Muhammad Asghar *
Sumera Jawad **
Muhammad Arshad Rehmani ***
Sumbul Natalia ****

The Malang in Pakistan Today

Abstract

The malang today is a religious cultural icon which embodies an essential aspect of local culture and society. The present study focuses on the characteristic visual appearance of malangs as well as their behavior and the ritual practices that they adopt today. Furthermore, this study examines the apparel and multifarious trinkets they wear and carry with them. We suggested the term in this article that they are called the friends of 'The Friends of God'. Many believe that they have spiritual healing powers. We conducted a series of ethnographic fieldworks. One of the basic findings of this research reveals that malangs are rejected by normal religion and conversely they reject society. We argue in this study that malangs actually are the powerful signifiers because of their easily recognizable appearance and the various articles they carry on their person represent a complex cultural code of a spiritual way of life. They embody important values beyond normal religious customs and rituals. They are the residue of the sacred.

Keywords: *Ethnographic fieldwork, Malang, Visual appearance, Multifarious trinkets, Cultural icons.*

Introduction

Ethnographist and anthropologist Jürgen Wasim Frembgen called Sufi saints "The Friends of God" (Frembgen 2009). We suggest that the *malangs* are the friends of the "Friends of God" and that describes their purpose very well. They are familiar figures in urban and rural daily life in Pakistan and they can also be found elsewhere in South Asia as well as in Central Asia (Ewing 1997; Sidky 1990; Frembgen 1993). They characterize themselves by their garb and demeanor to clearly show what they are. They can be clearly identified by their appearance, such as their long hair, flowing scraggly beards (sometimes the beards are small and also some are clean shaven) and their caps. Their right hands (and sometimes both) are invariably covers with rings fitted with stones of different shapes and

* *Dr. Muhammad Asghar, Assistant Professor, Institute of Art and Design, Government College University, Faisalabad. Email: asghar@daad-alumni.de*
** *Prof. Dr. Sumera Jawad (Corresponding Author), College of Art and Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore. Email: sumerajd@gmail.com*
*** *Muhammad Arshad Rehmani, Visiting Faculty, Institute of Art and Design, Government College University, Faisalabad.*
Email: m_arshad.designer@yahoo.com
**** *Sumbul Natalia, Visiting Faculty, College of Art and Design, University of the Punjab Lahore. Email: sumbulnatalia@gmail.com*

colors. They wear colorful costumes and some carrying colorful placards of devotional icons and devotional knick-knacks decorate their costumes. Apart from these, many carry colored triangle flags (either red or black) on long bamboo poles.

Before we proceed further it is necessary to establish who *malang*s are? Anthropologists use this term to refer to people of similar sets of beliefs and practices of a particular nature. Louis Dupree explains *malangs* as follow;

> …usually among Afghani, Iranian, Pakistani, or Indian Sufi Muslims, *malangs* travel from place to place, are fed, honoured, at times feared by local population, or at least held in awe. Often, they spout unintelligible gibberish, words they claim to be from Allah or a local saint. At other times, they quote the Qur'an, usually inaccurately" (Dupree 1973, 107).

The term *malang* has different meanings from one region to another. At times the word is used to refer to *fakirs* (either beggars or religious mendicants), *qalandars* (wandering Sufis), *charsis* (hashish addicts), *divanas* (possessed madmen). In this article we are talking about the category of people that is generally understood to be called *malangs*. There are no recognized or clearly defined schools of thought but there are various diverse brotherhoods and groups. Among the scattered, loose structured and heterogeneous society of these people they have a randomly recognized hierarchy of some *malangs* who are considered senior, like gurus. This hierarchy is quite well-defined within the various brotherhoods. A neophyte is supposed to receive training and guidance from a senior in order to become a *malang*. Usually a neophyte receives *bait* --- confirmation that they have attained the level --- from his master, and often there is an emotional bond between the disciple and the master who initiates him into the ranks of *malangs.* The neophyte is given some emblem like a *karra* (bracelet), ring, *taweez* (religious amulet), etc., on this occasion in recognition of him being initiated. Since there is no overall acknowledged authority there are many free-lance *malangs*, frauds and conmen.

