



RESEARCH PAPER

Promoting Tolerance and Harmony: Lessons from the Shared Sacred Space of Jhule Lal/ Udero Lal in Sindh, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the phenomenon of shared sacred spaces as a means of fostering tolerance and harmony within diverse communities. Specifically, it examines into the case study of Udero Lal, a revered shrine located in Sindh, Pakistan, where people of various religious and cultural backgrounds converge to pay homage and seek blessings. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing ethnographic fieldwork, historical analysis, and interviews with local stakeholders, this study examines the mechanisms that facilitate interfaith coexistence and peaceful interactions within this sacred site. The findings of this research highlight the significance of shared sacred spaces in promoting religious pluralism, social cohesion, and mutual respect among different religious communities. Moreover, it emphasizes the potential of such spaces to serve as models for conflict resolution and peace building in regions marked by religious diversity and historical tensions. The study contributes to academic discussions about religious studies and conflict resolution, but it also offers practical advice for policymakers, community leaders, and religious institutions seeking to use shared sacred spaces to promote tolerance and harmony.

KEYWORDS Jhule Lal, Religious Pluralism, Shared Sacred Spaces, Tolerance, Udero Lal

Introduction

Jhule Lal's shrine is situated in the small village of Udero Lal within the Matiari district of Sindh, Pakistan, approximately 45 kilometers to the north of Hyderabad. This striking white shrine, designed in the fashion of a fort, was commissioned by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. To construct this monument, Shah Jahan enlisted the expertise of renowned craftsmen and architects hailing from Kashmir and Bengal, and the construction was completed in 1666. The Jhule Lal shrine complex encompasses both a mosque and a temple dedicated to the lamp (jot).

Jhule Lal holds a revered status among the Sindhi Muslims, who address him as Shaikh Muhammad Tahir. For Sindhi Hindus, he is regarded as an Avatar or deity and is commonly known as Jhule Lal or Udero Lal. Various other names are also attributed to him, such 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 fervently chant the Jhule Lal slogan to invoke his blessings for the fulfillment of their desires: "Jeko chwando Jhule Lal tanhja thenda bera Paar, Sindhi Bhgwan kee jai" (He who calls upon Jhule Lal will have all their wishes granted). The shared shrine of Jhule Lal/Udero Lal has persistently served as a powerful symbol of tolerance and unity, not only for the local community but also for the global audience. It stands as an enduring testament to the diverse and culturally rich heritage of the Sindhi people.

In a world marked by diverse religious beliefs and practices, the coexistence of different faith communities often serves as a crucible for understanding the broader dynamics of tolerance, harmony, and peaceful interaction. Shared sacred spaces, locations that are revered and frequented by individuals from various religious and cultural backgrounds, emerge as unique arenas where these dynamics come to life. These spaces, in many instances, become sanctuaries of coexistence, fostering interfaith dialogue, social cohesion, and mutual respect among their visitors. This research paper embarks on an exploration of shared sacred spaces as potent instruments for promoting interfaith coexistence and peace building, with a specific focus on the exemplary case of Udero Lal, a sacred shrine nestled in the heart of Sindh, Pakistan. Udero Lal holds a significant place in the religious and cultural landscape of the region, drawing pilgrims and devotees from diverse backgrounds who gather to pay homage and seek blessings. This case study not only allows us to understand the intricate tapestry of religious diversity but also presents a unique opportunity to examine how shared sacred spaces can serve as catalysts for harmony and understanding. The central aim of this research is to unravel the mechanisms and factors that contribute to the peaceful coexistence within Udero Lal and to discern how this experience can be relevant to other settings grappling with religious pluralism and historical tensions.

Literature Review

Udero Lal, also known as Jhule Lal, is a revered figure in the cultural and religious landscape of Sindh, Pakistan. This literature review explores various aspects of Udero Lal/Jhule Lal, shedding light on his historical significance, teachings, and the enduring legacy of religious tolerance associated with his shrine. Udero Lal's historical importance is well-documented. "In his book, Hughes (1876), recounts the tale of a Muslim merchant, Shah Hussain, who constructed a shrine in honor of Udero Lal in CE 925". This act alone signifies the enduring reverence for this saintly figure. The shared shrine of Udero Lal/Jhule Lal is celebrated as a symbol of religious tolerance and harmony. "As Khan (2008) notes, Udero Lal's teachings emphasized the unity of Hindus and Muslims, emphasizing that both communities worship the same divine entity". Udero Lal, also known as Jhule Lal, stands as an emblem of interfaith harmony, tolerance, and shared spirituality in the Sindh region of Pakistan. This literature review delves into the multifaceted aspects of Udero Lal's significance, exploring historical accounts, cultural narratives, and contemporary perspectives.

