

A Historical and Institutional Study of the Punjab Auqaf Department

Dr. Tahir Raza Bukhari
Post-Doctoral Scholar, University of the Punjab.
Email: drtahirazabukhari@yahoo.com

Received on: 11-01-2025

Accepted on: 13-02-2025

Abstract

The institution of waqf has long served as a cornerstone of Islamic philanthropy and religious infrastructure, particularly in Muslim societies where it has historically funded mosques, shrines, madaris, hospitals, and welfare projects. In the context of Pakistan, and specifically the province of Punjab, the systematic management of waqf properties gained prominence after the country's independence in 1947, following decades of neglect under colonial rule. The establishment of the Punjab Auqaf Department marked a significant administrative and legal development in ensuring the preservation, organization, and utilization of waqf assets in accordance with Islamic principles and public welfare objectives. This study aims to provide a comprehensive historical and institutional overview of the Punjab Auqaf Department, focusing on its origin, legal foundations, structural evolution, and functional roles. It explores the department's development from its early legislative roots in the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance of 1959, through provincial restructuring after the dissolution of One Unit in 1970, and into its present-day operations. The research examines how the department manages religious institutions, protects waqf assets, organizes spiritual and cultural events, and utilizes generated revenue for social services including education and healthcare.

Keywords: Punjab Auqaf Department, Waqf Management, Islamic Endowments, Religious Institutions in Pakistan, Shrine Administration

Introduction

The institution of waqf holds a venerable place in Islamic jurisprudence and history, serving as a crucial mechanism for social welfare, religious propagation, and communal development. Rooted in the Islamic principles of charity and perpetual benefit, the waqf system has historically underpinned various educational, spiritual, and social infrastructures across the Muslim world. In the context of South Asia, and particularly the region now known as Punjab in Pakistan, the waqf tradition flourished under the Muslim empires, especially during the Mughal era, where religious endowments were integral to the functioning of mosques, shrines, madaris, caravanserais, and hospitals.

Post-colonial realities, however, necessitated a reformation of waqf administration due to the significant deterioration and mismanagement witnessed during British colonial rule, which lacked a cohesive Islamic framework to govern such religious endowments.¹

The fragmentation of waqf records, arbitrary transfers of waqf properties, and the absence of a regulatory authority led to large-scale exploitation of these assets. The creation of Pakistan in 1947 brought with it the challenge of reconstructing religious institutions within a modern state framework, while remaining faithful to Islamic jurisprudential traditions. It was against this backdrop that the Government of Pakistan initiated a structured mechanism to manage waqf properties, leading to the eventual establishment of the Punjab Auqaf Department.

The Punjab Auqaf Department emerged as a provincial authority tasked with the centralization, regulation, and preservation of waqf assets across Punjab.² Envisioned not merely as a custodial body but also as an institution responsible for the socioeconomic uplift of the Muslim community, the department assumed control over thousands of mosques, shrines, religious schools, and commercial properties whose proceeds were meant for public welfare. The department was also intended to safeguard the sanctity of religious sites while ensuring efficient utilization of revenue in line with the intentions of the original donors.

Despite its foundational importance, scholarly literature on the Punjab Auqaf Department remains scattered and insufficient, with much of the available research focusing narrowly on individual shrines or legal perspectives on waqf.³

A comprehensive historical and functional analysis of the department, its administrative evolution, contributions, and contemporary challenges is still lacking in mainstream academic discourse. This research article seeks to fill this gap by presenting a detailed historical overview and contextual study of the Punjab Auqaf Department, drawing on archival data, legislative documents, and secondary sources to assess its trajectory from inception to the present day.

The present study aims to critically examine the origins, objectives, structure, and roles of the Punjab Auqaf Department within the broader socio-religious and administrative framework of Pakistan. It seeks to answer the following key questions:

- How has the institution of waqf evolved in the Punjab region from the pre-colonial to post-independence period?
- What were the legal and policy imperatives behind the creation of the Punjab Auqaf Department?
- How effectively has the department fulfilled its mandate in terms of religious management, revenue generation, and public service?
- What are the contemporary challenges faced by the department in managing waqf assets and ensuring transparency?

This research holds significant importance not only for policy makers and scholars of Islamic Studies, but also for those involved in public administration, development planning, and religious governance. A critical understanding of the

Punjab Auqaf Department's history and functioning provides insight into how Islamic endowment principles can be reconciled with modern state structures and how religious resources can be mobilized for societal benefit in a contemporary Muslim country.