Usually *malangs* are found in large numbers at the various shrines of Sufi saints particularly at the shrines of Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, Sindh province and Data Gunj Bakhsh in Lahore, Punjab. They live in lodges located near to the shrines of these Sufi saints. They are ostensibly religious mendicants who have renounced all material considerations of the world and are following a spiritual path in life, sometimes dedicated to one or more Sufi saint. However, unlike the mendicants of Christianity, who follow a code of asceticism, self-denial and self-mortification, the *malang* assumes a more mystical air, even with a degree of awesomeness. He also performs some self-appointed spiritual functions (like taking care of some small shrine of a lesser known saint; paying homage at Sufi shrines; doing some magic; often they pertain to have healing powers, ability to counteract evil spells, etc.). They live by begging, but they don't actually beg for money. Their creed is that they are supposed to receive alms. Normally they may just utter a loud religious exclamation thereby making their presence felt and expect the people around to give them charity. They may be seen wandering through alleys, with their *kashkuls* (begging bowl) either just shuffling along or singing or calling loudly upon the Almighty to bestow alms on them.

Their characteristic appearance is indication enough for people to give something to these friends of "The Friends of God". *Malangs* have been walking through city alleys and country roads in the subcontinent --- and other places --- for centuries and their pristine image is associated with esoteric knowledge. There is also a veneer of emotional violence about them since they are not bound by the norms of civil behavior.

As such they are symbols of another code of life, alien to the commerce, social taboos and demands of the community. Usually the *malangs* do not associated themselves to any certain religious order. *Malangs* in the street may claim they are of one of the other of many Sufi school of thought, but that is as far as this categorization goes. In actual practice *malangs* usually belong to brotherhoods or groups (Sidky 1990).

We referred to *malangs* as the friends of "the Friends of God", thus are itinerant dervishes because often, they will be seen going on *ziarat.* The term *ziarat* means pilgrimage to a holy shrine. This is a common and necessary practice of *malangs*. It is usual to see *malangs* roaming the streets begging while on *ziarat*. They trust in God to get their livelihood and basically they lead a carefree life. Some of them also take care of shrines or serve some *pir* --- living or deceased on the way (Sidky 1990). Katherine Ewing, a cultural anthropologist reports of *malangs* in Punjab that;

> … walking from one shrine to another staying in one place for different lengths of time: sometimes only a few days, sometimes for longer periods of time --- during such stays they may serve some *pir* or deceased saint at his shrine. Large, prominent shrines often have their own retinue of *malangs*, who come and go even if they lodge there, so *majavars* (the caretakers of shrines) normally accommodate itinerant *malangs*. Many indulge in drugs (Ewing 1983, 76).

On the other hand, *malangs* sometimes guard and take care of small shrines and simple tombs of saints, located mostly in lower class residential areas in cities. The *malang* cleans the tomb and lights the oil lamps. Sometimes he tends to visitors and accepts donations. *Malangs* of higher status sometimes have pupils (*chelas*) or lower level *malangs* who serve them by preparing their food, tending their *hujjra* or beg for them (Frembgen 1993, 89).

Malangs are dedicated to their cause and spiritual way of life of renouncing the world and all material considerations. Due to this reason, many adherents of Sufi saints such as Lal Shehbaz Qalandar pay homage to *malangs* doing *ziarat* by regarding them with devotion and offer them food and money. One of our lower-class interlocutors said that;

> … *malangs* are holy persons. They come from the holy land of Sehwan. The land of our *Pir-o-Murshid* (Spiritual master). They are the spiritual healers. On behalf of Lal Qalandar, they pray for us for our good fortune, to get out from every kind of difficulty related to our business and personal life and give us serenity and peace.[1]

The attitude of above non-lettered interlocutor helped us understand the phenomenon of saint veneration which has a deep root in our local Sufi culture. This simplistic way of thinking readily identifies the characteristic appearance of *malangs* with holiness that they can relate to. We argue that the *malangs* are

[1] Interlocutor A

actually a powerful signifier because of having this easily recognizable appearance; they carry with them a complex cultural code representing their spiritual beliefs and they embody important values and what we would term 'residue of the sacred'.