The architectural testament to Udero Lal's legacy is his shrine, constructed during the Mughal era by Emperor Shah Jahan". This white shrine, featuring a mosque and a temple, is an architectural marvel that symbolizes the coexistence of different faiths in the Sindh region. Udero Lal's identity varies among communities. To Sindhi Muslims, he is known as Shaikh Muhammad Tahir, while Sindhi Hindus revere him as Jhule Lal or Udero Lal". This dual identity signifies the syncretic nature of Udero Lal's spirituality and his capacity to bridge religious divides. Devotees from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds converge at Udero Lal's shrine, engaging in shared rituals and chants. The chant, "Jeko chwando Jhule Lal tanhja thenda bera Paar, Sindhi Bhgwan kee jai," underscores the belief that invoking Udero Lal fulfills their desires". In contemporary Sindh, Udero Lal's shrine continues to be a symbol of tolerance and unity. "Udero Lal's charismatic personality transcends religious boundaries and has attracted followers from both Hindu and Muslim communities". His ability to unite people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs under the banner of peace and harmony is a testament to his enduring influence. Udero Lal's philosophy centered around syncretism, love, tolerance, and brotherhood among all species, emphasizing the importance of treating all living

beings with kindness and compassion". He passionately advocated for the unity of Hindus and Muslims, recognizing their shared belief in the oneness of God.

Udero Lal, also known as Jhule Lal, holds profound theological significance for both Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. His teachings emphasize the unity of God, transcending religious boundaries. "Udero Lal's message revolves around love, peace, and the commonality between Hinduism and Islam. "The historical accounts of Udero Lal often include miraculous events attributed to him. Stories of his intervention to save individuals from harm, regardless of their religious background, abound in Sindhi folklore. Udero Lal's cultural significance extends to the celebration of various festivals. Cheti Chand, the Sindhi New Year, is marked with enthusiasm by both communities. It is a time of joy, reflection, and communal harmony, showcasing the shared heritage of Sindhi Hindus and Muslims.

Material and Methods

A case study technique based on ethnographic methodology. To examine Udero Lal's common space, ethnographic approaches were used, including participant observation, informal talks, unstructured interviews, and audio and video recording. That required direct and original data collection. Unstructured interviews were carried out with various key stakeholders, including Hindu caretakers, Hindu followers, Pandits (priests), local Hindu attendants (Shevdar), Hindu women, Muslim Sajjadnasheen (caretaker), Muslim followers, Mujawar (Muslim Shaikh), local village residents, and Muslim women. These in-depth interviews were conducted in the native Sindhi language and subsequently translated into English for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Udero Lal's Message of Peace and Tolerance

Regardless of the name by which he is called, be it Udero Lal or Shaikh Tahir, he stands as a true legend, scholar, educator, peacemaker, and historical figure of the Indian subcontinent. His global message of tolerance is a legacy that deserves further exploration and preservation to grasp the underlying philosophy of diversity promotion. It is worth noting that he commissioned the construction of both a temple (Mandir) and a mosque (Masjid) at the same location, a profound testament to his commitment to unity. Upon his passing, his shrine was erected precisely between the temple and the mosque, fulfilling his wish, which was embraced by both Hindus and Muslims. One part of the shrine was integrated into the temple, while the other part became a shared sacred space for both religious communities. This act symbolized religious harmony, peace, and tolerance in the heart of Sindh. Udero Lal's shared sanctuary became a conduit for the propagation of peace and tolerance throughout the region.

Udero Lal possessed a charismatic personality, extending his helping hand to both Hindus and Muslims in times of need. For Hindus, he was a savior; for Muslims, a peacemaker. His dynamic nature was characterized by an unwavering tolerance, forgiveness even toward his adversaries, and a commitment to guiding them towards the path of serving humanity, transcending distinctions of color, caste, and creed.

