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Love in Tharparkar

by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro — March 16, 2018

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A devotee seeking the blessing of Shiva

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While travelling through the cultural landscape of Tharparkar, I came across many recently built grand Hindu temples: reflecting a general mood of tolerance and support from the local people and government authorities – a situation that allows for the local Hindu communities to build their temples and honour their beliefs freely.

People tend to have over-simplistic views about the challenges faced by Hindu communities in Pakistan. A popular perception is that perhaps Hindus are not allowed to practice their faith or build temples at all. I find that such misconceptions are based primarily on the Internet as a source of 'information', with little experience of the rich

tapestry of life on the ground. I always tell people to travel and see for themselves how Hindu communities not only thrive but are also facilitated by the federal and provincial governments to celebrate their festivals. In this article I hope to share some information from my field experience since I travel frequently for my books on the subject of syncretic culture in Sindh.



A devotee at the temple of Krishna

In Sindh, in almost every town and city, there is a Hindu temple. In recent years, many new temples have been built. But I want to particularly mention a few which are located in the Tharparkar district. In Mithi, Diplo, Islamkot, Nagarparkar, Chachro there are Hindu temples which have recently built. Apart from these there is the small town of Kantio where there is also Hindu temple. There are two religious places of Hindus in Kantio in Chachro taluka – one is the shrine of Chando Pir, also known as Dado Chandal Pir, and the other is the Krishna Temple.

Chando Pir is 4 km northeast of Kantio on the Chachro-Kantio road. This is one of the famous syncretic shrines in Tharparkar where both Muslims and Hindus eat together at the time of festival. During the annual festival of Chando Pir, which takes place in the month of September, there is a shared festival of both Muslims and Hindus. Both through the shrine during that time. The shrine of Chando Pir was built by Rana Chandar Singh. There are four graves/Samadhis inside the devri (shrine) which include that of Pir Chando, Pir Bhojraj, Pir Dajo and Pir Bhomji. To the east of the shrine of Chando Pir is the devri of Pir Shivji who was from the family of Chando Pir. All the Pirs at Chando Pir are descendants of Pir Pithoro, who is believed to have received spiritual blessings from one of the saints from the family of Bahauddin Zikria. Pir Pithoro carries dual identities. For Muslims he is Makhdoom Naimtullah and for Hindus he is Pir Pithoro. Pir Pithoro is a patron saint of the Meghwars. Like Pir Pithoro, the identities of many of the Meghwar saints in Sindh are disputed: they are actually more related to Ismailism than the Suhrawardi Sufis of Multan.



Image of Hanuman at Krishna temple, Kantio

There are over a dozen such shrines of the descendants of Pir Pithoro in Umarkot and Tharparkar districts.

Apart from the shrine of Chando Pir, the Krishna temple is another worship place for Hindus of Kantio town. The temple was built by the Hindu Panchayat of Kantio in 2001. In the past two decades, various Hindu Panchayats of different towns in Tharparkar and Umarkot have been building temples. Every rich Hindu merchant contributes to the building of temples. They are not only building temples but also shrines dedicated to Hindu ascetics. Some shrines of Muslim saints have also been erected by Hindus of Tharparkar. Some of the eminent Sufi shrines, especially those of Miyon Shah Ghazi, Rabu Shah, etc. were also commissioned by Hindus.

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The Krishna temple of Kantio is one of the most impressive structures in Chachro taluka. The shikhara of the temple is conspicuous from a distance. This temple is best example of Sindhi temple architecture with a lofty shikhara, a hemispherical dome and two attached octagonal devris (structures) to the temples. Both of these house the images of the Hindu deities. The right devri of the temple houses the image of Shiva and shivalinga and the devri on the left contains the image of Hanuman. Three arched entrance open to an antechamber further to grabhagriha (inner sanctum) where are placed the images of Krishna (after whom the temple is named) and Radha. In the Krishna temple of Maheshvari (the Hindu Panchayat of Kantio is largely represented by Maheshvari) are also some posters of Rama Pir who is a deity of Dalits. This is another example of interfaith harmony among lower and upper caste Hindus.



Images of Radha and Krishna

The older members of the community sit on the floor of temple and discuss their everyday family problems. The temple is open for all castes of Hindus. It is not closed for Dalits. Both the religious spaces of the Krishna temple and the shrine of Chando Pir transcend the religious and caste barriers and boundaries.

In the mornings and evenings, the Hindus of Kantio pray at the temple. They pass by the mosque and madrassah of Kantio but they were never stopped from going to the temple. During the Holi, the festival of colour, Hindus throw colour on their Muslim friends and fellows. No untoward incident has ever taken place in Kantio, which is dominated by the Muslim population. Like many other cities and towns in Tharparkar, this small town of Kantio is one of the important places where tolerance is at its best and where harmony is the hallmark of the town.

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