

University of Tartu
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Institute of Cultural Research

Kashif Farooqi

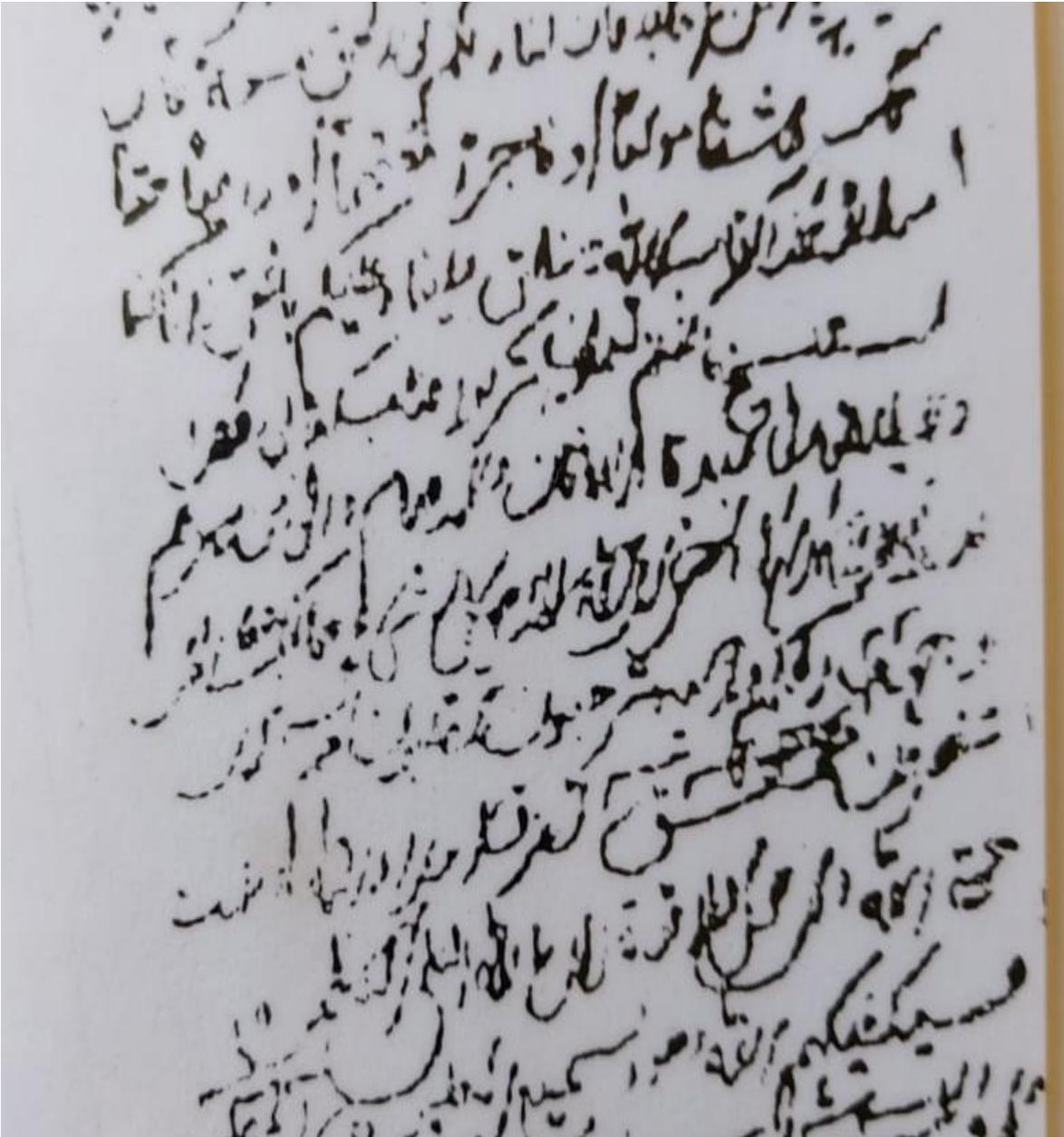
**Matrilineal charming tradition:
Gender and socio-cultural analysis of Zulekhavi tradition in Multan**

Master's thesis

Supervisor: Associate Professor Jonathan Edward Hodgess Roper

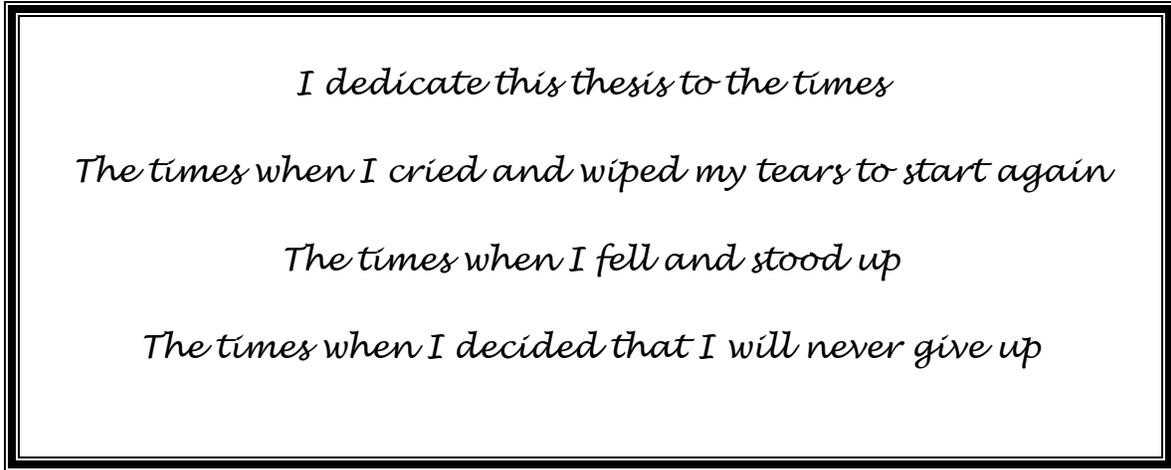


The picture above on this page is the calligraphic expression of *Ali un Wali Ullah*, which means that Ali (referring to Ali Ibn Abi Talib) is the guardian of God.



The written charm that my sister gave me in February 2022 to keep it with me all the time

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



A BIG THANK YOU

- Thank you, Dr. Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (Associate Professor, Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies and Program Director, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore), for your enormous support in my difficult times.
- Thank you Dr. Jonathan Edward Hodgess Roper (Associate Professor, Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore) for understanding my difficult situation and helping me get out of it.
- Thank you, Sayyed Casimir Sirhindi (my son), for understanding my hardships and extending your eight-year-old little helping hand.
- Thank you, Sidra Humayun (Sexual and Gender-based Violence-SGBV Expert), for your tremendous moral and emotional support during my difficult times.
- Thank you, Howaidah Farooqi (charm practitioner) for your trust and sharing your knowledge with me for this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always struggled and found ways to overcome physical, mental, and socio-cultural impediments that hinder their physical, mental, and social performance. Some of these barriers are beyond human comprehension. In order to deal with the unseen forces, humans used the power of words, especially charms. Charms are not only a way to find solutions to problems but are also a means of coping with situations that fall beyond human grasp. Charms may or may not be rooted in religion, but they certainly have a cultural dimension. Charms are objects or words that are supposed to have magical powers. A more detailed definition of charms is provided in chapter 2. It is important to mention that the word incantation is used as a synonym for charm in the thesis.

The Zulekhavi tradition of charming is a matrilineal tradition that exists in Multan city of Pakistan. Multan is one of the major cities of the Southern Punjab region of Pakistan situated 28 kilometers away to the east of the Chenab River. This matrilineal tradition has been kept alive for decades by its practitioners by passing on the oral knowledge from one generation to another but is now facing the threat of extinction. This tradition is practiced by women charmers and is meant to serve women only. Zulekha Bibi was the pioneer of using the knowledge of the charms for community healing. Before Zulekha Bibi, this knowledge was exclusively practiced in the family.

Howaidah Farooqi, the great great granddaughter of Zulekha Bibi and the fourth generation, who practices charming now and is the last one in the matrilineal chain to hold this knowledge. Howaidah Farooqi, has two sons and no daughter. According to the principles of the tradition, this knowledge is only to be passed on to the women in the family. So, this knowledge and the tradition will die here as she does not have a female heir to pass this knowledge to.

The thesis builds its structure on the foundation of the theoretical perspective of Ulrika Wolf-Knuts about charms as a means of coping. Wolf-Knuts explains the relationship of man and the supernatural world by quoting a text from a Nordic charm. This Nordic charm was part

of Anna Birgitta Rooth's work on Nordic folklore that Wolf-Knuts quotes in her scholarly work. Wolf-Knuts mentions, by quoting Anna Birgitta Rooth, that the purpose of the charms is magical and the aim is to fulfill the wishes of the person who pronounces them. These needs and wishes that are desired to be fulfilled could be of the person himself who pronounces the charms or of another person. Also the needs and wishes vary depending on the circumstances, for example, the need could be to find a solution to a particular problem or to gain access to additional amount of comfort in life.

This research looks into charms as a means of finding solution to human problems particularly related to those that women encounter in their day-to-day lives. It also attempts to capture the non-verbal aspect of the family folklore, which is one of the genres of folklore. The knowledge related to charms in the Zulekhavi family has not been explored and documented earlier. The attempt to record this knowledge through this research makes it novel in its own way.

The experiential knowledge in this research has been gathered through qualitative research methods. The interviews were conducted in the native language (Urdu) in order to gain as much access as possible to the knowledge. A total of 10 WhatsApp interviews were conducted along with 47 voice note messages that contained answers to the follow-up questions. The conduction of interviews began in January 2022 and lasted for a period of five months till May 2022. However, the collection of answers to follow-up questions through WhatsApp voice note messages continued till June 2022. The interviews were transcribed to the best possible accuracy and I take responsibility for the translation of the content to English and the transcription of the recorded interviews.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 contains sections related to background, historical glimpse of the Multan city where the charmer from the Zulekhavi family practice charms, theoretical framework that this thesis draws its strength from, methodology and the ethical issues that were taken in consideration while conducting the research.

Chapter 2 sheds light on the historical background of charms and how charms can be defined in an academic context. It also walks the reader through information about how the diagnosis is made before treating the clients with charms and what sort of problems are addressed using charms.

Chapter 3 acquaints the reader with some of my personal experiences regarding charms. These experiences revolve around my childhood observations and recent sensory experience of being a beneficiary of charming. This chapter will help provide the reader a sensorial understanding of charms and their impact on human beings.

Chapter 4 mainly focuses on the treatment of physical ailments through charms and what specific charms are used for different illnesses. Texts of charms are quoted in this section with the translation in English to help the reader understand the meaning of the charms used. This section also briefs the reader on what types of charms are used to treat chronic illnesses and also shares information of how charms are blended together with some incantations to treat some specific maladies.

Chapter 5 takes a step further and shares information about what is meant by the essence of a charm, and how divination plays its role in treatment through charms. It also talks about the clients and how they reciprocate in response to the treatment that they receive.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, is about how the knowledge was kept alive. What knowledge transfer mechanisms are in place to ensure that the knowledge is transferred accurately. It also talks about the characteristics of a charmer and then makes an attempt to analyze the whole tradition with a gender socio-cultural lens.

Chapter 1: Overview

1.1 Rationale

I grew up in a Muslim religious family and saw my grandmother and mother listening to the problems of the women who came to our house. I used to see our courtyard always filled with women and my grandmother sitting on the *Takht Posh* (a small wooden bed-like platform used in South Asian cultures to sit). The women used to come to our house as early as 7:00 a.m. in the morning and this visiting used to continue till the time of *Maghrib* (sunset). My grandmother only used to take prayer or lunch break during this time. Then after my grandmother's death, I saw my mother continuing the same routine.



Traditional *Takht Posh* used in South Asian houses. Picture source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/545709679845161935/>

In my childhood, I never had any idea about what this practice was but later when I was sensible enough, I realized that my grandmother and mother were some sort of community resource to whom the community women used to come to seek solutions to their problems. My grandmother and mother told the women to recite something, sometimes they exorcised them and sometimes they wrote something on different things (white paper, animal bones and ceramic plates etc.) and guided them what to do with them. I never figured out what this was because; one, being male members of the family, we were not allowed to interfere in this matter and second, seeing this happening from my childhood didn't trigger any curiosity in me.

In 2020, when I started studying Folkloristics and Applied Heritage Studies at the University of Tartu, I realized that the practice that I saw in my childhood at my home was a matrilineal

tradition of charming. It was a vernacular Islamic healing practice. The uniqueness of it was that it was only practiced by women and benefitted by women. I studied about charms and healing practices more and decided to document this tradition as part of my master's degree research.

1.2 Multan: The City of Saints

ملتان ما با جنتِ اعلیٰ برابر است

آہستہ پا بنہ کہ ملک سجدہ می کند

--- *Bahauddin Zakariya (Sufi Saint)*

“Multan is comparable to the great Paradise,
Tread slowly, the angels are paying obeisance here”

The city of Multan was part of the Early Harappan era of the Indus Valley Civilization. The oldest living city in history, the twin city of Rome, is said to have existed in 5000 BC. Rigveda was written here, Alexander the Great took over it, and the famous Chinese traveller Xuanzang visited here. Formerly known as the “City of Gold”, is now known among its residents as the “City of Saints” because of the number of shrines of sufi saints in the city. The city is located on the bank of Chenab River in the south of the Punjab province of Pakistan and has a population of 1,871,843 (6th Population and Housing Census 2017, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan). 99.37% of the total population of the city are Muslims whereas 0.54% are Christians. Hindus and Sikhs also make up a small portion of the religious minorities' population of Multan. Saraiki (Indo-Aryan language) is the main language spoken in Multan, however, Punjabi and Urdu are also spoken.



Multan circled on the map of Pakistan and Punjab respectively. Picture courtesy <https://simergphotos.com/2020/08/29/exclusive-photo-essay-the-mausoleum-of-pir-shams-in-multan-pakistan-through-the-lens-of-malik-mirza/>

The origin of the name of the city is unclear. According to the olden Hindu tradition, the name of Multan was ‘*Mulasthan*’ or ‘*Moolasthan*’. According to a local talebearer, the name of the city was ‘*Malhi Asthan*’. *Asthan* means place, so *Malhi Asthan* can be translated as Malhi’s place. Malhi was a local tribe who fought against Alexander the Great. This tribe still lives in Khanewal, Multan’s neighbouring city.

