturing Sindh. Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh Ṣāḥib was saluted by the British. They used to respect him a lot. He used to live in Jhirk where Jinnāḥ [founder of Pakistan] was born. He used to come from there on a horse. He loved hunting and the environment of this place. He also visited the cave [of Muḥammad b. Ḥanīfwhich is located at the site of Amīr Pīr]. Before Ṣāḥib's arrival, Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh [d.1798?] used to come here quite often. He made people from the Ranjāl [local Sindhi Tribe?] Khojā. Since that time, we have also been playing the dhamāl. All of this is our duty…"[17]

Qāsū's narrative indirectly offers us an approximate date of the arrival of Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh to the site of Amīr Pīr. It does so by making a mention of the broader event of the British annexation of Sindh, which took place in the aftermath of the battle of Mīanī, in 1843. This date is quite close to the date proposed by Tajddin (i.e., April 1843 onwards).Moreover, his reference to Jinnāḥ[18] and Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh[19] is extremely unique because suchtype of information rarely occurs in written Ismāʿīlī sources. I argue here that the oral sources about the Ismāʿīlī tradition in Sindh, to which scholars rarely pay attention, are full of historical hints and clues, which might be useful to the historians in the process of constructing a broader picture of the Ismāʿīlī history in Sindh.

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[17] Qāsū gave me interview in Sindhi language. All the translations from Sindhi are my own.

[18] The Ismāʿīlīs of Jhirk had a deep connection with the site of Amīr Pīr. Qāsu informed me that newborn Jinnaḥ's head was shaved for the very first time at Amīr Pīr by either his father or grandfather. Jinnah was brought by her mother, Miṭhībā'ī, who had deep affection for Amīr Pīr. Refer, M. Reza Pirbhai, *Fatimah Jinnah: Mother of the Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 28-9. Qāsū also declared that the forefathers of Jinnaḥ had been visiting Jhirk to attain the vision (Dīdār) of Aga Khan I since the time of latter's arrival in Sindh.

[19]Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh (d. 1798?) was an Ismāʿīlī Sayyid, who propagated the Satpanth Ismāʿīlī teachings in areas including, but not limited to Sindh, Kuttch, Kathiawar, Delhi etc. His shrine exists in the town of Sondah, Sindh, Pakistan. A couple of his poetic compositions, known to the Ismāʿīlīs as the Ginān, are immensely popular. The present author, however, recently transliterated Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh's hitherto unpublished Ginān into English. Refer to: Ali Jan Damani, Transcriptions of Unpublished Ginans of Fateh Ali Shah from manuscript Ms Ism K 22 of Harvard Manuscripts Collection (MS Indic 2534), 2021, https://ginans.usask.ca/commons/resources.php?id=20601. For a communalhistorical account on Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh, see: Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *Ismaili Pirs, Vakils and Sayeds of South Asian Regions* (Karachi: Islamic Book Publisher, 2015), 93.

FIGURE 1
Qāsū's setup under Malūk Jin's (or Malūk Bābā's) area outside the main cave area at Amīr Pīr

ʿAlī Khān[20], another informant in this study, who looks after the mosque located at Amīr Pīr, and calls himself its hereditary caliph (Khalīfa), also pronounced similar views on the origin of Shāh Jā Qadam. He proclaimed as thus:

> "Our ancestors have been here since about 450 years. What we tell is the "real story" of this site. Others only make their own assumptions. There were original inscriptions on the mosque and elsewhere on this site; they were removed by some culprits, who did not know the significance of this site. I am Sunni but I fear ʿAlī [first Shīʿī Imām] and his sword [dhulfaqār, or as it is locally pronounced in Sindh,

[20] ʿAlī Khān told me that in order to earn his living, he does a job in his village located nearby the site of Amīr Pīr. According to him, he is a government teacher and has also been serving in the education department of his village. He also informed me that his son is in Hyderabad. He gave interview to the author in Urdu, but occasionally also used Sindhi.

