

# Dulley Shah's Mice: From Physical Shell to Mental Bondage

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## 1. Abstract

This research paper re-examines the tragic historical and sociological phenomenon of Dulley Shah's "mice"—individuals with microcephaly traditionally associated with the shrine of Saint Shah Daulah in Gujrat, Pakistan—through the lens of contemporary social critique and classical Islamic spiritual psychology. By synthesizing the investigative reporting of Asma Sherazi with the philosophical frameworks of Imam Al-Ghazali as analyzed by Che Zarrina Saari and Timothy J. Gianotti, the study identifies a disturbing parallel between physical cranial deformation and the metaphorical "mental bondage" prevalent in modern society. The literal "iron caps" (*kantoops*) historically alleged to stunt the brain growth of infants serve as an allegory for invisible burdens such as sectarianism, blind imitation (*taqlid*), and prejudice (*asabiyyah*) that restrict intellectual and spiritual development today. Drawing on Al-Ghazali's dual definitions of the heart (*qalb*), spirit (*ruh*), and soul (*nafs*), this analysis argues that true human worth is located in the spiritual subtlety (*latifah*) rather than outward form. The paper concludes that liberation from both physical and mental shells requires a societal shift toward the purification of the heart and the prioritization of rational inquiry over unreflecting emulation.

**Keywords:** Dulley Shah's Mice; Al-Ghazali; Mental Bondage; Qalb; Ruh; Microcephaly; Asma Sherazi; Islamic Psychology; Taqlid.

## 2. Introduction

The narrative of Dulley Shah's mice (*Duley Shah ke Choohay*) remains one of the most haunting and enduring legends in the cultural history of the Punjab region. Traditionally, it refers to children born with small heads and intellectual disabilities who were abandoned by their parents at the shrine of the 17th-century Sufi saint Shah Daulah in Gujrat.<sup>1</sup> While medical science identifies the condition as microcephaly, folklore suggests a far more sinister origin: the use of heavy iron caps or clay vessels to physically compress the developing skulls of infants, thereby ensuring they remained "rats" or "mice" to be exploited for the shrine's begging rackets.<sup>1</sup> These individuals, characterized by their receding foreheads, small crania, and distinctive head shapes, were historically viewed with a complex mixture of pity, religious awe, and social stigma.<sup>4</sup>

In the contemporary era, journalist Asma Sherazi provides a profound evolution of this narrative by drawing a sharp metaphorical parallel between the physical victims of the Gujrat shrine and

the "mentally stunted" members of modern society. Sherazi argues that while literal iron caps may have been prohibited by government administration, society has succeeded in manufacturing "educated rats"—individuals who possess top-tier degrees but lack true wisdom (*ilm*), whose hearts and minds have been shrunken by the "caps" of extremism and self-interest.<sup>1</sup> This research paper adopts this metaphorical framework, utilizing the classical Islamic intellectual tradition to analyze the mechanics of this modern bondage.

To address the depth of this intellectual and spiritual entrapment, we turn to the works of Imam Al-Ghazali. Specifically, we utilize the comparative analysis provided by Che Zarrina Saari in her study of Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* and *Al-Risalah al-Laduniyyah*, alongside Timothy J. Gianotti's examination of Al-Ghazali's "unspeakable" doctrines of the soul and the afterlife.<sup>1</sup> Al-Ghazali's distinction between the physical heart (the "pine-cone flesh") and the spiritual heart (the "divine subtlety") provides the essential vocabulary for understanding how a human being can be physically healthy yet spiritually and intellectually "disabled".<sup>1</sup> The core argument of this preprint is that just as the physical iron caps restricted oxygen to the brain, the "mental shells" of prejudice and blind imitation restrict the "light of guidance" to the soul, resulting in a cognitive paralysis that threatens the very fabric of human dignity.

<b>Analytical Dimension</b>	<b>Physical "Mice"</b>	<b>Metaphorical "Mice"</b>
<b>Mechanical Device</b>	Literal Iron Caps ( <i>Kantooop</i> )	Sectarianism, Extremism, Hypocrisy
<b>Impact on Growth</b>	Restricted Physical Brain Capacity	Shrunken Intellect and Spiritual Perception
<b>Social Function</b>	Victims of Begging Rackets	Voiceless "Mice of Interests"

Islamic Remedy	Abolition of Abuse and Protection	Purification of Heart ( <i>Tazkiyah</i> ) and Reason
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1, 14

### 3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative and synthetic methodology, integrating historical documentation, journalistic investigation, and classical philosophical exegesis. The foundational factual narrative is derived from the BBC Urdu report by Asma Sherazi and documented evidence of the Gujrat shrine's history spanning 170 years.<sup>1</sup> The spiritual and psychological analysis is grounded in primary Al-Ghazalian texts as interpreted through two seminal academic articles: Saari's (1998) comparison of the *Ihya* and the *Risalah*, and Gianotti's (1998) work on the secrets of the soul in the *Ihya*.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Literature Review

The investigation of Dulley Shah's mice requires a multifaceted literature review that spans early Mughal-era hagiography, 19th-century medical journals, contemporary Pakistani journalism, and classical Islamic epistemology.