The Hindu religious manuscripts mention that Multan was founded by the famous Vedic sage Kashyapa. Alexander the Great received the fatal wound in the battle with the Mallians, the natives of Mulasthan. This place is known as “Khuni Burj” (Bloody Tower) in the modern city of Multan. Famous Chinese traveler Hieun Tsang and Berber traveler ibn Battutah visited Multan in 641 A.D. and 1333 A.D. respectively. (Government of the Punjab n.d.), (Wikipedia n.d.).

چهار چیز از تحفه ملتان

گرد، گرما، گدا و گورستان

(*Chahar cheez az tuhfa-e-Multan*

Gard, Garma, Gada o Goristan) – literal translation

“Four things with which Multan abounds
Dust, Heat, Beggars, and Burial Grounds”

– Persian saying (Guglani 2014, 29)

‘*Garma*’ meaning heat is one of the noticeable characters of the city of Multan. Historically, this city has worshipped sun and the first Aditya Sun Temple was built 5000 years ago. There are various tales about the sun in the oral history of Multan. One of the famous is related to the famous Sufi saint Shah Shams. *Shams* (Arabic) means sun. The story says that to show the residents of Multan his miraculous power, Shah Shams ordered the sun to come closer and cook the piece of meat in his hand. From that day onwards, Multan receives a lot of sun and is known for its scorching heat.

The ‘City of Saints’ has more than 300 saints’ tombs that are documented in various history books about Multan. The oral raconteurs indicate a greater number of saints whose final resting place is Multan. The residents of the city say that Multan has spiritual vibes because its foundation was laid by a famous sage.

1.3 Setting the stage: Theoretical construction, research methodology during COVID-19 pandemic and ethical issues

1.3.1 Theoretical construction

Stressful situations have pushed humans to find ways to come out of them and also to avoid them in the first place. Human beings react differently to different situations. Talking to friends, looking out for guidance from someone who has survived that particular stressful situation, resorting to use of substances that can lower the fear of the unwanted outcome of the crisis or calling for help from the unseen forces are some of the few responses or, in other words, defence mechanisms that human beings adopt to cope with stressful situations. What shall all these efforts made to minimize the effects and after-effects of a problematic situation, be called? This question must have been intriguing for the scientists and researchers studying

the social psychology of human beings. There is an interesting difference between defense and coping mechanisms. Defense mechanism is about the way individuals manage stress whereas coping mechanism is a purposeful and conscious process that involves cognition to deal with stressful situations.

Coping can be simplified as, cognizant and oblivious efforts humans put in to unravel issues and reduce tension. It is the in-built troubleshooting system of the mind that intends to reestablish its ideal working state. It is important here to note that coping theories are divided into two different parameters; a) trait-oriented theories versus state-oriented theories, b) microanalytic approach versus macroanalytic approach.

The trait-oriented theories focus on the early recognition of a person's resources and tendencies related to coping, while the state-oriented theories emphasizes the actual coping of an individual and the outcome of his application of coping methods or strategies.

On the other hand, the microanalytic approach studies a wide variety of specific and concrete coping strategies, while the macroanalytic approach concentrates on fundamental and abstract coping methodologies. (Explorable n.d.)

Until 1967, coping was not part of the *Psychological Abstracts* (a journal and index periodical published between 1927 – 2006 years by American Psychological Association) as a separate category (Zeidner and Endler 1996, 3). In 1984, Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman, who were amongst the forerunners of coping theory, defined coping as follows:

constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.

(Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 141)

Freud's earlier work is key to understanding the psychological aspect of defence. His work on the subject mostly focused on the observation that troubling thoughts are sometimes not

part of the consciousness. Freud's theories evolved over time and so did the concepts of repression and defence. (Zeidner and Endler 1996, 3)

Anna Freud, an Austrian-born British psychoanalyst, and founder of child psychoanalysis has tremendously contributed to the concept of defence. Her work is important in the promotion of numerous ideas about the concept of defence, which had perceptible impact on the works in the field of social sciences. One of the unique contributions is her observation about how human beings use defence mechanisms. She mentions that although there are numerous defence mechanisms available, but individuals use selective mechanisms of defence based on their situations and circumstances. (Zeidner and Endler 1996, 4)

The work done by most of the psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud on human defence mechanisms was from the perspective of psychology and psychoanalysis. Their work helps understand human defense mechanisms from the perspective of social psychology and facilitates the readership of this research to have an overview of difference between human defense and coping mechanisms.

Ulrika Wolf-Knuts' work is more relevant to this research. She approaches coping from a socio-cultural approach. In this essay Wolf-Knuts studies Nordic verbal charms and analyzes how they were used as a means of coping in the times of difficulty. She mentions that coping is a cultural and a very personal process which has roots in the culture and the socialization of the individual. "Coping is also a culture-specific process. And furthermore, it is also a very personal process that is influenced by the individual's personal experiences and characteristic traits" (Wolf-Knuts 2009, 66).

She further mentions that coping is a socially ingrained and cultural activity. Times of distress present a person with both positive and negative opportunities. It is up to the person whether he/she opts for the positive or the negative opportunity. If a person opts for the positive opportunity in times of distress then it is called coping.

Coping is a cultural, socially anchored, repetitive activity that opens a person's eyes to new opportunities in times of distress. This sounds very optimistic – there are always new opportunities – but the opportunities need not be positive; they can also be negative; man can decide to give in. The main thing is that he has decided how to react to what happens. Man creates a system of orientation along which he conducts his coping process. The system of orientation is a general world view made up of customs, values, relationships, beliefs and personal characteristics. This system is not stable or unchangeable. On the contrary, it changes with life so that some factors that once were central may later become ephemeral. (Wolf-Knuts 2009, 64).

Wolf-Knuts further explains charms and choosing between available options as a means of coping by putting forward an example. She mentions different options in the example that a farmer could have and then how he opts for one based on the social and cultural orientation.

Choosing between available options is also a way of coping. For example. When the farmer chose to visit or to call upon a specific sorcerer, he coped in such a way that he could be happy when the cow recovered and he consequently got a good milk yield and other products for consumption and for sale. If the animal did not recover, the farmer would have to find some explanation for this, and that explanation would give him significance in the new situation. He would start a process of attribution, i.e. a process of creating meaning in the critical situation. He would find some person, being or circumstance to blame for his failure. He would find an explanation to fill his need for significance and for meaningful reasons for this unsuccessful outcome, so that it would seem logical and open up a new perspective on life and new ways of living. In my view, attribution is one of the means by which man copes with life occurrences. However, unsuccessful charms are seldom found in the collections, simply because there is no mention of the real effect of charming. (Wolf-Knuts 2009, 65)

Referring to the psychology of religion Wolf-Knuts says that it can be helpful in further understanding charms and the interpretation of charm texts. A problem carries both social

and economic costs and it is up to the person how to handle the difficult situation. A person might give in or decide to take up the challenge. If the person decides to fight against the odds, then use of charm is one of the options to deal with the difficult situation. Wolf-Knuts further mentions that uttering a charm can be one of the ways of dealing with a difficult situation.

The psychology of religion might give us some good ideas on how to interpret the charm texts. By using the psychology of religion we can perhaps interpret charms by cautiously maintaining that man's psychological needs in critical situations have not changed much over the centuries. In any case, in a rural household, the crisis incurred severe economic and, consequently, existential risks. Man might adjust himself to the difficult situation; he might give in, and no charm would be needed. On the other hand, he might counteract it, both physically and mentally. Then, more or less consciously, he would decide to oppose the powers that caused the crisis and try to thwart them. Saying a charm would be one of several ways of coping with the dangerous situation. (Wolf-Knuts 2009, 64)

This thesis constructs its formation on Ulrika Wolf-Knuts' scholarly work of charms as a means of coping. However, to clarify the difference between defense and coping mechanism, some examples and works of Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud in the field of social psychology are mentioned additionally.

This research will study the use of charms as culturally-driven coping mechanism that individuals opt to resort to in order to address particular problematic situations.

1.3.2 Methodology

The purpose of the research project was to document the knowledge and practices in the Zulekhavi family regarding charms and healing. This knowledge is available with the female incantation practitioners of the Zulekhavi family. Hence, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with the main interlocutor. Initially couple of informal discussions were conducted

with the primary respondent in order to have a general understanding of the tradition. This helped set the stage for the data collection and also built the rapport.

Since the aim of the inquiry was to document the available knowledge and analyze its various dimensions with a gender lens, an open-ended questionnaire was devised that was pivotal to the research. The open-ended questionnaire was designed to acquire more information that could be helpful in analysing the tradition.

Tremblay mentions it as a technique that "...is preeminently suited to the gathering of the kinds of qualitative and descriptive data that are difficult or time-consuming to unearth through structured data-gathering techniques such as questionnaire surveys." (Tremblay 1957, 688).

COVID-19 pandemic made traveling and fieldwork difficult, but it also presented an opportunity to try new ways of data collection from the field. The research involved using online and digital tools to collect data from the field. Data collection through digital means saved financial resources and time but it also presented its own challenges. For example, availability of some digital means to the interlocutors and quality of the internet connectivity were the prime challenges.

To ensure smooth and uninterrupted data collection, instant digital communication platforms like WhatsApp was used. WhatsApp is a platform that is widely used and to an extent works well with low quality internet connections. It is important to mention here that WhatsApp is the most commonly used communication platform in Pakistan, which is used by both urban and rural and literate and illiterate populations. It was convenient to use WhatsApp rather than any other technical communication platform like Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The interviews were recorded, and supplementary questions were conducted through WhatsApp's voice messaging facility.

1.3.3 Ethical issues

The prime ethical consideration was to ensure that the charms and the procedure of performing charms are presented in a way that does not compromise confidentiality. Some of the charms were not allowed by the charmer to be mentioned as part of this research and they are mentioned in the thesis in a generalized manner. The purpose of the research was explained to the interlocutor and prior permission was obtained before the data collection process was initiated.

The interviews were conducted in Urdu and the sole responsibility of transcribing and translating the interview content lies with the researcher. Earnest effort has been made to ensure that the content is translated accurately, however, synonyms of some of the local phrases and charm-related terms mentioned by the charmer during the interviews were difficult to find. It was ensured in close consultation with the interlocutor that appropriate and equivalent words are used that reflect the precise meaning of the term.

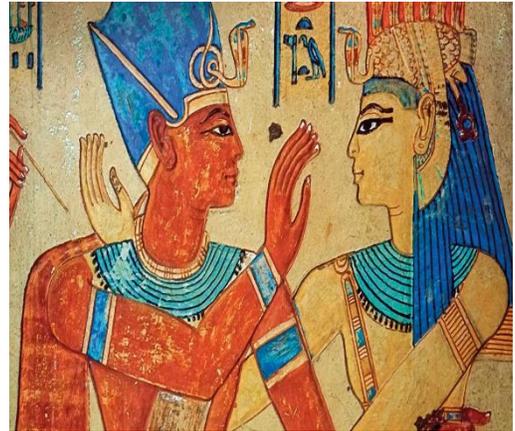
The data obtained will only be used for this research and not for any other purpose. It is important to mention that where required, names of individuals and places have been changed to ensure the privacy.

Chapter 2: Historical overview and definition of charms

2.1 Historical background

It is difficult to trace back the origin and history of charms and charming. However, recorded accounts shed light on the fact that Sumerians, Assyrians, and Egyptians used charms to cure various illnesses. It is important to note that healing was the exclusive domain of priestesses and queens in these cultures. Looking at the religious dimension of the healing, it reveals that healing was attributed to the goddesses and deities. (Chamberlain 1981, 16)

For example, a picture on the wall of the tomb of King Rameses III of Egypt shows Isis (Egyptian goddess) as a healer. Queen Mentuhetep (2300 BC), Hatshepsut (1500 BC) and Cleopatra (100 BC) were noteworthy physicians.



The goddess Isis embraces Pharaoh Ramses III.

Picture source:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2020/03/worship-of-this-egyptian-goddess-spread-from-egypt-to-england>

The gendered role of women in the family and society furthered their role as caregivers and hence it augmented their knowledge about healing. Midwifery was supposed to be exclusively a woman's job. In order to deal with situations midwives coupled different knowledge areas like herbal remedies, food-based healing, emotional healing etc.

In the book, *The Daughters of Hārītī*, Santi Rozario and Geoffrey Samuel talk about the history of women's role as birth attendants and healers in South and Southeast Asia. *Hārītī* is known to be the archaic Buddhist goddess of childbirth.

The 'daughters of Hārītī' are the birth attendants, midwives, and female healers of the South and Southeast Asian region. Her [Hārītī] worship seems to have been particularly important in Gandhara and Mathura (present-day Pakistan and North

India, first century BCE to fourth century CE). Her legend describes her as a child-eating demoness who was converted by the Buddha. (Rozario and Samuel 2014, 1)

After the spread of Islam in the subcontinent, the religious aspect of the healing practices changed but women healers continued to perform their roles in their communities. In the communities that converted to Islam, the practices of resorting to deities and goddesses for help changed to monotheism.

The roots of the Zulekhavi tradition can be traced to the North Indian knowledge of healing. Charmer Howaidah F. (the main interlocutor) recalls that her great grandmother Zulekha Bibi learned healing from one of the Kashmiri Pandit families. Zulekha Bibi was born and raised in the district of Kupwara in Indian Kashmir. She learnt the healing practice from the practitioners in her family and nearby communities.

Zulekha Bibi migrated to Multan (Punjab, Pakistan) many years before the 1947 India-Pakistan partition. She brought this knowledge to Multan and started the healing practice. She then transferred this knowledge to her daughter Aziz Fatima. Then this knowledge was transferred to Aziz Fatima's daughter Shameem Akhtar and then to Howaidah Farooqi.

2.2 What are charms?

What is a charm? What makes a verbal utterance or a written piece a charm? In order to understand the mechanics of charms, it is important to comprehend the very basics, which is the 'definition'. There are many academic and non-academic definitions available that touch the material and non-material aspects of charms. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary mentions that charm can either be an object or a word that contains magical powers. Renowned academician and expert in English charms, Jonathan Roper mentions that verbal charms are formulaic in character and are repetitive. He mentions that its an enactment of repetitive sets of words. In the following paragraphs, non-academic and academic definitions of charms are provided to have a better understanding of what charms are.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a charm is “an object or saying that is thought to have magical powers, such as the ability to bring good luck.” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.)

