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**CONTESTATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS: THE SHARED  
RELIGIOUS SPACE OF JHULE LAL IN SINDH, PAKISTAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Syncretic and shared religious spaces have long been perceived as reflections of tolerance. This does not imply that tolerance is completely liberated from multiple clashing components and the coexistence of interfaith practices do not suggest that hostility is entirely missing. In recent times, a transformation is taking place at the shared space of the Jhule Lal by the dominant religious group. However, there remains an appearance of tolerance at the shared space of the Jhule Lal among believers of both Islam and Hinduism, which blinds the observer of the deep internal contestation and process of transformation between both Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims who revere the same saint of the Jhule Lal. A syncretic space does not simply absorb different religious groups, and by studying the practices, rituals and interactions of the custodians, visitors and devotees at the shrine, this paper aims to unearth the processes through which shrine is contested in multiple identities, discourse (written, textual, verbal) authority, and belief systems.*

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**Keywords:** Contested Saint, Jhule Lal, Indus River, Sindh, Sindhi Hindus, Sindhi Muslims

**INTRODUCTION**

The land of Sindh remained under foreign rulers' occupation since the inception and fall of the Indus civilization (2350 BC-1500 BC) and through the prehistoric period (1500 BC-519 BC). The various dynasties had ruled over Sindh included the Soomras (1010 AD - 1351 AD), Sammas (1351 AD - 1521 AD), Arghuns (1521 AD – 1555 AD), Tarkhans (1555 AD - 1592 AD), Mughals (1592 AD - 1700 AD), Kalhoras (1700 AD - 1782 AD), Talpurs (1782 AD - 1843 AD),

and the British (1843 AD - 1947 AD) after which Sindh became a province of Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947 (Allana, 2010: 77-103). Sindh got its name from *Sindhu* - the Indus River - which flows through the province's heart (Lambrick, 1986:1-5). The Sindhu has been the source of both fertility and destruction because in the past, it changed its course, giving birth to a new civilization, and destroying the old (Schimmel, 1986:9-18).

Jhule Lal was born in 1007 Vikram Samvat (CE 950) at Nasarpur, Sindh (Boivin & Rajpal, 2018: 48). The most famous oral narrative known by the local people that an event took place in the mid-tenth century when Muslim ruler Mirkh Shah ruled over the Thatta. He was a tyrant ruler who released a '*Shaahi Farman*' (Either embrace the Islam or leave the Sindh land or be ready to die) order for the Sindhi Hindus, who were then given a certain amount of time to consider the offer. All Sindhi Hindus went under the rituals of *Chaleeho* for forty days on the bank of the Indus River to get rid of the cruel despotic ruler, who was forcibly imposing Islam religion on them. Hindus worshiped at the bank of the Indus River for 40 days to get help.

A young man appeared from the Indus River on a lotus flower with a beard, who was sitting on the *Pallo* (fish), asked all Hindus, do not worry, he has come to save them, will be born in the home of Rattan Rai from the womb of Mata Devki at Nasarpur; will defeat the despotic ruler Mirkh Shah. Jhule Lal showed many miracles and saved all Sindhi Hindus from the genocide and forced conversion from the Mirkh Shah. Finally, Mirkh Shah was defeated and became the follower of the Jhule Lal. Jhule Lal's charismatic personality won over the despotic ruler's ministers and the other Muslims became his devotees. He talked for both the Hindus and Muslims community's rights and he taught tolerance and brotherhood. He further argued that Hindus and Muslims are all human beings created by God whom Muslims call Allah and Hindus call Ishwar. He wanted to bring unity among all to create harmony, peace, tolerance, and the right path, leading to God's oneness. In the last days of his journey, he travelled from Nasarpur to the Sindhi Muslim Jahejo village later known as Udero Lal village. Muslim Shaikhs Mamman, Suharo, Muhammad Aalam, and Younis gifted the land to Jhule Lal, where he made his last abode. Jhule Lal's shrine is in the small village of Udero Lal, district

Matiari 45 km north of Hyderabad in Sindh, Pakistan. The white shrine was constructed like a fort by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahn who brought renowned masons and architects from Kashmir and Bengal to construct the monument that was completed in 1666. The Jhule Lal's shrine comprises a *Masjid* (mosque), and *Jot* (lamp) temple as part of the Jhule Lal shrine complex.

The annual fair, *Jaat jo Melo/Chetichand* (birth of the Jhule Lal), is held in the April of every year. Another fair called *Asu jo melo/adh Jaat* in the local language is also celebrated in September/October. Jhule Lal has multiple identities ascribed to him by both Hindus and Muslims. He is a saint for the Sindhi Muslims, who call him Shaikh Muhammad Tahir; whereas Sindhi Hindus consider him an Avatar or a God and refer to him as Jhule Lal or Udero Lal. He is also known as Zindha Pir, Khwaja Khizr, Amar Lal, Lal Sain, Darya Shah, Duhla Shah, Uday Chand, Kalangi waro Lal, Sindhi Bhagwan, and Joytan waro Lal.