#### 4.1. Historical Context: The Saint and the Shrine

Hazrat Kabiruddin Shah Daulah, popularly known as Shah Daula Daryaie Ganj Bakhsh, was a Mussalman saint who lived through the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, dying in 1676.<sup>2</sup> Historical accounts describe him as a philanthropist and a lover of animals who established several bridges and buildings near the Chenab River to protect people from frequent flooding.<sup>3</sup> He was notably inclusive, counting the Hindu Raja Chattar Singh among his disciples.<sup>3</sup>

While Shah Daulah was known for his kindness to the disabled, the "votive offering" of firstborn children became institutionalized over the centuries following his death.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-19th century, European doctors and ethnographers like Johnston (1866) and Alexander Cunningham

(1879) began systematic observations of the "chuas" at the shrine.<sup>4</sup>

Historical Marker	Date	Impact on Narrative
Death of Shah Daulah	1676	Legend transitions from philanthropist to miracle-worker for fertility.
Shahamat Ali's Report	1839	First formal recording of "chuas" linked to fertility vows.
Johnston's Study	1866	Introduces medical jargon; notes head shape as "trigonocephalous."
Auqaf Takeover	1969	Government attempts to ban abandonment and artificial deformation.
BBC Urdu Column	2018	Asma Sherazi reframes the "mice" as a social metaphor for modern society.

## 4.2. Asma Sherazi: The Social Critique and the "Voiceless Society"

In her article titled "Duley Shah ke Chuhe" (The Rats of Duley Shah), Asma Sherazi provides a poignant critique of modern Pakistani society.<sup>1</sup> Sherazi utilizes the vivid imagery of the shrine's "mice"—recognizable by their green robes, stone necklaces, and stunted heads—to describe a contemporary class of "educated mice".<sup>1</sup> She argues that society now produces individuals who possess high academic credentials but shrunken intellectual and empathetic capacities.

She writes, "Today I see Dole Shah's mice everywhere, but those whose hearts as well as their brains have been made small".<sup>1</sup> This shrunkenness is attributed to systemic indoctrination through sectarianism, extremism, and political manipulation.<sup>1</sup> These modern individuals, according to Sherazi, possess the capacity for independent thought but choose silence and incoherent sounds over informed speech, effectively becoming "rats of self-interest" who allow the ruling class to maintain power without accountability.<sup>1</sup>

## 4.3. Saari: Al-Ghazali's Ontological Map of the Human Essence

Che Zarrina Saari's academic work, "Al-Ghazali's Views on the Heart, the Spirit and the Soul," provides the essential theological foundation for understanding the "Mental Shells" concept.<sup>1</sup> Saari analyzes how Al-Ghazali, particularly in his *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, assigns dual meanings to fundamental terms to distinguish between the animalistic and the divine aspects of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

- **The Heart (*al-qalb*):** In its physical sense, it is "special flesh, pinelike in shape," located in the breast.<sup>1</sup> In its subtle sense, it is a "divine (rabbaniyyah) and spiritual" entity that perceives, knows, and is responsible for punishment or blame.<sup>1</sup> Saari highlights that this spiritual heart is the "recipient of knowledge of God" and is unaffected by the body's physical attributes.<sup>1</sup>
- **The Spirit (*al-ruh*):** Al-Ghazali uses the metaphor of a lamp. The animal spirit is a "subtle substance" that flows through the arteries to power the limbs, while the divine spirit is identified with the knowing essence of the heart.<sup>1</sup>
- **The Soul (*al-nafs*):** While commonly associated with the "seat of blameworthy characteristics" (anger and lust), Al-Ghazali also defines the "rational soul" (*al-nafs al-natiqah*) as a jewel-like substance that serves as the commander of the faculties and

persists after the body's death.<sup>1</sup>

Saari's comparison between the *Ihya* and the *Al-Risalah al-Laduniyyah* reveals that while Al-Ghazali adopts philosophical terminology in the latter (using "rational soul" instead of "heart"), the concept of an immortal, perceiving essence remains consistent.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the "mice" of the shrine, despite their physical "iron caps," possess a complete and potentially enlightened rational soul.