Jonathan Roper exquisitely sheds light on what a charm is. It comprises of two aspects: a) definitional and, b) gestural. He underscores the definitional aspect of the charm, which is "*force of patterned traditional utterance, a force which, when performed in a certain arena, and sometimes accompanied by gesture and medicine, has been credited with the power to bring about changes in health, fortune, safety and emotional state. So, verbal charms, or what are now commonly known as “spells”, could be defined as traditional verbal forms intended by their effect on supernature to bring about change in the world in which we live.*" (Roper 2003, 8)

Islamic mythical fable narrated by Charmer Howaidah F. to emphasize the power of words

When Adam was departing heaven, God gave him certain gifts before he leaves heaven. Satan was listening to this, and he shouted that you are giving him the gifts that will bring him in a powerful position. Why you haven't given me the power. God replied, “okay, I will give you some too.”

So, the God gave three gifts to Adam and three to the Satan.

God asked Adam, 1) whosoever in your lineage will circumambulate Kaaba, I will forgive him and if someone asks for forgiveness after committing a sin, I will forgive him, and this opportunity would be available to him till his death. 2) I will grant you the power to choose between virtue and sin. 3) I will give you the Power of the Word so you can heal.

Then the God asked Satan, 1) you will be able to see humans, but the humans will not be able to see you. 2) I give you the power to enter the human body and move inside his body by circulating in his blood. 3) you will be capable of creating delusion and paranoid in human hearts.

Simply stated, “A *verbal charm*.....is a traditional form of words thought to have a direct effect in the world, usually of a protecting, healing kind. These forms of words are often formulaic in character and repetitive in structure, possessing a high degree of sound-patterning. They are intended, when performed by a legitimate person (often using special accompanying actions and accessories) to bring about change in the world in which we live (e.g. to heal someone, to cause someone to fall in love with another, to encourage a cow to give milk, to make the rain fall, etc.), or to serve an apotropaic function (e.g. to protect someone, to prevent something bad from happening), or to discover some information (such as the location of stolen property or the direction of someone’s affections). When delivered orally, such a charm is termed an *oral charm*. A *written charm* is a similar traditional form of words to an oral charm found in written form. The words may, for instance, be written on paper and worn as a talisman, or they may be engraved on an object.....” (Roper 2005, 15)

Jonathan Roper strengthens the definition of charm by further elaborating on the gestural aspect of charms. He refers to it as an ‘enactment’, adding up that “*Healing charms may be accompanied by particularly elaborate rituals involving massaging or stroking, blowing upon or spitting on the sick part of the patient, the application of special preparations etc.*” (Roper 2003, 37)

The effectiveness of charms is strongly reliant on and interconnected with performance, timing, and remedies. An effort has been made in the current research to study these aspects and understand performance of charms holistically.

Monika Kropej mentions about the importance of moon phases in performance of charms in Slovenia. She reveals that moon phases “can greatly affect the outcome of a ritual, hastening or impeding the healing process”. (Kropej 2003, 67). Not only the different phases of moon are important in the performance of charms but also the days and the specific times like dawn, midday, or dusk. For example, Thursday in general or first or second Thursday of the lunar month holds an important position in performing certain charms and *Istikhara* respectively. The performance of *Istikhara* is discussed in detail in the section ‘Diagnosis’.

Inter alia, the therapeutic part of performance of charms is often based on the local and historical knowledge of homebased remedies. This knowledge is mostly passed on orally from one generation to the other or is based on observance. Mentioning the case of Germanic charms, Andrea Bargan says that they “contained true medical prescriptions, including some borrowings from the classical Greek-Latin world” (Bargan 2017, 34). It is noteworthy to mention that other types of material culture or objects like foods, comb, animal bones, knives or accessories play an important part in the performance of charms.

Chapter 3: My personal experiences

I am of the viewpoint that personal experiences, be those your own or someone else's, help a lot to understand a phenomenon. They open up a new dimension, which is human and carries the emotional aspect of the situation. Another aspect of it is that individuals can easily relate to experiences and emotions.

3.1 Childhood memories

In my ancestral home in Multan, most of the time I used to wake up in the morning around 6 a.m. Not because I was an early riser but because someone used to knock the front door so hard that it used to break my sleep. The knocker was always some woman who wanted to see my grandmother. My grandmother's name was Aziz Fatima, and she was a famous charmer in the community. My grandmother's name never made sense to me, and I always used to think why this name was a mix of masculine and feminine names. Aziz is a masculine name whereas Fatima is a feminine name.

The women visiting my grandmother (Aziz Fatima) used to sit with her for long hours and were always discussing any problem. Some used to come with minor health issues whereas others sought her help for matters related to their status in their in-laws' house. Sometimes she used to listen to their problems and sometimes she used to write them something and asked them to put it under any heavy object where no one can find it out. That heavy object was mostly the footboard because in our community beds in the house is the object that is very less moved from its place. I never understood that how this woman's issue will be solved by putting some written piece of paper under the footboard.

3.2 My recent experience (February 2022)

I was undergoing a tough personal situation in my life and things were falling apart. Everything seemed to be out of control. I shared with my elder sister (who performs charms) about my problems, and she sent me two written charms via postal mail. One was written

with the black ink and the other with saffron. She mentioned that the charm written with saffron was prepared on the night of *Shab-e-Barat* (also known as the Night of Forgiveness). According to the charmers' viewpoint, any charm (be it oral or written) performed this night has more power and impact.

Shab-e-Barat is one of the prominent festivals celebrated by the Muslims. It is celebrated on the 15th night of the 8th lunar month (Shaban) of the Islamic calendar. The night starts from the sunset of the 15th and ends at dawn.

In Islamic mythology, it is said that in this night the distance between the Creator and the creature lessens. God, with His angels, comes to the first sky from the seventh and says that "Who wants forgiveness, I will forgive you. Who wants food, I will provide food", and God says this over again and again until dawn. So, the Muslims spend this night praying for their better future. Another side of this festival is that kids light firecrackers on this night starting from the sunset till late in the night, which makes this night culturally similar to the Hindu festival of the lights 'Divali'.

My sister asked me to keep this charm at a higher place in my room and I will dream(s) in next few days. Once I see a dream, I have to tell her what I saw. I noticed two things after I received the charm. One, the next morning of the night when I received the charm, I woke up with a dizzy head. It was a feeling that is close to the feeling of a pleasant vertigo. I was surprised at my situation. I had normal dinner last night and slept normally but woke up with this really strange feeling that lasted for an hour or so. Second, few days later I saw a dream.

The Dream

I saw that I am sitting on the roof-top room of my ancestral house in Multan and one of my younger sisters comes upstairs and tells me that my horse is here. A few moments later, I see a grey horse comes upstairs and I say "ohhhh, he is *Zuljanah*". *Zuljanah* was the horse used by Hussain Ibn Ali in the battle of Karbala, Hussain Ibn Ali being the grandson of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and son of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam of Shia Muslims.

I was thinking in my dream that what can we give this horse to eat. Suddenly I hear my mother say that give him this. There was cabbage and some leaves lying next to her to which she pointed. I picked them and gave the horse to eat. When I was feeding the horse, I see a plastic lid in his mouth. I try to take that lid out of his mouth with some fear that what if the horse chews my hand. But to my surprise, the horse opens his mouth and allows me to take the lid out of his mouth. It looks that the horse was tamed. Then I wake up from my sleep.

I told both the situations to her and she explained me that every *Kalam* has a ‘*Moakkal*’ (guardian angel) who protects the user from any odd things. *Kalam* is an Arabic word which literally means poetic writing or work. The word *Kalam* is used in our family to mention the Quranic verse(s) that are used for charms. -The word *Kalam* is also used to say, “Word of God”.

My sister further mentioned that the dizzy feeling could be the result of the charm, but it will adjust with you. Then she interpreted the dream as below:

“The horse resembles any *hawai* creature (referring to the invisible creature). Because *Burraq* was also a horse.

[*Burraq* was the horse that the Prophet Muhammad rode to meet God on the seventh sky – Islamic mythology].

And when in your dream you call this horse *Zuljanah*, that means that this is the *Moakkal* (guardian angel) of the charm that I sent you. As you mentioned that this horse in your dream is tamed and is not trying to harm you or is not wild or stubborn, which means that this is a good sign and points to the *Moakkal* of the *Naqsh* (charm). Angels are white in color, but God has assigned different duties to different angels. This grey color horse must be representing any specific duty. Grey and Khaki (sand like color) are the colors of the earthy metals and are natural colors (they are not synthetic). At times water and soil looks to us as grey. Some metals appear to us in grey color. This is a good sign. If this horse had appeared to you in any dark color like firey or in anger, then it would have been a bad sign. The horse himself comes to you in your dream which means that you now will have to take

care of the charm that I wrote for you. And taking care of it means that you must do good deeds and keep your actions right. Be good to other people and don't think negative about anyone. If you will keep your actions right, this charm will benefit you; otherwise it can turn against you and harm you as well. You saw that you are taking out some plastic thing from the horse's mouth, which points out to the fact that this charm will help you take out negative and unnecessary things out from your life. Plastic represents garbage and is harmful. No human or animal eats plastic, so it is pointing towards things that are unnecessary and useless in your life.”

It is really difficult to express what I underwent or my experiential feelings in a manner that others can understand because at times I feel that vocabulary isn't supportive enough to give meaning to the sensorial experiences. Occasionally it is difficult to make others understand about your experience. People come from diverse backgrounds, and they have their own socialization experiences that they refer to, which also acts for them as reference points. However, I have learnt that people understand experiences easily once they can relate to them.

After receiving the written charms, I started feeling confident and hopeful. I observed that things started falling in place. I received couple of job interview invitations and things started happening the easy way. I also received some financial assistance that helped me manage the financial aspect of my life.

Chapter 4: Mechanics of charms

4.1 Diagnosis

Diagnosis is the first step before treating a client. Diagnosis is made in two ways, first, by talking to the client and understanding the cause of it. Most of the clients come with their social or domestic issues. Talking to them about their issue also helps the charmer understand the root cause of the problem. If things are not clear, then the charmer uses *Istikhara* to diagnose the problem and to understand that whether the client is under the influence of magic or any invisible creature (mostly *djinn*).

To understand the social or domestic issue, the charmer uses the technique that scholars have described as the “Active Listening” technique. Active Listening “is making a conscious effort to hear, understand, and retain information that’s being relayed to you. It involves more than listening to the words they say. Instead, you consciously analyze what you hear, and try to pick up on intent, content, and emotion from the speaker. Active listening requires paying attention.” (Colorado State University Global n.d.)

In case of any family dispute, the charmer tries to understand what triggered the dispute. The majority of the issues are the result of wrong perceptions or the understanding of others’ viewpoints. The main interlocutor Charmer Howaidah Farooqi mentions that:

These days, people are more reactionary rather than responsive. They lie in their relationships and have high expectations in their relations. Such situations are controllable, and, in this case, we counsel the clients to handle the situation wisely and not reacting to it. Most of the situations can be handled by overpassing or forgiving. The client is advised to *forgive* in order to avoid further complexities.

It is important to note that forgiving is one of the vital practices of all the religions of the world especially Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

If the things are beyond counseling, then the charmer uses *Istikhara* to understand that whether the problem is because of any external influence or not. *Istikhara* is a process in which the charmer seeks help from the God to choose its course of action. Ibn Hajr, one of the companions of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, said, “*Istikharah* means asking God to help one make a choice, meaning choosing the best of two things where one needs to choose one of them.” (Al-Bukhari, Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 97, Chapter 10, Hadith no. 7390)

The charmer performs the *Istikhara* by offering two unit (*raka'ah*) of voluntary prayer. *Raka'ah* is a unit used to refer to a series of movements starting from *qayam* and finishing at *sajida*. Once this series of movements is complete, it is considered as one *raka'ah*. There are minimum two *raka'at* (plural of *raka'ah*) in one Muslim prayer.

After that the charmer recites the words (supplication) for performing the *Istikhara* and then goes to bed for sleep and talks to no one after the charmer has read the words. It is important to note here that the *Istikhara* supplication shall only be said in Arabic. Then through the dream the charmer gets the guidance. The guidance is not clear in the sense that you are informed to do this thing or the other. Rather whatever the charmer sees in the dream, she interprets it according to her knowledge and experience about dream interpretation.

The supplication of *Istikhara* is as follows:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ، وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاقْدُرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ، وَاقْدُرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ

“O Allah! I ask guidance from Your knowledge, and power from Your might and I ask for Your great blessings. You are capable and I am not. You know and I do not and You know the unseen. O Allah! If You know that this job is good for my religion and my subsistence and in my Hereafter—(or said: If it is better for my present and later needs)—Then You ordain it for me and make it easy for me to get, And then bless me in it, and if You know that this job

is harmful to me In my religion and subsistence and in the Hereafter–(or said: If it is worse for my present and later needs)–Then keep it away from me and let me be away from it. And ordain for me whatever is good for me, and make me satisfied with it”

Another way to perform the *Istikhara* is to recite Surah Fateha (the first surah of the Quran) 21 times with Darood (Arabic phrase containing salutation upon Prophet Muhammad) recited 3 times in the first and the last. After reciting, blow on the right hand is made and then the performer sleeps sideways facing Kaaba (a building at the center of Al-Haram Mosque, Mecca, Saudi Arabia).

Darood is a Persian word, which means praising and equivalently used for the Arabic word *ṣalawāt* (divine blessings on Prophet Muhammad). There are different types of Daroods but the most famous one is called Darood-e-Ibrahimi (Darood of Abraham).

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

“O Allah send peace on Prophet Muhammad and to the family of Prophet Muhammad as you sent peace on Prophet Ibrahim and the family of Prophet Ibrahim. Indeed, you are praiseworthy and glorious. O Allah, bless the Prophet Muhammad and the family of Prophet Muhammad as you blessed Prophet Ibrahim and the family of Prophet Ibrahim. Indeed, you are praiseworthy and glorious.”

It is also evident from the Islamic books of Hadith that the Prophet Muhammad encouraged and taught his companions about conducting *Istikhara* (Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 19, Chapter 25, Hadith 1162 – Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 97, Chapter 10, Hadith no. 7390 & Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 19, Chapter 25, Hadith 1162). Hence, the charmers in the Islamic societies take it as evidence to perform *Istikhara* as part of the charming practice and finally deciding about the treatment of their clients. In other words, it can be said that *Istikhara* is the first step of devising the treatment plan of the clients.