Local historian and writer, Dr. Azizullah Talpur, emphasized Udero Lal's stance against the class system and caste, highlighting his teachings on tolerance and peace. Additionally, Deevan Lekhraj Manglani, the retired President of the Udero Lal Sheva Mandly, who served for 24 years at Udero Lal's shrine, expressed that both Sindhi

Hindus and Sindhi Muslims are like two wheels of Udero Lal's shrine. Udero Lal, akin to the rider or driver, ensures the perpetual harmony between Hindus and Muslims under his benevolent shadow. The coexistence of a mosque and a temple, standing side by side in the same space, is a remarkable symbol of shared worship, transcending differences in color and faith.

Udero Lal's mission was to unite Sindhi Hindus and Muslims under the banner of peace. He ardently wished for people to embrace his philosophy of syncretism, peace, tolerance, and harmony. His tolerance extended even to the tyrannical ruler, Mirkh Shah, whom he forgave for his misdeeds and welcomed as his devotee. Remarkably, Udero Lal also came to the aid of Muslims whenever they encountered difficulties. A local resident of the same village, Attuallah Shah, recounted an incident where Udero Lal intervened to prevent the forced conversion of Hindus to Islam. He cited the Holy Quran, specifically the verse "La Iqra fiddeen" (there is no compulsion in religion), to challenge the practice of forced conversions, emphasizing that it went against the Quranic teachings.

Well-Known Story of Udero Lal

A renowned tale involving Udero Lal recounts how he rescued the daughter of a Muslim merchant from the clutches of a cruel Hindu king. Shah Hussain, a Muslim merchant hailing from Delhi, erected the shrine of Khwajah Khizer (Udero Lal) in CE 925 in Bakkhar, Sukkur, Sindh. One fateful day, Shah Hussain embarked on a journey to Makkah in a boat sailing along the Indus River, accompanied by his daughter, to fulfill the Hajj pilgrimage. On the opposite side of the river, a tyrannical Hindu king harbored intentions of forcibly marrying Shah Hussain's daughter, despite the merchant's staunch refusal, citing Islamic teachings that Muslim girls cannot marry Hindus. In her distress, the daughter called upon Udero Lal for assistance. He came to her rescue by mysteriously causing the rope tethered to the boat to loosen, altering the course of the Indus River. This unexpected shift led the boat to safety, but unfortunately, the city of Aror was submerged in the process. In gratitude, Delhi's Muslim merchant, Shah Hussain, commemorated Udero Lal's intervention by constructing a shrine in his honor.

Continuity of Tolerance

Additionally, a local Muslim and devout follower of Udero Lal, Syed Muhammad Ali Shah, expresses his belief that tolerance will endure within the shared precincts of the Udero Lal shrine. He reasons that Islam, being a flexible religion, accommodates forbearance and extends respect to minority groups. Hindus, in turn, strive to avoid conflicts, especially in reverence to a saintly figure like Udero Lal. The communities share amicable relations in terms of trade and business, with Hindus owning factories and lands and enjoying positive associations with influential Muslim landlords and political figures. In times of adversity, most Muslims stand in support of Hindus due to their shared land, culture, and Sindhi identity. Furthermore, the strong bonds of social and cultural factors unite Sindhi Hindus and Muslims, fostering mutual understanding and preserving their harmonious coexistence at the Udero Lal shrine. All Hindus participate in rituals, which are also joined by Muslims.

Udero Lal's Teachings

Udero Lal, a Sufi, scholar, intellectual, educator, and advocate of tolerance and patience, based his philosophy and teachings on principles of coexistence, peace, harmony, love, tolerance, and brotherhood. His message emphasized humanity and

equality, extending love to all living beings. During the Bahrano (food offering) ritual by the Indus River, he offered fruits to the river as sustenance for the various species residing in it, demonstrating his concern for all life forms, including humans. He vehemently opposed forced conversions to any religion and protected humanity from malevolence. He endeavored to explain to both Hindus and Muslims in Sindh that Khuda and Bhagwan are one and the same, referred to as Ishwar by Hindus and Allah by Muslims. He advocated for the brotherly coexistence of these groups, emphasizing the importance of peaceful living and imparting lessons on syncretism. Udero Lal's love extended to both Hindus and Muslims, and he intervened whenever a Muslim Qazi attempted to forcibly convert a Hindu to Islam, ensuring the safeguard of both communities during times of trouble.

