



Tayabba Batool Tahir \*

**Abstract:** *Evil eye is a malignant glance that can damage wellbeing of the person upon whom it's casted. Evil eye can be intentional or unintentional. The roots of evil eye lie in envious feelings towards someone's health, wealth, social and personal growth. Evil eye is a widely accepted belief across the globe as it elucidates inexplicable misfortunes faced by an individual or a group of people. By conducting an ethnographic fieldwork of four months among females of Ghareebabad, this study explores varied cultural and religious perceptions about evil eye prevalent in Pakistan. For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted by using purposive sampling technique. The descriptive analysis of data collected reveals greater reliance on local cultural remedies rather than religious rituals to ward off evil eye. The indigenous remedies used by respondents to ward off evil eye highlight the deep embeddedness of superstitious beliefs in local cultural cognizance.*

**Key Words:** Evil Eye, Religious Remedies, Pakistan, Cultural Remedies, Envy

## Introduction

Evil eye is considered as a malignant glance that can damage wellbeing of the person upon whom it's casted. Evil eye can be intentional or unintentional. Evil eye is a widely accepted belief across the globe as it elucidates inexplicable misfortunes faced by an individual or a group of people since ages. Many world cultures have a strong belief in evil eye, however, the understanding of the causes of evil eye and ways to cure it varies across cultures. Evil eye can affect all aspects of human being like as economy, material, physical and biological since it is not limited to any aspect of life.

The roots of evil eye lie in envious feelings towards someone's health, wealth, social and personal growth. Envy is a multifaceted and perplexing emotion. The belief in the evil eye as a destructive power triggered by envy is prehistoric and widespread across culture. The belief in the evil eye is a belief in the power of envy and jealousy that can mysteriously cause harm and destruction leading despair and hopelessness. In Muslim cultures, envy and jealousy are considered as satanic tactics that he used to plant evil in the hearts of people against each other. Satan was envious and jealous of humankind, therefore, envious feelings and emotions towards happiness and success of other people are strongly detested in Islam. This study explores religious and cultural underpinnings of the

prevalence of evil eye in a small Muslim community of Ghareebabad, Multan. Drawing on [Wolf's \(1955\)](#) conceptual framework of culture, health, illness and cure, this paper examines the socio-cultural dimensions of evil eye and its impact on the social relations and well-being of society at large.

The concept of evil eye is one of oldest and widespread in the world. The history of evil eye can be traced to the ancient Greek and Rome where it was believed that it causes threat to a person who is praised. The ancient Greek not only believed on the evil eye, but they also used strategies to protect against the evil eye. The ancient Roman people used to believe that the gods also looked enviously people for their good fortune and often due to spiteful enjoyment they tend to destroy the good fortunes of people. Besides, it was also believed in ancient Rome that gods were envious of each other. According to Brazilians, evil eye can cause the prosperity of others to ward off. In Jewish culture, people believe that praise can cause the evil eye. In European culture, people believe that an envious eye brings bad luck. German feared that those with red-eye bring harm to the success of others. In Ireland, it is believed that those with squinty eyes are considered the evil eye possessor. Hinduism also has a strong belief in evil eye and the harms caused by the evil eye. In Hinduism belief in the evil eye is derived from the third eye of

\* Assistant Professor, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.  
Email: [tayaba.batool@bzu.edu.pk](mailto:tayaba.batool@bzu.edu.pk)

god Shiva, which has the capacity to destroy the entire world just with a single look. The Hindu belief is that the crises of life are particularly precarious from the standpoint of susceptibility to the evil eye. [\[Woodburn, 1945\]](#).

It is substantial to note that in many languages the expression for “evil eye,” “to see,” and “envy” are closely related. Different kind of words are used in various languages. In Arabic, the “evil eye” is “any al-hazed” literally meaning “the eye of envy”. Japanese used the word “Jashi”, whereas, in Latin word “NVidia” from which the English “envy” stems, derives from viper, “to see”. Similarly, the Russian word for “envy”, zavist, derives from the root of the verb videt, “to see”. The Sanskrit word commonly used for the evil eye is “drishti” which literally means sight. In Urdu/Hindi language the word “Nazar” is used to refer to sight and evil eye too.