One of the parts of the diagnosis is also to assess that if the client is affected by magic, how old is the magic spell casted on her. For example, some clients are under the influence of magic for 5 years or more, but they don't realize it and when the things get worse, they seek the guidance of the spiritual healer. As a charmer it is important to first help the client get out of the influence of magic.

4.2 Problems related to livelihood

Majority of the clients come with problems related to their social or domestic lives and among them the prominent issue is related to their livelihood. Clients mention that there has been decrease in their livelihood or they are experiencing decrease in the livelihood opportunities.

It is difficult for the clients to understand the contributing factors that are affecting their livelihood. For example, COVID-19 has badly impacted everyone's livelihood these days and people of the third world countries are not able to keep up with the changing trends. Digitalization and economic changes happening in the world have also impacted our lives. – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi (WhatsApp interview dated 16 January 2022)

The above statement of the charmer also indicates that the charmer takes account of the other factors that contribute to a problem. This also points to the fact that the charmer is using a holistic approach when it comes to proposing or finding a solution to any problem.

To further assess the reasons of decreased livelihood, the charmer performs *Istikhara* to know the causes behind it. Whether it has been affected by magic or any other type of spell. Once the charmer receives the sign that someone has casted magic then she proposes the treatment according to the severity of the problem. Generally, the following treatment is proposed.

First of all, it is important for the client to offer prayer regularly. Because this makes the treatment effective. Then the client is told to recite "يا باسط، يا رزاق" or "اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ" "اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ" or to recite Surah Al-Waqi'a (the 56th surah of Quran) at the time of *Isha* (Isha

is the time after sunset when Muslims offer the fifth and final prayer of the day). Time is very important when it comes to reciting the *Kalam*. There are certain *Kalams* that are recited in the morning and others in the evening. When and which *Kalam* to recite depends on the *Taseer* (essence) of the *Kalam*. Based on the *Taseer* of the *Kalam*, *Sa'at* (moment or time) is recommended for recitation. The *Taseer* of the *Kalam* will be discussed in the thesis later. The number of the times the client has to recite these *Kalams* also depends on the nature and severity of the magic casted on the client.”

Normally the client is asked to recite these *Kalams* 33 times but in other scenarios the *Kalams* are also recited 99 or 1001 times. The number of recitation of the *Kalam* depends on the nature and gravity of the problem. A *Kalam* for a specific problem is to be recited 33 times but the same *Kalam* is recited for another problem 99 times and 1001 times for another issue.

Charmer Howaidah Farooqi mentioned that while diagnosing the issue, the reason of the problem is categorized according to the following:

- Magic
- *Saaya* (bedeviled)
- the will of the God

(WhatsApp interview of Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 31st March, 2022)

The charmer also changes the prescription depending on above mentioned categories.

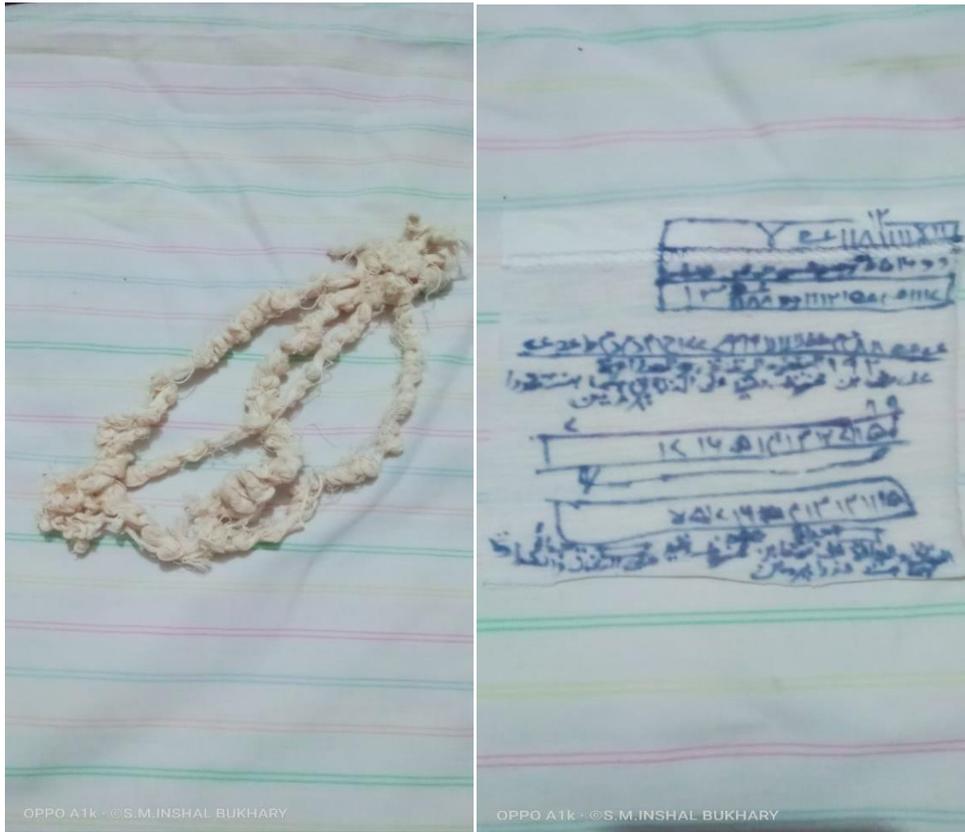
4.3 Family disputes

The family disputes require a lot of in-depth understanding because it is really difficult to understand things by only listening to the one side of the story. “People’s behaviours have changed a lot and they show less tolerance towards others.” – WhatsApp interview of Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 31st March, 2022.

The charmer tries to assess the situation by listening carefully to what the client is saying. If the problem can be solved through counseling, then the client is guided to have a look at her

way of looking at and dealing with the situations. I think that this way of dealing with and understanding the situations very much resembles with the Buddhist practice of looking at and correcting one's own self.

If the problem persists, then the charmer performs Istikhara to understand whether it is the magic that has been casted on the client to create disturbance in the house or the house is possessed by any evil spirit.



Far left picture:
White raw yarn is used to wrap written charms. Blue colour yarn is also used but selection of yarn colour depends on the nature of the problem to be addressed.

Left picture:
Charm is written on the piece of an under-vest. This charm is used to address extramarital issues. It is either kept near a fireplace or in the sun.

Picture courtesy:
Charmer
Howaidah Farooqi

In case magic is spoiling the family relations of the client, then the client is asked to recite the four *Qul* (Surah Kafirun, Surah, Ikhlas, Surah Falak and Surah Naas – they are popularly known as four *Qul* because they start with the Arabic word *Qul* قل). In other situations, the client is also asked to recite the following *Ayat* (verse) of Surah Taha:

وَأَلْقَ مَا فِي يَمِينِكَ تَلْقَفْ مَا صَنَعُوا إِنَّمَا صَنَعُوا كَيْدُ سَاجِرٍ وَلَا يَفْلِحُ السَّاجِرُ حَيْثُ أَتَى. فَأَلْقَى السَّحَرَةُ سُجَّدًا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا بِرَبِّ هَارُونَ وَمُوسَى.

(Cast what is in your right hand, and it will swallow up what they have made, for what they have made is no more than a magic trick. And magicians can never succeed wherever they go. So the magicians fell down in prostration, declaring, “We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.”)

This *ayat* (verse) from Surah Taha is normally recited 21 times, but the recitation cycle can also change depending on the severity of the problem and the condition of the client. The aftereffects of reciting these verses are so strong that at times clients can't bear them. For example, the evil spirits start troubling them more. In this case, the charmer takes the responsibility of reciting these verses. The charmer asks the client to provide either their shirt or a photograph on which these verses are recited.

Besides reciting *kalam* (*Wazeefa*) clients are given blessed water or edibles. In most of the proposed solutions, the client is asked to bring any edible that has white color. Sugar is preferred in this case. The charmer recites the oral charm and blows on the sugar and asks the client to use it in her daily routine (adding it to tea, milk or in any other way). This reduces the impact of magic on the client. The client is also asked to regularly share her condition or any dreams that she sees. The dreams are interpreted by the charmer and the treatment is changed according to the signs in the dreams.

Chapter 5: Treatment

5.1 Physical ailments

“The number of patients suffering from physical ailments has increased over the period of 20 years. When I used to go to the hospital with my mother some 20 years ago, I used to see few patients at the hospital but now the number has increased. Now you see 600 to 700 patients in the hall waiting for their turn. One of the reasons that I see of the increase in physical ailments is that people have become materialistic. They now believe that money can do everything which has put them in the race to earn money. This has taken away their mental peace and increased their anxiety and stress. And you know that mental stress also results in physical problems.” – WhatsApp interview of Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 31st March, 2022.

The other day-to-day ailments that the people come with are headaches, toothaches, stomachaches, swollen eyes or blurry eyesight, ear pain and problems related to pregnancy and conceiving. The treatment for these ailments is combined with home remedies. Oral charms are performed on home remedies to have greater impact and heal the patient quickly.

Often times, charms are also used as a first aid treatment before the patient gets medical attention. For example, in situations where the patients get sick in the middle of the night or they can't arrange any mobility service in time, they are given the treatment using oral or written charms. Toothaches, stomachaches, and snakebites or poisonous bites are some of the issues that are treated by the charmer when the situation becomes troubling.

5.2 Treatment of physical ailments

The bodily ailments are treated with charms. Mostly the treatment is done through verbal charms but if the disease has strongly gripped the human body, then charms are written on different objects and given to the patient. Mostly the charms are written on edibles including

porcelain plates, and bread. Also verbal charms are recited and blown on edibles including milk, water etc. in order to increase the healing impact.

Treatment of some of the physical ailments through charms is described in the section below because these are the most common ones that the clients come with.

5.2.1 Headache

Headache is the most common problem that the women come with. “Women take care of their domestic chores which is a tiring job. No one acknowledges it or understands the amount of effort a woman has to put in order to make everyone comfortable at home. In this, they forget about themselves. They forget to take care of themselves. They don’t drink enough water and don’t eat timely. This triggers headache. I ask them to first drink plenty of liquids to keep yourself hydrated and keep an eye on your eating habits.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi



Charm written on a wooden comb used to treat headaches.

Picture courtesy: Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

For the treatment of headache, the client is asked to put her hand on the top of her head and recite God’s 50th name "يا شهيد" (O, The All Observing Witness) or "وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ" (and We have not sent you, except as a mercy to the worlds). These have to be recited 41 times and either 9 or 11 times respectively and it has to be recited after regular intervals till the headache goes away.

5.2.2 *Toothache*

“Children are the ones who have toothache the most. They eat a lot of sweet and don’t brush their teeth regularly.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

Clove is used as a treatment for immediate relief from toothache. The charmer recites on cloves or clove oil and asks the client to keep them at home and use whenever they need. The clove is placed on the tooth that is aching. The other treatment is that the charmer puts the finger on the place of the toothache and recites يا شهيد (O, The All Observing Witness) or the client can do it herself as well.

The charmer also asks the client to boil the leaves of Azadirachta Indica (a tree of the mahogany family) and bring the water. Then oral charm is performed on the water and the client is asked to rinse the mouth several times a day with this water.

The other home remedies that are used for toothache and performed oral charm upon are:

1. Grind alum finely and mix it with salt. Applying it on teeth helps relieve toothache. The charmer performs oral charm on the powder and asks the client to apply it on the teeth.
2. Grind clove finely and add few drops of lemon juice to it. Apply the mixture on the teeth helps relieve toothache.
3. Grind garlic and add few drops of honey to it. Applying the mixture on the teeth also helps relieve the pain.

5.2.3 *For snakebite/bee sting/other poisonous bites*

In case of snakebite, it is important to immediately stop the spread of the venom. Tie the affected part (in the direction where the blood is flowing to the rest of the body) tightly with a piece of cloth or a string so that the poison doesn’t spread to the rest of the body. Then

mark a circle around the bitten area with the index finger and recite Ayat-ul-Qursi (Throne Verse or the Verse of the Throne - 255th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Quran) or recite وَإِذَا بَطَشْتُمْ بَطْشَتُمْ جَبَّارِينَ [And when you seize, you seize (as) tyrants].

The circle marked around the bitten area will not allow the poison to flow to the rest of the body and reciting the above verses will neutralize the poison. Ayat-ul-Qursi has to be recited either 3, 5 or 7 times.

5.2.4 *Stubborn/crying child*

Small children often show behaviour that is irritating to the parents. They show stubbornness or cry without any reason. “It is important to understand that why the child is showing such behaviour. Is it because of the negligent attitude of his/her mother or there is some other reason? Mothers have a lot on their plate. They have to take care of household chores. Some of them do jobs. In this, at times the child gets ignored.”

Despite of efforts to remove the social causes of child’s stubbornness, if the problems persists then the charmer steps in and treats the issue. The client is asked to recite Ayat-ul-Qursi 7 times after offering every prayer. It is important to recite Ayat-ul-Qursi and insufflate (blow) on the child’s face. The other way is to say Azan (call for prayer) in child’s ears: 7 times in right ear and 5 times in left ear. The flowing text of Azan is considered as one unit. The unit is to be recited 7 and 5 times in right and left ear respectively.

Text of Azan

الله اكبر (Allah (God) is The Great) – 4 times

اشهد ان لا اله الا الله (I bear witness that there is no God except Allah) – 2 times

اشهد ان محمدا رسول الله (I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God) – 2 times

حي على الصلاة (Make haste towards prayer) – 2 times

حي على الفلاح (Make haste towards welfare [success]) – 2 times

الله اكبر (God is The Great) – 2 times

لا اله الا الله (There is no God except Allah) – 1 time

5.2.5 *Stomachache*

Stomachache is other common illness that the clients come with. Most of the clients are children. Children eat a lot of stuff from outside, which if unhygienic and unhealthy. As a result, they complain stomachaches. “Every household shall have *Phakki*. It is very effective in stomachaches. It is made of different herbs and spices that includes cumin seeds, fennel, carom seeds, white cumin, Himalayan black salt and gingerdry.” (Charmer Howaidah Farooqi, WhatsApp voice note dated 8 April 2022). *Phakki* is a powder made from dried herbs and spices and is very commonly used in South Asian households.

