

unchallengeable reasons to contradict their viewpoint. The fact is that the Muslim conquerors who are accused of wielding the sword to thrust Islam on non-Muslims, in fact, failed to do their normal duty to propagate Islam through state machinery. Instead the Muslim divines and mystics and sufis took upon themselves to serve the cause of Islam everywhere.

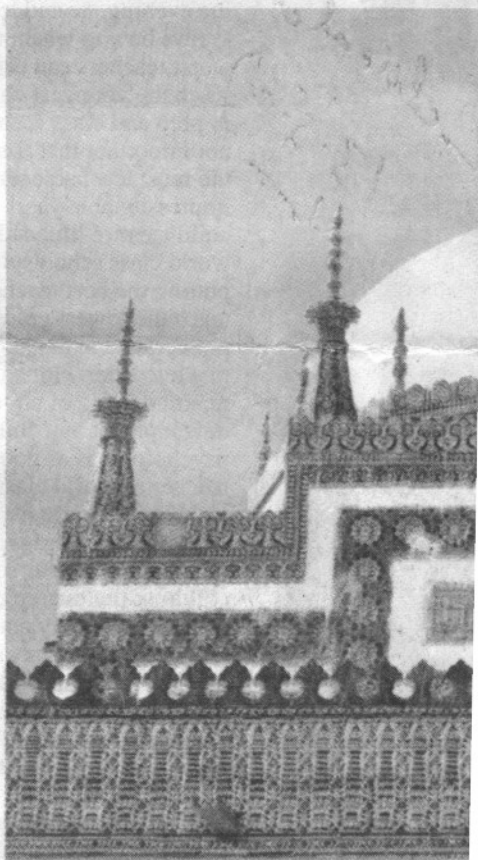
Wherever they set their foot, they mixed up with the local people, learned their language, their manners, studied their psychology, won their confidence and presented Islam to them in the language of love. Islam's message of simplicity, equality, peace and humanity broke the spell of superstition, and caste system and people were attracted to these saints and savants.

These saints can be divided into two groups. One group maintained their contact with the rulers of their time to serve the cause of the people, while the other group, with their piety, knowledge and high moral character established themselves as 'spiritual monarchs' and ruled the heart and soul of the people. It was this group that rallied thousands of people under the banner of Islam. Amongst them, saints like Hazrat Khawaja Moeenuddin Chishti Ajmiri, Nizamuddin Aulia Mahboob, Shah Jalal Silhati, Baba Fariduddin Ganj Shaker, Ghaus Bahauddin Zakariya, Makhdoom Shah Rukn-i-Alam, Mujaddid Alf-i-Sani, Shah Hamadan, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai were a great source of inspiration to the people.

Despite education and light, followers of one sect cannot dare to offer prayers in the mosque of another sect. While in the days of the sufis, there was perfect tolerance and respect for each other's beliefs and views. Ghaus Bahauddin Zakariya would give his sermons beside the Prahalad Mandir, which was a very sacred place of worship of the Hindus. People would assemble to listen to his sermons instead of going to the Mandir. The same method of teaching was followed by Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. Two hundred and forty-two years have elapsed since he passed away but he is still remembered by people irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Shah Abdul Latif's lasting contribution to the Sindhi language, culture, literature and romantic tales is

DR GHAZANFAR MEHDI on the an
invaluable services to Islam and last
forever remain ingrained in the heart

