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Sufis of Sakrand



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Sixteen domes surround the central large dome of Syed Muhammad Shah Zakri's tomb

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The Suhrawardi Sufis were the first to appear in the Sufi landscape of Sindh. They were followed by the Qadiri and Naqshbandi silsilas, which later emerged in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The Qadiri Sufis established their khanqahs in many cities, towns and villages of Sindh. From the 16th to the 20th century, Qadiri Sufis made their presence known almost everywhere in Sindh with major and minor centres at Sehwan, Sukkur, Rohri, Badin, Kandiaro, Gambat, Ranipur, Thano Bula Khan, Sakrand etc.

Sakrand, a taluka of Shaheed Benazirabad, became the centre of Qadiri Sufis in the 20th century when Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri made his Sufi lodge there. The father of Muhammad Shah Zakri, Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani, came to Sindh in search of a Sufi master from Rajouri – which is now located in Indian-administered Kashmir. According to hagiographical accounts of Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani, he probably made his first visit to Sindh in 1894. He stayed in the Sufi lodge of Makhdoom Sakhi Uman Shah near Tando Ghulam Ali. After staying a few months in the company of Makhdoom Usman Shah, Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani went back to his village in Kashmir. He migrated to Sindh with his family in 1896 and stayed in several villages of Badin. In fact, he spent most of his time in that area and many people became his disciples. He finally he settled at Kandri Sharif near Talhar in Badin district, where his shrine is now located. Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani was a Qadiri Sufi and followed the rituals and practices of that order. It is believed that he was a disciple of Khwaja Nizamuddin (died in 1895) of Kayan Sharif in Azad Kashmir. Khwaja Nizamuddin was a Naqshbandi Sufi and he used to initiate his disciples into that order. However, Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani was known to his disciples as a Qadiri Sufi, as they believed that he was from the family of Abdul Qadir Jilani, the founder of the Qadiri Silsila of Sufism.



Grave of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri

Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani died in 1906 and was buried in Kandri Sharif. He spent ten years in Sindh spreading the message of love, tolerance and peace amongst his disciples and converted many to his faith. Some of his prominent disciples who also spread the thought of their mentor included Faqir Allah Bachayo Umrani (died in 1918, buried in Chaneri in Talhartaluka), Nawab Faqir Lund, Haji Muhammad Umrani, Fateh Khan Umrani, Faqir Abdullah Arain, Rajib Ali Nizamani and Baqir Faqir Nizamani. According to the devotees of Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani, Baqir Faqir Nizamani

was a landlord of Talhar taluka, who became his disciple and gave 32 acres of land to Syed Muhammad Sher Shah Jilani for running the expenses of his khanqah.

Syed Muhammad Sher Shah had three sons – Fazal Shah, who died at a young age, Ahmed Shah and Muhammad Shah. Syed Ahmed Shah Jilani alias Pagaro became the Gadi Nashin of his father's shrine at Kandri Sharif. After the death of his father, Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani stayed for some time at Kandri Sharif and later went to Nawabshah (now Shaheed Benazirabad) for preaching the message of Islam.

Syed Ahmed Shah died in 1927 at Kandri Sharif and was buried in the shrine of his father.



Shrine complex of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri

After spending many years preaching the message of Islam in the villages and towns of Sindh particularly at Faqir Jikhohi, Dodai (Larkana), Ghandia, Paliyo village, Paryal Shah village, etc, he finally settled near Sakrand at the village of Muhammad Hassan Chohan, who was his disciple. It was here that Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani spent most of his time in devotional activities for Allah and His Prophet (PBUH). Due to his constant practice of Zikr and associated devotional chants, he became known as Zakri. The disciples of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri became known as 'Zakri Jamat'. In fact, Zikr became central to all the rituals of the Zakri sub-order of the Qadiri Silsila of Sufism in Sindh. In a short span of time this Zakri sub-order of Qadiri Silsila became known far and wide and thousands of people enrolled as disciples of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri. During the Friday prayers, thousands of people from far-flung areas of Nawabshah used to come to pray at the mosque of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri alias Rozay Dhani.

He died in 1936 and was buried in the tomb which he commissioned one year before his death. Pir Zakri laid the foundation of the tomb in 1935 and it was completed by his son Syed Ahmed Shah Jilani. Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri employed celebrated masons of Sindh to construct his tomb and mosque. The tomb of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri is unique in terms of Sufi shrien architecture in all of Sindh. It has sixteen small domes surrounding the central large dome. One of the eminent masons of Dadu, Soomar Faqir, built the tomb of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri. Soomar Faqir also painted the tomb. The Arabic and Persian calligraphy work was done by Maulvi Abdul Aziz Chandio, who was a resident of Sial village in Dadu. The wooden canopy which stands over the grave of Syed Shah Muhammad Jilani Zakri was made by a carpenter Muhammad Lakho. It is a fabulous piece of art with intricate carvings and ivory work inlaid – which is rarely seen on the grave of a Sufi saint. The construction of a six-domed mosque was also started during the lifetime of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri and was completed by his son Syed Ahmed Shah in 1937. The celebrated mason of Daulatpur town Faqir Ghulam

Nabi Punjabi (as he was popularly known in the area) built the six-domed mosque. He also painted the mosque inside and outside. Both the mosque and tomb of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri were renovated twice – first by Ahmed Shah Jilani, the first Gadi Nashin of the dargah in 1990 and later by the present Gadi Nashin, Syed Muneer Shah.

After the death of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri, his son Syed Ahmed Shah continued to preach the message of Islam till he passed away in 2000. The present Gadi Nashin of the shrine, Syed Muneer Shah Jilani, leads the Zakri Jamaat. On the occasion of the annual Urs of Syed Muhammad Shah Jilani Zakri, which is called 'Barho Sharif' thousands of his devotees throng the shrine and the environs of Sakrand resonate with the Zikr of "There is no god but Allah" – uttered devoutly by the Zakri Sufis of Sindh.

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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