The charmer prescribes home remedies for instant relief from stomachaches. For example, chewing fennel relieves stomachache and the clients are asked to chew fennel since its available in every household. For infants, a drop of fennel syrup/juice (anisette or fennel distillate) relieves stomachache. Anisette is prepared by boiling fennel in water and then distilling it.

Preparing tea from mint, black cardamom, and cinnamon relieves stomachache as well. Adding a little bit of sugar and salt to the tea increases its effectiveness. Fennel tea is another quick home remedy prescribed for immediate relief from stomachaches.



Charm written on betel leaf used for stomach-related problems in both humans and animals. Picture courtesy Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

Additional instant relief prescribed for stomachaches is taking a pinch of ordinary salt or Himalayan black salt with lukewarm water. The charmer asks the clients to bring ingredients of these home remedies to her and she performs charms on them in order to increase their potency. هو الشافي [He (God) cures] is recited 99 times on these ingredients.

The charmer recites Surah Quraish (106th Surah of the Quran) either 7 or 11 times on the client's stomach for pain relief.

لِيَلْفِ قُرَيْشٍ- أَلْفِهِمْ رَحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ- فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ-
الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ.

(At least for the favour of making Quraysh habitually secure. Secure in their trading caravan in the winter and in the summer. Let them worship the Lord of this

Sacred House. Who has fed them against hunger and made them secure against fear)

This surah is recited on the home remedy ingredients as well, especially on the salt.

5.2.6 Eye pain

“Dust affects the eyes the most and the kind of environment we live in contains a lot of dust. These days everyone uses cell phones. Excessive usage of mobile phones is badly affecting eyes.” (Charmer Howaidah Farooqi, WhatsApp voice note dated 8 April 2022)

The clients are asked to bring rosewater and the charmer performs the charm on it and asks the client to pour few drops of it every night before going to bed. Similar kind of charm is performed on *Surma* as well. *Surma* is known as Kohl. It is an eye cosmetic, which is made

by grinding Stibnite. It is important to note that the tradition of wearing Surma dates to 3100 BCE (ancient Egypt).

ياالله، يا نور، يا بصير

(O Allah [God], O Light, O All Seeing)

The above is recited 41 times in the morning and at the time of *Isha* (night) and then a blow is made on the affected eye.

For decreasing eyesight, Surah An-Naba is recited one time after *Asr* prayer (*Asr* is the time 1-1/2 to 2 hours before the sunset). For blurry, watery, and aching eyes (conjunctivitis) and to stop further decline of the eyesight the same Surah An-Naba is recited one time after *Maghrib* prayer (*Maghrib* is the time right after sunset).

It is important to note that time is really important in the performance. The same Surah is recited at two different times for two different kinds of eye-related ailments.

Surah An-Naba

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ

Concerning what are they disputing?

عَنِ النَّبَاِ الْعَظِيْمِ

Concerning the Great News,

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيْهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ

About which they cannot,

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

Verily, they shall soon (come to) know! agree.

نُكَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

Verily, verily they shall soon (come to) know!

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا

Have We not made the earth as a wide Expanse.

وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا

And the mountains as pegs?

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا

And (have We not) created you in pairs,

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا

And made your sleep for rest.

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا

And made the night as a covering,

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا

And made the day as a means of subsistence?

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا سِدَادًا

And (have We not) built over you the seven firmaments,

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا

And placed (therein) a blazing lamp.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا

And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance,

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا

That We may produce therewith grain and vegetables,

وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا

And gardens of luxurious growth?

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا

Verily the Day of Sorting Out is a thing appointed,

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا

The Day that the Trumpet shall be sounded, and ye shall come forth in crowds;

وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا

And the heavens shall be opened as if there were doors,

وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا

And the mountains shall vanish, as if they were a mirage,

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا

Truly Hell is as a place of ambush,

لِلظَّالِمِينَ مَا بَأْسًا

For the transgressors a place of destination:

أَلْبَيْتِينَ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا

They will dwell therein for ages.

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا

Nothing cool shall they taste therein, nor any drink,

إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا

Save a boiling fluid and a fluid, dark, murky, intensely cold,

جَزَاءً وَفَاقًا

A fitting recompense (for them).

أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا

For that they used not for any account (for their deeds).

وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا

But they (impudently) treated our Signs as false

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا

And all things have We preserved on record. to look.

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا

“So taste ye (the fruits of your deeds); for no increase shall We grant you, except in
Chastisement.

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا

Verily for the Righteous there will be an Achievement,

حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا

Gardens enclosed, and Grape-vines;

وَمَوَاعِبَ نِثَابًا

Maidens of Equal Age;

وَكَأْسًا مِدْحًا

And a Cup full (to the Brim).

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذْبًا

No Vanity shall they hear therein, nor Untruth;

جَزَاءً مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا

Recompense from thy Lord, a Gift, (amply) sufficient,

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَنُ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا

(From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all between, the Most Gracious: none
shall have power to argue with Him.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا

The Day that the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any
who is permitted by The Most Gracious, and he will say what is right.

ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ الْحَقُّ ۖ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا

That is the True Day: therefore, whoso will, let him take a (straight) Return to his Lord!

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكُفْرُ بِالْيَتَنِيحُ كُنْتُ تُرَابًا

Verily, We have warned you of a Chastisement near, the Day when man will see (the Deeds) which his hands have sent forth, and the Unbeliever will say, “Woe unto me! Would that I were (mere) dust!”

5.2.7 Earache

Earache is another common problem that the clients come with. Mostly children of minor age or infants face this problem. Surah Fateha (1st Surah of the Quran) is recited 41 times and then the charmer blows directly in the patient’s ear to heal the pain.

Often times, a folk remedy for earache is also used. Garlic is burnt in either mustard or olive oil and pouring a drop of that oil in the ear relieves the pain. The charmer recites on the oil before pouring the drop in patient’s ear.

Surah Fateha

أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

Master of the Day of Judgement

إِلَيْكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِلَيْكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Guide us to the straight path

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray

If the client is unable to visit the charmer, then the patient can perform the same by herself. She recites Surah Fateha 41 times and blows on her right index finger and then inserts the finger in her ear for cure.

5.2.8 *Pregnancy related charms*

The patriarchal social setup has burdened the woman with the pressure to give birth to a baby boy. Families want their lineage to be continued, someone to take care of their businesses whereas others want a boy to take care of them in their old age. The desire to have a baby boy often takes things too far, even to the extent that the family is willing to do anything. It also increases the economic burden of the family because they spend a lot of money seeking help from healers, doctors and other service providers. The economic burden of the family also increases when the family has consecutive births of three to four girls in order to have a baby boy. As a result the family has to take care of not only the deteriorating health of the mother but also to meet the needs of all the children in the family.

Clients coming with the desire to have a baby boy are also counselled to understand and accept the will of God. They are advised to undergo the necessary medical checkup in order to understand the causes of the problem. Even then if things are not working out, then the charmer performs certain charms to help the client conceive.

Charmer Howaidah Farooqi narrates a specific case and mentions that a family came to her mother. The couple was married for 10 years. They had three daughters and wanted a baby boy. “Ammi asked them that the treatment will take time and it may last for 8 to 12 months. After a long treatment, they were blessed with a baby boy.”

Before treating the client, the charmer performs the istikhara to understand the causes. Charmer Howaidah Farooqi mentioned in her interview (dated 16 January 2022) that the causes are divided into four major categories: 1) is the client under the cast of any magical spell? 2) is the husband or the wife bedeviled? 3) is there any internal health issue that is not being addressed, and 4) is it the will of God. Once the charmer gets the sign after performing the istikhara, the treatment plan is chalked out.

In case the clients are under the cast of a magic spell or are bedeviled, the treatment duration lasts for a minimum of one year. Medical complications are dealt with written charms and plates (charms are written on ceramic plates). The clients are asked to seek medical help parallelly. There are times when the charmer receives no sign and just silence. The charmer tells the clients that its God's will and you must wait. "Clients show impatience, and they want things to happen overnight. This cannot happen. Problems are interconnected and they have to be dealt one by one." – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

The charmer doesn't go directly for the conception treatment because if the root cause isn't addressed, the child born may possess physical or mental disability or complication. The most common physical diseases that a child of a possessed mother goes through is called *Sokra*, *Umme Subyan*, *Balawi* and *Athra*. In this disease the child's skin color turns black and he becomes no more than a skeleton. *Balawi* and *Sokra* are the diseases because of bedevilment of the parents whereas *Umme Subyan* is because of magic. Treating a child with *Sokra* or *Umme Subyan* is nearly impossible. Charmer Howaidah Farooqi remembers one such case where such a child was brought to her grandmother for treatment and she remembers her grandmother saying, "You have brought him to me now when he won't survive", and after two days the child died.

For the treatment of magic, *Ajwa* dates or *Chhohara* (dried dates) are used. *Ajwa* is one of the finest dates and is widely grown in the Medina city of Saudi Arabia. The charmer recites on the dates and asks the client to eat them during the treatment period. Both the man and the woman have to eat these dates. A specific number of dates have to be consumed every month. The husband and wife are asked to each consume three dates daily. If its not possible for the

client to consume three dates daily, as it is quite expensive, then they are asked to at least consume a quarter of a kilo in a month. The ideal consumption amount for the treatment is 3 Ajwa dates daily for 41 days.

Charms are also written on boiled eggs and given to the couple for the treatment. *Aab-e-Zam Zam* (water of sacred well in Mecca) is also used in the treatment of magic. The Islamic story behind the creation of the well is that it miraculously appeared in the desert when Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) left his wife Hajra (Hagar in the Hebrew Bible) and son Ismail in the desert. Hajra ran seven times in search of water between the hills of Safa and Marwah and when she came back to Ismail, she saw that a water fountain has sprung out of the place where Ismail scraped the ground with his heels because of thirst. This water is considered holy by the Muslims and is used by charmers to treat magic.

If the magic casted on the woman is severe, then she is asked to bring river water. The charmer recites on the water, puts a written charm in it and asks the woman to bathe with it. “This treatment goes on for months, and the clients lose patience. Without completing the treatment, they conceive the child, and it results in a child having any form of disability.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

For bedevilment, the clients are given the *Aab-e-Zam Zam*. *Aab-e-Zam Zam* is the holy water miraculously generating from the Zam Zam well. According to the Islamic version of the story, the water sprung out when Ismail (son of prophet Abraham) rubbed his heels on the ground because of the thirst. The Zam Zam well is located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The charmer recites the following ayat (Quranic verse) on *Aab-e-Zam Zam*. The same ayat is also written on the bread and given to the client. 41 pieces of bread are written, and one piece has to be consumed daily for 41 days.

وَيَوْمَ نُسَبِّحُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَاهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا.

“Beware of the Day We will blow the mountains away, and you will see the earth laid bare. And We will gather all humankind, leaving none behind.”

5.3 Evil eye

What is an evil eye? Whose evil eye impacts? Who does it affect? These are some of the basic questions that are to be understood before talking about the treatment of evil eye. In 1872 Alexander Dumas wrote, “.....the Evil Eye is not an invention of yesterday ... it is a scourge bequeathed by the ancients to the modern world.....it is a chain which stretches across the ages, and to which each century has added a link.....the Evil Eye was born on Olympus.” (Berry 1968, 250)

The Chambers's Encyclopaedia mentions evil eye as, “the power of exerting an evil influence or fascination on anyone by a glance from the eyes.....” (Berry 1968, 250)

Experts have tried to define evil eye in various ways and so is the mention of its treatment in various cultures. Marking the child with black ink in South Asian cultures to use of iron in European cultures to be safe from the evil eye, indicates that every culture has, in one way or the other, a belief in its existence and has tried to find a remedy for it.

“When our eye sees something. We liked it, it looked beautiful to us, and it led to creation of a desire in us to acquire it. We can't possess it and it creates a feeling of envy in us. The thought that comes in our mind as a result of this all, creates a complete or partial damage to it. Evil eye is never good, it will always bring damage. Our act of seeing something that brings a negative change in the body or the appearance of something is called evil eye.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi (WhatsApp interview dated 9th April 2022).

The charmer divides evil eye in three major categories according to its caster:

1. evil eye of humans
2. evil eye of animals
3. evil eye of nonvisible or supernatural beings

The evil eye of humans is the result of a person's liking and disliking. For example, someone is wearing a nice color dress. Another person who sees it either likes it or envies it, results in bringing some damage either to the person wearing the dress or to the dress itself.

Animals can cast the evil eye. They desire food. If a person is eating something next to a cat or dog, it will crave for that food resulting in the evil eye. It is always said that if you are eating something and an animal is sitting next to you, do give him something to eat.

Supernatural beings do have an evil eye. It is difficult to say that what attracts their attention, but it does happen. If you are passing through a cemetery or through a deserted place, there are chances that you become a victim of their evil eye. They might like anything in your appearance, or they become uncomfortable because of your presence in or passing through their domain. This type of evil eye is difficult to detect as you don't get to know about its impacts immediately. Wise women used to say that don't leave a child unclothed after giving him/her a bath because the supernatural beings can get attracted.

There are different ways to treat evil eye. The most effective one is to sacrifice a black hen and feed its meat to the poor. For the treatment of evil eye of a supernatural being it is required to take some raw meat and circle it seven times in the air over the affected's head and then leave the meat at a deserted place.

For the treatment of evil eye four *Quls* are recited (the four Surahs of Quran starting with the word *Qul*). Reciting Ayat-ul-Qursi is another way to treat evil eye. For the evil eye of supernatural beings, the following ayat is recited:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَضُرُّ مَعَ اسْمِهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ، وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

“In the name of Allah with whose name nothing is harmed on earth nor in the heavens, and He is The All-Seeing. The All-Knowing”

This verse is also recited for the evil eye. The number of times these verses are recited depend on the severity of the evil eye. Normally it is recited 11 times but if the evil eye has a severe impact then it is recited 99 times.

أَعُوذُ بِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ التَّامَّةِ، مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ وَهَامَّةٍ، وَمِنْ كُلِّ عَيْنٍ لَامَّةٍ.

“O Allah! I seek Refuge with Your perfect words from every devil and from poisonous pests and from every evil, harmful, envious eye”

The above-mentioned ayat is also recited on the bridal dress and bride’s makeup kit to protect her from the evil eye.



Charm written on a porcelain plate for the treatment of depression and anxiety. Picture courtesy: Charmer Howaidah F.



