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Mahwish Zeeshan[*] | Aneela Sultana[†] | Abid Ghafoor Chaudhry[‡]

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Aastaanas of Magicians: A Ray of Hope for the Marginalised Community of Rawalpindi

Abstract: *People continue to believe in the efficacy of magic in the era of science and technology. Mythology pertaining to curative aspect of magic which is believed to solve the social, economic and medical problems of the people. Initially, a socio-economic survey of the households was conducted in Rawalpindi at Dhok Ratta and Dhok Khabba, which tapped 796 households. Later, 44 people who confessed using magic were interviewed with the help of an interview guide and participant observation at the aastaanas of the aamils. Mostly people who believed in the magical practices were inflicted with health, domestic, social and economic problems and sought magical cure as a last resort. The efficacy of magic is determined by socio-economic status, sex, marital status and education of the people rather than their belief in religion and fatalism.*

Key Words: Aamils, Astaana, Magical Practices, Shamans, Socio-economic Problems

Introduction

The topic of research is significant for research to bring a humanistic and holistic anthropological perspective, social needs in a sociological perspective and the perspective of Quran and Bible as the theological perspective to have a balanced understanding about folk religion; magic. Life is not smooth for all. Like all oppressed people, the downtrodden segment of the society has historically turned to religion for solace, hope, and inspiration against the forces that have conspired to enslave them literally, spiritually, and psychologically. It is the triumph of austere rationality that one is ready to relinquish in magic to achieve his will and seek solace through it (Jacobson, 1979). It is believed that by casting the spells, the powerless can gain control over the situation. So, in a way, magic serves for solace and gives hope to the believers. The widespread usage and conviction in magic served as a primary precursor of taking this issue as a topic of research. The survival of "magic" that we call it now might have been expected to decline –unless science takes over offering alternative paradigms (Young & Kullick, 2017).

Magic and the supernatural are engaged as techniques of liberation, wholeness, and healing, contemporary used by the lower socio-economic strata of the society for doing two things (Stark, 2001); reflecting the diversity of beliefs in their community and making a deliberate, active, conscious rational choice. Alternative forms of spirituality such as magic, ghosts, spirits, horoscopes, visions, fortunetelling, or supernatural powers did not sit any better with us than did organized religion– as ways in which bogus, self-proclaimed "holy men" or the *aamils* in the religio-cultural context took advantage of the wretchedly poor, illiterate, superstitious masses.

Walking through the congested streets of the urban ghettos and reading from the chalked walls often intrigued the idea of working on the *aamils* or the magicians since long. The study was therefore backed by the motivation of working with the magicians and shamans, which is an ignored area of investigation.

People think that the causes of the ailment are rooted in the supernatural realm, and the curative power lies at the hands of those who have the communicative ability in the transcendental world. It is believed that shamanism proliferated in the social realm to a greater extent in the eighteenth century, whereby medical researchers have been increasingly conscious of the magical implications shamans had in the parallel medical systems (Flaherty, 1992). In every corner of the world, *aamils* or shamanistic figures are found. In Pakistan, such figures are not merely engaged in spiritual healing but rather use magical means to help their clients. It is more of a business that has flourished tremendously, and people approach them as healers for seeking a solution to their problems. According to the magicians, people approach these magicians with all sorts of

[*] PhD Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: mahwish.zeeshan@uaar.edu.pk
[†] Assistant Professor (Incharge), Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
[‡] Associate Professor (Chairman), Department of Anthropology, PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

social, economic and medical problems despite being aware that magical practices in contradiction to Islam [Farooq & Kayani, 2012].

Review of Literature

The evolutional history of magic suggests that Egypt was considered as the holy centre of magicians. Religion, medicine, technology and what is now called magic have coexisted over centuries without any obvious conflict [Fawad, Kholood, & Arshad, 2019]. Witchcraft, sorcery and magic serve as tools of social control hence found in societies which lack the formal authority to regulate it and impose laws. Anti-social behavior is prevented by the fear of either being victim or being accused of witchcraft and sorcery [Pinch, 2006].