Devotees sound the Jhule Lal slogan in loud voices to fulfil their desires “*Jeko chwando Jhule Lal tanhja thenda bera Paar, Sindhi Bhgwan kee jai*” (He who calls the Jhule Lal, his all wishes will be fulfilled). According to the local accounts, Jhule Lal's name is referred to by the Sindhi Hindus for their Vedic God Varuna or an avatar of the River Indus. When Jhule Lal was born, he was placed into the *Jhula* (cradle) swinging itself; when his mother saw him, she called him her *Lal* (beloved), and he was subsequently named a Jhule Lal by his mother. Jhule Lal is a nickname which is given to both Jhule Lal and Shahbaz Qalandar; the first part of the word ‘Jhule’ means to swing, and ‘Lal’ is the color red; the translation ‘swinging red’ evokes the image of ‘*Dhamal*’, a swinging dance performed by devotees at both shrines (Boivin, 2015:170).

The shrine of Jhule Lal currently has a Muslim male *Sajjada Nasheen* (spiritual master) named Ghulam Abbas Shaikh, whereas the management is looked after by a female Hindu, *Ghaadi Nasheen* (keeper of the throne), Mata Beena - a lawyer by profession - and her younger sister Mata Suneeta, who resides in India, but visits twice a year on the main events of the annual fair (*Chetichand*) birth anniversary of the Jhule Lal. The Muslim Shaikhs have been *Mujawars* (in charge of a dargah) of the shrine for generations, and Hindus are the caretakers. According to the local Muslim accounts,

Jhule Lal was born in a Hindu home and later converted to Islam whereas the Hindus believe that he was born a Hindu and always remained Hindu.

Due to India's partition in 1947, most Sindhi Hindus migrated to India from Sindh and other parts of the world but continue to pay homage to him. Sindhi Hindu diaspora also celebrate the annual *Chetichand* globally in which they also perform the *bahraano sahib* (food offering) ritual and pay tribute to Jhule Lal while singing the *Panjras* (admiration of Jhule Lal) in praise of the Jhule Lal. Sindhi Hindus were originators of the famous slogan of the Jhule Lal “*Jekochawando Jhule Lal tahnajh thenda bera paar*” (whoever will call Jhule Lal, his/her boat never sink, and succeed), *hanry Sabhaee chao Jai Jhule Lal Sindhi bhagwan* (now all should say, live long Jhule Lal Sindhi god).

Jhule Lal's worship is also comprised primarily of the *Jal* (water) and *Jot* (lamp), and there are various rituals performed by both Hindus and Muslims at the shrine. The main Hindu rituals include *Bahraano* (food offering), which remains the central part of the *melo* (fair); after the eleventh days of the *Chetichand melo* (fair), *Chodas* (bath) ritual is performed at the shrine of the Jhule Lal, *Chhando* (sprinkling water), and *Jarnyo* (rites of passage). Muslims also mostly perform *Matam* (chest beating) - a ritual popular amongst Shia Muslims - *Jhand* (head shaving) and *Dahmal* (spiritual dance) is also performed. The Shrine of Jhule Lal is open for all the visitors, both Hindus and Muslims.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is presented as a case study that reveals the conflicts and contestations that underpin shared syncretic religious spaces. It employs ethnographic methods and qualitative research based on primary data collected through extensive fieldwork. Methods include participant observation, informal discussions and unstructured interviews recorded in audio and video. The first round of fieldwork was a four-month- long engagement, conducted from 1st February to the end of May 2019. This first phase was used to develop a rapport amongst Hindu and Muslim devotees at the Jhule Lal's shrine. Local vernacular was employed in conversations to cultivate relationships in a casual setting. To gain the trust, note- taking at the site was avoided so much so that a Muslim *Mujawar* Shaikh Afaque Ahmed commented: *Why are you not taking notes and we have observed you*

*for many days that you have neither a note-taking book nor any recorder because when other people come, they take many notes on the same day and never return. Still, you have been visiting us regularly, have not taken any notes yet.*

The second round of formal fieldwork took place from the 2nd of August 2019 to 31st March 2020. The earlier phase of relatively informal fieldwork had built the ground for a deeper engagement in this phase. Open-ended questions were employed in 85 unstructured, in-depth interviews with the following: leading Hindu Caretakers (11), Hindu *Ghaddi Nasheen* Mata Beena (1), Hindu devotees (16), local Pandits (2), Hindu Shevdar (12), Hindu women (5), Muslim *Sajjada Nasheen* Ghulam Abass Shaikh (1), Muslim followers (9), Mujawar Muslims Shaikh (13), residents of the village (9), Muslim women (3), and Muslims Moulvis (3). Informal discussions with members of both faiths were conducted. Additionally, participation in the main events, rituals, and annual fair (*urs*), called the *Chetichand / Jaat Jo Melo* (commemorating Jhule Lal's annual birthday) in April added to the depth of the study.