> Zulfiqār]. It is Mowlā ʿAlī's place. We are only servants and caretakers of this site since many generations. When Aga Khan I (pahelā) came here, our forefathers served him. He offered Fāteḥa here[21] and stayed for a couple of days. The ʿAlam (standard) which you see outside is the place where Aga Khan I was seen first on his arrival by our forefathers. Our forefathers preserved his "Qadam ke Nishān" (footprints). Since then, this place has been an important landmark on the site of Amīr Pīr. Ismāʿīlīsnever return to their homes without paying a visit to Shāh Jā Qadam…"

If the information put forth by Qāsū allows us to make a possible inference about the approximate time of Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh's first visit to the place, then ʿAlī Khān's account offers us clues about how the early physical formation of Shāh Jā Qadam took place probably at the hands of the local Sunni community and a handful of Ismāʿīlīs. Communal scholarship reveals similar insights about the early construction of Shāh Jā Qadam. For example, Tajddin observes that:

> He [Aga Khan I] dismounted and offered faith on the graves of his Shiāite soldiers. The followers preserved the marks of the Imām's footprints, known as Shah JaKadam. The local Shiāitewalled the space with an alam (crest or emblem) inside on a staff, where a ceremony of its hoisting was performed before 1984.[22]

Although Tajddin and ʿAlī Khān offer us similar views about the early phase of Shāh Jā Qadam's construction, however, there still remains a serious point of contention in both the accounts. According to the former, the footprints of Aga Khan I were preserved by his followers, while the latter, who is now a Sunni Muslim, suggests that the work of preservation was undertaken by his forefathers. These accounts help us to raise some important questions which we cannot answer with utter conviction for now. Firstly, were the forefathers of ʿAlī Khan

[21] ʿAlī Khān did not mention the exact place where Aga Khan I offered Fāṭeḥa. It is quite likely, however, that he offered Fāṭeḥa either nearby the main cave of Amīr Pīr or in the surrounding of the very place where Shāh Jā Qadam is situated.

[22]Tajddin, "Amir Pir Mela in Sind & its Origin."

Ismāʿīlī, Shīʿī or Sunni? Why did they preserve these footprints in the first place; did they do it in respect, love or religious cause? And is it possible that the forefathers of ʿAlī Khān were initially Ismāʿīlīsbut later converted to Sunni Islam? Moreover, if the footprints were preserved by the followers of Aga Khan I (as Tajddin mentions), then were they local Sindhi Ismāʿīlīs, Persian Ismāʿīlīs (who had come with their Imām from Iran) or Ismāʿīlīs from some other

FIGURE 2
ʿAlī Khān sitting outside the mosque located at Amīr Pīr

region?

Abdul[23], a regular Ismāʿīlī visitor to the site of Amīr Pīr from Karachi, narrated to me numerous accounts about the site of Amīr Pīr. He expressed the following information about Shāh Jā Qadam:

[23] I met Abdul (late) at Amīr Pīr for the first time in 2013. From 2013 to 2016, I interviewed him over a dozen times both in Karachi and Amīr Pīr. He had vivid memories from the days of his youth which he had spent at Amīr Pīr

> "When I was kid, my maternal grandmother (Nānī), who died just a few years before the Diamond Jubilee of Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh [d. 1957], told us that Imām Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh Dātār (roughly, it means giver], who was the father of Imām Āqā ʿAlī Shah [d. 1884], came from Iran to India [presumably Sindh] about 100 years ago. Soon after his arrival he came to this place. Do you know why? [I replied: kindly tell me]. He wanted to visit the graves of his Murīds [disciples or followers], who had died while protecting him in a battle which took place in Jhirk. Do you know what people say? They will tell you that Mā Bāp [referring to Aga Khan I] came there because he liked the atmosphere of the lake [Darīā]. Why would he come for the sake of the atmosphere only? The real reason is not this. You know that this is a lake in which there are numerous sea creatures. They wanted to give their Dasond[24]. Therefore, he came and collected the dues. The head of the sea creatures is a three-headed python with one diamond on each of its head…"[25]

The account provided by ʿAbdul indicates the date of arrival of Aga Khan I to Sindh and subsequently to the very site of Amīr Pīr. The nature of the account's content is particularly interesting to observe. A surface reading of the account might lead a reader to conclude that the content is either rooted is some sort of (Hindu)[26] mythology or influenced by local Sindhi

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with his parents. He narrated to me the greatest number of mythical stories and events about Amīr Pīr. Fluent both in Urdu and Sindhi, he often remained bilingual in our conversations. During the later years of his life, he lived in the Garden East neighborhood of Karachi.

