

## Faith-Based Justice: Understanding The Social Role Of Shrines And Pirs In Rural Sind, Pakistan

**Author:**

Jamil Ahmed Sheikh<sup>1</sup>  
(Penulis: 1 Author)

**Affiliation:**

University of Wah  
Pakistan<sup>1</sup>

**Corresponding  
author:**

Jamil.sheikh@uow.ed  
u.pk

**Abstract:**

The present paper designed to study social, spiritual and political contributions of *Dargahs* (shrines) and *Pirs* (spiritual leaders) in the development of faith-based justice in rural Sindh, Pakistan. Using the frameworks of the legal pluralism theory and social capital theory, it uses mixed-method approach that is, combining surveys and discussions, and focus groups to examine how the shrine-based mediation serves as an informal system of justice. The results indicate that the shrine-based resolution is believed to be accessible, effective, and based on the religious legitimacy. However, it is also an expression of larger social inequalities, with women, as well as the lower castes, frequently being excluded when it comes to making decisions. In addition to this, the shrine networks are also a source of political influence and *Pirs* are able to use their religious power to influence and mobilize their supporters as well as influence the electoral process. The participants also highlighted the emotional relief and moral reassurance that shrine spaces offered, which is in contrast to the remote and bureaucratic state courts. Despite the absence of any legal validation, the rulings of the *Pirs* possess binding force but with moral obligation and godly responsibility and pressure. In general, the paper emphasizes the role played by religious authority in supporting decentralized jurisdiction and social stability in the postcolonial rural setting.

**Keywords:** Shrine, Pir, Faith-based justice, Legal pluralism, Social capital, Sindh

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of justice, controversies and human life are as old as the history of the earliest community that inhabited this earth. Individuals who live in groups and clans are transformed into communities due to their similarities in existence. Looking around, we cannot deny the significance of the socio-interactive behavior in the human society. Our family system, formation of governments and even our global economy is founded on this social interaction which is the foundation-behavior (Pensis, 2011). When interacting with human beings, it becomes a clash of interest protecting, and this leads to conflicts among individuals or groups. So, conflicts are natural expression, until they are concealed, and do not pose any danger to harmony and peace (sheikh, 2022; Attaullah, 2017).

To resolve dispute historically, humans have developed three modes of dispute resolution mechanisms, such as through violence, formal adjudication, and informal means and mechanisms (Attaullah, 2017). All of these approaches are evidence of various cultural values and social structures, which have an impact on the ways of conflict resolution. Along with the development of societies, the focus on alternative methods of dispute resolution, including mediation and negotiation toward collaboration and understanding, is becoming more common (Sheikh, 2022). In times of conflict, it is often deemed the role of legal systems or the state to provide protection and, in conflict, the legal mechanism for resolution. However, the weak state institutions are unable to provide and also lack public trust; such institutions wane away gradually. Consequently, citizens seek alternatives and other sources. This is the first step where influential non-state actors find gaps and step in by showing their presence and offering necessary services that people looking for peace (Acemoglu, Cheema, Khawaja, and Robinson, 2019).

Religious or the cultural appropriate term *Pirs* (saint), which are one of the most suitable cultural and social structures mechanism in a community where landlords controlled the political arena and enjoyed a considerable religious authority (Waraich, 2017). In rural Sindh, the role of the *Pirs* has received significantly less attention compared to the operational aspects of these systems and their perception within the societies that practice them. Furthermore, what is the implication and the religious, socio-cultural and political orchestration of

shrine-based justice, and how does this mechanism of justice comprehend the formal legal system? By discussing these aspects, it closes a gaping literature gap in the South Asian non-state legal orders and enquiries into the relevance of religion in the establishment of justice and conflict resolution in poor contexts.