The research question central to this study is whether the shared space of Jhule Lal is harmoniously syncretic as the literature suggests or are there any indications of contestation and transformation at the shrine. More specifically how is the shrine and the emblem of Jhule Lal viewed by believers of both faiths? Are there any differences and if so, how do these differences play out in the physical space of the shrine? What are the everyday tensions and conflicts and how do they contribute to the transformation of a syncretic shared space?.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hayden (2016) conducted an ethnographic study of a shrine in Pathardi Taluka, Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra, India. The Muslims called it Dargah, named the *Shah Ramzam Mahi Savar Chisti* saint, and it was *Samadhi*<sup>1</sup> for the Hindus as saint named *Kanifnath*. Saint had dual religious identities and was an example of syncretism in India. Hindus and Muslims venerated together, which had various histories since the pre-and post-partition of India. As Hayden argued, despite the saint's multiple identities, Hindus and Muslims had a long history of harmony and peaceful worship of both communities

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<sup>1</sup>A shrine; a place where the ashes of the saint are preserved.

together at the Dargah, but it also had a contestation history. However, it has been contested and later changed as well converted and occupied by the dominant one religious' group. He further argued in his research studies that there are many sacred religious spaces which are shared by the different religious groups and create the competitive sharing for their dominance, interest, and control over the shared Space; both religious communities even have syncretic practices at the same shared site, they are turned into violent, later, shared Space is contested and physically transformed by the dominant religious group.

Alike, Jhule Lal shared Space has remained competitive sharing of religious sites in Sindh between Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims over the saint's identity and ownership. Hindus claimed that he is Hindu, Muslims claimed him as a Muslim saint. Despite the coexistence, harmony, Jhule Lal's shared Space is contested, and half of the Space is transformed. As Hayden's model "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces" suggested that one dominant religious group always tries to be dominant over the other group who competes for their interest to occupy the shared Space, which leads to the "Antagonistic tolerance" later contestation and physical transformation takes place. Similarly, Jhule Lal's Balanbo Sahib Space has been physically transformed by one dominant group at the shared Space of the Jhule Lal. The dominant religious group attempted to transform the main shared Space of the Jhule Lal physically.

#### **THE JHULE LAL AS A SHARED SPACE**

Saints buried across Sindh are venerated by both Hindus and Muslims alike, and almost all are known by separate names amongst disciples of both communities. The River God known as Udero Lal or Jinda Pir by Hindus, and he is known as Shaikh Tahir or Khwaja Khizr amongst Muslims. Similarly, Lalu Jasraj is Mango Pir among Muslims, Raja Qalandar Lal Shahbaz is known as Raja Bartari among Hindus. Hindus claim that Muslims have tagged their own names on indigenous saints for their own interests and purposes (Hughes 1876: 680-681). Additionally, Hindus claim that the Muslims aim to "Muslimize" the shrine, whereas the Muslims claim the shrine is being "Hinduized". Sikand mentions that upon entering the shrine, a man warned him of people claiming that Jhule Lal belongs to the Muslims and told him not to believe the story as it is false and intends to

misguide followers about Jhule Lal. The author further mentioned that he met another man at the shrine; he was told that Jhule Lal was Hindu who later converted to Islam and that he was a pious Muslim who took on the name Shaikh Tahir (Sikand, 2011:257-260).

#### TRANSFORMATION OF JUHLE LAL BY HINDUS

Burton argues that the Hinduism in Sindh is influenced by elements of Islam in Sindh, due to a mingling of beliefs and practices: Hindus worship at the altar of saints claimed by both religions. Moreover, their faith takes on a monotheistic bent in the Sindh region, where they believe in one God, whom they call Khuda with other deities serving a role similar to those of Prophets in Islam (Burton, 1973:324-325).

After the partition, Hindu Preetam Dass, *Satreehen Peerhee* (17th generation) was the *GhaddiNasheen* of the Juhle Lal. During his tenure, there was no physical transformation at the shrine of Jhule Lal. His daughter Mata Beena is the current *Ghaddi Nasheen* after him; she has brought the physical transformation at the *Balanbo Sahib* (sacred well) space. In 2014, she installed the big equestrian statue on which Jhule Lal is shown as seated, called the *Lal Sane Jo Ghory Waro* hall (equestrian room of Jhule Lal). In 2016, she constructed the Shiv temple side by side with the *BalanhoSahib* to which many Muslims made objections, stating that the whole shared space of Jhule Lal ought to have remained the same as it was before and after the partition.

