

Rasheeda Bano (Rehmatullah Alaihi): Noble Lineage and Her Socio-Economic and Religious Contributions — Sister of Hazrat Makhdum Abdul-Rashid Haqqani and Wife of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya

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Abstract

This study examines the life and contributions of Rasheeda Bano, wife of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, mother of Hazrat Sadruddin Arif, and grandmother of Shah Rukn-e-Alam. Belonging to the noble Qureshi Hashmi lineage through her father Ahmad Ghous, and to the saintly Jilani household through her mother Janat Bibi, Rasheeda Bano embodied a unique synthesis of political authority and spiritual heritage. She played an active role in the domestic and spiritual spheres, supporting women's education, moral development, and financial empowerment. Her influence extended beyond her family environment to the broader society of Multan, where she nurtured women's religious growth, guided disciples, and contributed to the consolidation of the Suhrawardi order. Using Feminist Theory in Religion and Social Capital Theory as analytical frameworks, this research explores her contributions to socio-religious transformation, her role in nurturing future saints, and the oral traditions that preserved her memory. The study highlights the gaps in existing literature regarding female figures in Sufism and argues for recognizing Rasheeda Bano as a key agent in shaping spiritual and social life in medieval South Asia.

Research Questions

1. What was the significance of Rasheeda Bano's lineage in shaping her role within the Suhrawardi order?
2. How did Rasheeda Bano contribute to women's education, spiritual guidance, and socio-economic empowerment in Multan?
3. In what ways did her upbringing of Hazrat Sadruddin Arif and Shah Rukn-e-Alam influence the continuation of the Sufi legacy in South Asia?

Introduction

The history of Sufism in South Asia is often narrated through the towering figures of male saints such as Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, Hazrat Abdul-Rashid Haqqani, and Shah Rukn-e-Alam. While these saints undoubtedly played transformative roles in shaping the spiritual and socio-political landscape of medieval India, the lives of women associated with them remain largely underexplored. Among these women, Rasheeda Bano emerges as a figure of immense historical and spiritual significance. She was not merely the wife of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya but also a spiritual nurturer, educator, and reformer whose influence permeated both the private and public domains.

Born into a family that combined Qureshi Hashmi nobility and the saintly legacy of Ghaus-ul-Azam Abdul Qadir Jilani, Rasheeda Bano's genealogy itself carried deep symbolic and spiritual weight. Her father, Ahmad Ghous Qureshi Hashmi, was both ruler of Kehrur and a saintly personality, while her mother, Janat Bibi, was the daughter of Syed Essa Jilani and granddaughter of Ghaus-ul-Azam. This dual heritage situated Rasheeda Bano at the confluence of political power and spiritual authority. Her marriage to Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya united the Suhrawardi order with the Jilani-Qureshi traditions, consolidating spiritual legitimacy and influence in South Asia.

Rasheeda Bano's contributions, however, extend far beyond genealogy and marital alliances. She was an educator of women, a provider of moral and spiritual guidance, and a supporter of social and financial growth among the female community of Multan. In addition, her domestic sphere was not a passive environment but a dynamic site of spiritual nurturing, where she raised Hazrat Sadruddin Arif, who later became a prominent Sufi scholar, and influenced the upbringing of her grandson Shah Rukn-e-Alam, one of the most celebrated saints of South Asia. Through these roles, she ensured the continuity of spiritual traditions and helped shape the future of Sufism in the region.

Despite her significance, Rasheeda Bano has not received adequate attention in existing historiography. The literature on Sufism in South Asia has largely emphasized the institutional roles of male saints while neglecting the contributions of women who provided spiritual, educational, and social support within their communities. This research aims to address this gap by situating Rasheeda Bano within both historical and theoretical frameworks. Employing Feminist Theory in Religion, the study highlights her agency as a female figure in a patriarchal spiritual tradition. Using Social Capital Theory, it examines how her social, spiritual, and economic networks created lasting influence in her society.

