



Seafaring with the Saint: An Ethnogeographical study of fisherfolks in Nagore Shrine, Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

In Southern India's coastal regions, fishermen face various challenges in their livelihoods, including the dangers of the sea. Shahul Hamid, a 16th-century Sufi master known as the "Protector of Navigation", holds significant spiritual influence in Nagore, Tamil Nadu, and beyond. Despite this influence, scholars have overlooked the impact of the saint's shrine on fishermen. This study uses the concept of sense of place to explore the connections between the Nagore fishermen community and the saint's shrine. Through qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups, the study uncovers complex relationships between fishermen and the shrine, revealing it as a source of security and connection to ancestral traditions amid modernization. The analysis highlights diverse relationships with the shrine, emphasizing the interplay between culture, spirituality, and livelihood in coastal communities.

Keywords: Fisherfolk, Nagore Dargah, Sense of Place, Coastal Communities, Cultural Geography

1. Introduction

Coastal communities worldwide possess a rich cultural heritage, spiritual traditions, and communal ties. Sacred spaces serve as focal points for community identity, social cohesion, and spiritual engagement. The Nagore Dargah, a shrine to the Sufi saint Shahul Hamid, exemplifies a sacred space intertwined with coastal life in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, a region along the southeastern coast of India, near the Bay of Bengal. Strategically located near key fishing areas, the shrine is geographically significant to the local fisherfolk

communities, who reside in settlements like Old Nambiyar Nagar and New Nambiyar Nagar, situated just a few kilometres from the Dargah. This proximity facilitates regular visits by fishermen seeking blessings for safe voyages and successful catches, making the shrine an essential part of their maritime routines.

This study explores the relationship between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah through the lens of the sense of place concept, highlighting the shrine's significance in cultural practices, economic interactions, and social networks. Despite the shrine's importance, this spatial and

spiritual relationship remains understudied. Through qualitative analysis of fisherfolk narratives, this research examines biographical ties, generational transmission, economic interactions, and communal practices to understand the intricate relationships between individuals, communities, and sacred landscapes. It aims to contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical interventions, emphasizing the role of sacred spaces in fostering community resilience, cultural preservation, and social cohesion.

2. Literature Review

Cultural geography, alternatively termed human geography as per Tuan's preference, emerged as the initial locus of concern for a sense of place. In its nascent stages, pioneering researchers in this field adopted humanistic frameworks akin to anthropological approaches (Cighi, 2008). Relph (1997) emphasizes that sense of place is not merely a theoretical construct devised by geographers but rather an innate faculty inherent to all individuals connecting them to their surroundings. This intrinsic aspect of human cognition underpins the significance of a sense of place within cultural geography, where it serves as a fundamental framework for understanding how individuals perceive, interpret, and engage with their environment (Relph, 1997). Scholars within this domain delve into diverse dimensions of sense of place, exploring its role in shaping identity, fostering community attachment, and influencing spatial behaviours.

The concept of "sense of place" encapsulates the emotional and psychological connections that individuals or communities develop with particular geographical locales. These connections are frequently shaped by individual experiences, cultural legacies, and environmental influences. As Cross (2001) observes, a sense of place is subject to variation among individuals, historical contexts, and over one's lifetime. It embodies a complex interplay of emotions, biographies, imagination, stories, and personal experiences reflecting the values and attachments people attribute to their surroundings. Thus, a sense of place epitomizes

the intricate relationship between individuals and their environment, encompassing both physical attributes and subjective meanings ascribed to a location.

Fundamentally, the notion of a sense of place functions as a theoretical framework facilitating the understanding of the intricate and nuanced interactions between humans and their environment within the realm of cultural geography. It underscores the significance of place attachment and meaning-making processes in shaping individuals' perceptions and experiences within their spatial surroundings.