More recently, in 2020 she constructed the main gate at the Space of *Balanbo Sahib* on which the statue of the *Pallo* (fish) was installed at the top of the gate, and the 'Om' symbol placed at the center, a trident (*trisul*) made on the posts on the top corner and a *Swastika* was made on the lower posts of the corner of the gate. *Jhule Lal Bera Ee Paar, Dargah Shiri AmarUdero Lal* was written in the Sindhi language among *Om*, *Trishul*'s and the *Swastika*. In 2020, she also installed the four portraited Jhule Lal's images into the main shrine representing the Juhle Lal as viewed in the Hindu imagination, appearing from the Indus on the *Pallo* fish. Local Muslims have also lodged an official complaint against the Hindus for transforming the Muslim *Pir* (saint) Shaikh Tahir (Jhule Lal) into a Hindu *Pir* by having the images installed. The Muslim *SajjadaNasheen* of Jhule Lal Ghulam Abbas Shaikh claims that: *Hindu Ghaddi Nasheen Mata Beena does not want peace and tolerance at the shared Space of Jhule*

*Lal among both Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. She is from India, has Indian nationality. Whenever, she comes to Sindh from India, she brings the new plan to transform this shrine of Jhule Lal. She has an Indian mind. She has the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) ideology of Hindutva, Mata follows the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) policy like a Shiv Sena extremists party, her elders never transformed the shared Space of Jhule Lal and maintained it in original form and the same condition for centuries, now you can see that she is transforming the Jhule Lal's shared Space day by day, she has made Shiv temple beside Balanbo Sahib (sacred well) and Ghoro (equestrian), it will lead to great chaos among Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. We will never let her transform the whole shared Space of Jhule Lal, we have always extended the cooperation for the sake of tolerance in Sindh, but she is not flexible<sup>2</sup>.*

Haji Malang is the second most famous syncretic shrine after Shirdi in Maharashtra, India, his holy compound consists of *Ganesha*, *Waghjai*, *Durga*, *Maruti*, *Santoshima*, and four *dargahs*<sup>3</sup>. The complex itself is looked after by the Brahmin, whereas both Hindu and Muslim priests oversee ritual activities and jointly organize all festivals that take place within the sacred complex. Both communities also pool donations collectively. It has been observed that visits by Hindu devotees decreased post the demolition of the Babari Mosque. It is claimed that cooperation has been affected by the Shiv Sena who have also renamed the saint Machindranath (Burman, 1996:1213-1214). According to Hindus Jhule Lal did not die: the land was opened, he went into it with his horse, who is still alive and is referred to as *Jhinda Pir*. Muslims claim that Jhule Lal died and was buried according to the Islamic teachings. During the interview, Mata Sahib states: *This is our blind belief that Jhule Lal is still alive; he immersed himself in the land with his horse where the tomb is made. He regularly comes out of the tomb on his horse at night, visits Joyat sahib (light), Kahchari (discourse) room, and the whole fort then comes back to the tomb. If*

<sup>2</sup> Mata Beena denied these accusations and termed them as an attempt by the Sajjada Nashin to malign her and politicize her services to the shrine. She stressed that she does not have any connections with RSS and BJP, she is a Sindhi and has firm belief in the Jhule Lal's message of tolerance.

<sup>3</sup> *Dargah* is a Persian word, its meaning is court, especially this word is used for the Sufi shrines where saint's tombs are made.



*anyone wants to see Lal sane with heart and soul, then he can see. If he/she wants to see with familiar eyes, they cannot see the Lal sane* (Personal communication, 2020).

On 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017, the 9th Muharram, a major event took place at the Jhule Lal's shrine: according to the Muslim accounts, Mata Beena installed a notice board which referred to the Jhule Lal solely as a Hindu deity. The notice board stated in Sindhi: “*Sheri Amar Juhle Lal Sain Hindu Peer Ghorhe Sudho Hin Qube Sahib mie Samaeyal Ahe*” (Jhule Lal is a Hindu saint/deity who is immersed into the tomb with his horse). The signboard was installed after 9 PM, when the gates are closed. When Muslims visited the shrine early in the morning for prayer, they noticed the board and were taken back to see Jhule Lal declared a Hindu. The news of this change spread like wildfire among the Sindhi Muslims, and thousands of the Muslims began to gather at the shrine of Jhule Lal under the leadership of the Ghulam Abbas Shaikh, the Muslim *Sajjada Nasheen*. An angry mob began to gather, and Hindu/Muslim tensions increased in a situation which almost escalated into communal riots between Hindus and Muslims.

According to the head of the Mirpur Khas temple of the Jhule Lal: *Mata Sahib should not have transformed the Balanbo Sahib (well) sacred space. She has constructed the Shiv temple, which does not suit her to build on the shared space of the Jhule Lal, because Lal Sane has his legacy and identity among all the Avatars of the Hindus. Jhule Lal is our main deity who saved us and gave us new life. Mata has limited herself and does not interact with anyone, and she returned to India after the annual fair. All the Jhule Lal management affairs are run by the others who ignore the Dargah in the absence of the Mata Sahib* (Personnel communication, 2020).