Clay bowl is used for writing charms on it regarding the treatment of diseases and other purposes. Picture courtesy: Charmer Howaidah F.



Rock salt (picture above) is used for the treatment of physical ailments in animals. The shoulder bone of a goat (picture below) is used to write charms on for conquering opponents. Picture courtesy: Charmer Howaidah F.

5.4 Treating chronic illnesses

The charmer puts extensive efforts to assess the cause of the illness. If the illness is because of the magic or bedevilment, then the charmer devises its treatment plan. The plan could be mix of different treatments based on the nature and severity of the problem and ranges from using home remedies to oral and written charms.

“A doctor cannot treat someone who is under the influence of any form of magic or is bedeviled. Neither it can be seen in the medical test reports.”

When a client approaches the charmer, she is asked to parallelly seek advice from the doctor also. The charmer performs Istikhara and in case the problem is not spiritual, the client is referred to the relevant medical practitioner.

Charmer Howaidah Farooqi recalls a case where a woman came to her complaining about kidney pain. “She came to me saying that my test reports are okay and there is nothing wrong with my kidneys, but I feel a lot of pain. I wrote the *kalam* on 11 plates and asked her to drink from these plates (one plate daily). After 11 days she went again for the ultrasound test and the stones were visible.”

The *kalam* is written on a white ceramic plate with black ink. These plates are written by the charmer on Thursdays only. the method of drinking from the plate is that the client is asked to pour some water on the written plate. The water shall be poured on the plate in such a way that the ink dissolves in the water properly. Then the client drinks that water.

5.5 Mantar (منتر) - Incantation

A charmer benefits from other fields and disciplines as well. The purpose is to heal the patient and if anything, outside of their field, has the power to heal someone is allowed to be taken, given that it should not distract the charmer from the right path.

“We mostly take the treatment from the Quran but if there isn’t anything that is neither mentioned in the Quran nor the Hadith, then we look out to other disciplines. We take help from numerology, geomancy, knowledge of incantation, and sometimes astrology. The ultimate purpose of taking help from other disciplines is healing.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

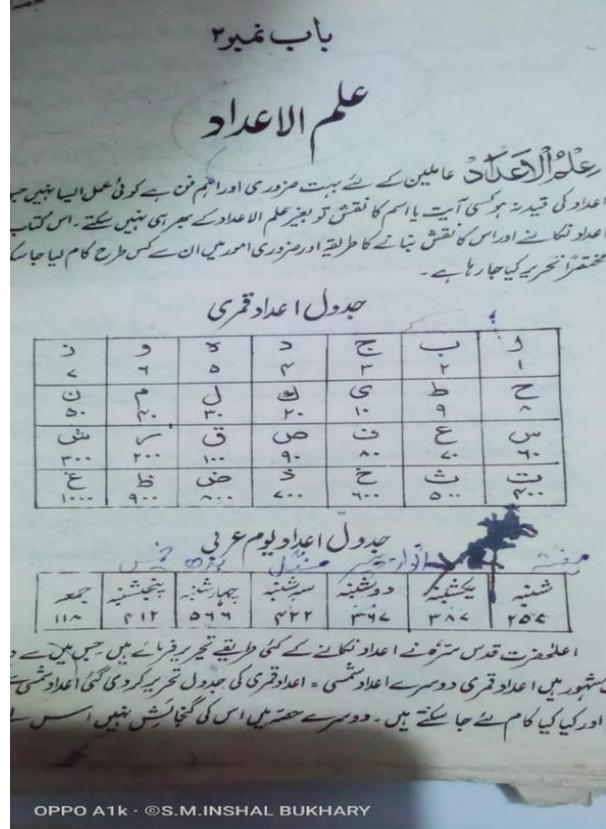


Table used to convert Quranic verses into numbers.
Picture courtesy: Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

Some of the incantations that are practiced by the charmers in the Zulekhavi family are mentioned hereunder:

5.5.1 Incantation for toothache

This incantation is written on a piece of paper and the client is asked to hold it in between the aching teeth. Later this written charm has to be swallowed. This is done several times till the toothache goes away.

موسیٰ کامیاب شد، فرعون غرق شد

Moses succeeded, Pharaoh drowned

This incantation is in Persian language, and no one is sure about its origin but since this is tested and has immediate remedial property, so it has been practiced for decades in the Zulekhavi family.

Another incantation that is used is as follows:

مکتب ذہب عقرب بقولہ لا الہ الا اللہ محمد رسول اللہ
زہر یکسد و ہشده گروہ کژدم فرور آید زہر ہفتاد گروہ بارہم فرود آید زہر یکسد و ہشده گروہ غنڈل ہم فرود آید زہر
خزنده و پرنده ہم فرود آید بہ ہدا حبیب میچن خیل فقیر بابا یا نوم بنی اللہ یا نوم نبی اللہ یا نوم نبی اللہ

The school of scorpions says that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. If a group of scorpions fall down once and for all, if a group of scorpions falls again and again, if a group of creeps and birds descend, if a caterpillar and a bird descends, then Habib Michan is very poor, or he is not a son of God.

Chapter 6: Charms, divination and the clients

6.1 Essence of *Kalam*

Oral charms, often referred to as *Kalam* by the charmers or Islamic healers, have an associated *Taseer*. *Taseer* is a Persian word that literally means “the effect”.

Simply, *Taseer* can be understood as the effectiveness of the *Kalam*. It can also be understood in a way that to what extent the *Kalam* will do its work. And how we know about the *Taseer* of the *Kalam*? It is by its end result. When we get the desired result, we say that this *Kalam* has the *Taseer*. There are two types of *Kalams*, *Jalali* and *Jamali*. *Jalali Kalam* is the one that has a thermogenic or rough or fiery impact on the body whereas the *Jamali Kalam* has a refrigerative or soothing effect. – (WhatsApp interview with Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 9th April 2022)

It is interesting to note that the classification of the *Kalams* based on their thermogenic or refrigerative nature is very much similar to the Ayurvedic way of classification of foods. In Ayurveda, the foods are mainly classified in two categories “Hot” and “Cold”, and this process of classification is called “*Virya*”. “Ayurveda tries to assess whether a particular food item has a cooling or a heating effect inside our body.....” (NDTV Food n.d.)

In the same way, similar to the Ayurvedic approach, *Kalams* are considered to have *Garam* (hot) and *Thandi* (cold) *Taseers* and respective impacts on the performer as well as the clients. The *Kalams* having *Garam Taseer* are advised to be read at dawn or dusk whereas the charms involved with the use of *Thandi Kalams* are advised to be performed during the day.

In order to understand the concept further, let us take the example of *Asma-ul-Husna* (اسماء الحسنی - God’s 99 names). The names *Ar-Rahman* الرحمن (The Beneficent), *Ar-Raheem* الرحيم (The Merciful) and *Al-Kareem* الكريم (The Bountiful One) are *Jamali* (having soothing or cool effect) names, whereas the names *Al-Jabbar* الجبار (The

Compeller) and *Al-Qahhaar* القهار (The All-Prevailing One) are *Jalali* (having coarse or fiery effect) names.

When reciting the *Jalali Kalam*, the reciter will feel internal heat and fieriness in the body. In contrast, reciting a *Jamali Kalam*, the reciter will feel serenity inside. The same impacts will be upon the task that the *Kalam* is being read for. A *Jalali Kalam* will impact the task aggressively whereas the *Jamali Kalam* will approach the task subtly. But the end result of both the *Kalams* will be positive. It is the difference in the approach. (WhatsApp interview with charmer Howaidah F. dated 9th April 2022).

The charmers have tested the impacts of *Kalams* over years, and it is the result of learning by experiencing. This knowledge about the *Taseer* (essence) of the *Kalam* is not documented by rather passed down orally. It is also noteworthy that the *Taseer* is interchangeably used for both *effect* and *essence*.

The charmers deal with the impacts of the *Kalams* on their bodies through diet and nutrition. For example, if a charmer is reciting a *Jalali Kalam*, she will increase her intake of food that has cold impact on the body and vice versa. This is the ayurvedic way of managing the body and points towards the crossroads of Charming and Ayurveda.

6.2 Charming and Divination – Crossroads

Humankind has always been curious about the future. What the future holds is the question that furthered the curiosity. An individual knows about the past, (s)he is living in the present but does not have knowledge about the future. To an extent a person can forecast about its future based on the careful calculation of his present actions but still lacks knowledge about the time to come.

In the book, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, Emilie Savage-Smith talks about the fluid boundaries of definition of magic and divination. She mentions that the Medieval Islamic

writers have attempted to lay forward the definitions under the broad headings of *Sihr* (magic) and *Kihāna* (divination).

“*Sihr*, for example, could apply to anything wondrous, including elegant and subtle poetry, to sleight-of-hand tricks, to the healing properties of plants, to invocations to God for assistance, to invocations to jinn or demons or the spirits of planets, and on occasion even to the divinatory art of astrology.” (Savage-Smith 2004, xiii).

She further elaborates that “magic seeks to alter the course of events, usually by calling upon a superhuman force (most often God or one of his intercessors), while divination attempts to predict future events (or gain information about things unseen) but not necessarily to alter them.” (Savage-Smith 2004, xiii).

Knowing about the future is *Ilm-ul-Ghaib* (knowledge of the unseen) and the person who attempts to gain entry to this realm is *Alim-ul-Ghaib* (the knower of the unseen).

God says,

قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ

Say, none in the heavens and the earth knows the *Ghaib* (unseen) except Allah, nor can they perceive when they shall be resurrected – Al Quran, Surah Naml, Verse 65].

We do not claim that we have the knowledge or have access in any way to the knowledge of the future. Rather we ask the God for *guidance*. We perform *Istikhara* to ask for guidance on particular matters and the God gives us the sign. Various fields like astrology, palmistry, *Ilm-e-Jafr* (branch of knowledge based on the numerical values of alphabets. It is also known as *Ilm-ul-Abjad* or *Ilm-ul-Huruf*), *Sifli Ilm* (black magic/witchcraft), geomancy and numerology etc. provide you some insight into the future but we completely rely on *Istikhara* as this is the authentic way to seek guidance from God. – WhatsApp interview of Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 11th April, 2022

The charmer Howaidah Farooqi acknowledges that, if needed, they seek guidance using other fields but that only is done with the permission of the *Murshid* (the teacher). It is because these disciplines tend to have deviating powers and a practitioner, if indulged, may deviate from her true purpose, which is serving people and not acquiring power.

Malak-ul-Ru'yā (name of the guardian angel of dreams) is the angel who is responsible to provide guidance to the Istikhara performer. *Malak* means angel and *Ru'yā* means dream or vision. *Malak-ul-Ru'yā*, through dreams, only shares whatever he is allowed by the God to share.

The next level of divine guidance is *Wahi* وحى (revelation), which was only for the prophets. As according to the Islamic philosophy, the series of prophethood does not exist anymore, so the only way left to seek divine guidance is *Istikhara*.

The amount of guidance received through Istikhara is dependent on the spiritual power of the charmer. For example, if there are five answers to a question asked in the Istikhara, the charmer can either be revealed, by God, only one answer or all the five. The more a person is spiritually powerful the more person gains access to the guidance. It is God who reveals the answers. It has been eighteen years since my grandmother but still people remember her Istikhara. People still say that whatever your grandmother used to tell us, happened in the same way. – WhatsApp interview of Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 16th January, 2022

Briefly mentioning about how access is gained to the unseen through Iilm-ul-Huruf (knowledge of letters), charmer Howaidah Farooqi said that numbers of the alphabets are calculated. The basic fields whose numbers are calculated are:

- Name of the questioner
- Mother's name of the questioner
- The question itself
- What time (s)he questioned
- What day (s)he questioned

Once the numbers of all the above are obtained then they are multiplied and divided to the extent that a single digit comes as an answer. If the single digit answer is an odd number, then the answer to the question is positive and if it is even number, then the answer is negative. If the answer is 0 (zero) then it means that there are obstacles in the way and those obstacles are needed to be removed first.

Black magic (*Sifli Ilm*) is also used to have access to the unseen. *Sifli Ilm* is performed on water, fire or orbuculum to create a display to see the answer. The charmer gets help from other disciplines, like *Ilm-ul-Huruf*, if the answer is required quickly.

6.3 Clients

Majority of the people seeking my grandmother's help were women. And they used to bring their children along as well if they wanted some treatment for their kids. Men also used to seek help but not directly. They used to tell their problems to either their wives or other women in their family and those women used to discuss that problem with my grandmother. My grandmother used to attend the women in the courtyard. It was an all-women space and I have seen 7 or 8 women at a time visiting my grandmother. Men from our family were not allowed to be in or around the courtyard when help-seeking women visited my grandmother.

6.4 Timing of the clients

The women used to almost the whole day, but I observed that my grandmother used to mention visiting timings to them. In summer, the women started visiting as early as 7 a.m. My grandmother used to take a break from 14:00 to 17:00 hrs for lunch, prayer, and nap. After Asr prayer, she used to resume attending the clients till 21:00. She then used to listen to BBC Urdu service's program *Sairbeen*. She was very sensitive about missing the program and she strictly used to tell the clients to visit her before 21:00 hrs.

The clients used to stay with her depending on the nature of their issue. For example, if she wanted to listen to her client in detail, she would ask her to wait till she gets done with other

clients. Clients with minor issues used to stay for around 20 minutes but the women who had issues that needed to be dealt in detail used to stay for over an hour.

6.5 Reciprocity

My grandmother and mother accepted offering in cash, kind and as service. I remember asking my mother once about accepting *Hadiya* (the in cash or kind offering). She mentioned that, giving the offering keeps their dignity lifted because then they don't think that they are getting something free. Free things lose their value. The things that the women bring are used to help others. We have to keep the cycle of goodness going. It is also a way women want to thank you.

I remember that in summer, we never went short of mangoes in our house. Women use to bring seasonal fruits and other eatables. Sometimes my grandmother and mother used to ask for certain commodities like sugar, wheat flour, milk, eggs, or white cloth. The commodities had to be of white colour, and my grandmother and mother used to give it to the needy families. She used to say that some charms are *Bhaari* (heavy in their nature) so we have to give something white to neutralize the impact of that charm on the charmer. She also used to mention that many women come with impacts of evil eye or negative energy and giving away white things keeps you safe.

Some of the clients used to reciprocate in the form of service. I remember one woman's husband had a transport business. So, she used to send a vehicle for my grandmother if she had to go somewhere out.