#### **4.4. Gianotti: The Secrets of the Soul and Esoteric Eschatology**

Timothy J. Gianotti's research on Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* dives into what he terms "unspeakable" knowledge concerning the spirit.<sup>14</sup> Gianotti argues that Al-Ghazali purposely wove esoteric content into the *Ihya* to alert advanced seekers to the soul's true nature, which even the Prophet Muhammad was prohibited from fully disclosing to the masses (citing Quran 17:85: "The spirit is from the command of my Lord").<sup>14</sup>

A key takeaway from Gianotti is that Al-Ghazali viewed the soul's journey after death as entirely independent of worldly deformities or physical shells.<sup>14</sup> This perspective is vital for our analysis of Dulley Shah's mice, as it suggests that the "iron cap" is a purely temporal, physical cage that does not restrict the soul's potential for eternal felicity. Gianotti emphasizes that for Al-Ghazali, "the heart is like a king and the soldiers are like servants," meaning that intellectual or spiritual stunting is a disease of the heart's orientation, not its biological container.<sup>1, 14</sup>

## **5. Analysis: The Historical "Iron Cap" vs. Modern "Mental Shells"**

The transition from physical mutilation to mental bondage is analyzed by comparing the biological and social effects of the iron caps used at the Gujrat shrine with the invisible burdens restricting contemporary minds.

### **5.1. The Mechanism of the Kantoop (Iron Cap)**

The historical narrative described by Sherazi and other investigators highlights the "mechanical stunting" of infants.<sup>1</sup> In this practice, infants left at the shrine were allegedly fitted with tight iron caps (*kantoops*) that restricted the natural expansion of the skull.

Mechanism of Physical Shell	Observed Effect	Psychological Consequence
Physical Pressure	Restricted Oxygen Availability to Brain	Small brain size (Microcephaly). <sup>1</sup>
Stunted Development	Receding Forehead and Unique Head Shape	Permanent cognitive impairment. <sup>1</sup>
Social Exploitation	Forced Begging in "Green Cloaks"	Deprivation of independent thinking and agency. <sup>1</sup>

This "device of disability" ensured that the individual remained in a state of perpetual innocence and dependence, making them "easy targets" for contract begging mafias.<sup>3</sup> The children became "rat-children" not by nature, but by a systemic intervention that placed the interests of the powerful above the development of the human mind.

## 5.2. The Mental Shell: Contemporary Bondage

The metaphorical "caps" identified by Asma Sherazi and the previous research versions represent modern-day equivalents that achieve the same shrunken state of heart and mind without the use of metal.<sup>1</sup>

- **Prejudice and Tribal Bias:** Judging others by sect, caste, or ethnicity rather than character acts as an iron helmet that prevents empathy and clear thinking.<sup>1</sup>
- **Blind Imitation (*Taqlid*):** Following traditions, leaders, or slogans without research and evidence is described as a "mental block" that causes intellectual stagnation.<sup>1</sup> Al-Ghazali critiques this in *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, identifying it as a regrettable source of disbelief among those who unreflectingly emulate Greek metaphysics.<sup>8</sup>
- **Fabricated Beliefs and Misinformation:** The modern landscape of constant noise and distraction restricts the "oxygen" of reflection, mirroring the physical oxygen deprivation caused by the *kantooop*.<sup>1</sup>
- **Political Tribalism:** Identity politics overrides justice and compassion, caging individuals

within shrunken ideologies that Sherazi terms "rats of self-interest".<sup>1</sup>

This comparison suggests that while the physical caps were "cruel and ungodly," the modern "mental shells" are spiritual maladies that cage entire communities, rendering them "conscious but senseless".<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Case Study: The "Educated Mice" and Cognitive Paralysis

Asma Sherazi's critique focuses on the "educated" class who, despite having access to information, lack consciousness.<sup>1</sup> This provides a compelling case study for the phenomenon of "cognitive paralysis."