However, apart from the major and even lesser known shrines of saints or tombs of *pirs*, some destinations of *ziarat* may be only a stone cairn, decorated with *togh*, or just a place that has been decorated with cloth flags, tinsel, clay lamps, etc., in the manner of shrines, in order to show that these are holy places. These are actually just random places that some *malangs* or group of *malangs* for some reason or the other have designated as being sacred *malangs* regularly journey to such shrines as well, that they consider important and make their offerings to them. They believe that such places are charged with spiritual and supernatural powers and spirits dwell in them (Sidky 1990, 287).

This practice harkens back to ancient druidic and Dravidian worship of finding inspirational spots and trees and decorating and venerating them. This practice is particularly prevalent among *Qalander* dervishes (Sidky 1990, 203). In fact, some of these mendicants even adopt a stance against the established Sufi fraternities and the shrines of orthodox saints and seek these undiscovered, subjectively religious sites. They are generally against traditional norms and values of society (Sidky 1990, 204). Many *malangs* of this creed adopt the *malamat* doctrine (Sidky 1990, 203), which was the philosophy of a mystic group in the 9th century who believed that piety is personal and private. To follow the religion of society infers gaining material status and position. Therefore, to renounce the world it is required to reject conventional norms and practices of worship.

It is said that some wandering Qalandar dervishes adopt unusual and strange miens. They make themselves appear threatening and frightening. They claim to be ordained with great magical powers (Sikey1990, 224); that they command the occult and can do black magic. Notwithstanding religious ethics and even what is written in Holy Scriptures, in a primeval manner they represent an aspect of worship. In ancient times there was a connection between religion and magic. The pharaohs, druids and shamans were supposed to have magical abilities. So, such tales of *malangs* projecting themselves as frightening and powerful figures who do dire magic terrify simple minded peripatetic groups like gypsies and isolated people even today and makes them venerate them.

However, it is a generally accepted belief amongst the laity that *malangs* do know magic and have healing powers, though not necessarily are they like awe-inspiring sorcerers. These healing and supernatural powers believed to be possessed by them are said to be either inherited or acquired through discipleship under established mystics (Sidky1990, 289). Thus, people often call them to treat commonplace ailments such as headaches, earaches, etc. In return they demand nothing but if the patient offers them money, food or gifts they will quietly take these.

The present ethnographic study looks into today's *malangs* in terms of their visual appearance, for instance the colorful costumes they wear and the gaudy knick-knacks they carry as well as the devotional practices they perform wandering from one place to another. It is a definite part of the Sufi visual culture (Asghar, 2016) and supplements it in many different ways. Although studies on *malang*s have

often analyzed their historical and social contexts (Sidky 1990; Frembgen 1993 and 2016), the visual appearance of *malang* today as described above, warrants attention. In fact it is a topic that to the best of our knowledge, scholars have seldom if ever studied the symbolism the *malangs* represent.

The main purpose of this study is to show in what respects *malang*s comprise a symbolic system in local society? Therefore, it is also necessary to understand at least some of the meanings of these devotional knick-knacks or scraps of writing that these *malangs* carry around and their role to communicate a particular message.

Research Method

We used ethnographic research method to analyze and interpret the visual data that we photographed. This research technique is convenient and effective in obtaining data regarding local phenomenon and particularities in different regions, both in the urban and rural. Scholars consider it as an important tool for collecting data (Fetterman 2018). In this study we used the medium of participant observation and made notes without disrupting the flow of the interviews 'to minimize the effect on participant behavior' (Fetterman 2010, 61).