[24] Dasond is an old Indian Ismāʿīlī practice. For further details, see "Dasond" in Mumtaz Ali Tajddin, *Encyclopedia of Ismailism* (Karachi: Islamic Book Publisher, 2006). There are a couple of other communal sources as well which discuss the subject of Dasond. See, "What is the concept of Dasond (Zakat)," Ismaili Gnosis, last modified March 7, 2018, https://ismailignosis.com/2018/03/07/q-a-what-is-the-concept-of-dasond-zakat/. Refer also, Abualy A. Aziz, *Ismaili Tariqah: Part II* (Vancouver: Ginan Project, 2005), 139.

[25] Abdul's account on Shāh Jā Qadam which is cited in the article has been extracted from my very first interview with him at Amīr Pīr in 2013. The complete interview will be published, as per the requirement, in my forthcoming book on Amīr Pīr.

[26] Snake has been symbolized in numerous sociocultural and religious traditions since millenniums. Scholars have observed the persistence of snake symbolism in different civilizations: Mesopotamian (Black and Green 1992, 166-8), Chinese (Eberhard 2003, 268), Indian (Jone and Ryan 2006, 300), Greek (Ingersoll 2013) etc. I have assumed that a common reader might consider it Hindu because of two main reasons: firstly, the ancestors of the Khojās were mainly Hindus before accepting the Ismāʿīlī form of Islam; secondly, it appears that the local Hindu community has been in connection with the site for quite some centuries. Therefore, the local Hindu folklore might have impacted the Ismāʿīlī narratives about the site of Amīr Pīr.

folklore[27]. However, I argue that the importance of such accounts is much more than that. Such oral accounts might be extremely useful in providing us with minute historical details, which could otherwise possibly go unnoticed by scholarswho largely prefer to rely on written sources or regard such oral accounts as mere mythical folklore.[28] To put it in other words, these oral accounts have allowed me to gather new insights on the subject—insights which cannot be gathered through archival work on written records. Thus, the oral accounts constitute an important source of information for scholars studying the origin and development of the Ismāʿīlī tradition in Sindh (and beyond).[29] In contrast to Abdul's account, a much more non-mythical account of Shāh Jā Qadam was narrated to me by late Manjī Vallū Dāmjī[30], who died around eight years ago. While talking about the history of Shāh Jā Qadam, Dāmjī related that:

> "My mother, VīrBā'ī, used to tell us aboutAmīr Pīr. She had a very old handwritten[HathThīLikhal]Khojkī book.[31] That book weighed around five kilograms. We used to recite Gināns from it. My mother could only read and write Khojkī. She did not know anything else. She was very pious and regular in her prayers [ʿIbādat]. I read that Khojkī book completely and copied out some parts of it in Gujarati in

[27] Snakes have been a prominent part of the local Sindhi folklore. See: Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, "Was it Poison or merely the Truth," The Friday Times, December 27, 2019, https://www.thefridaytimes.com/was-it-poison-or-merely-the-truth/. Also, see: Muhammad Sharif Khan, *Snake in Pakistani Folklore*, trans. anonymous (Lahore: Urdu Science Board, 1993), 181-9.

[28] Irrespective of Daftary's great contribution in the form of producing numerous volumes on different periods in Ismāʿīlī history, he has repeatedly failed to produce any substantial work on the history of the Satpanth Ismāʿīlī tradition. In fact, Daftary has often regarded the oral Satpanth Ismāʿīlī traditions and Gināns as anachronistic, hagiographic and legendary in nature, and thereby referring to them as "unreliable" historical sources. See: Farhad Daftary, *A short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 178.