## Literature Review

Belief in the evil eye has a projective function which through the transformation from personality traits to cultural configuration, becomes manifest as a form of a dominant anxiety expressed through culturally legitimated ideas of reference [\[Reminick, 1974\]](#). The evil eye is inflicted through people’s unconscious jealousy, envy, or greed [\[Spiro, 2014\]](#). [Wolf \[1955\]](#) suggests that belief in evil eye, superstitions and black magic is due to institutionalized envy, which represents the element of jealousy prevalent in a community. Similar views have been endorsed by [Spooner \[1970\]](#) & [Foster \[1975\]](#), who considered evil eye as institutionalized personification of misfortune on the progress, success, and well-being of another person. Evil eye belief is a realistic fear of envy. The evil eye belief appears to be one of the most dysfunctional social controls in human society, which means, the more effectively it functions, the greater it tends to harm the welfare of society. If a society let belief in evil eye go rampant, it let itself be ruled by the envious. Kathryn P. Sucher and Pamela Goyan [Kittler \[2011\]](#) explain evil eye as a social explanation of envy. She says sickness attributed to social causes occur around the interpersonal conflicts within a society. It is very common in a community to blame an enemy for any pain and suffering.

Belief in evil eye falls in the category of belief in superstitions and supernatural. The supernatural elements neither follow the laws of nature or respond to a conventional rationality nor scientific reasoning can be used to explain supernatural phenomenon. Those who do not believe in evil eye presumes that science is the most precise producer of rational claims and knowledge. In the scientific world of rationality, evil eye has no place. However,

positive science is far from the ultimate producer of knowledge and many supporters of positive science trust its discourse completely [\[Roussou, 2014\]](#). Social scientists have argued that cultural and economic backwardness correlate with an extreme incidence of the evil eye belief [\[Schoeck, 1991\]](#). Similar argument has been suggested by Greshman [\[2015\]](#) that wealth differentiations and lack of productive resources were the main reasons causing envy provoked detrimental behaviour thus, leading to the advent and propagation of belief in the evil eye as a cultural mechanism. [Gershman \[2015\]](#) work on evil eye belief and its association with economy largely focuses on economic perspective of evil eye and relates those feelings of envy arises due to economic inequality. However, it is observed that in South Asian context evil eye is majorly discussed in relation to familial relations, children, and beauty. For instance, [Qamar’s \[2016\]](#) work on Punjabi Muslims predominantly focuses on pregnant women and newborn babies as victims of evil eye. In Punjabi Muslim culture, envy is the disease of the heart that brings harm to one’s soul. According to [Qamar \[2016\]](#), many Muslim women in Punjab believe that new-born babies are more vulnerable to the evil eye. Since people cannot identify the possessor of the evil eye, they suspect that evil eye is casted by someone who is envious and deprived such as a childless woman. There is a constant fear of evil eye on the pregnant woman during pregnancy and after the birth of child. Several religious and folk methods are used to ward off evil eye. Despite the availability of medical facilities, many women follow religious healing methods to protect mother and child from the evil eye. [\[Qamar, 2016\]](#).

The possessor of evil eye is mostly guessed in relations to deprivations of people. Frequently possessors are the persons whose eyes are different from common people. For instance, Germans look with suspicion for those with red eyes. In Irish cultures, people with a squint in their eyes or people with different eye colour are considered as possessors of evil eye. Often it is glaring or piercing eye that is to be feared. It may not be the eyes at all, but the eyebrows give us the key to their owner’s power. Some Italians have it that heavy eyebrows which come together are considered as evil eye carriers [\[Jones, 1951\]](#). Common signs associated with evil eye results in an illness which is not due to organic disease, a fracture or chillness. In Pakistan, *nazarbutto* is commonly known for protection. Different people take different colour or objects to protect from bad effects in every culture and every culture has its own understanding of the concept and remedies. Blue is considered the most potent colour of protection. Some people use garlic water as

protector. People believe in a myth for which possess the evil eye is totally changed from the teachings of Islam [Mohyuddin and Awan, 2015].

The removal of the evil eye is a complicated matter consisting of well-patterned rituals, there are a multitude of everyday devices used as preventives, warding off tragedy before it can get its grip. Babies especially must be protected since they are peculiarly liable to attack. The consisting of colors, objects, and miniature objects to always provide protection: then there are special actions and phrases to be used when situation is fought with danger [Jones, 1981]. Specific Rituals are used for protection, detection and dispelling *najar* (evil eye) and *bhut* (ghosts), which varies in different cultural contexts. For instance, evil eye bead is frequently used in Turkish culture to ward off evil. In Turkish culture, buying and gifting evil eye bead symbolizes good will towards others especially when someone buys a new car, home or gets married. It is a widely purchased and gifted souvenir of Turkey. Even people do not believe in protective feature, they have attached value and respect to evil eye bead on account of symbolizing culture and tradition [Manzakoglu, 2016].