The data we have presented in this study was collected in the Punjab over a period of one year between 2018-2019 through series of field works. This gave us a unique opportunity to familiarize ourselves with this adjunct of Sufism. We conducted ethnographic surveys in the suburbs of the cities of Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan and some villages where we could encounter wandering *malang*s. We have collected data in the form of photographs and conducted interviews. The findings of this study are based on the original interviews of both *malangs* and the people who venerate them.

Discussion and Results

Malang – a so-called spiritual healer

This research gave us the unique opportunity to study the relationship of *malangs* with Sufism. Most of the original Sufi schools genealogically trace themselves to Hazrat Ali (RA), except for the Qadriyya sect; that is traced to Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA). Thus Shia *malangs* envisage themselves as part of this great spiritual grid with Hazrat Ali (RA) on top. Sunni *malangs* also visualize themselves as being part of a Sufi grid. It was difficult to interview *malangs* in regard to these concepts because of their emotional response. It may be concluded that they consider themselves spiritually closer to these venerated Sufi saints. According to one *malang* interlocutor;

> … I am the disciple (chela) of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. He is my spiritual master. My master spreads light in all directions. Those who come under this light and get what they want in their material life. I pray for the people to follow the path of Qalandar. The path of truth.[2]

Some *malangs* may adopt a saint as their spiritual master. The shrine of a Sufi saint gives the *malang* special authority since he feels he has a definite relationship with the saint more than the myriad votaries who come there. Their adulation is at a higher level. They are the ones who mainly dance, often play the drum and other musical instruments and sing. They go into trances. Also, many of them prepare

[2] Interlocutor B

narcotic concoctions to give themselves and others what they consider higher spiritual experiences. Another fairly uncommon custom of theirs is to administer *thappis* --- blows with their fists on the back of a votary, with the permission of the votary--- which is a form of religious abnegation.

One of our interlocutors told us that;

> … one of my neighbors had been suffering from *mirgi* (epilepsy) and medicines could not cure him. Then he met a wandering *malang* who performed some rituals over him and told him some *totkey* (short religious formulas). Miraculously he recovered from the chronic ailment.[3]

People who experience a run of adversities, which appears inexplicable, such as the loss of domestic animals, diseases or a series of deaths in the family, sometimes suspect that somebody is doing magic on them (Sidky 1990, 297). In such circumstances the victims may summon a *malang* to pray for them to counteract the magic. This reputation of knowing magic adds to the esoteric image of *malangs*.

Another feature common among *malangs* is indulging in drugs as indicated by Katherine Ewing (1983). The common methods are smoking *charas* and drinking *bhang* --- both are cannabis preparations. The configuration of beliefs of *malangs* is of a mystic and ecstatic form of worship. They do not follow the rituals of orthodoxy. They reject restrictive elements in both religion and society. Their devotion seeks communion with the Almighty. In this regard they often regard that imbibing narcotics is part of their homage and it gives them greater spiritual experiences. They are not bothered by ethics and social. Also, the intoxication aids them in their religious dancing, singing and drumbeating. Further it is a deeper extension of their trances, which it must be said are usually genuine. Of course, though the drugs enhance their ecstasy and make them feel more sublime, but at times they can make them violent. However, this use of narcotics is only one aspect of *malangs*, whereas intoxication through divine meditation is another genuine aspect of their religious practice.

Many people accept *malangs* because they feel their religious dedication turns their mind inwards towards God. On the other hand, others do not like *malangs* because they feel they are irrational and their thoughts turn outwards which gives them a tendency to become violent. Although they profess to respectively belong to various Muslim sects and schools (like Brelvi, Shia, Qadriyya, etc.) and conduct their rituals in the idiom of Muslim mysticism, their creed can easily be distinguished from that of orthodox followers because of their appeal to spirits and adherence to ecstatic religious practices.