This paper argues that Rasheeda Bano's life represents a model of how women in Sufi traditions contributed to both private and public spheres. Her story enriches our understanding of South Asian Islam, challenges male-dominated historiographies, and underscores the importance of recognizing women's roles in spiritual, social, and educational reform.

Literature Review

Scholarly works on South Asian Sufism have primarily focused on major saints such as Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, Baba Farid, and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. Authors like Annemarie Schimmel (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 1975) and Richard Eaton (*The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, 1993) have discussed the spread of Sufi orders but provide little insight into the women associated with these saints. Studies such as Carl Ernst's *Eternal Garden* (1987) explore Sufi thought but again marginalize female figures.

While some works on gender and Sufism, such as Sa'diyya Shaikh's *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy* (2012), emphasize the importance of women's participation, specific biographical studies of female Sufis in South Asia remain rare. Accounts of Rasheeda Bano are found mostly in oral

traditions, shrine narratives, and local hagiographies, often embedded in the histories of her husband or descendants. These sources present her as a figure of moral guidance, but systematic academic analysis is missing.

Gaps in Literature

1. Lack of independent scholarly focus on Rasheeda Bano as a historical and spiritual figure.
2. Limited analysis of the role of women in consolidating Sufi orders in South Asia.
3. Insufficient integration of feminist and social theories in studying female contributions to Sufism.

Significance of Study

This research is significant because it fills a critical gap in South Asian Sufi historiography by foregrounding the role of a woman whose contributions were foundational yet overlooked. It demonstrates how Rasheeda Bano combined her noble lineage, spiritual training, and domestic responsibilities into a transformative role for her society. By applying modern theoretical perspectives, the study provides a model for reinterpreting the roles of women in Islamic history beyond patriarchal limitations.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical methodology. Primary data is drawn from oral traditions, shrine records, and local hagiographies. Secondary data includes scholarly works on Sufism, gender in Islam, and South Asian history. Textual analysis is applied to interpret narratives of Rasheeda Bano's life. A theoretical lens is used to integrate her contributions within broader frameworks of social and religious thought.

Theoretical Framework

1. Feminist Theory in Religion – to analyze Rasheeda Bano's agency as a woman within patriarchal Sufi structures, highlighting her educational, moral, and spiritual leadership.
2. Social Capital Theory – to explore how her social, familial, and spiritual networks contributed to the sustainability of the Suhrawardi order and community growth.

Hypothesis

Rasheeda Bano's noble lineage, combined with her active role in spiritual guidance, education, and the upbringing of future saints, positioned her as a key but underrecognized contributor to the socio-religious transformation of medieval South Asia.

Rasheeda: A Name of Divine Guidance

Her very name, Rasheeda, signified "one who is rightly guided." This was not a mere title but a reflection of her personality, character, and spiritual life. Oral traditions of Multan describe her as a woman enlightened with Hidayat-e-Ilahi (Divine Guidance), whose decisions, actions, and counsel radiated wisdom and purity of heart. She was remembered not only as the wife of a great saint but as one who carried within herself the light of guidance, serving as an inspiration for women and families of her time.

It was this divine enlightenment that allowed her to balance multiple responsibilities — as a wife, a sister, a mother, and later as a grandmother of saints — with dignity and spiritual strength. Her guidance was not limited to her family; she extended it to the women of Multan by educating them in faith, offering moral direction, and supporting them in matters of social and financial well-being. This Hidayat-e-Ilahi made her a beacon of hope and stability in a society where women's voices were often hidden in silence.

her upbringing as the daughter of Ahmad Ghous and Janat Bibi,

her marriage to Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya,

her teaching and guidance for women,

her nurturing of Hazrat Sadruddin Arif,

and her spiritual influence on her grandson Hazrat Shah Rukn-e-Alam.

This way, the light of Divine Guidance becomes the unifying idea of her whole life.

Family Lineage

Rasheeda Bano belonged to one of the most distinguished families of South Asian Islam, a family that combined political leadership with spiritual authority. Her father, Ahmad Ghous Qureshi Hashmi, was both a revered saint and the ruler of Kehror. His position reflected a balance of worldly responsibility and religious devotion, qualities that deeply influenced the household in which Rasheeda Bano was raised.