Studies across various disciplines have delved into the influence of spiritual figures on communities, elucidating their roles in fostering cohesion, providing guidance, imparting wisdom, and engendering hope (Chile and Simpson, 2004; Platovnjak, 2017; Altmann et al., 2012; da Silva et al., 2019; Reddy, 2020). However, the scholarly discourse primarily revolves around the broader nexus between religion, spirituality, community dynamics, sustainability, and management, with scant attention paid to the nuanced relationship that individuals, particularly fisherfolk, foster with spiritual figures and sacred sites and the ensuing impact on their livelihoods and cultural practices. While Kelkar-Khambete's work (2012) sheds light on the unique rapport shared between fishing communities and their maritime environments, providing insights into the religious practices and community dynamics of Hindu fisherfolk in Kerala, there remains a conspicuous gap in the literature regarding the intricate dynamics underpinning the relationship between fisherfolk and sacred sites. This gap underscores the imperative for a comprehensive exploration of the cultural significance, environmental ramifications, community dynamics, and global perspectives embedded within the relationship between fisherfolk and sacred sites.

Additional studies by Johnson (2000) and Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have explored the role of sacred spaces in shaping community identity and social cohesion among coastal communities. Massey (1994) discusses the intersection of space, place, and gender, providing a critical framework for understanding

the gendered dimensions of the sense of place. Chidester and Linenthal (1995) highlight the socio-cultural significance of American sacred spaces, drawing parallels with sacred sites in other cultural contexts. Jackson (1994) and Basso (1996) emphasize the role of cultural geography in mapping the meanings attributed to places by different communities.

Furthermore, Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) provide a comprehensive overview of the anthropology of space and place, highlighting the diverse ways in which cultural practices and beliefs are spatially situated. Soja (1996) and Harvey (1993) offer critical insights into the socio-spatial dynamics of contemporary urban environments, which can be applied to understanding the spatial practices of coastal communities. Sack (1997) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of human-environment interactions, which is particularly relevant to the study of sacred sites and community resilience.

3. Methodology

The study focuses on the Nagore Dargah in Tamil Nadu, centered around the tomb of the 16th-century Sufi saint Shahul Hameed, or Nagore Andavar, and its relationship with the local fisherfolk community. Data collection began with secondary sources, including historical texts and previous studies, followed by a pilot study conducted with the Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA) Foundation, an NGO (Non-governmental organization) supporting fishermen in Nagapattinam and Karaikal. Old Nambiyar Nagar and New Nambiyar Nagar were selected as study sites due to their proximity to the shrine and strong historical ties to the saint. Informants were chosen through purposive sampling based on criteria such as seniority, personal association with the saint, and willingness to participate. Fieldwork, conducted in December 2022, employed qualitative methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather insights into the community's spiritual, cultural, and economic ties to the shrine. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted, focusing

on spiritual connections, economic practices, and the generational transmission of religious devotion. Data were analysed using thematic analysis via MAXQDA, which helped identify recurring themes, such as the role of the saint in ensuring safety at sea and the shrine's cultural significance. Saturation was reached when no new themes emerged, ensuring the depth and accuracy of the findings.

4. The Nagore Shrine: A Sacred Space for Fisherfolks

It had always been a tradition to pray to the 16th-century Sufi saint Shahul Hameed, whom the fishing community fondly calls "*Nagore Andavar*". *Andavar* means God, and therefore the saint is regarded as the "God of Nagore". He is also commonly called among fishermen by several other names like *Erayvan*, *Bawa*, *Ajomon*, *Mira Sahib*, *Qadir Wali*, *Nagore Miran*, *Nagore Andagai*, and *Nagore Nayagam*. His resting place, i.e., the Dargah (Figure 1), is known as *Andavar Ko-il*, which means Nagore Temple.

The saint is highly revered as he was the direct 22nd descendant of Prophet Muhammad. Born in 1504 in Manickkapur near Ayodhya in the Northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, India, he performed numerous miracles during his lifetime and continues to help people with miracles even now. His shrine is located in Nagore, a small town in the Nagapattinam District of Tamil Nadu, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal.