### Concept of evil eye in Islam and Pakistan

Pakistan is a Muslim majority country, where the concept of evil eye (*nazarlagna*) is supported by Islamic teachings. Before discussing the prevalence of evil eye in Pakistan and its repercussion on social well-being of people, in this section, we explain the Islamic underpinning of the concept of evil eye. Islamic scriptures (the Holy Quran and the Hadith) endorse evil eye as a virulent energy which can damage happiness, beauty and even the existence of object/being on its victim. For instance, the Prophet (SAW) used to seek refuge with Allah (declaring it deed of Abraham) for his grandsons Hassan and Husain and prayed in these words: "O Allah! I seek Refuge with Your Perfect Words from every devil and from poisonous pests and from every evil, harmful, envious eye". When the Prophet (SAW) fell ill, Gabriel recited these verses. "In the name of Allah. He may cure you from all kinds of illness and safeguard you from the evil of a jealous one when he feels jealous and from the evil influence of eye."

According to Islamic perspective, the harmful effects of evil eye can be warded off by reciting the last two chapters of the Holy Quran, i.e., Surah *Falaq* and Surah *Nas*. Both these chapters have prayers to seek refuge of Allah against sickness, jealousy, witchcraft, envy, and satanic obsessions. These two chapters have been quoted in several hadiths as the most effective shield against harmful effects of evil.

In Pakistan the belief of evil eye is widely accepted and is referred as "Nazar". There are different terms used for *nazar*, *burinazar*, *bad nazar*, and *kali nazar*: Pakistan is the farming country; farming is the main source of earning in almost all four provinces. Any loss in the production of crops; any disease of crops is considered because of evil eye. In Pakistan this belief is so intensely rooted that people often suspect their own relatives of casting an evil eye. Ghilzai and Kanwal (2016) discussed variations in belief system and remedies to protect from evil eye in four provinces of Pakistan. Culturally, there are variations in remedies to ward off evil eye, however, from Islamic point of view by reciting holy verse one can protect himself/herself from the spell of evil eye. Unintentional, saying "MashAllah" (whatever God Wills, will come to pass) protects from the evil eye.

### Research Methodology

This research is conducted in Basti Ghareebabad, which is situated in Multan district. Multan is situated in Southern part of the province Punjab. Multan district is comprised of four Tehsils which are: Multan Cantonment, Multan Sadar, Shujabad and JalapurPir Wala. The target area of research i.e., BasitGhareebabad is bordered by old Shujabad 1.4km to the East, Khudadad colony 2.6 km and Qasim Bela 5.4 km to the West Multan Cantt 1.8 km to the North, and Farooq Pura 0.8 km and Purani Chand Mari 0.7 km to the South. The population of this area is around 1500, which is largely dominated by Muslim population. Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki are commonly used languages in this area. Ghareebabad is a semi-urban area, where caste system has a great influence on the lives of native people. Most people belong to Bukhari, Aarbi, Hashmi and Awan cast. People of Ghareebabad are strongly bound with their traditions and customs. Literacy rate of the area is very low i.e., 30% and many women cannot not get access to higher education in this area.

The data for this research was collected by using ethnographic research methodology. Participant observation was conducted with female of Ghareebabad for a period of four months. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted from 28 females. The age group of the respondents was between 20 to 50 years. Out of 28 respondents, only 19 participants were educated, and the highest qualification of the participants was bachelors. None of the participants had higher education. The socio-economic cadre of the informants was between middle to lower-income group. All the informants were household women and only four informants

were unmarried. The researcher participated in the daily activities of informants and attended special events like marriages, childbirth, *milad*, *aqeeqa*, where interactions with other women was developed. Rapport was built with the informants to create friendly environment. The participants were informed about the objectives of the research, and they were ensured that their identity will not be disclosed as it might lead to conflict of interest in the area. Therefore, pseudonyms are used to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

## Findings and Analysis

The female residents of Ghareebabad often tend to associate misfortunes with evil eye. Many phrases have been used by the informants during interviews and informal discussions to elucidate the deep embeddedness of the concept of evil eye in their culture. Some of the commonly used phrases are as follow:

*Nazar logon ko qabar tak pouncha deti hy* (Evil eye can take a healthy man to his grave)

*Shaarikun sy Kisi ki kushi bardasht Ni hoti* (Relatives cannot bear the happiness of others)

*Nazar Sony ko mitti kr deti hay* (Evil eye changes gold into clay)

These phrases highlight the concept that evil eye is an institutional envy as proposed by [wolf \(1955\)](#). Many informants appeared insecure of their relatives and believed that their relatives are responsible for their misfortunes. This further explains that the concept of evil eye affects the social world and one can easily blame other for their mis-happenings and unfortunate events in their lives. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss in-depth case studies of three participants to unfold various layers of religious and cultural underpinnings associated with evil eye in Pakistan.