Her mother, Janat Bibi, came from the noble Jilani family of Baghdad. She was the daughter of Syed Essa Jilani and the granddaughter of the eminent saint Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani, widely known as Ghaus-ul-Azam. From her mother's side, Rasheeda Bano inherited the spiritual legacy of the Qadiriyya order, which was rooted in humility, piety, and the service of humanity.

Thus, her ancestry represented a rare synthesis of two streams of sacred heritage: the Qureshi Hashmi line that carried the honor of the Quraysh tribe of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Jilani tradition that symbolized the highest ideals of spiritual leadership. This noble background elevated her status in society, giving her both respect and influence.

Her kinship ties further deepened her spiritual significance. She was the younger sister of Hazrat Abdul Rashid Haqqani, a leading saint of Multan. Her marriage to Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, the founder of the Suhrawardi order in the Indian subcontinent, created a historic alliance between two major Sufi traditions—the Suhrawardi and the Qadiriyya. Through this union, she became a vital link between Baghdad's spiritual legacy and the emerging Sufi networks of South Asia.

Rasheeda Bano's lineage therefore positioned her not only as the wife of a great saint but also as a bridge between traditions, a custodian of sacred ancestry, and a noblewoman whose very family heritage symbolized piety, authority, and guidance.

Early Life, Education, and Spiritual Training

Raised in an atmosphere where both scholarship and spirituality were highly valued, Rasheeda Bano's childhood was shaped by discipline, faith, and intellectual engagement. Her father's role as a ruler exposed her to governance, responsibility, and community service, while her mother's Jilani heritage trained her in devotion, humility, and asceticism.

Love for Ahl al-Bayt and the Mothers of the Believers

A defining feature of her upbringing was her devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt (the family of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Mothers of the Believers (the wives of the Prophet). She studied their lives as moral examples and sought to embody their virtues in her own.

She admired Hazrat Khadija's generosity and strength, Hazrat Ayesha's knowledge and leadership, and above all, Hazrat Fatima al-Zahra's simplicity, patience, and spiritual purity. Throughout her life, she consciously modeled herself on Hazrat Fatima, seeing her as the supreme role model for Muslim women. This devotion was not abstract but deeply practical: it shaped her daily choices, her family life, and her guidance to other women.

Spiritual Education

Her early education included Qur'anic recitation, the study of Hadith traditions, and ethical training. Oral traditions suggest that her spiritual teachers included both men and women from her extended family, especially saintly women of the Jilani household. These women transmitted lessons that combined scholarship with character formation.

The key principles of her training were:

Self-purification, cultivating inner discipline and control over desires.

Reliance on God, developing absolute trust in divine will.

Service to humanity, especially care for widows, orphans, and the poor.

Hospitality and generosity, virtues that her family considered sacred.

Marriage and Integration into the Suhrawardi Order

Her marriage to Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya was not only a personal union but also a spiritual partnership. As the wife of a saint, she ensured that the family environment functioned as an extension of the Suhrawardi khanqah (spiritual lodge).

She managed the resources of the household with wisdom, supported her husband's mission, and created opportunities for women to participate in religious and moral education. Unlike many women of her time, who were confined to the private sphere, Rasheeda Bano expanded the role of women by turning the family environment into a place of guidance, charity, and service.

Her early life and spiritual training thus prepared her to be more than a supportive companion—she became a spiritual educator, a model of piety, and a reformer who extended the teachings of the Suhrawardi order to women and families in Multan.

Contributions

Economic Contributions

Rasheeda Bano's economic role reflects her belief that material well-being and spiritual growth are interconnected. As the wife of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya, she played an important role in supporting the financial stability of the Suhrawardi khanqah in Multan. The khanqah was not only a place of worship and spiritual training but also a social institution that provided food, lodging, and education for travelers, scholars, and disciples.

