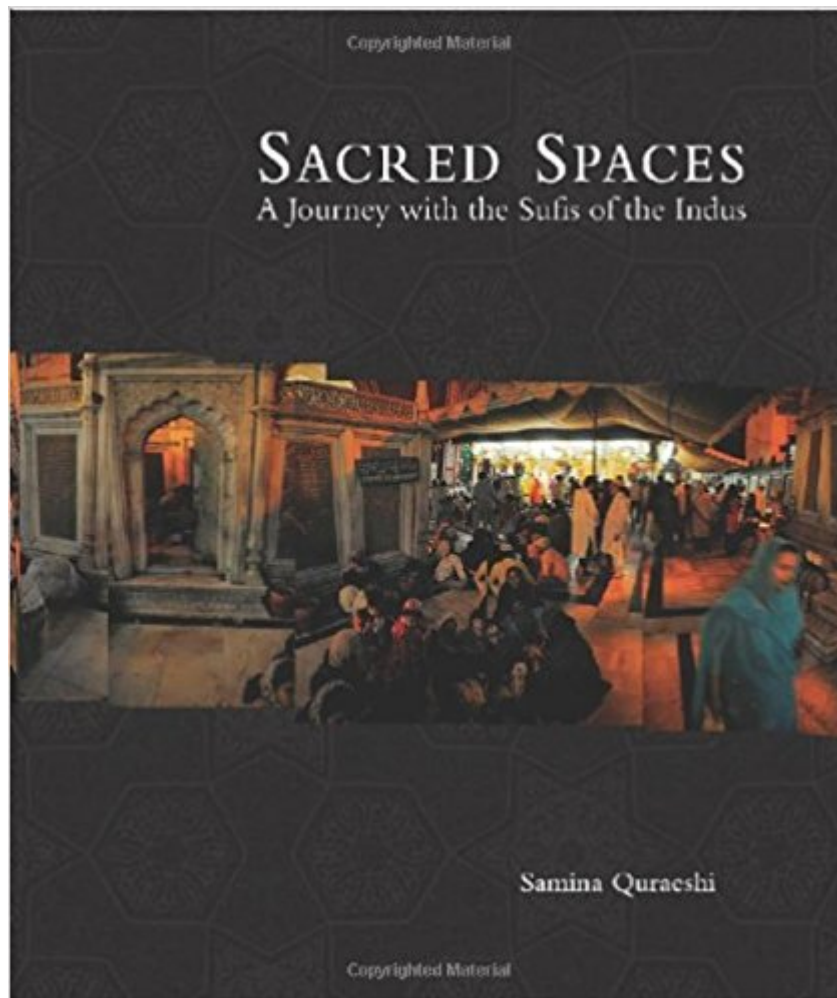




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Sacred Spaces: A Journey With The Sufis Of The Indus (Peabody Museum)



Synopsis

Sufism, the mystical path of Islam, is a key feature of the complex Islamic culture of South Asia today. Influenced by philosophies and traditions from other Muslim lands and by pre-Islamic rites and practices, Sufism offers a corrective to the image of Islam as monolithic and uniform. In *Sacred Spaces*, Pakistani artist and educator Samina Quraeshi provides a locally inflected vision of Islam in South Asia that is enriched by art and by a female perspective on the diversity of Islamic expressions of faith. A unique account of a journey through the author's childhood homeland in search of the wisdom of the Sufis, the book reveals the deeply spiritual nature of major centers of Sufism in the central and northwestern heartlands of South Asia. Illuminating essays by Ali S. Asani, Carl W. Ernst, and Kamil Khan Mumtaz provide context to the journey, discussing aspects of Sufi music and dance, the role of Sufism in current South Asian culture and politics, and the spiritual geometry of Sufi architecture. Quraeshi relies on memory, storytelling, and image making to create an imaginative personal history using a rich body of photographs and works of art to reflect the seeking heart of the Sufi way and to demonstrate the diversity of this global religion. Her vision builds on the centuries-old Sufi tradition of mystical messages of love, freedom, and tolerance that continue to offer the promise of building cultural and spiritual bridges between peoples of different faiths.