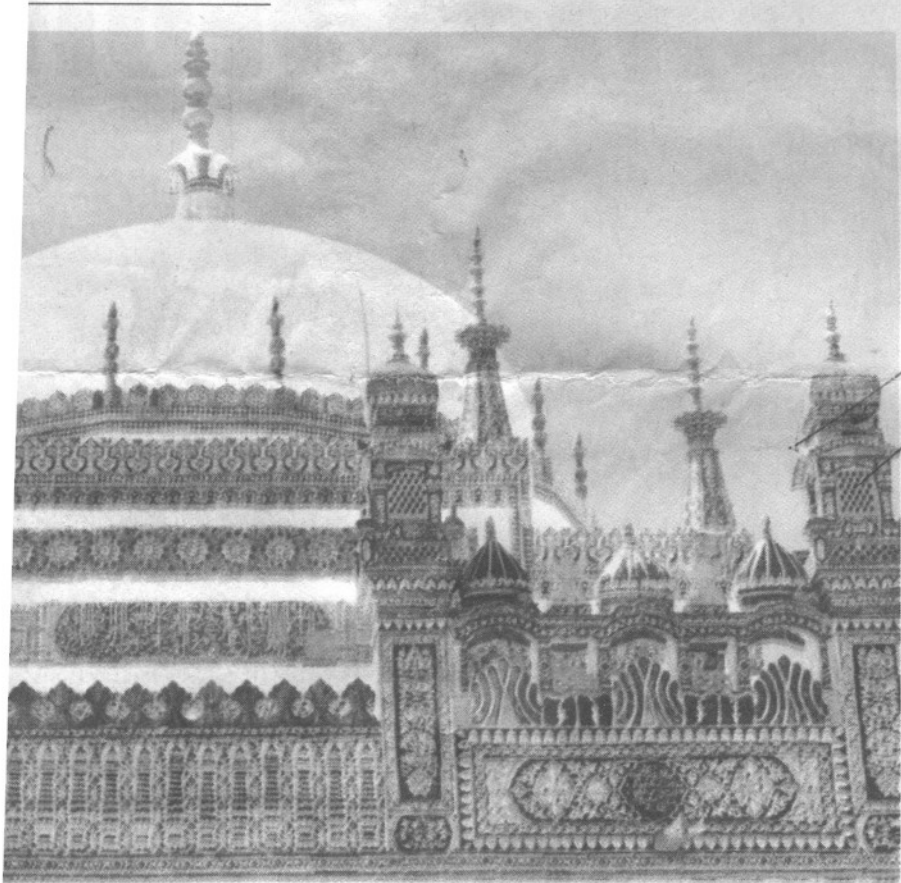


Mausoleum of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, th

when he lent an Islamic impression. The present provincial boundaries have been the creation of the British Raj. In Shah Abdul Latif's concept, Sindh meant all regions now forming Pakistan right from Kunjerab to old Debal.

The sufis and saints would travel Mansura to Kashmir side during summer to spread the message of Islam and from Kashmir back to plains in the winter. The places where they happened to camp during their journey were later regarded sacred places. There are twenty-seven such places in Pakistan. In 1977, this scribe happened to see a place in Hazara District known as Panj Pir. Baba Fariduddin Shaker Ganj, Ghaus Bahauddin Zakariya, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Shah Jalal Silhati and Shah Jalal of Uch Sharif had used the place as their camp. A few kilometers from Abbottabad there is a village called Silhad which is the mutilation of

Annual Urs of Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, highlights his
 stinging contribution to Sindhi literature and culture which will
 arts of his devotees



the saint poet of Sind

“Silhat” in Bangladesh where Shah Jalal is buried.

Research scholars on the life and work of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai observed that he is the only original poet whose poetry has passed unadulterated into Sindhi language and has become a part of the rich literature of Sindh. He is not only considered a celebrated poet, but a celebrated saint

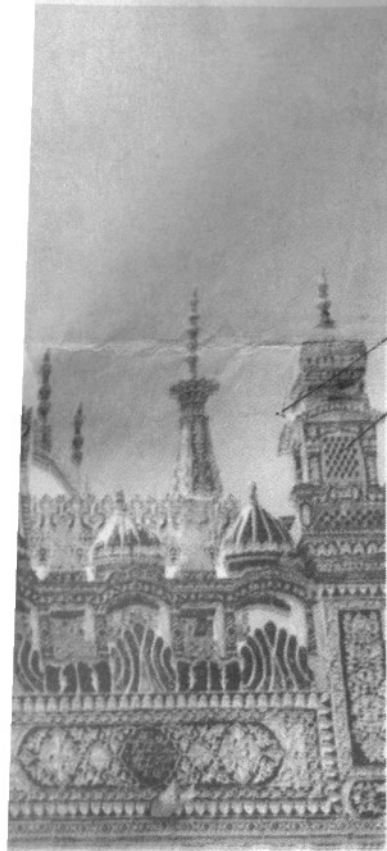
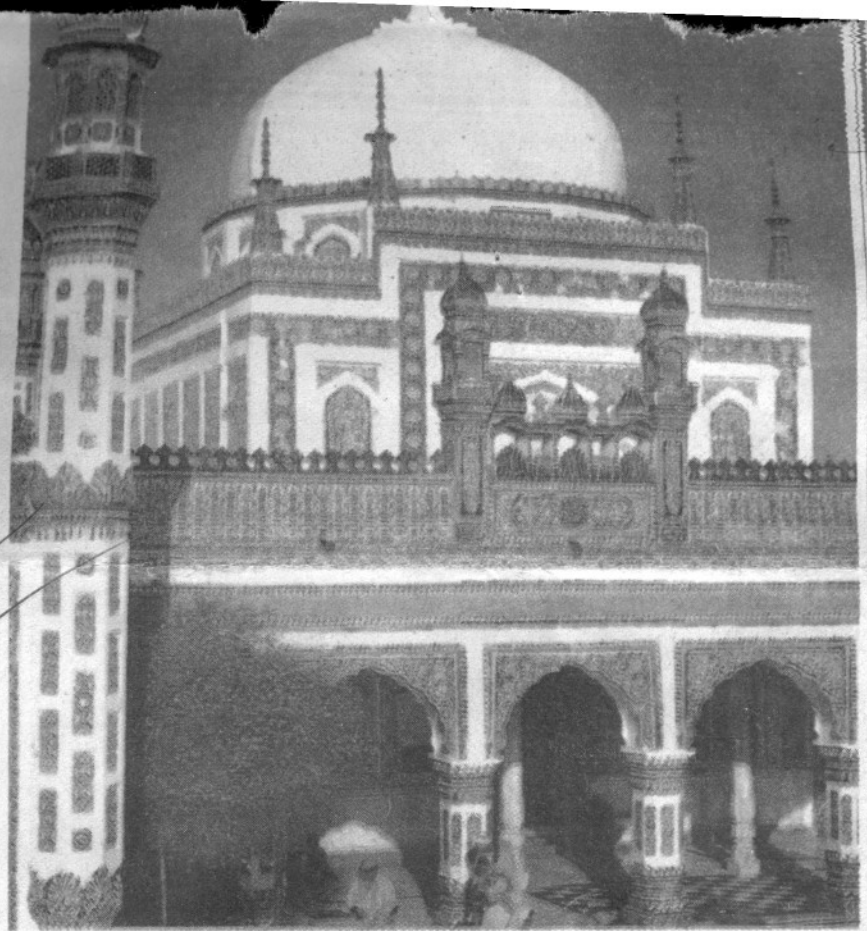
Shamsul Ulema, Mirza Kelich Beg in his book “life of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai”, says “He thinks musically, he speaks musically, he acts musically. His very silence is musical”. It is no exaggeration to say that he was a spiritual guide while living, a poetical saint while dead, he still reigns over the hearts of millions.