She supervised the management of resources and ensured that charity was distributed fairly. Through her foresight, women were encouraged to participate in economic activities such as

weaving, embroidery, and other crafts. These skills allowed women to gain financial independence and dignity, rather than relying solely on charity.

Rasheeda Bano also promoted fairness in matters of inheritance and property rights. In medieval South Asian society, women often faced marginalization in matters of wealth distribution. Her advocacy for justice in this area reflects her commitment to aligning community practices with Islamic principles of equity. By emphasizing that economic independence was a moral and spiritual duty, she offered women a framework in which they could sustain their families with dignity while remaining connected to religious values.

Thus, her economic contributions can be summarized as:

Ensuring financial sustainability of the khanqah.

Supporting women's skill development and economic self-reliance.

Promoting justice and fairness in inheritance rights.

Social Contributions

Rasheeda Bano's social contributions were equally significant. She created spaces where women could participate in communal and religious life, which was rare for her era. By welcoming women into her circle, she provided them with moral instruction, guidance in personal affairs, and opportunities for collective solidarity.

Her efforts extended beyond spiritual teachings. She supported women in navigating the challenges of marriage, widowhood, and motherhood, and provided practical advice rooted in Islamic ethics. By doing so, she transformed the role of women from passive participants to active contributors in the social fabric of Multan.

She also strengthened community bonds by ensuring that no woman—especially widows and orphans—was left unsupported. Oral traditions suggest that she frequently organized gatherings where women were reminded of their responsibilities towards family and society, and where they found encouragement to live with dignity, faith, and resilience.

Her model of social reform was quiet but transformative, ensuring that women were not isolated but were integrated into the broader mission of the Suhrawardi order.

Moral and Ethical Guidance

Rasheeda Bano's guidance extended into the moral and ethical formation of women and families. She emphasized virtues such as patience, modesty, honesty, and gratitude, which she considered central to a righteous life.

Her approach was deeply practical. She encouraged women to apply ethical values in daily life—whether in raising children, managing family responsibilities, or dealing with neighbors.

She believed that a moral society could only emerge if families were built upon justice, mutual respect, and devotion to God.

In particular, she condemned arrogance, extravagance, and cruelty, seeing these as causes of social decay. Instead, she promoted humility, moderation, and compassion, thereby laying a foundation for both personal reform and collective harmony.

Educational Contributions

One of Rasheeda Bano's most lasting contributions was her emphasis on education for women. She believed that women must have access to both religious and practical knowledge in order to fulfill their roles effectively.

She encouraged Qur'anic learning among women, taught them moral lessons from the lives of the Mothers of the Believers, and urged them to cultivate wisdom that would guide their families. Oral traditions suggest that she also promoted practical education, such as learning languages and skills that could help women engage with a wider community.

Her vision of education was not limited to religious knowledge but extended to the practical skills that could support both spiritual and material well-being. By doing so, she aligned with her husband's broader mission of spreading learning and reform through the Suhrawardi order.

Spiritual Guidance

Above all, Rasheeda Bano was a source of spiritual illumination. She offered women guidance in prayer, remembrance of God, and moral discipline. Her spiritual gatherings created opportunities for women to experience the transformative power of Sufism.

Her emphasis on inner purification—the control of ego and desires—reflected the central teachings of her family heritage. She reminded women that true closeness to God could not be achieved without humility, service, and compassion.

Her spiritual guidance also extended into the family environment. She nurtured her son, Sadruddin Arif, who later became a great Sufi leader, and she influenced her grandson, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, one of the most renowned saints of South Asia. Her upbringing of these figures demonstrates her ability to combine spiritual guidance with practical parenting, ensuring that her descendants carried forward her values.

Child Upbringing and Legacy through Descendants

The role of Rasheeda Bano as a mother and grandmother was one of the most defining aspects of her contribution to South Asian Sufism. She understood that the continuity of a spiritual tradition depended not only on public teachings but also on the private nurturing of the next generation. Through her careful upbringing of her son and grandson, she ensured that the Suhrawardi order would flourish and that its values would remain deeply embedded in society.