Historical Background

The concept of waqf is deeply rooted in Islamic civilization, with its origin traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who encouraged the practice of dedicating property for

religious, educational, and social welfare purposes. Throughout Islamic history, auqaf played a vital role in the establishment and sustenance of mosques, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and inns for travelers.⁴ These endowments were designed to be perpetual in nature, governed by religious principles, and managed by trustees to ensure their benefits reached intended recipients across generations.

In the Indian subcontinent, the tradition of waqf became well established during the Delhi Sultanate and particularly flourished under the Mughal Empire. Eminent rulers and nobles established vast endowments to support religious institutions, scholarly pursuits, and social services. The province of Punjab, owing to its strategic and religious significance, became home to numerous prominent shrines, mosques, and madaris supported through **waqf** properties. These included the shrines of Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore, Baba Farid in Pakpattan, and Bahauddin Zakariya in Multan, which were historically managed by hereditary custodians and local trustees.⁵

However, the decline of the Mughal Empire and subsequent advent of British colonial rule led to the weakening of Islamic institutions, including the waqf system. The British introduced secular land laws and revenue policies that neither recognized the sanctity of waqf nor provided a suitable legal mechanism for their protection.⁶

This resulted in widespread misuse, illegal transfers, and fragmentation of waqf properties. Custodianship became a source of personal enrichment rather than public service, while many charitable functions of auqaf ceased to operate effectively.

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the newly formed government recognized the urgent need to reclaim and regulate waqf assets in line with Islamic objectives.⁷ In 1959, the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance was promulgated, marking the first formal legislative attempt to bring waqf under state supervision.

This ordinance laid the groundwork for centralized control and transparent management of religious endowments. Following the abolition of One Unit in 1970, provincial authorities assumed independent control, leading to the formal establishment of the Punjab Auqaf Department, which was tasked with managing waqf properties within Punjab. Since then, the department has played an instrumental role in institutionalizing waqf administration, preserving Islamic heritage, and promoting public welfare through religious endowments.

Establishment of the Punjab Auqaf Department

The formal establishment of the Punjab Auqaf Department is rooted in a post-independence realization of the need for state-regulated administration of Islamic endowments. Following Pakistan's creation in 1947, one of the major concerns facing the government was the deteriorated state of religious institutions and the misuse of waqf properties that had suffered neglect, usurpation, and disorganization under colonial rule.⁸

The early administrative efforts focused on devising a legal and organizational framework to manage these assets effectively in accordance with Islamic objectives.

In response to these concerns, the West Pakistan Waqf Properties Ordinance, 1959 was enacted during the rule of President Ayub Khan.⁹

This ordinance empowered the government to take over the management, control, and administration of all waqf properties in West Pakistan that were being used for religious, charitable, or educational purposes. The ordinance marked a turning point, as it shifted the

custodianship of significant shrines, mosques, and madaris from hereditary caretakers to a centralized administrative system managed by the state.

The ordinance further stipulated the creation of a formal body for enforcement and operational oversight, leading to the establishment of the Auqaf Organization under the West Pakistan government.¹⁰

However, with the abolition of the One Unit scheme in 1970 and the restoration of provincial autonomy, the responsibility of waqf administration devolved to the individual provinces. Consequently, the Punjab Auqaf Department was formally instituted as a provincial department under the Government of Punjab to oversee all waqf-related affairs within its jurisdiction.

The Punjab Auqaf Department was established with a two-fold mandate:

1. To ensure the religious sanctity, preservation, and efficient functioning of mosques, shrines, and religious schools.¹¹
2. To utilize the income generated from waqf properties for public welfare in areas such as education, healthcare, and religious propagation.¹²

Since its establishment, the department has evolved into a structured and hierarchical institution, headed by an Administrator Auqaf Punjab, under the supervision of the Secretary Auqaf and Religious Affairs.¹³

It operates through multiple directorates including Finance, Religious Affairs, Shrines, and Engineering, and maintains regional offices to oversee district-level activities.

The department's creation represented not only a bureaucratic necessity but also a symbolic reclaiming of Islamic religious authority by the state. It was intended to align the management of religious assets with national Islamic values, improve service delivery at religious sites, and restore public trust in the waqf institution through transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Organizational Structure

The Punjab Auqaf Department operates under the administrative jurisdiction of the Government of Punjab, with its functioning guided by Islamic principles, provincial legislation, and public administrative protocols.¹⁴

Since its inception, the department has developed a multi-tiered and functionally specialized organizational structure designed to ensure the effective management, protection, and utilization of waqf properties, as well as the promotion of religious and welfare activities throughout the province.