[29] It is worth mentioning on this juncture that such oral accounts, generally speaking, often contain a reference to a popular event from which dates of many other events could be ascertained. For example, if we look at Abdul's account, the source of information for Abdul is her maternal grandmother. He indicates that her death took place a few years before the Diamond Jubilee of Aga Khan III which was celebrated in 1946. She informed him that it was around 100 years back (i.e., 1846) when Aga Khan I arrived in Sindh. As she died a few years before 1946, then one of the possible years of her death could be 1943, which, upon subtracting a century,gives us the exact year of Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh's arrival to India(i.e.,1843). This is one of the essential ways in which scholars can look for historical information in such oral accounts. In fact, I would suggest here that this approach can be used to extract historical information from the Gināns as well.

[30]Before his sad demise, I used to interview him on weekly basis in Karachi. I took his first interview at Amīr Pīr around a decade ago. He gave most of the interviews in Kuttchi, while sometimes speaking in Urdu as well.

[31] According to Dāmjī, this khojki manuscript belonged to his family. He informed me that they lost this unique manuscript while relocating their home from one neighborhood to another in Karachi.

> my diary which I showed toyou.[32]So, from that Khojkī book, I learnt that Shāh Jā Qadam are the footprints of the first Imām to arrive in India, namely, Imām Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh. When he came to Sindh, the British [he said: BritishMā'ī Bāp] took his help to conquer Sindh. At that time, he visited Amīr Pīr. The Ismāʿīlīs from Sindh noted the footprints of the Imām.However, theNiyāz [referring toKhāk-e-Shafā] was not prepared from the mud of these footprints.[33]Initially, there was only a diyā (lamp) to indicatethe footprints of the Imām Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh. These huge walls and ʿAlam are recent additions to the site. They have been added during the time of Imām Sultān Muḥammad Shāh.Thisis the true story behindShāh Jā Qadam. The old graves located around the Shāh Jā Qadamwhich we used to see in our youth are no more visible. They have probably been destroyed as more space was needed to build new Lāḍīs [small houses at Amīr Pīr]. ButImāmḤassan ʿAlī Shāh offeredFāṭiḥa on these graves as they were of theIsmāʿīlīs who died in the battle of Jhirk…"

Dāmjī's account, as he strongly maintained, is based on a Khojkī manuscript which is not accessible anymore.[34] If we put a glance over the details provided by Dāmjī, we immediately realize that his account, for the most part, is quite similar to other accounts we have at our disposal. His account, if it is truly based on a manuscript source, can then be used as a strong evidence to claim for the validity of the oral traditions. My argument here is not that Dāmjī's account is non-oral. Rather,I argue that the referenceto a written source in oral accounts lends more weight to the idea that oral Ismāʿīlī sources are as important as the written ones, and thus

[32] He copied a couple of Gināns from the khojkī manuscript in his own small diary. Dāmjī also showed me a couple of other Gujarati copies of the Gināns which he made in his own handwriting around 50 years ago.Some of this material was donated by his sonseither to IIS, London, or Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board for Pakistan (ITREBP) upon his death.

[33] For more on the Ismāʿīlī ceremony of Āb-e-Shafā (which was formerly known as Khāk-e-Shafā), see the following community publications:Tajddin, *Encyclopaedia of Ismailism*, 11-3;Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad and ZarinaKamaluddin, *Practices and Ceremonies: Essays on Rites and Rituals*, trans. Aziz Ali Hassan Ali(Karachi: Z.A. Printer, 2011), 101-16;Aziz, *Ismaili Tariqah: Part II*, 78-84.

[34]Even in the absence of this important Khojkī manuscript, we can learn the significance that these largely ignored manuscripts hold.Dāmjī's accountis an evidence highlightingthe significance of the Khojkī manuscripts as one of the main repertories of the Khojā Ismāʿīlī history.

cannot be ignored in the name of legendary and hagiographical accounts.[35] Moreover, not many oral accounts are of the nature similar to that of Dāmjī's. It implies that it is not too often that we find in theoral Ismāʿīlī sources references to the written sources. Therefore, scholars cannot apply cherry-picking technique while dealing with the oral accounts. Maximum possible accounts must be recorded before they are no more accessible.[36]

FIGURE 3

Current View of Shāh Jā Qadam (2021)

[35] I am not comparing the importance of oral and written sources. What I am trying to argue here is that,it is quite likely that the scholars might not be able to find the historical information they desire from the oral narratives, however, that does not mean that the oral sources are not worthy of being used as sources of historical information.