Upbringing of Sadruddin Arif

Rasheeda Bano was the mother of Sadruddin Arif, who later became one of the most prominent heirs of the Suhrawardi order. She recognized early in his life that he carried the spiritual inheritance of his father, Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya.

Her upbringing of Sadruddin Arif was grounded in three principles:

Discipline of character – She instilled in him patience, humility, and justice, reminding him that leadership in a spiritual community must be guided by service rather than pride.

Commitment to knowledge – She ensured that he studied the Qur'an, Hadith, jurisprudence, and Sufi teachings. She arranged for him to learn not only from his father but also from other scholars of Multan, creating a broad base of education.

Service to humanity – She taught him that true sainthood required active care for the poor, widows, and orphans. This moral training shaped his later leadership as a compassionate spiritual guide.

Sadruddin Arif grew to embody the balance of intellectual, spiritual, and ethical values that his mother had emphasized. He became a central figure in spreading the Suhrawardi teachings after his father's passing, carrying forward both the scholarly rigor of his father and the moral-spiritual depth of his mother.

Influence on Shah Rukn-e-Alam

Rasheeda Bano's influence extended to her grandson, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, one of the greatest saints of the Indian subcontinent. Although she did not live to see the full flowering of his spiritual career, her guidance during his formative years left a profound mark.

She taught Shah Rukn-e-Alam the values of humility, generosity, and self-restraint. Her stories about the lives of the Ahl al-Bayt and the Mothers of the Believers served as his earliest moral lessons, shaping his understanding of sainthood as rooted in devotion, simplicity, and service.

Importantly, she emphasized the role of prayer and remembrance of God, training him to see spirituality as the foundation of all human activity. This early discipline allowed him to develop into a towering figure whose influence spread across South Asia and whose shrine in Multan continues to be a site of devotion.

A Model of Maternal and Spiritual Nurturing

Through her role as mother and grandmother, Rasheeda Bano demonstrated that spiritual leadership is not confined to public preaching or governance of khanqahs. It is also exercised within the family environment, where values are nurtured and future leaders are formed.

Her careful balance of affection and discipline, coupled with her emphasis on both scholarship and service, created a legacy that transcended generations. By shaping the character of Sadruddin Arif and Shah Rukn-e-Alam, she indirectly influenced thousands of disciples and communities across the subcontinent.

In this way, her child upbringing was not merely a private act of parenting—it was a strategic act of spiritual preservation and transmission, ensuring the continuity of the Suhrawardi order and the flourishing of Islam in South Asia.

Oral Traditions and Preserved Memories

The life of Rasheeda Bano, like many early Sufi women, was not extensively recorded in formal chronicles. Instead, her memory was preserved through oral traditions, family narratives, and the testimonies of disciples. These oral accounts offer invaluable insight into her personality, character, and contributions to the Suhrawardi order in Multan and beyond.

Stories of Devotion and Piety

Oral traditions emphasize her devotion to God, her love for the Ahl al-Bayt, and her imitation of Hazrat Fatima. Many accounts describe how she spent her nights in prayer, recitation, and reflection. Devotees narrate that she would often encourage women in her circle to combine their daily responsibilities with constant remembrance of God, thus transforming ordinary actions into spiritual acts.

One widely repeated story speaks of her constant generosity: she never allowed food or resources to remain unused when the poor were in need. Women in Multan often recalled that her kitchen was a place where the hungry were never turned away, symbolizing her compassion and faith in divine providence.

Teachings Transmitted through Generations

Much of Rasheeda Bano's legacy was preserved through her descendants, particularly Sadruddin Arif and Shah Rukn-e-Alam. Oral reports indicate that many of the values these saints embodied—such as humility, fairness, and love for humanity—were first instilled by her.

Disciples often recount that Shah Rukn-e-Alam would tell stories of his grandmother, presenting her as a model of patience and faith. This shows how her example was deliberately remembered and transmitted as part of the Suhrawardi spiritual heritage.

