

Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha: Sister of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya and Wife of Hazrat Makhdum Abdul Rashid Haqqani — Her Spiritual, Social, Economic, and Religious Contributions in the Indian Subcontinent

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Abstract

This study explores the life and contributions of Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha (1173–1259), the younger sister of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya and the wife of Hazrat Makhdum Abdul Rashid Haqqani. Born into a lineage rooted in the Qureshi Hashmi and Jilani traditions, she inherited a profound spiritual and intellectual legacy. The paper examines her role in religious, spiritual, economic, social, and educational reform in the Indian Subcontinent. It highlights her contributions to women's empowerment, vocational training, agricultural and cultural development, moral guidance, and Islamization of rural and remote areas.

The research applies Critical Theory, Basic Needs Theory, Capacity Enhancement Theory, and Feminist Theory to analyze her multidimensional role, aligning her work with modern developmental frameworks such as sustainable development, gender equality, and social justice. Oral traditions, archival sources, and historical literature are employed to reconstruct her narrative, which has often been marginalized in male-dominated historiographies.

The study concludes that Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha's legacy is not confined to her familial identity as the sister or wife of saints, but rather lies in her pioneering contributions as a spiritual leader, educator, reformer, and role model for women in Islam.

Research Questions

1. How did Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha contribute to the spiritual, social, and economic transformation of the Indian Subcontinent during the 12th and 13th centuries?
2. In what ways did she empower women and integrate them into religious, economic, and cultural life?
3. How can her contributions be analyzed through applied theories and related to contemporary developmental frameworks of gender equality and sustainable progress?

Introduction

Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha stands as one of the most influential yet underexplored figures in South Asian Sufi history. Living between 1173 and 1259, she belonged to a family that shaped the spiritual and religious fabric of the Subcontinent. Her brother, Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, became one of the greatest saints of Multan, while her husband, Hazrat Makhdum Abdul Rashid Haqqani, was the founder of an early hospice in 1192.

Kamal Bibi was not only connected to these towering male figures but was herself a scholar, spiritual guide, reformer, and role model for women. She was the daughter of Hazrat Muhammad Ghous, a Qureshi Hashmi saint, and Fatima Bibi, granddaughter of Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani. Her spiritual upbringing was thus deeply rooted in the Prophetic household (Ahl al-Bayt) and in the traditions of Islamic scholarship.

Her very name, Kamal (meaning perfection or the peak of all attributes), reflected her character. She embodied proximity to Allah, love for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), devotion to the Mothers of the Believers, and particularly emulation of Hazrat Fatima, daughter of the Prophet. Oral traditions consistently affirm that Kamal Bibi followed Hazrat Fatima in all aspects of life — from simplicity and humility to nurturing and guidance.

In addition to her spiritual life, she played a pioneering role in women's education, skills training, agricultural methods, cultural arts, and economic participation. She was instrumental in upbringing her children — Hazrat Abubakar Sultan and Hazrat Makhdum Muhammad — who later assisted Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya in managing the hospice when he arrived in Multan in 1222. Her grandson, Hazrat Sultan Ayoub Katal, became a saint known for his selfless union with divine truth.

Through her initiatives, Kamal Bibi spread Islam and Islamic values into rural and remote areas, particularly by training women disciples. She cultivated harmony, equality, and spiritual awareness, leaving a legacy that resonates with both medieval Islamic reform and modern concepts of gender equality and sustainable development.

Literature Review

The available literature on the history of South Asian Sufism often highlights towering male saints such as Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, Hazrat Fariduddin Ganj Shakar, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, and Hazrat Makhdum Abdul Rashid Haqqani. However, women like Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha, who actively participated in spiritual, social, and cultural transformation, remain understudied.