Embracing spiritual pursuits at an early age, Shahul Hamid embarked on a journey traversing West Asia, reaching Mecca, and further venturing to Burma, China, Ceylon, and eventually the South Indian coast, accompanied by his devoted followers. Notably, his arrival coincided with a tumultuous period for Indian seafarers, particularly the Tamil Muslim ship owners, who faced relentless harassment from the formidable Portuguese naval forces. Amidst the hostile presence of the Portuguese at Nagapattinam, the presence of the Sufi sage in nearby Nagore provided profound solace, not only to the beleaguered maritime traders but also to the seafaring fishermen. Demonstrating an

unwavering commitment to social welfare and material prosperity, regardless of distinctions of caste, creed, race, or religion, he tirelessly engaged in missionary endeavours, leveraging his extraordinary healing abilities, often involving miraculous deeds associated with water.

Through his hagiographies, we also glean insights into Shahul Hamid's remarkable curative powers, many of which revolve around water. In one account, a paralyzed boy experiences immediate healing after being sprinkled with water from the saint's *Kashkul* (alms bowl), prompting the boy's non-Muslim father to embrace Islam. In another narrative, a blind man's sight is restored through water distributed by the saint. Additionally, Shahul Hamid is attributed with control over natural water sources; he can transmute saline water into potable water, a phenomenon commemorated annually on the anniversary of his passing. He commands rainfall, alleviates droughts, directs rivers to subdue malevolent spirits, and intervenes to safeguard forts from destruction (Asher, 2009).

The hagiographies further attribute extraordinary abilities to Shahul Hamid, including the capacity to levitate, outmanoeuvre Hindu yogis, and perform a range of miraculous acts, all in line with the revered traditions of Sufi saints. Renowned for his patronage among South Indian Muslims during maritime voyages, Shahul Hamid later propagated Islam in Thanjavur, where his healing of Hindu King Achyutappa Nayakar led to a land donation for the Dargah in Nagore. His demise in the latter part of the 16th century initiated a rich tradition of lore, accentuating his miraculous feats, often intertwined with water symbolism (Asher, 2009).

Many tales recount miraculous events attributed to the saint of Nagore, particularly involving the sea and maritime activities. One such story describes how, amidst shaving before his morning bath, the saint responded to prayers from passengers aboard a sinking Dutch ship by simply directing his shaving mirror towards the sea, miraculously sealing the ship's breach, and saving all onboard. Fishermen in Nagapattinam, Nagore, and Karaikal revere the saint as their deity, seeking His blessings before embarking

on their sea journeys. This reverence extends beyond Tamil Nadu; the Tamil diaspora, especially in the 19th century, placed their trust in Nagore Andavar when venturing into the sea, erecting memorials in his honor wherever they landed. Regarded as the guardian of seafarers, the saint's spiritual influence stretches from the East Indies to the West Indies, evidenced by numerous mosques, madrasas, and Sufi lodges bearing his name across South and Southeast Asia. Notably, he is the sole Muslim saint commemorated with surviving memorials in regions as diverse as Penang, Singapore, Myanmar, and the Caribbean, with recent additions in Toronto and New York. These memorials, known as "branch office" tomb shrines, annually celebrate the saint's death anniversary with rituals mirroring those at the Nagore Dargah in Tamil Nadu, including flag-raising ceremonies and *Kandoori* celebrations.

In the customs observed by the fisherfolk community who venerate saints, various rituals and ceremonies play integral roles. Upon the birth of a child, whether within an individual household or across the broader community, a tonsure ceremony is conducted at the Dargah. During this rite, the infant's hair is ritually sacrificed in homage to the saint, seeking his blessings. Likewise, significant life events such as weddings, ear-piercing ceremonies, engagements, and the *Punitahneeradduu vizah* (Holy Bathing ceremony of the girl) (Figure 2) are marked by extending the first invitation to Nagore Andavar.