Muslims wanted to remove the Hindu deity notice board effective immediately, which the Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah took urgent notice and the Sindh police promptly intervened. The superintendent of Police Matiari district Syed Imdad Ali Shah himself visited the scene at the Jhule Lal shrine, which was put under police control. Prominent leaders in the Hindu and Muslim community including the two caretakers were called into discussions with the police. Muslims demanded the immediate removal of the sign board and claimed that they would remove it by force if necessary. Hindus did not agree to remove the notice board.

Eventually, the police decided to remove the notice board and forbade any further changes in the shrine by either Hindu or Muslim communities, which placated the Muslim community's anger. However, the notice board incident has added to the contestation of Jhule Lal between Muslims and Hindus. In an informal discussion, the Muslim *Mujawar* Sarfraz Shaikh stated that: *Hindus insulted the Dargah of Jhule Lal, when they installed the notice board of Hindu Pir (Hindu deity) that 'Jhule Lal is a Hindu Pir who is buried with a horse into the tomb' Hindus wanted to convert the Jhule Lal as a Hindu deity, we know well that Hindu Ghaddi Nasheen Mata Beena was behind all the scene, she fixed the Hindu deity notice board in order to declare Jhule Lal as a Hindu deity, as Muslim cannot claim Jhule Lal as a Muslim saint Shaikh Tahir . Suppose she declares and fixed the Jhule Lal Hindu deity notice board, then no Muslim would enter the shrine, how does Muslim can worship the Hindu deity. Mata made a blunder mistake to declare Jhule Lal as a Hindu Pir, that further made the hatred attitude among the Sindhi Muslims and Sindhi Hindus. She has an Indian extremist mindset like a Shiv Sena member who demolished the Muslim's sixteenth century Babri Masjid in 1992. She is not Sufi and does not want to follow the tolerance and harmony in Sindh, Pakistan* (Personal communication, 2020).

Jhule Lal's Hindu *Ghaddi Nasheen* is widely regarded more powerful than the Muslim *Sajjada Nasheen*, therefore she has attempted to physical transform the main shared Space of the Jhule Lal. On the other hand, Muslims *Sajjada Nasheen* has claimed that he has documentary proof that stewardship of the shrine belongs to the Muslims and has emphasized that: *I have official document proof of the Jhule Lal shrine that it belongs to us. I have colonial period British official registry of (1938) of Jhule Lal shrine, which is on the name of my grandfather Haji Gul Muhammad, in which detail was written that it belonged to us. Hindus do not have any documented proof; if they have evidence, they can show us. The whole Jhule Lal shrine's property belonged to us; Hindus cannot claim that if Hindus further tried to dominate us, I will start a case in the court against the Hindus on the bases of my British official documents* (Personnel Communication, 2020).

#### **MUSLIM TRANSFORMATION OF JHULE LAL**

The transformation of Sanctuaries and Churches into Mosques by the Ottoman Sultan Osman; the Cenaculum at Jerusalem had been

known as the Tomb of David and was converted to a Mosque after Muslims started praying there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Urban sanctuaries are physically converted from Churches into a Mosques. Transformation from Christianity to Islam was less in Asia but high in European Turkey (Hasluck, 1929:4-11).

According to Sindhi Hindus, Sindhi Muslims are trying to transform and declare Jhule Lal a Muslim saint in order to occupy the physical Space of the Jhule Lal shrine. Now Muslims have placed the holy Quran in the shrine, and have attached a sticker bearing the Kalma, (declaration of faith), “Ya Allah, Ya Rasullelah, La baik Ya Rasullelah”, “Mashallah”, images of the Kabba and Tomb of the Prophet Muhammad on the tomb of Jhule Lal that were not present before. The Muslim *Kalma* ‘La ilaha illallah Muhammad-ur-Rasulullah’ is also attached on the main entrance gate of the Jhule Lal shrine. The Mosque and *Jot* temple stand side by the side next to the Jhule Lal shrine in the fort. The Mosque was not functional in the past, but now the Muslims have made the mosque functional: praying five times a day, teaching the holy Quran, and arranging Islamic religious programs annually. The fort complex was historically white, but the Muslims have painted the Mosque green in recent years. The Hindu *Ghaddi Nasheen* Mata Sahib has stated: *Before, the holy Quran was not in the shrine of Jhule Lal; now, Muslims have brought and placed the Holy Quran, despite that we did not object, because this is the sacred book of Allah, and it is most respectful for us. There was not a mosque, in the beginning, there was only place to pray when Muslim traveler used to come from far-flung areas, they used to pray at this place then we did not object for the namaz (pray) that they should pray, we permitted them then the Muslims occupied our land and made the mosque to that place. This is Lal sane fort, and everybody can come here; Sindhi Muslims and Sindhi Hindus both can come and pay homage to Lal sane* (Personal communication 2019).