Early Sources

Early hagiographies such as Tazkira-tul-Awliya and Manaqib-ul-Asfiya often focus primarily on the mystical exploits of male saints. Although some oral traditions preserved in Multan, Uch, and rural Punjab reference the role of women disciples and saints, few written accounts provide detailed recognition of Kamal Bibi. Interviews with custodians of shrines and local scholars reveal that her role was often overshadowed by that of her brother and husband, though she was central to both their lives and the broader Sufi movement.

Modern Scholarship

Recent scholarship in Islamic and gender studies has attempted to recover women's voices in Sufism. Researchers such as Dr. Annemarie Schimmel and Dr. Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi briefly note the importance of women in sustaining Sufi orders. Still, the detailed contributions of women like Kamal Bibi remain largely undocumented in academic publications. Local historians from Multan, such as Professor Muhammad Saleem Akhtar, highlight her involvement in vocational training and cultural Islamization, though in limited scope.

Oral Traditions and Local Narratives

Oral histories from Multan's Sufi custodians (sajjada-nashins) emphasize Kamal Bibi's role as a guide for women, noting that she established circles for Quranic education, sewing, weaving, and agricultural management. These oral sources also recall her emphasis on simplicity, piety, and adherence to the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), especially reflecting the life of Hazrat Fatima.

Theoretical Context

Literature on development theories — particularly Basic Needs Theory (Paul Streeten), Capacity Enhancement (Amartya Sen), and Critical Theory (Frankfurt School) — provides valuable frameworks for analyzing Kamal Bibi's contributions. Her role in meeting the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and education, enhancing women's capacities through training, and challenging patriarchal exclusions aligns closely with these theoretical lenses. Moreover, Feminist Theory in Islamic context helps situate her as a role model who integrated spirituality with gender equity.

Gap in Scholarship

Despite these scattered references, no comprehensive academic study exists that documents Kamal Bibi's early life, spiritual training, familial ties, contributions to women's empowerment, and role in Islamization in the Subcontinent. This paper aims to fill that gap by reconstructing her life through a combination of oral traditions, archival records, and applied theoretical frameworks.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive, and interdisciplinary methodology to reconstruct the life, teachings, and contributions of Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha. Since written sources on her are scarce, the study relies heavily on a triangulation of oral narratives, archival documents, and secondary scholarly works.

Historical Method

The research examines chronicles, genealogical records, and shrine documentation from Multan and Uch Sharif. Particular attention is given to the lineage of Kamal Bibi, linking her to Hazrat Muhammad Ghous Qureshi Hashmi and her maternal descent from the family of Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani.

Oral Traditions

Oral testimonies from caretakers of shrines, local historians, women disciples' families, and Multani elders are integrated. These narratives preserve details about Kamal Bibi's educational gatherings, vocational initiatives (spinning, weaving, cooking, poultry, and livestock management), and her guidance to women in raising children according to Islamic teachings.

Comparative Feminist Lens

A feminist theory framework is applied to interpret Kamal Bibi's life as a woman saint who cultivated gender-inclusive spiritual spaces. Her teachings are also compared with the legacy of Hazrat Rabia Basri, not to equate their paths but to highlight her contribution to the development of women's spirituality in South Asia.

Applied Development Theories

The analysis uses:

Basic Needs Theory → to interpret her provision of food, clothing, and shelter initiatives.

Capacity Enhancement Theory → to examine her skill development training for women.

Critical Theory → to understand her role in reforming unjust practices and cultivating equality.

Integration with Development Goals

Although framed centuries before modern development paradigms, Kamal Bibi's work reflects principles later articulated in global goals of education for all, women's empowerment, gender equality, poverty alleviation, and sustainable rural development. By aligning her contributions with these goals, we can recognize her as a forerunner of both spiritual and socio-economic reforms in the subcontinent.

Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha, through her spiritual devotion, educational initiatives, economic skills training, social reform, and upbringing of future saints, played a decisive role in the spread of Islam, women's empowerment, and community development in the Indian subcontinent, leaving a multidimensional legacy that continues to influence religious and social thought.