The following remark by Harald Einzmann about Afghan *Malang* also applies to other ecstatic of this kind;

> "…the *malang* way of life, which is regarded as extraordinary, even as strange, is associated with the fact that among these eccentrics there are often people who have physical or mental defects [who] are forced to live on the margins of society" (Einzmann 1977, 79).

[3] Interlocutor C

A doctrine of worship among marginalized members of society; rejecting social norms and accepting eccentricities of human behavior naturally gets mentally disturbed people in their ranks. *Malangs* are noted for their irrational behavior but sometimes it's a moot point whether the eccentricity is a conscious act or actual derangement.

The first author of this article will illustrate from a personal experience during field research for this study. He once gave a *malang* some money and he threw it away. This has happened before and it was an indication that the money was not enough, so on that occasion, he increased the amount and it was accepted. However, this time the *malang* kept throwing the money away no matter how much he increased it. This poor *malang* was mad.

Such *malangs* at times may utter incomprehensive gibberish. Many incredulous people feel that such religious mad-men, unfettered by social or material considerations and with only God to look after them are actually spouting spiritually revelations. and when they babble, they are actually communicating divine messages. Such handicapped but supposedly spiritually gifted people (even such children) are called *majzubs*. Some *malangs* fall in this category. Such mentally disturbed people actually exist within the *malang* group: some speak incomprehensibly and it is sometimes difficult or impossible to communicate with them. But on the other hand, one not infrequently meets *malangs* who kindly answer questions about their way of life; who care for strangers and impress them with their simple piety and devotion to God.

Colorful Costumes

The costume of *malangs* is an important aspect, since this is what identifies them. Today they wear distinctive colorful dresses particularly those of red, black and yellow or sometimes blue. With certain accoutrements: the get-up will be a long robe, chains, bracelets, anklets, etc.; any amount of bead necklaces; they carry a wooden or metal begging bowl that they hang over their shoulder. They always wear *taweezes* and usually have a number of rings inscribed stones on their fingers. They are often strong believers in the superstitious powers these semi-precious stones are supposed to have on a person. They sometimes carry an ornamental metal axe for protection on their travels and also this weapon may signify a victory they believe they have had over some *jinn* or supernatural entity.

Frembgen throws light on the costumes of *malangs* as follow;

> … the *malangs* belonging to various brotherhood has its specific costume, differentiated from one another in the form, material and colors of the clothing and items of equipment. Special attributes that distinguish the *malang* from a simple fakir or lowest rank *malang* also vary depending on the brotherhood. Above all, followers of heterodox brotherhoods dress in bizarre and imaginative manners. They also shave their head and beard and others keep long, scraggly and unkempt beards. This tangled hair of some mystics, which is never cut, is considered a sign of renunciation of the world and holiness. One of the most important components of the *malang* costume is a long garment (muraqqa) often sewn together with patches or covered with cloth

> patches. Wearing scraps of dervish robes torn in ecstasy or pieces of rock a sheikh has given them are particularly popular. (Frembgen 1993, 143).

It may be noted that both red and yellow colors appear to be a background canvas and other devotional knick-knacks are put in the foreground to make a beautiful color scheme (Figure 1). Today's *malang* has a great aesthetic sense in choosing the colors not only for their costume but also for their other trinkets too to attract common people. They usually represent a colorful symbolism which is sometimes even adopted by other educated devotees in their clothes.

Figure 1: A wandering *malang* carrying colorful devotional trinkets in Multan. Picture: Muhammad Asghar, 2020

In addition to the typical dervish costume - consisting of a patch coat, hat and begging bowl - the shaved body hair - both the head and beard, eyebrows etc. - are characteristic features of the Qalander (Sikey 1990, 226).

