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World-Wandering Mystics

Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro on the eminent Jahaniyanpota lineage of Sufis who shaped Sindh's mystical landscape for over six centuries



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Tomb of Makhdoom Hassan Shah Jahaniyan

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Coming from many different centres of the Islamicate world, Suhrawardi mystics established their khanqahs in a number of cities, towns and villages of Sindh. The majority of Suhrawardi centres in Sindh are associated with Multan and Uch. Bahauddin Zakariya (1170-1262) and his descendants frequently travelled to Sindh and some permanently settled there.

Among these were some Suhrawardi mystics from the family of Jalaluddin Bokhari – also called Jalal Surkh (Red) – who settled in Sindh.

Jalaluddin Surkposh Bokhari was an eminent disciple of Bahauddin Zakariya who migrated from Bukhara in Central Asia to Bhakkar in Sindh, where he got married to a daughter of Syed Badaruddin, a son of Muhammad Shah Makki. Later due to local jealousy he had to migrate to Uch in 1244. When the Suhrawadi silsila began to decline in Multan after the death of Shaikh Ruknuddin, it was rejuvenated by his disciple Syed Jalaluddin Makhdoom Jahaniyan (Lord of the Mortals) in Uch. He was the grandson of

Syed Jalaluddin Surkhposh Bokhari. In fact, Jalaluddin Surkhposh Bokhari had three sons: Syed Ahmad Kabir, Syed Bahauddin and Syed Muhammad. Syed Jalaluddin Makhdoom Jahaniyan and Raju Qatal were the sons of Syed Ahmad Kabir.



Grave of Mahdi Sarkar at Shahpur Jahaniyan

It is believed that Jalaluddin Makhdoom Jahaniyan was appointed Shaikh-ul-Islam and made head of the Khanqah Muhammadi in Sewistan (Sehwan) by the Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. But he did not remain in Sehwan long.

Jalaluddin Makhdoom Jahaniyan, whose epithet was Jahangasht (World Traveler) was the most eminent Suhrawardi of the 14th century. That order spread from Uch to Gujarat, Punjab, Kashmir, Sindh and even extended its influence to Delhi itself – where Sultan Firuz Shah came under its influence. It is also believed that the Soomras of Sindh, who were Ismailis, adopted Sunnism under the influence of Syed Jalaluddin Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht. He was also believed to have played an influential intermediary role in the time of conflict between the Sultans of Delhi and the Jams of Sindh.

Shahpur Jahaniyan in Qazi Ahmad taluka in Shaheed Benazirabad district is home to a number of shrines of Jahaniyanpota Sufi saints who traced their ancestry back to Jalaluddin Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht (died in 1385) of Uch Sharif. There are five Suhrawardi saints from the family of Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht who became known as Jahaniyanpota saints of Sindh. They spread the Suhrawardi silsila through Sindh and Gujarat.



Tomb of Mahdi Sarkar in Shahpur Jahaniyan

The first person from the family of Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht who migrated from Uch to Sindh in the wake of Mirza Shah Hassan's invasion of Uch was Makhdoom Hamid Shah alias Shah Murad. He first migrated to Isakhel in Mianwali in the first quarter of the 16th century and later went to Sindh. It was he who remained a considerable period of time in Sindh prior to migrating to Barodi in Gujarat where he died and was buried. It was after him that term "Jahaniyanpota" (grandsons of Jahaniyan) was coined.

The second Suhrawardi saint from the family of Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht was Shah Mehmood I who was born in what is today known as Shahpur Jahaniyan near Daultapur in Qazi Ahmad taluka of Shaheed Benazirabad. He was the son of Makhdoom Hamid Shah alias Shah Murad. He went to Barodi in search of his father and lived there. In fact, he became an eminent mystic in Barodi. He died there and was buried in an impressive tomb.

The third significant figure from the family of Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht who was born in Shahpur Jahaniyan in Sindh was Hamid Shah son of Shah Mehmood I. He got his early education at Shahpur Jahaniyan and travelled to the many of the Sufi lodges of Sindh and Iran. He died in Iran.

The fourth eminent Sufi who kept travelling between Uch and Sindh was Makhdoom Hassan Shah Jahaniyan, who lived during the reign of Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro (1719-1753). As legend has it, Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro had a severe problem of piles which was healed with the blessings of Makhdoom Shah Hassan Jahaniyan and he

later became known as “Bandi Mok” (the piles healer). Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro held him in high esteem due to his piety and granted him a jagir where today his tomb is located. Makhdoom Hassan Shah Jahaniyan was the first Suhrawardi mystic from the family of Makhdoom Jahaniyan Jahangasht to become the most popular saint in 18th-century Sindh. He also went to Barodi to visit the tomb of his grandfather Shah Mehmood I.

Many of the Suhrawardi and Qadiri Sufis of Sindh and Punjab visited his khanqah in Shahpur Jahaniyan.

The fifth saint from the family of Jahaniyan Jahangasht was Mehmood Shah II, son of Hamid Shah.

The Jahaniyanpota family of Shahpur Jahaniyan in Sindh produced many who composed poetry. The list of those Sufi poets would be very long, however, the prominent ones include Syed Fatehuddin Shah ‘Miskeen’ (1880-1942); Faqir Syed Qutab Ali Shah ‘Qutab’ (1814-1910) whose shrine is located in Tando Jahaniyan in Hyderabad; Faqir Roshan Ali Shah ‘Roshan’ (1867-1932) who is buried in Tando Jahaniyan, Hyderabad; Syed Shamsuddin Shah ‘Shaman’ (1889-1920); Syed Ghulam Shah; Faqir Hadi Shah Miskeen, Syed Ghulam Abbas Shah and Faqir Mahdi Shah.

We know that Faqir Ghulam Mahdi Shah I (1889-1969) who became popularly known as Mahdi Sain was a Malamati Sufi and established his order of Malamatis in Shahpur Jahaniyan. Many of the disciples of Mahdi Sain established and spread the Malamati Sufi silsila in Nawabshah (now Shaheed Benazirabad), Larkana, Qambar Shahdadkot, Khairpur, Naushero Feroz and Hyderabad. Mahdi Sain was also a Sufi poet and singer. He wore anklet brackets and used to dance at his lodge known as ‘Piyalo’ (cup). One of his eminent disciples Janan Chan, whose shrine is located in Mondar Lakha village in Warah taluka in Qambar Shahdadkot district, was also an excellent poet and singer affiliated with the Malamati silsila. This was how Shahpur Jahaniyan became a centre of 20th-century Malamatis.

Today, the tombs of Suhrawardi and Malamati Jahaniyanpota Sufi saints break the skyline of Shahpur Jahaniyantown in Sindh. All these shrines are now sites of veneration for the majority of the local communities and people from neighboring towns of Daulatpur and Moro. The most popular shrines are those of Makhdoom Shah Hassan and Mehmood Shah II.

The tomb of Makhdoom Hassan Shah Jahaniyan is adorned with blue ceramic tiles. Four of the minarets rise from the thickness of the wall. The five-domed tomb symbolically represents the first five Jahaniyanpota Pirs who settled in Sindh. The tomb of Makhdoom Hassan Shah Jahaniyan also contains many graves of the Jahaniyanpota Suhrawardi and Malamati Sufis alike – with the prominent graves being those of Ghulam Mahdi Shah I alias Mahdi Sain, his father Imam Bakhsh Shah and son Mauj Darya. The tombs of Mehmood Shah II and Ghulam Shah Mahdi II alias Mahdi Sarkar are also located in the vicinity, and are popular sites for the devotees of the Jahaniyanpota saints.

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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