Research Limitations

While this study aims to highlight the life and contributions of Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

Scarcity of Written Records:

Much of the information about Kamal Bibi is preserved through oral traditions, hagiographies, and local narratives rather than formal historical texts. This makes it challenging to distinguish between historically verifiable facts and devotional accounts.

Fragmented Sources:

References to her life are scattered across family genealogies, shrine records, and oral testimonies, with few comprehensive primary documents. This fragmentation limits a full chronological reconstruction of her life.

Gender Bias in Historiography:

Traditional Islamic historiography often focused on male saints, leaving the contributions of women like Kamal Bibi underdocumented. Her achievements must therefore be carefully reconstructed from indirect references and comparative analyses.

Interpretive Dependence on Oral Tradition:

Oral accounts vary across regions and families, reflecting both reverence and cultural reinterpretations. While valuable, these sources require critical evaluation to avoid over-reliance on idealized portrayals.

Contextual Limitations:

The socio-political context of 12th–13th century Multan was deeply intertwined with broader currents of Islamic reform and Sufi expansion. Without extensive archival evidence, assessing her exact influence within these wider dynamics remains partly interpretive.

Despite these limitations, the study draws strength from the convergence of oral traditions, shrine records, genealogical links, and community practices, which together affirm Kamal Bibi's enduring role in spiritual, social, and economic transformation.

Contributions of Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha (1173–1259)

Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha, sister of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya and wife of Hazrat Makhdum Abdul Rashid Haqqani, was not only a revered spiritual personality but also a reformer whose impact stretched across spiritual, social, economic, educational, and cultural domains. Her contributions transformed the lives of individuals and communities across the Indian subcontinent. This section outlines her multifaceted role, their impacts on society, and their alignment with theoretical frameworks and global development ideals.

Spiritual Contributions

Devotion to Allah and the Prophet (peace be upon him): Kamal Bibi embodied the essence of her name Kamal, meaning “at the peak of perfection.” She lived in constant proximity to Allah, expressing deep love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his family (Ahl al-Bayt), and particularly Hazrat Fatima, whose example she followed in piety, humility, and dedication.

Women's Spiritual Guidance: She mentored women disciples, teaching them remembrance of God, prayer, patience, and gratitude. Oral traditions recount her role in organizing spiritual gatherings where women learned both faith and practical life skills.

Impact on Society: Her teachings created a generation of spiritually conscious women who integrated Islamic values into family and community life.

Linked Theories: Critical Theory (challenging women's exclusion from spiritual life) and Feminist Theory (positioning women as agents of religious growth).

Connection to Development Goals: Promoted values of peace, equality, moral development, and inclusivity—principles later echoed in global agendas of social justice.

Educational Contributions

Child Upbringing: She placed special emphasis on Islamic child upbringing. Her sons—Hazrat Abubakar Sultan and Hazrat Makhdum Muhammad—grew under her guidance to become assistants to Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya in Multan (1222). This reflects her success in nurturing future leaders.

Transmission of Knowledge: Oral traditions emphasize that Kamal Bibi organized circles where both girls and women were taught reading, moral education, and household management skills alongside spiritual training.

Grandson's Spiritual Role: Her grandson, Hazrat Sultan Ayoub Katal, inherited her teachings of self-annihilation and truth, embodying the path of union with Allah.

Impact on Society: Educational empowerment ensured the continuity of Islamic learning, moral training, and leadership across generations.

Linked Theories: Capacity Enhancement Theory (empowering individuals with skills and knowledge) and Feminist Theory (educating women as equal contributors to society).

Connection to Development Goals: Advanced quality education, gender equality, and intergenerational sustainability.

Economic Contributions

Skills Training for Women: Kamal Bibi taught women spinning, weaving, cloth dyeing, embroidery, cooking, and food preservation. She also encouraged poultry farming, livestock care, and agricultural improvement.