There are numerous major differences between the Hindu and Muslim beliefs and practices concerning the Jhule Lal. However, both share the same physical, religious space within which they have made a separate shrine: Muslims have placed a Quran in their space rather than the symbol of Jhule Lal burning lamp and accept him as a Saint (C. Ray 2012:233-234).

#### **MULTIPLE IDENTITY OF THE JHULE LAL**

Haider Shaikh saint is in the Indian Punjab Malerkotla town. Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs venerated him peacefully. People of the Malerkotla believe that the saint's power and blessings rest upon this city. If any communal conflict is aroused, the multi-religious people resolved the disputes. Multiple Identity and ownership of the shrine are not into question by all religious groups, and there is also a historical fact that during the partition of India, Punjab was devastated. However, Malerkotla town resisted bloodshed and remained peaceful among all the religious communities due to Haider Shaikh's saint (Bigelow, 2004:1-59).

Syncretic belief systems have become deeply rooted in most of western India, for example the Shrine of Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chisti of Ajmer Sharif of Rajasthan is a popular shared Dargah (Roy, 1996:112). The region of Sindh is known for saints that are revered by people of multiple religions; these Saints occupy multiple identities in the societal imagination, with multiple narratives being ascribed to a single saint. During fieldwork, Syed Mafooz Ali Shah, a Muslim local native of the same village narrated: *Hazarat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Bhauddin Zakrya Multani, Hazrat Jalal-u-ddin and Surkh Bukhari, all four saints used to visit together to disseminate the message of Islam; While traveling on the way to Sindh, they saw a child was playing with a ball, when he threw the ball on the land, it was coming back to him itself, the saints threw the same ball to the land than the child could not return it back ; Bauddin Zakrya told him that you had been born in Hindu's home otherwise your destination would have been beyond all of us, then they converted him as Muslim, he was the Jhule Lal whom Muslims saints converted him into the religion of Islam. Hindus gave him various names such as Aamar dino and Jhule Lal, Udero Lal, and Muslims named Shaikh Tahir* (Personal communication 2020).

Another one of the devotees of the Jhule Lal, Mohan Lal Oda mentioned during an interview: *Do not search for the identity of the Jhule Lal, I have been worshiping for 30 years of the Jhule Lal, many scholars, and Ph.D. Researcher came. However, no one proved about the identity of the Jhule Lal. It is also better not to explore the identity of Jhule Lal, because he concealed his identity. If he had not concealed the identity, there would have been many conflicts that*

*might have led to riots between Sindhi Muslims and Sindhi Hindus in Sindh* (Personal communication, 2020).

There are attempts by Sindhi Hindu devotees to legitimize Jhule Lal's identity with reference to official records or material sources. According to them, they have not heard the Jhule Lal's Muslim name, nor is there a Muslim name mentioned in official documents, and the official name of village, library, and station has been the Hindu name of Jhule Lal for generations, which is enough to prove Jhule Lal as a Hindu deity. They consider Shaikh Tahir a name created by Muslims and ascribed to Jhule Lal in order to lay claim to and occupy the shrine complex and fort. Hindu priest Babu Raj Kumar who is head of the Tando Adam temple of Jhule Lal stated: *This does not seem right that Jhule Lal was Muslim or converted into Islam. He has no Muslim name. Permanand and Tahir were fishermen who used to catch the Indus River's fish at Sukkur, Sindh, and sell into the market. Once their boat was about to drown, Tahir was Muslim; he recited verses of the Holy Quran, and Permanand was Hindu, who started to call the Jhule Lal to save their boat, Sane Jhule Lal appeared from the Indus water and saved their drowning boat. Muslims have given the Jhule Lal wrong name as a Shaikh Tahir to declare Jhule Lal as a Muslim. Tahir was a fisherman. Still, Jhule Lal has a birthplace, "Janam bhomi" at Nasarpur, Sindh, who was born in Hindu's home and remained Hindu until this world's departure. In the ancient time, the Indus River used to flow from Nasarpur Sindh* (Personal communication, 2020).

Jhule Lal's identity is considered a mystery by locals and the lack of research by historians and social scientists further fuels contestation. A.Z. Khan has observed various similitudes between Jhule Lal and Fatimid Ismailism; during the tenth century, this variant of Shia Islam was common in Sindh, especially in Multan. He further proposes that the *Darya Panth* (Indus cult) may have been associated with Ismailism or have had an inclination towards it. When the Sunni rulers persecuted the Ismaili, they adopted the *taqiyya* (invisibility) to hide their real identity to save themselves and continue their preaching mission. Khan has traced the historical perspective of the Jhule Lal, but he has assumed, he is not sure about Jhule Lal that he belongs to Fatimid Ismailism (Khan, 1975:212-213).