Magic served as a form for the authority of the poor or the powerless" different from the religious traditions. It was a tradition of "locating some other potential source than the very 'god' for one's own creativity". Even before Islam, religion contested in the very realm of magic with the advent of Christianity as well [Whiting, 1971]. The Supernatural is taken as a Tool of Empowerment. The vast majority of people seek solace in religion or in an expression of spirituality outside the domain of the formal religion, i.e. the folkway of getting things done. People stuck in distress seek help of their emotional, physical, psychological and socio-economic wellbeing [Yamauchi, 1983]. Religion deluded the masses; exploited poverty-stricken people into accepting their man-made poverty as fate rather than uniting in political action. Thus, some rebelled against organized religion as the tool of the ruling class, or in Marx's famous phrase, "the opiate of the masses" [Walsh, 2009].

The magicians of ancient Egypt claimed the power of compelling the mightiest of the gods to do their bidding by threatening them with destruction as a consequence of disobedience [Fox, Craig, & Piccioto, 2017]. Natural objects are wonderfully efficacious, which can do wonders. They are capable of binding men into hatred or love, health or sickness, or the like [Frazer, 1922]. Magicians gather clienteles without creating a lasting bond of a moral community amongst them since there is no church of magic [De Lawrence, 1913]. It is, therefore, a profound virtue that unites the objects through their application in the context of each other by thoroughly knitting them together with the virtues and powers of superior bodies [Durkheim, 1975].

In Social Sciences, magic has been described in a derogatory manner [Greenwood, 2006]. For E.B Tylor magic is the most pernicious illusion that ever-vexed mankind [Tylor & Frazer, 2006] James Frazer called it 'pseudo-science' [Frazer, 1911]. The malinowskian description of myths of primitive people asserts that they functioned in regulating social life of the people [Malinowski, 1948]. A.L Krober designated magic as a trait of 'retarded cultures' [Kroeber, 1916]. For Sigmund Freud, there was a parallel between neurotic and infantile delusions and magical beliefs [Freud, 1938]. It was viewed in opposition to public religion as private and negative activity by Emile Durkheim [Belier, 1995]. From a theological perspective; mainstream religion, practising magic is not only prohibited but also considered as an act against God [Greenwood, 2006].

According to a research conducted in Dhaka on the evil eye, Jinn and black magic among the Muslim community, it was found that the prevalence of belief of women as compared to men was more likely in the existence of such supernatural phenomenon and to cite religious figures as the treating authority for diseases attributed to affliction by black magic. It was also found that those participants who had a higher qualification were less likely to believe in Jinn and evil eye as compared to those with lower educational attainment that could cause mental health problems [Mullick *et al.,* 2013]. In a study conducted with professionals in the US, Stuart and Lucille Blum found that higher education lowers supposititious beliefs and magic [Vyse, 2013]. Keeping in view, the prevalence of magical practices in modern and contemporary society, this research was conducted to uncover the mythology pertaining to a curative aspect of magic which is believed to solve the social, economic and medical problems of the people. It has been inherited from the past but changed its dimensions and efficacy across time. Anthropologists raise a more fundamental question: on use of magic in contemporary anthropology which is supplanted by the observation that a variety of actions are merely, intended to induce efficacious outcomes [Kendall, 2018]. In terms of religions, especially the Abrahamic religions, magic is strictly prohibited. Laflin agrees that the Bible forbids magic, especially the one trying to speak to the dead or cast spells on people," he explains [Price, 2008]. Rare are any academic studies conducted on magic nowadays. Cases on fake faith healers and shamans are often reported by media but not enough research is available on the factors compelling people seek the services of these *aamil*. There was a need to understand the role of education, marital status and the gender-wise difference in belief and practices pertaining to magic. The study reveals that women not only believe more in the charms of magic but also magic can invert power relations between men and women and between clergy and laity, destroying public

order [Wieben, 2017]. However, the scope of the study was limited to gender-wise belief in magic and does not focus on finding out the power relations between clergy and laity.

