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Princess and Pir



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Located 25 km southeast of Tando Aallahyar town is the shrine complex of Abdul Hameed Buchari. According to Mir Ali Sher Qani, the author of *Tufhat-ul-Kiram*, Abdul Hameed was an eminent sufi of the Samavati pargana in Sindh. He belonged to the Qadiri silsila of Sufism. He was born in Buchar village, and hence was called Buchrai. Today his shrine is located in Makan Sharif, the village which is known for the Buchrai Pirs of the Tando Allahyar district. He lived in the eighteenth century during the Kalhora period (1700-1783). It is believed that he died in the last years of Mian Noor Muhammad's (1719-1753) reign in Sindh.

After the death of Abdul Hameed Buchrai, his son Muhammad Sharif managed the affairs of the khanqah (hermitage) of his father at Makan Sharif and also became the Gadi Nashin of the Makan Sharif Dargah. Like his father he was also known to be a very pious and generous person who served everyone irrespective of any caste and creed. He also became an eminent Qadiri sufi of his time. This dargah remained close to the royal family of the Kalhoras.

Mai Shahar Bano, the daughter of Mian Noor Muhammad (1719-1753) and sister of Ghulam Shah Kalhoro (1757-1772) held Abdul Hameed Buchari in great in veneration. Mai Shahar Bano also built the shrines of Abdul Hameed Buchrai and his son Muhammad Sharif and the mosque at Makan Sharif.



A darvesh at the shrine of Abdul Hameed Buchrai

She was a pious and generous woman who built many mosques, madrasahs and tombs over the graves of Sufi saints in Sindh. Not much has been written and researched on the role of women in Sufism in Sindh. Many royal women from the Kalhora and Talpur dynasties were known for their devotion to Sufism, welfare and philanthropy. Mai Khairi, the mother of Mir Fateh Ali Khan Talpur, the founder of the Talpur dynasty, built many mosques and madrasahs in Sindh. She was a devout follower of Syed Ishaque Bokhari. She built an impressive mosque in Nasarpur town for his murshid Syed Ishaque Bokhari. Mai Khairi's mosque was one of the most imposing structures of the Talpur period (1783-1863) in Nasarpur town. The mosque was decorated with Nasarpur ceramics. Both the interior and exterior were tastefully decorated. It is believed that Mai Khairi commissioned the most celebrated Kashighars of Nasarpur. But unfortunately, the ceramics and other forms of decoration were lost when the mosque was renovated one decade ago.

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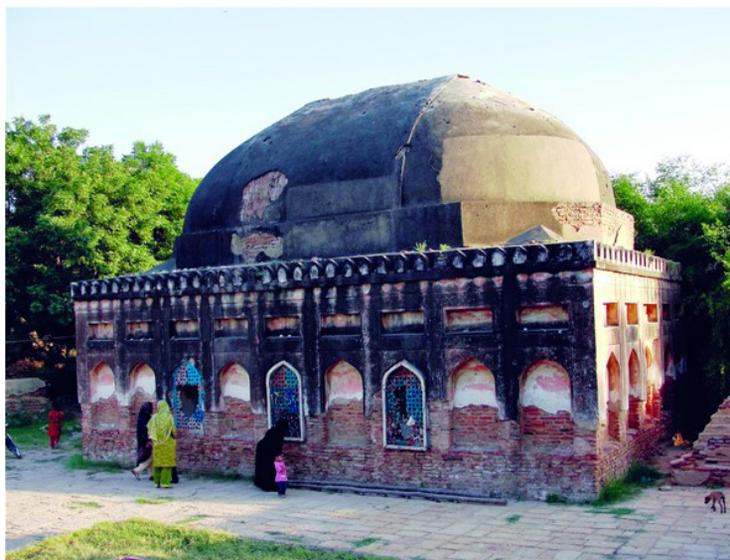
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Mai Jaman, a wife of Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro was also renowned for piety and built a number of mosques in the Sanghar district. She was believed to have commissioned eight mosques in different villages in Sanghar district. All the mosques carried her name and are locally called 'Mai Jamanjun Masjidoon'(the mosques of Mai Jaman).