### 6.1. Informed but Unaware

The "educated mice" are those who have graduated from the best institutions yet possess a "specific mindset" that prevents them from actualizing their potential.<sup>1</sup> They possess the capacity to write and speak but choose to remain voiceless participants in a shrunken social framework. Sherazi describes them as "healthy but disabled," mirroring the shrine's mice who were innocent but cognitively stunted.<sup>1</sup>

### 6.2. The Feedback Loop of Exploitation

Just as the shrine caretakers exploited the "mice" for begging alms, modern social systems exploit "educated mice" for the preservation of power.<sup>1</sup> Sectarianism and extremism are fostered deliberately to maintain a fragmented and voiceless society that is unable to hold the ruling class accountable.<sup>1</sup> This feedback loop replaces evidence with "advertisements" and accountability with "allegations," creating a community that communicates through incoherent sounds (*ghoon ghaan*) rather than informed discourse.<sup>1</sup>

## 7. Al-Ghazalian Remedies: Breaking the Shells

To liberate the human being from these shells, Al-Ghazali proposes the purification of the inner spiritual faculty and the prioritization of truth through deep reflection.

### 7.1. The Polished Mirror of the Heart

Al-Ghazali famously describes the heart as a "polished mirror" that is destined to reflect divine secrets.<sup>9</sup> However, prejudice, lust, and blind imitation act as a "coating of soot" or "dust" that gathers on this mirror.<sup>1</sup> To break the bondage of the mental cap, the individual must engage in the "daily cleanse" through *dhikr* (remembrance), *istighfar* (repentance), and the avoidance of sin.<sup>10</sup>

## 7.2. Seeking Truth over Status

Al-Ghazali emphasizes that "whoever determines the truth from people alone will remain lost in the plains of bewilderment. Rather, know the truth, and you will know its people".<sup>9</sup> This principle directly counters the "mental cap" of blind imitation. By training the mind to examine claims with evidence rather than emotion, individuals can free themselves from the "noose of servitude" to tribal or political figures.<sup>1</sup>

## 7.3. The Jihad Against Invisible Enemies

Al-Ghazali identifies "thirteen enemies you cannot see," including egoism, arrogance, conceit, greed, and intolerance.<sup>9</sup> These internal maladies are the artisans of the modern "mental shell." Mastery over these traits is the prerequisite for intellectual and spiritual growth. The report argues that just as physical iron caps restricted oxygen reaching the brain, these "internal enemies" restrict the flow of empathy and clear thinking to the soul.<sup>1</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

The tragedy of Dulley Shah's "mice" is not merely a dark chapter of Pakistani folklore but a powerful living metaphor for the state of modern consciousness. The "iron caps" of the past were tools used by unscrupulous men to physically stunt human potential for profit.<sup>3</sup> Today, society uses the "mental caps" of sectarianism, blind imitation, and misinformation to achieve a similar stunting of the human heart and spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on Al-Ghazali's intellectual legacy, we recognize that the true human essence—the "rational soul" and the "spiritual heart"—remains pure (*fitrah*) even when the "physical shell" is deformed.<sup>1</sup> True liberation is not found in physical health alone, but in breaking the invisible "collars" of dogma that prevent the soul from knowing its Creator.<sup>7</sup> Asma Sherazi's critique of the "educated but unlearned" serves as a final warning: a society that prioritizes degree-holding

over wisdom and silence over justice is a society that has placed its own "iron caps" on the hearts of its people.<sup>1</sup>

The path forward requires the courageous removal of these "caps of ignorance." By fostering an environment of rational inquiry, compassion, and the purification of the heart, we can ensure that every individual, regardless of their physical or social station, can flourish as a full participant in the divine command of life.

### 8.1. Summary of Comparative Frameworks

Concept	Al-Ghazali's Framework	Sherazi's Metaphor
<b>Bondage Source</b>	<i>Taqlid and Asabiyyah.</i> <sup>7</sup>	Sectarianism and Hypocrisy. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Location of Value</b>	The Inner <i>Qalb</i> (Heart). <sup>1</sup>	Shrunken Mind/Heart. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Mechanism</b>	Rust/Soot on the Mirror. <sup>1</sup>	Iron Cap restricting oxygen. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Ideal State</b>	<i>Al-Nafs al-Mutma'inna</i> (Soul at rest). <sup>1</sup>	Aware and Informed Consciousness. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

The removal of these hidden caps is the only way to transform a "voiceless society" into one characterized by enlightenment and true freedom. Just as authorities rightly banned the physical iron caps, it is the responsibility of every intellectual to work toward dismantling the mental ones.

## 9. Disclaimer

This research report is a work of social and philosophical analysis intended for publishable academic preprint purposes. The conclusions regarding the historical practices at the Gujrat shrine are based on a synthesis of documented medical studies and journalistic reporting. The theological interpretations are based on secondary scholarly analysis of Imam Al-Ghazali's

works and do not constitute original religious rulings.

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