Materials and Method

The research was conducted to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The methodology was primarily descriptive. The socio-economic survey form was designed to gather the data on bio-statistical information which was employed to find out the precursors of approaching the magicians. A total sample of 796 respondents from the two dhoks of district Rawalpindi; Dhok Khabbay and Dhok Rattay was gathered through Simple Random Sampling. The data was gathered over a period of four months for a research assignment from January to April 2019. The data was post stratified and tabulated in SPSS for co relational analysis. Participant observation and rapport building served as methods for detailed observations. Participant observation at the field was made by meeting a few *aamils* at work; however, the role of the researcher was limited to the participant as an observer in the Malinowskian paradigm [Malinowski, 1948]. Out of 796 respondents, 49 claimed that they used or continue to use magic for fulfilling their wishes. The data gathered from the socio-economic survey forms are tabulated in the following section

Statistical Analysis

From a total of 49 cases, only 44 respondents gave complete responses voluntarily for an in-depth interview. The data was filtered and entered in SPSS. The data from the users of magic was then cross-tabulated by applying co relational analysis. Prevalence of magical usage was correlated with sex, marital status and education of the respondents. The correlation was applied to various variables, but only the results of the significant ones are depicted in the tables of the following section [Rowley, 1922].

Results

The results of the study are based on age-wise stratification of respondents whereby respondents were taken across all the age groups and from both the sexes. 425 males and 371 females were employed in the socio-economic survey to explore the prevalence and use of black magic.

Table 1. Age Group of the Population.

S. No	Age group	Male	Female
1	1-10	67	53
2	10-20	96	80
3	20-30	137	91
4	30-40	52	46
5	40-50	41	49
6	50-60	28	40
7	60-70	4	12
8	70 above	-	-
Total	796	425	371

Table No.1 depicts the ratio of the males and the females' population. It is clearly seen from the above table that the ratio of men was slightly more than the women. The table also shows the population of different age groups. It can be seen from the table that a greater number of people belongs to an age group between 20-30 years with those between 10-20 was the second-largest cohort of the sampled population.
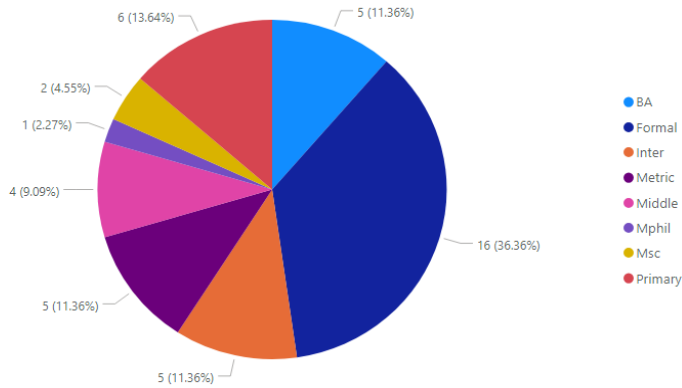
Figure 1: Education Level of the Population

Figure no. 1 indicates that only 12.7% of the total population was illiterate and hence did not acquire any formal or religious education, whereas 82.3% of the total population literate. Interestingly, 67.9% population was moderately educated, i.e. from matriculation to bachelors.

Table 2. Religion and Sect

Religion	Sect	No of People	Percentage
Muslims	Sunni	581	73%
	Shia	207	26%
Non-Muslims	Catholic	8	1%
Total	-	796	100%

Religion and sects of the sampled populace are represented in table 2. The data suggests that largest percentages of the people living in the area were composed of the Sunni Muslim sect with a 26% proportion of the Shia Muslim population and some exceptions of the Catholics, i.e. 1%.
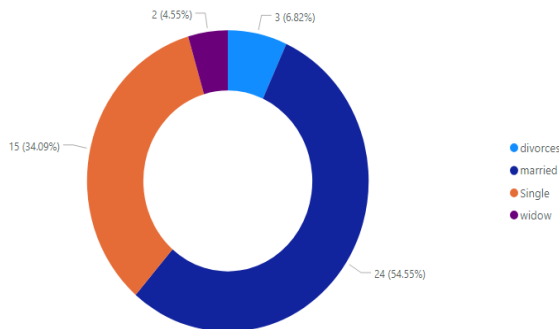

Figure 2: Marital Status of Population

The above figure shows the marital status of the respondents. Most of them were singles, therefore, looking for a life partner. In a country like Pakistan, where strong patriarchal values prevail, the trend of endogamy is still dominant in the semi-urban population. The couples are often left with trying their luck by engaging magicians to cast spells that could compel their families to agree to their wishes. This gave a good scope for the magician's business and brought them clientage of bachelors.