[36] I suggest here that institutions like IIS, and local, regional and national ITREBS should work on collecting oral Ismāʿīlī histories before they are lost. I began such a project on documenting oral histories related to the site of Amīr Pīr around a decade ago. I have more than a thousand interviews recorded. However, support and scholarship from these relevant institutions is still required in order to further maximize the research pace.

According to Dāmjī, the above shown current structure of Shāh Jā Qadam has its roots in the time of Aga Khan III (d. 1885). It means that initially the Shāh Jā Qadam lacked any sort of hardcore surrounding walls or pillars. According to a Gujarati inscription on Shāh Jā Qadam, the latest major repairs to it were made on November 10th, 1951. The inscription reads:"In the memory of his late father Muḥammmad Bhā'ī Kurjī, Tāj al-Dīn made repairs to the Shāh Nā Qadam and dedicated it to the [then] current Imām [Aga Khan III, Sultān Muḥammad Shāh], Lord His Royal Highness Prince Aga Khan."[37] The original inscription looks like this:

[37] This translation is mine. This is taken from a chapter dealing with the inscriptions at Amīr Pīr in my forthcoming publication. The writing dimensions of the inscription are29cm by 30cm; while the dimensions of the marble on which the inscription is written is: 33cm by 34cm. The Arabic Bismillāh ar-Raḥmān ar-Raḥīm is indicated by 786 at the top of the inscription. The transliteration of the inscription is as follows: MarhūmMāmadBhāiKorjīnāFarjañdTājdīn Bhāī EPotānā marhūmPitājīnīYādgīrīAtheMajkūrShāhnāKadamnoBhāgRīperKarāvī Hazrat MolānāDhaṇīSalāmat Dātār Hājar Imām Hijh Royal HāinesPrinsĀgā Khān SāhebneApaṇ Karel Chhe.