Fishermen traditionally visit the Nagore Dargah before setting sail, engaging in rituals like offering flowers, incense, and *Sambrani* (Balsamic resin). They actively participate in the *Kandoori* festival, where a coin called *Pamaram* is attached to the flag rope during the flag-raising ceremony, symbolizing prayers for safety. Fishermen carry this coin during fishing trips, believing it ensures their well-being. The shrine holds spiritual, security, and cultural significance for fisherfolk, representing divine favour, protection, and cultural identity. It serves as a symbol of faith, security, and cultural continuity, embodying their resilience in maritime life's challenges.



Figure 1. Dargah, Andavar Ko-il, Nagore Temple. Photo by the Author.



Figure 2. Holy Bathing Invitation, Nagore Dargah. Photo by the Author.

5. Sense of Place and the Fisherfolk Community

Fishermen confront numerous challenges in the maritime environment, spanning both physical and socio-economic realms. The sea's unpredictable and hazardous nature, characterized by rough seas, storms, and cyclones, poses significant risks to both vessels and crew members. These conditions not only endanger fishermen's safety but also hamper their ability to conduct fishing operations efficiently, resulting in decreased catch yields and financial losses. Furthermore, fishermen encounter socio-economic challenges stemming from economic volatility, including fluctuating fish prices and market demand, which introduce uncertainties into their livelihoods and affect their income stability and socio-economic well-being.

In the face of the challenges encountered by fishermen, Shahul Hamid holds a significance that goes beyond religious reverence; he serves as a tangible source of comfort and safety for those navigating hazardous waters. The rituals and ceremonies performed at the Nagore Dargah by fishing communities emphasize their enduring belief in Shahul Hamid's protective presence, seeking divine intervention for safe voyages and successful catches. Furthermore, Shahul Hamid's influence extends far beyond Nagore, resonating with fishing communities across the Indian Ocean and beyond. The proliferation of shrines and memorials dedicated to him in distant lands attests to his role as the "Protector of Navigation", uniting seafaring cultures worldwide across geographical boundaries.

Amidst modern challenges, Shahul Hamid's role as the "Protector of Navigation" remains crucial for fishermen. By invoking his name and seeking his blessings, they find strength to navigate unpredictable waters. As custodians of maritime heritage, Shahul Hamid's devotees uphold his legacy, ensuring his role as the guardian of seafarers endures. The Dargah also preserves cultural heritage, perpetuating customs integral to fishing communities' identity. Through rituals and festivals, fisherfolk reaffirm their connection to their roots. The relationship between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah extends beyond spiritual devotion, involving intricate material and perceptual connections

that profoundly influence their daily lives and collective consciousness. Fisherfolk expresses reverence through various offerings, symbolizing their spiritual devotion and gratitude.

The offerings at the Nagore shrine hold deep symbolic significance for fisherfolk, rooted in their belief systems and cultural practices. Fishermen view offering these items as a form of reciprocity, believing that their acts of devotion bring divine blessings and protection from the uncertainties of the sea. Additionally, the shrine provides worshippers with perceptual experiences that go beyond the physical, evoking feelings of reverence, awe, and spiritual transcendence. Its architectural features, sacred relics, and ambient sounds create a multisensory environment that enhances worshippers' spiritual connection with the divine.

To understand the complex connections between fisherfolk and the Nagore shrine, employing the sense of place framework is essential. This framework highlights the subjective and multidimensional nature of human-environment interactions, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. Cross (2001) explored this concept by surveying residents of Nevada County, California, revealing the diverse ways individuals connect with specific environments. Building upon this approach, the present study aims to explore the relationships between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah using a similar investigative framework (Figure 3).

6. Findings

The analysis revealed intricate connections between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah, showcasing the interplay of cultural, spiritual, and communal dimensions. Various relationship types emerged, such as spiritual, biographical, narrative, and dependency ties. The study highlighted the temporal and their spatial dimensions of these connections, their evolution over time, and spatial presence within the community. Religious practices, rituals, generational influences, and communal factors played significant roles in shaping the bond with the Dargah. Testimonials of miraculous beliefs and inclusivity further enriched these

connections, providing valuable insights into the collective sense of place within the coastal locale.