Table 3. Correlations of Respondents Sex and Black Magic

		Sex wise Breakup of the Respondents	Prevalence of Black Magic
Sex Breakup of the respondents	Pearson Correlation	1	.808**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	44	44
Prevalence of black magic	Pearson Correlation	.808**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	44	44

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in the above table are based on sex-wise usage of black magic among the respondents. So, it can be stated that the direction of the relationship is positive meaning that these variables tend to increase together. Women are more prone to the practice of magic and believe in their efficacy as compared to men. The value of N=44 shows that there are no missing observations for both variables, as presented in table 5. The P-value for this correlation coefficient is 0.000. This value is less than 0.05. Because of this, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant correlation.

Table 4. Correlations of Marital Status and Black Magic

		Prevalence of Black Magic	Marital Status
Prevalence of black magic	Pearson Correlation	1	.828**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	44	44
Marital status	Pearson Correlation	.828**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	44	44

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As noted, sample correlation coefficients range from -1 to +1. Here, the sample correlation coefficient says 'r' is 0.828 indicates a positive correlation. The statistical p-value is 0.000, as presented in table 6. As concluded that there is need to improve the marital status, People deal with Black magic with the help of *aamils*, the penchant for faith healers, shamans and magicians etc. on the results suggest that the usage of black magic for matrimonial issues is more prevalent. Also, married people visit magicians more than singles. It can be deciphered that married people have more issues in their daily life than singles. Unless people let go of their superstitious beliefs seeking refuge in religion and science, magic cannot be avoided.

Table 5. Correlations of Formal Education and Black Magic

		Formal Education	Prevalence of Black Magic
Formal education	Pearson Correlation	1	.960**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	44	44
Prevalence of black magic	Pearson Correlation	.960**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	44	44

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analyses were used to examine the relationship between formal education and types of black magic, as presented in table 7. So, it can be stated that the direction of the relationship is positive meaning that these variables tend to increase together. It is observed in our society, that increase in awareness comes with formal education, the more aware and educated people get to be, the lesser will be the probability of belief and practice of magic. The P-value for this correlation coefficient is 0.000. This value is less than 0.05. Because of this, it was concluded that there is a statistically significant correlation.
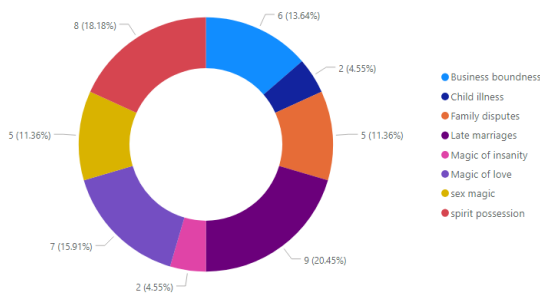
Figure 3: Reasons for Using Magic

The findings reveal that people used magic for multiple purposes. The most pertinent reasons were late marriages, spirit possession and love. All cases of spirit possession were of females. Later comes the family disputes, declining or loss in business ventures and issues related to sex that brought people to the *aastaanas* of the magicians. Some cases of physical and mental health were also taken up to the magicians.

