

Muslim saints and their Hindu devotees



by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro — May 25, 2018 in Features, Latest Issue, May 25-31, 2018 Vol. XXX, No. 16



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Graveyard of Sakhi Jam Lohar - with his tomb on the right

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There are many Muslim shrines in Sindh which are venerated by the Hindu community. Some of the most popular Sufi shrines which are frequented by them include the shrines of Sufi saints Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Shah Inayat and Sachal Sarmast. Apart from these popular Sufi shrines, there are many lesser known shrines of Muslim saints which are also revered by the Hindus. These lesser known shrines are located in every district of Sindh. In fact, the tombs over the graves of a majority of lesser known saints in three districts of Sindh – Umarkot, Tharparkar and Jamshoro – have been built by Hindus. In Thana Bula Khan tehsil of Jamshoro district, barring one or two shrines, impressive structures have been built over all other graves of Muslim saints. They include the shrines of Sumbak Sawai, Pir Gebi, Mai Umeedi, and Jam Lohar. Of these, the shrine of Jam Lohar is the most popular, venerated by both Hindus and Muslims. Jam Lohar lived in the 16th century and was famous for his generosity and piety. He preferred to lead a virtuous life after the death of his father Jam Aari, who was the chief of the Numeria Burfats. Being the eldest son of Jam Aari, he was designated as the new chief of the Burfats by the tribesmen but he refused to become the chief. He preferred to lead an ascetic life. Instead his brother Jam Hamal was made the new chief of the tribe. Jam Aari

had four sons Jam Lohar, Jam Hamal, Jam Bapro and Jam Baadin – from whom sprang the lineages of Loharanis, Hamalanis, Barpranis and Mardois respectively.



Posters of Muslim saints and Guru Nanak at the Sakhi Jam Lohar Astan, Sari

Jam Lohar's shrine is located at Taung Sharif, 70 km north of Thana Bula Khan. His stone-carved grave bears the inscription on the projected slab "Jam Lohar Aari Nuhmardi". Close to his grave are two other cenotaphs which belong to his wife Moldi and his son Jam Nindo. Both stone-carved graves are noted for beautiful decoration. The graveyard of Jam Lohar contains more than 300 stone-carved graves with animal, geometric, floral and weaponry depictions. It is noted for the tallest stone-carved graves in Sindh – with the maximum height going up to 20 feet.

The domed structure over his grave has been built by his Hindu devotees. Pehlaj Rai Ratnani, the caretaker of Sakhi Jam Lohar's shrine, collected donations from his Hindu devotees and built the tomb. The Hindu caretaker gives all money to the Muslim Faqirs of Sakhi Jam Lohar – amounts that Hindu devotees donate at the time of the annual festival. Three community halls at the shrine of Sakhi Jam Lohar have also been built by Hindu devotees Diya Ram Esrani and Diyan Chand Esrani, the former having been a minister for Excise, Wild Life, Forests and Minorities.

The Hindu caretaker gives all the money to the Muslim Faqirs of Sakhi Jam Lohar – amounts that Hindu devotees donate at the time of the annual festival

Hindus have also built two astans (sacred spaces associated with the saint) of Sakhi Jam Lohar – one at Thana Bula Khan and other at Sari Town. Sakhi Jam Lohar's astan is located 7 km east of Thana Bula Khan Town. Hindus venerate Sakhi Jam Lohar at his astan, where his symbolic grave has been made. Hindu devotees regularly visit and make vows at the astan of Sakhi Jam Lohar. They also bring their babies for their first head-shaving at his astan. It is also obligatory for newlywed Hindu couples to pay homage and to seek the blessings of Sakhi Jam Lohar at his astan.

Apart from this astan, there is another at Sari Town which lies 50 km southeast of Thana Bula Khan. A wall enclosure has been erected to house a symbolic grave and a small domed structure (devri). The entrance of Jam Lohar's astan is inscribed with the words "Jam Loharki Jai". In the mornings and evenings the Hindus of Sari Town worship Sakhi Jam Lohar.



Stone-carved grave in the Sakhi Jam Lohar graveyard

Sakhi Jam Lohar shares the sacred space (astan) with six of the most popular Muslim and Sikh saints as their posters have been placed in the domed structure (the devri). Four posters have been placed in the devri, which depict Lal Shahbaz Qalandar with his chief disciple Bodla Bahar, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, Saman Sarkar, Abdul Qadir Jilani (the founder of the Qadiri Silsila of Sufism), the Dargah of Moinuddin Chishti and Baba Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikhism). A calendar with original and symbolic graves of Jam Lohar dangles from the trunk of a tree just before the small domed structure (devri). This reflects the syncretic culture of Sindh where Hindus not only worship their deities but also venerate the Muslim saints and Sikh gurus. This also mirrors centuries-old traditions which are being carried forward by both Muslims and Hindus – thus resulting in a composite culture of shared spaces which are conduits of tolerance, harmony and peace in Sindh. There are many examples of Muslim-Hindu composite culture in Sindh which can be seen at some of the shrines carrying dual identities – Uderolal/ShaiikhTahir, PirPithoro/Makhdoom Naimtullah, Makhdoom Abdul Rahman/Ram Jago and many others.



Similarly, the syncretic nature of a sacred space is also a peculiarity of Sindhi culture – with Hindus worshipping not only their deities but also venerating Sikh gurus and Muslim saints. In the case of Sakhi Jam Lohar's astan, Muslim saints and the founder of Sikhism Baba Guru Nanak are commemorated at one place in Sari where a sizable population of Nanakpanthi Hindus also lives. One also finds sacred spaces or astans of Muslim saints in other towns and villages of Sindh, which are also venerated by Hindus who have lavishly spent on the construction of these places.

The author is an anthropologist and has authored three books: 'Perspectives on the art and architecture of Sindh', 'Memorial Stones: Tharparkar' and 'Archaeology, Religion and Art in Sindh'

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