Udero Lal's Role as a Guardian of both Hindus and Muslims

Udero Lal served as a protector and savior for both the Hindu and Muslim communities. When the Muslim ruler, Mirkh Shah, engaged in conflict with him and was subsequently defeated, Udero Lal chose to pardon him, leading to an increase in his followers among Muslims. Udero Lal possessed a magnetic charisma that drew both Hindus and Muslims, who became devoted to him. He issued strict instructions to his followers from both faiths, emphasizing the importance of not engaging in conflict with each other and living together as brothers. Udero Lal emerged as a symbol of peace and harmony for both religious groups. Upon his passing, a debate arose among Hindus and Muslims regarding his final resting place, whether it should be a Muslim grave or a Hindu Samadhi. However, a voice from the community wisely declared that he belonged to both Hindus and Muslims, and this dilemma was peacefully resolved.

Udero Lal as an Icon of Peace and Harmony

The shrine's structure was transformed into a tomb, a testament to the shared acceptance of both communities. According to legends, Udero Lal initially constructed both the mosque and the temple, known as the Jot, and his shrine ultimately comprised both a mosque and a temple within the same shared space, in accordance with Udero Lal's wishes. This arrangement became a symbol of the peace and tolerance shared by both communities in Sindh. Within the Udero Lal complex, a lecture hall known as the "kehchari" (discourse room) was constructed in shared space. Seminars and conferences were regularly held here, attracting people from all walks of life, regardless of caste, creed, or color, to listen to lectures and engage in discussions. Interactive sessions allowed everyone an equal opportunity to voice their opinions, generate debates, and participate in healthy discussions, often centered on philosophy, Sufism, religion, and tolerance.

Udero Lal's Final Abode

In his final resting place, Udero Lal chose a Muslim village called Jahejo. A Muslim named Maman Shaikh generously donated fertile land for this purpose and became the custodian (Mujawar) of the Udero Lal shrine. Subsequently, the Hindus known as Tahkurs, who were believed to be descendants of Udero Lal, assumed responsibility for the shrine's complex. Following the partition, when many Thakurs settled in India, the Hindus known as Bawas, who were attendants of the Thakurs, took on the role of caretakers for the Udero Lal shrine. Notably, they did not identify themselves as Hindu custodians (gaadinaheen) of Udero Lal but preferred to be called khadmatgars (attendants) of the shrine. They maintained amicable relations with the

Muslim community and refrained from making any alterations to the Udero Lal complex.

Conclusion

In the heart of Sindh, the shrine of Udero Lal, also known as Jhule Lal, stands as a testament to the enduring power of tolerance and coexistence between two diverse religious communities: Hindus and Muslims. Throughout history, this sacred site has radiated a message of unity, peace, and harmony that transcends religious boundaries. Udero Lal's story and teachings encapsulate the spirit of Sindh - a land where diversity is not a source of division but a wellspring of strength. His legacy is a shining example of how individuals, irrespective of their religious beliefs, can come together in a shared space to celebrate common values and humanity's shared heritage. The positivity surrounding Udero Lal's message of tolerance is a beacon that should guide both Hindus and Muslims in Sindh. It is a reminder that our commonalities far outweigh our differences. The historical coexistence at this shrine is a source of pride for all Sindhis, regardless of their faith.

Recommendation

According to the study's findings, Udero Lal built both the mosque and the temple, also referred to as the Jot, and his shrine eventually included a mosque and a temple in the same common area. In the context of this study, the coexistence of both religious structures is seen as a symbol of religious harmony and tolerance, emphasizing the acceptance and understanding of different faiths. This study recommends the promotion of interfaith dialogue and cooperation as a means to foster peaceful coexistence. The study also suggests the implementation of policies that protect religious freedom and discourage discrimination. By doing so, societies can create a more inclusive and harmonious environment for all individuals. This can ultimately lead to a more tolerant and understanding society.

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