Administrative Hierarchy

At the apex of the department is the Secretary Auqaf and Religious Affairs, who serves as the principal accounting officer and policy overseer.¹⁵

The Secretary reports directly to the Chief Minister of Punjab and coordinates with other departments to align religious, legal, and development activities.

Beneath the Secretary is the Administrator Auqaf Punjab, who functions as the operational head of the department and is primarily responsible for the day-to-day administration of waqf properties, including shrines, mosques, and institutions.¹⁶ The Administrator supervises multiple directorates and regional offices and ensures the implementation of

departmental policies and legal compliance under the Punjab Waqf Properties Ordinance and related regulations.

2. Key Directorates and Units

The department comprises several specialized directorates, each assigned distinct functions:

Directorate of Religious Affairs:

Oversees religious activities, manages appointments of khateebis, imams, and muazzins, supervises Quranic education programs, and organizes religious events including Urs celebrations.

Directorate of Shrines and Mosques:

Manages the maintenance, cleanliness, and preservation of major shrines and mosques under Auqaf control. It also handles visitor facilities, discipline of staff, and dispute resolution at religious sites.¹⁷

Directorate of Finance:

Responsible for budgeting, revenue collection from waqf assets (rental properties, donations, and commercial ventures), financial audits, and fund allocations for welfare projects.¹⁸

Directorate of Engineering:

Handles construction, renovation, and infrastructure development of shrines, mosques, hospitals, schools, and other waqf-affiliated buildings.

Legal Cell:

Provides legal support in matters of property litigation, encroachments, and enforcement of waqf laws.¹⁹

Regional and Field Offices

To ensure grassroots implementation, the department is divided into several regional zones. Each zone is managed by a Zonal Administrator who coordinates field activities, monitors local staff, and reports to the central office. Field offices maintain direct contact with shrine committees, mosque personnel, and local stakeholders.²⁰

Supporting Institutions

In addition to its administrative units, the department also oversees various educational and healthcare institutions, such as:

- Auqaf-managed hospitals and dispensaries.
- Quranic education centers (Darsgahs, Madaris).
- Training programs for khateebis, imams, and shrine caretakers.

These institutions reflect the department's dual role in spiritual and social development.

Core Functions and Responsibilities

The Punjab Auqaf Department undertakes a broad spectrum of religious, administrative, and social responsibilities derived from both Islamic principles and public policy objectives. Its

core functions encompass the following:

Management and Maintenance of Waqf Properties:

The department is responsible for the administration, preservation, and upkeep of a vast network of waqf-based assets, including mosques, shrines, religious schools, and commercial properties throughout Punjab.²¹

Facilitation of Pilgrimage and Religious Practices:

Ensuring proper facilities and services for pilgrims and worshippers is a central responsibility. This includes sanitation, accommodation, crowd management, and security at major shrines, particularly during peak religious events.²²

Organization of Religious Events and Urs Celebrations:

The department plays a key role in planning and executing religious programs such as Urs commemorations, Milad gatherings, and other special occasions of spiritual and cultural significance, which attract millions of devotees annually.²³

Utilization of Waqf Revenues for Public Welfare:

Income generated from waqf assets is allocated to public service initiatives including the construction and operation of hospitals, dispensaries, educational institutions, and the provision of scholarships for underprivileged students.²⁴

Protection of Waqf Assets:

The department actively pursues legal and administrative measures to prevent encroachments, illegal transfers, and misuse of waqf properties, thus upholding their sanctity and intended purpose.²⁵

Promotion of Quranic and Islamic Education:

Through its network of madaris, Quranic education centers, and darsgahs, the department supports religious education for youth and promotes spiritual literacy in rural and urban communities alike.²⁶

Appointment and Supervision of Religious Functionaries:

The Punjab Auqaf Department oversees the selection and performance evaluation of khateeb, imams, muazzins, and caretakers to ensure that religious services are conducted in accordance with Islamic ethics and aligned with state policy.²⁷

This regulatory role ensures both spiritual integrity and administrative accountability within the mosques and shrines under its jurisdiction. The department holds profound importance within Pakistan's religious and socio-economic framework. It plays a vital role in preserving the Islamic cultural and spiritual heritage by maintaining some of South Asia's most revered religious landmarks, including Data Darbar in Lahore, the shrine of Baba Farid Ganj Shakar in Pakpattan, and the tomb of Bahauddin Zakariya in Multan. In addition to heritage preservation, the department generates sustainable revenues from waqf assets, which are redirected into essential sectors such as public health, education, and religious services—

thereby offering direct benefits to marginalized and underserved populations. Furthermore, the Punjab Auqaf Department acts as a bridge between the government and religious communities, helping to mediate the implementation of religious policy while maintaining respect for traditional spiritual sentiments. Through the organization of inclusive religious events, especially Urs festivals and public spiritual gatherings, the department also contributes to social harmony and national unity, ensuring that major religious sites remain accessible, well-managed, and spiritually enriching for the diverse population of Pakistan.