6.1 Biographical Relationships

Biographical relationships in this study represent the personal histories, memories, and experiences of individuals closely linked to the Nagore Dargah. These connections are shaped by specific events, anecdotes, or milestones in participants' lives, intertwined with their interactions with the shrine and the saint. Through interview narratives, the significance of biographical relationships emerges as participants recount transformative experiences such as illness, guidance from the saint, lifestyle changes, and familial dynamics influenced by devotion to Nagore Andavar.

Vineeta: "I used to catch big fishes in the sea. But the saint asked me to quit the job and do some easy work. Therefore, now I am selling fish. Not the big ones, only the small fish. Nagore Andavar has asked me not to do heavy work. I do only small work and sleep, take rest. I used to think that if I caught big fish or sold big fish, then I would get more money, buy a big house, and sleep peacefully. But Nagore Andavar told me I should worship him, and he would give me lots of money by selling a small number of fish. So, I only pray to him".

Vineeta's narratives show how her connection with the saint led to a transformative shift from fishing to less strenuous work. This highlights the personal aspect of her relationship with the Dargah, shaped by spiritual interactions and adherence to the saint's guidance. These narratives emphasize the importance of biographical relationships in understanding the profound impact of the Nagore Dargah on individuals' lives and identities within the community.

6.2 Generational Relationships

Generational relationships involve passing down values, traditions, and cultural practices within a community over successive generation. Rooted in shared experiences and beliefs, these connections reflect the continuity and resilience of cultural heritage over time. For example,

families may maintain traditions like visiting the Nagore Dargah across generations, fostering a sense of identity and belonging within the community.

Pakirswami: "For generations, we have been going to the Dargah. My mother used to go to the Dargah. When a baby is born in our house, or in the whole community, we do the tonsure ceremony in the Dargah. The hair is sacrificed in the name of the saint, so he gets the blessing of Nagore Andavar. So, since birth, we are attached to him, and till death, he is there for us, the whole family, and our whole community to protect. So, from the previous generation to the next generation that will come, all will be associated with the Dargah".

Generational relationships are central to the connection between individuals or communities and the Nagore Dargah. These accounts demonstrate a continuous devotion spanning multiple generations within the fishing community. Pakirswami describes how this familial tradition, involving visits to the Dargah and rituals like the tonsure ceremony, is deeply ingrained, emphasizing the intergenerational transmission of religious practices and beliefs. The narrative underscores Nagore Andavar's enduring significance in providing protection and blessings to entire families and communities. These narratives highlight the profound and lasting nature of generational relationships with the Nagore Dargah, shaping familial identities and communal cohesion within the fishing community across successive generations.

Suresh: "My mother used to take me to the Dargah. My father as well used to worship Nagore Andavar every time before sailing, and otherwise also. Now also every Thursday I go to the Dargah, without any gap. If I am in Nagore".

Suresh's narrative portrays a generational relationship with Nagore Andavar within his family. His upbringing involved regular visits to the Dargah guided by his mother, and his father's consistent worship of Nagore Andavar before sailing indicates the continuity of

devotion. Suresh's commitment to the tradition, demonstrated by regular visits every Thursday, underscores the enduring nature of the generational connection. Overall, the narrative emphasizes the transmission of religious practices across generations within the family, showcasing Nagore Andavar's integral role in shaping familial beliefs and traditions over time.

6.3 Dependent Relationships

The fishermen's community deeply relies on Nagore Andavar for their livelihood, safety at sea, and overall well-being. They depend on the saint's blessings for successful fishing trips, protection from natural disasters, and resolving personal or familial challenges. In return, they express gratitude through prayers, offerings, and acts of devotion, attributing their successes to the saint's benevolence. This reciprocal bond emphasizes their spiritual connection and sense of indebtedness to Nagore Andavar.

Rajan: "I write different brand names on pieces of paper and place them in a jar. I then shake the jar and select one by asking Bawa to name it. This is how I chose the fishing net brand. You can observe that many decisions in my life are guided by Bawa; how could I fathom losing his guidance? It is not just about fishing nets; for every decision I need to make or every purchase I consider, I consult Bawa first. Before setting out for fishing, I seek his permission, and upon my return, I visit him, sharing all the details and seeking his advice".