Women's Circles and Spiritual Influence

Another strand of oral memory highlights her role in creating spaces for women's education and spiritual growth. These gatherings were informal, often taking place in her home or garden,

where women would listen to her guidance on morality, modesty, charity, and devotion. Oral accounts suggest that she framed her teachings with references to the lives of the Mothers of the Believers and Hazrat Fatima, making her guidance both relatable and inspiring.

Such women's circles were remembered as safe havens where women could discuss not only spiritual matters but also practical issues like family, social support, and financial struggles. Her leadership in these spaces ensured that the Suhrawardi order included women's voices and participation in ways that written records seldom captured.

Anecdotes of Guidance and Wisdom

Oral traditions also preserve anecdotes about her wisdom in resolving disputes or offering counsel. For example, one story relates how a young woman once came to her in despair over financial hardship. Rasheeda Bano not only provided material help but also encouraged her to adopt resilience and trust in divine mercy. Such stories underline her role as both a spiritual mother and a practical supporter of her community.

Significance of Oral Narratives

While written histories often focused on male saints, these oral traditions ensured that Rasheeda Bano's contributions were not erased. They highlight the interplay between memory, devotion, and lived experience in sustaining the legacy of Sufi women.

By valuing these stories, scholars and devotees alike recognize that the transmission of Sufi heritage was not confined to formal texts but was deeply rooted in the lived practices and oral testimonies of communities. Rasheeda Bano's memory survives precisely because she touched lives so profoundly that her example became part of collective storytelling and devotional practice.

Conclusion

Rasheeda Bano, the wife of Hazrat Baha-ud-Din Zakariya and mother of Sadruddin Arif, occupies a unique place in the spiritual history of South Asia. Emerging from a distinguished Qureshi Hashmi and Jilani lineage, she embodied both noble heritage and profound piety. Her life demonstrates how women contributed not only to the private nurturing of families but also to the public growth of spiritual orders.

She dedicated herself to the service of women, offering moral, spiritual, and social guidance. She supported their financial independence, promoted their education, and helped them participate in religious life with dignity and confidence. Inspired by her love for the Ahl al-Bayt and the Mothers of the Believers, especially Hazrat Fatima, she fashioned her life as a model of humility, devotion, and resilience.

Her role as the mother of Sadruddin Arif and grandmother of Shah Rukn-e-Alam shows her deep impact on the continuity of the Suhrawardi order. By instilling discipline, scholarship, and compassion in her descendants, she ensured the endurance of a spiritual tradition that continues to inspire millions. Oral traditions further reinforce her influence, preserving memories of her generosity, wisdom, and commitment to women's empowerment.

Thus, Rasheeda Bano must be remembered not only as the wife of a great saint but also as a spiritual leader in her own right—a woman whose legacy combined faith, service, education, and maternal guidance to shape the future of Islamic spirituality in the Indian subcontinent.

Recommendations

Drawing from the life and legacy of Rasheeda Bano, the following recommendations can be made for both scholarship and contemporary society:

Recognition of Women's Role in Sufism

Scholars and researchers should give greater attention to the contributions of women in Sufi orders, ensuring that figures like Rasheeda Bano are integrated into mainstream historical and spiritual narratives.

Preservation of Oral Traditions

Oral accounts about female saints should be collected, documented, and preserved in academic archives to safeguard women's spiritual heritage that written texts often overlook.

Promotion of Women's Education and Leadership

Following her example, contemporary Muslim societies should invest in women's education—both secular and spiritual—so that women can contribute meaningfully to community life.

Integration of Spiritual and Social Guidance

Just as Rasheeda Bano combined moral instruction with practical support, modern initiatives should blend spirituality with social services to address the holistic needs of communities.

Family as a Site of Spiritual Training

Her approach to raising Sadruddin Arif and Shah Rukn-e-Alam highlights the importance of families as spaces for transmitting values. Parents today can draw inspiration from her example to nurture integrity, humility, and service in their children.

Further Academic Research

Future studies should explore comparative perspectives between Rasheeda Bano and other female figures in Islamic history, situating her legacy within broader discourses on women's leadership in religion.



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