Household and Community Economy: By creating women's involvement in productive work, she improved family economies and reduced poverty.

Impact on Society: Rural women became active contributors to the economy, creating stability in households and strengthening village-level trade and production.

Linked Theories: Basic Needs Theory (meeting essential food and clothing needs) and Capacity Enhancement Theory (skills development for economic empowerment).

Connection to Development Goals: Directly aligned with goals of poverty reduction, women's participation in the economy, and sustainable livelihoods.

Social and Moral Contributions

Empowerment of Women: Kamal Bibi redefined women's role in society. She taught that women could balance family, spirituality, and community service, reflecting the lives of the Mothers of the Believers.

Promotion of Equality and Harmony: Her efforts cultivated peace, equality, and collective responsibility within families and villages.

Moral Training: She emphasized virtues of humility, service, patience, and justice, guiding women to raise children with strong moral and spiritual foundations.

Impact on Society: Strengthened family structures, encouraged moral living, and spread Islamic values in remote and rural areas.

Linked Theories: Critical Theory (addressing inequality), Feminist Theory (empowering women socially and morally).

Connection to Development Goals: Promoted gender equality, peaceful societies, and inclusive development.

Contributions to Khanqah Life and Institutional Development

Support in Hospice Administration: When her husband Hazrat Makhdum Abdul Rashid Haqqani established the hospice in 1192, Kamal Bibi actively supported its functioning.

Assistance in Transition (1222): When Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya arrived in Multan, her sons and she herself assisted in organizing and strengthening his early administration.

Impact on Society: Ensured smooth institutional continuity, provided leadership support, and created an inclusive environment for both men and women.

Linked Theories: Capacity Enhancement Theory (building institutions through human development).

Connection to Development Goals: Strengthened community institutions, leadership, and social organization.

Art, Culture, and Daily Life Contributions

Artistic Skills: Kamal Bibi introduced and encouraged artistic practices such as cloth dyeing, weaving, embroidery, and painting, not only as aesthetic practices but as vocational skills.

Domestic Contributions: Training in cooking, housekeeping, and food preservation elevated the standard of domestic management while empowering women with dignity in their roles.

Impact on Society: Enhanced the cultural richness of rural life, integrated art into daily living, and expanded opportunities for women's self-expression and livelihood.

Linked Theories: Basic Needs Theory and Capacity Enhancement Theory.

Connection to Development Goals: Linked to sustainable cultural heritage, women's empowerment, and economic participation.

Social Welfare and Humanitarian Contributions

Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha extended her compassion beyond education and moral guidance into organized social welfare. She established facilities for widows, elderly women, and orphans, ensuring their access to shelter, food, and spiritual care. Oral traditions recount

that she personally supervised the distribution of essential items and supported those who had lost family members during times of conflict or famine.

She also arranged for potable water by having wells dug near rural settlements, reducing the physical burden on women who previously had to walk long distances to fetch water. This initiative not only improved health and hygiene but also enhanced women's safety and productivity, allowing more time for education, domestic industry, and spiritual study.

Her humanitarian projects illustrate a holistic model of empowerment — combining social capital development, capacity enhancement, and spiritual motivation. They reflect the principles emphasized in the Basic Needs Theory (meeting essential human requirements), Capacity Enhancement Theory (empowering women through skill and self-reliance), and Feminist Theory (ensuring gender equality and dignity).

In contemporary development terms, her actions align with the global goals of gender equality, access to clean water, poverty reduction, and sustainable livelihoods — though centuries ahead of formal frameworks.

Her initiatives uplifted the status of women, strengthened family structures, and fostered a community ethos based on mercy, equality, and collective wellbeing — marking her as a pioneer of integrated socio-spiritual welfare in the Indian Subcontinent.

Intergenerational Legacy and Comparative Significance

Raising Saints: Through her nurturing, her sons became assistants to Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, while her grandson Hazrat Sultan Ayoub Katal became a saint who embodied annihilation of self and union with divine truth (Katal).