#### **JHULE LAL CONTESTED IN HINDU AND MUSLIM DISCOURSE**

The identity of Jhule Lal is contested in oral tradition and written by the Hindus and Muslims. Naraen Dass is Sindhi Hindu writer who

argued in his Sindhi book that If Jhule Lal had converted himself as a Muslim, then he would have converted Hindus into Islam; if Jhule Lal was Muslim, then why he immersed himself into land with his horse which is against the Islam. He further argued that It seems the immense conspiracy by the Muslims to declare Jhule Lal as a Muslim saint to occupy the temple and Dargah of the Jhule Lal (Motyani, 2014:133).

Hindus consider Jhule Lal savior and leader as he saved Hindus from the despotic ruler Mirkh Shah, who wanted to forcibly convert them to Islam. Hindus continued to follow the path of Sufism in Sindh but did not follow Islam's fundamental principle (Anand, 1996). After the India's post-partition, Jhule Lal's discourse was popularized with regards to Hindu persecution in Sindh. Jhule Lal fought against the cruelty of the Muslim's despotic ruler for Sindhi Hindus. When Sindhi Hindus migrated to India after partition, they were not accepted, then Jhule Lal appeared there to unite them as Sindhi Hindu god (Kothari, 2007:169-171).

Muslim texts have argued and tried to prove that Jhule Lal converted to Islam and remained a Muslim for the remainder of his life. According to these accounts, he was famously a follower of the saint Baha' ud-Din Zakariya Multani. As a young Hindu boy who earned his bread and butter through hard work, he decided to follow the path of Islam and went to Shaikh Baha' ud-Din Zakariya to learn the teachings of God. When Baha'ud-Din looked at him his state of mind changed completely: he addressed the sermon in the mosque, got guidance from his, *murshid* (spiritual master) and became his devotee forever. He came back to Sindh and started to live in the Jahejo village, where he lived till his death (Vafae, 2005:264-267). Abdullah Shaikh, who is Muslim *Mujawar* at the Jhule Lal shrine, described the historical event: *Before India's partition, there was a British colonial government in Sindh; Hindus were more powerful than the Muslims in every walk of life. Hindus Extremist installed the idols at the main entrance gate of Jhule Lal, which was not acceptable for the Sindhi Muslims. The local Sindhi Muslim Dodo Burrno broke the idols with Daira Sani Haji Shah Muhammad Shah; Hindu and Muslim riots erupted in Sindh. The highly qualified British officer was deputed to resolve this dispute by the colonial government.*

*The Ghulam Muhammad Bhrugari Sahib became the representative on behalf of Muslims, who gave the evidence to the British officer for Jhule Lal to prove as a Muslim saint: (1) Jhule Lal has a Muslim name as Shaikh Tahir, (2) Graveyard of the Jhule Lal is in Muslim style as well as tomb, (3) The verses of Kalma Taiyab is written on the main entrance door of the saint, (4) In the same complex, there are the four Muslims Sajjada Nasheen's graveyards beside the tomb of the saint Jhule Lal, (5) A mosque is side-by-side the saint's tomb in the same complex, (6) Mulla Ali Thathvi's written poetry was fixed beside the saint's entrance gate, which shows that Jhule Lal was a Muslim saint. After all the evidence, the British officials decided in the Muslim's favor, and Hindus were only allowed to worship the Jot (light) and Saint (Personal communication 2020).*

One of the old Hindus Shevadar (attendant) of the Jhule Lal Ramesh stated that: *Muslims claimed that Jhule Lal is a Muslim and he belonged to them, his name is Shaikh Tahir, but I have never seen in my 50 years about Shaikh Tahir's name in any document. If there had been Jhule Lal name as a Shaikh Tahir, then there must have been the name of village, station, school, police station name as a Shaikh Tahir, but all the names were declared on the name Jhule Lal. There is not any kind of documents, which may prove the name of Jhule Lal as a Shaikh Tahir. Jhule Lal's shrines all keys and management are under Hindu's control from generation to generation. Muslims spend no single penny, and how Muslims claim that he belongs to them and is Muslim. Nevertheless, if the Muslims want to venerate the Jhule Lal; Hindus have no objection; we want to live in peace with Muslims in Sindh (Personal communication, 2020).*

Sindhi Muslims opinions differed from those of the Hindus regarding the identity, ownership, and management of the Jhule Lal. A Muslim native of the same village, Syed Attauallh Shah Bukhari stated that: *I have studied the more than 30 books on the Jhule Lal, which were written before the creation of Pakistan, and this is my firm belief and research that Jhule Lal is Hindu by birth. He was born at the Nasarpur; then he was converted into Muslim; who so ever converted him, then became Muslim, and his Muslim name is Shaikh Tahir; whatever I believe that he is Muslim now. Jhule Lal was a Sufi Muslim who promoted interfaith and harmony in Sindh (Personal communication, 2019).*