This illustrates the interviewee's dependency on Nagore Andavar for guidance, protection, and decision-making in various aspects of life.

Karvarayan: "I belong to the fishermen community, and my father is Bawa. When I encounter any trouble in my life, whom do I reach out to? My father. Bawa is like a father figure to me. Just as your father looks after you and provides you with financial support, similarly, Bawa provides me with financial assistance".

The excerpt underscores a dependency relationship wherein Karvarayan, belonging to the fishermen community, perceives Bawa as a

paternal figure. This dependency manifests notably when facing adversity, as Karvarayan instinctively turns to Bawa for support and financial assistance. This portrayal highlights the intricate network of social support within the community, wherein individuals seek guidance and material aid from respected figures like Bawa, akin to seeking paternal counsel in familial structures.

6.4 Spiritual Relationships

Spiritual relationships encompass the profound and personal bonds individuals forge with the saint, characterized by unwavering devotion, faith, and a belief in the saint's divine authority. These relationships are marked by the earnest quest for guidance, protection, and divine intervention across various spheres of life.

As articulated by Smriti: "In a dream one day, Baba appeared to me and instructed me to visit the Nagore Dargah for healing. Following his guidance, I spent 48 days at the Dargah, fervently praying to Ajomon day and night, ultimately experiencing a full recovery".

This account illustrates the deep spiritual connection individuals harbour towards the Nagore Dargah and its saint, *Ajomon* (Shahul Hamid). Such narratives underscore the profound impact of these spiritual bonds on individuals' beliefs, practices, and life trajectories, highlighting the depth of their spiritual relationship.

Similarly, Ganesh's testimony further elucidates the depth of the spiritual bond shared by the fisherfolk with Nagore Andavar. Ganesh expresses: "My life is Nagore Dargah. I can only say this. See this picture, this is the boat I have named after Bawa. My blood circulation is Bawa".

Here, the fisherfolk's profound spiritual affiliation with Nagore Andavar is palpable, with the Dargah symbolizing the epicentre of their existence. The act of naming boats (Figure 4) after Nagore Andavar and adorning them with his imagery serves as tangible manifestations of their spiritual devotion.

These narratives highlight the vital role of spiritual relationships in individuals' lives, marked by unwavering devotion and dependence on the saint for protection, guidance, and miracles. Nagore Andavar is seen as a divine protector and saviour, closely associated with the community's well-being and safety, demonstrating the deep spiritual connection between the saint and the fisherfolk community.

6.5 Economic Relationships

Economic relationships between fisherfolk and Nagore Andavar involve a mutual dependency, where individuals or communities rely on the saint for economic prosperity in their livelihoods. This dependence is shown through practices like financial contributions to the Dargah and seeking blessings for fishing endeavours.

The belief in Nagore Andavar's ability to bless fishing activities is deeply rooted within the fishing community. They regularly visit the Dargah to seek divine intervention before fishing, attributing their potential success to the saint's blessings. Rituals during the *Kandoori* festival, such as burning *Sambrani* and fasting, are acts of devotion aimed at securing economic well-being.

Ravi: "Bawa has always been close to the fishermen... One percent of earnings or share we give to the Dargah".

Ravi's statement highlights the economic connection between fisherfolk and the Dargah, mentioning a contribution of one percent of earnings or shares to the Dargah. This financial commitment represents a reciprocal economic bond, with the community investing in the Dargah in anticipation of economic benefits.

6.6 Narrative Relationships

The narrative bond between the saint and the fisherfolk community comprises shared stories, traditions, and communal ties centered around Nagore Andavar and the Dargah. These narratives transmit collective experiences, fostering a cohesive sense of identity and belonging among community members. The fisherfolk venerate Nagore Andavar, attributing divine attributes and significant importance to his presence.