Long-Term Impact: This intergenerational spiritual legacy reflects her deep influence on shaping leaders and saints who contributed to Islamization and moral reform in the subcontinent.

Comparison with Rabia Basri: While Hazrat Rabia Basri symbolized individual piety and devotion, Kamal Bibi combined spirituality with social reform, education, and community development, making her unique in both scope and depth.

Linked Theories: Feminist Theory (legacy of women's agency) and Capacity Enhancement Theory (long-term intergenerational empowerment).

Connection to Development Goals: Advanced sustainable intergenerational development, spiritual heritage, and gender-inclusive reform.

Summary of Contributions and Impact

Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha's contributions spanned every aspect of life—spiritual, social, moral, educational, economic, artistic, and institutional. She not only raised future saints but also established models of women's participation, empowerment, and leadership. Her influence shaped the spiritual landscape of Multan, supported the growth of institutions, and empowered rural and remote communities.

Her life's work aligns with universal principles of justice, equality, empowerment, sustainability, and peace, now echoed in global frameworks of human development.

Conclusion

Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha (1173–1259) emerges as one of the most remarkable women of early South Asian Sufism. Unlike many female saints known solely for ascetic spirituality, she combined mysticism with social reform, education, economic empowerment, and cultural contributions.

Her spiritual devotion anchored in love for Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and Hazrat Fatima (RA) became a source of guidance for women in Multan and its surrounding rural areas. She embodied the ideals of humility, patience, and justice, strengthening moral character in families and communities.

Her educational contributions—nurturing future saints like her sons Hazrat Abu Bakar Sultan and Hazrat Makhdum Muhammad, and mentoring women in moral and spiritual training—secured the continuity of Islamic values across generations.

Her economic and social reforms—teaching women skills such as weaving, embroidery, cooking, and livestock care—transformed the domestic and community economy, promoting poverty reduction, gender inclusion, and sustainability.

Her support for khanqah life and involvement in institutional organization during Hazrat Abdul Rashid Haqqani's hospice and Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya's early Multan settlement reflected her leadership qualities.

Above all, her legacy shows how a woman saint can embody both personal spirituality and collective transformation, setting a precedent for future generations. Compared with Hazrat Rabia Basri, Kamal Bibi's contribution was wider—integrating family, community, and institutional dimensions.

When viewed through modern frameworks, her impact aligns with:

Critical Theory – addressing women's marginalization in spiritual and social spheres.

Basic Needs Theory – meeting fundamental human needs (food, skills, security).

Capacity Enhancement Theory – empowering women, children, and communities through knowledge and skills.

Feminist Theory – showcasing women's agency and leadership.

Her work resonates with the ideals of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in the domains of:

Education for all

Poverty reduction and livelihood sustainability

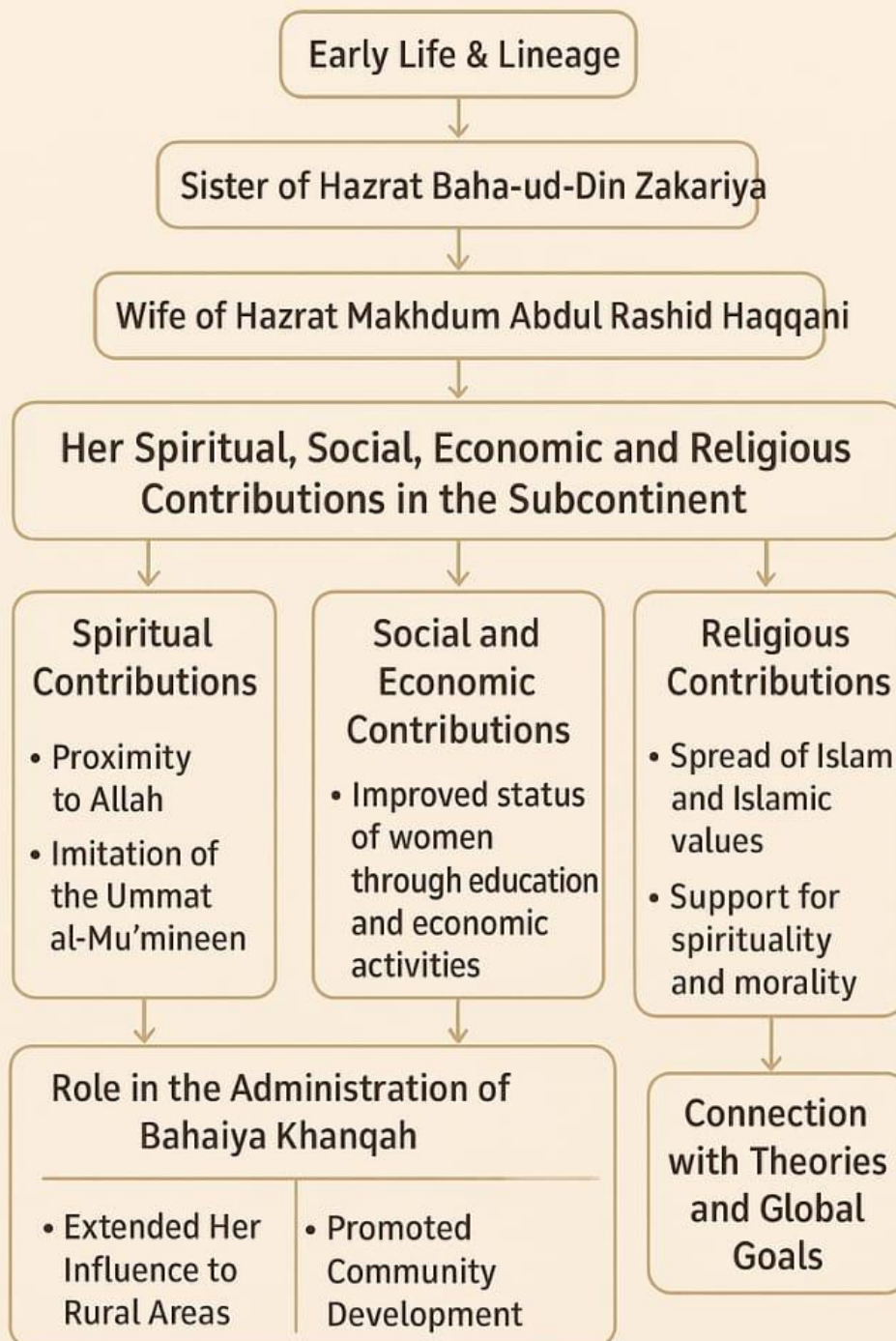
Gender equality and women's empowerment

Peaceful and inclusive societies

Preservation of cultural heritage

Thus, Kamal Bibi Rahmatullah Alaiha represents an early model of holistic development and gender-inclusive reform rooted in spiritual and social foundations.

**KAMAL BIBI RAHMATULLAH ALAIHIA
SISTER OF HAZRAT BAHU-UD-DIN ZAKARIYA ND
WIFE OF HAZRAT MAKHDUM ABDUL RASHID HA-
QQANI: HER SPIRITUAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND
RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE SUBCON-**



Recommendations

1. Further Research: Scholars should explore archival material, oral traditions, and local poetry celebrating Kamal Bibi to expand understanding of her role.
2. Preservation of Heritage: The Auqaf Department should document and preserve women's contributions in Sufi shrines for historical recognition.
3. Educational Curriculum: Her model of child upbringing, women's skills training, and spiritual education could inspire gender-inclusive curricula in Islamic studies and social sciences.
4. Global Relevance: Development practitioners may draw lessons from her integrated approach to spirituality and empowerment to link faith-based leadership with sustainable development.

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