Some foreign scholars endeavoured to compare his poetry with Rumi, Jami, Hafiz, Al-Bustani, and Khayam. Dr. H.T. sorley in his book compares Shah’s

verses with those of Shelley, Donne, Crashaw, Isaac Watts, G. Herbert and Abu Sayed Ibn Khair.

Well-known township of Hala is the ancestral home of Shah Latif. Famous saint Mukhdoom Nooh Bhakarvi belonged to the same town. Shah Abdul Karim the famous saint of his time was the grandfather of Shah Abdul Latif. Shah Latif received his primary education from Maulana Noor Muhammad Bhatti. It was a period of political turmoil. Both the Moghuls and the English wanted domination over Sindh. In these days Abdul Latif, known as Bari Imam whose *mazar* is in Nurpur near Islamabad, happened to visit Sindh. Incidentally, he met the father of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and gave him the tidings that he would have a son and that his name should be Abdul Latif. The popular song “Sakhi Shahbaz Qalandar” in praise of Shahbaz

f Bhattai, highlights his and culture which will



Qalandar was written by Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai had spiritual relations with Shah Inayat, Khawaja Muhammad Zaman, Maulana Muhammad Hashim of Thatta and Makhdoom Amin of Thatta. He would often pay visits to them. Due to the constant political unrest he went to Baluchistan and for sometime he stayed at the shrine of Hazrat Sultan Sarwar in D.G. Khan. He also stayed at the Shrine of Ghaus Bahauddin Zakriya, Shah Rukn-i-Alam and Sultan Bahu. It is said that the "Chilla Khana" sanctuary in the north of Bari Imam's *mazar* was built by Shah Latif Bhattai. he passed his old age on the bank of lake Karar. A number of poets have, in their poems praised the natural scenery of this lake. Shah Murad, the well-know poet of Chakwal has compared the beauty of Kalar Kahar lake with that of Karar lake. Shah Latif's poetry has had deep impact on the poetry of all Pakistani poets. He regarded Sindhi as the best language to express his thoughts. He thinks that the mother tongue is the best medium of mass teaching. He says that

Islam is the religion of peace, therefore, we should follow his foot steps in the propagation of our religious beliefs and exercise tolerance in projecting our viewpoint. At the moment we have a National Language Authority to promote the cause of Urdu. There should be a language authority for all other Pakistani languages or this work should be entrusted to the existing National language Authority, so that all Pakistani languages get equal opportunity to flourish.

It is deplorable that the annual income from the shrines of the great saints which run into lakhs of rupees is not spent on propagation of the literature that these great sufis have left behind or on their research work. In fact, these sufis and saints are the real architects of Pakistan. There would have been no Pakistan if these great men had not converted these areas into an Islamic region. It is time that a national policy is devised to promote the poetry and literary works of these great divines. ■

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