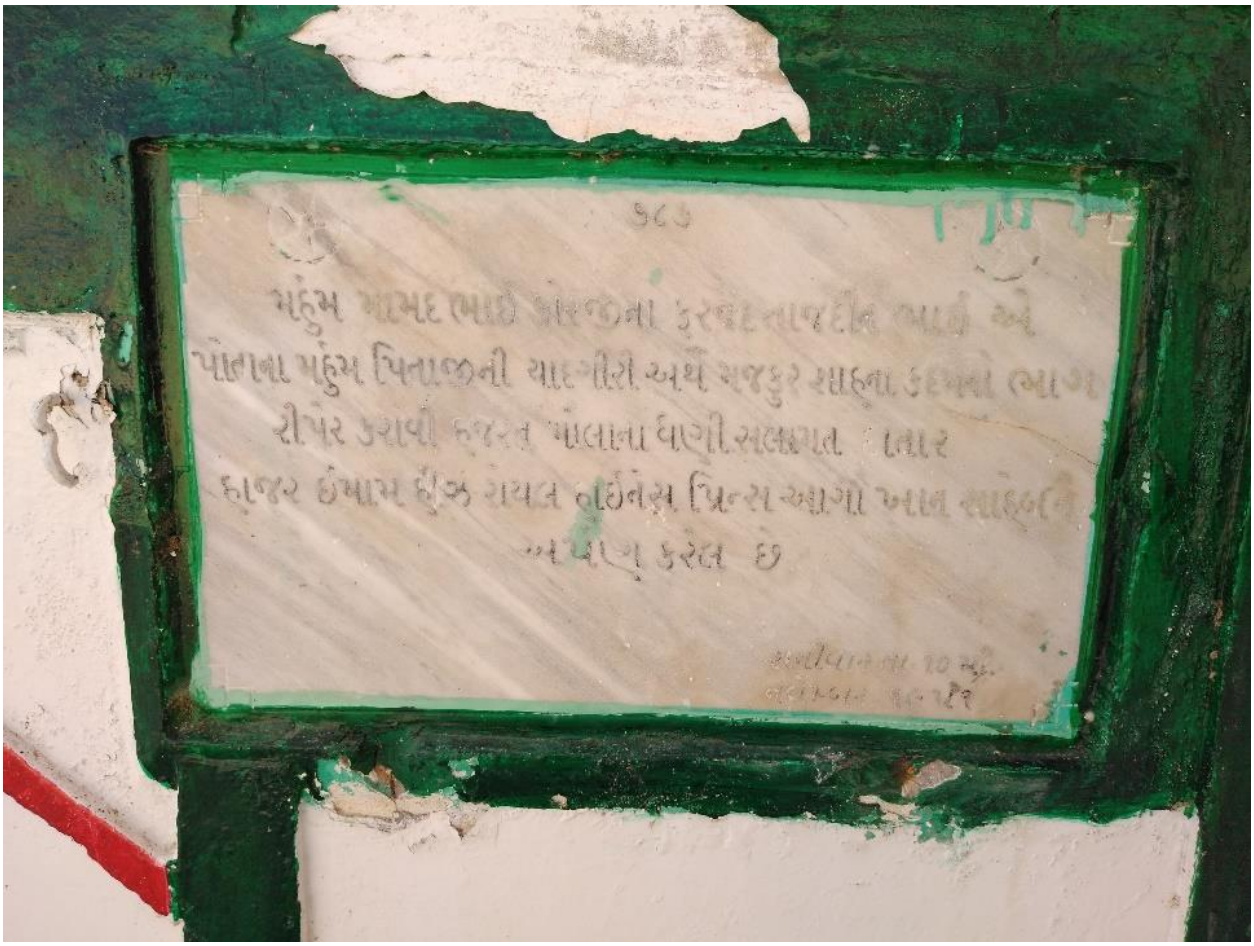

FIGURE 4

An inscription at Shāh Jā Qadam (1951)

Thus far, we have observed that our informants have presented us with similar thoughts about the current form of Shāh Jā Qadam. Similar in a sense that almost all the accounts quoted above agree to the point that the current form of Shāh Jā Qadam appeared during the time of the previous Ismāʿīlī Imām (1885-1957). However, none of the abovementioned sources provides us with an answer to the question about the physical appearance of Shāh Jā Qadam during the 19thcentury. In other words, how Shāh Jā Qadam looked like during the period of the first two Aga Khans? This question is difficult to answer because we do not have any written source indicating the structure of Shāh Jā Qadam during the 19th century. Consequently, we have to rely on the oral accounts in order to seek plausible answers to this question. According to

Dāmjī,following their Imām's visit to the site, the local Sindhi Ismāʿīlīs noted his footprints and subsequently placeda lamp (probably under some kind of muddy wall-like structure?) in order to preserve them. It is quite possible that in the early years following the visit of Ḥassan ʿAlī Shāh, the only structure that Shāh Jā Qadam possessed was that of a small stony or muddy wall-like structure within which a lamp was placed as an indicator for the visitors from other areas. This structure would have been approximately ten times smaller than the structure of Shāh Jā Qadam which we see today. Dāmjī's reference to a lamp raises some more important queries like why a lamp was chosen over any other object. Andwho was responsible for looking after this lamp? Some of these questions fall beyond the scope of this article, however, I have tried to incorporate some oral narratives which could shed handsome amount of light on questions like these.