Figure 2: A wandering *malang* carrying colorful devotional posters of various Sufi saints in Lahore.
Picture: Muhammad Asghar, 2020

Malangs Carrying Colorful Placards, Stickers and Trinkets

Frambgen explains in his study 'Icons of Love and Devotion' that;

> "… the *malangs* are preeminently symbols, in as much as they represent other things, such as stickers and placards of various sizes from 16 cm. to 11 cm showing icons of Sufi saints, calligraphic verses from the Holy Qur'an, views of the holy places of Macca and Medina, also the Prophet Muhammad's (SAWS) celestial mount Buraq, members of the Holy family (ahl al-bait), Shi'ite Imams and martyrs of Karbala, heroes of Islam as well as narrative figural scenes with Qur'anic themes, a sizeable number of prints from Muslim South Asia shows Islamic mystics. These are the similar visual representations as we see in urban and rural domestic and public spaces. Since the early 20th century, coloured images and posters depicting Islamic images of piety often of Sufi saints were printed and marketed as religious mementos in cities such as Cairo, Damascus, Tehran, Lahore, Bombay, Delhi and Madras" (Frembgen 2016).

Basically, these are cheap, mass produced commercial items but the subject matter and the genre in which they executed evokes deep religious response among votaries, even to the extent of considering them as holy amulets or endowing them with beneficial powers. They are often hung in tea stalls and shops in urban and rural areas as well as in private houses in the lower- and middle-income groups (Asghar 2016). To *malangs*, these articles of devotions almost have the status of religious relics. They increase their religious authority; give them greater authenticity apart from being personal articles that bring benediction and protection on themselves and guide them on their path. These symbolize their beliefs and give them strength. Often, they highlight some particular aspect of belief or holy personality that the *malang* wants to emphasize.

Many wandering *malang*s are loaded with mass produced placards and visual images of Sufi Saints and their shrines such as Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Data Gunj Bakhsh. The imaginary figure of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shown with his beloved disciple Bodla Bahar is a main foci of these placards. They are of various sizes measuring from 16 cm to 11 cm. Such images are found in contemporary devotional posters often hung up in shops, restaurants and tea-houses of urban and

rural areas (Asghar 2016). Thus, they are not mere appurtenances but represent the religious passion of the *malang* and are part of his role in the world (Figure 2).
In the information age of the early 21st century the original creativity of these posters has decreased. They are no longer composed with the spirit, originality and variety that they used to be. Instead the older ones that were more commercially popular are scanned and reproduced by market learned graphic-designers on the computer.

Color Symbolism

The three primary colors red, green and yellow dominate in this cheap genre religious art that the *malangs* carry. In the world of the culture of Sufi shrines in Pakistan, the color red, "*lal*, has been associated with the popular Sufi saint of Sehwan (Sindh), Shahbaz Qalandar, which is why one of his titles is Lal or the red Sufi. It is said that he used to wear red clothes. It has also been reported that his eyes used to get red in the ecstatic state" (Mokhtar 2012 15).

Annemarie Schimmel and Priscilla P. Soucek noted the significance of colors and their meaning in Islamic art and culture. She referred white, red and black colors to the colors of Sufis. They referred red color to energy, power and blood. They found a connection of three primary colors to the Sufis and further threw light on the significance of these basic colors to the verses of Holy Qur'an and explained their spiritual meanings. They referred white as a color of purity while black was a color of evil which is sometimes used to describe the light that comes form not seeing as in the case of ecstasy where Sufi may experience a state of enlightment. She refers to black as having a negative connotation expressing mourning and asceticism. She mentions green color as being the color of life. It is linked in the Quran to paradise and was the Prophet's favorite color. For Sufis green depicted a high stage on the mystical path. 'It is the color that is reached when a Sufi has passed through the 'black light" and emerges at the emerald mountain, the symbol of divine proximity and eternal duration, *baqa*'. (Schimmel and Soucek 1992, 46). The printed visual art, flags mounted on a large bamboo carried by *malang*s and the clothes worn by them are often of these three basic colors.
Hence the red color evoked emotions and feeling among the devotees of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Devotees respond immediately to this color and it identifies the *malang* spiritual affiliation. *Malangs* and the devotees of this saint all over

from Pakistan often wear red colored clothes and decorate their vehicles with red flags when they go to the *urs* (death anniversary of the saint) of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. There are also several spiritual songs referred to Lal Shahbaz Qalandar which signifies the red color. Therefore, the symbolism of red color has prime importance for *malang*s.

