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Nanakpanthis in Mithi

by Zulfikar Ali Kalhoro — May 4, 2018 in Features, Latest Issue, May 04-10, 2018 Vol. XXX, No. 13

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Guru Nanak Darbar and astan of Mard Faqir in the same street, Mithi

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Mithi, headquarters of the Tharparkar district in Sindh, has also a small number of Nanakpanthis, mainly the Mangnani lineage of Lohanas. Generally, it is believed that the majority of Hindus in Sindh are Nanakpanthis – which is not true. On the contrary, the majority are Matapanthis (worshippers of Devi Mata – Durga and many of her incarnations). In fact, it is mainly the upper caste Hindus who are Nanakpanthis in Sindh. The lower caste Hindus are not Nanakpanthis, although there are a few converts amongst them who claim themselves to be Sikhs and sometimes Nanakpanthis. In Tharparkar district, the case is entirely different from all other districts in Sindh. The majority of Hindus

adhere to cult of Devi Mata and follow major Hindu deities Shiva, Vishnu and two of his most popular incarnations – Rama and Krishna too. Hanuman is also worshipped by all Hindus in Tharparkar in all other districts of Sindh.

A majority in rural Tharparkar follow folk deities namely Rama Pir, Pir Pithoro, Pabuji Rathore, Gogo Chauhan, Khetarpaland Hindus ascetics including Sant, Sami, Puri, Gar, Bharati and Nath ascetics and Muslim saints. The cults of Jhujhar(deified heroes) and Sati (Widow-burning) also constitute pantheon of Hindus in Tharparkar.



Guru Nanak Darbar Mithi

The majority of Hindus also venerate Muslim saints and have constructed impressive tombs over the mortal remains of saints in Tharparkar. When elite Hindu women cannot travel frequently to the shrines of Muslim saints in the villages, instead they venerate those Muslim saints at *astans* which have been constructed by the rich Hindu community in their localities in the towns of Tharparkar. In the mornings and evenings, when Hindus go to the temples; they also visit and get the blessings of the saints at the *astans* in Mithi. Located in Lohana Mohalla of Mithi is an impressive building which houses the symbolic grave of Sain Mard Faqir whose original shrine is located in Kerti village which lies 45 km southeast of Mithi town. Sain Mard Faqir is worshipped by the Ghindilya lineage of Lohana Hindus. Located in the same street is the Guru Nanak Darbar, formerly Gurdwara, which has recently been rebuilt by Lohana of Mithi and Thana Bula Khan with a major contribution coming from Ramesh Khumwani of Thana Bula Khan. This is the only Nanakpanthi shrine in the whole of Tharparkar district. Apart from Tharparkar, there is also a Nanakpanthi shrine, locally called Tikano in Umarkot, a gateway to Thar.

Guru Nanak Darbar's outer walls and the main entrance are decorated with Sikh symbols- Khanda and Ek Onkar, showing that the building is a Sikh shrine belonging to Nanakpanthis – Hindus who venerate Guru Nanak. In the interior walls of the darbar are written "Waheguru" in Sindhi language, referring to God, the Supreme Being or the creator of all. The word "Waheguru" is flanked by symbols of Ek Onkar and Khanda in the interior of the Guru Nanak Darbar.



Interior view of Guru Nanak Darbar

Guru Nanak Darbar was a small building before Partition, and was taken care of by a Sikh. Both the temple and Gurdwara (as it was called before Partition) were located in the same building. After the Partition, the Gurdwara was managed by Karo Mal and later by Bhagwan Das. In 2012, the Hindu community decided to rebuild the Guru Nanak Darbar. Today, the Guru Nanak Darbar is the only Nanakpanthi shrine in Mithi. The Mangnani lineage of Lohanas are the only Nanakpanthis in Mithi.

There are two halls in the darbar, in one of which is placed the Guru Granth Sahib. The other serves as a Kirtan Hall and Pathshala where the young Hindus are taught the Gurmukhi script – thus enabling them to understand the Guru Granth Sahib. Two young Hindus from Thana Bula Khan town in Jamshoro district came to Mithi about 5 years ago to teach forty young Hindus Gurmukhi. Now these young Hindu are teaching Gurmukhi to their children.

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At Darbar, Nanakpanthis chant Shabad Kirtan, singing hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. It is believed that Shabad Kirtan began in the sixteenth century as a musical expression of mystical poetry and accompanied by the musical instrument Rabab by Bhai Mardana, a Muslim follower of Baba Guru Nanak. Two of companions of Guru Nanak, Bhai Mardana and Bhai Bala, are always shown with Guru Nanak in the carved doors of Nanakpanthi Darbars in various towns in Sindh. Some of the most refined wood carvings of Guru Nanak with his companions are found in the doors of Shikarpur, Rohri, Mehar and Khairpur.

Apart from Shabad Kirtan, Akhand Path another important Sikh practice, the nonstop recitation of all verses in the Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end is also performed once a year at the Guru Nanak Darbar of Mithi. This is a common practice in all Nanakpanthi Darbars of Sindh, where Nanakpanthi Hindus perform continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib. Besides, Gurburab celebrations are also done at the Darbar in Mithi.



Image of Guru Nanak in Mithi Darbar

Langar, a special community lunch, is arranged by caretaker of the Guru Nanak Darbar which lasts for two days. During the Langar, Hindus of lower and upper castes eat together at one place – a reflection of tolerant Sindhi society that transcends religious and caste barriers. Muslims also come to eat at the Darbar during the Langar, which is the best example of interfaith harmony to be seen at the Guru Nanak Darbar in Mithi.

This interfaith harmony in Sindh has provided much space and solace to the Hindu community in Sindh, who are building impressive temples and grand Gurdwaras. This is one of the reasons that Nanakpanthis are building Darbars and Gurdwaras everywhere in Sindh. One of the largest Gurdwaras, in fact, is being built in Hyderabad on the Hyderabad Bypass near the Rajputana Hospital by the Nanakpanthis.

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