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The article adheres to convergent parallel mixed-method research design, which involves quantitative and qualitative techniques in the measurement of the complexity of the shrine-based dispute resolution in the rural Sindh. The rationale of using a mixed approach is that there is need to triangulate different sources of information and gain a better understanding about the religious, cultural and political dimensions of the informal justice practices. a) Quantitative Component-The quantitative component of this study was based on structured survey on 278 respondents (187 males and 91 females) of Larkana District who had direct or indirect exposure to shrine based dispute resolving exercises. The questionnaire was a 25-item questionnaire, a Likert scale and closed-ended questionnaire, and closed questions to get a data on the perception of fairness, trust on *Pirs*, accessibility, gender inclusiveness, and more effective comparisons between the use of the shrine-based and formal legal system. In subsequent years, the selection of this statistical technique was to indicate the explorative nature of the study and how local the color of the justice structures erected on the shrines the study is lying on. b) Qualitative Component-In the qualitative portion, to obtain the views of various stakeholders regarding shrine based resolution, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used. The survey was complimented with a semi-structured interview with 18 respondents. Some major stakeholders were interviewed such as *Pirs* (N=02), disputants (N=08), their families (04), *Dargah* workers (N=02), the respective judge to the lower court (N=01), and a lawyer (N=01). The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis that involves six steps (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conflict analysis and local indigenous practices were done in this analysis, and faith-based mediation was applied with the use of belief systems as a type of social capital. Theories of social capital delve into the perception of

relationship as an important asset and how social networks of relationships are mobilized to bring conflict resolution activities.

**Table no. 01**

| <b>Theoretical Framework for Shrine-Based Dispute Resolution</b> |                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theory</b>                                                    | <b>Core Idea</b>                                                                                 | <b>Relevance to Shrine-Based Justice</b>                                                                                       | <b>How It Appears in Your Findings</b>                                                                                              |
| Legal Pluralism                                                  | Multiple legal systems operate at the same time within a society (state law + informal justice). | Shrine justice works alongside formal courts, offering an alternative that people often trust more.                            | Respondents prefer taking disputes to the <i>Pir</i> rather than the police or courts due to speed, trust, and cultural acceptance. |
| Social Capital Theory                                            | Trust, community ties, and shared norms guide cooperation and social order.                      | Shrines act as hubs of social trust; <i>Pirs</i> hold influence because communities see them as honest and spiritually guided. | High trust in the <i>Pir's</i> fairness; participants believe shrine rulings reduce tension and maintain social harmony.            |

In this study two major theoretical approaches to comprehend shrine-based dispute resolution in the rural Sindh have been used: 1. Legal Pluralism- This is used to analyze how the shrine based justice works in conjunction with formal legal system. It assists in clarifying the reason why individuals circumvent state institutions, why the two systems co-exist and why communities tend to consider shrine choices more available, equitable and more culturally pertinent. 2. Social Capital Theory- This theory is applied to investigate the impact of trust, relations in the community and shared norms on conflict resolution. It offers the reasons as to why individuals rely on the *Pir*, the impact of social networks in promoting the acceptance of choices, and the power of communal trust which enhances the authority of the shrine.

## FINDINGS

Shrine-based dispute resolution has been a vital aspect of communal life for many generations, according to data collected via surveys and interviews. The results indicate that the villagers strongly prefer the *Pir* above formal legal institutions for a variety of reasons. The villagers stated that the conviction that religious authority results in just and morally obligatory solutions, further faith in the *Pir's* character, prompt dispute resolution, and cost-effectiveness are some of the main causes.

For the majority of rural people, shrines are places where disputes are resolved in a way that maintains communal peace. According to the respondents, the *Pir's* rulings have emotional and spiritual significance, and their decisions have led to religious conformity, which has increased people's willingness to obey. This kind of compliance is seen to be simple to put into practice since moral obligation is thought to be more powerful than the pressure imposed by law enforcement or judicial rulings.

The findings also highlight the significance of social ties. Individuals who frequently visited the shrine or belonged to its broader community were more likely to bring their issues there. People's opinions of the *Pir's* decision are greatly influenced by these social networks. Additionally, respondents to the poll claimed that the official legal system was slow, corrupt, or difficult to access, while the temple system was quicker and less expensive.

Additionally, the study's results show that decision-making varies by gender and socioeconomic status. Despite being followers of *Pir* and his authority, few women from the community and families from marginalized communities felt that they had limited access to *Pir* and could not take part in decision-making. This implies that while shrine-based systems replicate certain current social structures, they also depend on community trust.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that shrine-based justice operates as a social institution underpinned by mutual respect, trust, and community ties in addition to being a religious activity. These results, which show how religious authority and community networks influence daily dispute resolution, are consistent with the concepts of legal pluralism and social capital.