Charmer Howaidah Farooqi explains the act of reciprocity saying that the treatment is heavily dependent on the severity of the problem. The more severe the problem, the more efforts have to be put in. Finding a solution to the problem also involves reciting kalam for thousands of times. The clients neither have the time nor the 'willingness' to recite the kalam in that many numbers. "Once a woman came to me asking for help because her son was trapped in a false legal case. I asked her to recite Surah Yaseen for 125,000 times. She said that its quite

impossible for her to recite that many times. So, I had to do the *amal*”, which in this particular context means the act of performing the charms.

Reciting a particular surah or a verse (both are referred to as *kalam*) in specific amount aims at mobilizing the *moakkal(s)* (archangel) of the *kalam*. The *moakkal(s)* then work to serve the purpose of the reciter. The charmer categorizes the *Hadiya* (gift or offering) in two sub-categories. One is the *hadiya* of the *kalam* and the second is *sadqa* or *khairat* (voluntary charity). *Sadqa* and *khairat* hold the same meaning but in the context of South Asian Muslim cultures specifically Pakistan, *sadqa* and *khairat* hold different meanings. *Sadqa* is given to ensure that evil spirits or evilness is washed away from a person. While giving *sadqa* it is said that one must tell the receiver that this charity is *sadqa*. Whereas *khairat* is a general form of charity in which the purpose is to help other to please God.

The concept behind the *hadiya* of the *kalam* is that the *moakkals* of the *kalam* also need something. In this case raw meat is obtained with the purpose that this has to be given as the *hadiya* of the *kalam* and then the meat is put somewhere at a deserted place where there are no or less human interaction.

Reciting the *kalam* to put away the magic and evil spirits has its own consequences. These consequences result in physical or material loss. Charmer Howaidah Farooqi recalls her childhood memories about her grandmother being the victim of such loss. “I was in Saudi Arabia with my father and mother and one day we received a telegram that grandmother’s arm is broken. In those days (mid and late 80s) telegram and telephone were the means of communication. The next day we called on our neighbour’s phone and talked to the grandmother. She told that she actually did an *amal* (charm performance) for a client and the *shayateen* (evil spirits) – plural of *Shaitan* (Satan) – were continuously disturbing her. She said that one day when she was trying to get off her bed and she felt that someone pushed her out of the bed, and she fell on the floor. Later she realized that her arm was broken.”

Turning another page from her memory, charmer Howaidah Farooqi recalls that how one day the water tank busted open, and the stored water started to flow out. She remembers her

grandmother saying, “*mo’ay mera nuqsan kar ga’ay nay*” (death be upon them, they have caused damage to me). When asked about who did the damage, the grandmother said that she was performing amal for a client and the evil spirits were resisting. So, they did this to teach a lesson.

The consequences are not only physical. They are mental in many situations where the charmer gets drained out of energy because of dealing with the evil spirits and extreme recitation. The clients want the work to be done but they are not ready to face the consequences and hence they ask the charmer to take this responsibility. To deal with the aftermath associated with the amal, the charmer considers it just to take a small but reasonable amount as hadiya. For those who can’t afford, the charmer offers her services for free.

Clients also bring in-kind offerings themselves. That can include anything that they think could be acceptable to bring. It ranges from seasonal fruits to meat to raw edible items like oil, eggs, home-grinded spices etc. The charmer uses these offerings to help the needy in the community or other indigent clients.

Recapitulating, charmer Howaidah Farooqi mentioned that her grandmother and mother did not accept cash contributions, however, they accepted contributions in-kind. She said that during their times there still existed the barter system of exchange whereas in the current times there is more involvement of cash. So in order to survive, one has to accept cash.

Chapter 7: Transference of knowledge

7.1 Knowledge management – How this knowledge is managed and transferred?

The knowledge of the charms and charming is transferred orally from one generation to another. There are two streams of passing the knowledge on. One is transferring it to your descendants or someone in the family and the second is to transfer it to someone who has an interest and the potential. The second scenario of knowledge transfer only occurs when the knowledge can not be transferred to the descendants, which is either having no children or lack of interest of children in learning charms.

Mary Chamberlain also mentions, quoting an example, the oral transfer of knowledge. She quotes an example of Suffolk wart-charmer.

“I learnt the cure from my aunt, before she died she told me. She didn’t like to feel that it was lost. So, she told me how to do it up. It seems to work, it seems to have cured everybody that I’ve given it to. My aunt always said you mustn’t tell anybody what you put in it, but she thought it was a shame to lose it, that’s why she passed it on to me” (Chamberlain 1981, 12)

The knowledge is considered sacred and is only transferred to the person in whom the charmer sees the ‘potential’. That potential is gauged through observation.

“Our grandmother had 8 daughters, but she didn’t transfer the knowledge to the eldest or all of her daughters. Instead, she transferred it to her third daughter. It is important for the person to be spiritually vibrant and have the spiritual capacity to carry the energy of the charms.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

When asked that how the assessment is done to understand that the person is suitable for the knowledge to be transferred, Charmer Howaidah Farooqi, mentioned “Every person has an aura. This aura explains everything. You have to have a positive aura.”

Istikhara is the key tool or performance that a charmer does in order to seek guidance from the God about whom to transfer the knowledge to. The charmer considers it as a sacred work and duty and wants to transfer the knowledge only to the right person.

“It is the work of the God. When the right time comes, God guides the charmer whom to transfer the knowledge to. It’s done by the God through dream or the thought. It’s not monarchy that only the eldest one should receive this knowledge. We wait for the right time and God’s sign. If you don’t see the sign, then we ask for God’s help by performing *Istikhara*.”

Taqwa (equivalent in meaning to God-consciousness, mindfulness, and piety) is really important and is the first and foremost parameter for anyone to be considered as the receiver of the knowledge. It is not necessary that you find all the right qualities in the eldest child. **Observing** and **Waiting** are the two important things to find the right person. They are considered as the main pillars of the process.

“God creates the characteristics or tendency in the receiver towards learning charms. The right qualities start showing themselves in that person. All has to be done is to wait.”

Once the charmer is confident about the *Shagird* (student), she starts transferring the knowledge bit by bit, which is called *Qalam daina* (handing over the ‘pen’). For centuries, Pen has been used as a symbol of knowledge in different cultures especially in Sufism. So the term *Qalam daina* (handing over the ‘pen’) actually represents ‘handing over the knowledge’ or transference of knowledge. In other cultures, ‘knowledge’ has been represented using different symbols for example use of Owl (Greek), Diya – clay lamp (Indian), Lotus (Eastern religions), Nyansapo and Serpent (West Africa), Raven (Norse), and Oak Tree (European Paganism). (Give Me History n.d.)

Charmers, healers, old wives, shamans, no matter what they are called in their respective cultures, they all share the same purpose of bringing good in people’s lives and to heal them.

The title ‘Old Wife’ doesn’t only refer to a role but also to a process and that process is oral transference of knowledge.

It is also important to slightly touch here on the etymology and gender aspect of the term ‘Old Wife’. Limited authentic information is available on the origination of the word and its use, which now presses to rely on internet sources. According to an online dictionary The Free Dictionary by Farlex, this expression already existed in ancient Greece and an English version of the term was first recorded in 1387 (The Free Dictionary n.d.). Wikipedia mentions that the word wife means ‘woman’ and it stems out from the old English word ‘Wif’, which is similar to the German word ‘Weib’ meaning ‘woman’. It is also mentioned that this word was used in 1611 in King James Bible as ‘old wives’ fables’ (Wikipedia n.d.).

The general reason given for the use of this term is to stop the spread of non-scientific knowledge and superstition, but gender and women’s rights experts argue that this term is the product of a patriarchal culture that undermines woman’s knowledge and wisdom.

The knowledge transference is a long training and takes years. The *shagird* (student) has to undergo years of training to be ready to practice charms independently. “Entry into the ranks of the old wives was achieved through experience or a form of apprenticeship.” (Chamberlain 1981, 12)

7.2 Training through observation

The initial phase of the training is ‘Observation’. The *shagird* is asked to just simply observe the clients that come to share their problems. This allows the student to understand the problem. This process of observation is also a first step to indirectly introduce the next healer/charmer to the client in specific and community in general. It also serves as a opening step to help the student understand the diversity of treatment plans for a same problem based on the diverse circumstances of the clients.

The ‘Observation Training’, which is called *Mushahida* at least lasts for a year depending on the grasping ability of the *shagird*. It is very important for the *shagird* to observe neutrally. Charmer Howaidah Farooqi recalls and narrates her experience during the time of her training.

“Once a woman came with a complaint about headache. It was early morning around 7 a.m. Normally, the women preferred to come early morning because they are mostly free at that time after sending their kids to school or husbands to work. I was sitting next to *Ammi* (mother).

She said that she has been suffering from headache since last night and couldn’t sleep well. The headache gets to different levels, sometimes fades down and sometimes aggravates. *Ammi* asked that what did you had this morning. The woman replied, ‘normal breakfast’. Then *Ammi* started reciting something sotto voce. I noticed that *Ammi* was yawning as she recited. After she finished reciting, she asked the woman to come in the evening.

Later *Ammi* told me that what do you think was the problem with the woman. I said it felt to me that she was okay because there was no sign of discomfort on her face because of the headache. *Ammi* immediately said to me that it is not for us to decide whether the client has the problem or not. We just give the treatment.”

Being non-judgmental is one of the main characteristics of a charmer and the training focuses on building the character of the charmer. The teacher sets an example for the *shagird* by being a role model. There are three main pillars of the spiritual character that a charmer must have; one, belief in one God (the supreme power), two, belief that Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of God and three, as a charmer the purpose is to serve the people. These are the three commandments a charmer must follow. Otherwise her work will not have impact. This is also called the *Mission Triangle* (God – Prophet Muhammad – People).

The next step after this is guiding the charmer to develop a spiritual routine. This includes daily recitation of Quran and offering prayer. Charmer Howaidah Farooqi mentions that she

was guided by her mother to understand and pay attention to every word and understand its meaning when she recites or offers prayer. This helps the charmer to stay focused and pay attention to the present moment avoiding unnecessary thoughts coming to the mind.

This serves the same purpose as meditation does, ‘stay focused and calm’. *Salah* (Muslim way of praying) and Yoga are called an ancient heritage of exercise by Merajul Hasan and Dr. Ujjwal Kumar Halder (Hasan and Halder 2018, 480). Paying regular attention to the words during prayer enhances the focusing capability of the charmer.

7.3 Spiritual behaviour

Differentiating between *Halal* (permissible) and *Haram* (forbidden) is an important part of a *shagird’s* training. This means that staying on the right path and avoid going astray. It allows the *shagird* to understand how to make right choices in life.

One should have a strong faith and the ability to understand and mold according to the changing trends. Should be understanding and have the ability to assess situations. These are the qualities are really important in a charmer. Your actions should be right. A right action is *Halal* and a wrong action is *Haram*. Your conscience is the best one to tell you what is *Halal* and what is *Haram*. Deep inside, you know it. – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

The prime purpose of performing charms is to help people. If the charmer doesn’t fulfill this prime objective and misuses her knowledge, then she isn’t considered eligible as the bearer of knowledge. The charmer reminds the *shagird* of her prime duty from time to time. It is important for the *shagird* to indulge in spiritual practices as it allows the student to stay focused and follow the right path.

“This is more than performing charms. It is spiritual leadership, and the *process* makes one a spiritual leader.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi

The teacher, called the *Murshid* (equivalent of the word Guru), sets examples for the *shagird* to follow. It can be said that this training is a blend of role-model guidance and learning-by-doing. The process of getting the *shagird* used to the *routine* takes years. The routine here means the spiritual routine that has to be followed before actually starting to learn how to perform charms. An important part of the *routine* is to wash your heart from the worldly things. Wash the heart from envy and grudge and other negative humanly feelings. The *process* is performed in such a way that it rehabilitates the person and prepares the *shagird* for a fresh start.

The process also enhances self-accountability in the *shagird*. Even God or the *murshid* is not watching, the *shagird* is capable enough to account herself for her actions. “The right and wrong are both with us. It is us who have to decide which path to choose. The process allows us to see what is right and choose it.” – Charmer Howaidah Farooqi. If the *shagird* reaches this level, it indicates that the foundation of a mature spiritual behaviour has been laid.

After the first step in the process, which is establishing a mature spiritual behaviour, the next step is *Chillah*. *Chillah* (چله) is derived from the Persian word *Chehel* (چهل) that means 40. The *shagird* undergoes this extensive spiritual practice for 41 days keeping a strict eye on her routine and diet. This act is called *chillah nashini* (چله نشینی), which is the combination of two words, *chillah* meaning forty and *nashini* meaning sitting down – sitting down for forty days. *Chillah nashini* is a spiritual performance in Indian and Persian traditions to attain a certain level of spirituality through meditation.

It is the *murshid* who decides which *chillah* shall the *shagird* perform. The *murshid* assesses the spiritual capabilities of the *shagird* and prescribes the *chillah* accordingly. Normally, *chillahs* of Surah Yaseen, Surah Rahman, Surah Fateha, or Ayat-ul-Qursi are performed in the beginning but the *murshid* suggests which one of these to begin with.

These *chillahs* act as a foundation and the *shagird* gains the basic understanding. “Its just like the ABC. Once the child is able to understand the ABC, he or she can make words from it. Same is the case with the *chillah*.”

Strict abstention has to be observed during the *chillah*. It ranges from dietary restrictions to social interaction. The *chillah kash* (چله کش), meaning one who is performing the *chillah*, confines herself to a room for 41 days and spends her time there. The *chillah kash* remains abluted during this time and wears only white clothes. A white cloth or sheet is spread in the room on which the *chillah kash* performs her *chillah*. Any alcohol-free fragrance is also worn while performing the *chillah*. A strict diet is part of the *chillah*. the diet is categorized into two types: *Jalali* and *Jamali*. Jalali diet is hard on human body and is likely to trigger restlessness or anger whereas the Jamali diet keeps the body cool and calm. The *chillah kash* only eats vegetables and refrains from consumption any type of meat. The primary diet is milk, yogurt, barley bread, and dates. The flour of barley bread shall be prepared on handmill and not on machine/electrical grinder. Use of garlic, onion, spice, and outside (market) food is prohibited. The *chillah kash* also fasts during these 41 days. In addition to the above, the *chillah kash* observes complete social disconnect and avoids talking to anyone.