The Ismāʿīlīs living in different regions—like Uthal, Pasni, Ormara, Gwadar etc—of what is now called the province of Baluchistan, Pakistan, made a considerable number of migrations to rural areas like Var and Ghulamullah in Sindh, Pakistan, in the final decades of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century. The main reason behind these migrations was to earn better livelihood.Descendants of one such Ismāʿīlī family who had made this type of migration from Pasni to Ghulamullah now live in the Garden Eastneighborhood of Karachi.38 The Golani family of Karachiinformed me about how their forefathers—upon their successful migration from Pasni to Ghulamullah—servedatthe Amīr Pīr and the shrine of Fatḥ ʿAlī Shāh. I was informed that a lam (Diyā) was burnt regularly by their forefathers to memorialize the significance of these holy places.ʿIzzat Golānī shared with me memories filled with vivid details. During one of the interviews, she explained about the services of her ancestors in the following words:

> "My grandfather's (Dādā) elder brother was renowned in our village for the miracles he performed. He was a person advanced in meditation. People used to see him at the same time at Amīr Pīr and at Fatḥ Shāh. He used to litthe lamps (Diyā) at both the places at the same time.How can one reach at two distant places so fast? At that

[38] I am extremely thankful to Nagina Wazir Ali for arranging my interviews with her family. Her forefathers were originallyfrom the province of Baluchistan, Pakistan. They were the residents of Pasni, a city and fishing port located on the Makran coast on Arabian sea, andmigrated to Ghulamullah (and later from there toKarachi) for better employment and business opportunities in the initial decades of the 19th century.

> time, there were hardly any boats. The boats did not travelafter evening (Maghrib), but heused to lit the lamp (Diyā) there in the evening. How did he travel so fast? There were no walls at Shāh Jā Qadam at that timeand severe wind used to blow thereduring entire day. Then how did the lamp remain lit? This is the power of doing proper worship. He used to treat the ill people in our village with his spiritual powers which were granted to him because of his sincere worship and meditation…"

Embedded in the above mentioned discourse on spirituality is a subtle historical "reality" which should be our concern here. In the latter half of the 19th century, when there was no proper structure of Shāh Jā Qadam, the mark to identity the place was a lit lamp. Reference to this lamp appears in both ʿIzzat's account and that of Dāmjī's. It is quite possible that ʿIzzat's grandfather's elder brother lived around the same time when the traditional Khojkī manuscript of Dāmjī's family was produced. It not so, then at least this very act of making the lamp lit, claimed by Izzat as a duty of her ancestor, was known well to the scribe of the manuscript. In any case, our bone of contention here is that in the period of Aga Khan I and II, when Shāh Jā Qadam lacked any hardcore structure, a lamp(probably under some kind of muddy wall-like structure?) was lit to mark the significance of the place.[39] Since we lack visual records too, it is a challenging task to trace the structural evolution of Shāh Jā Qadam. From the oral accounts, however, it appears that the ʿAlambe came a part of the space of Shāh Jā Qadam after the death of Aga Khan I. Dāmjī and a couple of other informants of mine were of the view that ceremony of the ʿAlam fully appeared either during the final decade of the 19th c or the initial decades of the previous century. There was (and is) surely a hidden symbolic meaning for the Ismāʿīlīsin this very ceremony which is not our concern here.[40]

[39] I have not focussed on the validity of ʿIzzat's claim for two main reasons: firstly, similar claims have been made by other Ismāʿīlī families as well; secondly, if we focus on the validity aspect, then we run into the riskforgetting the historical detail which such accounts afford. That is to say, the debate here is not about who was actually responsible for making the lamp lit on daily basis. Rather, we are concerned with the idea that at least there was a lamp (probably under some kind of muddy wall-like structure?) in the absence of any hardcore structure.

[40] The ceremony of ʿAlam has been deliberately omitted for it will appear in the forthcoming publication of the author on Amīr Pir. See bibliography.

After therepairs made to Shāh Jā Qadam in 1951, the space underwent its next major changeafter two decades on January 1st, 1971. It was the time when water supply was provided at Shāh Jā Qadam by a certain Ḥussain Karīm. This information appears in an inscription at Shāh Jā Qadam.[41]