That *aastanas* of magic practitioners are quite congested. Sometimes a magician deals the client's separately in rooms and offices. Often, women face sexual harassment and abuse at the hands of the magicians, but because of manifold reasons, they do not disclose it with their family. Often these women are visiting these magicians secretly without the consent of their families or the community's conviction in the magicians is so overpowering that no one would believe them rather they would only face embarrassment and brutal punishment by their family members. Does the question arise that how do these *aamils* work? There are such kinds of bindings as these made by sorcerers, collieries, unguents, and love potions; by binding to or hanging up the things; by rings, by charms, by strong imaginations and passions, by images and characters, by enchantment and imprecations, by light, by numbers, by sounds, by words, and by names, invocation and sacrifices; by swearing, conjuring, consecrations, devotions and drivers superstitions, and observations, and such like. The force of sorceries is reported to be so great that they are believed to be able to subvert, consume and change all inferiors' things.

Discussion

It was once believed, rather hypothesized that magic, religion and science supersede each other. However, traces of each human developmental stage stay as a piece of the cultural baggage of the proceeding stage; magic is one such institution from the primitive stage of mankind. Instead of class struggle and grass-roots activism, the poverty struck community is being offered magic, voodoo, and faith in the supernatural. The tools of survival and resistance—such as magic, –that is adopted by people often reflected through wall chalking in the interior parts of the urban slums and ghettos which are accurate reflections of their own communities. Mythology pertaining to magic is used as a device along with ancestor-worship (*peeri mureedi* in this context), native spirituality, magic, and the supernatural, their reflection in drama.

Literature suggests to the lower the socio-economic community, and specifically, women, can transcend racism and sexism, how they can survive in conditions where people want to see them fragmented and voiceless (Geertz, 1981). There is little evidence of magic, mysticism, spirituality, or the supernatural there. The consequences of this lack of spirituality and the excessive dependence on pragmatic materialism are devastating.

The study finding on post-marital adjustment issues is consistent with the previous researches (Atkinson & Hammersly, 1998). Married people entrusted more in these aamils for their familial issues than bachelors. A quarrel between husband and wife and fights between mother in law and daughter in law creates an infuriating environment in the domestic sphere. Matrimonial issues and post-marital issues are another major reason for people to seek help from these aamils. Also, lower educational attainment and lack of awareness are the precursors behind belief resorts in use of magic a ray of hope among people. People are engulfed and overloaded by problems like inflation, unemployment and lawlessness. Some people stuck in these problems considered black magic accountable for these issues (Dorothy, 1970). People, because of their weak and suspicious beliefs, consult these *aamil* or magicians for instant help. One of the major reasons behind

consulting these aamils is the desire for a luxurious life. Several reasons besides materialistic goals, on the top of the list, include love, marriage by choice, success in exams, domestic problems and health.

Gallup Pakistan conducted a survey on *tawaeez ganday* in 2007, 'Religion and Spiritual Beliefs', which suggests that half of Pakistan's urban population continues to believe in Black Magic as a plausible reality and *Taweeze Ganda* (charms and 'amulet') can be efficaciously used to treat the illness. The rest of the half of the sample disagreed however, 52% of the respondents expressed believed in the efficacy of Black Magic (*Kala Jadoo*) whereas 47% did not believe in magic and a further 1% did not record their response [Sultana A. , 2011]. 52% respondents who believed in magic do not necessarily use magic for goal attainment. One of the major reasons in restricted usage is the educational level of the urban populace since there lays an inverse relation between magic and education. Higher the educational level of the respondents, lower is the probability to practice magic.

The core finding of the research was the superstitious beliefs of people. It was observed that many people had great faith in such types of healers. Mostly the people proclaim that they have faith in Allah, His last Prophet (PBUH) and the Quran. And they also assumed that Allah Himself says that when one is having any problem, the Almighty has kept a way out for people. So, they think these people (*the aamils*) are the *Wasilla* to help them out from the complexities of life. However, there is a clear prohibition on any kind of magical practices imposed by Islam which condemns magic.

Studies suggest that competition and tension arise more frequently where statuses are achieved than where they are ascribed. Tension and conflicts arise due to these social statuses. People in a social structure desire for the status of an object in a social structure which does not regulate or eliminate competition and it tends to be projected into subsequent conflict and beliefs which are not adequate institutionalized outlets for it [Freud, 1938]. As per the study findings, magicians or *aamils* who find people in immense distress, assure them of swift remedial measures. They assure their clients on having contact with the supernatural by employing spirits and ghosts reassure them for the fulfilment of their wishes.

