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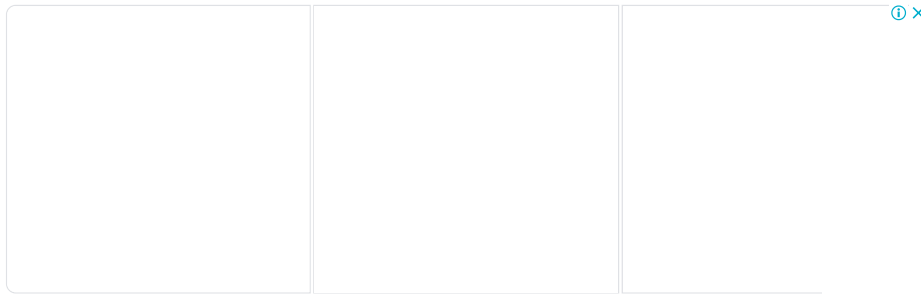


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Where Sindh's Suhrawardi Saints rest

 by [Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro](#) — July 27, 2018

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Almost every historic village and town in Sindh has a Sufi shrine to boast of – becoming a place of pilgrimage for a large number of ‘rustic’ people. Little is known about some of the Sufi shrines located in these historic villages and towns.

One such Sufi shrine is located at Kamaro Sharif in Tando Allahyar district and belongs to Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi. He was born into the eminent Suhrawardi family of Bahauddin Zakiriyya in Multan. His father Muhammad Ghaus had frequently travelled to Sindh to meet his friends and devotees. Two of his eminent friends were Qaimddin Qalandar and Mohsin Shah Wanjheri. Qaimddin Qalandar was also a Suhrawardi saint from the Quraishi family of Multan. Later Muhammad Ghaus Quraishi made Sindh his permanent home. He first settled in Tando Bago and later moved to Kamaro Sharif and died at Bukera Sharif in 1230 AH/ 1814 AD when the Talpurs were the rulers of Sindh. There were two important Suhrawardi centers in Tando Allahyar which were connected with the Suhrawardi saints of Multan – one was at Bukera Sharif and the other at Kamaro Sharif, which is located 10 km east of Tando Allahyar.



Old tomb of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah

These fabulous pieces of art and architecture should be preserved, most certainly, but that process has its own set of pitfalls. There is always the risk of an ill-planned preservation which can lead to destruction in the name of preservation

Not much is known as to when Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah (1799-1860), the son of Pir Muhammad Ghaus Quraishi, settled in Kamaro Sharif. But it may be said with some certainty that he settled in the first quarter of the nineteenth century when his father died in Bukera Sharif and was buried in Kamaro Sharif. The village Kamaro existed much before the arrival of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi. He became the eminent Sufi of lower Sindh in the nineteenth century during the Talpur period. Kamaro Sharif became a centre of Suhrawardi saints in Sindh – where people thronged to become disciples of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi. The number of his devotees increased as he used to travel between Sindh and Multan frequently. He would travel on the Sukkur-Rohri-Ghotki-Rahim Yar Khan-Bahawalpur route to go to Multan. During his journeys, he would stay at Kingri and Bharchundi Sharif. Many people became his disciples in the districts of Khairpur, Ghotki and Bahawalpur. Nawab Sadiq Khan I also became his disciple and bestowed upon him a jagir which existed in Moza Pir Gulu in Bahawalpur State. Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi enjoyed friendly relations with the then two most popular Pirs – Pir Pagaro of Kingri and Hafiz Muhammad Siddique of Bharchundi Sharif, the shrine complex located 3 km from Daharki.



The Tomb of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi after renovation

Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi was a man of learning and piety. Tales of his compassion and kindheartedness were known far and wide. His devotees still tell many tales of his kindheartedness, generosity and forgiveness. At one point, his young son was killed by the Quraishi Pirs of Rajo Khanani. This incident took place during the reign of the Talpurs, who very much respected the Pirs of Sindh in general. When the news reached the power corridors of the Talpurs, the Pirs of Rajo Khanani rushed to Kamaro Sharif to seek forgiveness. Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi was himself a powerful pir and enjoyed good relations with the Talpur rulers of Sindh. But he forgave the killers of his son. In fact, such was his endurance and patience that he did not say anything to the killers of his son. But this incident found a place in his poetry – where he asks himself to be patient and show obeisance to God's will, and that nothing can be done about that which is destined to be happen. Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi was also a poet of great repute. His collection of poems *Risalo Muhammad Ashraf* is popular amongst his disciples and is sung by his devotees during the annual festival on the 1st of Rabi-ul-Awal. He composed poetry in Sindhi and Saraiki. The *Risalo* of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Quraishi was first published in 1914 by the second Sajjada Nashin Haji Pir Khan Muhammad Quraishi, who was the son of Haji Pir Jan Muhammad Quraishi, the first Sajjada Nashin of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi's dargah (shrine).

Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi died in 1277 AH/1860 leaving behind daughter who had been married to Pir Muhammad Jan Muhammad. He was buried in Kamaro Sharif in an imposing tomb which is believed to have been built by Haji Pir Khan Muhammad Quraishi. This is one of the most magnificent tombs in terms of tile-work – and has no peer among its counterparts in 20th century Sindh. Abdul Hamid Akhund and Naseern Askari write in their book *Tale of the Tile: The ceramic traditions of Pakistan* that “the tomb is a fine example of underglaze tile work in southern Sindh combining *hafrang* elements from Multan and Sindh”

Built in 1916, this tomb is profusely decorated with blue and ochre tiles. Persian calligraphy in naskhi script in white-on-blue underglaze adorns three exterior walls of the tomb. The square structure is decorated with four corner turrets with an elevated drum in Multani style on which rests a squat dome which is plentifully embellished with ceramics. Unfortunately, the original blue and ochre tiles are all gone since the renovation of the structure. White marble tiles replaced the original blue and ochre ones. And yet fortunately, the nearby mosque still stands in its original beauty. This mosque was first built by Pir Muhammad Ashraf Quraishi in 1263 AH/1846 AD and later it was extended and renovated with a profuse use of tile-work.

According to the inscription on the facade of the mosque, it was renovated in 1324 AH/1906 AD. This mosque has no parallel in terms of decoration in the whole province of Sindh. The profuse use of blue tile work representing vases and fruit dishes is rarely seen in 20th-century mosques in Sindh. While there are a few such mosques which are embellished with blue ceramics representing floral and geometric designs, they don't include the fruit dishes which are commonly found in mural paintings. The ceiling of the mosque is decorated with lacquer and glasswork, which is a peculiarity of mosques built in 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century Sindh. Unfortunately, the interior of the mosque, which was once decorated with paintings, has been completely renovated. That process played havoc with the paintings. Today, they are gone from the interior.

These fabulous pieces of art and architecture should be preserved, most certainly, but that process has its own set of pitfalls. There is always the risk of an ill-planned preservation which can lead to destruction in the name of preservation – as we have already seen in the tomb of Pir Muhammad Ashraf Shah Quraishi.

The author is an anthropologist and has authored three books: '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