Apart from royal women, there is a long list of those women who belonged to the middle class but their devotion to Sufism was unmatched. They built mosques near the shrines of sufi saints. Some women enrolled themselves as disciples of eminent Sufis and became famous female Sufis themselves, later on. In the main bazaar of Nasarpur is located the shrine of Bibi Nurbhari who belonged to Dabgaran caste. This is still a popular shrine in Nasarpur town. Almost in every district of Sindh, there are two or three popular female shrines. In the purlieus of Karachi, there are most popular female shrines which belong to Mai Garhi and Mokhi respectively.



Tomb of Mai Shahar bano and other Kalhora women in Hyderabad

The Makan Sharif shrine complex is different from all other contemporary shrines in Sindh. There are four wall enclosures; all were decorated with glazed tiles. The distinctive features of graves at Makan Sharif are that all the graves are mud-plastered. A dome was

not erected on any of the shrine except the main entrance to the shrine complex. The prominent wall enclosure with the Mihrab in the western wall belongs to Abdul Hameed Buchrai and lies to south of the mosque. Wall enclosures to the north and northeast belong to the family of Abdul Hameed Buchrai. The wall enclosure to the north of mosque has two arched entrances, one of which has recently been closed. All the graves here are also mud-plastered. All the walls of the wall enclosures, the main entrance and the mosque are decorated with merlons reflecting a semblance of beauty. Three-domed mosque breaks the skylines of Makan Sharif shrine complex. The green domes and merlons juxtaposed with white coloured walls of the shrine complex all show the ambiance of spirituality and peace which these sacred spaces always project in the bucolic areas of Sindh among the rural folks.

The Kalhora princess Mai Shahar Bano lives on in these Sufi structures which she commissioned for Qadiri Sufis at Makan Sharif. There are also some religious structures at Hyderabad which she built for the populace to get religious education. A large impressive madrasah with mosques was built in Hyderabad northeast of the Puca Qila. Today, the tomb of Mai Shahar Bano at the Mian Ghulam Shah tomb complex is venerated and visited by both Sindhi- and Urdu-speaking communities of Hyderabad. There are four graves in the tombs. Besides Mia Shahar Bano's grave, the tomb also contains three graves of Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro's wives. One of the graves belongs to his Iranian wife who was very influential at the court of Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro. She was very instrumental in appointing many Iranians especially from Isfahan at the court of Kalhoro court. She is also buried in this tomb. His second wife, Sindhi Rani, was the daughter of Wasuji, a cousin of the Rao of Kutch. She was also a powerful lady and was famous for her welfare works. The third wife of Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro was Mai Bahu Begum, popularly known as Sahib Daulat. She is also buried in the tomb of Mai Shahar Bano. Mai Bahu Begum was the daughter of Nawab Nisar Khan Gujar who also built mosques and got wells dug for the poor.

Many royal women from the Kalhora and Talpur dynasties were known for their devotion to Sufism, welfare and philanthropy

An annual festival is held at the shrine complex of Abdul Hameed Buchrai but there is no mela held at the tomb of princess Mai Shahar Bano. Nevertheless, female visitors outnumber the male members at the tomb of Mai Shahar Bano on Thursdays and Fridays. In the male dominated society of Sindh, the voice of their counterparts is not mute and unheard. It is loudly heard when the female devotees sing songs in the praise of their female mentors at their tombs and shrines.

The author is an anthropologist and has authored four books: 'Symbols in Stone: The Rock Art of Sindh', 'Perspectives on the art and architecture of Sindh', 'Memorial Stones: Tharparkar' and 'Archaeology, Religion and Art in Sindh'. He may be contacted at: zulfi04@hotmail.com

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