Jhule Lal is also known as the patron saint of Sindhis and is considered the main icon and symbol of Sindhi identity and culture (Parwani, 2010:3). Another legend regarding Jhule Lal says that Hindu washerman Ratan Chand saw a floating wooden box on the Indus bank River at Nasarpur; when he opened the box, there was an infant child inside. Being childless, he happily took home the child and named him *Uderano* (flying) (Gaho, 2002:157). As Khan (2008:259) points out Jhule Lal's contestation and identity "was he an incarnation of the Vedic Varuna, an avatar of Krishna, a yogi of the Nath sect? a manifestation of the Coranic Khwaja Khizr who had drunken the elixir of immortality, a Sufi saint, an Ismaili missionary under the guise of a Qalandar, a precursor of Kabir and Nanak's 'syncretic' message?". Moreover, Muslim Ghulam Wadero described that: *Jhule Lal is not Avatar; he was not born Hindu, his wooden box was found from the Indus River at Nasarpur city by the Hindu washerman Ratan Rai, and it is sure that he was Muslim because there was bloodshed war where Jhule Lal's parents used to live; therefore, his parent's put him into the wooden box and floated him into Indus River to save his life* (Personal communication, 2019).

According to local oral tradition, when Jhule Lal departed from this world, conflict arose between Hindus and Muslims upon the Jhule Lal's burial. Muslims wanted to make a grave and construct a tomb in the Muslim style, and Hindus wanted to build a *Samadi* in the Hindu style. Hindus argued that if Muslims make a grave and tomb in Muslim style, they will not allow Hindus to enter the Jhule Lal shrine to worship, and vice versa. After intense discussions, both parties agreed to request the Jhule Lal to intervene.

Both Hindus and Muslims stayed awake the entire night to hear the decision of the Jhule Lal; the voice came at night: "My aim of life is to create peace, tolerance, harmony, and unity among Hindus and Muslims so the architecture of the Space should be built in such a way which should be acceptable to both Muslims and Hindus in which both may perform their worship in their way at same Space and Muslim will forever remain *Mujawar* of this *Dargah*". So, Muslims made the grave and constructed a tomb over the Jhule Lal's grave in the same Space. Hindus constructed the *Jot* (lamp) room in the same space, which is also said to be the *Jot Jo Kamro* (lamp room) /temple in which four *Jots* (lamps) were illuminated.



**CONCLUSION**

Jhule Lal shared Space is intensely contested among both Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims religious communities. Half the physical Space of Jhule Lal's shared Space, which is known *Balanbo Sahib* (sacred well), has been physically transformed by the Hindus *Ghaddi Nasheen* where the Shiv temple, and large equestrian was constructed in 2012, Muslim followers of Jhule Lal do not enter there now. In 2020, the new gate was constructed on which 'Om' is written, a *Pallo* (fish) statue was added on the top of the gate opposite the main entrance. Four large central portraits are fixed into the main tomb of Jhule Lal, which represents the image of the Hindu *Pir* Now Muslim devotees of the Jhule Lal do not enter the transformed Space. Ghulam Abbas Shaikh the Muslim *Sajjada Nasheen* of Jhule Lal does not have full authority, as the Hindu *Ghaddi Nasheen* is regarded more powerful and has management of the shrine under her control, and she makes all major decisions without taking into confidence her Muslim counterpart.

Muslims are not satisfied with the Hindu *Ghaddi Nahseen's* efforts: according to them, she is rigid and is trying to declare Jhule Lal a Hindu deity and wants to ban Muslim entry into the shrine. Her elders were cooperative as they never transformed the shared Space of Jhule Lal. In 2017, Hindu *Ghaddi Nasheen* fixed the Hindu deity notice board at the main entrance gate of Jhule Lal shrine in which she wanted to declare that Jhule Lal as a Hindu deity who was immersed with his horse into this tomb. Riots by Muslim devotees resulted in the Sindh. Police taking control of the shrine and removing the board at their insistence. The mosque and *Jot* (lamp) room stand side-by-side in the shrine of the white colored fort, except the now the mosque has been painted green by the Muslims. According to Hindus, Muslims have placed the Holy Quran and have fixed the sticker of Muslim religious symbols, holy verses in Juhle Lal's shrine, which were not present before. Due to the Sindh Government's direct involvement, the Jhule Lal shared space is not fully transformed; however, the section with *balanho sahib* (sacred well) Space was entirely transformed by the construction of the Shiv temple. Jhule Lal's shared Space reflected the contestation and physical transformation between religious groups to control over the shared Space of the Jhule Lal due to competitive sharing; Hindus group has become more dominant. Due to contestation and physical transformation, the strong message of tolerance has

become weak. The Jhule Lal shrine becomes a contested saint who used to disseminate the syncretic message of peace and tolerance in Sindh. Now Jhule Lal's tolerance message became injured due to the contestation and Physical transformation. Nevertheless, tolerance is not suspended, which is tacitly shared at Jhule's Lal shared Space. However, tolerance and harmony could be strongly sustained at the Jhule Lal's shared Space if both Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims follow the Jhule Lal's message of love, peace, harmony, tolerance, and brotherhood.

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