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Customer Reviews

Sacred Spaces is an ambitious attempt at proposing religious tolerance in today's Pakistan by recalling to the core values of Sufism, which is all-inclusive in nature. Quraeshi delves into history to allay the nationalist and fundamentalist contentions of the country's hard-line elements, prescribing sermons of the thirteenth century poet Jalaluddin Rumi, among other saints from foregone eras...It includes a dramatic collection of photo montages and calligraphic work of the shrines, the architecture and the people who inhabit these religious centres, with a handful of essays introspecting on the centuries-old traditions of the mystical messages of the Sufis. (Jaideep Sen Time Out Bengaluru 2010-02-19)

Samina Quraeshi is Gardner Fellow and Visiting Artist, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Ali S. Asani is Professor of the Practice of Indo-Muslim Languages and Cultures, Harvard University. Carl W. Ernst is William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Kamil Khan Mumtaz is an architect living in Pakistan.

In the 1960s, the author Samina Quraeshi recalls, religious tolerance was the norm in Pakistan, with Sufi spirit permeating the region. Her Muslim family had Christian, Hindu, Zoroastrian, and Jewish friends, and she even went to a Catholic missionary school. As we all know, conservative zealots are on the rise around North Africa and the Middle East, and Sufi shrines and Christian churches have been destroyed, along with the great Buddha monuments in Afghanistan. Thus, she had returned to her homeland to document by photography, personal encounters, and historic lore about Sufi saints before Sufism is suppressed or forced into low profile, as had occurred in Turkey last century. In this effort, she enlisted three academic experts to contribute chapters on Sufism and Islam in South Asia (Ali S. Asani and Carl W. Ernst) and on the architecture of Sufi shrines (Kamil Khan Mumtaz). This last essay was especially interesting, as while plans of a cube and dome with intermediate octogons, based on proportions and geometry, may be approved, construction is actually more an organic process than a mechanical assembly, filled with serendipitous modifications and adjustments. The simple exteriors of brick are found inside to be geometric wonders of wood, paint, and tile and calligraphic design. This handsome book grew out of an exhibit at the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Color photographs of towns, streets, shrines, and portraits of people taken mainly by Quraeshi fill the pages, which is appropriate as the bright, solid colors of clothing and decoration, the reds and blues with green and black and turquoise, dazzle the eye. Other images are illustrations from ancient books. The reader can attain some feeling of Pakistan's architecture and its peoples. Sufism, the many mystical orders of Islam [Shisti;

Suhrawardi; Qadiri; Firdausi; Qubrawi; Shattari; Nawshbandi; and in Turkey, Mevlevi and Rifa'i), all have various religious practices, such as breathing, mantra repetitions, music and movement, and are essentially bhakti (devotional worship piety, love of Allah) in approach. As in all mystical traditions, there is a lineage of master and disciple. The shrines of Sufi saints are not only pilgrimage sites but sacred spaces where rites and festivals are said to grant wishes and lead to spiritual attainments. Quraeshi's narration of the sagas is part of the storytelling tradition, whose allegory, parables, and mythology is oral history. She also offers a woman's perspective, mentioning key women in Islam and Sufism, beginning with Fatima. She also describes how women (who do not go to mosques) gather to worship at home upon sheets. (The separation of women into alcoves and adjacent rooms in mosques is not unknown in orthodox Judaism, where women (and young children) worship behind dividers or in the balcony of synagogues.) A helpful glossary and bibliography may be found at the end. Two minor complaints: the font is gray in hue, which while eliminating glare from high contrast, does require good lighting; and the physical practices that are neuro-physiologically instrumental in Sufism are scarcely mentioned. Quotations from the Qur'an, liturgical sayings, and poetry are featured as chapter dividers. One sets Sufism apart from mainstream Islam, besides its importance of music and dance: Qur'an 2:256: Let there be no compulsion in religion. Quraeshi, photographer and artist and educator, gives us in this book an appreciation that the interpretation and practice of Islam is not monolithic but ultimately individualistic and personal. The book title's sacred spaces are, as she notes, within ourselves.

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