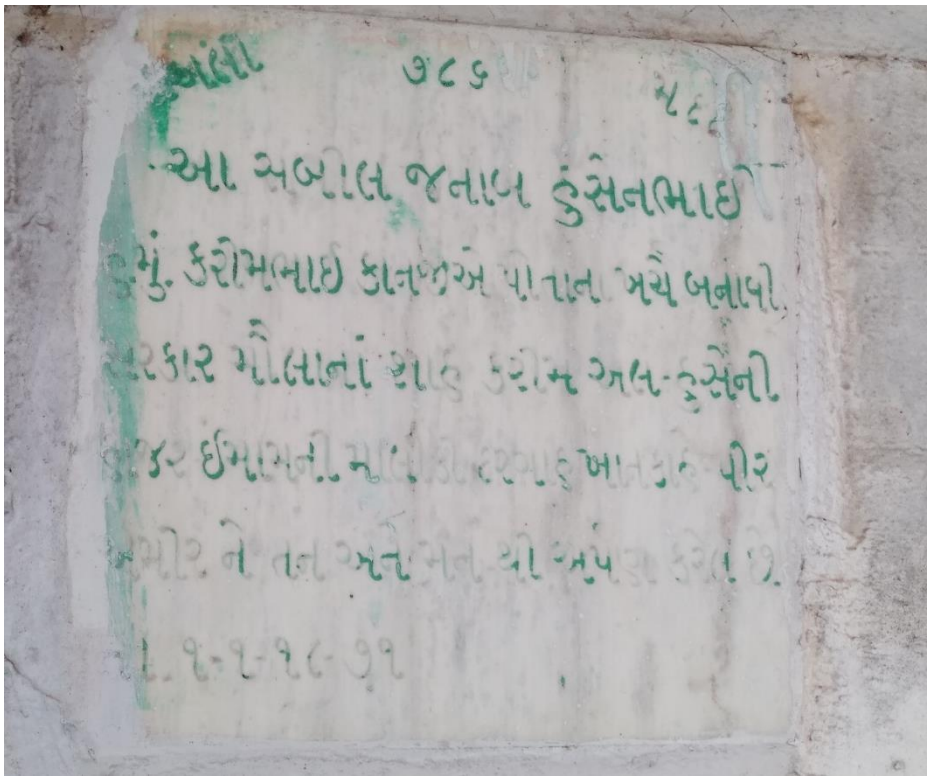

FIGURE 5
An inscription at Shāh Jā Qadam (1971)

Following the installation of a water supply line, the last two additionsof the 20th c. to Shāh Jā Qadam were that of a graveof a certainAmaldārī Ghulām Hussain Ṣāleḥ Muḥammad Pardhānon June 13th, 1971 and a sitting area in front. Since then, there has been no major structural addition to Shāh Jā Qadam, however, the maintenance is done regularly.

[41] Transliteration of the inscription is as follows: Ā Sabīl Janāb HuseinbhāīKarīmbhāī Kānjīe Potānā Kharche BanāvīSarkār Maulānā Shāh Karīm al HusenīHājarImāmnīMālīkīDargāhKhānkāhe PīrAmīr ne Tan Ane Man ThīApaṇ Karel Chhe. The translation is as follows: This water-source was built by HusseinbhāīKarimbhāī on his own expense, who donated it with all heart and mind to the shrine of Amīr Pīr, which is a property of Hāzir Imām (Aga Khan IV).

FIGURE 6

Grave ofAmaldārī Ghulām Hussain Ṣāleḥ Muḥammad Pardhān (1971)

Conclusion

Through the agency of written and oral narratives, this paper answers two important questions about the space of Shāh Jā Qadam viz. How did this space originate in history and how has this space evolved structurally over the period lasting almost two centuries?In doing so, we learnt about the significance of the oral Ismāʿīlī accounts and the role they can play in the research of a historian. I have demonstrated how the oral traditions can be reconciled with the written ones, and how the former category of sources can act as supplementary testimonies to the written record. In this manner, I have been able to comment upon the historical origin (time period when this space was first built in its historical form) of Shāh Jā Qadam and its structural evolution (from being a space consisting of a lamp only to a contemporary mighty cubicalstructure) over the period of the Imamate of the four Aga Khans. Being a pioneering ethnographicstudy onShāh Jā Qadam,I assume that this paper will induce scholars to further investigateaboutthis site which has been ignored in the academia since years.

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