Challenges and Recent Developments of the Punjab Auqaf Department

Despite its institutional strengths and valuable contributions, the Punjab Auqaf Department faces a range of persistent challenges that hinder its optimal performance.²⁸

A major issue is the encroachment and illegal possession of waqf lands, which diminishes potential revenue and complicates administrative control. In addition, the department has historically relied on outdated, manual record-keeping systems, which have led to inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and frequent mismanagement. Although digitization efforts are now in progress, the legacy of poor documentation still impacts operations.

Another critical concern is political influence, which undermines transparency and meritocracy in the appointment of religious and administrative staff. Irregularities in recruitment processes and financial management affect the credibility of the institution.²⁹

Furthermore, the department faces the challenge of balancing traditional religious values with modern governance frameworks. Navigating between spiritual sensibilities and bureaucratic structures remains a delicate task.

To address these issues, several significant reforms have been initiated in recent years. The digitalization of waqf records is a key development, aimed at improving asset tracking, legal oversight, and revenue generation.³⁰

Efforts are also being made to upgrade facilities at major shrines, with enhancements in infrastructure, cleanliness, surveillance systems, and visitor services.

Moreover, capacity-building programs have been introduced to equip religious personnel—imams, khateeb, and caretakers—with contemporary skills in leadership and religious management. These programs are designed to bridge the gap between traditional roles and modern expectations. Finally, interdepartmental collaboration has been strengthened, particularly with the education, health, and social welfare sectors, to ensure that waqf income is strategically utilized for public benefit. These initiatives reflect the department's commitment to evolving in line with present-day administrative and spiritual needs, while remaining rooted in its religious mandate.

Conclusion

The Punjab Auqaf Department is a cornerstone institution in Pakistan's religious, cultural, and welfare ecosystem. By ensuring the effective administration of waqf assets and channeling their revenues into public benefit, the department exemplifies how Islamic charitable principles can be institutionalized within modern governance frameworks. However, to fully realize its potential, there is a need for sustained reforms focusing on transparency, capacity building, and legal enforcement. Strengthening the department's role

can serve as a model for other provinces and contribute meaningfully to the religious and socio-economic development of Pakistan.

References

- ¹ . NOUR, HAYSAM MOHAMED HAZEM MOHAMED, and MAAMOUN HASSAN. "Awqaf and heritage: urban conservation in historic muslim cities. The case of Waqf Institution in historic Cairo." (2012).
 - ² . Lashari, Ayaz Mahmood, and Muhammad Usman. "Public Waqf in Punjab Province Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities." *Journal of Contemporary Business and Islamic finance (JCBI)* 2, no. 2 (2022): 173-185.
 - ³ . Ibad, Umber Bin. *Sufi shrines and the Pakistani state: The end of religious pluralism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.
 - ⁴ . Khan, Muhammad Tariq. "Historical role of Islamic waqf in poverty reduction in Muslim society." *The Pakistan Development Review* (2015): 979-996.
 - ⁵ . Iqbal, Qaisar, and Zulfiqar Ali. "Political Economy of Sufi Shrines in Pakistan: A Case Study of Sial Sharif." Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (2022).
 - ⁶ . Abbasi, Muhammad Zubair. "The classical Islamic law of Waqf: A concise introduction." *Arab Law Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2012): 121-153.
 - ⁷ . Richardson, Gail. "Waqf Resources in Pakistan'." *Islam and Social Policy* (2004): 156.
 - ⁸ . Khan, Naveeda. *Muslim becoming: Aspiration and skepticism in Pakistan*. Duke University Press, 2012.
 - ⁹ . Iqbal, Muhammad Asif, Hina Khan, and Surkhab Javed. *Nonprofit sector in Pakistan: Historical background*. Social Policy and Development Centre, in collaboration with Aga Khan Foundation (Pakistan) and Center for Civil Society, Johns Hopkins University, USA, 2004.
 - ¹⁰ . Abbasi, Muhammad Zubair. "Case studies of waqf in Pakistan." In *Waqf Development and Innovation*, pp. 256-268. Routledge, 2021.
 - ¹¹ . Karimullah, Suud Sarim. "The role of mosques as centers for education and social engagement in Islamic communities." *Jurnal Bina Ummat: Membina Dan Membentengi Ummat* 6, no. 2 (2023): 151-166.
 - ¹² . Usman, Muhammad, and Asmak Ab Rahman. "Funding higher education through waqf: a lesson from Pakistan." *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 14, no. 2 (2021): 409-424.
 - ¹³ . Hanif, Kalsoom, Abdul Basit Mujahid, Muhammad Abrar Ahmad, Shahbaz Ali, and Sana Zaheer. "Institutional Development of Legislation in Punjab 1849-1947: An Historical Analysis." *Pakistan Vision* (2020).
 - ¹⁴ . Sherdil, A. Z. K., and Muhammad Ahsan Rana. "Assessment of Local Government System in Punjab." (2008).
 - ¹⁵ . Suhaimi Nahar, Hairul, and Hisham Yaacob. "Accountability in the sacred context: The case of management, accounting and reporting of a Malaysian cash awqaf institution." *Journal of Islamic accounting and business research* 2, no. 2 (2011): 87-113.
 - ¹⁶ . Richardson, Gail. "Waqf Resources in Pakistan'." *Islam and Social Policy* (2004): 156.
 - ¹⁷ . Ja'afar, Saharani. "Facilities management competencies model for mosque administrator." PhD diss., Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Faculty of Built Environment & Surveying, 2022.
-