An anecdote from the interview illustrates this narrative relationship, recounting a miraculous event where the saint is believed to have saved a sinking boat:

"One day, Bawa was shaving near the beach, and a boat was sinking. The person in the boat was praying, 'Andavarey ina kha paatey' (God, please save me). The saint threw the mirror, blocked the hole, and saved the boat from sinking".

This narrative highlights the community's strong belief in the saint's protective abilities and intervention during crises. Through such stories, the fisherfolk community strengthens their spiritual connection to Nagore Dargah and their collective faith in the saint's benevolence. These narratives inspire spiritually and preserve communal traditions, strengthening the bond between the fisherfolk and Nagore Andavar. Overall, this narrative relationship underscores the enduring cultural and spiritual significance of Nagore Dargah within their collective identity.

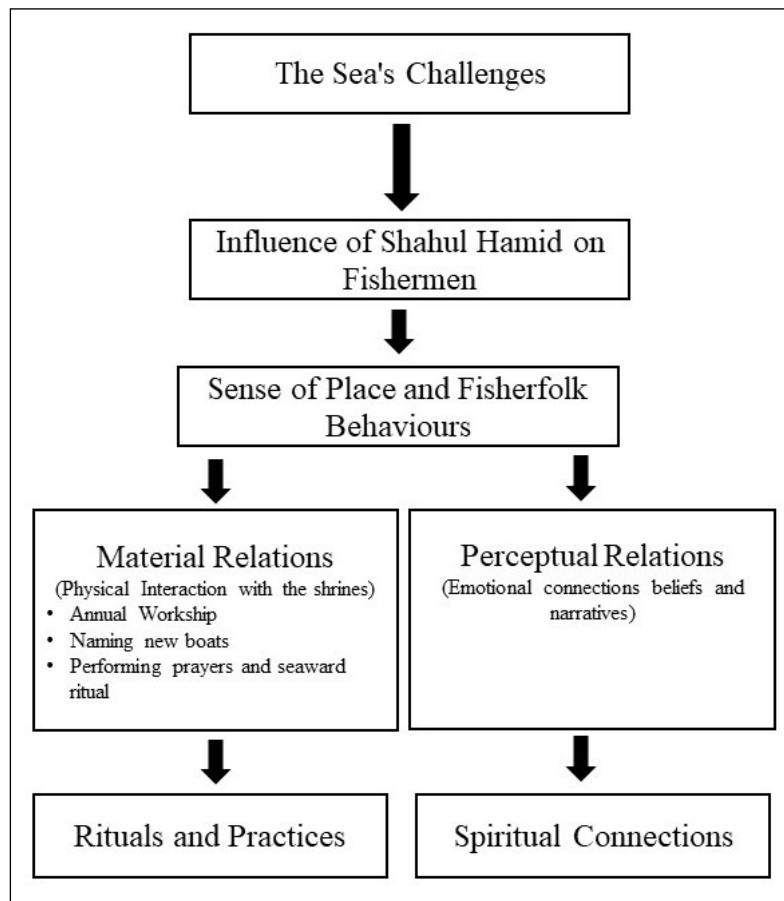


Figure 3. Nagore Dargah Investigation Frame. Author's elaboration.



Figure 4. Nagore Dargah, Naming Boat. Photo by the Author.

6.7 Communal Relationship

The communal relationship between the fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah is evidenced by the inclusive ethos of the worship space, which welcomes individuals from varied religious affiliations. In contrast to exclusive religious sites, the Dargah fosters an environment of communal harmony and unity. Moreover, the incorporation of Nagore Andavar's blessings into various community ceremonies, such as weddings and engagement rituals, underscores the pivotal role of the saint in communal celebrations and social gatherings.

As expressed by one of the fishermen: "Normally here in Nagapattinam, Muslim people and fishermen are very close to each other... Both the communities participate in each other celebrations".

This statement underscores the communal dynamics and interactions within the Dargah, wherein individuals from diverse religious backgrounds converge to seek blessings and engage in shared religious festivities. This relationship epitomizes harmonious coexistence and mutual support between the Muslim and fisherfolk communities, fostering a sense of unity and camaraderie that transcends religious boundaries.