Previous studies conducted on the subject also suggest that 'Lack of formal and religious education on the part of the believers and superstitious beliefs has strengthened the roots of the folk magicians in our society' [Haroon, 2014]. As long as people do not get aware and well acquainted with scientific knowledge, they will not be able to let go of the magical mythology that operates beyond the premise of logic. Apart from religious inhibitions on casting the magical spells, the sociological experts also reject the magical solutions since they are often blinding the individual from reality or are short term. Efficacy of magic was once believed when religion, science and logic had not taken over.

According to the experts, "Due to poverty and deficiency, people are entangled in problems, and instead of giving the fee to doctors, they consult *aamils* for their solutions. It is frequently seen that epilepsy patients are thought to be possessed by some kind of spirit or *aasaib*" [Code, 2002]. These views are in accordance with this research, where several such cases were observed. Also, women in difficult circumstances are more prone to seek resort in magic in spite of knowing the difference between the right and wrong. The desire of seeking wishful results and the desire to take revenge is so overpowering that these women have no reluctance using malicious means of engaging black magic to achieve their goals. 60% of women consult *aamils* for their mental and psychological solutions, and the majority of women being uneducated fail to find the solutions for their problems and think it may be black magic or some *aasaib* due to which their problems continue to persist.

Magic serves as a mode of solace to the ones living in the ghettos. In fact, the ghetto itself becomes a symbol of the brutality, isolation, violence, and alienation that flourish without the restorative powers of gyno-centric spirituality. In a Muslim society like Pakistan, people generally suggest that there is a notion of use and abuse through magical practices since people tend to be religious. However, the reality contradicts the ideal religio-cultural statements, and a considerable population segment seeks the services of these quacks. Also, the findings of the study can be concluded that these are not the real shamans or magicians who are looting people in the hope of their wish fulfilment. Not all the *aamils* are the real magicians and possess the power of making things work for people. They often play with the psyche of the people. These *aamils* are aware of the fact that people are too much indulged in their mundane life entangled in their everyday issues. By ensuring them swift and desired solutions to their problems, the *aamils* govern the mind of the superstitious believer. When a client seeks their help, they keenly observe the client, the way they converse and behave, and then tackle the situation accordingly. Mostly they are aware of the common problems faced by the people, for instance, marital issues, domestic problems, love affairs, compatibility of couples, infertility, financial problems,

unemployment etc. and secondly people lack knowledge on their religion [Khalid, 2008]. They believe in seeking help from these holy, shamanistic figures; the *aamils*.

Conclusion

The research suggests that the use of magic and the supernatural serve as tools of empowerment in the lower socio-economic class does more; however, than act as a rejoinder to the dominant society. It was believed that people approach magicians for malicious practices and the principle of contagion operates to inflict pain, nevertheless, rare were the cases of revenge and higher were the cases of daily life issues of people which compelled them to make use of magic to their benefit. The key finding of the research suggests that it is not merely the socio-economic status of the people which compels them to believe in the efficacy of magic as a short cut, but also dependent upon the sex, marital status and formal education of the people. Women are more prone to believe in magic than men.

Recommendation

In the advanced world; Europe and America, there are proper organizations opened by the *aamils* in which native laws are deliberately employed, but in Pakistan, this profession is being run without any affiliation or licenses organization. Whoever wants to establish an *aastana* is free to do so, ideally in an urban slum or ghetto and gets wealthy in few years by looting people of their money they invest as *nazrana* offered to the magicians. There needs to be a proper check over these magicians, *aastaana* and their activities need to be monitored closely. Government and civic society must keep eyes on the activities of such healers, and a proper law must be prepared and passed for so-called occult activities. In order to maintain the fair working and practising of this knowledge, it can be introduced at an institutional level, however challenging in a society like Pakistan which is believed to be a Muslim society since magic or occult is in contradiction to the basic premise of Islam.

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