## DISCUSSION

The current discussion section looks at survey results about the function of shrine-based dispute settlement in rural Sindh and summarizes the trends in the tables. The theoretical frameworks of legal pluralism and social capital theory are used to explain the data. These frameworks offer recommendations for understanding communities who favor informal, faith-based methods over the official legal system. The conversation links numerical patterns with more general social and cultural dynamics by examining respondents' views of trust, justice, gender engagement, and social bonds.

Table No1.

#### Reasons for Choosing Shrine-Based Dispute Resolution

| Reason             | No of Respondents |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Quick Resolution   | 64                |
| Low Cost           | 58                |
| Trust in Pir       | 35                |
| Cultural Tradition | 49                |
| Combine all        | 72                |

The justifications offered are in line with legal pluralism and demonstrate that individuals choose justice forums based on cultural and practical considerations. People select judicial systems that align with their social circumstances, according to Merry (1988). According to Griffiths (1986), informal systems endure because they are still ingrained in day-to-day existence. Tradition can limit women's access, according to Shaheed (2004). Cultural institutions can occasionally conceal underlying power relations, according to Jamal (2015).

Table 2.

#### Gender Participation in Shrine-Based Justice

| Gender | Active Participation (%) | Limited Participation (%) |
|--------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Men    | 74                       | 26                        |
| Women  | 32                       | 68                        |

The gender difference in the table is evident. Shrine justice is trusted, but women's involvement is still restricted. This validates previous research by Kandiyoti (1988), who contends that patriarchal traditions influence how communities make decisions. According to Weiss (2014), masculine voices are frequently given priority in religious leadership. However, other academics, like Pfaz (1999), point out that shrine locations can occasionally allow for women's spiritual agency. However, your research indicates that decision-making is still dominated by men.

**Table 3.**

**Social Ties and Acceptance of Pir's Decisions**

| <b>Frequency of Shrine Attendance</b> | <b>Acceptance of Rulings (%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Regular Visitors                      | 181                              |
| Occasional Visitors                   | 54                               |
| Rare Visitors                         | 43                               |

This table shows a high correlation between social ties and the acceptance of the Pir's decisions. This aligns well with the social capital idea. Putnam (2000), who describes how networks foster trust. Coleman (1990), who argues that social links serve as a guidance for collaboration and dispute resolution. However, Bourdieu (1986) argues that social capital may also reinforce power structures. Your data show both sides: intimate ties may keep outsiders out while encouraging uniformity.

The tables together demonstrate how the propensity for shrine-based justice is influenced by social networks, cultural embeddedness, and trust. This supports the theoretical position of legal pluralism by showing that people consciously choose systems that are more effective in their lived situations. The patterns, however, suggest that shrine justice is not totally unbiased. Gender inequality and uneven involvement suggest that shrine-based organizations also reflect the broader social structure, which is consistent with criticisms raised by feminist and political sociologists.

## CONCLUSION

According to the study, shrine-based dispute resolution is still important in rural Sindh because of social trust, shared norms, religious authority, and the

limitations of formal legal systems. The findings demonstrate that people utilise Pirs because they offer timely, reasonably priced, and culturally relevant solutions that satisfy community expectations for justice and peacemaking. These patterns complement the ideas of legal pluralism and social capital theory by showing how informal justice systems survive when they are incorporated into social networks and consistent with local values. The numbers also highlight internal issues, such as uneven access and differences in happiness across different groups.

Although shrine-based justice is revered for its capacity to maintain harmony, it also reflects contemporary socioeconomic injustices. Concerns regarding representation and long-term justice are raised by the fact that gender inequity, class differences, and reliance on local power structures limit equitable participation. These disadvantages suggest that while shrine-based systems are helpful in resolving common disputes, formal legal institutions cannot be entirely supplanted by them. More egalitarian channels for community justice might be created by increasing legal accessibility, strengthening the responsiveness of state systems, and encouraging communication between formal and informal processes. This study paves the way for further investigations on gendered experiences, political influence, and the changing role of shrines in a modernizing rural society.

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