7. Discussion

The investigation into the relationship between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah reveals a complex interplay of cultural, spiritual, and communal dimensions within this coastal community. Through qualitative analysis, a diverse spectrum of connections emerged, each offering unique insights into the significance of the Dargah in the lives of fisherfolk.

From biographical ties to generational transmission, the multifaceted nature of these relationships underscores the nuanced dynamics at play. Participants shared personal narratives reflecting transformative experiences influenced by their interactions with the shrine and the saint. These stories illustrate the subjective and personal dimensions of individuals' relationships with the Dargah, shaping their life trajectories and personal identities within the community.

Moreover, the study highlights the temporal and spatial dimensions of these relationships, elucidating their evolution over time and their spatial manifestations within the community. Generational transmission emerges as a pivotal aspect of the connection between individuals or communities and the Nagore Dargah. The continuity of devotion and reverence spanning across multiple generations within the fishing community underscores the enduring significance of Nagore Andavar in shaping familial identities and communal cohesion over time.

The profound role of religious and ritualistic practices, as well as generational and communal influences, emerges as a central theme in shaping the fisherfolk's bond with the Dargah. Participants express deep reliance on the saint for guidance, protection, and economic prosperity. Testimonials of miraculous beliefs and inclusivity further underscore the richness and diversity of these relationships.

These findings hold significant implications for understanding the relationship between sacred spaces and communities. By highlighting the multifaceted nature of connections between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah, the research underscores the intricate ways in which sacred sites serve as focal points for cultural expression, communal identity, and spiritual engagement within local communities. The inclusive ethos of the Dargah exemplifies the role of sacred spaces in fostering social cohesion and interreligious harmony, contributing to a broader understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics shaping sacred landscapes.

The study makes theoretical contributions to cultural geography by emphasizing the dynamic and relational nature of sense of place within the context of sacred spaces. By drawing on concepts such as biographical relationships, generational transmission, and narrative construction, the research expands theoretical frameworks for understanding the socio-spatial dimensions of community attachment and identity formation. Furthermore, the exploration of economic relationships underscores the interconnectedness between sacred landscapes and livelihood practices, providing insights into

the economic agency of religious institutions within local economies.

8. Conclusion

This research offers a comprehensive exploration of the rich and intricate connections between fisherfolk and the Nagore Dargah, unveiling the multifaceted layers of sense of place within this coastal community. Through qualitative analysis, a diverse tapestry of relationships emerges, painting a vivid picture of how cultural, spiritual, and communal dimensions intersect to shape individuals' lives and identities.

The findings highlight the profound geographical importance of the Nagore Dargah. Its strategic location near the fishing settlements of Old and New Nambiyar Nagar places it at the heart of both the spiritual and economic lives of the local community. The physical proximity of the shrine to key fishing areas ensures that it serves as both a spiritual haven and a geographical anchor, deeply intertwined with the fisherfolk's daily navigation practices and livelihoods. This spatial relationship reinforces the sense of place among the community, where their movements on land and sea are inextricably linked to the Dargah's presence, ensuring divine protection during voyages and influencing their economic practices. The study advances our understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics within coastal locales, providing theoretical insights into how sacred spaces like the Nagore Dargah shape community cohesion, identity formation, and livelihood practices. Furthermore, the practical implications of this research extend to community development initiatives, where policymakers and stakeholders

can leverage the cultural and geographical significance of sacred spaces to foster resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable development within coastal communities. By recognizing and honouring local traditions, geographic realities, and values, interventions can be tailored to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of community members, promoting inclusive growth and well-being.

In essence, this research contributes to a deeper appreciation of the intricate tapestry of human-environment interactions within sacred landscapes, offering valuable lessons for fostering community resilience and cultural preservation in coastal regions. As coastal communities confront various challenges in an ever-changing world, understanding the nuanced relationships between geographical location, sacred spaces, and community practices becomes increasingly vital for promoting holistic well-being and sustainable development.

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