One of my informants, Abida, who was twenty-eight years old described that she did not use to believe in evil eye before her marriage. Her mother often used to warn her that she might catch an evil eye, but she never heeded to her. After her marriage her mother-in-law warned her about a woman (Sajida) from neighbourhood, who was a great possessor of evil eye. Once Abida was taking lunch and Sajida came. She said to Abida's mother-in-law: "tumhari bahu kesy mazy se or jaldi jaldi kha rahi hy mujh se to kuch khaya hi ni jata" (Your daughter-in-law is lucky that she can enjoy a good meal, I can't eat a lot). After few hours of this incidents, Abida had a pain in her stomach. Her mother-in-law said to Abida that I warned you about Sajida, but you did not listen, you caught an evil eye from her. Abida consulted doctor and took medicine, but she did not recover.

Then, Abida's mother-in-law used an indigenous remedy of warding off evil eye by taking a ball of *pathkari* and moving it seven-time around her head while saying the following words:

*Bandy di nazar hut javy*, (the evil eye should be removed)

*Hasid di nazar hut jaway*, (hostile stare from a jealous person must be removed)

*Pakhuprindy di nazar hut jaway*, (Evil gaze from birds must be removed)

*Jinbhot di nazar hut jaway*, (Evil gaze from ghosts must be removed)

After saying these incantations, she threw the ball into fire at backside of the house. Next morning, Abida's mother-in-law saw that *pathkar* ball turned into the shape of dog. Abida reported that she recovered the same day and since then she developed a strong belief on evil eye and its negative effects.

Shabana, who was forty years old, strongly?

believed that evil eye could have harmful effects on a person. She said that she had been victim of evil eye several times and blamed her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law for destroying her happiness. She narrated an incident when she was badly affected by evil eye of her mother-in-law. On her son's birthday party, she was wearing a black dress, and everybody praised her. Her mother-in-law said, *Chup chup ke kya lagati ho jo itne haseen hoti ja rahe ho* (which skincare product you use secretly to revitalize your beauty). According to Shabana, next day she fell seriously ill, and her black dress burnt while she was ironing it. She consulted doctors with her husband, all her test reports were accurate, yet she used to feel low and dizzy all the time. Shabana's next-door friend came to see her and said that you are affected by evil eye. Her friend made three small balls of wheat flour, she covered one ball with red chillies, second with salt and third with black pepper. She moved those balls around Shabana's head three time while saying the following words:

*Nazar Karin phutmarintrutmarin*  
*Aaspaas di nazarhaqhamsayan di nazar*  
*Maa puu di nazar jinn bhot di nazar*  
*Pariyaun di nazzar due blayun di nazar*  
*Ja k sut dun samandrun par*  
*Ja k sut dun daryan par*  
*Wal naawyshabanadykool*

Shabana's friend threw the balls on the roof of their house and said that she will recover when these balls will be eaten away by birds. She also gave Shabana *dam walapani* to drink daily. After doing these therapies, Shabana said that she recovered within two days.

Tehmina, thirty-five years old educated married woman, described herself as a strong believer of evil eye. Her youngest son fell ill when he was only of twelve days. He was very healthy with fair complexion after his birth, and everyone used to praise him. Suddenly, he got sick, and his health deteriorated even after consultation with doctor and medication. She lost hope after trying several doctors and became worried. Tehmina's mother-in-law said that the child got struck by evil eye. They took child to the darbar of Hazrat Peer and described the situation of the child. Hazrat Peer Sahab looked at the child and said that the child was sick because he caught evil eye of a woman.

Hazrat Peer gave her four black threads. He said to tie threads on arms and legs. He also gave her "dam wala anda." He told them to hang egg on the baby coat and gave her some amulets to be burnt in fire. He said that with the burning of amulets the side effects of evil eye will fade away. By practicing the healing strategies suggested by Hazrat Peer, Shahbana's child started recovering. She described that within three days the egg broke and within a month her son recovered completely.