If the *chillah kash* is to perform the *chillah* of Surah Rahman, she has to recite Surah Rahman for certain number of times daily during the period of 41 days. The amount of recitation daily is prescribed by the *murshid*. Minimum 11 times daily recitation is prescribed for the beginner. Time is key when the recitation is done. The next day the *chillah kash* recites the surah on the same time. There can't be the change of time. *Chillah kash* has to strictly follow the time. What time to recite the surah on is also decided by the *murshid*. Mostly this *chillah* is performed at dawn, which is called *thanda* time (when sun is not hot yet), *thanda* meaning cool. The *thanda* time is divided into three categories: *Fajr*, *Ishraq* and *Zahak* (in Islamic tradition the morning prayers are also divided in this way). The time of *Fajr* is from beginning of dawn to sunrise. *Ishraq* approximately starts twenty minutes after sunrise, when the sun is above the horizon approximately the length of a spear. It ends at mid-morning (halfway between sunrise and zenith). The time of *Zahak* starts after *Ishraq* and lasts few minutes before midday or sun reaching the zenith. According to the Muslim philosophy of praying or worshipping, no prayer shall be offered at the time; a) when the sun is rising, b) when the sun is at zenith, and c) when the sun is setting. The *murshid* picks up one of the above-mentioned

times for the *chillah kash* to recite the surah and the *chillah kash* has to strictly follow the time.

Every surah has its *moakkal(s)* (guardian angels). Once the *chillah kash* is four to five days into the *chillah*, she starts feeling movements or other sort of actions. The *chillah kash* shouldn't fear them. When the *chillah kash* is extensively reciting the surah at a specific time, she is basically calling to the *moakkals* (guardian angels) of that particular surah. The *moakkals* will test the activator.

The *murshid* regularly asks the *chillah kash* about the condition or feelings during the *chillah*. What did the *chillah kash* observe or feel. The advice of the *murshid* to the *chillah kash* remains the vital part of *chillah kashi* (چله کشی) – the act of performing the *chillah*. The *moakkals*, when feel that the person is not eligible to call for them, try to disrupt the *chillah* by creating distractions for the *chillah kash*. Sincerity and purity of the intention is the key. The intention of the *chillah kash* should be helping the people, only then the *chillah* can be successfully completed otherwise the *moakkals* will not let you complete the *chillah*.

If the *chillah kash* successfully completes the *chillah*, then on day 41st, she should offer a prayer of thanks and conclude the *chillah*. The benefit of the *chillah* is that the surah that she has completed the *chillah* of will have increased healing impact. Seventy to seventy five percent of the training is practical whereas the rest is theoretical means the knowledge of charms (WhatsApp interview of Charmer Howaidah Farooqi dated 11 April 2022). The *murshid* guides the *shagird* during the training process on how to deal with the cases. The *shagird* observes the treatment methods first and later tries them independently but in the supervision of the *murshid*. The *shagird* also learns from her personal experiences means whatever she goes through after performing the charms is experiential learning.

There is no specific time frame to declare that the *shagird* is ready to perform the charms independently. “It is not like a university degree where you are declared a degree holder after one or two years. This is a time-taking process and takes years. The spiritual capability of the

learner is really important. The more it is strong, the quickly she will learn.” The training can even last for 10 years.

7.4 Gender and socio-cultural dynamics

Struggling for their rights in patriarchal societies has always been a battleground for women. They have to fight on multiple fronts to secure a ‘breathing space’ for themselves. From the household to the avenues of the parliament, it has always been a multifaceted struggle. Patriarchy controls resources and sets the social norms. The struggle becomes even more challenging with the lack of access to social resources.

Human lives in the social communities are interdependent on other members of the community as well as the resources that exist in the communities. Patriarchy decides who and to what extent the members of the communities will have access to these resources. Education, health services, healing systems, and support structures are among the community resources that women not at all or have limited access to. One prominent factor that limits or hinders women’s access to social resources is *Pardah* (also spelled as *Purdah*). *Pardah* is a socio-cultural and religious way to seclude women from men. *Pardah* is a Persian word, customarily used in South Asia, which means curtain. The Arabic equivalent of *Pardah* is *Hijab*. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *Pardah* means “*the custom, found in some Muslim and Hindu cultures, of keeping women from being seen by men they are not related to, by having them live in a separate part of the house or behind a curtain, and having them wear clothing that covers the whole body, including the face.*”

Pardah has proximal, ethical, and visual aspects. It alludes three primary components: veiling of women, separation of genders, and a set of standards and demeanors that defines the boundaries for women’s ethical conduct. It is basically practiced in Muslim and Hindu communities in South Asia. It shifts broadly concurring to religions, locale, nationality, societies, and economic groups.

Pardah is also one of the factors that restricts woman's mobility. Her mobility is restricted by and dependent on male members of the family. However, women have managed to work around this restrictive measure by allying with older women and children in the community. Mobility of married women, women accompanied with older women or children is less likely to be questioned by the male members of the community.

Going to a healer is very difficult. Lots of social problems are attached to it. Most of the people do not believe in the spiritual treatment. I have to take someone along with me. I take any *Bari Boorhi* or *Bazurg Khatoon* (older woman) or *Samajhdar Khatoon* (wise woman) with me. Otherwise, it is difficult to go to a healer. – WhatsApp interview of a client (name not mentioned to maintain the privacy of the client) dated 2nd June, 2022.

The word *Bari Boorhi* literally means 'old aged' and is used culturally for wise community women. Senior women or married women of older age (mostly over 40 years of age) have a comparatively trusted standing in their respective communities. Hence, other women in the community resort to them in order to seek their help and support for their mobility.

Seeking help from a woman healer also resolves the issue of Pardah as it is an 'all-women' space. In addition to it, women are more comfortable sharing their issues with other women as compared to sharing it with men. The community healers hold a respectable and legitimate position in the community. This position gives him/her an authority to have a say.

A renowned gender expert from Pakistan, Ms. Sidra Humayun shed light on gender, authority, and distribution of family resources especially food.

In a patriarchal society, men and boys are given priority in the family. Men and boys get the best of the food and women, and girls are fed on ordinary diet. Milk and meat and other fortifying food is given to the men as they are considered as bread earners and have to do the so-called 'hard work'. Women's work isn't considered as 'hard work'. This gender-based distribution of food leads to issues related to

malnourishment in women and girls especially among pregnant women. A woman healer, holding a position of authority, has the power to change this gender-based distribution of food. Performing a charm on a meat, milk, eggs, or other edibles and giving it to a patient also resolves the dietary problems of malnourished pregnant women. I think that the women-led healing systems have the power to address the gender based social stereotypes. – WhatsApp interview of Ms. Sidra Humayun dated 2nd June, 2022.

Another dimension of charms is the sensorial experiences and upliftment of women's position in the family. One of the clients' mentioned in her WhatsApp interview that after she sought help from a charmer, her position in the family changed positively.

We moved to a new house because my husband was posted in a nearby town. That house was possessed. We experienced paranormal activity, for example, opening up of the locked doors by themselves, turning on of the fan and the tap, heard footsteps but didn't see anyone walking. I talked about this to a woman in our neighbour and she took me to the charmer. The healer told me that a spirit lives in the house. Later I learnt that this building was illegally constructed on a graveyard. My children felt scared. The healer asked me to gird the house with Syrian rue (*peganum harmala*) and frankincense and recite Surah Baqarah loudly in the house. She also told me to sprinkle charmed water on the walls of the house. After that, things got better, and my children weren't scared anymore. My husband showed more respect to me. – WhatsApp interview of Shazia (client's name changed because of the privacy) dated 2nd June, 2022.

Bringing solution to the household problems also results in raising women's position in the family and they are seen as 'contributors' and their mobility is not questioned. It is the oppression of patriarchy that women's household work is not considered as a 'contribution'.

If a woman is seeing a spiritual healer and she is bringing solution of the problem and good fortune to the house, for example, increase in livelihood, then her she is allowed

to go outside the house. It is unfortunate for a woman, from a gender and human rights perspective, that her mobility is restricted. But still, it is a positive development that, because of an intervention, she can enjoy her right of unrestricted mobility. – WhatsApp interview of Ms. Sidra Humayun dated 2nd June 2022.

CONCLUSION

Taking a folkloristic plunge into the local healing systems reveals various dimensions of it ranging from social and gender-based perspectives to cultural and sensory experiences. Communities develop their own healing mechanisms. The healing practices could be based on the knowledge of healing properties of various plants, herbs and spices or use of idiomatic phrases and stories to relieve mental stress or use of charms and magic to address the supernatural dimensions of the problems. These healing systems either rely on one form or meld two forms, for example, concocting scientific and traditional methods of treatment or take a holistic approach where they benefit from different models through cultural selection. This cultural selection is based on the geography, physical environment, social norms and values and cultural traditions of the communities.

Use of charms is a form of coping. The tradition of performing charms in the Zulekhavi family serves as a local model of healing that adopts a holistic approach. Through this thesis, it was interesting to study this women-led model of holistic healing and how it contributes to women's empowerment in the local contexts. This model in particular and other similar models help women build their own agency in the face of patriarchy through creation of all-women safe spaces. They further women bonding and sisterhood and allow them to develop their own way to 'authenticate' their knowledge, without relying on the patriarchal ways of knowledge authentication. Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger points, in a different way, highlights the problem of 'authenticity' by sharing the experience of Carolyn Heilbrun. She talks about 'writing authentically' about women's own experiences or experiences of other women but it also can be related to the 'patriarchal authentication' of women's knowledge.

In *Writing a Woman's Life* (1998), Carolyn Heilbrun writes of the difficulty women have often experienced in writing authentically about their own or other women's lives since the models for biographies or autobiographies have historically been male, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She illustrates the importance of models when she writes about T. S. Eliot's difficulty in his experimentation in *Samson Agonistes*..... Heilbrun concurs: "It is

precisely such a safety net that is absent from women's lives, let alone their writings.....” – (Flueckiger 2006, 141)

Keeping in view the social and cultural dynamics of a community, the problems that women undergo are contextual and so they develop their own methods of coping those problems. Resorting to charms is one of the coping techniques. Applying a scientific lens to find the answer to the question that whether these charms find the solution or not, would be unrealistic because looking at the issue with a gender and cultural lens will help understand that at least these local women-led healing systems are providing women a ‘breathing space’ in patriarchal social setup.

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Resümees

Käesolev magistriröö “Matrilineaarne loitsimistraditsioon: sooline ja sotsiokultuuriline analüüs Zulekhavide traditsioonist Multanis” uurib sügavuti üht matrilineaarset loitsimispraktikat Pakistanis, et jäädvustada praktikute teadmistepagasit sellest kaduvast loitsimistraditsioonist. Uurimistöö põhiküsimusteks on a) kuidas kasutatakse loitse kogukondlike ravisüsteemide osana; b) mõista kogukondliku tervendamise holistlikkust, sest kõne all olev traditsioon toimib ühes teiste teabeallikatega (tavameditsiin, omavaheline nõustamine); c) kuidas antakse teadmisi edasi tulevastele põlvkondadele; d) kuidas on sel traditsioonil õnnestunud ellu jääda patriarhaadi südames ning mis traditsiooni ohustab; e) kuidas mängib see traditsioon rolli naiste võimendamises ning aitab saavutada naiste autoriteeti.

COVID-19 pandeemial oli uurimistöö käigule suur mõju, ent samas andis võimaluse katsetada uusi meetodeid uurimuse läbiviimises. Kvalitatiivse materjali korjeks kasutati digitaalset andmekogumismeetodit, mis aitas aega ja allikaid kokku hoida. Siiski tuli andmekogumise käigus ette tehnilisi raskusi, näiteks halb internetiühenduse kvaliteet ja professionaalsete kommunikatsioonivahendite Zoom, Microsoft Teams jne puudumine. Sellest hoolimata avas digitaalne andmekogumine uusi avastamist väärt perspektiive, kuidas digitaalseid vahendeid folkloristliku materjali kogumisel rakendada.

Käesolev uurimistöö tutvustab ühe paikkondliku tervendamissüsteemi – Zulekhavi tervendavate loitsude traditsiooni – erinevaid tahke, alates sotsiaalsetest ja soopõhistest perspektiividest kuni kultuuriliste ja sensorsete kogemusteni. Uurimistöö põhjal saab öelda, et kogukonnad arendavad välja omaenda tervendamismehhanismid. Tervendamispraktikad võivad põhineda teadmistel erinevate taimede, ürtide ja vürtside raviomadustest või idiomaatiliste fraaside ja lugude kasutamisel, et vähendada vaimset pinget, või loitsude ja maagia kasutamisel, et viidata vaevuste üleloomulikele dimensioonidele.

Kasutades loitsimist kui toimetulekuviisi, on Zulekhavi perekond võtnud loitsude kasutamisel omaks holistliku lähenemise. On põnev uurida, kuidas naiste eestvedamisel toimiv holistliku tervendamise mudel panustab naiste võimendamisesse paikkondlikus kontekstis. Kõne all olev või sellega sarnanevad mudelid aitavad naistel üles ehitada eneseteostusvõimalust patriarhaadi südames, luues ainult-naised (*women-only*) turvalise

ruumi (*safe space*). Loitsimispraktikad soodustavad naiste omavahelist lähedust ja sõsarkonna-tunnetust ning võimalust oma teadmisi “autentiseerida”, toetumata patriarhaalsetele teadmisviisidele. Lühidalt pakuvad need naiste eestvedamisel toimivad paikkondlikud tervendamissüsteemid võimalust luua naistel enesele patriarhaalses ühiskonnakorralduses hingamisruumi.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. How would you define charms? Could you please share some historical information about how charms originated generally and particularly the charming tradition in the Zulekhavi family?
2. Could you please shed some light on the origin and continuity of this tradition in the Zulekhavi family?
3. Could you please share that what is the procedure of treating through charms?
4. What kind of issues or problems are treated with charms?
5. What do you think are the factors that make these words work or lay their impact? (What is the mechanics of charms?)
6. If we divide the impact of charms in two segments, physically and spiritually, how do you think it lays impact physically?
7. I understand that belief is very important in charming. But is having a belief important for the subject as well in order to have the charms work?
8. What is the procedure for transferring the knowledge (methodology)?
9. Do you seek help from other words or knowledge outside Quran?
10. What do you think are the characteristics of a charmer?

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