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Nanakpanthi Saints of Sindh

 by Zulfqar Ali Kalhoro — April 13, 2018 in Features, Latest Issue, April 13-19, 2018 Vol. XXX, No. 10
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Darbar of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai

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There is a Nanakpanthi shrine in every town and city of Sindh – be it a smaller settlement or a major urban centre. The majority of Hindus in Sindh are Nanakpanthis who venerate Hindu deities, Baba Guru Nanak, his son Baba Sri Chand and other Sikh gurus. It is a blend of Hindu and Sikh religious traditions. In upper Sindh, there are many *darbars* and *tikanas* which belong to Nanakpanthis. One such darbar is located in Kambar town in the Kambar-Shahdadkot district. Located in Shivalo mohalla of Kambar town, Sain Vali Vilayat Darbar is the largest in the district. This darbar was founded by Sain Vali Vilayat Rai who came from Old Hala, first settled in Larkana and then moved to Kambar where today his

darbar and Samadhi are located. Vali Vilayat Rai was born in 1825 in a rich Hindu family of Old Hala. His father Pratab Rai was a Munshi of the Talpur Mirs of Hyderabad (1783-1843). Before moving to Kambar, Sain Vali Vilayat Rai served as a Tapedar (village accountant) under the Raj. Some irregularities were found in the accounts that he maintained. A case was registered against him and was sentenced to prison.

In jail, the story goes, he got a vision or visit by Guru Nanak, who told him about his previous incarnation as a yogi. Guru Nanak told him to discover himself. Moreover, Guru Nanak communicated to him that he was here in this world to do many things and to serve the people. After some time Sain Vali Vilayat Rai was released from jail and the charges under which he was sentenced proved to be false. He used to mediate whenever he found free time after his job. After some time, he discovered himself as a yogi and left the job. He went to Kambar town from Old Hala.



Photos of Baba Guru Nanak, Vali Vilayat Rai, Sikh Gurus and Hindu deities in the room of Baba

Vishandas

Sain Vali Vilayat Rai was a famous Sant in nineteenth-century Sindh. When Sain Vali Vilayat Rai came to Kambar, he chose the present Shivalo locality which was not populated at that time and was a perfect rendezvous for Yogis, Sants and Sadhus of Kambar, Shahdadkot, Larkana and other small towns in the then Larkana district. He preached Bhakti and led a Grihastha life, i.e. that of a householder. In other words, he led the life of a married person and home-builder, which is the second stage of a virtuous life lived according to Dharmic principles. Followers of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai upheld these principles as such.

He is believed to have travelled with Muslim Sufi saints to the famous Sufi shrines in Sindh. According to his hagiography once in a year he used to go to visit the Sufi shrines in Rohri, Sehwan and Jhok. In a short span of time, he became a popular saint in Kambar town and he started meeting frequently with other Hindu ascetics, Sikh Sants and Muslim Sufis. Apart from Sain Vali Vilayat Rai there were many Nanakpanthi saints who were equally popular. Some of his contemporary Nanakpanthi saints included Swami Dharmdas who founded a darbar in Kennedy Market in Larkana. Swami Dharamdas was a disciple of Sant Bhai Wasan Shah in Rohri. First, he established a darbar in Mena village and later in Larkana. Bhai Waliram was another famous Nanakpanthi saint who established his darbar in Digano Mahesar village in Miro Khan taluka. In all these darbars were placed copies of the Guru Granth Sahib. These Nanakpanthi saints of Larkana and Kambar spread the message of love, harmony, peace and tolerance among the various Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities of Sindh.



Image of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai

Sain Vali Vilayat Rai also established a large hall in his darbar where the Guru Granth Sahib was placed. People used to recite the Guru Granth Sahib in the morning and evening. After his death, the darbar was managed by his chief disciple Jiwat Singh. He first served in the police department but soon left the job when he became the disciple of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai. Sain Jiwat Singh opened free dispensary for the poor people of Kambar. The people were given medicine free of charge and irrespective of faith. He used to spend most of his time either in serving the poor people or in spreading the message of his Guru Sain Vali Vilayat Rai. Sain Jiwat Singh was also a famous Sant and knew three languages: Persian, Arabic and Sindhi. He composed poetry in Sindhi. He died in 1899 in Kambar town. He was succeeded by his chief disciple Vishandas, who became the caretaker of the darbar. Like Jiwat Singh, he also spread the message of love, harmony and tolerance as taught by Sain Vali Vilayat Rai.

Today, Sain Vali Vilayat Rai Darbar is one of the main worship places of Hindus of Kambar town. It is a three-storey building noted for its ornately carved doors and windows reflecting colonial aesthetics. The building is believed to have been erected by Sain Vali Vilayat Rai in 1887. The spacious hall of the darbar houses the Guru Granth Sahib with posters of Sikh gurus hung on the walls. On the east of the hall is a small room containing with the relics of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai, Jiwat Singh and Baba Vishandas. A small wooden canopy houses a cot on which Baba Vishandas used to sit. In front of the wooden canopy is placed a table on which pictures of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai, Sain Jiwat Singh and Baba Vishandas have been placed. They are invoked daily by the devotees. On the wooden canopy are posters of Baba Guru Nanak and Durga Mata. On top of the canopy are placed three pictures. In the centre is a poster bearing the images of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai and Jiwat Singh. On the left of this poster is photo of Baba Guru Nanak and on the right is

an image of Sai Baba. The wall of this room is also decorated with posters of Sikh Gurus and Hindu deities. Posters of Uderolal are also to be seen on the wall.



Photos of Sikh gurus in the Vali Vilayat Rai darbar

Just opposite the hall of the Guru Granth Sahib is located a square structure crowned with a dome, which contains three Samadhis – those of Vali Vilayat Rai, Jiwat Singh and Baba Vishandas respectively. The domed building was erected by Baba Vishandas in 1941.

After Partition in 1947, many Hindus from Sindh migrated to India. The majority of the descendants stayed in Sindh, Pakistan, and some migrated to Mumbai, India. A branch of the Vali Vilayat Rai Kambar Darbar was established at Kandivali, Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1960. The foundation stone of Kambar Darbar at Kandivli Bombay was laid by Mata Chaini Bai, originally from Larkana, who also became the first female spiritual head of the Kambar Darbar at Kandivali. After the death of Mata Chaini Bai in 1980, Dadi Gopi, who was also from Larkana and migrated to Bombay after Partition, assumed the spiritual responsibilities of the Kambar Darbar at Kandivali. And when Dadi Gopi passed away in 1998, Dadi Kamal Badlani took over.

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After the death of Baba Vishandas in 1946, the Sain Vali Vilayat Rai Darbar in Kambar town itself was managed by the Vali Vilayat Rai Trust. The trustees of the darbar are responsible for the activities of the Darbar as per the Trust Deed of 1940 prepared by Baba Vishandas. The present trustee of the darbar, Sobhraj L. Parmani manages all the affairs of darbar – from holding the annual festival to the maintenance. At the time of the annual festival, Qamabr Town is thronged with the devotees of Sain Vali Vilayat Rai from all over Sindh.

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

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Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro

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