### **Institutional Envy**

*Nazar lagna* (to cast the gaze) is a verbal expression in Urdu for the punishment of the hostile stare. *Nazar lagna* portrays the arrival of an overwhelming force through the eyes that is started by the sentiment of jealousy. Evil eye is seen as an envious gaze of an individual or a *jinn* (supernatural beings) that is unsafe in an assortment of ways. The evil eye conviction is related to the malevolent forces of envy stored in the eye of the beholder. Anything which is attractive may excite envy and might be ill wished through a lethal jealous gaze (Qamar, 2016). The eyes passed on a wide scope of feelings including humility, pity, arrogance, defiance, generosity, dissimulation, miserliness, malice, hostility, and envy. The dread of the hostile stare has driven individuals to practice multiple folk and strict defensive measures as on account of Shabana, her family followed cultural practice to get rid of evil eye while Tehmina preferred religious practices for the treatment of her son. The evil eye conviction is related to the feelings of envy that can be harmful for children in their early childhood. The action of "eyeing" involved looking with envy and perniciousness (Elliott, 2016). Among Muslims, the evil eye is considered as a danger to a children's wellbeing prior or after birth. Women (especially newly married and pregnant women) and children are considered as vulnerable victims for evil eye as described in the above case studies. Except dependability & physical weakness, this vulnerability

relies upon the general worth of the child in the family. For instance, a male child is considered as more vulnerable than a female child. A first child born after numerous years, the only son after many daughters and the youngest son can be an easy victim to the malignant eye. Moreover, the beauty of a child draws in jealous eyes and the risk of evil eye affliction can be increased as highlighted in the case of Tehmina.

### **Religious and Cultural Context**

The significance of religious healing is prominent in Tehmina's case. Tehmina's baby boy was affected with the evil eye. He was the youngest child in her family. That is the reason why all family members were really concerned about his health. Fair complexion and a healthy body further made him an easy victim of the evil eye. When he effected from the hostile stare, his family members followed several religious remedies after unsuccessful treatment by the doctors. Their strong belief in religious healing practices supported them to deal with dangers of the evil eye. Many Pakistanis follow spiritual leaders or religious teachers (*pir* or *murshid*) to tackle the evil eye effects. Islamic wellsprings of information set up faith in the hostile stare as a reality that carries harm and danger because of the desirous and envious goals of some people against other individuals. In Islam, the malignant glance, or al-'ayn العين, is a typical conviction that people can view individuals, objects or animals to put them in disastrous conditions. Most Popular religious practices referenced are types of *ta'viz* (amulets) or *dam* (amulets soaked water and the practice of blowing air on the effected person while reciting sacred verses) (Qamar, 2016). Religious healers utilize various natural objects and call on divine forces by using talismans and amulets as recuperating objects as mentioned in the case of Tehmina. Spiritual healing and cure is viewed as the most unequivocal strategy to free a person from the evil eye. Preferably, one uses talismans and spells in advance to stay away from the evil gaze because prevention is better than cure. Pakistani folks perceive cultural remedies as *tauna*, a kind of profane magical practice that has no association with religion (Qamar, 2016). Shabana's mother-in-law considered *tauna* as effective and fruitful; that is why she practiced it. Such practices are performed paying little heed to religious teachings. Respondents easily recognized folk remedies like *tauna* and spiritual healing practices.

### **Conclusion**

The conviction in evil eye is excessively unavoidable that individuals look for religious and cultural

remedies to remove the effects of evil eye. As they presume the hostile stare to be an oblivious or cognizant envious gaze, individuals who are suffering from hardships are associated as owners with the evil eye. They can be dangerous for individuals due to envy or jealousy. Cultural and religious remedies are used to remove the curse of evil eye. Regardless of present-day advance medical facilities, a definitive fulfilment and trust in the cure is accomplished through the customary convictions. Also, people's belief in religious remedies is becoming more stronger nowadays than folk remedies. People like to consider spiritual healers; however, some famous cultural remedies are still in practice. Likewise,

spiritual healing is also melded with magic as magico-religious healing. For healing and protection, people visit *imams* and religious leaders. Most commonly, *imams* are considered as spiritual healers and they suggest evil eye amulet and talisman. In Islam, it is a strong belief that Muslims should have faith only on one God to guard them from witchcraft and pernicious spirits as opposed to turning to charms or amulets which are bearing images or rare stones accepted to have otherworldly forces or different other things for protection yet still a vast majority of people have faith in such practices for the removal of evil eye impacts.

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