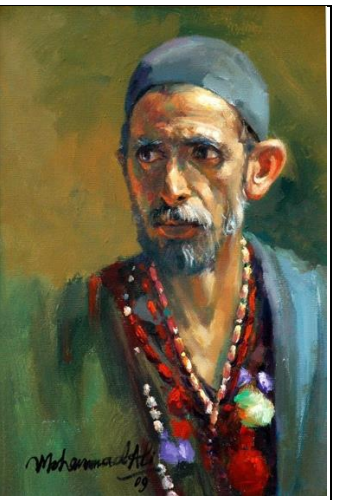

Figure 3: Painting portrait of *Malang baba.*
Picture/Painting: Muhammad Ali Bhatti, 2009. Used with permission via Facebook message to first author, May 23, 2020.

Malangs in Visual Arts

Over the centuries the subject of Sufi saints has been of great interest to painters to create extraordinary works of art. Although we can see iconographies of Sufis saints of the Muslim world painted in illustrated manuscripts of 14th and 15th centuries, however, *malangs* have also caught the attentions of contemporary painters and are depicted in their retrospectives. Because of their colorful appearance, they have become a subject of great interest. Contemporary artists such as Muhammad Ali Bhatti, now living in the USA, painted a series of portraits of local *malangs* (Figure 3). Although portraits of *malangs* seldom appears in the mass-produced genre art mentioned above however their iconography in modern painting represents popular high-art culture. But of course, such portraits do not possess any magical or beneficial powers for the common devotees as the popular devotional genre images of these saints do. They are not painted keeping in view the devotee's devotional interests for veneration. They are painted and sold purely as artistic renditions of an ethnic subject to the elite class.

Conclusion

Malangs may be viewed as hermits roaming in villages, cities and public places. They are disadvantaged in two ways; one, they are rejected by normal religion; two, they reject society. Thus, they exist on the marginal limit of society, tolerated rather than accepted. However, since they are a centuries old institution they are valued by many.

Islam, like other religions tends towards extremism. The presence of *malangs* in religious circles is a manifestation of unorthodox beliefs that by its very presence mitigate extremism. Though, as far as social structure is concerned *malangs* are out of place in the modern world, but these people still impact the lower classes and rural areas. In the lower middle and middle classes beliefs are more conventionalized and bound by the norms of society and the aspirations of the *mohallah* (neighborhood). Thus, *malangs* symbolize a secondary form of religious observance rather than being custodians of religious authority like *maulvis.* The

validity of the beliefs they represent is delimited though usually among votaries of Sufi saints they are more highly regarded. Still they retain an overall ascendancy in esoteric knowledge and superstitious powers among these classes. The lower and rural classes, without mitigating normal religious validity of beliefs and sources of authority more readily accept *malangs* for what they symbolize and believe in their superstitious powers and arcane doctrine without finding any dichotomy. On the other hand, in juxtaposition to the growing tendency of extremism the very existence of *malangs* is a limiting factor and *ip´so facto* broadens religious concepts.

More than anything else, in a changing world, *malangs* are basically still following the same way of life since the time of the Sufi saints however their visual appearance has changed from time to time. The modern world does not have much meaning for them. Thus, they represent a religious world that is constant and pristine. In their perspective, the great, venerated Sufi saints were alive and physically present just yesterday and their presence still guides them today. The *malangs* are harbingers of ancient religious trends roaming the streets of the cities today, keeping alive the Sufi tradition of the soil and the soul.

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