- ¹⁸ . Khan, Muhammad Kashif, Siti Zaleha Abdul Rasid, Barjoyai Bardai, and Sarah Athirah Saruchi. "Framework of affordable cooperative housing through an innovative waqf-based source of finance in Karachi." *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 14, no. 3 (2023): 379-397.
- ¹⁹ . Arif, Mohd Izzat Amsyar Mohd, Faezy Adenan, Muhamad Syahrul Deen Ahmad Rosli, Norazlina Mamat, and Shofiyyah Moidin. "Reforming Waqf Law In The Federal Territories: A Study On Legal Issues And Challenges." *al-Qanatir: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 30, no. 2 (2023): 349-355.
- ²⁰ . Amin, Mohammad, and Siti Muhammadah. "Improving Mosque Management: Strategies Towards A Center For Islamic Activities." *Journal of Research and Community Service* 1, no. 1 (2024): 31-43.
- ²¹ . Ayub, Muhammad, Khurram Khan, and Muhammad Ismail. *Waqf in Islamic economics and finance: An instrument for socioeconomic welfare*. Routledge, 2024.
- ²² . Almeahadi, Mater, and Jaber S. Alqahtani. "Healthcare research in mass religious gatherings and emergency management: a comprehensive narrative review." In *Healthcare*, vol. 11, no. 2, p. 244. MDPI, 2023.
- ²³ . Raza, Syed Ali. "Cultural Festivals: An Impotent Source of De-Radicalization Process in Pakistan: A Case Study of Urs Ceremonies in Lahore City." *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 30, no. 2 (2017): 22.
- ²⁴ Usman, Muhammad, and Asmak Ab Rahman. "Funding higher education through waqf: a lesson from Pakistan." *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 14, no. 2 (2021): 409-424.
- ²⁵ . Tamboli, Mahek. "Waqf Property Encroachment: Should the Government have Greater Oversight." Available at SSRN 5289529 (2024).
- ²⁶ . Aijazi, Omer. "The extra-religious functions of madaris: Implications for community planning in Pakistan." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2010.
- ²⁷ . Ahmad, Arshad, and Aijaz Ahmed. "Traditional Islamic Charities." *The Islamic Welfare State* (2024): 128.
- ²⁸ . Lashari, Ayaz Mahmood, and Muhammad Usman. "Public Waqf in Punjab Province Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities." *Journal of Contemporary Business and Islamic finance (JCBIF)* 2, no. 2 (2022): 173-185.
- ²⁹ . Altaf, Hina, and Quratul Ain Shabir. "Reforming Pakistan's bureau-crazy; enhancing governance, institutional quality, and professionalism for effective public administration." *Int J Contemp Issues Soc Sci* 2 (2023): 1507-1527.
- ³⁰ . Ali, Hassnian. *Islamic microfinance: landscape, models and future prospects*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2024.
-